



CERIGNOLA CONNECTION

455th Bomb Group Association Newsletter

Fall, 2016

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Message from the President

**By
Norman Crum**

I'm happy to once again offer a few words of introduction to this edition of *The Cerignola Connection*. I do so with mixed feelings.

Of course, it is sad to think about publishing the final edition of this fine newsletter.

We enthusiastically and sincerely thank our Editor Craig Ward, our Association Executive Greg Riggs, and our Historian John Rohrer for their excellent work in preserving the memory of the men who served in the 455th. On behalf of the veterans themselves and their descendants, I say ... thank you, gentlemen. Job well done.

Mixed with this sadness

is a note of pride in knowing that we're winding down the Association in good order.

It seemed somehow disrespectful to allow this organization to simply fade away through neglect and indifference. As will be explained, the time has come to wrap things up. Please know that your Board is taking every effort to do so in an orderly and proper manner.

I previously commented on Eisenhower's use of heavy bombers in the *Transportation Plan* that was instrumental in cutting-off the Normandy battlefield preparatory to the D-Day landings in 1944. As a child, I remember looking at my dad's photo-album from the war and seeing pictures of railway yards far below enveloped in smoke. Equally important was the role the 455th played in the strategic *Oil Plan* of the Army Air Forces in Europe in WWII.

Modern militaries run on oil. In early 1944, General Carl Spaatz argued strenuously that heavy bombers from the Eighth and Fifteenth Air Forces could deliver a staggering blow to the Nazi war effort by concentrating on the Luftwaffe's and

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Wehrmacht's supply of fuel and lubricants.

But even though AAF Commanding General Hap Arnold and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill favored the *Oil Plan*, the England-based Eighth Air Force was forced to focus almost exclusively on bridge, roadway and rail targets until the D-Day armies were firmly established in France.

But the Fifteenth was free to bomb, among other targets, aircraft manufacturing and transportation targets. Its daring April/May 1944 raids on the Ploesti oil complex inflicted severe damage and persuaded the allied high command to order further oil-related raids from Italy.

Tremendous air battles occurred over heavily-defended oil refining targets in Romania and Austria. Hundreds of planes were lost on both sides. The ferocity of the fight convinced Allied planners that they had found the enemy's fatal flaw.

Albert Speer, Germany's brilliant Minister of Armaments, declared in his post-war memoirs, "In these raids the technological war was decided." He reported to Hitler that "the enemy has struck us at one of our weakest points. If they persist at it, we will soon no longer have any fuel production worth mentioning."

Once the Eighth Air Force was freed to pound synthetic oil production plants in central Germany, the twin blows halved Nazi fuel production and

crippled their mechanized forces.

In the end, Albert Speer eloquently explained the impact that the men of the 455th and their Eighth and Fifteenth Air Force brethren had on the war. "This was preeminently an economic war between rival production systems and was decided through attacks from the air, especially the oil raids in the spring of 1944. The losses inflicted by these air fleets constituted for Germany the greatest lost battle of the war."

In this edition of *The Cerignola Connection*, we pay a final tribute to the young men who flew and serviced the warplanes of the 455th Bomb Group. We owe each of them a deep debt of gratitude.

Thank you for allowing me to be of service as Association President for these past four years.

Signing off.

Final Flight

Dear Editor,

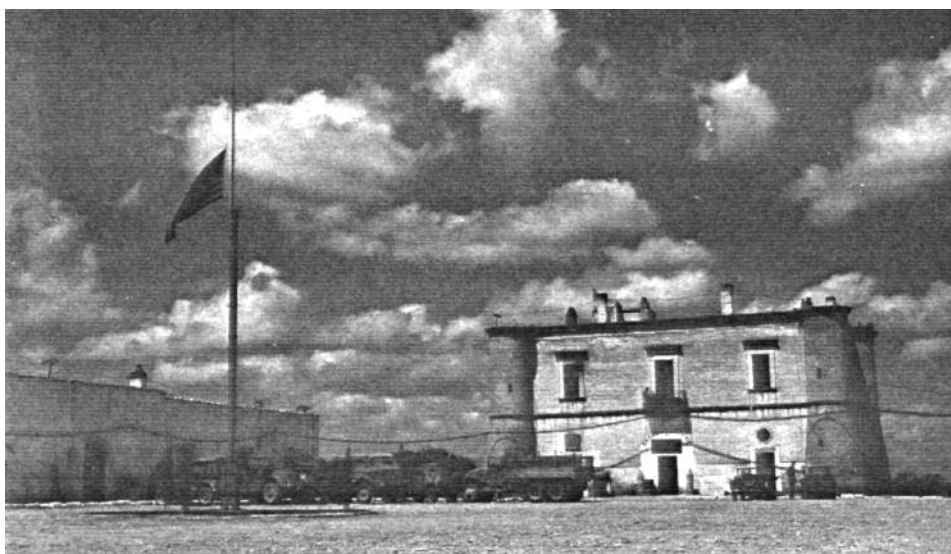
I am writing to inform you of my father's passing.

Russell Allen Crocker (742), age 91, was a member of the 455th Bomb Group, and the nations greatest generation.

My father was proud of his service, but he never talked about the bad side of combat. He did mention that we had to take care of those who returned, but were injured.

I thought the *Wounded Warriors* and *USO* would be appropriate organizations for donations.

Best Regards,
Mark A. Crocker



455th Bomb Group Headquarters Castle
San Giovanni Airfield
Cerignola, Italy

A Brief History of the 455th Bombardment Group (H)

The group was activated July 1943 with four essentially stand-alone bomb squadrons: 740th, 741st, 742nd, and 743rd.

After a somewhat nomadic training regimen with dilapidated equipment, the pieces of the group came together at Langley, VA in October 1943. They were issued G and H models of the Consolidated B-24 Liberator.

Vulgar Vultures

Activated 1 June 1943 at Clovis, NM.

De-activated 9 September 1945 in Italy

Activated 25 March 1947

De-activated 27 June 1949

Activated 25 July 1956 as 455th Day Fighter Group

The 455th flew 252 combat missions over France, Italy, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Austria, and the Balkans.

They dropped 13,249 tons of munitions with the following approximate targeting breakout:

Marshalling yards, railroads, bridges, rolling stock ---

6,239 tons

Oil refineries and storage ---

2,704 tons

Air fields ---

2,093 tons

Harbors and shipping ---

1,035 tons

Troop concentrations ---

974 tons

Gun emplacements ---

204 tons

Donor Acknowledgment for Fall 2016 Cerignola Connection

This is the cumulative list of contributors towards the *Cerignola Connection*. **Those in bold print have made additional contributions since the Spring 2016 edition.** Any contribution checks received after I knew we would have to close were returned to the sender, but their generosity is still acknowledged in the list below. The last two and a half years of newsletters have been the gift of the people listed here. We all owe them our thanks. -
Executive Director

Taxi (\$25-\$99)

Joseph A. Abbondondelo

Gerald W. Adams

John Caufield

Jarred Fishman

William E. Fredrickson, in memory of Elwood (Freddie) Fredrickson

Lloyd C. Kestner

W. Scott Lawing, in memory of MSgt (Ret) Robert L. Denton (743)

John Kay McBain

Loraine McGinnis, in memory of Joseph McGinnis

Victor E. Murray

Takeoff (\$100-\$199)

Annis Dominey in honor of S/Sgt J.R. Dominey, Jr.

John Edwards

Charles A. Greenman

Elmo J. Henske

Henry C. Paris

Charles H. Rosenberg

Richard C. Skagenberg

Charles V. Vandoren

Wesley Fellowship Class, in memory of MSgt (Ret) Robert L. Denton (743)

Dorothy Wood Cloud, in memory of T/Sgt Robert D. Cloud

Helen A. Worster, in memory of Lt Col John R. Worster

Bombs away (\$200-\$499)

Thomas E. Boyd

Virginia Corsello, in memory of 1 Lt Anthony (Tony) Corsello

Francis G. Hosimer

Robert W. Rohler, in honor of 1Lt Charles William (Bill) Rohler

Karen R. Schoene, in honor of Lt Col Horst R. Schoene

Catherine Spewock, in honor of S/Sgt Andrew Spewock

Mission complete (\$500 or more)

Norman Crum in memory of George W. Crum

Robert O. Foernsler, in memory of Capt Ed Soderstrom & crew
L. Harvey Hewit

Mary E. Jureka, in honor of Col John F. Jureka

Thoughts from a retired fighter pilot

They won't let me fly their jet fighters anymore.

The day after I no longer pulled 5-6 Gs (or more) multiple times every day, my middle started expanding.

It hasn't stopped.

First, my toes disappeared, and then the equipment in the Nether Regions disappeared except on outstanding occasions. My feet might as well be in China. My toenails are turning into claws. The ladies no longer look at my ass as I walk by.

My eyesight has started to fade. I once had the best vision of anyone I ever flew with except Chuck Yeager. He could see another aircraft at 60 miles, and I could not see it until 50 miles. And he was older than me. I guess that is why he was an Ace.

The music has faded. Twenty-five years in close proximity of screaming jet engines will do more damage to your hearing than a rock band. The VA gave me some very nice hearing aids, but I don't wear the damned things. *(I don't want to look like an old man.)*

My prostate started to enlarge, and I have to pee every 5 minutes. Speaking of which: The pressure is too low, the hose is too short, and the nozzle is set on spray. I find it advisable to sit down to pee to avoid getting Wet Foot Syndrome. I know the location of every publicly accessible bathroom within 100 miles.

My gyro tumbled and I have vertigo. I have had it many times while flying in Instrument Flight Rules (IFR) weather, but this is different. This is Visual Flight Rules (VFR) weather all the time.

I walk like a drunken sailor. My golfing days are over. My back swing would put me flat of my back. A walker may not be far in the future. If I were to find myself on the ground in the middle of an empty Wal-Mart parking lot, I would not be able to get up onto my feet. The legs are just not there anymore. I would have to crawl to a shopping cart or fence to pull myself up.

My smoking days finally caught up with me, and I have emphysema/COPD. I used to cuss while climbing out returning from North Vietnam if I was so high that my Zippo lighter would not light so I could have a smoke to help me come down from an adrenaline high.

I have had to go on oxygen in order to have enough to live. It is a real bummer to have to haul a bottle of O2 around with me when I go out of the house. I wear a nose harness at home and drag a plastic tube around and an oxygen concentrator out in the garage runs 24/7. The tube is always snagging on something or someone steps on the damn thing, and it jerks my ears off.

Don't get me wrong, I like oxygen. I used to really like it after a night of serious partying when I had an early morning mission. As soon as I got into the cockpit I went on 100% O2

for startup, taxi, and weapons arming pit. By the time I had wheels up, I was ready to fight.

Some AfterThoughts:

Some people wonder why old fighter pilots (there are no Ex-Fighter Pilots) miss flying high performance jets so much.

A couple of examples:

1) I start up, taxi out, and line up on the centerline of a 10,000-foot runway. I throttle up to full power, release the brakes, and go into afterburner. There is a huge shove against my back that pins my helmet against the back headrest. The runway streaks under me faster and faster.

At flying speed, I raise the gear to get the wheels free of the earth. Flaps up. Sink down a foot or two until the end of the runway and then the field boundary flashes underneath, and I pull the nose up to point to the sky and freedom.

The horizon rapidly expands, and after about three minutes, and 6-7 miles above the earth, I come out of burner, roll inverted, and at zero Gs let the nose slowly drift down to the horizon. I look out the top of my canopy at the earth far below and think about all those pedestrian a-holes down there that will never know what true joy is.

2) I complete my mission in North Vietnam, and climb out south, toward the home base far away. I have to go to 53,000 feet in order to have enough fuel to make it. Once there, the adrenaline is subsiding, and I turn off my cockpit lights to enjoy the view. There is not one

light visible on the ground. But above ... Oh, my God!! It is unbelievable! The sight is not describable.

Only God could have created something like this. The stars and galaxies are so bright that I do not need cockpit lights to read my instruments.

This is something that an old fighter pilot cannot forget, and it is only one of thousands of memories that only an old fighter pilot can have.

They won't let me fly their jet fighters anymore.

Final Flight

Francis J. "Frank" Lashinsky, 91, of Cornwall, PA., passed away August 14, 2016 at Cornwall Manor.

He proudly served the 455th BG Association as a past President.

Born in Mahanoy City on September 23, 1924, Francis was a son of the late John and Anna (Dronginis) Lashinsky.

Francis was a graduate of Mahanoy City High School. He trained at the Farm Show building and worked at the Army Air Depot at Tyndall Field as an aircraft electrician before entering the military.

Frank served during WWII as a sergeant tail gunner in the Army Air Force, completed 25 missions, and survived the destruction of four B-24's before becoming a prisoner of war.

In addition to his wife, Dorothy (Byrne), he is survived by three children, three grandchildren, three great-grandchildren, and a sister, Florence Larrousse.

Final Flight

In the Spring, 2013 issue of the *Cerignola Connection*, Tim Hancock wrote a letter regarding his father, 1st Lieutenant John P. Hancock, the pilot of "105," of the 742nd Bomb Squadron, and included a crew photo.

My uncle, Kenneth G. Trainor, was the tail gunner on that crew. It is with great sadness that I must report that Kenneth took his final flight on July 7, 2014, at age 90.

Kenneth spent his life after the war in upstate New York, helping out around the family home and his brother's farm, and fishing local trout streams. He had very sharp memories of his time in Italy, and also of the technical aspects of the B-24, its engines, the bombsight, etc., and would talk about them freely, but he would never talk about the more emotional aspects of the war.

He remembered vividly the members of the crew, and stayed in touch with at least one of them, Frank Binder, for many years after.

Sincerely,
Brian Duncan
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Which One?

As a pilot only two bad things can happen to you (and one of them will):

- 1) One day you will walk out to the aircraft, knowing it is your last flight.
- 2) One day you will walk out to the aircraft, not knowing it is your last flight.

Dear Editor,

I have come across your web page and the archival record on the 455th BG.

www.awardphp.com

My father, Col. (Ret.) Hamilton DeSaussure (742) was a pilot in the 455th and flew the *Miss I Hope*. He stayed with the service, flew in combat in Korea, and retired from the Air Force in 1970 as a Judge Advocate General.

He will be turning 95 this November and is still going reasonably strong. I am not sure why I am reaching out at this time, but I thought, given your web page and interest, that you would like to know that there are still some who fought and flew with the 455th who are still around.

My family and I are trying to preserve some of Dad's recollections on video. It has been a bit of a struggle since Dad has always been humble about his wartime experiences. He is starting to open up a bit, though, and hopefully such things will be preserved over time.

Thanks for keeping the 455th BG going on the internet. It is interesting to read and enjoy.

Sincerely,
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Make up your mind !

You have to make up
your mind about growing up and
becoming a pilot.
You can't do both.

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Final Flight

Lt. Harry L. Jordan (743)
died May 16, 2015, at age 93.

He was in the Army Air Corp, and flew 50 missions as a navigator in a B-24. He received numerous medals during the war. He looked forward to every copy of the *Cerignola Connection*.

Sincerely,
Joan Jordan
Wife of Harry
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Scottsdale, AZ 85260

AS I AGE, I REALIZE THAT ...

I don't need anger management. I just need people to stop pissing me off.

My people skills are just fine. It's my tolerance of idiots that needs work.

The biggest lie I tell myself is "I don't need to write that down, I'll remember it."

The day the world runs out of wine is just too terrible to think about.

Wouldn't it be great if we could put ourselves in the dryer for ten minutes; come out wrinkle-free, and three sizes smaller.

If God wanted me to touch my toes, he would've put them on my knees.

At my age, "Getting lucky" means walking into a room and remembering what I came in there for.

Scorpion In Your Tent

A man was conducting an All Service member briefing one day, and he posed the question:

"What would you do if you found a scorpion in your tent?"

A **Sailor** said, "I'd step on it."

A **Soldier** said, "I'd hit it with my boot."

A **Marine** said, "I'd catch it, break the stinger off, and eat it."

An **Airman** said, "I'd call room service and find out why there's a tent in my room."

World War II Obscure Facts

The first German serviceman killed in the war was killed by the Japanese.

Over 100,000 Allied bomber crewmen were killed over Europe.

More U.S. servicemen died in the Air Corps than the Marine Corps.

Polish Catholic midwife Stanisawa Leszczyńska delivered 3,000 babies at the Auschwitz concentration camp during the Holocaust in occupied Poland.

In World War II, British soldiers got a ration of three sheets of toilet paper a day. Americans got 22.

In 1941, more than three million cars were manufactured in the United States. Only 139 more were made during the war years of 1942-1945.

Four of every five German soldiers killed in the war died on the Eastern Front

Only 20 percent of the males born in the Soviet Union in 1923 survived the war.

In World War II, the youngest serviceman in the United States military was Calvin Graham - **age 12**. Graham lied about his age when he enlisted in the US Navy. His real age was not discovered until after he was wounded.

Only one out of every four men serving on German U-boats survived.

The Siege of Stalingrad resulted in more Russian deaths (military and civilian) than the United States and Britain sustained (combined) in all of World War II.

To avoid using the German sounding name *Hamburger* during World War II, Americans used the name *Liberty Steak*.

Adolf Hitler's nephew, William Hitler, served in the US Navy during World War II.

Adolph Hitler and Henry Ford each kept a framed picture of the other on his desk.

During World War II, the largest Japanese spy ring was actually located in Mexico.

The mortality rate for POWs in Russian camps was 85 percent.

Had it been necessary for a third atom bomb, the city targeted would have been Tokyo.

An Imperial Japanese Army intelligence officer, who fought in World War II, Hiroo Onoda refused to surrender in 1945. For almost 30 years, he held his position in the Philippines. His former commander traveled from Japan to personally issue orders relieving him from duty in 1974.

Total casualties for World War II totaled between 50 - 70 million people, 80 percent of which came from only four countries - Russia, China, Germany and Poland. Over 50 percent of the casualties were civilians, with the majority of those being women and children.

Final Flight

George L. Liddle, Sr. (742)

Today I received the *Cerignola Connection*, and noticed my Dad's name in the roster. I have had his mail and my mother's mail sent to me due to illness.

My father passed away on November 15, 2011. He flew 49 missions in World War II as a bombardier, stationed in Bury Saint Edmonds, England. He was shot down three times and lived to not only tell the story, but returned to the U.S., married my mother, fathered two children, got his college education, and spent his life giving back to others.

I remember his trip to the fire department in his small town every Christmas with 10 gifts for girls and 10 gifts for boys, as an example.

He lived a full life, and shared his memories of his days in the War.

We miss him every day. We are glad he lived 87 years to the fullest!

Thank you
Layne L. Liddle
rfick@mybluelight.com

Can You Help?

Dear Editor,

My father, Ken Hosterman, was a member of the 455th Bomb Group (740).

I have no idea if any of his comrades are still alive. I don't even know who he flew with.

He was a B24 navigator. My father is now deceased, but I would love to connect with anyone who might have flown with him.

My Dad was there from October of 1944 to June of 1945, and flew 35 missions. I remember Dad saying he was with the *Vulgar Vultures*.

One of his pilots was Dick Hollrock, and he called him *Rock*.

Can you help me connect with anyone who knew him? I would be grateful.

Thank you.

Karen Hosterman Sabel
khostsabel@gmail.com

Dear Karen,

Here's the list of your dad's aircraft crewmembers I came up with from an accident report:

Hollrock, Richard H.

Stokem, Frederick

Riley, Lewis

Hosterman, Kenneth F.

Lucas, George L.

Caulfield, John J.

Engle, Robert

Cleveland, Robert

Post, Fred M.

Rohrer, Carl R.

Regards,

Dave Ungemach
davetw1@cox.net

Dear Karen,

There were two missions scheduled for Nov 16, 1944.

The main mission was to Munich, and involved 28 aircraft. Richard Hollrock was flying *Tail-End Charlie*, also known as the *Coffin Corner*.

Flak over Munich was notoriously accurate and deadly. Since they bombed through the clouds by *Pathfinder* method on this day, the Germans could not see the formation and the formation could not see the target.

Hope this helps your understanding.

Sincerely,

John Rohrer
455th BG Historian
Son of Carl R. Rohrer
Richard Hollrock crew
spartacpa@gmail.com

Dear John,

Wow! Another "Hand of God" moment for my Dad and yours.

Thank you for the info.

I cherish it.

Karen Hosterman Sabel
khostsabel@gmail.com

Say What?

A man was telling his neighbor, "I just bought a new hearing aid. It cost me four thousand dollars, but it's state of the art. It's perfect."

"Really," answered the neighbor. "What kind is it?"

"Twelve thirty."

Guess Your Age

Three mischievous Grandmas were sitting on a bench outside the retirement home when an elderly gentleman walked by.

One of the Grandmas yelled out, "Hey, we bet we can tell exactly how old you are!"

The gentleman said, "There is no way you can guess my age!"

One of the Grandmas said, "Sure we can! Just drop your pants and we can tell your exact age."

Embarrassed, but anxious to prove they couldn't do it, he dropped his drawers.

The Grandmas asked him to first turn around a couple of times and then jump up and down several times.

Determined to prove them wrong, he did it.

Then they all said in unison, "You're 87 years old!"

Standing with his pants down around his ankles, the gent asked, "How in the world did you guess my age?"

Slapping their knees, high five-ing, and grinning from ear to ear, the three elderly ladies happily crowed.....

"We were at your birthday party yesterday."



Veteran's Day Tribute

Chick-fil-A, the franchised, fast-food outlet, has once again proven to be a positive to the world.

This time it did so by unveiling an amazing Veterans Day tribute that left Georgia resident Eric Comfort in complete shock.

When Eric walked into a local Chick-fil-A, he discovered a "Missing Man Table" that contained a single rose, a Bible, and a folded American flag, as well as a plaque which had the following explanation:

"This table is reserved to honor our missing comrades in arms.

The tablecloth is white, symbolizing the purity of their motives, when answering the call of duty.

The single red rose, displayed in a vase, reminds us of the life of each of the missing and their loved ones and friends of these Americans who keep the faith, awaiting answers.

The vase is tied with a red ribbon, symbol of our continued determination to account for our missing.

A pinch of salt symbolizes the tears endured by those missing, and their families who seek answers.

The Bible represents the strength gained through faith to sustain those lost from our country, founded as one nation under God.

The glass is inverted, to symbolize their inability to share this evening's toast.

The chair is empty. They are missing."

After the story went viral, the store manager explained that his team members had set up the table because they "wanted to honor veterans."

Furthermore, he offered free meals to all veterans and their family members on Veterans Day.

The manager also put up a poster so that customers could write in the names of loved ones who they have lost.

"We've had a lot of people who have come in and seen it and been touched by it," the manager continued. "It's been special to see."

Dear Editor,

I've been researching the 455th Bomb Group, and my dad's participation as a waist gunner in a B24 based in San Giovanni, Italy during WWII.

My dad was Billy G. Manning (740). He arrived in Italy on April 22, 1944, and was shot down on June 26, 1944.

He spent the duration of the war in Stalag Luft IV, and went on the march from that POW camp.

I would be immensely interested in talking with someone who also experienced these events.

If you know of anyone that I might contact, I'd be most appreciative of their contact information.

*Thank you.
Gail Fray
Fraygail@gmail.com*

Final Flight

The spirit of our father, Harry Wilton Anderson (740) lifted off July 17, 2015, to join his comrades in heavenly peace.

Lt. Anderson was the pilot of his beloved B-24 # 492, the Linda Ann and Her Wee Wabbits. He successfully completed 50 bombing missions over European targets. He was proudest of his Distinguished Flying Cross and Air Medal.

Harry hitchhiked to Randolph AFB from his hometown of Marlin, Texas to enlist in the Army Air Corp on August 9, 1941. He retired a Major on April 30, 1966 at Randolph AFB, where it all began for him.

His beloved wife of 69 years, Merlene, his high school sweetheart, followed him around the world during his service. They had 3 daughters. After retirement, he joined the Civil Service in San Antonio.

During the civilian years he kept in touch with his copilot, Charles Stark. Ironically, he was the "Last Man Standing" of the crew of the Linda Ann. He proudly donned his uniform for his picture of his Final Salute to his Captain before he himself passed 6 weeks later.

Dad, we thank you for your service, the great life you lived and the great lives you gave your family during your time on earth with us. Rest in Peace. We love and miss you.

*Sincerely,
Kay Price
wkayprice@gmail.com
Linda Anderson Lisciarelli
garylin65@aol.com*

Dear Editor,

I am the new Command Chief at the 455th Air Expeditionary Wing here in sunny Bagram, Afghanistan.

Our history and heritage dates back to the 455th Bomb Group. Brig. Gen Sears and I are very interested in our heritage and I thought I would shoot you a note to introduce myself before I ask a ton of questions.

We are the only counter-terrorism wing in Afghanistan delivering decisive airpower on our enemies. I look forward to hearing back from you.

I hope this email finds you well.

Sincerely, a fellow Texan
PETER A. SPEEN, CMSgt, USAF

Command Chief, 455th Air Expeditionary Wing
Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan
VOIP (318) 447-6312
VOSIP (318) 447-4550
peter.speen@bgab.afcent.af.mil

Dear Chief Speen,

Thanks for your email. I appreciate your interest in the 455th BG Association.

I would first like to thank you from the bottom of my heart for your service to our beautiful country. You guys, toiling on the ground, and in the air, in that part of the world, are true heroes. I appreciate you and your comrades, and the noble job that you do.

Please be safe!

I assume you found my website, which has all the previous archived 455th BG newsletters, the *Cerignola*

Connection. Also, the 455th BG history book is available on the same website:

www.awardphp.com

Another website with lots of info on the 455th BG is the following address:

www.455th.org

The webmaster of www.455th.org is Hughes Glantzberg. I have forwarded the email to him.

I have also forwarded our communication to three other people who are associated with the 455th BG. Myself, and these three other guys, are all sons of aviators that were involved in the bombing of the Axis powers in WWII. Their names are Greg Riggs (Executive Director of the 455th BG Association), and John Rohrer & Dave Ungemach (both veteran historians of the 455th BG).

I know they will be interested in getting your questions regarding the history and legacy of the 455th BG in WWII (1943-1945).

Please send me your questions, and your feedback. I would love to fill in some of the blanks for you and your comrades. I know the other gentlemen on this email thread will be pleased to add their input, as well.

BTW, if you haven't read the book *The Wild Blue*, by the prolific late author Dr. Stephen Ambrose, it is a must-read book. It chronicles the experiences of Sen. George McGovern in the 455th BG in WWII. Regardless of your politics, I think Sen. McGovern's story, and by extension, the story of all these

wonderful guys that flew with the 455th, will move you profoundly.

It will be an honor and privilege to correspond with you and your comrades.

Please be safe, and come home ASAP.

Best Regards,

Craig Ward

Editor, *Cerignola Connection*

Dear Editor,

I wanted to inform you that my father, Daniel Boone Mason (740), passed away on June 8, 2016 at the age of 97 in San Antonio Texas.

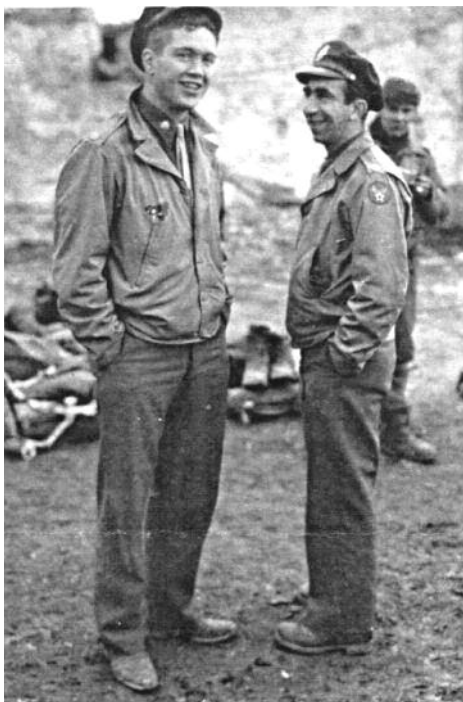
He was very proud of his service to our country in the Army Air Corps as part of the 455th Bomb Group. He served in the United States Army Air Corps and U.S. Air Force, serving from October 3, 1940 to July of 1966, with the latter 21 years as a Reservist.

He retired as a Lt. Colonel. During World War II he is credited with participation as a Bombardier in 39 combat missions.

Dad lead an active life up until the end, and took great pride in his military service. In 2014, he had the good fortune to visit D.C. as part of the *Alamo Honor Flight*.

In 2015, he attended the WASP Reunion at the WASP museum in Sweetwater, Texas which is where he washed out of pilot training before becoming a Navigator/Bombardier.

Sincerely,
Barbara Scheib
scheib@earthlink.net



Lt. Col. Hugh Graff
(Gp Dep CO)
Lt. Col. Phil Johns
(Gp Exec)



Major Al Coons
(Gp Intel)



Lt. Dave Wolf
(Gp Weather)

Final Flight

Dear Editor,

Theodore "Ted" King (740) of Syracuse, New York, died peacefully at his home on August 20, 2016, after a brief illness.

After High School, he enrolled at Syracuse University, but his college education was interrupted by WWII.

He flew as the navigator of a B-24, flying 15 missions from Cerignola, Italy from January, 1945 until the end of the War.

After the war, he completed his studies at Syracuse, graduating in 1947 with a degree in Business Administration.

At age 92, he thoroughly enjoyed a trip to the WWII Memorial in Washington, DC, courtesy of the *Honor Flight* organization.

Attorneys and Their Actual Trial Questions

ATTORNEY: Doctor, how many of your autopsies have you performed on dead people?

WITNESS: All of them. The live ones put up too much of a fight.

ATTORNEY: What was the first thing your husband said to you that morning?

WITNESS: He said, 'Where am I, Cathy?'

ATTORNEY: And why did that upset you?

WITNESS: My name is Susan!

Dear Editor,

My father is Victor E. Murray (743) of the 455th BG.

He is 92 years old and just had abdominal surgery. He is doing fine and should recover soon. I am writing an article about my father and will submit it to you soon. I am his son, and a Vietnam veteran. I take real good care of him.

I will stay in touch.

Richard Murray
vemurray@cfl.rr.com

Statistics Army Air Corps & US Air Force

At its height in mid-1944, the Army Air Forces had 2.6 million people and nearly 80,000 aircraft of all types.

In the second decade of the 21st century, the US Air Force employs about 325,000 active personnel (plus 170,000 civilians) with approx. 5,500 manned and 200 unmanned aircraft.

The current figures represent about 12 percent of the manpower and 7 percent of the airplanes of the WWII peak.

Whether there will ever be another war like that experienced in 1940-45 is doubtful, as fighters and bombers have given way to helicopters and remotely-controlled drones over Afghanistan and Iraq.

But within living memory, men left the earth in 1,000-plane formations and fought major battles five miles high, leaving a legacy that remains timeless.

WERE YOU THERE ?

THE ARMY AIR CORPS

Official Song of the United States Army Air Corps

Words and Music by
ROBERT CRAWFORD
Captain, Air Corps

Off we go, into the wild blue yonder,
Climbing high, into the sun;
Here they come, zooming to meet our thunder,
At 'em boys, give 'er the gun!
Down we dive, spouting our flame from under,
Off with one, hell-ov-a roar!
We live, in fame, or go down in flame,
Nothing'll stop the Army Air Corps!

Here's a toast to the host of those who love
the vastness of the sky,
To a friend we send a message of his brother
men who fly.
We drink to those who gave their all of old,
Then down we roar to score the rainbow's pot
of gold.
A toast to the host of men we boast, the
Army Air Corps.

Off we go, into the wild blue yonder,
Climbing high, into the sun;
Here they come, zooming to meet our thunder,
At 'em boys, give 'er the gun!
Down we dive, spouting our flame from under,
Off with one, hell-ov-a roar!
We live, in fame, or go down in flame,
Nothing'll stop the Army Air Corps!



GRADUATION EXERCISES

Class 44-B
8 FEBRUARY 1944

LUBBOCK ARMY AIR FIELD
LUBBOCK, TEXAS

COMMANDING OFFICER
LUBBOCK ARMY AIR FIELD
Colonel Ralph E. Holmes, A.C.

DIRECTOR OF TRAINING
Major William J. Moser, A.C.

POST SURGEON
Major James B. French, M. C.

DIRECTOR OF GROUND TRAINING
Major Gordon J. Mott, A.C.

DIRECTOR OF FLYING
Major Alvin L. Smith, A.C.

SECRETARY
Major Russell DeW. Shively, A.C.

COMMANDANT OF AVIATION CADETS
Captain Thomas M. Potter, A.C.

PROVISIONAL TRAINING SQUADRON COMMANDERS

Major Thomas O. Marshall, A.C.
3rd PROV. TNG. SQ.

Captain Albert G. Arnold, A.C.
2nd PROV. TNG. SQ.

Captain Walter A. Gremban, A.C.
4th PROV. TNG. SQ.

Captain John L. Schroeder Jr., A.C.
1st PROV. TNG. SQ.

PROGRAM

Invocation-

First Lieut. Randall T. Miller, Post Chaplain,
Lubbock Army Air Field

Administration of the Oath of Office-

Major Russell DeW. Shively, Secretary

Introduction of Guest Speaker-

Colonel Ralph E. Holmes, Commanding Officer

Graduation Address-

Colonel J. C. Grable
Second Air Force

Presentation of Wings to Honor Student-

Major Gordon J. Mott, Director of Ground Training

Presentation of Wings to Class 44-B

First Lieut. Marshall B. Shantz, Jr., Operations
Officer, 2nd Provisional Training Squadron

Captain Walter A. Gremban, Commanding
Officer, 4th Provisional Training Squadron

Air Corps Song-

Sung by Graduating Class

Presentation of Distinguished Flying Cross-

Awarded to 1st Lieut. Charlie P. Henderson
To be Accepted by His Wife, Mrs. Elsie M. Henderson

National Anthem-

Lubbock Army Air Field Band, Chief Warrant
Officer George P. Attridge, Director

Maribor, February 28th 1946.

My dear ally companion in arms,

After hard and protracted fighting for our independence I succeeded to reach my home in Maribor. Also my family, my wife and the children who had to pass the brutal days of the occupation in german concentration-camps have returned. My eldest son Janko Kuster was interned in the notorious camp of Mauthausen in Germany, from which, by luck, he escaped. Without loss of time he joined the Tito-partisans and he is already above twelf months in the Military-Flyingcorps-Academy S.S.S.R. - Čkalov - 1^{oe} - ČVAY - 5^{ou} ŠAP.

I think often about our joint adventures especially about the sad moments in the year 1944, when we were lucky enough to save your life.

I hope, my dear ally companion in arms, as our russian compatriot, that you have not forgotten the occurence of that time, as the note as follows, written by your own hand, confirms:

~~St. Walter Shostock, 1027 Riverview Ave Dayton, Ohio.~~

16.Oct.1944.

Met with Tito-partisans who gave me aid food and shelter. The are due the reward due from the United States Government for the help they gave me.

Walter Shostock.

I and my family would thank you very much if you would let us know how you arrived home again, whether you are still alive and how you are.

As, after such a long time you may not remember me, I give you the following account:

On, or about October 13th 1944 on the occasion of the catastrophe to your aircraft as you and your comrades saved your lives by descending with parachute from a height of 5000 metres, we succeeded to save your life only, because after three days you came to us, the Tito-partisans. Of the other five comrades I have proofs that they were caught by the germans and shot at Bleiburg, (Carinthia), Austria.

I am convinced you will be anxious about the fate of your comrades who had not the luck to come to us Tito-partisans.

1993

Dear Lynny,

Just to keep the record straight, here's the story of the last flight.

We took off from our field in Cerignola Italy, near San Giovanni and about 40 miles from Bari, about 4 A.M. We were in the 15th Air Force, 455 bomb group, 741 squadron. We were to bomb the Blechhammer synthetic oil refinery near Kattowitz, Poland. It was early fall and the weather was cool but not yet miserable. The mission would have taken about 8 hours had we returned. Our regular copilot did not fly with us that day. We had a 1st Lt John Noske from Hobart Oklahoma as an observer trainer with us. We flew almost to the target before we ran into any enemy fire but then all hell broke loose. We dropped our bombs and started to turn towards home when we took a direct hit in the nose of our B-24 bomber. The bombardier and nose gunner were killed instantly. Our windshield and instrument panel and rudder pedals were demolished. Lt. Noske had eye injuries but I didn't get a scratch. Because we had no throttle control and because we had severe structural damage we couldn't make it home and had to bail out over the little town of Bleiburg Austria. 5 of the crew were captured by the SS and executed in the local schoolyard. I jumped out of the plane several miles down the road and managed to elude the Germans. I walked south for several days and eventually ran into a hidden shack that had several Tito's Partisans in residence. It was rather comical; when I knocked on the door a huge man opened it and looked at me. He was wearing a gun and had several grenades tied to his belt. I smiled and asked him in Russian, "are you a German?" He replied "No--Are you?" Then we both laughed and he invited me in. He was a Serb and knew that the enemy wouldn't be wandering around in the hills alone. I stayed there for a week and got my strength back and then took off for a field near Ljubljana Yugoslavia where I would be picked up and returned to my base. We were a party of 4, my guide and a man and woman. We traveled by night and stayed in farmyards during the day. The day we arrived at the proper place we stopped for lunch at a friendly farmer's but someone betrayed us and the German troops searched the houses looking for us. We hid in the attic but they found us and shot two of us on the spot. Fortunately I was laying on the floor and they missed me. When the soldier stated to reload his gun I ran past him and down the stairs into the street. The rest of the troops took us in custody and turned us over to the city jailors and then sent us to a German tank battalion where we had a nice chat with the commander and then off to Zagan Near Poland where we spent the rest of the year and then walked across Germany in Feb 1945 to escape the oncoming Russian troops. The Germans didn't want the Russians to have us. I guess we were useful pawns.

On April 29 1945 we were liberated by elements of Patton's 3rd army and came home in May. You were a little two month old kid but it was a real joy to hear you cry.

Some of the trip to the prison camp (Stalag Luft 3B) was stressful. We sat through an air raid in Vienna Austria while the guards went to a shelter. We sat in the rail yard in the train. It's a good thing the English had lousy bombsights. The interrogation center in Frankfurt was depressing. Solitary confinement was no fun for a calm, cool, extrovert like me.

I came back from camp Lucky Strike in France by ship and spent a week in the hospital at Fort Dix N.J. with a strep throat. Then HOME

Dear Editor,

I found this letter (see above) written by my father, summarizing his experience of being shot down, his capture by the Germans, and his liberation. Also included is a letter (see previous page) from a Tito-Partisan, dated Feb. 28, 1946, who offered assistance, prior to Dad's being captured.

Cheers,

Lorraine Moskecz

Daughter of Lt. Walter Shostack, 741

mom.moskecz@gmail.com

Dear Editor,

My Dad, Raymond S. Windsand (740) was my hero!

He talked a lot about the war. I finally started to listen. I took notes, asked him questions, and made a scrapbook. I have all his Army papers. He died on September 15th, 2016 at the age of 96.

He went into the service March 31, 1942, and discharged October 23, 1945. So, he was probably older than many of the soldiers.

I'm so excited to email someone with knowledge about this.

Sincerely,
Mary Windsand
mwindsand@chartermi.net

Dear Mary,

Since your father was Raymond S. Windsand, right waist gunner on the *Sky Wolf*, I probably know some things about the plane and the crew that you would find interesting, and I suspect you know a few things I'd find interesting.

For example, while the group was killing time in New York during the last half of December 1943, my Dad, Col. Ed Riggs (740) and his crew used to hang out at the Swingland Night Club on 54th Street in Manhattan. One night, Bob Leonard, the club owner, commented that they were all a bunch of "sky wolves".

The next morning when Dad went out to the plane, the outline of the wolf's head had been painted on the side of the nose. The lettering and the

young woman holding the bomb followed later.

Also, the original radio operator for the *Sky Wolf* was Bill Largent, but he was transferred to another crew right before the bomb group left Langley Field. Bill was the father of Steve Largent, All American receiver from Tulsa University while I was growing up (in Tulsa), and NFL Hall of Famer for Seattle Seahawks. At the time he retired from the NFL in 1989, he was the league's all-time leader in receptions (819), receiving yards (13,089), and touchdown catches (100). He was only the second player to ever lead in all three categories.

He later was a U.S. Senator from Oklahoma, promising from the beginning to serve only two terms. After 12 years, he stepped down as promised.

There are also interesting stories about many of Dad's crew members. For example, his original navigator was passed out drunk on the floor of the flight deck all the way during that crucial flight across the Atlantic!

Col. Hugh Graf was riding in the *Sky Wolf* on that crossing, and recommended to Dad that he get himself a new navigator. Dad requested a replacement and, of course, the request was granted.

Mary, if you want to swap tales sometime, let me know.

Best Regards,
Greg Riggs
Executive Director
455th BG Association, Inc.
455BG-H@austin.rr.com

455th Bomb Group **Statistics**

Authorized personnel strength was over 4,000 personnel.

The group lost 118 aircraft, 31 directly to fighters, 36 directly to flak, and 51 from all other causes combined. The figure for combined causes includes causes such as collisions, ditchings, and crashes attributable to fighter or flak damage.

As time passed, the fighter opposition decreased but the Germans concentrated their anti-aircraft guns around the fewer remaining targets, so the threat from flak remained intense. The group is credited with 119 enemy aircraft destroyed, and another 78 probables.

The two toughest missions are probably these:

1) The Group hit the ball bearing plant at Steyer, Austria on 2 April 1944. They lost 4 of 40 aircraft—40 comrades. In addition to successful target damage, they were credited with 27 enemy aircraft destroyed and 17 probables. It was their first heavy loss in two months of combat.

2) The other consensus mission was the Moosbierbaum oil refinery at Vienna, Austria on 26 June 1944. Thirty-six planes took off with only 26 returning. Six of the ten losses were from a single squadron. Several of those crews were on their 50th mission.

The Group received the Distinguished Unit Citation on both missions.

Dear Editor,

My Dad, Donald F. Lonergan (741), served his country during WWII as a waist gunner in a B-24 bomber named Yo Yo (see photo this page).

As a child, I was interested in his service, and he was eager to explain his missions to me. He set a perfect example of a true American and Dad.

He read the *Cerignola Connection* the day it arrived, and often answered many of the *Can You Help* sections.

He marched in the Veterans Day parade in downtown Denver with his daughter (Donna) and two granddaughters (Theresa and Megan) on 11/11/96. He looked fabulous in his favorite red, white and blue shirt, along with his bomber jacket.

In his office at home, he had framed on his walls, many photos related to WWII, such as his bomb group Certificate of Valor, and one picture of himself standing by his jeep.

He had a large binder containing his draft notice, pictures of his training sessions, reunion programs, and other certificates.

He spoke fondly of his crew and their time in Cerginola and Naples, Italy.

He always enjoyed the reunions, attended them often, and enjoyed hooking up with his buddies.

Since my dad's passing in October, 2000, I am proud to have his binder, pictures and bomber jacket. All four of his

children have pictures that were important to him.

He always brought us back souvenirs from the reunions. He was a wonderful soldier, husband, dad and grandfather that is truly missed.

With appreciation,
Dianna Lonergan
6022 Pebble Bend Ct.
Cheyenne, WY 82009
moonbeam8826@bresnan.net

The American Flag

The American Flag does not fly because the wind moves past it.

The American Flag flies from the last breath of each military member who has died protecting it.

God Bless America!



Front Row (L-R)

Robert Darling (Radar), Robert Foernsler (Co-Pilot)
Ed Soderstrom (Pilot), George Goetz (Navigator)

Back Row (L-R)

Frank DeMarco (Radio Operator), Robert Probst (Engineer)
Donald Lonergan (Waist Gunner), John Tessier (Tail Gunner)
Kenneth Latzka (Ball Turret Gunner)

Dear Editor,

I'm looking for any information about Capt. Murray Friend or his brother Maj. Milton Friend. I think that both of them were with the 455th BG.

I would appreciate any information. Thank you very much.
Herbert M. Sorkin, Ball Turret 739th squadron, 454th BG
605 Grove St. F-11
Clifton, N.J. 07013



This is my grandfather Sgt. John Tyson. He was a mechanic with the 455 B.G. 741st squadron in Foggia Italy. In this picture he is working on the B-24 "Fords Folly", serial #4252249. He also worked on the B-24 "Big Gas Bird", serial #4250419. I am interested in hearing from anyone, especially family members, about his fellow mechanics or the air crew of the planes.

Sincerely,

John Tyson

Contact me at: jjtyson379@aol.com

4158 Cross Rd. White Lk. MI, 48386

Dear Editor,

My father-in-law, James William Hunziker (742), was a nose gunner on the B24 Bomber *Miss I Hope*. He is now 93, healthy with a great mind and memory. He wonders if any of the rest of the *Miss I Hope* crew is still alive. Can you help us find out?

If any of the crew is still living, he'd love to hear from them.

Thank you.

Lois Hunziker

60287 Sweet Oak Ave, Knox City, Missouri 63446, Phone 660-434-5250

Email: sweetoak@marktwain.net



Dear Editor,

We were assigned to the 455th BG, 743rd squadron, in October of 1944 as a replacement crew. In March of 1945, we completed our 35 combat missions and returned home.

Thank you.

Fred White (743)

Back Row (L-R)

TSgt. Joe Woolley (Radio Operator / Waist Gunner, age 28, from Washington State)

SSgt. William Heitkamp (Tail Gunner, from California)

SSgt. John Magee (Nose Gunner, age 18, from New York)

SSgt. Dick Kuhmz (Ball Gunner, age 19, from Wisconsin)

TSgt. Adam Czarnatowicz (Flt. Engineer, Top Turret Gunner, age 21, from New Jersey)

SSgt. Warren Pulver (Waist Gunner, from New York)

Front Row (L-R)

1stLt. John Ludeman (Navigator, age 22, from New York)

1stLt. Americus (Fred) White (Bombardier, age 22, from Roanoke, Virginia)

1stLt. John Helbig (Pilot, age 22, from Ohio)

1stLt. Irving Wanhaftig (Co-Pilot, age 20, from New Jersey)

Final Flight

Dear Editor,

My father, Maj. Arthur Tilley (742), passed away on March 3, 2016.

His plane was shot down June 26, 1944 on a bombing mission to the oil refinery at Moosbierbaum, and was interned at Stalag 3 and Stalag 7A until the end of the war.

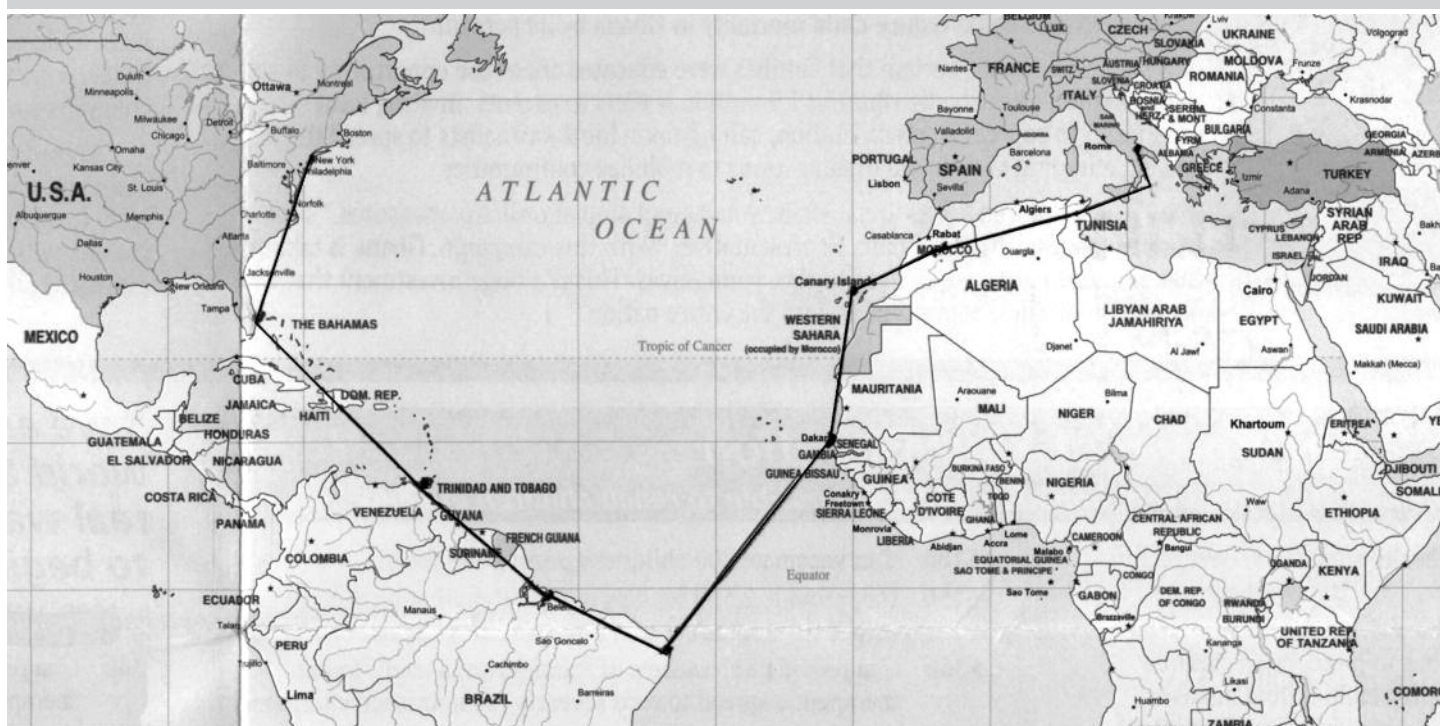
Thank you,

Matthew Tilley

mtilley@gwi.net



Group photo of the 455BG convention, held in St Louis (1948) on the first anniversary of the Air Force as a separate branch of service. Col. Ed Riggs (740), father of 455BG Association Executive Director Greg Riggs, is second from right in the middle row.



This map shows the route many crews from the 455th BG took to get from the USA to Cerignola in 1943-1944. *Cerignola Connection* Editor's father, Lt. J.T. Ward (740), said that the thunderstorms he and his crew endured (in the last week of December, 1943) on the long flight between Brazil and West Africa were almost as terrifying as a combat mission !



"Vulgar Vultures"

455th BOMB GROUP ASSOCIATION, INC.

P.O. Box 93095
Austin, Texas 78709-3095

12 November 2016

President
Norman Crum

Treasurer/Executive Director
Gregory E. Riggs
Colonel, USAF (Retired)

Secretary:
Ted Tronoff
455th WWII veteran

Directors:
Ormond H. Buffington
455th WWII veteran

William Heitkamp
455th WWII veteran

Craig Ward

John Rohrer

Registered Agent:
Vacant

Editor, Cerignola Connection
Craig Ward

Association Historian
John Rohrer

The Board of Directors met via conference telephone call at 1400 hours Central Standard Time on 12 November 2016. President Norman Crum called the meeting to order at 1401 hours after ascertaining all members expected to participate were present.

Members present for the meeting:

Norman (Norm) Crum, President
Gregory (Greg) Riggs, Executive Director/Treasurer
Ormond Buffington, Director
William (Bill) Heitkamp, Director
Craig Ward, Director
John Rohrer, Director

Members absent from the meeting:

Ted Tronoff, Secretary

President Crum appointed Greg Riggs to act as secretary in the absence of Ted Tronoff.

The minutes of the 8 November 2011 meeting were presented by Greg Riggs in the absence of Secretary Ted Tronoff. The minutes had already been provided to each director. One error (the meeting date was reported as 8 November 2012 rather than 2011) had already been identified and corrected. With that correction, the minutes were approved.

ANNUAL REPORTS:

Greg Riggs presented the annual financial summary. As of the end of October 2016, the Association had \$2,144.85, down \$1,749.16 from the previous year. Cerignola Connection costs totaled \$2,065.22, and other administrative costs totaled \$143.94 of which \$136 was for the rental of the post office box. Income of \$460 consisted of: \$75 from memberships, \$10 for extra copies of the Cerignola Connection, and \$375 from gifts. After projected expenses are satisfied in fiscal year 2017, the Association is expected to have less than \$950 left in available assets.

Greg Riggs presented the annual membership summary. As of the end of October, the association had 111 WWII veterans, 88 widows of veterans, 29 other family members, and 1 WWII Red Cross worker.

OLD BUSINESS:

There was no old business.

NEW BUSINESS:

Greg Riggs briefed that because our Registered Agent passed away, we no longer have anyone living in Iowa who can serve as the required registered agent for the Association (we are incorporated in Iowa). None of the primary workers for the Association currently has the capacity to go through the process of incorporating the Association in a different state. It has been extremely difficult even to man the Board of Directors at the level required by the By Laws (seven directors). In view of these facts, the following motions were introduced and passed.

MOTION 1: That the 455th Bomb Group Association be formally closed as an association effective 31 December 2016.

MOTION 2: That all association historical materials be archived at the discretion of the Association Historian, John Rohrer.

MOTION 3: That all remaining association cash assets be split equally three ways among the Executive Director and the Editor as honorariums for over a decade of service each to the association, and to the 455th Bomb Group Research Foundation, a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt entity established by Historian John Rohrer to continue his research efforts into the 455th Bomb Group.

Greg Riggs will deliver the minutes of this meeting to each director via email. Each director will express his approval of the minutes or need for revision by "reply all" email. Once the minutes are approved, they will serve as the authorizing document for the Executive Director to proceed with closure of the Association. There being no further business, President Crum adjourned the meeting at 1433 hours.



Gregory E. Riggs
Acting Secretary

Dear Editor,

I was delighted to come across this your 455th BG website recently.

www.awardphp.com

I have not rummaged thru its records & issues of the *Cerignola Connection* beyond scanning the first issue. On page four of the first issue is a picture of *TeePee Time Gal* with the caption "One of ours, crew unknown". My dad was Co-Pilot on that plane on at least one mission (2nd Lt. Francis W. Campbell, 743rd squadron).

He now lives in Tucson & will be celebrating his 95th birthday in 2016.

I look forward to introducing him to this site, and to glean what else I may from him of his time in Cerignola.

Should there be anything of substance that I can share, I shall.

Respectfully,

Dug Campbell
dugwood@verizon.net

A MESSAGE FROM YOUR *Cerignola Connection* EDITOR CRAIG WARD

It is with honor and humility that I am writing my farewell message to all of the 455th Bomb Group veterans, their families, and all other *Cerignola Connection* readers.

Being Editor of the *Cerignola Connection* since 2003 has been an incredible experience. I have made many friends and acquaintances over the last 13 years, in my role as a conduit for information on the men who flew and maintained the B-24s that brought Hitler's war machine to utter defeat.

My father, Lt. J. T. Ward (Co-Pilot, 740) was credited with 50 combat missions from March through November, 1944. He passed away in 1986. He left a 35 minute taped recording of his wartime recollections as a final gift to me. He had the wisdom to know that, while I was unfortunately not interested in his war-time experiences while he was alive, I would someday want to know the details of the combat missions he bravely endured with his comrades.

I was a 31 year old single guy when he died. At the time, all I wanted to do was chase girls and ride motorcycles. After we buried my dad, I realized what an opportunity I had missed to bond with him, and to show my appreciation and love for the remarkable service he had provided to our country.

In 1986, I wrote Dad a note in a thank-you card expressing my love and admiration for him as a father, as a man, and as a veteran who so bravely served our country in its time of peril. I told him he was my hero. He died two months later.

I was so glad to have had the blessing of a little time at the end to give that message to my Dad, in writing, and verbally.

After spending many hours researching the 455th BG, using the internet, Dad's military documents, and reading numerous books on the air war over Europe, I joined the 455th Bomb Group Association as an associate member (family member). After going to the San Diego reunion in the early 2000's, and after meeting so many of my Dad's comrades, I was more determined than ever to learn all I could about him and the other aviators that helped defeat the Nazis.

At a subsequent 455th BG reunion, I was asked by General Gene Hudson (741) if I would serve on the bomb group Board of Directors, and, oh, by the way, there was a need for a *Cerignola Connection* newsletter editor. What? Me? But, I've never done anything like that. Besides, the late Tom Ramey was the best Editor any newsletter could ever have.

I reluctantly agreed to do it. The first edition that I edited, Fall of 2003, was not pretty. I was blessed to receive some "schooling" from the printer that Tom Ramey had been using for many years, Custom Printing, Inc. (Appleton, Wisconsin), and the owner Jim Vandenberg. I believe the later editions of the newsletter would have met with the approval of Tom Ramey, and with my father, Lt. Ward.

In 13 years and 26 editions of the newsletter, my goal was to present stories of heroism, questions from family members that might receive answers from other readers, and generally be a conduit for information between people wanting answers about their loved one's service and others who might have answers.

I hope and believe the goal was more or less achieved with each edition.

I have used the word "hero" several times over the years in editing this newsletter. The veterans I have had the honor of interviewing regarding their service reject the title "hero". One 455th BG veteran said that he was NOT a hero. He said the heroes were the ones that are buried in Europe, and the ones that did not come home to America alive. I agree with that point of view, but I must respectfully add that if you served in a combat role in WWII, you provided a heroic service to the USA.

The older I get, and the more I learn about the commitment and service of our WWII veterans, the more humbled and appreciative I become regarding the sacrifice of these men and women.

As a grateful American, I'd like to say to all our veterans, and specifically to the 455th BG veterans, **THANK YOU** for your service to our country. You **ARE** American heroes!

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A MESSAGE FROM THE 455TH BOMB GROUP ASSOCIATION, INC.,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, GREG RIGGS

It's been a good flight!

Elsewhere in the newsletter (pages 21-22), you will find the minutes of our final Board of Directors meeting. We've published them so you will know the final decisions of the Board. My article in the Spring *Cerignola Connection* summarized the reasons we have come to the point of closure. The Association closes out with 111 WWII veterans still on the roster!

This is the final edition of the *Cerignola Connection*. I think each of you would agree with me that Craig Ward has done an absolutely outstanding job as our editor these last 13 years. According to my search of our records, Craig has been our longest-running editor. He and I have worked closely together, and he has been a joy to work with. Craig, thanks for a job well done and a pleasant working relationship!

By the time everything is wrapped up for the Association, I will have been serving as Executive Director for just shy of 12 years. Again, our records indicate this is the longest term anyone has served. I recall getting a somewhat panicked call at my father's home early in 2005. Gene Hudson and John Davis were calling him to get my phone number, but I happened to be in Tulsa visiting at the time. They wanted me to take over immediately as Treasurer in somewhat of an emergency situation. Only later did I learn that being Treasure also meant being the Executive Director. That following October at the reunion, my appointment was confirmed by the general membership.

I initially agreed to serve as a way of honoring my father. I was one of those children who was blessed to have had an excellent father. Sadly, I know that far too people have not had the same privilege. But I was lucky, and serving the Association was another way of expressing my appreciation for him. He made his final flight over five and a half years ago, but by then I was serving the Association out of my appreciation and affection for the fine men who made up its membership. I have made many friends along the way.

So, I would like to say thank you for the opportunity to serve. Thank you for sharing your memories so that I have an even better understanding of what it is to serve America selflessly and sacrificially. Thank you for the friendships. I especially thank WWII veteran Ormond Buffington for his many years of service on the Board of Directors and his personal friendship. I thank WWII veteran Bill Heitkamp and second-generation member John Rohrer for stepping forward recently to serve on the Board of Directors so we could conduct our final business in accordance with our bylaws. And thanks to Laura Flanagan and Sherrie Heitkamp for their behind-the-scenes assistance as we wrapped up some of this final business.

And as always, I thank each of you for helping preserve the freedoms we sometimes take for granted. There is so much going on in the world today that should heighten our sensitivity to the fact that freedom is a precious gift, it is not guaranteed, and it is not free!