

# NEWS LETTER

Vol. 11, No. 2

SECOND AIR DIVISION ASSOCIATION

April 1973

## THE SECOND AIR DIVISION MEMORIAL TRUST

Early in 1945 before hostilities had ceased in Europe the men of the Second Air Division, 8th Air Force, began to give thought to establishing a Memorial in East Anglia dedicated to their fallen comrades they would shortly be leaving behind.

Many ideas were advanced concerning the form such a Memorial should take. Some wished to restore a bombed church, but it was reluctantly decided that such a project could not commemorate men of all creeds or men of none. The proposed new Central Library in Norwich, England, seemed most likely to provide the setting for, what was destined to become, a very unique Memorial.

From thought to completion is always a long step in any project, and so it proved to be in the case of this proposed Memorial. On Thursday, May 25th, 1945 General William E. Kepner handed over to city officials duplicate trust deeds establishing the Trust Fund for which 20,000 pounds was subscribed in less than one month by virtually everyone in the Second Air Division at

the time, and this included Fighter as well as Bomb Groups.



The American Cemetery and Memorial, Cambridge.

In the words of General Kepner when making the presentation: "This Memorial must be a spiritually living thing. The deep and sacred feeling giving birth to this Memorial — that our comrades' spirit of youth, hope and desire for a world of decency, freedom and peace must live on — must imbue this Memorial with that same sacred spirit dedicated to oncoming generations whose way of life they died to protect. This Memorial must be a haven wherein the flame of their principles will burn brightly and eternally, wherein the bewildered, stumbling footsteps of succeeding generations can be unerringly placed on the right paths."

Post-war conditions showed that the original time-table of 'three years minimum' from 1945 for the construction of the new Library was a bit over-optimistic. As the years passed and the Library was still not completed the Governors of the Trust felt bound to consult the Second Air Division Association in the United States. Should an alternative and more easily realized form of Memorial be found?

The Association set up a special committee to review their position and the reply was quick in coming. An emphatic 'NO' was transmitted to their friends across the Atlantic. This committee reported that they had considered alternative suggestions but had found none which would 'be useful to the people of

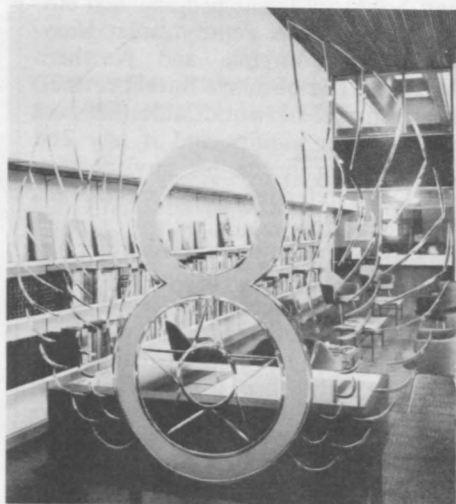
Norwich', or 'would further the friendly relations between them and the American people which had always been a major objective of the Memorial.'

Two successive reunions of the Association in 1952 and 1953 reconfirmed this view, and in 1954 the Association decided that the fund should be kept intact for another ten years at least. At the end of that time, should the Library still be in the planning stage, alternatives would be considered.

Keeping this fund intact and growing did not prove to be an easy task. Various Government agencies had heard about the Trust Fund and they were exerting pressure on the Association to release these funds for other 'worthwhile' projects. What had to be the most classic suggestion, and it was made in all seriousness, was that these funds should be used to cover the expenses involved in moving a captured German submarine from its ocean port on the East Coast to a permanent site in down-town Chicago!

Led by Jordan Uttal (presently the Association member on the Board of Governors of the Memorial Trust) all such attempts to divert these funds were deftly turned aside. In a word, they were ignored.

MEMORIAL (Cont. on Page 6)



The Memorial Room and cabinet containing the Roll of Honor seen through the glass panel in the Oregon pine screen.



American Ambassador John H. Whitney hands the Roll of Honor to the Lord Mayor of Norwich (Ald. T. C. Eaton) April 10th, 1958.

## Second Air Division Association Eighth Air Force

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## PRESIDENT'S CORNER

As we are pressed for space in this issue I won't make this long, but I do want to thank all our members who gave so generously to the Library and the Memorial Trust Fund.

While the final figure is not in yet — we are still receiving donations — the amount given to date has far exceeded our wildest expectations. A full report will be given at our business meeting in Colorado Springs.

It just goes to show that with a little from many a great deal can be accomplished. On behalf of the Officers of your Association, and myself, thank you.

William G. Robertie  
President

## CONGRATULATIONS ARE IN ORDER

We have just been notified that Dr. John Jacobowitz has received his fellowship in the Academy of Family Practice. Another accomplishment in a long, unending line of accomplishments by a man we all know and admire. Doctor John and his lovely wife Betty manage to attend each and every reunion no matter where or when it is.

Former pilots of his squadron may remember the then Major Jacobowitz's penchant for close formation flying — those occasions when he tucked his wing under yours and insisted that you lean out and sign it. I can assure them that John has mellowed. When he flies by you now he only insists that you wave. Providing, of course, that your close enough to knock on his window first!

## WITCHCRAFT

The pride of the 467th Bomb Group, 790th Bomb Squadron, was a plane very aptly named, considering her accomplishments, "Witchcraft".

She flew 130 missions without an abort and that stands as THE record. By the time 1945 came over the horizon most of the other planes of the Group had turned into war-weary wrecks and the Group's formation was then made up of newer, unpainted silver planes. Yet on every mission, flying among these silver fashion-plates, the "Witch" could always be seen. She continued to wear her battle-scarred camouflage paint with the pride and dignity of a Grand Dame.

On three occasions she went over the target with only three engines function, but she never turned back for mechanical or personnel reasons during ANY mission. In the course of action she received 300 flak holes and twice had to go to the sub-depot for major repairs as a result of battle damage.

The credit for all this goes to her ground crew and to the crews that flew her. She was kept flying by Crew Chief Joe Ramirez and his 'League of Nations' assistants: Ramirez of Mexican descent, Dong of Chinese, Betcher of German, Vetter of Dutch and Elliott of longer American descent.

One of her pilots, Lt. John Oder, said of Ramirez: "Joe was totally devoted to this aircraft and she was kept immaculate. To him a minor oil leak was a major disaster".

"Witchcraft" and her ground crew were famed, decorated and cited on more than one occasion. She had flown the Group's first mission on April 10, 1944 and flew the next-to-last one on April 21, 1945.



[L to R] - Joe Vetter, Walter Elliott, Joe Ramirez (Crew Chief), George Dong, and Ray Betcher.

In June of that year "Witchcraft" was flown back to the States carrying her celebrated ground crew. While the men proceeded to their homes and eventual discharge the "Witch" went on a bond tour until the end of the war.

## JOE WHITTAKER RETIRES? NEVER!

After 27 years with American Cyanamid Co. in the explosives department our past President Joe Whittaker retired as of January 1, 1973 at the ripe young age of 55. So much for the official announcement.

Five minutes after his retirement became effective Joe was back in business with his own consulting firm. The scope of his activities will include consulting on quarries, coal stripping, coal mining, metal mining and all phases of construction where explosives are used. In addition he has formed another corporation for the distribution of bulk ammonium nitrate and nitro-carbon nitrates used in quarries, coal stripping and construction plus a full line of explosives and accessories. The geographical coverage on this is Pennsylvania, Maryland, West Virginia and Northern Virginia. The coverage on his consulting firm will be world wide. Fees are available on inquiry and if any 2nd AD member needs his services they will be extended the special off schedule rates.

Having been lead bombardier for the Second Air Division Joe is an expert when it comes to re-arranging Real Estate with a minimum of fuss and bother, and is well qualified to consult with when it comes to moving that pesky neighbor two blocks east, four blocks west and five miles high.

In all seriousness we wish Joe the best of luck in his new venture and if your business requires his expertise by all means call on him.



Jack & Betty Jacobowitz

All kidding aside, the Doctor Jacobowitz we know today is a mighty fine person who is most admired for his giant efforts in getting the Association on a solid footing during those trying years when he turned out the Newsletter on his office copying machine. Now THAT'S dedication!

Congratulations Doctor John, and may many more honors come your way.

## THOMAS C. EATON

The 13th day of October 1918 was a big day for Thomas Christopher Eaton of Norwich, England, for on that day he became the eldest son of a Norwich lawyer whose forebears had lived in the city since the 18th century. In short, he was born.

Educated at Stowe School Tom joined the Territorial (Volunteer) Army in 1936. With the outbreak of hostilities in 1939 he was mobilized and served with the 4th Battalion, Royal Norfolk Regiment, as a Company Commander. In the fighting at Singapor he was wounded, mentioned in dispatches and with the fall of that city became a



Thomas C. Eaton in the robes of Lord Mayor of Norwich, 1957-1958

'guest' of the Japanese government. From that time (1942) until 1945 Tom gave his Japanese captors his undivided attention, the net result of which was to make them wish he had gone to some other area of the conflict.

After the war Tom returned to Norwich and was qualified as a solicitor. At the present time he maintains a Law Office in the city. It wasn't long before he found the fascination of politics and was elected to the Norwich City Council. During the period 1957-1958 he moved up to become Lord Mayor of Norwich. It was during this period that he took the big plunge into the sea of Matrimony and is now the father of one son and two daughters.

As Lord Mayor he received the Roll of Honor for the Memorial Room from the U.S. Ambassador, John Hay Whitney. A member of the Norwich Libraries Committee 1949-1969, he was Chairman for 8 years which included the years when the Library was opened by Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, and the Memorial Room was dedicated. He has been a governor of the Memorial Trust for 20 years and is now Vice-Chairman.

Tom was a leader of the Norwich City Council 1969-1970 and is still an Alderman on that Council. Awarded the O.B.E. (Order of the British Empire) in 1962 he is also a Deputy Lieutenant for the County of Norfolk. One time Chair-



Tom and his daughter Mary at his favorite past-time.

man of the Norwich Y.M.C.A., and currently a Trustee of the East Anglian Trustee Savings Bank, Tom's interests throughout a busy life have been, and still are, many and varied. Come to Colorado Springs and meet Tom and his son in person. A charming and delightful gentleman who takes great pride in serving on the Board of our Memorial Trust.

## 28 YEAR FUSE

An American 1000 pound bomb exploded in the north German city of Hanover yesterday more than 28 years after it was dropped during World War II. It made a crater 15 by 30 feet, but there were no injuries.

*(ed. note: O.K. Who goofed?)*

## PERSONALS

### BERNARD N. CUTLER CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

We spent a week in London between Xmas and New Years and were fog bound for 3 days. Went to Norwich and met with Mr. Philip Hepworth, then to Rackheath and Wroxham. Our guide was a Norwich cab driver who, as a 10 year old, remembered the 467th Xmas party for the youngsters at the Rackheath Village Hall in December 1944. The trip was quite interesting and for awhile I was 28 years younger.

### GEORGE H. PARKER BLOOMINGTON, ILLINOIS

A note of interest. Judy Gowing of 25 Elm Hill stopped off last November to recover from the jet lag on her way to San Francisco to visit uncle Joe West. She was one of the hostesses at the 1963 reunion in Norwich. She has a spare bedroom at 25 Elm Hill for any visiting 466er.

*(ed. note: Please. Don't all you 466er's descend on Judy at the same time.)*

### JAMES D. KIERNAN BUFFALO, NEW YORK

We'd like to make the convention at the Air Force Academy. Our oldest boy graduated from the Academy in 1968. Our second oldest graduated from West Point in 1972 and another son is in the army so we're still military oriented. We've got 10 children so we keep PLENTY busy.

### FRANK S. WATSON ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

As a matter of information, my crew had a reunion at Colorado Springs in 1969. This was the 24th anniversary since we completed our combat missions in 1945. During our reunion we were also guests of the Air Force Academy for one day.

*(ed. note: How about getting that crew in formation once again for a reunion with the entire Division Frank?)*

### CLEMENS F. KOWALCZYK CLARENDON HILLS, ILLINOIS

I experienced a rather severe heart attack (myocardial infarction) on February 17, 1972. However, I am back in reasonably good shape now — Thank God! Had Henry X. Dietch & wife (Shirley) at our place recently for a small gathering of friends. See Howie Moore occasionally. Old Jordan now a Texan?

*(ed. note: Take care of that 'ticker' Clem and we'll see you at the Academy. Old Jordan lives in Texas but the verdict is still out concerning his status as a Texan.*

### BENJAMIN NOLAN BRONX, NEW YORK

Judge Benjamin Nolan who has been serving as Judge by way of an interim appointment has just been elected to a full ten year term as Judge of the Civil Court in the November election of 1972. Preoccupation with politics and his own future prevented him from making the trip to Norwich which he wanted to do so much. He will, however, be joining with us during the 1973 reunion at the Air Force Academy. Welcome aboard Judge Nolan.

# REUNION NEWS

## 466th BOMB GROUP REUNION

Bill Brooks (Dike's navigator, 785th) is making arrangements for the 466th reunion. Bill reports that there will be a great deal of hangar flying again this year. Some plan to arrive early to insure a good take-off run (on the 18th). The main day for the 466th will be July 19th at the Antlers Plaza Hotel. There will be a hospitality room open for you to meet that old pal most of the day. In addition to talk, the 466 room will have a history corner that will contain a display of much of the data collected by John Woolnough, the unit historian. It is hoped that you too will bring 466 data for display.

Bill Brooks hopes to arrange for a copy machine to be available so that copies of rare documents can be made on the spot.

The history corner will also have a recorder available. This will give you a chance to talk-back for the record. If you have a war story or two, remember a funny happening, need to correct the record or want to say your piece, head for the history corner.

Please contact Bill Brooks for answers to reunion questions (350 Norton St., Boulder, Colo. 80303, Phone 303-494-9572).

## 93rd REUNION

Glenn Tessmer, Otis Hair, T. C. Gibbs, F. D. Worthen and I will act as joint chairmen to organize a rather informal gathering of 93rd people at Colorado Springs.

We plan on having a happy hour and buffet dinner for all who attend, and if enough members bring photos and other memorabilia we will set up a display for all to view.

If any 93rd members of the Association have current names and addresses of 93rd people who are not members send them on to us. Better still, write them yourself and tell them about the reunion.

If there is enough interest shown at this reunion we will organize for future ones on a more elaborate scale.

Joseph J. Rosacker  
315 S. Walnut  
Iola, Kansas 66749

## 389th REUNION

Al Kopp



Reunion plans to contact the old gang are beyond my wildest expectations! Although early — the response has been very good! There are 48 who have responded and only 2 "Can't make the reunion this year, but don't forget me" reports. Assuming that most have wives, family or sweethearts to bring — it could be quite a rendezvous to rehash that old "Battle of Hethel". (The home of the 389th Bomb Group near Norwich should be uppermost in our thoughts these days.)

Roy Jonasson and Arron Schultz are doing a bang up job feeding me names of former members to contact. Keep up the good work troops! Every clue helps me a lot.

Col. Howard "Ben" Walsh, pilot of "the original Little Gramper" has been located in Santa Barbara. (Thanks to Russell Hayes, Waterloo, Iowa). Also, Col. Jim Steiger, pilot of the "Little Gramper, Jr." has sent a big howdy too! Both men and planes are famous in 389th circles! Hope to see you both in tight formation at the reunion. Any hope of gettin' the crews together?

Looks like the "Buncher Six" Song is bringing up more tunes to sing. How about this one?

(To tune of Strawberry Roan)  
Oh, that B-24, Oh, that B-24  
At 55 inches she won't even cruise

The pilots that fly them are sure bound to lose.

Oh, that B-24!

Remember that one? Not true of course. (And we'll clobber any B-17 jockey who sez so!)

I am running a small type contest at home to see which son can build the best model of the "Green Dragon". Hope to offer one as a door prize!

Early returns also indicate most members wish to have a central hors d'ouvers and snack table and bar. A piano has been appropriated. Any volunteers to play?

I am still looking for a good photo of "Fightin Sam" to copy. Earl Zimmerman, Indianapolis, Indiana, sent one which will help in reconstructing the 566th insignia. How about the 564th and 565th and the group insignia? According to a military study, the 389th had no group emblem, *right or wrong?* Let's have any photos of the squadron

insignia if you have sketches, paintings or photos.

We will start festivities by having a reception line with Mr. Tom Eaton, Chairman of the Library Trust; president Bill Robertie and Vice President for "Recruiting", Evelyn Cohen. "Yers Trooly" will handle introductions, then chow, cocktails and ballads follow.

Albert A. Kopp

914 Joy Avenue  
Rapid City, S. Dakota, 57701

## 44th REUNION

Charles 'Joe' Warth,  
Chairman



This year will mark the second reunion of the "Flying Eightballs" since our 'crash' course in modern warfare ended in 1945. Chairman for this year's reunion is Joe Warth who served his time in the 506th squadron.

While Joe's Stay with the 44th can't be measured in terms of years it is a period he is not likely to forget. Joe managed to get himself shot down on a mission over Italy and promptly became a guest of the German government. For a period of a couple of weeks he had the chance to compare German food with the 'Gourmet' fare put out by the 44th cooks. He decided on the latter and took off with a couple of British soldiers eventually making his way back to the British lines and home.

Col. Goodman  
G. Griffin



Responding to our plaintive plea for "HELP" the 44th's Executive Officer, Col. Goodman G. Griffin, agreed to be MC for the evening. All of us who know, and knew, 'Griff' relish his sense of humor and it promises to be a lively evening.

Joe and Griff plan to get together in Hawaii during April to finalize their plans for the reunion. If you didn't get to the last one you had better plan on attending this one. There will never be another one like it — I guarantee you!

Signed  
'Anonymous'

*NOTE: The 448th and 467th will also be having mini-reunion banquets but at press time for this Newsletter not all their plans had been firmed up. Complete details on these Groups will be in the July Newsletter. Early returns are pointing to a large turn-out for all six Groups planning a mini-reunion at Colorado Springs.*

## THE LAST FLIGHT OF "HEAVENLY DAZE"

by John W. Archer



The last flight of the Lib that was to become the victim of friendly fighters over the North Sea began normally enough. The aircraft named "Heavenly Daze" lifted off the runway at Hardwick, the home of the 93rd Bomb Group, and at the controls sat Lt. Richard J. Pettit flying the plane's 25th mission and his first in command.

It wasn't long before Pettit found out that this just wasn't to be his day even though it started out that way. Runaway propellers were the first manifestation of disaster, the plane lurching forward and climbing with the speed of a fighter. Pettit and his co-pilot, Lt. Humphrey J. Elliott, wrestled desperately with the controls with very little effect.

Adding to their problems was the fact that they had no idea where they were. They thought the aircraft was somewhere over the North Sea Coast, but did not want to risk jettisoning their bombs on a town or village. A crash landing was out of the question as visibility was bad and the ceiling over 800 feet.

Pettit considered the situation and decided to reduce the risk to his crew. He gave the bail-out order and parachutes quickly blossomed under the ship while Pettit steadied it as best he could under the circumstances.

The sound of the Liberator's engines could still be heard by the crew as they reached the safety of Norfolk soil. Looking up they saw that the aircraft had levelled off and began to orbit the area. People in the towns below resumed their work as the engine noise settled down to a steady drone. To them it became just another aeroplane.

The Royal Observer Corps also heard the B-24 but were unable to catch sight of it due to the low cloud base. Under these circumstances the aircraft was plotted as an 'intruder' and a flight of fighters was sent up to investigate. Ground defenses were also alerted.

First on the scene were RAF Spitfire pilots and they reported that the bomber was apparently crewless, much to their amazement, although it still droned on over the coastal sector.

In the meantime, one by one, the American crew telephoned Hardwick;

the bombardier, Lt. Robert F. Leesley, came down close to a WAAF camp and co-pilot Elliot landed in a tree. The navigator of "Heavenly Daze", Lt. Leslie A. Jacobson, descended into a field, started down a nearby road and was picked up by a passing farmer. The next day he regained consciousness in a hospital remembering nothing since pulling the ripcord. The waist gunners, Sgts. John P. Kogut and Erharot D. Lange, landed near a haystack. Sgt. James R. Stanley, engineer-gunner, was challenged by a youngster who: "Took some convincing that I was a Yank, not a Jerry."

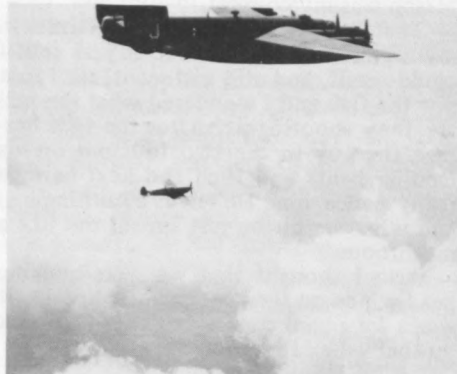
Pettit himself ended up in a drainage ditch, a mere 100 yards from the sea, and reported to Hardwick that he had been the last man out of the ship. Meanwhile the B-24 continued its unstable course under the watchful eyes of the Spitfire pilots.



Fighter takes off after "Heavenly Daze"

A lively exchange of views commenced over the R/T between the fighter pilots, their home stations and the Liberator base. Finally everyone concerned decided that the abandoned B-24 with its 6,000 lb. cargo of high explosives, should be disposed of.

The Spitfires circled the lumbering Lib until it headed out over the North Sea again. It had been flying for about an hour and a half now and the RAF pilots debated who would go into the attack first. None of them relished the thought of the Liberator's bombs and fuel going up in their faces. It became a



Spitfire contemplates how to attack "Heavenly Daze" with her explosive cargo.

game of aerial 'flip the coin' with the winner losing. Finally they lined up and went in one after the other.

They soon learned what the Germans had learned a lot earlier. The B-24 was a hard plane to destroy. After several passes one fighter ran out of 20mm ammunition after pouring cannon fire point-blank into the bomber's wings. Eventually, the sheer weight of attack had its effect and the Liberator commenced a shallow dive into the sea.

That night the communique might have read "One of our bombers is missing - due to friendly action!" In the meantime the Information Officer of the Liberator squadron was trying to decide just how to enter the flight in his report. It just didn't look right saying that "Spitfires had deliberately shot down an American Bomber." How he got out of that dilemma we don't know, but to this day somewhere at the bottom of the cold North Sea sits "Heavenly Daze" with a full load of bombs and slowly rusting away - her crew stations empty, her skin full of holes but her pride intact.

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To get your wife's undivided attention to what you are saying, say it to another woman, in a low voice.

### NEWS FROM ABROAD

The Newsletter has just been advised that at the December 13 meeting of the Board of Governors of the Memorial Trust the appointment of Jordan Uttal as a member of the Board representing the 2nd Air Division Association was confirmed "with acclamation". We can think of no person more deserving of this honor than Jordan who has done so much to keep the lines of communication open between the Association and the Memorial Trust. Congratulations Jordan.

From Philip Hepworth comes the news that he has been able to purchase more than 50 titles of books from the "generous donation of \$500.00 made by the Association last June". These 50 titles are spread through U.S. History, Sociology, Biography, Literature, Music & Films, Art, Handicraft, Science & Commerce, Miscellaneous and 12 volumes of the State of the Nation Series covering 12 States. He is most appreciative of this help.

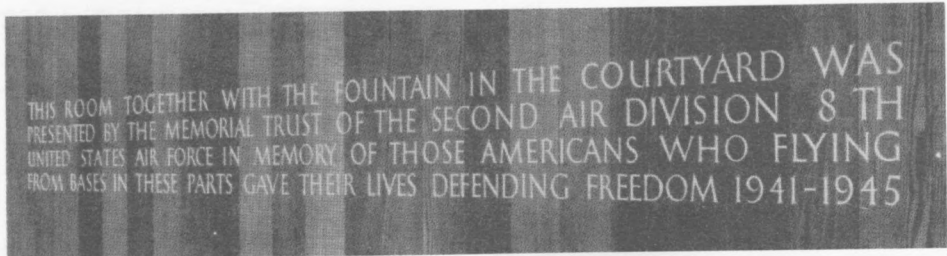
MEMORIAL (Cont. from Page. 1)

By the time construction began on the Library the Governors of the Trust decided to contribute 5,000 pounds for the construction of a single room, a room which would serve as a home for the Role of Honor and as a reference and reading room for the public. A further 2,000 pounds was allocated to furnish this Memorial room and build a Memorial Fountain in the courtyard.

As the new Library neared completion the Trust, aided by its American members, provided the illuminated Roll of Honor which the then Ambassador (Mr. John Hay Whitney) placed in the custody of the City in 1958. The Governors of the Trust, at the same time, began to perform their permanent function of making annual grants for the purchase of American books and periodicals. Over 12,000 pounds has already been expended in this manner.

The intensive preparations during the early months of 1963 towards the completion of the Memorial included the shipment of stones from every American State to form the collection in the Memorial Fountain. Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, expressed great delight with the Memorial on her official visit to the New Norwich Central Library on January 19th, 1963.

With the completion of the Library and the Memorial Room the work of the Trust entered on a new phase. 20,916 pounds had been collected in 1945. With accrued interest this sum had risen to 34,640 pounds. From this sum, when the work was completed and the Memorial Room, Fountain and many books paid for, 19,566 pounds



The inscription carved in the panelled screen

still remained invested as an endowment for this unique, living Memorial.

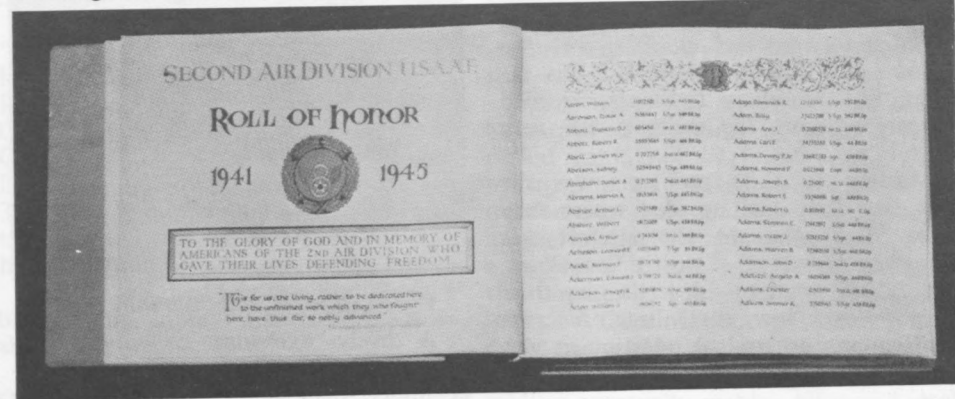
In the years since that time, and during each reunion, Association members have contributed additional funds for the purchase of books and ordinary maintenance of the American Room and a 'Living Memorial' will, in truth, continue to 'live'.

Future generations of English students, as well as the general public, will know that at a certain point in their history Americans came as friends, left as friends and remained friends.

Particular mention should be made of the original American Governors of the

Trust who did so much to make this all possible. General William E. Kepner, Brigadier General Milton W. Arnold, Colonel Frederick P. Bryan and Colonel Ion S. Walker. All are still members of the Association and with any luck they will join with other members at the Air Force Academy this coming summer when new and additional plans to perpetuate the Trust Fund will be unveiled.

Mention should also be made of our many English friends who are currently serving, and others who have served, on the Board of Governors giving unstintingly of their time and talent in managing the Fund.



The Roll of Honor

LETTERS

Dear Bill:

Plan on discussing with my wife this weekend the trip to Colorado Springs. We will send in our reservation card this coming week. We will probably be staying in the 'standard room' category. I imagine there will be other government employees at the reunion and they too will undoubtedly stay in the small rooms. Just hoping our room will have a window!

Enjoyed the little article about the Worts couple from Norwich. Seems like I might have known that gal. I can't get my wife out in the yard even to cut the grass or pull weeds etc. My hat is off to Mr. Worts.

Sincerely,  
Donald Olds  
Rolla, Mo.

(ed. note: Your problem Don is that you only want your wife to go out in the yard to cut grass and pull weeds. Try Worts' approach and keep us advised!)

Dear Bill:

Just finished going thru the Newsletter again just to make sure I didn't miss a damn thing.

I was on that hairy job at Hamm that nite (Jim Hoseason article). I was taking a transition course as first pilot. A Captain Mason was my co-pilot.

That B-24 that went down in flames in my opinion did not dive. It just fell. I could see it, and still can see it, all. I first saw the flak and I wondered what the hell are they shooting at. After the first barrage the guy in the two four put on his landing lights and then the next barrage really nailed him. He fell as a burning ball and when he hit he just spread out like a mushroom.

Also I thought that we were bucking head-winds on the way back that night. It was a long haul coming back. Lots of flak up that valley that evening.

Sincerely,  
Leo Pesonen,  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Dear Bill:

James Hoseason's account of the April 22, 1944, raid over Ham, had special significance for me. One chapter in my book, "Elusive Horizons" was devoted to this particular raid. It certainly was a mess, and out Lib ended up in the mud after the mission, but we were just mighty happy to be down in one piece.

Since I was shot down seven days later, my account of the mission was based on unofficial reports relative to the number of planes shot down by the Germans as well as the British Air Defense, and it was interesting to get the official report on this first attempt to land American bombers at night.

Enclosed is my check toward the Norwich Memorial Library.

Best regards,  
Keith C. Schuyler  
44th Bomb Group  
Cedar Lane, R.D. No. 2  
Berwick, Penna.

## THE EIGHT BALLS

by Steve Birdsall

The old 44th Bomb Group was the first full B-24 Liberator group in the Army Air Forces, but because they had achieved mastery of this plane, untried at the time, it was decided that they should impart their knowledge to others. So instead of going overseas they were given the job of forming and training more Liberator groups. The first of these was Col. 'Killer' Kane's 98th, the Pyramidiers, who the 44th would meet again in North Africa in less pleasant circumstances, the second was the 93rd, with whom they would fly out of England, and the third was the 90th, a Southwest Pacific outfit soon to gain fame as the Jolly Rogers.



The 44th's Group insignia of the "Flying Eightball" was unique among groups of the 8th Air Force.

So the Eight Balls did not fly their first mission until November 7, 1942 under the command of Col. Frank Robinson. It was the beginning of a war which was more costly to the 44th than to any other Liberator group in the 8th Air Force.

A fore-taste of what was to come occurred on December 6, 1942 when, for its third mission, the 44th was assigned to bomb the Abbeville-Drucat Airfield. Upon reaching the coast of France a re-call signal was sent but this was heard only by the 66th and 67th squadrons. The 68th continued on to the target unaware that they could have turned back.



The "Yellow Nose" fighters attack

Over the target they were met by a swarm of Folke-Wulfs flown by the most seasoned fighter pilots of the Luftwaffe — Goering's yellow noses. It was in this battle that the group incurred its first losses. Under repeated hits Lt. DuBard's plane went down in flames. Lt. Tommy Holmes took three hits from a fast closing FW 190; one in the No. 2 engine, one in the mid-section and the third right through the windshield which exploded between Holmes and his Co-Pilot Robert Ager. The blast rendered both pilots unconscious and wounded Sgt. Metsa in the legs.

Holmes was out long enough for his plane to fall about 5000 feet and when he came to the plane was up-side down and vibrating badly. Although seriously wounded he managed to right the aircraft and stay with the remainder of the Squadron until they returned to their base 1½ hours later. For his courage and skill in getting his crew safely home, in a badly damaged ship and in a painfully wounded condition, Lt. Holmes received the group's first Distinguished Flying Cross.



Col. Leon W. Johnson who led the group through its most trying days.

Sometimes it seemed that the Eight Balls were just a hard-luck group, and by the time they flew their last mission on April 25, 1945, they had lost 153 aircraft. The Group received two Distinguished Unit Citations, the first for a bloody raid on Kiel in May 1943 when they went in below the B-17's and only thirteen of their nineteen aircraft got back. Hardest hit had been the 67th Squadron: Their first commander, Major Don MacDonald, died on a Luftwaffe operating table after his aircraft was shot down over Dunkirk on February 15, 1943. Captain Howard Moore, pilot of the immortal *Suzy Q*, took over, but the bad luck seemed to stay, and after Kiel all that was left of the squadron was *Suzy Q*, (receiving major repairs), Howard Moore and a makeshift crew commanded by Bill Cameron.

Three days later the group got a shot-in-the-arm when they flew a superbly executed mission to Bordeaux. Then in June the 44th began practicing low-level flights across the green fields of England. In July they were at Benina Main with Kane's Pyramidiers waiting for the August 1 low-level mission to the Ploesti Oil Fields.

Led by Col. Leon W. Johnson in the aging *Suzy Q*, the 44th flew into the most savage ground-air battle of the war. Of the five Congressional Medals of Honor won on this mission, one went to Colonel Johnson.

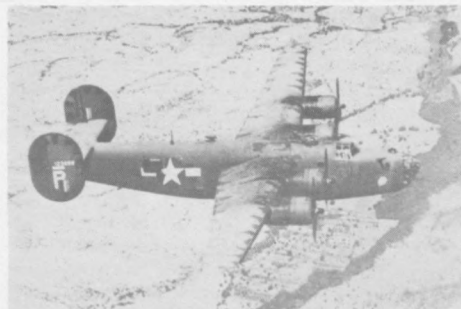


Ploesti

After Ploesti the 44th hit Wiener Neustadt on August 13, and it seemed the jinx was still there. Of nine aircraft lost to the three Eighth Air Force groups, the 44th lost eight... including the now immortal *Suzy Q*.

Late in the month the Eight Balls were back in England, then on September 16 they were headed for the desert again. On October 1 the target was Wiener Neustadt again, and of fourteen losses eight came from the 44th. Eight more crashed on their return to base and the Air Transport Command had to be called in to provide transportation for the remnants of the group back to Shipdham.

As that bloody year ended more liberator groups were arriving, and the darkest days of the 44th were over. There were still plenty of tough missions to come, and a lot of wrecked B-24s and empty beds, but there was no turning back. One tangible sign that you could survive was an old B-24D named Lemon Drop, one of the group's original aircraft. Daubed with black and yellow stripes she was used as the group's formation assembly ship, but in her earlier days she had been through it all.



Lemon Drop over North Africa.

Lt. Col. Jim Posey replaced Leon Johnson in September 1943, then three months later Col. Fred Dent took the group until March 1944. Col. John Gibson and Col. Eugene Snavely followed, with Col. Vernon Smith commanding for the last few days of the war.

When it was all over the Eight Balls had flown 343 missions, more than 8,000 sorties.