

Hardlife



Herald



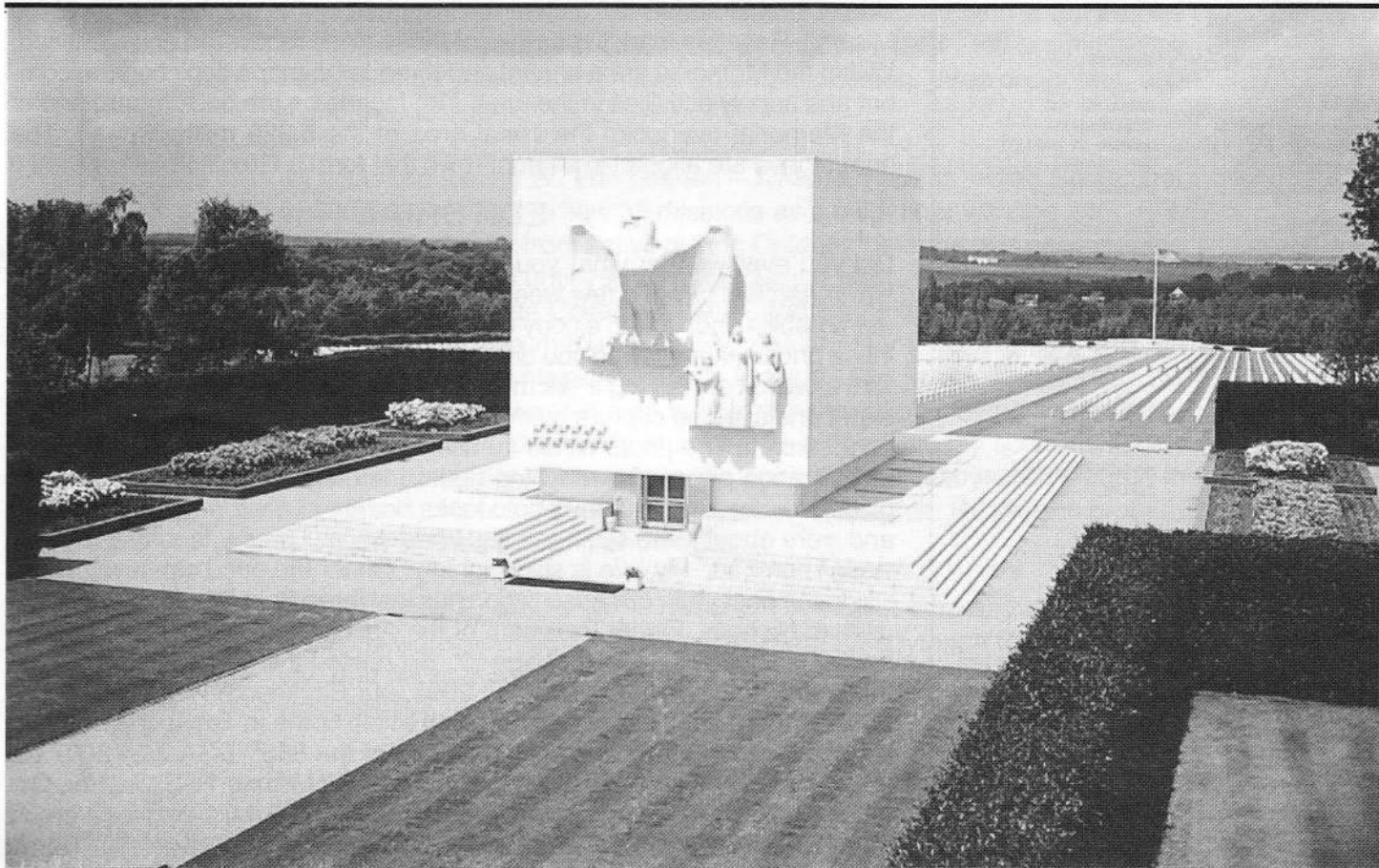
Newsletter of the  
385th Bombardment Group Association

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

*The Mighty Eighth*

Vol. 24 Number 3

December, 2007



**385<sup>TH</sup> BGA REUNION • SAVANNAH GA • AUGUST 3-8, 2008**

# Hardlife Herald

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Federal IRS Tax Exempt Code #501 (C) (19)  
52-1068468

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\*deceased

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## COVER

### ARDENNES AMERICAN CEMETERY AND MEMORIAL

The Ardennes American Cemetery and Memorial is located 12 miles southwest of Liege, Belgium. The 90-acre cemetery contains the graves of seventy six members of the 385<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, and thirteen members are listed on the Wall of the Missing. The Memorial is a stone structure with a massive American eagle and other sculptures on its façade. Along the outside of the Memorial, 492 names are inscribed on the granite Tablets of the Missing. Rosettes mark the names of those since recovered and identified. Within the Memorial are a chapel and three large maps depicting the combat and supply activities in the area. The façade on the back (north) end of the Memorial overlooks the burial area of the 5,329 military dead. The headstones are aligned in straight rows that form a Greek cross.

## EDITORIAL

Did you ever wonder what you looked like when you were an airman at Great Ashfield? Well a few weeks ago I was perusing through my military memorabilia and I found a copy of my old escape photo. Do you remember those photos that showed you dressed in civilian clothes? One carried them with a packet containing a silk map of Europe and other items to be used in event one avoided capture by the Germans after parachuting from a damaged aircraft. The photo would be used by the underground to make your identification papers for reaching neutral territory. I don't know how your pictures looked like, but my photo looks like my clothes were never ironed and were about three sizes too big. I had a scowl on my face and my hair wasn't combed. My wife is still laughing. Oh for the good old days!!!!

In the past year, our Association has lost three Past Presidents. William (Bill) A. Nicholls, Eighth President of the Association, 1955-1987, passed away December 23, 2006 at age 87. Bill hosted the 1997 association reunion in Philadelphia. On May 26, 2007, our Eighteenth President, 2005-2007, Arthur (Art) Driscoll passed away at his home in Tennessee. At that time, Art was in the final planning stages of the 385<sup>th</sup> BGA July 2007 reunion. In November, I was notified of the death of Michael R. Gallagher, October 27, 2007, the Fourteenth President, 1997-1999. Michael was a proud member of the Association, and as President, he dedicated the 385<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Monument at the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force Museum in Savannah, Georgia. The 385<sup>th</sup> BGA mourns the loss of these dedicated Association members.

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Since I have received the mantle of the President of the Association, it has been my sad duty to again report the death of one of our Past Presidents. Michael R. Gallagher, our 14<sup>th</sup> president from 1997 to 1999 passed away October 22, 2007. We offer our condolences to his wife, Marion, and his family.

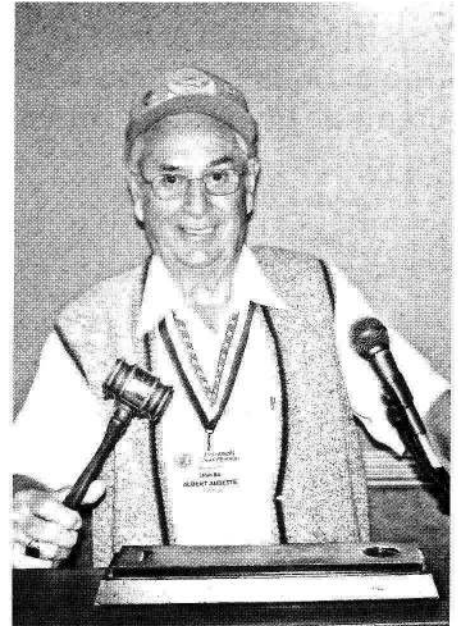
I have been trying to come up with an appropriate report. With all the communication that has been going on between me and the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force Association, and also with the members of the 385<sup>th</sup> BGA Board of Directors, it is important for me to keep things in perspective. My message to the 385<sup>th</sup> BGA members is that

we purchase a Flag honoring our 385<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group and having it placed in the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force Museum in Savannah. This flag will not be for any individual, but for all members of the 385<sup>th</sup> BG.

The flag that Leo had made is for our use at our reunions, and will always be with us. Any special honors for individuals should be voted on by the Board of Directors. If there are any comments about this policy, please let me know. Your comments on any item will make my job as your President much easier.

See you in Savannah.

Al Audette, President  
8<sup>th</sup> AFHS, 385<sup>th</sup> BGA



## 385<sup>TH</sup> BOMB GROUP FLAG

The Eighth Air Force Historical Society has been in discussion with the 385<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association regarding the purchase of a 385<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group flag to be displayed with other bomb group flags in the rotunda of the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force Museum in Savannah, Georgia. The flag will

be designed and purchased by the 8<sup>th</sup> AFHS, and will be the same size and design as all other 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force group flags.

The cost of each group flag is \$1,750 each, and each group is to pay for their group flag. The 385<sup>th</sup> BGA Board of Directors has been in e-mail contact with

President Al Audette, and has voted in favor of purchasing a 385<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group flag for the museum. We hope that a flag may be designed and purchased, and be in place at the 8<sup>th</sup> AF Museum for the 385<sup>th</sup> BGA Reunion in Savannah, Georgia.

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We should listen to the old people, for they have been where we have not. They have seen what we shall never see. They have heard the sound of silence. And when they go, things will never be quite the same. They are a dying breed. It is sad but it is so.

Michael Watkins, This Other Breed: East Anglian

There are men here tonight with mental and physical scars obtained during those dark days who could tell any "peacenick," far better than I could, that there is no glory in war.

Roger Freeman, St. Louis, Missouri, U.S.A.  
8 October 1977

(From his address at the Eighth Air Force Historical Society's third annual reunion)

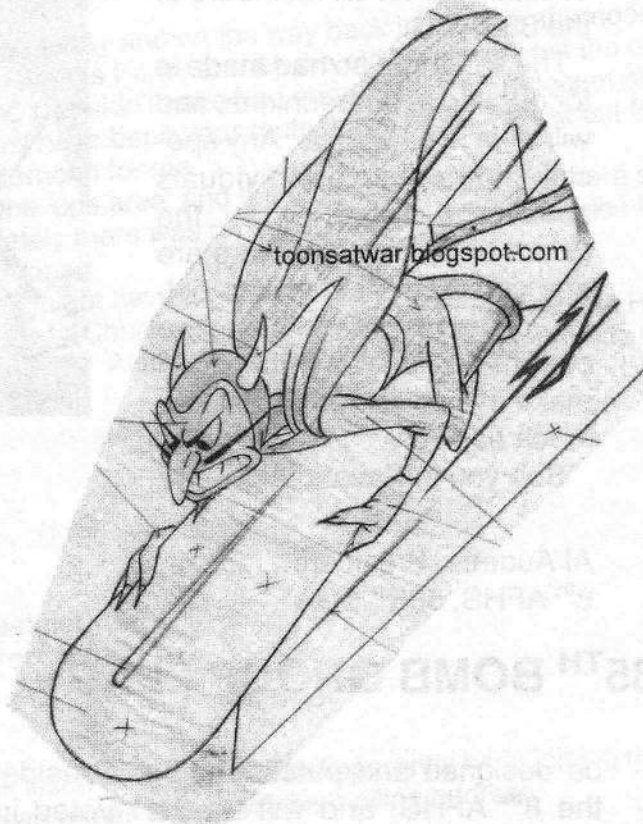
## SQUADRON LOGO

### Phototype Design from the Collection of Sam Grabarski

This design of the 549<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron logo was created by Disney artist

Hank Porter in 1942. The design is based loosely on the Devil that appeared in a

Disney Silly Symphony cartoon titled "The Goddess of Spring."



1942 Cartoon

Logo of the 549<sup>th</sup> Squadron, 385<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force, WWII

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## THE MISSION OF 7 APRIL 1945

By Bill Varnedoe

Crews in the 385<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group (H), 8th Air Force, stationed at Great Ashfield, England, were awakened for the 285<sup>th</sup> mission of the group on 7<sup>th</sup> of April 1945. Like all crews of the group, Lt. George F. Burich and his crew arose, dressed and ate breakfast as they had done for seven previous missions.

By now the war was going very well, and the Luftwaffe was all but non-existent. No great opposition was expected as the crews were briefed for a bombing mission to an enemy airfield at Gustrow, Germany. True, enemy antiaircraft fire (flak) was just as intense as ever, if not worse, because all the 90 mm antiaircraft guns had, by now, been squeezed into Germany proper. Following the briefing the crews took off and assembled in scheduled formation for the mission. Although the group was flying at only 15,000 feet, a bit lower than their normal 23,000 feet, the flak was light and the mission went according to the briefed plan. It was a successful mission and the bombs hit the target.

As anticipated, there was no fighter opposition, and the group turned from the target, and took up a heading for home. Suddenly, a lone FW 109 was seen making a pass on the rear of the formation. Lt. Burich's B-17, Serial No. 44-8744, was positioned in the

"tail-end-charlie" spot, the rear-most position in the Group's formation. Both Sgt. Charles J. Stewart, the tail gunner in Lt. Burich's bomber, and Sgt. Leroy Lancaster, the tail gunner in Lt. Crow's plane, which was just ahead of the Burich B-17, spotted the FW-109 and started firing at it with their 50 caliber machine guns. Normally, a solo attacking enemy, once spotted and fired upon by our crews, would usually break off and prepare for another attack. However, this German pilot was different. He did not fire his guns at all, nor did he take any evasive action, but kept coming straight at the rear of Burich's B-17.

Contrary to instructions to fire only in short bursts, both Sgt. Stewart and Sgt. Lancaster locked down the triggers on their 50 caliber guns and kept firing at the incoming enemy plane. This did not deter the German pilot. Without wavering, he kept his course coming directly at the Burich aircraft. Not changing his course, he impacted aircraft No. 44-8744 at the left wing root between engine No. 2 and the fuselage, and the impact tore the B-17's left wing completely off. In a moment, the B-17 disintegrated, and the pieces fell to the ground. No parachutes were seen by the other aircrews in the Group. Debriefing showed the aircraft

as lost, and the crew as MIA {Missing Air Crew Report (MACR) No. 13721}.

Far below on the ground, an American POW, William P. Marsicano, witnessed the ramming incident. He saw one parachute, which he thought emerged from a piece of the B-17, land over a hill nearby. This sighting is unusual because B-17 airmen normally did not wear a parachute just the harness. After an incident like this, there is simply not time to find your parachute and attach it to the harness.

Shortly after the parachute and body was recovered, a German prison guard picked six American POWs, including Marsicano, to bury an American airman. At the burial site one of the POWs asked if he could pray over the body. He was given permission to do so, and found the body still warm. At the site, the POWs found no parachute near the body and saw white skin on the finger and wrist of the body which hinted at a missing ring and watch. Marsicano managed to remove and keep the airman's belt which had the markings S3906, S for Stewart and 3906 for the last four digits of 33613906, Sgt. Stewart's serial number. Clearly, the body was Burich's tail gunner. Based on the white skin markings, the POW burial detail concluded that this airman had parachuted safely but was sub-

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sequently killed and robbed by unknown assailants, or by German soldiers.

Based on Marsicano's memory, this incident was written by Joseph X. Flannery and published in Mariscano's hometown newspaper in 2001.

Returning from the bombing mission, the 385<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group had no further problems and the remaining B-17s arrived safely back at Great Asfield. Since Sgt. Lancaster's gun barrels had warped from the continuous firing, he was told that he was to be charged pay for new barrels. However, Lt. Charles Crow, his pilot, explained the ramming incident and Sgt. Lancaster did not have to pay for new gun barrels. Instead Sgt. Lancaster was given ½ credit for killing the German pilot. At that time, and for over 60 years, we all thought that the two tail gunners had killed the German pilot. We reasoned that the pilot did not shoot his guns at Burich's B-17 because he was dead, and we thought that the ramming of Burich's plane was a consequence of a dead man at the controls of the enemy plane. We did not believe that the German enemy was suicidal.

In the *Stars and Stripes* the next day, the front page

showed a picture of a B-17 with its left wing off. The picture was taken on a mission on the 7<sup>th</sup> of April. I, Bill Varnedoe, navigator on Crow's crew, wrote the editor of the *Stars and Stripes* and requested a copy of the picture. Without comment, the editor sent me an 8 X 10 glossy print, which I still have. Later this photo was identified as that of another B-17. Although we think that type of collision and the date of the photo is striking, we believe that the photo is of the Burich ramming incident.

Sixty years later, in 2005, a shocking revelation came to light. On page 210 in Jane's *Battles with the Luftwaffe*, there is a story by a German pilot named Walter Otto. He tells of how on that date (April 7, 1945), he deliberately rammed a B-17. He said that he carried no ammunition, hence the lack of firing during his attack. He said that he was thrown clear and parachuted to safety. Therefore, we now believe that this must have been the parachute the POWs saw, and it neatly explained why no parachute was found on or near Marsicano's body.

Later we found that Walter Otto, in another report, said that he landed in Steinhuder Lake, about sixty miles away

from the ramming incident. Therefore it is possible that the German pilot that rammed Burich may not have been Walter Otto, but someone else.

A recent chapter of this incident was written in 2007 when Ruediger Kaufmann, a German historian in the area, sent the author an e-mail stating that in 2003, a German researcher found the wreckage of a B-17, serial No. 44-8744, and recovered an engine. (Note: See copies of the e-mails with photos under "LETTERS AND E-MAILS") The engine is now on display in a private collection. Ruediger Kaufmann said there are damage marks on the FW-109's propeller from the ramming of the B-17. The crash site of the B-17 is located at 52.36N, 10.3E, near Gross Oesingen, about 20 miles East of Celle, Germany.

Like so many war stories, incidents that we positively were considered accurate and happened in a certain way, we later discover that those incidents possibly were different. Records can confuse and do damage to our memories. But it is a fact that Burich's aircraft of the 385<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group WAS rammed by a FW-109, and all the crew were killed on the 7<sup>th</sup> of April 1945.

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Why does someone believe you when you say that there are four billions stars, but check when you say the paint is wet?

Why is it that no plastic bag will open from the end you choose on your first try?

If people evolved from apes, why are there still apes?

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## THE CARPETBAGGERS

The 801<sup>st</sup>/492<sup>nd</sup> Bomb Group was an 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force Group that was called the "Carpetbaggers." The purpose of the Carpetbagger group was to fly "Special Operations" to deliver supplies to resistance groups in occupied countries, to deliver specialized personnel to the area, and occasionally to bring back personnel from the field. The group flew out of Harrington, England, a secret OSS base.

Combat with the enemy was avoided as it only endangered the success of the mission. Enemy anti aircraft installations and detector posts were skirted as widely as possible in order not to reveal the presence or destination of the aircraft. To avoid any action with the enemy, flights were normally made at night and at low level. When it was necessary to cross enemy held areas equipped with anti-aircraft defenses, the chosen route seldom exceeded 7,000, and as soon the aircraft passed the dangerous area, the aircraft dropped down to 2,000 feet or lower to make it more difficult to detect the aircraft either by sound or radar, since objects on the ground distorted the sound of a low-flying aircraft and radar had less time to focus on the aircraft. The major-

ity of the Carpetbagger flights were made when the moon was out to make the ground visible to the navigator and bombardier. Non-moon flights were made using special navigation equipment known as "Rebecca," as well as S-Phones and radio altimeters. However, the reception parties were required to have the ground counterparts of the Rebecca and S-Phone equipment, and be able to use them expertly. Sometimes bonfires were used if there were prominent landmarks that could be distinguished in the dark, such as rivers or lakes.

For more accurate drops, the aircraft flew within 400 to 600 feet of the ground and at a flying speed of 150 mph or less. Personnel were normally dropped from a height of 600 feet while containers and packages were dropped from heights of 300-500 feet.

The missions of the Carpetbaggers were flown with B-24D aircraft since they were able to carry a bigger load and had a longer range than the B-17s. The aircraft were painted black and were specially modified for these clandestine missions. There was no nose turret with 50-caliber machine guns since the bombardier and navigator required

a clear view to see any signals from resistance fighters in the underground so that supplies could be accurately dropped. The belly turret was removed and replaced with a plywood door so that OSS agents could jump.

Carpetbagger operations from England fell into two periods: January to September 1944, and from January 1945 until the last two months of the war in Europe. From January until September 1944, the US-SAF delivered supplies to resistance groups in France, Denmark, Norway, Belgium and Holland.

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

Editor: Additional information and pictures can be obtained from the following website:

<http://home.comcast.net/defactohistorian/index.htm>

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When we are in the supermarket and someone hits our ankle with a shopping cart and then apologizes, why do we say, "It's all right!" when we know it isn't right. So why don't we say, "That hurt, you stupid idiot!!!"

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## MISSION TO BRUX

By Hugh S. Andrew

An article came across my desk a few days ago about a little town in Czechoslovakia named Brux, and it brought back memories. We went to that town one day in the summer of 1944 to bomb a synthetic oil plant.

It started out like any other mission. Someone woke you at 4:00 a.m. for the mission, and he told you the gas load and the bomb load but not the target. If there was a full gas load and full bomb load for the planes, you knew you were going a long way, but you didn't know where. You got up and went to the mess hall for breakfast and then to the briefing room. There was a map on the wall hidden by a curtain. After everyone became seated and quieted down, the briefing officer pulled the curtain aside, and you saw the map of Europe with tape outlining the route, in and out, and the target location. We were going to fly all the way across Germany to the target, Brux, Czechoslovakia. (There was a loud groan from all when this was seen.)

After the crew briefings (pilots, navigators, bombardiers, and radio operators) were completed, we all proceeded out to our planes and did our pre-flight checks. Our pilot for this mission was from the 551<sup>st</sup> Bomb Squadron, and he was flying his last mission. He had replaced our own pilot, Wes Brashar, who had been with our crew since it was formed, and who was scheduled to go into lead crew training.

We took off as scheduled, assembled in formation, and started climbing. At 15,000 feet, we crossed the English Channel and approached the coast of Europe. Suddenly our number 4 engine started to miss. We attempted to enrich the fuel mixture and to switch to other gas tanks, but nothing seemed to help. The higher we

climbed, the engine would get progressively rougher. However, since we couldn't do much about it, we took what we could get out of it and kept on going.

We finally reached bombing altitude basically flying on 3? engines, which at least kept us in formation. We certainly didn't want to drop out of formation deep inside Germany. During the bomb run we encountered some flak, but dropped our bombs on the target. After the bombs were released and as we were turning away from the target—Boom!!, the propeller on the number three engine ran away and the RPM was out of control. We tried to feather it, but it failed to feather. We were concerned that it would go completely out of control, freeze up, and pull the engine from the wing. We couldn't stay in formation since we couldn't maintain a speed of 150 mph. We left the formation and maintained radio silence since any transmission we would make to the group leader could be picked up by an enemy ground radio station, which would have advised the Luftwaffe that there was a crippled aircraft that could not stay with its group.

We turned back to the west and gradually lost altitude. We discovered that by flying at 110 mph we could keep the propeller from windmilling. Over 110 mph, the prop would start to run away. In the meantime number four was barely running. Here we were, two good engines, one running only a third of the time, and one totally stopped. We were gradually losing altitude as we could not maintain a steady altitude at a speed of 110 mph. We hope that we could reach a part of Belgium that was under the control of the Allies.

This particular day was one beautiful day over Europe. There wasn't a cloud in the sky anywhere, high or low. Soon all the planes in our group and all other

groups were gone, and here we were slowly losing altitude. We could see a hundred miles in all directions, and every German within a hundred miles could see us. There was no place to hide and there we were, "sitting ducks." However, as we descended in altitude, there was a reverse effect on the number four engine. It began to run better. We began to think that we could stretch our flight, and possibly get to the English Channel, where we might ditch.

During this time while flying by ourselves, suddenly a lone P-51 appeared beside us and for the next half hour escorted us toward England. However for a P-51 to fly at 110 mph, he had to put his flaps down and reduce his power to barely above stalling speed. After a half hour, he waved to us, indicating he was low on fuel and must leave us and head back to England.

At 3,000–4,000 feet altitude, we now felt that we could hold our altitude, and thus we kept on going. It seemed as if we might make it back to England, but we still kept radio silence. We just kept going. Finally we crossed the channel and arrived back to Great Ashfield and the 385<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group. We made our landing and parked. I can tell you that our pilot who flew his last mission was one happy fellow.

We never did find out what happened to number four engine, but we did find out what caused number three engine to run away. A small piece of flak had cut a quarter inch diameter line which supplied hydraulic fluid to the propeller feathering system, thus making it impossible to feather the prop. However, the report of this mission always makes a good story.

Ed. Note: Hugh Andrew was the copilot on this mission.



## LETTERS/E-MAILS

From: ruediger.kaufmann@google.com (Ruediger Kaufmann)  
To: billyar@comcast.net (Bill Varnedoe)  
Subject: 385<sup>th</sup> BG, Lt. Burich B-17, S.N. 44-8744  
November 2007

Hello Mr. Varnedoe,

I found (found) your e-mail in a forum as expert of the 385<sup>th</sup> BG. My name is Ruediger Kaufmann and I am from Northern Germany. I am 44 years old and a private historian searching for airwar in my home area.

The B-17 of Lt. Burich was rammed at the 7<sup>th</sup> of April 1945 by an unknown Bf109 and crashed north of Wesendorf, north of Gifhorn. I had the MACR (Missing Air Crew Report) but I found from the crew or the plane.

Have you more information for me?

Best wishes  
Ruediger Kaufmann

From: Bill Varnedoe  
To: Ruediger Kaufmann  
November 15, 2007

Rudiger,

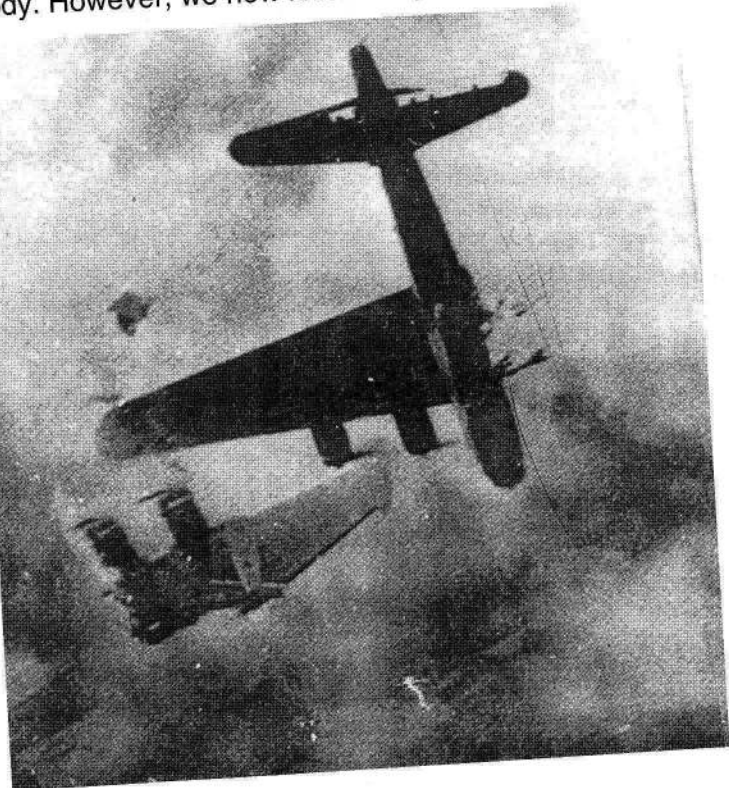
We believe the 109 that rammed Burich was piloted by Walter Otto. We did not know this until he wrote of it, many years later. He survived the ramming and wrote of it in a book, "Janes's Battles With The Luftwaffe," ISBN 0 00711363. The incident is described on page 210. A story of this incident also became available after the war told by an American POW who witnessed the collision from the ground. He thought one member of the Burich crew parachuted. After the person landed, the POW thought the aircrew member's parachute was stolen and he was killed on the ground. The POW was part of a detail that buried the body. However, we now know the parachute that he saw was the German pilot, and the crewman that the POW found on the ground was already dead, having fallen without a parachute. Note: We normally did not wear our parachutes. We wore a harness, but not the parachute. We would clip on the chute if we had to jump.

I do not have a photo of the Burich crew. The aircraft they were flying that day was B-17 Serial No. 44-8744. It was a relatively new aircraft, and had not yet been named. We think the attached photo might have been 44-8744 after it was rammed.

My crew saw the collision and saw the 109 impact on the left wing between the number 2 engine and the fuselage.

They (Burich) were the last plane in the formation, bring up the rear of the formation. Our target that day was "Gustrow."

Bill Varnedoe



# LETTERS/E-MAILS

From: Ruediger Kaufmann  
To: Bill Varnedoe  
November 16, 2007

Dear Bill,

First of all, many, many thanks for your e-mail with the information and the photo. I read you were the pilot of the other B-17 as you write that your crew made the photo. I think you have very good luck that day.

My dead father was in the Luftwaffe. Not as a pilot but as Feldwebel at JG77. As I write, I am searching in my home area for airwar, and speak with a lot of eyewitness people and write the stories a local history down for the future generations. Please look at the photo in our little Museum.



The engine is from Lt. Burich's plane!!! A farmer recovered it in 2003, and I get it for our Museum. After my research we know that it was from the rammed B-17. You can still see the marks of the Me-109 on it. The American soldier's uniform standing behind the engine is an original (uniform) bought by me on market.

The crash place was southeast of Gross Oesingen. This town is about 4 Kilometers north of formally Wesendorf airbase. I will send you a map.

I will look and search for the German pilot. Maybe he is still alive.  
Please excuse my bad English.

Best wishes from Germany,  
Ruediger

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14 November 2007

Mr. Frank X. McCawley, Editor H.H.

Dear Sir:

You're doing a great job as editor for "The 385<sup>th</sup> BGA." Thanks! I love every issue. I am sending you some pictures that I brought back from "Great Ashfield" in June 1945. I was on the same flight group (549<sup>th</sup>) as Mr. "Art Driscoll."

# LETTERS/E-MAILS



I would like you to research the records of the pictured B-17 – M. This B-17 had the name “Hit Parade” Serial #42-38031. What happened? I figure that the hydraulic system was shot away. There should have some history concerning this B-17. Who was the last crew that flew this bomber? I would love to hear about this B-17!!

Thanks,  
Harry Shovan  
(hshovan@webtv.net)

\*\*\*\*\*  
From: wagon6120@juno.com (Art Weigand)  
To: billvar@comcast.net (Bill Varnedoe)  
Subject: Historical Records for Mission to Ochlesleben-July 1943  
October 2007

Hi Bill,

Hope this finds you in reasonably good health and fairly happy, all things considered... I was wondering if you could advise (me) how to get Group and Squadron records for the initial raids of the 385<sup>th</sup> BG – 550<sup>th</sup> Squadron. I'm interested in the Group's Fifth and my Third mission to Ochlesleben – 28 July 1943. I was flying with Jack Schley in “Sly Fox” in a composite group with the 388<sup>th</sup>.

It was a Maximum Effort, five of us were supposed to go (with the Composite Group), but one ended up with the Main (385<sup>th</sup>) group, so we got to go with four in the Composite Group. One was shot down, (Gurple), one went home with two engines out, (Fryer), and two of us were able to bomb. During a fighter attack, I got hit in the right arm, and a lot of stuff from the Glare Shield, on the left side, came flying up, bounced off my oxygen mask and hit me in the eyes, blinding me. (It seemed like looking though two coke bottles full of wine.) Jack was flying the airplane at that time while I called the passes that the fighters were making. He didn't get hit, although the wheel and the throttles had taken some damage I found out later.

To make a long story short, I ended up in the Field Dispensary, and the next day in the 2<sup>nd</sup> General Hospital in Oxford, and on October 1<sup>st</sup> was on a Hospital Boat enroute to the States. My arm in a cast, my left eye missing, and a Purple Heart some Colonel pinned to my pillow when he found out I couldn't see. Later, at the Atlantic City Redistribution Center, a flimsy came through in the mail saying that I had been awarded “The Distinguished Service Cross for Valor” and said something about “directing

# LETTERS/E-MAILS

Fighters, etc." They pinned it on in the Reception Center on the Boardwalk, and I got sent down to Langley Field for further duty.

That Flimsy was the only paperwork accounting for the medal that I ever got, and it didn't last too long in my warbag traveling around between stations. So here I am, coming up on 90 years of age trying to get my Estate papers together, and can't find evidence that the award is genuine. I think one of my sons has the medal, but I am not sure. Correspondence sent to the Military Records in Kansas City brought news that because of a fire in the warehouse in 1957 that they have no records for me because all papers for the last half of the alphabet were consumed, and I will have to depend on the DD-214 given out by a Medical Board during my separation in December 1945.

I thought if some mention was made in the 385<sup>th</sup> Group or 550<sup>th</sup> Squadron reports, it would help in finding out just what I did that warranted the medal. It might have been a morale thing that a commander might do if he finds his group had lost 10 planes, 25% of his command between ending training, moving to England, and only five missions completed. I have never made a big thing of it. Cerrone would bring it up at the Reunions, but I have found that being a Hero in Peacetime puts one at the Beck and Call of any politician who wants to put on a legitimate front to something being cooked up. Enuff said!!!

Hope you can help! If not, my thanks anyway. All the best.

Art Wiegard (wagon6120@juno.com)

\*\*\*\*\*  
From: billvar@comcast.net  
To: wagon1620@juno.com, (Art Wiegard),  
jayjaymasters@yahoo.com (Vince Masters)  
CC: fxmccawlet@comcast.net (Frank McCawley)  
October 29, 2007

Art,

Your story needs to go to the Hardlife Herald. I have all the records of the 385<sup>th</sup> BG mission No. 5, 26 July '43, but they do not contain the details you want. The mission folder from the National Archives in Maryland has the complete loading lists for all crews, the formation assignments, and a summary report by Capt. McDonald, the Ops Officer. These records confirm your account about who flew with the Composite Group or with the 385<sup>th</sup> Group. Col. Vandevanter flying with the Jaques' crew, led the group. Your plane, Sheley's crew, were in the No. 5 position in the C Flight. Vince Masters was leading this flight.

\*\*\*Vince: What light can you shed on this mission?

According to the mission reports, the 385<sup>th</sup> BG was in the high Group, but lost the Lead Group (Middle Group) in the clouds, then joined the 96<sup>th</sup> and the 100<sup>th</sup> Bomb Groups, and came home with them. In the 385<sup>th</sup> BG formation, Robbins and Shorr were shot down. Fryer, Schley, Noel and Gurgel flew with the 388<sup>th</sup> BG, and were joined by Pettinger who took off late. Gurgel and Noel were shot down. Actually the report says, "Failed to return."

There are some other details, like: Briefing at 0230; Takeoff 0530; 26 aircraft tookoff; 2 planes dropped bombs; bomb load was 10 X 500lbs with 1/100<sup>th</sup> fuse. Other documents that might help you are the Missing Air Crew Reports (MACR). These often give details of the battles. I have copies of MACR's Nos. 189A, B, C and D. But these do not tell of the other aircraft in the formation, just those that were lost.

I understand your reluctance to use politicians, but for the kids and later generation's sake it might be worthwhile. I'd say, "Use 'em!"

I hope you can make the reunion in Savannah, Georgia next year.

Bill

# LETTERS/E-MAILS

October 1943

To: Commander, 385<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group  
Dear Sir:

I am a member of the Women's Land Army and a week or two ago while ploughing in the fields, I watched your planes circling overhead before they went out, and I wrote this poem in the evening when, at last, I saw them return.

It occurred to me today that as they were your planes you might care to have the poem or your pilots might care to see it, so I am sending it with sincere gratitude for all your boys have done to help us.

Good luck, and God speed to each and everyone of them.

Sincerely, Beryl Miles

## "The Return"



Twenty-one went out this morning,  
And the Sun was in my eyes  
As I watched them circle round  
Before they vanished in the skies.

Twenty-one went out this morning,  
And the Sunlight caught their wings  
As they crossed the little thicket  
Where a blackbird always sings.

Like birds into the morning  
They flew I know not where,  
And, small and secret in my heart  
Allday I've held a prayer.

Twenty-one went out this morning,  
Hiding splendid through the sky,  
And still there's no sign of them,  
Though soon the day will die.

Then suddenly, through time and space,  
There's Sunlight on a wing  
And above the beating of my heart,  
I hear an engine sing.

The Sun still goes on shining,  
But my world is grey with fear,  
For twenty-one went out this morning,  
But only seventeen are here!

From Totton J. Anderson's files of Memorabilia



# LETTERS/E-MAILS

From: MGalla9509@aol.com (Marian D. Gallagher)  
To: AEAud@aol.com (Al Audette), fxmccawley@aol.com (Frank McCawley)  
Subject: Death of Michael R. Gallagher  
November 5, 2007

Dear Al and Frank,

It is with heavy heart that I report the death of my husband, Michael, on October 27, 2007. I did write to Leo LaCasse because he and Mike were e-mail buddies. Leo may have reported the news to you.

I did want you and the membership to know how proud my husband was to be affiliated with the 385<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group Association for the many years. He and I talked so much about the reunions and the dear friends we made. Please know that he did die peacefully with grace and dignity even though his illness was serious and debilitating toward the end. And know on his tombstone will be an etching of a B-17E Bomber plane AND his Bonanza A-36. The inscription will be the first and last lines of a poem, "High Flight", written by John Gillespie Magee, Jr. Magee was an Officer Pilot of a Spitfire V in the Air Force WWII, and was killed at the age of nineteen in 1941.

"Oh, I have slipped the surly bonds of earth...  
put out my hand and touched the face of God."

Would you kindly advise our friends in Luxemburg about his death? That meeting was one of the many highlights of his membership with the 385<sup>th</sup>. He was honored to donate his flight jacket and other mementos to their museum. Another thrilling and humble highlight was the dedication of the 385<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Monument at the Air Force Museum in Savannah, Georgia when he was President of the organization.

Regretfully, I ask you to remove his name from the Hardlife Herald mailing list.

Most sincerely yours,  
Marian D. Gallagher

\*\*\*\*\*  
From: wmtodd15718@att.net (William E. Todd)  
To: fxmccawley@aol.com  
Subject: Tom Newton  
October 10, 2007

Thank you so much for publishing our son's article for the Hardlife Herald." {Vol. 24 No. 2, August 2007, Page 10-11} It was due to Tom Newton's influence so we thank him too. Rick enjoyed writing it and I have been pushing him for a candidate in the 2nd generation. Sorry we have missed the last few reunions, but Bill is not well enough to attend.

Our condolences to the family of Art Driscoll. It was at the reunion in Omaha that Art got on the bus to go to the football game and passed us (already seated) and recognized Bill immediately. He was a super guy and kept in touch with us regularly.

Again, thank y'all!

Mary Todd

## LETTERS/E-MAILS

From: super38\_2000@yahoo.com <Matt Bertch>  
To : billvar@comcast.net  
December 2007

After making my first post onto armyairforces.com, I have been told that you have a lot of historical documents on the 385th in Great Ashfield along with a 385<sup>th</sup> history book available for sale with pictures of the "Madam Shoo Shoo". What I am really hoping for is that maybe you have a photo in the book that can be blown up and framed.

My original post (e-mail) to the armyairforces.com was:

"Hello,  
My grandfather was stationed at Great Ashfield with the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force, 385<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group, 551<sup>st</sup> Squadron. He is now 84 years old and living in his hometown of Sidney, Ohio. My son, his great-grandson, was asking him some questions about his duties in WWII. This has sparked interest in my son and me to find out more info if we possibly can.

He flew on a B-17 named "Madam Shoo Shoo". He was a radioman/gunner with his pilot having the last name of Coleman. I will try to post more information as I find out. Any and all information including pictures would be outstanding.

Thanks,  
Matt Bertch  
super38\_2000@yahoo.com"

I received these replies back:

Matt,  
According to Project Bits and Pieces, "Madam Shoo Shoo" was 43-37786 Z attached to the 385<sup>th</sup> BG, 551<sup>st</sup> Squadron. Also known as "Madame Shoo Shoo" and "Mickie II". Arrived overseas 15 June 1944 and made it though the war and was back at Kingman, AZ in Nov. 1945. Does that correspond with the time your grandfather arrived in England? There is a picture in "The Mighty Eighth in Color" by Roger Freeman on page 58. My best to your grandfather and may you have him with you for many more years. He is deserving of our thanks for his contribution to preserving our freedom.  
Vic

and

Matt,  
Contact 385<sup>th</sup> Veteran, Author, Historian Bill Varnedoe. billvar@comcast.net.  
He has 385<sup>th</sup> BG books in stock. Lots of info. There is a photo of "Madame Shoo Shoo" #43-37786 in the Book. Crew position Radio operator/Waist Gunner.  
Mike

# LETTERS/E-MAILS

From: bilvar@comcast.net  
To: super38\_2000@yahoo.com

Matt,

Yes, I can help you.

The book is: *The Story of Van's Valiants, A History of the 385<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group*. Col. Elliott Vandevanter was our Commanding Officer.)

I have copies for \$25, post paid.

Bill Varndoe  
5000 Ketova Way  
Huntsville, AL 35803

The book does have many pictures of the B-17s of the 385<sup>th</sup>, including "Madam Shoo Shoo". It is B & W in the book, however, "Madam Shoo Shoo" was one of the very few to have a color picture made. I attach a copy.

I am a veteran of the 385<sup>th</sup> and am the Historian of the "385<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association", and I, too, am 84 years old. The 385<sup>th</sup> BGA is an organization of veterans of the 385<sup>th</sup> and their kin. We hold reunions and publish a newsletter, the *Hardlife Herald*. ("Hardlife" was the tower radio call at Great Ashfield.) We have many 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation members as well as veterans. You and/or your father would be most welcome as an Associate Member (s) and receive the *Hardlife Herald*, as well as your grandfather, as a 385<sup>th</sup> BGA member. Dues are \$35/year. Send to our Treasurer, Chuck Smith, at P.O. Box 329, Alpharetta, GA 30009.

I hope y'all and your grandfather join us. Our next reunion will be in August 2008, at the Mighty Eighth Air Force Museum in Savannah, GA.

Give me a few days and I will give you some more information about him and the Coleman Crew.  
Bill

From : super38\_2000@yahoo.com  
To: billvar@comcast.net

Bill,

I don't know how to thank you for the time you spent on this. I realize that you probably have this information cataloged and such. I am sure that when my grandfather sees this picture it will make his day. I am looking for a good idea for a Christmas present for him. He loves to read about the war and watch shows on the History Channel. If there is not a college football game on TV, he is more than likely watching documentaries.

I know that he had a brother that was part of an aircrew in a bomber that was shot down over the English Channel. His brother survived, but I have forgotten about the fate of the other crew members. I will definitely get the information from him this week and forward to you so that maybe you could add it to already extensive catalog of information.

Again I thank you for the picture. My dad has an A-2 flight jacket that he would love to have the nose art of the "Madam Shoo Shoo" airbrushed on the back of it.

Well I look forward to hearing from you soon, and looking forward to the information you have on the Coleman crew. Maybe next year my grandfather would like to make it down to the reunion in August. I know that he is still in contact with a widow of one of his fellow crew members that lives in Iowa.

Thanks,  
Matt



# LETTERS/E-MAILS

From: billvar@comcast.net  
To: super38\_2000@yahoo.com

Matt,  
I just noticed that in our correspondence, I do not have your father's name! Who is he?  
Bill

From: super38\_2000@yahoo.com  
To: billvar@comcast.net  
Subj: Hardlife Herald Subscription for my Grandfather  
10 December 2007

Bill,  
Greetings to you and your family and wishing you a Merry Christmas here. A couple of months ago we had e-mailed each other on my grandfather being in the 385<sup>th</sup>. I mentioned about paying for him a subscription to the *Hardlife Herald* as a Christmas present. My grandfather is still in great health, but my grandmother fell and broke her hip, and then the very next day when she got home, we had to take my Dad to the hospital for chest pains. He ended up getting a three way bypass, so much to say we have been practically living at hospitals.

I am going to send out a money order for the \$35.00 for a subscription to the *Hardlife Herald* tomorrow. However, I would like to see if at all possible if we could get at least a prior issue to my address so that my grandfather would be able to open it at Christmas. Then the rest of the issues, I would like to go ahead and have them sent to my grandfather's address.

I understand that I am supposed to send the money order to Treasurer Chuck Smith.  
My address is: Matt Bertsch, 720 Sixth St., Sidney, Ohio 45365.

My grandfather's address is: John F. Bertsch, 2203 Armstrong Drive, Sidney, Ohio 45365  
If you could, would you let Chuck know what is going on and double check all of the info I have written. I have listed my phone number below if you would like to contact me by phone.

Thanks,  
Matt Bertsch  
super38\_2000@yahoo.com  
(937-493-0088)

From: billvar@comcast.net  
To: fxmccawley@aol.com, chucksmith@smithindustrialsales.com, super38\_2000@yahoo.com  
Subj: (Fwd: Hardlife Herald Subscription for my Grandfather)  
December 10, 2007

Matt,  
Frank McCawley is the editor of the *Hardlife Herald*.  
Chuck Smith is the Treasurer. I am forwarding you e-mail to them.

Frank,  
See if you can send him a back issue of the HH.  
Bill

Note: Several back issues were sent to Matt for his grandfather.

# LETTERS/E-MAILS

From: paul.i.welch@bt.com (Paul I. Welch – United Kingdom)  
To: billvar@comcast.net (Bill Varnedoe)  
December 1, 2007

Hi Bill,

Had to go to Cambridge today and on the way back in the late afternoon failing light I took a detour past the entrance to Darsham's Farm, and up the old trackway past the old sites. It was a bit too late to go down to the farm, and I wouldn't have had enough light for a decent photo. But it was quite a moment following what must have been your route to the base. Talk about following in the footsteps of heroes – quite true this afternoon for me.

I had a quick look at the 'ops area' and the only original building there seems to be the operations building itself. Unfortunately there was no one in the building, otherwise I would have asked them if I could have had a look around.

I was wondering if you might have a photo of the main gate?

Finally sent off my subs to Chuck, am looking forward to the Hardlife Herald. Do you know if it is possible to get 'back issues'? Also sent Bill Daysh some money for his CDs and DVDs.

Best wishes

Paul Welch  
UK

From: billvar@comcast.net  
To: fxmccawley@aol.com  
December 1, 2007

Frank

Do you have a back issue or two for Paul? Apparently he is joining up. If you wish, send him an e-mail to request his mailing address.

Bill

From: fxmccawley@aol.com  
To: paul.i.welch@bt.uk  
December 5, 2007

Paul,

Bill Varnedoe requested that I send you some copies of our newsletter, the Hardlife Herald.

Please send me your home address and I will send you some previous issues of the Hardlife Herald newsletters. I do not have the cost of mailing them to the UK, and will not know until the package is weighed and the postage determined by the post office.

I do hope that you join our association. If so you will be on the mailing list to receive every issue. To join, advise our treasurer as he is the keeper of all members and the payment of annual dues. His e-mail is:

chucksmith@smithindustrialsales.com. His postal address is: Chuck Smith, P.O. Box 329, Alpharetta, GA 30009, USA.

Frank McCawley

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# Taps

Michael R. Gallagher -- Chagrin Falls, OH -- Died October 27, 2007. BGA President 1997-1999. (see page 14)

William (Bill) Hoagland -- Franktown, CO -- Died October 14, 2007, age 87. Bill was a pilot in the 550<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron. Services were in Castle Rock, Colorado on October 18, 2007. Internment was at Fort Logan National Cemetery, Denver, Colorado.

by George Salvador

Vincent P. Coleman -- Rockaway Township, DE -- died September 20, 2007 at age 91. A graduate of the University of Scranton, he was employed as a general manager/contract administrator by the Bendix Corporation in Teterboro. As a 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. he flew 35 missions with the 385<sup>th</sup> BG, and received the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal with 3 Oak Leaf Clusters and the Distinguished Service Medal. He was a member of VFW Post 242, the Men's Club at Forest Hills in Rockaway, and a 3rd degree member of the Knights of Columbus Council No. 1954. He is survived by his wife of 55 years, Ruth (Allen) Coleman, one son, three daughters, and eight grandchildren.

Gerald (Jerry) W. Van Loenen -- Almena, Kansas -- died September 9, 2007 at age 88. He flew 35 missions as a tailgunner with the 385<sup>th</sup> BG. Upon his discharge from active duty in October 1945, he was served in the Air Force Reserves until 1951. He graduated with a Political Science B. A. from Fort Hays State College in 1946, and was employed at Kansas-Nebraska Energy as a manager of gas measurement, dispatching, and the gas laboratory until his retirement in January 1985. In addition to flying his small airplane, he was an avid reader of history and playing the harmonica. As an active community member, he was a Sunday school teacher, youth group leader, and sang in the choir at the Presbyterian Church in Phillipsburg. He is survived by his wife, June, daughter Roxie, one brother, two sisters, and several grandchildren.

Richard E. Molzahan -- Hawley, PA -- died September 10, 2007. Services were held September 15 at the First Presbyterian Church in Hawley, and he was interned at Fort Indiantown Gap VA National Cemetery, Annville, PA.

John W. Matthews -- died February 22, 2007.

Pat N. Howard -- Unknown date.

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**DUES DUES DUES DUES DUES DUES DUES**

Dues for the year 2008 were due on December 31, 2007 for those members who's Hardlife Heralds have an address label of "M07" (385<sup>th</sup> BG Veteran Annual Member) or "A07" (Associate Annual Member).  
All Annual Memberships are delinquent after December 31, 2007 and will be purged from the roster and mailing list.

Make your check or money order to: 385<sup>th</sup> BGA

Identify check as: 2008 Dues

Mail your check to:

Chuck Smith  
385<sup>th</sup> BGA Treasurer  
P.O. Box 329  
Alpharetta, GA 30009-0329

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**385<sup>th</sup> BGA**

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

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