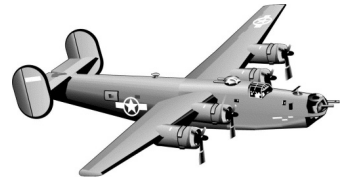




Flightline



Newsletter of the 780th Bombardment Squadron of WWII

January 2020

Residents got to keep fuel, steel mats

Oregon town folk help B-24 make emergency night landing in 1944

Editor's note: Squadron member Robert D. Freeman, son of 780th instructor pilot Frank Freeman, submitted this article. Does anyone else have some interesting stories to share? Robert's comments: My dad, Frank Freeman, is still going at age 99, but he's not very communicative any more. Doesn't use email any more. But here is an interesting piece his brother, Bob, wrote many years ago. He wasn't a pilot but was in the Navy in World War II. Enterprise, Oregon is just over the Blue Mountains from where they both grew up in Walla Walla, and I have a cousin who lives there. Robert D. Freeman, North Bend, WA.

by Bob Freeman

During World War II a small community in the southern part of the state of Washington, Walla Walla, was the site of an Army Air Force B-24 Bomber Training Command. Crews took their training as a unit to develop their skills prior to going overseas. One such crew with an instructor on board took off for a training mission on May 30, 1944, to complete a cross-country segment of their training. A short time after take-off the instructor outlined the mission to the student pilot and retired to the rear of the plane and joined a poker game with the crew.

Some time later, the student pilot called for the instructor and informed him that he was not only low on fuel but he was completely lost. The instructor could not recognize any landmarks and, to compound his problem, his radio was



The amazing story of the emergency B-24 landing appeared in the Sunday News, "New York's Picture Newspaper," in June 1944. Credit: Wallowa County Chieftain.

out and darkness was approaching. This was prior to radar. As darkness deepened he saw a community of lights below and started to circle.

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Your News & Letters

Kathy,

Hello, Hope you are well. Upon opening my grandfather's footlocker several years back we discovered this .38 Special with U.S. stamped leather holster. Does anyone in the group remember these? Do they have theirs?

Joshua Hummel

Editor's note: The handgun and holster are pictured far right. If anyone can answer Joshua's questions, his email is summersun83@gmail.com.



Checking In with *Flightline*

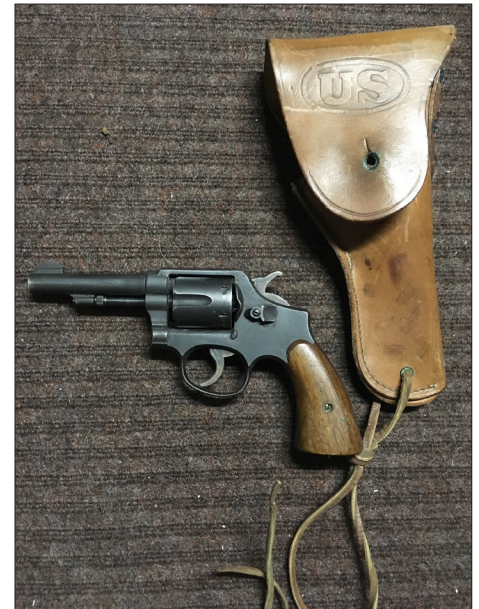
I had a great conversation with 780th radio operator Jim Long of South Carolina in No-

vember. He is doing great and sounds great.

I received a Happy New Year letter from Vera Bagley, widow of ball gunner Jim Bagley. Vera and her daughter, Dawn, have combined forces and have moved to a gated apartment community called Cortland Vera Sanford. "Vera enjoys seeing her name everywhere in the complex," Dawn noted. Vera plays bridge, uses public transportation, and receives physical therapy for her left side following a 2018 stroke. It sounds like Vera and Dawn have a great arrangement. Vera's new address is: 4856 Veracity Point #148, Sanford, FL 32771.

I talked to Brad Branch, son of 780th tailgunner Bart Branch, this week. He wanted to get in

touch with Dave Kuchenbecker, son of tailgunner George Kuchenbecker (incidentally I am the granddaughter of a tailgunner). Brad and Dave might be cooking up a trip to Europe this year. As it so happens, so am I! More about that this spring. - Editor



Wings of Freedom Tour to continue after B-17 accident

As you may recall from the national news and the October 2019 issue of *Flightline*, the B-17 operated by the Collings Foundation crashed shortly after takeoff on October 2, killing two crew and five passengers. "Amidst the shock, tears, and personal reflection upon the outpouring of support we witnessed, the simple truth was clear: our mission must continue as living history is more relevant than ever before and is an essential part of our nation's fabric," wrote Collings Foundation Executive Director Rob Collings in its 2019 Annual Fund Campaign letter. As proof of the American public's desire and support of "living history" Collings reported that the Foundation saw more growth in 2019 than ever before in its 40-year history, record-breaking attendance at its Wings of Freedom Tour, the opening of its American Heritage Museum in Massachusetts, and the restoration or addition of several World War II aircraft. Collings stated its second B-17 is undergoing restoration, inspection and repainting and hopefully will be ready to join the Wings of Freedom Tour in 2021. The 2020 tour already is underway in Florida. I myself sent a small donation. If you'd like to do so as well (absolutely no pressure), mail your check to The Collings Foundation, Attn: Membership and Contributions, 568 Main St., Hudson, MA 01749. Please let them know you are a B-24 veteran or spouse, or a B-24 family member and, of course, mention the 780th Bombardment Squadron of the 465th Bomb Group and *Flightline*!



2020 15AF Bomb Groups Reunion heading to Albuquerque

Interest and attendance at the 2019 15AF Bomb Groups reunion in Dallas in September was so high (see chart below) that plans were put in motion immediately afterward for 2020. The 2020 reunion will be held September 10-13 in Albuquerque, New Mexico, at the Sheraton Uptown. Rumor has it that Kirkland AFB is anxious to host our men and families and provide an enjoyable experience to all. A schedule, hotel reservation information and registration will be posted at <http://484th.org/Reunion/Reunion.htm>. Thank you to Reunion Committee Chair Dave Blake of the 464th for planning, organizing and crunching all the numbers.

Dallas 2019 Bomb Group Reunion Registration Totals - All Groups Combined												
	Attendees	Welcome Dinner	Stadium Tour	Individual Group Dinner			Combined Banquet			Flight Museum	Farewell Dinner	Wheel Chairs
				Filet	Salmon	Eggplant	Steak	Chicken	Vegetarian			
98th BG	23	21	12	11	10	1	13	8	2	15	14	
99th BG	1			1			1			1	1	
376th BG	59	45	24	26	22	7	27	19	2	28	38	6
451st BG	20	9	11	8	10	1	12	7	1	4	4	1
455th BG	4	3	4	2	2		1	2		2	2	
460th BG	3	1	1	1	2			3		1	1	
461st BG	24	19	17	14	6		16	9		14	13	
464th BG	26	24	10	10	14	2	15	11		12	12	1
465th BG	45	23	17	13	30	2	17	17	3	15	14	3
483rd BG	41	36	32	24	13	2	25	13	2	30	29	
484th BG	33	13	16	12	15	3	16	10	4	19	11	3
485th BG	13	7	8	7	5	1	7	6		2	5	
Reunion Total	292	201	152	129	129	19	150	105	14	143	144	14

15AF B-24 story told at National WWII Museum

My family (below) visited the National WWII Museum in New Orleans after Christmas. On this page are some photos of exhibits pertaining to the role the 15th Air Force played in the war. Right: an explanation of how the air war in Europe was beginning to be won by early 1944. That's when Pantanella was established. Coincidence? Bottom: a map showing the bases and operational range of the 15th Air Force. More photos will be published in the March issue of *Flightline*.



...continued from front page

It seemed he was surrounded by rather high mountains and the time was fast approaching when he must land the plane.

Below the plane the sleepy little mountain community of Enterprise in northeast Oregon recognized after the plane had circled a few times that it was in some type of trouble. An Air Force pilot home on leave and other townspeople had enough presence of mind to see the plane must land, even though they had no landing field.

After Action Report

The crew was taken into town, fed, and housed. The next morning military police and engineers from Geiger Air Force Base in Spokane showed up to assess the situation. and set up a tent city that would exist for two weeks. The damaged engine was repaired and the plane was stripped to reduce weight. Three hundred gallons of aviation fuel still on board was pumped out and given to ranchers and farmers for free.

A runway was prepared, using steel matting that came by train. On June 15, a VIP transport plane brought officers, a test pilot and a copilot for the tricky take-off. After the B-24 took off, circled the golf course and headed back to Walla Walla, the military brass took off and the townsfolk went about their business.

The four-by-eight-foot steel matting panels were dismantled and dispersed among the locals. The golf course was more or less restored with new sod. A dance was held that Saturday with most of the Army engineers showing up.

The crew that landed in Enterprise finished training with a full crew and a brand-new B-24, which they ferried to Italy. They were stationed near Manduria. For years after the emergency landing, wheat ranchers north of Enterprise tilled up .50-caliber machine gun bullets that the crew had jettisoned.

The community soon organized itself and volunteers went from house to house urging people to get their cars out and go to the golf course as fast as possible to help an injured airplane. As cars showed up at the golf course, the drivers were shown where to park and what signal would be given for them to turn on their lights. As if mental telepathy were involved, the pilot figured out what was happening as he saw the lights of cars suddenly streaming in one direction. Eventually, the cars were in place in a double row - all pointing in with their lights turned on, giving the pilot a lighted landing strip too short... but it would have to do.

After a number of false passes, and with considerable skill, the pilot brought the plane down between the rows of cars, pickups and trucks, and was able to stop it a few feet short of a stream.

Three "post action" points of interest:

1. One of the plane's crew was from the Enterprise area but did not recognize where they were until he stepped out of the plane and saw his friends and neighbors in pajamas and bathrobes.
2. The Army Air Force eventually brought steel matting in and built a runway which allowed the stripped-down B-24 to be flown out.
3. The crew as well as the U.S. Army engineers who came in to build the runway were adopted by the community and given parties and dinners. Tours of the airplane were allowed and, in general, everyone cooperated.

Editor: The Wallowa County Chieftain reported that it took more than an hour of trial runs before the aircraft landed, skimming trees and a clubhouse on the narrow field, before skidding about 700 yards with all wheels locked. It came to a stop only about 150 yards short of the end of the field where fences, a creek and an embankment would have wrecked the ship.

Kathy Le Comte
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Flightline Flashback

2004 780th Squadron Reunion • Gainesville, Florida

Pictured are 780th Squadron Association members from the 2004 reunion in Gainesville (the 780th also met in Gainesville in 2001). There are 23 pictured but I can name only 20. Can you help identify the other three, or let *Flightline* know if some names to faces are wrong? Email me at johnkath5@comcast.net, call me at 217-414-1400, or write me at the address above.

Front row, seated: Ord Campbell, Wes Schultz, _____, T.P. Walton.

Second row: Bart Branch, John McParland, Frank Love, Everett Kron, Bill Larson, Bob Dorrigan, _____.

Third row: George Kuchenbecker, Jack Ball, _____, John Fleischer, Ashby Nelson.

Fourth row: Frosty Sommers, Bill Edwards, Jim Halter, Ed Rostedt, Jim Long, Louis Lindeman.

Top: Larry Nix.