



Flightline



Newsletter of the 780th Bombardment Squadron of WWII

September 2016

780th still flyin' high

This issue marks the beginning of my eighth year as editor of *The Flightline*. I continue to love creating each issue as much as the first one I did, back in 2009. Why? Let me tell you.

First and foremost, it keeps me connected to all of you. Many of you I know from squadron reunions, but some of you I have "met" through your letters, emails and contributions to the newsletter. I am so thankful that we can stay in touch.

Second, I hear from so many of you how much you appreciate *The Flightline* - and that fills my heart. It truly does! I know how important *The Flightline* is to me, and it's so rewarding to hear how it's important to you.

Third, I continue to learn about the war, the squadron, and all of you. You are my teachers and even my stand-in grandfather figures. My grandfather, S/Sgt. George J. Le Comte, was KIA on a mission to Vienna in December 1944. Fortunately I have his letters, some of his personal effects from the service, and his burial

flag - but not his experiences. You help fill that vacuum.

The Flightline fund is flush so I hope you will continue to read and enjoy future issues. But please help me out by sending in your letters/emails, calls, stories and photos. We all love hearing from you.

Now some editor stuff: beginning on page 4 is a four-page historical narrative of the history of the 465th BG from January-April 1944. The late Jack Ball copied it from the Air Force Historical Research Agency. It contains a lot of interesting information, such as training details, hours flown, unit strength and even the weather. It also describes, in detail, the movement of the group overseas beginning in February; and lists the 16 men from the 782nd who died in a mid-air collision in March in Tunisia - the first accident for the entire group since activation. I will share more records with you as I can.

Thank you for reading and supporting *The Flightline*! *Kathy Le Comte*

THANK YOU!

Threatt Plumbing
Christine Plews
Richard Fry
Mr. & Mrs. W.S. Hardesty

The Holland Family
Robert & Mary B. Ricks
Debbie Haggerty
Ernest & Marie Bridgers

for your generous donations to *The Flightline*
in memory of Bill Edwards
(see TAPS, page 2)

TAPS



Bill Edwards, 90, passed away at his beach home in Surf City, N.C. on July 11, 2016 after a courageous battle with cancer. Bill was born in Durham, N.C. on November 3, 1925. He graduated from Durham High School and attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Duke University. At the age of 17, Bill asked his father to sign a waiver in order to serve in World War II. His father was disabled in World War I and denied his request. Determined, a year later Bill enlisted and served as a top turret gunner, flying on a B-24 Liberator named "Alleyoop" out of Pantanella, Italy. He was employed by Sears Roebuck, retiring after 39 years of service. Bill

enjoyed living on the beach, tennis, golf, and working out at the gym. Bill's 48 years in residence on Topsail Island led him to square off against Mother Nature on many occasions. He rode out three hurricanes in his oceanfront home in Surf City. When Hurricane Fran made landfall in 1996, Bill became an impromptu reporter heard on radio stations across the United States. Bill was preceeded by his wife, Ruth, and parents and sister. He is survived by his daughters, Debbie (John) Haggerty and Cathy Coulter (Chuck Sullivan); son, Johnny (Stephanie) Edwards; and seven grandchildren, eight great-grandchildren, and nieces and nephews who, to him, were just like his own children.



Bill Edwards and crewmate Harold Workman at a 780th reunion.



Reunion deadline Sept. 22



If you haven't already done so, time is running out to register for the 2016 15th Air Force Bomb Group reunion in Dallas, Texas. The reunion will be held Thursday-Sunday, Oct. 13-16. The 461st Bomb Group is taking care of all the details for the seven bombs groups that will meet.

The deadline for making a hotel reservation is 5 p.m. (CST), Sept. 22. The hotel is the Wyndham Garden Dallas North. Room rate is \$89 plus tax and includes up to two full, hot breakfast buffet coupons per room, per day. Make reservations by calling the hotel directly at (972) 243-3363 and mention the booking code "**Bombardment Groups 2016 Reunion**" to receive the group rate. Parking is free, with complimentary airport shuttle to both Love Field and DFW airports.

On Thursday (Oct. 13) is reunion registration, hospitality room, welcome dinner, and mayor's

address. Friday (Oct. 14) begins with a morning tour of Cavanaugh Flight Museum with box lunch. The afternoon will feature presentations and official reunion photos, followed by a cash bar and then group dinners. On Saturday (Oct. 15) there will be a morning tour of the Sixth Floor Museum, where Lee Harvey Oswald fired on President John F. Kennedy. In the afternoon there will be presentations, social hour and cash bar, and the All Groups Banquet with live entertainment. Finally, on Sunday (Oct. 16) there will be a memorial service followed by lunch, then a tour of the Dallas Holocaust Museum with a Holocaust survivor, and a tour of Dallas. The reunion closes with an informal "Farewell Fajita" dinner.

See the June 2016 *Flightline* for a registration form. More detailed information about the reunion is on the 461BG website at: www.461st.org.



Robertson shares Kling photo collection

Rickey Robertson, nephew of 780th member Sgt. Bobbie T. Robertson, KIA 11 October 1944, shared some photos with *Flightline* that belonged to 780th veteran Joe Kling, who passed away in 2014. Sgt. Robertson and Kling were crewmates, but being newly-arrived gunners, flew on separate planes on that October mission.

Top left is a 780th plane in flight. Top is Joe (third from left, anyone know the others?) with his crew in front of their B-24 sometime after the 11 October mission. Top right is bomb damage inflicted on the Smederevo Oil Refinery (near Belgrade), Yugoslavia, mission, 11 June 1944.

Bottom left shows the 780th flying into flak during bombs away, and bottom right is a great example of the box formation.

Rickey has more photos and will share them over time. Rickey also has a small military museum, dedicated to his uncle and to Joe. Thank you, Rickey, for continuing to tell the story of our fallen comrades, and all the men who served in the 780th.



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HISTORICAL NARRATIVE.

UNIT HISTORY 465th BOMBARDMENT GROUP (H)

For period - 1 January 1944 to 30 April, 1944.

Book I

VOLUME I

CHAPTER VI.

ADMINISTRATIVE AND OPERATIONAL:

The month of January was taken up almost entirely in third phase of training. The weather continued cold but clear, temperatures being at or below zero levels. The same precautions that proved so successful in the preceding months to keep the airplanes operative, were continued, and were responsible, to a large degree, for the successful completion of our training program on time.

For the first time in our history, we flew a 24-ship formation on 14 January 1944. It was felt by Colonel ROGERS and members of his staff that the continual emphasis placed on high-altitude formation flying since first phase training would pay real dividends when the Group reached the theatre of combat operations.

On 6 January 1944, the Group participated in a "Ring" mission of 210 airplanes, over Colorado Springs, Colorado. On 8 January 1944, the Second Air Force inspectors held our pre-POM (Preparation for Overseas Movement) inspection.

On 14 January 1944 we took our initial POM test flight. On 23 January 1944, we flew a second mission and were notified that we had passed the test. We received sufficient new airplanes to bring our Group strength to 62 airplanes.

Specific minimum requirements set up by Second Air Force were completed by the 26th of the month, at which time the training program was discontinued entirely, preparatory to movement of the Group overseas.

During all training phases, a total of 3353 missions were accomplished with 9567.58 hours flown, without single mishap.

During the month, maximum efforts were devoted to completing minimum requirements for all crews, and this program was accomplished with the following operations:

High-altitude formation flying
Air-to-Air Gunnery

High Altitude precision bombing
1000 Mile Cross Country Flight

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HISTORICAL NARRATIVE
(Continued)

Some reports of the Statistical Section follow:

Hours flown	4229.28
Average Final Type planes in commission	76.5%
Average Training Type planes in commission	56.3%
Planes assigned at Month end	62
Increase	28
3rd phase missions completed	634

EVENTS:

During the month Brigadier General NATHAN LONGFELLOW, of 16th Wing, paid several visits to the Group.

In the interest of concentration on the completion of final phase training, all parades, reviews, etc. were dispensed with.

POI inspections both of air and ground personnel featured the middle and final stages of the month.

<u>STRENGTH:</u>	<u>Officers</u>	<u>L.O. & F.O.</u>	<u>E.N.</u>	<u>Total</u>
As of 31 January 1944.	394	4	1654	2052
As of 1 January 1944.	393	12	1622	2027
Increase	1		32	25
Decrease		8		

The month of February was taken up entirely by the movement of the Group Overseas. (See complete description of this movement in all Squadron Narrative Reports attached)

Combat crews arriving in North Africa early in March commenced active training at Oudna Field, Tunisia, on 18 March, 1944. 2002 hours of training flights were completed during this month. Emphasis was placed on high-altitude formation flying. Training progressed satisfactorily though maintenance was handicapped by lack of facilities. Numerous personnel were hospitalized with colds. A crash in mid-air of two airplanes from the 782nd Squadron marred our training activities. On 11 March 1944, 16 officers and enlisted men lost their lives as a result. (See letter to Commanding General 15th Air Force, attention: Historian - for statistical details of this accident). This was the first accident in the entire group since activation.

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c. Strength, commissioned and enlisted:

(1) Month of April, 1944.

(a) -- at beginning	1948
(b) net increase	40
(c) net decrease	--
(d) at end	1988

d. Stations - A. A. B., McCook, Nebraska.

Departed 1 February, 1944, for Army Airfield, Pantanella, Italy, (APO #520), arriving as follows:

	<u>GROUND</u>	<u>ECHELON</u>	<u>FLYING</u>
Gp. Hq.	- 17 March 1944.		
780th Sqdn.	- 1st unit - 15 March 1944.		19 April 1944
	2nd unit - 18 March 1944.		
	3rd unit - 20 March 1944.		
781st Sqdn.	- 28 March 1944.		20 April 1944
782nd Sqdn.	- 25 April 1944.		26 April 1944
783rd Sqdn.	- 12 April 1944.		20 April 1944

e. Movements - The Group moved from its training base, A. A. B., McCook, Nebraska, commencing 1 February 1944, to its overseas base, Pantanella Air Field, Italy, the ground echelon departing by rail in four sections for the Port of Embarkation - Camp Patrick Henry, Va. (Hampton Roads) embarking on the following dates:

Group Hq. -	12 February, 1944.
780th Sqdn.	
1st unit	11 February, 1944.
2nd unit	12 February, 1944.
781st Sqdn.	22 February, 1944.
782nd Sqdn.	22 February, 1944.
783rd Sqdn.	22 February, 1944.

Meanwhile the flying echelon left by aircraft, commencing 2 February 1944, for A. A. B., Lincoln, Nebraska and Topeka, Kansas, for final processing, before proceeding to Morrison Field, Florida, for final departure from the United States, 13 February 1944, arriving Cudna Field, Tunisia 3 March, 1944.

f. Campaigns -

- (1) Name - European African Middle East Theatre.
- (2) Duration - Still in progress.

g. Operations -

- (1) Period devoted mainly to completion of training - and shipment overseas, as well as establishing camp and airfield at overseas base. On arrival overseas of

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air echelon, flight training continued.

- h. Commanding officers in important operations - Not operational.
- i. Losses in action - None.

(1) Training casualties:

Burk, Robert J.	2nd Lt.	0-698653
Lickler, Marvin F.	2nd Lt.	0-752009
Ricciotti, Anthony W.	2nd Lt.	0-687905
Melody, Charles A.	1st Lt.	0-789071
Murphy, Robert B.	1st Lt.	0-740883
McClister, Lester H.	2nd Lt.	0-807860
Walsh, Harold F.	2nd Lt.	0-668850
Bressler, Edward L.	T/Sgt.	32205054
Conrad, Roland L.	T/Sgt.	12180993
Ronan, William J.	S/Sgt.	32339474
Jonkman, Norman (NMI)	S/Sgt.	32558362
Ruiz, Joe P.	S/Sgt.	18045102
Couch, Gene E.	S/Sgt.	17028464
Tennant, Edgar C.	S/Sgt.	35746646
Finch, William A.	S/Sgt.	20885560
Rousseau, Napoleon J.	S/Sgt.	39201790

- j. Members who have distinguished themselves - Colonel Elmer J. Rogers, Jr.
- 2. War Diary was not scheduled to be kept during period reporting. It will accompany future monthly unit histories.
 - a. Enclosed is story of Colonel Elmer J. Rogers, Jr. describing period between his departure A. A. B., McCook, Nebraska and arrival overseas, including results of two combat missions in which he participated.
 - b. Enclosed - 2 photographic prints
1 sketch of Group Airplane Insignia

FOR THE COMMANDING OFFICER:

W. H. Bigelow
WILLIAM H. BIGELOW, Major, A.C.
ADJUTANT.

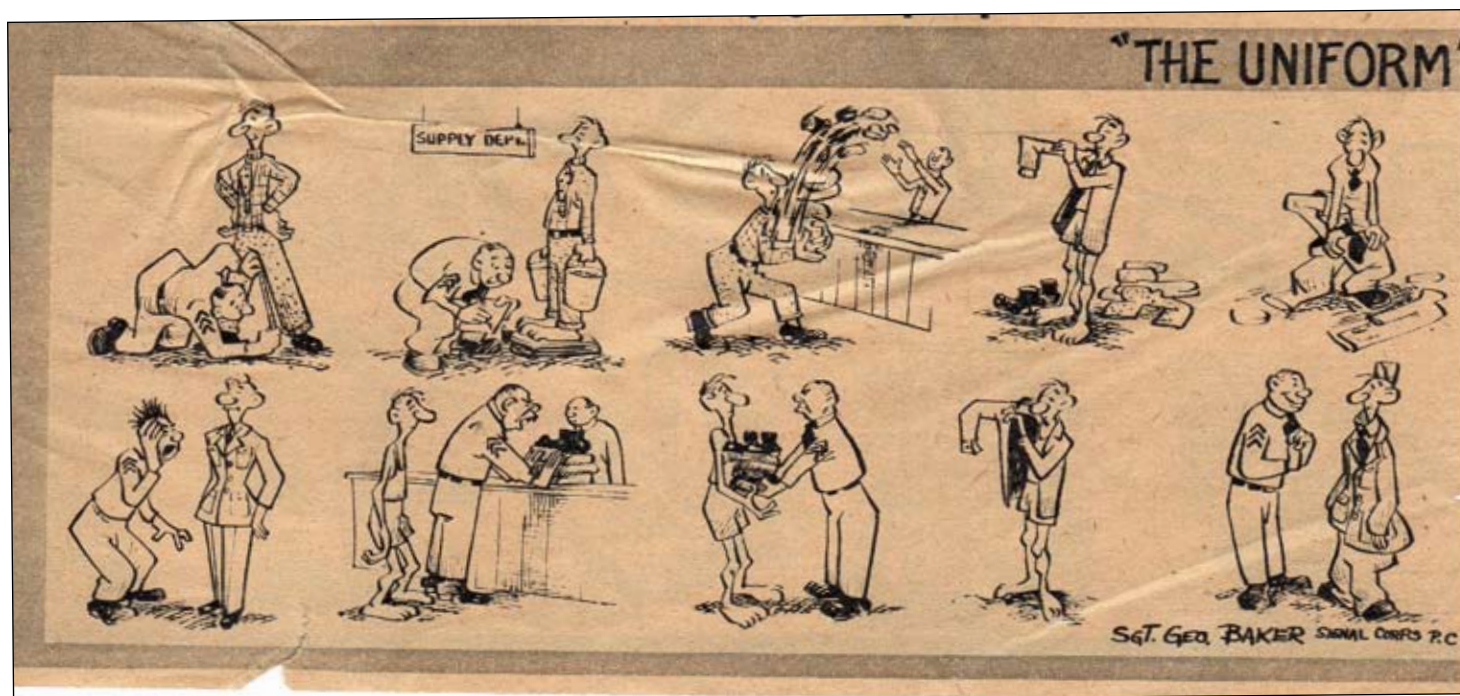
6 Inclosures:

- 1. Special Account, Col. Rogers.
- 2. Photographic prints.
- 3. Group Data.
- 4. Narratives of Squadrons
- 5. Data of Squadrons
- 6. Group History

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The Flightline has published one or two *The Sad Sack* cartoons collected by the late Jack Ball. Here is another. In case you are curious about the story behind the cartoon, here it is, according to Wikipedia: *The Sad Sack* was created by Sgt. George Baker during World War II, debuting in June 1942 as a comic strip in the first issue of *Yank*, the Army Weekly. Set in the United States Army, it depicted an otherwise unnamed, lowly private experiencing some of the absurdities and humiliations of military life. The title was a euphemistic shortening of the military slang "sad sack of s---," common during World War II. Today "sad sack" means an inept person or inept soldier. After the war ended, *The Sad Sack* ran in newspaper syndication in the United States until 1957. There also were several books published featuring the comic strips.