



PANTANELLA NEWS

Published by 781st Bomb Squadron Association® #107 June 2012

781st Reunion in Branson, Missouri

The 781st Bomb Squadron Reunion is set and ready for September 30 - October 4, 2012. This year's reunion will be in beautiful Branson, Missouri where attendees can partake in a trip on the Showboat, Branson Belle, for dinner, entertainment and a cruise. Enjoy taking in a Clay Cooper show along with enjoying lunch at McFarlain's. A tour of the Veterans Museum in Branson is also on the itinerary. The reunion will culminate with a Final Banquet held at the Hotel with entertainment. This and so much more awaits you in Branson. Make sure you are registered and that you have your room reserved at The Grand Plaza Hotel. Hope to see you there!

Registration Form on page 3



PANTANELLA NEWS

Edited by: Lance McKinnon
 4128 Chanticleer Dr. NW
 Kennesaw GA, 30152
 770-425-3213
 email: glmckinnon@gmail.com

Contact one of the following individuals
 for FW's, News, Address Changes, etc.

781st BS Association Officers**President:**

Orren Lee
 2312 Braemar Dr.
 Sioux Falls, SD 57105
 605-339-1297
 email: cle75@q.com

Vice President:

Earl Leinart
 936 S 111th Plaza
 Omaha, NE 68154-3306
 402-334-9118
 email: leinartge@cox.net

Treasurer:

James Braud
 403 Christian Ln.
 Slidell, LA 70458
 985-290-2021
 email: braudj@hotmail.com

Executive Secretary:

Carole Lee
 2312 Braemar Dr.
 Sioux Falls, SD 57105
 605-339-1297
 email: cle75@q.com

781st Bomb Squadron Association
 c/o Orren Lee, Pres.
 2312 Braemar Dr.
 Sioux Falls, SD 57105
 Email: cle75@q.com

Board of Directors:

President: Orren Lee
 Vice President: Earl Leinart
 Treasurer: James Braud
 Secretary: Debbie Cherry
 Chaplin: Joseph Soucy
 Board Member: Don Munce
 Board Member: Georgia McKinnon

PANTANELLA NEWS

781st BOMB SQUADRON (H)
 Part of the 465th Bomb Gp. 15th AF
 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 in Seven Battle Campaigns.

President's Letter



All of us need things that make us feel good, like a humorous book, a familiar song, or lunch with friends. Do you have a place to go that you think of as your “feel-good” place? Carole and I have discovered Branson, MO is a “feel-good” place to go. It is good to drive around in the Ozarks in the fall with their beautiful autumn colors. The shows are amazing and there are more than 100 to choose from. Your choices range from Country Western to Broadway hits, plus other types of musical shows that take you down memory lane. If you are a veteran or are celebrating a wedding anniversary or a birthday, you will get attention at every performance. And Branson appeals to young people too. We have met a couple on their honeymoon. Branson is a “feel-good” destination for any age – not just for seniors.

I am looking forward to our 781st Reunion in Branson and to the many stories we have to tell. I remember telling my story. When I first arrived at Pantanella, I went to the radio shack. A fellow there was telling me when he was shot down. He was one of the last ones out of the plane but the first to hit the ground. His chute wouldn't open and while he was falling he took a knife his brother had given him one week prior to the mission and opened his chute. I didn't believe him, thinking he knew I was new and was putting me on. But it is in the history book of the 781st on page 90. Also, Dr. Sweet was telling me about his time in Switzerland when he learned I had a daughter living in Switzerland. On page 85, it lists 1st Lt. Elliott B. Sweet as returning from Internment Camp in Switzerland. Sgt. Leonard H. Emmel was among this group along with three others I don't recall meeting, T/Sgt. Dowie Hymans, Sgts. Willie Golden and Sgt. Melvin Fulkerson.

This book, the 781st History book of which Harry S. Carl was the Editor, copyrighted in 1989 is priceless to me. If anyone has a copy they would be willing to sell, we have members waiting to hear from you. Maybe if your family member has joined the folded wings and no one in your family wants to keep it, please let us know. — Orren Lee

MEMBERSHIP DUES: Dues are \$10.00 per year. The last time you paid dues is recorded on your Newsletter label. If it has a year prior to 2012, your dues are due. The Treasurer will accept them at any time throughout the year and will then update your label. Send checks payable to 781st Bomb Squadron Assoc. to James Braud, 781st Bomb Squadron Treasurer, 403 Christian Lane, Slidell, LA. 70458. If you are a Veteran and have a Life Membership this message is not for you.

781st Bomb Squadron Registration Form

September 30-October 4, 2012

(To be printed and mailed in....not to register online)

Name: _____ **Spouse/Guest:** _____

Address: _____

State _____ **zip** _____ **telephone** _____ **email** _____

HOST HOTEL: THE GRAND PLAZA

Room reservations can be made by calling the Grand Plaza at 417-336-6646. Be sure and mention you are with the 781st Bomb Squadron to get the special group rate of \$87.00 per room per night plus tax. That rate will be good 3 days prior and 3 days after the reunion, based on hotel availability. Rooms that are reserved in the group block will be dropped August 30, so be sure and make your reservations prior to 8-30.

Please register me for the following:

Reunion Activity Package: \$215.00 per person

_____ **# of activity packages x \$215.00 per person = \$** _____

TOTAL DUE: \$ _____

A 50% Deposit is requested by July 30 with final payment due by August 30. Refunds after September 24 will be on a case by case basis. This applies to the activity package.

Cancellations must be made by phone and authorized by a representative of Gatherings Plus. All refunds will be processed within 30 days of cancellation.

Questions? Call us at 417-338-4048

GATHERINGS PLUS

P.O. Box 1023, Branson West, MO 65737

TEAR OUT PAGE

REGISTRATION FORM ON OPPOSITE SIDE

Fill In Registration Form on Opposite Side and Mail to

GATHERINGS PLUS

P.O. Box 1023, Branson West, MO 65737

Branson Reunion Flight Deals

Now Booking!

Flights to Austin, TX,
Milwaukee, WI & Nashville, TN!

BRANSON
AirExpress

Service begins May 10th, 2012!

Introductory Fares
Begin at \$99

www.BransonAirExpress.com



VISIT
BransonAirExpress.com
for great deals on
flights in and out of
Branson, MO



PAST TO PRESENT

Tommaso Palermo from Italy sent in these photos that he recognized as the building that served as the headquarters of the 15th Army Air Force. The current address of the building is Lungomare Nazario Sauro, 39 Bari, Italy.



This image was taken from a video from Youtube. The video can be viewed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=q29_X98ifXc.



Lungomare Nazario Sauro, 39 Bari, Italy.

A SOLDIER'S PROFILE



Ssgt Cecil B. Cantrell

November 26, 1920 - December 29, 1993

My Grandfather, Cecil B. Cantrell, Sr., was born November 26, 1920 and passed away on December 29, 1993. He was born in and a life-long resident of Greenville, SC. He was drafted and enlisted in the army on July 27, 1943 and reported initially to Camp Croft in Spartanburg, SC. He then progressed to the Air Corps Gunnery School and after graduation was assigned to the 781st. He arrived in Italy in September '44 where he served as a nose gunner with Grant A. Benson's crew flying a total of 35 missions until the end of the war and achieving the rank of Staff Sergeant. He was awarded an Air Medal and one Oak Leaf Cluster.

After the war, he resumed his trade in masonry and for a time owned and operated his own business, traveling all over the eastern part of the country sub-contracting for many construction companies on projects ranging from residential, commercial, and industrial

facilities. He later worked as a Masonry specialist consultant for Santee Cement Company for nearly twenty years until his retirement. Outside of work, he enjoyed working on old cars and farming. He married his high school sweetheart, Dorothy Williams, in 1940 and she still lives in the house he built in Greenville. At the time of his passing, he had two sons, five grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

To my knowledge, he never attended any of the Squadron reunions, but did receive the Pantanella News and a copy of the 781st history book which I still have. He never spoke much of his service during the war and so I'd like to appeal to anyone who might have known him in Italy that perhaps I could contact them. His other air crew members were Bernard S. Freeman, William C. Cooper, Thomas S. Hammond, John M. Carmack, James B. Cunningham, Richard C. Baker, William W. Bond, Everett A. Passaly, Michael J. Gedra, Jr., Frank J. Dinkelkamp, and Francis R. Clark. Not sure if the Squadron Association records have current contact info for any of these folks.

— Frank Cantrell



This photo shows my Grandfather, Ssgt Cecil B. Cantrell and I believe, Richard C. Baker, at St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City, Rome. My Grandfather is the taller of the two men in the middle foreground facing the camera. They were members of Grant Benson's crew, 781st. This was probably early 1945.



Cecil B. Cantrell is first from the left.



Cecil B. Cantrell is first from the left.



Cecil B. Cantrell is first from the right.

FOLDED WINGS



VERLON H. BENNETT, 86, of Midland, MI died Saturday morning, June 18, 2011, at his residence. The son of the late Lawrence and Abigail (Wheaton) Bennett was born in Flint on

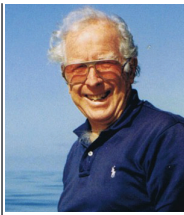
March 4, 1925. He was drafted into the U.S. Air Force during World War II and while serving, Verlon was a radio operator on a B-24 bomber of which he survived a mid-air collision. After 20 years of service, Verlon retired from the Air Force in 1968. He then went to work for Michigan Bell, retiring in 1986. Verlon was a member of the Odd Fellows #418 where he was a Noble Grand, a Grand Patriarch of the Grand Encampment of Michigan, a Life Member of the Midland Bowling Association, and was a member of the Golf League for Ameritech. Verlon was also an amateur radio operator.

Surviving is his wife of 58 years, the former Myrna Morris, whom he married on June 13, 1953 in Flint; sons, James (Avis) Bennett of Livonia, Jeffery (Anita) Bennett of Midland; grandchildren, Justin (Amy) Bennett, Shannon (James) McFarland, Sarah (Jason) Toner, and Luke and Mark Bennett; great-grandchildren, Abby and Zack Bennett, and Avery Toner; brother, Irwin (Harriet) Bennett of Hubbard Lake. In addition to his parents, Verlon was preceded in death by a sister, Catherine Kasper.



WALTER CLAUSEN JR., age 86, of Fenton, MI passed away Saturday, July 9, 2011, at home. Walter was born February 24, 1925, in Sioux City, Iowa, the son of the late Walter and Helga Clausen. He was preceded in death by

his parents and sister, Emily White. Walter was a Veteran of the U.S. Army Air Corps, serving in WWII from August 20, 1943 to October 17, 1945 with the 781st Bomb Squadron. He was a Prisoner of War from October 13, 1944 to May 2, 1945 for which he earned the Purple Heart Air Medal. Walter married Connie Hoyt on February 14, 1948. He was employed for over 30 years at Buick until his retirement. Walter was a member of the Fraternal Order of Elks, enjoyed golfing and spending winters in Florida.



EARNEST (ERNIE) VAN ASPEREN,

Van Asperen embarked on his last voyage on Feb. 11, 2012. Ernie was born in Oakland 96 years ago. His life was a reflection of his adventurous, audacious, fun-loving personality. He created the famous Ernie's Wine and Liquor, which grew to be a chain of over 80 stores. With his wife, Virginia, he created two restaurants: The Dock and Windjammer, in Marin County, and they later found their true vocation when they founded Round Hill Winery in Napa Valley, which they operated with great passion and success until they decided it was time to retire. His zest for life led him into boats and airplanes. He took great pride in being an excellent mariner and pilot. During World War II, he commanded a B-24 bomber in action over Italy and Germany. He continued flying as a private pilot until well into his 80s.

P.S. Ernie and Jim Althoff were in the wine business at Napa Valley, together, and Ernie provided the wine at the 781st Reunions. (We received this newspaper article and information in a letter from Pierre Kennedy, tail gunner on the Althoff crew.) We remember everyone had enjoyed his wine until the corkage fee restaurants charged prohibited this practice.



FRANCIS K. "KENNY" KILL

89, passed away peacefully on May 6, 2012, at Birchaven Village with his family by his side. Kenny was born in Landeck, Ohio on October 9, 1922. He was the younger of two sons of Albert N. and Theresa G. (Wallen) Kill (both deceased). He was also preceded in death by his only brother, Arnold R. Kill, on April 19, 2010.

Kenny was a 1940 graduate of Spencerville High School. He was later drafted by the US Army-Air Corps and proudly served his country in World War II as part of the "greatest generation that ever lived." He was a bombardier on a B24 Liberator in the 781st Bomb Squadron, of the 465th Group in the 55th Wing of the 15th Air Force serving the European theater and stationed in Pantanella, Italy. On May 21, 1949, he married the love of his life, Ms. Elizabeth "Betty" Weber. Betty

survives in Findlay. Together they enjoyed nearly 63 years of marriage and were blessed with five children: Kayleen (John Rice) Kill of Houston, Texas; Karl (Carol) Kill of Powell, Ohio; Patricia Kill, of Springboro, Ohio; Susan (George) McAfee of Findlay; and John (Anne) Kill of Houston, Texas. There are six loving grandchildren: Chris and Katie Kill, Jack and Nicholas Kill, and Whitney and Makenzie McAfee. He is also survived by his sister-in-law, Eleanora Kill.

Among his many passions, Kenny (and Betty) were founding members of a reunion group for the 781st Bomb Squadron. This group has met annually for more than 20 years. Almost 65 years after their last tour of duty in 1943, the surviving squadron members were given the distinctive honor to "reassume their posts" in a B-24 aircraft on display at the Wright Patterson Air Force Museum in Dayton. This was during their 20th annual reunion in 2008. Though well into their 80's, each man eagerly boarded the aircraft and took their posts.

A loving husband, devoted father, admired grandfather, trusted friend and dedicated community steward, Kenny will be sadly missed by all who knew him.

JUDY WILLETT

wife of the late Frank "Flaps" Willett, passed away April 9, 2012, reported by dear friends, Walter & Margie Sutton.



GRACE R. LEINART,

86, of Omaha, NE, wife of Earl Leinart (vice president of the 781st BS Association) died April 17, 2012. In addition to her husband, she is survived by 3 children, 6 grandchildren, and 6 great-grandchildren, and a brother.


**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.**

781st "PANTALELLA NEWS"

Orren Lee, President
2312 Braemar Dr.
Sioux Falls, SD 57105



PANTANELLA NEWS

