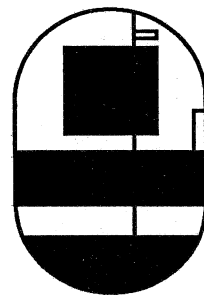


# PANTANELLA NEWS



APRIL 1992

Published by 781st Bomb Squadron Association ©

NUMBER 28

## REGISTRATION TO BEGIN FOR OUR 1992 REUNION IN OMAHA

Welcome to our 5th reunion. Reunions are a time to meet old friends, remember times past, make new friends and look to the future. We have made it our goal in planning this reunion to have the hospitality room open at all times when there is no formal meeting or dinner in progress. This way we have a place to meet and spend some time with all our 781st comrades.

Everyone should plan to attend all the events on the schedule. Arrangements have been made for tours of the SAC underground facilities and a bus tour of the above ground SAC base and the looking glass plane. There will be 4 underground tours, and 3 bus tours. See time and dates on schedule.

Also in your planning be sure to make your airline reservations early if you plan on flying. I noticed some very reasonable fares (Don't forget Senior Citizens discount). Taxi service available at the airport. A few motor home spaces available at the hotel for electrical only. Suggest a review of AAA, KOA, and other guides for complete hook up locations.

As you can see on the reunion registration form we are asking you to pre-register for the SAC underground tour and bus tours if at all possible. In the case of the underground tours, they are restricted to 40 per trip and SAC requires a list of names for each trip in advance, security I guess. We are asking "early bird" arrivals to please select the Thursday trips. We have not planned buses for the underground trip as we thought most people would have cars and share rides. As all the SAC tours are limited to group size, an early registration will help us get you on the tour you desire.

We will have seating arrangement for the dinners on Thursday and Saturday night. We are planning tables of 8 or 10. If one member of your crew or section would do a little advance planning, and that person registers, we should be able to get you at the same or adjoining tables, as we are sure you wish.

Our group photo will be taken at the start of the Thursday Champagne Party. Individual, crew, or section photos can be taken during that time, or during other functions when the photographer is available.

Besides the joy of seeing old friends, everyone looks forward to an interesting program. And each time we

have something a little different. Here are some of the plans so far;

### WEDNESDAY Sept. 9.

1 PM to 5 PM - Early-bird Registration.

Hospitality Room open from 1 PM until ? Not an official reunion day, but we know there are many early-birds and this gives you an opportunity to settle in early and meet your comrades.

### THURSDAY Sept. 10.

9 AM and 1 PM - SAC Underground Tours. Select which time you desire. Transportation by share-a-ride in private cars. CAUTION - There are many stairs to climb on the Underground tour. There are no elevators. Be at the base by 8:45 or 12:45. Tour lasts 2 hours.

1 PM - Bus Tour of SAC (Above ground). Bus will leave hotel at 12:30. Please be on time. Tour lasts 2 hours.

10 AM to 5 PM - Registration. Make seating arrangements for the two dinners and pair up for car rides to SAC and Boy's Town.

11 AM to 5 PM - Hospitality & Trophy Room Open.

5:30 PM to 6:30 - Champagne Party given by the Hotel. Group Photo taken at this time. (Cash bar during and after Champagne Party).

7:00 PM - Dinner followed by program. Hospitality and Trophy Rooms will be open after dinner.

### FRIDAY Sept. 11.

9 AM & 1 PM SAC Underground Tours will be repeated. Private car share-a-ride. Meet at SAC base at 8:45 or



12:45.

9 AM & 1 PM Bus Tour of SAC (Above ground). Meet at the hotel 9:30 AM or 12:30 PM.

Late arrivals Check Trophy or Hospitality Room if open, or check Hotel Events Calendar. Someone will be available to get you on the tours or answer questions. Here are some names to contact; Walt Longacre, Ken Sutton, Jim Althoff, O. J. Cowart, etc. 1 PM until? Hospitality Room & Trophy Room. Late information will be posted in Hospitality Room.

3 PM - Board meeting. Location to be announced.

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#### 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.

There are no formal plans for dinner this evening. This is the time set aside for getting together with your crews, section, or special friends.

#### **SATURDAY Sept. 12.**

10 AM - Memorial Service will be at Chambers Protestant Chapel at Boy's Town. Share-a-ride for a 10 minute ride to this famous place. After the service a flight of Air National Guard Jets will have a missing man formation flyover.

1 PM - 781st Business meeting followed by some interesting tales of the 781st including our simulated briefing of our bombing mission on 12 September 1944 - 48 years ago! After briefing the Hospitality Room will be open until 5 PM.

5:30 PM to 6:30 PM - Attitude Adjustment Hour - cash bar.

6:30 PM - Banquet followed by a short program. Again we will have a special event and some surprises. To end a beautiful evening we will have the SAC Band play some "Old Favorites" of our WWII times!

#### **SUNDAY Sept. 13.**

All good times must end, so it is time to say goodbye to our 781st comrades and to start planning our next reunion.

**QUESTIONS** - Drop a note to Ken Sutton or Walt Longacre (who are co-chairmen) if you have any questions before arriving at the Reunion.

Volunteers please send in your name to Ken Sutton with a note if you have any particular duty you would like to help out with.

In addition to the three or four days that you will spend with your comrades at the reunion you will find there are other interests in the Omaha area.

SAC Museum (Nearby Offutt).

Joslyn Art Museum

Western Heritage Museum

Henry Doorly Zoo & Indoor Jungle, One of the largest in the world  
Con Agra River Front - All new.

Steak Houses galore. Omaha is noted for steaks.

Chardonnay Room at the Marriott has a four star rating!

Boys' Town. Open 8:30 to 4:30 daily. We will have our memorial service there on Saturday.

Convention and Visitors Bureau will be at check-in with literature and information.

A note about the Marriott Hotel and Omaha. Small town atmosphere prevails in Omaha. It is a friendly city and easy to get around. The hotel will have our squadron as their only large group. It is a new hotel, but not as large as the last two. You will find it easy to get around and it will be bursting with 781st Bomb Squadron members. Look for a good time and you will not be disappointed!

Many, many notes and letters have been received indicating a very large attendance at Omaha - it may be the largest one yet. Many reasons are given for attending - to be with their comrades, for a crew reunion, or section reunion, etc. One particular comment touched me some months ago in a note from Floyd Trudeau, "We do stay busy but shouldn't be so busy that we neglect our real friends. Looking forward to seeing the gang in Omaha."

And we have a BIG QUESTION?? Where shall 1994 be held?? Let us know in advance so that we can do some planning prior to the reunion.

In the last newsletter in the article about the Prince crew a number of members have commented that they were surprised that the German Fighter planes attacked **S/Sgt James Downs** in his parachute. It is no surprise if you read the reports from other groups and squadrons. Near the end of the war the German Luftwaffe was comprised of many very young fliers with little training. They began using parachute and the airmen in them for target practice. Just as the civilians in a number of countries began hanging downed airmen. Civilians were taking a lot of punishment from the bombings and began taking revenge.

# Lt ALEXANDER LOVEY CREW

*First, a history of the original Lovey crew, then their last mission on Friday, October 13, 1944.*

The Lovey crew was trained at Biggs Field, El Paso, Texas, then transferred to Topeka, Kansas to pick up their new B-24 and orders to fly to Italy. They were the first replacement crew assigned to the 781st Bomb Squadron. Members of the crew are listed with the crew photo.

At Pantanella they flew with Arthur Eaton, who was formerly Copilot for Schuster crew, for six or seven missions. Therefore, the crew's name does not appear in the history book until the 22nd of June. The first member of the crew that was lost was Wilburn Vorheir, Nose Gunner, who was shot down with the Martin crew on 6 June on a mission to Ploesti, and taken POW.

William West, George Wingate, James Balsano, and Clifford Grant finished their missions before the Lovey's crew's last mission on October 13 October 1944. The following story from two of the crew members will fill in more about the Lovey crew.

## MY REMEMBRANCES

*From Clifford M. Grant*

I was transferred to the Lovey crew while we were in training to go overseas at Biggs Field in El Paso, Texas. My original crew broke up due to the pilot's health and the Lovey crew was short a ball turret gunner, so I filled the vacancy. I don't think I could have found a more suitable crew if I had to do my own selection.

Lovey was the youngest on the crew, just 20 years old. Before going overseas we had to make out a will, but Lovey couldn't - he was too young!

We finished crew training and were sent to Topeka, Kansas on May 7, 1944. We were issued a new B-24, then flew to West Palm Beach, Florida, on May 18 after a three day delay when the nose gunner got sick. There we had an overseas inspection and left for Trinidad May

22. The next stop was Belem for a three day lay-over, then to Natal Brazil. On the 28th we flew to Dakar, Africa.

After our box lunch was consumed our radio operator felt a B.M. coming on and he used his lunch box to hold the over load, but when he tried to dump it out the camera hatch, the wind picked it up and dumped it in the tail gunner's turret. This was about the only time I ever heard any words that almost led to a fight between our crew members.

From Dakar we flew to Marrakech, the next day to Tunis, then Gioia and on June 1st we flew to our new "home", the 465th Bomb Group, 781st Bomb Squadron. Our plane was taken to the 464th Bomb Group.

I flew my first mission on the 4th of June and my last and best on the 20th of September. I think I was very lucky. I was only out of the USA a total of 5 months and 2 days. I was the first crew member to finish my tour of duty on September 20th, 1944. I often think of what a swell crew I was privileged to be associated with.

## LOVEY CREW STORY

*from William J. West.*

I regret I took so long to get in touch. I've enjoyed reading the exploits of others and their lives after coming home. As I reminded you in our recent phone conversation, I was bombardier on the Lovey crew.

While most of your correspondence deals with stories of combat, and the unfortunate experiences of those who were shot down and captured, and we (Lovey's crew) had our share of close calls and some serious and humorous escapades, I decided to try to describe what happened to some of us lucky ones.

Due to the fact that our squadron seemed to be short of some classifications (including bomb droppers), I had been assigned to fly with other crews while ours was 'standing down.' Consequently, I reached the necessary number of missions required for rotation before the rest of the Lovey crew was scheduled to come home. I had to wait around for about ten days, before being flown

over to Naples, so, Moses Athon and I flew a few "special missions" while waiting around. One was even a retaliatory 'strike' on the field of the P-51s who were always 'buzzing' our place. We went in so low, the tower called Mose and told him to lower his wheels to raise the plane off the ground.

I also ran some 'errands' for the boss (Col. Lokker). One was to Bari to pick up a couple of guys who had been caught stealing stones from farmers' fences. When they convinced Jack they didn't tell that the rocks were for his winter home, we all chuckled over the slight 'reprimand.'

When Walt Sutton finally decided he couldn't bribe me into taking his job (even with captain's bars for only 10 more missions), we both headed for Naples. We separated, there. He caught a plane ride home; I caught a boat. It was while in Naples that I learned, with mixed emotions, that Lovey and the gang had gone down. I felt that I was fortunate not to be with them, and again felt that I should have been. It wasn't until talking to you, recently, that I learned two of your boys were with them. Then I started what probably turned out to be the greatest Binge the local carabinieri ever saw.

The ship I was on was a new naval transport on its maiden voyage and they were really showing it off. The accommodations, food and service, would equal or surpass current day cruise ships; so good that in the 16 days at sea, I gained 28 pounds. We slept all day until dinner. After the movie, we started playing poker until breakfast, with a snack at midnight. Radar had picked up a Nazi sub pack causing us to swing down to South America and make our way up the coast to Newport News. We landed on election day of November 1944, and were received royally with a big mess hall with anything in God's world you could ask for. I started out with two quarts of milk. After eating our fill, we got what was considered the orientation for homecoming servicemen. It was great. And though the ship had spoiled us, we were back and happy to be here in the good old U.S.A.

After processing, we were sent home on two-weeks leave with orders to report to the nearest R & R base (Santa Ana for me) for a new physical and re-assignment. After three weeks of doing a whole lot of nothing, I was sent (by mistake) to Houston' Ellington Field. I knew it was wrong, but I had a bunch of friends there (from back in Pre-flight days). After ten days of confusion, I was sent to Instructor's School at Midland. Upon completion, I was assigned to a training unit at Carlsbad AAF in New Mexico to help train a contingent of Chinese Cadets. Great setup; they spoke very little English and I couldn't even cuss in Chinese. However, it wasn't long before we were able to communicate very well. Arriving at CAAF, we were checked in at Air Corps Supply by a pretty little Italian girl. I haven't got unchecked, yet. We were married six months later, and still are, 46 years and 5 youngins later.

About two days after arrival, who do I run into in the PX? You guessed it.....Walt Sutton!!! He had a dandy

little cabin at a place, between Carlsbad and the Caverns, called Black River Village. We had some great times (fishing and a party or two) at his place and others in the vicinity. In September, it was decided I had enough "points" to become a civilian, so I was sent to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas (near my home in Topeka) and separated from the service on September 22, 1945.

I went back to work for the Highway Commission, and, after my parents both passed away and two kids later, we moved back to Carlsbad so Oly (short for Olympia) could be near her folks. I went to work for the U.S. Borax Co. (You know, 20 Mule Team, and Borax hand soap and sweet smelling diapers, etc.). I worked for them there for 17 years (while pursuing a hobby in television and radio), until I was transferred to their chemical plant in Wilmington (L.A. harbor area) California, an Industrial Engineer working on cost reduction. After several heart attacks, a couple of open-heart surgeries, with 5 bypasses, it was decided I better retire, which I

did in '86. So, I've been living it up since, figuring I can live it down later. I quit playing softball only two years ago. If I felt any better, I'd have to be two people.

Of the crew, Lowell Lunn came to Topeka and stayed a while. He has since "folded his wings." I've been in touch with Don Toomey, Bill Vorheir and Cliff Grant. The rest are either gone or cannot be found.

I realize this is not the usual type of letter you receive, but I had no hair-raising adventures to relate. In fact, I some times feel a bit guilty that I got through the war rather easily. At night I pray for our buddies who didn't make it back and thank the Good Lord for those that did. As for me, although I am not wealthy, I think of myself as the richest and luckiest man in the world.

Since this is quite lengthy I better quit and get it in the mail. I always enjoy the news of the old 781st, and if anyone remembers me, I would appreciate a note. I hope I can make it to a reunion at least one time.



Rear - L to R, Alexander Lovey, Pilot; Raymond Morse, Co-Pilot; Donald Toomey, Navigator; William West, Bombardier; Front, Clifford Grant, Ball Gunner; Charles Hudson, Top Gunner; Lowell Lunn, Engineer; James Balsano, Tail Gunner; George Wingate, Radio Operator; Wilburn Vorheier, Nose Gunner.



## THE LOVEY CREW'S FINAL MISSION

*Some background before Don Toomey's story. When the crew arrived in Topeka to pick up their new plane they had to fly one practice mission to teach Don Toomey (Navigator) how to drop bombs. He then would be listed as Navigator/Bombardier. On the practice mission William (Bill) West (Bombardier) suggested that he drop them since it would take time to show Don, and Bill wanted to get back for their night on the town before leaving the USA. West did drop the bombs, scored real well, but it went on Toomey's record.*

*After arriving at Pantanella Don Toomey was finally shown how to drop the bombs after about six missions. Without any formal training all Don really knew was how to toggle the bombs out. With his good bombing score that Bill West scored for him, Don was selected to fly deputy lead at times.*

*First Don will tell about a previous mission, then their final one.*

I flew most of my missions as navigator/bombardier on the Lovey Crew. Sometimes our crew flew deputy lead. I did not know that deputy lead had to set the bomb-sight up until on a mission to Vienna when we were assigned the deputy lead position. Everything went well to the IP, but after we started down the bomb run, the lead plane called Lt. Lovey and said that their bomb sight was out, that we would have to drop the bombs. I told Lt. Lovey that I did not know how to set the bomb-sight up. Lt. Lovey said, "Don, you have to drop the bombs!" I told Lt. Lovey to fly the same course as the squadron ahead of us and when the distance to the target looks about the same as the other missions we flew, I would let the bombs go. Everything went well and the bombs hit the target. I asked Lt. Lovey to make sure that we didn't ever fly deputy lead again unless we had a bombardier. Lt. West, our bombardier, flew with other crews most of the time. He finished his missions in September, a few days before Friday the 13th of October, 1944 when we were assigned a new bombardier.

So, on October 13, 1944, the day

we got shot down, we were assigned the deputy lead position, but we didn't have to worry as we had a bombardier. But when we got ready to take off we didn't have a bombardier! They had placed him with another crew in one of the back positions. So, we took off for Blechhammer flying deputy lead. Before we got to the IP I called Lt. Lovey and told him maybe we should change position with plane #5, as we had no bombardier. So we changed positions before we got to the IP. From the IP to the target everything was going smooth until a shell went off up ahead of us at the same elevation, then another one went off, also at the same elevation. The next one I didn't see or hear as it went off between the nose and the number three engine. It tore up everything in the nose. I was between the ammunition boxes in the nose which scared me. It tore my helmet off,

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It tore my helmet off, which knocked me out because I had the chin strap snapped on

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which knocked me out because I had the chin strap snapped on.

When I came to, Sgt. Clausen, the nose gunner, was shaking me. He said Lt. Lovey said to abandon ship. My parachute was laying on the floor full of flak holes. I picked it up and snapped it on the harness. Then I went to pull the nose door release, but it was blown off. So, I stood and jumped on the nose wheel door, but it did not open. Sgt. Clausen and I crawled through the bomb bay. Sgt. Clausen jumped first. I looked up in the cockpit and the pilots were still trying to control the plane. I think the automatic pilot was knocked out. There was fire the full length of the right wing and the plane was being pulled to the right.

I then jumped and as soon as I was clear of the plane I pulled the rip cord. I didn't know if I would have to open it by hand, as it was full of flak holes. It opened OK, but there were many holes in it.

I then looked for the plane and the pilots. There was nothing to be seen. The plane must have blown up right after I jumped.

To this day I thank the Lord, that I was flying with two pilots that would give their lives to make sure that all the crew got out. It took Sgt. Clausen and myself quite a bit of time trying to get out of the nose wheel door and then crawling all the way back to the bomb bay.

## A RIDE TO BLECHHAMMER WITH THE LOVEY CREW

*By Pierre J. J. Kennedy (Tail Gunner/Althoff)*

By October 12th, I had completed 18 missions flying with Jim Althoff and other pilots. Our crew received orders to go to the beautiful Isle of Capri for seven days rest camp on the following day. That evening we sergeants stayed in our tent, sewed on stripes and patches, got our uniforms ready, and shined our G.I. shoes getting ready for our rest camp. I put away my .45 automatic and shoulder holster that I had taken on each flight.

That night, while air crews slept, and the mechanics were working on the line, preparing bombers for the next mission, the 15th Air Force Headquarters decided to put up a maximum effort on the 13th against the Blechhammer South Oil Refineries in eastern Germany. More crewmen and more aircraft would be needed for this strike at the enemy. So, as we slept, names were removed from the Capri Rest Camp orders, including mine, and that of Leonard J. Goldstein (Radio Operator/Althoff).

The result of this change in orders occurred at about 4 A.M. on the morning of the 13 October 1944. I was awakened by a Jeep which drove up to our enlisted men's tent. I could make out someone approaching the tent. Soon a voice shouted, "Goldstein, radio operator, Kennedy, tail gunner, you're filling in on another crew today!" I shouted back, "We've got orders to go to Capri today!" The voice answered, "Go up to operations, and argue with them, if you want to." Then the Jeep disappeared. It was Friday the 13th, and I had felt relieved, after receiving our Capri orders, that our crew had not been scheduled to fly that day. Just a little superstitious.

Leonard and I dressed for flying, grabbed our gear, and left our sleeping crewmates. I did not bother taking my sidearm.

We went to the mess hall, and briefing session. There we were told the target was Blechhammer, and the enemy flak would be "Heavy, Intense and Accurate." There was complete silence, and it seemed that everyone was left to his own thoughts for a few moments.

I had a feeling all along that it would be a bad day. Leonard and I joined the crewmen in Lovey's plane. Take off time was 7 A.M. As we flew up over the Adriatic Sea, I looked down to find the "line" I had noticed on previous missions, where apparently two sea currents came together to give the appearance of blue water on one side, and green water on the the other side. I never found the "line" in the sea, that day.

The gunners in the rear of the plane congregated in the waist and talked, or rather we had to shout above the roar of the four Pratt & Whitney 1830 engines. I did not know anyone on this crew, but soon found that everyone was very friendly. As we approached enemy territory, we went to our stations. I put on a flak suit, climbed into the tail turret and connected the oxygen, electrical and mic lines.

The huge bomber formation slowly made its way toward Germany. It was necessary to clear the Alps, then continue climbing to 23,000 feet, the target bombing altitude. Every crew member searched the skies for enemy fighters.

As we climbed higher, the temperature outside, and also inside my unheated turret, went down to some 30 or 40 degrees below zero. It was then that the condensation in my oxygen mask would seep out, and would turn to ice pellets in the second or so it took for a drop to fall, and strike my pant leg. Then a stream of pellets would start bouncing from my pant leg down to the turret floor.

We approached the I.P. for the start of the bomb run, and I could feel sweat running down my back. The enemy was firing anti-aircraft at us, and they had our altitude. My watch said 11:18 A.M., and the tar-

get time was scheduled 11:20. Two minutes through this barrage would seem like two days. Just a few seconds later, while we still had the bombs, our B-24 was hit by flak in the right wing, and we slipped down from the formation. The plane was afire, and the crewmen jumped.

Leonard Goldstein and I would never see the beautiful Isle of Capri. Instead we, along with the other members of Lovey's crew were captured, and we became prisoners of war. After capture I met the rest of the crew except for the Pilot and Co-pilot.

After the war, I learned that the Pilot, 1st Lt Alexander Lovey, and Co-pilot, 2nd Lt. Raymond Morse, were Killed In Action that day over Blechhammer.

### MY LAST MISSION

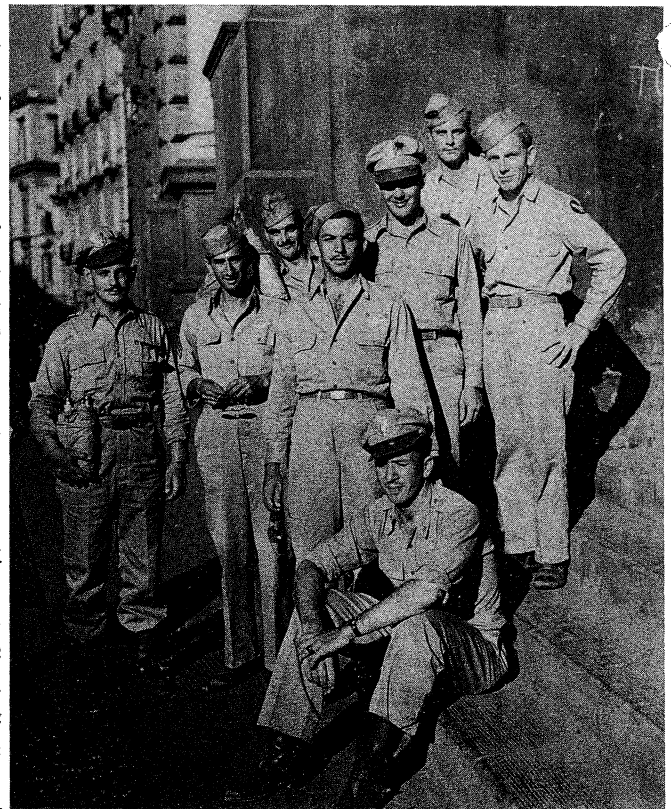
*By Walt Clausen*

I was assigned to the Lt. Lovey's crew after arriving at Pantanella in early July of 1944. Lovey's nose gunner had gone down while flying with Martin's crew on June 6.

I had 37 missions, which left 13 to go before I'd be eligible to go home on leave. On Friday, October 13, 1944 our mission was to Blechhammer oil refinery in Southern Germany, one of our toughest and farthest targets. We all feared this one especially as it was noted for the heavy flak. We were flying deputy lead that day which made me feel a little better because I thought the concentration of flak didn't reach that high. As we approached the target we got word the lead ship's bombsight was out and our plane would have to use ours to drop the bombs. As Lt. Toomey explained, Lt. Lovey got permission to change to a lower position. I really got nerv-

ous (scared) as riding there in the nose turret the flak was getting heavier and closer.

Then it happened, we were hit! I got a glimpse of Lt. Toomey falling across the compartment and figured he had been hit, but then my turret doors opened, (which Lt. Toomey must have done) so I scrambled out. I looked at Lt. Toomey to make sure he was OK and grabbed my chute. He indicated that we couldn't get out the nose door and motioned to go to the bomb bay. Upon reaching the entrance to the bomb bay, which was still full of bombs, I looked up at the flight deck wondering if anyone needed help, but someone, I thought it was Sgt. Hudson, but it might have been Lt. Morris, motioned me to jump and out I went. I don't know why, but I remember being told to free fall before opening the chute as it was cold at high altitudes. After falling for a while I thought I'd better see if the chute was going to open. I pulled the rip cord and it opened. My oxygen mask, sun glasses, helmet and shoes which were fastened to the chute were ripped off when the



L to R, William West, who was celebrating his birthday in Naples, James Balsano, George Wingate, Charles Hudson, Don Toomey, Lowell Lunn, Clifford Grant and seated, Alexander Lovey. Raymond Morse not in photo and Wilburn Vorheier was POW.

chute opened. Then there was the pain of the parachute harness straps binding on my groin. I looked for the plane but never saw it again.

As I floated down I thought I'd never reach the ground. As it came closer I saw a woods, a ditch, and a field. I tried to slip the chute to land in the field, but at tree top level I fell like a rock and landed on the cement banks of the ditch and rolled to the bottom. Luckily there was just a little water in it. After removing the harness and chute I tried to get up. I had terrific pain in my ankles and went down. I crawled up the bank and within a minute the civilians were there, mad and swinging at me. Fortunately some soldiers (home guard) kept them off me. I only had a chipped tooth from the civilians. I later found out I had broken my right ankle and cracked the left one in the jump. Then off to interrogation and POW camp.

From the Archives, the Missing Air Crew Reports, and other notes from observers in other planes:

By **Eugene C. Deal** (Tail Gunner/Crutchner), "Yellow "L", flown by Lt Lovey, was hit by flak over the target. When the plane pulled up from the rest of the planes and then started slipping down. The No. 3 engine was hit and started burning. The plane was going down slowly and the pilot seemed to be trying to pull out. I don't know whether it was contacted by radio or not. There was heavy flak over the target, but no fighters. Right after the ship was hit two men bailed out and their chutes opened. Another man abandoned the ship as it was going down. He fell quite a way before the chute opened. The three men should have gotten down safely. The plane disappeared from view right over the target. I did not see it crash.

**Charles Fry** (Gunner/McKenna) made a similar report.

**Charles Hudson** (Top gunner) reported a conversation between pilot and co-pilot just seconds before they got hit saying, "It looks like no flak today." Then they got hit, and as Hudson was about to leave the plane he saw the co-pilot standing behind his seat. Hudson said Lovey

was at the controls trying to keep the plane level so everyone could bail out.

Other information noted was the POW capture time; Leonard Goldstein at 11:50, Walt Clausen at 11:15, and Charles Hudson 1:00. Most landed at Birkes District of Kosel. There was a notation of burial on 21 October in Cemetery Friedman. I assume it referred to the Lovey and Morse.

As mentioned early four members from the Lovey crew had finished their missions (Clifford Grant, West, Balsano and Wingate). Since they only flew with nine men (No Bombardier) they had only three replacements; Harold Grant (Ball Gunner/Leggett), Leonard Goldstein (Radio Operator/Althoff) and Pierre Kennedy (Tail Gunner/Althoff).

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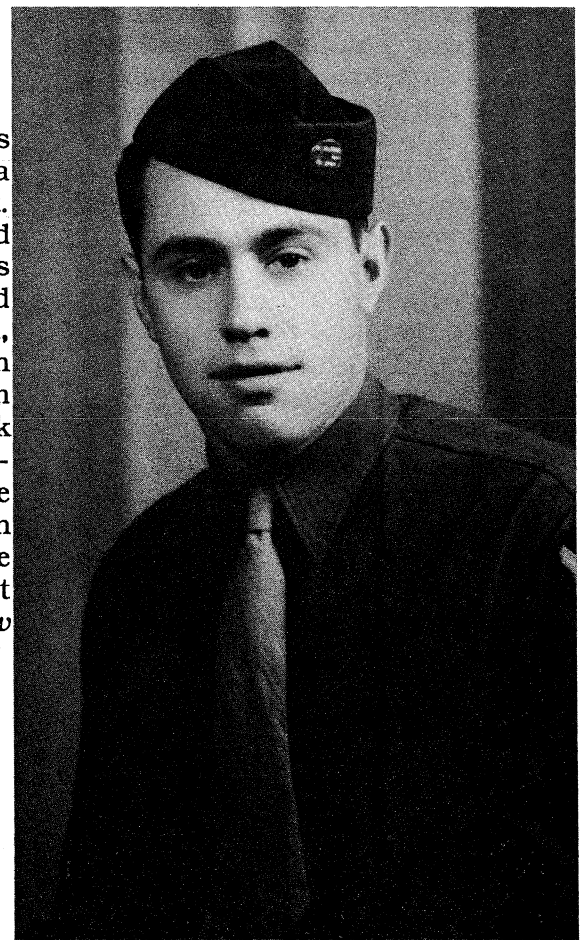
### Some Bits from the Archives

July 3, 1944, a mission was flown to Timisoara, Rumania marshalling yard with Capt. Wray and Maj. Cook in the lead plane. In the report it states one casualty; Second Lieutenant **Vernon L. Burda**, nose gunner and navigator in the lead aircraft received a gash on top of the head when struck by a piece of the "G" box antenna, which came into the nose turret after it had been shot off when the guns in the Martin (top) turret were test fired. *You just never knew what would happen!*

And here is an excerpt from a letter I received, "I remember the Bologna mission very well. We were over the Adriatic, the flight path may have been to go north over the sea, then west to approach Bologna. We were ready to test our guns, as always, over the Adriatic. The ball turret gunner called me to ask if it was clear behind us to fire his guns. I was looking in my sight, and just ready to fire, when he called. I looked around the sky - it was O.K., and I told him so. After he fired

for a few seconds, I fired my guns without looking in the sight again. Then I checked the sight - - there was a B-24 filling up my sight! I expected it to fall out of the sky. I dreaded that trip. Back on the ground, I waited for some pilot to ask who shot up his B-24. I never heard anything. *In this case what could have happened didn't. .*

On 25 July 1944 on a mission to Goering Steel Works at Linz, Austria, there were two casualties, **S/ Sgt John Forhan** received a serious flak wound of the ankle, and S/Sgt Robert C. Paige (not 781st) received an amputated index finger from a parachute line used to slow down the aircraft in which he was assistant engineer, when it made an emergency landing at the Island of Vis. *Ouch! . .*



**Andy Getsy** (Communications) sent in some photos to **O. J. Cowart, Jr.** Most were not identified. One anyone would recognize, though, is that of **John Messmore** (First Sergeant), the only man who wore a diamond in the center of his stripes. Since John is retired maybe he can fill us in on some stories about Pantanella.

# MAIL CALL



**Charles O. Morgan, Jr.** (Radar Navigator), "Although I was only in the 781st Bomb Squadron for a short period of time, and then was transferred to the 485th Bomb Group, and consequently did not get to know many of the people in the 781st, I truly enjoy the newsletter, *Pantanella News*, and want to compliment you on it. Therefore, I would like to keep it coming and am enclosing a check for that purpose."

*Thank you, Charles, for the sizeable contribution. It may be interesting for you to know that when the war was winding down the 485th Bomb Group was deactivated several weeks before the end of the war. The crews with the most missions were transferred to other groups to finish up and the newer crews were returned to the U. S., for I believe training in B-29 units. We had several crews in our squadron for a few weeks before "the end."*

**Lolette Tucci** (from LaTurbie, France), "I'm sorry for being so late writing you this little note but I hope it is still time to wish you and yours the Best New Year."

"I take this opportunity to send a check for the "Bomb Squadron Association" which was so dear to Joe's heart. Thank you for sending the *Pantanella News* and to keep me up to date with what's going on, I appreciate it very much."

*Several years ago I had the opportunity to meet Lolette and Joe when they visited their sons who live about fifteen miles from me. Lolette, many of the men remember Joe (Group Sergeant Major) and it is so nice to hear from you once in awhile.*

**Morris Cohen** (Engineering), "I am now a life member of "Disabled American Veterans," Deputy, fund raiser and public relation officer and volunteer at the VA in Florida. I am enclosing a few copies of letters and press releases about the toys that were donated to the Toys for Tots and to the Children's Home & Nurs-

ing Home."

*I returned the photo that appeared in the last newsletter with the two men on the camel. I had William Coonan's name on the back of the picture and somehow mailed it to Morris. I believe this is the first picture that I mis-sent. I know how valuable these old photos are to each of you and I handle them very carefully and return them after they are used in the *Pantanella News*.*

And, I took a guess that the one man looked liked Shack Myers. Surprisingly, I received a letter from Gregory Figulski of the 782nd Squadron who is receiving the *Pantanella News*. He identified the two men as Figulski and Spear from the 782nd. Now I wonder how Coonan had this photo!

I received the Fall Newsletter from the McCook Army Air Base Historical Society. A report was given on the 1991 reunion. Attending from the 465th Bomb Group were; **Mr. & Mrs'. Denly Thompson, Albert LeBlanc, Walter Longacre and Ray Hope** from the 781st, and Russ Ball from the 780th. Denly Thompson is Treasurer. Those of you who served at McCook might consider a stop there, coming or going from our reunion in September. In case you are interested in joining, the dues are \$10. McCook Army Air Base Historical Society, PO Box B-29, McCook, NE 69001-0029.

**Ken Foden** (Ball Gunner/Tannenbaum), "I just finished going thru the *Pantanella News* for a second time. You and your cohorts are certainly doing a fine job. Which leads to time for a dues check. I have a slight change of address; 900 N. Broad St. #3013, Brooksville, FL 3460.

"In your listing of planes a little error. "Patches" went down on 6 June not 16th. Looking forward to Omaha in September.

"Just out of curiosity, would you have any idea what was the history of the brand new B-24 Radar equipped (first in the squadron, I believe) our crew (Tannenbaum) brought over the last of May 1944? George Harteloo II was the radar

navigator with the ship. Naturally we never saw that prize plum again."

**Mel Blye** (Radar Navigator) called to report he flew on Yellow "Q" on the night harassment missions. It was a Mickey ship (radar). He said the missions were flown from December 12th to 18th and the purpose was to keep the German radar going and their Air Force on alert during the time the weather was socked in and the daylight bombing could not penetrate. He noted that the 465th flew at night, but the 464th flew during the day. On two of his three night missions night fighters were in the area, but they were able to avoid contact.

*I do not believe the record shows all the night activity. The history book shows a December 7th night flight by one plane not from our squadron. Then, Lt. Doss on the 8th and the 12th. Mel, why not join us in Omaha and fill us in more on those night missions? I understand the flak at night was very interesting!!*

**Ken Foden** - could Yellow "Q" be the radar plane your crew brought over? Later planes were silver, so this could be yours.

From **Walker H. Shipley**, (Navigator/Zalk) "Reference to your inquiry about the photo of Yellow "Q", I may be able to shed light, or confuse the matter further.

"On December 11, 1944, the Zalk crew flew a mission to Vienna. I do not have any record of the plane flown. My memory is that during the very rainy season, returning from a mission to Vienna, our plane ran off the runway on landing and sank into the mud up to the engine nacelle of the right landing gear. We left the plane through the top hatch. The plane stopped about midway down the runway, about opposite the operations tower. As I recall, although the hydraulics were shot out, the plane was not that badly damaged by action or the landing. When the mud dried up, it was "refloated" and towed away for repairs, or salvage.

"Hope this will be helpful."

**Mrs. Melvin Fulkerson**, "I noticed in the last *Pantanella News*



that you had lost contact with **Willie Golden**. He suffered a stroke and was moved to a nursing home where he remained until his death in February, 1991.

"Melvin and I had the pleasure of visiting him in his home in 1990, a few months before he had the stroke. He was badly crippled with arthritis, but was a delight to talk to. Melvin and Willie were on Lewis Robert's crew and were good buddies."

The last member located, **Frank Piteo** (Waist Gunner/Billger) sent a note and the largest donation any individual has ever made to the Association. If ever anyone is considered a life member, Frank certainly is!

Frank also made a substantial donation to the Collings Foundation to keep flying.

**Bob Bassinette** (Bombardier/Blakita) wrote that he is wrestling with his plans for a trip to Europe in September. He hopes to work it out so that he can attend the reunion on the way to Europe. We hope to see you in Omaha, Bob.

**Betty Gates** (wife of **Walter Gates/Engineering**). "I was so surprised and happy when Walter's copy of your news came and we saw his photo on page 4 in the news item from **Earl "Deacon" Viands**. Walter is 73 now and a patient in a local nursing home. He has Parkinson's disease and has lost the use of every muscle in his body. After leaving the service he worked in a coal mine, and then the last 27 years before his illness in a garage where he was a truck mechanic. Although he cannot walk, and speech is difficult for him, he does enjoy cards or letters which I read to him. I always take the Pantanella News and read to him and he seems to enjoy that. I know he would love to hear from any of his old buddies who served with him during his time in Italy. I remember a few names and Deacon Viands was one. We have 4 daughters, 1 son, 7 grandchildren and 1 great-grandchild.

Although it is hard to bear now, God has blessed us and I have had

45 years of marriage with a good Christian man. Walter has always been a good person and very proud of his "Air Force and Buddies." Probably many will remember him from his accordion playing. He carried his accordion overseas everywhere he was stationed. He lost it when our home burned, but we replaced it and he played until he couldn't anymore. Keep up the good work and May Gold Bless You All!

*Thank you for writing, Betty, and explaining why we have not heard from Walter. And here is Betty and Walter's address; R2 Box 43, Oaktown IN 47561. Some of you who were engineering buddies of Walter can give him a little cheer by writing.*

**Terri Tiehen**, daughter of **Larry Tiehen** (Nose Gunner/Gaines) wrote in a request for material we might have to help her in developing a story on Larry's WWII and POW experience. She requested POW maps and I have referred that to Pierre Kennedy.

If you will recall Larry had a story of some of his experiences evading, then capture, and his time as a POW in an earlier newsletter.

Some of you that flew with Larry or saw him in POW camp please write to Terri. Those of you at the Colorado Springs reunion will remember Terri accompanied her father there. And she expects to be at Omaha. So, let's help her in her story.

**Fred Maute** (Radar mechanic) sent a card from Marco Island, Florida where he is basking in the sun and wondering where some of his friends in the radar section are. A number of them have not been located. We'll review the list and do some more searching, Fred.

**CORRECTION** - An error on Page 7 of the January Pantanella News - in the photo it is Dorothy Grantham and Dick Grantham (not Graham).

Thought for today - The easiest way to get to sleep is to count your blessings instead of your problems.

## A JOURNEY IN JULY 1991

By O. J. Cowart, Jr.

The Collings Foundation owns a WWII A-26 Douglas Invader Fighter-Bomber in which I was privileged to fly from Houston to Elkhart, Indiana and Kalamazoo, Michigan for Air Shows. The flight from Houston lasted four hours non-stop and we used over 800 gallons of gasoline to Elkhart. This trip will never be forgotten.

The two big 18 cylinder Pratt & Whitney 2500 hp engines were designed to move this slim and trim aircraft along at fighter speeds. Can you just imagine the feelings of a young pilot sitting between two 2500 hp engines in a light aircraft? Bombs tended to hang in the bomb bay and three spoilers are installed in front of the bomb bay doors to create turbulence to break up the vacuum when the doors are opened. When deployed, the spoilers slow the plane 15 mph. The airspeed indicator on this plane shows 700 mph, and in Kalamazoo I asked a crewman how fast he had been in one (Korea); he said 650 mph. The A-26 is the only known plane to have been used in WWII, Korea, and Viet Nam. Since it was the fastest plane available after WWII, many of these aircraft were stripped of armour/military hardware and converted to corporate executive use. The Collings A-26 retains 8500 lbs of heavy armour plate (1/4 in. tempered aluminum) remote gun turrets, operation bomb bay and other military hardware.

Robert Young, Crew Chief at Pusan, Korea has been located and states the following. Each plane had only one Crew/Chief mechanic and they would help each other service and repair the planes. Young said he was small and had difficulty in pulling thru the engines before starting. His solution was to get on top of the wing (18 ft in the air) jump off the wing and grab a propeller blade on the way down. He did this six times for each engine. He said he was only 18 years old at the time so he had plenty of spare energy to per-

form this necessary chore (that's real American ingenuity). Typical missions were of about 4 hours duration, and bomb loads totaled up to 5000 lbs. This Collings plane was sent on 3 missions 27 July 1953, the day of the official cease fire that ended the Korean War.

On one mission the plane was seriously damaged by enemy fire, requiring replacement of most of the tail section. Evidence of damage can still be seen today in the form of patched bullet holes on the right outboard engine nacelle.

Recent history of the A-26 . . .

In 1991, A-26 Invaders are featured in the Steven Spielberg "Al-ways."

A-26 Invaders are still used as Fire Bombers in Canada.

Early History . . .

The Douglas A-26 Fighter-Bomber was designed as a replacement for earlier bombers such as the North American B-25, the Martin B-26 and the Douglas A-20. The first flight of the XA-26 occurred on 10 July 1942. The A-26 first entered WWII combat on 6 September 1944 over Europe. The A-26 also saw limited action in the Pacific Theater when it was deployed there in July, 1945. By the end of the war 2502 Invaders had been built.

Early action in Korea proved that the high flying and fast B-57 Canberra bomber was not well suited for night interdiction missions against enemy supply lines. The A-26 (re-designated the B-26 with the retirement of the Martin bomber in 1948) was brought out of retirement and flew numerous low-level missions against truck convoys and trains, disrupting enemy supply lines to the front. The last bombing mission of the Korean conflict was flown by Douglas Invaders.

The first A-26 Invaders to appear in Vietnam were used by the French in 1946 against the Viet Minh. In 1962, the French also used A-26 Invaders against an insurrection in Algeria. Meanwhile, the United States was becoming more involved in Vietnam and A-26 Invaders were used in 1963 in support of South Vietnamese ground units. Following structural failures brought on by

the increased loads being carried on the A-26 Invader, they were grounded in early 1964. However, because of the increased need for night interdiction missions on the Ho Chi Minh trail, forty one A-26 Invaders were rebuilt and featured greater structural strength, more powerful engines, greater fuel capacity and advanced weapons. These re-entered the war late in 1964 as B-26K Invaders, and performed a variety of roles with great success until lack of spare parts and attrition forced them out of the war in late 1969.

## ONE WAY OUT

I have heard the story about one of the squadron flight engineers bailing out on the way to a target. I made notes from several conversations at various reunions and decided to try to get the facts together. Going through the Archives records I find a report of one Robert E. Swanson, S/Sgt, ASN17035903, MIA 24 August 1944, then corrected to 27 August 1944. He was listed with the 783rd Squadron; however I understand he was transferred to the 781st. He was engineer on the Frazier crew for several missions, then transferred to another crew.

Also in the Archives I find on August 27th on the mission to Blechhammer, near Kosel, Germany, a notation, "One crew member is missing due to the fact he made a parachute jump from his plane at the IP. No explanation can be offered as to why he bailed out the waist window."

Another interesting note is that one plane upon turning on the IP jet-tisoned 4 bombs as they fell out of the bomb bay as the doors were opened. It looks like Swanson landed with a bang.

Several of the men remember the morning of the mission when Swanson jumped out. They report he had packed extra candy bars, some clothes, etc. On the mission when it turned at the IP, he pulled open the hatch and jumped out. Previously he had said he wanted to visit his grandparents in Germany.

In an inquiry to the Veterans

Administration all I received is his date of death in 1975.

Does anyone have any further information??

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## FLIM FLAM GROUP DROOL by The GHOUL

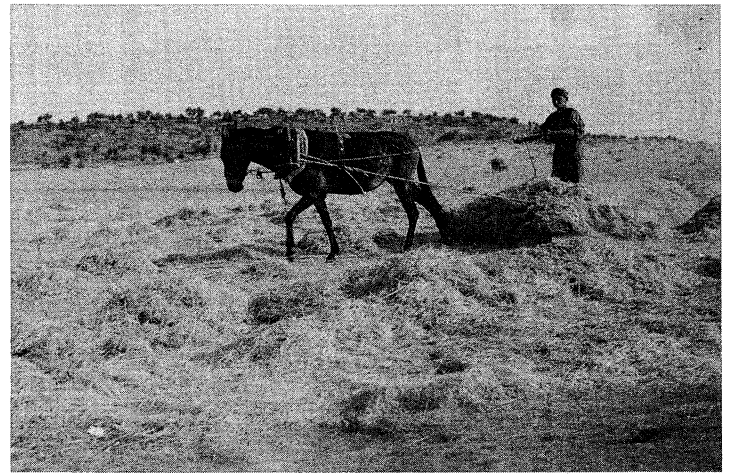
Cpl Phil Bransen is being pegged as "The Lion-hearted." It took a lot of courage for Phil (whether he knew it or not) to be chairman of the E.M.'s discussion period on "Why we Fight." As far as I know that point was not clarified before the meeting adjourned. Robert Leasure - he's the boy Col. Vaughn calls "the Jelly-bean soldier" - gave the shortest and most typical G.I. answer encountered in the discussion. Said Robert, "The illegitimates declared war." Our psychology is simple - THEY started it.

Major Moody and Captain Fisher are both trying their luck with a bit of mustache, and so far, a bit is all that it is. I thought that I saw a blemish of some sort under Major Moody's nose Saturday, but I thought that it was a ring left by the rim of a glass after quaffing Friday ale. . .

Saturday's Presentation - - stirring marches rang out, gallant men were decorated, guidons snapped in the breeze, and the earth trembled to the beat of marching men - nope let's keep that in singular. Capt Kantor was the only one marching there.

Deposits of albumen or some other unknown ingredient in the system of M/Sgt Tucci is known to greatly impede his social life. That is most regrettable, but such is not the case with Bob (note the profile) Jans. Not being able to attend the Opera the other night our effete elite sought some of the other opportunities afforded a nocturnal peragrinator circumambulating gay Bari.

WHERE!!! (I will not tell the third character's name as he made this column two weeks prior and it wasn't because he got the Good Conduct Medal either. To give you hint, though his initials are Ralph D. B.



Photos from the album turned over to the squadron by Robert W. Pennock (Group Casualty Reporter). The top two were taken on the base. A note with the photos by Robert is as follows; "The Italian donkey seems to be a comparative mild animal, probably because it is closely associated with the human beings at all times, living in an adjoining room, or the floor below the family in some cases. It and the mule are seen throughout southern Italy. The horse is more in evidence in the cities being used as a carriage animal, especially the tax-carriage trade." The photos should bring back some memories of Pantanella.

## THE WELL STACKED HAY STACK

465th Bomb Group Intelligence Officers, Gale Graham, told me this story during the reunion in San Antonio. The Group Headquarters had an exceptionally low number of cases of VD, so the Commanding Officer approved a large increase in the number of passes for the men. After several weeks the number of VD cases hit all time highs and the Purple Banner was hoisted. Then the CO restricted the men to the base until all cases were cleared up.

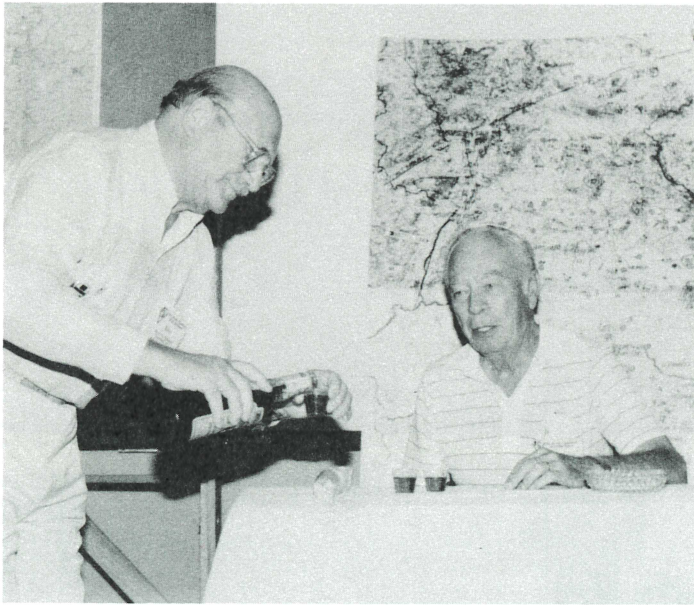
But that never happened. In fact it got worse. The Doc and the Officers at Group Headquarters could not understand what was going on. Then one day someone noticed a well worn trail to a nearby haystack. Upon investigation the problem was answered. There in the haystack was a young Italian Senorita practicing the oldest profession known to man. The haystack was hollowed out to make one small room that would accommodate a cot. And it probably had a straw mattress.

Needless to say she received an eviction notice and soon the Purple Banner was lowered.



Could this be Senorita Haystack?





Doc Rapoport is pouring a 2 ounce portion of bourbon for Jim Wray. They just finished the mock breifing at the San Antonio reunion and all participants received their well earned bourbon. Just like at Pantanella!



Another reunion photo - a typical scene with Pantanella comrades in deep discussion while their wives chat. And in the corner is Pantanella's Silver Wings band leader Bonnie Rowe playing a background tune.

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