



602



601



603



600

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

VOL. 9 NO. 4

FLAK NEWS

OCTOBER 1994

## Busy Year Ahead For The 398th

No sooner had the thrill of the Tucson reunion begun to subside but what fingers were turning the calendar and pointing to a very busy 1995 ... and beyond.

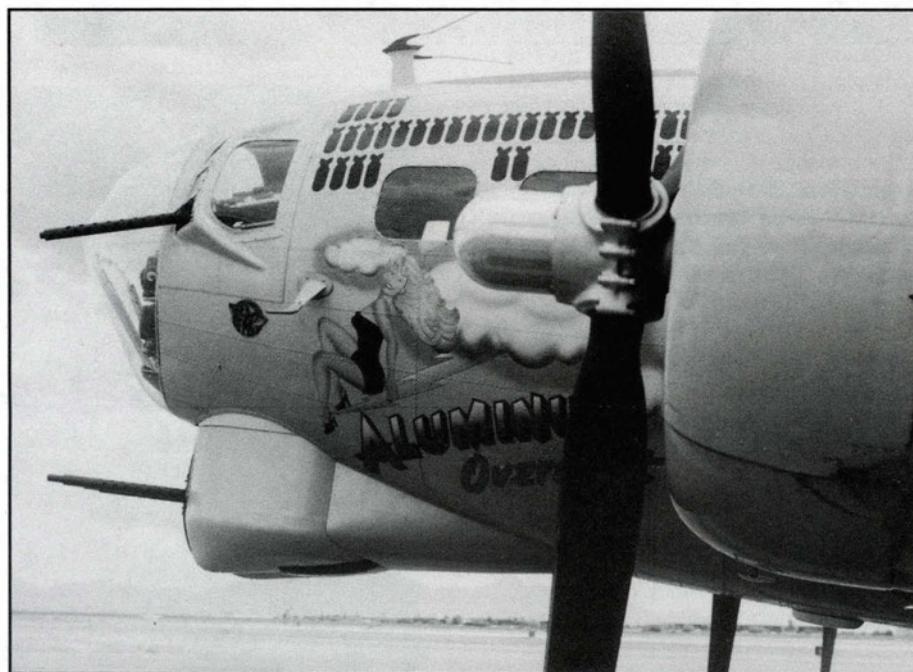
As previously announced, the 1995 reunion will be held in the southeast city of Charleston, South Carolina. Dates of the reunion will be Wednesday-Thursday-Friday-Saturday, October 11-12-13-14, 1995.

Charleston, where the War Between the States began when the Confederate Army fired on Fort Sumter, is also known for plantations, extraordinary restaurants, Cypress Gardens, The Citadel, and ... the world's largest naval and maritime museum, Patriot's Point featuring the aircraft carrier, Yorktown.

Before Charleston, however, there will be an opportunity for members to take a memorable journey next May to the Czech Republic, there to visit the city of Pilsen (Plzen), listed as the final 8th Air Force bombing target of World War II in Europe. See Page 5 of FLAK NEWS for complete information.

Looking ahead to 1996 and Elaine Tyler, the Friends' "honourable secretary," was at the Tucson reunion and declared that last summer's visit was "a very happy occasion" for their members and friends. She hinted strongly that a "fantastic surprise" would be in store for our members next year.

Hmmmm.



THE ALUMINUM OVERCAST IN TUCSON

## TUCSON REUNION It Was A Good One!

Chalk up one more great gathering of the troops!

Tucson, way out there in the sagebrush country of Southwest Arizona, proved to be a first-class drawing card as the 398th Bomb Group held its 11th annual reunion September 21-24, 1994.

The attendance was a marvelous 548.

Yes, it was a tad bit hot, if one classifies temperatures in the 95- to 104 degree range as "hot." However, nothing was postponed because of the weather. Not the golf tournament, not the evening at Old Tucson, not the tour to Nogales, Mexico, not the tour to Pima Air Museum, and Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, not the tours to Sabino Canyon and the Sonora Desert Museum.

And certainly not the visit to the Aluminum Overcast, the EAA's B-17 flying 398th colors. Lots of folks toured the restored Fortress on the ground and no less than 38 members and friends opted for rides during its three-day stay in Tucson. (See Page 7 for the list of lucky passengers.)

Of course, there were those who escaped the heat in other ways, primarily in the hotel swimming pool. Some were actually seen in the lobby bar.

The big attraction, during the "lulls" between activities, was the Memory Room. The walls were decorated with 398th memorabilia, as were the many tables. Men and women relaxed at the

*Continued On Page 3*



**MARIA HUNTER** was presented a portrait of her late husband, Col. Frank P. Hunter, Jr., at the Welcome Banquet at Tucson. It was a copy of the photo that ran in the "Colonel Hunter Special" in last July's issue of **FLAK NEWS**. The presentation was made by President **Bill Comstock**.

**A STANDING OVATION** was accorded the 398th KC-135 crew at the Farewell Banquet. From left to right are S/Sgt. Rodney Pate; S/Sgt. Steve Hewitt; T/Sgt. Albert Warren; M/Sgt. Tom McElroy; Capt. David Rodriguez; and Maj. Gary Gutowski. Not pictured are Sr. Airmen Dave Kirkpatrick, Andrew Wright, David Quinlan, and L/C Marc Stormont, deputy CO of the 398th Operations Group. In the background are Clyde and Gail Sebastian and Evelyn and Bill Comstock.



**SENIOR AIRMEN** Andrew Wright and David Quinlan admire one of the many displays in the Memory Room at the Tucson reunion. The blanket was created by Sam Miller of the Dana Lovelace crew. The collection of military insignias depicts the many units represented at the German prison camp where Miller spent time after being shot down.



**JILL CHANDLER**, a young “fan” of WW II airmen, was a guest at the Tucson reunion. She read two of her poems, “I Can Tell You’re A Veteran” and “Take Me Back” during the Welcome Banquet. She also read “Phantom of the Midnight Sky” at the Farewell Banquet, as “searchlights” followed a B-17 model moving across the banquet hall. Jill’s dramatic readings touched the hearts of the men and women in the audience.

**JAMES DUVALL** was the recipient of the “Flowers For The Living” award presented by president Bill Comstock. The 398th chaplain and Marguerite Duvall admire the plaque given by the 398th. It read, “50 Years On, Still Our Chaplain.” It also bore the words of a poem that had been written by the Duvall’s daughter. A second “Flowers” award was given to Jack Wintersteen for his work as historian and PX officer.

## *Tucson Reunion Was Happy, Emotional Affair*

*Continued From Page 1*

tables to exchange stories, view photos and albums. Others opted to watch one of the several WW II air war videos that seemed to run nonstop.

The evening programs in the large banquet hall featured a variety of entertainment, including a spiffy group of young people displaying their dancing skills. Their exciting routines prompted some of the veterans (the older ones) to recall those Broadway shows and movies featuring Ruby Keeler, Dick Powell, Ginger Rogers, etc.

Nostalgia and tears also were there. A young guest, Jill Chandler from Spokane, Washington, read some of her poems which tell of the air war. Her tribute to Colonel Frank P. Hunter, Jr., called “For The Fallen,” set the tone and attitude for the audience.

More eyes were moistened when she recited, “I Can Tell You Are A Veteran.”

Nostalgia continued when president Bill Comstock brought up Chaplain James Duvall and his wife Marguerite to receive an award called, “Flowers For The Living.” The plaque read –

“50 YEARS ON,  
STILL OUR CHAPLAIN.”

It bore the emblem of the 398th Bomb Group, “Hell From Heaven,” and a poem written by the Duvall’s daughter, Nancy.

They were visibly touched with the pre-

sentation and returned thanks to the emotionally-drained audience.

A second, “Flowers For The Living” was presented later. Comstock called up Jack and Marqueen Wintersteen and presented them with a framed drawing of a B-17 created by the English artist, Steve Ridgeway.

Wintersteen is turning over his PX job to Joe and Rozanne Joseph (see Page 12) and his historian job to Willis Frazier. For many years Wintersteen has been collecting historical data on 398th members and now has four large albums. Frazier said he will continue Wintersteen’s project.

Reunion chairman Clyde Sebastian got the party off to a good start by displaying a pair of “398th DAY” proclamations given by the governor of Arizona and the mayor of Tucson.

Another guest at the banquet was Lt. Col. Iceal Hambleton, USAF, retired. The former EB-66 navigator kept his audience spellbound with the story of his escape from North Viet Nam after being shot down by a SAM missile.

The irrepressible Jack Lee, who had openly (tongue in cheek) questioned if Tucson was safe for visitors, quoting a Los Angeles travel column telling of dangerous javalinas, foxes, cougars, etc., that supposedly roamed the city streets.

He was presented with a Frank Buck helmet and toy gun for his own protection against the “wild animals of Tucson.”

He had no snappy retort, claiming his tongue was plugging a hole in a busted filling. (A real tongue in cheek.)

Lt. Col. Marc Stormont of the 398th Operations Group, Castle Air Force Base, California, led a ten-man KC-135 tanker crew down to Davis-Monthan to join in on the reunion activities. They opened their plane for inspection as members toured the huge air base.

Two of his senior airmen brought the banquet audience to its feet by presenting the colors (US and 398th flags) as the band played the “Star Spangled Banner.”

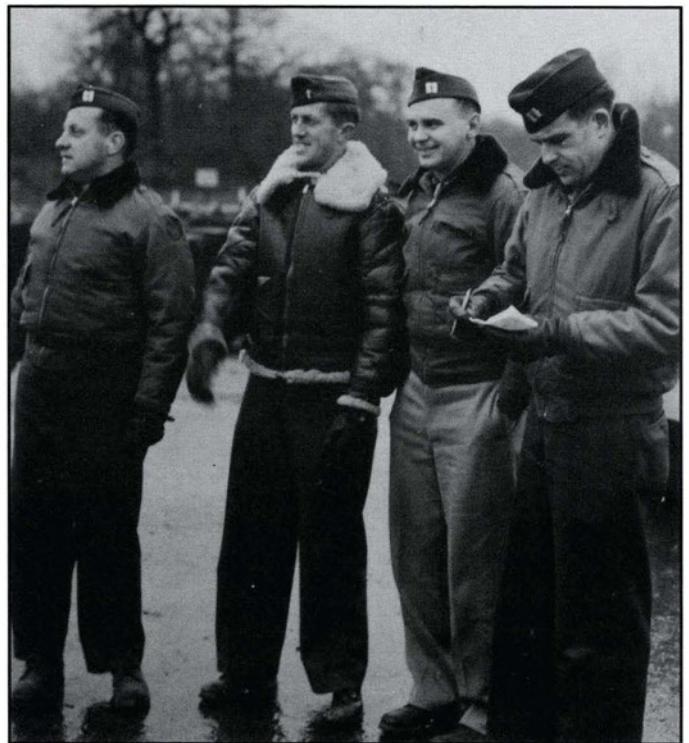
As the final event of the Farewell Banquet, Jill Chandler came to the podium to read another of her poems, “Phantom of the Midnight Sky.” As she began to read, the hall darkened and 12 flashlights began to illuminate a B-17 model suspended near the ceiling. Lights on and propellers turning.

As it moved across the room on an invisible cable, Jill continued to read, finishing with these words –

*“The scene never changes  
The engines never still  
In the old haunted theaters  
The war never ends.”*



WITH A LITTLE imagination, one can visualize the old east/west runway at Station 131. Or what is left of it. This view, taken by Wally Blackwell last summer, looks to the east. The control tower would have been at the far right, now the site of a tall flag pole flying the flags of 398th members who have passed on.



THE MEDICAL STAFF (and chaplains) were always on hand, just in case, when the 398th bombers came home from a mission. Shown here awaiting in blustery weather near the runway are Dr. William Kavanaugh (602); Chaplain Jim Duvall; Dr. Lew Hunter (603); and Dr. Robert Kelly (600).

**THE STORY OF**  
*Flying Fortress*  
No. 42-107214 V

This B-17 propeller was found on the Reed Hall Farm following the crash of the Flying Fortress on November 25, 1944. The plane was returning to its base at Nuthampstead following a bombing raid on Merseburg, Germany, in World War II.

The B-17 was from the 398th Bomb Group, 600th Squadron, Serial Number 42-107214 V.

Three airmen died in the crash – Vellardell (V.A.) Hansard, pilot; Robert L. Davis, co-pilot; and Williams H. Baker, Navigator. Six others parachuted to safety seconds before the lane plunged into the ground, exploded, and burned. They were William S. Lake, engineer-gunner; Kenneth Hesterley, togglier; Robert H. Cantwell, radio operator; Ed Briskie, ball turret gunner; Willie Colclough, waist gunner; and James Fowler, tail gunner.

The propeller was given to the 398th Bomb Group Memorial Association in 1992 by Chris Handley and Douglas Crowther. On June 27, 1994, it was presented to the "Friends of the 398th" to retain as a memento from Station 131, Nuthampstead, England.

THIS IS THE TEXT on the plaque that was affixed to the propeller off the V.A. Hansard B-17 that crashed when returning from Merseburg on November 25, 1944, taking three lives. The propeller is now in the hands of the Friends of the 398th, and one day will be placed in a designated "repository" near Nuthampstead.



HARRY MAZUR points to the "Plzen" sign during his visit to the Czech Republic city last July. Next May, 1995, a bus load of 398th members and friends will visit the city on a special tour.

## HUNTER FLAK NEWS AVAILABLE

The special FLAK NEWS issue featuring Colonel Frank P. Hunter, Vol. 9, No. 3, is still available at \$2.00 each. Order from treasurer Ralph Hall, New Bedford, MA 02740-1915.

An extra 300 copies were printed in July, anticipating that members might wish to present the "collector's item" to family members and friends.

Members contributed over \$300 to help defray the costs of the 20-page special. As of press time, over 200 extra copies had been mailed.

## Frazier Rallies The "Troops"

Dick Frazier, anticipating the fly-in of the Aluminum Overcast in his hometown of Oklahoma City in late September, rallied all the local 398th members to turn out for the Fortress' three-day appearance at Wiley Post Airport.

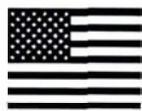
Frazier also rallied his fellow Confederate Air Force members to join forces with the sponsoring EAA local chapter in assisting with the fly-in arrangements.

The 398th Board member urged other members at future fly-ins across the country to assist the EAA local chapters in turning out Fortress fans to view (and fly in) the 398th's "own" Aluminum Overcast.

# The 398th

Is Going To Pilsen,  
Czech Republic,

**ONE MORE TIME!**



Welcome  
to Plzeň

1945  
1995

Celebrate the 50th Anniversary  
of D-Day and Pilsen's 700th  
birthday while on a special,  
10-day "Last Mission" tour  
with the 398th Bomb Group.



**MAY 4-13, 1995**



Ask for Barbara Fish

**\$1,995**

From Newark, New Jersey

**\$2,195**

From Seattle, Washington  
(\$295 Single Supplement)

Allen Ostrom  
Tour Coordinator

"We would like all people of good will from all  
the world to gather in Plzeň in 1995 and  
remember those who sacrificed their lives for  
our freedom. We would also like to pay our  
tribute to all the living participants in the war  
events in Europe."

-CITY OF PLZEN



- See our "Target For Today" - the Skoda Works.
- Participate in Pilsen's VE Day ceremonies.
- Two days in Copenhagen and Tivoli.
- A whole day in the great city of Prague.
- A day at the world famous Spa city of Marienbad.
- See the Memorial to our 398th air crew members killed on The Last Mission.
- Visit the world famous brewery in Pilsen and the Moser Glass factory in Karlovy Vary.



## 398th Books Available

Way back in time someone said, "the children don't mind their parents and everyone wants to write a book." This still holds.

At least seven members have contributed to the 398th history in recent years, including the "official" REMEMBRANCES by Allen Ostrom.

The latest to appear is Leonard Streitfeld's "Hell From Heaven," a recording of his experiences as a bombardier on the Shimek crew of the 600th. He also produced a VHS video taken from his color movie film shot in 1944-45. Streitfeld contributed over \$1,300 to the 398th from proceeds of the video. It is still available to members, as is his new book. His address is Hammonton, NJ 08037-5149.

Hollis Dalton, 601 pilot, also has written a book called, "The Flight of the Kentucky Colonel." This refers to his B-17 of the same name. The book is filled with many references and names familiar to 398th personnel. He can be reached at Longwood, FL 32750-2802.

Harry Nelson produced a work called, "Above and Beyond the Wire," telling of his life in a German prison camp after being shot down with the Gene Douglas crew. He was the 600th Squadron lead navigator. His address is Lawrenceville, IL 62439-0307.

Larry Miller turned out a book called, "The War Years." This is a day-by-day scenario of his life in the Air Force from the beginning through his 35 missions with the Ted Johnston crew of the 600th. His address is Lexington, MA 02173-5623.

"In The False Dawn" was written by "Cap" F.M. Bailey, a veteran of both the North African and European air wars. He flew 60 missions, received 23 decorations, was shot down four times, and was credited with eight fighter kills. Bailey was with the 398th briefly as an instructor and writes highly of the group's combat skills. Bailey is quite outspoken on many war subjects and admits to "telling like it was" regardless of names and personalities. His narrative on the Ploesti raids is eye opening, as is his story of evading after being shot down. His address is Fountain, CO 80817-3309.

FLAK NEWS - Vol. 9 No. 4

## Start Pulling The Props:

# Pilsen Target Once More for 398th

Forty-nine years ago who would have thought that the 398th would one day return to Pilsen, Czechoslovakia, for "one more mission?"

(On April 25, 1945, it was the Last Mission flown by the 398th and the 8th Air Force.)

Well, guys, start pulling the props 'cause another mission to the Skoda Works is "in the works." But this time, Skoda is turning out machinery for the world's industry, not 88 anti-aircraft cannons and shells. Skoda, would you believe, is now owned by an American company from Texas, Brown and Root!

A special 398th tour has been created for just this experience and it will happen next spring, May 4 through 13, 1995. It will be a 10-day mission not only to see Skoda, but also to share in Pilsen's 700th birthday celebration and VE Day on May 8.

And there is much more, like two days in Copenhagen at the conclusion of the tour, a visit to Prague, plus the famous Czech spa town of Marienbad and the glass works at Karlovy Vary.

**"We are happy that today the American and Czech flags may again fly side by side as they used to 50 years ago. We are happy that we may again shake your hands as we did on those happy and hopeful days of May 1945."**

- CITY OF PLZEN

And perhaps most important, a visit to the beautiful memorial at nearby Litice to honor the men of the 602 Ferguson crew who were killed there on the last mission. It is hoped that the crash site of the Colville crew, also of the 602nd, will be discovered and available for a visit.

The Pilsen group called SLET has been searching for the site for several years. A new "lead" this year has centered their search in the area of Marienbad.

All four squadrons from the 398th flew the Last Mission, headed by Captain Michael Robinson of the 601st. 2nd Lt. Gaylord Pryor led the 602nd; 1st Lt. James Hanauer the 603rd, and 1st Lt. Orrin Tachio the 600th. The story of the Last Mission appeared in Vol. 8 No. 2 of FLAK NEWS.

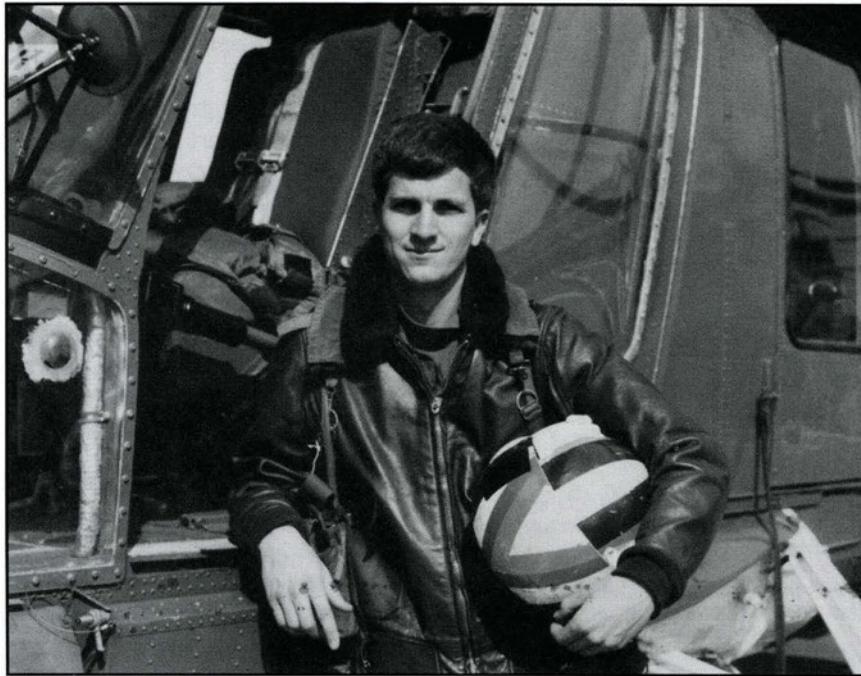
The names of the entire loading list appeared in that issue, and also on the back page of the brochure printed on this page. The brochure may be procured by calling Barbara Fish, Travel House, Inc., Seattle. Toll free 1-800-423-5454. Barbara will send the complete itinerary and other special information to anyone interested in the May 1994 tour.

The tour will be via scheduled SAS Airlines, leaving either from Newark, New Jersey, or from Seattle, Washington. Arrangements to and from Newark and Seattle also may be made with Travel House.

The first six days of the tour will be spent in Pilsen (Plzeň), with tours to the various sites being made via air conditioned coach. The final two days will be spent at a downtown Copenhagen hotel, with the "Farewell Banquet" at Tivoli.

# “A Dream As Real As The Dreams Of Youth”

## Navy Helicopter Pilot Shares Late Father’s Memories



**Navy Commander Craig Austad – “Both Hands On the Yoke ... Of A B-17”**

**BY COMMANDER CRAIG K. AUSTAD, USN**

Executive Officer, Mayport Naval Air Station, Jacksonville, Florida

I flew one. Just the other day. A dream as real as the dreams of youth. I cannot write with any authority for I have none. One hour is nothing. Their mission, their first mission, each mission, 25, 30, 35 missions. Ask them. They, and only they can speak with authority. However, it is as if I have been given the rare privilege to stand along the wall of a vast room with smoky mist for air, filled with the great ones, the men of courage and fear. From these I was allowed to stand and watch. They laugh with the ease of an age recently past. Eyes as bright as starlight, smiles as warm as day.

These thoughts and a thousand others poured through me as I sat there, in the right seat with both hands on the yoke as I scanned inside at the gauges then outside to check my attitude. I was talking to NAS Mayport tower, getting permission for a fly-by. We were cleared for the low pass. Smoke generators came on all four. We buzzed low over the concrete, pulled up and banked left heading south to pick up the coastline. Next stop, St. Augustine.

I told the pilot, Jonathan Rising, that it was 50 years ago this year that my dad came to England with his crew. I do not know that for sure. I based it on a story I remember Dad telling me once that he thought he may have flown during the Battle of the Bulge. The operations tempo was such that he wasn't sure where they were. Dad rarely talked about the war and when he did they were stories that somehow had an amusing or thought-provoking line to them. So I told Jon the one about how at the end of a mission and they were once again in friendly skies, Dad would crawl to the nose and look down at the countryside. He said that he could look down and see a trail of downed aircraft dotting the land nearly all the way to England. He would see one, look to the west and see another, then another.

After the pass at NAS Mayport, we saw one of the Navy's newest cruisers just off the coast. Of course. We flew past, smoke generators on and salute to the men standing the Sea-and-Anchor detail.

Enroute to St. Augustine, I gave up my seat to a newly licensed pilot and squeezed my way aft over the catwalk. I paused and thought of a scene I'm sure played out too often. Bomb bay doors open, icy blast of air, jump, dive, roll or tumble out of a stricken ship. Flail, reach for the handle and pull. Look up and see that chute. Count, how many other do you see? Then Dad's voice "God, I'll never figure out why I was one of the lucky ones. Why I never caught one." It wasn't until I was a lot older that I understood what he meant.

Past the radio compartment I came to the ball turret. Dad told me he was a ball turret gunner on some missions. I asked him what it was like. He said that after the first two rounds he couldn't hear a thing. A gun lined each ear. I asked him "Did you shoot any Germans down?" He got a sad look on his face and then slowly said he didn't know. Then he said he was so busy that it was shoot at a blur, maybe see some metal fly, then look for another.

Waist gunner. Dad was also a waist gunner. As I looked out through the window I realized that a single .50 cal was not much. But there was not much space either. You were cheek-to-cheek with your best friend. In fact, there wasn't much space anywhere. I had already smacked my head twice on the overhead just walking down to the waist gunners positions. Mel, one of the crew of this B-17G, the "Nine-O-Nine," told me that his position was as left waist in the sky over Italy. He was 17 then. Every mission was as left waist because it was only a

*Continued On Page 7*



THE COCKPIT OF THE ALUMINUM OVERCAST

## 38 Took Rides In Aluminum Overcast

The Tucson reunion was more than a gathering of old 398th friends for 38 of the 500-plus attendees at last month's 11th annual reunion.

The Aluminum Overcast, flown in especially for the 398th, was made available for flights over Tucson (\$325 each) and for the better part of three days was kept in the air by pilots Hal Weekley and Dr. Bill Harrison.

"The thrill of a lifetime" was the most common description offered by lucky rid-

ers. The "loading list" was comprised of seven ex-pilots, four navigators, four gunners and one ground crew line chief. Plus seven wives or widows, 10 children, and one Doubletree Hotel bellman.

The latter was "treated" to a ride by Bob Wiggins, an ex 600th navigator who thought the young bellman might just enjoy such an experience. (He did.)

The loading list - Les Veley and daughter Cheryl Cavavan; Bill Comstock; Wally and Teedy Blackwell; Clyde

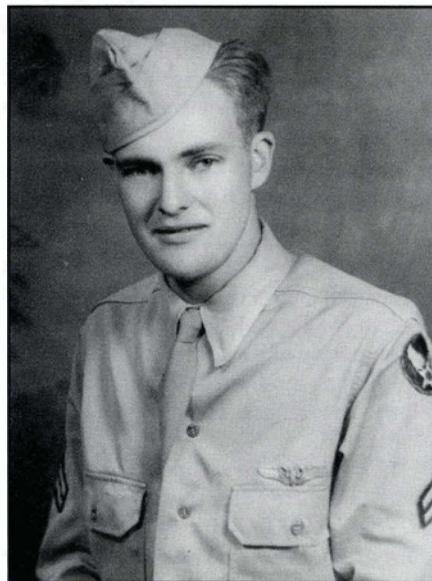
Sebastian; Frank Weiler; Gertrude Wells Neff and daughter Trudie Wells Kirkland; Hank Rudow; Jim White; Herb Meeker and son Henry; Adelyn Mills; Arnold Schneider; Bill Dean; Russ Read and Millie McMillan; Ray and Jeanne Stange; Bob Nelson and family members Alice, Helen, Christine, Robert and Nels; Bill Cook, Leo Arlinghous; Don Dunn; Claudia Smiley; Henry Florin; Marv Laufer; Pat Ryan; Ted Brass; Keith Anderson; and bellman Mark Timm.

## "I Flew One. Just The Other Day"

*Continued From Page 6*

turn, step and out the hatch if he needed to. In the words of someone who has gone on ahead of me, "From this position, only aluminum separates you from eternity."

I suppose I could tell you how the controls felt, how solid the wings felt through the yoke, or about the vibration and asynchronous hum of the props but it was more important to tell you about how she made me feel. How she caused me to stop and remember again of one special life that one of her sisters carried within her. For I am a Navy helicopter pilot. I go to sea aboard small ships and fly off flight decks the size of postage stamps. And at the end of the mission, in the middle of night, when she has been washed and rolled into the cramped hangar aboard the ship, I walk along her side and touch the living metal. I wonder if Dad did that. I bet he did.



KERMIT AUSTAD

## Austad Gunner On 601st Taylor Crew

Kermit Austad, whose Navy helicopter son wrote the very moving story about his one-hour flight in a B-17, was a gunner on the Art Taylor crew of the 601st Squadron.

Austad was an FAA flight controller after the war, and in his retirement years and until his death, was a regular on the FLAK NEWS mailing crew in Seattle.

Others on the Taylor crew were Robert Jauregui, copilot; Don Sable, navigator; William Scales, bombardier; Grover McGuffey, ETG; Dick Van Pelt, radio; and gunners Ed Norris, Bob Manoly and Andrew Pilarcik.

Scales died of anoxia on a mission December 24, 1944, and was replaced by Fred Brusher. The latter also took over for Sable, who went into flying leads with Taylor. Jauregui became first plot and Claude Wilson copilot.

# “What Goes Around, Comes Around”

## Spirit of VAT 69 Returns

There is an old saying that's been around for a long time –

“What goes around comes around.”

It took 50 years, but “VAT 69” made the full circle this year.

The story goes back to 1944 when the John Rice crew of the 600th Squadron decided, while still at Rapid City, to name their new B-17 after the crew's favorite Scotch.

(We can all believe that 20-year-old kids knew just a whole lot about Scotch whisky.)

Anyway, ball turret gunner Leo Lorenzo started a VAT 69 decal on the port side of the plane, but didn't have time to complete the art job before the group departed for England.

Upon arriving in England, the crew “lost” their plane to a “2nd lieutenant with a clipboard.” (See FLAK NEWS Vol. 8 no. 3.)

Newly arrived replacement B-17's were routinely scheduled for various bits of modification before being assigned to combat. In this case, VAT 69 went to another group, someone else finished the paint job, and a variety of crews successfully completed 100 missions.

Someone from that group (the PR man, no doubt) arranged for the Edinburgh, Scotland, distillers of VAT 69 to reward the lucky crew of the 100th mission with a case of their finest.

But not a drop for the original VAT 69 crew, including Rice, the pilot; Clinton Clifton, copilot (later killed in action); Arthur Murphy, navigator; Max Raitchel, bombardier; Sydney Treibwasser, ETG; Edward Richey, RO; and gunners Lorenzo, John Kolafa and W.O. (Mike) Holmberg.

Fifty years later, someone from the 398th (probably the RR man) retold the story of “not a drop” and it was picked up by a “Friend of the 398th” in Hitchin,



**THIS IS THE CREW that went to war without the plane they had christened “VAT 69” back at Rapid City. It went to another group and ultimately flew 100 missions, for which the crew received a case of VAT 69. Fifty years later the “real” VAT 69 crew received a case from the Scottish distillers, then sold it and donated the money to the Heritage Center. The crew, left to right, back row: W.O. (Mike) Holmberg, Clinton Clifton, Arthur Murphy, Max Raitchel, and Ed Richey. Front row: Sydney Treibwasser, John Kolafa, Leo Lorenzo, and John Rice. The crew's original pilot was Bill Markley, who moved up to operations officer and then 600 Squadron CO.**

England, Jim Spicer. The latter contacted Ann Marie Fraser, Marketing Operations Coordinator for United Distillers, and suggested that the original crew members from the 398th Bomb Group might be worthy of sharing a “drop” of VAT 69.

Sure enough, a case of VAT 69 was delivered to Spicer and Alan Smith, a Friends officer at Nuthampstead. During the Farewell Dance and Hog Roast the final night of last summer's England Tour, one of the bottles was “cracked” and each person shared a nip if he was so inclined. One bottle was presented to Spicer for his initiative and one to the Friends association for future museum display. The remaining bottles were to be delivered to the surviving members of the crew.

But then it became apparent that 50 years had taken their toll on the crew

members. Three had died and others were in less than the best of health. The decision came from Lorenzo and Holmberg that the remaining bottles should be sold to the Friends in England and that whatever money was raised be given to the 8th Air Force Heritage Center now under construction in Savannah, Georgia.

And then, one more idea followed –

If the Friends of the 398th in England could come up with \$150 for the case of VAT 69, then how about the 398th coming up with a matching \$150 and sending the combined \$300 to the Heritage Center?

“Right on,” said the Board at its annual meeting in Tucson.

Thus, a case of VAT 69 became a case of \$300 for the 8th Air Force Heritage Center.

“What goes around, comes around.”

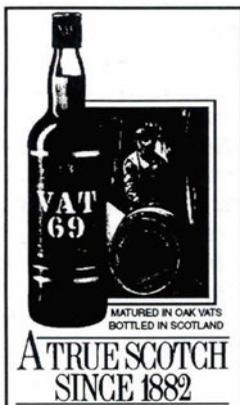
## Heritage Building Has Begun

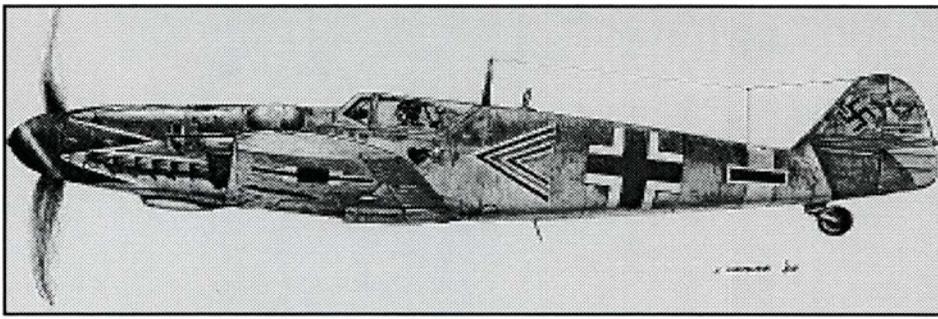
SAVANNAH, GEORGIA – The Mighty Eighth Air Force Heritage Center started construction of its new 95,000 square foot building at the Center's construction site along Interstate Highway 94 west of Savannah.

“This is the day that all of us have looked forward to for a long time,” retired Lt. Gen. E.G. Shuler, the Center's Chairman and CEO, told the crowd of government and community leaders and Eighth Air Force veterans. “It's the day on which

we start construction of a unique memorial honoring all who have served in The Mighty Eighth in peace and war. We have a lot of work to do between now and April 1996 when we plan to open your Heritage Center.”

The Eighth Air Force was created as a part of the U.S. Army Air Forces in Savannah in January 1942 and soon moved to England where it ultimately grew to be the largest air armada in history.





ERICH (BUBI) HARTMANN

## 398th REUNIONS, TOURS

The history of the 398th Bomb Group is generally contained in a brief, two-year period between 1943 and 1945. This is when the lives of many members changed dramatically. And for many, ended dramatically.

But what of the ensuing years? When did the group begin to reorganize and where have the meetings been held since this regrouping?

President Bill Comstock, who has been the 398th leader since Day One, said that the "new" 398th began in 1976 when 30 members gathered at Dayton and chipped in with \$1.00 each to establish a \$30.00 treasury.

The 1976 meeting, plus those through 1983, were held in conjunction with the 8th Air Force Historical Society. These meetings were as follows —

- 1976 – Dayton, Ohio
- 1977 – St. Louis, Missouri
- 1978 – Washington, DC
- 1979 – Phoenix, Arizona
- 1980 – Orlando, Florida
- 1981 – Mpls./St. Paul, Minnesota
- 1982 – Cincinnati, Ohio
- 1983 – Houston, Texas

At Houston, the members decided to hold future meetings independent from the Historical Society. Following are the cities where reunions have been held since then —

- 1984 – Rapid City, South Dakota
- 1985 – Seattle, Washington
- 1986 – Colorado Springs, Colorado
- 1987 – San Antonio, Texas
- 1988 – Richmond, Virginia
- 1989 – Dayton, Ohio
- 1990 – Oshkosh, Wisconsin
- 1991 – San Diego, California
- 1992 – Nashville, Tennessee
- 1993 – Buffalo, New York
- 1994 – Tucson, Arizona
- 1995 – Charleston, South Carolina

In addition to these annual meetings with the 8th Air Force Historical Society and later independently, the 398th made several journeys back to the old base at Nuthampstead. Also, any number of members have returned on their own.

The first small group going back on a "mini" tour was in 1976, when six members returned. In 1982, a large contin-

gent came back to dedicate the new Memorial. This group survived a small "hurricane" at the dedication ceremonies.

The next tour, beginning an "every-other-year" pattern, came in 1986. The group also visited Normandy and Paris. In 1988, the group returned to Nuthampstead after first visiting the Battle of the Bulge sites on the continent and the city in Germany (Neuss) where Colonel Hunter was shot down.

In 1990 the group returned to Station 131 after touring Scotland. In 1992 the 398th visited Merseburg, Germany, before coming back to Nuthampstead and beginning the popular "home stay" program.

This past summer, 1994, it was an "all-England" tour, with many stops along the way before once again "returning home."

Europe calls for another tour in 1995, but this time the call is from the Czech Republic and the city of Pilsen. Many 398th members who flew that Last Mission on April 25, 1945, are planning to celebrate VE Day in Pilsen 50 years later. See Page 5 for details.

What's ahead for 1996?

Stay tuned!

### Tucson Tower Surprise

The Aluminum Overcast, with Hal Weekley and Dr. Bill Harrison in the cockpit, was winging its way toward Tucson where they would spend three days displaying and flying the classic Fortress for the benefit of the 398th reunion attendees.

Twenty minutes out from the Tucson airport, Harrison radioed the tower to ask for landing instructions —

"Tucson tower, this is Boeing 3 Zero H (601st Squadron call letters) requesting landing instructions."

"Roger, Cessna, 3 Zero H, where are you?"

"Correction, Tucson tower, this is BOEING 3 Zero H."

(Pause)

"3 Zero H, what kind of a plane is this?"

"Tucson tower, this is a Boeing Flying Fortress."

(Pause)

Then a barely audible woman's voice — "Oh God!"

**IDENTIFYING the enemy fighter, in this case the ME-109, was an ongoing study for WW II combat crewmen. Identifying the enemy pilots, however, was something else. But nevertheless, they were real, live young men behind those helmets and goggles, which was about all that could be seen during those split-second encounters. Though not encountered by 8th Air Force crewmen, the fame of this German pilot, Erich Hartmann, spanned two fronts. He was the most successful fighter pilot of WW II, scoring 252 aerial victories on the Russian front. He was known to his comrades as "Bubi" because of his youthful appearance. "Bubi" died last year in Germany at the age of 71, according to a story in B-17 Combat Crewmen & Wingmen. He flew 1400 missions for the Luftwaffe.**

## Time Again For Dues

The 398th dues schedule looks to the Northeast states once again for its quarterly collection for funds to keep the organization afloat. Dues are still \$5.00 (or \$50.00 for a lifetime membership).

Dues notices have been included in the FLAK NEWS bound for Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, and Washington, DC.

Also receiving notices are those members living in Switzerland, England, Canada, Channel Islands, Australia, Mexico, and Bermuda.

Members are asked to verify their mailing addresses and to offer any pertinent information that might be of interest to the group.

# WHAT WAS GOING THROUGH YOUR MIND?

*Here is another installment of memories from the pens of 398th Bomb Group members. Likened unto the television reporter who plants a microphone in the face of a man who may have a story to tell and is prompted by the question, "What was going through your mind ... ?"*

"On the morning of November 2, 1944, I was standing just inside the door of the briefing room. I can remember it as vividly as if it happened 10 minutes ago.

"Everyone was waiting with undivided attention and watching the curtain as it was being raised by the briefing officer. This would be our first clue as to where we would be going on this mission. As the curtain was pulled back and the map exposed I saw the colored yarn stretching all the way to Merseburg.

"Immediately this thought forced itself into my mind —  
*'Merseburg. This was our first mission back in July and now it will be our last.'*

"I do not know where those last three words came from, but I immediately barricaded my mind against thinking of them again. Until we all got to the plane for pre-flighting.

"Then I overheard two of the other crew members talking and one said the very same thing —

*'Merseburg. Our first mission and it will be our last.'*

"It was indeed our last mission. We were one of three lost that day, Herb Newman and Russ Reed of the 603rd being the others."  
**Ben Core, AR 72902-1446.**

"Being pinned with a Bronze Star by our commanding officer, Colonel Pete Rooney, was the thrill of a lifetime for me. It was after my plane, 027, had completed 55 missions without once having to turn back because of mechanical failure. This came after the group's 100th mission. Ten other crew chiefs had 50 or more by this time. It was a great day for all of us."

**Charles Church, Jacksonville, FL 32258-2369.**

"After World War II, I stayed on active duty. After leaving the Regular Army, I joined the National Guard and received a direct commission. I requested active duty during the Korean unpleasantry, and went off to Infantry School and later to other assignments, although none of them actually took me to Korea. The end of that war found me in Japan, competing with a considerable number of other officers for regular commissions. Like so many others, I was RIFed and went back to the reserves.

Years later, during the Vietnam conflict, I spent one summer camp at Fort Benning looking for mosquitoes around the quarters areas and other buildings on post. One day I took a straight route to the O Club and found myself seated at the bar with two warrant officer chopper pilots, men a generation and two wars younger than myself.

"I was a ball turret gunner on a B-17 during World War II, and throughout the succeeding years I always wore my gunners wings. As I sat next to the young warrant officers, I could hear them talking about my wings. Finally one of them turned to me and asked, 'Excuse me, Captain, but what kind of wings are those?'

"I was ready for them. 'Mister, those are rocket pilot wings.'  
"As I concentrated on my drink, I could hear the argument beside me.

"'I'm telling you, he's a rocket pilot!' said the first chopper pilot.

"'There's no such thing!' insisted the second.

"I finished my drink, did a 80 and departed the area, leaving behind two befuddled chopper pilots. I like to think that they may still be trying to convince people that they once met a rocket pilot in the bar at Fort Benning."

**Jack Hudson, Seabrook, TX 77586- 6129.**

"I was en route to Tucson for the annual reunion when a young woman got on the plane and took a seat next to mine. Later in the flight I was reading an advance copy of the book I had just written, called "Hell From Heaven." It is about my experiences as a bombardier on the Shimek crew of the 600th.

"During a conversation with this lady she asked me what I was reading, saying it had such an unusual jacket cover. I inquired about her interest in World War II and she explained that her father had been a B-17 pilot and was killed on a bombing mission over Germany.

"'What was his name?' I asked.

"'William Wells', she answered and said he was with the 398th Bomb Group and that her name was Trudie Wells Kirkland.

"Would you believe that the cover of my book depicts the very mission that the Wells crew was shot down? And I turned some pages and showed her the story of that mission. Consider the odds of Wells' daughter, whom he never saw, being assigned a seat next to me on a transcontinental flight 50 years later."

**Leonard Streitfeld, Hamonton, NJ 08037-5149.**

"Ten years after the war was over I had the pleasure of a visit from General Jimmy Doolittle. He came to our primitive geologic camp on the Alaskan Peninsula in 1955.

"The general flew in to our barely recognizable airstrip in a Piper Cub. He was wearing an old GI uniform and carrying a box of meat on his shoulder. He was a vice president with Shell Oil Company at the time. When we finally recognized who this man was we were so overwhelmed by his presence that none of us managed to get a photograph. What a great guy!"

**Herb Mann, Houston, TX 77042-2020.**

"Before my father died he told me about the day he and his crew, piloted by Russ Conrow, had to bail out after being hit over Magdeburg, Germany. It seems Dad had a gunnery officer from the 8th Air Force headquarters flying with him in the waist. He was there to try out a new sling arrangement for use by the waist gunners. He was in this sling when the plane was hit and everybody was ordered to bail out. Dad had to help him out of it and then help him into his regular shoes before they could both go out the waist door. Dad often said how concerned he was for this officer during those terrifying seconds after being hit."

**Maggie Downing, Clarksville, GA 30523-1054.**

## All Officers Re-Elected

Bill Comstock, president since 1976, was reelected to another term at the annual business meeting in Tucson. Ted Johnston, vice-president; Wally Blackwell, secretary; Ralph Hall, treasurer; and George Hilliard, contact officer, also were returned to office.

Board members Bill Jones, Hal Weekley, Dick Frazier, Dale Brown, and Allen Ostrom also were retained. Jack Wintersteen stepped down as historian and was replaced by Willis Frazier.

Bob Wiggins; Bill McLaughlin, and Dick Frazier remain as the Memorial Fund Committee.

**"Ideas without precedent are generally looked up with disfavor."**

— J. HARLAN BRETZ, 1929

# BRIEF-things

The text of the coming revision in the 398th Bomb Group bylaws, plus a new "sustaining plan," will be published in a coming issue of FLAK NEWS ... responding to the appeal for funds to assist in the repair of the old church at Anstey, members contributed \$1345, adding to the \$600 raised by the Friends of the 398th at Nuthampstead ... **Reginald Proctor** made most of the rounds at the Tucson reunion in the company of a cute, little cairn terrier called "**Peppy**"; he is more than just a pet for **Reg**, but also serves as his "hearing" dog; **Proctor** did a lot of hearing as **Al Stockman's** radio operator ... **Joe Spechulli** had to cancel reunion plans at the last minute, but he contributed half of his prepaid ticket to the group treasury ... **Tom Overturf** was the man who built the B-17 model used so dramatically on the final banquet night; he planned to be there to direct the operation, but suddenly cancelled; a week later word came that he had died suddenly ... Help! Can someone come up with the names of the 398th dental officers? Send to FLAK NEWS ... **Gen. Bert Sparrow**, a 1933 West Point classmate of **Colonel Hunter**, said he would take copies of the July FLAK NEWS to the next West Point luncheon and will use the material in a future issue of the graduate magazine, Assembly ... the 100th Bomb Group recently completed the rebuilding of their old control tower at Thorpe Abbots ... a pair of F-16's were returning to Davis-Monthan from gunnery practice when they spotted the Aluminum Overcast cruising over Tucson with a half-dozen 398th passengers; they received an "OK" to make a fighter pass at the lumbering Fortress, which they did (from a safe distance); later the two F-16 pilots came over to tell the Fort pilots how excited they were at being able to buzz the WW II veteran ... the first people to register for the Pilsen, Czech Republic, trip were **Elliot** and **Connie Novak** ... reunions have a way of bringing back quotes from the past; **Bob Wiggins** was flying as navigator on the **Tom Matthews** crew in the slot element directly behind **Colonel Hunter**; "I can still hear **Tom** on the intercom: "THERE GOES THE LEAD" ... for those of you who spent time at Ephrata, Washington, in 1943, the old field is still there, now used primarily for soaring (gliders) ... news from Merseburg and the Leuna plant is grim; the big upgrade spoken of when the 398th toured there in 1992 apparently has fallen through; first our bombers and now the "economy" ... the "fantastic" surprise promised to 1996 398th England tour visitors by **Elaine Tyler** comes under the heading of a "coup" (we are told) Hmmm ... one of our many "associate" members is **Eddie Webber** of Frisco, Texas; he writes FLAK NEWS urging support for a commemorative stamp for Army GI **Audie Murphy**; "he wasn't an airman, but he did his part on the ground while you did yours in the air" ... some of the money "oversubscribed" by 398th members for the Aluminum Overcast corrosion control will go toward buying and installing a new tail wheel retraction unit ... one of the other B-17 bomb group's post-reunion critiques mentioned the need for LARGER printing on their name tags ... some of our eyes may be becoming dim, but there are still a lot of young dancing feet amongst us as noted at the Farewell Dance in Tucson ... 603 pilot **Joe Tarr** thinks his crew holds the record for missions to Merseburg (6); can any 398th crew challenge this? ... one more 398th book is in the offing, this one by 600 pilot **Paul Wagner** ... only 34 "398th Bomb Group REMEMBRANCES" remain to be sold; send \$22 to **Ralph Hall**, treasurer; soon there will be "no more" ... January 23, 1945, is remembered as the date that **Colonel Hunter** went down on a mission to Neuss; 50 years later on this date in 1995 our German friends will honor **Colonel Hunter** and the 398th with a special remembrance service at the "Bunker" church at nearby Heerdt ... the Neuss "Friends" also pay annual visits to Hunter's grave at the Ardennes cemetery near Leige, Belgium.

# Letters, Letters

"We are not planning to put the Aluminum Overcast on tour this winter. We will be doing required maintenance, as well as further improvements to the aircraft. We hope to schedule a North Central/Mid-Atlantic tour next spring, but in any case we will not put it on the road until at least April 1995. Best regards to all my friends in the 398th Bomb Group."

**Greg Anderson, EAA Aviation Foundation, Oshkosh, WI.**

"Thank you so much for your letter and photographs. They show how much we Kennedys enjoyed ourselves at your banquet last summer at Southampton. The presentation of the plaque, in honor of my husband, was a very touching moment. I was very moved, as were our children, Iain and Alison. I assure you, the plaque will be treasured by the Kennedy family.

"I am enclosing \$40 as a small contribution to offset the costs of the July issue of FLAK NEWS, which was dedicated to your Colonel Hunter. It was so well done."

**Vivien Kennedy, W. Sussex, PO19 4QH, England.**

"My husband, Alex Cochran, a pilot with the 602nd, often wrote about concentrating on getting his plane over the church steeples on the outskirts of the airfield. And at the same time glancing at the chaplain as he waved from the end of the runway.

"Then later, turned to the thought of seeking out those same steeples when coming home from a mission. In recent years we considered sending memorial gifts to these churches close to Nuthampstead. Finally, with the help of Peggy Wells, we have sent memorial gifts to both the Anstey and Chishall churches. They are in memory of Tom Gerber, Alex's navigator, and Peggy's late husband, David. Perhaps the spirit of those 500-year-old churches, along with our prayers, helped give the bomber crews that extra internal strength to come through those difficult days." **Beryl Cochran, Twin Lakes, WI 53181-9373.**

"Needless to say, our thoughts wander constantly back to June 23, the day your 398th coach arrived at The Wash and the old Station 172 gunnery school. Our summer of '94 will go down as "one to remember." It was a special occasion for us, especially when we felt the warmth and friendliness of your tour group. We continue to pursue local records from the old gunnery school and we hope to have a '172 museum' here one day. Our main goal at the moment is locating some Air Force movie film of the station. Perhaps you can help?

"Meanwhile, please know that we will always remember the 398th and our 'summer of 1994' "

**Brian Clipston, Norfolk NR11 8AS, England.**

"I am sending you some photos which may be of interest to you and your work with the group. I will keep looking for more. Meanwhile, you may keep these. Keep well."

**Dr. William R. Kavanaugh, Kalamazoo, MI 49006.**

*Ed's Note: Dr. Kavanaugh was flight surgeon for the 602nd.*

"I didn't know what to expect when I came to Tucson or how I would be received. But you folks are just neat people and I was made to feel so welcome. I made some new pen pals and touched hearts with a few simple poetry lines.

"When I was reading "For The Fallen" it was all I could do to complete it. I had to ask the Lord for strength to make it through.

"But when guys came up to me and told me that it brought tears to their eyes, my own shed tears were worth it all.

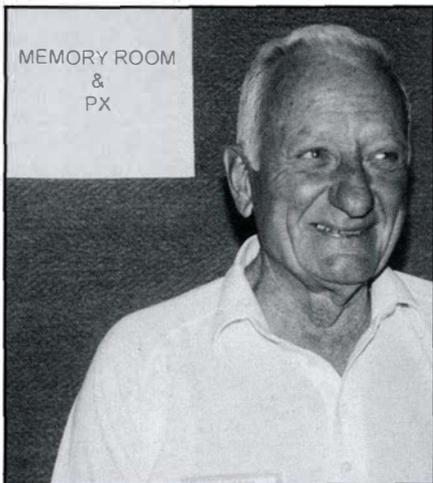
"Hearing about your experiences means a lot to me. I know how difficult it must be to recall such memories. Yet, those are the stories that inspire me to write poems.

"Thank you all for giving me a wonderful experience."

**Jill Chandler, Spokane, WA 98202.**

*Ed's Note: Jill said she would send a complete set of her poems to any interested 398th members. (The Editor suggests a \$10 check for reproduction, shipping, and handling.)*

NON-PROFIT  
ORGANIZATION  
US POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
SEATTLE WA  
PERMIT NO 800



**JOE JOSEPH**

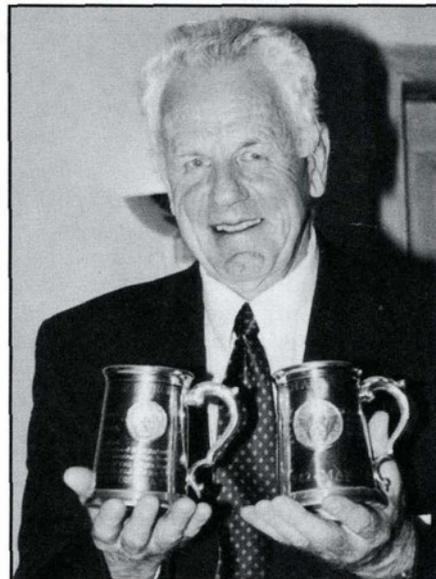
## **New PX Officers**

Joe and Rozeanne Joseph are the new "proprietors" of the 398th Bomb Group PX. The Josephs, well known to Reunion PX customers, have replaced Jack and Marqueen Wintersteen.

A new PX inventory and format are being developed by the Josephs. This will appear in the next issue of FLAK NEWS. Meanwhile, all future PX inquiries should be sent to Joe Joseph, Defiance, OH 43512-8854.



**ROZEANNE JOSEPH**



**KEITH ANDERSON** displays the two commemorative pewter tankards that are available to members of the 398th. Made in England, they sell for \$80.00 each. One commemorates the 8th Air Force, engraved with the names of all the aircraft that flew from England in WW II, including the Flying Fortress. The other commemorates the 50th anniversary of the D-Day landings and the Liberation of Europe. Prepaid orders can be sent to Allen Ostrom, Seattle, WA 98177-4808.