



# Flightline



Newsletter of the 780<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron of WWII

December 2015

## ***Doesn't let B-17 birthplace overshadow 'Liberator'*** **'Cookie' still on a mission**

by Dave Kuchenbecker

When the Collings Foundation's collection of flying World War II planes makes its annual stop in Seattle, it is truly Cookie's favorite time of the year.

Cookie, of course, is George Kuchenbecker, and he still fits into his flight suit, something he is very proud of. He brings his flight helmet and his A-2 flight jacket (this past year we talked him into wearing the original), and he really enjoys talking to the local aircraft enthusiasts.

They younger ones often enjoy trying on the oxygen mask and flight helmet. A couple of years ago he was joined by a representative of the Tuskegee airmen, an emotional meeting to say the least. Even now, Cookie still enjoys taking a few visitors into *Witchcraft* to give them a personal tour and to see the world as he used to.

In past years Cookie was the onsite coordinator for the stops in Washington state. Now, he just enjoys seeing "his" plane and visiting with others who appreciate the place these aircraft hold in the history of the world.

What is really interesting and sometimes quite humorous is to hear Cookie respond to many who come to see the B-17. The Boeing Red Barn, the original Boeing building, is only a few yards away. Watching their reaction as Cookie explains that the B-24 is actually a far superior aircraft to the B-17, and that more B-24s were



George "Cookie" Kuchenbecker and his 11-member B-24 "crew" this past June, underneath his "office," complete with his name on the door. From left: grandson Austin, his wife, Cindy, and their daughter, Nora; George; son, David; Gloria; step-great-grandson, James; Jacinda, wife of grandson, Matt; Dave's wife, Patti; and great-grandson, Axel.

built, catches them off guard. They all nod in pleasant agreement... and then slowly move away to consult their smart phones.

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# Your News & Letters

Dear Kathy,

*Just a note to let you know Bart and I are still kicking. He does have Alzheimer's and has been diagnosed for nearly four years, but is doing well. Physically he is very well.*

*I was reading the Flightline and saw that Bill Edwards was talking about being the second youngest in the squadron and I think they forgot Bart. He was 90 on September 13<sup>th</sup> but I don't know Bill's birthdate, so maybe he is (the second youngest). Imagine wondering who is the youngest 90-year-old? I was recently informed that Bart is the last surviving member of his crew.*

*I am enclosing a check to help, a little bit, to defray some of your costs. We really enjoy receiving the Flightline, and would not want anything to happen to it. Thank you for your work and loyalty.*

*Keep well,*

*Helen Branch*

Editor's note: It indeed is a wonderful thing to have a good natured debate about who is the youngest 90-year-

old! I don't know how to resolve the question without asking the nominees to turn in their birth certificates. Let's call it a three-way tie?



*Hello Kathy!*

*Happy Thanksgiving to you and your family! I was wondering if you have a roster of the officers in the 780<sup>th</sup>? I am looking for the full names of the following: Minanick, Anderson, Capt. Davis, Capt. Stenans, Paluck, McNanny. I really don't think they are spelt right? On the back of the picture the names were faded. Any help would help me!*

*Thanks and Happy Holidays!*

*Pat Kelly*

Editor's note: Pat joined the 780<sup>th</sup> family this year when he asked for some back issues of the *Flightline* to complete his collection. They are collectibles, you know! Pat became interested in the 780<sup>th</sup> when he found a grouping related to Lt. Arthur Hulseberg, the bombardier of the Lengvenis crew

that was lost 24 August 1944. Pat's story about the crew's last mission appeared in the September issue of *Flightline*. Pat is the archivist of the 367<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group but has a strong interest in the 780<sup>th</sup> as well. I tried to answer his question above as best I could using my original copy of *780 Memoirs*. I identified Minanick, Paluck and McNanny as pilot Lt. Herman J. Minnick of Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin; Paluck as Lt. Edward J. Paluch of Chicago; and McNanny as Lt. Robert E. McNannay of Hastings, Nebraska. There are two possibilities for Anderson: Lt. G.R. Anderson whose address is not in the roster but whose photo appears in the officer section of the book, and Lt. Lester J. Anderson of Prairie Farm, Wisconsin. I wonder if Stenans could be Lt. William F. Stephens of Chicago? I could not make a good guess at Capt. Davis. In *Memoirs* there is a crew photo that includes Minnick, McNannay and Anderson together (crew W-13, original members); and another crew photo that includes Paluch (Crew 235, original members). Can anyone else confirm the crew in Pat's photo?



*Kathy*

*I was contacted by Gary Stromberg several days ago and have been corresponding with him.*

**THANK YOU**  
**Bart and Helen Branch**  
**For your donation to**  
**the FLIGHTLINE**

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*780th BS/465th BG*

# Whose Plane is this, anyway?

**T**he U.S. Government paid for them, air crews flew them, and ground crews serviced them, but just who "owned" a B-24 bomber?

Movies would lead us to believe that the plane belonged to the flight crew, but I found this excerpt online from the book, *The 464<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group in World War II*, by Mike Hill and Betty Karle. If I'm not mistaken, the 464<sup>th</sup> was across the valley from the 465<sup>th</sup>, both sharing the pair of airstrips. This quote is attributed to M/Sgt. Joseph E. Krenzelok, a B-24 ground crew chief from the 464<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, 776<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron. He states:

"Contrary to popular belief, the planes did not belong to the flight crews. In a lot of cases they were privileged to paint the name on the side of the ship. No, the planes did not belong to the Army Air Corps, either. Despite what the crews and Uncle Sam thought, the planes actually belong to the crew chief and his ground

crew. They were the men who sweated blood over the planes. They spent countless hours fixing the damage and worn systems on the ships until they were as perfect as humanly possible under the worst possible working conditions. If it had not been for these heroes the planes would have never gotten off the ground. Yep, the plane belonged to the crew chief: he was just loaning it to the flight crews."

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*He had read some of my historical stories on the Stephen F. Austin State University website where I post a monthly historical story. He had read of my uncle, Sgt. Bobbie T. Robertson, and of S/Sgt. Joe Kling, the last member of this B-24 crew who served in the 780<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron. His dad was M.H. Stromberg who was in the 780<sup>th</sup>. I sent him an e-mail with your info so that he could join the association and so he can now keep up with the group through Flightline. Thanks for all your hard work in keeping this organization going!*

*Hope you hear from Gary soon!*

*Rickey Robertson*

Editor's note: I haven't heard from Gary but I will check in with Rickey to see if there is a way I can get in touch with him. His father was Marcellus H. Stromberg. And if anyone else knows of a 780<sup>th</sup> member who isn't receiving the *Flightline*, let me know!

Editor's note: Thank you, Dave, for sharing your observations as your dad continues his mission of telling the B-24 story. I'm certain he has enriched and enlightened countless people. George and Gloria are now at a Seattle nursing home where George still smokes his pipe. They get frequent visits from Dave and his family. And regarding the Tuskegee airmen, everyone I have ever spoken to in the 780<sup>th</sup> deeply respected and appreciated those pilots as they provided protective escort to the bomber crews.



# Kansas City 15AF reunion a success, next reunion in Dallas

The reunion of six bomb groups of the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force this past September - including the 465<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group - was a success by several accounts.

Carole Lee of the 781<sup>st</sup> reported that 38 veterans total were in attendance, including seven from the 465<sup>th</sup>: five from the 781<sup>st</sup>, and one each from the 782<sup>nd</sup> and 783<sup>rd</sup>. Carole said everyone felt very welcome.

"When we first arrived and went into the hospitality room I saw a plaque with all the tail arts of the groups in attendance. To see ours included immediately gave a good feeling. A welcoming feeling," she said. "The many people at the banquet made it feel like old times."

I'm sure many of us can relate to that feeling from past 780<sup>th</sup> banquets.



*465th Bomb Group members at Kansas City included, from row from left: Charles "Bubba" Braud, Harley Bridger, Harvey Erwin, Orren Lee and Kenneth Rehn. Back Row: George Hausold and Harry Fike.*

Reunion activities included tours of some local museums and speaker programs at the

hotel in the afternoon. Some of the sessions included "The Best Seat in the House," by 451<sup>st</sup> nose turret gunner Achilles "Achi" Kozakis; "Navigating to the Target, World War II and Vietnam," by 451<sup>st</sup> navigator Alexander C. Kuras; "Revisiting the Tragic Saga of *The Lady be*

*Good*," by Kim Hobbs, son of 376<sup>th</sup> pilot Charles L. Hobbs; and "Shot Down and Surviving as a POW," by Hjalmar Johanson of the 461<sup>st</sup> and Orville Hommert of the 484<sup>th</sup>.

One of the highlights of the weekend was the memorial service. All groups or squadrons were asked to send in a list of recently departed veterans. Since the 780<sup>th</sup> list was thankfully short, I sent in a list going back two years (see page 5).

Planning for next year's reunion is underway. It will be in Dallas, Texas, October 13-16, 2016. The 781<sup>st</sup> Squadron is the "lead" squadron for the 465<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group for the reunion, with 781<sup>st</sup> president Orren Lee as 465<sup>th</sup> coordinator.



*Carol and Orren Lee*

# TAPS



Nathan "Sonny" Golden, 89, passed away peacefully at his home in Los Angeles, October 25, 2012. He was born in Revere, Massachusetts, on December 2, 1922, and was given the nickname "Sonny" at birth by his sister, Geraldine. The intrepid Sonny overcame becoming orphaned at an early age, and the Great Depression. He served with distinction in the Army Air Corps during World War II, surviving 22 missions as a B-24 bombardier. His plane, *Jackpine Joe*, was hit by flack over Germany and Sonny bailed out and spent a year as a POW in Switzerland. After the war, Sonny worked as a song plugger and became the road manager for the Andrew Sisters. He went on to become a prominent and well-respected business manager and financial advisor in the entertainment industry to clients such as Frank Sinatra for more than 50 years. He is survived by his children, Josh (Rebecca) and Dayna Golden; and grandchildren Kai and Natasha Golden.

*Editor's note: I only recently found out about Nathan's passing, which occurred in 2012. Nathan's son, Josh, has been a member of the 781<sup>st</sup> squadron and now is a member of the 780<sup>th</sup> as well. The story of the crash of Jackpine Joe in July 1944 will appear in the March issue of Flightline.*

Daniel A. Killion, 93, passed away on July 7, 2014. He was born and raised in Philadelphia and most recently lived in Glenolden, Pennsylvania. After high school Dan enlisted in the Army Air Corps. He was awarded seven Bronze Stars for his heroism. He also served for two years during the Korean conflict. Dan retired from the U.S. Postal Service in 1976 as a regional supervisor. He was preceded by brothers, John and Thomas, and nephews, Jack and Billy. He is survived by many nieces, nephews, great-nieces and great-nephews.

These are the members of the 780<sup>th</sup> who folded their wings in 2013 and 2014 that were remembered at the Kansas City 15AF reunion:

*Louis "Dyke" Lindeman (gunner)*  
*Jim Alter (navigator and bombardier)*  
*Ned Hayes (pilot)*  
*Harry Larson (gunner)*  
*Joe Kling (gunner)*  
*Ed Gluklick (pilot)*  
*Bill Shreve (pilot)*  
*Joe Spontak (navigator)*  
*Larry "Firpo" Nix (electrical specialist)*  
*Bob Bleier (navigator)*  
*Jack Ball (crew chief)*  
*Sam Marie (bombardier, 783<sup>rd</sup>)*

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## *Flightline*

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The bomb group mail clerk was always popular. Even though these Christmas packages arrived in March 1944, they were welcomed by the men of the 455<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group stationed near San Giovanni, Italy. Christmas packages from the home front had to be mailed by October 31. (photo credit: fold3.com)