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

VOL. 24 NO. 4

FLAK NEWS

OCTOBER 2009



“398th Has Done It Again”

“We cannot fail,” was the urging of Wally Blackwell when the 398th Bomb Group Memorial Association was in the “final stretch” of raising \$25,000 for the memorial at the Mighty Eighth Museum at Savannah, Georgia.

“We made the final cut,” was his announcement when the 25K number was reached. And the memorial was dedicated in 2000.

Another “we cannot fail” challenge was reached at the annual reunion in Austin, Texas, in September when the 398th Bomb Group Association Board voted to provide \$5,000 toward the restoration of the B-17 G recently acquired by the museum. It will be the centerpiece in the Museum’s Combat Gallery.

The Fort is now at the Museum, having been acquired from the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, DC, and is undergoing complete restoration.

“This is the most important project we have had since we opened almost 13 years ago,” said CEO Henry Skipper.

“We are most grateful for the 398th contribution,” he added. “It is a capstone to go with the many other items already given these past years by your group.”

These include the book, REMEMBRANCES, the Hansard Prop, Sam’s Blanket, Chaplain Duvall’s stole, FLAK NEWS bound volumes, many videos, the silk escape maps and the many individual and crew memorials.

“Now you have done it again with this much appreciated \$5,000. Thank you,” said Skipper.

2009 Reunion In Austin:

Late Rush Brings On Crowd Of 187

The count was 187, and it brought joy and happiness to the leaders of the 398th Bomb Group Memorial Association reunion last September in Austin, Texas.

The days of anticipating 500 veterans and friends at the annual reunions have come and gone, but there was hope that the would not fall below last year’s 124, held in Florida.

Only weeks before the September 9-12 gathering, reunion chair Sharon Krause was looking with gloom at “maybe 100,” and a potential financial loss in tour guarantees.

“Thank Goodness!” she said. “The registrations literally flew in during the closing days. I was thrilled, happy and inspired.

“All the tours were sold out, and we can thank the second generation for that. I couldn’t be more pleased. And there were no mishaps and no disasters!

“Yes, there was some rain, especially on the Duck tour, but Austin was desperate for rain those days, having had temperatures of 100 degrees or over for 68 straight days.

Krause failed to mention the part of the weather that left some members scrambling for air conditioning to escape the relentless humidity.

Inside the Radisson North Hotel, the accommodations made for happy gatherings in the Memory Room, where the registration desk brought people together to collect their tour tickets, banquet tickets and generally exchange greetings about “last year” or “65 years ago.”

“Jack’s Books,” started years ago by the late Jack Wintersteen

Continued on Page 3



SHARON KRAUSE

ENGLAND CALLS OUR PRESIDENT

Change Of Address For Gibb-Rice

Marilyn Gibb-Rice found that her world had changed abruptly earlier this year when she took over as president of the 398th Bomb Group Memorial Association upon the passing of Wally Blackwell. It changed again in early October.

Marilyn, on the heels of leading the 398th to a successful reunion in Austin, Texas, last September (Page 1), has moved to England, along with her husband, Geoff, who serves the Association as Photo-Researcher.

"This is a move that has been in the works for some time," said Marilyn, "but we fully plan to continue our work with the 398th."

Marilyn explained that the move to England (not far from Nuthampstead) was made so Geoff might be closer to his English family. Geoff, an engineer, lived and worked at nearby Stansted, before his marriage to Marilyn.

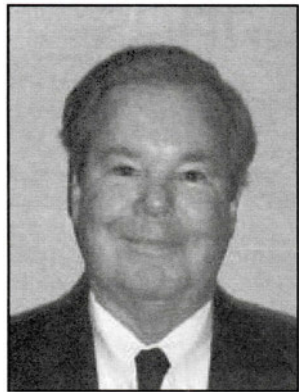
Vice-President Bob Bowen said that the move to England "should pose no problem what with the communications we have today." This was echoed by Director Lew Burke, who said, "She should be able to conduct business just fine. After all, she'll be next door to good ol' Station 131."

Marilyn's final act at the reunion Board meeting in Austin was to sign off on the \$5,000 gift to the Mighty Eighth Museum for the restoration of the newly acquired B-17.

See the story on Page 1 for comments by Museum CEO Henry Skipper.

"Also," said Marilyn, "we will have an opportunity to watch our FONA (Friends of Nuthampstead Airfield) as they proceed with their plans to erect a 398th Museum. It will be located near the Woodman Inn."

Behind this project are Peter Brooke, the FONA chairman, Russ Abbey, Malcolm Osborn and a host of other "enthusiastic" members.



HENRY SKIPPER

The museum will be created out of a World War II Nissen Hut, which was salvaged by Wilfrid Dimsdale and stored in his Meesden Bury barn for many years awaiting such an announcement.

For more information on the Museum, which will honor both the 398th and the 55th Fighter Group, contact the following —

Marilyn Gibb-Rice
Sewards End
Essex CB10 2ST
England



MARILYN GIBB-RICE

Wally Will Be Remembered

Our late 398th president, Wally Blackwell, was an active and supportive member of the Mighty Eighth Museum at Savannah, Georgia, much of his work resulting in the erection of the 398th granite memorial dedicated in 2000.

Many other members have contributed to special memorials, and the group as a whole is represented by one of the lighting fixtures at the Chapel.

Since Wally's passing, members contributed \$2,040 toward a memorial for him, to

be determined by his widow, Teedy. That determination will be a Remembrance Tree and Bench, she announced during the annual reunion in Austin, Texas. Both will be located near the 398th Memorial and will bear an appropriate plaque in remembrance of Wally.

For more information on memorial sponsorships, call the Mighty Eighth at 912-748-8888.

Or e-mail finance@mightyeighth.org.

Dues Go "Out West" This Time

As expressed by an enthusiastic membership at the Austin, Texas, reunion, the 398th is alive and well. And ... "alive and well" because the membership as a whole (beside the 187 at Austin) have chosen to support the Association with their annual dues of \$20.00, which the Board voted to retain for another year.

And now, it is time for the membership that lives "Out West," to kick off the coming year of 2010 with their annual dues. The other three sections of the country will get their chances in the January, April and July issues.

Thus, the dues envelopes this time have been inserted in the newsletters destined for The West — Washington, Oregon, Idaho, California, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Alaska and Hawaii.

If the return envelope is missing, simply direct your \$20.00 (plus any additional memorial gift) to Dues Manager Dawne Dougherty, 951 S 9th St, Harrisburg, OR 97446-9585.

Also, send her any address change or Taps notice. Remember, the Taps list will be published in January (it is very lengthy).

Small Stories Can Lead To Bigger Stories

The little FLAK NEWS item that told of Gen. Jimmy Doolittle's granddaughter being an 8th Air Force guest last summer in England (and at the Woodman Inn) prompted a telephone call from Phyllis McCormick in Illinois to Gen. Doolittle's son, John, living in California.

It seems that ex-602 B-17 pilot McCormick (after his POW sojourn in 1945) had gone on to more combat in B-52's and B-36's in Korea and Vietnam. And ... that his fellow Command Pilot at Castle AFB in training new B-52 pilots was Gen. Doolittle's son.

And ... following additional assignments, they both returned to Vietnam and resumed their B-52 duties.

McCormick has passed on, but Phyllis continues on with their many contacts formed through his long Air Force careers, as noted above.

(John contributed the POW story in the book (398th REMEMBRANCES, available in the PX on Page 12.)

“Seconds” Help Reunion Count

Dimsdale Lauds 398th “Diplomacy”

(Continued from Page 1)

and more recently brought up to date by Lee Anne Bradley, were scrutinized for photos and other personal data about members' 398th careers.

A full boat load of members opened the four-day reunion with an evening dinner tour on Lady Bird Lake, fronting downtown Austin. Complete with a “bat display” that has become the early evening entertainment center for Austin visitors.

Another tour took a coach load to the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center and Botanical Gardens and still another to Fredericksburg and the Nimitz National Museum of the Pacific War.

The actual 398th veteran count was 31, plus six from the 55th Fighter Group. The “Fighters” met independently for their business meetings, but joined the “Bombers” for the Welcome and Farewell banquets.

A few 398th members who were at their first reunion happily lined up to receive special medallions ... and kisses from the second generation ladies.

One of these “ladies” was Marilyn Gibb-Rice, who had inherited the presidency at the untimely passing of Wally Blackwell. She was unanimously elected president at the business meeting, as was vice president Bob Bowen, who moved “up” from his previous position as secretary.

The then-vacant secretary's job was “won” by Karen Neff, the second generation daughter of Gertrude Neff, who was not able to attend but whose presence at many previous reunions and tours was noted.

Ann Collins of Rocklin, California, made appearances at both banquets to remind members of the 2010 Tour to England and Czech Republic. (See additional story on Page 4.)

Webmaster Dave Jordan reported that the *398th.org* is attracting about 10,000 hits each month and that the Timeless Voices (398th veterans) is among the most popular of the many features.

The presence of the 55th Fighter Group contingent proved a revelation, both to them and to the 398th.

Their group, numbering 33, fitted in nicely with the host 398th, especially with the presence of Russ Abbey, one of the visitors from England. Abbey is an authority on the 55th from the days they flew P-38's out of Nuthampstead, and he continues to be an authority with the newly named Friends of the Nuthampstead Airfield (FONA).

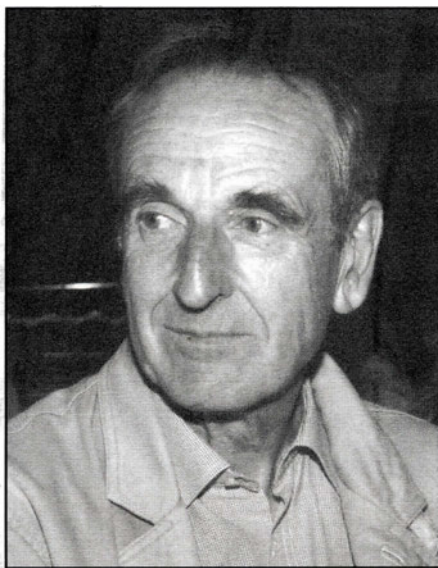
The 55th's Frank Bertceil announced that their group would be disbanding in

2010, blaming age and infirmity as the reason for the group's eminent demise.

“We failed to make the same provisions for the second and third generations as you folks did,” he told the banquet audience.

This was amplified at the Farewell banquet when the 398th seconds, thirds ... and fourths ... generations led in the singing of the National Anthem.

The other visitor from England was Wilfrid Dimsdale, who was again elected to the board of directors, representing the Friends in England. Dimsdale has for



WILFRID DIMSDALE
Remembers The “Home Stays”

many years been in charge of maintaining the 398th Memorial and surrounding grounds, although the Memorial is now under the auspices of the American Battle Monuments Commission.

Dimsdale applauded the FLAK NEWS story written by Lynn Marie Alexander on the “diplomacy” engendered between the veterans at Station 131 during World War II and the local residents.

“Diplomacy can be between states and governments, but it is far more successful when it is between families and individuals, as it was during the time when you were here in wartime,” he said.

Dave Jordan, webmaster of the *398th.org* web site, said –

“Allen gave one of the best explanations on how they assembled 1,000 aircraft in the bomber stream.”

That would be Allen Ostrom, FLAK NEWS editor, who began his description by telling how the 398th B-17's would take off every 60 seconds from the Station 131

The Reunion Veterans

Keith Anderson, Issaquah, WA
Cleo Bickford, Cypress, TX
Bob Bowen, Athens, GA
Lew Burke, Centreville, VA
Bill Clack, Plano, TX
Russell Currier, Palo Alto, CA
Jack Dodson, Amarillo, TX
Dallas Ebest, San Antonio, TX
Vaughn Erickson, Vancouver, WA
Ralph Greenwalt, Franklin, NC
Roger Harvey, Santa Paula, CA
George Hershberger, Springfield, MO
Vern Kling, Athens, TX
Bernard Kuse, LaGrange, TX
Joe Mansel, Humble, TX
Herb Meeker, Easton, PA
Dave Mills, Norwalk, CT
Don Menard, Baton Rouge, LA
Ray Moore, Aurora, IL
Newell Moy, Centennial, CO
Allen Ostrom, Seattle, WA
Fred Parker, Olympia, WA
James Powell, Shelbyville, TX
Russell Reed, Port Ludlow, WA
Ray Richman, Pittsburgh, PA
Paul Roderick, Palm City, FL
Terrance St. Louis, Albuquerque, NM
Chuck Sasse, Minneapolis, MN
Jim White, San Pedro, CA
Leo Wilcox, Jamestown, NY
Frank Yarmoski, Chicago, IL

runways (in the pre-dawn darkness) and fly directly to nearby Debdon, circle back to Nuthampstead, then back to Debdon in a continuous “racetrack” pattern until reaching formation altitude, every plane climbing at a prescribed 300 feet per minute.

“At an exact moment, perhaps an hour or more later, the group would meet up with the others in the Wing and then on to the Division stream.

“Meanwhile, there would be 40 other groups doing exactly the same thing, flying over their own racetrack ‘turf’ in East Anglia, a piece of England 75 by 125 miles.

“It was an incredible undertaking and it was the greatest air armada of all time. And it can never happen again.

“But the most remarkable part is the fact that most of the 20-odd thousand

Continued on Page 9

30 Prepare For Tour

With the tour still seven months distant, there appears to be at least 30 members and friends of the 398th Bomb Group Memorial Association who are making plans to spend some time in England and the Czech Republic in June of 2010.

At least 10 of the 30 will begin with visiting Prague and the other Czech sites identified with 398th history. It all starts in Prague on June 9, with the special tour bus and escorts moving on to Pilsen, where the 398th concluded its 8th Air Force campaign with the Last Mission on April 25, 1945. And to nearby Litice, where the last 398th plane came down, and where the crew (Ferguson) is remembered at the city's memorial.

Another big Czech event will come on June 12, where that city honors the Donald Christensen crew, shot down



ANN COLLINS

near the city's airfield. It concludes with the spectacular Air Stars celebration in Slany.

Also, a visit to Kovarska to see Jan Zdirasky's "school house" museum dedicated to the 8th Air Force's air battles over the Ore Mountains.

On Sunday, June 13, the tour shifts to London, with some local sightseeing before moving on to Cambridge, there to begin a host of activities arranged by Malcolm Osborn in and around Station 131 — Nuthampstead.

Tour prices, schedules and information can be secured from tour leader Ann Collins, the daughter of a 601 ball turret gunner. Ann is an orthopedic physical therapy specialist in California (and in October underwent her own total knee replacement.)

A Message From Nuthampstead

"I just love walking my dogs up to the end of the old airfield, especially early in the mornings. I see Nuthampstead in all four seasons — wonderful sunrises, hoar frosts, green shoots bursting forth or the brown fields heralding the autumn and another winter.

"I sometimes feel as though I am an honoured caretaker of this peaceful countryside. The peace I experience and treasure was hard won, with many sacrifices making it possible for me to stand on the old airfield with the breeze ruffling my dogs' coats.

"You made all this possible. We are eternally grateful to you for all you did for us in our time of real need."

— PETER BROOKE
Chairman, FONA

England France DVD Available

It was five years ago, but seeing it again made it seem like yesterday.

The "it" would refer to the DVD video produced by Dr. Ken Peirce of the 2004 England-Normandy tour which featured a traveling party of 40.

The Seattle neurosurgeon is a contributor to FLAK NEWS in the form of "digital assistance." He covered the tour with his video camera from London to Portsmouth to the Normandy beaches and back to England and the many stops in and around Nuthampstead.

The ceremonies on the Channel ferry, Normandie, to Couseuilles-sur-Mer, Omaha Beach, Caen, Villedier Les Poeles, Saint-mer-Eglise, La Chapelle-Enjuger, Bayeaux, Pagasus and other stops represents a classic lesson in the World War II allied invasion of Europe, especially for the 398th.

The DVD is being made available to 398th members at no cost, but with the suggestion that a gift be made to the 398th via the Dues Manager, Dawne Dougherty, Harrisburg, OR 97446-9585.

(The Editor says it's a collector's item.)



To The Editor

A sincere thank you for publishing my "diplomatic" story in the July FLAK NEWS. Your idea of using the 8th Air Force commemorative plate made for a spectacular front page!

The whole issue was so nicely compiled and laid out.

The newsletter certainly is your passion and you do it so well. You mention that one day it might go digital. That will surely be a loss for those used to your style.

It was a pleasure to work with you on this project. You were so gracious and kind.

I have showed the newsletter to my friends and family and they were impressed and full of questions about the 398th

I am appreciative of you and all the members of the 398th for sharing a piece of themselves with me. All the best.

— Lynn Alexander
Independence, MO
64055.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Several readers also called or wrote FLAK NEWS to comment on the July issue containing Alexander's story and the 8th Air Force Plate. These would include Dave Mills, Marilyn Gibb-Rice, Bill Scott, Evelyn (Comstock) Rhodes, Karl Issel, Bill Frankhouser,



Ted Johnston, Julius Eckstein, Malcolm Osborn, Sir Roger duBoulay and ... Queen Elizabeth II, who also was "interested" in knowing that the 398th will be coming to England and Nuthampstead next June.

**Visit Our
Web Site
www.398th.org**

“WE MADE IT HOME, BUT ...

WHERE’S THE BASE?”

BY BILL FRANKHAUSER
Navigator, 603rd Squadron

My first mission upon returning from leave was to Merseburg, where Herb Newman’s crew had been shot down on November 2, 1944. In fact, Merseburg was a dreaded target for the 398th. By the end of the war, the Group had hit those refineries on eight different occasions and lost 10 planes.

We were leading the bomber stream this day and I was in the lead plane of the low squadron where Jack Brandstatter was pilot. Jack had been a friend since training days back at Rapid City. The actual combat phase of this mission was not rigorous since this was one of the two missions to Merseburg when the 398th had not lost a plane. The weather was a bigger concern.

Upon return to England, the ground was completely covered with thick layers of clouds. The Group was separated above the clouds in a normal sequential dispersal pattern and given a heading to fly individually in a line while descending through the clouds. Upon breakout from the lower cloud surface, each ship would then head toward Nuthampstead using pilotage navigation.

The squadron lead plane, because of the take-off and dispersal sequences, was now in the air longer than most of the other 11 planes. Also, the mission was a lengthy trek deep into Germany. Although we were anxious to get back to Nuthampstead before dark, some problems developed. First, I was not certain of my specific position when we started in line into our descent. We had been flying in the dispersal pattern without being able to get a position check. I did know that we were heading south on a path that would keep us between London and the east coast of England. Second, it was getting late in the day and darkness was approaching.

When we broke through the clouds, our flying ceiling was, at best, less than 1,000 feet and visibility probably was no more than one-half mile. These were not good conditions to do pilotage. Third, we were too low for the radioman to pick up a buncher beam for us to orient ourselves. Fourth, the flight engineer told us that we had only approximately 10 minutes of fuel supply.

As we broke out from the clouds, I sighted the Thames River. Thank heavens! We were flying south across it and it was easily recognizable. I turned us back straight north to keep us away from London to our west. The question now was

where were we along the Thames? With the lousy visibility I could not determine where we had crossed the river. Everyone was put on alert by the pilot to look for any airport and to have their parachutes handy in case he had to go higher for us to bail out.

The bombardier and I both yelled into the intercom, “At 300 degrees, an airport!”

Jack started an oval route around a runway to get in position for landing. We



— Painting by Gil Cohen

were so low that he had to evade a tall smokestack and he also lost sight of the runway terminus. Why didn’t they turn on the lights for us? Based on the location, we knew it had to be an RAF base. Then, on the second try going around, two fires appeared on either side of one end of the runway. Jack still had trouble finding even those fires when he tried to get us around in the necessary pattern, but he slipped the plane in abruptly on our third circuit and we landed.

We wondered why no planes were in sight on the ground. We soon learned. Our position was Romford, a northeast suburb of London, and this site was an abandoned, non-active RAF air base. It was now occupied by a barrage balloon unit of the RAF. Lighter-than-air balloons were being used over London at this time to protect against German air attacks. The heavy steel cables attached to the large balloons anchored them to the ground and caused airplanes to crash after striking them.

Weather was so bad on this particular evening that no balloons were aloft because of the presumption that Germans could not fly over England in those conditions. The weather had caused our prob-

This Mission Story Ended In An Odyssey

The very enlightening story on “Missing Air Crew Reports” (following pages) reveals some graphic information on the 398th Bomb Group’s combat history.

Other stories had happier endings, albeit some were “touch and go, as was the case of the December 12, 1944, mission to Merseburg for the Jack Brandstatter crew. Bill Scott was the pilot; Bill Campbell, bombardier; Bill Frankhauser, navigator; Johnny Muir, ETG; John Borquin, RO; and gunners James Humbert, Floyd Lynch and Irving Zuckerman.

Frankhauser relates the story, as told in his book, “World War II Odyssey.”

lem and had also saved our lives. With balloons aloft, we would have impacted into the cables and been “dead ducks” flying off-route in bad weather.

It seems that all of these experiences during my combat tour, no matter how dire, also had a humorous side. In this case, we soon noted that the RAF lived in somewhat more sumptuous quarters than ours at Nuthampstead. After feeding us and treating us with brandy, we were each assigned a bedroom. After more than 12 hours under considerable duress, I was dog tired. My bed had a soft down-filled mattress and white sheets, which were considerably better than the U.S. Army blankets and straw-filled mattress slab back at Nuthampstead.

In the morning, someone shook my shoulder. I looked up and there stood a beautiful young WAF (Women’s Army Corps). She said, “Good morning, Lieutenant.”

I looked further and saw a steaming cup of tea and some crumpets in her hands. I sat up, thinking, “Wow,” and saying, “Thank you.”

When she left, I noticed my old GI high-top shoes aligned on the floor by the head of the bed. They had not seen a drop of polish or oil since I purchased them months before at the base store back at Nuthampstead. Now, they were perfectly shined and polished.

Our crew did not leave this RAF site for three days. Perhaps Jack Brandstatter and Bill Scott were enjoying the interlude as much as I. Their story was that their instructions, by telephone, were to leave as soon as the weather cleared. Fuel had already been sent by a tanker truck for our plane. The problem was that we were in the midst of what the British called a “pea souper” — a very dense fog of long duration. Finally, 603rd Operations gave up on the plane and sent a truck to take our crew back to Nuthampstead.

Ed’s Note — Bill’s book, “World War II Odyssey,” is available in the 398th PX, found on Page 12 of FLAK NEWS.

Crew Information Came Slowly:

“One Of Our Aircraft Is Missing”

When a World War II air crew failed to return home, and the eye witnesses provided convincing evidence that they had been shot down, little time was wasted in clearing out their personal belongings from their Nissen hut or tent.

Early that morning they were there. Full of life, cocky and confident.

Then gone. The hut now is strangely quiet and different. Someone has already slipped in and picked up their things. The photos are gone. The clothes on the rack are gone. The boots under the bunk are gone. The .45 that “Shorty” was so proud of is gone. It has all been cleaned out.

Silently, as if questions are forbidden, the ones in the hut who did make it home go about the tasks of rearranging their quarters. One will move to a bunk away from the drafty door. Another will lay claim to the choice bunk in the corner where one of the “missing” guys had built a neat writing desk.

And the drama will continue. Another mission tomorrow and soon the names of the “missing” guys will hardly be remembered.

Once a crew was listed as missing there was precious little information forthcoming as to their status. Just missing.

Sadly, some crew members simply never did find out what happened to the men who one day turned up missing. If they were lucky enough to come home from the war healthy and unscathed there were more important tasks at hand. School, job, marriage, family ...

News about the killed in action, wounded, prisoners, missing, became a distant dream. And then all but forgotten.

Some didn't forget, however, and their efforts are recorded in military archives called Missing Air Crew Reports (MACR). Only through these reports has it been possible to learn what really happened to some of the B-17 crews after they were plucked from the skies by sharp-shooting German fighter pilots or flak gunners far below.

The statisticians of the Air Force remained “on the job” until the last shred of information on each crew member was filed and recorded. For a time, it was just a matter of putting each piece of information into a file folder and giving it a number. Eventually, each piece of paper was put on microfilm or microfiche.

Each microfiche contains up to two dozen pages of information on the missing aircraft. Eye witness reports, crew loading lists, home addresses and next of kin; types and numbers of machine guns aboard, bomb load, German reports on killed, wounded and captured, burial

Missing Air Crews Of The 398th

PILOT/CREW	SQD	TARGET
Alhadeff, Ike	600	Brandenburg
Baker, John	600	Bretteville
Beatty, Hubert	600	Stendal
Berry, Kearie	601	Humieres
Blackwell, Wally	601	Bretteville
*Brodin, Unite	603	Berlin
*Buzza, Ken	603	Merseburg
Campbell, Robert	601	Merseburg
Carter, Nigil	601	Peenemünde
Christensen, Donald	603	Bohlen
Connolly, Harry	602	Münster
Conrow, Russell	601	Magdeburg
Coville, Paul	602	Pilsen
DeCleene, Donald	603	(England)
Doerr, Lyle	602	Bischofsheim
Dwyer, Wilbur	603	Merseburg
Ellis, Richard	603	Osnabruck
Erickson, Mahlon	602	Bingen
Farmer, John	602	Münster
Ferguson, Allan	602	Pilsen
Fields, James	602	Brux
Folger, Robert	600	Leipzig
Foster, Thomas	603	Munich
Gallagher, Raymond	603	Munich
Godwin, John	602	Toulouse
*Gonzales, Federico	603	Neuss
Hadjes, Willard	601	Hamburg
*Halter, Ralph	601	Hamburg
Hansard, V.A.	600	Merseburg
Hawkins, Dallas L.	602	Lechfeld
*Hopkins, Robert	603	Bretteville
Howell, Charles	603	Merseburg
Ingram, John	601	Berlin
Jacobs, William	602	Kassel
Lehner, Robert	603	Merseburg
Lovelace, Dana	600	Munich
Martinek, Emil	601	Neumünster
McAfee, James	600	Oranienburg
McArthur, John	603	Peenemünde
McCormick, John	602	Berlin
*Meyran, William	603	Cologne
Mitchell, James	601	Ludwigshafen
Newman, Herbert	603	Merseburg
Nisewonger, Boyd	603	Leipzig
O'Neal, Ira	600	Berlin
Palant, Sam	601	Neumünster
Pinner, Howard	603	Kassel
Pope, Kermit	600	Misburg
Powell, Perry	603	Berlin
Reed, Russell	603	Merseburg
Rich, Paul	603	Merseburg
*Rohrer, Richard	601	Berlin
Rolfe, Benjamin	601	Misburg
Searl, Charles	600	Versailles
*Sheely, Roy	603	Münster
Shirk, Arthur	602	Krailburg
Thomas, Andy	603	Oranienburg
Thompson, Thomas	600	Dessau
Wade, Warren	601	Ludwigshafen
Weekley, Harold	601	Rouen
Wells, William	600	Derben
Weum, Roger	600	Merseburg
Wilson, George	601	Humieres
Wismer, Frederick	603	Merseburg
Wright, Parke	600	Stuttgart
*Zimmer, Charles	600	Misburg
*Lead Crews		

From: “REMEMBRANCES”

The list of the missing air crews and accompanying story is reprinted from the 398th Bomb Group book, **REMEMBRANCES**, published in 1989. The information for the story was gleaned from the reports contained in the Missing Air Crew Reports.

sites, etc.

These are grim statistics, representing for the most part painful memories. To be sure, there are many reference to former buddies once thought dead who turned up as prisoners of war.

But then there is the reality of discovering that seven crews on the Missing Air Crew Reports went down without a single survivor. These are Charles Searl (600) who crashed near Bovingdon, England; Ben Rolfe (601) whose crew was flying the popular B-17 “Ugly Duckling;” Bill Meyran (603) who crashed on take-off and exploded in the moat surrounding the former castle at Anstey; Thomas Foster (603) who took a direct hit in the tail over Munich; James Fields (602) who was on the way to Brux, Czechoslovakia, when flak caught two engines and he had to turn back. They never made it. It is believe the plane crashed in the Baltic Sea as they tried to make it to Sweden. John McArthur (603) was hit over Peenemünde, the German rocket research facility on the Baltic. The ball turret gunner on the John Ryan crew, William Coombs, offered this report to Intelligence upon returning home — “Four bursts completely covered the McArthur plane's left wing. Suddenly the ship quivered, shook and belched forth a large red flash. It went into the Baltic Sea in a power dive.” Lyle Doerr (602) apparently had trouble from the beginning, as he never made it into formation, but crashed into the Channel.

Six crew members became the sole survivors on their downed aircraft — Robert Templeton, 600 waste gunner, (William Wells crew); Dave Bancroft, 603 tail gunner, (Perry Powell); Frank Gnasdowski, 601 tail gunner, (John Ingram); Doyle Borchers, 602 waist gunner, (Dallas Hawkins); William Hamor, 602 radio operator, (Harry Connolly); and Selmar Haakenson, 603 tail gunner, (Donald Christensen).

Ira O'Neal of the 600th was the pilot on the very first 398th plane to be lost in combat. This occurred on May 19, 1944, on the way to Berlin. There were two survivors, George Graham and Howard Baer.

One pilot, Kermit Pope of the 600th,

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The Skies Were Seldom Friendly

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probably said, "Thanks a lot," if he saw 600 CO Bruce Daily after the war. Pope had flown 10 missions with the 379th at Kimbolton when he was transferred with his navigator, Walter Poole, to the radar navigation school at the 482nd.

Meeting Daily in London one day, Pope suggested he and Poole would like to get out of the school assignment and back into combat. Daily said, "Leave it to me," and proceeded to get them transferred to the 398th and into the 600th. The first mission Pope and Poole flew with their new crew they were hit over the target at Misburg and ultimately made a forced landing in German occupied Holland.

On one of the many infamous Merseburg missions — November 2, 1944 — tail gunner William G. Jones of the 603 Herb Newman crew took out an ME-109. Moments later, in a second attack, the Newman plane was rocked by cannon fire and Jones and three comrades were killed. The crash occurred near the city of Eisleben, better known as the birthplace of Martin Luther.

Among the unusual stories found in the MACR's concerned William Hendrickson, assistant gunnery officer for the 8th Air Force. He had gone along as observer on the Russ Conrow

crew of the 601st on a trip to Magdeburg on September 28, 1944. Hit at the IP and with a fire in the bomb bay, Hendrickson was forced to bail out with the other nine airmen. But not before he had to be released from a sling he had set up for himself to "observe" from the waist. And not before he removed his heated felt boots and put on his GI shoes!

Stendel was the prime training field for the Germans in developing the jet-powered fighter, ME-262. A mission there on February 22, 1945, stirred up a single 262, who proceeded to knock out "Beatty's 8-Balls" of the 600th. This would be the Hubert Beatty crew.

Beatty and his fellow officers were killed. The toggler, Urie Zook, survived the bail out, only to be killed later by the strafing American P-47 while he and others were on a PW train.

Among the many "little friend" comments to be found in the MACR concerns Lowell Thompson of the Mahlon Erickson crew of the 602nd. All nine crew members bailed out during an attack on a bridge at Bingen on December 29, 1944. Nearing the ground, an ME-109 began circling Thompson as though lining him up for a burst of machine gun fire. Along came a P-51 and chased him away.

At the same time, Adolph Huesgen was being fired on from the ground. Once he got unhooked from his chute, Huesgen took off and didn't stop running until he found some friends from the U.S. 89th Infantry.

Help in the form of heroism was noted

the waist door.

Pennell then apparently tried to check on the crew up front, but went down with the aircraft. George Gagne, radio operator on the Thompson crew, bailed out successfully. And landed in the middle of the PW camp on the outskirts of Dessau, the mission's target city.

An English gunner aboard a rescue amphibian called the "Walrus" made a valiant attempt to save a crew member from the Lyle Doerr crew that crashed in the Channel. The amphibian landed near the crash site, found one crewman navigator John Walker, struggling in the cold water. Unable to pull him aboard, this unnamed British gunner

dove into the Channel and tried valiantly to save him. He finally had to give up the attempt as he became too exhausted to continue. The B-17 was called "Boomerang" and the crash site was 16 miles off Beachy Head. The pilot of the "Walrus" was "Flight Officer Robinson."

The Missing Air Crew Report scenario continued until the very last mission flown by the 398th. It is ironic that two B-17's went down on this day — April 25, 1945 — but doubly so in that both were hit by flak on their second pass over the target, the Skoda



Munitions Works at Pilsen, Czechoslovakia.

This mission was the last heavy bombing mission flown by the 8th Air Force in World War II. And there are those who assume that the Skoda Works were targeted for destruction in order to keep the plant and its equipment out of Russian hands. As a favor to Winston Churchill.

To the members of the 602 crews of Paul Coville and Allan Ferguson the political overtones of the mission were lost in a few brief moments of flak, flame and death.

Unexpected dense cloud cover caused Air Commander Michael Robinson to order a 360 and another run on the target. This time there was a brief clearing and the Skoda Works came into view for a visual attack. It was a highly successful

on the reports. On the Sam Palant plane of the 601st during the April 13, 1945, "RDX" mission the tail gunner happened to be a gunnery officer flying on of his required six missions. Orie Hedges, in the tail, was injured by flak. Waist gunner Byron Cunningham responded to his urgent call on the intercom, dragged Hedges back to the waist and put his own chute on him as the plane was on fire.

Cunningham pushed Hedges out the waist door, then crawled back to the tail to retrieve Hedges' chute and finally bailed out himself.

The words, "Pennell was a hero" are placed on a MACR by a survivor on the Tommy Thompson crew of the 600th. Pennell came out of his ball turret as his ship began its death plunge. Seeing waist gunner John Namey injured, Pennell hooked on his chute and tossed him out

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Combat Stories From Remembrances:

Some Lived, Some Died

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run and the flak was described as “inaccurate and moderate” for three squadrons, but “accurate” for the high squadron. Indeed it was!

Seconds after “bombs away” the Coville aircraft caught a flak hit directly behind #3 engine. Ball turret gunner Charles Walker reported a hole in the wing and gasoline pouring out. Walker was ordered out of the ball turret by Coville while he and co-pilot Robert McLaughlin tried to feather #3 prop.

Fire then broke out and soon the engine exploded, spreading fire over the entire wing. The wing folded back over the fuselage and then tore loose. The aircraft went into a series of end over end spins and finally exploded.

Coville, McLaughlin, Neil Bartimus (navigator-togglier) all bailed out the front hatch. Charles Rawlings went out the tail door and Norman Markel (radio) and Harry Overbaugh (waist) went out the waist door. Before jumping, Markel responded to a “Help me!” from Walker, assisting the ball turret gunner with his chute. Although apparently ready to jump, Walker might have been pinned to the fuselage as the aircraft began its violent spinning. He never got out.

The survivors landed near the German-Czech border and all made their way to the nearby Allied lines. One member, Overbaugh, was even given directions by two German soldiers!

The same tracking anti-aircraft that had the high squadron of the 602nd zeroed in caught the Ferguson B-17 a moment after picking off Coville.

This time there were only two survivors, William O'Malley and Harry Mazer.

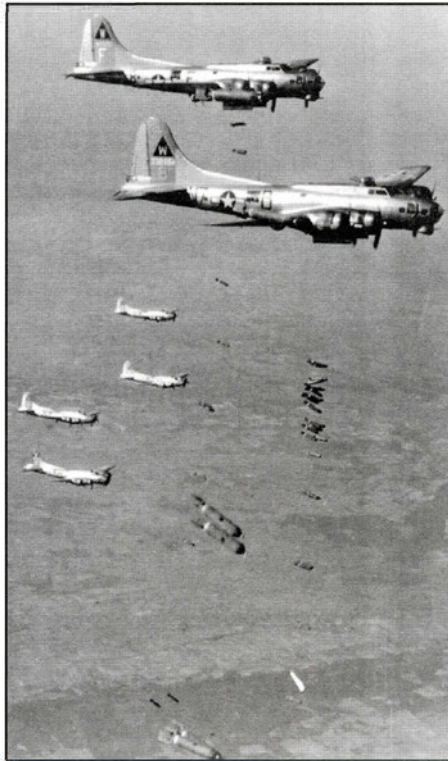
Unable to get out of the stricken craft were Ferguson; co-pilot John Halbert (his first mission); navigator-togglier Howard Feldman; and Joseph Heustess, engineer.

Flak caught the left wing of Ferguson's aircraft and it went into violent spins. The official mission report suggest that the pilot might have been hit. The ship went into a steep dive with smoke streaming from #2 and #3 engines. As it disappeared into the clouds three falling bodies were seen.

There were four — O'Malley, the ball turret gunner; Mazer, waist gunner; Michael Brennan, radio operator; and Byron young, tail gunner.

Young and Brennan were both “found dead,” according to German reports.

O'Malley and Mazer came down on a hilltop near a city and were taken prisoner immediately. For 13 days they spent retreating with the Germans through the



Sudetenland and into Austria. The day the war ended they were in a Wehrmacht army camp between Linz and Salzburg.

Thus, the war for the 398th came to an end.

The Coville and Ferguson crews would become the penultimate and ultimate crews to be shot down during the group's tour of duty with the 8th Air Force.

O'Malley and Mazer would become the last crewmen to bail out of a stricken B-17. The last to be taken prisoners.

Just as it was in the beginning of the war ... or later in the tour ... some lived and some died.



HARRY MAZER, shot down over Pilsen in 1945, returned in 1994 — 49 years later — near to where he landed after bailing out during The Last Mission.

New Book Looks At Where 398th, Others Trained

The 398th Bomb Group, as with many heavy bomber groups of World War II, was born in Blythe, California.

Other 398th pre-combat bases included Ephrata and Spokane, Washington; Orlando, Florida; and Rapid City, North Dakota.

But the “core” of the 398th leadership, featuring some 85 officers and men, came from the 34th Bomb Group, then the resident training group at Blythe for heavy bomber airmen. This would include Col. Frank P. Hunter, Jr., and the four original squadron commanders.

The 34th finally was sent to England ... at the same time the 398th became a training group at Rapid City.

All that to announce that a new and fascinating book called, “Runways In The Sand,” has been published by Art Wilson of (naturally) Blythe, California.

Some 26,925 crews were trained at Blythe, part of the post-Pearl Harbor military buildup. It was located in the California desert, away from the Pacific Coast which was then fearful of a Japanese invasion.

Wilson's book is a collection of historical information describing the conversion of a brutal desert wasteland into an elite training center for the Army Air Corps. The area also accommodated Army tank maneuvers. It is beautifully illustrated with photos of the day, individual stories, poems, sketches, etc. Like a walk back in time. A collector's item.

Price is \$21.95 plus postage. Contact Art Wilson, Blythe, CA 92225-1046. Or www.blytheairbase.com.

Reunion

(Continued from Page 3)

people in this armada were teenagers. Imagine that! Teenagers or guys in their young 20's!

"So I say to you who were part of this —

"Do you know what you have done?"

Ostrom then referred to the speech by Col. Mike Ryan at the 2004 reunion in Falls Church, Virginia. Col. Ryan told the veterans that their victory had given Europe 60 years of peace, something they had not experienced since the Romans.

"And you gave them not only peace, but also freedom."

Dimsdale and Abbey, longtime history buffs of the Nuthampstead area and its connection with bombers and fighters of World War II, gave glimpses of what they have in mind for the proposed FONA museum.

"We have decided to show what life was like for the young air crews and support staff," said Abbey.

"We are currently collecting artifacts and are appealing to the veterans to support the project with their contributions." (See "President" story on Page 2 for addresses of UK contacts.)

It is possible that the 398th bound volumes containing 25 years of FLAK NEWS will one day find their way to the new Station 131 Museum. The three volumes were presented to the board at the Austin reunion by editor Allen Ostrom and are currently in the hands of PX manager Carolyn Widmann.



CAROLYN WIDMANN monitors the 398th PX, which includes a substantial inventory found on Page 11. She will also look after the 398th FLAK NEWS bound volumes with an eye to sending the books to the proposed museum at Nuthampstead.

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398th Diary At Garage Sale

Garage sales are usually fun and exciting, especially when one finds a great bargain.

A "web friend" named Eddie Ebert came upon a 398th diary at such a sale and found it had been written by Oliver Bradford, engineer-gunner on the Ken Hastings crew.

He turned it over to webmaster Dave Jordan, who accepts such gems even if they come via a garage sale.

THE MOLE HIGH CITY
DENVER

It is announced that the 27th annual 398th Bomb Group Memorial Association Reunion will be held in the Mile High City of Denver, Colorado.

Reunion dates will be September 8-9-10-11, 2010.

www.398th.org

398th BOMB GROUP FLAK NEWS

c/o Allen Ostrom

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