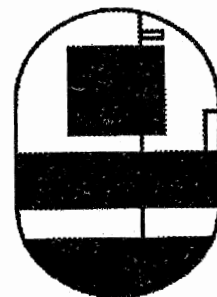




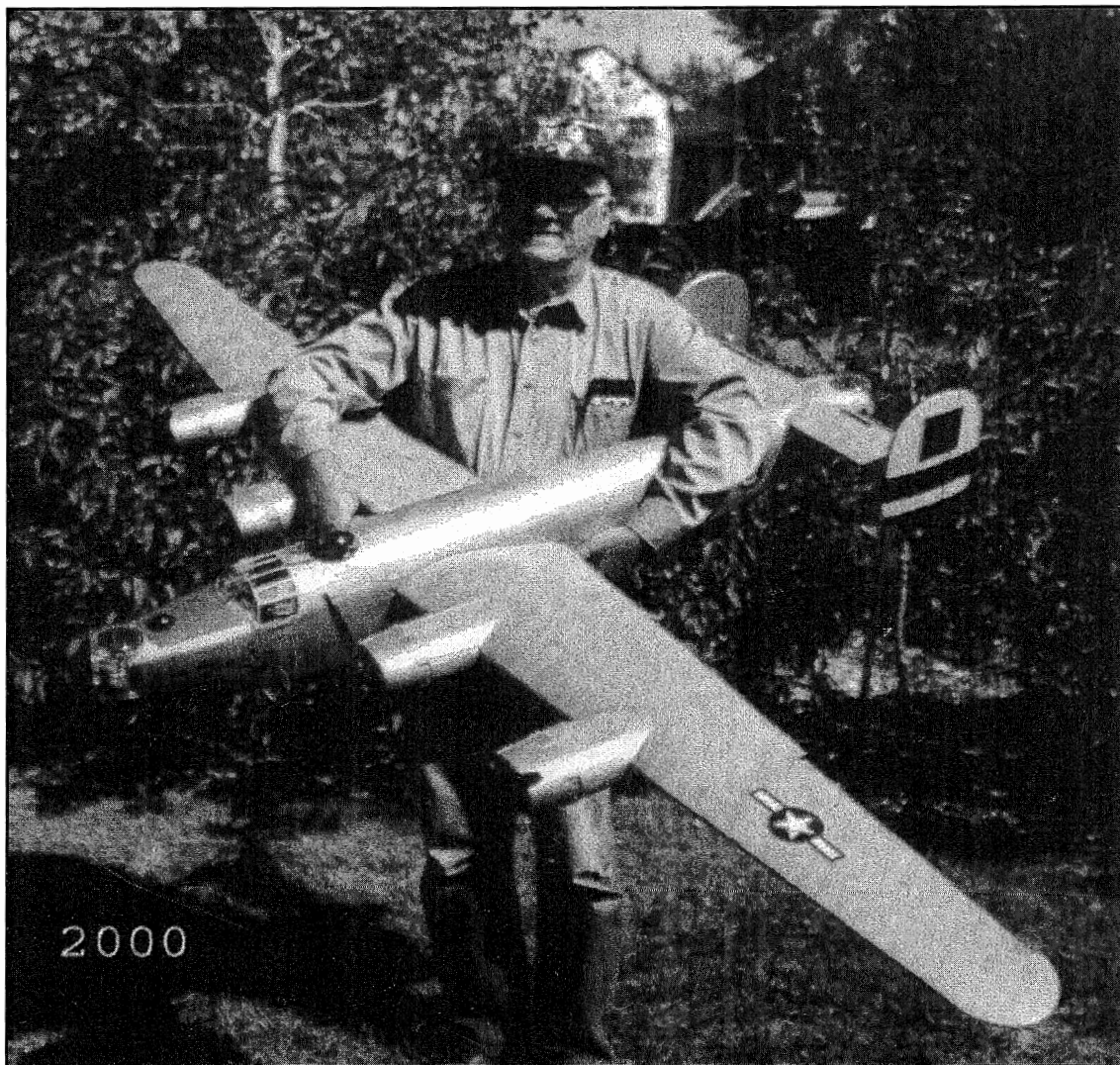
PANTANELLA NEWS



October 2001

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NUMBER 66



Gene Barnett with his personal B-24 Liberator

The Building of a B-24 Liberator

It all started when my wife gave me a B-24 kit for Christmas in 1974. I did not get motivated to start building it until the Omaha reunion in 1992. At that time I decided it was time to get at it. The kit was designed using the B-24D (Strawberry Bitch) that is in the Dayton Ohio Museum. The kit was provided with the parts to build a model D.

I decided to build a copy of the J model that I flew from Italy to the states after the war. The plane was serial NO 44-41122 (Hot Matilda) which my crew and I picked up at the processing point in Italy and left there on the 7th of July 1945.

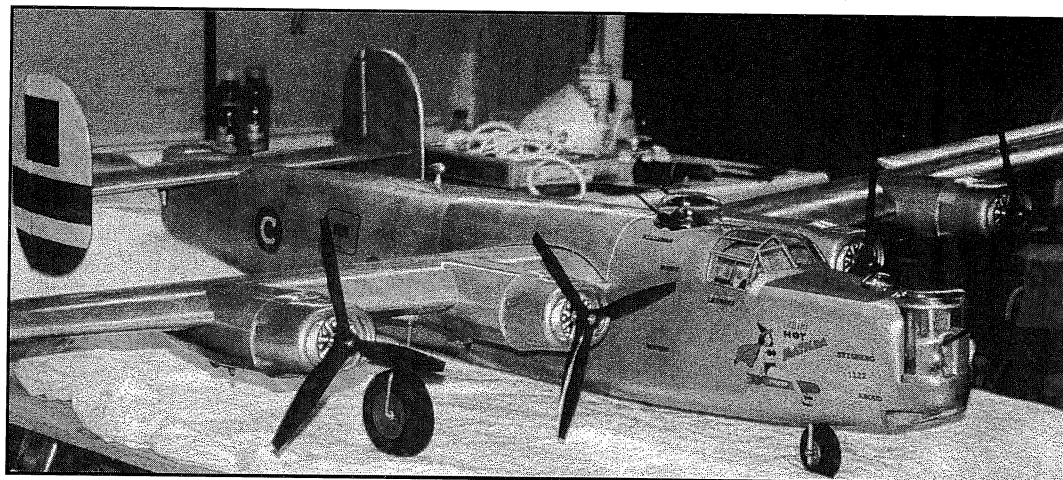
We went first to Casablanca as they had a dust storm at Marrakech where we were supposed to land and stay overnight. We went to Marrakech the next day, refueled and flew on to Dakar. We stayed there overnight and crossed the Atlantic the next day to Natal, Brazil. The next day we flew to Puerto Rico and on to Savan-

nah Ga. We unloaded there and went our separate ways, leaving Hot Matilda there never to see her again.

I would like to thank all of the Air Crews and Ground per-

There were two traumatic incidents that happened during the construction:

First: the sink in the kitchen was directly over the work bench in the basement



sonnel who preceded us to Italy for the job they did in decreasing Germany's might so that our tour there was mostly uneventful.

Back to the building of a B-24. I took the pieces out of the box for the first time in Nov 1992 and started work. Construction was mainly according to the kit except the nose and the center of the wing. I redesigned the nose to accommodate a nose turret and made the wing in two pieces, as it was seven and a half feet long, so it would be easier to transport. Sometimes because of the changes I would not physically work on the kit for weeks or months while I mentally worked on the problems associated with the changes.

I used my memory and any pictures I could find in hobby shops and libraries to help in making the plane as close to the real one as I could.

where I was building the plane and it developed a leak. When I checked the plane the fuselage had about a quart of water in it. I poured the water out and sweated for a couple days. Luckily I used a glue (Tight Bond) which was not affected by the water and the fuselage was ok after it dried out.

Second: One day after putting a coat of primer on the fuselage I was taking it back to the basement when I missed the bottom step and fell on my face. Luckily there was a pile of dirty clothes where I fell and we (the plane and I) were both OK. I put approximately 20 coats of primer on the completed plane. I decided with putting all this work in building the B-24 I would not fly it. So I changed the motors from gas to electric. I made the gear, flaps, ailerons, rudder, elevators and motors, radio controlled so I could taxi it and have control. Using the nose art photo of Hot Matilda that was in the 781st History

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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 WWII (1944-1945). During its 191 missions over Southern Europe it dropped thousands of tons of bombs, shot down 23 enemy aircraft

Book and my memory I used my computer and made the art I put on the model. I have and am trying to put as much detail on the model as I can. I hope to bring the model to the next reunion if everything goes well.

I believe the model of Hot Matilda is of the quality to be in a museum. There are two museums I have in mind. The B-24 Museum in Pueblo, CO and the Colorado Air Museum at the now closed Lowery AFB.

Hi Jim. I am not very good at writing but here it is and maybe you can fix it up. Gene.



The Real Hot Matilda

ENEMY FIGHTER ACTIVITY

Continuing the article by Otis Scott started in Pantanella News Number 65

MISSION #52: 26 July '44 A/D Bad Voslau, Austria 15 to 20 enemy a/c were observed attacking a formation 30 miles west of Lake Balaton area. One enemy a/c passed within 500 yds. of the formation and made a non-aggressive pass and is claimed as destroyed.

MISSION #56: 3 Aug. '44 A/C Wks Friedrichschafen, Germany. En route to the base from an operation over Friedrichschafen, group no. 2 of third wing in the column of wings had dropped behind to cover one of its aircraft which had suffered flak damage over the target area. When this group reached a point just south of Innsbruck, Austria, its leading elements had fallen a distance of 15 miles behind and to the left rear of the wing. "C"

box of the group was 3 miles farther to the rear. The bombers were flying at 19,000 feet over a 9/10 undercast at 17,000 feet, one P-51 group, escort for "A" wing, was covering the main body, flying 360 degree circles over the lead groups. Under these circumstances at 1137 hours 40/50 enemy aircraft identified as ME 109's and FW 190's in approximately equal numbers, attacked from below out of the under-cast, from 4 to 7 o'clock. They made a single pass at "C" and "D" boxes with a few enemy fighters carrying through to "B" box. Eight bombers, 4 each in boxes "C" and "D", were lost as a result of this single attack. In response to calls for assistance, the fighter escort made contact with the enemy aircraft 3 minutes later at 1140 hours and

dispersed them, destroying 10. Enemy fighters were reported using either rockets or pre-fused 20 mm shells. The attack, coming out of the under-cast was so sudden that upon interrogation, only one tail gunner had confirmed that he had seen the enemy fighters for an instant before the attack was pressed home. Destroyed: 10 bombers, 10 fighters.

MISSION #58: 7 Aug '44 O/R Blechhammer Four (4) ME 109's were seen between Győr and Bratislava at 1220 hours at 21,000 feet. 4 to 6 ME 109's and one ME 110 or 410 in the target area at 1131 hours at 22,000 feet. 4 ME 109's attacked the formation at 1220 hours, com-

ing from 11 o'clock high across able box and baker box. Crews state that the fighters took full advantage of the sun and most of the gunners didn't see the e/a until they were right in the bomber formation. One gunner said he could see the shells bursting before he could see the fighters in the sun and he said that the rate of closure was so fast that most of the gunners did not have time to fire a shot. It appeared to some observers that the e/a were aiming at the lead ship and one shell burst about 20 feet from the left wing of the lead ship but did no damage. It was also thought that one rocket was fired at the bombers.

The fighter escort at the time was above the bomber formation. The escort immediately chased off the attackers and only the one pass was recorded. It should be noted that the under-cast below the formation presented an ideal cover for e/a. The bombers apparently did not see the e/a coming in and out of the sun until they were actually in the bomber formation. No attack came from this direction, probably because the escort kept diving below the under-cast to reconnoiter. One probable is claimed.

At 1130 one ME 109 made an attack on the group below and behind our group and while flying toward our formation at 5 o'clock low was destroyed by one of our gunners. This ME 109 was not pressing an attack on our formation, but rather was recovering from a pass just made on the formation below.

MISSION # 70: 24 August '44 Pardubice, Czech. No enemy aircraft made a direct attack upon our formation, however 50 or more ME 109's with a few FW 190's were seen by our group below the formation at 49 26 N / 15 30 E at 1233 hours. These a/c made attacks on the group ahead and two of them breaking away and passing close to our formation are claimed to have been destroyed. The two a/c claimed destroyed were ME 109's. One of these was in a group of 4 which had come away after attacking the 464th group. These a/c passed between dog box and able box, within 350 yds of the former, allowing the nose gunner of the former to fire at and destroy it. The other destroyed a/c passed within 200 yds of the nose of A-1 allowing the navigator an easy target.

MISSION #114: 6 December '44 M/Y Bratislava While the formation was making a 180 degree turn after rallying off the target, 20 to 25 ME 109's and FW 190's approached from the rear in two formations, a high box of 14 or more and a low box of 7 to 9 planes. The attack began northeast of Bratislava at 1118 hrs and continued until 1150 hrs in the vicinity of Gyor. Attacks on this group were all from the rear and were generally unaggressive.

Two formations of enemy a/c attacked simultaneously: A seven a/c formation attacked from 7:00 o'clock closing to about 400 yds before breaking to the right; a 4 a/c formation furnished a diversionary attack breaking off at 800 to a 1000 yards. There were several single

attacks from 5 to 7 o'clock which broke off in a split "S" showing the belly of the enemy a/c to the formation at 800 to 1000 yds. The 464th bomb group was flying just to the left of our formation and the majority of the attacks were against the last box in their formation which was scattered.

Most of the single attacks against our formation resulted from enemy a/c breaking away from their attacks on stragglers and scattered a/c of the 464th group which drew in toward "dog box" of our formation for protection.

Four ME 109's are claimed as destroyed and one ME 109 is claimed was a probable. Attacks on the 464th were generally in the tail cone. 2, 3, and 4 a/c attacked in trail from 5 to 7 o'clock breaking off to the left and right of the B-24 attacked, the second breaking over the B-24 attacked, and continued alternately breaking above and below the plane attacked.

One straggler was attacked by five planes abreast from 6 o'clock with the center plane closing the attack to 200 yards and diving down and under. A straggler was shot down by a coordinated attack with one ME 109 attacking from below in a steep climb toward the ball turret and four ME 109's coming over the plane in trail from 6 o'clock and performing a split "S"

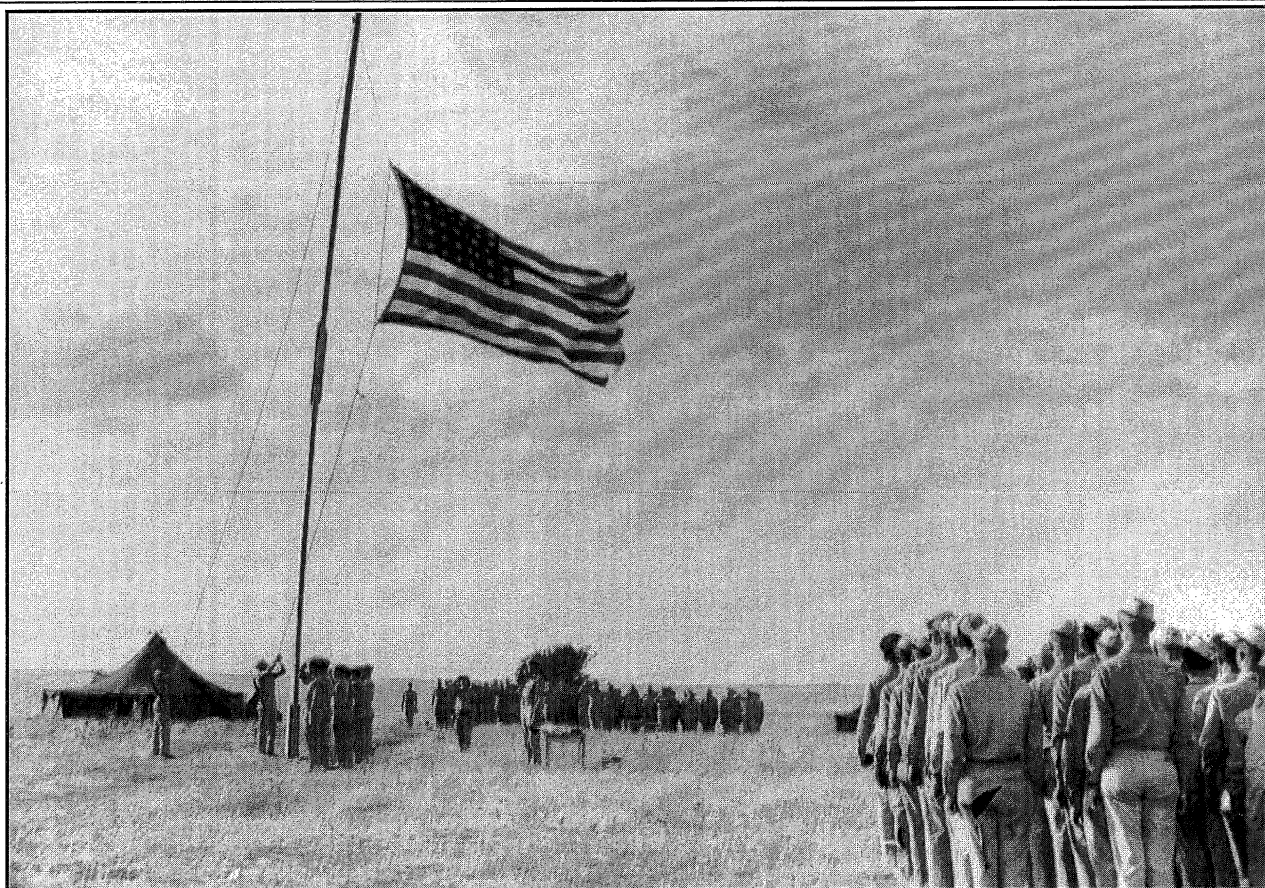
into the B24, firing as it came out of the dive of the "S" and heading out at 6 o'clock. Two ME 109's were observed to have been shot down by B-24's in the 464th Bombardment Group.

This information (preceding pages) was compiled from monthly summaries for the months of May and June of 1944, the first two months that the 465th Bomb Group operated out of the Pantanella Army Air Base. Details for the month of July 1944 and subsequent months through April 1945 are from Narrative Mission Reports which were written and submitted to the 55th Bombardment Wing for each mission flown.



Target Abbreviations:

O/R - Oil Refinery
M/Y - Marshaling Yard
A/D - Airdrome
A/C - Aircraft factory
- Aircraft works.



Formation at Pantanella in honor of Franklin D. Roosevelt's death on April 12, 1945.
See page 8.

Frank Ambrose, our squadron photographer, has put up a WebSite on the internet that should prove of interest to all the members of our Association. In addition to a brief history of the 465th Group and tidbits about the 781st., the site depicts several photos of B-24 Nose Art based at Pantanella and a variety of other aircraft in Italy during 1944/1945.

The heading on the Home Page starts out with the following declaration:

•Dedicated to my fellow Airmen of the 781st Squadron • 465th Bomb Group

(H)•15th Air•Force• Italy •1943/1945•

The site can be accessed on the internet by typing the following URL:- <http://www.frankambrose.com>. Or you can search it by entering any of the following Keywords:- '781st Bomb Sqd', '465th Bomb Group', 'Photos of 15th. AF' in the Altavista, Lycos or Yahoo Search engines.

WWII Wedding Gown Sewn From Parachute

Engine trouble caused the 10 crewmen aboard a U.S. B-24 Liberator to abandon the plane over rural Hungary. The crew, including Mt. Lebanon na-

tive Bob Elliott was en route to a bombing mission at a German oil refinery in December, 1944. As the airmen parachuted safely from about 4,500 feet, some, including Elliott, landed in a farm field. A helpful farmer, who had once lived in Chicago, led Elliott to a farmhouse where several women were getting ready for the wedding of a farmer's daughter. As Elliott and his mates stripped off their equipment and outer clothing one of the women fingered the nylon that lined the parachutes. The woman had an inspiration - why not make a wedding gown out of this shiny material that was entirely new to these women? The gown was created. It looked great. The wedding took place. And, as far as is known, the Hungarian couple lived happily ever after. At about the same time, the U.S. airmen were granted a favor, thanks to

an unlikely source. The Germans considered anyone with the rank of sergeant and above to be a commissioned officer. In the U.S. scheme of things, a sergeant is a non-commissioned officer. If an American with a lower rank were captured by the Germans, he was apt to be treated less well than an officer. The solution was to promote anyone who flew air missions to a minimum rank of sergeant. So the privates and corporals in Elliott's group and the rest of the Army Air Corps, as the service was then called, all were boosted to the rank of sergeant. To pull this mass promotion off required tact and clout. The airman who negotiated it with the higher authorities was, of all people, Major Clark Gable, winner of the U.S. Air Medal, not to mention an Academy Award Oscar.

B-24 Production Facilities

Different models of the B-24 were manufactured at different facilities. Those were: Consolidated at San Diego and Fort Worth, Douglas at Tulsa, Ford at Willow Run, and North American at Dallas. The following information was extracted from "Log of the Liberators" by Steve Birdsall.

MODEL	TOTAL	CONSOLI-DATED SAN DIEGO	CONSOLI-DATED FORT WORTH	DOUGLAS TULSA	FORD WILLOW RUN	NORTH AMERICAN DALLAS
B-24A	36	36				
B-24B	0					
B-24C	9	9				
B-24D	2, 728	2, 415	303	10		
B-24E	791			480		
B-24F	NO Production					
B-24G	430					430
B-24H	3, 100		738	582	1, 780	
B-24J	6,678	2, 792	1, 558	205	1, 587	536
B-24K						
B-24L	1667	417			1,250	
B-24M	2, 593	916			1, 677	
YB-24N	7	CONTRACT	CANCELLED		5, 168 ORDERED	
Total	18, 039	6, 585	2, 599	1, 277	6, 301	966

History of "Taps"

From Stan Winkowski and Paul Durckel

I've never heard this story, but history and music buffs (and others) will be moved by it.

We have all heard the haunting song, "Taps." It's the song that gives us that lump in our throats and usually creates tears in our eyes. But, do you know the story behind the song? If not, I think you will be pleased to find out about its humble beginnings.

Reportedly, it all began in 1862 during the Civil War, when Union Army Captain Robert Ellicombe was with his men near Harrison's Landing in Virginia. The Confederate Army was on the other side of the narrow strip of land. During the night, Captain Ellicombe heard the moans of a soldier who lay severely wounded on the field. Not knowing if it was a Union or Confederate soldier, the Cap-

tain decided to risk his life and bring the stricken man back for medical attention.

Crawling on his stomach through the gunfire, the Captain reached the stricken soldier and began pulling him toward his encampment. When the Captain finally reached his own lines, he discovered it was actually a Confederate soldier, but the soldier was dead. The Captain lit a lantern and suddenly caught his breath and went numb with shock. In the dim light, he saw the face of the soldier. It was his own son.

The boy had been studying music in the South when the war broke out. Without telling his father, the boy enlisted in the Confederate Army. The following morning, heartbroken, the father asked permission of his

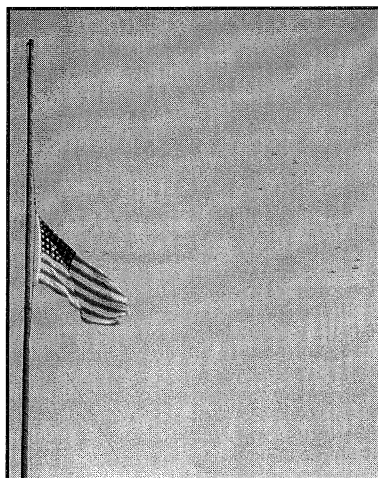
superiors to give his son a full military burial despite his enemy status. His request was only partially granted. The Captain had asked if he could have a group of Army band members play a funeral dirge for his son at the funeral.

The request was turned down, since the soldier was a Confederate. But, out of respect for the father, they did say they could give him only one musician. The Captain chose a bugler. He asked the bugler to play a series of musical notes he had found on a piece of paper in the pocket of the dead youth's uniform. This wish was granted and the haunting melody we now know as "Taps" used at military funerals, was born and the words follow.

Day is done,
Gone the sun
From the Lakes
From the hills
From the sky.
All is well,
Safely rest.
God is nigh.

Fading light
Dims the sight
And a star
Gems the sky,
Gleaming bright
From afar,
Drawing nigh,
Falls the night.
Thanks and praise,
For our days,
Neath the sun,

Neath the stars,
Neath the sky,
As we go,
This we know,
God is nigh.



I, too, have felt the chills while listening to "Taps" but I have never seen all the words to the song until now. I didn't even know there was more than one verse.

I also never knew the story behind the song and I didn't know if you had either. So I thought I'd pass it along.

I now have an even deeper respect for the song than I previously had. Ed.

Folded Wings



In Memory of
Col. James W. Wray, Jr. Retd. U.S.A.F.

Date of Birth
March 19, 1919

Entered into Rest
May 18, 2001

Services
Thursday, May 24, 2001
One O'Clock P.M.
Sunset Funeral Home Chapel
San Antonio, Texas

Officiating
Chaplain 1st Lt. John D. Vander Kaay

Cremation Inurnment
Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery
San Antonio, Texas

Sunset Funeral Home
San Antonio TX 78218

W. Harold "Woody" Woody, 88, Springfield, departed from this life Jan. 30, 2001, in Primrose Place. The son of William and Myrtle Carter Woody, he was born Oct 6, 1912, in Peace Valley, MO. He was a veteran of the 15th Air Force, 465th Bomb Group, 781st Bomb Squadron The radio operator on Gene Barnett's Crew.

He was a retired retail store division manager and was a member of University Heights Baptist Church for 46 years. He was preceded in death by his parents and one brother, Raymond.

Woody is survived by his wife, Doris, of the home; one daughter, Kim Woody, Springfield; one son, Brent Woody, Ozark; a sister-in-law, Elizabeth Woody, Springfield; two nephews; and one niece.

From *Newspaper clipping sent by Woody's widow: Doris Woody; 1133 W. Stanford St.; Springfield MO 65807-1981*

Andy Getsy; Communications Section, passed away on Feb 22, 2001. His home was at Poland, Ohio. Andy's daughter advised us of his death but we have no details.

Pantanella Haircuts

by O. J. Cowart

Hair cuts were a problem for me in Italy. During the war I had my hair cut in a flat top fashion. I did not want a "burr head" cut and would wave my hand back and forth so the Italian barbers would not cut it round.

Finally one day, a barber turned around and picked up a brush and said, "Similar brush?" From that day I always knew how to tell them I wanted a flat top.

At the Red Cross Center I got the full barber shop treatment. Included was a cut, shampoo, facial, manicure, and something I had never even heard of, a singe, which was performed by lighting a long thin candle which was then lightly passed over the ends of my hair.

The whole price for all this treatment was about a dollar and 25 cents. In Italian money this amounted to one hundred and twenty-five lire.

PX Items For Sale

We're getting low on many items. Buy them while they still are available.

Our favorite: 781st Mug. I just saw one like it with a B-24 on it for \$10.00

Our beautiful mug is \$6.50 plus \$3.50 shipping. Buy two and get one free.

Pissed off Indian Leather Jacket Patch At \$20.00 plus \$1.50 shipping.

B-24 Rubber Ink Stamp: \$3.00 plus \$1.50 shipping.

Embroidered 781st Shoulder Patches: \$2.00 plus \$1.50 shipping.

465th Rudder Pins: \$3.00 plus \$1.50 shipping.

465th Bomb Group caps: Beautiful Blue with Gold Scrambled Eggs. Only a few left \$5, plus \$1.50 shipping.

781st Bomb Squadron Stationery :

Beautiful gold and blue printing on white paper. Souvenir of the Travis Air Base, Fairfield, CA Reunion. Squadron Insignia encircled with gold leaf. Send a letter to a comrade. It will be a beautiful souvenir. While it lasts, below our cost at \$2.00 per pack of five sheets and five envelopes. Buy five packs of five and get one pack of five free.

Send your orders to: Barney G. Russell
1014 N. Washington St.; Magnolia, AR 71753

Sick Call

Loren Foote, Ordnance Section and our Squadron Association Chaplain. Had heart surgery (five hours) but is recovering very well.

Herbert Schlossin, Communications Section. Had quadruple bypass surgery and a heart valve repair in July. He is recovering very nicely and, with Shirley, expects to attend the Omaha reunion.

Editor's Corner

This newsletter was delayed due to the reunion and now there is some further delay due to the New York Terrorist attack.

As most of you know the reunion was scheduled for Oct. 13 to 16th. When the Terrorist attack occurred it changed the plans for many of us. I called a number of our members involved with the reunion to determine what to do. We could cancel it, delay it or continue as planned. It was the opinion that it would be difficult to contact everyone and that the number already on the way would be disappointed. Therefore the reunion plans continued.

I found the airline and airport that I would fly from was closed and no flights were available. By the time I made all the calls and considering other plans it was too late for me to attempt to drive therefore I had to cancel my plans to go to the reunion as did many who were going to attend.

There will be a survey at the reunion and possibly some calls or correspondence to others to determine what plans should be made for a future reunion. When these facts are known I will discuss the matter with the officers and directors for a final decision.

Jim Althoff

MAIL CALL



From Bob Elliott, Bilger Engineer.

Dear Jim. Enclosed is a check for my subscription to the Pantanella News which I always look forward to.

In August. we had a nice reunion with the Clodfelter crew in Pittsburgh. PA, something we have been doing for a number of years - ten towns in nine different states. Everyone of the remaining crew came except Gunner Royal Wilson who was unable to attend at this time.

Attending were: Donald and Wilma Clodfelter - Greenwood, IN; Bombardier John I. Wilson - St. Clair Shores. MI; Flight Engineer Calder L. Shelby and Melba - DeLeon. TX; Radio Operator J. Charles Joubanc and Penny - Zanesville, OH; Top Turret Gunner Charles R. Hemphill and Doris - Canton, NC; Tail Gunner Robert H. Munson - Chesapeake Beach. MD.

Although I was the Flight Engineer with the Gerry Bilger crew. I was called on to substitute for Cader Shelby on December 18. 1944 on a mission to Blechhammer.

I am also enclosing a copy of an article which ran in one of the local community newspapers which you might

like to include in a future edition of the Pantanella News.

From George Harteloo:

On page 8 of your Pantanea News, Number 61, dated July 2000 Mr. Glenn Haywood says that I, George Harteloo, loaned him a hammer over in Italy in 1944 or 1945. Mr. Haywood's picture appears on the same Page 8, however, I cannot truthfully say I remember him or the loaning a hammer to him, but I was there at that time and he correctly spelled my last name, which no one else does and at that time my hair was red, it is white now. I do not doubt that I loaned him the hammer. I'd appreciate it very much if you would send this letter to Mr. Glen Haywood whose address I do not have.

From Bob Freed, Ordnance Section

I have just finished reading the newsletter (#64) for the second time. This was one of the best issues that you have ever put out. Harry Carl's history notes were meticulously documented; Frank Ambrose's photos were excellent (when aren't they) and your post mortem on Ken Sutton was one of the finest.

I'm certain that many who took the time to closely read this issue were surprised as to Harry's detailed descriptions of how it all began and your info on Ken Sutton's lengthy illness of the past 10

years. I'm quite certain none of the Ordnance people were aware of what he was going through and I'm equally convinced not many if any squadron personnel knew what was happening either.

As far as the Omaha reunion is concerned we cannot make any definite plans. My wife's left eye cornea transplant is coming along slowly and it will be another 3 or 4 months (estimated) before the Dr. will release her. However, the right eye is now beginning to indicate a similar problem and at this time the Dr. feels she may have to go thru surgery on this eye as well. As we move along thru the year I'll continue to update our status.

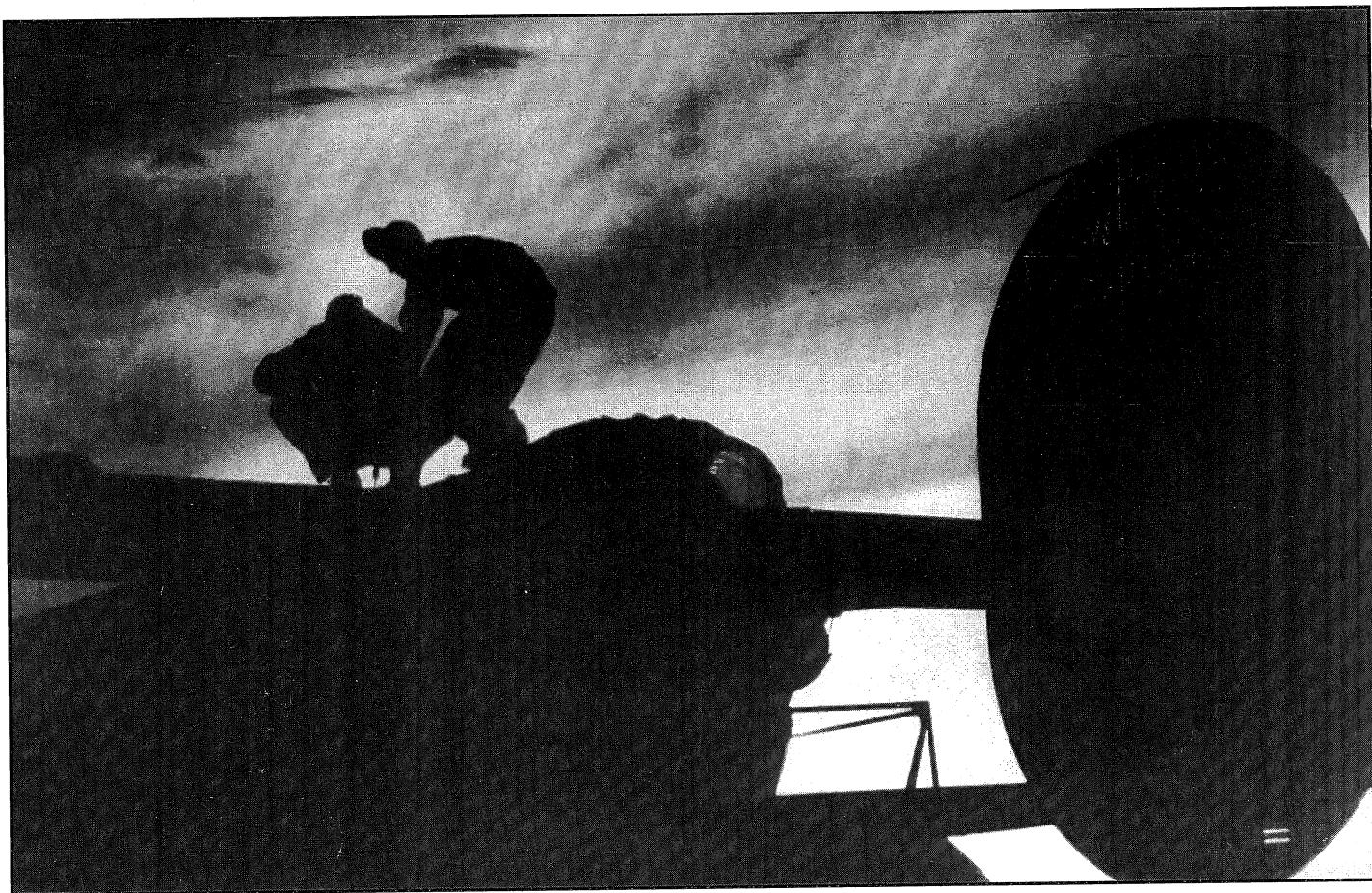
Nothing more to report so we'll talk again soon I'm sure.

From Maurine Wray

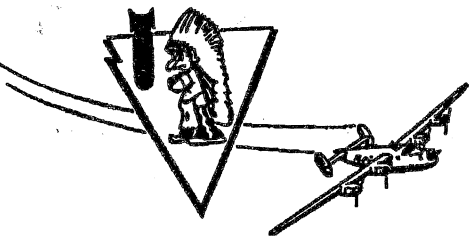
All of you guys in the 781st have been so kind and good to keep us up to date. Jim loved you all so much and looked forward to each issue of the "Pantanella News."

We'll miss him "bunches", but the many fun and happy memories will last forever.





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