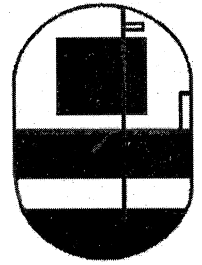




PANTANELLA NEWS



July 2003

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NUMBER 72

A Mission in Yellow "K"

"The Making of a Hangar Queen" by Ben L. Donahue

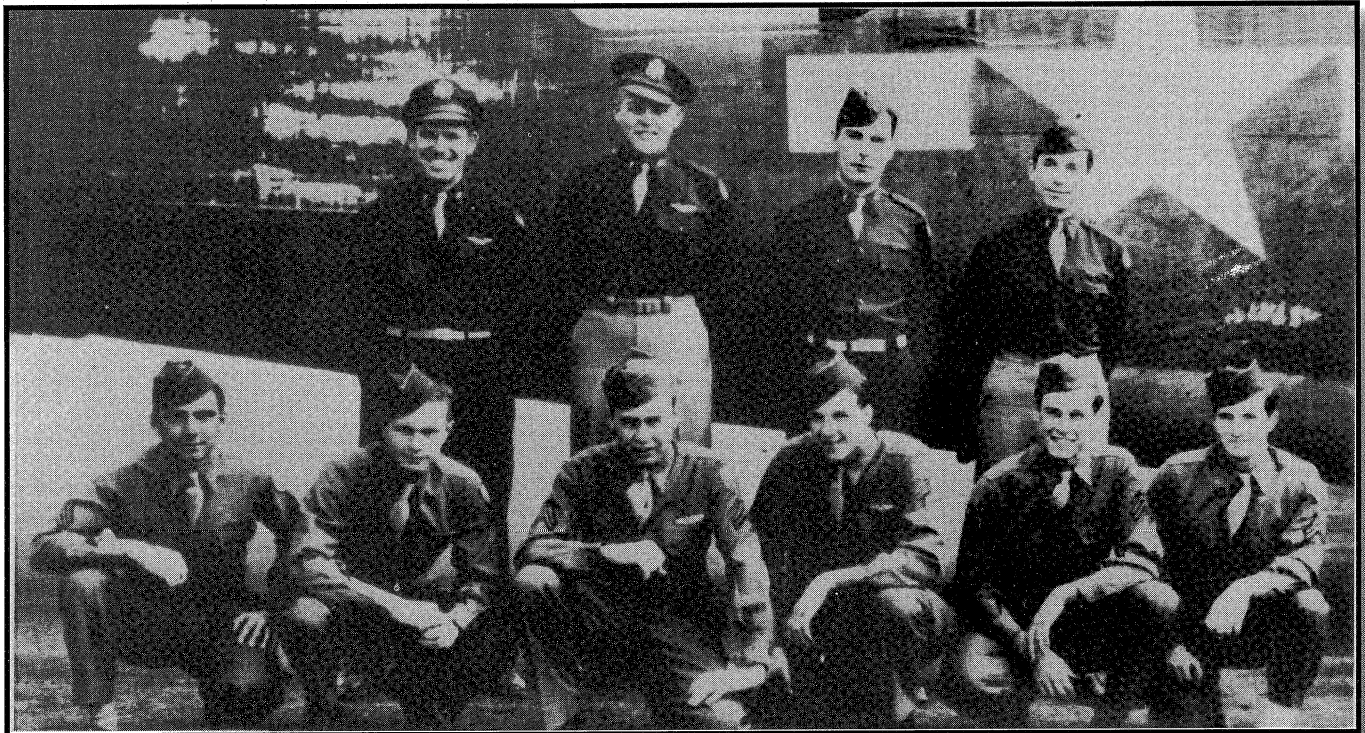


Photo as Appeared in 781st BS History Book

Ben L. Donahue Crew:

L to R Rear: Ben L. Donahue, Pilot; Reuben L. Krough, Co-Pilot; Harold J. Long, Navigator; Joseph Ormes, Bombardier.

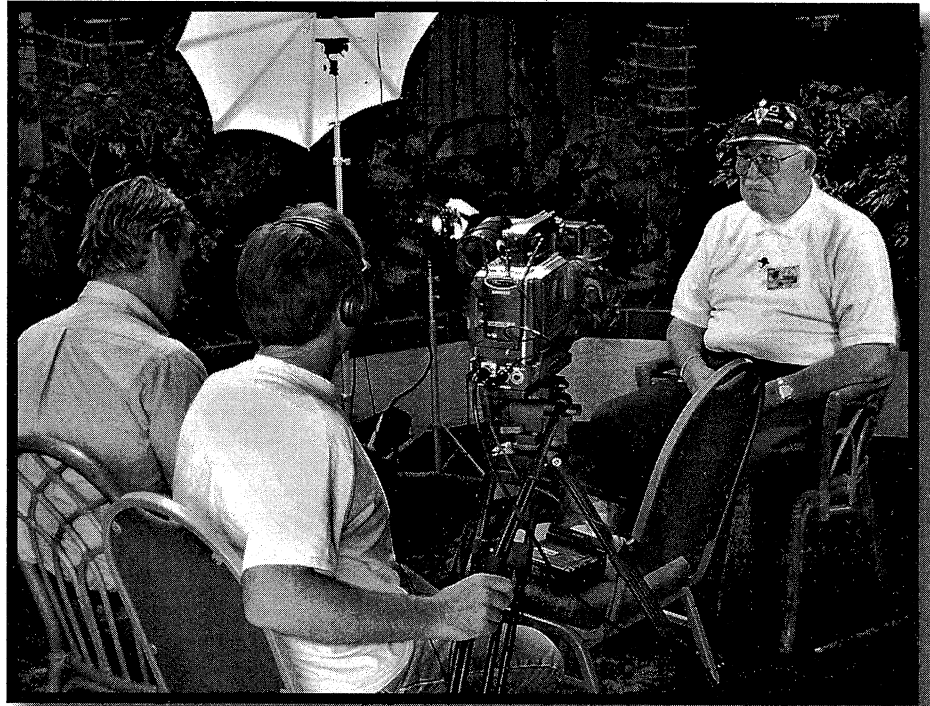
Front: Paul E. Poulin, Engr.; Kenneth A Koch, R/O; Richard L. Swanson, Ball Gunner; John R. Drinko, Nose Gunner; Robert Floyd, Top Gunner; Raymond W. Hill, Tail Gunner

One unforgettable day in Feb.'45 my crew and I were assigned to a mission. Target may be forever be unknown.

Arrival at the "war weary" (Yellow K) was notable. Engines #2 and #3 were marginal. The nose compartment had missing windows. I was ordered to put flak vests over the 'non-windows'. The upper turret was malfunctioning. Later to be rectified? There were other factors of the aircraft. Some were minor. But because of a maximum effort by all groups I was committed to fly it! Take off and "Rendevoo" was of a normal pattern. En-route things became a bit sticky. Excess power settings were necessary to get into our position in the "Bomb Stream."

Cont. on Pg. 2

My engineer and co-pilot kept me informed of the fluctuating engine instruments on engines #3 and #1. Upon arriving at the initial point for the bomb run all hell broke loose! Number 3 was running away! The usual procedures to control such a situation did not work. Feathering of #3 did little to ease the problem. Because of the extreme cold, minus sixties, it would not stay feathered. The problem persisted, necessitating the constant use of the feather-



Ben Donahue being interviewed for the Veterans History Project at the 781st Bomb Squadron Reunion in Colorado Springs last year

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781st BOMB SQUADRON (H)

Part of the 465th Bomb Gp. 15th AF in Italy
1944-1945.

Flew 191 Missions over Southern Europe
dropping thousands of tons of
death and destruction to the enemy.
Shot down 25 enemy aircraft
Received Two
Presidential Unit Citations

ing switch. I was unable to stay with the group leaving the crew and I alone over Austria.

Turning for home, still with the bombs on board, Good Ole Joe, my bombardier, picked up a target of opportunity. Located in a small valley there was a junction of a railroad, a highway and 2 bridges. Joe laid the string across the junction. The crew in the back end stated the string looked good. Damage was not visible due to the smoke that arose from the area.

Ahead of us lay further troubles. The weather front had moved

into the area after the bomb stream had flown through. A big ugly wall of weather stood in our way. I had only #3 turning and #4 slowly wind-milling. Number One was not cooperating too well during this period. The whole crew was discarding all that they could. Guns, ammo, flak vests, etc. all went out the aircraft. We were down out of the fighter area so I felt that it was the thing to do.

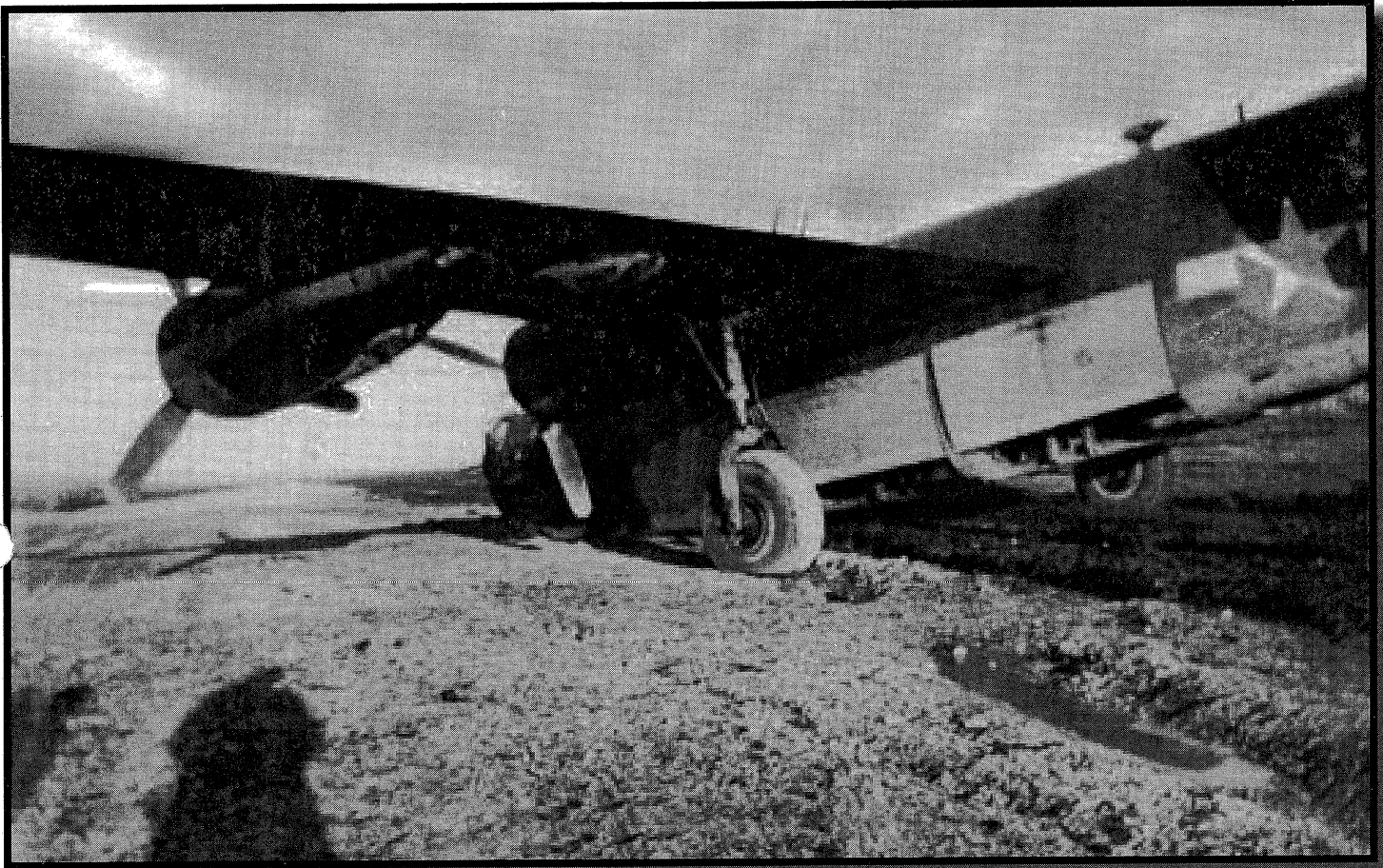
Well, that big black wall engulfed us finally! We all suddenly got very cold. The electrical system had packed up and quit with the feathering

circuit haywire. We really had problems. I was on the gauges with my good co-pilot monitoring with me while the engineer fiddled with the prop-feathering switch. We got into some very rough air.

co-pilot, and I pushed like two Atlas's on the yoke while standing on the right rudder pedal with both feet pushing to get the wild bird under control. Rube kept shouting "Don't jerk, don't jerk!" as we slowly

still in that black wall of weather and had been in for over the last half-hour.

I called out to my crew "Are you still all with me?" The crew one by one called back, and I quote, "Hell, Lt., we were glued to the airplane-we couldn't have left you if



"YELLOW K" as it came to rest on the un-finished runway at the future Base of the 525th Fighter Group. As a result of this landing Ben Donahue earned the distinction of becoming the first Allied Pilot to land at that base.

Within moments #1 engine packed up and #3 became a howling banshee. I remember the tach on #3 go past 3000 rpm. I suddenly became a very busy person. With #3 running away put us upside down very quickly. I chopped the power on the two good engines. Rube, my

got the aircraft under control. The engineer said that the airspeed went way past the "redline" somewhere over 320 mph. I saw the altimeter at 8000 ft. as we slowly pulled the wild bird up and back to about 13,000 ft. This was all on the old basic needle ball and airspeed as we were

we wanted to"!

By gingerly flying on needle ball and airspeed we finally broke out over the Adriatic somewhere along the coast of 'Yugo'. Calling 'Big Fence', a radar station near Ancona, we got a fix to that area. With the 2 engines wind milling I was unable to keep altitude. #2 and #4 were running

at very high power settings. Exactly how high I cannot recall. We slowly passed thru 13,000 ft. when #2 suddenly decided to become just a passenger and not work.

Calling the English controlled field at Ancona, I got clearance for a straight-in approach from out over the Adriatic from about 10 miles out over the water.

That was not in the cards! Seems that the 'Gremlins' were still at work and not about to make it that easy. Suddenly, the British tower calls and tells us that we cannot land. They have an emergency on the field at the present time. Please use the airfield 10 miles inland. "G--D---!" I was barely going to make 3 miles. I so notified the Bastard. I had committed myself to gear and flaps so I just did a right turn and was going to attempt a beach landing. There was a good stretch of sand north of the town.

Then "Lo and Behold" the most beautiful airstrip loomed up in front of us. No indications had been made at briefing or on the flimsy. But hell, I would take it rather than the beach any time. By this time I had no choice. I was fully at the mercy of the Gods. The #1 engine was packing it in. I had the #4 at full power. We were then too low to go to the 'chutes' The "Gremlins" were on our case again! The damned airfield was under construction! People and equipment were all over the place. They must have heard the one howling engine and seen our flares being shot above the aircraft.

Well, the co-pilot and I sat the old cripple down into a big morass of mud, sand and gravel since the metal pierced planking had not been placed as yet.

If I do say so myself, we sat her down real nice on the mains. Holding off the nose gear? Forget it! Losing air speed real fast as the gear sank into the sand, gravel and mud. The nose gear collapsed along with the nose section, the navigator and bombardier compartment. As we continued forward the plane scooped up tons of the gunk all the way back past the lower deck section and into the bomb bays.

All systems were quickly shut off and we evacuated. None of the cockpit crew could go out thru the bays. We all went out the top and over the nose to terra firma. The gang in the rear went out the lower hatch. The last crewman out the rear got his hand caught as the hatch cover came down, trapping him with his feet just inches off the ground. The whole crew gathered together and hugged one another. We had gotten down. WE HAD LANDED!

We stood for a moment in relief, then suddenly realized one of the engines was still running. We could not believe it. It was Number 4! My engineer and I crawled back up over the nose turret and into the cockpit. Engine switches were in the off position. All levers were pulled all the way back. Throttles at full retard and the main bus bar was down. But

the 'GD' engine still ran. We finally switched the selector on #4 to the OFF position on the engine panel and #4 gave up the battle. The 'Gremlin' had made a good fight of it.

I could say that this story ends here. But it was not to be! About 6 weeks later I was dispatched to Ancona to pick up a repaired aircraft. Forbid! The plane was the same SOB I had put in the mud. By now the field was finished and a crew patched up the aircraft. Hung 4 engines on the thing, built a nose to it and rewired it. I flew it back to Group where she flew 2 abort missions and became a "Hangar Queen" for the last month or two of the war. It was then assigned to fly home to the States in May of '45. Well, I learned the crew and plane spent a month on Ascension Island. I never did learn of its demise. I do know that the crew left it at Puerto Rico.

"Editors Note:-

This article by Ben Donahue is a result of an Email received from a young lad in Italy searching for information on him and this historic incident. "Yellow K" earned the distinction of being the first Allied aircraft to land at "Mondolfo Airfield". Situated near the town of Marotta on the East Coast of Italy, the field was to become the 325th Fighter Group's new base. At the time of this incident the field was still under construction. The iron matting had not been laid and the runways were far from being completed. As a result of this 'Controlled Crash Landing' by Ben and his crew, a special page has been added to the town of Marotta's history book.

NOTICE:
PULL OUT THIS CENTER SECTION
TO SAVE

CONSTITUTION OF THE 781ST BOMB SQUADRON ASSOCIATION (465th BOMB GROUP)



ARTICLE I - NAME

The organization created by this constitution shall be known as the 781st Bomb Squadron Association (465th Bomb Group)

ARTICLE II - LOCATION

The association reunions will be held annually anywhere in the United States as voted upon by the members during such national meetings

ARTICLE III-PURPOSE

- a) This Association is a non-profit benefit association and it is not organized under the Non-profit Public Benefit Association Law for public purposes.
- b) The objective of this Association shall be to promote close social relations among its members and their families.
- c) To preserve the friendship, memories and incidents of the Association as members of the 781st Bomb Squadron (465th Bomb Group) during World War II.
- d) To hold and participate in national reunions held by the Association members.

- e) To engage in charitable efforts related to and of concern to members of the Association.
- f) To offer its services whenever desired to the Air Force Academy and the Fifteenth Air Force.
- g) Notwithstanding any of the above statements of purposes and powers, this Association shall not engage in any activities or exercise any powers that are not in furtherance of the specific purpose of this Association.

ARTICLE IV - MEMBERSHIP QUALIFICATIONS

- a) All personnel that were members of the 781st Bomb Squadron (465th Bomb Group) and served at Pantanella Air Base, Italy during World War II. Spouses of all of the above are to be considered honorary members, not subject to paying dues.
- b) Widows of members can, by payment of dues, continue as honorary members (non-voting).

ARTICLE V - OFFICERS

- (a) The elective officers of this Association shall be the President, Vice-President, Secretary and/or Treasurer.
- (b) The appointive officers of this Association shall be Committee Chairmen as appointed by the President
- (c) Nomination for the various offices shall be made from the membership, but not more than four (4) members may be nominated for any one office. Officers shall be elected by a majority vote of the Association's active membership attending the business meeting of each national reunion.
- (d) Officers shall be elected by a majority vote of the Association's active membership attending the business meeting at each national reunion.

ARTICLE VI - MEETINGS AND QUORUMS

- (a) Regular meetings of the association shall be called at any time desirable, at dates, times and places determined by the elected officers of the Association.
- (b) Special meetings may be called by the President or upon request of 15 Association members.
- (c) A majority of members in good standing (including an elected officer and 15 members present at the business meetings) shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business.
- (d) Each member shall be entitled to have an equal vote. There shall be no distinction relative to grade or rank held by any member while in the mili-

tary service, of the association, or order of business. One session at any reunion shall be devoted to the business of the Association.

- (e) At such a session the following will be the order of business.
 - (1) Meeting called to order by the President.
 - (2) Roll Call of personnel that have registered.
 - (3) Reading of minutes of the previous meeting.
 - (4) Committee reports.
 - (5) Old business.
 - (6) New business.
 - (7) Nomination of Officers.
 - (8) Election of Officers.
 - (9) Installation of New Officers.
 - (10) Adjournment.

ARTICLE VII - COMMITTEES

There shall be 3 standing committees whose duties shall be as follows:

- (1) Membership: Shall be responsible for contacting former members to determine if they wish to become active.
- (2) Reunion: Shall be responsible for selecting a site and planning the reunion activities.
- (3) Historian: Shall be responsible for researching the history of the 781st Bomb Squadron (465th Bomb Group) and preparing a booklet of the history for Association members.
- (4) Other Committee Chairmen: The president will appoint chairmen of other Committees as deemed necessary.

BY-LAWS

781st BOMB SQUADRON ASSOCIATION

ARTICLE I - DUTIES OF THE OFFICERS

1. The President shall preside at all meetings of the association. He shall appoint the chairmen and members of all committees and specify (to them) their functions and duties. The President will also perform all other duties pertaining to this office.
2. The Vice President shall perform all duties pertaining to the office of the President in his absence. In case of vacancy he shall succeed to that office.
3. The Treasurer shall be charged with the custody of the funds, including all dues and shall keep accounts for and make a report thereon at each regular meeting. A committee of 3 members appointed by the President shall audit his accounts annually. He shall pay all bills.
4. The Secretary shall keep in permanent form the minutes of all meetings, record the correct names and addresses of all members and perform all other duties pertaining to his office.

ARTICLE II - ELECTION OF OFFICERS

1. The officers of this association shall be elected by a written ballot of those members present. A majority vote shall be required to constitute a valid election. If at any time a candidate for office does not receive a majority vote on a ballot count, the two candidates having the most votes

cast for them will be considered as candidates for re-vote.

2. Those officers elected will assume office upon completion of business during each national reunion election.

3. Any member may nominate another member as a candidate for any office at the time of election of officers.

4. Should an officer resign before the next national election, the senior elected officer shall appoint a member in good standing to temporarily assume the office. He shall then direct the secretary to send notice to the membership of the appointment prior to the next business meeting at which time the vacancy will be filled.

5. Terms of office shall terminate at each national reunion or until their successors are installed or appointed.

ARTICLE III - MEMBERSHIP

1. There shall be an annual fee of \$10.00, hereinafter called annual dues, payable in advance, on or before January 1. The association year to run concurrent with the calendar year from January 1 to December 31.

2. Life membership, currently not available, can be re-instituted by direction of the Board of Directors, and will make a member paid up for life by payment of a fee as directed by the Board.

3. Such payment of annual dues constitutes the payee an active member of the 781st Bomb Squadron Association (465th Bomb Group). Anyone that served with the 781st in Italy is considered an inactive member of the Association. The person becomes active

only upon the payment of the yearly dues.

4. Membership annual dues may be raised or lowered from time to time if deemed necessary by the President and approved by a majority vote of the members at the annual meeting.

5. A registration fee may be required to take care of incidental expenses of any meeting called by the officers of the association. Such expenses will be reviewed and approved and the officers are hereby authorized to see that all just debts of the association are paid.

6. In the event it becomes advisable to disband this association, the property of this association is irrevocably dedicated to civic league or social welfare purposes and no part of the net income or assets of this association shall ever inure to the benefit of any private person. Upon the dissolution or winding down of the association, it's assets remaining after payment of all debts and liabilities of this association shall be distributed to a nonprofit fund, foundation or corporation which is organized and operated exclusively for civic league or social purposes and which has established its tax exempt status under Section (cX4) of the Internal Revenue Code.

7. The organization receiving these funds will be selected

by the majority of the remaining members present at a meeting called for that special purpose.

ARTICLE IV - COMMITTEES

1. The President shall appoint such committee as he considers necessary at any time, or as directed on the majority vote of the members present at any business meeting. He shall appoint such committees as they direct.

ARTICLE V-AMENDMENTS

1. In order to change the By-laws, the membership must be notified by mail in sufficient time to vote on such change or changes in the By-laws at the Annual Reunion Meeting.

2. Any change or changes voted upon and approved by the membership will be incorporated into the by-laws and become effective immediately.

ARTICLE VI -ADOPTION

The Bylaws and subsequent amendments hereto shall become effective immediately upon adoption.

ARTICLE VII - PARLIMENTARY AUTHORITY

Robert's Rules of Parliamentary Procedure shall be the authority on matters not covered by the Constitution and Bylaws of the Association.



781st. Vets pose near the B-24 Memorial at the AF Academy in Colo.Springs at the last reunion in 2002

**HI-Y'ALL!!
LET'S MEET IN
HOUSTON TEXAS
781st BS REUNION
SEPTEMBER 14 TO 17th, 2003**

**Holiday Inn Houston NASA
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NASA SPACE CENTER & AIR MUSEUM GALVESTON**

SEND RESERVATIONS TO

**John W. Ogden
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Dickinson, TX 77539-6108
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FOLDED WINGS

Eugene Krzyznski, Bombardier for the Tipton crew passed away on January 13, 2003 in Kenmore, NY. He was 79 years of age. He was holder of the Silver Star which he earned for Valor during a mission July 14, 1944. In order to save the aircraft and all it's occupants, Krzyznski carried a live time fuse through the bomb bay and tossed it out the waist where it harmlessly exploded.

Robert H. Carr, Engineer on the Cauble crew, passed on in Hawaii, date unknown. His passing was noted in the 'Luft IV' newsletter.
Reported by Harold Farrar.

George W. Sinner, Navigator on Kennedy crew, died April 3, 2003 in Milford, DEL.
Reported by his wife, Dorothy.

Lewis Coghill, 781st Engineering, had been ill with heart problems and cancer for some time. He passed away February 12, 2003.
Reported by his wife, Loraine.

Our thoughts and prayers are with all our fallen comrades who have found everlasting peace. You have served your country well. We will remember you forever.

2003 Reunion Highlights.

The reunion committee has planned the following tours to make your stay in the Houston area a memorable one.

Water your imagination and travel the oceans of the world at **The Aquarium at Moody Gardens**. Step into the Rainforest Pyramid with thousands of tropical plants, exotic fish, birds and butterflies. Explore the mysteries of science at the Discovery Pyramid, and take a rocking and rolling ride through the universe at the Ridefilm Theater. See spectacular images leap from the screen of

their six-story IMAX 3D Theater.

Space Center Houston will take you on a spectacular journey into America's space program. NASA's Official Visitors Center features actual spacecraft, like the Mercury, Gemini and Apollo capsules, and a walk in space through state-of-the-art simulators. Visitors also see Texas' largest IMAX theater, behind-the-scenes tours of the famed Johnson Space Center and a huge display of space flight hardware and astronaut memorabilia. Send in your registration now!

TREASURER'S CORNER

Report as of June 21, 2003

The association consists of 262 active members. I was able to track down some of those whose dues had elapsed.

The 781st Bomb Squadron Association Treasury as of this date consists of the following funds:

Association Checking	\$ 5,629.73
Association Savings	\$34,952.42
Reunion Checking	\$ 518.40
Total	\$41,100.55

There are no outstanding obligations against these accounts.

LETTERS

Thurs. May 15th, 2003

To: Frank Ambrose

From: Bernie Badler

Subject: Statistics from Gene F. Moxley's book "Missing In Action" Frank;

I compiled the following figures by Squadron.

Losses in planes

780th-21

781st-19

782nd-23

783rd-30

Plus 2 782nd planes lost in mid-air collision in North Africa

Killed in action

780th-50

781st-40

782nd-75

783rd-97

Plus 5 killed of various causes

Of the total killed on the mission on Aug. 3, 1944 29 were killed.

POW

780th-60

781st-75

782nd-79

783rd-161

My sharp eyes caught a mistake in the list of those KIA on page 176 he listed Col. Lokker in the 783rd Squadron.

NOTE:

Letters, articles and general Info to be submitted to this NewsLetter has never been easier.

Just email anything you would like to share with others via the internet.

You can also send your photos for inclusion as well. If you are unsure as to how to send your photos email me and I will attempt to walk you through it. Send your items via Email to: frank@frankambrose.com

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Concomitant with my resignation as President of the 781st Bomb Squadron Association, I wish to use the Presidents corner for one last time.

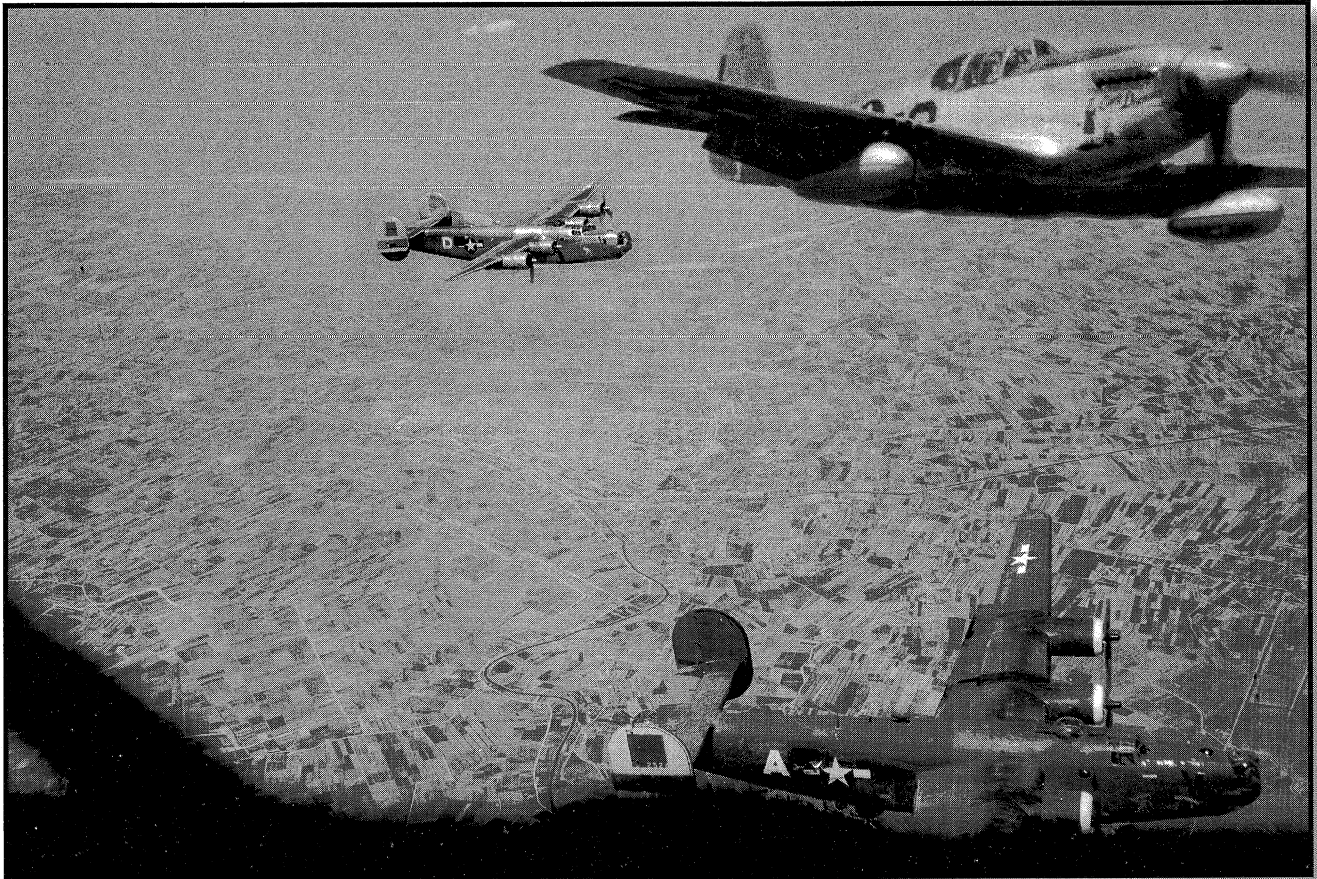
I would like, at this time to express my heart felt thanks and appreciation to all of you who have served in various capacities during our years together. To Ben Donahue, Marcel Snyder, Harry Carl, Walt Longacre, and all the others that gave of their time and effort to find 781st Bomb Squadron personnel, and to make the Association the success that it has proven to be. Special thanks go to Walt and his vivacious wife Ann, for their tireless efforts on the reunions held in Omaha and Colorado Springs.

I've particularly enjoyed my relationship with our First Vice President, Harry Carl, Editor and Historian for the Association, whose extra efforts have produced, not only our history book (sadly, now out of print), but so many great issues of Pantanella News. Loren Foote, our chaplain, and all of our Board of Directors. Thanks also to the unnumberable others, who have contributed in so many ways, the loyal members, who have attended reunions and continued your membership, thanks for your participation. Without Indians, where would the Chiefs be?

A very special thanks for the prayers and warm wishes for my recovery and continued good health.

THANK YOU, YOU ARE NOT TAKEN FOR GRANTED!!

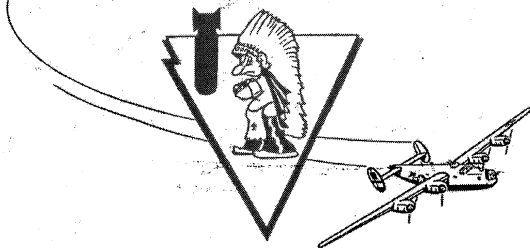
James C. Althoff



Tuskegee "Redtail Angels" P-51 flying cover for the 465th Bomb Group

781st BOMB SQUADRON ASSOCIATION

3728 Evergreen Drive
Dickinson, TX 77539-6108



POST
HERE

Return Service Requested