



602



601



603



600

398TH BOMB. GROUP MEMORIAL ASSOCIATION • 8TH AIR FORCE • 1ST AIR DIVISION • NUTHAMPSTEAD, ENGLAND

VOL.5 NO. 4

FLAK NEWS

OCTOBER 1990

Record Turnout At Oshkosh



“Well Done, Morris & Mary”

MORRIS & MARY SWED receive applause from Evelyn & Bill Comstock (and 500-plus in the audience) at the conclusion of the 1990 398th reunion held September 12-15 in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. Under their leadership, the group set a new reunion attendance record — 531.

Time Now To Pay Dues For 1991

Once each year your 398th Bomb Group Memorial Association puts forth an appeal for funds to underwrite the year's administrative activities. Like paying for stamps, letterheads, envelopes, telephone, paste, Scotch tape, etc., etc.

And publishing FLAK NEWS four times each year. And providing the funds for the care and maintenance of our impressive Memorial at Nuthampstead. (Now administered by the American Battle Monuments Commission.)

All these are important, and the members attest to this importance with generous donations each year. And because of this generosity the Board has again decreed that the dues will remain at \$5.00 per year. Easily the lowest among the many B-17 bomb group associations.

As has been the custom in the past, there also is an opportunity this year to add to the 1991 \$5.00 dues with additional contributions especially earmarked for either FLAK NEWS or the Memorial Fund.

A special dues card has been inserted in this newsletter. Fill out the specific dues information, enclose a single check to cover all items, and mail to Ralph Hall, 398th Treasurer, New Bedford, MA 02740.

And PLEASE! Help us with our group historical and mailing records by filling in the questionnaire on the reverse side of the dues card.

398th Still On A Roll; 531 Attend Annual Reunion

Move over Dayton.

Stand aside, Richmond and all the other cities that have hosted a 398th Bomb Group reunion and set previous attendance records.

That record now belongs to Oshkosh, Wisconsin, where 531 members gathered September 12-15, 1990 to meet, look, eat, shop, visit, and in general reminisce about those days of fame almost a half century ago.

Oshkosh is no Big Apple in the arena of reunion towns, but it obviously had the kind of appeal that helped fill the two biggest hotels in town and a number of other smaller motels. The mid-West location offered reasonable driving distance for 90% of the attendees. The rest came by air (except one, who came by boat from across beautiful Lake Winnebago.)

The prime attraction, aside from meeting and greeting each other, was the spectacular Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA) museum on the outskirts of town.

And naturally, everyone had to zero in on the “main” attraction, the B-17 named Aluminum Overcast. (Sometimes at the expense of passing up some of the other aviation attractions.) But with this B-17 adorned with the red and white, Triangle W markings of the 398th, it was easy to understand. This Fortress also carried the marking of the 601st Squadron, the call letter H, and factory serial number 2102516.

This to honor the man who flew the plane at air shows in recent years and the man who led the campaign to generate the funds for the exterior cleaning and paint job ... and 398th markings.

This would be Hal Weekley, former 601

Continued On Page 2

Memories Abound As Crews Gather

Continued From Page 1

pilot and in civilian life an FAA inspector (and part time B-17 pilot.)

The EAA Museum offered many more attractions than the group had time to enjoy. The new Eagle Hanger, where the B-17 stands as the premier attraction, also contains many other familiar war planes of WW II fame. The hanger also has a bomber "ready room," complete with maps of the continent and the ominous colored yarn indicating the "target for today." Those who had vivid memories of those days were seen to ponder in silence as the taped sound of the briefing officer told the men what to expect that day.

One man was heard to say to no one in particular before the curtain opened — "The target for today is Merseburg!"

The Hilton Hotel offered facilities for many of the gatherings, including the Memory Room. Here the men and women (and more than a few young people) viewed the many videos of the air war, pored over Jack Wintersteen's historical record books and availed themselves of the many goods at the P-X. Joe and Rozanne Joseph again manned the P-X booth, selling jackets, sweat shirts, T-shirts, patches pins, bumper stickers, etc.

The three banquet dinners were held at the Convention Center, across from the Hilton. Their facilities just did accommodate the record crowds each evening. Entertainment came in the form of young groups called the Fantastic Forties and



Captain & The Kids

PAUL WAGNER (front, center) had a six-man 600 crew at the Oshkosh reunion, all decked out in specially designed T-shirts. Left to right, front row, are Guy Mattana, Wagner and Doug Mann (whose daughter designed the shirts). Back row, Ellis O'Neal, Larry Crocker and Walt Thumbler. Others on the Wagner crew were Dan Vallani, Sidney Joseph and William Stegall, the latter killed in action. The crew's average age during combat time was 19.4 years.

Northern Lights. There was dancing one evening to the 40's music of Phyllis and the Guys.

President Bill Comstock, recalling a dramatic mission in 1944, reached out with a

surprise gift for Wayne Doerstler, a 602 engineer gunner. Comstock, the pilot, aborted this mission at the insistence of Doerstler, not his regular ETG. Although miffed at the thought of turning back, Comstock landed back at Nuthampstead to discover that had he continued on the mission a major fire surely would have resulted.

"If it had not been for you, Wayne, neither of us would be here this evening. Thank you," said Comstock.

Comstock also saluted our UK Friends of the 398th at Nuthampstead by recounting the Battle of Britain. "Never in the history of human endeavor have so many owed so much to so few."

Another surprise by the president was the awarding "Flowers For The Living" to Allen Ostrom. The flowery comments were directed to Ostrom, a beautiful orchid to wife "Geg" Ostrom.

Phil Stahlman offered a reading called, "A Place of Honor." This poem supposedly was to honor an unnamed pilot for refusing to fly a B-24.

No less than 75 members were attending their first reunion.

The cheer that went up at the first banquet was for the general manager of the Hilton, Andrew Swinney, who fetched a ladder and changed the American flag on stage. It had been hung backwards.

In action taken by the 398th Board — Accepted the resignation of Harry Gray, who has been struggling with ill health. Harry will continue to maintain the group mailing list, however.

Continued On Page 3



We Meet Again, Finally

HOWARD BAER & GEORGE GRAHAM were the lone survivors of the 600 O'Neal crew that went down over Berlin May 19, 1944. They met for the first time at Oshkosh since bailing out of their stricken B-17. Needless to say, they had much to talk about.

“The weather during the winter of 1944-45 was particularly bad, and there we were flying around in the frozen fog with 2,000 gallons of high octane fuel, 10,000 pounds of high explosive bombs with nine teenagers on board with the Germans shooting at us.”

The above quote seemed particularly appropriate in light of the photo on the preceding page, showing six members of the Paul Wagner crew at Oshkosh sporting their spiffy T-shirts. And pointing out that they represented the young age of our WW II air-men. The quote came in the form of a letter to Mrs. Maria Hunter from a friend who flew with the 401st Bomb Group, Wally Hicks.

Continued From Page 2

Approved a gift of \$1,000 for the Air Force Academy for the construction of the Alumni Building.

Approved the selection of a city in the Southeast section of the U.S. for the 1992 reunion.

Approved a plan and named a committee headed by Wally Blackwell to seek out prospective “second generation” members for future Board positions.

Clarified the policy that all widows of members are welcome to remain in the Association with free lifetime memberships.

Confirmed that the theme for the 1991 reunion in San Diego will be the honoring of ground crew personnel.

Chaplain Jim Duvall provided a fitting an emotional conclusion to the meetings with his closing “Reflections.”

He told many stories of the drama at Station 131, one of which concerned his responsibility of having to give his approval before any member could marry.

“They were really screwed up in those days,” he recounted. “Here they thought nothing of sending these kids up there every day to fight and die. Yet, they sent them to me for permission to get married.”

OSHKOSH B’GOSH — More than a few members took a liking to the A-2 jacket offered by Bradley Associates, 3713 Everest Dr., Montgomery, AL 36106. (\$175.00)... Paul Wagner (Page 2) received the 1989 International Thermal Conductivity Award at the University of Kentucky for his contribution in the field of thermo-physics ... more members came from California than any other state ... Bob Hart picked up a speeding ticket coming into Oshkosh. Did he have to go to court to pay the fine? Naw. The cop accepted his Visa card ... when John Auckerman of the Ray Armor crew died he was buried in his 398th uniform and a photo of his B-17 ... John McCormick, the pilot and lone survivor of his crew when collided with Perry Powell’s B-17 on a Berlin mission (FLAK NEWS, Vol. 1 No. 1) continues to research the events of that tragic day; while at Oshkosh he was able to meet with a relative of the Powell crew and convey to him the details of the mission that cost 16 lives.



A Dramatic Day Remembered

A. L. DOUGHERTY was on the mission as a waist gunner on the 603 Tarr crew the day Col. Frank P. Hunter and Federico Gonzales were shot down on a mission to Neuss January 23, 1945. Only Gonzales survived. In an emotional presentation at the Oshkosh reunion Dougherty presented Gonzales with this painting depicting his craft being shot out of the formation during the bomb run.



Memento For Maria

MARIA HUNTER and her grandson, Frank Hunter MacDonald, display the wood carving created for her by William P. Adams of London. The gift being delivered by Walt & Cena Marsh. “Witka Tanka Ton” represents the name of the B-17 that Col. Hunter flew to England from Rapid City, SD. It was named by a Sioux Indian chief.

MERSEBURG: DREADED MERSEBURG

"Where Are The Rest?" Asked Col. Hunter

When Eighth Air Force veterans gather to talk about Nazi Germany's great cities and their military targets of World War II the conversation usually starts with such well-known names as Berlin, Schweinfurt, Cologne, Munich or Regensburg.

The "MPI" for the bombardiers were initials for ball bearing plants, munitions factories, aircraft assembly plants, bridges or other targets as seen through their Norden bomb sights.

These "Main Point of Impact" targets were bombed as often as the Eighth Air Force Bomber Command at High Wycombe deemed necessary. And at a predicted cost in men and aircraft they held to be "acceptable."

Thus, most combat airmen did not look kindly at seeing the long, colored yarn on the briefing room wall stretching from England, across the Channel, and zig-zagging across Germany to the likes of Berlin and Schweinfurt.

The air war over Germany, begun long before the first American GI was to set foot on Normandy, was to cost over 50,000 young men. Some of these were trained at Rapid City, SD by the original echelons of the 398th Bomb Group during 1943-44.

During the coming year of 1944-45 the 398th would show 760 casualties as killed in action, wounded, prisoners, escapees, liberated or rescued at sea.

And there would be 153 B-17's either shot down, abandoned on the continent or damaged so badly they would never fly again.

The 398th, while being the last of the B-17 groups to join the Eighth Air Force due to its crew training assignment at home, quickly found its share of dread at the mention of certain targets. And the sight of the long yarn.

But it would be a much smaller and lesser known city in eastern Germany that would bring on the deepest "groans" from the men of the 398th when the "target for today" was presented at briefing.

Merseburg Mission In "Remembrances"

The story of the November 21, 1944 mission to Merseburg is re-printed from the book, "398th BOMB GROUP REMEMBRANCES."

The original printing of 1,000 was sold out in August, but the Board authorized a second printing of 250. These are now for sale to members, friends and aviation book stores.

REMEMBRANCES costs \$20.00 each postpaid. Send your check to 398th Bomb Group Book, c/o Ralph Hall, New Bedford, MA 02740.

The Merseburg story is only one of many chapters that chronicles the combat history of the 398th. Among the other features is a list of all crewmen killed in action, wounded, evaders and prisoners of war.

There is also a list of all missions, mission dates and targets.

There was something special and ominous in the name "Merseburg."

Dreaded Merseburg.

It would take its toll in men and machines. Even more than Berlin, Munich, Hamburg, Kassel, Ludwigshaven. Or any of the others.

Merseburg, with its Leuna refinery, was an oil target. And ultimately, it was this denial of refined petroleum products that would be so instrumental in ending Hitler's pursuit of world domination.

The 398th went to Merseburg eight times. Six times there were empty spaces at the hardstands when the group came home.

A ring of 400 anti-aircraft guns, twice the number protecting Berlin, had been brought into the Merseburg refinery corridor in a desperate attempt to protect Germany's dwindling petroleum supply.

It was on November 21, 1944 that the 398th, especially the 603rd Squadron, would feel the full impact of this ring of protection. This was the day the German radio would beam the news toward England that Goering's elite FW-190 fighter group, known to American airmen as the "Abbeville Gang," had destroyed an entire squadron of B-17's from the 398th Bomb Group!

"We got them all," was the boast, reminding his listeners that the planes shot down carried a Triangle W on their tail.

The famed Luftwaffe fighters with the yellow spinners — plus four 20 mm. cannons — had found a lone, scattered, separated 603rd grouping in 9/10th weather. The Abbeville boys claimed the entire squadron. It wasn't quite true, but almost.

"Where are the rest?" asked Col. Frank P. Hunter, 398th commanding officer, as he approached Lt. Warren Johnson, leader of the three-ship "squadron" as they returned to Station 131 more than eight hours after taking off that morning.

"There are no 'rest,'" answered Johnson, as he identified his two wingmen, Lt. Ernie Spitzer and Lt. Harold Spangler.

At that point, completely spent after their long ordeal and narrow escape from fighters and flak, the trio was certain they were the only survivors of the day's mission to Merseburg.

Col. Hunter himself, along with Chaplain James Duvall, had stood at the end of the runway early that morning and waved to each crew as the group's 37 Fortresses took to the air starting at 7:51 a.m.

First off was Maj. Robert Templeman, 602 operations officer. He would be mission commander, with Capt. E.D. Scott in the pilot's seat. Next came the 601st, led by Command of Aircraft Capt. Merwin Genung and aircraft commander Robert Brown.

Lt. Ken Hastings, who was soon to receive his captain's bars, was the 603rd leader with pilot Ken Buzza. Others in the 603rd squadron that day were Lieutenants Joe Tarr, Staver Hyndman, Paul Rich, Robert Lehner, Fred Wismer, John Smith, John Aniello, Charles Howell and John Stevens. Plus Johnson, Spitzer and Spangler.

One of the pilots in Major Templeman's 602 formation was Lt. M.E. Boswell, who would retire from the Air Force in 1981 as Lt. Gen. Boswell, deputy vice chief of staff.

Another pilot in the same squadron was Lt. Bill Comstock, who would retire as Colonel

Comstock and later become President Comstock of the 398th Bomb Group Memorial Association.

Howell was the last to take off (8:50 a.m.) due to engine problems. He did not slip into his position in the lead element until well over the North Sea.

For all three ships in the lead, plus one each from the low and slot elements, the mission would end at 12:15 p.m. One had to abort before reaching the IP when caught by a lucky flak hit, one had to find his own way home after being crippled by a flak burst, and two sustained enough flak damage to be forced into crash landings in France and Belgium.

It was the area of Osnabruck that hints of things to come began to appear. First off, the leader's VHF radio went out, limiting his contact with the wing and division leaders. Weather also was becoming a factor, as the heavy clouds and contrails at the prescribed bombing altitude of 25,000 feet were making formation flying difficult and hazardous.

And the German anti-aircraft had made a lucky, albeit critical, hit on the B-17 being flown by Aniello. He was on his first mission. J. Gordon Blythe, who was Buzza's regular co-pilot, was in the right seat with Aniello when flak caught one engine. Blythe was able to feather properly, but when they discovered that half of their oxygen system also had been taken out by the flak burst, they decided to drop from the formation and return home.

It was now obvious that the weather was becoming "impossible."

Hastings and Buzza, in the 603 high squadron lead, had trouble keeping Templeman's lead squadron in sight. Templeman ordered the group to "keep climbing" in hopes that they would break into clearer skies.

The 603rd broke out at 29,500 feet ... all alone. The 601st and 602nd were nowhere to be seen. And to add even further complications to the critical situation, Hastings had lost radio contact with the group. Then more electrical problems.

Radar navigator Marvin Laufer, a decorated veteran from the Italian campaign, reported that his radar had been blowing fuses. He had only one left and he was saving this for the run from the IP to the target.

Meanwhile, unbeknownst to the 398th, the other groups in the wing had dropped to a lower altitude to find clearer flying weather.

And now another from the 603rd was missing. Smith, with an ailing engine, couldn't keep up in the push for more altitude and had drifted out of sight. Luckily, he caught on with another group on the Merseburg run and tagged along as a grateful straggler.

Now nearing the IP at Nordhausen, still alone and with 11 still in a reasonable formation, the 603rd pressed on toward Merseburg. Now well within the ring of 400 guns, the sky began taking on an eerie, dark form as the 88's exploded in mass profusion.

"We could hear the flak bursts and smell the gun powder," said one flyer. "Spent flak rained down on the planes like hail on a tin barn."

Stevens was the next victim of the flak barrage. No. 1 engine was hit, which feathered nicely. But when No. 2 went out and could not be feathered, the Fort began disappearing in the

Continued On Page 5

OIL TARGET TOOK HEAVY TOLL

"There Are No 'Rest'" Said Johnson

Continued From Page 4

clouds below. This descent continued for three hours as Stevens and co-pilot Iz Rovinsky fought to keep their aircraft in the air while heading for friendly territory.

"We dropped the ball turret and every possible loose nut and bolt in hopes of saving her," said Stevens. "But finally, we had to belly in some 30 miles southeast of Paris."

Stevens recalled that "we flew those final hours at 110 MPH indicated, with No. 3 and 4 engines at 52 inches HG and 2600 RPM."

Engineer Bud Neidringhaus did his part in keeping his craft in the air by releasing all the bombs by prying them loose from the shackles with a gun barrel. Neidringhaus was killed in a crash of a C-47 at Chanute Field in 1947.

By now, Laufer had blown his last radar fuse and there was no hope of successfully bombing either visually or via PFF. Hastings, aware that the other squadrons might be beneath him in the clouds, asked navigator Oral Birch for a heading to a secondary target.

On the way to Erfurt, south of Merseburg, bombardier Chuck Wilbur discovered that his bomb bay doors were frozen shut, which he opened the hard way — manually. He scurried back to the nose and toggled the bombs. At least most of them. Three 500 pounders had hung up on the right side.

Wilbur again headed for the bomb bay. Straddling the cat walk, all the time considering a drop of almost 30,000 feet without a parachute, Wilbur released the inside bomb by hand, but needed a screw driver to pry loose the other two. One smacked him on the leg as it dropped.

Seeing the lead bombs go, the other bombardiers in the squadron followed suit.

If the 603rd was having problems, it was also nightmare time for Captain Genung and the 601st. By IP time, only seven were target bound, albeit hopelessly scattered. Five already had aborted for a variety of reasons, and the remaining took the "target of opportunity" route. They made their way home as best they could, with three making it only as far as Belgium and emergency landings.

Major Templeman's lead 602nd pressed on to the target and made its drop on Leuna at 11:30 a.m.

The drama of the day was still to come, however.

Charley Stankiewicz, engineer on the Johnson crew, was in the standard hand crank position with the bomb bay doors frozen open. He would soon be introduced to the business end of a 20mm cannon shell.

Tarr, monitoring the crew intercom, couldn't get an oxygen response from either his waist or tail, so he dispatched ball turret gunner Harold Clyne for a look-see. Clyne helped Allison Dougherty switch his mask to the other side of the waist supply and then scurried to the tail where he found Bill Fleming "motionless and blue." Ice had clogged the tail gunner's mask, shutting off his life-sustaining supply.

The tail gunner soon "came to" and Clyne returned to the ball, where he would soon be looking at more trouble.

Pilot Tarr, realizing half of his oxygen supply was gone, brought extra walk-around bottles to the waist, just in case.

Fighter activity had been reported off and on for 30 minutes, first at 8 o'clock low and now at 2 o'clock high. The sky, murky as it was, was

filled with criss-cross vapor trails, the unique signature of high altitude combat.

It was indeed aerial combat! A squadron of German FW-190's was having a head-to-head encounter with a squadron of American P-51 Mustangs.

As to whether the FW's had been stalking the Fortresses until flak activity had subsided, or whether they had stumbled into the formation as they scrambled out of their dog-fight with the P-51's remains a matter of conjecture. That the

190's left their mark on the 603rd is a matter of record.

Two waves of five or six fighters each slammed into the formation, the fighter-bomber wings almost overlapping in the split second exchanges. Many of those who survived recall seeing the iron crosses on the FW cockpits and even the faces of the Luftwaffe pilots.

All three planes in the lead element were hit by cannon fire. Buzza, his ship falling off to the right with one engine afire and Hastings fatally wounded beside him, ordered his crew to jump.

Hastings was found in the plane where it crashed near Eisenach. The Germans buried him in the cemetery at Moosbach. The other crewmen were captured, sent to PW camps and ultimately returned to the U.S. These included Buzza, Wilbur, Birch, Laufer, George Spraggins, John McMenamin, Jack Madlung, David Morgan and Eugene Minchoff.

McMenamin and Morgan effected escapes from one of the marches between camps and found their way to Brussels and freedom.

The deputy lead, piloted by Lehner, received 20 mm cannon hits in their right wing, sending their craft into a tight spin . . . and ultimate explosion. Lehner, killed in the cockpit, was the only crew member found in the wreckage near Erfurt. All the others were blown free. Some to safety. Others to their deaths.

Parachuting to safety were Ozie French, Kenneth Bachman, Rex Kellogg, William Elliott and James Esterbrooks. Bachman, from his position in the ball turret, saw that his wing was ablaze and came into the waist and put on his chute. He was immediately pinned against the wall by the centrifugal force and soon blacked out from lack of oxygen. When he "awoke" he was tumbling in space, recovering just in time to pull his chute rip cord.

Killed as they fell without chutes, or possibly victims of angry civilians, were Virgil Register, Stanley de Lafayette and Henry Ference. German medical records reveal only two words, "found dead." All were buried at Zimmernspura.

Howell, the third member of the lead element, also went into a violent spin with his left wing on fire. Only his radio operator, John Bahling, and two waist gunners, Jose Echevarria and William Landrie, managed to survive. Bahling suffered a fractured skull as he landed and Landrie a broken ankle.

Howell, William Bryan, John Leyden, Robert Gaynor, Ralph Glancy and Brooks Atchison were all summarily listed as "found dead" and buried at Truegleben.

Landrie and Echevarria, tossed about the waist as the ship overturned, witnessed the ball turret come tumbling into the waist. Atchison popped out of the ball, put on his chute as the plane leveled off momentarily and led the others out the waist door.

Landrie, being marched to the Erfurt Air Base jail, saw someone hanging from a tree at one of the intersections. A single parachute cord around his neck and a group of people standing around.

"To this day, I believe it was Brooks Atchison," said Landrie.

That Merseburg was a dreaded target had been quietly transmitted that morning to Bob Welty, co-pilot for Tarr. Welty met lead navigator Gaynor coming out of early briefing.

FORMATIONS

21 November 1944

LEAD SQUADRON
602

TEMPLEMAN
Scott, E.D.

Comstock	HANCOCK		
	Erler		
Zimmerman	Evans		
Petska	Kunkel	Beam	Shaffer

Boswell

McCormick Erickson

HIGH SQUADRON
603

HASTINGS
Buzza

Lehner Howell

Hyndman Johnson

Aniello	Wismer	Stevens	Smith
---------	--------	---------	-------

Spitzer

Spangler

Rich Tarr

LOW SQUADRON
601

GENUNG
Brown

Hunt STALLINGS

Prather

Rogers Blackwell

Watkins	Morrison	Palant	Curtis
---------	----------	--------	--------

Sitler

Landrum	Rolfe
---------	-------

Continued On Page 8



SQUADRONS FOUR: 398TH MEN GA





HER AT OSHKOSH WITH "THEIR" B-17



"Gentlemen, Your Target For Today Is ...

LEAD SQUADRON - 602

A/C #975 M Squadron Lead

CA Maj. Robert Templeman
P Capt. E.D. Scott
N Capt. V.F. Mitchell
VN 1st Lt. J.W. Finch
B 1st Lt. J.P. Cosco
ETG T/Sgt. M.D. Hancock
R T/Sgt. Joseph R. Gaiser
LW S/Sgt. V.M. Brewer
TG S/Sgt. C.E. Nungester
MIC 1st Lt. R.A. Kraft

A/C #164 H Deputy Lead

CA 1st Lt. William C. Hancock
P 1st Lt. Donald Erler
N 1st Lt. Arnold I. Mangen
B 1st Lt. Lyman Constantine
ETG S/Sgt. Burton W. Matheson
R T/Sgt. Alfred B. Ogas
LW S/Sgt. O. Gale Kinzie
RW Sgt. Robert A. Werschey
BTG S/Sgt. William F. Kendall
TG S/Sgt. George E. Keating

A/C #8652 V

P 1st Lt. William F. Comstock
CP 2nd Lt. J.D. Gray
N F/O Ed McCormack
Tog S/Sgt. Percy Paget
ETG T/Sgt. A. Jack Davis
R T/Sgt. James Andrell
LW S/Sgt. Harold Snyder
BTG S/Sgt. Dan Mack
TG S/Sgt. Paul Peterson

A/C #664 P

P 1st Lt. Leland Zimmerman
CP 2nd Lt. R.H. Breimeyer
N 1st Lt. S.G. Horvath
B 1st Lt. Raymond Szotek
ETG T/Sgt. P.C. Mitchell
R Sgt. H. Kurczodyna
LW S/Sgt. Anthony Bartusis
BTG S/Sgt. L.W. Baker
TG S/Sgt. L.J. Moeller

A/C #610 L

P 2nd Lt. Al Petska
CP 2nd Lt. Tom Van Matre
N 2nd Lt. John J. Krause
Tog S/Sgt. Ray R. McGee
ETG Sgt. George W. Forsythe
R Sgt. Tom Spencer
LW Sgt. Donald J. Shaw
BTG Sgt. James S. Froelich
TG Sgt. Homer Newman

A/C #188 G

P 2nd Lt. John Kunkel
CP 2nd Lt. L.R. Krause
N F/O Lou Alessio
B 2nd Lt. R.E. Lucier
ETG Sgt. H.M. Sharp
R Sgt. E.C. Smith
LW S/Sgt. E.N. Buck
BTG Sgt. H.R. Hunczak
TG Sgt. Clarence Smith

A/C #8627 Z

P 1st Lt. William Evans
CP 1st Lt. Walt Bittner
N 1st Lt. Mike Derrick
Tog S/Sgt. R.A. Stewart
ETG T/Sgt. Olin Burdett
R T/Sgt. Don Denner
LW S/Sgt. Claude McNeil
BTG S/Sgt. Cliff Baker
TG S/Sgt. Carl Saglin

A/C #274 B

P 2nd Lt. Burl Beam
CP 2nd Lt. James R. Frazier
N 2nd Lt. R.G. McCurdy
Tog S/Sgt. J. Fenland
ETG Sgt. C.W. Blankenship
R Sgt. Sam Peschtello
LW S/Sgt. Howard Studor
BTG Sgt. Victor White, Jr.
TG Sgt. Shirley D. Roberts

A/C #836 T

P 2nd Lt. William Shaffer
CP 2nd Lt. Keith Drager
N 2nd Lt. J.S. Zlasner
Tog S/Sgt. J. Lesko
ETG S/Sgt. Murray Ross
R S/Sgt. Clayton Mahlum
RW Sgt. G.W. Engle
BTG Sgt. Gilbert Sulkey
TG Sgt. Ted Gulyas

A/C #7374 X

P 1st Lt. Marion L. Boswell
CP 1st Lt. W.A. McMillen
N 1st Lt. J.F. Stevens
B 1st Lt. W.G. Skinner
ETG T/Sgt. John Bernard
R T/Sgt. Roy Poston
LW S/Sgt. D.C. Nicol
BTG S/Sgt. John Maxfield
TG S/Sgt. J.D. Roberts

A/C #7387 H

P 2nd Lt. John McCormick
CP 2nd Lt. William Feinstein
N 2nd Lt. Ray Woltman
Tog Sgt. William Logan
ETG Sgt. Marvin Gooden
R Sgt. Joseph Stritch
LW Sgt. William Garner
BTG Sgt. Reynaldo Garcia
TG Sgt. C. Fellows

A/C #188 G

P 2nd Lt. Mahlon Erickson
CP 1st Lt. Robert Blacker
N 2nd Lt. Paul Nachtwey
B F/O Lionel Leitner
ETG S/Sgt. Emil Peterson
R Sgt. Claiborne Graves
LW Sgt. James Sewell
BTG Sgt. Lowell Thompson
TG Sgt. Robert Morden

ROBERT B. TEMPLEMAN
Major, Air Corps Operations Officer

Classic Encounter With "Abbeville Gang"

Continued From Page 5

"I recall distinctly that his face seemed flushed," said Welty. "Where are we going?" I asked.

"You've been there before," he said.

Welty didn't have to ask again. He knew it was Merseburg.

Dreaded Merseburg.

The second wave of Focke-Wulfs took out three engines on Wismer's B-17. Just one pass and it was all over. With no chance of remaining airborne all nine crewmen bailed out. All parachuted to safety and PW camp. Except one.

Waist gunner Marvin Clark was never seen again until his body was recovered from a common grave in Erfurt in 1948. Others on the Wismer crew included Eugene Reaves, Dave Levy, John Butler, Ahealeas Pares, Eldon Severson, Sam Luizzi and Herman Hager.

It was Hager, many years later, who would lead the way in developing the magnificent memorial at Nuthampstead which stands in memory of his buddy, Clark, and the many other 398th men who perished in the conflict.

Another B-17 caught in the second wave of the FW assault was piloted by frail-looking Paul Rich. Although small and very "youngish" looking, Rich had the reputation of being a gifted B-17 pilot.

Trailing in the slot element, Rich took a hit in his No. 2 engine and another in the oxygen storage, igniting a major fire in the cockpit and gangway. Veering sharply to the right and quickly exploding, only Robert Rasmussen and Earl Kearney escaped the fiery death plunge. Each man was blown free and each was fortunate enough to have had his chute partially hooked at the time of the blow-out.

Buried at Pferdingsleben were Rich, Don

McCordindale, Robert Stuart, Clib Johnson, James Ault, Walter Miller and Milton Passmore.

Another 190 caught Hyndman's plane, wounding navigator Ken Carlson and knocking out two engines and the hydraulic system. Despite these afflictions, Hyndman nursed his Fort as far as Bruges, Belgium where he made an emergency landing at an RAF fighter base.

The Air Force took notice of Hyndman's action and awarded him the Distinguished Flying Cross in 1948.

Another of the second wave 190's bore in on high element leader Johnson and planted a 20 mm. shell in the leading edge of the open bomb bay door, with engineer Stankiewicz in the hand-crank position. The shell splashed in the empty bomb bay, narrowly missing the engineer and radio operator Mario Procopio, but severing wires only inches away.

Co-pilot Robert Lucy, who was flying, had just pulled up at seeing the plight of one of the lead element ships. This maneuver saved the Johnson ship from taking cannon shells in the nose or cockpit. While one hit the bomb bay door, others passed harmlessly beneath the Fort.

The fighter passed within inches of Johnson's left wing, then flashed down toward Tarr, trailing in the slot element with Rich and Spangler. Welty said he counted four 20 mm. tracers as they whizzed over his windshield.

"This guy passed over us so close I thought for sure he was going to 'kamikazi' us," said the co-pilot. Also on Welty's mind during the attack was the out-of-control Rich aircraft, which was beginning to fall into his own flight path. Welty kicked the rudders for just enough slip to avoid a collision.

Tarr, making his way from the waist to the

cockpit after delivering walkaround oxygen bottles to his waist gunner, almost wound up in the bomb bay as a result of Welty's plane-saving rudder maneuver.

With one engine feathered due to flak, his oxygen supply half depleted, and planes dropping from formation all around, Tarr scrambled back into the cockpit and immediately dove for the cloud cover below. With astute navigation from Walter Small, the crew returned along to Nuthampstead only 15 minutes after the "squadron" landed at 4:45 p.m.

After the second attack by the Focke-Wulfs, only Johnson, Spangler and Spitzer were still in their assigned positions in the dismembered squadron. "Form on me," radioed Johnson, as he headed for cloud cover to escape the torment scene.

If the FW's returned (or were happy to effect their escape from the P-51's) they found nothing.

"Give me a heading," came the order from Johnson to his 20-year-old navigator, Ike Thacker. And the trio struck out for home.

Larry Paul, co-pilot for Spitzer, flying one of the 603rd's venerable Fortresses — 469 Q — characterized the general condition of the three returnees with this description of old Queenie —

"We couldn't even taxi her off the runway. Both tires were punctured and we quit counting the flak holes when we got to 250."

For his part in leading the "little flight" back home to Nuthampstead as a squadron of three, the Air Medal was presented to Warren Johnson. That award came 41 years later, 1985.

Flak, fighters, courage, luck, fires, drama, gallantry, bail outs, sacrifice, weather, airmanship, death ...

They all happened to the 398th this day.

... The Leuna Oil Refinery At Merseburg''

HIGH SQUADRON - 603

A/C #348 A Squadron Lead

CA 1st Lt. Ken Hastings
P 1st Lt. Ken Buzza
MIC 2nd Lt. Marvin Laufer
N 1st Lt. Oral Birch
B 1st Lt. Charles Wilbur
ETG T/Sgt. George Spraggins
R T/Sgt. John McMenamin
LW S/Sgt. Jack Madlung
RW S/Sgt. David Morgan
TG S/Sgt. Eugene Minchoff

A/C #671 F Deputy Lead

P 1st Lt. Robert Lehner
CP 2nd Lt. Stan Delafayette
N 1st Lt. James Esterbrooks
B 2nd Lt. Henry Ference
ETG T/Sgt. Ozie French
R T/Sgt. William Elliott
BTG S/Sgt. Ken Bachman
RW S/Sgt. Virgil Register
TG S/Sgt. Rex Kellogg

A/C #147 L

P 1st Lt. Charles Howell
CP 2nd Lt. William Bryan
N 1st Lt. John Leyden
B 2nd Lt. Robert Gaynor
ETG S/Sgt. Ralph Glancy
R T/Sgt. John Bahling
BTG S/Sgt. Brooks Atchison
LW S/Sgt. William Landrie
RW S/Sgt. Jose Echevarria
TG S/Sgt. Fred Cole

A/C #078 U

P 1st Lt. Staver Hyndman
CP 2nd Lt. Allen Gidcumb
N 2nd Lt. Ken Carlson
B 2nd Lt. E. Dalton Ebbeson
ETG T/Sgt. Charles F. Gray
R T/Sgt. Charles T. Jones
BTG S/Sgt. Carl C. Stanley
LW S/Sgt. Carmine Salsano
TG S/Sgt. Robert J. McLaughlin

A/C #825 J

P 2nd Lt. John Aniello
CP 2nd Lt. John G. Blythe
N 2nd Lt. W.O. Parker
B F/O Barney Glickman
ETG S/Sgt. Richard Martin
R Sgt. Francis Redican
BTG Sgt. Sidney Fagelman
RW Sgt. Raymond Gardner
TG Sgt. Charles Ormsby

A/C #600 Z

P 1st Lt. Fred Wismer
CP 2nd Lt. Eugene Reaves
N F/O Aheieas Pares
B 2nd Lt. Elbert Severson
ETG T/Sgt. Sam Luizzi
R T/Sgt. Herman Hager
BTG S/Sgt. John Butler
LW S/Sgt. Marvin Clark
TG S/Sgt. Dave Levy

A/C #982 K

P 1st Lt. Warren Johnson
CP 2nd Lt. Robert Lucy
N 2nd Lt. Ike Thacker
B 2nd Lt. Pete Special
ETG T/Sgt. Charles Stankiewicz
R T/Sgt. Mario Procopio
BTG S/Sgt. Doyle Atwood
LW S/Sgt. Larry Zagelow
TG S/Sgt. Allen Ostrom

A/C #390 X

P 1st Lt. John Stevens
CP 2nd Lt. Iz Rovinsky
N 2nd Lt. Clint Slusher
B 2nd Lt. John Osborn
ETG T/Sgt. M.A. Neidringhaus
R T/Sgt. G.C. Jackson
BTG S/Sgt. John Abernathy
LW S/Sgt. Ken Chesshir
BIG S/Sgt. Dave Doerfler

A/C #977 R

P 2nd Lt. John E. Smith
CP 1st Lt. Donald J. deClene
N 2nd Lt. Robert Burkart
Tog S/Sgt. J.A. Humbert
ETG Sgt. James Armbruster
R S/Sgt. Dallas Kite
BIG Sgt. Donal E. Mapel
RW Sgt. Dennis Berry
LW Sgt. Paul Cox
TG Sgt. Stanley Sachs

A/C #469 Q

P 1st Lt. Ernest Spitzer
CP 2nd Lt. Laurence Paul
N 1st Lt. Warren Davidson
B 1st Lt. James Haas
ETG T/Sgt. B.P. Jaruszewski
R Sgt. W. Bruce Gillis
BTG S/Sgt. Alfred P. Shadroui
LW S/Sgt. Paul F. Crawford
TG S/Sgt. P.J. Cregan

A/C #091 L

P 1st Lt. Harold Spangler
CP 2d Lt. Robert E. Weidig
N 2d Lt. James Mayhall
B 2d Lt. John Schantzback
ETG T/Sgt. Frank Garry, Jr.
R T/Sgt. Howard Ayres
BTG S/Sgt. Gerald R. Bacon
LW S/Sgt. Carl J. Tope
TG S/Sgt. Donald King

A/C #138 T

P 1st Lt. Paul Rich
CP 2nd Lt. Don McCorkindale
N 2nd Lt. Robert Stuart
B 2nd Lt. Earl Kearney
ETG T/Sgt. Clib Johnson
R T/Sgt. Robert Rasmussen
BTG S/Sgt. James Ault
RW S/Sgt. Walter Miller
TG S/Sgt. Milton Passmore

A/C #249 P

P 1st Lt. Joe Tarr
CP 2nd Lt. Robert Welty
N 2nd Lt. Walter Small
Tog S/Sgt. R.J. Livingston
ETG T/Sgt. Russell C. Currier
R T/Sgt. Arthur D. Jones
BTG S/Sgt. Harold Clyne
LW S/Sgt. Allison L. Dougherty
TG S/Sgt. William R. Fleming

KEARIE L. BERRY, JR.
Captain, Air Corps Operations Officer

LOW SQUADRON - 601

A/C #7889 B Squadron Lead

CA Capt. Merwin Genung
P 1st Lt. Robert E. Brown
N 1st Lt. Ralph H. McIntyre
B 1st Lt. Lester B. Veley
ETG T/Sgt. Joseph J. McCort
R T/Sgt. Richard W. Catterlin
WG S/Sgt. John P. Mallon, Jr.
BT S/Sgt. Charles W. Dufur
TG S/Sgt. Clayton E. Johnson

A/C #8121 Q Deputy Lead

CA 1st Lt. Harold O. Stallings
P 1st Lt. Malcolm L. Prather
N 2nd Lt. Vern E. Klippert
B Capt. David L. Levy
ETG T/Sgt. James B. Ryan
R T/Sgt. William J. Delcroy
WG S/Sgt. James C. Crouch
BT S/Sgt. Phillip D'Addio
WG S/Sgt. Ralph C. Lampton
TG Sgt. Aucdio G. Diguiseppa

A/C #2519 A

P 1st Lt. Mack J. Hunt
CP 2nd Lt. Robert H. Dee, Jr.
N 2nd Lt. Herman J. Buck
B 2nd Lt. Robert J. Jensen
ETG T/Sgt. Robert G. Hayes
R T/Sgt. John R. Courmeen
WG S/Sgt. James T. Haynes
BT S/Sgt. Albert J. Pysson
TG S/Sgt. Robert L. Sternadel

A/C #8463 X

P 2nd Lt. Linn R. Rogers
CP 2nd Lt. Orland D. Brown
N 2nd Lt. Robert J. Beckley
B 2nd Lt. Robert N. Rebillot
ETG T/Sgt. William R. Cook
R T/Sgt. Bruno R. Bongiani
WG S/Sgt. Raymond C. Brokaw
BT S/Sgt. Billie S. Clack
TG S/Sgt. David Lawler

A/C #7338 C

P 2nd Lt. Samuel Watkins
CP 2nd Lt. Ross F. Scott
N F/O Haskell Schwartz
Tog Sgt. Jene L. Pricer
ETG Sgt. Jerry A. Manzi
R Sgt. Lloyd B. Paris
WG Sgt. Glenn W. Tueller
BT Sgt. Francis F. Piha
TG Sgt. Jack F. Dodson

A/C #2507 I

P 1st Lt. Russell J. Morrison
CP 2nd Lt. Guy C. Quick, Jr.
N 2nd Lt. Charles D. Scofield
Tog S/Sgt. William L. Shields
ETG T/Sgt. George B. Bryan
R T/Sgt. Bernard M. Kuse
WG S/Sgt. John L. Gerle
BT S/Sgt. William Schmidt
TG S/Sgt. James F. Wickam

A/C #8064 H

P 1st Lt. Wallace Blackwell
CP 2nd Lt. Roy L. Anderson
N 2nd Lt. Isadore Cassuto
Tog S/Sgt. Frank A. Yarmoski
ETG T/Sgt. Arnold Brunsberg
R T/Sgt. Hillyer B. Brown
WG S/Sgt. Jack D. Eder
BT S/Sgt. Gerald A. Decker
TG S/Sgt. Jack L. Bohn

A/C #7080 S

P 1st Lt. Samuel H. Palant
CP 2nd Lt. John J. Baumeister
N F/O Nunzio P. Addabbo
B 2nd Lt. Roger W. Campbell
ETG Sgt. Wilbur W. Withrow
R Sgt. Paul W. Brown
WG Sgt. Frank R. Strnad
BT Sgt. Walter W. Hall
TG Sgt. Byron B. Cunningham

A/C #8707 T

P 1st Lt. Glenn F. Curtis
CP 2nd Lt. Theodore A. Klein
N 2nd Lt. Herbert R. Berk
B 2nd Lt. Keith B. Hill
ETG T/Sgt. John L. Grossman
R T/Sgt. William L. Keene
WG S/Sgt. Klein L. McCroskey
BTG S/Sgt. Francis V. Hill
TG S/Sgt. James P. Rawls

A/C #2418 M

P 1st Lt. William A. Sittler
CP 2nd Lt. Charles F. Seal
N 2nd Lt. Albert D. Turney
B 2nd Lt. Joseph P. Ruzich
ETG T/Sgt. Vincent A. Bowe
R T/Sgt. Frederick W. Blehm
WG S/Sgt. John H. Allen
BT S/Sgt. Raymond Z. Lopez
TG S/Sgt. William H. Elmore

A/C #7203 Z

P 2nd Lt. Francis S. Landrum
CP 2nd Lt. James R. Akins
N 2nd Lt. Kenneth J. Rockstroh
B 2nd Lt. Arthur D. Gibbons
ETG Sgt. Rudolph R. Fanska
R Sgt. Benton C. Greider
WG Sgt. Herbert H. Garbrecht
BT Sgt. Joe M. Rutland
TG Sgt. Robert R. Sandford

A/C #2596 N

P 2nd Lt. Benjamin G. Rolfe
CP 2nd Lt. Alfred E. Kastner
N 2nd Lt. Vernon D. Anderson
Tog Sgt. Richard W. Rimmer
ETG S/Sgt. Joseph M. Price, Jr.
R Sgt. Frank Laconis
WG Sgt. Arthur P. Schmidt
BT Cpl. James B. Coulson
TG Sgt. Thomas S. Pozder

By Order of the Squadron Commander:

WILLIS E. FRAZIER

Captain, A.C. Operations Officer

LETTERS FROM HERE & THERE

"Since the untimely death of David Wells I have held the post of interim chairman of the UK Friends of the 398th and have endeavoured to lead and hold the group together whilst that wound healed. With the completion of a very successful reunion here at Nuthampstead I now feel that I can step down and hand a rejuvenated group over to a younger chairman.

"It has been agreed that Wilfred Dimsdale should become chairman and the officers should be as follows — Vic Jenkins, vice chairman; Barry Tyler, honourable treasurer; and Elaine Tyler, honourable treasurer. The committee will be made up of Peggy and Tim Wells; Robert and Francois Dimsdale; Tony and Greta Barker; and Tony and Beryl Clark.

"My resignation is in no way a change of heart. It is my belief that the future of the Nuthampstead Friends and your Memorial will be best served by the new chairman. We have made many friends over the years and we hope to make many more in the years to come."

Tony Clark, Rosebrook, Saffron Walden, Essex, CB 11 4SB, England.

"The joy of the Oshkosh reunion remain with us in memory and pictures. These moments together add a freshness to our years like the coolness of the fall after a long, hot summer. The words to the song, "We Have This Moment," so well describe these reunions —

"Yesterday is gone, and tomorrow may never come, but we have this moment today."

Marguerite and Jim Duvall, San Pedro, CA 90731.

"Sorry to inform you that I will not be able to participate in the October and January mailings of FLAK NEWS. I have cataracts in both eyes and am scheduled for surgery in October. Hope to resume participation on the April and July mailings. Regards to the mailing crew."

Tracy Petersen, Tacoma, WA 98498. Editor's Note — Tracy has been a faithful volunteer in the mailing process of FLAK NEWS since 1986. Perhaps he could use some "volunteer" greetings from his 601 friends.

"Please extend my deep feelings of appreciation to the men and women of the 398th for their beautiful messages of sympathy. Helen was a real trooper to the end. She loved the 398th. Please remember her in your prayers."

Earl Berryhill, San Antonio, TX 78209.

"Recently I went out to meet Wally and Teedy Blackwell. He had amassed a packet of photos and other material relating to the ceremony at Penn, England, last July 1. It was wonderful and I was deeply moved by it all. The dedication and reverence of the people of Penn, and the faithful and loyal pursuit of information in remembrance and respect for my brother Leo and the others on the Searl crew was heartwarming. After 45 years, this was a wonderful tribute to those men. I am sure the other crew members' families also are most grateful."

Mary Ellen Walsh, Washington, DC 20011. Editor's Note — Mary Ellen and Edmond Walsh are sister and brother to Leo Walsh, bombardier on the Searl crew that crashed at Penn in 1944. A Service of Remembrance was held at Penn during the group tour last summer.

"Thank you very much for the information on our UK Friends of the 398th. My third daughter and I will be at Nuthampstead in early January, 1991, and will be looking forward to seeing and greeting some of these great folks. Please find a check to be used to further the 398th."

Joseph P. Roberge, Bellport, NY 11713.



WILFRED DIMSDALE
New Leader of "U.K. Friends of 398th"

"Peggy Wells and her family would like to thank all their kind American friends, who joined with Nuthampstead Village to give the beautiful memorial bench in memory of David Wells. It was a lovely tribute, and looks so appropriate at the Memorial site. We hope many people will come and enjoy using it.

"We so enjoyed the group visit here last summer and are already looking forward to making plans for your next visit in 1992."
Tim Wells, Nuthampstead, Royston, Herts, SG8 8LT.

"It was my honor and privilege to attend the funeral services here at Air Force Village for General Curtis E. LeMay. He will be interred at the Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, CO. General LeMay was sometimes accused of being 'opinionated,' but there was no question that he was one of the greatest military leaders of our generation. As an 'ex-SAC type,' I can confirm that he always 'took care of his troops.'"

Bill Markley, Jr., Riverside, CA 92508.

San Diego Next Up; Nov. '91 Dates Set

One 398th reunion is just over in Oshkosh . . . and another is abuilding in San Diego.

The 1991 reunion is scheduled for November 6-9 in the Southern California city. A moderate departure from the "usual" summer or early fall dates of past meetings in Rapid City, Seattle, Colorado Springs, San Antonio, Richmond, Dayton and Oshkosh.

The winter dates will provide a summer-like respite for those folks living in areas buried in ice and snow. San Diego may also provide the kick-off locale for those members wishing to visit on the West Coast . . . or possibly on to Hawaii, Australia, etc., etc.

The 398th reunion will be held at the Town & Country Hotel, 500 Hotel Circle No., San Diego, CA 92108. Telephone (619) 291-7171.

Reunion chairman at San Diego will be Bob Hopkins, San Diego, CA 92111.

For those members wishing to leave their cars at home and take to the air, it is recommended that they begin now even to talk to their travel agent for reservations. Most airlines have attractive fares for advance bookings.

Once again the 398th will be working with VIP Travel for special arrangements. They are located at 100 No. Royal St., Alexandria, VA 22314. Toll free telephone 1-800-451-5439. Ask for Ellie Turner.