



# *Flightline*



Newsletter of the 780th Bomb Squadron of WWII

March 2011

## First Gathering Since 780<sup>th</sup> Disbandment

# Saddle Up for Abilene

**T**he date and place are set - all we need is you and your family!

The 2011 780th Bomb Squadron get-together will be in Abilene, Texas. It will be hosted by Kim McLaughlin, daughter of co-pilot Gayle McLaughlin.

The 780th Bomb Squadron Association disbanded last fall. Because many families and some men are still interested in keeping up the annual reunions Kim has offered to host whoever wishes to come. Here are the details:

The 780th will meet in Abilene from Thursday through Sunday, September 15-18, 2011. Arrival is on Thursday and departure on Sunday.

The squadron will stay at the Hilton Garden Inn in Abilene. A block of 20 rooms has been

set aside. Rates are \$89 for a standard room and \$139 for a room with a jacuzzi and includes a free breakfast buffet. These special rates have been set aside for the 780th until August 14.

To keep costs as low as possible, if someone plans to reserve a jacuzzi room please let Kim know if the squadron can use it as the hospital-ity room.

There are a couple of options for the traditional squadron banquet. The hotel has a banquet room for a deposit of \$250. Depending on the size of the group and interest, another option is to reserve a room or tables at a local restaurant. If you have any suggestions about the banquet/Saturday dinner, please let Kim know.

There's already one activity on the schedule. A local private school has requested that one of the veterans talk to their students. The talk would be for Friday. If you are interested in volunteering, let Kim know.

Kim is in touch with the local Chamber of Commerce to explore other activities.

"Hopefully this will be a grand time for our guys, their families and friends," Kim says.

You can reach Kim by email at [mclaughrn@yahoo.com](mailto:mclaughrn@yahoo.com), or by phone at (325) 370-0593.

We look forward to seeing you again, so please put Abilene on your calendar for September.



### 780th Hotel Website

The Hilton Garden Inn in Abilene has created a website for the 780th. You can make your room reservation by going to the hotel's 780th website or by calling the hotel's toll-free number: (877) 782-9444. The 780th's booking code is **BSR**. Copy and paste this url into your web browser: [http://hiltongardeninn.hilton.com/en/gi/groups/personalized/A/ABIABGI-BSR-20110915/index.jhtml?WT.mc\\_id=POG](http://hiltongardeninn.hilton.com/en/gi/groups/personalized/A/ABIABGI-BSR-20110915/index.jhtml?WT.mc_id=POG)

# Your Letters

*Received The Flightline and it saddened me to learn that it had to be disbanded. Only a few of the guys attended the reunion! I can see the dissipation of our squadron.*

*I was saddened to learn that Mr. Love passed away. I read his wonderful book and was encouraged by his tenacity in overcoming all of the rough days of his life. He must have moved from one job to another 15 times. I found the book a great inspiration. Everyone should read it and learn. He was an effective servant of the Lord also.*

*I attend a gathering of veterans every Monday at Wendy's at 9 a.m. We have 100 attending and we started with only five of us ten years ago. We have coffee and donuts, a raffle and plenty of conversations between ourselves. Fun!*

*I have saved every Flightline issue since its inception. (every one, yes!)*

*Keep up the good work. You are a hero.*

*Sincerely,*

*Gene Koscinski*

*Calabasas, CA*

*bombadier, Dick Sigler's crew*

Editor's reply:

I appreciate the sentiment but you and all your fellow 780th members are the heroes. Gene has generously sent me a few old *Flightlines*. As space allows I'll print tidbits from some of these old issues. It's a real treasure that Gene has.

*Sorry I could not attend this last reunion. I hope it was a good one, and that there will be another. Wasn't sure when to send my money, but the reunion was a reminder.*

*Thanks,*

*Jerry (Ken) McMann*

*Eufala, OK*

Editor's reply:

Sorry you missed the LAST reunion, Ken. A 780th get-together (not an official squadron association reunion) is set for September. See the front page. And as for dues - there no longer are any dues. You and everyone else in the squadron association are "paid up."

## Just a Common Soldier

by A. Lawrence Vaincourt

submitted by Ashby Nelson

He was getting old and paunchy and his hair was falling fast,

And he sat around the Legion, telling stories of the past.

Of a war that he had fought in and the deeds that he had done,

In his exploits with his buddies; they were heroes, every one.

And tho' sometimes, to his neighbors, his tales became a joke,

All his Legion buddies listened, for they knew whereof he spoke.

But we'll hear his tales no longer for old Bill has passed away,

And the world's a little poorer, for a soldier died today.

He will not be mourned by many, just his children and his wife,

For he lived an ordinary and quite uneventful life.

Held a job and raised a family, quietly going his own way,

And the world won't note his passing, though a soldier died today.

If we cannot do him honor while he's here to hear the praise,

Then at least let's give him homage at the ending of his days.

Perhaps just a simple headline in a paper that would say,

Our country is in mourning, for a soldier died today.

# Kuchenbeckers Set Sail Again in 2010

The Kuchenbeckers were on the water again in 2010. If you remember in 2009, we took a great cruise down the rivers of Europe. We boarded a great 44-foot sleek river boat, the *Viking Legend*, and set out from Amsterdam. Two weeks later we ended up in Budapest, Hungary, after traveling down the Amstel, Rhine, the Main and finally the Danube rivers. Enroute we explored some towns that are all too familiar to most of us in the 780th. Regensburg, Bratislava, Vienna, and others we saw so long ago. This time I got a better look as we were on foot exploring towns I had only seen from 25,000 feet.

So what to do to get on the water in 2010? Would you believe another river cruise. This time we were aboard our son's 42-foot ketch rigged sail boat and up the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway. Dave and his wife, Patti, picked up the boat in Jacksonville, Florida. We agreed they would sail up the waterway to Surf City, NC, where we would meet them and spend a few days with Bill Edwards. What a great time by all. Bill introduced Dave and Patti to some good ole southern hospitality on a daily basis. When we went out to Bill's house on the shore of the Atlantic they couldn't believe the surf was right at his doorstep. "That's what I've been telling you for years. Now do you believe me," I said.

One day Bill's daughter and two of his great-grandchildren (can you believe that?) came down to the boat and we had two enthusiastic young boys instantly converted to sailboats. They were totally involved and exploring all the nooks and crannies of the boat. Of course Dave didn't mind all the questions, and there were many of them. When it came time for them to head home the boys were reluctant to leave. Bill told me later that the boys were totally sold and had been drawing pictures of sailboats for him.

After those few memorable days we cast off and headed up the waterway. It's a great stretch of water but definitely not for a large sailboat as the channel is only about 30 to 40 feet wide and no place to sail. We did manage to get some sail time in the Pamlico Sound but most of the time

we were under power and traveling at about 5 or 6 knots, roughly 7 mph. But the scenery was great and the small towns along the way were as picturesque as Southern towns are supposed to be. We stopped at several places for a bite to eat and to walk on land for a while.

One particularly memorable stretch was through the Dismal Swamp canal. I still haven't figured out how it got that name. While we had been in a canal with grassy banks, the Dismal was a true canal with concrete banks topped with long steel angle iron on the corners. There were tie-down rings on top, spaced all along the way so boats could tie up safely while waiting for a bridge to open. Not long after we got into the swamp canal we suddenly lost all power. The prop had struck something and broke the drive shaft. We suddenly became a large sailboat being towed back to the canal and a concrete wall with a tie-down ring by a ten-foot dinghy powered by a three horse power outboard. One of the tie-down rings became our home until we could get some help. Dave radioed a towing service and asked for a tow to Newport, the closest place we could get a good boatyard to replace the shaft. While we waited we strolled into the neat little town and had a good lunch, then back down to the canal to patiently wait for a tow to arrive.

The tow boat arrived a couple hours later and we were on our way again headed up the rest of the Dismal Swamp. Not long after the towing started the tow boat also hit something and broke the sheer pin in the propeller. Now we had two powerless boats. The little dinghy again came to our rescue. We tied the tow boat securely to the sailboat and the tow guy climbed into the dinghy, maneuvered it into position and tore down the prop of his boat. After replacing the sheer pin and trying it out we were on our way again. I prayed for no more excitement. Thankfully the rest of the five-hour tow was uneventful and the tow guy brought us to a marina in Portsmouth, Virginia, and bid us goodbye. The sailboat was

...continued on back page

# When One Discharge Just Isn't Enough

by Joseph Sullivan

I read the article written by Joshua Hummel about meeting 780th members, published in the August *Flightline* in which he mentioned he met Gene Kosciński, who I remember quite well. Wanting more information, I called Kathy Le Comte, our newsletter editor, for Hummel's telephone number. While talking to Kathy I mentioned I had five honorable discharges from the Army, which she asked me to explain. I did so, and Kathy asked me to write the story for the *Flightline*.

The Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor December 7, 1941 - my 16th birthday. I turned 17 a year later, lied about my age, and entered the Army on February 22, 1943. Throughout WWII I was an ordnance weapons repairman in the 780th Bombardment Squadron, and got my first discharge at the end of the war. But after that I had a problem.

Without a high school diploma I couldn't get a job. I even got a U.S. Coast Guard "ticket" as an ordinary seaman in the Merchant Marines, and sat in the hiring hall in New York for weeks without getting a ship. I had no former experience. But I figured I knew how to repair weapons and blow things up, so I re-enlisted.

I was trained to repair central fire control systems on B-29s, and was stationed with the 559th Engineering Squadron in Alaska. I got out of the Army with my second discharge, and stayed in the enlisted reserve.

Then I finished high school. I attended the Colorado School of Mines, went through their ROTC program, and was commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 1950. I received my third discharge from the Army enlisted reserve. It effectively was an administrative discharge, as one day I was a sergeant and the next day I was a lieutenant.

When I was commissioned a Second Lieuten-

ant reserve officers did five-year hitches. But two years later the government changed the law such that reserve officers were in until they wanted out. As the law had changed, they terminated our commissions. This was my fourth discharge, second as an administrative discharge. If you signed up under the new terms, they commissioned you again, so I have two commissions as a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.



With time, I became a civilian Deputy Division Chief in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Research and Development laboratories at Ft. Belvoir, VA, handling a number of top secret programs.

In 1965 I received a letter from the Army designating me a key federal employee. That meant I was not available for active military duty in a national emergency. If a war were to start, I would just continue to go to work. As a result, I felt further activity in the Reserve program would be useless, and in 1966 I resigned my commission and received my final - and fifth - discharge as a Corps Captain.

## Call for Stories

**I have a few stories on hand but soon I will need more. Please email your Pantanella memories and photos to share.**

**johnkath5@comcast.net**

**Or mail to:**

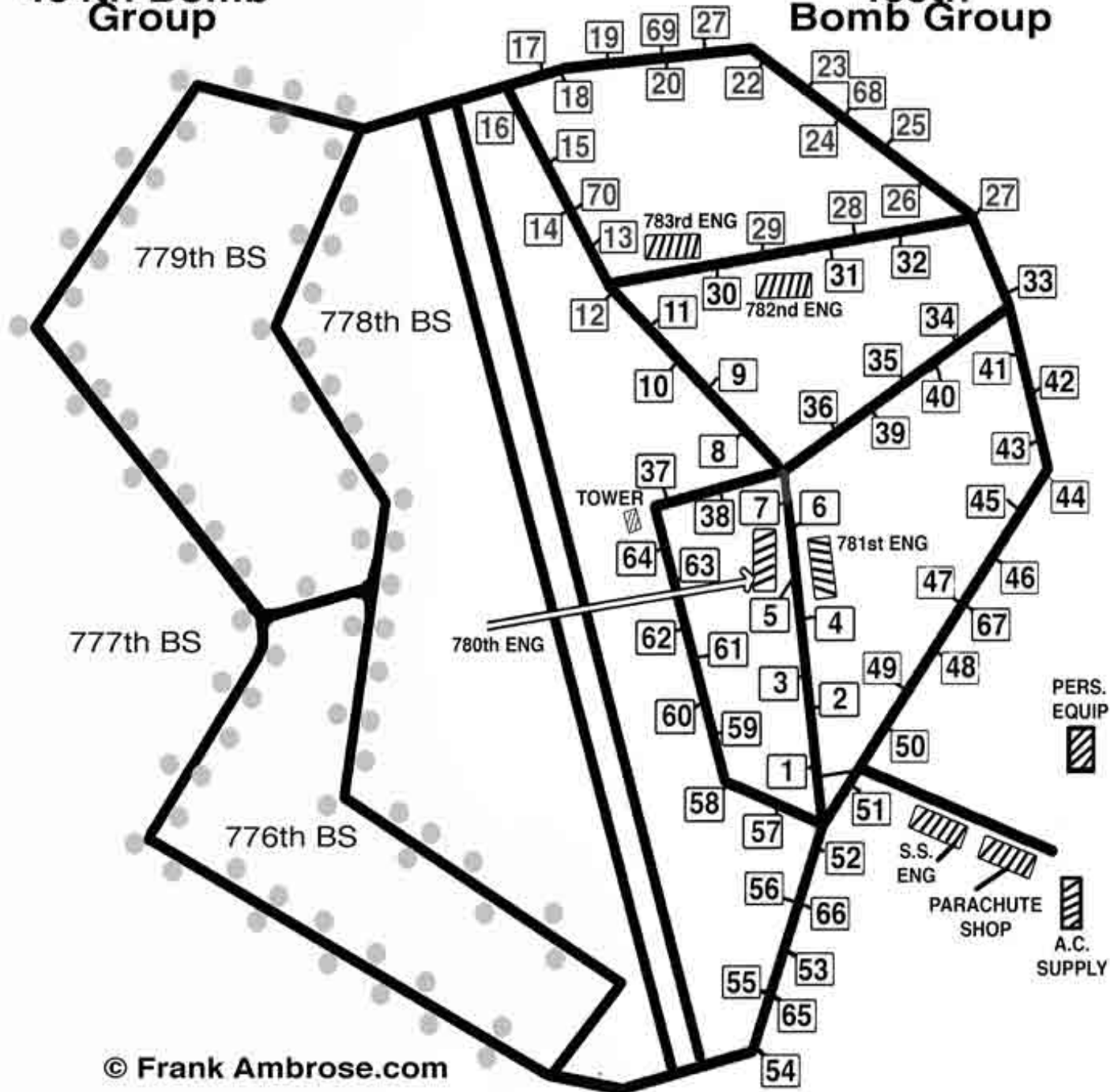
**Kathy Le Comte  
869 S. Columbia Ave.  
Springfield, IL 62704-2342**



# PANTANELLA BASE LAYOUT

**464th Bomb Group**

**465th Bomb Group**



Look familiar? This is a map of the Pantanella air base. The left side was the 464th Bomb Group. On the right, and in more detail, shows the hardstand assignments for the 465th Bomb Group. The 780th was located in the verticle rectangle closest to the double runways. Do you have any memories to go with this map? Please share them by email at [johnkath5@comcast.net](mailto:johnkath5@comcast.net). Credit: Frank Ambrose. (See more 465th BG photos and information at [www.frankambrose.com](http://www.frankambrose.com).)

Kathy Le Comte  
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## *Flightline*

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...Sail, from page 3

lifted and placed on a big cradle and the crew began the repair job. This was going to be a major repair so we rented a car and set out to explore the area.

We drove up to Washington, D.C., with stops along the way to sightsee, and checked into the Marriot where our oldest grandson, Austin, is night manager. We all went out to dinner and spent a relaxing evening going over the events of the day. The next day we did more exploring in D.C. and then drove to Annapolis for more sightseeing and shopping. We covered a lot of great museums and other good stuff while in the D.C. area.

Then it was off to bed as the next day we would head for the airport and back to Seattle. All in all it was a really great three weeks, but we are tired. It will be good to get back home and get off the hectic routine we have been on. All of it was great fun, but about all we could take. Soon it will be time to start thinking about 2011 and another adventure.

## **Don't Just Sit There -**



**Make Your Reservations Now  
for the 2011 Get-Together in  
Abilene, Texas, in September.  
(see front page story)**

**cartoon courtesy of Jack Ball from August  
1995 *Flightline***