

FIRST ISSUE PANTANELLA NEWS October 1985

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ACTING BOARD OF DIRECTORS

WEST COAST

JAMES C. ALTHOFF
2 MT. VERNON LANE
ATHERTON, CA 94025
(415) 325-8356

BEN DONAHUE
365 OAK STREET
MOUNTAIN VIEW, CA 94041
(415) 967-1855



EAST COAST

PIERRE J.J. KENNEDY
27 FERNBROOK
WEST HARTFORD, CT 06107
(203) 561-1592

JAMES M. SNYDER
1226 ROYAL OAK DRIVE
WINTER SPRINGS, FL 32708
(305) 365-7938

781ST BOMB SQUADRON ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER, 1985

NUMBER ONE - This is the first Newsletter of the 781st Bomb Squadron Association. We have searched and have not found another association or organization of the 781st. We will consider this the official association. Don't you think it's about time the fighting 781st gets active?

BACKGROUND - With all the reunions starting about the time of the 40th anniversary of D Day in Europe I began to think more about my crew and the 781st, and our times at Pantanello, Italy. I began to search for my crew and found three of them. Then I became affiliated with the 783rd since I knew some of them and had flown with them. I attended their second reunion in Dayton, Ohio this past August. I can't say enough about the comradery and spirit of the 783rd. On the second day of the reunion we went to Wright-Patterson and while standing in line to go aboard the 'ol B-24, I began chatting with the next in line who turned out to be another 781st member, James Marcel Snyder. Right there we decided to get the 781st active. I got back home September 1 and dug out an old yellow dog-eared roster of officers that the squadron put out about March 1945. I began calling and located about 35% of those that I tried to find. I had made up my mind that when I had 50 I would get out a newsletter. It has been very interesting to talk to many of you and I hope in the next month or so there will be another 50 to talk to.

ORGANIZATION - Until there is a reunion where officers and directors can be elected by the membership, we will organize with a temporary board of directors. As I mentioned, James Marcel Snyder met with me in August and he will oversee membership east of the Mississippi, and I will do the same in the west. Marcel expects to retire early next year and he said he will "work full time for the 781st". Marcel was a Mickey operator in the 781st. The other director on the East Coast is Pierre J. J. Kennedy; more information about him later in the newsletter. Ben Donahue was a pilot and lives near me so we have been in touch over the years. Ben has been attending the 780th reunions which have been held yearly for about 20 years. We will probably add another director or two before the first reunion.

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PURPOSE - The purpose of this association is to locate and have as membership all who served in the 781st Bomb Squadron from its beginning in 1943 until July 1945. The association will publish a newsletter of interest to all members and furnish a roster so lost "old buddies" can be contacted. We will also develop a history of the squadron for ourselves and our families.

REUNION - We plan on a reunion next year and at the present time are working on Colorado Springs, Colorado for September. Plans are to be near some Air Force activity like the Academy or a museum, etc. Future plans will be decided at the first reunion. Most of you have indicated you will attend a reunion and we would expect to have over 100 members plus wives.

781st HISTORY - We're working on this and expect to have a full history by reunion. Anything that you have that might be of help, please let us know. We have no records to work from so they all have to be dug up from the past. We can find some in old military records, but personal items have to come from us.

CREWS - We encourage crews to plan reunions at the same time as the squadron reunion.

465 BOMB GROUP - There is no active group association that I know of. We would like to tie into a group reunion. Some work is being done to see if it can be done for next September. We all want to keep our squadrons together; however, it would be nice if we could all meet in individual squadrons at nearby hotels and one day make it a 465 Bomb Group affair. I mentioned the 780th and 783rd as having reunions. The 782nd had their first one in Dayton and Marcel and I spent an evening with them - another fine group.

WIVES - Wives will be a part of the reunion and we will have special events for them.

PIERRE J. J. KENNEDY - Pierre has been selected to be the first member to have his story told. Pierre happened to be my tail gunner so I know him quite well and know his story. We arrived in Pantanella August 27, 1944 and little did Pierre know that six weeks later he would be POW. After flying 12 sorties he was scheduled for Capri with the rest of the crew for rest camp. The night before he was pulled from the rest camp orders and had to fill in on Lt. Alexander Lovey's crew. Co-pilot was Lt. Raymond Morse. The target was Blechammer and the date was Friday, October 13th. The sortie was #13 for Pierre. That morning all went well until turning off the IP with full bomb load and just beginning the bomb run when Yellow "L" took a direct hit in the gas tanks in the right wing. Needless to say, the plane became a flaming fireball. Pierre managed to get out of his turret and crawl forward to get out of the hatch in the floor. He was last out of the waist section. By that time fire was extending beyond the waist windows and the plane was vibrating and out of control. He did not know what was going on up front until after capture when he learned both pilots were KIA and the rest of the crew got out. After being captured he ended up at Stalag Luft #4 in Gross

This is a copy of a reprint of the first 2 pages of the first issue of the Pantanella News discovered in the September 2009 issue. Number One and Number Two were missing from our collection. If anyone has them, please contact anyone listed on the masthead of the most recent issues.