

# Hell's Angels Newsletter

303rd BOMB GROUP (H) ASSOCIATION, INC.

AUGUST 1997

## They waited fifty-two years for their DFC

### Czechs honor downed flyers



Most, C.R., April 17, 1997, Memorial services for Lt. T.F. Kahler and Sgt. T.R. Smith killed in raid on Dresden on April 17, 1945. Attending the ceremony and representing the 303rd BGA were Les Latz R/O on "Earthquake McGoon:" and Charles Smith. Also present were members of the Czech RAF of WW II and officials of the Czech Government. Rosary beads that Les Latz and Bill Broughton (BTG) shared before missions were laid to rest on the monument. (see page 10)



DFC Presentation - (2nd from left) Robert M. Wertz, Melvin A. Durst, Edward J. Giering and Kenneth Jensen were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross by Maj. Gen. Lewis E. Lyle (l) during a ceremony at The Mighty Eighth Air Force Heritage Museum on May 16, 1997. The DFC was presented for their heroic actions during a combat mission over Nazi Germany more than 52 years ago.

According to citations accompanying the medals, the four crew members distinguished themselves by extraordinary

achievement while participating in aerial flight on a bombing mission to Langendreer, Germany, on 16 Feb. 1945." On that day, 39 B-17s of the 427th Squadron, 303rd Bomb Group, 8th AF, were sent to bomb a synthetic oil plant at Langendreer. However, only 18 aircraft managed to reach the target because of clouds and heavy and dense and persistent contrails.

As combat attrition took its toll during the mission, B-17 crew #7201, that included pilot 1st Lt. Wertz, co-pilot 2nd Lt. Durst, radio operator-gunner T/Sgt. Giering, and ball turret gunner S/Sgt. Jensen, moved its aircraft up to the lead position. Unable to bomb the primary target during two passes over it, the crew continued to fly and successfully bombed the secondary target, a railhead at Munster, Germany. However, their aircraft was badly damaged twice by exploding flak and the crew members had to parachute out of the doomed aircraft while over enemy territory. They were taken prisoners of war and remained in the Nazi POW camp for the duration of World War II.



Ceremony commemorating the 54th anniversary of the crash of B-17, "Black Swan" piloted by Lt. Jay R. "Bobby" Sterling. The ceremony took place at the crash site where a monument was erected several years ago and was attended by representatives from various military organizations and freedom fighters. In front of the podium are wreaths and a shadow box containing 303rd and 427th patches. Michel Lugez is at the mike. House in background was full of refugees when plane crashed in back.



## 303rd BOMB GROUP (H) ASSOCIATION, INC.

### "HELLS ANGELS" NEWSLETTER

Editor: Hal Susskind

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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 303rds to meet and do things together.

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

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

Membership years begin on the first day of January. In the future, the 303rd Bomb Group Newsletter will be sent only to paid up members. When you pay annual dues, the membership chairman will send you an updated membership card. Annual dues is \$10; \$15 for foreign addressees.

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### Short-snorters

I'm the widow of a wonderful former B-17 pilot - John W. Hendry, Captain, former POW, 23 missions - two to Schweinfurt. I lost him to cancer in 1990.

What I am writing about is after his death - through our Florida branch - there was an English gentleman who was searching for the men who signed the enclosed English pound note.

I received a beautiful letter from the English gentleman's wife. He passed away without knowing one of the men was found. My husband's signature was on the note, along with several others from the 303rd.

I read the Hell's Angels Newsletter "cover to cover", then pass it on to a fine gentleman from our church who is a real B-17 WW II buff. He looks forward to each issue.

**Gloria D. Hendry**  
Widow

*Ed. Note: Mrs. Hendry's letter and the English pound note brought back some fond memories of the short-snorters of WW II. I remember when we signed each other's currency. Sometimes it was a U.S. one dollar bill and in this case it was an English one Pound note. I also remember collecting all the currency from countries we flew over or through and then scotch-taping them together. I believe I still have one that is almost as tall as I am. Since I found the newspaper article that Mrs. Hendry enclosed to be quite interesting, I am reproducing it for your reading pleasure. It appeared in an English newspaper sometime in February 1983. It tells of the English gentleman's quest to find the owner or the signers of the English Pound note that he found in 1982. To add to the mystery, where was the note between 1943 and 1982?*

*Does anyone know where or when the "short snorter" was born?*

### Flak and fighters!

I flew group lead on the raid on the V-2 rocket sites. On our first low level pass - when the flak was busting all around us - our bombardier notified me that he forgot to use the sight mechanism properly. We flew west, turned the group around and headed back to the target. Flak was more intense - my right wing man caught fire and headed down. (Never saw him again.) On this sec-

ond go-around, we suddenly became aware that another group was passing over the target, directly underneath. There were "independent" groups all over the sky. We ended up dropping on the secondary target.

Schweinfurt was probably our most exciting and tiring mission. The fighter attacks were intense all the way in. (No fighter support.) My co-pilot and I fought that ship all the way; obeying the commands of our gunners: "to take it up" or "take it down" or "more right or left." Over the target the flak was intense. On the way home I can remember seeing fires of downed B-17s burning on the ground as markers for our return journey. Our plane was leading a low flight on that mission.

**John V. Lemmon (358)**  
Pilot.

*Ed Note: Was John V. Lemmon one of the signers of the pound note below?*

### Memories

I am still in touch with some of the men that served with me in the 38th Recon Sqdn, 19th Bombardment Group. We formed part of the 427th Bombardment Squadron. The ground crew of this squadron were great and will always be in my memories. We were all very proud of the "Combat Team." When there was a loss - it hurt, especially when you knew them.

**S.M. Andriessen (427)**  
Clerk

## Mystery of the men who signed their names on old pound note

Retired police chief Jack Hamblin has turned detective - to trace the one-time owner of a war-time issue one pound note.

For in addition to the customary Bank of England cashier's signature, this note carries autographs of 11 men, any one of whom, feels Mr. Hamblin, would like it returned if any are still alive.

"That's fairly unlikely," reflected now crippled Mr. Hamblin this week. "If they were, what I think they were, their chances of survival were slim." Since finding the note in Winchester last year, Jack has been doing some digging.

He thinks it likely the men were an American Flying Fortress crew with the 303rd Bombardment Group, stationed at Molesworth from 1942 to 1945.

Nicknamed "Hell's Angels," the men won the admiration of British crews and the wrath of the Nazis - with their cool courage in flying near suicidal missions in daylight bombing raids over Germany. "They took a real pounding and not many of them came back," said Mr. Hamblin.

It was the sort of courage war-time observer and bomb-aimer Mr. Hamblin knows all about.

For he earned a DFC for his heroism in two terrifying tours in Lancasters of 100 Squadron in night- and day-bombing.

He defied death twice - once when a German fighter set their Lanc ablaze and another time when skilled flying brought them home after a crippling head-on night-time crash with a Lancaster from another squadron - to return to civilian life with Hampshire Police Force.

But on the ladder to success, Mr. Hamblin had reached Chief Inspector at Police Headquarters off Romsey Road when the stress of war-time caught up with him and he's been chairbound ever since. "Where the note came from is a mystery I'd like to solve," he said, seated at the fire-side of his home off Oliver's Battery. "But I'm sure that either a survivor or one of his relatives would love to have it."

"I'd like to be able to give it to him."

The one pound note on which is handwritten 'October 1943 303rd Bomb Group' also bears signatures with surnames Goddard, McElwain, Webster, Flcouich (?), Hendry, Lope (?), Campbell, Johnston, Lemmon, Maher and on the reverse Hartigan, 2nd Lt., ETO.

Jack Hamblin, DFC, lived at 16 Sunnydown Road, Oliver's Battery, Winchester SO22 4LD. (Further details on page 12)





### "Floosie"

Just received the Hell's Angels Newsletter and, as usual, found many articles I could relate to in the near future.

Regarding names missing of the Hell's Angels ground crew: Kasmer Wegrzyn (rear row, 2nd from left in photo in May issue) flew back to the States for, I think, the first War Bond drive. My mother and my wife met him and the crew at Midway Airport in Chicago.

Two months after arriving back in the States, we, back at Molesworth, were notified "Wergy" was killed riding a bicycle back in his hometown.

Another piece of bad news: George Ham, crew chief of "The Floose" has passed away a number of years ago. Cancer was the cause. George married an English girl while overseas. I don't have his home address but he lived in Oelwein, Iowa.

I was George's assistant crew chief. We had 101 missions on "The Floose" when, on the last mission being badly shot up, couldn't make it back to Molesworth on the 102nd mission (with the 92nd Bomb Group). It completed the mission but crash-landed on return. I wanted to go and see if it could be repaired but was told by engineering that "The Floose" was too old for repair.

Being without a plane, Capt. Nevel (358th) assigned me to another B-17. It had no name and it might have been #44-6006. I named it "Foreign Run" because it was used to ferry GIs on a run to Paris, France. Don't know how many trips it took, but it had to take 100 or more men back and forth.

Please excuse the penmanship but just had an operation on my right hand for Carpal Tunnel Syndrome.

**E.J. O'Brien**

301 W Francis Rd  
New Lenox, IL 60451-1010

P.S. I also learned that "The Swoose" was built by women. The name was already painted on the nose. It looked like a cross between a goose and a duck. After hearing this news, a conjecture on my part may have been named meaning "Floosie."

*Ed. Note: I wouldn't touch that last conjecture with a 10 foot pole.*

### "An act of honor!"

I clipped the insert enclosed from our local paper. To me it was very interesting. I am amazed that anything like this would ever happen. I flew one mission to Bremen but it was the harbor and city area that we

hit. It wasn't this one. These poor devils were in poor shape. Any time an enemy would fly within 12 yards to check out an aircraft, he had to be pretty sure the 50s were silenced. I and the readers of the newsletter would like more information on what squadron and group "Ye Olde Pub" was from and how many of the crew survived the ordeal. A fuller account of it all would be most welcome.

I was in a similar situation on my final mission before becoming a POW; plane shot-up, one engine on fire and ready to head out over the North Sea, but we weren't so lucky. Stigler wasn't around to give us escort. With the fire, I don't know if the old ship would have made it but the Germans, through the grapevine, told us the ship didn't burn after it crash-landed so there was hope there.

Anyway, thought this article might interest you.

Keep up the good work.

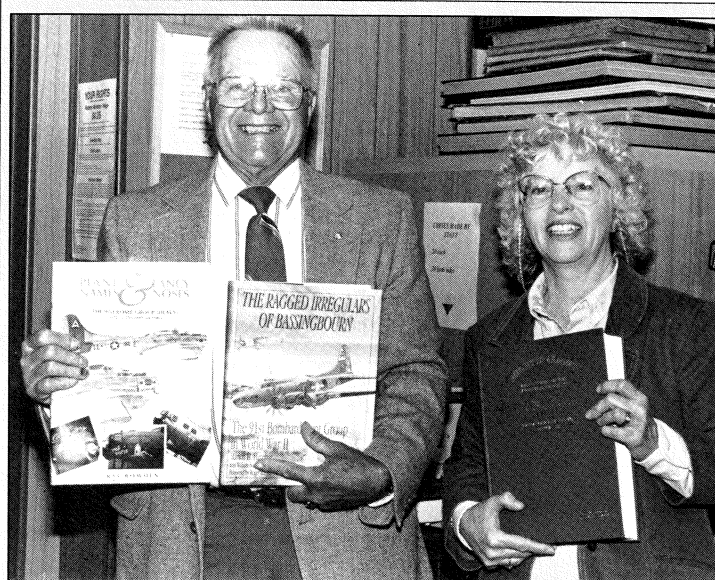
**J.B. Halliburton (358)**  
2528 183rd N.E.  
Redmond, WA 98052

*Ed. Note: Lt. Halliburton, a bombardier on Lt. A.L. Emerson's crew, was shot down on the Oschersleben mission of Jan. 11, 1944.*

*Halliburton sent me a clipping from the Seattle Post Intelligencer which told about a World War II incident involving Lt. Brown, pilot of B-17 "Ye Olde Pub", and a German Luftwaffe Lt. named Franz Stigler, pilot of an Me-109. The story in a nutshell is that Brown's B-17 was badly shredded by German fighters after dropping its bombs on Bremen. But when Stigler swooped in to finish off Ye Olde Pub, he did something that could have gotten him shot if superiors in Nazi Germany found out. Rather than killing the crippled bomber and its crew, he escorted it part-way across the North Sea, saluted and flew away.*

*"I was amazed that the aircraft could fly," Stigler said of Ye Olde Pub. "I flew within 12 yards of it. It was a wreck. The tail gunner was lying in blood, holes all over. I saw Charlie Brown (wounded in the shoulder) by himself flying the plane and his crew running all up and down tending the wounded." Stigler had already shot down two B-17s that same day and had he finished off Brown's plane, he would have won the coveted Knight's Cross Medal.*

*The incident faded in Brown's mind until he mentioned at an Air Force gathering in 1986 that "I think I was once saluted by a German pi-*



**G**reene Prairie Press, White Hall, IL - May 22, 1997 - 91st BG/303rd BG veteran William L. Hoots, left, on May 15 presenting three books to the Roodhouse Library and Librarian Mrs. Sue Bradford. The books are: "Planes, Names and Fancy Noses," about 91st Bombardment Group with whom Hoots flew 25 missions in World War II; "Regular Irregulars of Basingbourne" (also about 91st Bombardment Group); and held by Mrs. Bradford; "Might in Flight" (about the 303rd Bombardment Group better known as "Hell's Angels" with whom Hoots flew 6 1/2 missions before being shot down and becoming a POW. Hoots escaped from the POW Camp shortly before the end of WW II. Hoots went on to see service in Vietnam.

Hoots, flying with Capt. Dalton's crew of the 91st BG at Basingbourne, finished his first tour of 25 missions on 21 Feb. 1944. Dalton and Hoots completed their tour on the same mission. The navigator, Lt. Sulli, also completed his tour and stayed in the 91st until the war was over.

Hoots returned to combat in the ETO with Lt. G.H. Jameson's crew in September of 1944 and was assigned to the 358th Bomb Squadron, 303rd Bomb Group at Molesworth. Capt. James "Tailwheel" Kaiser was the navigator of the crew, which was composed of both combat veterans and neophytes. They flew their first mission with the 303rd on November 6, 1944, when they bombed the synthetic oil refinery at Bottrup, Germany. Following in rapid fire order were missions to Metz, Cologne, Gelsenkirchen, Weisweiler and Merseberg on 9, 10, 11, 16 and 21 of November. On 26 November they were part of the maximum effort of the 303rd BG - 58 B-17s - largest armada ever put up by the 303rd to bomb the railroad viaduct at Altenbeck via Gee-H bombing. The last resort target was the railroad marshaling yards at Osnabruck. Thirty-six B-17s, with Lt. Col. W. Shayler as air commander and Capt. D.R. Davis as navigator, led the 41 CBW-A Group; 22 B-17s led by Capt. J. Tulloss, with Lt. H. Susskind as navigator, led the lead and two squadrons of the 41 CBW-B Group.

Aircraft #42-97972 of the 358th Sqdn. piloted by Lt. Jameson experienced difficulty when they were transferring fuel resulting in a blaze around the No. 4 engine supercharger. Lt. Jameson ordered his crew to bail out. Sgts. Hole, Haegers and Bender pulled delayed jumps. Sgt. Hoots was falling when the aircraft blew up. Nine members of the Jameson crew became POWs.

On the same mission, Sgts. R.T. Leal and V.A. DeLiso flying with Capt. R.F. Healy in aircraft #42-97691 were ordered to bail out and also became POWs, and along with Hoots were on the 87-day death march through Northern Germany (see map on page 5) before being liberated.

lot," saying it was the strangest encounter he ever experienced in the air.

A year earlier, Stigler had traveled to Seattle for a Boeing celebration of the B-17 and had mentioned the

episode in a news interview. When someone showed Brown a tape of the interview, he said, "That's my plane." The two got together in 1989 after Brown found Stigler through a German newsletter for fighter pilots.



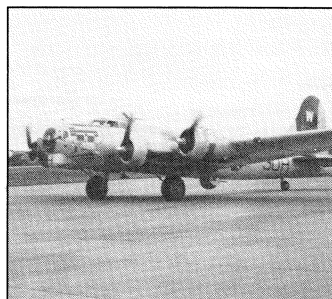
Enclosed find our State of Wisconsin Legionnaire newspaper. I sent the notice of our reunion in April. I thought being from Wisconsin I would get more response, but this is the only one I received. His name is Jack Smith, 14545 West View Court, Brookfield, WI 53005. He is from the 360th and worked in the orderly room with Kronsford. He then transferred to G-2. He told me all about Sgt. Therien that was our 1st Sgt., who, all of a sudden, went on combat and was shot down over France. Came back through France and over the mountains through Spain. Jack came in the Group at Boise, Idaho, and went all the way with us through Alamogordo, El Paso and on the Queen Mary to England. Jack is interested in joining, so send him all the information you can to influence him. He never knew too much about our association, so it seems we should have started the membership drive long ago. So many have left us

and the rest are just too old to get involved. I certainly enjoyed keeping in touch with people like you and Eddie and the organization. Hope to see you in Pittsburgh but you never know what may befall us in four months.

**Robert Heiliger**  
2834 S 71st St.  
Milwaukee, WI 53219-2951

*Ed. Note: Actually, we have been running membership drives for the past 10 years but we never put the emphasis on it like we did the current one. Thanks for your help.*

We had a B-17 visit little old Huntington, WV, on May 27-29, thanks to Ernie Clay, President of the Experimental Aircraft Association's Huntington Branch. The plane was a B-17G-VE, "Aluminum Overcast" with the square W insignia paid for by the 398th Bomb Group. Harold Weekly, 75 years young, was one of the pilots and had 20 combat



missions. From a personal standpoint, I spent time both days talking to folks before and after their tour of the B-17. There were veterans from many services who wore their outfit caps. I had an 8th AF one. Significantly, many of the vets were ground troops. They talked of seeing the forts go over with the fighter escorts and the contrails. That really hit home.

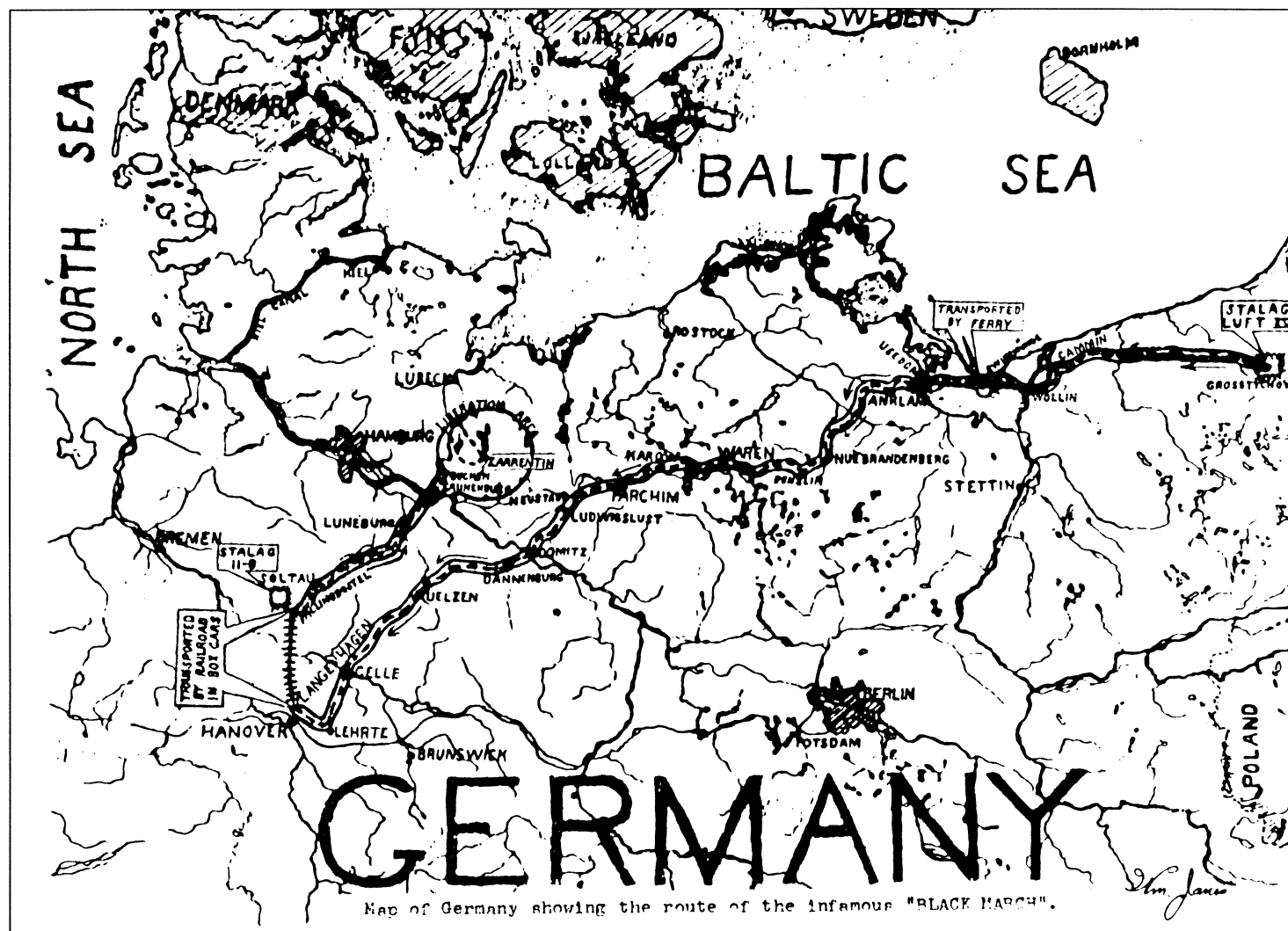
**Abbott M. Smith, Jr.**  
**P.O. Box 370**  
**Barboursville, WV 25505**

James H. Batton died on March 2, 1997, and was buried with full military honors at Princeton, N.J., on March 9.

Jim went to Molesworth as co-pilot of George Sirany's crew in April 1944. He checked out as first pilot before leaving Molesworth. He was recalled to active service as a pilot for the Korean War. He ended his military pilot career by transporting military dead from Viet Nam to Dover Air Force Base. Not too many 303rd pilots flew in three wars. Jim owned and flew his own plane up to 1995.

Jim was special to me because of his military record and because it took me 50 years to find him. Besides 20-plus years in the service, he earned a BS degree in education from the University of Illinois. He fathered four children, three sons and a daughter. Jim was a life member of the 303rd BGA.

**Robert C. Umberger**  
P.O. Box 92  
West Rockport, ME 04865



# From the President

Bill Zachar called the other day. At Molesworth during the war, he was M/Sgt. William P. Zachar, a ground crew chief with the 359th who led his maintenance team in keeping some of the squadron's most illustrious B-17's flying. He and his wife, Jeanette, are nicely settled in Davenport, Iowa, and will attend the 303rd Bomb Group reunion in Pittsburgh next month.

Our talk ranged far and wide, as often happens when Hell's Angels get together in person or by phone. Bill was particularly pleased that the Association is honoring the 11 crew chiefs whose management skills and engineering talents kept their assigned B-17 flying for 100 or more combat missions. Bill just missed. His B-17 *Bonnie "B"* had 93 missions.

I learned that *Bonnie "B"* was named in honor of pilot Neil Bech's brand new baby daughter. She's Bonnie Ziegler now, married to a retired Air Force colonel. Bonnie and her husband, Ken, plan to join Neil and Betty at the Pittsburgh reunion.

What struck me most in my conversation with Bill Zachar was his worry about the future of the 303rd Bomb Group Association and our annual reunions. He recalled my column in the February issue of the Newsletter, in which I wrote about the challenges facing the Association as time relentlessly thins our ranks.

Bill's concern was simply stated, "Many of us look forward all year to getting together at the 303rd's reunion. It would be a shame if this was taken away from us while we're still around to enjoy it."

In my February column, I wrote, "There are a multitude of options open to the Board of Directors, with many shadings.

"For example, some say let's set a date, possibly the year 2010 or earlier, at which time a major portion of the funds in the Association treasury would be donated to the 8th Air Force Heritage Museum with the balance remaining for Associate Members to carry on and sustain the 303rd's traditions.

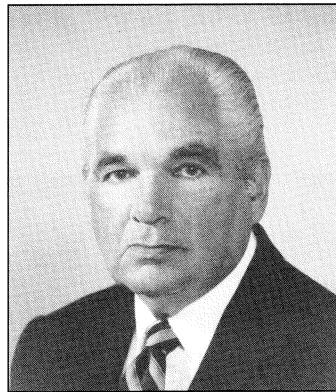
"In the middle ground, there are those who say let the end come when there are no more than a hundred 303rd veterans able to, and interested in, attending a reunion.

"At the other end of the spectrum, there are those who say let's do nothing and let the last two Molesworth veterans tap the treasury to drink a toast to each other, leaving the Associate Members to

look out for the assets and the thereafter."

Perhaps the two biggest questions marks revolve around our future capability to sustain a World War II veterans' management team and the unknown potential of the Associate members to step into the breach when the time comes.

How much longer can we count on ready, willing and able 303rd veterans to fill leadership roles as officers, members of the Board of Directors and committee chairman of the Association? When those numbers drop to a point where we can't fill the majority of positions, will the Associate members be sufficiently strong in number, enthusiastic and truly dedicated enough to take over for the long term?



Unfortunately, none of us can do more than guess at the answers to those paramount questions.

A lady named Rachel Frith, associated with the 352nd FG, wrote a tender, beautifully crafted and compelling poem about Air Corps Group reunions. Her sentiments were published in the 8th AFMMF anthology, "The Sky Was Never Still." I'd like to share her words with you.

*"Autumn leaves, rustling together, to the appointed place the old warriors come. Pilgrims, drifting across the land they fought to preserve.*

*"Where they meet is not so important anymore. They meet, and that's enough for now. Greetings echo across a lobby. Hands reach out and arms draw buddies close. Embraces that as young men they were too uncomfortable to give, too shy to accept so lovingly.*

*"But deep within these Indian Summer days, they have reached a greater understanding of life and love. The shells holding their souls are weaker now, but hearts and minds grow*

*vigorous remembering.*

*"On a table someone spreads old photographs; a test of recollection. And friendly laughter echoes at shocks of hair gone gray, or white, or merely gone. The rugged, slender bodies gone forever. Yet, they no longer need to prove their strength. Some are now sustained by 'medicine's miracles,' and even in this fact they manage to find humor.*

*"The women, all those who waited, all those who love them, have watched the changes take place. Now, they observe and listen, and smile at each other; as glad to be together as the men.*

*"Talk turns to war and planes and foreign lands. Stories are told again and again, reweaving the threadbare fabric of the past. Mending one more time the banner of their youth. They hear the vibrations, feel the shudder of metal as propellers whine and whirl, and planes come to life.*

*"These birds with fractured wings can see beyond the mist of clouds, and they are in the air again, chasing the wind, feeling the exhilaration of flight, close to the heavens; this wild blue yonder of their anthem.*

*"Dead comrades, hearing their names spoken, wanting to share in this time, if only in spirit, move silently among them. Their presence is felt and smiles appear beneath misty eyes.*

*"Each, in his own way, may wonder who will be absent another year, and the room grows quiet for a time. Suddenly, an ember flames to life. Another memory burns. The talk may turn to other wars and other men, and of futility. So, this is how it goes. The past is so much the present.*

*"In their ceremonies, the allegiances, the speeches and the prayers, one cannot help but hear the deep, eternal love of country they will forever share.*

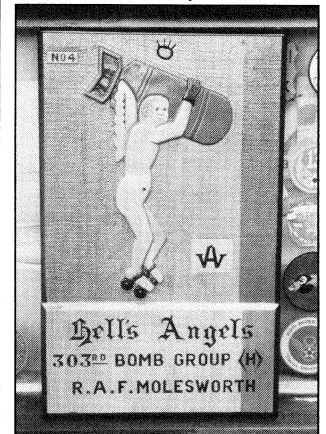
*"Finally, it is time to leave. Much too soon to set aside this little piece of yesterday, but the past cannot be held too long, for it is fragile.*

*"They say, 'Farewell...see you next year, God willing,' breathing silent prayers for one another, each keeping a little of the others with him forever."*

**Eddie Deerfield**

## Incidentally

by Hal Susskind



**Wood carving of "Hell's Angels" by Bill Adams, which was donated to the 303rd BGA to be raffled off at the reunion in Pittsburgh.**

→ → →

In this issue...are a collection of stories testifying to the high esteem and respect with which the members of the 303rd Bomb Group are held throughout Europe because of their heroic actions and sacrifices made during World War II.

Concrete examples of this is the memorial service held at St. Pere-en-Retz, France, on May 1st honoring Lt. Jay Sterling and members of the crew of the "Black Swan" on the 54th anniversary of their crash.

On May 14, the men and women of the Joint Analysis Center at Molesworth hosted Air Force Heritage Day honoring visiting members of the 303rd Bomb Group.

Hundreds of miles to the east, memorial services were held in Most, Czech Republic, on April 17, honoring Lt. T.F. Kahler and Sgt. T.R. Smith, who were killed in the raid on Dresden on April 17, 1945.

When was the last time you saw any memorial services conducted to honor ex-military men in the U.S. except for the obvious Memorial and Veterans Day celebrations?

That's why the ceremony held at The Mighty Eighth Air Force Heritage Museum in Pooler, GA, honoring a deserving 303rd crew with DFCs after a 52-year wait was so emotional. Which should be a good incentive for all those who are still deserving of awards, but have been coming up short over the years, to keep trying. The time is ripe for you to submit that paperwork. By the way, if you are in need of your flying records, they have been moved to: National Personnel Records Center (Military Personnel Records), 9700 Page Boulevard, St. Louis, MO 63132. x

# 8th AF Heritage Museum celebrates 1st anniversary

**T**he Mighty Eighth Air Force Heritage Museum held its first anniversary and Armed Forces Day celebration at the museum May 15-16, 1997. Many 303rd Bomb Group veterans attended and participated in several of the activities; e.g., four members of the 303rd received the Distinguished Flying Cross presented by Major General Lew Lyle; the Lewis E. Lyle Rotunda was dedicated, the Association's Past Presidents plaque was unveiled; the 303rd showcase exhibit was enlarged, and many individual Wall of Valor plaques were finished. Firmly believing in the old adage that a good picture is worth a thousand words, the editor decided to save you valuable moments of reading time and visually display many of the activities; a sort of preview of what you will see in 1998 when the reunion is held in Savannah.



Bill and Mary Eisenhart look for Mary's plaque on the Wall of Valor. Mary, then Lt. Mary Shore, was a nurse with the 303rd Station Hospital.



(l to r) William E. Eisenhower, Eddie Deerfield and Carl Fyler (r), past presidents of the 303rd, admire the Bomb Group Memorial and the Association's Past Presidents plaque.



303rd Bomb Group's Rotunda plaque



303rd Bomb Group's showcase exhibit, which includes memorabilia from many sources, including T/Sgt. Forrest Vosler's Medal of Honor, two wood carvings by Bill Adams, a chest pack parachute, an A-2 jacket plus many other interesting exhibits.

**Do you have something to donate?**



*I have recently returned from a ceremony commemorating the 54th Anniversary of the crash of the "Black Swan," piloted by Jay R. (Bobby) Sterling, at St. Pere-en-Retz.*

*The ceremony took place at the crash site where a monument was placed several years ago. The Mayor of St. Pere-en-Retz conducted the ceremony attended by representatives from various military entities and resistance fighters (FFI). Mr. Lugez read the history of the "Black Swan," the town band played the Star Spangled Banner, the Marseilles and the Hymn of the French Resistance, and three wreaths were laid at the monument.*

*I presented a shadow box of Bobby Sterling and a B-17 complete with 303rd and 427th patches to the Mayor as two WW II aircraft did a low fly-by. The enclosed text is the report on the Black Swan given by Mr. Lugez.*

*Mr. Lugez is a unique individual, working in the interest of American WW II veterans. He himself was in a Nazi forced labor camp during the war and is now an official with a large shipping firm in St. Nazaire. He personally gathered the funds to restore the WW II American Memorial in St. Nazaire, which was destroyed by the Germans during their occupation of the area. He rebuilt the memorial and added a dedication to the U.S. for our help in WW II. In addition, he is on a mission to honor all 54 U.S. plane crashes in the St. Nazaire area. He has hosted survivors as well as relatives of those that did not survive, footing the bill entirely on his own. He deserves to be honored and given official recognition by the United States somehow.*

*I hope you find this interesting. The French people included us in a warm and respectful experience. They thanked our family profusely for Bobby's sacrifice.*

John Sterling

## "THE FLAK CITY"

# St. Nazaire honors Lt. Sterling and crew of the "Black Swan"

By Michel Lugez

The last flight of the B-17F, the "Black Swan," No. 42-5780, of the 303rd Bombardment Group's 427th Squadron, was accomplishing its third mission over occupied France.

Saturday, the first of May 1943, marked the 53rd mission of the 8th Air Force in England and the eighth American bombardment of Saint Nazaire.

Nineteen B-17 bombers of the 303rd Bomb Group leave their base at Molesworth at 08:55 to join the 305th above Chelveston at 09:20, flying at 3,000 feet altitude. The ceiling being very low, the assembly of aircraft took place at 2,000 feet, then, because of an opening in the cloud cover, the formation climbed to and continued at 3,000 feet.

The rendezvous with the other groups having been scheduled at 10:30 above the point of Portland, the 303rd and 305th, arriving at 10:45, had to circle in an "S" pattern before finally assembling in combat formation.

The Group flies west of Guernsey Islands at 10:41, passes over St. Brieuc at 11:08, Chateau Briand at 11:27; the route selected by Air Force HQ is good, and the altitude of 23,000 feet is correct.

The "Initial Point" fixed at St. Etienne de Montluc was reached at 11:37. The formation turned about 70 degrees hoping to obtain better visibility over the objective.

The formation continued towards St. Nazaire on a heading of about 290 degrees. At about this time, it came under attack by enemy aircraft flying overhead. It is certain that Lt. Sterling's B-17 was lost because of this assault. Hit in one of his engines, he loses altitude and leaves the formation; immediately the D.C.A. and several Focke-Wulf 190 German fighters of the JG2 Fighter Group (commanded by Egon Mayer) pounced on the crippled bomber - one of the German fighters was shot down.

At this moment, the B-17 had descended about 600 meters under the US formation. The bomber was hit



Michel Lugez holds floral wreath before placing it at monument. In back of Mr. Lugez are members of the French Resistance.

again in its No. 3 engine, which began dangerously smoking. A burst of enemy machine gun fire struck the right wing. The fuel tank of No. 3 engine was also hit.

One of the survivors recalls: "Everyone was shouting over the intercom; one could hardly hope to escape; Lt. Sterling ordered the bombardier, Lt. Parker, to release the two bombs (of one ton each) to lighten the aircraft; the intercom broke down, the aircraft was violently shaken, the electric system was out; I thought it was time to jump."

Of the 10 crew members, four will jump with their parachutes as the plane fell to its right; some moments later the aircraft exploded into a thousand pieces; Lt. Parker, stuck and trapped in the plane, was miraculously ejected in the explosion and was able to open his parachute. The shattered aircraft fell to earth at The Morandieres in the town of St. Pere

en Retz. The tragic results were the death of six of the 10 man crew.

Lt. J.R. Sterling, pilot of the 303rd Group (according to the declaration of one of the survivors) could have escaped along with his comrades, but as I have been able to find out from my research, I learned that many pilots stayed at the controls of their aircraft, evidently to avoid crashing into cities or villages and causing deaths in the civil population. They voluntarily sacrificed their lives.

T/Sgt. Fields, radioman, was mortally wounded in the head by a shell explosion. Sgts. Arthur McCormack, manning the turret guns, Jessie C. Cleavelin, tail-gunner, William R. Whalen, right waist gunner, Daniel J. Cashmanin, left waist gunner, were killed by the explosion.

Only four succeeded in surviving the hell.

The co-pilot, Lt. John L. Neill, fell heavily to the ground unconscious

neck. Giving aid to the aviator, Joseph Mariot had the presence of mind to pull on his head in order to straighten out his cervical vertebrae. Neill then headed towards the city of Pornic to obtain help from the Gendarmerie, but he bumped into the Germans who made him a prisoner. He spent the rest of the war in Germany in Stalag Luft III. He returned to St. Pere en Retz a few years ago.

Lt. Dave H. Parker, bombardier, hid during the first day in the bushes. The next day he entered a farm where he was taken prisoner. He also spent the remainder of the war in Stalag Luft at Segan.

T/Sgt. Powell E. Griffin, mechanic, was wounded and made prisoner immediately. He ended the war at Stalag 17B at Krems in Austria. He died on September 30, 1967.

Lt. Harry E. Roach, Jr., navigator, was more fortunate. He was helped by farmers who were in neighboring fields. He met Joseph Monnier who took him to his home, provided him with civilian clothing, gave him a glass of cognac to fortify him, and directed him to Chaude, where he was taken to the Resistance net-

work in Nantes. He (Monnier) received later a citation from General Eisenhower for his help to Allied aviators.

Roach traveled by bicycle from Nantes to Agen, eating and sleeping in farms on the way. He had a rendezvous with men of the Resistance who put him into contact with a guide to cross the Pyrenees. From there he reached the Spanish village of Lariba where he was arrested. The U.S. Consulate in Madrid had him liberated on 19 June, and he went on to Gibraltar arriving on 26 June. There he boarded a plane to rejoin his unit in England on 29 June. He was the 44th aviator able to escape territory occupied by the Nazi.

In 1954 Major Harry E. Roach died in an aircraft accident as he was on active duty, ending a career in the American Air Forces.

His son, Harry Roach, and his wife came to The Morandieres on 17 October to thank those who helped his father to escape, and to inaugurate the granite stele memorializing these tragic events.

The First of May 1943 was a bad day for the 8th Air Force. Because

of a thick blanket of clouds over St. Nazaire, only 29 bombers were able to drop their bombs over the target. The others had to turn around.

The American aviators coined the nick-name, "The Flak City" for St. Nazaire because of the hundred cannons emplaced around the city were serviced not by dummies, but by experienced men. The missions over St. Nazaire were always dreaded by American airmen.

On this day, seven planes did not return to their bases and 60 aviators were killed or disappeared. Most of them were very young men between 22 and 25 years of age. They were "pioneers" of the 8th Air Force and the four pathfinder groups who carried out bombing missions in occupied territory. The 91st, 303rd, 305th and the 306th Bombardment Groups suffered heavy losses. Very few of the airmen would reach their 25th mission, allowing them to return to the United States, awaiting the rapid formation of new combat groups which made it possible in 1944 and 1945 to send more than a thousand bombers a day over German factories and cities.

These American aviators, by their country to fight Nazism, came to offer the ultimate measure of dedication to freedom by giving up their lives. This freedom, so expensively obtained, must be defended and retold to our youth. In front of the Sterling family who came especially from the United States, I want to say that we will never forget the pilot, J.R. Sterling and his crew who fell here at The Morandieres in St. Pere en Retz, fifty years ago today, about this time. They were not supermen; but these ordinary men who sacrificed themselves for freedom were true heroes.

Long Live freedom; long live the United States of America; long live France.

Signing the Golden Book at St. Pere en Retz City Hall, John Sterling wrote:

"Many thanks to the people of St. Pere en Retz for commemorating the crash of my cousin 'Bobby' Sterling during the war and the suffering you endured for helping his crewmen to safety."

John Sterling, 1 May 1997

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*52 years after crash*

# Czechs at Most Still honor dead fliers

By Les Latz



Lt. Charles Smith, Navigator, Jaroclau Holub, NCAA, and T/Sgt. Les Latz pose in back of memorial to Lt. T.F. Kahler and Sgt. T.R. Smith. Monument was erected in 1995.



Remains of the POW "Lazaret," where Bill Broughton (BTG), and Les Latz were interned in Bilina, C.R., after they were captured in 1945.

In reply to your letter, I was back again to Most, Czech Republic, in April for two weeks. The second week our original navigator, Lt. Charles Smith, joined us in Prague. Until he read an account of the mission in the newsletter a short time ago, he assumed that all of us on Lt. Kahler's crew were killed that day, April 17, 1945, since the initial reports said, "No parachutes were seen. The entire crew was believed to have perished in the explosion."

Lt. Smith flew the first 15 raids with us and was not on the ill-fated mission.

Earlier in the year, Eddie Deerfield, President of the 303 Bomb Group Association, was notified by Carl Novak, of Most, that a ceremony would be held on April 17, 1997, for Lt. Kahler and Sgt. Smith for whom the monument was dedicated in 1995 at the new Most Aero-Club.

Soon after I called Charles Smith and we made reservations for, and got, airline tickets to Prague for the dates of April 8-23. After all this was

resolved, I heard from Pavel Uhlir, an NCAA member and our host, that Mr. Novak had changed the date of the memorial service to April 26. As you know, I am sure, changing international flight dates and so-on are very costly, such as the trip there alone. So we could not do it. We chose not to; in essence we had the

ceremony on April 17, 1997, as we felt it should be.

Present were members of the Czech RAF, WW II; representatives of the Most Coal Co., law officers of Teplice and Bilina and the C.R. president of the Aero-Club.

Floral tributes were from the 303rd Bomb Group Association,



(l-r) Les Latz, Pavel Uhlir, Ilona Uhlir and Jaroclau Holub at the home of Mr. & Mrs. Holub. Talk about hospitality. Wow.

Chemopetrol factory of Most; Most Coal Co., and the Mayor of Most and Belina.

I had a rosary that Bill Broughton (B.T.G.) and I shared before missions, that was said and I put the rosary beads to rest on the monument. The flags you see I brought from the American Legion, Post 258, Belleview, Florida. The ceremony went well. That night Smith and I hosted a dinner at one of the local restaurants for 8-10 of the actual eye-witnesses of the incident on April 17, 1945.

We also motored to Frieberg and Dresden, Germany. We visited new news archives in Frieberg to try and find more news of "Sacktime," B-17 shot down same day as we. I wrote to Lt. Blaine, who was in jail there; but have had no reply. Saw the military museum in Dresden. We really did bomb that city. Special thanks to Pavel and Ilona Uhlir, our gracious host and hostess for 14 days. Thank you, people of the Czech Republic, for your kind hospitality.





# Hotpourri - - - a little bit of this - - - and a little bit of that

Am writing you about two recent 303rd BG articles that appeared in the May 1997 Newsletter.

1) The 15 Aug. '44 Wiesbaden AF mission.

2) Fred Kiesel, Bombardier on McCutcheon's crew.

Hope this package may help you fill space in some of your future newsletters. "Keep up the good work. Disregard the 'sour-apple' wanna-be editors."

The only reason I (our crew) wasn't on that 15 Aug. mission is because of a fluke in the 3-day pass rotation. After only three missions, we got a pass to London; evidently in place of a recently departing crew. Needless to say, there were a lot of empty bunks when we returned.

Fred Kiesel...A superb football player, could knock you down with a bullet-pass at 30 yards. Had planned to marry his blond girlfriend and star at USC. We had many talks about this. I was his cadet flight leader at Carlsbad Bomb.-DR Nav. School during Oct.'43-Feb. '44. We graduated together in Class 44-3.

Richard McGilray...Co-pilot on McCutcheon's crew. He and Ben Starr (Nav.) gave Fred the first-aid when his arm was shot off on 9. Sept.'44 mission. He told me all about it, at his S.F. area Pizza Restaurant, after the 1985 Seattle reunion.

Ben Starr (Deceased)...Became top TV comedy writer (Duffy's Tavern). Told me Fred Kiesel was very depressed on return to L.A.

"Cowboys and Indians"... This is the complete story of the 25 Aug. '44 mission and the subsequent 25'x75" "Fortresses Under Fire" mural on display in the WW II second-floor portion of National Air & Space Museum in Washington, D.C.

I did a lot of research in the Space Library during the 1980s. Larry Wilson dug out this book for me, plus 8"x10" crew pictures of my crew. Also thought that the Galland excerpt and extra info on the 15 August 44 German pilots might be of interest.

Last but sadly, I read where Jeff Ethell was killed this month (June 97) while flying a P-38 in Oregon, a great loss. I suspect he was Associated with Bob Hoover's Evergreen Aviation stationed in that area.

**Ray Gorham, Sqdn. Bomb.  
358th BS 1944-45  
358th J. Ave. (coincidence?)  
Coronado, CA 92118-1140**

P.S. I hitch-hiked down to the U.S. Hospital at Reading to visit Fred Kiesel after his arm was amputated. He was his usual hilarious self, keeping the entire ward in stitches. I thought he would be OK.

P.S. #2 - One last thought.

Re: 25 April 1945 Pilsen Mission (Newsletter, page 15) I missed this one, fortunately. The Group Bombardier told me not to fly my 30th mission until he could get me my captaincy. I was at great odds with Col. Raper, so there were no "tracks" for me as long as he was in command. Lt. Col. Sipes took over in April, and, as a result, I found my promotion orders to Captain in my mail box after returning to base after a long five day extended leave in Bournemouth, due to "no travel" due to V-E Day celebrations. My orders were dated 4 May '45. I understand all promotions were torn up on 8 May - saved me six years in making major.

In 1946-47, I was going through pilot training at Randolph AFB. Spied Sipes in the PX and rushed over to thank him. Lo and behold, he was wearing M/Sgt stripes, had re-enlisted after the 90 day grace period had run out. Was in Base Ops. Later got his Lt. Col. back. Don't know what happened to him. Does anyone?

More on Mural...During one of my 1980s visits, I was looking into the Bombardier/chin turret, real-life size, when I heard German voices behind me. Turned out to be, Gunther Rall (275 victories) and Mackey Steinhoff (176), both who were Post War CGs. Rall had gotten pudgy, but Steinhoff's horribly burned face was a dead give-away. He crashed and burned a Me-262 during take-off on a bomb-rutted field in April 1945. Since they spoke better English, than my poor German, I explained the mural to them. They knew the German pilots (Maj. Dahl) and were interested in my explanation. Steinhoff has since died but don't know about Rall. My biggest regrets are that I never got to meet Galland (died Feb. 1997), or Erich Hartman (352 victories). Of course, the greatest shooter was Hans-Joachim Marseilles, who had 158 victories in North Africa at the age of 21. He waited too long to bail out of a burning 109 at low altitude. He hit the tail and chute failed.

Recent Air Force magazine still insists that Jabara was the first-ever jet ace....B.S.!!!! I have a list of 22 Luftwaffe 262 pilots who did that (and more) in 1945.

Heinz Baer had (16) with the 262 Galland (7) Steinhoff (6)

I just sent Joe Blinbury (my ball-turret an excellent WW II Book "Combat Crew," by John Commer, flight engineer, 381st BG, Ridgewell. It's about the really rough missions in 1943 & 1944. I correspond with Peter G. Horner,

Leipheim, Germany. He is a WW II Historian. I sent him target maps on the April 1944 raid that destroyed many 262s. They hid them under trees and used the Autobahn as take-off runways.

Ed. Note: Peter Horner is an Associate Member of our Association. He will read this in the newsletter.

## The truly amazing journey of the English one pound note

Once upon a time; in the dark ages, about October 1943, eleven young men of the 358th Squadron, 303rd Bombardment Group, signed their names in ink on the front and back side of a one pound English note, worth about \$4.83 in U.S. currency. Thus a 358th "Short-Shorter" was born. After the signatures were dry, the infamous note was folded and stuck in the wallet of its unknown owner.

It is assumed that the note never circulated throughout England but made the journey back to the United States when the war in Europe was over; all this time in the comparative safety of its owner's wallet.

In 1976 it surfaced in a house on Birdcliffe Road in the City of Woodstock, in New York State according to Carol Allen who said, "During March 1976, my husband and I and our three children, went to live in Woodstock, N.Y. During our three years there I took a tailoring course and the lady instructor gave me an English one pound note and a few old coins dating back to the Second World War, thinking I might like to have them since I was English. She told me they were her husband's who was now dead, and that the men in his Squadron signed the note when he left the squadron. She gave them to me in a little box, the type you might buy jewelry in from the jewelers.

"Then during 1979/80, the little box went missing, that was after we returned to England. I just assumed that one of my children had either taken it to school to show his teacher and lost it; or to show his friends and lost it but on questioning them, they said they hadn't." The one pound note was definitely lost."

On 7 June 1982, a Mr. Jack H.L. Hamlin, DFC, contacted the editor of Air Mail, the Journal of the Royal Air Forces Association in London and said, "A friend of mine has recently bought a miscellaneous collection of foreign stamps. Among these was a one pound note covered with signatures. It bears the date, 'October 1943, 303rd Bomb Group,' which vaguely suggests that it applied to an RAF unit. Would you please insert an enquiry in Air Mail in an endeavour to trace any of these chaps who care to contact me."

Carol Allen back in England saw Mr. Hamlin's article in Air Mail and contacted him. She was curious to find out if it was her one pound note that had been found because it seemed too much of a coincidence not to be but how it came to be lost is still a mystery to her.

At this juncture, Lady Luck stepped in. Two ex-RAF members who saw the notice in their Journal came up with some positive ideas. A Mr. Anthony Biggs, then living in Yonkers, in New York in December of 1982, and a member of the 8th Air Force Historical Society was able to relate the 303rd Bomb Group to the U.S. 8th AF and of course the date in 1943 when the note was signed. He wrote to Mr. Hamlin and told him to contact Joseph Vierera in Hollywood, Florida.

Mr Eric Smith, the other ex-RAF living in Essex, England, forwarded a copy of the article that appeared in the journal to Joseph Vieira in Florida with the suggestion that the answer to the puzzle lies in the United States. It is fortunate that at that time Joe Vieira was an officer in the 303rd Bomb Group Association and John Hendry was a member of the Association. Joe forwarded Eric Smith's letter with the Air Mail insert to John Hendry.

In June 1986 Eric Smith was notified that indeed one of the signers of the well traveled one pound note had been found. John Hendry had been located in Jacksonville, Florida.

The Hendry family has the missing pound note. It is unfortunate that Jack Hamlin never lived to realize that he was instrumental in finding a signer of the note. But the mystery still remains. Who was the original owner of the note who lived on Birdcliffe Road in Woodstock, New York?

# My most unusual 303rd experience

## Target: Merseberg! "nuff said"

My most memorable remembrance of my time spent with "Hell's Angels" 303rd Bomb Group, 427th Bomb Sqdn., would be what proved to be my 14th and final bombing mission. I had intended sending this story to Carlton Smith after reading the "One Way Trip for Miss Lace" by Robert Krohn that appeared in the Hell's Angels Newsletter in January 1993. But I started treatments that put me in the hospital for major surgery, followed by three more hospital visits for more surgery that kept me out of action for a few years.

Our plane for this mission to Merseberg, Germany, 24 Aug. '44, happened to be "Miss Lace." We had a full flight of 12 planes from the 427th and joined the other groups to fly in at 35,000 feet (our highest mission to date) and that in itself seemed to be a good sign. Looking out to the rear of our formation, I saw a B-17 quite a distance behind, and I called to our tail gunner to check and see if he could make out the markings and whether she might be in trouble. As far as he could tell, she seemed to be flying at the same speed and altitude. However, as we approached the I.P., he called back to say she was peeling off. This confirmed our suspicions that the Germans had captured one of our B-17s, repaired it, and used it to fly behind our formation and call in our air speed and altitude to the anti-aircraft batteries on the ground, thus providing perfect accuracy.

We started on the bomb run when all hell broke loose. I had my hand on the gun control arm to press the intercom button to tell our pilot I was opening the bombbay doors when I saw our lead plane take a direct hit (we were deputy lead) and blow apart, scattering pieces of the plane and bodies - saw one with his hand on the handle of his chest pack chute, others with chutes open.

I felt our plane lurch and a funny feeling on my arm and hand. I looked over to see my ring finger on my right hand missing and pieces of shrapnel in my hand. Due to low temperatures (probably about 60 degrees below zero), there was no feeling yet.

We continued our run and I dropped my bombs, closed the bombbay doors, called the pilot and told him, "Let's head for home right now!" As we started back I got a call from our waist gunner, Charlie, telling me he had been hit. Since one of my extra duties was first aid officer, I asked him if Jarvis, our radio man, could handle it since I had a little problem myself. He assured me it wasn't serious and I didn't have to come back.

By this time I was bleeding all over the place, so I called our navigator to give me a hand. When I looked at him, he was shaking like a leaf. I looked where he had been sitting on the navigator's desk and noticed the gaping hole where the shrapnel had entered, right where the middle of his anatomy had been. But he had reached down at just the right time to retrieve some maps and papers and it probably saved his life. We must have made quite a pair with my one hand and his shaky ones as we dumped all the sulfa powder on my shot-up hand, then bandaged it 'til it looked like I was hiding a boxing glove.

We got back over the coast without any fighter plane encounters and headed for our home base at Molesworth. When you have wounded aboard, you fire off red flares for landing priorities. That day every plane was firing flares! The first plane to land was really in bad shape; two engines out, the third one going out on landing, and the fourth and final engine quitting when he hit the runway; most of the stabilizer tail section was out; there was a hole in the wing that you could crawl through and a monstrous hole in the fuselage where one crew member was killed and another lost a leg. They told me afterwards that they just hooked what was left of the plane to a tow vehicle and took it straight to the junk yard.

Our plane came in for a landing with our hydraulic system shot out so we were off the runway going through a field with an ambulance chasing after us. If it hadn't been of such a serious nature, it probably would have looked like a Keystone Cop comedy with all the planes going off in different directions, chased by ambulances.

The final toll was: one plane blown

up over the target with 10 casualties (actually two got out); one plane home but destroyed with two casualties; the remaining 10 planes of the 427th with at least 100 holes in each and 23 wounded taken to the 303rd station hospital. The good part was that my crew went on to finish their tour in "Miss Lace" and returned to their states before I did.

## Lt. Charles W. Ziesche (427) Bombardier

*Ed. Note: The navigator in the 427th's lead aircraft was also wounded in the arm with blood sputtering all over the nose of their aircraft. In this case, it was the bombardier who became the first-aid administrator. Unfortunately, I believe you went over the target at 25,000 feet - not 35,000, as stated.*

## A memorable mission!

My last raid was memorable in that it was a terrible fiasco. On 6/25/43 we were Hamburg bound to join the Brits in demolishing it. I was with Capt. Roller and we were leading the high squadron. Bill Cline, our original copilot, was now flying our wing with his own crew. As I recall we were in bad soup shortly after take-off, which was compounded by serious contrails as we got higher. Then we began to lose visual contact with others. Our wingmen stuck tight and we finally broke through, and guess what? Our three-ship flight was in!

They were not shooting at us very much so we chugged along over a solid undercast as far as the eye could see. At last we joined up with

Capt. Billy Southworth of the 427th Sqdn.; he had 35 ships with him. We couldn't see the ground so somebody decided to go home. Then we had a nice running fight with "Jerry" for quite sometime. I finally saw the island of Baltrum in the Frisians and made a quick bomb run - six ships together dodging in and out of the clouds. Don't know if we did any damage other than plowing sand and I never could find out. Our six got home together and the rest of the formation straggled home in two's and three's.

The 8th AF lost 18 aircraft to no avail. Anyway, when we landed, Bob Yonkman, our bombing officer, met me at the plane with a big drink of rum. I had made it through the war.

You know, time distorts; you should get Jack Roller's version of this mission.

## John R. Shoup (359) Bombardier

*Ed. Note: John Shoup, Jack Roller and Bill Cline were part of one of the original crews that came over to Molesworth in October of 1942. Their original aircraft was the "Knockout Dropper," the first B-17 to reach 75 missions in the ETO.*

## A few unusual missions!

On a mission to Nurnburg we were hit hard and fell from around 28,000 to 18,000 feet. Number three engine was on fire. The navigator, Lt. Trieges, left the nose to go up with Lts. Leach and Olson. I was ordered to stay in the nose and give reports





# Experiences were varied and came in different packages

on the fire. I figured if that prop fell towards the fuselage, I would have my own plane. When the engine burned out, the prop fell and thankfully it went straight down.

On another mission, after dropping my eight 250-pounders, the red light would not go out. The bomb bay doors would not close, so I unhooked my oxygen and hooked my mask to a walk-around bottle and made my way back to the bomb bay. I discovered one bomb did not release. Standing on a walk about six inches wide with a great view of the mountains, I held on with one hand and released the bomb with the pliers held in my other hand. I went back to the nose, went back on oxygen and closed the bomb bay doors. The red light went out.

Those were about the most unusual missions, plus going to Berlin twice and seeing our share of the flak.

**Johnny W. Psota (358)**  
**Togglier**

## Mid-air collision!

During my crew's combat tour at Molesworth, we had several exciting experiences, all of which were thankfully rather mild. We lost an engine over the target; we had to abort because of a sheared propeller shaft; we had to land without a tailwheel when the worm gear was damaged by flak; we ran off the runway when landing because the hydraulic line between the brake pedal and the wheels had been damaged by flak; we landed at English bases on several occasions because of low gas, and we had a bomb snag in the bomb bay over the target, which we had to kick out. But "the most unusual experience" as witnessing the collision of two B-17s on the 1/21/45 mission to Aschaffenburg, Germany (described on pages 636-7 of the fine book "Might in Flight.")

We were flying on Tasker's left wing, and I was consciously observing the situation before and at the time of the collision. Duffield, the squadron leader, let his IAS increase to about 160 mph in the left turn. Upon completion of the turn, he immediately reduced his air-speed, and Tasker was slow to react. Consequently, Tasker's plane moved forward until he was nose to nose directly under Duffield's plane. In an apparent effort to slow down, Tasker put down some flaps and the lift raised his plane into contact with Duffield's. While I had been watching this entire event develop right in

front of me, the actual collision was unexpected. My first realization of the seriousness of the situation was when a landing gear wheel from one of the planes nearly hit my right wing; my instant reaction was to peel off to the left, so both planes were on their way down by the time I saw them again.

Since we generally expected that everyone involved in the collision had perished, my tail gunner, Howard F. O'Neal, was surprised to encounter Tasker's tail gunner, A.H. Driver, on the ship when returning to the U.S. a few months later. Witnessing two B-17s colliding in mid-air only a few hundred or so feet ahead of you certainly qualifies as an "unusual experience."

Most often I flew plane 608E which I named "Lucille," after my wife of a few months.

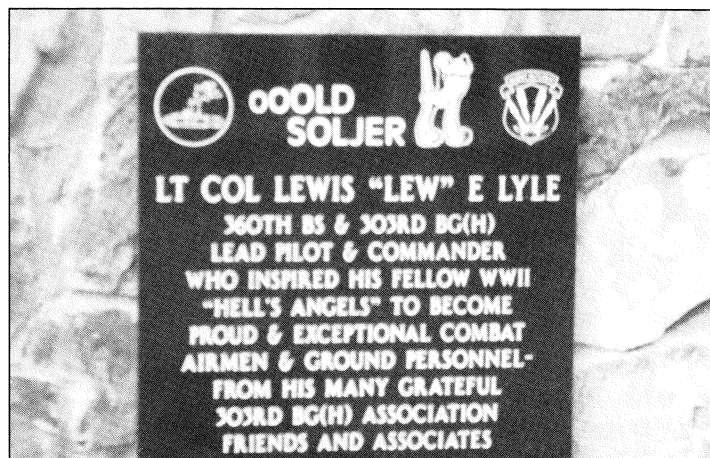
**John s. Proffitt, Jr. (359)**  
**Pilot**

*Ed. Note: Actually, there were two survivors to the collision. Lt. J.C. Flemmons, a bombardier on Lt. Duffield's crew, also survived the collision and became a POW.*

## Luck or skill?

Hullar's crew (our crew) was a very lucky crew. We all did our 25 missions and went home. We did have our troubles but always managed to get back to Molesworth, except for the one time we ditched on our way back from Stuttgart on 9/6/43 in "Old Squad." The first Schweinfurt mission was our second combat mission. We were very lucky to complete that one. But our luck held out. We ditched on our sixth mission, as stated above. We also flew the second Schweinfurt mission and was very lucky to get back from that one. Our plane "Lucious Lady" was badly shot up and had to be partially repaired on the base before she could be sent to the repair depot.

We went to Bremen, Germany, about five times. Hated that target. Had trouble every time. On Jan. 5, 1944, we went to Kiel, Germany. We took off in the dark that morning and one of our planes and a plane from Kimbolton hit head-on right under us. The concussion knocked down two more planes and damaged one of our engines. We pushed on to Kiel leading three green crews. We couldn't keep up with any group, but managed to latch onto one group, then another. On the way back from the target, we were jumped by a lot of FW-190s but about the time that things got serious, a group of P-51s



came along and drove them off. We flew our 25th mission, Feb. 20, 1944, to Bernberg, Germany, but had to abort and got credit for an abortive sortie. Lucky again. No one in our crew was killed or wounded - eight of us finished on the same mission and the other two later. (On Schweinfurt, our crew credited with one kill (mine), two damaged and one probable.)

After I was in the States for awhile, I asked for a transfer to B-25s and flew 14 missions in B-25 Gunships in Asiatic-Pacific area; skip bombing and strafing Japanese ships and airfields and oil refineries in Indo-China and Formosa.

**Merlin D. Miller (427)**  
**Tail Gunner**

## "Henn's Revenge"

On Jan. 22, 1945, on our 30th mission on Sterkrade, I was injured. We had flown in intense flak for 20 minutes, and during this time a piece ripped into the tail section cutting through my flak helmet and leather helmet, knocking away my oxygen mask. I was immediately unconscious and as I slumped forward, the oxygen mask miraculously swung back into place, thus saving my life until crew members could come to my aid. We made it back to Molesworth and I was immediately taken to the hospital, where a leading neurosurgeon performed surgery. A good sized piece of flak had entered my skull just above my right ear, resting precariously close to delicate brain tissue. The surgeon removed the flak and placed a titanium plate over the injured skull.

I experienced severe paralysis of my entire left side as a result of the injury. After several weeks of recovery and therapy in England, my mobility improved. Later I was sent to DeWit Hospital in Auburn, CA, for

more rehab before being discharged in May.

A partial paralysis on my left side remained a factor all my life, leaving me with no sensitivity in my fingers and weakness of arm and leg muscles. I'm grateful to God for sparing my life when my oxygen mask swung back in place and for having such a great crew, whose friendship and concern supported me all my days.

(Wife's notes - "Tom became a teacher and school administrator whose life touched countless others. He influenced young lives and was a popular leader in our community. He was a natural athlete, and in spite of his handicap, excelled in tennis, skiing and golf. He loved life, music, nature, friends and family.)

**Thomas Henn (358)**  
**Tail Gunner**

*Ed. Note: The crew later named B-17 #44-8427 "Henn's Revenge" in honor of the wounded tail gunner.*

## RHIP including golf!

I volunteered on a mission to Norway to destroy the "heavy water" operation at the command of Germany. This was the start of nuclear warfare. The day before the mission, my commander canceled me because he was on another mission and I was to take his place while he was gone. I am able to write this today because the aircraft and crew that made the flight was shot down by German fighters.

The unusual part of my assignment came after recovering from a bad case of the flu. The doctor released me after a few weeks, but did not allow any high altitude flights. I managed somehow to end up with an old twin engine British airplane with the task of flying generals to Scotland to play golf. At that time I was a fair golfer, but I could not leave

# *The unexpected experiences are the ones that you relive*

the aircraft on the small airport because the Germans could knock it down for good. (My wife and I played golf at St. Andrews in Scotland on the 4th of July 1976.)

**Peter L.M. Packard (358/360)**  
**Pilot**

*Ed. Note: Since the 303rd had no general officers assigned, Maj. Packard must have been on special assignment during the golfing expeditions.*

## **A bogus B-17**

On a mission over Denmark, all of a sudden a B-17 joined us and flew alongside of us. The plane had no markings and we waved to them and it disappeared as fast as it had come. All of a sudden we were shot at from the ground and we received many hits. The plane was an enemy plane and had flown with us to get our altitude. We were lucky we didn't get shot down. The plane was a B-17 which had probably been fixed up by the Nazis.

**Irving Libert (360)**  
**RO/Gunner**

## **A medley of experiences!**

Our crew (Lt. E. S. Harrison's) was extremely blessed to have survived our missions. In part it was due to the skill of our pilots and co-pilots, and a large part in the skill, work and dedication of the ground crews to prepare the plane for combat missions. Everyone knew that once over enemy territory there could be no safe turning back to get something repaired. It gave one a secure feeling to look out and see all four engines turning after having fighter attacks, flak, and very cold weather, to contend with. So in a way the ground crews had a big part in our survival.

On the Jan. 5, 1944 raid to Kiel, Germany, before we had reached Denmark, our supercharger controls wouldn't work properly, so we aborted the mission. The pilot and navigator turned the plane and followed a signal on the radio compass that was supposed to bring us straight back to England. We had let down to 4,000 feet, and after a short time some one spotted islands off to the left, and we were heading right into them. (I don't think the Navigator or pilot had heard about how the Germans learned how to bend radio beams). As we started to come over the islands, it was the impression of the pilot and navigator that it was the Wash on England's east coast. It was my belief that it couldn't be the Wash for two reasons: first, we hadn't flown

long enough to reach the Wash and second, land was on our left not on our right. The pilot asked me if the I.D. set was turned on and was it working? And I replied, "yes" No sooner had we come inland, a battery of 12 88 mm flak guns opened up. First four bursts were close, then four more closer and so on. Some one said, "We've got to turn and dive out of here, if we can." So the pilot turned sharply and dived down to the ocean with the plane just clearing the waves. As the flak gunners were tracking and firing at us out to sea, we were very lucky in that only the tail gunner got hit with flak. He had his flak helmet on, and it saved his life. After gaining some altitude, the pilot called me and told me we were lost, could I use my radio to get us back. I told him I could. So I tuned the radio to the direction finding station to get our position and a compass course. On the first transmission, I received back it was very loud

authentication numbers. He gave the right numbers. Then I asked the operator for our position and the magnetic heading to fly. So once we had our position and a magnetic heading to fly and it wasn't too long before we reached England and Molesworth.

January 11, 1944 on the Oschersleben mission we started out as a spare but due to an abortion, we filled the vacant spot and went on in even though the Engineer's headset wasn't working. By now it was too late to turn around. As soon as the 2nd and 3rd Division aircraft got their recall and turned around, the Luftwaffe started coming up through the clouds like a swarm of bees. Soon they attacked with the ferocity. On the way to the target, an enemy fighter hit a B-17 in front of us, and it blew up sending a wing toward us. The pilot had to dive to prevent colliding with the wing. I was standing at my gun position looking out of the radio hatch as the wing barely missed us going over the top

hose was so badly damaged that it was useless to me. One or two crew members started passing out. (I would take aim at a fighter and soon I couldn't see anything). Someone said, down below us is a small formation of crippled B-17s. The pilot asked if there were any fighters trying to make a pass at us. And we answered, "no." So he said hang on, we are going down to join them. We were able to make it down without being attacked. It felt good to be able to see and breathe again, as we were now down to about 17,000 feet. We made it back to England without being picked on by German fighters. But we could not locate Molesworth, due to the fog, and were instructed to proceed to Horsham St. Faith. So we headed in that direction. Soon the pilot said, "put on your parachutes and prepare to bail out," as we were running out of gas. The bomb bay doors were opened and I was just putting one foot on the catwalk and was disconnecting my heated suit cord and my mike, when someone said, "look down there at that opening in the clouds at 11:00 o'clock low, there is a B-24 base." The pilot said, "hang on, we are going down through that cloud opening." The bomb bay doors were closed and we went down through the hole in the clouds. The pilot brought the plane around in line with the runway and set it down. No sooner had we touched down, the engines stopped running and they had to get a tow tractor to pull us off the runway. All of you who flew on that mission know how lucky we felt to have made it back. We flew the plane #42-39885, "Sweet Rose O'Grady" and landed at Wengling. Some of the battle damage was No. 3 engine hit and feathered, the two oxygen lines cut, the radio room damaged by the ammo coming out of the boxes and flying around due to the evasive action.

Easter Sunday, 9 April 1944. Mission to Marienburg. In briefing we were to fly our regular assigned plane, "The Spirit of Flak Wolf." We had started putting in our guns, when an Operation's Officer came with Lt. McGarry's crew and told us that we were to fly #42-3158 "Max" this day instead. We grumbled about the change as we had the guns about in, and besides it was our assigned airplane that we had been flying. But, off we rushed to get the other airplane ready, as take-off time was fast approaching. We had barely finished when the taxi flare was shot up. We took off alright, but Lt. McGarry and

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*... So, I became suspicious.*

*I again called the D.F. station  
using its call sign.*

*And again the operator answered  
giving me a heading, which as yet  
I hadn't asked for.*

*So I challenged the operator...*

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and clear, and a heading was given to me. The heading he gave me was unrealistic to what it should have been. And it was too strong a signal for being over the channel area. So I became suspicious. I again called the D.F. station using its call sign. And again the operator answered giving me a heading, which as yet I hadn't asked for. So I challenged the operator. He came back with the right numbers. Again I challenged asking for a different set of numbers. Again he gave the right ones, and a heading. Once again I asked for another set of numbers. This time they were wrong. So then there was no doubt in my mind that it was a German radio operator, using our D.F. station call letters, trying to get us to turn back over Holland, so they could shoot us down. (Later we decided we had come in over the Frisian Islands.) I kept trying to reach our D.F. station, and soon very weakly I heard the station. I asked the radio operator for the

of the plane. As we started on our bomb run a flak burst came close sending a chunk of metal hitting and cutting one oxygen line. So that left half of the crew without oxygen, including me. I got down on my knees hunting up my walk around oxygen bottle, which had fallen down into the supercharger control compartment along with a case or two of loose 50 cal. ammo. (The plywood had come off the top of the ammo box due to evasive action taken to distract the fighters aim) While down on my knees, pulling out my oxygen bottle, a FW-190 at three o'clock high came in and put a 20mm or machine gun bullet through the radio room cutting the other oxygen line and hitting number 3 engine. The pilot was able to feather the prop. If they were 20mm shells they didn't explode. Had I been standing holding my 50 cal. machine gun, the projectile would have hit me. We began losing our eyesight for lack of oxygen. My spare oxygen bottle

# Now is the time to document your experiences!



Lt. Harrison's crew-December 1943 (back row l to r) E. J. Biedinski (B), Stephen Bastean (CP), Emmitt Harrison (P) Walter Kurnick (N). (Front row l to r) A.S. Burkett (TG), L. O. Volmer (R/G) K.L. Hawk (WG) J. Dye (BT), K.W. Campbell (WG) J.P. Rombach (E)

his crew crashed on take off in "The Spirit of Flak Wolf," killing six of the crew. Afterwards we wondered, if battle orders hadn't been changed, this might have happened to us.

6 June 1944, Invasion Day. I had finished my missions on May 28th, on the Glide Bomb mission to Cologne. I was still assigned to the 427th Sqdn. All the crews had taken off for France, when a pilot came into the barracks and asked me if I would be his radio operator, as he wanted to fly down and have a look at the invasion. I told him I would. So off we flew to the invasion coast in the tow target B-17. When we arrived there it was so cloudy and foggy that all we could barely see was a few ships firing at the French coast, and flights of B-17s going in. So the pilot turned around and headed for Molesworth. At the time I didn't realize how close we came of being shot down by our own group. One gunner told me afterwards that he almost opened fire on the tow target airplane, as in briefing, they were given orders to shoot down any airplane that wasn't in formation, and had markings that wasn't up to date, and acting like it might be a captured B-17 being used by the Germans. Needless to say, no mission credit was given for this flight. As I recall (after 52 years) the crew consisted only of a high ranking pilot, co-pilot, navigator and a radio operator. But there might have been more but I can't remember any of their names.

**Lawrence Volmer (427)**  
Radio Operator

## "OJT ing"

In the spring of 1942 I was stationed at what is now called Edwards Air Force Base. The 303rd had a detachment from Boise, ID, there for

training. I got information that they needed personnel. I walked over and got an interview. The Officer asked me what I knew about B-17s. I said "nothing." He said good; now we can teach you what we want you to know. That's how I got into the 303rd. Stayed 'til the end of the war.

I had no schooling by the military on aircraft. It was "on the job," but I had men like M/Sgt. Yaniga, M/Sgt. Mintz, M/Sgt. Osiecki and M/Sgt. Helton that had faith in me. They gave me the time and opportunity to get ahead. I also became the youngest Crew Chief in the 359th and was awarded the Bronze Star. I was the Crew Chief on "Lucille" that Lt. Col. Dick Cole claimed as his plane. I made a career out of the Air Force and of all the outfits I was in, none ever came close to the 303rd. I'm proud to have been a part of it.

**Joe B. Strange (359)**  
Crew Chief

## Merited luck!

Our first mission with the 303rd was on Feb. 26, 1943 to submarine pens in the Netherlands. Our radio operator passed out and because of inexperience we left the formation and was immediately attacked by seven FW-190s. We got back but luck was with us- a lesson was learned on mission number one.

On Feb. 17, 1943 while flying locally on a training mission our barracks (4 crew officers) burned to the ground; all we saved was what we had on our backs. We had to start from scratch to replace uniforms, supplies and personal items. Tough time!

Luck was with us on March 18, 1943. Returning from Vegesack, shot up and low on fuel our plane engines lost power at approximately 600 feet

while we were approaching Molesworth. All we could do (pilot and co-pilot) was to land wheels up, straight ahead. We hit a plowed field with no trees or dwellings. The plane was totaled, but we had no injuries. Just one of those times that luck and the "One" above was with us..

**Walter Swanson (360)**  
Co-Pilot

## "Grapefruits" for Cologne

On 28 May 1944, we delivered "grapefruits" to Cologne, Germany. This was classified as a highly secret mission. I remember it well

We were called to briefing about 0800 hours. This was later than the usual briefing. They were usually around 0300 or 0400. We were going to carry "grapefruits" to Cologne, Germany. No, not the round yellow juicy ones, but large 2,000 pounders with wings attached. A single wing about 20 feet long was attached to the top of the bomb. Two 4" x 4" beams ran along the side of the bomb and about 4 feet to the rear ending in a tail assembly. Control rods ran from the tail to a gyroscope control unit placed a bit forward. It looked like a large glider. This is what it was. Two of these glider bombs were placed in the wing racks on each ship. One bomb was slung under each wing. Three airfields (41st CBW crews) were participating in this experimental mission. Weather was predicted to be perfect. We had been turned back on a previous occasion because of a slight change in the wind. We did not want a recall. We wanted to get rid of these "grapefruits." We were three small groups, about 20 planes in a group. With only 60 planes in our immediate air space, the sky seemed empty. At the North Sea our fighter escort met us. It would have been difficult for any bandits to have challenged us this day. Fighter escort was below us and above us. Everywhere you looked, there was fighter escort, 47s, 51s and 38s. It was apparent that General Doolittle didn't want the Germans to get a good look at our gifts. We crossed France struggling for altitude.

Our target was the Eifeltor Marshalling Yard in Cologne. About 20 miles from the city was a road running north and south. This was to be our dropping point. Spotting the road in the distance, we started a shallow dive. Air speed built up quickly. The old lady began vibrating. Noise increased as George eased her up to the speed required for releasing the "grapefruit." My ball turret was whistling. Hank, our bombardier called "bombs away." Away they went. They

dropped about 300 or 400 feet straight down, straightened up and began gliding in a zig zag course. Some of our bombs must have gotten their gyros dumped. Some went into tight nose down spins. Some went into flat spins and some did acrobatics. It was quite a show; a show reserved for some sixty ball turret gunners. We made a turn to the right and headed back to England. Bursts of flak were beginning to appear over Cologne. I do not know why. They had seen us coming and had seen us turn back. They could not have thought that those few bursts of flak had scared us off. They kept putting it up. P-38s were swooping in taking all kinds of pictures of the "grapefruits." It was great, get within 20 miles of your target, drop your bombs, turn around and head for home. Not a burst of flak within miles.

From the ball turret, I kept my eyes on the city of Cologne. We had been headed homeward for almost five minutes when I saw the first explosion. A giant burst of flame and smoke leaped skyward from one section of the city. A geyser of water leaped from the river running through the city. It must have been a half mile high to have been seen from such a distance at such clarity. We probably killed a few fish with that one. Explosions were seen in many sections of the city. I counted 18 explosions before the city passed from view. Later hearsay was that approximately 35 bombs had glided into the city. One of the "grapefruits" had clipped the great Cologne Cathedral. We heard that the Cathedral damage wasn't too extensive.

The "grapefruits" were put away and not used again, to my knowledge. They were not accurate enough for these "pin-point" experts of the Eighth Air Force. It was a new experience.

**G.E. Bale (359)**  
Ball turret gunner

*Ed. Note: 1,341 aircraft of the 8th AF bombed the marshalling yards at Cologne that day. The 60 "grapefruit" aircraft was just a small force. I visited the Cologne Cathedral in 1993. The damage to that magnificent structure was minor a testimony to the accuracy of the US bombing when you consider how close it was to the marshalling yards.*

## Correction

Regarding "My most unusual experience" in the May 1997 Newsletter, my story "Happy Birthday Dear Doris" has two mistakes. My name is James H. Fisher and the date that I was shot down was 29 April 1944.

**James H. Fisher**

# Experiences were fantastic and bizarre but never dull!

## Airborne medic

It was the 27th of December 1944. We were feeling good about it all. The crew of M.M. Stiver had a successful trip over the railyards at Euskirchen. There were no enemy flak and no fighters, therefore no matter that there were also no escorting P-51s. This was our fourth bombing raid and the first time we had seen Germany, much less the target. Our three previous trips had been over 10/10ths cloud cover. Our navigator was kneeling beside me with maps in hand and giving us a Cooks' Tour of Germany. His father had been in WW I and Leon recognized the names of some of those battle sites that we were now approaching.

Suddenly all hell broke loose as the front-line German gunners began firing at us and hitting us. Our path out of Germany had taken us too near to the point of attack of Hitler's winter offensive which was now beginning. The waist gunner, Bob Wilson, reported that he had been hit in the leg; shortly a report of bandits in the area; everyone else untouched; Bob asking for help; it all happened so fast. The pilot was sending me to help but I suggested the navigator since I would be needed on the guns with enemy fighters around. Stiver reminded me that he would be needed to layout the shortest way back to base. I had to agree, so with shaking hands I reluctantly attached the portable oxygen tank and made my way through the now empty bombbay and the radio room to assist Bob. He had been hit behind the knee and it seemed to me he bled profusely. I managed to cut the flying suit so that I could apply a tourniquet to stop the bleeding knowing full well that he was going to die any minute. I soon realized that I had been out of touch with the crew so I unplugged his headset since I felt he would be better off not hearing. By now he was in severe pain and I realized I had not yet administered morphine. I took out a vial and immediately broke the frozen needle. Remembering the training I then placed two vials under my arm pit and in due time successfully injected one into the calf of his leg. We had been warned about leaving the tourniquet too long so periodically I released the pressure and each time he would yell in pain. It finally dawned on me that I had applied the morphine below the tourniquet. I managed to cut away some more of the suit and get a shot above the restriction.

Everything else was going for the better. No enemy fighters appeared so we left the formation at the coast and rapidly descended below the need for oxygen. At last I divested myself of the portable tank that seemed to be always in the way. The radio operator came to my assistance and also administered moral support to us which I sorely needed. The plane, though badly laced with shrapnel, was not severely damaged. The navigator got us to Molesworth long ahead of the Group and the emergency crews were ready and waiting when our wheels stopped rolling. There were 168 flak holes patched, we were told.

Bob never flew again but he also never regained complete use of his leg. He frequently used a cane but he was able to go into the construction business with his father-in-law in West Virginia. He and his wife had a child each year for the next five or six. Several times during those years I told him he survived in spite of me - not because of me.

I'm well aware that this situation was not so unique. Many times during the next few months I was far more severely frightened, but that fourth mission is burned in my memory forever.

**Basil D. Hight, Jr. (360)**  
**Bombardier**

## Fortunate

I flew 34 missions with the 359th and on 19 April 1945 was transferred to the 427th Sqdn. I flew no combat missions with the 427th. I was scheduled to fly one on 25 April 1945. As I recall I had just returned from pass to London and was alerted that I was to fly with Lt. Mauger on that mission. A Navigator, named Knox came and asked if he could fly in my place on the evening of April 24th. He was eager to fly missions because his father was ill in the U.S. and he wanted to get home quickly. I told him that if he could square it with the squadron, it would be fine with me. He arranged it and flew in my place to Pilsen, Czechoslovakia on what would have been my 35th mission. Lt. Mauger and the crew were shot down. Lt. Knox apparently survived but the bombardier was KIA.

My most unusual experience was not going on what was to be the last mission the 8th AF flew in Europe and not being shot down on my 35th mission.

**Glenn V. Hudson (359&427)**  
**Navigator**

## Bravo!

My most unusual experience or achievement was being Commanding Officer of the 303rd Bombardment Group (H) for 14 months.

**Kermit D. Stevens (303rd)**  
**Commanding Officer**

## Left or right?

I do not remember the exact mission or date but while we were over the target, the flak was heavy and my ball turret operator called to inform me that we had been hit in the left wheel well and he was sure that the tire was blown. Upon returning I reported this to the tower and was told to wait until all the other planes had landed. All the usual firetrucks, ambulances, etc., were in the ready. As I came in to land, I kept the left wing high so not to put any weight on the left wheel. I made the two point landing OK but immediately we took off to the right. It was then that I realized it was the right tire that was blown instead of the left. It was too late then for any corrections so I just continued across the field until I came to a cross runway where I stopped. No damage was done except the tire. Before I got the engines shut off, a staff car came roaring up and there was Col Stevens who yelled out the car window, "If you can't fly the damn thing get the Hell out of it." I could see he was laughing, so I knew he was not serious. We figured out later that the ball turret operator was facing the rear of the plane which put the right wheel on his left side. Needless to say he took quite a ribbing from the rest of the crew.

**Deane L. Barnes (427)**  
**Pilot**

## "Halt! Who goes there?"

Night guard duty; mid March 'til June 5, 1944. Rumored that German Airborne units might try to neutralize some 8th AF bases at the time of the coming invasion. Some of us - about 25 - who worked the 4-12 shift were chosen to stay over the rest of the night in bunks that were set up in the hangar. We were issued Thompson sub-machine guns, with three loaded clips. Since most of us were unfamiliar with this weapon, we all had a brief course at a target range. Some fun.

**Neil J. Svare (444th S.D.)**  
**Mos 555 - Sheet metal**

## "Thru Hel'en Hiwater"

Saturday, April 22, 1944, Mission #139, Railyards at Hamm, Germany. Takeoff time 16:30. In the vicinity of Werl, Germany was hit by flak behind No. 2 engine and fuel cell, causing an inferno. I helped Ray Brim, ball turret gunner out, as he started out the door, he fell. As I was pushing him out the door, the fuselage separated at the waist door and I was thrown against the tail wheel, rapped in control cables. As I freed myself I floated out as the tail was falling guns down. Made a successful parachute jump landing in a tree over a deep rocky gulch, too high to drop. As I hung there, two Me-109s came at me, the leader was low at my level. As he passed me, he waved. I can still see his face. He had a mustache. I slid down the tree trunk and walked over the hill and met H.E. Levy, the navigator. He had a bruised leg. Did not get captured 'til Monday morning. Then we got separated. But we both made it back home.

**Everett E. Culp (358)**  
**Radio Operator**



Molesworth, October 1943. 303rd B-17 with glide bomb hung underneath. Code name for project was "Grapefruits for Cologne."



# DITCH IN TIME SAVES NINE

We had begun our missions over Germany, June 11, 1943 with Wilemshaven, our primary target. We were veterans of 33 days of this air combat of which there was no history or example of this type of warfare, unique in its experience, even to this date. We were roused on July 14, 1943 at about 4:30 a.m., and after breakfast were briefed to bomb a German aircraft assembling and repair facility in Villacoublay, France about 14 miles South of Paris. It was Bastille Day for the French, a holiday, so we could bomb away with a lot less fear of killing our French Allies and the factory idle.

We went over the target at 21,500 feet, loaded with 500 pound demolition bombs to destroy any and all of the material and factory. We were 116 at the time we left England, 101 reached the IP (initial point of the bomb run), and 96 hit the target area about 8:10 that morning, and this is where we got ours.

Flak took out one of our engines over the target, we dropped down a bit with this loss of power and the fighters hit; they got one more of our engines and reduced another one to less than 50 percent power. We were on the way down, dropping 1,000 feet a minute with about 90 miles to the coast. But we made the coast, ditched about nine miles

off France and 60 plus miles from England. By this time we were being covered by Spitfires and Hurricanes and a PT boat was on its way. The PT boat arrived as the prison boat from Le Havre was about 300 yards away - saved by the tide. I think the two hours from the time you are first hit by enemy fire 'til the time you hit the water and rescued, are the longest minutes a man can stretch time into relativity.

We were in the English Channel about 1 1/2 hours when we were picked up. They gave us some hot rum, warm sweaters and delivered us to Exeter, England, where those English girls really knew how to greet the downed "heroes" when they return to the White Cliffs of Dover. The ship we ditched was the Memphis Blues, a sister ship to the Memphis Belle, of Hollywood fame. The pictures herein are first: our picture, the morning after our rescue on the South Coast of England. The other picture is of the same crew when we started to fly "Hell's Angels," our "new ship" which we flew until it was returned to the U.S. on a publicity and bond selling tour. The picture with "Hell's Angels" was made about July 20, 1943.

**James O. Matthews**  
715 President  
San Antonio, Texas 78216



Rescued after their Flying Fortress "Memphis Blues" ditched at sea nine miles from the French Coast after the July 14 raid on Paris, these crew members are: Front row, left to right, Sgts. Edward W. Griffin, James O. Matthews, Rudolph S. Lopez, and Edward Cobb. Standing: Lt. William H. Karraker, Lt. John R. Johnston, Sgt. James F. Mills, Lt. Calvin D. Swaffer and Lt. William F. Sweet.

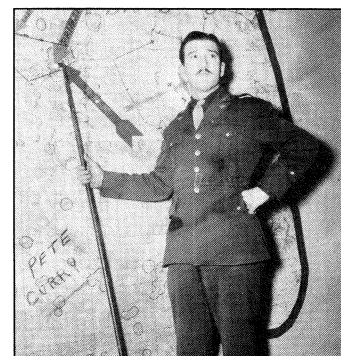
# THE S-2 STORY

Back in the war years S-2 designated the Intelligence Staff of a military unit. In the Headquarters building at Molwsworth, that staff occupied a room between S-1 (Personnel) in the front of the building and S-3 (Operations) in the rear. Across the street from the flagpole and just beyond an open field were the briefing rooms and the map room which were a part of the S-2 complex.

A typical S-2 staff of an 8th AF bomb Group consisted of the Group Intelligence Officer, the Group Photo Interpreter, a senior NCOIC, an NCO for the map room and the escape and evasion material as well as one or two additional NCOs. Supplementing this small crew were the Intelligence Officers and staff from the four combat squadrons who had desks in the Group office. Each squadron usually had two officers and four NCOs so there were adequate numbers to operate on a 24 hour basis. At first glance it might appear the organizational structure was contrary to effective management with personnel answering to both the S-2 officer and their squadron commander, but this was no hindrance to effective operation in the 303rd Bomb Group. Dedication to a common mission outweighed parochial ties. Duties were assigned and performed by mission functions rather than by squadron designation.

To walk through a typical mission, it would start with the receipt of the field order from Operations. The briefing officers would prepare their notes, maps, photos, and other material while the NCOs would post the routes on the maps, prepare the mission kits for the bombardiers and navigators, make up the escape and evasion kits and be ready to assist in the briefings. Usually there was a separate briefing for pilots, bombardiers, navigators and gunners. All would be advised of the importance of the target, flak and enemy fighter threats and recommended escape and evasion procedures. In addition, the S-2 briefing for bombardiers would include detailed target identification information and bomb run landmarks beginning at the Initial Point (IP).

When the aircraft returned from the mission, the S-2 personnel became interrogators. It was then their job to obtain as much information as possible from the physically tired crews who were often more anxious to hit the sack than talk about that from which they had just returned. It required tact and understanding yet a prodding for details which made



**Lt. Peter Curry**

up the required reports that were due in higher headquarters a few hours later. There was always a mission summary report which had to be compiled and very important for future operations was the flak report. The reports of crew comments and fighter claims were no less important.

As soon as the strike photos were received from the photo laboratory, the Photo Interpreter plotted the bomb patterns of each squadron, determining the centers of these patterns and comparing them to the assigned mean point of impact (MPI). From this, a degree of bombing accuracy (range and deflection) could be recorded. The last phase of the PI report was a damage assessment. The report was sent ASAP to the Group Commander, but it was also of much interest to the bombardiers and many made post-mission stops at the PI desk to review the photos. As the PI, I became close to many of the bombardiers, because of this common interest and it was natural for me to do the bombardier briefings and target identification classes. To upgrade my capabilities in this area, I flew missions in various positions of the aircraft and to various types of targets. I don't know what the S-2 Staff did in other Groups, but in the 303rd at least two of us "ground pounders" came home with Air Medals. I mention this not as an ego trip, but to illustrate the extent of dedication in a Group called the Hell's Angels.

Who were some of the names behind these desk jobs? As far as this writer can recall, they were: Majors Jesse Barrett, Claes Johnson, McMillan and Charles McQuaid; Capt. Joseph Robinson and Lts. Peter Curry, Tony Ficovich, David Fraser, Robert Shaw and Carlton Smith. Also M/Sgt. Karl Lamb, T/Sgt. Joseph Weinheimer, S/Sgts. George Christenson, Jerry Reddick, Joseph Schultz, Robert Thoma and Claude Whitson; Sgts. Milton Klabe and Howard Seidler; Cpls. Roy Buis and Rowland Eng.

## FROM THE MEMBERSHIP CHAIRMAN

Because we are continuing to receive numerous address changes from the Postal Service, we have decided to delay the publication of the new Membership Directory. The target date is now "sometime after the August Newsletter." I'm sorry if I misled you on an earlier publication.

As is always the case when we request address updates, we lose contact with some of our Life Members. Time has expired for forwarding the Newsletter to a new address, thus we end up with no valid address. Specifically, we have lost contact with the below listed. If you have a new and current address for them, please let me know so I can return them to the active roster and send their missing newsletters.

L1708 Frederick O. Blair

L1305 Charles W. Dunlap, Jr.

LA-365 Keith Wheeler

Correction to lists in the May '97 issue: Andrews B. Claster (not Claset) became a Life Member - LA-288. Paul R. Ellis (not Willis) died on 16 February 1997. H. Duane Litwiller (#1915) was omitted from the listing of Donations/Memorials. In Memorium - John L. (not R.) Olson.

Quentin Hargrove's \$100 memorial to Mel McCoy was accompanied by a letter expressing true friendship and admiration. Quent's ending comment was, "The King of Maintenance has gone, but his contribution will be around forever." I think we all confirm the comment.

The lists that follow are current as of 15 May 1997:

**Carlton M. Smith**

**12700 Red Maple Circle #54**

**Sonora, CA 95370-5269**

**209-533-4033**

## NEW MEMBERS

- L2013 Thomas E. Hatton, 15502 Prince Frederick Way, Silver Spring, MD 20906-1317 (359)  
 A-453 Peter Rozantes, 239 Sinsbury Rd, West Granby, CT 06090-1607  
 L2014 John M. Surrrell, 891 Sunlite Dr, Santa Clara, CA 95050-5164 (359)  
 A-454 William W. Duggan, 12120 SW 179th Ter, Miami, FL 33177-xxxx  
 L2015 Arthur C. Kraft, 10503 Trowbridge Ct, Fairfax, VA 22030-8102 (359)  
 LA-455 H. Ronald Welsh, 3219 First City Tower, Houston, TX 77002-6760  
 L2016 Alfred Slakish, 1225 High Rd, Kensington, NJ 06037-1914 (Unk Sqdn)  
 2017 Grover C Mullins, 112 Hill Dr, Windsor, MO 65360-1206 (358)  
 L2018 John B. Bielecki, 1742 W 64th St, Hialeah, FL 33012-6108 (359)  
 A-456 Henrietta S. Duke, 71 Lake View Dr, Williamsburg, KY 40769-2043  
 A-457 Nance B. Morris, PO Box 6067, Fernandina Beach, FL 32035-6067  
 2019 James M. Pierce, 1731 3rd Ave, Grinnell, IA 50112-2126 (358)  
 2020 Norman Genter, 11204 Valley Forge Towers, King of Prussia, PA 19406-xxxx (Unk Sqdn)  
 A-458 Erich S. Redhage, 702 Gardenia Ave, Royal Oaks, MI 48067-3649  
 L2021 Clifford L. Moore, Rt 2, Box 555B, Franklin, TX 77856-xxxx  
 A-459 Heidi Girman, 1931 Fullerton Dr, Indianapolis, IN 46214-xxxx  
 A-460 Scott Girman, 1607 Blaine Way, Indianapolis, IN 46254-xxxx  
 A-461 Martin H. Kulick, Rt 2, #443 RD 5, Carmel, NY 10512-xxxx

## ADDRESS CHANGES

- L1051 Harold J. Bach, 2065 Eagle Pointe, Bloomfield Hills, MI 48304-3807  
 L634 Clayton S. Balcombe, 200 N El Camino Real #206, Oceanside, CA 92054-1747  
 1712 Robert E. Black, 6541 W Alice Ave #CT7-69, Glendale, AZ 85302-4322  
 Widow Mrs. Irma Brackett, 4 Chafee Ln, Unionville, CT 06085-1403  
 Widow Mrs. Betty Brooks, PO Box 4023, Roanoke, VA 24015-0023  
 L1390 Burt J. Cardwell, 15701 Johnson Rd, Bakersfield, CA 93312-xxxx  
 L106 Oscar A. Deen, 390 Circulo La Cruz, Rohnert Park, CA 94928-1956  
 1252 James F. Fowler, PO Box 1069, Marion, SC 29571-1069  
 Widow Mrs. Alba Gray, 7428 Copper Crown Ct, Las Vegas, NV 89129-1728  
 L810 Fred H. Gruenberg, 1611 67th St NW, Minot, ND 58703-8817  
 A-449 John D. Hall IV, PSC 1, Box 1362, APO AE 09009-1362  
 1759 Arnold H. Hansen, 2320 Del Webb Blvd W, Sun City Center, FL 33573-xxxx  
 S385 Ralph S. Hayes, 20550 Falcons Landing Cir #5303, Sterling, VA 20165-3587

## ADDRESS CHANGES

- S278 William C. Heller, 972 Evening Dew Dr, Las Vegas, NV 89110-2925  
 L1352 Charles L. Herman, 1104 6th Ave N, Apt 213, Great Falls, MT 59401-1591  
 A-359 Sheri Jacobsen, 17730 Solberger Rd, Hillsboro, OR 97124-xxxx  
 L891 Alfred G. Kemmerer, 1204 N Halifax Ave, Daytona Beach, FL 32218-3657  
 A-101 William J. Luttrell, 475 E 900 S #205, Salt Lake City, UT 84111-4344  
 Widow Mrs. Viola M. Lynch, 15 Washington Ave, Avon By The Sea, NJ 07717-1422  
 128 Millard E. Mason, 320 Compton St, Apt D, El Cajon, CA 92020-xxxx  
 LA-367 Alan E. Mayer, PO Box 77, Morro Bay, CA 93443-0077  
 Widow Mrs. Laura Mc Mahan, Rt 1, Box 155A15, Paige, TX 78659-9725  
 Widow Mrs. Mable R. Stout Melton, 2347 Biggers Reyno Rd, Biggers, AR 72413-9715  
 LA-368 Robert W. Miller, 8535 E Baker Hill Rd, Apt K, Orange, CA 92869-5839  
 Widow Mrs. Barbara J. Minkowitz, 37 Pulford Rd, Sale, Cheshire, M33 3LR, England  
 L1948 Thomas H. Morrison, 204 Leaning Oak Ct, Chapin, SC 29063-2323  
 075 William E. Olson, PO Box 152, Emily, MN 56447-0152  
 L1032 Ralph E. Page, RR 3, Box 1134, Lancaster, VA 22503-9269  
 588 Thomas I. Peacock, 3 Sand Hill Rd, Salem, NH 03079-4301  
 L1930 William J. Polk, 3322 Wild Cherry Ridge W, Mishawaka, IN 46544-6901 (Only 1 May to 1 Oct)  
 LA-239 James E. Reeves 22481 Canyon Crest Dr, Mission Viejo, CA 92692-4548  
 1458 Rudolph T. Rendon, 535 W Main St, Port Lavaca, TX 77979-4039  
 S286 Robert J. Sorensen, PO Box 154, Walhalla, MI 49458-0154 (Only 1 June to 1 Sept)  
 A-315 Larry Stafford, 14733 Oak Run Ln, Burnsville, MN 55306-6449  
 S1550 Robert W. Thoma, 509 Route 530, Apt 133, Whiting, NJ 08759-3146  
 L871 Richard E. Wakefield, 25725 Sunnyvale Ln, Excelsior, MN 55331-8411  
 L1258 Franklin F. York, 748 Country Lane Dr, Greencastle, IN 46135-8898

## UPGRADE TO LIFE MEMBERSHIPS

- S2018 John B. Bielecki (359)  
 L1972 Harry V. Hosso (360)  
 L1645 Robert L. Johnson (3rd)

## DONATIONS / MEMORIALS

- 1792 G.E. Copeland (Unk Sqdn)  
 L1275 William W. Duggan (427)  
 A-286 Jeffrey A. Gilman  
 S344 Eugene E. Girman (359)  
 L410 Quentin W. Hargrove (HDQ) - Memorial to Mel Mc Coy  
 Widow Mrs. Frances M. Kasik - Memorial to Robert F. Kasik  
 A-379 Christopher G. Kelly  
 A-149 Michael A. Meister - Memorial Fund  
 Widow Mrs. Martha Redhage  
 A-387 Michael C. Uher  
 — Tara L. Walker

## DONATIONS / MEMORIALS

- 1760 George E. Anthony (427) - 6 May 1997  
 S740 Frederick E. Barnes (359) - 3 Jun 1997  
 L059 Charles J. Bonn (360) - 19 Apr 1997  
 L467 Morris Dimowitz (427) - Unk date  
 S732 Melvin T. McCoy (444) - 11 May 1997  
 L751 Arthur B. Middlemas (360) - 8 Jan 1997  
 1819 Bonnar P. Mc Mahan (427) - 25 May 1997  
 1816 William O. Murphy (427) - 17 Feb 1997  
 L643 S. Bus Schieving (359) - 20 Jan 1995  
 L763 Louis E. Speer (358) - Unk date  
 807 Arthur M. Stoy (360) - 30 Mar 1997  
 — John M. Tinklenberg (359) 2 May 1997  
 L482 Donald W. Torley (359) - 6 Mar 1997



Lew and Bety Lyle in the Lewis E. Lyle Rotunda dedicated on May 13 at The Mighty 8th Air Force Heritage Museum. (see page 7)



Historian Harry Gorbrecht displays his crew's memorial plaque which will hang in the Memorial Gardens at the 8th AF Heritage Museum in Savannah. Individual and crew plaques can be ordered through the Museum. Harry also reminds us that the second edition of *Might in Flight* due out in late fall can be ordered by filling out the coupon on page 9 of this issue. Other interesting items in this issue include the review of the inner workings of the "S-2" section by Carlton Smith, the 303rd's ace photo interpreter; the English One pound note that originated in October of '43 and has spent the past 50 years spanning the Atlantic as the proud possession of a number of people but its original owner is still unknown. Also included in this, the 43rd issue put out by Editor Hal Susskind are five pages of unusual experiences endured by members of the 303rd who lived to tell about them.

**303rd Bomb Group (H) Association, Inc.**  
c/o Hal Susskind  
2602 Deerfoot Trail  
Austin, Texas 78704-2716



Air Force Heritage Day which saluted two former members of the 303rd Bomb Group - Lt. Col. Irl Baldwin and John Hagar - was celebrated at RAF Molesworth on May 14, 1997. It was also the 54th Anniversary of the raid on the submarine pens at Kiel, Germany which was led by then Capt. Irl Baldwin flying in B-17 "Hell's Angels." Eight B-17s did not return including "FDR's Potato Peeler Kids," piloted by Capt. R.C. Bales whose Bombardier was Lt. Mark Mathis, the second of the Mathis family to die in combat with the 303rd B.G.

In his welcoming remarks, Col. Philip C. Marcum, Commander, said, "On behalf of the men and women of the Joint Analysis Center, I welcome you to RAF Molesworth Air Force Heritage Day. As the U.S. Air Force celebrates its 50th Anniversary in 1997, we can look back with pride on the heritage of RAF Molesworth. The 303rd Bomb Group flew combat missions from RAF Molesworth from November 1942 to April 1945, establishing a distinguished record of courage and accomplishments."

Other agenda items included a presentation of a painting of Capt. Irl Baldwin commissioned by Mike Ripley which will be on permanent display in the Might in Flight Building at Molesworth. Bill Adams also completed a special wood carving honoring the crew of Hell's Angels for display in the Might in Flight Building. Other paintings by well known artists unveiled at the ceremony for display in the Might in Flight Building were: Mike Bailey ("Knockout Dropper"); Steve Acker ("First to Fall"); Keith Hill ("Last One Out"); Arthur Whitlock ("The Big O"); Theo Fraser ("Duel in the Skies"); Keith Aspinall ("Death Over Magdeburg") and Geoff Pleasance (Heroes of Molesworth series) a series of lithographs produced to honor heroes of Molesworth, e.g., Charles Spencer, Joe Sawicki, S/Sgt. William T.I. Werner and Lt. Thomas F. Dello Buono.

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