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781ST BOMB SQUADRON ASSOCIATION

NUMBER 6

PANTANELLA NEWS

OCTOBER 1986

REUNION '86 - Or shall it be called NUMBER ONE? Whatever it will be called, it will be long remembered. It was a proud time for the Fighting 781st! It will be hard to describe the outpouring of camaraderie and friendship. The bond that was formed over 40 years ago remained. Here are some of the quotes from notes and comments sent in since the reunion; "This reunion was the greatest - terrific reunion, everyone connected was outstanding - especially enjoyed the relaxed organization of the get-together - wouldn't have changed a thing - I wish to sincerely thank all who gave their time and effort for this opportunity - I thoroughly enjoyed the reunion and it exceeded my fondest expectations - the fellowship was beyond belief - how do you improve perfection - nothing can excel Colorado Springs '86 - it will be hard to exceed the organization and excellence of this, our first reunion - much more than I ever hoped for - wouldn't have missed it for the world - the reunion was professionally done - I have not had emotions like this since the war - I loved it all."



There were 167 men to answer the roll, another eight families of the deceased, and four guests, making a total of 335 with wives or family members. Only three canceled, and two joined the folded wings in July after registering - Jimmy Patrick and Donald Dalton. The courageous wife of Donald Dalton and her son, Mark, attended in memory of Donald. Dick Crutcher and his crew, of which Donald was a member, gave her great comfort.

You all have to be complimented on your early response and cooperation at registration. It helped a great deal in the planning and the accuracy of our meal counts. And the cooperation in the car pooling was outstanding. Wasn't it interesting to meet other members of the 781st.?

THE EVENTS - For those of you who were unable to attend, or to some who could not stay the entire time, I will review the "events." Marcel and I were finalizing arrangements, starting on Tuesday morning, and, later that day, we found some early birds already checking in. By Wednesday, over 60 were there, so we opened registration and the hospitality room, and were in full swing one day early! By the time registration opened on Thursday at 1000, there was a line which did not end until 1700. At 1730, it was off to the Academy Officers' Club for photos, cocktails, and a steak dinner, with 319 joining in on this festive occasion. After a short get-acquainted period, we saw Harry Carl's great slide presentation, "Tales from Sacajawea." It certainly brought back memories of Pantanella, and set the stage for reliving those memories. Then it was back to the hotel for a good night's sleep.

Friday's bus tour of the Academy departed on schedule at 0900. At 1100, we entered the spectacular cadet chapel for private services for those who made the supreme sacrifice and those who died since. Our own Roy Byrd, former squadron bombardier, now a Presbyterian minister, assisted the chaplain in a very moving service. There was not a dry eye in the chapel. Following, we had photos on the chapel steps and watched the cadet luncheon formation. Then lunch and a tour of the Garden of the Gods. The evening was open and many crews and sections got together for their own special times.



The forty-five flags in the wreath represent the forty-five men killed in action.

Saturday's business session was followed by election of officers and directors, then a general discussion, and photo identification. After lunch, it was back to the Academy theater for the afternoon program. A briefing was held similar to the one 42 years ago on that date. Col. McKenna was in charge with Byron Thompson, intelligence; Jack Ertel, navigator; Walter Sutton, bombardier; Hank Willett, operations; and Roy Byrd, Chaplain. It was a very interesting session. Following was an extremely interesting video on the German jet fighter, the Me 262, then a video on the Althoff crew with scenes from Pantanella and combat. Then it was back to the hotel to get dressed for the Honors Banquet. The Cheyenne Mountain Inn provided a beautiful setting for this special occasion. At the conclusion of the attitude adjustment period, we began our program with the trooping of the colors by Cadet Ian Bates Winfree Bryan, Pierre J. J. Kennedy, and Leonard Goldstein, invocation by Roy Byrd, and the singing of the Lord's



Prayer by Patti Thompson (above). After dinner, there was recognition of Ex-POW's, MIA's, and those credited with enemy planes shot down. Then a very special event was the awarding of the Distinguished Flying Cross posthumously, to Lt. Col. Clarence J. Lokker, and given to his widow Mrs. Sybil Lokker Wilson. We were pleased to see this special recognition given to our commanding officer who gave his life for his country.

We heard from several of our squadron members and then an address by Brig. Gen. David Winn, which was most interesting and well received. Then a couple more songs by Patti Thompson, a few dances, and a wonderful evening was over.

Sunday was free until 1500. Many chose to go to the cadet chapel for services and some toured the area. Hospitality was open by 1000, and it was a full day of going over pictures and swapping stories. At 1500, it was back to the Officers' Club at the Academy for more stories, jokes, and a gathering of information. Then to the NCO Club for Cocktails, dinner, and sad farewells.

Yes, we had a full program and had meetings in five different locations. And I never heard a complaint. The weather was so great that traveling around made it enjoyable. It was your tremendous response that required us to move from the limited space at the hotel. We'll be ready for you next time!!

Mrs. Sybil Lokker Wilson accepts the Distinguished Flying Cross which was awarded to Col. Lokker. Presentation was made by Col. Burt Andrus, who was a West Point classmate and very close friend of Col. Lokker. His assistance was invaluable in obtaining this recognition for Col. Lokker.

The close family of Hulitt Holcombe was well represented in honor of their husband and father. Hulitt's widow, Alice, attended with her sons Ronald and Allan, and her daughter, Patti Thompson. Patti brought her son of 8½ months, Canon.

Janet and Lawrence Lilly celebrated their 45th wedding anniversary. Hank Willett had a birthday - number ?? And there were other celebrations.



The telegram below, was received during our banquet on Saturday evening from our Commander In Chief. Also received were letters of congratulations from Gary Hart, United States Senator from Colorado, and Richard D. Lamm, Governor of the state of Colorado.

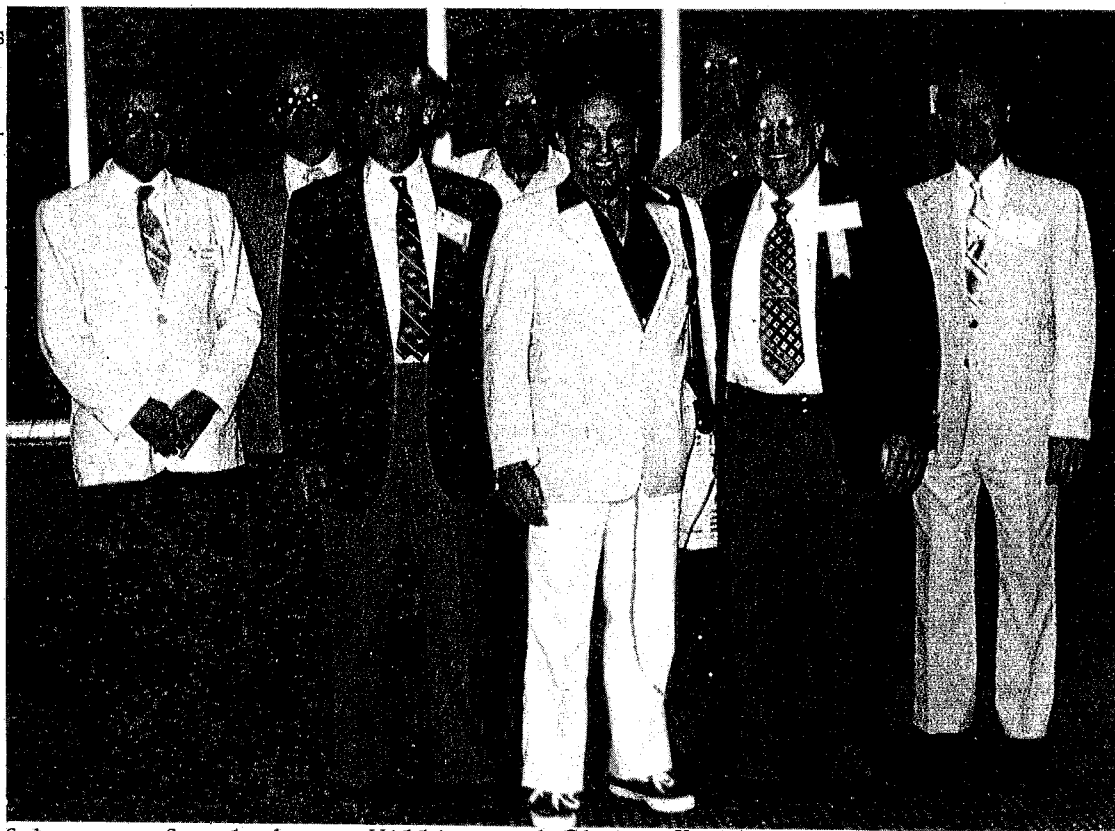
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BT

IT GIVES ME GREAT PLEASURE TO SEND GREETINGS TO THE MEMBERS OF THE 781ST BOMB SQUADRON ASSOCIATION GATHERED IN COLORADO SPRINGS FOR YOUR FIRST REUNION. EACH OF THE MEMBERS OF THE 781ST HAS GONE HIS SEPARATE WAY IN THE WORLD. BUT -- AS THIS REUNION SHOWS -- YOUR SERVICE AND SACRIFICE TOGETHER HAVE FORGED A BOND OF BROTHERHOOD THAT TIME AND DISTANCE CANNOT BREAK. ON EVERY MISSION YOU CONFRONTED GREAT DANGERS AND ENDURED THE HARDSHIPS OF THE FREEZING COLD, LONG HOURS, AND DEBILITATING FATIGUE. YET YOU ROSE TO THE CHALLENGE. YOU NEVER FALTERED. MANY OF YOUR BROTHERS GAVE THEIR LAST FULL MEASURE OF DEVOTION SO THAT OTHERS MIGHT LIVE IN FREEDOM. THOUGH MANY YEARS HAVE PASSED, AMERICA'S DEBT TO YOU REMAINS FAR MORE THAN WE CAN EVER REPAY. I TAKE A MOMENT WITH YOU TO HONOR YOUR COMRADES WHO CAN NO LONGER ANSWER ROLL CALL, AND SEND MY BEST WISHES FOR A MEMORABLE GATHERING. GOD BLESS YOU.

RONALD REAGAN

CARL DAHL's crew was 100% - all eight of the surviving members were in attendance. Back L to R - Homer Moeller, CP Bill Rachow, Bomb Mike Beeson, CP Neil Culhane, Nav Carl Dahl, Pilot Front L to R - Milt Levinson, NG Adrian Martin, TG Parker Layne, BG



The youngest man in attendance was Adrian Martin, age 60. The oldest was Mike Horvath, a young 72. Did I hear someone was 74 and didn't want to admit it? And Fred Aboud lost his worry beads. Don't know if he ever found them. William and Claire Yurek were mighty proud parents - their son, William, a 1/C cadet at the Academy, visited the reunion.

A comment from John Zartman, "One of the things that concerned me prior to arriving at Colorado Springs was that I could only put about four faces with names as I reviewed those who were to attend. However, as I talked with people and saw their name tags, the cobwebbs of 42 years ago slowly disappeared, and I was able to remember many more after arriving. Making new friends and acquaintances was also very gratifying."

And from Leo Fink; "I cannot begin to adequately express my appreciation to you and those who helped you, for what you have done to provide me with what must have been one of the most memorable experiences of my life. What a thrill to see my old buddies, and those who followed us in the 781st Bomb Squadron, for the first time since 1944!"

A special thanks to Dollie Snyder and her crew that took care of the registration desk. Helpers included Grant Benson, Donna Carl, Ellen Cooper, Dick Crutcher, Joyce Deslatte, Gerry Ihde, Thelma Levinson, Russ and Carolyn Maynard, Maurine Wray, Elayne Reed, Dorothy Robinson and Judy Willett.

Weren't those name tags great! Thanks to O.J. Cowart and his fancy computer. If we would have had to order them commercially they would have cost \$400 and not been nearly as nice.

And thanks to Ernie Van Asperen for furnishing some of his delicious and famous Round Hill wines. You will find these wines to be the best value of any premium wines coming from California - if you can find them in your area.

Marcel and I want to thank everyone else that helped so much to make the reunion a success - Harry Carl for his hours of work preparing the slide presentation and his continuous work during the reunion - Russ Maynard who had his hands full - the cash handler - Frank Ambrose and Paul Ihde, photography - Ben Donahue over-

seeing the hospitality room - and to those not mentioned, many thanks for your help. And as Marcel said many times, "It would not be a reunion without you." A standing ovation of thanks for the terrific turnout.



Another photo of happiness; L to R, George Hausold, Paul Brady, Ray Cauble and Frank Hylla. Doesn't Paul look spiffy in his mess dress!

REUNION PHOTOS, VIDEOS, BOOKLET, CAP - We will be preparing a reunion booklet consisting of some 20 pages of photos and a story of the reunion. Send a check for \$15, made out to the 781st Bomb Squadron Association, and mailed to our treasurer, Russ Maynard, 721 Rutherford Drive, Fredericksburg, VA 22401. Also, if you did not pay for Thursday dinner, or a couple haven't paid the extra \$8 per person for Saturday night, mail to Russ.

A reunion video, approximately 2 hours long, is available for \$39.95. Send check and order directly to: Carol Bousquet-Redmond, Qtrs 6757-1. USAFA, Colorado Springs, CO 80840. Specify VHS or Beta.

For the group picture on the chapel steps you can order as follows: Feingold Studios, 20 S. Elm Street, Denver, CO 80222. It's \$8 for a color 8 x 10. The picture on the front page was reduced 10%. You can order men only, men and women, or women only. If you want a picture taken of you at the Thursday night dinner, it's \$5 for a 5 x 7 color. To identify yourself send a full description on your height, color of hair (or amount), color of clothes etc. All handled direct with the studio.

If you want a video of the Althoff crew it's \$29. Send check to me and I will have the studio make a copy.

Caps are \$10. Make check payable to me and send to me. When they arrive I will send them out. If you ordered at the reunion and didn't pay for the cap, please send your check to me. I expect to have the order in by the time you receive this newsletter.

FOUND - One airmen's helmet with headset and oxygen mask, and a white cap. Harry Carl has the helmet and I have the white cap.

THE NEXT REUNION - A questionnaire at the reunion gave us the answers to all but one question about future reunions. Still undecided is whether to hold one in 1987 or 1988. If you have not given your opinion, we would like to hear from you. Just let us know if it should be in 1987 or 1988. The board will review the matter and decide in the next month or two.

What was very clear in the questionnaire was that the reunion should be three days long, be held in September, be near a military installation, rooms not to be over the \$60 range, and the two locations with the most votes were Dayton and San Antonio.

YOUR HELP IS NEEDED - An urgent plea from Harry Carl, squadron historian, to those that promised to send in photos and information. We need the information as soon as possible. Harry has a huge task, so let's all be prompt and send it to Harry so that he can complete the history book. We don't want to miss those important photos and articles that will be enjoyed by all.

DUES - At our business meeting it was agreed that there will be no mandatory dues. You all know there is a cost in producing the newsletter and taking care of other incidentals for the Association. If you can afford \$10 or \$20 per year, it would be most welcome. Many have sent in much more. Checks are to be made out to the squadron and sent to Russ Maynard, treasurer.

PANTANELLA - In search for the origin of the name "Pantanello," someone reported that it was the name of the family that owned the land. We'd like to hear from the person who had the information on Pantanello.

ORDNANCE SECTION - The good-looking group of men below are; L to R Back, Malvern Barner and Harold Schuster - Front, John Zadrozny, Edwin Kapusta and Loren Foote. And wasn't it Malvern that sang, "The 781st will shine tonite, the 781st will shine, the 781st will shine tonite, all down the line; won't we look sweet tonight, all dressed up so fine; when the sun goes down and the moon comes up, the 781st will shine!"



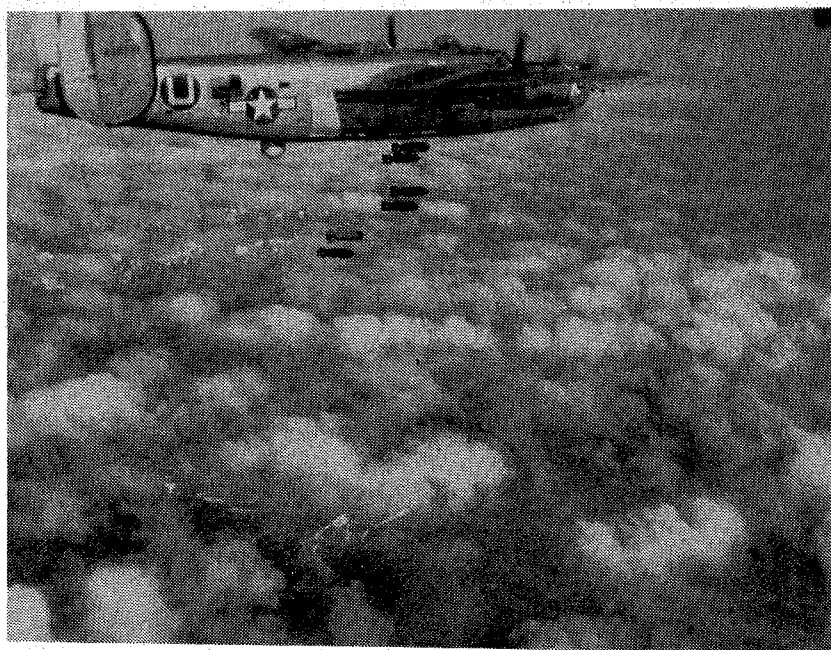
LT. GRIFFITH CREW - In trying to locate a member of this crew, Ray Laughner, a son, Peter, received the letter and wrote that his father passed away in 1971. Peter asked if there was additional information available about his father's service, and about Blue 'N' and the crew his father got shot down with. I located one member, James Burns, bombardier, who was quite ill. He reported that he was quite certain six were killed and four survived. He could not identify all four that survived. About a month later, I called to see how he was and found that he had passed away. I did not have the addresses for the others so I wrote the National Archives for the Missing Air Crew Report. It had not arrived when I left for the reunion, so I questioned the men there without success. Upon return, I had the report and immediately called the WWII address for the two men I thought had survived. In both cases it was their mother's address. The first was Chicago and I got a typical large city operator who offered little help. After some pleading, she checked the surrounding area, and I had Richard Carlson on the phone. I then thought I would stretch my luck and try the second name. I had Dempsey Brett on the phone immediately. Here is the report on the Griffith crew and Blue 'N':

On 19 December 1944, the mission was scheduled to Blechhammer. Due to weather, the first alternate, Maribor, Yugoslavia, was selected. After turning at the IP, Lt. Griffith, flying number seven position on his second mission, began losing an engine and had to salvo his bombs to keep with the formation. Flak soon took care of another engine and he began losing altitude and dropped out of formation. He was heard calling for fighter protection, but disappeared from view before the fighters could join him. At 1325, Blue 'N' was observed heading East, with #3 and #4 engines smoking. Near Lake Balaton, over the city of Gyor, Hungary, Lt. Griffith gave the bail out order. The area was German occupied. Lt. Laughner went first, Sgt. Carlson second, Sgt. Brett third, and Lt. Burns fourth. The other six crew members were uninjured, and were to follow bailing out. The first four were captured by the Germans and taken to prison together. The other six, bailing out a little later, were captured by Hungarian civilians and hanged, according to reports. The War Department, however, notified the families of Sgt. Benvenuto and Sgt. Russell that they were found dead in the plane.

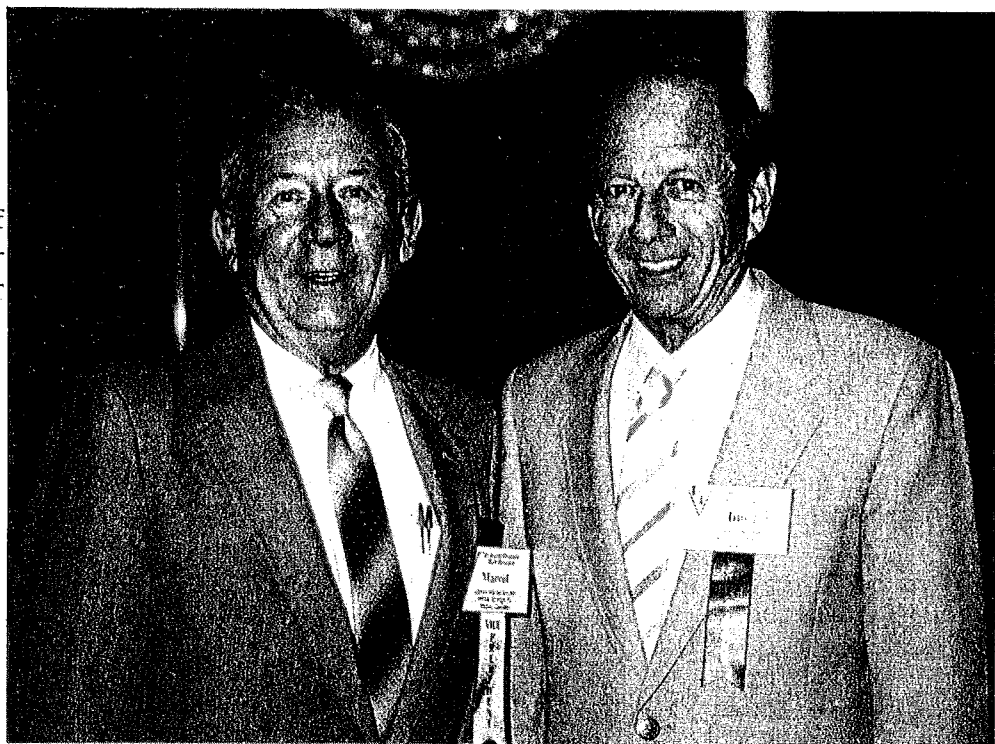
In Peter's letter, he wrote that, after his father was taken prisoner and enroute to Stalag 2, they were nearly lynched during a layover in a bombed-out freight yard. The guards on the train saved them.

Blue 'N' was not our squadron plane, but was assigned to our squadron due to shortage of planes at the time.

I received a letter from Dempsey Brett, and I quote him, "Words cannot express the joy I felt, after 41 years, finally hearing from someone in the squadron. I was so terribly sorry to hear of the tragic deaths of my other crew members. But, finally after all these years I was, at least, able to know their fate." Dempsey is writing his full story and it will appear in a later newsletter.



ONE YEAR LATER - It was just over one year ago that Marcel and I first met and decided to form the 781st association. The photo at the right was taken at the close of the reunion. We had reason to smile - a successful reunion was over and we were proud to have located 430 members and another 285 in the folded wings section. We look forward to another successful year.



MEMBERSHIP - In each newsletter I had planned to give a brief report on each new member found. Since there was an average of 75 found between newsletters, time and space did not permit the report. I will start now to report those located since leaving for the reunion. Melvin Fulkerson, nose gunner on Jocko Robert's crew was located by Jocko. After returning home I found the results from previously mailings. Kelley E. Shepherd was reported to have passed away February 20, 1951. After a note to the postmaster in Princeton, Idaho, I received a reply that Ed Tietz now lives in Moscow, Idaho. I received a note from Ed, who noted he was in engineering and worked on the Guardian Angel. Then a reply from James Boswell, living in Snow Camp, North Carolina, from the armament section. Also from the armament section, I received a long letter and pictures from Charles Speer. He lives in Monaca, Pennsylvania, has two daughters and four grandchildren from the marriage to his sweetheart during his time at McCook. His most memorable day at Pantanella was VE day - he said they were all so happy that they all went down to the line and unloaded all the planes with one big salvo! Another reply was from John Hughes, a mickey operator. He stayed in the reserves, went back in during Korea and flew 56 missions, and retired a Lt. Colonel. Another Smith was located - Robert F. Smith, co-pilot on the J. T. Smith crew. He lives in Newcomby, New York. There also was a letter from Al Arveson, navigator on Hendrickson's crew. I'm not sure who made the first contact with Al. In addition to the two located in the Griffith crew report, the Missing Air Crew Report adds Bruce Cospers name to the KIA list.

My wife, Agnes, flew to Milwaukee from the reunion to visit family. I gave her the Milwaukee list and she came back with one - Edwin Tolzman. Ed was a cook in the enlisted men's mess.

There are over 400 still to be tracked down. Contact your state chairman to see if you can help. Look over the enclosed roster. Let us know if you have any clues to any of the men. If you know what crew they were on, what section, where they went to school, did they stay in service, etc.

PHOTOS - If you have any photos from the reunion that you think might be of interest for the reunion booklet, please send them in immediately.

Last week I returned most of the photos that were received during the year that have been copied or are not needed. Those not returned are held by Harry Carl, and will be returned at a later date. The history book is an enormous task, and it will take some more time to analyze the pictures and copy those needed.

OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS - AT the business session the following were elected;

President	Jim Althoff	Directors; Jim Althoff	Stanley Winkowski
Vice President	Marcel Snyder	Harry Carl	John Zadrozny
Vice President	Walt Longacre	Charles F. McKenna III	
Secretary	Ben Donahue	O. J. Cowart	
Treasurer	Russ Maynard	Marcel Snyder	

Harry Carl is our historian. He's listed on the membership roster, but I'll give his address here in case you have something to send him - 550 Creek Road, Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania 19317.

Two directors were added after the business session at the suggestion of some members. They were approved by the Board.

To be elected your president is an honor and a privilege. I will continue to serve to the best of my ability until the next reunion. Your tremendous response and great cooperation makes it a pleasure to serve you.

A couple items to squeeze in before closing. The next newsletter, about January, will have a new letterhead. Walt Longacre will be overseeing membership, so give him cooperation if he calls for help in your state. And I almost forgot to report that Doc Rapoport is still treating 781st members. I understand several at the reunion required his expertise.

In closing I want to remind you that this is your Association. Let us know your suggestions and ideas. Keep the reports coming in on what is happening that would be of interest to others. Many have not sent in their memoirs of Pantanella and what you have done since. Remember, what happened on the ground is as important as it was in the air.

Good Health and Best Wishes for the coming Holidays from your Officers and Directors.

Jim Althoff

HIGH FLIGHT

*By John Gillespie Magee, Jr. **

O, I have slipped the surly bonds of earth
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;
Sunward I've climbed and joined the tumbling mirth
Of sunsplit clouds - and done a hundred things
You have not dreamed of
Wheeled and sword and swung
High in the sunlit silence. Hov'ring there,
I've chased the shouting wind along and flung
My eager craft through footless halls of air.
Up, up the long and delirious, burning blue
I've topped the wind-swept heights with easy grace,
Where never Lark, or even Eagles flew;
And while with silent, lifting mind I've trod
The high, untrespassed sanctity of space,
Put out my hand, and touched the face of God.



DAVID ORR AND FRIENDS



WALTER SUTTON, EARL LEINART AND FRIEND



BEN DONAHUE LOOKING AT PICTURES



FRANK HYLLA, RAE BRANCH AND JACK ERTEL



REGISTRATION



RUSS MAYNARD'S "FLAMIN' MAMIE" JACKET



SATURDAY MORNING BUSINESS SESSION



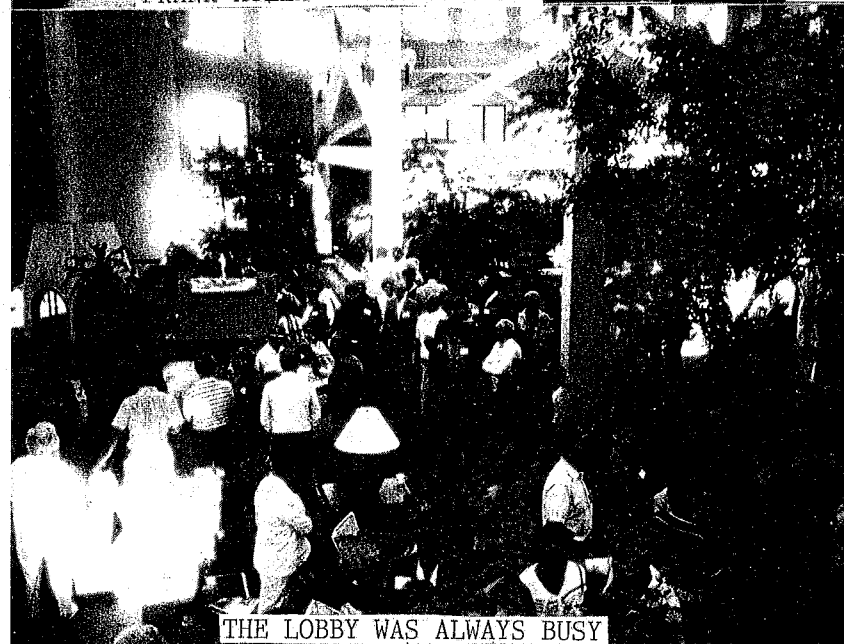
JIM ALTHOFF AND MRS. SYBIL LOKKER WILSON



FRANK HYLLA - BEST DRESSED



MANY HAD JACKETS AND OTHER WWII UNIFORMS



THE LOBBY WAS ALWAYS BUSY



RUSS MAYNARD TOLD A STORY