



# CERIGNOLA CONNECTION

*455th Bomb Group Association Newsletter*

**Spring, 2011** Editor, Craig Ward, 813 Peterstow Drive, Euless, Texas 76039  
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## **Message from the President**

**By Carl A. Barr (743),  
President, 455th BG Assoc.**

The Collings Foundation brought the show to Shreveport Downtown Airport on the 10th of March. I spent about three enjoyable hours visiting the display and talking with other visitors, including Bill Toombs, a flight engineer in the 493rd Bomb Group in England; he flew 28 missions on B-24s and B-17s from May to October, 1944. Mike Tull wanted to know about navigation techniques and equipment that we used. Not a WWII vet, but very much interested in it.

Julie Summerfield and Rob Haley wrote about having visited the Collings exhibit when it was in Pennsylvania last fall.

Brookshire Grocery in Shreveport Bossier City will

sponsor at least one flight to Washington, D.C. 10-12 May to take about 30 WWII veterans to visit the WWII Memorial. The previous Honor Air program had ended in Louisiana about a year ago. If you have not visited the Memorial, I recommend it. Being there is a lot different from seeing pictures.

I wrote in the Fall, 2010 issue about the availability of two 455th history CDs from the archives at Maxwell AFB. I have spent some time browsing the set that I bought, but have found it to be of little value to me. Most of the material is difficult to read. It is digital copy, pdf format, from microfilm. The search tool does not work. You may still want them. Ask for CDs B0602 and B0603. \$30 each. To purchase the CDs send a check or money order payable to DDO 6607 to:

Mrs. Lynn Gamma  
HQ AFHRA/RSA (CD order)  
600 Chennault Circle  
Maxwell AFB, AL 36112

7 December, 2010, Pearl Harbor Day. Three local survivors of that attack were honored in a ceremony at the Northwest Louisiana War Veterans Home here in Bossier City. Navy veteran Philip Serio,

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resident/patient, was one of the honorees. Philip Serio, 90, died 8 March.

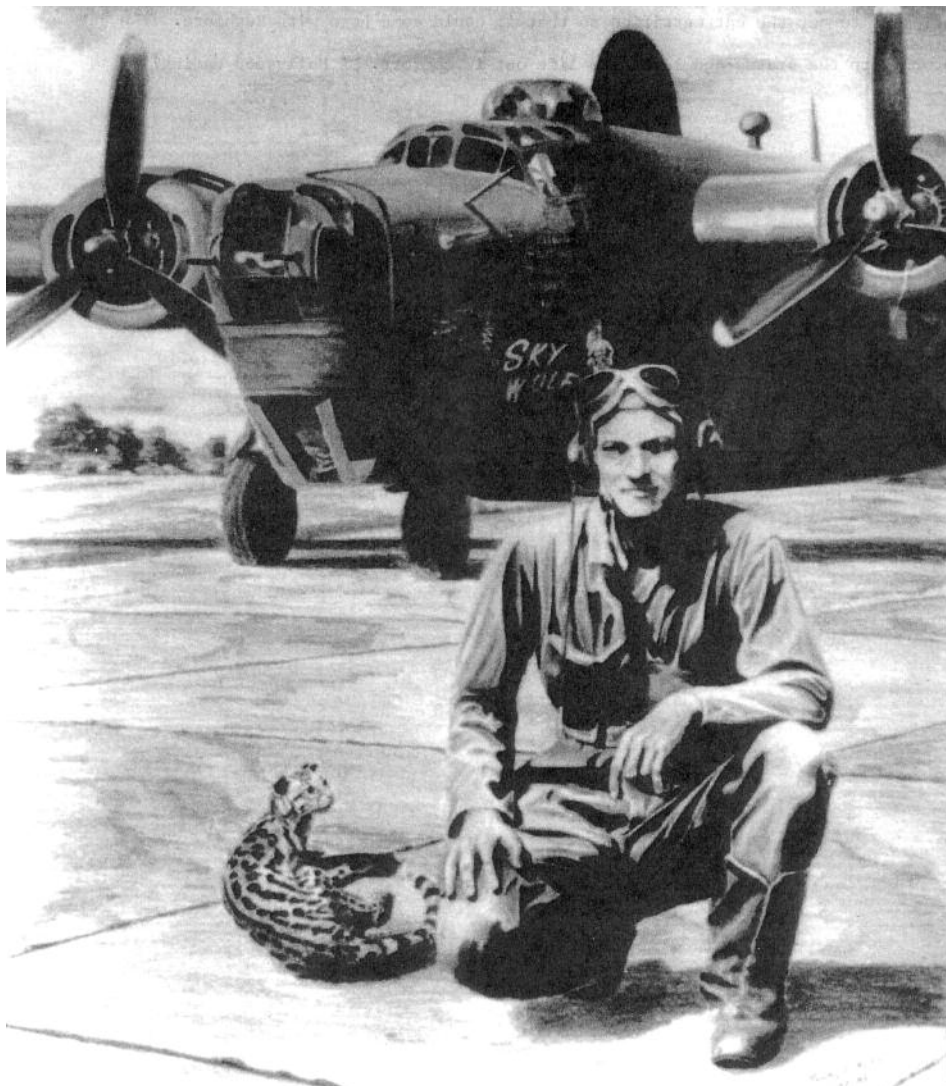
2010 Board of Directors meeting was a telephone conference call, successfully recorded. For personal reasons, Mark Mason resigned as the Secretary and as member of the Board. Greg Riggs then served as acting Secretary for the rest of the meeting. Ted Tronoff has since agreed to take that position. John Rohrer is now the Association Historian. We thank each of these gentlemen for their service to the organization.

"Unbroken" is a brutally realistic WWII account by Laura Hillenbrand. She tells about B-24 Bombardier Louis Zamperini from his childhood through his years of imprisonment in Japanese POW camps. It will make you glad you served in Europe.

Respectfully,

**Carl A. Barr (743)**

**President, 455th BG Assoc.**



Bill Toombs (left), with 455th BG President Carl Barr (743)



### Request to the Readers from your Editor

The picture above was provided by Craig Johnston, whose father flew on the *Sky Wolf* in the Ed Riggs crew (740). It shows Sgt. Rushmore, a *Sky Wolf* waist gunner, with his pet Ocelot named *Kitty Mutton* at the San Giovanni airbase.

Legend has it that this big cat regularly terrorized the 454th BG's pet German Shepherd!

Sgt. Johnston went into Cerignola with Sgt. Rushmore and the cat to have it certified to go home after the war with its owner. The cat did indeed return the the USA with Sgt. Rushmore, and lived out its life in comfort ... a true Hollywood ending!

If anyone has stories about this cat, or other pets you had while overseas, please send them to your Editor for publication.

Thanks in advance.



**455TH BOMB GROUP  
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AUSTIN, TX. 78709-3095**

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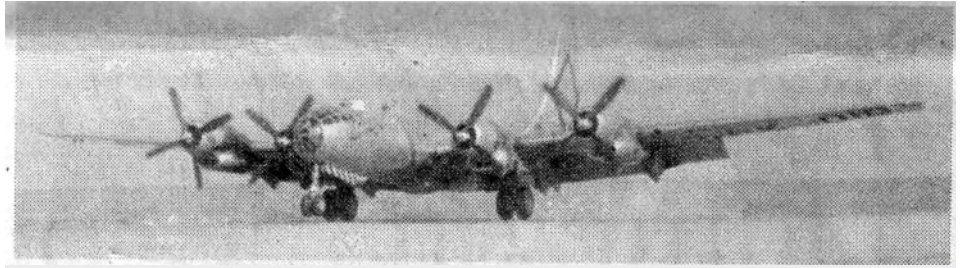
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T/Sgt. USAAF  
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Editor, *Cerignola Connection*

**REGISTERED AGENT**

**John F. Davis**  
Col. USAF (Ret.)  
**ASSOCIATION HISTORIAN**  
John Rohrer

**A MOMENT  
IN AVIATION  
HISTORY**



On the morning of March 2, 1949, Lucky Lady II, an Air Force B-50 Superfortress, touched down at Carswell Air Force Base in Fort Worth, becoming the first airplane to fly nonstop around the world.

Lucky Lady II had departed Carswell midday Feb. 26 with a crew of 14 under the command of Capt. James Gallagher. The plane traveled 23,452 miles in 94 hours and 1 minute, flying an average ground speed of 239 mph at altitudes ranging from 10,000 to 20,000 feet.

The B-50 was refueled by B-29 aerial tankers above the Azores, Saudi Arabia, the Philippines and Hawaii.

The flight was kept secret. Reporters were flown to Fort Worth from Washington by the Air Force with no idea where or why

they were going.

Air Force Secretary Stuart Symington, Air Force Gen. Hoyt Vandenberg, Strategic Air Command Lt. Gen. Curtis LeMay and 8th Air Force Commander Maj. Gen. Roger Ramey congratulated the crew on their historic achievement. The city of Fort Worth bestowed the airmen with honorary life citizenship and gold medals commemorating the event. In the top photo, Symington shakes hands with Tech. Sgt. Virgil Young.

**455TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP (H)**  
**Member Information**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Squadron: \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

May we publish your e-mail address in the newsletter? \_\_\_\_Yes \_\_\_\_No

Current members may retain this form and use it to report a future change of address or other contact information. The form can also be given to anyone interested in membership. Please return completed forms to: 455th Bomb Group Association, P. O. Box 93095, Austin, Texas 78709-3095.



**Dear Editor,**

I met you at the 455th BG Association reunion in San Antonio in 2007. My family and I were on our way to Italy.

At that time, I gave you some photo copies covering many topics. One was a photo of my original crew in front of our plane, "Yo-Yo".

You were going to put it in a future copy of the *Cerignola Connection*. I have not seen it published yet. Could you possibly put it in a future issue.

Most of the information that I left with you included all the names that I could recall. Not all persons in the photos are identified.

Thank you for all you do. I enjoy every issue.

Best Regards,  
Vervin "Gil" Gilson (741)  
Gilmarner@aol.com

**Editor's Note:**

*Gil is correct. The three photos have not yet been published. They are on this page and the next.*

*I asked Gil, after the correspondence above, to send me his recollections of his Italy trip with his family. Those thoughts are below.*

**Craig Ward, Editor**

**Dear Editor,**

As you may recall from the SAT reunion, my party included my son, his wife, four grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren, for a total of eleven.

One highlight of the San Antonio reunion was to again visit with Sen. George McGovern, who had also been assigned to the 741st Squadron.

When he arrived at the

455th BG, I was completing my missions, and getting ready to return to the good ole' U.S. of A.

Five of us left San Antonio on the morning after the 741st Squadron dinner for Europe. This party included all four of the generations.

We first flew to France, where we spent four days touring. We visited Paris and all the sights, including, the tower, arch, Cathedrals, Normandy beaches, and American Cemetery.

We then took off for Venice, Italy. We toured the canal area of Venice, and fed the pigeons at St. Marks Square.

After picking up a rental car, we started driving south, stopping at all the Italian sights we wanted to see.

I had contacted Mario Capocéfalo before leaving home. He met us in Cerignola. He had arranged hotel accommodations for us, and showed us around for the next few days.

We visited the site of the old San Giovanni Air Base, including the former 455th BG HQ castle. It was still standing, and was occupied with a family.

The word **"HEADQUARTERS"** is still visible above the front door!

Mario is very proud of the small base chapel, which he helped restore, and maintains to this day.

The old briefing room and movie theater are still intact. Most of the olive trees are gone from the site where our tents were located. Mario and I enjoyed our trip down memory lane. He is a wonderful 455th BG ambassador.

We then traveled from Cerignola to Sorrento, and visited points of interest in Naples, Pompeii, and the beautiful Italian coastline before heading back to the USA.

A fantastic trip it was!  
Best Regards,  
Vervin "Gil" Gilson (741)  
Gilmarner@aol.com



Top, left - Capt. Schuknect (741 squadron medical officer)  
Top, second from left - Capt. Stewart (741 squadron Operations officer)  
Top, fifth from left - Capt. Graham (741 squadron asst. operations officer)  
Bottom, third from left - 1st Lt. Vervin "Gil" Gilson (741)  
Bottom, fourth from left - Maj. Welsh (741 CO)





### **Yo-Yo**

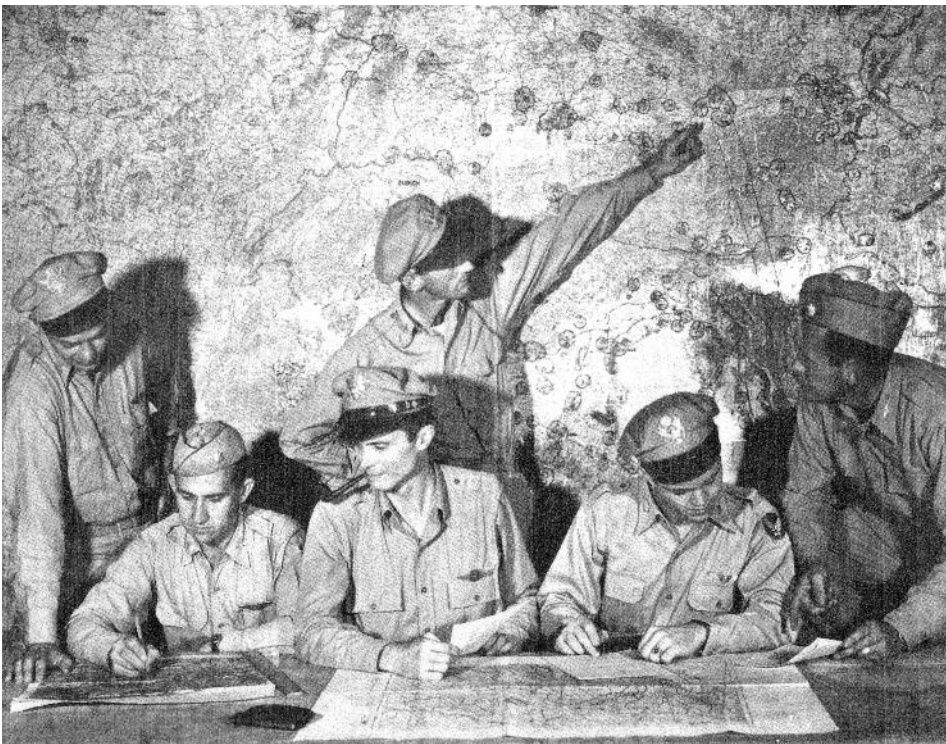
**Gil Gilson crew (741)**

**Top Row (L-R)**

Vervin "Gil" Gilson, Marion Culver, Ted Widener, Bob Asa

**Bottom Row (L-R)**

Bruce, Fulmer, Teeter, Rowden, Jensen, Crow



Col. Cool with 455th  
Group Officers

### **Dear Editor,**

My father-in-law, Leo W. Smith (743), flew as a tail-gunner on missions out of Cerignola from December, 1943 until he was shot down on May 18, 1944. He was sent to Stalag Luft VI, was on the potato march, and was liberated in April, 1945.

I went on the the Army Air Forces Forum, and have gotten some information, but the name of his plane that the Forum gave me is not what he remembers (*Snuffy Smith and the Yard Birds*).

We have requested his records from the Archives. He has lost all of his medals, but he still has his dog tags. We are just trying to piece things together for him.

He is 89, and does have a great memory of his missions, his captivity and the march.

We are looking for pictures, or any other information your readers may be able to provide. Thank you for any help you can give us.

Sincerely,

Janice Smith, for Leo W. Smith  
3445 SE 45th St  
Ocala, Florida 34480  
Email: js5719@cox.net  
Fax: 352-694-5002





**Dear Editor,**

My father in law, 1st Lt. Edward C. Atwell (deceased Dec., 2001), was a navigator in the 455th BG, 743rd squadron. We have his service records. They are in excellent condition, and detail his training and fifty combat missions. Also, we have a few photos of his crew, including one in front of *Prather's Panthers* (see photo). Unfortunately, he never talked about his combat experiences, and we don't have any diaries or personal mission notes.

One intriguing discovery was a "Short Snorter" currency bill with 15 names written on it. I had no idea what it was, until doing some computer searching. It is the typical Ratal-Dakar dollar bill, in excellent condition. It has sticky residue from tape. It was part of a chain, I suppose.

The names, as best as I can tell are: Edward C. Atwell, Richard J. Haney, David C. Colman, Jack F. Prather, Paul B. Guillman, Carl J. Schmiedeskemp, Norman A Plook, Dan McKenzie, Chet Ogden, David H. Price, Anthony Furmo, Samuel W. Peterson, David Pellemen, and Ed H. Johnson.

I have attached a scan of a couple of the photos (see below). If any of your readers know anything about these names or photos, we would appreciate it if they would contact us.

Best Regards,

James Wallace & Sherry Atwell Wallace (Retired & Loving It)  
j2sherrywallace2@hotmail.com



### **PHRASES TO SURELY BRING BACK MEMORIES**

"SOS for breakfast"  
"The eagle sh--- today"  
"Get your card punched"  
"Deuce and a half"  
"Six by six"  
"Four by four"  
"Keep your bowels open,  
your mouth shut, and  
don't volunteer!"  
"Rodger-dodger, old codger"  
"I'm a colonel, too"  
"Peel it back"  
"Turn your head and cough"  
"Bend over and spread"  
"Take all you want, but  
eat all you take"  
"If it moves, salute it ---"  
"If you can lift it, pick it up ---"  
"If you can't lift it, paint it"  
"90-day wonder"  
"Repo-depot"  
"So thick you can walk on it"  
"Skivvies"  
"Clodhoppers"  
"Spit shine"

Courtesy of  
Col. Sy Gaynes (743)



**Dear Editor,**

I am Dave Matheson, nose turret gunner on the Mendenhall crew (742).

I flew a mission when a sabotage incident took place, and am familiar with a few of the details. *Argosy* magazine had an article about it in 1945, right after the end of the war.

The gist of the incident is that a line chief from the 460th BG slipped over to our field in the evening driving a jeep, and since he was in uniform, it was easy for him to get past the guards on some pretext or other to plant a bomb in the nose wheel-well on several of the planes, which were rigged to detonate at wheels up.

When the first plane blew up, it was assumed to be a malfunction, but when the second aircraft blew up on take-off, the operation was halted. All planes were inspected, with bombs discovered in several! After the bombs were removed, and the planes cleared for takeoff, an investigation was launched. It centered around the guards, & all ordinance personnel from the 454th BG.

Their testimony led to the arrest of the line chief from the 460th BG, who subsequently confessed.

He was being paid by the Germans to blow up our bombers, and was being paid money into an account for each plane destroyed.

The murderous line chief was dispatched by firing squad before nightfall that same day.

The war was bad enough without someone who was

supposedly on our side fighting us from the inside.

Sincerely,  
Dave Matheson, T/Sgt.  
USAF Retired  
ihatebugs@cox.net



Last Mission, August 27, 1944  
Arnie Boucher, Chris Bakos,  
with Dave Matheson (742)

**Dear Editor,**

My name is George Pifko Jr., son of a deceased WWII B17 Bombardier, who was shot down over Hungary on July 8, 1944.

In the course of going through my father's papers, I found a letter from a Mr. Nandor Mohos who is a Hungarian researching WWII aviation incidents. The letter was forwarded to Dad by his pilot, the late Laurel Gibson, in 2001.

According to my *Google* search, and your *Cerignola Connection* newsletter, Mr. Mohos was still actively researching as recently as 2008.

Your *Cerignola Connection* newsletter has several references to the work being done by Mr. Mohos.

If you have his email address, that would expedite my attempt to make contact and respond to his inquiry, which I believe went unanswered.

My father passed on in November 2003. He flew with the 348th BG and, fortunately, all of his crew survived being shot down.

Thank you very much for anything you might be able to provide regarding this matter.

Sincerely,  
George Pifko, Jr.  
Broadalbin, NY 12025  
gpifko@nycap.rr.com

### Airplane Wisdom

Just remember, if you crash because of weather, your funeral will be held on a sunny day.

Advice given to RAF pilots during WWII: When a prang (crash) seems inevitable, endeavor to strike the softest, cheapest object in the vicinity as slowly and gently as possible.

The Piper Cub is the safest airplane in the world; it can just barely kill you.

A pilot who doesn't have any fear probably isn't flying his plane to its maximum.

If you're faced with a forced landing, fly the thing as far into the crash as possible.

If an airplane is still in one piece, don't cheat on it; ride the sucker down.

Never fly in the same cockpit with someone braver than you.



## **Aircraft facts of WWII**

### **THE COST of DOING BUSINESS ---- The staggering cost of war.**

276,000 aircraft were  
manufactured in the USA  
during WWII.

43,000 planes were lost  
overseas, including 23,000 in  
combat.

6600 American service men  
died, on average, per month,  
during WWII  
(about 220 per day !).

### **THE PRICE OF VICTORY**

B-17	\$204,370.
P-40	\$44,892.
B-24	\$215,516.
P-47	\$85,578.
B-25	\$142,194.
P-51	\$51,572.
B-26	\$192,426.
C-47	\$88,574.
B-29	\$605,360.
PT-17	\$15,052.
P-38	\$97,147.
AT-6	\$22,952.

### **THE NUMBERS GAME**

10 billion gallons of  
gasoline consumed,  
1942-1945.

108 million hours flown,  
1943-1945.

460 billion rounds of aircraft  
ammo fired overseas,  
1942-1945.

8 million bombs dropped  
overseas,  
1943-1945.

2.3 million combat sorties,  
1941-1945.

300,000 aircraft accepted,  
1940-1945.

808,000 aircraft engines  
accepted,  
1940-1945.

800,000 propellers accepted,  
1940-1945.

### **MOST-PRODUCED COMBAT AIRCRAFT OF WWII**

Il-2 Stumovik	36,183
Yak	31,000
Bf 109	30,480
Fw 190	29,001
Spitfire/Seafire	20,351
B-24 / PB4Y	18,482
Thunderbolt	15,686
Mustang	15,875
Ju-88	15,000
Hurricane	14,533
P-40	13,738
B-17	12,731
Corsair	12,571
Hellcat	12,275
Pe-2	11,400
P-38	10,037
Zero	10,449
B-25	9,984
LaGG-5	9,920
Avenger	9,837
P-39	9,584
Mosquito	7,780
Lancaster	7,377
He 111	6,508
Halifax	6,176
Bf-110	6,150
B-29	3,970
Sterling	2,383

In less than four years  
(December, 1941 through  
August, 1945), the US Army Air  
Forces lost 14,903 pilots,  
aircrew and assorted personnel,  
plus 13,873 airplanes, **inside  
the continental United States.**

They were the result of  
52,651 aircraft accidents (6,039  
involving fatalities) in 45  
months.

They average 1,170  
aircraft accidents per month, or  
nearly 40 a day. However, less  
than one accident in four  
resulted in totaled aircraft.

Almost 1,000 Army  
planes disappeared en route  
from the US to foreign shores.

A staggering 43,581  
aircraft were lost overseas,  
including 22,948 on combat  
missions, and 20,633 attributed  
to non-combat causes  
overseas.

In August, 1943, sixty  
B-17s were shot down. That  
was a 16 percent loss rate and  
meant 600 empty bunks in  
England.

In 1942-43, it was  
statistically impossible for  
bomber crews to complete a  
25-mission tour in Europe.

Pacific theatre losses  
were far less (4,530 in combat)  
owing to smaller forces  
committed. The worst B-29  
mission, against Tokyo on May  
25, 1945, cost 26  
Superfortresses, 5.6 percent of  
the 464 dispatched from the  
Marianas.

On average, 6,600  
American servicemen died per  
month during WWII, about 220  
a day.



By the end of the war, over 40,000 airmen were killed in combat, and another 18,000 wounded.

Some 12,000 missing men were declared dead, including a number "liberated" by the Soviets, but never returned.

More than 41,000 were captured. 50% of the 5,400 held by the Japanese died in captivity, compared with 10% in German hands.

Total combat casualties were pegged at 121,867.

US manpower made up the deficit. The AAF's peak strength was reached in 1944 with 2,372,000 personnel, nearly twice the previous year's figure.

The losses were huge, but so were production totals. From 1941 through 1945, American industry delivered more than 276,000 military aircraft. That number was enough not only for US Army, Navy and Marine Corps, but for allies as diverse as Britain, Australia, China and Russia. From 1943 onward, America produced more planes than Britain and Russia combined, and more than Germany and Japan together 1941-45.

Our Axis enemies took massive losses. Through much of 1944, the Luftwaffe sustained uncontrolled hemorrhaging, reaching 25 percent of aircrews and 40 planes a month.

In late 1944, and into 1945, nearly half the pilots in Japanese squadrons had flown fewer than 200 hours. The experience disparity of two

years before had been completely reversed.

### **Experience Level**

Uncle Sam sent many of his sons to war with an absolute minimum of training.

Some fighter pilots entered combat in 1942 with less than one hour in their assigned aircraft. The 357th Fighter Group went to England in late 1943, having trained on P-39s. The group never saw a Mustang until shortly before its first combat mission.

A high-time P-51 pilot had 30 hours in type. Many had fewer than five hours. Some had one hour.

With the arrival of new aircraft, many combat units transitioned in combat. The attitude was, "They all have a stick and a throttle. Go fly 'em."

A future P-47 ace said, "I was sent to England to die."

He was not alone. Some fighter pilots tucked their wheels in the well on their first combat mission with one previous flight in the aircraft.

Meanwhile, bomber crews were still learning their trade. Of Jimmy Doolittle's 15 pilots on the April, 1942 Tokyo raid, only five had won their wings before 1941. All but one of the 16 co-pilots were less than a year out of flight school.

In WWII, flying safety took a back seat to combat. The AAF's worst accident rate was recorded by the A-36 Invader version of the P-51; a staggering 274 accidents per 100,000 flying hours. Next worst was the P-39, at 245 accidents per 100,000 flying

hours, the P-40 at 188, and the P-38, at 139. All were Allison-powered.

Bomber wrecks were fewer, but more expensive. The B-17 and B-24 averaged 30 and 35 accidents per 100,000 flight hours, respectively --- a horrific figure considering that from 1980 to 2000, the Air Force's major mishap rate was less than two.

The B-29 Superfortress was even worse at 40; the world's most sophisticated, most capable, and most expensive bomber was too urgently needed to stand down for mere safety reasons.

The AAF set a reasonably high standard for B-29 pilots, but the desired figures were seldom attained. The original cadre of the 58th Bomb Wing was to have 400 hours of multi-engine time, but there were not enough experienced pilots to meet the criterion. Only ten percent had overseas experience.

Conversely, when a \$2.1 billion B-2 crashed in 2008, the Air Force initiated a two-month "safety pause" rather than declare a "stand down", let alone grounding.

The B-29 was no better for maintenance. Though the R3350 was known as a complicated, troublesome power-plant, no more than half the mechanics had previous experience with the Duplex Cyclone. But they made it work.

### **Navigators**

Perhaps the greatest unsung success story of AAF training was Navigators. The



Army graduated some 50,000 during the War. Many had never flown out of sight of land before leaving the USA for a war zone.

Yet the huge majority found their way across oceans and continents without getting lost or running out of fuel --- a stirring tribute to the AAF's educational establishments.

### **Cadet To Colonel**

It was possible for a flying cadet at the time of Pearl Harbor to finish the war with eagles on his shoulders. That was the record of John D. Landers, a 21-year-old Texan, who was commissioned a second lieutenant on December 12, 1941. He joined his combat squadron with 209 hours total flight time, including three in P-40s. He finished the war as a full colonel, commanding an 8th Air Force Group, at age 24.

As the training pipeline filled up, however, those low figures became exceptions. By early 1944, the average AAF fighter pilot entering combat had logged at least 450 hours, usually including 250 hours in training. At the same time, many captains and first lieutenants claimed over 600 hours.

At its height in 1944, the Army Air Forces had 2.6 million people and nearly 80,000 aircraft of all types. Today, the US Air Force employs 327,000 active personnel (plus 170,000 civilians) with 5,500+ manned and perhaps 200 unmanned aircraft.

These 2009 figures represent about 12 percent of the manpower and 7 percent of the airplanes of the WWII peak.

Whether there will ever be another air war like WWII is doubtful, as fighters and bombers have given way to helicopters and remotely-controlled drones. But within living memory, men left the earth in 500-aircraft formations, and fought major battles five miles high, leaving a legacy that remains timeless.

**Source: AAF Statistical Digest**

### **Dear Editor,**

I would like some help from your readers.

The attachment is a picture that I remember taking of a B24 named "**My Ginnie**" with my pilot, Lt. Bert "Pete" Peterson (740) standing alongside.

That was a long time ago, but I'm sure my crew flew her on several missions. She was in the 455th, that I'm sure of.

I would like some history on "**My Ginnie**", if anyone can remember that far back. Pictures would be wonderful, as well as any stories about her.

Best Regards,  
Fred Hamilton (740)  
Radio/top turret  
Fastfreddy1881@att.net



### **The following poem was found in 1944, on a bulletin board in Stalag Luft III, by Don Durant (POW)**

Until now, her name's hardly been mentioned, Still they've praised all the others before.

And to extol here is not my intention, Though her merits are more than a score.

She was needed and born for a reason, And she has every right to be proud.

To me, it's almost high treason To slander her good name aloud!

It's a visible fact she's no beauty, And her lines are no work of art.

But she's up there doing her duty, A patriot right to the heart.

She's a queen in the sky and she knows it, She ignores all ridiculous rib. She was named for a queen, and she knows it.

Perhaps that's why they christened her "*Lib*".

She goes where the fighting is toughest, Be it Berlin, Ploesti or Kiel.

And she fights where the fighting is roughest, She's as hard as true tempered steel.

When the haul is too long for others, Or a load too heavy to pack,

She's out there ahead of her brothers, Braving both fighters and flak.

On a run she's as smooth and as steady, As the pillars of old Hercules.

If it's bombing you want, then she's ready, Just a few of her merits are these.

I could list two or three dozen Of her virtues that I've known and seen As she fights along side her first cousin The commendable B-17.

It is said that queens live and die proudly.

For freedom, for country and more,

But none fight for these things more proudly,

**Than our *Liberator*, the B-24.**

***Author Unknown***



## **455th BG E-mail Roster**

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**Dear Editor,**

I am seeking info on pieces of WWII history.

I aquired a flying helmet and other details that belonged to a USAAF gunner that flew with the 455th BG. I only have his initials, which are **"E. D"**.

I have identified four S/Sgts within the 455th with those initials.

They are:

Ernest C. Dandenault (743)

Edwin B. Daniel (740)

Elvin A. Davis (741)

Ernest F. D'Andria (743)

I'd like to find out if these individuals were 455th BG crew members, and if any were in fact gunners.

Thanks for your help.

Best regards,

David Bell

dvdbell@roadrunner.com



**Dear Editor,**

I am the grandson of tail gunner Ralph L. Hostetter (742). He was stationed at San Giovanni airfield from 1944 to 1945.

I am writing to see if any of your readers may have known him, or might have some information about him or his aircraft.

My Grandfather passed away some 16 years ago. He didn't speak much about the war. He only gave bits and pieces. I'm sure for many veterans, there are things better forgotten, but some other things might be worth passing on.

I have been doing much research to find out my grandfather's story, to try to piece things together for my father (his son) and me.

What I do know is that he flew his required missions, plus three more. He was shot down by flak on his third extra mission on February 27, 1945, (Mission 204, bombing of the marshalling yards at Augsburg, Germany). The plane (44-49928) was hit in one of the engines, and Pilot Donald Fotheringham peeled off and headed to Switzerland.

They landed at Dubendorf Air Field, and were held there for the remainder of the war.

I'm trying to find out more about his original plane and his regular crew (Pilot William Hogan, Jr.). I'm also trying to find information on a story that he told regarding running out of fuel on return from a mission, and the subsequent ditching of the aircraft in the sea.

He said that they ditched near the beach, and ended up in about ten feet of water. He said that they were all laughing with joy because they had made it.

I haven't been able to find any record of this ditching.

My grandfather also said that he flew in the same box as a plane called *Heaven Can Wait*. There's a picture of the plane on a B 24 Website, but no identifying numbers to the group.

I think that *Heaven Can Wait* is the aircraft he spoke of, because there's a photo of it in the *Cerignola Connection* news letter, with another 455th plane in an accident at San Giovanni. Its an olive drab plane with nose art of a female. It looks like she's sitting on wheat. (**Editor's Note: See photo next page. Could this be the aircraft referenced?**)

Does anyone recognize or remember the aircraft?

I don't have the date of his arrival to San Giovanni, but I know he was there from late 1944 until February of 1945.

I have a crew photo of him in front of *Swamp Angel*, but I don't know if he flew in it or not. When asked if he had any art on his plane, he said that his pilot didn't want any nose art.

I'm attaching a photo of him with his crew in front of *Swamp Angel*. He is the second from the right, bottom row.

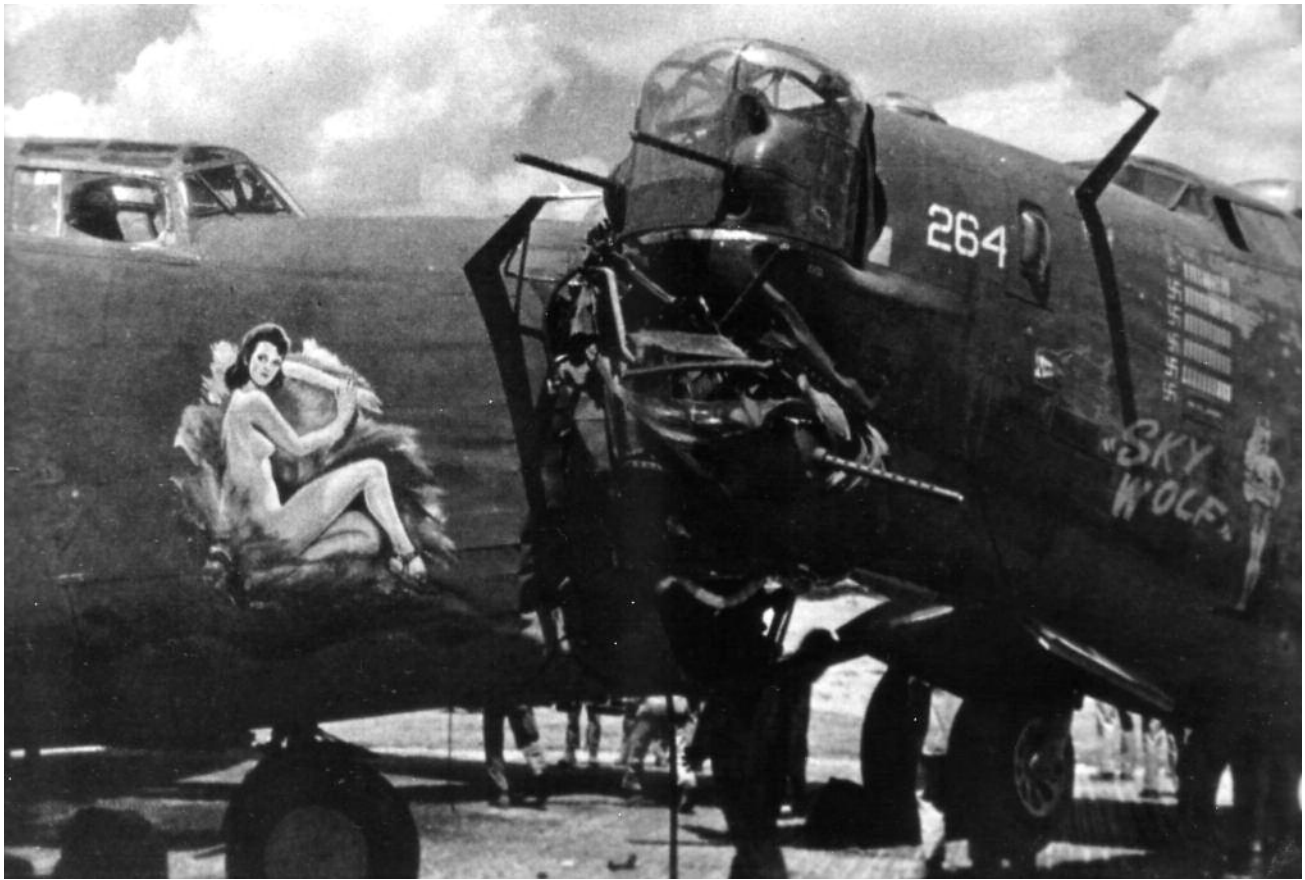
I hope this rings a bell with someone. I would like any photos that your readers could share (aircraft, base, living quarters, in-flight, etc.)

I plan to make an album book for my father with the story of the 455th and a timeline. It would mean the world to him, and to me.

Thanks in advance,  
Robert Hostetter  
robo1945@yahoo.com







Does anyone know the name of the aircraft on the left? This could be the nose art referenced by Robert Hostetter on the previous page. If you can help, please contact Mr. Hostetter by email at: [robo1945@yahoo.com](mailto:robo1945@yahoo.com).

Photo courtesy of Craig Johnston, whose father flew on *Sky Wolf* as a tail gunner in the Ed Riggs crew (740).

## JOHN "JACK" AGNEW

# Soldier's unit said to have inspired 'The Dirty Dozen'

PHILADELPHIA — John "Jack" Agnew, one of the original members of an Army unit that operated behind enemy lines during World War II and is often credited with having loosely inspired the movie *The Dirty Dozen*, has died at age 88.

Mr. Agnew belonged to the

Filthy Thirteen, an unofficial unit within the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division. He was pronounced dead Thursday at Abington Memorial Hospital after becoming ill at his home in Hatboro, where he and his wife moved about a year ago, his daughter said.

On D-Day, the Filthy Thir-

teen parachuted into France to take a bridge over the Douve River. Before the Battle of the Bulge, Mr. Agnew and other members of the unit were requested for pathfinder duty and parachuted into Bastogne, which was besieged by German forces. Mr. Agnew operated a beacon to help guide in planes carrying supplies.

Tales of the unit's exploits and a *Stars and Stripes* military newspaper photograph are said to have inspired *The Dirty Dozen*, not because any of the unit's members were convicts like the movie's characters — they weren't — but because of their reputation for brawling, drinking and spending time in the stockade.



## **FINAL FLIGHTS**

*Ref: The death of a great and humble man who saved our lives many times, flying his first mission at the age of 19.*

### **Dr. Harrell "Hal" Josey (741)**

Our pilot for 35 missions, between August, 1944 and February, 1945, Dr. Harrell "Hal" Josey, of Starkville, MS., whose plane was *Big Gas Bird*, died October 13, 2010.

He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross twice, and was honored in the Starkville Hall of Fame shortly before his death.

Dr. Josey was a pioneer in the field of large animal veterinary practice, paving the way for many dairy and cattle farmers. He was president of the Mississippi Veterinary Medical Association. His career included numerous local business and real estate ventures, and board memberships.

Submitted by:

Joe Kiernan  
President  
Princeton Admin. Systems, Inc.  
16 Barbara Lane  
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609-771-3886

### **1st Lt. Stanley M. Iverson (740)**

*Former VP of the  
455th BG Association.*

Stan Iverson passed away peacefully in his sleep on October 14th, 2010. Ironically, this was the same date in 1944

when he and his crew parachuted into Bosnia.

Stan played golf up until two months before his death from cancer.

## **OBITUARIES**

### **Maj. Dick Winters, 92, led 'Band of Brothers'**

They were subjects of a book and a miniseries.

PHILADELPHIA — Even as Parkinson's disease began taking its toll on retired Maj. Dick Winters, who led his "Band of Brothers" through



Winters

some of World War II's fiercest European battles, the unassuming hero refused, as always, to let his men down.

Friends accompanied him to public events, subtly clearing a path through the adoring crowds for the living legend, whose Easy Company's achievements were documented by a book and an HBO miniseries. His gait had grown unsteady, and he did not want to be seen stumbling.

Maj. Winters "didn't want the members of Easy Company to know," William Jackson said Monday of his longtime friend, who died last week at age 92. "Right up to the end, he was the company commander."

Maj. Winters had asked that news of his death be withheld until after his fu-

neral, Jackson said.

Maj. Winters became the leader of Company E, 506th Regiment, 101st Airborne Division, on D-Day after the death of the company commander during the invasion of Normandy.

During that invasion, Maj. Winters led 13 of his men in destroying an enemy battery and obtained a detailed map of German defenses along Utah Beach. In September 1944, he led 20 men in a successful attack on a German force of 200 soldiers. Occupying the Bastogne area of Belgium at the time of the Battle of the Bulge, he and his men held their place until the 3rd Army broke through enemy lines, and Winters was promoted to major shortly afterward.

Historian Stephen Ambrose interviewed Maj. Winters for the 1992 book *Band of Brothers*, on which the HBO miniseries that began airing in September 2001 was based.

The miniseries followed Easy Company from its training in Georgia until the war ended in 1945. Producers included actor Tom Hanks and Steven Spielberg. Damian Lewis played Maj. Winters.

**Editor's Note:** For anyone who has not yet watched the "Band of Brothers" series, do yourself a favor and rent it from your favorite video outlet. Based on the book by the late historian Dr. Stephen Ambrose (author of "The Wild Blue"), this HBO series is an honest, stark, and gritty portrayal of the experiences of the American foot soldier in the ETO. Inspiring, awesome, devastating ...



## NIGHT FLIGHT

Higher than the eagles flight, Beneath a dome of Stellar light  
Exists a state of in-between, Where space & time suspended seem to merge and touch - **Eternity.**  
Ahead the blackness seems to grow, White towers reach from down below  
My wings are strong, my engine drones, But trepidation gnaws my bones  
And festers with - **Uncertainty.**  
Somewhere deep down the feeling grows, The origin from which it flows  
Is veiled from my consciousness, My mind no longer is at rest, But grapples with - **Anxiety.**  
Those clouds ahead that loom so black, Aren't clouds at all - It's Flak-It's Flak!  
My ears are full of sounds long dead, BANDITS! BANDITS! - DEAD AHEAD!  
Gone is all semblance of - **Reality.**  
Fear, then panic grows and grows, My heart bursts, my head explodes  
There is no corner in the sky to run for cover - no place to hide, Terror consumes all - **Sanity.**  
There's no hope now, The wings are gone, The rush of wind is death's own song.  
I can't die now, I'm still too young, There's much, too much, I haven't done.  
I'm not ready to accept - **Finality.**  
Sweet blackness overcomes the fight, It's just a dream.  
The soothing night is back to wipe away the tears  
The nightmares of the yesteryears. My mind returns to - **Serenity.**  
The city lights are growing brighter, The air is filled with traffic chatter.  
Familiar sights come closer, closer. We're home again!  
I call the tower, All's well, on final - **Security.**  
It's over now, those days long gone, But youthful faces - forever young  
At times appear recalling when men were boys and boys were men. The faces fade - **Obscurity.**  
The stars alone record the scene, There are no graves - all's bright and clean.  
That battlefield has marked no past, Of death and blood and holocaust.  
The sky knows only - **Tranquility.**

Author - Lt. John Smidl (743)



"Well," snarled the tough old Army Officer to the bewildered Private,  
"I suppose after you get discharged from the Army,  
you'll just be waiting for me to die so you can come and pee on my grave."  
"Not me, Sir !" the Private replied.  
"Once I get out of the Army, I'm never going to stand in line again !"



## Parachutes

Most guys who flew in bombers in WWII know that parachutes were different for crew members.

Pilots wore a "seat pack", the pack being used as a cushion in the hollowed-out pilot seat. The ball-turret gunner wore a "back pack", which was a flat pack and could fit on the gunner's back in the turret.

Everyone else wore a "chest pack", where the man wore a harness over his deflated Mae West. The harness had two large "D" rings, which were affixed to the front of the harness. The parachute pack was a separate pack with two male snap clips which snapped on to the "D" rings when the chute was put on, but not worn during the flight. It was worn only in the emergency, when bail-out was imminent.

The pack was laid out near the man's position for quick access, hopefully in time. Also, the hope was that it wouldn't be hit by flak coming through the fuselage, and ripped to pieces, as sometimes happened.

After we flew about ten missions, the 15th Air Force grabbed several parachute riggers from the paratroops nearby, and sent two or three to each squadron.

The riggers inspected our chutes, in the chute room, to be sure they looked OK. No oil spots, no coffee spots, no bent pins at the opening part.

They also inspected our harnesses, to be sure on chute

opening that we wouldn't suddenly speak in high voices!

The rigger asked me "How much do you weigh, sir?" I said about 200 lbs. He then asked my bombardier, "Big Ed" Johnson, who answered "about 220 lbs."

The rigger said "You guys would be killed if you used these chutes! They're 24 feet in diameter, and designed for no more than 180 lbs. You two need 28-foot chutes."

I said, "Fine, how do we get 28-foot chutes?" He answered, "There ain't none in Italy!"

Johnson and I flew our remaining missions with 24-foot chutes. Yes, we did.

Col. Sy Gaynes (743)

## Can You Help?

Dear Editor,

I flew as a Bombardier on the Bill Richards crew (743). We were shot down on our 11th mission, Mission # 21, on 12/17/44.

We bailed out over Adony, Hungary, and were picked up by Russians. We eventually got to Bucharest, Romania, and returned to base in late January, 1945. We continued flying missions, finishing with 35 in April, 1945.

I recently corresponded  
with the 455th BG Association's  
President Carl Barr regarding  
this mission. His mission notes  
follow in the next column to the  
right >>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>.

Regards,

Harvey Hewit (743)  
lhew@aol.com

Dear Harvey,

Thanks for the note. Your brief summary triggered something in my mind, so I went to look in my own journal. Here is what I found:

**12/17/44, Mission # 21**

**Target - Odertahl, Germany.**

*We got ourselves put back in formation today - deputy lead in "F" box. Well, it was partially lead, even if it was the last box in the last group in the wing!*

*Went through a 2000 ft. deck of strato-cumulus over the Adriatic, which broke up the formation. There were boxes strung out all over the sky up to Bratislava.*

*Radio picked up a report of four (4) squadrons of Jerries leaving the ground there. That got most of the boxes together. Even Murray got in his turret!*

*We sweated those boys out all the way to the target and back to Bratislava, but none of them made any passes. Flak at Csehi going up and on return.*

Other boxes seen to get flak at Vezprem and Gyor. Some flak clouds were laying over target from an earlier group, but NONE was fired into our own box. Possible that we rallied short of target. No mickey in our box, so we can't tell for certain. Left bomb bay doors stuck about 12 inches open, so the ground crew is working overtime tonight to put in new doors. Metz did not fly today. Otherwise, entire crew added one to the books. Time 07:30 [Richards MIA]

(Continued, next page)



I also checked my other source, our group history written by Colonels Asch, Graff, and Ramey.

Page 132, Mission 137:  
“....One of our aircraft was lost and was last seen about 5,000 feet below the formation with an engine on fire. No chutes were observed and ten crewmen were missing in action. All other planes returned safely.”

Regards,  
Carl Barr  
President, 455th BG Assoc.  
carlbarr@bellsouth.net

## **AN INTRODUCTION OF LOVED ONES OF AN AMERICAN HERO ... 67 YEARS IN THE MAKING**

### **Editor's Note:**

*In 2001, my wife Marsha and I visited what's left of the old San Giovanni Airbase outside Cerignola. We were blessed to have Mario Capocefalo, the official 455th BG "Ambassador" in Cerignola, as our tour guide. I was thrilled to walk the same soil as my father (Lt. John T. Ward, 740) did back in 1944.*

*Mario filled in so many "blanks", and added rich context to the land and the buildings we were viewing (HQ castle, briefing room, chapel, etc.).*

*Back at Mario's beautiful home, which overlooks an olive grove, Mario told many stories about running errands and doing chores as a "tent boy" for the American aviators of the 455th and 454th Bomb Groups.*

*One of the stories he told was of losing his dear friend, Lt. Jerry Thaxton, who was killed in action. As you will read in Mario's story below, Jerry's wish was for Mario to receive his belongings in case he was killed.*

*I could hardly control my*

*emotions as Mario displayed Jerry's shaving kit with complete reverence, and described to Marsha and me what Jerry meant to him, back then and all these years later.*

### **Now, Fast forward to 2011**

*Mario and Jerry's sister, Bettye Davis, somehow found each other over the telephone and internet earlier this year. I have been in touch with both of them regarding their introduction after all these years.*

*Both of them kindly sent me their thoughts (below, and on the next page) on this unexpected but exciting introduction of two people, half-a-world apart, who both dearly loved an American hero who gave his life in the battle against tyranny.*

*Craig Ward, Editor*

### **Dear Editor,**

In my 17 months spent at the San Giovanni airbase, my friendship with Jerry Thaxton and some of the other airmen is the highlight of my childhood.

These brave Americans changed the life of a young boy, and positively steered him into manhood.

My usual daily routine was to help replacement crews put up their tent, and to furnish them the useful accessories which I saved from a previous crew that were sent back to the USA. I soon became a tent boy, and was paid 50 lire per day (about 10 cents).

I helped to keep the tents clean, and took the airmen's laundry home to be washed by my three sisters.

Jerry was the navigator of the James Cavanaugh crew. The crew arrived with the 455th BG the evening of April 15, 1944. However, the next day, they were transferred to the 454th BG (737th squadron).

Jerry was the tallest of the crew, and I was just a short little boy. He asked me why I didn't go to school, and I explained to him the situation of myself and my large family.

We needed food, clothing, soap, and all the other basic living supplies. School would have to wait.

Jerry became my closest friend. Even after 67 years, I have wonderful living memories of the short time I had with my friend Jerry.

I spoke a lot of him at home, and my mother wanted to have Jerry, James, Billy, & Jack over for a Sunday Italian lunch. This lunch never happened, because on a mission over that damned Ploesti, schrapnel from a flak shell struck Jerry's head, killing him instantly.

After missions, I had to have the tents ready for the returning fliers. I would have a canteen of fresh water, and their clean laundry on their cots.

On that fateful day, as I watched for the returning aircraft, I saw the red signal rocket fired from a B24, but I didn't know which crew was flying it.

I discovered shortly afterward that it was from the James Cavanaugh aircraft.

After I finished my job with the other fliers, I finally went into Jerry's tent. There were only three crewmembers there, all with sad faces.

I asked, "Where is Jerry?" What an unforgettable moment! James Cavanaugh asked me to join him in a prayer because Jerry was killed.



I didn't say the prayer.  
Instead, I ran out of the tent.

My heart was broken.

Jerry told me that if anything bad happened to him, all his personal belongings were to be given to me. The next morning, May 19, 1944, an officer in charge gave me Jerry's clothes, shoes, and many other things. He said I was too young to use the shaving kit, but I told him I wanted the shaving kit to be saved as a remembrance of my good friend Jerry.

Since that day, I have never used it.

Since 1965, I have been good friends with the custodian of the memorial cemetery in Nettuno, where Jerry was buried. I am pleased that Jerry was buried in such beautiful place.

Going to Nettuno with my wife and children was a normal routine for many years. We would deliver flowers, pray, and remain close to the memory of the nice young man that Jerry was.

Earlier this year (2011), Billy Davis, Jerry's nephew, got my email address and wrote to me. Soon afterward, I had the great joy of talking with Bettye Davis, Jerry's sister.

I plan on flying to Texas later this year to visit with Bettye and the rest of her family.

Best Regards,  
Mario Capocefalo  
mario.capocefalo@alice.it



#### Dear Editor,

This is a wonderful story. During WWII, there were two people from two very different worlds who loved the same young man, and still do.

I had hero-worshipped my older brother long before he became Lt. Gerald Thaxton, 454th Bomb Group, based in Cerignola, Italy.

Correspondence was sketchy once he was overseas, and details of his daily life there were few.

When we got the terrible news that Jerry had been killed in action on May 18, 1944, I did not know that a thirteen year old boy was crying for him there, as I was crying for him here.

I did not know that a little Italian boy would keep him in his heart, just as I have, and honor that memory, even to this day.

And now I have connected with that boy .... Mario Capocefalo!

Mario, once a tent boy for Jerry's group .... now, he's my friend. After 67 years, through a series of coincidences, and after many near-misses (times we crossed paths and didn't know it), we have finally found each other.

What a joy!

He has told me things about the last weeks of Jerry's life that have filled a void. These stories have brought me and my family great comfort.

We have talked on the phone, exchanged letters and pictures, and we hope to soon meet in person.

Through Mario, I have made more new connections.

Mary Ann Riccardi Cerra, daughter of Lt. Riccardi, Craig Ward, son of Lt. John T. Ward, and Steve Ray, who sent his father's story of his wartime experience to us.

Both Mary Ann and Craig told me that Mario had shared cherished memories of Jerry with them, as he has with many others. Steve told our son Bill the same thing.

I can't think of a finer legacy a man can have, and I believe that somewhere Jerry is smiling about it.

Best Regards,  
Bettye Davis  
1505 Woodlawn  
Baytown, TX. 77520  
281-427-4445 (home)  
818-634-5464 (cell)



Lt. Gerald Thaxton  
454th BG (737)





Dear Editor,

Ref: *Babs 339* (photo below)

I was so excited to see this photo in your online newsletter (Spring, 2010).

My father was in the 455th Bomb Group, 740th Squadron. He was a "recon" photographer named Leon Resnicow (he later changed his last name to Ross).

I have this original photo with my father's other WWII pictures. I believe he was the photographer of the picture.

I have been trying, unsuccessfully for some time, to research this aircraft, and to find out what missions it would have been on. I'd also like to know what areas of operation the recon photographers might have been in.

Any information you or your readers might have on this would be appreciated.

Sincerely,

Helen Ross

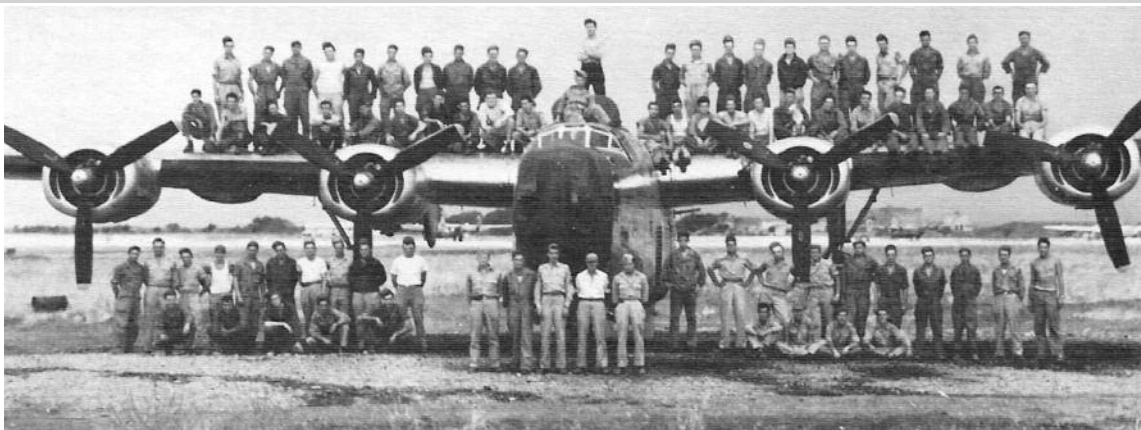
rosshele@bellsouth.net



**Editor's Questions for Helen Ross, or anyone having information on these group photos:**

Were these posed pictures a regular activity in all bomb groups / squadrons? Were these photos taken as part of an event, a celebration, or some other specific group happening?

If any 455th BG veterans have taken part in one of these group pictures, please send the story behind it (with photo, if available) to your Editor for publication.





## **RE-PRINT OF AN EDITORIAL COLUMN BY YOUR EDITOR**

### **Editor's Note:**

*For those of you who have been reading the Cerignola Connection for several years, you have probably seen my requests for WWII veterans to tell their stories. Record them on audio or video tape for future generations, if you are so inclined.*

*Painful memories aside, relatives of veterans, as well as other history buffs, are captivated by the bravery and sacrifice of you brave combat veterans.*

*I once spoke to a combat veteran of the Normandy invasion. He said he didn't speak about his experiences much because "I don't want to sound like I think I'm some kind of hero, or that I'm bragging."*

*Please don't feel this way. Your story is important. Your family is interested, or they will be some day. Share your WWII experience, either in person or on video. You will be doing your family, and future generations of historians, a valuable service.*

*I wrote the following message to a 455th BG veteran several years ago. I published it at the same time in the Cerignola Connection. Here it is again.*

*Thank you for considering my request.*

*Regards,  
Your Editor*

**Dear Veteran,**

My father, Lt. J.T. Ward (740), passed away in 1986, and I was only 31 at the time. In my young adulthood, all I cared about was chasing girls and driving fast cars and motorcycles. I didn't give a hoot about my father's war experiences.

That turned out to be one of my biggest life regrets. I can

tell you without reservation that I would give up all the fast cars, girls, and everything else I ever had for the opportunity to speak to my father about his combat experiences today. I believe he would have talked to me about them back then, but I never asked.

He volunteered a few things over the years. For example, after he was credited with 50 missions in late summer of 1944, his CO offered to promote him a rank and make him a first pilot if he would stay on and do 15 more missions.

He said "Hell, no!" He wanted to go home to his new wife (my mom). I'm glad he made that decision. I might not be here had he taken the offer!

The only time I recall seeing him get emotional about his war memories was when he and I were watching TV one night. I was about 9 years old.

The show was about bombers in action in WWII. At some point, I turned to him and asked him if he ever killed anybody in the war (*a stupid question that a kid will ask when they don't know any better*). He got misty-eyed, and said "I pray to God every night that I didn't, but I'm afraid that I did".

The point is that I know a little, but not a lot, about my father's experiences in WWII. That's why I enjoy being associated with the 455th BG, and why I enjoy being the editor of the *Cerignola Connection* newsletter.

It's the next best thing to learning these historical facts directly from my father.

I know you gentlemen think that the generations that came after you don't care, and don't appreciate what you did back then. It's true that a large portion of the American public can't even say who the warring countries were, much less having awareness of the horrific sacrifices you and your fellow airmen endured.

Please know, however, that a sizable portion of the baby-boomer generation is finally waking up to the fact that we owe you a debt of gratitude that cannot ever be repaid.

I never told my dad how proud I was of him for what he did. However, it's my honor to be able to tell YOU.

Do your family a big favor. Record your memories. Get a voice recorder or video camera, sit down, and just talk. It will be awkward at first, but if you write notes ahead of time, it will get easier. The memories will start flooding back as you go along.

Your family will cherish this recording, I promise you.

If you want to have your story preserved for future historians and scholars, send it to the Eisenhower Center at the University of New Orleans. It has the biggest collection of WWII experiences (told first-person by the warriors who fought it) in the world.

**Your story belongs there.**

**The Eisenhower Center  
for American Studies  
Department of History  
The University of New Orleans  
2000 Lakeshore Drive  
New Orleans, LA. 70148  
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## **LAWRENCE F. LIBERTY**

### **(741) REMEMBERS**

by Col. Horace Lanford (741)

#### **Editor's Note:**

*Last year, Frank Hosimer (741) kindly sent me three volumes of information on the history of the 741st squadron. These volumes were written and compiled by the late Col. Horace Lanford, Ph.D.*

*This page includes excerpts from Dr. Lanford's historical volumes.*

An unsung hero of the 741st Squadron and 455th Bomb Group is Hugh Graff. Hugh Graff was the original Group Operations Officer.

He was responsible for planning and implementing the flying training program for the group. This flying training program really began to bear fruit with the nine airplanes assigned to the group in Salt Lake City.

Formation flying was practiced with regularity. A highlight of the practice missions was the assumption of a nine aircraft echelon to the right, coming in on a low approach, with each aircraft peeling up in turn, and out for a landing approach.

Remember the take off and landing procedure at Cerignola? Three airplanes on the runway for take-off, with 1) one breaking ground, 2) second one half-way down the runway, and 3) a third releasing brakes after applying power.

On landing: One aircraft at the far end of the runway turning off, one rolling halfway down the runway, and the third touching down. (Cripples, of

course, were an exception.)

Larry Liberty recalls a practice mission at Langley, when the field closed and ten or twelve airplanes were diverted to Atlanta. A weather front had to be penetrated. All aircraft landed safely.

Good practice for those who had to later fly instruments through the inter-tropical fronts extending across the South Atlantic, from Belem or Natal to Dakar.

Formation flying, a strength of the 455th Group, began at AAFSAT in Orlando, Florida. The combat returnees, Col. Cool, Capt. Keefer, Capt. Thayer, and Lt. Asch taught us how to fly good formation.

This training saved many an airplane while flying out of Cerignola during fighter attacks.

The group formations on practice missions out of Dajida, Africa were invaluable.

The 741st is grateful to Hugh Graff.

Larry Liberty reminded me of an incident which I had forgotten completely. Larry says that after cleaning out the old farm building we used for an enlisted club, an officers' club, squadron offices, and the penthouse (home for Lanford, Welsh, Schuknecht, Van Lent, and two others), he was sent to Foggia to get tile for the floors.

The tile was installed, the walls painted, and a granite slab was engraved with "741" for the enlisted and officers' bars. Larry recalls he was sent to Bari to find furniture for the clubs. Larry and party found a warehouse

with furniture stored in it, and located the owner. There were sofas, chairs, and other new and attractive furniture.

Larry bought enough furniture to fill two 6x6 trucks.

The problems then began in earnest! He had to call the Squadron C.O. and tell him of the transaction, and that he needed \$2,000 in cash and two trucks pronto! Communications between Bari and Cerignola were by field telephone.

Much of this conversation had to be relayed by telephone operators. Larry says when he asked for \$2,000 and two trucks, he could actually hear the squadron commander scream "What?!!", even over the poor telephone connections.

The story has a happy ending. The 741st squadron eventually had a large club, a nice officers' club, and each club was tastefully furnished.

The officers' club had a piano. Someone even built a gaming table!

Larry Liberty recalls one of our original pilots, Dick Deeble, was made a Flight Leader and promoted to Captain before he was 21 years old!

If my memory serves me well, Gene Hudson and Win Bowers did the same. Liberty adds that this "was a truly great accomplishment to be that young, and to have done all of those things."

I agree!





## **What Happened ?**

*(An editorial comment from your Editor)*

One evening, a grandson was talking to his grandmother about current events. The grandson asked his grandmother what she thought about the shootings at schools, the computer age, and just things in general.

The Grandma replied, "Well, let me think a minute, I was born before television, penicillin, polio shots, frozen foods, Xerox, contact lenses, Frisbees and the pill.

There were no credit cards, laser beams, or ball-point pens.

Man had not invented pantyhose, air conditioners, dishwashers, clothes dryers, and the clothes were hung out to dry in the fresh air, and man had yet to walk on the moon.

Your Grandfather and I got married first and then lived together.

Every family had a father and a mother.

Until I was 25, I called every man older than me, "Sir"- - and after I turned 25, I still called policemen and every man with a title, "Sir."

We were before gay-rights, computer-dating, dual careers, day-care centers, and group therapy.

Our lives were governed by the Ten Commandments, good judgment, and common sense.

We were taught to know the difference between right and wrong, and to stand up and take responsibility for our actions.

Serving your country was a privilege; living in this country was a bigger privilege.

Having a meaningful relationship meant getting along with your cousins.

Draft dodgers were people who closed their front doors when the evening breeze started.

Time-sharing meant time the family spent together in the evenings and weekends -- not purchasing condominiums.

We never heard of FM radios, tape decks, CDs, electric typewriters, yogurt or guys wearing earrings.

We listened to the Big Bands, Jack Benny and the President's speeches on our radios. And I don't ever remember any kid blowing his brains out listening to Tommy Dorsey.

If you saw anything with '*Made in Japan*' on it, it was junk.

The term 'making out' referred to how you did on your school exam.

Pizza Hut, McDonald's, and instant coffee were unheard of.

We had 5 & 10-cent stores where you could actually buy things for 5 and 10 cents.

Ice-cream cones, phone calls, rides on a streetcar and a Pepsi were all a nickel.....And if you didn't want to splurge, you could spend your nickel on enough stamps to mail one letter and two postcards.

You could buy a new Chevy Coupe for \$600, but who could afford one? Too bad, because gas was 11 cents a gallon.

In my day, "grass" was mowed, "coke" was a cold drink, "pot" was something your mother cooked in, and "rock music" was your grandmother's lullaby.

And we were the last generation to believe that a lady needed a husband to have a baby.

No wonder people call us "old and confused", and say there is a generation gap.

**How old do you think grandma is ??**

**Grandma is 65 years old (born in 1946) ...**

**How could so much go wrong in such a short time?**



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## **FINAL FLIGHT of COL. CLARENCE EDWARD "ED" RIGGS (740)**

### **Father of 455th BG Association, Inc. Executive Director Greg Riggs**

**Ed Riggs shared rare air, but wasn't star-struck. The decorated aviator was taught to fly by actor Jimmy Stewart.**

No bells were ringing when Ed Riggs got his wings. Longtime Tulsan Ed Riggs was a B-24 bomber pilot during World War II. He flew 50 missions over two years, and palled around with the likes of movie icon and fellow pilot Jimmy Stewart. But before the pilot-in-training flew his first World War II mission, he spent some time with the guy who immortalized that idea in the movies.

During the war, Col. Riggs learned to fly both B-17 and B-24 bombers with Hollywood legend Jimmy Stewart in the cockpit beside him. Stewart, who took a long break from acting to fight in the war, was a flight instructor, before later flying combat missions. Riggs, a longtime Tulsan, learned from Stewart well. As the pilot of a B-24 bomber, he completed 50 combat missions in Europe during the war. A decorated World War II veteran, and retired lieutenant colonel in the Air Force Reserves, Clarence Edward "Ed" Riggs Jr. died March 19. He was 88.

Col. Riggs and his famous flight instructor became fast friends. Because of the persistence of autograph seekers, Stewart generally steered clear of the nightclub scene, as did Riggs, who did not drink. "Jimmy wanted to be treated like just another soldier," said Greg Riggs, Ed Riggs' son, a retired Air Force colonel.

"He and Dad were the only ones who didn't go to the club, and they spent a lot of evenings together. They had many conversations in their quarters. Dad always considered Jimmy Stewart a friend."

At age 21, Riggs became the youngest member of his B-24 crew, and the highest ranking. His youthful mettle was tested. Bombers were frequent targets of enemy fighters and anti-aircraft guns. Once, in mid-flight, a piece of flak hit the cockpit and stuck in the heel of Riggs' boot. His daughter, Linda Boyd, still has the piece of metal. "It was the closest Dad ever came to a Purple Heart, and the closest he wanted to come," she said.

The respect that Riggs' mates developed for him showed, especially during one mission. "Winging homeward, despite heavy damage and two lost engines, Riggs advised his crew to bail out when they were over friendly territory, and could be picked up.

Greg Riggs said, "They asked Dad, 'What are you going to do?' And he said, 'I'm going to try to take this thing in.' And they said, 'We're staying with you.' I think it showed how much they trusted him."

After ordering them all to the plane's rear for the attempted landing, Riggs was able to bring the battered aircraft to a skidding stop, his son said.

Riggs was awarded five Air Medals and other decorations during the war, but it's probably the diary he brought home that his family treasures the most. His detailed entries reveal exactly what he was doing each day.

On March 19, 1944, for instance, his plane dropped 40 incendiary bombs on Graz, Austria.

*(Article courtesy of Tulsa World)*

