

Hell's Angels Newsletter

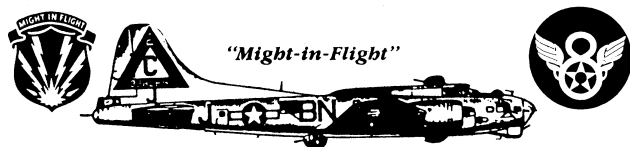
303rd BOMB GROUP (H) ASSOCIATION, INC.

MAY 1988



"Bailing Out"

LT. SPENCER: PORTRAIT OF COURAGE



303rd BOMB GROUP (H) ASSOCIATION, INC. "HELLS ANGELS" NEWSLETTER

VOL. XI, NO. 3

Editor: Hal Susskind
2602 Deerfoot Trail, Austin, TX 78704

MAY 1988

The 303rd Bomb Group (H) Association, Inc., a tax exempt organization under IRS Code 501 (c) (19), founded in 1975 is chartered in the State of Florida to perpetuate the history of the 303rd Bomb Group and to provide opportunities for 303rds to meet and do things together.

Because you are helping to perpetuate the history of the 303rd Bomb Group, your dues and/or donations to the 303rd Bomb Group Association are tax deductible.

The Association is open for membership to all persons, assigned or attached to the 303rd Bomb Group, from its activation in 1942 in Boise, Idaho throughout its war years at Molesworth Air Base in England to its deactivation in Casablanca in 1945. Spouses of 303rds may also become members. All other persons, interested in perpetuating the history of the 303rd Bomb Group and in furthering the aims of the Association, may apply for Associate status.

Membership years begin on the first day of January. In the future, the 303rd Bomb Group Newsletter will be sent only to paid up members. When you pay annual dues, the membership chairman will send you an updated membership card.

If you do not receive the 303rd Newsletter for a period of more than four months it means you are delinquent in your dues for that calendar year.

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HELL'S ANGELS NEWSLETTER
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In this issue

We have changed our look for this issue. We wanted to honor and salute some great people and this is the best way we could think of doing it.

We salute Distinguished Service Cross winner Lt. Charles Spencer who on Nov. 26, 1943, although seriously wounded and his navigator killed, stayed in the shot out nose of his B-17 to ward off fighter attacks until he passed out from lack of oxygen and the bitter 55 degree zero cold. Read what he accomplished in his chosen profession against almost insurmountable odds.

We also honor the members of the 303rd who were shot down over enemy territory. Some died instantly while others spent the rest of the war as prisoners in a variety of German prisoner of war camps. Quite a few of our Group died in those camps. Two members of our Association relate their experiences during their two years of confinement.

We have enclosed an application for the POW medal and instructions of how and where to apply for the award approved by Congress almost three years ago. Rounding out the issue are some interesting letters with stories that have surfaced after some 40 odd years.

On the cover:

B/Gen. Stephen McElroy, USAF, (Ret.) a veteran of more than 30 years of service — mostly in the Strategic Air Command — gives his impression of what a flier sees as he bails out over enemy territory. Now an Austin, Texas, artist, several of Gen. McElroy's paintings hang in the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., and the Air Force Museum in Dayton, Ohio.

Hell's Angels Forum

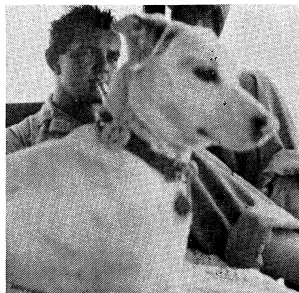
Your chance to sound off

Another Recon Rooter

Reading Hells Angels Newsletter, Vol XI No. 1 November, 1987, I ran across an interesting article in the Hells Angels Forum: "Do You Remember?" Page 5.

I have a follow up or additional information on a paragraph concerning "Recon", the little white terrier at Alamagordo. Sgt. Nelson or Nellie as we called him, was Recon's master; not quite sure where he acquired her, probably Gowen Field, Boise. We were at Gowen latter part of winter and spring, 1942; coming there from Kern County Airport, Bakersfield, via March Field via Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, via a troop-ship heading for the Philippines, December 6-8, 1941. We were originally at March Field, moved to Albuquerque spring of 1941. Our outfit was the 38 Reconnaissance Sqdn. hence the terrier's name) 19th Bombardment Group; Major Truman Landon commanding. After leaving Boise we trained flight crews with stops at Muroc, North Island Air Station, San Diego, then Alamagordo.

Back to Recon; Sgt. Nelson was sitting alongside one of the barracks at Alamagordo when a rattler attacked him, but Recon intercepted and was bitten on her face; she was in bad shape for awhile, but thankfully recovered.



Sgt. Nelson and Recon at Alamogordo, N.M. in 1942

From Alamagordo we went to El Paso then Fort Dix and from New Jersey boarded the Queen Mary, Sept. '42 arriving in Scotland about five days later. Sgt. Nelson smuggled Recon aboard the Q.M. in his "A" bag. We spent 33 months at Molesworth. Last time I saw Nelson and "Recon" we were in Casablanca about June '45 awaiting re-assignment. Recon accompanied the outfit to Casablanca from Molesworth on one of our 17's. About the photo of the B17 City of Albuquerque, photo was taken at Molesworth '43 or '44. Ship and crew had completed their missions; the plane was fitted with new engines and prepared for flight to the States and a bond drive; well they just had to use her one more time, one more mission, but she didn't return. Don't recall if regular crew was on board or a replacement crew.

In this photo of City of Albuquerque, most of personnel shown were former members of 38th Recon, a few more men were not present for photo.

I hope this might be of some interest to members of my outfit, 427th Sqdn. - 303rd bomb group. I have more snapshots, mostly State-side, also have negatives of pictures enclosed and others. Anyone interested, I can have copies sent to them.

Lester L. Hilliard
10914 La Cima Dr.
Whittier, CA 90604

Ed. Note: According to the Honor Roll of the 303rd, aircraft #42-3292, City of Albuquerque was shot down by enemy fighters on August 19, 1943 on her 22nd mission. It was the Group's 61st mission and the target was Gilze-Rijen airfield in Holland. The pilot was 2nd Lt. L.H. Quillen. It was his second mission as it was with most of the crew.

Tribute to DeCamp

Since my last note to you, our fly-mate Don DeCamp died suddenly on March 8 in California at the age of 64. Even though only 19 in 1943 when we were at Molesworth he proved to be an excellent combat pilot. He also served as co-pilot for return of Hell's Angels in January 1944 and shortly thereafter his mother's permission was required at the time of his marriage since he was under 21. He will be greatly missed by all who knew him.

Robert E. Galbraith
Ripley, N.Y.

Who Said Never Volunteer?

I am a member of the 303rd. I live in Gloucester, VA, which is about 40 miles from Norfolk and I lived most of my life there.

I just wanted to volunteer myself to help if needed for the 1989 Reunion. If I could act as liaison for you or whatever, let me know.

Bob Miller
Wicomico, VA

Nestok Still in the Tail

Noticed Feb. Newsletter item. "Frank Nestok moved, no forwarding address." After over 40 years finding my tail gunner, your item had me worried. Got off a message to Frank, dated 4/15/88. Has not moved, has a new rig and takes off camping. His address is Frank Nestok, 15301 SW 299 St., Homestead, Florida, 33033. Phone 305-248-0809.

So Hal, he's still in my tail. Don't want any spare.

Don Johnson
Pilot, Iza Vailable II (360)
Philmont, NY 12565

Forum

Let's Hear More About Our Ground Personnel

After reading the poem, "The Forgotten Man" in your recent issue of the 303rd I couldn't help but think how true.

For many years we have been reading your newsletter. Couldn't help but notice how most of it deals with the pilots and their crews. Could be these are the only ones that write in, but what about all the other 303rds, the cooks, mail clerks, supply, office personnel, etc; they too were 303rds. My husband Arthur M. Stoy left Texas for Boise, Idaho in '42, left in Sept. of '42 for Molesworth, England where he spent the rest of the war. Being in personnel he was in the last contingent to leave Molesworth for Casablanca.

He was Personnel Sgt. for the 360th Bomb Sqdn. of the 303rd Bomb Group.

Through your letters he has made contact with several of his old buddies.

Let's read more about the ground crews - they also lived, served and died.

**Mrs. Arthur M. Stoy
Hereford, Texas**

P.S. At present Arthur is part owner and Mgr. of Garrison Seed & Co., Inc. in Hereford, Texas. Enclosed find \$10.00 membership dues.

How many Yardbirds Were There?

I refer to page 8 of your Feb. 1988 Newsletter. The picture of Yardbird II and crew was very good.

Lew Lyle dropped me a line and asked that I help you identify the crew members in the photo. Lew was then 360th Sqdn. Commander; the best I ever knew during my Air Force career that ended Aug. 1, 1967 when I retired.

Lew went along to be sure everything went well on my 25th mission and I'm glad he did. There is always a little added stress when you know you are going to finish a combat tour unless the enemy gets in a lucky shot. The mission was briefed with Wilhelmshaven as the primary target. Our ship was designated lead for the strike. The primary was soaked in as was the secondary, so we unloaded on Heligoland. It was a little accidental, but strike photos showed we severely damaged the airfield and related installations.

Upon landing, the ground crew headed by M/Sgt. Mike Abrams painted the 25th bomb on the nose of Yardbird II and the picture you printed was taken. I can partially identify all but three in the picture. After 45 years my memory is a little hazy.

First row kneeling, left to right are S/Sgt. Frank Bartlett, tail gunner (shot down, wounded and POW, 19 May '43); S/Sgt. Paul Prescott, waist



gunner (shot down and mortally wounded, 19 May '43); S/Sgt. Lincoln T. O'Connell, ball turret gunner; T/Sgt. Eric Lindewall, radio gunner; I am not certain about the last man, maybe someone else can identify him.

Second Row, left to right are: T/Sgt. K.C. Hassler, flight engineer, top turret, now lives in Kansas; Major Lew Lyle, pilot; Lt. Rick Auman, navigator (now deceased); Capt. John Farrar, pilot; Capt. Founorow, Bombardier (lead); Major Sam Anderson, navigator (lead).

A final comment - the men of Yardbird II crew were a great group on the ground and under fire. It was my privilege to be their pilot. Together we survived our combat tour during the early days of the 8th Air Force bombing effort and hopefully contributed a little to the crews that followed us. President John F. Kennedy authored a book titled, "Profiles in Courage". The story of the 303rd could aptly be described by that title, from the beginning in 1942 to the conclusion in 1945. It is still scary to read the whole story. Every man who served on the ground and in the air deserves the everlasting thanks of the American people.

**John Farrar
Mattoon, IL, 61938**

Ed. Note: Now I'm really confused. Were there two Yardbird aircraft in the 360th Sqdn. at the same time? According to the 303rd Honor Roll, Sgts. Bartlett, Prescott and O'Connell were all shot down on May 29, on a mission to St. Nazaire in an aircraft called "Yardbird". It was the aircraft's 10th mission. Yardbird II was shot down on Oct. 2, '43 on a mission to Emden. It was the aircraft's 43rd mission. Anybody have the answer?

Let's Hear It For The Knockout Dropper.

Was surprised to see the picture of Knockout Dropper on page 9 of your February Edition. I am the one standing on the left of the picture, and was the Radio Repairman for Knockout Dropper, 359th Sqdn. I am enclosing an article that was published in the *Stars & Stripes* about her.

Another interesting, but sorrowful fact was that her original Crew Chief M/Sgt Buford Pafford, was killed in 1944 when he came out of the front hatch with the engines all running and needless to say got hit by the

inboard prop and was killed instantly. Does anybody remember the incident?

I was in the 359th from El Paso to England to Africa. Finally got my walking papers in August 1945.

**Harold Froehlich
Cumberland, Wis.**

Ed. Note: The March 27, '44 article told of the veteran Knockout Dropper gaining further fame and setting an ETO record by completing a mission to central France. It was the Dropper's 75th mission. It also revealed that the Dropper, a B17F, was one of the original planes in the Hell's Angels Bomb Group, and was the first U.S. bomber to complete 50 raids over Europe.

In her raids, the article stated, Knockout Dropper has hauled 150 tons of bombs into Germany and France. In 675 combat hours inside her well-worn fuselage, no man has won the Purple Heart for wounds received in action.

Pilot for the 75th mission was Lt. John Savage of Cherryville, Kansas. The ground crew headed by M/Sgt Buford G. Pafford, included S/Sgt. Morton M. Moon, Jr. Sgt. Martin N. Strasburg, Sgt. Stanley J. Jacobs, Sgt. Wayne E. Trant, Cpl. James T. McShane, Cpl. George Rutherford and Pfc. William S. Crowe.

Information Wanted

I've been hunting for someone from the 303rd B.G. since 1942.

My outfit was attached to the 303rd in 1942; we were just a small outfit, the 56 Signal Platoon. Whoever wanted us, if we were available, this is where we went. We were with the 303rd at Gowen Field, Idaho; Alamogordo, New Mexico (White Sands) from here to Muroc Desert, California. We were patrolling the West Coast when the Japs bombed the Oregon Coast. From here we went overseas to Shipton, England.

I am having trouble getting my National Defense Medal. They claimed my files were burned up in St. Louis, Missouri when the files building burned down. So can you or Hdqs. help me get this medal or any other that the 303rd got during this time or can you give me the address of Hdqs.?

We left the 303rd in England, got attached to the 1st Division, 16th Inf., made the invasion of Africa, Sicily and Salerno, Italy. From there we went to India, made the invasion of Burma, got attached to the 329th Serv. Group, went up the Ledo Road to China (Kunning) came back to Jorhat, India, (B-29 base and Black Widows) from here to Australia to Manila to San Pedro, California to Liberal, Kansas (B-24 base), from there to Fort Dix and discharge. None of the above is on my discharge paper which only lists: European Mid East, Asiatic Pacific, Good Conduct Medals and Victory Medal. This is all. Please can you help?

**William S. Hudock
R.D. #2, Box 332 3rd St.
Grindstone, PA 15442**

Ed. Note: Can anyone help this 20th Century Marco Polo?

My name is Charles Rukes of Geary, Oklahoma. While reading thru a May 1987 issue of Air Classics magazine, I came across your name along with the listing for the 303 Bomb Group Association Reunion, which was to have been held on June 3-7 at Ft. Worth. I was pleased to learn that there is an association since I have a personal interest in the 303rd.

My uncle, Sgt. Merlyn Dale Rukes, was a tail gunner on a B-17F during the war. He was assigned to Lt. James Clark's crew. Their ship was named "Leapin' Liz", serial number 41-24526. It was one of the original ships assigned to the 358th Sqdn. of the 303 stateside. By serial number, the "Liz" was the second oldest ship in the group.

On January 3, 1943, "Leapin Liz" was one of four 303rd ships lost in the St. Nazaire's U-Boat Sub Pen raid. The crew was listed as MIA and later presumed dead. As months went by it was reported that a few of the crew members bodies were found, identified and buried somewhere in France. My uncle's body was never found.

One or two missions before the "Liz" went down, the Belly-gunner, John W. "Jack" Kennedy, Jr. went back to the states to take his Air Cadet Pilot's training. He was replaced by another man who was lost along with the crew during the St. Nazaire's raid.

Thru a letter received by my grandmother from Seattle, Wash. in May of '48, we know that Mr. Kennedy survived the war. I would like to find out if he is still living and where he can be located. I am hoping Mr. Kennedy will have some of the information on the "Liz" and the 303rd that I've been looking for.

I'm curious to learn if the 303BG and 358, 359, 360 & 427 BS's had unit emblems or patches, what they looked like, and if any are available.

I'm also in the process of building a model replica of the "Liz" and I'm needing to find out if anyone knows when the Army Air Corps actually started putting the unit and plane recognition letters on the fuselage. I don't know if she had her letters on her when she went down. I do know that the "Liz" was plane recognition letter "J" but don't know what her unit recognition letters were or if the Triangle "C" was in use yet.

Mr. Susskind, I would like to see the era preserved when Americans had spirit and pride in their country and when the "Queens" overshadowed the sky in defense of freedom.

I would like to thank you for taking time to read my rather lengthy letter. I will greatly appreciate any info or leads you can supply us with. Am

Forum

looking forward to hearing from you or any fellow 303rd enthusiasts.

Charles D. Rukes, Jr.
Rt. 1 Box 147-A
Geary, Oklahoma 73040

P.S. Rukes recently joined the 303rd B.G.P. as an associate member.

My purpose in writing this letter is to find out what you can tell me concerning a cousin of mine who, I am told, was with the 303rd Group. His name was Charles Daniel Bovey, his rank was Sergeant and possibly Master Sergeant, and he was a ball turret gunner. He was killed March 25, 1945 under rather unusual circumstances.

According to one story I have heard, the group was returning from a mission and, as they were crossing the North Sea and nearing the English coast, Sgt. Bovey was getting out of the ball turret. Just as he pulled himself through the hatch, the airplane abruptly nosed down for what reason I do not know and this rather violent maneuver threw him through the air and out one of the waist windows. Naturally at that point he was not wearing a parachute, there being no room in the ball turret for one, and presumably he fell to his death in the North Sea. He left a widow and two small boys.

As I said, this is one story and it is the one his family, who live in the nearby city of Everett, believes. But not to confuse the issue, I will not now repeat any of the other stories.

My reason for trying to confirm the facts of my cousin's death is that I am preparing a family genealogy and hope to have it as accurate as possible. Therefore, I will appreciate any help you can be to me.

Earl L. McCabe
Lt. Col. USAF (Ret)
19123 37th Ave. S
Seattle, WA 98188

P.S. I myself was a pilot with the 486th Bomb Group (H) which was part of the 3rd Division.

Thank you very much for opening and reading my letter. I write you about my research work on a B-17 bomber that landed in our vicinity during World War II.

I am searching for the B-17 and the crew who were on their way to a target somewhere in Germany. In the area of Liège (Belgium) they had to contend with German Flak or fighters. Seconds later they were hit and all decided to turn back trying to get back to base. In the area of AAR-SCHOT (Belgium) the whole crew abandoned the plane, because it was losing altitude very rapidly. They came down near a small village near Aarschot.

Suddenly, the lonely bomber once again turned back, the way it came from. Unmanned, it landed safely on a range of a hill near SCHERPEN-HEUVEL, some 5 miles from Aarschot. A few hours latter, some mem-

bers of the crew came to the place to see what the plane looked like. This in company with British soliders who just liberated the neighborhood. It all happened in the second part of September, 1944.

Now I want to ask you kindly, if possible, some members of your organization or archive records of the Bomb Group recognize themselves with this small story. Other informations about this all are always welcome.

Thanking you in advance for your kind attention and help on this letter and hoping soon to receive a small answer from you.

JANSE Johnny
Halensebaan 63bis
3386 Molenbeek-Wersbeek

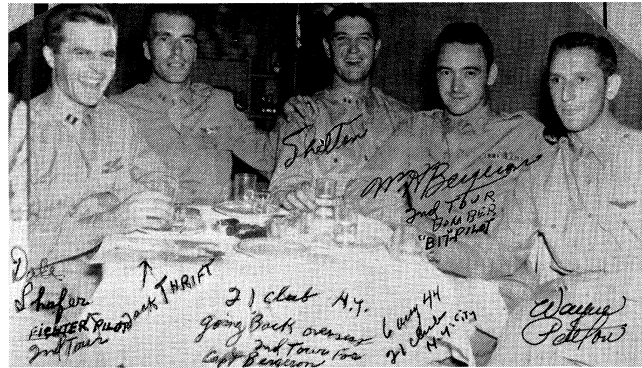
Ed. Note: On 28 Sept. 1944 on attacks on oil and vehicle plants in Central Germany, the Luftwaffe made a so-called "Company Front" attack using approximately 48 aircraft. Exposed to the same tactics the day before, the 445 BG (B-24s) lost 28 aircraft out of 35 dispatched.

Was This the First 303rd Reunion?

I sure did enjoy your Feb. '88, "Hell's Angels" Newsletter, and that smooth paper makes it "Number one". The ink doesn't come off. You sure do a fine job in putting that newsletter out.

The letter about the 2nd Air Depot Group really brings back many memories. When I graduated from mechanics School at Chanute Field, Ill. in Dec. 1941 with a second AM rating, I was assigned to the "Second Air Depot Group" at McClellan Field, Sacramento, CA. I arrived at McClellan Field, 22 Dec. '41 and our section was assigned to the depot to tear down P-39 aircraft and crate them for shipment overseas. We did one in two days and got fired by the civilian management. They were doing one per week. I started working in the orderly room as 3rd assistant to the First Sgt., M/Sgt. Ball. Lt. Bodenhimmer was the C.O. (By the way, Capt. Bodenhimmer was aboard the ship that I returned home on from my first tour of duty in March 1944.)

I got to read all the incoming mail and saw a Reg. on **How to Become a Cadet**, so I took my cadet exam and passed. About a week later which was about 28 Jan. 1942, we were put on a ship in Alameda Harbor, which was getting ready to sail overseas. I thought, "Boy there goes my cadet days." We stayed on the ship several days and one evening about 15 of us were taken off and trucked back to McClellan Field and put on a 30 day leave. We were told we would be notified when to report back and get our cadet assignment. (I heard that the ship sailed the next night.) I went home to Detroit and kept getting 30 day delays until August '42 when I was told to report back and



Bergeron (2nd from r) and friends at 21 Club in N.Y.

was assigned to Kelly Field (upper Kelly), now Lackland AFB for pre-flight training. The rest is history.

That picture of your first reunion in New York brought back more memories. (Enclosed picture tells the story.)

When I was sent back overseas in July '44 for my second tour of duty, I was in a group of about 75 captains; all had been flying instructors who were going overseas for the first time. Capt. Dale Schafer was a fighter pilot who had finished a tour in fighters and I was the other officer who had completed a combat tour, so five of us went into the 21 Club in New York City and had a going away party; so being a 303rder wasn't I the first one to have a 303rd reunion?

I sure do agree with John Casello's, "one man's opinion". He was right on target.

Bill Bergeron
San Antonio

Who Remembers the Early Days of 303rd?

Talked with you by phone about two months ago. Read the article that you included in "Might in Flight", Nov. '87 and I have heard from one person who gave an address of one of the fellows that appeared in the picture.

I am sending several things; included is my copy of "The First 300", the Hell's Angels, 303rd Bomb Group Publication. I am sending mine because of the names and addresses on the back, autographed by some of my 303rd friends a long time ago. It is possible you might gain something from it.

Also enclosed, is a post war diary that I jotted down from memory.

I have a book called "Kriegie Memories", written and illustrated by Ben H. Phelper, an ex-Stalag 17B Kriegie, and will send it to you upon its return from my daughter. There are many pictures taken by Ben and I have added captions to most of the pictures.

Don't know if you know that I went to the 94th Bomb Group meeting in Sacramento, CA, in October. Met my co-pilot and bombardier for the first time since being shot down on May 29, 1943. Also at our table

were the original four squadron commanders (three survived POW life). Again as you know, I became an original 94th Bomb Grouper after the 303rd sent three crews from each squadron to Tucson as instructors.

Beginning with Pendleton, OR, a few months after Pearl, I was in the 38th which became the 303rd so I feel I was sort of original there also.

Hope to meet you in person at the next 303rd gathering.

Don Webster
Ormond Beach, Florida

Happy Golden Wedding Anniversary



Fifty years ago, July 11, 1938, Chappie and Mama Slawson were married in Marysville, Tennessee and left immediately for Florida where they served in the Methodist Ministry at Canal Point down in the Everglades.

From there Chappie went on active duty with the U.S. Infantry, Ft. McClellan, Alabama, and was later transferred to the 322nd Bomb Group (M) McDill AAFB, Florida. The group received overseas orders and arrived in the UK in November of 1942. Shortly after arrival, the bombing of a bridge in East Anglia during freezing weather resulted in a severe case of exposure and a long convalescent stay in a British Hospital. On the 15th of March 1943 he was released from the hospital and assigned to the 303rd Bomb Group (H).

Following the war, Chappie remained on active duty and retired at Lackland AFB, Texas on March 31, 1963.

Diary of a downed flier...

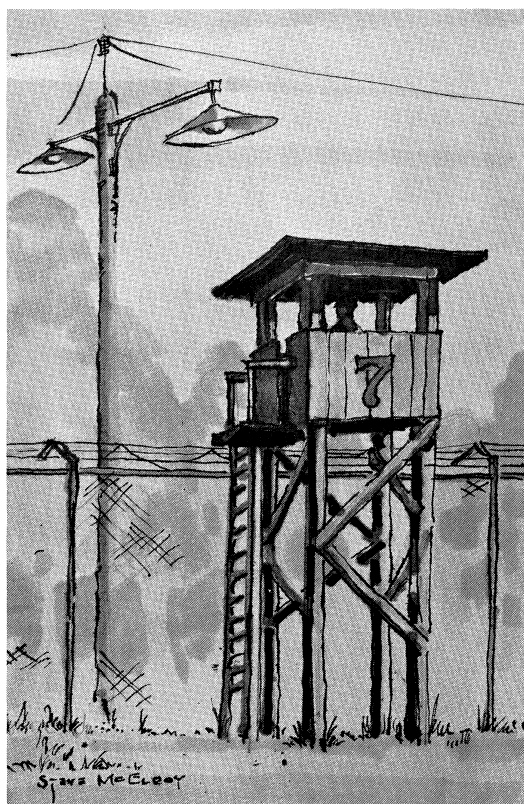
Shot down by German flak and fighters over Rennes, France on May 29, 1943 at 3:00 p.m. Bailed out 18,000 feet, sustained fractured back and three broken ribs as chute failed to open properly after being hit by enemy fire in plane. Enemy plane made passes but did not fire. Ground fire directed at chute until wind forced me out over channel (English) and out of range.

Freed myself from chute at 100 feet and held on until close enough to water to drop in. Swam about halfway to shore (one mile) and German boat came alongside. Had cigarette, coffee and whiskey to recover from shock. German naval doctor dressed wounds and strapped chest and back. Questioned at a hotel by German intelligence. Walked about nine miles and then truck transported us about 50 miles to airfield. Several other crew members were present now. Remained at airfield two days and then took train for Frankfurt, Germany. Arrived at Camp Dulagluft, the German interrogation center for all allied airmen.

Confined to solitary confinement for two days during which time German officers questioned me several times. After this I was released to the barracks. After spending two weeks at this camp, we entrained to Mooseburg, Bavaria, and camp Stalag 7A.

At this camp we began to feel that we were really prisoners of war. There were 179 of us and thousands of Russians, French, Serbs and English. Food and tobacco was scarce and sickness and privation were in evidence among the other nationalities. At first I thought we were in the wrong war because of the many slant-eyed Russian Mongolian prisoners on hand. I made some lasting friends at this camp of which the three best were the Serbian leaders. They smuggled food in to me and first aid packages (American food at that). They also made it possible for me to escape, however after three days out I was caught stealing some food from a farm and was returned to camp.

I drew solitary confinement for three weeks and then I was put into a barrack used for so-called bad actors. This barrack (German spelling) was a sort of a prison within a prison and housed mainly Russians. The week spent there was undoubtedly one of the worst weeks I endured of the two years confinement. It was fenced off from the main camp and locked and heavily guarded during the night. It was infested with fleas, lice and bedbugs and the Russians were for the most part quite unclean in their personal habits. I did meet one Russian by the name of "Tayer" who became a close friend. He was about 20 years old and acted as interpreter for all of us in that particular barrack.



After I was released and went back to my comrades, the Russian boy "Tayer" would show up at the American compound about four days a week asking for Sgt. Webster. The first time that I met him, he produced a real hen's egg and gave it to me. We conversed in German and I became his comrade. We moved from that camp in September 1943 and I lost track of him—oh yes, while I think of it, he was in the Russian Navy, in submarines and said they had engine trouble and consequently were captured by the Germans.

We had grown from 179 Americans in May 1943 to about 1500 in September and because of too many escapes and also the fact that we had outgrown our area, we were moved some 300 miles away by boxcar. The trip took three days and was somewhat uncomfortable. Blankets were few and food was next to nothing. We were forced to sit or lie down in shifts because there were so many of us in each car. Sanitary conditions also bothered us as we were not allowed out of the cars from start to finish of the trip.

We had been told by the Jerries that our next camp would be run exclusively by Luftwaffe personnel and that it would be a haven or heaven for all shot down Air Force people. By this time anything the Germans had to say to us only aroused suspicions; not only did most of them talk in circles but they were so poorly informed that they usually came to us for information.

Our new camp was the most dismal sight I've ever seen in my life. It nestled between two mountain ranges and our limited view that took in the surrounding countryside resembled prairie land. The barracks were nothing more than shacks, housing about 300 men, 12 to a bunk. Russian prisoners had been housed there before us and the

camp was overrun with fleas, bedbugs and lice. We never did rid ourselves of the "varmints" and after the next 20 months of being "lousy" I missed it after liberation.

After two winters in that camp were sure glad to move. However briefly I will point out some of the happenings at this camp named Stalag 17B. Seemed like our camp was a meeting place for Allied aircraft (10,000 to 25,000 feet overhead), Americans and Russians by day and English by night. For a year, from the Spring of '44 to Spring of 1945, they plastered Vienna Neustadt and other targets in Austria. Our existence for the most part was humdrum, except for the air raids, an occasional killing, and many rumors — good and bad. Our main sport was to plague the Jerries.

Late in April 1945, B-24s let their bombs go at low level right over Stalag 17B, aimed at Krems, Austria softening up the Danube for the Russians. A couple of days later, they walked us out of Stalag 17B in eight or nine groups of 500 kriegies, an hour apart. We walked about ten miles a day with a ten minute break per hour and later, one day's rest in seven.

About 30 days later we arrived on the outskirts of Innsbruck, Austria.

After the second day out of 17B, I left the columns and stayed on farms and in houses and enjoyed good food and shelter, rejoining the group in the a.m. (Sometimes different ones than the 500 I left with). Always had food for Al Baker (Texas) and my engineer, Steve Stevenson (Kansas).

Arriving at Innsbruck and put into a wooded area between Russian and French POWs, we were given two axes and two cut saws and were instructed to cut down trees and make places to live. After smokey fires and latrine digging, I decided to leave and did. I notified a German guard named Franz that I was leaving at a little before dusk and not to shoot because I would be back; he didn't shoot.

I went through some woods and then an open field and a farm with a lot of German Army activity which I skirted and went on to another farm, staying approximately a week, milking cows, etc. I decided to return to our group to find out what was happening and did. Found mass confusion; our people, Russian and French POWs all milling about, a Jeep with a 50 cal. gun and a couple of G.I.s with 45's had lined up the Jerry guards and stacked their rifles. It was freedom of sorts. I decided to leave again, this time with engineer Steve and one other. We took German rifles and went back to liberate the farm. With all their German activity in and around it we rounded up 102 German soldiers who were seated inside the farm complex (their weapons already had been placed in two wagons). We marched them and their weapons — using the farm horse — back to our camp area. Our war was over.

—Don Webster

Portrait of Courage

"Nothing but grit and courage enabled this man to live"

When Lt. Charles "Chuck" Spencer of Peoria, Illinois was awakened for the mission on the morning of Nov. 26, 1943, it seemed just like any other morning in the life of a combat crewman. Today would be his 16th mission since he arrived at Molesworth Air Base in July, some four months before.

As he walked through the pitch dark, blacked-out airbase to the mess-hall, he thought to himself, "Just 10 or more missions and I get to go home to see Jeanne and a stateside assignment where we can be together."

Since this was a pre-mission breakfast, fresh eggs, cooked to order, were on the menu. Usually the fare was a square omelette cooked with powdered eggs.

Breakfast over, he made his way to group headquarters building for the first of two briefings. After the call to attention with the arrival of the commander, the briefing got under way with a time hack, and the usual spiel about the makeup of the various formations and their positions in the bomber stream. But the briefing really hit the climax with the raising of the curtain which covered the map. The intelligence officer raised the curtain to reveal the target. His first words were almost drowned out by hoots, jeers and catcalls.

"The target for today is the City of Bremen. This is a maximum effort by the Eighth Air Force and the 303rd is putting up 35 aircraft. Since more than 500 planes will be attacking the same area, it is very important that you keep your assigned position in the bomber stream." Tracing the course on the map with a pointer, he continued, "You cross the enemy coast at this point at 22,000 feet and you go along this route to the I.P. The bomb run is about 40 miles and it should take you about seven minutes. Flak in the target area should be moderate to intense. Fighter opposition should be expected along the entire route. We estimate that the Luftwaffe can put up about 200 aircraft to try and stop you. Good Luck."

After the general briefing, there were short bombardier and navigator briefings. Spencer, who graduated from Bombardier School at Midland, Texas in early '43 joined the Bombardiers.

"This is no milk run," Spencer said to his pilot, Lt. William C. Fort of Fort Meade, Fla. as they boarded the truck, which was taking them to "Stardust", their assigned aircraft



Chuck and Jeanne Spencer

for today's mission.

Spencer's words proved to be very prophetic but little did he know that the mission to Bremen would change the course of his life and in fact almost take it.

The takeoff of the heavily loaded bomber, the assembly and flight to the I.P. were normal and routine with a few exceptions; the winds at flying altitude were in excess of 120 miles an hour and the temperature was more than 55 degrees below zero.

Three German fighters pounced on "Stardust" just as she started on the bomb run. Their 20-millimeter cannons blasted out all the plexiglass in the Fortress's nose, destroyed half her oxygen system, knocked out one engine, partially wrecked her communication equipment and left a gaping hole in one wing.

The Navigator, Second Lieutenant Harold J. Rocketto, of Brooklyn, N.Y. - on his first mission - was killed instantly by machine gun bullets.

"Stardust" was knocked out of formation but Lt. Fort maneuvered her back into formation and gallantly continued over the target. He didn't know that the bombardier Lt. Spencer was unconscious. The latter cut about the face by broken glass, his helmet and oxygen torn away, lay gasping for breath as the frigid winds whipped about his unprotected face and head.

When engineer T/Sgt. Grover C. Mullins, Windsor, MO., entered the nose to check the damage, he found Lt. Spencer on the floor, bleeding and frozen. He dragged him into

the passage beneath the pilot's compartment and tried to give him oxygen. "His face was so swollen I could hardly see his nose," said Mullins.

But Sgt. Mullins was a busy man. He had to assist the co-pilot whose oxygen mask had been shot away, too. And he had to drop the "Stardust's" bombs himself, because the release mechanism had been smashed. So he left Lt. Spencer in the passage semi-conscious and apparently close to death.

"He seemed to have one idea in the back of his mind," said Sgt. Mullins. "He thought he ought to release his bombs and man his guns."

"He was still conscious enough to crawl back, and after we landed I found him unconscious beneath his guns."

The co-pilot, Lt. Donald Riddick of Beaumont, Texas, said Lt. Spencer insisted on getting back to his guns, "and he even struggled to get there, although all he could do at first was to roll over."

When he was rushed to the hospital in England, Army doctors told Spencer that he would spend the next two years of his life in a hospital and he would be crippled for life.

"Nothing but grit and courage enabled this man to live," was the report of the flight surgeon.

"For gallantry in action," Lt. Spencer was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

For Lt. Charles Spencer, the war in Europe was over, but the fight to survive and live a meaningful and rewarding life was just beginning.

What happened to this heroic American who was recommended by his superiors for the highest award for gallantry is a story in itself.

Although the mission which changed the course of his life happened more than 40 years ago, he still remembers things quite clearly, "We got a 20 millimeter cannon shell through the plane which blew the nose off, killing the navigator beside me and hitting me with fragments," he said.

Most of my injuries were from severe frostbite. My facial features, nose and ears (new ones were made) were frozen. My hands were so frozen that the fingers had to be amputated. The tip of my toes were frozen. One eye had to be enucleated, the other was impaired."

The freezing temperatures also helped to save his life. It kept him from bleeding to death from injuries caused by the shell fragments.

Spencer spent four and a half months in England for primary reconstructive surgery. Then, he underwent two and half years of cosmetic surgery-some 36 operations-in the Valley Forge Hospital in Pennsylvania. During that time, the palms of his hands were split so he could use them like pincers.

It was during his stateside hospitalization that faith redirected his life toward the ministry.

"I really thought I was going to die," he said. "It was a period of great darkness. I prayed and I asked God for mercy for me, for my loved ones back home. Later on I felt that God had saved my life for a purpose. It was miraculous."

Jeanne, his wife - they will be celebrating their 47th anniversary this year - began reading the Bible to him. They began to make plans for him to attend a seminary.

"I would have had an awful struggle if she hadn't been beside me," he said. "She was my eyes for a long time and still is today."

He graduated from Central Baptist Seminary at Kansas City in 1951 and finally fulfilled his new quest. In December of 1953, he went to Fort Dodge after four years as a minister in Willard and Whiting in Northeast Kansas.

Despite the physical scars of the war- his face is badly dis-



(Rear row left to right) Lt. W.C. Fort, 2nd from left, Lt. C.W. Spencer, far right; (front row) far left, S/Sgt. G.C. Mullins, eng.

figured and he is blind in his right eye and has only travel vision in the left - he maintains a deep abiding faith in God and mankind. In 1953, the Rev. Charles Spencer became the Chaplain of the Kansas State Soldiers Home at Fort Dodge, located five miles east of Dodge City.

Spencer was the Chaplain at Fort Dodge, a state facility for a few hundred disabled, retired and sometimes forgotten veterans and widows of veterans, for almost 30 years.

"My physical appearance may have made some people a little squeamish, but the greater percentage haven't taken my disfigurement as a bar from the ministry," he said. "In fact I think it helps in many ways to make people think a little less of their ailments in life."

His days at Fort Dodge began early and ended late. He was available days and nights and weekends for people in need. He tried to establish a "work day" but no one was ever turned away even if it was after 5 p.m. on a Saturday.

Spencer remembers the white chapel at Fort Dodge which was in the heart of the Soldiers Home. The chapel, built around 1910, had pale green walls and a striped rug. His wife served as the church organist since the Spencer family came to Fort Dodge in '53 and Spencer himself rang the church bell by hand every Sunday morning.

His love for mankind was manifested in the way he performed his daily rounds at this little known and oftentimes forgotten Home.

His rounds included stops on the way to talk to some elderly veterans, then off to the infirmary to talk to a silver haired elderly woman. She just needed com-

pany and thanked him for the brief visit. She promised to pray for him. Spencer thanked her and moved on.

A woman, sitting in a wheelchair, chatted with him saying she missed her children and grandchildren, wishing they would visit more often. Spencer patiently listened.

"They often poured out their hearts and heartaches to me. They got it off their chests, then they felt better," he said. "I was a good listener."

Spencer explained that loneliness was a frequent problem faced by members of his small congregation. They brought to me the gamut of their problems. The list included attempted suicides and alcoholism, but the common denominator was the stone-coldness of being alone.

The aging veterans in the halls had survived the bad years, mustard gas and the Germans. Time hadn't been kind to them. Many of their relatives had moved to other states or distant cities. They had forgotten to write frequently or call occasionally.

"Some of them felt bitter. They felt that they were abandoned by their children, but it was usually not the case. Their children had lives of their own. And they felt it was the best thing to send them to Fort Dodge. It was sad," he said.

Very often he found himself being looked upon as a beacon of hope for these unknown and forgotten veterans. He cared for their religious needs, was at their bedside when they were very sick and he comforted them as death approached. He often reminded his congregation that, "We are all God's children and He cares for us very much."

During his last few years at

Fort Dodge, he suffered a couple of heart attacks which slowed him down a little. But he still maintained an active religious program and conducted the services and prayer meeting throughout the week at the various halls housing men and women.

He occasionally thought of the future and looked forward to retirement in 1982 when he became 65. He eagerly looked forward to the time when he could go on a year long sabbatical, then returning to help out at the First Baptist Church in Dodge City.

The retirement years still finds him just as busy as ever. He helps in the ministry at the First Baptist Church at Dodge City. He looks forward to traveling with his wife, visiting friends as far south as Giddings, Texas to visit an old Navy Chaplain. They both look forward to visiting their son, Tom, now living in Tucson, Arizona. Another son, Robin, was killed in an airplane crash in 1978 in Kentucky.

Recently Jeanne formed a band called the "Prairie Pipers." It has seven - sometimes eight -members ranging in age from 60 years to an 87 year old lady who plays a harmonica. Spencer plays the big harmonica and his wife Jeanne, plays the electronic keyboard. They play at the Senior Citizen Centers and other centers around Dodge City.

The death of his youngest son and the scars of war have not diminished his strong faith in both mankind and man's Maker. His wife Jeanne and the Bible are his constant companions.

"I think the Lord has been good to me," he said. "He cared for us well."

In my opinion, the military made a mistake years ago when they failed to award their highest military decoration, the Medal of Honor to Lt. Charles Spencer but I'm sure in the eyes of his Maker, Lt. Spencer will always be "Top Gun".

By Hal Susskind

Ed. Note I'd like to thank Gerald Hay, Harris News Service; Leo Branhan, AP Features, and Douglas Werner, UP, for their contributions in making this salute to Lt. Charles Spencer possible.

May 19, 1943; the Air War in Retrospect

U.S. BOMBER STATION, Thursday.—

Today ground crews at this airfield are running over the large fleet of Fortresses which yesterday took part in one of the heaviest attacks U.S. Army Air Corps has yet made against two targets in Germany.

They delivered smashing blows at Kiel and Flensburg, and preliminary reports show that the raids were completely successful.

All the ships from this station returned. Their objective had been Kiel and the target one of Germany's largest ship-building establishments, which at one time specialized in battleships but has recently been devoted to all-out production of U-boats.

The airplanes came back through heavy flak over the target and between 40 and 50 enemy fighters, with only a few bullet holes, three wounded men and one engine knocked out, as their casualties.

I watched these air battleships take off yesterday with Mr. Robert A. Lovett, U.S. Assistant Secretary of War for Air.

We saw an astounding example of American air power, as, at one minute intervals, the Fortresses raced away along the runway and circled the field until the last Fortress had taken its place in the formation.

I have never seen so many aircraft in the sky together. Everywhere you looked from the top of the control tower, squadrons were coming in from other fields for the rendezvous with our group.

Mr. Lovett waited until the whole force had assembled and started. We watched a dense mass of aircraft flying in perfect formation until they disappeared. Then Mr. Lovett left to continue his tour of airfields and to meet another group when they landed from a raid.

At the exact time scheduled for return, a single ship approached the airfield, circled and asked permission to land.

"Where are the others," we asked.

The Fortress pilot, Lieut. Robert S. O'Conner of Milwaukee had left the formation over the North Sea when out of range of enemy fighters to rush back his radio operator, T/Sgt. Everett A. Dasher, peace-time school teacher of Georgia, who had a serious chest wound.

As he came in O'Conner feathered one of the engines and landed with three.

Soon afterwards the rest of the force approached. They were still in magnificent formation and I watched with astonishment how these boys coolly peeled off to make perfect landings after the long journey to and from Germany.

We counted the number of aircraft in. There was one missing. Later we heard the pilot had run short of petrol and had put down at a nearby airfield.

And this is the story of the raid told to me by officers and men who took part.

The bombers had excellent weather and the target was visible at great altitudes, although the Germans quickly started a smoke screen, operated from boats in the harbour as well as from land to hide it.



(Front row, l to r)
Sadler, Smith,
Heaps and Dasher;
(Back row, l to r)
Lt. O'Conner,
Maxwell, Lt. Grant,
Zremer, St. Hurlburt
and Lt. Steele.

Over the target there was moderate flak and slight evasive action easily avoided the bursts.

As the Fortresses turned for home they ran into between 40 and 50 enemy fighters and for the first time American crews faced four different types of enemy pursuit ships. There were FW 190s, ME109s, 110s and 210s.

The Germans adopted different tactics from their head-on method on previous raids. On this occasion all the attacks were made from the rear.

Bombardiers and Navigators told me it was rather a dull trip.

Leader of the flight was Capt. Robert J. Nolan of Trenton, New Jersey, who was on his 22nd flight over enemy territory.

"The target was easily visible despite the heavy smoke screen," he said.

"We had little interference on the bomb run but turning for home we encountered quite a force of enemy fighters—not as many as on our last attack on Kiel—but they were using more types. From what I could see as I turned home we got the target pretty well."

Lieut. Donald Hurlburt of Panama, co-pilot of Yankee Doodle Dandy, which raced in the wounded men, told me that as their ship approached Kiel they could see Flensburg well on fire.

"As we took our turn on the bomb run and turned away it was an amazing sight to see the following aircraft coming in. It looked like a pack of cards falling from a conjurer's hand."

Some of the squadrons ran into fighters before they reached the German coast, and there were about 10 concentrated attacks. The German fighters stuck to the squadron for more than two hours and the last did not return until the Forts were 80 miles over the North Sea on the homeward journey.

No official figures of downed German aircraft has yet been given, but it is believed a good percentage were destroyed.

S/Sgt. James Bruskotter, top turret gunner of Saginaw, Michigan, who completed his 25th bombing mission yesterday believed that he got a Messerschmitt 110.

Capt. Sanford Smith, of Lakewood, Ohio, skipper of The Duchess, told me, "I saw a good number of hits. The fighters seemed to be pretty accurate. They hit our ship several times but did not do enough damage to stop us."

Sgt. Earl R. Howard, of Farmersville, Texas, a rear gunner, said, "I have seen tougher

raids but I am getting more action now. The Germans are giving our tail guns a workout."

Many of the men who took part in yesterday's raid from this base have completed 25 missions on enemy territory.

Before the crews had time for dinner after the interrogation, there was a call for a blood transfusion for Sgt. Everett Dasher. Within five minutes, 30 of the men who took part in yesterday's raid had lined up outside the hospital.

Ed. Note: The events described on this page by Philip Grune first appeared in the May 20, 1943 issue of the London Evening Standard. It reported explicitly, a typical day in the life of a combat crew at an American Airbase in England during WW II. The airbase was Molesworth; the outfit, the 303rd Bomb Group and the featured performers, the crew of the 358th Sqdn. aircraft, "Yankee Doodle Dandy."

The news article was forwarded to me by the Rev. Everett A. Dasher who as you read was one of the main characters in the story. The clipping was forwarded to him just recently by Neal W. O'Conner, the brother of Lt. Robert O'Conner, the pilot who rushed Dasher back to Molesworth for emergency treatment and in all probability saved his life.

What happened to the crew after that mission is another chapter in the remarkable history of the 303rd Bomb Group and its members; many of whom made the supreme sacrifice.

Lt. Donald W. Hurlburt, co-pilot, finished his 25 missions and returned to the USA. On Oct. 1, 1943 he was killed in an aircraft accident on a local flying mission out of Eglin Field, Florida. Hurlburt Field, near Ft. Walton Beach, Florida is named for him. His portrait hangs in the Officers Club at that base.

Lt. O'Conner was the pilot of the aircraft "The Mugger" which on July 4, 1943 was shot down by enemy aircraft over LeMans, France. The citizens of Malecorne, France erected a beautiful monument to him and the Bombardier, Lt. Richard Peterson who was killed on the same mission.

Lt. Donald Grant was also killed in action, but at the present time I have no definite information concerning his death.

Today, Maxwell, Ziemer, Dasher and Steele are members of the 303rd Bomb Group Association. The whereabouts of Sadler, Smith and Heaps is unknown.

But there is another interesting mystery. According to the Group Honor Roll, when The Mugger was shot down on July 4, 1943, four members of the crew escaped capture but none of them are members of the Association. We are fortunate to have Donovan B. Manifold, Lt. Col. (Ret) who was the co-pilot on that mission, on our roster. Maybe he can fill us in on the details.

Rhythm Pilots bring Joy to "Mudsworth"



Left to right on the front row: Robert Featherstone (me) sax; Frank Interesemone, sax; Einar Katz, sax; Robert Rabassa, sax; Roger Peter Carocari, guitar. Back row, left to right: Bob Feldman, trumpet; Alan Lindquist, trumpet; Steve Tzneskowsky, trumpet; Ray Espinoza, drums; Sidney Merlin bass fiddle and Henry Kendall at the piano.

Those who were there will easily recall the bleak days of the winter of 1942-43 at RAF Station 107 Molesworth. It was cold! The kind of high humidity cold that penetrates to the bone. Seemingly there was no way to stay warm. Food was poor with the main staples being spam and submarine, powdered eggs. Mud! Mud was everywhere and our base was quickly (and rather accurately) dubbed "Mudsworth". There were shortages of everything. You name it and very likely we didn't have it. Emotions were in keeping with the living conditions, the shortages and, of course, poor mail delivery. Tempers flaired easily. A yankee general named W. T. Sherman once remarked the "War is Hell" and he was right on target. Most at Molesworth would endorse that assessment.

Times like these seem to motivate certain men. Invariably someone will rise to the occasion and such was the case with 2nd Lt. Alan Lindquist.

Lindy was, I believe, from Fort Myers, Florida and had something of a musical background. He gained access to the Group personnel records and sought out those who claimed to have musical talent. The result was the formation of a base orchestra — the "Rhythm Pilots". A dance band, female companionship and perhaps a bit of the foolish juice worked wonders to combat the mud, the shortages and the mail.

The Rhythm Pilots were never a serious threat to Major Dorsey

nor even to Geraldo (now there's a tough one for you to remember) but the music **was** danceable. I like to think that the orchestra filled a real need.

For the better part of three years the Rhythm Pilots played at every Saturday night engagement at the Red Cross Club at Northampton and several times for dances at the Drill Hall there. Numerous other gigs were played at Slough, Bedford, Kettering, Thrapston, etc. and etc. Once we performed over the BBC and for a ladies tea party at Cambridge (now that was an unforgettable experience). Every dance on the base, officers and enlisted, found the Rhythm Pilots furnishing the music.

This activity was extra-curricular. Each band member had duties to perform which did cause problems from time to time. Lindy solved them all.

The enclosed photograph was taken by a news-photographer from the Chronical and Echo at Northampton. As I recall - at the Drill Hall and the date was late 1943.

I realize I have failed miserably to spell some names correctly and took a stab at doing so phonetically. Sorry about that fellows.

In the forty some-odd years since, I have not heard from, or of, any of the orchestra members. Could it be that I played that badly????? Perhaps I should let sleeping bands lie.

The Triangle C will fly forever.

R. Wesley Featherstone
Edmond, Oklahoma

In Memoriam

Unmindful of the weather and the early hour, he was always there on those mission mornings to give the flight crews the strength and support they were looking for. He was always there on their return to give them comfort, especially when they returned from an extremely rough mission.

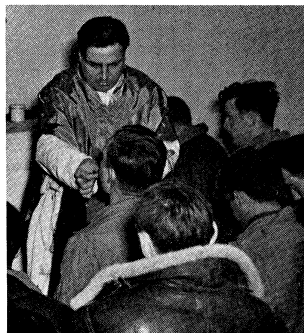
I can still hear that raspy voice with the Chicago accent saying to us, "You guys would be stupid not to take advantage of being able to go to communion before you go on today's mission." As if he had to market religion in those war torn days.

In the afternoon on our return, he would be there to say, "How was it? Was it rough?" If anyone needed consolation he was there to help.

Although he did not fly or tune up an engine he was an integral part of the 303rd Bomb Group from its inception in 1942. When the Association was formed, he was an active participant and remained so for more than 10 years.

But he is with us no longer. For Fr. Edmund Skoner passed away on January 31, 1988 at Boynton Beach, Florida.

A native Chicagoan, Father

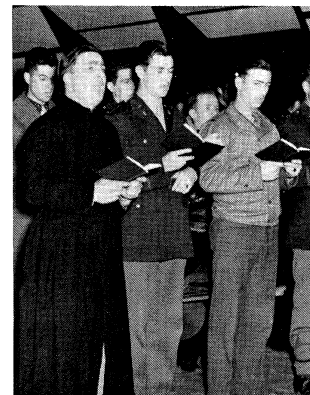


Morning Mass

Cletus H. Vogel, 71, Tail gunner with 359th Sqdn., passed away on Feb. 5, 1988 at Eustis, Florida, from cardiac arrest. He had been ill with lung cancer for five years. He is survived by his wife Frances W. Vogel. Burial was in Dallas, Tx.

Lawrence C. Merthan, 358th Sqdn., died of cancer on Sept. 30, 1987 in Washington, D.C. A retired Colonel, Merthan is survived by his wife Claudia and one daughter, Mary Elizabeth Merthan.

Donald F. DeCamp, 358th Sqdn., died on March 8 in California. DeCamp was the co-pilot on the aircraft Hell's Angels when it flew back to the U.S. carrying the six ground crew headed by M/Sgt. Fabian Folmer. He is survived by his wife Betty.



Fr. Skoner at Evening Mass

Skoner was a graduate of Our Lady of Grace School and the Chicago archdiocesan seminaries. His first assignment after ordination in 1937 was to Immaculate Conception Parish in Chicago for five years. He then served as a Chaplain with the 303rd Bomb Group including its stay at Molesworth in England.

Returning to civilian life in 1946, he was named associate pastor of Immaculate Conception Parish in Highland Park for two years. From 1948 to 1961, he was a member of the Archdiocesan Mission Band.

After his retirement Father Skoner and his sister, Lillian, established a scholarship endowment fund for archdiocesan seminarians.

He celebrated his golden jubilee in the priesthood in April 1987.

Father Skoner is survived by a sister, Frances Kreuter, and a brother, Ralph.

Although Fr. Skoner is no longer with us physically, I'm sure he will be with us in spirit as long as there is a 303rd Bomb Group Association.

Dominick Carbillano, 360th Sqdn., passed away on Nov. 7, 1987 in Yonkers, N.Y. He is survived by his wife, Regina, twin daughters, Nancy and Phyllis and four grandchildren.

Johnny E. Roberts, 360th Sqdn., died on March 7, 1987 at his home in Ottumwa, Iowa. He is survived by his wife Mary; two sons, John Jr. and Don; two granddaughters and his mother, Etta Armbruster.

Herman C. Stover, 427th Sqdn., died on March 1, 1988 in Oklahoma City, OK. He was a lifetime resident of Piedmont, OK, except for the four years in the Air Force during World War II. He was a cook with the 427th which he joined in 1942. Survivors include three brothers and two sisters.

Ken J. Kurtenbach

A Man of Confidence

I became a prisoner of war flying as a tailgunner on a B-17 out of England and we were shot down on December 12, 1942. After wandering in an attempt to "evade" capture, going from east of Paris to Dieppe, thence to Boulogne, back to Paris, thence enroute to southern France, I was captured along with a comrade when we attempted to cross the line of demarcation at Dijon, France which was then in effect between occupied France and Vichy France.

My companion, George Dillard of Fresno, California, and I were held for about two weeks after our capture by the Gestapo on December 25, 1942 in a civilian prison at Dijon. We were then transferred to Dulag Luft, then to Stalag 8-B at Lambsdorf, Germany near the Polish and Czech borders.

This camp was by far the most interesting of any camp in which I was interned in that contained prisoners from the evacuation at Dunkirk, two and one-half years prior, as well as prisoners from Crete, North Africa, and were mostly British with prisoners from every dominion that Britain had at that time.

The camp was governed by a Camp Leader who was a Regimental Sergeant Major. The camp was well organized.

Perhaps at this time a comment would be in order as to the methods of organization that I observed during my stay in the various camps in Germany. Under the Geneva Convention of 1929, (to which I do not believe the United States was a signatory power) it provided that the senior officer would be the camp leader. It provided that in enlisted men's camps the choice of Camp Leader would be chosen or elected by the internees. Non-commissioned officers were not required to perform labor for the enemy but all other ranks below that rating would be required to perform labor.

The Germans referred to the "camp leader" as Hauptvertaunzman (head trusted man) and the French referred to it as homme d'confidence (man of confidence). These terms are probably misspelled by me. The British and Americans came to use camp leader as their designation for either the officers' camps and enlisted men camps.

Upon being transferred from Stalag 8-B the number of American prisoners had grown to 21 men. We were transferred by boxcar (40 men or 8 horses of World War I fame) to Stalag 7-A at Moosburg, Bavaria. Upon our arrival there we found more men had been shot down and captured, so we now numbered 117.

Stalag 7-A was then primarily a transient camp for large numbers of prisoners arriving from Italy, having been captured in North Africa after the American landing in late 1942. There were many British as well as Americans in these groups. Generally they were there for only a few days or weeks and would then be transferred on to other camps.

The resident prisoners were composed mainly of French, Serbian and Russians in great numbers. The Germans had a difficult time maintaining discipline and seemed somewhat overawed by the problems. Escapes were numerous (with little success) and intermingling of all nationalities provided many opportunities for trading various goods and life did not seem as restrictive or boring as it was in later months in other camps.

Some of my decisions in later months at Stalag 17-B were based on education gained in both 8-B and 7-A and some of my best assistants were veterans of these camps.

In about late March or early April of '43, the 117 American Air Corps prisoners were transferred, along with about 3000 American ground troops captured in North Africa, to Stalag 3-B located at Furerstenburg on the Oder south of Stettin in northern Germany. There were not enough American Air Corps at this time to allow the German command to decide what to do with us and so they simply assimilated us with other troops.

At Stalag 3-B the men of the camp elected a Camp Leader, a Master Sergeant Clyde Bennett, who did a fine job of organizing the camp and creating order out of chaos.

During this time at 3-B the Air Corps members were requested by Sgt. Bennett to elect an Air Corps Man of Confidence to represent their problems to him and I was chosen by the 117 men as that designated agent.

After a stay at 3-B we were again transferred by boxcars to Stalag 7-A. During this trip the Air Corps personnel were contained in three boxcars. A successful escape attempt was made by three men, Sgts. Charles Roth, Paul Giddons and Rusty Swarmer. Others were prepared to go, but we pulled into a station before we could get out. The Germans noticed the damaged lock on the boxcar and immediately put 80 men into one boxcar. This was a most difficult situation and the men suffered considerably on the balance of the trip. I should mention that after our arrival at 7-A all three escapees were captured and returned to our group.

Our group of Air Corps personnel, numbering 117, arrived back in Stalag 7-A, Moosburg, probably sometime in July. Upon our arrival we found a number of newly captured Air Corps personnel, numbering perhaps 350, along with a group of about 30 men who had been interned at Luft III at Sagan. These 30 were longer term prisoners than ourselves and contained men that had been captured on the first raid of the war by American Air Corps, August 17, 1942.

The somewhat chaotic conditions of the transient camp were being overseen very well by a Master Sergeant McMahon of the ground troops out of Italy. He was most capable and a very cool-headed person.

At his request for a representative of the Air Corps, I was again chosen by the approximately 550 men to act as Man of Confidence under Sgt. McMahon, as Camp Leader.

The camp grew rapidly shortly after our arrival back at 7-A. The cause was the anniversary raid of August 17, 1943, and a subsequent bombing run a couple of days later, at Schweinfurt and Regensburg against the ballbearing plant. As I remember, we received 550 men in the period of about three days, and other substantial amounts of men over the period of the next two weeks.

The air war was accelerating and corresponding amount of prisoners were being taken. Along about the last of August or first part of September Sgt. McMahon and a large contingent of ground troops were transferred out of Stalag 7-A and the responsibility of Camp Leader for the entire American contingent became my responsibility.

Trading with the other nationalities was slowly becoming more restricted by the Kommandant



Kurt in one of the POW camps. Photo was taken by a French photographer.

of the camp, but it was still comparatively easy to obtain other foods, maps, compasses and other escape paraphernalia. There were literally dozens of escapes attempted, but only one was successful, one Lee Gordon, who ultimately made it back to England.

Matters were in such a state of flux at this time there was not really a cohesive escape committee. This came later at Stalag 17-B when I chose Sgt. Joe Dillard, a most capable person, as Chief of Security. A most cool-headed person, as impeccably dressed as possible under those conditions, and one of the older prisoners from Luft III that had transferred in.

I am not privy to all the details of the escape of Sgt. Gordon, as I was not then Camp Leader, but it became necessary to cover his escape with someone else. An Australian soldier from North Africa volunteered and he remained under the alias of Gordon throughout the entire period of captivity.

It was also necessary to cover other escapees at 7-A and we had a tacit agreement with the men that we would attempt to cover their escape for three days, giving ample opportunity to get far enough away, and would then allow the Germans to discover their absence. This was accomplished by taking advantage of the habit of the Germans at the morning and evening rollcalls of placing the men in a parade of five men deep, and they were accustomed to counting heads as five, ten, fifteen, etc. until the complement of that particular barracks was accounted for. The fifth line of men would drop back an extra foot or eighteen inches, thus allowing a man who would have been counted at the beginning of the count to race in a bent over fashion to the far end of the line, naturally as quietly as possible, and he would come erect at a prearranged spot in the line perhaps five or ten men from the end. He would take off his cap, perhaps turn sideways a little, so the counting guard or guards did not recognize him readily from earlier in the line. This method of covering the missing man or men was most successful.

To be continued in next Newsletter.

303rd Bomb Group (H) Association, Inc.

*Might - in - Flight******
APPLICATION FOR ☐ MEMBERSHIP FOR ☐ LIFE MEMBERSHIP FOR ☐ ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIPSee Below

Name _____ Military Grade _____ Spouse's Name _____
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 State _____ Zip _____ Home Phone (_____) _____ Bus. Phone (_____) _____ ext. _____
 Crew and/or Duty _____ Squadron _____ Pilot's Name _____ Retired Military Grade, If Any _____
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MEMBERSHIP DUES/\$10.00 FOR CALENDAR YEAR**LIFE MEMBERSHIP DUES SCHEDULE**

| | |
|--------------------|------|
| 60-64 years | \$75 |
| 65-69 | 60 |
| 70-74 | 45 |
| 75-77 | 30 |
| 78 years, or older | Free |

Substantial savings are available to our members who wish to apply for Life Memberships. A few of our members have sent in money for 2 or even 3 years at the annual rate of \$10 per year. They should evaluate whether they might be able to save dollars by converting these prepayments to a Life Membership.

DO NOT SEND CASH THROUGH THE MAIL!
 Make Check or Money Order payable to:
 303rd Bomb Group (H) Association, Inc.

Mail to:

Jim S. Reeves
P.O. Box 5700
Brea, CA 92622-5700

Those Red Dots ...

Many thanks to the members who observed the red dot on their 303rd Newsletter mailing label and paid their dues for 1988. We still have quite a few who are still delinquent; consequently, their label now has two red dots. As in baseball, three red dots and the newsletter will be discontinued. However, if you find it a hardship to pay your dues, please let us know since we have many members who have volunteered to pay the yearly dues of members who through some unforeseen circumstances cannot pay their dues at the present time.

We have many interesting projects in the works and we would hate to see members left out because of an oversight in not paying their dues.

The Editor's Scratchpad

I changed the format for this issue to salute our downed fliers and to take advantage of a beautiful water color painted as courtesy to the 303rd by Gen. Steve McElroy.

This format gives us more flexibility in make-up and allows us to take advantage of some good photography you may have in your possession. If you have any good, clear, B&W photos with a vertical format that could be blown up to make a good cover for the next issue of the Newsletter, please let us know. Good shots of ground personnel—no matter what the subject—are needed.

I am also in the process of designing a first class certificate for distribution to all former 303rds or their survivors. We hope to have it ready to hand out at the next 303rd reunion in Norfolk. But, I need input from all facets of the organization: ground crews, air crews, office personnel, cooks, etc. I believe all should be represented on the certificate in some form or another... So let's hear from you.

Also in the plans is an updated super-newsletter of some 200 pages that really tells the story of the 303rd Bomb Group with its heroics, sacrifices and accomplishments. Again I need your support in supplying the information and also your financial support in purchasing the product through your PX.

I would like to have your comments on the new look of the newsletter, (one color cover a year) and whether or not you would like to see it go to 16 pages.



The beautiful Omni International Hotel (upper right), the Waterside Marketplace and Point Park. This is where the action will be in Norfolk-by-the-Sea for the 303rd Reunion in Sept. 27-Oct. 1, 1989

POW Medal Now Available

A medal honoring Americans who were taken captive in World Wars I and II, Korea and Vietnam, is now available three years after legislation calling for the decoration was introduced in Congress.

A Pentagon official estimated that as many as 142,000 Americans have been taken prisoner by enemy forces since 1917. Although it is estimated that 27,000 Air Force personnel are eligible for the award, we have no accurate count as to how many 303rds became POWs during WW II.

Veterans requesting medals must prove eligibility with photocopies of discharge or repatriation certificates or other documents. Since many records of former POWs were destroyed in the fire at St. Louis Records Center several years ago, it may be necessary for those POWs to get affidavits from other prisoners who were confined in the same camps.

Written requests for applications or award of the medal should be addressed as follows:

* Former Air Force POWs, including Army Air Forces veterans, may write to the Air Force Reference Branch, National Personnel Records Center, 9700 Page Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63132-5199.

Using the form, an applicant will be expected to provide his full name, service number, social security number, Veterans Administration claim number, date and place of birth, branch of service, unit of assignment when captured and dates of confinement and release.

Processing of the application will take anywhere from 45 to 90 days because of the need to verify military records, the Pentagon said.

M/Gen. Lew Lyle has volunteered to present the medal to those eligible Hell's Angels planning to attend a mini-reunion of the 303rd being held in connection with the 8th Air Force Annual Reunion at Des Moines, Iowa on Oct. 12-15.

Those applicants planning to go to Des Moines may have the medal sent to them direct in which case you are asked to bring it to the reunion with you; or you may have it sent to Gen. Lyle as a representative of the 8th Air Force by filling in his name and address in Box 15 B of the application form.

Further information on the 8th AF Reunion will be carried in the next issue of the newsletter or you can get further information by writing to Dr. Carl Fyler, President, 303rd B.G. Assn., 300 S.W. Yorkshire Road, Topeka, Kansas, 66606.

The mini-reunion in Des Moines, Iowa, in October is being publicized for those who have inquired about having a get-together yearly and is not a substitute for our next 303rd gala reunion to be held at Norfolk-by-the-Sea in Sept. 27, 1989.

THE 303RD B.G. PX ORDER PAGE

Check Desired Item and Indicate Quantity in "QTY" Column

| Qty. | Description | Cost Ea. | Total | Qty. | Description | Cost Ea. | Total |
|-------|--|----------|-------|---|--|----------|-------|
| _____ | 4" Embroidered "Might in Flight" Patch | \$ 3.50 | _____ | _____ | Leather Key Fobs 1-1/4" x 1-1/2" with 303rd/8th AF Insignia | \$ 2.00 | _____ |
| _____ | 4" Interior/Exterior All Weather "Might in Flight" Decal | 1.50 | _____ | _____ | Life Membership Plaque with Name Engraved: 4x6" Brass on Walnut** | \$12.50 | _____ |
| _____ | 3" Interior/Exterior All Weather 303rd/8th AF Decal | 1.00 | _____ | _____ | <i>Chick's Crew</i> , by Ben Smith, Jr., 1984 Revised edition. 7 x 9, 192 pages. Illustrated crew history and story of life in 303rd BG. Drawings by the author. | \$15.95 | _____ |
| _____ | B-17 Franklin Minted Coin (38MM) Very Rare and Limited | \$12.00 | _____ | **These Items Will Be Sold To Life Members Only! | | | |
| _____ | "First 300" Mission Book of 303rd | \$ 7.00 | _____ | Directions: Check quantity of each item desired, and enter the total of each entry in the right hand column. Add the cost of the ordered items and place this amount on the TOTAL COST line below these directions, add the postage and handling charge (if cost is under \$20.00), write in the TOTAL AMOUNT DUE and PRINT your name and address. When ordering, please be sure to send this entire page with your check to the 303rd BG at the address below. | | | |
| _____ | 1" Cloisonné 8th USAF Shoulder Patch... the Original!! (Pin) | \$ 3.00 | _____ | TOTAL COST of items ordered \$ _____ | | | |
| _____ | 1" Cloisonné "Might in Flight" 303rd Insignia (Pin) | \$ 3.00 | _____ | For postage and handling, when total cost is less than \$20.00, add \$2.50 \$ _____ | | | |
| _____ | 1/2" Cloisonné Member Pin (Tie) | \$ 3.00 | _____ | TOTAL AMOUNT DUE (to 303rd BG) \$ _____ | | | |
| _____ | 3/4" Cloisonné Member Pin (Lapel) | \$ 3.00 | _____ | Your Name _____ | | | |
| _____ | 1/2" Cloisonné Life Pin (Tie)** | \$ 3.00 | _____ | Street _____ | | | |
| _____ | 3/4" Cloisonné Life Pin (Lapel)** | \$ 4.00 | _____ | City, State, ZIP _____ | | | |
| _____ | 38MM (Dollar Size) Cloisonné USAF Insignia (Not a Pin) | \$ 4.00 | _____ | Make checks payable in U.S. funds to 303rd BG (No Cash Please) and send with this order page to: | | | |
| _____ | 38MM (Dollar Size) Cloisonné 303rd/8th Insignia (Not a Pin) | \$ 4.00 | _____ | ROBERT E. (BOB) KIDD | | | |
| _____ | B-17 Belt Buckle "50th Anniversary" (Numbered & Limited Edition) | \$20.00 | _____ | P.X. 303RD B.G. | | | |
| _____ | Silver or Gold Money Clip with B-17 Coin (Circle One) | \$21.00 | _____ | P.X. ADMINISTRATOR | | | |
| _____ | Silver or Gold Money Clip with 303rd/8th AF Insignia (Circle One) | \$14.00 | _____ | 13214D FIJI WAY | | | |
| _____ | Silver or Gold Bola Tie w/Strings; 303rd/8th AF or USAF Insignia. Ties: Blue-Brown-Gold-Silver. <i>Please Circle One on Each Line</i> | \$16.00 | _____ | MARINA DEL REY, CA 90292 | | | |
| _____ | Silver or Gold Bola Tie w/Strings; B-17 Minted Coin. Ties: Blue-Brown-Gold-Silver. <i>Please Circle Two of the Above Indicating Colors Desired</i> | \$22.00 | _____ | All orders must be paid in advance and no substitutions please. In the event the manufacturers' supply or stock is depleted, a refund of those items will be made. | | | |
| _____ | Ladies 1-1/2" Pendant Necklace w/ 303rd/8th AF or USAF Insignia | \$12.00 | _____ | Signature X _____ | | | |
| _____ | Ladies 1-1/2" Pendant Necklace w/ B-17 Minted Coin | \$22.00 | _____ | CREDIT CARD INFORMATION (Minimum charge: \$20.00) | | | |
| _____ | English Leathers: 4" x 8" Brass on Black (Circle One) B-17 or 8th AF Patch | \$10.00 | _____ | Check One: MASTERCARD _____, VISA _____, | | | |
| | | | | Exp. Date _____ | | | |
| | | | | Card No. _____ | | | |

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