

Hardlife



Herald



Newsletter of the  
385th Bombardment Group Memorial Association

1942 - 1945 • Great Ashfield - Suffolk, England • Station 155

*The Mighty Eighth*

Vol. 19 Number 1

February, 2002



**Group Briefing**

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*Off we go into the wild blue yonder  
Climbing high into the sun;  
Here they come zooming to meet our thunder,  
At'em boys, giv'er the gun!  
Down we dive spouting our flames from under,  
Off with one hell-uv-a roar!  
We live in fame or go down in flame,  
Nothing'll stop the US Army Air Corp.*

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# Hardlife Herald

385th Bombardment Group (H)

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### Perle Luxembourg Band

Band performed for the 385th tour members during the ceremonies held in honor of the 385th members.

**Luxembourg & Europe Tour 2002**  
**May 23, 2002 through June 1, 2002**



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## PRESIDENTS REPORT

By Leo A. LaCasse, Col., USAF, Ret.

From the Prez:

At the ABQ reunion last year Verne Phillips, our Treasurer, gave his report on the financial standing of the Association's funds. Basically the fund, derived from the receipt of members annual dues will barely sustain the publication and distribution of the quarterly HLH. It was suggested at that time that the Life Memberships be revoked and require those LMs to start shelling their \$25 annually. It was and still is that a LM means forever. Some members offered to cough up as much as \$500 to help out. That is not the answer.

Why do we need money? We are a memorial association and besides getting the HLH and making a few reunions to renew old acquaintances, we have an obligation to our comrades who paid the ultimate price at War and their remains are scattered around the world. We have all promised that they shall not be forgotten. At ABQ I mentioned that we would need funds to honor our brothers with wreaths at various locations the association has dedicated monuments to them. The monuments I am familiar with are; The 385th plaque at Arlington Cemetery, The monument at the Air Force Academy, The monument at the 8th AF Museum and overseas we have All Saints Church, Reedham, The Military Cemetery at Madingly, Perle

and other Military Cemeteries in Europe.

In May of this year our Group will need funds to purchase wreaths at various events scheduled in Perle. I believe All Saints Church has sufficient funds to cover Reedham and Madingly on those special Memorial Days.

In the January issue of Air Force Magazine the names of individuals and organizations donating funds to the Air Force Scholarships program was listed. Many 8th AF Groups were listed. The 94th BG had four listings in honor of their departed comrades in amounts of \$4000, \$2000 and two \$1000 donations. It would be nice to donate funds toward the construction of the Chapel at the 8th AF Museum for leverage to move our Monument from behind the doors entering into the gardens. We don't have a boot to hiss in. All I'm asking for is money to pay for wreaths to be placed at all our dedicated monuments around the world. With that in mind I would like to have these wreaths representing all our members and not just those paying their annual dues. If you LMs can see it in your hearts to send a token amount each year, I firmly believe we can stand tall and say, "WE HAVE NOT FORGOTTEN". At our age \$25 might be more difficult to shell out than the \$100 it cost you thirty years ago.

### EUROPEAN TOUR 2002:

At this writing twenty-one members and families are scheduled to depart May 22 from five different Gateways in the US and arriving in Luxembourg at 11:00am on May 23. I have been given a three week extension for anyone wishing to join the tour. Feb. 15 will be the last day the air carrier will hold seats for the 385th. Anyone wishing to take advantage of this tour send me \$100 per person to lock in a seat. The air carrier will allow anyone on this tour to leave seven days earlier providing they return with the Group on June 1. Or you may extend the tour for two weeks and depart from any International Gateway in Europe. For those members not taking advantage of our Tour package, you are reminded that you will have to make your own accommodations and transportation arrangements. If you join the tour in Perle you will be assessed for that portion you wish to participate in.

This may be the last newsletter before our departure to Europe. All members signed up will receive either E-mails or letters in the future to keep you further advised. For those of you who have not sent me the full names as they appear on your passport please do so immediately

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## CHAPLAIN SEZ

*By Bev. James H. Vance*

Happy New Year to you all!!!

Saint Benedict made a statement in the 500's or 600's A.D. that I have printed on a card on the wall above my desk. I don't know why but I feel I am led to write something that would elaborate on his statement. His statement is this: "LET US PRAY IN SUCH A WAY THAT OUR MINDS AGREE WITH OUR VOICES".

The first assumption is that we do pray. I really believe everyone prays one way or another. Whether as a believer of a religion or in a God or just

wanting help in something. It seems to be a human trait to consciously or unconsciously express our gratitude for something or our need for help. I call that prayer.

The next assumption is that we do not think before we say something. I'm certain that is true much of the time. But let's think about what St. Benedict wrote so many years ago. "LET US PRAY IN SUCH A WAY THAT OUR MINDS AGREE WITH OUR VOICES" If we study what it is we truly believe and the facts are evident and we ask

for guidance from God, then what we say will reflect what is on our minds.

But the final assumption is that we want to do Gods will. That involves all of life, our relations with each other and our consistency in living and voicing our opinions. "LET US PRAY IN SUCH A WAY THAT OUR MINDS AGREE WITH OUR VOICES."

Think on these things. May God bless our country, our people and our efforts to do the right.

Sincerely Jim Vance

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## THE SOFT LIFE SIDE

*By Marian Gallagher*

Greetings girls! When Darla suggested that the women of the 385th should share part of The Hard Life Herald it was a brilliant idea. How easy it is for us to spread some joy and keep you smiling! Remember the old "Chain Letters" of long ago? They certainly would be a hoot in this day of technology. E mail users refer to the US Postal Service as "Snail Mail." I call it mostly junk mail. However, the computer does serve a purpose, passing on dirty jokes, keeping financial records, passing on dirty jokes, keeping in touch with friends and passing on dirty jokes. One can also glean important information. So... not that what follows will make you any smarter, BUT HOW CAN YOU LIVE SO LONG WITHOUT KNOWING

THESE THINGS?

1. The first couple to be shown in bed together on prime time TV were Fred and Wilma Flintstone. (The age of innocence.)
2. There are more collect calls on this day than any other day of the year. Which day? Father's Day. (Isn't that touching?)
3. The cost of raising a medium size dog to the age of eleven. \$6,400. (But it's worth every penny.)  
 $4.111 \times 111 \times 111 \times 111 \times 111 \times 111 = 12,345,678,987,654,321$  (No comment.)
5. What occurs more often in December than any other month? Conception. (I thought it was Christmas!)
6. If you were to spell out numbers, how far would you have to go until you reach the

letter "A"? One thousand. (Who would do such a thing?)

7. What do bulletproof vests, fire escapes, windshield wipers and laser printers all have in common? All invented by women. (Hooray for our side!)

8. What is the only food that doesn't spoil? Honey (How sweet.)

9. What is an activity performed by 40% of all people at a party? Snoop in your medicine cabinet. (Shame on you!)

.....AND FINALLY.....

10. In Scotland, a new game was invented. It was entitled "Gentlemen Only Ladies Forbidden"... and thus the word GOLF entered into the English Language. (And also\*#/\*<! \*</#!\*#)



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## LUXEMBOURG & EUROPE TOUR 2002 PROGRAM

**May 23th 2002:** Arrival at Luxembourg-Airport at 11:00 a.m. Drive to your Hotels in Esch-sur-Sure, have lunch and rest in the afternoon. Dinner and overnight stay.

**May 24th 2002:** After breakfast drive to the Moselle region. River cruise with lunch on board and visit of a wine cellar in the afternoon. At 6:00 p.m. return to Esch-sur-Sure, dinner and overnight stay.

**May 25th 2002:** After breakfast, start of Rogers Program. Probably in the morning visit of Bastogne and in the afternoon memorial service at the Hamm Military Cemetery. Lunch in Arsdorf or Esch-sur-Sure. Dinner and overnight stay at your hotel in Esch-sur-Sure.

**May 26th 2002:** After breakfast, Rogers Program in Perlé. Lunch in Arsdorf or in Esch-sur-Sure. In the evening dinner offered by the local authority of Rambrouch (Mayor). Overnight stay in Esch-sur-Sure.

**May 27th 2002:** After breakfast leave Esch-sur-Sure at 9:00 a.m. Arrival at Saarbrücken at noon. Lunch in Saarbrücken. After lunch visit of Saarbrücken with a local guide for 2 hours. At 5:00 p.m. you will leave Saarbrücken and return to Esch-sur-Sure. You will be back at about 7:30 p.m. Dinner and overnight stay.

**May 28th 2002:** Visit the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg. After breakfast you leave at 9:00 a.m. Arrival at Luxembourg - City at 10:00 a.m. Visit of the city with a local guide. Lunch in Luxembourg-City. For the afternoon I would propose a tour to Echternach and Vianden to make you see typical luxembourgish tourist centers. At 5:00 or 6:00 p.m. return to Esch-sur-Sure. Dinner and overnight stay.

**May 29th 2002:** Tour to Rudesheim and Rhine river. Today you'll leave Luxembourg after breakfast at 8:00 a.m. Arrival in Rudesheim at noon. Lunch. Short visit of Rudesheim with its famous (DROSSELGASSE), a very picturesque street. At 4:00 p.m. drive along the Rhine river to Koblenz. Short visit. After visit continue along the Rhine to Königswinter (half an hour before Cologne). In Cologne it was impossible to find a Hotel because there is a big trade fair during that period. Königswinter is a nice touristical town at the Rhine river. Dinner and overnight.

**May 30th 2002:** Visit of Cologne. After breakfast guided tour of the city of Cologne with the famous, huge cathedral, Lunch in Cologne. After lunch free time for shopping. At 5:00 p.m. leave Cologne for Den Haag (Netherlands, about 3 hours to drive). Dinner and overnight stay.

**May 31st 2002:** Amsterdam. After breakfast visit of Amsterdam on a guided boat tour on the Canals. Lunch in Amsterdam. After lunch visit of the big flower show called = FLORIADE = near Amsterdam. This is a great flower exhibition which is only organized every ten years. At 6.00 p.m. drive to Den Haag for dinner and overnight stay.

**June 01st 2002:** After breakfast you leave the hotel to drive to Schiphol airport to board your return flight. End of Service.

**Quotation:** Price per person including: coach transfers

9 overnight stays in the hotels in Luxembourg, Königswinter and Den Haag in half board.

9 lunches

3 guided city visits

the river cruise on the Moselle river, the wine cellar visit, the Canal Tour in Amsterdam and the entrance to the flower show.

Price per person in a double room: (based on the actual exchange rate 1 USD = 43 LUF) is \$1090.00

*Those interested in going on this tour should contact 385th President Leo LaCasse as soon as possible for tour information & reservations. Leo's mail address and e-mail address is on page two of this issue of the HLH under officers.*

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### 2002 DUES ARE DUE

Please send check for \$25.00 payable to 385th BGMA for your 2002 dues. Please mail check to our Treasurer, Verne D.J. Philips, P.O. Drawer 5870 Austin, TX 78763. It has been the policy of the 385th Group not to send dues statements, but to request the members to send in their dues. The Hardlife Herald address label indicates what year your dues are paid through. Following your name there may be a LM999 which indicates you are a life member. If there is an R letter plus two numbers, indicates you have regular membership & year paid through. To be current all regular (R) and associates (A) members should now have R02 or A02. If you are several years behind you may reinstate your membership by paying your 2002 dues of \$25.00 now & avoid losing your membership & receiving the Hardlife Herald news letter.

### Books Authored by 385th Members

**Letters to Hardlife  
And No Purple Heart  
Fear Faith Courage  
Hunkered Down  
The Wrong Stuff**

**Thomas A. Helman  
Frank R. Mays  
Willard Richards  
Sterling Rogers  
Truman Smith**

Your Editor recommends that every 385th member should have a copy of these fine books. They may be purchased from the author, their address is in our 385th BGMA roster.

### Editors Note

Your editor wishes to express his appreciation to all the contributors of material for the Hardlife Herald. Without your support we would not have a Hardlife Herald. Due to limited space in the HLH sometimes we must edit some articles. Also for the same reason we are unable to publish every submitted article right away. Just because you did not see your article in the following HLH issue, do not quit sending in items. Again, thank you.

### Web Sites

Have you visited The Friends of The 385th web site. Great site maintained by our fine Perle, Luxembourg friends. Visit it at the following. <http://www.385bg.com/>

If you have any other good web sites that would be of interest to 385th members send them to Editor, Hardlife Herald. We will publish them in the Hardlife Herald.



### Send Your E-Mail

It has been suggested that we start a page with member's e-mail address. If you are interested in sharing your e-mail address with other members please e-mail it to [tjnewton25@aol.com](mailto:tjnewton25@aol.com) In subject box identify as 385th e-mail.



## Target Reception FLAK



On the bomb run you see a reception of red flashes appear around you, followed by lingering puff of black smoke, sometimes pink or white. Over the roar of the engines you hear the explosion of those red flashes. Next the airplane shakes and shudders and you hear something hitting the aircraft. What is this unwanted reception, FLAK. What did you know about the flak guns shooting at you?

The three sizes of flak guns commonly used by the Germans to counterattack high-flying aircraft were the 88mm, the 105mm, and the 150mm guns. The table gives the pertinent data for these weapons that were used against 385th crews and planes doing a combat tour.

The QE in the table represents a typical firing angle to the effective ceiling. Burst altitude was determined by timing fuzes and typically a burst occurred about 20 sec after firing a shell. In general, a shell travelled upward on average about 1000 ft./sec. Barrage type flak was often used in defense of installations, but CPF or tracking flak

was the most accurate. The tracking of aircraft could be done by either optical or electronic (radar) methods. The deadliest type of FLAK (CPF) was used whenever the defenders could "line-up" on a formation coming to the target on a predictable (straight-line) course or elsewhere when aircraft were flying on a straight-line or uniform curve type course. From 15 to 30 seconds of "tracking" was needed for the firecontrol instruments to compute the "lead" for the first rounds and to pass the firing data to the guns. Five to 30 seconds later, the first FLAK BURSTS reached the predicted position. The time of flight for the projectile varied with the altitude

of the aircraft and with the distance of the gun battery from the ground track of the aircraft.

Once the computation of the firing data was in progress, the guns were continuously pointed (ie., given a continuous "lead" based on speed and direction of the aircraft's flight). Successive FLAK bursts moved along with the formation as many a combat crewman could testify. A single battery of flak guns would produce a ragged line of bursts along the flight path while the fire from several batteries shooting at a formation produced a rough cylindrical pattern of bursts that often resulted in the downing of aircraft.

Gun Caliber, mm	Muzzle Velocity ft./sec.	Projectile Weight lbs.	Max. Rate of Fire, Rds./min.	Effective Ceiling Height in 1000s ft.		Lethal Burst Rad.ft.,
				QE=85°	QE=70°	
88	2690	19.8	15	32	26	30
105	2890	32.2	8-10	37	31	50
150	3450	88.6	6-8	42	not avail.	75

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## TRUMAN SMITH COLUMN

(Author, *The Wrong Stuff*)

Over a half-century after the Big War and we find that Stupidity is still with us. Remember when Japan made a sneak attack on the "Sleeping Giant" and Hitler put Europe under the "boot" to establish the Third Reich that would rule the world for a thousand years?

Well, the Giant blinked open its eyes, yawned, stretched and went to work. It was some kind of a stretch, because it went clear around the world. While Holland and Hungary each had standing armies larger than America, and they were crushed by the Nazis, and Japan had invaded China and the South Pacific with its successes in war, they were both put out of business - not in a thousand years-but in less than seven years.

There's always someone who doesn't get the word, like that sand-sucking asshole, half-way around the world who fell through a crack, missed the big show and was building dreams while playing with himself in the desert. Using a 1400 year old rule book, he figured it would be easier to pull civilization back to the middle ages than to catch up to the benefits of the 20th Century. How Stupid, when it was Western technology that discovered and developed oil production that allowed him the funds to mess up his own play pen.

When it was rumored that U.S. planes were aborting to the neutral countries of Sweden and Switzerland, "verbal" orders were given to American fighters to shoot down American bombers

who left the bomber stream and headed for these countries.

I have witnessed bombers, apparently in good shape, leave the formation and head for sanctuary- and I confess, after bombing Berlin, not looking forward to a long hard trip across Europe to get back to England - and more missions, I did glance to the north toward Sweden, thinking how much closer it was, and thinking how much easier it would be to go there - like many others with the same thought. But I didn't go.

It was an easy thought to come by and, therefore, reasonable to assume that somebody up the chain of command would say, "We've got to put a stop to that!" So it came to be that long after the war I discovered on a TV documentary that a "verbal" order had been given to our fighter escorts to shoot down any American bomber headed for Sweden that did not show signs of distress. I was pleased and proud to hear one of the fighter pilots say that none of them had ever shot at an American bomber headed for Sweden, even if looked like it was not in trouble, because, "You can't look at a bomber and know what troubles they might have inside of it. "Hurray for our side".

General Hap Arnold had the matter looked into, with the result that all planes that had aborted to Sweden had done so justifiably.

I think of Turner (a billet mate) who did go to Switzerland with his crew on a mission to Munich in July '44, which had

emptied our barracks that week, except for one other crew, Fred Bornes the "Other Crew", as we greeted each other.

After the war I met Turner's bombardier in Oklahoma City and he gave me the details: The problems they had; how it was touch and go and how they finally made it; escaped; returned to the group; sent on leave; returned to combat and he was later wounded.

He had been hit in his right chest by flak, which spun around his rib cage and they excised it from the opposite side from where it had entered. He carried the flak piece with him; handed it to me and asked me to read the numbers on the casing, while he pulled out his dog tags and asked me to compare his serial number to the shell numbers, which were more than the seven numbers of his dog tags. However, the last seven numbers on the shell were identical to his serial numbers! Believe it or Not. What are the odds? What was the meaning of it, if any. I was speechless, but he asked for the fragment back, because he wanted to know where it was at all times. I gave it back and assumed that he would live forever...

Happened just a few years ago that I met a former Luftwaffe pilot, Oklahoma. He told me that it was his better judgement that he abort his flight and go to Sweden since he had only himself to think about, the war was at an end, and that's what he did. Now retired in Wichita, Kansas, he feels he made the right decision.



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## Air Stories [385BG] "Off The Record (4)"

By Frank R. Mays, Author of "And No Purple Heart"

The German military was very innovative in designing and putting into use new weapons of War during WW 2. Not the least of these was the "V-1" or "Buzz Bomb" un-manned flying bomb.

This weapon was nothing more than a 1,000 pound general demolition bomb fitted with short stubby wings and a ram-jet gasoline engine. The units could be launched from a ground installation, or carried aloft and set on course from an airplane.

The flying bomb was internally guided by a simple gyro devise which was preset prior to launch. The gyro devise simply aimed the Buzz Bomb toward a target and at a preset time cut-off the fuel supply to the engine causing the unit to fall from the sky. The first Buzz Bombs were not very accurate in locating a specific target and seemed to fall random in an area. The Germans selected as their first target, the City of London, and the British people living there. I happened to be in London, on pass, the night in 1944 when the first Buzz Bombs appeared over the City. It seemed to me the British military was caught completely by surprise as no one seemed to know what the lights, and roaring noise, were in the dark sky.

With a little practice, the Germans improved on accuracy, and specific targets were being selected and hit all over England.

The navigator on my crew,

Lt. W. W. Dutt was KIA on a bombing mission to remove one of the Buzz Bomb launching sites in France, located somewhere near Pads.

One use of the flying bombs was to target main North/South railroad lines to disrupt movement of war materials about England. It was on one of this type Buzz Bomb mission when Great Ashfield experienced a close-encounter of the first kind.

About 10 pm, in my Hut, all were sacking-out for the night, the base air-raid siren sounded, and simultaneously loud roaring engine noises were heard. The Hut emptied of airmen heading for the above ground earthen shelter just outside the door.

As the noise became louder I poked my head above the embankment and saw an object that caused my heart to race. There in the sky, some 20 feet or less, above ground, I was looking at a Buzz Bomb. The angle I was looking made it look as if it was going to go straight in the Hut door. Everything seemed to move in slow motion. The engine noise was deafening. I looked at the Hut door and saw Cooper, my crew tail gunner, standing with hands on the door frame, frozen as he looked straight at the bomb coming toward him.

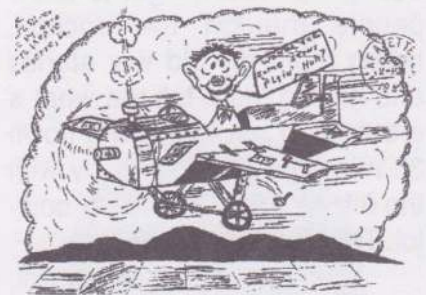
I watched as the bomb travel the length of the Hut, just feet above it, and continue on it's way. Less than a minute later there came a loud explosion.

The all-clear siren sounded it's long wail.

There was a lot of kidding Cooper about him standing there to keep the bomb from coming in the Hut. We learned the bomb passed over the Recreation Building and two men had been hurt when they jumped clear of the squadron road onto some sharp tree stumps. The bomb narrowly missed the water tower at the Mess Hall and landed in a field just beyond the base entry gate.

The vibration from the engine noise had shaken all clothing from coat racks in the Hut. After getting things straight, it was back in the sack, and to sleep, before being awakened for the early morning bombing mission coming up in a short while.

You got 'nother one, Frank



**WORLD WAR II PILOT, BOB SILVER, SHOWN HERE ON A TOP-SECRET MISSION BEHIND ENEMY LINES**

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## A COMMENTARY

By J. Wesley (Wes) Sullivan

Retired Chairman of The Salem, OR Statesman-Journal Editorial Board

### 35 MISSION COPILOT 548TH SQUADRON

Now that the public has recognized ours as the "Greatest Generation," we should get as much out of it as we can in the few years remaining to us. One good way is to become a docent (guide) in your neighborhood air museum.

They are springing up all over the place as organizers realize that people will pay good money to look at old airplanes.

I'm luckier than most. I have a great air museum within a few miles of my wintertime condo at Palm Desert, CA and another within range of my summer home in Salem, OR.

I've been a docent at the Palm Springs Air Museum for four years, the year after it opened. It has the largest collection of flyable World War 11 military aircraft I know of, including one of the 14 flyable B-17s.

On Thursday mornings during the winter, I get to show people through the cockpit, telling them my old war stories and having them tell me what a great guy I am for having flown 35 missions over Germany with the 8th Air Force as a B-17 copilot. That's not hard to take.

Perhaps more important, being a docent at the air museum throws me in with a whole bunch of old WWII flyboys. The Palm Springs area is a retirement haven. A local comedian calls it "God's, waiting room." Most of us are just sifting around in the sun waiting for a heart

attack.

It's like joining a fraternity to become a docent. We have our own ready room at the museum where we swap stories, eat lunch together and share in general fellowship. We also have parties.

Mike Pappas of the 385th also is a docent. He was shot down and spent much of the war in a POW camp. He is a special favorite of the visitors. We have a ball turret gunner on my Thursday crew, and he gets a lot of the play. People really seem entranced by the ball turret and the idea of someone cooped up in it for hours at a time.

The collection of planes was started by Robed Pond, a WWII fighter pilot. He comes from a wealthy industrial family in Minnesota. They make forklifts or somesuch. He's become a multi-millionaire. When he retired to his huge complex outside of Palm Springs, local people suggested he house his planes in an air museum next to the airport.

We now have three hangars full, one Army, one Navy and one for the B-17. Pond also has one of the finest collections of old autos in the country, but he keeps them to himself. We get to see them once a year when he hosts a party at his place for the docents.

People come from all over the world to Palm Springs, so we get some interesting folk

going through the plane. Meet a lot of exB-17 people that way.

The air museum near my home town of Salem, OR is at McMinnville, 20 miles away. It houses the Spruce Goose, the monster aircraft Howard Hughes built out of wood during the war. It is so big, the tail is wider than the wingspan of a B-17. The museum has lots of other planes, including a flyable B-17, which is gone a good deal of the time to airshows.

Never in my wildest dreams when I was holding my breath for 35 missions as a copilot did I even dream that what I was doing would seem so important to other people more than a half-century later. What the heck. Why not bask in whatever glory they are willing to give us while we are still around to enjoy it?

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#### Air Force!!!

A Gallup poll conducted around last Memorial Day was most revealing of public attitudes toward military services. In terms of the most importance to national defense, this how the public rated them: Air Force (42%), Army (18%), Navy (15%) and the Marine Corps (14%). the remaining 11% said they were the same or had no view.

When it comes to *prestige*, the Marine Corps top the list at 36%. It was followed by the Air Force (32%), Nave (14%, and Army (11%). Some of the interviewees did not rate the services status.

From: *Tall Tales* Oct. 2001  
(GA Chapter 8th AFHS)



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## CANNON IN THE NOSE

*By Don Kabitzke*

"Tough Shit" was a B-17 Flying Fortress belonging to the 385th Bomb Group at Great Ashfield, England. It was dealt a fate it did not deserve. One day while returning from a mission over Germany, a lone German fighter followed them over the English Channel trying to shoot them down. Somehow the German got too close and locked wings with the Fort. The 17 pilot somehow was able to land in an open field near Kent, England safely with out loss of life for both planes. The German was captured and taken to a POW Camp for the duration.

I belonged to the 88th Service Squadron and we were stationed at Great Ashfield. Originally we had been trained to service B-26's and when we got to England. At the time we arrived. 13 B-26's took off at a base in England, two aborted and came back. The other 11 were never heard from again. The brass was sure it was a security leak, and to play safe they grounded all other 26's. We

were moved to Great Ashfield, some of the first on the field. It was our job to salvage aircraft when necessary. Crews were sent to Kent to bring back "Tough Shit" in pieces. The whole nose section was placed in 4 by 4 framework between the woodwork and machine shops.

In our squadron was a Tech Sergeant by the name of Elmer Blank. He now lives in California. He and a Warrant Officer from the bomb group were determined to find a way to mount a 20 millimeter cannon in the nose of a Fort. Blank was an excellent machinist. At one time there was a critical shortage of what were called cowlpins, used to hold the cowls around the engines. Blank heard about it and got someone to get a certain gauge wire so he could make a supply until a shipment arrived from the States. They were like a safety pin.

In the meantime the two worked on their cannon mount. When they thought they were ready, a Fort was put at their dis-

posal to mount it for testing. It was tested out over the North Sea. It was a success. It was safe to use. The cannon was the partial cause for the Germans success at hitting the Forts head on and downing them. It was the crucial weakness on the plane.

Word got out and authorities back in the States were notified. A few days later a silver C-47 landed. It contained engineers from Boeing. They took photos and made all the drawings necessary before they returned home. There was one thing wrong with all of this, it was too late in the war to equip other bombers at the factory.

Why had the designers waited so long to correct a known error in the plane which costed too many lives, will probably never be known. I never did hear what the Air Force did to say thanks to the two.

When the story was printed back in the States, the name of TOUGH SHIT was changed to T/Sgt Tech Sergeant. An insult to a great plane.



**Members of the  
551st Squadron  
385th Bomb  
Group that  
attended the  
2001 reunion in  
Albuquerque NM**

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## A 385th Bomb Group Archival History, How it started and where we are.

By Bill Vamedoe

I am amazed how often a vet will die without telling his children about his war experiences. Many descendants WANT to know. We, Frank McCawley and I, Bill Vamedoe, are creating a data base for the 385 th BG missions. This is how it came about: Quite a few years ago, I (Bill Vamedoe) decided to write up my war experiences, mainly for my kids. Although I had kept a record of my missions, it was a bare outline-dates and target, The memory of many incidents was fresh enough, but I had a problem attaching incident to specific mission. I wrote to the National Archives to see if they had any records. They did. I ordered copies of the files for my missions. Knowing which B-17s I flew on, from these mission files, I made an attempt to collect pictures of each one. The details in these files were phenomenal, and fleshed out many of my air stories. When I wrote up the mission of 2 March 45 in all it's detail for the *Hardlife Herald*, many veterans wrote in with questions. Since several were flying at the same time as I was, I was able, with those files, to answer some questions. Along about then, our friend, Ian McLachlan, published a list in the *HH* of most B-17s of the 385th. This was great, and I expanded my quest of photos to try to get as many pictures of EVERY B-17 assigned to the 385th. I now have about 170 pic-

tures of different Forts in the 385th, many are nose art. While doing this, I found many puzzles, and some downright errors. It has been an ongoing task to unravel conflicting reports and records. The two Raunchy Wolf's, for example, took some time to disentangle. Another phenomenon that required research to clear up was when a crew renamed a given B-17, sometimes completely repainting the nose, sometimes just altering the nose picture. Along with all this B-17 work, I began to collect crew histories. This, in turn, brought up more questions that needed answers. Slowly, I began to acquire files on more and more crews and individuals. With only the original *History of the 385th* as a reference, I diligently tried to get Ian to write and publish a new version. The old one was written by a paddlefoot, and while very complete and factual, lacked stories of the aircrews. When Ian declined, I took it upon myself to do the job. That is how the second book, *A New History of the 385th Bomb Group* got published. In compiling the data for this book, my files swelled considerably. But, as more questions arose, both from veterans and from their kin, I could see how much data I lacked. I wrote to the National Archives with the idea of getting ALL of the 385th mission folders. However, the huge cost

soon disabused me of any such scheme. As vets and sons of vets asked questions, I steered them to the National Archives to obtain their mission folders. In return, I requested that they make copies of the loading lists out of their folders for me. Many did. Despite the help of these people, my files were woefully inadequate to answer many questions. That is when I requested the help of Frank McCawley, one of our members who lives only blocks from the Archives. At first our objective was to get, at least, the crew (pilot) and aircraft serial number for each mission, But so many of the vets were not pilots, and often as not, kinfolks didn't know which crew they belonged to, so we expanded our objective to, in addition, get the loading lists for each 5th mission, (although for every mission would be even better.) To date we have the crews for about 85% of the missions and loading lists for maybe 20%. Not only veterans, who want information that time and fading memories have erased, but many descendants want to know what happened. I do not mind, in fact, enjoy helping veterans, sons, daughters and grandchildren of vets get information. I have been called the 385th BG Historian, but no one has conferred this august title upon me, and I certainly do not claim it. I just make whatever

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er files I have collected on the 385th BG assessable. For a few pages or an email picture, there is no cost. More extensive copies or photo quality pictures are at cost. I have willed these files to the Mighty 8 th Air Force Museum in Savannah. They will not be lost. But, if we ever do complete the collection for all missions, it ought to be published. Hopefully, someone will step up and ride that horse.

Getting these copies has not been, and is, neither easy nor cheap!! The board has voted \$500.00 for copying costs and time expended at the National Archives to Frank McCawley to get the data. The 385th BSMA is creating a great legacy for posterity. It will make retrieval of specific items and details of our history much easier to obtain. For the hoops one must jump through at the Archives and the cost, listen to Frank who bears the brunt of the legwork!!



## A 385th Bomb Group Archival History Retrieving Mission Data

By Frank x. McCawley

As Bill indicated, several years ago he asked if I could retrieve some 385th BG mission data from Archives II about eight miles from my home. Archives II is an extension of the main Archives which is located in downtown Washington, DC and the home of the US Constitution, Declaration of Independence, and other United States historical documents. It is also where genealogy data, such as the ten year cycle of censuses, ship manifests, etc., can be retrieved. Archives II located on the campus of the University of Maryland is a large five story building where historical military documents of United States wars are available for review and study.

With such a large inventory of historical documents, security is very tight to avoid theft, destruction and alteration of these documents. Prior to September 11, "researchers" were required to register and obtain a picture ID with a bar code. Any loose papers or personal notes are examined and stamped for approval by the reception desk. A guard checks these items and each researchers ID against a computerized data base when entering and leaving the research area. No one is allowed to wear a jacket or coat, or carry a pen, briefcase or folder into the research room. Since September 11, a guard checks each vehicle entering the park-

ing area. Each person is now screened with a metal detector at the building entrance. The above measures still apply once inside the building.

Pencils, paper and memo cards for transcribing data are provided for your use by the Archives. Pens are not allowed, however, a laptop computer may be used. Xerox machines are available for coping files at a cost of \$.15 per page. All data for copying must be approved by an attending archivist. Many papers in the folders are stamped SECRET, although they have been declassified. To be reproduced they require a special notation by the archivist. Stapled papers must have the staples removed by an archivist. Owing to the large number of researchers retrieving all types of records, there is a five minute time limit at a Xerox machine for the copying of files.

The data for the 385th Bombardment Group (H) are contained in 65 boxes that are numerically indexed. It shows their location within the archives and the content, such as, the mission number, target and mission date, of each folder in the box. However, the mission folders within each box are in no logical, numerical or alphabetical order. Furthermore, many boxes only list folders by date. Most missions have two or more folders and each folder may be

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in a different box. To obtain any box of folders a Service Reference Slip must be submitted for each box indicating the stack area, row, compartment and shelf number. After about two hours, the boxes are delivered to the research area for use. The maximum number of boxes allowed at one time is twenty, Once received, only one box and only one folder from that box is allowed to be viewed at any one time. Owing to the time required to obtain the files and the restriction on their review, I keep them open for review for three or four days.

Bill has indicated the majority of the requests that he received are from Association members or kinsfolk who would like to know what missions a 385th BG veteran flew, what happened to him, what were the names of the other crew members and what aircraft did he fly. Bill has determined that most of the requested information can be obtained from the crew lists, which give the aircraft number,

the squadron and the names of all crew members with rank and serial numbers. For every mission as a minimum I obtain the aircraft number, the squadron and the pilots name from a published crew list. Many mission folders do not have published crew lists and I obtain the data by cross referencing statistical reports, aircraft positioning formations forms and Navigator debriefing sheets. The entire crew lists (usually five to seven legal size sheet) for every fifth mission is copied, via Xerox. If any mission has information such as MIA or accident reports or of a special interest, the crew list plus the other data is copied. All information is forwarded to Bill for the 385th Archival History.

I do enjoy obtaining the data for our Group History. Reading the Group and Squadron (High, Middle and Low) Commanders mission reports, as well as some of the debriefing reports of all crew members, and other data, is quite interesting and informa-

tive. Being a Radio Operator in an area of the aircraft with a limited view, data about many of the missions on which I had flown was unknown to me. Now my "war stories" are much more colorful.

Individuals can obtain data files from the Archives II by requesting it from the government Archivists. I understand that you can request the information for a specific mission at a cost (15 cents per sheet) of reproducing the papers. Furthermore the information may not arrive for several months as there are many military files and only a few archivists, You will receive all the data available for the requested mission, such as teletypes pertaining to the operation orders, crew lists, aircraft take offs and landings times, mission reports to the Group Commander and to higher headquarters, debriefing reports of all crew members, statistical reports of the maintenance and ordinance officers, etc.



***Lt. Maxwell, Bombardier of the Notstein's crew giving a crew briefing before their last mission. They were rammed over Frankfort on the raid of 29th January 1944 and spent the remainder of the war as guests of the Germans. Photo submitted by Earl R. Follenbee, co-pilot of the Notstein's crew.***



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## A Short Career in the 385th

by Sterling Rogers

It was such a long time ago. Our time with the outfit was so short that I really don't remember much about it. We were fresh from the States, full of disappointment that our shiny new B-17th had been taken away from us in Ireland. We came down by train from Stone and were met at the station by a smelly old GI truck. We were hardly settled into our quarters before the round of more training began.

We had come overseas with a co-pilot and navigator who were assigned to the crew just weeks before. Len was so uncertain of their abilities that he had me doublechecking the navigator all the way across the Atlantic. Talk about the blind leading the blind! Somehow we managed to make it in spite of lousy weather predictions and an overloaded airplane. Then, at Nuts Corner, they took our air-

plane away from us. That really hurt.

I know we made several training flights at Great Ashfield before we were sent on our first mission, but the only one I have a clear memory about was a check ride for the pilots. The evaluator discovered after take off that he had left his oxygen mask in the briefing room. He was going to abort the mission until Len and I convinced him that he could use mine and I would sit in the radio room where I could get a slug of straight oxygen now and then. And that is what we did. We flew around over England for a very long time while I sat on the floor and tried not to breathe too much.

We were in England just three weeks - not a record, I'm sure, but pretty close. I flew three missions - the first with someone else's crew, of course.

The last was on April 29th of 1944. I remembered the target as being the railyards in Berlin, but it seems it was Magdeburg instead. We were hit by both flack and fighters and I had to dump the bombload because we had an engine shot off its mounts. We lost a second one to a 20 mm shell in a prop hub, and the entire center section of the fuselage looked like a sieve from all the flack. But, somehow, all ten men had escaped injury. I was the only casualty and I broke my leg when I hit the ground.

Oh yes, we bailed out. B-17s are notoriously poor gliders and it's a long way back to England from Magdeburg. It took 365 days and eight minutes before we were free again.

*Sterling Rogers lives in San Marcos, TX His memoir of his year as a POW, Hunkered Down, was published in 2001.*

### Hunkered Down

*A book by Sterling Rogers, a 385th member.*

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# MALOX MOMENTS FOR YOUR THIRD VP

## *While Stationed At Great Ash field*

By Art Driscoll

Many malox moments were experienced during my six months as a pilot with the 549th SQ of the 385thBG. Flak was usually moderate but accurate as my crew well knows by a direct hit over Dunquerque. We left our B-17 to be salvaged at Merville, France, and our wounded tail gunner, Suds Sumney, to be hospitalized. This was the end of combat for both, which are stories to be told elsewhere.

Fowl weather conditions was another source of many malox moments. We were put in harms way for a potential mid-air collision every time we took off and climbed to altitude through layers of dark clouds. Visibility was very limited and much of the time we were on instruments rather than sight until we got to altitude and joined our group.

Flying tight formation maximized our firepower against enemy fighters but also made us vulnerable to mid-air collisions. My position as low section leader made us even more vulnerable. We were "boxed-in" by the squadron formation with six planes above me, one on each wing, and an element of three planes below me. I had no place to escape except straight forward and that would be difficult since we were already at full power at altitude.

Lead crew training involved flying a lot of practice missions designed to improve the skills of bombardiers, and navigators. Most crews did not have a bom-

bardier because the whole group dropped upon signal from the lead plane. As low section leader we were back up for the lead and deputy lead plane. My bombardier, John J. Sweeney, got plenty of practice with all types of bombs. I had to fly 19 practice missions in order to complete 22 combat missions. During January, February, and March of 1945, we flew more practice missions than combat missions. Sometimes we experimented with dropping 500 pound Napalm bombs. These fire bomb explosives, which contained a liquid compound, were less reliable to handle. They tumbled out of the bombay, end over end, without the driving force and trajectory of bombs normally used. The Norden Bombsight had to be adjusted according to weight, timing of release, and pattern of trajectory. Our target was an uninhabited island off the coast of Portugal which involved three to four hours flying time. We experienced "Many Malox Moments" when loaded with 500 pound fire bomb explosives,

Ironically, my navigator, Edward J. Gildea was KIA over Dresden on March 2, 1945. The British had bombed Dresden the night before and this was the raid that started the well known firestorm in Dresden. The 385th lost four crews on March 2. Gildea was flying with Tripp's crew as substitute navigator. Some say the German fighters hit hard, that fateful day, in revenge for the Firebombing of Dresden.



Vs. 2

*Off we go into the wild blue yonder  
Climbing high into the sun;  
Here they come zooming to meet our thunder,  
At 'em boys, giv'er the gun!  
Down we dive spouting our flames from under,  
Off with one hell-uv-a roar!  
U'e live in fame or go down in flame,  
Nbnthg'll stop the US Army Air Corp!*

Vs. 3

*Minds of men fashioned a crate of thunder  
Sent it high into the blue  
Hands of men blasted the world asunder,  
How they live God only knew!  
Souls of men dreaming of skies to conquer  
Gave us wings ever to soar,  
With scouts before and bombers galore,  
Nothing can stop the US Army Air Corp!*

Vs. 4

*Here's a toast to the host of those  
Who love the vastness of the sky,  
To a friend we send the message  
Of his brother men who fly.  
We drink to those who gave their all of old,  
Then down we roar  
to score the rainbow's pot of gold.  
A toast to the host of men we boast the US  
Army Air Corp!*

Vs. 5

*Off we go into the wild sky yonder.  
Keep the wings level and true!  
If you'd live to be a gray haired wonder,  
Keep your nose out of the blue!  
Flying men guarding our nation's boarders,  
We'll be there followed by more,  
In echelon we carry on!  
Nothing'll stop the US Army Air Corp!*





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## My Experience in the 385th Bomb Group

By Jerry Mudge

Tom, I joined the 385th in Spokane after transition training in B-17's at Ephrata, Washington. During which time the crew was assigned, I as Pilot, William Clark as Co-Pilot, Verne Philips as Navigator, Samuel Sheffield as Bombardier, Burnell Cook as Top Turret Gunner and Flight Engineer, Leonard Ensele as Radio Operator and Gunner, James McGarvey as Ball Turret Gunner, Plato Galamopoulos and Joe DeGiacomo Waist Gunners and John Moniz as Tail Gunner. We were assigned to the 549th Squadron. Then it was off to Glasgow, Montana for more training as a crew. We received our B-17F there and flew over the North Atlantic to England. Because of a lot of mechanical problems on the way we named it "The Hesitating Hussy". Our first four missions were Milk runs but on number 5 to an airfield near Pads, France (Vitre et Artois) after we left the target, the German Fighters came from 12 o'clock high. They shot out our right engine and damaged the inboard one also. Ed Stone our Flight Leader lost his left ones. Within minutes we were under attack by twin engine night fighters. They quered up and took turns trying to shoot us down but I used every maneuver I could to dodge their bullets. The crew took quite a shake up. A flight of Spitfires; cleaned off the Germans and as we passed over the coastline of the English

channel Ed Stone's ship was shot down by a German MEI 09 fighter. I ordered the crew to throw out everything they could because we were losing altitude and I didn't want to ditch the plane in the ocean. There ahead of us were the White Cliffs but as we flew in past the waters edge to our left was a fighterstrip and I put down on it. Our Top Turret Gunner-Engineer was badly shot up and the rest of the crew, except for Bill Clark our Co-Pilot and I, badly bruised and battered (but alive) from the ride I had given them. On this mission Harland Villers had filled in for Plato Galamopoulos. For more details on this mission you the reader might ask our treasurer Verne Philips for his version. The next rough show for me and the crew was on October 10, 1943 to Munster, Germany, We had had some crew changes since our 5th Mission. Lt. James R. Watzke was now our Bombardier, Barney Blackwell was now top Turret, Richard Lewis Radio Operator, Frank Powell Right Waist Gunner, Malcom Hess Left Waist Gunner and Richard L. McDaniel Ball Turret Gunner. On this mission I was the Flight Leader, with Richie and Whitlow as wing men (flying low men of the group). This time all three ships were shot up by fighters flying thru our formation. Tom Helman in his book "LETTERS TO HARDLIFE" tells of the Richie Crews Air Battle and the flight

home to Great Ashfield our home base in England. While Whitlow as Tom writes, "Spent the night in a Cave beside a canal and the next three months walking home thru Spain." For my final (25th) Dec 13, 1943 we were off to Keil, Germany. The news release said, 1/Lt. Jerome Mudge, of Minneapolis, Minn., picked a rough mission to finish his tour of operations to the E.T.O. His plane lost an engine to flack on the way in but bombed on three engines and was forced to leave the formation near the coast on the way home. Half a dozen fighter attacks were beaten off by Mudge's Gunners, who, however, entered no claims, "We were too busy to get conformations" Mudge said I personally don't remember much about that day, I was just happy to be alive and going home. Jerry Mudge



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## The Spendid Nine

*By Sherwin I. Glazer*

It was back in the old days, when girls wore bobbysocks and saddle shoes, when boys hung around the corner drug store, when we listened to Tommy Dorsey and Bing Crosby, and we went to the neighborhood movies every week. There were no TV's, VCR's, MP3's, and DVD's the family would sit around the parlor and listen to the radio at night. Fibber McGee and Molly, Lux Radio Theater, and the Shadow were our main entertainment. You would see Chevys, Fords, and Chryslers driving down the street, without cell phones; no Toyotas, Hondas, and BMWs. Life was simple, uncomplicated..... until - - - — things suddenly changed.

There were nine of us, ages of about 20 to 30, and we came from all over the United States. There was Harold, from Illinois, Willis, from West Virginia, Louis, from Pennsylvania. They were the oldest. The rest of us were only about 20. There was Tom, from Oregon, Elmer from Utah, Francis, from N. Dakota, Eric, from Florida, and Bill and me, both from New York State. My name is Sherwin, a funny name, perhaps, but my parents must have liked it.

No, even though there were nine of us, we were not a baseball team. Harold, nicknamed Art, was the oldest. You might call him the captain, or chief, or leader of our small group. As such, he shouldered the most responsibility. He was

firm, but fair, and lead our group without too much difficulty, as, although we were young, we learned well and performed our jobs efficiently and without rebelling or resisting Harold's authority.

Harold was tall and slim, had a dark mustache, and could have been a stand-in for Clark Gable. Although he was attractive to females, he never wandered from the straight and narrow path. He was dedicated to his work and performed his duties so competently and conscientiously, that our team, or group, was chosen to lead other teams.

There were other groups such as ours, and we all carried enormous responsibility. We were entrusted, even at our young ages, by our employer with a piece of machinery that, even in those early years, cost our employer hundreds of thousands of dollars, perhaps a million or more. Our duties, if we had not carried them out successfully, would have resulted in a life far different than what we have lived during the ensuing years.

The duties in our work were varied and required skill. At first, to be admitted to this type of work, each of us had to pass demanding exams, both physically and mentally. For those of us who were able to pass the examinations, we were rewarded with, not only higher pay, but also a distinction that we were able to carry out perhaps more

dangerous and difficult tasks than others. We depended on each other and relied on each other's competence and capability. We were close companions, and friendships were developed that have endured through decades.

During these ensuing years, our endeavors have taken all of us along separate paths. Eric became a pharmacist, and still to this day works part time in a pharmacy in his home state of Florida. Francis, in partnership with his brother and father, raised horses on their ranch in Montana. Bill became sales manager of an automobile dealership in Buffalo, before packing up his family and moving to the warmer climate of Texas, where they now reside. Tom, from Oregon, went back to college, completed his education, worked in a savings and loan association of which he later became it's president. Tom took flying lessons and still flies his own plane. His wife, Darla, is a volunteer guide in the Oregon state capitol building. I, after completing my studies at Syracuse University, joined my father and two older brothers in operating a furniture business on Salina Street in Syracuse, NY, for forty years.

I cannot report on the whereabouts of Harold or Willis. We have never been able to locate them or to contact them. Due to the fact that they were older than most of us, it is entirely possible that they have both



passed away. And Louis, who was also older, has passed away, as his wife informed me about fifteen years ago.

Even though we all live in different parts of the country, with hundreds and in some cases thousands of miles between us, most of us manage to meet every two years to spend a few days together. We all bring our spouses, those of us who still have spouses, and those of us who are able to attend the get-togethers.

Well, I purposely haven't divulged what kind of team or group we were and what our work consisted of. I thought perhaps my readers would like to try to put forth a conjecture. Now, the time to reveal our type of group and its purpose has arrived. We were not a sports team; we were not a squad of

law enforcers like police or state troopers; we were not a crew of workers in industry, nor were we teachers or professors.

We were the combat crew of the heavy bomber Hells Bells in the Mighty 8th Air Force in World War II. It was our duty to bomb and destroy German military installations, railroad yards, factories, and thereby participate in the destruction of the capability of the German war machine to conquer Europe and eventually the western hemisphere. Thankfully, we were able to achieve our goal and to save the world from the throes of German Nazism, to preserve our way of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

SHERWIN I. GLAZER  
B-17 Navigator  
549th Squadron  
385th Bomb Group

## A Fair Comparison

by James R. Blackburn,  
34th Bomb Group

After reading the August 1998 edition of the 8th A.F. NEWS, I feel that the time has come for me to write this letter concerning the comparison of the B-17 and B-24 bombers. Some of us had the opportunity to fly both the B-24 and the B-17 under the same combat conditions. As many know, the Third Air Division of the 8th A.F. was half B-24 groups and half B-17 groups. The First Air Division was all B-17s and the Second Air Division was all B-24s. As 8th A.F. grew, it was decided that the Third Air Division would convert to all B-17s. I was in the 34th Bomb Group (H) in Mendlesham, England. We converted to B-17s in July 1944. My crew's conversion came when ferry pilots brought in new B-17s and flew the B-24s out. Our instructors were teams of one instructor pilot and one instructor engineer. We got one two-hour flight in the local area and two landings. We were then given a new B-17 in which we flew about four practice missions, dropping bombs at the range called "The Wash" at 25,000 feet. After seven missions in B-24s, our crew was designated as a Group Lead Crew. Every mission was led by a Group Lead Crew with another Lead Crew as Deputy Lead. We dropped our bombs with all groups doing pattern bombing when the Group Lead dropped two smoke bombs with the regular bombs. All Group bombardiers then dropped their



**Hell's Belles** Flown by the Paul Lowry crew. For their 35th and final mission on March 19, 1945 to Jena they were assigned a different airship, bad luck, they were shot down. All aboard parachuted out and became POWs. Hell's Belles then was flown by the Kay crew on a number of missions. See article *The Splendid Nine* by Sherwin I. Glazer, Navigator on the Kay crew.



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bomb loads in trail at intervals directed in our Intelligence briefings. Another reason that I feel qualified to make this comparison is that we were shot down on our thirteenth mission and landed the damaged B-24 on an English base on the East Coast of England. When our Engineering officer arrived and inspected the plane he declared it unrepairable, and it was left at the English base. The second time we were shot down was while leading a B-17 formation (same 34th Bomb Group) to Ludwigshafen on our eighteenth mission. Two of the 88 mm direct hits damaged the #2 wing tank and the bomb bay. The aircraft was burning and starting to break up. Making it to friendly lines, ninety miles away, was impossible. We all bailed out at 26,500 feet, were POWs, and returned home in June 1945. I will briefly list my qualifications before making the comparison. I was in the Army Air Corps, then the Air Force from 1941 to 1971. I have 7,000 hours as a pilot. Heavy bombers that I have flown are (in order) B-24J, B-17G B-29, B-47E and B-52G. Now for the comparison:

1. B-24s and B-17s are very similar, both weighing about 65,000 pounds at takeoff.
2. They had almost identical armament and fuel load.
3. The B-17 had four 9 cylinder single row radial engines of 1820 cubic inches and 1200 hp, was turbo supercharged and built by Wright. The B-24 had four 14 cylinder double row radial engines' of 1830 cubic inches and 1200 hp and was built by

Pratt Whitney.

4. The B-24 had a new type wing called the Davis wing with Fowler (slide down) wing flaps. The B-17 had a conventional design wing with split flaps.

5. As for the bomb load, our bomb wing always carried 6,000 pounds of bombs. Mainly the bomb loads were twelve 500 pound bombs but several times there were 6,000 pounds of 250 pounds bombs and once we carried magnesium incendiary bombs. All the B-17 and B-24 pilots that I knew in Stalag Luft I POW camp said they also always carried a 6,000 pound bomb load.

6. Unlike the B-17, the B-24 was made in many different models, such as the excellent Navy long range patrol bomber. Many of these versions might have carried different bomb loads, but our B-24s were barely able to get off the ground from our base on mornings when there was variable or no wind. This was because we were given a British air base which had short runways because of previous use by fighters. It was a common occurrence for planes to run off the end of the runway into the dirt overrun before the stick was pulled back. On one of these mornings one of the B-24s became airborne but sank back into the ground after about two hundred yards. The aircraft and crew were lost. The wing loading on the B-24 Davis wing was much higher in pounds per square foot than the B-17 with the conventional wing. When we got B-17s we floated off the runway 1,000 to 500 feet before we

got to the end of the runway, a great relief to all.

7. Altitude and Handling: While flying B-24s our parts of the bomber stream flew at around 21,000 feet. As soon as we changed to B-17s our altitude moved up to 26,000 feet, sometimes more, where the flak was less accurate. The bomber stream at that time was as far as you could see ahead and behind. The lead crew was responsible for keeping his thirty nine plane formation exactly three minutes behind the one in front and so on down the line. In the summer of 1944, the bomber stream almost always had 2,000 B-24s and B-17s. All lead pilots were required to hold 150 mph indicated air speed. At the usual conditions of 25,000 feet and -40C, this gave a true air speed of 222 mph.

8. Emergency handling: In the emergencies that we experienced we found that (a) The B-17 with two engines out on one side handled much better than the B-24 and could maintain a higher altitude, (b) The B-17, with its flat bottom (fuselage and wings) crash landed and stayed intact much better than the B24, which had about ten feet of fuselage below the wing to absorb the impact. This also enabled a B-17 that ditched in the water to have a better chance of staying intact and floating much longer. On a mission in B-24s to Politz, a rocket center near Poland, we all knew that gas was going to be tight. No aircraft were lost over Germany and we were returning over the North Sea when five of



## LETTERS

my wing men called and said they were running out of gas and were preparing to ditch. Our crew alerted British Air Sea Rescue and gave them time and position (co-ordinates) of the ditching position, number of planes and crew members. No crew could loiter in the area because we all had very little gas. The North Sea was very rough that day and the water was cold. We never again heard any information about plane wreckage or crew members. It is my opinion that the planes must have broken up because of ditching on the rough sea.

9. Conclusion: All heavy bomber pilots from POW camps retrained in B-24s at Smyrna, Tennessee, which is where I started out before going overseas. After the war I also flew stripped down versions of the B-24 and B-17. With the extra weight, turrets and armaments gone, I cruised each aircraft at low altitude at 30" of mercury and 2,000 rpm. Each plane indicated around 180 mph. Although I flew more missions in the B-24 and flew it first, for handling, engine-out emergency and ditching, I prefer the B-17. I have heard this argument off and on since 1950 and waited as long as I could for someone who flew both planes, in conditions and with experiences similar to mine, to write. There are few of us left that flew both aircraft in combat. I feel compelled to record my observations.

(From JUNE 1999 8th AIR FORCE NEWS)

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!!

Our annual flight back to Florida was a bit more stressful than usual, mostly because of enhanced security at Frankfurt Airport. We did not object to the longer lines at security check points and only wish that security checks were as stringent and efficient at airports in this country. There are no flights from Luxembourg to Orlando anymore, so we opted to go to Frankfurt by car, about 3 hours by Autobahn. The 9 1/2 hour flight to Pittsburgh wasn't much fun, but we made it. Customs inspection was no problem although there was more scrutiny of our dog's papers than usual. We have another Chihuahua she was evidently abandoned in the forest near our village. We call her Foxy and she gets along fine with Inco.

It was an eventful and enjoyable summer. Several groups of WWII Vets came over and I always enjoy showing them around. I made 3 trips to Bastogne and also discovered a fantastic museum in Clermont, Belgium called The Remembrance 1945-1949 which reflects years of hard work by a wonderful couple, Marcel and Mathilde Schmetz.

Immediately after the horrible events of 11 September there was enormous outpouring of support from all Luxembourgers. Thousands went to the U.S. Cemetery and placed floral tributes on the graves. The American Embassy was swamped by hundreds who came to express their condolences and reaffirm their support to our nation. They mourned with us. I was invited to attend ceremonies in several towns and villages where flowers were placed at monuments and memorials that had been dedicated to Americans who fought in the area during WW II. People I did not even know would stop me and express their feelings of sorrow and support—it was really touching.

All of us suffer along with the families who lost loved ones on September 11th. We reach out to them with our thoughts and prayers. We look for ways to help the suffering families. However, I have noticed at least some good that has resulted from 11 Sept. Families are closer together, church attendance is up—it is easy to get blood donors. Firemen, policemen, medical personnel and members of the military are now recognized as the true heroes that they are. Patriotism is enjoying a tremendous upsurge that we have not seen since Pearl Harbor Day. Donations to charities are on the increase.

The goal of the terrorists was to bring down America, and they have failed miserably. The deaths in the Pentagon and The World Trade Center have helped America become an even stronger nation, held in greater respect all over the world. Long live The United States of America!!

We hope that each of you has a wonderful Holiday Season and that you are surrounded by loved ones and friends. If I learned anything in the recent tragedy that has befallen us all it is that nobody has enough friends.

God Bless You All,  
John and Felicia Parker

*Editor's note.*

*Colonel John Parker (USAF Retired) and his wife Felicia live the summers in Luxembourg and winters in Florida. Colonel Parker is a very good friend of the 385th. He has spent many hours assisting Roger Feller with the 385th museum in Perle, Luxembourg. During the 385th tours to Perle Colonel Parker was always there with a smile on his face to give us a helping hand.*



## LETTERS

Dear Tom and Darla

I hope you had an good start in the new year and that you are going well. I had the opportunity to buy a link trainer in Belgium. It is the same as you used on your base. It is still working. We will show it in the museum. It is a wonderful item and I think the only one in Europe. I got a picture from Leo laCasse while he is sitting in the trainer at Great Ashfield. On 29th of January the U.S. Air Force Band is coming to Perlé for a concert. It will be again a great day for the 385th BG. We will hold a ceremony with the honor guest at the memorial. The U.S. Ambassador will come to Perlé and many Officers of The US Air Force.

Hope to see you two in Luxembourg in May. Best regards  
Roger and Jeanny

Dear Tom,

Thanks for the copy of the Hardlife Herald which I just received.

Thanks also for the review of The Munster Raid - Before and After. I think both the review and the Hardlife Herald are excellent. The Hardlife Herald is so complete, it is more like a magazine than a newsletter.

When we flew pathfinder missions at the 482nd BG (Sept. '43 - Mar. '44), we would leave Alconbury the night before the mission, and fly to the group we would lead during the mission. Unfortunately, I don't think we flew a pathfinder mission with the 385th.

Thanks again, and best wishes.  
Sincerely, John O'Neil

Tom,

Rather than tell another "combat air story," I think I will tell of another 385th incident:

We had won the air war and we had celebrated VE day. Our assignment while waiting to fly back to the States was to fly into Austria, pick up displaced persons and ferry them to their home. In this case we picked up 30 French slave laborers at Lintz and were scheduled to fly them to Laon, France. Now as you know, B-17's were not designed to carry 30 passengers. Benches, resembling bleachers, were built into the bomb bay. We planned to place 5 passengers in the nose with me, and put 5 more in the waist. The remainder would go into the bomb bay. This, more or less, would balance the load.

The trip into Austria was great! No flack or fighters, no need for oxygen and we got to fly low enough to actually see details on the ground. We could see both all the damage our bombs had done, as well as the fairy-tale like castles along the Danube River.

On the return leg, I elected to take a detour and fly over Paris because I wanted to see the Eiffel Tower. (I didn't ask or tell the pilot; I just gave the appropriate headings.) When it came in sight, the pure joyous emotion of the Frenchmen was overwhelming. However, as those in the waist told those in the bomb bay what was in sight, the bomb bay emptied!! They all wanted to see! Can you imagine what 25 people suddenly in the waist did to the trim?? None of us spoke French and none of them understood (or wanted to understand) English. It took a lot of arm waving to get the message across to PLEASE get back in the middle of the airplane. We didn't crash, I did get to see the Eiffel Tower and all 30 Frenchmen got home.

Bill Varnedoe, 1st Vice Pres.

FROM "THE DAILY TELEGRAPH", LONDON, MONDAY 24TH DEC. 2001  
EUROPE WILL NEVER RIVAL THE POWER AND PURPOSE OF AMERICA

By W.F. DEEDES

What an extraordinary contrast we see between Europe's enthusiasm for regulating our lives and its reluctance to get seriously involved when as happened on 11th September, "the chips are down". The notion that, by bringing into line a dozen or more nations, Europe can match the power and influence of America is taking a considerable knock.

Europe can create a common currency, regulate trade and industrial practices. It can produce endless codes of conduct for our different institutions. What it cannot do is to achieve a common foreign policy, and so present the sort of resolve that makes America formidable.

And please don't tell me that it is early days, and that Europe will eventually gather such strength and influence. As long as Europe's principal nations pursue their separate interests in the world, as they have done for centuries and will go on doing, there will be no concerted foreign policy.

Britain's attachment to America, which Tony Blair has been fostering with heroic diplomatic endeavours, is not reflected in Europe. Russia now has a closer understanding with America than has France.

Having lived through two world wars, I am not against closer European brotherhood. I support it. But I deplore Europe's pretensions, such as promises of a European Army that can replace NATO, so making us independent of America.

This is eyewash, and recent events in Afghanistan have proved it to be eyewash. America knows what Europe finds hard to accept, namely, that in this predatory world, you must defend your corner or go under. That concept is anathema to peace-loving Europeans, dedicated to a cosy, conformist life for us all; but it is reality.

That we can all celebrate Christmas this week with a relatively easy mind owes more than Europeans will admit to the power of America. Deplore it, if you must, but don't pretend it is not so.

WITH WARMEST WISHES TO YOU ALL FOR 2002  
FROM A BRITISH FAMILY



## LETTERS

Dear Mr. Newton:

Maybe I should feel hurt that you left mine out of the list of books authored by 385th members, but I think I understand. You were listing works dealing with 385th subjects as much as you were listing works by 385th authors. Mine (called *Hunkered Down*) is about the life of a crew who became prisoners of war. It was published commercially last spring by JoNa Books, PO Box 336, Bedford, IN 47421. It can be had direct from the publisher or by special order from any bookstore.

But, aside from that, I have to relate an incident which happened a couple of years ago when we were trying to locate the members of our old 550th crew. I was bombardier on Len Sexton's crew. We went down on 29 April 1944 north of Magdeburg. Four of the gunners and I have been in contact for many years but we didn't know the whereabouts of the rest of the crew. One of the gunners got a listing from the internet of telephone numbers and addresses for people who had similar names and I began to send out inquiries. Nothing came of it for a long time.

But one night my phone rang and the caller announced immediately that his name was Len Sexton but he was not the man I was looking for. Turns out he and his father both are named Len Sexton with no middle initial, they both have lived all their lives in New Market, TN, (which was our pilot's home of record) but neither had ever heard of a third man with that name in their town. I had quite a long talk with the man, but we never located the Len Sexton I was looking for.

For anyone interested, the entire crew on 29 April consisted of Len Sexton, pilot., Gene Khoury, Co-pilot; Robert Pelletier, Navigator; Sterling Rogers, Bombardier; Earl Osbourne, Engineer; Oral Moore, Radio; Henry Dunning, Waist gunner; Robert Masten, Waist gunner; Thom Fairchild, Ball gunner; and John Frangadakis, Tail gunner. We all survived and made it back to the States but Masten and Frangadakis have since died. We have been unable to locate the other officers on the crew.

Sterling Rogers

Dear Tom,

I would like to tell you of an interesting incident that happened to me some years ago. On a trip through Europe we stopped at the border of the Netherlands to convert money and go to the restroom. It was dark and raining and on the way to the restroom I tripped on the curb. Didn't think much of the incident till I got back on the bus and felt my elbow - and it was quite "squishy" so I had my wife look at it. By flashlight she said I can see bone. So we bandaged it. We were scheduled to spend the night in Amsterdam. After we got settled in - it was time to get the elbow taken care of so we went to the nearest hospital emergency room. On checking in I was asked "Who will pay for this." I agreed to pay. I was directed to the emergency room and found five doctors and five nurses there -and I was their only patient. The doctor who worked on me said "You are the first American that I ever worked on." That brought to mind the American-Dutch connection so I mentioned to them that I was on a couple of the food drop missions and was wondering if they knew about the incident. Then I realized that they all knew about it and that it was one of the most remembered things of the war. They stitched my elbow and gave me a sling .... and you know, I never heard them mention anything about a bill.

George S. Hruska

7442 Ontario St. Omaha, NE 68124-3563

geoshruska@juno.com



**Leading Lady**

James Wetner's Crew, Photo Submitted by Russell N. Wissman, Tailgunner. L to R Ground Crew Member, Copilot Robert Yates, Ball Turret Tommy Johnston

## Taps

**James Thomas Williams** age 82, of Nolensville TN. died November 23, 2001. Served in the 548th Squadron of the 385th Bomb Group, of the 8th Air Force during WW2. He flew 35 missions as flight engineer on the Florian Toman crew.

**Carl W. Carpenter Sr.** age 82 of Lewisville Ohio died Oct. 3, 2001. A U.S. Army Air Corps veteran of WW2. He served with the 8th Air Force, 385th Bomb Group as a parachute rigger.

## Deceased

John D. Hite

Russell Pfau

Harold L. Smith

Charles E. Wells

March 2000

Please forward all obituary notices to:  
Tom Newton PO. Box 34, Dallas, OR 97338-0034



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February 2002

### 385th BGMA

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