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

VOL. 8 NO. 2

FLAK NEWS

APRIL 1993

# THE LAST MISSION

## Four Squadrons On Final Flight

The 398th Bomb Group sent up four squadrons and 358 airmen for what was to be the final combat mission flown by the Group and the 8th Air Force in World War II.

The Mission was led by Michael Robinson, who had taken over as 601st Squadron CO only the week before. The other squadrons were led by Orrin Tatchio (600), Gaylord Pryor (602) and Jim Hanauer (603).

Complete crew loading lists appear on Pages 6 and 7.

## Warning Issued By Ike: Our Bombers Are Coming

A radio broadcast announcing the pending raid on Pilsen, Czechoslovakia, was broadcast from London on orders from General Eisenhower.

Read Jim Hanauer's mission report and explanation of why the Allies had chosen to bomb the Skoda plant even as American ground troops were about to enter the city ... and the Russians were approaching from the east. See Page 8.

## Report From Pilsen By Czech Observer

Eyewitness accounts of the April 25, 1945, B-17 raid on Pilsen were gathered by Czech historian Vladislav Krakty. Read his account of the eventful day on Page 8.

## Search For Crash Sites

Six young men from Pilsen have formed an organization called, "SLET." This group is devoted to locating Allied World War II aircraft crash sites. They presented the adjoining drawing to 398th members on tour to Merseburg last June 21, 1992. Their story appears on Page 9.

## BULLETIN

*LONDON, April 26, 1945 — The great Skoda armament works at Pilsen, Czechoslovakia, probably one of the last remaining sources of arms for the German Army, was attacked yesterday by United States 8th Air Force Flying Fortresses.*

*The first bombs went down on the Skoda works an hour and a half after Allied headquarters had issued the following warning —*

*"Allied bombers are out in great strength today. Their destination may be the Skoda works. Skoda workers, get out and stay out until the afternoon."*

*This was the first time that a warning naming the target had been broadcast ahead of the American heavy bombers. Sixteen United States bombers and three fighters are missing.*

## End Comes After 195th Mission

The last World War II mission flown by the 398th Bomb Group ... and the Eighth Air Force ... was 48 long years ago.

**April 25, 1945.**

Including this long flight to Pilsen, Czechoslovakia, the last of 195 such combat missions, the 398th sacrificed 296 men as "killed in action." Plus another 298 who survived bail outs and crash landings in enemy territory and spent time in the various German PW camps.

And since World War II in Europe officially ended and the troops began returning home, another 450 (at least) are known to have passed on.

Yet, almost 1,700 remain as current or associate members of the 398th Bomb Group Memorial Association. And many of these airmen were on that "Last Mission" to Pilsen.

Czechoslovakia was not a "popular" military target for the 8th Air Force. But because it was a German occupied country and a contributor (even if reluctantly) to the German war effort, the 8th bombers and fighters made selective attacks, mostly on transportation targets. The 398th previously had visited Brux (Most) Prague, and Eger (Cheb) in Czechoslovakia.

By April of 1945 much had changed at Station 131. Colonel Frank P. Hunter had been lost on a mission to Neuss in January. Lewis Ensign came from Wing HQ to replace Hunter and he himself had been replaced one week before the Last Mission by Arthur Briggs, who had come over from the 381st at Ridgewell to be group operations officer.

*Continued On Page 5*



**“Let Me Put Madeline On The Line”**

# First Meeting In 47 Years

“I discovered what God has known from the beginning, that a child born out of wedlock is every bit as precious in His eyes as the one born of parents with benefit of clergy.”

With those words imbedded in his mind after living for 47 years with the knowledge that he had left an unborn child in England when the war was over, Tom Dougherty returned to England last summer to meet the daughter he fostered, but had never met.

“On September 9, 1992, my dream came true when we met for the first time at the Rose & Crown Hotel in Baldock,” said Dougherty.

“It was love at first sight,” he continued. “There are no words to describe the feelings that enveloped us. She was so loving and caring, and truly happy that her real father wanted to find her.

“And the father was so happy that his daughter wanted him to find her.”

Dougherty came to England with the first contingent of 398th Bomb Group airmen, being a waist gunner on the Harold Woodson crew of the 602nd Squadron. Others on the crew were Richard Morauer, Peter Mullin, Raymond (Mal) Turner, Gerald Dixon, Solomon (Sol) Waslow, Russ Spear, Cecil (Tex) Moore and George Shoptaw.

## Gunner Returns To England To Find His “Precious” Daughter

Dougherty’s luck with women had not been all that successful even before leaving Rapid City, where the 398th trained combat crews before departing for Nuthampstead and Station 131. A hasty, ill-advised marriage ended in annulment. And subsequently, a 16-year marriage begun in 1947 also would be dissolved.

The only child he had after all these years was the daughter he fathered in England with “Molly” from Baldock.

With every intention of bringing Molly and his baby to the United States after the war, Dougherty nevertheless could not generate enough extra money with his regular and part-time jobs to send for them.

“Things were not turning out the way I had hoped,” he said. “The weeks and months passed and Molly apparently lost hope. In her last letter she informed him that ‘It is over.’ I continued to write, but then a letter came from her mother saying that Molly ‘had made other plans.’”

Thoughts of his daughter continued in Dougherty’s mind throughout the coming years. Finally, with the encouragement of the woman he married in 1966, Dawne, he began thinking seriously of trying to locate his offspring, who was born in the fall of 1945. Still, he reasoned, would she be interested in his coming on the scene after all these years? Had Molly even told her about her American father? Did he have the right to break into someone’s life in this manner? Could he even locate her? So many questions!

“Your daughter should be the one to decide if she wants a relationship with you,” offered Dawne. “Find her and ask her.”

With that encouragement, plus all the news coming out on the 50th anniversary of the 8th Air Force celebrations being planned in England during 1992, Dougherty — now 70 — decided “It’s now or never.” And the search began.

I made contact with numerous organizations who located servicemen’s children and relatives. I sought help from a group called ‘Trace.’ No luck at all.

“Finally, I decided to place a ‘personals’ newspaper ad and contacted a publisher at Hitchin. I also wrote a letter to ‘Resident’ at Molly’s old address in Baldock. Unbelievably, Molly’s sister, Rosemary, still lives there.



**THE 398TH MEMORIAL at Nuthampstead was the perfect place for a reunion between Tom Dougherty and the daughter he left unborn after completing his tour as a gunner on the Harold Woodson 602 crew. After 47 years he traced his daughter to Hitchin via a “personals” newspaper ad. After getting together at Hitchin, the two drove to Station 131 to view the memorial ... and exchange more memories. Dougherty found that his daughter, named Madeline Maxwell, was “precious.”**

“Rosemary also received calls from two others who had seen the newspaper ad. Her first call was to Brian Maxwell of Baldock, who just happened to be married to Dougherty’s daughter, whose name is Madeline.

“Maxwell called me with the news that he was my son-in-law. And also that I had two grand children! He said that he would tell Madeline all this startling news ‘when the time was right.’ A few days later he called again and said, ‘Let me put Madeline on the line.’”

“We talked for an hour, and finally we made a date to meet in person on September 9 in Baldock.

“It had taken 47 long years, but I found my daughter. And she is precious.”

## ENGLAND TOUR ON THE BOOKS FOR JUNE 1994

Yes, there will be a tour to England next year! Final plans and arrangements are now being drawn by Tour Coordinator Allen Ostrom, assisted by our English Friends of the 398th and our travel consultant, Barbara Fish of Travel House, Inc., Seattle.

In addition, Angela Tours of Southampton, England, will again do the coach tour under the guidance of Linda Ellis and Jim Espezel.

It has been determined that the tour will originate in Southampton to include visits to various south England D-Day installations and museums. June 1994 will mark the 50th anniversary of D-Day.

A five-day “home stay” program will again be featured during the visit to Station 131. Dates of the England tour have been set for June 15-June 30, 1994.

Complete information, itinerary, costs, etc., will be mailed in the July issue of FLAK NEWS. Travel House, Inc., Seattle, has a toll-free telephone number — 1-800-423-5454.

As of FLAK NEWS press time in mid-April, Barbara had already received verbal tour commitments from over 40 members.

“They seem to be about evenly split between those who had been on one or more tours, and the first timers,” she said.

One comment she heard from several callers —

“We heard so many good things about last year’s tour we determined we were not going to miss the next one.”

# NEXT UP: Buffalo, NY

## 1993 Reunion

It may or may not break the attendance record set last year at Nashville, but Larry Paul and his committee are determined to make the 10th annual 398th Bomb Group reunion an event that will rate right up there with "the best of them all."

This is the promise for the Buffalo, New York, event where some 500-plus are expected for the four-day reunion on September 15-16-17-18, 1993.

Buffalo, where Niagara Falls is a world-renown attraction and the Buffalo Bills are almost world-renown in the Super Bowl. (Maybe next year.)

The Falls will attract attendees on two days, Friday and Saturday, September 17 & 18. A six-hour tour has been arranged by the committee that is sure to leave the spectators breathless.

There also will be time to see the host city via a coach tour called, "The Best of Buffalo." Plus a specially-arranged tour to "Calspan," a one-of-a-kind research facility that is home to a variety of scientists working on a variety of advanced technical projects. This tour will be conducted at four different times on September 17, and will be limited to 25 members per tour.

For those who want to do things on their own, the National War Planes Museum is an hour's drive from Buffalo, at Geneseo, New York. Dozens of WW II aircraft are there, including the B-17, Fuddy Duddy.

The golfers, a breed apart, will be out in the early mornings at a local course selected by Marvin Laufer, a "golfing nut" who builds his own golf clubs.

Those who visit Niagara Falls are reminded that they will be entering Canada, so will need to bring along proof of U.S. citizenship.

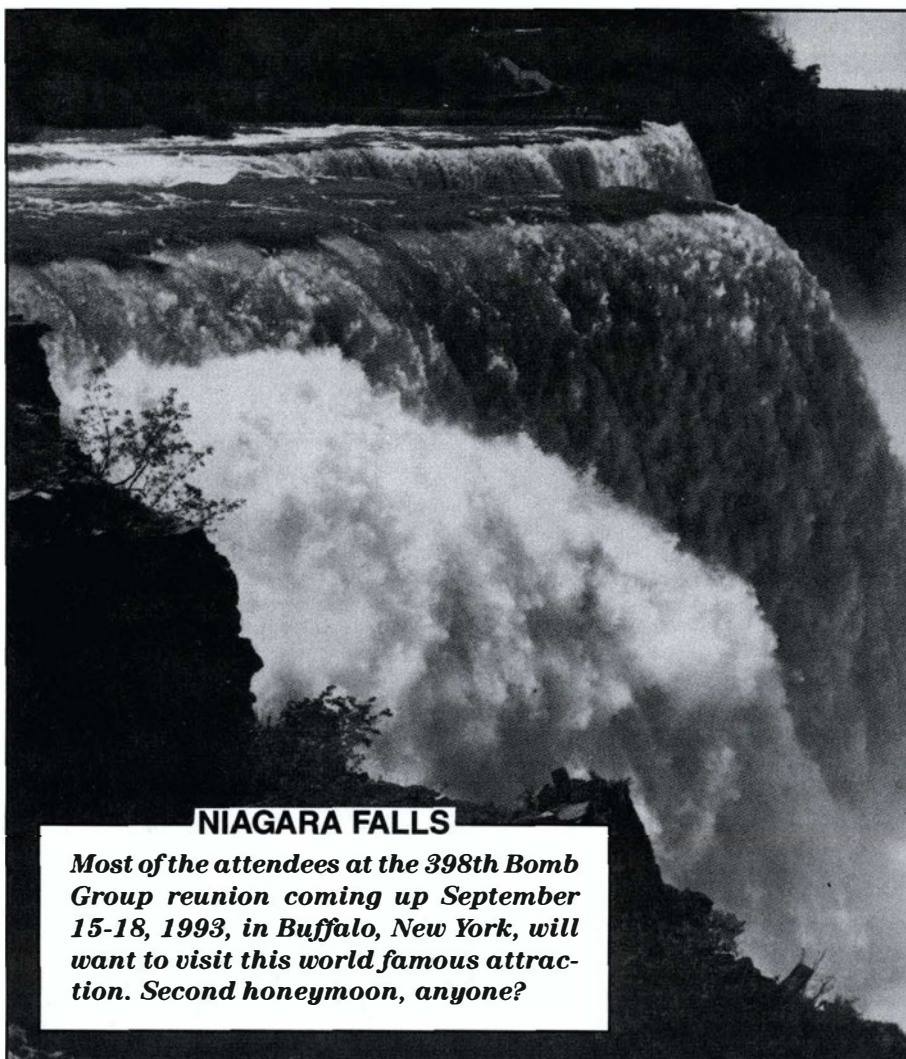
The headquarters hotel, Sheraton Airport, has easy walking access to a shopping mall, where a special ladies program is being arranged.

All three evening banquets, on September 16-17-18, will be held in the Presidential Ballroom at the Sheraton.

Diane Susek, a soprano recording artist, will be featured at the Friday, September 17 banquet. (See Page 5.)

Members are invited to look over the Official Registration Form on the next page and select the activities and attractions of their choice. Mail the completed form to reunion chairman Larry Paul with your check covering all selected events. Include your \$10 PER PERSON registration fee. Larry will return your photocopied form which will be your receipt.

A packet of tickets and other information will be awaiting you at the registration desk in the Memory Room of the



### NIAGARA FALLS

*Most of the attendees at the 398th Bomb Group reunion coming up September 15-18, 1993, in Buffalo, New York, will want to visit this world famous attraction. Second honeymoon, anyone?*

Sheraton Hotel. Members are reminded that they must register (on arrival) for seating assignment at all three banquets.

### Hotel Reservation Cards in FLAK NEWS

A hotel reservation card for the Buffalo, NY reunion, September 15-18, 1993, has been inserted in your FLAK NEWS. Use it to reserve your room at the headquarters Sheraton Buffalo Airport Hotel, 2040 Walden Avenue at I-90 (Exit 52E).

The reservations cards should be returned no later than August 25, 1993. If your card is missing, write the hotel at the above address or call (716) 681-2400. The 398th has a special daily rate of \$68.00, single or double.

### Microtel Is Backup At Buffalo Reunion

The Microtel, located six miles from the headquarters Sheraton Hotel, will serve as "backup" hotel for the 398th reunion. It is located just off I-78 at Exit 49. A rate of \$49.95 plus tax will be available to members identifying themselves as being from the 398th. Reservations at the Microtel may be made by calling toll free 1-800-648-9880.

### TRAVEL HELP AVAILABLE

Reunion attendees preparing to make their travel arrangement are invited to make a toll-free call to check on the "best fares" available to Buffalo, New York.

Travel House, Inc., Seattle, the company that made the travel arrangements on last year's big tour to Germany and England, will handle the Buffalo travel requirements. Call Barbara Fish, toll free, 1-800-423-5454. She is also handling arrangements for the 1994 England tour.

### 398th REMEMBRANCES Continues To Sell

The third printing of "398th Bomb Group Remembrances" continues to be a good seller. More than a few of the recent purchases have been repeaters, according to treasurer Ralph Hall, who monitors the sale of the 100-page 398th historical document.

"It seems many of the books are being ordered for sons, daughters and grandchildren," he said. "They want their kids to know what grandpa did during the war. And 'Remembrances' sure tells the story of what we went through over there."

The book may be purchased for \$22.00 each by sending a check made out to "398th Book," % Ralph Hall, New Bedford, MA 02740-1915.

# OFFICIAL REGISTRATION FORM

398th Bomb Group Memorial Association Tenth Annual Reunion  
Buffalo, New York September 15-16-17-18, 1993

**PLEASE RETURN NO LATER THAN AUGUST 15, 1993**

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ WIFE \_\_\_\_\_ SQD: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

NAMES OF OTHERS IN PARTY. PLEASE PRINT FOR NAME TAGS

**WEDNESDAY, September 15:**

Golf	6:30 AM	Meet in Lobby .....	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
Registration	1 PM - 5 PM	McKinley Room	
Memory Room	1 PM - 5 PM	McKinley Room	

No organized activities today. Dinner at your selection.

**THURSDAY, September 16:**

Golf	6:30 AM	Meet in Lobby .....	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
Registration	9 AM - 5 PM	McKinley Room	
Memory Room	9 AM - 5 PM	McKinley Room	
Officers Meeting	10 AM	Comstock Room	
Group Business Meeting	2 PM	Roosevelt Room	
Womens' Fashion Show	2 PM - 4 PM	Walden Galleria Mall, free..	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
Cash Bar	6 PM - 7 PM	Lower Courtyard	
Welcome Banquet	7 PM	Presidential Ballroom .....	\$24.00 x _____ \$ _____

**FRIDAY, September 17:**

Registration	9 AM - 5 PM	McKinley Room	
Memory Room	9 AM - 5 PM	McKinley Room	
Niagara Falls Tour	9 AM - 4 PM	Meet in Lobby .....	\$24.00 x _____ \$ _____
CALSPAN Tour (25 maximum)	9 AM	Meet in Lobby .....	\$5.00 x _____ \$ _____
CALSPAN Tour (25 maximum)	10:30 AM	Meet in Lobby .....	\$5.00 x _____ \$ _____
CALSPAN Tour (25 maximum)	1:30 PM	Meet in Lobby .....	\$5.00 x _____ \$ _____
CALSPAN Tour (25 maximum)	3 PM	Meet in Lobby .....	\$5.00 x _____ \$ _____
Cash Bar	6 PM - 7 PM	Lower Courtyard	
Dinner/Entertainment	7 PM	Presidential Ballroom .....	\$23.00 x _____ \$ _____

**SATURDAY, September 18:**

Memory Room	9 AM - 5 PM	McKinley Room	
Niagara Falls Tour	9 AM - 4 PM	Meet in Lobby .....	\$24.00 x _____ \$ _____
Best of Buffalo Tour	1 PM - 5 PM	Meet in Lobby .....	\$19.50 x _____ \$ _____
Cash Bar	6 PM - 7 PM	Lower Courtyard	
Farewell Banquet	7 PM	Presidential Ballroom .....	\$28.00 x _____ \$ _____

**SUNDAY, September 19:**

Catholic Mass	9 AM	Location to be announced	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
Worship Service	10 AM	Location to be announced	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes

Registration Fee (Per Person, 2 Maximum Per Family) ..... \$10.00 x \_\_\_\_\_ \$ \_\_\_\_\_

1993 Memorial Association dues (if applicable). Check your dues card..... \$5.00 x \_\_\_\_\_ \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Check payable to: 398th Bomb Group Reunion TOTAL \$ \_\_\_\_\_

I/We will be traveling by  car  train  plane.  
We will be staying at the  Sheraton  Microtel  other.

Please complete form and mail to:

Larry Paul  
398th Bomb Group '93 Reunion  
Buffalo, NY 14221

Received \$ _____ Date _____
<p><b>Larry Paul</b></p> <p>A copy of this form will be mailed to registrants upon receipt of check or money order, payable to 398th Bomb Group Reunion.</p>

## GIFTED SINGER REUNION GUEST



### DIANE SUSEK

Recording artist and international traveller on the world's concert scene, Diane Susek, will be a repeater as 398th Bomb Group reunion guest soloist.

Susek came to Richmond, Virginia, in 1988 and presented the reunion attendees with a concert featuring sacred and patriotic songs.

"That was my first Air Force veterans concert," she said. "And I enjoyed every minute of my time with you."

Likewise, the 398th also enjoyed the music of Susek, who thrilled the gathering with her great soprano voice. She has nine albums to her musical credit, one of which was judged "Best of the Year." She also has "Best Female Vocalist" to her credit.

Susek, from York, Pennsylvania, will appear at the reunion banquet in Buffalo, New York, on Friday, September 17, 1993.

## Dues Notices Sent For Seven States

The 398th Bomb Group dues program, designed to spread the collection of dues over four quarters instead of once annually, continues with Zone 3 this time.

Dues notices have been inserted only in those newsletters being delivered to the following states — Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Texas.

If your Zone notice is missing, you may still send your contribution to 398th Bomb Group, % Ralph Hall, New Bedford, MA 02740-1915.

## Photocopies OK

Should you not wish to tear out the Reunion Registration page from your FLAK NEWS, it is quite permissible to make a photocopy and send it in as your official registration.

Your completed registration form will be photocopied by the reunion chairman and returned to you as a receipt.

# The Last Mission

## Drama Abounds For Downed Crews

Continued From Page 1

Also gone from the 398th by now were names like Rooney, Petersen, Frazier, Markley and other leaders who had been there from the beginning.

Among those still around was Jean Miller, who started out as a second lieutenant in 1943 with the 601st. He would be the CO when the group returned home in May and June, 1945.

Michael Robinson took over from Tracy Petersen as CO of the 601st on April 18. On April 25 he was leading the 398th Bomb Group and the 1st Combat Wing on this, what would prove to be the Last Mission.

The "Operations Officer's Report" of Mission No. 195 (as most official mission reports) is crisp, factual, concise ... and says nothing of the human drama played out that day.

Buried in the text are these innocent lines —

*"Four aircraft received major battle damage, 19 received minor damage and two aircraft were lost from this group due to flak."*

Not one word about the fact that one airman was shot and killed by a German soldier. Nor a word about four others from the same crew who also perished and also were probably shot and killed by the Germans. Nor a word about the one gunner who was found dead near the crash site. Nor a word about the two who did survive the bailouts and subsequent marches with their captors.

And of the other B-17 that went down with the loss of one crew member. Nor the experiences that some of the others had after bailing out and "capturing" their German captors who had seen the handwriting on the wall. (The Russians were coming.)

Allen Ferguson of the 602nd was a 26-mission veteran pilot and had survived the usual "tough ones" and the "milk runs" during his time at Nuthampstead. He might have had one more "long one" had the Group not decided to do a "360" over Pilsen.

(Oh, those 360's!)

Ordered to bomb VISUALLY only, the target area was obscured on the first pass so Robinson ordered a go-around. Meanwhile, the other groups from the Wing, the 91st and 381st, proceeded over the target and bombed successfully. Flak on the first 398th pass was moderate and no one was hurt badly.

Not so on the second pass, as the German Flak gunners had found the range. Just about everybody picked up hits of varying degrees.

Just before the target, which now was being obscured by the bomb hits of the other groups, Ferguson peeled out of formation with smoke coming from No. 2 engine.

"While the aircraft was flying at an angle, wings nearly vertical," wrote

Herbert Miller ball turret gunner Donald Oswalt, "it released its bombs. It then went into a flat glide, then began to spin and spiral. But then it leveled off. Shortly before this I saw two chutes."

There were three (at least). They belonged to waist gunner Harry Mazur, ball turret gunner William O'Malley and radio operator Michael Brennan.

According to officials from the War Crimes Board, who investigated the incident, it was Brennan who was shot after landing near the cemetery at Litice, about three miles south of Pilsen.

O'Malley and Mazur were more fortunate. Their German captors marched them toward the Austrian border in the company of two airmen from another B-17 group and a P-51 pilot. A 13-day walk. They were near Salzburg when liberated by American ground forces.

## Czech Memorial Still Honors American Airmen

Neither Mazur nor O'Malley can attest to seeing more than three parachutes as they descended. Each assumed the rest of the crew went down with the aircraft.

However, researchers in Czechoslovakia (including members of the group called SLET) claim that there were four others. These would have been Ferguson; co-pilot John Halbert (his first mission); navigator/bombardier Howard Feldman; and engineer Joseph Huestess, Jr.

An eighth crew member, tail gunner Byron Young, was found dead near the crash in the vicinity of a town called Lhota. Records do not reveal where the others were found.

SLET researchers claim that a French prisoner of war actually witnessed the execution of the four airmen. It is known that the four bodies were exhumed from local graves and removed to American military cemeteries. There remains a "division" among local residents as to the authenticity of the PW story.

However, a memorial was erected in Litice in 1946 in memory of "the American airmen killed by the Germans." The plaque was ordered changed by the Communist government in 1960 to show that it was the Russians who had liberated Pilsen, not the Americans.

In 1990, the original plaque was retrieved from its hiding place and again installed on the memorial. It is there today.

Also of consequence is the fact that one of the four engines on Ferguson's B-17 now serves as a World War II memorial at the airport in Prague. Other bits and pieces of the plane are at the SLET office in Pilsen.

Continued On Page 10



# MISSION

# Pilsen, Czechoslovakia

## Low Squadron (603)

HANAUER  
Beckstrom

King  
Keenan  
Worley  
Lollar  
Keenan

Gieryn  
Donovan  
Williams  
Branyon

## Low, Low Squadron (600)

TATCHIO  
Nolan

Hill  
Hoelzel  
McLean  
Hultman

Shimek  
Beck  
Watson  
Eisele  
Bischoff

### 603 Squadron Loading List

#### AC 363 V

CA 1/Lt. James Hanauer  
P Capt. Ken Beckstrom  
N 1/Lt. Hank Weymer  
B 2/Lt. Ken McLaughlin  
PFF 2/Lt. John Hancock  
ETG T/Sgt. Joe Joseph  
RO T/Sgt. Robert Notorpole  
WG S/Sgt. Harold Zimmerman  
WG S/Sgt. Robert Molesworth  
TG S/Sgt. Dale Gruneberg

#### AC 293 J

P 1/Lt. Willard Worley  
CP F/O Chas. Wasserman  
N 2/Lt. R.E. Herkenham  
B F/O James Miller  
ETG T/Sgt. James Lintern  
RO T/Sgt. Edward Pulley  
BTG Sgt. Willie Ivy  
WG S/Sgt. Sanford Warren  
TG S/Sgt. James Atkins

#### AC 242 C

P 2/Lt. Robert Gieryn  
CP 2/Lt. Ralph Greenwalt  
N 2/Lt. Charles Berthoud  
B 2/Lt. Gerald Johnson  
ETG T/Sgt. William Jeffords  
RO T/Sgt. William Isch  
BTG S/Sgt. Richard Knerr  
WG S/Sgt. Raymond Winslow  
TG Sgt. Frank Thompson

#### AC 146 N

P 1/Lt. Charles Lollar  
CP 2/Lt. Arnold Schneider  
N 2/Lt. Paul Horton  
TOG S/Sgt. Walter Wolff  
ETG S/Sgt. Kenyen Kauffman  
RO Sgt. Harold Armstrong  
BTG Sgt. Jack Hammontree  
WG Sgt. John Linkowski  
TG Sgt. Edmund Jackson  
SJ S/Sgt. Darrell Brewer

#### AC 086 L

P 1/Lt. Charles E. King  
CP 2/Lt. William Cole  
N 2/Lt. Charles Hough  
TOG S/Sgt. Raymond Garnder  
ETG Cpl. Loris Pettit  
RO Sgt. James Daffin  
BTG Sgt. Joseph Surhigh  
WG Sgt. Charles Miles  
TG Sgt. Walter Ambiel  
SJ S/Sgt. Donald Dunn

#### AC 669 G

P 2/Lt. Norman Williams  
CP 2/Lt. Lewis Burke  
N 2/Lt. Emanuel Cohen  
TOG S/Sgt. Dale Brian  
ETG T/Sgt. Edward Baldiga  
RO T/Sgt. Vincent Bordonaro  
BTG S/Sgt. William Robertson  
WG S/Sgt. Thomas Paugh  
TG S/Sgt. Harold Ottens

#### AC 982 K

P 2/Lt. Paul Keenan  
CP 2/Lt. Victor Ciociola  
N 2/Lt. Nicholas Bur  
B 2/Lt. James Hazliitt  
ETG T/Sgt. James Armbruster  
RO S/Sgt. Kermit Dunn  
BTG Sgt. Robert Armstrong  
WG Sgt. Lloyd Keating  
TG PFC Barrett Yager

#### AC 630 U

P 2/Lt. George Leung  
CP 2/Lt. Charles Thomas  
N/B 2/Lt. Barney Glockman  
ETG T/Sgt. James Emmons  
RO T/Sgt. Basin MacPhail  
BTG Sgt. Gustave Goosens  
WG Sgt. Eldred Adams  
TG Sgt. George Colantuono

#### AC 318 P

P 2/Lt. George Donovan  
CP 2/Lt. Robert Taylor  
N 2/Lt. Roy Hussey  
TOG S/Sgt. C.P. Thranus  
ETG S/Sgt. Joseph Klosterman  
RO S/Sgt. George Kuenneth  
BTG Sgt. Robert Howard  
WG Sgt. Russell Anderson  
TG Sgt. William Holz, Jr.

#### AC 631 T

P 2/Lt. Royce Branyon  
CP 2/Lt. Robert Seaquist  
N/B 2/Lt. John Thaxton, Jr.  
ETG T/Sgt. Calvin Combs  
RO T/Sgt. Andrew Henderson  
BTG S/Sgt. Joseph Bucolo  
WG S/Sgt. C.F. Gray  
TG S/Sgt. Paul Cox

DAVID W. BISHOP  
Capt., Air Corps  
Operations Officer

#### AC 716 C

CA 1/Lt. Orrin Tatchio  
P 2/Lt. Robert Nolan  
N 2/Lt. Vernon Helms  
VN F/O William Clark  
B 2/Lt. Carl Homan  
ETG T/Sgt. Ralph Will  
RO Sgt. A.H. Conway  
WG Sgt. Joe Passmore  
TG Sgt. Willie Smith

#### AC 896 M

P 1/Lt. Albert Shimek  
CP F/O Henry Florin  
N 2/Lt. Coy Smith  
B 2/Lt. J.M. McCarty  
ETG T/Sgt. Eugene Jasinicki  
RO T/Sgt. William Prettyman  
BTG S/Sgt. Dwight Hatch  
WG S/Sgt. George Allen  
TG S/Sgt. Randolph Moore

#### AC 249 P

P 2/Lt. J. Dean Hill  
CP 2/Lt. Cleveland McCormick  
N 2/Lt. William Anderson  
B 2/Lt. David Scott  
ETG T/Sgt. Richard Cousineau  
RO T/Sgt. Gerald Souder  
BTG Sgt. Floyd Hakomaki  
WG S/Sgt. Harold Cole  
TG Sgt. Thomas Osborne

#### AC 487 B

P 1/Lt. Harry Hoelzel  
CP F/O Eugene Podesta  
N F/O Wesley Churchill  
TOG S/Sgt. Herman Slovesky  
ETG T/Sgt. James Archer  
RO T/Sgt. James Streck  
BTG Sgt. Richard Winchester  
WG S/Sgt. Melvin Roberts  
TG Sgt. George Foster

#### AC 805 Z

P 2/Lt. Alois Beck  
CP 2/Lt. William J. Lake  
N F/O Condee Ellison  
B 2/Lt. Len Streitfeld  
ETG Sgt. Benj. Pierzchala  
RO Sgt. Charles Ham  
BTG Sgt. Simeon Dionne  
WG Sgt. Dwyer Albert  
TG Sgt. Louis Polidoro  
SJ Sgt. Franklin Bowie

#### AC 180 G

P 2/Lt. Arthur Watson  
CP 2/Lt. Jere Maher  
N 2/Lt. James Tangney  
TOG S/Sgt. James Doyle  
ETG T/Sgt. Carroll Irvine  
RO T/Sgt. Melvin Loftus  
BTG Sgt. Paul Miller  
WG Sgt. George Hafer  
TG S/Sgt. Robert Carter  
SJ Sgt. K.S. Cadous

#### AC 157 W

P 2/Lt. Neal McLean  
CP 2/Lt. Donnelly Vowell  
N F/O Arthur Johnson  
B F/O Theo. Herskowitz  
ETG Sgt. Lyle Compton  
RO Sgt. Francis Melvin  
BTG Sgt. J.F. Kouvant  
WG Sgt. L.F. Walker  
TG S/Sgt. A. Dale Pritchard

#### AC 564 X

P 2/Lt. Francis Eisele  
CP 2/Lt. John Basco  
N/B F/O John George  
ETG Sgt. Andrew Melnick  
RO Sgt. Demetries Counes  
BTG Sgt. Clarence Cropp  
WG Sgt. Donald Young  
TG Sgt. John Locy

#### AC 102 V

P 2/Lt. Clarence Hultman  
CP 2/Lt. Herschel Glasgow  
N/B 2/Lt. Robert Hale  
ETG Sgt. Alfred Hudson  
BTG Sgt. Charles Schultz  
WG Sgt. John Swords  
TG Sgt. Harvey Cutler

#### AC 977 R

P 2/Lt. Albert Bischoff  
CP 2/Lt. Rufus Gatten  
N/B F/O Mark Eitzey  
ETG Sgt. Lewis Sullivan  
RO Sgt. Mario Bernardini  
BTG Sgt. Charles Gibson  
WG Sgt. Arthur Hight  
TG Sgt. Commie Cain

DEAN ASHWORTH  
Capt., Air Corps  
Operations Officer

"N7 Adorn"

"N8 Maple"

# 398th Led Raid On Škoda Works

**Was It: "Wipe It Out Before The Russians Come?"**

BY JIM HANAUER

603rd Squadron Leader

*Pilsen Mission April 25, 1945*

I participated, as squadron leader of the 603rd Bombardment squadron, in a mission that bombed the Skoda Works on April 25, 1945. The only documentation I have of the mission is a 5" x 8" file card kept by our squadron operations section to record missions flown by individual crew members which listed my 31st mission as 25 Apr '45, Pilsen, Czechoslovakia (Lead) and my "Form 5," My AF Form 5 Individual Flight Record (pilot)" shows that I logged 10 hrs. / 50 min. of flying time on that date as squadron lead pilot.

The mission briefing was routine except for the fact that it was emphasized that the bombing was to be "VISUAL ONLY" and there were no alternate targets given. The 398th was tasked to lead the 1st Combat Bombardment Wing (CBW), 1st Air Division (AD) of the 8th Air Force. The 1st CBW consisted of the 398th, 91st and 381st BG's. Each of the groups consisted of four squadrons of 10 B17-G aircraft per squadron, or a total of 120 aircraft. The bomb load for each plane was probably the standard 5000 pound load consisting of either ten 500-pound or five 1000-pound bombs.

The flight from takeoff to the Initial Point (IP) was routine. At the IP, when the group lead turned onto the bomb run heading, the two low squadrons and then the high squadron moved in trail, one minute behind the lead squadron so that each squadron could bomb individually. We were probably flying at 25,000 feet. The weather at this altitude was good — no clouds, turbulence or contrails. We were

well above, maybe 10,000-15,000 feet above a 4-5/10 cloud cover undercast. Below the clouds the weather appeared good. We could make out check points and landmarks on the ground.

On the bomb run none of the 398th BG squadrons could identify their aiming points in sufficient time to drop, consequently the leader made a 180° turn to enter a race track pattern in order to make a second bomb run. On the first run we did encounter "flak" (anti-aircraft fire) but I don't remember how intense it was although it was noteworthy. On the second bomb run the bombardiers were able to identify their aiming points in sufficient time to synchronize the cross hairs of the Norden bomb sights on the point and the 398th squadrons did bomb.

## Was Attack Part Of Roosevelt, Churchill Plan?

After landing back in England we heard that General Eisenhower, Allied Supreme Commander, had broadcast a warning over the BBC to the workers in the Skoda Works that allied bombers were on their way to Pilsen. It was the opinion of most of the returning pilots that the message was received and that the workers did leave the plant. Several days after the missions I was ordered to the Public Information Office (PIO) of the 8th Air Force in London. After being questioned about the

mission of the 25th an interview was prepared and I read it to make a recording which was supposedly to be broadcast to Pilsen. Basically it said we were sorry we had to bomb the Czechs.

I'm sure that many reasons or explanations have been expressed for the Skoda bombing, but notwithstanding, the following is my personal opinion:

The Skoda plant was definitely a strategic target during the war and SHAEF certainly wanted it destroyed but did not do so in consideration of the Czech people. Skoda also held strategic implications for the post war world. By prior agreement, Russia was to occupy Czechoslovakia. Both Churchill and Roosevelt did not fully trust Stalin and were apprehensive of Russian intentions in post-war Europe.

I think both were fearful that under Russian occupation the plant might be stripped and the machinery and equipment sent back to Russia, or if not, to what use would the production capacity of the plant be put? To have such an arms production capacity in war-ravaged Europe would certainly not be a stabilizing factor.

Granted, US forces had entered western Czechoslovakia but at the same time Russian forces were well into the eastern part of the country. It is probable that the US forces could have occupied Pilsen, but then to destroy the plant under the very nose of the Russians would have been unthinkable, but to bomb it as a strategic target was acceptable.

Tragic as it was, in just a half a decade, Czechoslovakia once again became a mere pawn in the realm of international diplomacy and politics.

## The Škoda Raid: As Seen By Czech Historian

*Vladislav Kratky of Pilsen, Czechoslovakia, in researching the history of the Pilsen Škoda Works, contributed the following article to FLAK NEWS of the April 25, 1945, bombing of the huge industrial plant.*

BY VLADISLAV KRATKY

On April 25, 1945, in the early morning hours formations of the first and second Air Division of the 8th US Air Force Army took off from their bases in Great Britain. Whereas targets for 282 B-24 Liberators were the railroad junctions near Salzburg, Bad Reichenhall, Hallstein and Traunstein, the 307 B-17 Flying Fortresses had as their target the Skoda Armament Works at Plzen where heavy guns and tanks as well as ammunition were predominantly manufactured.

To prevent great casualties among the civilian population and the workers in the Skoda plants the SHAEF took a unique measure. In the night and early morning BBC radio transmissions it was announced that American bombing aircraft were just taking off and heading for the target of Plzen. At 10:00 a.m. most of the workers left the plant or hid themselves in airraid shelters. The inhabitants of the town did the same.

The German airraid defense consisting of various caliber flak artillery also got ready to fire.

At 10:11 a.m. the first aircraft began to drop bombs on visible targets only, according to the instructions received. In the case that the targets were covered with clouds, the bombers had to fly back to their I.P. and repeat the attack, all of this taking place in more and more precise and stronger anti-aircraft gun fire. The German fighters did not appear at all on that day.

In 45 minutes more than 600 tons of explosive and incendiary bombs were dropped. The plant, employing about 40,000 men and women, was 70 percent destroyed.

The damage caused to the plant was estimated at US \$236 million. Within the plant 28 manufacturing shops were totally destroyed and 33 shops were heavily damaged. Owing to the pre-warning by the BBC there were only six

casualties and four slightly injured men in the entire plant.

Owing to the strong anti-aircraft fire several attacking formations were dispersed, and their bombs also struck residential districts of the town. There, 335 houses were totally destroyed, several thousand houses were damaged, 67 persons were killed, and 73 persons received medical treatment.

Among the anti-aircraft gun crews, 17 German soldiers died from bomb hits. According to the 8th Air Army historian, Mr. R.A. Freeman, six bombers were downed over Plzen and four aircraft were hit in the immediate vicinity of the town.

In the vicinity of Plzen monuments were erected to commemorate all the American airmen killed in the raid.



# SLET:

*"We do this work because we would so that people know of young boys which flew and were shot down over our country."*

— JAROMIR KOHOUT, Pilsen, Czechoslovakia.



**JAROMIR KOHOUT**

They call their little group "SLET."

This is a Czechoslovakian word meaning "reunion," or a "gathering of people from many places." Like a class reunion. Or a 398th Bomb Group reunion (SLET).

Whatever the real Czechoslovakian meaning of the word might be, it still spells out some remarkable respect on the part of some very young Czech men for a generation of people they never knew.

Only in history books did they learn about "Fortresses," Liberators," "RAF," "bombing missions," "crash sites," "air battles," etc. All are in their 20's.

Since SLET was formed in 1985 by two brothers from Pilsen named Jaromir and Martin Kohout, the group has grown to six. Since the day they found parts and pieces from their first discovery, a B-24J, they have records and findings from over 370 crash sites.

Rounding out the little group of six are Jaromir Kveton, Lubos Mokriz, Jindrich Sperl and Radek Kuchera. All live in or in the proximity of Pilsen.

The organization has assembled a display of their findings in Pilsen, and is currently working on a history of the many air battles over Czechoslovakia.

The Kohout brothers are employed by the famous Skoda Works, where SLET leader Jaromir is a welding instructor. He is the only one of the six who speaks and writes English. Early in their crash site search campaign Jaromir wrote this on behalf of SLET —

"We do this work because we would so that people know of young boys which flew and were shot down over our country."

Not exactly perfect English, but the message is inspiring.

Upon learning that members of the 398th were to visit Merseburg, Germany, last June, the SLET team determined to journey there to meet with the men who flew World War II combat, and possibly

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## **Grim Reminders Of Last Mission**

**ALLEN FERGUSON'S 602 B-17** was shot down while bombing the Skoda Works on April 25, 1945. It crashed near the town of Lhota, on the outskirts of Pilsen. These parts were salvaged in 1986 by members of the group called SLET. Still visible on the shattered tail section (lower) are parts of the 602 identification numbers "K8." Only two crew members survived, William O'Malley and Harry Mazur. SLET members are still trying to locate the crash site of the other 602 plane shot down that day, piloted by Paul Colville. Seven of the eight crewmen survived.

# Colville, Overbaugh Took Prisoners

Continued From Page 5

The area where the crash occurred was part of a historically-embattled region called the Sudetenland. It was populated by Czechs until 1938 when Hitler "annexed" this region along the German border and relocated many thousands of Czechs.

After WW II the Germans were forced back to their own country and the area was again re-populated by Czechs. Hence, people who lived near the crash site at the time are now gone.

Moments after Ferguson's B-17 was plucked from the Czech skies, another 602 aircraft was hit, ultimately plunging to earth in the area of Marienbad, also in the Sudetanland. This would be the Paul Colville crew, veterans of 19 missions. Coincidentally, Colville also had a rookie co-pilot, Robert McLaughlin.

A flak hit caused gasoline to stream from No. 4 engine, which soon was on fire. Colville battled to feather No. 4, hoping to head his stricken craft in the direction of the front lines not far to the west. When the wing buckled, it was bail out time.

The navigator/bombardier, Neil Bartimus, was the first out, followed by McLaughlin, waist gunner Harry Overbaugh and tail gunner Charles Rawlins.

Colville, engineer Vincent Ferraro, radio operator Norm Markel and ball turret gunner Charles Walker were all still in the plane when the wing broke off between No. 3 and 4 engines. It went into a violent spin. Markel had been assisting Walker with his chute straps but then both were pinned in the spinning plane.

Markel wrote later in his report of the incident —

"I could not even lift my hand or head from the floor. Then I blacked out and the next thing I remember I heard an enormous explosion and I was blown into the air. I came to while falling and the ground looked real close. I opened my chute and in a very few minutes I was on the ground.

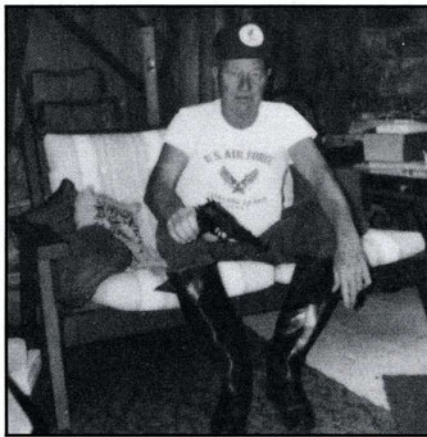
"Colville, Overbaugh and Ferraro also were blown out by the explosion. Walker apparently did not get out or perhaps could not get his chute to open in time. He was the only one of the crew that did not make it." Some of the crew members think he was shot by Germans while descending.

Both Colville and Overbaugh each lay claim to having captured a pair of Germans after landings safely (?) on a Sudetanland hill which was being contested for by both the Germans and Americans in a mortar battle.

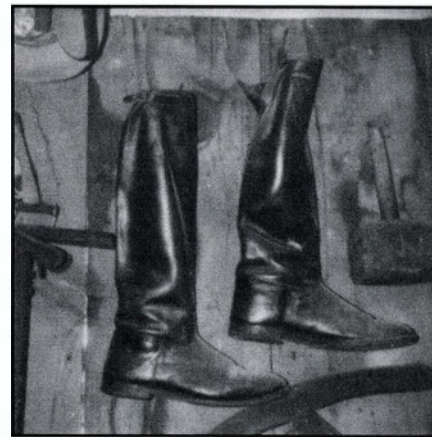
As Colville lit a cigarette to help him contemplate his predicament, he was approached by two Germans, one being an officer. Both came with their hands up. Colville remembered that his .45 was in the wreckage of his B-17 somewhere, but he shoved his hand into his jacket pocket and made like he had a weapon.

All began walking and within a mile or

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Harry Overbaugh And His German Boots & Pistol



## "WHAT IS IT?" A Machine Gun "Stud Bolt"

# Flak News Contest Won By Gunner John Bell

The FLAK NEWS contest was called, "WHAT IS IT?" And for the best response to what was pictured in the January issue there came a promise of a prize of the book, "398th Bomb Group REMEMBRANCES."

A dozen members took a shot at identifying the small part, giving test to their memories dating back to WW II and the B-17.

And from Corinth, Mississippi, came the winning response —

*"This is a stud bolt, and it fits into the side of the .50 caliber Browning machine gun, into the receiver; thence into the bolt. The stud bolt prevents said bolt from traveling too far in either direction while the gun is firing."*

And then he continued —

*"The stud bolt must be removed prior to field-stripping the weapon, and this is easily done when the drive spring and the back plate have been removed."*

For that precise and concise description, a copy of "REMEMBRANCES" has been mailed to —

**John E. Bell**, gunner on the Wally Blackwell crew of the 601st Squadron.

Your FLAK NEWS editor, himself a tail-gunner as was Bell, had to disqualify himself as contest judge and opted to seek "professional counsel" from a younger man who served as an armorer in the U.S. Army.

Now a member of the 161st Infantry (M), Washington State National Guard, Sgt.

Leonard Carlson examined all the entries and proclaimed the Bell definition as "best."

Sgt. Carlson even provided a .50 caliber machine gun from the WNG armory and proceeded to demonstrate, bringing back waves of memories dating back to "those days." As Sgt. Carlson disassembled the .50 and pointed out each action and part, the editor-observer-veteran shook his head and

silently mused —

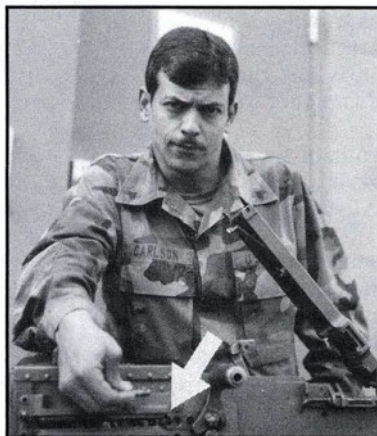
"Could I possibly have known this machine gun a half-century ago as well as this young Army sergeant does today?" Hmmm.

It was remembered (vaguely) that a stud bolt was supposed to come with each gun barrel and assembly from the armory shack. And all to be returned after the mission. Some gunners, however, opted to retain the bolts in their personal possession (just in case.) This sometimes prompted howls of protest from the armorer guys and the airplane commanders had to

intercede in the "conflict."

Bill Auten of the 601 Ray Hernden crew obviously was one of those "keepers," as it was he who sent the FLAK NEWS editor not one, but TWO stud bolts following an editorial inquiry some months ago.

And finally, for what it's worth, Sgt. Carlson rang an old bell when he was explaining how the .50 caliber gun was timed — "All the way open and two clicks back."



SGT. LEONARD CARLSON  
"This Is The Stud Bolt"

# The Last Mission

Continued From Page 10

so they came upon an American tank, with its big gun pointed directly at his little troop. The tank hatch opened and an officer advised Colville that they had seen his plane come down. And that they would relieve him of his two "prisoners." Colville was then handed a coat by the tank officer and taken to a nearby American field hospital.

He was given a checkup by medics, who seemed to display an inordinate amount of respect for him. About this time he realized that the jacket the tank officer provided was decorated with the silver wings of a bird colonel. An aide soon came to retrieve the jacket.

Overbaugh also landed in the midst of the mortar fire, and was wondering what direction he should start running. About the time he got his chute harness unbuckled, two Germans approached, hands raised in surrender. One carried, on the palm of one hand, a German P-38 pistol.

Harry countered with his own .45 and then relieved the man of his pistol. Both Germans wore dirty, bloodied uniforms, but yet did not appear to be injured. One had a pair of classic German officers' boots, which Overbaugh took an immediate liking. He had lost his own when his chute popped.

"Nein der boots," complained the German.

A .45 on the German's nose elicited a more reasonable attitude, and soon it was Overbaugh with the boots.

They soon met an American patrol and the next day the crew was again reunited. In two weeks they were all back at Nuthampstead.

Walker was buried temporarily in the area. In the months following the end of the war, Bartimus transferred from the 398th to Graves Registration and recorded the transfer of Walker's body back to the United States.

## SLET: "Welcome Back To Pilsen"

Continued From Page 9

meet airmen who had actually flown on missions over Pilsen in WW II.

They made the 175-mile journey in one car, and in a Leipzig hotel they met with three men from the 398th who flew on the Pilsen mission on April 25, 1945 —

Elliot Novek, radio operator on the Nolan Thompson 602 crew.

Chuck Sasse, engineer on the Sam Zins 602 crew.

Virgil Kramer, co-pilot on the George Donovan 602 crew.

As guests of the 398th at a luncheon, the young men from SLET presented each of the 80 tour members a bottle of Pilsen beer. And an invitation to come to Pilsen for a visit one day in the future.

"We promise we will not shoot at you this time."

# BRIEF-Things

Fulfilling a promise they made in 1945, that they would meet again in 50 years, five of the nine members of the 601 **Bill Costanzo** crew got together last February in Sarasota, Florida ... along with pilot **Bill** were **Art Laughlin, Dennis Johanson, Fred Marlett** and **Ray Talbott** ... they posed for a typical crew photo in front of the Collings Foundation B-17, 'None-O-Nine' ... **Dwight Ross**, commiserating with Bill Comstock on the latter's bout with colon cancer, attributed the problem to "high altitude flying and English beer." ...

**Dorothy Crouch**, like so many 398th grandparents, ordered copies of the book, "REMEMBRANCES," for her children ... would you believe that a book store specializing in military books has "REMEMBRANCES" on sale for \$75.00 per copy? ... other book items: AMERICAN HERITAGE (September) contains a photo of **Larry deLancey's** "nose blown" B-17; Smithsonian's AIR & SPACE (December-January) has a big section on the 8th Air Force's 50th anniversary return to England, with several photos devoted to the 398th; and the Wright-Patterson Museum's FRIENDS JOURNAL reprinted the entire FLAK NEWS story of the **deLancey** "nose" mission ... if some of the participants on the Last Mission don't recognize some of their fellow crew members as printed in the Loading Lists (Pages 5-6) it is because there was considerable "substituting" and "interchanging" among the personnel ... talk about "famous last words" that really came true: when rookie pilot **Richard Cady** came back from Pilsen, he told his veteran co-pilot, **Charles Claude**, "Lord, I hope I never have to go through that again." ... **Dr. Bill Kavanaugh** (602) reminds that only he and **Dr. Bob Kelly** (600) among the 398th medical-dental staff are still around

... the book is called, "ONE ZERO CHARLIE," authored by **Laurence Gonzales**, and father **Federico Gonzales** says, "it is a great book and I think you will like it." ("I am not entirely unbiased," he added) ... the England '94 tour is only now being put together, but already we have heard from 42 members who say, "count me in!" ... the "Taps" list which is published in FLAK NEWS each January represents those members who have passed on since returning home; not to be confused with the "Killed in Action" list and other wartime statistics published in "REMEMBRANCES" ... and for all the contributions from several "Last Mission" airmen, FLAK NEWS says "thanks" for supplying many of the "loading list" first names (some of the "clerk-typists" had opted for initials only) ... **Manfred Konig** and **Alfred Wilms**, two of our German friends responsible for arranging our visits over there, both have retired from their positions with "Ford Deutschland" of Cologne ... several of our members saw the photo-story of **Betsy Ross** in the February issue of Air Force News; yes, this was a 398th B-17 that was crash-landed in Belgium by the **Perry Powell** crew of the 603rd; there will be a complete story on this event in the July issue of FLAK NEWS ... for the benefit of the bombardiers and toggliers who flew that Last Mission, we remind you that your "Intervalometer Setting" was 150' and your "Bomb Load and Fusing" was 20x250 M57 GP 1/10 nose, 1/40 tail ... regarding **Comstock's** recovery from surgery, he was quite humbled by the show of calls, cards and letters wishing him well ... (could it be that the folks in the 398th really appreciate you, **Bill**?) ... the highest ranking officer on the Last Mission was not the CA pilot in the lead 601 aircraft, but rather the lead navigator, **Fred Stugart**, a major ... the 602nd Squadron was really short of brass, as not one officer held a rank over first lieutenant; there were no less than SIX second lieutenants in the 602 lead aircraft, including the CA, **Gaylord Pryor** ... hunting for all those missing first names in the Last Mission loading list turned up a dozen or more "lost souls" ... the SLET crash site searchers in Czechoslovakia (now Czech Republic) turned up even more parts and pieces from the Ferguson aircraft as they continued their digging ... and they are now dedicated to locating the Colville crash site in the former Sudetanland ... another book giving a big play to the 398th and the memorial at Nuthampstead is a London publication called, "8th Air Force Remembered"

... if there're any of you out there who did not receive your 1993 membership roster along with the January issue of FLAK NEWS, please request a copy from FLAK NEWS ... it is possible that some books were lost due to aggressive Post Office handling.