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10th Reunion
42d Anniversary
1985
Los Angeles

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"The Mighty Eighth Reunion Group"

385th BOMBARDMENT GROUP MEMORIAL ASSOCIATION

GREAT ASHFIELD — SUFFOLK, ENGLAND

STATION 155

ASSOCIATION OFFICERS**PRESIDENT**

Forrest V. Poore
23253 Westwood St.
Grand Terrace, CA 92324
(714) 825-2465

VICE PRESIDENTS

William A. Nicholls
743 Lake Ave.
Woodbury Heights, N.J.
(609) 845-4378

Mary L. Weikert
6306 Green Leaves Rd.
Indianapolis, IN 46220
(317) 257-3969

SECRETARY

Robert E. Douglas
29512 Hillside St.
Pueblo, CO 81006
(303) 948-3814

TREASURER

John F. Pettenger
Box 117
Laurel, Florida 33545
(813) 488-7569

EDITOR, BGMA NEWSLETTER

Verne Philips
P.O. Drawer 5970
Austin, Texas 78763
(512) 458-1359

**8TH A. F. HISTORICAL SOCIETY
UNIT CONTACT**

Gerry Donnelly
10770 S.W. 46th
Miami, Florida 33165
(305) 221-3592

HONORARY MEMBERS

Gen. James Doolittle
Gen. Curtis E. LeMay
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L/Gen. Ira C. Eaker
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Col. George Y. Jumper
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PAST PRESIDENTS

Ruel G. Weikert
Frank B. Walls
Vincent W. Masters
John C. Ford
James H. Emmons
Paul Schulz

NEWSLETTER

VOL. XI, NO. 4

OCTOBER, 1984

PREZ SEZ

Robert Lojinger and his memorial committee did an excellent job on our Memorial Dedication. Over 103 sent in reservations for Friday night's dinner at the Officers Club at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. However, only 84 people showed up. Bob had to pay for 100 meals, so I'm afraid some owe Bob money. How about it, fellows?? After an excellent meal, our speaker, Mr. Robert E. Baughman, Chief, Public Affairs, Air Force Museum, spoke on the future plans of the museum.

Saturday's activities started at 8:30 when the 385th BGMA were allowed into the Museum 1-1/2 hours earlier than the general public. We were allowed to go through the B-17 that is inside the Museum. In fact, some even showed us how to properly board the forward compartment on the old bird. While others had a hard time making it through the bomb bay racks to the cockpit.

Shortly before 1100 hours we gathered out in the Memorial Park of the Museum. It was a lovely day, and not too hot. After welcoming everyone the Colors were posted. Chaplain Captain David J. Scrimshaw said a few words before the invocation. After which, I said a few words in remembrance of the 385th personnel. Then, acting as the President of the 385th BGMA, I presented the plaque and the tree to the Air Force Museum from the 385th BGMA, and Mr. Robert E. Baughman said a few words in acceptance on behalf of the Air Force Museum.

We picked up some new members at the meeting and I know we can have a real good turn out come next September in Los Angeles, California.

Sincerely



Reunion Reminder --- from Sam Lyke & Al Chealander

A note from Sam Lyke has arrived, saying 17 members have signed up so far for the 10th reunion of the 385th BGMA in Los Angeles on September 11-14, 1985!

To reiterate: The registration fee is a mere \$58/person and includes the Friday night Mexican dinner, the Saturday night dinner dance, the Sunday breakfast on the 15th, and the morning coffee for the ladies' and mens' meetings on Saturday.

Remember also that your registration fees should go to: SAM LYKE, 4992 PRINCETON DRIVE, BARTLESVILLE, OK 74006.

Al Chealander has negotiated for lodging at the Hyatt Hotel at the Los Angeles Airport, and reservation cards will be mailed soon. All rooms will be \$60 plus tax, which is a flat rate for 1, 2, 3, or 4 persons occupying the room. Rooms contain two large queen size beds. The Hyatt furnishes free transportation to and from the Los Angeles International Airport.

DON'T BE LEFT OUT!! MAKE THOSE RESERVATIONS NOW!



A time for thought in the Piper Cub for Mrs. Dee Lavelle.



An emotional moment for Betty Ford and her daughter Mary Randleman.



The ashes of the late John C. Ford are scattered from a Piper Cub over Great Ashfield airfield by daughter Dee Lavelle and pilot Jim Empson.

Dying wish fulfilled over Suffolk airfield

Pictures by Ian Hulland
Report by Jeremy Lamb

THE treasured memories of his wartime years at Great Ashfield, near Bury St. Edmunds, always filled American John C. Ford with pride and nostalgia. And so it was, at the weekend, that his dying wish came true.

After a memorial service in the village church on Saturday, his ashes were taken up in a plane and, as he requested, scattered over the old airfield where he was based during the 1939-45 War.

His 75-year-old widow, Betty, an English woman whom he met at that time, stood on the old runway to watch the ceremony, and, her voice full of emotion, said, "To him, this place was home and now he has come back." The morning also included a fly-past tribute to Mr. Ford by one of his friends, piloting a 1939-45 War Harvard.

Buried

Another friend, flying a Piper Cub, emptied the urn over the airfield from the window of his plane, and afterwards Mr. Ford's youngest daughter, Mary Randleman, threw poppies along the runway.

The urn was buried at the airfield.

Mr. Ford's youngest daughter, Mary Randleman, who flew over from the USA for the



Betty Ford waves farewell as the Piper Cub flies away after scattering her husband's ashes.



The late John C. Ford.

occasion along with her mother and sister, Mrs. Dee Lavelle, said, "Great Ashfield meant so much to my father, who was based here for the whole of the war."

"My mother was an ambulance driver in London during the Blitz, and that was when my father met her.

"He had talked about this wish for at least the last five years," added Mrs. Randleman.

Mrs. Lavelle said, "My mother always said that my father's life started here. It is an occasion which means so much to us all."

During the war Mr. Ford was a ground crew

chief with the 385th Bombardment Group, based at Great Ashfield, and part of the 8th Air Force. He lived at Camp Springs, Maryland, USA, and died, at the age of 72, in hospital in June this year.

Saturday's ceremony was organised by Mr. Ian McLachlan, of Newton Flotman, near Norwich, an aviation historian.

"I knew Mr. Ford since the early 1970s and became a friend of his and his family."

About 50 people, including about a dozen relatives and representatives of the Friends of the Eighth Air Force attended the memorial service at All Saints

Church, Great Ashfield, which was conducted by the Rev. George Pattison.

After the service, Mr. Ford's widow and daughters were driven to the airfield in a 1939-45 War U.S. Jeep, followed by members of the congregation in cars.

Ipswich man Mr. Eddie Edwards, a friend of Mr. Ford's, a flew over the airfield in a North American Harvard, which was used as a fighter trainer during the war.

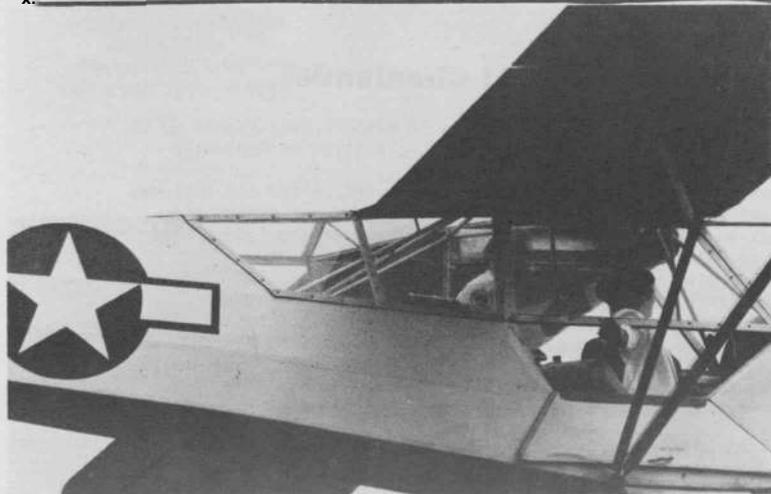
Then Mr. Jim Empson, also a friend of Mr. Ford's and from Ipswich, took Mrs. Lavelle up in his Piper Cub.

As they passed over the main runway, Mr. Empson emptied the urn from his window. As the ashes flew from the plane the emotion of the occasion took over and some of the relatives and friends quietly cried.

Afterwards Mrs. Mary Randleman threw poppies from the plane.

Mr. Ford's widow, Betty, said, "I cannot put my feelings into words. This is what he wanted so much, and it's just so marvellous that it has happened that way."

As the cars drew away there were several last looks back and many thoughtful smiles. John C. Ford's friends and relatives had done him proud, and he had, indeed, come home.



JIM EMPSON PILOTS JOHN'S VAUGHTER, MARY, AS SHE PREPARES TO RELEASE POPPY PETALS IN A TRADITIONAL TRIBUTE. JIM WOULD NOT TAKE A CENT FOR HIS FUEL, AND REGARDED IT AS HIS OWN GESTURE TO A WELL LOYEV MAN.

REMEMBERING JOHN FORD

I first met John Ford at the Atlanta, Georgia reunion. Doris and I had learned of the existence of the 385th BGMA through a fellow Air Force reservist - John Kavaljunas.

The conversations between John and myself were limited at this reunion; however, we formed a friendship which continued with many phone calls between subsequent meetings.

As I sat thinking about John and his effect on my association with the 385th, I found the May, 1980 copy of our newsletter.

I've included a photocopy of the article entitled, "It's Just Like That."

To me it says everything - his humor, his courage, his faith, and his love for all.

This is the John Ford I remember.

Bill Nicholls

(Ed. Notz: *Here's the heatit of£ that atitctie:)*

"I believe that life and death are a matter of faith. I believe in the Resurrection and life after death. I have lived life every day as best I could, accepting illness, sorrows and joys as the honing agent for a better life on earth. I am fortunate in both family and friends. We love and accept each other for what we are and not what others would like us to be. And now I have doctors in whom I have faith - one whose hands possess a God-givdn and trained skill to remove and replace, and another with the same skill and training to alleviate and treat pain, even when a cure is not within her grasp. I guess I am a kooky humorist with a lovely tumorist!

Only one thing puzzles me! Over the years I have fantasized that someday I would be a Lothario and women would fall into my arms. How come I have now fallen into their hands?

Believe me, I wouldn't haiee it any other way!"

The news of John Ford's passing wasn't exactly a surprise, but we wehe much saddened to hear it.

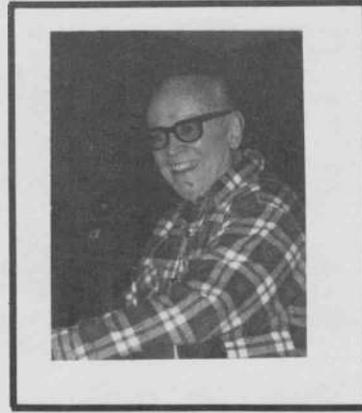
John was one Of those special persons that one meets once in a great while. He was especially unique in that he took great joy in helping others. The 385th Association was very important to him, and he spent many, many hours in research, correspondence, and in editing the paper. I don't know how he found the energy and time to do all that he did for us.

He is most fondly remembered by all of us and is sadly mi ssed.

James H. Emmons

Sorry to hear about John Ford, of the 550th. I was in his outfit and knew him well. He was a hard worker on the B-17s. Sometimes I wondered if he EVER slept, he was always on the go.

Walter Gazda



During the 1950's and 1960's Frank Walls, Ruel Weikert, Rudy Cunat, Jim Cooper and the other members of the Cleveland Connection started and kept the 385th BGMA going. They put in a lot of time and effort to keep the Association alive. Along came John Ford during the 1970's. John started at once carrying the work load so the early workers could take a well deserved rest. He expanded and kept our roster up to date, edited and started our present newsletter format and did all the leg work and organized our trips to England during 1976 and 1980. John also spent many hours searching the national archives for records of our group. All the days and energy spent to further the cause of our memorial requires an exceptional man dedicated to the good of his fellow man.

It is hard to decide whether John's heart, or the shoes he left us to fill are larger.

Rememberi ng,
John F. Pettenger

What a send-off! While his attractive daughters scattered his ashes and poppies from a Veteran Cub over the site of Gt. Ashfield airfield, his friends sipped champagne and quietly toasted his memory. John would have been delighted with the way his request for the disposal of his earthly remains was honoured. No wake, no pious words; he wanted to leave in the same bright, bubbly way he had gone through life.

I don't remember when or where, but I first got to know John Ford in an airport. He just appeared beside me; put me straight on a few problems; waved me a cheery goodbye, and was gone. Thereafter, he was always popping up in the most unexpected places, always chirpy, always the optimist. One couldn't help liking him. His pride in his old outfit and nostalgia for the Great Ashfield days were paramount in his furthering of the 385th BGMA at every opportunity. He devoted the same care and attention to the Association as he did to the B-17's he crewed at Great Ashfield.

John Ford may have been just "one of the guys on the line" in the ranking of 8th Air Force personnel, but I'm certain not one other of those near half million men ever had such a grand exit from this life. I shall never be able to pass Great Ashfield again without thinking of him.

Roger Freeman
May's Barn, Dedham, Colchester,
Essex, England

continued...

FORD (continued)

John's death was indeed a bitter pill to swallow. I knew John had been ill for many years, but it still is hard to accept the finality of death and the loss of a very dear old friend. John has touched my life, yours, and all the lives of the 385th BGMA members, and I know in my own heart that he shall not be forgotten.

John was exceptionally knowledgeable on all systems of the B-17 aircraft which gave him the technical knowledge to handle the duties of line chief. However, what impresses me more was his warmth and friendliness in working with people at all levels of command. His ability to work with the young people made him invaluable, as all of his crew chiefs were not too many years out of high school at the time. He had the gift to inspire people.

I can recall one incident about John, and I still chuckle about it. One evening I had decided to go into town and view the local movie and I asked Tommy Thompson to join me if he could. There was no mission scheduled so the idea seemed to be a very good way to pass a pleasant evening. I had a command car at my disposal for that evening, and if you can recall, it was a rather large and clumsy vehicle to drive. No windows of course, just the side curtains. Since it was late in the year it was quite dark when we left the base for town. It was quite misty at the time and the combination of darkness and the mist made driving rather difficult. Also, please remember we had to drive with blacked out headlights. Anyway, we turned out of the gate onto the road into town and went no farther than about 100 yards when Tommy Thompson went off the road into a ditch. Well, we were sitting in the ditch at about a 45 degree angle, and no way could we drive out. I stayed with the car and Tommy walked back to the gate house and called the engineering office and Sgt. Ford answered. His response was that he would be there shortly, and within ten minutes John came driving down the road in a heavy tractor which we used to tow our aircraft. He came up to the car and said, "Sir, just hold the wheel straight and I will tow you out in no time at all." He hitched the chain to the rear of the car and we were out of the ditch quickly and with no other problems. After John had taken the chain off the car and back on the tractor, he came up to the car, lifted the side curtain and poked his head inside, and as usual, had a big grin on his face. He then said, "Sir, a good driver would be able to stay on the road." He ducked out and I could hear him chuckling as he left. I never did tell John that I was not driving. A small incident, but one which brings out his warmth and sense of humor under other than normal conditions.

There was another incident when we were preparing for a mission. I was sitting in the aircraft going over a few final items and momentarily looked out the cockpit window and saw a red flare go off in the cockpit of an aircraft several hardstands away. I seemed to be hypnotized by the glare for it began to burn brighter with each passing moment. I climbed from the cockpit and out of the aircraft and I was standing by the aircraft watching the fire spread. Soon the 50 caliber shells began exploding and I was ready to run for cover. Tommy Thompson was there and said that the shells were exploding harmlessly and would not do any damage. About that time a couple of those harmless shells came over our heads and I beat a hasty retreat behind the engineering quonset hut. I looked out to see if Tommy was still standing there but I did not see him so I felt he must have also sought safety somewhere, and under the circumstances this seemed to be the better part of valor. Anyway, a few minutes later Sgt. Ford came around the building and said, "Sir, I don't think its very safe here." My reply was "It's safer here than sitting in that airplane." Besides, I was not about to leave the somewhat dubious safety of that quonset hut and make a dash across open field to a bunker. Just about then the bomb load exploded and debris came flying over our heads in various shapes and form. To cap it all off there was suddenly a tremendous "thud" and a B-17 engine buried itself about 10 yards in front of us. John looked at me grinning and said, "Sir, I told you it was not very safe here." He left chuckling and commenting that he had to get to work and see how much damage we had sustained. Here again, an unusual incident, but one which he faced with a grin and humor and making life bearable for those around him.

LTC Wm. M. Tesla and CMSgt. John C. Ford, South Ruislip, England, 1960



Another incident occurred during the cold grey dawn of a typical English day. At the time I had just left operations and was enroute to the Squadron Engineering Shop. I heard an aircraft approaching with the unmistakable diesel exhaust sound and looking up saw the aircraft pass overhead and the big black crosses identifying the aircraft positively. He was less than a thousand feet in altitude and since he was passing harmlessly over the field there was no cause for alarm. However, the aircraft no sooner reached the other side of the field when the pilot did a tight 180 degree turn and came on back toward us and started to unload his bomb load. I think he dropped only a half dozen bombs, missing the runways and hardstands but hitting our maintenance aircraft hanger. It set off a fire in the hangar, destroying one of our B-17 aircraft and damaging others, and, of course, severe damage to the hangar itself. The firefighters did an exceptionally fine job of putting out the fire, and after the excitement had somewhat dwindled, I went on to our engineering quonset hut to check on any damage that our aircraft may have sustained. Sgt. Ford was there at his desk reviewing some supply forms, and he did not look too pleased. I asked him if we had serious damage and he reported that we had none, but he was pretty mad at those son-of-a-guns who blew up our hangar queen B-17 as he had his eye on her for some spare parts, and now he had to look elsewhere. He started grinning then and said "I'll find them." Here again, another unusual incident and John Ford still could grin and bear it.

One of John's characteristics which made him so likable was his infectious grin, and regardless of the pressures of the moment John would have this warm friendly grin on his face. John enjoyed his work, and I believe this, in turn, had a positive effect on all the crew chiefs and crew men that worked for him. Because of John's outstanding attributes as Line Chief the 550th Bomb Squadron was able to meet every commitment for aircraft that the Group assigned the squadron. Our aircraft abort rate was low and on the few occasions when an aircraft did abort John Ford and the Crew Chief were there to meet it at the hardstand, and no time was lost in ferreting out the problem. It was always this quick response to seek out answers to problems, his devotion, pride, and love for his work that kept our aircraft flying and this is why we were able to handle our share of assigned missions and workload.

I am forever grateful to John for his support during those trying times. I am forever grateful for his friendly mannerisms and human understanding, and I am forever grateful that he has touched my life the way he has. John Ford was indeed a great man and he will not be forgotten.

Bill Tesla

FORD...

The 385th has been a special Group to me for many years and John Ford a very special person within that group. From our original, research orientated correspondence there developed a cherished friendship which permeated both families and created a bond which I am sure will continue with my children and his grandchildren.

My interest in the 385th began twenty years ago when I began investigating the loss of Hutchison and Pease on 21.2.44. In the early 70's I contacted John and he provided invaluable aid through his contacts within the 385th and from his own archives. When FOTE was formed, I happily took on the role of link man for the 385th and got involved in the famous 1976 reunion at Great Ashfield. John was instrumental in arranging what is still regarded by many here as the best visit of any former Eighth Air Force Group. The 385th returned to Great Ashfield, renewed old friendships, made new ones and gave and received many happy memories.

For me, one of the highlights of that trip was to ride in a jeep with John to where the 550th hardstands had been and listen while he recalled the Fortresses that once sat proudly in their dispersal areas: SLO JO, RAUNCHY WOLF, SLEEPYTIME GAL and so on. The pride he felt for them and the men who flew them was strong in his voice and the hours and energy he so unstintingly gave to the 385th BGMA was his gesture to the Group.

To those of us seeking to preserve the artifacts and achievements of the 385th, John became a key figure and, thanks to his efforts, a lot of material that might otherwise have vanished will be available for succeeding generations. The historian in me will miss him as a source of information but John and I had gone way beyond that: my family loved that old man with the cheeky grin.

Ian McLachlan, England



I didn't know John Ford very well during World War II, but in the early seventies I started working closely with John and I have never known a finer or more well informed man. He was a hard worker for the 385th BGMA and created great interest when he became Secretary, Editor and later President of the 385th BGMA.

John started the newsletter in 1975. I am sure that all the members eagerly awaited the next newsletter. John possessed great knowledge of the 385th Bomb Group and its history, and along with his many friends who submitted articles, it made the newsletter most interesting.

John was the type of individual you could depend on to do a job when it had to be done. For instance, the wonderful way he organized our first reunion trip to the airbase at Great Ashfield, England. He also continued to donate his time until he became ill.

John Ford will be greatly missed by all individuals connected with the 385th BGMA.

Ruel G. Weikert

John Ford, Judy McLaohtan, Be-tty Ford



During my years in the Air Force I was unable to attend a 385th Reunion because of location or my inability to schedule leave at the proper time. My first reunion was Atlanta in 1975. It was really wonderful to renew old friendships after almost 30 years. During that reunion, I was impressed by a man who seemed to be constantly taking pictures and when not taking pictures, he was taking part in discussions or was suggesting ways to accomplish various tasks. I was impressed with his energy and singleness of purpose. Nobody was a stranger to him and I assumed that he had been to many reunions. To my amazement, I learned that this was also his first reunion. John C. Ford was his name, a retired USAF Chief Master Sergeant. Wherever you turned John Ford was there, helping.

During the business meeting, it was suggested that the organization visit England and Great Ashfield in particular during the bicentennial year, 1976. At this meeting, John Ford was elected Secretary. One of his first tasks was the publication of a formal newsletter. He was instrumental in organizing our group into a recognized non-profit organization. He personally compiled all the necessary paperwork and submitted all the supporting documents to the IRS to substantiate our claim of a non-profit group.

During this same period he was also busily engaged as our travel coordinator, arranging our tour to England and the magnificent reception by the FOTE. He made many friends on that trip. John Ford was elected President at the 1977 reunion in Las Vegas. In 1981, at the Ft. Walton Beach reunion, John submitted my name in nomination for President. During the period of 1975-81, John continued as Editor of the newsletter and also was engaged almost full time in research at the National Archives, mostly on 385th Bomb Group history.

John Ford was a man who could not say no. He was always willing to help someone who had a problem or needed an answer. The last example of his desire to help was his research into the circumstances of the loss of Mrs. Barbara Varga's father, S/Sgt. Ned H. Mertz, on October 6, 1944.

John C. Ford was a great leader, a stalwart friend who will be missed by all who knew him.

John, may you rest in peace on your beloved Great Ashfield.

Paul R. Schulz Past

President

□ □***□*

.... In the years that I knew John, from when we first worked together to bring over the 1975 trip and right up to his last private visit here, we looked upon him as a friend and a gentleman. His passing is a loss we will all feel, but perhaps we should be thankful that at least we had the good fortune to know him, and I'm certain that our lives are enriched somewhat because of this.

He will certainly be missed by many, but at least through the BGRA we will remember him for a long time to come -- and we'll miss him, too.

David J. Wade, England

Continued on page 13

U.S. bomb group revisits East Anglian base



Mr. Don Cook of Great Ashfield holding a photo of himself taken by an American serviceman during the war, Mr. Cook wondered whether any of Sunday's visitors remembered taking the picture.



John Pettenger (left) who was shot down over Munster after taking off from Great Ashfield on October 10, 1943, chats with local resident Clint Gansdale who is interested in the history of the airfield.

MEMORIES came flooding back for members of 385th Bombardment Group Memorial Association at Great Ashfield on Sunday.

About 30 ex-servicemen P.ew from America on Thursday for a third visit to Great Ashfield where they were based 40 years ago.

Sunday began with a memorial service in All Saints Church conducted by the Rev. George Pattison, Rector of Great Ashfield, after which guests were entertained to lunch.

In the afternoon they

revisited the former airfield in the village where local members of the Friends of the Eighth laid on rides in restored Jeeps and other American service vehicles.

The highlight of the afternoon was a fly past by the only remaining airworthy B-17 bomber Sally-B which flew over the airfield several times.

Yesterday the travelling party were visiting the American War Cemetery in Madingley near Cambridge.

GREAT ASHFIELD
SUFFOLK, ENGLAND
STATION 155

John Ellis

September '84

ENGLISH GREET THE YANKS AGAIN

A Memorial Reunion at Great Ashfield

We in Great Ashfield were very happy that the group visit on September 16th finally 'made it'. Much of the arranging fell upon us at Great Ashfield and in cooperation with Mrs. Angela Miles we were finally able to organize a program which made everybody happy, the visitors and local people (who always look forward to these visits) as well.

Long before the service was due to start, groups gathered in the church yard and local people greeted friends old and new. The Rector, the Rev. George Pattison, arranged a beautiful service which gave a special meaning to the visit, particularly to those of you who were on the Station at Great Ashfield in the wartime. After the service Vince Masters caught me on the hop and announced that John Ellis would say a few words about the history of the Memorial in the Church, which I managed to do.

The members of the group then joined with the hosts we had arranged for them, and all departed their different ways for lunch.

We arranged to gather together again on the airfield about 3:30 p.m. where the Friends of the Eighth had brought their old jeeps and other wartime vehicles and there was great enthusiasm for rides (very rough) round the old runways and concrete dispersal areas, the enthusiasm was noticed, just as in the wartime, by the younger generation, and many of the passengers were like those whose wartime cry was "Any gum, chum?"

Not many of the visitors, when leaving home, had anticipated seeing once again a B-17 in flight, but we were honoured by a fly-past by the last remaining operational B-17 which, on its way from Lakenheath to Bentwaters, was diverted by the good offices of a local friend, Stan Hodgkins, who knew the pilot and arranged for the diversion. It was a dull and gloomy afternoon, and, accompanied by the once familiar roar of engines a dim shape appeared in the mist, the giant plane circled over the old runways a dozen times before disappearing once again in the clouds.

A tea party was arranged in one of the buildings when local people and visitors were able to enjoy each others' company before the coach took the reluctant tourists on their way.

Since then other 385th members have visited us: Sam Lyke, with Mary, and friends Reg and Pat Hammond from

Ipswich were with us for tea yesterday, and today George Hruska with his wife and sister-in-law called briefly with their friends, Mr. and Mrs. Hunt from Wetherden.

We have had several inquiries for accommodations in the area, and while it is impossible to find bed and breakfast in Great Ashfield, several members have stayed at the Dunston Guest House, 8 Springfield Road, Bury St. Edmunds, about 10 miles from Great Ashfield, others have stayed at the Verandah Guest House, Ipswich Road, Stowmarket, and the Cedars, Stowmarket.

September '84

A SEVENTEEN FLIES BY AGAIN

A Memorial Reunion at Great Ashfield

Swooping low as she buzzed the main runway of Great Ashfield, the Flying Fort Sally B gracefully made a climbing turn for yet another pass at the field.

The exhibition of flying skill of a beautiful ship was most likely the highlight of the 1984 Reunion of the 385th Bombardment Group Memorial Association. As a tribute to the members and friends — and the courage of departed comrades — the fly-by was arranged by F.O.T.E. member Stan Hodgkins.

Standing on the runway at Great Ashfield as the B-17 came in low for yet another pass, the ideals and urgency of 1944 shivered through our hearts. Returning to the East Anglia countryside, joining hearts and hands with the spirited English people, we felt at home.

Many special events were enjoyed throughout the tour. As a special feature, Steve Gotts of the Friends of the Eighth presented a slide and movie evening honoring the Eighth Air Force. Curator Mick Tipple and Ken Arnold came along for the evening and invited us to visit the Parham Museum. To see the movie and hear the sounds of those engines starting up, as Steve brought back many memories, was exciting. To stand on top of the control tower at Parham — memories flooding back — was thrilling.

Our good friend Iar. McLachlan, F.O.T.L. liaison to the 385th, had many surprises in store for us. Our friend

Continued on page 14

August '84

A. F. MUSEUM CEREMONIES LED BY POORE

Planned by Lojinger and Committee.

The memorial plaque and tree for the fallen of the 385th were dedicated at the Air Force Museum, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio on August 24-25, 1984. Friday night 385th visitors heard R. E. Baughman, Museum Chief of Public Affairs. Saturday morning at eleven o'clock the memorial was dedicated.

The invocation was given by Air Force Chaplain (Captain) David C. Scrimshaw, Forrest V. Poore, 385th BGMA President, presented the memorials to the Museum. Mr. Baughman accepted the plaque and the tree on behalf of the Museum.

Forrest reports that Ernest Casner, of Cheyenne, Wyoming just happened to be visiting the Museum on Saturday and saw one of our members with his cap with the square "G," and so he asked him if he, too, was in the 385th. He was welcomed into the group's activities.

In addition to Casner, others present not on our membership roll were the following:

Mr. and Mrs. Vincent L. Bowman, 79 Burdsall Ave., Ft. Mitchell, KY. 41017 (548th)
Mr. and Mrs. Everett Hay, Rt. #1, Hanover, IN 47243
Mr. & Mrs. Sherman Emmons, 13959 U.H. Hwy. 6, Plymouth, IN 46563
Mr. & Mrs. James H. Sarles, RR#2, Box 301, New Albany, IN 47150
Mr. & Mrs. Ernest Casner, Jr., 807 W. 25th St., Cheyenne, WY 82001
Mr. Jonathan R. Auterhoff, Hargrave Military Academy, Chatham, VA 23451



Accepting the 385th memorial to R.E. Baughman, Chief of Public Affairs, at the Air Force Museum. Behind him is Forrest V. Poore, 385th BGMA President. Photo: Bob Lojinger

From our membership present at the dedication activities were the following:

Robert E. Andrews	Mr. & Mrs. Charles J. DuShane
George J. Behl	Mr. & Mrs. Carl R. Eyman
Mr. & Mrs. Emerson Branson	Mr. & Mrs. Harold Fiscus
Mr. & Mrs. Charles Cavan	Mr. & Mrs. Melvyn Fenton
Mr. & Mrs. Earl L. Cole	Raymond A. Flora
Mr. & Mrs. Sidney E. Colthorpe	Norman W. Gaul
Mr. & Mrs. R. Wayne Detwiler	M/M Robert W. Hake
Dr. & Mrs. Wm. E. Dickison	M/M Donald P. Hale
M/M Harold Heithercote	M/M J. Richard Jones
M/M Thomas Kavanagh	Harry Kleest
M/M F.D. Leatherman	M/M Dale G. Leggett
M/M Robert I. Lojinger	M/M Reid H. Lowe
Clovis M. McWilliams	M/M Richard M. Miller
M/M Wm. W. Moebius	Wm. A. Nicholls
M/M John D. Noble	M/M Frank K. Osborne
M/M John F. Pettenger	M/M John Pofelski
M/M Forrest V. Poore	M/M Charles T. VanVactor
M/M Robert R. Weikert	M/M Ruel G. Weikert
M/M Norman C. Wiche	M/M Glen P. Weisgarber
M/M Robert L. Wright	

Many thanks are due the 385th Museum Memorial Committee, Thomas Arthur, Columbus, Raymond A. Flora, Dayton, Gerald L. Miller, Akron, and Chairman, Robert I. Lojinger, Cincinnati. Bob's anxiety index rose steeply during the preparation for the dedication, but to quote Forrest Poore: "Robert Lojinger and his memorial committee did an excellent job on our Memorial Dedication."

Those of us who did not make it to the dedication will want to stop by when we can for our time to remember those who did not return.



Invocation. Forrest V. Poore, 385th BGMA President, and Chaplain (Capt.) David C. Scrimshaw by the 385th BGMA plaque and tree, at the Air Force Museum. Photo: Paul Cole

Ex-POW remembers Buchenwald

By MARV JANE CLEMMER
Benton County Democrat, A-tfe.

BELLA VISTA - A resident here and former Chairman of the Property Owners Association Board of Directors, Bill Powell, will be among the 10,000 persons attending the annual ex-prisoner of war convention July 20 in Cleveland, Ohio.

But Powell's prisoner of war experience differs considerably from those of his colleagues.

He was one of about 80 Americans in WW II who were imprisoned in Buchenwald (German Concentration Camp - a prison primarily for political prisoners and dissenters from the Nazi regime.

"I don't know to this day that the U. S. government ever knew we were in Buchenwald," Powell said. "We were listed as missing in action - there's no evidence on my military records to reflect that I was there."

The B-17 bomber on which Powell was a navigator was shot down over the Belgium border on January 29, 1944 while on a bombing raid to Frankfurt, Germany. Powell and three others bailed out and landed near each other in the woods outside Lobbes, Belgium.

"The Germans saw us come down and strafed the woods," he said. Two of the crew members were injured in the parachute jump and one was stranded in a tree.

Belgium peasants heard the strafing and later came into the area ostensibly to cut wood.

"I'd had three years of French and was able to ask them for help," Powell related. "They were wonderful." The Belgians got medical treatment for those who were injured and supplied clothing and ID's for the others.

"They had trouble finding pants to fit me," Powell laughed. He is 6'3". His ID showed that he was a Belgium newspaper editor.

From January 1944 until August of that year, Powell and his crewmen trekked across Belgium contacting the underground in an effort to get out. "We walked the 90 miles from Lobbes to Brussels looking for a way out and later walked the 90 miles back," he said.

The crewmen were finally turned over to the French underground and taken to Paris with the idea that they would then go to Spain and on to England. But the Germans had broken the underground network in Paris, unbeknown to the four Americans.

"One night we were picked up by a man in civilian clothes we thought was a member of the French underground. We sped through the streets of Paris and turned into an estate with a large gate. Once inside the driver got out of the car, pulled out a gun and said, "German Gestapo, you're now in Friends' Prison."

From there the crewmen were taken by train to Buchenwald, a town filled with ammunition and weapons factories, as well as the dreaded concentration camp.

"We thought we would be taken off the train at Frankfurt where the Germans had a prisoner of war interrogation center."

But instead they found themselves inside the barbed wire confines of Buchenwald.

During the first six weeks there, Powell went from 185 pounds to 119. "We were fed once a day with soup made from barley and water and were given a little bread with it."

The crew were part of a contingent of Americans and about 50 Canadians who ended up in Buchenwald - the reason is still not known, Powell said. "Although I think the Germans may have had some idea of using us as a trade."

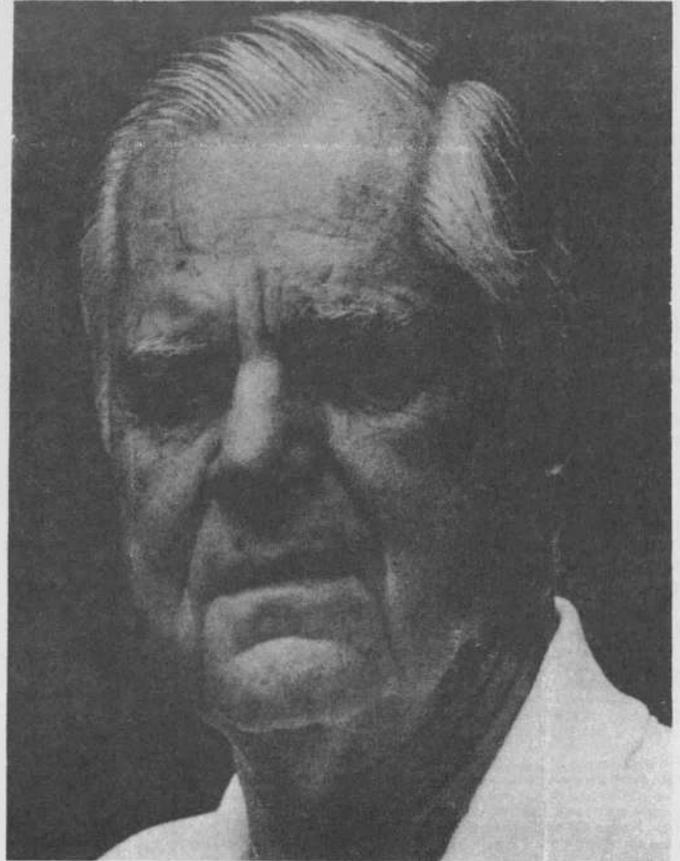
"No one even thought of escaping. There were 80,000 political prisoners in Buchenwald with only 120 SS (German Storm Troopers) to guard them. They were well organized and armed."

"Our favorite pastimes were either talking about food, or seeing who could catch the most bedbugs in a short time."

Although the Americans and Canadians were not tortured, Powell said the constant fear and degrading life was emotional and physically debilitating.

"We slept on the ground and had one blanket for five guys. It was sort of like a bobsled team - the guys in the middle were all right but the ones on the end got pretty cold."

"We kept our sanity by focusing on the future. We had secret church services, something forbidden by the Gestapo, and every now and then we would play cards using cigarette packages."



Bill Powell remembers pow days

Several times a week, Powell said he saw the much feared Ilse Koch, known as the "Bitch of Buchenwald" because of her inhumane torture and alleged hobby of making lamp shades out of human skin.

"She was pretty, but you didn't dare look her in the eye or you would be machine gunned right there."

"The Russian soldiers had an eagle tattooed on their chests and she would take it off and make lampshades out of it," Powell said.

While in the prison camp, Powell found his Brussels contact in the underground who had been captured too. "Both of his legs had been amputated. The Germans had infected them with typhus lice in one of their many experiments," Powell said.

The Americans and Canadians were aware, he said, of the two large crematoriums in Buchenwald and the showers in which thousands of Jews and political prisoners were gassed or electricuted, depending on the design of the shower.

"The showers had a floor that tilted and when the prisoners were gassed the floor dumped the bodies into an underground conveyor that took them to the crematorium," he said.

"It's funny that I can talk about these things forty years later. I couldn't talk about them right after the war."

The Americans and Canadians remained in Buchenwald from August to November, 1944 and one day they were removed, without explanation, to Stalag Luft III, the German POW camp for airmen.

"We were there until January 1945 and then we were marched 100 miles to another town and put into box cars for Nuremberg where we stayed until April 1945. The war was over then and the Germans knew they were finished."

We wound up in a POW camp in Munich with 87,000 allied prisoners.

The camp was liberated when General George S. Patton came through, Powell said.

Continued on page 14

Former POW joins rescuers in reunion

By MaUtoU Bach, (1/ee.Uy VUta, [Be.Ua](#) VUta, Mu. **

BELLA VISTA - The past 40 years vanished into thin air May 17 when former Prisoner of War Bill Powell walked into the Lobbes, Belgium Town Hall where 50 people were waiting to welcome him back.

Most of those in the hall were World War II resistance fighters who hid Powell from the Germans for seven months during 1944.

"You can't imagine what it was like," he said recently. Powell is a former director and chairman of the Property Owners Association Board, and a former chairman of the Finance Committee. He and his wife, Yvonne, moved to the village from Council Bluffs, Iowa.

"There was the American flag flying in the center of all the Belgium flags - there was so much nostalgia, so much emotion - and the tears flowed."

Powell said his original idea was to return to Lobbes and to personally thank the many people who had "put their lives on the line" to hide him and members of his crew from the Germans.

"They are the real heroes and I wanted them to know how I felt - but instead, they turned the reception around and made me the hero," he said.

Powell emphasized that the people of Lobbes, and may others like them, had made great personal sacrifice and had taken enormous chances with their own lives to protect and hide the Americans.

"Even today, despite what you read or hear on TV, the people we talked to on the streets and in the country expressed admiration and respect for Americans and for the government. They were not opposed to the defensive missiles we have put over there."



Bill Powell

RECALLING OLD TIMES

Above Bella Vista Bill Powell, right, enjoyed a visit recently with the Belgian man who rescued him from the Germans in 1944, when they reunited this year. Right, Powell shows off the silver medallion given to him by the mayor of Lobbes, Belgium.

the audience, "If it had not been for the Americans, you would be speaking either German or Russian now."

In 1944, Powell, a navigator on a B-17 bomber, was shot down near Lobbes. He and three crewmen hid in the woods from the Germans. Several hours later they were found by a resistance member - who was at the door of the Town Hall to greet Powell and his wife, Yvonne, when they arrived last month.

After Powell and his crewmen had been found by the resistance member, they were hidden out by several different families in the area of Lobbes. With the exception of one man, the head of the resistance, Powell said he saw all of his old friends - "and caught hell from one of the wives for not being a better correspondent."

The head of the resistance had been ill and could not attend, but the Powells went to his house for a very memorable and emotional reunion.

One particularly moving event had Powell in tears. While being hidden from the Germans, Powell taught English to Lucien Dumont, who was 15 at the time. The boy was fascinated with planes and "somehow, I don't remember how I did it, but I got a model plane kit for him of a B-17. I helped him assemble it and we painted the name of my plane, 'The Hustlin' Hussy,' on the side." Lucien is now 55 years old. "When I walked back in his house after 40 years, the plane was sitting in the middle of his dining room table."

The Powells were hugged and kissed and wined and dined in the best tradition of Belgium hospitality. "I was just amazed at the time and effort that went into this (reception)," he said.

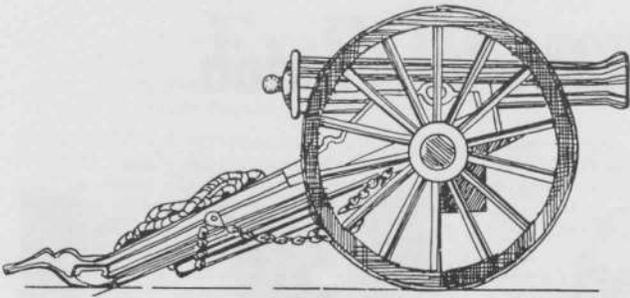
"Americans did not suffer the way these people did in World War II. It is hard for people here to understand what the resistance forces did for us and what chances they took for their own and their families' lives."

"They are so modest and still feel our role was more important than theirs. Powell's experience as a prisoner of war was different than most POWs. Through a fluke, he was captured by the Gestapo, after leaving Lobbes, and was taken to Buchenwald Prison, a prison used to torture Jews and political prisoners of the Third Reich. Powell says to this day the United States never knew the Americans and Canadians were in Buchenwald. "We were missing in action."

Continued on page 13



The Belgium interpreter who attended the reception and luncheon in Powell's honor told



12TH AIR FORCE MEMORIAE ASSOCIATION???

Would anyone know if there is a 12th Air Force Memorial Association? In addition to my 8th Air Force missions with the 385th/549th... I also flew 61 combat missions in the 12th as an armorer/tail gunner. I was based at Ghisonaccia, Corsica, and Fano (on the Adriatic), Italy.

The Colorado Springs reunion of 1983 brought me back into contact with Bruce Ey and Arthur "Whitey" Wallace whom I had flown with on the wonderful Lt. Hyman Kaplan crew. Bruce Ey saw my name as one attending and through him I was able to contact "Whitey."

Yours truly,
Ed Conrow

EOSS OF VIRGINIA. BENESH

The news of the death of Virginia Benesh hasn't as yet come out in our newsletter, so I'm writing to notify you of this fact, as I'm sure there are some who may not know. We met the Beneshes at the National in St. Paul and became real good friends.

On January 19, 1984, Marvin and Virginia were in a head on auto accident, Virginia and another lady lost their lives at that time. Marvin has been in the hospital ever since. Right now his address is Marvin Benesh, Rm. 309, Bethesda Care Center, Grandview Drive, Tolado, Ia. 52342, or, R. R. Chelsea, Iowa 52215.

I'm sure he would love to hear from anyone. Every other year there is a mini-reunion held. This year it is July 20-22, 1984. The Beneshes had planned to be hosts, but due to circumstances plans are on hold until notified.

Harlan and Jean Aronson

(Ed. note: *Thu, uica Aeceived Apntt 24, 19S4, and w<zi oveAEoofeed Zn eoAZZeA newaZeZZeA.*)

SOUSE FAMILY - WAT'S YOUR STORY?

Ian McLachlan, a 385th link man for Friends of the Eighth in the U.K. is seeking some details for his historical files concerning the aircraft assigned to the William C. Jacques' crew of the 548th. He is trying to tie in a nickname for the B-17 originally assigned to that crew and confirm the name and number of the one flown in August, 1943. His records indicate that B-17 #42-5895 was assigned in the states and lost on 26 July 1943 while being flown by the Harris crew. The name "The Souse Family" seems to have been associated with a B-17 flown later by the Jacques crew. It will be of great value to him to receive confirmation of the names and aircraft numbers. Photographs lent for copying and return will be of even greater value to him.

John Northrup, now of Sumter, South Carolina, remembers some of the details, which have been sent to Ian. If any of you can help tie up these loose ends please contact:

Ian McLachlan , England

Short Bursts

FREEMAN'S WORDS ON *THE "X-RATED TAILS"*

Had to chuckle when I read John Richardson's letter in the April 1984 newsletter. I, too, have noted how the representation of "01' Doodle Bug" gets around - that red checkerboard obviously takes people's fancy.

For the record, the reason ODB was selected for the colour plate in THE MIGHTY EIGHTH was that at the time the artist did the painting, the only clear colour photograph I had of 385th coloured tail marking was a shot of this Fort taken post-war in the Arizona graveyard. We obviously wanted to show the 385th at its most colourful period - paintwise. The red checkers came about when the 385th was transferred from the 4th Wing to the 93rd Wing in February 1945. The 93rd's other three groups (34th, 490th and 493rd) lost their letter-in-square symbols the previous summer, when the 93rd introduced its high visibility markings on its aircraft. Evidently the 93rd Wing ordered 385th to remove the Square G to conform with its other groups. It would be interesting to know if 385th protested at being denied its battle-famous symbol, or obediently complied. Those checkers must have caused the paint shop to work overtime. Incidentally, the 'X' was ODB's radio-call letter.

Anyway, John won't be amiss if he gives his ODB model a Square-G as she certainly wore this device in the earlier days of her service.

Yours sincerely,
Roger A. Freeman

A CHALLENGE??

TO THE EDITOR:

Just saw the story about 6 crewmen of the "Blind Date" of the 548th Sqdn being at Colorado Springs this year. I wanted to point out Bob Milligan's crew of the "Home Sick Angel" had NINE men present plus the crew chief at the 1983 reunion. Also 9 of the wives were there, one member not being married. They include Bob Milligan, pilot, Fairfield, Ohio; Clarence Abrahamson, Santa Susana, California; Lowell Cooper, Peabody, Kansas; Eugene Curtis, Mitchell, Nebraska; Van Durrant, Roseville, California; Stan Pettit, Topeka, Kansas; Howard Rembert, Houston, Texas; Frank Sutter, Pasadena, Texas; Ernest Traudt, Sutton, Nebraska; and the crew chief. Earnest Martin of Pasadena, California.

Tom Panfile is deceased, and the original co-pilot, Raymond Noiseau, became a pilot and was shot down on October 6, 1944 in the raid mentioned in the same newsletter. He was a POW and in trying to locate him, I found he died in Duluth, Minnesota in April, 1973.

Beginning in 1977 in Las Vegas we have won the honor of having the most crew members present for each reunion and have retired the plaque presented to us. We all enjoy the reunion and visits with our "family" and other friends we have made at each reunion.

Sincerely,
Clarence Abrahamson

(Ed. Note.: *Li CtaAenee ehaLengtng each cAew to have cci many. CACU members at LM Angetei ai Bob MLLLcgan'A ctieu) ofc the Home Stck Anget?*)

b/wll bursts

/Another Cry from the "Lone Wolf"

Edi tor:

Like I mentioned before (page 4, Jan. '84 Newsletter), flying "Lone Wolf" I never got to know any of the crews. I also never took notes on missions as to what plane, crew, or names of the members.

Remembering one mission where we were hit by a piece of flak entering the nose: Flying as toggleer, the plexiglass hit me in the forehead. (No damage - hard head). The flak hit our navigator in the upper right shoulder (or arm).

The Lt. we had was wearing a brand new shirt that day, which I promptly destroyed by ripping it up with my bowie knife. By the time I had stopped the flow of blood, the nose was full of compresses and blood. When we had landed with Doc Kuhn awaiting us, the wound was taped and the bleeding had stopped. Doc said the Lt. didn't need a doctor as he had one "up there." If he had looked into the nose, he would have seen why I was concerned about the Lt. The flak must have hit an artery and was shooting blood. He was pretty weak from loss of blood. The ground crew had a mess to clean up, and asked me later who died in the nose.

Sorry about the shirt, Lt., and hope that you made it home after the war. Would like to hear from you. (However, I refuse to pay for the shirt.) Wish I knew what date that mission was on.

Another time, another raid, another story.

Ralph B. Joye

(Ed. Note.: Can anyone tell Ralph about any time, any laid, any storey? He wilt appreciate your recollections and we will enjoy them.)

EDITOR:

This is to inform you of my change of address: My old address was Rt. 1, Box 184, Edgemont, Arkansas 72044.

My new address and phone number:

James C. Wooden, 550 Bomb Sqdn.
46 Smoking Oak Road
Conway, Ark. 72032 1-501-327-1026

Our old house was destroyed by a tornado on March 16, 1984. Please send all correspondence to me at my new address.

Thank you.
James C. Wooden



Three from same cwtew 40 years ago together again ion Wright-Patters on dedication. L to R, Sherunan Emmons, Bob LojInger, Museum Memorial Committee Chairman, and Harry KLeest. Photo: Bob LojInger

E.S. Bird Library
Syracuse University
222 Waverly Avenue
Syracuse, N. Y. 13210

Dear Mr. Philips :

I wish to thank you for your efforts on behalf of my research on WWII nose art. I was very glad to get the information on Wingert's art work and was most grateful for the article in your newsletter about my research. I have heard from about a half dozen members of the 385th BG who have been most helpful sending me both photographs and drawings and answering a variety of questions.

I had seen the Simonsen article in the 8th Air Force News and plan to write to him. I appreciate your thinking of me when you saw it. I would be interested in hearing about any other material of this nature that you should run across. I am now trying to locate a Cpl. Ploss of the 385th who decorated Hangar One at the base and created the nose art for planes such as Ruby's Raiders.

Thanks again for the interest and generosity of the members of the 385th!

Best Regards,
Randall Bond



June 26, 1984. Air Force Museum, Fairborn, Ohio. L to R: Carl Williams, Edwin Johnson, Hugh Bradford, Gordon Akley Novo Maryanovich (nou) Martin). Perhaps (Irst crew to finish up Its missions In the 550th.

We need a memorial. Something to keep alive the memory of this airplane and the men who flew and died in it. The AF Museum is a perfect place for such a memorial. In the three days I was there, crowds of people were constantly moving through the place.

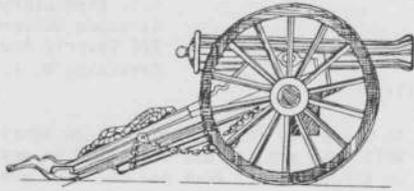
I think they should see the Fort as we saw it - in warpaint with guns at every position, possibly with dummy model crewmen at each post. And it should be front and center, as it was in combat. I would also like to see a viewing machine similar to one there about space flight but composed of authentic combat film clips and narrated by one of the top 8th AF generals of WWII. People stop at these machines to view the space story. It would be a good way to tell them the ETO air-war story.

For all this, we would need Air Force cooperation. We could solicit funds for restoring the B-17 and perhaps obtain donations of personal equipment "liberated" by ex-fliers with which to dress the model gunners, pilots, etc. Things of no use now in the attic.

It would be a fitting memorial to the crews and the aircraft which were such an important part of the victory in WWII. I doubt any other plane could have done the job.

Time is running out. We have to begin our B-17 Memorial Fund campaign now, while there are still enough of us around to see it to successful conclusion. Best regards to all you old warbirds.

Edwin "Johnny" Johnson



continued—

Dear Verne,

You might think that I have forgotten all my old friends of the 385th - that is not the case; I have been saving up some items to include in a letter for the newsletter and, also, we are expecting to leave our old home here, after almost 40 years, and there has been a lot to do to move the accumulation of the ages.

The news most on our minds at present is the recent memorial service to our very old friend, John Ford, last Saturday, August 4th, at All Saints Church, Great Ashfield, and the very touching ceremony when his ashes were spread over the old airfield he loved so well.

I will not write much about the airfield ceremony, but enclose a copy of our East Anglian Daily Times which, with pictures, tells it all so well. I would like to say a few words about the service in the Church, which was attended by his wife, Betty, and daughters. Dee and Mary.

It was like old times to meet them once again outside the Church and to remember the great kindness we received from them when we stayed at Camp Springs in 1979. Our welcome there, by John and his family, will be something we shall never forget, and on Saturday the years slipped away and we were together once again. The brief, but touching service was by the Rector, the Rev. George Pattison, who, although he had not met John, had heard much of him from those of us who remembered his many visits to the Church. Old favourite hymns of his family were sung and a farewell address given by Ian McLachlan of F.O.T.E. who had known John for many years. During the service John's ashes lay in front of the 385th Bomb Group Memorial altar. Then, out into a sudden squall of rain, which soon passed by, and into an old Jeep and the convoy made its way to the airfield.

Afterwards we joined together at the Bacton Bull for sandwiches and 'something' and, before the family made their various ways homewards, Betty, Dee and Mary, together with other members of their family, came home with us to Fox Farm for an old English cup of tea and what we call in Suffolk, "a jow."

We have been worried in Great Ashfield about the proposed visit on September 16. News of what is expected has been hard to come by, but David Wades has agreed to send news as soon as anything is fixed up.

The old airfield came to life on June 23rd when some of the young people of the Parish organized a "Car Boot Sale." Let me translate - boot - trunk and dealers bring their cars packed with whatever they sell, spread them out in their boot, (or trunk) or on a stall in front and hundreds of Buyers or just spectators throng around to take part, meantime the ladies sold as hard as they could, hot dogs and ice cream, tea, coffee and coke. The stalls or 'pitches' pay 5.00 lbs. each and, with refreshments and a church stall, almost 500.00 was raised.

A welcome letter from John Pettenger about a month ago, with the 385th annual gift to the church at Great Ashfield, \$1,300.00. We had the 'Quinquennial Inspection' this year and a lot of things are reported by the architect which require attention, so much money will be required in the future - every one at the Church is grateful to our American friends for their wonderful generosity. Note: Quinquennial inspection - every five years every church in the Diocese is inspected by the Diocesan architect and a report saying what repairs are needed is sent to the Church Council.

We have had several American visitors to the church this year, and more are expected. Robert E. Lee, and his wife "Barney," have written from Cocoa, Florida, to say they are coming in September, and on July 13th I had a call from the Elmswell garage to say that two Americans were there who were unable to hire a car or taxi and could I take them to the church and airfield. I hurriedly changed and picked up John and Doris Alcock of Elmira, N.Y. and together we spent a happy afternoon visiting the old sites as far as possible.

Yours very sincerely,
John and Lucy Ellis, England

Gerald Van Loenen wrote Barbara Varga to tell her what it was like to fly as a tail gunner on a 549th B-17 as her father had done. His description conveys the impression of a cramped, bitterly cold, and uncomfortable space. Those who flew that position will understand and will agree, no doubt. Set out below is an extract from Jerry Van Loenen's letter to her.

Dear Mrs. Varga:

I have finally gotten some material together and time to write to you as I had hoped to do much, much earlier. I am sure Verne Philips, editor of the 385th BGMA newsletter, has mentioned to you that he had a conversation with me and has now even mentioned it in a subsequent newsletter. I have also noted you got several very good letters and contacts. My long delay in getting this to you is because I could not find some pictures that I knew I had at one time. I finally found them but due to poor quality did not feel that I would have much luck in reproducing them. I finally decided to just run them through our copier at the office so that you could at least see something of B-17's, the 549th Squadron area, our barracks (probably the same one your father lived in), and pictures of the tail gunner's position and others. Most of these also include pictures of myself and crew.

I was startled when I read your letter in the February issue of Air Force magazine as I was in one of the replacement crews that came into the 549th after the terrible October 6, 1944 losses.

I can tell you that there was not much room back there and you entered through your own small door on the lower right quarter of the fuselage just back of the tail wheel compartment. You sat in a kneeling position on a little bicycle type seat that could be raised or lowered to some extent. There were two separate oxygen lines (one on each side) that ran back from tanks up forward. There was also a small walk-around bottle in case you had to crawl forward. I also carried a small slender high-pressure bailout bottle. We wore 24 volt heated suits, boot inserts, and glove inserts as well as heavy parkas and under clothing. The twin 50 caliber machine guns also had little preheaters as 60 degree below temperature was not uncommon. The air stream whistled freely through the tail wheel compartment and out the gun mount area. It was a cold, lonesome spot, but we found our inner clothes quite damp from sweat at times in spite of the environment.

I am pleased to be of service to you in sharing some aspects of the tail gunner's position as well as the pictures of myself and some of the other crew members. You may be sure that no one can appreciate those brave men who died more than those of us who served with them. If I can ever be of further service, please feel free to communicate.

Sincerely,
Gerald W. Van Loenen

To The Editor:

I was in San Antonio this past year and had a short visit with A. V. Benner, Jr. At that time he was trying to locate all the original pilots of the 549th. All originals were still living except "Stone" who went down in 1943. I had seen Jack Daniels in Humble, Texas, who went down first and came back as a P.W. This information appeared to make his list complete.

Robert Q. McGuire (Mack)

continued....

I met John Ford in England in 1944, but my real knowledge of John and our friendship began in 1975 when my wife, Ruth, and I went to Great Ashfield with the 385th. John was the typical friendly, fun-loving man we grew to know and love on that first return trip to England.

John was an active man, interested in expanding his knowledge, sharing that knowledge with his friends, and always interested in assuring that the members of the 385th were having an enjoyable time.

That first reunion in Great Ashfield in 1975 was due in large part to John's work and organization. John and Betty reintroduced many of us to England -- to the tea shops they loved, and to the English gardens and shops. Due to John, many of the people of Great Ashfield invited us into their homes and made our trip even more worthwhile.

In 1976 we returned to England with John and Betty to the 94th Bombardment Group Memorial Dedication at Bury St. Edmunds. As were all our experiences with John Ford, he took an interest in everyone and he regaled us with stories of WWII. He kept us laughing and interested with his extensive knowledge of the War and specifically, his knowledge of the 385th. His meticulous records kept on the group benefited all of us. From records he compiled over the years, John could provide information on every B-17 assigned to the 385th, including each flight made, the composition of the crew, and the result of each mission.

Our last visit with John and Betty Ford was in Washington, D.C. in December, 1982. Over dinner, John told stories about the War and his courtship of Betty. Men such as John Ford are rare. We will miss his friendship and his dedication to the 385th.

Earl Cole

Like the many members of the Association, I was deeply shocked to learn the news of John Ford's passing away. I did know just after the sad occasion. I had met John over the years while he continually returned to his old haunts of yesteryear. I'm sure I will state this correctly when I say, John held the Association together over the years. He did so much for the Association, he will be missed greatly.

John W. Archer, England

Air Force Policy Letter for Commanders



From the Office of the Secretary of the Air Force

Washington, D.C. | October 1984

COMMANDERS: TELL THE READINESS STORY. In a message to Air Force Commanders on 31 Aug., Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Charles A. Gabriel forwarded a list of Air Force readiness improvements made since 1980. He said:

"We need to further increase our efforts to tell the full and unbiased readiness story to our Air Force people and the public. Media attention on this subject, for the foreseeable future, is not likely to diminish. The facts clearly show that the warfighting capability of the Air Force has improved significantly in recent years. The efforts and funding that have gone into achieving a balanced growth in capability are paying off. Readiness is one pillar of the four pillars of military capability; and balance between readiness and the other three -- sustainability, modernization, and force structure -- is essential in achieving military capability goals. Our responsibility, as commanders, is to continue to improve warfighting capability in a balanced and rational manner, and the record will speak for itself if factually presented. . . .

"These are the facts — our Air Force possesses greatly improved equipment, supported and maintained by the best trained, best educated force in our history. I ask that each of you personally get involved in keeping your people and the public informed of our significant warfighting improvements. Much remains to be done, but it is counterproductive to national security and continued progress to let distortions of the facts go unchallenged."

POW reunion *continued*

Powell presented a letter from President Ronald Reagan to the Mayor of Lobbes. (See below)

The mayor and the town's people gave Powell a handsome silver medallion engraved with the gates of the Lobbes Abbey, dating to the 12th Century, on one side, and the keys to the city on the other.

The Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), sent a lieutenant colonel and an interpreter to the reception and luncheon, to also honor the Powells.

In his speech to the people of Lobbes, Powell said: "Your contribution to the winning of the war was beaucoup. Many American and allied fliers can attest tn that and I certainly can vouch for your contribution on my behalf.

"The sacrifices made and the dangers faced by my benefactors. Monsieur and Madam Gilbert and their daughter, Renee, (all of whom attended the luncheon) was multiplied by thousands who fought and sacrificed in their own way to help the cause of freedom in this world. I apologize for waiting so long to bring my thanks and gratitude to those I love who will always be in my heart."

Letter from President Reagan which was framed and presented to the Mayor and the people of Lobbes:

Forty years ago, the United States and Belgium fought a common enemy with heroism and sacrifice.

On January 29, 1944, an American B-17 bomber was badly crippled while returning from a mission over Germany. The crew was forced to bail out over German occupied Belgium. At grave personal risk, the citizens of Lobbes took these airmen into their homes and into their hearts. The people of Lobbes were willing to sacrifice their lives for the freedom of Belgium and the continent of Europe. As a result, these eight crewmen survived the war. Your efforts helped ensure the freedom of Western Europe. Today our countries are also engaged in the fight against forces that would take away the freedom our nations value so dearly. Your dedication to that freedom serves as a guiding light for all the world to see.

I salute your tribute to some of this world's bravest citizens. I pray that our continued commitment to freedom may some day make the world a united community of peace.

Sincerely,
Ronald Reagan

WANT TO JOIN UP - OR RE-UP -
IN THIS GREAT GROUP?

If you are reading this and thinking that the 385th seems like your kind of group, we have a message for you: Just send \$5 for dues for one year, along with your name and address - and you are in.

If you are an annual member (rather than a life member), you will gladden the heart of our Treasurer by sending - NOW - your dues for 1985 which is galloping toward us. In either event, sent your name, address and funds flying to Florida:

JOHN PETTENGER
Box 117
Laurel, FL 33545

A SEVENTEEN FLIES BY AGAIN, continued

and author, Ian Hawkins, joined us at the Parham Air Museum with a hot-off-the-press copy of his new book on the raids at Munster. It was good to see him looking so fit.

Mick and Ken arranged a night on the town with Peter Claydon, fellow F.O.T.E. member. Touring members were treated to an evening of fish and chips in Felixstowe, to be followed by a great time at the Ferry Boat Pub on the waterfront. Our careful driver, Dave, and 385th member Bill Hunter succeeded in beating Ken and me at a mean game of darts.

Sunday, September 16, was our day of remembrance as we attended services at All Saints Church at Great Ashfield. Our tour numbered 23, but another 15 or more 385th members joined us from their individual vacations. Kneeling together before our Memorial Chapel, we felt at peace.

Angela and Roley Miles and John Ellis greeted us. The Miles had graciously arranged for the people of Great Ashfield to open their homes to us and welcome our group for Sunday dinner. We all agreed that this was a very personal way to renew old friendships and to make new ones, and were very pleased to be hosted to such lovely times. Our humble thank you was a centerpiece basket of flowers delivered to each hostess.

Following lunch we all assembled on the remaining airways of the Great Ashfield airfield -- now part of the Miles' farm. Here we were greeted by more than 100 villagers and members of Friends of the Eighth. What fun as we eagerly climbed into the WWII jeeps and other vehicles and rode off to renew our memories. What a spectacle when the lovely lady Sally B -- the only flying B-17 in all of England -- came out to greet us as well! What a sight! Is it any wonder we all left the final reception in one of the restored air hangers drying a tear from our eye?

Monday following was a typical Cray and rainy day in England. This was the day we had scheduled a wreath laying ceremony at the American Cemetery at Maddingly near Cambridge. Dodging the rain drops, Lal a Phillips and George Menkoff did the honors of placing a wreath at the base of the cemetery's flagpole as we stood in a circle saying a prayer. The rain prevented more than a momentary visit to the grave sites and the Wall of the Missing, but we shared a moment with our fallen comrades -- a memorial reunion close to our hearts.

Vince Masters

Ed itor:

I received my copy of the July newsletter this week and was very pleased to read my own little article in it. I think it is the first time I have ever had anything that I have written printed! I must congratulate your printers on the way they reproduced those 40 year old photographs - they were really good.

I have had letters from both Rose Mary and Helen and they were thrilled (and surprised) to see their pictures in the newsletter.

Ian Hawkins rang me last night to say how much he liked the article, and could he reproduce it in the Framlingham Times (the F.O.T.E. magazine) and I said sure he could if it was O.K. with you.

Now Sam and Mary Lyke are staying with us in our home this week and Sam said that he was sure it would be O.K. with you. He had also brought me a copy.

Sam and Mary have been with us since last Sunday. Unfortunately, they were touring France and Spain the previous week so could not attend the 385th reunion service at Great Ashfield, but I went to it, and it was a very moving occasion. The church was almost full, the candles were lit on the memorial altar, and the memorial book open. I always like to feel that I represent the Creegan family on those occasions.

Ian Hawkins was there, Mr. and Mrs. Rowley Miles, Margaret Gemmel, and of course, John Ellis, among others from our side of the Atlantic. I met John Pettenger and his wife, and Judy and Vince Masters, and many others. We were all sad about John C. Ford, he had done so much for the Association. During that afternoon the Sally Bee, the one remaining B-17 flying in this country, flew over your old airfield.

We have been showing Sam and Mary around this part

of England this week, took them to visit Ian Hawkins, John Ellis, Margaret Gemmel and Great Ashfield Church. Before they went to France we had a few days in London with them and showed them a few places up there. In all we have had a grand time together.

My wife Pat and I wish you every success with the 1985 reunion, we would love to come, but it depends on many things back here at home, so here's hoping and May Be! Our very best wishes to all in the 385th BGMA.

Reg Hammond
England

POW 'Iemembe'iA.. co niinucd

"But the best sight of all was the GI trucks pouring into the camp loaded with loaves of white bread. Within one and a half hours of our liberation, the Americans had set up a mess kitchen for all the prisoners."

"But we had lost our taste for food and it took a long time after that to get our stomachs adjusted."

Powell said on his return to the states, he was never debriefed by the military nor asked about Buchenwald. Instead, he was about to be shipped to the Pacific to fight again when the war there ended.

Unique experiences seem to be the hallmark for Powell's life. After the war he returned to his home in Waterbury, Connecticut and was elected to the state legislature. "I ran as a Republican in a Democratic stronghold - I never dreamed I'd make it."

Powell and his wife, Yvonne, came to Bella Vista in 1978 from Council Bluffs, Iowa where he owned a computer and accounting service business.

He has served on the budget and finance committee of the POA and retired this year as board chairman.

"Enough is enough," he said last week - but there is one more thing.

"We are going back to Belgium in the fall. I'd like to see some of those wonderful people again."

I'll fill you in on the rest of the story. I went home to Connecticut in 1946. In 1948 I was recalled for the Korean conflict. I had been to Weather School so I had two critical skills. Weather Officer and Navigator. Stayed in the service until 1960 and settled in Iowa. We retired in Arkansas in 1978. I had completely lost track of the Belgium people during that time. The only contact that I had with a crew member was our Engineer who lived in Kansas. A fellow who was a member of the local POW Chapter here had a contact in Holland. He sent John Verhagen my name and I supplied him with what information I had. This consisted of names of the people with whom I spent the evasion time. After a few months he wrote and said he had their addresses. I immediately made arrangements to visit them in Belgium. John told me that they were planning a small reception in the Town Hall at Lobbes. We had eight crew members that were hidden by the people of Lobbes and the immediate surrounding area, so I felt that they had done more than their share. Four of us left and were caught and sent to Buchenwald Concentration Camp and eventually to Stalag Luft 3. The other four stayed and were liberated in August, 1944. I wanted to take something over there but didn't know what - then I had the idea of getting a letter from the President and presenting it to the Mayor and the townspeople for display if they wished. I wrote a letter to our Representative, J. P. Hammerschmidt, giving him the details and suggesting that he contact President Reagan and try to get a letter. I also pointed out that it would be good diplomacy and public relations. With no further questions, I received the letter you saw in the article. I had a brass plaque made with the following: "Presented to the citizens of Lobbes, Belgium with thanks and gratitude for your sacrifices. May 17, 1984." Signed Bill Powell. My Bombardier was in Lobbes about a month ago, and they showed him the letter displayed prominently in the Town Hall I sent a copy of the article to Reagan so he would at least know the result his letter had on those Belgians.

I think this brings the story up to date.

Bill Powell