

NEWS LETTER

Vol. 15 No. 1

SECOND AIR DIVISION ASSOCIATION

March 1977

"Jerk's Natural" And Its Lucky Crew

by Victor Tannehill (Assoc.)

Capt. Darrell L. Sims and the crew of "Jerk's Natural" flew 25 combat missions in three different theatres of operations and not a single crew member was even scratched and not one enemy fighter touched that B-24!

Could be that the last three digits of the serial number of the plane, 711, accounted for that phenomenal record! "Jerk's Naturals". "Jerk" was the original pilot, Maj. John L. Jerstad of Racine, Wis., who won the Congressional Medal of Honor posthumously as a combat wing operations officer on the Ploesti mission. He skippered "Jerk's Natural" through the first five missions.

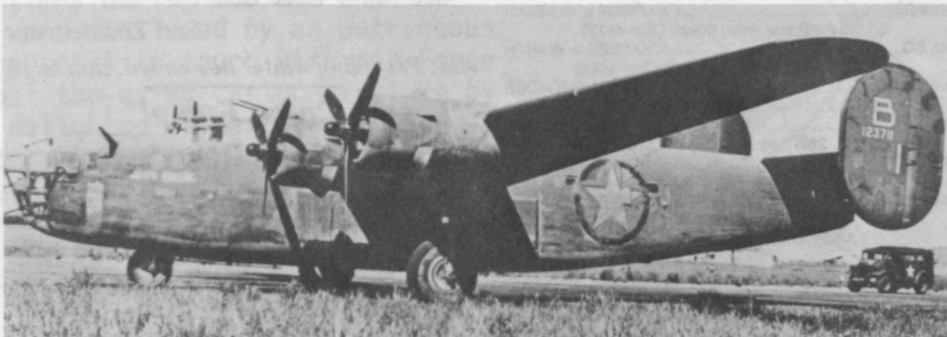
Except for Major Jerstad, the tunnel gunner (who was grounded for medical reasons in Africa) and Co-pilot Robert H. Hudspeth, of Verdi, Nev., missing from a raid in another plane, the original crew finished their combat tour intact.

The crew met their first Germans in June, 1942, in the Gulf of Mexico. On their way back to Fort Myers from a cross-country to Chicago, they looked down to see the slim outline of a sub.

"We had two depth charges that we'd wheedled out of the boys at Barksdale, La.," recalled Captain Sims, a Jonesboro (Ill.) redhead. "We made our run out of the sun, but they must have spotted us, because by the time we dropped the ashcans, she was almost submerged. However our enlisted bombardier, Staff Sgt. Edward W. Eichmann of Milwaukee, did a sweet job — put 'em right alongside."

In England, "Jerk's Natural" flew in most of the early raids on targets in occupied France. Once or twice she was scratched or dented by flak fragments, but tight formation flying and good shooting kept enemy fighters from putting a single slug into her. Her record of the fewest number of turn-backs for mechanical reasons of any plane in the Group was attributed to the untiring work of her crew chief, Master Sgt. S.M. Benson of Darien, Conn.

Over those concrete sub shelters, Capt. Maurice Elstun, bombardier, of Ross, Ohio, helped make for himself and his



"Jerk's Natural" crew a reputation for precision bombing.

The plane and crew later were in Tunisia, digging dust out of their ears and nostrils laying 1,000-pound eggs on Rommel's rear guard and dodging flak over Naples.

Africa was dust and sand and a pint of water a day. Cold nights and hot days and long flying distances.

The first trip over Naples was a breeze, but the second was rough. The plane next to "Jerk's Natural" was shot to ribbons. Looking out of his waist window, Gunner Samuel J. Delcambre, a Cajun from New Iberia, La., could see the crew of the stricken ship as the B-24 plunged down. But a happy combination of luck and skill seemed to be riding with Sims' crew.

Officially, "Jerk's Natural" was credited with two enemy fighters shot down in Africa.

The radio operator, long tall Tech. Sgt. Robert H. Harms of Alton Ill., was responsible for saving several lives when a B-24 was shot down five minutes after unloading its bombs over Sousse. He saw six men bail out and float down into the Mediterranean. Instantly he called Malta. Malta was unable to send help, but it did the next best thing. On the International Distress Frequency it called the Germans and told them of the airmen's plight. The Germans obligingly went out and picked up at least two of the survivors.

Flying over the desert, "Jerk's Natural" had its only really close call. One of the waist gunners, pouring a stream of lead at an enemy fighter, swung his .50 caliber too far and shot off one of the Liberator's trim tabs. As a result, Sims

couldn't hold the ship in formation. She dropped back, along with another crippled B-24. It was just by chance that the fighters chose the other cripple as their victim. They ganged up on it and shot it down while Sims' ship staggered in safely.

Once Navigator First Lieut. Rollin C. Rineck of Van Nuys, California, had trouble finding home base. But "Jerk's Natural" luck held. At the last minute, almost out of gas, Sims set her down safely.

As the crew racked up one combat mission after another, rank meant nothing and meeting their personal responsibility to the crew meant everything. Staff Sgt. J.R. (Peewee) Lawrence of Colwin, Pa., crouched in his tail gun position, was just as important as the pilot or bombardier. If Waist Gunner Howard G. Crissman of Butler, Pa., failed to keep his gun clean, the result might be disaster for them all. They all knew it and acted accordingly.

"Keeping 'em flying" in the desert was tough under difficult conditions. But Tech. Sgt. Phaon T. Wenrich of Pine Grove, Pa., flight engineer and top turret gunner, kept the Liberator's big radial engines turning.

Returning to England, "Jerk's Natural" and crew continued missions against Hitler's "Festung Europa." More than once Group Commander of the "Flying Circus" Col. Ted Timberlake took over the plane, "ranking" the pilot out of his seat. This was not hard to do, inasmuch as for 23 missions all four officers remained Second Lieutenants. To commemorate this fact, Elstun wrote a poem called "The Gold Bar Boys," which they used to recite sadly to one another over the interphone!

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER



Fall In. Inspection, 10 pm, July 30. Uniform of the Day; Class "A", or Blouse if that's all you can manage. Requirements? no alterations permitted. If you have a beer belly let it all hang out. Everyone has a chance for the 1st prize, so dig down into that footlocker and find that moth-eaten uniform. Among other events will be a grand door prize and a prize to the crew which has the most members present. Efforts are being made to get national TV coverage, so don't miss out on all the fun.

Have you found a new member yet? Time is growing short, give your VP a helping hand. Let's give our next president a membership of over 4,000.

See you at Lake Geneva.

Earl Zimmerman

(Ed: Providing winter has ended, that is!)

"Lassie Come Home" Article Brings Response

(ed: The following letter was sent to President Earl Zimmerman in response to his article in the December Newsletter. We felt it should be re-printed here.)

Dear Earl:

Just yesterday I received the November issue of the 2nd Air Division Association Newsletter. I was semi-reclining in my chair in my den, casually leafing through the paper. As I came to page 5 the first thing I noticed was the picture of the plane which had crashed near the Horshams St. Faith base and even before reading the article, I came out of my chair with a start and incredulously stated, "My God, that's the plane." On rare occasions each of us encounters some picture or scene of yesterday — something that happened years in the past, and it brings back a host of memories. For some intuitive reason or other, even before I read the article, I immediately recognized both the plane and the scene depicted in the photo — for I was there shortly after the crash.

I would like in this letter to present to you another facet of the story of the plane there pictured. In early 1944 while serving as Chief Clerk of the Quartermaster Office of Headquarters Squadron at Ketteringham Hall, I met the family of a Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Jones who resided at 16 Marshall Road in Norwich — in fact, this family must have lived in close proximity to the then residence of your wife. In this family, in addition to the parents were a daughter, Vera, married to an English soldier, and also three sons, Peter, age 12, Brian, age 9, and David, age 7.

From time-to-time during 1944 I visited this family, and they were at all times very kind to me and, as best I could, I endeavored to reciprocate. Brian, the middle son, was quite proficient in drawing and he would often show me different pictures of tanks and ships and especially planes — in fact he had some excellent drawings of our B-24 bombers in his accumulation.

I spent Christmas of 1944 with this family and had a really great Christmas away from home, enjoying the festivities of the day and season as well as some of that delicious Yorkshire pudding.

Two or three weeks later, on a bright Sunday afternoon while I was working in the Quartermaster Office on our base, the phone rang; and when I answered the voice coming from the other end of the phone was that of Vera — and it was obvious that she was crying. She said, "Virg, Brian's been killed. Can you come in?" Though quite stunned and almost in disbelief, I finally elicited from her the fact that Brian had been killed by a plane. I immediately got a jeep and drove from our station to their home in Norwich, a distance of approximately four miles. Tearfully they told me that one of our crippled bombers, evidently trying to make the airstrip at Horshams, had crashed in a quadrangular area flanked on all sides by houses and apartments; and that Brian and his cousin Mary had been crushed beneath the wings of the plane. I went to the site of the crash and it was there that I witnessed the very scene which your picture and photo so vividly recalled to my mind.

In your article you quoted the statement: "Two small children playing in the garden next door were killed." One of these children thus was Brian, my little friend, and evidently the picture of that plane and the debris and utter destruction present there was so vividly etched in my mind that I immediately knew that this was the scene and the plane, even without reading the article.

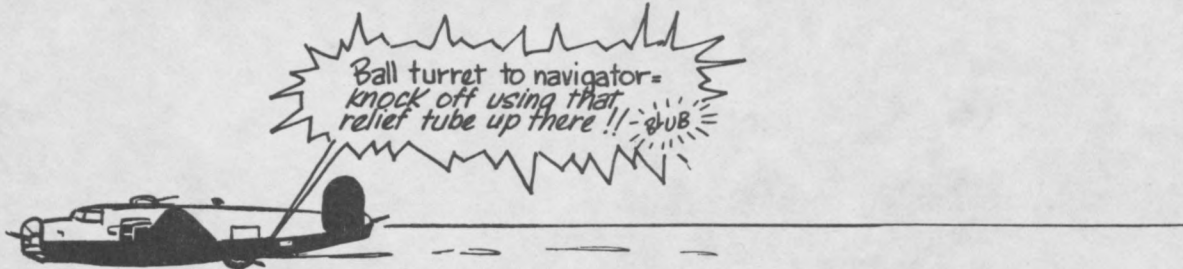
Just four months ago my wife and I made a trip to England, and we visited our friends. Mrs. Jones now lives just across from Eaton Park in Norwich and Vera and her husband Arthur reside on Bolingbroke Road in the city, and so likewise do the two boys. As I read your article, I realized that there is a definite possibility that your wife, June, might have known the Jones family or at least would know the location of Marshall Road, as she must have lived nearby. To me this was a great coincidence. I would appreciate it if somehow you would see that I receive an extra copy of the November Newsletter as I would like to send it to the family; and I would further suggest if you are attempting to locate the name and address of the tailgunner who was the sole survivor, I am sure it would be carried in the archives of the Norwich newspaper, who must have reported this at that time.

I do enjoy the newsletter even though I was never a part of many of the activities and I remember the early days at Shipdham and the later days in the Quartermaster Office at Ketteringham Hall — in fact, in 1961 we visited Bileau Hall in which Headquarters was located.

My congratulations to you on the presidency of the Association and season's greetings and warmest personal regards to you and your wife.

Sincerely yours,

VIRGIL O. HINTON
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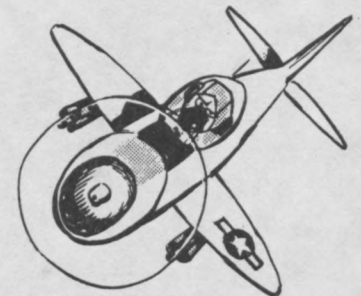


"TO ALL THE MAGNIFICENT MEN OF LIBERATOR MACHINES" and their "LITTLE FRIENDS"

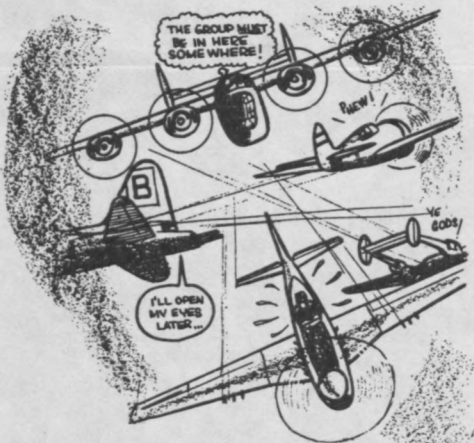
It's no secret that the 24's carried the biggest bomb loads in the ETO, hit the roughest targets and led all other bombing divisions in accuracy through the last four months of the war. It's also no secret THE VILLAGE PRESS now has the biggest bargain in the WW II book world for you today (plus a chance to swell the coffers of the 2AD Memorial Fund)!



"There I Was..." How many times during the 2nd unpleasantness did you hear those words followed by an outrageous story? Those of you who are still in touch with Air Force Magazine know of Bob Stevens' top-rated cartoon feature by "There I Was..." which has delighted readers for two decades. Bob's sparkling cartoons of the humor and pathos of that great conflict have been described by critics as "the best cartoon book about airmen in print." Those of you who haven't seen his work have missed "the Air Force's answer to Bill Mauldin" (Phoenix Republic).



Bob's cartoons have been previously published in two paperback books which were best sellers in the aviation world. NOW we've combined the best of these two previous books plus new material, including all those great songs and ballads of WW II, into one beautiful hardbound book which became an instant success as a Jeppesen Aviation Book Club selection. The clips shown here are just a few of the great cartoon "outrageous stories" you'll enjoy in this outstanding book.



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Okay, folks, send me _____ copies of Bob Stevens' "There I Was Flat On My Back". I enclose \$11.95 for each copy. I understand that \$1.00 of sale of each book goes to the 2AD Memorial Fund. My check or money order is enclosed.

Send to: _____

ZIP _____

California residents please add 6%, foreign orders 10%.

THE MOST IMPORTANT PIECE OF EQUIPMENT IN THE 'LIB' WAS A EMPTY 50 CAL. AMMO BOX--



(P.S. IT WENT UNDER HERE TO KEEP THE NOSE DOWN ON THE GROUND).

RUDE COMMENTS

Bah! Bah! Black Sheep (or any other color)

by Walter Rude (448th)

Gowan Field — 1942 & 1943: Most have heard of the old cliché "An army marches on its stomach." This had to be true, considering the marching qualities exhibited by Air Corps personnel. We certainly didn't march on our feet! When you consider the quality and non-availability of selection as regards our vittles, it's a small wonder that we were able to walk in any style — marching or otherwise!

I cast no reflections on the abilities of our food service people. They did the bestest with the leastest that anyone could expect. I am referring specifically to that point in early 1943 when the services changed from 'garrison' to 'field' rations. Under garrison rationing a good mess sergeant could feed roasts, fried chicken, chops and even steaks AND there was money left over for free beer, cigars, cigarettes, soda pop and candy each Friday after work.

Field rations changed all this. Menus were planned, and supplies purchased, by a centralized organization. Everyone throughout the service ate the same thing on the same day. Steaks became stew; chops turned into liver; roasts became hash and fried chicken graduated to being "Chicken-a-la-King." King of what? I often felt king of lower slobovia!

To get to the title of this story. Mutton stew became a leading item on the menus, sometimes twice in one week. Your introduction to the day's culinary disaster

came early. As you passed through the kitchen to get your hen fruit, pancakes or what-have-you, you couldn't help but notice the sheep carcasses neatly trussed in paper and webbing lying on the concrete apron looking ever so much like dead dogs. YUK!

The cooks, so 'tis said, couldn't stomach the 'woolies' either. The smell of cooking sheep was too much for even the hardiest soul, and the only person who could stand that stench would have to be someone with a malfunctioning olfactory system. The cooks would chop the carcasses into edible portions, toss them into a large pot, add seasoning and vegetables, turn on the heat and then get the hell out of the kitchen!

Come noon and it was time to serve this violation of all good food principles. This is when typical GI ingenuity came into play. We all knew after one previous experience that if we didn't consume the entire mess at that sitting, we would have it again for supper, and, if you happened to work nights, for midnight chow. SO-o-o-o we would all urge the serving personnel to "Give me some more." Then when we passed through the doors leading into the dining hall we would, as surreptitiously as possible, dump the over-loaded plate's contents into the nearest garbage can and head for the PX snack bar for a hamburger or anything else that your stomach would accept in a more satisfactory manner.

I might add that due to the fact Gowan Field was located right in the heart of the Basque-inhabited sheep country, it was only natural, in a political and economic sense, for the military to patronize said sheep-herders. BAH! Enuff said.

Last Days at Shipdham AAF Station 115

by Brother R. J. Marotta SDB, (44th)

After the end of the War, on May 8th, 1945, the entire Air Base was in a happy mood awaiting the trip home to the USA. In a short time the order came. The Air Corps personnel, *only*, were to fly home in their Liberators with 40 pounds of luggage allowed. Needless to say, those left behind had a wistful look on their faces as we watched the B-24s take off into the wild blue yonder.

The 806th Chemical Company (Air Operations) was given the odious task of cleaning up the station to return it to the British.

Since the "FLY BOYS" left in such a hurry and with limited baggage, there were tons of supplies that had to be returned to their respective DEPOTS. The depots were not happy about this as they were also in the process of packing and leaving. We assembled the men, told them to try to get the job done and then they could have some time off. They responded and worked very hard from dawn to dusk.

But then came another factor that surprised us. As the ratio of Americans decreased the British soldiers increased. This led to some altercations in the local towns which were caused by ugly rumors concerning the deportment of the Americans during our tour of duty in England. Our CO wisely solved this problem by tell-

ing the men to stay on the base and he would supply the liquid refreshments!

Then came some more disturbing news and until this day I do not know if it was a reward or a punishment. We were being sent to another air base to DO IT AGAIN!

One of our officers was assigned to accompany the British Evaluation Officer on a tour of inspection. One evening he came in fuming. The British Officer was going to charge the USA Govt. for removal of one light bulb socket from one room to another. The GIs had made many alterations to suit their needs and we thought the Base was in better condition at the end than at the time we took over in 1942.

Colonel Dent, one of our Group Commanders, poured tons of concrete to alleviate the mud problem that we had when we arrived. This is one "concrete" example of American improvement.

After the final inspection four American and four British Airmen stood at attention at the flagpole. One lone bugle played and the American flag was lowered for the last time, and the British flag raised for the first time. This seemed to me a very quiet and unpretentious ceremony to cover an event that spanned three years of occupation by the 44th Bomb Group.

News of 392nd "Crusaders"

by Bob Vickers (392nd)

At the outset we all want to thank Bill Robertie, our fine 2AD Editor, for his superlative efforts in turning out the most informative of Newsletters! To you, Bill, our many thanks, as we have had many responses from 392nd members relating how much they appreciate your professional efforts!!

All 392nd folks we have 'rescued' so far should have the latest Group Directory (dated December 31st) and Group Newsletter in hand, along with a copy of the 2AD Membership Form. As noted, we are pushing hard to build our Group's 2AD membership upwards to well over 200 by this summer, from the 130 plus now, and earnestly need everyone's help! So, please repro a few of the 2AD forms and help the Area Contact Directors in your areas? (Their names in November '76 2AD Newsletter.) Even though all prospective members may not be able to make the Lake Geneva Group 'maxi' this July, we are encouraging them to join now — looking forward to seeing them in future years.

We were delighted to pass the final information along to all on the forthcoming publication of our combat history book, 'The Liberators From Wendling.' With all your support, we should have this handsomely printed effort out by late spring or early summer at latest! We are hoping that if there are any extra printings run as a result of outside requests among other former 8th AF personnel, any excess monies would go as the 392nd's contribution to the 2AD Memorial Foundation at Norwich . . . a hope anyway. (See J.D. Long's comments on the Foundation effort in the Sept. Newsletter.)

On another note, does anyone have information on additional Libs of the 392nd which flew over '100' missions? If so, pass on info to Bill Robertie. With the aid of Myron Keilman and the old 2AD 'Target Victory' bomb recap publication, we managed to dig up one for Steve Birdsall's listing (See TOP SCORERS insert, last 2AD NL). The ship was a B-24H, "SHORT SNORTER," number 990, with the old Mobil Gas 'Flying Horse' insignia painted on the left nose section. This fine old Lib flew 128 consecutive missions without an abort! Her crew chief was MSGT S.A. Dergo a former Choirmaster from Bridgeport, Conn. Anyone know of his whereabouts? Both came from the 579th BS. (Pix of them will be in our Group history). We're looking forward to Myron K's account of the famous (and tragic) Group raid on Fredrichshafen, March 18, 1944, to be published in the 2AD NL!

One final word. Plans are underway with Joe Warth of the 44th to share a large hospitality room with our two Groups at Lake Geneva! Looking forward to seeing you all there along with many new faces as well.

NOTICE

If you are one of those planning on driving a camper to the reunion at Lake Geneva, we advise you to get in touch with James R. Carey, Jr., Box 300, Ossian, Iowa 52161. Jim owns and operates a trailer court in Ossian and has contacts in the Lake Geneva area. Jim has offered to help all those who contact him in obtaining space. He can help, so write him as soon as possible.

MEMORIAL TRUST

N. J. D. Walter
Clerk to the Governors

After many years of faithful service to the Association, Mr. John Howard resigned this past year as Clerk to the Board of Governors, Memorial Trust. Taking his place is Mr. N. J. D. Walter whose father held the same position for many years until 1969. For a background of Mr. Walter we use his own words:

"You will perhaps recall that my father, Mr. F. R. D. Walter succeeded Basil Cozens-Hardy as Clerk to the Governors and remained Clerk until his death in 1969. I am now what you would call a lawyer in the same



firm in Norwich as my predecessor, Cozens-Hardy & Jewson.

I am a native of Norwich and, of course recall the tremendous excitement during the war when the 2nd Air Division B-24s were forming up over the City in the early mornings before setting off for Germany. I joined the Royal Navy at the beginning of 1945 as an Executive or, as your Navy would term it, a Deck Officer, and served mainly at sea on the small ships until the end of 1964 when I left with the rank of Lieutenant Commander. During my Navy career I obviously had quite a lot of contact with the United States Navy, both socially and operationally. In one of the ships I was in towards the end of my service we visited Norfolk, Virginia for an exercise with ships operating from there and subsequently we went up the St. Lawrence Seaway the year it was opened and subsequently up the Welland Canal to Lake Erie — and two British ships called on Cleveland, Ohio, the first British war

ships to visit Cleveland since it was bombarded by some during the War of Independence.

I am now, as I have said, a lawyer and deal largely with the court work side of my firm's practice. I enclose a couple of rather revolting Polaroid photographs and hope that they will be sufficient for your newsletter.



I also take the liberty of enclosing a photograph of my attractive, efficient, and long-suffering secretary Lynne Frary, who, as you will appreciate, does all the fairly substantial amount of correspondence and typing that is involved. I feel a photograph of her will be a much greater asset to your newsletter than one of me."

(ed. note: In a beauty contest between thee and she, she wins.)

OSS Mission to the CBI

by Sebastian H. Corriere (492nd)

Members of the 492nd Bomb Group, accompanied by representatives of O.S.S. made a flight to New Delhi, India to investigate the possibilities and discuss with the O.S.S. officials in the China-Burma-India theater the feasibility of conducting operations.

A crew captained by Major Bestow Rudolph (pilot), 858th Bomb Squadron, captained by Capt. Emanuel Choper (copilot), 1st Lt. Charles W. McGuire (navigator), 1st Lt. Robert A. France (bombardier), Capt. Clifford M. Fulton (Engineer) M/Sgt. Willis L. Delano, Jr. (crew chief) and Sgt. William A. Lewis (radio operator), all of the 856th Bomb Squadron, were chosen to perform the flight and Lt. Colonels Gable and Chandler of the London O.S.S. office accompanied the crew to conduct negotiations.

Aircraft 42-63980, one of the oldest Liberators in Carpetbagger work, was selected to be taken along to demonstrate the modifications and general appearance of carpetbagging aircraft.

On November 29, 1944 the "Playmate" took off from Harrington, stopped at Bovington to pick up the O.S.S. officials and proceeded to New Delhi, India, via Naples and Cairo. Previous to the appearance of General Donovan of the O.S.S., the party from England inspected bases and facilities in order to obtain a clear all around picture of the conditions in that theater on whether or not operations could be effectively conducted. Sites were inspected in North Burma, Calcutta, and Dinjun, India. Cols. Gable and Chandler proceeded over the hump into China to complete the investigations by conducting inspections in the field. They returned after five days in China to New Delhi.

With the General's arrival a meeting was held. The end result was that a carpetbagger project was necessary for the CBI and the conditions were such that the project could be accomplished without undue hardships or difficulties. It was further decided that it would not be feasible for any part of the group to be sent to

the CBI unless the entire ETO group could be made available. As long as part of the ETO group was needed in that theater, a new group could be organized from available groups in the CBI theater.

The return trip started January 17, 1945 and "Playmate" followed the same route back. The trip was of sixty days duration, covering 25,000 miles.

As an added note to this story, I wonder if this was the plane that was to arrive at noon at Harrington when we had just been snowed in. Because of the heavy snow, all personnel, combat crews included except for the Officer-of-the-Day, were sent to shovel the runway clear.

Another note. How many romances would have been shattered if the 492nd had been sent to the CBI?

News From the 453rd BG

by Don Olds

August 14, 1943 will always be remembered by the men in the early days of the 453rd BG. On this date we experienced the loss of a B-24 and its entire crew. Early that afternoon a training and photographic mission was planned by the 735th SQ, and aircraft 41-29032 was airborne with 2nd Lt. David MacGowan at the controls.

At a point approximately thirteen miles south of DuBois, Wyoming this plane was caught in a blind canyon and crashed into a mountain side. Complete destruction of the plane resulted in every member of the crew being instantly killed. A forest fire followed the accident which led to the discovery of the burned wreckage and the bodies of the victims.

Considerable difficulty accompanied the recovery of the bodies due to the terrain. Group CO, Colonel Joe Miller and Major Harvey Lloyd, the Group Medical Officer, immediately went to the scene to personally direct and assist in the rescue work. Everything possible was done to alleviate the grief of the relatives, including men of the 453rd accompanying the bodies of the victims to their respective hometowns by train.

Below is a photo of MALE CALL, the only original B-24 the group took to England and which was still flying with the group when it was stood down in April '45. It was originally assigned to the 734th SQ Crew #57, Charles A. Ward, pilot. MALE CALL was battle tested in 95 combat missions over enemy territory.



The 733rd SQ was cited for "distinguished and outstanding performance of duty during the period of 9 May 44 and 17 August 44." During this period they flew 82 operations without the loss of personnel or aircraft, setting a new standard of performance for heavy bombardment in the ETO. While this record was being made the squadron was under the command of Major R.D. Coggeshall who was personally decorated along with Capt. Sam Haggard, the Engineering Officer. (Both are members of the Association.)

In the last newsletter I asked members to please send me names and addresses of former 453rd men they knew while at Old Buck. After three months I'm still waiting for my first letter. So in the next couple of months I'm going to be writing to many of you with a personal request to help me out. I've got the names of many of your men who were on aircrews. Surely you remember where some others of your crew hailed from and I'm hoping you'll take five minutes to jot them down and send them to me. I'm certain many of them would be anxious to join us at Lake Geneva if they only knew about the upcoming reunion. Come to think of it, make sure you get your reservations in early. We want a large turnout so we can have our own de-briefing room.

Did You Know?

by Steve Gotts

Three miles to the East of Cambridge, beside the Newmarket Road, two derelict buildings stand alone on farmland. These, and the broken remnants of a control tower, are among the few remains of what was once AAF Station F374, Bottisham, Cambridgeshire, a former wartime home of the 361st Fighter Group, 8th Air Force.

When the station's three steel mesh runways were eventually torn up after the war, a unique story associated with them passed into history. The last of the runways constructed, which measured 1167 yards in length on a North-South heading, became the subject of an unusual contest. Two teams of 35 engineers each, from VIIIth Fighter Command Eastern Base Section, were assigned the task of laying the runway in the shortest possible time.

At 0903 hours on 23 January 1944, the two teams assembled in the centre of the airfield and, working in opposite directions, began piecing together the sheets of interlocking perforated steel planking.

Return of A Rare Coin

by John Archer
(The Eastern Daily Press)

A rare Bungay coin which was found by an American airman at Flixton more than 30 years ago and taken to the United States after the war was presented to Flixton Primary School this week — just a stone's throw from where it was found.

The coin, a Bungay halfpenny dated 1794, was presented to the chairman of the school managers, the Rev. John Speers by Mr. John Archer, the local 8th Air Force historian.

It will be framed and probably hung in the older part of the school where it will be on view to all the children.

The story of the coin goes back to 1944 when Jimmy D. Seery, a member of the United States Army Air Force, stationed at Flixton airfield, was walking in the deer park near the entrance to the old Flixton Hall.

As he walked through the park near the gamekeeper's lodge he was suddenly startled by a shotgun blast which was later found to have come from the gun of a poacher.

Later that day Jimmy came across an old Prince Albert tobacco tin which contained several coins, a Bungay halfpenny and a silver crown among them.

After the war the halfpenny, with a caricature of Bigod's Castle on one side and Justice with scales on the other was one of a number of mementoes which Jimmy took back to the States with him.

Now, after more than 30 years he decided to write a letter to find out how Flixton had changed since his days in the U.S.A.F. when he was responsible for the 707th Bomber Squadron auto-pilot and bombsight workshop.

The letter was addressed to The Head Master, Flixton Manor, Bungay, Suffolk, and was passed to Miss Eileen Stone,

Both teams operated in shifts, and during the night worked under the glare of carbon arc lamps. On the morning of the 24th, the work was suspended to allow the 361st Group to fly its second combat mission of the war. Taking off from the main runway, 51 P-47s, led by Major Rimerman, flew an uneventful area support mission over Belgium and returned unscathed to Bottisham. As the last Thunderbolt taxied to its dispersal, the engineers returned to their labors and again worked on into the night, despite the rain and intense cold.

Bad weather on the 25th prevented any flying, and the winning team completed their section that evening in a time of 56 hours and 40 minutes. 30 minutes later, the other team finished, and, being the losers, were assigned the additional task of laying the marshalling area.

The winners were awarded furloughs of time off from completion of runway up to a six day deadline set by their commander, Col. I.O. Brent. As Col. Brent state later, the engineers undoubtedly established a record . . . "never equalled in the E.T.O. or anywhere else by U.S. troops."

head mistress of Flixton Primary School.

She was unable to say in detail how the area had changed since its days as a wartime airfield, so she passed the letter to Mr. John Archer of Station Road, Earsham, Bungay, the local 8th Air Force historian. He wrote to Jimmy giving him a present-day picture of his former home.

Jimmy had mentioned in his letter the Bungay halfpenny and had offered to send it to Flixton if anyone in the village was interested in it. Miss Stone suggested that the school would be very pleased to have it, frame it, and put it on display for the children.

The coin arrived within a short time, but at a price. Jimmy insisted that some of Miss Stone's pupils write to him about the school, the village and themselves.

Miss Stone told a reporter that her nine to 11-year old pupils would be writing a letter to Jimmy soon. "The children will be doing a project which will be sent to this American airman," said Miss Stone.

Mr. Archer said the school was situated only a few hundred yards from where the coin was found and it seemed an appropriate place to put it on display.

But nobody will ever know whether the tobacco tin together with its contents fell from the poacher's pocket as he made his hasty retreat.

That is something Mr. Archer may never find out!



Mr. Speers (left) receives the coin from Mr. Archer.

Why Wait 'Til Next Year

by Pete Henry (44th)

Chances are, if you enjoyed the 2nd AD Assn. reunion in Valley Forge in 1976, or in Norwich in 1975, or in Wilmington, S.C. in 1974 etc., you probably had a good time with some old friends. So, why wait a whole year to see them again? That's the way we felt and, before our final "Cheers" at Valley Forge in July '76, we promised to visit a few friends before the year's end.

It started in October at Cherokee Village, Hardy, Arkansas where our bombardier, Al Jones and his wife Peggy, retired from school teaching in Michigan last spring. We enjoyed five wonderful days there golfing, bridging, eating, square dancing, etc., and you'll not find a nicer retirement village anywhere. Al has a storehouse of photos that we took in England back in 1944-45, but they're still packed away in boxes from their move. He's promised to dig them out and maybe we'll see some of them in future Newsletters.



Art "RED" Hand and Pete Henry with 8-ball rug hooked by Red.

Our next stop was Paris! No, not Paris, France — Paris, Ill. where our gunner, Art 'Red' Hand resides with his wife, Lois. We had only two days there but they were fun-filled. The first thing that greeted us (after Lois and Red) was a rug with the Flying 8-ball and 8th Air Force insignias on it (see accompanying photograph). Art hooked this rug just after he got home in 1945 and, while somewhat worn, is still in excellent condition. Lois advised in their Christmas card this year that Red is going to hook a B-24 rug after Christmas and we hope they will bring both rugs to Lake Geneva.

Indiana is only about 50 miles from Paris and they have a covered bridge festival in Rockville every October. We were too late for the festival, but the Hands took us for a motor tour of some of the bridges. However, most of the time was spent talking about the 2AD Assn., WWII, B-24s, Norwich, etc., plus examining pictures and books.

By the time this article appears in the March 1977 Newsletter, you may already be making plans to attend the 2 AD Assn. reunion in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. If you enjoy it, why wait until next year (1978) to visit old friends that you see there?

I REMEMBER: A Most Disastrous Mission (in three parts)

by
Col. Myron H. Keilman (392nd BG)
Col. Robert Berger (392nd BG)
collaborated by
Col. Vernon Baumgart (392nd BG)
Mr. Donald Clover (392nd BG)

On 18 March, 1944 only ten out of twenty-four airplanes returned.

The Eighth Air Force "Big Week" of 21-26 of February was just the beginning of the great air offensive in preparation for "D-Day." Each of the three air divisions were flying maximum efforts nearly every day against industrial targets of the German Third Reich. 1,000 bomber strikes were regular daily occurrences. The Royal Air Force fleet of Halifax, Lancaster, and Mosquito bombers flew night after night with their devastating loads of 10,000 pound "blockbuster" bombs and incendiaries.

As one of the 392nd Bombardment Group's four squadron commanders, it was my turn to lead the group as Command Pilot, and 18 March promised to be a great day.

The target: Dornier airplane assembly plant at Friedrickshafen — a city on the north shore of Lake Constance, on the German-Swiss border. It was here the great dirigibles, Hindenburg and Graf Zeppelin, were built in the late 1920s and 30s.

The weather: Clear all across France and Bavaria and the target area — ideal for visual bombing with our Sperry bombsights.

Opposition: We could expect the usual heavy anti-aircraft defense of the target area and German fighter attacks both in-bound and out-bound of enemy territory.

Fighter cover: There would be a great concentration of friendly fighters (P-47s, P-38s, and P-51s) all along our route to defend us.

Briefing was held at 0730 hours and take-off was at 0930. Assembly of our two twelve-ship squadrons and the 2nd Air Division's fourteen groups was effected on schedule. The great bomber stream of some three hundred and fifty B-24s in twelve-ship formations with "con-trails" streaming, roared across the English Channel at 20,000 feet altitude. Paralleling our course on our left was the long bomber-stream of B-17 formations.

As we crossed the French-German border just south of Strasbourg, I can still see that tremendous azure-blue skyscape filled with formations of B-24s and B-17s rushing eastward with P-38s, or P-47s or P-51s ever circling above — searching for attacking German airplanes. It was a sight that no camera or painting can possibly capture in perspective or magnitude. It must have been an awesome sight — and sound — to the eye-witnesses below.

Separate from the regular formations of B-17s, I remember seeing a six-ship formation. They were out *there* all alone — and what I considered — "asking for IT." It wasn't until later that I learned that that was exactly what they were doing — asking for the German Luftwaffe to attack them. They were specially armored and



equipped airplanes that were deployed so as to draw the enemy fighters away from their more vulnerable "brothers." They didn't even carry bombs.

I also remember seeing German fighters attacking a "tailend Charlie." Any airplane that was stricken with engine trouble or for some other reason lagged behind was especially vulnerable to attack, and what I saw was typical. In spite of our fighter cover the Jerries would sneak in and shoot up a lone airplane in no time at all. They could also be vectored to a lone or isolated formation and there attack it in force. The 392nd was next to last in the 2nd Air Division bomber stream of fourteen group formations, and I didn't see any fighters attacking the B-24s ahead of us. Our group did have the misfortune of losing two airplanes in a mid-air collision just after crossing the Channel into France.

The snowy Alps were shining bright to our right as we skirted the Swiss border. My formation of two squadrons were holding a nice formation. I was really proud of them.

The bomb run was so designed that we would fly eastward past our Friedrichshafen target, then circle to the right toward the initial point (IP) of our bomb run on the east end of Lake Constance — about twenty miles from "bombs away." After bomb-release, we would make a right turn to assemble the group, then head out-bound for home.

As we turned over the IP our bomb-bay doors were opened and all bombing equipment was in readiness and functioning properly. The target area was clear of clouds, and I was in high hopes of a really successful bombing attack. The lead crew was one of the 392nd's best. This was their twenty-fifth and last mission. I remember how blue Lake Constance looked as we flew along its shore at 20,000 feet.

Up ahead I could see the black shellbursts of anti-aircraft fire — but it wasn't in a big barrage like I had seen and flown through over Bremen, Kiel or the Ruhr. It

didn't look bad — then all hell broke loose! Flak started bursting right in the formation. Not up ahead, above or below — they had us "zeroed in." The concussion made our airplane buck; chunks of steel clanged into it; and with that the other airplanes of the formation went sailing by. I was stunned at the havoc. Captain Baumgart, with his eyes on the flight instruments flying the bomb run, quickly recognized that we had lost power on number four engine and promptly feathered it, along with applying full power to all others, but the formation had over-run us and was scattered — the bomb run in disarray. The bombardier did the best he could to adjust for the sudden change in air speed and loss of programmed altitude, but it was too late. Needless to say, we didn't get our bombs on the target. Five of our B-24s were shot down by that intense and accurate flak. My left wing-man had disappeared and my right wing-man — the deputy lead — was flying on three engines, too.

Vernon Baumgart, now a retired colonel, remembers: "On post-mission inspection of El Lobo, the whole fuselage aft of the bomb bays looked like a hatchet-wielder had gone berserk. The flak cut the intercommunication and electric power cables to the rear turret, and the tail gunner couldn't communicate nor operate his turret or guns. When showing his plight to the waist gunner, he even held up the severed ends of his heated suit cord and pointed to the dangling airplane control cables. (Thanks, Convair, for installing dual elevator and rudder control cables.) One of his shoes had been sliced open by a ragged projectile — but barely cut the skin of his heel." Lucky gunner!

Leaving the target area, our airplanes closed back into formation; eleven in the lead squadron and six in the second. Flying on three engines, we were ten miles an hour slower; thus the formations ahead pulled away from my little formation in a very short time.

Worse yet, our Wing leader — the 44th Group — was forced out of position by another group cutting in at the IP. The 44th then had to do a large 360° turn for a second bombing run. This maneuver created a long gap in the bomber stream ahead of us and one behind us. The resulting isolation left us vulnerable and invited the ensuing fighter attacks.

I remember that we had hardly taken stock of our situation when the waist gunner called: "Fighters at 3 o'clock!" There they were, a whole "gaggle" of them; ten to twelve in close formation, paralleling our course about a half mile on our right — and climbing. I got on the radio and began calling for friendly fighters.

Just like the "book" said, they climbed up to a one o'clock high position into the sun about two miles out, made a wing-