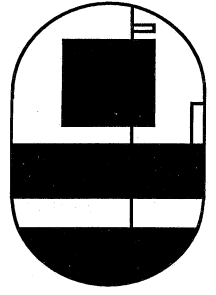


PANTANELLA NEWS



APR 1998

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NUMBER 52

REGISTRATION BEGINS FOR REUNION 98 AT DAYTON, OH. OCT 7 TO 11 PLANS IN FINAL STAGES FOR AN EXCITING REUNION

Plans are well under way for this exciting reunion. Wright Patterson has proven to be a very interesting site. It was the location of our second reunion, the largest ever. With all the squadrons attending it will be one to remember. Already the Hope Hotel is fully booked with three squadrons from the 465th Bomb Group including the 781st. And it is the only hotel on an Air Force Base!

The museum has added more planes to make it one of the most interesting aviation museums in the country. I met someone who recently returned from a vacation in Dayton. He spent four days at the museum and he wants to go again!

Heading up the planning for this reunion is our experienced and competent Ken Sutton and Roland Soucy, co-chairman. Never have we had plans nearly completed at such an early date.

The reunion will be here before you know it. Now it's time for you to begin some serious planning. Remember it costs nothing to register — you get 100% refund if you have to cancel. Let your friends know you are coming by getting on the registration list early.

The early bird registration form is enclosed. You can't beat the \$50, plus tax, room price! Fill it out and send the portion for the hotel as directed and the portion for the 781st registration and check to OJ. Cowart. OJ and Esther are waiting for the registrations to flow in.

Here are some reasons why this will be a "biggie." Not only will you be meeting with old 781st comrades, but you will have the opportunity to visit with some friends you may have in the other squadrons and the

465th BG headquarters personnel.

Also, we are linked by common interests, memories, and friendships by our participation in that great conflict of fifty three years ago, World War II. So join with your comrades to remember those who are no longer with us and to relive those days at Pantabella that were such an important part of our lives. We have a schedule of events to help bring back those memories for you to share with your comrades and their families.

More families have shown interest this time. Remember families and widows are always welcome and can participate in all events. We do not have programs for men only.

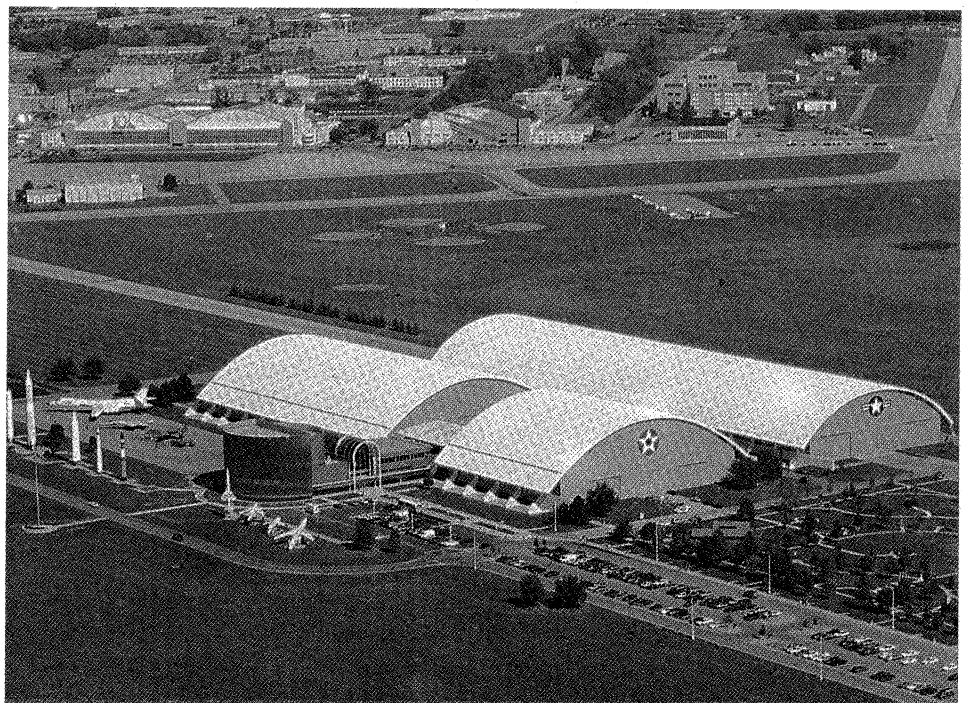
Dress is informal except it seems

everyone likes to make the dinners a little dressy.

There will be a complete program in the next newsletter. For now we will just give you an outline.

For Tuesday Oct. 7, for the early early birds who fly in, we have arrangements made for the discount Charter Van Service to start service from the airport to the hotel (1/2 reg. price) available for all 465th Bomb Group members. There will be no formal activity at the hotel, but there should be a bulletin board up to find out who is there.

On Wed, when over half will check in, registration will be from 1 to 5 PM and hospitality and trophy room will be open from 1 PM to



The United States Air Force Museum, Dayton, Ohio. The 781st Bomb Squadron/465th Bomb group tree and plaque are located off the lower right corner of the photo. The memorial garden is now completely filled and closed to any further tree planting or memorial.

closing.

Thur. will be registration and hospitality all day. From 5 pm to 11 pm will be our private party at the Air Force Museum. Wander through the museum (free) and spend as much time as you want to look at planes or climbing inside for a better look on your self-guided tour. Then a cocktail party and dinner between the planes! Nobody can say you didn't get to see many planes this time!

Friday AM has a scheduled short board meeting, then a 781st meeting. About 11 we will leave by bus to the Officers club for lunch, then memorial service and squadron photo. Back at the hotel will be hospitality and trophy room with the evening open for section and crew dinners.

Saturday is the 465th Bomb Group day. In the morning there will be a program for all and then videos and casual gatherings in the hospi-

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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.

ality room area most of the day.

All the planning not complete for this day. That evening will be the 465th Bomb Group cocktail party and banquet. You will have a chance to meet your friends in the other squadrons and enjoy a good meal and interesting program.

Bring along any memorabilia or old photos you may have to show to your comrades.

If you are flying watch for airline specials. If you plan to drive, there is plenty of free parking.

The Saga of the Pitts Crew and the "Flamin' Mamie"

As told by Dave Coleman, Dean Otto, and Recollections of the Crew of the Flamin' Mamie.

The Pitts crew was formed at Davis Monthan Army Air Base in 1944 with the assembling of Homer Moeller (co-pilot), Howard Weistling (flight engineer), Tom Yancey (bombardier), Truman Leath (radio operator), with aerial gunners Dean Otto (nose), Al Hellman (ball), Ralph Leach (upper turret), and Donald Stern (tail). These eager young men joined new B-24 commander Marion Arthur Pitts, one of the University of Virginia's finest.

Training Days

The process of training and forming this crew into a combat unit started with a hectic pace of ground school, formation flying, gunnery, and bombing, with each member learning to depend on each others skills and coordination. This dependency was necessary to make the crew a fighting unit that would be able to survive in a hostile environment. After a couple of months of training, navigator David Coleman joined the group and was integrated into the routines to become a proficient member of the crew.

During the crew's stay at Tucson, several incidents occurred that etched their memories and may have been a precursor of things to come. On one flight, the elevator

trim tabs had been rigged in reverse. Fortunately, it was not a formation take-off, as the aircraft immediately became nose-heavy and required corrective action. The pilots were trained in the use of elevator trim to assist the physical movement of the aircraft, but their efforts proved ineffective in keeping the nose level to attain a safe altitude for bail out if necessary. Fortunately, the alertness and training of the pilots helped them to quickly isolate the trim tabs as a problem. Upon assurance that no other problems existed, the pilots (Pitts and Moeller) landed the aircraft safely without further incident.

A memory which will endure occurred on the night of the Moeller's wedding at the base chapel. A crash of a training flight immediately after take-off occurred just prior to the time set for the wedding. The chaplain who was to perform the ceremony was summoned to the crash site thus delaying the wedding for several hours. This gave the crew ample opportunity to contemplate the dangers inherent with their newly-found profession.

Bound for Europe

Most of the crews in training at this time were considered to be replacement crews, and orders soon arrived assigning all to Topeka, Kansas. Excitement abounded as rumors started flying that the men would fly new aircraft to their overseas assignments. As it turned out, the crew was scheduled to ship out by sea. Processing for overseas began with drawing flight equipment, posing for crew photos, and making the train ride to Patrick Henry, Virginia for further shots, physicals, and training in ship evacuation. Patrick Henry was the assembly point for all troops leaving by convoy from Newport News for Europe. On November 13, 1944, the Pitts crew left port and zigzagged through mine fields all day upon the French ship Columbia. The convoy of nine ships formed at Hampton Roads and sailed for their new home in Italy.

After spending Thanksgiving Day at sea, the crew soon appreci-

ated their accommodations aboard the Columbia as one of the Liberty ships in the convoy signaled that a fire in their ovens burned up their Thanksgiving meal. The Columbia was considered a medium sized vessel carrying approximately 3000 troops plus cargo. Many days at sea were rough, and the troops spent time practicing, shooting the guns aboard ship, or relaxing by playing cards or working crossword puzzles. Once the ship passed Gibraltar, the seas calmed and the troops were offered views of the Atlas Mountains of Africa, Tangiers, and even a few fishermen in rowboats nearby.

On November 26, the Columbia sailed into Naples at 10:00 am and by 4:00 pm the crew was on an English ship, the Arundle Castle, which at the time was the seventh largest ship in the world. The next day, the ship set out for Bari, Italy and on the way the crew could see the island of Capri and the volcano Stromboli which was erupting that very night. On November 28, the men transferred to trucks for the

ride to Gioia and the reception camp. The ride from Bari to Gioia and Pantanella was hardly long enough to prepare them for what they were to face at their new assignment with the 465th Bomb Group.

Life at Pantanella

The group arrived at Pantanella at the 781st Bomb Squadron late in the afternoon of December 2, and was confronted with pitching a tent in the rain, long before they could relax and begin to enjoy the "comforts" of home. The first tent leaked and the next day, they acquired a second tent to cover the first, hoping to mismatch the holes of the first.

Conditions were anything but sanitary, and the crew experienced two things that helped them prepare for their coming POW days. First, the mud floor did little to provide a healthy environment. The

men found some wooden crates which provided an excellent floor, and even served as closets for equipment and clothing. However, the Squadron Commander was soon to announce that the MIA crates being built for downed crews were disappearing from supply and should stop. By this time their needs were satisfied and they contributed no more to this problem.

Second, the crew experienced heating problems that plagued most tent residents. Their stove was heated with German diesel fuel and one night the chimney pipe clogged. The next morning Pitts, Moeller, and Coleman found soot hanging in long streamers inside the tent. Each person was also coated with a black soot that could not be removed in the cold showers. This "protective" coating was to last several days.

The crew was subject to the rituals of being new to the camp. Many were intent on impressing the "new" crew that they wouldn't live much longer. There was a lot of talk about 24s being shot down. On December 6

the base was awakened by a 500 lb bomb blowing up in an aircraft on take-off. The entire crew of that mission was lost, some of whom had almost finished their assignments. This proved to be a sobering reminder of the grim realities of war.

The Pitts crew was to fly several practice missions for orientation, and on December 12 while shooting landings, the right tire blew and caused the aircraft to head for the control tower. The aircraft skidded off the runway mat, breaking the wheel strut. The aircraft continued to skid through the mud a quarter mile while nearly full of gas. Pitts used the left wheel brake to miss the tower and the nose wheel collapsed. The aircraft finally came to rest just a few feet from the front of the tower. The aircraft was a total loss, and was salvaged. This flight has caused much speculation as to what mission and what crew did this superb job of scaring the tower personnel. This aircraft was the Yellow "C", 41-28857. There was



Marion A. Pitts Crew, L to R.

Rear - Truman C. Leath, R/O; Howard G. Weistling, Eng.; Ralph W. Leach, Top Gunner; Dean T. Otto, Nose Gunner; Alvin Hellman, Ball Gunner; Donald Stern, tail Gunner. Front - David B. Coleman, Navigator; Marion A. Pitts, Pilot; Homer L. Moeller, Co-Pilot. Not shown, William L. Cassel, Bombardier.

also some confusion on the date of this occurrence, but Dean Otto's daily journal lists this flight as occurring on December 12, and not December 14 as stated in some reports.

The Mission

It was the policy for new crews to fly with a seasoned pilot on their first mission, and the Pitts crew was no exception. Mike Blakita was selected to be with the Pitts crew on their first mission bound for Brux, Germany to bomb the oil refineries there. The crew had also left their bombardier (Tom Yancey) at Tucson and William Cassel was scheduled in his place. Homer Moeller was also to remain behind, and subsequently await word of the fate of the "Flamin' Mamie" crew. Russ Maynard had flown the Flamin' Mamie (42-51631) on many missions, and had become attached to this aircraft as "his" ship. He too was to feel the loss of this old friend. Moeller was to fly with several crews until he eventually became a member of the Dahl crew.

On December 16, 1944 the Pitts crew and the Flamin' Mamie took off from Pantanella to meet their destiny. After several hours in formation, the aircraft was somewhere over Austria when the ball gunner reported that oil was streaming back over his turret from the number three engine. Not long afterward, the number three engine was feathered and the Flamin' Mamie began to lose altitude and fell back in the formation. Once altitude and position in the formation was lost, a second engine was feathered at which time the decision was made to drop the bombs and head for home. As altitude became a major factor in crossing the Alps, all weight was thrown overboard. In the vicinity of Linz, Austria anti-aircraft weapons were zeroing in on the aircraft and the decision was made to abandon the aircraft.

Bail-out and Capture

The crew bailed out and was scattered in a peculiar fashion. The radio operator, navigator, and ball gunner all landed very close together and were captured within one

hour. The navigator, David Coleman carried a pair of GI boots as he bailed out which were lost immediately upon the chute opening. However, Truman Leath, the radio operator upon landing was nearly hit by this lethal missile from the sky. He had these boots with him upon his capture, and they remained with him throughout his stay in Germany. The co-pilot (Pitts) and tail gunner (Stern) were captured in close proximity to each other and the other crew members were captured separately within a few hours after bail out. After eluding German patrols for several hours, the flight engineer (Weistling), radio operator (Leath), and ball gunner (Hellman) were separated after being searched, and were relieved of all flying equipment.

After a few days, all crew members were reunited at an air base at Wells, Austria. The crew along with several guards were dispatched by train to the interrogation center, Dulag Luft, near Frankfurt. The interrogation process required a few days in solitary confinement after which the crew was reunited at the Red Cross Reception Center at Wetzlar. This was the first time the crew stayed in bomb shelters pray-

ing that the 15th Air Force was not aiming at their position. By Christmas Day, the crew along with many American and British soldiers celebrated their own version of the holiday. Since they were close to Wetzlar, Germany, home of the Leitz Optical Works, they were to enjoy Allied bombings as a Christmastime treat.

After several days in the bomb shelter, the crew was loaded in boxcars and sent to their new home at Stalag Luft 1 at Barth, Germany. The train was made up of many prisoners going to different camps, and the men were subjected to spending much time along the way in marshalling yards trying to survive "friendly" bombings. Barth is north of Berlin on the Baltic Sea, so their rail journey took them through many large cities which were constantly under attack by fighters. It was comforting to see that the aircraft was a Me 109 or a Fock Wolf 190 instead of

an American P-51 or P-47.

Stalag Luft 1

The crew finally arrived at Barth on New Years Eve and were happy to be released from their boxcars and to begin a new life as a "Kreigie." As many airmen were being shot down, the camp was rapidly expanding. To make room for the new POWs, a new compound (North 3) had just been completed and was being rapidly filled. Colonel Hubert Zemke was the senior American officer in charge of this camp, and was the representative for all the prisoners under the German commandant. Lieutenant Colonel Francis Gabreskie was the senior officer in North 3.

The military organization in place under Col. Zemke made life at Barth livable under the German command. Many problems affecting the prisoners were handled by Col. Zemke and his resolve to stand up to the Germans and force them to abide by the Geneva Convention. It was a great relief for the crew to be among so many Americans and to think that they had a fairly "secure" place to live while awaiting their dreams of liberation.

The routine at Barth was very



Howard G. Weistling. Photo taken by Germans at Stalag I.

dull and dreary. The morning and evening roll calls made for the only change of pace. Calisthenics were often incorporated into the roll call. Many hours were spent walking the perimeter when the weather was cooperative. The prisoners could observe the contrails of the V-2s being launched from Peenamunde. Also near the camp was a radar tracking school which used a trimotor transport as a tracking target and all the fighter pilots longed for the opportunity to make a firing pass.

Near the end of the war, the crew had the occasion to see Me 262s and other jet aircraft operate from the local airfield. After lights out and during much of the winter days poker was the main pastime. IOUs did little to bother the serious players as most debts were to be forgiven on the liberation day. A very limited amount of sports equipment was available. Softball and volleyball was played by a few of the stronger and more athletic. A few minor work details within the camp such as coal distribution, potato distribution, and cleaning details offered some break from the daily routine. Church services were well attended, and the few books that were available had many readers.

A small infirmary and hospital was manned by British doctors and corpsmen. This facility provided excellent service in spite of its many limitations. Lt. Cassel (bombardier) was treated at this facility prior to his being diagnosed with leukemia that resulted in his death. Coleman (navigator) was hospitalized in this small facility with pneumonia and was successfully treated.

After Lt. Cassel's death, a military funeral was allowed by the Germans. Col. Zemke, Lt. Col. Gabreski, Chaplain Charlton, Blakita, Pitts, and Coleman with the German guards accompanied Lt. Cassel's body to the nearby town of Barth and the body was interred in the city cemetery. Lt. Cassel was returned to France where he is now buried in a U. S. military cemetery.

Liberation

In the spring of 1945, the allied

forces gained the upper hand in the war, and it appeared the end was near. Col. Zemke had made arrangements with the Germans for the Americans to take over the guard towers as the Germans headed west to outrun the approaching Russians. This occurred on the night of April 30, 1945. What a surprise it was for all prisoners upon the dawning of the new day. The purpose of keeping the personnel confined for the time being was to provide safety for all, and to prevent chaos and a scattering of personnel all over the countryside. Contact was made with the advancing Russian army. After the Russian command moved into the camp, all fences and towers were torn down, and many POWs headed in all directions. Col. Zemke had requested that all personnel remain at camp so that they could be flown back to U. S. control. The Russians had their own plan, which was for the Americans and British to be moved by truck to Odessa and then be returned to Allied Control. Col. Zemke interceded and finally arranged airlift via B-17s, B-24s, and C-47s for all prisoners to France.

Many friends were reunited at Camp "Lucky Strike" located near Rouen, France, while awaiting ships at LeHavre to transport the "RAMPS" (Recovered Allied Military Personnel) to Camp Patrick Henry at Newport News, Virginia. Everyone was given leave to return home and then to report to rehabilitation centers for medical attention or return to duty. Since the Pacific War was soon over, the processing of discharges began for most.

Epilogue

The Pitts crew like many others drifted apart after the war, pursuing careers, college, families, and other interests with contact almost completely severed. However, due to the efforts of many, the 781st Squadron was "reactivated" and many were motivated to locate old crew members, renew lost friendships, and share the events that had occurred in the fifty year interval since their separation after the war.

Since the first reunion at Colo-

rado Springs in 1986, the Pitts crew has located all its member and has had several reunions in addition to the regular squadron reunions. Sadly, three members of the crew have joined the "Folded Wings." Mike Blakita, Donald Stern, and Marion Arthur Pitts have passed away.

All members of the Pitts crew have been very successful in their civilian and military professions. The reunion in Tucson marked the 50th wedding anniversary of Homer and Inez Moeller, which resulted in a large gathering of family, friends, and crew members of Pitts and Dahl to join the celebration of this special event.

In the days to come we will see fewer of the old crew, and less will be able to travel, so the crew will get together as often as possible in the future. The relationship that developed over 50 years ago through the experience of war has endured, and stands a tribute to these young men who in 1944 took to the air and risked their lives in service to their country.

Research done by Stephen Weistling via internet. Ed.

Address and Phone number help.

In recent articles I have been trying to make everyone aware of zip code and area code changes and the necessity to inform me if you want to keep current on the roster and to receive the Pantanella News with a correct zip code. One of our directors, **Bob Freed**, took up the challenge as noted in the following letter from him: "Our Sunday newspaper brought out the fact that many phone area codes would change effective 2/1/98. Knowing there were a number of people in the Pittsburgh area and surrounding communities who belong to the 781st or 465th I got out the 1997 roster and sure enough, if the men I list below still have the same addresses and phones as they did in '97 their area codes will change Feb. 1 from 412 to 724."

Thanks Bob for being 'on the ball.'

Bob listed the five men living in his area code; Oliver Graham, Wm. Huges, Eugene Martis, John Zadrozny and Bob Freed. Ed.

BRUCE MILLER

Armament Section

In July, 1987 Bruce Miller returned his questionnaire and additional information about his activities since Pantanella. He was in the Armament Section and sent a roster with most of the men he had checked out as to address or in Folded Wings. Later he sent in more letters updating our files. Unfortunately the file got lost, but finally here is his article.

In his first letter he wrote, "Ever since the 465th Bomb Group was disbanded (June 1945), I believe in Italy, I have pondered the reason why our unit was selected for troop transport service to Trinidad while nonessential personnel were abandoned to the Italian winds.

"Many of my friends in the Armament Section of the 781st ask the same question. Were we "Peck's Bad Boys of the 15th Air Force?"

"After long and loyal service to the 465th, the non-essential personnel did not receive an official discharge from their parent unit. My discharge is from the 4th Squadron, 52nd Fighter Group (P-51s) with whom I did not serve in war time."

Bruce replied he was willing to take an active roll in locating members, but did not know if he would be on a foreign assignment.

Following is information received from his letters:

Bruce Miller was in the Armament Section beginning October 1943 at McCook, Nebraska. At Pantanella, as a member of the Armament Section, he was involved in the loading bombs and ammunition boxes on planes preparing for the following day's mission. When there was no mission scheduled there would be machine gun inspections and cleaning.

When the war ended at Pantanella he was transferred to a B-17 squadron at Foggia Main. A month later he was transferred to a P-51 base (4th Sqdn, 52nd Fighter Group) at San Severo, Italy. The group was returning to Florida for retraining before going to the Pacific war. Since Bruce had enough points for discharge he was scheduled to go along as excess personnel.

One day after leaving Naples the Japanese surrendered and the troop ship (Manhattan) headed for Boston to unload. From Camp Miles Standish he went by troop train to Indiantown, PA and was discharged August 26, 1945.

Bruce enrolled in Pennsylvania State College in September, 1945 in the School of Agriculture and received a B.S. in June 1949. He stayed on for another year and received another degree.

Since employment was difficult in the U. S., he accepted an assignment in Liberia, West Africa as a Divisional Superintendent with the Firestone Plantations Company where he was involved in the production of liquid rubber (latex).

In 1953 he returned to the U. S. and accepted a position with the U. S. Department of Interior (Land Management) in Oregon. A year later the Bureau of Reclamation in California where he became involved in irrigation in the large central valley.

After 10 years and a number of promotions he was in the regional headquarters in Sacramento.

In 1965 he was approached by a friend who was working for the Irrigation Department in the Kingdom of Thailand. He accepted the job as an irrigation specialist to train personnel and technicians for crop production.

Bruce remained in S. E. Asia (Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines) and in the Middle East (Syria, Iran and North Yemen) for 22 years.

In his last correspondence he said he had a stroke in 1993 and had to simplify his life. He noted that he would like to see more of the armament section men attend the reunion. With the reunion in Dayton this year and close to the majority of our members we should see a good turnout and the armament section should have a good reunion.

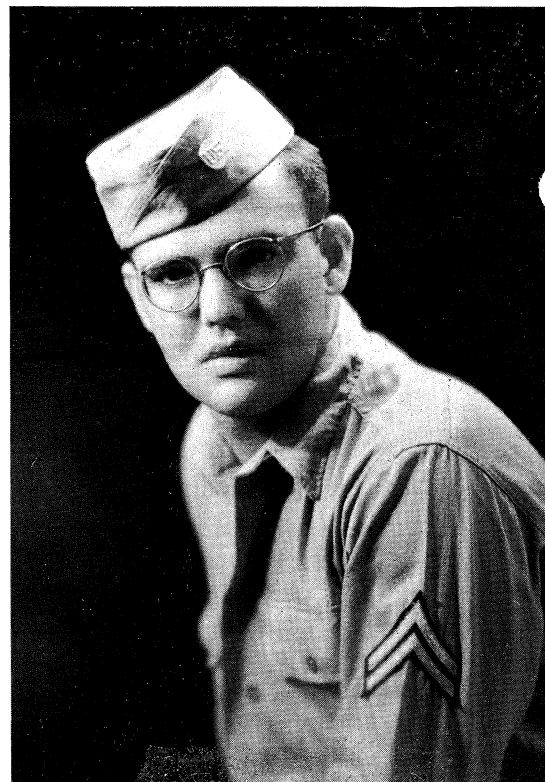


Photo of Bruce Miller was taken while on a pass from Pantanella, on July 22, 1944.

B-24 Bronze Sculpture

A 19 foot bronze B-24 replica will be placed in the honor court of the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs so that our B-24 will not be forgotten. The sculptor is Robert Henderson, famed Aviation sculptor. The Second Air Division (B-24s in the Eight Air Force) has been raising the funds for this project and have \$117,000 in pledges of the \$175,000 needed for the sculpture. Donations of \$450 or more will allow you to have your name or the name of your choice on the bronze plaque at the base of the model. The 465th will be on the plaque as the result of donations from all the 465th Bomb Group Squadrons. The funds from the 781st were from the **Frank Piteo** donations fund.

Individuals can also make donations and have their name listed on the plaque. If you are interested in making a donation contact Neal Sorensen, 489th BG, Treasurer, 132 Peninsula Road, Minneapolis, MN 55441.

Another Armament Section Member Responds Paul "Hoot" Hosier

"Hi, Do you guys remember the shuttle runs the Air Force made from England to Russia to Italy and back to England ? Our personnel supply officer asked us to turn in our extra blankets for the incoming flight crews for one night. Well, the one night was over and myself and two others went to supply to reclaim our blankets. Ken Sutton happened to be there and he told us to get lost, that we had all the blankets we were going to get, which was two.

"So, after a couple of nights of freezing the three of us went to the Red Cross farm house to soak up some wine. About midnight, or so, on the way home we had to pass a 32 man tent full of Italian laborers all sound asleep with warm blankets covering them. I always carried a little pocket knife you could shave with if needed. We decided to get some blankets off their sleeping bodies. I went around the tent and cut all the ropes except the four corner ones. The other two banditos went in and started grabbing blankets. When I heard the racket I cut the two back corner ropes and the back of the tent collapsed on them. I then ran around the front inside to get more blankets and out again and cut the two front corner ropes. The whole tent collapsed on them. All the time the Italians were hollering and screaming under their tent. We gathered up our new blankets and went home to a warm night's sleep.

"The next day we counted our loot. We had sixteen new blankets. The Italians told the guards that we held them up at gun point to rob them.

I talked to Ken Sutton about this article and his comments were that Hoot has a memory better than his.

Did you know??

That the 15th Air Force was assigned 3,544 B-24 Liberators and almost 50% were lost in combat — 1,756.

781st MEN CHANGE ENGINE IN RECORD TIME

The "QUICK CHANGE ARTISTS" of the 781st squadron became the quickest change artists of the Fifteenth Air Force as they set a record believed to be tops in any Air Force. Time, 2 hours and 37 minutes clocked.

The men started from a built-up engine, pulled off the old parts while simultaneously the propeller man was taking off the prop. The teamwork continued as the men made the new adjustments and the feverish workings didn't cease until the job was completed.

The 8-point-change started in the heat of the afternoon at 1330 and when the engine was turning over it was just 1607. After 45 minutes of slow time the men didn't adjourn for the afternoon, as would be expected. They said, "we were working just to make sure the afternoon would pass by swiftly while we waited the return of our other bombers who were off pounding at a Jerry target."

How did all of this competition start??? M/Sgt Leo C. Lutgring, line-chief and worker notably known as the "Beaver," went to work one afternoon with some of the men to see just how long it took to change an engine. They accomplished the feat in 7 hours and 29 minutes. This sparked other groups and the 781st boys soon learned that another array of men of another group had bettered their record by doing their exploit in 4 1/2 hours.

Undaunted, Sgt Lutgring said; "If they can do it in that time we'll better it." Lutgring, who has many a good mechanic in his 'men of the line', chose at random flight chief; S/Sgt Warren G. Carden, a crew chief; Sgt Lebron Hankins, an airplane mechanic; Sgt Edward O. Tietz, an airplane mechanic and propeller specialist, T/Sgt Robert L. Robinson.

The group of men made a formidable array and now say, "Even if our record is beat again, we'll better it!"

(Imagine — Sgt Lutgring snapping his fingers and having a complete engine change? Who said machinery was taking the place of man-power?)



The record-making mechanics are; from left to right in front of the engine nacelle are, Sergeant Aurelius A. Becnel, Master Sergeant Leo G. Lutgring and Sergeant Martin A. Honthaas. In the back row, from left to right are Master Sergeant John L. Thomas, Technical Sergeant Mallory H. Simmons, Master Sergeant John T. Patrick, and Staff Sergeant James Aitken, Jr.

465th BOMB GROUP SCORES NUMBER ONE

SUMMARY OF THE WEEK

THIS WEEK represents a triumph for the bombing crews of the 15th Air Force. The tactical situation was such that the conditions for accurate bombing were more nearly fulfilled than they usually are, and the crews took full advantage of it. The formations were generally small, targets were for the most part along the coast making navigation more certain than usual, and altitudes were somewhat lower. All these things combined to favor accuracy. However, the actual identification of small gun positions and the like is difficult, and it is a credit to the bombardiers and navigators that such outstandingly high scores were achieved.

The high scores of this week indicate how much tactics and the situation of the target have to do with accuracy. It has often been claimed that our bombardiers will hit their targets given good visibility, sure pilotage and navigation and a formation small enough to respond to minor corrections. The truth of this seems to have been proved by the scores of this week.

FOR THIS WEEK the 55th Wing was easily the highest, with the 47th Wing second. The Air Force average took a big jump ahead. One hundred and twenty group-attacks were flown, with 61% of them being scored.

THE HIGHEST GROUP

The 465th Group of the 55th Wing has set a new standard for accuracy in the 15th Air Force. Last week, for the previous ten missions up to and including August 11 this Group had an average score of 66%. These scores, including some tough targets, are about as high as can be reasonably expected until it becomes practical to bomb from squadrons in trail.

BOMBING ACCURACY BY WINGS

(1% within 1000' of briefed MPI)

For the four-week period ending August 18. . . August 11

For the four-week period ending <u>August 18</u> . . . <u>August 11</u> . . . <u>August 4</u>			
55th Wing	51.5	38.2	41.3
47th Wing	42.3	34.2	34.2
49th Wing	41.9	40.0	37.7
304th Wing	36.8	40.5	36.6

15th AIR FORCE. . . . 41.5 35.6 35.7

The Air Force average for four weeks of bombing crossed the 40 % line for the first time and the 55th Wing has the honor of being the first Wing over 50% This Wing was also the first to cross 40%. The relative positions of all the Wings changed this week with the exceptions of the 5th (B-17s), which remains at the bottom of the list for the fourth consecutive week.

FLIM FLAM

By Al "Scoop" Nagel

How to win a free room at the Hope Hotel, Dayton, Ohio between October 7th and 10th 1998! Our reunion dates!

Flim Flam Questions:

The answers to the questions with the highest score will win you your first nights lodging. FREE. SCORE TALLY"

Correct answer-4 points
Partial correct - 3 points
Almost correct - 2 points
Bad guess - 1 point
Wrong Answer - 0 points

Take a sheet of paper and enter;

Your name, Birth date, and place, also, your address with Zip code. List your answer by the number of the question.

1. What is a horse called before it reaches age 1 and becomes a yearling?
2. What is a kibitzer?
3. Do you pull your stomach in when you are on a scale and why?
4. Who discovered X-rays and in what year and why?
5. What is a popsicle?
6. What is the rush hour?
7. What part of a reptile is desirable to some gamblers?
8. Initials of word that will make it correct - 9-P in the S.S.?
9. Health term - Bacteria?
10. Health term - Nitrates?

Send answers to Al Nagel, Flim Flam Editor, 18601 Newland st. #61, Huntington Beach, CA 92646.

Why I Want to Be a Pilot

Written by a ten-year-old-boy

I want to be a pilot when I grow up because it's a fun job and easy to do. That's why there are so many pilots flying today. Pilots don't need much school, they just have to learn numbers so they can read instruments. I guess they should also be able to read road maps so they won't get lost. Pilots should be brave so they won't be scared if it's foggy and they can't see, or if a wing or motor falls off they should stay calm so they will know what to do. Pilots have to have eyes to see thru clouds and they can't be afraid of lightning or thunder because they are closer to them than we are.

The salary the pilots make is another thing I like. They make more money than they can spend. This is because most people think plane flying is dangerous except pilots don't because they know how easy it is. There isn't much I don't like except girls like pilots and all the stewardesses want to marry pilots so they always have to chase them away so they won't bother them. I hope I don't get air sick because I get car sick and if I get air sick I couldn't be a pilot and then I would have to go to work.

MAIL CALL



Richard Seabridge, (Ball gunner on Wilcox Crew), "Just a note to let you know that the "All American" B-24 visited New Jersey this past fall. I haven't flown in over 52 years, but seeing this aircraft buzz the air field **so low** it brought back old memories. While I was up on the flight, my wife and daughter were interviewed by a reporter."

Following is part of the newspaper article, When Richard Seabridge landed at Mercer County Airport in 1945, with World War II and his military service in the Army Air Corps behind him, he vowed he would never fly again.

In the 52 years since, despite the pleadings of his wife and daughter, he never set foot on another plane.

Last week, Seabridge, 72, saw a classic B-24 bomber flying over Mercer Airport. It buzzed the spectators, and Seabridge said: "Something happened. I said to my wife, "I would like to fly in that plane again."

On Monday, Seabridge was on the tarmac at South Jersey Regional Airport in Medford, waiting for his turn to fly in the four-propeller Liberator.

"The expression on his face changed," said Joyce Seabridge as her husband, a veteran of 51 combat missions over Europe and the Balkans, got close to the plane. "he has arthritis very bad, and I haven't seen him move this fast for a long time."

From **Collings Foundation** Newsletter writing about the past years tour of the All American and Nine-O-Nine, "The flight from Wooster, OH into Lancaster, PA was a long one across most of the state of PA, so we didn't have any media on the flight. However, **Charlie Ferich**, tail gunner for 72 missions, didn't let that stop him from organizing an absolutely terrific stop. Lancaster was absolutely the "Gem" of 1997. We had an extraordinary turnout, an exceptional gate, an unsur-

passed PX, and just an incredible interest in local Dawn/Dusks Patrols."

A note from **Ray Tyler** informing me that his wife passed away November 19, 1997. He hopes to join us at the Dayton reunion.

A Holiday note from **Mrs. Lolette Tucci**, "All my best wishes to you and your family for a very Happy New Year. I receive regularly the Pantanella News and I appreciate it so much. Thank you. Also, all my wishes of prosperity to the Bomb Squadron Association."

*Lolette's husband, **Joe Tucci**, was Group Sergeant Major. It's always a pleasure to hear from Lolette who lives in Monte Carlo, France.*

A note from **Al Rodman**, (Navigator on Branch crew) "Always glad to get your Pantanella News and keep up with developments. Keep on course and continue this good work."

The request for **Burton Alper's** whereabouts in the last news brought a reply from a recipient of Burt's Xmas card. Burt's address is in the address correction list.

Other replies:

Oliver Graham, "Hoping to be at Dayton in the fall if Mrs. Graham is better."

Eugene Fenner, "As I read this last newsletter I thought that this is history that we made as a unit. I don't remember of any one writing that we saw a sight that was never seen before and will never be seen again. Those large formations of planes in the sky.

And how about the sound of those formations — you will never hear that again either. Ed.

Julia Cato, Hope to make it to Dayton." (Mrs. Lewis Cato).

Harold Farrar, "I am looking forward to the next reunion in Dayton. Hope to see you there."

Bob Shetterly, "I never seem to get around to yearly dues on time so put me in for a Life Membership."

Dick Krekel, "Two weeks ago I had by-pass surgery, but I'm doing fine." *Ed, we wish you a speedy recovery.*

Ray Hall, "I do appreciate the Pantanella News. Thanks for the efforts of getting it together and out. Surely a labor of love."

Bill Coonan, "What a pleasure it is to send in my dues for the Pantanella News. The Pantanella Valley article by Frank Ambrose was great. Yes, I remember laying the steel mats for the runways.

"Also went to Rome twice. Went to the Vatican and saw the Pope from about 20 feet. Saw the Forum, Coliseum, and Pompeii. I guess the highlight of my stay in Italy was my visit to see Padre Pio and to serve his Mass, to meet him and kiss his hands that had the stigmatism of Christ's crucifix. He is up for sainthood now."

Wendell Galbraith, "It's quite sure that Shirley and I are going to go on the Pantanella Tour that Marcel Snyder is organizing for May. As a matter of fact at least one and possibly both our kids are going to go with us. We are all looking forward to it as we are going to use the tour as part of our up coming 50th Wedding Anniversary events."

"Hope you guys are all well and perhaps you'd like a second tour of duty at Pantanella too. Anyway, I'm sure we'll see you in Dayton at the 465th reunion in October."

Don White (780th Sqd.) "I sure do enjoy the Pantanella newsletter from the 781st squadron. This last newsletter was great, especially the story by Frank Ambrose."

Carl Dahl, "Really enjoyed the last issue of the Pantanella News, but it is always great and brings back so many memories, both good and not so good. I am planning to be at Dayton, the Lord willing, and look forward to seeing you and your gracious wife there also."

Ruth Goyne, "I am sending my dues for 1998 so that I do not miss any of the newsletters. I really enjoy reading them. Maybe I can make it back to Dayton in the Fall for the reunion. That was the first and last time Garvin and I got to attend.

"I really appreciate your adding the widows names to the list so that we can continue to keep up with our late spouses friends."

Garvin Goyne worked at the Orderly Room at Pantanella. Ed.

In reviewing the Archives film I found another story about how a civilian remembered the 3 August 1944 mission to Friedrichshafen. Editor.

On the 3rd of August 1944 at noon 4 formations of American planes flew over our valley from the direction of Innsbruck and were going in the direction of Kempten. Some time after they returned, the German fighters attacked the last planes. One of the planes burnt at once and crashed near my house. Some German soldiers who stayed here went to the crash point, but they did not come back. Therefore, I went to the crash point in the afternoon and found a dead man in a distance of 250 meters from the plane. He was approximately 5 feet 6 in. tall, had curly hair and was burned very badly. I suppose that he was a navigator because he had still the head-receiver. In the wreckage of the plane was also a mutilated body which was burning. I supposed that he was also a pilot because he was in the nose of the plane. His hair was reddish. I did not find personal effects or identification tags.

From this plane five men of the crew jumped out with parachutes. One of them was a lieutenant. This officer went to an Alpine dairy, which is situated in a little distance from my house. Two other airmen were escorted to my house by a shepherd boy. They went then to Ehrwald. A customer of my hotel, who was walking near my house, came back with one of the flyers. I asked two civilians, who were by chance at my inn, to accompany him to Ehrwald. The fifth pilot was brought from the Coburger inn. Three or four weeks after my colleague, who was the innkeeper of the Coburger inn, told me that a commission had inspected the crash point. The bodies, which were already decayed very much, were dosed with gasoline and burned. The remains were buried at the crash point.

Statement received from Joseph Posch, innkeeper in Ehrwald. June 24, 1946.

Noted on the photocopy of the document; Unknown X-6878, Reinterred

U.S. Military cemetery St. Avold, III-4-48. The language is from the Swiss citizen and their identification of the crew members were different than our identification. Apparently in 1946 an effort was made to find the remains and bury them properly. Ed.

Meanwhile back at Pantanella by O. J. Cowart

On a cold freezing night, some of the Cryptographers talked me into helping them start a fire in their little GI pot bellied stove in the Code room. The Italian coal was more like rocks than coal and it was difficult to keep a fire going. As I poured gasoline in the stove, I was made aware that the "good buddies" had failed to tell me there had been a fire in the stove.. The result: I almost helped the German cause by blowing up the whole Code room. I was not trained as a fire fighter and there was no fire extinguisher available, so I yanked off my fur leather jacket, and began beating out the flames. Some secret documents were scorched and the Crypto fellows put them out of sight so there was no visible signs of the near disaster. Unlike the bomb dump blowing up, there was no FBI investigation of this incident. The only casualty was my singed eyebrows and the angle head flashlight in my leather jacket. The next day I turned in my badly mangled flashlight to tech supply (normally a flashlight is something you carry dead batteries in). I wasn't asked about it's condition and I sure didn't volunteer any information about how it could have come to such an untimely and obviously violent end.

SICK CALL

Our Treasurer, O. J. Cowart, has been down with the flu and then some. According to the newspapers there are some very serious cases of flu and it takes a long time to recover. OJ seems to have one of those bad ones. At last report he was feeling better and just about back to good health.

FOLDED WINGS

Warren J. Hartley (Navigator) passed away December 26, 1997 of lung cancer. He is survived by his wife, Ruth, two daughters and four grandchildren.

Christopher A. Murphy (Wilcox Top Gunner) passed away July 24, 1997. Notice was received from his son, Mathew, who noted his father took great pride in the 781st Bomb Squadron. Mathew will continue to receive the Pantanella News.

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

Address changes:

James Marcel Snyder, PO Box 622795, Oviedo, FL 32762-2795, Phone 404 696-4355. **This is a temporary address until May or June.**

Wayne Weber, 5272 Weymouth Way, Oceanside CA 92057-1818.

Eugene Fenner Phone 937 382-2194

Osar Schmitt, 211 Ryan Hill Rd., Lalke Ariel, PA 18436-4619

Oliver Graham Phone 7244 694-9122.

Leslie Wheeler, 18036 Dartown Road, Westfield, IN 46074-9324. 2 Laliq Dr., Montville, NJ 07054, temporary.

Kenneth Foden, Zip 34601-6324.

Burton Alper, 2 Laliq Dr., Montville NJ 07045.

Melvin Derry, 469 West 150 North, Columbia City IN 46725.

Hoyt Adsit, 30 Park St. Apt A2. Norwich, NY 13615.

Tour to Italy

I received notice from Marcel Snyder that the tour to "Pantanella or Bust" has been postponed until May 1999. The planning had a late start and just not enough signed up to make it financially viable. All deposits are being returned, so don't worry about losing your money.

To be sure of a good count for 1999 tour reservations (no money are being taken effective immediately. More details later.

RETIREMENT FROM A CHILD'S VIEW

After a Christmas break, a teacher asked her young pupils how they spent their holidays. One small boy wrote the following:

We always used to spend Christmas with Grandpa and Grandma. They used to live here in a big brick home, but Grandpa got retarded and they moved to Florida. Now they live in a place with a lot of other retarded people. They all live in little tin boxes. They ride on big three wheeled tri-cycles and they all wear name tags because they don't know who they are. They go to a big building called a wreck hall; but if it was wrecked they got it fixed because it is all right now. They play games and do exercises there but they don't do them very good.

There is a swimming pool there. They go into it and just stand there with Their hats on - I guess they don't know how to swim.

As you go into their park, there is a doll house with a little man sitting in it. He watches all day so they can't get out without him seeing them. When they can sneak out they go to the beach and pickup shells that they think are dollars.

My Grandma used to bake cookies and stuff but I guess she forgot how. Nobody cooks, they just eat out. They

eat the same thing every night - Early Birds. Some of the people are so retarded they don't know how to cook at all so my Grandma and Grandpa bring food into the wrecked hall and they call it "pot luck."

My Grandma says Grandpa worked all his life and earned his retardment. I wish they would move back up here; but I guess the little man in the doll house won't let them out.

Help thy Neighbor

We found another good neighbor, Al Nagel.

I recently received a "Retired Senior Volunteer Program" brochure. It described how citizens help out their neighbors. The group members have to pass an eight-week training program before assisting the Police Department as special ambassadors and other tasks. The past year they removed 30,000 illegal signs, performed 4,500 vacation house checks and volunteered over 30,000 hours. Congratulations, Al, for helping out.

Anyone else have a project to "help thy neighbor?"



Mussolini and his mistress after WWII. They were captured by the Partisans near Lake Como, shot, then hung up-side down by their heels. This photo shows them after they were cut down and lying with others killed in Milan. Photo from Barney Russell who got it from a friend who was at the scene.

We salute our New Life Members "A BADGE OF HONOR"

- 120. Cader Lex Shelby
- 121. Leonard A. Cwik (Group S-2)
- 122. Robert L. Shetterly
- 123. Carl V. Dahl

Life Membership dues are \$100.
A beautiful certificate is sent to all Life Members.

Dues Time!

Our treasurer received a flood of dues payments and many kind notes. However, there are still some who have not been heard from. Look at your label - if it does not have 98 you are not current. Let's make it 100% for 98.

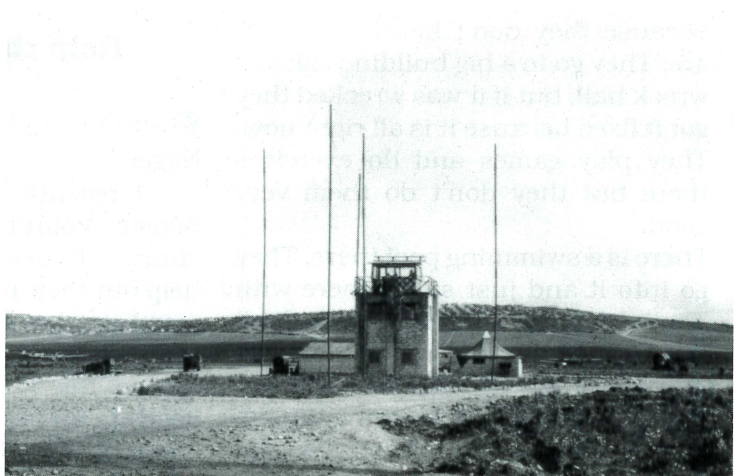
EDITOR'S CORNER

1998 seems to be going by swiftly. For us here in California I guess we can blame El Nino. In February 20 of the first 22 days it rained. It had to have some effect on us.

Comments coming in regarding the reunion are above average indicating a very good turnout. We'll have one more newsletter before the reunion (July) which will have a list of those registered at that time. Register early so that your friends will know you will attend. Remember it costs nothing if you have to cancel - prepayments will be refunded.

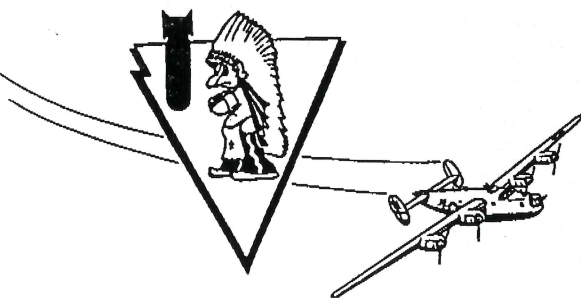
If you are bringing relatives or friends be sure we have all their names so that we can send them to the gate for entrance to Wright Patterson AFB. O. J. Cowart is compiling that list, so please keep him informed.

To keep an interesting newsletter we need your stories. Think about your days at Pantanella and put the pen to the paper. Photos are also important.



Remembering Pantanella and the 465th Bomb Group. Upper left; Aircraft maintenance squadron. Upper right; Down on the runways with shepherds watching their flocks. Lower left was a summer sign. There was no dust when winter rains came. Lower right; Racecard Five, the communications tower for runway activity.

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