



Hardlife



Herald

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385th Bombardment Group Association

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*The Mighty Eighth*

*Rittler P15*

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**385™ BGA REUNION • BOISSER CITY, LA • OCT. 3-8, 2006**

# Hardlife Herald

385th Bombardment Group (H)

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William A. Nichols '85-'87	Leo LaCasse '01-'03
	W. W. Varnedoe, Jr. '03-'05

\*deceased

## Honorary Members

Roger Feller                      Eldon Nysethner  
Mayor Ferdinand Unsen

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## COVER

The cover depicts the 385<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association members who attended the 385<sup>th</sup> BGA 2005 and 8<sup>th</sup> AFHS reunion meetings in Arlington, Virginia September 28 through October 2, 2005.

## EDITORIAL

I am continuing to receive good stories from many 385<sup>th</sup> BGA members as well as from the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation persons. However, I know there are still many great stories that have yet to be told by our veterans, both from the ground support personnel and the flying personnel. Put on your memory caps and send me your experiences. They do not have to be only mission flying stories that I want, but also stories of your days in training for your military job. For example, what schools did you attend? How did you travel to the 385<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group? By air, by boat, or some other way. How did you travel home? What did you do when you were not flying? Send me those stories.

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## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

The current Board of Directors is committed to the task of keeping the 385<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association active as long as possible. The term of office for Board members is two years. A budget of \$13,000 has been adopted for 2006. Committee chairs, identified as contact persons, have been named from the Board members by the president. Reports will be made as plans are developed and projects activated. The next reunion of the 385<sup>th</sup> BGA will be in conjunction with the 8<sup>th</sup> AFHS re-

union in Bossier City, LA, October 4-7, 2006. Mark your calendars now! At our reunion, we will celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the formation of the 385<sup>th</sup> Memorial Association in 1956. We will also celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Memorial Trust Fund at All Saints Church in 1976. Our 385<sup>th</sup> BGA has much to be proud about and thankful in 2006.

The 385<sup>th</sup> BGA has many friends in England and Europe. The 385<sup>th</sup> BGA 2005 tour group was welcomed as heroes at each

location visited, especially by our long-time friends at Great Ashfield and Perle. New friends were discovered at Merville, France, and at the Air and Space Museum located just north of Paris at Le Bourget. Other meaningful friendships were established with local villagers who sponsor or adopt gravemarkers for 385<sup>th</sup> BG veterans buried or listed on the Wall of the Missing in American Cemeteries at The Ardennes, France, the Henri-Chappel, Belgium, and the Margraten, The Netherlands.

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## 385<sup>th</sup> BG MISSION QUERY

William (Bill) Daysh, an Associate Member of the 385<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association from Bury St. Edmunds, requests information about the Mercy Missions conducted by the 385<sup>th</sup> BGA from May 15-30, 1945. Bill was contacted by a French lady working in London requesting information about her father who was returned to France by a crew of the 385<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group after he was liberated from the Austrian Stalag 17B POW camp at Krems. Her name is Chantel Crevel-Robinson and she works at the Institute for Fiscal Studies in London.

Chantel wrote:

"Regarding my father, he is French and he was a prisoner of war for five years in Austria - Krems, Stalag 17B. He was fighting and was made

a prisoner. He was not an officer, just a private like his two brothers but they were not in the same camps. The Russians liberated the camp but after that the Americans came to take them back to France, and my father flew back in a Bl 7 from Lintz to Nancy between the 18-20<sup>th</sup> May 1945. My dad wants to know the names of the pilots who brought him back home to France. If you need more information please let me know and I shall contact him."

Bill has been unable to obtain any information to comply with Chantel's request with the exception of Bob Silver who flew one of the Lintz to Nancy missions but not on the specified dates. He requested that Chantel's plea be placed in the Hardlife

Herald. Anyone with any relevant information or photos of the crews that flew on those 'liberation missions' is urged to contact Bill by e-mail ([wdaysh@aol.com](mailto:wdaysh@aol.com)) or mail any information to Bill at:

Bill Daysh  
20 Pightle Close  
Elmswell  
Bury St Edmunds  
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United Kingdom

Bill Varnedoe, as a member of the Crow crew, made two ferry runs from Lintz in May 1945. One ferry run was to Chantilly and the other to Leon. On one of the ferry runs, they made a detour off their prescribed route to pass over Paris and to see the Eiffel Tower. The French passengers were overjoyed to see Paris and the tower.

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## 385<sup>th</sup> BGA 2006 REUNION

The 2006 reunion of the 385<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association will be held in conjunction with the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force Historical Society in Boisser City, LA October 4-7, 2006 near Barksdale Air Force Base, the current location of the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force Headquarters. The quarters of the 8<sup>th</sup> AFHS Reun-

ion is the Isle of Capri Casino Hotel.

The 8<sup>th</sup> AFHS President, Ivan McKinney, promises that this year's reunion will be unique, different, and enjoyable for all. A Special Ceremony for the 8<sup>th</sup> AFHS attendees will be conducted in front of the B-17 and

B-24, and many other aircraft, at Barksdale's Eighth Air Force Museum.

Make your plans to attend the 385<sup>th</sup> BGA Reunion now.

Additional information about the reunion will be published in future issues of the 8<sup>th</sup> AF News and the Hardlife Herald.

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## NEW FLAG DEDICATED AT PERLE MUSEUM

A new 385<sup>th</sup> BG flag was dedicated at the 385<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Museum in Perle, Luxembourg during the June 24-26, 2005 visit of the 2005 BGA tour group. Roger Feller, an outstanding friend of the 385<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association, designed and presented the new flag to the 385<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Museum. Above symbols for patches of both the 385<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group and the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force are written the words "FRIENDS OF THE 385<sup>TH</sup> BOMB GROUP

(H)." On the reverse side of the blue flag is the Red Lion symbol of Luxembourg. Accepting the flag for the museum is Art

Driscoll, President of the 385<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association (BGA).

Flanked by local villagers on the left and an Air Force Military Honor Guard on the right seven members of the 385<sup>th</sup> BGA are pictured, left to right: William Moebius - navigator, John Hyatt - pilot, Wayne Ziegler - pilot, John Matthews - armour gunner, Joe Kubr - ball turret gunner, Art Driscoll - pilot, and James Bond - tail gunner.



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"Aim towards the enemy."

—Instruction printed on a US Rocket Launcher

"If the enemy is in range, so are you."

—Infantry Journal

"Tracers work both ways."

—U.S. Army Ordnance

"Cluster bombing from B-52s are very, very accurate.

The bombs are guaranteed to always hit the ground."

—U.S. A.F. Ammo Troop

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# INITIAL DAYS AT GREAT ASHFIELD

by Floy Jillson

Our crew arrived in England in mid-February 1945. There was a need for bomber crews at the 385<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, 550<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron because prior crews were completing their thirty five missions that constituted a tour of duty, and had earned the right to go home for a leave before reassignment. Furthermore, plane and crew casualties in the Group required replacements.

The pilot of any B-17 crew was referred to as the "airplane commander." In other words, he was the boss. Normally in the military there is a good bit of saluting and military courtesy. However, once a crew was formed there was very little of that type behavior. The reason: Every single crew member had a job to accomplish. Each person served to protect himself as well as every other person on board. For example: Any one of the gunners could save one and all by his accuracy in downing an enemy fighter plane. Ignorant of rank, there was this unspoken equalizer at work among us at all times.

It was the policy of the Group that the pilot was to fly two bombing missions prior to taking his crew on their first venture into combat. Bob Davis, our pilot, flew his first mission to Kassel on the last day of February. Once he returned from this mission, we met with him in his quarters for an informal visit. In a sense we were debriefing him about his introduction into combat. Bob's first trip was a relatively easy one, however, we had a most helpful meeting.

Just before the meeting broke up, he shared with us a package that he had received from his wife. As a loving wife, Bob's wife, who enjoyed knitting, was

concerned about her husband's comfort. She knew that the early months of the year in England could be quite cold. She was right about that, as both the officers and enlisted men were housed in non-air-tight barracks heated only by pot-bellied stoves. Bob smiled at us sheepishly and carefully unwrapped a knitted "garment" sheltered by tissue paper from an attractive gift box. This item of "apparel" was designed to protect and cuddle his genitalia at any time. Since wartime patriotism prevailed in America, a certain color scheme was evident. The testicles were to be housed in a cup of blue and to be kept in place by a cord tied in a bow. The shaft was white and the crown was an appropriate red. To a man we proved to be awestruck observers. Bob had chosen not to display his comforter to others other than his military family. We thanked him for his "show and tell", and wished him well for his second mission scheduled for the next day.

Little did we know that Kim Crowl, our co-pilot, would be asked the very next day to pack this knitted garment with Bob's other personal belongings to be sent home, for Bob was killed on his second mission with sixteen other men in a mid-air collision just across the channel. Two planes, piloted by Armbruster and Ruesky, collided in dense clouds over the coast of Belgium. Of the eighteen men on board the two aircraft, seventeen died - including Lt. Bob Davis. The tail of one of the plane broke off, and the tail gunner rode the tail section down 15,000 feet to land in a Belgian field. He survived the fall and rescued by Belgian farmers.

On our return to our barracks

following our meeting with Bob Davis after his first mission, Buck Krouse, Jim Eshelman, Phil Flynn and I were ordered to spend the night on guard duty manning fifty-caliber machine guns out on the flight line. On occasion, German planes fly in to bomb and strafe the Allied airbases. Such a German bombing had done major damage to Great Ashfield before, thus the base was guarded both day and night. Machine gun emplacements were located around the perimeter of the landing strips, and near the hangers and hardstands on which the B-17s were parked. As trained gunners we were ready in event any enemy planes attempted to visit the base. Next to the machine guns were shelters which contained a cot, blankets, a little cook stove and a small table. Two persons stood guard while the other two rested or enjoyed a bit of food and coffee. That night was beautiful with a full bomber's moon sharing the time with us.

Owing to the death of Lt. Davis, the medics recommended that our remaining crew be provided with several days leave. Now three days later -March 4, 1945, I was in Liverpool with Eugene "Mick" Cooper, our engineer and top turret gunner. Mick's older brother, William Cooper, had been stationed in Liverpool where he had met and married an Irish girl. Mick asked me to accompany him to visit his sister-in-law, Carmel. Carmel met us at the Liverpool station, and took us to the local pub for a glass of bitters before we were to catch the train for Bootle. I learned that bitters is a very dry heavily hopped ale, and that London is spoken of as "Big L-" and Liverpool is "Little L-."

Arriving in Bootle we were met by the bride's mother, Mrs. Flynn, a friendly widow in her sixties. Mrs. Flynn, decked out in her Sunday best, welcomed us by opening a brand new bottle of White Horse whiskey and providing us with a shot. It was warming. After a wonderful dinner of roast pork with vegetables, tea and tarts, we spent several hours answering questions, and talking

about William Cooper who was in France.

Later in the evening we went to a local dance party, and then back to Mrs. Flynn's to spend the night. We slept under Irish linen in a luxurious real feather bed. After a day in Waterloo, we returned to Mrs. Flynn's for another fantastic dinner, and several more drinks of the White Horse whiskey.

Finally it was time to return to

Great Ashfield and we tearfully parted Carmel and Mrs. Flynn with real Irish goodbyes. We boarded the train and were on our way back to the base to prepare for mission #1. So we ended our memorable week end stay with the Flynn family in Bootle, a town near Liverpool or "Little L."

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## 2005 VISITS TO GREAT ASHFIELD AND PERLE

*by Art Driscoll*

The 385<sup>th</sup> BGA 2005 tour to England and Europe returned to Great Ashfield for the weekend of June 17-19, 2005. The 43 tour participants included 13 BG veterans, and their family and friends. After stops in London and Duxford, the group arrived in Bury St Edmunds on June 7<sup>th</sup>. A Welcome Committee from Great Ashfield presented gifts to all members of the tour group during a Friday evening dinner hosted by Rowley and Angela Miles. Trustees of the 385<sup>th</sup> Memorial Trust Fund were introduced, and speeches were made by Stephan Miles and Art Driscoll.

On Saturday morning, the Deputy Mayor of Bury St Edmunds, Michael Jones, hosted a reception for and visited with members of the group. He spoke about the legacy of WWII veterans and the significance of 385<sup>th</sup> BGs return to Great Ashfield. About 10:00 am we arrived at the old airbase and was greeted by Stephan Miles and a group of locals. A fly-bye and aerobatic show was performed by a private aircraft pilot. Rides around the old base in WWII vehicles were provided to former sites of the hangers, control tower, barracks, hardstands and taxi strips. Two buildings and

major parts of the two runways still remain in place.

Lunch was served at Stephan's barn located where the two runways intersect. Ian MacLachlan presented a slide show of historical events and stories. In mid-afternoon, after tea and cookies at All Saints Church, Roy Barker provided a history of the church, the 385<sup>th</sup> Memorial Altar, the 385<sup>th</sup> Stained Glass Window, and the Book of Honor that contains the names of the 413 men who died while stationed at Great Ashfield.

At the Sunday worship services in the church, a plaque inscribed, "AS LONG AS WE LIVE, THEY WILL LIVE ALSO" was presented to Stephan Miles. During services, members of our tour group presented to local parishioners tributes honoring those KIA and known personally by our members. After worship, our members were hosted for Sunday dinners by village families in their homes.

Back at the airfield about 4:00 PM, Di Barker read meaningful readings to all to commemorate the bond between the local villagers and the members of the 385<sup>th</sup> BGA. Boarding our coach, we conducted a simulated taxi

and takeoff down a runway to celebrate June 19, 2005 as the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our departure from Great Ashfield. On that date in 1945, the first echelon of B-17s departed for home with 1,000 flight and ground personnel. Later in June 1945, additional B-17s left the airbase with some 440 persons. Under the command of Frank Marano, some members stayed several months to close the base.

Bill Daysh developed a DVD about the 385<sup>th</sup> BGA's visit to Great Ashfield. Copies can be ordered from Leo LaCasse for \$20.00. Make check out to Leo and mail to: 911 Hunting Hill Ct., Roanoke, VA 24014. Other DVDs and CDs about the 385<sup>th</sup> BG are also available from Leo.

The 385<sup>th</sup> BGA tour group made a visit to Perle, Luxembourg during the weekend of June 24-26, 2005. Our group of 31 participants was made up of ten 385<sup>th</sup> BG veterans and their families and friends. Upon arrival in Esch-Sur-Sure, we were greeted by Roger and Jeanny Feller and Mayor Ferdinand Unsen and his wife Maizie.

After a visit to the Battle of the Bulge in Diekirch on Saturday morning, we drove to Perle to participate in the "National Day in

Luxembourg” ceremonies. Roger had managed to postpone this event from June 23rd to June 24th so that the 385th Tour Group could participate. Luxembourg Embassy Officials awarded the 10 veteran members of our group a medallion, which were mounted on red, white and blue ribbons, commemorating the 60th anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge. As each medal was presented, Roger read the name, rank, flying position and number of missions completed during WWII. Following the presentation of the medals, the new Museum flag was unveiled and dedicated.

A plaque for the Museum was presented to Mayor Unsen to commemorate (1) the 60th Anniversary of the end of the ETO combat, (2) the history of our many visits to Perle, and (3) Moments of Remembrance for those 385th BG members who paid the supreme sacrifice. The plaque inscribed with “As long as we live, they will also live” was read by me, and translated into French by Kathy Holloway, my daughter.

Roger conducted a ribbon-cutting ceremony to open a new wing of the 385th BG museum. Many members of the tour located and viewed exhibits donated by 385th BGA members. Some of us found our own exhibits. The development of this first class museum

in this WWII combat area has attracted visitors from other veterans groups and the general public. The 385th BGA is proud to have this museum named in their honor. We are eternally grateful to Roger for his time, energy and money to preserve the legacy of the 385th BG.

At the Village Square in Perle a memorial service was conducted at the Monument honoring the crews of White and McDonald. Attending was a military honor guard and military personnel from Spangdahlem Air Base, local and national officials, and local villagers. A choral group taught by Roger sang “America The Beautiful” and “God Bless America.” Eldred Harrington and William Moebius presented flowers from the 385th BGA. A fly-bye was executed by the 52nd Fighter Wing from Spangdahlem AB.

Mayor Ferdinand and Maizie Unsen hosted a dinner of wine and good food for the 385th BGA on Saturday evening and the many groups involved in the “National Day in Luxembourg.” Include at dinner were the pilots who executed the fly-bye over the Memorial. I thanked Mayor Unsen and Maizie on behalf of the tour group, and told those present that both Mayor Unsen and Roger Feller were both Honorary Members of the 385th BGA.

On Sunday we enjoyed a full day starting with a reception at the American Embassy in Luxembourg City. The US Ambassador, Mr. Peter Terpeluk, entertained us with refreshments and a tour of the Embassy’s spacious rooms on the main level. A portrait of General George S. Patton, Jr. was prominent in the drawing room. The Ambassador entertained us royally. Many subjects were discussed during the informal conversations with individuals present. Some good natured bantering occurred when the subject focused on games between Notre Dame and the University of Oklahoma. The Ambassador made an excellent speech about political matters and international affairs.

Back on our coach, we had a guided tour of Luxembourg City arranged by Roger. After the city tour, we enjoyed a late lunch and a relaxing cruise on the Moselle River. Returning to Luxembourg City, we arrived at the Luxembourg American Cemetery to hear taps and see the lowering of the American flag. Roger had arranged for the deputy superintendent to provide us with a private tour after the cemetery closed.

Thank You Roger, for hosting another 385th BGA Tour Group.

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“Cluster bombing from B-17s was always very, very accurate. The bombs always hit the ground.”

“Tracers work both ways.”

“Airspeed, altitude and brains. Two are always needed to successfully complete the flight.”

Basic Flying Rules: “Try to stay in the middle of the air. Do not go near the edges of it. The edges can be recognized by the appearance of ground, buildings, sea, and trees. It is much more difficult to fly there.”

“Mankind has a perfect record in aviation; we never left one up there.”

“Any ship can be a minesweeper—once.”

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## MISSION #29

### German Jets

by Lew Smith, Pilot  
550<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron

The paragraphs below are from an article I found in my files whose source or author I do not know.

"By the spring of 1945, Germany was in dire straights. Almost paralyzed industrially, its' communications were badly snarled, and its' economy bled white. Defeat in the air as well as on the ground, seemed to be only a matter of time. The Allied Air Force statisticians had all manner of charts, graphs and statistics to prove this was so."

"Unfortunately, they could never represent with a squiggle on a graph the incredible desperate last-ditch flying of the German Fighter Pilots. A flying fortress shot down in flames during the last days of the war carried down to earth, miles below, nine men who were just as dead as if they had 'bought it' over Merseberg back in 1943."

"The sight of large groups of ME-262 jet fighters and lesser numbers of the speedy ME-163 rocket interceptors still conjured up the nightmare that Hitler might yet produce a miracle in the struggle for air supremacy."

"On March 3, 1945, more than 50 of these new fighters playfully circled our escorting P-51 Mustangs at tremendous speed,- then closed in and shot down six heavy bombers and three fighters without a loss. On March 18<sup>th</sup>- with our victory 'already assured'

twenty four bombers and five fighters were shot down, and sixteen other bombers were so badly damaged that they crash landed in territory controlled by the Russians who were within 50 miles of Berlin."

"The 550 mph speed of the ME-262 and the punch of its' four 30mm cannon could prove devastating. One burst could tear the wing off a hapless B-17."

The March 18<sup>th</sup> mission was my 29<sup>th</sup>, and the target was Berlin, my 3<sup>rd</sup> visit. As usual, the weather was lousy with heavy contrails at altitude. It was much like flying through soup. Fortunately the weather did clear enough for visual bombing of the target. Just before we reached the target, ME-262 jets attacked a forward group with devastating results.

Leading the low squadron that day, I was breaking in a new first pilot who was flying as my co-pilot. My regular co-pilot, Bill Chaney, who needed only two more missions to finish, was flying on my right wing with the Cocks crew. Over Berlin, flak from the 400 plus anti-aircraft guns was vicious and the smoke so heavy that there was virtually a gray cloud over the city. Flak put holes in nearly 700 of the 1,250 bombers on the mission. The only good thing about a flak cloud is that the enemy fighters would seldom follow you into it. Both of my wingmen were in position as we flew into the flak barrage over the city on our bomb run. With exploding shells bouncing the plane around,

we were extremely busy trying to achieve anything resembling level flight, and under this kind of assault, the formation spreads. We were bombing at 27,000 feet, and even though the temperature was minus 49 degrees, one still sweats.

After dropping our bombs, we finally emerged from the cloud, battered, but still flying. However, neither wingmen were with me. We had been so busy 'in minding our store' that we had no clue as to what happened to them. Later by talking to others, we later learned that my right wingman, with my co-pilot aboard, received a direct hit in number two engine, did a wing over, and started down. We received no report on my left wingman. However, one fortress of the four planes our group had lost, had exploded over the target.

The trip home to Great Ashfield was uneventful. Our battle damage was considerable, but all our fans kept turning. The Cocks crew was from our barracks, so the return to our Quonset hut with empty beds was quite a difficult experience.

After the war, I learned more of this mission story from my co-pilot, Bill Chaney. They had lost two engines over Berlin and parted company with the group. As a straggler on two engines, fighters soon hit them. The right waist gunner was killed and the radio operator was wounded and lost his right arm, which led to his premature death a year later. At 12,000 feet, they managed to make it into a cloud cover which extended to the ground. Coming right out on the

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deck, an immediate crash landing was the only choice. The landing was rough and everyone was banged up, especially Bill Chaney, my co-pilot. He received a back injury that later resulted in four back surgeries.

Their crash occurred near Grodzisk, Poland which was behind Russian lines. Picked up by the Russians, they were flown to Kiev, Russia, and locked up with

about 100 other allied air crewmen for about three months. Then they were put on a train for a one week ride to Odessa where they boarded a British ship that took them to Naples. From Naples, they went to Marseilles and Paris, and finally back home to the 385<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group in Great Ashfield. The Russians had treated them pretty much as prisoners. All in all, the round trip took several months,

but eight of the crew members finally made it home.

The German jets (ME-262s and 163s) were infinitely superior to any aircraft the allies had in production, or even on the drawing board. If produced in quantity six to nine months earlier, and if fuel and pilots had been available, they could have made a tremendous difference in the war or at least the war's duration.

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## MY ARMY AIR CORPS SERVICE

*By Leo LaCasse*

Flying a Stearman PT-17 in Primary flying training was, to me, the most fun filled three months of my flying career. The PT was slow, but maneuverable and in many ways forgiving. It was an aircraft you could visualize yourself in combat flying against the enemy. No other aircraft that I flew ever came close to doing what I did in those first days of flying. Just a few days before graduation, I remember tackling a Mississippi tug boat pulling four barges up the river. I dove my PT-17 down from about eighteen hundred feet with my guns blazing (Rat Tat Tat Tat) pulling out at about ten feet. On my next pass, the boat Captain was on deck with a shot gun. As I pulled up after buzzing the tug, I heard an unusual sound not associated with the usual noise of the plane's engine. Returning to the field and parking by the hanger, the crew chief asked me how I received the three inch hole through the elevator. The incident was reported to the school staff and needless to say I got hell from the School Commandant. He said that I would be the first one to take my final check flight to see if I de-

served to remain in the program. The next day with my parachute hanging on my shoulders, I reported to the aircraft for my check ride. The check officer's first words were, "Are you the Hot Shot shooting barges on the river?" I replied, "Guilty Sir!" He laughed and said, "Show me how you did it." As we started our approach to the tug boat, he wheeled the plane around and bounced the wheels off one of the barges, and said, "That's the way you should have done it. Take me home kid."

The next phase, Basic Training, was at Gunter Field in Montgomery, Alabama. Within hours of my arrival, all Cadets were summoned to the ready room on the flight line. The B-13s seemed awesome. Mainly because we would be flying off runways and not grass strips.

I was assigned to Flight Lieutenant Thorn, an impressive British Officer. The chest of his blouse was filled with medals, and he made no bones about the type of flyers we were. However, he was prepared to take a chance of wasting his time trying to make us pilots. Over the next few

weeks I became good friends with him. F/L Thorn, a former British Bobby in her Majesty's Home Service, had applied for flight training in 1937 when the war seemed inevitable. During the Battle of Britain in 1939, he flew Spitfires and completed 90 missions with several kills to his name. Now he was assigned to teach both British and American Cadets, not only to fly, but to stay alive in combat situations.

Although I wished to become a fighter pilot, at graduation, the Commandant called my name and said, "Twin Engine Advance for Bombers." Advance Training at Blytheville, Arkansas was quite dull. The winter months were taking their toll on flying. Since the BT-9 was the hottest aircraft on the line, it was never difficult to get one and I finished my time several weeks before the rest of the class, and was assigned to fly as co-pilot for those students who need time. The night before graduation I was assigned to fly three missions of three hours each to get all the students ready for graduation. After flying all night I finally landed my last at nine in the morning.

Unfortunately I was scheduled to get married at eight thirty that same morning. However, the wedding went off as well as could be expected, and after sixty three years of marriage, I am still married to Anne. Three hours after the wedding, I was pinned with Pilot's Wings and given a pair of gold bars. Sadly I was also presented with orders to report to Sebring, Florida for B-17 transition training with five days travel time allotted.

Five days after becoming a Pilot, I was fighting the controls of lumbering B-17Bs and Cs, and occasionally a B-17D. Those first weeks of training were rough. I was looking forward to thirty days leave after B-17 training. Not to be!! One week before graduation I was given special orders to report to Ephrata, Washington for

further assignment. At Ephrata, I received further orders to report to Geiger Field, Washington for assignment to the 385<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group. Two days later at Geiger Field I was given orders to report to the 548<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron, commanded by Capt. Jim MacDonald, the first squadron commander.

I was assigned to a crew whose pilot had been grounded for physical reasons. You can imagine what they thought of a brand new second john taking over a crew who had been training for the past six months. A few days later in April, the group moved to Montana. The Headquarters Squadron and the 551<sup>st</sup> Bombardment Squadron went to Great Falls, the 550<sup>th</sup> BS went to Cutbank, the 549<sup>th</sup> went to Glasgow, and the 548<sup>th</sup> went to Helena. After picking

up our new B-17s, we headed for England in June.

Shortly after arriving in England, my old friend Squadron Leader Lenny Thorn visited me at the 548<sup>th</sup>. Sadly he informed me that upon arriving back in England, he was assigned to fly four engine Sterling bombers. In February 1944, Lenny perished on a mission over Hamburg. As much as I wanted to give up flying B-17s and transfer to a fighter unit, it never came about. After three months as Danny Riva's Assistant in the Headquarter Training Division, I became the Operations Officer of the 548<sup>th</sup> Squadron. When I finished my 30 missions, I was assigned to 3<sup>rd</sup> Air Division as an Operations Officer. Another story will follow about my experience as an Operations Officer at 3<sup>rd</sup> Air Division.

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## PERSONNEL RECORDS AVAILABLE ONLINE

Military veterans can now access their personnel records using a web site provided by the National Personnel Records using the following: <http://www.vetrecs.archives.gov>. This web site may be quite helpful when a

military veteran needs a copy of his/her DD-214 for employment, or for other purposes. Only military veterans and the next of kin of deceased former military members may now use this online military records system to request

documents. Other individuals must still use the Standard Form 180, which can be obtained online, to obtain a veteran's military documents.

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"It is generally inadvisable to eject directly over the area you just bombed."

—U.S. Air Force Manual

"Five second fuses only last three seconds."

—Infantry Journal

"Never tell the Sergeant you have nothing to do."

—Unknown Marine recruit

"If you see a bomb technician running, follow him."

—USAF Ammo Troop

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# THE DEVESTATING MISSION TO BERLIN

by Oscar N. Winniford - "TEX"

Out of 26 missions which I flew, the mission to Berlin on October 6, 1944 was the most memorable to me.

On that day, under the command of Captain Robert Karin, our crew was scheduled to fly to Berlin. Just after departure from England our oil pressure dropped in number 3 engine, and we thought that we would have to abort the mission. But luckily the oil pressure rose back to an acceptable level and we continued on the mission.

Although there was not much enemy action on the way to Berlin, we were advised by the high squadron that we had overshoot the IP. And as we approached the target area on the bomb run, we were slightly disoriented. During the bomb run, the navigator told the crew, "Look over to your left and you can see the coliseum where Jesse Owens won all his track medals." We flew over Berlin, and as we continued our flight, we saw many of our

B-17s being shot down by enemy fighters.

During our bomb run, our number 2 engine was hit by flak. The engine lost all of its 17 quarts of oil, which covered the whole left side of the fuselage. Immediately the pilot called for crew check, starting with me the tail gunner. My reply was that everything was not good. Looking up, I saw that the sun was shining through by the tail wheel. Looking up through the vertical stabilizer, I saw a large hole in the stabilizer, and advised the captain. When the pilot asked about the control cables, I replied that they had not been damaged. After a complete crew check, the pilot informed us that he could not feather number 2 engine, and that the prop was windmilling. He advised us that he would stay at high altitude.

Our radio operator, Richard Molzhan, was requested to contact air-sea rescue service in event we had to ditch the plane in the North Sea. He was answered

with a 'stand by' from the sea rescue service. We stayed at high altitude until we visually saw England, and our airbase. Descending, we landed safely at the base.

Upon landing we learned of the devastating loss of eleven of our aircraft on that mission. Our maintenance and other land crews were as shocked as we were. There now stood eleven vacant hardstands.

An old infantry man once said:

"There are no atheists in a fox hole."

I might add:

"Nor are there any in the tail of a B-17."

A very memorable time for me this past summer was when I became an honoree who paid tribute to Captain Hyman Kaplin at the All Saints Church in Great Ashfield. I had trained with him at Pyote, Texas during WWII.

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"The only time you have too much fuel is when you are on fire."

"There are more planes in the ocean than submarines in the sky."

— An old carrier sailor

The three most common expressions in aviation are;

"Why is it doing that?", "Where are we?" and "Oh S...1"

"You know that your landing gear is up and locked when it takes full power to taxi to the terminal."

"There are many Old pilots,  
and many Bold pilots,

But darn few OLD BOLD pilots

— 545<sup>th</sup> BS Briefing Room S.A.C.

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## ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO

The year is 1905. What a difference a century makes! Here are some of the U.S. statistics for the year 1905:

"The average life expectancy in the United States was 47 years.

"Only 14 percent of the homes in the U.S. had a bathtub.

"Only 8 percent of the homes had a telephone.

"A three minute call from Denver to New York City cost eleven dollars.

"There were only 8000 cars in the U.S., and only 144 miles of paved roads.

"The maximum speed limit in most cities was 10 MPH.

"Alabama, Mississippi, Iowa and Tennessee were each more heavily populated than California.

"With a mere 1.4 million people, California was the 21<sup>st</sup> most populous state in the Union.

"The American flag had 45 stars. Arizona, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Hawaii, and Alaska hadn't been admitted to the Union yet.

"The population of Las Vegas Nevada was only 30.

"The tallest structure in the world was the Eiffel Tower.

"The average wage in the U.S. was 22 cents per hour.

"The average worker made between \$200 and \$400 per year.

"An accountant could expect to earn \$2,000 per year, a dentist \$2,500 per year, a veterinarian between \$1,500 and \$4,000 per year, and a mechanical engineer about \$5,000 per year.

"Sugar cost four cents a pound

"Eggs were fourteen cents a dozen.

"Coffee was fifteen cents a pound.

"More than 95 percent of all births in the U.S. took place at home.

"Ninety Percent of all U.S. doctors had no medical education. Instead they attended so-called medical schools, many of which were condemned in the press and by the government as "substandard."

"Most women only washed their hair once a month, and used borax or egg yolks for shampoo.

"The five leading causes of

death in the U.S. were: 1) Pneumonia, 2) Tuberculosis, 3) Diarrhea, 4) Heart disease, and 5) Stroke.

"There was no Mother's Day or Father's Day.

"Crossword puzzles, canned beer and iced tea hadn't been invented yet.

"Only six percent of all Americans had graduated from high school.

"Two out of every ten U.S. adults could not read or write.

"Eighteen percent of all households in the U.S. had at least one full-time servant or domestic help.

"There were about 230 reported murders in the entire United States.

These stats boggle your mind, I know it did mine. I received them in a matter of seconds via my e-mail. Try to imagine what it may be like in 100 years from Year 2005.

Your Editor

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## THE COCHE CREW AND THEIR RUSSIAN CAPTORS

March 18, 1945



# LETTERS/E-MAILS

October 25, 2005

To the Editor  
Frank X. McCawley

Dear Mr. McCawley:

I would like to notify you of the death of my husband Foster Falkenstine, on October 5, 2005. Foster was 87 years old. He was born in Terra Alta, WV, but lived most of his life in the metropolitan area of Washington, DC until we moved to Colorado in 1996 to be near our children and grandchildren.

Foster was a B-17 pilot stationed in Great Ashfield, England with the 8th Air Force, 385th Bomb Group, 551st Bomb Squadron. He often talked about his time there and the many missions he flew, 21 in all. He was involved with a then secret mission, "Alphrodite Desperate Mission" about which Jack Olson wrote a book. The aim of the missions were to guide a plane fully loaded with torpex into the mouth of submarine pens in Helgoland. Foster had volunteered for these missions, and on one of his runs another baby (as they called the plane) was piloted by Joseph Kennedy, Jr. As they ascended to the proper altitude during that mission and it was time for the pilot and engineer to bail out, two legs showed in the trap door (of Kennedy's plane), then went back up and immediately the plane blew up. Foster said that he had a devil of a time controlling his own B-17 to keep it from crashing. That is how young Kennedy was killed.

Foster also flew as lead pilot on D-Day. After crossing the channel one of his engines was shot out and he had to dump his bomb load. He said that he went down below the clouds to return to the base, and he described that as far as the eye could see was this armada of ships. He often mentioned that it was the most incredible sight and something that will never be repeated again.

Foster began speaking to Civil Air Patrol cadets about his war days, and he was warmly received by the cadets. He often said, "I haven't been called Sir so many times in a month of Sundays." On numerous occasions, he also spoke at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs. According to the supervising officer, he was appreciated and admired for his service in WWII.

Last year at the 60th anniversary celebration of D-Day, he ventured to Nellis Air Force Base outside of Las Vegas to be honored for serving on D-Day. He had a wonderful time including getting a flight on his beloved B-17 during the Air Show. In addition we went to the WWII Memorial in Washington, DC last October. It was a beautiful day in Washington and as he stood for a long time just looking at the beautiful Memorial, I, his wife, began to wonder what he was thinking. I asked him later about it and he replied that he was thinking of all those who had not returned.

I would like to add as a footnote, that I came to the US in 1954 from Berlin, Germany, and married Foster after he was widowed in 1972. When we first met and he found out that I grew up in Berlin, he remarked that his first mission was on Berlin. I said, "Thanks a lot." But I came to admire this man greatly for his kindness, bravery, innate goodness and courage.

As these men die, we owe such gratitude to them. Without that incredible generation, where would we be?

Sincerely,

/s/

Ingrid R. Falkenstine  
Littleton, Colorado

# LETTERS/E-MAILS

Re: Nice Tribute to Our Older Veterans

January 12, 2006

From: [REDCON@aol.com](mailto:REDCON@aol.com)

To: [REDCON@aol.com](mailto:REDCON@aol.com), cc: [caromont@peoplepc.com](mailto:caromont@peoplepc.com) (Caroline Montgomery)

You may have heard this song before, but it is very gripping. We all go about our daily lives, rarely thinking about how blessed we are to be free and living in the USA. We owe a debt we can never repay.

The Inspiration for "Before You Go."

The elderly parking lot attendant wasn't in a good mood. Neither was Sam Bierstock. It was around 1 a.m., and Bierstock, a Delray Beach, Fla., eye doctor, business consultant, corporate speaker, and a musician was bone tired after appearing at an event. He pulled up in his car, and the parking attendant began to speak.

"I took two bullets for this country and look what I am doing," he said bitterly. At first Bierstock didn't know what to say to the World War II veteran. But he rolled down his window and told the man, "Really, from the bottom of my heart, I want to thank you." Then the old soldier began to cry. "That really got to me," Bierstock says.

Bierstock, 58, and John Melnick, 54, of Pompano Beach - a member of Bierstock's band - "Dr. Sam and the Managed Care Band" - have written a song inspired by that old soldier in the airport parking lot. The mournful "Before You Go" does more than salute those who fought in WWII. It encourages people to go out of their way to thank the aging warriors before they die. "If we had lost that particular war, our whole way of life would have been shot," says Bierstock, who plays the harmonica. "Every ethnic minority would be dead. And the old vets are now dying at the rate of about 2,000 every day. I thought we needed to thank them."

The song is striking a cord. Within four days of Bierstock placing it on the Web, the song and accompanying photo essay have bounced around nine countries, producing tears and heartfelt thanks from veterans, their sons and daughters, and grandchildren. "It made me cry," wrote one veteran's son. Another sent an e-mail saying that only after his father consumed several glasses of wine would he discuss "the unspeakable horrors" he and the other soldiers had witnessed in places such as Anzio, Iwo Jima, Bataan and Omaha Beach. "I can never thank them enough," the son wrote. "Thank you for thinking about them."

Bierstock and Melnick thought about shipping it off to a professional singer, maybe a Lee Greenwood type, but because time was running out for so many veterans, they decided it was best to release it quickly, for free, on the Web. They've sent the song to Sen. John McCain and others in Washington. Already they have been invited to perform it in Houston for a Veteran's Day tribute-this after a few days on the Web.

They hope every veteran in America gets a chance to hear it.

# LETTERS/E-MAILS

January 12, 2006

From: [caromont@peoplepc.com](mailto:caromont@peoplepc.com)

To: [artdriscoll@hotmail.com](mailto:artdriscoll@hotmail.com) (President Art Driscoll)

Mr. Driscoll,

This is touching—and ever so sad. I am forwarding because I wonder if it is one you have seen. I hope you are doing okay—it seems so long since I have had a Newsletter and now I am concerned that I may have forgotten to continue my dues.

Of my husband's crew on "Angel's Sister," the Radio Operator, Dean Leyerly, original crew (he was loaned out to another crew after very few missions and that plane went down, and he was a POW for the remainder of the war) is still alive living in Midland, TX. A gunner, Don Shee, who trained with the original crew, was bumped as they were sent overseas in 1944 when the crews were reduced from ten to nine members. He is in Michigan and we keep in touch. Harold Trousdale, who was the Ball Turret Gunner, has Alzheimers and, I confess, I did not hear from his wife this year. I plan to give her a call but when I talked with her last year, she said that Harold no longer remembered his crew's names, etc. All others are gone.

Caroline Montgomery, surviving spouse of Capt. Wayne Montgomery, Pilot  
"Angel's Sister"

January 14, 2006

From: [Artdriscoll@hotmail.com](mailto:Artdriscoll@hotmail.com)

To: [caromont@peoplepc.com](mailto:caromont@peoplepc.com)

Caroline,

Thanks for sending the tribute to our older veterans. It is sad that we are running out of time to thank them as about 2,000 die every day. Mary and I are doing ok, but we have slowed down a lot. Most of our travel is to visit the families of our three daughters. We were in Houston for Christmas.

Glad you look forward to receiving the Hardlife Herald, and hope that the current issue will arrive soon. We publish only four copies a year, and the editor says he is not satisfied with the mailing process. Also it is slow because it is mailed third class to save postage.

Thanks for the update about your husband's crew, and regret to hear that Harold Troutdale has health problems and no longer remembers the names of crew members. Four members of my crew are still living.

I hope you plan to attend the next reunion of the 385th BGA which meets in conjunction with the 8th AFHS in Boisser City, LA, October 4-7, 2006. The military headquarters of the current 8th Air Force is located there, directly across the Red River from Shreveport, LA.

Best wishes to you and your loved ones in 2006.

Art Driscoll  
President, 385th BGA

# LETTERS/E-MAILS

J. H. Dunlap  
415 Flamingo Drive  
Destin, FL 32541

January 17, 2006

RE: August Issue - Hardlife  
Target Jena, by Roy Jillson

I was also on the 19 March (1945) mission. My target flimsy was marked "Lutzendorf" and it was my 20<sup>th</sup> mission. Co-pilot Kim Crowe should read Kim Crowl.

I witnessed the Arbruster-Russky collision in which Joe Jones, tail gunner, survived. On my log, this occurred on March 1<sup>st</sup>, to Kassel. Joe put in a career as a Secret Service agent, and was one of the original charter signers.

At any rate, Crowl ended up on our crew after our co-pilot (Bob Barr) suffered a broken foot. He completed our tour with us, and was a great addition to our crew. He and Jack Sherman were good friends.

After WWII we kept contact, and crossed paths on several assignments. Kim retired, and died a number of years ago.

Regards,

/s/  
Joy Dunlap  
Pilot 550 Sq.  
"Stork Club"

Re: Note of Appreciation  
1/18/2006  
From: [benndill@netzero.net](mailto:benndill@netzero.net) (Bruce Bennett)  
To : [fxmccawley@aol.com](mailto:fxmccawley@aol.com)

Sir:

A few issues back there was an article about the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis, MO. The article explained that in contacting this center a person might be able to secure military records. I did so to see if they would be able to send any information on my father's military record. Was I ever surprised.

After quite a long wait, (approximately six months) I received a package from a Mr. Paul Erasmus at the center. This packet contained more than I could ever imagined. Everthing from my father's test score at basic flight training to his final discharge after his inactive duty reserve time in 1954. It even included his commendations and the people awarding them. All of his assignments at different commands were another item included. Needless to say, the wait was well worth it.

I would highly recommend and 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, or even 4<sup>th</sup> generation relative to take advantage of this service. I found it extremely enlightening and eye opening.

A special thanks to you and to the 385<sup>th</sup> for the info in helping me find the center, and also to Mr. Paul Erasmus for being so diligent in locating these very important documents for me.

Respectfully,

Bruce Bennett (2<sup>nd</sup> generation 385<sup>th</sup> BGA member)  
Son of Robert E. Bennett (549<sup>th</sup> BS, 385<sup>th</sup> BG)

# LETTERS/E-MAILS

Re: 385<sup>th</sup> BG Mission Query  
January 13, 2006  
From: [artdriscoll@hotmail.com](mailto:artdriscoll@hotmail.com)  
To: [WDaysh@aol.com](mailto:WDaysh@aol.com) (Bill Daysh)  
fxmccawley @ [aol.com](mailto:aol.com)  
CC: [ianm385bg@btopenworld.com](mailto:ianm385bg@btopenworld.com)  
feller@ pt.lu

Bill Daysh,

Thanks for sending me a copy of your e-mail to Frank McCawley regarding Chantal Crevel-Robinson and her father who was a French POW. I happen to have a book of letters from French POWs and DPS (Displaced Persons in German Slave Labor Camps) which includes one from Kleber Cravel, whom I assume is her father because he writes about being flown in a B-17 by the 385<sup>th</sup> BG from Lintz, Austria to Nancy Airport in France, May 18 or 20, 1945. I do not know the location of the Nancy Airport mentioned in two of the letters. This book of 15 letters was compiled by my friend Charles Elain, an Architect in Paris, who arranged a meeting for the 385<sup>th</sup> Tour Group with 8 of these POWs/DPs in the Air and Space Museum at Le Bourget, which is near the Charles DeGaulle Airport. We were together most of the day with two general sessions and guided tours before and after lunch. This is a story to be written for the HH later.

Art

Frank,

I would like to list several airports used by the 385<sup>th</sup> to deliver French POWs home after combat ended in the ETO. Some listed in our records include: Chantilly, Chartres, Laon, and Station 55. Others mentioned in the above book of letters include airports at Le Bourget, Creil, Beaumont, Nancy, Chateaudin, and Merville. I appeal to our veterans to respond with brief stories about their involvement in these mercy missions during May 15 to 30, 1945. We do not have specific information in our Archives, or elsewhere such as Maxwell AFB, so we depend on reports from our members. I know that Bill Varndoe, Robert Valliere, and Art Schaefer participated in these mission. I hope you guys will respond to me with copies to Bill Daysh, and submit stories to the HH.

Best regards for 2006.

Art

# LETTERS/E-MAILS

Re: Great Ashfield

1/23/2006

From: [ericlesley@oldmillcotts.freemove.co.uk](mailto:ericlesley@oldmillcotts.freemove.co.uk) (Eric Elmer)

To: [billvar@comcast.net](mailto:billvar@comcast.net) (Bill Varnedoe)

Hello,

I was a kid evacuated from London to Bacton, Suffolk, and can remember the B-17s leaving from Great Ashfield, and returning from Germany during 1943-45. I also remember the GIs cycling around, and one name that stuck in my mind for the last 60 years. I know memory plays tricks but I am sure that his name was Dick Foot. I remember that he had a deep red birthmark on his face and he often stopped by our house. I would love to know who he was and if he is still alive to thank him for the gum and kindness he showed us in those dark days.

Many thanks to all the boys,

Eric Elmer

From: billvar

To: ericlesley

Eric,

That's a slim bit of a clue to work with! Unfortunately, there is no roster of all of us who were at Great Ashfield. I am right now trying to compile a roster of the 385<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group airmen. There were approximately 3,000 of them. I have all of the crews listed by pilot's name in each mission. But as there were 10 men to a crew, about 30 aircraft per mission, and 296 missions, looking through these three filing cabinets full of paper is worse than the traditional needle in a haystack, especially since the data are not alphabetized. If I had the pilot's name, the name of his B-17, some specific data, or ANY additional clue, I will be glad to search further. Of course, this is only the aircrews (roster), and there were many more ground crew personnel.

We will put your enquiry to the editor of our newsletter, the Hardlife Herald (Hardlife was the 385<sup>th</sup>BG tower radio call). He will put it in the next edition.

Good luck,

Bill Varnedoe

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# Taps

Foster Falkenstine - Terra Alta, WV - died October 5, 2005, age 87. Foster was a pilot with the 385<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, 551<sup>st</sup> Bomb Squadron. He flew 21 missions and was involved with "Aphrodite Desperate Mission," which was to guide a plane fully loaded with explosives into the mouth of the sub pens in Helgoland. Foster was on same mission in which Joseph Kennedy, Jr. was killed.

Foster spoke to Civil Air Patrol units and at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs about his war days. In 2004 he was honored at the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of D-Day at Nellis AFB, Las Vegas; and was provided with a flight on a B-17 during the Air Show.

From his wife, Ingrid R. Falkenstine, Littleton, Colorado

Vincent Joseph Meyer - Waukee, IA - died October 11, 2005, age 84. Vincent was a lead bombardier with the 385<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, 548<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron. He completed 30 missions and flew most of his mission with the Olin W. Hayes' crew. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with 4 Oak Leaf Clusters.

Following the war he completed his studies at Northwest Missouri State College, Maryville, OH, and began teaching at Waukee High School. In 1953 he became principle at Waukee HS and continued until his retirement in 1984. Vince is survived by his wife of 55 years, Barbara, and two sons and a daughter. A funeral mass was held at St Boniface Catholic Church in Waukee on October 15, 2005.

From his great nephew, Karl Meyer, Tulsa, OK

John L. Shealy - Leesville, SC - died November 12, 2005, age 84. John was an original member of the 385<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, 551<sup>st</sup> Bomb Squadron. He became a POW on his 19<sup>th</sup> mission on October 10, 1943 while on a mission to Munster.

From John Pettenger

