HARDLIFE HERALD

Newsletter of the 385th Bombardment Group Association













1942 - 1945 Great Ashfield - Suffolk, England Station 155 - The Mighty Eighth

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385TH BGA REUNION - SAN ANTONIO, TX - OCTOBER 2012

HARDLIFE HERALD

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<u>Front Cover:</u> Yoke of Flak Shak 42-97307 with crew picture superimposed.

Photo of yoke by Wes Lundsberg Additional Graphics by Brian Hilling, Jr.

CORRECTIONS - Volume 28. No. 2

*Note on P 18. B-17 Loops: The only reported "official" loop by a B-17 was made by the Fleischer crew in 42-31677, Satan's Mate, on 15 Feb 45. This loop is commemorated in the stained glass window in All Saints Church in Great Ashfield. It was well reported and described in The Story of Van's Valiants.

However, the crew in 42-39860, War Cry, also looped, as reported by the ground crew, Cameron Osborn and Handy Gibson. The air crew failed to report it to avoid a reprimand..

And the navigator of 42-31864, Remember Us, has written that they made a loop sometime in early May 44. But this time, it was not on a mission, but done deliberately just to "see what it could do!" That, too, went unreported at the time.

*Page 19, Taps column: Andy Rooney did fly on a mission in the 385thBG as a waist gunner, but it was in 42-3397, The Fighting Cock, with the Rummans Crew on 8 Oct 43. The mission described in "Air Gunner" was with Bud Hutton, his co-author.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

As we begin 2012, I am pleased to report that the 385th BGA is alive and well and bustling with activity. This is the inaugural issue of the Hardlife Herald under the auspices of our new editor, Charles Lundsberg, a 3rd generation member. I am sure I speak for the membership in welcoming Charles and his enthusiasm to the editor's chair; and it goes without saying that we owe Frank McCawley a tremendous debt of gratitude for the years of hard work, care, and attention he devoted to editing the Hardlife Herald. Thumbs up Frank for a terrific job. He deserves another Oak Leaf Cluster on his Distinguished Editor Medal.

After a lot of discussion and one or two false starts, we are actively developing an "official" website for the 385th BGA. It will serve as an online repository for digitized information from the Group's archive, past (and future) issues of the Hardlife Herald, pictures, stories, etc. A steering committee consisting of Tom Gagnon, Charles Lundsberg, Ian McLachlan and Lin Weikert will oversee implementation of the website. More info to follow.

My best wishes to you all. Tom Gagnon

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

First, I'd like to thank Mr. Frank McCawley for his service and the past 5 years of Editing and contributing to the Hardlife Herald. I'd also like to thank the officers and board members for allowing me the honour of Editing the Hardlife Herald. They say timing is everything; had I not gone to the reunion in St. Louis and overheard a conversation between a certain President and a certain Treasurer I wouldn't be typing these words right now.

I am elated to be in this role. The reasons behind my fascination with WWII is a book in it-self: The vast progress in technology, the humble depression-era beginnings of those who served only to return home to an America of opportunities, the pride of having relatives who served. It is all these things and so much more.

Now it would be very easy for me to say, "Check out the size of those shoes! How am I supposed to fill them?" But I won't...simply because I can't. I cannot begin to fathom or compare what war-time veterans experienced. Most veterans I speak with humbly don't speak about their experiences unless asked. From what I understand, they saw it as their job: They went over and did their duties because they were expected to and because they had pride in their work and country. I will forever be thankful and grateful for your service. This newsletter is for you and about you. From Ground Crew to Airmen, from WACs to G.I. Brides I want to hear from you and I hope that I can do you justice within this newsletter.

So who am I and what is my connection to the 385th? My name is Charles Lundsberg (III) and my grandfather (1st Lt. Charles Lundsberg) was a B-17 pilot from June of '44 until his internment in Luft Stalag I on Sept. 26th 1944. I never had the pleasure of meeting him as he passed away in 1968, but I find myself learning more about who he was as I go through his journals and letters to home. He was very active in the American Legion and would have enjoyed (and no doubt been a part of) this wonderful association and its reunions.

This past summer I have sought out relatives of his crew for any information or pictures they may be willing to share. As of this writing, I have found relatives for all of his crew minus the Ball Turret Gunner. I am also on a seemingly never-ending quest to find a picture of "Flak Shak" hopefully with her nose art.

The following story of "Flak Shak" is from a letter my grandfather wrote to home combined with his POW journal's written account of their 23rd mission.

Thanks in advance for your patience as I step into this role. Please don't hesitate to contact me. -Charles Lundsberg, III

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SAGA OF "FLAK SHAK"

It-17 #42-97307 - SEPTEMBER 12, 1944

CHARLES W. LUNDSBERG - PILOT J.M. ELLZEY - CO-PILOT **ROBERT E. SMALLMAN - NAVIGATOR** JOHN W. WISE - BOMBARDIER COSMO RABASCO - ENGINEER / TOP TURRET GUNNER JACK M. WALKER - ASS T ENGINEER / WAIST GUNNER FORREST O. SAMPSON - RADIO OPERATOR WILLIAM R. SIZER - ASS'T RADIO/BALL TURRET GUNNER

EDWARD D. MORGAN - TAIL GUNNER so long ago the crew of the ill-fated FLAK SHAK took off on another mission deep into the heart of Germany. The crews all gathered in the briefing room to learn of our "target for today." Here we found that we were flying number 3 position and our target was an oil refinery at Bohlen. We were all in fine spirits as we were getting back into the rut again after a layoff due to the repairing of runways. It was a beautiful day and little did the crew of my ship, or myself, realize what the next few hours had in store for us. Everything went according to schedule from the take-off until we started on the bomb run some hours later. Just before we started on the run we had our final check and all of the crew checked in OK. Yellow flares meant IP - Bomb bay doors opened and we were on the run. As we swung into the bomb run I went on to the radio, so I could hear any instructions from the lead ship. It so happened that on this day we were flying in

"One fine morning not No. 3 position which is right off the lead ship, and thus we were a vital ship in holding the formation of planes together. Just about minutes before bombs away there were two loud explosions followed by three more. ship bucked violently and we were knocked out of formation. After the first explosion the cockpit had filled with smoke and out of the corner of my eye I could see flames coming up between me and J. and I thought we "had had it." I managed to get control of the ship and get back into formation in drop my bombs time to with the lead ship. If I had dropped my bombs when I had been hit it would have caused the rest of the formation to drop with us and as a result we would have missed the target. Just as soon as I felt the ship lighten I knew that bombs were away and I left the formation as I could smell gas - and fire along with gas just doesn't mix. The reason for leaving was I had figured we were going to blow up and I wanted to be away from the other



1st Lt. Charles W. Lundsberg England, 1944

ships. I figured that if we blew up in formation at least 3 or 4 other ships would go down with us. As soon as I knew that we had cleared the formation and all of the other ships, I turned back to interphone to find out just what had taken place. Without knowing it, what I said acted like a quieting agent on the rest of the crew. Don't get the idea that they were excited, because they sure weren't. A more calm and collected bunch of guys I have never seen. In case you are wondering what I said it was something along this line. "Now fellows. what's the matter?"

The cockpit was so full of smoke and fire that I couldn't see my instruments and therefore could not tell how many engines had been hit and in general, I didn't about anything. know Mν first thought, of course, was

to get the fire out and away from the gas. As soon as we heard the first explosion, J (the co-pilot) went into action and went to work putting out the fire. Before I go any further I want to tell about Moe and his condition at the time. He was in his top turret at his guns as usual and all was well. When the gas tank got hit the gas was rapidly running out into the prop wash and then into the bomb bays which accounts for the engineer and radio man almost being drowned in gas. Inside the ship it splattered all over Moe and every member back to the tail. Such was Moe's situation - drenched with 100 octane gas and a fire within 3 feet of him with fumes strong enough to choke a man through his oxygen mask... In a short time the co-pilot and navigator had the fire out and the cockpit began to clear of smoke. It was their quick work in getting that fire out that saved us.

It seems that we took about 4 direct hits in all. One hit had gone thru the No.2 engine's gas tank and I could see a hole big enough to crawl through and then knew where the gas was coming from. I told J to feather number 2 engine, and told Moe (engineer) to transfer all the fuel he could out of that tank into another one. Moe came down and started to transfer fuel from the dead engine to a good one to save as much as pos-

sible. While he was doing this J and I took stock of the instruments and to our amazement found that we had 3 engines gone. No 1 was still running but not doing any good. No 2 shot up and out of gas, No 3 in good condition and No 4 dead due to a direct hit in the oil lines and could not be feathered. The four direct hits that we had were located: 1. In No.2's gas tank; 2. In the bomb bays while the bombs were still aboard; 3. Directly under the pilot and co-pilot, which hit the oxygen bottles and caused explosion along with fire; 4. The 4th hit blew off the right wing tip.

All during this time I had been figuring our chances of getting back to friendly territory now that the fire was out and we were going along smoothly on one and a half engines. I had all the men put on their 'chutes, just in case, and then told them to start throwing out EVERYTHING that moved. I knew that that was our only chance and thus started the internal destruction of FLAK SHAK. The boys worked very methodically and in no time at all, we had thrown out everything and I do mean EVERYTHING. Guns, ammo, equipment, spare radios, chairs, armor plate, everything went and nothing was spared save our chutes and clothes. Last of all we dropped the ball turret which hangs under the ship. Before this all took place Sizer down in the "ball" had heard

us talking about fire and gas but had not left the ball until he called and asked me if it was OK. That is one incident of cool calm courage of a man who was practically on deaths door step but did not flinch but remained at his guns until relieved. Before coming out of the ball he took his "sight" with him as they are worth quite a bit of money. The ball was then salvoed which was a main factor in keeping us in the air. Walker did a wonderful job on it and it was out of the ship 20 minutes after he started to work on it. While the boys were doing this I had J call the friendly fighters to come and stay with us and within a few minutes we had 2 P-51s that said they would stick with us. Those "Little Friends" (as they were called) were never more welcome and stick with us they did. In the end they even found a landing field for us, landed ahead of us and then took off again. I sure would like to meet those boys as they did a wonderful job and if I should ever meet them, the drinks are going to be on me. Even with the lightened load our air speed was only about 100 or 105 so you can see that we were just able to stay in the air. From then on we just sat and hoped the one engine could stand the strain. It seemed like years but finally the navigator called and said that we were now over occupied country and I right away felt better as I could crash

land in any field handy if the need arose. Bob (nav.) had a course plotted for an airfield near Brussels that had just been taken from the Germans and was OK for a Fort to land on and he wanted to know if we could make it. A quick check with J on the gas situation and everything in general told me that I could and informed him so.

More time went by and we were gradually losing altitude having started at 25,000 and we were now at about 8,000. Finally we were over the city and the fighters found the field and led us to it. Just hoping that there were no other planes landing I came right in with the wheels down and made a better landing than I usually do when I have all 4 engines going. I never thought I'd live to see the day I would be glad to get out and kiss the ground, but I sure was that day and so were the rest of the crew. Of course we had to look over the battle damage and it was major, I will say. There were several things that could have happened that didn't and we were very thankful for that. I will not bother to mention all the damage as it can all be summed up in a few words and that is - "The FLAK SHAK was a wreck and in all probability will spend the rest of its life right there where I parked it." There isn't anything left of it to speak of and it would cost more to try and fix it than it would be worth.

There ends the story as far as FLAK SHAK is concerned and also one of the most and I hope last of my close calls in this war. By all the rules and regulations, we should have blown up, but as I have mentioned, the Lord was with us and was guiding me and giving me the judgment and knowledge to keep us going. I will always have Him to thank for bringing us home safely again.

I will write about our stay in Brussels later as it will take too long now and I have already told plenty for one letter. I have never seen people happier than those. We were some of the first Americans they had seen as they had been liberated by the British 6 days previous and when they found we were Americans we just couldn't pay for a thing and they almost mobbed us. It was really a wonderful feel-

ing and you then fully realize just what we are fighting for and it all makes it seem worthwhile. Will go more into detail in the next letter. All in all tho, you see we had one exciting time and I now am fully convinced that I have the best crew in the whole air force. The way they worked and how coolly and calmly obeyed all orders that I gave is something that a pilot loves to see. I give all credit to my crew for bringing us back by their coolness and efficient work. I can't put into words just what I want to say about them but I can't praise them enough. Thus ended our [23rd] mission and we were safe. The crew did a perfect job in keeping us in the air and much credit goes to them and their work. The Studebaker engine also did a good job of standing up under the strain at over speed."



The original Lundsberg Crew - Mac Dill Field, Tampa, FL March 13, 1944

Top L-R: Engineer COSMO RABASCO, Bombardier ZELIG SHABSIS, Pilot CHARLES LUNDSBERG, Co-Pilot J. M. ELLZEY, Navigator ROBERT SMALLMAN

Bottom L-R: Ass't Engineer JACK WALKER, Armament Gunner DONALD HENRY, Tail Gunner EDWARD MORGAN, Radio ROBERT KRANTZ, Ass't Radio WILLIAM

Krantz left due to parentage and was replaced with FORREST SAMPSON. Shabsis also left and was never replaced until last two missions with JOHN WISE. Henry was transferred to light bombers after 4 missions.

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SIZER

--FEBRUARY 2012



Seventy years ago this past January, the 8th Air Force was activated in Savannah, Georgia. The unit was constituted on January 19th but not formally activated until January 28th, 1942.

Interestingly, the Eighth was first flagged as the Fifth Air Force. Its designation changed a few days later when it was discovered that the 5th had already been allocated to an activating Pacific Air Force.

The Chatham Armory on Bull Street was selected to house the headquarters element and according to the Army's historical report, the "various units assigned to the 8th Air Force constituted the better part of all organizations" located at the nearby Savannah Army Air Base.

Colonel Asa N. Duncan, then commander of the 3rd Air Support Command at Hunter, took command of the 8th. Over the next three months all training and other activities at the Savannah Army Air Base were geared towards preparing the 8th for combat service.

The 385th Bomb Group will celebrate its activation's 70th Anniversary later this year on December 1, 2012.

A Few Words About the WASP by Marty Girson

I don't remember what Army air field it was, but the story is...

The Lockheed P-38 Lightning was introduced to the pilots at this air field. The pilots were having a little trouble flying the P-38 and a few of them crashed. The pilots claimed the plane was unsafe and refused to fly it. In fact, they called it a "widow-maker."

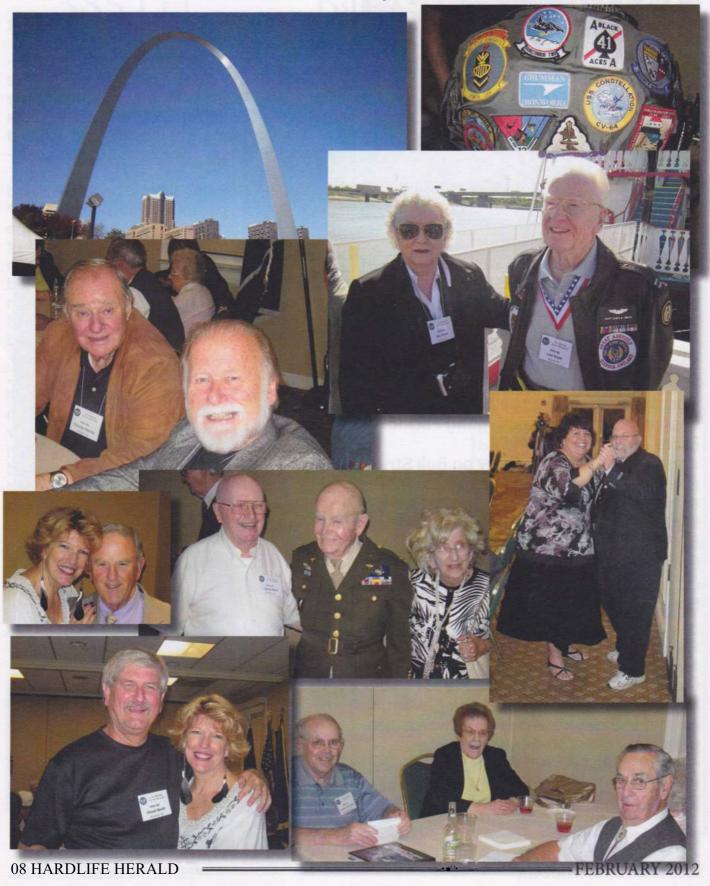
When General Jimmy Doolittle heard about this he recruited one of the WASP Pilots and instructed her on how to fly the P-38. Doolittle then went to the air field of the striking pilots, he had them assemble on the air field and at a given set time, he had the WASP pilot fly over the field for the men pilots to watch. The P-38 then performed where they could all see it. The pilot turned off one engine and flew by. The pilot started the engine and cut-off the other engine. The pilot intentionally stalled the plane all the time keeping control of the plane. When the plane landed all of the pilots went over to the plane to meet this great pilot. When the pilot opened the canopy and climbed out they saw it was a girl. Well, this ended the strike and she stayed at the air field and instructed the pilots on how to fly the P-38.

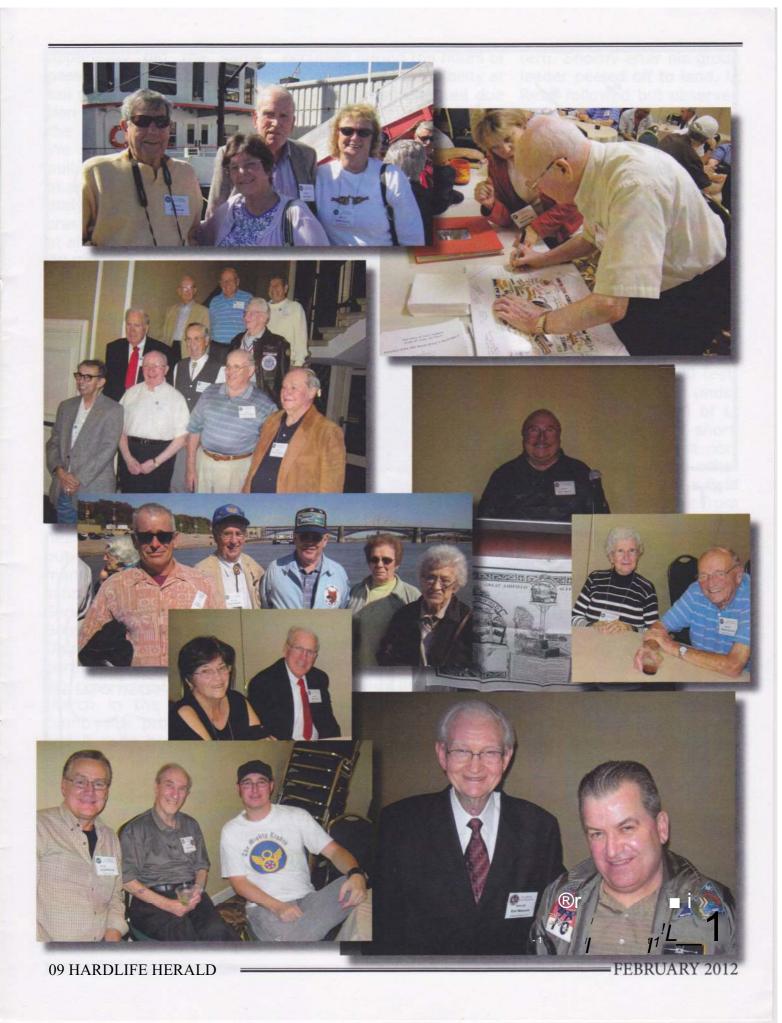
The WASP did a great job and deserved more credit than they ever received.



WASP Pilot Ruth Dailey with her Lockheed P-38 Lightning.

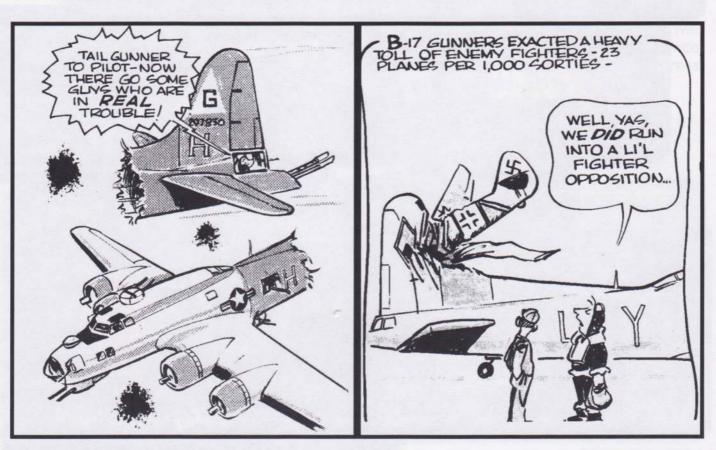
MEMORIES OF ST. LOUIS 385th BGA REUNION, OCTOBER 2011







"There I was..." The cartoons of Bob Stevens



THE SLEEPYTIME GIRLS...

AND GAL'S MULTIPLE NAME PUZZLE

BY BILL VARNEDOE WITH HELP FROM IAN MCLACHLAN

lan and I had many emails trying to untangle the confusion of five different possible B-17s in the 385th Bomb Group with a name resembling "Sleepytime Girl."

Documented Facts from Roger Freeman's book and Photographs in the 385th BGA Archives:

42-3338, Assd 385 on 29 Jun 43; Tr to another Group in Jul 43.

42-3388, Sleepytime Girl: Assd 385 about 3 Aug 43; Hutchison flew first 15 Aug 43, Hutchison flew last 19 Nov 43, however 42-3388 last flew Nesen 24 Apr 44. Hutchison had named a new B-17 Sleepytime Gal II by 18 Dec 43 in a letter home.

42-31370 assd 385 on 24 Nov 43, It first flew with Robinson on 11 Jan 44 and Hutchison first on 13 Feb 44 and last on 21 Feb 44, collided w/ -963.

42-37963 assd 385 on 24 Nov 43; Pease first flew 29 Jan 44 and Pease last on 21 Feb 44, collided w/ -370.

42-102636, Sleepytime Gal assd 385 22 Apr 44, First flew-Heiser 24 May 44 Last Flew-Crow 10 Apr 45.Rt U.S. 30 Jun 45

Discussion and Conclusion:

In the confusion of the multiple "Sleepy-times," it was once thought that 42-3338 was named Sleepy Time Girl. But there is no evidence at all for this. Perhaps once, a typo of its serial number with 42-3388 which was definitely Sleepytime Girl, created this idea. There is no doubt that 42-3388 was Sleepy-time Girl, as shown by a picture with both this name and its serial No. Hutchison named

a B-17 Sleepytime Gal II as stated in his letter. Checking the times that 42-31370 flew and with whom, it seems likely that this was Sleepytime Gal II. So named by Hutchison since 42-3388, Sleepytime Girl, that he had flown was still flying. It is easy in casual conversation and even in informal text to equate "Girl" and "Gal." In the absence of pictures or other evidence, we will go by Hutchison's letter for the spelling. There is no evidence that 42-37963 was named Sleepy-anything. It collided with 42-31370 which was probably named Slepytime Gal II. This may have created the confusion with this name. 42-102636 was definitely Sleepytime Gal, as shown by a picture with both name and serial No.

Final Story?

42-3338 name, if any, unknown. 42-3388 was Seepytime Girl. 42-31370 was probably Sleepytime Gal II. 42-37963 name, if any unknown. 42-102636 was Sleepytime Gal.



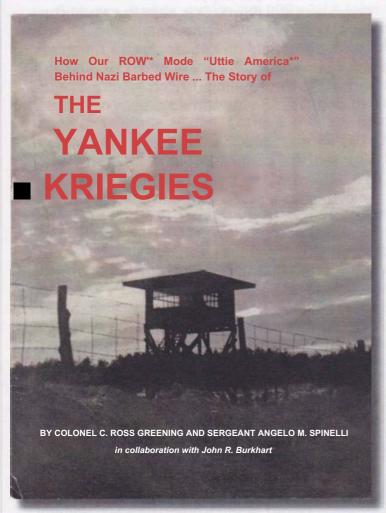
Sleepytime Girl (top) vs. Sleepytime Gal (bottom)



FEBRUARY 2012

"The world knows all too little of how the average prisoner, with typical Yankee ingenuity, daily achieved small miracles to ease the unfortunate lot of himself and his comrades. In publishing "The Yankee Kriegies" the Y.M.C.A. hopes it will give you a new appreciation of the fortitude of America's fighting men..."

AN EXCERPT FROM:



SGT. SPIN ELI.I: One thing that helped us out were the deals we were able to swing with the German guards. In exchange for cigarettes and chocolate bars, the guards would smuggle food to us. If it hadn't been for that we would have been a lot more hungry. Trading with the guards was such a well established custom in our camp that we had a regular price list to go on. I got my camera and had my films developed through exchanges with the guards.

COLONEL GREENING: We did our share of trading, too, but from what 1 hear, the enlisted men were more successful at it than were the officers. In some officers' camps, the prisoners were forbidden by their superiors to trade with the Germans.

SGT. SPINELLI: Although I hope I never have to eat them again, some of the dishes we cooked up would make Oscar of the Waldorf green with envy. I'll bet Oscar never used tooth powder in the place of baking powder, nor made whipped cream out of powdered milk and margarine, and I'll bet he never thought of making ice cream out of snow, powdered milk and jam.

COLONEL GREENING: No, and he never had to make a potato masher out of barbed wire, a skillet from the side of a stove, or a rotary egg beater made from our old friend, the tin can.

SGT. SPINELLI: Maybe he'd like to try out this recipe for Kriegie pie a la mode. Take a dozen C Ration crackers from the Red Cross food parcels, grind them up with a tin can grater and roll them into flour with a table leg rolling pin. Add two tablespoons of margarine, a tablespoon of powdered milk, eight tablespoons of water to form an excellent pie crust batter. Using one of the tin can pie tins, bake for four minutes in a tin can oven at what you hope is a moderate temperature. Boil the contents of either raisins or prunes from a food parcel and pour into pie crust. Bake this for another four minutes. Remove and cool and then take powdered milk and mixing a very thick paste, spread over top, cut into eight pieces and serve as Kriegie pie a la mode. (These ingredients were a normal two weeks' supply of crackers and dried fruits.)

Sgt. Spinelli took his life in his hands to get this picture showing a long-coated "goon" exchanging a loaf of bread for a can of margarine. The coats of the guards were very handy for hiding food, films and other goods to trade with the Americans. These were the world's most risky business ventures, with death the "silent partner" in all transactions.



"HE'S TAKEN A TURN FOR THE NURSE" PRINTED IN U. S. A. A MUTOSCOPE CARD

FEATURED PIN-UP ARTIST

Zoë Mozert (1907 - 1993), born Alice Adelaide Moser, was an American illustrator. She was one of the early 20th Century's most famous pin-up artists and models.

In 1925 Mozert entered the Philadelphia School of Industrial Art where she studied under Thornton Oakley, a former student of Howard Pyle. She painted hundreds of magazine covers and movie posters during her career. Mozert frequently was her own model, using cameras or mirrors to capture the pose. Her paintings are best known for their pastel style and realistic depiction of women.

In 1941, Brown and Bigelow bought Mozert's first nude and signed her to an exclusive calendar contract. During the war, her pin-up series for the company called Victory Girls was published both in calendar and mutoscope-card form. In 1946, Mozert created the publicity poster for Republic Pictures' Calendar Girl, a movie about the Gibson Girl. By 1950, Mozert had become one of the "big four" along with Rolf Armstrong, Earl Moran and Gil Elvgren.

Some of Mozert's most famous works include the poster for Paramount Pictures' True Confession starring Carole Lombard, the poster for the Howard Hughes film The Outlaw with Jane Russell, and her most popular image, Song of the Desert (1950).



Zoë Mozert illustrates Jane Russel for "Song of the Desert." Information from Wikipedia.org

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<u>"Get Your Head Out"</u> (A 385th Operations Book Excerpt)

Do You Know?

- 1. Procedure of dropping ball turret for a wheels-up landing, and where the tools to do the job are located in the airplane?
- 2. Does your Bombardier know how to retract the Bombay Doors, if the bombs have been salvoed?
- 3. What instrument tells you how many volts are flowing from your Inverter to your Electronic Superchargers?
- 4. Which type Tokyo valves you have in that particular ship and the proper use of them?
- 5. Procedure for manual extension of landing gear and location of cranks?
- 6. Where the oxygen plug is located?

Answers to Questions

- 1. Instructions are posted on Right hand side of the ship at bulkhead #6. Tools are on rear Right hand sode of same bulkhead.
- 2. Refer to latest "G" file.
- 3. A.C. Voltmeter located on the Pilot's panel to the right of the Hydraulic pressure gauge. Normal reading should be from 25 to 20 1/2 Volts.
- 4. To be determined by reading instructions on entrance door of rear bombay and on the valves themselves.
- 5. Crank is located on front of bulkhead #6, on the right hand side of ship. Crank according to arrow instructions on rear of bulkhead #4.
- 6. Taped to the post of the Ball Turret.

FEBRUARY 2012

"HE'S TAKEN A TURN FOR THE NURSE" PRINTED IN U. S. A. A MUTOSCOPE CARD

The 385th and those interested in USAAF history owe a great debt to Bill Varnedoe. This is not only because he's a veteran who flew his share of perilous combat operations during World War 2 and our indebtedness to he and his comrades on that score is beyond measure but, in the years since, Bill has honoured the men with whom he served by ceaselessly toiling in compiling his book, "The Story of Van's Valiants. A history of the 385th Bomb Group in World War Two". Drawing upon the recollections of his comrades-in-arms, compilation of their memories is a part of Bill's legacy to the 385th and to those of succeeding generations who want to find out what went on at Station 155, Great Ashfield in Suffolk, England 1943-1945. Through personal stories of men who combat or "sweated out" the missions, we are transported to those grim days in harrowing accounts of flak and fighters; mid air collisions and ditching in the sea's icy, unforgiving grasp or reminders of long days in captivity. Life on Station 155 is relived with glimpses of the occasional good times

- the 200th Mission party
- and bad times the Luftwaffe's visit in May 1944. For those aficionados of the Mighty Eighth, Bill includes a list of 385th aircraft by serial number and illustrations of

BOOK REVIEW

By Ian McLachlan

The Story of Van's Valiants of the 8th Army Air Force

A History of the 385th Bomb Group in World War II

By
W. W. Vamedoe, Jr.
billvar@comcast.net



8" Edition, 2010

Published by
Colonial Graphics Group
www.colonialgraphicsgroup.con

arts followed by a collection of crew pictures of young men peering at us through time as they pose by their B-17s. Listed, too, is the Roll of Honor as a reminder that many of those young men failed to grow old as Bill has and his tribute continues to develop as more information arrives from families or other sources worldwide. I can thoroughly recommend it and the book is available from Bill himself at \$25.00, post paid (checks only, please). His address is

Bill Varnedoe, 5000 Ketova Way, Huntsville, AL 35803. Bill has also compiled an database excellent listina 385th aircraft and crews plus gathered many photographs relating to Great Ashfield and he's devoted countless hours to helping veterans, their families and other historians. Having taken over from Bill in the role of 385th historian, I owe him a personal thanks for the help he's given me over many vears and he's certainly a hard act to follow.

THE MYSTERY OF MARY ELLEN II

IAN MCLACHLAN ©

Ploughing the fields of East Anglia often unearths links with its rich history. Shards of Roman pottery; the occasional coin - Iceni: mavbe medieval Roman. - flint axe heads evoke an even more distant and warlike past. Tiny pieces of aluminium tilled amidst the topsoil of a farm in Suffolk relate to a more modern conflict when a Flying Fortress fell from the heavens and these fragments are all that remain to mark its pass-

It was 16th September, 1943, when the 385th mounted mission 19 to an enemy airbase at Chateaubernard, their longest sortie to date involving 21 aircraft led by Major Bill Tesla. They were part of an overall Eighth effort dispatching 148 Fortresses to attack ports and aerodromes in France and, whilst enemy aircraft were encountered with the 385th claiming 10 for nil losses, it was a more insidious enemy - the weather that accounted for most of the American casualties that day and it certainly contributed to the 385th's losses.

1/Lt John D Schley missed flying his regular ship, "Sly Fox" because it was unavailable, presumably owing to the need for repairs from a previous mission and Schley had "borrowed" B-17F 42-30601, "Mary Ellen II" from Lyle Fryer and crew. Schley's crew comprised:

Pilot: 1/Lt John D Schley Jr. CP: 2/Lt John B Baum Nav: 2/Lt Earl R Bates Bomb: 2/Lt John Ellingsen Jr TTG: T/Sgt Walter J Roth RO: T/Sgt John B Egbert BTG: S/Sgt Willard C White TG: S/Sgt Clyde C Gingerich WGL: S/Sgt Chester E Traux WGR: S/Sgt Harold A Waldner

The sortie itself was which we thou relatively uneventful for own as Group the 385th but the ele- had given order ments, ever an implacable and our flare had foe, found many Fortresses off. Saw the shadeling seeking sanctuary in dete-second. Co-pilot riorating weather conditions pulled the ship during the last vestiges of I put it in a steep turn to

daylight. A number of these the left. Other ship [Schley]

were from the 385th's near neighbours, the 95th BG at Horham and, amidst the confusion, several 95th aircraft ioined the Great Ashfield circuit with disastrous consequences for "Mary Ellen II". One of the 95th aircraft, 42-30120, was piloted by 2/ Lt Louis S Reno who subsequently reported, "Flying at about 1500' circling field to left outside of outer circle of lights. Other ship appeared to be circling to the right at same altitude. I was on command trying to contact field which we thought was our own as Group Commander had given orders to peel off and our flare had been shot off. Saw the ship for a split second. Co-pilot saw it first, pulled the ship up and then



SCHLEY CREW

apparently did the same, passed over us hitting our tail guns. We called the station twice telling them of the crash, but no answer. We soon lost an engine, so pulled out and finally landed at an RAF base. We immediately informed them of the crash. We had our lights on at all times." Reno's co-pilot. 2/Lt Robert N Moon added. "...Due to poor visibility was not able to see other ship until a couple of seconds before the crash. He approached us from two o' clock and both ships pulled up and to the left. His wing tip hit the tip of our tail, knocking the guns around. We saw the plane burning on the ground..."

"Mary Ellen II" had plummeted to earth and exploded in a field of cattle beet on Abbotts Hall Farm near Rickinghall in Suffolk but had any of her crew managed to parachute to safety? British National Fire Service units from Beccles, Botesdale, Stowmarket and Diss attended the scene supported by an RAF fire-fighting crew from Honington. A search in the surrounding countryside proved fruitless and it soon became grimly apparent that there were no survivors.

On Station 155, Major Preston Piper conducted an investigation into the tragedy and his Report of Aircraft Accident stated:

"The 385th Group was returning in formation to its home base after a combat mission. The accident

occurred during the hours of darkness and the visibility at the time was restricted due to intermittent rain showers. All aircraft of this wing were approaching bases in the area at the time making the traffic extremely heavy.



Crash Site of Mary Ellen II
September 17,1943

The propeller protruding from the soil in a beet field prompted the hope that something substantial might still be buried nearly seven decades later.

Also attempting to land at this base (Great Ashfield) were several other planes from other Groups. An aircraft of the 95th Bomb Group, 334th Bomb Squadron...flown by 2/Lt L G [sic] Reno was following his Group Leader who was in the Great Ashfield traffic pat-

tern. Shortly after his group leader peeled off to land, Lt Reno followed but observed another aircraft approaching him head on flying a collision course. The co-pilot of Lt Reno's ship reacted by pulling up and Lt Reno aided by turning sharply left. The other aircraft passed overhead and Lt Reno's ship was hit by the other aircraft in the tail position. This other plane... was flown by 1st Lt John D Schley...,550th Bomb Squadron. As near as can be determined, the collision occurred at an altitude of 1500 feet. The left wing tip and under wing surface (7 feet) of Lt Schley's aircraft was shorn off. This, along with a portion of the tail of the other aircraft, was found in a field approximately one mile from the crash. Observers on the ground saw the aircraft make a violent left turn and then plunge into the ground. Fire broke out immediately after the crash and all personnel were killed and the A/C totally destroyed...

Considerable difficulty has been experienced in landing large formations in this area after dark. This difficulty is increased due to the fact that so many airports are located in a small area and all groups stationed at these fields are attempting to land at the same time. Pilots also must be certain to conform to left hand traffic around airports at all times. Wing headquarters is aware of the problems and steps are being taken to eliminate

as many of the dangers as possible, however due to the close proximity of airdromes in this theatre, number of aircraft returning at the same time, all low on gas or battle damaged, accidents of this nature must be anticipated."

The 385th's British mural and nose-artist, Anne Haywood, had been particularly fond of the handsome Schley and Anne's daughter, Fiona, told me her mother had a psychic sense that saw an aura around those flyers who were later to be lost. Anne understandably suppressed these feelings but they troubled her throughout her time with the 385th.

Another mysterious episode relating to this incident occurred after publication of my book, "Final Flights". I neither believe nor disbelieve in the paranormal but, having given a brief account of the tragedy in "Final Flights", I later received a call from Samantha Alexander, daughter of the renowned clairvoyant, Simon Alexander. Following alleged ghostly occurrences in the Petwood Hotel at Woodhall Spa in Lincolnshire. Simon had been asked to investigate. It seems that sounds of boisterous RAF parties were echoing down vears from the hotel's wartime service as an officer's mess for the famous RAF 617 Dambusters squadron. There were, apparently, even sightings of their leader, Guy Gibson. However, Simon

made no contact with Gibson but somehow picked up the troubled spirit of an American airman named "Schlow" but, with a strong southern drawl, the enunciation was unclear. The American was unhappy about being blamed and said it was not his fault. He mentioned a "Mary Ellen" and said. "all the Johns are here" and named crew members White and Ginger. Checking the crew list shows four airmen named John; White was the ball turret gunner and "Ginger" undoubtedly appertains to Clyde Gingerich, the tail gunner. Some of the information "given" to Simon Alexander could have been taken from Final Flights but I cannot explain the southern drawl because I had made no mention of this and it remains a mystery to me. Was the clairvoyant was aware of Schley's Savannah, Georgia origins beforehand? It is a mystery to me.

During 2011 my friend Peter Snowling and I visited the crash site and, with permission, landowner's conducted a metal-detector search for items from the lost bomber. We found nothing on the first attempt but were invited to return later when the field would be harvested and then ploughed. It seems that every year, fragments of "Mary Ellen II" emerge and, as we discovered, 2011 was no differ-Following the tractor with detectors, we soon had a cluster of readings and began picking some fragments from the surface whilst others were found a few inches down. Exploded .5 rounds molten aluminium and spoke of the fire's ferocity but hopes of larger pieces still extant disappeared and we contented ourselves with only tiny pieces of the oncemaiestic Flying Fortress. "Mary Ellen II". -



Ian McLachlan's son, Rowan, uses a metal detector to locate wreckage from Mary Ellen II

Another puzzle surrounding the loss of "Mary Ellen II" is hinted at in a letter I was given by the late John Ford, former President of the 385th Association. The letter, dated 23 March 1945, has First Lieutenant John D Schley Jr as the subject and is written by Major E A Bradunas, Chief, Notification Branch, Personal Affairs Division, Assistant Chief of Air Staff, Personnel, HQ Army Air Forces, Washington. Addressed to "Commanding General, Eighth Air Force, APO 634, c/o Postmaster, New York, New York" the letter reads, "Mrs Schley, mother of subject named officer, has visited this headquarters and is disturbed by unofficial rumors concerning the death of her son. Request all available details regarding Lt Schley be forwarded for dissemination to Mrs Schley. Also request list of crew members associated with Lieutenant Schley on 16 September 1943." I have a copy of the list provided on 9th April 1945 but have no idea what the "unofficial rumours" were about and hope further information might be found relating to this rather sad mystery surrounding the loss of "Mary Ellen II" and her heroic crew.



385TH

BGA

TAPS

Herbert L. Baudier of the 385th Bomb Group, 550 Squadron,died Jan 11th 2012.

"The best dad a girl could ever have," from Anne Baudier, RN







During the October 2011 385th BGA Reunion in St. Louis, MO, the following Bomb Group Association Members were honoured in their passing by the reunion attendees:

Theodore (Ted) Church

Gerald W. Donnelly

Jack Gesser

Thomas A. Heydon

Charles Hughes

Jack G. King

Charles Lewis Miller

Albert E. Rummans

Kenneth Sherril

George P. Solomos

Truman Smith

Forbes Leroy Tenbrook

Marvin Durrell Unruh

Lester L. Shaak, 88, died Saturday, March 5, 2011, at Stone Ridge-Towne Center, stown. He was the husband of Alice J. (Hoffman) Shaak, who died December 5, 2006. Bom in Strausstown, he was the son of the late Monroe W. and Mary J. (Smith) Shaak. He was a member of St. John's (Hain's) U.C.C. Wernersville. He was a U.S. Army Air Corp veteran, having served in WWII. He worked at the Wernersville State Hospital until retirement as a plasterer and mason. He is survived by two sisters. Helen widow of Harvey Eisenhauer, and Verdie M. widow of Gilbert Gassert; a stepdaughter, Judy wife of Steven M. Enck; a step-son, William E. Larson: a son-in-law. James Swartz: granddaughters; three three step granddaughters; two step grandsons; great-grandson; one and several nieces and nephews. He was predeceased by a daughter, Carol Swartz; and two brothers, Luther S. and Norman W. Shaak.

385TH BGA TAPS



Rex Morton Cantrell, beloved husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather, and friend went to be with his Lord and savior on the morning of January 4, 2012 with his family by his side. Rex was born to Malcom and Gertrude Cantrell on February 13th, 1921 in Billings, Montana. Rex served in the Army Air Corps Eighth Air Force, 385th Bomb Group, WWII in Europe. He survived 28 bombing missions as lead navigator on the 551st B-17 squadron. After the war, Rex met and married Phyllis Monroe and settled in Santa Rosa, CA. Together they raised four children and Rex became a successful businessman. After Rex and Phyllis decided to go their separate ways, in 1973, Rex married his wife Trish 1976 and together they lived in Santa Rosa, Dunsmuir, Mt. Shasta and finally moved here to Lodi in 2002. Rex and Trish enjoyed travelling and visiting children and

grandchildren throughout their 36 years of marriage. Rex enjoyed many hobbies throughout his life and was very active in many service organizations. He served as president of Toastmasters, Lions, Masons, The Wine Club of Sonoma County and The Navy League. He was a very skilled craftsman and master wood-worker, creating many beautiful furniture pieces that he proudly gifted to his family throughout the years. Rex was also very involved with sport aviation. He was a member of the Civil Air Patrol, past president of Experimental Aviation Association chapter in Santa Rosa and active in many other aviation related organizations, He was very proud to have completed a number of aviation projects in the 1950s into the 70s. He completely rebuilt a 1946 Taylorcraft, finished a partially built experimental monoplane and built 2 matched Pitts Special biplanes long before "kit aircraft" were even available with nothing more than a set of blueprints. As a pilot, Rex enjoyed both the building and flying activities of sport aviation and the Sonoma County Airport became the family "hang out" over the years. Rex will be remembered as a wonderful husband and father who with his warm smile and outgoing personality, gave unselfishly of his time and abilities. He was a respected role model and enjoyed passing on his amazing "can-do" attitude and special talents on to his children.

Rex is survived by his wife, Patricia, Children Peggy Lockard (John), Ron Cantrell (Nancy), Kenneth Cantrell (Marilyn), many grandchildren and great-grandchildren. He was preceded in death by his daughter, Sandy Ellers.

Cono J. Damato of River Bend died Monday, January 9, 2012. Cono was born July 27, 1925, in Tuxedo, NY.

He was married for 58 years to his wife Jean Strait Damato. Cono was employed by Abex Corporation in Mahwah, NJ, until his retirement in 1988 after almost 40 years. He started in the foundry and steadily rose within the company. He was the company controller when he retired. Cono was a 1st Lieutenant in WWII and a lead Navigator of a B-17. Cono was a member of the 8th Air Force, Bomb Group 385 stationed in Great Ashfield, England. During his retirement, Cono was an active member of the New Bern Aeromodelers remote control airplane club.

Cono is survived by his wife Jean and son Joseph and family, of Hudson, OH; son Paul and family of Rockaway, NJ; son Cono Jr and family of Baldwinsville, NY; and son James of Nashville, TN. He was well loved by his five grandchildren. Cono is also survived by a sister, Angela Siciliano of Plymouth Meeting, PA.

23 HARDLIFE HERALD -

FEBRUARY 2012

LETTERS

From: koseredm@comcast.net
To: ianm385bg@btopenworld.com
Subject: Looking for 385th Information

Dear Mr. Maclachlan,

My name is Chris Koser. I was referred to you by Bill Varnedoe. My father, Donald James Arvas, was a 385th/548th pilot at Great Ashfield. I've been researching my father's missions for many years now. About 10 years ago, Mr. Varnedoe sent me a few of my father's mission reports. They were, however, written at the "group" or "squadron" level. Were mission reports also submitted at the individual plane level by each crew?

I am looking for a couple of things: 1) The mission reports I am missing (I'm willing to pay for copying and postage, of course!); and 2) Growing up, we were always told about the time that my father's plane had a flak hole in it that was so big the entire crew could stand in it when they limped back to Great Ashfield. Is there any way to track down information about that?

Sincerely, Chris Koser

Dear Chris.

Sorry for the delay responding but I'm a bit in arrears with my 385th activities owing to commitments elsewhere but I'm now trying to catch up. I'm sorry that I can't help much at the "plane" level because the 385th archives I took over from Bill are primarily at the Group level and the mission files hold mostly the loading lists detailing aircraft and crew. From research for one of my books, "Night of The Intruders" many years ago I do know that some files in US National Archives contain what were called "Combat Reports" where returning crews were debriefed if combat with enemy aircraft had occurred but I don't have these for the 385th in their entirety - I do have them for a few but none that tie in with the dates of your father's missions. To get these for your father's missions would, I feel, entail a visit to your National Archives where you might also be able to get battle damage reports that might unearth the story you mention about the flak hole so large the crew could stand up in it.

I've checked what I have for your father's missions and there are some files with the group reports from personnel leading the missions but these are hard copy - I did find his Nav report for Mission 292, and scanned it in, copy attached. I've also attached a copy of the Arvas crew which I think must have originated from you? I don't have any names and would appreciate it if you could let me know who's who. I've copied this to Charles Lundsberg who now edits the 385th newsletter, "Hardlife Herald" and if we're lucky, it might be that someone can tie in the flak damage account.

All the best for now, lan

From: "Stephen Gillis" < scgill04inf@comcast.net >
To: "Chuck" < chucksmith@smithindustrialsales.com >

Subject: "Hardlife Herald" Article

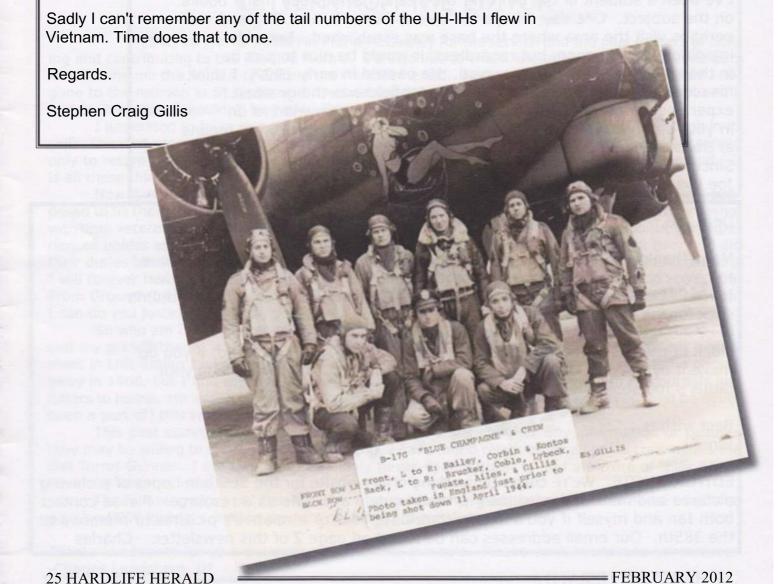
Dear Chuck:

Happy New Year! I trust the holiday season was a good one for you.

I read with interest the article on the "Blue Champagnes" in the December 2011 edition.

How long my dad's crew flew aircraft #42-3547, I have no idea. However, it is a fact that my father did the "Blue Champagne" nose art on both aircraft. Whether the first aircraft's nose art was "modified" I have no idea, but obviously from the photo, there was some "modification."

The fact remains that the second "Blue Champagne," aircraft #42-37977 was the aircraft the crew went down in on 11 April 1944.



LETTERS

From: Joseph Pyatek [mailto:joep@pyatekarchitectllc.com]

To: <u>ianm385bg@btopenworld.com</u> Subject: can contribute photos

Dear Mr. MacLachlan,

In reading the "Hardlife Hearald" I understand you are the historian for the 385th. My father, Joseph Pyatek, was a member of the ground crew for the "Raunchy Wolf" of the 551st squadron based at Great Ashfield. My father told many stories about his time at Great Ashfield and gave me photographs he had from his wartime experience. Some of the photos are of nose art of various B-17s on the base and there are some photos of air crew as well. I would be pleased to have the photos scanned and send them on to you electronically or on a disk if appropriate for your use in building the archives.

I've been a student of the 8th over the years, having read many books on the subject. One day, I hope to have a chance to visit England and perhaps visit the area where the base was established. I would imagine it is long gone, but regardless, it would be nice to just be in the area where my father served. He passed in early 1997. I think his experience with the 385th at Great Ashfield was the greatest experience of his life. I would like to know his photos will live on in your archives. Please let me know at your convenience what means of transfer you would prefer and I will endeavor to get it accomplished. Sincerely, Joe Pyatek

Dear Joe.

Many thanks for your email - I'm delighted to hear from you and would love to have copies of the photographs you mention to add to the 385th archive. It would be excellent if you could scan them and put them on a disk or thumb stick for me.

Much of the base has gone but there are remnants still extant and, if you do make it over, I'd be delighted to show you around so you can walk in your father's footsteps.

Best wishes, lan

EDITOR'S NOTE: We're currently working on a website for the 385th in hopes of archiving pictures and information so they're more widely available as a resource. Please contact both lan and myself if you'd like to contribute your or a relative's pictures or memoirs to the 385th. Our email addresses can be found on page 2 of this newsletter. -Charles

Mayonnaise Jar & Two Beers...

When things in your life seem almost too much to handle, when 24 hours in a day are not enough, remember the mayonnaise jar and the 2 Beers.

A professor stood before his philosophy class and had some items in front of him. When the class began, he wordlessly picked up a very large and empty mayonnaise jar and proceeded to fill it with golf balls. He then asked the students if the jar was full. They agreed that it was.

The professor then picked up a box of pebbles and poured them into the jar. He shook the jar lightly.

The pebbles rolled into the open areas between the golf balls. He then asked the students again if the jar was full. They agreed it was.

The professor next picked up a box of sand and poured it into the jar. Of course, the sand filled up everything else. He asked once more if the jar was full. The students responded with a unanimous 'yes.'

The professor then produced two Beers from under the table and poured the entire contents into the jar effectively filling the empty space between the sand. The students laughed..

'Now,' said the professor as the laughter subsided, 'I want you to recognize that this jar represents your life. The golf balls are the important things—your family, your children, your health, your friends and your favorite passions—and if everything else was lost and only they remained, your life would still be full. The pebbles are the other things that matter like your job, your house and your car. The sand is everything else—the small stuff.

'If you put the sand into the jar first,' he continued, 'there is no room for the pebbles or the golf balls. The same goes for life. If you spend all your time and energy on the small stuff you will never have room for the things that are important to you.

Pay attention to the things that are critical to your happiness. Spend time with your children. Spend time with your parents. Visit with grandparents. Take your spouse out to dinner. Play another 18. There will always be time to clean the house and fix the disposal. Take care of the golf balls first—the things that really matter. Set your priorities. The rest is just sand.

One of the students raised her hand and inquired what the Beer represented. The professor smiled and said, 'I'm glad you asked.' The Beer just shows you that no matter how full your life may seem, there's always room for a couple of Beers with a friend.



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