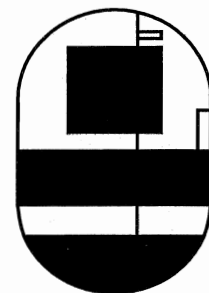




# PANTANELLA NEWS



JULY 1994

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NUMBER 37

## 465th Bomb Group "Silver Wings Orchestra"

By Bonnie Rowe

It all started when I arrived at Pantanelle in September of 1944. After a day to get unpacked and squared away I flew my first combat mission. A couple of missions later all my crew flew 3 missions and then we were called to squadron headquarters and advised we were to be sent to R & R in Roma. We thought the squadron was so thoughtful to send us to rest camp so soon after Martz and my five missions and the crews' three missions. So we were off to the big city of Roma. When we returned we found out we were to train for bad weather and night missions. So at night "off we went to the wild black yonder!"

While in Roma I stopped by a music store and decided to buy an accordion. I left mine at home when I went in the army (drafted that is) and later sold it. I had not played accordion for two years. Someone told me

about Dave White who played clarinet and I went looking for him. We got together for a couple of practices and we sounded pretty good. Then came our big debut. We were asked to play a little music before the movie at the Stable House Theater. We were a hit.

After Dave and I performed we heard that Lt. W. H. Shipley played alto sax and he was in the 781st. Having been in the squadron a very short time and hardly knowing anyone in the group I received a report about a trumpet player in the 780th, a bombardier, Lt. Phil Olsson, and a guitar player, Sgt. Rubin Zubofsky, of the 783rd. Then we added a clarinet player, Cpl. Alvin Schunick of the 780th. Now we had a sextet and we began rehearsing for a better stage show at the Stable House Theater. We put on a show that we had rehearsed and we were a hit.

It didn't take much to be a hit for the group needed all the entertainment we could get. We also continued to grow and pick up more talent as we went along. We got our drummer, Pvt. George Engels of the 780th and he had a drum set to play. We also got another excellent



Front row: Bonnie Rowe (Piano/Accordion), Al Schunick (Clarinet), "Pappy" Franzrel (Bariton Sax), Derrik Quackenbush (Alto Sax), W. H. Shipley (Alto Sax), Dave White (Tenor Sax). Back row: Bob Burgess (String Bass), Rubion Zubofsky (Guitar), George Engels (Drums), Bill Foote (Trumpet), Phil Olsson (Trumpet), J. V. Lancaster (Trumpet).

trumpet player, Sgt. W. M. (Bill) Foote of the 944th Eng. and S/Sgt. F. V. Lancaster of the 781st on trumpet. Sgt. Herb "Pappy" Franzrib was added with his bari sax. We got a tenor sax player, Cpl. D. V. Quackenbush, who was lacking a sax. We knew of a unit on the airfield that had a tenor sax and did not have anyone playing it. We requested they loan us the instrument but the unit would not let us use it as it was charged out to them. We needed the saxophone real bad so a midnight requisition was arranged! The band was growing.

I made a trip to Bari to contact the 15th Air Force Special Service to see if I could get some help in locating a string bass that we needed badly. I was advised I would not find one in Italy and I should just forget it. A few days later the 465th Special Service Officer, Gale Graham, and I headed to Roma with PX money to see if we could find a

bass. After many stops at violin shops and music stores we were given the name of a symphony bass player who lived on the 6th floor of an apartment building near the bombed out rail yards. We went looking for this man and had to walk up six flights. Sure enough he had an extra bass he was willing to sell if the price was right. We finally reached the right price and we had our bass. I don't know how we transported the bass in a jeep with the two of us and the dentist, William H. Kantor, who went with us to Roma. A stand up bass is a good sized instrument. We were back at base with a bass and a bass player, Robert Burgess of the 783rd. Before Bob Burgess we had a major who played bass with us before he shipped out. I don't remember

his name.

We were now very busy playing for the various units around the area and the Silver Wings orchestra was getting a name for itself. We were approached by a Special Service and Red Cross unit that wanted us to go on a short tour with a show built around the orchestra. Several nights we went to Cerignola to practice for the show. We were looking for a short tour of maybe a week to 10 days. I went to Col. Foster with a request we be given permission for a short tour. Col. Foster told me he would give permission as long as the flying officers were back to fly when alerted. This made it impossible if we were playing 200 miles away when alerted. Col. Foster at the time was not interested in the orchestra. However, later he called me to his office and told me he had some high ranking officers visiting the group and he wanted some music. I told him I was on alert for the next mission but I would get a combo to play that night. I believe he received some pats on the back for the good food and music. After that the orchestra was his pet. In fact he put all the members on orders to report to me each day for practice.

In Italy with a war on we couldn't go shopping in town for various things the orchestra needed. We had to some way "make do" ourselves. We needed music stands for the orchestra and at first we were using large cigarette shipping cartons, but these made reading music difficult for we had to look down at a different angle. Rube Zobofsky was an artist and he took some of the cigarette shipping cartons and with a wood frame made some excellent music stands. The cardboard was painted blue with a large yellow musical note. Now we looked like an orchestra and were getting more requests to play around the area.

The one unit that wasn't too fond of me was the motor pool. I was always contacting them for a driver and a truck to take the orchestra to an engagement. Also, I was constantly asking for a jeep for a trip somewhere in Italy. I really had to get on them sometimes for transportation and on several occasions the group executive officer would loan me his jeep which the sheet metal unit had enclosed for him. Every time I drove his jeep I kept praying I wouldn't have an accident on those Italian roads. I also had a problem signing out in the 781st orderly room for all I would hear was "What! you going again." It was all for the orchestra.....maybe a stop at an American Red Cross Club for some ice cream.

On one occasion a major from wing IG contacted me about how much extra money the orchestra was making. He informed me that enlisted men could only make half their base pay and the officers could not make any extra money. We didn't make much as it was. I informed him that the orchestra member had a duty assignment and the orchestra was not an authorized orchestra and I could not ask the men to spend their evenings traveling to different places we were playing and play for several hours without compensation. I told him we would just have to

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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.

dissolve the orchestra. The Major said, "Oh no! Don't do that....just forget my visit." The next time we played at Wing Headquarters he was the first to buy the orchestra a round of drinks. Also Gen. Acheson came out with a fifth of American whiskey and stated he wanted the orchestra to have some good whiskey.

I had several things to worry about. Number one was flying combat and not only did I worry about my own hide, but I also had to worry about losing a sax player, trumpet player, or some other musician on a combat mission. These musicians never realized the prayers I made for their safe return and for the orchestra. Then I had to be the one that came back by boat. We didn't lose an orchestra member.

After losing my crew while I was at lead school I gave up the quarters my crew built and gave the hut to a replacement crew. I moved in with Ben Donahue and Reuben Krogh who had lost two officers of their crew. We got along great and they even put up with my accordion playing. One day while they were on a mission and the group was on a Class A Inspection Alert I was waiting for some time and I figured the generals were detained (again) so I informed some of the officers in the area I was going to practice on my accordion and for them to let me know when the inspection team arrived in the area. I took off my blouse and threw it on the cot and was playing away when I suddenly heard a loud "ATTENTION." I jumped up with the accordion bellows nearly down to my knees and colonels and generals circled around and one of them asked me the meaning of me not being ready for inspection. My reply was that I had waited for a time and didn't want to waste my time when I could be practicing and that I had told my good buddies to inform me when the inspection team arrived in the area. I also informed them that the others were having a good laugh at what was happening. I was rather shaken but nothing ever came of it and I am sure the fame of the "465th Silver Wings" orchestra had a bit to do with me not getting in trouble.

Remembering some of the great tunes we played included our theme song "Silver Wings in the Moonlight," "I'll Walk Alone," "Strange Music," "Sweet and Lovely," "Don't Fence Me In," "I'll Remember April," and many other great songs. Then we had special arrangements by Lt. Walker Shipley like "Isle Of Capri" and the Italian song, "Ah! Maria." Lt. Phil Olsson made an arrangement of "Sleepy Time Down South" and Sgt. Bill Foote's own composition "Pantanelle Jump." There was always my favorite, "Honeysuckle Rose."

The members of the orchestra made many trips to clubs and bases in the area by truck. That was the hard part as a musician but towards the end of the war we were able to travel by plane. This made us realize we had arrived. We flew to a base to play for a party they were having and we opened with

"Don't Fence Me In" and the band was in a mood to play and you would have thought we were Glenn Miller. That day we did sound a touch above! We got quite a hand.

We had a big worry in our rhythm section for the large stand-up bass had gut strings and the big string had a small tear and we kept praying the string wouldn't break. Luck was with us for it didn't break and it made it all through the war. At the time there was no way we could have gotten another string.

At our recent reunions I was surprised to find our little orchestra made an impression on so many. It made an impression on me for none of it was planned. It just fell in place as a need for so many at a bad time. I made a little scrap book on the orchestra and I wish I could remember every little detail, but there has been a lot of water over the dam and too many years. Walker Shipley was a great help to me, an advisor, and was usually the leader when I was alerted to fly the next day. I think Walker should write about his experiences with the orchestra. I am sure he remembers a lot that I have forgotten about.

It was a nice thing to remember the orchestra and I am glad there are still memories of the group. It was good for all at a time we like to recall in our memories, but don't want to go back. "SILVER WINGS IN THE MOONLIGHT!"

## **POST SCRIPT TO BONNIE ROWE'S HISTORY OF "SILVER WINGS ORCHESTRA" by W. H. Shipley**

It has been said that war, for the soldier, consists of long periods of boredom interrupted by short periods of



*An early photo of the orchestra playing at the "Stable House." Here the orchestra was called the 465th Bomb Group, later they were the "Silver Wings."*



intensely emotional excitement. Most of us, with our selective memories, focus on the adrenalin-pumping periods of aerial combat and bombing missions, and tend to forget the endless hours of BOREDOM . . . the 24-hour card games, poker, cribbage, ping pong, dog-eared mystery novels passed from hand to hand and an occasional grade "B" movie. Perhaps we remember the excitement of war, and forget the tedium. There were lots of guys that were "starved" for entertainment. The Silver Wings Orchestra (hereafter designated SWO or the Band) helped to fill that need . . . if not for the audience, then certainly for the players.

We were combat airmen first, and musicians as a hobby. But, in retrospect, we made a unique contribution to the 465th Bomb Group and other units with our musical efforts.

Lt. Bonnie Rowe was the organizer, leader and main-spring of the band. There was a "cadre" of ground personnel, supplemented by whoever was available from flying duty at each different performance. We played at Enlisted Men's Clubs, Bomb Group parties, Flying and Service Personnel audiences, the Stable-house Theater and a bash at Wing Hdqts. Although playing with the band was lots of fun, it was also a lot of work. We had to scrounge instruments, stands, transport them, set them up, take them down, find music, write our own arrangements, and fake it when nothing was available. Like most everything else at Pantanella, it was put together with scraps, patches and a whole lot of ingenuity.

Members of the band, like most all units in service, came from many different parts of the U. S., and from varied backgrounds. The common thread in this case was the FUN we had making music. We didn't know a lot about each other's background . . . it wasn't important at the time. I do recall, one member had played with a radio studio orchestra in N. Y., some others with dance bands as civilians prior to service. I had, in addition to playing with dance bands, been a

member (4 years) of the 143rd Infantry Band (36th Division, Texas National Guard . . . an outfit that later saw lots of action in Italy at Anzio and Rapido River).

The SWO was an egalitarian group. Membership and position was based on need, talent experience rather than rank. Discipline was self-imposed. I never saw any member drink too much, get out of line or goof off during performances or rehearsals. In many ways, playing in the SWO required precision teamwork and cooperation much like that of a combat crew.

Like Bonnie Rowe, I arrived at Pantanella with my crew (Zalk) and flew one combat mission before the rest of the crew. Then we built our nest (a Casa). When Bonnie approached me about playing at the Stable-house Theater in a small combo . . . just for laughs . . . I went along with the challenge. Believe me, it was a challenge. We had no instruments, sheet music and had never seen each other before. None of us at the time had any idea that this pick-up combo would grow into a full blown "big band." From that point, the SWO grew like topsy, one member at a time. The membership was somewhat fluid, not permanent. It was all volunteer, and changed at nearly each performance based on who was available. Much later, a small measure of official recognition of its existence was given in an order from Col. Foster.

For us, the players, the SWO provided a badly needed CREATIVE OUTLET.

Those of you who were at the reunion dinner in Omaha, realize what an impact the big band music of the 40s had on an audience. It often had the same effect on our audiences in Italy. Guys loved to hear the popular tunes they remembered from home. We were able to lift the spirits, if only for a little while, of ground and flying personnel.

Just a couple of incidents to add to the very comprehensive history that Bonnie has written, we were asked to play for the 563rd Service Group E/M Club dance. (My memory of the location is vague, but I think

it was near Bari). I had already learned not to question where anyone would find females to attend a dance. These guys (563rd) were resourceful; they invited a large group of Yugoslav girls to the dance. At the time, convinced by our briefing that the Yugoslavs were friendly, helpful people. I didn't know that when they were not killing other folks, they killed each other. So, the girls may have been in Italy to escape some sort of retribution from their own countrymen. Being a naive youngster from Texas, I had never before seen a Yugoslav. For some reason, I had the mental picture of a tall, well-built Germanic type like I had seen on the German and Czech farms back home. Boy, was I surprised when I saw these gals. They were built loooooow to the ground, and any one of them could bench-press a cannon. Not all the peril was in the flying. At this party, a stage had been hastily thrown together with



31 December 1944 playing for a New Year's Eve party at the Service Squadron on the line. Note the music stands were hand made.



empty ammunition crates for a bandstand. When the joint began to rock so did the ammo crates. I would have felt more comfortable with a parachute.

On the other side of the coin, the dance at Wing Headquarters was well attended by females that I assumed to be WACs, Nurses, Red Cross girls and some fashionable Italian women. This was the first time I had ever been inside an upscale former Italian residence. The baroque architecture, complete with wall and ceiling murals, was beautiful (especially compared to the Stablehouse at Pantanella). This night, we were joined by a really outstanding piano player. I've forgotten his name, but his favorite piece of music was SWEET LORRAINE, played in the manner of Nat King Cole. It soon became our favorite too.

Very late one night, we were returning from an engagement in Spinazzola in a vehicle about the size of a weapons carrier. We passed an Italian farmer asleep in the back of his 2-wheeled cart. His horse was plodding slowly toward his home. We felt it would be un-American, a breach of tradition, if we failed to do something crazy while fighting a war, so we pulled the truck ahead of the cart, turned off the lights and waited for the horse and cart to catch up with us. When it arrived, one of us got out of the truck and silently turned the horse and cart around 180 degrees without the horse missing a step. Then we continued back base.

Just one other side-note. It's amazing how we humans become accustomed to our environment so that we no longer "see" things that are obvious. While at Pantanella, I proudly sent photos home of the band performing, without ever noticing the ubiquitous VD poster in the background. . . that is, until I received a letter from my mother asking, "Does that sign say what I think it says?"

As the SWO was not a formal military unit, we never really disbanded. With the war in Europe over, we went our separate ways, returning to the USA. We've never met together since.

*In the 781st records is a copy of the order signed by Col. Joshua Foster. "The following named officers and enlisted men will report to 2nd Lt. B. G. Rowe at the 781st Officers' Club daily from 0900 to 1200 until further notice for the purpose of band practice. This will become effective on 13 April 1945 and will take precedence over all duties other than combat missions. Lt. Rowe will make a daily report of all absentees together with the reason therefor."*

#### WELCOME NEW MEMBER

**Joseph A. Delguercio** (Engineering) was located at 10 Glen Ridge Parkway, Bloomfield, NJ 07003. Phone (201) 743-3129. I was making some calls from the list of some of the names run off from the national phone listing of 70 million phone listings and found Joseph at home. He was very interested in hearing about the association. OK, engineering men, get in touch with Joseph and welcome him back.

## More on Ploesti

Since the recent article on Ploesti I received some comments and the question raised if there were one or two raids before the assignment of the target to the Mediterranean Allied Strategic Air Force. The following brief article will cover the prior raids on Ploesti.

The first attack on Ploesti was in 1942 and was the result of a delayed force of B-24s assigned to bomb Tokyo as a morale booster similar to the Doolittle raid two months earlier. Early in 1942 twenty-three B-24 Liberators were given to Col. Harry Halverson, a dare-devil American Army pilot with a reputation of being ready to fly anything anywhere at anytime. Halverson's detachment (HALPRO) left the U. S. early in 1942 for China by a route through Africa, Burma and India. By the time they reached Africa at Khartoum, Sudan they were told to remain there. They flew practice missions and the wind and sand began to take its toll of aircraft.

The Air Force then transferred HALPRO to Egypt for the purpose of bombing Ploesti thirteen hundred miles away. Only thirteen planes remained from the original 23. They assembled at an RAF airfield at Fayid, near the Suez Canal.

For the mission they were briefed by an RAF Officer to bomb Ploesti at 30,000 feet, but Halverson changed it to 14,000 feet and made the route more direct. At 2230 hours on 11 June 1942 the thirteen B-24s took off for Ploesti. Flying all night they reached the Danube at dawn. They found an overcast at 10,000 feet. Without



Planned route for Ploesti attack 1 August 1944

making any attempt to create formation each plane roared straight into Ploesti and dumped its two tons of bombs. No flak or fighters were encountered and no damage or casualties were suffered. They now raced for their home base. Nine landed in Iraq and Syria and four landed in Turkey and were interned.

There was no publicity about the ineffective raid. It did cause one negative effect - it caused the Germans and Rumanians to strengthen their defenses around Ploesti. The mission was entered into the records as the first mission for the U. S. Air Force to any target in Europe. The first B-17 had not yet arrived in England.

The second raid on Ploesti was over a year later and was known as the tree-top or low-level mission. It was officially called TIDAL WAVE. The force consisted of 178 B-24s from five groups. From the Ninth Air Force in Africa came the 98th and 376th Bomb Group, and from England the 44th and 93rd, all with combat experience. Also from England the 389th without combat experience. They assembled at Benghazi which is 1350 miles from Ploesti.

Planning and training took a great deal of time, all in top secrecy as they felt surprise would be a key factor in success.

Col. Keith Compton, from the 376th Bomb Group, was selected to lead the formation. Nobody could understand why Compton insisted on flying in a rear position as leader of the second section, while leaving his lead navigator fly with Major Brian Flavell, who flew number one position. The navigator aboard Compton's plane was a relatively inexperienced second lieutenant. Gen. Uzal Ent, chief of the Ninth Air Force Bomber Command, got permission from the planning staff to go, and elected to fly with Compton as observer.

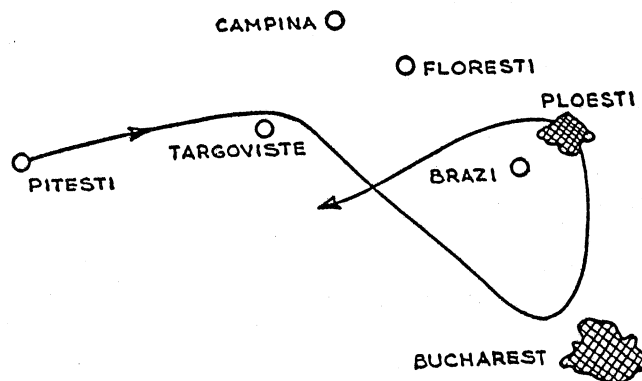
The mission took off at 7 AM on 1 August 1943. One aircraft was scratched and one crashed on take-off leaving 176 to assemble. The first group flew low over the water and each of the six following stacked up so that the last group was at four thousand feet.

At 11:30 A.M. near the island of Corfu the lead plane spun into the sea with the loss of all crewmen including the lead navigator. The odd arrangement of Gen. Ent flying with the mission lead pilot in a rear position began to cause problems. After some confusion Compton, with Gen. Ent, moved into lead position with their young, inexperienced nineteen year old second lieutenant navigator. The pilots, although experienced in navigation, did not have the charts and details needed to precisely follow the route.

The deputy lead dropped out of formation to observe the crash for survivors and to drop life rafts if there were any survivors. Finding no trace of men and unable to climb his overloaded aircraft back up in position he headed back to Africa. With him went the deputy group navigator. Now the mission was missing both the lead and deputy lead navigators.

Enroute they ran into weather causing groups to get out of order, some circled to get back in order thereby losing valuable time. Compton and Ent still had the lead

at the first IP, Pitesti, on its way to the second and final IP, Floresti, they made a major navigation error by turning to follow the wrong railroad tracks. The young navigator protested, but Gen. Ent overrode him and they were on their way to Bucharest instead of Ploesti. They were flying at 200 feet or less, so navigation was more difficult.



*Strike as executed by the 376th Bomb Group. You can see that if the group continued to Floresti and turned, the same heading would have taken them directly to Ploesti.*

By now the German and Rumanian forces were alerted and the element of surprise was lost. Gradually the errors compounded, radio silence was broken and the confusion caused many changes in the order of attack. In spite of all the problems leading to the target the majority of the planes hit targets and caused considerable damage. Planes were lost over the target from hitting barrage balloon cables, time bombs going off that were dropped from other planes that had already hit the targets, enemy guns and finally fighter planes attacking mostly after they left the target area. The heroism of the crews will always be a part of history. It is worth reading a book to cover the fury of the attack over the target.

In spite of the confusion 151 aircraft went over the target and major damage was inflicted. Reports estimated destruction of 60% of the refineries. However, two months later Ploesti was producing more oil than ever before. It had been operating at only 70 to 80% of capacity before the raid.

The 2700-mile mission cost 57 Liberators, 30% of the bomber force, and 440 crewmen were killed or missing, 54 wounded, 79 interned and 200 were taken POWs.

The Medal of Honor was awarded five men, three posthumously, the highest number ever awarded for a single military operation.

*I have read two books and can recommend them both. Low Level Mission by Leon Wolf, which I received from Tom Arthur, is a well written and interesting 230 page hard cover book. Also, Ben Donahue loaned me "Ploesti" by James Dugan and Carroll Stewart. It is smaller print in 280 pages, soft cover, with a more detailed description. And some of you received "Air Battle of Ploesti" after WWII, written by the 15th Air Force. A copy of that large book will be at the reunion.*

# **Final Notice**

## **781st Bomb Squadron Reunion**

### **Tucson, AZ**

### **October 13 to 16**

The registration form is enclosed. Registration with the hotel should be completed 30 days before our reunion to guarantee a room. We have suggested that you send in your meal and registration costs with your association 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 and send to O. J. Cowart.

Our hotel is just a few blocks off of I-10 if you are driving, or a free ride from the hotel van if you fly in.

Why go to the reunion? A quote sent in by Jack Van Slyke, "Everyone needs to be with people his or her own age from time to time. There is something about having shared the same dangerous adventure on Earth that produces a bond that's hard to deny." Besides this we have the camaraderie of the 781st and a planned program to recall our days of WWII and some entertainment besides.

Here is a brief outline of the reunion:

Wednesday - Afternoon early bird registration. No formal function of the reunion on this day. Over half have been registering on Wednesday. Many will be wanting to see the sights of Tucson, others will just check in to be with old friends.

We will have a bulletin board from Tuesday on to post those registered, and information about Tucson. And the hospitality room will be open from Wednesday noon on!

Thursday - All day registration. Hospitality and Trophy rooms will be open. In the evening there will be a group dinner and program.

Friday - Bus tour of Davis-Monthan Air Force Base then a service at the chapel, group photo and lunch at the Officers Club. Friday evening is open.

Saturday morning is a meeting to include planning for future reunions, and some 781st business. Afternoon is free. Saturday evening will have the usual banquet to end the reunion activities.

On Sunday morning usually the majority will be visiting during breakfast or going to church, before saying farewell to another memorable reunion. And I'm sure more than usual will stay on to enjoy Tucson.

To the widows and family members of deceased members we want you to know that you are welcome to attend to learn more about your husband's or father's service and meet some of his friends. Our welcome committee will be there to get you acquainted.

#### **DAVIS-MONTHAN**

You have heard about all the points of interest in and around Tucson. Two that will be most interesting to the members of the 781st are the Pima Air & Space Museum and Davis-Monthan.

First, some information about Davis-Monthan. It is still an operating Air Force Base. Part of our program will be to go by bus to Davis-Monthan on Friday morning. There we will pick up an Air Force Officer for each bus to be our tour guide driving through the base and particularly through the aircraft graveyard. The tour will be about an hour followed by a stop at the chapel, then lunch at the Officers Club before returning to the hotel.

#### **PIMA AIR MUSEUM**

If you have not had enough of viewing aircraft you can return Friday afternoon to Pima Air and Space Museum (next to Davis-Monthan). This is the largest privately-funded air museum in the world. The tour here is not organized, so you can walk among the planes for as long as you like. To start out you enter through a beautiful gift shop where wheel chairs are available for those requiring them. Look for an A-2 jacket donated to the museum by William Gill, bombardier on the Ashley crew.

The museum has 90 years of aviation history. Not only U.S. planes, but planes from Germany and other countries. A B-29, B-17, B-24 in a hanger, SR-71 Blackbird, a VC118A used as a personal plane by Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson, and many, many others. Their brochure lists over 200 different types of aircraft. There are also Quonset huts and WWII barracks.

By the end of Friday you will have had the opportunity to see thousands of military and civilian planes that are a part of our history.

Many pieces of information have been sent to me by



*Ben, you are a month early for the 781st reunion.  
It's not until October 13th.*

Ben's registration was the first one received by O.J. Cowart.



many of our members regarding Tucson.

From Col. Charles McKenna, who lives on a golf course in California, an article from Golf Magazine, February 1994 entitled "Golf Orgy." Tucson is well known for its excellent golf courses. Fifteen (of the 34) golf courses were listed from Ventana Canyon, if you can afford it, to El Conquistador (Remember that name? It was the hotel by Davis-Monthan before it moved to the canyon), and many more courses stretching to Green Valley twenty miles to the south.

The five muni courses are excellent values at \$19 for mid-winter green fees.

Let me know if you want a copy of the article, or contact Tucson Convention & Visitors Bureau 1-800 638-8350.

### **POINTS OF INTEREST COMING TO TUCSON, OR ON YOUR WAY HOME.**

Thunderbird II Field, Scottsdale, AZ. Dave Bowman sent in a recent newspaper article on this WWII pilot training base where 5,500 pilots graduated. Dave writes, "I stopped by a few weeks ago and was amazed to find these old hangers much the way they were when they were Cadet Land. I visited the warehouse hanger and I don't think it was ever repainted. The operations headquarters still has the big regional map mounted on the wall. I can't look at these old buildings and not get a twinge of home sickness." The address is 7410 E. Sutton Drive, Scottsdale.

For those who are traveling by car from the East and have some extra time you may want to consider a stop at the Confederate Air Force at Midland, Texas. Located at Midland International Airport the CAF has a museum and a warbirds display. If you happen to come by on October 7, 8, or 9 they have their annual AIRSHO. They re-create the major air battles like an attack on Pearl Harbor, ending with the B-29 atomic bomb drop. For further information call (915) 563-1000.

Other sites along the way include Tombstone, Bisbee, Kitt Peak observatory, and the list goes on. Contact AAA or Tucson Convention & Visitors Bureau 1-800 638-8350

### **BUDGET RENT A CAR OF TUCSON**

We have received special group rates starting with \$27 per day for a Compact (\$125 weekly), \$28 for midsize, etc. If there are 25 rentals we get a free one. If this occurs we will raffle it off among those with Budget rentals.

Call (800) 279-3734. Ask for the group rate and give the code Z64 for rates. Rates start 7 days before the reunion.

### **MEMORABILIA WANTED**

If you have any WWII memorabilia you would like to donate to the 781st Bomb Squadron bring it along to Tucson. We keep it and bring it to each reunion. When the Association "winds down" our plan is to donate it to the 15th Air Force Museum at March Field, California. If you have memorabilia you do not want to donate, but

show, bring it along and Jack Van Slyke will watch over it while it is displayed in the Trophy Room.

### **U. S. POST OFFICE**

A 781st Bomb Squadron Station of the U. S. Postal Service will be set up one day at the reunion for the purchase of stamps and to mail out-going letters. Stamps will include WWII scenes, with one stamp showing a B-24J on a bomb run over Ploesti. Special 781st envelopes and stationery are also printed for the occasion - our Fiftieth Anniversary. They are pure white with gold stamping - beautiful! Also, a special cancellation stamp commemorating the 781st Bomb Squadron's Fiftieth anniversary is being made to cancel outgoing letters. This will be the only time this stamp will be used by the U. S. Postal Service.

All the above art work was done by our squadron's commercial artist, Frank Quagan.

Bring along addresses of friends you would like to send one of these letter to and especially to your squadron comrades who are unable to attend the reunion.

### **WHO IS COMING?**

Since the printing of this *Pantanello News* is three months before the reunion only half or less are registered, so we do not feel it gives a fair indication of who is attending. Just look at the past record and you know we'll have a least 250 with representation from all units in the ground echelons and flying echelon. As of June 27 we have 151 already registered.

### **CREW OR SECTION REUNION?**

Some crews and sections want to have all their men and wives together at reunions, especially at our meal functions. We will set tables to your needs no matter what the number GUARANTEED. Sign up for tables will be at registration.

In the **Arizona Daily Star, January 9, 1944** was an article about the history of Tucson. The article begins, "Few cities in the United States have such an interesting history as has Tucson. Her story contains the shifting pageantry of nearly four centuries of changes. It begins with the Spanish conquest of this continent and continues through Mexican and American occupations. It is still being written as giant bombers wing up from desert air bases which are of importance as this nation engages in the world's greatest war."

In the same newspaper under a photo of a girl dressed as a man was the following article, "Evelyn Bross, 19, dressed in man's attire because she said male clothes and haircut were "practical." She said she was a machinist in a war plant. She was freed under \$25 bond at Chicago on charges of wearing clothes of the opposite sex in public places."

*My, My, how times have changed!!*

## FORMATION SIGNALLING

By Wendell Galbraith

In the last issue of the *Pantanella News* there was a letter from Pierre Kennedy inquiring as to whether there was any signalling done from the lead planes. Since I flew more than half of my missions in either a squadron or group lead plane I think I can answer his query. Yes, the tail gunner flashed a letter in the assembly area to assist the various planes to find their correct formation. In addition the radio operator (my position) had to fire an identification flare, coded for that particular mission, e.g.; green - red - green, or yellow - green, etc. I think it was done to assist the other planes for squadron and group identification purposes. It was also the responsibility of the tail gunner in the lead ship to inform the command pilot as to whether the formations were in proper position.

This presented no problem to our regular tail gunner, but on one mission we had to substitute our original ball gunner to the tail position due to the illness of our regular tail gunner. When Col. Foster inquired as to the condition of our formation our poor ball gunner, not familiar with the procedure, stuttered and stammered a vague reply. As usual Col. Foster went bananas, but everything settled down and the planes formed up properly.

Oh, yes, I can add a little more data to one of the missions that was chronicled for V GRAND. Mission 10, October 11, was flown by Capt. Steiner and his crew from the 780th. My original co-pilot, Lt. Charles Metzger, was shot down while flying with another crew on that mission. Needless to say that was just about the lowest day I experienced since we were very close to Steiner's crew members, one of them Joe Gist, being my best friend. Back at the base we were not immediately aware that they had survived by crash landing on the Island of Vis. So, we had lost our co-pilot and my best friend that day - almost too much to bear.

Wendell Galbraith, a member of the 782nd, has been a regular subscriber to the *Pantanella News*. A story about Wendell appeared in *Pantanella News* No. 26. He was aboard a 781st plane piloted by Capt. Richardson of the 782nd when it went down over Vienna with Col. McHenry Hamilton (465th Group CO) who was on his first mission. Wendell expects to be with us in Tucson.

## 8th Air Force Ball Gunner Response

By Robert E. McGee

In the January issue of *Pantanella News*, the article about the 8th Air Force gunners said that the nose turret had been eliminated. It was the ball turret and I would like to tell you about a mission using the hole where the ball turret had been.

Before being transferred to Pantanella I was in the 8th Air Force, 44th bomb Group in Jolly Old England. The ball turret had been removed from the B-24s due to its weight and the fact that it didn't get much action. It

seems that when a B-24 was badly shot up, the crew had to lighten the plane and the ball turret was the easiest to jettison. The English frowned on this practice as 1500 pounds at that speed could sink a patrol ship. Our normal 10 man crew was reduced to 9 eliminating a gunner on each mission. The armorer would have been the ball turret gunner, so he flew every mission as one of the waist gunners when we carried bombs. For some reason, no one wanted his job of removing the cotter pin on each bomb to arm them in flight. As you know, the cotter pin permitted a tiny propeller to spin and when it went 120 revolutions, the bomb was armed.

Mission - 18 September 1944 to Best, Holland, low-level supply flight, A/C #A-725. The mission was scheduled to drop supplies to the air-born invasion. C-47s were ahead of us with paratroops and gliders. The cover, where the ball turret had been, was removed and supplies with static line parachutes were stacked around the opening. We had a jump-master on board who was assigned to push out the supplies.

The bomb racks had supplies instead of bombs. I was operating a hand held Fairchild camera taking pictures through the floor opening of whatever I could see of military interest. Suddenly we heard a ripping sound. The place where I usually stood at the waist window got a row of holes from a German soldier who didn't like us. I think the camera saved my life. Our #2 engine was feathered as an oil line was shot off. We were flying probably 500 feet or less so the parachutes wouldn't drift too much. I heard that the invasion wasn't too successful as the drop zones weren't synchronized. Supplies, gliders (some had small cannons) and paratroopers undoubtedly ended up in German hands.

"Going back over the North Sea, we saw a B-24 in the water, some of the crew stepping out on rubber rafts, a plane circling and a rescue boat arriving. I could have had it all in one picture but I was told that if anything happened to the camera, I would pay for it. It was back in its case as soon as we left the continent. We made it back to the base on three engines.

I thought you might want to know about which turret was removed and the how the hole was used on one mission to good use.

The letter was signed, "Have fun while you're young," Bob McGee.

## Among the records I found one on our one and only "Doc" Rapoport

The records show "Doc" was assigned to the 781st Bomb Squadron by Special Order No. 2 Hdq. 465th Bomb Group (H) AAF, Davis-Monthan Field, Tucson, Arizona on 26 Aug 1943 and proceed to Dalhart, Texas. From there he was transferred to McCook. His form 5 (flying time form) shows 9:10 flying time in a B-24H during October 1943 at McCook. The form 5 for Capt. Morris R. Rapoport was signed by James W. Wray, Jr., 1st Lt., Air Corps, Operations Officer. At this point "Doc" outranked Lt. Wray.

# MAIL CALL



From **Ed Hansen**, "I was only in the squadron for a few months as a radar mechanic. I was there when the war ended in Europe. I never will forget how we celebrated that night!! We had a dance at the club house. We heard that the local Italian girls were afraid to come to the party but a group of female Yugoslavs soldiers were in uniform and came. They had been on the front lines and we G.I.s posed no threat to them. They could probably throw us over their shoulders if they wanted to. Not exactly the dainty type! Conversation was a bit difficult. We knew a little Italian and most I danced with could also speak a few words of Italian. No long conversations I assure you!

I have noted that very few of the radar mechanics are members of the association. I have lost track of everyone but Fred Maute, who was the person that first told me about the organization. You folks do a great job of keeping the association going and in preparing the *Pantanella News*.

I now have a son in the U. S. Air Force. He is a cardiologist at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs

I live in Bellevue, WA, but spend four or five months a year in Australia with Friends."

**Bob Freed** sends in another correction on the video of the low-level Ploesti attack. It appeared on Arts and Entertainment channel (not Discovery). the correct number to call is 800-423-1212. When ordering refer to "Air Combat - Combat Crews" and you should get the right person. It's \$19.95 and is good film with all B-24s and includes All American in parts where combat is not shown, like the interior of a B-24.

From **Lowell Myers**, "I keep hoping that I'm going to make the next reunion, but it seems some physical thing or another hasn't allowed me to. This month I'm facing some minor surgery, but I'm still hoping for Tucson in October. I was very sorry to hear Glen Haywood lost his wife this past year. The last I heard I think he will probably be attending and also Telio Giamarco."

A letter from **Rae Branch**. "I just finished reading the latest *Pantanella News*. When I opened to page 4 the photo really hit home. We flew Yellow "N" on that mission and it brings many fond memories. The group broke up into 4 individual squadrons and each of us had a different bridge to bomb. We were only at 12,000 feet (no oxygen) and led the squadron. Ken Braley, our ace bombardier, called up and said he couldn't use the bomb sight, so would use his fingers and toes and hope the rest would drop on his drop. It was one of the closest bomb patterns we had ever taken photos of. The bridge

was covered, we thought, only to learn we destroyed the road at both ends and straddled it, but it took 4 P-47s to dive bomb it later before finishing that pesky bridge.

"Thanks for printing that picture. It was our 39th mission and the nearest thing to a "milk run."

*Evidently V GRAND was still flying with the 781st Squadron on its second mission. The photo was given to me by Bob Babcock of the 780th Squadron.*

**Bill Pruitt** sent a photo of the B-24 on static display at Castle Air Force Base at Merced, CA. He said he'll see us in Tucson and informed me it's my turn to buy! I'll see you in the hospitality room, Bill.

## **Bill McGonigle writes Donald Toomey**

(Copy to O. J. Cowart, Jr.)

Dear Don:

"In re-reading the April '92 issue of the *Pantanella News*, I was interested to see your letter and those of other of Lovey's crew on your last mission. This is the first detailed account of that mission which I've seen so far.

"You mention in your letter that you had no bombardier aboard. I was the bombardier who was scheduled to fly with you that day. When I woke up it was broad daylight and silent. In some confusion, I went to operations to inquire as to why I hadn't been called. The only thing I could think of was that I had been rescheduled for a practice mission (I was bucking for lead bombardier at that time and didn't know we were flying deputy lead) only to be told "I called you, lieutenant." I went into shock. That afternoon I sat on the hillside overlooking the runways waiting for the squadron to return, hoping, praying. When it was plain that you weren't coming back, I got a bottle and drank, maintained half a bag on for about two days before going back to operations to ask to be put on the next non-milk run.

"I have wondered for nearly 50 years why I wasn't with you that day. On days when I flew, I usually awoke early, heard the jeep start out from operations, was up getting dressed before the orderly entered the tent. I don't recall there being anything special about that mission or the preceding evening. As I recall, we had flown together once before and I felt comfortable with you all. I was very favorably impressed with Lovey as a pilot.

"It was, and still is, very strange and uncomfortable to feel that I should have shared the misfortune that occurred to all of you and yet, at the same time, be glad that I didn't. Worse yet to think that, had I been aboard, you would have remained in the deputy lead slot and possibly have returned to base intact.

"I write this letter to fill in another missing detail in the history of that mission. I hope it does not add to the painful memories you already have of it."

Sincerely, **Bill McGonigle**

*The mission Bill is talking about was on Friday, 13 October 1944. Lovey and co-pilot Morse were killed and the rest of the crew bailed out and spent the rest of the war in POW camps.*





A memorable and happy reunion after over 49 years occurred recently when **Stanley Winkowski** and **Richard Bilger** got together. Little did Stan know that Richard lived less than ten miles from him for many years when Stan ran the Best Western motor Lodge in Stockton. Both send their thanks to Bernie Badler for locating Richard through the USAF Retired Officers Manual.

Richard joined the William Smith crew as radar navigator (Stan was co-pilot) on the mission to Moosbi-erbaum Oil Refinery near Vienna on 1 March 1945. They got shot up and had to head to Russian territory and landed at Pecs, Hungary. All returned to Pantanella about two weeks later.

## FOLDED WINGS

**Harold Schuster** (Ordnance) passed away in his sleep May 14, 1994. Reported by Bob Freed.

**Carl Robert Hull** passed away Jan. 8, 1994. Probably served in the 485th Bomb Group prior to the 781st Bomb Squadron. Reported by Gene Moxeley.

**Fred Aboud** (Barnett Bombardier) passed away June 1, 1994. His son, Louis, reported he passed away in his sleep from a heart attack.

**Leo Lutgring** (Engineering's beloved Master Sergeant) passed away June 28, 1994 at his home. His wife, Virginia notified us. More about Leo in the next newsletter.

*We extend our deepest sympathies to the families and friends of our comrades whom we loved and respected. We give them a final salute.*

## SICK CALL

**Frank Piteo** (Billger crew) spent a week in the hospital, but is home and planning for the reunion in Tucson.

**Mrs. Shirley Ingram** wrote, "I want to let you know that **Bud (Charles) Ingram** had two surgeries this spring. First a lens implant in his right eye and on May 2nd he had a heart valve replacement. He is recovering nicely and hopes that ends the hospitals for a while. At this time we don't know if we will be making the Tucson trip. Our best to all"

Our quarterback for on-the-location contacts at Tucson, **Nick Schaps** has a second home in nearby Green Valley AZ. Nick and Marion spend more time in Arizona than in their home in Minnesota. Recently they returned to Minnesota where Nick had back surgery. We expect him to back in shape soon so he can get back on the golf course, and return to Arizona before reunion time.

## EDITOR'S CORNER

Isn't it amazing how we put aside our war experiences and went on with our lives after WWII. Then years later, when time let's your mind wander, we remember those times. At each reunion more remembrances come back and we begin to see some of them appearing in the *Pantanella News* so that all can enjoy them.

Speaking of the reunion I will make a prediction that we will have more attending the Tucson reunion than attended the Omaha reunion. If I'm wrong I'll pay, if I'm right I'll see a lot of happy faces!

I would like to encourage those of you who can possibly attend a reunion to do so at this one in Tucson. This will be our Fiftieth Anniversary and a special time, a time to remember fifty years ago at Pantanella when we were half way through the struggle, and a time to renew those old friendships

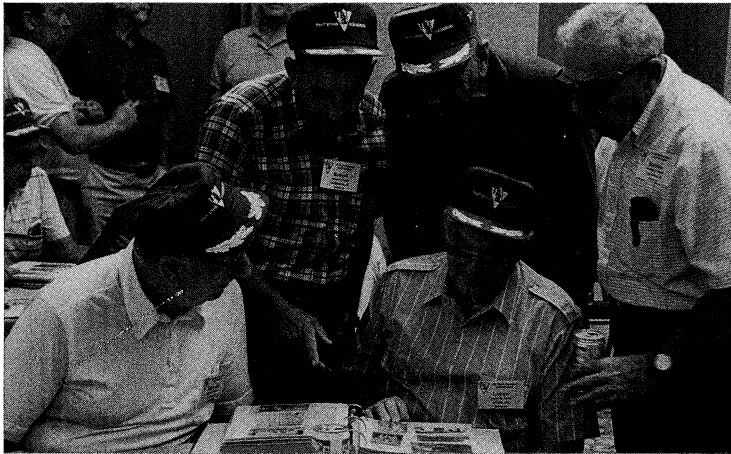
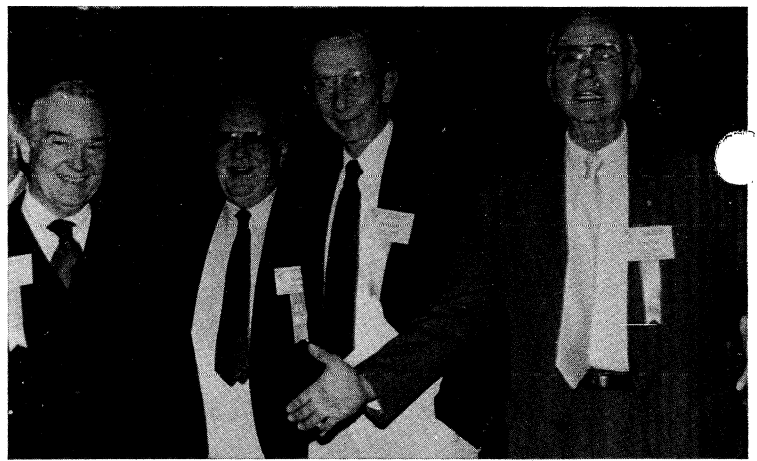
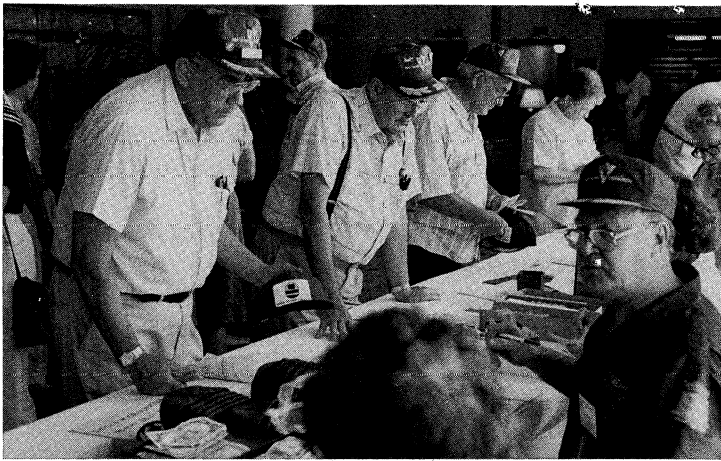
Ken Sutton and his convention committee will be ready with a super program for you. In addition to our normal full program there will be a few surprises. And here will be lasting memories for you and family members to enjoy and take home.

You may notice the newsletter is a little late. I had planned on being late due to the late date of the reunion, but a minor disaster made it later than planned. My hard disk "crashed" and put my word processor out of commission for 11 days. And it took some extra time redoing some lost material. Now someone owes me a drink!

See you in Tucson. Keep 'em Flying!



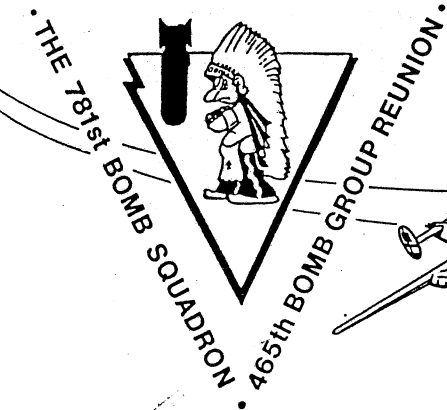




*Some happy faces from prior reunions.*

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