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# The Bombers Are Coming ... Again

## German Writer Looks Into Eyes Of Returning Vets On 1992 Visit

BY ANDREAS DUNTE  
*Hallesches Tageblatt, Halle, Germany*

"That was me." Lester Veley pointed to a piece of paper. "November 16, 1944, Merseburg." Did he drop the bomb which hit the east wing of the castle? The bomb which set the historic piece of architecture, residence of the bishops of Merseburg, meeting hall of German Kings, witness of a unique architecture, in flames? Was it him?

I wanted to ask Lester Veley what he thought at the time, and what he thinks now about the bombardments. Yet, I hesitate. The well-built man looks on his piece of paper, lost in his thoughts.

Just a moment ago the group of elderly ladies and gentlemen climbed out of

*Continued on Page 4*



**LESTER VELEY**  
"Was it him?"

Nineteen years ago (1992) 80 members of the 398th tour group set out for "the last place the 398th should want to visit" — Merseburg, Germany. It turned out to be an unforgettable adventure. A German writer, Von Andreas Dunte, also was there to tell the story as he witnessed it with his own eyes and ears, and look into the eyes of the returning "bombers."



5th May, 2011

*Dear Mr. Ostrom,*

The Queen has asked me to thank you for your letter of 20th April, and to say that it was most kind of you to enclose the latest issue of the 398th Bomb Group Memorial Association FLAK NEWS.

Her Majesty was interested to learn about the proposed building of the 398th Museum in Nuthampstead, Hertfordshire, and I am to convey The Queen's warm good wishes to you and to all concerned.

*Yours sincerely,*  
*Sonia Bonici*

Mrs. Sonia Bonici  
Senior Correspondence Officer

Mr A Ostrom

# The Queen Takes Note Of Museum

The Queen of England — Elizabeth II — has taken note of the Nuthampstead Airfield Museum project as planned by the 398th Bomb Group/55th Fighter Group at Station 131.

Queen Elizabeth, a long-time recipient of FLAK NEWS, responded via her Senior Correspondence Officer — "Her Majesty was interested to learn" of the proposed building and also sent, "warm good wishes to you and to all concerned."

In addition to the Queen and her greeting, many more members and friends of the 398th have contributed \$200 "in memory of" or "in honor of" to push ever nearer to the goal of \$30,000. The count currently stands at \$27,500, according to treasurer Mellisa Ledlow. Each contribution comes with a wooden "Founder" plaque, adorned with a piece of cement from one of the runways and a piece from a B-17 that had crashed at Station 131, plus the name of the person remembered.

When the \$30K number has been reached, work will get under way on the museum building, located within walking distance of the Woodman Inn. After that, an additional \$15K will be required for what curator Russ Abbey calls, "fitting out."

It is Abbey, in concert with 398th president Marilyn Gibb-Rice and the museum

*Continued on Page 3*

## The President's Page:

# Much Going On With The 398th

BY MARILYN GIBB-RICE

President, 398th Bomb Group Memorial Association

### *FLAK NEWS Will Continue*

It is not our intention to stop publishing FLAK NEWS, despite the bleak financial outlook that appeared in the April issue.

FLAK NEWS will continue as long as we have an organization. It is our major source of communication with our membership.

However, we must be diligent in seeking new ways of raising funds, even over and above the annual dues appeal. This will be discussed at the Branson reunion in September.

### *We Need A New 398th Webmaster*

We have some major shoes to fill in trying to replace webmaster Dave Jordan, who is retiring after 10 years on our web site [www.398th.org](http://www.398th.org).

According to Dave, the key web skills needed are 1) familiarity with CSS, known as Cascading Style Sheets. Most of the 398th web pages use CSS, which is a central list of instruction for the look, the fonts and layout of thousands of pages, and 2) familiarity with CSS templates.

All CSS pages originate from 17 master templates which Dave created. Ideally, we would like a volunteer that would commit at least 3-4 years since it would take at least a year to get familiarity with

all that is there and also learn the 398th lingo. He should have the ability to devote 7-10 hours a week and the willingness to be interested in all aspects of the 398th, all squadrons and disciplines.

There is no possible way to adequately thank Dave for his contribution to the 398th. Thanks to our previous president, Wally Blackwell, for having the insight to bring the second generation on the board of directors and to get them involved in whatever capacity they could bring. I feel certain that Wally and the others are very proud of what Dave has accomplished for our group.

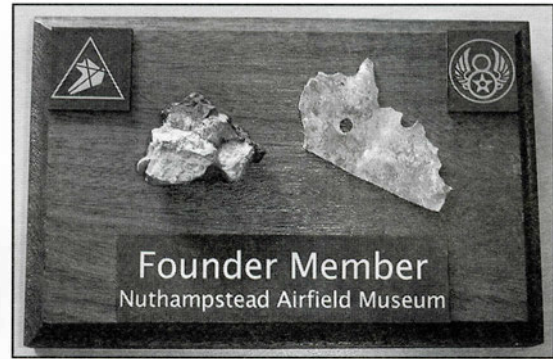
If interested in replacing Dave as webmaster, please e-mail me at: [president@398th.org](mailto:president@398th.org).

### *Founding Member Goal Near*

We are well on our way of gathering all 131 U.S. Founding Memberships. After we have reached that goal, a new fund raising scheme will begin. A security fence has been built around the museum site, which is a lovely area where we envision a garden with a nice seating area and flag pole proudly flying the U.S. flag.

Plans are still in process for the building to house all of the items that have been donated to us. An extensive collection has been donated by Victor Stoll's family, a trunk and blanket has been donated by Florence Kowalczyk's family, and a box of items donated by Charles Dacon's family. If you have items to donate for the museum, please contact me via my e-mail [president@398th.org](mailto:president@398th.org). I will then be able to give you correct shipping instructions for your items.

The trustees of the Museum will be having an open day preview at Bee Farm in Nuthampstead from 10:00 - 4:00 on July 30, 2011, for the local community. Donated items will be on display and refreshments will be served.



## Founder List \$27,500

Here is the latest listing of members and friends who have sent in their \$200 Founder donations, pushing the total to \$27,500. Or very close to the established goal of \$30,000 that will be required to "begin building" the Nuthampstead Airfield Museum.

BOWEN FAMILY — JANE, BARBARA, BOB III, BETH, BONNIE & BRUCE, in honor of Bob Bowen.

RICK & TOBY HARLAN, PATTY & RUSS COOLEY, TIM CHENOWETH & FAMILY in honor of John Chenoweth.

GARRY CROCKER, in honor of T.J. (Ted) Johnston.

TOM & REYNOLD DACON, in memory of Charles E. Dacon.

JEFF EBERLE (VICHA), in memory of Ray Vicha.

RICHARD B. FOX, in memory of William B. Radnedge.

WILLIAM B. FOX, in memory of Frances C. Clark.

ANNA M. GONZALES, in memory of Federico (Fred) Gonzales.

ALICE GOTTSCHLING, in honor of Richard B. Fox.

GEORGE & JEANNE GRAHAM, in honor of the Ira O'Neal crew.

EDWARD B. GILLER, in honor of Edward B. Giller, 55th Fighter Group.

WANDA GUICE & TOM BRANTLEY, in memory of T.L. Guice, Jr.

MELBA LEWIS, in memory of Frank E. Lewis.

TOBYE LOSS, in memory of Ralph Loss.

PHYLLIS McCORMICK, in memory of John R. McCormick.

H. RALPH McINTYRE, CYNTHIA McINTYRE-DROLSHAGEN, DIANA McINTYRE-O'DONNELL, in memory of Ralph H. McIntyre.

DON MENARD, in memory of Jay Menard.

DON MENARD, in memory of Davis Menard.

DON MENARD, in memory of Robert Renard.

JAMES, DON, DENNIS, TONY ROWLAND & NANCY ROWLAND GREEN, in memory of Bob Rowland.

CHUCK SAASE in honor of Chuck Saase.

RICHARD C. SHAW, in memory of Donald John Shaw.

LOUIS J. STOFFER, in honor of Louis J. Stoffer.

JAMES W. THOMAS, in honor of the 55th Fighter Wing Association, Inc.

R.C. TULLUIS, in honor of Regis Urschler, 55th Fighter Group.

GEORGIA WRALSTAD ULMSCHNEIDER, in memory of George Wralstad.

REGIS URSCHLER, in honor of the 55th Fighter Group.

# \$200

**"398th B.G. Memorial Association"**  
c/o Mellisa Ledlow, Treasurer  
Houston, TX 77044-1112

*Include "In Memory Of" or "In Honor Of"*

# Museum Project Noted By Queen



Continued from Page 1

committee who will oversee the development. Already, many museum items are on hand, and the committee is awaiting more to arrive from 398th/55th friends the world over.

Andrew Grisbrooke is chairman of the museum committee; Christine Barry, treasurer; Geoff Rice, vice chair; and Marilyn, secretary.

Our friends from the 55th Fighter Group, who flew P-38's from Nuthampstead before the 398th arrived, joined in with several \$200 contributions.

Don Menard, already aboard with memorials for two former crew members, upped the ante to \$1000 with additional three on behalf of his three younger, veteran brothers.

The memorial previously listed on behalf of Maurice Berger, should have shown "in honor of" the James Holstead crew of the 600th Squadron.

The donation on behalf of William Dean Whitaker was by Lucille Whitaker (not Lillian).

## Quotable Quote

"Something may be called fool-proof, but there is always a fool greater than the proof."

— DANIEL HIRSCH  
Nuclear Power Expert

[www.398th.org](http://www.398th.org)

## Dave Jordan Stepping Out As Webmaster

After 10 very productive years, during which the 398th web site has been labeled, "The best," Dave Jordan has decided to "move on and do other things with my life."

"Regrettably, I have sadly come to the conclusion that it is time for me to phase out of active 398th participation.

"I realized that it has been almost a decade since I began the web pages and while it has been most enjoyable working with excellent colleagues, it is time to move on.

"It is now time to find a new webmaster who will bring new energy and ideas to our Association," he said.

Dave, whose father was a 603 Squadron pilot, started the 398th site in cooperation with Wally Blackwell, Lee Anne Bradley and Geoff Rice. It began with stories from FLAK NEWS and developed into thousands and thousands of pages of text documents, photos, and history ... including the Registration Form for the upcoming reunion in Branson.

See Marliyn Gibb-Rice's "Want Ad" for a new webmaster in her "President's Page" column on Page 2.

# Act Now For 398th Reunion At Branson

It may be the middle of summer in most places, but September is just around the corner.

And time to lock in on the 28th annual 398th Bomb Group Reunion, to be held at Branson, Missouri, on September 7-8-9-10, 2011. All the reunion facts and information were contained in the April 2011 FLAK NEWS. The Official Registration Form should be in the hands of Sharon Krause no later than August 8.

Also, the individual Branson Hotel



reservations must be in place by the same date. Call the Radisson Hotel at 1-888-566-5290. The Radisson is located at 120 S Wildwood Dr.

It is newly decorated and remodeled in the heart of Branson. There are 472 rooms. In calling for reservations, mention "398th Bomb Group, special rate \$99.00."

Sharon needs the individual reservations to certify the numbers for the Radisson. This to include the Thursday and Saturday night banquets plus the space required for the Memory Room, Board and Group meetings.

Also, to verify the numbers for the tours to the Wednesday evening dinner show; Thursday luncheon cruise; and Saturday Stafford Theater luncheon show.

Registration forms may be downloaded and filled in from [www.398th.org](http://www.398th.org).

The attractive ladies in the above photo are not part of the Branson reunion (darn), but are there to remind the ladies that there will be a "Hat Parade" at the Farewell banquet to be led by Carolyn Widmann, who "savored" the royal wedding festivities of Williams and Kate.

Also, veterans (and widows) should bring their special 398th Medallions.



**HERE ARE SOME of the WW II items that have been received for the Nuthampstead Airfield Museum that will soon be built. See the President's Page on Page 2 along with a list of new Founder donors.**

# The Bombers Came Back

*Continued from Page 1*

the colorful busses. Cameras running, mixed voices. A group of tourists like many others. The city tour guide explains the history of Merseburg, points to the orangery, the guild house, talks about the legend of the raven and the architecture of the castle.

“Only in the 1970’s was the east wing of the castle restored to its old standing,” says the tour guide. “It took that long because the building was totally destroyed during the bomb attacks.” No more running cameras. No more voices.

“Let it be,” somebody says to me.

## The 398th At Merseburg

The 398th Bomb Group visited Merseburg no less than seven times in 1944-45, plus additional missions to Leipzig and other oil and chemical targets nearby.

The group lost 10 B-17’s over Merseburg, losing 32 men killed in action and 57 to prisoners of war. Two men evaded, and many more wounded.

The 603rd was the hardest hit among the four squadrons, losing no less than eight of the 10 crews. Two were from the 601st.



**THE MERSEBURG CASTLE, destroyed by allied bombing in World War II, has been rebuilt and was visited by the 398th tour members in 1992.**

“No one knows for sure who hit the castle. We flew 30,000 feet above the ground, couldn’t see a thing. The castle as well as the city center were hit by stray bombs. The sole target was the Leuna Plant. Do believe me.”

Allen Ostrom is the spokesman for the 80 Americans. They belong to the former 398th Bomb Group of Veterans. It took them three years to prepare for this Goodwill mission to Merseburg and Leuna. The feeling of unease which travelled with them is now released.

Finally they stand next to their tree. A linden as a symbol that they returned to the place of their youth, this time as friends, not as death-bearing enemies from the skies. Addresses, presents, hand shakes. A plaque remembers the event — the tree planted by the Americans. History at a closure?

The gathering disperses. We talk with each other.

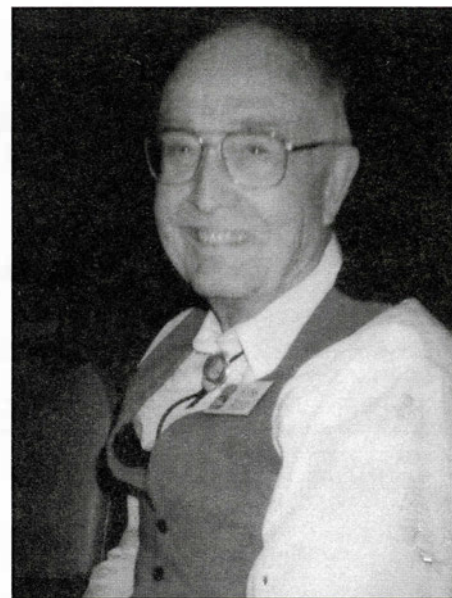
“It is difficult for me to understand

what went on during those times,” I say.

With questions in my eyes I look at the friendly lady interpreter, an American by appearance. Or am I mistaken? Maybe not?

“I was born in Merseburg in 1941. As a three-year-old I remember the war. Our house was so badly damaged that we had to move to Halle. Do you know the furniture store Reinecke & Andag? That was founded by my great-grandfather.” In 1961 Insa Kipping fled to the west. After her studies in Heidelberg she moved to America with her husband, to Seattle. Some more studies and finally her position with the German Consulate General.

“When Allen Ostrom asked me some time ago if I would go to Merseburg with him, I had to make sure I heard right. Did he mean Merseburg or Meersburg where most tourists go. I accepted. Later I learned how committed they were in their desire to return, all those veterans



**RUSS REED**

of the bomb group. How intensely alive their past was.”

Most of them were about twenty. Few had families of their own yet and no hate for the German people. “Hitler was our enemy, not the German people. We did not even know a German.” Twenty-five missions were flown by Lester Veley who finally broke his silence.

“From England to Eastern Germany and back was 10 hours in our B-17’s. Those of us who had the order to fly to Merseburg turned inward for prayer. Merseburg meant hell, we knew what to expect. The flak defense was massive.”

Many of Lester’s buddies never returned to England. This Saturday five Americans in Germany went to visit the grave site in Mueheln. Radio man and co-pilot return to the grave of their comrade. During a crash close to the chemical plant in Lützkendorf he and four more soldiers lost their lives. The 398th Bomb Group had about 4000 men. Almost 300 Americans lost their lives during the air attacks.

After the organ concert given by the cathedral organist Günther Wauer, I turn to Russell Reed. He remembers war torn Germany not only from the air. His story differs from many of his bomb buddies. No, he does not hate the Germans. He was hit above the skies of Merseburg. He turned his aircraft around and bailed out of his burning Fortress near Teutschenthal/Saale country. By Eisleben his B-17 bomber exploded. Before Russ Reed touched ground he was shot at.

“German civilians found me and turned me over to the German military. Somehow one could sense that the war was coming to an end. Maybe that was my luck.”

After his prisoner of war time in Poland and later near Munich, Reed returned to Antelope Lane in Georgia in 1945. There it had become known that he had been shot down, and people for sure figured

**Continued on Page 10**

# Solving A Problem: Can Life Members Save FLAK NEWS?

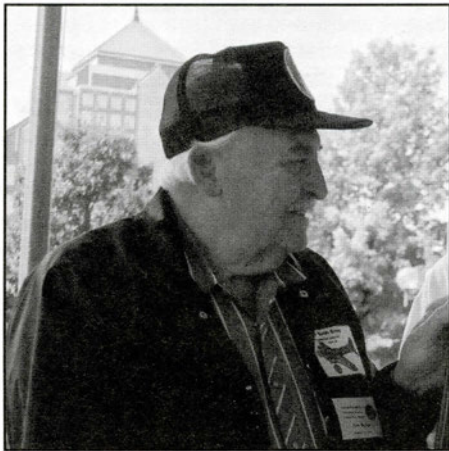
BY LEW BURKE  
Director, 398th Bomb Group Memorial Association

Our 398th Bomb Group Association has a problem! It involves expenses which now outstrip revenue.

We can and will cut corners on as many outlays as possible. But, the largest expenditure is one that should not and cannot be eliminated. I refer to our premier quarterly newsletter — FLAK NEWS.

We enjoy the dedicated service of Allen Ostrom the Editor of 26 years. He spends many hours in preparing, researching and editing FLAK NEWS. He provides excellent talent, untold hours, and much leg work. Yes, he cuts and pastes and uses a word processor that replaced his typewriter. That does not make the paper any less expensive and I doubt if he even requests reimbursement for the many ribbons and pencils he has used up over the years he has performed for the benefit of all of us.

There must be solutions for the prob-



LEW BURKE

lem. One we will not select is to eliminate FLAK NEWS. So let me offer one that may solve that situation.

There are costs for FLAK NEWS that we incur after Allen has an issue ready. Printing and mailing are the really expensive outlays. Four issues that each of us receive annually cost the Group cost to \$10.00 per registered member. Okay, the

## Bulletin

More than a few members responded to April's "bleak" description of the 398th financial condition and sent in "substantial" contributions. This story will appear in the next FLAK NEWS.

## Members Voice Their Concern

Many 398th Bomb Group members have voiced their concern over the financial condition of the Association, following up with suggestions on how to help. Director Lew Burke led the way with this column, followed by others who wanted a say in supporting the group's newsletter.

dues now are twice that and the Group should be able to cope with this expenditure. We mail approximately 1,300 to our members. But the fly in the ointment is that not all the 1,300 recipients pay, for whatever reason. Many of us are Life Members, and those old life members' dues do not provide enough to pay the production costs at today's prices.

I offer this suggestion as a solution. Let's all of us life members make a contribution that will at least pay for the FLAK NEWS issue that we receive. I propose here, and will do so again at the Branson reunion, that each of us donate at least \$10.00 each year to assure continuation of our newsletter. We may contribute more but the least we can do is ante up ten bucks. By the time you read this I will have made a \$100 donation. This will pay my share for ten or more years. I plan to be around for longer than that, so will need to contribute again in about 2021. Will each life member reader agree to ante up ten bucks each year? I'm betting you will!

### George Schatz, Highland Park, MI —

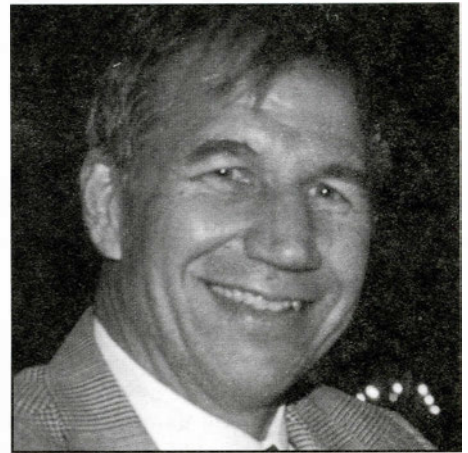
"FLAK NEWS is the cohesion that keeps us together as a family. There should be some of us financially capable of assuring that we don't lose this connection that now includes many precious grandsons and daughters."

### Ken Peirce, Edmonds, WA —

"Before any talk about shutting down, we should be utilizing the \$35K we still have available in savings."

Editor — Ken is the 398th Memorial Chair.

## "Head And Shoulders" Greg Salute



GREG ANDERSON

"Regardless of what the future of the 398th will be, please know what you did for our way of life will always be remembered by our Wings Over The Rockies Museum here in Denver.

"In my humble opinion, the 398th pulled off more good news than any other flying unit, thanks to the leadership of Bill Comstock, Wally Blackwell, Hal Weekley and others. Your group is head and shoulders over the rest of the pack.

"It has been a joy and pleasure to be associated with you as we restored the Aluminum Overcast in your colors and sent it around the country before millions of admirers.

"It would seem good news and continuing challenge are part of the way of life for people in aviation ... as I read of the 398th financial discussions.

"I wish you well."

### Frosty Fowler, Poulsbo, WA —

"It is really just about over? What will your future hold? FLAK NEWS has always been 'right on' and I can't imagine not receiving my next copy. They are always hard to put down and when I'm done I pass them on to others. May God richly bless the 398th."

### Barbara Iten, Seattle, WA —

"What?! You're closing down FLAK NEWS?"

### Diane Graham, Quesnel, B.C. —

"I notice that the recent issue of FLAK NEWS might be the last. I have so much enjoyed them in the past and do hope they will continue."

### Ralph Ambrose, Burke, VA —

"It's time to increase dues to at least \$25. And at the same time reduce the editions to three instead of four. Also, perhaps it is time to drop *Timeless Voices*."

## “Perhaps The Time Has Come”

# Peggy Laments Possible FLAK NEWS Passing

BY PEGGY WELLS  
Nuthampstead England

It would indeed be sad to see the demise of FLAK NEWS.

It has been such fun over these past many years, meeting all the returning veterans, becoming friends with them plus their wives and families.

Over the years we have welcomed many as our house guests which have resulted in many happy memories. Our travels to the U.S. reunions were also so much fun, with us making even more friends.

FLAK NEWS has always played a special role in keeping us updated with not only reunion news, but also the 398th historical events, such as learning what happened when the Fortresses left from here on their missions.

Sadly, the passing of time has seen the Taps list grow ever longer and we have lost so many of our dear friends. Perhaps then, this would be an appropriate time to allow the FLAK NEWS to fade away.

Allen has done his job so well, but if the money runs out perhaps it is time to say, “all good things come to an end.”

**Marjorie Hall, New Bedford,  
MA —**

“I treasure my lasting 398th friendships, even when I can no longer travel. FLAK NEWS keeps me in touch.”

**Some like PDF copies —**

“How about considering ‘PDF’ copies for those with computers and eliminate the print copies?”

## He Had Many “Interesting” Missions:

# And Several Were Deadly

BY JERALD A. DAVIS, Pilot, 601st Squadron

In reminiscing about my 33 missions with the 398th, flown between April and September 1944, I recall a number of “interesting” events, most of them extremely somber.

Shortly after D-Day, I was flying in the “slot” position directly behind and beneath the leader. One ship in the lead failed to release all his bombs and the bombardier tried releasing them out with a screw driver.

He apparently lost his footing and tumbled out of the bomb bay, falling to the ground from 25,000 feet. We could plainly see him as he fell past the nose of our plane, still wearing his oxygen mask with walk around oxygen bottle. But no

## *Elaine Tyler Says, “Keep It Alive”*

“I am very sad to hear that FLAK NEWS may be coming to an end.

“Over the years Allen has done such sterling work with his organisation and



ELAINE TYLER

production, and thank you Allen for that. There is no doubt that FLAK NEWS has been more than just a magazine. It has bound the 398th family together and has kept us in touch with one another. Before reading the articles I always flip

through and look at the pictures and see who has been doing what!  
“I hope that some way will be found to ensure that it continues to arrive on our doorsteps, even twice a year, in the years ahead.”

*Editor’s Note: Should FLAK NEWS continue, a coming issue will contain a “Memories” article by Elaine Tyler, one of the original “Friends of the 398th” and its first secretary.*

parachute.

Another time, on a mission to Caen, France, our wingman was Wally Blackwell. His plane took a direct hit in the tail, killing his tail gunner. I saw the boy’s leg as it came past my cockpit window.

Earlier, on a mission to Toulouse, France, the low squadron leader was hit over the target and we observed 10 parachutes.

One crewman apparently did not have his harness buckled properly and when his chute popped open he fell out of his harness at 26,000 feet.

On this day my own co-pilot came to “work” with a severe hangover, and was of little help in the cockpit.



“There was a strong breeze, which took the flag immediately as it was raised, leaving it snapping and crackling over the old 17/35 runway. It was a glorious day with hardly a cloud in sight.”

This was the day last April that Peter Brooke and Malcolm Osborn raised the casket flag of Peter Special on the tall pole at Station 131. Special was the bombardier on the Warren Johnson crew of the 603rd, and his was the latest in a long line of flags raised these past 20 years in memory of 398th Bomb Group loved ones.

This time, the Special flag will be flown for three months and then returned to Special’s son in Wisconsin. Otherwise, the veteran flags are “flown to destruction.”

Casket flags may be sent to Secretary Karen Neff, Lexington, VA 24450-6742. She will relay them to Nuthampstead. Thus far, 60 veteran flags have been flown.

## **Many Crew Comments In FLAK NEWS**

“He loved it when the FLAK NEWS came.”

So said Lois Britton in a letter announcing the passing of her husband, John, of Elizabethville, Pennsylvania. He was a gunner-toggler on the Andy Andrack crew of the 602nd Squadron.

And there have been so many such letters in recent years as the “young guns” of the 398th reach their final resting place.

As usual (maybe) those “final flight” names will appear in the January 2012 FLAK NEWS, as has been the case these past 26 years.

“Britton enjoyed the reunions, and the camaraderie with his crew,” said Lois. A comment shared by many windows.

And FLAK NEWS has enjoyed receiving such notices ... even though they come via saddened hearts.



— Bob Mudra, (Oswego) Daily Herald

**A LONE VOLUNTEER FIREMAN looks on helplessly as the B-17 Liberty Belle burns after landing on a farm field near Oswego, Illinois. The nearby city fire equipment could not reach the plane because of the soft conditions of the field. None of the crew or passengers was injured.**

## FIRE DESTROYS B-17 AFTER FARM LANDING

Liberty Belle, the most recently restored B-17 and active in offering rides and demonstrations at airfields throughout the country, fell victim to an engine fire minutes out of Aurora, Illinois, on June 13, landed successfully in a cornfield ... and then was all but completely destroyed by fire as the crew and passengers looked on helplessly.

The local fire department came from nearby Oswego but was unable to move equipment over the rain-softened farm field. The engine fire had been detected moments before. The pilots determined there was not enough time to return to Aurora and instead set the Fortress down flawlessly in a normal landing even as the No. 2 engine's fire suppression system was activated.

As the passengers and crew safely exited, and awaited help from the arriving firemen, the fire spread to the fuel cells and there was no stopping it. And the crew could only stand and watch as the fire trucks remained immobile at the edge of the field.

The Liberty Belle is owned by Liberty Foundation, a Tulsa, Oklahoma, insurance conglomerate. It carried the colors of the 390th Bomb Group, stationed at Framlingham, England, a part of the 3rd Division of the 8th Air Force.

The Fort was piloted on this day by John Hess, an active Delta Air Lines captain with 14,000 flying hours. The co-pilot was Bud Sittic, also a captain with Delta with 14,000 hours.

Ray Fowler, chief pilot for Liberty Belle, said that after the investigation and recovery, the Foundation will remain committed to restoration and flying of World War II aircraft.

The 'Belle was sold as scrap in 1947 and since then had gone through a number of exchanges until purchased and restored by Liberty, which was started by the son of the 'Belle's original tail gunner. It has been flying (again) since 2004, including a trip from the U.S. to England.

### The "Clerk" And His Job

Every 398th airman should know what the squadron clerk did "back then."

George Hentschel explained —

"I served with Capt. Alton White in the 601st Squadron Engineering and Operations Office. Here we kept records on all our B-17's and updated all the tech orders and directives to repair and replace parts and services to keep the planes flying.

"I stayed with the 398th all the way to discharge time at Drew Field."

And all the airmen said, "Thank you."

## Danny Had Some Extra ETG Skills

BY DANNY LEYVA

Engineer-Gunner, Mangan crew, 603rd  
(*"I am a mechanic, not a typist"*)

During the bombing of our target, maybe Paderborn in early 1945, our No. 2 engine propeller dome got a hit and it began to leak badly.

We were the lead plane and commanded by Lt. Col. Miller. He decided to land near Brussels on a large field that looked from the air a landing field for crippled planes.

We landed and some Belguims began to gather around. Good thing they speak French. I spoke some high school French so the colonel told me to ask them if they could provide food and shelter for the night. They said they could.

Then he said that I as the engineer would have to stay behind and repair the plane from parts of other crippled B-17's. So I work all night with the help of English truck drivers which I bribe with candy and cigarettes.

In the morning the colonel and the rest of the crew showed up well fed and rested. So we flew home, hedge hopping all the way to avoid German radar. They were only 90 miles away.

Many years later I heard from a Belguim by mail. He was one of the kids that came and played in our downed plane. He sent me a photo. I still write him and send him money when he got sick.

Imagine! If I would have told the Belguims, in French, that the colonel and the crew were spies?

*(Editor's Note: This letter was written by Leyva several years before his passing.)*

### Wright-Patterson Honors 602 Pilot

Remembering that the 398th had planted a tree and placed a memorial plaque at Wright-Patterson AFB, the base chose to remember George Hershberger, 602 pilot, as his funeral in nearby Greentown, Indiana, last March.

"They sent a group of young airmen to the service," said his widow, Pearl. "They all seemed to young," remembering that her husband, and most of his crew, also were so young.

Hershberger flew many leads with the group commanding officer, Col. Frank P. Hunter, Jr.

## It Was Bad News At Both Ends:

# Percy Remembers The B-17 Tail ... And Nose

BY PERCY PAGET  
Togglier, Comstock Crew, 602

The 30 months I spent in the Army impacted my life for years to come. It all started in March 1943 when I officially became a U.S. soldier. From basic training in Miami Beach, to aircraft mechanic school in Lincoln, Nebraska, to engineering at the University of Minnesota, to gunnery school in Las Vegas.

Then back to Nebraska where I was assigned to the Hancock-Comstock crew. Then on to Alexandria, Louisiana, for combat training and finally to Bangor, Maine, and England ... and Station 131.

On September 9, 1944, we were awakened at 4:30 A.M. and told to report for briefing. The room was full. At the end of the room there was a map with a ribbon indicating our route to the target — a factory in Manheim, Germany.

I was assigned to take the tail gunner's position because Paul Peterson was in the hospital. I had a good view of where we've been and saw the bomb bursts on the ground from the group ahead of us. The flak was heavy and I could hear small bits of it hitting the aircraft.

Suddenly I felt like someone had kicked me in the rear. I reached behind with my hand and brought it back in front of me. It was covered with blood. Here I was, 25,000 feet up and hundreds of miles inside enemy territory, and I was wounded. The pilot instructed Jack Davis, our flight engineer, to come back and apply first aid, but instead I grabbed a portable oxygen bottle and crawled to the radio room where Jack met me with a first aid kit. He cut open my flight suit and applied sulfa and bandages and asked if I wanted a shot of morphine. I declined, but moments later I changed my mind.

When we arrived back over our field, Davis released a red flare to indicate we had wounded on board and we landed first.

As we touched ground, an ambulance followed us on the runway. As soon as we came to a stop, they came on board, placed me on a stretcher and into the ambulance. The ride to the hospital took an hour. The hospital was full of infantry soldiers who had been wounded in France.

The doctors removed a chunk of flak from my backside and I remained in the hospital for three weeks. By this time the crew was changed. Hancock was promoted to command pilot, and Comstock and Leo Croce became our pilots. The bombardier was promoted to lead bombardier and I was asked to take his place as togglier.

I flew my first mission in the nose on November 5. This turned out to be rather scary as small pieces of flak struck the Plexiglas nose right in front of me. On the next mission the same thing happened and I really was starting to get worried.

The missions continued without too much trouble even though we rarely returned to base without some damage. What bothered us most was having to land at other bases due to recurrent fog conditions at 131.

Finally our crew finished 30 mission but I had to remain to make up the missions I had missed while in the hospital.

I was quickly assigned to another crew led by Lt. Bill Jacobs and continued flying missions until March 9. The target at Kassel would be my last mission.

The flak was extremely heavy and we received a direct hit in our number three engine which also severed a fuel tank. The pilots were unable to feather the prop. The engine shook so violently that it soon detached itself from the airplane and fell to earth. Miraculously, the plane did not

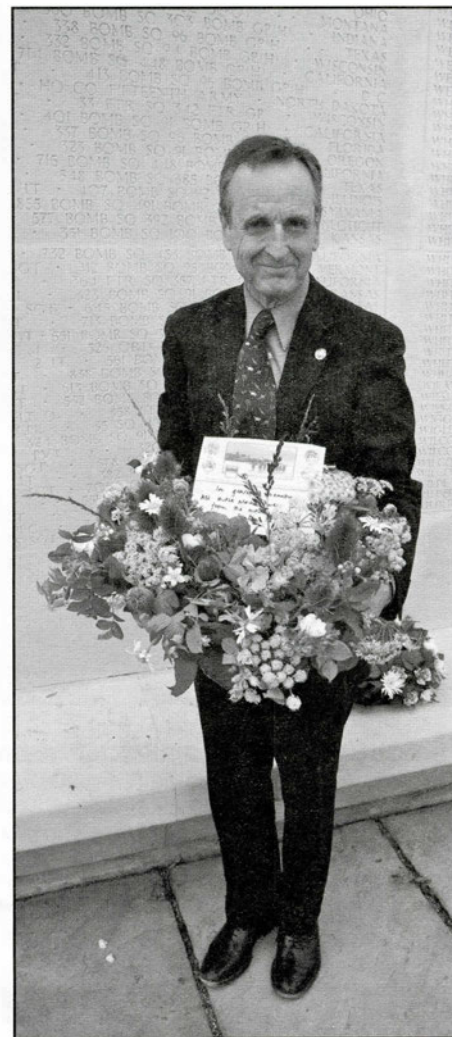


PERCY PAGET

blow up and we skidded in on a German farm. We all got out of the aircraft immediately as the danger of explosion was still there. The navigator, however, had elected to stay up in the nose and was killed as we skidded in.

We looked around. No one was in sight. We looked up and saw the reason.

Two P-51 Mustangs had followed us down. As soon as they left, a German Army truck arrived and took us to a local jail where we spent the night. The following day they put us on a train that took us to an interrogation center, but the trip was interrupted when U.S. fighters



**WILFRID DIMSDALE, our 398th Director in England, presented the Memorial Day wreath last May at Madingley. All the flowers came from the old Station 131 runways.**

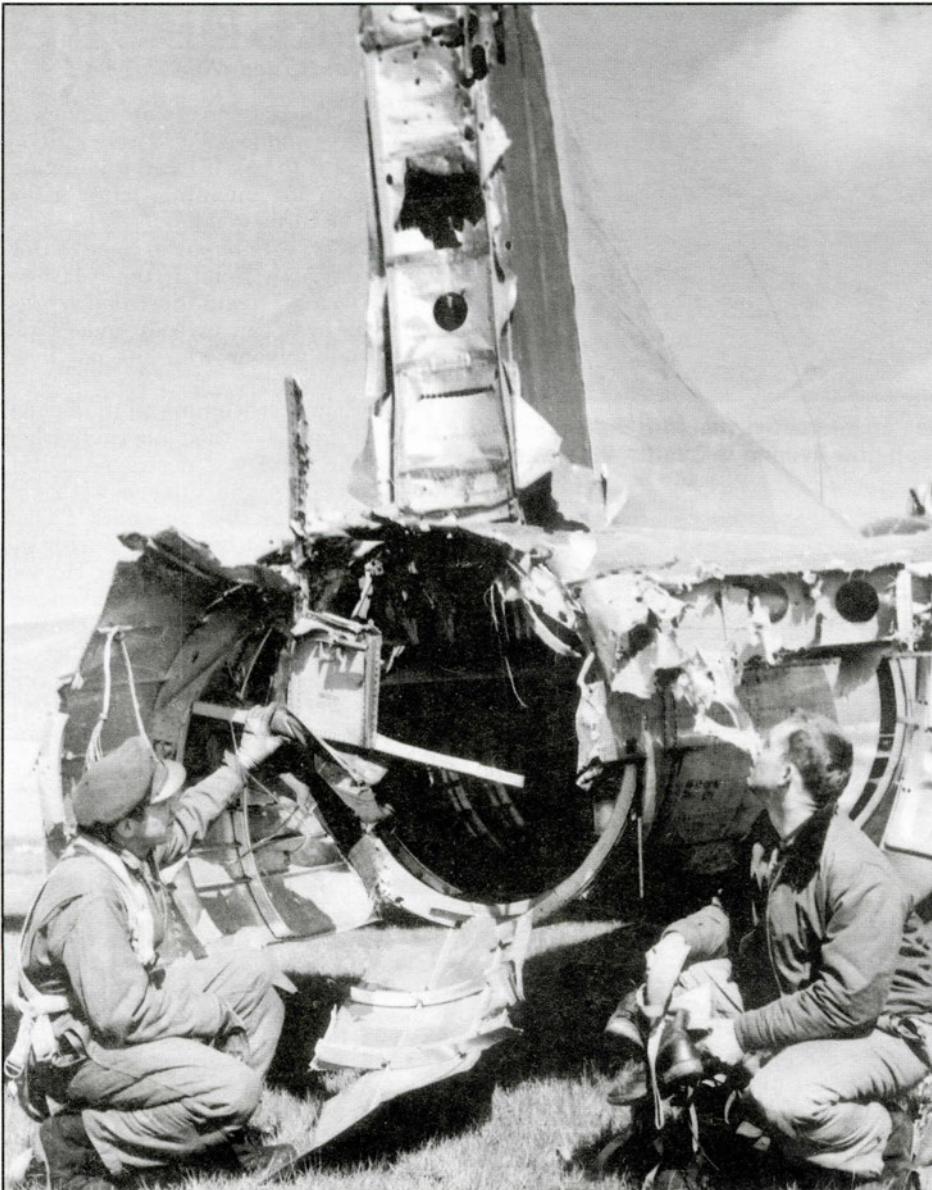
attacked the train.

There were 10 P-51's circling a town in the distance. The German gunners started firing at them, which was a big mistake. This got the attention of our fighters and they immediately split up. Five stayed at their target and five came to where we were and bombed the hell out of the train. That ended our train ride and now we were on a forced march to our final destination. Stalag 7A.

On the way, we slept on the ground and had very little food. That march was two weeks of misery. Stalag 7A was not much better. Things were chaotic and it was terribly overcrowded. Food consisted of some soup and a slice of bread each day. This didn't last too long as, thankfully, General George Patton's tanks came through the gates one day and brought cheers from thousands of men who thought they would never see home again.

Others on the "Stinker, Jr." crew besides Comstock, Croce, Davis, Patterson and myself were James Arndell, Harold Snyder, Daniel Mack, Robert Chorba and William Norby.





IT WAS NOT the best day for tail gunner Wallace E. Kasch on this mission to Derben, Germany, on April 8, 1945. Pilot John Hahn and Command of Aircraft Bruce Daily marvel at the damage ... and ponder how they managed to bring the plane home. Tail gunner Kasch's name is on the Wall of the Missing at the American Military Cemetery in the Netherlands.

## The War In The Air

For a saving grace, we didn't see our dead,  
 Who rarely bothered coming home to die  
 But simply stayed away out there  
 In the clean war, the war in the air.

Seldom the ghosts came back bearing their tales  
 Of hitting the earth, the incompressible sea,  
 But stayed up there in the relative wind,  
 Shades fading in the mind,

Who had no graves but only epitaphs  
 Where never so many spoke for never so few:  
*Per ardua*, said the partisans of Mars,  
*Per aspera*, to the stars.

That was the good war, the war we won  
 As if there were no death, for goodness' sake  
 With the help of the losers we left out there  
 In the air; in the empty air.

— Howard Nemerov, RAF

## “The Clear Oblivion Of Empty Air”

This fine poem originated from and speaks with authentic emotion and accuracy about an aspect of reality occurring with our own 8th Air Force in World War II.

Solemn and meticulous ceremonies properly honor the fallen soldiers of today's and any future military conflicts, offering solace and closure to the families, friends, and brothers and sisters in arms of those who offered up their lives for us.

But, as this poem and photo so poignantly enunciates, it confronts an actuality that still resonates even today, 67 years after the horrendous happenings in a B-17 Flying Fortress.

Emotional traumas still persist as many planes struck by Nazi fighter planes or German Flak did spin down, giving some or all of their flight crews time or opportunity to parachute out safely, or, at the worst, have their bodies recovered after a crash landing.

However, too many planes attacked simply exploded, completely blowing up with a shattering and startling finality that thrust their courageous crews into the clear oblivion of that “empty air” the poet describes.

Lost forever to their rightful, most worthy place of remembrance, except in our living hearts.

—GEORGE SCHATZ, Bombardier  
 600 Squadron

## From Our Chaplain

“We living members of the 398th Bomb Group association lift high the flaming torch of freedom passed to us by our comrades whose lives were given in the battle against totalitarianism. We remember those lives that never had the opportunity to grow old with us. They gave their lives that others could live free. Many never had the opportunity to experience the youthful years of life, grow into manhood, have a family and enjoy the golden years. We have all benefited from the gift of their supreme sacrifice.

“Today we stand in humility and gratitude. We are thankful that we were able to share a bit of life with all whose names are inscribed on memorial windows. We may forget what has been said here but never let us forget what was done here.”

— James T. Duvall  
 Chaplain, 398th Bomb Group



**INSA KIPPING**, the 1992 398th tour guide, was an interested visitor to the Merseburg Castle, along with the tourists. A German now living in Seattle, Insa was born in Merseburg.



**RUTHANNA DOERSTLER**, one of the 80 398th tourists to Merseburg in 1992, took advantage of the shopping in Leipzig to look for some fine glassware. Her late husband, Wayne, was an engineer gunner in the 602nd Squadron.



**DR. JÜRGEN GLIETSCH**, the deputy mayor of Merseburg, welcomed the 398th tour party and was the recipient of a plaque given by the 398th Association as a memory of the 1992 visit ... and the visits paid in World War II.

## Dues For The "Big" States

The July issue of FLAK NEWS has traditionally been reserved for the 398th Dues destined for the "big" states of Texas, Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin.

The "big" states constitute about one fourth of the membership receiving FLAK NEWS. They also contain individual inserts of the Dues payment envelope destined for Dues Manager Dawne Dougherty, Harrisburg, OR 97446-9585.

Dues (for now) remain at \$20.00, but that could change at the upcoming annual meeting in Branson, where the financial condition of the Association will be discussed. (See additional stories on this.)

Meanwhile, the success that comes from the "big" states will weigh heavily in the discussions.

# MERSEBURG

*Continued from Page 4*

him dead. The reunion remains unforgettable, he says and looks intensely into my eyes — as if to ask if I can understand him, grasp the meaning. After a few minutes he turns to me.

"I am very, very happy to come to Germany today, as a friend. In those days we were so young." Again this same expression in his eyes: can anybody understand my stories, anyone who has not lived through the war?

The group is continuing on the Leuna, the main target of their air raids when 80% of the plant was destroyed. Later, much later as the buses with the Americans are on their way back, I ask a German how it had been then, during the war, in Merseburg and environs. He, too, was just about 20, worked in Lützkendorf, hid out in the fields first, later in the coal mines, each time the bombers came. "It was hell for us. Then this question;" And bombers were in Merseburg just now?" He shook his head. And then there was silence.

How can we understand those days, comprehend since we never experienced them? Is war comprehensible?

## PAST REUNION HISTORY

- 1984 Rapid City, South Dakota
- 1985 Seattle, Washington
- 1986 Colorado Springs, Colorado
- 1987 San Antonio, Texas
- 1988 Richmond, Virginia
- 1989 Dayton, Ohio
- 1990 Oshkosh, Wisconsin
- 1991 San Diego, California
- 1992 Nashville, Tennessee
- 1993 Buffalo, New York
- 1994 Tucson, Arizona
- 1995 Charleston, South Carolina
- 1996 Springfield, Missouri
- 1997 Spokane, Washington
- 1998 Harrisburg, Pennsylvania
- 1999 Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
- 2000 Savannah, Georgia
- 2001 St. Paul, Minnesota
- 2002 Portland, Oregon
- 2003 Covington, Kentucky
- 2004 Falls Church, Virginia
- 2005 Overland Park, Kansas
- 2006 Livonia, Michigan
- 2007 Phoenix, Arizona
- 2008 Cocoa Beach, Florida
- 2009 Austin, Texas
- 2010 Denver, Colorado
- 2011 Branson, Missouri

[www.398th.org](http://www.398th.org)

# BRIEF-things

Before reading any more BRIEF-things, make a decision to register for the Branson Reunion, to be held on September 7-8-9-10 (see Page 3) ... for those individuals going to England this year (398th tour is next year) you can find **Malcolm Osborn** "on the job" as a tour leader at Madingley Cemetery ... **Mellisa Ledlow** reports that many Nuthampstead Airfield Museum donations have come as result of word of mouth ... **Matea Baffaro** said she cried when she read, "It Was A Fortress Coming Home" in the March 8th Air Force magazine (she also noted that it was incorrectly labeled as a "389th" plane, not "398th"), but the Delancey article still came from FLAK NEWS ... the Merseburg visit (1992) by the 398th was the first of nine tours led by **Barb Fish**, and she quickly learned why it was important that the 398th had to return to "that" place ... combat airmen were privy to many sights and sounds, but the hardest to endure was seeing a fellow airman fall without a chute, as seen by **Jerald Davis** (see Page 6) ... the chairman of the airfield museum, **Andrew Grisbrooke**, got a jump on the project by placing a fence around the building; he lives nearby (with his wife and a kennel-full of Siberian Huskies) ... seven members from the 398th were the first to return to Station 131 as a group (1976), and **Lou Stoffer**, who was almost killed in the **Grinter** crash on takeoff, is the lone living survivor ... Peggy Wells is the one who loaned **Wally Blackwell** her bicycle so he could roam the airfield and store up information for "Wally's Tours" ... among the many American "likes" in the Czech Republic is swing music à la Glenn Miller; their latest music idol band is Wil Salden and his "Evergreens in Swing" (as reported to FLAK NEWS by Milan Spineta of Slany) ... our "b-17annie," the 2012 England Tour co-director, visited the Aluminum Overcast in Sacramento in May and opted for a ride (again); the AO's flight crews know her very well ... **Ken Howard** and **Ann Collins** will have the latest proposal on their 2012 England tour at the reunion in Branson ... **Phyllis McCormick** called FLAK NEWS on the B-17 crash in Illinois (see Page 7); she weathered many such dramas during her husband **John's** B-17, B-29 and B-36 tours in two wars ... the 8th Air Force was established after Pearl Harbor, and went on to become the largest air armada in history; over 26,000 8th airmen lost their lives in WW II; the Mighty Eighth Museum in Savannah is now 15 years old, and one day (soon?) will have a B-17G on exhibit ... in addition to a B-17, there will be a ground crew exhibit ... the Sentimental Journey helped make a hit TV spot in the filming of "Don't Mess With Texas," a "don't litter" commercial ... cartoonist **Joe Heller** answered the question — "who is the largest holder of America's debt?" with this answer — "the debt owed to our fallen servicemen" ... Madingley in England is one of the smallest American cemeteries in burials, but it has the longest Wall of the Missing, thanks to the great number of 8th and 9th Air Force flyers who became "Missing in Action" ... Ladies, don't forget to bring your favorite hat to Branson and wear it at the Farewell Banquet (and dance with your favorite partner) ... **Connie Novek** was anxious to say "thank you" to those in England and the U.S. who sent her the Founder plaque that she has placed in her late husband **Elliot's** favorite room near a photo of his beloved B-17 ... considerable money was saved in April by having FLAK NEWS sent via e-mail to England as a PDF rather than mailing individual copies from Seattle. FLAK NEWS was printed in England and mailed to our U.K. and Continent members. Several **Friends** contributed their time and energies for this project ... and then there was the B-29 guy who lost two engines over Japan, flew back to Iwo Jima at "tree-top" level and then had to circle the field for 45 minutes to allow other B-29's to land who were "really in trouble" ... if FLAK NEWS is cut to three issues, it probably would be printed in February, June and November ...

# 398th Bomb Group PX

This form can be downloaded and filled in from [www.398th.org](http://www.398th.org).

## ORDER FORM (The Second Generation)

QTY	ITEM	UNIT COST	TOTAL
<b>CLOTHING</b>			
_____	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, white, with Triangle W on front, Clearing & Colder on back	\$15.00	_____
_____	Denim Shirt, long sleeve, 398th logo (S, M, L, XL, XXL, <b>please indicate size</b> _____)	\$28.00	_____
_____	Men's Golf Shirt, light blue, embroidered Triangle W, 60% cotton, 40% poly mesh (S, M, L, XL, <b>please indicate size</b> _____)	\$25.00	_____
_____	Men's Golf Shirt, navy blue, embroidered Triangle W, 65% poly, 35% cotton (S, M, L, XL, XXXL, <b>please indicate size</b> _____)	\$25.00	_____
<b>CAPS</b>			
_____	Black, with logo (indicate 600, 601, 602, 603)	\$8.00	_____
<b>JEWELRY</b>			
_____	Squadron lapel pins (indicate 600, 601, 602, 603)	\$6.00	_____
_____	Group lapel pin (Hell From Heaven)	\$6.00	_____
_____	Group pin (blue with B-17)	\$6.00	_____
_____	8th Air Force pin	\$6.00	_____
<b>LOGOS</b>			
_____	Squadron Patch 3" (indicate 600, 601, 602, 603)	\$6.00	_____
_____	B-17 Jacket Patch, 4"x3"	\$6.00	_____
_____	8th Air Force Patch	\$6.00	_____
_____	Group Patch (Hell From Heaven), 2½"x3"	\$6.00	_____
<b>BOOKS (books include postage/handling)</b>			
_____	<i>Fortresses Over Nuthampstead</i> (Bishop)	\$30.00	_____
_____	<i>398th History</i> (1946, photo copy)	\$20.00	_____
_____	<i>Remembrances</i> (Ostrom, 1989, photo copy)	\$30.00	_____
_____	<i>Hell From Heaven</i> (Streitfeld)	\$19.95	_____
_____	<i>WW II Odyssey</i> (Frankhouser)	\$19.00	_____
<b>PHOTOGRAPHS &amp; PRINTS</b>			
_____	<i>Clearing &amp; Colder</i> , 14"x19"	\$30.00	_____
_____	<i>Clearing &amp; Colder</i> , 14"x17", on canvas	\$40.00	_____
_____	<i>Anstey Stained Glass Window</i> booklet, 11"x17" (includes list of comrades Killed in Action)	\$10.00	_____
_____	<i>Sunset at Nuthampstead</i> , 8"x10"	\$7.00	_____
<b>MISCELLANEOUS</b>			
_____	Bumper Sticker (red, white & blue)	\$3.00	_____
_____	Blue Ballpoint Pen (398th imprint)	\$5.00	_____
_____	License Plate Frame (398th imprint)	\$5.00	_____
_____	Book Marker	\$5.00	_____
_____	Tote Bag, 20"x15", (black with logo) <b>ON SALE!</b>	\$3.00	_____
_____	2011 Station 131 Nuthampstead Airfield Museum Calendar (postage included) <b>ON SALE!</b>	\$8.00	_____
<b>TIMELESS VOICES DVD's (DVD's include postage/handling)</b>			
_____	Member \$17.00 ea., Non-member \$22.00 ea. For information and titles, visit the "Timeless Voices" section at <a href="http://www.398th.org">www.398th.org</a>		_____

Cost of Items ordered \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Postage/handling add \$5.00, \$6.00 if order over \$20.00 \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Payment in US funds to "398th Bomb Group PX" Total \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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# BRANSON REUNION

September 7-8-9-10

# 398th BOMB GROUP FLAK NEWS

Telephone 206-367-2099

c/o Allen Ostrom

Seattle WA 98125-6324



— Photo by Malcolm Osborn