





303rd Bomb Group (H) Association, Inc.

Might - In - Flight

"HELLS ANGELS" NEWSLETTER

VOLUME VIII NUMBER 2

Editor: Bud Klint 5728 Walla Fort Worth, TX 76133

APRIL, 1984

THE PREZ SEZ Special Report from Joe Vieira

We, of the John Vieira, Sr. family, wish to thank our many friends in the 303rd BGA for the kindness and sympathy expressed to us during our recent bereavement. A very special thanks from Thelma and me. My brothers and sisters said that my dad talked about the Washington D.C. re-union all the time. I am very happy that he was able to attend one of our reunions and to meet many of those who attended. It meant much to him, then. It means very much to me, now.

Plans for our reunion in England and the Memorial Dedication are progressing very well. This is due to the efforts of Richard Waggoner, Rev. E. J. Skoner, Samuel Minkowitz, Rev. George L. North and Ray Cossey. The latter three live in England. Maj. Minkowitz and Ray Cossey are strong coordinators. They are doing all they can to make this a memorable trip. I am really looking forward to it. I'll be leaving for England ahead of the Group, on June 14 and will return July 2.

On Friday, March 23, we signed up member # 1020. I will be coming out with amendment No. 4 to the membership roster very soon. If you do not have a copy of our membership roster, order it on the back page of this Newsletter. For one buck, you'll get the main roster and the four amendments to update it.

While we're talking about members, just imagine how many we could locate if each current member sent me the address of a 303rder. Even better, if each of you would recruit a "lost" 303rder. There still are a lot of 303rders out there some place who have not joined our association; many have not even heard of us. Spread the word! Send those good names and addresses to me!

Unpaid dues for the class of 1978 are delinquent. If you joined the Association in 1979, dues are due this year. The class of 1979 includes members #525 through #682. Your membership number and the date you joined the Association are on your membership card. Check yours now. If you are delinquent or if your dues are due this year, send your \$10 in. \$10 for 5 years is still the biggest bargain around.

Walt Mayer is reunion co-chairman for the Seattle reunion in 1985. Walt and I are looking for help in making this our biggest reunion yet. We will be more than glad to hear from anyone willing to volunteer. Walt has already done a lot of leg work trying to line up our headquarters hotel and some activities, but we still need help. Let us hear from you.

The 8th AF Historical Society will be holding a reunion in Los Angeles, October 3-7, 1984. As usual, we of the 303rd will have a mini-reunion in conjunction with the 8th. Thelma and I will be going and hope to see a good representation of the 303rd. Information will be mailed to all members of the 8th. You must belong to the 8 AFHS to attend the reunion. If you are not a member, it is highly recommended that you join before the reunion. If you want to attend and do not belong to the 8th, contact me for the info and registration forms.

PLEASE, I am still looking for the colors for the 359th Squadron patch. All you 359ers, please make make one more extensive search and see if you can come up with the colors. Also do any of you remember where the wolf character came from? Was it designed by Disney Studios or by someone else?

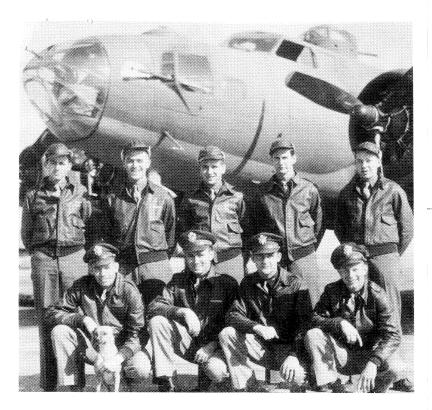
See you at Molesworth in June!

Last mission over Germany

By Curt Sutherly Staff Writer

Reprinted from FOCUS MAGAZINE of the Lebanon SUNDAY PENNSYLVANIAN

The crew of the B-17F "Flying Fortress" which was attacked by German fighters over Aschersleben, Germany, in February, 1944, credited William Werner, back row, second from right, with saving their lives. Werner, a tail-gunner, stayed with his guns even after receiving serious wounds.



War hero recounts dogfight

early 40 years have passed since the day when William Werner, wounded and bleeding, safely stowed his guns, then crawled from the tail-gun position of his B-17 before collapsing near the aircraft tail wheel.

A tail-gunner aboard B-17F 42-508, a U.S. "Flying Fortress," Werner, of 216 High Street, Cornwall, had been on four previous bomb runs over Germany. He had no way of knowing it, but his fifth mission was to be his last; the severity of his injuries would soon

return him to the states, far from the war.

For him, the combat was ended.

In England, Werner was hospitalized but recovered quickly — a fact credited to his youth and strength. In subsequent ceremonies he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross — the nation's second highest military honor. He was also awarded the Air Medal with oak leaf cluster and Purple Heart.

Werner was 19 when in December 1942 he enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps. Today, at 61, he is retired from Bethlehem Steel in Lebanon, where he was employed as safety supervisor until January 1982. He still carries, in his liver and left arm, unwanted war souvenirs: shrapnel from the air attack that nearly took his life.

Werner talks about his combat ordeal in the comfort of his home, in the company of his wife, Betty. He talks easily, quietly, noting that he has spoken little about it all these years. He says the embedded shrapnel has never troubled him.

Almost casually, Werner mentions that enemy weapons fire tore a hole in his back, narrowly missing his spine. He recalls that he was "shot all up" and says the injuries he received, com-



PANSE 37 GOVT=WUX WASHINGTON DC 6 502P

MRS MAREL K WERNER= 844 AN 6 PM 5 23



906 QUENTIN RD LEBANON PENNE

REGRET TO INFORM YOU YOUR SON STAFF SERGEANT WILLIAM T WERNER WAS ON TWENTY ONE FEBRUARY SERIOUSLY WOUNDED IN ACTION OVER OSCHERSLEBEN GERMANY PERIOD MAIL ADDRESS FOLLOWS YOU WILL BE ADVISED AS REPORTS OF CONDITION ARE RECEIVED=

ULIO THE ADJUTANT GENERAL

THE COMPANY WILL APPRECIATE SUGGESTIONS FROM ITS PATRONS CONCERNING ITS SERVICE

The terse telegram sent by the U.S. military mistakenly said that Werner had been injured on February 21, 1944. Papers filed in support of his valor, however, stated that he had been injured on February 22.

bined with the intensity of the battle, caused him to experience the phenomenon of having his life's memories revolve quickly through his mind.

A former first-string football tackle for Lebanon High, class of 1940, Werner was a strong and rangy young man who lettered in his sport. News accounts of the day described him as being a cool, level-headed competitor.

His youth, strength and presence of mind — intermingled with a bit of luck — combined to save Werner's life when, on Feb. 22, 1944, during the bombing run over Aschersleben, Germany, his aircraft was hit heavily by enemy fighters and later by antiaircraft fire.

Much of the enemy fire centered on the B-17's tail section, where Werner was pouring return fire from his 50caliber guns. Nevertheless, he says, "I never felt I was going to die."

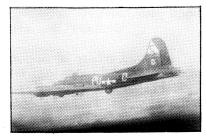
During the heat of the aerial firefight, with German FW 190s cutting a 20-millimeter swath through the B-17 formation, Werner says he had no chance to be truly afraid. He was, at the time, a staff sergeant assigned to the 303rd Bombardment Group of the 427th Bombardment Squadron.

"You're fighting," he recalls. "You react. It's your life or his and you are just hopeful that you can get back to home base."

But manning the tail-gun position was lonely, Werner remembers. "You're alone back there. You're always looking. You have to inform the rest of the crew if the enemy attacks from behind."

Because he was the first gunner assigned to the crew of his B-17, Werner says he was given first choice of gun positions. The tail-gun was his choice, he says, because of a handy trapdoor through which he could parachute in the event the Fortress took a disabling hit.

Trapdoor or no, the tail-gun was a dangerous post on a B-17. Werner says that after the battle he recalled a com-



A B-17 of the 303rd Bombardment Group of the 427th Squadron as if looked from another bomber in formation.

ment made by an Army gunnery school instructor. The comment: the lifespan of a tail-gunner during active combat is 30 seconds.

"It didn't sink in at the time," he says with a trace of a smile.

Indeed, the former sergeant feels he would have died had his heated flight suit not been damaged in a fortuitous manner.

Because the Fortresses flew at an altitude of 20,000 to 25,000 feet, the crew members wore heated suits to protect them against the cold. However, a piece of shrapnel knocked out Werner's suit rheostat, causing his body temperature to plummet and the blood oozing from his wounds to coagulate rapidly.

If the suit had been functioning properly, Werner says, he could have bled to death.

The severity of Werner's injuries was acknowledged in a letter directed to the top echelon of the 303rd Bombardment Group by Sgt. Samuel C. Ross, a waist-gunner on Werner's B-17. In the letter, dated Feb. 24, 1944, Ross detailed the events leading up to, and following, Werner's collapse.

He wrote: "The aircraft in which I

He wrote: "The aircraft in which I (Ross) was flying as a waist-gunner was subjected to fierce enemy fighter attacks and later heavy anti-aircraft fire prior to reaching the target.

"Approximately one-half hour before reaching the target, and after the fighters had for the time being ceased their attacks, the tail-gunner, S/Sgt Werner, crawled out of his position and collapsed beside the tail wheel.

"The radio operator and I both started back to assist him. Because the aircraft was equipped with constant-flow oxygen our first thought was that Sgt. Werner was suffering from lack of oxygen, so the radio operator (S/Sgt Wayne Magner) dragged him back to the radio room to revive him while I went into the tail gunner's position.

"I was not too concerned about Sgt. Werner," Ross wrote, "because he was apparently still conscious and had had the presence of mind to clear the guns (of ammunition) and stow them, thus in no way leaving any danger of an accidental discharge.

"It was not until later that I learned that Sgt. Werner had been seriously wounded and that he collapsed in a weakened condition from loss of blood rather than lack of oxygen."

In a similar letter, the radio operator, S/Sgt Magner, recounts: "My first thought was that he (Werner) had passed out from lack of oxy-



Werner as he looked in February 1944. Shrapnel from a 20mm cannon nearly cost him his life, and he still carries shrapnel in his liver and arm.

gen. He had not completely lost consciousness, however, and when I got him into the radio room I noticed blood stains around his parachute harness.

"The blood was just beginning to soak through the heavy suit. I promptly administered first aid and did everything possible to keep him warm and comfortable for the remainder of the mission.

"At no time before the waist-gunner (Ross) mentioned it on the interphone was I aware that something was wrong with the tail-gunner. An almost continual stream of fire was coming from the tail guns on every fighter attack.

"As near as I can ascertain," Magner wrote, "Sgt. Werner was wounded about an hour and a half before the target by a 20-millimeter cannon shell. About 20 or 30 minutes later we received a flak hit in the tail section and Sgt. Werner was wounded again in the arms, abdominal region and leg."

Both Magner and Ross, in their letters to military high command, had only absolute praise for Werner. At one point Ross suggested that Werner saved all their lives. He wrote: "I hesitate to say what might have been our fate if Sgt. Werner had not stayed with his guns during those terrific fighter attacks."

In the aftermath of the battle, Werner underwent surgery in a U.S. Army field hospital in England where he was retained for several weeks. Later, he was transferred to a rest-and-recovery station — a building he recalls as having been large and castle-like. He remained there for three weeks before returning

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stateside for a two-week military leave.

Just prior to his return home, Werner was decorated in a special ceremony. A military memo dated March 5, 1944, cited the Lebanon man for "extraordinary heroism in action," and credited Werner with shooting down an enemy aircraft during the firefight.

"They said I shot it down," says Werner. "I don't recall it but maybe I

did."

Following his homecoming leave, Werner was lodged temporarily in the Ambassador Hotel in Atlantic City, then headquarters for returned Army Air Corps enlisted men. Later he was relocated to a B-29 bomber base at Pratt, Kan., where he worked as a WAC recruiter.

Asked about that particular aspect of his military career, Werner only smiles and says, "It was something else."

Still later, he was transferred to Chanute Field (today Chanute Air Force Base), Champaign, Ill. There, Werner was assigned to the ground safety office where he received training that, years later, enabled him to move from a warehousing job at Bethlehem Steel to the position of company safety supervisor.

Werner remained with Bethlehem Steel for 31 years before his retirement in 1982. Today he, Betty, their daughter, Jeanne, and her husband Bill Horstick co-own the Quentin Haus restaurant, located south of Lebanon on Route 72.

And this summer, accompanied by his wife, he plans to return to England.

The trip will reunite Werner with former members of the 303rd Bomb Group for a week-long tour of England (June 20-26). Included is a visit to Molesworth, a village near Cambridge where the men of the 303rd

were stationed during the war. As part of the Molesworth visit, the villagers will host a night of feasting and idle chat in their refurbished village hall.

Tour promoters have designated this day, "Mission Molesworth."

Werner notes that his wife has never been to England and this, as much as the reunion, has made him especially keen on the trip.

As for his former B-17 comrades: "I'm not sure how many of the crew are still living," Werner says. Of the 10 crew members, he acknowledges that one has remained in touch — 2nd Lt. Ballard T. Byers, co-pilot of the B-17.

This June, Werner hopes to get reacquainted with Byers, and with any other surviving members of the crew of aircraft 42-508. For him and the others, "Mission Molesworth" will, in a special sense, be a homecoming.

THE CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

Rev. Merritt O. Slawson



When The Lights Came On Again

One memorable day I was on TDY on the Continent, Paris, to be exact. The years was 1945 and, with two or three other chaplains, in the company of Charles I. Carpenter, Chief of Air Chaplains, we were driving down one of the beautiful boulevards of that city in a jeep. We had just left a meeting in the former Headquarters of Gen. Rommel, "The Desert Fox".

We were minding our own business as you would expect Air Force Chaplains to do, when - and I know of no more descriptive phrase, though it may not be becoming of a Chaplain - "All hell broke loose!" Bells rang, sirens wailed, horns blared and people tired to scream, cry and laugh, all at the same time.

What, a moment before, had been a peaceful, quiet and relatively uncrowded Parisian Blvd. suddenly became a seething mass of wild humanity. Without an explanation, it was a rather frightening experience. Had the World gone crazy? We could not move a foot. The jeep was not only surrounded, it was loaded! Even though it could not move, people piled on it as though we were going some-

where. You would not believe how many can climb on a jeep! If you are a MASH addict, you may remember Hawkeye in one of his escapades, attempted to break the Guiness Book of Records by filling a jeep to capacity. Well, we put that effort to shame!

Finally, we were able to understand the words on everyone's lips. The war in Europe was over! And people were celebrating! This was not known when we left Hdqs. or we never would have ventured into the street. After many hours, the M.P.s, along with the French Gendarmes, were able to extricate us and we arrived at our quarters.

That night as darkness descended over the city after years of complete "Black-out", there was a moment of expectancy, and suddenly the whole city was flooded with blinding lights. In that instant of complete silence, I could only think of these words: "Be still and know that I am God". Psalm 46:10.

In our own day, when crisis comes and it looks dark and sometimes hopeless, be still and let the light of God's love shine through and the lights of joy and peace will flood your heart.

"Chappie" Slawson

Editor's note: "Chappie" has had plenty of opportunity to practice what he preaches since our reunion last fall. His blood pressure went wild and he wound up back in the hospital. It's being controlled with medication now, but he still has to monitor it every 8 hours. On top of that, in February, "Mama" had emergency gall bladder surgery. She's doing great. Both "Chappie" and "Mama" will appreciate your prayers.

MR. PRESIDENT . . .

That's the title of a novel, a topical political thriller, written by William Heller. In this policital year, it is especially appropriate reading. While it is pure fiction, the book paints an intriguing picture of a situation not outside the realm of possibility in these United States. It's a thought-provoking tale and one that will get you personally involved in operation "Tango Oscar."

Bill Heller is a member of the 303rd. He served as a pilot in the 360th Squadron, Operations Officer for the 359th and then returned to the 360th as Commanding Officer. He remained there until VE Day, 1945. After the war, Bill flew commercial airliners for 35 years.

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A PICTURE IS WORTH . . .

The November '83 issue of the Newsletter carried a picture of a group of 303rd ex-POWs taken at the D.C. reunion. Joe Fertitta was in that group photo. When Clayton David of St. Clairsville, OH saw that picture of his old crew mate, it stirred some memories and spurred him to action on a "search and find mission".

Within a period of two weeks, after several letters and a bunch of phone calls, Clayton located the other surviving members of training crew #52. He learned that Charles (Red) Finch had been killed in an auto accident some 20 years ago. The toughest one to locate was Theodore Cody, who since the war, changed his name from Czeczotka. Fortunately, Ted's mother was still listed in the New York directory under the original family name. The others, besides Fertitta and Cody, that Clayton was able to locate were: Karl Arundale, James Burlow, Joe Vogel, Richard Davis, James Elovich and Angelo Petix.

After training together, the crew arrived Molesworth on 14 Nov., 1943 and was immediately assigned to the 358th Squadron. Two months later, Cody was the only crew member still flying with the 303rd. The other nine had all gone down over enemy territory and were either evadees of POWs. They haven't been together since early January, 1944.

Now, Clayton is trying to get the crew together this summer. He has issued a "Special Report", in

the best military format and has sent a copy to each man. Paragraph 3 reads: "It is now suggested that all personnel set an objective to assemble, at a place and date to be determined, in the summer of 1984 for the purpose of being briefed and debriefed in an atmosphere of friendship and relaxation. When you consider the element of time and the nature of events, our survival rate is a near miracle. We should not delay."

It appears that only three of these nine men are listed in the 303rd BGA roster. Wouldn't it be great if the other six joined up and they held their "second annual crew reunion" in conjunction with the 303rd "Seattle Spectacular" in 1985? How about it, Clayton?

Incidentally, Clayton and wife, Scotty, went to England last year as part of the 8th AFHS Friendship Tour. They were the only 303rders aboard. Clayton is pictured here in front of the Cross Keys Pub with Eileen and Walter Nottage, F.O.T.E.,



LOOK-ALIKES IN A WAR CAN CAUGE A LOT OF TROUBLE! OFTEN IT WAS SHOOT FIRST, THEN IDENTIFY. THE FACT THAT GOOD DESIGNS, PARTICULARLY IN FIGHTER AIR CRAFT, WERE COPIED BY THE GOOD GLYG and BAD GUYGALIKE, DIDN'T HELP THINGG A BIT, EITHER!



IN THE ETO, THE GPITFIRE and ME-109 WERE DEAD RINGERS FROM BEHIND—Reprinted by permission of Bob Stevens and AIR FORCE Magazine.

TWO DAYS THEY'LL NEVER FORGET!

They brought home a B-17 with 600 holes - Next day they didn't make it home!

NOW - Bob Waldron, brother of Leo Waldron who did not survive, John Hill, Bill Miller, John Hutson and Tony Zelnio.

A dramatic reunion took place in Moline, IL last fall when four of the five survivors of the Bill Miller crew gathered for the first time since WW II. They reminisced about two traumatic days that cost the lives of six of their close friends, four of them a part of their original crew.

The crew arrived at Molesworth in August, 1944 and was assigned to the 359th Squadron. By Sept. 26, they had complete six missions. Then came the two days these men cannot, and no longer want to, forget. "It's branded on your brain," said Bill Miller.

On Sept. 27 the crew headed for Cologne in their regular ship, Old Black Magic. They were part of an 18 plane force which the 303rd launched that day. They never saw the target!

Over Germany, enemy fighters hit the formation. Black Magic was knocked out of formation, its electrical system disabled. Miller and John Hill, the co-pilot, turned homeward with a plane they later discovered had more than 600 flak and bullet holes in it. They made it back to Molesworth with no small difficulty, but with all crew members unhurt. Miller recalled, "All of the missions were rough, but this was the roughest. The reward was that we got to do it all again!"

They did it again, the very next day. And, if the previous day's flight was rough, the word was redefined for them that day. They took off in a subsitute B-17, Miss Umbriago, borrowed from the 360th. John Hutson, the tail gunner and Max Smoller, radio, were stood down by the Flight Surgeon, so there were subsitute crewmen in these positions. The target was Magdeburg and they were carrying propaganda leaflets.

As a leaflet plane, they were positioned at the rear of the formation. When German fighters appeared out of nowhere again, Miss Umbriago was one of the first planes hit. In the cockpit, Miller and Hill thought it was



only the left wing of the plane which had been hit. Miller hoped to turn back as he had the day before.

In the waist, Tony Zelnio knew differently. The rear of the plane was badly damaged. Through tremendous holes in the fuselage, he could see the flames jetting way behind the tail. Hit, and bleeding from both legs, he crawled to the ball turret. Warren Ball, the gunner was dead. Painfully, he made his way to the tail gunner -- dead!

An oxygen bottle was hit, exploded and careened through the ship exploding two more oxygen bottles. Zelnio baled out. "It was instant quiet," he recalled. The noise, the terror was gone. As he approached the ground, he blacked out.

When he awoke he found that Leo Waldron, the engineer, had placed a tourniquet on one of his bleeding legs. Leo was being led away by a group of German civilians armed with clubs. He was never seen or heard from again.

Zelnio was taken by German farmers to a jail in a nearby town and later transferred to a makeshift prisoner-of-war hospital. He remained there until Patton's 2nd Armored Division swept through the area in April, 1945.

Miller and Hill were the only others to survive. They parachuted safely, were overtaken and spent the duration at Stalag Luft, One, on the Baltic coast. They were freed by Soviet troops, May 1, 1945.

For a few years, the men kept in touch, exchanging Christmas cards and occasional letters. But, time and distance took their toll, even interrupting the friendship of Miller and Hill, who had grown up in the same Dallas, TX neighborhood. Zelnio said, "Our lives just grew in opposite directions."

The reunion idea began two years ago when Miller picked up the phone and gave Zelnio a ring. "It was

just a whim," he said. Zelnio and his wife, Norma went to Miller's Canoga, CA home last year for the 38th anniversary of the crew's fateful flights. There, they decided to pursue a full reunion in Moline. Everyone was eager to attend. The only missing survivor was Max Smolar, confined to his Pittsburgh home due to illness.

Given years for retrospect, all of the men say they have a keen understanding of the circumstances surrounding those two difficult days. All are very proud of having done battle for their country. But Miller, recently retired from Hughes Aircraft, looks back with some remorse. "We were fighting the Nazis, but we were killing Germans," he said. "It's a brutal, savage business when you're bombing cities, but I still had the feeling 'Why are these guys shooting at me!"

Zelnio, who works in the engineering department of John Deere added, "None of us believe in war. We don't believe in killing, but we believe in our country."

The men all boast a strong belief in patriotism and say they are disturbed by the lack of it in many young Americans. "We learned this freedom didn't come easy," Zelnio said. That's a lesson that has stayed with them constantly since those two days in September, 1944. And, they say those days have had an immeasureable impact on the way they have lived their lives. Miller summed it up: "An experience as hairy as that will cause you to change your values. You realize what's important. The 27th and 28th of September, 1944 changed all of us. The impact of those two days was the equivalent of, yea-many, years of living."

Parts of the above are reprinted from a story by Craig DeVrieze which appeared in the Metro section of the Moline Daily Dispatch, Oct. 4, 1983.



THEN - Front, Leo Waldron, top turret; Tony Zelnio, waist; Warren Ball, ball turret; Max Smolar, radio; John Hutson, tail; back row, Arthur Conn, navigator; Teddy Smith, bombardier; John Hill, co-pilot; Bill Miller, pilot.

303rd Bomb Group Reunion in Britain '84

SCHEDULE UPDATE

There have been some changes in the activities planned for Friday, Saturday and Sunday. The revised schedule is printed below. For all other days refer to the original brochure.

Friday, June 22 "MISSION MOLESWORTH"

A "free" morning to do as you will - perhaps some sightseeing or some shopping.

2:30 PM - Leave hotel by coach for the 1½ hour run to Molesworth.

4:30 PM - English tea at the grounds of a private resident. (Pay as you go.)

 $6\mbox{:}00\mbox{ PM}$ - Wander about the Old Station, what is left of it.

7:45 PM - Return to the village for a social event at one of the local farms, in a 17th century barn.

Saturday, June 23 "YE OLDE ENGLAND"

Same activities that were originally scheduled for Friday - Stratford-on-Avon, Blenheim Palace, village of Blaydon.

Sunday, June 24 "IN REMEMBRANCE"

9:00 AM - Leave hotel by bus for Brington Church. 11:00 AM - Memorial Service and Dedication. After services, we will go to Alconbury for lunch at the Officers' Club. (Pay as you go.) After lunch, to Cambridge for a tour of the historic city.

TAPS

We extend our deepest sympathy to the families and friends of these former members of the 303rd who have passed away recently.

VERNON LOY, 427th Squadron 100 Grace Street Chencoteaque, VA 23336

ROBERT HEUSSLER, 360th Squardon Sharon, VT 05065

Sometimes we don't hear about the death of one of our number. If you know of someone from the 303rd who has passed away, please notify Joe Vieira promptly. Joe needs to correct our membership/mailing lists and issue an honorary membership to any surviving wife.

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303rd Bomb Group (H) Association, Inc.

Might - In - Flight



APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP Military Spouse's

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