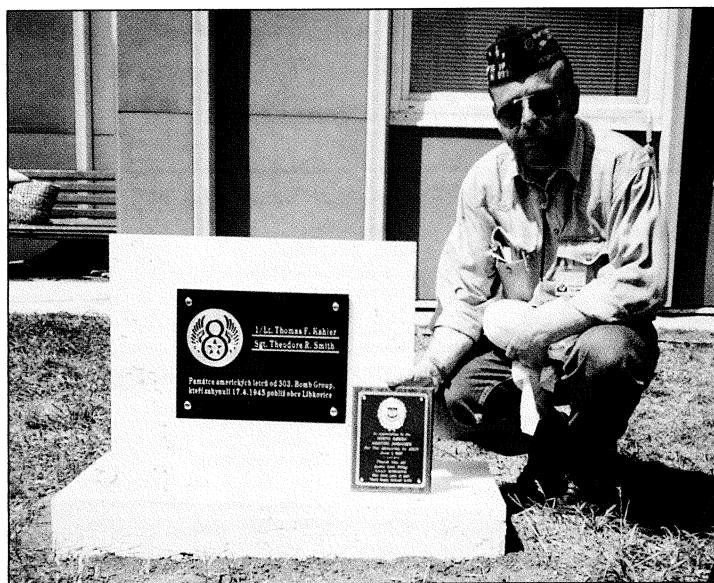


Hell's Angels Newsletter

303rd BOMB GROUP (H) ASSOCIATION, INC.

AUGUST 1996

Czech officials honor 303rd crew



Karel Novak, Chairman of NCAA, poses with memorial erected in honor of Lt. Thomas F. Kahler and Sgt. Theodore R. Smith and holds plaque donated by Les Latz in appreciation of work done for B-17 crew.

On June 1, 1996, a memorial was dedicated to a 303rd crew which crashed near Brux, Czech Republic, some 51 years ago. It is the 23rd memorial which has been erected in Europe honoring a 303rd crew.

On 17 April 1945, 41 aircraft of the 303rd Bomb Group under command of Capt. William Eisenhart took off on a deep penetration to bomb the marshalling yards at Dresden, Germany. It was the Group's 362nd mission.

Due to adverse weather conditions in the target area, the formation was forced to descend some 4,000 feet below the briefed altitudes to bomb successfully. The lead and high squadrons each made three bomb runs. Flak was moderate and accurate for the lead and high squadrons. In making their three runs the lead and high squadrons went through intense and accurate fire at Brux, Czech-slovakia.

According to "Might in Flight, the Daily Diary of the 303rd," two aircraft were lost in action. B-17, #43-37597, "Earthquake McGoon," had a direct hit from anti-aircraft fire in its gas tank. The right wing caught

on fire. Flames streamed back over the top of the aircraft and all around the bombbay. There was a large puff of smoke, flames and debris as the Fortress exploded in the air. The B-17 went down in the vicinity of Brux, Czech-slovakia. No parachutes were seen. The entire crew was believed to have perished in the explosion.

The other aircraft which failed to return was "Sack Time" piloted by Lt. Blaine Thomas. It went down in the vicinity of Dresden.

On June 8, 1996, the following news release was received from Pavel Uhlir covering the events which took place at the new airport at Most (Brux) in the Czech Republic.

"On June 1, 1996, a festivity was held to commemorate the opening of the new airport in Most. The new airport has a grassy runway and is owned by Aeroclub Most. The airport will be used for sport airplaning events such as sport plane flights and sport pilot training.

A coal deposit was found below the old airport; so, the local coal company financed the construction of the new airport. The new airport is located north of Most on a



Wreath honoring Lt. Kahler and Sgt. Smith donated by Mrs. Emily Broughton, Mrs. Edna M. Lowery, Leslie L. Latz and R. T. Fogarty. The wreath was laid by the men who saw the crash of the B-17, 51 years ago.

plateau created with relocated and leveled overburden, coal deposits, from the nearby open pit coal mine.

The ceremony opened with a coal company representative presenting the key to the new airport to JUDr. J. Mracek, chairman of the Aeroclub Most; he, in turn returned the key to the old airport. The secretary of Transportation, ing. V. Budinsky, served as patron over the festivities. The day's festivities began at 08:00 a.m. with sightseeing flight tours. At 10:00 a.m., the air show began and spectators watched gliders and airplanes perform aerial acrobatics. The festivities also consisted of an historical plane flight as well as the demon-

stration of other airplane models. Shortly after this, the sky was filled with colorful parachutes. Parachutists created many different configurations-the most difficult formation was one named, "the stairs." After the parachutists landed, helicopters arrived to demonstrate the rescue of people in danger. The helicopters departed and, next, the spectators observed the slow takeoff of hot air balloons.

Next, people moved on to the new airport area and the U.S. and Czech national anthems were played as the introduction to the unveiling of the memorial plaque ceremony. The representative of
(cont'd on Pg 5)



303rd BOMB GROUP (H) ASSOCIATION, INC.

"HELLS ANGELS" NEWSLETTER

Editor: Hal Susskind

VOL. XVIII, NO. 3 2602 Deefoot Trail, Austin, TX 78704 August 1996

The 303rd Bomb (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 303rders 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 303rders 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. Annual dues is \$10; \$15 for foreign addressees.

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OFFICERS 303RD BOMB GROUP ASSOCIATION

President

Edgar C. "Ed" Miller
422 S. Walnut Avenue, Temple, OK 73568-0219

(Wife's name: Jill)
(405) 342-5119

Vice President/Administration

Eddie Deerfield
3552 Landmark Trail
Palm Harbor, FL 34684-5016
(Wife's name: Mary Lee)
(813) 787-0332

Secretary

Richard R. Johnson
5901 Joe Road
Deale, MD 20751
(Wife's name: Marjorie)
(410) 867-0597

Vice President/Reunions

Walter J. Ferrari
2 Pine Ridge Drive
Newman, GA 30263

Treasurer

William J. "Bill" Roche
1428 Gleneagles Drive
Venice, FL 34292
(Wife's name: Doris)
(941) 485-5073

SQUADRON REPRESENTATIVES

358th Squadron Representative

Walter J. "Walt" Mayer
W. 14605 Taylor Rd.
Cheney, WA 99004-9245
(Wife's name: Beverly)
(509) 299-3250
(W) 6649 E. Hwy. 80, SP331
Yuma, AZ 85365-8441
(520) 344-6961

Alternate(s)

William H. Simpkins
348 S Cologne Ave., Box 217
Cologne, NJ 08213

359th Squadron Representative

William E. "Bill" Eisenhower
1734 72nd Ave. NE
St. Petersburg, FL 33702
(Wife's name: Mary)
(813) 526-5088

Eugene E. "Gene" Girman
8420 Parrish Place
Highland, IN 46322
(Wife's name: Evelyn)
(609) 965-2871

360th Squadron Representative

William C. "Bill" Heller
P.O. Box 3006
Half Moon Bay, CA 94019
(Wife's name: Ruth)
(415) 726-6886 Fax 726-4214

J. Ford Kelley
7073 Fairway Bend Lane
Sarasota, FL 34243-3264
(Wife's name: Betty)
(941) 351-2281

SQUADRON REPRESENTATIVES

427th Squadron Representative

Vernon W. Stone, Jr.
75 Camino Del Rio
Port St. Lucie, FL 34952-2374
(407) 878-7057

Alternate(s)

Norman O. Peterson
7658 Found Lake Road
St. Germain, WI 54558
(Wife's name: Jane)
(715) 542-3983
(W) 850 Snead Drive
Fairfield Glade, TN 38555
(615) 484-5528

HEADQUARTERS & SUPPORTING UNITS & 44TH AIR DEPOT REPRESENTATIVES

Melvin T. McCoy
8865 SW Maverick Terrace, #806
Beaverton, OR 97008-7474
(503) 524-3587

Maurice J. Paulk
205 W. 12th
Wood River, NE 68883
(Wife's name: Opal)
(308) 583-2583

WIDOW MEMBER'S REPRESENTATIVE

Joanna M. Tressler
Rd. #1, Box 373-K
Northumberland, PA 17857
(717) 473-3816

APPOINTMENTS: COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN

Newsletter Committee Chairman

Harold A. "Hal" Susskind
2602 Deefoot Trail
Austin, TX 78704-2716
(Wife's name: Rae)
(512) 441-6475

Group Advisor

Lewis E. "Lew" Lyle
207 Ridge One
Hot Springs, AR 71901-9118
(Wife's name: Betty)
(501) 321-1956

Membership & Roster Management Chairman

Carlton M. Smith
12700 Red Maple Circle #54
Sonora, CA 95370-5269
(Wife's name: Phyllis)
(209) 533-4033

By-Laws Chairman

Jack P. Rencher
2901 Hill Road
Boise, ID 83703-4705
(Wife's name: Louise)
(208) 343-2265

Px Administrator

Charles R. Sykes
16281 N. 31st Ave.
Phoenix, AZ 85023-3008
(Wife's name: Vicki)
(602) 993-8015

Audit Committee

Frank C. De Cicco, Jr.
6 Kitty Hawk West
Richmond, TX 77469
(Wife's name: Jean)
(713) 341-5004

Nominating Committee

Malcolm J. Magid
2307 Briarwood Hills Dr. NE
Atlanta, GA 30319
(Wife's name: Iris)
(404) 237-1212

Mission Reports Administrator

Mark Matthews
5530 Center Hill Church Rd. SW
Loganville, GA 30249
(404) 952-4622

Memorials Committee

Alvin L. Morton
301 Third Avenue Rm. 703
Pittsburgh, PA 15222
(412) 765-2532

Past-Presidents Advisory Committee Chairman

J. Ford Kelly
7073 Fairway Bend Lane
Sarasota, FL 34243

Historian & 8th AF Liaison

Harry D. Gobrecht
505 Via Deseo
San Clemente, CA 92672-2462
(Wife's name: Barbara)
(714) 361-2662

San Francisco 1996 Reunion Committee Chairman (Aug. 23-27 1996)

Eddie Deerfield
3553 Landmark Trail
Palm Harbor, FL 34684-5016
Local Committeemen - James
McCoy, James Taylor, Bill Heller,
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Rom. Catholic:

Bishop Rene H. Gracida, 4126 Ocean Dr., Corpus Christi, TX 78411
Rev. Bernard Schumacher, Subiaco Abbey, Subiaco, AR 72865

Protestant:

Rev. Charles G. Rice, Jr., RR #2, Box 18, Greenville, NY 12083
Rev. Everett A. Dasher, Rt. #4, Box 425, Saluda, SC 29138
(Wife's name: Helen)
Rev. Warren L. Hedrick, 14 March Drive, New Durham, NH 03855
(Wife's name: Alma)

Hell's Angels Forum

Your Chance to Sound Off!

Crew Size?

Regarding the item on crew sizes on page 4 of the May issue and your editor's note; I can enlighten you this much. Yes, I was shot down on the same raid over Dresden as Lee, same area and only 8 crew members for reasons I do not know. The latter days of World War II, we had no waist gunners. The radio operator (me) would man the waist guns if a fighter attack came.

Les Latz
10890 S.E. 73rd Ct.
Bellevue, FL 34420

Ed. Note: This wouldn't have been possible if the USAAF didn't have air superiority.

Not every day was "Brass" flying weather!

This is in reference to Walt Shayler's article in the February 1996 issue of the Newspaper regarding newspaper pictures ("Stars and Stripes"). He mentioned one about two birds in the fog. I have a copy of that picture. It's of two pigeons on the ground. One says to the other, "Hell I'm walking to Bedford in this soup!" The other replies, "Two n' six says Molesworth's up in C-1 bombin'!"

I'm not sure where this cartoon originated, but I don't remember it coming from the "Stars and Stripes." I also have a two page photo from the "Illustrated London News" dated May 23, 1936, of a colored print of the Queen Mary, which the 303rd Ground Personnel sailed in to England from New York, Sept. 5, 1942, landing at Gurrack, Scotland, Sept. 9, 1942.

Let me know if you would like copies of these pictures, and I'll either send them to you or bring them to San Francisco in August.

James W. Johnson
27701 Murrieta Road #95
Sun City, CA 92586

Ed. Note: Bring them to San Francisco. I'm sure many of our members would like to see them.

303rd's Thunderbolt!

Just reread the letter from William Rader in the May issue of the Newsletter. This was the letter about the P-47. You have me confused. In the Ed. Note, you asked for a pic-

ture of said P-47. Gee whiz! Who wants it, you or William Rader?

That I guess is immaterial and I won't strain my brain about it. Education and Scarlet Fever were the same with me - I was exposed to both and neither one "took" So what I'm going to do is send you a picture of said P-47. I regret to say that it shows no 303rd markings that I can identify. This is contact print from a 620 Kodak. I think that a friend and I developed this in an outer wing panel crate that we turned into a dark room, which we set up in a reparable hangar. I still have the negative which I can have enlarged if you wish. The "character" on the wing is myself. Rather than keep on rambling as I am known to do, I will close with this statement. You have done an excellent job as editor. I read it from cover to cover (sometimes twice) - keep up the good work.

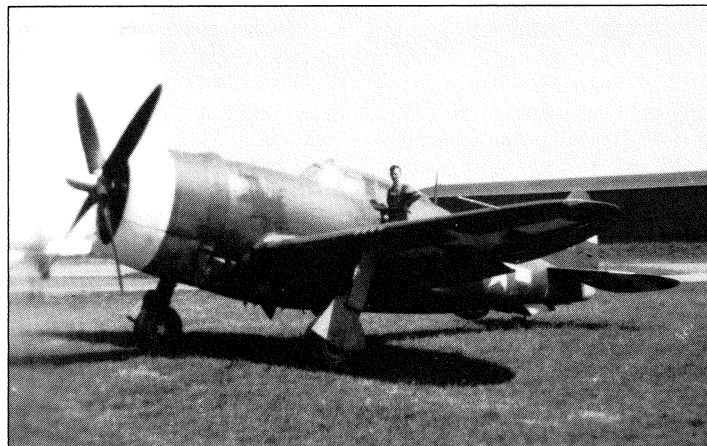
Maurice J. Paulk
205 W 12th St.

Wood River, NE 68883-9164

Ed. Note: Up to the last newsletter I never knew we had a P-47 with 303rd markings on it at 1 Molesworth and I was there from November of 1943 until I went to Casablanca in June of 1945. See how educated you get when you read the newsletter!

To 444th Squadron Members

Once again I would like to submit some newsworthy items for our Hell's Angels Newsletter. At the last two reunions, my spouse, Barbara



and I had the pleasure of meeting and conversing with Hal Susskind. What a tremendous job he does with the newsletter! He is deserving of the recognition and the award presented to him in Colorado Springs.

While there at the last breakfast, my wife stated she would like to have a mini-reunion at our home in Redlands, CA, and invited the 444th members that live in the nearby area.

Robert "Red" Phillips came all the way from Napa; Joseph and Eleanor Taylor came from Warner Springs; Lee and Margaret Lingo came from La Palma and Dale and Ann Ragel came from Simi, California.

We had a delicious chicken luncheon later that afternoon. We surprised Robert Featherstone with a telephone call. This gathering took place on March 20 of this year.

I, now and then, get a bunch of 8th AF guys for a breakfast get-together. There are four 303rds that

live here in Redlands; Shayler(360), Isaacson(427), Don Rusk(9427) and myself (444).

Here is a picture of the Engine Shop crew that worked in the hangar. It was taken by Tom Struck of the Electric Shop. I am in the center with my sleeves rolled up. Sam Masington, shop chief has his hands on my shoulders; Jack Rake is standing on his right. Front row is George Frickel, Unk, "me," Miglerini and Thomas Hogan. Others are unknown.

We had a good turnout of the 444th at the last reunion. I sure hope to see more 444th "guys" in San Francisco.

Raymond A. Espinoza
233 Phlox Ave.
Redlands, CA 92373
(909) 793-0862

Distinguished service Awards

Since Colorado Springs I have had the distinct honor of sending over 65 DSAs to newly located comrades who served at Molesworth, or to their widows. I had hoped that the notice in past newsletters would have encouraged more of you to send me the names of your "buddies."

I've got to believe that many of you are aware of the names and current addresses of those that flew with you, or served with you, while at Molesworth, yet have not joined the Association.

Please don't delay, send their names and addresses to me, or the name of the widow, along with a current "correct" address.

Ed Miller
422 S. Walnut Ave.
Tempe, OK 73568-0219



Forum

Info wanted

Lt. Richard Browning was the original Navigator for the Idaho Potato Peeler, which was Ross Bales' aircraft which we flew to Molesworth in the original crews of the 359th. I was the Bombardier, Wilson McGough was the co-pilot. The plane was subsequently renamed, on the occasion of Roosevelt's birthday in 1943, to FDR's Potato Peeler Kids. Group and Wing wanted us to use the name FDR, but we would not agree to give up the Peeler name.

Browning volunteered to accompany Walt Dooley on his first mission as a first pilot. We had been selected as a crew to leave for the rest home on the day of that mission. Browning went anyway and was going to join us later. There was a mid-air collision, near the base, before we had actually departed the base, and Browning was lost with the rest of the crew.

Dick was older than the rest of us. He came from the New York City area and was already a CPA. He was a highly ranked bridge player by the time he was age 27 and he taught me the game and we played a lot together. He was a brilliant, well educated and well read young man and an inspiration because of his maturity. I was 21 years old then and the rest of the crew about the same age.

Could you publish a note in the Newsletter asking if someone, anywhere, might know anything about his family and where I might reach someone of them? To show his meaning to us, we named our second son, Richard, in his honor. Tragically, my son was also killed in an accident after having served with the Marines in Viet Nam.

Paul M. Thomas
3496 S Via Del Papagayo
Green Valley, AZ 85614
(602) 625-2602

Ed. Note: You may possibly run a classified ad in one of the New York City newspapers. It would help if you had an 1943 address. We have many New York City members who could possible help you.

I am a member of the 8th Air Force, 93rd Bomb Group, 409 Bomb Squadron organization and a

former POW. I am looking for some information about one of six of your Group's aircraft that was shot down August 15, 1944 near the city of Bitburg, Germany and I hope you can help me.

I have the names of two airmen that were killed that day. I do not know if they were of the same crew or not. I am hoping that any of their surviving crew members would contact me at the above address.

Lt. Lester E. Reuss (358th)
Sgt. Fred O. Byrd (358th)

Paul O. Bergman.
P.O. Box 237
Eagle Creek, OR 97002
(503) 637-6546

Ed. Note: Reuss and Byrd were flying with different crews. Lt. Reuss bailed out safely but was captured by the Germans when he landed and was shot. Sgt. Byrd was killed when his plane exploded. Several members of "Bad Penny" the aircraft that Lt. Reuss flew on, survived and are members of the As sociation.

Info on Pilsen raid wanted

The May newsletter was great! I really enjoyed all of the articles, and especially the photo on page 13 of you and Robert Hullar in the San Francisco restaurant. I say "especially" because I just finished reading "Half a Wing, Three Engines, and a Prayer, a wonderful account of Hullar's crew in combat. All associate members should read this book. Also is there any member who could recount the 360th Squadron's last mission to Pilsen? I would very much like to know about it either directly or through the newsletter. Thank you for a job well done...then and now.

Jeff Gilman (A-286)
4525 Buckeystown Pike
Frederick, MD 21704

Ed. Note: Pages 706 through 709 in Harry Gobrecht's "Might in Flight", the Daily Diary of Hell's Angels contains an excellent account of that mission. Also Warren Mauger, pilot of the last aircraft lost by the 303rd wrote a wonderful account of his experiences in avoiding capture by the Germans for 10 days. Some of his memorabilia is in a museum in Pilsen in the Czech Republic.

Forced March From Stalag Luft IV

Mr. President, today we commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe. Victory in Europe Day is one of the milestone dates of this century. I rise today to honor a group of Americans who made a large contribution to the Allied Victory in Europe while also enduring more than their fair share of personal suffering and sacrifice, the brave men who were prisoners of war.

I believe it is appropriate to commemorate our World War II POWs by describing one incident from the war that is emblematic of the unique service rendered by those special people. This is the story of an 86 day, 488-mile forced march that commenced at a POW camp known as Stalag Luft IV, near Gross, Tychon, Poland on February 6, 1945, and ended in Halle, Germany, on April 26, 1945. The ordeal of the 9,500 men, most of whom were U.S. Army Air Force Bomber Command non-commissioned officers, who suffered through incredible hardships on the march yet survived, stands as an everlasting testimonial to the triumph of the American spirit over immeasurable adversity and of the indomitable ability of camaraderie, teamwork, and fortitude to overcome brutality, horrible conditions, and human suffering.

Bomber crews shot down over Axis countries went through terrifying experiences even before being confined in concentration camps. Flying through withering flak, while also having to fight off enemy fighters, the bomber crews routinely saw other aircraft in their formations blown to bits or turned into fiery coffins. Those who were taken POW had to endure their own planes being shot down or otherwise damaged sufficiently to cause the crews to bail out. Often crewmates - close friends - did not make it out of the burning aircraft. Those lucky enough to see their parachutes open had to then go through a perilous descent amid flak and gunfire from the ground.

Ed. Note: The above remarks were read on the floor of the United States Senate on May 8, 1995, by U.S. Senator John Warner. It was forwarded to us by Joseph F. Fertitta, who says it is his story and the story of many members of the 303rd Bomb Group. Unfortunately it does not tell the complete story because once on the ground, in enemy territory, the unlucky flier had to risk being shot or injured badly by either the S.S. troops or the civilian population.

Every member can find a member!

Just a few lines to tell you about an incident which may be of interest to you.

***On June 16th, I attended the graduation of my cousin's daughter at Stanford university School of Human Biology. He is the Dean of the school and a professor at Stanford. He awarded his daughter her degree and it was touching as they hugged each other on the outdoor stage. During the ceremony, my cousin, Professor Heller, introduced his staff. On his staff was a Dr. Hurlbut. Handsome young fellow who seemed to be loved by all of the graduates - 164 of them. Hearing the name startled me. I decided to talk with him after the ceremonies.

When I approached the rear of the stage, I called out, "Dr. Hurlbut?"

He turned and I introduced myself as the cousin of Professor Heller on the dais. Then I asked him

if he was any relation to a Dr. Bart Hurlbut who was once President of the Stanford Medical Alumni Association. He said, "Yes, he is my father. Why do you ask?"

I said rather excitedly, "Your father was a Flight Surgeon attached to the 360th Squadron of the 303rd Bomb Group in WW II and I was a personal friend of his and spent a lot of time with him when we were at Molesworth together."

He was quite excited. He came to the reception at my cousin's home after the ceremonies and we spent a lot of time talking over old times his Father and I enjoyed at Molesworth. What a coincidence!

He was going to get in touch with his father in NYC that evening. If I hear from either of them I will let you know. His father is not listed as a member of the Association.

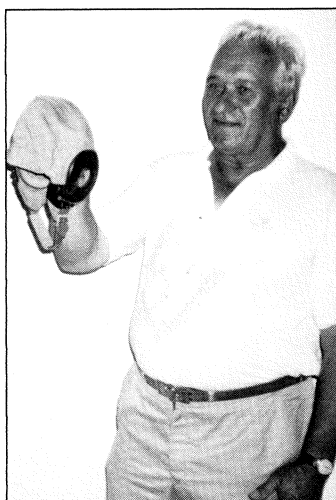
William Heller
P.O. Box 3006
Half Moon Bay, CA 94019

the U. S. Embassy recognized the B-17 aircraft crew and the members who lost their lives. In his speech, the chairman of the North Czech Aviation Archive (NCAA), Karel Novak, described the obstacles faced during the search for the B-17 aircraft crew and the final success. Next, on Leslie L. Latz's behalf, Pavel Uhlir, a member of NCAA, presented a plaque to Karel Novak, in thanks and appreciation of the NCAA work done for the B-17 crew. It also represented an expression of thanks for the invitation Latz received to revisit the place of his greatest struggle of his life. Latz revisited it last October.

The time had finally come to unveil the memorial plaque. The memorial plaque honored Thomas F. Kahler, Pilot, and Theodore R. Smith, Tail Gunner of the B-17 #43-37597, 427th Squadron's "Earthquake McGoon," killed on the 17 April 1945 mission to Dresden, Germany. Flowers were laid by the memorial plaque, which included a floral wreath donated by Mrs Emily Broughton, Mrs Edna M. Lowery, L. L. Latz and R. T. Fogarty. The wreath was laid by the men who saw the crash of the B17 aircraft; J. Fartak, who was the first person by the aircraft and saw the two men killed in the pilot cabin; L. Veverka, who was the closest to the aircraft; and S. Chobot, who received the flight record from one of the crew members and who talked to the crew member after the parachute landed near his house. V. Mrstik was one of the ceremony attendants; he was another witness to the aircraft shoot down. V. Mrstik is saving a cloth pilot helmet in the memory of the crew that was shot down that day.

The sound of a bugle ended the ceremony

Ed. Note: While members of the 303rd Bomb Group Association are indeed grateful to the Czech people and the members of the North Czech Aviation Archive for honoring two members of the 303rd Bomb Group, it is our desire to try and recreate the happenings of some 51 years ago and examine the circumstances under which they died.



Vaclav Mrstik is holding cloth helmet he claims he got from a member of the crew of "Earthquake McGoon" 51 years ago.



Lt. Col. G.M. Cukr, U.S. Embassy, speaking at ceremony on June 1st. (Back row from l to r) Josef Mracek, chairman Aeroclub Most; Vladimir Machula, Director of Flight Education, General Siska, RAF veteran and John Posta, friend of NCAA.

Following is a letter which was published in the Forum Section of the March 1987 issue of the Hell's Angels Newsletter

Lest We Forget

Concerning our pilot Lt. Thomas Kahler, perhaps you did not notice on my application, in the area "Retired Military Grade, if any," I marked "KIA" pertaining to him.

You see when we were shot down and captured, the civilians and S.S. beat Kahler and Smitty, our tail gunner to death and hanged their bodies in a tree.

I and the rest of the crew landed in a different area, were taken prisoner by Wehrmacht soldiers and put in the town jail in Bilin, Czechoslovakia. Three days later, Les Latz, our radio operator and I were sent to a makeshift POW hospital since we were both wounded. We remained there until the end of the war. The rest of the crew, were sent to a Stalag somewhere in the area. I have never known exactly where.

It is hard remembering and writing about this; even after forty plus years, so I will say so long for now.

William A. Broughton
Chalfont, PA

Ed. Note: Bill died on 4 February 1991.

In view of the letter above, Harry Gobrecht, our Historian has written to Pavel Uhlir asking if he could shed some light on the actual cause of the deaths of Lt. Kahler and Sgt. Smith and how were their bodies handled.

In the interim, since the news release mentioned that three witnesses to the crash of the aircraft were attendants at the dedication ceremony, I contacted the translator of the news release and asked if he could get some statements from them regarding the particulars of the crash. If the statements are not received by deadline, I will cover it in the next issue of the newsletter. To add to the mystery Sgt. L.L. Contreras, BTG on Lt. Thomas' crew also reported seeing an

unknown airman shot.

Writing about the incident in "Might in Flight: History of the 303rd BG", our historian had this to say:

#42-102544: "Sack Time" 360BS-K was on its 110th mission without aborting and was hit by flak north of Brux. The No. 2 engine was smoking and was feathered. Bombs were dropped on the third bomb run and the target was crossed with the formation. It then slipped off to the left and exploded in the air approximately three minutes after it started descending. Six parachutes were seen. The first three came out together, then three a bit later. One jump was delayed. The men in the rear of the B-17 went out the waist hatch, Sgt. Carlson jumped first, followed by Sgts. Smith and Contreras. Other crewmen jumped from the nose hatch. Sgt. Contreras landed separately from the rest of his crew, sought shelter and was captured by angry civilians. He witnessed an unknown airman being shot by the civilians, was beaten and abused and placed in a city jail for four days.

“THUMPER”

The very interesting story below appeared in a January 1943 issue of the "Stars and Stripes." It was forwarded to our Historian Harry Gobrecht as part of the Personal Biography Questionnaire on Lt. Kent Fitzsimmons. It was forwarded by his brother, Associate Member, Lee Fitzsimmons. Since censorship was in effect at the time it was written, there are no references to the actual target, date of the mission, bomb group involved or any information on the mission number, aircraft involved or who led the formation. It was the 11th mission for the 303rd Bomb Group. The target was the Port Area at Lorient, France. Ninety aircraft were involved in the raid with the 303rd putting up 21 led by DCO Lt. Col. George Robinson. To attest to the viciousness of the raid, only 12 aircraft returned to Molesworth; five were lost over the target and four crash landed at other locations. Other stories on this mission appeared in the following issues of the newsletter; (May '96, May '95, Feb. '95 and Aug. '94)

One of the more harrowing experiences that has come out of the many trips made by the U.S. Army Air Force Fortresses happened on a recent mission to Lorient, France.

The "Thumper" took off from their base with the rest of the formation with 1st Lt. John A. Castle, 26, of Seattle, Washington as the pilot and 2nd Lt. Kent M. Fitzsimmons 21, of Las Animas, Colorado, as the co-pilot. Although Lt. Castle is the regular pilot of the aircraft, Lt. Fitzsimmons was handling the controls on this mission because of their position in the formation.

The "Thumper" reached the target in their "tail end Charlie" position of the formation after one fighter had attacked the aircraft and sent a shell into the bomb bay and released three of their bombs. They dropped their remaining bombs on the target and swung away. Things began to happen.

Because of the propwash of the rest of the formation, "Thumper" had to pull out of the way. A barrage of Flak came up from the target area, one burst of which hit the right aileron and severed it. Putting this aileron out of commission meant that the aircraft was unable to take any evasive action at this time and still stay as close to the formation as possible.

Both the pilot and the co-pilot had to handle the controls to keep the

plane under control. It took perfect coordination on the part of Lts. Castle and Fitzsimmons.

Enemy aircraft observing the condition of the plane started a series of attacks which continued into a running fight. The came in from all angles. One of the first hits was directly at the nose tearing half the plexiglass out. Normally the Navigators-Bombardiers compartment is well heated and it isn't necessary to wear heavy flying equipment. However with half the nose shot away it became extremely cold. The shrapnel from the 20mm. shell wounded both the Navigator, 2nd Lt. Charles L. Herman, 24, of Houston, Texas and the Bombardier, 2nd Lt. Louis N. Sinopoli, 22, Denver, Colorado. Lt. Sinopoli's hands were also frost-bitten. Blood was streaming down the face of both men but they literally stuck to their guns and kept shooting at the enemy fighters.

Almost immediately another 20mm. shell exploded in the cockpit. This blew the entire instrument panel out of commission. All of the vital instruments upon which the pilot and co-pilot depend entirely might just as well been on the ground. The boys were now flying by "the seat of their pants." This explosion also blew out the hydraulic system of the plane causing the fluid to leak out. Fire started in the cockpit and nose causing both Lt.

Castle and Lt. Fitzsimmons to release the controls for a moment. The fire singed Lt. Fitzsimmons eyelashes and eyebrows. Lt. Castle regained his composure immediately and turned off the hydraulic system, putting the fire out.

No. 4 engine was then shot and oil immediately gushed out all over the plane. The propellor on this engine was then feathered. Loss of this engine slowed the plane up so that it lost the formation entirely. No. 3 engine was hit but did not go out. However it was shaking very badly in the nacelle and Lt. Castle thought it might fall out entirely. Because there was no instruments, Lt. Castle couldn't tell how much power was coming from this engine but it seemed about one half as much as it should be.

At this time enemy aircraft were coming in greater numbers and closer than ever. Lt. Castle and Lt. Fitzsimmons both working the controls started violent evasive action. hits were made on the control cables and it seemed that it was going to be impossible to keep the plane under control. Actually everything that was not tied down, flew all over. The navigator's maps had blown out when the first shot blew the nose out. The movie camera which had been in the radio compartment was thrown out the top hatch. Sgt. Joseph Klasnick, waist

gunner, who was on his first trip where evasive action had to be taken, was pinned to the top of the plane, but kept his both hands on his gun, not only to try and keep shooting, but also to keep from falling out. The other waist gunner, Sgt. Martin Semonick, 20, Cherokee, Kansas, floated in the air to the rear door. His radio hook up and oxygen mask were torn from his person. He thought he was going to be thrown from the plane. The other waist gunner took a bale-out bottle of oxygen back to him but found that the top had been shot off.

Lt. Herman, the navigator who was continuing to shoot his gun had the bag of his oxygen mask shot off and didn't realize it. He kept right on working his gun and breathing as though nothing had happened.

Enemy aircraft bullets also pierced the two oxygen tanks from which their oxygen is supplied and in a few instants their entire supply was gone but they kept right on flying the plane.

The plane was given full throttle and maximum manifold pressure, even though they were unable to determine what speed was being indicated. The uppermost thought in everyone's mind was to give it everything to keep going. They were all alone in the area except for the enemy planes. The best they could do was fly in what they

thought was the general direction of England.

In the meantime guns in both turrets had been shot out in the fight and both gunners worked feverishly to get them working again after several minutes had passed.

Enemy fighters continued to follow and come in until the "Thumper" was between 15 and 25 miles out over the channel. They were still maintaining altitude and when the last two FW-190s came in, Lts Castle and Fitzsimmons pulled back on the controls bringing the plane straight into the air and then put the plane into a steep dive successfully evading the last two enemy planes to be seen.

Because of the condition of the plane, every violent maneuver the boys put their plane in was a gamble, but they took the gamble knowing that if they didn't, they would be shot down.

The planes ahead could barely be seen now. They attempted to follow but these planes were now losing altitude and going below the clouds.

Lt. Castle figured that if he didn't try to maintain altitude while he could and another motor went out he would automatically drop down. He didn't know how low the clouds were hanging. The radio went out with the rest of the instruments leaving only the interphone so that they had no way of contacting either the other planes or the ground. They were unable to tell where they were going or what they were getting into. In addition their gas was getting low because of the extra power they were getting from what engines were left.

A break in the clouds came and they headed down. From general observation they found they were near Bristol and by a stroke of luck located an RAF Field. It was decided that the crew would bail out and the pilot and co-pilot bring the ship in for a crash landing on the air-drome. It was felt that because of injuries from which the crew was suffering they would be treated sooner and would not be subject to the additional injury which might be obtained from a belly landing.

Lt. Castle told the crew to bail out over the interphone and then went back to see if they all understood what to do.

Lt. Sinopole, the bombardier, was the first to jump to prove to the rest it would be all right. The rest of the crew followed.

Lts. Castle and Fitzsimmons proceeded to take the plane around on a landing pattern. At this time I began to act up badly. They had to fly with the left wing low because of



Early photo of Lt. John Castle's "Thumper" crew taken at Molesworth sometime in 1942. It was one of the original 360th BS crews that came to Molesworth in November of 1942. It is possibly Lt. Fitzsimmons in the middle in back row.

the #3 and #4 motors and because the trim tabs were not working.

They took one pass at the field and saw at once from observation on the ground that they were going too fast. They then made another approach and found they were still going too fast, but decided to head the ship in. Down went the nose and by pulling up sharply brought the plane in on the grassy part of the field skidding along a considerable distance, stopping six feet short of a stone and hedge fence. Both men immediately threw off all switches to eliminate fire hazard and crawled out of the plane.

The RAF had sent ambulances out to the plane and also around the field and country side to pick up the rest of the crew.

Sgt. Semonick, a gunner on the plane walked to the nearest farmhouse although he was injured badly. He was presented with two lovely fresh eggs.

Sgt. Klasnick landed in an open field and several farmers approached with pitch forks, shovels and any other implements they could lay their hands on thinking he might be a Nazi airman. It took some little time to convince them he was an American.

Someone asked Lt. Sinopoli if he was getting in a little practice on jumping.

Lt. Herman landed in the only ditch within miles. Tail gunner Sgt. Billie Staner, 22, Argus, Indiana, was killed jumping from the plane when his parachute failed to open on time.

Lt. Kent M. Fitzsimmons, 360th BS, 303rd BG(H) was killed on 31 March 1943 flying as Co-Pilot in aircraft #41-24559, "Ooold Soljer" another one of the original 360th aircraft. It collided with 358th, B-17, "Two Beauts" while flying in tight formation going through 10/10 cloud cover.

Crew of the "Thumper"

Pilot - 1st Lt. John A. Castle, 26, Seattle, Washington
Co-Pilot - 2nd Lt. Kent M. Fitzsimmons, 21, Las Animas, Colorado
Navigator - 2nd Lt. Charles L. Herman, 24, Houston, Texas
Bombardier - 2nd Lt. Louis B. Sinopoli, 22, Denver, Colorado
Top Turret - T/Sgt. Meyer Levin, 27, St. Louis, Missouri
Ball Turret - S/Sgt. Cecil E. Craft, 21, East St. Louis, Illinois
Radio Gun. - T/Sgt. Emilio J. Yannie Jr., 25, Wellsville N.Y.
Waist Gun - Sgt. Joseph S. Klasnick, 27, Pittsburgh, Pa.
Waist Gun. - S/Sgt. Martin A. Semonick, 20, Cherokee, Kansas
Tail Gunner - S/Sgt. Billie L. Staner, 22, Argus, Indiana
Photographer - Sgt. James F. Loll, 21, Crosswell, Michigan

Mears Ashby plaque Honors 303rd crews

On 31 March 1996, at Mears Ashby, England, a memorial was dedicated to 15, 303rd Bomb Group crewmen, who were killed as a result of the mid-air collision between 360th BS, B-17, "Ooold Soljer" and 358th BS, B-17, "Two Beauts."

At 0935 hours on 31 March 1943, Major E.A. Romig, 359th BS (H) Commanding Officer, took off followed by 19 other B-17s. The last plane was in the air by 0946 1/2 hours. Since the briefing was held at 0800 hour, a few short cuts were necessary to make the scheduled take-off time. Normally three hours had been allowed between briefing and take-off. This worked to the disadvantage of most crews, as verified in their comments at the debriefing.

Shortly after take-off at approximately 1026 hours the crew in Capt. Walter Shayler's, 360th aircraft #42-5382 in heavy cloud cover reported seeing two B-17s collide in mid-air.

The colliding B-17s were later verified as the 360th BS #41-24559, "Ooold Soljer," and the 358th BS #42-29573, "Two Beauts." The two aircraft collided when the tight formation passed through 10/10 cloud cover in the vicinity of Wellingborough. "Ooold Soljer" was completely demolished and was seen to have lost its right wing from the No. 4 engine out. "Two Beauts" was later salvaged.

"Ooold Soljer" was Lew Lyle's B-17 that he flew from the USA to England in October 1942. The flight on March 31, 1943 was the first time that this B-17 had flown on a mission without Lew Lyle at the controls. Lt. K.O. Bartlett and five of the six enlisted crew members on the ill-fated flight were original members of Lyle's crew. With Bartlett flying as pilot, Lt. Kent M. Fitzsimmons filled in as co-pilot.

The dedication ceremony called "Mission 48" - it was the 8th Bomber Command's 48th mission - was attended by T/Sgt. Clayton S. Balcombe, one of the two survivors out of the ten aboard "Ooold Soljer." Balcombe unveiled the plaque designed and manufactured by Richard Watts of Mears Ashby who was the guiding force behind the ceremony.

A beautiful glass framed colored full size replica of the Mears Ashby Memorial plaque will be displayed at the San Francisco reunion before it is sent to the Mighty Eighth A. F. Heritage Museum permanent display.

Beyond Expectations

Mighty Eighth Air Force Heritage Museum Opens

by Harry D. Gobrecht

For those of you who were unable to make the grand opening of the Mighty Eighth Air Force Heritage Museum, I'd like to say that it is a spectacular museum - far better than I ever imagined. One visitor from Great Britain, a woman about our age, told me, "I've seen all the great museums in England but none of them compare with the quality of the "Mighty Eighth Air Force Heritage Museum." The museum is far from being completed. It will grow and expand and become even better with future exhibits and other additions and improvements.

The Monday, May 13th, opening was for 8th AF veterans and friends. About 1,500 were expected. Between 2,500 and 3,000 were in attendance. The B-17 fly over was tear jerking and was timed at exactly 0900 when Lt. Gen. Buck Shuler stepped to the podium to declare the Museum open. Another fly over was made during the memorial garden dedication.

When Buck Shuler was introducing the important guests, he arrived at Lew Lyle's name. When his name was mentioned the entire audience rose to their feet with a loud and long cheer. This was the only time this happened during the introductions. A great tribute to a great guy. At 1400 the beautiful Rotunda was dedicated. It has been named "The Lew Lyle Rotunda." The dedication and naming was a complete surprise to Lew and his wife, Betty. Lew accepted the praise with his usual very humble reply, but he was obviously touched with the recognition. A beautiful plaque is being prepared, with his photo, that will be displayed in the Rotunda. I'm helping to develop the plaque design and text together with Dr. Walter Brown and Buck Shuler.

At 1600, the still unfinished Memorial Garden was dedicated. Part of the ceremony was the sprinkling of some Molesworth dirt to mingle with the Georgian soil. This

was symbolic of the intense friendship between the British and American people who still appreciated the sacrifices of the Eighth Air Force Airmen during World War II. Brian McGuire, of the JAC-USEUCOM, brought the dirt with him from Molesworth. The garden will be planted with beautiful flowers, shrubs and trees. There will be an Amphitheater and a chapel that will duplicate a small English church. One of the museum board members has told us he will pay for its construction. The Garden will also contain a children's play area and a rest area for adults. The Memorial Garden's paved entrance contains a large 8th AF insignia that has been inlaid with colored bricks.

The Monday opening ended with a three hour reception in the rotunda area. An Air Force Band played Glen Miller songs and the food was something to behold and sample.

It was as good a spread as I have

ever seen at a reception. Glen Miller's son John, also had a display at the opening honoring his dad. The interior of the rotunda is large. Lining the walls are plaques honoring each of the 8th AF Bomber, Fighter and Support organizations arranged in group numerical order by divisions.

The 303rd BG (H) monument far outshined any other that had been completed. Our monument still hasn't been completed but we had a dedication ceremony full size reproduction. The plaques and insignia were full size bronze color reproductions of the bronze castings that will be made. The insignias were likewise dedication reproductions. Everyone, however, could visualize how the completed monument will appear. The insignia will all be in full color and the B-17 will be in bas-relief projecting out from the plaque. The monument company told us they had never made a

monument that can compare with ours. The dedication plaque had a few errors on it which will be corrected (Molesworth spelled incorrectly and the wrong day in May for the Mathis MOH mission). The monument company is going to ship the dedication reproductions to me. I will have them at our San Francisco meeting.

Lew Lyle had a beautiful 12"x24" black granite plaque made honoring the 303rd and 379th BGs. Ben Smith had a 24"x24" Georgia white marble plaque honoring his "Chick's Crew." These will be placed on the monument wall facing each side of the large reflector pool. Many of the 303rd members present (about 60 men and their wives) ordered 4"x12" individual plaques which will be placed on the Wall of Valor. Others ordered 12"x24" or 24"x24" plaques honoring their crew or friends they want remembered. My Wall of Valor 4"x12" name plaque



Inlaid bricks form 8th AF insignia at entrance to Memorial Gardens at Heritage Museum



Betty Lyle (I) discusses sculpture of Gen. Ira Eaker, 8th Air Force Commander, with its sculptor at the opening of the 8th AF Heritage Museum at Pooler, Georgia.

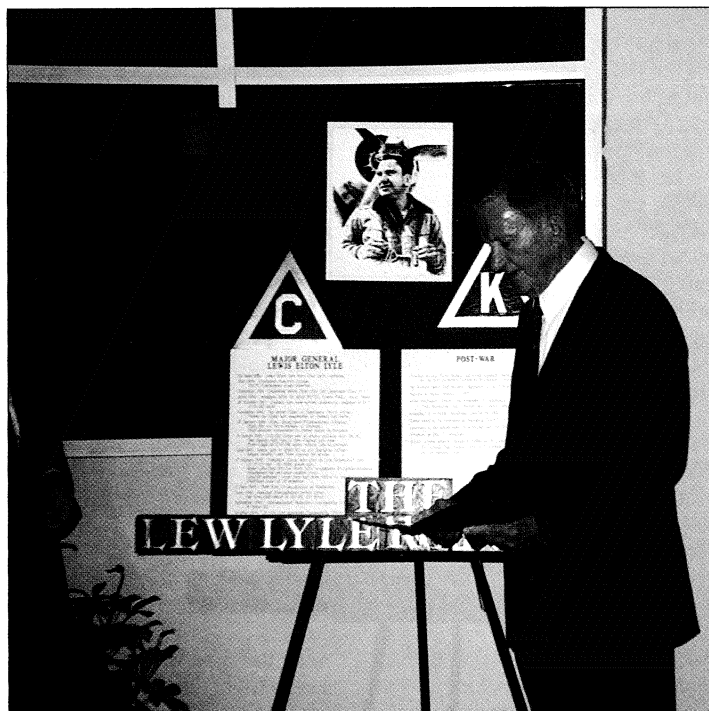
has been ordered. I am trying to persuade myself into buying a 24"x24" plaque honoring the Gobrecht crew - all great guys with the best 8th AF pilot. A 4"x12" plaque will be made for our deceased Secretary, John M. Ladd

The 303rd BG(H) showcase exhibit was one of six that has so far been completed. The A-2 jacket on exhibit was donated by Eddie Deerfield. The parachute and Mae West are mine. Our exhibit will be improved but time ran out for the Museum to fully complete the unit exhibits. Our 303rd BG(H) Molesworth Battle Flag, with our campaign streamers, proudly stands next to our exhibit showcase.

Brian McGuire brought with him two wood carving plaques made by Bill Adams in London. One has our 303rd Might in Flight insignia which was presented to Buck Shuler and Lew Lyle. It will be displayed in or adjacent to our 303rd BG showcase exhibit. The other was the nose art from "The Floose" a 358th BS B-17 that was destroyed upon landing, on its 100th mission, by the pilot of another bomb group that had borrowed it for a mission. This was the B-17 in which I flew on my first combat mission which accounts for my name being on the plaque. It was presented to me by Bill Adams and Brian McGuire but I have donated it to the Heritage

Museum. It was very difficult for me to part with this beautiful gift.

The museum exhibits were all made by professionals and they reflect this fact. All are outstanding. The museum highlight is the "Mission Experience Theater." It starts in a Quonset Hut briefing room where a film shows an actual mission briefing (many 303rd scenes). You then move outside the briefing hut to another area which shows a B-17 being prepared for a mission takeoff (303rd B-17s are in evidence). You then move to another theater where you go on a combat mission (you again see many 303rd combat shots) The "Mission Experience" uses one large screen, two smaller screens and four other still smaller screens. Sound effects are realistic as are fighter attacks and flak barrages. You can hear the B-17 engines, crew chatter, flak bursting and hitting the airplane. Almost all of the 8th AF men had large tears in their eyes after seeing this 25 minute show. You even see the bomb bay doors open from inside the B-17 on a special tilted screen on the theater floor. You feel the sudden rush of cold air from below (from blowers), hear the sound of the open bomb bay and hear and see the bombs dropping. Yes, there are even shots of a Navigator and a Bombardier at their stations and on you can visualize them thinking, "Why the Hell am I here?"



Maj. Gen. Lew Lyle, USAF (Ret) commander of both the 303rd and 379th Bomb Groups, makes remarks at the dedication of "The Lew Lyle Rotunda" in the Heritage Museum.

The POW and Escape and Evasion exhibits have video and sound presentations on a continuous basis as do many of the other exhibit areas. The large art gallery has many of the original 8th AF paintings by Peter Hurd. It will be expanded to include paintings by Keith Ferris, Robert Taylor, Keith Hill, etc. Beautiful 8th AF paintings can also be seen along many of the exhibit areas walls, meeting rooms, library and offices.

The second floor of the museum contains a large and spacious library fully equipped with up-to-date computer equipment, VCR and television for viewing films, many meeting rooms and offices. Downstairs there is a large gift shop, (one of the largest museum shops that I have ever seen). There will also be a large kitchen that will serve fast food type fare during the day and capable of catering to large meeting groups (300 plus) during the day or in evenings.

Eighteen 8th AF bomber and fighter groups have already signed up to have their reunions (and banquets) at the Heritage Museum during the next 12 months. Several large corporations are also planning to hold dinners at the museum.

Now that the Museum is open we must all face the future. Running the museum will be an expensive undertaking. Revenue will come from visitor fees (\$7.50 adults and

\$5.50 for children), the gift shop, the snack bar, catered meetings and many small gifts from individuals and a few large gifts from corporations, foundations and individuals. Everyone who served with the 8th AF, as well as their relatives and friends, should be encouraged to participate by generous gifts. The museum is also continuing its plea for donations of 8th AF memorabilia.

I hope that you will be able to plan a visit to the museum. You will find it to be an emotional and memorable experience.



Harry Gobrecht with plaque of "The Floose" by B. Adams.

From the President

I would like to thank the membership of our Association for allowing me to be your leader for the past year. Sitting in the President's chair, lets one realize the kind of hard-working people we have. "PEOPLE-PEOPLE--PEOPLE." The three best things an organization like the 303rd can have. They have made the 303rd Bomb Group Association the very best. I would like to have all of you, join with me, by giving them a "WELL DESERVED THANK YOU!!!"

We often take our fine Newsletter for granted, but please realize that there is not a finer Newsletter, among our World War II 8th Air Force Bomb Group Associations. Hal Susskind is indeed a true professional. Be sure and let him know that you do appreciate his fine work. The "Man of the Decade" Award that we bestowed upon Hal, at Colorado Springs in September 1995, was so well deserved. And of course, we do not want to forget Rae, who says her home becomes a newspaper office for about eight months, out of every year.

As President, I have had considerable contact with Harry Gobrecht, our Historian. His contribution to our Association is multifold. Every month he responds to 40 to 50 requests for information. And he has all kinds of information, that he gladly shares with anyone who asks. He documented our 303rd Bomb Group World War II operations, in every detail in his "Hell's Angels" book. He maintains contact with other Bomb Group Associations, which bodes well for our Association. They know, when they are talking with Harry, that we are the leaders, both in peacetime, and, as we were in wartime. We thank you Barbara, for allowing us to share your husband.

Those of you who were at Colorado Springs last year, know the high quality Reunion that Eddie and Mary Lee Deerfield provided for us. We are in for another treat at San Francisco. I understand that the entire block of 300 rooms has been sold out at the Airport Marriott Hotel. They are now looking for additional space at nearby hotels.

Eddie has been called upon to do double duty this year. With Walt Ferrari, our V/P, Reunions undergoing radiation treatments, and unable to travel, Eddie has picked up the ball for the 1997 reunion. And that had to be done while finalizing the San Francisco arrangements, and all of the detailwork of sending out

registration packets. we are so grateful for their dedicated service.

Please join me in offering heartfelt condolences, due to the death of their 31 year old son, Scott

A long-time key member of your Executive Committee is Bill Roche, our Treasurer. He has held that position for three terms, and we hope you will want him to carry on in 1997. He has developed a fine set of books for the Association. We always know that he will have the very latest financial figures, when we call upon him. His past and current knowledge of the, what is going on within the Association, has helped him develop "next year budgets" that have been very near the final result. When you talk with him, and his wife, Doris, be sure and thank them for their devoted service.

Our beloved John Ladd, who passed away this past February, while serving as our Secretary, has contributed greatly to our Association for many years. He served two terms as our Treasurer in the late 1980s, and before he was elected as Secretary, he served a term as our By-Laws Committee Chairman.

We have dedicated a Memorial Plaque to John, and it is placed on the "Wall of Valor" at the Mighty Eighth Air Force Heritage museum's Memorial Gardens. He will be missed by all. All of us send our condolences to his lovely wife, Tele.

Carlton Smith is in greater "personal contact" with our membership than any other of your leadership. Smitty, collects your membership dues, and your memorial donations, and spends untold hours, looking for "lost comrades." His success in finding some of our missing has been outstanding this year. The work that he does in maintaining rosters, and keeping the addresses up-to-date, is very time consuming. Since last September, he has notified me of over 60 new members. And of course, these new members have received their Distinguished Service Awards. Remember, if you know of a comrade who has not received the DSA, please let me know.

Smitty, and Phyllis, have really contributed to the well-being of this Association, over the several years that they have been working on the

membership and roster. When you see them in San Francisco, let them know we appreciate their long and devoted service.

The other permanent Committees that serve the Association and its membership have worked diligently this past year.

We have provided the PX Administrator, Charlie, Sykes, and his wife, Vicki, with additional funds. The new items that they have procured for our membership, will be displayed in San Francisco. Be sure and thank them for their time and effort. Remember that they are Associate Members, the ones we must rely upon to provide continuation to our Association.

I just got off the phone with Malcolm Magid, our Nominating Committee Chairman. He, and his committee, will offer an outstanding slate of officers for consideration by the Board of Directors. He spends untold hours on the phone, attempting to find "new blood" who are willing to step in and serve. We thank you Malcolm, and Iris.

We are most fortunate to have

Frank De Cicco as the head of our Audit Committee. Frank, and his wife, Jean, are the heads of a very large real estate sales organization in Texas,

but finds time to conduct periodic audits of our finances. This function is most important as it allows us to operate as a non-profit organization. Our thanks to you Frank, and Jean.

To our Memorials Committee Chairman, Alan Morton, we thank you for your work in providing for a beautiful flower arrangement at the Madingley Cemetery, near Cambridge, England. We must never forget our lost comrades whose bodies are laid to rest at this beautiful cemetery. And to those whose bodies were never recovered, and whose names are inscribed upon the "Wall of Honor," we bow our heads in reverence. We thank you Alan.

The Mission Reports Administrator, Mark Matthews, has been a very busy person, since we dropped the price of the Mission Reports to five cents a page. Mark, and his Mother, June, have been serving our Association for over two years, and from everyone who have ordered Mission Reports, our sin-

cere thanks.

Over the years, Jack Rencher, and his wife, Louise, have worked diligently for the Association. Their work as the "local member" of the Reunion Committee at Boise, will be recalled by everyone who enjoyed that wonderful 50th Anniversary. We haven't had to call upon Jack for work on the By-Laws Committee this year, but we know that he stands ready, when ever we need him. We already have committed Louise to help my wife Jill, and Jim Taylor, with the Tuesday night banquet seating in San Francisco.

What "strength" one receives when you ask for and receive guidance from our Group Advisor, Lew Lyle. His advice regarding the beautiful memorial that now resides in the Memorial Gardens at the Mighty Eighth Air Force Heritage Museum at Pooler, Georgia, was most beneficial. We all can be real proud of that outstanding edifice, that is dedicated to "Everyone Who Served at Molesworth." We sincerely appreciate your guidance, and we love you, Lew, and Betty!!!

Over the years, your Association has been blessed with some very fine leaders. Last September, I initiated a "Past-Presidents Advisory Committee." To provide continuity, I selected the last four past presidents to serve on that Committee: Ford Kelley, as Chairman, with Bill McLeod, Carl DuBose and Bud Klint as members. I have relied upon them often for guidance. I highly recommend the continuation of this Committee, as they provide seasoned experience and advice.

Our Squadron Representatives, and Members of the Board of Directors, contribute a very worthwhile service to our Association. Bill Heller, for his assistance to Smitty, in writing "dues" letters to all members, stands out. We thank them all.

I would like to mention a few others, that work in the background, but, whose contributions are very important to the smooth running of our Reunions.

Ed Gardner, works with the Reunion Committee Chairman, and does all of the computer work that is required. He is responsible for your name tag, and the several rosters that allow the Reunion to run as well as it does. Our sincere thanks, Ed.

Walt and Bev Mayer have played a significant role in our Reunions, as long as I can remember. They are also in charge of our Recogni-

People, People, People.

From the President

tion Awards Committee. They work hard at attempting to single out members, who have provided exemplary assistance to our Association. Walt and Bev, deserve our continuing "Thanks."

Our devotion to GOD, is the most important role for everyone in our Association, and our Chaplains have always played a vital role. At the Reunion time, we call upon them and they are there. On the

Protestant side, we have Reverends Charley Rice, Everett Dasher, and Warren Hedrick. on the Catholic side we have Bishop Rene Gracida and Reverend Bernard Schumacher. Our sincere thanks to all.

You're always afraid that you will fail to mention some of our members who have made significant contributions to the Association. During my three terms on the Executive Committee, I have had contact

with many wonderful members, who have helped make the Association the very best that it is. We thank you all, who have served so very well.

Again, I say, "PEOPLE--PEOPLE--PEOPLE" are what it takes to have a fine organization like the 303rd Bomb Group Association. I hope every member will take the time to read "this letter" about our "Key People" who have served them over the past year, and long

before. They are the heart of our Association. They deserve your thanks. Please let them know that you appreciate their long and devoted service.

And there is a "MOST IMPORTANT PERSON" that I must also recognize. Thank you, Jill, for your devotion and encouragement!

**Ed Miller
President**

Dedication of the 303rd Bomb Group Association Memorial 13 May 1996 at Mighty Eight Air Force Heritage Museum and Memorial Gardens Pooler, Georgia

The dedication ceremonies were opened by Lt. Gen. E.G. "Buck" Shuler, Chairman of the Board of the Mighty Eighth Air Force Heritage Museum and Memorial Gardens. It is estimated that over 500 veterans were in attendance. Invocation was offered by Chaplain Martin Loyley.

The 303rd Bomb Group Association, Inc. was the first to dedicate their memorial and members of the Group were asked to stand near their Memorial. Ed Miller, President of the 303rd, presented the following message:

"It is my extreme privilege and pleasure, as President of the 303rd Bomb Group Association, to dedicate this beautiful Memorial today. As this Memorial was being designed, we wanted everyone, who viewed it, to know that it was for "All who served at Molesworth, England, during 1942 through 1945."

To those of us, who are assembled here today, we are the more fortunate of those who served at Molesworth. We must remember, that some of those who are not here, made it possible that we be present. I am sure that you can well recall, many times when it could just as well have been you, or me! It is to them, that we dedicate this Memorial today!

Throughout the 51 years that have gone by, we have seen many of our comrades pass to the great beyond. And they too have been most fortunate to experience a wonderful life, after the horrible years of battle. It is to them, that we dedicate this Memorial today!

And to those of us, still grateful of being able to enjoy this wonderful world. It is to us, that this Memorial is dedicated.

I, again, want to emphasize that this Memorial is dedicated to "All who served," at Molesworth -- the entire 303rd TEAM.

* To the men who worked all night, plotting our targets, readying our aircraft, and loading our bombs and munitions.

* To the men who awakened us, in the wee hours, got us to the mess hall, to the briefing rooms, and to our aircraft.

* To the men who made sure we were supplied with oxygen masks, parachutes, guns, ammo, bombs, chaff and warm clothes.

* To the men who cared for our health, and welfare, who fed us, and waited at the runway side, to administer to our wounded.

* To our administrators, for maintaining our records, our pay, our promotions, our passes and our general welfare.

* To our squadron leaders, who selected our crews, and provided the leadership for our bombing missions.

* To our Headquarters and their leadership, for carrying out the target responsibilities, and getting us on our way.

* To the men who repaired our badly damaged aircraft, and spare parts, and configured the new aircraft to wartime needs.

* To all those men who served in their separate way, in maintenance, engineering, supply, transportation, medical, chemical, ordnance, fire fighting, weather, tower, personnel, finance, and military police - to provide the

aircrews with the necessary resources to accomplish their assigned mission.

* To all of the aircrews who faced death on each mission, and who braved the most difficult weather, to drop their bombs on the target.

* To all of the flight leaders, for the leadership they provided in getting the group assembled, on its way, over the target, and back home again.

* To the aircrews who started it all, on 17 November 1942, to Saint Nazaire, and the six subsequent missions to "Flak City," where we lost 77 of our comrades.

* To the aircrews who went to Wilhelmshaven, Hamm, Rouen, Antwerp, Kiel, Hamburg, Paris, Kassel, Schweinfurt, Stuttgart, Bremen, and Schweinfurt again, and those who didn't return.

* To the aircrews who went to Oschersleben on 11 January 1944, when we lost 110 of our comrades; to Frankfurt, Leipzig, Berlin, Marienburg, Oranienburg, Lyon, Saarbrücken, Cologne, and Big Berlin again, and those who didn't return.

* To the aircrews who paved the way for our D-Day invasion, by pounding the many French targets of Caen, Dannes, Gilze-Rijen, Nantes, Evreux, Lille, and Chateaudun, and those who we lost.

* To the aircrews who went to Wiesbaden on 15 August 1944, when we lost 81 of our comrades, to Peenemünde, Ludwigshafen, Merseberg, to Anklam, Mainz, Osnabrück, Mannheim, and Magdeburg, where we lost 91 comrades, and those who didn't return.

* To the aircrews who went to Bonn, Sterkrade, Nurnberg, Hanover, Spandau, Oranienburg, Halle, Bordeaux, Dresden and Pilsen, Czechoslovakia, our last on 25 April 1945, and to the hundred of Axis targets in between, and those who didn't return.

* To the aircrews who went on each of our 364 missions and returned, to 841 of our comrades who lost their lives, to 747 of our comrades that became Prisoners-of-War, to our 67 evadees, to our 29 internees.

It is to "All of these Men" that this Memorial is dedicated today.
"GOD BLESS THE ENTIRE TEAM - ALL WHO SERVED."

The above dedication was followed by a Blessing by Reverend Everett A. Dasher, our 303rd Bomb Group Association Chaplain.

Our Group was the first to dedicate their Memorial, which was followed by the dedication of all of the different group memorials and crew plaques.

During the playing of Taps, and the B-17 flyover, Maj. Gen. Lewis E. Lyle, scattered a sack full of Molesworth dirt on the grounds of the Memorial Gardens, near the Reflecting Pool, and Wall of Valor.

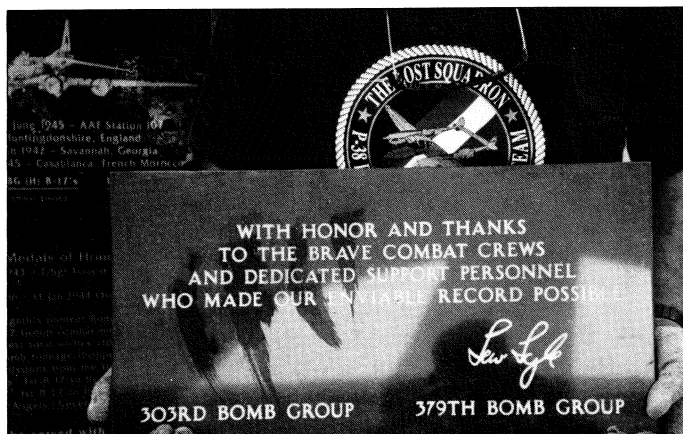
One of the plaques dedicated was of special significance to our Bomb Group. The plaque was dedicated "In honor of those who served so bravely in the 303rd Bomb Group and the 379th Bomb Group." It was signed by Lew E. Lyle, our gallant wartime and peacetime leader.



The Mighty Eighth Air Force Heritage Museum opens at Pooler, GA. About 500 Air Force veterans attended the opening, including a party of 70 from the 303rd Bomb Group.



Maj. Gen. Lewis E. Lyle, USAF (Ret.) President of the Heritage Museum, scatters Molesworth dirt throughout the Memorial Gardens which are unfinished at present.



Memorial plaque dedicated to the 303rd and 379th Bomb Groups by Lewis E. Lyle who flew with and commanded both groups.



Ben Smith made a special presentation of the above plaque to his crew. The 24"x24" plaque will be placed on the "Wall of Valor."



303rd BG - (l to r) Ed Miller, Bill Roche, Mel Abernathy, Bill Eisenhaart, Rev. Everett Dasher, Harry Gobrecht, Fred Barnes and Malcolm Magid in front of the 303rd Memorial.



Jill Miller in front of the 303rd Bomb Group Memorial. A reproduction of the memorial will be shown at the San Francisco Reunion.

FROM THE MEMBERSHIP CHAIRMAN

Last May another very generous donation was received. The American Memorial Association, Saint Nazaire, France sent a check for \$1000, but the origin of the gift was our Associate member Michel Lugez, who is also President of the French organization. (See "The 303rd Bomb Group Association Salutes Michel Lugez," May '96 Newsletter, page 12). We have reciprocated by making Michel one of our Life Associate members.

While on the subject of our Associates, you will be interested to know that we now have six who were assigned to other units other than the 303rd. They are Peter Horner (44thFBW), Bruno Lombardi (91st BG), John Mudie (379th BG), Curtis Roper (487th BG) and John J. Sarris (93rd BG). Several of them plan to attend the San Francisco reunion and I hope you will look them up to make them welcome. They

may not have been at "Ye Olde Molesworth" with us, but they are still comrades in arms and staunch supporters of the Association.

Look for me too at the reunion. I'll have my Roster/Membership table as usual and may even have the assistance of a couple of sons and daughters-in-law. In addition to just "shootin' the bull" with you, I'll be there to: (1) Check the roster entries for currency; (2) Accept new memberships, life memberships and donations/memorials; (3) Collect 1997 dues if you wish to pay early. I will also have a few back issues of the Newsletter and Membership Directory.

The following lists are current as of 20 June 1996:

Carlton M. Smith
12700-54 Red Maple Circle
Sonora, CA 95370-5269
209-533-4033

NEW MEMBERS

- L 1950 Wesley G. Loosemore, 1112 Inverness St., Port Charlotte, FL 33952 (1 Nov. - 1 May); Rt 1, Box 672, Skanee, MI 49962 (1 May-1 Nov)(359).
- 1951 Arthur Bluementhal, P.O. Box 944403, Greensboro, NC 27429 (427).
- 1952 Eugene L. Zawacki, 400 E Howry Avenue, Apt. 616, Deland, FL 32724-5436 (3580).
- 1953 Robert E. Lyda, 10 Jay St., Russell, KS 67665 (427)
- L A 377 Robert D. Dwan, 1251 Sobre Lomas, Tucson, AZ 85718
- L 1954 Sam Edwards, 14508 Homecrest Rd., Apt 205, Silver Spring, MD 20906 (360).
- 1955 Evan R. Soule, 3500 Rue Nichole, New Orleans, LA 70131-5458 (358)
- A 378 Thomas Day, P.O. Box 1062, Sarasota, FL 34230
- A 379 Christopher G. Kelly, P.O. Box 93 South Street, Patterson, NY 12563-0093
- S 1956 A. G. Oswald, 1003 Oak St., Oshkosh, WI 54901 (427)
- 1957 Elmer E. Prusha, 1002 Washington St., Tama, IA 52339 (427)
- 1958 Julius C. Persyns, 2460 Parker Rd., Newark, NJ 14513 (444)
- L 1959 Robert J. Weaver, RD 2, Box 92, Loganton, PA 17747 (358)
- L 1960 George R. Weinbrenner, 7400 Crestway, Apt 903, San Antonio, TX 78239 (?)
- A 380 Kenneth J. Miller, 817 Cinnaminson, Palmyra, NJ 08065
- L 1961 Russell S. Klingensmith, 101 Runson Rd., Camp Hill, PA 17011-2739 (359/Hdq)
- 1962 Ralph S. Feezel, 1735 Tamarack Ave., Carlsbad, CA 92008 (358)
- 1963 Gordon B. Nute, 28 Easy St., Weymouth, MA 02190 (359)
- L 1964 Harley L. Hansen, 9036 E. Wrightstown Rd., Tucson, AZ 85715 (427)
- A 381 Kenneth F. Nye., 24085 CR 452, Mineola, TX 75773
- A 382 Bruno Lombardi, 1723 Zinfandel, Petaluma, CA 94952 (91st BG)
- A 383 Curtis E. Roper, P.O.Box 2825, La Grange, OR 97850-7825 (487th BG)
- 1965 Herbert L. Barkin, 346 Rock Ridge Rd., Fairfield, CT 06430-2217 (358)
- A 384 William S. McLeod, III, 15815 S. Lakewood Pky West, Apt 1067 Phoenix, AZ 85044
- 1966 Don W. Bassett, 3785 S. Main St., D-12, Akron, OH 44319 (?)
- A 385 Richard J. Broderick, 6414C Chasewood Dr., Jupiter, FL 33458
- A 386 James Balsano, 80 Okeechobee Rd/POB 375, Glen Spey, NY 12737

- L 1967 Joseph De Luca, 2750 Wallace Ave., N. Bellmore, NY 11710 2859 (360)
- L 1968 Earl K. Lawson, 408 S. Main, Lawton, MI 49065 (360)
- A 387 Michael C. Uher, 1932 Farnam St., Davenport, IA 52803
- L 1969 Howard C. Ness, 7202 N. San Pasquale, Tucson, AZ 85704-1951 (427)
- A 388 William Hoard, 9235 Alexander Avenue, South Gate, CA 90280
- A 389 John J. Sarris, 642 Penitencia St., Milpitas, CA 95035 (93rd BG)
- A 390 Gary L. Schlich, 855 D Brookline Dr., Sunnyvale, CA 94087
- L 1970 Martin E. Plocher, 2318 Elsinore Rd., Riverside, CA 92506 (?)

DONATIONS/ MEMORIALS

- L 634 Clayton Balcombe (360)
- S 377 George V. Broderick (359)
- L 218 James A. Durkin (359)
- 621 Robert B. Heiliger (360) Memorial to Joe A. Donnelly, Walter Melton and Ralph Walder
- S 563 J. Ford Kelley (359)
- L A 275 Michel G. Lugez
- A 243 Maryan J. Malone
- S 255 William S. McLeod, Jr. (358)
- L 147 Jack G. Rolfson (427)
- S 265 Samuel W. Smith (360) Donations to Memorial Gardens in Savannah, GA
- S 890 Vernon W. Stone (427)
- L 321 Paul M. Thomas (359) Memorial to Lt. Richard Browning
- L 138 Paul A. Tognetti (359)
- L 439 Horace D. Williams (358) Memorial to Louis Redhage
- A 249 Richard A. Young
- 1310 Anthony A. Zarella (427)

ADDRESS CHANGES

- L A 371 Dana C. Barnes, 25405 Oakstone, Moreno Valley, CA 92553
- 1470 John H. Bowman, 5833 Regancy St., Gurnee, IL 60031
- S 053 D. R. Davis, P.O. Box 1583, Brackettsville, TX 78832
- A 334 John Eisenhart, 3121 Ramshorn Dr., Castle Rock, CO 80104
- S 1084 Robert A. Finley, 3829 Muirfield Ct., Palm Harbor, FL 34685-3121
- L 1031 Warren L. Hedrick, 13 York St., Sanford, ME 04073
- 849 Grady Hodges, 7910 Husky Way SE, Olympia, WA 98503
- A - 197 Marie Leduc, #4747 6110 Pleasant Ridge Rd., Arlington, TX 76016-4307
- 926 Jesse W. McLaughlin, P.O. Box 829, Ozark, AR 72949
- A 274 Wanda A. Seile, 45 River Street, Ludlow MA 01056-2632
- L 199 John I. Snede, 2601 Kenzie Terr. #315, St. Anthony, MN 55418-3259
- 1784 G. Moulton Webber, 5389 Pond Rd., Sidney, ME 04330

UPGRADE TO LIFE MEMBERS

- L 634 Clayton Balcombe (360)
- L 026 James H. Hensley, Jr. (360)
- L A 275 Michel Lugez
- L 1300 James O. Matthews (358)
- L 1563 John W. Peters (359)
- L A 89 Patrick D. Quinney
- L 199 John I. Snede (427)
- L 1932 John E. Tevis (427)

IN MEMORIAM

- A 374 Scott L. Deerfield - 24 May 1996
- S 1731 Richard E. Kitson (427) - Jan. 1994
- L 1199 Harold K. Ludlow (unk) - 25 Feb. 1996
- S 390 Walter C. Melton (360) - 19 Dec. 1995
- Robert N. Nye (358) - Apr. 1996
- S 604 Louis Redhage (359) - 21 May 1996
- L 047 Ralph Walder (360) 19 Oct. 1995
- Byron W. Watson (427) - 13 April 1981
- L 1640 Donald R. Wilson (427) - 24 Jan. 1996

My most unusual 303rd experience

On the B-17 "My Yorkshire Dream" -February 22, 1944, Mission #5 -to bomb Fighter Factory (Aschersleben) Germany. Shortly before reaching the target we were attacked by about 20 FW-190s. On the first contact our tail gunner Bill Werner was hit in the hip, leg and stomach. He was able to crawl back to my position (left waist). I noticed he was not wearing his oxygen mask. I assisted him with my own mask and relocated him forward into the radio compartment where T/Sgt. Wayne Wagner gave him first aid. I remained at both waist positions while the other waist gunner, S/Sgt. Sam Ross took over the tail gunners position. Our mission was completed, the target was bombed, and Bill Werner eventually recovered from his injuries.

On the lighter side - 21 days after completing my missions, and waiting to return to the United States - on a pass to Northampton, I met a young lady who was working for the British Govt. at Bletchley, Bucks. In May 1945 she became my bride and we celebrated our Golden Anniversary last year. (War is hell - but as they say -you can find some good in everything!!)

Orvis K. Silrum (427)

* * *

My most memorable mission took place, Jan. 10, 1945. Our target was Bonn, Germany. I had flown three missions prior to this. This bomb run was fairly routine with only moderate flak. Shortly after "Bombs Away" there was a loud crashing sound at the rear of the plane, and the nose shot up 45 degrees. My co-pilot, Dave Shroll, and I literally had to put our feet up on the control column to force the nose down and prevent stalling out. We had fallen out of formation far below our bombing altitude of 27,000 feet. My navigator, Tom Donahue, crawled back into the bomb bay to check the damage. He reported that part of the tail section had been ripped off, losing our tail gunner, Marion Mooney.

Naturally we headed West towards France. Visibility kept getting worse. Then my radio operator, Charlie Knowles, saved the day by picking

up a call signal from an emergency air field at Merville. I'll always remember the call sign for this radio was "Martini." We headed for this signal. I was slowly losing altitude. We weren't sure how much fuel we had remaining and it was beginning to snow. We made it directly over the radio signal but couldn't see any runways. It was blanketed with snow. We began to circle and I spotted a fire in a gasoline drum at the end of the runway. I made my approach but wondered if we were too high to land safely. My co-pilot, Dave, said, "the Hell we are!" and promptly cut the throttles. We bumped down and slid off the runway into the mud and snow, but stopped safely.

We gave our report to the commanding officer of the field and were put up in barracks for the night. Later, I found out that an American fighter pilot at Merville had watched my landing and had written to my commanding officer back at the 303rd Bomb Group recommending the Distinguished Flying Cross.

Two days later we were flown back to Molesworth and began flying missions again. We survived 35 missions, including three to Berlin.

Roy F. Statton (360)

* * *

On my third mission, I was pulled from my original crew to fly in Lt. J.W. Bailey's plane as deputy lead. After briefing I entered the plane via the nose hatch. After our bomb run we had two engines shot out and we fell behind the formation. We were attacked by German fighters. The pilot ordered the crew to bail out, which I and the enlisted crew did. But as I heard later, the pilot and co-pilot remained in the plane for awhile and eventually bailed out into free France.

The rest of us were captured and became POWs. To this day, I have never seen the pilot or co-pilot as they entered the plane via the rear exit.

William Fisher (Nav. 359)

Ed. Note: The date of the above mission was 9 Feb. 1945. The target was Lutzendorf, Germany.

The unusual was normal. I was a 19 year old waist gunner who flew 34 missions before I was 20. I was on 14 combat raids in one month.

My war started when we left the USA in a new B-17 bound for England. We listened to the enemy radio transmissions trying to divert us to the open ocean, as we flew to friendly bases in Labrador, Greenland, Iceland and finally Scotland.

We were assigned to Hell's Angels, 303rd Bomb Group. Combat was next.

I was shot down on my second mission with my first alternate crew, (Lt. Maugher). I was hit by flak in my flak-vest, knocked down, losing my oxygen and intercom. I got up, hooked up again and found no blood. I had just returned to my gun when the oxygen bottle at my feet was hit and exploded, sending the bottle nozzle through the radio room door and striking the radio operator in the leg. Again, no blood. On one and a half engines, the fires out, our pilot made a miraculous, one chance only, wheels down landing, on a just recovered German air base near Eindhoven, Holland.

On our fifth mission, our ball turret gunner was wounded. Unable to help himself, two of us managed to get him out of the turret. I administered morphine and bandaged a nasty wound in his thigh. Forty years later, in Hollywood, Florida, he thanked me for saving his life. Our ship had more than 200 holes, over 100 in the right wing alone. As far as I know, that plane never flew again.

I have emptied my guns while under attack. I've seen B-17s blown up, on fire, mid-air collisions, shot down and friends lost. The smell of cordite at 20,000 feet from German flak was strong even with our oxygen masks on. I have watched many crew members bail out of their stricken plane and tried to count parachutes to tell intelligence later at debriefing.

A German jet attacked alongside our left wing firing at our group leader. He was less than 100 yards away and surprised me so completely, I didn't fire a round.

I saw the glider fiasco in Holland, the smoke screens, the fighting on the ground. I watched the German V-2 rockets pass us over the English Channel headed for England, as we carried tons of bombs to drop on them.

A good day got you back to base, a hot meal and shower. Next you cleaned your guns, checked for mail, got some sleep, because four a.m. could start another day over Germany. You wanted to be ready.

Dyle K. Davidson (360)

* * *

The four officers of the Langford crew being wounded in combat was a memorable series of events in my association with the 303rd BG.

While on a combat mission to the oil refinery at Hamburg, Germany on June 20, 1944, Lts Donovan (Nav) and Torley (Bomb) were wounded by flak.

On the combat mission, July 20, 1944 to Dessau, Germany, Lt. Langford (Pilot) was wounded by flak.

August 20, 1944 was a questionable date for F/O Zimmerman (Co-pilot), but he didn't fly a combat mission. It was Sept. 19, 1944, that Zimmerman flew a combat mission to Hamm, Germany. He was seriously wounded by flak. The 303rd did not fly a mission on the 20th.

Four purple hearts being received on the same day (20th) of four months has remained in my memory all 50 plus years.

Donald W. Torley (359)

* * *

Over Paris in July of '43, picked up flak fragment with our aircraft tail number #341 "Vicious Virgin" on it.

"That was close. It had our number on it."

Developed drop tables on our one and only glide bomb.

A.C. Strickland, Jr. (427)
also 41st CW, 384th BG,
545 Sqdn.

**More
to
come!**

Experiences were varied and came in different packages

By 1940, Antoni Bednarchuk was well on his way to fulfilling his childhood ambition of becoming an aviator. He had already obtained a private pilot's license and attended the Skylines Aviation School in Rhode Island. Toni was also a master mechanic. When he tried to enlist in the Army Air Corps for pilot training, he was rejected as unfit; a childhood accident had cost him his left index finger and now a chance of becoming an Air Corps pilot. Toni made his second attempt to enlist on January 6, 1942. This time Toni said he was welcomed with three options; "it's KP, MP or aerial gunnery." Toni chose the latter. His eventual station on the B-17, "Sons of Burchs," was, in his words, "as far removed from the cockpit as one could be and still be on the same ship...I became a tail gunner."

"On December 5, 1942, his B-17 crashed in a remote section of the country, disabling the number 4 engine. Transportation facilities were exceedingly limited; Sgt. Bednarchuk, aerial engineer, working long and uninterrupted hours, with only an engineer's emergency kit and improvised devices, changed engines, installing an engine designed for another type airplane, placed the plane in flying condition."

After the repairs were completed, Toni realized his boyhood dream.... he acted as co-pilot on the flight to the base." For his heroic efforts, S/Sgt. Antoni Bednarchuk was awarded the Legion of Merit, Legionnaire's Degree.

Maysie Bednarchuk

Ed. Note: Toni died in 1990. This report was submitted on behalf of his wife by Alan R. Tortolani, an ardent supporter of the 303rd BGA.

* * *

The waist gun position has to be the most useless position to be in when the pilot is doing evasive action maneuvers. It is all one can do to hang on to one of the pivotal guns and be bounced between the ceiling (Thank God for the flak helmet) and the floor. During a momentary halt in one such maneuver during the fighter attack on our notorious 15 August '44 mission, I was able to glance out of the waist window and there, right next to me was a FW-190 just as big as life and just on the other side of him was one of our B-17s. Before I could decide whether to fire and probably hit the B-17 too, I was back bouncing off the ceiling again and when I got an-

other chance to look, the FW-190 was gone and I never seen another even at a distance.

Donald H. Foulk (358)

* * *

We had several tough missions, but the one I can never forget is Vegesack. Our Bombardier Jack Mathis was killed and I was never able to relate the story without breaking. The story is told in Harry Gobrecht's book, "Might in Flight: on page 155. (Also in March 1987 issue of Newsletter)

One other that was a close one. Had I realized I would survive the war, I would have kept a diary.

While over the target we had lost two engines from flak. Then shortly after, the pilot Lt. Stouse, had to feather the third, leaving us with one engine. Was a good thing we were at altitude as we started losing it as we headed for home. Fighters tried to finish us, but we fought them off. I think we were lucky as they were getting short of fuel and I was running mighty low on ammo.

Stouse gave us the word to prepare for ditching. He said to stand by and wait for the word. Seemed like an eternity when we spotted the White Cliffs of Dover. Stouse then said we're going to make it. He landed just over them in a field. The aircraft needed lots of repair before it could be flown home.

During this time, our crew flew "The Eight Ball" on our first raid to Germany. The target was Wilhelmshaven. That's the only picture we have of the "Duchess" crew after that raid.

Eldon W. Audiss (359)

Ed. Note: The "Duchess" also hold fond memories for me I flew in it on its 50th mission to Oschersleben, Jan. 11, 1944. It brought us home too. In June 1996, Goodfellow Air Force Base, at San Angelo, Texas named its 32,000 square foot, \$3.5 million facility as the "Mathis Sports and Fitness Center. In honor of Lt. Jack Mathis who was born in San Angelo.

* * *

Our B-17 made it back from a mission but did not make it to Molesworth but landed safely at Little Staunton. Our ground crew with John Simpson, crew chief, was taken there by truck the next day to check it over and replace an oil cooler that had failed. We loaded my tandem bicycle into the truck as well so we would have transporta-

tion whenever we needed it.

We got an oil cooler and installed it and a pilot and co-pilot were sent to fly the plane back to Molesworth about eight or nine minutes away. So all our crew, along with the bicycle, got in for the ride back to Molesworth. Coming in for a landing at Molesworth, we came in a little too hard and the landing gear on one side collapsed. I can't remember now whether it was the left or right but the pilot went along on one wheel real good until we lost speed and the wing tip and both props hit the runway and spun us around in a ground loop and off the runway onto the grass where we plowed in a 50 gal. barrel of green paint which gave us a fresh paint job. Everyone of us was O.K., so the crew chief told us to go ahead to "chow." So I think it was Othmar Sahli and I got the bike out and rode off to chow. I don't think the airplane ever flew again but was towed into the hangar to reign as "Hangar Queen" Other guys on the crew were: Don Flaherty, Gene O'Brien, Danny Salisbury, Kirkendall, George Hyman, Carl Mohr and Joe Uhls, also Ed Kumer and Milton Grove.

We crewed: "Shoo Shoo Baby" not the famous one.

Loy E. Tingley (358)

* * *

With war starting to wind down, there was a shortage of crews available to fly missions - as a result we flew 21 combat missions in 37 days; don't know if that was a record but we do know we had some tired troops. Our last mission was on April 17, 1945 to Dresden.

After having been hit on the 2nd run over the IP and then returning for a 3rd run with fuel running into the bomb bay, we were hit again and this time we developed a wing fire. The crew in spite of a growing wing fire, elected to continue on to the target and release our bombs. After bombs away, we pulled off to the left of the formation and dropped down a little then bailed out. The plane blew about the time I got out. After capture I was placed in a local jail in a small town called Frieburg. I was there for a couple of days then moved to what seemed to be a farm. From there the Navigator (F/O Bonanno), an Infantry Officer, and I were marched for two days to a place on the Elbe River and were placed in an old fortress (Koenig). There were five American officers there, five Dutch Generals, two English Lords - The Earl of

Hoptown and the Earl of Haig and the entire French General Staff - I believe a total of 300 officers, lowest rank Colonel along with what I understand was 300 enlisted who served as their orderlies. One day a French General came up to me during the hour we were allowed out of our room and asked if I was the American pilot. I told him I was and he chatted for a few minutes and then asked me if I knew General Marshall. I replied that I knew him by name and he told me he had spent some time with him somewhere and that he was a fine man. I agreed with him. We were liberated by Russian troops the day after the war was over. I might add that was a rather "scarey" event in my young life. Those people looked like they were mostly Mongolians and hadn't bathed for months.

I have always felt that the crew earned some type of award for staying with the plane until bombs away. Two great crew members lost their lives on the ground; the toggler and the tail gunner.

Blaine E. Thomas (427)

Ed. Note: The cover story of this issue deals with the April 17, 1945 mission to Dresden. Lt. Thomas flying in "Sack Time" was the other crew lost on that raid. It was his BTG Sgt. Contreras who reported seeing a n airman shot on the ground..

* * *

My career was rather uneventful. I got up early when there was a raid scheduled, helped get the airplane ready to go, then waited four - five or six hours for it to return. Then patch up the holes, maybe change an engine, and have it ready for the next day's mission. I was fortunate that while I was at Molesworth, there weren't any bombs dropped on the field. We heard the Buzz Bombs fly over - that is as close as I got - and I'm not sorry about that

Lester Voth (427)

* * *

On November 6, 1943 I was fortunate to marry Margery Doreen Colson of Ringstead Northants who has been my loving and faithful wife to this day.

**John M. Hagar (360)
England**

Ed. Note: This is the start of a series of stories on your unusual experiences with the 303rd.

300-ROOM BLOCK AT MARRIOTT SOLD OUT FOR 1996 REUNION

By Eddie Deerfield

Chairman, 1995-96-97 Reunion Committee

One of the most difficult decisions any 303rd Bomb Group reunion chairman has to make is how many rooms to reserve at the principal hotel. Standard hotel contracts call for a stiff financial penalty if member reservations don't reach at least 80 percent of the commitment. At this stage in our lives, you would think the law of averages would dictate smaller and smaller numbers of reservations as years go by. Not so for the "Mighty 303rd."

In 1995 in Colorado Springs, 250 rooms were blocked at the Red Lion. More than 700 persons attended the reunion and we had to spread out into two nearby motels. This year, we blocked 300 rooms - the most the Marriott could give us at the \$73 rate - and those were all gone by the middle of May.

If you don't have a hotel reservation as yet, here are the alternatives.

The Marriott will continue to give the 303rd members first call on rooms until the hotel is fully sold out. Their best rate is now \$109, telephone (415) 692-9100. We have blocked 50 rooms at the prestigious Westin Hotel directly across the street from the Marriott, at \$95. If you're interested, call them at (415) 692-3500.

Think back to the usual reunion gift packages members have received when picking up their name tags and tickets at the 303rd's registration desk in the hotel, routinely coffee mugs, caps, pens, and the like. This time the 303rd Bomb Group Associations plans to present members with "A Taste of San Francisco." They're baskets especially made up for the 303rd, filled with a bottle of California wine, fresh sourdough bread, cheese, luncheon meat and grapes. "Bon Appetit."

We have received many notes from members from members praising the Keith Ferris artwork which appeared on the cover of the 1995 reunion program and the Archie McLachlen painting of the 303rd B-17 "Yankee Doodle" flying over the Golden Gate Bridge, featured on the cover of this year's Registration booklet. The cover of the 1996 reunion program to be distributed in San Francisco will carry artist Keith Hill's famous "Molesworth Dawn" which captures the drama of a ground crew readying "Hell's Angels" for another combat mission.

Mike Ripley, master of our great memorabilia display in Colorado Springs, has been ill, but promises an even bigger and better display for San Francisco. He hopes to add a B-17 radio room and tail gun position to the authentic array of cockpit controls and gauges already in the display. If Mike is able to keep up the good work, we may have the equivalent of a full "Flying Fortress" by the time of the 1997 reunion!

The local committee for the San Francisco reunion advises that notices will be posted on a bulletin board near the 303rd Registration Desk on how to get downtown from the hotel. There will be plenty of time for members to go off on their own explorations, if they wish. We're told that transport costs will range from \$2 for an express bus to \$40 for a taxi.

There's a scene in the recently released movie, "The Rock" showing what is supposed to be Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, D.C. The actual location where this scene was filmed was Golden Gate National Cemetery, site of the 303rd's memorial service on Sunday, 25 August., says Steve Decker, a Navy Seal who is in the movie and Mary Lee Deerfield's nephew!



"The Commanders," a jazz ensemble of the USAF Air Mobility Command's "Band of the Golden West" from Travis AFB will entertain at the farewell banquet on the evening of 27 August.

In this issueThe memorials dedicated to the 303rd Bomb Group continue to mount. This issue covers two of them and mentions a third which happened in June of this year. The cover story deals with the crash of B-17, "Earthquake McGoon" which crashed in Czechoslovakia on 17 April 1945. But there is still a mystery as to how two crewmen died. The second memorial was dedicated in Mears Ashby, England and honors the crews of two aircraft of the 303rd which collided in mid-air, over that city, on 31 March 1943 on a mission to Lorient, France. The third memorial honored Lt. Jack Mathis and was dedicated in June of 1996. Goodfellow Air Force Base at San Angelo, Texas named its 32,000 square foot, \$3.5 million facility as the "Mathis Sports and Fitness Center" for Jack Mathis who was born in San Angelo.

Historian Harry Gobrecht's article on the opening of the Mighty Eighth Air Force Museum and Heritage Center is chock full of information on what you will see when you visit this outstanding museum. Of course it is not fully completed but Harry brings us up to date on what is coming in the future. What Harry missed is covered by President Ed Miller who headed a delegation of 70 303rds who attended the opening ceremonies.

On page 14, we are starting a new feature about your experiences as a tenant at Molesworth in 1942-45. These excerpts are taken from your questionnaires. The "My Most Unusual 303rd Experience," has brought in a ton of information including stories we have never seen before and ones we have heard before that have improved with age. This may be a good incentive to get your questionnaires in as soon as possible.

If there were any doubts about flying combat missions being a tough way to make a living, I invite you to read about the "Thumper" on page 14.

Page 16 contains the last reminder about our annual reunion in San Francisco. We expect a record turnout for this one. Eddie and Mary Lee Deerfield have come up with another "bell ringer"... And so as I complete my 11th year as editor. I've gone full circle. I started out on the West coast in Seattle in '95 (more like 1895) and I'm returning to San Francisco to retrace the steps some of us took back in 1945 when we transferred from the ATC in North Africa to Hamilton Field in SF. And then we set up our 303rd BG Headquarters at the Fairmont Hotel. That's where many of us separated from the Service. Is this an omen? Hal Susskind

303rd Bomb Group (H) Association, Inc.

c/o Hal Susskind
2602 Deerfoot Trail
Austin, Texas 78704

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