



Flightline



Newsletter of the 780th Bomb Squadron of WWII

September 2012

Germans Not the Only Hazards in the Air

Many 'Enemies' When Flying Missions

by Cleon S. Moore

I was the nose gunner in the Lt. Frank Berry crew aboard the *Alley Oop*. After 35 missions, we were allowed to return to the States. Between November 1944, when my crew arrived in Pantanella, and V-E Day in May 1945, I flew 22 missions. On four or five of those missions, I was a substitute gunner with other crews.

P-47 *Thunderbolts* and P-40s were the escort planes that accompanied us on these missions. We would fly from Pantanella across Italy over to Germany to the target. The escort planes left one and one-half hours after we departed and caught up with us at the Italian-German border, accompanying us 400-500 miles into Germany and for the return trip. The escort planes did not have as much gas and they couldn't make the entire trip if it was more than 400 miles.

We referred to missions when the German fighters didn't attack us as "milk runs." On milk runs, we only had to worry about ground flak shooting the plane down, and we didn't have fighter escorts on those missions. I went on one mission that we thought was going to be a milk run to help the English 8th Army in

northern Italy. The 15th Air Force, commanded by General LeMay, furnished air support for both U.S and British armies. We flew up the peninsula of Italy to Rome. The English were on the north side and the Americans under General Clark were on the southern side. We returned with 150 holes in the plane.

Once when flying over the Alps, we lost formation because the fog was so thick. The commander gave the order to fall away because the planes couldn't see each other. Moody, our engineer, reported that the fourth engine overheated and should be shut down. We turned around and dropped down to 12,000 feet, and the fog cleared. I dropped the bombs that day because we were flying without a bombardier. We had 50 100-

pound bombs. I dropped the bombs along the train tracks at sites with coal bins on the way back to base. We got credit for that mission.

On another mission we went to northern Italy to drop bombs ahead of the British troops. At 12,000 feet, I was in the turret with oxygen running. I got out of the turret and went to the bombardier nest and forgot to reconnect the



A B-24 dropping its load over Germany in 1945. (Credit: U.S. Air Force)

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Your News & Letters

Dear Kathy,

I don't really have anything important to say other than hello and thank you for the newsletter. It's nice to read and see what's going on. Not much I guess, except we're getting older unfortunately!

I moved into the masonic Home some time ago and gave my home to my oldest daughter. She's a teacher - counselor. She's eligible

for retirement and will probably step down soon. When she's retired she can work as a substitute at any school other than where she taught. Good deal, right?

I do want to thank you again for the newsletter. It's nice to hear what's going. Keep the news coming.

Thanks,
Ned Hayes
Pilot

(Editor's Note: Ned commented that his handwriting is bad, but that didn't stop him from writing *The Flightline*. Bad handwriting is not an excuse for writing a note to say how you're doing, what you're doing, and who you're doing it with! Please take a moment to send us an update or your Pantanella stories.)

The next note is from August 2011. Sorry it took so long to print:

Dear Kathy,

My son and I drove 430 miles so we could ride in the B-24 Witch Craft. It was in Altoona, PA - 215 miles from Erie, PA. It was worth it. Had a great time. A nice ride over beautiful country and gave a 12-year-old boy a lesson on the tail turret. He was thrilled but I think his dad was more so. It was also nice having my son, Mike, with me. First time I have been in a B-24 since June 9, 1945, and first time in the tail turret since April 26 (1945) I believe.

Cliff Taylor
Tailgunner

Search for 780th Crews Lost Over Atlantic

Kathy, I need your input about something I am working on. After the war, a few of the ships in the 780th squadron were assigned to a few crews and told to fly them from the Azores to St. Johns, Newfoundland. One of the ships named the Hamtramck Mama was assigned to my pilot, Lt. Dick Sigle. After three days and some hazardous flying we finally made it to St. Johns. There were supposed to be five crews from the 780th that were assigned to this flight. When we arrived at St. Johns, we were told that only our crew and the crew of Lt. Weir, our neighbor, had arrived safely. The other three crews did not make it and were not heard from. We had to assume that those three crews had to have either ditched in the Atlantic or just crashed into the ocean. Can you put out a notice in the 780th news letter about my search? Maybe someone can help with information related to what happened. I should like to know who those other crews were as well as what happened to them.

Kathy, I did a story about the Hamtramck Mama and have sent several pictures of that ship to historians in Michigan who are interested. As an aside, please understand that I lived eight city blocks from Hamtramck, where most of my relatives also lived. Can you please help?

Sincerely, Gene Koscinski

(Editor's Note: Sorry this took so long to publish, Gene. Does anyone have any information about these lost crews? Did anyone else fly ships to Newfoundland after the war? If you have information, email Gene at genemk@sbcglobal.net or me at johnkath5@comcast.net.)

Koscinski Recovering

Joshua Hummel reports that Gene Koscinski had a heart attack in early September. Gene is out of the hospital and making a strong recovery. Please send your prayers to Gene and his family.

...continued from front page

oxygen hose in the bombardier seat. I passed out. The pilot always turned the plane over to the bombardier on the bomb run, so he could line the plane up. The pilot always gave the order to drop the bombs, but there was no response. The pilot sent Moody, the crew chief, to check on me. The crew chief in the air could repair most anything. Moody reconnected the oxygen, and I revived. The plane made another pass over the target, and I dropped the bombs.

The second time my plane crash-landed was during a mission to Regensburg, Germany. That was approximately Mission 18 for our crew.

We heard a rumor that jet aircraft were being made there. We were flying at 18,000 feet when Messerschmitt Me 109's came out of the clouds. I was in the lead plane, flying in the middle of the box. We got shot up, and the pilot couldn't control the plane, so we fell out of formation and slowed down.

The pilot ordered us to open all the bomb bay doors to drop the bombs, but the doors wouldn't open because the hydraulic system was damaged. Two other men and I put on parachutes, tied ourselves to struts inside the bomb bay, manually cranked open the bomb bay doors, and dropped the bombs. We thought we would have to ditch in the Adriatic, but we actually made it to Visz, Yugoslavia. We cranked the wheels down manually and



B-24s displaying the box formation during a bombing mission over Europe. (Credit: U.S. Air Force)

landed without brakes. It was a safe landing. The Brits took care of us. We had a good meal that night and we were on a cargo plane back to Pantanella Air Field two hours later.

The week after that second crash-landing, a squadron reported that a German jet plane came through the formation and shot down a bomber and the jet was gone! The jet plane departed so fast that none of the U.S. planes even reacted before the jet was gone. They estimated the jet was going 600 mph. (The Liberator flew at 185 mph.) Then we knew we had to bomb Regensburg because they were building jet fighters there.

(Belated) Congratulations

To Lt. Col. James M. Stahl of the 46th Test Wing at Eglin AFB, who was promoted from major in June 2011. Lt. Col. Stahl and a few of his men joined the 780th Bombardment Squadron at its reunion in Biloxi, MS, where the 780th officially handed off its legacy to Lt. Col. Stahl and his men. The 780th of World War II is now a test squadron in the 46th Test Wing. See the December 2010 issue of *The Flightline* for photos, information, and Lt. Col. Stahl's speech to the squadron.

Keep 'em Flyin'

The Flightline is read by more than 110 780th veterans, families and friends. Keep the newsletter flying by contributing stories, pictures or just a note to everyone. Drop us a line at johnkath5@comcast.net, or write the return address on the address label.

"Dear Folks: Riding on Gas Tank is Fun!"

CENSORED

This is Letter #82 that Jack Ball sent home on May 15, 1944.

Around Hardstand # 63

We finally finished the motor scooter & it runs pretty good. Don't think I will ride it much as the first day I sprained my knee starting it. We have a motor cycle engine in it & is almost to(o) much power for the frame. We have two small airplane wheels which stand about twelve inches high & are big enough in diameter to make it ride easy. It is big enough for two of us to ride if one sits on the gas tank. Rode on the tank up to camp & except for the gas leaking out of the tank & soaking my pants everything was O.K. By the way we don't have a throttle as yet & the one on the back has to reach forward & control the carburetor.

Oh yes, I am now bald headed. Don't get exited - my hair is just shaved off. You know each sqn. has a

Intelligence reports indicate Jack and Eleanor Ball will attend the 781st Reunion in Branson, MO, the first week in October. We wish them safe travels, a wonderful time, and much luck at the casinos!

barbers set. One day last week we drew them out of supply & while the customer set on a five hundred pound bomb the

acting barber went to work. We have an Italian who barbers for us in camp, but we had a lot of fun cutting each others hair. We can get a very good hair-cut for only a dime & shave cost us five cents.



Maybe this is similar to Jack's scooter.

Jack adds this note: Don't think the Air Force would allow this kind of stuff anymore. The envelope has Lt. Harry K. Godfrey name on it as censor. If anyone out there knew or is a relative of Lt. Godfrey let me know and I would be happy to send this envelope to them.



Thank You!

To all whom have contributed to my 780th Archival Project. I have had almost ten members send pictures, stories and books. I really appreciate it. Please mail or email me your information: letters, stories, photos... anything! I would love the chance to save all the information I can about the 780th.

And Another Request...

Does anyone have an extra 465th *Remembered* book that I could purchase?

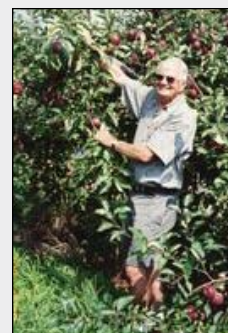
Joshua Hummel

Grandson of S/SGT Robert F Davenport
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TAPS

Richard S. Beak, 89, of New Smyrna Beach, Florida, passed away February 17, 2012, following a battle with terminal throat cancer. He was born November 17, 1922, in Syracuse, New York. He attended Syracuse University until he served his country in World War II, rising to the rank of second lieutenant serving in Europe with the Army Air Corps as a navigator on a B-24. After his service, Richard became co-owner of Beak and Skiff Apple Farms in LaFayette, New York until he retired in 1990 and moved to New Smyrna Beach. For many years he attended Coronado Community United Methodist Church, New Smyrna Beach.



Richard is survived by his loving wife of 39 years, Marie Beak; children, Kim (Greg) Brewer, Timothy (Eileen) Beak, and Jacklyn (Tom) Beak-Tubbs; stepsons, Ronald and Bruce Raymond; and many grandchildren and nieces. He was predeceased by a son, Charles; daughter, Terry; stepdaughter, Diana Raymond; and brother, Ronald Beak. Interment was at Pine Ridge Cemetery, Navarino, New York.

Donald J. Stuyvenberg, of Appleton, Wisconsin, passed away March 4, 2012, at the age of 87. Don was born in Appleton on March 25, 1924. After graduating high school he joined the U.S. Army Air Corps where he served in Italy from 1941 to 1945 as a captain on a B-24 bomber. He was a navigator bombardier and flew 27 missions receiving numerous medals. After proudly serving his country, he was employed by Kimberly-Clark as an electrician. He followed this endeavor as an employee of Lawrence University, retiring as the Physical Plant Director. In August 2010, Don thoroughly enjoyed attending the Air Force Honor Flight in Washington, D.C.



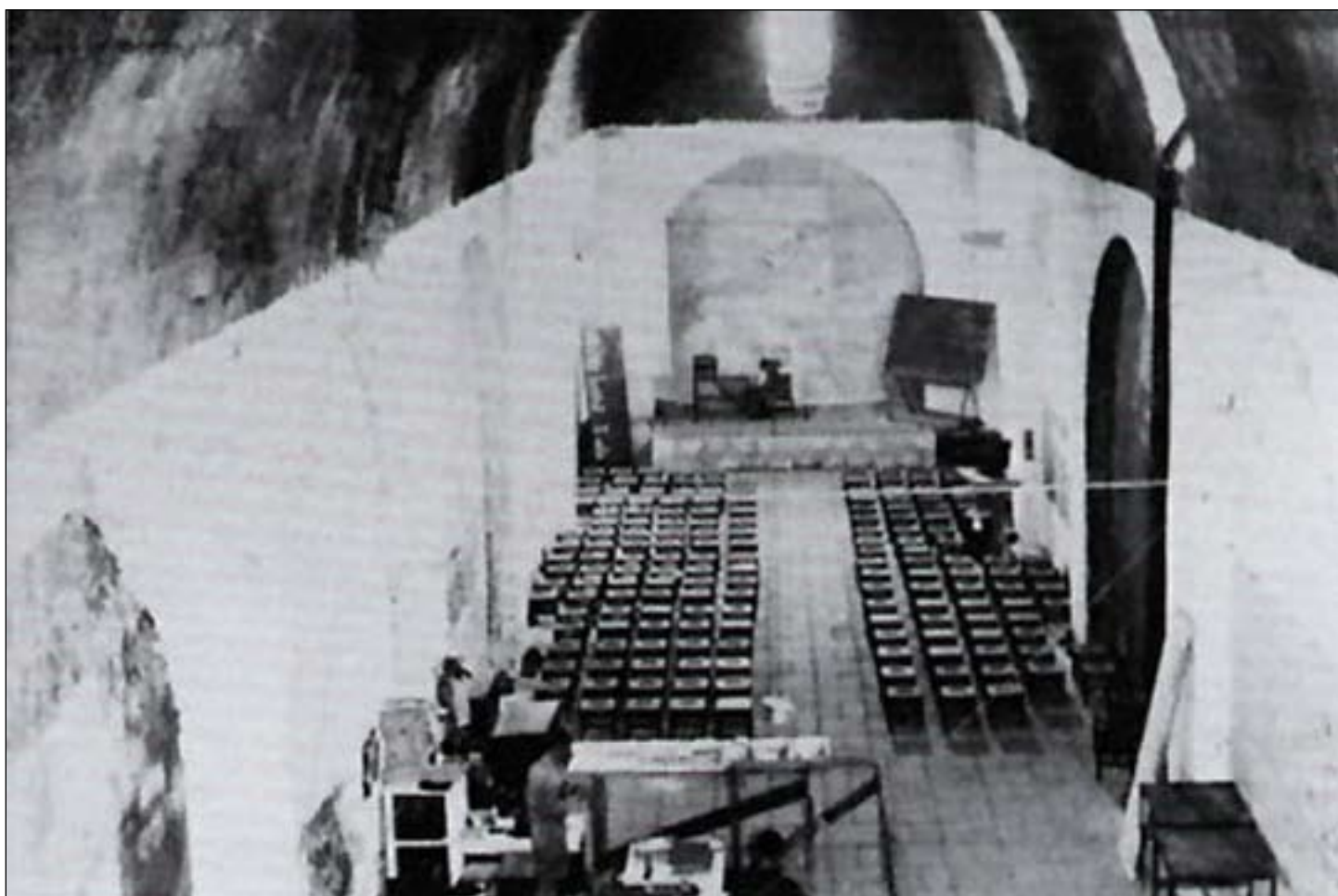
Don was married to Dorothy Hopfensperger from 1943 until her passing in 1988. He then married the second love of his life, Ginger Welhous, in 1991. He is survived by his wife, Ginger; and children, Sally Kaney (special friend Greg Lauer), Sandy (Dan) Van Gompel, Cindy (Dan) Haen, and Bill (Tina) Stuyvenberg. Also surviving are nine grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Editor's Note: Richard Beak and Don Stuyvenberg were fellow crewmembers of Cleon Moore on the Frank B. Berry crew. Cleon's son was named after Richard. Cleon's daughter, Cheryl Hewitt, says the Berry crew of nine arrived at Pantantella in November 1944. They didn't have a bombardier so they picked up Don after arriving at the base. Don had been at Pantanella for a while and was with the John W. Franklin Jr. crew. He did not fly with the Franklin crew in November 1944 when they were shot down on a mission to Blechhammer, Germany. The Franklin plane took a direct hit over the target, causing the bomb bays to burst into flames. Six crewmembers parachuted out and were captured by the Germans. Five of the nine crew members were declared dead, including John Franklin Jr.

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Flightline

The Board Room?



This Pantanella photo comes from www.canosaweb.it. I believe it is a briefing room. Can anyone confirm this, and give details?