



Hardlife



Herald



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385th Bombardment Group Association

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* MONUMENTS, MEMORIALS
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'Frank Walls	72-'75	Sam Lyke	'89-'91
'Vincent Masters	75-'77	'Sid Colthorpe	'91-'93
'John C. Ford	'77-'79	'Robert C. Smith	'93-'95
'James H. Emmons	'79-'81	Robert Valliere	'95-'97
'Paul Schulz	'81-'83	Michael Gallagher	'97-'99
'Forrest V. Poore	'83-'85	Tom Newton	'99-'01
William A. Nichols	'85-'87	Leo LaCasse	'01-'03
		W. W. Varnedoe, Jr.	'03-'05

'deceased

Honorary Members

Roger Feller
Mayor Ferdinand Unsen
Eldon Nysethter

Table of Contents

Page	
2	Cover/Editorial/Officers and Board
3	President's Report
3	385 th BG Mission Query
4	385 th BGA 2006 Reunion
4	New Flag Dedicated at Perle Museum
5-6	Initial Days at Great Ashfield
6-7	2005 Visits to Great Ashfield and Perle
8-9	Mission #29
9-10	My Army Air Corps Service
10	Personnel Records Available Online
11	The Devastating Mission to Berlin
12	One Hundred Years Ago
12	The Coche Crew and Their Russian Captors
13-18	Letters/E-Mails
19	Taps

COVER

The cover shows a rare event these days. Two B-17s in the same photograph, the Duxford, "Sally B", and the French "Pink Lady." Our thanks go to Bill Varnedoe for providing this picture.

EDITORIAL

Please accept my apology for late delivery of Issue 23, No. 1 of the Hardlife Herald. Although the printer had a proof copy of the issue soon after I provided him the draft, I was away from home all of February and half of March thus I was unable to provide him a proofed and corrected copy for printing and mailing. I hope to have future issues out in a more respectable time period.

We, the old members of the 385th BG, are leaving this good earth at a much faster rate. To continue our Association, we need all of us to recruit our sons and daughters, our grandsons and granddaughters, and other persons to become members of our Association and to continue history. Tell them of your WWII experiences, and also tell us so we can provide them to all 385th BGA members.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

We will celebrate three historic events at our reunion in Boisser City, LA.

- (1) Fifty years ago, Ruel Weikert and others started the 385th BG WWII Veterans Association, and in 1957, he was elected President at the first reunion in Pittsburg, PA.
- (2) Thirty years ago, in 1976, Vincent Masters was serving as President; and the first 385th Tour Group returned to our former base at Great Ashfield. This outstanding tour was arranged by John Ford and his wife Betty; and a unique bond was established between the villagers and the members of the

385th tour group. Tour groups every four or five years have renewed this meaningful relationship.

- (3) Twenty years ago in Dayton, OH, the 385th BGMA formed a Memorial Trust Fund at All Saints Church with a Deed of Trust, dated Jul. 27, 1987. Funds amounting to 10,000 English pounds were deposited to the Deed of Trust. These funds had been accumulating for over nine years from Life Memberships (LM) of \$100 first offered in 1979. By 1996, a total of 317 LM's offerings had been transferred to the Memorial Trust Fund.

In 2003, the Board of Directors voted to discontinue offering LMs as we had more LMs than annual paying members (AMs) and a potential budget problem was evident. However, current donations from members have sustained a positive cash flow.

These historic events will be reported in future issues of the Hardlife Herald. For example: Vincent Masters, President, 1975-77, has submitted to the HH a reprint from a souvenir of the 1975 Reunion which provides some information about the early history of the BGA. Bill Varnedoe, Past President and 385th BGA Historian, will provide excerpts from our archives about these three historic events. I hope other members will also provide information of these events. Please notify me if you have such materials to share.

385th BGA 2006 REUNION

The 385th BGA will hold their 2006 reunion in conjunction with the 8th Air Force Historical Association at the Isle of Capri Casino Hotel in Boisser City, LA October 3-8, 2006. Scheduled is a tour of Barksdale AFB on Friday, October 6th. The tour of Barksdale will include a greeting by the base commander, Lt. Gen. Kevin Chilton, and his Wing Commanders, the dedication of a monument by the 385th BGA, a visit to the 8th Air

Force Museum which includes a B-17 and B-24, and a lunch with Barksdale personnel. Other scheduled events are both Thursday and Friday night dinners and the Saturday night banquet.

On Thursday, October 5th, the 385th BGA will hold their group business meeting and celebrate the three historical events of the 38th BGA. A suite has been reserved for a separate Hospitality Room.

Hotel reservations for the hotel MUST be made through Ivan McKinney rather than direct to the hotel.

We regret that is all the information we have, and hopefully, we will receive further information on costs and activities for the reunion, and print them in the next issue of the HH.



FORMER 385th BGA PRESIDENTS TO BE HONORED

During our Reunion in Boisser City, LA, we will celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the first reunion of the 385th Bomb Group which met in Pittsburg in 1957. At that reunion, Ruel G. Weikert was elected as the first president, and served as president for 15 years. His son Lindley R. Weikert is on the current Board of Directors as Secretary.

Included at our Boisser City reunion, will be the personal re-

cognition of the living past presidents and a memorial service for those deceased. All former living presidents and family members, and family members of some deceased former presidents have been invited to attend our reunion and memorial service to help us honor them. We hope that past presidents unable to attend will be represented by a family member, or a former Board member during his tenure. The 385th BGA

would be honored by your presence.

Any BGA member who knows the name and address of any family members of past presidents: Frank B. Walls, John C. Ford, James H. Emmons, Paul Schulz, Earle L. Cole and Robert E. Smith, please contact Art Driscoll via mail or e-mail.

385th BGA REUNION

October 4-7, 2006, Boisser City, LA

Our Reunion will be held October 4-7, 2006 in conjunction with the 8th AFHS Reunion at Boisser City, LA. Several private 385th BGA sessions are scheduled. The current headquarters of the 8th Air Force is located at

nearby Barksdale AFB. One of the tours of the 8th AFHS Reunion will include a tour of the 8th AF Museum which exhibits a B-17 and a B-24.

The Reunion starts on Wednesday and concludes with a

Saturday night dinner banquet. Information and reservation forms will be published in the 8th AF News and the Hardlife Herald. Mark your calendars and join your friends in Boisser City.

B- 17 FLYING FORTRESS

The B-17 Flying Fortress may have been the most famous bomber of World War II. It was the first US massed produced four-engine bomber. It was an airplane which was able to come home with its body, wings and tail full of holes from enemy bullets, flak, and 20mm cannon shells.

The first B-17 was built by Boeing in 1930 as a four-engine aircraft, "Model 299", and was first flown in 1935. The B-17 aircraft was recognized for its toughness, its armament of .50 caliber machine guns and its long range potential; and on seeing the first model, it was apply named the

"Flying Fortress" by Richard L Williams of the Seattle Times.

A Boeing design with four radial engines, a total of 12,731 B-17s were built by Boeing, Lockheed-Vega and Douglas. The original design went through six major changes, but the B-17G with the addition of the two-gun chin turret was the last. Models B-17G had a maximum speed of 300 mph, a cruising speed of 180 mph and a maximum range of 2000 miles when loaded. It had an armament of thirteen .50 caliber machine guns and could carry a bomb load of 6,000 pounds. It had a wing span of 103

feet 4 inches, a length of 74 feet 9 inches, a height of 19 feet one inch, and a weight of 55,000 pounds (normal load.) Normally it had a crew of six to ten members.

The B-17 served in all theaters of the war and dropped more bombs than any US aircraft in World War II. It was the first aircraft to bomb the Japanese forces in the Pacific, and the first to bomb the German forces in Europe. Some 4,750 B-17s were lost to enemy action. Seventeen B-17 airmen were awarded the Medal of Honor.

BOOKS ABOUT THE 385th BG

Many 385th Bomb Group members wrote and published books about the history of the 385th BG or about their experiences while a member of the Group. A list of the known books marked with a # (out of print) or ++ (still in print) or && (unknown availability) follows:

History of the 385th Bombardment Group (H) by Leonard Mardsen. (#)

The 385th Bombardment Group by Leonard Marston (++)

History of the 385th Bomb Group by W. W. Varnedoe, Jr. (++)

The Story of Van's Valiants, A History of the 385th Bomb Group by W. W. Varnedoe, Jr. (++)

B-17s of the 385th Bomb Group by W.W. Varnedoe, Jr. (privately published)

The Wrong Stuff by Truman Smith. (++)

And No Purple Heart by Frank Mays. (&&)

Forever Yours by Howard Muchow. (&&)

Fear, Faith, Courage by Willard Richards. (&&)

Winner Man by Robert H. Winnerman. (&&)

The Ohio Air Force by Thomas A. Helman (privately published)

Aphrodite Desperate Mission by Jack Olsen

Air Gunner by Andy Rooney and Bud Hutton (#) (Andy Rooney flew one or more missions with the 385th BG, Nos. 5, 27 &/or 29 with the Cerrone Crew in the B-17 named *Lady Liz* and tells about them in this book.)

Bill Varnedoe's book "The Story of Van's Valiants" can be purchased for \$25, post paid, from McNally Productions, 4282 Arnie Road, Blaine, WA 98230.

Other books with stories about the 385th BG, the 385th BG veterans, or with reference to specific 385th BG B-17s or nose art are:

Eighth Air Force Bomber Stories by Ian MacLachlan. (++)

The Mighty Eighth by Roger A. Freeman (&)

The Mighty Eighth by Gerald Aster (&)



BOOK REVIEW

Views of World War II from a B-17 Flying Fortress

Memoir Included in Senator's History Project Details Young Airman's Tour with "Mighty Eighth"

MITCHELL, IND. - They left farms and loved ones behind to travel half a world away when duty called; enduring hazards and heartaches beyond compare; and came home changed men - if they came home at all. Living through a war has a way of putting everything else into a perspective, a theme that permeates James Lee Hutchinson's new memoir, *Through These Eyes: A World War II Eighth Air Force Combat Diary*.

Hutchinson, now 80, was one of the 16 million young men and women called to military service by Uncle Sam more than a half century ago. The author's combat service was with the 490th Bomb Group in England as a teenage radio operator in a B-17 Flying Fortress. Interspersed with his frank, sometimes humorous and always riveting narrative are excerpts of his tour diary.

Readers travel back in time and ride with Hutchinson and his nine fellow crew members on 20 missions aboard the "Fort," the most deadly aircraft in the European Theater, as they join hun-

dreds of other bombers deep into the heart of Hitler's Germany. No bombing run was ever routine, and readers are kept on edge of their seats as Hutchinson's vivid descriptions convey what it was like to be flying at 25,000 feet on oxygen in sub-zero temperatures for hours at a time facing enemy anti-aircraft "flak" and attack by Luftwaffe fighters. There was also the sickening sight of other B-17s falling out of formation and wondering if the next one to go down would be his.

"The crews manned their combat positions and waited for the hell they knew was coming," he writes. "Bombers receiving a direct hit were blown out of the sky and another 10-man crew was lost."

A copy of *Through These Eyes* has been placed in the Library of Congress as part of Sen. Richard Lugar's World War II Veteran's History Project. A copy was presented to Queen Elizabeth II of England who was a teenager during the war. Hutchinson's early chapters about life during the Great Depression have been used in high school history classes.

Through These Eyes is a timeless, fascinating firsthand look at one of the most important eras in modern history; a slice of life from the Greatest Generation. The book was edited by Dr. Susan Hutchinson of the University of Memphis.

Hutchinson grew up in the hills of southern Indiana. He served with the "Mighty Eighth" Air Force - the most decorated U. S. Army Corps unit during World War II. After the war, Hutchinson earned several degrees in education from Indiana University. He was a teacher and administrator for a combined 37 years. He and his wife, June, recently celebrated their 58th wedding anniversary.

Through These Eyes contains 336 pages and includes 40 WW II photos. Books are available from bookstores, <authorhouse.com> and <amazon.com>.

An autograph copy and/or a copy of the original diary, complete with Stars and Stripes articles may be obtained at <jhutch5@localnet.com>.

A WARTIME ROMANCE

By Chales W. Halper, Ret. USAF

I didn't have to go. As a construction worker for DuPont Corporation I had a deferment, but I also had a yen to be an airline pilot, so I took the aviation cadet examination and was accepted. I

planned fly the P-38 Lockheed Lightning Fighter but instead, they sent me to bomber school.

My first look at the B-17 Flying Fortress I was assigned to fly made me feel like throwing up

right there on the tarmac. There it sat, tail dragging on the ground, nose pointed in the air like a hound dog on the scent, olive drab paint, studded tires, and no guns or turrets. After dreaming

about the P-38, now this thing. I thought I'd be sick.

After two months of learning to fly this wreck, they gave me a new silver B-17 and nine men to train with. After we finished up we flew over to England, put some girlie art on the nose of the plane and named her "Maiden America."

She and I began to go steady and we started to fly bombing raids into Germany. We dreamed up a safe way to get home in bad weather and avoid those all-too-often mid-air collisions. We learned the railroad tracks back to the base. The Maiden and I thought this was great sport.

She let me do partial stalls to dump altitude on the final ap-

proach, and wing-overs for priority landings. Whatever the antics, she was always patient with me and never complained.

When on one occasion, the Germans proved again they didn't know how to treat a lady, they slapped her around and wounded two of her crew with anti-aircraft fire, but she simply turned away and brought us all home safely to an English emergency field.

By the time the Maiden had carried us in and out of Germany the required 35 times, all thoughts of the P-38 had vanished. I parked her on her hardstand for the last time, patted her chin turret and said goodbye.

Back in the States I flew everything from the B-29 Super

Fortress to Sailplanes, but there never was a competitor. I had long before lost my heart to the B-17.

Years later I saw her once again at the airport in Long Beach, California. She was surrounded by her admirers and looked as young and beautiful as I had always remembered her. Of course she would never recognize me. How could she imagine that the old man, standing apart from the crowd, and gazing at her wistfully was that young pilot that once courted her so passionately.

I'll take one more look and then I'll be ready to go. Hey, wait a minute! Did you see that? She remembered! She just winked at me with her landing light.

MERVILLE AIRPORT - 1945

During the 385th 2005 Tour, one of the major events was the visit to the Merville Airport. In 1945, the Merville Airfield, under RAF Control was listed as an airfield for aircraft to use in event of damage to aircraft and unable to return to home base. For four of the members of the 385th Tour it was a special revisit to the airfield since they all were aboard aircraft that landed at Merville because of damage to their aircrafts. Following is their stories of those days in 1945:

MADAM SHOO SHOO

by Joe W. Kubr

I was the ball turret gunner on the B-17 "Madam Shoo Shoo." Our pilot was Adolph "Abe" Keskes. On March 19, 1945, we were on our sixth mission, the target was Jena. We were about

20-30 minutes over enemy territory (somewhere around Frankfurt) when we lost one of our engines. I don't remember what the problem was. One of the other engines was not working right either, so we decided to abort the mission and go back to England. Eventually, the second engine went out, so we headed for Merville, France and landed safely. We remained over night in Merville, and the next day we brought another plane back to England. Afterwards, we found out that all four engines were replaced on Madam Shoo Shoo.

LANDING AT MERVILLE from the diary of James Bond, Tail Gunner

Friday, March 2, 1945 - We got early again this morning to go on our Fourth Mission. We were

briefed to go to Ruhland, Germany for the target and Dresden for the secondary target. Since Ruhland was covered with clouds we went to Dresden. Near the target, I saw two enemy fighters attack the plane in the low squadron. The right wing of the plane burst into flames and the plane went into a dive. Pulling out of the dive, three chutes came out of the waist door, however all chutes caught fire and they went down. As we started the bomb run, we were attacked by four German fighters, and my oxygen and intercom were shot out. I blazed away at the fighters and obtained a hit on a Foulk Wolf 190. Switching to another oxygen system, I blazed away at the second attack, while hearing their bullets whistle by. I stayed at my position waiting for the fighters to

return. It was a more helpless position than when I received Mom's letter that my brother, Jack, was MIA.

We were hit and out of formation, and I did not know whether to expect more fighters. I did not know where we were headed or if I was supposed to bail out. After awhile my waist gunner, Desmond, called to me. Everyone was OK (BTG Donald Points, CP James Kelly, Nav. Bill Moebius, NG Ron Webster and TTG Milo Poteat), but WG John Desmond and Hatfield, our RO, were wounded when a 20mm exploded in the waist. I went back to my position and stayed until I ran out of oxygen. We soon were over France and landed at Merville.

Examination of the damaged plane showed that the controls were shot out, the radio receiver was out, and the oxygen and intercom were out from the waist back. No. 1 and 2 props were badly damaged and the hydraulic system was out.

After landing in France, the WG and RO went to the hospital and the rest went to a barracks in town. We had chow, some cognac, and then went to bed. I thanked God that I got back safely.

On Saturday, March 3rd we got up about 8:30 and were late for breakfast. After buying some souvenirs, we went out to the field, and after lunch we boarded a C-47 for England. Landing at a field about 8 miles from our base,

had chow, then went by truck to Great Ashfield where we were listed as MIA, and had removed everything from our lockers. After debriefing the intelligence officer, we went back to our barracks where I read my mail and wrote to my Mom. Her letters indicated nothing new about my brother, Jack. Tomorrow, we get a pass, and I can really use it

385th BG MISSION #284
by Art Driscoll, Pilot

April 4, 1945 - The target was the airport at Unterschlaughterbach, near Nuremberg, Germany. Weather conditions forbode disaster with thick cloud coverage from ground level to higher altitudes. Briefing changed the climbing pattern from the buncher at Colchester to a weak

Standing under wing of "Pink Lady"

L to R: Joe W. Kubr, Jame M. Bond, William J. Moebius, Art Driscoll



radio station over France and interference from commercial stations made it difficult to determine headings. Half of the 385th aircraft did not make the time and place to form the 20,000 foot Bomb Stream. Sixteen planes of our group attached themselves to other groups. We flew with the 493rd BG, and was the only plane not returning to Great Ashfield.

After hitting the target near Nuremberg, we separated from the formation. Over the target, flak was heavy and accurate. Weather was poor on the way home, and we did not see any aircraft for nearly two hours. The navigator, Norman Leib, reported that his "G-Box" was not functioning properly, thus we were flying blind with no reference to earth and little visibility at altitude. Flying west, we descended to a lower altitude to find a ground check point so the navigator could use dead-reckoning. About an hour

later, a check point, Dunkirk, came as a tragic surprise.

Over Dunkirk at 1400 feet, our B-17 took direct hits from flak. Our engineer, Walter Bohrer, assessed the damage and reported that our TG, Suds Sumney, Jr., was wounded by flak that did extensive damage to the tail section. Bombadier John J. Sweeney, Jr. administered first aid to Suds and since the TG could not manage a parachute, we decided to ride the plane down, and the navigator gave me a heading for Merville, an emergency airfield. RO Tommy Clark contacted the control tower and briefed them of our decision.

I had little control of the aircraft because all cables to the control mechanisms were hanging loose in the waist, and the fuselage was riddle with hundreds of holes. Using all of the runway, I landed at 150 mph instead of the normal 110 mph because the

rudder, flaps and ailerons were not functioning properly. We quickly evacuated the plane for fear of fire or explosion. TG Suds was rushed to Merville Hospital, and the rest of us boarded another B-17, previously left for repairs, and headed back to Great Ashfield. Bombadier Sweeney reported at a delayed debriefing, "Sir, we left our B-17 at Merville, Fr, to be salvaged; we left our TG, Maurice "Suds" Sumney, in the hospital at Merville; but I have bombsight camera proof that we hit the target."

Two days later we were flying again, and we completed nine more missions before the end of combat. Our damaged B-17 was salvaged at Merville, and TG "Suds" was returned to the US and received the "Purple Heart." Still alive are Suds, Navigator Norman Lieb and Bombadier John J. Sweeney, Jr. All others are deceased.

Mighty Eighth

Air Force Museum

MEMORIAL GARDENS TRIBUTE PROGRAMS ARE NOW RE-OPENED

The recently-dormant memorial programs at the Mighty Eighth Air Force Museum have been reactivated and are now once again open for subscription by 8th Air Force veterans and their families! The Wall of Valor Program, established at the Museum in 1994, and the Crew Plaque program are both back in full swing.

Men and women who served in the Air Force and related armed forces may be memorialized by having their name, Units, and

crews inscribed permanently into the Wall of the Memorial Garden - a program that is unique in the world.

Each Wall of Valor plaque consists of two lines that include the name, Unit and some personal information about the honored veteran. Crews and crewmen - air and ground - may be listed together with their aircraft markings, identification letters, and art work. There is a choice of plaque sizes, materials, and colors. All plaques will be presented carved into high-quality polished granite before installation on the walls. Purchases may be made by veterans, families, or by your entire crew.

A number of troops have already called in their order. Information and pricing is immediately available by calling Peggy Harden at the Mighty Eighth Air Force Museum at telephone 912-748-8888 ext. 103; e-mail finance @ mightyeighth.org.

Permanent care of memorials will be assured by our museum staff at the permanent home of the Mighty Eighth located in Pooler, Georgia near Savannah.

/s/

W. Brown, MD
President/CEO

RUEL G. WEIKERT- 1st PRESIDENT OF 385th BGA

By Lindley R. Weikert

During the 2006 Reunion of the 385th Bomb Group Association in Boisser City this October, there will be an event to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the founding of the group. My father was the groups first President from 1956 to 1972.

After WWII until the mid 1950's several families exchanged visits periodically, centering around the Cleveland, OH area. The families enjoyed reminiscing so much they decided to organize a reunion so that all 385th members could participate. During the weekend of September 7-9, 1956, Deb Wagner, John Nejedlic, Rudy Curnat, Frank Walls, Jim Cooper, Jesse Ashlock, Wally Olowniuk, Bob Lambert, Vince Masters, Ruel Weikert, and their wives assembled in Cleveland to discuss the possibility of having a reunion for the all members of the 385th. At this meeting, my father was elected President, Frank Walls, Secretary, and John Nejedlic, Treasurer. The first reunion was held August 2-4, 1957 at the Hotel Webster Hall in Pittsburg, PA. At that time the registration fee was \$12.00 per person, which included the Friday night get-together, the Saturday dinner

dance and Sunday brunch. The hotel charge was \$10.00 per night per couple. Frank and Winn Walls were the host and hostess.

The purpose of the 385th BGA was so that the people who made the ultimate sacrifice would not be forgotten, and so the people who survived would have a means in which to keep in touch and occasionally see each other.

To be elected the first President was an honor for my father, and something of which he was extremely proud. It was a wonderful positive time in his life. While it took a lot of work, my mother, Mary Weikert, was always there to help out by typing letters and staying on top of all details. There was a lot of correspondence and letter writing. Just keeping the addresses current and staying in touch with the members took a great deal of effort. In our present day of e-mails, the Internet, and instantaneous communications, it is hard to imagine how much time and postage went into the effort to communicate with all members of the 385th.

I was five years old when my father was elected President. I was in college when he left the position in the capable hands of

Frank Walls in 1972. The 385th BG, and dad's Presidency, was part of my life. But dad never talked much about it. And I think this is true with many of the men who served in WWII. You fulfilled your war duty, and moved on. I know my wife, Patti's father, was the same way. He never talked about what he did during the war either.

I cannot recall any specific stories my father told me about the 385th BGA. But I know he was extremely proud to serve as the first President. He was proud of the 385th BGA, and he was proud of what he and other heroes accomplished while on duty in England, although he would never applied of that term to himself. When Dad gave me a Life Membership to the 385th BGA for my birthday, it was one of the nicest present I was ever given. And now I am on the Board as the Secretary, and looking at my name on the masthead of the Hardlife Herald along with my father's name as a Past President gives me a real sense of pride. I have continued this tradition by giving my son, Jonathan, a 3rd generation membership.



SOUVENIR OF THE 5TH REUNION OF THE 385TH BOMB GROUP Atlanta, GA April, 1975

By Vincent W. Masters

Reunions are distinguished from one another by our differing styles of life. They have existed with each of us through church, schools, college, and business groups.

However, the idea of a get-together of a bomb group has an entirely different attraction from all other reunions. The 385th was a relatively short-lived group by comparison, less than three years, and friendships had even less time to ripen. The lasting relationships are probably because they occurred during the most hectic, glamorous, and at times, most tragic and controversial era in history. The 385th was in the middle of a fast moving period in history and a part of the famous Eighth Air Force. The Eighth Air Force was undoubtedly an enviable place to be in what was to become "the greatest show on earth."

The 385th reunion effort, which had no formal beginning, had no planned future. Its very existence could be described as accidental. Those few fragile friendships have given a chance of renewal through efforts, which are related here.

Until the mid 1950's several families exchanged visits periodically, centering around the Cleveland, Ohio area. Among those visiting were Frank Walls, John Nedjedic, Ruel Weikert, Jim Cooper, Rudy Cuna, Jessie Ashlock (Hardlife), Deb Wagner, Vince Masters, Wally Alownuk, and Bob Lambert. At each visit, more names were mentioned.

In September of 1956, most of these men met. They enjoyed reminiscing so much they decided to organize a reunion so that all the 385th members could participate.

There was no official list of men available. The only way to build a mailing list was by contacts through people we knew.

At that meeting a loose organization was drawn up. Ruel Weikert was appointed president, John Nedjedic as secretary-treasurer and Frank Walls was designated to head the host committee.

By May 1957, plans were firmed up to hold a reunion at the Webster Hall Hotel in Pittsburgh, PA. We then had 250 names on our mailing list. More than fifty members attended along with about forty wives.

At that reunion, Ruel Weikert was elected president, John Nedjedic as treasurer, and Frank Walls as secretary. It was decided that we should have another reunion the next year. The Pick Congress Hotel in Chicago was selected as the site for the 1958 reunion with J.K. Hughs and others from the mid-west handling the host job.

The 1958 gathering decided on another reunion to be held in New York City on August 5,6,&7, 1960. This reunion was hosted by the men of the New York City area headed by Charles Edelstein. The attendance at the second and third reunions was not as great as the first, however, sufficient interest was maintained along with small contributions to keep the effort alive.

For some unknown reason, no firm date was established, and due to the pressure of normal living, no effort was made for a reunion during the next decade.

During the summer of 1970, John Pettinger and his wife, Ronny went to visit Frank Walls and his family, and suggested that since time was marching on at a rapid pace, we should try another reunion. Since there was some money in the treasury, arrangements were made to meet in Cleveland with the other officers the next summer. We set July 22, 1972 for the 4th reunion in Cleveland, Ohio. The reunion was finally scheduled to be held in the town where the idea was originally conceived.

There were 138 members and wives in attendance at the reunion. The host committee, headed by Rudy Cuna, Jim Cooper and their wives did a magnificent job of hosting a very successful and interesting reunion.

Ruel Weiker who had served so faithfully as president gave up the job and Frank Walls was appointed to replace him. Jim Cooper remained treasurer, and Rudy Cuna was elected secretary.

After a lively discussion as to various locations for our next reunion, they settled in Atlanta, GA for early 1975. Charles Smith and his lovely wife were given the job of hosting the 385th's fifth reunion, thirty years after the completion of the job it was organized to do.

WANTED WORLD WAR II STORIES

We want and need your help. We want to hear from you through your personal history of your memories of World War II. Please take some time to sit down with pen/pencil and paper and write about your memories. Individuals often say that their job was not important enough in the war effort; they were just doing their job. We disagree! The history of WW II is only now being

written. In the future years, historians will raise new questions and only you with your experiences will have any impact on the future interpretations of World War II.

Start by identifying yourself by giving your name, and how did you serve in WWII. Tell us about your self, your military training, your buddies/crew. If you were the member of a flying crew, what happened on your missions, first,

last, and those in between? Were you a POW? Tell us about your individual experience as a POW? Tell us about the planes you flew, what was their names and what sort of nose art did they have? If you were a member of the support personnel, what was your job? What did you do after the war - i.e. your education, civilian work, family, etc.

LT. ROBERT PAYNE AND "THUNDERBOLT"

This story was initiated by a letter from Norm Valentine (see Letters and E-Mails) to the Editor of the Hardlife Herald. Norm's letter told of how the dog, "Thunderbolt", would wait at the hardstand for the return of Lt. Robert Payne from his missions.

Several weeks after Norm's letter, I received a telephone call from a Mr. Art Beltrone who was writing a story about Lt. Payne and Thunderbolt. He requested any information we might have on Lt. Payne and his dog. I advised him to contact Norm Valentine since Norm had been in contact with Lt. Payne many years after WWII ended.

Mr. Beltrone contacted Norm via telephone and received additional information about Lt. Payne and his dog. Mr. Beltrone sent me the following information that he received from Norm Valentine, and he requested that I put an appeal in our newsletter to all 385th BGA members for any information about Lt. Payne and his dog,

Thunderbolt. Below is Art Beltrone's request for further information:

Author Art Beltrone, who in 1995 with his wife Lee, wrote the book, "A Wartime Log", about WWII Army Air Corp POWs, and is currently working on another project that involves a former 385th Bomb Group pilot, - Lt. Robert A. Payne, of the 548th Bomb Squadron.

Sometime before Lt. Payne's aircraft, "Gremlin Buggy" was shot down on 29 November 1943 during a raid on Breman, Lt. Payne, befriended a stray dog and named him "Thunderbolt." The pair reportedly became inseparable, and "Thunderbolt" repeatedly watched from the hardstand as Lt. Payne and his crew took off on missions. The dog was always there, awaiting the aircraft and his master's return.

After Lt. Payne was shot down, "Thunderbolt", was cared for by the mess officer, Lt.

Robert Lipsett, and it is reported Lt. Lipsett took the dog with him during the invasion of Normandy. It has even been reported the dog was wounded while heading for the beach on the landing craft.

When Stalag Luft I was liberated and Lt. Payne freed, "Thunderbolt" and the officer were reunited in the United States, and the dog lived with the Payne family until he died.

Anyone who was an eyewitness to any part of this story or who knew Lt. Payne or Lt. Lipsett is asked to please contact Art Beltrone by e-mail at beltrone@cornerstone.net, or by calling 434-296-1288, or by writing Art Beltrone, P.O. Box 125, Keswick, VA 22947.

The circumstances of Lt. Lipsett's taking the dog "Thunderbolt" from Europe are of special interest, as are any photographs that were taken of the dog while at Great Ashfield.

USS RONALD REAGAN

The USS Ronald Reagan (CVN 76), the US Navy's newest aircraft carrier at 97,000 tons, is the largest warship in the world and is expected to operate in the fleet for about 50 years. It is powered by two nuclear reactors that can operate for more than twenty years without refueling. Its flight deck covers 4.5 acres, is 1,092 feet long (about the length of three football fields placed end to end), and towers 20 stories (244 feet) above the waterline.

The ship has two rudders, each 29 by 22 feet and weighing 50 tons. Four bronze propellers, each 21 feet across and weighing

66,220 pounds, gives the ship a speed of over 30 knots. It has two 30-ton anchors with 1,080 feet of chain for each anchor. Four high-speed elevators, each more than 4,000 square feet, can lift aircraft from the lower decks to the flight deck. One of four steam-powered catapults can thrust a 60,000 pound aircraft 300 feet, from zero to 165 miles per hour in two seconds. Each catapult can launch a F-18 every three minutes and 45 seconds. Three arresting cables can stop a 28-ton aircraft going 150 miles per hour in less than 400 feet. The Ronald Reagan can carry more than 80 combat aircraft.

Approximately 20,000 meals are served daily, and the ship can store 90 days of refrigerated and dry storage goods. Distillation plants provide 400,000 gallons of fresh water from sea water daily, enough for 2,000 homes. A post office processes more than a million pounds of mail a year. The ship has nearly 30,000 light fixtures, 1,400 telephones and 1,325 miles of cable and wiring. Including personnel salaries, it costs the Navy \$2.5 million per day when underway and \$1 million per day when in port.

MEMPHIS BELLE

The "Memphis Belle," the Eighth Air Force's first B-17F heavy bomber to complete 25 successful bombing missions over Europe during WW II, is now at the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force, Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio.

The move came as the result of an agreement between the Air Force and the Memphis Belle Memorial Association. The aircraft, which is currently being restored in the museum's restoration hanger, is being prepared to undergo several years of

restoration work. Once restoration on the aircraft begins, it can be seen as part of the museum's "Behind the Scenes" tours.



LETTERS/E-MAILS

Mighty Eighth

Air Force Museum

Unit and Chapter editors:

Please include in upcoming issue - with thanks in advance for helping preserve the history of the Mighty Eighth!

MEMORIAL GARDENS TRIBUTE PROGRAMS ARE NOW RE-OPENED

The recently-dormant memorial programs at the Mighty Eighth Air Force Museum have been reactivated and are now once again open for subscription by 8th Air Force veterans and their families! The Wall of Valor Program, established at the Museum in 1994, and the Crew Plaque program are both back in full swing.

Men and women who served in the Air Force and related armed forces may be memorialized by having their name, Units, and crews inscribed permanently into the Wall of the Memorial Garden - a program that is unique in the world.

Each Wall of Valor plaque consists of two lines that include the name, Unit and some personal information about the honored veteran. Crews and crewmen - air and ground - may be listed together with their aircraft markings, identification letters, and art work. There is a choice of plaque sizes, materials, and colors. All plaques will be presented carved into high-quality polished granite before installation on the walls. Purchases may be made by veterans, families, or by your entire crew.

A number of troops have already called in their order. Information and pricing is immediately available by calling Peggy Harden at the Mighty Eighth Air Force Museum at telephone 912-748-8888 ext. 103; e-mail finance @[mightyeighth.org](mailto:finance@mightyeighth.org).

Permanent care of memorials will be assured by our museum staff at the permanent home of the Mighty Eighth located in Pooler, Georgia near Savannah.

/s/

W. Brown, MD
President/CEO

LETTERS/E-MAILS

The B-17 Flying Fortress Association

Dear Fellow Airwar Veterans:

As a 17-year old I worked on construction of Spokane's Galena Air Depot, which later became Fairchild Air Force Base. Eleven WW II heavy bomber groups were staged and trained at Geiger Field and Fairchild A.F. Base.

As I had early ties to Fairchild AFB I've been supportive of the Museum there. And when I could not raise interest in an airwar museum here in Walla Walla where 4 heavy bomb groups started, I have been delivering my large collection of airway photos, printed material, and memorabilia to the new Fairchild Museum.

The museum is moving off-the-airbase to an excellent location at the entrance to Spokane International Air Terminal. The site and plans have been approved, now the great need is for donations to raise the \$5 million for Phase 1 of construction. Ground-breaking will occur this Spring, 2006.

Please consider printing the enclosed appeal for donations for the new facility, now known as The Armed Forces & Aerospace Museum.

Best Regards,

/s/

Don R. Hayes, President/Editor
B-17 Flying Fortress Association

LETTERS/E-MAILS

Dear Sir,

I make you this letter in French and in English, please agree to excuse me if I do not practice your language. These some lines are capital for my association and the projects in 2005: help me to carry them out.

I take part in commemorations of events which have occurred on French ground like with inaugurations of monuments. I make research for American veterans. I to the USA will join my American friend and we traverse your country for meetings of veterans, visits of museums to the research of the history for the conservation of the memory.

I seek flying gears of crews of B-17, B-24, B-26 as well as town suits. With that I would like to expose them at the time of air meeting auquels I take part. This to show and explain to the people what it was necessary to do to overcome an idealism.

I also seek "NOSE ARTS" of B-17, B-24, of B-26 this to make an exposure to the museum of LE BOURGET in FRANCE. These drawings can be real i.e. be cut out of the plane.

They can be photographed either color or in back and white. Can you forward me either negative or the photographs. They can be repainted there too you send either the original to me or the photographs numerically.

I also seek photographs and documents on flights of B-17. The adventure of this war since the construction the planes, the flight tests, the training of the crews and the mechanics. One does not speak much about the mechanics but I think they played a significant role in the success of the missions. Are these documents and behaviors?

I am interested by the crossing of the Atlantic and then the missions of war has to achieve during long months. Life in England for the crews and the mechanics: have accounts and photographs.

I would like also information on the French bombardments.

I belong to association "fortress always flying" which maintains a B-17G, the 448846 PINK LADY and the fact of flying;

I also form part of the memorial association 305 bomb group in the USA. I have relations with the museum of the 8eme Air Force in Savannah in the USA.

Can you help me in my research and my step of having of memory.

I need all that for January in order to work with the exposure and my presentations in order to make things correctly.

I thank you in advance for the assistance that you will bring to me, will also a recall of the history which should not be forgotten.

Jean Paul ANDRE

(s)

LETTERS/E-MAILS

Norm Valentine
721 Valentine Lane
Amber, PA 19002

Editor: HLH
Frank X. McCawley

Hello Frank,

Enclosed is a copy of an envelope from many that I still have as my mother kept all of my letters from Dec 1941 to Aug 1945. This particular letter was censored by Lt. Robert Payne who was quite well known in the 548th Sqdn. He wore RAF Wings on his right and USAF Wings on his left chest. Perhaps many of the members will also recall his big dog "Thunderbolt" that never left his side and waited at the hardstand in vain for his return when on 29 Nov 1943 Payne was shot down on a mission to Bremen and held at Stalag Luft 1 at Barth. I have a transcript of a call from Col. Payne where he relates the sequence of those events to me. He and his dog were reunited after Payne was released. I also have a clipping and a few stories about that Lt. Payne went on after the war to become Brig. Gen. Payne was C.O. of a fighter Base at Westover, Mass.

At Great Ashfield I often drove Capt. Septime S. Richard the C.O. of the 548th B.S. Unbeknown to me when he transferred to 4th Wing he recommended me to Col. Castle who sent for me. I had an interview with Col. Castle and he "hired" me to be his personal driver.



Christmas Eve morning of 1944 I drove Gen. Castle to the 487th BG at Lavenham for what was to be his last mission.

June 1944: Somewhere around the same time that Maj. Richard was transferred to 4th Wing, Lt. Col was also transferred to the 4th Wing as Operations Officer.

March 11, 1942 Arrived at Geiger Field.

June 9, 1942 1 was transferred to Ephrata.

Feb. 23, 1943 Then back to Geiger and assigned to the 385th BG, 548th Squadron.

Regards,
/s/
NORM

LETTERS/E-MAILS

Jan. 7

Dear Sir,

I have been very poor a long time and thus I had not got to renewing my membership in the Hardlife Herald. Let me know the price of it so I can renew it soon. I am also looking for original B-17 photos and B-17 toy airplanes.

I thank you,

/s/

Mike Slosberg

Editor: Original memo sent to Ed Stern.

Dear Frank,

Recently I sent an e-mail to you, the editor of the HH. A few days later you sent me a very nice thank you. In this you asked if I might be able to relate any mission experiences of my father, Robert E. Bennett, 549th BS, 385th BG.

Unfortunately, my father never spoke much of his wartime years. I guess it was just something he did and then went on with life. I actually blame myself for not asking questions. I now wish I had. It was not until his death in 1997 that I began to find out about his time in the 385th.

I do know that he was extremely proud to have been a member of the 385th. I know he flew 25 missions between July '43 to about March '44. He flew on the 1st Schwienfurt raid. After another mission, he and his crew ended up in North Africa for about a month with a broken B-17. I know just a few "facts" about missions but lack any personal things. He never spoke of what it was like to fly through a wall of flak or being shot at by an aircraft aiming right for your nose. I have none of that. What I do have is a sense of extreme pride of being the son of a member of an organization that did what it had to do to preserve our freedom. To make sure that I, my children, and my grandchildren can live peacefully in these United States.

To this end I would like to issue a plea to all of the 2nd and 3rd generation members of the 385th. Do not let these memories pass like I did. Talk to your father or grandfather. Implore him to let you write down his memories, his fears, smiles, laughs, tears, joys or hates. Send them to the HH for publication. Make his 385th time a permanent part of 385th history never to be forgotten or overlooked. From me, a person who did not do this, believe me, it may be one of the most important and satisfying endeavors you can embark on.

It is too late for me. Don't let it be too late for you.

Respectfully,

Bruce Bennett

Son of Robert E. Bennett

Proud Associate Member of
385th BGMA

Taps

Robert Valliere — 385th BGMA President '95-'97 died January 7, 2006. Bob was a Navigator with the 385th BG and flew many combat mission over Germany and Czechoslovakia, and later dropped food to Holland where the Dutch were starving.

After the war he directed the family business retiring in 1993. He was a member of Post 83, American Legion and served as post adjutant, and was Grand Marshal of the 2002 Memorial Day Parade. He was the director of the Manna/Chowhound Brotherhood, treasurer and director of the Connecticut Chapter of the 8th AFHS, a member of the Royal Air Force Bomber Command, the DAV and the VFW. He shared his experiences by speaking at local high schools. His latest achievement was his inclusion in a book entitled "The Bomber Boys."

By daughter, Bobbi Wisniowski

J. Harold Schrotter — died March 7, 2006 at age 85. Harold was a radio operator in the 385th BG, 549 BS during the 8th Air Forces day bombing of Germany. On his third mission, his aircraft was severely damaged and he was forced to bail out and upon landing he was nearly killed by German villagers before being captured by German soldiers. He remained a POW until being liberated from Stalag Luft IV by General Patton's forces.

After the war, Harold became an electrical engineer and developed and patented the heating element for the first self-defrosting refrigerator. In 1961 he moved to New Jersey and spent the rest of his career with the Thomas & Betts Corp, where he rose to the position of Director of Marketing.

By son Craig Schotter

Eldred L. Harrington — died February 1, 2006 at age 87. Eldred was in radio communications while stationed at Great Ashfield. He also was on active duty during the Korean War and was stationed in Japan. Prior to being drafted during WWII he was in the Merchant Marines.

He retired from the Keyes Fiber Co. where he was employed as a mechanical engineer. For many years he and his son operated a Christmas tree farm in Sangerhill, ME and was a member of the Maine Christmas Tree Growers Association and the Sangerhill Historical Society. He is survived by his wife of 63 years, Irene, and two sons, Patrick G. and Allen L., and several grandchildren.

By son Allen L. Harrington

Carl Hannon — a strong supported of the 385th BGA. As a computer expert he made and maintained an internet web page called "The War Horse" for Frank Mays. Frank Mays, a 385th BG veteran and a Ball Turret Gunner on the Lamping Crew, wrote the book "And No Purple Heart." His B-17 was 42-31764, named The War Horse. Carl, known as The Grunt, was a member of a chat group of 385th BG veterans called The Dusty Dozen. This group post jokes e-mails, patriotic items, and 385th BGA news to each other. Many 385th BG veterans and others, like Bill Daysh, are part of The Dusty Dozen.

By Bill Varnedoe

Robert Kuhn M.D. — died March 20 at age of 90 of Alzheimer's Disease. Dr. Kuhn was the flight surgeon for the 385th BG, 549th BS. At age nine, Bob proclaimed his ambition to become a doctor. Undeterred he graduated from the University of Michigan School of Medicine. In 1942 in London, he met the girl who would become his wife. Bob specialized in Internal Medicine and Cardiology and maintained a family practice until 1990. Bob was a member of the first team to use a heart-lung machine and the first team to perform open heart surgery at Cedars Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles. He and his wife were the founding members of the L.A. Ethnic Arts Council and were involved with the appreciation of primitive art throughout the United States. He is survived by his wife of 60 years, Helen Josephine, two sons, and a sister.

Ernest Ray Harper — died October 15, 2005 at age of 84. He was a co-pilot and completed 30 missions with the 385th BG, 550th BS from June 1944 until January 1945. Upon completion of his missions, he served with 594th RCD at Stone, England. He owned and operated Capital Bindery in Jackson, MS; was an avid golfer; and a member of the Colonial Heights Baptist Church. He is survived by his wife, Jacqueline, three sons and eight grandchildren.

Some of the war-time vehicles rebuilt by Roy Baker, of Wyverstone, Stowmarket, Suffolk, England. Roy is a member of FOTE (Friends of the Eighth) and he and his wife Helen used the vehicles to give rides to 385thBGMA members and their wives and Associates. Dr. Vince Masters and Ruel Weikert are in the front jeep.



20 Hardlife Herald

May 2006

385th BGA

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