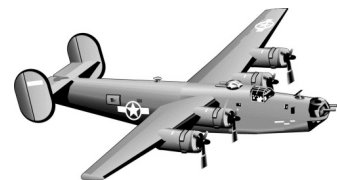




Flightline



Newsletter of the 780th Bomb Squadron of WWII

June 2010

Sunk Ships, Crew Shot Down, Armed Italians Shocking Welcome to Italy

by Cleon S. Moore, as told to Cheryl Hewitt

Bon Voyage

I was in the Lt. Frank Berry crew, which joined the 780th in December 1944 as a replacement crew. Twelve new crews joined the bombardment group while I was in Pantanella from March 1944 through May 1945.

We crossed the Atlantic aboard the French luxury liner *Colombie*. When the United States took over the ship at the beginning of the war it didn't repaint or rename the ship. We departed Norfolk, Virginia, on 25 November 1944. The ship took six days to cross to Naples. We were in a convoy of 250 ships, but the *Colombie* was so much faster than the others that we went ahead and never saw the other ships during the crossing.

About 2,400 Army Air Corps men traveled on the *Colombie*, and we had beautiful accommodations, four bunks to a room. We slept four enlisted men or two officers per room. The U.S. Army's "Big Red," about half of the 1st Division Infantry, traveled with us, and they had bunks in the hold. Air Corpsmen were used to the up-and-down motion of the ship because we were accustomed to the motion of the plane's strafing movement. But the infantry troops were not used to the ship's



Lt. Frank Berry crew. Kneeling left to right: A.F. Madison (tail gunner), G.E. Bennett (top gunner), L.D. Moody (waist gunner), Joe Guido (bottom gunner), W.B. Newton (radio operator and waist gunner), Cleon S. Moore (nose gunner). Standing, left to right: Richard Beak (navigator), Clifton Stenswick (co-pilot), Frank Berry (pilot), Donald Stuyvenberg (bombardier).

movement; many of them got sick and would puke over the side of the ship.

When we arrived in Naples, it was a battlefield. In the harbor, we disembarked and walked across the water on a mulberry landing - a walkway about eight feet wide that was built on top of all the ships that had been sunk in the harbor. We walked from the dock about a mile to a convoy of trucks that carried us to Pantanella.

Replacing The Franklin Crew

Two crews got off the truck the night we arrived. A crew had been shot down on 2 De-

...continued on page 5



2010 Reunion
Sept. 14-16
Details Inside

Nephew Connects With Uncle's Crewmate

In the March issue of *Flightline*, Rickey Robertson sought information about his uncle, Sgt. Bobbie Robertson, who was KIA over Vienna, Austria, on October 11, 1944. His prayer was answered:

Kathy,

We see, hear and read of fascinating stories from World War II that continue to come true after all these years. And guess what? Flightline was able to bring about a story long lost that involved my uncle, Sgt. Bobbie T. Robertson of the 780th.

In the last issue of Flightline you published my letter concerning anyone who may have attended any training schools or knew him. Miracles do happen. I received a letter from Joseph Kling of Walled Lake, Michigan. Mr. Kling is the last surviving crew member of my uncle's B-24 crew (pilot Everett H. Kron).

I have been in contact with Mr. Kling and he has given me so much information about the mission, being a crew member with my uncle, living in the same tent at Pantanella air base with my uncle, and of completing 35 combat missions and returning safely to the United States. He has given me so much information that my grandparents never received as they grieved for their son. But I have been able to share this information with my family and we all have been able to come to grips with this loss and to have closure that unfortunately my grandparents never had.

Ironically, my uncle was lost on their first mission, with the crew members being scattered in other aircraft to gain some experience. S/Sgt. Kling was nose gunner on the B-24 right behind the plane

my uncle was flying on and saw it when it was hit by flak and started to come apart. He even saw some of the parachutes as they opened. And yes, all my uncle's personal items that I have at my home, Joe Kling was there in the tent the day the First Sergeant came and packed all these items up for shipment back to the family. So much great information!

Thanks for assisting me and my family by printing my letter about Sgt. Bobbie T. Robertson in Flightline. I have now found a comrade of my uncle, made a new friend, and now look forward to meeting Joe Kling and others at the 2010 reunion in Biloxi!



Flightline Editor Kathy Le Comte visited 780th president and former editor Bob Bleier at his home in San Jose, California, in May. Bob reports he has a bum knee which might keep him from the reunion this year. We hope not!



780th OFFICERS

President

Bob Bleier

1288 Rio Hondo Dr.

San Jose, CA 95120

408-268-2310

bobbleier@aol.com

Vice President

(vacant)

Treasurer

Ashby Nelson

255 S. First St. East

Preston ID 83263

208-852-2066

bettyandashby@q.com

Secretary

Eleanor Ball

1333 E. 84th Ter.

Kansas City, MO 64131

816-444-4684

ballinsky@aol.com

Newsletter Editor

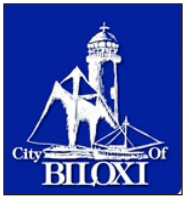
Kathy Le Comte

869 S. Columbia Ave.

Springfield, IL 62704

217-787-6512

johnkath5@comcast.net



Steer Course Towards Biloxi In September

Have you made your reservations for the 2010 reunion in Biloxi, Mississippi? Don't let the oil spill muck up your plans - make your reservations now.

The 39th reunion of the 780th Bombardment Squadron will be held Tuesday through Thursday, September 14-16, 2010. Jim Rogers, son of the late Matthew and Eve Rogers, is our host. He has selected the Isle of Capri as our hotel, with plenty of amenities to make our stay a Southern one: "easy and breezy."

Rooms are \$65 per night for a regular (king or two queens). A room with a balcony is \$20 more.

With each room comes two free breakfasts each morning. We will enjoy the hotel's huge buffet for our evening meal, costing just \$11. And we will enjoy our meal together in our

private hospitality room, which also will be the location of our banquet.

Several members who haven't been to a reunion in a while, and some family members who have never been to one, have said they plan to attend. We never know when the last reunion will be, so don't miss this chance to see your Pantanella buddies in Biloxi.

Kuchenbecker To Break 65-Year-Old Promise

by George Kuchenbecker

I guess I'm going to go back on a vow I made many years ago about Biloxi. I had vowed to never go to Biloxi again in my lifetime.

Why, you ask? When I was in basic training at the nearby Keesler Field, a couple other GIs and I had ventured into town after our first weeks of training. (Rain, mud, more rain, mud, everywhere. I guess that is "normal" weather in January.) I don't remember how we got to town but we were walking down a very nice residential street among well-kept moderate homes, minding our own business, when we came upon a sign in a very well kept yard. The sign read:

DOGS AND SOLDIERS KEEP OFF!

We turned around and found our way back to the base and never returned to the quiet red-necked town of Biloxi. We vowed to never again come to Biloxi.

So now, these 60-plus years later, I am going to return. Hopefully the offending sign has been removed.

How to Make Reservations

Isle Casino Hotel - Biloxi, MS
1-866-ISLE-VIP or 1-866-475-3847
Group Code: 780BOMB

Hotel Contact: Fred Thomas, Group Sales Manager, 228-436-7814

Rooms: Standard rooms are one king or two queens, free wireless internet and cable, in-room coffeemaker, hair dryer, etc. Hotel has a spa and exercise room.

Reunion Contact: Jim Rogers, Baton Rouge, 225-272-4710 (h), 225-614-5784 (c), or email jimrogers.usa@gmail.com.

Transportation: Closest airport is in Gulf Port, 15 minutes from Biloxi. If you desire pick-up service from Jim, please call him in advance of the reunion.

Your Letters

Notes, letters and emails sent to or forwarded to *Flightline*.

Dear Ashby,

Sorry to have fallen behind - hope this catches me up. Thank you for doing what you do. The Flightline is always welcome!

For the past four and a half years I have lived in a nice retirement home, so far in "independent living." For an old fellow I still do some consulting work, as a geologist. Several old clients keep me available. Not too much but enough to say I'm busy.

Sorry not to have made recent meetings, always a conflict. Perhaps the next one if we have one.

Regards,

Adolf "Ad" U. Honkala
Richmond, VA

Kathy,

Please excuse my printing. If I wrote longhand you wouldn't be able to read it. My printing isn't much better.

I appreciate the newsletter. It's nice to be kept up to date. For an old man, I'm in pretty good shape, or so they tell me.

Give my regard to the gang at the reunion. I would love to be able to attend, but my traveling days are pretty much over. As you can see, I moved into the Masonic Home and gave my condo to my daughter. It was a smart move. Nice room, half bath and good meals. They take good care of me and are very attentive. Sometimes, I wish they would back off. Plenty of activities to keep us occupied - we can't get bored.

We have a good workshop in the basement and they have us do much of the minor repairs. Keeps us occupied and involved.

Take care,

Ned Hayes
902 Jacksonville Rd. Rm. W-342
Burlington, NJ 08016-3814

Kathy,

Good to hear from you and the gang. Not sure when I'll be going "back east." Much love to all.

John McWhorter
Bakersfield, CA

TAPS

Donald K. Wake passed away March 6, 2010, in Upland, California. He was born in Farmington, Illinois, on January 15, 1922. In 1940 he enlisted in the Army Air Corps. While serving at Moffett Field in Mountain View, Calif., he met his future wife, Mildred "Millie" Cline, on a blind date on Valentine's Day 1942. They celebrated their 66th wedding anniversary in December. Don flew 48 missions as a navigator in a B-24 over Europe until his plane was shot down in July 1944 and he was taken prisoner. After the war Don attended Chaffey and Pomona Colleges and the University of Southern California Medical School. He practiced medicine in Upland for 35 years. In addition to Millie, Don is survived by his four daughters, Donna Wake (Tom) Wilson, Marilee Wake (Dave) Binnquist, Holly Wake Shinoff, and Tracy Ellen Wake (Bill Petrick); brothers, David and Lee Wake; sisters, Mary Alice Page, Judy Thurman, and Marjory Plumer; and four grandchildren, Katie and Michael Wilson, Sandy Binnquist Sonke (Marty) and Steven Binnquist. (From the Inland Valley (CA) Daily Bulletin, online.)

...continued from front page

ember, just before we arrived, and my crew replaced them. The Lt. John W. Franklin, Jr. crew was shot down on a mission to Blechhammer, Germany. Five of the crew were declared dead, including Franklin. Six men parachuted out and were captured by the Germans. My crew inherited their bombardier, Donald Stuyvenberg. Stuyvenberg had not gone on that mission, so my crew picked him up. The Franklin crew was one of the original crews that formed the Squadron at McCook Army Air Corps Base at Lincoln, Nebraska.

The officers were assigned to Franklin's old quarters, which was a brick hut. The enlisted men got the Franklin crew's old tent. Most of the personal possessions of the downed crewmen were removed from the tent before we arrived.

The day after we arrived, we reported to a building that had been left on the site by the Italians, and we got in line to be promoted. All corporals got promoted that day to E-5, Staff Sergeant, so if we were shot down, under the Versailles Treaty, the Germans could not force us to work.

A Walk In The Dark

At Pantanella, we flew one day and were off two days. We could do anything we wanted on the off-days, we just had to return to base on the third day.

One day some of my crew went to the town of Andria, about 15 miles from the airfield. We would go to the restaurants there and eat dinner, which was usually eggs and chips. Eggs and potatoes were about the only foods the locals had. That night we walked back to the base from town, but we left after dark and couldn't find the road to the base.

One of the men in my crew was S/Sgt. Joe Guido, bottom gunner, an Italian from Brooklyn. Joe didn't want the locals to know he could speak Italian, so he only spoke English while we were assigned there. He would tell us what the locals were saying while we were in the towns around the base.

That night when we were going back to the

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

**CONSOLIDATED
B-24
LIBERATOR**

**SHOCK STRUTS
CARBURETORS**

Bendix
ENGINE / DISTRIBUTION

**This great ship - largest of the
American Bombers - carries
Bendix Products into battle
as a part of its "invisible crew".**

BENDIX WAR PRODUCTION BOARD JOINT-MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

base, Joe refused to ask the locals where the road was. As we tried to find our way in the dark, we came across railroad tracks and followed the tracks because the railroad ran within one mile of the base. Finally, we came to a switching station, about a mile from the base, where the U.S. military stored munitions.

Two Italians were guarding the switching station that night. One of them yelled, "Stop!" in Italian, but I didn't understand what he was saying, and I kept walking. He yelled, "Stop!" again. I said, "We're Americans." The guard pulled out a long gun, aimed it at us, and I heard the click of a bolt action loading the rifle. I dropped to the ground, pulled out my .45, and put a bead on him. I decided that if he cocked the gun, I was going to shoot him. I wasn't going to die at the hand of an Italian.

I yelled to Joe to tell the guards in Italian that we were Americans. I told Joe a second time to tell the guards in Italian who we were. He finally did, and no one died that night.

Kathy Le Comte
Editor, *Flightline*
869 S. Columbia Ave.
Springfield, IL 62704-2342

Flightline

780th Cap Wanted
Harold Miers would like to purchase a 780th cap. If you have an extra and can part with it, please give Harold a call at 856-222-4272.

780th Test Squadron Adopts New Patch

The 780th Test Squadron - legacy of the 780th Bombardment Squadron - has adopted a patch that pays homage to its predecessor.

Pat Logan, son of the late Patrick "P.J." Logan, has been following the development of the squadron and the patch for several years. He and a few others, including four-star Air Force Gen. Charlie Holland (Ret.), former commander of U.S. Special Operations, tried to get elements from the original 780th patch incorporated into the new one. They weren't as successful as hoped, but the new patch, pictured above with the original 780th patch, includes a few details - the bomb in the knight's hand and the chain links - from the original.



The original 780th patch, left, and the new 780th Test Squadron patch.

"It is still an honor to have the Squadron activated after all these years, and the patch will be a new legacy for the men and boys who flew the B-24s over Germany," says Pat.

According to Maj. David Ferris, operations officer of the 780th TS, 46th Test Wing, at Eglin AFB, the squadron is responsible for the majority of developmental testing of Air Force conventional weap-

ons. The 780th TS was key in developing and testing the Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM) that took out wanted terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in 2006. According to the Eglin AFB website, the JDAM is a bomb tail kit that provides GPS and inertial navigation, essentially turning a gravity bomb into a smart bomb.

Today the 780th TS directs daily tests for 306 armament programs and performs about 1,600 missions a year.

"We are not a flight test squadron and thus do not have airplanes," explains Maj. Ferris. The 780th TS provides program engineers and test engineers to lead, plan, and execute the weapon tests, while other squadrons provide flight operations.

And so the 780th continues.