



*The 461st*

# **Liberaider**



Vol. 14, No. 1

June 1997

SOMEWHERE IN THE USA



## **Major General Nathan Farragut Twining**

Commanding Officer of the 15th Air Force  
Bari, Italy - 1944

Presenting the

### **PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION**

to the 461st Bombardment Group at  
Torretta Field near Cerignola, Italy  
November 6, 1944

(Please see letter from Walter Stewart on Page 4  
and the Commendation on Page 24)

The 461st LIBERAIDER  
461st Bombardment Group (H)  
Activated: 1 July 1943  
Inactivated: 27 August 1945  
Incorporated: 15 November 1985

CORPORATE HDQRS: 1407 W. 4th St. P.O. Box 5160, Spencer, IA 51301

FEDERAL IRS TAX EXEMPT, Internal Revenue Code 501(c)(19) No. 42-1272736

#### OFFICERS

Frank C. O'Bannon, President, 9260 Fosteris Drive, Tucson, AZ 85741  
Edward N. Chan, Vice-President, 1065 N. 5th St., New Hyde Park, NY 11040  
G. "Pete" Peterson, Treasurer, 1407 W 4th St., P.O. Box 5160, Spencer, IA 51301

#### DIRECTORS—1993-1995

Leonard D. Cole Hdqrs Sqdn Rt #1 Box 495, Osage Beach, MO 65065  
Thomas Javaruski 764th Sqdn 951 N. Railroad Ave., Staten Island, NY 10306  
Thad Farris 765th Sqdn 11835 Sagamore Dr., Yukon, OK 73099-6601  
Joel Fish 766th Sqdn 165K Cross Slope Ct., Englishtown, NJ 07726  
George A. Iubelt 767th Sqdn P.O. Box 3134, Carbondale, IL 62902

#### ALTERNATE DIRECTORS

Hdqrs Sqdn  
James L. Hardee 764th Sqdn 1864 Herman St, Atwater, CA 95301-3215  
Elmo E. Ward 765th Sqdn 9500 N. Hwy 99W, McMinnville, OR 97128  
Robert F. Kerth 766th Sqdn 165K Cross Slope Ct., Englishtown, NJ 07726  
Fernando Berumen 767th Sqdn 5422 Hersholt Ave., Lakewood, CA 90712-2027

#### COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN

Memorial:  
Membership: Ed Chart, 1065 N. 5th St, New Hyde Park, NY 11040  
Post Exchange: Wally Robinson, 3 E. Cardott, Ridgeway, PA 15853  
Publicity: Looking for a volunteer!

1997 Reunion: The Marimac Corporation, 6790 E. Calle Dorado, Tucson, AZ 85715

#### "Liberaider"

George D. Dickie—Editor—P.O. Box 615, East Sandwich, MA 02537-0615  
The "Liberaider" is published twice a year on behalf of the members of the organization. Permission is granted to use articles provided source is given.

## FROM YOUR EDITOR

On this same page in the December 1996 issue of the "Liberaider" we ran an article on membership dues and put the responsibility for membership directly on you. If you wanted to renew your membership in the Group or if you wanted to join after a long absence so that you could receive the "Liberaider" you had to contact us and pay your dues. This ultimatum rattled a lot of trees and we heard from members who had been silent for many years. We were pleased with the response and enjoyed hearing from all of you.

Pete, our Treasurer, sent me many of the notes you wrote him when you sent in your dues, especially the ones that commented on my performance as editor of the "Liberaider". These plaudits were gratefully received and, as always, fuel the fires that keep me going. There were too many to reproduce here but I would like to recognize your comments by adding the names of most of those who wrote.

Lester J. Emery	764th
Ralph L. Merrow	764th
Charles A. Buxton, Sr.	765th
Stanley A. Stone	767th

Hagar H. Burton	766th
Buren H. Storts	767th
Charles F. Beegle	767th
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John C. Stegeman	765th
Edward E. Myllmaki	765th
George C. Peterson	765th
Howie Kaems	766th
Charley D. Fann	767th

If I missed any of you it is because I didn't get your note. Pete might have been selective, favoring only those that would pump up my ego.

Quite a few of the above became "Life Members". One short note made me laugh. It read, "Enclosed check is for "Life Membership" so that we can smile and do nothing but Gloat".

Best wishes

Alex Gwozd, 764th

(See Item 1 at the top of Page 2 in the December 1996 "Liberaider")

Last year we located another "lost" member who was Co-Pilot on our crew led by Lyle Crume. We found Albert Lubinsky in Monsey, NY and he is the last of the four remaining members of our crew. This winter we all met in West Palm Beach, Florida for a couple of days of reminiscing. Here we are grabbing a few "Rays" at Jupiter Inlet.



L to R: Mort Parker, Armor Gunner; Paul Wagner, Bombardier; Al Lubinsky, Co-Pilot; George Dickie, Navigator.

**461st BOMB GROUP (H) 1943-1945 INC.**Financial Statement  
1-1-97 to 5-15-97

## RECEIPTS

Bank Balance General Checking Account 1-1-97		\$15,979.32
Dues Paid	\$5,433.63	
PX Sales	571.00	
Interest on Checking Account	101.94	6,106.57
		\$22,085.89

## EXPENSES

Liberaider	\$3,164.94	
Office Supplies	686.04	
PX	378.09	4,229.07
Bank Balance General Checking Account 5-15-97		\$17,856.82
		\$22,085.89

Other accounts to provide proceeds to replenish bank account when Life Members dues are the largest part of needs for receipts:

CD Farmers Tr & Svgs Bank, Special Offer 6.14%	\$ 3,982.29
Scudder Income Fund, 4/30/97 6.37%	\$ 5,055.76
Stein Roe Income Fund, 3/31/97 7.23%	\$ 4,125.70
Vanguard Income Fund, 4/1/97 7.49%	\$ 4,070.22

Other Accounts to be used for Reunions:

Reunion Checking Account, Farmers Tr & Svgs Acct, 5/10/97 2%	\$ 8,128.10
CD Reunion Account, Farmers Tr & Svgs Account 1/2/97 5.61%	\$ 7,033.37

Gail Peterson, Treasurer



## MAIL CALL

September 4, 1996

Dear George,

In scrounging through my World War II pictures, I ran across the enclosed one, showing Maj. Gen. Nathan Twining at Torretta Field at the time he awarded the Presidential Unit Citation to the 461st.

On the picture's back, you find the detailed information about this presentation and the 461st's part in it. In the out-of-focus background of this picture, you will notice two or three of the 461st's aerial photography unit. Although they are out of focus, I remember that the one standing taking moving pictures is T/Sgt. Jim Van Nostrand - - He both worked with the photo unit on the ground and flew on missions.

As this represents one of the two highest awards which our bomb group won during its active work in Italy, this picture of Maj. Gen. Twining may interest many. Especially since he was commander of the 15th Air Force, later to become Chief of Staff for the Air Force and then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington.

This picture was made by me in the photo darkroom which was in the old stable/barn about 300 feet from headquarters (the house) at the Torretta farm where we were stationed.

Walter H. Stewart  
766th Squadron  
2636 14th Ave. Ct.  
Greeley, CO 80631

\* \* \* \* \*

14 April 1997

Dear George,

Thanks for including my diary in the December 1996 and the June 1997 volumes of the 461st "Liberaider". I sincerely hope that fellow Liberaiders enjoy reading the article as much as I enjoyed putting it together. Needless to say, the project rekindled old memories of the fun, adventure, and good fortune that my bomber crew and I experienced so many

years ago.

Today's morning report indicated three of our crew transferred PCS. John Yagersz, Paul Yunge, and Charley Sooy are gone and we miss them. The rest of Moe's crew are present for duty and doing fine. We have had get-togethers for the last four years and they have been real hummers.

One more point that is kind of special to me. We still have at least one B-24 in the 461st. My airplane is a Beachcraft Sierra - Model B-24R and the main gears retract outwards. The bad news is it only has one tail and one engine. The good news is that I can still pass my FAA flight physical to fly it.

Thanks again George for publishing my diary, it was a "biggie" for me, and thanks for the outstanding job you have done with the "Liberaider".

Jack C. Morledge  
766th Squadron  
4110 Country Club Drive  
Dickinson, TX 77359

\* \* \* \* \*

Dear George,

This letter is in regard to Mission # 108, 4 October 1944 in the "Liberaider" December 1996 page 26.

Today's mission was to Munich, Germany. Got near the target and had to fall back as we were using too much power. Dropped 4 bombs in the Alps to keep up with the formation and subsequently #6 took our place (Lt. John Turner's plane) and we took #6. Dropped our bombs and the flak got damned thick and furious. Made a sharp right turn after bombs away. In the formation ahead of us one of the planes had a bomb hang up. The bombardier salvoed that bomb as our box turned right. That bomb hit the #1 plane in our box and exploded taking two more ships from our box. Our co-pilot dove our plane 3000 feet and just missed the wing of the exploding plane. The nose of our plane was pushed in and the windows blown into my lap by the explosion. I freed the nose gunner and watched the altimeter to get ready to bail out if necessary. Got out of the area and were in bad shape. Results of squadron losses, 3 lost over the target, 2 crashed on friendly fields, our plane and the

(Continued on page 5)

(Continued from page 4)

January 24, 1997

other, Steve Sklansky's plane, both badly damaged, landed on home base.

I believe Lt. Wyllie was my pilot on this mission. Neither plane ever flew again. Used only for spare parts.

Joseph Breshinsky  
Bombardier, 764th Squadron  
918 Dielman Road  
Saint Louis, MO 63132

\* \* \* \* \*

January 24, 1997

Dear Gail,

Here's my \$50 to become a life member of the 461st. Please use the below Eastsound address (my permanent home) for all mailings, including the semi-annual "Liberaider".

I served with the 461st during October and November 1944.

Although I'll probably not be attending reunions (travel is now more than uncomfortable), I very much enjoyed the December, 1996 "Liberaider", probably because my name was in it.

Keep up the good work.

Robert A. Crinkley  
767th Squadron  
HC I Box 104  
Eastsound, WA 98245

Editor's Note: This letter and the following one lead me to think Bob has a story to tell. He was hospitalized following Mission No. 138 to Blechhammer and appears to have suffered from his serious injury for the past 53 years. Mission No. 138 is written up on page 31 of this issue and the bomb strike photo is shown on page 27.

How about it Bob, can you tell us your story?

Add my name to what must be a lengthy list of folks who enjoyed your December, 1996 "Liberaider". I look forward to the next issue and am hopeful another stalwart 461st member will continue your fine work.

If you have not seen the enclosed *Unsung Heroes Lament*, you may want to consider including it in a forthcoming issue. I would guess some of the other 461st pilots may also have first met the B-24 at Liberal, as I did.

I served as an instrument instructor pilot at Liberal for a few months in the spring of 1944 before teaming up with what turned out to be a replacement crew in Boise and then, via Liberty Ship, to Cerignola and the 461st. I logged nine missions prior to abandoning the aircraft over Croatia returning from a mission to Blechhammer on November 20, 1944. Fortunately, I was the only guy to sustain serious injury; the rest of the crew all made it back to the states in good shape.

Once again, thanks for the "Liberaider".

Robert A. Crinkley  
767th Squadron

Editor's Note: The "Lament" is printed in this issue on page 9.

\* \* \* \* \*

January 29, 1997

Dear George,

The December 1996 "Liberaider" article about requirements for winterization of tents sent me scurrying to my album of war-time memories, producing the enclosed photograph.

The reference to the building material as tufi or tufa is foreign to me; we called it cliché brick.

Previous occupants had erected the edifice and we made a few modifications: i.e. covering the door

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*(Continued from page 5)*

with fabric salvaged from B-24's that crashed on approach behind our squadron area. Our heating system was vented with aluminum duct that once served as deicers and was an excellent convector of heat, as it got red-hot. Other components consisted of a 55 gallon drum that contained a/c fuel located outside the tent, piping fuel via 1/4" tubing controlled by a pet-cock that dripped the fuel into a pan within a half of a 55 gallon drum that served as the heater and cook stove.

Once we got settled in and started receiving packages from home, Elmer and I never ate breakfast at the mess hall but gourmet foods prepared on our cook stove; smoked sausages, Mrs. Grasses noodle soup and eggs purchased from local farmers (50¢ each) was typical fare. We all enjoyed chestnuts roasted over that make-shift affair. If my memory

serves me correctly, we could get half of a tow sack of chestnuts for a couple of packs of cigarettes.

Come to think about it, not only were we put in jeopardy when we flew but also having to live in such a combustible environment.

As an aside, this photo as well as all that I took while in Italy, I developed and printed at Headquarters where an underground wine cellar was converted into a dark room equipped with excellent facilities.

Thanks for the memories!

Charles R. Krause  
765th Squadron  
P.O. Box 556  
Calico Rock, AR 72519



**L. to R. George Boerger (deceased), John Babyak (deceased), Lucian Richey (still playing the guitar), Elmer Vidovich (deceased), and Charles Krause**

Dear George,

In the Dec. '96 "Liberaider", on page 24 you ask for comments on the stone blocks that were used to build our tent walls. My sources say that the blocks were

February 22, 1997 made of tufa and the encyclopedia identifies tufa as a type of limestone that is formed by spring water that after a great length of time builds a large terrace of tufa. The various limestones make excellent building blocks for they are easily sawed and carved plus they

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*(Continued from page 6)*

do not split. The following is based on my letter home of Nov. 11, 1944.

Early in November the weather took a turn for the worse with plunging temperatures, high winds, and driving sleet that resulted in several of the tents of the Squadron being blown down. This all happened while we were in the midst of winterizing our quarters. To accomplish this, the Italian workers poured cement floors and built surrounding low stone walls of a size that the canvas sides of our tents could be pitched over the whole. On Saturday, Nov. 11th our tent was assigned a truck to go to a nearby stone quarry to obtain tufa blocks for our walls. It seems that the stone workers wouldn't load the limestone without a US officer present to sign the contract and since this trip was for our tent I was given that duty. I talked our navigator Bob Rathfon into accompanying me. The two of us with our driver plus a second truck and driver set out for the quarry on a rather mild fall afternoon. After we were well on our way, suddenly one of the rear tires on our truck blew out. This took us by surprise as we were on a smooth paved road and in an empty ten-wheeled vehicle but since we still had three good tires on the one side it didn't worry us too much.

When we arrived at the quarry the blocks weren't ready and we had to wait quite a while before the workers began loading them. After finishing, each truck was stacked with 250 blocks about the size of today's cement building blocks. By the time our two conveyances started back to the 764th it was getting cloudy and dark and along with a drop in temperature it started to sleet. We didn't get very far before the second tire on our dual wheel let go. That was as far as our vehicle was going so we moved to the other but as the cab had only room for three Bob and I took turns riding on top of the blocks which were stacked high enough that we were above the protection of the cab.

What a miserable ride that was as we were dressed in light jackets giving us very little protection from a wind whose temperature was low enough to freeze the sleet on the windshield. One of us would stay on top until we couldn't stand it any longer and then pound on the cab to stop so we could switch places. We weren't much further down the road when one of

the tires on this second truck blew out. It was a relief when an enclosed command truck stopped and the driver told the four of us to pile in. Arriving at Cerignola the drivers called our Squadron for help while Bob and I hotfooted it to the town's Army Mess for supper. All we wanted were big bowls of hot soup to warm our shivering bodies. After the meal we quickly caught a ride to the Squadron but the two drivers had to wait for help and didn't get back until after eleven that night.

The next morning at daybreak our truck driver roused the four of us out of bed to unload the stone blocks. While we were in the midst of this task the transportation officer appeared and gave me hell for overloading his trucks. I told him that the first tire had let go on an empty truck traveling under 40 mph, that I could run a weight and balance on a B-24 but had no idea what load his trucks could carry or what each block weighed. Furthermore, Transportation had been carting the blocks for some weeks and by now the drivers should know how many their trucks could handle. End of dialogue.

Later that morning the Italians laid the foundation for our walls following which our bombardier Frank Gaudio and I leveled the dirt to prepare for the pouring of the cement floor. Afterwards the two of us went up to the flight line to look for a valve and tubing to be used for our stove. Engineering had a B-24 that had been so badly damaged that it couldn't be repaired and it was being used as a parts bank. We spent a couple of hours hacking and sawing inside that plane before we found a length of tubing that was just right for our stove but we could not find a single valve. Back at our tent site we buried the pipe in the dirt and passed it under the wall so it would be ready for the cement floor.

In about a week the Italians started pouring the cement floors but when they finally got to our tent's location they had only enough to cover half of the floor. They informed us that it was the last bit of cement on the base. After it was down it was up to us to "float" or smooth out the surface and as it got dark before we were done, almost half of it remained quite rough. We had to wait for another delivery of cement to finish the floor and build the walls thus we didn't move into our winterized domicile until late in December.

Clair Alexander, 764th Squadron  
710 Mentor Rd., Akron, OH 44303

*(Continued on page 8)*

(Continued from page 7)

February 20, 1997

March 4, 1997 Dear George,

Dear George,

Thank you for all your work over the last several years, being Editor for the "Liberaider". I appreciate very much what you have accomplished and, being the editor for our Departmental Newsletter at Oklahoma State for twenty-five years, I know what a task it is to get information and pass it on. You did a good job and we appreciate it.

As to documented proof about the Master Sergeant in the 485th that was sabotaging planes, I do not have any nor do I think any exists. It all happened before I joined the Group in early October of '44. There was a lot of talk about it as many of the planes crashed near our 766th area. I was talking about it, the events that is, at one of our weekends at Vance AFB at Enid, when one of our legal beagles from the area suddenly entered the conversation. Seems like he was at the JAG office in Foggia at the time and they got a call from the 485th telling them that they had caught the SOB, had proof that he had large amounts of money in his tent and had sent home thousands of dollars according to the receipts he had, and they were going to try him and shoot him and that they wanted to make it legal so please send someone from the JAG office down for the trial.

It was apparently a drum-head trial and the problem solved with dispatch but I would assume all was not legal as it should have been. Therefore, all documents were destroyed and the matter swept under the rug. If they did a good job of sweeping, getting documentation would be most difficult.

Thanks again for all the years you have served and your service to the cause of keeping us informed. We are all getting a little old to assume new responsibilities and your effort is very much appreciated. Like my Newsletter, the "Liberaider" will probably pass too with your resignation.

George W. A. Mahoney, PHD  
766th Squadron, Lt. Col. Ret.  
624 W. Ute Avenue  
Stillwater, OK 74075

I want to thank you for putting my article in the "Liberaider". Frank O'Bannon called and gave me Ken Merry's address. I wrote to Ken but have not received an answer yet. I wrote to the Kansas City Police Department concerning Jesse Palmer (his father was a police officer and Jesse had the KC Police Dept. address on his dog tags) and received a reply that Jesse's father died in 1954. The house that they lived in has been sold and they have no other information on Jesse.

I wrote to the Jersey City newspaper in the hopes that they could have something in their morgue concerning Tom Merkouris. As of yet I have not heard from them either.

I made reference to "The Blade" the navigator that was in OTU with us and got transferred to another crew. The plane was later shot down and the officers were killed by having meat hooks inserted through their lower jaws and hanged until they died. Tom Yates, who wrote the story "Had To Go To War in the June and December 1994 issues of the "Liberaider wrote to me and told me that he recalls an officer who was small in stature, who smoked a pipe and was shot down. He was captured and was hung up on a meat hook and the captors took target practice on him with his own pistol. His crew witnessed the incident while hiding in the woods. Tom said that he never took his pistol on any other missions. He also was on Lee Ward's crew. Lee flew with us on December 16, 1944 and evaded for 40 days after bailing out. He ended up in Stalag Luft I with us until he was liberated by the Russians. Tom bumped into Lee in Houston during the 50's. Lee was an Assistant District Attorney at the time. Tom also told me that Lee had sugar and did not take good care of himself. Unfortunately, Lee had to have both legs amputated because of his disease. The hanged officer was definitely not "The Blade" because "The Blade" was a big man and I don't believe he smoked. I wonder if anyone knows anything else about his crew.

I also made mention of the saboteur and asked if anyone knew anything about him. Frank O'Bannon could not give any facts and said that it was probably a story that grew and went around the squadron. He could not verify it.

(Continued on page 9)



*(Continued from page 8)*

Last night I got a call from Charles Buxton. Charles was in the 461st - 765th Squadron. He completed his 50 missions and his crew was broken up in October 1944. I believe that quite a few of his crewmates were either lost in combat or spent time as POW's. He and another crewmate were the only two left of their original crew. Anyway, Charles is well aware of the saboteur. He was a Staff Sgt. in the 454th Bomb Group that used Cerignola as their home field. The guy was caught because he sent home a tremendous amount of money. He said that he thought he blew up about 10 planes. One of the planes was blown up and Charles's tent was destroyed by the pieces of the plane that landed on it. He also knew about the courts-martial. Charles' address is P.O. Box 478, Fruitland Park, FL 34731. He is going to try and contact his fellow crewmember for authentication of the story.

Maybe there is something to these stories and someone else will come forward. If I hear anything I'll drop you a line.

Paul Haggerty  
766th Squadron  
12 Fischer Drive, Apt. 3E  
North Kingston, RI 02852-2854

### **THE UNSUNG HEROES LAMENT Liberal, Kansas - Circa 1944**

They sat in state, the heroes in that vaulted hall of fame,  
In proud and scornful silence, for each had made his name.

On fields of storied battle, on many a bloody sea,  
Though carved in steel, and forged in fire, each died in history.

There was little Davy Crockett, and the martyr, Nathan Hale,  
And the rebel, like all that fell, in Shenandoah's bloody vale.  
There was Grant, who had seen brief glory, but died another way,  
And others known to time alone, and each had seen his day.

There was on each haunted visage a deep forbidden gloom,  
And every gaze was on a stranger who shambled into the room.  
In his left hand was a check list, in his right an R.B.I.,  
His face was worn, his clothes were torn, his flighter was awry.

The first to speak was Caesar, by virtue of his age,  
And the finger that he pointed was trembling with his rage.  
"What right have you, brash youngster, with gallant men of yore?"  
The man replied, though not with pride, "I flew a B-Two-Four."

"It was on the plains of Kansas, in the land that God forgot,  
Where the winter winds are piercing, and the summer suns are hot.  
We were young and hopeful, fresh from ten day leaves,  
But somehow we knew, and the feeling grew, they were but last reprieves."

"For there's a peculiar sort of madness in the supercharger's whine,  
And you hear the ice cubes tinkling in the turbo balance line.  
The runway strips were narrow, and the snow banks, they were wide.  
The crash trucks say, in a mournful way, you're on your final ride."

"The nose gear rocks and trembles, it's held with safety wire,  
The wings are filled with thermite, to make a hotter fire.

*(Continued on page 10)*

*(Continued from page 9)*

The camouflage is peeling off, it adds a bit of luster,  
The pitot head is filled with lead to help the load adjuster."

"The bomb bay doors are rusted, they close with a ghastly shriek,  
The Plexiglass is smeared with oil from some forgotten leak.  
The oleos are twisted, the wheels are not quite round,  
The bulkheads thin, Ford builds with tin, admit the slightest sound."

"You taxi to the runway, 'mid groans of tortured gear,  
And feel the check rider's sharp teeth, gnawing on your rear.  
The co-pilot's dozing on your right, in a likker-laden coma,  
He mingles his breath, like the kiss of death, with the put-puts foul aroma."

"So, it's off into the overcast yonder, 'though number one is missing,  
And hydraulic fluid escaping sets up a gentle hissing.  
The compass dial is spinning in a way that broods no stopping,  
And row by row, the fuses blow with intermittent popping."

"It was named the "Liberator" by some low and twisted mind,  
But men who come to Liberal, no freedom ever find.  
There is no hope, no sunshine shines today, instead thin tears of sorrow.  
For those who land, and still can stand, must fly again tomorrow."

The strangers voice fell silent, a tear shone in his eye,  
And from all his honored audience, arose a vastly sigh.  
Great Caesar rose up to him, with pity in his face,  
And bowing low, he turned to show, the stranger to his place.

\* \* \* \* \*

### REMEMBERING THE FORGOTTEN MECHANIC

Through the history of world aviation many great names come to the fore.....  
Great deeds of the past in our memory will last, as they're joined by more and more.....

When man first started his labor in his quest to conquer the sky,  
he was designer, mechanic and pilot, and built a machine that would fly.....  
But somehow the order got twisted, and then in the public's eye  
the only man that could be seen was the man who knew how to fly.....

The pilot was everyone's hero, he was brave, he was bold, he was grand,  
as he stood by his battered old biplane, with his goggles and helmet in hand.....  
To be sure, these pilots all earned it. To fly you had to have guts.....  
And they blazed their names in the hall of fame on wings with baling wire struts.....

But for each of these flying heroes there were thousands of little renown,  
and these were the men who worked on the planes but kept their feet on the ground.....  
We all know the name of Lindberg, and we've read of his flight to fame.....  
But think, if you can, of his maintenance man, Can you remember his name?

*(Continued on page 11)*

(Continued from page 10)

And think of our wartime heroes Cabreski, Jabara, and Scott.....  
Can you tell me the names of their Crew chiefs? A thousand to one you can not.....

Now pilots are highly trained people, and wings are not easily won.....  
But without the work of the maintenance man our pilots would march with a gun.....  
So when you see mighty aircraft as they mark their way through the air,  
the grease-stained man with a wrench in his hand is the man who put him there.....

Stolen from Kelly's Kobras, January 1997, As reprinted from the Alaskan Region Intercom.

## HUMOR



\* \* \* \* \*

A Swede in Minnesota decided to have himself cloned and the result was a perfect likeness of himself in every detail except for one. And that was the clone had a filthy mouth. Making obscene remarks wherever he went, much to the extreme embarrassment of the Swede. Finally, it had such a damaging effect on the Swede's life with the rotten-talking Clone ruining his reputation that the Swede enticed the Clone to go on an outing to the countryside. Then the Swede enticed the Clone to view the magnificent scenery from the edge of the cliff or bluff as they are called in Minnesota. As the Clone leaned forward to get a glimpse of the panorama below, the Swede quickly bumped him from behind and the Clone fell over the 120-foot precipice to the rocks below. When the Swede surmised that death had occurred, he got in his car and went back to town. Several days went by and he figured that the body was found and presumed an accident with no blame toward him. But in a day or two a policeman walked in and arrested the Swede. Why? He asked. It's for making an obscene Clone fall, said the policeman.

\* \* \* \* \*

My Lady friend made me a marble cake for my last birthday. I took it for granite.  
I later, tried to divorce her because she couldn't make a decent cup of coffee. But the Judge said that was Poor Grounds!

\* \* \* \* \*

Recently, the President returned to Andrews Air Force Base on Air Force One following a visit home to Arkansas. The usual Marine Honor Guard was at the bottom of the stairs as the President descended with a pig under each arm.

The Marine saluted and said, "Nice Pigs, Sir!!"

The President proudly responded, "These are no ordinary pigs, son. They are Arkansas Razor Backs of the finest quality. I got one for Hilliary and one for Chelsea."

The Marine of few words responded, "Nice Trade, Sir!!"

## HERE IS "PART OF THE STORY" WHY OUR B-24H MODELS HAD SPERRY SIGHTS

We surely do not intend to argue the value of the Norden versus the Sperry bomb sights of WW2... much has been printed to the attributes of both, with Norden getting all the publicity (sounds familiar, doesn't it?) The Bombardiers Inc. organization newsletter, "CROSSHAIRS" explains the issue of Dec. 89 clearly, taking both sides.

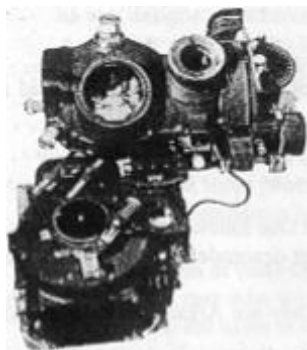
In a "feedback article" from the USAF Museum "FRIENDS" magazine journal Dick Asbury sends in the following article: **FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE**, from C. Watkins, New Bern, N.C. "There were two reasons why the Sperry sight (S-1) was even deployed in the European Theater: the Navy's reluctance to release the Norden to the Air Corps for European Operations and a severe shortage of Norden bombsights during the early days of the conflict.

Resolution of the above led to a meeting of Air Corps Officers appointed by General Hap Arnold who recommended 15 Sept. 1944 that the Air Corps standardize on the Norden M-series bombsight and C-1 autopilot and that the Sperry equipment be deleted from all B-24's. This was not simply an arbitrary decision. Tests conducted by both the Army and Navy from 1940 to 1942 utilizing the Sperry O-1, S-1, Estoppey D-8, and Norden (Navy MK-XV, Army M-Series) revealed that the Norden was superior in ease of operation, accuracy, and maintenance than the competition.

As a Col. Unitt stated, "The Sperry bombsight was indeed a one piece unit. But that one piece was a big seventy-five pound box, awkward to remove and install in the limited confines of the bombardier's "office". The classified Norden sight head at 35 lbs. was easily handled by one man trips to and from storage vault containers between flights." (end of article quotations).

**Editorial Comment:** During bombardier flight training for the original cadre 449th bomb crews, most bombardier schools used the Norden sights, only a few of those bombardiers received any pre-graduating schooling on Sperry equipment, and then very seldom in flight! When the combat aircraft were assigned to the 449th crews in Oct. and Nov. 1943 all learned that the B-24H models were Sperry bombsight equipped with the Sperry A-5 Autopilot. Training began but was short in duration, thus our original crews arrive overseas with bombsights that they had just begun to learn to use. Repeat hours on the sights paid off... and by late Mar 44 the newly arrived replacement ships were Norden equipped... but there were still some H-models within the 449th Group into 1945... crews were interviewed if they had handled Sperry equipment before. . those that said no were assigned to fly in the other ships... by Feb.45 only less than 5 ships with radar equipment and Sperry sights were on hand and these used as squadron lead ships only. Most bombardiers swear by the Norden but only because they did not have experience in Sperry bombing. Even today, WW2 bombardiers say the same . . . it is something we can remember and say, "given time we could learn both easily as well" but we now know that supplies must be on hand and standardization does have its operational value! Having used both Sperry and Norden in combat with the 449th, both in lead formation bombing, it was easier with the Sperry, we didn't have "fight the leveling bubbles" and the bombs did not always hit where the crosshairs were placed with Norden (that is something a bombardier can explain)... the story here is (stay in the sight and complete a good synchronization) and then you saw where the bombs hit, under your crosshairs (wherever you left them).

Editor's Note: Taken from the "Late Pass" newsletter of the 449th BG.



**THE NORDEN**



**THE SPERRY**

January 4, 1997

Liberaider  
P.O. Box 615  
East Sandwich, MA 02537-0615

Dear Sir:

Your publication gives me a surge of pleasure every time it arrives. We were all young men together, we didn't understand the political forces, but we were given our job, and many of us were lost. But you and I are among the lucky ones who not only survived the war, but also survived the statistical lottery, although time is catching up with us. We will drop out at an increasing rate as time goes on but for now, it is a joyous privilege to be part of this gallant brigade. I am astounded at our good fortune, mine, and all of yours. We are still here to reminisce, to think back to those exciting times, and know that we all have a common experience.

I have not yet opened the careful boxes of numbered letters that went back and forth during the war, between my wife and me, but perhaps I will one day, and perhaps I will recover some more memories that I have in common with other members. I would like to share a memory of, not combat experience, but one of the flak leave experiences I had in Naples. Like everyone else, I had been getting myself out of bed in the gray dawns and showing up for briefings, and been trucked out to the flight line, from whence we took off and rendezvoused with the other bombers. Each time I had packed my wife's picture and a toothbrush in my pocket in case I didn't get home that night, and I had felt the cold sweat run down my back as I tried to hold our place in the formation on the bomb run which led right through those unforgiving little rows of black smoke puffs with their deadly kernels.

But when I was not in the airplane, I was a tourist, visiting strange places and seeing exciting scenes as a guest of my Uncle Sammy. I had taken a canoe out onto a pond in Newfoundland and chased a beaver around, swimming strongly, until he slapped the lake with his tail and dove for cover. I had stood on a high hill looking westward out over the sea in the Azores and wondered if Columbus looked back at it as he sailed away to the West. I had dickered with street peddlers in Marrakech, and looked at Roman ruins in Tunis.

We had flown scary mission after scary mission, which was what I had expected, and then one day we had been given orders from out of the blue to go to Naples and then out to the Isle of Capri, where we had no duty except to lie around for a week. It was a total surprise, for I had no idea they could spare us for that long from the work-a-day routine of flying missions. It was like being given a glorious holiday that they generously decided we deserved, and I wasn't sure we did deserve it, but I was certainly not going to turn it down.

At Naples, we landed at the airport and were trucked out to the wharf to be taken out to Capri by boat. As we got out of the truck and mingled with the crowd of airmen, I looked at my navigator, and he looked at me with the same air of surmise. I said, "Do you realize this is the only opportunity we may ever have to see Italy?" Suddenly alert, his face fit up with the same excitement I was feeling. As the pilot, I was responsible for the crew when we were in the combat area, but the crew was rapidly being taken under the wing of the local tour group people, and I knew they would be well taken care of out on the island. I had read The Bells of San Michele by Axel Munthe, when I was in high school, and so Capri was very alive for me. I figured we had a full week, and if we could run around Italy for three or four days, that would still leave us three or four more to see Capri.

Interestingly enough, Dr. Munthe was a Swedish psychiatrist, and neither I nor my navigator knew that we would both end up doing that same job.

In the general confusion of the large crowd at the docks, Jack and I slipped away from the crowd and caught a cab and went out to the military airport. I felt somewhat guilty, as though I was deserting my post,



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but since I was only going to substitute one kind of holiday for another one, it didn't seem wicked, only adventurous. After all, the whole country was under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Army, and so we were just going to look over another part of the post.

At the airport, we went to operations and encountered a kindly older officer, I think he was a Lt. Col., and told him we would like to hitch a ride to Rome. We explained that we wanted to get back in a few days and join our crew on Capri, but wanted to see some of the country first. He was amused and approved of the project, so it felt as though we had official blessing. We were so lucky not to run into someone who would have taken a narrow view of the enterprise. But, after all, our orders did mention "rest and recreation." He called out to another officer going by, a captain (we were both 1st Lts.) and asked, "Would you have a couple of seats on your plane for these two young men, er officers, who want to go up to Rome?" Sure, said the captain, follow me, and off we went. An hour or so later, we were in Rome, the Eternal City, seat of power of the ancient Roman Empire, and the center of the Holy Church of Rome, I was a protestant, Jack was Jewish, but it didn't matter, we were on sacred ground.

That first night, we drifted along with other soldiers, and ended up sleeping on a hard bench under a thin blanket in a drafty stadium, the Foro Mussolini. We were too excited to sleep very much, and too young to mind the primitive sleeping arrangements, and the next morning they furnished us some kind of hearty G. I. breakfast, and we were off and running. Looking back, it seemed we packed a whole lifetime into that one week. This is how I remember it:

I have always had a weakness for the tourist travel mode, the open horse-drawn carriage. I didn't smoke, and neither did Jack, so we used our cigarettes as currency. One pack was an hour's ride. The streets were thronged with laughing, friendly Romans, who seemed like the happiest people in the world. I was surprised they were so friendly, for Italy had only lately left the Axis to become, if not our allies, at least our co-belligerents. When I remarked upon this to Jackson, who had already had two years of college (none for me so far) his response was, "Down through the centuries, they have had the soldiers of armies from all over Europe in their streets. One army is pretty much like another army to them." It hadn't been too long before that that the German soldiers were sightseeing in their street. They did seem very cosmopolitan and unexcited by our presence. They were quite friendly in general.

We drove by the ruins of the ancient Imperial Forum and looked at the remnants of the old Roman agora, or market place, and wondered about the long ago civilization when almost half of the people were slaves, captured in Roman wars. We went to the Coliseum and tried to figure out how it would have been in the old days when they filled the central arena with water and had naval battles with live soldiers, and when they had gladiators that fought to the death. We tried to think how they could ever have strung up a canvas cover over the whole thing to shade the spectators.

We stopped at the Trevi fountains with their marvelous sculptures and threw coins over our shoulders into the splashing fountains, like we had seen in an old movie.

We got out of the carriage at the huge round Piazza de St. Pietro and walked by the obelisk in the center of the square and looked up at the balcony where the newsreels would show Il Papa come out and bless the crowd on Feast days. And then we headed for the doorway under the balcony of St. Peter's cathedral, the greatest church in Christendom.

We walked by the Swiss guards, with their halberds and striped colorful uniforms, and into the sanctuary of that cavernous temple. Inside it was cool and quiet, like heaven is supposed to be, and I stood there with tears running down my cheeks, leaning back to look up at the lofty ceilings, where I expected to see a few angels gently waving their wings and flying about on official business. To me, a small town boy from Ohio, it looked so huge, it could have formed moisture and rained, with its own private weather system. I had always read about St. Peter's but I never expected to live to see it. I was awestruck by the richness of the paintings and statuary. There were delicate little cherubs carved from marble, clinging up near the ceiling. But I knew they were at least twice my size. I got in a line that was going up to kiss the foot of a bronze statue of Jesus. I kissed on the same spot everybody else did, and the golden bronze color showed through the green patina from all the lips of the reverent penitents, irreligious me among them. If so many people thought it was holy, then that made it so, as far as I was concerned. At home, I did-

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n't even go to church regularly, but this was different.

We wandered back to the Sistine Chapel and looked up to the ceiling where Michelangelo (He had actually been there in the flesh and had painted it with his own hands!) depicted God holding out his finger to give a spark of life to Adam, and I felt like it was a sacred moment to be able to see it for real, after looking at pictures of it all my life. We stood reverently in front of the Pieta, where the gentle dead body of Christ looked so soft and flowing, having been lovingly carved out of the Carrara marble by Michelangelo himself, again. And then, we followed a crowd into a chapel and saw the Pope, Pius XII himself. He was a thin ascetic looking man with metal-rimmed glasses and an arched nose. I had bought some little chains and crucifixes outside in the piazza for my little nieces who were catholic and I had them with me in where he blessed everybody. An Italian woman said, "If you had any crucifixes in there, they were blessed by It Papa himself, and you can tell your little nieces it happened." It seemed as though everything was working out just right for us.

Buoyed by our success so far, we settled on a bold plan for the night's lodgings. We walked into the lobby of a splendid hotel right on the Via Veneto because it had a sign on it that said it was restricted to the United States Army. That was us, wasn't it? At the desk, I asked if they could put us up for the night, and the clerk, a corporal, asked to see our orders. I showed them to him, and he demurred a bit that they were not for Rome, but for Capri. In my new found aplomb, I brushed that aside, and told him we were on our way back to Capri, but we needed to sleep somewhere that night. I smiled at him conspiratorially and said, "Give us a break, Corporal. This may be our only chance to see Rome." I think he was intrigued by our boldness, for he gave us a small guarded smile, and said, "Well, it's not exactly by the books, but I guess we can put you up for the night. But just for one night. I don't want to get my ass in a sling." He gave us a room key, a large brass one with a heavy ball on the end, and we winked and thanked him and tried to walk sedately to the elevator without jiggling up and down with joy.

It was the fanciest hotel room I had ever stayed in, but not as fancy as the one we stayed at in the next night. We lounged in the tub and lolled in the beds, and slept like a couple of student princes on the grand tour. Breakfast in the dining room was regal, and it was all because of our uniforms. They opened all doors, it seemed. I had fleeting thoughts about spending the rest of my life in the protective cocoon of the Army, but sanity kept me from losing my head. I had a sweet little wife waiting for me back in Ohio, and I wanted to spend the rest of my life with her, not running around the world as one of Uncle Sam's kiddies.

We still had a lot of places we wanted to see, like the Spanish square where Mr. and Mrs. Browning the poets, used to live, and Hadrian's Castle, and the Vactor Emmanuel Memorial, and, of course, wanted to look at Tiber, Father Tiber, the great river that runs through the town and used to flood it every year until they built the big embankments alongside it to contain it. I wondered if we could see the bridge where Horatio took his stand to fight off the invaders, but I never did see it.

This was our last night then, and I knew it wouldn't do any good to try and hit that same hotel up for a room again. We had gone in one smaller, classy looking hotel and inquired at the desk. Without looking up, the bored sergeant had asked what the rank of our group leader was. I said, "Lieutenant." He said, "Is that Lieutenant Colonel or Lieutenant General?" I suddenly figured out we were in the wrong place. I said doggedly, "Just plain Lieutenant." He lifted up his head then and looked at me pityingly. "I'm sorry Lieutenants, but this hotel is reserved for field grade and above."

We decided then to hit a really big fancy hotel that also had a sign indicating it was for U.S. Army personnel. At the desk, the man on duty stood looking at us as we approached the desk, sizing us up. He waited patiently while I asked him if we could get a room, but he didn't even ask to see our orders. "I'm sorry, gentlemen," he said, "but we don't have an empty room in the hotel." It was getting late, and I was beginning to feel a little desperate. I leaned on the desk confidentially and said to him, "Look, Corporal, I know that in larger hotels, especially in Army hotels (I didn't really know it, I had just heard it somewhere) you always save a suite for emergencies in case some general drops in late. My buddy and I travel very light, as you can see. If you could let us bunk up in the emergency suite (assuming he had one) it would only take one quick call, and we'd be out of

*(Continued from page 15)*

there in five minutes. How about giving us a break? We're tired and it's been a long day."

I didn't really think he'd go for it, but you just never know. He stood there in a moment of indecision, and reached back for a key. "All right," he said. "But five minutes, if I give you a call. I'll be on all night." I thanked him profusely and left a couple packs of cigarettes on the counter. I was afraid it would hurt his feelings, but he nodded and swept them off the counter to a shelf below.

If the room we had the night before had been lavish, this one was opulent. There were large windows in a bay front looking out onto a small balcony above the street, and the living room led off into two bedrooms, and huge bathroom. True to our promise, we tried not to leave creases or marks in the rooms, but the bathtub was enormous, with what looked like a gold-plated flexible hose to shower ourselves as we took turns lolling in the tub. The furnishings were massive and expensive looking, and we both said. "So this is how the rich people live." Two boys, one from Brooklyn and one from Ohio, were knocking around in this giant suite like marbles in a barrel.

In the morning we tidied up the rooms and went down for breakfast - we had figured out it was always part of the deal, and we were out for our last day of sightseeing. Later in the afternoon, we went to a transportation depot and asked if we could find a ride back to Naples. I could hardly believe our good fortune when a pfc. driver who was carrying some dispatches to Naples in a jeep said we could ride with him. We were hoping to travel by surface to see some of the countryside and it was a ride through some of the most battle scarred areas we had ever seen. This included territories that had been bombarded before ground troops had assaulted the beaches and moved inland, and in many of the towns we went roaring through, there were scarcely any buildings that had one block on top of another one. I thought about what a hard time those guys must have had when they were living in foxholes and popping their head up quickly so they could get ready to jump out and run for the next one. I said this to some infantryman later on, on the boat home, and he said, "Hard time? Ha. I used to lie down there in my safe little hole and look up at you guys flying along in formations and thinking, 'Man, those poor bastards haven't got any place to hide, They're hanging right out there in the sky and they're gonna get their asses shot off.'" So different people have different viewpoints, I guess.

In Naples, late that night, the kind driver directed us to a G.I. hotel in downtown Naples, and they put us up for the night. We still had three more full days, and we hadn't seen Naples yet. I figured a day and a half for the town and a day and a half for Capri was about right. I had grown up with an old Neapolitan boatman's song, I guess, that rang in my ears:

Twilight is falling, in fair Napoli, stars kiss the sky.  
Night stealing near, like a faint melody, bids day goodbye.  
There as I lingered long, entered my heart this song:  
Oh nights of splendor, your charms so tender,  
make love surrender, etc., etc., etc.

We rode the funiculari to the top of the town and looked out over the harbor and we could see Capri dreaming out there in the distance. We went into their wonderful historic museums where I remember an ancient burial marker for an old Roman. It was a square marble post as tall as a man, and head high, there was a bronze head of the man, with classic curls and ribbon around his head. About middle way down the post, on the front, was his bronze genitalia, as though the two most important parts of him were commemorated. Naples had open horse-drawn carriages too, and the price was still one pack of cigarettes per hour.

In the afternoon we caught a bus out to Pompei, and wandered through the reconstructed ruins of that old Roman pleasure resort that had been frozen in time by a volcanic eruption back in 79 A.D. We bent down over an old drinking fountain and put our hands in the worn smooth spots that thousands of Pompeiins had stopped to take a drink from - but the water was turned off. We looked at all the sexy pictures on the walls of the pleasure houses, and listened to the guide tell about how it was then. When they closed the place up, we rode back into town

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and walked the streets until it was time to go to bed, and we went back to our hotel, the first time we had slept two nights in a row in the same room since we started. We spent a restful night.

The next morning after breakfast, we took another bus back out to the Pompeii area, but this time we went to join a group we had heard about the day before. It was a guided walking tour that was going to the top of the fairly quiet volcanic mountain, Vesuvius. In addition to that big blow in A.D. 79, they had had several eruptions since then, most recently about a year before this. I had remembered reading about it before we left the states.

Our guide was a cheerful young Italian who carried a long staff like a fishing pole about eight feet long, as we walked up the long slope toward the mountain, I wondered what it was for. About a third of the way up, he stopped in front of the group, which consisted entirely of American servicemen, and paused dramatically. "Last year," he said, "maybe you know Vesuvius erupted, and we are walking on the lava bed that leads all the way up to the top, where we are going, to look down into the crater. I want you not to fall into any of the cracks along the way, and here is one for us to examine." With that, he stuck his long pole down into a crevice along our path, held it down in for a moment, and brought it out flaming on the end. The fire was banked, but still hot right under our feet. I was pretty impressed, and Jackson said, "Well, this gives you some idea what the earth is like down in the inside. This is just one of the little pipes that lead to the surface every place where they have volcanoes." I hadn't realized the earth was full of molten rock, until then. Stupid me.

Whistling and singing, the Neapolitan guide led us all the way to the top of the crater, where we all moved cautiously to the edge and looked down into the hole that was filled with rocks with steam and smoke seeping out here and there. I thought maybe it would be bubbling with molten lava, but it looked very peaceful, except for the wisps of smoke and steam. Somebody asked him if it would blow up again very soon, and the guide laughed and said, "Who knows? Maybe another hundred years, maybe another ten minutes. When you live near a volcano, it makes life very sweet, for you don't know when it will end." He didn't look worried, so I couldn't work up much excitement at the possibility of an imminent eruption.

He led us then along a path near the edge of the rim around to the back side of the mountain, and paused pointing downward into the pile of cinders and ashes that led down to the bottom, which looked like it was a mile or so almost straight down. "Would you like to run down the mountain?" he asked, challengingly. "If you want to go back the way we came, retrace your steps. If you want to run straight down the mountain, follow me." With that, he leaped straight out and down the steep slope, and we all, nothing loath, leaped after him. It was one of the most exhilarating experiences I ever had. We had to lean back to keep from plunging head over heels, and each step was about ten feet long, digging our heels in and sinking into the loose ashes and cinders ankle deep with each step. Our shoes were soon filled with cinders, but it didn't matter. It was like flying, or (as I would find out later) like skiing in powder snow. Where it had taken us a couple of hours to climb up the mountain, we were back at the bottom in a few minutes. All of us were glowing with excitement, and aware that it was an experience we would probably never have again.

It was back, then, into Naples to the pier, and out by boat to Capri. Jack and I found our hotel, parked our ditty bags, and went back out to sign on for the next tour of the island. We visited Tiberius' villa at the top, Axel Munthe's more modern and modest villa in the middle of the island, then down to the beach to get a ride out to the Blue Grotto. The cheerful boatman rowed up to the mouth of a cave, which was submerged in the water except for the upper tip of the opening that was a few inches above the water line. He had all of us lower our heads in the boat while he grasped the rope leading into the cavern. The water rose and fell regularly, and just as it was starting to fall, he tugged at the rope and we went sailing into the grotto. It was wonderfully enchanted, and of course no one ever forgets riding around on the surface of that luminescent water, where the sunshine angles into the opening below the water and gives it its neon-like glow.

Afterward, we went back to our hotel, and encountered another crew member, our bombardier. A total Sybarite, he had literally not gone out of the hotel for the whole week. "Where you guys been?" he asked. "Oh, just sight-

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*(Continued from page 17)*

seeing a little", said we. Satisfied, he volunteered, "Dinner is in a half hour. The chow is pretty good here." And so it was.

My other occupation is that of a writer, but my only publication so far is Decoding the Secret Language of Your Body - Simon & Schuster. It is a layman's handbook of the mind-body connection in illness and health.

Martin Rush, M.D.  
Middletown, Ohio

Editor's Note: Thanks for your story Dr. Rush. I applaud your adventurous spirit and ability to "Pull it off." Although I got to Rome for three days I never saw it as you did. I wish now I had.

\* \* \* \* \*

**AMERICAN RED CROSS SERVICE CLUB**  
**Foggia, Italy**



This was one of the Red Cross facilities where you could get coffee, donuts, cake and ice cream. They had a large message center where you could leave messages in an attempt to locate friends. Frank O'Bannon left a message for a P-38 pilot that was a friend of his brothers. A week or so later he showed up at Frank's tent. Frank said he didn't think to ask if he could get "checked out" in the P-38 he brought with him.

Editor's Note: Borrowed from the "Pathfinder" of the 459th Bomb Group



461ST BOMB GROUP (H) INC. REUNION  
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE  
Headquarters: Airport Marriott  
August 20-24, 1997

THIS WILL BE THE LAST YEAR FOR MAILING BROCHURES. BEGINNING IN 1998. INFORMATION WILL BE PUBLISHED IN THE LIBERAIDER IN LIEU OF INDIVIDUAL MAILINGS. This was voted on at the general meeting in Salt Lake City. This action is being taken due to increased printing and mailing costs.

Registrations will be numbered and dated upon receipt. CUT-OFF DATE FOR THE HOTEL IS 6 AUGUST 1997. Registrations received after that date may or may not be housed in the MARRIOTT but we will get you into another hotel nearby if possible. CANCELLATIONS MUST BE RECEIVED BY 13 AUGUST. Cancellations will be fully refundable (except the registration fee) unless MariMac has been required to obligate funds prior to receipt of cancellation.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Hotel rooms, banquet and tour space are restricted and will be handled on a FIRST COME-FIRST SERVED BASIS. We are holding 150 rooms on the peak nights (Friday and Saturday), and 100 rooms for Wednesday and Thursday. Please get your reservations in early in case we need to increase the room block. We hope to have 4-500 at this reunion, as it is more centrally located for all.

PARKING: Plenty of parking if you are driving.

AIRPORT TRANSFERS: Complimentary

ROOM COST: \$96.00 SINGLE OR DOUBLE, INCLUDING TAX OF 12.25%

RV PARKS: Opryland KOA, 2626 Music Valley Dr PH 800-833-6995

Holiday Park, 2572 Music Valley Dr PH 800-323-8899

The Marriott is approximately 6 miles from downtown and 6 miles from Opryland.

Experience the Old South at Belle Meade Plantation. This 1850s Greek Revival Mansion is surrounded by eight out buildings representing 100 years of history from the 1790 log cabin to the 1890 carriage house/stables. The restored mansion reflects the grandeur of a bygone era.

Cheekwood is Nashville's home of arts and gardens. Tour 55 breathtaking acres of gardens, lawns and forested hills, plus a mansion-turned-art museum. Exhibitions change regularly.

Chaffin's Barn Dinner Theatre has been bringing live entertainment to the Nashville area for 29 years. Doors open at 6:00 PM, dinner is served until 7:30 and the show starts at 8:00 PM.

The Hermitage is a National Historic Landmark. This fine Greek Revival home of our 7th President, Andrew Jackson stands on 625 acres of rolling woodland. Enjoy the garden created in 1819 by Rachel, his wife, with its Greek Revival monument marking the graves of the President and his wife. Nearby is the small Presbyterian church supported by Jackson and a cemetery containing the graves of nearly 500 Confederate veterans.

The Ryman Auditorium is the original home of the Grand Ole Opry, and is known as the Carnegie Hall of the South. During its rich history it has been used for religious revivals, variety acts such as W.C. Fields, Mae West and the Ziegfeld Follies, and performances by such notables as Will Rogers, Sarah Bernhardt and Helen Keller. The original oak pews have been preserved and there are memorabilia and photos of Opry notables such as Kitty Wells, Tex Ritter and Hank Snow along with life sized bronze statues of Minnie Pearl and Roy Acuff. This is a self-guided tour.

The Parthenon is the world's only full-scale reproduction of the famous Parthenon in Greece. The museum features both the Athena Parthenon, tallest indoor sculpture in the western world and the city's art museum. A must see for history and culture buffs.

The Grand Ole Opry is radio's longest running, regularly scheduled show. It hasn't missed a broadcast since it first took to the airwaves in 1925. Be a part of the live performance and share the music and memories of country's grandest show.

The Opryland Hotel is a truly unique property with almost 3000 sleeping rooms, over 20 places to eat, and 30 shops. There are 3 "interiorscapes;" the Conservatory, with 10,000 tropical plants; the Cascades, with a 12,500 square foot lake, a laser-accented Dancing Waters fountain and a 40-foot high mountain complete with plunging waterfalls; and the just completed Delta, with an 85-foot tall fountain, a sub-tropical garden, and, yes, a river runs through it.

We hope you will enjoy the optional tours we have selected for you.

PLEASE REMEMBER TO PAY FOR YOUR OPTIONS AND REGISTRATION BY CHECK. WE CAN ONLY ACCEPT CREDIT CARDS FOR THE HOTEL ROOMS.

Remember that there is a \$10.00 late fee for any tours or meals booked after arrival in Nashville, so book early and save!

SEE YOU IN NASHVILLE!

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Wed, 20 AUG Registration desk and hospitality suite open at  
Noon-5:00 12:00 noon. Complimentary coffee available in  
the hospitality suite.

5:30-11:00 Dinner theatre - Chaffin's Barn. The show is  
"Take My Wife." \$38.00 per person

Thu, 21 AUG City Tour - The Hermitage (Andrew Jackson's Home),  
9:00-3:00 the Parthenon, Ryman Auditorium. Lunch on your  
own. \$30.00 per person

4:00-5:00 PM Board Meeting

7:00 PM Squadron Dinners - \$27.00 per person

Fri 22 AUG Shuttle to the Opryland Hotel & enjoy the scenery,  
9:00-5:00 PM the shops, and lunch on you own at one of more than  
20 places to eat. Shuttle will operate all day.  
\$4.00 per person, round trip.

4:00-5:00 PM Annual Meeting

6:30-9:30 PM Grand Ole Opry performance. \$26.00 per person

Sat, 23 AUG Antebellum Homes Tour; Belle Meade & Cheekwood,  
8:30-12:30 two of Nashville's best. \$20.00 per person

6:30 PM Cash bar available prior to the dinner dance.

7:30 PM Annual banquet and dance. \$36.00 per person

Sun, 24 AUG Memorial Breakfast - \$16.50 per person  
8:00 AM

Sun, 24 AUG Cruise down the Cumberland River aboard the  
11:00-2:00 Gen Jackson, largest showboat in the world.  
Enjoy professional entertainment and a buffet  
lunch. \$40.00 per person

NOTE: SQUADRON DINNERS, BANQUET, & MEMORIAL BREAKFAST PRICES  
INCLUDE TAX AND GRATUITIES TOTALING 27.25 PERCENT.

A \$10.00 LATE FEE WILL BE ASSESSED FOR TOURS OR MEALS BOOKED AF-  
TER ARRIVAL IN NASHVILLE.

BE SURE TO WATCH THE BULLETIN BOARD AT THE REGISTRATION DESK  
FOR ACTUAL DEPARTURE TIMES FOR TOURS.

We will have a drawing of the banquet setup at the registration desk. Please bring  
tickets for all to be seated at your table. Table number will be written on your tickets.

461st BOMB GROUP (H) 1943-45, INC. REUNION  
20-24 AUGUST 1997  
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE  
Headquarters: NASHVILLE AIRPORT MARRIOTT

PLEASE FILL OUT AND MAIL THIS REGISTRATION FORM WITH CHECK TO:

461st Bomb Group, C/O The MariMac Corporation  
6790 E. Calle Dorado  
Tucson, AZ 85715

REGISTRATION FEE	_____	@ \$10.00	_____
	# of persons		Total Amount
CHAFFIN'S BARN	_____	@ \$38.00	_____
Wed, 20 AUG	# of Persons		Total Amount
CITY TOUR	_____	@ \$30.00	_____
Thu, 21 AUG	# of Persons		Total Amount
SQUADRON DINNER	_____	@ \$27.00	_____
Thu, 21 AUG	# of Persons		Total Amount
OPRYLAND HOTEL	_____	@ \$4.00	_____
Fri, 22 AUG	# of Persons		Total Amount
GRAND OLE OPRY	_____	@ \$26.00	_____
Fri, 22 AUG	# of Persons		Total Amount
ANTEBELLUM HOMES	_____	@ \$20. 00	_____
Sat. 23 AUG	# of persons		Total Amount
BANQUET & DANCE	_____	@ \$36.00	_____
Sat, 23 AUG	# of Persons		Total Amount
MEMORIAL BREAKFAST	_____	@ \$16.50	_____
Sun, 24 AUG	# of Persons		Total Amount
GEN JACKSON CRUISE	_____	@ \$40.00	_____
Sun, 24 AUG	# of Persons		Total Amount

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ SQUADRON \_\_\_\_\_  
(AS YOU WANT IT ON YOUR NAME TAG)

SPOUSE \_\_\_\_\_ CHILDREN/GUEST \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_ CITY \_\_\_\_\_

STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

ARRIVAL DATE \_\_\_\_\_ DEPARTURE DATE \_\_\_\_\_

FORM OF PAYMENT FOR HOTEL \_\_\_\_\_

Check or Credit Card Name, No., Expires \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL AMOUNT SUBMITTED BY CHECK: \_\_\_\_\_

TAPS  
MAY THEY REST IN PEACE FOREVER

November 1996—June 1997

SQ	Name	Hometown	MOS	Date of Death
764	Gotham, John E.	Dunedin, FL	748	14 July 1996
	McNaught, Ansel B.	Mifflintown, PA	757	12 Dec 1996
	Robbins, Burney	Pleasanton, TX	754	27 June
	Sawyer, Gene L.	Trenton, MO	612	31 Oct 1995
765	Bindrim, Arthur L.	Ft. Meyers, FL	1034	1996
	Clifton, Hubert N.	Lexa, AR	590	27 June 1991
	Molyneux, Robert L.	Dansville, NY	748	14 June 1995
766	James, Albert C.	Dillard, GA	1092	24 Feb 1997
767	Workman, Nathan T.	Ft. Worth, TX	309	30 Sept 1995

**COLONEL JOHN R. "KILLER" KANE**

**Dead at Age 89**

John R. "Killer" Kane, holder of the Congressional Medal of Honor for valor at Ploesti, was well known and respected in name and in person by the Eighth and the Fifteenth Air Forces' flying personnel who ever flew a mission east of the Danube River during World War II. With minimal navigation data, Colonel Kane led the formidable "low level" raid, August 1, 1943, on the oil refineries at Ploesti, Romania. Of the five Medals of Honor awarded for heroism at Ploesti, Kane is thought to be the only living person at the time of the award. (The others being awarded posthumously.) One of his quotations most remembered by those of us who frequently spoke of him is found in the introduction he wrote to the author of the book, DESERT RATS, by Michael Hill.

....." One of the few times I cried in my adult life was after that mission. I cried because of all the fine men we had lost that day and wondered if their sacrifice(s) had been worth it. Freedom always has a price, and we paid dearly at Ploesti."

He was not alone in shedding tears. Many of us have hard set, yet tender, empathy with Colonel Kane's reflections. He was reflecting on an experience in his life that we pray will never have to be relived by any other person in another generation. It is not enough for us to say of his passing, "Another page in history has been turned." For prodigious reasons, we will keep our history books open to that page long enough for our children and grandchildren to have ingrained in them the knowledge of, and to a great extent, the meaning of the prices that are paid for freedom. We will keep these memories alive. We remain guarded, alert, and well honed mentally in regard to "The Worth of Freedom".

Colonel John R. Kane died on May 29 at the Veterans Administration Nursing Home in Coatesville, PA. Colonel Kane, who was known to his men as "Killer Kane", won the Medal of Honor in WWII for his role in leading a force of 98th Bomb Group B-24s in an attack against the Ploesti oil fields. ***Rest in honored glory.***

Editor's Note: Copied in part from the February, 1997 newsletter of the Association of Former Prisoners of War in Romania.

**Men Returning From Detached Service**

**November 1996 - June 1997**

764	Garrod, Robert D., 5337 Cortez Dt., Cape Coral, FL 33904-5879
	Piatt, James W., Jr., 2902 4th Street, Richmond, VA 23223



## HISTORY OF THE 461ST BOMB

### CHAPTER XIV

### WAR DEPARTMENT UNIT CITATION - NOVEMBER, 1944

#### (A) Narrative History

The outstanding event of the month of November for all members of the Group was the awarding of a War Department Unit Citation to the Group by Major General Nathan F. Twining, Commanding General of the Fifteenth Air Force, on 6 November 1944.

HEADQUARTERS  
FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE  
APO 520

GENERAL ORDERS)  
NUMBER 4115 )

23 October 1944

Citation of Unit . . . . . I

#### SECTION I - - CITATION OF UNIT.

Under the provisions of Circular No. 3 3 3, War Department, 1943, and Circular No. 89, NATOUSA, 10 July 1944, the following unit is cited for outstanding performance of duty in armed conflict with the enemy:

461ST BOMBARDMENT GROUP. For outstanding performance of duty in armed conflict with the enemy. On 12 April 1944, the Group was assigned the task of preparing maximum aircraft for an attack on the Duna Repulogepgyar Aircraft Components Plant at Budapest, Hungary. The successful destruction of this aircraft factory would greatly reduce the output of enemy aircraft that were sorely needed by the hard pressed air force. Realizing the importance of this mission and the extreme hazards to be encountered on this operation, the ground crews worked arduously and enthusiastically to have their aircraft in the best mechanical condition to insure the success of this attack. On 13 April 1944, thirty-eight (38), heavily loaded B-24 type aircraft were airborne and set course for their destination. Despite severe and adverse weather conditions encountered en route, they maintained their compact formation and proceeded to the target. Deep within hostile territory, the Group, then unescorted by friendly fighters, was viciously attacked by aggressive waves of persistent enemy fighters, firing rockets, cannon and machine guns, in a desperate effort to break up and destroy the formation before it reached its vital objective. Under continued heavy attacks from enemy fighters, together with intense, heavy and accurate anti-aircraft fire encountered over the target, displaying outstanding courage and determination, the gallant crews maintained their tight formation and battled their way through the enemy defenses. Though their aircraft sustained severe damage from enemy fire, with outstanding airmanship they accomplished a highly successful bombing run, with the entire tonnage of bombs from the Group concentrated in the immediate target area. Numerous direct hits were scored on the seven (7) factory buildings composing the complex, with incalculable severe damage being inflicted from blast and near misses. Through their highly effective defensive fire, together with their superior ability to hold a compact formation under such heavy opposition, the Group was able to destroy three (3) enemy aircraft and probably destroyed three (3), while their own loss was held to a minimum of three (3) bombers. The tremendous material damage inflicted by the Group on this vital enemy target, contributed greatly to the curtailment of the enemy's aircraft production at a most critical time. By the conspicuous gallantry, determination and professional skill of the combat crews, together with the superior technical skill and devotion to duty of the ground personnel, the 461st Bombardment Group has reflected great credit upon itself and the Armed Forces of the United States of America.

By command of Major General TWINING

*(Continued on page 25)*

*(Continued from page 24)*

Only a very few of the combat crew personnel who flew the mission on which the citation was earned on 13 April 1944 or who were members of the Group at that time were still members of the Group on 6 November when the citation was presented. But almost all the original ground personnel were on the Base for the occasion. Despite the fact that there was a "double header" mission that day, many of these ground personnel were in the formation for the presentation,

As these officers and men took their places and performed their parts in the ceremonies there were memories of other days and places and of flying personnel no longer with the Group. Memories of Gowen Field, where the original Group cadre was organized; of the humidity of Orlando, Florida, and the mosquitoes and afternoon rains of Pinecastle, where the air echelon of the original cadre received its first training as a Group; of the strict regulations and the good food at the Kearns Basic Training Center, where the original cadre of the ground echelon was stationed for its first training with the Group; of the salt flats of isolated Wendover; of the morning fogs of Hammer Field; of the embarkation from Camp Patrick Henry; of a long boat ride across the Atlantic and the Mediterranean; of the cold marble halls of the Collegio Constanzio Ciano; of the jaunt across Italy in "40 and 8" cars; of the various experiences of the off-loaded air echelon at Morrison Field; of the winter mud of Oudna; of the multiplicity of difficulties, problems, and hardships of establishing a base at Torretta; of the many handicaps of the training program in March; of the pride with which all had watched the 461st climb to the top of the Fifteenth Air Force in bombing accuracy; of the planning, excitement, and hustle of missions' preparations; of the long drone and suspense of take-offs for missions; of formations of planes flying majestically over the field to peel off for landing at the conclusion of missions; of planes straggling back from rough targets; of red flares from returning planes on the final approach to the field, signaling wounded men aboard or an emergency landing; of flares from the tower to pilots who were fighting for a more favorable position on the final approach to the field because their planes were low on gas; of planes stopping on the taxi strips from which wounded men were transferred to ambulances; of combat mission experiences told by crew members at interrogation and in the mess halls, clubs, and tents; of hundreds of flying officers and men who had been killed or wounded or who were prisoners of war or were missing in action or had finally returned from enemy occupied territory to go back to the United States; of other hundreds of flying personnel who had finished their missions and had gone home; of Major Burke, who had led the Budapest mission and was now missing in action; and of Colonel Glantzberg, who had trained this proud Group, brought it overseas, led it to superior achievements, and was now gone home.

All polished and pressed, they made an excellent appearance as, led by the Fifteenth Air Force Band, they passed in review for the Major General in their first military formation since coming overseas. But these ground personnel were not the only ones at the presentation ceremonies. Their ranks were greatly enlarged by the presence of hundreds of replacement flying officers and men who were proud to be assigned to be members of the 461st Group and to pass in review as members of the Group for the Commanding General of the Fifteenth Air Force. Then, too, the 484th Group, with which the 461st had shared the Base since April, was also receiving a Unit Citation. On the ground, as in the air, the two Groups were still together in formation.

There in the front rank was the Commanding General of the Fifteenth Air Force, Major General Nathan F. Twining, to make the award and decorate the colors. In the reviewing party with the General was Colonel William L. Lee, the 49th Wing Commanding Officer; Lieutenant Colonel Hawes, the Commanding Officer of the 461st Group, who had been a member of the Group for a year; Lieutenant Colonel Busch, Deputy Commanding Officer of the 484th Group; and the staff officers of each Group. Out on the parade grounds were the Deputy Group Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Lawhon, who was acting Wing Commander of troops; Lieutenant Colonel Grogan, who was the Group Commander of Troops; and Major Scott, who published the orders.

On 2 November Miss Betsy Workman, the American Red Cross Clubmobile Staff Assistant, was assigned to another base. Her place with the 461st was taken by Miss Josephine L. Ryan of Seattle, Washington. "Jo" was quickly accepted by the men and officers as a member in good standing with the Group. She managed the improvement and winterization of her doughnut and coffee dispensing facilities, smiled the engineers into graveling the approach to her headquarters; and set up a twenty-four hour coffee dispensing service for the men who worked nights on the line.

*(Continued on page 26)*

*(Continued from page 25)*

On 10 November Lieutenant Colonel Hawes and Major Donovan, with a crew made up of individuals selected from various combat crews, flew a cargo mission to the United Kingdom for the Fifteenth Air Force Headquarters. Due to unexpected difficulties encountered on the trip, they were gone several days from their respective commands. When the Group Commander returned to the Base he learned of his promotion to the rank of full colonel.

Late in November Master Sergeant William E. Schiffermiller was discharged from the Army to accept a battle appointment as second lieutenant effective 1 December 1944. Master Sergeant Schiffermiller had been a tail gunner on a crew that came overseas with the 98th Bombardment Group. After completing a tour of duty in Africa with that Group in 1942/43, he was returned to the United States where he was eventually assigned as a tail gunner on a combat crew of the 461st Group. After flying approximately one half of the number of missions required to complete a tour of duty with this Group, he was removed from his crew to become the Group Gunnery Officer. His outstanding record as a tail gunner with the two heavy bombardment groups, his accomplishments as an instructor in gunnery, and his development of a fire control system, which was accepted by the Fifteenth Air Force for use in all B-24 Groups in the Air Force, earned for him this battle appointment. He became the first enlisted man in this Group ever to receive a battle commission.

On 5 November Company L, a 366th Infantry Detachment (colored) of the 3rd Battalion, moved from the Base at Torretta. Under the command of Captain Lloyd R. Riley, members of this Company had served from 6 May to 5 November inclusive as a security detachment for the Group in such a manner as to reflect a great deal of credit upon themselves and their commanding officer.

## **(B) Operations**

The month of November saw two squadron commanders, Major Edwin T. Goree and Major Harrison G. Word, complete a tour of duty in the Mediterranean Theatre of Operations and return to the United States. It also saw several innovations prescribed by the Fifteenth Air Force in an effort to negate bad flying weather and to impose the will of the United Nations upon the enemy.

Realizing that bad flying conditions would hamper formation flying by comparatively large numbers of planes, the Air Force continued to employ the practice of assigning two missions for a single day, each of which was flown by a reduced force. This procedure necessitated the planning, briefing, and reporting of two missions on the same day and frequently called for two different bomb loads. To execute new tactics the pathfinder airplanes were equipped with de-icer boots and sent out individually in small numbers to bomb targets from above a complete undercast on days when the bad weather prohibited formation flying. Pathfinder airplanes were also dispatched individually to bomb targets at night above a complete undercast.

To the RDX, the incendiary, and the frag cluster bombs, which had been used by the Groups in the past, were added three new modifications or types of bombs. (1) On several missions during the month some of the bombs in the load were fused with delay action fuses from six to seventy-two hours; (2) Screamers were fastened to the bombs that were used on two different missions; and (3) Propaganda leaflets were dropped on certain missions in an additional bomb which was added to the load.

The bombing accuracy of the Group for the month of November was seldom scored by the Air Force because of the limited number of missions on which the Group bombed visually. From an average score of 63.4 with which the Group had ranked fourth in the Air Force for October, the bombing accuracy dropped in November to 31.4 and the Group to tenth position in the Air Force.

In flying nineteen missions during the month the crewmembers amassed a total of 2663 combat hours. Of the 421 planes that were airborne, there were 47 early returns but none of these were returned by weather. The Group dropped 500.1 tons of bombs on targets, lost seven airplanes, had eight battle fatalities, twelve com-

*(Continued on page 27)*

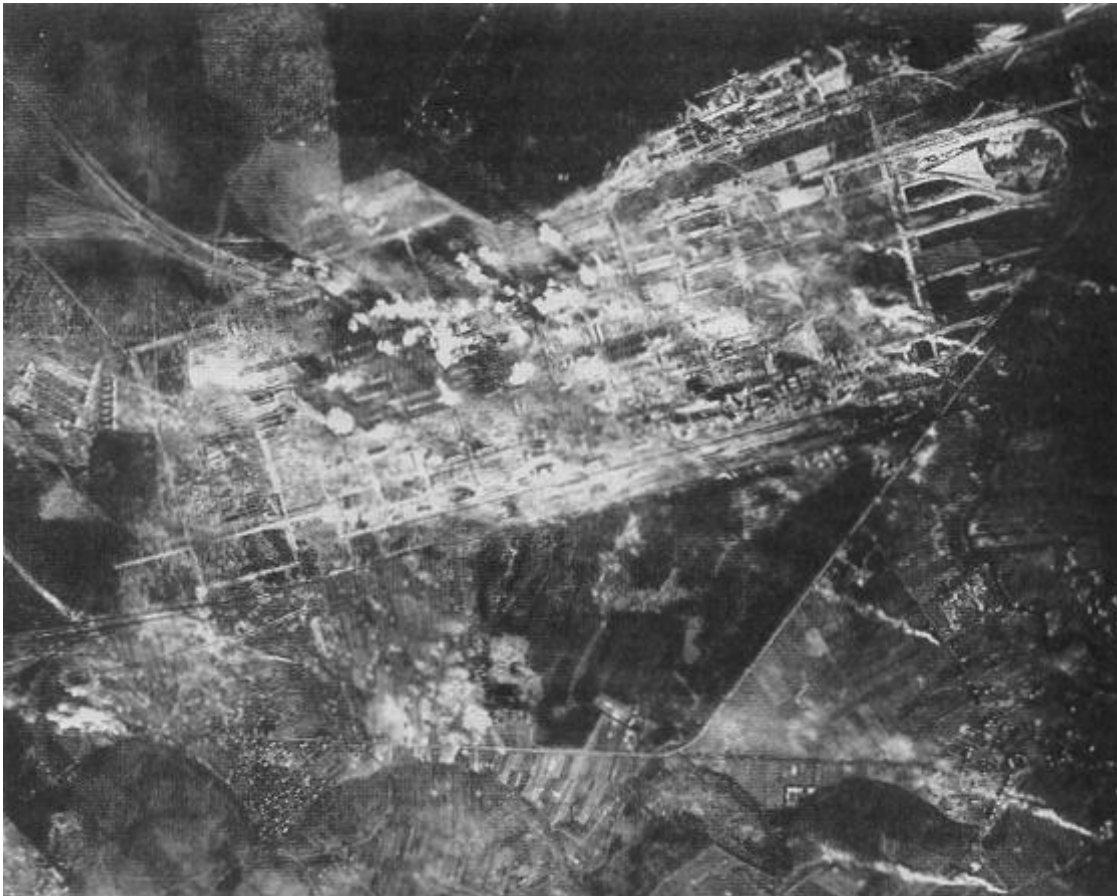
(Continued from page 26)

bat crew members wounded, and a total of sixty-four officers and men missing in action. In the only encounter of the month with enemy fighters the Group destroyed one, probably destroyed another, and damaged four.

A total of twenty-two new crews were received during the month of November.

764th Squadron	765th Squadron	766th Squadron	767th Squadron
2nd Lt. James G. Taylor	2nd Lt. Arthur L. Hughes	2nd Lt. Joseph M. O'Neal	2nd Lt. Robert E. Harrison
2nd Lt. Kenneth B. Smith	2nd Lt. Robert S. Staples	2nd Lt. Roger Nixon	2nd Lt. Thomas P. Villing
2nd Lt. Raymon E. Spehalski	2nd Lt. John C. Stegeman	2nd Lt. Robert M. Barnhart	2nd Lt. Frederick B. Capalbo
2nd Lt. Neal Clay, Jr.	2nd Lt. James R. Yancy	2nd Lt. Thomas N. Merkouris	2nd Lt. Doyle R. Langley
2nd Lt. Thomas B. Lightbody	2nd Lt. Earl R. St. John	2nd Lt. Robert K. Coats	2nd Lt. James H. Schultz
2nd Lt. Marion C. Sargent			2nd Lt. Joseph C. Kuestersteffen

\* \* \* \* \*



**Mission No. 138 - Blechhammer South Synthetic Oil Refinery, Germany. See write-up on page 31**



## MISSIONS

### Mission No. 123

**1 November 1944**

#### **Target: Graz Marshalling Yards, Austria**

The primary target for the first mission in November was the South Ordnance Depot at Vienna, Austria. The thick layers of clouds that had been encountered over Italy and over the Adriatic practically dissipated over Yugoslavia. Atmospheric conditions were such over the Alps, however, that extreme haze and vapor trails reduced visibility to one mile. Under these conditions the third alternate, the marshalling yard at Graz, Austria, was selected for the attack. Bombing was done by the pathfinder method. On the bomb run the "mickey set" was hit by flak and rendered practically useless. The photographs, which are not very clear because of haze and clouds, reveal that the target was not hit. Seven of the airplanes of the Group became separated from the formation and bombed the marshalling yard at Liebing, Austria, with unobserved results. Returning crews brought with them a healthy respect for the flak at Graz that had holed nine of the airplanes over the target.

### Mission No. 124

**3 November 1944**

#### **Target: Herman Goering Benzol Plant, Linz, Austria**

Cancelled

### Mission No. 124

**3 November 1944**

#### **Target: Klagenfurt Aircraft Factory, Austria**

A "double header" mission was planned for 3 November but because of the weather the large force was stood down. Mission No. 124, flown that day, was the first of the individual airplane missions to be flown by this Group. Beginning at 1122 hours four planes took off at one-minute intervals to bomb the aircraft factory at Klagenfurt, Austria. The airplane commanders on each of the planes were Lt. Colonel Hawes, Major Goree, Captain Mixson, and Captain Roberts. The weather at the target was ten-tenths un-

dercast as briefed. Each plane dropped its bombs by the pathfinder method and returned safely to Base. The planes ran into clear icing conditions on this mission. Had the plane in which Captain Mixson was riding as co-pilot been flown by a pilot and co-pilot not accustomed to flying in icing conditions, it probably would have spun in over the Adriatic. As it was, Captain Mixson's full year of experiences while on anti-submarine patrol stood him in good stead.

### Mission No. 125

**4 November 1944**

#### **Target: Augsburg Marshalling Yard, Germany**

On 4 November Major Word led a large formation through spotty weather to attack a marshalling yard at Augsburg, Germany. The weather on take-off and over Yugoslavia was bad, but over the Alps it was CAVU. As the formation approached the target area, unfortunately, it was discovered that the target was completely obscured by a ten-tenths cloud coverage. Bombs were dropped by pathfinder method with unobserved results.

### Mission No. 126

**5 November 1944**

#### **Target: Florisdorf Oil Refinery, Vienna, Austria**

Another "double header" was flown on 5 November. One formation, led by Major Donovan, attacked the Florisdorf Oil Refinery at Vienna, Austria. Again the bombing was done by the pathfinder method and again the results were unobserved. Of the twenty-five single engine enemy fighters which made one pass at the formation between Lake Balaton and the target, one was destroyed, one probably destroyed, and four damaged. Damage due to flak over the target was extremely light for the Vienna area.

### Mission No. 127

**5 November 1944**

#### **Target: Ali Pasin Most Marshalling Yard near Sarajevo, Yugoslavia**

The second half of the "double header" of 5 Novem-

*(Continued on page 29)*



(Continued from page 28)

ber provided Lt. Colonel Hardy with his first opportunity to lead a Group formation on a combat mission. The target was the Ali Pasin Most Marshalling Yard near Sarajevo, Yugoslavia. Clearing weather over the Adriatic gave the crewmembers hopes of being able to see their target when they arrived in Yugoslavia. They felt confident of being able to do this when they reached landfall across the Adriatic. As they approached the target, however, a large cloud formation appeared over the target. Lt. Colonel Hardy did a 360-degree turn and led his small formation around the edges of the cloud cover but was unable to find an opening through which to attack the target.

**Mission No. 128**  
**6 November 1944**

**Target: Power Sub Stations, Bolzano, Italy**

Another "double header" mission on 6 November. Captain Mixson led the smaller formation against the power sub stations at Bolzano, Italy. Despite the haze and the extremely intense, heavy flak, the score of this mission was 49 percent. Eight of the thirteen planes over the target were hit by flak that killed two individuals and wounded a third. The dead, Sergeant Don R. Trail and Second Lieutenant Doc W. Roberts, were in two different airplanes.

**Mission No. 129**  
**6 November 1944**

**Target: South Ordnance Depot, Vienna, Austria**

The larger of the two formations which flew a mission on 6 November had as its primary target, the Vosendorf Oil Refinery at Vienna, Austria. Bombing through a solid undercast the mickey operators selected the South Ordnance depot as the target for the attack. Five enemy airplanes were seen in the Lake Balaton area but there were no encounters. Flak at the target was extremely rough for a cloudy day. The formation was led by Major Goree who completed his tour of duty on this mission. Of the four officers who were the squadron commanders on 2 April 1944 when the Group flew its first combat mission Major Goree was the only one to complete a tour of duty with this Group. He was also the first squadron commander in the Group ever to complete a tour of duty. (Lt. Colonel Knapp, Lt. Colonel

Applegate, and Major Dooley were all transferred to the 451st Group before completing their tour of duty.)

**Mission No. 130**  
**7 November 1944**

**Target: Ali Pasin Most Marshalling Yard near Sarajevo, Yugoslavia**

The target for Mission 130 of 7 November was the Ali Pasin Most Marshalling Yard near Sarajevo, Yugoslavia. This target was of high priority at the time it was attacked because of the use the Germans were making of it in their withdrawal from Greece. Because of the military importance of the target and because of the fact the target was bombed visually, it was a great disappointment to the Group to almost completely miss it. The intense, accurate, and heavy flak defending this target hit sixteen of the twenty-four planes in the formation and wounded one man.

**Damage Assessment Report**

HEADQUARTERS FORTY NINTH BOMB WING  
APO 520

16 November 1944

SUBJECT: Attack on Sarajevo of 7 November 1944

To: S-2, 45 1 st Bomb Group  
S-2, 461st Bomb Group  
S-2, 484th Bomb Group

1. "For your information: Following is a report received from ground sources on results of the attack on Sarajevo, 7 November:

"Sarajevo arms repair work shops, gas works, engine house, railway works shop destroyed or severely damaged. At Ali Pasin Most Railway repair shop, six locomotives destroyed and station installations heavily damaged. On road between Derventa, and Doboje, three locomotives and one armored train destroyed. Casualties at Sarajevo high with the First Ustachi Regimented wiped out."

**Mission No. 131**  
**10 November 1944**

**Target: Herman Goering Benzol Plant, Linz, Austria**

Cancelled

(Continued on page 30)

(Continued from page 29)

**Mission No. 131**  
**11 November 1944**

**Target: Sillian Highway Bridge, Austria**

Another "double header" was assigned for 11 November but only one of the formations got off. This one was led by Major Word, who was pressing to complete his tour of duty. The primary target was the benzol plant at Linz, Austria. Bad weather made it impossible to reach the target. Major Word swung the formation around and began looking for a target of opportunity to bomb visually. The only target which could be found was a highway bridge at Sillian, Austria, which was bombed through an eight-tenths undercast with unobserved results.

**Mission No. 132**  
**11 November 1944**

**Target: Isarco/Albes Railroad Bridge, Italy**

Cancelled

**Mission No. 132**  
**12 November 1944**

**Target: Herman Goering Benzol Plant, Linz, Austria**

Cancelled

**Mission No. 132**  
**13 November 1944**

**Target: Osterrieichische Automobifabrics, Vienna, Austria**

Cancelled

**Mission No. 132**  
**14 November 1944**

**Target: Southeast Goods Depot, Vienna, Austria**

Cancelled

**Mission No. 132**  
**15 November 1944**

**Target: Innsbruck Main Marshalling Yard, Austria**

Mission No. 132 on 15 November was flown by four individual airplanes against the main marshalling yard at Innsbruck, Austria. The loss of the plane flown by Lieutenant Beatty on this mission was both the first plane lost to combat during the month and also the first plane ever to be lost by the Group on this type of mission. Nothing was heard or seen of this plane after it took off, but it is believed to have iced up.

**Mission No. 133**  
**16 November 1944**

**Target: West Marshalling Yards, Munich, Germany**

Mission No. 133 that was led by Lt. Colonel Lawhon on 16 November with the West Marshalling Yard at Munich as the primary target served to demonstrate again that an almost unlimited number of variables and one seemingly unimportant little mistake can completely ruin a mission for a whole formation. After the planes were on their bomb run the nose turret navigator in the lead plane, while moving around in his heavy flying clothes, accidentally hit a switch with his shoulder and released the bombs. All the other bombardiers in the formation toggled their bombs, as briefed, on the lead plane. Knowing that all the bombs in the formation were away, Lt. Colonel Lawhon pulled the formation off the bomb run to avoid unnecessarily going over the heavy flak at Munich.

**Mission No. 134**  
**17 November 1944**

**Target: Florisdorf Oil Refinery, Vienna, Austria**

Another "double header" on 17 November. Major Word became the second squadron commander in the Group to complete a tour of duty by leading the smaller of the two formations of the day in attacking the Florisdorf Oil Refinery at Vienna. The ten-tenths undercast necessitated instrument bombing with unobserved results and probably also reduced the accuracy of the enemy flak over the target.

**Mission No. 135**  
**17 November 1944**

**Target: Blechhammer South Synthetic Oil Refinery, Germany**

(Continued on page 31)

(Continued from page 30)

The other half of the "double header" of November 17th saw the larger of the two formations of the day led by Lt. Colonel Lawhon. The solid undercast that had been experienced earlier in the day by the formation over Vienna also prevailed over the South Synthetic Oil Refinery at Blechhammer, Germany. More pathfinder bombing with unobserved results.

**Mission No. 136**  
**18 November 1944**

**Target: Villafranca Airdromes, Italy**

Good weather and good bombing marked the 136th mission of the Group which was a frag job against the Villafranca Airdrome in Italy. A large formation of forty planes was led by Major Rider. Three well concentrated patterns hit at least twelve enemy air-planes on the ground and started several small fires

in revetments.

**Mission No. 137**  
**19 November 1944**

**Target: Vosendorf Oil Refinery, Vienna, Austria**

On 19 November Captain Roberts, the 766th Operations Officer, led the Group formation in attacking the Vosendorf Oil Refinery at Vienna, Austria. This was the first time a formation of the 461st Group had ever been led by a squadron operations officer. Despite the nine-tenth undercast which necessitated pathfinder bombing the flak was extremely accurate. Eight of the twenty-six planes over the target were hard hit by flak, one was lost, one man was killed, and another was wounded. The plane that was lost was flown by 2nd Lt. Arthur E. Farham Jr. The man fatally wounded was Staff Sergeant Charles V. Rentschler.

**COMMENDATION**

From: Lee, CO 49th Bomb Wg.

To: Commanding Officer, 461st Bombardment Group.

"The following teletype is quoted for your information. With pride I pass to you and your officers and men the following cable from General Arnold:

"Fifteenth Air Force operations from 16 through 19 November 1944 have been noted with appreciative interest. Worthy of commendation is the sustained effort on successive days. Convey to all members of your command participating my heartiest appreciation for a job well done. The ground maintenance crews in particular should be most emphatically informed that their untiring efforts are most deeply appreciated not only by air crews but by all members of higher echelons, especially myself. The AAF is indeed proud of the men on her ground crews who made possible each new air success."

**Mission No. 138**  
**20 November 1944**

**Target: Blechhammer South Synthetic Oil Refinery, Germany**

On 20 November Lt. Colonel Lawhon, flying more than his share of the missions through bad weather due to the absence of Colonel Hawes and Major Donovan, led the Group and the wing in attacking the South Synthetic Oil refinery at Blechhammer, Germany. This was the fifth mission to be flown by this Group against a Blechhammer target. It proved to be the first time the combat crews had ever seen the target. Weather over the target was CAVU. The smoke screens, which had always completely ob-

scured this target on all previous missions by this Group, were ineffective. It may have been the enemy was slow in getting the screen started, but observations reveal that a strong surface wind was blowing the smoke away from the target. The radio monitor picked up enemy fighters in the area but none were seen.

Swinging northward off the briefed course to avoid a clouded area and maneuvering the Wing formation in a superior manner in a desperate effort not to permit an opportunity to really hit a Blechhammer plant fail him at the last moment, Lt. Colonel Lawhon ran into a great deal of flak but brought the Group formation straight across the target. Many of the bombs in the

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(Continued from page 31)

first attack unit of the Group fell northwest of the target, but those of the second attack unit really struck home. The bombs fell in the center of the target scoring many direct hits and near misses on vital installations. The boiler house received hits and near misses as did the sulphur removal plant and the gas generating plant. Other installations receiving hits, the north rejector house, the coal gas plant, and the cooling towers. The marshalling yard on the east edge of the refinery was also hit. See photo on page 27.

The mission was highly successful but costly. Twenty-three of the twenty-six planes over the target were hit by flak. On the return route both 2nd Lt. Robert A. Crinkley and 2nd Lt. Arthur L. Hughes bailed their crews out over Yugoslavia. 2nd Lt.

Charles F. Krahn and four other members of his eleven man crew were lost when he ran out of fuel and was compelled to ditch the plane but a short distance off the Italian coast in the Adriatic.

**Mission No. 139**  
**21 November 1944**

**Target: Troop Concentrations West of Novi Pazar, Yugoslavia**

Poor visibility and flak at unexpected places interfered with a two flight frag formation led by Captain Mixson against German troop concentrations in Yugoslavia on 21 November 1944. Photographs show that the bombs fell across the railroad tracks and the highway three miles southeast of Cacak.

**COMMENDATION**

From: Lee, CO 49th Bomb Wg.

To: Commanding Officer, 461st Bombardment Group.

"The following message received from General Spaatz, forwarded from General Twining, is passed on to you for your information: 'Highly gratified at the excellent progress you are making in bombing under adverse weather conditions by day and by night.'"

**Mission No. 140**  
**22 November 1944**

**Target: West Marshalling Yard, Munich, Germany**

In attacking the West Marshalling Yard at Munich on 22 November, Major Rider, leading the formation, proved himself a real formation leader. On the way over the Alps en route to the target the Group, flying behind the 451st that was being led by Colonel Knapp, ran into a deck of cirrus with bases at 20,000 and tops at 28,000 feet. As they approached the target the cloudiness increased. Far short of the target the pilots were compelled to fly formation on instruments. Over the target the cirrus was ten-tenths, but Major Rider kept the whole formation together and brought it back over the Alps through weather as bad as that over the target. The bombing, of course, was done by instruments with unobserved results.

One plane in the formation rammed its nose turret into the tail turret of the plane ahead. No one was hurt but both turrets were destroyed. Leaks in the fuel lines, which were caused by flak, compelled 2nd Lt. Thomas D. Welton to bail his crew out south of the bomb line in Italy.

**Mission No. 141**  
**23 November 1944**

**Target: Troop Concentrations at Novi, Pazar, Prijepolje, and Visegrad, Yugoslavia**

Cancelled

**Mission No. 141**  
**24 November 1944**

**Target: West Marshalling Yard, Munich, Germany**

Cancelled

**Mission No. 141**  
**25 November 1944**

**Target: West Marshalling Yard, Munich, Germany**

For the last mission of the month, which was flown on 25 November, the Group went back again to the

(Continued on page 33)

(Continued from page 32)

west Marshalling Yard at Munich, Germany. This, however, was a night mission, the first one ever to be flown by the Group. The three individual planes on the mission were piloted by Lt. Barnes, Lt. Hess, and Lt. Miller. Two of the planes, feeling that the nine-tenths cloud coverage in the target area warranted them sufficient protection against possible enemy fighters and searchlights, bombed the marshalling yard by the pathfinder method. The third plane, flown by Lt. Barnes, developed oxygen leaks which necessitated the bombing of Haiming, Austria, as a target of opportunity.

**Mission No. 142**  
**27 November 1944**

**Target: Brux Synthetic Oil Refinery, Czechoslovakia**

Cancelled

**Mission No. 142**  
**30 November 1944**

**Target: Main Marshalling Yard, Innsbruck, Austria**

Cancelled

HEADQUARTERS  
49TH BOMBARDMENT WING (H)  
A.P.O. 520, U.S. ARMY

SUBJECT: Commendation 14 November 1944  
TO: Sergeant Francis M. Wheeler, 39311909, 461st Bomb Group (H), A.P.O. 520, U. S. Army  
THRU: Commanding Officer, 461st Bomb Group (H), A.P.O. 520, U.S. Army

1. Sergeant Francis M. Wheeler, 39311909, 461st Bombardment Group (H), A.P.O. 520, U.S. Army, is commended for exceptionally meritorious achievement and service in support of combat operations against the enemy.

2. During the period of June 1944 to November 1944, Sergeant Wheeler manufactured parts and accessories to aid in the training of aerial gunners on "Position Firing", with parts taken from wrecked airplanes. He worked hard and long in designing for the Martin upper turret and electrically controlled systems of lights, mirrors reflectors, cams, rollers, cables and miniature airplanes to give gunnery students training in tracking fighter airplanes attacking bomber formations. Students now have training in necessary leads required to shoot down fighters attacking from zero to ninety degrees deflection. Sergeant Wheeler has made it possible to attract the students attention at all times during their training by having this arrangement record hits by the student on the fighter, or the simulated fighter return fire on the bombers.

3. By his outstanding professional skill and devotion to duty in manufacturing and installing this device, which is now being used by all Groups of this Wing, Sergeant Wheeler has reflected great credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of the United States of America.

/s/ WILLIAM L. LEE  
Colonel, Air Corps

TO: Sergeant Francis M. Wheeler, 39311909, 461st Bomb Group (H), APO 520, US Army

1. By your untiring efforts and devotion to duty you have reflected great credit upon the 461st Bomb Group as well as upon yourself. Therefore it is with great pleasure that this commendation is forwarded to you.

/s/ BROOKS A. LAWHON  
Lt. Col., Air Corps



## (D) Changes in Personnel

In late October ten officers had returned to the Group from rotation to the United States. In early November an additional eight officers were reassigned to the Group on the same basis as follows: Captain Edward F. Veiluva, who very shortly became the Operations Officer of the 764th Squadron; 1st Lt. Paul A. Dietrick, who became the 765th Squadron Navigator; 1st Lt. Eugene P. Ford, who became a flight leader pilot; 1st Lt. Robert M. Hacker, who became a flight leader bombardier; 1st Lt. Paul M. Kuric, who became a flight leader navigator; 1st Lt. Thomas J. Lightbody, who became a flight leader pilot; and 1st Lt. Verlin A. Rhodes, who became a flight leader navigator.

By 1 November 1st Lt. Jack R. Cody had returned to the Group after having been to the United States to attend a flexible gunnery school at Laredo, Texas. A few days after his return he was assigned to the 765th Squadron where he became fire control officer,

On 2 November the following orders were cut on 1st Lt. Hanley M. Norins: Paragraph 5 of Group Special Orders No. 141 -- "1ST LT NORINS, HANLEY M., 0-2044554, is hereby rel'd fr asgd to Hq 461st Bomb Gp (H) and is trfd to Hq USSTAF, WP w/d RUAT CG for dy. Travel via mil, naval or comm a/c or govt mtr T is auth." He was replaced by 1st Lt. John Trommershausser as Flight Control Officer and as Tactical Air Inspector.

On 4 November Major Francis J. Hoermann, the 765th Squadron Operations Officer, belatedly followed Lieutenant Colonel Knapp, Lieutenant Colonel Applegate, and Major Dooley to the 451st Bombardment Group where he became Group Operations Officer.

On 6 November Captain Sydney S. Spivak, who had been on detached service for some time to Headquarters of the Mediterranean Theater of Operations, was transferred to that organization.

For purposes of training as Group Navigator, 1st Lt. Steve Toth Jr. was moved to Group Headquarters from the 765th Squadron, first on detached service for an indefinite period, and later on transfer orders.

On 11 November Captain Marion C. Mixson, one of the original flight leaders of the Group who had but recently returned again to the Group on a rotation basis from the United States, was transferred to the 766th Squadron. Later in the month he replaced Major Goree as the commanding officer of that Squadron.

On 26 November 1st Lt. Robert F. Phalen was placed on detached service from the 766th Squadron to be the Group Radar Navigator.

Captain Charles R. Phillips, the Assistant Group Operations Officer, was transferred on 27 November to the 766th Squadron where he replaced Major Word as the squadron commander. Captain Frank M. Poole, but recently assigned to the Group by the 49th Wing, replaced Captain Phillips as Assistant Group Operations Officer.

### Ship Ahoy!

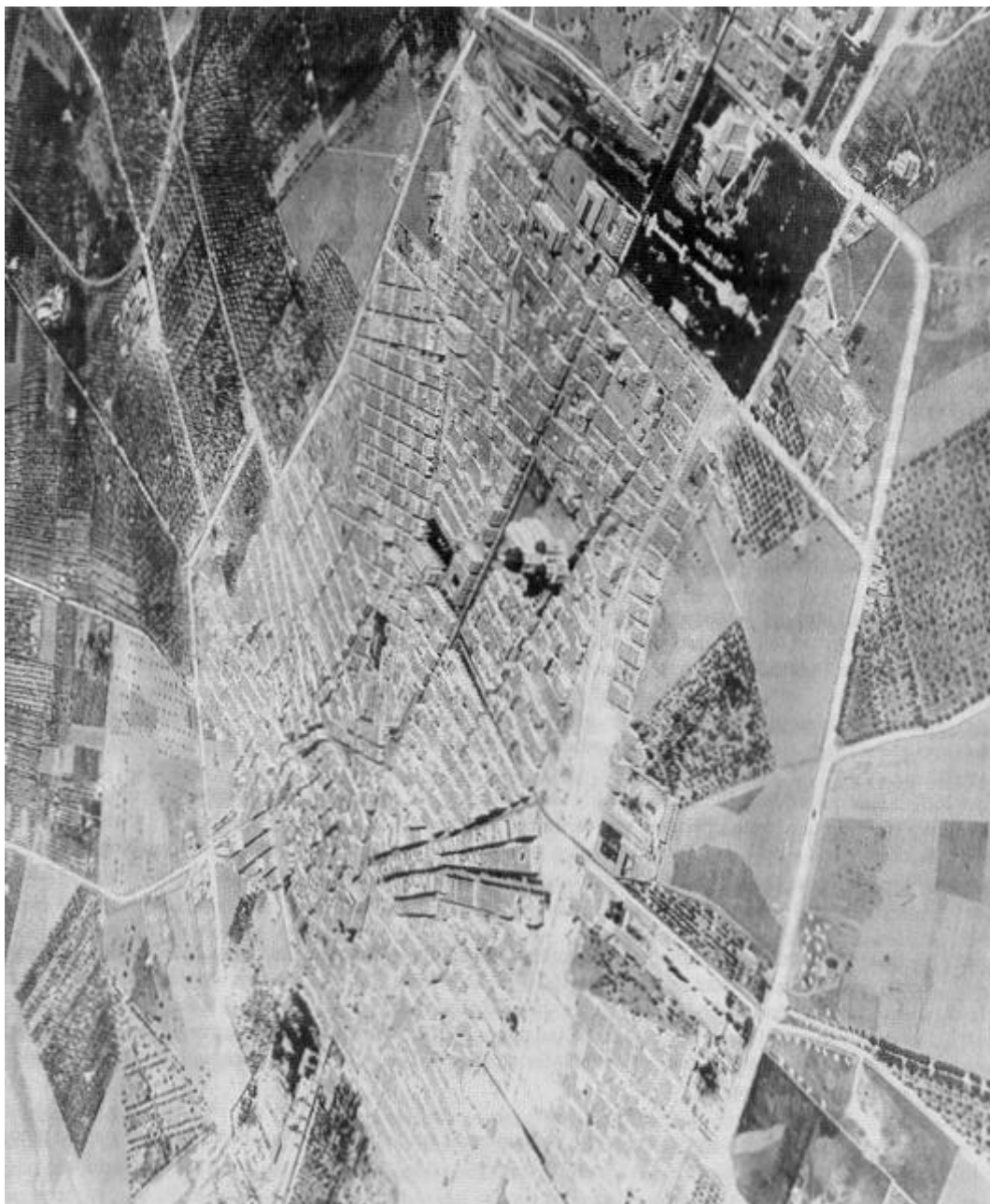
A minister didn't want to tell his prim and proper wife that he was speaking to the Rotary Club on the dangers of extra-marital sex. He told her he was speaking to the club about boating.

Later in the week, his wife met a Rotarian who said that her husband had given a wonderful speech.

"Really?" she replied. "He only tried it twice. The first time he threw up and the second time his hat blew off."

Editor's Note: Taken from the Air Forces Escape and Evasion Society "Communications" December 1996

## IS THIS CERIGNOLA?



Your Editor has had this picture for a while and thinks it is an aerial shot of Cerignola but it could be Foggia or some place else. Can anyone identify the Italian town.

## **B-24 Crew 4859 and The Summer of 1944**

Editor's Note: The following is the conclusion of the true story from the World War II diary of Jack Morledge. The first part of the story was printed on pages 33 to 40 of the December 1996 issue of the "Liberaider".

The five of us, John, Charley, Paul, Bob and myself made our way to the outskirts of the city, away from the fighting, by walking and even catching a ride on a streetcar. Hump wasn't with us; he was still in the hospital with a broken leg injury. We were very careful traveling, watching for German soldiers. Fortunately, we didn't meet any, as they probably would have shot us first and asked questions later. We came to a Rumanian Army garrison, quite by dumb luck and met the officer in charge. It was a cadet-training unit and they offered to help us. The OIC said that it would be best for us to stay there overnight because there were German troops in the area. It was a long miserable night; the Germans kept a plane in the air all night to harass the Rumanians. It would drone around in a race track pattern sometimes dropping a bomb or two, other times just keeping us sweating it out. At any rate, we were in a slit trench with a lot of other folks the whole night long. Some of the bombs fell too close for comfort.

August 25th, early that morning we got a rumor that the Germans were heading our way and the cadet outfit was going to abandon the garrison. That was our signal to get the hell out of the garrison compound. We climbed out of our nice deep trench and ran for the perimeter fence about twenty yards from the trench. Just as we started to climb over the fence the fighting started with heavy ground fire including automatic weapons in the direction we were headed. We hit the dirt and crawled on our bellies back to the nice slit trench. Later we found out that six truck loads of German troops tried to run the blockade past the garrison. The Germans knew the Russians were coming and they had several divisions stationed in Romania and Bulgaria that would be cut off in the Balkan Peninsula when the Russians took Romania and they were desperately trying to escape.

After the fighting had stopped at the garrison the OIC advised us to move a little further down the road where a cavalry outfit was camped. As we left the garrison we saw two dead German soldiers that had been killed in the fighting and the German prisoners that had been taken. A few of the Germans looked like first line troops, but most of them were a motley bunch like us. When we arrived at the cavalry camp we were well received. The soldiers were friendly and gave us food. They were camping in a grove of trees and it looked like a good spot except, we didn't have any shelter. The cavalry guys were tough; they slept on the ground with the horses.

August 26th, it was quiet during the night but early in the morning our 15th AF bombed something in the city, probably the airdrome the Germans were operating out of. In the afternoon the Germans bombed the city with twin-engine bombers. Bucharest had a busy day. I was beginning to think that we had made a smart move by getting out of town for a while. We heard over the BBC that the Germans had 12 divisions trapped in Romania and that Bulgaria had sued for peace.

August 27th, there were a couple of raids the night of the 26th but they didn't amount to much. However, the Germans did hit a target a few kilometers from us that burned all night and finally blew-up. We also watched a couple of air raids and heard that our prison yard had been hit. We also heard that the big unfinished hospital building and air raid shelter was OK. That was very good news. We also had a tad of good luck. We met a representative of the French Legation. I signed a chit and he gave me 500 Lae to buy food for our group. We were out of touch with the outside world and didn't know what was happening.

What was happening was quite a story. We didn't know about it at the time. This is what was going on and probably why I am still here to tell about it.

Our senior officer in the Rumanian POW camp was Lt. Col. James A. Gunn, commander of the 454th Bomb Group (Heavy). Col. Gunn was shot down over Ploesti on the 17th of August and became the senior officer in prison. On the 24th with the gates open and the guards gone it didn't take Col. Gunn very long to

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get in touch with the Rumanian officials and to cut a deal with them. First they would provide safer arrangements for us and secondly they would fly him back to his base in Italy. In return he promised air support to fight the Germans and to ask for American take-over of the Rumanian Government. King Michael's military officials agreed with the proposal and at 5:20 p.m. on the 27th they stuck Col. Gunn in the radio compartment of a BF-109 fighter. Capt. Constantine Cantacuzin, Romania's leading ace, flew him back to his home base at San Giovanni Airfield, Italy. The two men were driven immediately to 15th AF HQ at Bari. Planning began that night for strikes on the Germans, and for the evacuation of the 1161 POW's in quickly modified B-17's. That's how we got out of one hell of a mess with our skins still in tact. Now back to the chronological order of events.

August 28, we moved into a small house the evening of the 27th about half a kilometer from the cavalry outfit. Straw was available and we made beds. There were no raids and we had our first good nights rest in a long time. It was also quiet on the 28th. We received news that our guys had established a new camp about 10 kilometers south of Bucharest on the property of the great Rumanian beer baron "Bergolia". Also, that our guys had made contact with our government. The word was that our AF could fly us out in B-17's. Our standard of living had improved considerably. We were still eating from our Red Cross packages and we bought bread, tomatoes, and little watermelons called "pipen". In the village, I got a shave and haircut but no bath. At least I looked OK if you didn't get too close to me. That evening we went back to the village and had a few beers with the locals. They were nice people and it was quite obvious that they were pro American and hated Germans and Russians.

August 29th, we decided it was time to go back into town, so we packed our meager belongings and caught a streetcar. We rode clear across town and back to where our guys were holed up in the big unfinished hospital building. Life in the city appeared to be back to normal. Some bomb damage was evident but the city had survived and was back in business. We saw a Russian Army unit with tanks and trucks. They had women soldiers riding on top of the tanks and in the trucks along side the men. They were a tough looking bunch, most carried tommy guns. They weren't laughing or waving to anybody. On the way to the hospital building we passed by where the shack had been when the HE-111's bombed us. It wasn't there any more.

August 30th, we had an air raid alert the night of the 29th but no raid. A truck took us out to the new camp and the whole crew was together for the first time since we arrived at the Bucharest prison. We received some good news in that the 15th AF would send a squadron of B-17's to ferry us all back to Italy. The operation took a few days to complete since there were so many of us. (Actually the diary ended at this point, however, every story should have a happy ending so I will press on for a bit.)

September 2nd, the B-17's had been ferrying our guys back to Italy for a couple of days and now it was our turn. The flight was uneventful and we landed at the airfield at Bari 15th AF HQ. A one star General welcomed us. We took showers, were deloused, and were given new uniforms. The whole crew was alive and well. That was almost a miracle. It took us a long time to complete the mission to Ploesti but we made it and put them out of the oil business. It had been a real fun summer.

January 23rd, 1995 my cat and co-writer "Midnight" has been by my side for the past 23 days of hunting and pecking on Effie's old Remington portable typewriter. Every once in a while he bites me. I think they are love bites. I don't get many Love bites anymore so I'm really not sure what they are.

Revisiting the Summer of 1944 has been quite an interesting trip back into my diary and memories of our crew's experiences. I have thought about and talked about our being shot down over Ploesti many times over the past 50 years, but had never really given it a great deal of in-depth thought until I started on this project. I had always felt like we had a near brush with death the day we were shot down and that we were lucky to be alive. Now I have concluded that we were extremely lucky to get out of the airplane and to have every one

*(Continued on page 38)*



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of our crewmembers, including Tom, survive survive the war. What changed my perspective was the level of risks that we faced. How really bad the odds were of making it home alive was brought forth in two issues of the 461st "Liberaider", June 1994 and December 1994. I was also influenced by an article in the January 1995 Air Force magazine entitled "Operation Gunn". I am including excerpts from those three publications as addenda to this report.

Of course I have known for 50 years about the events and actions that were documented in these three articles, but I never knew how bad things were for the boys that flew in flak alley. For example:

(1) From the June issue of the "Liberaider" 367 heavy bombers and 111 fighters were lost at Ploesti with a total of 3781 men shot down. 1185 men survived. I went a little further and ran some numbers on the Ploesti raids. During the entire operation from 1 August 1943 through 19 August 1944 about 1430 heavy bombers went to Ploesti. 367 heavy bombers were shot down. 332 fighters were sent and they lost 111. The bomber losses were over 25% and the fighter losses were over 33%. These were just American losses. The Brits lost a bunch of Wimpys and the Russians must have lost a few of their planes, too.

I'm just an old Missouri boy, but it seems to me that the Germans were awfully good at what they were doing or we were pretty bad at what we were doing. I don't mean our crew, I think that the whole concept of the way we used our bombers was flawed. Our crews did a hell of a job under the conditions that were imposed on us.

(2) I have known from day one that the lead plane in our formation, lost an engine and made us late at the IP and consequently late at the target. What I didn't know until just last week was that the lead plane salvoed their bombs before reaching the target. The rest of the group dropped their bombs short of the target because they were dropping off the lead. What a hell of a note that was. All of our efforts including getting shot down were for nil. Nobody hit the damned target. Here's the real irony of the whole stupid thing. If the bombs had still been in the bomb bay when we were hit we would probably have blown up. Since we dropped early, we dodged that bullet by hook or crook.

(3) The last item on my hit list is Colonel Gunn's dash to freedom. You may not agree but I have always thought that it was a dumb thing to do. There must have been some other way of communicating with our side besides going as a messenger in an enemy airplane.

The bottom line is that we all survived. We did what we had to do and a lot more. We made it through the war. All of us, including Tom, his crew went down and he was a POW for a lot longer than we were. He's also a good old Missouri boy and for old Missouri boys like us, everyday in prison was like Sunday on the farm.

Jack Morledge  
SMSGT USAF RET

\* \* \* \* \*

Editor's Note: This article was borrowed from the Valor section of the Air Force Magazine, January 1995. Thanks to John L. Frisbee, Editor, Lt. Col. Bob Goebel and Col. Gunn for providing the story.

### **Operation Gunn**

Lt. Col. James A. Gunn gambled his life to ensure that POW's in Romania would be repatriated as the Germans withdrew.

After the famous August 1943 low-level bombing of oil refineries at Ploesti, Romania, it was several months before the Fifteenth Air Force in Italy attained a strength adequate for a sustained campaign against Ploesti while meeting its other commitments in southern and central Europe. Between April 5 and August

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19, 1944, Fifteenth Air Force's heavy bombers hit Ploesti nineteen times. Oil production in that complex was reduced by an estimated eighty percent, but enemy defenses remained strong, downing 223 bombers and many fighters. Some 1,100 captured bomber and fighter crews became POW's in Romania.

On August 23, 1944, King Michael of Romania, whose country had joined Germany in 1940, surrendered to Soviet forces that had advanced into the country. In the next few days, one of the most unusual adventures of World War II took place.

It all began on August 17, when Fifteenth Air Force sent 248 bombers to Ploesti. Lt. Col. James A. Gunn, commander of the 454th Bomb Group, led his B-24s on that strike. Before bombs away, four of the eight planes in his lead squadron were shot down by flak. Gunn and all but one of his crew parachuted safely and were captured immediately by the Romanians.

After interrogation, Colonel Gunn was sent to the officers' prison in Bucharest, where he was the senior Allied officer. Although the POW's were not harmed physically, living conditions in the prison were appalling.

As news of the surrender spread, Romanian prison guards vanished, leaving the gates open. Gunn's first task was to keep the POW's from vanishing into the city and surrounding countryside until arrangements for the repatriation could be made. It was some time before he could find anyone with authority. The retreating Germans had begun reprisal bombing of Bucharest, which added to the general terror at the prospect of Soviet occupation.

Colonel Gunn finally located several senior Romanian officials who agreed to move, the POW's to a safer location and to fly him to Italy (there were no functioning radio or wire facilities in Romania) so he could contact Fifteenth Air Force about evacuating the POW's. In return, Gunn agreed to arrange for Fifteenth Air Force to attack the fields from which the Germans were bombing the city and to convey a request that Romania be occupied by either the British or the Americans.

True to their word, the Romanians arranged a flight to Italy in an ancient twin-engine aircraft. Twenty minutes out, the Romanian pilot turned back, claiming engine trouble. On landing, Gunn was approached by Capt. Constantine Cantacuzino, who offered to fly him to Italy in the belly of a Bf-109. Captain Cantacuzino was commander of a Romanian fighter group that had been flying for the Luftwaffe. He was also Romania's leading ace and a member of the royal family. The risk of this venture was not slight. If they were downed by German or American fighters or by flak, or had engine failure, it would be curtains for Gunn, locked in the aft fuselage of the Bf-109.

There were no maps of Italy available, so Gunn drew from memory a map of the southeast coast of the country and an approach chart for his home base in San Giovanni Airfield. He wanted Captain Cantacuzino to fly on the deck to avoid German radar, but the Romanian, who did not have complete confidence in his engine, held out for 19,000 feet, which would test Gunn's tolerance to cold and lack of oxygen.

As an added precaution, they had a large American flag painted on both sides of the fuselage. While that was being done, Cantacuzino drew Gunn aside and told him their plan to take off early the next morning had become widely known and might be compromised. As soon as the painting was finished, Cantacuzino produced heavy flying gear for Gunn, stuffed him through an eighteen-inch-square access door into the fuselage (from which the radio had been removed), locked the door, and took off at 5:20 p.m. on August 27. The two-hour flight was completed without incident, though the Bf-109's engine began to run rough over the Adriatic.

The two men were immediately driven to Fifteenth Air Force headquarters at Bari. Planning began that night for strikes on the German airfield near Bucharest and for the evacuation of the POW's in quickly modified B-17s. The plan was designated Operation Gunn. By September 3, 1,161 Allied prisoners of war had been flown out of Romania. Colonel Gunn had gambled his life and won - as had the POW's. Sadly,

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*(Continued from page 39)*

Romania was to remain under brutal Soviet control for the next forty-five years.

Jim Gunn retired from the Air Force as a colonel in 1967 and now lives in San Antonio, Texas, where he heads a real estate business and is active in civic affairs.



REMINISCE - Col. James A. Gunn and MSgt. Jack C. Morledge recall their experiences upon liberation from the Rumanian Prisoner of War camp as they look at a picture made at that time.

**461st BOMB Group (H) 1943-1945, Inc.**

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