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781ST BOMB SQUADRON ASSOCIATION

NUMBER 4

# PANTANELLA NEWS

APRIL 1986

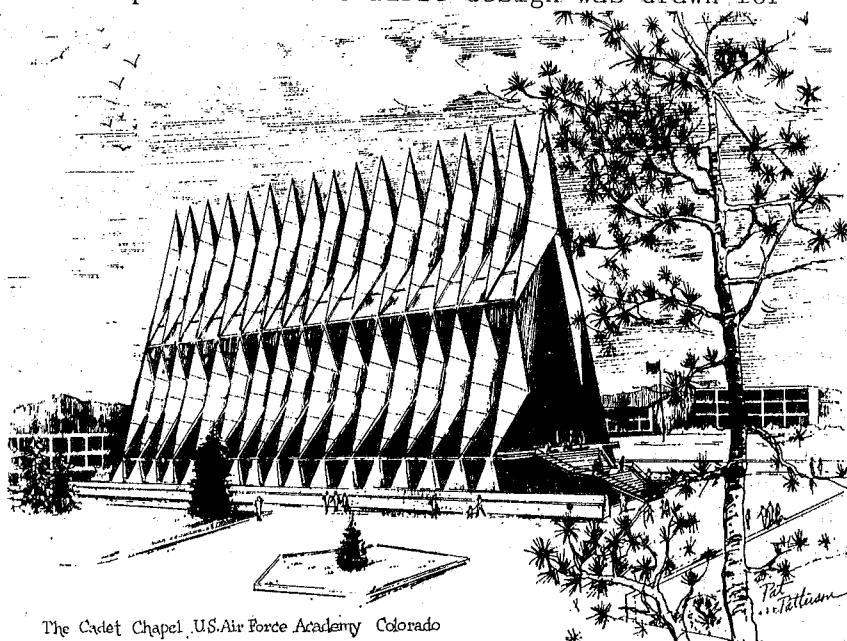
**REUNION** - The final plans have been completed. James Marcel Snyder and I spent two days at Colorado Springs and the Academy. The scenery was as spectacular as ever, with a terrific view of Pikes Peak from the hotel. We took in some of the activities at the Academy including Sunday Services. Full details on the last page. Over 75 men registered, making it 140 with wives! Be sure to get your reservations in early! We will certainly go over the 100 rooms originally reserved, so early reservations will assure more rooms. The first reservation to come in was from Richard Storm, followed by Denly Thompson and Norm Stenerson.

**MEMBERSHIP** - We're right on target and should hit the 250 mark by the time you receive this Newsletter. With Harry Carl's list we know that the squadron was 1200 strong. We also know that about one-third were KIA, or now deceased, leaving 800 potential members. We'll have 400 by reunion time, which will be just great. We are very fortunate to locate men from all sections and most of the air crews. One recent week resulted in locating the following; David Orr - Engineering Officer, Harry Carl - Communications Officer, William Ellet - Adjutant, Byron Thompson - Intelligence Officer, James Wray - Commanding Officer, Charles McKenna III - Commanding Officer, John Messmore - First Sergeant, Carl Weber - Mail Room, and the list goes on!

**AIR FORCE ACADEMY CADET CHAPEL** - Our Friday morning tour of the Academy will take us to the chapel. The Academy draws more than a million visitors a year; drawn especially by the spectacular cadet chapel. When the first design was drawn for the chapel, it was so controversial that it was almost scrapped. It has two levels so that services for two faiths can be held at the same time. Friday morning we will hold a short private service in memory of our fallen comrades.

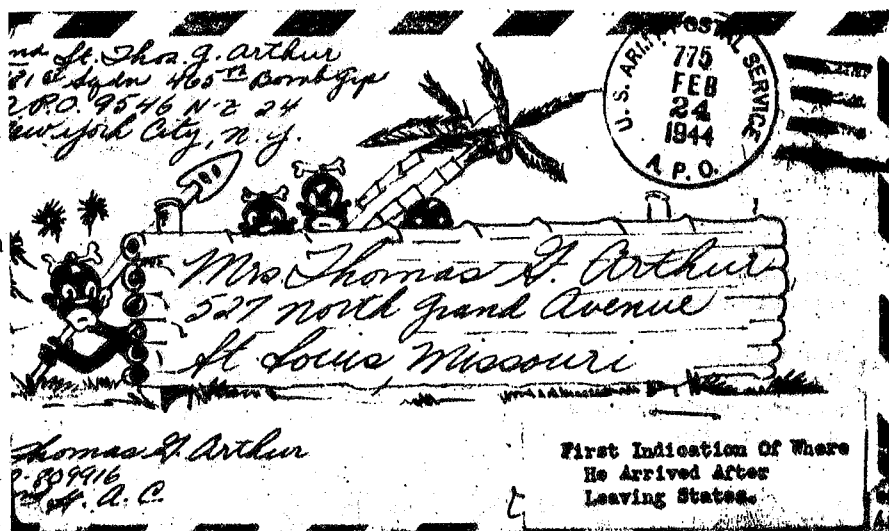
You will also have the opportunity Sunday morning to attend regular services at the cadet chapel.

"They who wait for the Lord  
Shall Renew their strength,  
They shall mount up with  
wings like eagles. IS 40:31



The Cadet Chapel, U.S. Air Force Academy, Colorado

THOMAS G. ARTHUR - A maximum effort search is underway for Tom. He was the famous cartoonist, and navigator on Joe Athon's crew. Hank Givens, bombardier on the same crew, sent in an article about Tom, showing some of his art work on his letters home. Hank said Tom was a strong Christian Scientist and Hank has written the mother church without success to date. His wife's family name was Currey and the first letter home was addressed to 527 North Grand Ave., St Louis, MO c/o Fox Theatre.



The next letter was to Pfingsten Road, Northbrook IL, then to Camelot Farms, Scrub Oak, NY. Come on you sleuths, let's find him.

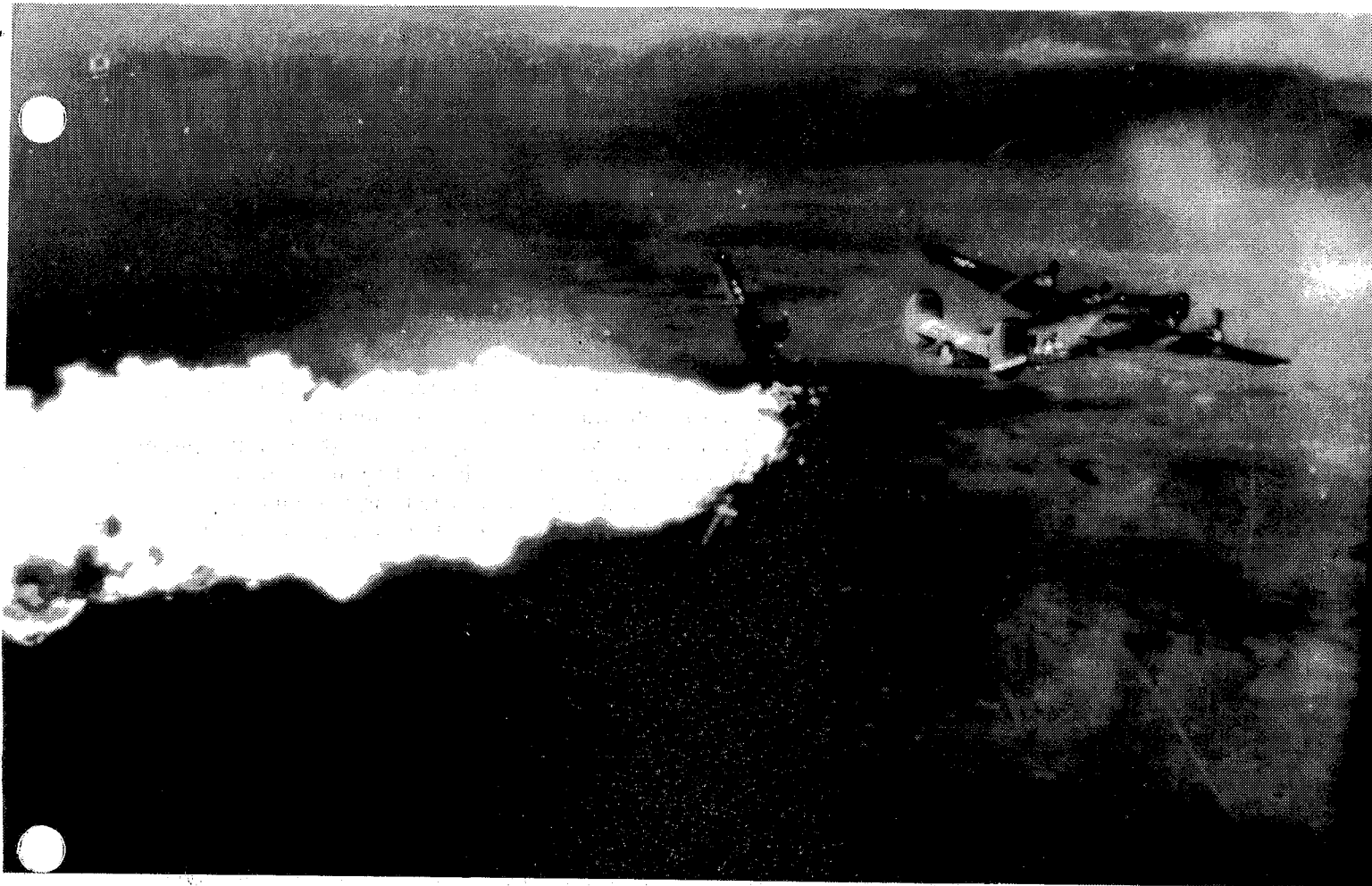
DENLEY J. "TOMMY" THOMPSON - A 10 page letter from Tommy was full of 781st history. He was one of the early volunteers, joining the Army Air Corps in November, 1940. After a short time he went to France Field, Panama with a B-18 Bomb Group. After Pearl Harbor he was assigned to the Galapagos Islands, about 800 miles off Ecuador, where they flew LB-30's on submarine patrol. Next stop was Davis-Monthan at Tucson. David Orr was engineering officer and was forming a unit for the 781st. He asked Tommy to join as supply sergeant, which he did. He then followed the 781st route to McCook, then to Pantanella. A quote from his letter, "It was the pride of the line crews to keep the planes flying. We were blessed with good mechanics, welders, electricians, and telephone repair men. It seemed to me that our 781st squadron ground crews really worked together. If one crew was caught up with their work and another crew needed help, they would give them a hand to get the plane ready." Tommy, the flight crews knew we had some good men on the line, and we really appreciated their efforts. Tommy owned an IGA grocery store for 35 years, and retired in 1982. Thanks for your letter and contribution Tommy.

SQUADRON OPERATIONS - March 1945.  
L to R - Roy Byrd, Sqd Bombardier,  
Ollie Blankenship, Operations  
Officer, John Ertel, Sqd.  
Navigator. We haven't found  
Blankenship yet. He had a truck-  
ing business by his name in  
Oklahoma. Should be easy to find!

PREVIOUS PHOTO - Identified by  
Al Upenkamp. The eight men were  
in front of the armament shop and  
are; standing L to R: Reed,  
Uppenkamp, Schoelly?, Yagge, and  
kneeling, Halpern, W. Martin,  
Scangarello, and Luzon.



NEW ACTING DIRECTOR - O. J. "Jack"  
Coward has accepted the position.  
Jack has been spending many, many  
hours on his computers keeping our rosters up to date. It's no easy job to come  
up with the latest addresses, correct spelling etc., of 1200 men. Welcome aboard  
Jack, we sure appreciate your help.



The fierce air war, being fought high in the skies over Germany in 1944, is vividly shown on the above photo, which appeared in Time, Life, and many other publications. The B-24 has just taken a direct hit, the wing is beginning to break off and the plane has rolled onto it's back. In command was Lt. Col. Clarence 'Jack' Lokker, Squadron Commander of the 781st Bomb Squadron. Col. Lokker and five of his fellow crew members escaped the flaming inferno. The following story is about the life of Col. Lokker, who gave his life for his country later on that fateful day.

Col. Lokker attended Hope College in Holland, Michigan with his education pointing to a law career so that he could join his father's profession. However, his desires to don the Cadet Gray at West Point grew until he managed to secure an appointment there. He did well and graduated high in his class of 1941. Upon graduation he chose the Air Corps, for his desire to "hit the blue" was well known. He trained at Spartan School of Aeronautics in Tulsa and then Randolph Field, Texas. He received his wings in March 1942. It was then that he married his childhood sweetheart, Sybil Brailey.

His next assignment was at Columbus Air Training School at Columbus, Mississippi, first as an instructor, then as Commandant of Cadets. In early 1943 he took his B-24 training at Hendricks Field, Florida. Then he went to Tucson as an instructor in B-24's. He joined the 465th Bomb Group as Assistant Group Operations Officer in August 1943, when the group was being formed at Davis-Monthan, near Tucson. Before leaving for overseas from McCook, Nebraska, he was able to get home to see his first and only son, David John, who was born on 29 December 1943.

At Pantanella he began flying missions with various squadrons and on 4 June 1944 he took command of the 781st Bomb Squadron, replacing Col. Charles McKenna III, who was transferred to the 464th Bomb Group as Deputy Commander.

On November 20, 1944 a mission was scheduled to Blechhammer South Oil Refinery, one of the most heavily defended targets, and, a long way from Pantanella. The 783rd was scheduled to lead in Able Box; the 781st in Baker Box; the 780th leading second attack unit in Charlie Box; and the 782nd in Dog Box. Memories are faded and records do not show some of the changes that took place late on the night of the 19th and at briefing on the 20th. What is known is that Wing Headquarters sent down an order requiring a Squadron Commander to lead the 783rd, which would be leading the group and wing. Col. Lokker was scheduled to fly with Lt. Dahl, Baker Box lead, but with the new orders he went over to lead the 783rd. There were further changes before the mission got off the ground. Col. Lokker had to change planes on the line and make some crew changes just before take-off. With changes complete, this was the crew and plane; Blue "I" with Col. Lokker - pilot and Wing Commander, Capt. Milton Duckworth - co-pilot, Lt. Joseph Kutger - wing navigator, Lt. Joseph Whalen - Mickey operator, Lt. Robert Hockman - bombardier, Lt. Grosvenor Rice - navigator, Sgt James Bourne - waist gunner, Sgt. Jack Rabkin - top turret gunner, Sgt. Paul Flynn - tail gunner, Sgt. Edmund Miosky - radio operator, and Sgt. Lee Billings - engineer. Col. Lokker, Whalen, and Rice were from the 781st and the other crew members were from the 783rd.

The formation took off at 0742 hours with 23 of the scheduled 27 aircraft. After take-off the group assembled in the usual area at 5000 feet, and wing assembly was accomplished over Spinazzola at 5000 feet before setting course at 0841 hours. Clouds obscured the ground all the way to the target area. At 1100 hours over Lake Ballaton, an escort of P-38's joined the formation and provided escort, with the second escort of P-51's arriving 10 minutes behind schedule at 1210 hours in the I.P. area. One aircraft returned due to illness of the nose gunner. The radar was not working well enough for a Mickey run, so, as they approached the I.P. without seeing the target, they decided to bomb the first alternate. Just as the decision was made they began breaking out of the undercast and Hockman reported seeing the target. Since they were off course Hockman said it was too short a distance to make a visual bomb run. It was then decided to make a 270° turn from their northerly heading and come back over the I.P., heading east on the bomb run. Col. Lokker also decided to make a climbing turn from 22,200 feet to 23,000 feet to get out of some of the heavy flak they were encountering. The 464th Bomb Group following was notified of the change.

On the bomb run, and seconds before bombs away, Col. Lokker's plane took a direct hit between number two engine and the fuselage. The wing began breaking off and the plane immediately burst into flames. On the flight deck behind the co-pilot and facing backward was Whalen, and seated behind the pilot was Kutger at the "G" box, facing forward. Kutger knew the plane was mortally wounded as he could see the wing breaking off from his side window, and that he had but two or three seconds to get out. He told Whalen to get out, but he was possibly injured or killed by flak as his eyes appeared to register nothing. Kutger picked up his chest parachute in his right hand, as he pulled the bomb release handle with the left hand, and dove out of the bomb bay attempting to snap on his chute. He fell some 20,000 feet before getting his chute on, then pulling the ripcord, and hitting the ground after two or three swings of the chute. He was almost certain no one else got out of the plane. Col. Lokker realized he had to give up his fight to save the stricken plane and headed for the top hatch and bailed out successfully. Rabkin, in the top turret, released his seat and was dropping out of the turret, but the plane rolled over and he fell back in. He evidently never got out of the turret before the explosion, and fire engulfed him. Duckworth tried to get out of the side window but could not because of the spin of the plane. He then went for the top hatch and pulled himself out by

HARRY CARL - Harry was located through David Orr, who had been located through Leo Lutgring. I was overwhelmed when I opened the first correspondence from Harry. It was an inch thick packet of loads of squadron information. Included was a roster of exactly 1100 names. Most had WWII addresses and serial numbers. Approximately 450 of these names were not on any of the rosters we had at that time.

Harry, who was squadron communications officer. brings to the association an invaluable amount of information for our history, and, with the roster, a closing of the gap on our membership rolls. Harry will be the Squadron Historian, and will be in charge of writing the history. At the end of WWII, Harry started to write the history, but, getting discharged, going to college, and marriage interrupted his plans. In addition to his computer to store the history, he has a photo lab at home as a hobby. So now, with the help of everyone for stories and photos, we will have the best squadron history ever completed. It's a tremendous satisfaction to see this most important part of our association fall into place. We'll be hearing a lot more from Harry in the future.

TIPS ON LOCATING MEMBERS - Every day I hear of different ways members have been located. If you know of a college or university someone has graduated from, you might check with them as they usually keep updated records. (per Curt Reed). When mailing letters you might add "or occupant" to the name so that the letter will be opened and forwarded, or the occupant might send you some information. Often they will know of relatives, where they worked, or other valuable information. Stanley Winkowski writes that his best source for finding his crew was Century 21 Real Estate computers for deed changes, etc. Walt Longacre finds that going to the local Legion Post has been very helpful. Or, even write to the Chamber of Commerce, or to the Mayor, or Postmaster. There are a lot of people out there who could be helpful if you just give them a chance. The smaller communities are the most helpful. For larger cities, try the suburb phone books, since most have moved out of the large cities.

ADRIAN A. MARTIN - Carl Dahl, from California, wrote to Pierre Kennedy in Connecticut, for help in finding his tail gunner, Adrian. It just so happened that a friend of Pierre's knew Adrian! Adrian was 18 years old during the days at Pantanella, and, after the war, he went back into service and retired as Lt. Colonel. During his tour in the 781st he bailed out and crash landed, now wears a metal plate, and still had over 50 missions. Let's have the whole story Adrian.

ANOTHER "WHO ARE THEY" PHOTO.  
Sent in by Frank Hylla.

DUES - Over 25% responded with \$10 to \$50 contributions. We thank you for your support.

RADAR MAINTENANCE MEN - Marcel Snyder would like to be in contact with them. Anyone know the whereabouts of any of them?

And how about Oscar Adler; can someone locate him?



FALLEN COMRADES - Our first member to be reported as passing away, since being listed on our roster is William "Bill" DeKriek, co-pilot on Doss's crew. His wife, Dorothy, called to say that he died February 11th after a bout with cancer. He was looking forward to the reunion, and was anxious to hear about everyone. Bill had a dairy farm in Washington, milking over 200 cows.

Another Fallen One - Rumold B. "Boom" Diegel, co-pilot on Stanley Tryon's crew. He passed away on January 26th, in the VA Hospital in Lincoln, Nebraska. His son wrote a long letter asking many questions about his father's service record. In part, "It is one of my great regrets that I was never able to sit down with Boom and pry the details of his Air Force career out of him." His son, Richard, plans on being at the reunion. He would like to hear from anyone who knew Boom. His address; Richard Diegel, 1703 N. 65th St., Lincoln, NE 68505, Phone 404 467-5117.

Charles Bradley just wrote that another co-pilot just passed away. Roy Rice, co-pilot on Hyman Newman's crew, passed away January 11th. He was also planning on attending the reunion.

And, Pierre Kennedy got a shock while location Charles Hudson. Charles was top gunner on the crew with Pierre when they were shot down October 13, 1944 over Blechhammer. After locating where Charles lived, Pierre called and got his brother-in-law. He informed Pierre that Charles was being buried that day, he died March 12th.

To our Fallen Comrades who have joined the Folded Wings Section, we know that you have found everlasting peace. You served your country well, and we will remember you forever. To their families, our thoughts and prayers. You are invited to join us at the reunion to share in our remembrance of them.

COMMENT - As previously mentioned, you owe it to your family to give them a record of your service. We will provide the squadron history - only you can fill in the gaps as to what your part was.

#### EARL VIANDS

The Deacon was crew chief on Col. McKenna's plane. Also on the crew were Walter Gates, Arnold Heiman, and Glenn King.

In the next issue; a story on the pilot of this famous plane, Col. Charles McKenna III.



Col. Lokker led his men well. He was a kind and gentle man. With his good humor and zest for living, character and splendid leadership, he was an inspiration to all who knew him. He answered his last call, and now stands on the "Plains of Valhalla" with others of that "long gray line" who await us all.

"But whether on a scaffold high  
Or in the battle van  
The fittest place for man to die  
Is where he dies for man." Michael Barry

The information on Col. Lokker comes from the Missing Air Crews Report, personal interviews with Mrs. Sybil Lokker Wilson, Col. Milton Duckworth, Col. Burt Andrus, and phone conversations with Col. Joseph Kutger, and a number of crew members of the 780th, 781st, and 783rd that flew on 20 November 1944. Your author served under Col. Lokker for three months and flew co-pilot for him on his mission prior to 20 November 1944.

WILLIAM MC GONIGLE - Here is one man that can stand tall. After the war he tried to find Col. Lokker to see if he made it back. He located his wife, Sybil, and she gave him the sad news. Each Christmas for the next ten years Bill sent a Christmas gift to the Lokker's son David John.

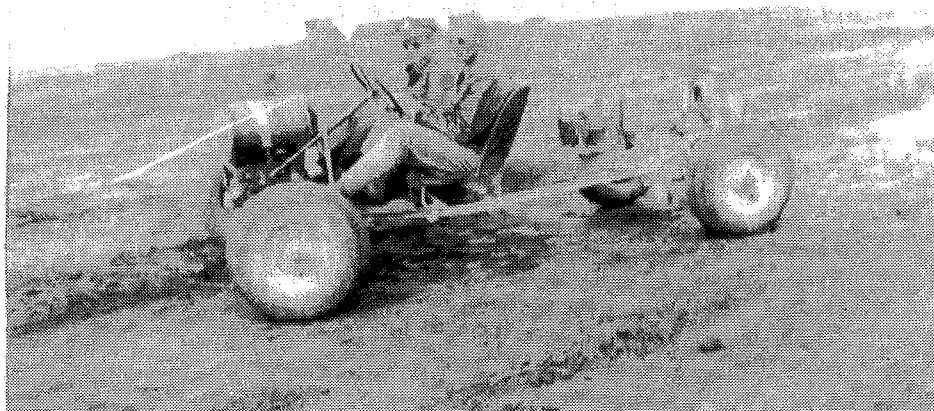
ELLIOTT B. SWEET - On Sunday March 23, 1986, the Hartford Courant had a one-half page article on Dr. Elliott B. Sweet. Elliott was navigator on Lewis "Jocko" Roberts crew, whose plane was "Pleasure Bent." Elliott is a famous orthopedic surgeon at Hartford Hospital in Hartford, Connecticut. He follows a long tradition in the Sweet family of "Bonesetters." He is the tenth generation of the family in the practice. His forefather, John, came to the New World only a dozen years after the Pilgrims, in 1632. Elliott, we are proud of you, and hope to hear from you soon.

PHOTOS, ORDERS ETC. - We have enough old orders now, unless you were a replacement crew after August, 1944. We are still missing some crew photos, with identification, and would like to have you copy your photo on a copy machine, and send it in with identification. We have the ordinance section with identification, but need the other sections. By getting copy machine copies we can determine which we need and request originals later. We also would like the personal photos you or your buddy took. Those that were not passed around the squadron that everyone had a copy of, like those from the photo section.

RIPPLIN RYTHUM - The German jeep transported from Africa. It seems everyone had their picture taken on this jeep. This photo from Frank Hylla shows George Haushold and John Fandrey.

SQUADRON MOTTO - I haven't heard of it. Did we have one? If so, what is it?

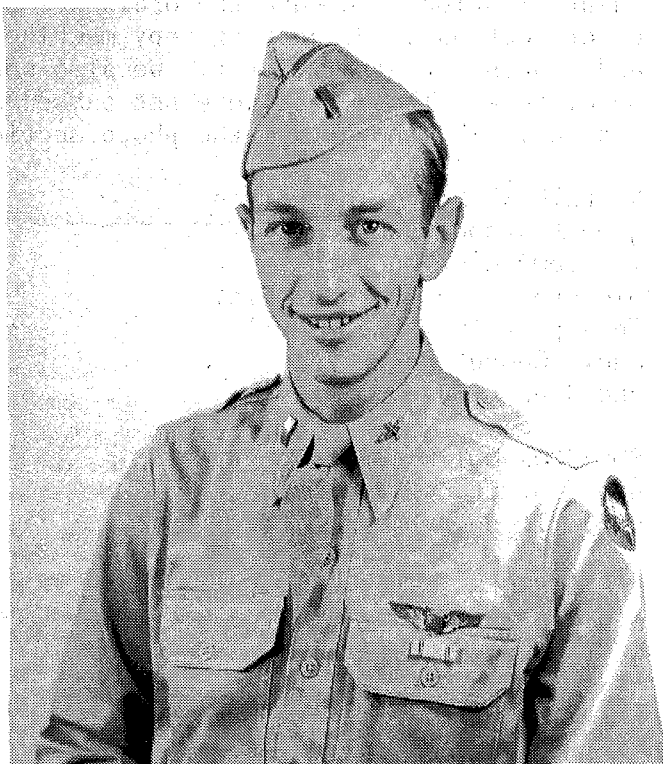
BACK ISSUES - They will be available at a later date. We're swamped right now.



grabbing the gun barrels from the top turret sticking out over the hatch. As he left the plane he could see Hockman and Rice still in the nose. Hockman got on his chute and went out of the nose wheel door. Rice, in the nose turret doing navigation without a chute on, was trapped. Probable loss of electricity prevented him from lining up the turret door to get out, or time did not permit him to get his chute on. Gunners Bourne, Billings, and Miosky were back in the waist. Miosky was last seen standing over the escape hatch with his chute on. The explosion evidently blew him away from the hatch and he got trapped in the fireball that followed. The explosion blew out both Bourne and Billings. They did not remember bailing out, but recovered from the explosion enough on the way down to open their chutes just before hitting the ground. Both suffered extensive burns and injuries, and Bourne lost an eye. Back in the tail turret, Flynn was trapped without his chute on and failed to get out.

Immediately upon hitting the ground Col. Lokker and Duckworth were captured by a German farmer near a flak gun installation. The farmer took them to his farm and stationed his wife to guard them while he looked for more airmen. About one in the afternoon the farmer's wife permitted them to escape. They immediately headed towards the Oder River in hopes of making it to Poland and receiving help from the Polish underground. About six that afternoon they ran into a patrol of German soldiers, who immediately pursued them, firing their rifles. Duckworth was hit in the leg, fell and remained fallen until captured. Col. Lokker was farther ahead, and the last Duckworth saw of him; he was running into a thick clump of underbrush with two Germans chasing him. Hockman, Kutger, Billings and Bourne were also taken prisoners.

Reports by the Germans to our POW's indicated Col. Lokker was taken prisoner. On 9 January 1945, however, Col. C. A. Clark wrote Mrs. Lokker that he was presumed dead. Later reports filtered back to the squadron and in the May "Flim Flam" Chaplain Blouch wrote that Col. Lokker was safe in a POW camp. On 7 January 1945 GEN. H. H. Arnold wrote Mrs. Lokker that an official determination had been made that Col. Lokker died 21 November 1944. On 4 March 1946, the first real evidence came in a letter from Maj. Gen. Witsel, who wrote that a translation of German documents indicated that Col. Lokker was killed 20 November, 1944 and buried at Langenlieben, Germany. The cemetery was located in a disputed area between Poland and Russia, and there was very poor cooperation with the Russians, therefore Graves Registration Service could not enter to confirm the report. It was not until 22 August 1949, that Lt. Col. W. E. Campbell wrote that the remains of Col. Lokker were found in a civilian cemetery at Lengenlieben, Poland and moved to a U.S. cemetery near Liege, Belgium. Later at the request of his family, his remains were returned to the U.S. and to a final resting place in Holland, Michigan. The documents from the Germans were very brief. Their report on 24 November 1944, reported that he was found dead and buried on 22 November 1944. It is possible that he was mortally wounded and died, and later found by the Germans. Nothing in the German records indicate the exact date of death, although the official U.S. Air Force report shows 20 November 1944. A report on what happened to the rest of the crew, the bomb run and the return of the formation will be given at a later date.



Col. Lokker as a 2nd Lt., March, 1942  
after receiving his pilot wings