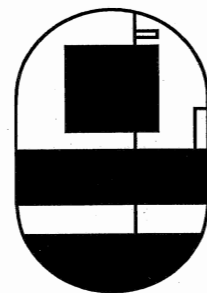




PANTANELLA NEWS



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OUR AIR FORCE TODAY

By Brig. Gen. Roger R. Radcliff

The following address was given by Gen. Radcliff at the banquet of the 781st Bomb Squadron's Fiftieth Anniversary Celebration.

I must admit that I am a little intimidated to speak to this group. In his invitation letter, your president suggested that I might like to talk about my Air Force experiences. Frankly I would rather sit down, get a fresh drink, and listen to you talk about your experiences. I think your stories are far more exciting and entertaining than mine. Besides, you have had a few more years to practice your stories.

Instead of telling war stories, I want to talk with you about your Air Force. First, about what we've been through in the past few years and where that has left us. Second, I want to focus on my current command, the 355th Wing, and our personnel. Finally, we should talk about continuing change and what lies ahead.

WHERE WE HAVE BEEN. I do not need to convince this audience that our nation needs the world's best Air Force. You were on the scene when the world really came to understand what

air power was all about, but if anyone asks you what your Air Force is doing to bring down defense costs, here are a few facts that you can present:

Our budget is down 44% since the peak years of the mid 80s. We have a third fewer people.

The combat fighter force is down

to half what it was just five years ago. In '88 we had 38 fighter wing equivalents.

Today we are at 24.5 and decreasing to 20 by September '95 - 13 active duty and seven in the Guard and Reserves.

We have cut our bomber force by 70% - 400 down to 150 and we now have B-52s and B-1s flying in the reserve components.

Many acquisition programs that were generated during the cold war have fallen by the wayside.

And by the way, we have undergone a major restructuring over the past 3 1/2 years - we have cut organizational layers, consolidated staffs, and reduced headquarters. The end result is a redesigned Air Force that is leaner, simpler, more flexible, but still very tough.

Has this been a painful process? Yes, it has. We have said good-



Gen. Radcliff receives a copy of the history book of the 781st Bombardment Squadron from Jim Althoff. Through the foresight of Harry Carl we set aside a number of history books for special occasions such as this.

bye to many fine young NCOs and officers that a few years ago would still be with us. Some of us have had the duty of leading wings with great histories through the closure process. I for one am not an eager volunteer to do that again. It is painful to take apart a superb organization and close a fine installation.

The goal of all of this has been to create a new Air Force which reflects the threat we perceive in the post cold war world and which makes the best use of that, dramatically shrinking budget I mentioned.

Suzanne and I spent the past four years serving in the United States Air Forces in Europe, better known as USAFE.

USAFE has been at the forefront of the drawdown. All those downsizing actions I have talked about have had a tremendous impact in Europe. The command has gone

from 72,000 personnel and 27 bases in 1990 to about 33,000 persons today and just six main operating bases. What do the following bases have in common? Alconbury, Bentwaters, Woodbridge, Wethersfield, Chicksands, Fairford, Greenham Common, High Wycombe, Zaragoza, Torrejon, Soesterberg, Florenes, Hahn, Tempelhof, Bitburg, Zweibrucken, etc.?? The answer, they are all closed.

When we went back to Europe from the Pentagon four years ago, there were 14 fighter squadrons in the United Kingdom. Today there are three. In 1990 we had 636 fighters in Europe, today we have 168. The good news is, they are our best airframes and it is a very robust force.

All this would make you believe that our forces in Europe must not be very busy in the current environment. If you believe this you could not be more wrong.

Let me just quickly run through the operations that USAFE is currently supporting:

OPERATION PROVIDE COMFORT. USAFE has been engaged in this operation since April of 1991. It began as an air-drop operation to prevent Saddam from starving the Kurdish people of Northern Iraq. It has since grown into an enforcement of a no-fly zone by Iraqi aircraft north of 36 degrees north. We are no longer airdropping food, but we do provide an environment in which relief organizations can safely provide food to the Kurdish refugees.

PROVIDE PROMISE is our humanitarian relief operation for supporting civilians in the Bosnia-Herzegovina area. We are in the 28th month of this operation. It has been conducted through a combination of airdrop and airland missions. Without doubt we have had a tremendous impact in saving lives through this operation. Take it from me, you can't appreciate the devastation of Sarajevo until you fly into the airport and look at the missing roofs and walls of houses in the area.

OPERATION DENY FLIGHT is the NATO enforcement portion of the operation over Bosnia. The enforcement of the no-fly sanctions

began in April 1993. The first violators were shot down in February '94. In July of '93, NATO modified the force to support the possible use of airpower to provide close air support to UN forces on the ground. As you know that option was not exercised until April '94. Since April of '93 20,000 fighter sorties have been flown. About half by USAF and US Navy forces.

There are more operations we could discuss. USAFE has had a part to play in the Rwanda operation, Somalia, and others. But, my intent was to highlight the operations where USAFE played the major role.

What has all this meant to the command - it has had a major impact on the people and the command's resources. The new USAFE commander, Gen. James L. Jamerson, described his vision for the future as "Stabilizing who we are, where we are and getting ourselves squared away for the future with the force structure we have right now."

After looking at all their commitments, he said, "The command's people and equipment are getting stretched pretty thin." He went on to say, "I have concerns about what we're asking our people to do and what we're asking our equipment to be able to do as we spread it out like we are. There's a lot of danger in how thinly we're spread right now. But that goes beyond USAFE; it goes across the spectrum of the US military."

The week before last, the Associated Press reported that my friend, Gen. John Dallagher, the commander of USAFE's biggest fighter wing, told the Secretary of Defense that his force is over-tasked and undertrained. He admitted that his unit's readiness to fight has declined and the trend is in the wrong direction.

Gen. Ron Fogleman, who will become the Air Force Chief of Staff later this month, commented in his confirmation hearings, that if the military must continue to do "The same number of chores that we have in the past," it will not be able to do so, not with decreasing levels of troop strength. "Something will

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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 WW11 (1944-45). During it's 191 missions over Southern Europe it dropped thousands of tons of bombs, shot down 23 enemy aircraft (German) and received two Distinguished Unit Citations.

have to give," he said, and it will probably be modernization efforts.

THE 355TH WING AND DAVIS-MONTHAN. On the 15th of August, I took command of the 355th Wing at Davis-Monthan. We have six flying squadrons and over 6100 personnel. In the past two months we have been busy. We have mobilized and deployed forces for the Haiti operation, and about the time we got unpacked we cranked up again and started moving aircraft, supporting equipment, and personnel to Southwest Asia.

We have our challenges here at Davis-Monthan. As of today we have over 800 persons deployed around the world - from Honduras, to Panama, to Italy, to Saudi Arabia, and several hundreds more on standby. I am very lucky. I command a truly outstanding wing composed of first class personnel. I wish you could have been with me last Sunday evening. We had a crew of dedicated, talented young airmen swarming all over an EC-130. It was in the hanger for heavy maintenance when we were alerted to deploy. Those folks said no problem. In about 12 hours they put it back together and we launched it. Right now it is on the ramp in the Middle East. There are many stories like that from our wing this week. As you toured the flight line Friday, you saw a squadron of A-10 Tankkillers which had external fuel tanks hanging. Early last week, those jets were flying in an exercise at Las Vegas. Late Tuesday afternoon I directed their return to Tucson. They were on the ground by 9 PM and less than 24 hours later they were cocked and ready for launch. Please excuse my pride in our people, when I say - we are good - working hard to get even better.

CHANGE. Well, if anyone thought we would be looking for work with the demise of the Warsaw Pact, they were wrong. Frankly, we are busier than I can remember. Short of a warfighting situation, and for the past few weeks, we have been right on the edge of combat.

We've been through great

change in four years, but guess what - there is more to come. There are many things driving that change - the evolving world situation, Haiti, Cuba, North Korea, the Middle East, Bosnia, etc. All of this is unpredictable to say the least.

I do not want to leave you with a feeling of gloom. We have challenges to meet, problems to solve, and issues with which to grapple. But, your Air Force remains the world's best. Everyday I get to spend time with your grandsons and granddaughters and let me tell you, if you want to get pumped-up and revitalized spend more time talking to America's youth in uniform. They are a big part of why we remain the world's most respected Air and Space Force!

Those young folks are carrying on the traditions you set for us a half century ago. We are proud and grateful for the heritage you gave us.

It has been a pleasure to be with you this evening.

Comments following the banquet all were unanimous in agreeing that the interesting and informative talk was one of the best we have ever heard. It was also discussed that we felt Gen. Radcliff will be wearing more stars before he retires from active military service.

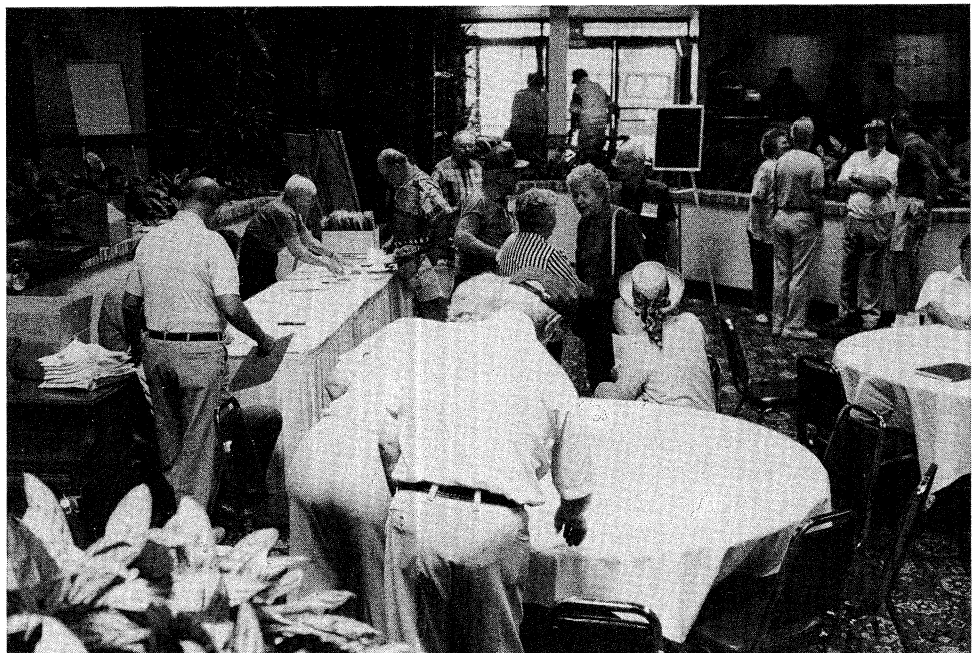
OUR FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION ACCLAIMED THE BEST EVER

Over 300 in Attendance

It all began with a few check-ins at the Holiday Inn on Monday, October 10th. By the time I arrived late Tuesday morning there was a growing number of arrivals who acted as a welcoming committee. No reunion activity was planned for the Early Birds, but they all had plans to visit each other or tour the area to see the sights. In the evening I tried one of the local Mexican restaurants with O. J. and Esther Cowart. It was a favorite of Linda Ronstadt, a former Tucson resident.

Wednesday morning had the usual gathering for breakfast or in the lobby area. The hotel had another meeting going on, so our planned registration area was reduced for part of the day, but it did not hinder check-ins. By the end of the day over half were checked in a day early and the blue 781st caps could be seen everywhere. The hospitality and trophy rooms opened later in the day and remained open late into the evening, so everyone could meet each other.

In the afternoon Ann and Barney Russell and I took the opportunity to visit the Titan Missile near Tucson



Registration and visiting in the lobby area. No lines with the speedy check-in plan by Ken Sutton.

with John Kennedy, who was Project Manager for the installation of the missile. An awesome sight to see this deadly missile and to know what destruction it could cause.

Thursday started before 7 o'clock with Eager Beavers going for morning walks and others meeting in the breakfast area. Registration opened by 9 and Ken & Nancy Sutton, O. J. & Esther Cowart, and other volunteers began checking in arrivals. Some were new arrivals who had not pre-registered, so it was the first indication we would go over the 300 mark.

Our Thursday evening cocktail party began at 5:30 in the upper level of the beautiful lobby area. Complimentary Margaritas were a big hit, with some deciding on other spirits from the bar nearby. After moving over to the dining room to reserved tables the meeting was called to order with a salute to our flag, then a prayer by Loren Foote, Squadron Chaplain.

After dinner introductions included 18 members, plus their wives or guests, attending their first reunion, widows, family members and guests. We then heard an interesting talk by Col. Charles F. McKenna III (USAF, Ret) our first CO.

Next John Kennedy (Pilot of Kennedy crew) was introduced. He talked about the Titan missiles and the one remaining at Tucson.

After adjourning almost everyone went to the Hospitality Room or Trophy Room to spend an hour or two with old friends.

Friday morning by 8:30 some were already eagerly waiting for the 9 o'clock buses to take us to Davis-Monthan for a most interesting tour of the hundreds of planes there. Each bus had an Air Force guide to explain about all of the different planes and the role Davis-Monthan plays with these planes. Some are kept for parts, others, like the 50 B-52s, are being scrapped because of an agreement with Russia. The agreement calls for a certain number to be scrapped each month. It was a sad scene to see these huge B-52s all bull-dozed at odd angles waiting to be cut up and hauled away. Many other types of planes

are returned to active service for commercial use or by sale to friendly foreign nations.

Besides the huge aircraft storage area of 2600 acres to store 4700 aircraft, Davis-Monthan is a very active operational base which includes an active fighter unit and the Air Force Materiel Command "Aerospace Maintenance and Regeneration Center." Davis-Monthan is spread out over a total of 10,500 acres.

We ended the tour at the base chapel early so we had some time to mix with friends and chat until we entered chapel number one. This is a new chapel, larger than the original one next to it which is still in use. Loren Foote and Walt Longacre had another special memorial service for a full house of nearly 300. In front of the altar was a display of a simulated military cemetery. A field of green Styrofoam with rows of white crosses with a flag placed at each one for those Killed-In-Action. An additional flag to remember other members who have died and especially for those who have died since the last reunion. The Base Chaplain appeared in fatigues, said a few words and had to leave because of the alert at the base. A prayer or two, hymns, a reading of the poem written by Dodie Shallman, and a prayer written by James Downs and an emotional and beautiful service

came to an end.

We left the chapel to go to the adjoining grounds for a group photos one of the men and one of the ladies. Timing was so well planned that we entered the Officers Mess block away at exactly 12 o'clock. We all enjoyed the lunch, then returned to the waiting buses to return to the hotel. There were no further scheduled events, but it was a busy afternoon since the Post Office was set up and there was a line to buy stamps, notes to be written, and then getting the stamps cancelled and in the mail. Then several took tours or visited nearby Pima Air Museum.

The hospitality and trophy rooms had a lot of action the rest of the day. In the evening we were free to join friends or crew members or section comrades for dinner.

Saturday morning we all gathered for an open meeting. First on the program was a simulated briefing of the mission of October 13, 1994. Byron Thompson took charge with a cast of characters which included Hank Willett, Walt Sutton, Loren Foote and Doc Rapoport. Byron gave the intelligence report, Hank the operational briefing, Walt the Bombing information, Loren gave the prayer that Capt. Blough always said, and Doc was there with the bottle for the customary 2 ounces of bourbon. Then, since the mission that day was a maximum



Ken Kill places a flag by one of the crosses as the name of one of the KIA's is called out by Loren Foote.



A full house at the morning session. In addition to the briefing Harry Carl presented the slide story of our days at Pantanella.

effort, many were present who flew and remembered various happenings that day. Some came forward to relate some experiences.

The next part of the morning program was the slide program by Harry Carl. It is a great presentation of the history of our squadron. It turns back the clock to the beginning of the 781st Bomb Squadron, up to and through the days at Pantanella. Requests by many that this be put on video received a favorable reply from Harry Carl, but it is not a simple thing to do. He continues to work on it and is seeing some promising possibilities.

Then a business meeting to decide our next reunion location and other association matters. The afternoon was free for visiting with old friends or sightseeing.

By 5:30 the cocktail party began and was soon overflowing. A little after 6:00, Brig. Gen. Roger R. Radcliff and his wife Suzanne arrived and had an opportunity to visit with and meet many of us.

When the doors opened for the banquet, everyone was ready to go to their reserved tables to enjoy our banquet. After dessert Gen. Radcliff was introduced and he gave a very informative and interesting talk. He had just taken command of the 355th Wing (Davis-Monthan Air Force Base) and had a very busy schedule, so we all appreciated the time he took to be with us.

Then it was time to recognize a few men for their great stories that they wrote for the *Pantanella News*. Those awarded the beautiful plaques were: Vincent Beeson, for

his story of the mission to Nova Zamky when all perished except Vincent. Unfortunately he was unable to attend. Then Vernon Burda was called forward to receive his award, but was too emotional to say a few words. Next Don Barrett received his award for the story on his experiences after bailing out over Switzerland. Bill Jostworth received an award for "On the Line," about the men in Engineering. Then an award went to Bonnie Rowe and Walker Shipley for their story "Silver Wings Orchestra."

Harry Carl gave a report on the election of directors for the next two years. One change, Nick Schaps took the vacancy resulting from the resignation of John Zadrozny. There was a round of applause to John for his help while serving as a director. The Officers to serve the next two years remained the same. Also, the board elected Jim Althoff to be President for life.

All helpers were thanked for the great job of making the reunion run smoothly. Ken and Nancy Sutton, (Ken was Chairman), O. J. Cowart, Jr. & Esther for helping at reg-

istration and keeping all the records straight, Nick Schaps for many of the local arrangements, Jack Van Slyke for overseeing the trophy room, and Ben Donahue for overseeing the hospitality room.

Following the banquet was my first opportunity to spend more than just a stop at the hospitality room. In fact I closed the place down at 1 AM Sunday morning with Dick Crutcher, Bonnie Rowe, and another member whose name escapes me.

Sunday morning Agnes and I accepted an offer from Walt and Ann Longacre to go to 7:30 Mass at Chapel One at Davis-Monthan. It was not as crowded as it was for our memorial service, but it was nice. We returned to the hotel for breakfast and then, with help from Jack Van Slyke and others, we packed the trophy room items and loaded them into my motor home. We said farewell to those in the lobby area and left another reunion, with a lot of happy memories.

It seems that after each reunion everyone always says that it was the best yet. In a letter from Dodie Shallman the following quote has an answer, "The reunions keep getting better and better. I mentioned this fact to someone whose answer was, 'It's because old friends become dearer, and we make new friends.'"

To me this reunion was unique in some ways to make it special. To



Bonnie Rowe and Walker Shipley receive their plaques for their story "Silver Wings Orchestra."

start with, more arrived early, as early as Monday. By Wednesday over half were in house. We had more late registrations than ever before. Also, there were 18 men, plus their wives or guests, who had never attended one of our reunions. To sum it all up, there were more in attendance at every function we had than ever before and the 50th Anniversary Celebration made it the friendliest group I have ever seen.

Responses from those unable to attend.

Russ Maynard. Caroline had an operation.

Jack Williams. Unable to attend.

Milt Levinson. Had open heart surgery. Doing fine.

Larry Tiehen. Sorry he will miss reunion this year.

Ray Tyler. Wife ill.

Frank Hylla. Some health problems.

Hugh Cooper. Health, but fine now.

Frank Piteo, Another commitment.

Others cancelling after sending in reservations included **William Bartlett, Joseph McDevitt, Earl Leinart, Leonard Emmel, W. T. Swisher, Curt Reed, Leo Fink, Jack Smith, Earl Schreiner and Ernie Van Asperen.**

Ernie Van Asperen furnished the wine for Saturday's banquet from his winery, Round Hill. He had planned to fly to Tucson in his private plane (Mooney) on Friday. A violent wind storm struck the California coast on that day making it very dangerous for small aircraft. Ernie opted for an old saying, "There are old pilots and bold pilots, but no old, bold pilots."

Ray Davis was so eager he ar-



The photo above of the 161 men attending was taken just after the memorial service.

rived by car September 13th for the reunion - 30 days early! (Slight oversight on the date). He toured the area and returned home. A month later he took a plane and arrived on October 13th for the reunion and had a wonderful time.

Homer and Inez Moeller celebrated their wedding anniversary on Friday evening. Their family, children and some grandchildren, joined them in Tucson for a lovely evening, where friends and crew members of crews Homer flew with

joined in the celebration.

Men who attended their first reunion:

Harold Baughman, radar mechanic.

Richard Bilger, radar navigator.

Melvin Blye, radar navigator.

Wilton E. Carter, Blakita navigator & squadron navigator.

Alvin P. Marchbanks, Tannenbaum top gunner.

Joseph P. Ministrelli, ordnance.

Morris Cohen, ordnance.

William F. O'Brien, Kennedy radio operator.

Ray E. Davis, Nelson gunner.

Howard R. Wilcox, pilot.

Charles H. Hafey, Jr, Wortham



Hank & Judy Willett (51 years).

All were married at the Davis - Monahan Chapel in 1944, except the Willetts who were married in a church in Tucson in 1943.

The most attending from any of the original crews were 6 members from the **Charles McKenna's** and **Carl Dahl's**. Others - **Stanley Tryon** with 5 and all attended for the first time! Also **Maccani** and **Van Slyke** with 5. Lots of 4s - **Althoff, Barnett, Crutcher, French, Pitts, Smith, N.B.,** and **Wheeler**. From Ground Echelon **Ordnance** had 8! Others were Engineering with 7, **Communications** with 5, and **Radar Navigators,** and **Radar Mechanics** each had 3.

Some were talking about possibly going to Europe or Italy next year for the 50 Years since Victory in Europe celebration. If any of you are planning on going to Pantanella let me know since some may want to arrange a meeting

there. Drop me a note and I'll spread the word.

At the reunion at the cocktail party, I believe it was Saturday night, in front of the bar someone asked me about a book I had written. I promised a copy, but lost the note and forgot who it was. Please contact me and I will see you get a copy.

Lowell Myers called to report he forgot to pick up his pictures from the photographer on Sunday morning. He was wondering if someone picked them up for him. If so please let him know as he is anxious to receive them.

navigator.

Robert L. Jasper, Mullan top gunner.

R. F. Ledwith, Tryon navigator.

William M. Pruitt, Jr, Tryon tail gunner.

William O. Maloney, Tryon ball gunner.

Wayne Weber, Tryon radio operator.

Stanley E. Tryon, pilot.

TROPHY ROOM. More items were donated to our growing assortment of WWII memorabilia. Ray Tyler sent in a E6B computer, the navigational aid we used to plot our courses during WWII era. Jack Van Slyke

and others donated some items. They were all packed up for me to keep until the next reunion, so I did not get to inventory all of the items. I will when time permits.

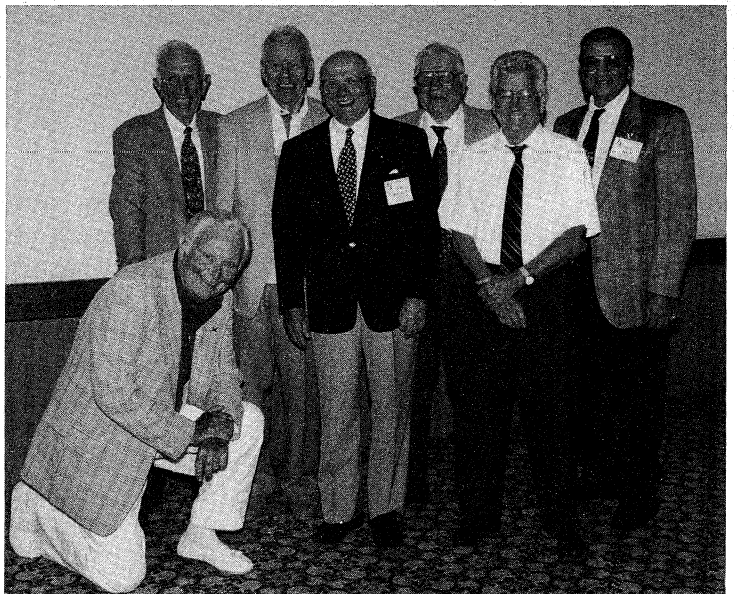
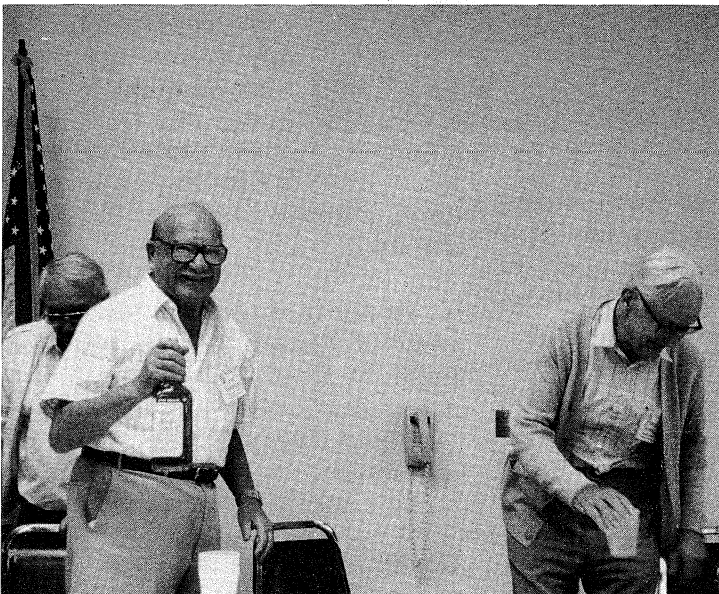
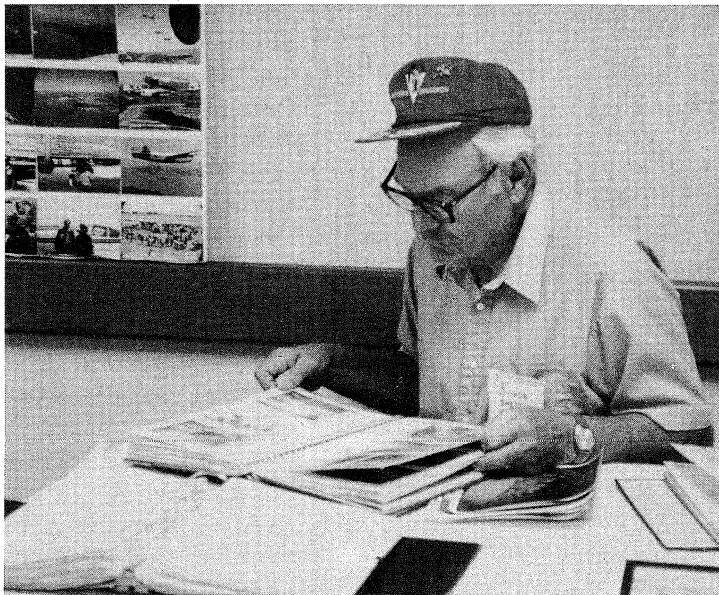
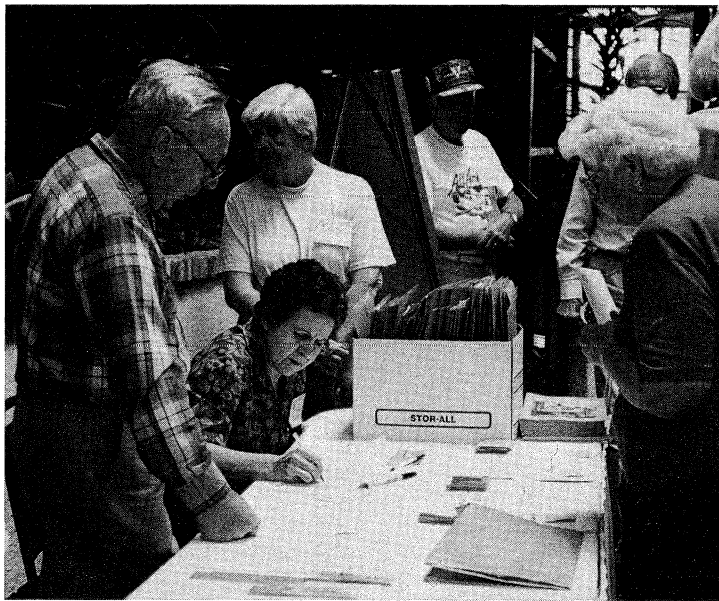
For those not attending the reunion, in addition to memorabilia in trophy room, there were photos, videos to watch on TV, the PX, and another place to pause and chat with an old comrade.

50TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARIES:

Homer and Inez Moeller.

Dick and Dot Storm.

William and Shirley O'Brien.



Clockwise starting upper left - Ken Sutton overseeing registration - Loren Foote giving opening prayer Thursday dinner - James & Betty Downs with family - Charles F. McKenna III's Model Crew L to R, McKenna Kneeling, Hank Willett, Bill Wood, James Waggle, Harold Straughan, Walter Sutton, and Nick Belik - "Doc" Rapoport with the "bottle", Byron Thompson - Bob Shetterly deeply engrossed in photos.

MAIL CALL



Paul "Hoot" Hosier, "I finally sold out about the middle of May, and about 10 days later drove to California to live. I had one flat tire and knocked the guts out of the transfer case. Tire repair \$20, transfer case \$910, gas \$220, and motel about \$200. As for the photos of the place I lived in in Alaska, I mailed them down here and when I get them from where they are stored I will send you some."

Hoot moved back to California where he lived before his hibernation in Alaska.

From **Louise Pease**, "I was sorting through some of the many pictures and found some of Richard's Pantanella photos. I thought that you would like to sort through them and keep the ones you like for the reunions. I am glad that Richard was able to attend the reunion in San Antonio. That was one of the high lights of his later life.

"Richard and I had a wonderful life together, plus a wonderful family. He was a success at everything he undertook. I consider myself lucky."

Richard Pease was group intelligence Officer. The photos were in the trophy room at the reunion.

From **Vince Beeson**, "What a wonderful surprise. The plaque is beautiful. It will hang in the den in our new home. We just moved in. Bessie is doing better on medicine for irregular heart beat. She had a slight stroke. I'm OK. Hope we can make it in 1996."

The plaque was awarded to Vince for the story he wrote for the Pantanella News. His new address is 7366 McSmith Ct., Dayton, OH 45414.

Bob Bassinette, "Thank you and the members of the board for a great reunion. I spent three days with some of the nicest people I have ever known, the members of the 781st and their families. I will get to

work on "Above and Beyond the Call of Duty."

Bob will be writing a story for the Pantanella News!

From **Dick Bilger** who was located this past year, "It was a fabulous time at the Tucson reunion. It is all due to leadership, the cornerstone of any organization, and the 781st is one of the very best."

He also commented on the proposed locations for 1996 - He will go to either one under consideration. He also enclosed \$100 for lifetime membership #12.

From **Loren Foote**, our Squadron Chaplain, "I would like to express our personal thanks to you as our Association President for another very enjoyable time at our reunion.

"With our Ordnance Section having Morris Cohen and Peter Ministrelli there for the first time, it really added to the occasion for us."

From **Frank and Marge Clark**, "Just a few words to congratulate you on another great reunion. The hotel was great and everything seemed to roll along quite smoothly. I imagine there were a few glitches along the way, but you and your efficient crew certainly kept things moving right along.

"The simulated briefing was especially interesting to me as that was the mission I flew with George Gaines, and we failed to make it back to the base. It doesn't seem like that could have been fifty years ago, but I will never forget that Friday the 13th of October 1944.

"We stayed around Tucson for a few days visiting relatives and sight-seeing. Then we spent five days on the road home.

"I was disappointed that none of the fellows on my original crew (Benson's), or the crew I flew to Blechhammer with, (Gaines') were able to make it to the reunion. I imagine that problem will only get worse with the passage of time."

From **Dodie Shallman**, "Many thanks to you and all who worked to make this reunion another memo-

orable event in my life. The reunions keep getting better and better.

"I was touched and humbled that someone chose my little poem worthy of using on the memorial service program. It was a lovely service and very impressive."

Walker Shipley, "Please accept my sincere thanks for, first, an outstanding 50th Anniversary Reunion in Tucson. Second, for the really nice recognition plaque for the *Pantanella News* articles. It is first class.

"I'm sure I am adding my voice to the many expressions of appreciation you received at our meeting for your dedicated service and commitment to the Association. Please express our thanks to the members of the Board of Directors and Reunion committees for their service."

A letter with our beautiful Fiftieth Anniversary stationery and stamped with a B-24 stamp was received from **McHenry Hamilton**. He writes, "What a Reunion.' The 781st must be the greatest squadron ever. One has to be there to see it. A World War II squadron with an average age of around seventy-two that can muster up around 300 (Mac had 400 - it seemed like that many) for a three day celebration is unbelievable!!!

"This fantastic showing, as always, is directly attributable to your expertise in keeping everyone interested. The "esprit de corps" that existed during the training phase and extended through the combat months has been perpetuated by your efforts to keep the reunions interesting and informative. Your idea of the "*Pantanella News*" has certainly helped in keeping all of us informed.

"This meeting was so stimulating that Pat and I are already looking forward to the next one.

"Tell Ernie we enjoyed the wine. We are accustomed to his Red Table wine (Round Hill) as we use it all the time."

Col. "Mac" Hamilton came to the 465th as Group Commander to replace Josh Foster who completed his tour. Mac flew his first mission a

week later and never made it any further than Vienna where they went down over the target. He is only now getting to know more of the members of the 465th Bomb Group. And I think Mac has a story to tell us about his promotions. I overheard him telling Gen. Radcliff about an amazingly short time between ranks. Will you share it with us all, Mac?

From **Bill Jostworth**, "Sorry for this belated 'thank you' to you and the directors for my 781st award. Mary and I extended our trip to further explore the State of Arizona and we just recently returned to Cincinnati, Ohio. As always, we had a delightful time at the reunion. Thanks to all who made it happen!

"On the posted list in the lobby that identified all members who attended the six reunions we should be shown at least as '5+.' My rationale; we were on our way driving to San Antonio, our reservations were confirmed, but 'Gilbert' unleashed its fury and we were turned back at Waxahachie, Texas. Patrols were directing south bound traffic north. So, we reversed our course NE to Alabama and darned if we didn't encounter five tornados on the way to Birmingham. Anyway, we tried for the reunion. "

Bill added some political comments which I agree with but am I afraid to quote since I got into enough trouble in this area at the reunion!!

From **Bill Pruitt**, "Doris and I did not know what to expect since this was our first reunion. We were really pleased with what we saw, felt, and tasted.

"Thanks to all the many people who made this event such a pleasure. Everything was done in such a timely and professional manner that it was a joy from start

FOLDED WINGS

Harold Schuster (Ordnance) passed away in his sleep May 14, 1994. Reported by Bob Freed.

Lawrence S. Lilly (Nose gunner/Hewitt) passed away February 8, 1994.

Quincy Adams (O'Brien tail gunner) passed away November 22, 1992. Reported by Seth Hawkins who received word from Quincy's daughter Patty Kavalaski.

Mrs. Janet Lilly wrote about the death of Lawrence. "We were able to celebrate our 45th anniversary at the first Squadron reunion in Colorado Springs. Lawrence was able to attend only one other, but enjoyed the newsletter very much."

We extend our deepest sympathies to the families and friends of our comrades whom we loved and respected. We give them a final salute.

EDITORS CORNER

I suppose you have been wondering what happened to the *Pantanello News*. Well, it is alive and well. Some unusual delays - expect January to be a month late, then we'll be back on track.

We had so much activity at the reunion which exceeded space needed in this issue to cover it all. We'll have more photos by Frank Ambrose, Charles McKenna III's and John Kennedy's talk, Life Membership program and much more in the January newsletter.

Correspondence is still coming in expressing happiness from seeing old comrades and enjoying all the activities of the reunion. Your officers and directors are delighted to have it turn out so well. Plans are already moving ahead for '96.

The site selection should be made in a month or two, and hotel selection by next spring. Montgomery was chosen as number one choice, so we are checking it our first. It appears the hotel rooms will be reasonable. The other important item is the airline fare. We are checking that out but it is not possible to get firm rates this far ahead.

Second choice was Colorado Springs and third was Dayton, Ohio. These sites will be reviewed again at the next reunion.

Thanks again to all who helped at the reunion. We need dedicated volunteers to pull it all together. Keep this in mind so that you can get on the list before the next reunion so

that you can get a volunteer slot of your choice.

Your Officers and Directors wish you all a Happy and Healthy Holiday Season.

Welcome New Member

At the reunion Harold Baughman gave me the address of **Ray Frank**, 4085 Ransom Road, Clarence, NY 14031. Ray was a radar mechanic at Pantanella. If you know Ray write or call to welcome him back.

POW'S CHRISTMAS

By John S. Chandley, Author

Almost everyone has in his memories a Christmas Eve or Christmas Day that stands out above others. To Herbert Schoket it

has to be 1944. Schoket, who had entered the military service by way of the National Guard and wound up in World War II as a radio operator and gunner on a B-17 flying out of England, had been taken prisoner in Germany after his plane was shot down on a mission to Czechoslovakia to hit an oil refinery. It was his 10th mission and he was captured May 12, 1944. After the customary interrogation by the Luftwaffe authorities, Schoket was taken to Stalag Luft IV, which was located 30 miles from the Baltic Sea in the Danzig corridor (East Prussia).

In Stalag Luft IV were allied captives from places other than the United States, including Russia. According to Schoket, the Russians were the most harshly treated. The food was meager and the accommodations were less than adequate, but most of the prisoners made out. Germany was a party to the Geneva Convention, but had it not been for the Red Cross packages the prisoners received, they would have been in much more misery. Even then the German guards looted the packages of the better brands of American cigarettes. The food supplied by the Germans was mostly potatoes and bad bread. Schoket, an eloquent little man, yields to an article written by Forrest W. Howell, which appeared in the *Veterans of Foreign Wars* magazine some years ago, to recount the Christmas of 1944. It follows in part:

There were two performances of the Christmas program that night because the building in which the program was being staged was not large enough to accommodate all of us at the same time. The men of my barracks were scheduled for the second and final performance. The Germans, to whom Christmas meant as much as it does to Americans, had agreed to a late lock-up. In return, the prisoners through their interpreters, promised there would be no escape attempts during the extra hours of compound freedom.

The attendance was 100 per cent. The makeshift seats filled quickly and many of us had to stand. It was a good show as prison camp shows go. But it failed to accent the Christmas theme as one would expect at this time of the year. No carols, no yuletide recitations, no Santa Claus - nothing to remind us of the day's significance or our loneliness in being separated from loved ones on this day of all days. The curtain fell for the final time and the English-speaking guards got up from their seats, signifying that we should return to our quarters.

"We will now sing 'God Bless America'," thundered an authoritative, triumphant voice from the stage. The crowd, which had been making its way slowly toward the single door, stopped, turned around and faced the stage. Standing there, as big and proud as a man can be, was an American prisoner, his body erect and arms poised in the air to

begin directing us in song. "Everyone sing," he shouted. And we did. Every one of us. The singing was not especially musical, but it was loud, clear, compelling and fervent. Never have I heard a song sung with greater enthusiasm nor a deeper sense of understanding, especially the chorus, where we pleaded with God to "bless the land we love, to stand beside her, to guide her, to bless our home sweet home."

The effect on the German guards was strange. They stood practically spellbound. They didn't know that to make of this unexpected display. They had no idea how to cope with the situation. They knew the singing should be stopped. But in the excitement of the moment, they didn't know how to do it. So they waited patiently until the singing subsided. It was a quiet group that filed out of the building into the softly falling snow. No one hurried, no one shoved, no one spoke, not even the German guards. Every one of us was in his own private dreamland. The spirit of Christmas had finally penetrated our dismal surroundings, bringing a spark of brightness and contentment to our ears. For a moment we forgot our weariness, our hatreds, our fears and we were comforted. And though the spirit of Christmas - peace on earth, good will to men - was not reigning in the world, it prevailed for the moment in our hearts, where it originates.

It was a month and a half later that the Germans did away with

Stalag IV, February 5 to be exact. The prisoners, including Schoket, were given two days notice that they were being moved to the south. They were given Red cross packages, minus the good cigarettes of course, so they packed what meager belongings they had. It was a march in winter weather and rather disorderly from the start. Later it became known as the infamous "Black March." Little food was supplied by the German guards. Schoket and his companions scrounged in the fields for what could keep them alive. They found kohlrabi and beets and occasionally an animal or chicken that kept them going. The prisoners walked between 500 and 600 miles, aimlessly at times. Finally they were liberated, some by the Russians, some by the Canadians. Schoket got as far as Annaberg, which is just south of Dresden. *Reprinted from EX-POW Bulletin.*

The article was sent in by Larry Tiehen. He writes, "many men from the 781st, including me, were interned in here at Stalag Luft IV. That was a Christmas Eve I will never forget. We were usually locked in at 4 PM. Even the shutters on the windows were secured. That night we were not locked in. It was a beautiful night and it was snowing. We were like kids playing in the snow waiting for our turn to go to the show. One thing the article didn't mention was when we went into the building for the show they handed us a little sack of candy. We were all acting like a bunch of little kids."

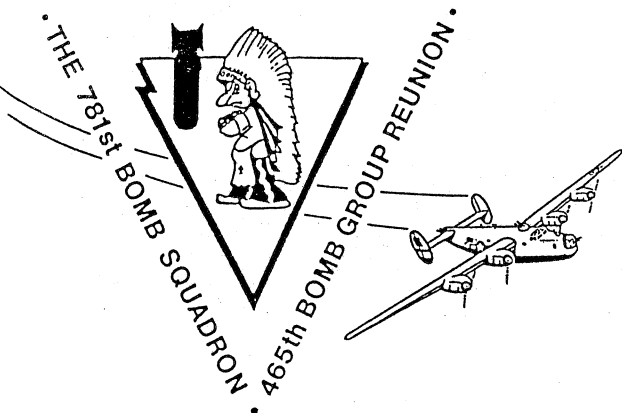




Clockwise from upper Left - Just planes - B-52s partially broken up waiting for final removal - Wing of B-52 being hauled away for melting down - The tour bus driving us around Davis-Monthan.

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