CERIGNOLA CONNECTION

455th Bomb Group Association Newsletter

Spring 1995

FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

By now I am sure you have all received Louie Hansen's letter explaining the details of our 1995 Reunion in San Antonio TX 27-30 Sept., 1995. The tour schedule and other group activities that Louie and his committee have lined up will make our 1995 Reunion one of the best we have ever had. As I mentioned in the last Cerignola Connection we promised to cap the reunion off with a great speaker for the banquet on Sat. night 30 Sept. '95. Thanks to the efforts of Senator George McGovern, who was a pilot in the 741st Bomb Sq., our guest speaker will be an Astronaut in the current space program with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). We have asked that the speaker show us some space films with the astronauts involved in a space walk. Senator McGovern will be introducing our Guest Speaker. All in all the 1995 455th Bomb Group reunion promises to be our greatest reunion ever. We are projecting that there will be over 450 in attendance. It is very important that you get your reservations into Louie Hansen as soon as possible but not later than 1 Sept. 1995. It is a great help to have your reservations in early not only to help organize the tours and activities, but to insure you can participate in all the activities you are interested in. We are looking forward to seeing you all in San Antonio 27-30 Sept.

Eugene F. Hudson

1995 455th REUNION AT SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

The 455th Bomb Group Association will be holding its reunion September 27 through the 30th 1995 at the Airport Holiday Inn, San Antonio, Texas. Reunion information packets were mailed to all on our personnel list on the 17th of April 1995. If you did not get an info packet, you can contact Lou Hansen at **P.O. Box 6125, Spencer, Iowa 51301 or call at 712/262-7237** for information on the reunion.

This reunion packet includes all information you should need. A schedule gives what's going to happen each day. All tours are listed when, where, cost, etc. NOTE ONE TOUR CHANGE THIS TIME. Only each tour bus that is fully loaded will be going on a tour. So, it's the first in (by postmark date) who will go. However, if we have reservations for only part of a tour bus load this tour bus will be cancelled and money refunded.

By September 1st we must have your reservations for tours, meals, etc., in order that we can have your activities and your reunion packet ready for you when you arrive. Your hotel reservation must go directly to the hotel. See this hotel reservation form in your info packet.

Come to the reunion at San Antonio to meet old friends, make new ones and have a great time. We look forward to meeting you there.

Lou and Frances Hansen

The Chaplain's Corner

No day of the year is more American than Memorial Day. I have no idea what people of other nations think of courage or bravery, but we as a nation are closely bound to those who not only died in battle, but those who stood firm at their battle stations, lived to return to become citizens and now have gone on to a far better and eternal life. Here in America we consider them very dear and precious and think they should be honored in very special ways. In the turmoil of the world today, it is no wonder we bow before the true and living God, asking for strength and guidance for our nation as we remember those fallen comrades.

I never hear a bugle blast
Or gaze on marching men,
But what I breathe a prayer to God
that war not come again
And rob us of our manhood strength,
Who die in war's mad fray.
O Lord, we lift our pleading voices
On each and every day.
Send peace and joy around the world
That men may hate no more,
But fellowship and love of man
Shall take the place of war.

Anon

LET'S HEAR FROM YOU!

The Cerignola Connection is expanding in size. Many of you have sent photos, stories, and other articles of interest for publication. We still would like more from our ground support personnel. i.e. engineering, maintenance, administrative, motor pool, cooks, armament, and all the vital group support personnel necessary to keep planes in the air and wage a war. And POW's too. We'd like to hear from you. The more you send the bigger and better your Cerignola Connection will be!

FINAL FLIGHTS

Our hearts are with and sympathies go to loved ones of the 455th members.

T/Sgt. Arnold H. Walter (Appx 11/87) Radio Operator/Gunner, George W. Underwood's crew, 742nd B.Sq.

T/Sgt. John W. Wade (06/04/92) Flt. Engineer/Gunner Robert A. Helbig's crew, 743rd B.Sq.

S/Sgt. John W. Magee (11/18/94) Nose Turret Gunner, John D. Helbig's crew, 743rd, B.Sq.

T/Sgt. Wayne C. Hill (04/09/59) Flt. Engineer/Gunner, J.D. Vandergiff & Don M. Rawl's crew, 743rd B.Sq.

S/Sgt. Donald A. Bergquist (12/18/94) Nose Turret Gunner, Andrew R. Winter's crew, 740th B.Sq.

S/Sgt. James L. Brown (12/14/91) Ball Turret Gunner, James J. Kiernan's crew, 740th B.Sq.

1st Lt. Harold E. Tigert (12/09/94) Pilot, 743rd B.Sq. Retired from the USAF in 1962.

Maj. John L. Bethune (12/17/94) Pilot, Plane "Glammer Gal", 740th B.Sq.

1st Lt. William R. Adkisson (01/09/95) Co-pilot with Bethune and then 1st Pilot, Plane "Glammer Gal", 740th B.Sq.

PFC Edward M. Rolfe (12/10/94) served on the aircraft refueling crew, 742nd B.Sq.

T/Sgt. Robert L. Frizsell, Jr. (09/04/93) Air Bourne Radar Operator, E. Felder and M.S. McComb's crew, Gp.Hq.

Sgt. William H. Merrick (05/27/94) Aircraft Mechanic, Engineering Section, 742nd B.Sq.

1st Lt. Peter S. Corden (05/26/92) Navigator, Owen D. Blankenship's crew, 743rd B.Sq.

1st Lt. James J. Kiernan (01/24/93) 1st Pilot, 740th B.Sq.

Capt. Robert C. Christensen (08/24/94) 1st Pilot, Plane "Ole Soldier", 741st B.Sq.

2nd Lt. Irving E. Singer (APX 04/94) Bombardier, Almon Catlin's crew, Plane "Leakin Deacon", 743rd B.Sq.

Maj. Harold R. Linneweh (12/16/94) Flt. Engineer/Gunner Almon Catlin's Crew, Plane "Leakin Deacon", 743rd B.Sq.

Helen Linnewett passed away on February 10, 1995. She was the widow of Harold R. Linnewett.

Grayce S. Bialas passed away on September 28, 1994. She was the wife of Casimir E. Bialas.

Doris M. Breed passed away on October 24, 1994. She was the wife of Billy A. Breed.

Bernice M. Latus passed away on April 19, 1994. She was the wife of Arnold C. Latus.

Virginia E. Beckner passed away on November 1994. She was the widow of Robert L. Beckner.



Fifteenth Air Force

The Fifteenth Air Force was activated during World War II on the first day of November 1943 and launched its first combat strike less than 24 hours later. The legendary General Jimmy Doolittle, already famous for leading the daring raid on Tokyo, was its first commander. Operating from captured Italian bases, Fifteenth Air Force's B-17's and B-24's attacked targets in southern and central Europe beyond the effective range of allied forces in England.

During nearly two years of operations, the Fifteenth's combat crews logged over 239,000 sorties, dropping some 300,000 tons of bombs on enemy targets from the Balkans to the Berlin doorsteps of Nazi Germany. Historians credit the Command's destruction of enemy petroleum production in the famous Ploesti oil raids as a deciding factor in the defeat of the axis powers.

During most of the intervening years, the Fifteenth Air Force was headquartered at March AFB in Riverside, California where it served an historic role as a major component of the Strategic Air Command.

During the cold war years, the Fifteenth commanded significant elements of our nation's nuclear deterrence — bomber, tanker, missile, and reconnaissance forces based throughout the western United States and Pacific Rim. It served with distinction in every major engagement from the Korea conflict to the Vietnam War and Desert Storm.

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact Forces, the Air Force was reorganized to effectively respond to the changing conditions and the new challenges of the post Cold War period. The fifteenth Air Force was reassigned to the new Air Mobility Command where it assumed a significant role in its continued service to our nation.

In July of 1993, Fifteenth Air Force Headquarters moved to Travis AFB in northern California. There the men and women of the Fifteenth continue to serve in the same great traditions of duty, honor, and country pioneered by countless unsung heroes who answered our nation's call since that fateful day of November 1, 1943.

From the 461st Liberator

Elmo J. Henske And Friends Return After 50 Yrs. To Italy

An airfield near the village of Cerignola in the Foggia Valley of Italy served as the home base of the 455th Heavy Bombardment Group in May of 1944. Fifty years later in the summer of 1994, eleven former members of the air group returned to that location and other cities in Italy to see the changes which have occurred. In sharp contrast, they found that the people of Italy now have more than sufficient food and good clothing and that the people are busy working hard. Italy produces all the food it needs; there are gardens everywhere, even on vacant lots in the cities. The farmers no longer use oxen and wooden beam plows; they have tractors with modern implements, including round hay balers, grain combines and mobile water sprinkler systems. Fields of grain, tomatoes, onions, garlic, artichoke, cabbage and other crops cover the countryside. Flocks of sheep were seen, also herds of cattle as well as herds of water buffalo whose milk is prized for making Mozzarella cheese.

A universal health care plan provides that no one is denied some medical service. The government assures that all the citizens have food, clothing and a place to live. Construction of housing is regulated as to the type and the design, as well as the color of the outside paint which is usually white, yellow or tan, and outside window shutters must be green or brown.

Italian ladies were very stylishly dressed in the larger cities. Highways are well maintained. City streets are crowded with small Japanese and European cars, motor scooters and bicycles. Driving seems to be rather unregulated and daring, but only two minor accidents were seen. The country of Italy with a population of approximately 60 million people would fit inside the State of Texas.

The two parallel runways of the Group's former airbase have now been converted to a wheat field. The cellar type briefing room is now used as a sheep barn. An Italian farmer used the operations building as his residence and a part for grain storage. A large part of the olive grove where the 743rd Squadron air crews' tents were located has been cleared and converted to a field.

The mayor of Cerignola, the police chief and the local newspaper editor greeted the group at the new City Hall after which a reception was held and refreshments were served. The local priest conducted a brief memorial service for the veterans in the small church which has been built by the Italians at the former air base headquarters. Inside the church a memorial plaque in appreciation of the Groups' service has been placed on the wall.

Many historical and artistic sites were visited, including the American Military cemeteries at Anzio-Netuna (8,000 burials) and Florence (4,000 burials). Memorial wreaths were placed at the principal monuments at the two cemeteries.

The people were courteous and friendly to the veterans and did not interfere with any of their activities. No scars or reminders of the war which raged in Europe fifty years ago were visible.

CASE CLOSED



Dear Tom,

Our Navigator John Pramik cleared up the name of the girl being harassed by the gremlins and it was Magnetic Molly. We flew that plane to Cairo, Egypt on flak leave 07/26/44. The picture of the crew in the unit history in front of the 741 (pp.229) was taken 08/12/44 at our field.

John is a retired member of the FBI—case closed.

Best Regards,

Gerald W. Adams

POSTAL SERVICE STAMP TO REMEMBER POWS & MIAS



The Postal Service will issue a "POW & MIA" stamp this year honoring American veterans captured by hostile forces and terrorists, and remembering those who remain missing in action. The stamp will be issued during dedication ceremonies in Washington, DC, on Memorial Day, May 29, 1995. This is the second stamp issued by the Postal Service honoring America's POWs and MIAs. The six-cent "U.S. Serviceman" stamp, issued in 1970, read, "Honoring U.S. Servicemen — Prisoners of War — Missing and Killed in Action." More than 67 million of that stamp were printed.

Al Asch Writes—

The 93rd Bomb Group was one of the most colorful heavy bomb groups of WW II. It earned the nick name of "Ted's Flying Circus" because of its several trips to North Africa and Middle East to support the war effort there. Colonel Ted Timberlake (became a three Star General) was Group Commander, thus the name "Ted". On one trip, the group flew the Ploesti low level raid during August of 1943. My Squadron Commander and Operations Officer received the Congressional Medal of Honor for leading the Group on that raid. The 93rd became a part of the 2nd Air Division when there became so many bomber groups in England that one command, the 8th Air Force, could not manage all of them. That came about after I left England in May of 1943.

SHOPTALK

A group of Air Force pilots and their wives were having dinner, and for several hours the wives

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sat and listened to accounts of takeoffs, landings, near collisions and bad weather.

Exasperated, one the the wives finally demanded! "Don't you fellows get enough shop talk when you're with the squadron?"

"Don't be silly," snapped her husband. When we're with the Squadron we talk about women."

Gulf Coast Cattleman

The 743rd Had a Poet, Too!

Air Force Prayer



O, Lord, we thank you for the men who fly,
For fighting soldiers aren't afraid to die,
For men whose heart is tough as steel,
Whose courage makes the enemy reel.

For pilots, brave and true,
For wills their task to do,
For men who guide the planes,
Through the fog, mist, and rains.

For men who work upon the ground,
Their skill is good and sound.
For Air Force men everywhere;
For them, we ask this prayer.

And, last of all to thee we praise
For guiding hands along airwaves,
For Presence with us every day,
O, Lord, this prayer we ever pray.

1943

Royce Hilliard, S/Sqt
Balls of Fire Plane

FLYING CADET

"Contact" the starter cries,
The blade begins to whine,
He revs it up until you hear
A deep full-throated chime.

The wheels begin to move,
It inches forward on the run,
And as the power is applied,
It heads faster into the sun.

Its wheels bounce on the sod,
The body clears the ground
The whirring blade shakes the rod
As both hit on the rebound.

Faster, faster runs the cadet
As he seeks to keep the pace,
For the bouncing ole lawnmower
Is really running a race.

Royce Hilliard
Oct. 1943

John Smidl Writes—

I was very impressed and pleased with the last Cerignola Connection. It was just great reading about the experiences of the guys from our era.

I was probably one of the last (if not the last) to enter the 743rd Officers Club when the group moved out for the last time. I remember walking into the bare place and looking at the caricatures of all the guys who had gone before. They were still all staring at me from the wall where they were hung. It was an eerie feeling all right — all quiet — no laughing and yelling.

I took my camera and tried to get a picture—several of the entire wall. Unfortunately the light was poor and most of them didn't turn out—anyway, here is what I got!

Just like a 23 year old sap, I took down my own drawing and still have it framed on my wall. It never occurred to me to take down any others, even of my own crew. What a fool I was—but of course we were moving out and there was no time to think about anything but "get the hell out and go home!!"

All the pictures were drawn by an Italian artist, Fran Kon. He was really a very fine artist. I guess all he got for his trouble was maybe a buck and some cigarettes.

Later he painted two water colors for me, one of my mother, the other of my wife. They are among my most prized possessions — truly wonderful pictures.

Well anyway I also took some photos of the 743rd and 455th moving out. We had knocked down all the tents and loaded the 6 x 6's and were gone!

Little did I know then what an era was coming to a close. How many lives had been lived — and died during those very few months or so. Now I know, and I'm sure many of us who are left can appreciate that very short time — when all things were new, exciting and terrible.

We knew it when it happened. Let's write about it now and tell it the way it really was. When we are gone,who else can tell the story?

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I recently came across a fellow who is a very fine artist and somewhat of a WW II historian. He is interested in more art and historical background of airplanes.

I gave him a picture of "Teepee Time Gal"—which I'm sure everyone in the 743rd knew as the "Belle of the Squadron." Probably nobody knew her better than Henry Jennings—her crew chief. If you can look up his address I'd be in your debt.

Also, anyone still alive that flew her, I guess Schumard was one. I flew her 119th. She was the best!!

Ed: I'll reproduce John's photos in the next issue of the Cerignola Connection. In checking them over, sure enough, there was your editor, crushed summer hat and all!

The Lost Breed from John Smidl the poet

Hail to thee Blythe Spirit
And all the spirits past
To the stick and rudder pilots
Who flew by the feel of their ass

Here's to the airplane drivers
To the great Lead Bird and US Fort
To the flak happy tail end Charlie's
And the guys who flew just for sport

Drink to the buzz boys and black sheep
Who battled the galloping crud
To the pea shooters, bandits and bogies
They painted the sky with their blood

Never again will you see them
Those racy undisciplined guys
But one day we'll all be together
Somewhere up there in the skies

Flash Reunion News!

Colonel Tom Hendricks, USAF Astronaut, now in space will be the guest speaker at the 455th B.G. Reunion in San Antonio, TX. His shuttle touches down June 8. Tom will bring with him the latest pictures of outer space.

From the Group of Flying Poets

Listen to the rattle
The rumble and the roar
The country side is littered
With the parts of 24's

The bombardier yells bombs away
Right through the bombay doors.
The country side is littered
With the parts of 24's

Oh, that B dash two four
Oh, that four engine whore
The pilots who fly it
Are all bound to lose.
Pull 55 inches and still only cruise,
Oh, that B dash two four.

Submitted by Mag Siegtried

Says it's better during happy hour and to the tune of the Wabash Cannonball!

15th AIR FORCE MEMORIAL

While still short of funds to complete the 15th Air Force Memorial significant progress has been made in the last few months. Dedication of the first phase is scheduled for November 1, 50th anniversary of the 15th.

The first phase of the memorial included a large bronze casting of the 15th Air Force WW II insignia (over three feet across and weighs nearly 200 pounds), a bronze memorial plaque, and a bronze bust of General Doolittle. As contributions permit a 180 foot long memorial wall will be constructed which will include a representation of the 15th Air Force's combat history. The 15th Air Force WW II insignia will be centered on the wall and the Memorial Plaque positioned just beneath. The Doolittle bust will be positioned on a pedestal in front of the wall.

The inscription of the Memorial Plaque is:

Dedicated on 1 November 1993 to all who have served in the Fifteenth Air Force:

In honor of and in memory of our comrades who died in defense of our country;

In tribute to all who have served during our fifty year history to keep our country free;

In recognition of those who serve today in the same great traditions of duty, honor, and country;

and

In trust as our legacy for those who will follow in our footsteps — guarding a heritage — defending tomorrow.

The donations for the Memorial Bench from the 455th Bomb Group and its members have been the principal source to date.

The 15th Air Force Memorial and the March Field Museum is located at March Air Force Base, California 92518. Contributions to the Memorial or membership in the 15th Air Force Association can be made by contacting **C.E. Ben Franklin, Executive Director, 15th Air Force Assoc., P.O. Box 6325, March Air Force Base, California 92518**

Freedom

Only those
who have lost their freedom...
can appreciate—
truly appreciate—
how terribly vital it is.

I have looked
through barbed wire
at machine gun towers...
and longed with all my being
to be free again.

My body was imprisoned...
but never my mind...
my thoughts...
my soul.

Since my liberation
I have treasured my freedom...
and will never forget
those terrible, torturous months
when I was hungry
and dirty
and cold...
but most of all
when I was enslaved.

Lt. Col. Bert McDowell, Jr., USAF, Ret.
AXPOW, WWII, Germany

AH

Amid the clink of ping pong balls,
And GI's boisterous chatter,
I sit me in the dark room hall
Trying to compose this letter.

If perchance the news is dry,
And the words stick together.
Remember this: Texas sun will fry
Any dirty ole G.I. Irish potato.

Royce Hilliard
10/1/43

SETTING OUR SIGHTS ON STEYR!

The overall Steyr mission 4/2/44 is well documented in the 455th History Book. Our crew was on that mission, most of us having flown about 10 missions previous to that. Part of the official chronology (from the 455th book) states, "three (aircraft) returned prior to the bombing because of engine troubles which prevented them from staying with the formation". Our aircraft was one of those three and I would like to tell the story from our perspective. Our crew on the mission was our regular crew which had trained together and gone overseas with the 455th (743rd Sqdn), as follows:

Donald Petrie (Pete)
— nose gunner (KIA 5/6/44)
Matthew Spencer
— ball gunner (Deceased)
Ingvar Anderson (Andy)
— navigator (Deceased)
Steve Drasco
— bombardier (Deceased)
Alex Herbert
— waist gunner (Dec'd 2/19/93)
Sebastiano Manzitto (Suby)
— waist gunner
Roland Keith
— Top turret gunner/flight engineer
Charles McArthur (Mac)
— tail gunner
Richard Dunscomb (Dusty)
— co-pilot
William Arnold (Bill)
— pilot

The mission was going as planned as the 455th crossed the Adriatic, over Yugoslavia, and into Austria. Andy and Drasco had been checking our course and getting everything in readiness for the bomb run. Keith had been making some electrical system checks. Crew members were reporting enemy aircraft shadowing us. Where was our fighter escort? We were in the second section which generally takes the brunt of the fighter attacks and was certainly not the safest place to be in the formation. Here we were, enclosed in a thin aluminum shell along with over 20,000 pounds of high explosives and high octane gasoline, and there was no doubt that people would be shooting at us today.

On this mission we were flying our B-24 Liberator which we had named "Turbo-Culosis" (Airplane No. 879). Pete had come up with this name after a previous mission in her where we had lost all of our super-chargers over the target. Turbo-Culosis was a replacement airplane and was the first unpainted airplane in the Group and the only one at this time. In a formation of camouflaged aircraft her shiny aluminum skin made her stand out like a sore thumb. She seemed to be a source of curiosity for German fighter pilots and an inviting target.

Our course was taking us across a valley in the Alps mountains. It looked so serene from our vantage point of four miles up. Suddenly we received an unexpected welcome — black bursts of flak! The enemy is offering resistance to our aerial invasion into his territory. It had to be here that we took a direct hit by an 88mm shell that went completely through the wing on a downward trajectory, but we did not realize it until later. It could have been a mortal wound to a lesser airplane, but if our sturdy Liberator did give us any hint that she was hurt we were too busy to notice. Off to our left a plume of smoke was seen ascending from the valley floor and rising to our flight altitude. Were they firing rockets at us from the ground today? This had been reported on previous missions in this area. It was fairly common for enemy fighters to have rockets as part of their armament. Anyway, in a minute or so we were out of any anti-aircraft fire and continuing on course with the Group intact.

A short time later, when we were about 20 minutes or so from the target area, the Group was attacked by a large number of enemy fighters, most of them coming in from the rear of the formation. The fighters were very aggressive and came in several abreast on their firing passes. By the din of the .50 calibers going off we knew that our crew was giving a good account of themselves. Tracers from the rest of the group were lacing across the sky.

A fighter came within about 50 yards of us and Pete in the top turret with his twin .50's sent him down on fire. Back in the tail Mac, Suby, Alex, and Spencer had their hands full as the attacking planes came in 5 or 6 abreast. Spacing between the flights of fighters as they came in was so close that there was hardly time to shift gun positions from one flight to the next. Mac in his tail turret shot one fighter down in flames and this was confirmed by another crew. Many hits on the attacking fighters were observed by our crew members and smoke was seen coming from some of the planes as they broke away.

Then we were hit!! Turbo-Culosis shuddered and lost airspeed. No. 4 engine was on fire and No. 2 engine was damaged. We were unable to keep up with the Group and it was pulling rapidly away from us. The life expectancy of our aircraft in this situation could probably be measured in seconds.

I peeled off to the left, passing over two of our aircraft that were on fire and losing altitude. I saw no chutes. Our co-pilot, Dusty, was trying to get the fire out. The intercom had been knocked out so communication was a problem. After clearing the two burning aircraft I went into a steep diving spiral hoping to convince any possible pursuers that we were already done for. Our crew at least was convinced!! Three 109's weren't fooled and followed us down until we dove into a cloud bank. We dove on through the clouds but they didn't follow.

At this point we didn't know if it

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would be possible to keep the airplane in the air, even if we were successful in extinguishing the fire.

As if our situation wasn't bad enough, a single-engine was spotted climbing up to meet us and its dusky silhouette spelled trouble. I tried to alert the crew but there was still no intercom and at this point they were probably all getting ready to bail out, except for Dusty who was still fighting the engine fire and having problems getting it out. Nobody on the crew was aware of our only seconds-away upcoming encounter with the enemy aircraft so I was on my own as to how to handle him.

The best way to confront this new threat seemed to be to take him head-on. Any turn would make it easier for him to get on our tail. At this point I believe that No. 4 engine was still burning briskly and we were leaving a trail of fire and smoke. We were still in a dive and going at a higher airspeed than the fighter which was in a climb attitude. We were coming head-on at each other and at our high closing speed it wasn't going to be long before somebody had to make a decision.

The fighter pilot decided to yield to the 4-engine bomber. He broke to his left, giving us a snap-shot of a swastika and the sharp nose of a 109, and then banked to the right. Since it was my intention to keep him always in front of us I banked to the right also and thanks to our high airspeed we pulled to within 150 yards or so of him before he was able to accelerate enough to pull away from us. The last I saw of him he was high-tailing it out of there. We fired no shots and apparently he didn't either for some reason.

After the 109 disappeared we leveled out somewhat, jettisoned our bomb load, and took stock of our situation as we headed in the direction of home. We had the skies to ourselves — the air battle had moved on. Nobody had bailed out or been injured. Dusty had gotten the engine fire out but we couldn't feather the prop. It was windmilling and producing a lot of drag. Pulling maximum allowable power on the two good engines we were still losing altitude. We still had the Alps to get over! We had to lighten our load. The crew started throwing everything possible over-board — flak suits, waste guns, bomb-strike camera, etc. I think someone even threw his parachute out!

Eventually we got to the point where we could maintain our altitude with reduced power settings. However, No. 4 prop was still windmilling, and would periodically go wild, shaking the nacelle, the wing, and the whole airplane. The drag of the prop exceeded the capability of the rudder trim system. Dusty and I had to spell each other in pushing on the left rudder pedal with both feet to keep the plane anywhere near in trim. Somebody suggested we shoot the prop off!

We were still over enemy territory so we kept our eyes peeled for unfriendly aircraft. We were not in very good condition to tangle with anybody. We eased out over the Adriatic and headed down the middle. We were just mushing along to keep No. 4 prop speed down. Aside from the high left rudder force required we seemed to be doing OK. We weren't seeing any more unfriendlies—evidently they were all still up in Austria.

Since we had suffered so much damage that was apparent, we had concerns about possible unknown damage to various other systems such as landing gear, flaps, etc. that could jeopardize a normal landing. Also, we might not have sufficient control if we reduced airspeed as for a normal landing. We decided not to test or operate any of these systems until we were in the vicinity of our base at San Giovanni and to use a slightly higher airspeed than normal on our final approach.

When we were about 15 minutes from San Giovanni we called in and told them about our condition and requested emergency vehicles to meet us. Fortunately we didn't need any assistance as all the necessary systems functioned normally and we came right in and made a more or less normal landing. When those wheels touched the runway — it was impossible to describe the feeling!! After we parked and got out some were seen to kiss the ground.

When we looked the airplane over it was quite a mess. No. 4 engine was partially burned up, and incendiary having buried itself in the crankcase. The crankshaft was broken. No. 2 was perforated with holes. The wing and other parts of the plane had taken many 20mm and other hits. The right wing had been hit by an 88mm shell which had gone completely through it leaving a large gaping hole where it came out. Not too many airplanes survive a direct hit by an 88mm! Turbo-Culosis had taken a beating on her 6 1/2 hour flight. Needless to say, we felt pretty lucky to be back home and with no casualties.

Later when the Group returned we heard of the successful bombing of the secondary target. Our losses on the mission were 4 airplanes and 40 crew members. All we could do was to hope and pray that somehow our downed comrades would survive.

Addendum

Don Petrie (Pete) received credit for probably destroying an ME-109.

Charles McArthur (Mac) received confirmation for destroying an ME-109.

W.A. Arnold
743rd Squadron

* * *

A True War Story

Ploesti. Just the name of it scared the hell out of me.

About 4:00 A.M. on the fifth of May, 1944, Captain Abraham Pendleton awakened me for a bombing mission. Although I was half groggy, not from sleep but a hangover, I said, "okay Abe, let's go."

Now with a pilot named Abraham, a bombardier named Israel and a navigator named John, how could I go wrong on a bombing mission with those Biblical names. Oh yes, even better, we had a David as the tail gunner and a Julian as the left waist gunner. I don't know if Julian is a Biblical name, but it sounded good to me.

I was a member of the 740th Bomb Squadron, (B-24's) of the top of the heap of the 15th Air Force, 304 Bomb Wing, 455 bomb Group and one of four Bomb Squadrons — 740, 741, 742, and the 743. Top of the heap meant we were positioned in the front formation of the wing.

Group Intelligence informed us at preflight briefing that oil production was up fifty percent over our last raid. Our mission to bomb the marshaling yards at Ploesti would be number 13 on that facility. Now I thought this was strange, since one B-24 Liberator dropping 10-500 pound bombs would have made Sun Oil refinery in Toledo (my home town) inoperative for months, including East Toledo, Oh well, a mission is a mission, but why 13? H-m-m-m...Why not 14, like skyscrapers that skip the 13th floor.

This raid would be a double mission. Our crew would get a double shot of whiskey on our return. Since most of Abe's crew didn't drink, I would get in my canteen cup about twelve shots of booze. Hell, at that rate I would have bombed Berchtesgaden by myself, after imbibing of course.

While Abe was checking the exterior of the plane, I was in the cockpit by myself when I heard a 'kaplunk.' I looked out and said, "Sergeant, what was that?"

"We're arming the plane with 500 pound RDX bombs," he answered.

I made a hasty retreat. RDX bombs can be unstable at times and I wanted no part in the arming. Once secured they help to protect us from 88mm flak.

Just several days before, ordinance men were dropping 500 pound RDX bombs off a 4x4 truck in our storage area when one went 'kaboom.' That was enough 'kaboom' for me.

Now we were ready for take-off. Captain Abe (Bunny) Pendleton had a real ritual after I started the engines. He would rev each engine, checking turbo, rpm, oil pressure, altimeter, etc. I would call out the check list and I also did my own 'a, g, p, m, l, f' list from my civilian flying previous to military flying.

We took off and the number one engine ran wild. I hit the number one run wild button and Pendelton got it back to norm (What a way to start the day.)

We got in formation and I marveled at the way the 485 bombers could get into the right formation with planes taking off every thirty seconds. That's why I remained a co-pilot.

Major General Nate Twining, Commanding General and Brigadier General Born, Chief of Staff of the 15th Air Force with headquarters in Bari, Italy were very proud of this particular raid; it would be the 15th's first 1500 ton bomb drop by 485 heavies. I say heavies because we had some 'Brand X' bombers in our force (B-17's). By my figures we dropped 1212.5 tons. Oh well, maybe we should have dropped Shamu the whale to bring up the tonnage.

With 485 bombers in formation, weather clear, Cumuli Nimbus clouds, and a Spam sandwich, what more could I ask for. It was a great exhilarating feeling to be with this outfit. Many ended up colonels, doctors, lawyers, engineers, entrepenours, as well as a few bums. Our average age was twenty years old, give or take a year or two.

Minutes before our bomb run, we observed a black speck on the horizon at three o'clock. As this lone plane, doing at least 450 mph, got closer we noticed no propellers. It flew past our wing and disappeared. Dr. Werner Von Braun had done it again. First the Buzz Bomb and now a twin engine jet plane (Messerschmitt 262).

When we arrived at our I.P. (initial point) on our bomb run, many hundreds of 88mm anti-aircraft explosive bombs were popping shrapnel and black smoke puffs all over the area. If you heard an explosion, you were in deep trouble. Some pilots claimed they were on instruments (blind flying) because of the smoke. Thank God the Germans didn't have radar like the Americans and English. The Germans had some radar, but primitive compared to ours.

While over the Ploesti oil fields and marshaling yards, I observed quite a bit of bomb damage our planes did on that mission as well as previous raids. Upon leaving the flak and bomb area there were our beautiful long-range P-51 fighter escorts to take us home.

Upon returning to our base at San Giovanni (an ex-monastery) at Cerignola, Italy, I felt like opening up the old monastery again with Abraham, Israel, John and David. Abraham, in the Old testament, never did get to the promised land, but our Abraham did. When I told the crew my feelings, they started calling me Father Raymond.

At debriefing we were informed our mission was very successful. Out of 485 heavy bombers we lost 10 and 190 men. Our squadron of nine planes lost one with ten men.

After debriefing by Group Intelligence and a noggin of rum, I looked at Abe and thought, 'you do have big ears; so that's why they call you Bunny.'

EPILOGUE

The Messerschmitt ME 262 could go over 100 mph faster than our P-51 Mustangs. On 22 December,

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1944, about eight months after our first encounter with the ME 262, Lt.s' E.P. McGlauflin and Roy L. Scales of the 15th Air Force Fighter Command, 31st Fighter Group, shot down an ME 262, the first jet victory in our arena. By the end of the war. Fighter Command had shot down a total of 12. Our bomber gunners shot down over 30. Goring had about a 1000 ME 262's. Due to our bombing their plants, on the ground straffing by fighters, and air-to-air combat, they were held in check.

CREW

Captain Abraham (Bunny) Pendleton
2nd Lt. Raymond (Wreck) Butler
1st Lt. John (Bigfoot) Pramik
1st Lt. Israel (The Man) Katz
M/Sgt. Julian (Count) Counts
T/Sgt. David (The Judge) Goble
T/Sgt. Gerald (Mr. Perfect) Adams
T/Sgt. William (Billy Boy) Groome
T/Sgt. Richard (Sparks) Keen
S/Sgt. Donald (Indian Joe) Kaplanek

RC Butler

George Curio Writes...

Enclosed is an article that I wrote commemorating the anniversary of the greatest air-rescue mission in history.

I was a nose gunner on a B-24, 742 Squadron, 455th Group. Our pilot was Cliff Wrightson. Most of my missions were on an old veteran aircraft, Shoo-Shoo Baby. I flew on my first mission on August 8, 1944. The target was the oil refinery at Kolin, Czech. Flew my last mission on February 16, 1945.

Notes from my diary on my last mission: "2/16/1945 — Sortie 35, Mission 50. Up again today, my fourth day in a row! Lost our formation in heavy clouds over Adriatic. Joined Red Tail formation. Ran into some flak approaching Alps on way to target — Regensburg. Flak at target not too bad. Saw one Lib go down in flames. Red Tail leader screwed up on the way home, led us over two flak areas. Flak at both places heavy and accurate. Left Red Tails and came home by ourselves. Sweated out weather, gas. After we landed, I dug a fairly large chunk of flak out of my nose turret — nice Souvenir! FINITO!

'Operation Reunion' Remembered 50 Years Later

Some things are never forgotten.

The media attention focused on the 50th anniversary of D-Day sparked a memory that had been buried deep in my subconscious for 50 years.

The sights, sounds and drama of "Operation Reunion" came flooding back as if it happened yesterday.

About three months after D-Day, the greatest air rescue mission of all time was successfully executed — and I was an eye witness.

"Operation Reunion" involved freeing more than 1,100 Americans held as prisoners of war 400 miles deep inside enemy lines.

On August 27, 1944, I was stationed at the San Giovanni Army Airfield, near Cerignola, Italy.

I had been there less than two weeks and had already completed four combat missions as a nose gunner on a B-24 Liberator heavy bomber.

On that day, the wailing of a siren startled me out of my daydreams and alerted me to the approach of enemy aircraft!

I ran out into the company street and saw a German Messerschmitt 109 fighter plane slowly circling our landing strip. Its landing gear and flaps were down and the pilot was slowly rocking the wings.

There is an unwritten code among airmen that a plane using this maneuver should not be attacked because it means the plane is either in distress, trying to desert or being flown by an ally.

Drama begins

As the Messerschmitt got closer, you could see that an American flag had been painted on each side of its fuselage. It was escorted by several American fighters.

The aircraft landed and the pilot pulled himself out of the cockpit with hands raised over his head.

This was just the beginning of one of the most dramatic events of the war, because tucked secretly inside the plane was Lt. Col. James Gunn, commanding officer of the 454th Bomb Group, based at San Giovanni Air Field.

The story of Gunn is remarkable in itself, and because of him "Operation Reunion" was launched.

A year earlier, shortly after dawn, on August 1, 1943, 177 Liberators took off from North Africa on mission "Tidalwave," a low-level attack on the Ploesti oil fields and refineries in Romania.

It was estimated that 60 percent of Germany's crude oil, or one-third of her liquid fuel, came from Ploesti.

The mere mention of the name Ploesti was enough to strike fear into airmen.

Ploesti, the most vital of the German oil facilities, lay beyond the range of bombers based in England.

The Germans believed that Ploesti, because of its location and heavy defense, was immune to the attack.

Operation Tidalwave proved them wrong!

The mission was not perfectly executed. Foulups over the target diminished the overall effectiveness of the first mass assault on this key target.

The planes caused heavy damage but only knocked out 42 percent of Ploesti's oil refining capacity.

Even though the raid was not a complete success, extraordinary heroism displayed during this mission resulted in five Congressional Medals of Honor ever awarded for a single action.

Fifty-four planes were lost and 532 airmen were killed, missing or captured.

The Germans made up for lost refinery capacity by activating idle plants and speeding repairs to damaged plants.

Ploesti wasn't attacked again until late spring of 1944. About a year after the first major raid on Ploesti and slightly more than three months after D-Day, the 15th Air Force mounted heavy strikes against the Romanian oil fields. On August 17-18-19, 1944 the 15th delivered the knockout blows that demolished the target.

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It was during one of these missions that Gunn was shot down. He was captured and being the highest ranking American officer, was named commandant of the prisoner of war (POW) camp.

Near the end of August 1944, word began to circulate throughout the camp that Romania had changed sides in the war.

The Russian Army was fast approaching and the Romanians were in revolt against the Germans.

On August 23, King Michael of Romania went on the radio to plea to the Germans to leave his country and he guaranteed that the Romanian Army would not interfere with the withdrawal.

Prisoners concerned

The big concern in the POW camp was the fate of the prisoners.

Would the Germans take them back to Germany? Would they be executed?

Freedom lay 400 miles away across the Adriatic Sea. It might as well have been a million miles.

Gunn was certain that if he could get back to Italy he would be able to convince Gen. Nathan Twining, commanding officer of the 15th Air Force, that an air rescue evacuation should be attempted.

Officials of the Romanian government learned of Gunn's idea and agreed to cooperate.

A pilot and an old Italian plane attempted to take Gunn back to Italy.

But shortly after take off, the plane developed engine trouble (or was it that the Romanian pilot got cold feet?) At any rate, the plane returned to Romanian soil and the plan appeared dead.

Along comes Romanian air ace Capt. Constantine Cantacuzino, who had access to a Messerschmitt 109. If the colonel would squeeze into the radio compartment of the single-seat fighter, then Cantacuzino would attempt to fly Gunn to Italy so he could present the plan to Twining.

The American agreed.

The radio was removed from the German fighter and Gunn squeezed into the radio compartment.

The daring Romanian pilot flew over the Adriatic Sea without incident until the plane reached the Italian coast, where it attracted several American fighters, who escorted the plane to San Giovanni Field.

Upon landing, Cantacuzino pulled himself out of the cockpit with hands held over his head. In perfect English, he asked for a screwdriver. He unscrewed the door to the radio compartment. Slowly, a cold, cramped, happy colonel inched his way out of the tiny quarters.

Both men stood side by side basking in the spontaneous ovation of the Americans.

Gunn was rushed off to meet with Twining, who immediately approved the plan. The final step was the approval of Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower and that came the next day.

"Operation Reunion" was then launched. Fifty-seven B-17 bombers were stripped of their armament. The bomb bays were fitted with benches. During the next three days, the 57 Flying Fortresses made shuttle runs to Popesti Airfield near Bucharest. They were under heavy fighter escort both ways.

The greatest air rescue evacuation effort of all time returned 1,162 POWs to freedom.

Ploesti scorecard: Not counting repeat missions of many crews, a total force of 59,834 airmen had flown against Ploesti, A total of 13,469 tons of bombs had been dropped on the oil fields and refineries, and 350 bombers were lost.

The freed airmen were deloused, fed and sent home.

I went on to complete 50 missions and was also sent home.

Gunn stayed in the Air Force until his retirement in 1967.

Cantacuzino returned to Romania where he was given a P-51 Mustang fighter and continued adding to his kill list. Only this time, the fighters shot down were German. He was reported to have died on an operating table in Spain in 1969.

Much of what I have written is from personal memory and observation. However, I must gratefully acknowledge help from two books; "Passage to Valhalla" by Bill Fili and "The Army Air Forces in World War II," edited by W.F. Craven and J.L. Gate.

It is written with the hope of helping to preserve and perpetuate "Operation Reunion" and the memories of the rescuers and the rescued.

Some things should never be forgotten.

By: Geroge Curio

Wartime Holidays!

I joined the 455th Gp, 740th Sqd as an AM at Salt Lake City in Sept. 1943. Thanksgiving that year was at Langley with many children from a nearby Orphanage as the invited guests; a very nice gesture. Christmas and New Years I spent on the Charlie B. Acott and we all felt like orphans.

At San Giovanni I remember the 100th mission party with Joe Louis putting on a boxing exhibit. In July 1944 I left the Ground Crews to become an Aerial Photographer.

On my 30th combat mission on Sept. 12, 1944, which was to Munich Germany, on Rich Hubers crew, our plane was disabled and we were lucky to land in Switzerland where we were interned. Thanksgiving Day 1944 I spent in a Swiss Hospital and nobody knew it was a holiday. However, I spent Christmas 1944 in a beautiful Alpine village of Adelboden with 200 other internees and all the friendly townspeople.

In Feb. 1945 we were repatriated back to Italy and thence home.

At holiday times I always recall what were the best and worst years of our lives.

THAT BROOKLYN GUY
Bob Carnaker

* * *

BLEAKEST DAY AND MYSTERY CLEARED

I remember one of the bleakest days in my life occurred in April, 1944. I had flown our first 13 missions with our crew but did not fly the 14th due to illness. A replacement co-pilot went in my place. It was his first mission. The target was the marshaling yards at Bucharest in Romania. WIllie Moore was our first pilot and I was his co-pilot. Moore was my tentmate along with Lief Ericson, Navigator, and Jim Gall, Bombardier.

I spent most of the day in the tent on my cot. That afternoon I watched the B-24's come home, peel off and land. The flight strip was about a mile away from our 740th Squadron tent area. After the crews were debriefed and went through the coffee, donut, and whiskey line the trucks began to arrive and the airmen jumped down and, with their gear over their shoulders, trudged to their respective tents in the Olive grove. But there was no Willie Moore, or Lief Erickson, or Jimmie Gall. I was somewhat alarmed, but there would be more trucks.

There were a couple of later trucks but my crew was not among them. Now I was really alarmed. I looked aloft and could see a few stragglers coming in and landing. I caught a jeep ride down to the flight line only to learn that my crew was not among the stragglers.

Back at our Squadron Headquarters tent I learned that we had had some losses at the target and apparently Willie Moore was one of them. I inquired among returning crews but no one could definitely say they had seen Willie Moore fall away although airplanes had been shot down.

That was how it was left. I knew the time for stragglers was past. It was hard to face but I resigned myself to the realization that my crew had been shot down.

It was black and quiet and lonely in the tent that night as I lay there with my thoughts. I considered the various fates that might have befallen the crew. They might have taken bad hits with some killed, some wounded. WIllie might have attempted a crash landing. Perhaps engines had been knocked out and all had bailed out over or in the target area. Or, perhaps, they had been hit, fallen away from the formation and were pounced on by fighters. Enemy fighters loved stragglers.

I was tormenting myself with these thoughts when about 11PM I heard my name called and someone entered the tent. It was Lt. Miller, our Assistant Operations Officer. He told me that our crew had bailed out over Northern Italy and was picked up by our Infantry and would be back at the Squadron sometime the next day. It was good of Miller to think of me and bring that news to me forlorn as I was in the lonely tent. My relief was indescribable. I slept soundly then.

The next afternoon Willie Moore arrived with the crew. He told me the story. Our ball turret gunner had waited too long to jump and his chute had not yet opened when he struck the ground and was killed. Infantrymen had observed this. The Navigator and Bombardier had bailed out over the target. Willie didn't know why but could only surmise that when 20mm shells from enemy fighters exploded under the control pedestal and instrument panel, the front area of the ship filled with smoke and they felt that all was lost and got out.

Willie recalled wrestling with the red emergency bomb release handle which was supposed to be lightly safety wired with breakable hairlike copper wire. It had, in error, been wired with heavier wire and he had to roll his seat back and twist and pull mightily to break it loose to jettison the bombs. The co-pilot had left his seat.

Back at the controls Willie gave a reassuring wave to Bombardier, Jimmie Gall, whose head had momentarily appeared in the astro-dome. After this Gall left the airplane through the nose gear hatch as Ericson had done a few moments before.

Willie then heroically fought the airplane back across Romania and Yugoslavia with systems out, control damage and losing one engine after the other. Steadily losing altitude he managed his way across the Adriatic to Italy and at 1000 feet signaled for bail out. The Engineer thought all were out, but the ball-gunner had hidden behind a waist bulkhead and jumped too late.

The enlisted crew, except for the radioman, wanted no more flying and were sent down to the flight line as helpers.

Willie and I continued to bunk together but did not fly together again. Our crew was dissolved. Willie flew where needed and I commenced flying as co-pilot with new replacement pilots as they joined the Group—three or four missions with each. During this period it was a matter of speculation between Willie and I as to just what Ericson and Gall had thought when they bailed out over the target. I was soon to find this out first hand.

Around the time I had accrued 40 missions I was checked out as a first pilot but had yet to receive a crew. My 46th mission was to the Ploesti oil fields. I was flying co-pilot for Roy Johnson, also a co-pilot recently checked out as a first pilot. I had been to Ploesti once or twice before and knew it was a fearsome target. Air Force historians have since described it as the "hottest target in Europe."

The barrage flak was massive. Just after "bombs away" we were hit. Number four engine went out. It's prop ran away but responded to the feathering button. We managed to hang in for a few moments before number three engine was hit and went out. It was feathered and engines one and two on the left side were run up to max power, but we could no longer maintain formation and we headed for home alone and rapidly losing altitude. Number two

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engine began to smoke and we reduced power.

It was clear to us now that we would be unable to clear the Yugoslavian mountains and would have to bail out.

Adventures followed but I will cut to about two weeks later when I was unloaded by truck at the school house in the heart of Bucharest where captured Officers were imprisoned.

As we newcomers jumped off the trucks in the school yard we were surrounded by POW's and among them I recognized the familiar face of a 740th Squadron mate. He did not acknowledge me but wheeled instantly and ran back into the school house. His haste was to immediately find Ericson and Gall to tell them that their former co-pilot was now among them. The pair came immediately and saw to it that I was bunked with them in their crowded school room.

Their immediate interest was to hear what had happened to the plane and crew after they had left it. I told them that end of the story and then turned to the mystery of why they had bailed out over the target on that fateful Bucharest mission some months before. Here is their story.

On the run in to the target the airplane was hit by fighters. The Navigator, Leif Ericson, from his position in the nose, was able to see both the pilot's rudder pedals. He noticed no feet on the co-pilot's rudders. Moving over for a better look he could see no one in the co-pilot's seat. At this point, amidst the noise and smoke and chaos from 20mm explosions he also noticed vacant first pilot rudder pedals. Feeling the ship was being abandoned he beat on the back of the nose turret to alert the bombardier who was manning those guns and pulled the release handle for the nose gear doors.

Jim Gall looked back from the turret in time to see Ericson exiting the airplane thru the nose gear hatch.

Gall then stood in the nose section and looked up to the cockpit from the astro-dome where he saw Willie Moore wave him out of the airplane, or so he thought. Actually Willie had given him a wave of greeting but having seen Ericson go out he interpreted this as an exit signal and out he went.

So, for me, at least, that mystery was solved. Six weeks later at the end of August, 1944, Romania switched sides in the war. Fifteenth Air Force B-17's landed in Bucharest and evacuated over 1300 POW's. We were flown to Bari and then sent to our Squadrons to pick up orders sending us home. By that time, however, Willie Moore had finished his missions and gone back to the States as had nearly all of the original 740th Squadron.

Richard J. Ennis
Superior Court Judge, Ret.



More About Dr. Schuknecht, former Flight Surgeon, 741 Squadron

Dr. Schuknecht published his classic Pathology of the Ear in 1974. For almost twenty years this pioneering effort was the source of knowledge on the pathology of the ear. Dr. Schuknecht, in spite of a busy otology practice as well as academic and administrative responsibilities as Walter Augustus Lecompte Professor, Department of Otology and Laryngology, Harvard Medical School, and Chief of Otolaryngology of the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary in Boston, completed the Second Edition of Pathology of the Ear, published by Lea and Febiger, Philadelphia, in 1993. The book was made possible by substantial financial support from the National Institutes of Health of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (32 consecutive years), the Deafness Research Foundation, the Research Fund of the American Otological Society, and Harvard Medical School, and monetary gifts from others. Dr. Schuknecht's wife, Anne, assisted with editorial assistance and proofreading.

Dr. Schuknecht's interest in ear disorders was stimulated by his experience with ear disorders as Flight Surgeon of the 741 Bomb Squadron from July 1943 to May 1945. All 455th veterans remember the conditions of that period leading to ear disorders: high altitude flying (for that time period) in unpressurized, inadequately heated airplanes, with little protection from the numbing cold; the intermittent firing of 50 caliber machine guns; the noise of turrets and hand-held 50 caliber machine guns; and skeet-shooting shotguns in ground training.

Dr. Schuknecht won the Soldiers Medal for pulling Lt. Cook (from a 455 Sqdn other than the 741) from his burning aircraft after a crash on 20 April 1944 on our San Giovanni airfield. The burning aircraft exploded immediately after Dr. Schuknecht successfully removed Lt. Cook from the burning wreckage. (I wonder if Lt. Cook ever thanked Dr. Schuknecht for saving his life? I thanked, in writing, each of the two heart surgeons who saved my life in bypass surgery complications on September 30 and October 1, 1994 - HL)

During my tenure as Commanding Officer, 741 Squadron, I discouraged Dr. Schuknecht from flying combat missions in spite of his burning desire to do so. In my opinion, his unique qualifications made him too valuable to risk on a mission. However, after I left the squadron Dr. Schuknecht flew a number of combat missions, won the Air Medal with possible clusters, and on at least one occasion his aircraft was pretty well riddled with flak shrapnel.

Colonel Lanford

FROM THE STARS AND STRIPES

Saturday, April 8, 1944

MAAF Jabs Direct Aid To The Russian Army

By John O. Kearney
(Stars and Stripes Staff Writer)

When Allied bombers swung northeastward out of Italy to strike at the marshaling yards and industrial heart of Budapest and other Balkan capitals this week, the day-to-day aerial effort to hamstring or destroy the productive centers of the Nazi war machine took a new direction.

Up to March 30 American and British heavies had concentrated, with some exceptions, on aircraft factories, factories making the components of aircraft, and on the communications centers of enemy cities feeding supplies more or less directly to the Italian front, or into the general areas to the west where, presumably, Germany may expect the opening of a major second front.

Suddenly, on relentless schedule, these heavy bombers—Liberators, Flying Forts, Wellingtons—have shifted their destructive weight of flame and shattering steel to the rail centers and the war factories of the Balkan nations which now lie in the path of the Red Army.

TO LEFT JAB

This shift of emphasis from the right hook to the left jab does not, in any sense, lessen the value of the work of these bombers in relation to the special needs of British and American forces, to whom southern and western Europe have been assigned as fields of battle. Strategically, whatever the bombers do is part of the common Allied effort. But the shift has special significance at this moment because Budapest, Bucharest, Sofia and Ploesti are rapidly becoming of tactical importance to the Russian infantryman.

Of the four targets, Bucharest and Ploesti in Romania have the most immediate tactical importance. Bucharest, the capital city, is the junction of all major rail lines in the nation. One of these lines runs northward to a lesser junction at Ploesti. From there it swings eastward toward the Pruth River, and again northward as the only major longitudinal railway within several hundred miles of the present Nazi front in the east.

RAIL JUNCTIONS

Similarly, Budapest, Hungary's capital, and Sofia, Bulgaria's capital, are junctions of railway traffic from all directions. Every factory feeding its products to the German eastern armies from areas south of Czechoslovakia and west of Hungary must ship its goods along railways reaching outward from Budapest. Secondary lines over which materials can be rolled do exist, but with the primary routes blocked, the Axis fighting man goes on leaner rations indeed.

Sofia has felt the blow of Allied bombing missions several times, but the first raid which fits closely into the pattern of direct assistance to the Russian armies was carried out on March 30. In the dark of March 29-30, RAF Wellingtons and Liberators struck at the Sofia rail junction toward which trains choked with Nazi troops and equipment were being rushed in an effort to block Russian armies striking from the Ukraine. Two very large fires were started in the Bulgarian city's great freight yards.

PLASTER SOFIA

The RAF had hardly returned to Italy when U.S. Forts and B-24s took off to give Sofia's rail yards and adjacent factories the heaviest single fall of bombs thus far let loose by the four-engined heavies of the 15th Air Force.

The second strike into the Balkans came on April 3 when Budapest for the first time became the target of American bombers by day and British by night. This city, which straddles the Danube, is the junction of all rail traffic leading eastward from southern Germany and Austria. The bombers struck shortly before noontime, putting down a thickly concentrated pattern of high explosives all over the marshaling yards on the left bank of the river. More than 250 freight cars were destroyed. Tracks were blasted skyward.

The combined AAF and RAF assaults did heavy damage to the Mannfred-Weiss Steel works and armament factory; did considerable damage to an aircraft plant making new ME 410s; blasted warehouses and a military barracks area in the vicinity of the rail yards, and set fire to an oil refinery, Our losses were relatively quite light.

BUCHAREST HIT

On the very next day the 15th Air Force struck at Bucharest, through which some 20 percent of Rumania's oil is fed to the armies and the war industries of the Third Reich. Allied recon planes have spotted as many as 800 oil tank cars in the Bucharest yards at one time. Hundreds of tons of bombs were rained on the yards and on nearby military installations by the fighter-escorted Forts and Libs.

Ploesti became the fourth major Balkan target last Wednesday when strongly escorted formations of Forts and Liberators struck at the city's vital refineries and communications lines. Once before—in August of last year—Allied aircraft struck at the Ploesti oil grounds from bases in Africa. But the damage done then was reported

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largely repaired before this second attack from a new base in Italy.

FIGHTER COVER

P-38s and P-47s covered the bombers in and out. The Ploesti rail junction was made impassable by huge craters amid the wreckage of twisted track. Huge explosions followed the bombs, and black smoke billowed up to a height of 16,000 feet.

Returning airmen reported stiff opposition from the Luftwaffe and from anti-aircraft crews stationed around this all-important source of Axis petroleum.

The chances are that stiffer Luftwaffe opposition may be expected in any further attacks against these Balkan targets. Opposition should become especially stiff as the frontline fighter fields of the GAF are pushed closer and closer to these cities by the apparently inexorable advances of Josef Stalin's legions.

Beyond the immediate effect of the Balkan bombing campaign, beyond its immediate importance to Russian forces whose gains should be greater as German means become less, there is the long-range task of destroying Balkan communication centers which aid German industry.

On the immediate effect, pointing to the raid on Budapest, the London Daily Telegraph says:

"From Budapest run the lines on which the German forces holding Romania and Bulgaria depend for their supplies and reinforcements The Red Armies now thrusting into Romania and towards Lwow, must soon benefit from the irrecoverable delay to German troops and munitions movements."

Of the longer-range result, pointing to the strategic, rather than to the momentary tactical effect, official Washington asserts that inestimable damage is done to German industrial productivity by any disruption of those rail lines over which she has been getting vitally necessary supplies of ores and other raw materials out of the Balkan nations.

U.S. Foreign Economic Administrator Crowley says:

"The Balkans have been of little industrial value to Germany, although some industrialization occurred under German direction...The total economic contribution of the Balkans to the German war machine is, however, so important under present circumstances that Germany...is likely...to defend the area vigorously."

USELESS OIL

Ploesti means oil. But without transportation it's useless. Sofia means Turkish chrome—because shipments must pass through that rail junction to be useful to German armaments factories. Without the chrome, Germany does without vital ferro-alloy which she needs badly. Bucharest and Budapest mean antimony, copper, magnesite, zinc, bauxite, nickel. These are the resources of the Balkans areas. To get them—to continue the war—Germany needs the rails.

* * *

A Stars and Stripes reporter tagged along for the raid on Budapest Monday. His only previous runs had been made out of Africa last summer when Marauders and Mitchells were attacking targets in Italy in preparation for the landing at Salerno. The job is a grimmer one now than it was then. The pace of the work seems to be faster, more exhausting. This difference was obvious from the start. "Stripes" went up to headquarters for permission to see the show.

Within 24 hours "Stripes" was directed to report to a bombardment wing commanded by Col. Fay R. Upthegrove. From there the expedition led through the dark of the night along dusty road to a group field where B-24s were black silhouettes against a dimly moonlit sky.

About 4:20, next morning, with the field still in darkness, the pilots, co-pilots, navigators, bombardiers and gunners of the ships which were to take off at 7:25 began to gather in a wine cellar as big as a small theater.

Most of them were sleepy-eyed. All were dressed for work. Every one of them became alert as the briefing officers started to talk.

The mission began officially as Maj. Harper got up on the platform and said:

"The target this morning is Budapest. She's a virgin so far as we are concerned. It behooves us to start her off right."

One officer after another took over their specialized jobs of supplying the essential information to men whose bomb run had to be made on a given line at a given time at a given place.

Much of the data that followed didn't mean anything to a reporter. But the aerial photograph of the target projected on a board screen did. And so did the diagram of the known defenses of the city.

MANY GUNS

"So far as we know," said the briefing officer, "there are many heavy guns concentrated in the immediate area of the target."

There were sighs from the hundreds of men who had been silent. And again there were sighs—of different significance—when they were told that the nearest German fighter field was many miles away. That could be expected to cut down the airborne opposition somewhat. Rockets from German fighters had been thicker than hail when these same bombers struck at Steyr, Austria, the day before.

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Many of our fellows didn't come back from that one.

At 8:10, with the first ships aloft already more than half an hour in the air, the formations were in their places and the group began to wing its way outward over the Adriatic. They headed for the jagged, high and snow-capped mountains of Yugoslavia; for the Hungarian border and the guiding line of the Danube.

CREW MEMBERS

"Stripes" rode a ship piloted by Lt. S.A. Archibald, Montclair, NJ. Co-pilot was Lt. Thomas A. Watson, Fort Wayne, IN.

Others in the crew of our B-24 were: S-Sgt. Joseph A. Abbondondelo, Roslyn Heights, Long Island, a waist gunner who has two enemy fighters to his credit; S-Sgt. Joe R. Hachey, Waterville, ME, also a waist gunner; T-Sgt. Harry Seiler, Schenectady, NY, nose gunner and radio operator; S-Sgt. Don R. Teisinger, Zanesville, OH, ball gunner, down under, and S-Sgt. Miller Todd, Winston-Salem, NC.

We ran into first flak immediately after picking up the Yugoslav coast. Far down below us lay a field. Probably 10 or 12 Kraut fighters were off the runways. Some 14 or 16 guns opened up with extremely accurate and well-patterned fire. A B-24 glided out of the formation with one motor in flames. She wheeled and headed for home—and got there.

Bursts of flak lashed against the fuselage of our plane with the sort of noise made by a GI brush when its bristles are swiped sharply over the outside clapboards of a barracks back home. T-Sgt. William J. Madzik, Detroit, MI, engineer and top gunner of our ship, said it was time to put on the flak suit. It's startling what a B-24 can lift. We crawled into armor-plated vests and got the oxygen masks ready.

The banter of the crew at the start, before the masks went on as we climbed above 15,000 feet, was free and easy.

TENSE FEELING

The feeling produced by the realization that you are headed for a bomb run over a well-protected target, and that you'll go through with it, come hell or high water, is the sort of feeling you'd have if you were mired to your knees at a crossroads, knowing that Krauts would be certain to shell it in exactly 30 minutes.

And there's nothing to be done about it. So you squat at the flight deck porthole, being careful not to overstretch your oxygen supply line, and you observe that the Danube isn't blue at all—but a muddy brown, as all rivers are at that great height. And you watch the specks of motorcars come to stops on the road far below as your swaying, gliding, gently lifting and falling companion bombers ride along with you, to the sides and above and below.

Ezell taps you on the shoulder and points up forward. And Archibald is gesturing over to his left. That's Budapest over there. And the formation is swinging in a wide left arc to run in where the Fortresses of the first waves had been before us. Ezell had said:

"When the bombs drop away—that's the best part of the whole thing."

GOT TO KNEES

So we sprawled down on the flight deck under the gyrating feet of Gunner Madzik. We opened the sliding door between us and the bomb bay, and waited. Twice we got to our knees to look out through the ports. The black puffs of bursting ack-ack were as thick as gum wadding on the sidewalks of New York.

Planes were hit. One of them fell away in flames. Parachutes billowed. A flak hole thrust its shiny jagged edges from our right wing. Flakes of bursts lashed at our sides and our belly and our back.

Finally the bomb bay opened. Sliding doors retracted. We could see the marshaling yards below us clearly. The cold was painful. Moisture condensing around the rubber tube of the breath-hot oxygen mask fell in drops on the cloth-covered deck and froze there. Heavy ack-ack shells could be seen rising, before they burst behind us. Sticks of bombs disappeared in the great depths of altitude. Smoke and haze lay over small sections of the city.

BOMB BAYS OPEN

It seemed an interminable time before our own stuff got away. Our bomb bays were open. But Lt. Robert K. Knox, El Paso, TX, bombardier, bided his time. Finally we heard the slight clicking noise as the huge explosives broke away from the fuse-arming wires, and they slid from the racks with the sound of sabers being sharpened on sabers.

We watched them drop away. They seemed to slow up as they straightened out for the tail-wobbling vertical rush to earth. More than 40 seconds after the let-go, and with our ship already wheeling into its homeward turn, the red flecks of the bursting splashed and gave way to a grayish puff in the concentration of rails near the choke point of the marshaling yards.

Coming back we were shot at by guns out of Serajevo. It was of historical interest only. A shot fired there from a pistol, in 1914, started the turmoil out of which grew what was once known as the Great War.

OUR HONOR ROLL

455th Bomb Group

★ ★ ★ ★

WE SALUTE YOU



For outstanding performance of duty in armed conflict with the enemy. Notified to prepare maximum aircraft for a mission against the highly important and heavily defended Moosbierbaum Oil Refinery, Moosbierbaum, Austria, the ground crews, despite acute shortages in personnel and equipment, worked untiringly and with grim determination to have their aircraft in the peak of mechanical condition to insure the success of this vital operation.

On 26 June 1944, thirty-six (36) B-24 type aircraft, heavily loaded with maximum tonnage, were airborne, and, assuming the lead of the other groups of their wing, set course for their destination. Enroute to the target, the formation was intercepted by approximately twenty (20) twin engine enemy fighters which were engaged by the escorting fighters. Immediately thereafter, the bomber formation was attacked by approximately sixty (60) additional twin engine fighters in a series of vicious head-on attacks, firing rockets, heavy machine guns, and 20MM cannon in a desperate effort to destroy the bomber formation. Nearing the target, sixty (60) more single engine fighters joined in the aggressive and relentless attacks against the Group's formation. Heedless of this seemingly overwhelming opposition, the gallant crew members battled their way through the heavy enemy fire to the objective. One of the bombers, after colliding with an attacking fighter, remained persistently with the formation for the bombing run before dropping out in flames. Two other bombers set on fire by enemy gun fire, continued over the target, successfully dropped their bombs, and then exploded in mid-air. With complete disregard for the continued heavy opposition, displaying outstanding courage, leadership, and fortitude, the Group held its lead of the Wing formation, bringing it through the enemy defenses for a highly successful bombing run.

The oil storage area of the refinery was heavily hit with large fires started. Eight direct hits were sustained by the power station and numerous rolling stock, and vital installations were severely damaged throughout the plant area. During the fierce aerial battle to the target, the gallant gunners of the Group, through their skill and determination in the defense of their formation, accounted for thirty-four (34) enemy fighters destroyed, to hold the losses of their Group to ten (10) heavy bombers.

By the conspicuous gallantry, professional skill, and determination of the combat crews, together with the superior technical skill and devotion to duty of the ground personnel, the 455th Bombardment Group has upheld the highest traditions of the Military Service, thereby reflecting great credit upon itself and the Armed Forces of the United States of America.

By command of Major General Twining

AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION SPECIAL AWARD AWARDED TO FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE

In recognition of the fiftieth anniversary of the magnificent effort of the members of the United States Army Air Forces' Fifteenth Air Force as they achieved one of the strategic air power's greatest triumphs — the destruction of the oil fields of Ploesti — in spite of fierce and determined defenses which took a heavy toll. This five month aerial campaign, carried out by the fighters and bombers of the Fifteenth, sustained by the ground echelons, severely curtailed the gasoline and oil supply of the Axis aggressors and directly led to their eventual defeat.

The Air Force Association honored the WWII service of the Fifteenth Air Force at its National Convention in Washington, DC. The inscription wording was taken from an accommodation made by General Nathan Twining at the end of the Ploesti campaign when he paid tribute to the heroic and devoted service of the 15th Air Force.

ORIGIN OF THE VULGAR VULTURE

The origin of the Group emblem, the Vulgar Vulture, is not known for certain. It is believed that Tom Mitchell, Intelligence Officer for the 743rd Squadron, did the design work and wrote the specifications. These were given to the Walt Disney Studios for the artwork, thus the Vulgar Vulture. Tom, now deceased, is remembered for his early work in finding 455th Group personnel for the establishment of our Association. He organized the first meeting that was held for the Group following the end of WW II. The emblem, sometimes referred to as a "Patch," was worn on the left breast of flight jackets by the crew members and on other clothing by the support personnel. It was a distinctive item that helped give everyone a sense of belonging and pride in the organization.

VETERAN 15TH AAF GROUPS

Throughout the time the 15th Air Force was helping destroy first the Luftwaffe and then German oil production, the campaign against communications targets was also being successfully waged. The attacks against rail targets reached a high point in December when 108 blows were struck, Attacks on a similar scale were continued through February, March, and April, chiefly against key centers in Austria which lay in the path of advancing Red Armies. The 15th's methods of hitting the rail centers involved both bombers and fighters in the effort to cut lines and destroy rolling stock. A few months before V-E day, the veteran 82nd Fighter Group with bomb-carrying P-38 Lightnings scored tremendous results dive bombing rail bridges and yards in southern Germany and Austria.

The next phase was that of attacks coordinated with ground forces. The 15th AAF is a lineal descendent of a strategic air force that learned the technique of working with the ground forces in North Africa. Even before the 15th was organized, it received experience in coordinating with ground forces as two bomb groups of B-17 Flying Fortresses, the **97th and 301st**, helped repel Field Marshall Rommel's forces at Kasserine Pass, while the **98th and 376th** B-24 Liberator groups of the 47th Wing learned ground coordination supporting the British Eighth Army on the North African desert.

A Thought on Moosbierbaum

The bombing of the oil refinery at Moosbierbaum, Austria was indeed a very "rough" mission. The loss of 10 airplanes and crews was suffered mostly by one squadron, the 742nd. They lost 6 B-24's and 59 officers and enlisted men. Several were on their 50th mission and 21 were scheduled to go home soon. Many of the original crews of the Group that trained together in the states went down. It took a long time to get over crew losses. Never has there been a single case in the 455th where the air crews turned away from the target because of enemy opposition before making the bomb run. This bodes well for the leadership, patriotism, dedication or any other like adjective one wants to use. In the early days from the 8th air force when the bombers had little or no fighter escort, they were under fighter attack before arriving at the IP and most of the way home to England. Some lost more than half of their airplanes and crews where the enemy fighters would concentrate their attacks on a single group. They nevertheless went over the target with whatever airplanes they had. The mission to Moosbierbaum compared in intensity to those early missions by the 8th Air Force.

Colonel Al Asch, Group Historian

Retribution

The vaulted dome of heaven, China blue,
that cups the gleaming diamond of the sun,
Where swallows soar & swooping silent fun
And rainbows build an arch of brilliant hue.
Calls from its boundless depths that man should view,
The miracle of flight that he has made
And guard it less he finds he has undone
The benefit and good he sought to do.
God never meant that we should desecrate
The quiet beauty of the sky with flame
Or urge our gallant youth to dedicate
Destruction to the glory of a name
And those he spared see justice in their plight
The pain of caged birds observing flight.

Anonymous

Friendship

Friendship depends on mutual care and a sense of trust. Old friends are as comfortable as our favorite pair of shoes. New ones are as exciting as the best of life's adventures. And best of all, having friends gives us the privilege of being a friend.

—Source unknown

FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE SHOWS THE WAY

Approximately 80% of all Eighth Air Force and 70% of Fifteenth Air Force missions during the last quarter of 1944 were characterized by some employment of blind-bombing devices. Constant study and assessment continued to show the not unanticipated conclusion that radar bombing was far less accurate than visual. For the last three months of 1944, the percentage of Eighth Air Force bombs that fell within 1,000 feet of the target was 38%, 25%, and 25% respectfully; in the same months the Fifteenth Air Force score was 40%, 36%, and 36%, and the Fifteenth continued to do much better than the Eighth in this respect.

FIFTEENTH COVERS ITSELF WITH GLORY

By Christmas 1944, the Allies could breath more easily, for it was clear that the Germans were being contained. Still the great majority of air force bombs for several weeks thereafter went on targets requested by ground forces. It was a slow and costly operation to close the Bulge and strategic air plans had to be rescheduled. Fortunately, Germany's oil installations did not enjoy the respite from bombing that might have been expected during the Ardennes campaign. This was due to the Fifteenth Air Force, which covered itself with glory during this otherwise grim period. In one of the most remarkable series of sustained operation in the whole air offensive, Fifteenth immobilized the chief refineries and rendered inoperative all of the synthetic petroleum plants on its target list. The two Blechhammers, Odertal, Oswiecim, Brüx, and the several Austrian installations suffered heavy attacks in the days when von Rundstedt was astounding the Allies in the west. Even when the bombings were blind and the weather extremely adverse, the Fifteenth's bomber crews achieved excellent results. And their losses were light, although they encountered spirited resistance on a number of missions. By the end of 1944, only four crude oil refineries and possibly five or six synthetics in the entire Reich were operating, and they were doing so on a reduced scale. Air Chief Marshal Tedder likened the German fuel position at the end of December to that in September, when the enemy was down to his last reserves. Thus the Fifteenth Air Force's oil campaign emerged in an hour of darkness as the one bright feature. Fifteenth's strategic offensive alone had produced spectacular results in the last months of 1944, results which were felt in almost every area and type of German activity, and the assistance Fifteenth had rendered in the emergency gave the Allied leadership cause for satisfaction in an otherwise bleak period.

From: The Army Air Forces in World War II, Vol. III, Office of Air Force History

MORE PROUD FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE HERITAGE — 1994

During the summer rush across France, the Allies had hoped the Germans might dissolve as a fighting power by autumn 1944. When that failed to materialize, they tried to get their armies across the lower Rhine in late September. That failing, they undertook to defeat the German armies west of the Rhine and to penetrate the Ruhr basin.

Air commanders shared the general disappointment of other Allied leaders who had hoped and planned for final victory in 1944. Late in September, General Arnold frankly confided to Spaatz his disappointment that the ground campaigns in western Europe had not progressed more rapidly. He thought that the armies had been too slow in forcing their way out of the Normandy bridgehead, and the heartening advance across France later in the summer, he attributed mainly to Patton's aggressive tactics.

Spaatz felt that another massive breakthrough might yet bring the Allies to the Rhine. "If that proves sticky as a barrier," he concluded, "it may still be possible to beat the Insides of Germany enough by air action to cause her to collapse next Spring."

Oil First Priority

After the strategic air forces reverted to CCS direction in September 1944, Spaatz and Air Marshall Bottomley drafted the governing directives for an all out offensive. Oil was named as first priority with ordinance depots, armored vehicle assembly plants, and motor vehicle assembly plants in a composite second place on the targeting list. The German Air Force was to be policed when necessary, or to be more precise, when its supporting facilities could be located. The directive reflected the widespread hope that the enemy could be prevented from refitting armored units withdrawn from France. But it spoke more noticeably of General Spaatz's persistent belief that the destruction of enemy oil would neutralize the enemy's ability to wage war.

Fifteenth Is Ready

As the Italian and Balkan campaigns came to a stalemate during the Fall of 1944. Fifteenth Air Force found itself free to devote its effort to the strategic offensive against Germany, which it did with great skill and heartening success. The Fifteenth had already destroyed most of the German petroleum production in the Ploesti and Balkan areas which cost the enemy about one-fourth of its total supply.

The Stage Is Set

The Allies knew, however, they would have to keep up the pressure on facilities in Germany to prevent the Germans from reconstructing bombed refineries faster than they could be destroyed. 350,000 laborers were devoted to

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the reconstruction efforts and Speer made restoration of oil production his top priority. The Germans were also dispersing their entire synthetic oil industry to make location of targets very difficult. The Germans were also making extensive use of smoke and camouflage and were concentrating heavy flak guns around the chief oil installations.

Fifteenth Destroys Oil

During the last half of September, Fifteenth Air Force sent bomber fleets of 100 to 150 aircraft which dropped 287 tons on Blechhammer North, 272 tons on Oderal, 235 tons on Oswiecim, and 253 tons on Budapest.

In October, the campaign went ahead with as much force as operating conditions permitted. Eighth Air Force was able to carry out no more than four extensive oil missions.

Fifteenth had a considerably better month. It hit the synthetic plant at Brüx, which had been previously rated as out of production for four months, and it unloaded large tonnages on Blechhammer South on 13 and 17 October. Blechhammer North was bombed effectively on 14 October, as was Odertal, and three centers in Austria were attacked on the 7th, 13th, and 16th.

Fifteenth initiated its November oil bombings with one of the greatest efforts it had yet carried out: 1,100 tons dropped by 500 bombers on the large crude oil refinery at Floridsdorf on the 5th and on the next day, 402 tons on Moosbierbaum, both of these targets in the Vienna area. Because of forbidding flying conditions over the Alps, no significant missions against Nazi oil were again possible until 17 November when Blechhammer South received 199 tons and Floridsdorf got 402. Then Floridsdorf and Korneuberg caught another 510 tons on the 18th. The month ended with major attacks on Vienna-Löbau, Linz, and Blechhammer South. Fifteenth Air Force crews again proved their expertise as the Allied oil busters!

From the Fifteenth Air Force Association "Sortie".

From The Office of the Chaplain Headquarters 304th Bomb Wing

FIGHTER SWEEP

And it came to pass that before the sun was risen, the night orderly went forth out of his place to the abode of the birdmen and roused them each in his turn.

And he said, "Tis the fourth hour and briefing comes before the dawn." And he retreated in haste for he was wise in the ways of the birdmen.

And the birdmen cursed him loud and long, for his tidings were of no great joy.

For the sweep cometh they knew, and only the keen were glad. And the keen were few. And the keen grew fewer at the fourth hour of each day.

And there was much weeping and gnashing of teeth and great unhappiness in that place. And they went.

And as they went there come unto them he of the great intellect who is the I.O. — But he was known by other names also.

And one of the birdmen said unto him: "What is this thou hast done unto me? Wherefore hast thou beguiled me?"

And the I.O. said, "Thus it is done in our country." And holding up a ribbon of blue and of gold he spake, "Fulfill this week and we will give thee this also for the service which thou shalt serve with us another seven years."

But the birdmen trundleth off saying, "What manner of poppycock is this whereof he speaketh. The law of averages getteth us all in the end. So be it.

Verily, verily, "sayeth the others. Amen."

For they were not happy in the service that day and the pouches of their eyes giveth witness.

And they went into the Holy of Holies called the Briefing Room.

And as they entered therein, each in his turn looketh upon the wall which hath the map. And behold, they looketh at the hand writing on the wall, for such it is. And after each looketh at the lines thereon they sayeth one to the other, "This cannot be." But soon one cometh among them known as Graywall who sayeth, "it is so." And all is quiet as the tomb of the prophet.

And he gathereth his flock into his bosom and speaketh earnestly of course and of D for dinghy damn you. And they looketh upon his countenance but comprehendeth him not. But he is wise and comprehendeth for them all.

Then he sayeth, pointing to the map, "Behold this heap and this pillar be witness that I shall not pass over this heap to them lest the petrol giveth out. For the A.S.R. maketh not light of early reveille."

And all that were there waggled their heads with gusto saying, "Verily it is so."

And then the Graywall sendeth messengers before him to his brother Prune in the land of the R.A.F.

Forsooth sayeth him, "The Spits will be welcome. Ere the sun setteth this day. "And it came to pass that he know whereof he spake.

And the Graywall telleth them, "Begone, for the hour of pressing draws near." And thus they goeth to the jeeps and the jeeps to the dispersals. And some goeth to the small house in panic. And some goeth to the big house in greater panic.

And the head birdman chooseth his flock for the day and some he husbandeth for yet another day. And some who he leaveth behind secretly rejoiceth and praise the Lord.

And those who goeth are called ones and twos and are given colors by which they knoweth the other. And number one shareth his jamoca with number two saying, "The Lord watch between me and thee when we

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are absent from another." And thus they drank saying, "Cheers," one to the other.

And it came to pass that each of the birdmen went forth to his bird and was amazed at what was contained therein. But at the hour of pressing each of the winged monsters draweth the breath of life and thundereth forth in power and majesty — save one which goeth not. And the birdman then beateth it with his hands and kicketh it with his feet but it goeth not. Thus he stayeth home and writeth the necessary form.

But all else goeth to the proper place to fly away and he of the checkered flag sendeth them off. And all flyeth off save for one who prangeth for lack of revs. "Woe betide he who prangeth," wayeth the words of the prophet, "for he curseth himself and his children and his children's children.

And the birds went on their journey and came to the land of the people of the east, and all was serene. And he who is known as Tablet talketh to Graywall of ten plus and twenty plus. But the others ignore him thinking he speaketh of the balloon barrage and he chuckleth to himself.

And it came to pass that the Forts were clobbered beyond the heap as was the custom in those days. But all was serene with our birdmen.

And someone sayeth, "Thou has a Focke-Wolfe on thy tail." And each of the birdmen goeth this way and that way to see where of he speaketh and each is lost onto the others. And one sayeth, "Where art thou Blue Two?" And the other replieth, "Lo, I spinneth out and am lost unto thee." And another sayeth, "Whither goest thou, Red One?" And the Red One answered, "Home for my cockpit hath smoke." And yet another talketh of homings.

And the Graywall sayeth, "Whence be ye. For tis time the big friends (for as such they were known in those days) be gathered together and shepherded to the waters. But the other heareth him not, or heedeth him not, for each thinketh only of getting the hell out of that place.

And they goeth home by divers routes, each roosting in its own good time.

And again they gathereth unto the Holy of Holies where Graywall telleth them of the bad show.

And he giveth them hell in general.

So be it.

Chaplains 304th BW
1st-Father St. John (Major)
2nd-Father Donovan (Capt.)
Submitted by R.C. Butler

Chaplain's Corner



To Thee, our God, we fly for mercy and for grace; Oh, hear our lowly cry, And hide not Thou Thy face! O Lord, stretch forth Thy mighty hand, And guard and bless our Fatherland.

Arise, O Lord, Make known abroad Thy name, And by Thy mighty word Put sin and war to shame. O Lord, stretch forth Thy mighty hand...

Give peace, Lord, in our time; Oh, let no foe draw nigh Nor lawless voice of crime Thy majesty decry. O Lord, stretch forth Thy mighty hand...

More from Mom Hunters Book of Poems

ESSAY ON MAN

Men are what women marry, they have two hands, two feet and sometimes two wives, but never more than one dollar or one idea at a time. Like Turkish cigarettes, all are made of the same material. They differ only in that some are a little better disguised than others, generally speaking, they may be divided into three classes: Husbands, Bachelors and Widowers. An eligible bachelor is a mass of obstinacy entirely surrounded by suspicion. Husbands are of three varieties: Prizes, Surprises and Consolation prizes. Making a husband out of a man is one of the highest plastic arts known to civilization. It requires science, sculpture and common sense, faith, hope and charity — especially charity. If you flatter a man, it frightens him to death, if you don't, it bores him to death. If you permit him to make love to you, he gets tired of you in the end; if you don't, he gets tired of you in the beginning. If you agree with him in everything he does, you soon cease to charm him. If you believe all he tells you, he thinks you are a fool, and if you don't he thinks you are a cynic. If you wear gay colors, lipstick and a gay hat, he hesitates to take you out and if you wear a little brown hat and a tailored suit he takes you out and stares at other women in gay colors and startling hats. If you join in his gaieties and approve of his drinking and smoking, you are driving him to the dogs, and if you don't, and disapprove, you are driving him crazy. If you are the clinging vine type, he doubts you have a brain, and if you are the modern and independent type, he doubts you have a heart. If you are silly, he longs for a brilliant mate, and if you are bright, he longs for a playmate. If you are popular with other men, he is jealous; and if you are not, he wonders what in hell is wrong with you???? DAMN MEN ANYWAY!!

OBJECTION SUSTAINED

Now listen you ladies,
And Gentlemen, too,
I have a little story
That should interest you.

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It concerns the poem
So indignantly wrote
By a certain "Miss Brown"
For your "info", I quote

"The lieutenants all tell you the last girl "stank"
She was so terribly conscious of rank"

Now most of us feel
You'll agree that I'm right
That a girl only dates
A boy that she likes.

And even a major,
A colonel or more
Will never be "cornered"
If he's just a bore

"And when you get there, they're drunk and it's late
And you never again lay eyes on your date"

Now there is a statement
That dear Miss Brown said
When most of us read it
We damn near saw "red!"

It's true we indulge
But most of us think
That a gentleman knows
When he's had "multi" drink.

So there is our reaction
We "poor fish" are fried
But most of us feel
We were unjustly tried

And so, dear Miss Brown
Next time that you "stew"
Base your opinion on many
And not just a few

We admire your frankness
On this subject, your stance
But you could learn to like us
If you gave us a chance

You say you've tried hard
And you've given your best
Why don't you try harder
And talk a little less?

Lt. Jack Haring

* * *

A FORTRESS FALLS

As the dawn broke the nocturnal stillness,
When the morning birds sung at the sight,
While the trees shook the dew from their raiment,
And the cock crowed in punitive might,
The Fortress had long since awakened,
While the crew prepared her for flight;
She purred like a satisfied woman
Glows in the soft morning light.

She bristled with weapons of defense,
She was the mistress of men,
And her bowels held eggs for the mission
The flyers would soon take her in.
Submittant she was to caresses,
Responsive to love's gentle touch,
But "Hell hath no fury" as she had,
If scorned or mistreated too much.

She waits with the patience of practice
For the birdmen with sleep in their eyes
Come laughing with meaningless humor
To coax her to enemy skies.
"The mission today is a long one,
The target well covered by flak,
And fighters will most likely jump her,"
Their talk, sends chills up her back.

She falters, — but faintly, — then proudly
She roars to her royal domain;
She is the Queen of the conquest,
A Fortress — impregnant to pain.
The flyers within her deep bosom
All thrill when her power unfurls,
To retain such symmetric formation,
As a chorus of costumeless girls.

Far over the target in echelon
The eggs are bared in her bomb bay
So tense — tho' poised and expectant,
Till relieved by the words, "Bombs away."
Then swiftly she rallys her sisters
For the onslaught of fighters and flak,
So wickedly boiling around them,
And spewing wild steel in her track.

Quick as the start, in a nightmare
The heart of her being is hit!
With a burst of bright flame from the cockpit
She staggers — as tho' faint just a bit;
She pulls back — then up — then she falters
As a wounded man clutches his throat,
She peels off — so languidly graceful, —
To scream to the earth in high note.

So died a magnificent creature
So lived on — her proud memory
So bow to her spirit and crewmen,
You mortals, — that they have set free.

Lt Harry Carroll

TO THE AIR CORPS

We're men with wings, a carefree lot,
But our lives on the ground are forgotten not.
Drink a toast to Life, to Health, to Hell!
For the work we did, has been wrought well.

Whether we fly to East and the rising sun
Or fly to West when day is done,
The bellowing clouds in the sunset red
Strike memories of a Life we once led.

While winging our way through ethereal space,
Many a thought through our minds did race
As what of tomorrow in a peaceful world
'Ere the last token of Hell has been hurled?

We are flying today to breach the gap
Of a world that might well be only a map.
Not all of us will return to find
The smouldering ruins of world once blind?

By "Chandra"

DREAMER

Always dreaming; always scheming
Of the things he's going to do
Always hoping, sometimes moping
When his dreams do not come true

Always thinking; sometimes sinking
Into depths of dark despair
Sometimes rising; visualizing
Life without a single care

Never working; always shirking
Any thing that's real and cold
Never building; always gilding
All life with a fringe of gold

Always playing; never staying
With a task to reach the end
Ever scheming; ever dreaming
Of success around the bend.

Lt. E. McB

B-24 PILOT

From the shores of Lake Lesina
To the ruins of Pompei,
You can hear our engines thundering
In the early light of day.

Sure we fly the "big 'uns"
With their row on row of dials,
Knobs and switches, instruments,
and gas for endless miles.

To turn or bank you lean way fore
So's to get behind the wheel
You twist and swear, and swear and twist,
Oh, it's really quite a "deal"

Now a dive or zoom is something else,
You lift both feet and then
Jam like hell and strain the wheel,
Nothin' to it, men.

Now some may think I'm bitter
'Cause I can't split "S" or roll,
Evade all flak, and shoot up Kraut,
Scare every bloomin' soul.

Well, you're right from start to finish,
My heart is in the blue,
In the 38's and 51's
I envy you - I do.

From the shores of Lake Lesina
To the ruins of Pompei,
May I soon be up there with you,
Flying every goddam day.

Lt. R. L. Dowell

REACHING HANDS

So Long,
So smooth,
So snowy white;
They reach
For me
With all their might.

They reach,
They plead,
For my embrace;
Your hands,
Your soul
Your angel's face.

Can I
Refuse
Their tender touch
When I
Do love
Them, oh so much.

Refuse?
Perhaps!
But alas and alack!
I find
Mine own
Are reaching back.

Lt. Harry R. Carroll

15th AIR FORCE WHAT NOW?

(to the tune of "MY HEAD IN THE CLOUDS")

Oh, we fly thru' the sky with our head up and locked
On our way back toward Rome
And the weathers so thick that you can't see the stick
And my instrument card's at home.
The Bombardier didn't even come near
When he dropped his bombs on the target so clear
Oh, my back - I see flak - will I ever get back?
15th Air Force what now
I'm calling Big Fence
15th Air Force what now?

Panorama Of Italy

If I were an artist with nothing to do, I'd paint a picture,
a compositive view,
Of historic Italy, in which I'd show visions of contrast, the high and the low.

Chapels and churches, great to behold,
Each a King's ransom in glittering gold;
Poverty and want, men craving for food,
Picking through garbage, practically nude.

Stately cathedrals with high-toned bells,
Ricovero shelters with horrible smells;
Moulding catacombs, a place for the dead,
Noisy civilians clamoring for bread.

Lumbering carts, hogging the road
Nondescript trucks, frequently towed;
Diminutive donkeys, loaded for bear
Horse-drawn taxis, seeking a fare.

Determined pedestrians, courting disaster,

Continued on Page 23

Continued from Page 22
Walking in gutters where
movement is faster;
Italian drivers, all accident-bound
Weaving and twisting to cover the
ground.

I've tried to describe the things
that I've seen
Panorama of Italy, the brown and
the green;
I've neglected the war scars,
visible yet;
But these are the things we want
to forget.

Anonymous

TUNISIA

To the tune of
"My Darling Clementine"

In Tunisia, in the desert
Looking mighty, mighty queer
Stood a combat weary pilot
And his drunken bombardier.

Oh, they went out on a mission
On a bright and sunny day
Then the pilot heard a mutter
bombs and bomb bay doors away.

Oh, we circled o'er the target
and we lost a thousand feet
But the Heinies on the Ack Ack
Had our range within two feet.

Then at last my bombs were scattered
And we rallied to the right
When my engines coughed and clattered
And I knew we had to fight.

Oh, my rudder, Oh, my trim tab
Oh, by screwed up P. D. I.
Something sure is caflooey
And it isn't you or I.

Then we saw the Jerries coming
By the tens and by the score
But we hope they pick the end
Like they've always done before.

Oh, the pea jobs, Oh, the Ack Ack
Oh, my engines, Oh, my wits!
Combat sure is mallacious
I was never meant for this!

Then we joined a brand new order
Having members by the score
But alas "tis without honor
Known as salvo bomb bay doors.

By the 341st Bomb. Sqdn., 97th Bomb. Gp.

LILLIE MARLENE

Underneath the lamp post by the corner gate
Darling I remember the way you used to wait
Twas there that you said you'd love but me
You said that you would always be
Chorus My Lillie of the Lamplite
My own Lillie Marlene
Time would come for roll call time for us to part
Darling I'd caress you and press you to my heart
And there in that far off lantern light
I'd hold you tight we'd kiss goodnight
Chorus
Orders came for sailing somewhere over there
All confined to barracks was more than I could bear
I knew that you waited in the street
I heard your feet but could not meet
Chorus
And when I'm marching in the mud and cold
And my pack seems more than I can hold
My love for you renews my might
I'm warm again my pack is light
Chorus
Resting in a village just behind the lines
Even though we're parted your lips are close to mine
Your fair face beams in all my dreams
Your lamplite yeys They seem to gleam
Chorus
When the war is over and I don't return
Who then will love you who will make you
don't feel bad and never be blue
For tomorrow comes a love that's new
Chorus

Bob Tank Writes...

Bob sings a lot with friends at a German Swiss organization he belongs to. It has an old country club room with a grand piano. Sometimes a German gal with an accordian will come and get the whole group going.

Some time in the evening they sing Lillie Marlene but they always end up with tunes of glory i.e. Yankee Doodle, Grand Old Flag, and the words to Stars and Stripes. He says these words are the best but few people know them.

Bob was paralyzed in an accident and says an undeserved hand of God touched him and let him recover enough to get around. He says he sees more now to remember and appreciate. He asks, do you remember how cold it was and how the cockpit would frost over and put you in a different world in seconds. Recall how getting back on the ground, any ground meant the whole world.

He hopes we all spend that day in May at a special remembrance for our comrades who flew all the way. "Bless all of the group who survived one of histories greatest adventures and it was only yesterday!!

Thanks to Bob Tank, 740th Sqadron, this historical collection of poems, stories and songs has been preserved for future generations. Most in part have appeared in the Weekly Briefing, Club Newspaper of the Foggia American Red Cross, and were written by the young officers and airmen of the 15th Air Force.

From Your Editor

The Cerignola Connections is published at least twice a year and is provided to the membership of the 455th Bomb Group Association at no cost, as a part of your dues.

Contributions and pictures may be sent to your editor, **Tom Ramey, 1211 Montclaire Ct., Appleton, WI 54915.** All material will be returned after publication. When sending photographs please apply your address label on the back of the photo in order that these may be identified after publication and then returned to you.

If you have a special "War Story" and it need not be flying or combat, but a squadron or group happening, send it in. This makes interesting reading for everyone.

If you are not a member of the Association and receive a complimentary copy of the Cerignola Connection and would like to support the publication, send your check, to **Lou Hansen, P.O. Box 6125, Spencer, IA 51301** and mark it for the Cerignola Connection. Rising engraving, printing, and postage costs, raise the cost of the publication, each issue.

Each issue we talk about dues. Dues notices are not mailed each year as they become due. We do this in order to save on postage and mailing costs. We rely entirely on your memory for payment. As you read this issue, ask yourself, "Did I send in my dues check?" And if you didn't, stop for just a moment and do so today! Annual dues are: $15.00, payable November 1 of the preceding year. Life memberships: $100.00. Make your check payable to the **455th Bomb Group Association and mail it to Louis Hansen, P.O. Box 6125, Spencer, IA 51301.**

Let's make a concerted effort to attend this years reunion in San Antonio, Texas, September 27-October 1. It's a wonderful opportunity to renew old friendships, tell war stories, and revisit our youth before the rocking chair sets in. An excellent program has been put together to make this the 455th Bomb Groups finest. See you there!

Ed

A Prisoner of War

There's those who die in battle
And by their names is writ,
"He died fighting for his country
And doin' his bit."
Maybe the dead can see those words
Which thrill men to the core,
But me — I don't see nothin',
A Prisoner of War.

There's those who hear the bugle call
Above the battles' din,
And cheer like flamin' madmen
As they go chargin' in.
There's those who do their duty
And guard their native shore
But me — I don't do nothin',
A Prisoner of War.

There's those who thrust their chins out
When the news ain't so hot
And say, "Now's the time, boys,
To giv 'em all we've got."
There's those whose hearts are singing
When victory's got the floor,
But me — I don't hear nothin',
A Prisoner of War.

There's those who see their loved ones
When they go home on leave,
And have their blooming Sheilas
A'clinging to their sleeves.
There's those who get their letters
Every week — and even more,
But me — I don't get nothin',
A Prisoner of War.

And so we go on living
And so the days roll by
And so we go on hopin'
Not ours to do or die,
Not ours the din of battle,
Not ours the victor's roar.
But we'll show 'em we can take it
Prisoners of War!

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