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398th BOMB GROUP MEMORIAL ASSOCIATION • 8th AIR FORCE • 1st AIR DIVISION • NUTHAMPSTEAD, ENGLAND

VOL. 21 NO. 4

FLAK NEWS

OCTOBER 2006

171 Turn Out For Reunion In Michigan

“They come together at reunions such as this, the ones who are left and those who can, because they must. You had to have been there to understand.”

— WASHINGTON POST

The above statement more or less “tells it all” on why grown men (and women) in their elder years chose to travel to Livonia, Michigan, to relive dramatic periods of their lives some 60-plus years ago.

It was the 23rd annual reunion of the 398th Bomb Group, held in that city on September 6-9, 2006. The reunion attracted 171 members, wives, widows, children and associates.

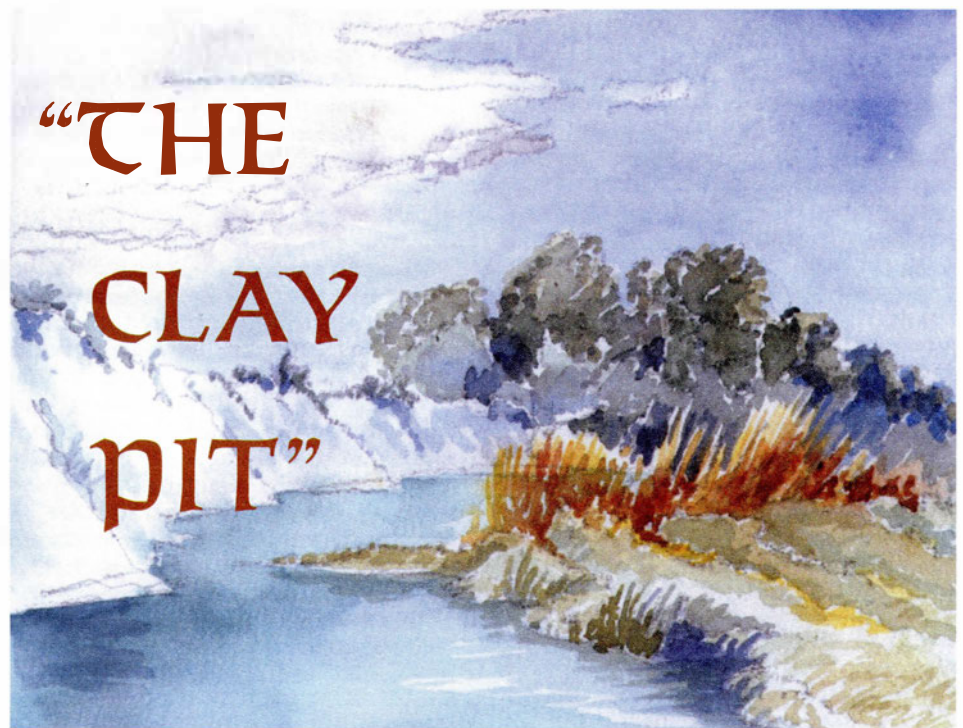
“Not the numbers we had 20 years ago,” said one veteran, “but it shows we are still going strong and I’ll see you in Phoenix next year.”

Reunion chair Sharon Krause developed a busy, well rounded schedule of events that showed off the big city 20 miles to the east — Detroit — beginning with a dinner cruise on the Detroit River.

She also “showed off” her father, 602 pilot Paul Roderick and his co-pilot Roger Harvey, in a banquet skit called, “A Cockpit Dialog,” written by “My Dad” to display some ridiculous B-17 combat mission humor that could never have happened in “My Dad’s” 32-mission career.

At this reunion (and five previous

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DIE TONGRUBE

Water Color By The Author

When The War Hit Home

BY PROFESSOR KURT HESSE
Düsseldorf, Germany

Since Easter (1938) we were first year students at the “Cathedral Gymnasium” of Merseburg and experienced the dedication to the classics and humanities. The Lauchstaedt Fest that summer was to be the last big festivity.

In 1939 the younger teachers were being drafted. Their replacements were made up of retirees who, strictly physically speaking, were a far cry from those Greek ideals. Hardly an inspiring bunch. Certainly not for someone as laid back as I, who reacted by carving a coat of arms in my bench with the motto “Kiss My A--.” My father had to come up with five Deutschemarks to pay for the removal of my engraving. That “motto” has guarded me many a time against overreacting to

all sorts of nonsense in my life.

Our favorite playgrounds were the open spaces of the Schmidt brick works at Hallesche Strasse, preferably in the adjacent clay pit. The pit ran along Hohendorf Way, close to the train station. Here we spent beautiful days swimming and roughhousing.

We swam in the turquoise-colored waters of the clay pit and feasted on

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The Time Has Come

BY WALLY BLACKWELL

President, 398th Bomb Group Memorial Association

Now is the time to complete the long planned 398th action of transferring the ownership and total care of the 398th Nuthampstead property to the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC). The 398th Monument Maintenance Fund, managed so expertly for many years by Ralph Hall, was created just for this purpose.

The ownership of the land in Nuthampstead, England, on which the 398th Bomb Group and the 55th Fighter Group monuments now sit, was given to the 398th Bomb Group Memorial Association by the Dimsdale family in 1988. Since that time we have paid an annual fee to the American Battle Monuments Commission for its maintenance.

At our request, the ABMC has always contracted the property maintenance to Wilfrid Dimsdale. The annual maintenance fee, usually about \$1,600, has been paid from the 398th Monument Maintenance Fund. The Monument and surrounding grounds have always been kept in splendid condition and the Fund has grown in value.

About five years ago, the U.S. Congress gave the ABMC the authority to establish and administer trust funds when requested and fully funded by veteran groups. When such trust funds are established, ABMC accepts ownership of the veteran organization's property and assumes the obligation to provide total care of the property for future generations. A proposal for the 398th BGMA to enter into such an arrangement with the ABMC was discussed and approved at the 398th Membership meeting in September 2006. The Friends of the 398th in England have also endorsed this plan.

I am pleased that the 398th BGMA has the resources to make this kind of transaction possible and that the 398th membership has agreed the time has come to do this. The major benefit of this action is that our Association will no longer have the obligation and need to be concerned about the perpetual care of our monuments. A number of other veteran organizations have already made such arrangements with the ABMC. Using their experience, we will not need to deplete the present amount in the 398th Monument Maintenance Fund to establish a 398th/ABMC Trust Fund. Any monies remaining in the 398th Monument Maintenance Fund will continue under Ralph Hall's management at this time. The transfer of ownership to the ABMC will in no way effect the use of the monument grounds as appropriate by the 398th BGMA or the Friends of the 398th in the future.

I will facilitate all necessary actions in the coming year to complete the transfer of our Nuthampstead property to the ABMC. The different stages of the work will be performed with the help of Ralph Hall and Wilfrid Dimsdale. If there are any questions about the reasoning for the property transfer, please contact me at any time.

Ed's Note — Wally's story was written prior to his heart surgery "grounding." Director Lew Burke handled the necessary administrative procedures at Livonia as Vice President Al Turney also was recuperating following heart surgery.

A "Lucky Fellow"

He was a "lucky fellow" in 1944 when he bailed out of his B-17 over France. He was a "lucky fellow" in 1982 when he survived a "plugged artery" heart attack.

And on July 20, 2006, awaiting a "routine" catheter job following an "alarming" stress test, he was once again a "lucky fellow."

"If you hold tight right here for 45 minutes I can assemble a team to operate on you," said the surgeon, who "really likes saving World War veterans."

"You have a severe problem," he said. "Your main artery is 90% blocked. It is unstable and if it shifts it could be fatal."

"They explained in detail what they would do. And they did it," recalled Wally during his rehab days.

The heart operation was successful, but on the advice of surgeons and family, Wally was "redlined" for the reunion in Livonia, Michigan.

"God, how I hate that tread mill," said Wally, but was quick to add — "I am a lucky fellow."

Help The Editor

The FLAK NEWS editor is looking for a FLAK NEWS issue dating back almost 20 years — May 1987 (Vol. 2, No. 2). If someone who has been "saving every copy" all these years will see fit to loan the editor this one copy the editor will return it after appropriate photo copies have been made. Please call Allen Ostrom.

"Out West" For Dues

So soon it will be 2007.

And getting a jump on the New Year's Dues will be those members living "Out West."

Dues envelopes bearing the home address of the 398th dues manager, Dawne Dougherty, should be found in this FLAK NEWS newsletter consigned to the following states —

Washington, Oregon, Idaho, California, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Alaska and Hawaii.

Annual dues remain at \$20 (or \$50 lifetime).

Members are always invited to make additional contributions to FLAK NEWS, or in honor or memory of "someone special."

If the dues envelope happens to be missing there is always the opportunity to use your own envelope and send a check directly to Dawne at Harrisburg, OR 97446-9585. She will also accept address changes and new telephone numbers. And Taps notices.

Time To Check The Taps List

The ever-expanding 398th Taps List will be printed in the January 2007 issue of FLAK NEWS.

As of press time, no less than 30 new names had been added since the last publication a year ago.

Members are now asked to peruse the January 2006 Taps List to see if a name is missing. To add to the file, write FLAK NEWS, Seattle, WA 98107.

Aluminum Overcast TOUR SCHEDULE

October 3-4..... Chattanooga, TN
October 6-8..... Lebanon, TN
October 10-11..... Millington, TN
October 13-15..... North Little Rock, AR
October 17-18..... Shreveport, LA
October 20-22..... Dallas, TX
October 24-25..... Houston, TX
October 27-29..... Georgetown, TX
Oct. 31-Nov. 1..... Oklahoma City, OK
November 3-5..... Tulsa, OK
November 7-8..... Amarillo, TX
November 10-12..... Albuquerque, NM
November 14-15..... Flagstaff, AZ
November 17-18..... Phoenix, AZ

www.398th.org

Memories Abound At Livonia Reunion

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reunions) "My Dad" served on the Registration Desk (along with Sharon's hubby, Pete). The skit was video taped by Geoff Rice and (hopefully) will be made available to the membership.

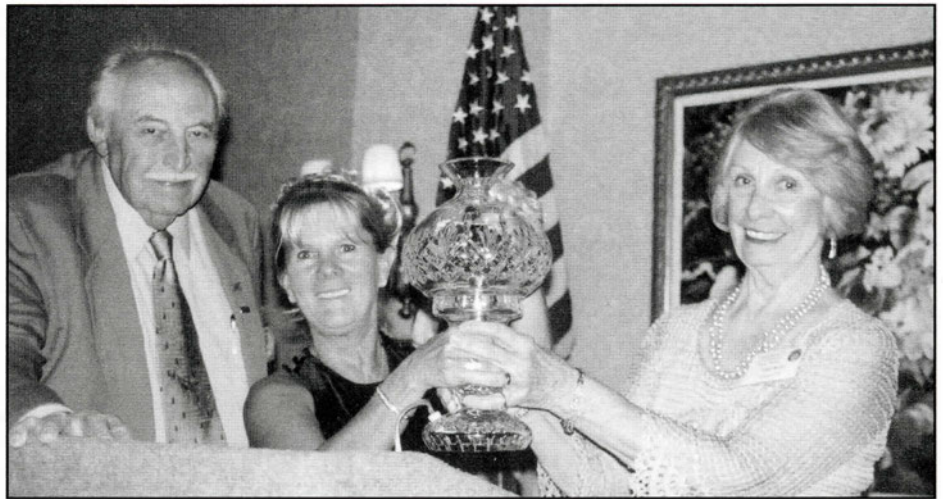
Speaking of taping, several members spoke of their Air Force careers on "Timeless Voices," interviewed by Marilyn Gibb-Rice, with production help from 398th Web Master David Jordan. This is the program begun by the late Randy Stange.

In the absence of both president Wally Blackwell and vice president Al Turney (see page 2) the reunion business affairs and banquet "MC" programming were conducted by director Lew Burke.

Burke and wife Lillie presented Sharon with a Waterford crystal lamp as a "well done" gesture for her efforts, which were monumental.

The reunion gathering made it abundantly clear (again) that the ranks are thinning. Herb Boehme, 602 pilot, was there in his classic, still-fitting original A-2 jacket. But sadly, no less than three of his crew passed on this year. Only a pair of crews had three members represented. Most of the crews responded with, "only one."

Our British Friends of the 398th were ably represented by Peter Brooke, who claims Anstey as his hometown. He operates offices in both Enfield and London, but his heart is at Station 131, of which he spoke affectionately at both banquets. Brooke was one of the many British "young people" responsible for supporting the June 2006 England Tour and Commemorative History Book along with a couple of dozen other from places like Broughing, Great Hornead, Hare Street, Heydon, Cheshunt, Wyddial,



LEW BURKE, 398th director, and his wife, Lillie, presented Sharon Krause (center) with this Waterford crystal lamp for her work (sixth time) as reunion chair. It was the final highlight of the 2006 Livonia, Michigan, meeting. "See you next year in Phoenix," said Sharon.

Nuthampstead, Dassells and others, like Meesden, the home of Friends chairman Wilfrid Dimsdale.

Brooke carried with him (from England) and passed out 100 Commemorative Books, produced to help finance the tour and 55th Fighter Group Memorial, dedicated at Nuthampstead last June. Ozzie Osborn and Russ Abbey also were major contributors to the book.

In the Memory Room of the Holiday Inn Hotel were displayed tables full of "memorabilia," the major attraction being those five huge volumes designated as "Jack's Books." Developed years ago by the late Jack Wintersteen, they have been scrupulously and lovingly cared for, preserved and updated by Historian Lee Anne Bradley.

Among the "contrasts" noted at the

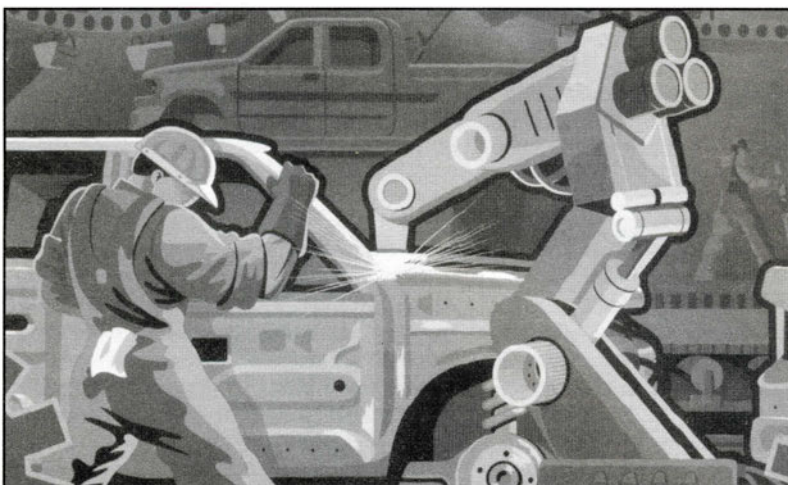
reunion was the Ford Rogue River Assembly Plant where members discovered how they build Ford 150 trucks. And later had a ride in a Ford Model T at Greenfield Village (see photo).

Others visited the Edsel Ford Mansion and Pewabic Pottery Plant or enjoyed a Detroit City Tour.

The reunion closed with an evening of dancing under the baton of 83-year-old Johnny Knorr and his Orchestra (with some extra polka help from Joe Cerva, who also played dinner music for the 398th diners).

Knorr's piano player/vocalist gave the dancers (and watchers) a nostalgic World War II memory jog when he sang, "With a full crew aboard and our trust in the Lord, we're coming in on a wing and a prayer." Also more music that carried

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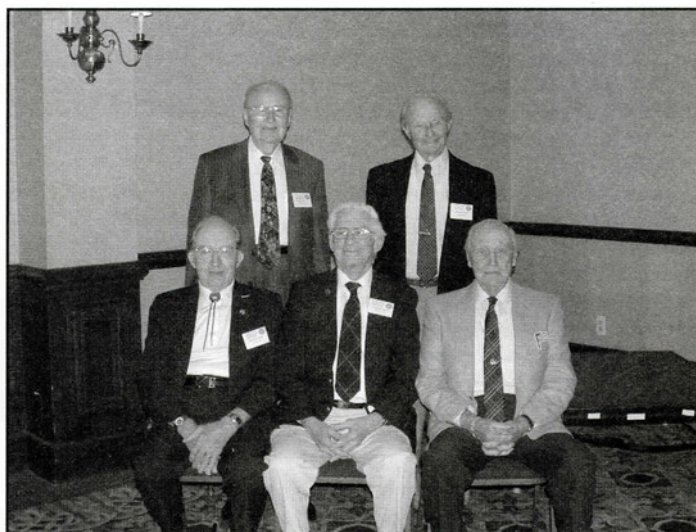
THE CONTRAST between ancient and current automobile production is noted in this reunion graphic of Ford's current assembly line and the Model T, seen at Ford's popular Greenfield Village. Keith Anderson, whose "other car is a B-17," poses with the still running 80-year-old "touring car."

398th Veterans Gather • Fewer, Older



600th Squadron

Front Row — Bob Goren, George Graham, Cleo Bickford, Herb Meeker. *Back Row* — Lou Stoffer, Jim Runnion, Keith Anderson.



601st Squadron

Front Row — Howard Traeder, Ralph McIntrye, Hal Weekley. *Back Row* — Ben Core, Marshall Zinter.



602nd Squadron

Front Row — Bob Rowland, Harry Overbaugh, Elliot Novek, Bob Knowles, George Hershberger. *Middle Row* — Roger Harvey, John Matecki, James Powell, Vaughn Erickson, Joe Mansell. *Back Row* — Herb Boehm, Paul Roderick, Bob Bowen.

Photos by Brandy Howard, Freeport, Illinois.



603rd Squadron

Front Row — Bob Howard, Earl Hoefert, Arnie Schneider, Homer Roades, Newt Moy, Ray Moore. *Middle Row* — Allen Ostorm, Lew Burke, Dale Brown, Joe Joseph, Joe Cerva (the fester accordionist), Ed Jones. *Back Row* — William Parker, Carl Foster, William Frankhouser, Russ Currier.

REUNION

(Continued from Page 3)

that special “40’s Sound” so familiar then ... and today. Bob Schuh of the 600 Grinter crew brought on some stark realities as he recited Kevin Whittaker’s poem, “Why Do You Still March, Old Man?” And Brooke offered an equally sensitive rendition of a poem written by Sandra Avarhart, “A Tribute to the 398th.”

Brandy Howard (third generation) asked to photograph each of the four squadrons. And this she did during the dance intermission.

The reunion in Livonia, Michigan, came and went without a definitive decision as to the group sponsorship of another tour to England and Station 131. There have been 12 such tours since 1982, plus two more to the Czech Republic.

The British Friends of the 398th have already issued a “you are always welcome” and have scheduled the third weekend in June 2008 as the time period for the next Remembrance services.

Tours In Limbo

An informal query from “second generation” members suggested that there was interest in continuing the tours, which have been under the leadership of Allen Ostrom and Barbara Fish the past 20 years.

Tour inquiries and comments should be directed to President Wally Blackwell, Rockville, MD 20850-3067.

When The War Hit Home In Merseburg

(Continued from Page 1)

cherries and hunted grouse and pheasants with uncle Erich.

We also had a chance to follow the production of yellow bricks, from the breaking of the clay all the way to mixing and drying, and finally the firing of the bricks inside the kiln.

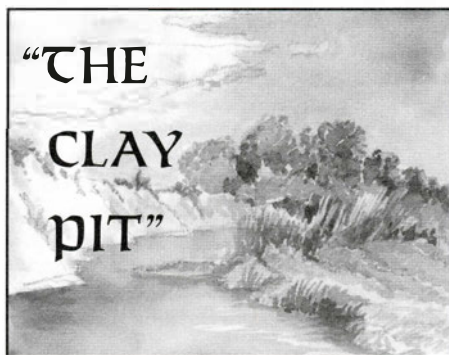
The first air raid warnings came in 1940 in Merseburg. A few bombs fell, one of which, much to our chagrin, missed our school ("Gymnasium") and hit the Brewery Street. The 8.8 cm flak near the clay pit produced plenty of noise but not much else.

At the Stalingrad debacle in the Spring of 1943, the three powers-that-be (the Military, the Hitler-Youth and School Administration) decided to draft the 17 year olds for service in the "Home-Flak" (antiaircraft batteries). The draftees freed the regular soldiers of the local flak units for front line service.

Our math instructor told those of us born in 1928 (I was still only 15) to serve in the Flak positions near the clay pit. We had mixed feelings. On one hand, we were "promoted" to adults. On the other hand, we realized that, owing to the worsening military situation, there would be no more idyllic vacations. We had already had a taste of things to come. A nightly air raid on the City of Leipzig took place in December of 1943. The following morning, an easterly wind had carried the yellow smoke and haze all across the skies of Merseburg.

We reported for service on January 5, 1944, in the Heavy Flak Battery, section 433, position 108. The location was north of the City of Merseburg, between station Elizabeth Heights and our good old clay pit. That was less than one and a quarter miles from my parents' home. Main purpose of the battery was to protect the Buna Works at Schkopau. Meanwhile, during the month of May, the battery had grown to six pieces of 105 mm capacity each, four of them on fixed pedestals, the other two on mobile beds. More reinforcements came in June 1944 in form of additional six guns of a RAD (Reichs Arbeits Dienst = Reich Labor Service) battery.

After a few days, we relocated to join other batteries, first to the town of Delitz-am-Berge, then to the town of Passendorf near the City of Halle. I had been assigned to reading the central detonator timer clock. During one of the first night attacks, I was totally absorbed with the splendid fireworks caused by incendiary bombs that I completely forgot about the clock which had meanwhile climbed to its highest mark (360 degrees from the cross hair). This caused the gun



About The Author

Kurt Hesse of Düsseldorf, Germany, reflects on his days as a 16-year-old Flak (anti-aircraft) gunner near his hometown of Merseburg, Germany. The city's Leuna plant was a target well known to the 398th ... and the entire 8th Air Force.

After World War II Hesse went on to graduate from the Merseburg Gymnasium (high school) in 1946 and two years later escaped from the East German Communist state and completed a West German architectural engineering course in 1955. Fifteen years later he is "project manager" for Düsseldorf University and in 1978 is appointed Poly Tech College professor. He returned for a time to Merseburg in 1990 to assist in reconstruction projects in the former Communist East Germany. See Page 9 for more details.

to fire at an imaginary moving target beyond the gun's firing range. It produced rather unfriendly comments.

Finally, we ended up at the position behind the town of Spergau, south of the Leuna Works. Here, in dug-in barracks, we shared quarters with the LWHs (Luft-Waffen-Helfer = Air Force Auxiliary) of the monastery school of Rossleben. Now we faced new sociological experiences. These fellows of the landed gentry declined to break bread with us ordinary folks at the same table. 'Til this day, I am unable to understand this when the circumstances should have been calling for levelling of the demographic playing field.

During the winter nights we had to dig out the Kommandogeräte (Flak Boxes) and guns from under three feet of snow. After repeating this procedure three times in the course of one night, I was sound asleep during classes the following morning. Mr. Schleuter, our instructor

for German literature, was kind enough to overlook my inattention.

Following a sharpshooting course at Stolpmeunde at the Baltic Sea (where I learned nothing) we got back to the battery at Elizabeth Heights. The daily routine became old hat lasting 'til May 10, 1944. It consisted of roll call in the morning, then classes, followed by lunch, thereafter battle drills, plane identification courses and steering tests, etc.

I was "B 2" at the Flak Box, in charge of the side angle steering. The box had a fast gear to be used only when the calculator, a complicated type of computer, was turned off. This time it wasn't because our B 5 was daydreaming. So I refused to carry out the repeated orders to engage the fast gear 'til the "tactical" shooter, a Lieutenant Bevermann, yelled at me to shift into fast gear.

I was right to refuse the initial order and the spectacular disaster that followed will illustrate why. The Flak Box had lost all ability to function, the electrical motors had melted, many "curve bodies" had jumped their ball bearing sockets, fuses were burned, etc. The pretty looking, and pretty arrogant acting lieutenant denied any responsibility, but blamed me instead which resulted in my "transfer" on May 11 from the tech group to the gunnery squad.

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MERSEBURG
Flak Gun Position ●

Die Tongrube

When The War Hit Home In Merseburg

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“Curve bodies” are vital elements. They combine entered values of measurements with special values (wind speed, ammunition temperature, gun barrel fatigue, etc.) to arrive at values for the firing direction. There were six cannons, caliber 105 mm; monstrous heavy mothers weighing 16 tons each, all of them new to me. On May 12, just one day after taking my new position, I became acquainted with war’s brutal reality in the form of the first major raid on Leuna, Merseburg.

Streams of bombers arrived from the south. They had already dumped their payloads. Directly over our position appeared what seemed to be their smoke signals marking the place for the rest of the planes to make a sharp westward turn. They made ideal targets but with the Kommandogerät (Flak Box) out of order, the battery was in total chaos. No directional values on the indicator system, and the headphones were useless owing to the engine noise. Luckily, after five or six shots our gun went dead.

K 1, the gunner responsible for setting the vertical angle, had to perform the worst job. He wriggled up and down as he worked the handles that were offset by 180 degrees. His body was moving like that of a connector rod of an old steam engine in order to get the gun angle indicator through constant motion in sync with the command indicator. When I had to perform this operation, I ended up with a hiatal hernia.

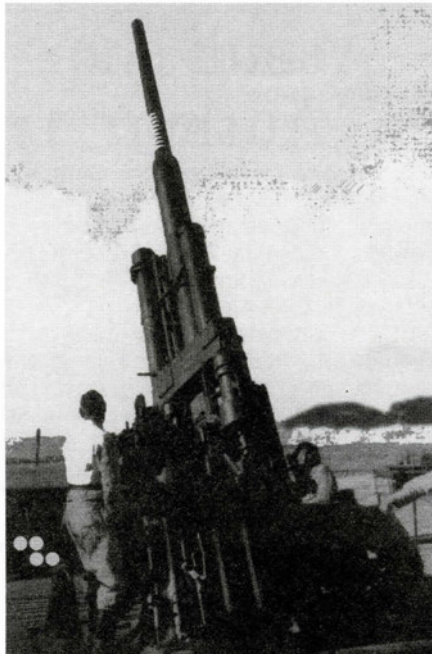
At the beginning, the whole area was being camouflaged almost daily by artificial fog. Not exactly healthy as the fog contained sulfuric acid which became airborne in form of a fine mist with the help of compressors. Fields and trees had been etched and blighted for years. We kept inhaling that stuff. It interfered with spotting the bombers. They, on the other hand, used the last minute fogging as the best target finder.

Ideally, planes were being located electronically, i.e. their distances were optically recorded by radar, horizontal and vertical triangulations. Tinfoil drops had little effect on radar equipment and the strands drifted with the wind and could be identified at such by the Flak Box. (The Americans called this “chaff.”)

The teachers would visit us in the morning to teach mostly Latin, Greek and German. English had been eliminated. The teachers had to have lots of understanding, as there was no way to give any thought to homework. Teaching was done along lines of university lectures to stimulate our interests. It was a small but important balance, because the age-

appropriate, speech-forming relations between HIWIs and frustrated older soldiers on one side and us students on the other side produced a good deal of gutter language, a brutalizing process hard to describe.

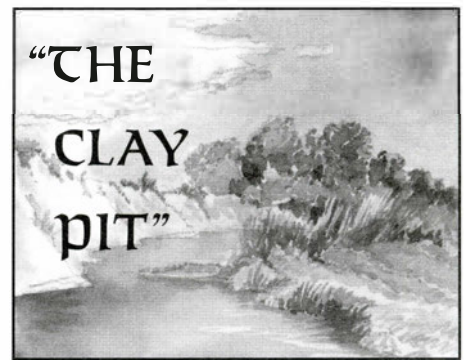
Instructor Grosse stirred our interest in a Constitutional State. With a view towards “expected changes in the near future,” he quite intentionally and courageously (given the grip of the Nazi dictatorship) chose his lectures from *Somnium Scipiones** to suggest to us other political constellations and forms of government.



105 MM FLAK GUN
Fired By 16-Year-Olds

One day I was covered with watery blisters all over. My mother maintained, “He had never had wind pocks, now he’s got them,” and reminded the master sergeant of their very infectious nature. So I ended up in the army hospital the next day; at first with people suffering skin and venereal diseases, later in a little private room next to the entrance. I truly enjoyed the white linens, lots of sleep and reading. The pocks needed powdering for healing. The sister of a

**Translator’s Note — The Roman politician, Cicero, wrote “About the Republic” in six books, the final of which contains the entire work’s essential ideas culminating in “Somnium Scipiones” (Scipio’s Dream), where Cicero constructs a fictional encounter between the elder and younger Scipio, both Roman statesmen and generals.*



classmate, a so-called “sweet carbolic mouse,” wanted to take care of the head to toe treatment. As my hormonal development had already proven its existence, I felt uneasy that this total powder treatment might extend beyond the therapeutical stage. Nudism had not yet become fashionable, though we had dropped our puberty inhibitions during skinny-dipping in the clay pit in the presence of female spectators.

Through carelessness a RAD member of the neighboring battery was fatally shot. Before we started our service, one LWH had died of polio, another one of a misdiagnosed middle ear infection. Another one died from electrocution, and several RAD men got stuck to the electric wire when their speedometer instrument hit the overhead high-voltage line.

Initially, firing exercises, plane identification classes and ballistics had a certain charm of novelty. Electrical conduit cleaning, gun cleaning, laundry and mending clothes had the opposite effect. Handling shells was bothersome, especially when the stuff weighing some 60 pounds, including packaging, came from some Berlin batteries and were simply dropped off in the fields, far away from our bunkers. During unloading the cartridge container was thrown hard on top of the concrete slab to have the shell detonator slip out first. Though, allegedly nothing could happen, it was always a little nerve wracking. After the war, during cleanup of the battery site three men got killed when some “rest munitions” exploded.

A typical battery offered a colorful picture during reveille: A group of soldiers, a group of LWHs, and a group of HIWIs. Most of the soldiers were craftsmen from Westphalia who showed a fatherly attitude towards us, whereas the young sergeants could and would work off their resentments, and social inferiority complexes. For instance, one sergeant made the remark, “Now you can still drill them, later they’ll be officers.”

The Westphaleans received beautiful “CARE” packages from home (so they could stuff themselves) but along came more and more sad news of another villager killed by dive-bombers.

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500 Guns Protected Merseburg

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The HIWIs were deployed in combat, three at a cannon. They were POWs who preferred collaboration to commiseration. They were Nickolaus, Sascha, Sergie, Wassili, etc.

We were always stunned by their ability to help themselves with primitive means: making fire with jacket linings, rings from dimes, and Schnapps from the fruits of the nearby fields (we could take a sip). Obviously, working in close proximity, doing the same job, carrying ammunition, cleaning guns (shouting, "periud-nasat") had to lead to a working relationship, even a friendship. I can vouch for the remark by Wassili who in the face of approaching American bombers said with his embarrassed smile, Hitler: Scheisse, Stalin: Scheisse, Woina (war): Scheisse. It is possible to express feelings and fears with few words. I owe him for having imparted to me the wisdom of the little man's perspective: The senselessness of the use of force.

Did our regime really believe that they could fully trust us students — the future officers — to fight against the Russians after such common bond? The political leadership had obviously reached the end of practical and moral considerations. The Russians had the greater combat experience; they could sense dangers and reacted much faster than we could. On days off they met Russian women at the clay pit and we took "lessons" with the help of our field glasses.

The bombers came in formation of 20 planes of the type B-17 "Flying Fortress" or "Liberator," at a speed of 135 meters per second (443 feet per second) and a carrying capacity of three to four tons of payload per plane. That amounted to 12 bombs at 550 pounds each per plane, a total of 240 bombs per formation, which were dropped simultaneously. Within seconds one such "bomb carpet" set up a dark wall of explosions stretching over 4200 feet.

Only the techs at the Flak Box were able to recognize the pilots inside the bombers. The rest of us were part of a mechanized war machine, like centaurs, half man and half machine, merely watching the clocks. We were drilled to suppress any exogenous feelings. The first look at "Yanks" came only after the first bombers had been shot down. They came down in various twists and turns, as burning torches, rolling over, spiraling downwards around a burning wind, or slowly flying at low levels with their engines shut off.

Some 500 heavy anti-aircraft batteries ringed Merseburg/Leuna, where some 128 bombers had been shot down. The centrifugal force of the downward spiraling planes would either impede or even

prevent the escape of the crews. The lucky ones opened their chutes instantly and swung back and forth from icy heights — almost as high as Mount Everest — for some 20 to 30 minutes before hitting the ground of the hard reality. More or less frozen stiff they regained their mobility near the ground.

Reporting on the visits by former American air crewmen with the people of Merseburg, 1992, an article quotes Allen Ostrom, who recalled the hell he and his airmen went through at 30,000 feet over the Leuna Works — "We remember your

at 5000 meter elevation (about 16,500 feet). They preferred 8000 meters (26,500 feet) for the rest of their visits. This cut their target precision down by a square, but helped plowing a lot of fields.

The 105-mm guns used exclusively shell munitions. Owing to heat expansion, the shells got easily stuck in the barrels. For that reason the shell bottoms were covered with an oil-grease mixture. That lubricated the rubber rollers pulling in the shell with the result that the shell got hung up between the high-speed rollers. The resulting friction could heat



398th Lost 10 B-17's Over Merseburg

Flak gunners and your Luftwaffe pilots," he told the gathering in Merseburg.

By August/September 1944 the U.S. Air Force had had enough. It now started attacking individual batteries. While the bomb groups were flying at some 26,000 feet, individual bombers at 16,000 feet aimed their loads at single batteries. The plane that came after us flew fortunately at a right angle to our longitudinal axis and sent its blessing straight into a field, except for one bomb which hit the berm around the Flak Box without hurting the instruments or the crew. A little further away, though, the supervisor of the RAD battery had his neck broken.

The firing speed of the guns ranged between two and six seconds. The hot shells got in everyone's way. We threw them over the berms with a stick. One type of ammunition (Navy-ammo) was annoying. The detonator flames exited to the back and would singe our hair and skin as we went shirtless during the summer. The efficacy of the flak defense has often been maligned. One thing was sure, through: the bombers flew only once

up the gun powder. That was the time to run for your life. The reverse happened when the empty shell melted to the barrel because the "grabbers" had not expelled the shell.

Someone would yell "shell pincher!" The K 3 could either remove the shell with a hook, or the shell had to be pushed out of the barrel with the help of a tree trunk. This is what happened on one such occasion: The weapons maintenance techs stood near the muzzle while the K 3 had already removed the shell and in the heat of the battle reloaded as I, the K 1, had not yet turned the gun upwards. The shot blew the maintenance techs clear to the side, with the grenade ending up in the Buna Works.

After the July attacks we had finally learned how to deal with those tricky problems and fancied ourselves as "old warriors." But by now all ammunition reserves had been exhausted. They were never fully replaced causing a constant lack of ammunition. For that reason I

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“Fireworks” Were Spectacular

(Continued from Page 7)

could not agree with the positive evaluation of production increases in 1944 made by Speer, Minister of Armaments. Back on May 12, he had already declared the war technically lost owing to the hits against the most vital spot, the fuel industry. He should have either secured the protection of the fuel production or ended the war. After July 1944, more people died in Germany in the remaining nine months of the war than in all the prior years of the war.

The raids kept coming with increasing frequency and with ever greater bomb loads while our ammunition supply was fading. The raids took place during the day following pretty much along the same pattern. The last minutes before the first shots were the most anxious ones when the squadrons were being reported at Nordhausen flying east, or when the radio instruments had made out the target (at about 25 miles). Then all turned quiet 'til the sound of the engines got louder and more threatening. You then checked the correct flight direction to see whether the vapor trails were pointing towards the battery. If their direction was somewhat sideways, the immediate danger was less and after “Fire Free at All Elevations” you could go back to “work.” All nervous tension and anxiety went away with the first shot and the ensuing activity. Discouraging was merely the fact that our efforts were basically ineffective.

Increasing raids near the north end of Merseburg brought the carpet bombing closer to us. We were very lucky. I estimate that there was a total of 22 larger raids and according to the records of the U.S.A.F. a total of 19,450 tons of bombs rained down on Merseburg, Leuna and Schkopau.

Our psyche began to change slowly in spite of the rather secure daily routine. We concentrated on staying fit through diet, sleep and “cultural” diversions. (Above my bed hung prints of the painter Caspar David Friedrich.)

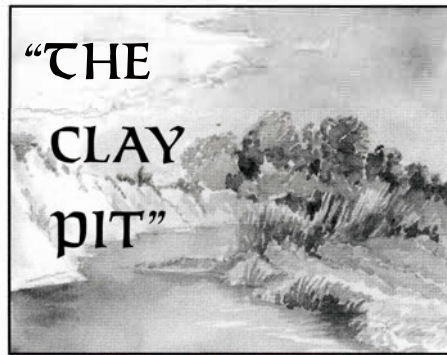
Combat experience doesn't add to your courage. After the first two weeks in December 1944 I developed regular feelings of fear.

December 6, 1944, was a double whammy — 1121 tons and 2040 tons bombs, 12 o'clock noon. Raid by U.S. Air Force. Carpet bombing near the battery. In the evening an attack by the RAF with high-speed bombers, Haviland Mosquito type. Owing to a brownout (courtesy of the local electric utilities) there was no warning that evening for the general public. Not even we had an alarm. Though we had heard the heavy sound of engines, nothing told us of an approaching armada. Only our Sergeant

and battery leader “Pieperhoff” showed up around 20:30 hours. In an unusually quiet and relaxed mood he said, “Boys, let's get back to the guns,” simply on account of the engine noise.

When the sky glowed red with Christmas Trees, the target markers, I was still sitting on top of the gun to throw down the heavy canvas. I got down faster than intended thanks to the pressure of the first “blockbuster” bombs. Our radio instruments had already established the targets and the well-known magic started all over again, this time in the dark, for a change. We didn't need our headlamps as it got very bright. After 40 shots we were out of ammo. One battery had failed as usual, so we left our cover, grabbed its last shells and used them all up. After that everyone kicked back and enjoyed the impressive fireworks.

Nothing compared to the entire sky being lit up in all its brilliance by giant waves of light pulsating upwards to the



zenith in rhythmic motion with each wave representing a different color of the rainbow.

We found ourselves inside a giant shining dome, and only the guns stood out as black and sharp silhouettes.

The spectacular show ebbed after 25 minutes. It got quiet. Only the city stood in flames, unfortunately including the area I called “home.” It was not far; help would surely have been welcome. So I reported “off base” with Herr Oberleutnant and off I went. Not so fast! He disallowed any absence from the post even after the appropriate reference to the fact that we were flat out of ammo. His response, “So we use bricks,” surpassed all logic and made no sense, except getting up my dander.

In a flash, I borrowed a bicycle and took off for the city. After 200 yards the bicycle chain came off near, of all places, dead horses and cows with bloated stomachs. They had been dead for weeks. Amidst the smell of smoke and cadavers I placed the chain back in place, and raced past the burning barns on the grounds of the Schmidt brick works on Hallesche

Street. Someone was forcing the scared horses from the stables, horses I used to ride.

The next barrier was the railroad tracks, four abreast for electric trains. Are the tracks still live? The shimmer of the tracks had to be nothing but reflections of the fires. Lifting my bike, I made it across. Nobody was at home at Klausentor, the house stood open, the windows with their frames lay scattered inside the room, some panes were still intact. I found my parents at a neighbor's house.

They carefully took me aside, so I wouldn't step on a bundle lying close at the entrance. It was a dead pilot who had been shot down. My parents had survived the raid relatively well in the basement of the Thomas family. There wasn't much I could do, but there was a treat in store for me: a special issue (courtesy Reich Government) called “soothing liqueur” — very sweet, my first positive acquaintance with alcohol. Somehow the Nazi brass did show you some of the better things in life.

The next day I was sent together with an officer candidate to check on the dead pilot of the RAF. By daylight I was able to clearly see what effect a free fall from 5000 meters has on a human being.

By contrast, several hundred yards further down at the river bank the other two pilots lay side by side, almost as having had a chance to shake hands in midair. The wide-open-eyes were staring from their seemingly uninjured bodies. They showed the physical evidence of the psychological horror they experienced in the last seconds of their lives.

In one of the pilot's shirt pocket was a pink-colored card bearing the fitting words — “The Secretary of Foreign Office on behalf of His Majesty requests to offer the bearer of this card assistance and protection as necessary for free and unhindered passage ...”

The “assistance” came too late. December 6, 1944, the day of the raid, was his birthday. He was clean-shaven as if he planned a party after a successful return.

Another raid. Renewed carpet bombing somewhat parallel to the railroad tracks. One of my parents would come and check on their offspring after each raid. Inside the basement, my father could tell whether we were firing — or whether we had “quieted down” due to lack of ammo, or whatever reason. Nobody showed the afternoon of December 12, likewise the next day and the one after that. I had noticed bombs falling near our house. I had to see for myself.

Continued on Page 9

“They Could Have Come By Train”

(Continued from Page 8)

After some flimsy excuse that got me permission to leave, I went on my way, and past the “Stecknersberg,” a farming estate. Its vaulted basements offered a secure shelter. My parents had once mentioned in passing that they planned using the basement’s apparent safety provided that, once the alarm had been sounded, they had enough time to run the 500 yards.

Hardly anything was left of the structures due to hits by several high explosives. One had struck the center of the vaulted basement. A row of trees led to the gate of the square shaped courtyard. Under the trees stood 14 stretchers with bodies covered in gray blankets. The hands were hanging down to the ground and some light snow started to cover everything.

I walked the remaining yards to my home with a heavy heart, for I had to fear that my parents were lying under those blankets. Why hadn’t they come to check on me? If they were alive, why hadn’t they come by?

As it turned out, there had been tensions between them. According to their different personalities, my parents had reacted to some politically charged accusations in exactly opposite ways.

Three waves of Lancaster bombers with 5.5-ton bombs cut our sleep short on January 14, 1945. Getting up three times, manning the guns, six batteries firing in unison, then back in the sack.

The shock waves from distant “block-buster” bombs drove the heavy coats between our legs. This had been our last engagement. We now prepared for ground combat. That meant removing the berms around the guns which would allow the guns to be lowered all the way down where they could fire at ground targets.

The Russians had reach the Elbe River. Herr Oberleutnant proclaimed, “The German leadership has done the only right thing: ‘All Express and Semi-Express trains are no longer running’” — I quipped, “Otherwise, the Russians could have come by train.” The circumstances, and the attempts to sell our intelligence short had made us 16-year-olds quite cynical.

Our discharge came February 10, 1945, only to be ready for induction in the military- or labor service, a more promising prospect as the front lines kept coming closer and closer, and with it the chance to be deployed at the eastern front in the morning and on the western front in the afternoon.

Thanks to a sinus operation, the city doctor exempted me from service. This allowed me to witness the entry of the American troops as a civilian. It took me

a while to appreciate my good fortune. I fully realized it when I visited our destroyed battery the next day.

I guess that it must have been April 13 or 14, when I decided to take a look at the battery, but I only made it to the last houses in the Buna subdivision. From there I observed the steady attack on the battery, presumably by grenade launchers.

After the complete occupation of Merseburg, I went back to the clay pit and the battery. The battery had made a full hit on three Sherman tanks that were still burning along Lauchstaedter Strasse. At battery, “Berta” the ammunition had exploded. A very young soldier was lying inside a ditch, dead, very peaceful.

I knew his face because we had trained him.



**AUTHOR'S DISCHARGE
Thanks For “Clay Pit” Duty**

TRANSLATION

In Recognition

of Services rendered to

Fuehrer und Fatherland

By Kurt Hesse

Who served as an Airforce Auxiliary

With a heavy Flak Battery

Protecting the German Homeland

Against enemy air raids

January 3, 1944

through

February 10, 1945

Area of deployment 2-10-'45

*— Jakob
(signed)*

*First Lieutenant
& Battery Head*

More Info On “The Clay Pit”

Professor Kurt Hesse, author of “The Clay Pit,” resides at Düsseldorf, Germany.

Karl Issel, who translated the article into English (and is a personal friend of Hesse), resides at San Francisco, CA 94127. He, like Hesse, also escaped from Communist East Germany as a youth, was educated in West Germany and later came to the U.S. as an architect.

The original German version of “The Clay Pit,” translated by Issel, was edited for FLAK NEWS by editor Allen Ostrom.

Mighty Eighth:

“WE’RE HERE FOR YOU”

“We’re here for you” is the call sign for the Mighty Eighth Air Force Museum’s 10th anniversary celebration.

“For the Veterans, we’re here for you.

“For your buddy or other hero of World War II, we’re here for you.

“For the parent or grandparent, we’re here for you to help fend off so many negative messages that influence our children.

“For the children, we’re here for you to provide creditable role models to follow today.”

And to keep these messages alive and well for generations to come, the Museum needs many friends and supporters. The 2006 Annual Fund Campaign is still on and there is still time to contribute. Make your checks payable to The Mighty Eighth, PO Box 1992, Savannah, GA 31402.

For further information on specific Memorial projects, call 912-748-8888. Fax 912-748-0209.

Or www.mightyeighth.org

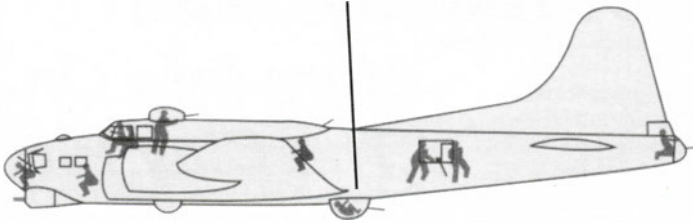
It’s Phoenix In November 2007

It will be a midwinter 398th reunion next year — November 28-29-30 and December 1, 2007 — in Phoenix, Arizona.

The 24th annual reunion will be held at the Grace Inn, south of the airport and Phoenix city center. The location is minutes off Interstate 10 at Elliot Road.

More details in upcoming FLAK NEWS, with the Official Registration to be available in the July 2007 issue.

Ball Turret Gunner



Most Flying Fortress crew members considered the ball turret the worst crew position on the aircraft. The confining sphere fastened to the underside of the aircraft required an agile occupant immune to claustrophobia and brave enough to be without a parachute close by.

The turret revolved a full 360 degrees, providing an extraordinary vantage point and covering the aircraft against attackers from below. Ironically, thought of as being the most dangerous position in a B-17, it turned out to be one of the safest — as far as suffering battle wounds. The gunner, curled up in the ball in the fetal position with his back against the armor plated door, had less of his body exposed to enemy fire than the other crew members.

The turret was stowed with the guns facing rearward for takeoff and landing. Once the aircraft was airborne, the turret would have to be cranked by hand to position the guns straight down, revolving the hatch inside the airplane. The ball gunner would then enter the turret, fasten his safety strap, turn on the power and operate the turret from inside.



The ball turret gunner would be hunched, legs bent, with his feet in stirrups on each side of the 13 inch diameter armored glass panel. His face was about 30 inches from this panel, and suspended in between was the optical display of the computing gunsight. A pedal under his left foot adjusted the red sight on this display and when a target framed within, the range was correct. While sighting, he would be looking directly between his knees. Two handles projected rearward above the sight and controlled movement of the turret. At the end of each handle was the firing button for both guns.

This presentation is part of a living History created by the Arizona Wing of the Commemorative Air Force, Mesa, Arizona. Other similar crew positions will be presented in future issues. Special thanks to the CAF and the Sentimental Journey.

www.398th.org



PETER BROOKE is pictured here being fitted for a T-shirt by 398th PX manager **Carolyn Widmann**. Brooke, from Anstey, England, was the guest speaker at the Livonia reunion. He carried best wishes from his British Friends, and urged the 398th membership to carry on with their visits to Station 131.

Letters, Letters

“Despite last year’s major problem with the UE, our SALLY B is now back in the air for her 31st display season. I cannot tell you just how pleased we are to have her flying again and we thank you all for your help in making this possible.

“Sally B’s most poignant annual engagement was at Madingley on Memorial Day, carried out in honour of the 79,000 U.S. Air Force airmen who died in World War II in fighting for our freedom.”

Elly Sallingboe, B-17 Preservation, PO Box 92, Bury St. Edmonds, Suffolk IP28 8RR, England.

“I am the niece of Sidor P. Stizzo, 603 waist gunner on the Unite Brodin crew shot down over Berlin on May 24, 1944. I grew up listening to my grandmother weeping over the loss of her first-born son. I missed not knowing him and grieved over his death as well. I now have all his old letters, and they have opened the doors of history to me. Uncle Sidor was a dedicated soldier who took his job to defend our country seriously.

“Thank you for those back copies of FLAK NEWS. I felt compassion and pride in reading about the 398th.”

Gail Bell, Albuquerque, NM 87108-1728.



THE PRINCESS was the name of the dinner cruise boat on the Detroit River during the 398th reunion in Livonia, Michigan. These “well-fed” faces belong to **Elliot Novek**, **Bob Schuh** and **Lou Stoffer**.

BRIEF-things

398th Bomb Group PX (The Second Generation)

Jillionaire **Paul Allen**, already owner of 20 WW II warplanes (including a B-17) added three more recently — P-47D, ME 109 and Hawker Hurricane; the P-47 flew at the Arlington (WA) “flying days” in July and now the local Fortress vets are all awaiting the “resurrection” of **Allen’s** B-17 ... Just wondering: how many air crew members “out there” have reached the age of 90? ... bombardier **Bill Martin** of the **Dwight Ross** crew, one of the originals, checked in at 88 “and I still like girls” ... and a most sincere “Thank You” to the family of **J.P. Wyers** of Noorbeek, Holland, who have “adopted” the grave of **Bill Wickens** at their Margraten Cemetery; **Wickens** was killed with others on the 600 Squadron **Bill Wells** crew; many American KIA members are similarly honored by Dutch families at Margraten ... can you believe that our British friends dug up the engine of a WW II Hurricane that had buried itself 20 feet deep in downtown London? ... one of our young members, **Jeff Vicha**, sends along an appeal asking if anyone “out there” who served in the 603rd on the **Kaufman, Lee, Hopkins** or **Steele** crews might have known **Jeff’s** grandfather, gunner **Ray Vicha**; send along any tips to the FLAK NEWS editor ... happiness to **Bob Steele**, according to his widow, **Arllys**, was giving his collection of FLAK NEWS to his grandson ... yes, readers, the “Somnium Scipiones” reference in “The Clay Pit” story refers to **Publius Cornelius Scipio**, the Roman general who defeated **Hannibal** at Carthage in 202 B.C. (after **Hannibal** had crossed the Pyrenees and Alps with elephants to defeat the Romans in 216 B.C.) ... author **Kurt Hesse**, as a requisite to graduating from high school in Merseburg, was quizzed by his professors on “any subject you feel comfortable with,” — **Hesse** selected calculus (“I had studied an American calculus book and it was so much better than any German book”) ... upon his discharge, **Hesse** discovered that while SS veterans qualified for German pensions, there was none for him as he was “under 17 years of age” when the war ended ... REMEMBRANCES has been out of print for 17 years, but one of our “on line” members found a copy on **abebooks.com** (\$70) ... a knee replacement these days is no big deal, but a very big deal if it comes with an E.coli infection, which kept Board member **Arnie Schneider** from the England Tour ... in addition to missing the Livonia reunion because of his heart surgery, prexy **Blackwell** also had to cancel an exciting date in France, where the locals scheduled quite a celebration where **Wally’s** B-17 came down in 1944 ... (I got a rain check, he said) ... **Dave Mills** went to the Danbury, CT, airfield to take a picture of a B-17 (Liberty Belle) but instead got a ride when they discovered he had done a Fortress tour “back then,” including a run over Schweinfurt at 11,000 feet ... since tour expert **Barb Fish** retired, the owner for whom she worked has disbanded his eight-person office and has gone “virtual,” meaning he will operate his travel business exclusively via the internet and phone ... coincidentally, some 398th members have been quietly inquiring on the skills required in handling future England tours ... the Livonia reunion came off “just fine,” but only because four foot, ten inch **Sharon Krause** rose up to knock heads with some Holiday Inn people who didn’t understand promises and contracts ... and, yes, most everyone noted that the Holiday Inn carpets were in dire need of cleaning ... do you check the “Corrections & Additions” each issue? If so, you would have noted the new address of **Colonel Hunter’s** daughter, **Mrs. John Randolph** and granddaughter, **Mrs. Sally Mackie** ... remember: Names Make News ... Phoenix in November 2007? The first six people told of this plan responded with a resounding “Yes!” ... in Livonia, **George Graham** met the man who had a perfect, tailgunner’s view of his B-17 (**Ira O’Neal**, pilot) being hit by bombs from a plane in his own squadron; the gunner was **Keith Anderson**, normally a pilot, but this day observing from the tail for his group leader; there were two survivors, but **Graham** now is the only one still living ... Kevin Whittacker’s great poem, “Why Do You Still March, Old Man?” made the 8th Air Force News (September, Page 45) ...

ORDER FORM

QTY	ITEM	UNIT COST	TOTAL
CLOTHING			
___	T-Shirt, black, “398th BG Flying Fortress”	\$12.00	___
___	T-Shirt, navy, with B-17 front view	\$12.00	___
___	T-Shirt, gray, with with logo on back	\$12.00	___
___	T-Shirt, olive, with Triangle W	\$12.00	___
___	Denim Shirt, long sleeve, 398th logo (S, M, L, XL XXL, please indicate size)	\$28.00	___
___	Golf Shirts, embroidered Triangle W 60% cotton, 40% poly mesh		___
___	Mens, light blue, white, S-XL	\$25.00	___
___	Ladies, light blue, S-XL (please indicate size & color)	\$25.00	___
CAPS			
___	Black, with logo (indicate 600, 601, 602, 603)	\$8.00	___
BOOKS (All books postpaid.)			
___	Fortresses Over Nuthampstead (Bishop)	\$65.00	___
___	398th History (1946, photo copy)	\$20.00	___
___	“Remembrances” (1989, photo copy, Ostrom)	\$30.00	___
___	“WW II Odyssey” (Frankhouser)	\$19.00	___
___	“The Youngest Crew” (Wagner)	\$19.95	___
___	“Hell From Heaven” (Streitfeld)	\$19.95	___
JEWELRY			
___	Squadron lapel pins (indicate 600, 601, 602, 603)	\$5.00	___
___	Group lapel pin (Hell From Heaven)	\$5.00	___
LOGOS			
___	Squadron Patch (indicate 600, 601, 602, 603)	\$6.00	___
___	B-17 Jacket Patch (rectangular)	\$4.00	___
___	8th Air Force Patch	\$6.00	___
PHOTOGRAPHS & PRINTS			
___	“Clearing & Colder” (8x10)	\$10.00	___
___	“Clearing & Colder” (14x17)	\$30.00	___
___	Anstey Stained Glass Window (11x17 includes list of comrades Killed in Action)	\$4.00	___
___	Aluminum Overcast (8x10)	\$2.00	___
___	“Sunset at Nuthampstead” (8x10)	\$7.00	___
MISCELLANEOUS			
___	Bumper Sticker (black)	\$3.00	___
___	Blue Ink Pen (398th imprints)	\$5.00	___
___	License Plate Frame (398th imprints)	\$5.00	___
___	Book Marker	\$5.00	___
___	WW II Coloring Book (with crayons)	\$4.00	___
___	Tote Bag (20x15, black, with logo)	\$8.00	___

Cost of Items ordered \$ _____
 Delivery and Handling add \$4.00
 or \$5.00 if order is over \$20.00 \$ _____
 Total \$ _____

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Make check payable to “398th Bomb Group PX.” Mail completed order form and check to Carolyn Widmann, Noblesville, IN 46062-7150,

398th BOMB GROUP

FLAK NEWS

c/o Allen Ostrom
Seattle WA 98107-3165



— Graphic by Lee Anne Bradley

THE B-17's of the 398th and the P-38's of the 55th Fighter Group were officially united last summer when the new 55th memorial was dedicated on the 398th grounds at Nuthampstead. The official logo of the 55th appears below the twin-tailed P-38's.