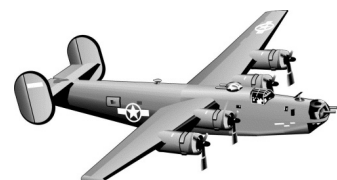




Flightline



Newsletter of the 780th Bombardment Squadron of WWII

March and June 2020

Attack on bombers led by German 'Ace'

Two crews lost in Ehrwald Air Battle

August 1944 stands out in the history of the 780th Bombardment Squadron as the month the squadron reached its peak in both combat activity and losses. The squadron flew 21 combat missions - the most of any of the twelve months that it was in operation. August also saw the highest monthly squadron casualties, with six crews failing to return from missions. The Lengvenis crew returned from a mission only to be lost later in the month when their plane exploded in mid-air. This article focuses on

two of these six crews, lost in what is known as "The Battle over Ehrwald."



The crash site of the Clarke aircraft near Ehrwald, Austria. Eyewitness Gerd Leitner, left, and 780th son Brad Branch, right. Stillshot from On the Wing.

Recently, Reid Bullock became interested in the 780th and requested information about his great-uncle Victor Earl Bullock.

"My uncle, Daniel Bullock, had done extensive research on the story of what happened to Earl over many years but, sadly, Danny passed away two months ago," Reid explained. "In the wake of his loss, I am starting in to recreate some of his research."

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★ **Special Double Issue** ★

The world around us changed quickly and dramatically since the last issue of Flightline came out in January. I have missed communicating with you, the 780th family, through the newsletter. I hope this issue finds you and your family and friends well and that you are adapting as best you can to the new ways of doing things.

I'm not going to dwell on the coronavirus. Instead, I want to tell you that Flightline is back and I'm going to keep publishing as long as there are readers, interest and funds. I think all three of those are in good supply so let's get to it. Because I couldn't put out a timely March or June issue I have combined them into this double issue. That means there's twice the articles and photos inside. I hope to be back to a normal quarterly issue in September.

This nation was built to adapt and pull through. Now is no different than 1775 or 1861 or 1941 or 2001. In the words Great Britain used to motivate her citizens in preparation for World War II, let's keep calm and strive to carry on.

Editor, Kathy Le Comte



Your News & Letters

Editor's note: Rickey Robertson sent the following email in mid-April, just as COVID-19 was starting to really ramp up across the country. Sadly, the situation isn't any better three months later but we will get through this. Rickey's letter includes a message of thanks to the 780th from someone who also went through a scary time in history.

John and Kathy,

Hope you and your family are doing well in these uncertain times in America due to the ongoing COVID-19 virus. We are okay down here in West Central Louisiana. Two very big "hot spots" for the virus are New Orleans and Shreveport. We are about 5 hours from New Orleans and 1 hour from Shreveport. But as Americans we will overcome this situation!

Before the virus became serious I was able to purchase a very fine "booklet" named The 15th Over Italy. It is about 40 pages long published in 1947 by AAF Publications and is filled with photographs of the various units of the 15th AF in action, on base, in town, and many various settings. A very great book! Don't know if anyone has a copy of this valuable treasure book but I cherish it!

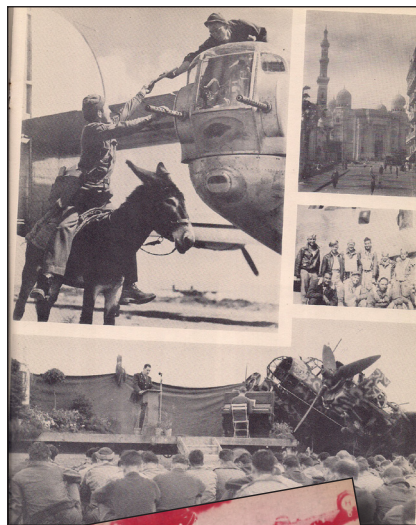
Of interest to all the 780th Squadron Family this booklet came from Israel. The seller and I corresponded several times and I told him that the 780th Squadron is still active even though mostly by family members. I also gave him the story of my uncle, Sgt. Bobbie Robertson, who was KIA on the October 11, 1944 mission to Vienna, Austria. He advised me to tell everyone in the 780th Family that his family were Jewish and the Americans helped to save his family by defeating the Axis. He wanted me to say THANK YOU to the World War II surviving veterans of the 780th. After the war his

family made it to Israel and reside there today. Veterans, you are still appreciated by those people you helped to liberate and save from destruction.

I wanted to share this story with the 780th Squadron Family. Also I scanned a few pages of the book. The brief history of the 15th AF tells of an overwhelming devotion to duty and of major accomplishments by the units of the 15th AF. And many great photos of the units!

Blessings from Louisiana to all,

Rickey Robertson



Left: The cover of The 15th Over Italy. Top left: Mail call delivered by donkey, and other images of life on base. Above: The bombs falling from the four bombers are labeled with the 15 bomb groups of the four bomb wings of the 15th Air Force.

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Bullock was a gunner with the Lt. Lloyd Clarke crew which was lost August 3 following a mission to bomb the Manzel Aircraft Works at Friedrichshafen. The crew consisted of pilot Clarke; co-pilot Patrick Logan; navigator Edward Paluch; bombardier DeWitt Garber; engineer Thurlie Cooke; radio operator William Burton; and gunners Claire Allred, Hoyt Geohagan, Victor Bullock and Albert Pearson. According to *780th Memoirs*, the Clarke plane was hit and last seen on

fire and out of control close to the Brenner Pass on the border between Italy, Austria and Germany. On the same mission another 780th aircraft, piloted by Lt. Lawrence Crane, also was lost. This crew consisted of pilot Crane; co-pilot Robert Kurtz; navigator Joseph

Spontak; bombardier George Britton; engineer Leonard Bracken; radio operator John Cooper; and gunners Lee Englehorn, Lawrence Hamilton, Anthony Jezowski and Charles Sellars. Also noted in the squadron history during this same mission is that 780th gunner Miguel M. Garcia shot down three enemy aircraft, earning him the Distinguished Flying Cross "for this rare feat."

There are no further details in *Memoirs* about what happened to the Clarke or Crane crews, however, more information was found in their respective Missing Air Crew Reports (MACR).

According to one eyewitness account Clarke's plane, "Red R," was in Number 4 position of Charlie Box. "The alarm was given that fighters

were attacking" and after one aircraft in the box was hit, afire and pulling out of the formation "Red R" was hit and starting to burn.

Co-pilot Logan added that the ship was hit from the rear, and as it left the formation spinning out of control Paluch bailed out of the nose while he, pilot Clarke, engineer Cooke and top gunner Allred exited out the front bomb bay doors. The ballgunner, Burton, went out the rear hatch. Bombardier Garber was believed killed in the rear section of the aircraft.

In a separate statement Clarke wrote that Ger-

man officers told him that ball gunner Geohagan, "came down in his chute o.k. but struck the face of a cliff, where his chute collapsed, and the fall down the face of the cliff killed (Geohagan)." Clarke's knowledge of tailgunner Pearson was that, "top gunner (Allred) reported tail of

plane shot to pieces, could easily have been killed by fire of fighters," and that a German intelligence officer told Clarke that Pearson was dead.

No one from the crew had any information about Reid's great-uncle, waist gunner Bullock, who was killed in action on his 30th birthday. Two bodies reportedly were found in the downed aircraft, and buried in a small village cemetery near the town of Lermoos, Austria, near the German border where the plane crashed. Interestingly, Bullock is not listed among the rest of the crew in a German report included in the MACR. It's possible Bullock's body was not found with



Left: The memorial in the Ehrwald town square to the eight American B-24s and eight German fighters that crashed in the area around Ehrwald. Right: The plaque that lists the names of the lost American airmen. Photos courtesy Pat Logan.



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Why was there no 465th BG association?

780th offers its disbanding story to bomb group

This spring a 15th AF bomb group association announced that it will dissolve as a formal organization at the end of the year and become an ad hoc group. Their board asked if any other organizations have gone through a similar process, and how they function and keep in touch with members. I am publishing my response, below, edited for space. If you have a correction or clarification, please let me know. I would especially like to know why the 465th Bomb Group organized as squadron associations after the war rather than a group association. - Editor

I do not know positively why the 465th BG Association never developed but I did ask someone in the 780th in the 1990s and was told that the squadrons lived and served together and knew each other better as squadrons, and so it was agreed that they would create their own squadron associations. I believe the four squadrons gathered together as a bomb group twice for a reunion. The second time that occurred was my first reunion. It was 1998 in Dayton, Ohio. I don't know when the first all-group reunion was.

So just who am I, and what's the story with the 780th Squadron? I am a granddaughter. My

grandfather was a replacement of a replacement tailgunner. He was KIA in 1944 on his first mission with the 780th. I joined the 780th in 1998. I came to know all the veterans and their families extremely well despite none of them knowing my grandfather. I attended all reunions from 1998 to 2010 except two when I couldn't travel due my children being born. By 2010 the men decided to disband the squadron association. They didn't want the responsibility of office (president, treasurer, etc.) any more, and travel was starting to become an issue for several of them. My opinion is they wanted to end on a high note, rather than peter out to just a few guys coming to reunions. Bob Bleier was squadron president and newsletter editor for a long, long time (maybe some of you knew him; he was a gregarious guy), but by 2009 his memory was starting to seriously slip and he couldn't continue being in charge. As I recall Treasurer Ashby Nelson took on president as well for 2010 and I think he polled everyone and they decided to dissolve.

They did ask me if I would be interested in taking over, being president. I said I didn't think that

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15AF Bomb Groups Reunion Postponed to 2021

Due to COVID-19 concerns the 2020 reunion of The 15th Air Force Bomb Groups - originally slated for September in Albuquerque, New Mexico - has been postponed. Instead, it will be held September 9-12, 2021. The location of the Sheraton Uptown has not changed.

Representatives from the bomb groups - including the 780th Squadron - were contacted in early June to get their thoughts about whether to postpone the reunion and, if so, what the new dates should be. The vote was overwhelmingly to postpone. The vote seems even more prudent now given the current resurgence of the disease.

The *Flightline* will publish details for the 2021 reunion as they become available, but information always can be found at <http://484th.org/Reunion/Reunion.htm>.

A special thank you goes out to Reunion Committee Chair Dave Blake of the 461st for shouldering the finances, planning and organizing of such a large reunion, and all in the midst of COVID-19.

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the plane and therefore the Germans didn't know he was missing. After the war his remains were found, identified and, in 1948, returned to his family for burial in his native Mississippi. There are other records, particularly the Individual Deceased Personnel File, that Reid can

request that possibly will have more information.



Battle of Ehrwald witness Gerd Leitner, left, visiting Crane crew member Anthony Jezowski, in Michigan in 2001. Credit: Keith Bullock's website.

As mentioned, the Crane crew of the 780th also was shot down on this mission. Three crewmembers - Spon-tak, Englehorn and Brittan - participated in a film about the 780th and the mission titled, *On the Wing*, produced by Brad Branch, son of 780th gunner Bart Branch. The 90-minute film describes the attack on the small cadre of planes that occurred over Ehrwald, Austria, and

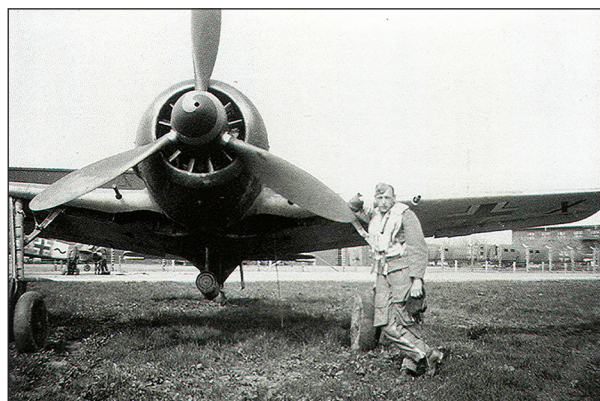
how the village has remembered the crews and the crash sites. In 2001 the three crewmembers, along with Pat Logan, son of the co-pilot of the Clarke crew, revisited the Ehrwald area, meeting with surviving witnesses of the air battle, and visiting the crash sites and homes where they briefly avoided capture.

According to the Crane crew, after bombing their targets in Friedrichshafen the small group became separated from the main group. The situation turned even more dire quickly. The Germans noticed the wayward bombers and attacked over the Ehrwald area. The German Focke-Wulfs and Messerschmitt 109s, hidden in low clouds, came up from behind for the attack. Bomber gunners were able to take down eight German fighters but eight bombers also were lost during the two-minute battle:

two from the 780th, four from the 782nd, and two from the 783rd. The planes and crews landed in different areas around Ehrwald. Clarke's ship crashed in the forest near Biberwier. Crane's plane, "Sugar Baby," struck near Brendlkar. Out of 79 airmen on the eight bombers, 30 were killed in action, six of them from the 780th: Hamilton and Sellars from the Crane crew; and Garber, Geohagan, Pearson and Bullock from the Clarke crew.

August 1944 went on to be even costlier for the 780th. On August 24 the Lengvenis and Buck crews were lost on a mission to Pardubice, Czechoslovakia. Out of 20 men only one survived - flight officer Harry Nolen from the Buck crew.

German 'Ace' Unger led fighter attack



German 'Ace' Willi Unger and his F-W 190

Reid Bullock wanted to know if German fighter pilot Willi Unger shot down the Clarke plane. The answer is, "definitely maybe." According to local historian Keith Bullock, when the order to attack the wayward bombers was issued, "the nimble Focke-Wulf 190 and Messerschmitt 109 fighter pilots, led by Uffz. Willi Unger, stalked the loose bandage under the protection of low-lying clouds and targeted a bomber with four swarm formations of four fighters each." Unger is credited with shooting down two B-24s, over Fussen, Germany, less than 24 miles from Ehrwald. Which specific B-24s is unknown. Unger is credited with 24 career aerial victories. He died in 2005.

Commemorative coin would support Nat'l WWII Memorial

Two representatives in Congress have introduced a bi-partisan bill (H.R. 4681) to authorize the U.S. Treasury to mint coins to raise funds for maintenance and programming at the National World War II Memorial.

The National World War II Commemorative Coin Act, proposed by Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur (D-OH) and Congressman Peter King (R-NY), would create commemorative coins to represent the sacrifice and commitment of World War II veterans. All proceeds from the sale of the coins would go to the Friends of the National World War II Memorial, a non-profit that helps maintain the memorial and provides educational programming and commemorations throughout the year.

The National Park Service (NPS) maintains all memorials on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. The NPS currently has a \$12 billion maintenance backlog of priority work nationwide. Nearly \$1 billion of the backlog is for the National Mall alone. Organizers behind the proposed coin act want to be able to support an already burdened NPS as well as prepare for future maintenance and improvements, according to Friends Executive Director Holly Rotondi.

"The original architects have identified points of concern,

and while they may not be critical projects now, they will (be) over time," she said. "The NPS has so many critical projects in the queue and we want to address these problems now."

An example is the lighting system, which needs to be redesigned and replaced. Rotondi estimates the cost of that project alone to be about \$500,000. Mortar is disintegrating, and granite is starting to calcify. The goal is to raise at least \$6 million for the Memorial, with a maximum of about \$9.5 million if they sell out of commemorative coins, according to Rotondi.

H.R. 4681 would raise private dollars to make these repairs — potentially saving millions in taxpayer money, and would allow for repairs to be made sooner than the current backlog allows.

In addition to helping fund long-term maintenance projects, the money raised would help continue educational programming and commemorative services that have shifted to a virtual setting due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Memorial was dedicated in 2004, and is the only national memorial that honors the service of all 16 million American World War II veterans, and the 400,000 American servicemen and women who were killed in action or are missing. It hosts more than five million visitors annually, and

since switching to virtual events commemoration viewership has increased, Rotondi said.

"We're reaching a wider audience and that is something we're really proud of. We're able to incorporate so many more veterans and families into that story in such a more personal way," she added.

Since the start of the pandemic, effort have increased to reach out to veterans to learn and preserve their stories.

"Now is the time because they're sitting at home," Rotondi said.

The bill introduced last October has accrued almost 100 co-sponsors. It needs 290 to be considered for legislation. Rotondi is optimistic about its support.

"Republican, Democrat, there is bi-partisan support across the board," she said. "As soon as they know what the bill is about, they're in support of it. They just need to know about it."

The National World War II Memorial Commemorative Coin Act has been endorsed by the Paralyzed Veterans of America and the Veterans of Foreign Wars, to name a few.

Contact Me

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TAPS



Richard Francis "Frank" Freeman, passed away May 21, 2020, at the age of 99, in California. Frank was born and raised in Walla Walla, Washington, where he attended Whitman College. He became a pilot in the Civil Air Patrol, then flew Clippers to Australia as a navigator with Pan Am before enlisting in the Army Air Corps where he trained to fly the B-24 bomber. After the war, he met his wife, Maxine, and earned a second degree from Oregon State University. In addition to flying, Frank loved travelling. He was a skier, hiker, sailor, bicyclist, music lover, camper, and enjoyed life in all its aspects. Frank leaves behind sons, Richard, Robert, and Charles; six grandchildren; six great-grandchildren; and a brother, Robert. He was preceded in death by his wife of 46 years; daughter, Perrie; and a brother.

Jane Baldwin, 93, widow of Robert C. Baldwin, passed away June 30, 2018, in Sarasota, Florida, after a brief illness. She resided in Sarasota since six weeks of age. Jane is survived by son, David Dexter; daughter, Elizabeth Dexter; and granddaughter, Ashley Dexter.

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was a good idea, and here's why: the squadron is the veterans. They had experiences together that cannot be duplicated by anyone else, even family. To carry on the squadron association to the next generation, or even the one after that which is me, would not be the same. We families loved to attend the reunions and be with the guys but it just wouldn't be the same if it devolved into the "Families of the 780th" holding reunions with few to no veterans present. My example was the Civil War veteran reunions. Those, too, faded away. It's not a bad thing, it's just the natural course of things. Interest in the 780th remains high, but not in organizing reunions and officer duties by the veterans. So here is what happened to the 780th; I think it has worked out extremely well:

In October 2010 during the business meeting at the Biloxi reunion the 780th Bombardment Squadron Association dissolved its charter. With the remaining funds they split them in half: they donated half to Disabled American Veterans (DAV) and they gave me the other half, in order to continue the quarterly newsletter, *The Flightline*. I had already taken over the newsletter from Bob Bleier in 2009. I deposited the funds

in my personal checking account and I have a spreadsheet where I keep track of the newsletter's expenses. I would publish the newsletter funds balance in the newsletter from time to time. When funds got low donations came in. I keep costs low by printing in black and white, and about a third of the 780th receives the newsletter electronically, saving on printing and postage.

Dues are not collected. The newsletter survives on the original funds plus subsequent donations and memorials. I use the squadron membership list as it stood in 2010 as the mailing list, and I've added people as they have found me online. Sadly, I have removed some from the list after they passed away. The 780th Association has been dissolved for 10 years yet my mailing list goes out to about 110 people. Most of them are family members now with about 10 veterans. These numbers may sound small but keep in mind this is the squadron level. Multiply my numbers by 4 and you'll get a bomb group number that perhaps is more familiar. There are no reunions but the newsletter, I hope and feel, keeps the squadron connected. Until last year I got content from the veterans but the last year I've had to come up with the content myself which I enjoy finding and researching.

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Flightline



World War II was the golden age of pinups. For the first time, the U.S. military unofficially sanctioned pinup pictures, magazines and calendars in order to raise morale. Pinup posters adorned lockers, barracks and, of course, the sides of B-24s. Some of the most popular pinups were of Betty Grable, Veronica Lake (who the government encouraged to change her peek-a-boo hairstyle to make it look more practical and safe for working women), Jane Russell, Greta Garbo, Rita Hayworth and Lana Turner. These original pinups are on display at the National World War II Museum in New Orleans.