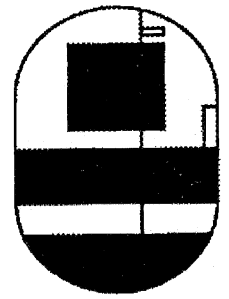




PANTANELLA NEWS



April 2000

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NUMBER 60



Members at our first reunion—at the Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, CO. In front of the Academy Chapel.

REUNION 2000 PLANS BEING UNVEILED

The phone lines, e-mail, and faxes have been busy between the 781st members working on our next reunion. Ken Sutton, Reunion Chairman and Carl Dahl, Co-Chairman have led the way in working out the details and submitting plans to the board of directors. Enclosed with this Pantanella News are your registration forms for the reunion and the hotel. We urge you to fill them out and send them in at your earliest convenience. We need to have the numbers for the transporta-

tion companies and the hotel facility so they can be prepared for us. Also, it is important to get your hotel registration in so the rooms will be held for us.

Our theme for Reunion 2000, will be "Down Memory Lane." In the past we covered in detail our efforts while at Pantanella and what we accomplished. Those times will of course never be forgotten, but now we will reflect more on our previous reunions and lives since Pantanella. And a change will be some Tours to

see some of the interesting places in the California area from San Francisco to Sacramento. Those of us in the planning stages know all the details and are very excited about the plans.

From the questionnaire, and other inquiries since, it looks like we will have another very good turnout. Many more are driving than previously to enjoy the good weather and scenery and many plan to stay on for extended vacations. And there are more relatives and

friends added to the list, like we had at Dayton.

To begin with we have a very nice recently remodeled Holiday Inn Select. Select means it is their high grade executive type hotel. It is located just off of Interstate 80 and surrounded by a very nice residential area much like the Marriot in Omaha.

As part of our program on Saturday we will be visiting Travis Air Force Base Headquarters. It will be like going to Spinazola, Italy to see someone at 55th Wing Headquarters. We hope to have someone from Headquarters as a speaker to fill us in on the 15th Air Force of Today.

Details of each day's activities will be given out at the reunion. However, following is a brief outline "REUNION 2000 PLANS BEING UNVEILED" on

what to expect..

Tuesday, Sept 12. There will be a few very early Early Birds checking into the Hotel. We'll have a bulletin board so you can check to see if a comrade has arrived. No official functions this day.

Wednesday, Sept 13. We will be serious about Early Birds and begin registration at noon. The hospitality and Memorabilia Room will begin to be set up, maybe with a little help from the Early Birds.

Thursday, Sept 14. We will be in full operation all day for Registration and an open Hospitality and Memorabilia Room. We'll have some refreshments in the Hospitality Room. Also Videos of prior reunions and some WWII items.

In the evening we will have a Cocktail Party starting around 6 PM with a cash bar. Dinner to follow about 7 PM. We will not have a guest speaker, but we will begin some activity to get the "Down Memory Lane" feeling.

Friday Sept 15. This will be something new. It will be called Fun Day. We will feature Tours so most of you can visit areas of interest with your friends.

Information on the Tours will be in separate inserts. Those not going on Tours will still have the hotel facilities and the Hospitality Room, and there are some attractions very close — like a Brewery, a Candy Plant (Jelly Belly's), an Antique Railroad Center, etc, etc. We haven't finalized Friday evening, but we will probably have a casual dinner at the hotel.

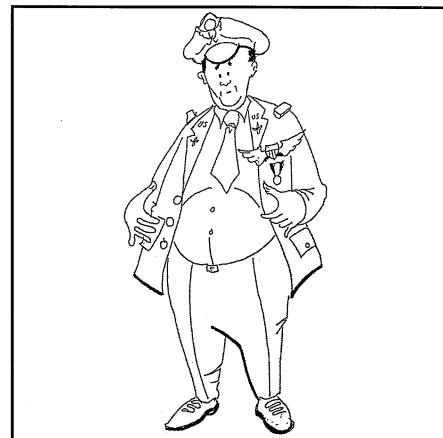
Saturday, Sept 16. This will be a full day. A short morning Squadron meeting, a great

lunch at the hotel, and we probably will have our own cancellation stamp for letters we want to send, similar to our two previous reunions. And early afternoon we will be bussed to Travis for our Memorial Service, followed by a visit to this active base, the museum and then back to the hotel to get dressed for our Cocktail Party and Banquet.

We have had some memorable reunions and this will be another one to remember. The weather is wonderful at this time of year and from the questionnaires and other replies it looks like we'll be seeing most of our Pantanella Friends.

Enclosed you will find the hotel registration form and the reunion registration form. The hotel registration should be filled out and sent to the hotel. Fill out the 781st registration, make out your check to the 781st Bomb Squadron Assoc. and mail it to Ken Sutton, along with your check. Please note that all deposits are fully refundable in the event you have to cancel your reservation or cannot use any part of the deposit.

Come join us.



Thanks to Tom Arthur, Athon Navigator.

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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 (1944-1945). During its 191 missions over Southern Europe it dropped thousands of tons of bombs, shot down 23 enemy aircraft (German) and received two Distinguished Unit Citations.

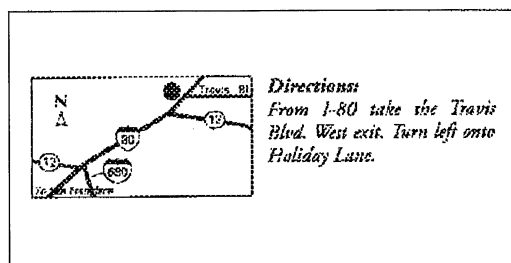
HOW TO GET THERE

If you drive to the reunion the Holiday Inn Select is on I-80 (Interstate 80). If you are traveling on I-80 Northbound or Southbound, exit at Travis Boulevard West.

After crossing over the freeway if you were going North, or if you turned off going South continue on away from the freeway for a short block and turn left on the first street, Holiday Lane.

About two blocks further on Holiday Lane will take you into the Holiday Inn Parking lot. It is very easy to find as you can see the Holiday Inn from the freeway.

If you intend to drive on Travis Air Force Base with your car you will need a drivers license (personal identification) and proof of car insurance. Enter on Travis Avenue and go to



the visitors center. You also need a purpose to go on the base. I will see that they are notified of our reunion which should get you through easily. I recently visited Travis and gave the Museum as the reason I was there, so they let me in. They make out a ticket you place in the window.

Another mode of transportation is the Amtrak Trains, I have received two inquiries about the train. Amtrak train stops in Fairfield, just minutes away from the hotel. Call the Holiday Inn hotel and they will pick you up.

Bus arrivals the same. For the van at the Holiday Inn call (707) 422-4111. Airport

pick up information elsewhere is in the Newsletter.

Pilots, if you intend to land a small plane at Travis at the Aero Club contact me for further details. Lots of forms, etc. needed.

A short distance away is Sacramento with many historical attractions in the Old Town section—for example, old trains, old paddle wheel boats for a river trip, Museum, etc.

Napa Valley starts 20 minutes away. Besides wineries there are gliders and balloon rides, and a luxury old train ride called the Wine Train traveling up the valley with gourmet food served on board.

San Francisco, with it's Golden Gate Bridge, Fisherman's Wharf area, Parks, Cable Cars, Zoos, etc., Sausalito nearby, Alcatraz on the Bay and many boats to take bay cruises. Spend a day or two in San Francisco coming or going.

Then there are the mountains — like Mt. Diablo, Mt. Tamalpais. And lots of boating. You can take a high speed boat from nearby Vallejo to San Francisco and return later. Only \$7.50.

South of San Francisco is beautiful Monterey and it's famous Drive, Monterey Bay Aquarium, and Monterey Peninsula with its beautiful homes and Pebble Beach golf courses.



James Marcel Snyder and James C. Althoff. These are the guys that got our Squadron Association started.

FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE

**15th Air Force Wing Public Affairs
540 Airlift Drive
Travis AFB, CA 94535-2127**

Fifteenth Air Force is one of the two combat-ready numbered air forces assigned to the Air Mobility Command. Flying C-5 and C-141 airlift, KC-10 and KC-135 tanker, C-9 medical evacuation aircraft and C-21 operational support aircraft. Its primary mission is to provide strategic and theater airlift for all Department of Defense agencies as well as air refueling for the Air Force in both peace and wartime. This includes the aeromedical evacuation of sick and injured. Headquartered at Travis Air Force Base, CA., its main area of operations is the region stretching west of the Mississippi River to the east coast of Africa, pole to pole, but it is prepared to operate, and often does, anywhere in the world.

With an assigned military work force of 28,912 personnel and an assigned civilian work force of 5,288 people, Fifteenth Air Force manages almost 300 aircraft and many support facilities in the United States and in the Pacific and Indian Oceans — all the way to Diego Garcia.

Fifteenth Air Force's current active-duty wings include the 60th Air Mobility Wing, Travis Air Force Base, CA.; 62nd Airlift Wing, McChord Air Force Base, WA; 375th Air Lift Wing, Scott Air Force Base, IL; 22nd Air Refueling Wing March Air Force Base, CA.; 43rd Air Refueling Group, Malmstrom

Air Force Base, MT; and the 92nd Air Refueling Wing, Fairchild Air Force Base, WA.

Also, en route mission support is provided by two groups located at 18 locations overseas. In time of a national emergency, the capability of the Fifteen Air Force will be expanded with the resources of the Air National Guard, the Air Force Reserve and the Civil Reserve Air Fleet. This could include seven Air Force Reserve units consisting of 18,000 people, 32 unit-equipped aircraft and 126 associate aircraft; and eight Air National Guard units consisting of 8,000 people and 80 unit-equipped aircraft.

Since its establishment Nov. 1, 1943, in Tunis, Tunisia, under the command of Maj. Gen. James Doolittle, Fifteenth Air Force has flown almost every type of aircraft in the Air Force inventory and has participated in every war and major contingency in which the United States has been involved.

Originating during World War II as a bomber and fighter unit, it became part of Strategic Air Command in 1946. It flew bombers in the Korean War and in the following decade added tankers to its arsenal. Between the Vietnam Conflict and 1991, it also commanded reconnaissance aircraft and ICBM missiles.

Fifteenth Air Force became exclusively a tanker command Sept. 1, 1991. When Strategic

Air Command was disestablished Jun 1, 1992, and its assets divided between the newly created Air Mobility Command and the Air Combat Command, Fifteenth Air Force Became part of Air Mobility Command.

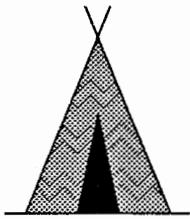
Headquarters Fifteenth Air Force moved from March Air Force Base to Travis Air Force Base on July 2, 1993, and merged its tankers with the airlift aircraft of the Twenty-second Air Force. The Twenty-second Air Force's flag moved to the Reserves, Dobbins Air Force Base, GA.

Fifteenth frequently participates in major exercises in all parts of the world, such as Team Spirit in South Korea. It played an important role in the Gulf War as a bomber, airlift and air refueling force, and its tankers helped make possible the air bridge to Somalia for Operation Restore Hope, while flying 15 percent of the airlift missions—demonstrating its global flexibility.

Altogether, Fifteenth Air Force is a flexible and potent force providing America's global reach.



Francis Kill, Bombardier on N.B. Smi crew wearing WWII uniform, and it fits!!



ADDRESS CHANGES

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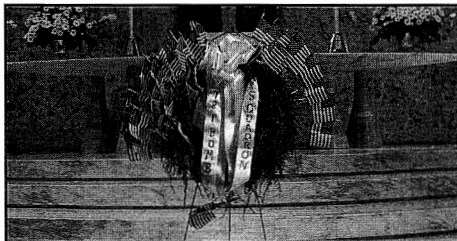
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FOLDED WINGS

Malvern Barner: (Ordnance) passed away February, 1999.
Reported by Bob Freed.

Robert L. Jasper: (Mullen Top Gunner) passed away October 31, 1999. Reported by his wife Darlah. She wrote that Robert suffered complications following the insertion of a stent in a coronary artery. A clot formed and he suffered damage before a new stent could be inserted and he died a few days later. Darlah noted it was a tragedy since he was not ill before the procedure and was remarkably active and robust.

Robert L. Bassinette: (Bombardier on Blakita Crew) passed away Jan. 31, 2000. Reported by his Son.

David Orr: (Engineering Officer) passed away February 15, 2000. Reported by his wife, Nancy.

Adrian A. Martin: (Tail Gunner on Dahl Crew) passed away Nov. 1, 1999.

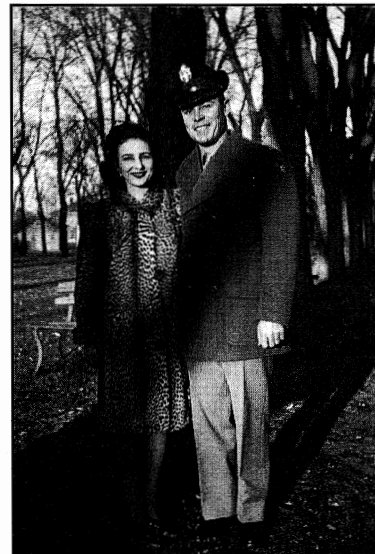
John Zartman: (Co-pilot on Wilcox crew) passed away Feb 26, 2000. Reported by his wife, Charlotte.

Alvin P. Marchbanks: (Top Gunner on Tanenbaum Crew) passed away in the Spring of 1998. Notified by a relative.

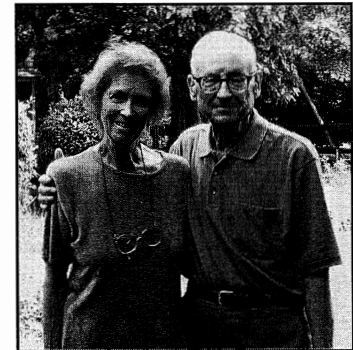
John E. Ward: (Co-Pilot on Van Slyke Crew) Passed away on Feb 26, 2000 due to a blood clot. He is survived by a daughter, Pam Greer and a son, Larry Ward, of Elyria, Ohio.

Byron W. Thompson: (Intelligence Officer) Passed away of a stroke March 7, 2000 at Tucson, AZ. He is survived by his wife, Kay, and step-daughter, Kitty. Funeral services will be at Frederick, MD.

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



Nancy and Dave Orr, 1943.



Kay and Byron Thompson at their Frederick, MD home. 1999.

MAIL CALL



The article on our planes has had some response in Mail Call. ED

Seth Hawkins, (Navigator on O'Brien crew) I have talked to Joe Saul, O'Brien's co-pilot, and Ken Wiggins, and they do not recall the letter on the plane we crashed in Brindisi. But we all agree it was a new plane. The radio operator's seat faced forward. As I recall, we called for the nearest field and the call letter was "Yellow L." I also called Bob Shetterly and he said that it was a new plane and was assigned to his crew. He did not know what had happened to the plane. There was a DC-3 parked on the runway, it was on a cross runway and he was parked where the two runways crossed each other. To avoid hitting him we took a wild ride. Carl Gruber was killed. It was July 2, 1944. Joe, Ken and myself are the only ones left on the O'Brien crew.

Dean F. Jones, I was nose gunner on "Guardian Angel 2." Joe McDivitt was top turret gunner, Calder Lamprey was tail gunner and Jack T. Benson was Navigator. Just wanted to get that straight.

Your report says "Guardian Angel 1" transferred to the 460th Bomb Group and was shot down by flak over Toulon April 29, 1944. Pilot, Maj. Wm. Orris. That is all wrong. In April Lt. Hurd's crew was flying that plane. It flew 50 missions and another crew took over. We flew that new plane from Omaha, Nebraska

to Tunis, to Canosa, Italy. It flew 50 missions and came back to the US. September, 1944. I knew nothing about "Guardian Angel 2.

There has been some confusion about some of the original 8-24s assigned to the 781st Bomb Squadron. It has been confirmed a number of our planes were transferred to another bomb group while in Italy. They had been already named in most cases and those names stayed on most of the planes. Then some crews painted the same name on the new planes they received either in Africa or at Pantanella. I have never seen a list identifying all the planes transferred and which ones were renamed. To compile the plane list I took information from our members who have written about their planes. I also corresponded with two B-24 Historians who have listed virtually all B-24s manufactured. The correct planes can be identified by serial numbers. Maybe we can get some facts from serial numbers and make corrections in identifications. ED

Wilton Carter. I enjoyed the Pantanella News as always. The story you wrote titled "And I remember" woke up my memory. Our CO, James Wray, called me on the carpet because of my behavior that day, too. I still enjoyed it, though.

While in Bari we visited several wineries. The Italians would give us a sample cup, and each time we would say "No Bono" (No Good.) And after that with our "groceries" we would head for home.

Jim, I sincerely thank you for each issue of the Pantanella News. We had rough days then, but I always will cherish the

memories of combat with such a fine group of men we served with. Best Wishes, Wilton Carter.

Wilton's reply brings back more memories to me. I joined the Crutcher crew on a rest leave to the Isle of Capri. One evening after dinner I decided to climb the tower which had a bell on the top. I proceeded to see how the bell sounded and rang it for a few minutes. As I climbed down a crowd had assembled at the bottom, I guess to find out what the celebration was for. Shortly thereafter another GI decided to climb the tower and give the bell another ring. After his entertainment he climbed down into the arms of two MPs who had arrived on the scene. My entertainment for the evening was over. ED

Don Barrett (Navigator on RJ. Smith crew). After trying to explain to various people for years about the various factions we were aware of in 1944, I was delighted to get the "News" with your report on Yugoslavia. Thank you for all the effort you must have put into it.

Reading the newspapers of the past couple of years, it seems like not much has changed and confusion still reigns.

As you probably know, my friend, Vern Burda, was shot down once and returned to Pantanella after being picked up by the Partisans.

I think the next time he was shot down he was picked up by the Ustachi and wound up in a Stalag Luft.

Thanks again for a very enlightening report. You are certainly a very dedicated leader of the 781st Squadron Association."



Continued

Ben Donahue was the first to reply on the List of our B24s in the last Pantanella News. Here are his comments: Re: Mullan 42-52494. I believe the reason for Mullan & crew going toward Lake Balaton was a multitude of problems. I was with Ernie Van Asperen right behind Mullan on the mission to Blechhammer. During the rally off the bomb run his number one engine began to smoke. He stayed with the group until the engine froze and the prop spun off. He then began to turn toward the Russian lines and Lake Balatan. He was possibly running low on fuel and nowhere to set the bird down, thus the bail out.

A little aside. One of the crew unfortunately landed in a small stream of very cold water and was immediately surrounded by Russian troops. He called out American! American! One of the troops said 'cigarette, cigarette.' The crew member reached very carefully into his leg pocket and pulled out a package of very wet Camels. The Russian took the pack, opened it and placed the soggy cigarettes on a rock in the sun. The poor kid had to stand in the water until the cigarettes dried out. The Leader of the group lit up one of the dry ones. After inhaling very deeply, he broke into a big grin and shouted Comrade Amerikanski! The rest joined in and almost beat him to death pounding him on his back and giving him big hugs.

Soon the rest of the crew

were rounded up and taken to a British Mission in Budapest. I remember Mullan walking into the mess hall wearing one of those big Russian fur hats! I wonder if the crewman who stood in the water for such a long time is still alive?

Murray Knowles. I was co-pilot on George Gaines' crew and on Friday October 13th, 1944 when we were hit by flak over Blechhammer Oil refineries and had to feather 3 engines. We then headed for Russia. Approximately 15 miles from the Vistula River (Front lines) the remaining engine blew and set fire to the wing and we bailed out.

I had been forced to change chutes as my back pack chute was torn open by shrapnel. The seat type chute was much too large for me and when it opened I became entangled in the shroud lines and the chute only partially opened. I dangled upside down twisting around until I fell free and the chute opened full at approximately 500 feet. I heard small arms fire and could hear bullets whizzing by, so I knew I was in hostile territory. I fell into a clump of trees.

By the time I disengaged the chute and hid it I was surrounded by a German patrol and taken prisoner. They mishandled me pretty badly, punching, shoving and kicking. I found out later from the interpreter that they thought I was Russian. I spent the night in a civilian jail on straw on the floor. I was taken to Krakow, Poland with other members of our crew who were captured the first day. If I remember correctly they were Karl Brown, Radio operator, Tom McNew, Tail gun-

ner, Louis Deslatte, Engineer, Ed Chapin, Gunner and Lt. Clark, Navigator. I am not sure about Clark since this was his first mission and new to the squadron. Van Reynolds, Navigator, and Mel Farber, Bombardier were flying with Col. Lokker in the lead plane and survived the mission. Clark had a broken leg and Chapin was severely wounded in the right arm. Medical attention was secured for them and they were taken to a German hospital.

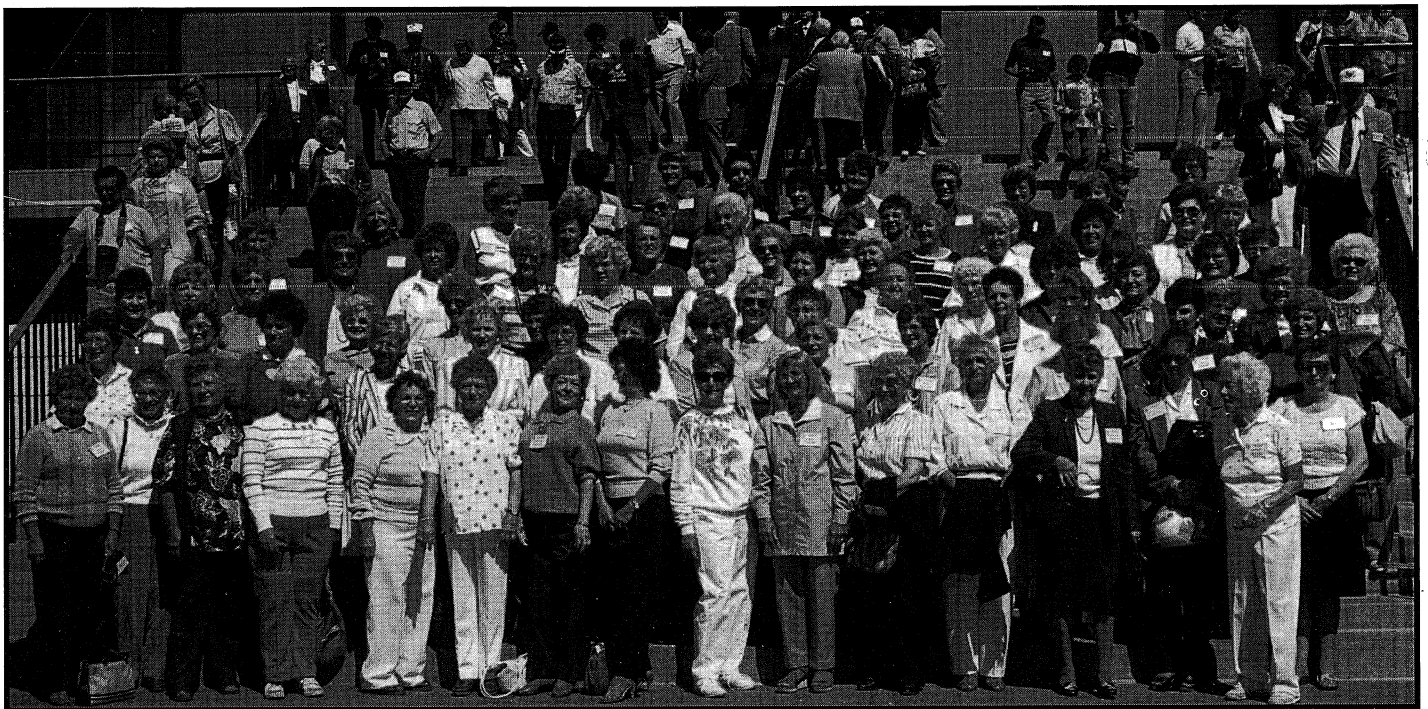
The rest of us were separated and sent to various camps. I went to Frankfurt on the Mein for interrogation and solitary confinement. Then to Weimar and then to Stalag Luft 3 in Sagan, East Germany in January 1945.

We were force marched in freezing weather and blizzard to Pressburg where we were placed in small crowded box cars and shipped across Germany to Mooseburg Stamlager VII where Patton's 99th infantry division and 14th Armor Division liberated us on April 27th, 1945.

I ran into some of the crew at Camp Lucky Strike, France, on the way home.

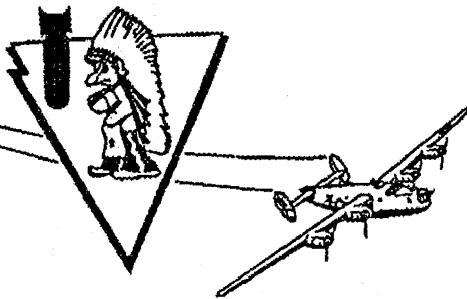
Editor's Corner

A recent addition to the 781st memorabilia was made by Ray Tyler. He donated a B-4 bag. I'm sure we all remember them, but have you seen one lately?



Spouses and associates at our first reunion.

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