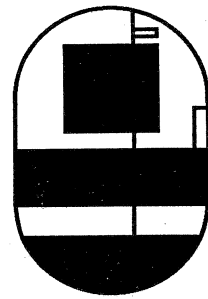




PANTANELLA NEWS



APRIL 1988

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NUMBER 12

REUNION PLANS ALMOST FINALIZED - September 15 to 18, 1988 at San Antonio will see the largest gathering of the 781st Bomb Squadron and 465th Bomb Group since May 1945. Our reservations indicate the 781st will have a larger turnout than the previous two reunions, and with the other three squadrons will make it the first 465th Bomb Group assembly since WWII. Don't miss out on this historic meeting.

Reservation cards are enclosed. Group personnel and honorary members please fill out the yellow cards if you are attending. Early registration helps us in our planning. Remember you get full refund if you have to cancel. If you are not staying at the hotel we still would like the yellow card sent to the squadron address so that we can plan meals, etc.

In addition to meeting your old comrades, you will enjoy the comfort of a grand old hotel where Teddy Roosevelt recruited his notorious Rough Riders, and are in walking distance to a very attractive downtown San Antonio. The Alamo is next door (see photo). It is here where Col. William Barret Travis unsheathed his sword and drew a line in the dirt in front of the crumbling, besieged Spanish mission.

He told the 190 men - including Davy Crockett and Jim Bowie - that they had no chance against the 4,000 Mexican soldiers led by Gen. Antonio de Lopez Santa Anna. Then he asked those who were prepared to die for freedom to step across the line. All but one did.

Nearby is the famous Paseo del Rio where the San Antonio river winds through town. You can relax on the terraced banks or take a boat ride - even dine on a boat. The visitor's guide lists thirty different points of interest like the Mission Trail which is America's most complete mission complex. Of the four, San Jose is most interesting - the Mariachi Mass is a memorable Sunday service.

Reservations are coming in from all sections of the roster. About 100 men will be registered by the time you get this newsletter. A roster of those registered will be in the next, and last, newsletter before reunion. As you know approximately two-

thirds were flying echelon and one-third were ground echelon. Our reunion attendees have been in that ratio. That's what makes our reunions so great - every section is represented. And our attendance is far above average squadron reunions. At the last reunion the Chaplain couldn't believe we were only a squadron. So, don't miss out on a wonderful reunion and a great meeting place.

From group we are getting word of a good representation also. Joe Tucci's son phoned me to say his father (Group Sergeant Major) planned on attending. And Richard Pease, group intelligence officer, wrote he planned on attending. For group registration please send in the yellow cards the same as 781st members. We will register you with the 781st, but you will have a separate roster and name tags for you.

Plans call for our squadron and group personnel to have our own gathering until Saturday afternoon when all squadrons will join together to make it a 465th Bomb Group affair for the rest of the day.

The next newsletter will have an insert that you can remove which will have a map of the area and a detail of the downtown area, so you will be able to find the

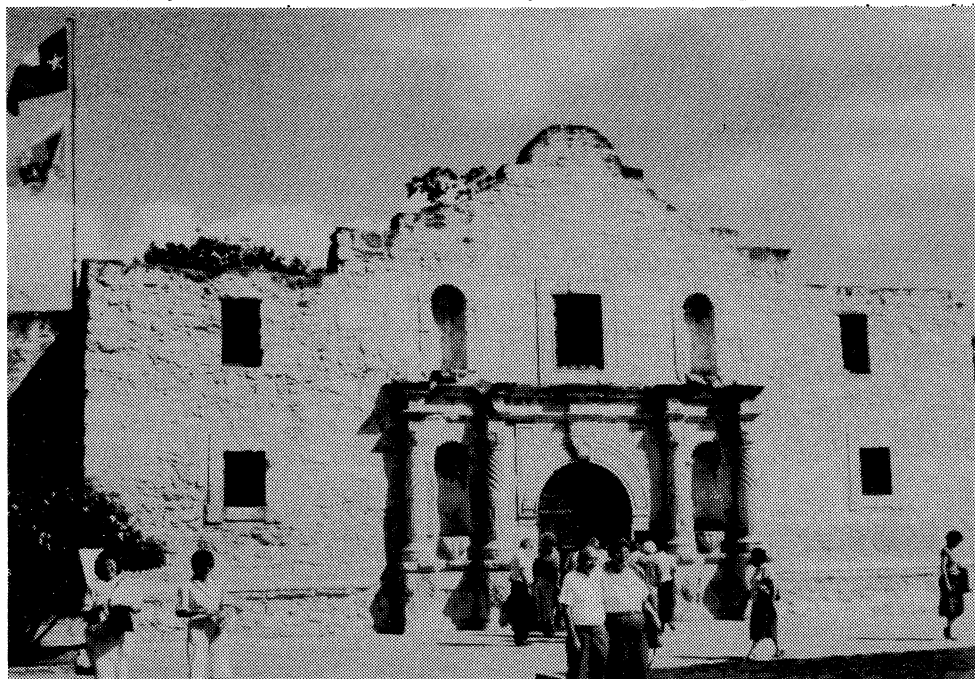
hotel easily if you drive. Also included will be airport transportation information, what to bring, etc.

There are two RV parks - Mission on I35 & I10, at 2617 Roosevelt, San Antonio, TX 789214, phone 512 532 6061, and San Antonio Alamo KOA at Coliseum Road exit off I-35, 602 Gembler Rd., San Antonio, TX 78219, phone 512 2244 9296. Both have city bus service to the hotel. Parking also available at the hotel, but they do not want guests staying overnight in their RV's.

REUNION COSTS - There will be a registration fee not to exceed \$10, Thursday dinner \$16 each and Saturday \$17 each. For the rest of the meals you are on your own. The hotel costs are on the yellow card - \$60 per night, plus 13% tax and parking is \$3.50 per day.

REUNION PROGRAM - A brief outline of the program so you can make your plans. Since about 40% have been showing up a day early we will begin having hospitality open Wednesday, about noon, for the early birds.

Thursday is the first official day and will have hospitality and registration open all day. Thursday evening is a dinner and program. Since our next dinner is Saturday and will be a group affair, we will have



our squadron functions Thursday evening. Friday will have a morning program (maybe a visit to a nearby airbase to see a B-24) and the rest of the day off for hospitality room visits and individual get-togethers. Saturday morning is business session, memorial service for the men killed in action and those who have died since. Saturday afternoon a program about our days at Pantanella with all squadrons invited. Saturday evening is the banquet with all squadrons. A band, with the big band sound, will play before and after dinner. Full details in next newsletter. Those of you that have attended prior reunions know we have a worthwhile program. We won't disappoint you - reunion '88 will long be remembered! Better memories than those German 88's. Let the good times roll!

RESERVATION COMMENTS - Some of the comments on the reservation card, "Can't wait," "We had such a great time in 87 and we are really looking forward to meeting together again in 88 in San Antonio," "Hope this one is the biggest and best

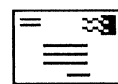
ever," "Looking forward to the reunion with great anticipation. I love San Antonio's river walk," "Don't need name tags - I have two from previous ones," "Looking forward to seeing you and having fun again." And many more similar comments.

B-24J LIBERATOR TO FLY AGAIN - I recently received a letter from the Collings Foundation, River Hill Farm, Stow, MA 01775. They are in the process of a total restoration of a B-24J. When completed it will be the only B-24 flying in the world! They hope to have it finished for the May 1989 Liberator 50th Anniversary. Of the 19,256 Liberators produced not a single one is flying today. (The C.A.F. has an LB-30 that has been modified like a B-24D and without turrets, etc. The B-24J at Liberal, Kansas has not been restored and I don't believe it has flown since it flew to Liberal two years ago and lost an engine on the way.)

If anyone lives or travels through the Stow area I would like a first hand report. It is my personal opinion that this is a worthwhile project and anyone inclined to should make a donation to help in the project. The cost is estimated at \$600,000 plus thousands of volunteer hours. The project is over 1/3 complete. It is a zero-time restoration with complete disassembly and restoration of every structure.

I will keep you informed of the progress. In case you want to call them the number is 617 568-8924.

The photo below shows the stripped interior of the B-24J.



MAIL CALL

A letter from Griscom Bettie reports the passing of Craig Taylor. He notes that the Shetterly crew, on which Griscom was co-pilot, and Craig the bombardier, was formed in Boise and Craig's father, an historian, suggested the crew use Lewis & Clark's guide as theirs. So, at McCook their plane was named Sacajawea. Does anyone know whatever happened to the plane?

The Shetterly crew stayed together for the full tour. Two were wounded and two injured. Griscom was at reunion '86 and hopes to make San Antonio.

Bert Stigberg made me happy - he confirmed from his log that my recollection that the bombing altitude on that cold 20 January 1945 was 27,000 feet and -55°C.

Kenneth Sutton noted on his reservation card that our casa looks a lot larger in the photo than he remembered.

Ben Donahue notes that he found Bill Fertig for the 782nd Squadron. One of our members asked about Bill at the last reunion. Check with us and we'll give you his address.

William Coonan from Engineering wrote a letter and sent in some articles for future newsletters.

SICK CALL - On his reunion reservation card Dean F. Jones reports he has been out of the hospital several months and feels great. Back to duty for Dean.

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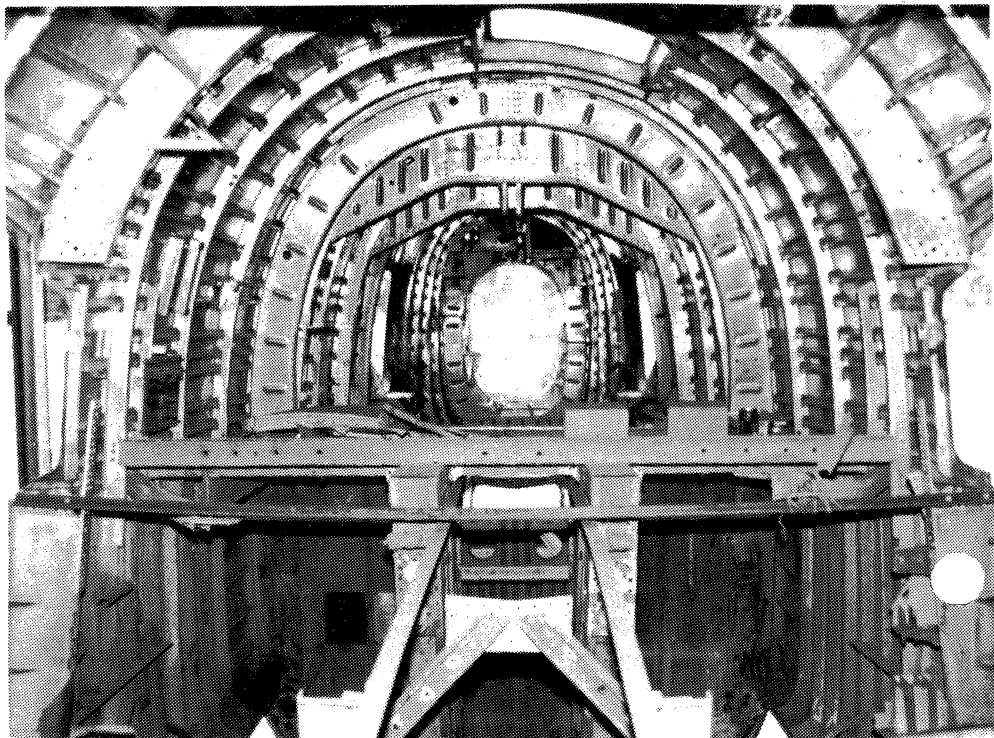
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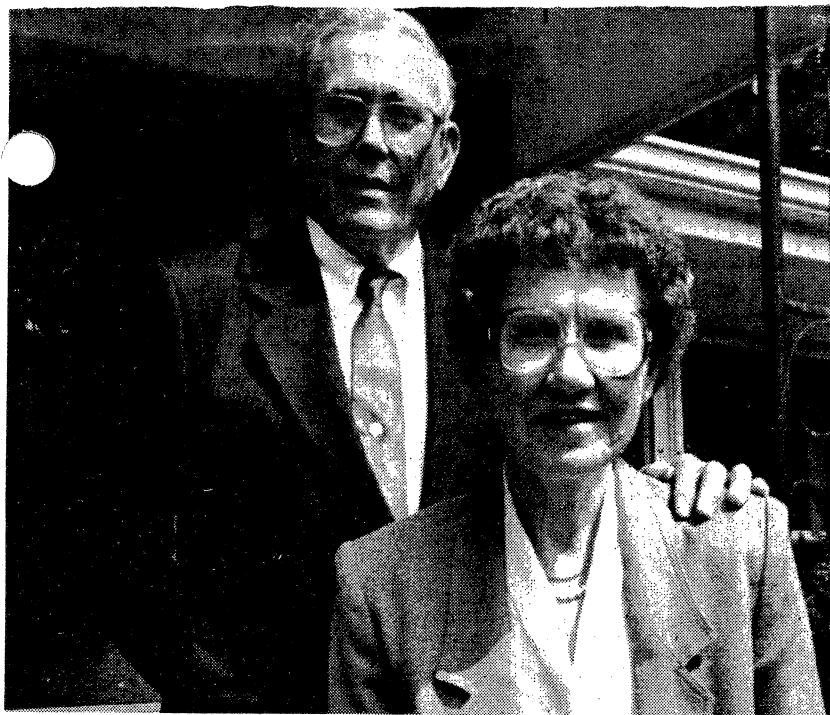
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JACK V. STALLINGS - The newspaper photo above of Jack and Virginia Stallings was taken after reunion '87. Before going to the reunion Jack had sent in a news release following the suggestion in the newsletter, and the reporter was waiting for him when he returned from the reunion.

Jack noted in the newspaper article that it was a shock to see the changes wrought in his old comrades by the four decades since the war. "They were young men then and now they are old men," he said.

Jack was 26 years old when he enlisted in the Army Air Corps in 1941. He was in engineering in the National Guard, "but the smell of dynamite would give me a sick headache for days." The Air Corps promised Jack one of his four choices of jobs if he enlisted, but he was sent off to radio school instead - not one of his choices. He became a communication specialist, rising quickly to master sergeant.

He joined the original squadron cadre, trained at McCook and went to Africa by boat with the squadron. Then to Pantanella, only to return to Africa two days later to work on a communications system. After thirty days he returned to Pantanella as communications chief of the 781st Bomb Squadron. In addition to maintaining our aircraft radios his unit was responsible for teletype and telephone systems and maintaining the control tower. His dedication to his work in the squadron earned him respect by his fellow men and many fine inspections reports for his unit.

After the war Jack returned to civilian life, worked for Amoco in Kansas City and retired in 1980. Then he and Virginia moved to Virginia to be near their son and daughter-in-law, Jack and Wilma. Young Jack, who was born while his father was in Italy, is pastor of Collinswood Baptist Church.

Jack stays busy in retirement. He enjoys gardening and particularly enjoys spending time with his grandchildren.

* * * * *

ROSTER CHANGES - **Walt Longacre** has a new street address; 1350 Christy St. **Wilburn Vorheiser**, 15631 Pohez Rd., Apple Valley, CA 92307. **Donald Fleming's** new street address is 910 Buffalo. **Charles Ramsay** now at 47095 Kasbah Dr., Palm Desert, CA 92260, and **Earl (Deacon) Viands**, 2929 M.L. King Dr., Apt #1, Leavenworth, KS 66048. **Jerry Edwards (widow of William Edwards)**, 3411 Roosevelt St., Midland, TX 79702. **Theodore Shpakowsky**, C-1 1190 Grange Rd, Wescosville, PA 18106, Phone 215 395 8917. **Loren Foote**, 416 Jeffries Ave., #23, Monrovia, CA 91016.

FOLDED WINGS

Roland Craig Taylor (Shetterly bombardier) had a heart attack and passed away November 18, 1987. Roland attended reunion '86.

Joe Archuleta (Communications) passed away in 1984.

Morris L. Massey (gunner) passed away in 1979.

Carl Switzer (ground echelon) passed away in March 1987 following a heart attack in January.

Marshall Cooper (Communications) passed away February 22, 1988, following surgery for brain tumor. Reported by Ralph Sims and Robert Daniel. Our condolences to the families of these fine men.

USTACHI - In the last newsletter William Rachow referred to the Ustachi and I indicated I would follow up on this subject. In the intelligence reports the information at times ran together and at first I got the impression that the Ustachi were Russian. This is not correct. The Ustachi were one of three or four political parties in Yugoslavia. While at Pantanella we heard of the Ustachi, but there was little information on them except that we would be better off to bail out over Partisian territory than Ustachi territory.

Since I have received more information on this subject than I had anticipated I will just write about the Ustachi and cover the other political factions in Yugoslavia later.

First I will give some excerpts of the intelligence reports. "Thought crews should be told of the Ustachi." "Two American officers reported to have been captured by Ustachi troops. Body of one was found with 200 bullet holes in it." "A few nights before Ustachi sneaked in and burned a hospital near Novisels killing 40 wounded." "Last seen at airdrome 60 miles s/s/w of Glina; has information of U.S. airmen who were killed by Ustachi." In Gene Krzyzynski's (bombardier on Tipton's crew) story he writes that on 16 July 1944 they were shot down by fighters near Zagreb, Yugoslavia, and taken into custody by Ustachi troops and handed over to the Germans. William Rachow remembers the Partisians talking about the Ustachi, but it was not until after the war that he learned more about them. He met another airman that went down in Ustachi territory. He was the only one to survive - the others were killed by Ustachi.

Recently Ben Donahue and I were together and Ben

the Ustachi hung some of their victims with a meat hook under the chin.

recalled a comment going around at Pantanella, "Swing and sway the Ustachi way." That reference was to the way the Ustachi hung some of their victims - with a meat hook under the chin. Pretty gory, but some of the atrocities filtered back and by making a joke of it, it was a way to shrug off our fears.

In the search for information on the Ustachi I called Byron Thompson, the 781st intelligence officer. Byron did some research and the following condensed report is filed by Byron.

"The organization or group know as "Ustase," which

spelling is probably closest to Slavic and which is also spelled variously including "Ustashe," "Ustachi," and "Eustachi," seems to have come into being in the 1930's. Its leader was Ante Pavelic who was a lawyer from Zagreb in the Province of Croatia in northern Yugoslavia. Its membership was primarily made up of Croatian Nationalist extremists - an underground group driven from Yugoslavia by King Alexander who had ascended the throne in 1921 and who was a Serbian. The movement ostensibly was intended to free the Croats from the domination of the Serbs and the King and to create a separate state. It seems accepted that early on the king had become a dictator and as such was well guarded by a large military force. He was inaccessible for assassination in his own country, but in 1934, while visiting Marseille, France, he and the French Foreign Minister were killed as they rode on the streets of that city. The Ustachi were branded as the assassins and Pavelic in particular was convicted and condemned to death in absentia, although evidence is apparently lacking as to his actual participation in the event. He continued to live in Italy where the movement existed openly and with the approval of Mussolini who expected it to be helpful to him, if and when he entered the Balkans, especially Yugoslavia. The Ustachi also existed in Hungary where military cadres were trained for an eventual invasion of and institution of an independent Croatia.

Not much seems to have occurred with the Ustachi after King Alexander's assassination until after the outbreak of World War II when they became fully organized and in 1941 entered Croatia with the German forces. A new State of Croatia was created by the Germans and Pavelic was made the leader or "Führer." Ustachi military units became or acted like the German S. S. troops. The following quotation from the book written by Fitzroy Maclean entitled "eastern approaches" - Time/Life books - offers a brief, but vivid description of the organization. Although the account may appear exaggerated and over-dramatic, almost everything written about the Ustachi reflects their violent, inhuman activities. Maclean ought to have been well qualified to write a book about the Balkans and Russia as he was, among other things, British Commander of the Allied Military Mission attached to Marshall Tito during the last 13 months of the German occupation of Yugoslavia - having parachuted into that country.

Pavelic's accession to power had been followed by a reign of terror unprecedented even in the Balkans. He had a lot of old scores to settle. There were widespread

massacres and atrocities, especially in Bosnia where there was a large Serb population. Then to please his Nazi masters, Jews, and where he could find them, Communists and Communist sympathizers. Racial and political persecution was accompanied by equally ferocious religious persecution. The Ustachi were fervent Roman Catholics and now that they were in a position to do so they set about liquidating the Greek Orthodox Church in their domains. Orthodox villages were sacked and pillaged and their inhabitants massacred, old and young, men, women and children alike. Orthodox clergy were tortured and killed. Orthodox churches were

churches were burned down with the screaming congregation inside them.

desecrated and destroyed or burned down with the screaming congregation inside them (an Ustachi specialty this) and the Bosnian Moslems, equally fanatical and organized in special units by Pavelic and the Germans, helped by the Mufti in Jerusalem, joined in with gusto and refined cruelty all of their own, delighted at the opportunity of massacring Christians of whatever denomination.

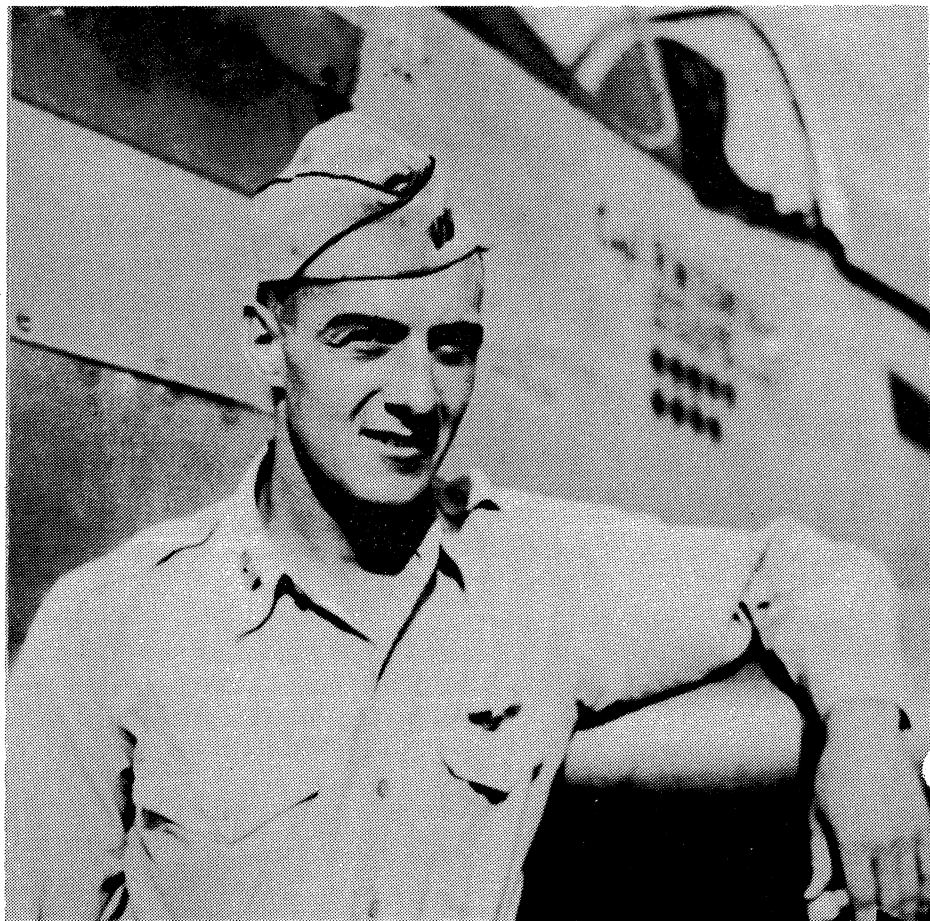
Pavelic must have led a charmed life

as he retreated along with the Germans and died in Italy in 1959 at the age of 70." *Thanks for the report Byron. A report of the Partisans and Chetniks in a later new letter.*

THE P-51 "THISIZIT" - Those of you who attended the reunion and saw the video on the Althoff crew, may recall the P-51 that gave cover on an early return in Yellow M, the Guardian Angel. It was number 7, "Thisizit." Pierre Kennedy remembered the plane when he was leafing through a book on the history of the 325th Fighter Group, "The Checkertail Clan." He spotted the plane and it gave the pilot's name, Capt. Richard Dunkin. Pierre sent the book to me and after a year's search I located Richard Dunkin. I thought you would enjoy the letter from Richard. "Thank you very much for sending me the video tape with the footage showing my P-51 #7, "Thisizit." I also enjoyed the shots of your crew on your way to Italy and on into combat. I was filled with a feeling of nostalgia as I watched each scene. I also enjoyed the video of the Me262 which I had not seen before, and your newsletters.

I was not flying "Thisizit" on 10 September 1944 and I'm not sure who was. It obviously was some fellow pilot from the

(Below - Capt. W. R. Dunkin by Thisizit)



317th squadron of the 325th Fighter Group, but I have no record of who it was. I have great respect for the courage shown by our "Big Friends" and I did have the opportunity of escorting crippled bombers back to Italy on a few occasions and it was a very heartwarming experience

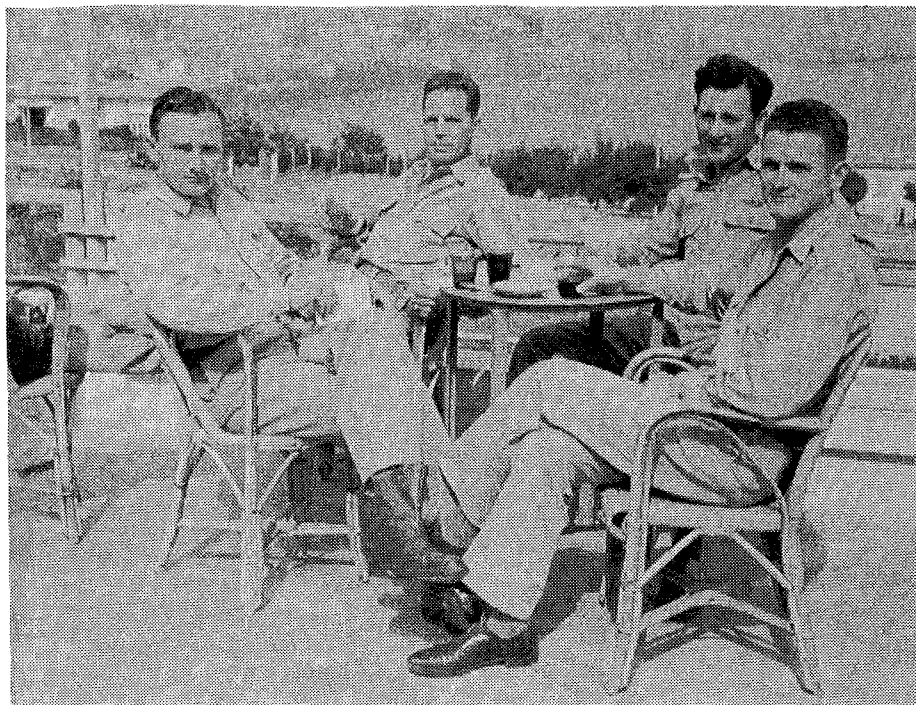
I have watched helplessly as many, many formations of 24's held steady courses and close formations through seas of flak on their way to and from the target area. Enemy fighters we could try to do something about, but we were powerless to help against the flak."

The 325th Fighter Group has had reunions every year since the war. Richard Dunkin was from Huntington, Indiana and graduated from single-engine advanced in the class of 43B. He began combat in Africa in May 1943 in P-40s and destroyed his first enemy aircraft over Sardinia. Then they changed to P-47s and he was credited for three more enemy aircraft. After a leave in the U.S. he returned to fly in P-51s and got five more enemy aircraft.

His record: 9 kills, 1 probable, 3 destroyed on the ground. He was awarded the Silver Star, Distinguished Flying Cross and Air Medal with 20 Oak leaf clusters.

THE PANTANELLA TOUR - I was aware of the planned tour by William Bruce of the 782nd. However, time did not permit a review of the travel agency and airline involved, so no recommendation was made in the last newsletter. I'm sure the group will have a grand time and we await some exciting tales from the world travelers. I understand three of our members have joined the sold out tour. At the reunion we'll have a discussion and determine any interest for any future tours.

HOW TIME FLIES - Recently a San Francisco Columnist, Herb Caen, had an item I thought I would share with you. "It's true, time flies, even if you're not having fun, and the older you get, the faster it goes. Take a year. Any year. When you're a kid, a year seems to last forever - golly, Christmas will NEVER get here! - whereas when you reach advanced maturity, whoosh, there goes another, causing a whiplash. The reason is that if you're, say, 10, a year is one-tenth of your life, but if you're 70, it's only 1/70th." *I read this to Agnes and her comment, "Are you trying to say we're getting old?"*



In the photo above L to R - Ollie Blankenship (Operations Officer), Leon Bell (Executive Officer), John Zitis (Supply Officer), and Harry Carl (Communications Officer). The war was over and the men are relaxing in Naples overlooking the harbor. Could that be rum and coca cola in preparation for Trinidad? Four fine looking officers!

PANTANELLA - WE FOUND IT! That is the exact location of Pantanella Air Base in 1944-5. As you are probably aware the air base was demolished after WWII and the area reverted to it's former use - agriculture land raising wheat and grapes. Most air bases have been completely eliminated without any building or structure giving a clue as to where the base actually was located. In our case the original Italian buildings that were taken over still remain, so the physical location is known. How to locate this on a map is another story.

In developing the history Harry Carl and I could not come up with a good dot on the map. Then one of the many listings of the squadron in military publications in trying to locate our members paid off. An English gentleman by the name of Craig Pugh called from England for information on the location of our base. Craig is completing a map of all 15th Air Force bases that were in Italy. We sent him photos of the base and other information, and have now received from Craig a detail of our base as it was in 1944.

STALAG LUFT IV & VI - If any Ex-POWs from this prison are interested in contacting friends while POW there, or joining their reunion contact Leonard Rose, 8103 E. 50th St., Indianapolis, IN 46226.

TEN MOST WANTED - Let's see what we can do to concentrate on ten of our men - Robert L. Bassinette, Oscar F. Adler, Oliver K. Ball, Ralford L. Crouch, Walter D. Day (Trenton NJ - a W. Day there with an unlisted phone), Albert B. Copeland, Richard L. Grantham, Howard R. Wilcox, Thomas G. Arthur, and Marion A. Pitts. Their last known addresses are on the roster. If you live in the area or were on their crew or in their section why not give it a try. Find out the latest and coordinate you efforts by contacting Walt Longacre.

THE STOCKADE - I don't suppose many of you know where it was! I was questioned about it some time ago and did not remember if there was one. I now have been informed there was a barbed wire stockade on the hill between the 781st orderly room and group headquarters. This was verified by someone who knew a former inmate. He was given a blanket, but no tent. Does anyone have a photo of the stockade?

WHERE DO WE ALL LIVE? - This question came up in a discussion with Charles McKenna, so here are several breakdowns for you - 543 live east of the Rockies and 108 west of the Rockies. Using the Mississippi River as a line 394 live east of the Mississippi, 257 to the west. California has the most for one state with 62.



WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Alvin J. Marchbanks, 1900 E. Willow St., Anaheim, CA 92805, Phone 714 535 1670.

Paul Hosier, c/o Hicks Creek, SRC 8410, Palmer, Alaska 99645.

Stephen Tabory, 847 Jennings Road, Fairfield, CT 06490.

George W. Sinner, 13 Elizabeth St., Milford, DE 19963, Phone 302 422 5577.

Emory E. Hall, 3001 Holly Dr., Las Vegas, NV 89106.

Andrew Dobeck, 50 Bassett St. Apt. A315, New Britain, CT 06051 Phone 203 225 8534.

Frank Griffen, 122 Lincoln St., Revere, MA 02151.

Joseph F. Ferguson, 2105 N. Springhouse Lane, Aston, PA 19014, Phone 215 497 4542.

Dick Krekel, N 67 W 22208, Sussex, WI 53089, Phone 414 246 6770. **Benny Naticchioni**, 29 Westfield Rd., Natick, MA 01760, Phone 617 655 0482.

Harold Wortham, Rt 1 Box 105B, Eureka Springs, AR 72632.

Albert W. Nagel, 18601 Newland St., #61, Huntington Beach, CA 92646. Phone 714 968-7555.

Clifford Bronson - c/o Joyce King, PO Box 92, Kihei, Maui, Hawaii 96753.

Stephen Tabory (nose gunner on Billgers crew) had been listed as Frank Tabori. His address was 847 Jennings Road and Walt located him through the

Chamber of Commerce living at 803 Jennings Road. Stephen was Billger's nose gunner.

Walt notified me that he had Paul Hosier's address in Alaska. A few days later Bruce Miller wrote that he had been in contact with Paul and received a letter from him. Paul states that he is really isolated in Alaska - he needs a float plane in the summer and a snowmobile in the winter to get to civilization. Another armament man back in the fold.

Alvin Marchbanks (Tanenbaum top gunner) took a little more digging. Here is the job Walt did on Alvin - a letter to the postmaster, no results - a letter to occupant at the address, no reply - a letter to the Veterans Service, no reply - the same to the American Legion, no reply - the Mayor replied he could not locate Alvin - the high school did not reply - finally a newspaper article located him.

George Sinner (Kennedy's navigator) wasn't easy either. A number of members have been looking for him, but Walt's contact with the Chamber of Commerce in a city that George once lived in found his sister who gave George's address. And Emory Hall (communications) writes that friends of his in Ogden, Utah, contacted him when they saw an ad in the newspaper. Emory lives in Las Vegas and he's happy to have been located - I'd say it's the best luck he's had in Las Vegas.

Pierre J.J. Kennedy went through all the Connecticut phone books to find Andrew Dobeck (was Dobeck). Andrew was McDaniel's top gunner.

Joe Ferguson was located for Walt Longacre by the Chamber of Commerce. Joe was another top gunner - on Rae Branch's crew

One of our ads in the VFW magazine caught the eye of Frank Griffen from armament section. We have located very few this way and are always happy that all the notices sent out pay off once in awhile.

Oliver Graham's wife, Ruth, wrote friends in Milwaukee who located Dick Krekel. They also located John Hartman, but he turned out to be the wrong Hartman.

Benny Naticchioni was located by Walt by writing to the Chamber of Commerce in Farmingham, MA.

And another one Walt worked on, but was not ready to give up. Harold Wortham took nine letters to find. Walt sent letters to five different Worthams in the phone book! They are still out there men! Harold said he moved at least a dozen times and lived all over the U. S.

Once in a great while they come easy - I received a letter from Albert Nagel (Intelligence Section Chief) after he had a chance meeting with a 783rd member, Ken Lindow, and Ken gave Albert my address. We appreciate the assistance of Ken Lindow.

Clifford Bronson took a year to find. He had worked for some newspapers in California right after the war, then moved to France. Harry Carl had corresponded with him, then lost him in the move to France. Letters to the California newspapers did not bring success. Nor did Ben Donahue's inquiry to the University he attended. Some time ago I got the information from Harry Carl on his California newspaper job and finally found a man that had worked with Cliff. He referred me to someone in Hawaii that should have his current address. I received a reply and learned Cliff lost the sight of both his eyes and is in a rest home. He enjoys receiving letters, so please write to him if you knew him and Joyce King will take care of the correspondence. From several of his friends I understand he was highly respected in the squadron. Joyce indicated he might like to attend the reunion.

We received a few tips after the roster was sent out. There must be more information on those not located. Can you help??

GROUP REPORT - The roster stands at 28 in folded wings and 29 located. Since I have no addresses of any kind on those not located it doesn't look like there will be much further success here unless someone comes up with some leads. How about it group men - anyone have any WWII addresses or any information to find some of your comrades?

A number of group men sent in

Walt Longacre continues to do a terrific job locating 781st members. In the photo below, taken during the last reunion, shows Walt (on right) receiving a plaque for his outstanding job. Walt has the dedication and is putting forth the effort!



comments and donations. In December I received a letter from Harold Bullock, group operations officer. I had flown right seat for Harold on one mission, so we exchanged information and video tapes. Harold went back in three years after WWII and spent a total of 24 years in the Air Force then spent 15 years in NASA at Houston. He is now retired to the life of tennis, an African safari, etc. He indicated interest in a future reunion - why not make it San Antonio Harold?

Some men like Ray Tyler, Jim Wray, etc. served some time both in the 781st and group. We keep them on the 781st roster if they started out there.

Our group tail insignia has been made into a pin and will be handed out to all who attend - group and squadron men.

Five group men already registered, so why not join your comrades for this first group assembly since WWII! Who knows when the next one will be??

SAVE ON AIR FARES - Special fares have been negotiated with Delta Airlines. They are forty (40) percent off Delta's unrestricted round trip coach rates within the United States. In addition, provisions have been made for a 5 percent discount off most Delta published round trip fares providing the rules and conditions of the air fares are met. Some promotional fares discounted greater than 75 percent off may not be included. To take advantage of this follow these steps:

1. Call Delta or have your travel agent call 1-800-221-1212.
2. Refer to Special Meetings Network reference file number Q01237.
3. In order to take advantage of these fares, you must travel between September 11 - 21, 1988.
4. These discounts are available only through Delta's toll free number.

Group personnel or anyone traveling to San Antonio for the reunion can receive these special fares - just refer to the 781st Bomb Squadron and refer to the Network reference file number Q01237.

Prisoner of War Medals - The Secretary of Defense has announced that the Prisoner of War Medal is now available for issue. The medal will be issued at no cost to any person taken prisoner of war and held captive after April 5, 1917.

Former prisoners of war, or their next of kin, may apply for the medal by writing to the military records center - Air Force Reference Branch, National Personnel Records Center, 9700 Page Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63132-5199. Application forms are available from the military service or a variety of veterans organizations. A toll free number, 1-800-873-3768, has been established to take requests for applicat-

ion forms and provide information about the medal. Applications are to be made on DD Form 2510, Feb 88.

Those of you who apply kindly let us know your results so that we can inform others.

Below are some photos of Reunion 87. A great time was had by all. The yellow cards are being received daily from your comrades in arms who are looking forward to another grand reunion in San Antonio!



PRISONER OF WAR EXPERIENCES by Pierre J. J. Kennedy. What became of the 781st Bomb Squadron crewmen who survived being shot down? The following account tells of a few happenings experienced by a downed airman. Some events here may bring back memories to other ex-POW's of the 781st.

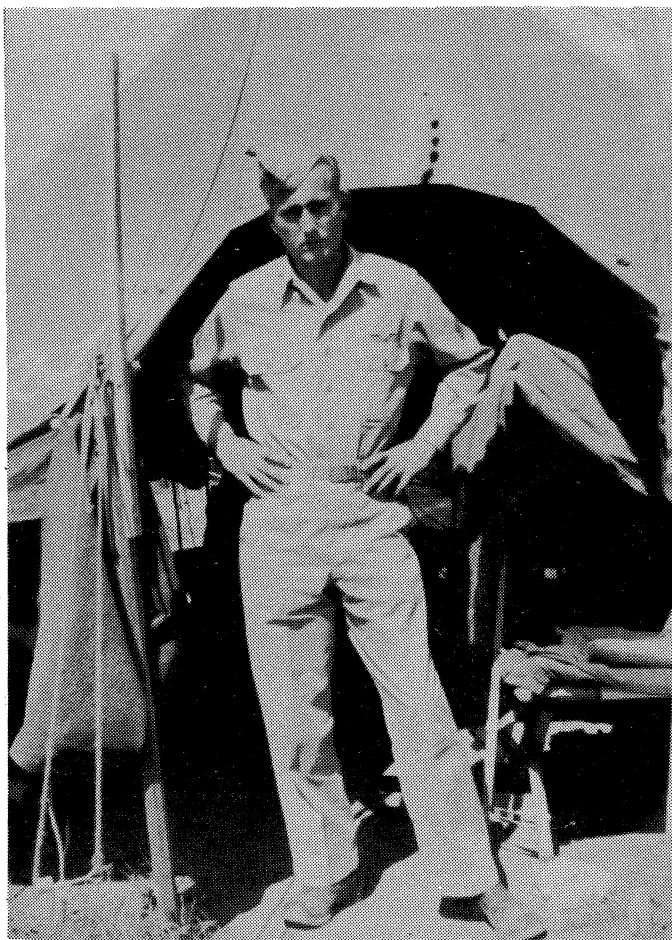
YELLOW L, piloted by Lt. Alexander Lovey, was just starting the bomb run when I saw a few flak bursts behind our number five position. The black puffs were not close, but the German batteries did have our altitude. Then came a burst which I hardly noticed back in my tail turret. It sounded up near the nose of the ship. I heard someone say on the intercom, "He's O.K.," then silence. There was no alarm sounded by the pilots, but I sensed something was wrong. I looked up through the plexi-glass and saw other B-24's flying away at a crazy angle. Actually they were in level flight and we were heading downward.

I had always kept the curved tail turret doors open so that if I turned my head I could see a little of what was going on in the waist of the plane. I turned and saw the crewmen in the waist hurriedly putting on their parachutes. Then I knew that we had been hit, and I had to vacate the turret fast. I removed my oxygen mask first - a mistake - then the flak helmet. I disconnected the mic cord and heated suit cord. The hydraulic power was still on and, while getting out of my seat, I accidentally hit the control handle which turned the turret and jammed my left leg. Something told me I would never get out but would go down, or blow up, with the ship. I freed myself and got out on the catwalk.

By now the plane was shaking violently and I had trouble staying on my feet. I

I saw flames from the right wing gas tanks belching back beyond the waist window

jerked the red cord on the flak suit which made the suit fall off, then picked up my chest chute, snapped it on the harness rings, and grabbed my GI shoes which were laced together. I had always kept the chute and shoes tucked in the sides of the catwalk as tail gunners had been instructed to do. (Some airmen lost one or



Pierre J. J. Kennedy - Pantanella 1944

both flying boots when their parachute popped open). I stumbled forward to the camera hatch and saw a hand disappear through the open hatch. Then the door fell shut. There was no one left in the waist, and smoke was coming in. I looked out and saw flames from the right wing gas tanks belching back beyond the waist window.

By this time I was groggy from the lack of oxygen and hardly remember opening the hatch door. I lowered myself through the opening and for some reason tried to hold on the hatch edge. There was a terrific pull on my legs, and suddenly I was blown free. I fell free for a long time before pulling the chute cord as I was afraid of hitting other bombers on the way down. There was considerable noise from the flak guns on the ground and projectiles zipping past. Then all was quiet, and I could see our planes disappearing from view. The parachute, which had scared me to death when it crackled open, and I thought the seams had split, now looked beautiful up there. I looked around and saw about six other flyers coming down in their chutes.

As I approached the ground I could make out a town through the haze, and I could hear children singing. It was so unreal that I wondered if I was alive or dead. Suddenly the ground rushed up

toward me and I struck the earth. Luckily I had landed in a newly dug potato patch. I was trying to gather up the parachute to hide it when a bullet zipped past. Three German soldiers approached me with rifles raised. One asked, "Pistole?" I shook my head in the negative. He ordered me to walk in front of them. When they stopped by a river bank, I was able to discard my flying boots and electric shoes and put on my GI shoes.

Our target that day, 13 October 1944, had been the Blechhammer oil refineries in Eastern Germany. How I wished to be back up in the sky with the Squadron heading home to Italy! I could not believe that I was down in enemy territory. It had happened so quickly. Later, as we walked down a road, two truckloads of British POW workmen rolled by. They noticed my flying outfit and gave me the thumbs up sign and shouted, "Keep your chin up, Yank!"

During the next few days the Germans collected captured airmen. I met Walter Clausen (nose gunner) and Lowell Lunn (engineer), both on **YELLOW L**. Sometimes we were together and other times separated. I was transported by horse drawn wagon, truck

How I wished to be back up in the sky with the squadron heading home to Italy!

and then by train from Breslau through Berlin to Frankfurt Am Main, then to Oberursel, the interrogation center. On the train some of us talked of escaping, but the guards who understood English were always close by, and there was no chance. Despite Allied bombing, trains were operating and always filled to capacity. Our guards commandeered space whenever necessary.

In Berlin, my small group crossed the city by trolley car to another railroad station. Here I saw German soldiers wearing arm bands denoting the Herman Goering Division and Afrikorps. I began to feel better near German soldiers as they did not bother us, but the civilians always looked menacingly at us.

At Oberursel, I saw Leonard Goldstein (radio operator) entering the camp as my group left. From Oberursel, I went to Wetzlar, the Dulag Luft or transient camp. After a few days there, 80 of us

were put aboard one car on a train bound for our permanent camp. While passing through Hannover, we were told to pull down the window shades so civilians would not see us and attack the car. Four days later, after crossing Berlin again, our train arrived at Kiefheide, Pomerania, located about 30 miles from the Baltic Sea. We were greeted by some 40 new guards and 15 guard dogs. We began to march from the station to our camp, Stalag Luft 4, at Gross Tychow, deep in a forest. I wondered why the dogs growled at us. Later I found out. German guards had unleashed their dogs on groups of POW's before our arrival, and, as the men ran the three miles to camp, the dogs had chased and bitten them, and guards had jabbed some airmen with bayonets. These airmen had come from Luft 6 at Heydekrug, East Prussia.

The 10,000 American and Royal Air Force enlisted men at Luft 4 learned to endure the hunger, cold, and monotony of this camp. The German rations included barley soup, potatoes, cabbage, and sometimes meat of unknown origin. Occasionally, we received a Red Cross parcel. We had to turn in each empty can which the Germans counted. Often they said the count was low, so either our rations were cut or we were given fewer lumps of coal for the small stove in our room. We were allowed to write a quota of letters and cards home, but I never received any mail while a POW. The high point of each day was the BBC report on the war. Someone had made a clandestine radio, and an airman would come to the barracks with the news. In December 1944, we heard of the Battle of the Bulge and the German advance, and our hopes dimmed for an early end to the war.

Soldiers sometimes groan about taking shots, but not at Luft 4. Our flight surgeon, Capt. Leslie Caplan (449 BG 719 BS 15 AF), had collected a small supply of typhus vaccine. One day hundreds of men stood in the snow in below zero weather waiting to enter the barracks where he and his medics gave shots with half doses of the vaccine until there was none left.

In January, prisoners of war from other camps began arriving at Luft 4 due to the Russian advance in the east. Also hundreds of sick and wounded POW's were shipped out by train to other camps. The remaining men were considered able bodied.

On the morning of 6 February 1945 the 2,500 POW's in Compound C were ordered to evacuate Luft 4. We were not surprised as other compounds had already left. We had sewn together pieces



Pierre today - 44 years later

of towel to make a tote sack and shoulder harness. We put our few belongings into the sack, then tied up blankets with string, and carried this bedroll on our backs. We were each given a Red Cross parcel on the way out.

As we marched away, I looked back at Luft 4, at the barbed wire fences, guard towers, and barracks which had been our home. I tucked in my scarf, turned up my coat collar, and pulled the wool cap down over my ears to ward off snow seeping down on us from fir trees lining the road. The only sounds were the rattle of tin cans and homemade grills attached to the men's sacks and the crunch of GI shoes as we plodded through snow.

At first, the Germans pushed us at a

One day we marched 25 miles to Swinemünde

fast pace westward. One day we marched 25 miles to Swinemünde. At Wollin, German civilians and soldiers were desperately erecting tank barricades. Others were scanning the road behind us with binoculars looking for the Russians. We ran through cities that had bomb damage. Our guards always told civilians that we were American infantry, never Air Force. With very little food, men became exhausted and sat at the roadside in the snow. The guards shouted at them and threatened them. I don't know what happened to these men. When our legs became stiff and our knees locked, we cut tree branches, used them for canes or crutches, and hobbled along to keep up with the main column. Capt. Caplan sometimes was able to get wagons and his medics helped the sick men aboard. He

tried to get the worst cases to a German hospital. He carried what little medicine he had on his person. This doctor was later to write of his experiences in "Death March Medic" (Air Force Magazine, November, 1945, and Air Force Diary, Simon & Shuster, N.Y., 1947). He also testified at the War Crimes Office in 1947.

At Parchim, the German captain in charge of our group, who rode in an ox drawn wagon, led us to a supply station where we each received one loaf of bread, a week's food ration. Sometimes we were given potatoes or soup. I received two Red Cross parcels on the march.

On starting the march, we had been told that it would last three days, and we would then reach a factory and stay there. Instead, we were on the march for 86 days and covered some 500 miles. Some young flyers, cold, exhausted, and sick, who

Some young flyers, cold, exhausted, and sick, who could march no longer, died along the way.

could march no longer, died along the way.

Our 2,500 men of compound C were divided up into "splinter" groups which traveled different routes. Somehow the days and weeks passed. Our eyes stayed fixed on the steps of the men ahead. At night, if lucky, we slept in large barns. If there were no barns, we slept outside. We spent two days riding in the infamous 40 and 8 boxcars, traveling from Ebstorf to Stalag IIB at Fallingbommel. Sixty men were crammed into each car, so we took turns standing and sitting. We each received one half loaf of bread and a small piece of butter.

We stayed in English tents at Fallingbommel and then were on the road again, now with older guards, some of whom soon dropped by the roadside. These were replaced with younger German soldiers.

We traded watches, cigarettes, or a sweater for bread, lard, or matches with civilians, guards, or slave laborers. We stole vegetables from farmers' storage and eggs from chicken coops. Sometimes men could grab dog food from a guard dog's plate. Two POW's were tied to a tree one night for stealing apples.

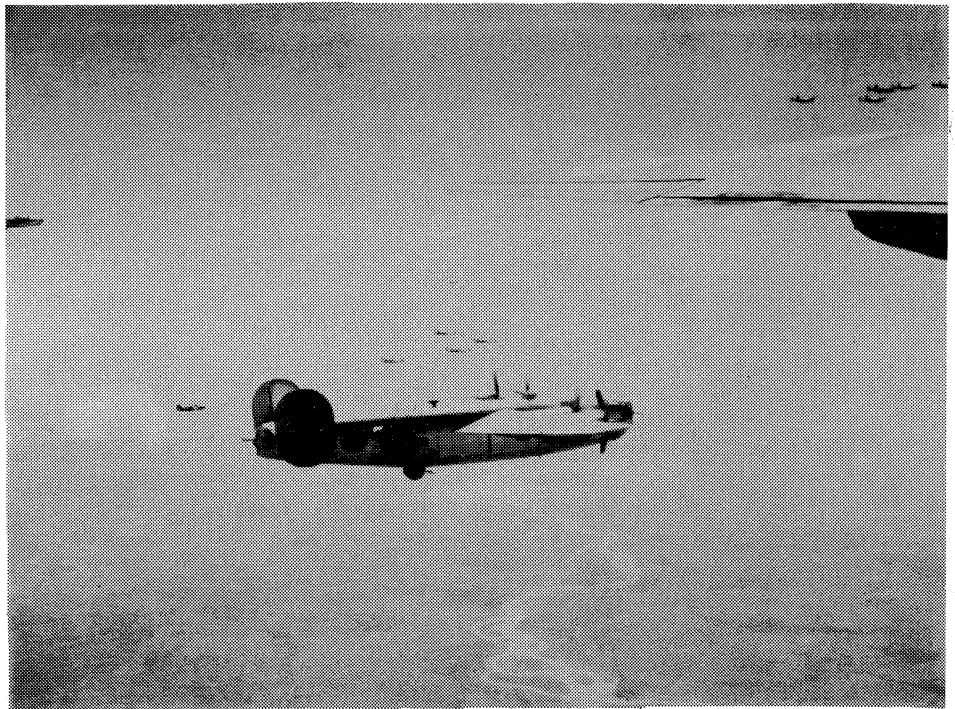
When early spring arrived and the snow began to disappear, a couple of us eluded guards and went to a pasture where we scraped salt from a cow's salt block as we had no salt. We usually stayed at large farms so we would search

through wheelbarrows and wagons for frozen carrots or potatoes. We collected wood, made a fire, and cooked over grills. We were filthy dirty, had lice, and most men suffered constantly from dysentery. One spring morning I broke through the ice on a stream and washed my hands, a simple act that seemed like a small victory.

At one town when an air raid alarm sounded, the streets were deserted since civilians were in shelters. Someone threw two loaves of bread out of a second-story window to POW's at the front of the column. Another day, an old lady stood in the rain on a village corner, and, as the column approached, she opened her apron which held several slices of bread. I was near the front this time so I took some bread and said, "Danke." German soldiers threatened the woman, but she stayed there, glaring at them. At a large farm, the German proprietor donated milk to our men as his supply route had been cut off and the milk would have gone to waste. At another place, the farmer gave us lots of potatoes. We cooked some and saved the rest. A French laborer told me that the German had a son who was a POW in America.

In late March, we had crossed over a high bridge above the Elbe River, going west. A month later, as the Allies were storming into Western Germany, our group was turned around, and we headed back to the east. One morning we reached the bank of the Elbe, and I climbed into a barge for the trip across back to the east. We unloaded on the far shore, and the barge returned for another load of POW's. When the loaded barge was in mid-stream, three Hurricanes came flying up the river on the deck. Luckily, the pilots held their fire - they must have been briefed on POW's in the area. We began to see more Allied aircraft in the days following. We felt it would not be long now.

On 2 May 1945, our group was liberated by a spearhead of the British 2nd Army near Büchen. Their tanks were a welcome sight, and finally we had some good food, but the war was not over. We could hear small arms fire and artillery in the distance. As we hurriedly left the area an endless line of British tanks was streaming up the road headed for battle. We threw newly obtained packs of cigarettes and boxes of tea up to the tank crews as they roared past. We were to be with the British for a week. They burned our clothes, and deloused us. I was issued a brown tankers uniform. We were transported to an airfield near Soltau, and after Royal Marines unloaded from a C-



The 465th Bomb Group on it's way to a target flying B-24 Liberators

47, we climbed in for a flight to Brussels. VE Day came, the war ended in Europe, and I was in Namur, Belgium, back with American forces. From there I rode a train to Camp Lucky Strike near Dieppe, France, and after a few days boarded a ship near Le Havre for the voyage home. **THE CREW ON YELLOW L 13 OCTOBER 1944,** Pilot - 1st Lt. Alexander Lovey, Co-Pilot - 2nd Lt. Raymond F. Morse, Navigator - 2nd LT. Donald E. Toomey, Engineer - T/Sgt. Lowell M. Lunn, Radio Operator - Sgt. Leonard J. Goldstein, Ball Gunner - S/Sgt. Harold W. Grant, Nose Gunner - S/Sgt. Walter Clausen, Top Turret Gunner - S/Sgt. Charles D. Hudson, Tail Gunner - Sgt. Pierre J. J. Kennedy. Lovey and Morse were KIA and the balance of the crew were POW. Goldstein and Kennedy (from James C. Althoff's original crew) and Clausen were reunited for the first time since the war at the 781st Bomb Squadron reunion in Colorado Springs, September 1986. "

Pierre's story leaves out a few items. On Friday 13 October 1944 Pierre and Leonard Goldstein were scheduled for rest camp at Capri, but the orders were cancelled to fly this mission. I flew another crew, saw the plane go down, but did not know two of my crew were in the plane. It was another one of those maximum effort missions which were put together at the last minute and had many changes in order to put up six boxes instead of four. After the war I talked to Pierre and Leonard on the phone and then lost contact.

Pierre was located when he replied to an ad on the 781st in the Briefing Journal put

out by the Liberator Club. It was before our first reunion and he served on the board of directors for the first year and helped out a great deal on finding many former comrades. Pierre then remembered that Leonard Goldstein had vacationed in Miami, he checked that phone book and located Leonard.

I questioned Pierre about the pilots and about the probable reason why they did not get out. Pierre said he did not know what was going on up front, but while a prisoner of war at Luft 4 he met Charles Hudson, the top turret gunner, who said that after they were hit the pilots, Lovey and Morse, had left their seats and were preparing to leave the ship when they told Hudson to jump first from the bomb bay. Hudson jumped but remembered nothing else until he found himself walking around, dazed, in some woods and getting captured.

Most likely the plane blew up as Hudson began his jump and the pilots were trapped in the ensuing inferno.

In the Missing Air Crew Report it states that YELLOW L crashed and Lovey and Morse were recovered and buried at Friedenau.

If you enjoy reading the experiences of Pierre and others, and have not sent in your experiences, please do so.

TODAYS CHUCKLE

They call marriage an institution because that's where you feel you've been committed to.