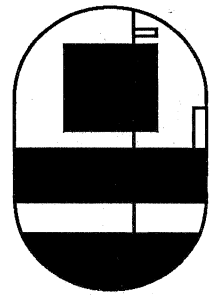




PANTANELLA NEWS



APRIL 1991

Published by 781st Bomb Squadron Association ©

NUMBER 24

Our First Group CO Lt. Gen. Elmer J. Rogers, Jr., USAF Ret.

The 781st Bomb Squadron and the 465th Bomb Group had an excellent record during training and during combat. The record was the result of great leadership, the best there was. The groundwork was laid by the original cadre. Its leader was 465th Bomb Group Commanding Officer Colonel Elmer J. Rogers, Jr. Original members of the squadron know his record, but to the replacement crews you may only have heard of him.

Colonel Rogers began with the 465th Bomb Group when it was activated by General Order #78, Par 1, Headquarters 2nd Air Force, dated 29 May 1943. The following story is from the microfilm we obtained from the Archives.

On 1 February 1944 Col. Rogers with Major Lokker as co-pilot and a crew of eight others departed from Army Air Base, McCook, Nebraska for Lincoln Nebraska, the staging point for the Air Echelon, thus leading the group on the first leg of its journey overseas. The Air Echelon moved from McCook in increments of ten or eleven airplanes so that in six days the entire sixty-two aircraft had advanced to Lincoln.

At Lincoln the airplanes of the Group were given a thorough inspection, cleaning, and flight check by the 12th Heavy Bombardment Processing Group, preparing admirably the aircraft for their long journey to the theater. The personnel of the 2th Heavy Bombardment Processing Group per-

formed their task with meticulous care, no detail being too small to escape attention.

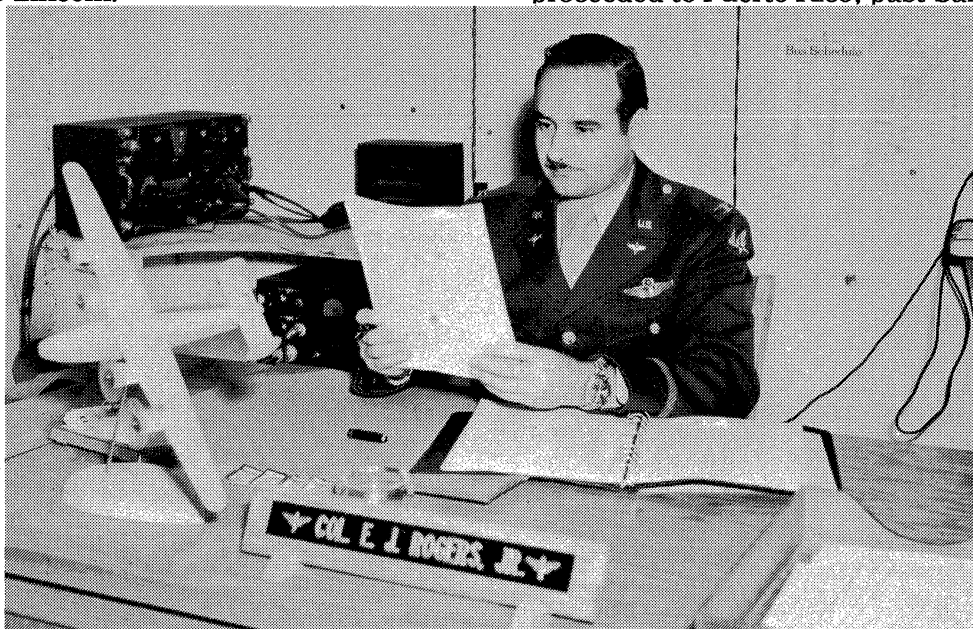
Before his departure Colonel Rogers assembled all the pilots of the Group and talked to them for an hour on the emphasis to be placed on particular items the observance of which would contribute largely to the safe conduct of their journey. He touched upon such matters as adequate sleep, abstinence from intoxicating liquors, avoidance of venereal infection, safeguards against malaria, problems of navigation, instrument flying, and particular items to be checked in the care and servicing of the airplane.

On 7 February 1944, Colonel Rogers departed Lincoln, Nebraska leading seventeen airplanes which were dispatched at two or three minute intervals. The flight to West Palm Beach, Florida was made non-stop without incident in seven hours and thirty minutes.

At this place the aircraft came under the control of the ATC. Following inspection by that agency, checking of overwater safety equipment and thorough briefing, Colonel Rogers departed at 0230, 10 February 1944 for Weller Field, Trinidad, leading a flight of twelve aircraft of the Group. Aircraft flew in groups of three, close enough to be in visual contact and in radio contact. Daylight found the advance elements of the flight over the northern edge of the Dominican Republic. The flight proceeded to Puerto Rico, past San Juan, thence to St.

Lucia and to Trinidad, where a landing was made ten hours and thirty minutes after take-off.

The servicing of Colonel Rogers' airplane disclosed a very serious leak in the gasoline tank for the No. 2 engine, necessitating a repair by the sub-depot. He was loathe to delay his own movement for the week that would be required to affect repair. However, one of the pilots, Lt. Hof-



Lt. General Elmer J. Rogers, Jr. USAF Ret. shown here as Col. Rogers, Commanding Officer of the 465th Bomb Group (H).

ferman, was grounded temporarily because of a severe cold and difficulty with his inner ear. The combination of these two unfortunates permitted Colonel Rogers to proceed on his journey the next day. He and his crew, together with Lt. Hoffer's crew, labored far into the night transferring equipment and baggage. The next morning at 0630, 12 February 1944, Colonel Rogers departed for Belem, Brazil, leading a flight of ten aircraft of the Group. Two B-25 airplanes were down along this route. Colonel Rogers was required to search for

them and flew at 600 feet altitude over the route dispatching the other aircraft of his flight at the 9000 foot level. The clouds were low and rain squalls were encountered frequently.

The microfilm was partially destroyed and the balance of the detail of the flight to Brazil, then to Dakar is missing. We will pick up the flight as it nears Marrakech, Morocco.

The flight emerged from the pass and began a slow decent which ended upon landing at Marrakech, Morocco, eight hours and thirty minutes after the departure from Dakar. Two other B-24s of the Group accompanied Colonel Rogers on this flight.

Four days were spent at Marrakech due to low ceiling and severe icing conditions along the next leg of the route. On 19 February Colonel Rogers departed Marrakech leading eight planes of the Group and arrived at Oudna, just south of Tunis, after a seven hour and five minute flight at low altitude through numerous rain squalls and under extremely low clouds. On 21 February Colonel Rogers departed Oudna and flew alone to Bari, Italy, where he reported into the Air Force. He spent a day in the A-3 section observing the planning effort which goes into the preparation of a mission. He then flew to Foggia where he spent a day in the headquarters of the 5th Wing attempting to learn as much as possible of the subsequent planning accomplished there in the execution of the Wing part of the Air Force mission. From this place he reported to the 2nd Bombardment Group where he was greeted by the commanding Officer Colonel Rice, a friend of long standing. On 25 February Colonel Rogers accompanied the 2nd Bombardment Group which that day led the 5th Wing in the Air Force Mission against the aircraft factory at Regensburg, Germany. He rode in the nose of the airplane to observe the degree of coordination affected among the pilot, the navigator and the bombardier and in addition manned one of the front guns. The weather was unfavorable at the base, but was CAVU at the target. The aircraft of the 5th Wing took

off from numerous bases in the vicinity of Foggia and spiralled upward through ragged and broken clouds and assembled on top. It was during this assembly period that part of the main force became detached so that forty three airplanes of the Wing proceeded to the target. The Wing climbed to 15,000 feet and held this altitude for some time to conserve oxygen. As the head of the Adriatic was reached the Wing climbed to 21,000 feet. Just before the Alps were reached the B-17s of the 5th Wing passed over and just behind a large formation of B-24s which were proceeding to the target over a slightly different route. At this point they were attacked by approximately 50 enemy fighters including Me 109s and Me 210s. Two of the B-24's airplanes were shot down in rapid succession and burst into flames as they struck the tall slopes of the Alps.

The B-24s had fighter escort and as the courses converged the enemy fighters remained with the B17s to press home their attacks with ever increasing and aggressiveness and ferocity. Diversionary attacks were made 12 o'clock from slightly below and from 10 o'clock and 2 o'clock in a diving turn. Rockets were fired from planes which approached from 6 o'clock and 7 o'clock by single airplanes. Yet other attacks were made by four or six airplanes abreast firing 20 mm cannons. Still other fighters opened up six or eight at a time to press home attacks on aircraft on the fringe of the formation up to within fifty yards of the Bombers.

Some fighters in their head-on attacks employed balls of fire which blazed through the air leaving a trail of bluish white smoke. The top turret gunner of the lead airplane kept up a running fire of comment to mark the progress of the battle. As time went on his report became almost monotonous in this fashion, "Fighter at 6 o'clock, level; he's coming in; get him; B-17 on fire; B-17 going down; fighters coming in at 6 o'clock." Colonel Rogers saw one B-17 received a direct hit from rocket fire and break in two. An ME-109 pressed home his attack from

781st Bomb Squadron Association
2 Mount Vernon Lane
Atherton, CA 94027
(415) 325-8356

Officers

James C. Althoff, President
Harry S. Carl, Vice-President
Walter M. Longacre, Vice-President
O. J. Cowart, Jr., Treasurer
Ben Donahue, Secretary

Board of Directors

James C. Althoff
Harry S. Carl
O.J. Cowart, Jr.
Charles F. McKenna III, Emeritus
Jack Van Slyke
Kenneth E. Sutton
Stanley J. Winkowski
John Zadrozny

Chaplain

Roy N. Byrd

Editor

James C. Althoff
2 Mount Vernon Lane
Atherton, CA 94027
(415) 325-8356

Historian

Harry S. Carl
550 Creek Road
Chadds Ford, PA 19317
(215) 388-2562

Treasurer

O. J. Cowart, Jr.
1003 Londonderry Lane.
Friendswood, TX 77546
(713) 482-1884

781st BOMB SQUADRON

as part of the 465th Bomb Group, Fifteenth Air Force, flew B-24 Liberators from Pantanella Airfield located near Canosa, Italy, during WW11 (1944-45). During it's 191 missions over Southern Europe it dropped thousands of tons of bombs, shot down 23 enemy aircraft (German) and received two Distinguished Unit Citations.

12 o'clock against the lead plane. Colonel Rogers could see his 20 mm cannon fire exploding just off his right wing tip and then saw the fire enter the cockpit of the B-17 flying on his wing and saw that ship go down immediately.

A little beyond the Alps these fifty fighters withdrew and another group of fifty climbed up to renew the attack with eager viciousness. By the time the target was within sight thirteen (13) B-17s had been lost to these fighter attacks. As the target was approached a great mushrooming cloud of black smoke marked their protecting barrage of flak. As the B-17s drew closer, predicted flak fire began to follow the course of the bombers and the enemy fighters withdrew to a circle outside the flak area. It seemed a relief

to get into the flak since it brought cessation of fighter attack. At this point Colonel Rogers observed a B-17 with its landing gear extended, indicating that it could fight no more. A JU-88 seemed to be attempting to force the airplane down to a landing on the snow-covered landscape far below. The bomber descended until it was in an advantageous position near a second aircraft factory east of the town, around which were bomb strikes marking the snow from a previous mission. Here the B-17 pilot salvoed his bombs and continued on his course earthward, demonstrating a dogged determination to derive profit from the placement of his bombs.

As the lead plane turned left from the target, the navigator called sharply to the pilot to watch out for another airplane. It was a badly hit B-17 from the rear position of the formation. It was flying on automatic pilot and crew members were tumbling out, abandoning ship. The airplane passed just under Colonel Rogers' plane and entered the flak areas which was bursting in a line to his right. One of the chutes was

struck by a burst of flak, flared briefly in flame, the crew member plummeting earthward like a stone.

It was at this point that Colonel Rogers noted an ME-109 lurking just outside the flak area apparently waiting his opportunity to attack the airplanes coming off the target. Colonel Rogers seized a chance to fire a short burst without deflection,



Col. Rogers inspecting the troops

noted the enemy stagger momentarily and then went into a spin to the right. He watched the ship spin through three or four turns, then lost it for a few moments, searched again and saw the ship strike the ground with a burst of flame and a column of black smoke. Colonel Rogers is being recommended for the Air Medal for this victory.

Remnants of the Wing turned homeward with fighters snapping viciously at the tail of the formation like wolves after a herd of moose. Suddenly the top turret gunner called that two airplanes had collided severely and were going down, no chutes coming from either plane. Apparently one B-17 had lost an engine and had attempted to restart it. With suddenly added power in a ship trimmed to fly on three engines it was believed that he swerved sharply and the collision resulted.

As the Alps were approached, Colonel Rogers noted a B-17 flying alone far below the formation and just clearing the ridges of the rugged terrain. It was apparent that the pilot of the crippled airplane maintained his ship only with the great-

est difficulty. The battle damage, a left wing tip shot away, was plainly visible from the lead ship. Over the middle of the Alps, the crew apparently believed the ship was doomed and tumbled out to descend upon the forbidding bleak and snow-capped slopes of the Alps. The pilot, co-pilot and engineer remained with the aircraft and brought it safely back to Base.

Fighters continued to attack the formation until it had passed Pola, then the aircraft were free to make their long, sloping descent back to Base.

Of the forty-three B-17s which penetrated enemy territory unescorted by friendly fighters on this mission, twenty-one were lost. The Navigator's log indicated that the Wing was under attack by approximately one hundred fifty fighters for a period of one hour and thirty-five minutes.

The next combat mission flown by Col. Rogers on March 2, 1944 will appear in the next newsletter. After being severely wounded his plane goes down at sea and Col. Rogers nearly loses his life.

REUNION '92 TO BE HELD AT OMAHA, NE

Sept. 10-13, 1992, is the date and the beautiful Marriott Hotel is the site for our '92 reunion. It is easy to get to and has plenty of free parking. Across the street is a major shopping center. And loads of restaurants nearby. Everything to make '92 another great reunion.

Plans call for a visit to SAC Headquarters at Offutt Air Force Base to visit their underground facilities. Also a museum nearby with lots of aircraft. And we will have a lot of activity at our hotel and some surprises as usual.

So plan to attend the '92 reunion. Relive some of your days at Pantanella with your WWII comrades.

Our Reunion '92
Is a must for you!



Denley "Tommy" Thompson

After graduation from high school I joined the Army Air Corps in Columbus, Ohio November, 1940 and was sent to Maxwell Field, Alabama for boot training on Army pay of \$21 per month. From there I went to France Field, Panama. I was assigned to the 3rd Bomb Squadron, 6th Bomb Group. We had six Boeing B-18 two engine bombers for the whole group.

I started my career as a typing clerk and just wasn't content with that so I was assigned to technical supply, which was supplying parts for airplanes, and I really enjoyed that type of work. I was in Panama when Pearl Harbor was attacked. France Field only had the six bombers and a couple of AT-6s used as tow target planes. The next day the airfield was filled with pursuit planes, P-40s flown down from the States. The 3rd Bomb Squadron was then sent to Rio Hato, Panama for combat training. After that part of the 6th Bomb Group went to Ecuador.

My squadron, the 3rd Bomb Squadron, went to Galapagos Island, which is about 800 miles off the coast of Ecuador 2 degrees below the equator. We spent 11 months at Seymore Air Field flying sub patrol up and down the coast of central

America because Panama Canal was considered a likely project the Axis would like to destroy to cripple our shipping routes. We had the British LB-30 bombers and two B-17s and one PB2Y which was for safety and salvage for the over water patrol missions.

I was detached for one month to Guatemala to secure parts for grounded planes there. Then my squadron was deactivated and I returned to Fort Hamilton, Long Island. Thirteen days later I reported to Davis Monthan Air Field in Tucson. During that time I got home for seven days which was the only time I got home in my five year hitch in the Air Corp.

I was assigned to Tech Supply at Davis Monthan a month or two before the original Cadre for the 465th Bomb Group was formed. Lt. David Orr was the engineering officer and I was on night shift in supply. Lt. Orr told me that the 781st was being formed and he would like for me to be Supply Sergeant for his new assignment. I was anxious to go overseas again and accepted. We left for Kerns Air Force Base near Salt Lake City for combat training which was close order drill and firearms training.

The next transfer was to McCook Air Field in Nebraska where I met Joye Heizenreter. She was a local girl who was hired for inventory and work in the oil house recording supplies for fuel, oil and paint. We had our first date going to a movie at the Fox Theater and married a month later, September 21, 1943.

After the training at McCook was over we went to Newport News and boarded the Asa Gray and joined a convoy, landing at Bizerte, North Africa.

I remember when we entered the Mediterranean at Gibraltar. We traveled under smoke screen until we got to Bizerte. Bizerte was a sight to see with the sunken ships. We had to have a special navigator to get docked.

We pitched tents and posted guards because there were about 2000 German prisoners captured from Rommel's North Africa campaign which were to be transferred to the U.S. in the ship we came over on and interned as prisoners of war.

After a week we boarded another troop tanker sailing by Sicily and to Naples. This was during the time of the landing at Anzio beachhead. The first night the Germans bombed the railroad and harbor.

On the third day we left in a 40 and 8 rail car (40 men and 8 horses) and was terribly cold and wet. We started a fire in one corner of the car to keep warm, but they stopped the train and made us put the fire out. We arrived in Foggia, then were transported by truck to Pantanella.

We had a supply depot on the field which was the source of supplies and parts for the airplanes. We would order from the main supply depot in Bari. It was the pride of the line crews to keep the planes flying. We were blessed with good mechanics, welders, electric and telephone electronic repair men. It seemed to me that our squadron ground crew really worked together. If one crew was caught up with their work and another crew needed help they worked together to get the planes ready.

Tommy was located early on and sent in several names and addresses of men he knew.

He was originally from West Virginia, but after the war he settled

In the recent photo below is Denley and Joye Thompson.



with his wife in Culbertson, Nebraska. Two years later he purchased the grocery store in Culbertson and operated it for 35 years, retiring in 1982. They have five children living in Nebraska and Colorado.

Tommy is a life member of the VFW and American Legion and has been Treasurer of McCook Army Air Base Historical Society since its organization in 1986. He also served as mayor of Culbertson.

From Milt Levinson's Files

Milt recently wrote that he was going through his records from the days at Pantanella and came across his record he made on a mission to Vienna that he thought I may remember. It is dated 22 March 1945 and reads as follows, "Today the fair city of Vienna was to receive a little call from Uncle Sam's Air Force. Our pilot was Althoff and we were to fly in Fox one position.

"When the intelligence officer in briefing said Vienna, I almost browned out. I had vivid memories of my last Vienna raid of 6 December when our load was 100 pound bombs. The briefing officer flashed a picture of the approach and the rally from the target on the screen. Looking at it I could not understand why we should take the longest route out of the flak area. We were told that we would have a 50 knot wind from the north to give us a push out of the flak area in a big hurry and that was why we were told to take the longer route.

"I was nervous and jumpy as hell all the way up to the IP. I called out, "Bomb doors coming open" as the lead ship opened their doors. I heard Layne call out suddenly, "Hold it up - there's a man on the catwalk." Martinez, our engineer, had got part of his clothes snagged when he was examining the bomb racks on the catwalk. One of the men went out and unsnarled him and we opened the doors just about over the target area.

"The flak had started to come up black and ugly. It meant mushroom clouds of death to any ship it touched.

"Bombs away" crackled over the interphone. I saw Yellow X, a ship directly in front of us get a direct hit. It lunged wildly up and fell off on the right wing. Flames were streaming from the left wing. The ship then fell off on the left wing and went into a spin, falling like a rock. After bombs away the pilot of our ship pulled a rally that stood us up on end and he made a turn to get out of that hellish spot. There were ships scattered all over the sky. Some were smoking and limping out of the flak area. There were boxes of ships flying in every direction imaginable.

"Our box stayed together fairly well and we made the rest of the trip back without any further trouble. One ship landed and had a tire blow out as the wheels started to make the metal runway sing with its weight. It went off the runway towards the other landing strip that paralleled it. It came to a stop just before reaching it. There are still five ships missing from today's raid. I truly thanked God for letting me live through that inferno. This was my 15th sortie and gives me my first cluster to my Air Medal."

Yes, Milt, I remember that day very well. I've often pondered who all was on the crew that day since it was the worst flak I had ever seen. Homer Moeller was co-pilot, but I'm not sure of all the rest of the crew. Since this was a maximum effort we had six boxes. As Fox one we were leading in the sixth box and being lead you can see more of what is going on than when flying wing, especially way back in Fox one. I was a bit jumpy since this was my fourth mission in 11 days, with one of the four to Florisdorf Oil Refinery at Vienna, and this one was my ninth sortie over Vienna. And I do remember the rally - not one for group lead to make, but, being the last box, I didn't think any crews in our box would object to a little more dip in the wing than normal on the rally.

If you look at the date, 22 March 1945, you will see that this is the mission that Col. McHenry Hamilton writes about in the lead article in the last newsletter. From the Group records - Able one took a direct hit, exploded after 60 seconds and went

down with the loss of life to Ernest Alden and Alfred Maas from the 781st. Paul Durckel, from the 781st was captured along with Group CO Col. McHenry Hamilton and the other crew members.

Another aircraft took a direct hit and immediately exploded. It was not known if anyone got out. The aircraft was not from our squadron. The other aircraft losses occurred after the target area.

Milt and Teddy Levinson visited Pantanella last fall. It brought back many old memories. He noted that it had changed quite a bit and he was uncertain at first if he was at the right place. Two local Italians acted as guides.

THIS GUY KNOWS HOW TO LIVE

Vernon Burda lives a busy life - and enjoys every bit of it. Recently he flew to Munich on a Sunday, had a scheduled meeting on Monday, took a train to Zurich on Monday night, held a meeting in Zurich on Tuesday, flew home on Wednesday, left from home on Thursday with his wife, Pat, for Hawaii, held a board meeting on Friday and Saturday, then flew home Saturday night.

The following Saturday I picked him up at the airport in San Francisco to take him to Oakland to narrate a portion of a video on the Ploesti raids. He took a plane back home that evening.

He just visited my area again on an auto tour from Oregon to Northern California area with his wife and two granddaughters. His plans call for another trip to Munich April 15 for a business meeting, then a visit to his WWII prison camp and other camps in the area. And who knows where he will go from there.

He is not only an attorney, but has a travel agency, is a real estate broker, a garlic farmer, and now is writing a book on the Tipton Crew. And he is working on some business ventures in Czechoslovakia.

When Ernie Van Asperen spoke at the last reunion about keeping active he didn't mean for us to keep up to Vernon Burda's schedule!

U.S. DEFENSE ATTACHE OFFICE IN BUDAPEST REPLIES

In my diligent pursuit for information on our squadron men I sent a copy of the October Pantanella News to the American Embassy in Budapest along with a letter requesting more information on the fate of the 41 men whose dog tags were recovered, but failed to return alive, and other information about the finding of the dog tags. In early February I received a response. The following is the response from Andy Anderson with the USDAO in Budapest. APO NY 09213-5270. (USDAO is the U.S. Defense Attache Office).

Thank you for your good news of 9 November. We were pleased to see that you had arranged such a fitting ceremony for the return of the dog tags. We have informed the men who gave them to us of your activity, and also given this story, along with the photo of the original crew from the History (The Embassy purchased our History Book!) and a few Hungarian details to a Hungarian newspaper, and we hope that we will shortly be able to forward a copy of this wonderful story from this end.

Thank you for your earlier correspondence regarding your losses over Hungary. As you can see from the attached paperwork, which I had hoped to send each of the 15 AF Bomber and Fighter Group Associations around Christmas, my project is starting to come together. We are beginning to find some Hungarian records regarding our folks coming out of their archives, which help to make sense of the puzzle.

You asked in one of your earlier letters if the cause of death of the 41 non-survivors was known. According to MACRs (Missing Air Crew Reports) and German reporting attached to them, many of these individuals were either killed in the crash of the aircraft or died of wounds shortly after. Apparently this pile of dog tags I acquired was just that, containing tags from people who had been through the interrogation center as well as some which had merely been passed up the tape after having been found in

the wreckage. Do any of your folks recall at what point theirs were taken from them? I have spoke to folks who were captured at the same time as some of these on the dog tag list, but said that they kept both of their tags - and still have them. I have, of course, come across serious allegations of brutality on landing, but much more common are stories of simple human kindness.

Over this last weekend I tracked down a gunner who had a photo of an aircraft on which I have not found US data, from November 1943...and that is just one of about 50 aircraft I am trying to trace. I also have about 175 individuals names which I haven't yet fitted to an aircraft, so there is plenty left to be done.

I find this process time very consuming, although I am repeating a procedure already performed by the Graves Registration people 45 years ago. If you are not familiar with it, I recommend Final Disposition of WWII Dead, 1945-51, edited by W. Steele and Thayer M. Boardman, QMC Historical Studies, Series 11,Nr 4, published by Historical Branch, Office of the Quartermaster General, Washington DC 1957, as compelling account of a tough job under trying circumstances.

Again, many thanks for your help, and I am always looking for fresh input from those who were here. Signed, Andy Anderson

Attached were several pages of information intended for those who went down in Hungary. It opened by saying the change in Hungary the past several years has been absolutely incredible and he is happy to report that the change appears to be absolutely irreversible.

They are trying to identify downed aircraft, tie in men who were helped with their Hungarian helpers, and are interested in knowing how long men stayed in Hungary before being transported to Germany.

For you men that went down in Hungary and have any interest at all please contact me and I will mail you the rest of the information. Or you can provide me with any information you have and I will forward it. I will see that they get our known plane

numbers and names to see if they have been located.

FLIM FLAM

Pantanella - April 1945

SPAGHETTI FEST -

Multa-mangiare was consumed by 12 men of the 781st "PIZON AA" as they celebrated their first year in the war-torn Italy that once was the home of their folks. The grub of course was spaghetti and all its trimmings of cheese and tomato sauce. There was no meat since it was meatless Tuesday.

Slapping the long-spindled 'strings' together were **'HONEST-to-GAWD' GULINO** and **'CHUCK-a-LUCK' BUTTA** with **PETRO BOTCH**, apron and all, dishing out the "garbage."

Who else was there: - Oh yes: **'ALO' LANZONI'**, the shutter-bug; **'EMRY' ALLEGRETTI**, the 24-hour-mechanic, repairing his fork; **'BOY'S HI' TEPEDINO**, from BROOKLYN (yah he was dere); **'LOOKS CORSO'**, also a **DODGER** says-Steve: How could anything be without a Brookleen representative. We even had one at the League of Nations meeting!"; **IKE LABELLA**, the only guy there who downed five 'platters' of the stuff; **'COWBOY' GUERCIA**, the rebel of the crowd because he is from St. Looie; **'GOILS' MAROTTA**, God's gift to the fems; **'SPEED' TURCAIANO**, the blue-blood of the crowd because he hails from Long Island; and of course, **'SCAN' SCANGARELLO**, the host. PS: Scan wants to know if the host is the guy who has to clean up the mess-after?

Well **ED KAPUSTA** of Ordnance found out about this Italian 'shindig' . . . so latest idle rumors have it he is arranging for a **'KILBACI'** dinner ala-king. "Just smell our breaths after our party," says burley Pole. (He means garlic fellas not 'hootch'.)

COUPLA LAFFS-

"You Americans," said the Briton, "are a funny people. When you make a drink you put sugar in the glass to make it sweet, lemon to make it sour, gin t make you warm and ice to keep you cool. Then you say, 'Here's to you' and you drink it yourself"

MAIL CALL



From **Al Toomey** (Engineering), I received the *Pantanella News* yesterday which I do enjoy reading. However, I seldom see anything about the ground crews. You know those B-24s didn't and couldn't fly without a little fixing now and then. Also, how about up on the hill, our First Sergeant John Messmore and others who contributed to the success of our outfit. I see nothing in the *Pantanella News* about them.

Al was a welder with Engineering. You're right about the 24s needing fixing - not always just a little. We all know the great job our engineering section, along with all the other ground crews, did to "Keep 'em Flying." Our losses were well below the average squadron in the 15th Air Force and Engineering played a big part in it.

When our association was formed in 1985 we made it very clear - this is an association of **all men** who served with the 781st Bomb Squadron. A few facts that result in more copy about the air crews than ground crews; there were nearly twice as many air crew men due to rotation, some POW's, etc., then there are more stories about the combat action of the air crews. We have asked for more stories from the ground echelon. It doesn't have to be dramatic - just some of your routine events. So how about it - some of you have promised to write something. Let us hear from you.

Al Arveson (Hendricson Navigator) wrote and sent some photos. He noted that he expects to be at the reunion in Omaha and that his letter was the longest he's written in years.

Bob Leasure (Group) writes, "I enjoyed the immensely, particularly the well told story of Col. McHenry Hamilton, Jr.

It's one of the things about our Group that I had forgotten.

"Your idea of showing the year of payment of dues on the label is excellent. I wouldn't want to miss an issue. I have subscribed to both the 780th and the 781st Squadron Newsletters for a number of years and have kept both in a binder since 1984. There are many familiar pictures in those issues.

"Sorry I did not make the last reunion. Ralph Dubois had written me and indicated he might go if I made a reservation by April 1st. Well, I missed the date and the reunion. I have a conflict every year since I help plan a yearly reunion for retirees of Harbison-Walker Refractories Company here in Pittsburgh and it is generally the Friday after labor day. I still hope to make it one of these years. I noticed in the pictures of the last reunion the familiar faces of Dan Dugan and Walt Sutton. I worked for Group Bombardier Dan Dugan in the Group Office and I believe Walt Sutton was the bombing officer for the 781st."

Ken Foden (Tanenbaum Ball Gunner) sent a note with his dues to O. J. Cowart that he enjoyed the *Pantanella News* articles, in particular Col. McHenry Hamilton's, "That is what I did, one-half a mission!! But I did better than many. Over in May, down in June and home in mid-September. A very, very short combat tour. We flew out of the POW camp in Romania to the Bari airfield on a B-17. Maybe that counts for a completed mission!"

Harold Erickson, Jr. (Radar Mechanic) is another man I have to apologize to. I had him noted as cancelling the last reunion because of health. In a note he said it is not so. After receiving his 'made on the spot' name tag he said he had a great time. I'll be more careful with the list next time Harold.

A welcome note from **Jerome Williams** (Schuster/Nose Gunner). He wanted to commend those responsible for the association and sent in a very generous donation. He flew his 50 missions at Pantanella and returned home in September 1944.

From far away in Alaska **Paul "Hoot" Hosier** (Armament) is heard from. He complains that living there he loses track of days, let alone dues from year to year. Hoot you will have to sell a few hides and make it to our next reunion. Let us hear if you had any more encounters with the local bears!

Michael Horvath (Communications) let us know he now lives in Florida at 20421 Five Palms Lane, Brooksville, FL 34610. He notes that he shoveled snow for 75 years and he will shovel the rest in Florida. He expects to get another "Iron Horse" and make the next reunion.

Many more notes and letters were received by O. J. Cowart and myself. We are always happy to hear from you.

At various times this century's wars become the topic of discussion. Recently I came across some statistics that will help settle some arguments.

	WWI	WWII	KOREA	VIETNAM
Captured and Interned	4,120	130,201	7,140	826
Died while POW	147	14,072	2,701	101
Returned to U.S. Control	3,973	116,129	4,418	735
Missing and unaccounted	3,350	78,751	8,177	2,489
Battle Deaths	53,402	291,557	33,629	47,318
Wounded	204,002	670,846	103,284	153,303
Number Serving	4,734,991	16,112,566	5,720,000	8,744,000

I don't think anyone will disagree that we were in the **BIG ONE**.

Albert "Shack" Myers Diary

Shack (FW) was Bombardier on the Dickey crew. He had started his diary on May 7, 1944, then did not make an entry until May 31. Recently his son Kerry loaned me his diary. Here is the entry.

Here it is half over and I still haven't found time to get this caught up to date, so I'm going to start here and try to keep it up to date and hope that sometime I'll find time to get the first half written up. I'm going to back up a couple of days to May 29 - a day that any of us who were there will not soon forget. We were awakened at 0300 and at the 0400 briefing we learned what was up - our target was Atzgersdorf Amme Luther Seek aircraft parts factory at Leising, Austria 10 miles south of Vienna.

We took off at 0630 and were on our way. Everything went off perfectly. The lead navigator (Alois) did a beautiful job of dodging the heavy flak areas on the way up. I thought as I turned off the IP on to the bomb run - we're doing OK, this isn't going to be as bad as it sounds. And about that time all hell broke loose and didn't let up for about 15 minutes. One of the first bursts we encountered got our number 4 engine, but Ace (Dickey) feathered it, poured on the coal on the other 3 and managed to stay with the formation on the bomb run.

About that time he had 3 run-away superchargers and had to slow down. He called the "Chief" (I assume referring to Col. McKenna in Chief Jo-Jan, pilot in the lead aircraft in our squadron) and asked him to slow down so we could stay with him and the "Chief" obliged, so we managed to stay with the formation. Ace said afterward that when we dropped back Larry Crane from the 780th, who would ordinarily have moved up to our position (#2), instead dropped back with us and got on our right wing and stayed there all the way home - a mighty comfortable feeling.

While all this was going on, John (Fandrey, navigator) and I were having our share of troubles too. I

had a devil of a time picking up the target because of haze and smoke, and what have you, but I finally got it and didn't have too much trouble killing my rate, although I noticed the lead bombardier was having a helluva time getting his drift killed. He did get it lined up pretty well though. As the flag in my sight disappeared I felt John kick me and looked up to see my indicator lights still burning, so I grabbed the salvo handle and got rid of them. It seemed like a minute late, but actually wasn't but a second or two Ace told me later. After I got rid of my bombs I caged my gyros and looked out to see where the bombs hit.

The target area was covered with smoke and I couldn't tell whether we got it or not. Later I learned that one bomb from the group hit a corner of the main building and one of the smaller buildings was destroyed.

While I was trying to see where the bombs hit I felt Fandrey jump down off the table. He tapped me on the shoulder and said "Al, I'm hit." No panic and nothing more - just "Al, I'm hit." I looked up and saw his hand was covered with blood. I jumped up and went to work on him, applying pressure on his arms and helped him get his harness and heavy flying jacket off. Then I got him to hold the pressure point while I ripped open the first aid kit and got out the scissors and cut and ripped his coveralls and shirt open to expose the wound. It was only a small cut on his upper left arm, but he was bleeding like stuck hog.

I got out a Carlyle dressing and wrapped it tight around his arm and left it that way for probably five minutes until he complained that his arm was getting numb. Then I loosened it and found that the bleeding had stopped, so wrapped it loosely back. Later I took it off again and sprinkled some sulphanilamide on it. All the way back I made him keep flexing his hand to keep the circulation going. I was afraid he might freeze his arm as our heaters had been shot out, but with his heavy jacket around his arm and the exercise he made out OK.

Just as I got John patched up a little bit I heard someone say some-

thing about a gas leak, so I went back to the bomb-bay to see if I could help Kurek (Engineer) fix it. The sight that greeted my eyes is one I'll never forget if I live to be a hundred. There was a solid sheet of gasoline spraying all over the bomb-bay that looked like someone was playing around in there with a fire hose. Right in the middle of all that commotion was Kurek, working like mad trying to get it stopped. It didn't take him long, but I had an uneasy few minutes until he did get it stopped.

After we got down to 15,000 feet Kurek started looking around to see what else was wrong. He found a broken control cable, which he wired together, but that was about all except lots of holes.

Just before we landed the hydraulic system sprung a leak and Hunter (Ball gunner) sat up under the flight deck by the nose wheel and held his thumb over the hole so we could have flaps and brakes.

We pulled off the edge of the runway to the first hardstand and we got John out and in the hands of the medics. Then I noticed that Ray (Cauble) and his boys had pulled in behind us. I thought their ship was probably shot up so bad they were unable to go further as I heard Ray and Jerry (Jolicoeur) laughing, etc. after they cut their engines. But they had each caught a hunk of flak. I helped them both to the ambulance. A piece went clean thru Ray's leg and one caught Jolli on the shin just below his knee. They took a look at me and thought I was dying or something as I had so much blood all over me. The nose of our ship was covered with the stuff.

After the usual routine I got our jeep and went down to the plane and got things straightened out, then took the boys stuff over to the hospital. After supper Ace and I went down to move the ship and see how much damage was done. They had counted 180 holes in the plane - it barely looked like a sieve. The gas lines were broken, the salvo arm was held together by a mere thread, one elevator had a huge hole in it and was hanging together by one hinge, and many other things too numer-

ous to mention.

One piece of flak came in the left side of the ship, clipped an elevator cable, went through the case around the cables across the flight deck, through the steel beam under the radio operator's seat, and into the radio. Kramer, our crew chief, said it was a mystery to him how we were ever able to fly the thing home. But for the grace of God we might be walking our way out of Yugo right now.

From the record - Two enemy planes were shot down by the group and one B-24 lost by the group. Target size was only 500 feet by 1000 feet. All Buildings were hit. Much damage done. 46.1 % of bombs hit inside the target area.

In our squadron wounded were: Cauble, Joliceour, Fandrey, and a frostbitten left hand by Gill. Crews flying that day were Lt. Col. McKenna, Capt. Wray, and Lts. Cauble, Ashley, Hurd, O'Brien, Stenerson, Dickey and Tipton.

More of Shacks experiences will appear in future newsletters.

ABOUT OUR MEN KILLED IN ACTION

WILLIAM T. NEWBORG

William Newborg became a member of the 781st Bomb Squadron at the end of May 1944 as co-pilot on the Poole crew. The Poole and Tannenbaum crews were the first two radar crews to join the squadron. The 781st was the lead squadron for the 55th Wing. For this reason many of the original radar crews and radar maintenance men were transferred to other groups in the wing.

After only one mission he was transferred to the 464th Bomb Group and on 5 July 1944 Newborg was flying co-pilot with Lt. Edward A. Grunewald (776th Squadron) on a mission to bomb "sub pens" at Toulon Harbor, France.

The Missing Air Crew Report (#06397) reports that after leaving the target, Newborg's B-24 "Free Delivery" was hit by flak. One surviving crew member wrote that Newborg had been struck in the chest by flak, others stated that he had been badly injured, and could

not get out, and probably was killed when the aircraft exploded at 20,000 feet. The plane crashed 4 KLM east of Toulon, and 3 KLM northeast of La Valette du Ver.

A casualty report stated that Newborg was buried 10 July 1944 in "western cemetery of Toulon." Of the ten man crew, co-pilot Newborg, and the top and ball turret gunners were KIA. A surviving crew member stated that Newborg had flown his only prior mission with the 465th Bomb Group, and this was his first mission with Lt. Grunewald and the 464th Bomb Group. William T. Newborg lived in Phenix City, Alabama.

BOYS WILL BE BOYS

by Walter Sutton

Prior to the mission of 12 July 1944 to Nimes, France Major Lokker was called to 15th Air Force Headquarters the day before, since he was to lead the Air Force on this mission. He had to attend a briefing and asked me if I wanted to ride along, so I did.

While he was being briefed I cooled my heels in the lobby at the 15th Air Force Headquarters and when Major Lokker came down we went to the jeep to go home. The jeep wouldn't start and I thought someone had stolen our rotor. I got out and looked and sure enough, it was gone.

Walt Sutton at Pantanella 1944.

Photo by...Frank Ambrose



Without a second thought, I turned to the jeep next to us and took the rotor out of it and put it in our jeep. Major Lokker got our engine started and I turned back to button the hood of the jeep I had taken the rotor from. Just as I was finishing up, a general walked up, said "Hello, Captain," and got in the jeep. I hurriedly got in our jeep and Jack Lokker made a very fast getaway. We never knew who the general was or how close we came to a court martial!!

HISTORY BOOK SPECIAL

As noted in the October issue of PANTANELLA NEWS, we have a limited number of the 781st History books left after filling all orders to date. In order to move these books out of Harry Carl's basement and into the hands of someone who may enjoy them the board has decided to sell them at a very substantially reduced price - to anyone who has already purchased a book or books at the regular price.

Everyone agreed that the book was a great bargain at the \$35 per copy necessary so far to be sure the sales covered our production expenses. That cost has been essentially recovered. Accordingly, the board has set a price of \$15 each to move the remaining books, a reduction of \$20. But, remember, the lower price is available only to those who have purchased a book or books at the regular \$35 price.

Orders will be filled on a first come, first served basis so get yours in. Send a check or money order to Harry Carl and he will ship your book, postpaid. His address is shown in the list of Association officers.

NOSE ART

Information we are collecting on the planes will help us to get the story on the nose art of our planes. In addition to the plane numbers, etc., we will start a listing of all the planes names along with



ALL AMERICAN

A spring tour is planned for *All American*. After some stops in Texas it will be in Tucson April 23-25, San Diego 25-27, then El Toro. After more stops in the Los Angeles area it

will go to Santa Maria, then Northern California about May 10th to 15th.

Then it will be in San Jose, Oakland, Sacramento, maybe Wat-

sonville, Concord, Stockton, etc. Watch your local TV and newspapers for the schedule in your area. Or for more details call Ben Donahue (415 967-1855) or myself.

DUES

As noted in the *Pantanella News* previously, we have established dues at \$10 per year. Your mailing label will have a number after your name to indicate the latest year you have paid.

We try to keep our records up to date, however, we may not have recorded your dues or contribution correctly. If you do not agree with your dues number after your name please let us know so that we can correct it.

If you have not contributed and are interested in the Association and want to continue receiving the *Pantanella News* please respond with your check for \$10.00 to cover the first year's dues. The check should be made payable to the 781st Bomb Squadron Association and sent to O. J. Cowart whose address is on page two.

O. J. Cowart and I have received many letters and notes along with the dues payments. All replies are very positive and agree with the established dues. We are pleased to see such a good response and want to thank those of you that have been so generous by sending much more than the \$10 minimum dues requested.

There are some who failed to respond. We would like to hear from everyone.

P X ITEMS FOR SALE

781st Cap (summer weight)	7.00
465th Bomb Gp Cap	7.00
781st Shoulder Patch	2.00
781st Tie Pin 3/4 "	3.00
781st Tie Pin w/chain	3.00
781st Pin, 1 3/4"	3.00
465th Bomb Gp Pin 1 3/4"	3.00
History Book	35.00
Second book	15.00
Reunion stationery & envelopes	
Pack of 5 each	1.50
Cancelled envelope with 781st cancellation and stamp	1.00
1990 Reunion Video	29.00
1986 Colorado Springs and 1987 Dayton Reunion Booklets Reduced from \$15 to	5.00

Plus shipping charges - For one or more caps \$1.50, for one or more of any of the other items, 50¢. No shipping charges on the video or history book.

the person responsible for naming the plane and the art work. We know Tom Arthur painted some, but so did some men on the line.

To begin with I will give as much of the history of **PLEASURE BENT** as I have. The above photo was sent in by Joseph Rich, dated 14 September 1944 and the comment 'it speaks for itself.' The plane's letter was Yellow "P" and Joe Rich was an engineer on it. The number was 41-29357 and was Lewis "Jocko" Roberts plane. Jocko flew it over from the U. S. with the original squadron flight. He named it to help take away the thoughts of the dangers ahead. They were bent for pleasure. But Jocko says more like bent than pleasure.

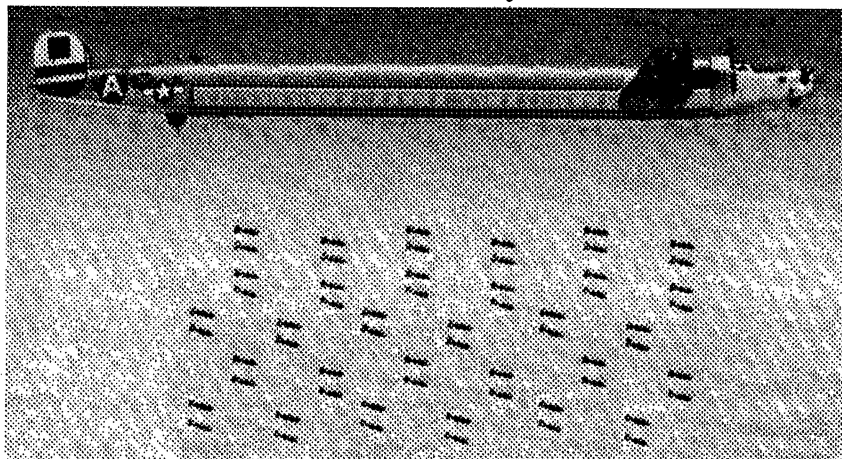
It was named for his son Bill and the art work painted on by someone in the squadron, but Jocko could not come up with the name.

It had many war wounds and near the end it crashed on the runway and was towed away for scrap.

When the war ended all the planes that could be made to fly were patched up and given to crews to fly home with. *Pleasure Bent* was resurrected and stripped of all unnecessary armament and made ready for a non-combatant flight to the U.S. The lucky pilot was John Kennedy. He reports a three or four day layover at every stop, but he finally made it to the U. S. in three or four weeks.

Does anyone else have anything to add to the story of *Pleasure Bent*?

In the next newsletter we'll do a story on **Chief Jo Jon** and **Geogia Wolf**. How about some history on these two famous planes!!



Herman Goering threw in the towel when his intelligence discovered the plans for this XB-2424. Believe it or not.

FOLDED WINGS

George J. Kwant passed away September 14, 1987.

William W. Strickland (Gunner/R. J. Smith) passed away on September 20, 1990.

William L. Allen passed away January 31, 1991.

Mrs. William Strickland informed us of her husband's passing due to lung cancer.

Warren Carden called to inform us that his wife **Jessie Carden** passed away December 11, 1990.

F. D. Bonvillain (Supply, Mess, and Transportation Officer) passed away of heart failure on February 6, 1991.

Our thoughts and prayers are with our fallen comrades and their families.



F. D. Bonvillain at Pantanella, 1944

In Memory of F. D. Bonvillain

by Sally Bonvillain. . . .

Recently we said good-bye to my husband. Good-byes in death are terribly sad and frighteningly final. However in spite of this knowledge on the part of each of us, there was a special feeling of love and caring that made us one in our farewell. The funeral was very touching and sustaining for me. I pray you also carried away something to strengthen you on your road of life.

Please know that our family and I thank you each and every one for your many, many kindnesses to us. Our grief is still very painful, but we walk on soothed by God's unfaltering love.

In closing let me say that to Dr.

Bon the preservation of the church with all its strengths and weaknesses was always his goal. Surely each time you sustain and nurture God's church, which is the beacon of hope for the world, Dr. Bon will look down from heaven with God's words and say, "Well done, O good and faithful servant." Let us go forward in love and faith.

We will remember F. D. for the beautiful memorial service he led by All American during our reunion at Waltham. It was his first reunion and he enjoyed it so much being with his old comrades.

There will be more about this fine man's life in the next newsletter.

EDITORS COMMENTS

Many thanks to those of you who helped make this newsletter possible both by your contributions and taking the time to give us your story or information about events that occurred at Pantanella. If your section or crew is not in the newsletter it most likely is due to lack of news from your members. You are interested in what others have to contribute, why not due your part and let others know about your experiences.

We are working on a list of all our planes, their names, squadron letter, pilots who flew them in, etc. Here is a good chance for the ground echelon to help out by letting us know what planes you crew kept flying.

MY STORY

by Ray Hope

I was born and raised near Breckenridge, TX on a farm. I joined the Army Air Corps January 19, 1943 at Shephard Field. I attended gunnery school at Tyndall Field, then to Sheppard for a hot summer in B-25 and B-26 airplane mechanics. I was then sent to McCook October 27, 1943 and assigned as Top Gunner and assistant engineer on the John Dickey crew.

After high altitude practice runs over the Smokey Hills Bombing Range and taking pictures of the hits from the catwalk with the bomb bay doors open with way below zero temperature I came down with the flu.

While in the base hospital over Thanksgiving the doctors thought my dry skin condition was due to eczema and would cause more problems overseas, so they grounded me. I then was assigned to the 245th Base Unit as gunnery instructor. I attended the gunnery instructors school at Buckingham Field and returned to McCook and promoted to NCO in charge of turret training.

When we phased out the B-24s I directed the set-up for training on the B-29 central fire control system and we built a mockup of the system in a T-62.

After the war ended I spent three months as assistant payroll clerk until discharge on February 6, 1946.

I spent six weeks at home in Texas and returned to McCook where I married Lola Maxine Goble. We lived in McCook until 1962 when we moved to Denver area. Our three children, Michael, Cheryl Ann and Mary Kay were born in McCook. My wife was struck down with polio in July, 1949 and has had problems ever since.

I have done quite a few things to make a living in the ensuing years. I managed the Pepsi Cola warehouse in McCook for 10 years, sold insurance for 10 years and since 1976 have been a real estate salesman in Arvada, CO, where we live. I have enjoyed good health all these years for which I am thankful.

Our son Michael, a structural engineer, lives nearby and has four children. Cheryl, a church pianist and piano teacher, and her husband also live nearby and have two children. Mary and her husband are linguists with the Wycliffe Bible Translators in B. C., Canada. They have one son.

I helped organize the McCook Historical Society and it seems to be getting stronger all the time and could use more support from the 781st.



Recent rains reminded me of the winter and early spring rains at Pantanella. This photo of the Group Theater and PX tells the story. The lean-to on the right is the PX. The sign over the door reads 465th Group Exchange. The main building's sign over the arch reads Theater and the lower sign reads Stable House. On the tour to Pantanella three years ago the PX door and sign were gone, but it remained the same otherwise including the original paintings on the wall. The Stable House signs were gone and now the building houses farm equipment.

781st BOMB SQUADRON ASSOC
2 Mt Vernon Lane, Atherton, CA 94027



NONPROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
MENLO PARK, CA
PERMIT NO. 998

ORREN J. LEE
2312 BRAEMER
SIOUX FALLS, SD 57262

91