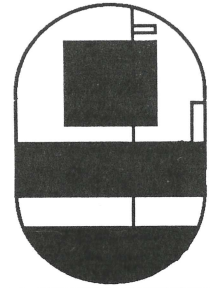




PANTANELLA NEWS



JANUARY 1988

Published by 781st Bomb Squadron Association

NUMBER 11

REUNION '88 - It will be held at the Menger Hotel in downtown San Antonio, opposite the Alamo, September 15 to 18, 1988. This reunion was planned in cooperation with other squadrons in the 465th Bomb Group and at least two of the other squadrons are holding a joint reunion and we will join together for our banquet. It promises to be the biggest yet. Another reason for the expected large turnout is the fact that there will not be a reunion in 1989. More details later on in the newsletter.

NEW MEMBERS - They are still being found, but it takes a little more time and effort. In late October I received a letter from John Ward, co-pilot on the Van Slyke crew. He writes, "Now for another tale. Bernie Badler wrote to some Greek church or association in Massachusetts and they gave him the name of one Steve Chirigotis, who might be Stavalas Tserigotis, Van Slyke's radio operator. Badler wrote two letters and received two letters in return from Steve, but Steve couldn't connect with the 781st. That is the way it stood at the reunion. After the reunion I wrote to Steve and enclosed a picture of our crew and a picture of Van Slyke, Pelleschi, Badler and myself taken at the memorial and BINGO we hit! He answered my letter and I know he is the right person because he mentioned Joe Wright in his letter. Joe left our crew in McCook to go to cadets." John enclosed his address and said he was going to work on the remaining man David Downes. I informed him Downes was in Folded Wings, so the Van Slyke crew is all accounted for. Roy A. Smith was found by you know who - Walt Longacre. The Chamber of Commerce of Urbana Illinois was contacted by Walt and they went out of their way to help. Roy was on our roster, but he may have been with us for only a short time and served in another squadron for most of his duty. We're reaching back in time to get the record straight.

A letter by Walt to the Township of Derry, Pennsylvania located Robert Smeltzer, who was Doss's radio operator. The township secretary, Lori Wrzesniewski, noted she made several calls in the area and one, John Zimmerman, contacted his sister, who works

at Admissions at the Milton Hershey School, and she looked up Robert's current address. Robert now lives in South Carolina and is in the photography business.

And another letter to the Mayor of Portland, Oregon brought a reply that gave Arthur C. Eaton's (Schuster's co-pilot) address. No phone was listed so we are waiting for a reply.

THE 781ST ROSTER - How did you like the roster? After over two years of work we finally have the roster of all the men we believe served in the 781st during WWII. Due to the age of the records (and some of our memories) there will certainly be some errors or omissions. Here is where all of you can help. Look over the roster very closely and let us know if there are any errors. What is most important is to give us any information at all that you might have on those not located (NL). Remember, just a simple thing like what school he went to can help us. Also, if an individual is listed without a crew or section, we would like to know that information. Let us know if you did not receive a copy of the roster.

GOOD MORNING AMERICA - How many

saw the 781st on Good Morning America? It appeared on November 17th as scheduled.

SNOW BIRDS - You folks who head south for the winter - how about letting us know departure and return dates and your address while away, if you want to receive the newsletter. Also if your winter address is a permanent one or if it will change each year. Our mailing with the mailing permit does not have the privilege of forwarding.

DEDICATION OF PLAQUE - Your directors were pleased that everyone seemed to like the decisions on the plaque. The directors and others were asked their opinion regarding the material (bronze, or aluminum), wording, location, etc. Most of the wording was taken from the plaque in front of the chapel at Pantabella. Along with the plaque the squadron purchased the four year old Crimean Linden tree near the plaque. The museum will maintain the area at no further cost to the association. Some of the comments, during our review of placing the plaque here, were suggestions that it could be placed elsewhere, one being the Air Force Academy. That would be a good place, however, squadrons no longer can



receive approval for a plaque there - only groups. It should be noted that on the opposite side of the sidewalk there is a monument by the Tuskegee Airmen. They were the black P-51 unit that gave us fighter cover - the RedTails.

We were pleased to be able to single out



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one of those for whom the plaque was dedicated, those killed in action, Lt. Col. Clarence Lokker. As reported at the reunion, last year, through military red tape and some personnel changes, we were disappointed that the Silver Star did not get approved. So, it was timely that we were able to get approval and present the award (see photo) to Col. Lokkers widow, Sybil Lokker Wilson, also in attendance was Frank Lokker, Col. Lokker's brother. We were all happy to see Sybil had recovered from her tragic loss in 1944, and married such a fine man as Bob Wilson. We'll forgive him for being Navy, but we'll accept him in the Air Force any time. We hope to see the Wilson's and Frank Lokker at many future reunions.

MORE ON REUNION '87 - The Frank Maccani crew won the best attendance honor - all eight members who are still living were there! The Argene Barnett crew checked in with seven. A lot of catching up to do for some old crewmates. And wasn't it great to see 46 men from the ground echelon.

FRANK HYLLA has a heartwarming story of what a reunion is all about. He writes, "I feel that this last reunion was great and had an extra benefit by meeting one of our liberators from Stalag 7A at Moosburg, a one in a million shot. At the reunion some of us were talking about our experiences in POW camp and I was going through my POW diary, when I came across a picture of my wife of 47 years, which I had carried with me while a POW. On the back of it was a name and address in Dayton. I checked it against the names that I had in my diary and his name was the name of the first GI who knocked down the gate and entered our camp to liberate us. I still can see him as he came in through the gate on the left side of the first tank. Yes, the bullets were flying, but I had to meet him. I did not have any paper, so I pulled out my wife's picture and wrote his name and address on the back of it and I'd told him I'd look him up after the war.

Since we were in Dayton I decided to try

to see if I could find him. Well, it happened, after several phone calls I located him. Arrangements were made for him to come to the hotel on Sunday morning for a reunion. An announcement was made at the banquet regarding the reunion the following morning and the following men were there to meet him; Left to right - John Dickey, Vincent Beeson, Marion Franz (the GI), Gene Weiss, Eugene Krzyzynski and myself.

So, you see this was more than a squadron reunion to us. It gave us a chance to meet one of our liberators after all these years. The date was April 29, 1945, a day I'll never forget."

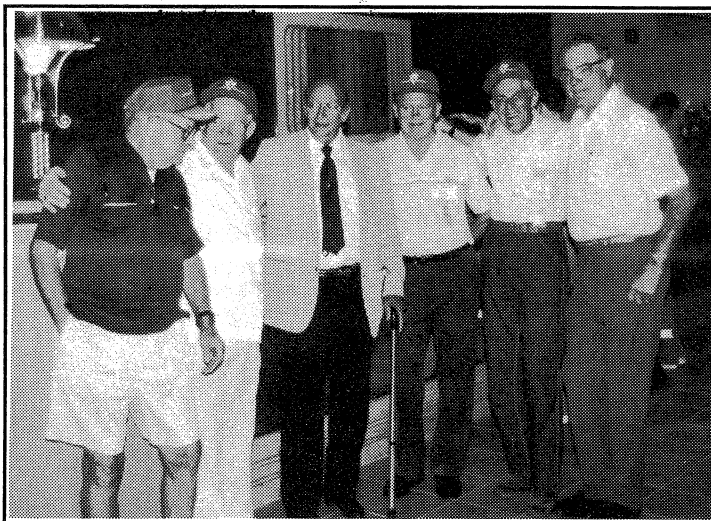
There is no one more appreciative of our country than Frank. He said there were four things he was able to keep during his incarceration - his rosary, picture of his wife, his sanity, and love of America and freedom.

REUNION BOOKLET - The booklet will be going to the printers shortly. You may be interested to know that the board of directors have decided that we will not have a booklet for '88, so if you want one of these rare items, the '87 reunion booklet, you will have to order shortly. Send \$15 to Russ Maynard, treasurer.

GROUP REPORT - In June I received an inquiry from Granville Price, who was in group S-4 under Major Moody. Granville inquired if the invitation for the reunion was extended to group personnel. I sent him information, but he couldn't make Dayton. After the October news Granville wrote that he was thrilled to see a report from James Miller - they were room mates in the engineering building near the line. It looks like a number of group men will be in San Antonio. Let's hear from more of you from group! Granville listed a few names with WWII addresses on several. Some were deceased, but I did locate Thomas Gavin in Chicago - one of six Thomas Gavins in the phone book!

Another group man from another country - Joseph A. Tucci who lives in Monte Carlo, Monaco!

Joe sent a long letter and a very generous contribution. He is going to try to make the reunion in San Antonio. He notes that the date is bad for him since his birthday and wedding anniversary fall during this time. I have suggested to him that he celebrate during the reunion. Joe was group Sergeant Major from inception in

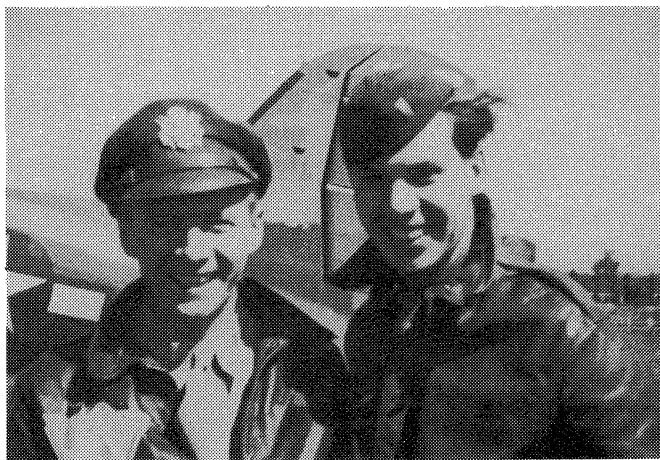


August 1943 and continued until the end in 1945.

FOLDED WINGS - I have had a few requests for more particulars when we find some one has joined Folded Wings. Many times only a notice in a newspaper is seen by someone and only the date of death is given. John Zartman reported two of those in the last newsletter after seeing the names published. I can fill you in on two whom I found some particulars on. Working with Harry Carl in trying to get the crew roster complete Harry suggested I call John Hughes, a radar navigator for one crew, since he flew over with them. I tried over a three week period and finally reached a young lady. She hesitated when I asked for John Hughes and I knew right away something was wrong. She turned me over to John's son who informed me that his father had passed away and he was closing the home. John was in the hospital for an operation and complications set in. His wife was not well and the shock disabled her so she had to be put in a rest home. John had been one of the early reunion registrants and his son said he was looking forward to seeing some old friends and talked about it many times.

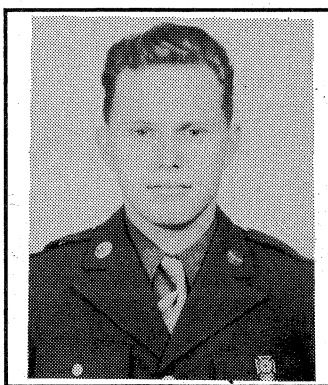
Another man was Sam Bogdan with engineering. I located Sam early in the search and we had a number of phone conversations. He had seen Capt. Dave Orr a number of times and offered to help in searching for him. In every call Sam would end up weeping when he talked of his friends and the fact that his health did not allow him to travel. He lived at the same address for 50 years. After the service his home burned down and he rebuilt it. He lost all his photos and war memorabilia, so I sent him some pictures. Then I did not hear for a while and newsletter #8 was returned with a new address. I sent one to the new address, but anticipated something was wrong. I planned to call, but time went on and the next newsletter was returned with a note that this veteran had died. Sam's health had declined and he entered a veterans hospital where he died. It just never is easy when you get the news that someone who cared for his fellow man so much had passed on.

THANK YOU - To Frank Ambrose, Paul Ihde, Harry Carl, and others that sent in photos taken during the reunion. And to all of you that have taken the time to send in your stories or information that result in a worthwhile newsletter. Remember we were a squadron consisting of all of you and we are enjoying reliving our squadron days at Pantanella only because of your support. Keep 'em flying!



HAROLD CROSSING - Died November 13, 1987 in Rosarito, Mexico. I called his wife when I heard of his passing and she informed me they were on vacation and he died of a heart attack during the night. Harold was a radar navigator and a real fine man. After the last effective mission our squadron flew Harold, Roy Byrd and I spent five days at Hotel Martinez, Cannes, France. I'll never forget the first thing we did each morning - check the map on the wall to see where the front lines were. We had had enough and didn't mind it a bit that Patton was rolling east. The photo of Harold (on the right) and I by the C-47 was on our departure from France - we were very happy knowing the end

was near. The war ended three days later. **FREDERICK C. MAUTE** - Fred sent in his questionnaire just over a year ago and he couldn't understand how we got his address. It is a wonder we did find him since the state was wrong, his name misspelled and on the wrong street. We finally got things straightened out and were fortunate to have Fred so interested in the squadron and help us with the radar section roster. He sent in the first picture of the section, only he was left out when the photo was taken. We'll make up for it now by showing his photo separately. After the war Fred went back to work at an electric utility, PSE & G in New Jersey doing electrical engineering type work. He is enjoying the

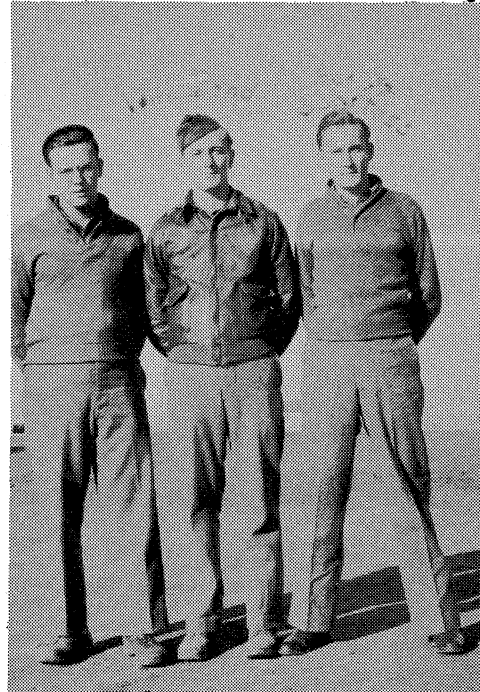


good life after retirement in 1980.

BRUCE MILLER - Bruce is shown on the right, with William Bond (Benson's engineer), and George Searfoss (cook). All three were from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Bruce was located this past year and has been a very active member. He has written many letters, attended the reunion, and has been very helpful in identifying the Armament Section, of which he was a member. After VE day Bruce transferred to a B-17 outfit, then P-

51's and was enroute to the US when Japan surrendered. After discharge he went to Penn State and received a Bachelor of Science degree in agriculture in 1949 and another degree in 1950. He accepted foreign employment, after graduation, in Liberia, West Africa, working for Firestone Plantations Company and involved in the production of liquid rubber (latex). Later he served with the U.S. Department of Interior in land management, irrigation, and then to Thailand (1965) as an irrigation specialist.

In Bruce's last letter he noted that on December 11th, 1987, four armament men got together in Coventry Hills, Pennsylvania, to tell tall tales of the days at Pantanella. They were William George, John Heavey, Petro Botch and Bruce. How about sending



in some of the tall stories Bruce?

ROSTER CHANGES -

Edward H. Hansen, 17924 75th place West, Edmonds, WA 98020.

Roy A. Smith, 1210 Redwood Drive, Champaign, IL 61820 (New Member).

James Kipp, Jr., RR #2, Box 166A, Stoystown, PA 15563

Robert B. Smeltzer, 30 Waters Ave., South Carolina 29605, 803 277-5312 (New Member)

Arthur M. Buckley, Jr., 2200 7th Ave., Parkersburg, WV 26101

Charles R. Murray, 554 Hillcrest Dr., Paradise, CA 95969

Bennie C. Naticchioni, 29 Westfield Rd., Natick, MA (617) 655-0482 (New Member)

FOLDED WINGS

Carl Switzer - Folded Wings 8/14/87

Harold Crossing - Folded Wings

Ernie T. Porter - Folded Wings 8/17/87

SQUADRON MEMBERS - As of January 15, 1988, 583 men have been located, another 351 in Folded Wings and only 198 unaccounted for. We're closing the gap!

MISSION #161, GRAZ, AUSTRIA, 15 MARCH 1945 - A discussion at the reunion between Harry Carl, Jack Ertel and Ben Donahue concerned the mid-air collision on this mission. Recently Harry sent me the notes from their discussions. I know our minds play tricks these days, but I was quite certain I knew some of the facts since I led the squadron box that day. I began searching and calling and these are the facts as I see them today. The crews listed in the squadron records as flying are; Wray, Althoff, Tryon, Hewitt, Benson, Donahue, Kennedy, Newman and Barnett. My recollection has Wray flying observation at assembly and not being on the mission. His mission record does not show that he flew. I was Baker Box lead and it was the first time I flew Baker one. Sometime before target area (my records show 6 hours mission time) I had engine problems and could not keep up with Able box. I called for number two to take over and dropped out. I was not aware of any problem except for the fact that one of the waist gunners reported, as he looked back, that he could see something falling from the formation area. As I approached Pantanella I heard one of the aircraft call for emergency landing as his hydraulics, etc. were out. It turned out that Hewitt and Tryon had a mid-air collision and all survived. Hewitt (number three position) dropped down over Tryon's plane (in number four position) causing Tryon's #1 prop to slice through the bombay doors and cat-walk of Hewitt's plane dislodging 6 five hundred pound bombs. One bomb fell onto the wing of Tryon's plane, slid across the back of the plane removing all of the antenna. The #1 prop from Tryon's plane came off and fell to the ground. Hewitt's plane lost its hydraulics when the prop sliced

the bombay doors and catwalk and upon landing it ran off the end of the runway and ended up in the field, wiping out one gear. This is the only mid-air collision I have heard of that did not end up with fatalities. Two lucky crews.

The following newspaper article appeared in Stanley Tryon's home town newspaper in 1945.

Comes in, Left Prop Amputated

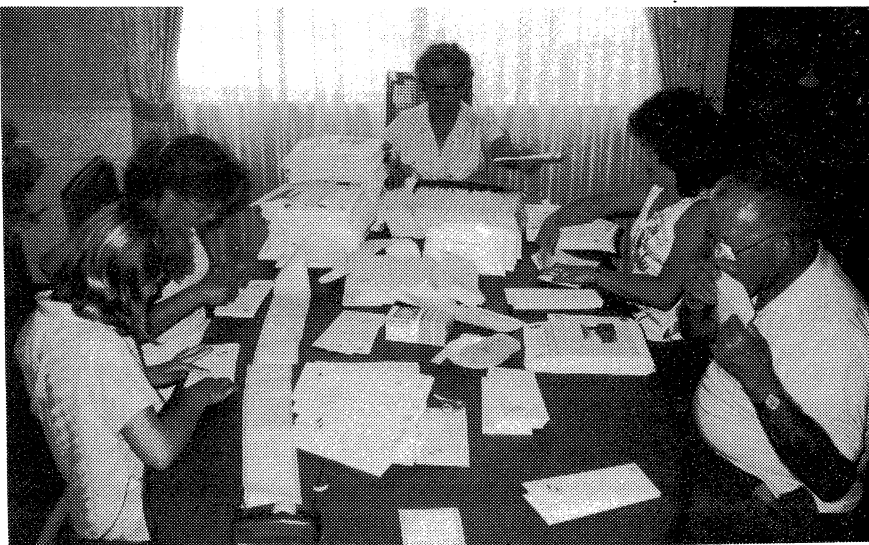
15TH AAF IN ITALY—Rough air recently hit two Liberators as they moved to new formation positions while enroute to their target at Graz, Austria, threw them so close together that a propeller on one ripped deep gashes into the other.

Although the underside of the top Liberator was mangled by the collision both bombers returned safely to the base with every man uninjured. Flying as pilot in the Liberator with the severed prop was 1st. Lt. Stanley E. Tryon, 24, recently promoted to that rank, son of Mr. and Mrs. Bert Tryon, of Rushville.

"I was flying in the bomber in the rear position, when the plane flying in the lead had an engine conk out on her. The plane flying ahead and to the right side of me locked like he had to take over the lead for the bomb run. I was reading my plane for the maneuver to the right when I heard a roar and ripping sound like a can-opener at work. I didn't realize until a moment later that my extreme left prop was playing havoc with the catwalk of the Liberator known as 'Old Tiger'. That alone wasn't bad enough but when one of 'Tigers' bombs was released by the impact, dropped through their ripped door and bounced off the fuselage of our Lib below, and then toppled down—I think my entire crew aged a couple of moons. Well, I brought my war-bird back with the whole left prop amputated. The 'Tiger' had her underside mangled."

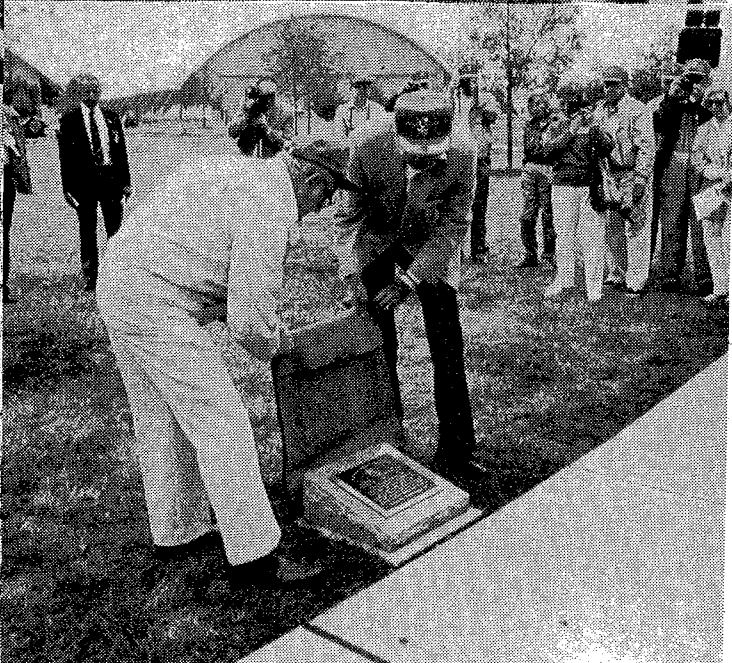
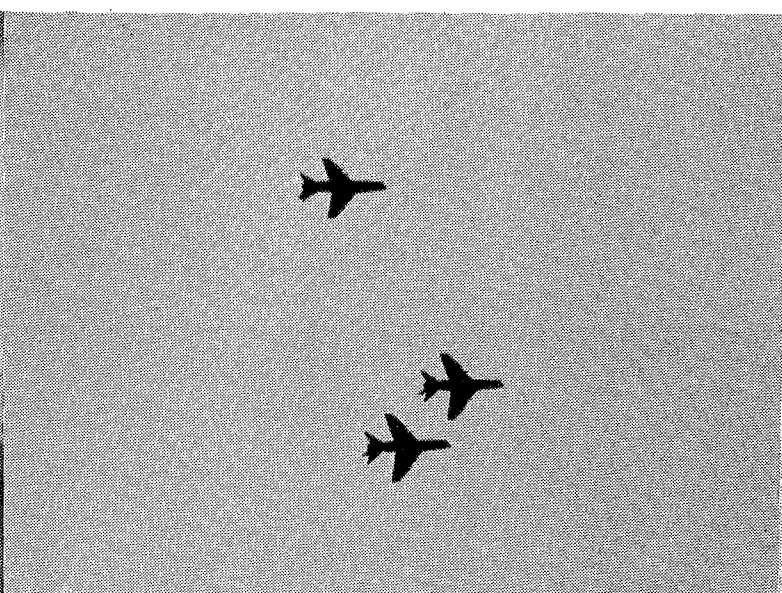
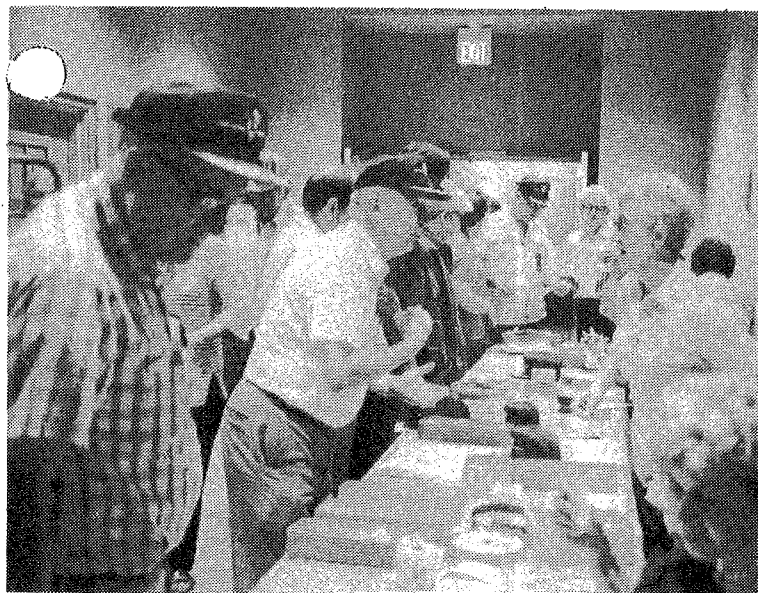
Tryon was graduated by the Rushville High School in 1938 and then attended the University of Nebraska majoring in agriculture. Prior to his entry into the service in September of 1943, he was a stock farmer and then was an aircraft worker for the Curtiss-Wright Corp. of Columbus, Ohio.

Lt. Tryon is married to the former Hope E. Robins of Rushville. They have a son, Stanley Gene, age 13 months.



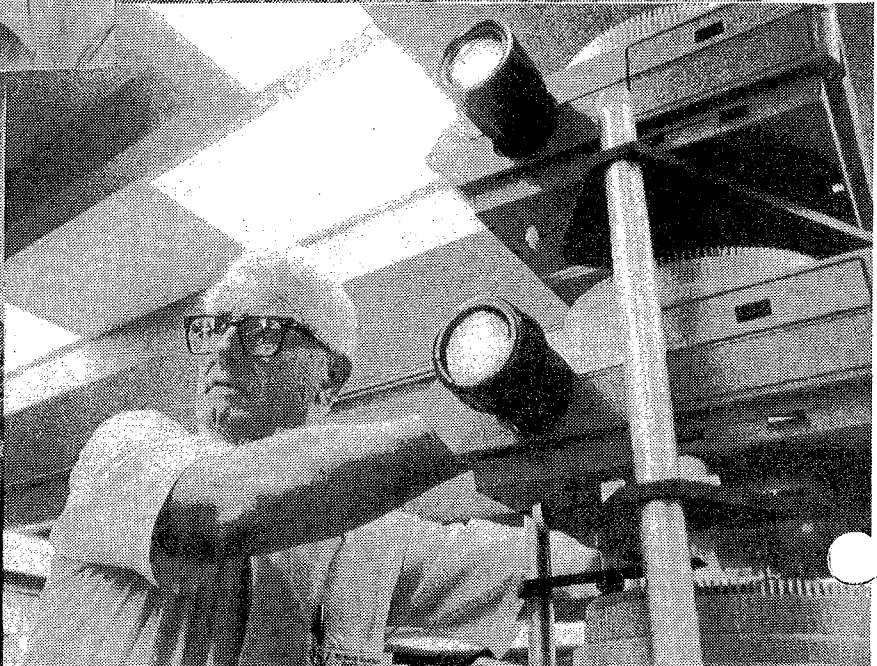
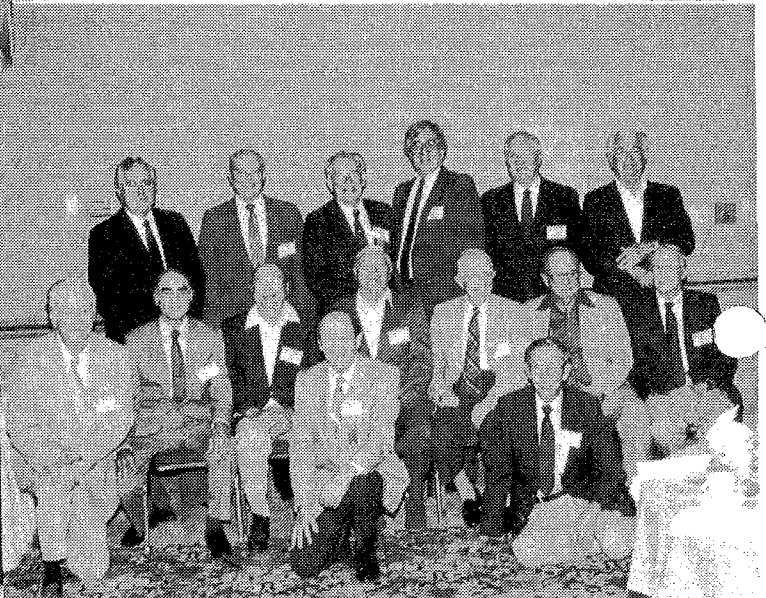
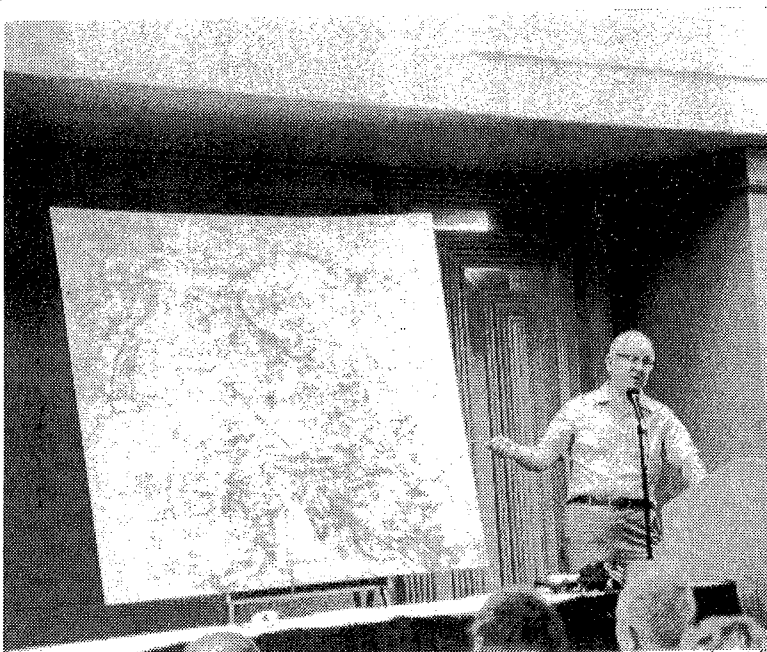
LICK 'EM AND STICK 'EM - When it's newsletter time it's a family affair along with Ben Donahue. L to R Granddaughters Deanna and Tina, Agnes, Daughter Patty and Ben. With the new permit - no more stamps.

MEMORIES OF REUNION '87



Clockwise starting upper L - Registration was always busy. The flyover arranged for by Roland Soucy. James Downes giving a beautiful prayer at dedication. James Wray and Vincent Beeson unveiling the plaque. Ex-POW's and MIA's. Feasting on pictures.

FOR MORE PHOTOS ORDER A REUNION BOOKLET



Clockwise starting upper L - Byron Thompson giving the briefing. Absorbing more photos. First pilots that brought over crews with Hank Willetts. Harry Carl in action showing his now famous "Tales of Sacajawea." Some veterans in their WWII uniforms. An intense photo session.

ROBERT SMELTZER - Recently located Robert was the radio operator on the Doss crew. He sent some photos from shots he took in Italy and commented that he wished he would have known more about photography then. After the service he was a reporter and then, at age 50, he realized he should have been a photographer. In the past 20 years he has been a free lance photographer and now, at age 69, he has no plans to retire since he is having too much fun. One lasting benefit from being a radio operator, for the last 40 years he has been an active amateur radio operator. Welcome back Robert and maybe you and the rest of the Doss crew can find your one missing crewmember - Elmer J. Parton, Jr.

MICHAEL C. LA BELLA - Another armament section man reporting in. He noted he had a change of address and was pleased to be receiving the newsletter. He recognized himself in the armament section photo. He notes that he may make the San Antonio reunion - let's eliminate that "may", Michael, and join your buddies that have had such a good time at the last two reunions.

HYMAN STITZER - Jack Hudson's top turret gunner sent in his questionnaire earlier last year. After the war he went to work with the garment industry in New York, got married and has two children.

The following is from Hyman's comments, "On my first mission I flew, a substitute top gunner took my position and I flew in the waist. I noticed what he had done with his flak suit. He sat on part of it and the balance around his head and neck. After that, on every mission I did the same. By noticing what he had done most likely saved my neck on one mission as the plexiglass wash hit, when I was flying in the top turret, and I ended up with a breezy turret and a souvenir of plexiglass, which I have to this day, with the black mark on it.

On another mission I flew with a different crew as flight engineer and was forced down in Yugoslavia. When I finally got back to Pantanella, my regular crew, which did not fly that day, had packed up all my gear. Boy, did I get mad at them. The day Lt. Col. Lokker got shot down I flew with Jack Hudson and saw a good man go down with his wings breaking in half."

Hyman first went to England, then left for Pantanella when the B-17 crews were reduced to nine.

IT'S A COLD WINTER - Hearing from some of you and listening to the weather reports it looks like this will be considered a severe winter. I thought some of you might recall the winter in Italy. We did not have it too cold on the ground - mostly rain and mud. We did get some snow and the photo shows our casa

(Kenneth Sutton, Van Asperen, Cooper, Russell and myself) under a blanket of fresh snow. The flight crews should remember what I believe was the coldest mission ever flown. The date was 20 January 1945 and the target was the Main Marshalling Yards at Linz, Austria. It was bitter cold at altitude and, due to clouds, an early climb to altitude was made. Group records show a -54° C. I have been told that this is where Fahrenheit and Centigrade temperatures converge. The mission began with 27 aircraft. There were four early returns. The weather cleared at the target and bombing was visual. Flak at the target was intense, accurate and heavy. The group leader said that a huge barrage of flak came up ahead of the formation just at a point where the formation was heading on their rally. It appeared from interrogation that the AAA gunners were tracking the group in front of our group and the gunners anticipated our direction of rally. We had a tail wind of 300K.

Twenty-one aircraft went over the target, but three did not drop due to malfunctions and one could not because its windshield was frosted and later he bombed Amstetten. Bomb load was 100 pound GP. The bombing altitude is not given, but if I recall it was 27,000 feet. We had to get over the 25,000 feet cumulus over the North Adriatic.

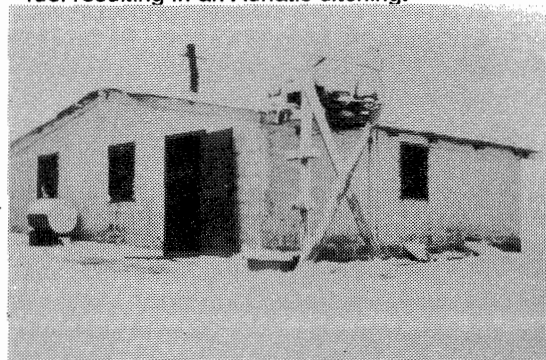
The following is taken from the record. "Some pilots blame the vapor trails for the loose wing formation and said at one point two boxes of a group ahead seemed to be lost from a group and appeared to be wandering back and forth across the course. The group leader said the vapor trails were yellowish brown color and seemed to freeze and form a solid cone behind the planes. Windows frosted up so badly that many of the bombardiers dropping on their leaders could not even see the target. Turret gunners found it necessary to scrape small areas of their glass free of frost in order to see at all.

Crews complained of the bitter cold. Some crews said they could not charge their guns because they were frozen and one aircraft reported its rudders were frozen, especially when they turned away from the sun. This made formation flying more hazardous and one pilot said he could not see the aircraft in front of him and had to depend on the vapor trails to judge the distance. Many crew members could not state where the bombs fell because their windows were frozen and most agreed that if attacked by fighters it would have been very difficult to put up an effective defense."

The bombing results were good - many hits were reported in the marshalling yard and shop area. Ten aircraft received flak damage. Seventeen finally made it back with four landing at friendly fields and two

ditching in Adriatic. One survived on one ditching and all survived on the other. From our squadron Lt. Wilcox landed at Lucera A/D and Lt. Donahue landed at Falconaire. And Donahue has a story about that landing that we'll give you later on. Our other crews were Hudson, Barnett, and Ellison. Melvin Bleiweiss (now Blye) suffered frostbitten feet and was hospitalized. Melvin visited me in the past year and still has problems with his feet as a result of the injury.

I remember this mission very well since I took the Robert Jones crew on their first mission. It was my first mission since returning from the hospital (appendectomy) and had to fly almost the entire mission because the co-pilot (Jones) could not see after we reached altitude due to the frost and heaters out. I believe I was flying number two. Robert Jones and his entire crew were lost on their next mission as a result of low fuel resulting in an Adriatic ditching.



ONE LESS MESSERSCHMITT - O. J. Cowart recently sent in an article on a recent crash of a Bf109. The Confederate Air Force in Harlingen, Texas had two flying 109's and in December an American Airlines pilot died when the Messerschmitt crashed from 500 feet just after take off. The pilot, Dick Baird, flew 283 missions in Vietnam and has logged over 20,000 hours. The crash is being investigated.

The Confederate Air Force is an organization that preserves and restores World War II aircraft and performs in air shows throughout the U.S.

BOMBARDIERS - There is an association of bombardiers, if any of you want to look up an old buddy that was a bombardier. The association is Bombardiers, Inc., Star Rt 1, Box 254, Eagle Harbor MI 49951. E. C. "Ned" Humphreys is Executive Director and they publish a newsletter called the Crosshairs.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE - A full report on the reunion plans, Pierre Kennedys story about his days as a POW, and many more reports from some of our members.

I will also have a story on the Ustachi in the next issue and would like to know if any EX POW's had any contact with them or if anyone else has any information about the Ustachi.

FROM J. MC DEVITT - "First I would like to thank you and the other men who work with you on this large and also beautiful project. If it were not for you people, I would of never known what happened to my crew members. From Pantanella News I located two former crewmen, William Tylavsky, our flight engineer and a good one, along with our nose gunner Dean Jones. I called Mrs. Jones and she informed me that he is in the Veterans Hospital and very sick. His age is 70. I am so glad to have found him and spoken to him by telephone. A prayer for him. I flew all my missions for Lt. Hurd as the top gunner. I might add we had a very terrific crew - thank God. After all these years of wondering, your devotion and hard work from you and your group has certainly paid off for me. Many many thanks for a job well done."

BILL G. POULOS - Another country heard from; Bill lives in Melbourne, Australia and works for the Boeing Company. Bill replied after receiving a newsletter and appreciated hearing from the 781st again. He expects to return to the U.S. in time for the next reunion. Along with his letter he sent a photo of a Me262 that is being restored at the aircraft factory he works at. Also included was a booklet on the 262. It is the best I have seen and will be useful for a future article. Bill was ball gunner on the Ashley crew.

SICK CALL - Dean Jones is in the Veterans Hospital. Argene Barnett had an operation after the reunion and is recovering nicely. And I understand Les Wheeler is feeling better and Jim Wray is back on the healthy list.

REUNION '88 - Reservation cards are enclosed. Send one to the Menger hotel for your hotel reservation and the other one to the squadron address. Remember these cards need only 14¢ postage. If you will not be staying at the hotel please indicate that on the card you are mailing to me. We have 200 rooms reserved for us at the Menger and expect all will be reserved by the August 14 deadline. I have been notified by the hotel that reservations are already coming in. Jack Hudson was the first to reserve! You will note the official date is September 15, but we put the 14th on the card due to the fact that so many arrive early and the hotel has to be prepared.

The Menger hotel opened in 1859 and is the oldest and most important hotel in the United States standing in it's original form. It has just been remodeled and offers the charm and ambiance of a great hotel. It is full of history - The Roosevelt Bar is where Teddy Roosevelt recruited his notorious Rough Riders. Many other historical events that we will fill you in on later. Parking is available at \$3.50 per day. Motor home information in April newsletter.

San Antonio offers a long list of attrac-

tions. The Alamo (next door), Botanical Center, Brackenridge Park, Skyride, museums, five military installations (four Air Force bases), missions, cathedral, shopping, etc. It's just a great place for a reunion. More details in later newsletters.

HISTORY BOOK -

The final chapter is being written. If you have something that you think may be of interest please submit it to Harry Carl. We have received many stories and pictures, but we know there are few more out there. We're missing some stories from the ground echelon. It doesn't have to be a hair raising tale - just the everyday happenings.

SALUTE TO VETERANS - That is the heading on a full page spread on Frank Hylla. After making note of not forgetting the date and purpose of Armistice Day it was all photos and the story of Frank's experiences during his days at Pantanella. Or, I should say his 30 June 1944 mission to Blechhammer. We'll have the full story in a later news.

And another almost full page on Jack Stallings as the result of an interview with him by the local newspaper. More on these two men later on.

THE HOLIDAY SEASON - It was a time to reflect on the past year and look forward to the coming year. Part of a letter from Pat Hendrickson (Ralph's wife) is appropriate. "This past week-end we were talking about how 1987 is coming to an end. We were also reflecting on the events and things that had happened over the past year. The most important was the reunion. To see the members of Ralph's crew after 42 years was something that words cannot express. It was very special for me because I knew them all during their combat training before going overseas." This message is repeated by many and it has been so rewarding to see the wives participate in the reunions and to enjoy reliving those trying times with their husbands.

BERT STIGBERG - Bert recommends the book "Those Who Fall" for reading enjoyment. He writes that the author, John Muirhead, was one of us and tells it just like we remember it. Bert was navigator on Barnett's crew. Thanks for the tip, Bert.

FLIMSYS - We would like to know if any more of you have copies of the mission flimsys. I believe just the pilots, bombardiers and navigators received them. They give good information on missions and will help answer a lot of questions some of you have as to who flew, what position, etc.

DUES - The board of directors voted to continue voluntary contributions and not assess dues. Those that can afford a \$1 or \$20 bill please send it to Russ Maynard, Treasurer.

LT. COLONEL LOKKERS CREW - The last survivor of Col. Lokker's crew on 20 November 1944 finally checked in. This was the Blechhammer mission that cost the life of Col. Lokker and five of his crew. Although all three of the 781st members of the crew (Lokker, Whelan and Rice) were killed, I was determined to find all survivors to complete the story on that mission. For over a year I have had a lead on Lee R. Billings, the engineer on the crew, but I just could not get contact. After getting an address I could not get a phone listing, and Lee admits to some procrastination, but he finally gave me a call. He was very happy to have been found and is writing his recollections of the events of that day. He is excited about joining us at San Antonio and hopefully he'll find some of the 783rd Squadron members he will remember since he was a member of that squadron.

THE POETS CORNER

From FLIM FLAM

We quarrel about the slightest things -
I'm all upset and harried.
We're getting on each others nerves;
It's time that we got married.

Anne - "I know the secret of popularity."
Pat - "So do I, but Mother says I mustn't."

Here lies the body
Of Pfc. Stark
He mistook the 1st Sargent
For a girl in the dark.

FROM TONOPAH TO PANTANELLA - by William A. Rachow. (Bombardier on Carl Dahl's crew). September 10, 1944 was such a long time ago, yet some of the memories of that ill-fated day could have happened only yesterday. It was a time in my life that I thought best forgotten, but since the reunion of the 781st and Carl Dahl's story of the survival of eight members of the crew, I thought it might be of some interest to put into words the happenings and experiences of the other two crew members. Frank Martinez may have a different interpretation of those events, but this is the story of how I remember them.

The following is from the diary notes that I kept of all the missions I flew. They are very sketchy. "Date, 10 Sept 44 - 4th sortie, 5th mission. Pilot, Carl Dahl - Position, Able 4. Target, Vienna Osterreichische Diesel Factory. Bomb Load, 10 500# RDX. Flak heavy, intense and accurate. Lost #1 engine over the target, flak hits through the nose and waist, rallied right and lost second engine, then a third. Flew to Yugoslavia for bail out. Mike broke his leg. Otherwise all others safe. Eight members of crew returned to Italy within 12 hours. Frank and I remained for 8 days at a British Mission. Returned 18 Sept 44. Mission time 6:55."

The above paragraph cannot really describe the events of that and subsequent days. There was pain for some, frustrations and fears for all.

Vienna was always the horror story of the 15th Air Force. The distance, route and the defense was the most, fearful for this area of the war. Since this was the first flight for this crew to this target, to me it was at first exhilarating, exciting, but it was at best fearful.

The takeoff, rendezvous and climb to altitude must have been uneventful because there is no memory, but I definitely remember the I.P. Since we were flying Able 4, I presumed the only duty I had was to determine the rate of closure with the bombsight, which would then automatically drop the bombs at the correct time.

I remember seeing the first plane going down. It must have been flying in the Able 2 position. The pilot of which I believe was named Nelson. It appeared to have taken a direct hit. (After the war and having returned to college, I ran into one of the crew members of this plane. All crew members survived and were interned for the remainder of war).

I recall the rally to the right immediately after bombs were away, but apparently it was to a heading over Weiner Neustadt (Flak Alley). It was here that the second engine gave up and we lost contact with the rest of the flight. I recall the order for a heading to the Island of Vis, but with the loss of altitude

a second request for a heading to the nearest Partisan territory. It was then that I informed Carl that I would go back to the waist to see if I could give some assistance. I recall Howard Percy with the seat of his pants removed by flak and the wires from his heated flying suit sticking out in every direction.

I don't recall how long we flew on this heading, but I do recall the firing from the right window at a Me109. To this day it is easy to remember the red prop spinner. The plane did a slow bank to the right and disappeared into the clouds. It was during this period that the third engine quit and the order came to bail out. The time must have been near 1100. Those in the waist lined up and and bailed out through the floor hatch. It was kind of eerie watching everyone disappear through the hole in the floor. After a quick



Bill Rachow

look around it was my turn and I stepped out into space.

I have no recollection of pulling the ripcord, but after a terrific jerk the canopy was above me and I was floating downward. The plane we had left was still visible doing a slow turn to the left. I could also see two other chutes, one below me and one going the opposite direction - up. It must have been that I was falling faster.

My first thought was to stop the pendulum action, because the swaying appeared to be out of control. But by pulling on opposite shrouds, this stopped. The next thought was where to land. There were two meadows below me which I could see quite plainly, one large and one small. I tried pulling the shrouds in an effort to guide the fall. I went for one meadow, and, seeing that I could not make it, tried for the other. I ended up missing them both and ended up in the forest

between the two. I hit the top of a tree, which collapsed the chute, and then went crashing to the ground. My right knee was sprained and I had lost most of the skin from my forehead, but otherwise was in good condition.

I was quite disoriented and could not remember how to take off the parachute harness, but after collecting my thoughts I was able to remove it. Then the realization came to me that I was standing in a footpath, which I started to follow - looking and listening. Absolutely no sounds. I wanted to hear some evidence that members of the crew were near. Finally I took out the pistol and fired three quick shots in hopes a rallying point could be established. I then realized that the weapon I carried and four unexpended rounds could not possibly win the war. I gave it a heave into the trees.

Within a few minutes I saw Frank Martinez coming out of the trees, and after a warm greeting, we continued along the footpath. Soon we came near a meadow and some older women and children came walking or running toward us. There was no need for introductions because they knew who we were and where we had come from.

A short time later some Partisan men arrived. They apparently knew where the plane had crashed and we indicated that we wanted to go there. They also gave no indication of the other eight in the crew or where they were. I wanted to visit the crash site to see if there were any human remains and that it also might be a rallying point. We walked another mile or so and there it was. It had crashed in a clearing and nothing was left but a pile of burning junk. I was able to distinguish only the nose wheel tire and some bomb shackles. There was no evidence that anyone had crashed with the plane. The Partisans seemed to be quite agitated and it was evident that they wanted to leave the scene immediately, so we headed for the tall timber.

The language barrier became more apparent. They could not speak English. There was no comprehension when I mentioned the words Vis, Bari, or Adriatic. Finally, they did come up with the words English and Airdrome and motioned in a north-westerly direction, so I passed out the cigarettes and off we went not knowing where or when we would get there.

Sometime later more Partisans appeared with horses and they indicated we were to ride. We mounted and, after a mile or so, I had to get off, regretfully declining the ride. My knee hurt more riding than walking as I was never much of a horseman and not adept in the saddle.

Distance was hard to estimate, but we rode and walked until about 4:00 and then stopped at a farmhouse. There were several

older men and women there, and one of the men spoke English. He had lived in Detroit at one time working in the automobile industry. He became homesick and returned to Yugoslavia in the 30's. They served us some fried eggs and a couple slices of bread, but no butter, salt or pepper. We were pretty happy for this courtesy and divided up most of the dollars from our escape packets with them. We then left and continued on until dusk. We stopped at another farmhouse and spent the night. Needless to say we had no trouble falling asleep.

Early the next morning we were up and on our way. Instead of riding horses they procured a buggy for us with two seats and a team of horses. Frank and I took the back seat and really felt we were in style. A driver and a guard sat in front. I believe that we continued traveling in a northwest direction. We stopped several times at Partisan encampments for bread and soup. By this time Frank and I had run out of cigarettes and had to start smoking the local variety. This meant cutting off thick slices from a wad of green tobacco leaves and then rolling our own from this concoction. Needless to say it was more punishment than pleasure to smoke these things. It did a good job of cleaning the lungs.

The countryside we passed through was mostly forest, but there were meadows surrounded by living fences and even some stone fences. There were few buildings or homes left intact. Mostly just shells. Whether this came from a scorched earth policy or from enemy shelling, we did not know.

Late in the afternoon we arrived at the town of Glina which was about 45 miles south of Zagreb. The first person we saw was a British Intelligence Captain. He thanked our guides, then took us under his wing for the time being. First things first, so we went to the local pub for a drink and he mooched some Philip Morris cigarettes for us. He explained the situation about the airstrip, the compound nearby, and the C-47 supply planes that flew in when it was safe and the weather good. Then they would fly wounded Partisans and Allied escapees back to Italy.

We had to walk a half mile or so to the compound and there we met a British Major, several British enlisted men, and a number of Partisans. We were handed a Red Cross packet with soap, tooth paste, tooth brush, comb and two packs of Chesterfields. We were also issued a blanket and, since Frank and I were the only Americans there, the choice of a sleeping spot in the hay mow. The first night we made acquaintance with all kinds of bedbugs, lice and other unmentionable varmints.

It was unfortunate but that night the weather socked in and remained socked in until the night of the 18th. By the time we left

over, 100 Allied escapees had been brought to the compound.

The compound was built around an open space which was approximately 200 feet on a side. There was an open well in the center around which the Partisans and British played soccer, with the dust settling in the well. Needless to say, dysentery prevailed. All of the buildings were constructed from hand hewn logs with the corners dovetailed together. A real work of art. The ground level of the building had been used for animal shelter and storage. The top level for living quarter for people and storage for hay. This is where we slept.

At some previous time the Partisans had been air dropped some water cooled 50 caliber machine guns that were packed in cosmoline in wooden crates. They did not have the least idea how they were to be assembled or operated. To keep busy Frank and I cleaned and assembled one of the guns. We test fired the gun and taught the Partisans how to operate it. We then had them dig a pit at the airstrip and placed the gun in the pit. Maybe this helped pay them back for helping us to survive.

We took a side trip one afternoon, to the prewar hot spring resort of Tunesco. It was several miles away from the compound. We scrubbed up real good in sunken tubs made of marble. On the return trip we hitched a ride with Randolph Churchill who had one of the few jeeps.

Some things that I remember about life in the compound: one day, out of the overcast came a Hawker Hurricane and landed at the airstrip. It gave us hope that a C-47 might soon arrive. And the two teen-age Yugoslav girls who helped with the meal preparation. They could easily carry two five gallon jerry cans full of water from the ground level to the second story.

The meals consisted of beef and kidney stew - the British version of C-rations, plus black bread and marmalade. The tea was a witches brew of boiling water, tea, condensed milk and sugar all together. Then after it settled, drinking what was left.

Frank and I went into Glina late one afternoon to sample a little local brew. We stayed later than expected and had to spend the night. We had been warned not to walk after dark - there were too many Russians (Ustachi) around that liked to shoot and ask questions later.

Finally, on the night of the 18th we were awakened about midnight and led down to the airstrip and there was the C-47. They had finished unloading the supplies and were loading litters of wounded Partisans. We and some other escapees were loaded next and then we were off. I recall that one of the wounded who was lying at my feet, unconscious from a bullet that went through his skull. It was then that I realized that I had no

problems. We landed at Bari after two or three hours of flying time. We were assigned to a cot and some blankets, and went to sleep.

We were awakened the next morning, showered, deloused with DDT, and had some new clothing issued. We were debriefed and then Frank and I went looking for Mike Beeson. We found him in the hospital with his leg in a cast and elevated. It was so good to see him.

That afternoon a plane from the squadron arrived to take us back to Pantanella. So, in a few minutes were back on the airstrip that we had left nine days previously. There was no welcoming party. All the other crew members who had returned were away to rest camp. It was rather a sad homecoming - no Mike and no crew.

One of the things that happened, but I can't remember how it happened, soon after landing and after meeting up with the Partisan men, I received a call on a field telephone, or maybe it was by radio, and first learned that all the crew was safe and that Mike had a broken leg.

There are a lot of unanswered questions from the time in Yugoslavia. Who were the Partisans fighting and what for? Were they fighting for Communism, or just fighting the Germans? Were they fighting the Royalist (Ustasha) and why? What would have happened if we had landed another 50 miles south of where we did? I have read of some horror stories of crew members who did.

Personally, this was the first time that I had ever put my trust in someone whom I did not know. I know that our safety was completely in their hands and I will be eternally grateful.

William Rachow went back to duty after a week at rest camp and completed his tour of duty (35 sorties vs 52 missions). After the war Bill left the service and spent 30 years in public school education.

It should be noted that after a crash landing on their third mission and bailing out over Yugoslavia on their fourth, the Dahl crew was scheduled to fly with Lt. Col. Lokker on 20 November 1944. Dahl was picked by Col. Lokker at the morning briefing because Col. Lokker got scheduled to lead the group during the night before. They went to the plane, but an engine failed to start, so Col. Lokker left the Dahl crew, took Whelan and Rice, who were lead navigators, with him and took over a crew from the 783rd - Capt. Duckworth's. That was the fateful day that Col. Lokker and crew got shot down. All three from the 781st got killed on that mission along with three from the 783rd.

USTACHI - William Rachow made mention of the Ustachi. There was not much information on these marauding Russians while we were at Pantanella. More about Ustachi in a future issue of the Pantanella News.