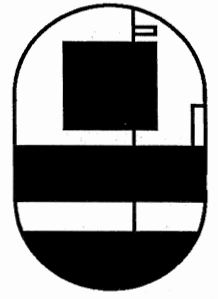




PANTANELLA NEWS



JULY 1991

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NUMBER 25

Second Part of WWII Service Record of Lt. Gen. Elmer J. Rogers, Jr., USAF Ret.

Our last issue of Pantabella News covered the movement of our group overseas, led by Colonel Rogers, and the first mission Colonel Rogers flew with the B-17 group. The following is an account of the next mission four days later.

On 1 March 1944 Colonel Rogers took off again with the 2nd Bombardment Group on a mission against the Anzio Beachhead in support of our Ground Forces. The mission was recalled due to unfavorable weather conditions.

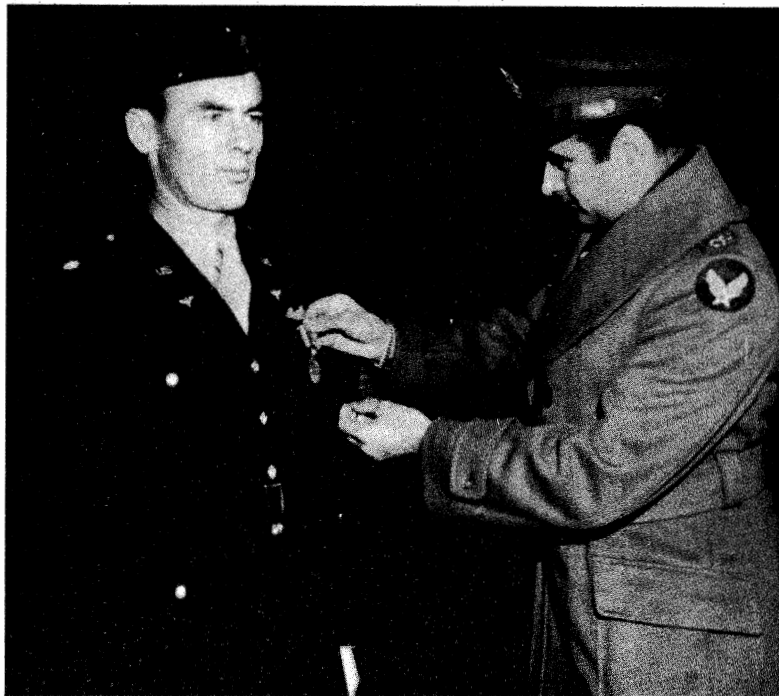
On 2 March Colonel Rogers took off a second time on the mission in support of our Ground Forces holding the Anzio Beachhead. He was flying as gunner in the nose of the deputy leader's airplane No. 2 in the first element of the first attack wave leading the Air Force.

The formation assembled in a slow spiralling climb then headed out across the Peninsula and out to sea where it turned at Ponza Island and set a course for the Beachhead flying at an altitude of 20,000 feet. Each airplane was loaded with 144 fragmentation bombs. The target was an area in which enemy ground troops were being massed for an assault against the Beachhead.

The enemy had massed a great number of 88 mm dual-purpose guns in this area and it was known that some of these guns were manned by the expert Grenadiers of the Hermann Goering Division. The anti-aircraft held its fire until the bombers were within about two minutes of the bomb release line then all hell seemed to break loose. Angry puffs of black smoke filled the sky with great density and at

the precise altitude at which the formation was flying. The airplane in which Colonel Rogers flew was struck lightly several times. Then the bombardier called, "Bombs away!" and the bombs began to fall. Almost at once the plane was struck by two direct hits. No. 4 engine was knocked out and gasoline began to stream from the wing. No. 3 engine was knocked out, oil spread in great depth across the wing and a trail of black smoke was emitted. Colonel Rogers could hear fragments of these bursts sizzling through the cockpit. One fragment cut a gash in the right knee of his flying suit. Another made a hole through the left leg of his flying suit and still another a hole across the back of his flying suit. Three more fragments lodged in his left foot wounding him painfully. Another burst struck the front of the airplane, blowing off the plexiglass nose, destroying the bombsight and knocking the bombardier backward so that he sprawled over Colonel Rogers' legs. Colonel Rogers disconnected the bombardier from his oxygen hose and his throat microphone and earphone connections. The bombardier, miraculously unhurt crawled to the escape hatch and prepared to jump.

Fortunately the airplane had not caught fire. If it had done so, parachute jumps would have ended with the crew members taken prisoner well behind the German lines. The airplane had dropped below the formation and once its bombs were finally away had turned to the left followed sharply by a concentration of shell bursts which seemed reluctant to permit the crippled plane to escape. At this moment the No. 2 "prop" ran away and the airplane was left with one engine. It vibrated severely. Speed was reduced to 135 mph and then, as the vibration persisted, to 110 mph with half flaps extended. The pilot flew due south to avoid fire from shore batteries



Col. Elmer J. Rogers, Jr. presents medal to Maj. Harold Bullock, Group Operations Officer, at McCook, Nebraska

and to miss any possible enemy fighters which might have been in the vicinity.

Colonel Rogers was unable to stand on his wounded foot. He removed his parachute and crawled without assistance through the bomb-bay to the radio compartment. It was apparent that the airplane would crash in the water. All loose equipment was thrown overboard and distress signals were sent out in a surprisingly brief time. The surface of the sea was approached and the nine members of the crew who had gathered in the

radio compartment prepared themselves for the shock of landing.

The sea was very rough and a strong wind was blowing. Because of the battle damage that had been sustained the airplane was nearly out of control and its impact with the water was very severe. In the crash Colonel Rogers sustained severe bruises, had some of the cartilage pulled away from the bone of his chest and suffered a sprained ankle. The navigator sustained a fractured skull. The shock of the landing caused the water to flow swiftly through the shattered nose of the plane, filling it with water so that it sank within twenty or thirty seconds.

One of the waist gunners was stricken with panic as soon as the ship struck. He leaped to his feet fought all others aside and made his exit through the top hatch to jump overboard and began immediately to drown. His panic spread to the others and three of the crew members began struggling in the hatch. Colonel Rogers pulled one of them down and cried sharply, "Keep calm! Go one at a time."

As the last crew member disappeared through the hatch, the ship plunged beneath the surface with Colonel Rogers still within the fuselage. He was lifted from his seat and carried through the fuselage and slowly and gently upward through the hatch by the swirl of water moving backward from the shattered nose as the airplane descended. It was like a scene from a slow motion picture as Colonel Rogers, fearful of catching on some projection, kept his arms rigidly to his side and let the current carry him out. Once free of the plane, Colonel Rogers swam toward the surface as rapidly as he could. Half way to the top he could hold his breath no longer and swallowed great quantities of salt water, strangling and choking from it. He was about to cease his struggling as consciousness faded when a glimmer of light from above gave him courage to swim with his last remaining strength.

When he reached the surface the sea was too rough to permit him to

pause and inflate his life belt. Burdened as he was with a heavy flying suit, boots, parachute harness and "Mae West," Colonel Rogers swam to one of the life rafts and held to the edge of it for four or five minutes until he could summon strength to clamber aboard. Nine members of the crew eventually got into the life rafts which, at Colonel Rogers' directions were tied together and the oars fitted for paddling. The gunner who had left first from the plane was very evidently drowning in spite of the life belt which kept him afloat. The copilot, Lt. Nabors, more lightly clad than the others and having had experience in civilian life as a life guard, took two "Mae Wests" and attempted to swim to the rescue of the gunner. The remainder of the crew attempted to paddle the life rafts in the direction of Nabors and the gunner but were unable to make progress against the strong wind and high waves. At the end of an hour these efforts had to be abandoned because of their most apparent futility. By this time Nabors and gunner had long been out of sight and out of earshot. The rafts were sixty-five miles at sea and about fifteen miles from Ponza Island. Colonel Rogers directed the crew to fasten a sail and the rafts began to move down wind at approximately 3 mph in the hope that a landing could be made at Ponza Island and a search initiated for the two crew members still in their life vests.

The airplane had been shot down at 0820 and had landed in the water at about 0830. At about 1000 several members of the crew leaped up and began to shout and wave white scarfs. Colonel Rogers asked what the matter was and was informed that an airplane was approaching from the south. He warned the crew to lie down in the rafts until the airplane could be identified. In a few minutes he exclaimed, "It's a Dornier 217!" This proved to be correct as the airplane flying about thirty feet off the water passed within two hundred yards of the life rafts without apparently being aware of their presence.

By now Colonel Rogers was suffering acutely from his wounded

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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 WW11 (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.

foot. Friendly airplanes had come close to the rafts but never close enough to sight them. At 1300 a Wellington was observed flying in a direction which would bring it close to the rafts. Colonel Rogers directed one of the crew members to prepare a parachute flare pistol. He waited until in his judgement the rafts were in the field of vision of the pilot and co-pilot and then directed that the flare be fired. The Wellington circled and approached a second time. A second flare was fired and the Wellington marked the position of the rafts with a smoke marker. It then flew away and circled over an air-Sea Rescue Launch. It returned once more to drop a second smoke marker, then sped away after a fleeting wave from one of the windows.

At 1330 the crew, in a nearly exhausted condition, was taken aboard the Air-Sea Rescue Launch. Despite his wound, Colonel Rogers insisted that the launch proceed to the scene of the crash and initiate a search for the two lost crew members. At 1500 the British destroyer Hambledon arrived on the scene, its Commander taking over the responsibility of the search and organizing it with additional vessels. Colonel Rogers was taken

tained. Although he had not eaten since five o'clock, Colonel Rogers could take no nourishment since the motion of the boat induced nausea and caused him to vomit the large quantities of salt water he had swallowed previously.

At 1700 the destroyer found the gunner dead, still floating in his "Mae West." He had drowned in his life belt. He was taken aboard the destroyer where artificial respiration was administered for five hours at which time the Captain consulted with Colonel Rogers and requested his permission to abandon efforts at resuscitation. There being no alternative, Colonel Rogers agreed. An empty life vest had also been found but there was no sign of Lt. Nabors. As darkness fell the search had to be abandoned. Lt. Nabors subse-

of broken bones, and the cleaning out and suturing of the wound on the bottom of his foot. In addition to being hospitalized for a period of 45 days, Colonel Rogers spend 30 days convalescing from his wound.

Colonel Rogers was awarded the Silver Star for bravery and gallantry in action, disregarding entirely his own painful condition in an effort to safeguard the lives of his fellow crew members.

This record from the Archives shows what a great leader we had for our group and is the reason our trained air echelon and ground echelon carried on to be an outstanding organization with a combat record we all can be proud of.

The next Pantanella News will have Gen. Rogers outstanding military carrer from WWII until his retirement after 40 years of service.

The following article appeared in the news recently about a mass grave found in Yugoslavia. Since the area brings back memories to many of you I thought you would be interested in this in case you have not seen it.

ZAGREB, Yugoslavia -
A mass grave discovered last week in northern Yugoslavia may contain the remains of 40,000 people executed by victorious Communists in 1945, a newspaper re-

ported Tuesday.

Most appear to have been Ustasha (or Ustachi) soldiers of the defeated Nazi puppet state of Croatia, Vjesnik said.

The victims apparently were executed after surrendering to Communist partisans or being deported to Yugoslavia by the Western allies from Austria, where many had sought refuge at the end of World War II.

The Ustashas were an elite, SS-type military unit accused of murdering hundreds of thousands of Jews, Serbs, and Gypsies after the so-called independent State of Croatia was created under German auspices in 1941.



Col. Rogers at McCook, Nebraska. Capt. Burton Andrus on the right, the other officer is not identified

aboard the destroyer for medical attention. The surgeon on the destroyer removed two large pieces of shrapnel through an incision he made in the bottom of the foot. Colonel Rogers writhed with pain and had to be held down upon the table since this surgery was accomplished with a local anesthetic that appeared to be almost ineffective. The removal of the shrapnel fragments relieved considerably the pain in the wounded foot and permitted it to bleed rather freely, thus perhaps reducing the chance for infection. Additional surgery was going to be required since a number of the toes were adhering to the foot by fragments of flesh and it was estimated that compound fractures had been sus-

sequently was awarded the Soldiers Medal posthumously.

The destroyer had been patrolling for submarines and had paused a number of times after taking Colonel Rogers aboard to destroy by rifle fire floating mines discovered in the area. Late in the evening the Captain of the destroyer was ordered to Naples so that Colonel Rogers might be hospitalized. The vessel arrived at midnight in the middle of an air raid during which one enemy airplane was shot down in flames to fall in the harbor. He was hospitalized at one o'clock the next morning and was operated upon at 0930 o'clock, suffering the amputation of a number of toes in addition to the removal

COMING IN ON A WING AND A PRAYER

by Walter Sutton

My most memorable mission was one that we got the most "shot up" of any, and I would like to see if other members of the squadron remember it. If they were on it, I'm sure they do.

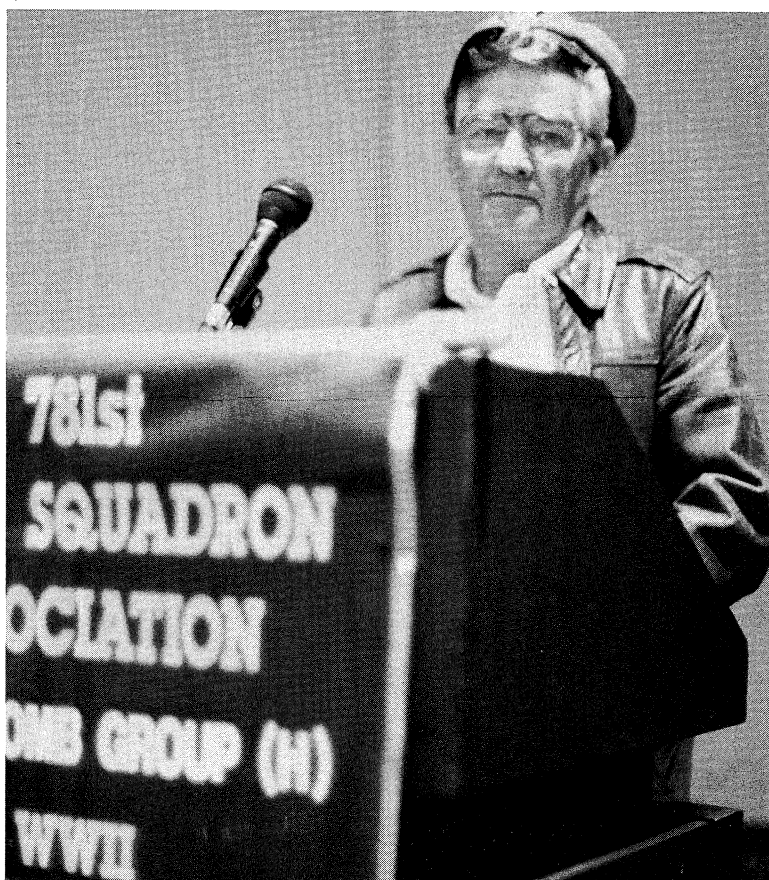
My recollection is that on 12 July 1944 we were leading the whole 15th Air Force and the target was the marshalling yards at Nimes, France. It was supposed to be a "milk run" and a lot of "rank" from wing came over to fly with us. Woody (William Wood, Navigator) thinks there were about eight of them among various planes in the flight. On our plane we had Col. Seeds flying as co-pilot for Major Lokker. The rest were Woody as navigator, Tom Arthur, another navigator, doing pilotage in the nose turret, and the model crew gunners, engineer and radio operator.

Over Southern France, before we got to the target, we were jumped by Herman Goering's Yellow-Nose

Squadron of Me109s. They made quite a few passes at us and I thought we were goners as I was sure they wanted to knock down the lead plane. Ironically, they missed us, but shot down our wing plane - the deputy lead.

Not long after the fighters left us we were over the target where we received very heavy and accurate flak. I was knocked off the bomb sight, but got back over it in time to

make a good run. We had two engines shot out on the same side by the flak and left the formation to get home as best as we could. Harold Straughan remembers Major Lokker asking Woody for distance and direction to Switzerland and the same for Corsica. We decided to try for Corsica and I remember that Lokker couldn't hold the plane straight and level because of the two engines out on the same side. He had Col. Seeds help him straighten it up and then put it on automatic pilot. The other two engines continued to run well and when we were close to Corsica, we decided to try for home.



Walter Sutton, Squadron Bombardier, giving the bombardiers briefing at the Waltham Reunion.

For some reason, I was sitting on the flight deck behind and between Major Lokker and the co-pilot and I remember when we got to the base, we were making a straight-in approach and just before touch-down the other two engines quit and we made a dead-stick landing!!

As I recall, Major Lokker got the two engines started again after landing and we taxied to our ramp. Woody remembers the wing com-

mand car came around and picked up all the wing personnel. Woody said they didn't even say "thank you" for the ride. Woody also remembers we counted over 350 holes in our plane after landing.

Group records show it was a maximum effort with 34 aircraft hitting the target. Excellent bombing with many hits in the marshalling yard, on rolling stock, and on repair shops. Ten German aircraft were shot down, two probables and two damaged. One group B-24 was lost.

Thanks for your story Walt. Maybe we'll jog some others memories on this mission. Other crews flying were Lts. R. J. Smith, Doyle, Shetterly, Eaton, MacFarlane, Wheeler, Van Slyke, Tipton, and Siefert.

OUR MEN AND OUR PLANES

We have made an effort to find all our men and have been very successful. Recently there has been some interest in our planes and what happened to them. We have a partial listing of the plane numbers, letter designation, name, crew's name that flew the plane to Pantanella, and some with the ground echelon crew members that maintained the airplane.

We would like to receive more information about our planes and I would like to see some response from the crews that maintained the planes. In some cases I believe crews had only one plane during the entire time. Others had three or four. Can we hear from some of you that have information regarding your planes name, letter, or number? Also, how long it was at Pantanella and whether it was lost in combat, scrapped or flown back to the U.S. In the next newsletter we will publish the updated list.

In the last newsletter I indicated there would be a story on **Chief Jo Jon** and **Geogia Wolf**, but not enough information was received for a complete story. I did receive one from Milt Levinson. If everyone could respond the way Milt does we would have a newsletter twice as big! Here is Milt's story.

"November 1, 1944, Milton Levinson flies his first combat mission as a nose gunner!

"We were awakened in the early morning hours to prepare for our mission. After dressing, we made our way into the mess hall which was crowded with many other crewmen. Breakfast was the usual green scrambled eggs with spam, bread and lots of coffee.

"We then headed to a building which was a former wine cellar for a briefing on the target for today. It was a town near Vienna. We next headed to a building where we were issued our combat gear that consisted of flak vests, helmets, and electric flying suits. Trucks then took us to our assigned ships where we prepared ourselves for the planned mission.

"We took off in boxes of seven and assembled into groups over Spinazzola, climbed on course of 3 degrees N over the Adriatic towards Yugoslavia. We were then over enemy territory. The temperature dropped quickly in my turret and I was totally unprepared. I hunched over the gun yoke, beating my hands against my knees to increase my circulation. My left gun had jammed as I charged it during the test firing!

"As we approached our target, Graz Marshalling Yards in Austria, the first flak bursts appeared directly in front of me. It came in bursts of eight, repeatedly. I was scared, to say the least. The visibility was bad and we passed the target up for the secondary target. Flak was high when we hit the secondary. Formations had scattered and we were the only box to drop bombs on this target. Coming off the target I realized we were out of the flak and headed home! Fear turned to cheer. The front of my turret froze up due to ice clouds and I could see nothing. This cold air was entering from some small opening. Frost formed on my eyebrows and eyelashes. I could feel my eyelids starting to freeze shut! I kept myself from blinking as long as possible. Gradually the air warmed and my visibility returned.

"Just before we reached the Adriatic, six black fighters were spotted. The tension mounted rapidly. We

spotted a P-38 that appeared from nowhere. It stayed with us until we actually sighted the Adriatic Sea. Once again the world was my oyster.

"I was rudely awakened by my happy state of mind by a cry of "Fire" over the interphone. I quickly removed my interphone connections, oxygen mask and lifted myself out of my small nose turret. I hooked on my chute and looked out the window. Number one engine had been feathered. I plugged in my interphone connection and found out that our situation was bad. Number two engine was leaking oil and about to be cut out. I positioned myself near the escape hatch awaiting instructions.

"About that time the navigator came crawling nonchalantly by through the passageway that led from the flight deck to the nose. When he spotted me with my chute on, his eyes opened to the size of saucers and his mouth dropped. I quickly explained the problem to him and then he plugged in his intercom to confirm what had happened. We slowly limped across the Adriatic Sea. Just prior to landing the pilot had to cut off the fuel to number two engine. We landed safely.

"The name of this B-24 was the "Gray Wolf" and this was the last combat mission that it was used for, as it was converted into a cargo ship. This was the end of the first combat mission for Milt Levinson from Philadelphia, Pa. Time 6 hours 55 minutes."

The information came from Milts diary and had entered Gray Wolf instead of Geogia Wolf. And our briefing room was not a wine cellar.

DAVIS-MONTHAN

Byron Thompson has a winter home in Tucson and recently sent in two newspaper articles. One was the arrival of *All American* on April 22 on it's way to the West Coast and the other was an article on the history of Davis-Monthan Field in Tucson. Since it was the base where the 465th Bomb Group began, and some of us took our crew training there, I thought it would be interesting to hear about some of it's his-

tory.

The civilian field was dedicated by Charles A. Lindbergh in 1927 before his solo flight from New York to Paris. It was officially named Davis-Monthan Field December 1, 1941. The field was named after Lt. Samuel H. Davis and Lt. Oscar Monthan, two Tucson men who were killed in military air accidents in the early 20's.

One of the first military pilots to land at Davis-Monthan was Lt. Jimmy Doolittle. The Army began using the field in 1940 and it was put on war footing within 12 hours of the Pearl Harbor attack. It became the home of the 39th bombardment group of the 4th Air Force and its mission was to train crews for the B-18 Bolo, the B-24, and later the B-29s.

After the war, activities came to a standstill until May 1946, when SAC moved in it's 40th and 44th Bombardment Groups with B-29s. In 1953 they converted to B-47 bombers.

Davis-Monthan continued to be an active base including missiles, the Titan II. By 1967 it was the second-busiest military airfield in the world during this Vietnam war period. Later U-2s, F-4s, A-7Ds and A10As were a part of the field. It also served as a storage base for excess or obsolete aircraft.

Recently it was on the hit list for closure, but it was reversed and it now has been recommended to be the 12th Air Force headquarters which will move from Bergstrom Air Force Base in Texas.

TIPTON CREW STORIES AND REMEMBRANCES REQUESTED

A writer, P. J. LaFerriere, has been engaged by the Tipton crew to write a book on the Tipton crew. It will encompass a great deal about the 781st Bomb Squadron also, so anyone who knew the Tipton crew is asked to write what you remember to P. J. LaFerriere. You can mail the information to P. J. LaFerriere, 5756 S. E. Viewcrest Dr., Milwaukie, OR 97267, or to our association address.

MAIL CALL



Ray Tyler (Intelligence Officer) sent in some roster corrections. He noted two group men should be listed under Folded Wings; Don Stratton and Charles Harding. Also, Maj. Russell Barnhart was Group Flight Surgeon and, another man not on the roster, Eugene Swartz, served in the Group code room before he was transferred to Bari.

Thomas Scalese Sr. (Tanenbaum Radio Operator) sends a note with his dues that he enjoys reading the *Pantanella News* although he doesn't remember too much about Pantanella. He was there only two or three weeks before he was shot down on his first mission. All in all it was some great experience, he notes.

From **Robert F. Arnold** (Engineering), "I am interested in my outfit and wish I was able to go to the reunions, at least one. I hope the squadron will not forget me as I will never forget the squadron. Thank you and a successful and joyful reunion in '92.

An early bird, **Vincent Beeson** (Martz Engineer), writes to O. J. Cowart, "I am off to work at the golf course. It is 5:30 AM. Thanks again for all the good work you have done."

And **Dean Jones** (Hurd Nose Gunner) writes, "I am fighting cancer - don't know which is worst, cancer or going over Ploesti."

Norman Stenerson (Maccani Tail Gunner) writes to O. J., "You officers of the Association are doing one hell of a job. I'm sure you're appreciated by everyone in the 781st. I enjoy reading the *Pantanella News* very much. I didn't make the last reunion, but hope to make the one next year in Omaha."

Also from Maccani crew, Ball Gunner **Harry Barrett**, reports he

saw Mac (Maccani) in Florida this winter and enjoyed the warm weather and fishing. He expects to make the reunion in '92

Dick Krekel notes that he had the rear view from Larry Brenneman's plane. He just returned to Milwaukee from his winter in south Texas. He said it is always a treat to see the *Pantanella News* in his mail box because it is so interesting and informative.

Mrs. Melvin Fulkerson writes that Melvin was on the crew that went overseas on the "Pleasure Bent." He thinks of it as a number one plane piloted by a number one pilot, Lewis M. Roberts.

Paul "Hoot" Hoosier included a note with his dues to O. J. Cowart, "I'm still alive and well. If I owe you more than this let me know. Living here I lose track of days let alone dues from year to year." *It's always good to hear from Hoot from his Alaskan hideaway.*

Kerry Myers (Albert "Shack" Myers son) sent in dues to O. J. Cowart and noted, "Enclosed is my check for payment of dues for myself and my mother. The remaining can be used at your discretion for the dues of a "strapped" comrade, or placed in the general fund of the Association.

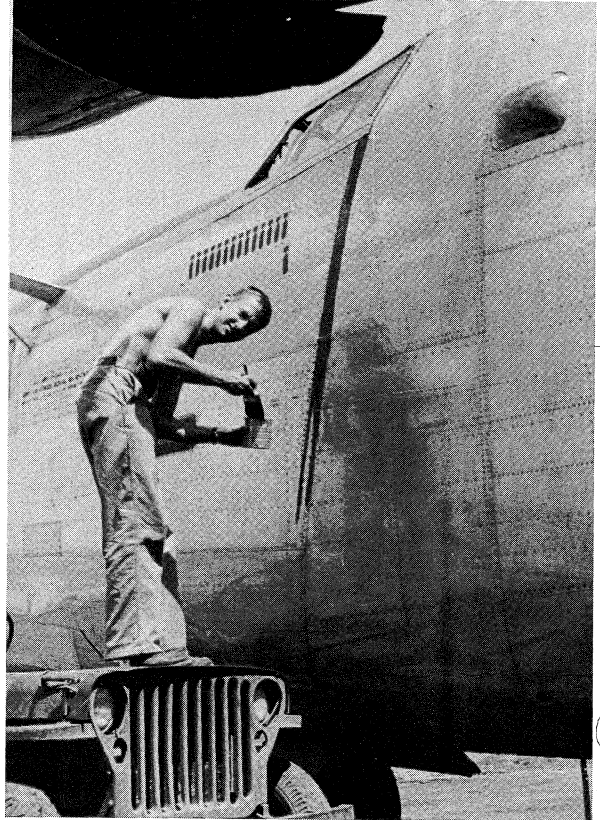
From **Vance Hutsell** (Engineering), "I have not been to any of the reunions as there have not been many of the fellows I worked with. I thought I would more or less be by myself, but I am going to try and attend the next reunion in Omaha.

My wife, Helen, passed away April 20, 1988. I still remember several of the fellows, Frank Ambrose hasn't changed much, looks like he did when we were in Italy. I have seen James O'Neal and James McNabb in the last two years.

I have several photos of the the fellows including the crew of Charles Kramer on "Super Natural" and

some photos of refueling unit which was under James McNabb. If you would like these photos please let me know.

Jack Van Slyke (Pilot) sent this note in response to my note to him about his airplane. "Hell's Belle II was Yellow K, but I do not remember the



number. It also had a wide red strip around the outside of the fuselage (see photo). It did stay with the squadron. Could this be the "Yellow K" that Ben Donahue wrote about in the October 1989 issue on Page 9?

"Two good features it did have was a cushioned bench on the left side of the flight deck and hot air from large ducts overhead. Warmest B-24 I ever flew."

FLIM FLAM TIME

BACK IN THE OVERSEAS USA-

A beautiful girl, (hats off)- who had been warned by her mother about MEN (4F's and men either too young or too old), got a job as a secretary to a loan shark. Her boss was also a newcomer and in the midst of the days dictation he asked the girl whether she 'retires' a loan?

Quickly she demurely replied: "No, I sleep with mama."

INCREDIBLE JOURNEY

By O. J. Cowart, Jr.

After 45 years, a billion dollars worth of memories is the only way to describe the flight from Galveston, Texas to Scottsdale, Arizona in the Collings beautifully restored B-24J *All American*.

After completing engine change at Galveston on Friday afternoon, 18 April 1991, a test hop indicated a bad gasket in prop regulator (governor) in the new engine. A heavy rain delayed installing a new gasket, after which pilot Joe Coleman said it was a go. At 8 o'clock, just before dark, the *All American* started its first leg of the journey from Galveston to El Paso. The pilot was Joe Coleman, and co-pilot was Craig McBurney.

We arrived in El Paso at 12:30 at night, checked into a motel, went to a restaurant for a midnight super, and then to bed after 2:30 AM. Take off was scheduled for 7:00 the next morning. After refueling and a walk around check, take-off was at 9:00. Arrival at Scottsdale was at noon where a very large crowd was waiting. *All American* left Scottsdale for Phoenix at 4:00 PM. Everyone except Joe Coleman and Craig McBurney and Mike Ritter went to Phoenix Airport for a commercial flight back to Houston. On the Galveston to El Paso, and El Paso to Scottsdale legs, I was permitted to co-pilot on part of the flights. At night from the cockpit, only things visible were lighted gauges on the beautifully restored instrument panel and the cherry-red turbochargers on the engine exhausts. Everything is as nearly original as possible. However, there were no throat mikes and the intercom system has been improved by the small mikes added to the headphones. Outside, there was a beautiful moon shining. It is much more interesting during daylight with the mountains and irrigated patches of color in the countryside.

Going through the bomb bay catwalk, my leather jacket hung up on the bomb racks and I spent about 5 minutes trying to get loose. At the

time, the bomb bay lights were not on and I could not see. Due to the great noise and darkness, it was impossible to signal for help. Bomb-bay doors were not open; boy, would that have been exciting. (See article about Martinez, crewman in Pantanella news last issue!) Later, bomb bay lights were turned on; too late to help in my predicament in the dark. Flying in various positions (tail turret, ball turret, waist guns, top turret, radio, etc.) gives one time to reflect on what it was like on a bombing mission during the big war.

The noise of those four big engines was incredible and was in stark contrast to the quiet and vibration free comfort of a modern pressurized jet that we have become so accustomed to. At night, it was cold, cold, and there were many places for the air to come in and greet you. Pressurized and air-conditioned, it was not! After moving around, I was huffing and puffing (not my normal style) and then I remembered that we were at 8500 feet altitude without oxygen. I then tended to stay put, adjust to the cold, and move around less.

In Scottsdale, Arizona I met John Zartman, Jim Kienitz (who informed me his wife had died recently), and Jim Debevec. Debevec saw Kienitz and myself with our 781st hats on, and said, "I was in the 781st." He had not previously been located, so I sent Jim Althoff his name and address so we have one more located.

At the top of my wish list is that all crew members of the Pantanella Bombers could take a refresher flight in the Collings B-24 *All American*. During the war, such a flight would probably bring back too many sad and frightening memories; but after 45 years, it's an incredible journey.

O. J. Cowart took some still video photos, but time was too short to transfer them for the Pantanella News. They will appear in a future issue. And O. J. will have another story about his flight in an A-26.

ALL AMERICAN COMES TO TOWN

Following the barnstorming tour through Texas, and Arizona that O. J. Cowart, Jr., talked about *All American* arrived in California. I was asked to help in making arrangements for its arrival in the Northern California area.

For the first stop on May 12 Concord was chosen and Dave Patterson from the 2nd Division of the Eight Air Force handled the arrangements for a very successful two day stop. For the next stop Oakland was chosen since San Francisco Airport turned us down. For this leg of the flight I had a dream to be aboard *All American* for a flight over San Francisco and the Golden Gate Bridge accompanied by an escort. I called upon friends in the Confederate Air Force to help on the escort. Other plans were made so that the flight could be made considering the heavy traffic in the area and FAA regulations.

The day, Tuesday, May 14th arrived, and even though all plans were set I still could not believe it would all go as scheduled. I got a flight into Concord in a Cessna 320 which was scheduled as a photo plane. When we arrived most of the war birds were already there, six helicopters were buzzing around, and there was a huge crowd viewing the *All American* on a beautiful day. A very exciting scene to say the least.

The *All American* crew called for a briefing of all pilots of the planes in the flight. The flight consisted of the B-24, a P-51, a TBM Avenger, two AT-6s, a T-28 and the Cessna photo plane. A second P-51 was unable to make the flight.

By the scheduled 3 o'clock departure the crowd was clear of *All American*, engines were started and we were on our way. After a low pass after take-off the other planes joined in the flight and we proceeded over San Francisco Bay, to the Golden Gate, out over the Pacific, and back across San Francisco. We spent 30 minutes or more circling over San Francisco and the Golden Gate for photos, then across the bay for some low flying in the Oakland area.



By the time we made the low pass over Oakland Airport the San Francisco area knew there were some WWII airplanes in the air.

A large crowd was waiting for our arrival and a very successful stop at Oakland. After two days it was off to San Jose. After a low flight and low passes we landed at San Jose to one of the largest crowds ever to see *All American*. The two days there were record breakers with three hour lines waiting to get aboard.

From here it was on to Sacramento's McClellan Field. We got delayed and arrived late, but the following two days were very well attended.

From here *All American* was on it's way to Portland and eastward, and I decided that after six long days with the plane I would take a rest.

The 781st men again showed their support for *All American* by going all the way in helping out. During my original airport contacts Ben Donahue assisted and then took charge of San Jose. Other men that did a super job in the San Francisco Area were Bernie Badler and Curt Reed. In Sacramento Dale Samuelson and Carl Dahl handled the arrangements for *All American*, with assistance from Calvert Crawford and Eugene Weiss. Two other 465th men did an outstanding

job - Al Honey from the 783rd and Bob Bleier, President of the 780th.

O. J. Cowart said it all, "to be aboard *All American* is an incredible journey." I had been aboard several times before, but never as involved with the crowds and emotions as this time. Many memories from a wonderful visit by *All American* and it's great crew.

REUNION '92 TO BE HELD AT OMAHA, NE

Sept. 10-13, 1992, is the date and the beautiful Marriott Hotel is the site for our '92 reunion. It is easy to get to and has plenty of free parking. Across the street is a major shopping center. And loads of restaurants nearby. Everything to make '92 another great reunion.

Plans call for a visit to SAC Headquarters at Offutt Air Force Base to visit their underground facilities. Also a museum nearby with lots of aircraft. And we will have a lot of activity at our hotel and some surprises as usual.

So plan now to attend the '92 reunion. Relive some of your days at Pantanella with your WWII comrades.

MYSTERY SOLVED

Some of you will remember the video on the Althoff crew shown at an earlier reunion. The WWII movies were taken by Leonard Goldstein, Althoff Radio Operator, then several years ago the movies were transferred to video. I have been asked how the film was saved all these years and how did Leonard have the film since he was shot down and taken POW. I would like to share the answers with you.

On our way to Europe in August 1944 we (Althoff Crew) picked up a new B-24 in Topeka, Kansas and left for Italy via the Azore Island /Africa route. During the trip over Leonard Goldstein was observed frequently panning shots with his movie camera.

We arrived at Pantanella late in August and by October 13th the crew was scheduled for rest camp at Capri. Since I had spent a week in the hospital I had fewer missions and I was not scheduled to go along. Late on the night of the 12th Goldstein, along with tail gunner Pierre J. J. Kennedy, was removed from rest camp orders and assigned to fill in on the Lovey crew for the mission to Blechhammer. As usual the tar-

get took it's toll and Goldstein and Kennedy went down with the Lovey crew (Lovey and Morse were killed). Since I had assumed my two crew members were basking on the Isle of Capri I did not check on who were on the downed crews. It was late that evening when I was notified of my missing two crewman. I immediately went to their tent knowing Goldstein's camera may be there, or at least some film. The personal effects had been removed and I thought that ended any chance of saving the film.

After Kennedy located Goldstein several years ago, I called Goldstein to inquire if by chance any of the film was sent home from Italy. He seemed uncertain at the time, but several weeks later it arrived at my home. I then had it transferred to video. Many times I thought, "How did Goldstein get the film back to the U. S.?" Finally, last year I thought I'll just call him and find out.

When Goldstein received the change in orders 12 October 1944 to fly instead of going to rest camp he gave the film and camera to the other crew members to take to Capri. He assumed he would return from his mission and go to Capri the following day. Obviously he did not show up at Capri, so the crew brought the film and camera back, and finding Goldstein MIA (Later POW), they turned it in.

After the war Goldstein contacted the Army about his missing items and he received the camera and film!!



"PRO", THE MASCOT OF BRANCH CREW ENLISTED MEN.

Bernie Badler recently came across the photo of Pro and thought some of the men would remember him. Bernie related the story about the Branch enlisted men picking up Pro at a pro station in Tunis. When Pantanella was ready for our planes Pro came along and rode in the cockpit on the floor between Rae Branch and Bernie Badler. Bernie relates that Pro did not enjoy the flight.

Pro lived with the men in their tent and when they would go on a

mission he would lie in front of the tent until they returned.

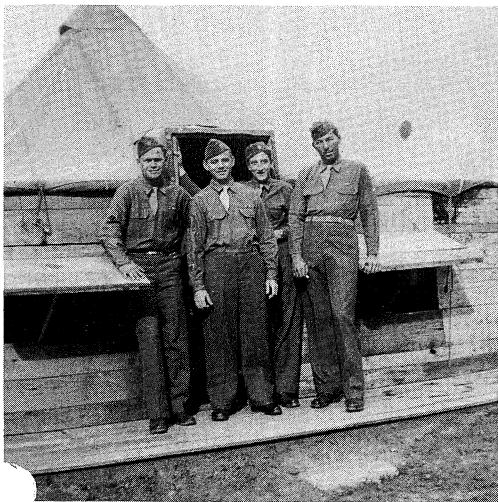
As the crew finished their missions and began returning home Joe "Sparkie" Lavender who had cared for Pro took him back home with him. And it was a "him" since Cliff Flowers remembers every time they went to the mess hall Pro would come along and would be jumping on Cliff's leg.

THE GREAT MC COOK AIR RAID

An earlier report made the Tipton crew responsible for this famous raid on the McCook lumber yard. Information has now come forward that the Tipton Crew was not the crew that was responsible. My apologies to the Tipton Crew for this incorrect report.

It was the Prince crew. The bombardier was Murray Septoff (now Stevens).

I have been in contact with Murray's son. Murray is not well and he is not able to talk on the phone. After explaining the purpose of my call his son gave permission to give this report.



Lewis Coghill (left) sent this photo of four men in Engineering. Who can name the other three??



Some of the men from Ordnance - Standing L to R, Bill Edwards, Bob Freed, Charles Braud, and Jan Janovich. Front, Ernie Magmore, Ed Chavey and "Angie." Photo from Morris Cohen's collection.

Welcome New Member

James Debevec

5426 W. Pierson
Phoenix, AZ 85031
Phone 602 848-0448

A lost soul found his way back to the 781st. When *All American* was visiting Phoenix James Debevec paid it a visit. Following is a letter from **Jim Kienitz** explaining Debevec's visit.

"I enjoyed seeing the *All America* in Scottsdale, Arizona recently. It felt good to walk through it, kick the tires, etc. It brought back a lot of memories.

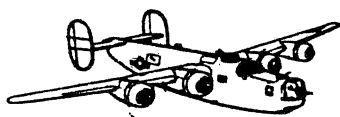
"I had a nice visit with **O. J. Cowart**. He was with the plane. While we were talking, **James Debevec**, Crutcher's Engineer, joined us. He had seen our blue 781st caps and introduced himself. He was unaware of the reunions, the history book, or the roster that was put together. He was listed as NL. He gave O. J. his name and address to send in. So, another 781st member is found. Thanks to the blue 781st caps.

"I was C. V. Stenersen's radio operator. There are only four crew members still living. I read all the Pantanella News from the 781st, the Liberator Club, the Collings Foundation and McCook Airbase Society. Now I hope to see a lot of old friends in Omaha in September 1992.

"I can't thank you, Harry Carl, and others enough for reviving the 781st. It means more to us than you will ever know. Thanks again."

Jim Kienitz signed up with the Collings Foundation to list their crew so you will see "C. V. Stenersen's Crew" added to the list of 781st crews already listed on All American.

I contacted James Debevec to find out why he escaped our dragnet. He got out of service and returned to Cleveland (we had S. Euclid) Ohio until 1974 when he moved to Arizona. We just never got a lead on him.



IN MEMORY OF F. D. BONVILLAIN

I had plans to visit F. D. and have an article about his activities since WWII. F. D. and I spoke of getting together at the Waltham reunion. Ironically on the day I received the news of his passing Vernon Burda was visiting me and I had mentioned to Vernon about planning a trip to San Diego in a week or two to visit F. D. When we arrived home that evening I received the news that F. D. had died.

So, it was a shock to me to have known such a fine man and to have him go so suddenly. I have received some information on his life since Pantanella which I know you will find interesting.

F. D. was born in Lake Charles, LA. He entered the service and met and married Evelyn Dusic in 1943. Later he became the Supply, Mess and Transportation Officer for the 781st Bomb Squadron.

After the war they settled in San Diego. He joined the staff of Stevenson's Department Store in LaJolla and became vice president.

Later he went on his own and owned and operated several restaurants in LaJolla.

After some 20 years in the retail and restaurant businesses he started toward his dream of becoming a minister. He received his B.A. in Sociology at UCSD in 1971, was ordained at Torrey Pines Church on June 30, 1974 and earned his doctorate at the Claremont School of Theology in 1976.

He served one year in Kailua, Hawaii, then was minister of Southgate First Christian Church in Southgate, California from 1976-1984.

In 1985 he returned to Torrey Pines Christian Church and remained there until his death.

From his memorial service pamphlet, "We shall miss Dr. Bon, his marvelous sense of humor and complete devotion to Jesus Christ. We thank God for blessing the congregation of Torrey Pines Christian Church with the opportunity to know and work with him."

To those of you that attended the last reunion you will remember the wonderful service that "Bonnie" led under the wing of *All American*. He was so happy to be with his old comrades and proud to be a part of the reunion.

Sally Bonvillain writes, "Dear Friends of the 781st. Squadron.



F. D. Bonvillian at the memorial services by All American.

Thank you very much for the flowers in memory of my dear husband. Flowers always bring sunshine and beauty so they are appreciated.

"We were always so glad we attended the reunion in Waltham . . . and now even more so. The comradeship and love of the squadron was very evident.

"What more can I say. I am devastated by his death, but know he is at peace, and life has a way of going on."

FOLDED WINGS

Roger E. Niemann (Nelson Gunner) passed away October 26, 1990.

Thomas R. Parkin (Radar Mechanic) passed away in 1990.

Don Stratton (Group Radar Mechanic Officer) passed away March 23, 1991.

Charles C. Harding (Group Armament Officer) was killed in a jeep accident at Pantanella 1944 or 45.

Ray Tyler reported on Don Stratton and Charles Harding. Harding was Tylers tent mate at Pantanella.

PANORAMA OF ITALY

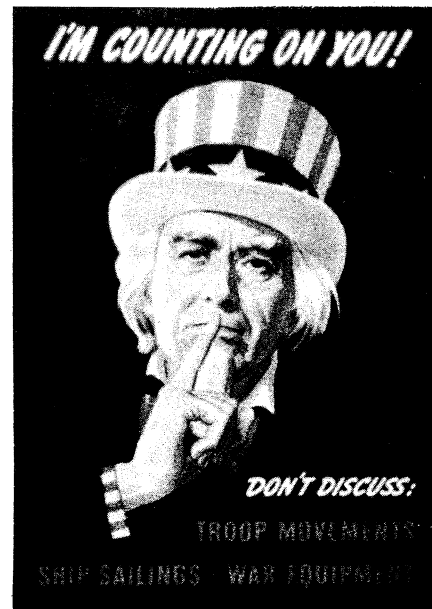
Sent in by Robert Daniel, Group Communications
 If I were an artist with nothing to do
 I'd paint a picture, a composite view
 Of historic Italy, in which I'd show
 Visions of contrast, the high and the low.
 There'd be towering mountains, a deep blue sea,
 Filthy brats yelling "Caramella" at me,
 High plumed horses and colorful carts,
 Two toned tresses on hustling tarts,
 I'd show Napoleonic cops, the Carabinieri,
 Dejected old women with too much to carry.
 A dignified old gent with a Balboa beard;
 Bare bottomed bambinoes, both ends smeared.
 Castle, and palace, opera house too.
 Hotel on a mountain marvelous view:
 Homes made of wood, bricks and of mud.
 People covered with scabs, scurvy and crud.
 Chapels and churches, great to behold,
 Each a king's ransom in glittering gold
 Poverty and want, now craving for food,
 Picking through garbage, practically nude,
 Stately cathedrals with high toned bells
 Covered shelters with horrible smells;
 Moulding catacombs, a place for the dead,
 Noisy civilians clamoring for bread,
 Palatial villas with palm tress tall,
 A stinking hotel, mere hole in the wall,
 Tree fringed lawns, swept by the breeze;
 Goats wading in filth up to their knees.

Revealing statues, all details complete;
 A sensual lass with sores on her feet.
 Big breasted damsels, but never a bra,
 Bumping against you; there should be a law.
 Creeping boulevards, a spangled team,
 Alleys that wind like a dope fiend's dream.
 Flowers blooming on the side of a hill;
 A sidewalk latrine with privacy nil.
 Two by four shops with shelvings all bare;
 Gesturing merchants, arms waving in the air.
 Narrow gauge sidewalk, more like a shelf;
 Butt-puffing youngster, scratching himself;
 Lumbering carts, hogging the road;
 Nondescript trucks, frequently towed.
 Diminutive donkeys, loaded for bear;
 Horse drawn taxis, seeking a fare.
 Determined pedestrians, courting disaster
 Walking in gutters where movement is faster.
 Italian drivers, all accident bound,
 Weaving and twisting to cover the ground.
 Home made brooms tied to a stick;
 Used on the streets to clean off the brick,
 Bicycles and pushcarts blocking your path;
 Street corner politicians, needing a bath.
 Barbers galore with manners quite wild.
 Rolific women all heavy with child.
 Il Duce's secret weapon, kids by the score
 Caused by his bonus which is no more.

Arrogant wretches, picking up snipes,
 Miniature Fiats of various types.
 Young street singer, hand organ tune;
 Shoe shining boys, a sidewalk saloon.
 A beauteous maiden, a smile on her face,
 With a breath of garlic, fouling the place.
 Listless housewife, no shoes on her feet
 Washing and cooking right out in the street.
 The family wash of tattle-gray
 Hangs from the balcony, blocking the way.
 Native coffee, God what a mixture
 Tiled bathrooms, with one extra fixture,
 Families dining from one common bowl
 Next to a fish store, a horrible hole.
 Italian zoot suiters, flashily dressed;
 Bare footed beggars, looking depressed.

Mud smeared children clustering about
 Filling their jugs from a community spout,
 A dutiful mother with a look of despair,
 Picking the lice from her small daughter's hair.
 Capable craftsmen skilled in the art,
 Decrepit old shacks falling apart.
 Surrounded by filth, rot and decay.
 Elegan caskets, carved out by hand.
 Odorous factories, where leather is tanned.
 A shoemaker's shop - a black market store,
 Crawling with vermin, no screen on the door,
 I've neglected the war scars, visible yet,
 But these are the things we want to forget.
 I've tried to describe the things that I've seen,
 Panorama of Italy, the brown and the green,
 I'm glad I came, but darned anxious to go;
 Give it back to the natives; I'm ready to blow!

*Doesn't this bring back some memories
 of our days at Pantanella? The sights,
 sounds and odors were a little different that
 we were accustomed to. I've read this several
 times and each time I find something new
 that I can ponder over remembering when I
 took a trip to a local town.*





Climbing out on the way to a target in our B-24 Liberators on a sunny day in 1944. Yellow "M" is leading the Squadron

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