

Hardlife



Herald



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***MONUMENTS, MEMORIALS AND ANNIVERSARIES**

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*deceased

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FRONT COVER

The Air Force Memorial, which honors the men and women of the Air Force, was officially dedicated on October 14, 2006 by President George W. Bush. The memorial is located in Arlington, Virginia overlooking the Pentagon, the Potomac River, and Washington, DC. The Memorial symbolizes flight and the flying spirit with the three stainless steel spires representing the contrails of the "bomb burst" maneuver of the Air Force Thunderbirds. The United States Air Force "Star" is embedded in granite beneath the spires. The entrance to the Memorial has a paved Runway to Glory, an 8 foot tall bronze Honor Guard statue, two inscription walls, and a Glass Contemplation Wall for visitors to pay tribute to fallen airmen of all wars. A flyover of Air Force aircraft included a World War B-17.

EDITORIAL

This past year our Association has lost many of our 385th Bombardment Group Association members, among them Archie Benner, Commander of the 549th Bomb Squadron, and Daniel Riva, Commander of the 551st Bomb Squadron. Many of us knew them as good commanders, and many of us flew on missions where they were leading the group. Like all our deceased 385th BGA members, they will be missed.

The Reunion in Savannah in August was enjoyed by all those present. Bill Swindell made an excellent composite of photos of some attendees caught in unguarded moments. A copy of his composite is in this issue.

The list of nominations for the next two-year term of Officers and Board of Directors was President Al Audette's message in the previous edition of the Hardlife Herald. They were: Tom Gagnon, 2nd generation member and current Vice-President, was nominated for President, and the current officers and board members were nominated to continue in office. However, there was no nomination for Vice-President, Since the publication of the August issue of the Hardlife Herald, Burton Gelbman has been nominated for the vacancy on the Board of Directors, thus filling nominees for the six Board of Director's positions.

As we, the veterans of the 385th Bombardment Group (H), grow older, we have to be replaced by our sons/daughters or grandsons/granddaughters if we wish to have our Association to survive. Urge them to become Association members, serve as officers or board members, and to be active in the activities of the Association. The best way to be active is to attend our reunions and meet their contemporaries, and, of course, meet and listen to us old codgers.

STALLING A B-17

By Hugh Anderson

I remember an incident where I did not follow my maxim**. I had finished my missions and was waiting to go home. As I would not be flying while waiting to leave, I wanted to get in four hours flying time to get my flight pay for the month prior to leaving the base. So I volunteered to slow fly a B-17 which had just come out of maintenance. We always did this before the plane would be flown on a mission.

Well, the bombardier on my crew, Earle Cole*** by name, wanted to go with me. Earle had started out in Cadet training as a pilot, but he had washed out because he could never find his way back to the training base, so he was transferred to bombardier school. I told him I would let him fly the plane after we had taken off and got to cruising altitude.

I had a crew chief with me to serve as the copilot in starting the plane, watching the engine instruments, and raise the flaps on my command. After completing those assignments, he went back to the Navigator's room, and probably went to sleep. So Earle gets in the copilot's seat, and I let him have the controls.

After he had made a few circles, Earle asked me if he could stall the

plane. I thought about it, and since we were high enough, I couldn't see much of a problem. So he reduced the power, pulled back on the controls and let the plane slow down. At some point the plane will slow down enough to where the nose will fall. Well, that plane kept shuddering as the speed went down, but the big wings on that plane just wouldn't stall. Just about then there was a

I grabbed the controls,
brought the plane up
to flying speed and
tried to find out what
had made that noise.

loud bang in the rear, so I grabbed controls, brought the plane up to flying speed, and tried to find out what had made that noise. All the while, the crew chief never came back to the cockpit to see what we were doing. He probably thought it was none of his business to check on those two crazy Second Lieutenants!!! So I told Earle to go back and see if he could find anything that

caused the noise.

The plane was flying just fine. No engine or control problems. Earle came back up front and said he couldn't find anything, so we continued to fly the remainder of the four hours without any further incident. I called the crew chief back to the cockpit to serve as the copilot for the landing, which went OK.

After we exited the plane and we were going around it for the post-flight inspection, we found out what had happened. One of our two-five man rafts and all its associated gear, which was stored in a compartment over the wing, was missing. Its door was open and I assumed the violent shaking of the plane had loosened the latch send the life-raft gear all over East Anglia. I wrote up the post flight report that somehow the door latch had somehow let go.

The next day I left the base and went back to the U.S. of A....That's my story and I am sticking to it.

** My maxim was: There are OLD pilots and there are BOLD pilots, but here are no OLD BOLD pilots! So don't do anything STUPID!!!

*** Earle Cole was a former 385th BGA President. He died a few years ago.

Keep your face in the sunshine and you will never see the shadows

—Helen Keller

OPERATION CARPETBAGGER

The Carpetbagger project was to fly "Special Operations" to deliver supplies to resistance groups in enemy occupied countries, to deliver personnel to the field and occasionally to bring back personnel from the field. Combat with the enemy was to be avoided and enemy anti-aircraft and detector posts were to be skirted as widely as possible to protect the presence and destination of the aircraft.

For accurate drops, pilots attempted to get down to 400 to 600 feet and to reduce speed to 130 mph, or less. Low speed reduced the damages to parachutes as the opening shock of the chute is less at lower speeds.

To avoid enemy action, flights were ordinarily at night and at low level. When it was necessary to cross enemy held areas with anti-aircraft defences, the route chosen would be areas of light guns only.

Altitudes seldom exceeded 7,000 feet and as the dangerous areas were passed, the plane descended to 2,000 feet or lower in order to make it difficult for the enemy to detect the plane by sound or radar. Obstacles on the ground distorted the sounds of low-flying aircraft, and radar and sound devices had less time to focus on the aircraft.

Most Carpetbagger flights were made on those nights when the moon was out, making the ground visible to the navigator and bombardier. For accurate drops, pilots attempted to get down to 400 to 600 feet and to reduce speed to 130 mph, or less. Low speed reduced the damages to parachutes as the opening shock of the chute is less at lower speeds. Personnel were normally dropped from 600 feet, while containers and packages were dropped from 300 feet to 500 feet.

Non moon flights at night used special navigation equipment: Rebecca", S-Phone and radio altimeter. With this equipment greater accuracy was gained than with ordinary pilotage, but the reception parties had to have ground counterparts of S-Phone and Rebecca equipment, and be able to use them expertly. However, dark periods were also possible without these items provided the reception signals consisted of bonfires and there could be references to prominent

landmarks distinguishable in the dark, such as rivers and lakes.

Carpetbagger operations from England began in January 1944 with the USAAF delivering supplies to resistance groups in France, Denmark, Norway, Belgium and Holland. The Marquis of Haute Savoie and other mountainous areas were supplied from the Mediterranean area until after the Normandy invasion; then the 8th AF bombers were diverted from strategic missions to make a series of mass drops. The shuttle mission to Russia dropped a small quantity of supplies to the Warsaw defenders.

The first period of Carpetbagger missions ended in September 1944 followed by a small scale of activity the last two months of the war. During the second period, most of the sorties were to Denmark and Norway as those countries had received only a small quantity of supplies compared to supplies delivered to France.

Between January and September 1944, the 801st/492nd Bomb Group flew 2,263 missions which due to various circumstances, 1,577 (69%) were completed satisfactorily. The successful missions delivered to Occupied Europe included 662 "Joes" (agents); 18,535 containers of supplies; 8,050 "Nickles" (bundles of propaganda leaflets); 10,725 packages of supplies; 26 pigeons (for messages, not eating); and 437 passengers.

TOMB OF THE UNKNOWNNS

On a recent TV program, Jeopardy, a question was, "How many steps does the guard take during his walk across the Tomb of the Unknowns?" The answer is 21 steps. It alludes to the twenty-one gun salute which is the highest honor given to any military or foreign dignitary. For the same reason, the guard waits twenty-one seconds after his about-face before he begins his return walk. After his twenty-one step march and about-face, he moves his rifle to his outside shoulder, which is away from the tombs. Guards are changed every thirty minutes, twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year.

Guard duty at the tomb requires a soldier to be between 5' 10" and 6' 2" tall, and have a waist size not greater than thirty inches. They must commit two years of duty to guard the tomb, live in a barracks under the tomb area, and cannot consume any alcohol for the rest of their lives, and cannot disgrace the uniform or the tomb in anyway. After two years of tomb guard duty, the guard is presented with a wreath pin that is worn on their lapel signifying that they have served as a guard of the tomb. There are only 400 pins currently worn. The guards must obey these listed rules for the rest of their lives, or give up the wreath pin.

The shoes worn by the guards are specially made with very thick soles to keep the heat and cold from their

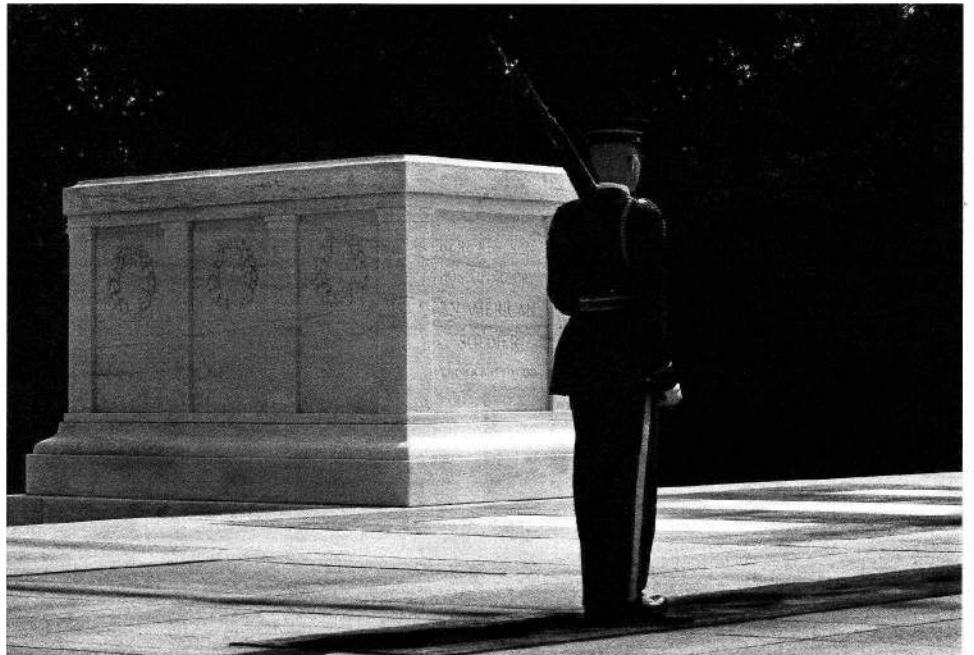
feet. There are metal heel plates that extend to the top of the shoes in order to make a loud click as they come to a halt of twenty-one steps. There are no wrinkles, folds or lint on the uniform. Every guard spends five hours a day getting his uniform ready for guard duty. Guards dress for duty in front of a full length mirror.

For the first six months of duty, a guard cannot talk to anyone, or watch TV. All off duty time is spent studying the names of all of the 150+ notable persons laid to rest in Arlington National Cemetery. Among the notables are: Presidents Taft and Kennedy, Medal of Honor winner Audie Murphy, the most decorated soldier of WWII, General Pershing of WWI, and boxer Joe E. Lewis.

In 2003 as Hurricane Isabelle was approaching Washington,

D.C., our Senators and House of Representatives took two days off with anticipation of the arrival of the storm. On the ABC news, it was reported that because of the dangers of the hurricane, the military members assigned the duty of guarding the Tomb of the Unknown Soldiers were given permission to suspend the guard assignment. They respectively declined the offer, "No way, Sir!" Soaked to the skin, marching in a pelting rain of a tropical storm, they said that guarding the Tomb was not just an assignment, it was the highest honor that can be afforded to a service person. The Tomb has been patrolled continuously twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week since 1930.

GOD BLESS AND KEEP THEM



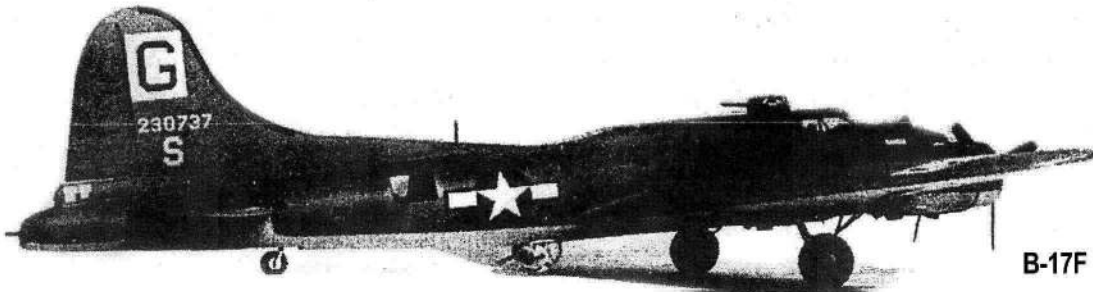
RECORD KILL

By The Associated Press

A U.S. BOMBER STATION, ENGLAND Oct. 12—
A new record of 12 German fighters shot down by one bomber on a single raid was set Sunday on the mission to Munster, Germany by the B-17 Flying Fortress the Ohio Air Force, piloted by Lt. John Richey, Steubenville, Ohio, it was announced today.

Out of a total of 24 claimed shot down in the hectic 90-minute air battle from which they escaped without a scratch, only twelve were officially corroborated.

Pilot Richey and co-pilot Thomas Helman, Medford, Ore., were the only crewmen who didn't make kills—and they have no guns.



John Richey's champion
B-17F Flying Fortress The Ohio Air Force

ALL 12 FORT'S NAZI KILLS CONFIRMED FOR RECORD

AN EIGHTH AF BOMBER STATION Oct 22—
Several weeks ago two B-17s put in record claims for enemy aircraft destroyed in one raid. The Fort Murder, Inc. claimed 11 German planes on the Frankfurt raid, and the Fort Ohio Air Force claimed 12 on the Munster raid.

The reviewing board cut Murder, Inc. claims from 11 to three, but all 12 claims of the Ohio Air Force have been approved so that the B-17, piloted by 2/Lt John Richey of Steubenville, Ohio, hold the ETO record for Germans shot down in a single raid.

Note: These News articles and picture were also printed on page 1 of the HH Vol. 18 No. 2 May 2001.

B-17 GOES HOME

The Mighty Eighth Air Force Museum is excited about the arrival of the B-17G Flying Fortress from the National Air and Space Museum location at Dulles Airport, VA. The B-17 will be transported from Dulles and be reassembled in the Combat Gallery of the Mighty Eighth Air Force Museum, and where it will be permanently be displayed. The entire reassembly and repairs project will be filmed and be available for viewing in the Museum, and also

be available to media channels.

One may be part of this historic Mighty Eighth Air Force Museum project by donating a financial gift to aid in the major restoration project. For gifts of \$100 or more, you will receive a "Certificate of Participation", suitable for framing, which recognizes your part in this historic Museum event.

Make your check payable to "B-17 Project" and mail it to the Mighty Eighth Air Force Museum, 175



Bourne Ave., Pooler, GA 31322. For credit card payments, call Tamika Ford at 912-748-8888 Ext. 101.

A KICK IN THE ASS

The head-on vulnerability of the B-17F frightened aircrews.

An impromptu mod of 1943 was intended to hit back.

By Ian McLacklan

WINTER, 1942/1943 saw USAAF commanders increasingly concerned about the ferocity and effectiveness of the frontal attacks on the B-17F. Clearly there was a need for improving its forward firing weaponry. Several independent initiatives resulted and one of these was the adaptation of a 385th BG Fortress to take no-less-a-weapon than a 20mm cannon.

B-17F-30-VE 42-5897 had been christened Roundtrip Jack and wore an appropriate Jackass caricature with a golden tooth. This was based on the antics of a crew chief John C. Ford – Jack to his friends – who had some knuckled dentistry and lost a tooth during a bar-room brawl en route to England.

Roundtrip Jack was one of the 550th BS's original flown by Lt. Gerald D. Binks and his lead crew. Commanding the 550th was Captain Bill Telsa and it was his mission critiques with pilots and 385th armament personnel that inspired W/O Nugent Tommie Thompson, the 550th Armament Officer, into action

Tommie listened in awe and shared their fear as airmen described vicious head-on assaults by enemy fighters. Hearing how the B-17's weak forward armament failed to deal with the enemy, Tommie conjectured that a 20mm cannon would have some dis-

suasive charm – but how to get one and try out his theory? USAAF red-tape would be insurmountable but then providence provided the solution when Tommie had the opportunity of liberating one by “midnight requisition” from a damaged P-38. Having obtained the weaponry, Tommie approached Bill Telsa who bal-

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anced the time bureaucracy would take to approve the trial installation, with the needs of the combat crews and sanctioned the work on his own initiative.

In June/July 1943, Tommie chose Technical Sergeant Elmer Blank and a small team of specialists to modify Roundtrip Jack. Installation was

achieved by welding a new frame to accommodate the cannon in the cone of converging steel tubes through a modified and toughened Plexiglas pivot-hole. Heavier plate ensured attachment to the fuselage and the team created a crude cradle for their baby. Handgrips were provided, between which was hung a huge metal plate responding to thumb pressure to actuate a micro-switch circuit for the firing solenoid below the cannon. Ammunition was fed from the right with clips and casing ejected noisily onto the floor.

Early in August 1943, Roundtrip Jack was trundled to the firing butts and completed some ground-firing tests. Following modifications, a flight test was planned over the Wash for the 13th. On board the B-17 as it climbed eastwards from Great Ashfield were the men responsible with Tommie taking the firing honours. Releasing the cannon from stowage and moving it forward was reminiscent of preparing a man o'war with the weapons black length extending well aft and Tommie bracing himself against the instrument bulkhead.

Apprehensively, he pressed the firing-plate and a short burst boomed from the B-17. The effect was startling. Recoil punched hard and ejected casing angrily around the nose compartment, some clat-

Modifications made,
the cannon was
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a mission on August 15
to Vitry en Artois.

tering into the rear of the instru-
ment panel and blew its circuits.
An alarming crack also appeared
in the nose Plexiglas but noth-
ing fell off, no serious damage
resulted and the idea's feasibility
was proven with the expenditure of

more rounds. However, the recoil
needed dampening, sighting was
crude and they needed to over-
come the risk of self-inflicted dam-
age from ejected casings.

Modifications made, the cannon
was pronounced ready for a mission
on August 15 to Vitry en Artois. Tom-
mie flew as cannoneer but not one
German fighter came out to play and
Roundtrip Jack landed with a disap-
pointed crew only to learn from the
Group Armament Officer that the
new B-17G with a chin turret would
soon be arriving and further plans
for their 20mm conversion had been

scrapped.

Tommie's footnote in Eighth Air
Force history typified its spirit. Later,
he fought rheumatoid arthritis with
similar determination until his death
in the 1970s. This year (1943) saw
more fortunate veterans return to
England – many for the last time. As
a nation, we should remember how
individual contributions of courage,
energy and enthusiasm created a
powerful force fighting for the free-
dom we have since enjoyed.

Editor's Note: This story was published in Vol
XX, No. 3 – June 1993 and is reproduced as
originally printed.

Consciousness: That annoying time between naps

•

Being “over the hill” is much better than being under it.

•

Ham and eggs: A day's work for a chicken, a lifetime commitment for a pig.

•

I smile because I don't know what the hell is going on.

•

Laughter is an instant vacation. —Milton Berle

•

Enjoy the little things and someday you will look back and realize
they were big things.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF THE B-17 GROUND CREWMAN

By Martin Girson

I will start with the return of the bombers after a bombing mission.

After the planes landed they taxied to their respective hard stands. These stands were concrete pads with no walls and roofs, and where the aircraft were parked exposed to the weather. For each aircraft there were three airplane mechanics, one of which was the Crew Chief.

After the plane was parked and the engines shut down, the ground crew mechanics inspected the plane for any battle damage, and conferred with the aircrew, specifically with the pilot, to obtain his assessment of the planes operation and for any maintenance suggestions. The flight crews then departed for the debriefing of the mission.

Provided there was no major damage and the aircraft was flyable, the fuel trucks arrived and the mechanic refueled the tanks of the plane with 100-octane airplane fuel. The main fuel tanks of a B-17 held 1750 gallons of fuel. In addition, each wing had a 500-gallon tank for an additional total of 1000 gallons, thus a fully loaded B-17 would have a combined fuel load of 2750 gallons. Only the main tanks were fueled unless the next operational mission was extra long, then enough additional fuel was loaded into the wing tanks to complete the mission.

After the mechanics assessed the battle damage, any required parts, such as oil coolers, booster pumps, etc. were obtained from the squadron technical supply. Upon returning to the aircraft, the ground crew repaired the plane, working all night if necessary. With no electric lights and no power tools, all work

Upon returning to the aircraft, the ground crew repaired the plane, working all night if necessary. With no electric lights and no power tools, all work was done with hand-held flashlights.

was done with hand-held flashlights, and in all kinds of weather.

Once the mechanics completed the repairs and the plane was airworthy, the ordnance personnel arrived with the bomb load for the next mission. For most of the mission, the load consisted of twelve 500-pound all purpose demolition bombs. However, other missions

may have required the loading of incendiary or fragmentation bombs.

After the bombs were loaded and fused, and other necessary equipment is replenished, the mechanics would preflight inspect the aircraft to ensure that all control cables and other mechanical parts were working smoothly. They ran each engine to be sure that each engine was running smoothly at full power with a manifold pressure of 46 inches of mercury at 2500 R.P.M. This check of each engine was very important as those engines must be able to lift off all the weight of 1750 gallons (about 14,000 pounds), twelve 500-pound bombs (6,000 pounds), the weight of the aircraft (about 38,000 pounds), and the weight of the crew and their equipment (about 2,000 pounds) for a total weight of approximately 60,000 pounds. Those engines must be able to lift the plane off the ground and climb to bombing altitudes of about 22,000 feet.

After their mission briefings, the aircrews began arriving at their assigned aircrafts. The gunners arrived first after picking up the plane's cleaned and oiled 50-caliber guns from the ordnance building and install them in the plane. Later the pilot, copilot, and other crew members arrived after their respective briefings, and about ½ hour prior to take-off, the full aircrew

When all planes had taken off, the mechanics, after working all night, went to breakfast, then to their Quanset huts, and caught some well deserved sleep after working all night.

boarded the aircraft. The pilot and co-pilot started the engines, the ground crew removed the portable voltage generator connection (putt

putt), the wheel chocks, and gave the pilot the signal to taxi.

The aircraft took their assigned position as they approached the take-off runway. Take-off was set for 0800 hours and at that time the control tower fired a green flare and the lead plane began to roll down the runway. The remaining planes followed at 30-second intervals.

When all planes had taken off, the mechanics, after working all night, went to breakfast, then to their Quanset huts, cleaned up, sprawled out on their cot, and caught some well deserved sleep after working all night.

The estimated time of arrival (ETA) for the returning planes was

usually about 1600 hours. About ½ hour prior to their arrival, the mechanics went out to the flight line to await the arrival of the planes from the mission. The first planes to arrive were those firing a red flare indicating that they had wounded aboard. The rest of the group then landed. The last plane to land was the lead plane which was first one to take off.

If a ground crew's plane did not return, they felt sorrowful and sad, but they knew that in a few days they would receive a new plane. However, the ground crew really felt the loss of ten friends that they would remember for the rest of their lives.

What is love? Kari, age 5 says, "Love is when a girl puts on perfume and a boy puts on shaving cologne and they go out and smell each other."

•

Beauty is in the eye of the beer holder.

•

A hangover is the wrath of grapes.

•

The heart that gives, gathers.

•

Throw your heart over the fence and the rest of you will follow.

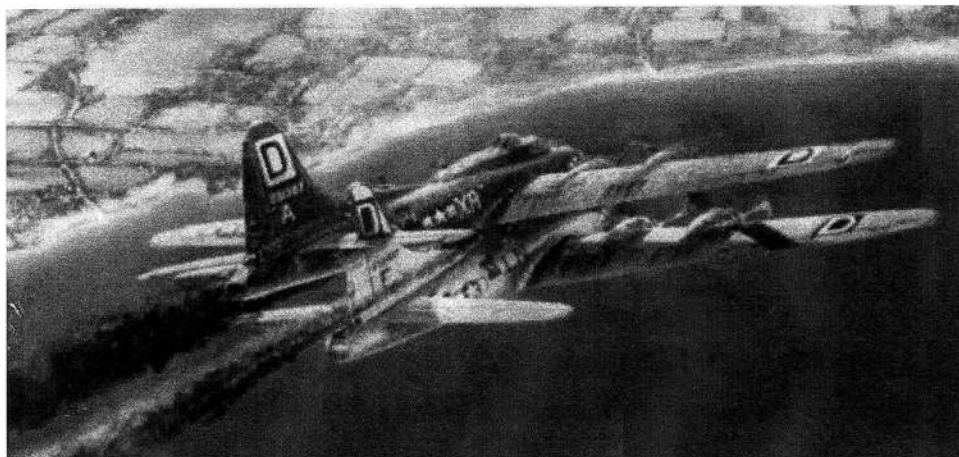
PIGGYBACK HERO

By Ralph Kenny Bennett

Recently they laid the remains of Glenn Rojohn in a Greenock, PA cemetery. He was 81, and he looked like so many other old World War II veterans whose names now appear in the obituary pages. But like many of them seldom talked about those days but he could have told you one hell of a story. He won the Air Medal, the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Purple Heart, all in one flight over Germany on December 31, 1944.

Capt. Glenn Rojohn of the 100th Bomb Group was flying his B-17G Flying Fortress on a raid over Hamburg braving heavy flak to drop their bombs. After the drop, the group turned back to England, when they were jumped by German fighters at 22,000 feet. The Me-109s attacked so close that Rojohn could see the faces of the German pilots. The group fought to remain in formation to take advantage of the combined guns of the planes.

Rojohn saw a B-17 ahead of him burst into flames and fall downward. Gunning his ship forward to fill in the gap, he felt a huge impact. His plane shuddered, felt very heavy and began losing altitude. Rojohn knew immediately that he had collided with another plane. A B-17 below him, piloted by Lt. William G. McNab, had slammed the top of his plane into the bottom of Rojohn's plane. McNab's top tur-



ret was now locked into the belly of Rojohn's plane, and Rojohn's ball turret had smashed into the top of McNab's plane. The two bombers were almost perfectly aligned – the tail of the lower plane was slightly to the left of Rojohn's tail section. They were stuck together.

Three engines of McNab's plane were still running, as were all four of Rojohn's. McNab's fourth engine was on fire with flames spreading back. The two planes were losing altitude. Gunning his engines Rojohn tried to break free from the other plane to no avail. Fearing a fire, Rojohn rang the bailout bell for his crew to jump out.

In the ball turret S/Sgt Edward L. Woodhall, Jr. had felt the collision impact and realized he had no electrical or hydraulic power. Using the handcrank, he cranked the turret down until he could climb out into the fuselage. Inside, he saw the ball turret of McNab's plane protruding through the fuselage of Rojohn's

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plane with the turret gunner, S/Sgt. Joseph Russo, hopelessly trapped. Unaware that his voice was going out over the intercom, Sgt. Russo began reciting his Hail Marys.

In the cockpit, Rojohn and copilot, 2nd Lt. William G. Leek, Jr. pulled back on the controls trying to keep the plane from spinning into dive and preventing the crew from parachuting out. Struggling, the two turned the collision hybrid back toward the German coast. Since the crew could not jump from the bot-

tom of the plane, he ordered them to work their way to the waist door and bail out.

Now the plane below was aflame and fire poured over their left wing. Rojohn ordered Lt. Leek to bail out. Leek knowing that without his help in keeping the controls back, the plane would drop in a flaming spin and the centrifugal force would keep Rojohn from bailing out. Leek refused the order.

Meanwhile Germans on the ground wondered and thought they were seeing a new Allied weapon – a eight-engined double bomber. However, anti-aircraft gunners had seen the collision and stopped firing as the planes were unable to fight anymore.

In the cockpit, Rojohn and Leek held the controls trying to ride the falling rock. The two planes slammed into the ground. The McNab plane exploded, vaulting Rojohn's plane upward and forward. Slamming into the ground, the plane slid forward and came to a stop. Rojohn and Leek were still in their seats. The nose of the plane was relatively intact, but from the wings back it was destroyed. Incredulously, neither Rojohn nor Leek were badly injured.

Two of the six men who parachuted from Rojohn's plane did not survive the jump. But the other four, including the ball turret gunner, Woodall, and, amazingly, four men from the other bomber, survived.

All were taken prisoner. Several of them were interrogated at length by the enemy until they were satisfied that the Americans did not have a new secret weapon.

Rojohn didn't talk much about experiences and medals. Of Leek, he said, "In all fairness to my co-pilot, he's the reason I'm alive today." For 40 years Rojohn attempted to track Leek down, and in 1986 they had their first conversation since they had shared that wild ride in the cockpit of a B-17. A year later they were re-united at a 100th Bomb Group reunion in Long Beach, CA. Bill Leek died the following year. Glenn Rojohn was the last survivor of the remarkable piggyback flight.

IT'S A GRIM HARDSHIP ALL THE WAY IN THE BIG BOMBERS

Condensed from AIR FACTS.

As told by Reader's Digest in 1944

The least known front on which our young men are now fighting is in the high altitude battle line. Anyone who has felt bitter cold may have some idea of the Russian front. Movies have given a glimpse of the man who fights in a submarine or a tank. But nothing short of an actual bomber mission can tell the whole

story of conditions on the 25,000 foot front. The cold is worse than Russia, the cramped quarters as bad as a tank's, the problem of oxygen as vital as in a submarine.

Leave out the danger from the enemy and consider only the natural hazards at this great height. A bomber crew is whisked at diz-

zying speeds from sea level to 25,000 feet. Making a deep penetration into Germany the men are in the air from eight to ten hours, every minute packed with intense danger and hardship. They must fight for their lives, possible suffering wounds without proper medical care, and expertly control some of

the most complicated and fast moving machinery ever invented.

Quick, accurate jobs are done by everyone from the tail-gunner to the pilot, but they have to be done in clothes that are aggravating bulky, for the cold may reach 60 degrees below zero. First a man dons the heaviest long underwear. Over it go the regular clothes. Then comes the bulging, binding winter flying-suit of leather lined with sheepskin. He is now moving awkwardly, but there is more to come; an armor vest of steel plates, a yellow Mae West life preserver, and, over all, the parachute harness. On his head he wears a warm cap and a steel helmet. On his hands go thick heated gloves.

More items remain, not clothing but gear. Without oxygen a man would lose consciousness in about 30 seconds, so he slings an oxygen mask around his neck- later its grip on his face will be maddening. Then there are the intercom headset and the throat microphone – the one clamped over his ears, the other strapped snug around his Adam's apple.

Worry No. 1 is take-off. The pilot is strapped in the seat by his crew chief, another restriction on movement, and he must take about 30 tons of steel and aluminum loaded with gasoline and high explosives, into the air. From the time the throttles are advanced at the head

of the runway, the tension begins. The speed mounts from 100, 120, before the heavy laden plane gets off the ground. Should the plane get hit during the mission, the co-pilot is the one who won't jump. Instead he fastens his walk-around oxygen bottle, worms out of his seat, and starts aft to check the status of the crew and aircraft. Every fold in

**The crew counts each
excruciating second.
Finally, the bomb run
and the thrilling shout
"BOMBS AWAY."**

his clothing seems bent on knobs, levers and corners that crowd the interior. At the deep frame of the top turret, he barely has room to squeeze by when the turret is still, but if the gunner is "searching", he may get caught in the powered track and be seriously injured. The narrow bomb-bay passage is fringed with sharp brackets and fixtures, and many a crew member has suffered serious cuts from them during violent action. By now his walk-around oxygen is giving out, but he continues his check of aircraft and crew.

The right waist-gunner was wounded and is unconscious at this station. The slipstream of wind shrieks in through the open gun aperture at 60 degrees below zero. He needs a tourniquet and a compress, sulfa dust and a hypodermic-it is no job for heavy gloves. The co-pilot slips his off and if he is fast, he may be able to get the necessary procedures done in two to three minutes.

As the Forts converge toward the bomb release line, the German fighters and the anti-aircraft gunners reach their frenzied peak of resistance. The air is alive with flak. Horsing the bomber through violent evasive action takes all the strength of the pilot. The crew counts each excruciating second. Finally, the bomb run and the thrilling shout "BOMBS AWAY."

The bomber swings from the target and turns toward home, and it goes through the same harrowing experience of fighters and flak again until that blessed moment when it slides down across the Channel in the protective custody of the Spits.

In spite of these fantastic hardships, no American Heavy Bomber formation has been turned back from its target by enemy action. The boys in the FORTS and LIBS can take it!

Note: This article was printed in the December 1944 issue of the Hardlife Herald, but was worth printing again.

LETTERS/E-MAILS

December 2008

From: lanm385bg@btopenworld.com (Ian MacLachlan)

To: fxmccawley@comcast.net (Frank X. McCawley)

Hi, I haven't had much time for my research during the last three years, but the family and I have represented the 385th at each Memorial Day Service and I would like to send you some photographs.

I am also trying to help another historian find out what happened to 2/Lt James M. SCOTT Jr. 0-671115 from Arkansas. I've checked the Casualty List and show Scott as KIA 8th April '44. NoK - Mr James S. Scott Snr - father - 203 North Eleventh St., Van Buren, Arkansas. Under remarks, it simply says "Germany". There's no MACR for that date and the Group history reports that "All of our men and planes returned." Whether Scott died that day from injuries received earlier isn't known, but I'm hoping you can help.

My job has folded as a result of the credit crunch and, at 62, the reality is that I'm unlikely to get another one so I'm now try to earn a few pennies extra by writing books. Another benefit is that I'll have more time for the 385th.

Cheers,
Ian

December 26, 2008

To: lanm385bg@btopenworld.com (Ian MacLachlan)

From: fxmccawley@comcast.net (Frank X. McCawley)

Ian,

The front cover of the August issue of the HH showed the 385th BG wreath that you placed in the Memorial Garden. I received many complimentary comments re the excellent wreath. My only regret was that I was unable to have it printed in color. The printing cost of color printing is prohibitive.

Have you checked with Bill Varnedoe regarding info on Lt. Scott. He has a wealth of info regarding KIAs, etc. He mentioned to me that he has many file cabinets of data.

Let us hope that the current credit crunch ends soon. According to our new President-Elect, he is going to solve the problem as soon as he takes office by spending billions of dollars. He will obtain that by raising everyone's taxes.

Frank

LETTERS/E-MAILS

December 30, 2008

From: lanm385bg@btopenworld.com (Ian MacLachlan)

To: fxmccawley@comcast.net (Frank X. McCawley)

Bill and I have opened up a dialogue which has helped us both in terms of 385th research plus answered, as best we can, the query from the other historian, Bob Collins, who was asking on behalf of John Hey in Holland so there's something of a network. Bill sent me a picture of 42-102431, *Slick Chick*, in flight and I sent him one of the crash and another of the crew so fair exchange is no robbery as they say.

Ian



LETTERS/E-MAILS

October 3, 2008

From: bilvar@comcast.net (Bill Varndoe)

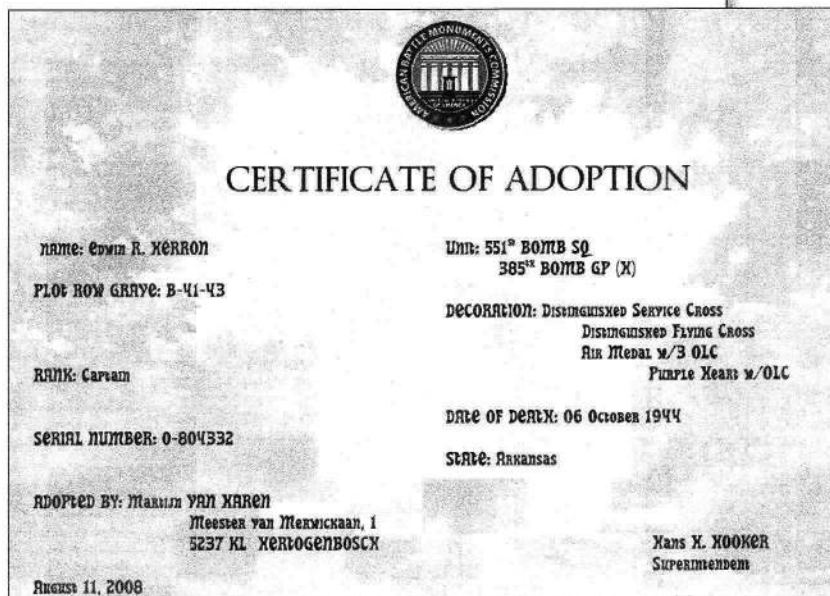
To: fxmccawley@comcast.net (Frank X. McCawley)

Frank,

I received an e-mail from Marijin van Haren, a gentleman from Holland who is volunteering to maintain WW II American graves. He sent the attached certificate with details of the grave he is tending. As you can see it was an airman from our Group.

I thought it is good for us to know that some Europeans do care! Herron was killed on Mission No. 194, October 6, 1944. That was the mission which we lost the entire high Squadron of 11 aircraft.

Bill



The certificate features a circular seal at the top center with the text "AMERICAN MONUMENTS FOUNDATION" around the perimeter. The main title "CERTIFICATE OF ADOPTION" is centered below the seal. The text is organized into two columns. The left column contains: NAME: Edwin R. HERRON; PLOT ROW GRAVE: B-41-43; RANK: Captain; SERIAL NUMBER: 0-804332; ADOPTED BY: Marijin VAN HAREN, Meester van Merwickenaan, 1 5237 KL XERLOGENBOSCH; and August 11, 2008. The right column contains: UNIT: 551st BOMB SQ, 385th BOMB GP (X); DECORATION: Distinguished Service Cross, Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal w/3 OLC, Purple Heart w/OLC; DATE OF DEATH: 06 October 1944; STATE: Arkansas; and Hans X. HOOKER, Supermember.

NAME: Edwin R. HERRON	UNIT: 551 st BOMB SQ 385 th BOMB GP (X)
PLOT ROW GRAVE: B-41-43	DECORATION: Distinguished Service Cross Distinguished Flying Cross Air Medal w/3 OLC Purple Heart w/OLC
RANK: Captain	DATE OF DEATH: 06 October 1944
SERIAL NUMBER: 0-804332	STATE: Arkansas
ADOPTED BY: Marijin VAN HAREN Meester van Merwickenaan, 1 5237 KL XERLOGENBOSCH	Hans X. HOOKER Supermember
AUGUST 11, 2008	

January 5, 2009

From: Pamela Metcalfe

To: All of you

I can't believe that I have missed not only Christmas, but also New Years as well. We were so busy before Christmas with the Bar, etc., and then in a great hurry to leave England to get to France before the kids got here that I did not have time to e-mail you all. While the kids were here it was meals on the hour, etc., and outings to see the snow that I never had time to climb the stairs to find the computer. Nicholas is the resident expert, so we respect his ability! So, better late than never, Happy Christmas, and a very peaceful and happy New Year.

I can't believe another year has disappeared. Where does the time go? We are already planning Cincinnati – or however you spell it. – so start making plans! We loved being in the States last year and are looking forward to 2009.

Lots of love to our really valued friends.

Pamela and Anthony

LETTERS/E-MAILS

From: winning1@gvtc.com (Amanda)
To: billvar

Dear Bill,

I am very interested in finding out about a copilot, Fred G. Montgomery, who went MIA, June 21, 1943. I have so far found out this – He belonged to the 385th Bomber Group, 550th Bomber Squadron. His family called him Garlan, not Fred – any help or details would be received most gratefully. My interest is this: William Wister Haines grew up on a street in Des Moines where I once lived two houses away. He wrote several books, one being 'Command Decision.' I have since moved to Texas, and I went to buy an old copy of several of his books and found a copy that had been inscribed in 1948. It was donated in Fred's name to the Ranger Texas Library. Also my husband has spent hours photographing WW2 aircraft. I was immediately intrigued with Mr. Montgomery.

Thank you in advance for any trouble you can spare me.

Jeanne Howe
Belverde, Texas 78163

From: billvar
To: winning1

Jeanne,

F. G. Montgomery was indeed the co-pilot on the Powley crew, 385th Bomb Group, 550th Sq. The full crew as posted on a Stateside Roster of 11 June 1943, before going overseas was:
Pilot-Herbert F. Powley, 2nd Lt.; Co-pilot-Fred G. Montgomery, 2nd Lt.; Navigator-Lloyd J. S. Beer, 2nd Lt.; Bombardier-Pat H. Ruffin, 2nd Lt.; Top Turret Gunner/Engineer-David J. McGaddy, S/Sgt.; Radio Operator-Ralph F. Atkinson, S/Sgt.; Gunners- Thomas N. Cockfield, S/Sgt., James Riggs, S/Sgt., William F. Hahn, S/Sgt., and Morris Myers, S/Sgt.

The crew was assigned to B-17, Serial No. 42-30254. On the trip overseas, this crew (and one other crew) disappeared and was never heard from. There is no further record of them. They were presumably all lost at sea. A book of those in the 385th BG who were lost during the war is on the altar of All Saint Church in Great Ashfield, Suffolk, England. Great Ashfield was the 385th BG airfield during the war. The Memorial Altar is still maintained by the local church. Lt. Montgomery is listed in this book along with other members of the Powley Crew although none of them actually arrived at Great Ashfield.

There is a book, *The Story of Van's Valiants, A History of the 385th Bomb Group*. I have copies for \$25, post paid. It does not add any further details on this crew.

Bill Varnedoe

LETTERS/E-MAILS

November 16, 2008

From: Tim Randleman tbonetim135@yahoo.com

To: Bill Varnedoe billvar@comcast.net

My name is Timothy Randleman, eldest grandson of the late John C. Ford, former ground crew and President of the 385th memorial group from the late 70's or early 80's. My grandfather who passed away in 1984 was an integral part of my life and was and has been my role model. I enlisted in the Air Force at the age of 25 and have been serving for close to 9 years.

This past September I arrived in England, station at RAF Lakenheath, and have since moved into a fairly large house (by English standards) in the small village of Wyverstone just a short 5 minute drive from Great Ashfield. I have visited the remnants of the old airfield where my Grandfather had his ashes scattered over, and have included a few pictures taken a few weeks ago. The one picture labeled "bunker" is one I am not sure about and if you might be able to tell me anything about it that would be great. Much the rest of the airfield as you know is farmland and a lot of it requires permission to enter the area where there is a small strip of runway used for light aircraft.

My family and I have also started eating at The Fox pub. I noticed a picture with your autograph on it along with other members of the 385th, as well as some other pictures of aircraft from the 385th. Some of the elder locals here in Wyverstone remember fondly of the "Yanks" that flew over their houses here and whom they got to know quite well during those years during WWII. I look forward to future correspondences with you and will be happy to supply more pictures.

Sincerely,

Tim Randleman

.....
From: billvar

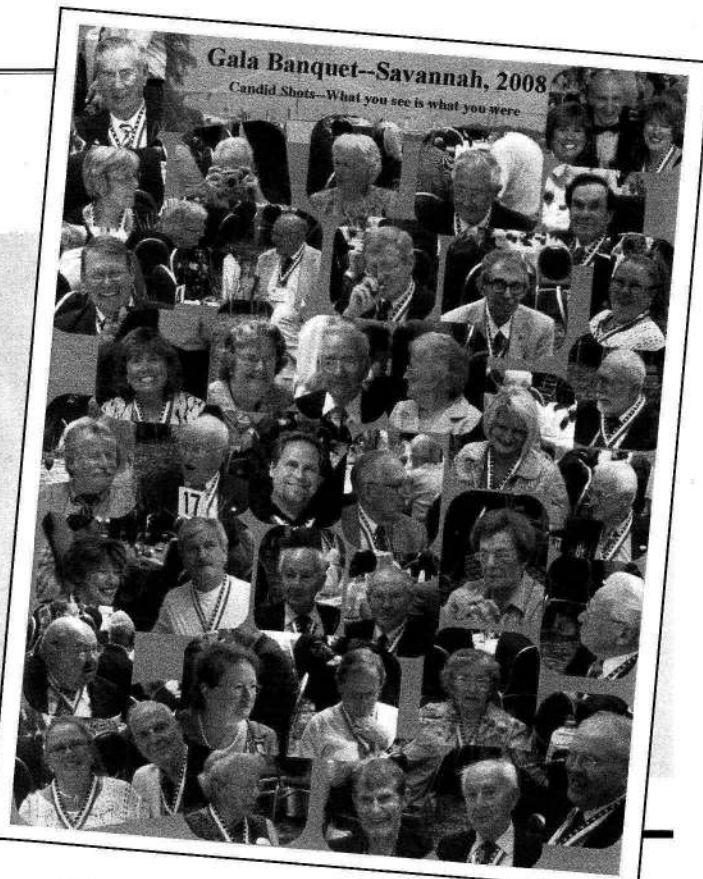
To: tbonetim135

Tim: It is good to hear from you!! I remember quite well your grandfather as a guiding light in the 3895th Bomb Group Memorial Association, and editor of our newsletter for many years. The Association, now called just the 385th Bomb Group Association (385th BGA), and the newsletter, now the "Hardlife Herald" is still going strong!! ("Hardlife" was the radio call for the tower.) I held the Presidency from 2003-2005 and am it's present Historian. The current President is Albert Audette. The current newsletter editor is Frank McCawley. The Treasurer is Chuck Smith, (a second generation member) at P.O. Box 329, Alpharetta, GA 30009. Dues are \$30/year. In addition to the newsletter we still hold annual reunions; the next at Cincinnati, OH in August. We solicit and need second and third generation members. We, veterans in the 385th BGA, are not as numerous as we once were, but there are still a lot of us old codgers, yet we need vigorous youngsters to run things! In fact, the nominee for our next President is a 2nd generation member.

Since you live so close to Great Ashfield, you should meet Paul Welch paul.i.welch@bt.com. Paul is a member of the 385th BGA and can help you with the airfield sites since he lives near there also. Many of the Great Ashfield residents are members of the 385th BGA. Get them to show you our stained glass window in All Saints Church.

Bill

**THE REUNION IN
SAVANNAH, GA
AUGUST, 2008**
Composite of photos of
some attendees caught in
unguarded moments
by Bill Swindell



~ Taps ~

Willard Hagman – Aitkin, MN, Bombardier with 385th BG.

Dr. Daniel Riva – Winter Park, FL died October 22, 2008 at home of bone cancer at age 90. Born in Hartford, CT, he came to Winter Park in 1967. He received a BS degree from Springfield College, Mass., a MA degree from George Washington University, Washington, D.C., and a Ph.D. degree from the University of Missouri. He was Dean of Continuing Education and Professor of Political Science at Rollins College from 1969 to 1981. Upon retirement in 1981, he received an honorary degree of Doctor of Laws and the permanent rank of Dean Emeritus. He served as a pilot in the USAF from 1941 to 1969. As one of the “Boy Colonels” of WW II, he commanded the 551st Bombardment Squadron and led numerous bombing missions of the 385th BG over Germany. After WW II, he participated in both the occupations of Germany and Japan, and from 1948 to 1949 he was Chief of Air Force Operations in the Greek civil war. In

Washington, he served in the Foreign Service Institute, Dept of State; was Chief of the International Affairs Division in the USAF Directorate of Plans; and, served as administrative secretary in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. Between 1958 and 1961, he was commander of the Itazuke Air Base in Japan and was awarded the Order of the Sacred Treasure. His military decorations included the Legion of Merit, the Distinguished Flying Cross (twice), several Air Medals, the Commendation Medal (twice), and the Gold Cross from King Paul of Greece. He is survived by his wife, Kimiko Hiraki of Japan; sons, Richard and Kyle; daughter, Linda; brother, Vincent; sister, Henrietta; and one grandson. His Funeral Mass was of on November 4th at Our Lady of Hope Catholic Church. Colonel Daniel Riva was buried with honors in Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington, VA.

Thomas Ashton Hollingsworth, II, Savannah, GA; 385thBG bombardier, spent two years as POW, and was a volunteer at The Mighty Eighth Air Force Museum.

385th BGA

Chuck Smith, Treasurer
P.O. Box 329
Alpharetta, GA 30009 USA

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A B-52 bomber and its bomb load. It's big, flies faster, and carries a much larger bomb load, but it will never overtake the U.S. No. 1 bomber position of our 385th Bomb Group's, and other Group's, B-17 Flying Fortresses.