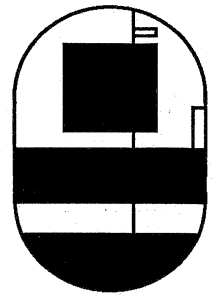




PANTANELLA NEWS



JULY 1993

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NUMBER 33

THE BIRTH OF THE B-24 LIBERATOR

As the war clouds began to gather over Europe President Franklin Roosevelt believed the United States would be entering the war before too long and saw the need to bolster the nation's security. Roosevelt pushed for more air power and by January 1939 he ordered Gen. Hap Arnold, Air Corp's chief, to increase B-17 production and develop a new four-engine bomber with a 3,000 mile range, a top speed above 300 miles per hour and a ceiling of 35,000 feet.

The Air Corp inspectors went to Consolidated Vul-

tee Aircraft Corp. in San Diego to discuss increased production of the B-17 they were building under license from Boeing. When they arrived Consolidated engineers had a mock-up of a new bomber they proposed to build. They borrowed the untried mock-up Davis wing from the Model 31 flying boat proposal, along with the Model 31's huge twin tail assembly for the mock-up.

The Air Corp was interested in the mock-up and on March 30, 1939 they signed a contract for a mock-up wind-tunnel model, and one prototype XB-24 airplane. Exactly nine months later, December 29, 1939, the first XB-24 was flown. The B-24 was born.

What made the B-24 so successful was the Davis wing, named after the inventor, David R. Davis, a self-taught eccentric engineer. The thin, narrow wing's



success was the reduction in drag - 25% on climb and 10% at cruise speed. Davis patented the wing in 1931 calling it the "fluid foil."

There were five experimental models and many design changes. A total of 27 planes of these models, XB-24, YB-24, B-24A, XB24-B and B-24C, were made before mass production started in 1940 on the first combat ready B-24D of which 2,738 were made. Each B-24 had 1,255,000 parts held together by 400,000 rivets.

By late 1941 the San Diego plant completed the first mechanized line for heavy bombers. The initial line consisted of 54 Liberators and periodically all 54 bombers would move to a new station in the line. By 1944 the procedure changed and the line moved in constant motion at the rate of 8 minutes per inch. By this time "Rosie the Riveter" answered the call; 45% of employees were women.

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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.

Meanwhile in May 1940 Roosevelt called for an increase in aircraft production to 50,000 per year. He had wanted Henry Ford to assist in the wartime effort, but Ford was an isolationist and despised war on moral grounds. Ford, however, tempered his stand when Germany began overrunning Europe, and agreed to begin defense work.

Ford began some defense work by accepting a contract to build 4,000 Pratt & Whitney

engines for U. S. aircraft. Shortly after, in January 1941, Ford met with the Advisory Council for National Defense at Consolidated Aircraft in San Diego. During the visit Ford's manufacturing boss, Charles Sorensen, made a proposal that Ford could produce one finished airplane every hour with 100,000 workers and a \$200 million plant measuring a mile long and a quarter-mile wide. Consolidated's goal was completing one airplane per day. With Ford, the U. S. would have an increase in production to meet the heavy bomber need, and no doubt shortened the war by many months.

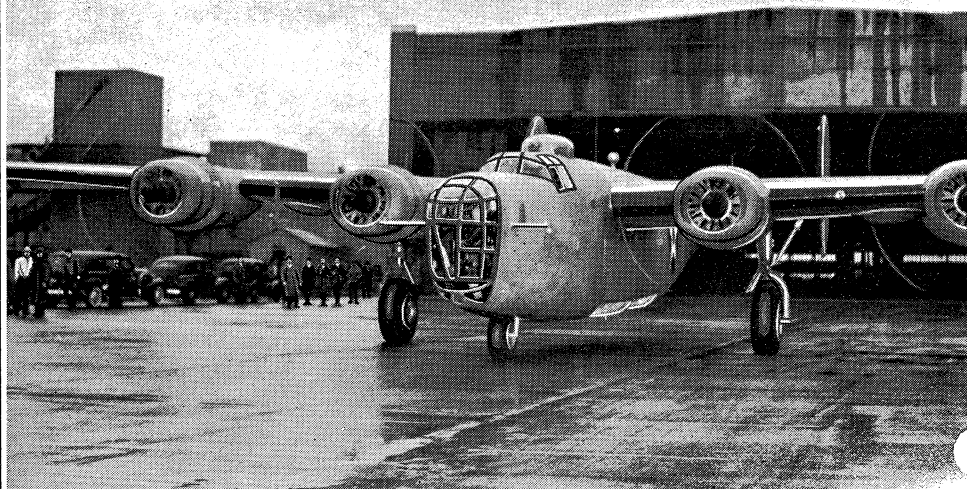
Ford's plant construction and manufacturing methods is a story in itself. Ford had committed his resources to the construction of the world's largest manufacturing plant to build aircraft. He changed completely the method of manufacturing used at Consolidated. Instead of plumb bobs and levels, Ford used sophisticated fixtures and gauges, Ford preferred steel dies for punching out aluminum and cast-iron dies instead of drop forgings and many other changes to speed up production. Eventually 30,000 dies were made to build the B-24. One interesting item, Ford had the plant sloped in the direction the planes would be moved so they could move by just letting them roll along on their own weight to the next assembly point.

Some of the dramatic changes; wing construction time was reduced from 19 days to a matter of hours, seam or spot welding to replace 15,000 rivets per plane reducing weight, and saving 35,000 hours of labor every month.

Aircraft production began in late 1942 with a total of 56 for the year, then 31 in January 1943, 190 per month by June and by March 1944 Ford's dream was realized - Willow Run produced 453 airplanes in 468 hours.

Willow Run had 3.5 million square feet of factory space covering 80 acres and employed 42,000 workers for which he had to build housing for 14,000.

FORD-BUILT BOMBER



The first B-24 Liberator to leave Willow run. It was an E model.



With 42,000 employees there was a bottleneck getting to work. Every car had every available seat filled - gas was rationed.

When the war ended Willow Run had an enviable record. The output nearly equaled Japan's entire production that year and was approximately half that of each of the nations of Germany, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union.

The assembly line method dropped the delivered price of a B-24 from \$238,000 each in 1942 to \$137,000 in 1944. A total of 8,685 B-24s were built at Willow Run.

B-24s were made or assembled at five plants: Consolidated at San Diego - Douglas at Tulsa - North American at Dallas - Ford at Willow run, and Consolidated at Fort Worth.

The first model for quantity production was the D model, with most planes produced in the H and J models, (6,678 J models.) The M was the last model, the N was under development. There were 2,738 D, 897 E, 429 G, 3,214 H, 6,678 J, 669 L, and 1015 M and 3769 PB4Y-1. A grand total of all experimental and other variations totalled 19,256. Air Corp Liberators and Navy PB4Y-1s numbered 18,842. These numbers vary slightly if added by classification only since in some cases some models were converted to other models and were added again with another classification. Five years after the war the Air Force had only

one B-24 in inventory.

One could wonder how much effect on the war in Europe the increased production of the B-24 by Ford made. The extra B-24s no doubt shortened the war in Europe by many months.

It was interesting to find in my research that the L model was produced with a lightweight tail gun and 1650 J models were delivered without tail turrets to be modified at depots in the field. One of these may have been the one Doss was flying when it went back in on it's nose on take-off. The complaint was it was nose heavy.

Thanks to Ben Donahue for his help on this article. Ben is a director with the American Aviation Historical Society.

WWII PLANES IN GREENLAND

You may have heard of the two B-17s and six P-38s that landed on an ice cap in Greenland on July 15, 1942. They were enroute to England, the B-17s leading the P-38s, ran into bad weather, and decided to land on the ice cap after learning all other landing sites were closed in and they were running low on fuel.

Since then, 260 feet of snow and

ice have compacted over them. The planes were located in 1980. In 1990 excavators reached the cockpit of one of the fighters and removed a piece of one of the B-17s. They discovered that the shifting ice had crushed and sheared the aircraft. They thought there could be no hope of recovering an intact B-17 or P-38. They did bring out some artifacts including the piece of aluminum taken from below the cockpit of the B-17. It was the name of the plane, "Big Stoop" and was given to the pilots wife, Phyllis Hanna.

Recently the Air & Space magazine had an updated article on the project. Various interested investors and volunteers worked on ideas

on how to dig out these planes. They finally settled on a steam probe which melted a four foot hole in the ice at the rate of two feet per hour. After melting five holes the were able to remove a dismantled P-38.

The project spent over \$2 million and it will cost one-half million to restore the P-38. They expect to have the P-38 flying for the 1994 Oshkosh air show.

If you have interest in the whole story, "Lightning on Ice" in Air & Space is very interesting and well worth reading.

FIFTY YEARS AGO

On 14 August 1993 it will be 50 years since the first cadre personnel were assigned to the **465th Bombardment Group (H)** and its four squadrons, the **780th, 781st, 782nd** and **783rd** at Davis-Monthan Field near Tucson, Arizona.

On 16 August 1943 **Charles F. McKenna, III**, Major, Air Corps, took command of the 781st Bomb Squadron.

On July 12, 1943, **Harold and Dorothy Straughan** were married in Tucson, AZ. Harold was a gunner on Charles McKenna's model crew.

MY RECOLLECTION OF RAYMOND DOSS

by Frank Wassenaar

As a member of the Doss crew, I would like to recall some of the things you and I talked about in Omaha, and I would appreciate any help Bill Bartlett, Jamie Hartley, or Bob Smeltzer (our remaining crew members) could add or correct me if I'm mistaken in my observations.

Doss and I never became close friends. When we arrived at Pantanella, there was a shortage of tents so our crew, at least the officers, were assigned beds in various tents. Frank Clark, Benson's navigator, had gone down on a mission with another crew, so his area was open and I began living with that crew and continued with them until the war ended and we shipped out.

I nearly left the Doss crew because of Doss in phase training at Pueblo, but Bill DeKriek, our co-pilot, talked me out of it and convinced me that Doss was a very capable pilot and had more experience and hours in B-24s than any of the pilots in our training group.

Most of the information I relate is directly from Doss and other crew members. It is my understanding that before joining our crew at Lincoln and then on to Pueblo, Doss had flown a tour of duty in Europe as a B-24 pilot with an aerial mapping squadron working the coastline of Africa. After returning to the states he was stationed at Smyrna, Tennessee at a transitional training base as an instructor for B-24 pilots. I think this could be verified from Air Corps records.

It was interesting to read Smeltzer's observations of the crash on take-off of Yellow P. I was on the flight deck with Smeltzer, Bartlett, and possibly Moore, our nose gunner. I don't recall having a navigator on board that morning. I remember the plane being airborne and seeing Doss hit the gear handle and then somehow we settled back on the runway. It is also my understanding that when the gear-up lever is activated, the nose wheel solenoid responds first, and then the main gear goes up in sequence. So, when Doss

hit the gear-up lever, the nose wheel solenoid had activated and when we settled back on the runway, the nose wheel collapsed and we skidded the rest of the way off the runway and into the field beyond. I think Doss and DeKriek did a fantastic job of keeping the plane going straight, not hitting the brakes or some other foolish thing. Everyone was eager to get out of the plane as quickly as possible. Not long before, a 464th plane had lost it on take-off and blew up. I lost no time getting out and as far from the plane as possible. Fortunately, nothing happened except a completely ruined new airplane.

One explanation, as suggested by Bartlett, was that there was no tail turret, making the plane nose heavy. Another was that there was a rather strong cross wind that day and as we were on the right-hand runway, we got some propwash from the left-hand plane which forced us down. In any event and whatever conclusion, it's possible that Doss may have hit the gear handle too soon.

Doss was transferred to a photo recon squadron flying P-38s which lends some credence to his story of flying photo missions in Africa. Lt. Trudeau took over as first pilot and our crew flew several missions before the war ended. I'm terribly sorry Bill DeKriek is not here to give us more insight about the crash. Maybe Bill Bartlett, our engineer, can supply more details.

My Remembrances Of Raymond Doss

by Glen Haywood

Shortly after we arrived at the 781st, and for reasons I no longer recall, Doss was checking us out on night flying using my usual right seat. As we gathered speed the forces grew and the seat latch on the check pilot, Ellison, let go shooting him rearward together with the yoke, forcing full up elevator. In one smooth movement Doss took over for an uneventful take-off. I thought his quick thinking and professional manner spoke well for his abilities.

After the take-off incident everyone seemed down on the guy and

treated him pretty much as a pariah around the club, so I spent a little time with him. He told me that as an enlisted man he had been involved as a camera operator on aircraft, engaged in mapping of South and Central Americas, as I recall. Anyway, because I wasn't as enamored with the B-24 as some of you buddies, I had made some contacts in Bari when they were flying P-38s on photo recon. I passed this information on to him and it seems he found a new home. In fact he flew back up to see us once, and that was the last we saw of him. I have since heard that he was killed in some manner.

My records do not indicated how Raymond Doss died. The records show he left the service in 1947 and died June 26, 1975.

No one seems to have a clear memory as to exactly what Doss did before he began training his crew for combat. I called William Bartlett, the engineer on the crew, for some of his memories. He was sure Doss was an enlisted man before taking pilot training, he was quite sure Doss had not been overseas before coming to Pantanella, yet he apparently had other B-24 time as pilot. A likely scenario is that he was an enlisted man doing camera work in South America or Africa, then took pilot training, B-24 transition and stayed on as a B-24 transition pilot instructor before combat crew training.

Bartlett pointed out that Doss was a nervous pilot, sometime getting blisters on his hand from working the throttles, quite a contrast to his easy going, smooth flying co-pilot DeKriek.

Bartlett is positive there was no turret in the tail - just two flexible 50s mounted on a swivel. This, of course, made the plane nose heavy. Additionally, he said that that day there was an extra pile of flack vests lying on the hard stand and Wassenaar threw an extra supply in the nose.

Doss was probably the most controversial pilot in the squadron caused by his personality and the accident he had.



I took this photo of *All American* over the Golden Gate Bridge from the "Hollywood" airplane, the B-17.

"All American" Comes to Town

I know many of you have seen *All American*, along with *Nine-O-Nine*, on their tour across the country. Our turn came on June 19th when they arrived in the area for a three week visit at various cities. I helped organize two of the stops, and joining in at San Jose was Ben Donahue and Curt Reed. At Half Moon Bay Kerry Myers, son of Shack Myers, helped out.

On the flight from San Jose to Sacramento the co-pilot for the B-17 did not show up, so I was asked to fly co-pilot! Well, I just had to take up the offer to find out for sure that the B-24 was superior! Arriving at Sacramento I saw waiting in the crowd two 781st men, Calvert Crawford and James Gingrich. We had a nice visit then they took me to the bus depot for my return trip home.

The following week the same situation occurred and I was able to fly co-pilot again in *Nine-O-Nine*. This time we had the company of three AT-6s. It was Memorial Day and the flight took us over the Golden Gate Bridge where we circled for a while to take photos and added

a little color for the many viewers enjoying the day. I just wish the photo of *All American* over the Golden Gate could be in color - it was a spectacular view that day. We landed at Livermore and Bernie Badler was there helping out.

My curiosity is satisfied - in the future I'll be back with the winner - "*All American*!"

Les Wheeler Has Some Comments

It was really interesting to read "On the Line" by William Jostworth in the Pantanella News. I knew that maintenance on our planes was excellent, but didn't know that not one 781st plane ever returned because of maintenance error. Also, I didn't know that the ground crews "sweated out" our return as he mentioned in the article.

Here's a question for engineering. Going to the target on one mission, our #4 engine suddenly started squirting oil like a runaway oil well. It happened several minutes after everyone had test fired their guns. We had to shut down the engine and feather the prop. At the

rate the oil was flowing out, the engine would have run dry and seized in a few minutes. We were still a long way from the IP. With three engines there was no way we could keep up with the formation, so I aborted the mission and returned home.

When we arrived back at Pantanella, the ground crew checked the engine to find the problem. There was a 50 caliber slug stuck in the front of the #4 prop governor control. We never could figure out how it got there. I was flying right wing on the lead ship with no other groups in sight. I always flew "tight in" and forward in formation. There wasn't any way guns from the lead ship could have hit

our #4 engine.

Can engineering give me a clue as to how it got there??

Now I appreciate the ground crews and their concern for us even more. By the way, I flew Yellow "O" on most of my missions. Sure would like to know the name of the ground crew chief for that plane. My thanks to him for maintaining Yellow "O" in such good shape. It brought us back from one mission on 2 1/2 engines. We were almost an hour late with no stops on the way home!

SICK CALL

In a letter from Bob Freed he informed me that **Helen Zadrozny** had major surgery. She is recovering nicely and expects to be in Tucson next year.

Our Squadron Secretary, **Ben Donahue**, just returned from the hospital after surgery. He's recovering nicely and expects to be on the go in a few days and able to help to get the *Pantanella News* in the mail.

A 783rd Squadron member, **Al Honey**, is seriously ill. Al invited me to their reunion in 1985 and the next month the 781st Association began. To those that know Al he would appreciate hearing from you.

MY LIFE IN BARI, ITALY

By O. J. Cowart, Jr.

I was assigned to Intelligence School in Bari at the 15th Air Force headquarters building shortly after we arrived at Pantanella. The building was a beautiful modern building overlooking the Adriatic Sea. During class sometimes the British Anti-Aircraft guns would open up outside. This would make it impossible to concentrate in school so we would go outside and watch the British AA's shoot at the attacking Germans planes.

After finishing school, the instructor, another fellow and I took a weapons carrier to the airport in Bari. We picked up some Sigcun code machines from a C-47 cargo plane and took them to fighter fields near Torremaggorie. One of the fighter groups was the only all Negro outfit (Red Tails) who later were escorting the Pantanella Bombers. They were flying P-47 Jugs at the time I was there; later they were flying P-51s. I was able to provide help for them before they escorted the Pantanella Bombers. While there, I had a meal with them and they had excellent cooks. I was a little uncomfortable since I was from Houston, Texas and had always been in a segregated environment.

While at school we were billeted in an Italian hi-rise. I was living on the sixth floor. This building had been requisitioned by the Army Signal Corps for military use. Each morning we were blasted awake by "Alexander's Ragtime Band" coming from loudspeakers throughout the building. In the mornings while the Italians were using water in other parts of Bari, there wasn't enough pressure to send the water up to where we were. We had to go downstairs to shave and wash; there were no elevators.

Bari was a large and interesting city built on the seashore of the Adriatic Sea. I was living among the Italians for one month and observed some strange sights and sounds.

Some of the streets were paved with slick cobble stones on which horses would sometimes lose their footing. In trying to regain their dignity there would be a tremendous racket (especially at night), then silence. On the waterfront would be fishermen with huge nets seining for small fish. Raw sewage was emptied in the Adriatic and these small fish had been feeding on it a short time before they were caught. I guess its what they get accustomed to that keeps them from getting sick. These small fish would be sold to the Italians who would stroll down the waterfront eating them uncooked like we would eat popcorn. They would not eat the heads. Also, there were small octopus that the fishermen would use a paddle to pound, then rinse in the Adriatic, then pound some more. After this "tenderizing" process, the Italians would purchase these small octopus, and tearing off a tentacle would go walking along eating them raw.

The Red Cross club in Bari was a very enjoyable place to rest and relax. They would put on shows with singing and dancing. One show was a belly dancer with her band. She was a very beautiful young girl from Egypt. It was the first time I had ever seen a belly dancer and was really impressed with her and her Arab band with their weird sounding music. The Red Cross sold snack bar tickets for 5 Lira (5 cents) These tickets had a drawing of Romulus & Remus nursing on a wolf. This symbol was used in many places in Italy. For 5 cents you could buy ice cream or cookies.

One day in Bari, a short little old Italian lady approached me with a bird in a cage. She wore ragged clothes and was very small, shriveled, and wrinkled more than anyone I had ever seen; she looked to be over a hundred years old. The Italians tried to sell any and everything imaginable to the

soldiers. She held up the cage and I presumed she was trying to sell me the little bird. I shook my head that I was not interested. She then pulled open a little drawer underneath the cage that contained many small neatly folded papers. She then opened the cage door and the tiny bird hopped out and picked up one of the papers in its beak. The bird then hopped back in the cage. The old woman offered the paper to me and to my amazement, this little paper was my fortune. It was obvious that some Italian had gotten a Italian-English dictionary and had composed my fortune in which I was encouraged to find a nice Italian girl, marry, have many kids and live happily ever after. For only 10 Lira (10 cents) I purchased my fortune from one of the most pitiful looking human beings I had ever seen.

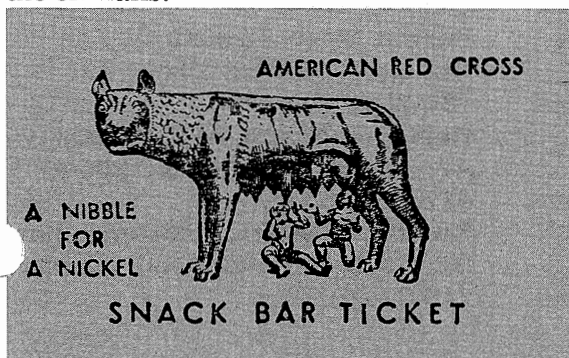
On one occasion, I saw a rich man's funeral coming down the street. It was preceded by a dozen or more small Italian girls dressed in all white. They were weeping, wailing and showing great emotion. The richer the deceased, the more little girls in the procession. Following the girls was an elaborately carved hearse pulled by horses. and then



followed by relatives and friends of the deceased walking slowly along.

The following describes a very unusual scene. There were possibly 20 or more people gathered around what looked like a very old school bus. One of these people had a stick with a rag tied around the end. It had been soaked in what I believed was gasoline and was burning. The hood of the bus was opened and the burning stick was put in the motor compartment. I was thinking those crazy Italians were going to blow up the bus. After holding the fire under the hood for several minutes I saw a scene that I have never observed since. This large group of Italians got behind the bus and started pushing. It then dawned on me that the rag was soaked in diesel fuel and the object of this activity was to pre-heat the diesel fuel before starting. They had no battery, thus no starter. Viola! There is more than one way to start an old bus during wartime.

The ship blowing up in the Bari harbor was a ghastly sight. They were unloading bombs when the ship blew up and the whole bow had been blown off the ship and deposited up on the dock. The docks were surrounded by multi-storied apartments and some were completely destroyed with great loss of life. After several days, all the heads and bodies were removed and all that was left were unidentified arms and legs among the rubble. They were smelling bad, so I didn't stay around very long. I really felt sorry for the Italians because the Germans probably just took what they wanted and the Americans came along and proceeded to purchase what was left, or as in this case just blow up things, thus leaving little or nothing but some bad memories for the civilians.



COKER PURPLE HEART

Since the last reunion another name has been brought up regarding the Purple Heart. John H. Coker, Jr., radio operator on the W. J. Smith, crew passed away August 30, 1981.

In checking with three of his crew members I learned that Coker was wounded on September 10, 1944 on the full crew's first mission over Vienna. Coker was wounded in his arm by flak and was under the care of Art Bovett, the bombardier on the crew and acting medical officer.

On arrival at Pantanella Coker was taken to the Group Hospital. Then, since he had nerve damage to his arm, he was taken to the hospital at Bari. He was shipped home from there. The crew remembers he received a Purple Heart at the hospital.

In a recent conversation with William "Bill" Smith regarding a story on his crew he said nothing unusual happened that he could think of. "But we did go to Vis twice and a northern Italy emergency field once." I reminded him he also went to Russia after being shot up another time over Vienna.

NEW SQUADRON CHAPLAIN

Roy Byrd recently asked the board of directors to accept his resignation as Squadron Chaplain due to the fact he has been unable to attend our recent reunions. He suggested that we consider **Loren Foote**.

The board of directors unanimously agreed with the suggestion. Loren Foote has accepted and will serve as Squadron Chaplain.

We all thank Roy for his help at our early reunions. I still remember the first Memorial Service in the Cadet Chapel at Colorado Springs. Those of us planning the reunion program were wondering how the service would turn out. Roy and his helpers held a beautiful service, one that we will



The above photo of our chapel is from Wayne Watson's collection. A note on the photo indicates it was taken when the chapel opened one week before we had to leave.

never forget.

Roy, we hope you can attend future reunions - come join us and just relax and enjoy. And Loren, we know you have done a great job at filling in during the recent reunions and we know you will continue to hold memorial services to honor our fallen comrades and their families.

WALT LONGACRE REMEMBERS A ROUGH MISSION

On 16 July 1944 I flew as a volunteer nose gunner on my 28th mission to Weiner Neudorf Engine Works near Vienna, Austria. My records show that it was with Lt. Wheeler's crew, however the Squadron history book does not show him and his crew on this mission.

This was one of the roughest and scariest missions I was ever on. We had a normal flight to the IP, then turned on the bomb run. We then flew through the heaviest flak I had seen. As I can remember, we made ourselves as small as we could so our flak vest would protect us.

About this time a German Me-109 decided to attack the formation and hit us in the leading edge of the wing between the right side of the fuselage and engine. To this day I can see this Me-109 coming in at us so fast we had no time to get any shots off at him. We had to drop out of formation when we were hit and lost one engine. The hit punctured fuel lines and a lot of gas sprayed over the rear and right side of the plane, but we were fortunate enough to get this stopped.

We dropped our bombs as soon as we could and fortunately we had a lot of cloud cover this particular day and managed to stay in the clouds back to home base. However, we started having engine trouble with another engine before getting to the Alps. The decision was made to start tossing out anything we could to lighten our load. This we did and luckily we made it over the Alps.

By the time we got back to the base we had one good engine, two feathered, and one about ready to go. We were about one hour later than the rest of the squadron getting back. Reports were that we had gone down.

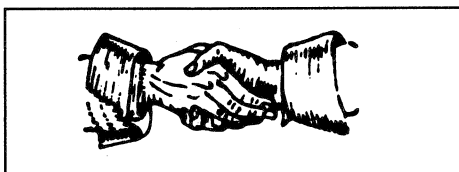
After our nerve settling shot of whiskey and debriefing I made it back to my tent and there on my cot was the neatest display of my clothing ready to go. My crew was sure I had gone down and had packed my clothes to send home.

Many of you had rougher mis-

sions I know, but for a young 21 year old this was rough enough.

This day the Lt. Tipton crew got shot down by Me-109s after the target near Zagreb, Yugoslavia.

Another time Walt saw an Me 109 coming in soon enough to get off a shot and score a kill. It was 8 July 1944 on the mission to Florisdorf Oil Refinery at Vienna. The group was awarded the Presidential Citation for this mission.



WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

There is an invention called a computer. Nearly every day there is a new wrinkle for the use of computers. Recently my cousin, Tom Miller, obtained a number of disks which list all the listed phone numbers in the United States - 70 million! And you guessed it, I began running through the names of our Lost Souls. The first number I called was for **William Pruitt, Jr.**, Tryon Tail Gunner, and it was the right man! He was a bit confused as to our squadron and group number, but then we had a nice conversation about his crew members and the B-24.

I then spent several hours get-

ting no answers, the wrong Joseph Smith, etc., but four more were added to the located list making it five new members that day.

Other new members include **Burton Alper** (Radar Navigator), **Harvey D. Erwin** (Kennedy Tail Gunner), **Elwood K. Helfer** (Intelligence/photography), **Joseph T. Smith** (Pilot). and **Hal Nease**, (Radar Navigator) who lived with Tryon crew.

These new men have a lot of catching up to do. Let's get on the phone or drop a note to fill them in. Almost all have had no contact with anyone since WWII! Most are interested in the next reunion, so let them know what our reunions are like and that they will be most welcome.

Addresses and phone numbers are listed under Address Changes.

After my calls I called Walt Longacre, our chief sleuth, to tell him about it. He had heard about the computer disks but, since he does not have a computer, he went to the local library. They did not have them in stock.

ADDRESS CHANGES

Leo Fink, 8312 Briar Drive, Dallas, TX 75243.

Francis M. Maccani, 10653 Holly Rd., Bokeelia, FL 33922.

Harold Straughan, 4230 Highway EE, Farmington, MO 63640.

H. Francis Quagan, 77 Delwood Rd., Warwick, RI 02889. Phone 401 737-1312.

Lebron Hankins, 2006 Burma St., Rossville, GA 30741.

Vann Reynolds, PO Box 295, Colchester, CT 06415-0295

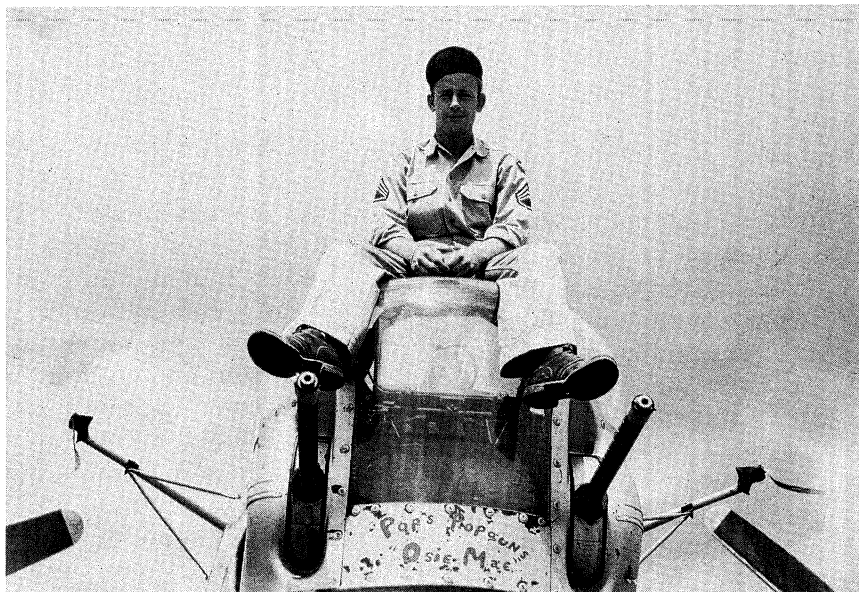
The following are new members;

Hal Nease, 4400 N. Kings Hwy, Myrtle Beach, SC 29577. Phone 803 449-9398.

Burton Alper, 12 McGuirk Ln., Orange, NJ 07052. Phone 201 731-2646.

Harvey D. Erwin, 2412 Kansas Ave., Joplin, MO. 64804. Phone 417 623-2344.

Elwood K. Helfer, 108 Manorshire Dr., Rochester, NY 14450. Phone 716 223-7018.



Walt sitting on top of his favorite position - the nose turret.

William M. Pruitt, Jr., 2051 Sheffield Dr., La Habre, CA 90631. Phone 310 691-1831.

Joseph T. Smith, 16 Basile St., Roslindale, MA 02131. Phone 617 323-4547.

MAIL CALL



On an address change for **Leo Fink** I made an error on the zip, so he did not receive the *Pantanella News* for about a year. We got it straightened out and I sent the back issues to him. He now knows it's Tucson for '94 and he replies, "I couldn't make the reunion in Omaha which was the first one I missed. I certainly am looking forward to Tucson in '94 where I first joined my crew in '43. What memories!"

A note from **Burt Andrus**, formerly CO of the 783rd, in response to Don Barrett's story in the last *Pantanella News*. "You put out the best unit newsletter in the business. As you may know I spent my last 3 years of active duty in Bern in the Defense and Air Attache Office - fabulous.

The "War Interlude" by Don Barrett is fascinating and the first of a kind that I've found." Please send me his address so that I may contact him."

Seth Hawkins writes, "I tried to find out about O'Brien flying in combat for the R.A.F. None of us on the crew ever heard he had flown combat. He transferred from the R.C.A.V. to the Air Corps and was flying gunners out of Ft. Myers. I have contacted all of the crew who are still living."

Bill Coonan responds, "I hope to attend my first reunion in Tucson. Glad to hear more Engineering men attended the last one. I hope there is a large turn out for the ground crew as this is where we started.

"The interview of Leo Lutgring was just great. Boy, does that Leo have a memory. Leo was liked by all his men because he was fair, serious

about his work, and he got the most out of his men.

"I enjoyed the article by Bill Jostworth. We talked on the phone and wrote each other. It is amazing how similar our lives are."

With his address change **Harold Straughan** made the following comments; "We were assigned to the model crew in August 1943 and all of us are still alive. That is a miracle.

Yes, Harold, your crew was blessed with a safe tour of duty and a long life. Col. Charles F. McKenna III's model crew is the only crew with all men still living, according to my records. What a wonderful thing if all you men could assemble in Tucson with us for our 50th reunion celebration in October 1994. Charles McKenna has already said, "I'm planning on being there!" How about the rest of the crew? Start your planning now.

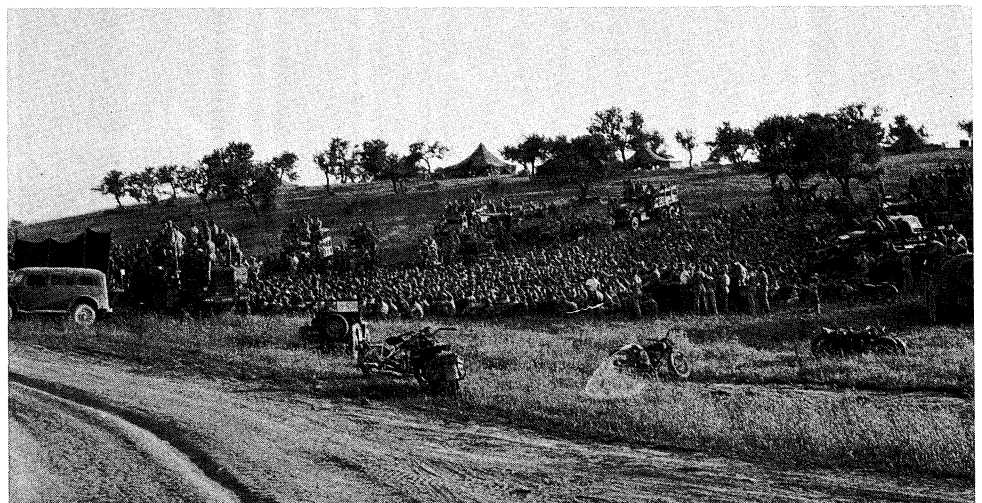
From **Ken Pulham**, "I have enjoyed receiving the *Pantanella News* and hearing about all the happenings of our squadron and group, and I have really enjoyed attending two of our reunions. We certainly want to attend the one in Arizona as it is much closer to our area. See you in '94.

A letter to O. J. Cowart from **Ric Church, son of Sam Monroe**, "I continue to find each issue of the

Pantanella News enjoyable and educational. I am pleased to see that you are going to have the '94 reunion in Tucson. A couple of years ago my wife and I took a trip to Tucson intending to go on to Phoenix. However, we got so wrapped up in the many things to do in Tucson that we never made it to Phoenix. We toured the Davis-Monthan Air Base and the Aircraft Maintenance and Storage Facility. (They do not like to call it the "graveyard" anymore). We found the Pima Air Museum to be fascinating, with aircraft of every vintage, from every military action and more.

We went to Old Tucson, where many of the big Western movies were filmed and where Westerns continue to be filmed - also a great tourist attraction. My wife is very interested in Astronomy and one of the largest observatory complexes in the world (eleven conventional telescopes and a solar telescope) is outside of Tucson, Kitt Peak. It is in the mountains where it is not only beautiful scenery but a welcomed break from the summer heat. We also visited the Mission San Xavier Del Blanc as well as spent a lot of time in the city of Tucson. So, to say the least your reunion attendees have much to look forward to.

It might be of interest to some of your readers that I recently had dad's (Sam Monroe) old flight jacket reconditioned. Dad kept used he flight jacket and used it as a work



This photo, about early summer 1944, was received from Gale Graham, Group Information and Education Officer. All available men are assembling for a USO Show. Note all the motorcycles and the lack of buildings on the hill. Were you there?

jacket, then stored it for forty some-odd years in an old foot locker which was exposed to the changing temperatures year round.

When Dad died I inherited his military memorabilia. The flight jacket was stiff and spattered with paint and epoxy. The cuffs and waist band were completely deteriorated. It took me years to find someone who would agree to take on the task of reconditioning the jacket. Finally, I found a lady who is a whiz with leather. She not only reconditioned the jacket to wearable condition, but she air-brushed in the faded picture of the "Paper Doll", which had been hand painted on the back nearly fifty years earlier, and kept in looking like it was the original painting entirely. She would be happy to talk to others who might need the same thing done with their jackets. (Not necessarily doing the reconditioning but advising whoever might).

From Henry K. Gick, "Recently I went to see *All American*. My oldest son works at the airport and helped refuel the planes. It was quite a thrill for me and brought back memories,

both good and sad.

I was discharged in 1945 and went to New York to work for the State Government and enrolled in the Pratt Institute School of Architecture. In 1948 I joined the reserve and was commissioned a 2nd Lt.

Later I worked for the Federal Government and retired in 1971 as Chief Architect of an F.H.A insuring office. Since I was only 50 years old I went to work for Suffolk County, NY as director of the building department.

In 1979 I retired from this position and, still being too young to retire I went to work Nassau County. In 1981 I retired from the Air Force Reserve as Lt. Col. and in 1989 I finally retired for good.

I should tell you one of the highlights of my life is when after 40 years I received the first envelope with the "Pissed Off Indian" on it. I am still hopeful of reaching one of the reunions.

Now that you are retired why not join us in Tucson?

BITS & PIECES

Grace Riley and Earl Leinart were married on May 8, 1993. Congratulations! We expect Earl and his new bride, Grace, to be with us in Tucson.

The Fifteenth Air Force 50th Anniversary celebration was canceled due to program difficulties and potential Air Force cutbacks.

McCook Army Air Base, Nebraska will have its annual reunion September 24 and 25, 1993. This one will also be its 50th Anniversary, it was April 2, 1943 when the gates officially opened at McCook Army Air Base. Memories for many 781st men. Contact McCook Army Air Base Historical Society, PO Box 29, McCook, NE 69001

Did you know that **Maj. Charles F. McKenna III** was a squadron Commander and Director of Flying at the Bombardier's School, Midland, Texas before becoming our Squadron Commander?

Did you know that 781st Bombardier **John E. Stark** dropped the first bomb in combat from the most famous B-24, **V GRAND**? It was on 14 August 1944 attacking gun positions at St. Tropez, France. Five Grand will be featured in a future newsletter. If you have information on Five Grand we'd like to hear from you.

Recently I was talking to one of our squadron pilots, I believe it was Les Wheeler, about the white flak we would sometimes see. Les said he understood it was the last shots fired from the German AA guns to let their fighters know they finished firing and the fighters could "take over." Anyone have any comments?



The above photo appeared in the first Newsletter. I asked for identification, but no one came near identifying anyone as I recall. It was a poor copy. I have several questions, but feel I know most. On the left must be an enlisted man if I can see the cap identification, then Bob Freeman, Hyman Newman, Bob Bassinette looking down at "Blechhammer," Gordon Ellison?, Wilton Carter, Jim Althoff and Arthur Bovet?

**REUNION 94
HOLIDAY INN PALO VERDES
TUCSON, AZ
OCT 13 to 16, 1994
BIRTHPLACE OF THE
781st BOMBSQUADRON and
465th BOMB GROUP
OUR FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY**

To get you acquainted with Tucson I will cover a brief history of Tucson and in later newsletters there will be articles more specific on individual points of interest for sight-seeing.

Tucson is located in the Sonoran Desert where thousands of majestic saguaro cacti grace the desert forest in what amounts to a living art gallery.

Tucson is recognized as the oldest American city to be continuously inhabited by civilizations overlapping one another. First residents were the Hohokam Indians, farming the area during the first century, A.D. They vanished and were replaced by the Pima and Tohono O'odham tribes. In 1687 Father Eusebio Francisco Kino, a Jesuit missionary from Spain, visited the area. The Pima village at the foot of Sentinel Peak was called "Stjukshon," which translates to "spring at the foot of a black mountain." The word evolved into "Tucson."

Spanish settlers built the walled Presidio of San Agustin de Tucson in the 1770s as protection from attacking Apaches. In 1821 Tucson gained independence from Spain when it became a part of Mexico. In 1846 the Mormon Battalion took over the city in the name of the United States and in 1867 it was named the capital of Arizona Territory. Later the capital was moved to Phoenix and in 1912 Arizona became the 48th state.

Tucson is on a high plateau, 2,389 feet above sea level and sprawls over 500 square miles. Due to the sprawl a car is essential to see all the sights. The 700,000 residents increase to over one million in

the winter months as part time residents "winter" in the wonderful climate.

One of the first things you notice is Tucson is cradled by many magnificent mountains. The sun rises over a range of mountains and sets over another range of mountains.

Tucson enjoys more sunshine than any other city, about 350 days a year. The air is dry and clean and stars at night are a sight to see - or a full moon is magnificent.

Many of us were stationed here, but did not get a chance to learn much about the area. Now, we have time to learn about Tucson, then enjoy visiting the area while attending our reunion in 1994.

Some eager beavers want to get registered early. Fred Aboud called and wanted to know for what sum to make his check for registration. He wants to be number one to register. Fred asked me to remember him to Ben Donahue and when I told Ben he said I want to be number two! They are about a year early, but it just shows the interest in Tucson.

Don't forget - we have a special room rate of \$59, single or double.

Editors Corner

We expect to print an updated roster later this year. If your address needs changing please let me know.

Thanks to all who have responded with articles for the *Pantarella News*. If your articles hasn't appeared in this issue watch for it in future ones.

Don't forget to contact your old friends in the 781st, and especially those what have been recently located. And those you know are confined to their homes or rest homes.

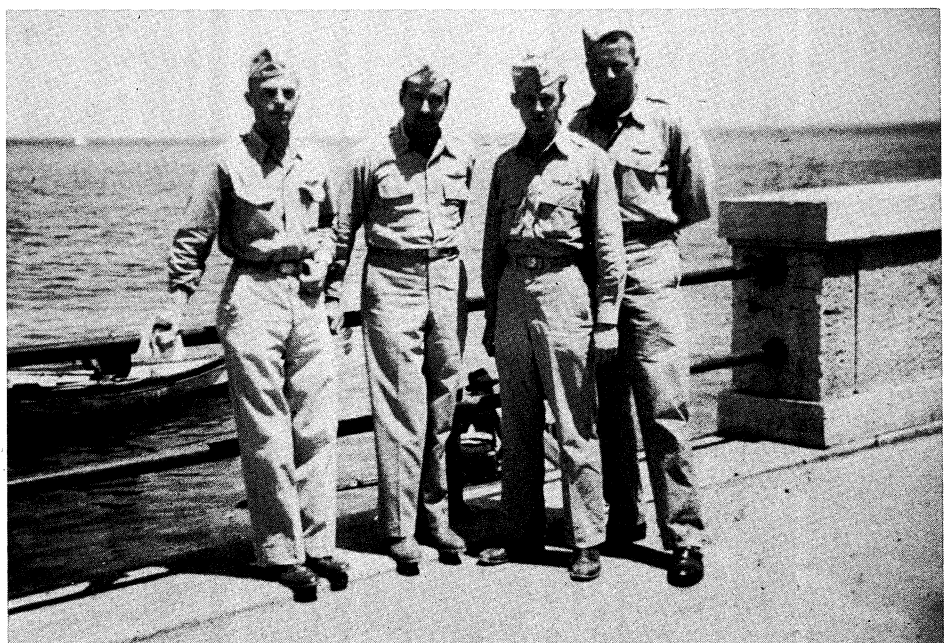
Some items from **Flim Flam**:

Overheard at the Red Cross;
Cpl: "Well Jack - looks like the war is going to be over soon"

T/4: "Holy smoke, I hope it doesn't finish before I get my furlough!"

ROAM-ing in ROME

I followed her ten blocks or more,
A figure trim and neat.
And then at last I saw her face
As she turned off down the street.
And now I'm roaming far and wide
And blood is in my eye;
I'm looking for the guy who said
That figures never lie.



The above photo was sent in by Gene Krzyzynski. L to R, Unknown, Col. Elmer Rogers, Gene Weiss and Dale Tipton. It was just a chance meeting on the Isle of Capri and Krzyzynski took the photo.



Italian women helping to build a bridge by carrying baskets of sand and gravel on their heads. Photos by Sgt. John Knoer with Group Headquarters.



Women carrying straw on their heads to the barn. The collection of photos by Knoer were donated to the 781st by Robert Pennock, Group casualty reporter. Full album will be on display at the next reunion.

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