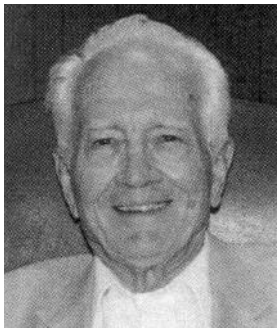
CERIGNOLA CONNECTION

455th Bomb Group Association Newsletter

Fall, 2010 Editor, Craig Ward, 813 Peterstow Drive, Euless, Texas 76039
phone: (817) 540-1068 ***email***: aphp@tx.rr.com ***website***: www.awardphp.com



Message from the President

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

Honor Air Flights for WWII veterans to visit the Memorial in Washington began over two years ago in several states, usually at no cost to the veteran. Seventeen flights have gone from Louisiana and each was a memorable time for the veterans and their escorts.

In May of 2009, I was one of a group of 107 veterans who went on the final Louisiana Honor Air Flight from Shreveport to see the Memorial and other special sights. We were in D. C. for about six hours and visited five memorials: the WWII Memorial, Arlington National Cemetery to witness the changing of the guard at the tomb of the Unknown Soldier, The USMC Memorial (also called the Iwo Jima Memorial), The FDR Memorial, and the Korean War Memorial. All of it was new to me. I was last in D. C. in 1993, and I did not visit Arlington at that time.

Our welcome at home was overwhelming. One estimate was over a thousand people there to greet us with waving flags and banners and wild cheering for each veteran as he came down the escalator.

If these flights are still going from your home state, I encourage you to go if you possibly can.

Mr. Hughes Glantzberg has developed a website for 15th Air Force units including pages for the 455th BG. Visit the site at *http://www.glantzberg.us*

My reunion photos for 2007, '08, '09 are posted on *http://carlbarr.homestead.com*.

Several people have contacted me through these web sites, asking about friends or family members who had been a part of the group, to tell us of the loss of a member, or to ask about specific aircraft.

(continued, Page 2)

In This Edition

Front Page ... Message from The President

Page 2 ... Can You Help?

Page 3 ... Vulgar Vulture Pins

Pages 4 - 6 ... Dear Editor

Pages 7 - 8 ... The Last Two to Walk Out the Gate

Pages 9 - 10 ... Can You Help?

Pages 11 - 12 ... The Tail-Gunner's Tale

Page 13 ... *Leakin' Deacon*

Pages 14 - 15 ... Email List

Page 16 ... Walter Shostack

Page 17 ... An Australian in Cerignola

Pages 18 - 20 ... The SR-71 *Blackbird*

Page 21 - 22 ... Fond Memories

Page 23 ... Final Flights

Back Page ... Exec. Director

(President's Message, cont.)

One person asked about the *"Lone Wolf"*; another about the *"Mad Bomber"* incidents in 1944.

John Rohrer has been quick to respond and has been most helpful in the several inquiries that I have forwarded to him. Thank you, John.

Kevin, a friendly researcher in Arlington, VA., told me about 455th history CD's in Maxwell AFB. I have ordered a set, but have not yet received them. If you are interested, listed below is how to get them.

The histories of the 455th BG are available for purchase on CDs B0602 and B0603 for $30 per CD. To purchase any of the CDs, send a check or money order (made payable to DDO 6607) to:

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

With My Best Regards,
Carl A. Barr
President
455th Bomb Group Assoc., Inc.

CAN YOU HELP?

Dear Editor,

My grandfather, Warren D. Buchanan (741), was a tail gunner on a B24 during World War II, stationed in Cerignola. The whole family absolutely loves receiving your newsletter.

Unfortunately, on April 3, 2010, my grandfather took his final flight.

Being involved with his military history has been such an important part of my life. While going through some of his belongings, I realized he had saved much more from the war than what he had originally shared with me. I knew he had saved many pictures and medals, but he literally saved everything!

I have both of his jackets, his gloves, an m.r.e., a detailed description of every mission which he logged himself, and so much more.

The pictures are spectacular. He took many pictures of nose art and other planes at the airfield. I could go on and on about that stuff, but I have a few questions that I was hoping you could help me with.

How do we go about getting his obituary in the next issue? Our subscription to the newsletter was in his name, and he just passed it along to us to read. How would we transfer that into our names?

Also, are there any aircraft of which you are looking to find pictures? Hopefully, you can point us in the right direction. I thank you for taking the time to read my letter.

Sincerely,
Wendy Buchanan
717-667-2429
146 Greenfield Drive
Reedsville, PA 17084
wendythecargirl67@yahoo.com

CAN YOU HELP?

Dear Editor,

Do you have information somewhere in the 455th BG documents and files on serial number for a B-24 with Battle # 74, flying with this number in September, 1944?

What aircraft was a B-24H-20-DT, serial #41-28982, possibly named *"Peace Maker"?*

Does any photo of it exist? Thanks to you and your readers for any help you can provide.

Best Regards
Peter Kassak
pkassak@yahoo.com
www.airwarsk.sk

CAN YOU HELP?

Dear Editor,

I am the Art Director for Valor Studios, the country's top publisher of military artwork.

We're currently working on a painting that will show the 332nd Fighter Group (*Tuskegee Airmen*) escorting B-24s from the 304th Bomb Wing during the October 21, 1944 mission to Gyor, Hungary.

For our scene, we wanted to show two of the Red-Tailed P-51 Mustangs as they escort a straggler B-24 to safety.

Would any of your readers happen to have records that would show if any 455th planes were damaged on the 10/21/44 raid?

We want this scene to be as accurate as possible, so any help or guidance you could provide would be appreciated.

Thanks,
Bryan Makos
Art Director
Valor Studios, Inc.
staff@valorstudios.com
www.ValorStudios.com

455TH BOMB GROUP ASSOCIATION, INC.
P.O. BOX 93095
AUSTIN, TX. 78709-3095

PRESIDENT
Carl A. Barr
Major USAF (Ret.)

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR / TREASURER / SECRETARY
Gregory E. Riggs
Col. USAF (Ret.)
P.O. Box 93095
Austin, TX. 78709-3095

PAST PRESIDENT
Roderick W. Clarke
Col. USAF (Ret.)

DIRECTORS
John F. Davis
Col. USAF (Ret.)
Ormond H. Buffington
T/Sgt. USAAF
Carl Loiocano
T/Sgt. USAAF
Craig Ward
Son, Lt. J. T. Ward
Editor, *Cerignola Connection*

REGISTERED AGENT
John F. Davis
Col. USAF (Ret.)

Available for a short while longer!
Vulgar Vulture Logo Stick Pins

Each pin is one and one quarter inch in diameter
Each pin has a brass-colored finish and four-color enameled logo
Each pin is secured with a standard "frog" fastener on the back side
Make checks payable to: 455th Bomb Group Association
Mail to the association at: P.O. Box 93095, Austin, TX 78709-3095



On the left: a 455th GROUP pin, $5 each
On the right: a SQUADRON pin, $7 each
Only a few squadron pins remain.
The 740th has a yellow bomb; only 12 remain at press time
The 742nd has a black bomb; only 4 remain at press time
There are approximately 50 Group pins left at press time
Orders will be filled by postmark date.

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 a membership. Please return completed forms to: 455th Bomb Group Association, P. O. Box 93095, Austin, Texas 78709-3095.

Dear Editor,

Enclosed is the copy of my dad's log (mission diary). I didn't have a chance to get to know my father very well when I was growing up. It's only been with the death of my father's siblings, and the subsequent discovery of dozens of letters from him, that I've learned more about him and his life.

After World War II, Dad became a civilian for a short time, but he could not stand it. So when Korea broke out, he went back in. He became an Air Policeman with the 97th Air Police unit stationed near Seoul. From then until his death from cancer in 1962, he stayed in the Air Police, eventually becoming a Captain.

During the 1960's, I worked for Republic Steel. One afternoon, a man from Inventory Control stopped at my desk, and asked me if Walter Bosau was my dad. I said he was, and the guy asked how that old *"son of a b----"* was doing. I said that "*old son of a b----"* is dead. He was so apologetic.

I asked how he knew my dad. He said "We served together. We were crew mates". Dad was a radio operator, Art Liddy was the navigator. He said my dad used to take photos of the raids and the attacking planes, ME109's, ME110's, and JU88's. He said the Captain used to yell at him on the intercom to "Put the camera away and SHOOT the bastards"! All those photos have disappeared. What a loss.

I saw my dad about eight times as I was growing up. The last time was his funeral. He's buried at Arlington. I've been to his grave a couple of times. Your dad and mine were like so many of that generation ... they really were, and are, HEROES!

Sincerely,

Wayne Bousau, 5616 Wellesley Ave., North Olmsted, Ohio 44070
Son of the late Walter Henry Bosau, Radio Operator

Editor's Note: *Although I cannot put Mr. Bosau's entire diary in this newsletter, suffice it to say the diary of his missions is fascinating. The sample entries below are just a small portion of the information I was sent by Walter's son Wayne. Thank you, Wayne!*

June 6 - Flew on to San Giovani Field. This is where we are to fly from each day. Home is far away tonight and I wonder when I'll make my first mission in enemy territory.

June 8 and 9 - High altitude practice missions, getting ready now.

June 10 - Today we took off on our first real mission. Very easy trip to Northern Italy. Flak was light and saw no fighters.

June 13 - Today we are briefed on a oil refinery in Munich. HERE WE GO GANG.. As we reached the target we were jumped by a group of German fighters. Flak was terrific, and we had one engine knocked out, but we returned okey.

June 16 - Here we go again.. Bombed an oil refinery in Vienna today. Flak was heavy and accurate. A B-24 in front of us caught a direct hit in his left wing tank and it exploded. The wing tore off and the ship went into a tail spin. One man bailed out and was followed by one other. Our number 3 engine was hit, and we threw out our flak suits, ammunition and gear to lighten the plane. Looked bad for a while. but returned okay.

June 22 - At 7:45 A.M. today a plane loaded with fragmentation bombs exploded at end of runway on take off. Three men killed. Take off was resumed by the rest of the squadron. I didn't fly today.

June 24 - Bombed a railway repair shop in Rumania. Very easy mission.

June 25 - Bombed a bridge in Arles, France. Got some flak holes but made it back okay. This flak business is scary at times.

June 26 - Rough trip today. Back up to Vienna to bomb some oil rerineries and storage tanks. We were jumped by a formation of ME 110's, 109's, 210's and JU 88's. They hit and knocked down 10 of our bombers. Flak hit number one engine, so once again we had to throw our ammunition, flak suits, and guns to

Dear Editor,

I've attached a photo (see below) of *Gargantua* (B-24H-10-CF Serial No. 41-29261, 15th AF/455th BG/742nd BS). Here is the crew list:

Standing (L-R)

T/Sgt Paul W. Lecomte
S/Sgt James R. Reese
T/Sgt Chester P. Wantuck - Gunner
T/Sgt William C. Graves
S/Sgt Harry M. Talkington
S/Sgt Arthur W. Briggs.

Kneeling (L-R)

Captain Harold S. Gorecki – Pilot
1st Lt Robert S. Holt;
2nd Lt Wayne E. Swartz
2nd Lt Len Giovannitti - Navigator

It turns out that Len Giovannitti was an "award-winning writer and television film maker." I would like to submit him as a possible candidate for your Famous Crewmember list. I've included his obituary below as a source:

Len Giovannitti, 71, Writer & Film Maker

Published: Saturday, April 4, 1992

Len Giovannitti, an award-winning writer and television film maker, died on March 27, 1992, at his home in Manhattan. He was 71.

He died of heart disease, said his fiancée, Dr. Vera Miller.

Mr. Giovannitti won a Peabody award for his television work. He wrote, directed and produced documentaries.

For NBC, he produced *"The American Alcoholic," "The Hill Country: LBJ's Texas," "In White-Collar America," "The Energy Crisis" & "And Who Shall Feed This World."*

With Fred Freed, he was co-producer of *"The Decision To Drop the Bomb,"* and they wrote a book with the same title.

For ABC, he produced *"Black Business in White America" & "Walking Hard: On Juvenile Delinquency."*

Born in the Bronx, he earned a bachelor's degree from St. John's University in 1942. He then joined the Army Air Corps, serving as a navigator. On his 50th mission, his plane was shot down in Austria, and he was held prisoner for a year. That experience led to his first novel, *"The Prisoners of Combine D"* (Holt, 1957), which won an award from the American Library Association.

A quick check of Google shows that he authored several books:

http://openlibrary.org/a/OL1915692A/Len-Giovannitti

Regards,
Dave Ungemach
davetw1@cox.net

Dear Editor,

I would like to point out an error in our history book, *455th Bomb Group (H), The Flight of the Vulgar Vultures, 1943-1945.*

In the left column of Page 238, middle picture, shows it is the "David Barbour crew".

It is NOT David Barbour's crew, but is instead the crew of James Shumard, shown on Page 245, left column, middle picture.

Sincerely,
Edward S. LaPointe, Sr. (743)
Maryland Heights, MO. 63043

Editor's Note:

I appreciate Mr. LaPointe's correction of the record above.

The information above has not been confirmed.

If any of our readers have further information or opinions regarding this history book correction, I will be pleased to publish it in the next edition of the *Cerignola Connection*.

Thanks,
Craig Ward
Your Editor



Dear Editor,

I came across some photos of my grandfather when he was in the Air Force, specifically the 455th BG (743), between 1944-1945.

My grandfather was Ralph Moore of Monahans, TX. (below)



My grandfather rarely spoke about the war. It wasn't until after his death that we found these pictures.

All he told me was that he flew planes, so I would love any information that you may have about his service. After the Air Force, he joined the 441st CIC (Counter Intelligence Corp). He most definitely did not tell us about that!

What's strange is that I can't find his name anywhere online. I looked through the links that you sent me **(www.awardphp.com)** and he isn't listed.

Then, on one of the good conduct medals the name listed is "Gordon W. Moore," and his name is Ralph V. Moore. I'm puzzled!

Thanks, & Best Regards,
Jennifer Veenhof
jennifer.veenhof@gmail.com









Dear Editor,

My father was a tail gunner in the 15th AF (465th BG). I made a documentary about the 15th AF B-24 bomber groups, and have since shown the film and interviewed many of the veterans. This 90-minute piece has been very enthusiastically received by all that have seen it because, as you know , not enough has been written about the 15th AF. The name of the film, *On The Wing*, has aired on PBS.

We are currently working on a third film about the air war over Europe. Please feel free to view the beginning of the film on my website ... *www.longshotfilms.net*.

If you feel your group may be interested in the film, please feel free to contact me. There is a cost, but it simply goes into the completion of the next film. I assure you no profit has been made by me.

Best Regards
Brad Branch
brad@longshotfilms.net

Editor's Note:

LongShot Films is offering this film to the public at a special price for 15th AF veterans of $28.50 (purchase price includes $25.00 for the film + $3.50 shipping and handling), or $33.45 for others.

For more information, or to purchase your copy of On The Wing, *you may contact the film company online at www.bbtfilms.com.*

Or, send your check or money order to:

LongShot Films
P.O. Box 122
Portsmouth, NH 03802

The Last Two to Walk Out the Gate

by Robert Frampton (740)

The war in Europe was over. We all knew that we would be sent home, or to the war with Japan.

Lee Thorne, First Pilot, and I, Robert Frampton, Co-Pilot, received the good news that we had enough missions to qualify for a plane to fly our crew home.

However, we were the last ones on the list. Within a day or two, our Commanding Officer called Lee in to headquarters. He told Lee that he, the C.O., was going to take our plane to fly his crew home.

Lee was very disappointed; however, since there was absolutely nothing to do, he asked if he and I could go into Rome for a few days. The C.O. said OK.

I do not remember how we got to Rome, but I do remember we were at the Rome airport headquarters where a high ranking officer was filling out a flight plan to Athens, Greece.

He had a B17 warming up. As a joke we asked him if we could go with him, and he said sure. We could not turn that down. As we were riding to Athens, we found out that he planned to go to Cairo, Egypt, and then back to his Fighter Base in the south of France.

Lee and I enjoyed Athens, and saw the Acropolis by moonlight ... we were the only ones there.

We checked in with our transportation, and found out he had to go back to his air base in France.

We arrived at his air base and asked if there was any way to get to Paris. He said sure, that the B17 was going back and forth all the time.

We saw Paris. We had our picture taken at the Arc De Triomphe. We then took the overloaded B17 (27 passengers, half standing) back to the air base.

We had gotten this far with no money, no change of clothes, and only the English language. We hitchhiked our way back to the Cerignola San Giovanni air base.

I remember one particular night very well. We stopped at an Officers Club, and met several Red Cross girls who asked where we were staying. When they heard our story, they arranged for us to spend the night on two davenports in the living room of their beautiful Chateau which was home to 27 Red Cross girls. We could not turn that offer down.

The 455th Bomb Group was gone. There was not one U.S. person there. We finally found three Italian workers who told us where everyone had gone.

The Headquarters Castle was completely empty. All of the furniture was gone. There was one large picture of all of the crews lined up after a mission.

I removed that last picture.

The tents where we lived were all gone, The concrete slabs were all that were there.

On our slab, there were two B4 bags with our clothes, two Mauser Rifles with bayonet, a German Helmet, Burp Gun, Luger Pistol, and two other pistols. Nothing had been taken (all of this was given to the Iowa Historical Building)!

We hitchhiked to a former prisoner of war camp and found our crew. The crew was waiting for transportation to the U.S. when our Commanding Officer found a B17 to fly us all back.

We had to get checked out in a B17. The biased Check Pilot just HAD to show us how much “better” a B17 was than a B24. He pulled the B17 up in an almost vertical stall and feathered the two inboard engines!

We had to agree that this would not be a good idea if you wanted to get home in a B24. We flew the B17 back to the Greatest Country in the World, the good ole’ U.S. of A.

During our time at Cerignola, we had a great crew and were very lucky. On our first trip over the Atlantic Ocean we left Gander, Newfoundland, Canada, in our new B24M. It was decorated with our names, and called *"The Honey Bea"* (Lee's Wife).

There were piles of snow higher than our plane. We were to land on the Portugal Azores Islands in the morning. About half-way there, at midnight, we started picking up ice and down drafts.

We had the de-icers and wing boots turned on full. Still, thick ice was coming off the propellers and wings, and hitting

the plane and rudders. We were carrying a huge load of ice, and our airspeed dropped to a stall.

At this point, I remembered the pitot heat, and flipped on the switch. We were going over the red line of 300 miles per hour straight down. Our sleeping crew were surprised of the result. The wings did not come off. When we got to San Giovanni air base, we never got to fly that plane again.

We had several other things happen. Our Engineer Crew Chief was hit in the steel helmet by flack, and it landed almost between Lee and me.

On one mission we had 57 holes in the bottom of the plane. On several other situations, we were lucky.

After 50 years, I organized a crew reunion at Davis-Monthan Airbase in Tucson. Twenty one veterans showed up, with one son from Alaska.

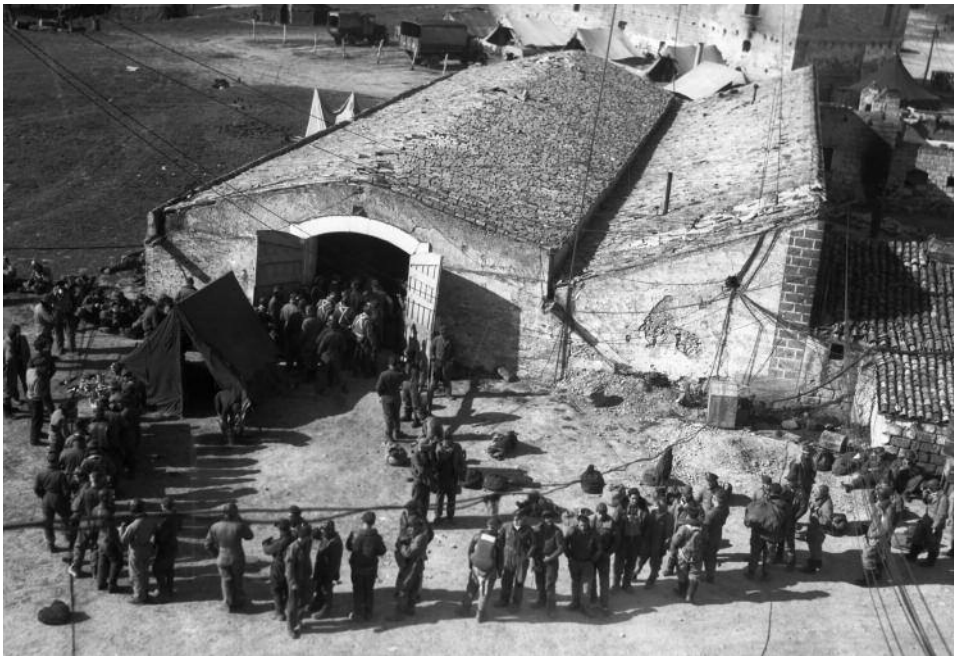
I organized a second reunion at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs. Unfortunately, our Ball Turret Gunner had died the day before, and Lee could not make it.

Lee passed away last fall (2009). I did get to see him a month or so before his final flight.

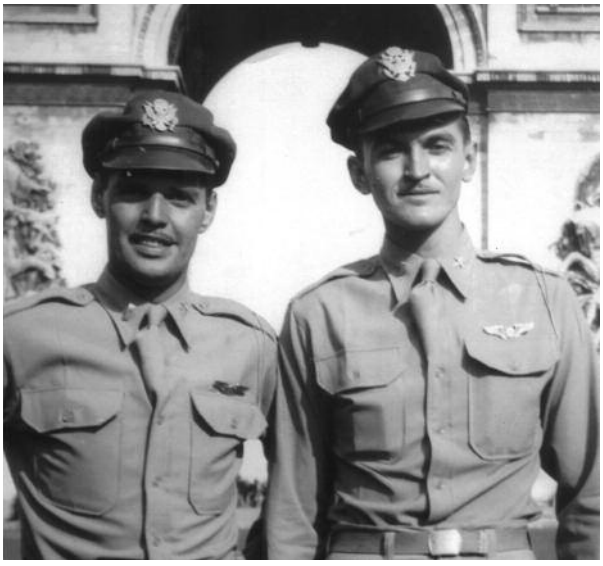
We were Good Buddies. There are three of us left out of ten.

Best Regards,

Robert E Frampton (740)
13731 Hickman Rd. #2309
Urbandale IA 50323
framptonbob@gmail.com







Dear Editor,

I've been on a symposium at Flying Cloud Air Field, which is SW of the Twin Cities in Minnesota. It's called Wings of the North, and their address is: 14801 Pioneer Trail, Suite 200, Eden Prairie, MN. 55347.

I had the honor of being with a Tuskegee Airman, Joseph Gomer, who was raised in Iowa, and is now retired to Duluth, MN.

What a guy! Google his name, and add *Tuskegee Airman,* and see what comes up. He was stationed in Sorrento, Italy until Mount Vesuvius blew-up and then moved to another airfield.

He told me they never lost a bomber they escorted because they didn't get "sucked-in" by the German fighter pilots, who wanted to be chased from the formation so other Germans could attack the formation from another direction. Very smart!

I was in the 742nd BS, and completed 28 sorties up to April 25, 1945, as a radio-operation-gunner and later radar jammer on Lt. Leighton Hope's crew. I flew with many other crews as a radar jammer, so I got in more missions.

We were forced down and landed at an emergency field near Zara, Yugoslavia. I'm still in contact with a tail gunner in Long Island, NY, and a bombardier in Fox Chapel, a suburb of Pittsburgh.

Best Regards,
Erling Kindem (742)
ErlingK@aol.com

CAN YOU HELP?

Dear Editor,

I have just come across the attached photo (see bleow) of the *Dazzlin Dutchess and the Ten Dukes* (42-84500) which I've been told was a 455th Bomb Group aircraft.

Can any of you tell me anything about this aircraft? I would like to post it on the 455th website, but would like to have some information to go with it.

Hughes Glantzberg
hughes@glantzberg.us



CAN YOU HELP?

Dear Editor,

I love your website!!
(www.awardphp.com)

My late cousin, Milton Robert 'Bob' Sepin, was AG 36806897.

He told me about dropping bombs over Italy in WWII. He passed away December 7, 2009 in Lemon Grove CA.

I have some family pictures that I may be able to share. I just got his aircraft accident report from September 13, 1944.

Wouldn't he have been eligible for a military service and burial?

Thank you.
Roxane Sepin Gehman
Richardson TX
sepin89@gmail.com

CAN YOU HELP?

Dear Editor,

Doug Beauvais here, son of Ray Beauvais (741). You kindly used his diary mission in the last *Cerignola Connection* (Moosbierbaum).

Thank you.

Someone I work with recently emailed the government to get his grandfather's war records and medals. I was shocked that they not only re-supplied all his medals, but they did so for free.

My father's medals were lost years ago. Our family would love to have them.

I emailed the appropriate agency with all the information I could find. In case your readers may want to do the same, here's the web address:

https://vetrecs.archives.gov/VeteranRequest/home.asp

I have a question. Once I get my dad's medals, I would want to mount them on some nice finished hardwood for displaying. How could I get my hands on anything related to the 455th BG, such as:

1) Vulgar Vulture patch,
2) 15th Air Force Patch,
3) 455th or 741st patch

Any help your readers could lend would be appreciated. Thank you.

Best Regards,
Doug Beauvais
dbeauvais@datarepro.com

Dear Editor,

My name is Georg Hoffmann. I'm an Austrian historian, doing research for the Austrian Ministry of Defense at the University of Graz.

I'm part of a research project (2010 – 2012) dealing with the fate of downed US airmen in Austria during WWII.

Among those men who were shot down over Austria were several members of the 455th Bomb Group.

Is there any chance to get in contact with members of your group who were shot down over Austria (or Hungary), and were captured or succeeded in escaping or evading the area?

I'm fully aware that the whole topic is a very difficult one because of painful memories.

However, I'm interested in those who want to talk about their experiences. With that information, I might be able to create links with places (and persons) in Austria / Hungary, and possibly clarify the fate of still missing comrades.

Thank you very much in advance. I'm looking forward to hearing from your readers.

Yours sincerely,

Georg Hoffmann
Email: iust@gmx.at
Karl-Franzens-University
Graz, Austria
Andrássy University
Budapest, Hungary
Leonhardstr. 95/1/3
A-8010 Graz, Austria, Europe
Tel.: 011 43 664 1524503
info@militarystudies.at
www.militarystudies.at

A Quick Response to Mr. Hoffman's request follows ...

Dear President Carl Barr,

The mention of Austria in Mr. Hoffman's request prompts me to add a note to you – if only for chuckles.

For entertainment in the past few years, (what I prefer to call my early, middle-age), I have written several books. One was entitled, *"The Only War I Ever Attended".*

That's really unimportant, but the mention of Austrians that I may have known often makes me think of the unseen enemy on our crew's many missions to Austria and Germany.

In several contexts in my writing, I found a way to briefly mention one of them, Joseph Ratzinger, a naive of Austria. At age 16, Joe was conscripted out of the seminary into an anti-aircraft unit of the German army. He served in the town of Lazersfeld, outside Munich, in 1943 and 1944.

It is clear that he had a daily *"relationship"* with the 15th Air Force. I intend to bring up the subject if I ever meet him.

Below is one of those references I enjoyed slipping into my recent book, *"Wartime Cinderella."* :

One's wartime assignment, and its outcomes, were always the luck of the draw. You went where you were assigned.

Some handed out socks at the Philadelphia Navy Yard. Another drove the Admiral's daughter in Hawaii. Others met their God in the shallow waters of Omaha Beach, or on the rugged terrain of Iwo Jima.

You never knew.

By God's grace, I did not face Normandy's Hell, or Japanese Kamikaze attacks. I was in an Army Air Corps cadet unit in Miami Beach, with 120 men who thought we were headed for pilot training. We learned midway in our tour that aerial gunners were in short supply.

We all experienced a quick occupational transition. That was not rejection, just re-assignment.

I experienced the war as a 15th Air Force B-24 ball turret gunner, with picturesque views of Europe.

Each time we bombed Munich, we took heavy flak and lost many planes and crews. A young German, Joseph Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XVI, was then assigned to a suburban Munich anti-aircraft battery that shot at us. ***We went where they sent us.***

Joe Kiernan
16 Barbara Lane
Tituille NJ 08560
jokernan@comcast.net
609-771-3886

CAN YOU HELP?

Dear Editor,

Thanks very much for posting issues of the *Cerignola Connection* on your website. I've found them to be a wealth of information.

Can you help me get some details about the story "*Solo Sortie*" by Lt. Winton Reynolds. The story was from December, 1944, and is told in the 455th BG history book.

The author did not mention either the crew or the date of the mission, but it may be about one of the four *Lone Wolf* missions flown that month.

Can anyone in the 455th BG Association tell me the squadron, crew and mission he described in "*Solo Sortie*.".

Thank you,

Kevin
sigarno@verizon.net

THE TAIL-GUNNER'S TALE

by George Johnston (740)

The take-off was horrifying, as usual ... engines revved to the limit.

The B-24, crouched like a Falcon, ready to pounce on an unsuspecting mouse. When the brakes were released, the big plane just rocked back and staggered away like a drunken fat man, rudders whipping back and forth.

And there was that oil leak in the Number Two engine, the oil dripping off of the rudder. One wondered if that engine would be the first to blow, or go forever because of all the fresh oil it received after each flight.

The tail gunner remembers when the new B-24 came into Langley Field. It was in the morning, still dark, as someone came into the barracks and yelled out that twenty five new birds were waiting for their crews.

Twenty five planes landed during the night, and no one heard a thing. They dressed and ran out to the flight line and began their search. Everyone was running between planes shouting, "Here, over here!"

But where the hell was our plane? Oh, no! Not THAT one. It's covered in oil, all down the side, clear back to the rudders and dripping off.

This has to be bad luck, a brand new plane covered in oil.

There goes the two thousand foot marker, and the rabbits seem to be mocking us.

At the fifteen hundred foot marker, the speed is coming on now, but still does not seem like enough. Starting to squirm in the seat now.

Damn, this one is a "sweater". Five hundred. feet now, the rudders are steady and the nose is coming up. The tail is perilously close to the ground.

Then comes that sound. We are still on the ground, but the pilot is pulling up the gear. Howling, the wheels screech off of the pavement.

The B-24 is now hanging on the props, and flying in ground effect. *Swooch!* There goes the end of the runway, and there goes what looks like branches off of the olive trees.

Could it be? Are those the marks we have seen on some of the other planes?

Now climbing, with the engines droning on. An hour goes by, and we're still climbing. It's starting to get really really cold now, with contrails forming.

It looks like its going to be a 4-plane diamond formation. Here comes the final plane, directly behind and below. The gunner can see into the cockpit. The pilots are looking up at him.

Oh, no, it's the *"fist shakers"* from a previous mission! When they were flying in the diamond formation, and the gunners were told to fire their guns for test, the brass cartridges were ejected out, and were bouncing into the other aircraft's windshields, propellers, and wings. These guys were shaking their fists at the tail-gunner, as if there was anything he could do about it.

Still climbing, and watching the formation. It was weird, and magnificently beautiful.

They are at the end of the formation; "*Tail-end Charlies",* they are called. Still climbing, over the coast, they hope they don't come under the B-24s at the I.P. Flying under bombers when their bombays are open is scary as Hell!

Leveling off now, and the engines are coming back on power. How these engines take the pounding is un-believable.

They are close to the target now, and in danger. They are losing altitude.

Wait, wait a minute! There is another plane behind them, must be a P-51 Mustang escorting them.

Damn! That's not a P-51 at all! Its an ME 109 German fighter, and coming fast!

The gunner calls on the intercom. Get ready. We're being targeted on our six o'clock. Get ready!

There is no response. That's strange.

The 109 is closing now. The gunner is shouting now, still no response.

Damn! The *fist-shakers* are falling back now ... they are WAY BACK, and can barely be seen. They must have lost a turbocharger.

The 109 is about five hundred yards away. He's coming straight in at the six o'clock level.

Now he's at four hundred yards; this guy has GUTS. This is the easiest of shots for the tail gunner.

A chilling thought. What happened to the *fist-shakers*?

Here comes the ME 109. The gunner has him in his sights. Just a little closer, come on, come on, ... NOW!

He triggers the guns. *Ker-Plunk*! The guns are frozen.

Now the 109 opens up. A hundred angry butterflies light up the 109's cowling, and the tracers go under the bomber.

He missed!

At the same time, the belly turret opens fire. Now, everyone is firing at the 109. The belly turret, the top turret and finally, the tail gunner's guns begin to fire.

To hell with short bursts! Hose him down before he gets us.

The 109's canopy shatters, the wheels come down, his hydraulics are shot out, and he rolls and goes straight into the ground.

As soon as he stops shaking, the tail gunner checks his turret for damage. He's going to get an ass-chewing from the pilot for yelling on the intercom, but at least they got the 109.

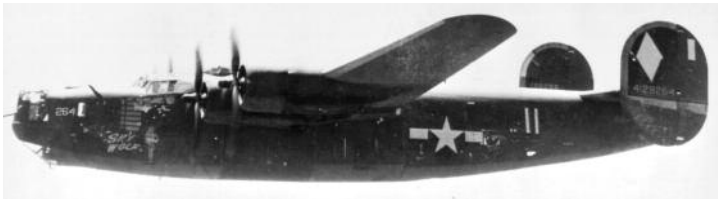
Looking around, he can't believe it. The mike cord was not plugged in, and no one heard a thing. Guns frozen, intercom not plugged in, attacked by a 109, and still flying,

It's been a lucky day for the old *Sky Wolf*.

The bomber *Sky Wolf* was only one of two out of the original twenty five to make it's tour.

***Sky Wolf* was in the 455th Bomb Group, 740th bomb squadron, piloted by Col. Ed Riggs.**

George Johnston was the tail gunner that told this tale.



Dear Editor,

The 98th BG was one of the B-24 groups on the original low-level raid on Ploesti on 1 Aug, 1943, a few months before the 455th BG arrived in theater.

Congressional Medal of Honor winner Col "Killer" John Kane was the 98th commander and led them on the raid.

The 98th BG wants to host a reunion of all crews who flew against Ploesti at any time during the war, from any of the 23 groups that hit Ploesti.

The invitation is open to anyone who was in our group when the group flew against Ploesti (including ground crews and crews that didn't fly those missions). They are presently trying to measure interest. They would like 25-30 reasonably solid expressions of interest before they start trying to nail down specifics such as hotel, hard dates, etc. They are open to suggestions.

Here are the particulars:

Location: Shreveport, LA (Barksdale AFB will help host the reunion; Shreveport happens to be where Kane grew up)

Time: September or October, 2011.

If you are interested, please contact:

Colonel (Ret) Bill Seals
2526 Plumfield Lane
Katy, TX 77450
(281) 395-3005
cbseals@consolidated.net
colbillyseals@hotmail.com

Dear Editor,

I would like to pay tribute to the original and early replacement crews of the 455th Bomb Group.

I was the flight engineer and top turret gunner on the bomber, *Leakin' Deacon.* I was probably one of the youngest crew members in the 455th (born April 28, 1924).

I volunteered in the fall of 1942. My parents had to sign the papers for me since they had not started drafting 18-year-olds.

Little has been mentioned about the chances the early crews had of completing their 50 missions. My estimate is a 25%-30% chance.

During this period, we were attacked by German fighter aircraft; mostly ME 109s and FW 190 fighters. From April-September, 1944, we lost a total of 81 bombers over this six-month period (April - 15 lost, May - 9 lost, June - 16 lost, July - 23 lost, August - 9 lost, September - 9 lost).

As I remember, only four of the sixteen original crews of the 743rd squadron completed their missions. The *Leakin' Deacon* and *Tepee Time Gal* were two of the crews.

We only had P-47 and P-48 escorts, until about the middle of April, 1944. Afterwards, we were escorted by P-51 Mustangs.

The group received two Distinguished Unit Citations--one for Steyr (April 2, 1944) and one for Moosbierbaum (June 26, 1944). The *Leakin' Deacon* crew made both of these missions.

The *Leakin' Deacon* was lost while we were on leave on the Isle of Capri after 35 missions. We flew in different planes after that.

The early crews also made most of the missions on the Ploesti oil refineries and storage tanks. A total of over 900 bombers were lost.

I am enclosing a picture of the *Leakin' Deacon* and crew (identified below).

Wishing you the Best,
E.J. Ledbetter, Jr.
blrayman@eplus.net

Crew of the *Leakin' Deacon*:

Front (L-R):
John E. Cayea (co-pilot);
Thomas Hardman (bombardier);
Daniel J. Neuman (pilot);
Wylie A. Smith (navigator)

Back (L-R):
Reid B. Peck (Ball Turret Gunner);
Marshall W. Hilgendorf (tail gunner);
Clyde Kennedy (waist gunner);
Earnest A. Phillips (waist gunner);
E.J. Ledbetter, Jr. (flight engineer/top turret gunner);
George W. Kloos (radio operator/nose gunner).

Celebrate the Wisdom That Comes with Age

Life isn't fair, but it's still good.

Life is too short to waste time hating anyone.

Make peace with your past so it won't screw up the present.

Burn the candles, use the nice sheets, wear the fancy lingerie. Don't save it for a special occasion. Today is special.

No one is in charge of your happiness except you.

Growing old beats the alternative -- dying young.

What other people think of you is none of your business.

If we all threw our problems in a pile and saw everyone else's, we'd grab ours back.

No matter how you feel, get up, dress up and show up.

Get outside every day. Miracles are waiting everywhere.

All that truly matters in the end is that you loved, & ARE loved.



455th BG E-mail Roster

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

Carl A. Barr (743)
carlbarr@bellsouth.net

Dave Bathie (assoc. 740)
davidbathie@yahoo.com

Joel Beauvais
Son, Raymond Beauvais (741)
jmb1958@att.net

1st. Lt. Thomas A. 'Tom' Bell
840 Kimberly Ct.
Lander, WY 82520
tsalix@yahoo.com

Gene V. Benson (740)
Livingston, MT.
bens348@aol.com

Jack Blum (741)
jblum15677@aol.com

Earl Bodenhorn
Waterford, MI.
jebodenhorn@aol.com

Winfield S. Bowers, Jr. (741)
Mount Dora, FL. 32757
winbow40@aol.com

Thomas Boyd
kent_brewster@yahoo.com

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

Ormond Buffington (741)
obuffington@charter.net

Robert Caldwell (741)
re7306@aol.com

Calvin Casteel
calcasteel@satx.rr.com

Saul L. Cayne (742)
sasl@adelphia.net

Rod Clarke (743)
Alexandria, VA
rory@his.com

Howard Cooper (740)
howcoop@sdlifestyle.com

Robert D. (Bob) Collette (740)
dotybob@verizon.net

Anthony Corsello (741)
corsello@aol.com

Albert E. Cratch
fishn928@verizon.net

Bill & Joyce Crawford
printsvs@earthlink.net <or>
Westerner01@earthlink.net

Janet & Russell Crocker
Janetcrockerfr@cs.com

Norman Crum
Son of Cpt. George Crum (742)
norman.crum@vpps.net

James P. Daly (740)
panadaly@aol.com

John Davis (741)
Davisjfdavis@gmail.com

Jack Dekker (743)
jdek457@att.net

Theodore Deppe (741)
tdeppe@indiana.edu

George Defenbaugh
crusin_dordo@hotmail.com

John Devito (assoc.)
jmdevito@verizon.net

Curtis (Curt) Diles, Jr. (740)
cdiles@woh.rr.com

Paul H. Ditchett (742)
vacationstogo@yahoo.com

William Dixon (741)
carolddixon@peoplepc.com

William G. Doyle (742)
wdoyle71824@aol.com

William M. Doyle (742)
Jupiter, FL 33477
wdoyle5184@bellsouth.net

Robert Emick (741)
elbo2@earthlink.net

Marc Gaynes
Son of Seymour Gaynes (743)
Fortdearborn1@yahoo.com

Sy Gaynes (743)
585 Live Oak Lane
Weston, FL. 33327
syjac@yahoo.com

William B. Gemmill (740)
wgemmill@tampabay.rr.com

Ann Genge
Daughter of Allen Durkee (743)
fredfox263@yahoo.com

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

Lt. Col. R. J. Haney (743)
haneyrj@comcast.net

Fred Hamilton T/Sgt (740)
fastfreddy1881@att.net

455th BG Email Roster (cont.)

Frances Hansen
lohansen@longlines.com

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

Robert Hilgendorf
serendipity@surry.net

Richard H.Hollrock (740)
107 Heather Way
Hampden, Me 04444
annedickrock@ol.com

Frank Hosimer (741)
fghosr@hotmail.com

Thomas L. Kablach (742)
kablach@sbcglobal.net

Joe Kiernan (741)
16 Barbara Ln
Titusville NJ 08560
jokernan@comcast.net

Erling Kindem (742)
erlingk@aol.com

Viliam Klabnik
vkaquam@zoznam.sk

George L. Liddle (742)
oljorge@mchsi.com

E.J. Ledbetter, Jr.
blrayman@eplus.net.

John L. Larma (740)
jnlarma@yahoo.com
913-712-8773

Don Martens (740)
2738 West Point Rd.
Green Bay, WI 54304
dmartens2@gmail.com

Mark L. Mason
Son of Robert G. Mason (742)
mlmason82@cox.net
Frank Mastroleo
Masty419@aol.com

Dave Matheson (742)
ihatebugs@cox.net

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

Jim Merritt
Son of Lt. Jim Merritt (741)
51 N. Main St.
Pennington, NJ 08534
merritt66@verizon.net

Stephen E. Miller (742)
nanpopmil@webtv.net

James H. Moreland (743)
agjh@webtv.net

C.E. McMullen (741)
cmcmullenjr@aol.com

Vic Murray (743)
vemurray@CFL.RR.COM

Robert E. Newberg (743)
2729 82nd PL #233
Urbandale, IA 50322
Newy7aces@aol.com

Charles Oltarzewski (740)
murphB24@aol.com

Christine Painter
Daughter of the late Col.
Charles W. Painter, Jr. (741)
christinepainter@verizon.net.

Peter Payant (743)
pbpayant@cox.net

Reid Byron Peck
Mesa, AZ 85209
bpeckfrommesa@webtv.net.
Roland J Pepin
327 Al Harvey Road
Stonington, CT 06378
virpep4400@aol.com

Wesley Powell (740)
wesjulia@gateway.net

E.J. Ledbetter (743)
blrayman@eplus.net.

John Rohrer
Son of Carl Rohrer (740)
jrohrer@spartacpa.com

Charles H. Rosenberg (741)
chrose3@comcast.net.

Irving (Irv) Rubin (743)
205 Buccaneer Ave, Apt 108
Merritt Island, FL 32952
321-514-3445

Sid Schoengold (740)
harsid123@netzero.com

August R. “Gus” Seefluth (742)
gseefluth@gmail.com

Sgt. John E. Skelton
woodshed704@netzero.net

Edward G. Spencer (740)
ebnezr@webtv.net

Michael Spewock
Son of Andrew Spewock (743)
spewocks@verizon.net

Charles E. Stark (740)
carbchar@comcast.net

Ted Stiner
Son of Lt.Theodore Stiner (741)
Ted.Stiner@gmail.com

455th BG Email Roster (cont.)

Angelo Synodis (741)
angiesynodis@charter.net

Julie Summerfield
Daughter of Walter Summerfield (743)
digger1649@mac.com

James Thiel
219-765-8217
bellygunner@yahoo.com
bellyguner@yahoo.com

Ted Tronoff (742)
TVTRONOFF@cs.com

Dr. Stanley Vogelfang (741)
stanvog@aol.com

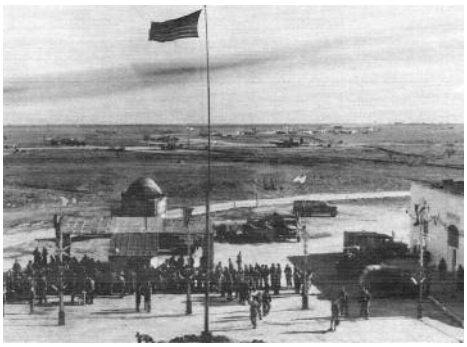
John R. Worster (742).
haw72@aol.com

Craig Ward
Editor, *Cerignola Connection*
Son of Lt. J. T. Ward (740)
aphp@tx.rr.com

Carl J. Wiskirchen
m-meyer@insightbb.com

Leland L. Young (743)
Allison Park, (Pittsburgh), PA
llyoung@netzero.net

Paul A. Young (741)
pyoung04@tampabay.rr.com



Dear Editor,

I just got out of the Mayo Clinic with a heart problem. Thank God I was able to go to *The Wings of the North* air show in Minneapolis the week prior that I had to go to the emergency room.

I met a lot of air corps guys again at the air show. Joseph P. Gomer, *Tuskegee Airman* was in a booth. His wife was with him this year. What a guy!

I told you last spring about the Tuskegee Airmen never losing a bomber they escorted. My story is in *The Wild Blue*" by Stephen Ambrose on page 213.

It was written about Senator George McGovern who was in the 741st. I was in the 742nd.

I discovered I flew many missions with him in formation, but of course, who knew he'd be running for President in 1972.

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

FINAL FLIGHT

Walter Shostack (741)

took his Final Flight on January 31, 2009, at age 87.

In 1942, Walter joined the US Army Air Corp and followed in his father's footsteps by becoming a pilot. During WWII, the B24 bomber he was co-piloting on his third mission to Germany, October 14, 1944, was crippled by flak, partially severing the nose of the plane.

Some crew members were fatally wounded, and others were forced to parachute into enemy territory over Bleiberg, Austria. Walter was captured in Yugoslavia and spent the remainder of the War as an MIA and POW.

Walter's final request was that his cremated remains be scattered in the air above the waters of Russian Beach, near his childhood home in Lordship, Connecticut.

In 2010, his wishes were granted during a Memorial Service, as his ashes were dispersed from a small plane, and from the hands of friends and relatives, who observed this Final Flight over Russian Beach.

The Final Journey

As we commit your ashes to the elements from whence you were conceived,
As the wind carries your spirit away from all fear,
May you return to the safety of the nurturing womb,
And leave the chaos of the Earth onto which you were born,
Now, may you freely soar above all confusion,
And see the light of all meaning and reason,
Let your soul be absorbed into the harmony of nature,
And your body rest in peace,
Dear Father, whom we deeply loved.

.

"The Final Journey" is a poem written by Walter's daughter Lorraine



WALTER SHOSTACK

An Australian in Cerignola

Dear Editor,

I am writing to you from Australia.

I recently had the good fortune to meet and stay for a few days with my late father's cousin, Mario Capocefalo in Cerignola, Italy. While I owe a great deal to Mario (my story shortly), I owe many thanks to you for making a video of your trip to Cerignola in May, 2001, and for giving some copies to Mario. You will get an idea of what your video has done for me when you read my story below.

My father was a young Italian soldier conscripted to serve in WWII. His hometown was Cerignola, and his mother and Mario's mother were sisters.

My father was captured by the Allies at Tobruk in November, 1941. He was then sent to a POW camp in India by the British Government, and later to POW camp in Australia, where he arrived Dec., 1943.

The Italian POW's were seen as low-risk. There was a labor shortage in rural Australia at the time, due to the large number of men serving in the war effort. So, the Italian soldiers were allowed out of camp to work on the farms. They were given food and clothing and payed a small allowance.

My father went to work on the dairy farm where my mother lived with her grandfather and three small children. She was having marriage difficulties at the time.

She and my father fell in love, and I was the result.

At the time, the Italian soldiers were forbidden to associate in any way with the Australian women, so this was, in fact, a crime.

My mother was not able to join my father in Italy after the war. He was repatriated and left Australia in December, 1946.

My mother did not tell me that I had an Italian father until I was 32 years old. She also made me promise not to try to find him, as he would have made a life with a family in Italy, and my presence might cause problems for all.

After my mother's death in 1993, my desire to find out more about my father and his life was too much for me to bear. With only a name given by an old lady and a few facts, my husband embarked on the process of finding my father.

Fortunately, with the help of state and federal archives, museums reference libraries, and the Italian Consulate, I finally made contact with my half- brothers and sisters in Italy.

My father had died six months before my mother died. Between 1995 and 1999, I visited my Italian family four times. Unfortunately, the nearest I was able to get to Cerignola during those visits was to stay in Foggia. The family saw no reason to take me there. They appeared to have lost all ties with the town.

For many years, I have looked for books and stories about life in Cerignola before and during the war. I needed to know what happened to my grandparents and my father's generation.

You can imagine how thrilled I was to receive a letter from Mario in February this year. By chance, he had met a cousin of mine who I had met once in 1995. This cousin mentioned this to Mario, who unknown to my Italian family, knew all about me.

When my father returned from the war, he discovered that his young cousin Mario could now speak English -- thanks to the American airmen. Mario was then enlisted by my father to read the letters from my mother, and to reply to them in English. This happened until Mario later left Cerignola to work in Rome.

Mario had seen my baby photo in my father's wallet.

Having received Mario's letter, I could not get to Cerignola to meet him quickly enough. You can imagine how wonderful this was for me.

Having spent time with Mario yourself, you will appreciate what a wonderful fellow he is, how very hospitable he is, and what a wealth of knowledge he has.

I now truly feel part of my extensive Italian family and fatherland. Previously, I had read something of the American contribution to the war effort in Italy, but now I know so much more.

I have read and re-read Stephen Ambrose book, *The Wild Blue.* I enjoyed reading quite a few of the *Cerignola*

Connections while I was with Mario, and I have since found your home page on the internet: **(www.awardphp.com).**

After seeing your VHS tape video at Mario's house, I offered to bring a copy home with me so I could make DVD's for Mario. I have done that for Mario so he will have a more permanent copy, and one for each of his children. I am grateful to have a copy of this video, where I can at any time see the country around Cerignola. Mario's stories are wonderful!

I was also able to show the video to my husband, as he was not able to accompany me on this visit.

Without knowing it, you have given a girl, who never knew her father or grandparents, a permanent living record of her fatherland, and her much-loved cousin.

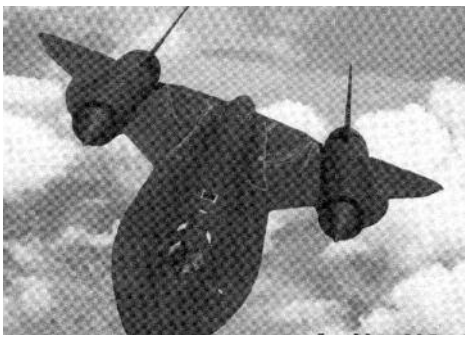
I am also indebted, and very grateful, to those brave young American air and ground crews. They not only befriended Mario and taught him English, but they endured so much, often paying the supreme sacrifice, to liberate Italy and Europe from Nazism and facism.

Kind regards,

Susanne Douglas
6 Elizabeth Street
Beaudesert, Qld 4285, Australia
Email: s.douglas1@bigpond.com

Socialism is a philosophy of failure, the creed of ignorance, and the gospel of envy. Its inherent virtue is the equal sharing of misery ...
Sir Winston Churchill

Take a Ride on an SR-71 *Blackbird*



In April 1986, following an attack on American soldiers in a Berlin disco, President Reagan ordered the bombing of Muammar Qaddafi's terrorist camps in Libya. My duty was to fly over Libya and take photos recording the damage our bombers had inflicted. Qaddafi had established a "line of death," a territorial marking across the Gulf of Sidra, swearing to shoot down any intruder that crossed the boundary. On the morning of April 15, I rocketed past the line at 2,125 mph.

I was piloting the SR-71 spy plane, the world's fastest jet, accompanied by Maj Walter Watson, the aircraft's reconnaissance systems officer (RSO). We had crossed into Libya and were approaching our final turn over the bleak desert landscape when Walter informed me that he was receiving missile launch signals.

I quickly increased our speed, calculating the time it would take for the weapons, most likely SA-2 and SA-4 surface-to-air missiles, capable of Mach 5, to reach our altitude. I estimated that we could beat the rocket-powered missiles to the turn and stayed our course, betting our lives on the plane's performance.

After several agonizingly long seconds, we made the turn and blasted toward the Mediterranean. "You might want to pull it back," Walter suggested. It was then that I noticed I still had the throttles full forward. The plane was flying a mile every 1.6 seconds, well above our Mach 3.2 limit. It was the fastest we would ever fly. I pulled the throttles to idle just south of Sicily, but we still overran the refueling tanker awaiting us over Gibraltar.

Scores of significant aircraft have been produced in the 100 years of flight. But the SR-71, also known as *The Blackbird,* stands alone as a significant contributor to Cold War victory. It is the fastest plane ever built. Only 93 Air Force pilots ever steered the "sled," as we called it.

The SR-71 was the brainchild of Kelly Johnson, the famed Lockheed designer who created the P-38, the F-104 Starfighter, and the U-2. After the Soviets shot down Gary Powers' U-2 in 1960, Johnson began to develop an aircraft that would fly three miles higher and five times faster than the U-2 spy plane, and still be capable of photographing your license plate.

The Blackbird always showed us something new, each aircraft possessing its own unique personality. In time, we realized we were flying a national treasure.

One moonless night, while flying a routine training mission over the Pacific, I wondered what the sky would look like from 84,000 feet if the cockpit lighting were dark. While heading home on a straight course, I slowly turned down all of the lighting, reducing the glare and revealing the night sky. Within seconds, I turned the lights back up, fearful that the jet would know and somehow punish me. But my desire to see the sky overruled my caution, I dimmed the lighting again.

To my amazement, I saw a bright light outside my window. As my eyes adjusted to the view, I realized that the brilliance was the broad expanse of the Milky Way, now a gleaming stripe across the sky. Where dark spaces in the sky had usually existed, there were now dense clusters of sparkling stars. Shooting stars flashed across the canvas every few seconds. It was like a fireworks display with no sound.

I knew I had to get my eyes back on the instruments, and reluctantly I brought my attention back inside. To my surprise, with the cockpit lighting still off, I could see every gauge, lit by starlight. In the plane's mirrors, I could see the eerie shine of my gold spacesuit incandescently illuminated in a celestial glow. I stole one last glance out the window. Despite our speed, we seemed still before the heavens, humbled in the radiance of a much greater power. For those few moments, I felt a part of something far more significant than anything we were doing in the plane. The sharp sound of Walt's voice on the radio brought me back to the tasks at hand as I prepared for our descent.

The SR-71 was an expensive aircraft to operate. The most significant cost was tanker support, and in 1990, confronted with budget cutbacks, the Air Force retired the SR-71. The Blackbird had outrun nearly 4,000 missiles, not once taking a scratch from enemy fire. On her final flight, the Blackbird, destined for the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, sped from Los Angeles to Washington in 64 minutes, averaging 2,145 mph and setting four speed records.

The SR-71 served six presidents, protecting America for a quarter of a century. Unknown to most of the world, the *Blackbird* flew over North Vietnam, Red China, North Korea, the Middle East, South Africa, Cuba, Nicaragua, Iran, Libya, and the Falkland Islands. On a weekly basis, the SR-71 kept watch over every Soviet nuclear submarine and mobile missile site, and all of their troop movements. It was a key factor in winning the Cold War.

I am proud to say I flew about 500 hours in this aircraft. I knew her well. She gave way to no plane, proudly dragging her sonic boom through enemy backyards with great impunity. She defeated every missile, outran every MiG, and always brought us home. In the history of manned flight, no aircraft was more remarkable.

SR-71 OVER LIBYA

Out my left window, Libya looks like one huge sandbox. A featureless brown terrain stretches all the way to the horizon. There is no sign of any activity. Then Walt tells me that he is getting lots of electronic signals, and they are not the friendly kind.

The jet is performing perfectly. She seems to know where she is. She likes the high Mach, as we penetrate deeper into Libyan airspace. Leaving the footprint of our sonic boom across Benghazi, I sit motionless, with stilled hands on throttles and the pitch control, my eyes glued to the gauges.

Only the Mach indicator is moving, steadily increasing in hundredths, in a rhythmic consistency similar to the long distance runner who has caught his second wind and picked up the pace. The jet was made for this kind of performance. With the power of forty locomotives, we puncture the quiet African sky and continue farther south across a bleak landscape.

Walt, my RSO, continues to update me with numerous reactions he sees on the DEF panel. He is receiving missile tracking signals. With each mile we traverse, every two seconds, I become more uncomfortable driving deeper into this barren and hostile land. I am glad the DEF panel is not in the front seat. It would be a big distraction now, seeing the lights flashing. My cockpit is "quiet" as the jet purrs and relishes her new-found strength, continuing to slowly accelerate.

At Mach 3.24, the J-58 engines are more like ramjets now, gulping 100,000 cubic feet of air per second. We are a roaring express now, and as we roll through the enemy's backyard, I hope our speed continues to defeat the missile radars below. We are approaching a turn, and this is good. It will only make it more difficult for any launched missile to solve the solution for hitting our aircraft.

I push the speed up. The jet does not skip a beat, nothing fluctuates, and the cameras have a rock steady platform. Walt received missile launch signals. Before he can say anything else, my left hand instinctively moves the throttles yet farther forward. My eyes are glued to temperature gauges now, as I know the jet will willingly go to speeds that can harm her. The temps are relatively cool and from all the warm temps we've encountered thus far, this surprises me but then, it really doesn't surprise me. Mach 3.31 and Walt is quiet for the moment.

I move my gloved finder across the small silver wheel on the autopilot panel, which controls the aircraft's pitch. With the deft feel known to Swiss watchmakers & surgeons, I rotate the pitch wheel somewhere between one-sixteenth and one-eighth inch location, a position which yields the 500-foot-per-minute climb I desire.

Walt's voice pierces the quiet of my cockpit with the news of more missile launch signals. The gravity of Walter's voice tells me that he believes the signals to be a more valid threat than the others. Within seconds he tells me to "push it up" and I firmly press both throttles against their stops. For the next few seconds, I will let the jet go as fast as she wants. A final turn is coming up and we both know that if we can hit that turn at this speed, we most likely will defeat any missiles. We are not there yet, though, and I'm wondering if Walt will call for a defensive turn off our course.

With no words spoken, I sense Walt is thinking in concert with me about maintaining our programmed course. To keep from worrying, I glance outside, wondering if I'll be able to visually pick up a missile aimed at us. Odd are the thoughts that wander through one's mind in times like these. I found myself recalling the words of former SR-71 pilots who were fired upon while flying missions over North Vietnam. They said the few errant missile detonations they were able to observe from the cockpit looked like implosions rather than explosions. This was due to the great speed at which the jet was hurling away from the exploding missile.

I see nothing outside, except the endless expanse of a steel blue sky and the broad patch of tan earth far below. I have only had my eyes out of the cockpit for seconds, but it seems like many minutes since I have last checked the gauges inside. Returning my attention inward, I glance first at the miles counter telling me how many more to go, until we can start our turn. Then I note the Mach, and passing beyond 3.45, I realize that Walter and I have attained new personal records. The Mach continues to increase. The ride is incredibly smooth.

The Mach eases to 3.5 as we crest 80,000 feet. We are a bullet now - ***except faster***. We hit the turn, and I feel some relief as our nose swings away from a country we have seen quite enough of. Screaming past Tripoli, our phenomenal speed continues to rise, and the screaming Sled pummels the enemy one more time, laying down a parting sonic boom. In seconds, we can see nothing but the expansive blue of the Mediterranean. I realize that I still have my left hand full-forward and we're continuing to rocket along in maximum afterburner.

I now see high Mach numbers, not only new to our experience, but flat-out ***scary***. Walt says the DEF panel is now quiet, and I know it is time to reduce our incredible speed. I pulled the throttles to the minimum-burner range, and the jet still doesn't want to slow down.

Normally, the Mach would be affected immediately, when making such a large throttle movement. But for just a few moments, old 960 just sat out there at the high Mach that she seemed to love, and, like the proud lady she was, only began to slow when we were well out of danger.

I loved that jet.

FOND MEMORIES

by

Carmine Casale

"This young man has been employed by me."

Signed: Lt. Col. ……..

(I cannot remember the name)

Those few words were written on a white, long envelope, the first one I saw in my life, as letter envelopes were rather square in those days.

I was at the house of a sophisticated, mature lady who had a pretty niece. "Son, you go on Piazza Duomo tomorrow morning and show this message to the sergeant driving the truck heading to San Giovanni".

This must have happened in the month of March or April, 1944. Since a couple of months before the arrival of the Allied troops in Cerignola (September 25, 1943), I was learning some English from an old phraseology book we had at home.

Obviously, I couldn't understand completely what the Colonel said. However, I did understand I'd found a new job.

Here I should introduce a nice anecdote about what my brother, my cousin, and I had learned from that book. Soon after the arrival of the Allies (that side of Italy was assigned to the British Army), a small group of British soldiers (including George and Bernard) camped in a little farmhouse owned by my cousin's grandfather. The three of us used to visit that farm and get some cans from the friendly soldiers.

One of the attractions for them was my question "George, are you an English man?"

Of course, yes. "Oh Bernard, I took him for an American".

The irresistible laughs exploding after that phrase were always uncontrollable, and incomprehensible to us.

The British troops had shelled Cerignola on September 24th from a hill ten miles away. There were about twenty strikes in the early afternoon. Lots of people reversed in the street hit by the intermittent strikes.

Sixteen Cerignola civilians were killed. For more than three days, the little town of Cerignola was divided in two portions. The main street, which at that time crossed the town (Interstate 16, Adriatica), was transformed in a river of tanks, trucks, carriages, etc. of the Allied Army.

Cerignola citizens were in the streets with large baskets of almonds, and little local cookies to offer the "liberators".

My 46 year old father was a civil servant at the local tax collecting bank. He was a WWI ack-ack veteran.

My family had been left without any support. Being the elder son, although in the middle of my school years, I had to find work to survive.

A few months later, the US troops replaced the Brits in town; the entire zone became one of the major US Air Force bases.

Cerignola was a little more than a village in those days, although the third largest municipality in Italy by surface. Surrounded by a vast plain, mostly cultivated with wheat, and some almond and olive trees, it was ideal for air fields.

Malaria and many other diseases took a very high toll, especially in childrens' lives.

A traditional stronghold of the socialist party, the village had been abandoned by the "regime", and improvements were rare.

Americans literally FREED the town. Some very old districts (built circa 1700 / 1800) were declared "out of bounds", and cleared up by intense use of DDT. Americans showed what it meant to have basic needs by offering work to civilians in the airfields.

The Americans were dispensing all sorts of goods, directly or indirectly. Cerignola citizens started to see some light in their future.

Many US veterans may recall some MP roundups: men were caught with overcoats and pants made out of military blankets, and girls with scarves and silk blouses made out of parachutes.

I don't believe Cerignola is to be blamed for this. Extreme poverty met with the great generosity of American soldiers. I don't feel ashamed of that.

Circumstances were horrible.

When the US forces settled in town, my first job was at the American Red Cross Club right in Piazza Duomo, in the house of one of the exclusive clubs of the town. I didn't quite understand what I had to do.

An interpreter told me I was hired as a waiter, but neither he nor the young ladies of the American Red Cross gave me any directions or instructions on my job.

I was delighted to talk, mostly by waving, with the officers who used to come and rest in the club. I washed some glasses, poured some coffee, and did many other things.

After a week, the interpreter came and told me I was fired!

On the subject of speaking by waving hands, I have to tell another anecdote. In the street where my family lived, there lived one of the highest Roman Catholic prelates in town (he was also my teacher in Italian and Latin in the High School).

One day, the prelate's sister opened the door asking the young Chaplains to come in. The Chaplains ran away in a hurry. In the Italian waving system, the gesture to invite somebody to come in is exactly the one Americans use to get people out, and vice versa.

I was there by chance, and I had to run after the Chaplains and explain to them the situation, with some fun.

Now, I knew how to find a job with the Americans, and I went to the hiring officer in the US Command. He assigned me to the Officers' Mess, in the kitchen.

Now, I knew what to do. There were other Italian workers, and I learned how to clean tables, wash dishes, sweep floors, etc. All of the Italian crew were happy, and worked with enthusiasm.

An American Sergeant was in charge of the kitchen, and we got along nicely with him, although he used to pull our legs by saying we Italians were not too capable with women (I was all too familiar with carnal subjects - a fifteen year old kid at that time was equivalent to a thirty year old man today!).

Yes, I have fond memories from those dark days in Cerignola.

Best Regards,

Carmine Casale
Via Mazzolari 23
20142 Milano, Italy
Email: c_casale@hotmail.com

A Soldier Died Today

He was getting old and paunchy
And his hair was falling fast,
And he sat around the Legion
Telling stories of the past.
Of a war that he once fought in
And the deeds that he had done,
In his exploits with his buddies
They were heroes, every one.
And 'tho sometimes to his neighbors
His tales became a joke,
All his buddies listened quietly
For they knew where of he spoke.
But we'll hear his tales no longer
For ol' Bob has passed away,
And the world's a little poorer
For a Soldier died today.
He won't be mourned by many
Just his children and his wife,
For he lived an ordinary
Very quiet sort of life.
He held a job and raised a family
Going quietly on his way,
And the world won't note his passing
'Tho a Soldier died today.
When politicians leave this earth
Their bodies lie in state,
While thousands note their passing
And proclaim that they were great.
Papers tell of their life stories
From the time that they were young,
But the passing of a
Soldier goes unnoticed.
Is the greatest contribution
To the welfare of our land,
Some jerk who breaks his promise
And cons his fellow man?
Or the ordinary fellow
Who in times of war and strife,
Goes off to serve his country
And offers up his life?
The politician's stipend
And the style in which he lives,
Are often disproportionate,
To the service that he gives.
While the ordinary Soldier,
Who offered up his all,
Is paid off with a medal
And perhaps a pension, small.
It's so easy to forget them
For it is so many times,
That our Bobs and Jims and Johnnys
Went to battle, but we know.
It is not the politicians
With their compromise and ploys,
Who won for us the freedom
That our country now enjoys.
Should you find yourself in danger
With your enemies at hand,
Would you really want some cop-out,
With his ever-waffling stand?
Or would you want a Soldier
His home, his country, his kin,
Just a common Soldier
Who would fight until the end.
He was just a common Soldier
And his ranks are growing thin,
But his presence should remind us
We may need his like again.
For when countries are in conflict
We find the Soldier's part,
Is to clean up all the troubles
That the politicians start.
If we cannot do him honor
While he's here to hear the praise,
Then at least let's give him homage
At the ending of his days.
Perhaps just a simple headline
In the paper that might say:

**"OUR COUNTRY IS IN MOURNING,
A SOLDIER DIED TODAY."**



FINAL FLIGHTS

Barbara Jean Loiocano
Daughter of
Carl Loiocano (741)
Passed away in August, 2010

Barbara Jean was a member of the 455th BG Association.

Carl Loiocano is a member of the 455th BG Association Board of Directors.

Their address is:
8137 Bear Lake Rd.
Stockton, NY 14784
716-792-4238

Ed Drabik (740)

88 years old, of Muskegon, MI ., took his final flight on April 22, 2010.

Ed was a bombardier in the 740th squadron of the 455th Bomb Group.

He was shot down over the German-Russian front near Gordisa, Hungary on March 12, 1945, after bombing the Florisdorf Oil Refinery in Vienna, Austria.

The plane was piloted by R.J. von Schrilltz, with Pete Winters as co-pilot. Charles Brazelton, navigator, John Coats, navigator, and Charles Adams radar operator, became MIA/KIA.

He was captured together with Al Beauchemin, Art Colton, Bill Taylor, Craig King, and Frank Lashinsky. They were in a "40 & 8" boxcar, part of the German army retreating back to Germany.

After six weeks of intermittent travel, arriving in the marshalling yards of Regensberg, the train was destroyed in a bombing.

After several weeks of marching, they arrived at Stalag VIIIA Moosburg. They were liberated on April 29, 1945, by Patton's forces.

He is survived by his wife of 65 years, Ardis.

Herbert L. Pryce (740)

87 years of age, of Girardville, PA., passed away July 7, 2010.

An Air Force veteran, he served during World War II as a member of the 455th Bomb Group.

Capt. James Smith (741)

of Fredericksburg, Texas passed away April 25, 2010 in San Antonio, Texas.

Capt. Smith was a past secretary of the 455th BG Association, Inc.

Warren D. Buchanan (741)

a tail gunner with the 455th BG, took his final flight on April 3, 2010.

HEROES

In war, there are lives risked and lives taken,
Men and women giving their best to defend what they love.
They defend their country, Their honor, Their people.
Some call them soldiers,
Others call them heroes.
Our veterans risked their lives for us.
They have lived through hell and fought with honor.
Many have killed,
And regret doing so.
For every life, there is a soul,
For every soul, there is a life.
For those who have died, we show great appreciation and remembrance.
For those who live, along with them live the horrific memories of battle.
Some, memories of defeat.
Some, memories of victory.
Our veterans were more than soldiers.
They were, and still are,

HEROES

Horst R. Schoene, 90, WWII B-24 bomber pilot

Oct. 10, 1919 — May 9, 2010

Horst R. Schoene, a retired lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Air Force and World War II combat veteran, died Sunday at his Amherst home. He was 90.

Mr. Schoene was born in Dresden, Germany, and came to the United States at age 4. His family settled in Buffalo and he was educated at Technical High School.

He served with the 15th Air Force in North Africa and Italy during World War II.

Based in Ceringnola, Italy, Mr. Schoene piloted a B-24 bomber for the 455th Bomb Group, 743rd Squadron, and completed 51 missions over enemy territory.

Mr. Schoene received the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with Five Oak Leaf Clusters.

He also served with the Ferry Command as a pilot of B-24 bombers out of Willow Run, Mich., and the Air Transport Command where he flew C-54 planes out of Miami and Homestead, Fla., to South America and the Azores.

While in the Air Force Reserve, Mr. Schoene served as a liaison officer for the Air Force Academy.

He managed the renewal parts department for Westinghouse Electric Co. and went on to earn his bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from the University of Buffalo in 1958. Mr. Schoene retired from Westinghouse in 1991 after 41 years of service.

He was remembered for his lifetime love of travel, the great outdoors, gardening and planting trees, family members said.

Mr. Schoene is survived by his wife of 65 years, the former Viola R. Hansen; a daughter, Dr. Karen R.; son, Dr. Gary; and a brother, Dr. Herman.

A funeral service will be held at 10 a.m. today in Harry A. Wedekindt Funeral Home, 280 Grover Cleveland Highway, Amherst.

455th Bomb Group Assoc., Inc.
P.O. Box 93095
Austin, TX 78709-3095

NON PROFIT ORG
US POSTAGE
PAID
GREEN BAY WI
PERMIT 460

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

A MESSAGE FROM 455TH BOMB GROUP ASSOC. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GREG RIGGS

Without annual or biannual reunions, I'm in a position of "no news is good news." From that perspective, I have pretty good news.

The logo pins we have been advertising in the newsletter have been popular. Please note that only a few of the squadron logo pins remain. See the ad on Page 3 for details. The group pins have been just as popular, but the original donation of group pins was much larger. Consequently, it is still easy for you to purchase group pins ---- at least for now! This is probably the last time these pins will be advertised in the *Cerignola Connection.*

We still have 473 members or associate members on our roster. This includes 450 WWII veterans or their widows. Twenty-three are other family members. Nine of our members are currently MIA. We continue to drop about 20 members each year for non-payment of dues.

I again encourage all of our annual members to go ahead and buy a life membership for only $60. It removes the annual burden of remembering to pay dues. Please check immediately above your name on the mailing label. It will indicate your membership status. If you see a two-digit number, that indicates the last year for which we have received dues payment. Annual dues for the coming year are payable by the end of December.

PLEASE READ THIS: We spend over $3 for every newsletter that is un-deliverable. Many of these are returned simply because a forwarding address has expired. Unfortunately, the only way to avoid this cost eliminates all forwarding of newsletters, even if a forwarding address has not expired (those currently cost us 50 cents). You can help us by sending us a change of address card if you move.

As we review costs, it is possible future newsletters will not be forwarded. If that becomes our policy, you will become an MIA if you move without sending us your new address. Nobody wants that, but we want to conserve funds so we can continue publishing newsletters!

In closing, I wish for you good health. I continue to enjoy life in a free country. Thank you for making that possible!

Greg Riggs, Executive Director, 455th Bomb Group Association

