CERIGNOLA CONNECTION

455th Bomb Group Association Newsletter

Spring, 2004 – Editor, Craig Ward, 813 Peterstow Drive, Euless, Texas 76039
(817) 540-1068 aphp@comcast.net

455th BG REVISITS BIRTHPLACE ... OBSERVANCE SHOWCASES CANNON AFB

(Article courtesy of *Mach Meter*, Cannon AFB newspaper, 9/19/03)

Media representatives from New Mexico and West Texas descended on Cannon last week to observe the Sept. 11 and POW/MIA ceremonies and to tour the base as part of the second annual Media Day.

"I think dialogue between the base and the public is essential," said 27th Fighter Wing Commander, Col. Robert Yates. "It's extremely important because that's what the American system is built on."

Yates started off the day by conducting a wing mission briefing for the media. He explained to the reporters the way the 27th Fighter Wing has become, and continues to be, the Air Force's most lethal wing.

"We came back from a deployment to Operation Iraqi Freedom with zero scratches to planes and no scratches to our people.

(See Clovis, page 4)

Editor's note: A correction to the "Final Flight" tribute to Tom Ramey in the Fall, 2003 CC newsletter is noted in the letter from Mrs. Ramey below:

Dear Editor,

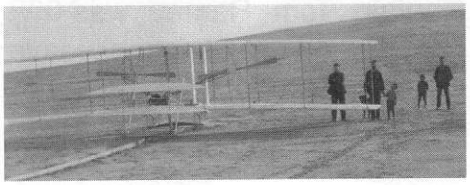
My family and I thank the 455th BG sincerely for the tribute to Tom in the last Cerignola Connection.

The C.C. was near and dear to Tom's heart. He took his work as Editor very seriously and was always willing to help 455th members when they wrote or called.

I have a favor to ask of you. Could you place a note in the next C.C. that we have three (3) children - not two (2) - Jeanne, Tom and Dan and six (6) grandchildren. I thank you so very much.

All the Best,
Pearl Ramey

DECEMBER 17, 2003 ... 100th ANNIVERSARY OF POWERED FLIGHT !



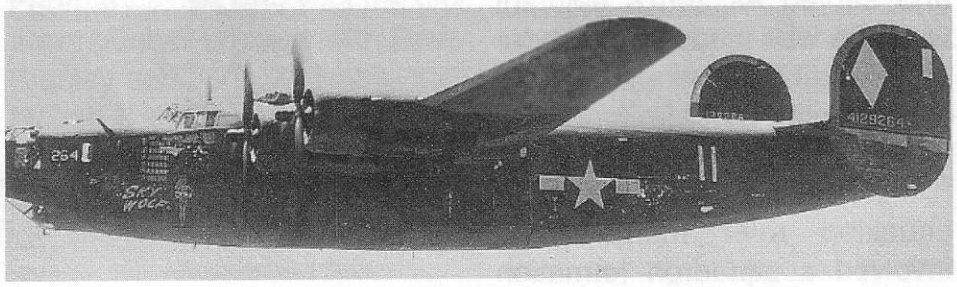
Dear Editor,

Today, December 17, 2003, is the 100th anniversary of powered flight. On this day, 60 years ago, I was flying from Trinidad to Belem, Brazil, on the way to Africa and Italy. Sixty years almost seems like yesterday.

Good health and best wishes to all the members of the 455th BG Association.

Col. Ed Riggs (740)

***Editor's Note: Photo below is Col. Ed Riggs returning to San Giovanni from his 50th mission in the left seat of his "office",* Sky Wolf.**



Dear Editor,

Congratulations on your first issue as editor of the Cerignola Connection. The Tom Ramey obituary was well written and very touching.

I was not a member of the 455th, but I had the privilege of serving with Tom during the Korean conflict. We developed a close friendship that lasted until his death in April, 2003.

The first direct, one-on one contact I had with Tom was when we were stationed at Dow Air Force Base, Bangor, Maine. I was an Airman First Class. Captain Tom Ramey was my CO. During my Christmas leave in 1951, I proposed marriage to a young lady. It was required that I get permission from my CO before the happy day could take place. I recall vividly my nervousness as I presented myself to Captain Ramey and requested permission to take the huge step. Fortunately, permission was granted, and 51 years later, I am still sharing a roof with the same lady.

After being released from active duty in 1953, Tom and I returned to our ANG unit in Milwaukee, WI. After I had reached the rank of M/Sgt, I had just about decided to leave the ANG program. Tom encouraged me to stay and apply for a commission, which I did. I was commissioned a 2nd Lt. in 1956, and served as Tom's adjutant when he was made commander of the unit. Thanks to Tom, I stayed in the program for a total of 30 years.

An event that he and I chuckled over many times involved a squadron formation which was my responsibility to form. After getting the 200 men into the proper formation, I was to report to Tom, give him a snappy salute, and say: "Sir, the squadron is formed". Tom was to return my salute and order: "Pass in review." Tom and his staff were in a position out of hearing range of the troops so, when I reported to him, instead of reporting that the squadron was formed, I saluted and said: "Sir, your fly is open." In the over 50 years that I knew and enjoyed Tom Ramey, that is the first and only time that he was totally bewildered as he mentally debated whether to return the salute or check his zipper. (Incidentally, the fly was closed).

Our relationship and friendship continued on into civilian life and I hired Tom and his advertising agency to handle the creative marketing effort for several companies that I was associated with.

How I cherish the memories of this fine man.

Sincerely,
Roger Zwieg



Can You Help?

Dear Editor,

My crew and I were shot down over Odertal on Oct. 12, 1944 and we lost half of our crew. We were on our second mission and never even knew the name of our plane.

My co-pilot and instructor was Lt John Noske. Does anyone in the 741st remember John?

Thanks.

Walt Shostack, Dayton, Ohio
Email: Boyar0711@woh.rr.com

Can You Help?

Dear Editor,

I'm desperately trying to figure out why kamikaze pilots wore helmets."

Dave Edison

Can You Help?

Dear Editor,

I am William T. Dixon searching for buddies. I was in the 741st squadron in Italy in 1944. I have lost contact with my crew member Tom Conroy - last address was in Miami, FL., P.O. Box 303121. If you can help me locate him, please email me at Carolddixon@aol.com.

Thanks.

Military Wisdom

"It is generally inadvisable to eject directly over the area you just bombed."

-U.S. Air Force Manual

455TH BOMB GROUP ASSOCIATION, INC.
P.O. BOX 149
CASTROVILLE, TX. 78009

PRESIDENT
William B. Gemmill, II
Lt. Col. USAF Ret.
11294 Richford Lane
Spring Hill, FL. 34609
VICE PRESIDENT
Rodrick W. Clarke
Col. USAF Ret.
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Gus H. Wendt Jr.
Lt. Col. USAF Ret.
Ph. 210-677-0773
SECRETARY
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S/Sgt USSAAF
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FINAL FLIGHTS

Col. Louie O Hansen passed away December 19, 2003. Col. Hansen was one of the original individuals that helped to organize the 455th Bomb Group Association. He became the first Executive Director/Treasurer of the Association and remained in that position until 1997.

Lou served in WWII as a tailgunner on a B-24 in the 455th Bomb Group. He was chosen for a Chief of Staff Visit of European Bases in 1965 and to attend the National War College in 1972. He retired as a Colonel from the Air Force Reserves in 1985.

John Douglas Smith died in July, 2003. Smith, who was lead Pilot, Operation Officer and Squadron Commander of the 740th and 743rd squadrons, flew 35 missions over Germany, Romania, Bulgaria and France between May 1944 and April 1945. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for action over France on June 25, 1944; won a Purple Heart and Air Medals, and ended the war as a Major.

Burton E. Hewett, nose gunner with Frank Hosimer on "Ten Hits and a Miss" (741), died on July 24, 2003 after a short illness.

S/Sgt. Reginald D. Bennett 11101448, passed away in Eureka, Montana, on 15, February, 2004. He was the ball turret gunner on crew with Dave Frauley and John W. Nash.

M/Sgt. Cyril Martin (742) of Ft. Worth, Texas took his final flight September 4, 2003.

George McChord, (741), died September 19, 2003

LT. Col. John J. Van Lent (741), 93, died November 18, 2003, at home in Muscatine, Ia.

S/Sgt. William F. Bowles, Jr. (741) passed away April 3, 2002. Sgt. Bowles was nose gunner and armor instructor on B-24 Ole Soldier / Rain Check.

Raider "Ray" Earle Ramstad, Sr. (742) took his final flight January 20, 2003 in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Tina Capocefalo, beloved wife of Mario Capocefalo, passed away in Cerignola February 5, 2004.

Can You Help?

Dear Editor,

I have been trying to contact a friend of my dad's (the late S/Sgt Wm. F. Bowles) by the name of Bob Armstrong (ball turret gunner, 741st), who wrote a book about the group called "Angel on our Wing". Dad sent him some information for the book. I cannot find the book anywhere. I thought Mr. Armstrong would have an email or physical address that one of your readers could forward to me. Any help would be greatly appreciated.

Mark W. Bowles

Editor's note: If you can help Mr. Bowles, forward the information to the Editor (see front page for contact info). I will see that Mr. Bowles receives it.

(Clovis, cont. from page 1)

That's a direct result of our training efforts here at home," Yates said.

The Sept. 11 and POW/MIA ceremonies were next before heading out to the 27th Security Forces K-9 Kennel, where the reporters were treated to a military working dog demonstration.

"That's one of the coolest things I've ever seen," said Amarillo's Angie Bruss of KAMR Channel 4. "I've seen these dogs a lot but I've never seen what they are capable of. It's kind of scary."

Questions were asked by the reporters about duties, the wing mission, deployments and a host of other topics.

"I liked this," said Tech. Sgt. Ray Ebron, 27th Security Forces kennel master. "It gives us a chance to show the public what we do and show off our dogs too."

After lunch at the Pecos Trail dining facility, the group headed to the 524th Fighter Squadron for a quick demonstration of the kinds of missions the "Hounds of Heaven" conducted during Operation Iraqi Freedom. While there, media members tried out night vision goggles that pilots wear when flying night missions.

"Getting along with the media is important for us," said Lt. Col. Tom Berghoff, 524th Fighter Squadron Commander. "We get to show off men, women and aircraft that might not get noticed otherwise."

The tour ended with a look at the flight line maintenance facilities.

However, the mood of the day never strayed far from the earlier ceremonies.

"The way we've operated as a squadron, a wing, an air force and even a nation has changed," Yates said. "With Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Noble Eagle, we've taken part in all of those, so we are forever linked to September 11th.

A group of men and machines arrived in Clovis, at what was then Clovis Army Air Field (AAF), in May 1943. By all accounts, there was nothing really to see and certainly nothing to do.

They knew there was a war on, so they trained. They learned to fly and fight in the B-24 Liberator heavy bomber and, eventually, helped flatten Hitler.

Recently, three of those men returned to modern day Cannon to dedicate a bronze plaque to the men who trained at the base and to relive those days when the rumble of radial engines filled the air instead of the roar of afterburners.

One of those men, Jack Lancaster, stayed in Clovis after the war and became a different kind of heroic figure. Lancaster liked the Clovis area so much he went to Eastern New Mexico University in Portales when the war ended and then became a teacher, and later a principal. His last job, before he retired, was principal at Ranchvale Elementary.

"It was like coming full circle in Clovis," Lancaster said. "We taught replacement bomber crews at Clovis Airfield and here I was, 40 years later, teaching the kids of men and women who worked at Cannon."

One of Lancaster's fellow fly-boys, Lt. Col. (Ret.) Gus Wendt Jr., was instrumental in organizing the reunion. "It was great to see the other guys again," he said. "The last time we were all together in Clovis, this base was a lot different."

The 455th Bomb Group, made up of four squadrons, left Clovis AAF in July, 1943. In that short time, the men who worked and sweated in the New Mexico summer made friendships that have lasted a lifetime.

"There's just something about men doing a job in a time of war," Lancaster said. "You see it in any conflict from our war up to the Gulf War. Men and women who don't even know each other have a common bond because of their war."

Lancaster was a sheet metal worker, repairing damaged aircraft after missions. Wendt was a pilot. The 455th flew bombing missions all over Europe, including the infamous raids over the refineries in Ploesti, Romania, in which 54 of 177 B-24's from different bomb groups were shot down. Many of the planes Lancaster worked on didn't return.

"You had to learn not to get too close to the crews or it would hurt too much," he remembered.

While the few days spent at Cannon were full of fond memories for the three men

(See Clovis, next page)

(Clovis, continued from Page 4)

involved, it was also a time for current Cannon members to learn and appreciate what their Air Force forefathers had to endure to lay the foundation for today's global force.

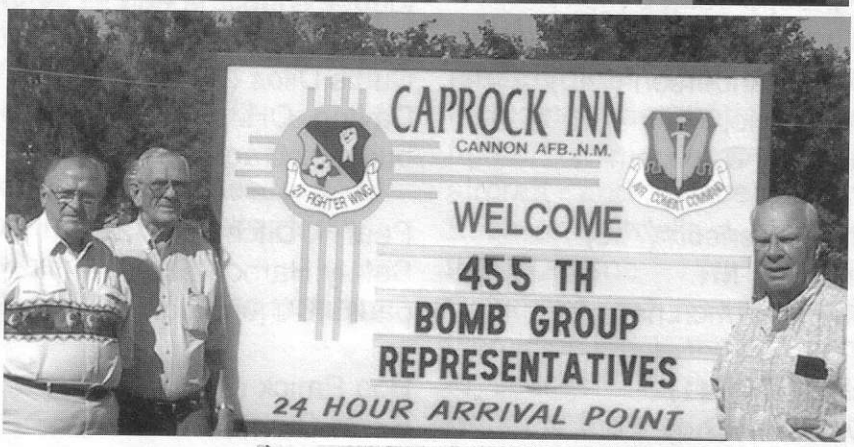
"I wish every person in our wing could have attended," said Col. Mark Atkinson, 27th Maintenance Group Cdr. "The stories of World War II, the missions they flew, the training they endured, and the sacrifices they made are inspirational to those who wear our uniform today."

Recently, a bronze plaque was dedicated inside the base operations center at Cannon in memory of the 455th Bomb Group.

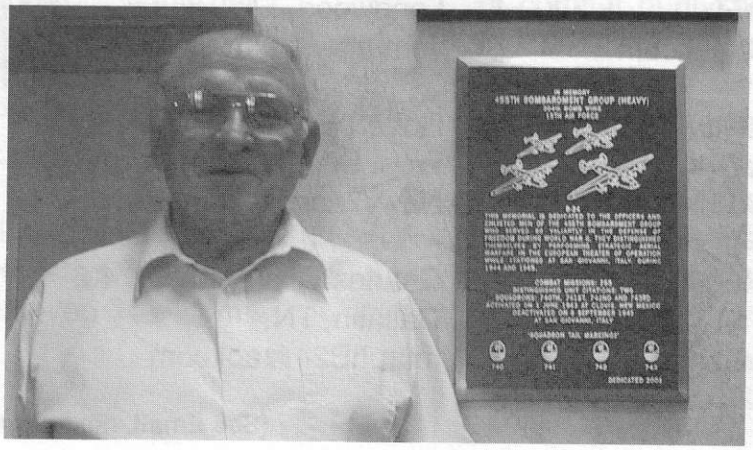
Lancaster said that was quite an honor for him.

"This place was a two lane dirt road with no trees when I got here in 1943," he said. "To see it today, you have to have great admiration for what these men and women do today and I deeply appreciate them taking the time to give us a memorial. I almost got completely lost on base because it's changed so much."











455th BG E-Mail Roster

Below is a list of e-mail addresses of 455th members that were sent to us for publication in the Cerignola Connection. If you want your e-mail address included in this roster, please send it to the Editor at 813 Peterstow Dr., Euless, TX. 76039, phone 817-540-1068, or email aphp@comcast.net.

Harry W. Anderson (740)
San Antonio, TX.
pomganny@aol.com

Gene V. Benson (740)
Livingston, MT.
dayflyguy@mcn.net

Jack Blum (741)
New Port Richey, FL.
jblum15677@aol.com

Winfield S. Bowers (741)
Mount Dora, FL.
winbow20@aol.com

Marlin L. (Bud) Brown (742)
Lake Placid, FL.
barbud@htn.net

Robert Caldwell (741st)
Prescott Valley, AZ.
re7306@aol.com

Saul L. Cayne (742)
Boynton Beach, FL.
sasl/51@aol.com

Howard Cooper,
Staton Island, NY.
howgladcoop@worldnet.att.net

Robert (Bob) Collette,
St. Petersburg, FL.
dotybob1@juno.co

James P. Daly (740)
Aberdeen, NJ.
panadaly@aol.com

Jack Dekker (743)
Grand Rapids, MI.
jdek457@att.net

Theodore Deppe (741)
Bloomington, IN.
tdeppe@indiana.edu

Curtis Diles (740)
Dayton, OH.
budynez@aol.com

Paul H. Ditchett (742)
Safety Harbor, FL.
paul546@juno.com

Bob Emick (741)
Battle Creek, MI.
refemick@aol.com

James A. Fedewa (743)
Dunnellon, FL.
jcfedewa@cs.com

William B. Gemmill (740)
Spring Hill, FL.
wgemmill@tampabay.rr.com

William C. Graves (742)
Jacksonville, FL.
wgraves210@aol.com

L. Harvey Hewit (743)
Haverford, PA.
LHHEW@aol.com

Eugene M. Hurley (742)
Calvert City, KY.
ghurley5@juno.net

Robert E. Johnson (743)
Salem, OR.
rjohn167@cs.com

Thomas L. Kablack (742)
Crown Point, IN.
techmart@mail.icongrp.com

Milton Kaplan (743)
Scottsdale, AZ.
miltkaplan1@cox.net

Erling Kindem (742)
Farmington, MN.
erlingk@aol.com

Jack Lancaster (742)
Clovis, NM.
mandj@3lefties.com

George L. Liddle (742)
Sun City, CA.
olgeorge@ez2.net

John L. Larma (740)
Omaha, NE.
jlarma@uswest.net

Dave Matheson (742)
Harrison, AR.
ihatebugs@cox-internet.com

C.E. McMullen (741)
Tomball, TX.
cmcmullenjr@aol.com

Vic Murray (743)
Longwood, FL.
vemurray@earthlink.net

Robert E. Newberg (743)
West Des Moines, IA.
Newy7aces@home.com

Charles Oltarzewski (740)
Gallatin, TN.
murphB24@aol.com

(See Email, next page)

(Email addresses continued)

Peter Payant (743)
Phoenix, AZ.
pbpayant@cox.net

Jack Phelps (740)
Dallas, TX.
606@ix.netcom.com

Roland J Pepin
327 Al Harvey Road
Stonington, CT 06378
virpep4400@aol.com

Wesley Powell (740)
Seabrook, TX.
wesjulia@gateway.net

Bob Probst (741)
West Columbia, SC.
rtprobst@aol.com

Sid Schoengold (740)
Monroe TWP, NJ.
harsid1@juno.com

Gus R. Seefluth (742)
Lebanon, OH.
gus@go-concepts.com

Walt Shostack (741)
Dayton, OH.
boyar0711@woh.rr.com

Edward G. Spencer (740)
East Haven, CT.
ebnezr@webtv.net

Charles E. Stark (740)
Pittsburg, PA.
carbchar@comcast.net

(Dr.) Stanley Vogelfang (741)
Houston, TX.
stanvog@aol.com

John R. Worster (742).
haw72@aol.com.

Craig Ward (Assoc. 740)
Euless, TX.
aphp@comcast.net

James A Cowden (742)
Tuscaloosa, AL.
jcowden@earthlink.net

Bill Crawford
Westerner01@earthlink.net

Charles H. Rosenberg (741)
chrose3@comcast.net.
11106 Marcliff Road
Rockville, MD 20852

Mike McFadden (Assoc. 743)
(Son-in-Law of Austin Herrity, Navigator, 743rd BS)
b24_455thbg@yahoo.com

NATIONAL D-DAY MUSEUM PLANS TO EXPAND

Expansion plans at the National D-Day Museum in New Orleans got a boost this week.

The plan: To triple its size, now 70,500 square feet, to include exhibits on all theaters of combat during World War II. Most of the museum now is devoted to the war in Europe, with a wing covering the Pacific.

Fund Drive: Estimated cost of the expansion is $150 million, and the first big private gift was announced in Washington this week--$1 million from Entergy Corp.

www.ddaymuseum.org

NEW AIR & SPACE COMPANION CENTER TO OPEN IN DECEMBER, 2003

The Smithsonian Natl. Air & Space Museum will soon have a new companion at Dulles Airport. The Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center, located south of Dulles' main terminal, will provide added space to display the Smithsonian Institute's aviation and aerospace artifacts.

The 760,057-square-foot center will house more than 200 aircraft and 135 spacecraft, including aerobatic planes, fighter jets, reconnaissance aircraft and space shuttles. Each artifact tells a story, from the Cessna 180 Spirit of Columbus (the plane piloted by Geraldine Mock, the first woman to successfully fly around the world) to the Boeing B-29 Enola Gay, the military aircraft from which the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima.

Currently under construction, the Udvar-Hazy Center was scheduled to open in December, 2003. The opening date was chosen to coincide with the 100th anniversary of the Wright Brother's first powered flight.

Website: www.nasm.si.edu

Military Wisdom

"Aim towards the Enemy."
-Instruction printed on US Rocket Launcher

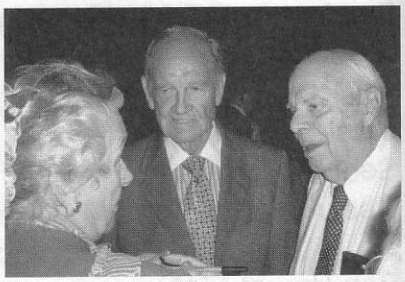
455th Bomb Group Association Reunion
October, 2003 ... Orlando, Florida



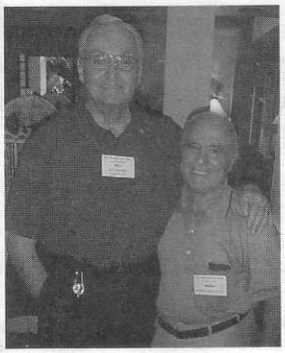












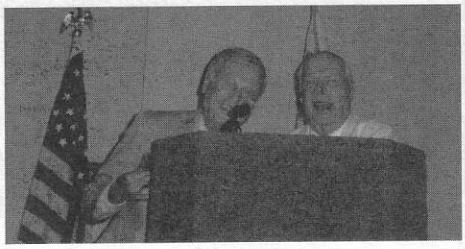


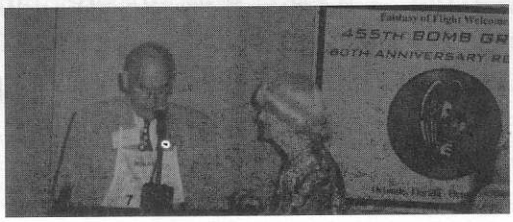














Mario Capocefalo's Speech at 455th BG Reunion in Orlando (Saturday Night Banquet, October 11, 2003)

I had to write what to say because I am afraid that in my excitement, it may make me unable to say how I do feel facing you after so many years. Let me just say I can't believe I'm here tonight!

From January, 1944, to July, 1945, I lived for more than 18 months at San Giovanni Air Base. I was only 13, hungry and cold at the beginning, but soon the young fliers took care of me. My mother and three sisters worked hard every day doing their laundry; washing, pressing and starching the shirts the young fliers wore. They also gave me some clothes, a large pair of shoes, and food, so that I would not suffer from the cold and starvation. They taught me to be honest, appreciate the freedom and have my own personality. I still remember how much my English improved day by day, thanks, and God willing, to the crews and the many times they washed my mouth out with that damn Lifebuoy soap when I swore or said dirty words.

Life at the base was the same for all the squadrons of both 454th & 455th and they all lived terrible moments and hard situations. The base was so large and only a few times I walked from the 737th to the 443rd squadron. Some fliers had friends from the same hometown in the states and I was glad to go with them from one group to the other. I can't remember the names of the crew members of the 443rd who became close friends with me. They learned the place where my family lived and several times they enjoyed visiting my family and drinking a kind of orange liquor made by my mother.

Soon after winter, 1944, the crew flew more missions and my task was to calculate the debriefing time. When the crews came back to the tent, they enjoyed drinking fresh water from the canteen which I filled from the tank. They said it was better than the doughnuts and lemonade from the Red Cross ladies! Usually, I placed the clean laundry on the cot, opened, so they could enjoy looking at it before they placed it back into their bags. After so many years, I still can't explain how I felt when the crew was shot down and the clean laundry stayed on the cot till the next day when a special team came to collect the belongings to send back to their families. The leader of the team wanted to give me the clean laundry because I hadn't been paid, but I always refused to accept it. My mother advised me never to take anything from crews that didn't come back from missions. She said we only lost little money, the American mothers lost their sons.

Some of you remember the worst mission of MOOSBIERBAUM, the 26th of June, 1944. The 455th was the leading group of the 68th mission, with other groups of 304 wing. That was the day I lost many good friends of different squadrons.

At the end of the war, both groups left the base. I was glad you all went back home, but, I then felt like a lost person. Yes, 18 months living at the base changed a 13 year old boy into an experienced adult man. I had no more friends in town as they were still boys compared to me. I spent most of the time riding my bike to the base, watching the big change. The two runways, which housed the many B24's, looked like a desert to me. I was so young and unable to understand why so many Americans gave us so much without expecting anything in return.

In the winter of 1946, I left Cerignola and went to Rome searching for a job. I started as a dishwasher in a small restaurant, but thanks to my Yankees' English, I had the chance to work in small hotels, and soon after, to first class hotels. I had to improve my English, learn the cockney British, plus the French language for all the hotel services. As a result, I became promoted to Head Waiter in 1952, and was requested by the most deluxe hotel in the Capital.

In 1962, I understood that to have a career as Hotel Manager I would have to learn German too. So, I had to leave my family and go to Germany for the first summer season.

(See Mario, next page)

(Mario, continued)

This helped me to start working as a Room Service Manager at the new Hilton Hotel in Rome. I lived in Rome for over 40 years, but every time I went back to Cerignola to visit my parents and relatives, I always wanted to go to see the big changes in the former San Giovanni Air Base.

I ended my hotel career as Hilton Night Manager and retired in 1986 realizing my wife's wishes to go back to Cerignola and only do some consultant management duties with the Sheraton in Bali, Capri and lastly, teaching hotel staff in Egypt on the Red Sea.

Some of you have visited Italy and Cerignola lately and realized how the city has become quite chaotic with lots of traffic, busy and overstressed people, with lots of modern life problems. I only drive 5 miles to be alone under the shade of the pine trees of the former 454th Headquarters, looking down the valley with hundreds of acres of vineyards, olive groves and lazy flocks of sheep in the pastures. It is there that I find my spiritual retreat.

In the spring, the mild wind weaves through the green ears of grain. I blink my eyes and go back in time remembering and praying for all those wonderful fliers who lived at the base and lost their lives in the war around Europe.

Since I retired from Rome, the Mayors of Cerignola have wanted me to be a guide and interpreter when different associations of veterans groups officially come to visit the former bases. This allowed me to meet the very dear Lou Hansen and his lady, plus the U.S Ambassador to the FAO in Rome, Senator George McGovern, and his lady. Historian Stephen Ambrose has also visited my home and interviewed me for his book *"The Wild Blue"*, and Tom Brokow wrote some about me in his best seller *"The Greatest Generation Speaks"*. I was lucky to become good friends of the late Tom Ramey. I miss him very much. Often I talked with him and his lady while he was in the hospital. He mailed me all the Cerignola Connections from the beginning to the last edition as well.

Only when Lou Hansen gave me the 455th book "*The Flight of the Vulgar Vultures*", did I learn who the guy was that scared me, and all the base, when he got drunk and burned the grain storage with gasoline causing a big explosion. We all thought it was a German Bomber bombing the field. I feel sad not meeting this guy, the good Lord keep him in good peace, but if he was here, I would have something to tell him! You all know him as he was the group Deputy Command Officer Hugh Graff.

During the year I spent Saturday mornings, when students from high school wished to come and learn something about life at the former base, telling them to whom they owe their freedom, welfare and prosperity. Twice, from the Town Hall, I was authorized to do the Exposition of the American Fliers in Cerignola, the last, and most outstanding one, on June 1st of this last year. The Mayor allowed me to have the Exposition for one week in the Main Lobby of our Theater. (I have a video tape with some of the ceremony). Civilian, military, and religious authorities attended the opening ceremony in the theater and the U.S. Ambassador sent a delegate and wrote a nice letter. (I have this documentation with me to leave to the Association.)

It is not easy for me to explain the political situation in Cerignola. They change the Mayor often and this makes me mad because they can't keep their promises or help me realize my dream to set up a small museum of the bomb groups stationed around Cerignola. It was nice to have the exposition, but cost quite a lot for new frames, transportation and new glass to replace the broken frames during transportation. Thanks to the money both the 455th and 454th mailed me, I can now hire some helpers to clean the chapel of San Giovanni inside so it will look like a small memorial with both plaques hanging in it.

Last year, in May, a big storm pulled down the iron gate so I had to hire two blacksmiths with an electric generator to weld it back up.

(See Mario, next page)

(Mario, continued)

I often talk to and struggle with the authorities and tell them that I will never lose hope and will always have good will to realize my dream of a museum. As long as the good Lord gives me life, it is necessary for me to save the loving memories for all the wonderful American young men that gave us their life to make us free.

Thank you for your kindness naming me Life Honorary Member of the 455th. This gives me great joy and I am so proud. Please don't consider me just an honorary life member. I wish you to consider me one of you. Anyone who wishes to come to Cerignola, just advise me in time and I'll be happy to show you around. Thank you, thank you. God bless you all and give you long life.

Best Wishes,
Mario Capocefalo

Editor's Note #1:
Mario's lovely wife Tina passed away February 5, 2004. Our deepest sympathies and condolences go out to Mario and his family from all the members of the 455th BG Assoc.

Editor's Note #2 :
The following appeared in the Spring 2003 CC newsletter. In case you didn't see it, this is a very good summary of Mario's efforts to keep the memories of the American airmen of the 15th AF alive for future generations:

Mario who? You may not remember the name Mario Capocefalo, but you might remember the name Mario. Mario was one of our "tent boys" when we were stationed at Cerignola; he was then 13 years old. At our last reunion, Craig Ward showed a video he made during his visit to Cerignola, where he was escorted around by Mario, and was shown the museum Mario has developed using pictures and many other articles about our sojourn at San Giovanni in 1944 and 1945.

Mario, with his most helpful assistant, Giovanni Montingtelli, and the assistance of Professor Rosella Rinaldi, the General Manager of Culture and History at the Cerignola library, have assembled a memorable tribute to "The Americans in Cerignola". Parades, ceremonies and exhibitions were held from 1 June through 6 June, 2002. This event was covered extensively by the press and Italian TV. The Italian Army band from Bari performed in the main squares of the town. The event was attended by many local citizens, military and religious leaders.

Mr. Giannanatempo, Mayor of Cerignola, and Professor Rinaldi, provided introductions to the many exhibits. The US Ambassador sent a special delegation to the event. Mario has been interviewed by Tom Brokaw and Stephan Ambrose to get information for their books.

In addition, the US Ambassador wrote Mario a special letter of appreciation for his efforts.

The 455th Bomb Group Association is "Dedicated to Preserving Its Memory and Heritage". The Officers of the Association felt that Mario deserved this recognition for his efforts. Mario Capocefalo was made an "Honary Life Member of the Association".

Thank You, Mario, for a "job well done"!



From a 455th BG Associate Member ...

Dear Editor,

I just received the Summer Cerignola Connection to see the unfortunate news about Tom Ramey.

He was a fantastic guy to me and instrumental in helping piece together my father-in-law's service history (my father-in-law passed on very little information to his family). My father-in-law, a navigator, flew his first mission with Tom on 8/3/44 (it was Tom's 42nd). As you know it was that mission on which Tom skillfully ditched in the Adriatic, saving the entire crew. My father-in-law was in the same room as Tom in Stalag Luft III, and was a close companion up until separation during the forced march to S.L. XIIID and then S.L. VIIA. But to me it was a miracle that I found my father-in-law's pilot after 56 years. And Tom was extremely gracious in sharing his personal story with me so I could piece together parts of my father-in-law's story that are not recorded in public records.

During the course of my research, I was sent various pieces of information and pictures from 455th vets. I'll go back through those records to see if there's anything that might be interesting for the readers of the newsletter.

Are you considering publishing the email addresses of Associate Members of the Cerignola Connection? If so, I enjoy helping people out with their research questions whenever I can (particularly for the July-Aug '44 timeframe, the focus of my research). Thanks!

Mike McFadden
(Son-in-Law of Austin Herrity, Navigator, 743rd BS)
b24_455thbg@yahoo.com

Editor's Note: The following letter was received from the 454th BG Association after the 455th BG Orlando reunion in October. A discussion was held at the reunion concerning having future "Joint-but-Separate" reunions with the 454th BG. Each reunion would be a separate event, but they would be held at the same venue at the same time in order to take advantage of volume rates for hotel rooms, activities, etc.

Dear Craig,

Last Saturday, I spoke with Frank Lashinsky regarding issues related to holding the 454th and 455th reunion in 2005 at the same time and in the same place.

He also mentioned that some 455th members have shown an interest in attending the 454th reunion in 2004. He requested that I send you pertinent information so that it could be included in the newsletter you prepare for your group.

First let me say that we welcome any of our 455th friends and I am happy to provide the following info.:

The 454th's 364 mission reunion will be held at the Marriott Houston North at Greensport from October 4th thru October 10th, 2004. Any 455th members who are interested should contact Ted Day, President, Armed Forces Reunions - P.O. Box 11327, Norfolk, VA 23517, Tel. 1-800-562-7226 - Fax 757-627-3807 or e-mail: ted@afri.com so that registration can be properly made and controlled through his office.

I hope that this information is of help and please feel free to contact me by mail at 41 Shirley St. Wading River NY 11792 or call 631-929-5479.

Sincerely,
Ed. Di Nunzio
Dir. & 2nd Vice President
Chair, Memorials
Cc: Ted Dey - Pres. AFR. Inc.
Vince Makowski, Pres. 454

Do You Recognize ...?

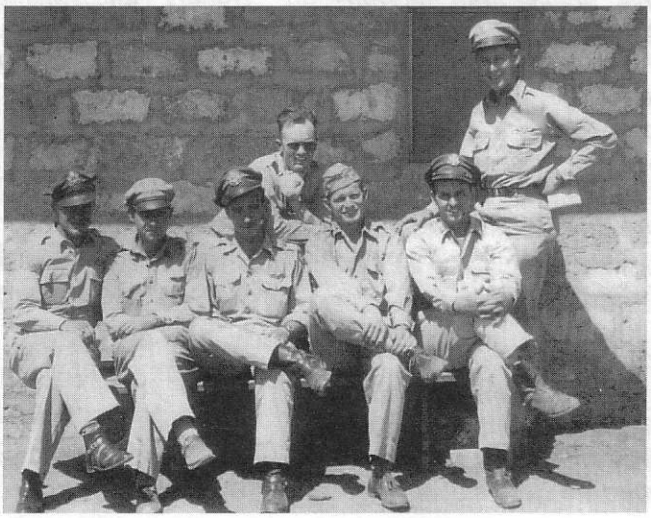
Dear Editor,

I received the summer 2003 edition of the Cerignola Connection recently. Thanks for taking over as editor.

In glancing over the photos on page 4, I found a picture of me in photo # 4 (cross your legs). I am sitting and am the person in the middle or third from the left. It looks as if it was taken at the airfield in Cerignola. It has been a long time and I'm sorry that I don't know the others in the picture.

Sincerely,
Theodore Deppe

Editor's Note: Thanks, Mr. Deppe, for the note and information. After visiting the airfield in 2001, Editor's guess is the building behind you is either the 455th BG briefing room or HQTRS. See the photo below.



IT IS THE VETERAN

It is the VETERAN, not the preacher, who has given us freedom of religion.

It is the VETERAN, not the reporter, who has given us freedom of the press.

It is the VETERAN, not the poet, who has given us freedom of speech.

It is the VETERAN, not the campus organizer, who has given us freedom to assemble.

It is the VETERAN, not the lawyer, who has given us the right to a fair trial.

It is the VETERAN, not the politician, who has given us the right to vote.

It is the VETERAN, who salutes the Flag, who serves under the Flag.

Military Wisdom

"Cluster bombing is very, very accurate. The bombs are guaranteed to always hit the ground."

- U.S.A.F.

Editor's note: This is the first of a series of bio's I hope the membership will enjoy ... the resumes and careers of the leaders and membership of the 455th BG. All veterans of the 455th BG have had interesting experiences and careers, and I believe these stories should be shared . Thanks to all of you who have and will share your stories with the readers of the Cerignola Connection.

BIOGRAPHY of MAJOR GENERAL EUGENE L. HUDSON (741)

Major General Eugene L. Hudson is Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff, Systems and Logistics, Headquarters U.S. Air Force, Washington, D.C.

General Hudson was born on October 6, 1921, in Los Angeles, California, where he graduated from Fairfax High School in 1940, and attended Los Angeles City College. He enlisted in the Army Air Corps in 1942, attended aviation cadet training, and graduated from flying school in May, 1943, with his pilot wings and commission as Second Lieutenant. He earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Engineering at the University of Southern California in February, 1949, a Master's degree from The George Washington University in 1963, and graduated from the Air War College in 1963.

General Hudson is a veteran Bomber Pilot and flew combat missions during World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. During World War II, he was a B -24 Pilot and went to Italy with the 455th Bomb Group, where he flew 36 combat missions over Europe. During the Korean War, he was a B-29 Pilot and Maintenance Officer, flying combat missions over North Korea. General Hudson had two tours in Vietnam/Thailand: the first flying B-52 and KC-135 missions out of Guam and Thailand; the second as Assistant Director of Operations of the 7th AF and later as Director of Intelligence for both 7th AF and the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV).

In October, 1949, he attended the Atomic Energy Training Course and the Airborne Electronic Maint. Course at Keesler AFB, Mississippi. In September, 1950, he was assigned to the 43rd Bomb Wing at Davis Mountain AFB as a Pilot and Armament and Electronics Maintenance Officer. In December, 1952, he was assigned to the 98th Bomb Wing Yokota Air Base, Japan as a B-29 Pilot and Armament and Electronic Officer.

General Hudson returned to the United States in August, 1953, as Commander of the Armament and Electronics Maintenance Squadron for the 320th Bombardment Wing, and as the Staff Maintenance Officer with the 12th Air Division at March Air Force Base, California. He moved to Dyess Air Force Base, Texas, in July, 1956, to become Director of Operations, 819th Air Division, and later assumed the position of Director of Operations, 96th Bombardment Wing. In April, 1958, he became Chief of the Missile Program Branch, Directorate of Plans, Headquarters Strategic Air Command, Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska.

After graduation from the Air War College in 1963, his assignments included Commander, 400th Combat Support Group, Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska, from July 1963, until September, 1966; Deputy Commander for Maintenance, Headquarters 68th Bombardment Wing, Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, N.C., from September, 1966, to April, 1967; Commander of the 68th Bombardment Wing at Seymour Johnson from April, 1967, to July, 1968; Commander of the 42nd Bombardment Wing, Loring Air Force Base, Maine, from July, 1968, until April, 1970; Commander of the 40th Air Division, Wurtsmith Air Force Base, Michigan, from May, 1970, to February, 1972; Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, Seventh Air Force, Republic of Vietnam, from February to May 1972; Director of Intelligence for Seventh Air Force and Military Assistance Command Vietnam, and later the United States Support Advisory Group (USSAG) in Vietnam and Thailand from May, 1972, to May, 1973.

(See Gen Hudson, next page)

(Gen Hudson, continued)

In June, 1973, he was appointed the Deputy Chief of Staff, Logistics, Headquarters Strategic Air Command, Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska. General Hudson was reassigned to Headquarter U.S. Plans and Programs for the Deputy Chief of Staff, Systems and Logistics, in January, 1975. He assumed the position of Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff, Systems and Logistics, in August, 1975.

His military decorations and awards include the Distinguished Service Metal, Legion of Merit with one oak leaf cluster, Distinguished Flying Cross, Bronze Star Medal, Air Medal with four oak leaf clusters, Joint Service Commendation Medal, Air Force Commendation Medal, Distinguished Unit Citation Emblem, Air Force Outstanding Unit Award Ribbon, and the Republic of Vietnam National Order of Vietnam.

General Hudson is married to the former Pamela Grace Evenden of London, England.

He was promoted to the grade of Major General effective August 1, 1972, with date of rank July 1, 1969.



21 GUN SALUTE

Did you know this? At military funerals, the 21-gun salute stands for the sum of the numbers in the year 1776?

A TRIP BACK TO SAN GIOVANNI

Having been a navigator assigned to the 455th bomb group, 743rd squadron in the spring of 1944, I had long had a desire to visit San Giovanni field once again and renew memories of that long-ago life spent living in a tent in an olive orchard. After retirement, in 1986, my wife and I had hoped to soon make this visit, but it seemed some obstacle to travel, some minor and some major, would always be coming up to prevent it. Finally early in 2002, our son Jim, talked us into planning the trip and agreed to go along with us. This time there were to be no obstacles.

We departed the Seattle airport on May 7th, 2002. Our destination was Rome with a stopover and change of planes in Amsterdam. We arrived in Rome at about 7:00 pm on May 8th. By the time we had checked into our hotel and had a bite to eat we were ready for bed, having been up for about 30 hours.

The following day we spent most of the time touring the Roman Coliseum. We found this visit to be fascinating and we learned much about the nearly 2000 year old historic structure.

The next day we drove the approximately 200 miles to Cerignola, where we were met by Mario Capocefalo, who I had previously contacted and who would be our escort. Much has been previously written about Mario in the *Cerignola Connection* and we found his assistance to be most valuable. He was the perfect host. He met us at the Cerignola exit off the Naples to Bari expressway where we had no problem spotting him as he was waving a large American flag and hugged us all in typical Italian fashion. We toured around the town for the balance of the day, saving the tour of the old 455th bomb group site for the next day. Cerignola seems to now be two distinct areas, the old and the new. The old appears much the same as it was in 1944-45 with the same old crowded and narrow streets with centuries old buildings. The newer portion is basically post World War II era and consists of modern looking apartments built on land that was formerly farm land, much as has been done around many American cities. In 1944, the people were destitute, having lost about everything they had during the Nazi occupation. If not for the assistance given by the allied forces there may have been mass starvation. I was pleased to see that it now appears to be much more modern and prosperous community. Where once children begged for candy and cigarettes on the streets, there are now world wide bank ATM's. The war ended a long time ago.

The following morning we met with Mario and first went to his residence where we met his lovely wife, Tina. They have a beautiful home with a large and well maintained productive garden and orchard. One of his rooms is almost exclusively

(See Trip Back, next page)

devoted to photos and artifacts from the various bomb groups stationed nearby in 1944-45. He hopes to some day see them displayed in a public museum so that future generations will know and appreciate the contributions our allied forces made to the people of this area during the World War II. We spent time reminiscing events from 1944-45. One incident I particularly remembered occurred on April 15th, 1944. We had just arrived as a replacement crew the previous afternoon.

Early in the morning we were awakened by a tremendous explosion. A B-24 from the near-by 454th bomb group had exploded on take-off with a full load of bombs. This pretty well shook up our entire crew since we were not yet used to such things. Mario said he well remembered this event, even the date it had occurred. He was about one hundred yards from the explosion.

"It was the worst day of my life. I was picking up body parts in a bucket for days afterward", he stated. "When I get sad I like to go out to the old base and close my eyes and go back to when I was a boy. I think about how many people got on those planes and it was the last time their feet touched the ground. They say I'm very sentimental but that's the way I feel."

When we left his home we piled into Mario's car. With a U.S. flag and 455th bomb group commemorative sticker affixed to the windshield, he drove us to the old 455th base. We followed the same route I had traveled many times back in 1944. The roadway seemed to be in much better condition than it was then. On each side of it there were fields covered with neat rows of new olive trees, fig trees, grapes, and artichokes. It was much more attractive than I had remembered it being in 1944. We soon arrived at the old group area. Much has changed from 1944. Little evidence is left of the area in the olive orchard where we once had pitched our tents. The old olive trees are pretty much gone and other crops, mainly grains, are planted in their place. The group headquarters building, the briefing room, the base chapel, and other buildings are still there but little is being done to maintain them and they show the effect of years of neglect. The chapel looks pretty dilapidated from the outside but was in surprisingly good condition inside due mainly to Mario's devoted attention. It had an impressive altar and a marble baptismal font. There was a plaque on the wall dedicated to the "Memory of those who made the supreme sacrifice and all who served that we may know God's peace." Where there use to be two one mile long runways is now a field of grain. In spite of all the changes it did bring back a lot of memories of that life there in the long ago past.

After leaving the base we returned to Cerignola and then headed for Sorrento on the Mediterranean coast, where we stayed for two days, touring the coastline to Amalfi. This area is one of the most picturesque coastal areas in the world. The Isle of Capri, where many of our personnel went for R&R, was just a short distance off the coast. We would like to have stayed longer but since our time was somewhat limited, we had to head back to Rome. We visited Pompei and The Abbey at Monte Cassino on our way back. We spent two more days in Rome before boarding our plane.

Though the trip was somewhat tiring, it was a most enjoyable one and it will forever be in our treasured memories. I cannot praise Mario enough for his assistance in making our visit a successful one. He is truly doing a tremendous job in keeping the memories of our stay in Cerignola alive for the generations to come. I know he has extended the same help to numerous other returning veterans. If it weren't for him there would be little hint that the area had once been the base for several thousand of our air force members. I also wish to express my thanks and appreciation to Craig Ward, son of the late Lt. John T. Ward, a pilot in the 740th squadron. He had made a similar trip the previous year and without his advice and encouragement, I might not have made the trip.

Roger V. Caple
2652 Fir
Longview, WA 98632



A FLIGHT TO REMEMBER
By Jim Caple

The extent of my airplane trauma is getting stuck in a middle seat on a four hour flight, and once having to watch both "Maid in Manhattan" and "Two Weeks Notice" on consecutive flights. I don't want to diminish the suffering involved with repeatedly watching Ralph Fiennes describe J-Lo's rear end as "exquisite", but let us consider what the brave men who flew bombing missions during World War II endured.

"The B-24 (bomber) was built like a 1930's Mack Truck, except that it had an aluminum skin that could be cut with a knife. Steven F. Ambrose wrote in *The Wild Blue*, "Steering the four-engine airplane was difficult and exhausting, as there was no power except the pilot's muscles. It had no windshield wipers, so the pilot had to stick his head out the side window to see during a rain. Breathing was possible only by wearing an oxygen mask - cold and clammy, smelling of rubber and sweat - above 10,000 feet in altitude.

"There was no heat, despite temperatures that at 20,000 feet and higher got as low as 40 or 50 degrees below zero. The wind blew through the airplane like a fury, especially from the waist gunners' windows and whenever the bomb bay doors were open. The oxygen mask froze to the wearer's face. If the waistgunners touched their machine gun with bare hands, the skin froze to the metal. Absolutely nothing was done to make the B-24 comfortable for the pilot, the co-pilot or the other eight men in the crew, even though most flights lasted eight hours, sometimes ten or more..."

It also probably should be pointed out that the Germans were trying to shoot the plane out of the sky.

My father, Verle Caple, was a navigator on a B-24 Liberator during WWII, flying multiple bombing raids from his base on Italy's Adriatic coast. His mission targets included Austria and southern Germany, as well as Romania's notorious Ploesti oil fields, a site so heavily defended that a third of the planes failed to return from one terrible raid.

There were 18,300 B-24s manufactured during WWII. That's more than any other American airplane ever made. And of those 18,300, do you know how many B-24's are still flying? Just one. It's called "Dragon and His Tail" and it's lovingly operated by the Collings Foundation, which restored it through thousands of hours of volunteer work (they even painted a naked woman on the nose for authenticity). The good folks with Collings fly the plane all over the country, along with a B-17 Flying Fortress, as a traveling museum.

I've seen ads for their air exhibits for several years, but I never saw them until after they had left the area. After just missing them again on their visit to Seattle last year, I was determined I wouldn't let it happen again. Looking at their website (collingsfoundation.org) I saw when they would be in Seattle this year and bought spots for my dad, my older brother, John, and myself on Sunday's last flight as a late Father's Day present.

It was my father's first flight on a B-24 since his last mission 59 years ago. "I remember that flight well," he said. "The bomb bay doors wouldn't close and we had to fly home with them open."

Yeah, well, I'm sure it wasn't pleasant. But remember, "Maid in Manhattan" played on both legs of my two recent flights. That makes four viewings total.

My father rarely mentioned his war experiences when I was growing up. He is a quiet, strong and uncomplaining man. He rarely shows his emotions, other than muttering whenever his beloved Mariners or Huskies fall behind in a game. (They're going to lose. I just know it," he'll say after Seattle strands two runners in the first inning.)

Like many WWII veterans, he began opening up about a decade ago with the 50th anniversary of D-Day. He began regularly attending reunions of his 455th Bomb group and recounted his memories for Ambrose's book. Last year, we visited the site of his old base in Italy.

(See Flight to Remember, next page)

Maintenance Problem & Solution

P: Mouse in cockpit.
S: Cat installed.

(Flight to Remember, continued)

The day we arrived, my mother fell and cut open her scalp, but she wasn't hurt badly, so it still was a better arrival than it had been for my dad during the war.

That's because the morning after he arrived for his first mission in 1944, a fully loaded bomber exploded on the ground at his base. Days later, they were still picking up pieces of the bodies. My dad flew his first mission soon after the explosion. He was 21.

And I thought it was intimidating walking into Tom Kelly's office after the Twins lost on my first day on the beat.

The Germans surrendered long ago though, so I wasn't too worried about our flight Sunday when we arrived at Boeing Field - until the Collings people required us to sign waivers releasing the foundation from all liability should the plane crash, which is never reassuring prior to boarding a plane.

Neither were the last-minute warnings given in the plane.

"Be careful," the man warned us. "The bomb bay doors were designed to break open if the bombs accidentally fell on them before release, and they'll also break open if you step on them. Obviously, you don't want that to happen while we're flying over the city. So stay on the catwalk. The red panels around the front wheel will break open, if you step on them as well. Stay on the catwalk.

"I'm not saying this to frighten you, but to remind you that this is a working WWII era plane."

"Is it too late to back out?" my brother asked me.

"Yes," I replied.

Deferring to his veteran status, the crew allowed my father to ride in a prime seat up front, while John and I went to the back and sat near the plane's waist. There were no seats, just the hard metal floor with canvas seatbelts hooked up in such a way that we had to sit facing the plane's tail. It was a bit like flying on Southwest, only more comfortable.

The engines gunned to life and I grinned at John. After years of looking forward to such an experience, we finally were flying on a Liberator with my father and about to get a small flavor of what it had been like for him so long ago. We were excited and we were ready.

There was just one problem: I couldn't get my seatbelt to fasten.

At age 21, my father had flown to the other side of the world, repeatedly strapped himself into a plane loaded with 8,800 pounds of bombs and taken off into enemy territory not knowing whether he would ever return. And me? I couldn't even fasten my seatbelt. Could I possibly be any more pathetic?

Yes, as it turned out. Because as I fumbled with seatbelt, a cell phone fell out of my jacket pocket and slid down toward the bomb bay.

With visions of the phone dropping onto an unsuspecting pedestrian's head ("Can you hear me now?"), I flopped over on my stomach and reached around desperately. By the time I finally wrapped my fingers around it and my brother strapped me into the seatbelt, the plane was roaring down the runway.

I zipped the phone up in my pocket and grabbed my camera. And then we were off the ground.

The beauty of the "Dragon and His Tail" is that the Collings Foundation maintained the plane's original interior as much as possible, so that flying in it now is very nearly like flying in it during WWII. Other than the fact that the machine guns have no ammunition, the bombs are fake and no one is shooting at you.

I unhooked the safety belt, stood up by the open waist gunners' window and stared out at the city rushing past my view. A cold wind blew across my face as I grabbed the machine gun and pointed it beyond Safeco Field, saving Ichiro and the Mariners by shooting down a dozen imaginary Messerschmitts.

Flying in a 60-year old plane with its windows open, my brother was a little hesitant to move about the interior. Not Dad. When I walked/crawled toward the nose of the plane, I found my 80 year old father eagerly climbing into the nose gunner's turret. I held my breath and prayed that he wouldn't step on the dreaded red panels, no doubt feeling the same fears he did when I was 15 and he handed me the car keys for the first time.

(See Flight to Remember, next page)

(Flight to Remember, continued)

I wanted to get a photo of him in the nose turret, but it was impossible for him to turn around. He always told me a B-24 was small, but this was ridiculous. Picture Mo Vaughn climbing into a baby buggy, then replace the rattles and binkies with a .50 caliber machine gun, and you'll get some idea of how cramped it is up in that turret.

Dad crawled back out, and I made my way past him. We were wearing earplugs and we couldn't hear each other above the engines' roar, but we didn't need to. We both knew we were sharing a moment we would remember the rest of our lives, one every bit as precious as the first baseball game he took me to (Seattle Pilots vs. Cleveland Indians, Sicks Stadium, August 22, 1969, Tommy Harper Night, Pilots score four in bottom of the ninth but Indians win, 9-8).

When my father was gone, I squeezed into the nose turret. It was extraordinary. I've logged well over a million miles in commercial airliners, but this was something far different. I could hear the wind rushing past. I looked down and saw the waters of Puget Sound directly beneath me. I could see the islands and city all around me.

I didn't feel like a passenger, I felt like I was actually flying.

Children can never picture their parents as having been young, but I tried to imagine what flying those missions must have been like for my father. He grew up so poor in a little town called Puyallup that his father had to cut wood and sell it for two or three dollars a cord. His mother died of an asthmatic attack when he was 10. And then the war started when he was 19 and a student at the University of Washington. He left school and soon found himself on another continent, risking his life on a regular basis by crawling into a cramped, cold plane and dropping bombs on the enemy.

Try as I did, I simply couldn't imagine what it was like for him. I don't think anyone who wasn't there can.

The flight was short, just 30 minutes. Making my way back to Dad and John, I wasn't even aware that the plane had turned around until I saw the Ballard lift bridge on my left and the UW campus in the distance. Soon we were zooming past the Space Needle and descending toward Boeing Field. The buzzer sounded twice, signaling it was time to sit down and strap on our seatbelts again.

As I did, and our flight came to an end, I looked over at my dad. He was flying in a B-24 for the first time since the war and the guy was smiling so broadly I would have thought the Mariners won the World Series and the Huskies beat Notre Dame the same day.

Except for one thing. There also was a tear running down his cheek. It's the first time I've ever seen my father cry.

Jim Caple is a senior writer for ESPN.com.

ETERNAL REST GRANT THEM O LORD, AND LET PERPETUAL LIGHT SHINE UPON THEM.

I don't know if you saw this in the news last year but it really impressed me.

Our US Senate/House took 2 days off because of an approaching tropical storm.

On the ABC evening news, it was reported that, because of the dangers from Hurricane Isabelle approaching Washington DC, the military members assigned the duty of guarding the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier were given permission to suspend the assignment.

They refused. "No way, Sir!"

Soaked to the skin, marching in the pelting rain of a tropical storm, they said that guarding the Tomb was not just an assignment, it was the highest honor that can be afforded to a service person.

The tomb has been patrolled continuously, 24/7, since 1930.

We can be very proud of our young men and women in the service no matter where they serve.

God Bless them.

Military Wisdom

"Whoever said the pen is mightier than the sword obviously never encountered automatic weapons."

-Gen. Douglas MacArthur

BAIL OUT
by David Brothers

I was Squadron Bombardier for the 455th Bomb Group, 15th Air Force, based at San Giovanni Italy near the City of Foggia. We had 5000-foot parallel dirt and metal mat runways. We operated out of centuries old buildings and lived in four man tents.

On the morning of June 26, 1944, my pilot friend, First Lt. Robert Montgomery, was flying his last mission before returning to the USA and wanted me to be his bombardier. I wasn't part of his crew and was not scheduled to fly that day, but I decided to go on the mission as a favor and got permission from my CO. Second Lt. Ed Sabo was our co-pilot. Our target that day was Moosbierbaum, (Moose beer tree) Austria, a large petroleum refinery located about 20 miles West of Vienna. There were 300 B-24s on this raid, including 40 B-24s from the 455th Bomb Group. Our flight route took us northbound and to the East of Vienna. After passing Vienna, we made a left 180-degree turn and made our bombing run on a southerly course west of Vienna. Our bombing run altitude was 19,500 feet.

While we were approaching our target, about 50 Me-210s attacked us. We didn't break formation and held our course. The Me-210s left after four P-38s came to our rescue. Oddly, our appointed escort (P-51s) never showed up and never answered our radio calls for help. We encountered heavy flak over Moosbierbaum but dropped our bombs right on target, which did much damage to the petroleum refinery. (This was reported by one of our crew that bailed out and landed near the petroleum plant. Austrian soldiers took him into captivity.)

Shortly after we dropped our bombs, the flak stopped and at least 100 Fw-190s hit us. They circled us like "Indians around a wagon train" and came at us in-trail with groups of eight. (T/Sgt. Kyle, our Ball Turret gunner, shot down two FW-190s on one pass. He was great---his body was repatriated to his home in M.J.) We took several hits, blowing our plane apart. I was hit in the buttocks by a 20 mm shell, and its impact slammed me against the fuselage wall. Although I was badly wounded, I was able to crawl to the bomb bay door, open them about 2 feet, and bail out. I was tumbling and flailing around when I remember being told that to stop the tumbling I should hold my arms out to the side. It worked! I stopped tumbling and finally had my descent under control. Some of the FW-190s followed me down until I landed in the Vienna Woods.

Three of us were able to bail out. Montgomery and the rest were blown out of the plane when it exploded. (I saw that after I bailed out. One of them survived.) Children playing in the Vienna Woods found his remains hanging from a tree 14 years later. His chute was unopened. A ring he wore identified his body, and his name was on his unopened chute. His skeleton was fairly intact. Lt. Sabo landed unharmed. James Mason, our tail gunner, landed nearby and was picked up, along with me, by civilians. He was badly wounded. I tried to get up but the 20mm told me "NOT". We were put into a cart, and taken to a courtyard near by where Austrian soldiers appeared. I held Mason in my arms until he died.

I was lucky that Austrian soldiers took us into custody. They kept the civilians, who tried to kill me, at bay. They kicked me, spit on me, and tried to club me. I was so angry at being attacked, and Mason dying, that I yelled insults and curses at the civilians. I called them all kinds of names. But there was a woman in the crowd who went into her house and brought me a glass of wine to drink. I am not much of a drinker, but I drank all the wine. The pain was starting to really kick in by then. Mason's body and I were loaded into a truck and driven through the Vienna Woods along a narrow, winding dirt road to a hospital in Vienna. I stayed there for 2 months and had 20 operations to put my backside back together and remove as much shrapnel as they could find. Obviously, they saved my life. The doctors were medically kind to me and marveled that I had not bled to death.

(See Bail Out, next page)

While I was in the Kaiser Franz Josef Hospital, there were several air raids. All of us prisoners had to remain in our wards, while all of the hospital staff would go down to the air raid shelter. An armed enlisted man would be assigned to guard us during these raids. The guard was not happy at all being exposed to the falling bombs! Of course, we enjoyed his uneasiness!

While I was there, the only time bombs landed near the hospital was when a bombardier's bomb release system must have malfunctioned, and the bombs didn't drop immediately when they were released. There was a string of explosions that I could hear coming toward the hospital. One bomb exploded about 100 yards before the hospital and the next bomb hit about 100 yards beyond the hospital! I know our bombers would not deliberately try and knock out a hospital.

In early September 1944, I was shipped to a Luftwaffe hospital in Budapest for another month. I have no idea of why they sent me there.

During my stay in Budapest, I met a Russian pilot, Col. Ivan Galinzki, who took me under his wing and had me assigned to his ward. He told me his B-25 caught on fire during a flight from Italy to Russia, and he was burned during bailout. Ivan claims that his navigator started the fire while smoking a cigar he had gotten from an American while in Italy! We became great friends and, when I left, he kissed me goodbye. He told me he would never go to a POW prison. I never heard of him again. Four other American prisoners and I were sent to Stag Luft III in Poland, then to Nuremberg, and then to the Munich area. We were liberated by Patton's 14th Armored Division. He was angry and ranted at the terrible conditions that existed when he found us. He was a tough "cookie" but wonderful to us.

How we survived in that camp, I will never know. No one could comprehend the filth other than the ones who were there. We had only scraps to eat. Of the five crewmen, out of ten that survived being shot down, I am the only one still living today. I sure would like to see those graves and Sister Dora Kupelwieser's grave. She was very good to me in the Kaiser Franz Josef Hospital.

When I first arrived at Franz Josef Hospital, there was a very young, attractive, German nurse who attended to us (14 wounded American prisoners at the time). The hospital authorities removed her and assigned Sister Kupelwieser, a much older woman, to take care of us. She may not have been a beauty, but she was a very kind and caring nurse with a heart of gold. She took excellent care of us. After I returned to the U.S.A., we wrote to each other, and, I sent her packages of food and other items I thought she might need. After she died, I tried to find where she was buried but never did.

Recently, I started having sharp pains in my buttocks. My wife recommended that I go to a doctor to determine the cause. I didn't want to see a doctor, although I am one. I finally allowed my wife to look at my buttocks to check out the probable cause. She pulled out a half-inch sliver of shrapnel!



Maintenance Problems & Solutions

P: Left inside main tire almost needs replacement.
S: Almost replaced left inside main tire.

P: Test flight OK, except auto-land very rough.
S: Auto-land not installed on this aircraft.

P: Something loose in cockpit.
S: Something tightened in cockpit.

P: Dead bugs on windshield.
S: Live bugs on back order.

Military Wisdom

"Don't ever be the first, don't ever be the last, and don't ever volunteer to do anything."
-U.S. Navy Swabbie

"If your attack is going too well, you're walking into an ambush."
-Infantry Journal

JOHN DAVIS PROVES HE ONLY GETS BETTER WITH AGE

From article in Clear Lake Mirror, August 6, 2003

"Age is strictly a case of mind over matter: If you don't mind, it doesn't matter." --- Jack Benny

At the age of 84, John Davis isn't getting older. He's getting better.

The Clear Lake man is proof that age shouldn't be a deterrent to activity.

Davis, a summer resident of Clear Lake since 1968, is involved in a number of activities, ranging from volunteering to play piano at the Clear Lake Senior Center, to sports.

It is generally regarded as a special achievement among golfers when a player "shoots his age." John's average score for 18-holes over the last five years is 82---two strokes less than his age. John says the leader of his golfing group, commonly referred to as the "McKay Group," records the rounds played by each member. Apparently, he has only exceeded his age a couple of times all year. In fact, just two weeks ago he scored a 78.

At the age of 45, John gave downhill skiing a try by strapping on a pair of 7'3" war surplus skis he had in his basement. Today, he continues to enjoy the sport, going so far as to participate in amateur racing.

In rankings compiled by NASTAR (National Standard Race), John is ranked number two in the nation in the 80-84 age group. In Iowa, he ranks fourth among men of all ages.

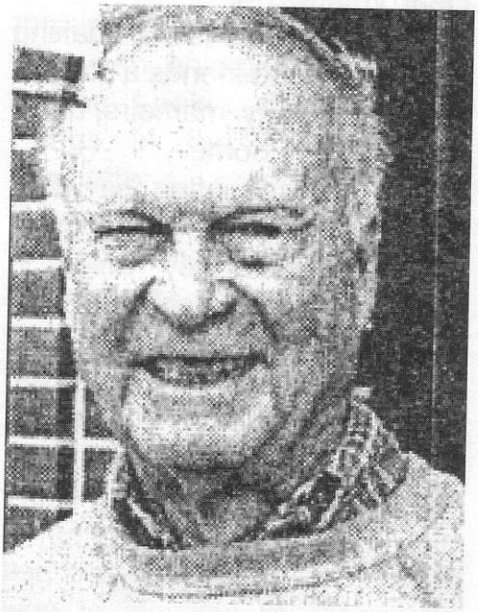
NASTAR is the largest public recreational grassroots ski race program, with more than 82,000 individuals racing last year. The program aims to provide a fun, competitive and easily accessible recreational ski racing program that, through the development of a handicap system, allows skiers of all ages and abilities a means to compare themselves against their friends, family members and the U.S. Ski Team, regardless of when and where they race.

John is a senior member of the Iowa Ski Club---out-distancing other members by 20 or more years. Still, he enjoys the clubs' outings, including trips to the mountains of Colorado. NASTAR has 100 participating ski areas and thousands of races are held each year. John describes the downhill races as being held on an intermediate difficulty slope around poles with flags called gates.

"When I was 80, I was number one in my age group. I skied better then," he said. Despite the fact that he no longer attempts moguls, John's abilities on the slopes continues to amaze. His average race time in 2002 would have nearly given him the gold medal in the 50-year-old division.

And because you're never too old to learn, John says he is learning a new sport these days. If you happen to see a lone windsurfer on Clear Lake, especially on Monday mornings, it may be John. His goal is to take off from the dock, sail, and return to the dock without being in the water. He reports that sometimes it doesn't work. But then again, he's got years to perfect his technique.

John Davis is a retired Air Force Colonel, and is on the Board of Directors of the 455th BG Association.



Military Wisdom

"When the pin is pulled, Mr. Grenade is not our friend.
-U.S. Marine Corps

"Try to look unimportant; they may be low on ammo."
-Infantry Journal

Editor's Note: The following are suggestions from the late Stephen Ambrose ("The Wild Blue") about recording an oral or written history about your experiences in the armed forces. Many of you have already recorded yours prior to* The Wild Blue *being written. If you haven't already done so, I would encourage you to document your combat and non-combat experiences during that difficult period in world history. Contact your Editor if you would like to have a specific list of sample subjects and questions that you could use for your story.

Dear Veteran,

Please consider making your family and friends a copy of your oral history, memoirs, diary, and/or letters home.

Veterans often say that they don't need to do an oral history because they weren't in combat, or they don't feel that what they did was all that important. Well that's not true. Regardless of what you did or where you were stationed, your history is important. The history of WWII is only now being written. In the coming decades historians will ask lots of new questions. I don't know what those questions will be, but I'm sure they will be focused on a lot more than combat.

Please take some time to sit down with a tape recorder and talk about your experiences. It is vitally important.

Veterans often ask me how to do an oral history. The guiding rule is that you talk about whatever was important to you at the time. Begin with a description of who you were before you enlisted; include a discussion of where and when you were born. Then carry forward with your training. What was your specialty? When did you ship overseas and where did you go? Tell me what no one else can: about your emotions, about the taste, touch, and smell of daily life. Tell me all about the people you knew, your buddies, your unit.

As you relate what happened, remember that we are not simply interested in tales of combat. Tell me about your leaves, your recreation, your promotions, about all the days you spent in transit or simply waiting at a base. Tell me what you thought was significant. Tell us about the equipment that you used. Did it work well? Was the enemies' equipment better? Were you married before you left?

Of course, if you were in combat, I want to know. What happened on your first combat mission? When did you first get shot at? Tell about the fighters, and the flak. What was your opinion of the different Allied escort fighters? What about the tactics of the enemy? What targets did you attack? What happened in the missions that followed? What did you eat? Who got wounded? How good was your C.O.? And the other officers? Where and when did you sleep? Don't forget to add a bit about what you've done since the war and how you feel about your experiences now.

Take your time. Turn on the tape recorder and start talking. It seems to help having a daughter, a grandson, your wife, or an old friend in the room. I find that it usually takes an hour before the memories start flooding back. When you get tired, I suggest that you wait a day, then repeat the process. Pull out old photos; look at maps; call a friend from your unit; you're bound to add some more details.

If you choose, your history will join thousands of others at the Eisenhower Center Archives in New Orleans where it will be available to scholars and film-makers for all-time. By leaving this record you will have done your country and family another good deed. You will serve future generations as they strive to understand their world.

Thank you for considering this request.

I remain ...

Your biggest fan,

Stephen E. Ambrose

Editor's note # 2:

I have received several excellent personal histories from members of the 455th BG Assoc (Arthur Tilley, Milt Kaplan, James Smith, Walter Dragich, Kenneth Lacey, among others). These fascinating stories are too lenghthy to produce in their entirety in this newsletter. Editing them down would not do these stories justice.

This year, your Editor will create a website on which I'll be able to, with permission, post these, and any future stories and pictures I receive, in their entirety. Friends, families, researchers, and historians can access these personal histories & photos via this internet website.

If you do not have access to the internet, try public libraries, family members, and friends as possible resources for online access. More information will come in the next newsletter.

Editor's Note: The following letter & proclamation goes under the headline "Long Overdue"!

Dear CC Editor,

My father, Emmett Ledbetter, just received the current CC issue. The first article I sent did not make it into the publication and only the addendum I sent (regarding the State Senate Resolution) was published.

Instead of resending the original article, I am submitting a revised version since my dad's crewmate, Reid Byron Peck, was also belatedly awarded the DFC this month!

Thanks,
Brenda L. Rayman
10044 Andrew's Pointe Way, Knoxville,TN 37931

Veterans Receive the Distinguished Flying Cross

T/Sgt Emmett Ledbetter (flight engineer/top turret gunner) and S/Sgt Reid Byron Peck (ball turret gunner) were original crew members of the 455th Bomb Group (H) – 743rd Bomb Squadron – 15th Air Force based at an airfield near Cerignola, Italy. They flew 50 combat missions beginning 2/12/44. T/Sgt Ledbetter flew his last mission 6/26/44. Due to illness which prevented him from flying an earlier mission, S/Sgt Peck flew his last mission 7/2/44.

T/Sgt Ledbetter and S/Sgt Peck's combat records are practically the same. They flew most of their missions on the Leakin' Deacon. T/Sgt Ledbetter and S/Sgt Peck were awarded the Presidential Unit Citation two times—the first for a mission (4/2/44) to Steyr, Austria, and the second for a mission to Moosbierbaum, Austria (6/26/44). They also received the Air Medal with six oak leaf clusters, and the EAME Theater Ribbon with three battle stars. Ledbetter and Peck were each credited with destroying a ME 109 fighter on 4/2/44.

On or about June 16, 1944, after completing a mission to Vienna, Austria, the crew discovered that one of the bombs had not dropped—the rear of the bomb was held by the back of the bomb rack while the front of the bomb had been released from the bomb rack. T/Sgt Ledbetter (flight engineer/top turret gunner) and S/Sgt Peck (ball turret gunner) put on portable oxygen masks as they were above 20,000 feet. T/Sgt Ledbetter opened the bomb bay doors and he and S/Sgt Peck made their way on the narrow catwalk. They were able to use tools to force the rear of the bomb rack to release the bomb.

When Ledbetter and Peck returned from this mission, they were debriefed by an intelligence officer who told them he would forward to the Squadron Commander a recommendation for the Distinguished Flying Cross for each of them. Apparently, the paperwork was lost or never submitted. Simply thankful to be alive and to have served their country, T/Sgt Ledbetter and S/Sgt Peck never checked to see why the Distinguished Flying Cross was not awarded to them.

Thanks to the assistance of Congressman John Tanner and Senator John McCain, the two veterans were belatedly awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross in 2003---Ledbetter in February and Peck in September---almost 60 years after the event. Although they live 1,500 miles apart (Ledbetter in Jackson, TN and Peck in Mesa, AZ), the two have remained good friends throughout the years.

An enlarged photograph of the Leakin' Deacon crew hangs in the classroom of Ledbetter's grandson, Seth Rayman, who teaches American History in Knoxville, TN. He tells his students, "I teach history, but my grandfather and his crewmates made history."



Military Wisdom

"If the enemy is in range, so are you." -Infantry Journal

"Tracers work both ways." -U.S. Army Ordnance Corps

"Bravery is being the only one who knows you're afraid." -Col. David Hackworth

"No combat-ready unit has ever passed inspection." -Joe Gay

"If you see a bomb technician running, follow him." -U.S.A.F.

ARE YOU BEING DROPPED FROM THE NEWSLETTER MAILING LIST?

Note on the mailing label of this newsletter. If there is a number 96 or 97 on the top line, you're going to be dropped from the newsletter mailing list. This number indicated the last time you paid your annual dues, and we haven't heard from you since then. If your number is 96 or 97, there is the probability that you have made your "final flight", or you are not interested in remaining a member of the 455th Bomb Group Association. Thus, we are deleting those names from our newsletter mailing list.

To re-establish having your name on the mailing list, please send $15 for '04 dues to P.O. Box 149, Castroville, TX. 78009. At least, then, we'll know you're still alive and interested in remaining a member of the Association.

A CENTURY AGO

The "third" Wright Brother, Charlie Taylor, built the Wright Flyer engine by hand 100 years ago. His contribution made POWERED flight possible.

455TH B.G. ADDRESS

During the past year, many letters being sent to the 455th Bomb Group have been sent to 5100 John D Ryan Blvd, Apt 542., San Antonio, TX.

This is not the correct address for the 455th Bomb Group. This address belongs to an elderly widow, and she always rejects the letters.

The correct address for the 455th Bomb Group Association is P.O. Box 149, Castroville, TX. 78009.

I have, by informal coordination, gotten such letters transferred to the correct address, however, the P.O. advises they cannot continue this informal action.

So, please take note of the correct address for the 455th Bomb Group Association or you may be surprised by getting your letter returned.

CAN YOU HELP?

Dear Editor,

I was visiting the B-24 bestweb page recently and I have your e-mail address from here. A few words about me. My name is Viliam Klabnik. I am a civil engineer and aviation historian. I am from Slovakia, Central Europe and author of Slovak Air Force 1942-1945 books (Vol.2, Vol.3) . At this time, I am preparing a book about the 15th AF over Slovakia during 1944 & 1945 (bomb raids over Slovakia, air battles, US losses and claims over Slovakia ... German too).

My private archive contains a quantity of records and photos here from Slovakia. However, I do not have photos about crews and planes of 15th AF from WW II (I need these photos, too) . I will be very happy if you help me with photos from your collection for my new project and send me their copies. I would like to have B/W scans (300 dpi, high scan resolution, and 9 x 13 cm size).

If you can help me with more photos, please send me these one file per e-mail. I shall be very pleased to help you with my records or photos from my collection.

I will be very happy if you can help me. I will be listing source of photos in my book. My big private archive is all for you.

My e-mail address is: aquam@slofanet.sk. Thanks.
Sincerely,
Viliam Klabnik.

455th Bomb Group Association, Inc.
P.O. Box 149
Castroville TX 78009

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