



CERIGNOLA CONNECTION

455th Bomb Group Association Newsletter

Winter 1991

Al Says Farewell!

What a great Association we have and it is going to get better under the leadership of Hugh Graff as President and Gene Hudson as Vice President! Hugh is a natural for President. He was our Group Operations Officer for about a year during WWII and then he became Deputy Group Commander for a few months before he was shot down over Bulgaria. All of us still look to Hugh as our leader. Gene Hudson had a distinguished career in the Air Force, with 23 years of service with the Strategic Air Command. He retired as a Major General. Both Hugh and Gene know how to get things done. They will have my full support.

My biggest joy as your President was working with Association members and hearing from so many by letter and telephone. My most sorrowful moments came when I would learn about some of our members passing away. At our business meeting, we passed a resolution to make the wives of our lost members Lifetime Honorary Members. The ladies have become such an important part of our Association that we want them to continue their participation, including those who have lost their husbands. Honorary membership means that they will continue to receive the Cerignola Connection and other

information we periodically publish. Also, they will be participants in our reunions and other affairs. We welcome you as members.

Naomi and I "glowed" all the way home from Colorado Springs to Michigan (we drove) thinking about seeing old friends and making new ones. Our members haven't changed a bit since WWII. Louis Hansen and I overlooked certain aspects of our reunion, such as assigning responsibility for serving refreshments in the hospitality room. Bill Green and Dave Frawley stepped forward and literally took over. Others also helped and the spirit of helping each other and caring prevailed just as it did during WWII. My lovely wife, Naomi, picked up a nickname of "Cinderella" at the reunion. Bill and Dave named her that because of her scrubbing dishes and coffee urns in the hospitality room. She loves the name and it will follow her for the rest of her life.

The highlight of the reunion for us was the memorial dedication ceremonies. About one hour before starting, the Academy personnel called me and advised of the inclement weather, that the temperatures were between 30 and 40 degrees with intermittent showers of rain mixed with snow. They offered to hold the ceremonies in the gymnasium.

If I choose to hold it outside the people should remain in the warm buses until just before the ceremonies start. I decided to hold it outside where the plaque would be installed and remain in its resting place in memory of those we lost. When the buses arrived, there was no way you were going to remain in the buses. I will always remember seeing you scurrying from the buses through the wet, cold grass to get to the site. I still choke up remembering the fly over of the All American. Ned Bowers (son of Win of the 741st) did such a great job coming over us with the bomb bay doors open and the engines perfectly synchronized. The "tear drop" turn for his second pass was perfectly executed so that we could see the All American at all times. Then his circle to the right and disappearance was like a final salute to those we lost during the war. Naomi and I had the pleasure of spending time with Ned the day before the ceremonies making a survey of the route and site. He was so thorough in his planning and indeed a fine young man.

This gives me the opportunity to thank all of you for the generous donations you made to pay for the All American visit. The donations covered all the costs associated with having the old B-

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Farewell - *continued from page 1*

24J at our reunion. Some of you gave even though you did not attend. Also, several of the ladies who lost their husbands made generous donations. What a caring group of people we have!

Another noteworthy event was the reading of a letter at our banquet from the White House and signed by President Bush. A copy of the letter appears later in this news letter. Tom Ramey is having it reproduced in its exact likeness which will be available to all members for purchase at cost to the Association.

I was on Chuck Baker's Radio talk show at Colorado Springs and one caller suggested that members of Associations such as ours visit the high schools in the local area and tell the students about WWII. He said there is a lack of understanding about what really happened and why it occurred. I think this is a great idea and we may want to do this at our next reunion. Thanks to Bert Andrus of the 465th Bomb Group, we received a great amount of publicity at Colorado Springs. He lives in the Colorado Springs area and volunteered to help us with the reunion. Bert was a great help in many other ways and served as my interface with local organizations for reunion affairs.

Others share my feelings about our having a great organization. For example, I received a note from Brigadier General Kenneth F. Keller who made an outstanding presentation at our banquet on the role of SAC in DESERT STORM, quote: "Dear Col. Asch. Thank you and all members of the 455th for your warm and gracious hospitality. I enjoyed my time with you and I am reading your history now. It is well done. You are part of a superb military organization. Thanks! Regards, Ken Keller."

People, of course, make a good organization. Some were singled out at our reunion: Louis and Fran Hansen for all the outstanding work they do as Executive Director, Hugh Graff and Tom Ramey for their work on the history book and Tom for his great job publishing the Cerignola Connection. It is dif-

"The highlight of the reunion for us was the memorial dedication ceremonies...I still choke up remembering the fly over..."

ficult to mention everyone here but our fine Secretary, John Davis, has been outstanding for the past years. For example, he keeps the minutes of our meetings, files corporate reports to IRS and others, researched the income tax exemption rules and applied for it and now one can make gifts to the Association which are deductible, and he researched the postage rules and set up procedures through working with local postal people on a practical way to handle our bulk mailings at a favorable cost to the Association. John is an attorney and I relied heavily on him for advice.

Our Association has been very active over the past two years. A small group made a trip to Italy and Cerignola to visit our old base there. A memorial plaque was given to the local priest and his congregation in memory of both Italians and Americans who lost their lives in the war. It was engraved in the

Italian language. Insofar as we know, the plaque will be displayed in the chapel at San Giovanni as long as it remains. A similar plaque was given to the Italian Air Force at a base near by. At the start of the period, we had 178 active members, we now have over 230 with paid up dues. We had 149 life members, we now have over 180. We had 641 member names with addresses in our data base, we now have over 700. We started publishing our news letter every six months with many good items from our membership and we published the history of our Bomb Group for WWII. We have sold over 800 copies out of a total of 1,040 printed. If you want additional copies, send your order to Louie Hansen. The cost is \$19.95 plus \$1.50 for handling and postage. In connection with writing the book, we found over 4,000 names of people who had at one time been a member of the 455th Bomb Group. Let's find the rest of us! We had over 435 people at our reunion this year! Let's make it a thousand at our next one which will coincide with our 50th anniversary from the time we were activated in Clovis, New Mexico!

"Cinderella" and I will be looking forward to seeing everyone at our next reunion in two years. We won't be as busy at this one and will have more time to visit. Thank you all so much for the support I received during the past two years!

Al Asch, President

A Message From Your New President

Fellow members of the 455th Bomb Group Association: I deem it an honor to be chosen as your President. I hope that I may serve you as well as those who have preceded me. Bob

Armstrong, Jim Bates, Jim Shumard and Al Asch. I see no reason to change any of their policies as they have done so well in the past. Our primary aim for the present is to track down any former members and make them aware of our existence as an organization and invite them to join us as members. In that regard you will be hearing from Dave Frawley and Bob Armstrong in the near future about methods to help find former members of the Group.

I have asked Al Asch to take over my duties as Historian to help coordinate the finding and correction of errors in the Group History. If you find any errors please make Al aware of them by sending them to him at his home in Mary-

land. His address is 6205 Meadow Court, Rockville, MD 20852. In that way we will be able to coordinate our efforts to make any corrections that are necessary. When we are sure we have them all we will publish an errata sheet and send it to everyone who purchased a book.

I believe that we all owe a vote of thanks to Al and Naomi Asch as well as Louie and Fran Hansen for the wonderful job they did on our reunion in Colorado Springs. It has certainly set the standard for future reunions and will be hard to beat. In that regard it will be one of our first jobs to search out the site of our next get together and if any of you have a preference please let it be known to me as soon as possible as the next one is only two years away.

Many thanks for your trust and I will try to live up to the honor you have shown me.

Hugh R. Graff

History Books Still Available!

All orders for the 455th Bomb Group History have been filled and either mailed book rate or sent to you United Parcel when more than one book prevailed. Initial comments "outstanding!" 400 photographs of your bomb group in action - 300 pages - 4 pounds of nostalgic remembrance complete with a recap of every mission flown, individual group and squadron histories, crew pictures, nose art, Cerignola scenes, and a roster of all members of the group from activation to deactivation.

If you haven't ordered, you'll want to order immediately. Less than 200 copies remain - there won't be a rerun. What an ideal gift for children and grandchildren. They will each want their own personal copy to treasure in the years to come. Only \$19.95 plus \$1.50 for shipping and handling. Send your order and check to: Louis Hansen, P.O. Box 6125, Spencer, Iowa 51301. Orders will be filled on a first come, first served basis.



The color guard of the United States Air Force Academy is present at the 455th Bombardment Group (Heavy) WWII Memorial Dedication. The presentation was held October 4 at Colorado Springs, Colorado.

455th Dedicates War Memorial

*United States Air Force Academy
Colorado Springs, Colorado, October 4, 1991*

The 455th Bombardment Group (Heavy) was constituted by General Order 74 issued on 22 May 1943 by Headquarters, Second Air Force, Fort George Wright, Washington. Actual activation occurred on 8 July 1943 at the Clovis Army Air Base, New Mexico by the issuance of General Order Number 1 by the Group. This order was signed by Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth A. Cool when he assumed command. The Group consisted of the Headquarters Staff and four Heavy Bombardment Squadrons, the 740th, 741st, 742nd and 743rd.

Forty-eight years ago this month, we started to come together as a Group and Squadrons at Langley Army Air Base, Virginia. Prior to that time, we served at various bases for training and the assignment of personnel. But it was at Langley where the original air crews and ground personnel trained together and the character of the Group and Squadrons was established.

During December 1943, we were on our way to Italy to fly high altitude strategic bombardment combat against the Axis Powers of Europe. Our Group was assigned to the 304th Bombardment Wing which was a part of the 15th Army Air Force in Italy. The aircrews flew their new B-24's through South America, across the Atlantic Ocean to Africa and then to Italy. The ground personnel traveled the long, hard trip in several Liberty ships. We made camp in January, 1944 at the San Giovanni Air Field, about five miles from Cerignola, Italy with tents in olive groves. Our landing strip, taxi ways and hard stands were crudely built of clay and gravel and there were no airplane or ground vehicle maintenance facilities. This was home for our ground personnel until the war

ended on 8 May 1945 when they started packing to go home. The combat crews had a shorter stay, up to 6 months when they would complete their combat and return home.

Our first combat mission was flown on 16 February 1944 and the last one 25 April 1945. During this time, we flew 255 combat missions, logged over 7,400 sorties and dropped over 13,000 tons of bombs and we received two Unit Citations. One was for destroying the critical Steyr Walzlagerwerke Ball Bearing Plant, Germany and the other the Moobierbaum Oil Refinery in Austria. Severe enemy opposition from flak and fighters was encountered when striking these two important targets. During our months of combat, our formations destroyed 119 enemy planes in the air and received credit for 78 probably destroyed.

Our successes were not without losses. We lost a total of 118 B-24's, 147 crewmen killed in action, 268 missing, 179 taken prisoners and 169 wounded from enemy action.

We all remember with sadness and we honor those who were lost and who paid the ultimate price with their lives. It is especially to them that we dedicate this Memorial. Let it remain here at the Academy in memoria and as a reminder that the ravages of wars by dictators accomplish nothing and cause suffering



and death to millions of people.

Our Group was deactivated in Italy on 9 September 1945.

By: Alfred Asch, Colonel, USAF (Ret.)

Presentation of Memorial to the United States Air Force Academy

This Memorial is in recognition of our 455th Bomb Group members who are no longer with us and in commemoration of our dedication to freedom and our great nation. We hereby entrust it to the United Air Force Academy for the benefit and knowledge of future generations of visitors who come here from around the world. May it serve to remind us all of our priceless heritage.

On behalf of the 455th Bomb Group Association, we are pleased to officially present this Memorial to the United States Air Force Academy.

By: Hugh R. Graff, Colonel USAF (Ret.)

455th Reunion A Huge Success

They turned out in strength for the 455th Bomb Group reunion in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Highlight was the low altitude B-24 flyover at the Air Force Academy memorial dedication. Despite heavy overcast and rain, the gallant Liberator exercised a perfect teardrop, made a second pass over the group and then lost itself in the distance. The B-24 was available on ground for all members to tour and relive their memories.

Thursday night Horace Lanford and members of the 741st Squadron hosted all in attendance to an evening reception. Friday was the memorial dedication at the Air Force Academy, a tour of the facility, visit to the gift shop and lunch at the Officers' Club. Thursday evening was crew night and individual crews dined on their own - or small groups made up temporary crews for the occasion. Saturday warmed up and

many of the group tailgated and then watched Air Force trounce Wyoming 51 to 28. The evening formal banquet brought everyone together for the last time. Many attended Sunday services at the Academy while others caught early planes - or began the long drive home.

Plans are already beginning to formulate for another big reunion in '93.



Chapel, USAF Academy



Checking in!



455th Memorial Dedication, USAF Academy



All roads end at the hospitality room!



Lunch, Officers Mess, USAF Academy



The night everyone dressed up - banquet night!



Guest speaker Brigadier General Keller - "The Air War in Desert Shield."



Major General Gene Hudson praises Al Asch and Louie Hansen for putting together a great reunion.



Al Asch (L) presents Louie Hansen with a watch from members of the 455th, recognizing all his efforts for the group.



And Hugh Graff (r) receives a special award for help authoring the group history.



Dave Bellemere (L) presents Tom Ramey with a special award for his work on the history and the Cerignola Connection.



Inside the chapel at the Air Force Academy.



The Group Headquarters Gang.



At the banquet - are you in this picture?



But General, I'm a civilian now!



The Group Dentist leads a lonely life!



From a legal standpoint, this is a reunion not a convention!



Air Force Tromps Wyoming.



After every score the Cadets do push-ups!



1600 Cadets marched!



Here comes the game ball!



The 455th tailgated in style.



A lone B-24 salutes!

President Bush Commends 455th Bomb Group

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

September 16, 1991

I am delighted to send greetings to all those who are gathered in Colorado Springs for the reunion of the 455th Bomb Group Association.

You meet to recall a time when our Nation and its allies were engaged in a life-and-death struggle against tyrannical forces that threatened to extinguish the light of freedom. As President Franklin Delano Roosevelt observed, your generation had "a rendezvous with destiny." Today, we know that you proved more than equal to the challenge.

Despite the threat of mortal danger, you answered your country's call to duty, serving with honor and distinction and standing steadfast in the defense of liberty. Through the many hardships and sacrifices that you endured, you demonstrated exemplary courage and resolve. On behalf of all Americans, I salute you.

I also salute you for continuing to serve our country today. By helping people to remember the lessons of World War II and by contributing to the well-being of your communities, you remind your fellow Americans that we must never take our freedom and our way of life for granted.

Barbara joins me in sending best wishes for an enjoyable reunion and for every future happiness. God bless you.

Editor's note: An authentic reproduction of President Bush's letter, on special paper suitable for framing, is available from Louis Hansen, 917 W. 11th St. P.O. Box 6135, Spencer, Iowa 51301, for only \$1.00. Allow ample time for processing and mailing.

Bits and Pieces

Time Takes Its Toll!

If you find any error or change in your 455th Bomb Group History Book, please drop a line to Al Asch, 6205 Meadow Court, Rockville, Maryland 20851 and let him know the specifics. Forty-seven years is a long time! Records are not complete, pictures not available and handwriting difficult to decipher. If a crew picture is missing, misidentified or names misspelled, we are sorry. Also if a name is missing from the roll call or a later higher rank should be noted, please let us know. We'll make corrections in the master and publish an errata sheet at a later date.

Dues Are Due!

It's getting close to that time of year when your annual dues are due. Let's get a jump start on '92 by mailing your check today. Annual dues are only \$15. A Life Membership \$100. If you're not a member of the association, join today. We want to keep sending you the Cerignola Connection and other mailings. We really want you aboard!

Make your check payable to the 455th Bomb Group Association and mail it to Louis Hansen, P.O. Box 6125, Spencer, Iowa 51301.

Member Widows Attend Reunion

How nice that three member widows attended the reunion in Colorado

Springs. As a result the Board of Directors unanimously voted to bestow upon all member widows an honorary lifetime membership. They will not be required to pay dues and will receive the Cerignola Connection and all other group communications.

I Found An Old Newspaper!

B-24 QUITE THE SHIP; SHAKES OFF FLAK AND KNOCKS OFF FIGHTERS

"It will fly through anything and can take more punishment than your favorite Wailing Wall has wailers."

The "it" in this instance is the B-24 and the men behind the words are five officers, now stationed at this Base, who have flown Liberators over Europe, Africa, Sicily, and Italy and played an important role in chasing Rommel, the Desert Rat, out of North Africa.

According to Captain William E. Keefer, of Torrance, California, the Liberator is a remarkable airplane.

"We went through plenty of pounding from flak and enemy fighters but "the old lady" brought us home each time."

This quintet of veterans, with a heavy bombardment group here, put in nearly a continuous year of active service in the European and African theaters of war and their tales are tall but plenty true.

Lt. Colonel Kenneth A. Cool, Captain David S. Thayer, Captain Frank J. Rinehard, Lt. Alfred Asch and the aforementioned Captain Keefer have

dropped plenty of bombs on Jerry and the greatest kick they got was from the part they played in the big push in North Africa when Rommel woke up one day and wondered where the Luftwaffe was.

After going through their training here in the States, they landed in England and before Hitler had time to stroke his mustache they hit the Germans where it hurt.

In November 1942, they pulled up stakes and headed for North Africa and when they were through in that area they had dropped eggs on practically every German stronghold.

Bizerte, Tunis, Sousse, Sfax, Gabes, Tripoli, Messina, the whole shooting match was at one time or other under their bombsights.

To put the icing on the cake, their group had the honor of being the first American fliers to knock holes in Palermo when Mussolini's ragamuffins were dug in there.

On completion of their destructive tours over this area, the group returned to England and once again started to pummel German territory.

It wasn't as easy as it reads and there was more than one time when they came home on less than the musical wing and a prayer. But their Liberators brought them back to their Base and that's all you can ask of a plane.

All five men have the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with three clusters. In addition to those awards, Lt. Asch also wears the Purple Heart.

These men returned to this country on May 16 and are helping train new crews to carry the battle right into Berlin.

Final Flight

Bob Beckner passed away October 12, 1991 at San Clemente, California. He was one of the original first pilots with the 740th Squadron. Bob and his crew flew 50 combat sorties in Italy without an abort. He had a strong belief in God and carried the New Testament Bible attached to his flight gear on all his combat missions. Bob had a distinguished career in the Air force following the war. His wife, Virginia, resides at 303 Calle Cuervo, in San Clemente. Bob will be sorely missed by his associates, friends and family.

Horace Lanford Writes to Former Members of the 741st Squadron

Thanks to all "apron wearers" and their ladies for their help in making the 741st reception a success.

RE: Squadron History. If you want to share an experience in WWII please let me know. We are considering a volume III.

We will duplicate Volumes I & II - if there are sufficient orders. Cost: \$50.00 per copy (includes both volumes). Send money to Gene Hudson or Horace Lanford.

It was good to see you all.

Do You Have a Contribution For The Cerignola Connection?

If your crew picture missed the history, if you have a favorite photograph taken during your stay overseas, or unusual war stores, send them to: Editor, Cerignola Connection, 1211 Montclair Ct., Appleton, Wisconsin, 54915. When sending photographs, place an address sticker on the reverse side for identification. All photographs will be returned after printing.



GREAT BALLS OF FIRE: they got together for the first time, as a crew, after all of these years. Of the original crew, Eugene Bassett, Bombardier and Carl Reed, Radio Operator are deceased. Now that those remaining have met again they intend to meet once a year. They haven't changed much in over 45 years, have they? Well, maybe a little. And I'll bet Dick Skagenberg can't fit in the ball turret anymore! See if you can match them up before you check the name listings below the photographs.



Rear: McHugh, Werfel, Metzdorff, Zimmerman, Smith.
Seated: McLendon, Skagenberg, Mrs. Bassett, Hilliard.



Front (L-R) Carl R. Reed, Radio Operator; Richard Skagenberg, Ball Gunner; William D. McLendon, Tail Gunner; Royce M. Hilliard, Nose Gunner; Gerard S. Metzdorff, Engineer; Meyer Werfel, Top Gunner. Back: Lee T. Smith, Navigator; William H. Zimmerman, Pilot; Charles S. McHugh, Co-Pilot; Eugene M. Basset, Bombardier.

Tie A String Around Your Finger

And don't forget to use this handy order blank to pay your 1992 dues...order additional history books for Christmas giving...become a Life Member of the Association...or to have a membership roster that gives names, addresses, and telephone numbers of all members and non-members of record. A tremendous opportunity to find lost friends and renew acquaintances.

And a last minute reminder, the history book will not rerun, there's only a few left. So if after you've received your copy and you are satisfied that you now want copies for your children and grandchildren, get your order in today. We'll process them as they are received. \$19.95 plus \$1.50 for shipping and handling. Books are mailed to you book rate and that takes a few days longer. If you're thinking of Christmas, then today is not too soon to order

455 Bomb Group Membership

Date _____

Name _____ Squadron _____

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City _____

State _____ Zip _____ Telephone _____

History Books \$21.45 \$ _____

Annual Dues \$15.00 \$ _____

Life Membership \$100.00 \$ _____

Membership Roster \$7.50 \$ _____

Total Submitted \$ _____

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