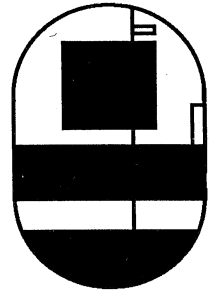




PANTANELLA NEWS



JULY 1992

Published by 781st Bomb Squadron Association ©

NUMBER 29

FINAL NOTICE FOR REUNION '92 OMAHA, NE

The final plans are in for our 5th reunion and they look great. The date is September 10 to 13. A variety of programs are planned which will be of interest to everyone. And the greatest part of all - it looks like there will be a record number attending. From early registrations and the notes received we expect an attendance of over 350.

We have made it our goal in planning this reunion to have the hospitality room open at all times when there is no formal meeting or dinner in progress. This way we have a place to meet to spend time with all our 781st comrades.

The registration form is enclosed. We have suggested that you send in your meal and registration costs with your registration to speed up the check in time. If you feel you want to wait until arrival you may do so, but remember all pre-payments are refunded 100% at any time. Make checks payable to the Association.

If you are planning to fly be sure to make your airline reservations early. Taxi service is available at the airport. A few motor home spaces available at the hotel for electrical only.

As you can see on the reunion registration form we are asking you to pre-register for the SAC underground tour and bus tours if at all possible. In the case of the underground tours, they are restricted to 40 per trip and SAC requires a list of names for each trip in advance, security I guess. We are asking "early bird" arrivals to please select the Thursday trips. We have not planned buses for the underground trip as we thought most people would have cars and share rides. As

all the SAC tours are limited to group size, an early registration will help us get you on the tour you desire.

Here are the plans;

WEDNESDAY Sept. 9.

1 PM to 5 PM - Early-bird Registration.

Hospitality Room open from 1 PM until ? Not an official reunion day, but we know there are many early-birds and this gives you an opportunity to settle in early and meet your comrades.

THURSDAY Sept. 10.

9 AM and 1 PM - SAC Underground Tours. S e l e c t



How many rushed down to enlist after seeing this WWII poster?

which time you desire. Transportation by share-a-ride in private cars. CAUTION - There are many stairs to climb on the Underground tour. There are no elevators. No walkers or wheel chairs permitted. No cameras permitted - leave in your car or better yet leave at the hotel. Be at the base by 8:45 or 12:45. Tour lasts 2 hours.
 1 PM - Bus Tour of SAC (Above ground). Bus will leave hotel at 12:30. Please be on time. Tour lasts 2 hours.
 10 AM to 5 PM - Registration.
 11 AM to 5 PM - Hospitality & Trophy Room Open.

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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.

5:30 PM to 6:30 - Champagne Party given by the Hotel. Group Photo taken at this time. (Cash bar during and after Champagne Party).

7:00 PM - Dinner followed by program. Hospitality and Trophy Rooms will be open after dinner.

FRIDAY Sept. 11.

9 AM & 1 PM SAC Underground Tours will be repeated. Private car share-a-ride. Meet at SAC base at 8:45 or 12:45. SAC above ground base tour meet - at hotel for bus at 8:30 AM or 12:30 PM

There are no formal plans for dinner this evening. This is the time set aside for getting together with your crews, section, or special friends.

SATURDAY Sept. 12.

10 AM - Memorial Service will be at Chambers Protestant Chapel at Boy's Town. Share-a-ride for a 10 minute ride to this famous place. After the service a flight of Air National Guard Jets will have a missing man formation flyover.

1 PM - 781st Business meeting followed by some interesting tales of the 781st including our simulated briefing of our bombing mission on 12 September 1944 - 48 years ago! After briefing the Hospitality Room will be open until 5 PM.

5:30 PM to 6:30 PM - Attitude Adjustment Hour - cash bar.

6:30 PM - Banquet followed by a short program. Again we will have a special event and some surprises. To end a beautiful evening we will have the SAC Band play some "Old Favorites" of our WWII times!

SUNDAY Sept. 13.

All good times must end, so it is time to say goodbye to our 781st comrades and to start planning our next reunion.

Volunteers please send in your name to Ken Sutton with a note if you have any particular duty you would like to help out with.

In addition to the three or four days that you will spend with your comrades at the reunion you will find there are other interests in the Omaha area. Convention and Visitors Bureau will be at check-in with literature and information.

Directions - For driving, coming from the East or West on Highway 80, turn off at 680 North. It is on the

western edge of Omaha. Go North about 2 and one-half miles to W. Dodge Road. Turn off to go East, then turn right the next block to Regency Circle and the Marriott is at 10220 Regency Circle.

A note about the Marriott Hotel and Omaha. Small town atmosphere prevails in Omaha. It is a friendly city and easy to get around. The hotel will have our squadron as their only large group. It is a new hotel, but not as large as the last two. You will find it easy to get around and it will be bursting with 781st Bomb Squadron members. Look for a good time and you will not be disappointed!

There are many reasons for attending - to be with your comrades, for a crew reunion, or section reunion, etc.

Don't forget to bring your WWII uniform, if you have some, memorabilia, or anything of interest to your comrades.

Widows and family members of our deceased comrades are always invited. Four widows are already registered. Some words expressed by Dodie (Jolicoeur) Shallman about her feelings attending her first reunion, "Words simply cannot express the joy and excitement I experienced at the reunion. When I was welcomed to the reunion in Boston, with such cordiality, I had thought perhaps that I would be "excess baggage," but everyone was simply wonderful.

"My only regret is that I have never been able to visit my husband's grave in St. Avold, France. But getting together with you guys last summer, and attending the memorial service beside the beautiful B-24, was a lovely healing experience.

"I'm glad to see the next reunion will be in the midwest. It will be an easy drive there."

PAYMENTS TO SQUADRON

Please note that all checks made to the squadron for dues, PX supplies, or reunion prepayments should be made out to the 781st Bomb Squadron Assoc. Please do not make them out to individuals.

A SALUTE TO OUR ENGINEERING SECTION



From the Air Force Times 1944. "15th AAF - Seven men of a Liberator squadron have set an unofficial record for a heavy engine change. Their time for a complete change was seven hours and 29 minutes. Shown above are the record-making mechanics. From left to right, in front of the engine nacelle are Master Sergeant Leo G. Lutgring and Sergeant Aurelius A. Becnel. In the back row, from left to right, are Master Sergeant John L. Thomas, Technical Sergeant Mallory H. Simmons, Master Sergeant John T. Patrick, Staff Sergeant James B. Aitken, Jr. and Sergeant Martin A. Honthaas.

This article gives just one example of the hard work our great engineering section did. As you know we had consistently less early returns and better maintenance than the average squadron. And the bombardiers and gunners could not have achieved the records if their equipment was not maintained satisfactorily.

To obtain further information on the Engineering Section I contacted David Orr. Dave moved from Arizona last fall and now lives just a few miles from me. He has two sons living in the area. We met for lunch at an appropriate place, a little Italian restaurant run by Italians that sound like they just got off the boat. I found Dave very interesting and I'm sure we will meet again and more memories will fill in more of the days at Pantanella.

A brief background on Capt. David Orr. He was a mining engineer in the copper industry for three years before the war broke out and had a full deferment from military service. He felt he wanted to do his part, however, and quit his job to enlist.

His first choice was the Navy, but they turned him down for flat feet. Then he investigated pilot training, but was rejected because of inadequate eyesight. He was successful to meet the ground echelon qualifications and was sent to an Air Force aircraft maintenance training course at Yale University.

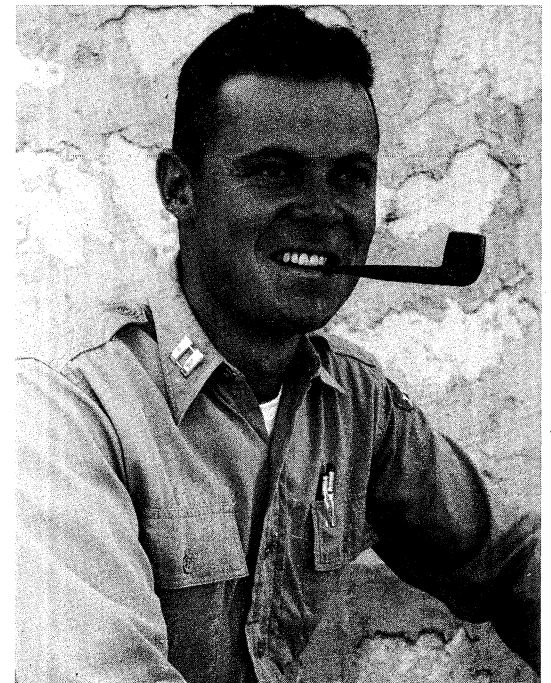
While serving the six months at Yale he had very little time off. He remembers one Saturday night off when he attended a USO dance. There he met his future wife, Nancy, on the only Saturday night out in his six months at Yale. Later, at McCook, Nebraska, on December 7, 1943 Nancy and Dave were married.

After Yale Dave was assigned to the original cadre of the 465th Bomb Group at Tucson Arizona. His assignment was Engineering Officer for the 781st Bomb Squadron. He knew he had to become familiar with the B-24, so the first chance he had to explore the plane was a night shortly after arrival. While climbing over the plane he heard a commanding voice, "Lt., you'll get hurt if you don't get down from there!" The booming voice was Sergeant Leo Lutgring.

Dave observed Leo for the next few days and noticed his men listened to him and he appeared to really know his job. Dave decided Leo Lutgring was the man he would like to be his line chief. Fortunately for the squadron, he accepted the offer. He proved to be a talented mechanic, a skilled organizer and a master motivator of men. In recognition of the superior maintenance record his crews achieved Leo was awarded the Bronze Star in May, 1945.

From Davis-Monthan the cadre was assigned to McCook for staffing and training for overseas movement. When the engineering section departed for the port of embarkation, about four months later, it had grown to 103 men.

Dave recalled the ship voyage to Italy - 23 days of a very rough voyage to Bizerte. The ship did not have enough physical space for every one to lie down. It was a Liberty ship carrying a load of grain in the hold and was top heavy causing it to have considerable roll. He doesn't know why, but he never got seasick. Nearly everyone



Capt. David Orr, Jr., Engineering Officer, with his favorite pipe.

else did.

After a week or so in Bizerte they were transported on an ammunition ship to Naples. There were no facilities for living aboard, so they were very happy to have their overseas voyage complete. The history book covers their final leg to Pantanella.

Dave then wanted to know if I knew one of his men, Earl G. "Deacon" Vlands. It so happened that upon finding Deacon, around 1986, I had a number of phone conversations with him and regular correspondence since. Dave was fond of "Deacon" and referred to him as a very talented mechanic.

Dave then recalled a request about two months before the war ended for a mechanic to go on a super secret mission. He chose Deacon since he knew he could handle any situation that arose. Deacon then left for Russian occupied territory to help repair B-24s that were down. He remained in Russian territory until the war was over. In June 1945, quite by accident in Naples, he met Deacon. Deacon told what he had been doing the past 2 months and added, "within five years we will be fighting the Russians." It wasn't the Russians directly, but we were fighting Communism five years later in Korea.

Another discussion led to Col. McKenna and his plane. Dave re-

called being surprised to see the bull's eye painted on his plane one morning. He admired Col. McKenna for doing this. About an hour later that morning Dave recalls the Group Engineering Officer, Maj. Moody, told Dave to remove the bull's-eye. Dave told the Major he would comply only if Col. McKenna so ordered him. Just before noon Dave received a call to report to Col. Clark's office at 1300. When he arrived Col. McKenna was there also due to the request from Col. Clark. Dave said this was the harshest "reaming" he ever got from a superior. Col. Clark said he didn't serve four years on the General Staff in Washington D.C. to take any crap from a Lt. Needless to say the bull's-eye was off before dark that same day!

And another mystery is solved. Rumors have been that Col. McKenna took off alone in a B-24, and flew a mission alone one time. In one conversation I had with Col. McKenna he would not confirm nor deny the fact. Dave remembers one Sunday afternoon at McCook A.F.B. Col. McKenna said he wanted to prove that one man could fly the B-24. He asked Dave to start the "put-put" so that he could get the engines started and Col. Mac took off! I questioned the mission that he may have flown alone and Dave said it could very

likely be, knowing Col. Mac.

As most of you recall there were all kinds of deals in getting our winterized casas built. Dave recalls Harry Carl made a deal with a local Italian to have their casa built for 15 cartoons of cigarets! He said it may not be entirely the correct terms, but that is his recollection after 48 years.

Dave learned a lesson in pouring concrete at Pantanella. It was snowing one day in late March, 1944 when they poured a floor for a new tool shed. Three days after they were convinced that mix would never set. The heat required to set the cement was cooled off too quickly by the snow, leaving a sandy mess.

When the war was over Dave returned to Fort Devens, MA for discharge. His wife, Nancy, came to Boston from New Haven, CT for their scheduled reunion. During their first dinner together in 19 months Dave got an attack of appendicitis. They went to a hospital, and he was operated on in the wee hours of the following morning. His first night back from overseas he ended up in a hospital!

The Stars and Stripes article was saved by Dale Samuelson. Dale was co-pilot on the Hudson crew, later first pilot. He noted the engine change was made on their plane, Easy Maid.



Col. McKenna in his plane after the "bulls-eye" was painted on.

ADDRESS CHANGES

Francis Maccani, 16210 Antiqua Way, Bokeelia, FL 33922. Phone 813 283-2069.

Helen MacFarlane, 31919 Bay Street, Tavares, FL 32778.

Ken Foden, 900 No. Broad St #3013, Brooksville, FL 34601.

Mrs. William (Lois) Strickland, 7225 Durban Ave., Cocoa, FL 32927. Ph 407 633-1355.

Donald E. Clodfelter, 549 Hall Dr., Greenwood, IN 46142. Phone 317-885-8325.

Charles Harding, 12324 Badger Lane SE, Albuquerque, NM 87123. Phone 505 292-3073

Dorothy DeKriek, 1722 Village Dr., Lynden, WA 98264.

OUR MEN AND OUR PLANES

Bill Bartlett (Engineer/Doss) remembers, "The B-24 pictured on page 10 of the January Newsletter, was not the B-24 that Doss crashed. I don't remember which plane it was. I do remember that it wasn't painted and was a new plane without a tail turret, just two hand-held 50's on a swivel in the tail. Probably one of the causes of the crash was not enough weight in the tail, changing the balance of the bird. It just wouldn't fly and we crashed back down on the runway after getting up about level with the tower. I think maybe we were taking off on the March 25th fragmentation bombing mission, as I remember that we were loaded with frag bombs that morning.

"After 1st Lt Doss was relieved from assignment, Lt Trudeau took over the crew and we flew our first mission with Lt Trudeau on April 1st. It was an abortive mission to Southern Austria. We flew many more missions with Lt Trudeau in the first seat, and flew a B-24 back to the States with him."

That certainly is interesting about the tail guns. Does anyone remember bringing over a plane like this? And, if you remember our weight and balance slide rule was thrown away when we went overseas. If the tail settled down on the skid it was tail heavy. Otherwise we never seemed to check anything. Without a tail turret it would make the plane nose heavy.

In checking through some photos that were sent in I find several from Robert Smeltzer. One is a nose shot of a crashed plane (photo on right) with the notation on back, "March 21, 1945, Yellow R - Anti personnel frags, Doss - Pilot. panicked. Dekriek (co-pilot) held on, Doss On our plane roster 42-78401 is shown as salvaged March 21, 1945 on Leo Lutgring's list, so it looks like this was the plane .

From John T. Patrick. "I just received a copy of the News and glad to read about some of the

writings. I was with the ground personnel and not much is said about us fellows. But I read in the Mail Call about Walker Shipley, Navigator on Zalks crew. The plane they flew was Yellow "A". I was crew chief on the plane.

"That day they were the last to land since #3 engine was hit as well as the right tire was flat on the same side. I was going to the mess hall with Sgt. Miller since my plane did not come back. As we came to the mess hall on the hill I saw this plane flying around and told Miller it was Yellow "A".

"When we got back down to the field they were coming in and when they hit the runway two chutes opened, one on each side from the waist gun. With the flat tire they went off to the right and into the mud close to the tower.

"We towed the plane to the hardstand and replaced #3 engine, put a new tire on, and patched up the holes from the flak.

"I really felt bad at the time when the plane didn't come back with the rest. I made such good friends with the crew. I have pictures taken of the plane sitting off the runway and after it was repaired

and back flying.

"Zalk visited me on his way back to the states when I was in Georgetown, British Guinea. Zalk was a good pilot and a good friend.

"I have seen Jostworth several times as he lives a few houses down the street from my daughter. I also keep in touch with Francis "Tug" Miller from Illinois. He stopped by last spring on his way from after visiting his granddaughter in DC.

"Keep up the good work. I sure would like to make a reunion one of these days. Give my regards to McKenna, he gave me my first B-24 ride from McCook to Lincoln NB. Also, regards to Jim Wray as I was Crew Chief on Yellow 'A'."

I did not have Yellow "A" on our plane roster. Did it have a name? Did it return to the U.S. And how about a number?

John, why not make it to the Omaha reunion? Tell us more about the trip to Cairo and meet some old comrades.

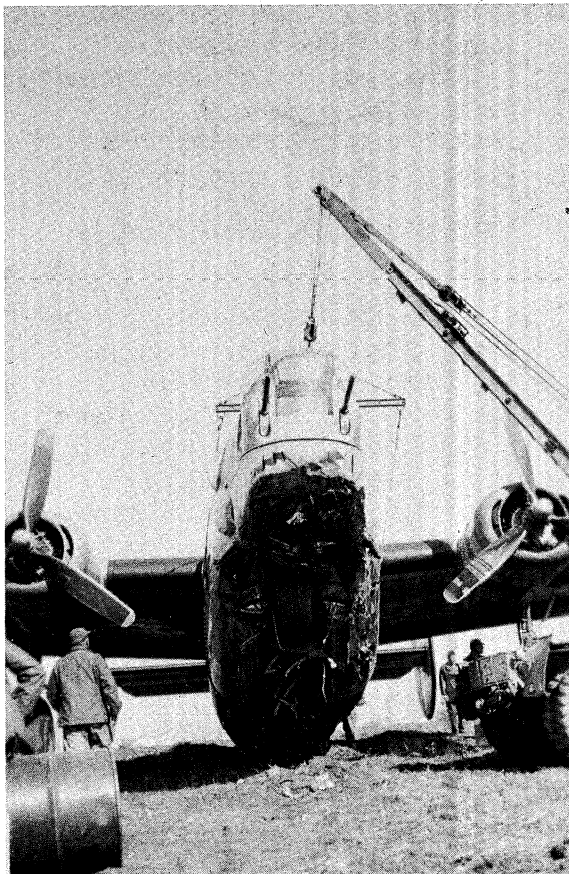
Charles Bradley (BallGunner/ Newman).

I had a little bout with cancer and just finished taking radiation treatments. I hope it is under control now.

The All American and a B-17 were here in Jackson, MI last summer for a few days and my whole family was able to go through them. We watched the B-24 land and taxi up, and who jumped out but O. J. Cowart. We talked for a few minutes before he had to leave.

In the last newsletter, Jim Kienitz was asking about "Yellow I", Paper Doll. I was the ball gunner on Hy Newman's crew and we were going to fly Paper Doll back to the states. We flew to Gioia, I think it was, and the morning we were going to leave Gioia there was quite a bad fuel lead in the bomb bay, so they gave us another plane that was there to fly back. I don't know if Paper Doll was brought back to the states later or not.

Now about "Super Natural." I remember talking to some of John Dickey's crew about it in



Colorado Springs. Norman Hunter, Jr. says he sent some information, but for some reason I never received it.

We flew "Super Natural" on a mission to Obertraubling Air-drome at Regensburg, Germany on February 16, 1945 and bailed out over friendly Italian territory.

Being in the waist section of the plane, most of my information is what I heard from others. This is what I think happened. The putt-putt in the plane would not run that day so they used an auxiliary unit to start the engines. One of the generators was out, and on the way to the target another one went out. Also, there was trouble with one of the engines. I think it might have been #3. I know #3 was throwing oil on the tail. When on the bomb run, I don't know if #2 engine got hit, or what, but I called Hy on the intercom and told him that something was wrong with #2. I heard him say, "Feather #2 and drop the bombs and let's get out of here." He called for escort, but with #2 engine out, that left only one generator. With the load it went out, so we had no radio or any power to operate the gun turrets or anything.

We got back to Northern Italy and had no power to transfer fuel and the cloud cover was from the ground up to about 5,000 feet. So not being able to see the ground, and no radio, we had to bail out over Rimini, about 50 miles from Florence, Italy.

I know the last thing I had seen was water and, when we bailed out in the clouds, I was wondering how long we would be in the water before anyone would find us. I was sure happy when I broke through the clouds and saw land. I landed on a rock pile in a small creek and messed up my ankle. Some Italians carried me into Rimini where there happened to be an Army radio shack. They called an ambulance and I was taken to an English Hospital in Florence. Roy Rice, our co-pilot, went with me and the next day got us a ride on a C-47 to Bari where I went into the general hospital for about two weeks before going back to the 781st. I think some of the crew saw what was left of Super

Natural before they were flown back to the 781st. The whole crew got back OK. So, that is what happened to Super Natural.

The crew consisted of Hy Newman - Pilot, Roy Rice - Co-pilot, Chet Mijal - Engineer, George Painter - Radio Operator, Lewis Cato - Navigator, Tom Carmody - Nose Gunner, J. Keith Lancaster - Top Gunner, Monroe Beebe - Tail Gunner, and Chuck Bradley - Ball gunner.

I am enclosing a clipping from the Jackson newspaper that appeared on Sunday, March 1, 1992. It shows a picture of some of the B-24s at Willow Run that were brought back in June of 1945. In the middle of the picture there is a B-24 with 465th markings on the tail. I can make out the letter "H" on it, but I don't know what squadron it was from.

Hope to see everyone in Omaha.

If my records are correct we had three planes known as Yellow H, Crescent of the Half Moon, down with the Tipton crew near Vienna by fighters, Belle Ringer, down in the Adriatic after running out of gas to Linz with Jones crew (all lost), and a third unnamed down with Leggate crew near Edelstahl, Germany. The photo shows a light colored letter, so it would be a good guess that it is White H from the 782nd squadron.

Records also show Paper Doll did make it back to the U. S.

Some of the mystery of Robert E. Swanson is Solved

From Charles Shoults, "I am writing you about a story you published in the April issue of the Pantanella news. I was Flight Engineer on the Lt Leslie Wheeler crew. Other crew members were Leslie Wheeler - Pilot, K. L. Tedin - Co-pilot, Ronald J. Soucy - Bombardier, Joe Newman - Navigator, Manuel Quinones - Radio Operator, Robert E. Swanson - Waist Gunner (Story on Swanson later on), Edward Chapin - Nose Gunner, Edward Schreiner - Ball Gunner, Albert Milner - Tail Gunner, Thea Harris - Top Gunner.

Regarding the article in the *Pantanella News* about Robert E. Swanson, S/Sgt. ASN 17035903,

MIA 27 August 1944, he was transferred from the Frazier crew to Lt Leslie Wheeler crew. Our plane was the "Virginia Rose." Swanson was flying as my assistant engineer on 27 August 1944. I saw him bail out of our plane on that day. I have a copy of all of our missions and on the 27th of August it was to Blechhammer, Germany. The men living in our tent saw him pack a bag and take it along. They didn't know what he was up to. I never knew what happened to him until I read your article in the newsletter. Any of the enlisted men who were in the waist with him can tell what happened. We can discuss this in Omaha in September.

One more thing, another article and picture in the news was a briefing by Major Harold Bullock, Group Operations Officer, at Oudna Field number two, 20 miles south of Tunis in Tunisia. I am with this group of men in the picture.

My crew left McCook, Nebraska and went overseas by boat. I was Major Bullock's engineer and I flew overseas to Tunis with him. We left Morrison Field, West Palm Beach, Florida and flew to Trinidad, through Brazil, then Africa and on to Tunis. There I returned to my crew and we trained until our base was finished in Italy.

I hope to see everyone in Omaha.

Thanks for filling us in, Charles. I received information that Swanson died September 13, 1975. His WWII home address was 2214 West 11th Street, Duluth, MN. Does anyone in Minnesota want to check out the family?

After some research I found I had some notes on Swanson and now have a little more information. I find the record shows that he was a POW and discharged from military service in 1958. He died in 1975 at age 56. Therefore, Swanson was evidently captured and taken as a POW. After the war most likely our military knew nothing of his planned bailout (or his desertion) and he remain in service.

And how about Virginia Rose - its the first time that name appeared. Could it be a plane from another squadron?

LT. GRIFFITH CREW

Crew gets shot down on first mission

A brief report on the Griffith crew was given in Pantanella News on October 1986. Since the report was incomplete and we had few members at the time I will give this full report on the crew and their missions at this time. Additional information was obtained from group reports, Missing Air Crew Reports (MACR) and conversation with the only survivor of the crew, Dempsey Brett.

The first mission for the pilot, Lt. James Griffith, was a combat indoctrination mission on December 6th to the Rangier Marshaling yard at Bratislava, Czechoslovakia. He was the only one of the crew to fly that day and got well indoctrinated in combat. Prior to takeoff a plane ahead of him blew up and all got killed. Then on the mission the group was attacked by 15 or 20 ME-109s and the 781st shot down two of them.

The full crew's first mission was on December 19, 1944. The primary target was Blechhammer, but weather forced a change to the second alternate, Maribor, Yugoslavia. Maj. Warnack was group lead and Lt. Mel Bleiweiss from the 781st was the Radar Navigator in the lead plane. Other 781st crews on this mission were Lts. Fifield, Barnett, French and Donahue.

From the Missing Air Crew Reports, Lt Joseph Ormes (Donahue Co-pilot) reported, "Blue N, flown by Lt Griffith, turned off to the right of the formation just after we turned from the IP. Blue N dropped its bombs and turned off about 1215. The pilot of my plane heard Lt. Griffith call for fighter protection. The fighters answered but the plane disappeared from view before the fighters joined it." (Blue "N" was from the 783rd Squadron but used by the 781st due to a shortage of planes). Dempsey reported that there were many things wrong with the plane, but Lt. Griffith did not want to turn back.

Other information from surviving crew members Dempsey Brett and Richard Carlson and other reports indicate that they were flying number seven position and lost one engine before salvoing the bombs. Then flak got another engine, they could not feather the prop causing severe vibration. They began losing altitude and dropped out of formation. They were last seen heading east with two engines smoking.

Near Lake Balaton, approaching the city of Gyor, Hungary Lt. Griffith sent Sgt. Hart (Engineer) to the waist to prepare the men for bailing out. Hart then returned forward with the impression they were going to bail out immediately. Dempsey said that all the crew members were afraid to bail out and did not want to since the plane was still flying although losing altitude rapidly. The pilot hit the bail-out alarm bell but no one jumped.

Over the city of Gyor, which was German occupied, the forward men began bailing out through the forward bomb bay. The navigator, Ray Laughner, was busy trying to keep track of their location and give a heading to the pilot. In doing so he blocked the front turret to prevent Dempsey from getting out. When the navigator finished his check and then the men in the nose, Sgt. Dempsey Brett, Lt. Laughner, Sgt. Carlson and Lt Burns crawled back to the bomb bay to bail out. Lt.

Lt Burns was so excited he wanted to jump out without his chute.

Burns was so excited he went to jump out without his chute. Others stopped him, put his chute on and the four jumped. Several survivors reported the order of bailout; Lt. Laughner, Sgt Brett, Sgt. Carlson, and Lt. Burns.

Sgt. Brett tells of his experience on the jump. "We were down to 13,000 feet when we jumped. When the chute opened I had a problem with the straps pulling in my crotch. We had no real training for jumping, so I did not know what to do to try to relieve the pain. But there were

other problems on my mind. We were over Lake Balaton when we bailed out and I did not know which side of the lake I should try to head for - the Russian side or the German side. I tried to guide my chute by pulling the shrouds and spilled it once. I could hear the heavy artillery guns as it was near the Russian and German front. I landed, not knowing in whose territory, in a pasture land, backward, and hit my head. I evidently was knocked out a bit as I was dizzy.

"As I came to I could hear "splat, splat" and it dawned on me that someone was shooting at me. Then I could see a whole crowd of people running towards me. I reached for my .45 but it was gone, evidently lost in the jump. I probably was lucky that I didn't have it since I'm sure they would have killed me.

"Some of the crowd were the Home Guard and they captured me saving me from the civilians. They didn't speak English and I began scuffling with them. Lt. Laughner told me not to do that since we were captured and no chance of getting away. One of the Guards said "Sprechen de Deutsch" and then is when I found out we landed in German occupied territory. When they found out I was American they became more belligerent.

"In the jail in Hungary Sgt. Carlson got diphtheria. They didn't know what he had. He then went to a hospital and I did not see him until coming through Camp Lucky Strike on the way home. He didn't seem to ever fully recover.

"We were marched all night to a jail, then by oxcart to another city jail. Then by open command car and eventually to Vienna. I'll never forget the meeting hall in Vienna - all pictures of Hitler, etc. In spite of the predicament I was in Vienna proved fascinating. I had an avid interest in history as it was my major in college. In the National Geographic magazine I had seen such scenes as Vienna, but never thought I would actually be here.

"From here we were taken to Frankfort Dulag Luft. Along the way I was amazed at the destruction, especially along the railroad. In one

railroad station we had a real scare. The corporal in charge left us with two German Air Force soldiers.

About 40 civilians ganged up and were trying to lynch us. I thought we were goners.

Then about 40 civilians ganged up and were trying to get at us to lynch us. I thought we were goners. Then two soldiers came on the scene with burp guns. They pointed them at the crowd and they disbursed.

"From here it was to Wexlar for uniforms and we were split up, officers to Stalag Luft III and I was sent to Nurnberg. Later I was on the march to Moosburg when the front lines moved closer to Nurnberg. On the march we got sprayed by Mustangs (P-51s). We made POW signs out of sheets; then we got daily flights over us from the Mustangs waving their wings.

"I still remember the camaraderie formed those days. The closeness to my fellow men will never be forgotten. I became friends with

another POW not from our group. I always thought I would like to see him once more. Then two years ago at Christmas he called me and said, "Do you remember spending Christmas in jail in 1944 in Papa?"

The four were the first to bail out and were captured by Hungarian military personnel and marched all night to a military post in Papa. The remaining six, uninjured, bailed out a short time later and were captured by Hungarian civilians and hung. Had the men in the waist bailed out when they were first told they might have been saved. The war department notified William Russell's and Sgt. Benvenuto's family that their bodies were still in the plane. There was also some indication that they could have been killed nearby and the bodies placed in or near the plane.

Some are surprised at the hanging of our airmen. You have to realize that the war had been going on for a long time and law and order was breaking down. The civilians had taken a lot of punishment from the bombing and they were taking their frustration and anger out on the airmen when they parachuted or crash

landed in their country.

Dempsey Brett is the only living member of the crew. When he was located in 1986 he wrote, "Words cannot express the joy I feel, after 41 years, finally hearing from someone in the squadron. I was so terribly sorry to hear of the tragic deaths of my other crew members. But, finally, after all these years, I was at least able to know their fate."

Recently Dempsey told me he was sorry that he didn't get to fly more missions.

SICK CALL

Sometimes I loose track of those on sick call, but I will not forget two brave wives who recently underwent open heart surgery. Two Nancy's, **Nancy Sutton** (Ken Sutton's wife) and **Nancy Orr** (Dave Orr's wife). Both went in for surgery the same week and are now on the way to recovery. We wish them well and hope their recovery is speedy and complete.



James w. Griffith Crew, L to R Rear, James W. Griffith, Pilot; Ray L. Laughner, Navigator; Bruce Cosper, Co-Pilot; James O. Burns, Bombardier. Front, John E. Hart, Jr., Engineer; William R. Russell, Radio Operator; Dempsey O. Brett, Nose Gunner; Attilio A. Benvenuto, Ball Gunner; Richard O. Carlson, Top Gunner; Lee C. Stutzman, Tail Gunner.

MAIL CALL



Frank Griffen (Armament) writes, "I received the Pantanella News (Jan., 1992) last week. Boy, what a great newsletter you fellows put out. I think it is really great, thank you.

"Jim, on page 4 of this edition you had a photo of "Deacon" Viands and crew. I believe the unknown member in the picture is Corporal Robert D. Yagge (FW) of Armament Section who passed away Feb. 26, 1979.

"Thanks again for a great "newsy" newsletter. I look forward to receiving it.

"Bless you all and I hope to see you again in September at the reunion in Omaha."

Dennis B Flaherty, (Tail Gunner/R.J. Smith)" I do not know what the procedure is for widows of members who have died. We lost three members of our crew since the last reunion. At least two of these widows would like to continue to get our newsletter and attend the convention this fall. The widows are Harold Butterfield, Harry Edwards and William Strickland.

"Hoping to see you in Omaha."

We certainly want to keep sending the Pantanella news to widows and family of our men. We would like to see better reporting from crews or sections when one of their members pass away. Sometimes the widow will move and we lose track of her. So, please let us know more details and we certainly welcome the widows to our reunions. We find the number of widows attending the reunions increasing. They find it interesting and comforting, especially our memorial service when we honor those who have lost their husbands.

From **Gene Martis**, (Radar Navigator/Maccani) "My wife, Josephine, and I have gone through a variety of experiences since last seeing you at Boston. Most have been good, but we have had some of

the other kind also. Needless to say we have survived them and at present all is well. I hope with all my heart that you and yours can say you all are well also.

"I have heard from Ben Donahue several times and this is always a pleasure. Some not so good news involves his radio operator, Ken Koch. I am sure Ben has informed you that Ken "folded wings" on March 20, 1992 after a super valiant effort fighting internal cancer. I met him at the showing of the *All American* in Pittsburgh the fall of 1991. Ken walked up to me on the apron and said he was sure he would see somebody from the 781st if he waited long enough. I actually did not recognize him for he had lost 65 lbs. We had a great reunion. We talked for at least an hour and our wives renewed acquaintances also.

"Several months later John Zadrozny, along with our wives, visited Ken and Kay at their home in Pittsburgh. It was a super afternoon and Kenny said "This has been the best day for me in two years. It made us feel very good for giving him a morale boost.

"A week after we returned home from winterizing in Florida we heard from Kay that Kenny had passed away. I have just written to Ben and it helps to think and write about it with someone who knew of Ken and cared about him. A strange but not unexpected bond seems to exist amongst us and it is the greatest benefit we have derived from the WWII experience. I cannot neglect to say, Jim, that you are mainly responsible for this feeling and I consider it an incredible accomplishment and service to your fellow comrades."

Thanks for your kind words, Gene. I may have had a hand in getting the 781st together, but the camaraderie that exists is the result of all the wonderful men in the squadron. With men like John Zadrozny and yourself cheering up Ken Koch, neither of you being from his crew, is an example.

Lionel (Larry) Lasselgne, (Nose Gunner/Hazel) "When the war in Europe was winding down, I was

one of those transferred into your Bomb Group from the 485th Bomb Group. As I remember our officers went to another group and we, the enlisted men, came into the 465th. As I mentioned before, I never flew with your group nor did I get to meet many in the squadron. But I do enjoy your newsletters and wish to continue receiving them. They remind me of my experiences, many of the missions being the same. You are correct, our group was sent back to the States to train in B-29s and those with a chance to finish their tour were transferred into other groups.

"I am taking a trip to Australia next year. Rotary International is having their international convention there and as a past club president I do wish to go. The many Aussies that I met during the war seemed very interesting and I built a desire to visit their country down under.

"My wife enjoys the newsletters as much as I do. They fill in many gaps of our experiences that I never mentioned."

From **Griscom Bettie**, (Co-pilot/Shetterly) "Dear 781st Friends; Thank you for keeping me abreast of the 781st news. I'm sorry that I'm not twins, but 1992 trips are all spoken for. I had the good fortune to fly with Bob Shetterly. I was his co-pilot. We finished our missions early and I got credit for 51 or 52.

"After the Budd Co. in Philadelphia I retired and moved to Key West, Florida and started a new career - a guide for fish parties.

"Now at 76 I'm happy to be alive. We travel (Mrs. Bettie and I) quite a lot. Our kids and their kids are all well. I hope you all are so lucky."

HANG IN THERE

In 1900, 1 American in 25 was 65 or over. Today it's 1 in 8! By 2000 it's expected to be 1 in 5!

In an insurance companies recent annuity table it shows a 68 year old man is expected to live to be 86! That's the average, so hang in there!

FOLDED WINGS

Richard C. Pease, Group S-2 (Intelligence) passed away Feb. 22, 1991.

Kenneth A. Koch (Radio Operator/Donahue) passed away March 20, 1992.

Edward J. Chapin (Nose Gunner/Wheeler) passed away May 27, 1992.

Richard Pease's death was reported by Ralph Du Bois. Ralph received a note from Louise Pease noting that Richard had passed away with a severe stroke. Ralph was Chief Clerk in S-2 and Richard Pease was his superior officer. They were good friends. At the San Antonio in 1988 Richard Pease and Ralph Du Bois met for the first time since Pantanella.

Ralph also noted that he had visited Leo Checkai (Group S-4) in Wisconsin last summer. He reported Leo is now retired and in good health.

At San Antonio I asked Richard Pease to address the Saturday afternoon general meeting. He declined, but during the meeting he changed his mind and agreed to say a few words. He proudly stated some of the notable accomplishments of the 465th Bomb Group. He was one of the 465th Bomb Group's fine officers and will be missed by all of us that served with him.

Ben Donahue reported Kenneth Koch's death. Kenneth fought a losing battle with cancer. He attended all reunions, missing only Boston because of health. He is survived by his wife Katherine, two sons and a daughter along with 7 grandchildren.

Funeral services were conducted in Aspinwall, PA and were attended by many friends and family members and two 781st Bomb Squadron members, John and Helen Zadrozny, and Gene and Josephine Martis. Gene Martis requested permission to place a small 781st patch in the casket, a loving gesture by Gene.

Frank Clark notified me of the passing of Ed Chapin, "I am sorry to have to report another name for the Folded Wings list. I received a phone call a few nights ago about the pass-

ing of Edward J. Chapin.

"He passed away May 27, at Sterling, VA of a heart attack. He is to be buried in Arlington National Cemetery on June 2.

"Ed was originally a member of Leslie Wheeler's crew. He and I were both with George Gaines over Blechhammer on October 13, 1944, when we were shot down. Ed and I were together in a German prison camp for the duration. We didn't see each other again until Colorado Springs. He had made reservation for Omaha."

After Frank's letter I called Frank to see if Ed had any family. I learned that he was living with another family and I contacted them to find that Ed had never married and there are no known living relatives.

Ed returned from POW camp in 1945 and went back to school. He majored in journalism and graduated from the University of Kansas. From there he led a very interesting life working as a reporter for the Cincinnati Times and TV news. Then he became associated with the Ohio Democratic Committee during President Kennedy's election. That brought him to Washington, D.C. working for the government as a multi-media specialist. Later he was with the Public Health Service and finally with the Consumer Product Safety Commission as a information specialist.

He received many awards during his career. At one time as a reporter his duties took him to Hollywood and he appeared in several scenes in "Teacher's Pet" which starred Clark Gable and Doris Day.

Friends of Ed may contact the family he was living with, Chuck Lawhorn at Ed's last address.

Our thoughts and prayers are with the families of our fallen comrades.

DUES

As noted in the Pantanella News previously, we have established dues at \$10 per year. Your mailing label will have a number after your name to indicate the latest year you have paid. If no number appears it

means that you are over a year delinquent in dues.

We try to keep our records up to date, however, we may not have recorded your dues or contribution correctly. If you do not agree with your dues number after your name please let us know so that we can correct it.

If you are not current and want to continue receiving the *Pantanella News* please respond with your check for \$10.00 per year for dues. The check should be made payable to the 781st Bomb Squadron Association and sent to O. J. Cowart whose address is on page two.

If you plan to attend the reunion we will be set up to receive your dues payment during registration.

We want to thank those of you who have been so generous by sending much more than requested.

I RECALL THE HAYSTACK

By Bill Bartlett

The article "The Well-Stacked Haystack" in the April Newsletter brought back memories I had forgotten about.

One day at Pantanella, three of us enlisted men on Ray Doss's crew Cliff Johnson, Elmer Parton and myself, went up to the PX. As we came out of the PX, we noticed a long line ending at a hay stack. Well, not wanting to miss out on anything, we got in line. When we were about five feet from the hay stack and could see the action inside the hollowed-out room, we were getting pretty excited. Just then the Officer of the Day, with his 45 strapped on, came down and evicted the Haystack Seniorita.

I have always cursed that Officer of the Day. But, after reading the rest of the story, I should thank him as he probably save me from joining the Purple Banner Gang.

And the Hay Stack Seniorita was definitely not the gal in the picture on Page 11.

Does anyone remember who the Officer of the Day was?

WELCOME NEW MEMBER

Charles H. Haffey, Navigator on Wortham's crew, finally comes home. Thanks to Thomas S. Thomas III President of the 464th Bomb Group Association.

In our records we had Charles listed as Herbert, however, I did have a note it might be H. Charles. His WWII address was Harrisburg, PA. Now his address is 116 Woodland Drive, York, PA 17403. Phone 717 854 1894.

Charles stayed in the reserves and retired a Lt. Colonel. OK friends and crew members of Charles, let's let him know we welcome him home! More on Charles when he fills us in what he has done since WWII and some of his memories of Pantanella.

A word about Tommy Thomas; he is President of the 464th Bomb Group Association, and a member and worker in many other organizations - Air Forces Escape and Evasion Society, Air Force Assoc., and the Caterpillar Assoc., etc. Over the past several years we have had numerous correspondence. A nice guy who was with our friends on the other hill at Pantanella.

ALL AMERICAN VISITS CALIFORNIA

For the second year in a row we had the pleasure of the visit of *All American* to all of California. This time the Hollywood aircraft came along, the B-17. In reviewing the names indicating donations I noticed our latest two members located, Frank Piteo and Charles Haffey, are Distinguished Flying Command members of *All American*.

It was a chance for some of our local members to visit, most of them were volunteers workers for the *All American*. Ben Donahue took charge in San Jose with help from Curt Reed. And Kerry Myers, with his young son, helped at the San Francisco stop. I did not get to visit all the stops and see everyone as there were seven in this area of California.

In a note after the visit Kerry

Myers writes, "All American looked beautiful with its lustrous paint job and spotless interior. The fighting 781st and indeed B-24 outfits across the country can take great pride in this American Beauty. She properly reflects the massive efforts of all who have come to her rescue. To you and all others who have given so selflessly to her restoration, WELL DONE!"

It is always a joy to see the appreciation the public has for these historic aircraft. And also seeing the younger generation interested in learning about WWII. And a special thanks to all of you that have supported this very worthy project - the 781st remains the squadron that has donated more to *All American* than any other WWII squadron!

1994 Reunion Replies

Dick Storm, "You asked for suggestions for the 1994 Reunion location and may wife and I would like to offer Tucson which of course has the Davis-Monthan Air Base where a lot of us took overseas training.

"There is a great air museum with the "Air Force One" plane that people are permitted to tour. Also the base has miles and miles of stored planes and as one drives by it leaves one in awe. We were there four years ago and the last we heard it is still an active field and offers base tours.

"I know Tucson will be warm if we should go in September, but later in the month the weather would be nice. There are some fine missions and the city is not far from the town of "Tombstone."

"Twice we have submitted Tucson and my only thought of why it wasn't chosen is because it so far for the Eastern members, but we on the West Coast have been travelling back toward the East since the reunions began.

"Please give Tucson and Davis-Monthan a very thorough consideration. My wife and I were married in the chapel at Davis-Monthan in 1944."

Gene Martis writes he got thinking about the newsletter and reunion suggestions and proposes Las Vegas. Here are the reasons;

1. A resort that is very popular

visited by many of us and a place others may not have been.

2. Easy access by plane at very attractive prices.

3. Fabulous accomadations in many hotels at super cheap prices.

4. Restaurants and food available at minimum cost.

5. Great Shows - a Holiday atmosphere.

6. Many varied activities (gambling, sports, trips, etc.)

7. Close to Luke Field AF test facility.

8. Great Weather, good access.

9. Fabulous scenery.

OK men, lets have some more comments. There has been requests in the past for Florida and California. I will have an outline showing membership by states at the reunion. We like to have the next reunion decided during the time of this reunion because its you the members that should make the decision.

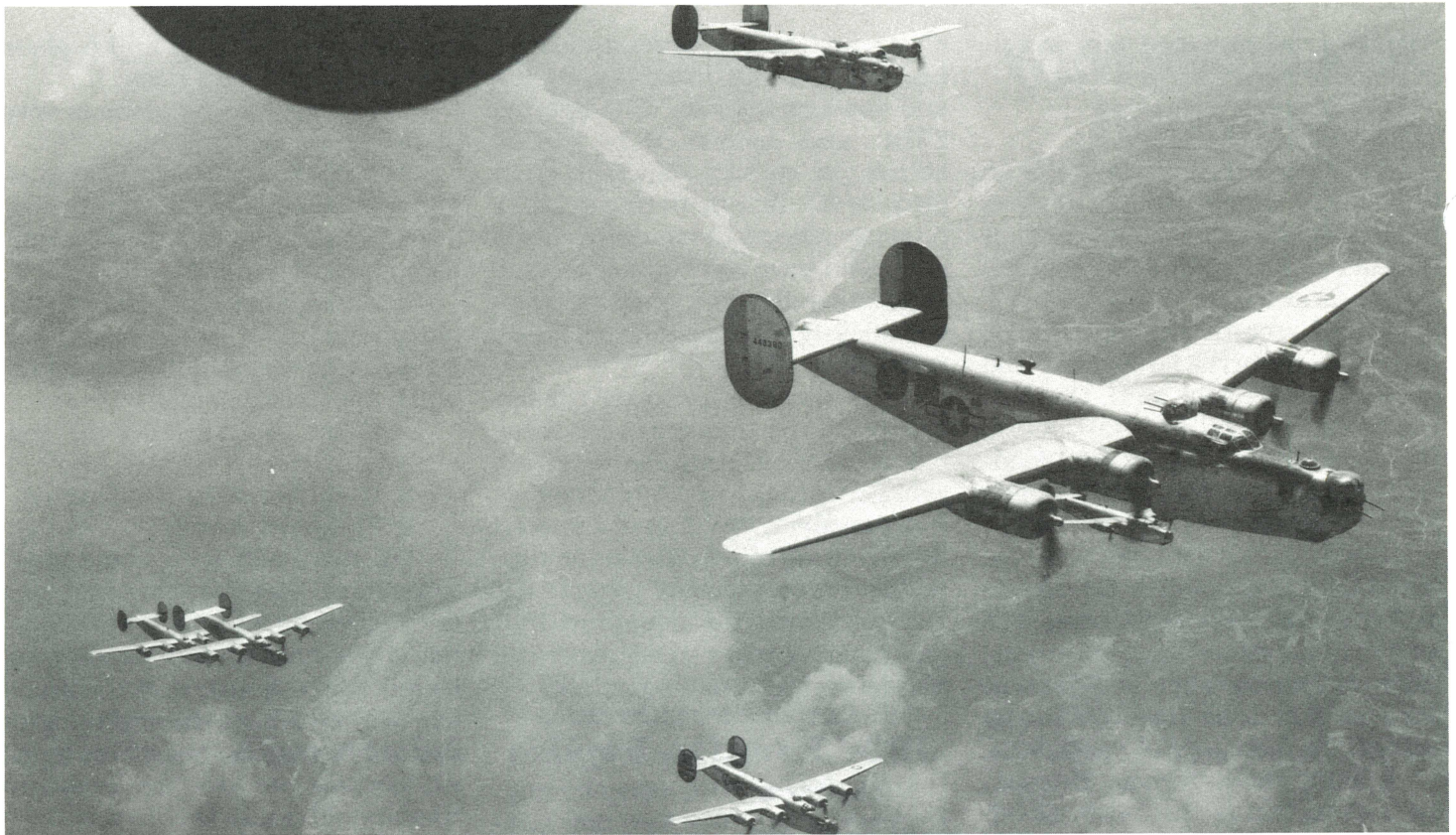
Charles McKenna, "In regard to a place for the next reunion, how about Wichita, Kansas? A B-1 wing is stationed there, there are a couple of aircraft factories there, it is in the middle west, and prices are reasonable."

In the past we have had suggestions for Florida, California Tucson and many other places. We want to make plans for '94 at Omaha, so give it some thought and be ready to help us pick the right location.

DEDICATION. . . .

Many of our members have put in a great deal of time and effort to help organize our squadron and get us all back together again. One man has been outstanding in his continued dedication. He is our Treasurer, O. J. Cowart, Jr.

You may remember me reporting about help from O. J. when our roster began to grow. I did not have a computer nor any experience with them. O. J. guided me through the process of purchasing a computer and helped me set up the roster and the format of the newsletter. Recently I had the honor of a visit from O. J. - all the way from Texas just to help me get familiar with a new program! And I think a little of that old Pantanella camaraderie is involved.



Our squadron on a mission over Southern Europe led by Yellow "J", the *Skin Wagon*. Two other planes identified are Yellow "C" and Yellow "N". The original Yellow "J", *Angel of the Sky*, was one of the original 12 flown over. It ran off the end of the runway and was replaced with the *Skin Wagon* according to Warren Carden the crew chief.

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