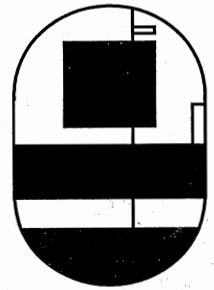




PANTANELLA NEWS



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PANTANELLA VALLEY 1997

By Frank Ambrose

One of the best things that happened to me during my tour of duty back in 1944 was that the Air Force assigned me to the 781st Bomb Squadron which was eventually based at an airfield in the Pantanella Valley of Italy.

As it turned out, the base was located very close to the little town of Matera where my father was born. Because of this close proximity, I was able to meet with relatives living there on several occasions.

On our short stay in Africa a few of us guys 'liberated' a German Staff car, which was then shipped to Italy with us as organizational equipment by painting over the Swastika, replacing it with the American Forces Star.

At the first opportunity, as soon as our base became functional and operational, four of us ventured into the surrounding countryside in our 'limousine' on a quest to locate any of my relatives that might still be around. As the town of Matera was only 40 kms., or so, from our base it didn't require a very long drive.

I was fortunate in locating my aunt within 30 minutes of locating the town. The sight of American

GIs in a large staff car visiting with locals spread rapidly through town. Suddenly cousins, friends and relatives seemed to be coming out of the woodwork. Lasting several hours, or more, the emotional greetings and introductions with the subsequent wine toast ceremony became the norm with whom it seemed everyone in town. In the meantime my aunt and the women were preparing a dinner by butchering a lamb, cooking pasta and other goodies, accompanied by wine to be served to us as a giant feast before returning to the base.

I visited my aunt on several occasions after that, each time bringing with me different GI bud-

dies to enjoy the native cooking and hospitality. Unfortunately, after the war I no longer communicated with her and soon lost track of them.

While surfing the World Wide Web I was able to locate the town of Matera in Italy which had a web site, and soon became good friends with the Webmaster, who befriended me in an effort to try to locate lost relatives, while at the same time urging me to return to Italy for a visit.

After reading Jim Althoff's account of his visit to the old base, then O.J. Cowart's story of his visit and the constant urging by my new found Cyber friend in Italy, I decided to go back to visit the 'Two Hills of Pantanella' and visit my father's birthplace once again.

Making plans, I decided first on a guided tour to visit the highlights of Italy, then renting a car for a 'safari' to try to locate the site of our former base at Pantanella.

Rome, the Vatican, the Forum, the Coliseum, Pompeii, Capri and others have not changed much since 1945. The only difference being more tourists, lots and lots of TV antennas above the ancient ruins and more restric-



A Laconia local farmer and Frank Ambrose with a piece of the runway steel matting (Marston mat).

tions.

I recall, as a photographer in '44 and '45, I had access to almost anything or everything I wanted to record. On my visit to Rome, soon after it was liberated, I went to the Vatican and brazenly informed the authorities there that I had come to photograph the Pope and within a short period of time, the photo session was arranged and completed. This time in order to photograph the Pope my closest vantage point was almost a mile away edged and shoved amid 40 or 50,000 people.

The Italian countryside is beautiful at this time of the year (June). The fortress towns at the top of the hills are surrounded by every thing lush and green, olive trees, vineyards, wheat and vegetation seem to be flourishing every where. From Rome, driving south on the Autostrade past Mt. Casino, the Abbey atop it's hill, has been completely re-

built and is an awesome site.

From Sorrento the drive to Canosa took around 2 hours, from there I headed southwest to Laconia. OJ had written me about a memorial plaque honoring the members of the US Air Force that was located in that village and I had my heart set on seeing and photographing it. Entering Laconia (about three or four structures), I approached four or five men sitting in the shade next to the local bar to ask for directions to the memorial plaque site. Informing me the plaque was no longer there, they asked if I would like to see the spot where it used to be. Expecting a long walk through the countryside, they led me from the shady side of the building, around to the sunny side of the building pointing up to a bare spot on the wall where the plaque was once attached.

The men proceeded to inform me the plaque was there up until a few years ago when, they think, it was stolen by someone in a group of Americans passing through. I had my heart set on photographing the plaque and was terribly upset and disappointed to think that another American had robbed me of this Kodak moment.

I spent 30 or 40 minutes conversing with the locals showing them

photos and maps of the base as it used to be, continually asking for help and directions. Finally one of the locals thought that his father, who was 82, might remember where Pantanella was located and motioned for me to follow him on his Moped in order to talk with him.

Unfortunately, his feeble father could only tell me that he could remember several bases scattered all over that part of Italy during the war. Conversing further, the farmer motioned for me to follow him through his farm yard, past an assortment of livestock, goats, chickens, horses and dogs, leading me around several out-buildings past a tractor to finally confront me with three or four pieces of runway matting piled against a building. At this moment, the discouragement and disappointment I had felt when I didn't find the plaque in Laconia was replaced with a heart pounding joy

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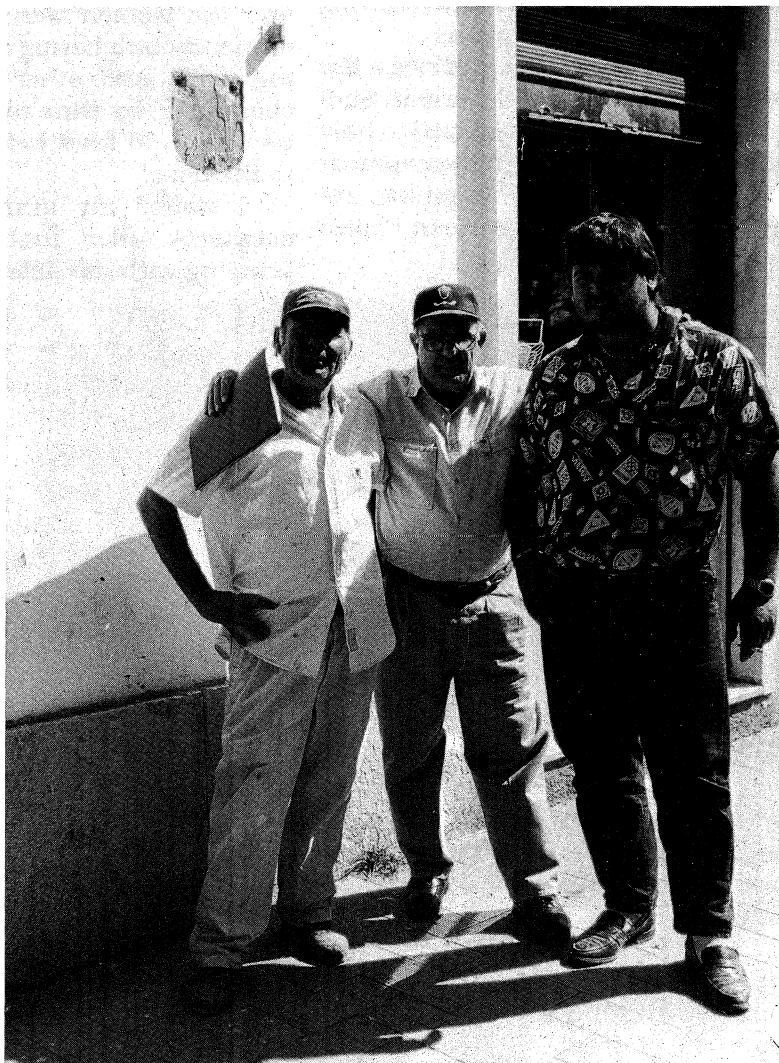
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781st BOMB SQUADRON

as part of the 465th Bomb Group, Fifteenth Air Force, flew B-24 Liberators from Pantanella Airfield located near Canosa, Italy, during WWII (1944-45). During it's 191 missions over Southern Europe it dropped thousands of tons of bombs, shot down 23 enemy aircraft (German) and received two Distinguished Unit Citations.



Note missing plaque on wall. Frank Ambrose between two local Italians.

at the site of seeing those rusted runway mats.

I had spent a lot of time laying those mats at Pantanella in order to make our field operational. As much as I hated the site and labor of laying them then, this moment was utter joy. The farmer told me he uses them when his tractor gets stuck in the field. He then motioned for me to follow him once again to the other side of the farm yard to another out-building. Inside the structure I spotted several faded olive drab GI wooden cases piled against the wall, reaching into one of the boxes he handed me a one quart can. It appeared to be olive drab and so rusty I couldn't tell what it contained. He informed me that the cans contained grease that he has been using to lubricate his farm implements for as long as he could remember. As I looked at all those faded olive drab packing cases I knew I must be very close to the base, I could almost hear the roar of the engines.

Soon the farmer's 15 year old daughter came out of the house with two of her school friends. They were all studying English and were urging each other in Italian to speak to me in English. I showed them the photos and maps of the area that I was trying to locate. I asked if they were aware of any large pipes used for irrigation, Jim Althoff wrote of them as a good land mark in trying to locate the field, however, they were unaware of any within 40 or 50 kms. Conversing further, constantly mentioning Pantanella, the farmer took my pen and started to draw a map in my note book, I was to turn right onto the SS93 Highway, go past Laconia 2km and turn right on Strot Galere. There he thought, was a valley that some old timers referred to as Pantanella. Thanking the farmer for all his help, I offered him money for his generosity which he refused and then insisted I drink a toast with his wife, daughter and friends before leaving.

Following the new map it soon became apparent as to why the young ladies and their father were unaware of the large irrigating pipes Jim had mentioned as landmarks on his return to the base. The huge

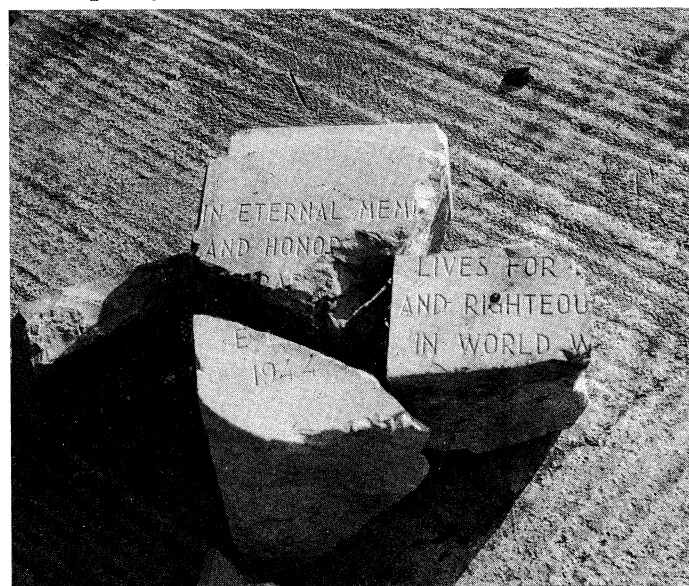
pipes lining the road had been removed and replaced by a gigantic water tower located between Canosa and the former runway. The high water tower, painted white, visible from miles around, is now a good landmark in locating the former base. Driving further along the road I noticed some buildings at the top of a hill to my left and then realized this had to be the former base. At the very first sign of a roadway, I turned left. The level roadway which led through neatly planted olive groves and vineyards, upon investigation, proved to be a roadway bisecting, what used to be, the exact center of the old runways. As the road started to climb gently and turn through what now suddenly became a wheat field between the two hills, I finally reached the summit. The former chapel and the 1945 cornerstone came into view first, then the former group CO living quarters. My heart started pounding as I knew I was there. Jumping out of the car, I ran from one familiar landmark to another, almost expecting an old familiar face to pop up. Suddenly, a feeling of nostalgia came over me and then reality. The area is pretty much as Jim and OJ described it when they were last there. Most of the original farm buildings are still there and still being used for the purpose for which they were built. The only real evidence of anything GI are the steel trusses which were erected to support the chapel roof, so out of place with the surrounding architecture. They still remain intact; however, the steel roof and bell tower have disappeared. The open-roofed former church now serves as a collection point for odds and ends of farming utensils. In a pile of rubble next to the

former chapel I was able to locate three or four broken pieces of marble that were once a memorial to our Group. Trying to piece them together, I was unable to make out the complete inscription.

Looking down into the valley between the two hills, towards where the runways once were, there is absolutely no hint that this peaceful and very beautiful valley was ever a hustling bomber base.

As I was about to leave, the caretaker came along. Since the area was posted, I explained why I was there and showed him where I had built my house. I then showed him several photos of the base and the activity around it as it once was in 1945 at the same time asking him if he could relate to anyone or thing in the photos. The only thing he recognized was the old tractor in the photo telling me he had worked on that very tractor up to 10 years ago. After I gave him several different 8x10 photos, he was so pleased to get them he invited me to his house for a glass of wine.

Driving back down, I stopped once again, at a point that I surmised to be the exact center of the



The complete plaque read as follows:

**"IN ETERNAL MEMORY
AND HONOR TO OUR COMRADES OF
THE
465TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP
(H), U.S. ARMY WHO, GAVE THEIR
LIVES FOR PEACE
AND RIGHTEOUSNESS
IN WORLD WAR II**

old iron matted runway, in order to take one last look in either direction. As I gazed up and down through endless fields of golden wheat, olive trees and green vineyards planted so neatly in rows, I tried hard to visualize the base as it once was with its assortment of hodgepodge structures and living quarters scattered randomly on the hills above. I tried hard to visualize the old matted runway and perhaps just one more time hear the roar of B-24s. Looking first to the north and then south and to finally scan the sky, all I could see was lush vegetation capped by a spacious sky, no steel runway, no tents, no tuff huts, and no B-24s. Scouring and searching the bright blue sky, there were no planes on the horizon, none were flying overhead, none were in the pattern, none were on final and none were on the ground. I strained hard to listen for the sound of engines, all I could hear was the awesome silence, punctuated now and then by chirping birds.

The runway is gone, the tents are gone, the tuff houses are gone, the B-24s are gone, the GI's are gone - the former Pantanella Base is nothing more than two gently rolling hills overlooking a lush, quiet and peaceful valley that only a few locals remember as Pantanella.

Pantanella Remembered

**By John Charlton
782nd Bomb Squadron**

Thanks for the back issues of the Pantanella News. You and the staff are doing a great service to Air Force history. Reading the three issues put me back in Italy with more realism than my own memory can do.

The list of missions you sent show me flying a mission with Frank Smith which I still can't remember. It also shows me flying with Col. Foster. I couldn't believe that one at first, either. Then my memory opened up and I got a good recall on the trip. The remarks said one aircraft dropped on the target, results unknown, but the rest of the group returned bombs to base.

I was in the left seat. I remember

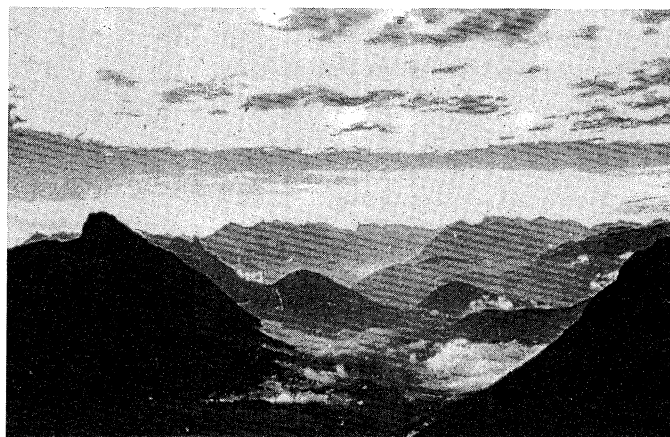
a stratus layer of clouds just at our altitude, I think 12,000 ft. The target was reportedly undefended. I don't know if it was a bridge or something else. Except for clouds at our altitude the visibility was unlimited. We were in the eastern part of the Po Valley.

I said, "Let's go down to 10,000 ft." Col Foster said, "No, head for home." We'll never know which judgement was best since we only operated one of them, but Col. Foster had more combat experience than I did and he was in command. There was a new pilot somewhere back in formation that was Polish and had a desire to inflict harm on the Germans. He was slightly more perturbed about turning for home than I was, causing him to break formation and make an individual dive bomb run on the target. I could see the whole event out of the left window, except whether he hit anything or not.

There was some discussion on radio between Col. Foster and the dive bomber, probably more at critique. The result was a court marshal, probably a missed target as well.

It all ended really well, however, they took him out of the B-24 and put him in a fighter.

John, who was operations officer for the 782nd, was located by his squadron about a year ago and has been eager to get information to help recall his days at Pantanella. He recently became a subscriber to the Pantanella News. I also sent him the mission list kept by group with details of the crews, etc. Ed.



Mieminger Mountain Range. Lt. Poole was shot down in this area. His body was found on the mountain on the left. Photo Courtesy of the rescue team via Keith Bullock.

Replies from 3 August, 1944 Mission to Friedrichshafen.

Jack Van Slyke sent a note and a copy of a mission report on our fighter cover for Mission #56 to Friedrichshafen on 3 August 1944. Their Mission report #44 follows:

17 P-51s of the 317th FS, 17 P-51s of the 318 FS, and 16 P-51s of the 319th FS took off at 0835 hours to provide P. Y. W. for B-24s attacking Manzell A/C Factory at Friedrichshafen, Germany. 5 P-51s returned early. 45 P-51s R/V at 46 45'N 11 40'E AT 1041 hours over target area from 1110 to 1120 hours. Left bombers at 1240 hours. Encounters; 3 ME-109s circling at 12,000 feet at 47 00'N - 11 25'E were engaged at 1145 hours and 1 destroyed. At 11:10 hours 14 ME-109s and 20 FW-190s came up from clouds and made pass on rear group of bombers destroying 5 B-24s. E/A were engaged in a 50 mile radius. FW 190s were firing rockets and some had belly tanks. Poor bomber formation made escort extremely difficult, all destroyed bombers being from the last group whose formation was extremely poor. 45 P-51s down at base at 1350 hours. Claims 10 - 1 - 1.

It was interesting to see their notes on the poor formation which we know attracted the fighters. The loss of 5 bombers they did not report going down must have happened before the fighters arrived. No P-51s were lost. Jack noted that his friend who gave him the report had talked with one of the German pilots shot down

and he reported 13 aircraft lost. Some of the P-51 damage claims of enemy aircraft must have been kills and increased the total. The Germans refer to it as the battle of Lermos. Ed.

**AN AIR BATTLE BETWEEN
FIGHTERS OF THE GERMAN AIR
FORCE AND BOMBERS OF THE
U.S.A.A.F. OVER LERMOOS,
TIRO, AUSTRIA.**

I have been corresponding with Keith Bullock of Tirol, Austria. He sent some information on what happened on the ground on the mission to Friedrichshafen. This first part is a report by the Parish Council of Lermoos, Tirol. Ed.

On August 3rd 1944 at 11:30 until 11:45 an air battle took place between 15 fighters of the German Air Force and a number of bombers of the U.S.A.A.F. The bombers, after having already dropped their bombs were heading for home at an approximate height of some 6,000 meters. This air battle lasted only 15 minutes but in this time eight of the American planes were heavily hit and some showed signs of smoking engines. One of the four engined bombers appeared to be totally out of control, was losing height and hung in the balance of crashing around Grubigstein and in the direction of Lermoos. At a height of about 2,000 m above the Mader

Liebenbänder the rear portion of the heavy machine broke off, fell and buried itself in the soft ground. At the same time the rear gunner was thrown out of the aircraft, his parachute failed to open and he crashed to the ground burying himself to the depth of a half meter in a meadow above and behind the Hotel 3 Mohren in Lermoos and was killed at once. The front portion of the aircraft, with the four engines and propellers thrashing and roaring, flew on over Lermoos and fell, with luck for Lermoos, about 100m from the outskirts of the village with a muffled thud in the meadows owned by Fr. Adelheid Fasser. This part of the machine burst into flames upon crashing and burnt for 48 hours. There were no survivors and nobody from Lermoos was injured in any way, but certain damage was recorded to the property of Fr. Fasser. Another bomber crashed in the woods at the back of the village of Biberweir, a short distance from Lermoos, a third machine was dashed to pieces on the Wampeten-

schrofen and a fourth crashed on the Ehrwalderalm (Brendlkaar). All four of the enemy bombers burnt out completely.

The area around Lermoos was littered with burning wreckage around noon time. This quiet picturesque area of snow capped mountains, beautiful green landscape with quiet mountain streams was changed forever. Bombers had flown over for months but never had such destruction taken place in the air above this peaceful locality.

Not a single plane crash landed, they all rained down in pieces or in whole. All were on fire or burned upon hitting the ground. Crewmen were killed as they landed in the mountains and were smashed into rocks, some were killed in crashes when they had no chance to escape and some in the planes during the flak and fighter attacks. Men were scattered over miles of all different types of terrain and some were captured in minutes due to landing in the valley. *(End of Council Report Most of the following information is from Keith bullock. Ed.)*

The Friedrichshafen bombing covered hundreds of square miles due to the number of groups of bombers and fighters, both German and American that were involved. The fact that this battle was covering ground area at about 150 miles per hour was also a factor. Not a single person was killed or injured on the ground. They also realized that the war could be very personal to them as it had come down to visit them at ground level.

In the evening of August 4th when the flames of the burning bomber outside Lermoos had subsided enough, a start was made to recover the occupants of the plane. One member of the crew lay headless near the machine and 8 more, through the help of 6 men and an ox, were literally dug and dragged out of the wreckage. They were all unrecognizably burnt. All ten members of the crew of the Lermoos crash, together with four from Biberweir, 14 in all, were buried in the Lermoos Cemetery. The ten airmen

from Lermoos and the four from Wampetenschrofen could not be identified. One airman who had attempted to parachute was dashed to pieces on landing and was found 20 minutes later in the Ringtal above Larcheneheim, as well as another who was found yet later from one of the crashed bombers, together with yet two more who were found dead from the Ehrwalderalm crash (Brendlkaar), were all buried on the spot.

Through the result of the air battle drama, the population became very restless, disturbed and confused for they had now been shown the real horror and terror of war. The search and recovery for the living and dead members of the crews of various American bombers was carried out under the leadership of Kreisleiter Hollwart and Geb. Jager Oberst Golle from Garmisch who had arrived with a troop of 50 men. 22 crew members from the 4 crashes were found dead and were buried, 16 were taken prisoner. The 16 prisoners were all taken to the Military Airfield at Kaufbeuren.

During this action 2 German fighters crashed and were splintered to pieces on landing. One pilot, who had been shot in the arm, parachuted from his aircraft and landed on the Lermooseralm and was rescued. The second fighter to go down, crashed on the Grubigstein, near the Gartnerwand, the pilot and machine burnt and it was not until August 11, 1944 that the pilot, Lieutenant Otto Pissol was found by the Shepherd Karl Sailer. This pilot was recovered by the Geb Jager Regiment 537 in Garmisch and brought to Heilbronn a/Neckar.

As conclusion to this battle, on a hot summer's day July 2nd 1946 the 14 airmen who had been buried in Lermoos were exhumed by 6 ex-Nazis under the watchful eyes of American soldiers and their remains were taken to a Soldiers Cemetery at Lothringen.

Following are interviews, eye witness reports, and other information. from Keith Bullock. Ed.

Ball gunner S/Sgt Oscar Rogers with Poole's crew that day was one of

the first to know there was trouble. Lt. Poole had stated on the intercom that they were falling behind and for Sgt. Rogers to get out of the ball turret and retract it in order to try to get some speed to stay in formation.

Sgt. Rogers remembers, "I was out of the turret and had it up and stored, but I had hurried to the urinal as I had to go real bad. While I was doing this I heard bullets tearing through the plane. I was not plugged into the intercom yet so I went to the waist window and got plugged in and spotted fighters. I could see bullets hitting the wing and then the oxygen bottles were hit. They were in a little space in the center of the fuselage, near the center of the wing. I opened the rear hatch to bail out and I noticed the waist gunner's chute had opened in the plane. The hatch slammed shut and I hit him on the back with my fist to let him know about his chute and he gathered it up in his arms. I got the hatch open again and just then a 20 mm shell hit the latch and the handle mechanism and blew it all to pieces. We both jumped out of the plane as it was a ball of fire by this time.

"I had heard that business about counting to ten before opening the chute, but I pulled it right away. Anyhow, I was falling fast and was down just after it opened. My chute was in shreds. Something, probably a shell, had hit it sometime before. I came down fast and landed in a big Hemlock tree. The chute got hung up in the top of the tree and I was hanging at the outside where the branches were too small to climb on. After struggling to get loose I got hold of some small branches, bunched them together and made a jump for the trunk of the tree. The branches were thick and it was just like climbing down a ladder to the ground. I started down the hill to a road that went east to west. I could see a gap in the mountains in the direction of the Swiss border and thought maybe I could walk there. I walked and climbed until I got where I could see nothing but snow and trees. I knew this wasn't going to work and turned back.

"I saw a truck load of Germans

come past on the road and the strangest thing, on the tail gate of that truck was a Coca Cola sign. They were just out of sight and they fired some shots up into the trees. I didn't hear any bullets in the bushes, so I guess they weren't shooting at me.

Another strange thing I saw over there was regular milk cows pulling logs. They had this cart-like thing with car wheels under it and the cows pulling it. When I first hid on the ground I spotted a woman and kid walking and picking berries in some bushes and they walked right past me.

"I had no place to go so I walked up to them to surrender. They were friendly but said they couldn't help me. They told me I could go with them and they would turn me in or I could go on alone. If I didn't I wouldn't get away. as they would have to turn me in anyway because someone might have seen them talking to me and they wouldn't have any choice but to report seeing me. The one woman said she was a German doctor and asked if I was injured. I told them I was all right.

"They took me to a small town and to a second floor office. There I was put in jail with another man. He told me there was another man being held in a building across the street

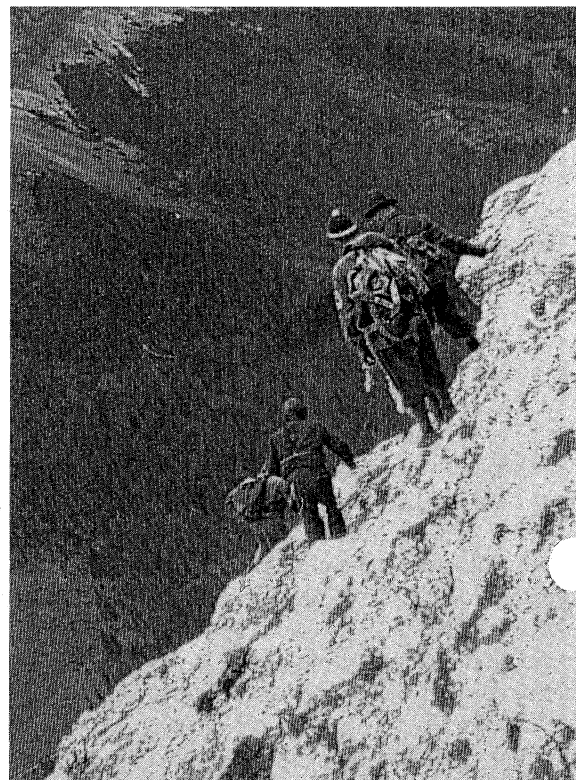
"I was hungry and thirsty and I informed them that I was an American Sergeant and they had to feed me. I finally got some "Kriegi" bread.

"The next morning we were taken out into the street and joined by the prisoner from across the street. He had some kind of hip or leg injury because he had trouble walking. I helped support him and we were taken to meet the train that would take us to Innsbruck. From there we went to Munich where the civilians wanted to hang us. When I saw the results of the bombing I could see why. We went from there to Stettin, Germany and then the train to Stalag Luft 1 at Barth.

"The train to Barth was a torture

trip in that there were 50 men to a boxcar and there wasn't enough room for all to lay down and rest, except in shifts. Food was scarce, if supplied at all, and water was non-existent. Sgt. Rogers tells of another man throwing packs of cigarettes out to some of the guards in exchange for snow balls to supplement water. The bathroom stops were few and the smell in the boxcars was nearly unbearable."

Back at the battle site all the



Climbing down with the rescued Airmen.

crew of the B-24 of Lt. Poole had bailed out with exception of the tail gunner S/Sgt Albert Hill. No intercom communication was heard from Sgt. Hill and it was believed he was killed or unconscious in the tail after the fighter attack. He would go down with the plane into the mountains.

The rest of the crew were rounded up, but Lt. Poole and S/Sgt Reents were unaccounted for.

S/Sgt Robert Salmon, who was a gunner on this ill fated plane, managed to get out with little time to spare. He was aware that the plane was in trouble and had to make a quick exit. Seconds after he bailed out he remembers hearing a big explosion which was no doubt, the plane crashing into the mountains.

Sgt. Salmon fell in his chute for only a few seconds before landing and hitting a big rock. He immediately found a badly wounded comrade, S/Sgt Andrew S. Kresnak, who was the nose gunner on the plane of Lt. Fiecoat. Sgt. Kresnak died shortly after and Sgt. Salmon wrapped him in his parachute, placed him in a nearby crevice and covered him with stones. The real war had suddenly become very personal. Sgt. Salmon was captured a short time later by the Germans.

Later in the afternoon, in viewing the mountains, a white area believed to be a parachute was spotted. A rescue team was summoned and started out the next morning to scale Hochwand, a peak about 7800 ft. high, in the Mieminger mountain range. After over six hours the rescue team reached the spot to find the body of Lt. Poole. His chute still attached and obviously had not opened before he landed in the rocky mountain side. The body was brought down and buried and a service was preformed.

While the rescue team was carrying out this rescue some movement was seen by those watching from the valley. About 1200 feet below the spot where Lt Poole was found, it looked as though another person had been located. Being late in the afternoon, another rescue would have to wait until another day.

The next day at dawn the rescue team started out once again. Leaving the small Triolean capitol town of Leutasch for the appropriately named mountain in the Alps called Hochwand, which in English means "high wall."

After many hours of climbing the rescue team got to the location and found another airman from Lt. Poole's plane. It was the nose gunner, S/Sgt Arthur Reents who was uninjured except for being cold, tired and hungry. How he managed to land on the near vertical side of the top of a mountain in this small hollow spot can only be credited to luck and someone looking out for him. It is a miracle, first that he managed to land without injury or death and then to survive so long.



S/Sgt Arthur Reents, tail gunner on Poole's crew, after rescue. It is amazing, after escaping from his plane, then spending 3 days on the mountain.

The next thing was to get him down and to do this his fear had to be overcome. Preparations were made by heaving clothing and a safety rope tied around his waist. To help overcome the fear of his descent he was given a bottle of schnapps and encouraged to drink it before starting out. The descent was made over the next hours and Sgt Reents was delivered to the authorities back at Leutasch.

Captain Jack Faiver and his crew all lost their lives when their Liberator crashed 50 meters from the Lermoos Village Church.

Capt. Pace's plane crashed in a mass of flames but the whole crew survived. Capt. Pace and his co-pilot John Allen were badly burnt about the face and hands. I have interviews with eye-witnesses who were present when John Allen was captured and taken to a farmhouse and had his wounds treated by the wife of the farmer and given something to eat and to drink.

Later about 15 of the 49 survivors from the various crashes were

assembled in the SS HQ in Innsbruck, they were told to form a line, as they did. Stan Pace, on the point of collapsing, was also in this line being supported on one side by Lt. Joe Sanford and the other side by S/Sgt Jack Bernstein. A group of SS men came into the room, immaculately dressed in black with jack boots polished so well one could see ones face in them. They completely ignored the state of Stan Pace. This was too much for Jack Bernstein, he left the line, marched up to the SS men uttered some choice words which indicated that they were no 'gentlemen,' collected a chair from behind them, brought it back to the line and sat Stan down on it, which, all this according to Joe Sanford, very much relieved Stan's breathing.

(Note see Conard Croston's story about his ordeal on this mission in Pantanella News #16).

I received information from Keith M. Bullock, Historian, in response to a letter I wrote to him. He was born in England and served as a radar/radio/direction finding operator in North Africa during WWII. He returned to England and in 1969 married a young lady from Tirol, Austria and then moved to Tirol to live. Photos from Keith Bullock. Ed.



Bringing down Lt. Poole's body.

MAIL CALL



From **Norman Hunter** (Ball Gunner on Dickey's crew). "The years go by so quickly we seem to hope and pray that the time has more years left for us.

"Every time the B-24 plane comes to Florida we go out to see it. It seems the younger people get more of a kick out of seeing it. I met a few men from my squadron. I saw a name etched on the side of the plane and said, 'I know this fellow.' The name was Duckworth. The fellow in back of us looked at me and said, 'I'll be darned, Norman Hunter.'" Of course some 50 years later they changed, but there was that feeling of remembering.

"We go to every B-24 showing and many unsung heros come out.

"Helen and I will celebrate our 55th and "Wow! never to be forgotten was our togetherness in our tent living in Italy."

Norman's wife, Helen, added a comment, "Norman just went thru a triple by pass and is doing great, what a warrior."

Norman added, "Keep sending the Pantanella News as I sure enjoy it. Doing fine after the operation. Real rough with the morphine and blood transfusions and all the hallucinations - Snow in the living room, monkeys and kids dancing, etc. I said I would rather fly 50 missions again than another operation, Ha, Ha."

From **Lewis L. Coghill** (Engineering). "As a member of the Engineering section I would like to see more news of the formal engineering section. As an enlisted man I would like more coverage of the enlisted ranks. Also would like to have coverage of where they are today. Due to the advanced age of most of the members, most are retired and it would be interesting to know how they are spending their twilight years. The newsletter is very good, but a little more information about what they are doing now would be interesting."

I agree with Lewis, but I can only

report on the members if I hear from them. I encourage all to inform us of your activities and we will pass on the information via the Pantanella News.

Lewis has responded in the past and has filled us in one of his favorite ways to keep busy is being a member of the Medinah Clown Unit with the Shriners in Chicago. Lewis' story was in Pantanella News #15. Editor.

A note from **Robert F. Smith** (Copilot on J. T. Smith crew), "I was a participant in the mission #56 to Friedrichshafen, Germany and found the July '97 Pantanella News very interesting."

A letter from **Russ Maynard**, (Pilot) "I have received phone calls and notes from buddies commenting on an article in the newsletter credited to me regarding the August 3, 1944 mission to Friedrichshafen. I was glad to hear from our "buddies." We traveled to New England in September and to Idaho the past two weeks. For whatever the reason, my copy of the Pantanella News was not in my carton of mail when I returned."

As noted elsewhere, some deliveries take up to three weeks longer than others. Ed.

A letter from **Charles Speer** (Armament), "The Armament group of the 781st is planning to attend the next squadron reunion to be held at Wright Patterson AFB in Dayton. Looking forward to seeing the whole gang again."

Dean Jones (Nose Gunner on Hurd crew), in the Holiday Spirit, "Wishing you and all our comrades the very best."

Raymond W. Smythe (Tail gunner on Wortham Crew), "You are doing and wonderful (and difficult) job and I appreciate your work very much. Although I was in the 781st for only 5 months at the end of the war, I still enjoy reading about what the others did before me. I had only 5 mission and then was sent back to the states early so that I could go to B-29 school. Luckily, the Japs quit while I was on leave at home. However, I was commissioned after college and was called back in for the Korean War. I did not stay in the Air Force but worked as an Engineer for

El Paso Natural Gas Co. and retired from there."

Frank Piteo, (Top gunner on Bilger crew). Late with my dues, Oh Well, I'm getting senile. Will write a long letter after the Holidays."

Frank is kidding. He is a Life Member yet continues to be the top supporter for the 781st Bomb Squadron. I look forward to his letter. Ed.

From **Beverly Stokes**, "The Pantanella News came yesterday and, as always, I have read it from cover to cover. I have spent the last year trying to adjust to being alone. My dear and beloved husband, Barbour C. Stokes, Navigator on Van Slyke's crew, died just over a year ago (coronary) on September 12, 1996. We had been married 46 years. I miss him so!

I didn't know Barbour during the war. We met in 1950, but I was aware, of course, of his service in the Air Force in Italy. I made an attempt to talk with him about his experiences but, at that time, he did not want to share his memories.

It wasn't until we went to the reunion in Colorado Springs that he felt free (within himself) to begin to tell me about the details of his time in the service. As the years passed we looked forward to being with the wonderful people we met at the reunions because the interaction really helped him to open up and vent some of the tragic things that he had stored in his memory. There were funny stories too - lots of those!

And then there was a turn of events: In the fall of 1995 I began working on a family history (genealogy) and as part of the outline, I pencilled in "Barbour's Participation in WWII." Little did I know that my research would end in a well documented and illustrated book of some 450 pages!

I became totally engrossed in the project. Barbour seemed to watch from a bemused distance and I spent endless hours searching for documents, pictures, etc. I went to a number of libraries and used videos to help me understand the tremendous impact that the B-24 and the 465th had on the war. Finally, in the spring of 1996 Barbour began to

help me because he was getting interested and he wanted to leave something to help his grandsons "understand my service in the Air Force." From that moment on our project became significant and it was a labor of love for both of us.

Now, of course, our project has become precious to those of us in the family who loved him when he was with us and who love him even more now.

I just talked to my son and we have agreed that we will plan for our whole family to attend the next reunion in Dayton as a tribute to Barbour.

Does anyone remember him - anyone in the 465th? I would appreciate a simple post card with a few words to add to my book. How wonderful that would be!

Thanks for being there for me and for including me among your illustrious membership. Faithfully yours, Beverly.

OK, men, if you knew Barbour how about dropping Beverly a note. Let's remember our comrades! Ed.

REUNIONS 1998

465th Bomb Group. October 10, 1998. Wright-Patterson AFB, Dayton, OH.

All squadrons and Group Headquarters personnel have been invited to join the first official 465th Bomb Group reunion. Three squadrons have already reserved hotels in Dayton for the reunion. Each squadron will handle their own registrations. They will also handle the group banquet reservations and the funds will be turned over to the group committee. Group headquarters personnel may register with the 781st as they have in the past or with any other squadron.

There will be a group program during the day and a group banquet in the evening. The group planning will be done by a committee representing the four squadrons. Further details in the April newsletter.

Along with the recognition of the **465th Bomb Group** I am pleased to announce the group will be listed on the bronze plaque at the base of the 19 foot B-24 sculpture to be placed

in the Honor Court of Air Force Academy. Three squadrons have contributed to the fund.

Individuals may also be listed as donors for a contribution of \$450 or more. Contact Neal Sorensen, B-24 Groups Memorial, Inc., 132 Peninsula Rd., Minneapolis MN 55441.

781st Bomb Squadron,

Hope Hotel, Wright-Patterson AFB, Dayton, OH, October 7 to 11, 1998. The room rates are \$50 plus tax!

The important place, the hospitality and trophy room, will be open Wednesday to Sunday whenever we are not meeting or eating. It will be the place to be with your friends from all squadrons.

Wednesday will be early registration. Thursday will be registration all day and the evening will be a catered dinner in the Air Force Museum between the planes! The Museum will be closed for the evening for our exclusive use. Shuttle bus service for those without cars.

Friday will be a short morning meeting, then lunch at the Officers Club followed by our memorial service and squadron photo. Friday night is free for crew and section dinner get-togethers.

Saturday we will be with the group meeting in the morning and banquet in the evening. More details in the April newsletter.

As the Hope Hotel does not have airport pick up we are making arrangements for a reasonably priced van service.

Our reunion in Dayton in 1987 was the largest one we ever had. We expect a great turnout for this one also.

Ken Sutton and his reunion committee are very excited about the plans for this reunion. They promise it will be the best ever!

780th Bomb Squadron, Hope Hotel, Wright Patterson AFB, Dayton, OH, October 7 to 11, 1998.

782nd Bomb Squadron

Hope Hotel, Wright Patterson AFB, Dayton, OH, October 7 to 11, 1998.

783rd Bomb Squadron

Their biennial reunion was held in 1997. No further details at this time.

Dues Time!!

Just about the time everyone is current on their dues another year rolls around. There seems to be four groups, the life members, who never have to read the "dues" article again, those who always pay a year or more ahead, those who wait for the reminder, and. . . those who want to wait until the news fails to arrive and then decide to do something about it! It sure would save a lot of time if we could get the attention of the last group! Get 98 on your label now!

I would like to point out that the dues is really a subscription to the *Pantarella News*. In fact the \$10 does not cover the current printing costs and postage. If it were not for some generous members the minimum of \$10 would have to be raised. There is a rumble that there should be a raise. It would not be retroactive so mail off your 98 dues now to O. J., Cowart, Treasurer. Thank you.

We salute our New Life Members

- 115. Melvin Blye
- 116. Argene Barnett
- 117. Harry J. Barrett
- 118. Steve Vargo
- 119. Roland J. Soucy

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

781st Bomb Squadron History Book

There have been inquiries for the purchase of the 781st history book and some have come up for sale. I have several names wanting a book, but since it has been some time I would like all who are still interested in a book to send in your name. I would also like to hear from any one who has a book for sale. This way I can match buyer with seller. The going price has been the original price, \$35 plus postage.

Address changes:

Clifford D. Derr, 200 Widnor Drive, Mount Vernon, WA 98274. Phone 360 848-9127.

James C. Boswell, PO Box 544, Snow Camp, NC 27349. Phone 910 376-6897.

Richard Swanson, 4632 Skyline Dr., Flowermound, TX 75028. Phone 972 539-1047

Alexander Szalay, 10 Pack St., Apt 9, Crosswell MI 48422.

Shirley Bovet, 918 E. Causeway Blvd, Vero Beach, FL 32963-2226.

Harvey J. Herd, (Group photo officer) 806 Canonero Circle, Midland, TX 779705. Phone 915 682-3383. Just located by Frank Ambrose!

Beverly Stokes, 4930 Ladera Sarina Drive, Del Mar, CA 92014. Phone 619 350-6055.

Bernie Badler, 1153 Brighton Circle, Petaluma, CA 94953. Phone 701 769-9665.

Jim Althoff, Area code now 650.

To all members! Check your mailing label to see that your zip code is correct. There are many zip code changes, but in many cases you will continue to receive mail on the old zip for some time. Then one day they will not deliver it and send me a notice it can't be delivered. That notice costs me \$50 and another 55¢ to send another newsletter if the postal employee gives the new zip so I can send another newsletter. Ed.

Milton Levinson sent in a photo of his license plate. Delaware is proud of it's veterans and displays it on their license plates.



PANTANELLA OR BUST

by Marcel Snyder

Do you ever relax in your favorite recliner in front of the TV with a glass of - ah - water in your right hand and the comic section of the local newspaper in the other and daydream about the good old days at Pantanella Army Air Field, from whence we won WWII, and say - "One of these days I'll have to take the little lady back there and show her just where I was..."? Better not put it off too long. Remember, that calendar clock is ticking faster every year. This may be your last opportunity to join your comrades in a return to the old air base or, should I say, what remains of the old base.

Ralph Hendrickson and I are in the process of organizing such a tour. The schedule calls for departure from the U. S. on 12 May 1998 and returning on the 25th of May. The itinerary includes Milan, Venice, Florence, Assisi, Bari, Pantanella, Sorrento, the Isle of Capri, Montecassino, Anzio Beachhead area, and Rome.

The last group to go to Pantanella about 10 years ago reported that some old fossil came out from behind the remains of the Chapel and asked why it took them so long to return. Who knows whom or what we'll see this time.

The price, which is estimated to be less than \$2,800 per person (double occupancy), will cover all costs except a few lunches; tips to drivers, tour guides, and the tour manager; and personal items. This is a steal! Don't wait until it is too late! Contact either Ralph Hendrickson at (407) 255-4932 or Marcel Snyder at (407) 365-7938 for more detailed information. Only **YOU** can make this a great trip !!!

Just reread Frank Ambros' article on the front page and you will get an idea of the thrill to return once again to Pantanella. Ed.

FOLDED WINGS

Kenneth B Braley (Bombardier on Branch crew) passed away April 7, 1995. Reported on returned newsletter.

Edgar Howlett (Communications) passed away in 1994 or 1995. Reported by Andy Getsy.

Forest Sinclair, Jr. (Personnel Clerk) passed away Oct. 5th 1997. Reported on returned newsletter.

Art Bovet, (Bombardier on W. J. Smith Crew) passed away October 30, 1997. Reported by Stan Winkowski.

William F. O'Brien (Radio Operator on John B. Kennedy crew) passed away April 15, 1996 of pulmonary fibrosis. Reported by Bill O'Brien Jr. Bill notes, "He passed away peacefully at home surrounded by his wife of 51 years, Shirley, and their 8 children. He loved golf, the beach, and his 18 grandchildren.

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

SICK CALL

John T. Patrick (Engineering) writes, "I've been in and out of the hospital since March 1, 1996 I had 5 operations and had both of my knees replaced.

I lost my wife September 14th and now living by myself."

John was crew chief on Yellow "A."

Wright-Patterson Museum gets a Beechcraft AT-10.

The only existing Beechcraft AT-10 aircraft, an advanced trainer designed in 1940-41, officially became part of the United States Air Force Museum's collection in a ceremony. Members of the Aviation Cadet Class 43-E, who trained on AT-10s and flew during World War II, attended the ceremony."

Article sent in by Jack Vassilyke. Jack also notes the museum has added an AT-9 since we had our second reunion there.

FLIM FLAM

By Al "Scoop" Nagel

Numerology:

Bonnie Rowe -88 - P.K.

John Zartman - 18. on G. C.

Vernon Burda - 4-Q. in a G.

(See end of column for answers).

Daffynition: Meteorologist - a Man who can look into a woman's eyes and predict WHETHER!

Wrong way health terms: IMPO-TENT - Distinguished, well known. G. I. SERIES - Baseball game between soldiers.

Words that mean something or other: Xmas - The "wrap" race. Sahara - Nomads land.

Frank Griffen - Thinks a Cesarean Section is a neighborhood in Rome - somewhat like Revere, Mass. where he lives in a large Italian neighborhood.

Loren Foote - He wanted to call the other day. He was going to tell me that at my age I should be thinking about the HEREAFTER. I told him I do all the time. No matter where I am - in the kitchen, upstairs, in the basement, I ask myself, Now what am I here after?

Morris Cohen

Angie , Nice little dog,
was sound as a ring
If she lived 'till spring,
She'd scratch on your carpet
and chew on your grass
She had three Bo legs,
And a reason to be class.
Her head bulged out and
Her back caved in
But she's (was) a damn good dog
For the shape she was in.

In Italy (1945) the operations officer, Major Blankenship) called a meeting of flying officers in front of operations. While he was talking, one of the dogs in the area came by and decided to lift his leg on him thinking it was a tree? Not Angie - it had to be a male.

Chucky Cheese Ferich - Note: They want some cans sent to Canosa, Italy like the ones you left behind in 1945. Frankfurters (small). Their supply is finally gone. I'm the boss of my family! I always decide to do the dishes right after my wife tells me to do it. Why does my alarm clock always go off when I'm asleep?

Tid Bits;

Bob Babcock, 780th P.R.O. Ace just returned from Kenya. Flight can cause jet lag.

I went to San Diego Wild Animal Park, Escondido, CA. No jet lag .

Answers: 88 = 88 Piano keys. 18 H. on G.C. = 18 holes on a golf course. 4 - Q in a G.= 4 quarters in a game.

Tell us about you hobby?

Do you have an interesting hobby or a special pet?

Send me you Stuff on this please.

How about the best of lists?

Newspaper headlines?

You know when you're getting old.

Do you remember?

Addicted to the internet?

Send **Flim Flam** articles to Al "Scoop" Nagel, 18601 Newland St. #61, Huntington Beach, CA 92646. Al was editor of Flim Flam at Panatella.

Editors Corner

COMING UP IN APRIL

There will be a story on Bruce Miller (Armament). I am in need of more info on the Armament Section. Also, Let's hear from someone about the daily duties of the Armament Section. Also needed are some photos. Photos with identity of the individuals is preferred.

There will be more details of the upcoming reunion along with the first reunion registration form. From correspondence and phone calls it indicates Dayton will be another winner.

I am having a problem in keeping our roster current. A lot of members move without changing their address, some have entered a hospital or rest home and some are deceased.

We have a list of volunteers from the

last reunion who indicated they would help me out. I believe the very successful method we originally used to locate our members should work in relocating some. Therefore, I would like to hear from the volunteers who will take on their state or a neighboring state. I will then send you the list of members that we have lost contact with.

If you did not volunteer at Montgomery, but would like to help out in your state please let me know.

There were more than usual calls about the past issue of the Panatella News. First, the comments were very favorable about the issue. Second was the number of complaints about not receiving them. This was the result of members who received them first then calling their "buddies" to discuss certain articles and their "buddy" had not as yet received his copy.

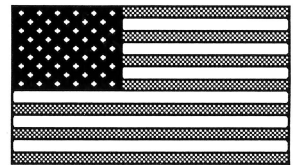
In the past year the Post Office has changed the bulk mailing from mailings by state to mailings by zip code. If there are up to ten in a zip code area they are marked differently and end up getting delivered similar to first class mail. Only about 20% go by this method. All the rest are put in a lot, sorted, and sent by the slow way by the Post Office. It takes a month after mailing by the slow way!

Now for some help on addresses. Recently I received four returns in one day - address changes sent by the Post Office. It cost us the newsletter (\$3) since the post office usually throws it away), then they charge me 50¢ to get the return notice. Then the member usually wants the newsletter and it cost 55¢ more for postage. The Post Office is getting very particular. Mail that has been going with a slight discrepancy now comes back. If you change from road to street it will come back, or use a box number and street, etc. Please notify of any type of address change.

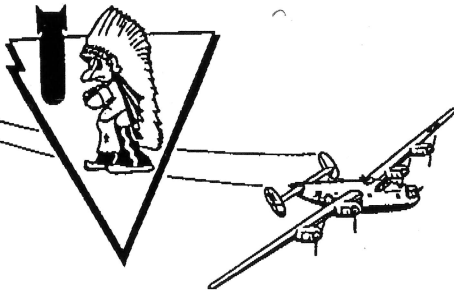
Here is an example: Burton Alper, Mail returned, Post Office noted "unable to forward." Phone discontinued. Who can find him?



On the left is the still smoking remains of the B-24 in which Capt. Faiver and his nine man crew perished after being set on fire by German fighters on Aug 3, 1944. The town of Lermoos can be seen in the background. Photo courtesy of K. Bullock.



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