

Hardlife



Herald



Newsletter of the  
385th Bombardment Group Memorial Association

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

*The Mighty Eighth*

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Vol. 20 Number 1

February, 2003

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**Ditching of Heavenly Body**

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**385 REUNION • HAMPTON, VA • OCTOBER 22-27, 2003**

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# Hardlife Herald

385th Bombardment Group (H)

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## Notice of Biennial Meeting

• The biennial meeting of the 385th Bombardment Group Memorial Association will be held October 22 - 27, 2003 at the Holiday Inn, Hampton VA to elect officers and transact other business that may take place.

• **2005 REUNION:** Now is the time to make your proposals for the 2005 reunion. Make the proposal as complete as possible by including location, why it is a good location, who will be the host, etc. If proposing a different format than previous reunions give details. Hosts can prepare a sales pitch to give at the 2003 reunion. Mail proposal to Bill Varnedoe, 5000 Ketova Way Huntsville AL 35803. Please send proposals by April 2003 if possible.

• **Editors note:** What are your thoughts on a 2004 reunion & annual reunions?

• **2003 DUES:** If your Hardlife Herald address mailing code does not show LM999, R03, or A03 your 2003 dues are due. Please mail your dues in the amount of \$25.00 to 385th BGMA c/o Verne Philips PO Drawer 5970 Austin TX 78763

## Notice of Proposed By-Law Change

**Amend Article IV, Executive Board. Section 3 and Section 5 to read as follows:**

Section 3. The Executive Board shall meet at each regular meeting of the members, and at such other times as may be called by the Chairman or by a majority of the Executive Board members. Meetings may be conducted by teleconferencing or by email.

Section 5. A quorum at any meeting shall consist of a majority of the members of the Board, then elected and/or appointed, and serving, who have not advised that they are unable to attend the meeting, either in person, by teleconferencing or by email. A majority of such quorum may decide any question that may come before Board. For teleconferencing, no answer shall be construed to mean, "unable to attend," and for email questions, no reply within two weeks of posting of the question shall be construed to mean, "unable to attend."

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## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

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

A business meeting of the Board of Officers will be held on Oct. 22 at 19:00 Hours at a location to be determined at a later date. Anyone wishing to discuss matters pertaining to the Association should have their inputs to me prior to the meeting. At this meeting I plan to assign responsibilities to each of the officers that will make our Reunion run smoothly. We can discuss the Hospitality Room hours and the cost of items to be dispensed, we can assign responsibilities for the

bus coordinators on each tour scheduled, I will need much help in getting the Banquet prepared on Sunday Oct. 26 and other matters not yet thought of at this time.

Any member planning or just thinking of attending the 2003 reunion would you please send me a card with your full name, the name of the person who will accompany you and the squadron you represent. Things are beginning to mount up and I would like to get started on mak-

ing the IDs for all participants to keep the work load down to a minimum at the last minute.

As you well know Mike Gallagher is the committee chairman to present a slate of officers for the next change over. If any of you want to retain your status I would advise you to let Mike know what your wishes are. I hope this meets with your approval Mike? I also expect you to make the presentation to the members at the reunion on the last day we meet. (Oct. 27)

## THE SOFT LIFE SIDE

by Darla Newton

Well we have made it through the holiday season, however we are in for another fast flying year before they are on us again. It would be a duller life without them. Aren't we lucky to live in a country that has Valentine, Patrick, Martin Luther King, Mothers and Fathers, the 4th of July, Memorial, Labor, Thanksgiving to name just a few of our days of celebration. Our family was going back in time and asking "What is the first Christmas you remember?" This could actually work for most holidays along with what they have meant to each of us. War time would make for some poignant memories.

At our age most of us don't have to worry about getting back to work anymore. To quote Danny McMoorty "I have never liked working. To me a job is an invasion of privacy." This year we

have the opportunity to meet again at the 385th Reunion in Hampton, Virginia. President Leo has lined up a swell time for all of us and the special part is just the getting together with those we now consider old friends.

What a better time to read. At least that goes for us in rainy Oregon. One book that is a good pat on the back is *What's Good About America* by Dinesh D'Souza. He is an immigrant from India. I also enjoyed one called *Abraham*. He is claimed by Jews, Christians and Muslims as their father. We attend a British Travel Club that have different programs each month. We recently had one on Roman England and then I found a fiction book set in that time frame around 300 in the Common Era.

Now Tom is much more current in his reading (ha). He is in WWII reading and enjoying so

many books by 385th authors. What good memories they have after all these years. Reading through then has made me realize why these memories are so imprinted on their thoughts and minds. It has given me a much greater appreciation of what these young boys endured.

If you grew up speaking English consider yourself fortunate. Why doesn't Buick rhyme with quick? The bandage was wound around the wound, Of course the weird headlines continue. "Lansing residents can drop of trees: stud tires out; chef throw his heart into helping feed needy" What a wonderful country and language! You all did know that a will is a dead giveaway.

So give thanks for minds to think, hearts to love, and hands to serve. Fondly, Darla

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## FEATURE STORY

# THE DEMISE OF THE "HEAVENLY BODY"

*By Herbert Ft. Greider - Navigator*

Edwin Perry-pilot (May 2002 Hardlife Herald) described how he and his crew came to name their B-17 (49-6608) the "Heavenly Body."

This is a description of the events on September 26, 1944 of the Charles Lamont Crew and that B-17 and its demise. As Ed Perry said he and his crew were on a three day pass and Lamont's crew was assigned to fly the airplane that day. The mission that day was to bomb Bremen, Germany. Lamont was first pilot and the copilot was Rodolfo Gutierrez, who was a first pilot. The method of operation for the 8th Air Force was for a new crew coming on base the first pilot would fly as copilot on his first mission with an old crew. It was to be Lamont's crew's last mission.

The usual procedure for the 8th Air Force bombing in Northern Germany was to group over England and go northeast over the north sea. They would stay over water as long as possible and make land-fall as near the target as possible.

Usually when we entered Germany there was some flak action. The mission planners kept track of the flak batteries and tried to enter Germany hopefully where there were none. That was seldom the case and on September 26 we got some flak. We got hit on number 4 engine and lost that engine. Lamont notified the lead pilot for 385th bomb group and was

advised to turn back and drop the bombs into the North Sea.

At this point there appeared to be no problem in returning to base. We had once returned from what is now the Czech Republic with an engine out with no problems even with all that time over Germany as a lone aircraft. We did get a P-51 as an escort for about half way back when the P-51 had to leave us to have enough fuel to return to base.

This day was certainly different. The returning head wind at mission altitude was over 100 mph. As we returned over the North Sea, the bombardier, Roy Buck dropped the bomb load, as we head west into the high winds.

As we headed toward England, Lamont called the British Air/Sea Rescue as a precaution. The way the British Air/Sea rescue worked with the 8th Air Force was that the Air Force would notify the British that the mission was going up the north sea, in time get their boats out along the route ahead of the planes fly over. The British even sent out a P-47 to follow us.

Things were going fine until we lost a second engine. With two engines left and 100 mph head wind, the ground speed was less than 50 mph. With high power on the two remaining engines, the danger of losing a third engine was great. We really had not pro-

gressed very far along the coast of the Netherlands. We were descending slowly to take advantage of the momentum. The third engine went out.

With only one engine, ditching was assured. We had talked to a crew that had ditched, no problem-just like you so often throw a flat stone over smooth water. But our problem was the high winds and huge waves. We, the crew, got into the radio room as the normal ditching procedure.

Lamont asked the engineer (Al Detert) about shoulder harnesses for the pilots. There were none installed on that B-17. The crew's position for ditching was to have five members backs against the forward bulkhead and two lay on the floor with their feet against the forward bulkhead.

The pilots did a wheels up ditching. What was not expected was the effect of the very high waves - 15-20 feet according to the British Air/Sea rescue. It was almost like hitting a wall. The plane broke open at the radio room. I was lying on the floor and was immediately underwater. Instead of crawling out at the overhead hatch we walked on the wing. The plane hit so hard the pilots never had a chance.

The B-17 had a life raft on each side of the plane. The one on the right side came out and inflated. Five crew members got in the raft back of the wing. The bombardier, Buck, went off the

wing forward and got hold of a low pressure oxygen bottle (knocked loose by the impact) to help keep him afloat in addition to his life vest. I (navigator) was the last man out of the plane (as shown in photo of the painting).

I was in the water with an inadequate life vest. With the high waves the water kept hitting me in the face and after some time I was drowning. Fortunately for me I was first to be picked up unconscious. Then the other crew members were rescued.

The plane sank in a few minutes. The P-47 followed us to ditching and dropped a smoke marker to show our exact location to the rescuers, you can imagine the difficulty of finding us in 15-20 foot waves.

The British medic said he worked on me over 45 minutes before I responded with any vital signs. The boat was on the way back to port before I was aware of things. The British kept me overnight at their naval hospital at Great Yarmouth. Al Detert stayed with me at the hospital overnight. The base sent a vehicle the next day to pick us up to return to base.

It is interesting that the people keeping score were not going to give us credit for this, our last mission since we did not go over the target. This decision was reversed before we returned to base.

We, the remaining crew, plus Charles Woodward our first pilot who had finished a mission ahead of us since he had flown as a copilot on his first mission, returned to the U.S. by ship in November 1944 into New York harbor.

## **Bible Foretells Rescue**

### **Text Picked by Flier Describes Sea Crash**

A U.S. EIGHTH AIR FORCE BOMBER STATION, England

Sept. 30, 1944 (A.P.)

Seven survivors of the Flying Fortress Heavenly Body, rescued from the English Channel after their bomber sank, named their new Fortress Seven Angels today, taking the name from a text in the Book of Revelation.

It goes back to the day when this crew in the bombardment division took off with a formation headed for Bremen to bomb a Nazi tank factory.

Staff Sergeant Gilbert Woemer 21, of Fredericksburg, Texas, just before the takeoff opened his pocket Bible at random and inserted an english pound note between two pages for safe keeping.

Subsequently he found in the verse marked by the currency an allegory of the ordeal he and his six crewmates experience.

Over Germany the Heavenly Body left formation. One engine was out and two of the three others engines had failed by the time it was over the channel.

The plane was vibrating and losing height badly and the pilot warned the crew they were going to hit. The plane split in three sections. The pilot and co-pilot were trapped and quickly sank. The other seven crewmen huddled in a rubber dinghy or clung to the sides.

From Chapter 8 of the Book of Revelation they read: "And I saw the Seven Angels which stood before God..."

While 20-foot waves buffeted them, they looked up and saw a British air-sea rescue plane circling as its pilot sent out the radio position for rescue craft.

"And another Angel came" they said.

The crewmen waited some 30 minutes, their eyes toward England.

"And. . . there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour."

A rescue launch sped across the channel and a plane dropped smoke bombs to direct it toward the survivors.

"And the smoke of the incense, which came with prayers of the Saints, ascended up before God..."

Besides Sergeant Woemer, the survivors are:

Lieutenant Roy Buck, 27, of Nashville, Tenn., bombardier; Lieutenant Herbert Greidel, 25, Dauphin, Pa., navigator; Technical Sergeant Albert Deterokr, 27, of St. Louis, Mo., top turret gunner; Staff Sergeant Robert Hoyman, 21, Latrobe, Pa., ball turret gunner, and Staff Sergeant Richard Rolander, 20, Leicester, Mass., tail gunner.

#### **Cover Picture:**

A photo of a painting by Gil Cohen - Doylestown, PA. It was commissioned by my son - Dr. Thomas Greider - Houston, TX. Mr. Cohen reconstructed the ditching scene - recollection of information from Roy Buck, Al Deter, Gil Woerner and Herb Greider.



## LIFE AS A POW Making The Things We Needed

*By Sterling Bogers*



In Zagan we never referred to a barracks. Both the prisoners and our guards referred to it as a block. I don't know why. That's not the German word for barracks. But block it was.

Our block contained a room called a kitchen, but it had none of the necessary equipment to allow it to serve that purpose. Even if it had contained a stove, there was not enough fuel to make it useful. Its several large metal pots were too large to be practical on the little tin stoves in our rooms. It probably was intended as a ration breakdown center since there was a central cook house where the German rations were prepared. I don't remember that "kitchen" ever being used for anything at all.

Each room was issued a large metal pitcher. That was the measure of a ration of soup. That, and a loaf of sour black bread, was the frequent extent of goon-supplied food intended to feed fifteen men for one day. The soup often had weevils in it, or was dehydrated cabbage soup (green death) which many could not stomach. The bread, barely edible normally, became acceptable when toasted against the side of the tin stove.

Without the Red Cross we would have been hungry indeed. Their corned beef, cold out of the can, will sustain life, but it is not a very palatable food. It leaves a coating of beef tallow on your teeth and the taste of it lingers for

hours. Spam, too, needs heating to improve its qualities. We found a way around that. We saved powdered milk cans, split them, pounded them flat, and then shaped them into cooking pots and pans. Some people became very adept at forming larger pans by joining two pieces of metal with a flat seam, carefully pounded into place and braced with extra metal. The edges of the entire piece were then turned up and braced so that a very serviceable square pan resulted.

Some of the metalsmiths became so skilled that they made little furnaces which could boil water with no more fuel than a few twigs and shavings. These were ingenious arrangements of fire boxes with controlled air drafts. Some of them even had a small hand-driven fan to increase the heat. From the time we left Nürnberg until we were liberated

these little devices were our only source of hot meals.

The trick to making pans really lay in one thing - never let the guards see you do it. Possessing any kind of tool was strictly forbidden. Even the cheap dinner knives we were issued as mess kit components were confiscated if we were caught using them as tools. But we worked around that one, too. We split tin cans with them, but only if a lookout was posted to tell us when a guard was in the area. We made mallets from pieces of firewood, but we kept them in the fuel box where they looked like just another bit of fuel.

There is no way our guards were ignorant of what we were doing. They knew. But they couldn't catch us in the act. In the absence of proof they took no action. And we went right on making the things we needed.

### Inspirational Thought

Almighty God, who hast given us this good land for our heritage: We humbly beseech thee that we may always prove ourselves a people mindful of thy favor and glad to do thy will. Bless our land with honorable industry, sound learning, and pure manners. Save us from violence, discord, and confusion; from pride and arrogance, and from every evil way. Defend our liberties, and fashion into one united people the multitudes brought hither out

of many kindreds and tongues. Endue with the spirit of wisdom those to whom in thy Name we entrust the authority of government, that there may be justice and peace at home, and that, through obedience to thy law, we may show forth thy praise among the nations of the earth. In the time of prosperity, fill our hearts with thankfulness, and in the day of trouble, suffer not our trust in thee to fail.

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## Air Stories [385BG] "Off The Record (9)"

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

After reading back over some of the stuff I've written, it tells me I need to do some checking? The "Spell-Check" on this contraception is good - but - it sure don't correct stupid English mistakes! Then again - how would I know?

I never said I was good with English. And - I've done some pretty stupid things in my life. Most were learning experiences. One thing I always did like to do was have my clothes looking nice. My Mama taught me that. She said, "Patches ain't all that bad - if they are clean."

I found a British Lady living outside the rear gate at Great Ashfield that would do my laundry. She could wash, starch and iron my Khaki shirts until the collar and creases were sharp as knives. I don't know how she did it but she "dry-cleaned" my Class-A wool uniform blouse and pants, getting rid of that "wet-dog" odor so often causing people to look at a soldier funny.

Some Airmen at Great Ashfield did their own laundry and dry-cleaning. An open top five-gallon bucket half filled with 100+ octane airplane gas was used to clean wool uniforms. I always thought it left the men smelling worse than before attempting this. The gas was smuggled from the flight line - brought to near the Hut in the squadron area - clothes dipped in the fluid several times - then hung in a breeze to dry on a metal rack.

One hot summer day I got up from my sack and lit a cigarette - just sitting there. I heard someone cussing outside the Hut window, I walked to see what was going on. Things happened in a hurry!

As I walked to the window a slight breeze blew in with the odor of gasoline - I saw a hand hang a pair of pants on the window latch - I started to turn but it was too late - there came a "whump" - and the fire from my cigarette set the air and pants on fire!

I grabbed the fire extinguisher from the wall and ran outside to the flaming pants. I shook the fire extinguisher - turned it upside down - aimed the hose spigot at the fire - and a stream of water about that a very small male child would produce came spouting out. It so amused me I almost dropped the container and stood there laughing. The thin stream of water continued to flow in short spurts and dribbles as if nearly finished. The fellow that hung his gas soaked pants to dry, threw them on the ground as someone else smothered the fire with a GI blanket.

That which was left of the pants was the fly - complete with buttons - a seam from the crotch to the rear about 6 inches long and two short seams down each leg. Nothing else was damaged? Not even the Hut? No burned grass - nothing?

The man was mad as "all

get out" at me for ruining his pants and said I would have to replace them. Still laughing - I did nothing more than gingerly pick-up the remains and head for squadron quartermaster. The Army rule was - To have clothing replaced one must turn in the used garment,

The fellows in quartermaster laughed and asked what the hell was this as I laid the burned hulk on the counter and made my request for a new pair of pants. Without pause - after beating their sides and rolling on the floor laughing - they gave me a new pair of pants of the correct size which I returned and gave to my Buddy at the Hut.

Never did figure if I was the stupid one - or - the man cleaning pants with gasoline - but - it taught me a lesson - check your fire extinguishers ever so often!



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## SOMETIMES DURING MY TOUR I HAD A FEW LAUGHS

by Dominic Jordan

Not long after arriving at our Great Ashfield base I met another Bombardier named Ozzie Bottari who was from Philadelphia which is not far from my hometown of Penns Grove, N.J. We got together sometimes for what we called a "rat race" into the various towns. We never came home without having some laughs. One day in May we wandered into the little Hamlet of Great Ashfield which adjoined the base, the town folks were having a quaint little festival to raise money. There were all kinds of plain little home made games; nothing fancy like Merry Go Rounds or Ferris Wheels. They had all sorts of contests and an auction. I got sucked into that while bidding on a huge turnip of a watch which the auctioneer said was a "family heirloom." It had to be wound with a key. I was not entirely ignorant about the value of the pound versus our dollar but I got carried away, which can happen at auctions and was horrified when I had to cough up ten pounds or about forty bucks for the ticker. The pound all during the war was pegged at \$403.1/2 cents. I am not a collector and don't really know why I even got into the bidding. I gave the watch to an old jeweler friend when I got home. However the best was yet to come, it was the feature contest of the day, the "orse race" as the race announcer, who was also the auctioneer. At first only two

farm lads showed up with huge plow horses, but just as the race was to go off another farm lad came dashing up. Ozzie and I died laughing at his racing colors...a flowing red scarf...the race went off as the announcer called off the distance to the mens outhouse and around the ladies outhouse and then as he stated back "ere". Away they went but the kid with the flowing scarf could not get his horse to run straight, he ran almost right angles almost the entire race but just at the finish line he got his steed straightened up and won by a nose. We rolled on the ground laughing.

I had always enjoyed English history especially its heritage when it was all Catholic and the later Cromwell dealings in regards to the reformation. I used to borrow a 'wheel', bike to us, and go wandering the lovely wooded roads around the base. One day I wandered into an old church near Stowmarket and was puzzled by the roughness of the Oaken pews, they had been sort of hacked off and as I sat there the minister came in and said that the roughness of the armrests was due to Cromwells men who had roamed the once Catholic countryside and hacked off any sign of the Papacy like adornments of Saints that had been originally carved on the pews. The centuries had wore them down.

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*I recently picked a new primary care physician. After two visits and exhaustive lab tests, he said I was doing "fairly well" for my age.*

*A little concerned about that comment, I couldn't resist asking him, "Do you think I'll live to be 80?"*

*He asked, "Well, do you smoke tobacco or drink beer?"*

*"Oh no," I replied, "I've never done either."*

*Then he asked, "Do you eat rib-eye steaks and bar-b-que ribs?"*

*I said, "No, I've heard that all "red meat" is very unhealthy!"*

*"Do you spend a lot of time in the sun, like playing golf, hanging out at the beach or things like that?" he asked.*

*"No, I don't," I said.*

*He said, "Do you gamble, drive fast cars, or fool around with sexy women?"*

*"No," I said, "I've never done any of those things."*

*He looked at me and said, "Then why in hell do you even WANT to live to be 80??"*

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# BOOK REVIEW

## A Mighty Fortress

by Charles Alling

Pilot, 8th Air Force, 34th Bomb Group

The 385th Bombardment Group has a number of fine authors that have written of their flying experiences during World War II. Some we have reviewed in the past & others will be reviewed in future issues of the *Hardlife Herald*. Some times it is interesting to have a different perspective.

Charles Alling flew a total of 27 mission beginning in November 1944 & ending when the war came to and end in May 1945. Alling tells, with great restraint, the story of what it was like to be there, over the skies of enemy territory, the enormity of some of the raids they were part of and the consequences for those on the ground; of the planes around them that fell out of the sky under enemy attack. The fact that pilots, like Alling, who became a B-17 group leader, were only 22 years old at the time is astonishing. On the book dust cover there is an endorsement by another young W.W.II pilot, ex-President Bush. *"In a fascinating way, Chuck Alling recalls his days as a pilot flying B-17's over Germany. He is truly a member of 'The Greatest Generation', and from his book written from the heart people can learn a lot about the laughs and the tears of World War II."*

Former President  
George H. W. Bush

Members of the 385th should doubly enjoy this book starting with the dust cover. On

the dust cover there is a picture of a B-17 with a square G on its tail. We know that is a 385th airplane. The 34th Bomb Group that Alling flew with was part of the 93rd Combat Wing which was composed of the 34th, 490th, 493rd, & and the great 385th. Being in the same Combat Wing the 34th & 385th flew many missions close together. Your reviewer was especially interested in the mission of March 23rd 1945 to Geisecke and Allings account of a mid air collision. A sudden burst of flak, not in the target area, hit the left wing tip of a B-17 and tore it off. The B-17 made a sudden descent into Alling's right wingman braking the wingmans B-17 apart, both aircraft plunged to the earth. I believe the 385th was immediately behind the 34th as I remember witnessing such a mid air collision on that mission

& I have the incident recorded in my diary.

Also interesting was his comments of the mission on Good Friday, my 20th birthday, March 30, 1945 to Hamburg. The flak was worse than Alling had ever seen, and wondering if he would return that day. Your reviewer remembers the flak very well and thinking what a way to have a birthday & will I have another birthday.

The book is well written, very interesting especially to those that were there. I am certain 385th members that flew during the same time frame of Alling book would find that different perspective on missions of interest to them. I would recommend this one for your library. The book may be purchased by ordering from Casemate at \$29.95 plus shipping. See order form for address.

Tom Newton, Editor

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## HOLLAND

*By Donald J. Kabitzke*

You had to see Holland to believe what happened to them. The Germans tried their best to do to them what they did to the Jews. The people of Holland were the most mistreated nation the Germans had conquered. The Dutch refused to cooperate with them AND DID THEIR BEST TO MAKE THINGS ROUGH FOR THEM. They also did the most to help the Jewish people by hiding them.

While in high school, a teacher one day asked us if we knew what the word sabotage meant. When no one answered she said it came from the Dutch word sabot, or shoe. The Dutch did everything they could do to sabotage the war effort for the Germans. One of their favorites was to take off a shoe and jam it into a gear on some machine rendering it useless. Others poured cold coffee down the hot barrels of artillery pieces.

There were some Dutch who turned traitor and joined the Germans. One was a pilot in the Luftwaffe. Engineers were building a new bridge across the Maas River at Maastricht where we were located it was about a half mile from our squadron living in a forest. They worked day and night, rain or shine. They used huge searchlights which crossed to form a tent like set of beams which in turn lighted the area below like daylight. They refused to shut the lights off even during an air raid. The Germans wanted that bridge

destroyed at all costs.

One night about 11 a lone German bomber arrived and kept circling the bridge for over an hour. The sky was red with 50 caliber machine gun tracer bullets. In the meantime I was in my underwear and wearing a pair of fleece lined boots, hugging and circling a huge oak tree as I followed the shadow of the bomber. Finally a 90 millimeter piece hit the plane. The pilot jumped and was cut in two by a 90 millimeter. He was identified as a Dutch boy from Maastricht.

The only decent thing about Maastricht was its natatorium where we could bathe, take a Turkish bath and even swim. A walk down the street was enough to make you want to cry. Not a single store had any merchandise to sell. The Germans took it all, all that they left was the advertising signs. When the Germans left Maastricht, they filled every light pole for as far as you could see in both direction, even stripped of their shoes. In Belgium you could even purchase all sorts of guns.

Toward the wars end, the 385th and some other groups dropped food to the Dutch. They will never forget these deeds. Two years ago 240,000, turned out for a thank you celebration of our Air Forces, They had saved them from starvation.

## TRUE STORY

*By Bill Varnedoe*

This is a true story that I thought you would enjoy. Bob Silver of the 385th BG sent me the details and I think they ought to be passed on: Events do chain, seemingly unrelated things can have far reaching consequences! This is a true story taken from the diaries of Bob Silver and Otto Schramm telling of some events as they unfolded in World War II. One day, a kind Dutch lady, Frau Nell deWijs, took a young German soldier, Eric Schramm, her enemy, in her house to let him get warm and gave him something to eat. He wrote of this kindness to his father, Otto Schramm, who was an anti-aircraft gunner, Sgt. Schramm had the job of supplying the shells to his battery. This battery was renowned for its accuracy and had been decorated for their skill. On the morning after he got Eric's letter, Sgt. Schramm bicycled to get his battery's ammunition for the day. On the way, he remembered the letter and reached into his pocket to see if he had it. He did. But just at that time a dog ran in front of his bicycle. With only one hand, he swerved and crashed, He was injured, not badly, but enough so that his shells were not available for the guns and they were silent that day, the 5th of March 1945. Sgt. Schramm wrote in his diary in 1945 that he was sure, if he could have delivered the shells, they would have knocked down some of the Fortresses that flew over. The 385th Bomb Group

went on that mission and among those flying was Bob Silver. There was no flack, and all returned safely. Later in April 1945, Bob and the 385th participated in the food drops to the starving population in Holland. Much, much later, in April 1995, Bob Silver was part of a group of 385th veterans visiting Holland. I will quote Bob: "As I was giving out some of the cards to the children who came to greet us, the mother of one little girl was standing behind her and handed me a note which said. We are so very grateful that you survived the war-mainly, of course, for your sake but also for ours: If you had not survived you could not have brought the food which saved our nation. My grandmother told us that the food which she received from you in 1945 kept her family from starving to death after the horrible 'hunger winter' of 1945. Her name is Nelly deWijs."

I was also on that mission of 5 March 1945, and I, too, was on the Dutch food drops. Makes you think! The kindness of Nelly deWijs may well have saved our lives. Eric wrote of her kind act to Sgt. Scramm who fell because of that letter and an errant dog, causing a flack free mission from a battery which was known for its kills, so we could live to feed Mrs Wijs.

## PHOTOS OF HOLLAND DURING THE FOOD DROP

*Submitted by Harry Shovan of the William Carlisle Crew*



### Crew 489

Left to Right (Top Row)

William Carlisle - Pilot

Joseph Kully - Tail Gunner

Julian Gladstone - Navigator

Paul Fredrick - Bombardier

James Ramey - Ball Turret Gunner

(Front Row)

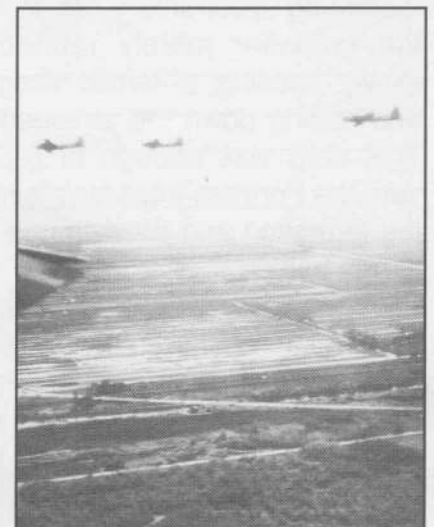
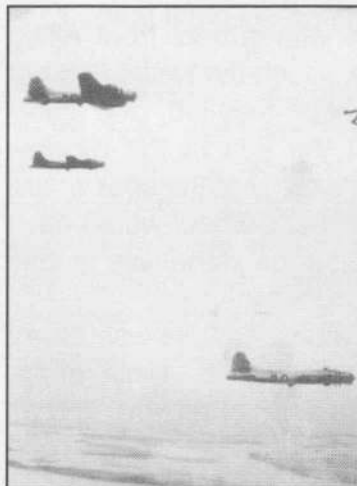
Thomas Kontos - Armorer Gunner

Thomas Levine - Radio Op. Gunner

James Baird - Co Pilot

(Took Picture)

Harry Shovan - Engine Gunner



## BOOK REVIEW

# A Mighty Fortress

by Charles Alling

Pilot, 8th Air Force, 34th Bomb Group

The 385th Bombardment Group has a number of fine authors that have written of their flying experiences during World War II. Some we have reviewed in the past & others will be reviewed in future issues of the *Hardlife Herald*. Some times it is interesting to have a different perspective.

Charles Alling flew a total of 27 mission beginning in November 1944 & ending when the war came to and end in May 1945. Alling tells, with great restraint, the story of what it was like to be there, over the skies of enemy territory, the enormity of some of the raids they were part of and the consequences for those on the ground; of the planes around them that fell out of the sky under enemy attack. The fact that pilots, like Alling, who became a B-17 group leader, were only 22 years old at the time is astonishing. On the book dust cover there is an endorsement by another young W.W.II pilot, ex-President Bush. *"In a fascinating way, Chuck Alling recalls his days as a pilot flying B-17's over Germany. He is truly a member of 'The Greatest Generation', and from his book written from the heart people can learn a lot about the laughs and the tears of World War II."*

Former President  
George H. W. Bush

Members of the 385th should doubly enjoy this book starting with the dust cover. On

the dust cover there is a picture of a B-17 with a square G on its tail. We know that is a 385th airplane. The 34th Bomb Group that Alling flew with was part of the 93rd Combat Wing which was composed of the 34th, 490th, 493rd, & and the great 385th. Being in the same Combat Wing the 34th & 385th flew many missions close together. Your reviewer was especially interested in the mission of March 23rd 1945 to Geisecke and Allings account of a mid air collision. A sudden burst of flak, not in the target area, hit the left wing tip of a B-17 and tore it off. The B-17 made a sudden descent into Alling's right wingman braking the wingmans B-17 apart, both aircraft plunged to the earth. I believe the 385th was immediately behind the 34th as I remember witnessing such a mid air collision on that mission

& I have the incident recorded in my diary.

Also interesting was his comments of the mission on Good Friday, my 20th birthday, March 30, 1945 to Hamburg. The flak was worse than Alling had ever seen, and wondering if he would return that day. Your reviewer remembers the flak very well and thinking what a way to have a birthday & will I have another birthday.

The book is well written, very interesting especially to those that were there. I am certain 385th members that flew during the same time frame of Alling book would find that different perspective on missions of interest to them. I would recommend this one for your library. The book may be purchased by ordering from Casemate at \$29.95 plus shipping. See order form for address.

Tom Newton, Editor

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## LETTERS

Dear Tom,

You don't know me yet but Di Barker kindly passed me your names and email address. I live in Elmswell, Suffolk, where my partner Linda and I came to live about eighteen months ago.

Earlier this year we came into contact with the daughter of one of the 385th veterans, Roy Bagley. Ellen Ingram, his daughter, was over here looking for the site of Great Ashfield, and Linda and I helped her as best we could. As a result of that meeting, I became interested in the 385th and have been in touch with Frank Mays, George Menkoff, Bill Varnedoe and Carl Hannon, and I have set up reciprocal links between the web sites of Friends of the 385th BG and a Fleet Air Arm reunion group, of which I am a member.

Initially for Roy Bagley, then subsequently for any veteran who would be interested, I have been photographing every remaining piece of Great Ashfield with the help of Roy Barker and other local landowners, to put together a CD-based digital album, which I have called Great Ashfield 2002. The album also contains photos of the American cemetery at Cambridge and All Saints Church at Great Ashfield village, plus every page of the Memorial Book and a complete list of 385th burials and Wall of the Missing entries at Cambridge.

I have sent complimentary copies of the CD to the veterans I have contact with, to get their reaction, and one has gone to the \*Friends\* museum in Luxembourg.

Kind Regards,

William Daysh

(known to my 385th vet contacts as Bill D)

### **The Great Ashfield 2002 Flip Album CD-ROM**

The mini-CD-ROM for PCs will autorun and contains four separate flip albums. On-screen, the albums behave like normal photo albums and may be paged through by means of mouse-clicks.

**1. Great Ashfield 2002:** An album of over 80 images of what still remains of the 385th BG Great Ashfield base in 2002, including those quarters and communal buildings that are still standing - the remaining runways and perimeter tracks - plus 1944 and 2002 aerial views of the site and the Air Ministry Record Site Plan to which the base was originally built. As a preface, Chapter Eleven of Graham Smith's book *Suffolk Airfields in the Second World War* covers the Group's history at Great Ashfield.

**2. The Book of the Fallen:** An album containing the pages of the Memorial Book at Great Ashfield church, in which the names of the Group's fallen are hand-scribed, together with images of the church and its 385th BG memorial plaque. Included are images of the American Battlement Monuments Commission military cemetery at Cambridge, England, and the names of all of the Group's fallen who are either buried or honored there.

**3. The 385th at Great Ashfield:** A collection of personal photos of some of the men of the 385th during their time at Great Ashfield. (Photos kindly supplied by the veterans and their families.)

**4. Flying Legends:** A collection of photos taken at the 2002 Duxford "Flying Legends" air show, which was dedicated to WW2 American warbirds and features the two B-17s still flying in Europe, "Sally B" and "Pink Lady".

**Price: GBP £15.00 or USD \$25.00, inclusive of p&p.**  
**Please contact Bill Daysh at [wdaysh@aol.com](mailto:wdaysh@aol.com)**  
**for ordering and payment details**

**Editor's note:** To cash a US personal check it cost Bill 5.00 pounds per check. To pool orders would be a considerable savings. 385th members wishing to order a CD and pool their order may send their order and check made payable to Tom Newton P.O. Box 34 Dallas. OR 97338. I will consolidate orders & issue one check. Your editor has reviewed the CD & would recommend.

## LETTERS

Leo,

I like the idea put forth by Roy and Di. Schedule two Briefing Sessions - one for Second Generation participants and one for Third Generation participants. Use resource person to provide orientation about our history and challenge our children and grandchildren to help keep the 385th BGMA alive and well as long as possible. Former presidents might be good to do the history update. Roy, Di and others can make significant contributions to these briefings sessions.

Art Driscoll

**Ed. Note: Our children and grandchildren would know they are welcome at reunions.**

Dear Tom,

Further to my email of 21st August, I want to advise Hardlife Herald about the further kindness and generosity of the Massari family. In my letter published in the November 2002 issue, I mentioned that Sue and I had primarily funded the wreath at Madingly on Memorial Day for quite a number of years. This wasn't too elicit anything from anyone, simply to show that our care and concern for remembering the 385th gave us the privilege of being able to represent the Group at the invitation of the U.S. Ambassador during this important annual ceremony. This year, the family of the late Lou Massari stepped in and covered the cost and, since then, I've been staggered to receive a further \$2500 with \$500.00 towards the repair of my camera and to help my research and \$2000 to be established in a special account to cover the cost of the wreath in the future. This generosity from the Massari family will ensure that Sue and I or our children in later years will be able to pay their respects and lay a floral tribute on behalf of all who served at Great Ashfield.

This kindness was, indeed a godsend because I lost my job in September and, at 55, finding work isn't easy. However, I have got a contract for 6 months starting in January and I've started my writing and research activities again. These had to be set aside because the last job meant so much travelling that it curtailed my aviation work - the new contract's closer to home. I've now started on a new volume of "Eighth Air Force Bomber Stories" which will, of course, feature the 385th. I'm also getting more time to give the 385th slide show, always very well received, and have 3 bookings already so interest in the 8th and the 385th continues to be very strong over here.

Kindest Regards  
Ian McLachlan

Does the 385th have a web site, if so what is the address. The 384th Bomb Group and the Swiss Internees have web sites. They would be of interest to many of our members. There are many others, but I am familiar with these two. I would be the first to appreciate the effort that is needed in an endeavor to keep people together. Ed Stearn and I am sure the many who help him has a classic new letter. I met Ed at one of our reunions, he knew my Pilot called him Junior Meyer. Always great to communicate with former comrades in arms. Keep up the good work.

Jerry Legg

*Ed. Note: 385th does not have a website but recommends the 385th museum in Perle, Luxembourg website [www.385bg.com](http://www.385bg.com) they have numerous links.*

Editor HH Mr. Tom Newton

Re: Reunions

2003 - I plan to attend.

2004 - I favor annual reunions, the clock is ticking. A reunion is a great pleasure. Its timely significance should be played up in future HH issues to attract membership attendance.

Dick A.J. Behr

## LETTERS

To Bill Varnedoe,

What a great newsletter. The article you wrote in this issue "Statistics of 385th bomb Group," gives me additional information regarding my brother, 2nd Lt. James D. McKee. He was the copilot of Fickle Finger of ?. Nice to know the plane was an original that made it all the way through combat. Unfortunately, he was filling in for the copilot of the Liberty Belle when he was killed. Bill, I appreciate all the assistance you have given me during the last year, researching my brother and the 549th. Tom, keep up the good work on this newsletter.

Dave McKee

To Editor HLH,

I think all of us have heard of the Falkland War that England was engaged in, and in thinking back you probably remember the French-built, Harrier FA2 Exocet Missile that was so dreaded in that war. It crippled several of England's ships and especially the HMS SHEFFIELD. He included a Web site we will want to explore.

Bill Daysh from near Great Ashfield, England was good enough to share this with me since I was in Ordnance, and I want to share it with everyone. This missile that he describes is still in use, and our US Ships may have to deal with them. We thank him for giving us this information. Bill is a retired Royal Naval Officer-Pilot, lives near Great Ashfield, and has recently produced a PC disc, flip-page book concerning the History of the 385th Bomb Group-it was very good.

George Menkoff, 550th Ordnance.

Hi George,

*The Exocet could be ground, air or ship launched. Those in the Falklands were air launched and were set to fly over the sea at around 12 feet (enough to penetrate the side plates of any ship). Because they flew at (virtually) zero feet (sea-skimming) they were almost impossible to detect. The best chance of detecting them was at the time they were launched from the aircraft, and that could be any range up to something like 70KM. The Royal Navy in the Falklands initiated a tactical plan which involved hovering a ship's helicopter in the path of the missile to 'lure' it away from its target - always hoping that the helo, pilot would be nimble enough to jerk his aircraft out its path at the last minute. Interestingly enough, Prince Andrew (second in line to the throne of England who was a help pilot in the Falklands) did this for his ship on a number of occasions.*

*I've seen a slow motion video of a test run of one of these missiles. It was filmed from the target ship and it shows the full length of missile passing through the ships hull like a knife through silver paper, before detonating deep inside.*

*The missile is still in use today and has been advanced by several marks. Visit this site by clicking here*  
<http://www.matra-def.fr/esom.php>

*As you have an interest in armaments you'll love this!*

Best regards,  
Bill

Hi Tom,

Nice job with the Hardlife . . .also I will repeat, Many Thanks for the many years that Ed Stern put in as editor.

For Dan Martin who asked about news in regards to his uncle William Bowles who served with the 548 Sqd. my diary records the following: Maybe it will help. . . He mentions the Navigator died.

July 8, 1944...Our mission today was to a pilot bomb depot at Crepy near Paris. Everything went wrong, we brought loads of bombs back, flak was all over the place, primary target was overcast, on our way to the secondary target flak suddenly hit our group leader Lt. Hughes Crew.. Knocking out two engines. He left the formation and #2 took over, after quite a rat race through France we came back we had been hit in #3 & 4 engines but they kept running. We heard that Hughes made a landing on the Cherborough Peninsula. The next day we heard that his navigator a Lt. Ikleberger had been killed by just a tiny piece of flak, he was not wearing his flak jacket, he bunked next to me and I talked with him alot, he had a wife and kid and another baby on the way, he was a nice guy, tall thin fellow.

Note to Dan Martin: Maybe you uncle was with Hughes crew at this time, you do not identify his pilot...hope this helps.

Dom Jordan

To Tom,

My e-mail address is correct, as you noted in the recent test to me. I want to thank you for including my Memorial Day story in the last HH. Are you aware that John Ellis passed away recently? John was known to many of the group and was for a time the churchwarden of All Saints Church, Great Ashfield. He showed many of the group who visited the base, and took them around the field. We invited him and his wife to our Kansas City reunion. Afterwards several of us entertained them at our homes. John Ford, in Wash, DC, Smith in Atlanta, Earl Cole in Kentucky and me in New York. John Pettenger and I often visited the Ellis' while they lived in Great Ashfield and also when they moved on to Mommoth, Wales. If you need more info let me know, even photos.

Bob Valliere

## 385th Members E-Mail Address as of Feb. 1, 2003

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Valliere	Robert	<a href="mailto:rbvllr@aol.com">rbvllr@aol.com</a>
Vance	James	<a href="mailto:gjvance@aol.com">gjvance@aol.com</a>
Varnedoe Jr.	William W.	<a href="mailto:billvar@bellsouth.net">billvar@bellsouth.net</a>
Webster	Ronald	<a href="mailto:rjwlegends@cs.com">rjwlegends@cs.com</a>
Wilson	Robert & Coralie	<a href="mailto:cwilson@bright.net">cwilson@bright.net</a>
Wray	Bill	<a href="mailto:Xtra85@aol.com">Xtra85@aol.com</a>
Zwick	Joe	<a href="mailto:joezwick@msn.com">joezwick@msn.com</a>

E-Mail address from this list is to be used only for correspondence between members.  
Additions to or correction of E-Mail address please notify [tjnewton25@aol.com](mailto:tjnewton25@aol.com)  
All correspondences please identify in subject box as 385th E-Mail.

## Bulletin Board

Hello,  
I need to find out about the death of my fathers co-pilot Tom Carson. He passed away in July in California and my father (George J. Behl) tried to send a card to his widow, and calling her, but has had no luck. Is there anyone in the 385th that can help? George would like to get in touch with her to send his condolences.

Thank you,  
The youngest of George's children,  
Mary Allen  
mallen@copic.com

Hi got your address and wanted to show my interest in ANNUAL reunions I was squadron leader with 548th sq from March of 1944 to Feb 1945 and would like to start e-mail contact with other members. This would facilitate contact and enable memebers to contact wartime peers and probably locate other members they knew. Would be happy to spear-head such effort if there is any interest shown by hierarchy. At any rate would like to hear from you and possibly meet at next reunion .

Lt. Col. Bill Wray USAF Ret

### Looking for any member or acquaintances of the James (Chris) Arvas crew

The Arvas crew was at Great Ashfield in March - April of 1945. Members of the 548th squadron. James Arvas daughter Chris Koser would like to make contact with anyone who may have known him. His crew members were, Leff Marble, Walter A. Schofield, Ken D. Wright, Norman Nielson, Logan L. Gerheim, Walter A. Hungler, Ed P. Baumgartner & Robert B. Smith. Please contact Chris Koser at 9509 Forest Dell Drive, Edmonds, WA or koseredm@earthlink.net

EDITORS NOTE Norman Nielson and I trained together at AM school, Amarillo TX, Gunnery School, Los Vegas. Traveled together to Tampa FL for crew assignment, His crew and my crew were in same barracks at Avon Park FL for OTU. We were surprised when both of our crews were assigned to the 385th. Norman Nielson was from Salt Lake City UT. Would like to make contact with any of the Arvas crew members or acquaintances. Tom Newton PO Box 34, Dallas, OR or tjnewton25gaol.com

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# Taps



## **Ernest W. Bemis**

Ernest W. Bemis age 87 of West Bridgewater, MA died on December 22, 2002. He was one of the original pilots in the 551st BS. He parachuted over Munster Germany on October 10, 1943, became a POW in Luft 111 and 7A Liberated on April 29, 1945. Ernie is missed very much by his wife Edie, family, crew members, and his many friends.

## **Roy Courtney**

Roy flew 25 missions in the B-17 "Hot Chocolate" in the 385th Group of the Mighty 8th Air Force. He made four missions over Holland dropping food supplies to the starving Dutch and one mission to Linz, Austria to airlift French POWS. Roy died on December 7 and was buried on December 10 in Ballard, CA. Plans are to send all of Roy's memorabilia and collections he has made throughout the years to the 8th AF Museum.

## **DECEASED**

Norman A. Franks	March 2000
Frank A. Stetson	December 2000
Joseph Matuna	December 2001
Norman W. Gaul	December 2002
James W. Mellors	2002
John Campanelli	2002
Quentin A. Swartz	2002
Edward F. McCarthy	