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Change of Gears? Brits See More Tours On Horizon

The Queen sent her regrets, but there were no regrets from the members of the 2006 England Tour, frivolously known as, "One More Peek."

Nor from the Friends of the 398th, nor from the new-found Friends of the 55th Fighter Group, nor from Mother Nature who blessed one and all with picture perfect weather during the ten-day visit "back to the old base" at Nuthampstead (and to Madingley, Duxford, Hertford, Anstey, Cambridge, Clavering, Royston, Barkway, etc.

Friends chairman Wilfrid Dimsdale, who coordinated the Station 131 activities along with brother Robert, expressed the lone bit of "grumbling" when he said —

"This talk of 'One More Peek' is just rubbish. Of course you will be coming back again. We are already scheduling your next visit for the third week in June 2008.

"There may be some changing of gears," he added, "but we will continue to have services at the Memorial and at the Anstey church."

The "changing of gears" he spoke of might well apply to the veterans, of whom there were 10 on the tour, all 80 years of age and beyond. Or it may apply to the ten sons and daughters and four grandchildren who were in the accompaniment of their elders. The youth brigade gave every indication that more visits down the road will surely be in their future.



BUCKINGHAM PALACE

13th April, 2006

Dear A. Ostrom,

The Queen wishes me to write and thank you for your letter and for the copy of FLAK NEWS which you enclosed.

Her Majesty was interested to know that you will be visiting England once more in June, but that this will be the last such tour under auspices of your 398th Bomb Group Memorial Association.

The Queen warmly appreciated the kind message sent on behalf of your President, Mr. Wally Blackwell, and the members of the Association, and hopes that you will all enjoy your forthcoming visit to this country.

*Yours sincerely
Mary Smith*

Lady-in-Waiting

Mr. A. Ostrom

The Memorial Service of Remembrance was, once again, emotional and inspiring. And the Memorial Monument presented as beautiful as ever as the Rev. Gerald Drew led the service in the presence of some 400 men, women and children who found their way to Nuthampstead, the Memorial and, of course, the Woodman Inn.

The presence of so many people in such a small area gave the young Sea Cadets of Stevenage ample opportunity to work their assignment— divert arriving cars from the Memorial/Woodman area to a

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Michigan Site For Reunion

Next Meeting In September

It may be summertime around the country, and time for vacations (whatever they are) but for the men and women of the 398th Bomb Group Memorial Association it only suggests that fall is coming that means REUNION.

Yes, it will be the group's 23rd annual meeting (we're still going strong, thank you) and it's all set for Wednesday-Saturday, September 6-7-8-9, 2006, in Livonia, Michigan, (20 miles west of Detroit).

The place is the Livonia West Holiday Inn and the excellent room price is \$79.00 providing you call in for the reservation BEFORE August 16.

And that toll-free number is 1-800-465-4329. The local Livonia Holiday hotel phone is (734) 464-1300.

(There is no reservation insert to be mailed in this year.) Just make the call.

A driving map is provided on Page 3 for the benefit of those coming by car and motor home. Many members live in the upper mid-west states and Livonia is but a day's drive.

Detroit is on the airline map for just about every carrier. Livonia is 20 minutes by taxi from the airport.

Once at the hotel members can enjoy the reunion by leaving the driving to

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MADINGLEY WELCOME — Superintendent Bobby Bell (right) was on the scene with a colorful wreath when president Wally Blackwell and the England Tour group arrived at the American Military Cemetery near Cambridge on June 2, 2006. Bell and his staff had the cemetery sparkling and beautiful in honor of the 3,811 men and women buried there, including 30 from the 398th. There are also 14 names of 398th airmen inscribed on the Wall of the Missing.

“You Can’t Get There From Here”: Cricketers Was Elusive

The Cricketers at Clavering is but a few miles (as the crow flies) from Nuthampstead and a gourmet attraction despite its isolation in the English countryside. And, incidentally, the home of Briton’s 30-something TV food idol, Jamie Oliver, known as The Naked Chef.

A visit to Cricketers was made during the England tour by tour leaders Allen Ostrom, Barb and Rick Fish, along with a Brit driver Ray Fox and back-seat driver Susanne Fosbrooke (“I used to live here”). Through Barkway, Barley, Nuthampstead, Snow End, Cole Green, Great Horstead, Hare Street (twice), Measden, Brent Pelham, Starling’s Green and ... finally Clavering.

A tad bit late (naturally) but the 16th century Country Inn called Cricketers was found and gourmet meals did follow. Jamie, The Naked Chef, was not there, but others on the eight-chef staff were there to uphold the tradition.

Asked if the Inn’s customers were all local (being so isolated) the server look about and replied, “Everyone here tonight appears to be out of town

(townies).” Like London, the city of six million 40 miles to the south. “They seem to flock here from the city or from their nearby summer houses,” she added. Either way, they seem to be able



to find Cricketers easier than the Yank visitors (and back-seat driver).

The road back to the group’s Cambridge hotel was easier — only through Sticking Green, Arkesden, Bridge Green, Upper and Lower Pond Street, Chrishall, Elmdon and finally the M-11 Freeway. The rest was easy.

French Friends To Host Wally At Crash Site

Charles-Hubert Rozoy of Cahagnolles, France, had wished for a long time that “Wally” could come for a visit.

And on August 8, 2006, it will happen.

Wally Blackwell, the 398th president, and wife Teedy, escorted to France by English Friend Barry Tyler, will call on Rozoy and his French friends and will be shown the very spot where Wally’s 601 Fortress came down after receiving a direct flak hit in the tail on a mission to Caen / St. Lo on August 8, 1944 (62 years ago.)

Blackwell and all his crew, save for the tail gunner (Charles Simons) bailed out safely and ultimately returned to complete their missions.

On August 8 (2006) Wally and party will be shown the exact spot where the plane (Kentucky Colonel) came down and where Simons’ body was found. They will also visit Simons’ gravesite at Normandy during the emotional revisit.

“It is going to be a grand adventure,” Said Wally.

Who Needs All The Engines For A B-17 Takeoff?

Yes, the B-17 can take off with only three engines, albeit this is not recommended.

Last spring the “new” Fortress, “Yankee Lady,” lost an engine while on tour in Tucson. Repairs were not available there, so it flew on the three good ones to Falcon Field, Phoenix, home of the “Sentimental Journey” for a friendly fix.

Yes, the FAA did get involved and provided a reluctant “take off waiver.”

PS —

Richard Holub, who did the B-17 “rocket assist” takeoff from a farm field at Nuthampstead, revealed that he once salvaged a B-17 from the long runway at Manston (England) with only two engines (and no co-pilot.)

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398th Reunion Coming Up

(Continued from Page 1)

Omega Tours, who have joined with reunion chair Sharon Krause in setting up exciting tours every single day. See the "Reunion Tours" program in the April FLAK NEWS. Or get a copy via E-mail from Sharon, Plymouth, MI 48170.

While the real "business" parts of the reunion will be held Thursday through Saturday, there will be many "early birds" coming on Wednesday for the Dinner-Cruise on the Detroit River. This fun-filled event gets under way from the ho-tel at 5:15 p.m.

Sharon and her registration "staff" will be prepared for the reservation "rush" starting Wednesday morning in the Lau-rel Park "Memory Room."

Of special interest to those relishing the Big Band Days (and dance like we used to) the good news will come on Saturday night at the Farewell Banquet. They will enjoy the Johnny Knorr Orchestra, which comes heralded as "the most sought after" dance band in the Midwest. Band members with their saxes, clarinets, piano, drums, flutes and trombones combine to form that exquisite 40's sound.

President Wally Blackwell, fresh from the England Tour, will get things underway with the Board and General business meetings on Thursday. And then join in with the membership on the tours and banquets the rest of the week.

Of interest to just about everyone (especially the ladies) is the Laurel Park Place Mall, easy walking distance from the hotel.

And for those who would rather play than shop, there is the hotel's indoor pool with palm trees and fountains. And a putting green, pool tables, whirlpool and fitness machines.

Just like Station 131, right?



HOLIDAY INN LIVONIA-WEST
17123 N Laurel Park Drive
Livonia, MI 48152



THIS IS THE first thing you will see as you enter the lobby of the Holiday Inn — Livonia West in Livonia, Michigan, for the 398th Bomb Group reunion. Dates are September 6-7-8-9, 2006. All the meetings and banquets will be held here, but there are several more opportunities to see the sights in and around the fabled Motor City — Detroit — located some 15 miles to the east. See the April issue of FLAK NEWS for registration information.



JOE CERVA, who entertained at the banquets two years ago in Falls Church, Virginia, will bring his accordion to Livonia, Michigan, for the 398th's 23rd reunion. He will play at both the Welcome and Farewell banquets.

*"Who builds a church within his heart,
And takes it with him everywhere,
Is holier than he whose church
Is but a one day house of prayer."*

Seven States Up For Dues

It's Dues Time for 398th members and friends living in some of our most heavily populated states —

Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Minnesota, Wisconsin and ... Texas.

Only seven states but they represent one quarter of our annual dues, which is what binds our Association together.

Dues envelopes will be found inside FLAK NEWS for these seven states (only). Next quarter it will be "out west" and then back again to the eastern side in 2007.

Dues are a modest \$20, and here it should be pointed out that failure to respond to this request for support may result in being "cut" from the FLAK NEWS mailing roster.

If the envelope is missing, simply mail your \$20 to Dues Manager Dawne Dougherty, Harrisburg, OR 97446-9585. Please note any change in address or telephone.

And for the "non dues" readers, you can always send a change of address to Dougherty. Or to FLAK NEWS. If you hear of a buddy or friend who has missed his FLAK NEWS lately, remind him of the "cut" policy.

OPERATIONS OFFICER

Willis Frazier Was Pilot For All Seasons As 601 Squadron Operations Officer

"The Squadron Operations Officer was the 'interface' between Group Operations and crews," said the late Willis Frazier, who served in this capacity with the 601st through most of the action in 1944-45. Before his passing, Willis had made these remarks at the Portland reunion in 2002.

BY WILLIS FRAZIER

Squadron Operations Officer, 601st Squadron

In the 398th Bomb Group organization there was one Group Operations Officer and four Squadron Operations Officers. The group and the squadron officers had different but complementary duties. Squadron Operations was the interface between Group Operations and the squadron aircrews.

GROUP OPERATIONS —

1. Issued standard B-17 airspeeds to be flown during missions. Airspeed for individual aircraft and for flight in formation during climb and cruise at altitude was 150 m.p.h. Indicated Airspeed. Letdown was at 170 m.p.h. IAS. As a data point, at 28,000 feet altitude 150 m.p.h. IAS is 240 m.p.h. True Airspeed. B-24's flew at a greater airspeed. Climb below 15,000 feet was at 300 feet per minute, and above 15,000 feet climb was at 200 feet per minute.

2. Issued procedures for aircraft take-off and assembly at Buncher Beacons on missions. For assembly of the group formation on missions the group lead aircraft would take off several minutes before the other aircraft, climb to the assembly altitude, and circle the buncher beacon. The lead aircraft would lower the landing gear and also fire different colored flares for identification. The other aircraft would take off individually at 30 second intervals, fly to the buncher beacon and form on the lead aircraft. Assembly was generally between 10,000 and 20,000 feet altitude, depending upon cloud conditions. Following assembly the group would join the bomber stream along a designated line.

Assembly of as many as 1500 B-17 and B-24 bombers plus 900 fighter aircraft in the air at one time within an area measuring about 75 miles by 100 miles was quite an accomplishment. Assembly flight paths were carefully planned.

The above specified airspeed, rate of climb and assembly altitude were adhered to on the Eighth Air Force mission to Berlin, February 3, 1945. Assembly of the formation was at 10,000 feet altitude, and values derived from the navigator's log are an average rate of climb of 180 feet-per-minute and airspeed over the

target of 151 m.p.h. indicated airspeed.

3. Provided mission details as appropriate to all group organizations.

4. Presented mission target, takeoff and assembly times, and en route information.

SQUADRON OPERATIONS —

1. Prepared flight formation layout during the afternoon prior to the next missions.

2. Designated the aircrews to fly on that mission, and their positions in the formation.

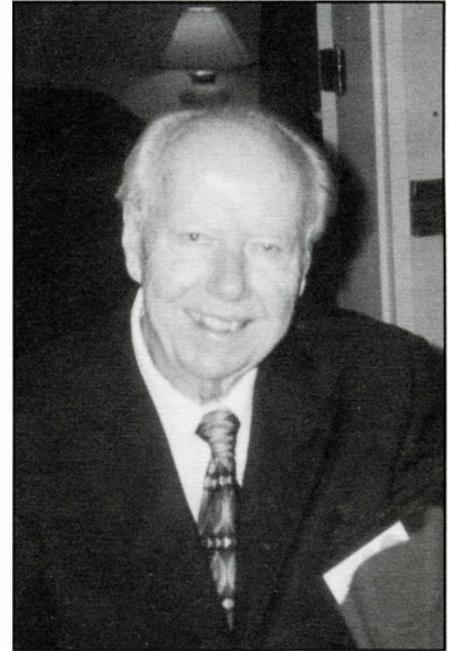
No position in the formation was safer than any other position. However, flying in the lead aircraft became especially dangerous. Flak gunners would concentrate their fire on the lead aircraft. On one mission Col. Hunter was scheduled to lead the First Division when the four previous division lead aircraft had been shot down. However, he completed that mission successfully. He lost his life flying lead on a subsequent mission.

The target was not known at the time the formation layout was prepared. The name of the target came down to the group in the mission field order from higher headquarters generally after 10 o'clock at night.

There was no way of knowing how difficult a target would be. Aircraft and crews were lost on missions considered to be "milk runs," while losses might not occur on missions that were considered to be extremely difficult. On one mission the lead and deputy lead aircraft were shot down on a mission barely into France, while on other occasions missions were flown deep into Germany with no losses.

Initially our squadron would put up a formation of 18 aircraft. In August 1944 the formation size was reduced to 12 aircraft. The 12 aircraft formation was made up of four elements of three aircraft each, and the elements flew in a diamond pattern. New crews flew in the outer positions, and progressed to the position of flying leaders as their skill in formation flying increased.

Formation layouts were not changed after they had been distributed. Regard-



WILLIS FRAZIER

less of what the target was, all crews flew as scheduled.

COMBAT MISSIONS —

Squadron operations officers flew combat missions. Their tours were spread out over a longer period of time than was the norm for the aircrews.

Early tours were 25 missions. Later the tour was upped to 30 missions, and then to 35 missions. I flew 28 missions, prorated between 25 and 30 missions. As squadron operations officer I flew as squadron leader, as deputy group and group lead pilot, and as group air commander (CA).

GROUND FORCES SUPPORT —

The 398th Bomb Group supported the Allied ground forces on D-Day, June 6, 1944, and during the battle of Normandy.

One target on D-Day was the beach at Courseulles, France. The purpose was to detonate German mines on the beach, and thus clear the path for the Canadians to come ashore. The beach was code named "Juno" beach. Our group put up six squadrons of six aircraft each. I led Squadron No. 3. Our squadrons individually navigated to the beach using GEE (Ground Electronic Equipment) navigation equipment. Approaching the beach the bombardier took lateral control of the aircraft with the Norden bombsight and

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“One More Peek” A Good One

(Continued from page 1)

parking area on the old airfield.

When the big Westours coach carrying the 398th party arrived, it was met by a 12-year-old Sea Cadet holding up his right arm in a classic HALT! position. Only after an appeal by the coach driver would the Sea Cadet relent and change his stance to PROCEED!

The ceremony honoring the group's 292 killed in action featured special wreaths from the Friends, the school children of the community and, of course, the 398th. That wreath was presented by Cleo Bickford, radio operator on the Lee Hicks crew of the 600th.

Don Menard, radio operator on the 603 Roy Sheely crew, read the Scripture lesson — Matthew 5:1-10. Standing with him were his daughter, Mellisa Ledlow and granddaughter, Carolyn.

The Friends' wreath was created by Bill Nottage, utilizing only flowers and vegetation collected from the old airfield.

A sea of Air Force blue was in evidence as an honor guard from Mildenhall's 95th Recon Squadron and 488th Intelligence Squadron.

Following the 398th Remembrance Service, the scene shifted to the newly installed memorial dedicated to the 55th Fighter Group P-38 airmen lost in battle while flying out of Station 131 (prior to the arrival of the 398th B-17's in April 1944).

The Rev. Russell Blowers, who served the 55th's Armament section, and is now group chaplain, unveiled the memorial saying, "O God and Father of us all, thank you for all these young men who laid down their lives for their friends in the skies over Europe. May our memories of them never fade nor the price they paid never be taken for granted. May this Memorial serve to enlighten future generations lest they forget; through Jesus Christ our Lord, we pray."

Wally Blackwell, Association president, added —

"Today, we, the living veterans of the 398th Bomb Group dedicate this memorial in remembrance of our brave and faithful 'little friends' of the 55th Fighter Group, who flew to protect us in the heat of battle. This monument is dedicated to all these warriors and in loving memory of our brothers who have rendezvoused in their final flight."

The memorial was sponsored by the 398th and the Friends, and stands very near to its own memorial, dedicated in 1982.

Hearing those words as a member of the 398th tour party (and classmate of president Blackwell) was Warren (Bud)



THE VETERANS on the England Tour pose in front of the 398th Memorial at Station 131. Front row, left to right — Bob Bowen, Don Menard, Wally Blackwell, Bill Dean and Russ Reed. Back row — Allen Ostrom, Lew Burke, Cleo Bickford, Harry Hoelzel and Warren Loring. The latter was a P-38 pilot and came with the 398th group to witness the dedication of the new 55th Fighter Group Memorial.

Loring, a 55th pilot shot down over France, and Duane Wikholm, whose brother, Bradford, was among those killed in action.

The memorial was the project of Ozzie Osborn and Russ Abbey, long identified with preserving the history of the Nuthampstead airfield. Peter Brooke also was in on the project and contributed to the publication of a "Big Friends & Little Friends" book commemorating the historical 2006 "bonding" of the 398th and 55th Fighter Group/422nd Air Service Group.

The celebration carried over to the next day as the tour party joined with the local friends and neighbors at a "full house" church service at St. George's Church, Anstey, complete with choir, bells and the Royston Band.

The Rev. Carol Kimberley led the worship, but yielded the pulpit to former rector, the Rev. Drew, who carried on with a sermon titled "Aim High."

Sir Roger duBoulay, church warden, welcomed the gathering, as he has done for all the previous 398th visits.

The first lesson, Psalm 121, was read by RAF Air Vice Marshal Alan Merriman.

Tour leader Allen Ostrom contributed with a reading of the Gospel lesson — John 14:15-31. Lew Burke carried the American flag in the procession to and

from the Altar.

A luncheon at nearby High Hall Barn followed, complete with music from the 40's, such as "White Cliffs of Dover." A reading of Roger Freeman's, "The Sky Was Never Still" was offered by Ostrom.

The longtime friendship between the 398th and Duxford Imperial War Museum continued happily as the group was given entree to the museum's B-17, Mary

Alice. (The Sally B was not available.)

Tours inside the B-17 had been restricted to "veterans only" but that was rescinded for the 398th and all members (who were able) were given access, even to the cockpit.

Faith Davie, sister of the navigator on the Doerr crew that went down in the Channel, John Walker, was especially moved when provided with intimate

details on the B-17's navigator's station. Also, additional details on how the RAF Rescue crew made valiant, albeit unsuccessful, attempts to save her brother's life.

Travel consultant Barbara Fish and Ann Collins, daughter of ball turret gunner Phil Collins, combined to monitor the lone entry into the B-17, the waist door. (No attempts were made to "pop up" into the nose hatch.) Ann and her mother, Elaine, used Wally's Tour of the old base as the occasion to raise Phil's casket flag



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398th Sponsored 55th Memorial

(Continued from Page 5)

on the tall pole; it was the 57th flag to be raised since the program began with Col. Hunter's flag.

The tour party paid a visit to HALS, the Hertfordshire Record Center where much 398th history is stored, cataloged and made available for general reading or research. Susan Flood not only made artifacts available on wall and table displays, but also treated the members to tea, coffee and cookies.

A prophetic expression of "things to come" occurred at Madingley American Military Cemetery, near Cambridge. President Blackwell, in presenting a wreath in memory of our fallen, asked all the "sons and daughters" to join him at the flag pole. No less than 10 approached, including his own son, John.

Others were Mellisa (Menard) Ledlow, Lee Anne Bradley, Marilyn (Crouch) Gibb-Rice, Col. Mike Ryan, Ken Howard, Bill Markley III, Kevin and Patricia Marsh, and Ann Collins.

Representing the grandchildren were Mike Braddock, Daniel Blackwell, Brandy Howard, and Carolyn Ledlow. Other tour veterans not previously mentioned were Bob Bowen, Harry Hoelzel, Bill Dean, and Russ Reed, all of whom were pilots.

Oh, yes, the tour also included some time in London and Windsor. They were nice, too.



**55th FIGHTER GROUP MEMORIAL
At Nuthampstead**



THE SONS AND DAUGHTERS of the 398th joined in presenting a wreath at the Madingley Cemetery during the England Tour. Back row, left to right — Kevin Marsh, Bill Markley III, John Blackwell, Ken Howard and Mike Ryan. Front row — Kristy Marsh Jones, Ann Collins, Mellisa Menard Ledlow, Lee Anne Bradley and Marilyn Crouch Gibb-Rice.

“Why Do You Still March, Old Man?”

By KEVIN WHITTAKER
Macclesfield, England

*Why do you still march, Old Man,
With medals on your chest?
Why do you still grieve, Old Man,
For those friends laid to rest?*

*Why do your eyes gleam, Old Man,
When you hear the bugles blow?
Tell me why you cry, Old Man,
For those days of long ago?*

*You seek answers from me, Young Man.
It's by God's good grace I am old!
But, we were once like you, Young Man,
Of youth and once quite bold.*

*And in our youth we heard the notes
Of the battle's bugle call.
They put silver wings upon our chests,
And the hope we would not fall ...*

*I'll tell you why I march, Young Man,
With medals on my chest.
I'll tell you why I grieve, Young Man,
For those I laid to rest.*

*Through misty skies of gossamer silk
Come visions of distant times,
When boys of tender age
Climbed forth to distant skies.*

*We buried them in a blanket shroud,
Their young flesh scorched and blackened,
A communal grave, newly gorged,
In blood stained gorse and bracken.*

*And you ask me why I march, Young Man?
I march to remind you all.
That but for those brave and fallen youths,
You'd never have known freedom at all.*

“AO” Continues Summer Tour

The Aluminum Overcast, refurbished from its “crash landing” almost two years ago, will continue on the current “Keep It Flying” summer tour until returning to Oshkosh the end of July.

The remaining summer schedule is:
June 23-25..... West Bend, IA
June 27-28..... Cedar Rapids, IA
June 30-July 2 Des Moines, IA
July 4-5..... St. Joseph, IA
July 7-9..... Kansas City, MO
July 11-12 Jefferson City, MO
July 14-16 St. Louis, MO
July 18-19 Springfield, IL
July 21-23 Madison, WI
July 24-30 Oshkosh, WI
(EAA Air Venture)

398th POW Pickup Party:

Coffee Brought Home A Pair Of Elite "Stowaways"

BY MARVIN COFFEE
Pilot, 602nd Squadron

Immediately after the end of the war in Europe, plans were implemented to airlift allied prisoners-of-war who had been held in various POW camps. Some of the POWs would be friends of ours who had the misfortune of going down in enemy territory.

The 398th Bomb Group was ordered to pick up prisoners held in Stalag #1 in Barth, Germany, which is located approximately 15 miles northeast of Rostock. Each B-17 would carry 32 to 35 passengers.

For weight and balance of our aircraft, most of the passengers would have to remain in the bomb bay area. Some of the B-17s had the ball turret removed in order to lighten the aircraft. Each B-17 would operate with a skeleton crew — flight engineer, radio operator, navigator, co-pilot and pilot. This mission looked like a 'cinch.' No flak, no bombs, and only the possibility of weather concerns. Our skeleton crew's morale was high.

This trip would give a great finish to our combat missions. It was a privilege to bring home the men who had had to deal with physical hardships, the uncertainty of life, and their concern for the welfare of their families who might not know if they were injured or even yet alive.

During briefing for this operation we are advised how the prisoners will be clustered into groups for each plane load. The groups of POWs will be spaced apart so that each B-17 will taxi up, park while the engines are running, and load its passengers. This will require that each B-17 will land and taxi in trail on the grass area and pull up to one of the groups. The pilot will be the only one allowed to deplane, and he will then pick up his

group's manifest and check everyone on board.

We are instructed to fly all of our prisoners to a field near Paris where they will all deplane. We are admonished that we are not, under any circumstances, to bring anyone back with us to England.

Caution is provided regarding the short runway we will be using at Barth. There had been a previous POW mission the day before, May 13, 1945, and a B-17 had to abort its takeoff and ended up in a sodded area beyond the end of the short runway.

We are looking forward to this flight as a fun trip with a good feeling of bringing our own out. Monday, May 14, 1945, we take off and fly in a rather loose formation en route to Barth. Because of my position in the formation, I am the first B-17 to peel off for landing. I taxi the designated route as indicated, leading the others that are in trail. I taxi past several groups of passengers until I reach my group which is the nearest the runway.

I deplane and the leader of my group hands me the loading list for his group. As I start to brief my passengers, I notice a strange looking vehicle headed our way, bouncing across the rough terrain. It pulls up directly in front of me, and a rather tall American officer gets out. Because of his position, I am unable to see his rank. "I want the order for this operation," he demanded.

My response is, "I do not have the order you want. I was just the first to land. Our lead aircraft will have what you want."

"Where is *Lead*?" he demanded.

"It will be in line somewhere, don't know at the moment how many aircraft landed between me and *Lead*."

Marvin Coffee survived his 398th combat tour to return to his hometown of Lubbock, Texas. He stayed "in the business" and became his city's director of aviation.



MARVIN COFFEE
As 398th Pilot in 1945

Appearing rather disgusted with me because I wasn't more specific, he turns to get back into his vehicle. It was only then that I noticed he wore two stars — the rank of Major General — and I had never saluted or even addressed him with a "Sir."

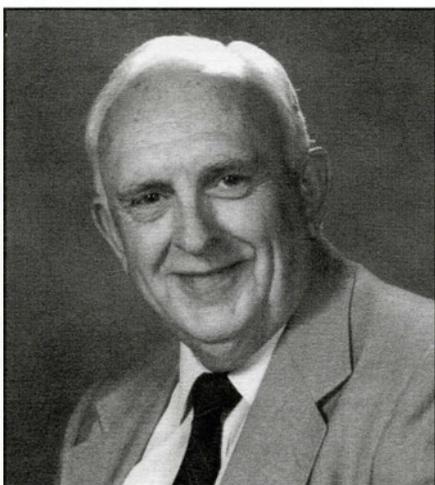
Getting back to the business at hand, I complete the briefing for my passengers. They all board the plane as I check their names on the manifest. Before getting back into the plane, I take a special preflight inspection. Now we are ready to depart. I am thinking how great it would be to be able to observe a B-17 taking off on this short runway, but since I am to be number one, I will be the one the others will watch. We begin our taxi back onto the runway.

We position our B-17 as close to the takeoff end of the runway as possible. I had been giving a lot of thought to our takeoff procedure and decided to make some changes. I say to Dave Woodring, my co-pilot, "I am changing our takeoff procedure. We are not lowering our flaps before the start of the takeoff roll. We will start our takeoff without flaps. I think we will accelerate faster with a clean ship. I will call for flaps when we have a good takeoff speed."

Dave responds — "Sounds like it should work. I am apprehensive about experimenting at this moment but let's give it a shot." We start our takeoff. When we reach near midpoint of the runway, we are going approximately 95 m.p.h. and I call for flaps. We come off the runway immediately. We had used only about one-half of the available runway. This worked so well that I wonder why it was not a standard takeoff procedure.

There will be no formation flying on this return trip. Each B-17 will go directly to Paris and, in effect, be on our own. This same plane will also take us from Paris back to our home base at Nuthampstead.

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MARVIN COFFEE
In Retirement Days

www.398th.org

WILLIS FRAZIER: Operations Officer

(Continued from Page 4)

the automatic flight control equipment (AFCE), and received heading and range information from the radar (Mickey) operator. The bombing was by radar, because clouds obscured the target. (See FLAK NEWS Vol. 19 No. 2.)

A second target of the 398th Bomb Group on D-Day was near Caen, France. The mission was recalled while the squadron was en route to Caen because the target was obscured, and orders were for "visual bombing only."

During the summer of 1944 the 398th Bomb Group supported the U.S. Army in achieving the St. Lo breakthrough. Advance through the hedgerows of Normandy in the area of St. Lo had been very costly. The Eighth Air Force was called upon to concentrate their entire bomber force on a small area west of St. Lo strongly defended by the German Army. The German defenses in the area 3½ by 5 miles in size were obliterated by the saturation bombing. The Army was then able to achieve the St. Lo breakthrough.

Let me present a little feedback on the St. Lo mission. Two years ago I attended the dedication of a memorial to the soldiers of the 90th Infantry Division who lost their lives near Perriers, France. I introduced myself to the head of the U.S. Army contingent, Major General Bockel, and mentioned that I had flown with the Eighth Air Force in the bombing west of St. Lo in operation "Cobra." He responded by making me an honorary member of the 90th Division, pinned the 90th Division insignia on my lapel, and expressed appreciation for our contribution to the breakthrough. I also talked with a soldier in an outfit whose task was to capture a ridge defended with 2200 artillery guns. The area was then bombed and they advanced with no difficulty.

Our group supported the Canadian Army in their advance toward Falaise in the closing of the Falaise Gap and destruction of the German Seventh Army. Wally Blackwell and crew were forced to bail out on this mission and landed in Canadian controlled territory.

The 398th Group also bombed a bridge over the Seine River at Le Manoir to prevent escape of the German Army. On this mission Harold Weekley and crew were forced to bail out of their badly damaged B-17. They became evadees.

PROVIDED ADVICE TO PILOTS —

Squadron operations had an open door policy with the aircrews. Questions were answered and advice given as appropriate. Examples follow:

1. One of our pilots wrote me the following, "I was assigned to the 398th as a replacement crew in July 1944. I became

a member of 601st Squadron and you were so helpful. I was so 'green' and had so many questions, but you were very patient and kind to answer my questions and be as helpful as possible. I am very thankful for your help."

2. At the Rapid City reunion, Russell Morrision mentioned that on one occasion I was at the end of the runway when he landed and later talked with him and suggested how he could improve his landing.

TRAINING AT RAPID CITY —

Members of the original 398th cadre were very well trained. As an example, during the year at Rapid City the pilots flew as instructor pilots. During that period I logged 600 hours B-17 first pilot time, bringing my total B-17 first pilot time to 800 hours. In comparison, replacement crew pilots would have logged in the order of 250 hours, and co-pilots many fewer hours. As a result of the training received at Rapid City and experience gained in combat members of the original cadre were able to provide advice to newer aircrews.

LOOKED OUT FOR CREW MEMBERS —

The crew member mentioned here is S/Sgt. Phillip D'Addio, ball turret gunner. While checking his guns in the squadron B-17 area, he inadvertently fired off a burst of .50 caliber bullets across the airfield. Fortunately, nothing was hit. An officer present grabbed D'Addio by the shoulder and pulled him upright. D'Addio then hit the officer. I walked over to the scene and the officer said he was going to court-martial D'Addio. D'Addio explained that the officer had grabbed him first. I said in that event we would have to court-martial both of you. That settled the problem.

FLEW INSTRUMENT CHECKS FOR PILOTS —

The operations officer would check out pilots on instruments and issue Instrument Cards. At the reunion in San Diego a 601st Squadron pilot showed me his WW II Instrument Card bearing my signature.

FLEW AIRCRAFT ACCEPTANCE FLIGHTS AFTER MAINTENANCE —

All aircraft were test flown after major maintenance. Examples of major maintenance are engine changes, horizontal and vertical stabilizer changes, outer wing panel changes, and control surface and cable changes. The flights were not always routine. On one flight the plane was extremely right wing heavy, with just enough control to keep the plane level. The problem was that the wing tanks (Tokyo tanks) on the replacement wing were empty, while the wing tanks of the other outer wing were full of fuel. The unbalanced weight on the outer wing with fuel was 1620 pounds (270 gallons) of fuel.

FLEW P-47 FIGHTER AIRCRAFT —

A P-47 fighter was based at Nuthampstead so that Group personnel could fly out to meet the bombers returning from a mission. I wanted to fly that P-47. I talked to the crew chief and he helped me start the engine. A red placard on the instrument panel read "Do not turn on final approach with gear and flaps down under 150 m.p.h. The placard was my only checkout. I had an exciting flight and learned a lot about P-47's in the next two hours.

REPRESENTED SQUADRON AT MADINGLEY —

Attended services at the Madingley Cemetery for members of the squadron who had perished.



THE SIERRA MOUNTAINS formed the backdrop for the Aluminum Overcast when it flew into Truckee, California, during one of its West Coast stops last May. Three Seattle area 398th members were there to support the EAA fly-in — Keith Anderson, Russ Reed and Allen Ostrom. The trio used the event to formally present the Legion of Merit medal to Richard Holub of nearby Grass Valley, California, for his dramatic 1945 "rocket assist" takeoff of a 398th B-17.

Letters:

"My brother, William H. Costanzo, was a 601 Squadron pilot in the 398th, and as a 13-year-old I remember how proud I was of him when he became a pilot.

"When the war was finally over I had a chance to see and touch a B-17 at the air museum at Wright-Patterson. But last year I got the best birthday gift I could have ever dreamed of. I believed my family was treating me to a birthday lunch, but instead they showed me a restored B-17 — the Liberty Belle.

"I wish I could go inside, I told my daughter. 'Better than that, Mom,' she said, 'you are going to get a ride in it.'

"I was so thrilled, I began to cry. Uncle Bill would have been so happy for me. I could hardly wait to get off the ground. It was a dream come true.

"In the air I checked the cockpit, the radio room, the gunners' positions, the bomb bay and tried to imagine what it was like to fly through the flak and fighters like Bill did.

"I even met one of the passengers who had been a tail gunner, and he was so happy to be in 'his' plane again.

"My experiences that day made me appreciate all the more what our brave airmen went through to protect us back home in America. My Big Brother Bill took his final flight (Heaven) last year, and I'll join him there one day.

"Thank you, men of the 398th."

Ruth (Costanzo) Young, →
Cedarville, Ohio

Others on the Costanzo crew were Art Laughlin, Dennis Johanson, Nick Marabeas, Daniel Unverzagt, Henry McGinty, Howard Thomas, Fred Marlett and Ray Talbott.

www.398th.org

Wife Also Had A Good Eye

He was called "General of the Sky" by his fellow Czech pilots who fled their country (and the occupying Nazis) to join the RAF during World War II. And find wide acclaim for his 14 aerial victories in Spitfires and Hurricanes before and during the Battle of Britain.

Frantisek Perina died this year at the age of 95, having returned to his hometown of Prague after the war ... and again after fleeing from the occupying Communists. He returned to the new Czech Republic with many of his fellow pilots after the "velvet revolution" in 1989.

The Coffee Caper

Continued from Page 7.

Right after takeoff, two of the passengers come up into the cockpit area. Their general appearance is much like that of the rest of the POWs. The uniforms and insignia are in bad shape. Their ranks are cut out of tomato cans or some other pieces of tin. They are very easy to spot as POWs at this point. We have fun bringing them up to date with the current goings-on and the status of the war. They in turn describe many of the experiences in Stalag #1.

We find out that the two visiting our cabin are Lt. Col. Francis (Gabby) Gabreski and 1st Lt. John C. Morgan. Lt. Morgan is a recipient of the Congressional Medal of Honor. He had been shot down by flak on a mission to Hamburg on July 23, 1943. Col. Gabreski was a P-47 Thunderbolt ace who destroyed 28 German aircraft in the air and three on the ground. He was listed as missing in action on July 20, 1944. He had been the



RUTH (COSTANZO) YOUNG
Thrill Of A Lifetime

commander of a fighter unit that provided much of our fighter cover support.

After landing at Paris and bidding farewell and best wishes to our great group of passengers, Gabreski and Morgan say that they want to return to England with us. I advise them of my orders, i.e. that under no circumstance are we to bring any of the POWs back to England.

Gabreski suggests — "Suppose we are stowaways and are on board without your knowledge?" I feel a strong desire to help them and agree to their plan. So I say, "Okay, let's get going," and we proceed on this basis.

During our takeoff from Paris we lose an engine, but continue our takeoff on the remaining three engines. After gaining some altitude, we are able to restart #4 engine. I tell Gabreski and Morgan, who are in our cabin, "I don't like three-engine takeoffs." Gabreski laughs and responds — "When you are in a fighter and lose an engine on takeoff, that's when you can start to worry."

The remaining flight to Nuthampstead is uneventful. We are the first B-17 to return so we park in our hardstand. Looking out I see Major Nathan Hays, our Squadron Commander, waiting to meet us. As soon as Gabreski and Morgan are visible to Major Hays, he becomes really angry, saying — "You were under direct orders not to bring any POWs back. I am going to have your ass for this. You will find out what a court martial is like."

I expected this royal chewing-out because this is a continuing saga of problems I've had with Major Hays.

The next morning Major Hays sends a messenger with orders for me to report to him at our squadron headquarters. I figure this will be another very unpleasant confrontation. When I enter his office, he springs up, slaps me on the back, and with his arm around my shoulder asks — "Do you know who those POWs are that you brought back yesterday?"

I say, "Yes, they're Col. Gabreski and Lt. Morgan."

"That's right, son, and they are special heroes. The *Stars and Stripes* carried a story about their return, and our 398th Bomb Group was given credit for flying them out."

"Then I'm out of the doghouse?"

"You bet. I should put you in for a commendation!"

I guess it was okay as long as my POW passengers turned out to be celebrities!

As anticipated, the air lift operation was a very good and rewarding experience, and I am pleased that I was able to participate.

“Pins & Badges” A Big Hit In Pilsen

Hotel Receives Unique Gift

It all began with a violent bomb strike by our B-17's in 1945, but since then the City of Pilsen has become a close friend to many members of the 398th Bomb Group Memorial Association.

Witness the first post war visit to the Czech Republic city in 1994 — and again in 1995, 1996, 2000 and 2003.

The city's Skoda plant, then making munitions for the occupying Nazis, felt the fury of the 398th and the rest of the 8th Air Force bomber stream from East Anglia. It was to be the final heavy bombardment on the Continent of World War II.

Today, Skoda is represented not as a bomb factory but rather as a museum, headed by a gentleman named Vladislav Krátký. Tour members from the 398th got to know him as he displayed the artifacts left over from The Last Mission on April 25, 1945.

This summer a letter came from Mr. Krátký expressing his sentiments on an unusual “remembrance” sent to the city's Hotel Continental and its “reception ladies” by FLAK NEWS editor and tour leader Allen Ostrom.

The “thank you” remembrance was in the form of a frame containing most of the “pins and badges” Ostrom had collected during his 13 398th tour visits to England and the Continent. Many included mementoes from Pilsen and Skoda.

The plaque was to be displayed in the hotel, where 398th members had their first contact with citizens of the “Czech Lands” in 1994 followed by the first big tour in 1995 to participate in the city's Liberation Day activities.

Krátký, on behalf of the hotel's “reception ladies,” wrote —



VLADISLAV KRÁTKÝ
Museum Boss Likes Souvenir



CONTINENTAL HOTEL “reception ladies” pose beside the framed “Pins & Badges” souvenir sent to the Pilsen hotel by FLAK NEWS editor Allen Ostrom. In the back row are Renata Procházková and Jitka Paníková. In front are Rose Minaříková and Jitka Fonioková. They remembered the many 398th visits.

“I am fortunate enough to inform you that your collection of pins and badges will be placed in the restaurant of the Hotel Continental in the most honourable place.

“We all appreciate your gift remembering the meetings of your veterans in Plzen.

“You will be pleased to know that your collection has been very well received because it provides one of the most interesting souvenirs from members of the 398th Bomb Group.

“I enclose a photo of the souvenir and the hotel's “reception ladies,” who are very proud of your gift. They all remember your visits of past years, as does Mr. Janecek, the hotel manager.

“As for my part, I am greatly impressed by your work in the position of the editor of FLAK NEWS and reunions and tour coordinator. I know exactly how complicated is the agenda to prepare the meetings in Europe with finding suitable transport and accommodation.

“It is time to thank you for sending of FLAK NEWS to me and wish you all the best for the veterans of the 398th.”

The “original” Czech friend of the 398th, who introduced us to his SLET team of “crash site locators,” is still “on the job” in Pilsen, but working at a slower pace.

Jaromir Kohout is now married and a father ... and still a welding instructor at Skoda. His brother Martin also is married and a father, as are other members of their SLET team.

It was in 1994 that Jaromir first brought members of the 398th to Litice, where a memorial stands in memory of the 602 Ferguson crew members who crashed near there on the Last Mission.

Other major Czech visits were hosted by Jan Zdiarsky of Kovarska and Milan Spineta of Slany.



CZECH SOLDIER poses with the 398th flag, presented to the City of Pilsen in 1995.

BRIEF-things

Her Majesty **Queen Elizabeth II** of Great Britain celebrated her "official" 80th birthday on June 17, reminding of her graciousness in responding to a number of 398th contacts these past several years (see FLAK NEWS Vol. 20 No. 2 — and the current issue) ... there was a superb color photo of "our" Aluminum Overcast in the last issue of *Bomber Legends*, the WW II aviation magazine highlighting the plane's return to action after being grounded for two years ... *Fly Past* magazine also had a great feature on the "AO" ... the 91st BG has closed its PX and lost its Historian, which should remind us all how grateful we of the 398th should be for **Carolyn Widmann** and **Lee Anne Bradley** ... the restoration people at Wright-Patterson revealed that the condition of the Memphis Belle was worse than expected; a heavy toll had been taken via neglect, corrosion, inept maintenance, weather, theft and vandalism; it will be restored over a period of several years ... our good friend **Ron Jensen** "covered" the 398th tours to the Czech Republic in '95 and again in France in '04 for *Stars and Stripes*, but after 17 years of overseas reporting he is back in Galesburg, Illinois, looking for a "real" newspaper reporting job (and he wants to remain on the FLAK NEWS mailing list) ... **Phyllis Veley** is another one of our precious widows who continue sending in dues and FLAK NEWS support; same for those "lifetime" member who do the same year after year ... a partial answer to the question of who the four sergeants were in the FLAK NEWS photo enjoying a chat with **Clare Booth Luce** at Station 131 in 1944 — "One was me, **Tony Severi**, and all of us were from Connecticut" ... **Jim Crouch's** widow, **Dorothy**, and daughters **Carolyn Widmann** and **Marilyn Gibb-Rice**, all agree that Operations Officer **Willis Frazier** was "special" ... **Elliot Novek** reminds that the radio operator also had gunner duties, early on in his own turret and later as the second gunner in the waist ("and we also dropped the chaff to confuse the Flak gunners down below") ... **Ida Peterson** recalls that her 91-year-old husband/tail gunner **Paul** pulled 82 missions, having a tour in Africa before joining the **Comstock** crew ... Since You Asked — the VA furnished no less than 369,000 inscribed headstones and markers for veterans' graves last year; and each day is adding 1,000 new records to the Internet database — <http://gravelocator.cem.va.gov> ... also — of the 16.4 million troops who served in WW II, 3.5 million are alive today ... dues manager **Dawne Dougherty** says that only 38 members were dropped from the FLAK NEWS mailing list last year, thanks to **LeW Burke's** friendly "dues reminder" ... a poem called "Empty Air" calls to mind the names on the Walls of the Missing at the various American cemeteries, men who were killed in action, yet whose bodies are forever lost like so many ghosts ... our good friend **Greg Anderson**, formerly with the EAA in Oshkosh, invited the Aluminum Overcast to his "Wings Over the Rockies" air museum at Denver's Centennial Airport and lots of Colorado 398th folks were there to help make the show a success; **Hal Weekley** was there too, plugging his new book, "Last of the Combat B-17 Drivers" ... **Wally's** wife, **Teedy**, and **Thelma Loring**, wife of a 55th Fighter Group pilot, were high school classmates ... **The Rev. Russell Blowers**, who unveiled the new 55th Fighter Group memorial, was in P-38 armament during the war, and later gave up a journalism career for the ministry and ultimately retired from a 4,000 member church ... while scanning the 398th material at the Hertford Record Center, **Mike Braddock** came upon a 1945 newspaper announcing "GERMANY QUITs," signed by his grandfather, **Maj. Heyward Braddock** ... travel consultant **Barbara Fish** met the young Czech student who was the 398th Pilsen tour guide in 1995, **David Frous**; he is now the press/political officer for the Czech Republic Embassy in London ... **Don Menard's** teenage granddaughter, **Carolyn Ledlow**, was so pumped about the England tour she wants to be a part of the next one in 2008 ... is London's Heathrow Airport a busy place? — consider one takeoff every 60 seconds; and soon (another) Terminal (5) and the 500-passenger A380 AirBus ... the tour group was smart to have a London "blue badge" guide through the city; **Britt's** knowledge of London was phenomenal ...

398th Bomb Group PX

(The Second Generation)

ORDER FORM

QTY	ITEM	UNIT COST	TOTAL
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_____	T-Shirt, black, "398th BG Flying Fortress"	\$12.00	_____
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_____	T-Shirt, navy, with Triangle W	\$12.00	_____
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BOOKS (All books postpaid.)			
_____	Fortresses Over Nuthampstead	\$65.00	_____
_____	398th History (1946, photo copy)	\$20.00	_____
_____	"Remembrances" (1989, photo copy, Ostrom)	\$30.00	_____
_____	"WW II Odyssey" (Frankhouser)	\$19.00	_____
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_____	Sun Catcher with logo	\$10.00	_____
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_____	WW II Coloring Book (with crayons)	\$4.00	_____
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_____	B-17 Pencil Sharpener	\$4.00	_____
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398th MEMORIAL AT NUTHAMPSTEAD