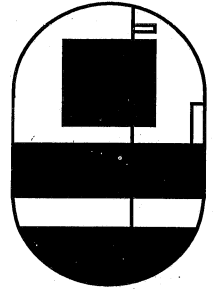




# PANTANELLA NEWS



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## POW EXPERIENCES AT STALAG LUFT IV AND EVENTUAL FREEDOM

By Harold B. Farrar & Pierre J. J. Kennedy

*For several years I have been receiving information from Pierre Kennedy (Tail gunner on Althoff crew) and Harold Farrar (Tail Gunner on Tipton crew) on their POW experiences, who the other POWs from our squadron were, and what they know of their experiences. I requested some stories from them, so Harold and Pierre decided to co-author an article about some of their common experiences at Luft IV and their 86 day, 550 mile forced march from Feb. 6th to May 2, 1945.*

*Harold had written a book about the Tipton crew, of which he was a member, on their experiences in training, combat, and POW life, and sent a copy to Pierre since he was also a prisoner at Luft IV.*

*Pierre responded in a letter describing his account of some of the identical situations in combat and also indicated that on the march they were very near each other even though they did not know each other at that time. This article combines selected comments: The first descriptions are direct quotes from events Farrar wrote about followed by Kennedy's reaction and description of the same situations as he experienced them.*

Farrar

Most of us flying

combat missions as Air Crewmen thought we would complete our mission requirements and return to the States or be killed or wounded, but we never expected to become prisoners of war. From the 781st Bomb Squadron alone, 75 airmen became prisoners of war and of these 25 of the enlisted men were held at Luft IV in North-Eastern Germany near the Baltic Sea. Those

of us held at this prison camp have similar stories to tell about camp life and our 86 day forced march. The following stories describe some of our POW experiences in camp and on that march.

On May 31st Captain Wray and the Tipton Crew were shot down for the first time flying in a B-24J named "Sacajawea" (Shetterly's plane) while on a Ploesti Oil Field raid and we were forced to bail out over Montenegro, Yugoslavia. (Our aircraft the "Crescent of the Half-Moon" was grounded that day for repairs from flak damage from the previous days mission). We evaded the enemy after being picked up by Tito's Partisans and guided through German held territory to a hidden airfield and then flown back to Italy by the British underground forces. After a short stay at the hospital in Bari we returned to Pantanella on June 9th, 1944.

After we returned to our base, our Squadron Officials told us that under the normal rules of war we should be sent home, because we had gone down in enemy territory and evaded being captured and if we were caught there again, we would be



Luft IV - Some of the 6500 prisoners on the road in the snow leaving our camp on February 6th, 1945 at the beginning of our 550 mile, 86 day forced march.

considered a spy instead of prisoners of war. They went on to explain that since the invasion of Normandy there had been a great drain on air crew manpower and very few crews were available, causing a very severe shortage of crew replacements for Italy.

It has been reported that we volunteered to stay on and fly. One of the things that an enlisted man is taught, usually in the first week of basic training, is the consequence of volunteering for anything. If you happen to have been the butt of that example it is kind of hard to forget, so I can not truthfully say that I volunteered.

If, we as a crew, had been sitting around a campfire and voted on it, I think it would have been a lot like the 104th Congress voting on term limits. I am not sure if it would have passed. I think the reason we stayed on as a crew was because of our loyalty to each other and for concern

for our families if this war was not stopped before it spread to the U.S.

The part about us being considered a spies and the possibility that we might be executed, if we were shot down again, was never clearly explained and made our willingness to fly again in the same area not seem any too bright as I look back on it now. Only five weeks later those of us on the Tipton crew were shot down for the second time. On this July 16th mission to Vienna we were first hit by fighters and then by flak and later forced to bail out near Zagreb, Yugoslavia where we were captured by the Ustachi, turned over to the Germans, and became POWs.

#### Kennedy

The part about being shot down twice, captured, and possible execution really interested me. I was shot down once, over the Blechhammer oil refineries in Silesia, and had to give up my dog tags to the German police immediately upon being captured. This put me in a precarious position in wartime Germany — our enemy.

I was turned over to the German military near Gleiwitz. There, a German Army officer informed me, "We have a perfect right to execute you, as you have no identification. You say you are an American flyer, but we think you may be a spy or a saboteur!" Of course they had my dog tags, nevertheless, it did not make my day to hear this. In fact, on the Missing Air Crew report, the Germans wrote that I had no dog tags, and my serial number 11120438 was what I told them.

In the weeks following, I would be asked to show my dog tags, and having none, I would hear the same reprimand. The Germans seemed to enjoy playing this little game. Three months after being shot down, while at Stalag Luft IV, I was given back only one of my longed-for dog tags, and was issued crudely stamped German dog tags with the prisoner of war number 4113.

#### Farrar

Near the end of January, 1945, after lock-up at night, our leaders told us we were probably going to be

leaving our camp soon on a forced march. It had been snowing on and off for the past six weeks and the temperature was near, or below, freezing most of the time. It was nearly unbearably cold sleeping in our barracks, so the thought of walking day and sleeping on the bare ground, or in barns, was rather frightening and made you wonder how many of us could survive under those severe conditions.

We suddenly became aware of what we might expect when a long line of marching prisoners that had just been evacuated from the East approached our camp and were guided into Lager B. They were Russian, Polish, French, and English soldiers and they were in pitiful condition. Their legs and feet were wrapped in rags and they just shuffled along and could hardly walk. Some even had to use long sticks as crutches to help them walk. They came straggling in all day long and the last ones were in even worse shape than the earlier group. They appeared to have no regard for anything and started tearing up the shutters and part of the barracks for fire wood.

Fortunately I did not have to vivid an imagination, so it had not come yet as to what we might be in for on a forced march until I saw them arrive. Now the thought that we might be looking and acting like them in a few days, added greatly to my anxiety, as we were making preparations to leave under similar conditions at a moment's notice.

#### Kennedy

In late January 1945 we had snow and cold weather at Luft IV. One day word came around that some new POW's were arriving down the road, heading for a nearby compound. I put on my warmest clothes, and joined the crowd at the fence to see if I would recognize any of these POW's. They appeared to be of different nationalities, and not Air Force. It was a pitiful sight-perhaps resembling what Napoleon's soldiers looked like when they retreated from Russia in the cold in 1812.

The sight was one I would never forget. A column of bent over men who were stumbling along the road. They were covered with snow and

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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 WWII (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.

looked truly miserable, both prisoners and guards alike. Some prisoners had towels wrapped around their heads for protection. A few guards were dragging small sleds which held their possessions. Little did I know at before the winter of 1944-1945 was over, I would be marching under much the same conditions.

Prisoners kept arriving at Luft IV from camps located to the East of us, in the path of the advancing Russian armies. These men had little to eat during their marches, so one day some of us from "C" Lager began to throw food and cigarettes (not that we had much ourselves) over the fence to them. The guards in the nearby tower threatened to shoot us if we kept it up, but we kept throwing them food. Then the guards fired their machine guns over our heads. Bullets sprayed everywhere and we scattered.

#### Farrar

As we were preparing to leave on the march, my thoughts turned to my family and I hoped and prayed they were alright. I had been a prisoner for seven months and the last news I had received from my family was when I was at my base in Italy in early July. I hoped they had received some of the cards and letters that I had been allowed to write since I had been there, and at least knew I was alive. They were alright the last time I had heard from them. They told me they had bought a home in San Diego and had just moved from the house they were renting. Fortunately, I had memorized their new address, so at least I could find them when I got out of this ordeal.

Many other prisoners held in Luft IV never received any mail while there. It was not until I was writing about my memories and read an article written by one of the Polish RAF flyers held with us that I learned of one of the main reasons most of us received no mail. He wrote that our new camp was called M-Stammlager Luft IV because the camp did not have a post card with its own number. The letters were not going directly to our camp, but as written, went via Stalag Luft 111 in Zagan/Sagan. (Luft 111 was the camp where my officers were being held.)

I checked the return address on

the letters and cards my folks received from me and it was true that our return address was identified as Stalag Luft 111. This meant that the mail from my folks went from the USA to Luft 111 in Sagan, Germany and then had to be sorted by my name and POW #6491 and then be re-sent to me in Luft IV. This helped explain why so few letters were received at our camp.

#### Kennedy

I had one letter written to my parents with this notation. I remember being told to write Stalag Luft 111 instead of Luft IV, as a return address, and not understanding WHY. As you mentioned, that is probably one of the main reasons we did not get any mail.

#### Farrar

We had been on the road for 50 days when we arrived at Ebstorf, Germany on March 28th. The group of prisoners that I was with were then marched to the edge of town and the guards gave us some bread and loaded us into some boxcars. They were generally referred to as 40x8, meaning 40 people or 8 horses, but this time they crammed 60 of us into each car. Some prisoners were so sick they had to lay down, so some of us had to take turns standing while others sat down and then we swapped positions and tried to rest.

After walking for seven weeks and covering more than 400 miles suddenly the fact that they were loading us up for a train ride made no sense in light of all the other things we had endured. The joy of thinking that we might ride instead of walk instantly disappeared when we remembered all of the British and American fighters roaming the skies above us looking for a target. We were locked in our box car all night and only had a bucket to use for a toilet and there was no way we could move around, so we had to pass the the bucket around and needless to say several prisoners could not wait.

The next day our train still did not move and they only gave us some water to drink and kept us locked in the car. By now it was even more unbearable in our car as some of us still had to take turns standing and the heat and odors were so bad many

more prisoners were getting sick.

That night, about 11:00 pm, after 33 hours of being locked in the box cars, we were coupled onto a train engine and started to finally move out of the train yard. Most of us were convinced that they were going out of their way to get us strafed while we were on this train. We slowly rode along with the cars lurching around, causing a certain amount of pain, for about 13 hours half expecting to hear airplanes diving at us any minute.

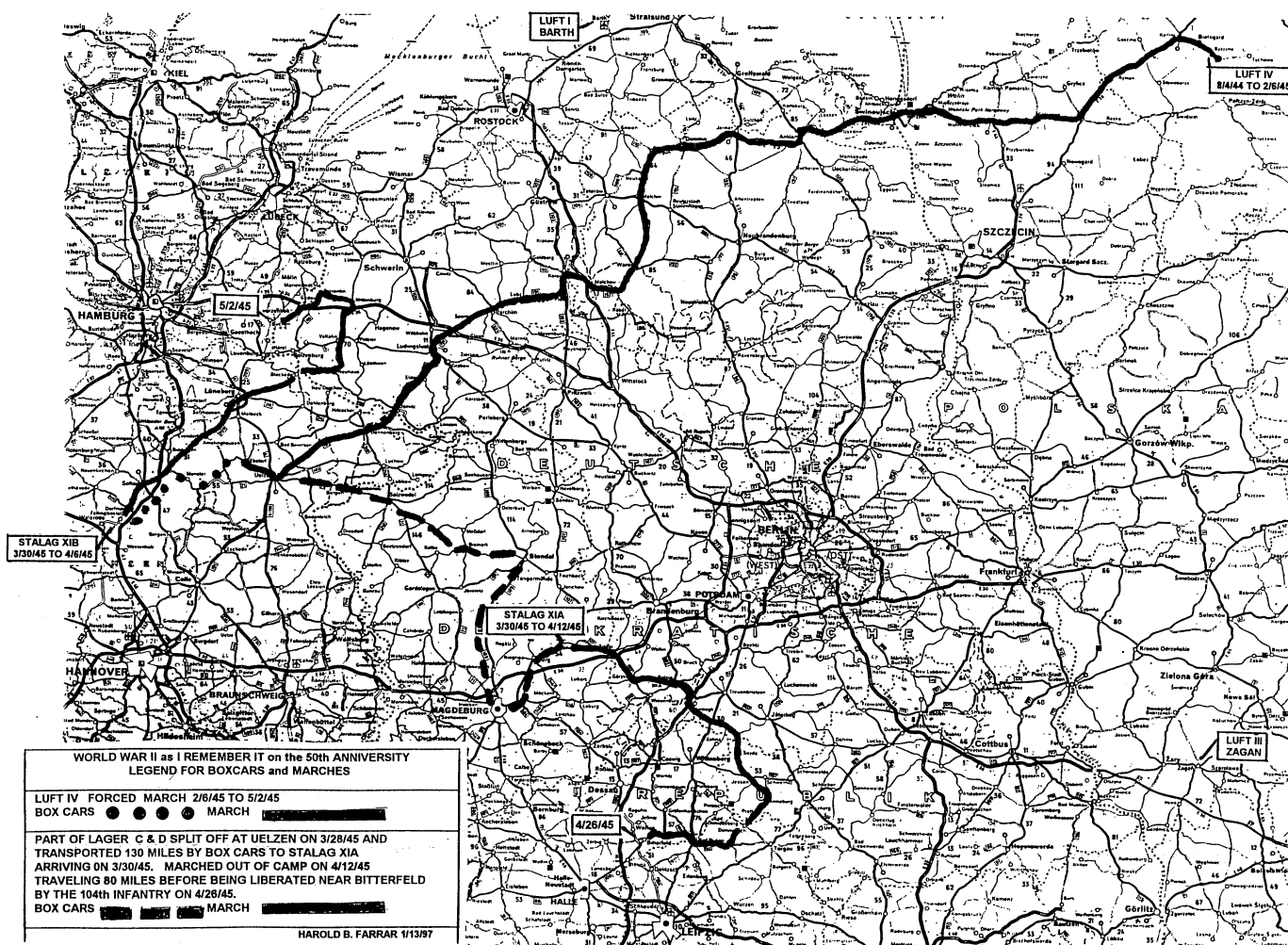
About noon, on March 30th, we arrived at Fallingb. After 46 hours of being locked in the cars, with 60 tired and sick prisoners per car, we were slowly unloaded and found that we had traveled only about 30 miles. I find it difficult to forget the abject misery during what seemed an endless amount of time under those conditions, but I can not adequately describe how bad it really was. We were now sure they had been trying to get us killed by our own fighters because those of us that were not sick could have walked that far in the same amount of time, and suffered less.

We were marched to the edge of town to Stalag XIB, which was a huge International prison camp, housing thousands of captured soldiers, mostly ground troops from England, Canada, Russia, Belgium, France, Holland, Poland, several other nations, and some Americans captured during the Battle of the Bulge. This camp was already overcrowded and those of us from Luft IV were housed in some large white circus size tents, set up on what seemed like a large parade ground. Some Luft IV prisoners were also housed in Camp 357 in this same area. There were over 100,000 prisoners in this area.

The large tents had some hay spread on the ground for us to sleep on. We were able to rest from the long walk, but there was very little food here because of the huge numbers of prisoners in such a small area. To me it seemed like a very unfriendly camp and I felt very uncomfortable. The few times I ventured inside some of the occupied barracks to try to get warm, I sensed a lot of hostility and suspicion towards us.

Reports that I have read say that some prisoners from Luft IV were al-

# LUFT IV 550 MILE FORCED MARCH, FEB. 6, 1945 TO MAY 6, 1945



*In late January, 1945 there were about 900 British and Polish Airmen and 8700 American enlisted airmen at Luft IV. As the Russian Army approached 1500 airmen in the poorest health were moved by box cars to Luft 1 at Barth and another 1500 airmen from Lager B were transported by box cars to Stalag XIII D at Nurnburg. About 200 hospital patients remained there on February 6th, the remaining 6500 of us left on a 550 mile forced march, generally following one of the routes shown on the above map.*

lowed to take a shower here and that their clothes were heated in a large oven as a means of de-lousing them. I was not a part of that group, but I sure could have used both services, as I had not had my clothes off or a bath since my last bucket bath, more than two months ago, back in what now seems like heaven, good old barracks #9. We had walked more than 400 miles, covered another 30 miles in box cars, and had thought that we had left the Eastern front far behind us, but now we suddenly found ourselves very near the Western front.

The rumor was that the British Army was now headed our way and all of us that came from Luft IV and were still able to walk would leave soon. So after only one week living in our tent, on April 6th, we were rounded up and forced back out on

the road headed in the general direction that we just came from.

## Kennedy

I well remember the white tents at Stalag XIB, Fallingbostal and going to the Russian quarters, looking around and trying to trade cigarettes for food, which the Russians had smuggled in while working on farms on the outside. Also, I was in a group that marched to the "de-lousing unit," in an old factory building, to take a 3 minute shower. At the entrance we noticed piles of coal so we put some chunks into our coat pockets. Standing in line, we had to give way to German soldiers who entered to get a shower. Only 38 POWs could enter at a time. Inside, we undressed and were told to put our clothes on a rack to be steamed. When I saw the

steam racks, I got rid of the coal. It was a large open room filled with about four men under each shower head. I noticed a couple of showers that were not crowded. So I began washing under one of them. My shower mate turned out to be a very rugged German soldier who shouted, and ordered me back to the crowded POW manned showers. He knew I was a POW since I was so thin and bony. After three minutes the water was shut off, and I was only half washed.

My group arrived at Fallingbostal on Sat., March 31, 1945. Easter Sunday was April 1st, and we were given 1/4 of a Red Cross parcel. Being transients, we American, British, and Canadian POWs did not receive as much food as the permanent party French and other prisoners there. We



were told it was out of the goodness of their hearts that we got the parcels which were from U.S.A., Britain, and Canada. We were very bitter about this, especially when we saw French cooks carrying pies from a kitchen to their quarters.

In all fairness, I should say that when my group first arrived at Stalag XIB, and we stood outside for hours, some French POWs managed to give us some coffee until a German officer noticed this, and stopped them. That afternoon our first food came in the form of warm soup which was greatly appreciated. The soup helped restore my waning eyesight. On the two day box-car ride, each man in my car had been given 1/2 loaf of bread. I had eaten my bread the first day.

I left Stalag XIB on Friday April 6th. We now had different German guards, older men who fell by the wayside after marching only a few miles. They were taken away on horse drawn wagons and replaced by younger German soldiers. I had hoped to stay at Fallingbistel, but my group was ordered to resume the march and we headed back East again. (Your map is very similar to a map I made which shows the localities I walked to after leaving this camp).

Since some Luft IV men stayed at XIB and were liberated there, our column of marching POWs was now smaller, and instead of being towards the rear of the column or near the "sick" wagons, I gradually got to the front of our rag-tag marching group, usually being with one of or two friends.

#### Farrar

It was now April 17th and we had marched about 478 miles. We were once again standing on the banks of the Elbe River at Bleckede, about 30 miles Northeast of where we crossed it less than a month ago.

As we approached the Elbe River there was no

bridge in sight and they loaded us onto a large barge. There were probably several hundred prisoners on board, as there was standing room only, and we covered all of the deck. We were just about out in the middle of the river when we heard the roar of a fighter headed our way. Looking up I saw a British Typhoon diving right at us and my first thoughts were if he hits us, we do not even have room to fall down. I have no idea why that bothered me, but at the time it seemed like a big problem. He came on in right at us and did not pull up until he had passed on by.

After we got our breath back, we could only guess that he recognized that we were prisoners and was taking pictures with his wing camera. When we reached the other side of the river, we felt lucky to still be alive. With so many of our planes in the air, we were hoping they were keeping track of our movements along the road, so we would not get strafed by one of our own airplanes. After we were unloaded we continued on a few miles, still headed in a Northeast di-

rection.

#### Kennedy

I was for once at the front of the column and crossed the Elbe River on the first barge load of POWs. Later I sat on the high bank on the East side of the river, eating a piece of bread. I watched the Typhoon fly up the river "on the deck" and stared at the barge in mid-stream. The German guards with us did not raise their rifles to shoot at the plane. We were all transfixed by the pending disaster. I could see the pilot looking down at you fellows. Thank God he only wagged his wings and took off. I still shudder when I think back at what might have happened.

#### Kennedy and Farrar

This last incident concludes our article about some of our common experiences. After marching for over 550 miles during one of the worst winters in history, on the 86th day, (May 2, 1945) several thousand of us prisoners of war, left from the original 6500 from Luft IV, were spread out



*Luft IV Prisoners on the forced march shortly after being liberated.*

over a wide area along the countryside, housed in numerous barns. The British 2nd Army, in Jeeps and Tanks, advanced through our area and liberated us from the Germans just a few days before the war officially ended. We kept walking towards the West and the next day the British picked us up in G.I. trucks, escorted us through the front lines, across the Elbe River on a floating bridge, and then we were flown in C-



Harold B. Farrar, (Tipton Crew Tail Gunner). Photo taken in coin-operated photo booth in Namur, Belgium on May 5, 1945 three days after having been liberated by the British Army while on the forced march.

47s to Belgium, where we were safe and once again back under the control of the U.S. Forces.

While in Belgium even though we were not together, both of us located an old fashioned coin operated photo booth in the building we were being housed. Below are the pictures we took in that booth about 3 or 4 days after we were liberated.



Pierre J. J. Kennedy, (Althoff Crew Tail Gunner). Photo taken in same booth within a day of Harold, however, Pierre nor Harold knew each other were in the same area at that time.

## A Different War Story

By Dodie Shallman (Widow of Jerome Jolicoeur).

In 1990 in Boston, I became acquainted—or reacquainted with—wonderful group of friends. Frank Hylla had sent me the *Pantanella News* and had been trying to persuade me to attend a reunion of the 781st Bomb Squadron. He won and I was hooked. The Boston reunion was the first one I attended. I have been to Omaha, Tucson, and Montgomery since and have loved every one. I am also an avid reader of the newsletter. Each contributor has had interesting experiences to share and has written many intriguing, fascinating, and yes, sad stories about the adventures of the 781st.

There is another kind of story, however, that originated with the 781st. My story could be titled "Widowed and Pregnant at Twenty-three." Similar stories could be written about all the families whose son, brother, or husband didn't come home after the war.

I have lived that lonely, heart-breaking story. In my opinion and experience, there is nothing that takes the place of that first love after it is snatched away. We were "head over heels" in love and had such grand plans for a career of the Air Force, but suddenly, it was gone. I never gave up hope that Jerry would return to us in spite of a Wounded-in-Action telegram in May, followed by a K.I.A. telegram in September, but when Frank Hylla, a crew member, came home the following summer and told me what had happened, I had no choice but to believe him.

But I'll start at the beginning:

Jerry and I met in the summer of 1941. We both worked for the same firm. I couldn't believe how lucky I was, when, sometime in September, he asked me if I would like to have dinner with him. His next question was, "Which do you like best, roses or gardenias?" I naturally said gardenias. About mid-afternoon, a florist delivered a heavenly fragrant corsage of gardenias for me to wear that evening. The whole office was abuzz.

Because WW II had already begun, we decided to marry before he got called for service by his country.

### 781st men held at Luft IV

**Robert Carr**

**Frank Jasicko**

**Harold Farrar**

**Sam Ippolito**

**Harry Reuss**

**Leonard Goldstein**

**Conrad Croston**

**Pierre Kennedy**

**Louis Deslatte**

Charles Murray

Thomas McNew

**Mike Deironimi**

\*Paul Brady (1)

\***Richard Thill**

\***Albert Ralston**

\*Lawrence Tichen (2)

\***Paul Fisher**

\***Roger Niemann**

\***Lyle Hermanson**

\*Lowell Lunn

\*Charles Hudson

\*Harold Grant

\*Joseph Carroll

\***Hullit Holcombe**

Walter Clausen (1)

**Bold print** - on Forced March.

\* Folded Wings.

(1) On Box Car to Luft 1.

(2) Stayed in Luft IV hospital.

I'm still amazed that when I was still so young and immature, I could recognize his intelligence and potential. His family was poor, "as in Church Mouse," (his words). Consequently, he had left high school after his sophomore year and had joined the Civilian Conservation Corp (C.C.C.) in order to help his folks.

We were married on April 11, 1942, again I wore gardenias. I still love them. Now it was time to discuss our future. Jerry had a horror of being an infantryman in the trenches, yet he hadn't finished high school. What a dilemma! He finally discovered that if he could pass the aptitude test that the Air Force had devised, it would accept him. He decided he had to try. He went to the public library and took out math books. They looked like Greek to me, but apparently he gleaned some gems from them. The second step in his preparation for being accepted was to go to mass and communion every morning. His sincere faith was his strength. I don't know which was the most efficacious, but he passed the test.

Soon after he was accepted, he left his job, and we gave up our minuscule apartment and stayed with his parents until it was time for him to be inducted.

After a tearful goodbye, he landed in San Antonio to be evaluated. He was classified as a navigation cadet. From San Antonio he went to Monroe, LA to navigation school. I was able to go to Monroe and see him often. Cadets stayed on the base, but soon they were allowed every other weekend in town, so we were able to have that much time together.

He graduated in late September 1943. I understand that Vern Burda was in the same class. After the graduation ceremonies were over, the brand new 2nd Lieutenants took off their newly-won wings and pinned them on their moms, wives, or sweethearts. I was so proud. It was a very lovely and emotional moment.

After a brief leave at home, a leave filled with family gatherings and celebrations, he was off to Davis-Jonathan Field, to be assigned to a crew. Again, I couldn't afford to go there, but it was a short stay.

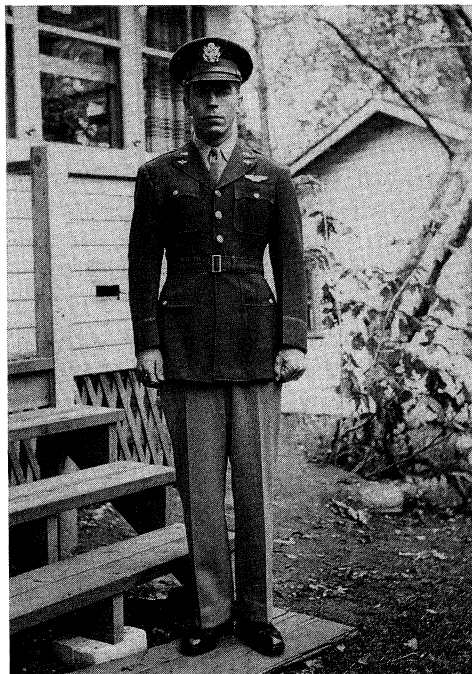
Then after being assigned to the

Cauble Crew, it was off to McCook. I was there with him, and that is where the men practiced working together as a crew, while their wives waited patiently and embroidered dish towels. It was at McCook that I met my support group, some of whom are still my good friends—Judy Willett, Florence Hylla, and Garnet Cauble.

Jerry left for overseas in February 1944. It was so hard to say goodbye. He was going so far away, but I was expecting our child, so I had something to look forward to as we waited for his return, and he would be back soon.

As the years have passed, I've had a chance to realize that the Jerry you men knew and the Jerry that I knew were two different personalities—a chameleon perhaps.

I have concluded that the Jerry you knew was an outgoing, boisterous, fun-loving, devil-may-care, "character" who was embarrassed to show his true feelings. That boisterousness was a facade to mask the kind, thoughtful and gentle person I married. He had a great sense of humor, a quality I loved, and he was so smart. He loved to play poker and mentioned it often in his letters. You all made the best of a "bad scene," and Jerry, like most of you, wanted to get those missions over with and get home. Jerry wanted to be home to welcome his son when he arrived.



*2nd Lt. Jerome F. Jolicoeur  
July 25, 1943*

(Jerry Jr. arrived 26 days after his father was KIA).

The Jerry I knew was a sweet and tender-hearted husband who expressed his love and asked for my prayers in every letter.

His faith was deep and heartfelt. What we had begun to build for ourselves was perfect and satisfying, so special that it can never be diminished. He taught me to live and to love. He brought me to a closer relationship with God, by example and by introducing me to his church and faith.

I would like to compare my life to a patchwork quilt, each square representing an era of my life. The square that represents the all-too-short two and a half years that I spent with Jerry would be the brightest, most colorful, and luminous square of all. This little parcel of time we had has had a more profound effect on me than any other period of my life.

I became a better person because of Jerry and I tried to raise his son as he would have liked me to. That too was a challenge, but it was fun, and I have many happy memories. My deepest regret is that Jerry Sr. and his son Jerry Jr. never had the opportunity to meet and experience that father-son relationship that everyone cherishes. Since Jerry Jr. met with an accident which claimed his life, last May 30, my hope is that they have met at last.

When we received word that Jerry was KIA, I was really at loose ends. Jerry's parents were wonderful and loved Jerry Jr. very much. My family too were a great and helpful group, which made life a little more bearable.

Jerry Jr. and I took a tiny apartment in Wayzata MN, near where Jerry's Jr.'s Grandparents lived. We saw them often. Jerry Jr. and I were a little family. We played, read books, and began a lifelong love, a very special love, layered with friendship as he grew up.

Soon it was time for him to go to school. He seemed to have inherited a natural love of airplanes. As a little boy he built balsa-wood gliders, powered with rubber bands. Soon he was building model airplanes and he had several hanging in his room. As

he entered high school, he joined an airplane club. The members built planes with motors and flew them by remote control. In high school he joined the Civil Air Patrol. He was a member of their drill team, which won the MN State competition, and then the regional at Omaha. That entitled the team to a free trip to the National Competition at the Air Force Academy in Colorado. When he finished High School the Air Force asked him to join, but he had developed diabetes and was not accepted. No Air Force career for him, a major disappointment!

Shortly after the war ended, the War Department asked me if I wanted Jerry Sr. sent home for burial or left in a military cemetery in France. Jolicoeur is such a lovely French name that his parents and I chose to leave him in France. I thought at that time, that I could take a trip over there soon and visit, but that was not to be.

When Jerry Jr. was three years old, I met someone who had been widowed in his twenties and had two little daughters. We married about a year and a half later. There were more children and no time for a trip to France.

No matter what we did or how busy I was, my first love was nearby in my thoughts. I kept his letters tied with a pink ribbon for many years before I could bear to burn them, keeping only the last one he wrote.

In 1992, 48 years after the death of Jerry Sr., his sister Joan and I, with the help and planning of Vern Burda, were finally able to make the trip to France.. We were in St. Avold, France for the Memorial Day services. About 4500 people attended. The Superintendent of the cemetery was happy to have someone from the U.S. there and we became instant celebrities. We were treated with kindness and tenderness. At the point in the program when flowers were to be placed near the flagpole, forty-eight large, fresh displays were brought forward to honor the 10,000 plus American young men buried there. The people of France really appreciated the help they received from all the patriotic American service men. We were driven to Jerry's gravesite in a golf cart and allowed to be by our selves. All forty-eight years

worth of tears were shed that day. I felt very close to him there, and seeing his name on that cross made me realize that many other families shared my sorrow. I had finally reached my goal—to visit his grave.

This is a different war story that illustrates that war touches our servicemen but also leaves many ruined and broken hearts in the lives of their families as well.

I have really appreciated being a part of your reunions and renewing old friendships, and I will always be grateful to Frank Hylla for not giving up until he convinced me to go to that first reunion. I shall never forget you all in the 781st. You are a part of my life, and as Bob Hope would say—  
*"ThankS for the Memories."*

## FOLDED WINGS

**William M. Pruitt** (Tryon crew Tail Gunner) passed away October 5, 1996. His wife, Doris, notified me of William's passing. He was diagnosed as having inoperable brain tumor in June 1995. Three days before he passed away he lapsed in a coma and did not recover. "He fought hard to regain his health," his wife noted. Also reported by Bob Ledwith who was also on the Tryon crew.

**Ben L. "Curley" Kraeger** (Tail Gunner on Branch Crew) passed away Aug. 27, 1996. Reported by Bernie Badler who said kidney failure was the cause of death.

**Howard R. Wilcox** (Crew Commander) passed away of natural causes in October, 1996. Reported by John Zartman, co-pilot on the Wilcox crew. Also a note from his niece, Charlotte Little, "I regret to inform you that Howard Wilcox collapsed and died last October at his home in Fort Myers, FL. His wife Carol died in March, 1996 and he just faded away after losing her."

**Edward H. Corbett** (Engineering) passed away Nov. 23, 1996. His wife Karen wrote, "Ed and I were at only two reunions (Colorado Springs and Dayton). We enjoyed those trips so much and hoped we could attend other reunions. Unfortunately, Ed's health did not al-

low for much traveling and he died from a heart attack during the night."

Thanks for keeping the memories alive.

*Karen enclosed some photos. If anyone in engineering knew Ed well and would like some of the photos please let me know.*

**Donald Myers** (Maccani Top Gunner) passed away Dec. 14, 1996. Reported by his wife and John T. Russell

**James P. Reed** (Radar mechanic) passed away Feb 17, 1993. Reported by his wife.

**Harry P. Gustin** (Engineering) passed away December 18, 1996.

**Bill Jostworth** reported the death of Harry Gustin. "He was a Cincinnatian and had attended several Army Air Corp schools with me and we were assigned to the 781st around the same time at McCook, Nebraska.

"After the war we lost contact with each other, however, in scanning the obit's we found his death notice. He was living in Covington, KY, when he died. I called his widow to verify it was him, to offer my condolences and to briefly reminisce"

Our thoughts prayers to our fallen comrades who have found everlasting peace, — you served your country well. We will remember you forever.

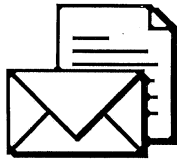
## SICK CALL

**Lewis "Jocko" Roberts** was reported by his wife as having Alzheimer's disease and is a patient in Pine Haven, an "Alzheimer's Community" in Houston. She notes, "I pray for his recovery, but it is unlikely."

**John Ward** had by-pass heart surgery in Cleveland just before the reunion and has now returned to his home in Apollo Beach FL. Reported by Jack Van Slyke.



# MAIL CALL



From **Fred Maute** (Radar Mechanic), "We thought we might be able to make the last reunion, but, right after we returned from Florida, my wife went into the hospital. In fact there were 6 visits to the ER! She was also admitted several times and had to have open heart surgery!

"About the time she was progressing, they discovered that I had a heart problem, called Atrial Fibrillation, never heard of it 'till then. Anyway, I had to have what they call a "Cardioversion," when they gave my heart an electric shock! In the beginning it looked like it worked, but a few weeks later I was told it did not and I would have to stay on a couple types of medicine. Worst part "No Alcohol!!

"Anyway, unless they put me back in the hospital we are still planning on our usual Marco Island, FL trip for February."

A letter from **Ralph Du Bois** (Group S-2). (Ralph was not able to attend our last reunion, so I sent him the plaque he was awarded for sending in the best story for the year). He noted he was very pleased with it and said he has it hung in a very conspicuous spot on his den wall and is very proud of it.

Hopefully we will see Ralph at our reunion in Dayton where a few more group men may attend.

From **Bob Bassinette** (Bombardier on Blakita crew). "I received my Life Membership certificate. Thank you. Like everything you do for the 78st, it is top drawer.

"I have instructed my family to make sure it is always kept by a member of our family. That way the 781st will always be remembered and honored.

"I was in the hospital at the time of the reunion, so I could not make it."

*I remember Bob very well. He flew his last mission with me when he was filling in as bombardier on my crew. We were leading the squadron*

*attacking the Garzare Highway Bridge with 1000# RDX bombs at 21,000 feet. Bob hit a bullseye and there was much yelling over the intercom when the bridge went up. No flak on this milk run so we were all relaxed and could enjoy seeing the results of our bombing.*

*Since Bob has a new computer I hope to see some of his remembrances of Italy.*

*And instead of signing off with "Keep 'em Flyin'" Bob signs off with "Keep it level,"— bombardiers language.*

From far away Monte Carlo France, **Lolette Tucci**, widow of Joe Tucci who was Group Sergeant Major. "The Holiday Season is almost here and this is to wish you and yours a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

"This past summer I was very fortunate to go to the States with my daughter who works for OECD in Paris. We visited my son and family in San Francisco and my daughter and family in Maui, Hawaii. My two sister-in-laws came from New Jersey to meet us in San Francisco. I was happy to have everyone around me, but I missed Joe more.

"I was very happy to see Joe on one of the pictures in the *Pantanella News* of July, 1996.

"I want to tell you again how much I appreciate receiving the *Pantanella News* and being kept up to date with what is going on.

"Merry Christmas and Happy New Year and best wishes for prosperity for the 781st Bomb Squadron Association."

**Dale Samuelson** joins the Life Membership and notes, "My wife and I remain in good health and we hope to read many more issues of the *Pantanella News*. They become more interesting and valuable as time goes by. Thank you and your crew for the professional newsletter. Keep up the good work.

"I have been devoting some of my time to the Veterans of Foreign Wars and meet many WWII comrades, but my first love is the 781st. It is surprising how many names and memories are recalled by reading the "*Pantanella News*."

A note from **Tom Arthur**, "I particularly enjoyed the article by Bob Shetterly. It was my privilege to fly several missions with him and his crew on the "Sacajawea." After Bill Magowan left the crew they were without a navigator, and I filled in as needed."

**Louise Pease**, widow of Richard Pease, Group Intelligence Officer, "I enjoy reading the *Pantanella News*. The 465th Bomb Group and the 781st Bomb Squadron contributed so much to the war effort and helped bring it to an end. All the best to you."

**Ernie Magmore** (Ordnance), "Wonderful newsletter, those boys taking time to turn in the articles. The picture and article of my 'old' comrade Peter Ministrelli—he hasn't changed much. He was the best dancer, tops in jitterbug. A real interpreter for us on leave in Italy and saved a few lire. He smoked too much.

You all keep up the good work. My wife and I have been ill. I missed "Bama reunion. Hopes up for Ohio."

**Wendell Gailbraith** (782nd member), "Enclosed is my check for 1997 dues. I would not want to miss any of the great *Pantanella News* publications that are so interesting to us who were there. I was also pleased to see that Esther Cowart was presented with a token of the Association's appreciation for all her efforts in its behalf. Congratulations!

"I missed the '96 reunion. I will be very happy when we finally meet as a group instead of individual squadrons."

**Murray Knowles** (Co-pilot on Gaines crew). "I had open heart surgery around Thanksgiving and it put me behind in my obligations, then in January my wife had a hip replacement operation and that pushed things further back.

"The recent story 'Stalag Luft IV' brought back some unpleasant memories. I was at Stalag Luft III in Sagan Germany (Now Zagan, Poland) and then Stamlager VIIA in Moosburg Austria after a forced march and boxcars.

I believe all your officers were also at Stalag Luft IV or stalag I.

We were reunited at Camp Lucky strike at LeHarve, France and we were one happy bunch."

## A TRIP TO BE REMEMBERED

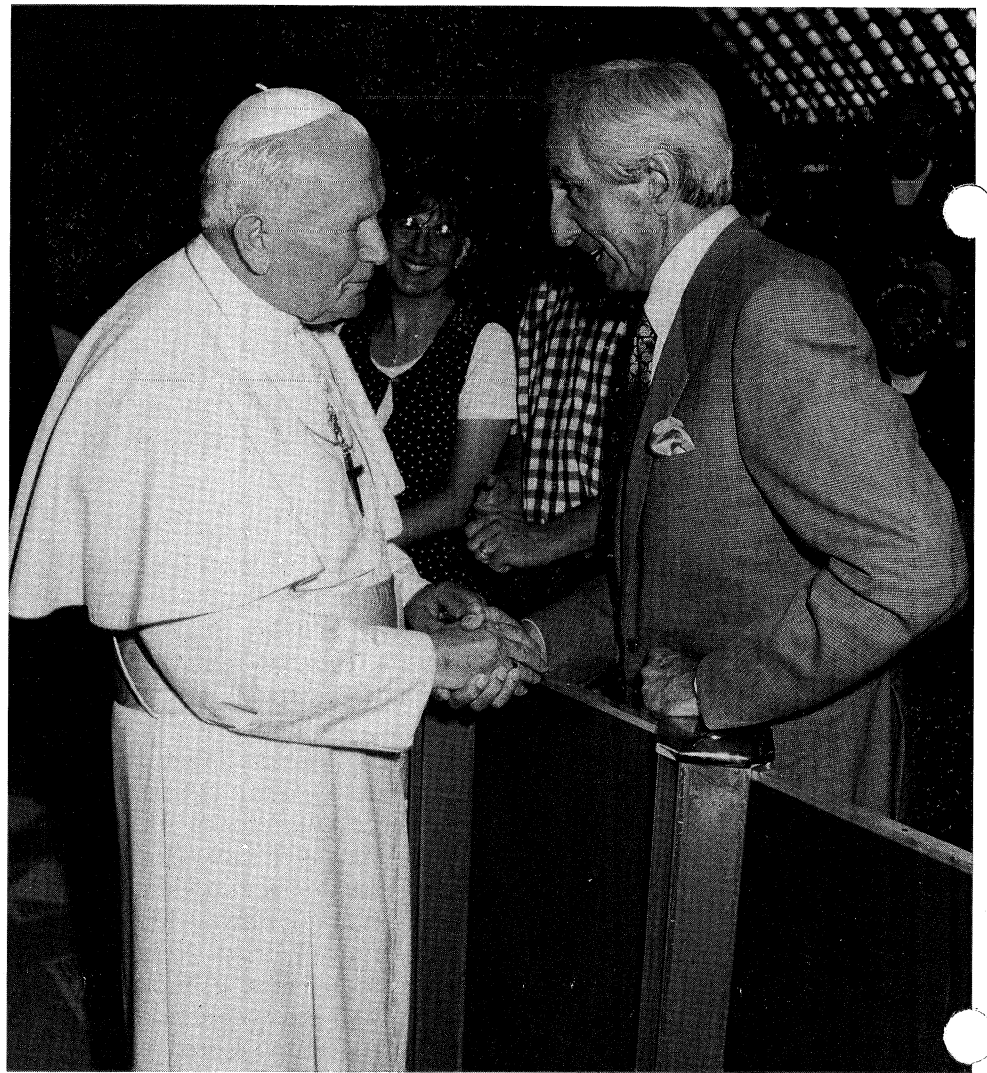
by J. Peter Ministrelli

My visit to Canosa (which would never have occurred if the following events had not taken place) started back in the late seventies by a meeting with two Nuns who had stopped by my office in Michigan for a donation. I learned at this time their property in Still River, Mass., had not met the restrictions necessary to receive their final vows to be Contemplative Benedictine Nuns of the St. Benedict Order. They had to relocate to a more secluded site, and this led to satisfying the necessarily requirements which in turn led to purchasing a 200 acre parcel of land in Petersham, Mass., with a 22 room mansion.

They had a need for a church, so I agreed to provide the funds to build it. We had the dedication of the church this past May 30th, with the Cardinal Law from Boston performing the ceremonies. Along with the Cardinal were Bishop Reilly and various Abbots among the concelebrants. At lunch after the ceremonies, sitting with Cardinal Law, I had mentioned a trip I was taking to Europe and Rome, and maybe he could arrange for me to meet Pope John Paul II. On August 28, 1996 I did shake hands with His Holiness. We exchanged a few words and a photo was taken. I cannot explain the feelings of such an experience. This certainly will be the highlight of my life.

After that, we then decided to motor down to the old Pantanella Air Base outside of Canosa. We only had a half of day to spend, but we did drive to the site. While standing on the hillside looking at the surrounding area, I was trying to envision back to the days I spent there. It was quite a moving experience. Now, it is so peaceful — no sound of the engines with planes roaring down the runway on the way to their target. There was only a shepherd guarding over his flock of sheep while dozing under a tree.

I came across the abandoned home where the peasant girl used to do my laundry. Leaving the area and driving through the miles of vineyards, I stopped to take bunches of red & white grapes. All the while,



L to R - Pope John Paul II and J Peter Ministrelli.

looking over my shoulder for the owner or guardian of the area.

On our stop in Canosa we took pictures of the plaza, observed people having lunch at the sidewalk cafes and walked the narrow streets. It's still to me just a quiet town which has not changed much.

Leaving, we drove up to Giovanni Rotondo to visit the Shrine of Padre Pio, a priest who had developed the "Stigma" — a bleeding of the identical wounds of Jesus Christ. I was told that over 400 people had the same wounds over the centuries since the death of Christ. I learned he had services in his church during the same time I was at Pantanella. I was really disappointed I was not aware of it then. It would have been quite an experience to have attended mass at that time. He will be canonized a Saint by the Catholic church.

I visited Bari while driving back to Rome. I stopped in Venice, Monte

Carlo, Cannes, St. Tropez, Paris, and then flew back to the states on the Concord. Another great experience.

So, you can see how all this came about from my meeting with the Nuns.

*Evidently not well publicized at the time, but the trip to Giovanni Rotondo from Pantanella was arranged by the Chaplain and was on Christmas 1944. See story in Pantanella news #18.*

*For those of you who do not have the newsletter, two truck loads of GIs drove up the winding dirt road to the mountain top. In Bill Coonan's story about the trip he wrote, "Padre Pio's teeth chattered on the chalice and he moaned as his hands bled during the service. I was close to him as I served at his Mass and kissed his hand afterwards. Padre Pio died at the age of 80 in 1968.*

*There is a National Center for Padre Pio in Norristown, PA.*

## WE SALUTE OUR LIFE MEMBERS

### "A BADGE OF HONOR"

1. Frank A. Piteo
- Ernie Van Asperen
- Robert S. Wootan
4. Leonard J. Goldstein
5. Frank P. Ambrose
6. O. J. Cowart, Jr.
7. Harry S. Carl
8. James C. Althoff
9. Harold A. Straughan
10. Walter Clausen
11. Kenneth Kill
12. Richard J. Bilger
13. David B. Coleman
14. John B. Baum
15. Charles V. Ferich
16. James H. Kienitz
17. Joseph A. Tucci
18. Eugene R. Sims
19. Stanley J. Winkowski
20. Nicholas V. Schaps
21. Walter Sutton
22. George G. Gaines, Jr.
23. Francis R. Clark
24. Jack Levin
25. Walker H. Shipley
26. Vernon G. Burda
27. John B. Kennedy
- Russ T. Maynard
29. Barbour C. Stokes, Jr.
30. Ralph Du Bois
31. Verle B. Dollison
32. William A. Rachow
33. Donald A. Barrett
34. Walter W. Dudley
35. John C. Zartman
36. Richard L. Crutcher, Jr.
37. Robert L. Jasper
38. Ralph D. Hendrickson, Sr.
39. Kenneth G. Foden
40. Michael J. Deironimi
41. Byron W. Thompson
42. Warren L. Beeson
43. Thomas L. Williams
44. Harry Reuss
45. John R. Dickey
46. Jack W. Smith
47. William B. Bartlett, Jr.
48. Joe P. Ministrelli
49. John P. Layne
50. Leo A. Fink
51. Homer L. Moeller
52. George W. Sinner
53. Kenneth E. Sutton, Jr.
- Eugene M. Young
55. Daniel E. Bailey
56. Calvert L. Crawford
57. Dennis B. Flaherty

58. Jack Van Slyke
  59. Adrian A. Martin
  60. Bonnie G. Rowe
  61. Walter N. Longacre
  62. Ray U. Tyler
  63. Morris R. Rapoport
  64. Pierre J. J. Kennedy
  65. Roland Pharis
  66. Gale Graham
  67. James Marcel Snyder
  68. Loren W. Foote
  69. Bernie Badler
  70. Nicholas C. Belik
  71. Melvin L. Derry
  72. Frank R. Jasicko
  73. Leonard H. Emmel
  74. Donald E. Toomey
  75. Albert P. LeBlanc
  76. Denly J. Thompson
  77. Herbert Schlossin
  78. Kenneth J. Kopp
  79. Telio Giammarco
  80. George F. Kilby
  81. Arthur W. Bovett
  82. Reuben L. Krogh
  83. Eugene C. Deal
  84. Dale L. Keiser
  85. Charles H. Braud
  86. Frank Wassenaar
  87. Raymond D. Cauble
  88. William A. McBride
  89. Henry L. Willett
  90. Paul N. Durckel
  91. Gino J. Pelleschi
  92. John Wroblewski
  93. Mary Ann Wootan
  94. Earl R. Leinart
  95. Clarence A. Knox
  96. Robert L. Bassinette
  97. Wesley C. Shaw
  98. Theron R. Robinson
  99. Milton Levinson
  100. Albert W. Nagel
  101. James Debevec
  102. Dale L. Samuelson
  103. Salvatore J. Scippa
  104. Donald E. Fleming
  105. John T. Russell
  106. Thomas G. Arthur
  107. Charles O. Morgan, Jr.
- Life Membership dues are \$100.  
A beautiful certificate is sent  
to all Life Members.*

Regular dues are \$10 per year payable in advance, or a little more if you can to help out those who cannot afford it. Your label, should have 97 to be current. Don't miss future newsletters -Send your check to O. J. Cowart, Treasurer.

## REUNION 98

Ken Sutton has announced the 98 reunion will be held October 7 to 11, 1998 at the Hope Hotel on Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio. It is the only hotel on an Air Force Base! There are many more reasons to plan for this reunion. We will begin giving details in the next newsletter. It will also include a 465th Bomb Group gathering one day of the reunion.

## EDITORS CORNER

I was pleased to see another excellent response for articles for the newsletter. The POW article describes some of the hardships and feelings our POWs experienced during their incarceration.

It is also a pleasure to hear from Dodie Shallman describing the feelings of someone who lost a husband. And the current experiences of our members like J. Peter Ministrelli. Keep the stories coming and we will keep cranking out the *Pantanella News*.

We are fortunate to have articles for future newsletters. For example, Harry Carl sent the complete original booklet of the proposed citation for the raid on Manzel-Dornier Werke at Friedrichshafen, Germany on 3 August 1944, for which our group received the Distinguished Unit Citation.

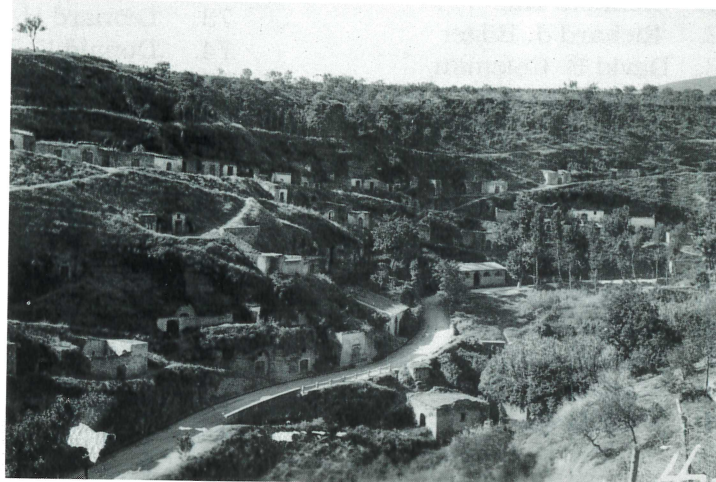
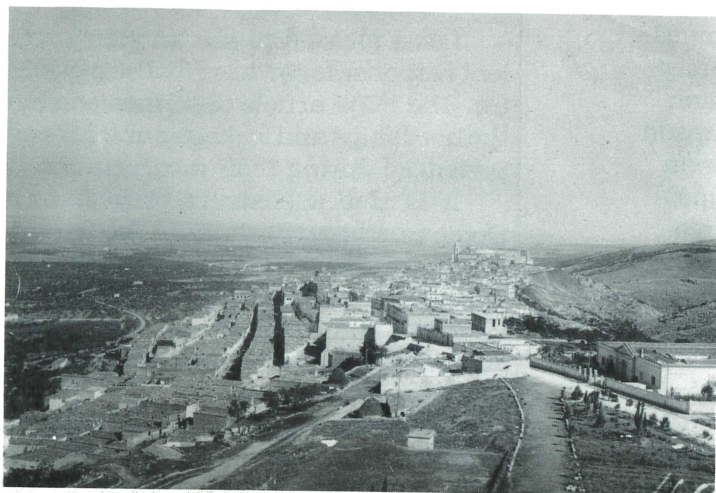
Other upcoming stories include articles from many of you and some from the archives to recall some of our days at Pantanella.

I would like to comment on our membership. With our ageing membership we find illnesses or one spouse passing away. Frequently members are moving to care centers or leaving large homes for apartments. In the process we do not receive address changes. For members who do not have close ties with other members it is difficult to find the member who moves.

What we need is more sections or crews to keep track of each other. The one prime example is the Ordnance Section. They send in a periodic reports on all their members. If one moves they search them out and keep us informed. Why not organize your crew or section to give us a hand to keep our lines of communication open to all our members?

Keep well and have a nice spring season.



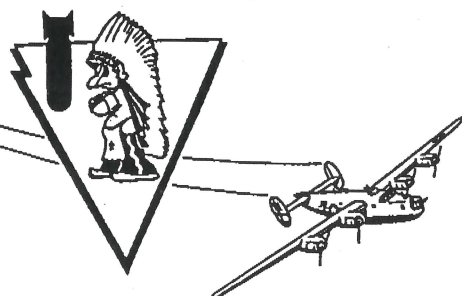


Upper L to R, Funeral with brass band in Andria.

Looking down two streets in Lovello, near Pantanella.

Lower L to R, View of Minervino taken from top of Fascist monument. Wine Cellars near Rapallo.

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