



HERITAGE HERALD

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Periodical of the Heritage League of the Second Air Division (USAAF)

“Meet Me in St. Louis!”

Front row: Stanley Zyborst Back row: Dick Giesing, Gil Baumbauer, Winfield Denton, Tom Perry, Lawrence Gilbert, Keith Roberts, George Player, Bob Vickers, Jim Goar, Jack Rotzien, Charles Wheelwright, David Greene, Carroll Cheek, Charles Dye, Wally Blackburn, Allen Duff. The photo was taken at the 8th Air Force Reunion Savannah Ga 2008.

Annette Tison, 392nd BG



League set to meet alongside 8th AF Historical Society, October 11-16th

For a brief period last fall, we expected to join the 2ADA again in their 2011 Convention, but when the plan suddenly shifted from the Dallas area to a Bermuda-bound cruise ship, we felt that we needed to make a plan demanding less time and money of our members. We considered holding our own intimate ‘stand-alone,’ along the lines of our memorable 2006 adventure to Savannah. Las Vegas also looked very enticing, and we are keeping it on our short list for the future, but the decision has been made.

You can now mark your calendars for Tuesday, October 11 through Sunday, October 16, 2011 at the Sheraton Westport Plaza in St. Louis, Missouri! We decided that this is a great point in history for the members of both perpetual ‘honoring and remembering’ organizations concerned with WW II’s Mighty 8th Air Force, to mix it up socially. In the past, our leaders have done so informally; and many carry membership cards for both the Mighty Eighth and Heritage League as well as Associate memberships in the 2ADA.

More details and program, registration and hotel information will soon be available in *The Herald* and at <http://www.heritageleague.org>. For now, though, count on a very good time among veterans and descendants of scores of 8th USAAF bomb group, fighter group, and support outfits. We hope to be there in strength, and will also hold our Annual Meeting over the weekend which will include elections and other timely business. If you have not come to one of our conventions before, we look forward to seeing you!

From Dog Tags to Body Bags...

By Lisa Niehoff

From Dog tags to body bags? In this tribute, it ain't so! I'm trying to think of some way to express my feelings about my second cousin, Lt. Warren Irvin Knox, a man I never knew but was a hero all the same, only one amongst many, but a true action man. What were the personal qualities that made Warren a champion? Was it leadership, loyalty, selflessness? In my opinion, anyone who fights in a war for the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness cannot be anything less.

What has always separated our service men and women from all the rest is their innocent, fearless souls. They have seen the horrors of combat, made allies, fought and killed enemies; learning the art of war. They have come through the fire with fresh eyes and a new heart. We may never know what went through Lt. Knox's mind on March 19, 1945, but here's his story, and surviving the end of the journey was surely his greatest reward.

1st Lt. Warren I. Knox of the 728TH Bomb Squadron, 452nd Bomb Group was flying in number 5 position lead squadron in his B-17 'TRY'N GET IT' in a heavy bombardment mission to Zwickau, Germany. About a minute before the IP, one jet propelled enemy fighter attacked his aircraft from 7 o'clock high. One shell hit the number 2 engine, cutting all of the fuel lines and setting it ablaze. This was immediately feathered. Fragments of another shell hit the

oil tank, which prevented feathering, forcing the prop to windmill. This engine was also on fire. Lt. Knox immediately released his bomb load in the target area and left the protective formation. In order to extinguish the two dangerous fires, he dove his aircraft from an altitude of 25,000 feet to 16,000 feet, which succeeded in putting out the blaze in the number

To quote General Moseley, "They walked in the footsteps of Airmen before them just as they paved the way for us."

1 engine, and the blaze in the number 2 engine was extinguished. All the removable equipment and the ball turret were immediately jettisoned and, with only two engines operating, Lt. Knox headed the crippled bomber towards Russian battle lines about 100 miles distant. During this hazardous flight, altitude was constantly lost, but was eventually maintained

at 6000 feet. When Russian battle lines were reached, the number 4 engine became inoperable due to a moderate yet accurate flak barrage sent up by anti-aircraft guns in that vicinity. With only one engine operational, and by applying his expert and unusual flying technique and skill, Lt. Knox crash landed the A/C in an open field without injuring any of his crew members.

With courage, coolness and complete devotion to duty, Lt. Knox skillfully accomplished his assignment and saved his crew from probable destruction. For this act of courage, Lt. Warren Irvin Knox earned a Distinguished Flying Cross.

Front row: Lt. Warren Irvin Knox; Co-pilot Leveene T. Larson; Navigator Jesse H. Champ-lin; Bombadier Robert S. Magdolin **Back Row:** Engineer Robert J. LeCoque; Radio operator Ray A. Sundet; Top Armor Gunner Lewis E. Abadallah; Ball Turret Gunner James L. Moore; Tail Gunner Daniel Drlich



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

—*Brian Mahoney*

As I write this, a tide of messy popular uprisings, clamoring for democracy under variously repressive Middle Eastern regimes, is taking root after Tunisia and Egypt have started changes that still look promising. On a much smaller scale, further to the West, we are changing by growth with the League's board, the Executive Committee with no bloodshed, and all good feelings! A few recent vacancies have been filled by appointment, bringing Jonathan Bickel, a relatively young 'Second Gen' into the Executive VP seat. Jonathan's father is now 88, hale and hearty, a 467th vet who was with us in Chicago in 2009. This position was previously held by Tina Woods, who has resigned in order to devote extra time to the care of her mother, our first Honorary Life Member, Red Cross 'Girl' Ruth Register Coleman, who has fans in several generations.

Ben Jones takes on the role of Heritage League VP for Volunteers. Norfolk born but now a US citizen, Ben served in the USAF and is now in a reserve unit as a loadmaster on the C-130. He brings his long interest in the 392nd BG and the 2AD to the position. It is an elective office created with our new bylaws in 2006 but not previously filled. He is very capable organizationally and as a researcher, 'cyber-guy,' and artist.

Laurie Bedus is making her debut as Herald editor, part of her big portfolio as our new Communications VP. She is a great niece of 392nd BG Capt. John Slowik, the Navigator on the Books crew, KIA March 18, 1944. Laurie immediately follows Reed Hammans, who has left behind a legacy for making great researcher connections, doing excellent research and writing, and giving many detailed answers to our website visitors.

All three have great depth in professional and individual areas which will serve the League well. Their energy and ideas are already transforming our culture. I am pleased to anticipate that come October my successor will have a good, energized group, and a few recent initiatives under way or wrapped up neatly.

Envisioning the future of the League, Jon, Ben and Laurie join several old hands actively making a huge volunteer impact on the day-to-day business. As we contemplate our slate for 2011-13, we would love to hear from any of you who could dedicate some time in one of the offices. We meet via audio chat over the internet for a few hours as a group almost monthly, and some of our



Representing the League at the Annual General Meeting of Governors Brian Mahoney shares lunch with Robin Eaton and Andrew Hawker following the cathedral service.

working committees work that way between.

If you would like to know more about the existing board roles and service opportunities, please contact me. If you are more inclined to volunteer for particular tasks, please let Ben know! All of us are listed on the back page of *The Herald*.

Not only am I grateful for the ways that volunteering has let me express gratitude to the 2AD vets, I am also ennobled to do it with a very fun and motivated cohort of sharp colleagues of two descendant generations. You will find it personally rewarding, too.

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By Pete O'Tube, Expert

Dear Pete,

One of the old pilots in Dad's group talks about "B. T. O.," a Liberator with some interesting nose art, with a fancy wolf on it! In some mission reports, full of abbreviations and acronyms, I see mention of "BTO mission" or lead ship, when there was poor target visibility. What does a wolf have to do with clouds?

Unclearly yours,
Raymond P.Darr

Dear Ray Darr,

Well, what they have in common is... an interesting era! It was an era when young airmen loved to name and decorate warplanes creatively. Their themes were awash in lots of technical terminology that just cried out for double-meaning puns. So, I will tell you about the technical part of the answer first!

"Bombing through overcast" was brand new lingo for the practice of bringing aerial bombardment to bear on targets obscured by cloud. The premise of strategic daylight bombing was that crews were able to "see" the target during the day, as there were no smart weapons yet. This strategy was tested and refined by the USAAF at a very dear cost; and was crucial to Allied victory. Crews had been trained in visual bombing from stable high flying heavy bombers using the top-secret Norden mechanical analog computer bombsight. It had no infra-red or other non-visual capabilities.

Weather scouts, navigators and bombardiers talked in terms of 'undercast layers' of cloud, at a given altitude, which obscured visibility of ground targets, using a 'tenths' system... 10/10s (read aloud as 'ten tenths') was solid cloud cover. 8/10s prohibited conventional visual bombing, and 5/10s would have all hoping for well-placed holes that would allow setting up a good

bombing run. "CAVU" (ceiling and visibility unlimited) was the same as 0/10s, indicating the clearest conditions, which favored both bombing as well as deadly antiaircraft fire by defenders below. In the last part of the war, rapidly evolving early radar allowed missions to proceed on days that would have had planes grounded, or returning home with bombs only months earlier. "Mickey sets" (or H2X) aircraft-based ground-sweeping radar became plentiful late in 1944 among 8th Air Force groups in England, and allowed increased operations over cloudy northern Europe.

Now, for the 'cultural' aspect of B. T. O. In the 1940s, a 'big time operator' was a smooth-talkin' dude who liked to spend time with the ladies. A 'wolf' was a young male that was pretty effective at getting the attention of the fairer sex, as they used to say.

Variants of "B T O" served with B-24 groups all over the place. No less than half of the 2nd Air Division's 14 Liberator groups had one—there is evidence, fitting enough, that one or more of these "got around" and served in a succession of different groups. (See <http://489th-bomb-group-museum.org/Veterans-Stories/b-24-big-time-operator-bto> as well as http://www.b24bestweb.com/Pics-B-BIG_T-BIG_V.htm) A Google search will lead you to info on a B-29 Superfortress that served in the Pacific Theater at the same time.

Puns, and humor generally, depend on the 'audience' sharing a lot of understanding with the person(s) doing the winking. As time goes by, we will no doubt just have to wonder at what the young crews were thinking when they cleverly named their planes. Let's hope that the main point, that these young warriors did have a sense of humor in the midst of it all, and did think of some timeless subjects other than war, will not be lost on future generations, encountering the memorable pictures and other records of WWII.

Hope that clears it up!
Pete

“Remembering Sacktime Sally”

Part 2 - Introduction

By Lisa Niehoff

In April, 2008, Rachel Hughes wrote the following message which appeared on the Heritage League website's guestbook:

I am trying to find out more information about my great-uncle's plane, Sack-Time Sally, which was shot down November 26, 1944. His name was George Scott, the turret gunner on that plane. Any info and pictures would be very much appreciated.

Our researchers were easily able to provide Rachel with information concerning this 389th BG aircraft. Among the things we learned was that Sack-Time Sally had been shot down near a Dutch village with the loss of 6 crew members, with the remaining 4 becoming prisoners of war.

Then about a month later, the following message appeared on the guestbook:

Hello Rachel Hughes, Just read your question. Sack-Time Sally crashed near our village called Opeinde (near the town called Drachten). An author wrote an article about the crash, and his name is Mr. Siebe Overwijk from Drachten. For the moment this is all the information I have, but if you want more information, I will try to get it. Kind regards, Johan Kuiper, Opeinde, Friesland the Netherlands.

This simple response led string of events culminating on May 5th, 2010, with the dedication in Opeinde of

a memorial to the crew of Sack-Time Sally and a RAF Lancaster which also crashed near the village

Along the way, thanks largely to the research and networking abilities of Johan Kuiper and others in the Netherlands, more family members of the crew were located, members of the Dutch Underground who helped the crew were identified, and many, many people were put in touch with each other, including Clint Gruber, a POW bunkmate of Sack-Time Sally's survivors. This list, though too long to detail here, also includes the sole surviving crew member, navigator Jim McGahee, who was able to talk with Nick DeHaan in Canada, who as a teenager helped hide Jim in his family's farmhouse.

The citizens of Opeinde put together a monument committee. This group of educators and amateur and professional historians led a successful fundraising effort and enlisted the aid of one of the Netherlands' top sculptors. Businesses and elected officials in Opeinde and surrounding communities became heavily involved in the effort, eventually sponsoring a week-long celebration of honor and remembrance, bringing to Opeinde Jim McGahee and his wife Garland, as well as Jeanne Braley, widow of pilot Roy Braley.

Part 1 of this story, Siebe Overwijk's history of the crew and crash, appeared in issue 43 of the Herald. We now bring you Part 2 of “A Crew Remembered”.

Lisa Niehoff



Pilot Roy E. Braly, Co-Pilot Dean H. Dalton, Navigator James H. MaGahee, Bombardier Merlin H. Verberg, Engineer Virgil L. Hoffman, Radio Op. Essman G. Matthews, Ball / Tunnel John B. Filenger, Waist George W. Scott, Waist Walter E. Wince, Tail Edward M. Goodall Note: The names listed does not match the crew member's order of appearance in the photo.

Sack Time Sally -

*Recounting by Johan Kuiper as told to Lisa Niehoff,
Edited by Laurie Bedus*

A Week

With his cap in his hands, James McGahee stepped into the barn of the old farm. So much had changed since he was last there but there was one landmark. In the wall between the house and the barn, the door stake was still visible. Silently, James looked up toward the ceiling as he was transported back to the last dramatic days of late November 1943.

From the minute he bailed out of the B-24 *Sack-time Sally*, he struggled to survive while evading the German Army. Spying on the airmen from the top of the old church tower spire, Mr. Roel Nijboer was only 10 years old when he witnessed McGahee land in an oak tree above the canal, some 100 meters from his home. McGahee was rescued from the tree by Mr. Auke Kunnen who was 25 years old at the time, and hurried him to the south. Young Nijboer watched him as he kept running and hid under a bed of leaves. When the evening fell the hunters were gone he started to run again. As a navigator, he instinctively knew to go south, and was hoping to meet people who would be able to help him because to survive alone in an occupied country was nearly impossible. By the time McGahee found a hiding place in a small bush, Roel met him and urged McGahee to go with him to his home a mile away.

"There he stood in the living room, clothed in his flight suit and pilot boots," recalls Mr. Roel Nijboer. "But it was too dangerous to stay inside the family's house because the German Army never would give up in finding the American flyer that was on the loose." As the sky darkened, they crossed the street and hid in the old church, where they made a bed in the shed at the back.

After three days the Resistance Movement arrived and from that time, McGahee was in their care. He was transported to a farm which stood alone in the wilderness and was owned by Mr. Foppe De Haan. Its secluded location was the perfect place to house local Resistance members and other people who were suspects of the German Army.

As McGahee began to write his war-memoires, a resident of Opeinde, Johan Kuiper researched the tragedy of November 26, 1943. Together with long-time researcher Mr. Siebe Overwijk, they forged the plans to establish a monument to honor the Allied airmen. Forming a workgroup with president Jan Bijlsma, Mrs. Sietske Riemersma, Mr. Max Veenstra and Mr. Peter Terpstra, they successfully raised money and commissioned the artist Anne Woudwijk and his daughter Roelie to sculpt the monument.

Jaap De Vries



On this day, May 4, 2010, Navigator James H. McGahee said, "Now, I can close the book," as he ended his 66 year journey back to that fatal day of November 26, 1943. As he stood in the barn with his wife Garland and Jeanne Braly, the widow of *Sack Time Sally* Pilot Roy E. Braly, there was no fear of being arrested by the Germans. The small group gathered together the day before they would witness the unveiling of the monument at Opeinde and its dedication to the deceased crews of *Sack Time Sally* and the RAF Lancaster on May 5, 2010, Liberation day in the Netherlands. On a fresh but sunny Wednesday, it was the return of a WWII hero to the village of Opeinde. Welcomed by the community's Mayor Mr. Bert Middel, the Monument Workgroup and the hundreds of residents from Opeinde and surrounding villages

66 Years Later

of Discovery

Jim revisits the Terrorist barn. To his left is the former door that he used to escape into the hay.



Jaap De Vries

of one of the RAF crew, were asked to step forward and unveil the monument by removing the white ribbon while the band played “Somewhere” from Leonard Bernstein’s *Westside Story*.

There’s a place for us

Somewhere a place for us

Peace and quiet and

open air

Wait for us

Somewhere

The atmosphere was emotionally charged as McGahee and Jan Bijlsma stared

at the monument; a giant black, marble flight map, which depicted Europe and four tiles with navigator equipment, each with his own symbolic value and the names of the airmen who were killed. Mrs. Sietske Riemersma, a member of the memorial workgroup called the rank, first name and the surname of each deceased Air Force Crewman and thanked him personally for his willingness to help free the Netherlands from German occupancy. With each name called a local schoolboy or girl placed a white rose into a vase until there were ten roses for the ten men killed. Finally an eleventh rose was placed to thank all the fallen Allied Air Force members of the Second World War.

Signalling the end of the memorial ceremony, Jorrit Spyksma stepped forward, took his trumpet and played the well known, “Last Post,” followed by two minutes of complete silence. When the time lapsed the band took over and began to play the United Kingdom Anthem “God Save the Queen,” while Siebe Overwijk rose the flag to the top again. As the band once again began to play the American National Anthem, “The Star Spangled Banner,” one more flag was to be risen. Feeling privileged, Johan Kuiper raised the American flag and when he turned around he witnessed James McGahee standing resolutely, saluting the Banner. McGahee was asked to step forward and he began to speak about his involvement in the development of the memorial and his invitation to the unveiling. With emotion in his voice he described the tragic moment of the loss of the *Sack-time Sally*

gathered together to welcome the foreign visitors. When they arrived at the monument a two piece brass band was already playing, President Jan Bijlsma spoke in Dutch about the crash of *Sack Time Sally*. The “small flames” started when the *Sack-time Sally* was hit, and finally rose in a giant destructive wave of fire. That day “small flames” were present again, but this time they wouldn’t destroy anything. They were a symbol of friendship and collaboration marking the new start of exchanges between the USA and the Netherlands. They would honor the American Liberators.

To begin the service, the four flags of the countries were fastened to the mast and were lowered half way as the band played Ludwig von Beethoven’s “Air” and the audience honored the fallen with a moment of silence. McGahee and Mr. Oliver, a relative

Remembering Sack Time Sally continued

Johan Kuiper



Co-pilot Clint Gruber and James McGahee were prison roommates. Mr. Gruber passed away on March 11, 2011 and was buried with honors on March 25.

and his six young friends. Gracefully, he started to speak about the heroes of the war, HIS real Heroes; the people who saved him, kept him warm and fed him. The heroes who helped him purchase fake papers and tried to get him back to England. Sadly Merlin Verberg and he were captured in Amsterdam by the Gestapo. It was no fault of the Resistance Movement, McGahee added. He was thrilled to see such a large audience and so many kids as he said, "sixty-seven years is a long time, but you have remembered. When I look around, and see your faces, I see not many who were even born at that time but still, you all do remember!"

The crowd applauded his speech and after Mr. Frank Oliver and the Mayor, Bert Middel spoke, there was time to shake hands with the audience. They were very excited to spend time with the American flyer who was an eyewitness to the air battle on November 26, 1943 when the Sack-Time Sally went down and a few parachutes were seen floating in the sky. Johan Kuiper's father lived about 500 meters from the crash site and saw the aircraft go down but told him the story of that terrible day many times when he was a small child. Mr. Klaas Kingma, with tears running down his face, shook hands with McGahee as he explained that Mr. Walter Wince, the gunner, had fallen to his death in his father's meadow. To end this beautiful event, the crowd congregated at the community house to eat, drink, and socialize; and what a party it was. Jim McGahee an honored guest, answered the many questions from the others.

During this week in May 2010, Johan Kuiper was happy to see what a deep impact the dramatic crash had on McGahee. He'd never told his story before nor had he ever come over to the

Netherlands to find a track back of his hiding place there. He just couldn't do it-until now. In the following days he would visit other sites which were integral to his escape and survival.

"A few times I stepped into my car to drive to the North of the Netherlands, to start searching," McGahee said, "I was at Bitburg Airbase, close to the Netherlands, but I could not do it. It was too emotional for me. On the other hand, I did not know where to search." McGahee continued, "I did not have names, villages, or other things to find my hiding place. But thanks to the access of a war prison roommate, B-24 pilot Clint Gruber, he was the one who put me in contact with Johan Kuiper."

Emotionally, he visited the crash-site of his *Sack-time Sally*. The guests were invited to ride in a horse drawn wagon which was driven by Mr. Willem Sietsma. As they approached the site, the look on McGahee's face showed his emotion, and when they both walked to the historic spot, Kuiper saw the same look when he was at that farm. His mind was again back in November 1943.

The soil still holds many small parts of the gigantic bomber; neither the meadow nor the ownership of the Van der Meulen family have changed in all this time. For the Van der Meulen's, it was a privilege to invite the American guests into their home to have coffee and cake with them. An amazing coincidence was that the three American guests had a farming background.

The final spot to visit was the old church where McGahee hid the first three days after Sack Time Sally and her crew perished. Again it was a special moment for him. Welcomed by the church keeper, Mr. Geert Zigterman, there were several people who witnessed his visit. "I'm certain this is the church.

Jaap De Vries



Jim visits the meadow for the first time and thinks about the six crewmembers who were killed.

I'm sure they have changed the inside, but I was here and I wish we could find the family who saved me."

Finally, the last historic moment was a visit to Mrs. Tiny Mulder, a member of the Resistance Movement who was involved in the escape of 72 Allied flyers; two of them were crewmembers of the 389th BG. She took Merlin Verberg into her parent's house and she was the one who housed McGahee on the DeHaan Family farm. Nearly 67 years later, McGahee thanked Mrs. Tiny Mulder in person for her help.

It's amazing how the destruction of Sack-Time Sally is being remembered this many years later. To meet so many people who were involved with it and to learn the information from people all around the world, McGahee developed lifelong friendships as well. He still maintains contact with strangers who became friends by virtue of their mutual involvement in the tragic events.

McGahee, now back in Texas, has exchanged stories with his friends in the Netherlands several times and it was some days later that he and Johan Kuiper learned of the death of Mrs. Tiny Mulder. While saddened by her death, Kuiper is grateful that she was able to meet McGahee after the passing of so much time. He is also grateful that he was able to tell

her about the daughter of Merlin Verberg, Susan though they never knew about each other.

In the summer of 2010, the church keeper, Geert Zigterman, found the man who helped McGahee hide inside the church and while they were unable to meet during McGahee trip the Netherlands, they have spoken on the telephone.

"2010 is a special year to me. I have met so many friends and people who will keep the story of *Sack-Time Sally* alive so that future generations will understand the events of those days so long ago. This wonderful monument, right in the center of the village celebrates the lives lost, the friendships created and the legacy of the crews who were so courageous."

Bottom Left, Jim and Garland pose in front of the hiding church, Top Right, the late resistance hero Mrs. Tiny Mulder and Jim pose. She took action to find a hiding place at the farm after the church, Tiny also housed Sack-time Sally's bombardier, Merlin Verberg into her parents house for three weeks. Below Right, Jim speaks to visitors from Great Britain after the Opeinde monument ceremony.

Jaap De Vries



Jaap De Vries



Jaap De Vries



John Didn't

by Laurie Bedus

In 1944 the world over eagerly awaited the end of a violent and inhumane war that had been raging on for five years simultaneously destroying much of main land Europe and claiming many, many lives. When World War II finally ended in 1945, people were left with no other choice than to begin picking up the pieces of their lives and try to heal from the depths of their grief. My Great Uncle John Slowik was a Navigator with the Eighth Air Force, and he was one of the estimated 28,000 American servicemen who did not come home from the war. He met his death over the Black Forest in Germany along with the eight other members of the Books Crew as their plane "Old Glory" crashed onto a field. All but one man was killed instantly. My family became like so many other families who lost loved ones in the war and they were changed forever as they attempted to cope with the loss of their only son.

As the only Slowik boy, John was an all star swimmer at Hartford High School and Trinity College. *"As quite possibly the best swimmer Trinity has ever seen,"* he appeared regularly in local newspapers (*Hartford Courant*). As he consistently hung up the unofficial record for the backstroke and relays, he brought home medal upon medal for his schools. It was whispered that had he not gone into the military, he might have gone on to swim in the Olympics. He was the first male to attend college. He was well read and an intellectual, and while on the quiet side, he was sociable and well liked by those who knew him. He had a mischievous and playful personality and was known for his flawless tan and great smile. Outside of school, John continued to shine in the water as he swam competitively with his two sisters Katherine "Kitty" and Genevieve in the public pools of Hartford to win food during the depression. Together, they were unbeatable and would take home 1st, 2nd and 3rd place in competitions that would secure eggs, peas, bread and milk for the family during some of the hardest years our nation would endure. John was very close to his sister, my grandmother

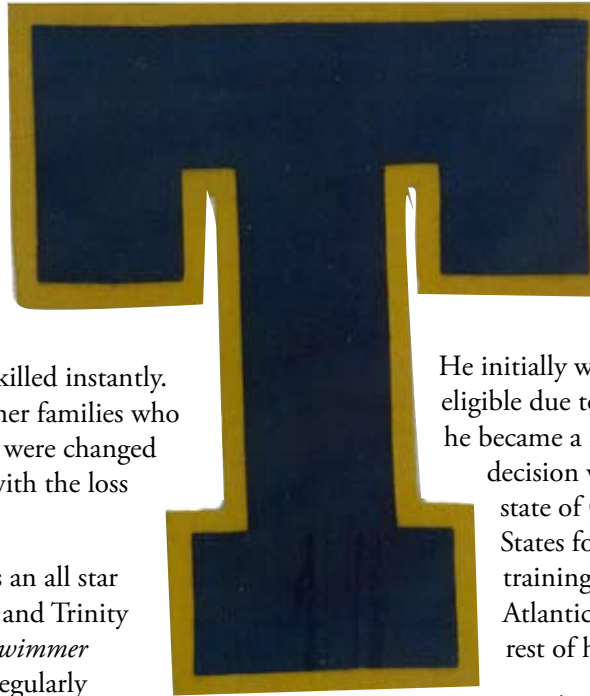
Kitty. As children, they spent much of their time together.

As a child, I remember sitting around the table listening to Kitty talk about her childhood. The few stories shared included incidences of her pulling his hair to get her way because it was his one weakness due to a scar on his head

from a swimming accident. In one competition, he dove too deep and hit his head in the pool getting him many stitches but no medal. As a result, it hurt to have his hair pulled and Kitty knew it and used it to her advantage. Upon graduation from Trinity College in 1939, John worked for the state as an engineer for the Department of Transportation and chose to enter the military.

He initially wanted to become a pilot but was not eligible due to the fact that he wore glasses. Instead, he became a navigator for the Eighth Air Force. This decision would take him away from his home state of Connecticut and across the United States for the next two years as he completed his training in the Midwest. Later he crossed the Atlantic to England where he would live the rest of his short life.

When he left, the distance between my great uncle and his family did not diminish the bond between them. So in 1944, upon learning of John's initial disappearance over Germany, the Slowik family was devastated. Great Grandma Slowik and Grandma Kitty wrote letter upon letter in search of information on John's whereabouts, and Kitty also maintained contact with the other family members of his crew. She never lost hope that *"As long as there's no mention of the boys or where they were buried...those 8 boys are safe somewhere."* Together, the Slowik women gained strength and support through sharing letters with the other family members of the Books Crew because like the men in the plane, the women of each family were bound together by the war and their mission to find their sons, brothers, husbands, and fathers. They were desperate to learn about their loved ones and did not have complete faith that their government knew what was going on. After all, when Great Grandma *"went to*



Come Home

John Slowik's 1935 yearbook photo. His captions reads "Better to die 10,000 deaths than wound my honor," by Joseph Addison.

Laurie Redus



the Red Cross and asked them where my son was buried but they couldn't tell me any news, they said Germany is big and it would take quite a while before they would know." These letters did not cease until 1951 when John's body was returned home to Connecticut and laid to rest on December 12th.

After his funeral, Kitty stopped writing letters to the government and to the families of John's crew, but she never stopped looking for information on John until her own death in September 2006. In 1999, I followed her steps and picked up where she left off in 1951 and started to contact the people and the agencies that I thought would know about John, much of the time retracing her steps and contacting the same people. Both of us had the same goal but at different times in our lives and for different reasons. She wanted to stop grieving for her brother, and I wanted to understand who he was and why he served in *"this horrible war."* I wanted to understand my family. Publicly, Kitty buried his physical remains in 1951 and with them, his story. She never stayed in contact with the family members of the Books Crew-it was just too painful. Like so many others who lost relatives in the war, she never recovered from his death. Quietly grieving, she put her experiences of World War II behind her-locked away in a box in a closet, never to be discussed again. Among the items in the box were family pictures, a scrapbook of John's triumphs in the water along with his swim medals, his high school and college yearbooks and a varsity letter, diplomas, a purple heart and his war journal. I am sure that a day did not pass in which she did not look at her brother's words scrawled gracefully on the pages of his journal.

When I first glimpsed his journal in 1999, I was excited and wanted to share that with my grandmother but I did not understand her cold demeanor. So many questions plagued me: Why she was so reluctant to impart her knowledge upon me when I asked her about our family and in particular her brother. Why did it always seem like that she did not want to talk about her brother with me? I was her granddaughter after all. Wouldn't she want to brag about her brother to me? I wanted desperately to bond with her, but did not understand her reluctance, mistaking it for aversion because I was young and hopeful-impervious to adulthood and the horrors it bore out with experience and time. My grandmother and I never found our common ground together-yet she has always been with me. Our individual quests for information and details always took us down separate roads which ultimately led to the same place. We were dedicated to understanding what my great uncle endured during the war, and she was desperate to cling to and covet what was left of him-his words, pictures, medals, school mementos and a few letters.

During the sixty years after her brother's death, Grandma Kitty often looked for people John mentioned in his journal,

Laurie Bedus



searching the internet and reading many of the same books that I did but we never worked together. Whereas she silently searched for information from the comforts of her Minnesota home, I actively sought the personal connections of those who lived through the war and bonded with other people like me who looked for their own loved ones stories. I found these connections through the other Book's Crew family members who had already unearthed the story of the horrific mission that claimed the lives of 218 men and obliterated 14 bombers from the skies over Germany. These distant family members are amazing in their dedication and fortitude when it comes



The photo of the woman holding the child is Katherine E. Slowik and the child is Lorraine J. Bowers, the author's mother. The right hand corner photo is the writer's grandmother and mother taken in 1983. The silhouette was a part of the family collection. These photos have been compiled over 13 years of research.

Laurie Bedus



The purple heart is a replacement of John's original medal.

to seeking facts and preserving the stories of their loved ones and the other men they died with. At the time, they were my connection to my great uncle, and my grandmother and they introduced me to the other members of the Eighth Air Force in the form of yearly reunions; which to my surprise changed my life and my goals forever. Now they are my friends.

So many times, I wanted to share my experiences with my grandmother-tell her about the gatherings, share pictures, ask questions-read John's journal together, but none of this ever happened. After almost 12 years of struggling to understand

why she kept silent, I think I finally understand. She was a private, dignified woman who kept close tabs on the people in her life from the confines of her home. She was not inclined to share her privacy nor was she willing to allow those of us interested in her to penetrate her wall. I will never understand how it must have felt to endure the loss of a brother in such a violent way. She was very proud of John and the debt he paid to the American cause during World War II and regardless of the distance in our relationship as grandmother and granddaughter I am very grateful and fortunate to have had the opportunities of searching for John. I am thankful that this gift has been

bestowed upon me and as I have struggled to unearth the details of John's service to the United States Army Air Corp, simultaneously revealing a wonderful family legacy. I realize that ultimately the only things that matter to me are that others may benefit as much as I have, and that one day when I meet my Great Uncle John Slowik and Grandmother Kitty again, they are able to clap me on the back and say "You did good kid."

John's personal account of his experiences as a Lead Naviga-

tor show that he was dedicated and focused. Proud of his work and the work of his fellow servicemen, John believed that the bombing crews could not *"be prevented from hitting the target. If the Jerri's don't give up they will end up a corpse with its skeleton destroyed."*

He loved and admired his friends-the men he flew with, very much. While together, be it in a pub or on a plane, John enjoyed the company of his crewmates, writing in detail about their mishaps and adventures in between flying some of the hardest missions that the 392nd Bomb Group would ever take part in. While in England, John set aside any yearnings for home and focused on his task of leading the men to war. He celebrated his friends daily and mourned the men when they did not come back as he silently counted to thirty. His journal was not only an observation of daily life at Wendling Air Base in a war torn England, but it was also a testament to the bravery and focus that the men of the United States Army Air Corp had. The motto of the Navigators was "We Will Find the Way". Indeed-they found their ways to mission after mission and hoped to find their way home. In the end, John may not have come home physically, but he is here now and he will be with me forever.

Katherine E. Slowik "Kitty" "A little, tiny, pretty, witty, charming, darling she." This quote appeared in the 1937 Hartford Public High School yearbook.

Laurie Bedus



By Lisa Niehoff

I'm Something Special...

I am a peppy li'l lass. I was noted as having a beautifully-shaped figure along with a spicy reputation. How right you are to adore me and to perpetuate my name. For I am a perky Spitfire and here's my saucy story.

I was first born in 1936 as a prototype. Supermarine Chief Designer, R.J. Mitchell, and my design evolved together during the 1930s. With my new Rolls-Royce PV-12 Merlin engine, we made quite a hotshot team. I was a low-drag design and a real sucker for improvements. To meet the Air Ministry's requirement that I first carried eight .303 cal. machine guns with four on each wing. Dearest Mitchell chose to incorporate a large elliptical wing form into my blueprint.

Like my flying cronies, the BF-109Es, I was an all-metal, stressed-skin monoplane. My new technology caused many problems, delaying my reaching the "Few". Over time I proved to be an uncomplicated, easy-to-fly classy lassie, and I certainly held second to none. I am still considered an enduring symbol of Britain's wartime spirit and spunk.

To introduce a tribute that's not totally about me, I would like to pay special honors to a very gracious lady. Yvonne



Yvonne MacDonald

MacDonald, 89, was still in school when the war started. In 1943, she and her sister Joy Gough Loft-house were among the first AB Initio pilots whom the ATA took in and trained. They ended up being the only sisters out of the 240 females who served. Given twelve hours to solo Yvonne progressed through the various flight and ground school hazards, and ended the war ferrying 20 different types, including light twins but mostly single engine fighters. Not bad for a non-technical young woman who, upon her husband's death early in 1943, was judged incapable of driving a car safely from the north of England to her home in the south!

Living in the US since 1946, she has 5 children from a second marriage. In addition to her family life, her postwar activities have included volunteer work such as driving an ambulance, social work with Children's Services, and the Prison Association. Cape Cod on the east coast is her home, but she manages to get back every year to the ATA gatherings.

Credits:

A History of Haddenham Airfield

www.wingsacrossamerica.us/wasp

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supermarine_Spitfire

30th Annual 2ADA BRUNCH

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

When: June 4, 2011

Reception: 9:00 a.m.

Program & Brunch: 10:00 a.m.

Where: The Phoenix Club

1340 S Sanderson Ave, Anaheim, CA

The Anniversary of D-Day is marked on June 6th. What better time to gather to honor our Veterans?

Many are members of the Second Air Division Association, the 8th Air Force Historical Society and other organizations honoring those who served in World War II.

Events include:

Bill A. Jones will again serve as Master of Ceremonies for a program that includes a special performance of the national anthem, the traditional candle lighting ceremony, a color guard, the playing of taps, and guest speakers.

A tribute to Colonel Richard C. Baynes (Ret.) (466th Bomb Group). Serving as Chairman for most of the past thirty years and President of the 466th Bomb Group Association, the Second Air Division 8th Air Force, and the 8th Air Force Historical Society, Dick is a founding member of the nine person committee that started the 2ADA Southern California reunion.

A champagne brunch buffet

Entertainment: Bill Jones and Dina Bennet will sing many favorite tunes. Johnny Vana's Big Band Alumni will provide plenty of great music to dance to! The musicians, all veterans who played for Glenn Miller, Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey, Count Basie, Harry James and other big bands of the swing era, will give a memorable performance.

A Raffle: benefiting the Second Air Division Memorial Library in Norwich, England, the Mighty Eighth Air Force Heritage Museum in Savannah, GA and the B-24 Memorial in San Diego, CA has been made possible by Peggy Learman the coordinator of the event, and her father-in-law, a VP of Consolidated Aircraft Company has been instrumental in finding donors of prizes that are, as much as possible, made in America.

THE COST: \$47.50 per person. Reservations should be made by May 24, 2011 and sent to Mrs. Richard Learman, 19317 Vista Grande Way, Porter Ranch, CA 91326. Phone (818) 366-6972. Make all checks payable to "2nd ADA SO Calif." and mention your bomb group affiliation.

If you wish to send a tax deductible donation, please make your check out to "466th Bomb Group Association" and send it to Elmo Maiden, Treasurer 466 BGA, 8136 Cozycroft Avenue, Canoga Park, CA 91306-1712.

Out of Towners: For those traveling from out of town, a special rate is available at the Ayres Hotel Anaheim, 2550 East Katella Avenue, Anaheim, CA 92806. Phone (714) 634-2106. (<http://www.ayreshotels.com/anaheim/>) A ten minute drive to The Phoenix Club, it has government rates, full American breakfasts, and free parking. Please make your reservations by May 15, 2011. Mention "2nd AD of Southern Calif" event at the Phoenix Club. The special rate is valid June 3-4, 2011

A Special Note: Ms. Jane Russell, America's Pin-Up Girl and a special friend of our veterans, passed away earlier this year marking the end of a cherished tradition. Previously, Ms. Russell and her accompanist would travel from Santa Maria to attend the annual get-togethers and entertain her troops with stories and songs. God bless you, Jane Russell. We will be thinking of you on June 4th and for years to come.



Jane Russell, Legendary movie star and Pin-Up Girl of the 2AD of Southern California; Colonel Richard C Baynes (Ret.)

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