



602



601



603



600

398TH BOMB. GROUP MEMORIAL ASSOCIATION • 8TH AIR FORCE • 1ST AIR DIVISION • NUTHAMPSTEAD, ENGLAND

VOL. 3 NO. 1

FLAK NEWS

JANUARY 1988

Group's Most Bizarre Mission:

RDX: Now It Can Be Told

The war in Europe would be over in less than two weeks, and at most bomber stations in East Anglia, there was an air of victory permeating around the bases. The end was in sight and it was just a matter of time and a few milk runs.

It was April 13, 1945. Friday the 13th!

Summer had come to England. Sunny, warm, clear.

The long, miserable winter was over. Forgotten were those cold, dark, dank days. Forgotten were those 3 a.m. wakeup calls by the CQ and the dark eerie walk to the chow hall. Even those grim memories of the Battle of the Bulge in December-January were beginning to fade.

Today would be a milk run to end all milk runs, and takeoff would be at the respectable hour of 11:40 a.m.! As we might have said 43 years later, "a piece of cake."

The target was to be the ammo dump at Bad Klenen. No fighters were expected and no flak batteries were known to be in this obscure part of Germany. No wonder the airmen were giddy and playful as the hour approached.

And to be sure, the optimistic scenerio was followed to the letter as the group formed over



PAUL BROWN

Debden at 8,000 feet and proceeded toward the target at 20,000 feet.

The group leader was Capt. Tom Marchbanks, who later in his career would rise to the rank of Major General. His pilot in the 601 lead aircraft was Art Taylor.

It was not a big thing, as it happened all the time. Bad Klenen, the primary target, was obscured. Change course to Neumunster and its marshalling yards. German transportation had come to almost a complete stop, so here was one more "stop" courtesy of the 398th!

Some years later, a young English historian from Nuthampstead, Ozzie Osborn, would write these words in his newsletter:

"The Grim Reaper was always looking over the shoulders of the bomber crews up there over enemy air space and oftentimes extracted a grim harvest."

Friday the 13th 1945 would be no exception.

It was mission No. 188 for the 398th Bomb Group and it would result in the most unbelievable, freakish, tragic mission of the war. Many of the crewman involved never really knew "what happened?" All they remember was flying easily and happily over Neumunster, seeing the bombs drifting toward the target. Some of these bombs, known as "RDX," carried such markings as "To Adolph from FDR."

President Franklin Roosevelt had died the day before, and these "greetings" were in his memory.

The story from this point will be told by those who were there. Men who in a brief instant of an orange flash witnessed the near dismemberment of the 601st Squadron.

Your editor acknowledges the contribution made by Paul Brown of Burnsville, MN, without whose energy and research this story

See Pages 4-5-6



BOB WIGGINS

This good-looking gentleman is Robert E. Wiggins, Jr., who pulled a tour as a 600 navigator/bombardier on the Tom Matthews crew.

That was 44 years ago. Since then, until his recent retirement, Bob has been a banker in Richmond, Virginia.

Being a Richmond native, and available, Bob agreed to take on the role of "reunion chairman" for the 398th Bomb Group reunion in his hometown Sept. 21-24, 1988. The largest membership turnout of all is predicted for the meeting in the historical city.

Bob and his wife, Mildred, live in Richmond, VA 23225. (804)272-1224.

Complete reunion information and registration forms will be in the April issue of FLAK NEWS.

Gefunden!

Der Absturzplatz, wo Oberst Hunter und seine Mannschaft, mit einer Ausnahme, am 23. Januar 1945 den Tod fanden, ist gefunden. . . nicht weit vom Ziel des Tages in Neuss. Auch gefunden wurden verschiedene Leute die sich an den Absturz erinnern und dem Treffen der Mitglieder der 398. zigten auf ihrer Gruppentour im naehsten Sommer entgegensehen.

See page 3!

Luftwaffe General To Meet With 398th Bunch In Cologne



GEN. ADOLF GALLAND

Lt. Gen. Adolf Galland is described as "a leading ace on the Western Front; commander of all day and night fighters of the Luftwaffe; one of the greatest fighter pilot leaders in the history of combat aviation."

Hang on, 398th members of the "Bomb Run" tour to England and Germany next June! General and Mrs. Galland will be guests of the tour group at a luncheon in Cologne on June 9. More than a few 398th airmen "met" Galland or one of his ME-262 jet specialists high in the skies over Germany during those final, frantic months of the war in 1945.

Gen. Galland commanded the JV-44 squadron, drawing on the best Luftwaffe fighter pilots for a "last fling" in combat, flying the advanced, twin jet Messerschmitt. Like other generals of WW II, Galland has mellowed considerably and thoroughly enjoys meeting his one-time B-17 foes. Should be exciting!

Now We Know Where "FLAK" Came From

In some areas it was known as "ack-ack," the expression coming from a contraction of the words, "anti-aircraft."

However, to the folks flying into the stuff, it was never known by anything other than "flak."

So where did such a silly/sinister word come from?

Frank and Dottie Halm, editors of the 94th BG Nostalgic Notes, are happy to provide the answer—

"Flak came from a long German word describing a cannon shooting at fliers: Flugabwehrkanone. FLAK.

To paraphrase a well-known "heavy flak" expression: "The word's long enough to walk on."

1988 "Bomb Run" Tour Facts;

EVENT: Special 398th members/friends tour to England to visit London, Cambridge, Nuthampstead and other nostalgic places of East Anglia. Plus a "bomb run" tour to Luxembourg, Germany, Holland and Belgium to visit the Battle of the Bulge sites and various "target" cities so well known during 1944-45.

DATES: Entire tour May 31 to June 11 (England only May 31-June 7.)

TRAVEL: Via scheduled airlines from various points in the U.S. and Canada. Scheduled airline from London to Luxembourg. Excursion buses remainder of tour. Escorted.

REGISTRATION & INFORMATION: Galaxy Tours, PO Box 234, Wayne, PA 19087. Toll free telephone: 1-800-523-7287. In Pennsylvania: (215)254-6600. Ask for Mark Burton. Inquiries invited.

COSTS: Call Galaxy Tours. Prices vary on departure airport and length of tour. \$200 down payment required. Galaxy can arrange travel to departure airport, or additional travel in Europe.

RESERVATIONS: By Feb. 29, please! Last minute entries complicate reservations for hotels, buses, meals, planes, etc.

"It Was a Sad Time"

Anstey B-17 Crash Recalled

It was a long time ago . . . Oct. 15, 1944 . . . but Eunice Fox remembers the day that a 398th B-17 plunged to its death with nine aboard into the great mound at Anstey, just a stone's throw from the end of the main runway at Station 131.

On that 603 lead aircraft were Charles Khouri, CA; William Meyran, pilot; William Vanderlick, navigator; John Baker, MIC navigator; Carlton Moore, bombardier; William Stull, engineer; George Barton, radio operator; Charles Kennedy, waist gunner; and Melvin Brown, tail gunner.

Following is Eunice Fox' letter describing the dramatic event:

"It was a Sunday morning, a bit misty. I woke up as usual to hear the planes warming up, as we called it, around 5 a.m. to take off.

"Then suddenly, when still half asleep, I remember hearing this plane making a terrific noise. I lived in a little bungalow on the edge of the moat, and as I looked through my bedroom window I saw the plane. It first hit the tree in the field beyond, and as it came towards us I hid under the bed clothes because I thought it would hit the house.

"Next thing there was a terrific bang as it plunged through the trees and into the side of the great mound. My father and mother were in the next room. We were all shaken. I rushed to our back door, opened it, and quickly shut it again as the heat of the fire was dreadful.

"Within minutes we were surrounded by everything and everybody and told to run for our lives as the plane was loaded with bombs and they could go off. So still in our nightclothes we ran across the fields. As my neighbor's daughter was getting married the following weekend we took with us her wedding dress and cake.

"We were not allowed to come back for two days. Luckily, the bombs went into the water and were removed later after the moat was drained.

"It was a sad Sunday as all those poor dears died. I was the organist at the church at the time and we had a special service. It is still said that there may still be a bomb in that moat. I do not know. It took a long time to clear it all up.

"Where I lived in those days I used to count the planes as they went out and when they came back. Often they would be ragged and torn, with bits hanging off. It was a sad time.

"I cannot remember more about the plane disaster, but I hope this will be of some use."

Sincerely,
Eunice C. Fox
Anstey

"Friends of the 398th" at Nuthampstead

They have long been "Friends of the 398th," but now they will have official recognition. The Nuthampstead folks who have been the station 131 "ground crew" all these years now have formed an official group with "real" officers and a constitution. The names will be familiar, the titles new: David Wells, chair and contact person; Barry Tyler, treasurer; Elaine Tyler, secretary; and a "committee" made up of Peggy Wells, Mr. & Mrs. Robert Dimsdale; Mr. & Mrs. Tony Barker; Mr. & Mrs. Tony Clark and Vic Jenkins.

Their first official "production" will be the welcome arranged for the men and women on the England Bomb Run next summer.

Crash Site, Witnesses, Photo Found

Gonzales To Meet Many Who Saw B-17 Come Down

It all started out with a "high hope" dream to locate the exact site of the crash at Neuss which killed Col. Frank P. Hunter and all but his pilot, Lt. Federico Gonzales, on January 23, 1945.

Dreams come true!

The site has been found, just outside the Neuss city limits and just within the Dusseldorf city limits in the community of Heerdt.

But more, much more!

At least two adults who were at the crash site within an hour of the crash have been located. Plus two who were there as six-year-olds.

And the grand-daughter of the "farm woman" who ministered to Gonzales at her nearby farmhouse.

All these folks still live in the general area and are awaiting the arrival of the 398th traveling party when they visit on the group tour next June.

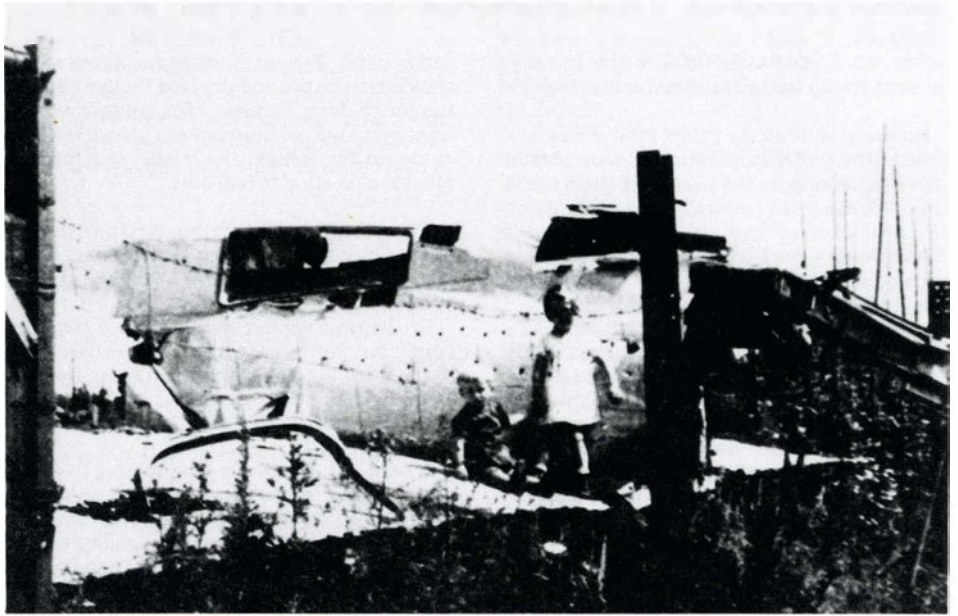
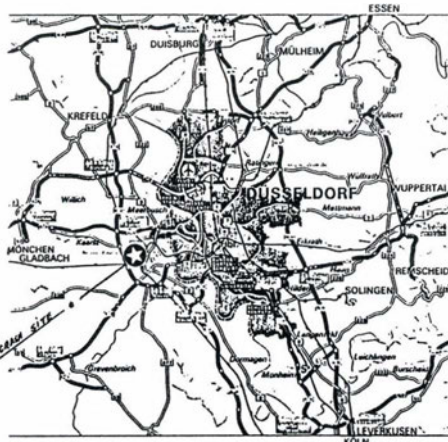
It was a German Flak gunner's perfect hit on the starboard wing of the Hunter-Gonzales plane that sent it on its death plunge. And a remarkable set of circumstances were set in motion to make it possible 43 years later for Gonzales...and Col. Hunter's widow, Maria...and many other airmen who were on that mission...to actually see the crash site and talk to the people who were a part of the drama in 1945.

Like Manfred Konig and Edgar Gorgen, who as small boys ran to see the demolished aircraft. To be chased away by the soldiers.

Like Willi Eirmbter, who actually pulled Gonzales away from the wreckage. And who witnessed a priest minister to a dying Col. Hunter and the other members of the crew.

And Gertrud Peiffer, who owns a stationery store in nearby Kaarst. She was the grand-daughter of the woman to whose home Gonzales was taken, seemingly more dead than alive.

"I am excited about your visit," she wrote Gonzales. "I will meet you and show you everything, including where you crashed in your plane."



**ONLY KNOWN PHOTO OF DOWNED HUNTER-GONZALES B-17
Little Children Play Near Aircraft At Crash Site Near Target**

Photo provided by Alfred Wilms, Dusseldorf-Heerdt

Eirmbter Witnessed Priest Minister To A Dying Col. Hunter

And then there is Alfred Wilms of Heerdt, who is writing a "chronic" of the region and wishes to include this event in his journal. He was at the crash site within the hour, and even provided the only known photo of the plane. He described the scene:

"I saw the wreckage pieces of the B-17 laying at the railway embankment. The plane's cockpit stuck in the snow in the ground. The body was broken behind the wings and lay about 800 meters off the steel work's ground. Both wings together with the engines were missing. Inside the deformed body two bomb bays were filled each with four bombs.

"A machine gun was hanging at one side of the body. It was removed by soldiers of the nearby anti-aircraft gun battery. Only later in 1945 were other pieces of the plane removed."

In addition to the photo, Wilms also provided detailed street maps pinpointing not only the crash site, but also of the Flak battery nearby that may or may not have provided the direct hit. It is estimated that the hit came two minutes before bombs away.

Aboard the plane that day with Hunter and Gonzales were William Beatovich, Kinney, MN; William Campbell, Wampum, PA; Charles Letts, Pt. Pierce, FL; Ralph Lenz, Lebanon, PA; William Butters, East Lansing, MI; Howard Rogers, Fresno, CA; Robert Mayfield, Mt. Lebanon, PA; and William Shumate, Big Wells, TX.

It is interesting to note that the aircraft came to its final rest in the general vicinity of the target for the day...the rail yards at Neuss.



GERTRUD PEIFFER

It Should Have Been A Milk Run:

Bombs Kissed In Mid-Air

BY PAUL BROWN
601 Radio Operator, Burnsville, MN

For many of us on the Palant crew it was supposed to be our 35th and final mission. And it was supposed to be the easiest of them all. A real milk run.

But it didn't work out as planned. It quickly became a nightmare which has taken a long time to fade into comfortable memory.

Our pilot, Sam Palant, was assigned to fly deputy lead on CA Tom Marchbanks and pilot Art Taylor. Our target, while in flight, was changed from Bad Klenen to Neumunster, some 40 miles due north of Hamburg. We would attack the city's marshalling yards with 10 "RDX" bombs in each of the group's B-17's.

These very special bombs yielded a very high explosive force, but were also very touchy and we were all cautioned that they had to be handled with care.

Everything was as briefed to the target. No flak and no enemy fighters. And it was a beautiful day, both in England and on the continent.

At the words, "bombs away!" I poked my head into the bomb bay to confirm that the load had been dumped. As deputy, we were to drop on the lead ship, and I could see the smoke marker from Taylor's aircraft.

I immediately hollered into the intercom that our bombs were still in there. Nothing happened! There was a flurry of conversation on the intercom, and I continued looking into the bomb bay, waiting for the bombs to go. After what seemed like several minutes, they all let go. All at once!

Then in just a few seconds I saw a tremendous orange flash through the open bomb bay. At first I thought our plane had exploded, then I realized that what I had seen was the reflection of an explosion beneath our plane.

Our tail-gunner on this trip was the squadron armament officer named Lt. Orie Hedges. He

had been hit. Byron Cunningham, in the waist, crawled to the tail and dragged Hedges back to the waist door. Hedges' own chute was still back in the tail, so Cunningham placed his own chute on the injured lieutenant and readied him for a position to bail out.

We had suffered heavy damage from the explosion, were losing altitude and there was a fire in the right wing! It was all bad.

By the time we had dropped to 12,000 feet Palant ordered us to bail out. By the time I got to the waist door, the others had gone: Hedges, Cunningham, waist gunner Robert Sandford and ball turret gunner Tom Coleman.

I could see the others plummeting to earth and I quickly joined them. I tugged on what I thought was the handle, but with no success. Finally, I realized that I had been pulling on the carrying handle, not the metal red handle that popped the chute. Being left-handed almost cost me my life.

Cunningham, who made a delayed jump, evaded capture for 24 hours, the rest of us were caught quickly and taken to an interrogation center at Pinneberg, near Hamburg.

During our passage through Hamburg, the 8th Air Force came over the city on their way to some other target. We were herded into a railroad tunnel which served as a shelter.

The townspeople, having experienced some of the heaviest bombing by the Allies, turned on us with shouts and curses. I felt lucky that Hamburg wasn't the target because if one bomb had fallen that day I'm sure the natives would have set on us and we would not have survived.

We were liberated by the British on May 2, 1945.

RDX Bombs Had Scary Reputation

BY GEORGE KLIX
603 Ordnance, Bloomfield Hills, MI

It was my responsibility in the 398th to check loaded planes for the proper bomb racking, safety wire insertion in the fuses, and to see that the safety pins were in place in the fuse vanes.

The operation of the bomb racks was the responsibility of the group maintenance people.

On the use of the specific bombs used on April 13, 1945 mission I recall that ordnance had at one time issued two bad lots of these bombs but both had been removed from our storage and disposed of. The safer bombs issued to the 398th were filled with the putty type RDX that lacked sufficient bee's wax which supposedly allowed the non-solid material to move on itself with a safe frictional resistance.



END OF THE LINE FOR C
601 Aircraft Died A Firey

Squadrons Flew

BY JOHN BORNSTEDT
601 Pilot, Salem, OR

Regarding the "RDX" mission I am enclosing a copy of the flimsey of the mission so you can see the position of each plane in the formation.

As you can see, I was the farthest from the explosion but our right wing was bowed upward from the concussion and nearly all of the inspection doors on the bottom side of the right wing were flopping in the breeze.

Our only injuries were several broken ear drums and some bloody noses. We were lucky there were no collisions, with planes bouncing in every direction. Some were out of control and ultimately crashed.

About all I can remember about the inquiry was that the accidental detonation was caused by the bombs from the deputy lead plane bumping together about 100 to 200 feet below the formation. This, of course, was caused by the bombs being salvoed rather than being released by intervalometer.

The squadron flight formations on the April 13, 1945 mission featured two, five-plane "V's," a departure from the previously used three-

Earlier, there had been explosions in boat loadings on the U.S. west coast and again in England.

It was my understanding that RDX bombs would be used only on a restricted basis. The Neumunster mission apparently qualified under the divisional guidelines, one of which was that they be dropped only in train, never salvoed.

There appeared to be an urgent desire on the part of Ordnance to clean the RDX bombs out of storage as their special use restrictions disrupted material flow and storage.

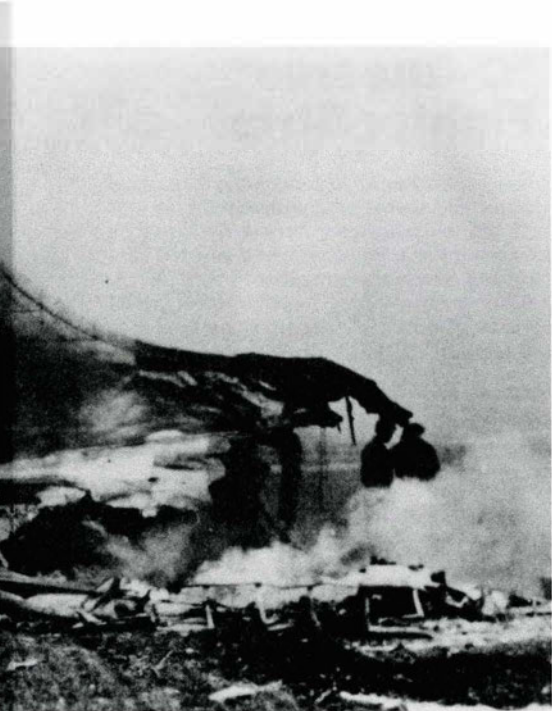
Now It Can Be Told

Continued from Page 1

might never have been told. And whose determined bird-dogging resulted in the re-uniting of his crew, piloted by Sam Palant, of Miami, FL.

Special thanks, also, to Mason Dicks, Keewatin, MN, who flew only one mission with the Palant crew (his last). Dicks volunteered to assemble and correlate the vast amount of information that began surfacing once the decision was made to publish the "RDX" story.

Rather than create a "conventional" story, your editor opted to present the events in "composite" form, using the first-person comments of the people who were there.



Explosion Raised Havoc With Every Plane in 601 Squadron

BY MASON DICKS
601 Navigator, Keewatin, MN

When we were over the target at Neumunster the lead ship dropped its bombs at about 1530. Simultaneously, our bombardier released the toggle switch and he said, "bombs away!"

He then called for a bomb bay check and the word came back that none of the bombs had left the plane. The bombardier and I had a hasty conversation to pick a "target of opportunity," which turned out to be Bad Segegerg, some 20 miles away and on our present course. We reached the target in five minutes at which time the bombs were salvoed.

During this time our pilot Sam Palant was trying to contact the bombardier, Nick Marabeas, to hold up the T.O. drop. Nick was flying his first mission with this crew along with myself and some others. The message was never received.

Several seconds after the salvo, with all four engines roaring and my helmet and earphones on, I heard a terrific explosion. Shrapnel came through the bottom of the nose and went out the top with terrific force, missing Marebeas and me by inches. At that time we had no idea what hit us, and certainly never associated the explosion with our bombs.

Then we heard that the tail gunner was injured and being ministered to by the waist gunner. And at the same time the engineer, Wilbur Withrow, and ball turret gunner, Tom Coleman, were reporting that the right wing and engines three and four were on fire!

This all happened in no more than a minute or two and the interphone was a mess of chatter. The tail gunner was wounded, the fire was being described, the pilot was calling me and asking me where we were, and the co-pilot, Robert Taylor, was asking how far we were from Allied lines!

We were about 20 miles east of Hamburg now and about 100 miles north of Hannover, the closest Allied territory. We pulled out of formation and I gave the pilot a course of 180 degrees to Hannover. We had taken off our flak suits and put on parachutes. A few minutes later, approximately 1540, Palant called for us to bail out. We were at 20,000 feet.

I made a delayed jump and was captured a few hours later while waiting for darkness. It was then I heard for the first time the famous German expression, "for you the war is over."

Lt. Palant stayed with the burning plane until everyone had bailed out.

"I dove to 12,000 feet hoping to put out the fire, but the wing was burning worse than ever," said Palant. "I realized I couldn't stay with it much longer so I set up the automatic pilot and then checked again to make sure everyone was gone.

"I stood in the bomb bay section until the heat from the fire became unbearable and then I jumped. I made the jump from about 8,000 feet and landed along the edge of the forest. I

was about 60 miles from Allied territory and took out walking. I knew where I was going because I could see the flashes of the guns at the front."

Palant was captured by British soldiers, who were not too certain he was not a German in stolen American clothes. After almost two weeks he worked his way back to London, where he borrowed money from a nurse to call station 131.

The lead B-17, piloted by Marchbanks/Taylor, lost two engines. And almost two pilots, as shrapnel crashed through the cockpit between the two men. They were able to make it back to France and a newly captured fighter airfield, landing with 1½ engines.

The plane piloted by Howard Traeder lost two engines, but made it as far as a small fighter strip at Paderborn where they crash-landed.

Bill Jones, who came to the 398th after completing a B-17 tour as an engineer-gunner in the Aleutian campaign, suffered a broken back in the landing. (See Howard Traeder story.)

Pilot Ray Hernden, with two wounded and a fire aboard, made it across the lines and crash landed. The B-17 burned almost completely.

The aircraft piloted by Charles Merritt had fires in its bomb bay, right wing and No. 4 engine. He dove from 20,000 feet to 8,000 feet

Astrodome Was Exit For Roger Campbell

and the fires subsided somewhat. But upon reaching Allied territory Merritt ordered his crew to bail out. Moments later the ship exploded.

The B-17 piloted by Emil Martinek, flying the lead ship in the second "V" formation, was probably hit the worst. Badly wounded in the hand, Martinek was induced by co-pilot Ted Cline to bail out, saying he would put the plane on auto pilot. Engineer Floyd Aarons opted to help Cline. Neither was able to get out before the ship went out of control.

Navigator Roger Campbell made the most improbable escape, popping out of the astrodome while the ship was upside down.

"As the plane rolled over I was tossed against the bomb sight," said Campbell. "I clawed my way back to the astrodome and finally unlatched it. I stuck my head through trying to get out head first but couldn't make it. Then I bodily pushed my feet through and the slipstream caught me and pulled me out."

Ed Steele, waist-gunner on the Martinek crew, landed near German civilians and was quickly captured. After successfully warding off an old man who was attempting to shoot him with a shotgun, Steele was rounded up by some soldiers who gave him a shovel and directed him to begin digging his grave!

Continued Next Page

OR Q-QUEENIE rey Death at Paderborn w In "Double V"

plane elements in a 12-plane squadron formation.

This new alignment was initiated about April 1, 1945. The second "V" flew about 40 feet behind and 40 feet below the lead "V."

Following were the formations on the bizarre "RDX" mission:

- | | | |
|----------------------|----------|------------|
| LEAD SQUADRON | | |
| 601 | | |
| MARCHBANKS | | |
| Taylor | | |
| Hernden | | Palant |
| Starkey | | Merritt |
| | Martinek | |
| Green | | Traeder |
| Bornstedt | | Adams |
| LOW SQUADRON | | |
| 600 | | |
| PETTUS | | |
| Maudsley | | |
| Eiselle | | Sheffer |
| Nolan | | Shimek |
| | Runnion | |
| Idso | | Hultman |
| Hoelzen | | Woodmansee |
| | McGeorge | |
| HIGH SQUADRON | | |
| 603 | | |
| GUICE | | |
| Beckstrom | | |
| Swift | | Worley |
| Swan | | King |
| | Aniello | |
| Rosenberg | | Alwood |
| Keenan | | Donovan |



END OF THE LINE FOR Q-QUEENIE
601 Aircraft Died A Firey Death at Paderborn
Squadrons Flew In "Double V"

BY JOHN BORNSTEDT
601 Pilot, Salem, OR

Regarding the "RDX" mission I am enclosing a copy of the flimsey of the mission so you can see the position of each plane in the formation.

As you can see, I was the farthest from the explosion but our right wing was bowed upward from the concussion and nearly all of the inspection doors on the bottom side of the right wing were flopping in the breeze.

Our only injuries were several broken ear drums and some bloody noses. We were lucky there were no collisions, with planes bouncing in every direction. Some were out of control and ultimately crashed.

About all I can remember about the inquiry was that the accidental detonation was caused by the bombs from the deputy lead plane bumping together about 100 to 200 feet below the formation. This, of course, was caused by the bombs being salvoed rather than being released by intervalometer.

The squadron flight formations on the April 13, 1945 mission featured two, five-plane "V's," a departure from the previously used three-

Earlier, there had been explosions in boat loadings on the U.S. west coast and again in England.

It was my understanding that RDX bombs would be used only on a restricted basis. The Neumunster mission apparently qualified under the divisional guidelines, one of which was that they be dropped only in train, never salvoed.

There appeared to be an urgent desire on the part of Ordnance to clean the RDX bombs out of storage as their special use restrictions disrupted material flow and storage.

plane elements in a 12-plane squadron formation.

This new alignment was initiated about April 1, 1945. The second "V" flew about 40 feet behind and 40 feet below the lead "V."

Following were the formations on the bizarre "RDX" mission:

LEAD SQUADRON
601

MARCHBANKS
 Taylor

	Hernden	Palant	
Starkey			Merritt
		Martinek	
	Green	Traeder	
Bornstedt			Adams

LOW SQUADRON
600

PETTUS
 Maudsley

	Eiselle	Sheffer	
Nolan			Shimek
		Runnion	
	Idso	Hultman	
Hoelzen			Woodmansee
		McGeorge	

HIGH SQUADRON
603

GUICE
 Beckstom

	Swift	Worley	
Swan			King
		Aniello	
	Rosenberg	Alwood	
Keenan			Donovan

Dicks Recalls Mission Drama

From Page 5

“When they thought I had it deep enough, the lieutenant in charge lined up his men with their machine guns and was about to order them to shoot me.

“I took out the picture of my wife and two-year-old daughter that I always carried with me. This apparently made the lieutenant curious and he came over to look. In good English, he asked if these were my wife and daughter. When I assured him this was so, he returned to the squad and briefly talked to the sergeant. Then he came back again and repeated the same question.”

“I also have a wife and daughter at home,” the German said. And he returned once again to his squad. He stopped, and for the third time, came back to me and asked if the Americans took prisoners. I responded, ‘they certainly do.’

“Once more he asked about my family, and then all of a sudden he ordered his men to put their guns down. And soon I was taken to a jail in a little town and the next day I was reunited with most of my crew.”

The questions remain to this day, and they probably will never be answered:

Why didn't the bombs leave in train over the target?

What caused them to explode when salvoed?

There is a lot of theory as to why the bombs exploded, but there is very little as to why they didn't leave the plane on the first attempt.

Armament personnel stated that RDX bombs were relatively, but not completely, safe and had a restricted use for the easier type missions.

They would be used only when they could be dropped in train so that they would fall individually and not hit against one another when leaving the bomb bay.

Campbell, who was Palant's original bombardier, offered this suggestion—

“One of the bomb's arming wires may have been loose and the slipstream blowing into the open bomb bay armed the fuse by turning the propeller or vane which was part of the bomb's fuse mechanism.

“Consequently, when the bombs did drop as a salvo the armed bomb hit another bomb and exploded the whole works.”

The Group investigation after the mission revealed little more than assumptions that the bombs were 1) improperly installed, 2) mistakenly salvoed, or 3) possibly sabotaged. A more thorough investigation could not be made at the time because the key witnesses were POW's.

Pilot Traeder Nursed “Q-Queenie” To Crash Landing On Fighter Strip

BY HOWARD TRAEDE
601 Pilot, West Allis, WI

It was truly a milk run. No fighters, no flak. And it was a beautiful spring day, bright and sunny with a few cumulus clouds.

But that all changed shortly after “bombs away,” when I suddenly found myself and my airplane out in front of everyone due to an unexplained, sudden accelerating force. I immediately “chopped” the throttles, poked the nose down, dropped flaps, and lowered the gear to regain control at a lower altitude where I could spot the rest of the formation.

The intercom then became very busy with reports of damaged aircraft, including one going down with the wing torn off and another crew bailing out. Then I discovered I had problems of my own, what with two dead engines. No. 2 feathered properly, but No. 4 windmilled out of control.

The crew reported the ship was full of holes and the bomb bay doors were sprung inward. The tail turret was jammed and useless.

It was obvious the formation was decimated (by flak, we thought) so we headed west toward friendly territory. We were momentarily alarmed as four, single-engined fighters

Captured German Field Posed “Rocky” Problem

closed in, but much relieved when they were identified as P-51's. They left us, without making radio contact or responding to our contact attempts. They apparently concluded we needed no help from them.

Just as our descending aircraft and the wooded terrain beneath us were converging too rapidly for comfort, we sighted an airfield. We could not identify it, but at this point any airfield looked just great.

But we soon discovered that our B-17 was not meant to be landed on this particular runway, which turned out to be a captured German fighter strip near Paderborn. With a huge pile of rock and rubble looming on either side of the runway extension, I called for “gear up” in order to belly in as we ripped into the rubble piles. Only the left wing gave way completely as “Q-Queenie” came to rest after turning 45 degrees right, skidding across a road and tearing out a telephone line.

That's when the miracle happened! As we counted noses after evacuating our now burning plane, two GI ambulances pulled alongside to transport us to the airfield hospital which had been established on that field just the previous week!

The crew sustained minor cuts and bruises, with the exception of Bill Jones, our tail gunner. Bill suffered a fractured vertebrae sheltering the rest of the crew during the crash landing. All but Jones returned to duty by April 17.

The smoldering hulk of “Q-Queenie” lay

where we left her, an inglorious end for a proud old bird. But perhaps not untimely, for she was stiff, old, and war-weary. Very difficult to fly. I remember her as being very heavy on the controls and totally unresponsive to trim tab adjustments. My co-pilot, Quent McMurray, and I would spell each other every 15 minutes due to fatigue.

I learned no further details of this incredible mission until some 40 years later when one day I answered the phone to have the caller greet me—

“I'm Paul Brown. I was the radio operator on the crew that blew you guys out of the sky on April 13, 1945.”

Some Received “Outside” Help

In the minds of at least two members on one of the crews on the RDX mission, their safe return to Nuthampstead in a badly damaged B-17 was attributed to something more than a stout airplane, skillful flying or just plain luck.

Pilot Bob Starkey and tail-gunner Harold Flynt both learned upon returning home that Starkey's wife and Flynt's parents both had premonitions of pending danger to their husband/son early in the morning of April 13, 1945.

As Flynt's parents told their son—

“Suddenly, in the early morning hours, we both awakened with a strange foreboding of something about to happen to you, that you were in grave danger.

“Getting out of bed, we knelt to pray. We prayed most earnestly for God to protect you.”

What time was this? Flint asked his parents.

“The big clock downstairs chimed four times when we were on our knees.”

Almost the exact time the 398th force was closing in on Neumunster!

Mrs. Starkey awakened similarly, feeling the need for God to protect her pilot husband.

She could not have known that at the very time Starkey's plane was about to sustain the kind of damage that should have sent it hurtling out of the skies.

Once down at Station 131, crew and mechanics studied the battered airplane. And expressed amazement that it survived. The main spar in one wing was almost severed. An engine was just barely hanging on. Several control cables were severed. Holes everywhere.

A miracle.

—Allen Ostrom—

PRESIDENT BILL COMSTOCK REPORTS:

CAF Thanks 398th For Sponsorship; Ellsworth Museum Fund Honors Hunter

CAF Sends "Thank You" Letter to 398th

A letter has been received from the American Airpower Heritage Foundation, better known as the Confederate Air Force, thanking the 398th for its landmark \$3,500 contribution to the care and maintenance of the Sentimental Journey:

"We congratulate the 398th Bomb Group on being the first unit to become a Combat Sponsor. We greatly appreciate your support and are delighted that you have taken this important step in keeping a B-17 around which can . . . belch smoke, drip oil, or thrill viewers with her awesome power and might."

"You have our heartfelt gratitude for your support of the Sentimental Journey and the Confederate Air Force."

LELAND M. (PAPPY) MARTIN, Col, USAF (Ret.)
Executive Director

(The CAF magazine, CAF DISPATCH, provided a very nice reminder of the 398th contribution in its November-December issue.)

55th Fighter Group Presents Request

A letter has been received from the 55th Fighter Group, the outfit which opened Station 131 at Nuthampstead before the 398th took over. They wish to add a memorial at our 398th site, a "smaller, little friend motif," as they put it.

Sounds like a neat idea, and we are running this request past our own Board officers, our English friends at Nuthampstead and the American Battle Monuments Commission.

Davis Honored At Mini-Reunion

We held our mini-reunion with the 8th Air Force last October in Pittsburgh. We had 44 in attendance, many coming for the first time. Among the high points at the meeting was the presentation of a B-17 model and plaque to Jack Davis, who served as our association secretary-treasurer for many years.

New Memorial Fund Established

I find there is a great deal of interest among our members as to how they can make contribution in the memory of a loved one or close friend. We are approved by the IRS as a charitable body and entitled to receive tax deductible contributions, so I am instructing our secretary to set up a procedure to accept such funds. I would like to start such a program with a \$500 gift to be shown as "In Memory of William C. Hancock."

We will discuss various other memorials and scholarships at our next Group meeting in Richmond in September.

Commission Takes Over Memorial Care

We now have \$10,000 deposited with the Riggs Bank in Washington, D.C., which will provide the funds for perpetual care of our memorial at Nuthampstead. This will now be taken over by the American Battle Monuments Commission, assuring our memorial the same care that is given our cemeteries all over the world. Thanks to Ralph Hall for pursuing this project. And thanks to Robert and Wilfred Dimsdale for their cooperation in deeding the land to the 398th. And to our Nuthampstead Friends who cared for the memorial since 1982.

Brown Delivers \$1,000 to SD Museum

Dale Brown reported that he attended a meeting of the Ellsworth Heritage Foundation in Rapid City, SD, where he presented, on behalf of the 398th, a \$1,000 check to be used for the South Dakota Air & Space Museum. The check was presented in memory of Col. Frank P. Hunter, Jr. A suitable plaque will be developed to be placed in the museum.

Reunion Registration Costs Lowered

Because of some very careful planning and operations at our last reunions at Colorado Springs and San Antonio, we will be able to reduce individual registration costs about 50% when we meet next September in Richmond, Virginia. I have asked reunion chairman Bob Wiggins and coordinator Allen Ostrom to continue to keep alert to costs.

Deed, Flag Ceremonies in Schedule

The long planned "changing of the deed" ceremony, the act of giving the 398th Memorial Association title to the land under the memorial at the Woodman Inn site, will be held at the home of Robert and Francois Dimsdale at nearby Barkway during the June Group Tour to England.

The first flag belonging to a widow of a deceased 398th airmen that will be flown over the Memorial will be the one belonging to Mrs. Frank P. Hunter. Additional flags will be flown as received by the "Friends of the 398th."

"Evadee" Hunter to Head Dayton Reunion

I am most pleased to announce that Jack Hunter has agreed to act as "reunion chairman" for our Group meeting in Dayton, Ohio, set for September 20-23, 1989. Jack was a waist gunner on the 601 Cucco crew, and one of the 398th's very few evadees after being shot down. Jack and his wife Virginia live in Kettering, Ohio. He retired as a tool maker and inspector for Monarch Marking Systems.



LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON

Capt. Ray Kozak, USAF, recently paid a visit to Nuthampstead, where he was pictured by the 398th Memorial. Son of Steve Kozak, 601 navigator on the Marias crew, Ray is a co-pilot on a KC-135R, which routinely offloads 100,000 pounds of fuel to US and NATO aircraft in Europe. Ray noted that his dad's B-17 had a gross maximum weight of 65,000 pounds!

"The Peace of God"

Taps List Grows With Golden Years

As in all areas of mankind, the ranks begin to thin at the approach of those "golden years."

The 398th also is experiencing a thinning of the ranks, as witnessed by the following list of 117 members.

The editor bestows "the peace of God that passes all understanding" on the widows and families who lost loved ones in 1987.

Adleman, Milo	Jarman, Gordon
Alexander, Claude	Johnson, Warren
Ashworth, Dean H.	Jones, Ira
Audet, Paul E.	Jordan, Edward
Bailey, Ray E.	Kearney, Earl
Baptist, Claude A.	Keene, Raymond
Baxter, Richard	Krause, John J.
Belcher, Jess	Levy, David L.
Benefield, (1st name unknown)	Long, Douglas
Bennett, Norville	Lutz, Joseph
Bell, Marvin	Marchbanks, Tom
Breymeyer, Royal	McLaughlin, Ken E. "Bud"
Berry, Kearie L.	McCoy, Wayne
Blanda, Guido	McCurdy, Robert G.
Brady, Jack	Melson, Rufus
Briody, J.	Meyers, Russ
Braddock, Heyward M.	Miller, Paul
Brown, E. Logan	Mitchell, George
Bushle, Louis	Moore, Randolph
Butler, John	Moore, Vincent
Byrne, Felix E.	Morris, Stacey Jr.
Callahan, Noel	Myers, Revel J.
Campbell, Tom	Nejaski, Leroy
Clafford, Lloyd	Norgy, William
Colburn, Warren	Overton, Vernon
Coombs, Frank	Robinson, Robert
Corsuti, Anthony	Rooney, Pete
Cowen, Harry	Rose, Arthur
Cote, Arthur	Rossi, James H.
Cummings, D.L.	Sachs, Stanley
Cox, Norman	Sawyer, Hiram N.
Darner, Leroy	Schneider, John
Delbart, Raymond S.	Seaver, Warren
Delorier, Joseph	Selevan, Arthur
Devon, Samuel	Scholl, Howard
Douglas, Gene	Sigsworth, John R.
Dunne, Bill	Shaw, Donald
Engard, Robert	Simeral, Robert
Ferguson, Allen	Scott, Ernest D.
Fernandez, Frank	Shimek, Albert J.
Folger, Robert	Smith, Coy
Foraker, Kenneth H.	Smith, John E.
Francischine, Gino	Stanbrough, Claude
Frew, George	Stone, Warren
Gibb, Robert B.	Suggett, Walter
Grant, Sam H.	Sweet, Robert
Griffo, Arthur	Terrion, Leo
Grossman, M.	Troost, H.M.
Gruber, Fred	Tucker, Frank
Gresh, Steve	Turner, Mark
Hager, Herman L.	Upmeier, Tom
Hancock, William C.	Vanderlick, William
Hatch, Dwight	Vernet, Wally
Herrera, Pedro	Wade, Warren
Hogrefe, Carl	Walkup, Charles A. Jr.
Houchins, Harry	Waarama, Arthur
Howard, Grant	Waring, Leonard H.
Hicinbothem, Franklin	Woodmansee, D.A.
Hunter, Lewis	Wilde, George J.
Jackson, Paul K.	Zagelow, Larry

Membership Roster Upcoming; Help Find The "Missing"

A roster of the entire 398th Bomb Group Memorial Association will be printed early this year, and will be made available to all members.

This will be the only appeal for address corrections and updates, so we encourage all members to check their FLAK NEWS mailing labels. Send corrections to the editor.

Remember, if we don't receive a change of address from you, we lose you. Just as we have lost these folks:

*Lyle Cochran
Willard Hadjes
Eddie Hinson
Arthur Keifer
Harvey Latson
John McGraw
Herman Roberts
Richard Severence
Henry Stack
William Harper
Ray Hoffman
Thurman Gentry
Paul Penders
Urban Terbieten
Dale Nichol
James Douvres*

*Fred Stromberg
Howard Goldstein
Rodney Haight
Houston Booth
P. Levinson
James Fisher
Phillip Krieg
James Martindale
Sam Powell
George Wilde
Preston Morrison
Johnny Petrel
Lee Treff
Joyce Tachio
Walt Skellenger
Mrs. Chas. Walkup
John McMillen*

398th BOMB GROUP FLAK NEWS
c/o Allen Ostrom
Seattle, WA 98177

SAMPLE NEWS RELEASE FOR LOCAL NEWSPAPERS

_____ NAME _____ NAME _____ has just returned from England and Germany, where he accompanied his 8th Air Force B-17 Bomber Group on a tour of his World War II base north of London. _____ NAME

and his wife _____ NAME _____ also visited Battle of the Bulge sites on the continent and several German cities which were bomber targets 43 years ago.

_____ NAME _____ was with the 398th Bomb Group in 1944-45, serving as a _____ in the _____ squadron."

(Include Name, Address and phone.)

NEXT ISSUE:

In the next (April) issue of FLAK NEWS, we will run complete information on the 1988 annual reunion, scheduled for September 21-24, Richmond, Virginia.

We will also run an up to date compilation of all surviving B-17's the world over. This to include serial numbers, locations, owners and contact officers. (There are about 50.)

We will also run a complete listing of all 398th personnel who are buried in England, France, Belgium and Holland. Or whose names appear on the Walls of the Missing.