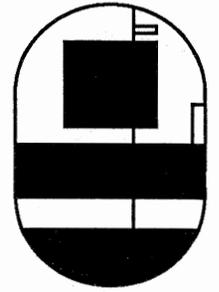




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WAR INTERLUDE

by DON BARRETT

This is not intended to be a war story. Rather, it hopes to be a chronicle of a sort of interlude during the war, a story of somewhat unusual events and relations with interesting people that occurred in the life of a fairly naive twenty-one year old during a few months of World War II. After almost fifty years, these memories are still clearly etched in my memory. They have surfaced occasionally on an oral basis and are reduced to writing now only as a result of innocent, casual requests from my family, friends and Jim Althoff. Our Squadron reunion leader's plea for stories for the "Pantanello News" overcame my last bit of procrastination and so pen finally met paper.

As you might expect, it has been an interesting but reluctant endeavor for me after all these years. My hope that it will be of some minor interest to someone else.

Our crew had been flying combat missions since May 5, 1944. We had lost some of our comrades, the original crews assigned to the 781st Squadron, 465th Bombardment Group. My best service buddy, Vern Burda, had been shot down for the second time. Our original co-pilot, Jim Doyle, with whom we had been through so much, had been reassigned to lead a replacement crew. The airplane in which we had trained, flown overseas and flown for our first 17 sorties, was relegated to the scrap heap after being shot up over Vienna.

Most of the original crews had about the same number of missions that I had (32 sorties, 42 missions) and we were beginning to think about going home. We thought about it but didn't talk about it much — superstition seemed to abound in combat. In a word, war was grim and getting grimmer with each mission. We frequently reminded each other of it. It was a psychological education to see the effects of combat on our various crew members. Some became more open and demonstrative, some retreated into themselves, some became more religious and some completely lost their morals.

I was assigned to fly with Jocko Robert's crew for the mission on August 16, 1944. The target was a synthetic fuel plant at Fried-

richshafen, Germany on the shore of Lake Constance. About ten miles west across the lake was Switzerland. We were the Deputy Group Leader airplane that day, so our crew make-up was unusual in that it included six officers and five enlisted men. There were two regular navigators and one radar navigator.

Over the target our plane was hit by anti-aircraft fire in the main gasoline cell in the middle of the airplane and also near the engines on the right side. The plane was immediately filled with gasoline fumes, and problems in the hydraulic system made it impossible to feather the malfunctioning engines on the right side so we dropped out of the formation. The gasoline loss and the drag of the unfeathered engines eliminated any possibility of making it to Allied lines, so Jocko made the decision to go across Lake Constance to Switzerland. Soon after we crossed the lake, German-made ME 109s came toward us. There were anxious moments until we saw the Swiss cross markings on their planes. We were losing altitude quite rapidly, the plane was difficult to control, and the gasoline fumes could have blown us up at any time, so Jocko instructed us to bail out.

Fortunately, Vern Burda had previously explained to me that he found out the hard way that you couldn't just put your feet down through the nose wheel door opening and drop, because your feet would immediately blow back up. So I straddled the nose wheel opening



Don Barrett with the Berner Alps in the background.

with arms and legs and dropped through, as he had suggested. Vern also told me that his chest parachute hadn't opened when he pulled the rip cord, so he had to rip the chute out of the pack while the ground rushed up to meet him. With this in mind, I counted what I'm sure was a fast 1 to 10, pulled the rip cord and immediately reached back to claw open the chute pack. It was already opening by itself so my impatience almost got my thumb ripped off.

As the chute opened and my falling speed was abruptly reduced, there was a very realistic sensation of the parachute pulling me skyward. (What a revolting development") After this passed, I looked down and saw a rather steep-roofed house, an open area and a large grove of trees. We had had very little instruction on parachuting and no practice at all, but we had been told to pull the shroud lines on either side to guide the descent, and to flex

our knees and keep the wind at our backs for a proper landing on our feet. (ha, ha).

I pulled the shroud lines, first one way, then the other and seemed to be descending in the open area, and then checked distance to the ground again. The descent seemed to be very slow and I even had time to see that there was a young Swiss fraulein waiting with the small group of Swiss soldiers and civil-

ians below. Suddenly the ground was rushing up to meet me. I flexed my knees and despite best efforts, landed solidly and unceremoniously smack on my derriere. Immediately the Swiss soldiers took charge of me and I was taken to a small station where some other members of our crew had been collected. As you can imagine, the relief of getting out of a plane filled with gasoline fumes and without sufficient power to get back to base, parachuting for the first time, and landing safely in a neutral country was an exciting but rather nerve-wracking day, and as Elliott Sweet (the crew's regular navigator) and I looked at each other, we smiled very nervously and broadly — we were 21-year-olds who had just had a big day. Jocko, older and with more savvy, cautioned us that we shouldn't look so happy. It could be misinterpreted by the Swiss.

From the station we were taken to an airport near Fraunfeld, Switzerland where we were joined by the rest of the crew. We had all landed safely within a few miles of Fraunfeld, which was only about 30 miles west of Friedrichshafen, our bombing target. However, it turned out that our radar navigator had some anxious moments after his bail-out. It seems he somersaulted out of the bomb bay and pulled the rip cord while in the somersault. The parachute shroud lines became twisted so he was rapidly trying to untwist them while in a speedy descent. He was quite low when the chute finally blossomed, but it was his lucky day. He was over an open pit mine so there was a little extra time to slow his descent. He came out of it with only a sprained ankle.

We also learned that our plane had crashed in Germany only a few miles from Schaffhausen, Switzerland. A look at the map will give some indication of the relatively short time we had to bail out over the northeast corner of Switzerland before the plane was back over Germany.

At the airport near Fraunfeld, Switzerland, we

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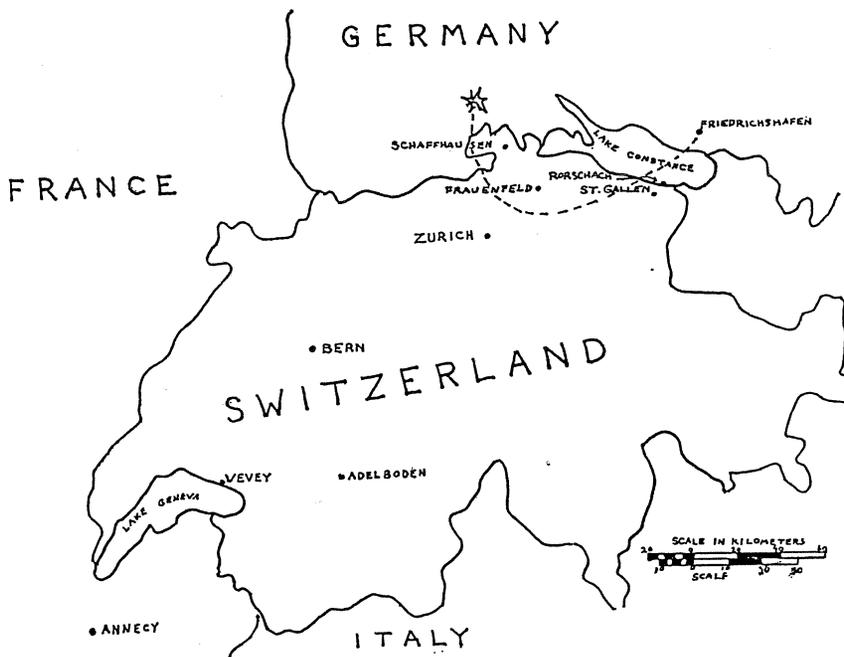
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781st BOMB SQUADRON

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.



were assembled in a room with tables and addressed by a Swiss soldier who had obviously handled American flyers before. He made a few wisecracks, was a little perplexed by the unusual make-up of our crew, and told us to put our escape kits on the table. He knew exactly what was in them, asked for a stick of gum, and told us to take the \$48 out of there but to leave the cloth escape maps. Remembering the sessions on our duty to escape, I hid my maps and took them with me.

From the Fraunfeld airport we were taken to Adelboden, Switzerland, a resort town where internees were kept. It was about fifty miles south of Bern, around 5,000 feet high in the Swiss Alps and accessible by only a single road. I should explain that the Swiss had at least two motivating factors for putting us in Adelboden: (1) to maintain their "neutrality" until the winner of the war was evident and (2) to fill their empty resort hotels with paying "guests" since tourism was almost non-existent at that time.

Our accommodations in Adelboden were at the Palace Hotel which was an older hotel with limited electrical capacity, etc. Elliott and I had a large room, but it was almost unheated and hot water was available for only two hours every Wednesday morning. Of course, we improvising Americans tried to circumvent the hot water shortage by buying water heating coils which resulted in blowing the hotel's fuses. By the way, we did our wash on Wednesday mornings in a deluxe douche bowl in our bathroom.

Also, in keeping with their ever-present economic awareness, the Swiss allowed us to get paid our regular pay through the Red Cross. Consequently, we were a great source of business for all the shopkeepers and restaurants in this four-block-long isolated town high in the Alps. When not treating ourselves to restaurant food, we were served normal Swiss Army food - very little meat but featuring potato bread, potato soup and rostie potatoes.

Of course, idle minds are the

devil's workshop, so many humorous episodes occurred. One snowy day, an American Lieutenant from Arkansas with a wry, dry sense of humor posted a notice on the Internee bulletin board in the hall. It indicated that for any internee interested in escaping, a bobsled with machine guns mounted front and rear would be departing at eleven p.m. over Mount Hannenmaus. We watched surreptitiously while a Swiss non-com tried to decipher the notice and immediately scurried to Swiss Commandant Howalt's office to give him this valuable information.

We had a ten o'clock curfew each night, so a few of us often went to the Alpenruhe Hotel bar at the other end of town from the Palace Hotel to imbibe cognac and sifon or other assorted spirits. We then hustled back to the Palace just before curfew. Eventually we chafed under this curfew, so we decided to invite Colonel Howalt, the Swiss Commandant, to accompany us. We made sure he had a good time, and when curfew time arrived, we made motions to leave.

However, Colonel Howalt, not one to underplay his authority, decided we should ignore the curfew and we stayed on for quite a while. All partially in our cups, we noisily walked back to the Palace at the other end of town. It was late Fall and there was ice and snow as we teetered on down toward the Palace entrance. A Swiss guard was stationed on the lower roof over the entrance and he was obviously excited about this transgression of the curfew rule. As we got closer and he was preparing to halt us, he finally noticed Colonel Howalt. He snapped and clicked to attention, (Nazi style) and slipped and fell off the roof. We were, of course, controllably amused until we got back to our rooms and laughed uproariously.

In the isolation of this peaceful mountain resort, we were occasionally reminded that there was a war being fought just beyond the Swiss border. Some nights we could see great flashes of light on the horizon, an indication of the British nighttime blockbuster bombing raids on

nearby Germany.

There was also a story told by a Yugoslav Royalist soldier (exactly why there were Yugoslav soldiers in Adelboden, I don't know) about a pregnant Royalist woman going by train from Belgrade into Chetnik (another Yugoslav faction) territory. According to him, the Chetniks opened her stomach, removed the fetus, inserted a cat, sewed her back up and sent her back to the Royalists. The story, while of questionable truth, illustrates the extreme bitterness between various Yugoslav factions. (It is interesting but hardly believable that the same type of story is circulated these days since the fighting among the various factions has erupted again). The characters change over the years but the ancient animosities seem to endure.

A few of us spent Sunday afternoons with a very interesting Swiss Lutheran minister. He had been a missionary in Africa to a group of man-eating savages and had come back to Switzerland to raise money for his mission. While in Switzerland, the war closed the borders and he was stuck for the time being. To fill in the time, among other projects, he conducted services for internees. Interestingly, his philosophy included the thought that it was more important for him to work with the savages than with civilized populations because civilized people know right from wrong (whether they practice it or not) but savages don't - they eat each other. He believed his purpose in life was to teach them right from wrong.

The minister lived in St. Gallen, in eastern Switzerland, about 10 to 15 miles from Lake Constance, and just across the lake from Friedrichshafen, Germany. He knew a Swiss industrialist's wife (previously an Oklahoman) in St. Gallen and between the two of them, they agreed that the minister should invite two of the American internees to St. Gallen for a pre-Christmas party, given by her. Somehow, Elliott and I were selected. Before we were to leave Adelboden, we were to sign statements that we would not try to escape from Switzerland during the visit. In the confusion of a

hasty departure, Elliott signed and I didn't.

We got to St. Gallen early one evening and were taken directly to a privately owned indoor tennis court that had been prepared for the party of 50 to 75 people and at which we were the guests of honor. After acknowledgements and dinner, a Viennese poet read poems she had written about Elliott and me, and we were given a great deal of attention. In particular, an attractive young woman who sat across from me at dinner was very attentive during dinner and dancing.

After the party, several of us went to the Swiss industrialist's home for swimming, saunas and a cheese omelette snack made by Elliott and me about four a.m. Elliott and I were then bedded down in a room with twin beds and a table in between. In a few hours, we were awakened by a canary placed in our room and a bath being drawn by the butler. We looked at each other over peeled apple slices that had been placed on the table between us. We laughed uproariously at the strange twists a soldier's life can take.

Later that morning, as we straightened our ties before a hallway mirror, Elliott said to me in his best high school German - "Kleider machen leuter," which loosely translated means, "Clothes make the man." At that exact moment, the butler came by, raised his eyebrows, and I am sure, hustled off to the Swiss/German industrialist with questions about the nature of our visit.

That afternoon, we were taken on a tour of the house and grounds. Down the terrace in a large outbuilding was a very well-stocked bottled wine cellar and a sparkling new Lincoln convertible - up on chocks until gasoline became available again.

Next day our hostess showed us the first American flag flown over the Oklahoma capitol after it became a state. She also inquired about our obligation to return to Adelboden. Upon finding out that I was not honor-bound to return, she called Sam Wood, the U.S. Consul in Zurich and arranged for me to go to his

office the following day for sanctuary.

That night we were invited to the home of the attentive young woman (from the party) for dinner and the night. It turned out that she lived in a refurbished castle near Rohrschach (of ink blot fame), which is just across Lake Constance from Friedrichshafen. She told me that at a very young age a marriage to an older Italian nobleman had been arranged for her. It was so distasteful to her that she made herself sick on seafood to avoid spending the wedding night with him.

Next day the ex-noblewoman drove me (in a charcoal-powered automobile) to a location near the consul's office in Zurich. While walking to the Consul's office, we passed a short distance from a fully uniformed Nazi in one of those long, luxurious leather coats with fur lining. He appeared to have the run of the city, which is in the German-oriented part of Switzerland. Of course I then wondered about Swiss neutrality but anxiously distanced myself from the Nazi.

After spending the night with the Consul's assistant, the Consul drove me west to Bern and a night in a crowded American Attache's of-

fice. There were about five other escapees also holed up there. It was rumored that Swiss francs and Swiss watches were good to have to bribe the Swiss border guards if you were caught and, if not, to sell in France. Someone from the Attache's office bought me a self-winding Swiss watch for about \$25. and a Robin's egg blue raincoat to wear during my escape.

Next night the several escapees left the downtown building two by two and walked to a less central location where we were to wait for a car to pick us up. It was a snowy night in mid-December and our rendezvous point was near an apartment building. We strolled up and down the street as casually as we could, but someone in the apartment building must have become alarmed and called the police. Just as our pickup car arrived at the designated corner and we were stuffing ourselves into it, up came a Swiss policeman yelling for us to halt. Our driver quickly took off, bumping the policeman with the car's right fender.

We drove for a while and were let out to wait alone in the real frigid night in a cemetery outside the town of Vevey, on the eastern end of



L to R - Jim Lyons, Elliott Sweet, Bill Rutherford from the 8th AF, CO of Adelboden prior to Jocko Roberts, Don Barrett, Jocko Roberts. Photo taken August 1944 on the veranda of Palace Hotel, Adelboden, Switzerland. Berner Alps are in the background.

Lake Geneva in the French-oriented part of Switzerland. After a bitterly cold wait, someone showed up and we very quickly ran a few miles into Vevey. In Vevey, we were put up in two barren (except for one bed) upstairs rooms with a few other escapees. Two slept on a mattress, two on the box springs and no one had anything other than body heat for warmth. The rooms were over a tiny, neighborhood restaurant, and the operator had us come down to eat in groups of four after the customers had thinned out. Of course we worried about the customers turning us in to the police. This arrangement went on for about three or four days over Christmas, 1944. The unknown guy who was going to lead us across the border would not do it until after Christmas - indicating that even undercover people sometimes observe religious holidays.

Finally we got the word that tonight was border-crossing night. It was a very bright, moonlit night. It seemed like a terrible night to try to avoid detection. We were led on a run out of town by, of all people, a Polish soldier. What he was doing that far from Poland in landlocked Switzerland is still a mystery to me. He was carrying a handgun and his demeanor convinced us he would use it if necessary.

We ran through a small woods and were out in the open when we heard voices. We were near the border and two Swiss guards were walking down a dirt road, apparently going off duty. We flattened ourselves on the ground about 25 yards from them and felt very conspicuous in that bright moonlight. I was sure they would hear my pounding heart and, if not that, the thundering tick of the self-winding watch in my pocket. All the running had wound it up and it was ticking proudly away.

After what seemed forever, the guards passed us, so engrossed in their conversation that they never noticed us. We then went into another small woods and to a creekside. We all had visions of getting icy wet when the Polish soldier produced a small rubber raft out of

the brush. Finally, all of us made the crossing into France and we went to a nearby house. There we were met by a sinister-looking French man who wanted to trade us French francs for our Swiss francs. He would sell us the French francs for the equivalent of 1/2 cent American each. We thought we knew that U.S. troops in France were paid in French francs as if the French franc was worth 2¢ each. There was a potential 4 for 1 profit if the U.S. Army paymaster would accept our French francs as we left the country. After trying hopelessly to verify that the watermarks on the sinister man's French francs were authentic, I gambled hesitantly on the equivalent of about \$50.

We spent one night in the French house, two of us huddling close under a feather tick in an unheated room on yet another frigid night. Next morning, a U.S. Army truck came and took us to a hotel in Annecy, France, where we were given warmer clothing and accommodations. The next day, we were trucked south to Lyon, France and left on our own for a day. I went to a barber shop and sold the self-winding watch for \$75 (cost \$25). Also went to the U.S. Army paymaster and, because I was being sent back to Italy, was able to cash in my French francs for \$200 (cost \$50). It occurred to me that Quartermaster troops stationed near European borders had a potential gold mine situation.

That night in Lyon, a few of us met some local girls and went to a nightclub. It was unusual in that all of the patrons sat at the tables sipping their cognac, or whatever, with their hats, coats and gloves on - no heat, in December yet. As we sat there, a hush came over the patrons as four rough-cut young men entered the club. They looked the crowd over and left. We were told they were members of the Maquis, the French underground resistance movement, and that they were probably looking for suspected Nazi collaborators. There seemed to be a great deal of apprehension by many in the crowd.

The next day I was flown back to

Italy and eventually to our airbase at Pantanella, where Ernie Van Asperen, a familiar face, saw to it that I was well taken care of. Ernie left me alone for a few minutes at the new Officer's Bar and an officer, who assumed I was a recent replacement arrival, began talking to me. He was just explaining how rough combat was (he had flown four missions). When Ernie came back, he quickly picked up the gist of the conversation and started laughing. He then told the officer my story and the officer very sincerely said, "What a wonderful experience; wish I had had it." I wasn't sure he would have enjoyed all of it, but it was an unusual closing comment.

One meets so many interesting people in a war situation and this story closes with just one more example. On the ship coming home from Naples, I met a young Infantry Lieutenant who had gone overseas as a private, outlived most of his comrades, won a battlefield commission in the African campaign, had a Silver Star, was mentioned in Ernie Pyle's book, contracted syphilis and took the many shots for it, was going home to a small town in Louisiana for 30 days' leave to raise hell and then return to Infantry combat. He was also a Lothario - on a ship carrying 3500 men and about 25 nurses home, he somehow obtained a bottle of liquor and a nurse for the voyage. I wondered about two things: (1) How wild would his leave in Louisiana be; could the little town handle him? and (2) Would he ever be able to lead a "normal" life again?

As I think about the forgoing, it occurs to me that wars have a way of rushing boys into maturity much too quickly. Only a few fortunate generations ever get to mature gradually. The rest of us definitely miss something, or rather, we trade it unwittingly for a war experience. I guess it has always been like that - and to be realistic, present events in the world seem to indicate it will continue to be this way.

Leo Lutgring Interviewed by O. J. Cowart

I was talking to Master Sergeant Leo Lutgring at the reunion in Omaha and asked him some questions about his memories of his days at Pantanella. As this article will show, the passage of time cannot erase Sgt. Lutgring's remarkable recall of details at McCook, Nebraska and Pantanella Airfield.

OJ. Having as many men as you had, did you have much trouble getting them to work as a team?

LL. No. They were all young fellows and very willing to help one another. If they didn't have an airplane around, they would help their buddies. When we had a full quota of airplanes, we didn't have but two or three boys on each airplane, and they had their hands full. I met every airplane when it came in and landed, and went back and checked with the boys to see if they needed any help and worked with them myself. I'm very thankful that I had the outfit that I had.

OJ. What about the Jeep engine hooked up to a generator?

LL. Down on the line, we used it to generate electricity for light cords and our barracks. It was a little 110v generator. We put the Jeep engine in a frame and I made a pulley out of ply board and hooked it up with a V-belt. We had a barrel of gasoline and let it run all night. Most of the work on the airplanes was done at night after the missions. We had little D-1 power units for lights on the hard stand. We took them out in a pickup to work on the airplanes.

OJ. Did your engineers work on the airplane putt-putts?

LL. We didn't work much on them. They were more like a lawn mower. It usually took a mechanic to start one of them. We had some one cylinder and some had two cylinders. The heavier two cylinder putt-putts came over with the radar planes that had more equipment than regular 24s. They were used mainly to start the engines. The radio men used them quite a bit

checking the radio and communications equipment. I'd rather hear the regular engines than the putt-putts.

OJ. During the winter when it was real cold, did the mechanics just tough it out and keep doing their job?

LL. Oh yes, yes. I have had my fingers so cold a lot of times I had to look

and see if I had a wrench in my fingers. When the cold weather was bad and we had ice and frost, we had covers on the wings, and you know you don't want to have ice and frost when you take off. It gives you trouble. The boys hated to put the covers on, but they did. I've seen them at night with a strong wind blowing and ground zero weather trying to tie the covers on the wings. We had more trouble at McCook with this than we had in combat. The weather was colder at McCook, Nebraska.

OJ. After the missions returned, did you go and inspect each airplane?

LL. Oh yes. The pilot would write up things wrong on column 1a. We would look at it to see what the trouble was. We would have everything from a pencil lead broke off in a oxygen mask to engine trouble. Every engine coming in with trouble, we would take it off and replace it. We would not risk a bunch of men's lives in an airplane if an engine wouldn't make it.

OJ. You didn't stay in the big engineering barracks up on the hill. How did that project get started?

LL. I really don't know. I was in a small place near the tower. I was up on the hill at the orderly room and group operations less than anybody in the outfit. I stayed down around the boys on the line. There were a lot of things that had to be done and it took a lot of men and cooperation.



Master Sergeant Leo G. Lutgring "On The Line" at Pantanella, 1944.

You would not believe how many of the men twenty or twenty-five years old had never driven a vehicle. There was a belief by some that you had to go 30 or 35 miles an hour to push-start a vehicle. This one fellow thought you had to go that fast to start - he tore up the vehicle!

OJ. What do you know about the B-24 "V Grand"?

LL. It was in the 780th Squadron. I wanted that airplane, but I didn't get it. The 780th had it and every time it flew it got shot up bad. The German fighters tried to shoot it out of the sky. One crew scheduled to fly it asked, "Why are you trying to kill me"? They didn't want to fly it over the target.

OJ. Did a lot of bombs go off when the bomb dump blew up?

LL. Some of the Ordnance men said between 350 and 600 five hundred bombs went off.

OJ. When you spent a lot of time fixing up a plane and it came back all shot to hell, what was the biggest disappointment you had?

LL. There was so many of them, it would be hard to pick any one. If a fuel cell was leaking it would be grounded, and the Crew Chief would almost sit down and cry because he would have to change it. Every fuel cell that was changed, I helped to put it in. There were times that I would take a cletrac with a winch and push the cell back in the wing or

put a block and tackle on the landing gear. To put a wing tank in, you had about a thousand or two screws to take out and put back in. You could change two or three engines in about the same time it took to change a wing fuel cell. Send it out on a mission and when it returned, maybe the same cell or one on the other side would have to be changed again.

The first airplanes I worked on were the LB 30s. We called them Liberators. They finally started calling the B-24 Liberator. The LB 30 did not have turbochargers and had electric props, and 30 cal. machine guns.

I came over on the boat to Bizerte, but Col. McKenna came to Bizerte in a Jeep and took me to Tunis.

Operations would call me and want to know how many airplanes I lost. Usually I would be watching and waiting for the airplanes to come back. If they were gone over 9 hours and 15 minutes, I knew something had gone wrong. They could have run out of gas or something worse. We put in 2780 gallons of gas in each.

Gasoline was a good cleaner to get oil out of ODs. You had to be careful because static electricity would start a fire. Hang on a coat hanger and in 15 minutes they would be dry with the creases still in.

When closing down Pantanella, we had 4,000 gallons left after filling all the airplanes. I tried to return it to the depot, but the driver was told to just dump it in a ditch. They were already tearing up the depot and couldn't take it. They said to take it over to a ditch and turn it loose. I went to the mess hall and noticed smoke. Later the tank driver came in and said, "See that smoke, that's my load of gas." We then took the trucks and Jeeps to Naples. Most of the trucks were GMCs and had lots of power and would just keep going.

OJ. Did you help with the war weary plane?

LL. We took the turrets and military hardware out. I helped make a test flight. The pilot took off and when we got near the control tower, we were

flying. He said "My God, what an airplane!" Without the military load, it was a hot rod.

OJ. When it was rainy and cold, did you have to get up on top of the airplanes?

LL. It was an everyday affair to get up on top to put in fuel. One of the Crew Chiefs slipped and I went to the hospital with him. Earl Viands had a dollar-watch, and when he hit the watch flew all to pieces.

OJ. About oxygen?

LL. The oxygen boys would put that in. Ordinarily the system called for 400 lbs, but we usually had 525 lbs. A lot of times they would be running out of oxygen before they got back. Some ground crews would drag the hoses in the dirt. I told them if they got a little grease or oil on it, it would blow up the airplane. I told him that you don't mix oxygen and oil. He didn't believe that. I had to change many oxygen masks. We would have to find out what was going wrong.

OJ. Engine repairs?

LL. Major repairs were usually done at the repair depot. Some of the boys had just gotten out of AM school and had no experience. I'll never forget one of the boys at Tucson twisted a spark plug off in the engine. He got a easeout; there were two kinds; one would screw out and the other kind was square. The square one is the best. He had a 12" Crescent wrench with a piece of pipe about 3 feet long and was coming down on it and twisted off the easeout. When he quit, I had to get that thing out of there. By taking a hack saw blade and grinding off half, I could make several cuts and get them out. It seems that it became my job to take them out.

OJ. In a phone conversation with F. D. Bonvillian shortly before he died, he asked me if I knew about the crewman being removed from a B-24 with pry bars. I told him I did not. Do you know anything about this?

LL. His name was Kelley. He made a remark one day that he would like to take a Purple Heart home with

him. The next day or day after, his wife was sent his Purple Heart. A piece of flack came thru the nose turret and hit him in the juggler vein. By the time they returned to Pantanella, flying at high altitude in bitter cold, his body had froze. I saw the medics using pinch bars to pry him out of that nose turret. I don't remember the boys first name but his last name was Kelley. (*The roster shows S/Sgt. James D. Kelley was KIA 2/7/45.*)

OJ. About the man who fell out of the nose wheel door over Pantanella. Did you know of any details?

LL. I think he was a navigator. He had some sheets of paper and the wind blew some of them on the floor and back over the nose wheel door. There wasn't supposed to be weight on that door. When he crawled over on the door to get the papers, the door flew open. I was told this was at an altitude of about 2,000 ft. and he was dead when they picked him up. He had no chute on and didn't have a chance of survival. I was asked to inspect the doors to determine if they were defective. I found no defect with the doors; it was just an accident. (*F/O Newton Goldman, Nelson/Navigator killed September 5, 1944.*)

OJ. A few questions I asked, Leo would just say I don't want to answer that. Then there were times he would ask me to not record some of his comments. I complied with his wishes and turned "that thing" off (my tape recorder). Also, since he was older, he always referred to the "boys". If time had permitted, and with Leo's sharp mind, he could probably write a whole book about his experiences with the pilots, airplane crews and his "boys" on the ground crews. I wish to thank Leo for his time in taping this article. I enjoyed this interview with our "chief mechanic" at Pantanella Airfield, Italy, Master Sergeant Leo Lutgring.

The easiest way to get to sleep is to count your blessings instead of your problems.

MEMORIAL DAY

As Memorial Day approaches we want to think of those who gave their lives during WWII, in particular the men from the 781st. Here is an example of one of our widow's remembrance.

Dodie (Jolicoeur) Shallman has enjoyed attending our reunions. Her favorite one was Boston when we had the B-24, *All American*. It was very satisfying for her to see and go through the plane.

It brought back memories of her young husband, Jerry Jolicoeur, who was lost in 1944, and buried in France. Her regret was that she had never been able to visit his grave in St. Avold, France.

Last year I heard from Dodie informing me that she had traveled to France with Jerry's sister, Joan, and visited his grave at St. Avold. The reunion in Boston inspired her to go.

They were there on May 24, 1992, Memorial Day, and attended

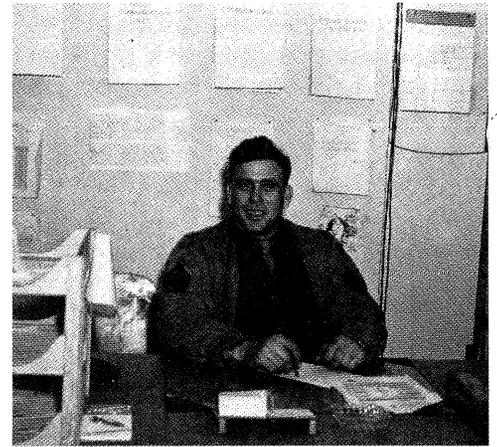
the Memorial Day services. There were about 4500 people in attendance. The program was in both French and English. A band played, a choir sang, and when it was time to offer a floral tribute to the fallen Heroes, there were 48 organizations who, one by one, came forward with their wreaths or sprays of flowers. It was a very moving experience for all. Later they were escorted to the grave site. The end of a long journey.

Most of you know Jerome "Jerry" Jolicoeur was navigator on the Cauble crew, and went down on 30 June 1944 on a mission to Blechhammer. He was severely burned and died 10 July 1944, in a Hungarian Hospital.

Jerry Jr. was born less than a month later, August 5, 1944. He lives in Grand Rapids, MN., with his wife and two daughters, Renee and Connie. He never got to meet his Dad, but has his picture and medals framed in memory of him.

The beautiful poem under the photo was written by Dodie Shallman.

FOLDED WINGS



M/Sgt Jack V. Stallings

Jack V. Stallings (Communications Chief) passed away December 4, 1992 and his wife, **Virginia**, passed away on April 5, 1992. Reported by their son, Jack W. Stallings.

Phil Kirby passed away April 27, 1992. Notice received from his wife.

Robert O. Daniel (Group Communications Chief) passed away November 18, 1992, at age 78 Reported By O.J. Cowart.

William Rupert (Communications) passed away October 9, 1992. Reported by O.J. Cowart.

James E. Frank (Radar Mechanic) passed away August 17, 1992. John Baum reported he heard from Frank's wife and that he had lost a battle with cancer.

Harold Grant (Leggiate/Ball Gunner) passed away March 31, 1991. Reported by Pierre J. J. Kennedy.

Milton Reed (Armament) passed away Nov. 29, 1992. Reported by Bruce Miller.

We extend our deepest sympathies to the families and friends of our comrades whom we loved and respected. We give them a final salute.

I contacted the law firm Robert Daniel worked with. They said he noticed he bruised easily and reported it to his doctor last September when he had a physical. After further tests it was determined he had a blood problem - it would not coagulate. He went on medication, then had the spleen removed in November. He was recovering fine and went to work every day. Then he



FOLDED WINGS

There he lies,
My beloved,
My fallen Hero,
Beneath this pristine cross.
His life like a comet

Blazed across the sky,
And was no more.
His comrades,
Hair turned grey
Gather to recount
Their glorious deeds of yesteryear.
But my Hero remains, in my memory,

got pneumonia and died in a few days. He had been in good health prior to his blood problem.

Jack Stallings son noted in his letter, "Although I have never met any of you, I feel as though I myself am saying, "Goodbye." I shall miss reading of you and the many memories which you all shared in common with my Father. I assure you that each of you shall always be fondly remembered by my children and me as we have occasion to recall the many episodes of which we have heard my Father speak."

MAIL CALL



A letter from **Ralph P. Du Bois**, Group S-2, Intelligence, Chief Clerk.

"I received a letter today from a law firm which has been the most part of Robert O. Daniel's life since his Pantanella days. He passed away on November 18, 1992. We had exchanged Christmas cards with notes since WWII.

"Bob was Master Sergeant in Group Communication. He had made several trips back to Italy as well as other parts of Europe. On one trip he met Joe Tucci (Group Sergeant Major) walking down a sidewalk in Paris, France. We had not seen each other since leaving Italy in WWII. Some coincidence!

"Bob was a bachelor, 78 years of age and I never had any indication that he was ailing in any correspondence. He was still active in the law firm last Christmas time.

"It makes me sad to think that I am the only survivor of 5 master sergeants who were housed together at Pantanella Group. Must be getting old! I feel fine and have no indication of pending disaster as of this writing.

"With best wishes for a great 1993 to you and yours as well as the 781st."

A note from **Bill Jostworth**, "I called **John Zartman**. He's now confined

to a wheel chair. His spirits were really up, and he's doing stained glass art as a hobby. He said he intends to be at the Tucson reunion. He's a wonderful man"

I'm sure John appreciated the call and I'm sure more of you are responding to the request to contact those confined.

A letter from **Bruce Miller**. "Some Solemn news - the Armament Section has lost another good member, the third in two years. **Sgt. Milton "Red" Reed**, age 72, died suddenly on November 29, 1992 while watching TV at his fishing camp on Mobile Bay, Alabama.

"Red, as we all called him because of his red hair, was in charge of the turret repair/maintenance crew for our squadron. He was well-liked by all that worked with him and will be missed by all his many friends."

Bruce also noted he was sorry he missed the Omaha reunion and will try to make Tucson.

From **Henry Gick** (Radio Operator). "Three days ago (Jan. 4) I went to see *All American* at DeLand Airport in Florida. I brought a copy of the Pantanella News with me and showed it to the crew. They were surprised because your name was the most prominent of those displayed on the B-24.

"I will give you a re-cap of my life since Pantanella. I was discharged Sept. 9, 1945 and returned home to New York and went to work for the state government and enrolled in Pratt Institute School of Architecture. In 1948 I joined the reserves and received a commission as a 2nd Lieutenant.

"I moved to the Federal Government and in 1971 retired as Chief Architect of the F.H.A. insuring office. I was 50 years old and took a job with Suffolk County, New York as director of building department and deputy commission of planning.

"I retired from this position in 1979, still too young to stop work, and became a consultant for sewage installations in Nassau County, New York. At age 60 I retired as a Lt.

Col. from the Air Force.

"I should tell you, one of the high lights of my life was when, after 40 years, I received an envelope with the Pissed-Off Indian on it.

"I am still hopeful of reaching one of the re-unions. I am in good health and hope you all are also. By the way, my first six missions were with the 781st."

In a note with his dues to O. J. Cowart, **Oscar Schmitt** wrote the following, "I do enjoy receiving the Pantanella News even though I was not with the 781st anymore during that period. I was on Bob Shetterly's crew all through Boise, Wendover and McCook and then was transferred to SAACC as an aviation cadet for pilot training. I had mixed emotions at the time about leaving the crew, but I had my heart set on being a pilot.

An interesting letter from **Carl Dahl**. "In going through my old records recently I came upon the records of the aircraft that was assigned to me to fly to Italy. For the record the serial number was #42-51714, delivered to me at Hamilton Field, CA and delivered by me to the command at Gioia, Italy where we first landed.

"Also noted in the last issue of Pantanella News that you are looking for information about Thomas J. O'Brien. My crew replaced his and though I didn't get to know him well, I did learn a few things. His crew all wore green French Berets on the ground, he gave me his before he left and I still have it. He considered it good luck. Even so, several of his crew were badly wounded at various times and possibly one was killed, not sure on this point.

"He told me that he had been raised and gone to school most of his life in France. He knew all about customs and manners on the continent and did his best to educate me in the short time we knew each other. He had a positive personality and very gung ho in spite of the tragedies his crew had suffered. "

Thanks for the information, Carl. For your info your plane was transferred to the 459th Bomb Group per John Beiting, B-24 Historian.

The O'Brien information is interesting. Yes, one of his crew was killed, S/Sgt Carl Gruber, when they crash landed at Brindisi. O'Brien was wounded in the leg and had to swerve off the runway in order to avoid another airplane. More information on this in the history book. There is more background on O'Brien out there. Anyone else have a report?

Lewis Coghill Sr. wrote, "I read with interest the "On the Line" written by William H. Jostworth. It brought back old memories of a time long ago and now is recalled as fond and sometime not so fond memories.

"I am retired but somehow I now have more to do than when I was working. I am Secretary of the Medinah Shrine Clown Unit and it is a demanding job that requires me to attend Area and International gatherings.

"Perhaps I will be able to join you in Tucson next year.

How about bringing along a clown outfit, Lewis!

A letter from **Frank Guagan**. "I just returned from a nice vacation in Green Valley, Arizona, below Tucson, and had a great time. Betty and I were able to spend half of our trip with Nick and Marion Schaps, who live there half the year. We planned the trip before learning that the next big reunion would be at Tucson. We are certainly looking forward to returning again in '94 for the reunion.

Frank asked about helping out for the special stationery for our 50th reunion. We will no doubt again have another special Post Office setup for our own cancellation stamp.

Les Wheeler was inspired by the article by William Jostworth and wrote the following letter. "It was really interesting to read "On the Line" in the *Pantanella News*. I knew that maintenance on our planes was excellent, but I did not know that no 781st plane ever returned because of maintenance error. Also, I didn't know that the ground crews "sweated out" our return as he mentioned in the article.

A picturesque card from **Fred Maute** vacationing at Marco Island Beach, Florida notes that he and Grace are having a nice relaxing time with perfect weather. So far this year he has not seen any WWII bombers landing.

Frank Arnold added a letter with his dues to O.J. Cowart, "I enjoy the photos in the *Pantanella News*, especially the one in the July 1992 issue. A salute to the engineering section in which I was a heavy engine change mechanic, but was one of those unlucky ones the photographer forgot to get me included.

I am proud to have been a member of the 15th AAF and the 781st Bomb Squadron. I will always love the B-24.

Along with his dues to O. J. Cowart **Bonnie Rowe** notes that he is going to write a story about the 465th Silver Wings Orchestra. Bonnie missed Reunion 92 because of a heart bypass. He hopes to make Tucson.

From Alaska another quip from "**Hoot**" **Hosier**. "The article about the sheet metal roofing has another story. The squadron Chaplain, myself and two other guys decided to make a midnight raid for some sheet metal roofing for use on the church that was under construction. We got some wine and started out in a 6 x 6 and arrived about midnight.

"We arrived at the depot and two of us started loading some sheet metal. Soon a guard in a foreign language started hollering at us. We ignored him and continued on until he fired a shot - in the air I hope. We then took him serious and left post-haste.

"P.S. I'm an atheist, I guess the wine made me do it."

Al Arveson said he was sorry he didn't make Omaha - he had retinal eye surgery twice during the year. He hopes to make Tucson in 94.

Gaye Dickey recalled the first three reunions with her husband, John. She would like to attend one now as

a widow, but it sounds like she needs a little encouragement from some of the other widows. How about it gals, can you give her a reason to come?

A note from **Ben Donahue** gave a report on his co-pilot **Rueben Krogh**. Rueben had circulation problems in his legs and needed surgery to prevent possible amputation. The 14 hour operation was successful and he is now well on his way to recovery.

WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBER HOWARD WILCOX

Thanks to **Richard Seabridge** (Ball Gunner/Wilcox) we got a lead on **Howard Wilcox**. In a letter with his dues to O.J. Cowart Richard noted that North Arlington was in New Jersey and not New York. O.J. forwarded the letter on to me and I immediately called the city for information on Howard Wilcox, but only E. Wilcox was listed. I tried that number and it was Howard's first wife. She later obtained Howard's address from their daughter and I mailed the January news with a note, then contacted him by phone.

In a reply Howard noted he did not recognize very many names in the last newsletter, but Doc Rapoport who he remembers well. At Pantanella Howard recalled being ill and going to see Doc who pronounced him ill with hepatitis. Howard didn't know what it was. Doc told him it was highly contagious and he would have to be hospitalized. "For how long," asked Howard. Doc replied, "Oh, maybe two weeks."

Howard remained in the hospital for two months. He noted, "I tried for a long time to find out what sort of a calendar he was using, but was never successful."

Howard also recalls taking Doc flying with him on several occasions.

**REUNION 94
HOLIDAY INN PALO VERDES
TUCSON, AZ
OCT 13 to 16, 1994
BIRTHPLACE OF THE
781st BOMBSQUADRON and
465th BOMB GROUP
OUR FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY**

Have you made your plans for Tucson yet? It's not too early to block out the dates. This will be a reunion that you will want to spend some extra time visiting all the points of interest. Here are some points for you to consider - the selected hotel, Holiday Inn, is within ten minutes from the airport if you flying, with free transportation by the hotel. If you drive it is two blocks off of I-10. The hotel is ten minutes from Pima Air Museum, with hundreds of planes (including a B-24), ten minutes to Davis-Monthan with thousands of planes, and the Tucson Tourist and Convention Bureau lists over 30 other points of interest like the Titan Missile site and the Biosphere 2. Wait until you see one of their brochures which will be mailed to you later on. And the room rates are only \$59.

I just returned from a two day visit and I can tell you from a firsthand visit, you will love it. The weather is fantastic and the mountains look spectacular. Many of you were stationed here, but may not have been here during the good weather time. October will be great.

I was taken on a tour and informational visit to Davis-Monthan by Nick Schaps and a tour to Pima Air Museum and Mission San Xavier Del Bac by Harold and Vi Seitz. I also had the pleasure of a visit to the new home of Harold and Vi and spent several hours visiting with Byron and Kay Thompson in their home.

Beginning in the next Pantanella News I will detail some of the interesting places for you to see. We will have group functions one day, but you will want to venture out on your own to points of interest you select.

**ALL AMERICAN
SCHEDULE**

In 1993 the 465th is starting out again among the four top donors to *All American*. Pierre J. J. Kennedy was made a D.F.C. member by his family as a surprise for his birthday. Wanda Dannelly, who served as Secretary to the 780 Bomb Squadron until her death a few years ago, was made a D.F.C. in her honor by the 780th Bomb Squadron. Other members are working to the D.F.C. and other donor classifications.

All American is on tour again. Following the Arizona tour they will go to Southern California the early part of May, then Northern California the later part of May.

- Here are some dates for later April;
- 15 - 17 Tulsa, OK - International Airport 918-836-6592
 - 17 - 19 Oklahoma City, OK - Wiley Post Field 405-787-4040
 - 19 - 20 Stillwater, OK - Municipal Airport 405-372-7881
 - 20 - 21 Lawton, OK - Lawton Airport
 - 21 - 23 Albuquerque, NM - International Airport 800-593-4990
 - 23 - 25 Phoenix, AZ - Falcon Field 602-832-0704
 - 25 - 27 Glendale, AZ - Municipal Airport 602-931-5591
 - 27 - 29 Tucson, AZ - Avra Valley Airport 602-792-2536

OTHER REUNIONS

FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE 50th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION REUNION will be held 30 October to 3 November, 1993. This promises to be a "biggie" with a full program and much to see at their new museum. A Doolittle Bust will cap the Memorial that will be dedicated in front of the Museum. General Jimmy Doolittle founded the 15th Air Force and served as its first commander. A number of the 781st members have already made plans to go. Full details in the next newsletter.

LIBERAL KANSAS AIR MUSEUM is celebrating its 50th Anniversary of the Liberal Army Airfield where 5000 B-24 pilots received their training. Also it will be the 50th anniversary of the first B-24 raid on oil refineries at Ploesti. The three day event, September 29 to October 2 will include an air show with the Snowbirds airobatic team. If interested contact Stephen Brown, Liberal Air Museum, Box 2585, Liberal, KS 67905.

Fifty Years Ago

On 29 May 1993 it will be 50 years since the **465th Bombardment Group** was activated at Alamogordo, New Mexico by General Order #78, Paragraph 1, Headquarters, 2nd Air Force.

On 16 February 1943 **Henry L Willett and Judith L. Dye** were married in Grace Episcopal Church in Tucson. Hank was our popular operations officer. After WWII he went into the nursery business and still owns and operates the Willett Wholesale Nursery, Hamburg, New York. Thanks to Jack Van Slyke for this news item.

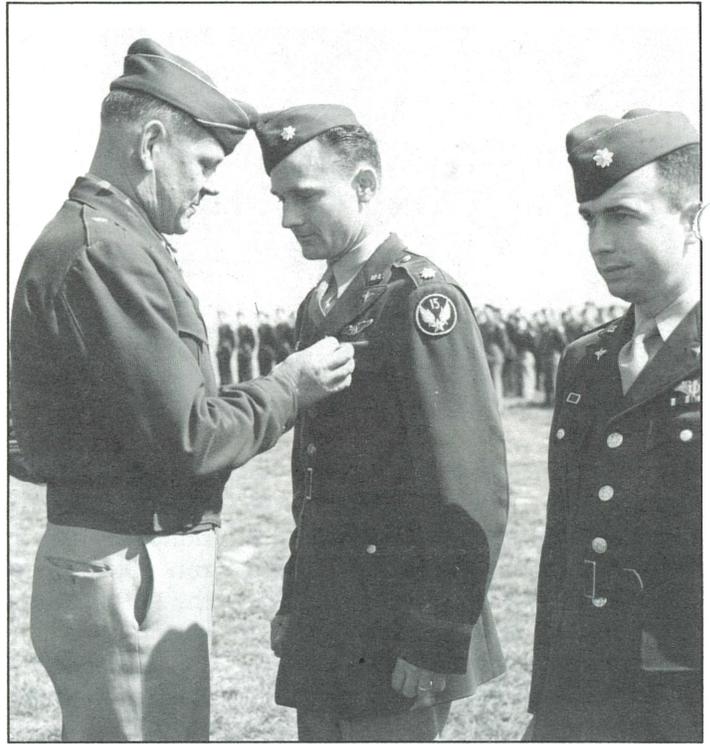
ADDRESS CHANGES

- Howard Wilcox**, 1003 La Paloma Blvd., North Fort Myers, FL 33903. Phone 813 731-2261.
- Robert Smeltzer**, 207A Chick Hampton Bldg, #1 Chick Springs Dr., Greenville, SC 29609.
- Leo A. Fink**, 8312 Briar Dr., Dallas, TX 75243.
- Russ Maynard**, 11621 Rutherford Dr. (not 721).
- Don Fleming**, 4782 Highway K33, Wellsville, KS 66092.
- Harold Seitz**, 4908 Condor Drive, Tucson, AZ 85741. Phone 602 744-2261.

From Flim Flam - About Ordnance (and Motor Pool) Officer Ken Sutton.
SUTTON'S SUPER SERVICE SAYS, "Man who says his motor failed is using old stall."

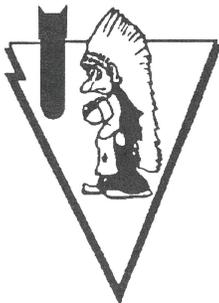


Two photos from Wayne Watson. Above L to R - Charles Lagneaux, Blakita Engineer and Squadron Engineer - Roy Byrd, Squadron Bombardier and Hudson Bombardier - Wayne Watson, Operations Clerk.



General Acheson presenting Major Blankenship with the Distinguished Flying Cross at Pantanella, 1945. To his right is Maj John Knaus, Group Bombardier. John was from the 783rd and flew with my crew on return to the U. S.

781st BOMB SQUADRON ASSOC
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