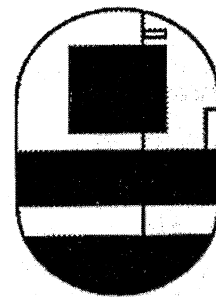




PANTANELLA NEWS



July 2000

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Robert E. French Crew: L to R: — Rear: William B. Briggs, Engr; Francis M. Donahue, Jr., Gunner; Frederick P. Wagner, R/O; Denny W. Horton, Gunner; Harold F. Quagan, Top Gunner; Lehman V. Wood, Gunner. Front: David L. Bowman, Navigator; Nicholas V. Schaps, Bombardier; Robert E. French, Pilot; Kenneth L. Parkhurst, Co-Pilot

OUR LUCKY THIRTEENTH — By Frank Quagan

It was March 2, 1945 and our 13th mission. We referred to it as 12B rather than the unlucky number 13. Getting ready for the mission to Linz, Austria, a very well protected target with many flak guns, we were not looking forward to the trip. We were flying B-24 bombers out of southern Italy, a part of the 15th Air Force. We kidded around that day, putting on our flak vests, which we rarely

wore, just in case they might be needed. Finally we took off for our target. As expected, we ran into a lot of flak approaching the target and our plane was hit a number of times. The guns below were very accurate that day, and our #3 and #4 engines were badly hit and had to be feathered. With a full bomb load we started to lose altitude badly and lost our position with the group. We tagged the group as best we

could and dropped our bombs at the secondary target, the marshaling yards at Amsetten.

Bob French, our pilot, told us that with only the two engines we couldn't get back to Italy and asked Dave Bowman, the navigator, for a heading to Russian lines. Dave tells me that we were trying to cross Lake Balaton in western Hungary where we were briefed that Russians

were in control.

We had a full undercast and couldn't see the ground. French had us throwing everything out the waist windows — guns, ammunition and all else to try to lighten the load. About five minutes later the undercast cleared enough to give us a clear view of the air field at Weiner Neustadt with dozens of German fighters parked at the ready. Fortunately, they didn't send any planes up for us although we were being harassed by spasmodic ack ack. We continued to lose altitude. Finally, we saw Lake Balaton. Dave tells me that he had hoped to reach Pecs where there was an airfield we could land.

Bob French was afraid our fuel would not last us, and we were still getting flak. Then #1 and #2 engines started to cut out on us. The eerie silence

wrenched our stomachs. Suddenly the engines came back on, very uncertainly, and Bob told us to get ready to bail out as he was afraid he couldn't keep us in the air. The bell rang and we all started to bail out, Dave from his nose wheel hatch, Bob French and Ken Parkurst, the pilots, probably a minute later most of us from the open bomb bay doors. The thought that we could be bailing out over German-held territory made us very uneasy, especially since we had heard that the German civilians were hanging any servicemen they captured, but we had no choice. By this time the plane was in bad shape and we feared that if the plane turned over, we could not get out due to centrifugal force which would hold us against the walls of the plane. We also had seen too many planes go down with no parachutes being detected. The past few moments got us over to the Russian side of the front lines.

A hail storm came up just then and we hesitated for a few moments before we started to jump out. It was a thrilling descent but we did not know what to expect upon landing. We feared we were going down in German-held territory. We floated down over a small village. The only member of my crew that I could see was Fred Wagner, our radio operator. He landed a mile or more away from me and his chute was dragging him head first like a plow into the ground. Finally he collapsed the chute and we got together. We were so happy to see each other that we hugged one another and then hid behind a haystack in the fields trying to figure out just where



Lehman Wood and Frank Quagan

we were. The maps that had been given to us were of no help. Fred told me that his 'chute didn't open when he pulled the rip cord, but he had a dagger strapped to his leg in his boot. (His brother had sent it to him from N.Y.) He cut the canvas and pulled out the 'chute by hand and fortunately it opened before he hit the ground. I was with him when later he brought it back to our parachute supply building, where a sign read,

"Bring it back if it doesn't work". I won't tell you what he said to the fellow that packed it. Strangely, Fred was the only one who carried a knife.

About that time we saw what we thought was a man running toward us. He turned out to be a large boy. Not knowing what we should do, we drew our 45's and made him come between us. He spoke to us in some foreign language but we gathered that he wanted to know where the oth-

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781st BOMB SQUADRON

as part of the 465th Bomb Group, Fifteenth Air Force, flew B-24 Liberators from Pantanella Airfield located near Canosa, Italy, during WWII (1944-1945). During its 191 missions over Southern Europe it dropped thousands of tons of bombs, shot down 23 enemy aircraft (German) and received two Distinguished Unit Citations.

ers in our crew had landed. We pointed in a direction and he took off like a marathon runner, shortly thereafter people from the village who had seen us came out to greet us. They seemed friendly enough but shouted- "Germanski", but we answered, "Americanski." We showed them the American flag on our shoulder and then they guided us back to their village.

As I went into a house there, I felt a rifle in my back. It was the first Russian I had met. After he realized I was not a German he greeted me with enthusiasm. We found out we were only a couple of miles from the German/Russian front line. (The next day the Germans did recapture this area.) The Russians got us away from that area fast. We saw an old woman digging trenches and a wounded young Russian soldier with one arm missing. We traveled with the Russians for a month, eventually ending up in Bucharest, Romania where we got a flight back to Italy. Our route to Romania took us from Hungary through northern Yugoslavia and then up to Romania. Along the way we would pick up other airmen who had been shot down

and were staying with some local families, some trying to sweat out the war.

By the time we got to Romania there were 70 of us altogether. A day or two after we landed we had several of the crew join Fred and me. They were Dave Bowman, Bill Briggs, Denny Horton, and Lehman Wood. We never did see the rest

of the crew until we got back to Italy. We assumed everyone got out safely. We had to leave Lehman Wood behind in Hungary because of his broken leg.

The Romanians thought we were paratroopers invading their city. Our first stop in Hungary, I believe, was Pecs where we stayed in a schoolhouse overnight along with some Russian soldiers. They were gun-happy and after drinking Vodka they were shooting their guns into the ceiling and the plaster was falling down on our heads. When driving us in their trucks they would shoot out the insulators on the telephone poles. They were really gun-happy. I found the Russian



L to R: — Dave Bowman, Bill Briggs, Denny Horton, Fred Wagner, Frank Quagan. Taken in Romania before leaving for Italy

soldiers to be uneducated and rather ignorant. I think some of them had never even seen a bed until they traveled in the army. That day was my birthday. I was 21 years old and I had taken a pledge as a teenager not to drink until I was 21, so I had my first drink with the Russians. I think they were trying to get us drunk so they could steal our para-

chutes to make scarves for their girl friends. I slept with mine wrapped around me. Others were missing the next day. We needed those nylon chutes to bargain for food. Since we had no idea how long we would be traveling, we wanted to keep this valuable nylon.

While we were in Hungary the Russians assigned two of us to stay with a farm family for a week. In this family was an old man, his daughter and a grandson. The daughter's husband was in the German army and the Russians forced the woman's brother into the Russian army. The woman spoke English but

would not talk to us, only to answer our questions. She knew English because at one time she had lived in Detroit. The first night they just looked at us and were very suspicious. We tried to make conversation and told them we would pay them for our stay since we had American dollars in our escape kits. I don't think

they knew the money was worth anything. However, they fed us with the small amount of food that the Russians allowed them to keep from their gardens. They had to turn in most of their food every morning since the Russians lived off the land they controlled.

That first night there was a knock at the door. The

people trembled. I went to the door and opened it and there were two Russian soldiers. They didn't know who I was, so I looked them in the eye and said, "Americans Oberlieutenant." They looked at me, saluted, and left. The family was so happy they kissed the flag on my shoulder and found some more eggs that were hidden in secret compartments and we had a feast. We found out later that they had been used to being abused and women were molested by the Russian soldiers and they would have to pour them wine to keep them happy. The Russian soldiers would take anything they wanted and the people would give it to them for fear of being shot.

After that event the family were very friendly to us and at the end of the week when we left they cried their hearts out in fear that the Russians would return to abuse them once more. The old man, Steve, said to me when leaving, "Frank, nix boom-boom, Steve", meaning when we return to flying, "Don't drop any bombs on Steve." We traveled on anything that moved, trucks, wagons, trains, anything going in the direction of Romania. We had one week on the train. The Russians gave us each 2 loaves of bread and a large roll of salami. When I arrived in Bucharest I still had one loaf of bread (and a good case of diarrhea). We were allowed to send a cable-gram to our parents, "All Well and Safe." and sign our names. That's all we could say to our parents, who had received the M.I.A. telegram earlier, that was enough!

The Russians assigned Bill Briggs, our engineer, and

me to stay with a millionaire in Bucharest. He owned a canning factory and had a large mansion with an iron fence and gates around the property. We came to his home and he saw me still holding onto this large loaf of hard bread. With a great sense of humor he asked, "Is that what you're dropping on the Germans these days?" He then gave us some clothes to wear while he had our uniforms laundered.

After practically starving on the train for a week, we now were treated to great dinners and all kinds of fancy French pastry. It was wonderful. This family could speak French so with my high school French I managed to communicate with them.

They treated us graciously all week. I would have been happy to get a job in his canning factory rather than going back to Italy and flying over Germany again. While we were in Romania the Russians had a curfew at night. Anyone on the streets after 8 o'clock would be shot and they meant it! One day while Bill Briggs and I were walking around town some people would stop us on the streets to tell us they have been to the United State, etc. One woman gave us her card, but we told her we didn't think we would get

to her place. Later that night we decided to try to find her home. It was an apartment and she was not at home. However, the people next door to her invited us to stay with them until she came home. We went into their home and within 25 minutes at least 50 people from the apartment came in to see what we looked like. We felt like monkeys in a cage. Many spoke English so we had an enjoyable time. However, we didn't realize what time it was getting to be, we left after 8 o'clock. We knew how risky this was. On the street we heard, "Stop!" A Russian soldier had spotted us. We yelled, "Americanski!" to the top of our lungs. He came up to us with his rifle pointed and



Romanian Paratroopers !
March 20, 1945

checked us over, looked at our uniforms etc. He took us back to our host mansion where our host was very worried since he was responsible for our welfare for that week. We apologized for our error and continued to enjoy his hospitality.

During the day as we

roamed the streets in Bucharest we noticed that when we went into a store there was a clerk behind the counter but no merchandise in the counter. I wanted to buy a German camera so the clerk excused himself and later returned from some place with a camera. I realized later that if they put anything in the counter, the Russians would just come in and demand it, free!!

At the end of the week our vacation was over and we got a flight back to Italy. When Lehman Wood came back later from the hospital in Hungary he told me that he had witnessed an accident. A young boy was hit by a Russian soldier driving a truck. When the boy's mother came out crying and shouting at the soldier he shot her. He saw this from his hospital window. We were entitled to a week at a rest camp at either the Isle of Capri or Rome. Lehman Wood, who had been hospitalized for a week, and I chose Rome. We arrived at Mussolini's playground which had become an Air Force rest camp the day President Roosevelt died. All activities were cancelled. However, we toured around Rome and Pompei for a week and returned to fly 13 more missions before the war was over.

Reflecting Peasants diving for a loaf of bread. Two fell off the back, I recall on top of the train. Bucharest, Romania — 1945 one mission we were coming back into friendly territory and we went through the usual procedure for the

planes to spread out so gunners could get rid of the one round in the guns. Then we got back into formation. After that, I had the urge to relieve myself. As I bent down to release my seat, I heard a loud noise. Where my head had been were two large holes in the plexiglass dome. Someone above us shot off his gun after we were back in formation and the empty shell came sailing through my turret glass. Was I glad I had the urge to wee-wee at that time!!

On another mission I remember coming back with 75 holes in the plane from flak and no one was hurt. One day, after leaving the target area, I noticed a fighter following us. I was in the top turret. We were the last plane in the formation. I wasn't sure of the make of the plane, but it looked like one of ours. He started coming in closer. I knew our planes were instructed to keep their distance from the formation. I thought It might be a captured American plane pi-

hometown paper. "Frank Quagan shoots down an American plane." Our bad luck, however, had not ended.

On the day we were to leave Italy Bill Briggs was warming up the engines. There was a hard stand in front of the plane. The brakes slipped a little and the prop screwed into the hard stand, sending small pieces through the cockpit, hitting Bill's face and breaking off a couple of teeth. We pulled out of formation. The next day in formation the dinky popped out of the wing and inflated itself. We again pulled out of formation. The third day we started going down the runway and the nose wheel collapsed. Something told us it was time to get a boat back to the good old U.S.A. Even when it came time to fold our tents and return home, we still had engine trouble over the ocean before reaching Connecticut. Well, whether it was bad luck or good luck our crew all returned home in one piece. Thank God!

We returned to the USA for a month-long furlough. We were destined to go to Japan next but after a delay in Texas and the atomic bombing of Japan, and the war's end, we finally got discharged from the service and returned home. I started Art school in Boston, Massachusetts, graduated and started work as a commercial artist, (today known as a graphic artist) and Art Director, semi-retiring in 1997.



loted by a German. I wasn't sure what to do. I finally gave him a short burst and he took off. I could see the headlines in my

Following is from a letter sent to Frank Quagan by Dave Bowman and dated October 26, 1998.

Dear Frank,

You remember that I received a letter from a man in Hungary a couple of years ago wanting to know about crews that were shot down in Hungaary in the war. I did answer, and have had an interesting correspondence with this young man whose hobby is researching the whereabouts of American airmen. He says he is an engineer and he was 25 years old when we first started writing.

He wanted to know where and when our plane had crashed, so I wrote him about the events of our crew on March 2, 1945. He has done some investigation and appaarently our plane is still sitting on the ground on a farm there. He went to the trouble of cutting a small 3"x5" piece our of it and sending it to me. I'm enclosing some of his correspondence which describes the location and the dates involved which seem to locate the crash site.

This is quite a story. I'm enclosing a copy of his letter (*which follows-ED*) with his explanation of the finding of our plane. I am also enclosing a map of western Hungary and indicating "Dombovar", where we the crew, without Bob French and Ken Parkhurst, stayed the first night. I think we landed in "Kocsola", and about 20 miles from Dombovar. I thought this was very interesting. I'm sure Nandor would be interested in hearing from you, too.

Yours truly, Dave Bowman.

Nandor Mohos - Vestprem -
Cholnoky Jenou. 2. - 8200 -

Hungary

December 7, 1997

David L. Bowman

4839 E. Greenway Rd. Ste. 383

Scottsdale, AZ 85254 USA

Dear Mr. Bowman,

If I remember well I have said thank you for your recollection and the crew photo you sent. I am really sorry if not. In this case I thank you very much for your memories and for the crew photo and I am sorry that it has taken so long for me to answer you.

After I read your letter I examined my personal archives looking for any information of a B-24 (your plane) for that area you gave me: Szakes, Kocsola, Lapafó. I did not find anything. I trusted in your description because you wrote about a crash-landed B-24 at a village while you were traveling to Dombovar. It had to be at Kurd and if you want to go to Dombovar from the area you mentioned you have to pass Kurd.

So I did not give up. This area is quite far from my home so I had to ask a friend of mine to make an "investigation" for your plane there. He lives close to there. He visited there and saw that there are a lot of churches with onion roofs. He visited some villages (anyway he owed some favors to me so it was obligatory for him — OK it was a joke). At one of the villages he met a man who told him that he saw a Liberator crash in the early days of March 1945. It was very strange for them because in fact the plane crash-landed but without any control. It was empty, no airman was on it. So it was a kind of magic for him

and for his fellows who were working in a small forest close to the field where the plane crashed. They saw only two chutes in midair so at that time they thought that some American airmen had to be in the plane. They went to the plane and figured out that there was not anybody. They had a pail and decided that they should take home some gasoline from the plane that was floating from the wings. But at that time the plane caught fire and they had to run from there. Some of them burned in the flames.

One of them was badly burned so two days later he died of his burning wounds. The man did not remember the exact date. My friend went to the local government and asked them to search for this death case in the Registers of Death. He found it. The given person died on the 4th of March and the register contains the date when he was wounded, it was 2nd of March 1944. So at that place a B-24 crashed on 2nd of March. This village is called Ujireg and the plane crashed close to a farm which belongs to this village. This farm is called Muth puszia — together, Ujireg -Muth puszia.

The two airmen who landed at that area had to be your crew members who you did not meet after you landed while you were at the Russians. The most important thing that made me happy and sure that this Liberator was your plane was the following. My friend was told by the locals that there was another understable thing for them: While the plane was gliding

only one prop was running, the other three stood still. The man at Ujireg showed the crash-site to my friend and gave him a piece of aluminum from the plane. I cut a smaller piece from it and that is what you found in this envelope.

I hope I could give you a

little pleasure with this piece of your plane. If you need more or a bigger part of it just let me know.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Sincerely,
Nandor Mohos

From Richard Seabridge —

During WWII — My Stay at Pantanella Air Base

I was the ball turret gunner on the Bob Wilcox crew. On Jan. 20, 1945 my 30th mission, Linz, Austria main marshaling yard, on the bomb run to the target we suffered major flak damage to #2 engine. It was feathered and we began falling behind the formation. We dropped our bombs and then lost #2 engine. We had to jettison equipment to maintain flight.

As we got nearer to the Adriatic Sea other problems developed with a third engine. We made a very fast descent and made an emergency landing on a fighter strip near the Adriatic Sea, causing me to have a lot of problems with my hearing. I am seeking information to see if any other airmen had the same experience. In 1945 I went through a series of radiation treatments over a three month period. I am enclosing a copy of the treatment and a letter from General Arnold. I am hoping someone in the group could give me some other information or went through the same experience.

Richard Seabridge's address is: 703 President Ave.; Lawrenceville, NJ 08648.

Following is a copy Richard enclosed so all airmen who received it will know why it was given.

Information about Radium Treatment for Aero-Oitis

The treatment you are receiving for Aero-oitis is radium placed in a small capsule at the end of a nasal applicator which is inserted through the nose back to the tubes that allow air to pass back and forth to the middle ear. The radium is not left in the nose long enough (8 minutes, 30 seconds) to affect any other tissue.

This treatment was devised by our Dr. S.J. Crowe of Johns Hopkins years ago. All of the Medical Officers who treat you have been especially trained under Dr. Crowe. A complete course takes 75 to 80 days and consists of three treatments at intervals of not less than twenty-five days. **YOU WILL NOT BE GROUNDED DURING THESE TREATMENTS.**

If you are not at this station at the end of each period contact your Flight Surgeon and

he will tell you where to receive it.

This treatment is for your benefit and is given to you at a great expense by your government. In civilian life it would cost you at least \$25 a treatment, so make certain you keep your appointments. Always bring your A.S.O. Form #206.

Richard enclosed another article from THE TIMES in 1997. "Thousands of American servicemen who were given nasal radiation treatment decades ago by military doctors may be at risk for further health problems, the Defense Department said.

The Pentagon is working with the Department of Veterans Affairs to identify and notify servicemen who participated in the radiation treatments. It made no mention of children of military personnel given similar treatments with radiation for inner-ear problems in the 1940s and '50s.

"The Pentagon is not admitting that the radiation caused any health problems among servicemen. In fact, it continues to point to studies that say evidence of long-term health problems are inconclusive. It acknowledges, however, a 'significant risk' of such linkages."

Settling in at Pantanella

By Glen Haywood

Some time ago you requested some of our recollections about how we acquired our Italian villas that adorned the hill at Pantanella. As previously noted, we moved into your abode while some of your tent mates were at rest camp. By the time they returned supply had a tent for us which we pitched a short distance from yours. It was close to the Lister bag for water, and the mighty three hole out-house. As they say in real estate, location, location, location.

We arranged for the local workmen to pour a concrete pad and tuffa block wall up to the normal side height of a tent. However, on one side it was built up to standing height for a future shower. One trip to the squadron facility and a 35 degree shower pointed up the need for this luxury. A couple of holes were left for future windows which Marty Santigian and I made from salvaged aircraft windows and bits of wood we scrounged as wood was at a premium there.

I borrowed "THE SAW" from either Ralph Hendrickson, or Frank Maccani (decorum dictates I not mention which one) and a hammer from Red Harteloo. A sheet of plywood constituted a door, and we were on our way to being snug and warm. Some furniture was made of packing crates and a single low wattage light bulb hung from the center pole. Until we got our own squadron generator and strung new wires it

was very dim as it was dependent on Italian power and would only brighten up late at night after the overall load had decreased. Lt. Hershey, a former Electrical Engineering student from Purdue, was the prime mover on this project and did an excellent job.

We were all saddened by his loss in March of '45. The next problem we faced was heat. This we solved by building one of the tried and true designs made from a half 55 ga. drum. We scrounged an old British

darn stove would turn red hot within about two minutes when going full blast,

Next came the matter of the shower. At some point we got a couple of P-38 drop tanks which were mounted on the roof of the shower area and plumbed in a real Rube Goldberg manner to a radiator type thing inside the super stove. It worked good too, and we had a small lavatory in there for shaving. The tank truck driver was kind to keep us supplied with water. Of

course our trading stock of cigarettes and bourbon helped on a lot of these endeavors.

We now turned to the matter of sleeping accommodations. Big Uncle seemed to think an

Army cot and two blankets were ample for our needs, but I was getting signs of hip joint problems until Marty struck

upon a great idea. We got some old aircraft inner tubes and cut strips which we nailed to the cot framework to replace the canvas. This worked like a charm, although I never went to sleep without wondering just how much stress the Wooden dowels which held the cot unfolded could take. What a surprise if one let go in the night and gobbled me up like a Venus Fly Trap! I must confess I was something of a ghoulish and each time I visited any tent I would inventory their beds. As a result, I ended up with an air mattress and sleeping bag from those no longer needing them. Grim business, war.



L to R: Marty Santigian, Navigator; Gordon Ellison, Pilot; Eugene Fallon, Bombardier; Glen Haywood, Co-pilot.

dump and came up with what I thought might have been a large socket used on tank axle nuts and which formed a nice burner pot. Hydraulic lines from crashed planes led to an outside barrel and furnished either captured German diesel oil, or 100 octane avgas after that supply ran out. The real problem was a stove pipe, and search as we might we couldn't find anything as a substitute. As a last resort we collected 22 empty Shell Oil cans from the British dump, and because I had spent a couple of years welding up Bamboo Bombers for Cessna, I spent a couple of tedious days down on the line welding them together. At last we had heat, and the

German General Galland and the Me 262 Fighter.

A potential disaster to the heavy bombers was averted by Hitler's lack of knowledge of the air war strategy.

Luftwaffe General Adolf Galland, commander of German fighters, and Germany's youngest general at age 30. He had his first flight in the Me-262 in 1942. In 1943 in a meeting with Hitler when Hitler saw the potential of the 262 as a Blitz bomber and ordered it to be made ready to be used exclusively as such.

In an interview with Colin Heaton in 1993 Galland gave a response when asked about this meeting with Hitler, "This was really the beginning of the misuse of the 262, as five bomber wings were supposed to be equipped with the jet. These bomber pilots had no fighter experience, such as combat flying or shooting, which is why so many were shot down. They could only escape by outrunning the fighters in pursuit.

This was the greatest mistake surrounding the 262, and I believe the 262 could have been made operational as a fighter at least a year and a half earlier and built in large enough numbers so that it could have changed the air war. It would most certainly not have changed the final outcome of the war, for we had already lost completely, but it would have probably delayed the end, since the Normandy invasion of June 6, 1944 would probably not have taken place, at least not successfully if the 262 had been operational. I certainly think that just 300 jets flown daily by

the best fighter pilots would have had a major impact on the course of the air war. This would have, of course, prolonged the war, so perhaps Hitler's misuse of this aircraft was not such a bad thing after all."

When asked about his last combat flight Galland replied, Yes, I was shot down by a Republic P-47D flown by a man named James Finnegan, whom I met some years later, and we became friends. We were intercepting bombers near Neuberg. I was leading a flight, and I attacked from the rear, astern. My rockets did not fire, but I poured 30 mm cannon shells into one bomber, which fell into flames, and flew right through the formation, hitting another. I could not tell if that bomber was finished off, so I banked around for another run, all the while my jet was receiving hits from the bombers' defensive fire.

Suddenly my instrument panel disintegrated, my canopy was shattered, and my right knee was struck. I was losing power and was in great pain. I thought about parachuting out but realized that might be dangerous, as some of our pilots had been strafed upon exiting their jets. I flew for the deck and headed for this field at the air base, which was under attack. I cut the power to my good engine and thumped across the field. My nose and wheel had been flattened, and smoke was pouring from my plane. I climbed out to get away, in case it should explode, only to find aircraft dropping bombs and firing rockets at me. "Well, our mission netted five victories total, and none of the pilots were killed."

Ed. comments: In 1985 I met General Galland in Las Ve-

gas during the 40th Anniversary of the Air Force.

Later, I met with James Finnegan, who was assistant district attorney in Marin County, CA, to discuss his victory over General Galland. He told about flying high cover for the B-26s and then saw this flash of an airplane going at an impossible speed. One plane was shot down in a flash, then he realized this was the new jet fighter the Germans had. Finnegan said he then rolled over the P-47 and headed straight down. He said nothing would fall faster than a P-47, or generally referred to as the Jug.

As he came upon the Me-262 he fired his cannons and the Me-262 banked into a cloud. Finnegan broke off the attack, returned to base and wrote up the action as a possible damaged German ME-262.

In about 1980 a student at San Francisco State University was studying WWII. In review of both the U. S. and German actions on the same day he discovered the reports by Galland and Finnegan. The student called Finnegan for his details of the mission and then said, "You shot down General Galland." This was the first he knew about the victory and later contacted General Galland and they became good friends. Both visited each others homes and remained friends until General Galland died in 1995.

I do not know of any attacks by the Me-262 against the 15th Air Force heavy bombers. I do know several were spotted flying during our last missions. The Eighth Air Force was attacked and had a number of losses.

Editor's Corner

LIFE MEMBERS

Recently four new Members joined the Life Member List. They are: **Leslie J. Clement, Jerry F. Cottle, Frank Miller, and Kenneth T. Pulham.** The complete list of 140 Life Members will be published later.

Photo and Information About Lester Hershey are Requested.

I have been contacted by Lester's former girl friend when he went into Service. They were engaged to be married. After he was shot down and became KIA she did not receive any mail. Since she was not next of kin she was not notified that he was KIA. She did learn that he was MIA.

Years went on and she still wanted information on Lester, she tried to check with his parents and found both had passed away. She never had a WWII photo of him in uniform. I said I am sure I could find one and checked the crew photos only to find Lester was missing when the photo was taken. So, most important is a WWII photo in uniform, alone or with crew members, or friends. Photo will be copied and returned. Please let me know if you can be of any help. Jim Althoff

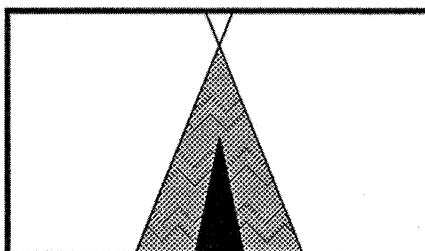
MAIL CALL



From Ken Pulham "I appreciate your putting up with my delinquency in paying my dues. I have always intended to pay them every time I received the News, but kept putting it off. They say the road to hell is paved with good intentions, so I guess I'm on the road to Hell.

I really enjoy the Pantanella News and it brings back some very wonderful memories. Circumstances have been such that I wasn't able to attend any reunions, but in the future we plan to be there. My health this past year has kept me down. I have diabetic neuropathy which effects my legs and I can't walk without a walker or wheel chair.

Keep up the great work, you're the greatest. We appreciate all you do for the squadron. In gratitude for you. *Ken Pulham, was the Radio Operator on Ralph Hendrickson Crew.Ed.*



Address Changes

Homer Moeller: 251 Latrobe Ave.; Northfield, IL; 60093

Folded Wings

Gale Graham (465th Bomb Group Info and Education Officer), Passed away January 7, 2000. Reported by his son-in-law Don Shapan.

Kenneth A. Bowerman (Engineer on Mullan Crew). Mail returned with note "Deceased."

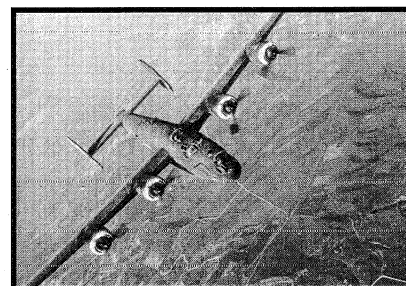
H. Charles "Chic" Hafey (Navigator on Wortham crew) passed away April 23. Notified by John Baum (Radar Maintenance) and Anthony Schneider of the 464th Bomb Group.

Oliver E. Graham (top gunner on Schuster crew) passed away May 3rd. Reported by Mary Lou Hugus.

Margaret Myers, widow of **Albert "Shack" Myers**. Her children were looking forward to bringing her to her first reunion. Now the children are looking forward to the reunion and get help to fill them in on their father's time at Pantanella.

Correction on **Adrian Martin**. His date of passing was February 3, 2000.

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



FINAL NOTICE FOR REUNION 2000

Most of you should have received the January Newsletter by now. They were mailed on April 5th with information on registration and the tours. However, I am shocked to hear that many still have not received the newsletter and those that have were very late in receiving it. I doubt that it will help to complain to the Post Office and have confidence that they will deliver this newsletter on time. Therefore, I have elected to send all Newsletters first class beginning with this issue so you will be current for the reunion.

I can tell you from the results of our questionnaire and from the numerous contacts I have had in the past month or two that we are going to have a very good attendance and there is a lot of excitement about coming to California, having the tours and able to enjoy the camaraderie with friends of long ago. What is interesting is the number of members planning on coming who have never attended one before, quite a few widows, and many family members like we saw at Dayton. Some of the members planning on attending are from California and have never attended a reunion. Without a doubt we're going to have a great time.

As we indicated, some of our planning was in the early stages and we expected some change. One change will benefit those who want to take the Napa Valley tour. We are fortunate to have Round Hill Winery owner, Ernie Van Asperen, vol-

unteering to be the guide on that tour. It will be partially a scenic tour of some of the valley with a stop at the winery for you to get first hand detailed information on how a winery operates. Of course, some samples under the shade trees across the stream from the vineyard. On the way back to the hotel we plan a stop for lunch and then may stop at the Budweiser Brewery across the highway from the hotel.

IMPORTANT. If you are planning to attend the reunion we ask you to send in your hotel reservation as soon as possible. Since our mailing did not get out as planned the registrations have been slow and the hotel is worried we will not have the attendance and want to cut back our number of rooms reserved. Remember, if something comes up and you have to cancel the hotel you can do it without a charge. Just follow their directions on your receipt. The same applies to the 781st reservations and payments for meals, etc. We refund 100 % if canceled prior to the event. If you have a question feel free to call or drop a note and we will respond.

A little History about Travis AFB. It is located adjacent to two cities, Fairfield and Susun, California. It used to be called Fairfield-Susun AFB, Flying B-29s, etc. The name changed after the CO, Gen Travis, was killed leading a practice flight of B-29s loaded with bombs when he had to turn back due to engine failure. The name was changed in memory of Gen. Travis. Now it is headquarters for the Fifteenth

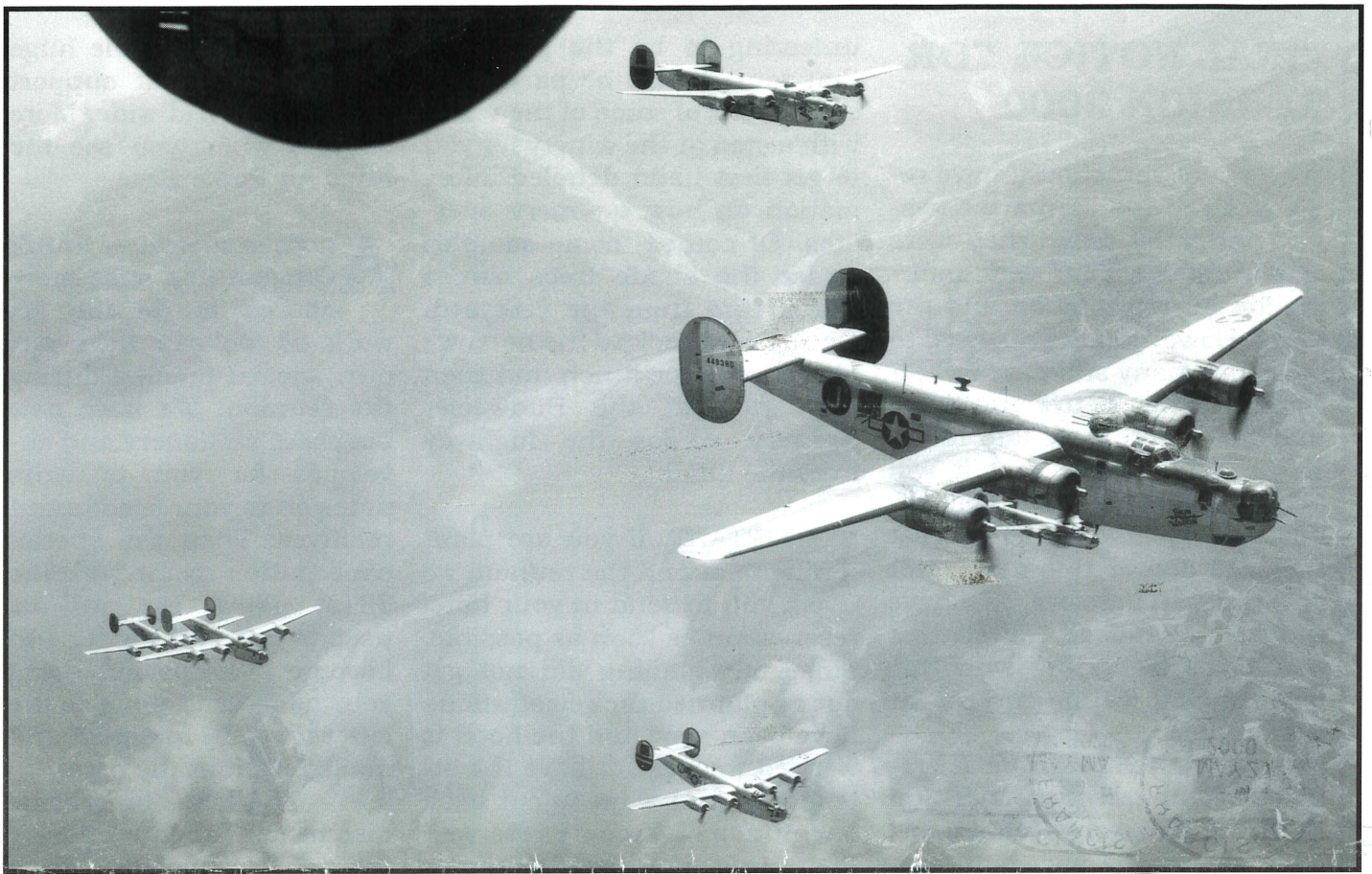
Air Force and for the huge cargo planes that support our forces world wide. More on this when you see the huge Air Force Base.

Another special — Frank Quagan has once more offered to do the art work so we can have our own special mailing during the reunion. We have new beautiful stationery and envelopes for you to write notes on to your friends and relatives. Then the special cancellation stamp with the 781st name, etc. will be used to cancel the letter and become a keepsake. Bring your addresses along so the letters can be stamped and mailed right at the hotel.

There has been some discussion about wearing WWII uniforms to "show off." We will plan this for Thursday afternoon. Maybe get a few of the wives to give prizes for the uniform that fits the best, the best preserved uniform, etc. Let's see what happens!

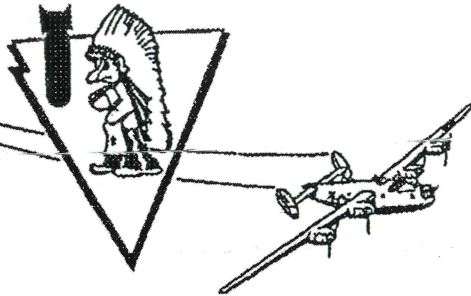
Also, we will again have a high ranking Officer to speak at the Saturday banquet. I believe this will be the first time in the history of the 781st to have the honor of a General from the Fifteenth Air Force to address our squadron. We are fortunate to be near the Fifteenth Air Force Headquarters.

More surprises will happen during the reunion. And we will have a room full of memorabilia for all to enjoy.



SIOUX FALLS SD 57105-29 05/29 #2

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