



PANTANELLA NEWS

781st BOMB SQUADRON ASSOCIATION



NUMBER 7

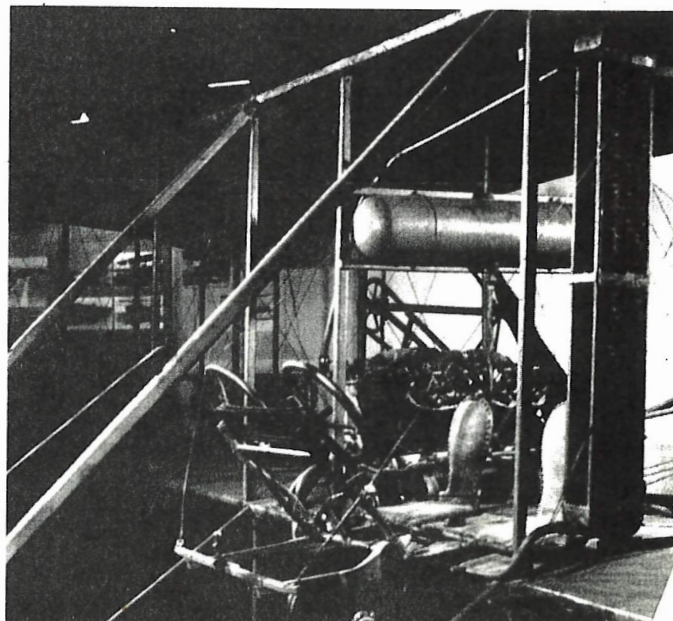
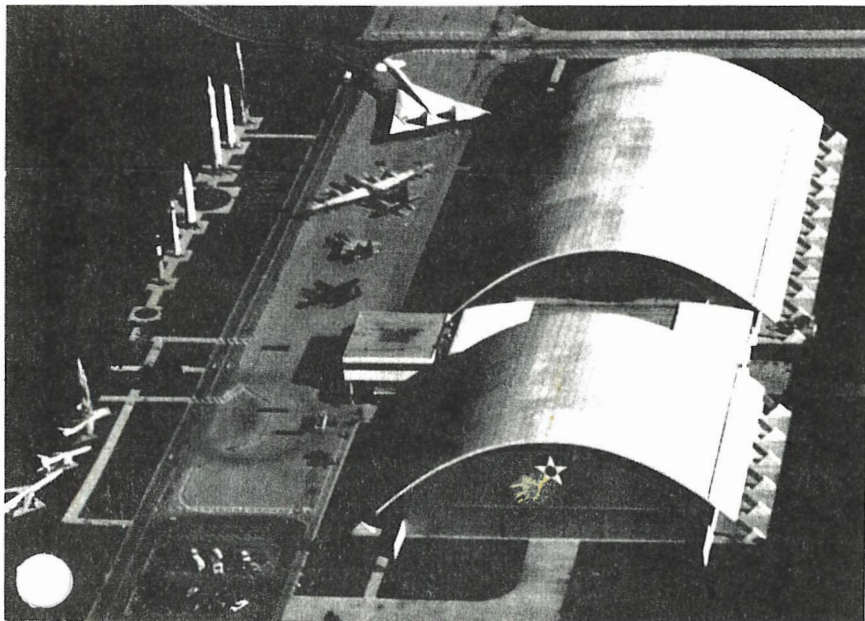
JANUARY 1987

REUNION '87 - After considering all the facts, the board of directors voted to hold the next reunion at Dayton, Ohio, on September 17 to 20, 1987, at the new Holiday Inn. The principal reason for selecting the next reunion in one year was the fact that so many were located less than six months prior to the last reunion and did not have a chance to make plans to attend. In addition to that we have located some 80 since the reunion, and since it will be held further east, many in the east will attend who could not make the journey to Colorado Springs. Estimates are that the attendance will be the same as '86.

We were fortunate to get the last available dates in September at a "brand new" Holiday Inn, under construction, and adjacent to Wright-Patterson at \$55 per day, single or double. We will be spending one day at Wright-Patterson, visiting the United States Air Force Museum, the oldest and largest museum of its kind in the world. Under construction is an addition that will double the size of the museum and should be open by the time of our reunion. More details on the reunion later.

The board has also decided to hold the 1988 reunion in San Antonio, and then each two years thereafter, at locations to be decided upon in the future. In 1988 we are tying in with the 780th and 782nd squadrons and are awaiting word to see if the 783rd can join us also, making it a 465th Bomb Group reunion.

Below on the left is an aerial view of the museum. In addition to the museum Wright-Patterson is bustling with Air Force activity. Some of the names on buildings are: Acquisition Logistics Center, Institute of Technology, Headquarters Air Force Wright Aeronautical Laboratories, Flight Dynamics Laboratory, Headquarters Aeronautical Systems, and the list goes on. The Dayton area is the cradle of aviation. Lower right is the cockpit of the Wright "B" Flyer.



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Col. James W. Wray, Jr. USAF, Ret. - Our third and last commanding officer to serve the 781st Bomb Squadron is now retired and living in San Antonio. Jim attended the reunion in Colorado Springs and participated actively in all the events.

Jim Wray began his military career tootin' a clarinet in his home town National Guard unit, in Oskaloosa, Iowa. With war clouds gathering the National Guard was being called up for one year active duty. 10 February 1941 found Jim in Louisiana as a buck private drawing \$21 per month. After dust, mud, scorpions, water moccasins, etc. on maneuvers in Louisiana Jim decided there must be an easier way. An application for a cadet examination started him in his flying career by Pearl Harbor time. After graduation he instructed in BT-13's and applied for combat duty one year later. This led him to B-24's and later assignment with the original cadre of the 465th Bomb Group, and operations officer of the 781st.



At McCook, Nebraska, Jim became co-pilot on the model crew and was promoted to Captain. From there he took the southern route to Africa and later to Pantanella. On 5 May 1944 he flew on the squadron's first mission to Podgorica, Yugoslavia. On 31 May 1944, with Tipton's crew, flying squadron lead to Ploesti, they were hit hard by flak on the bomb run. Fuel lines to #3 and #4 engines were ruptured and the engines shut down. Later a prop ran away and they were forced to drop out of lead. Fighting to get over friendly territory (Tito held) found them losing altitude and soon looking up at the Dineric Alps in every direction. This forced them to bail out, all landing safely and were taken in by Tito's soldiers. The Partisans brought them a lamb to see and an hour later they they feasted on lamb and fried eggs. They remained there two days for the sprained ankles and bruises to heal and then began their trek back to Pantanella. They were happy to leave their straw mattresses and lice. Traveling by foot, horseback and in wild truck rides over mountain roads at night, brought them to a British commando encampment. The British had a radio and contacted the 15th AF Headquarters. The next night a C-47 landed to the light of four oil drums, loaded up the group of fliers and some wounded Partisans, and took off for Bari. They were de-loused, de-briefed and then sent to Capri for a week before going back to the war.

On the right is Jim Wray and Bill Ellett having Thanksgiving dinner with the enlisted men. A note on the back of the picture, "the food was good and the spirits were high."

As we found out at the reunion a number of stories of 'who did it', or 'what happened',



Merry Christmas and Victory in '45

Maj. J.W. Wray



came to light. During the trek out Jim learned that it was this crew that bombed the lumber yards near McCook, and now we all know who scored the first hits by our squadron!!

The next mission for Jim was to Vienna, then a few more, followed by a return trip to Ploesti. He admits to some "puckers" on the return to Ploesti

Jim was promoted to Major in August and then transferred to Group as assistant operations officer. From the group he continued to fly missions with the 781st and on 7 November 1944 he was scheduled for group lead on a mission to Isarco Albes R.R. bridge, in northern Italy. The record reads: Wray, Pilot - Althoff, co-pilot - Wood and Russell, navigators - Sutton, bombardier - Althoff crew. The initial report reads "bridge covered with good pattern." Later official report shows 98.1% within the 1000 foot circle! A group record! I do not have the Air Force records, however, Jim Wray informs me that it was a 15th Air Force Record!!

On 20 November 1944 Jim Wray was transferred back to our squadron as squadron commander, the day Lt. Col. Lokker got shot down. In April he received his promotion to Lt. Colonel, and was finishing his required number of missions when the war ended. He stayed with the squadron skeleton that was transferred to Trinidad. When it was dissolved in July, 1945, he was the last remaining pilot and ended as group commander, by succession. Jim ended up serving more time in the 781st as a pilot than anyone else. He was the first pilot assigned at Davis-Monthan and the only pilot still with the squadron and group when it was dissolved.

Jim recalls ordering all Flight Officers grounded when they arrived in the squadron. He was aware of the fact that the families did not get the benefits that commissioned officers did, so they stayed grounded until their commissions were granted.

After the war Jim Wray attended various Air Force schools, got a degree in General Science, commanded a B-47 squadron at March AFB, and had various other assignments. During his career he remained an active pilot, amassing 5000 hours of flying time. In February, 1960, his 16 years as a Lt. Colonel ended - he got promoted to full Colonel! He retired in 1962, went to work as vice-president of Dallas Market Center, then manager of the New Orleans Superdome and retired in 1978.

Jim has some interesting stories about the days at Pantanella. We will have some of those in later newsletters.

MEMBERSHIP - You were all excused from finding lost buddies during the month of September, but did you have to take off October too!! I knew there were quite a few more men that would like to again join the 'ol 781st, so I began beating the bush in late October. About that time Walt Longacre got back from his vacation and started his letter writing. Results of our work began to pay off and by December another fifty were added to the roster. Some other's efforts began to pay off also. Aboud and Leinart sent in three of their crew, Frank Maccani found the last one of his crew, Earl Culpepper found one, and John Zadrozny came with six new members. I promised to give a short write-up on each new one found, however, the list is too long again, so we'll enclose a new membership roster with the next news.

Some interesting ways to find our lost ones. Frank Clark returned home from the reunion and followed up on his promise to clear up the roster for his state of South Dakota. He had some advantage since there were only two on his roster and he was a ham radio operator. He struck out on Selmer Engebretson - he never received a bonus from the state after WWII, had never been issued a driver's license in SD, and VA computer had no record of him. He did have luck on Dean Otto, however. He contacted a nearby mail carrier by radio, got him to contact people by the same name in the area and came up with Dean Otto's address near Minneapolis.

And I have one - I got a fairly recent address on Francis Walborn, but the letter was returned. I wrote the postmaster, but forgot to note who I was looking for - only the address and that he was a WWII veteran. Back came the note with the new address on the bottom! In another case I wrote the postmaster for any information on Wayne Weber. A couple weeks later I get a letter from Wayne's sister in Wisconsin with Wayne's address in California. Also included was a note from the mail carrier thanking her for her help. The postmaster must have known Wayne's sister and asked her to send her brother's address to me.

Walt Longacre has some interesting finds also. He has sent out hundreds of letters since the reunion. Walt has located over half of the new members and those in the Folded wings since the reunion. There are still some out there that want to rejoin the Fighting 781st. Won't you help out??

HERE'S HOW TO HELP - Just spend a few minutes and look over the non-member roster enclosed. If you can add anything at all on any of the men we would like to hear from you. Maybe you remember his home town, or what section or crew he was on - anything at all. In addition to locating them we want to put them in their section or crew. Let Marcel Snyder, Walt Longacre, your state chairman, or myself know if you have any further information on anyone.

ZU FRUH ALT UNT ZU SPAT SCHLAU - So soon old and so late smart. I did not know that our non-profit rate mail was not forwarded or returned. So you may not have received the October newsletter if you changed address. With "address correction requested" we will receive the information. If returned it will cost 22 cents or probably 56 cents for the 3 ounces, plus the same additional for remailing. So, please give us your new address promptly. The 8 1/2 cent postage is only good when 200 or more pieces are mailed at one time.

REUNION MEMORIES - Notes and letters keep coming in. It's so rewarding to hear of many of you getting together and contacting each other. It appears that at least 90% never had contact with any other squadron members between the time of leaving Pantanella and the past year.

One of the program highlights to me was the simulated briefing. I thought you all did a great job. Many things came back to many of us at the reunion. Something I had not thought about for a long time was the ominous sound of the jeep pulling up in the morning with headlights glaring in our tent and the clerk with a flashlight and clipboard to awaken us for the mission. It sure brought back memories to me when Walter Sutton told about one occurrence. I have memories of a particular morning when a nurse came in the jeep to awaken us. The war just didn't seem so bad that morning - until we got to the briefing room.



For Lynn and Harry Reuss the reunion is happiness. They were beaming with joy throughout the reunion. Harry was a gunner on Nelson's crew and is Indiana state chairman with a lot of members to his credit.

MORE ON REUNION '87 - It was decided at the reunion that the next one should be in Dayton. Frank Maccani lives in Cincinnati, so he offered to check out the Dayton area for us. We learned of the new Holiday Inn and made contact. We were fortunate to get in contact when we did since we got the last available dates left in September. Marcel and I are familiar with the downtown Dayton area and we think you will like it in Fairborn much better. It is less than five minutes from the gate of Wright-Patterson. We have 175 rooms reserved, the maximum they will give us of the 200 available. Another 25 are reserved about 10 miles away in the event attendance is beyond the estimates. Our program will be similar to Colorado Springs except nothing on Sunday. It may be that there will be some golf arrangements on Sunday and a group dinner for those staying over. We are not planning any association function after the banquet on Saturday night. The normal registration will be on Thursday, however, we will have the hospitality available on Wednesday for the Eager Beavers. More on the program and events in the next newsletter. One of our members, Roland Soucy, lives very close to the Hotel and is also helping out with arrangements at Wright-Patterson.

If you plan to attend please fill out the reservation form and mail the lower portion to the hotel and the top portion to me. Remember that it's best to make your reservations early if you plan to attend to guarantee your reservation in the new hotel. In the event you cancel you will receive full refund. And remember wives are invited and expected to accompany you. The program is planned for the wives as well as the men. Just ask any of those who attended last year, the wives were the greatest boosters.

To those of you who are thinking about the reunion and can't quite decide as to whether or not to go, just call one of your buddies that has attended. You owe it to yourself to plan to attend one and you decide. The experience of the camaraderie and the love for one another that the great group had at the last reunion should be experienced by all. What was so rewarding was to see men that stayed in and served in other units during their careers, yet they came back to their first unit where a bond was formed in trying times, and consider the 781st their home.



FRANK AMBROSE - A reunion photo shows Frank with the tools of his trade - photography. At Pantanella he was in the photo and intelligence section and we are fortunate that Frank kept many photos from "those days." He was located just before the reunion and was able to change his plans so he could attend. Notice his WWII identification tag with photo. Not much change in 42 years.

SHORT STORY - Harold Quagan, top gunner on the French crew, sent in the following story - "Fred Wagner, radio operator on our crew bailed out with us when our plane caught fire. When he pulled his rip cord, nothing happened. Fred Wagner, strangely enough, had received a hunting knife from his brother in New York. He was the only member of the crew who had a knife in his boot, strapped to his leg. He realized his chute was not opening, so he reached for his knife and cut the canvas open and pulled the chute open with his hands.

When he returned to Italy, he wrote a nice letter to his brother and it was published in the New York paper. I don't remember the words exactly, but it was something like this: "I want to thank you for the knife that you sent me. It came in real handy." He further explains what happened and how his chute didn't work. Fred said, "I lost about 5000 feet and 5 pounds of brown matter before the chute finally opened." I'll never forget the article. Fred was the only one I saw when we landed and he was almost a mile from me in an open farm area. Fred brought his chute back with him to Italy and went to the parachute department where the sign humorously reads: "IF IT DOESN'T WORK, BRING IT BACK." He asked to see the fellow who packed the chute. He then threw it at him and said, "Here is one that didn't work." The rest of what he said isn't for print.

We are missing photos and identification of the following crews: Brenneman, Wortham, Ellison, Tannenbaum, Jones, Van Slyke, and Nelson. You'll be left out if we don't hear from you! Also only have partial identification on Martin and Becker crews. We have over 60 crews to put together and have just about run out of time that we can spend on this. Don't get left out! Does anyone know what crews Thomas Hammond, or Charles Tittle were on? Two co-pilots we do not have a record on. And does any one remember Sgt. Peoples? Or do you know anyone that stayed in the service that we have not found? We need the help now so we can complete our records.

We feel we have complete rosters on Communications, Engineering, and Ordnance. If you have a roster of any of the other sections we would sure like hear from you. So many of you have not sent in your questionnaire!! This would sure help to identify you in a particular section or crew.

REUNION BOOKLET - Harry Carl is working on this also. In the next month he will be taking it to the printers. If you have a good photo that might be useful please send a copy machine copy to Harry and he will let you know if he might use it. If you want to order a booklet send \$15 to Russ Maynard, Treasurer.

REUNION VIDEO - I apologize for the poor quality of this short video. Something will be done about this. I will inform you further in a later news.

GINO J. PELLESCI - Gino returned his questionnaire with a brief description of his flying experience. He writes, "After four years of flying backwards as a tail gunner on B-17's, LB-30's, and B-24's, I still had the flying bug, so I decided to see what it was like flying forward. I received my private and commercial licenses with multi-engine rating. I was recalled during the Korean War and was assigned to an air-to-air refueling squadron and flying backwards again as a boom operation on a KC-97 tanker!" Gino was tail gunner on Jack Van Slyke's crew on the plane "Helle's Belle."

ARNOLD SCHUTZMAN - Arnold was located in July and very happy to be in contact with his old crew again. He was bombardier on Richard Crutcher's crew. He wrote a long letter and recounted some of the happenings at Pantanella and included some memories of the day Lt. Col. Lokker went down. He writes, "The newsletter on Col. Lokker brought back a memory that has never left me. If memory serves me correctly, Roy Byrd was scheduled to fly with Col. Lokker. They then had plane trouble and changed planes, picking out one with a Sperry bombsight. I was the only bombardier checked out on a Sperry, and since Roy couldn't handle it, they sent a jeep up to find me and bring me down for the mission. When the jeep arrived at my house they could not find me as I had gone to the bathroom and I didn't know anything about it until the next day when Roy Byrd told me about it. Again, trying to remember what transpired then was that Col. Lokker, not being able to use the Sperry plane, picked up a complete other crew and flew with them. So it appears that both Roy and I missed out on that mission."

Yes, Col. Lokker did take over another plane. Milton Duckworth's plane and crew from the 783rd were taken over by Col. Lokker, and the mission finally got under way.

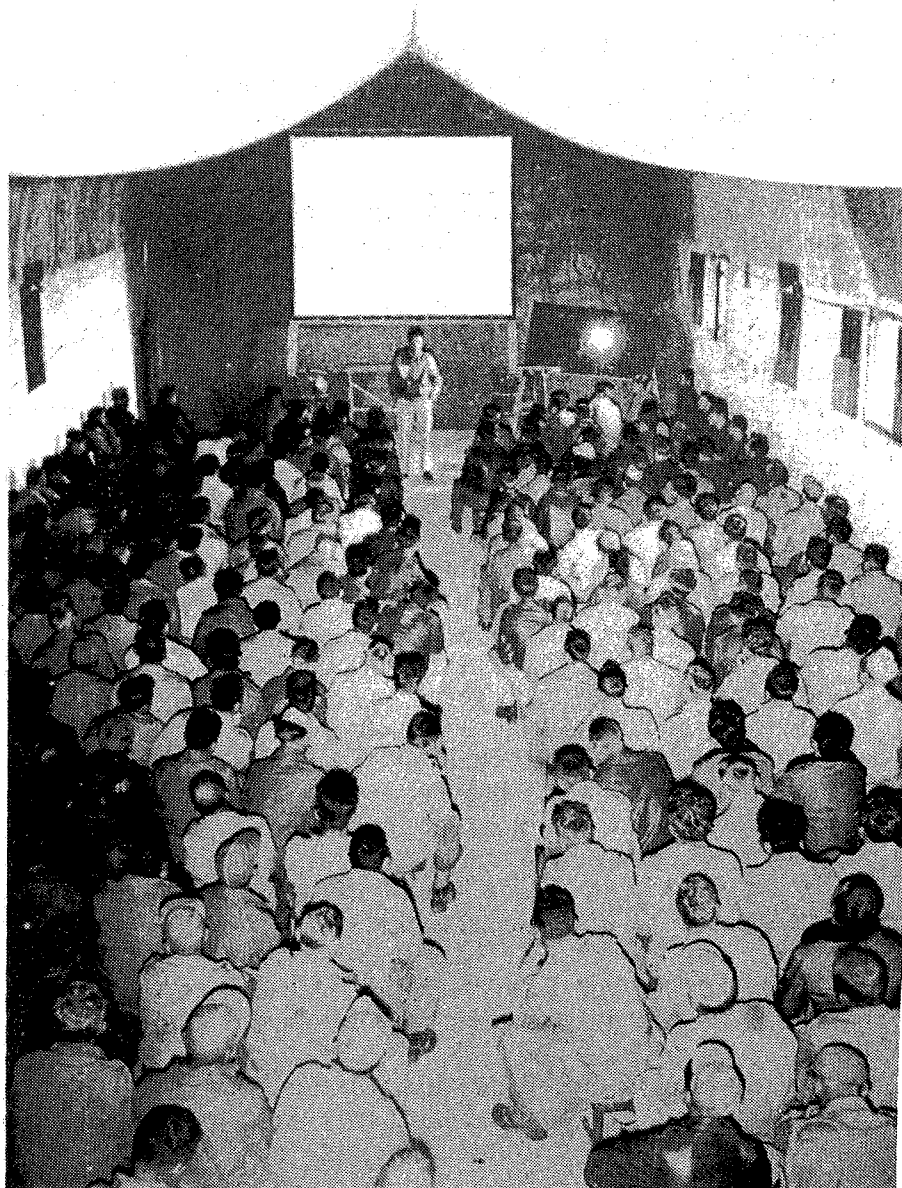
With reference to the bombsights, if memory serves me correctly, the original crews had mostly A-5 auto-pilots with Sperry bombsights. Replacement crews came in with new planes equipped with C-1 auto pilots and Norden bombsights. The original crews preferred what they knew best, the A-5/Sperry. I recall a mission with Col. Lokker 22 September 1944 to Munich. The plane was A-5/Sperry equipped. Enroute to the target the Alps were a beautiful sight and Col. Lokker tapped me on the shoulder and said, "take over, I'm going back to the waist to take some pictures." He no sooner left when fighter cover called, another group called regarding time to the IP and I was trying to keep a steady course with the the A-5 that I was only vaguely familiar with. I was one happy pilot when Col. Lokker came back to take over.

JOHN C. ZARTMAN - John was located early last year and has been active in finding other 781st members - over 20 to date. He was co-pilot on Bob Wicox's crew during the days at Pantanella. He was a sophomore at Ohio Wesleyan University when he was called to active duty. After his tour of duty he went to Ohio State University, graduating with a degree in Business Administration in 1947, went to work for Ohio Bell Telephone Co., and got married in the same year. Later they adopted two children. His duties at Ohio Bell involved supervision of telephone operators, data systems etc. Work moved him to a number of cities in Ohio, coming back to Columbus in 1962 as District Manager, where he remained until retirement in 1985. Since retirement he has been active in his church, doing volunteer work at Children's Hospital in Columbus and some work with H&R Block. John, we were happy to see you at the reunion and thanks for the membership help.

DO YOU REMEMBER THIS? The base theatre. Lt. Col. McKenna is lecturing the troops in May 1944.

ERNIE VAN ASPEREN - Those who attended the reunion will remember a complimentary glass of wine - it was from Ernie and it was his Round Hill Wine. Recently he received a high award for his fine wines. I'll quote from USA TODAY, "GREAT GRAPES: International Wine Review toasts Round Hill Winery of St. Helena, Calif., as the USA's Winery of the year." He won four gold and one silver medal at last summer's American Wine Competition. Congratulations Ernie, we wish you continued success.

We want to hear from you if you have news of our comrades. Stan Winkowski sent in the above.



HELP - HELP - Harry Carl, our squadron historian, is making another plea for old orders and good or unusual pictures for the history book. We also need identification and rosters for some of the sections. If you have anything that you might think could be of value to Harry, please copy it and send it to him. PLEASE!!!! sent in the above item

We do not have serial numbers on the following men. See if you have old orders that may have their serial numbers, or any other information.

Locke, Clarence	Samet, Henry	Tinglihoff, William H	Oberg, Bernard
Archuleta, Joe R.	Luna, Byron	Schaffer, Charles W.	Yaroshuk, Harry
Armstrong, Robert F.	Lyden, John D.	Schiffino, Joseph W.	Wilcox, Howard
Bailey, Raymond L.	Lynch, Charles R.	Schwartz, Howard W.	Jr. Wortham, Harold
Baner, John R.	Manoli, Sam A.	Shaffer, Clarence K.	Parker, Don R.
Bartels, Arnold	Mantee, Fred P.	Short, James W.	Kirby, P. W.
Bell, Leon R. Jr.	Maquire, Ralph E.	Simmons, John W.	Knutson, L.
Best, John W.	Marcin, Roy L.	Simons, Earl V.	Paterno, Anthony
Cameron, Richmond	Mascarella, E. J.	Sinis, Ben O.	Kruszczynski, Edward
Freeman, Barnard S.	Mauton, Paul	Sitz, Harold L.	Pielham, Ken T
Gamoff, Irving I.	McIntyre, Robert	Slater, Charles	Pop, Herbert
Gilliam, Roy K.	McShane, Theo.	Smith, James C.	Kucher, E. Jr.
Gnate, Leonard J.	Mease, Hal C. Jr.	Smith, John E.	Kuian, George J.
Greenberg, Ralph	Meinillo, John P.	Smith, Roy A.	Putnam, Myrl
Gwinn, Jessie E.	Melville, James E.	Soto, Reynaldo	Lamb, Charles E.
Hernandez, Refugio	Monaghan, John	Sperry, Watts A.	Quattochio, Albert
Hafey, Herbert C.	Moran, James	Splatt, Arthur	Lasseigine, Linel L.
Jackson, E.	Stickle, Irving H.	Pinnix, Paris E.	Lee, Orin J.
Jacob, S.	Morris, Louis	Swaldi, Albert B.	Rose, William E
Jones, R. V.	Myal, Chester	Switzer, Carl B.	Riffle, Stanley S
Kachugis, Henry J.	Nelson, Neil Jr.	Thomas, Lewis	Ries, John
Kangman, (Kaufman)	Nielson, Robert D.	Thomas, Robert L.	Reznyi, Joseph J.
Karas, Joseph	Nouil, Edgar	Thompson, Douglas H.	Reb, Robert J.
Kerichenka, Nicholas			

PRISONER OF WAR MEDAL - This new medal has been approved and will be ready sometime later this year. It will be awarded to any military member who was taken prisoner after April 5, 1917. Widows or parents of deceased ex-POWs will receive the medals as well as survivors. The new medal is rated as the highest decoration for service. Applications for the medal will probably be early 1988. We will keep you informed.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS - We hope to have available for you at a later date back issues of the newsletter. To get current about the 781st why not call one of your buddies on the roster. The purpose of the association is; to locate all former members of the 781st Bomb Squadron that served at Pantanella during WWII, to hold periodic reunions, to publish a quarterly newsletter, to publish a history book, to reunite us in our common bond and to honor our Fallen Comrades. For those those that asked about dues - we have a voluntary dues. There is a cost of \$10 to \$20 per year for the newsletter, so contribute what you can if you can. All funds go to Russ Maynard, Treasurer.

JOHN C. HEADER - John, radio operator on Francis Maccani crew, was located about a year ago. He retired from Ford Motor Co. after 25 years. He finished his missions just as the war ended. And a few words at the end of his questionnaire, "I want to commend you men for making this effort to bring this squadron together, because these men were a special breed. It took a lot of courage to get into those airplanes, the flak being what it was and a load of 100 octane gas on board. Frankly, I never thought I was going to finish my allotted missions because there was too many missions considering the crews we were losing."

Then John wrote the following letter, "You have a Robert E. Martz listed. He was a pilot. I know for sure he was KIA. I am going to quote from my own diary, which was filled out after every mission. I kept this diary for my heirs in case I did not come home. 'Mission #23, 23 March 1945, Nove Zamke. Our objective was to hit the rail yards in this town on the Russian Front in Hungary. It was cloud covered all the way up and we saw little of the ground, so we thought it

was impossible to bomb the prime target. It luckily cleared up 20 miles from Nove Zamke. As we made the bomb run flak was heavy and very accurate. I had a very good view and saw our bombs fall in the center of town. Another unit right behind us hit the yard dead center, destroying 60 units of rolling stock. As we came off the target number two in our box (Martz) took a burst and went out of control. It started diving at about a 45 degree angle back down towards the town we had just bombed. At about 9000 feet he went into a tight loop like the letter 'E', came out of it and I saw only one chute, whereupon he went into another dive and never recovered. As a sequel I might add that a gunner on this crew was a friend of mine. He was from Vandalia, Ohio. Two years after the war I was in his locality, so I decided to look up his folks and give them an account of how he passed away. I figured he was dead because there was only one chute. Well, as I remember, it was a hot Sunday afternoon, and I was directed by the local drug store to a farm west of town. I remember a long drive up the driveway. A man was mowing the lawn and it was Beeson. Then I knew he was the only one that got out. He said they were hit, he looked up and saw Martz with his whole side torn open, and knew he had to get out. When he landed he saw peasants coming from all directions. He really thought they meant to harm him, but a German soldier in the regular Wermacht, on leave, took custody of him. He was locked in jail overnight. That night the town was bombed, but he did not know by whom. I have not seen since then."

John, I heard from Vincent Beeson in December and he is still in Vandalia. His report will be in the next newsletter.

SILVER WINGS - That was the name of the 465th Bomb Group band. Another honor for the 781st - Lt. Bonnie Rowe was chosen to lead the band and to conduct practice. Bonnie was navigator on the Zalk crew. The band was directed to report to the 781st Officers Club daily from 0900 to 1200 for band practice. It took precedence over all other duties other than combat missions. The order was signed by Col. Joshua Foster, Group Commander. In addition to Bonnie playing the accordion our squadron was represented by Walker (Horton) Shipley, playing alto sax, J. Keith Lancaster on the trumpet, and Dave White, tenor sax. How about a tune at the next reunion men!!



Pictured on the right: Front L to R- Al Shunick, Pappy Franzrel, Dave White, Derrik Quackenbush, Warren Shipley, Bonnie Rowe, Rubin Zubofsky, Back L to R - Keith Lancaster, Phil Olsson, Bill Foote, George Ingles, and Bob Burgess. Photo courtesy of Keith Lancaster.

GARVIN GOYNE - Many of you should remember Garvin, clerk in the orderly room. He was recently located in Dardanelle, Arkansas. He got out of the service in 1945, spent some time farming with his father, got married and have three children, and now retired. He notes he would be happy to hear from anyone and will be proud to be a part of a reunion.

CALDER LAMPREY - After the reunion Calder sent in a large book (17" x 18") entitled, "The Air Battle of Ploesti." Over 100 pages of the most detailed bombing report I have seen. I'll bring it to the reunion for all to see. Calder was tail gunner on Ray Hurd's crew.