

# SORTIE



FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE



## NOT FORGOTTEN



Ross Strode   Bill Large   Jim Shumard  
(455 BG)   (454 BG)   (455 BG)

## WE SALUTE YOU

# OUR LIFE MEMBERS . . . WE SALUTE YOU

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 Gen Leon W. Johnson  
 Gen Paul K. Carlton  
 Gen Charles C. McDonald  
 Gen John A. Shaud  
 Gen Russell E. Dougherty  
 Lt Gen William K. Martin  
 Lt Gen William F. Pitts  
 Lt Gen Bryan M. Shotts  
 Lt Gen John J. Murphy  
 Lt Gen James E. Light  
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 Lt Gen Richard A. Burpee  
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 Maj Gen William G. MacLaren  
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 Maj Gen Alan V. Rogers  
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 Maj Gen Thomas G. Darling  
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 B/Gen William Constantine  
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 FO Anthony Santomango  
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# SORTIE



FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE



VOL IX No 2

P.O. Box 6325, March Air Force Base, California 92518

## ■ OUR LATEST NEWS ■

15th Air Force has a distinguished record of service to our country and over the years one of our primary purposes has been to serve as a focal point for insuring that the distinctive achievements of its people are recognized and proudly remembered. Recent events highlight these efforts.

**MEMORIAL BENCH:** On 23 May 1994, before a large gathering of our veterans and friends, we dedicated a 15th Air Force Memorial Bench at the Air Force Museum at Wright Patterson AFB in Dayton. Bill Large Jr (454 BG), represented us and made the dedication with these words: "This Memorial Bench is presented to the Air Force Museum for display in recognition of our members, both those living and those who are no longer with us, and in commemoration of our dedication to freedom and to our great country. We hereby entrust it to the museum for the benefit and knowledge of our own and future generations of visitors who come here from around the world. May it serve to remind each one of us of our priceless heritage. On behalf of the 15th Air Force Association, we are pleased to officially present this Memorial to the Air Force Museum."

Jim Shumard (455 BG) presented a history of the 15th Air Force during WW II including a poignant remembrance of our wartime commander, Maj Gen Nathan Twining. Ross Strode (455 BG) and Elwood Miller (455 BG) unveiled the bench for presentation to the museum.

Our Memorial Bench is depicted on the cover along with a salute to Bill, Jim, and Ross. We deeply appreciate their dedication and service. We also express our gratitude to the members and officers of the 454th and 455th Bomb Group Associations. They made major and generous contributions to enable us to place this memorial. Thank you 455th and 454th and of course, all of our many members whose support enabled us to complete this project. During Bill's public remarks, he recognized the project's ramrod - Ross Strode, our 15th Air Force Association Project Officer - whose drive and perseverance made it all possible. We join him in saluting Ross for a "job well done." Thank you, Ross.

**AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION:** The AFA will honor the 15th Air Force on the 50th anniversary of our bombing missions which destroyed a major portion of Nazi oil production. The special recognition will be made during the opening ceremonies of the AFA National Convention at the Sheraton Washington Hotel on 12 Sept 1994. Paul Bell (15 HQ), a member of our Board of Directors and President of the

Riverside Chapter of the AFA, will represent our Association. There is no charge for the opening ceremonies and if you want to attend, you must report to the AFA convention registration desk (at the Sheraton) at 8 a.m. to pick up a special name tag - just tell them that you are there to observe the opening ceremonies honoring the WW II 15th Air Force.

**15TH AIR FORCE MEMORIAL:** With your generous help, we continue to make progress with our 15th Air Force Memorial. The bronze plaques, bronze WW II insignia, Doolittle bust, and pedestal are secured and we are making a concerted effort to assist the March Field Museum Foundation in completing the memorial wall and courtyard. Entries for the memorial book have been compiled and are ready for the bindery. We will complete the book when the project is finished and place it during the dedication.

**AUSTRIAN EXHIBIT:** The Austrian government is sponsoring a major exhibition during the summer of 1995 which will include recognition of 15th Air Force's role in WW II. Reed Sprinkel (484 BG) will represent our Association and attend as an honored guest of the government. During the official visit, Reed will meet high government officials and will be interviewed by the press and TV concerning 15th Air Force operations over Austria. Reed will be accompanied by his wife, Rita, and a delegation of friends and comrades.

**ROMANIAN SYMPOSIUM:** In April, Ben Yedlin (449 BG) represented us at a symposium of WW II veterans and historians in Romania where he read a letter of greetings from our Association to the symposium (see page 7).

**AMC COMPETITION:** The new home of 15th Air Force, the Air Mobility Command, held an air mobility competition at McChord AFB at the end of June. Gen Walt Kross and Col Steve Lorenz graciously included us in the group of civilian leaders invited to observe the activities. We flew up in a KC-10 and witnessed our 15th Air Force "actives" doing an outstanding job dropping troops, engaging in short field operations, and numerous other activities. We also observed the impressive airlift capability of AMC's new C-17 Globemaster III. As politicians rush to spend the so-called "peace dividend", the production of C-17s has been cut. We solicit your help in encouraging your representative to proceed with caution. We still live in a dangerous world and our 15th needs to remain ready; the C-17 will keep them ready to respond to global contingencies.

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The 50th anniversary of the 15th Air Force is now history but the memories linger on. It was disappointing that the Bob Hope Special had to be canceled which was instrumental in our reunion being canceled as well. Nevertheless, an impressive function was held at March Field celebrating our 50th anniversary and the 75th anniversary of March Field.

Ms Jann Carl, the noted anchor of the Los Angeles TV station KTLA News At Ten, was invited to be the honored guest of the Fifteenth Air Force Association. Unfortunately, her busy schedule would not permit her appearance but she responded with a warm and inspiring letter of regret. The Air Force is not new to Ms Carl. Her Air Force Lt Col brother-in-law is stationed in Virginia with the B-1 and B-52 programs. Ms Carl has flown a B-1 simulator and expresses enthusiasm for the Air Force. She combines her talent and beauty in presenting not only the news, but the weather and Hollywood reports as well. Her pleasing "Goodnight everyone, we'll see you tomorrow night" is heard by millions.

We are pleased to announce the re-activation of the Active Duty Advisory Board to provide input from the active duty wings and to stimulate membership. If our Association is to survive, it is imperative that active duty membership increase.

MURRAY A. BYWATER  
Brig Gen, USAF, Retired  
President

## SMALL TALK

**GEN KROSS:** The President has nominated Gen Kross to become the Director of the Joint Staff and he will be in Washington before the end of July. We are pleased that he has received this well deserved advancement and extend our heartiest congratulations. But this is a real "good news - bad news" situation and the bad news is that we will no longer have the frequent contact and the benefit of his wise counsel. Gen Kross has been gracious in the many courtesies extended to us and his support has been paramount in helping us reestablish operations at March after the departure of the 15th Headquarters. He values our heritage, appreciates your service, and has often recognized your distinguished contributions as pioneers of the 15th. We will miss him!

**GEN FISTER:** Gen Bruce Fister has been selected to become our 21st commander and we send him our warmest welcome as he assumes his watch with the 15th. We look forward to meeting him and pledge our strongest support. Welcome aboard, Sir!



Ms Jann Carl

**GROUP LEADERS:** We publicly acknowledge the outstanding support we are receiving from our Group leaders. As the passing years thin our ranks - as our TAPS entries grow ever longer - we are very aware of how our shared heritage serves to bind us together. During D-Day observances, I was very moved by the special bond - the genuine affection - between those who have faced great danger together. I send my deeply held esteem and affection for each of you. **BEN**



**SORTIE**  
FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE

Sortie is published on behalf of the members of the Fifteenth Air Force Association, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation of the history and heritage of the Fifteenth Air Force and to the sacred memory of its honored dead.

PRESIDENT ..... MURRAY A. BYWATER  
Brig Gen, USAF, Ret  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR/EDITOR..... C.E. BEN FRANKLIN  
Lt Col, USAF, Ret

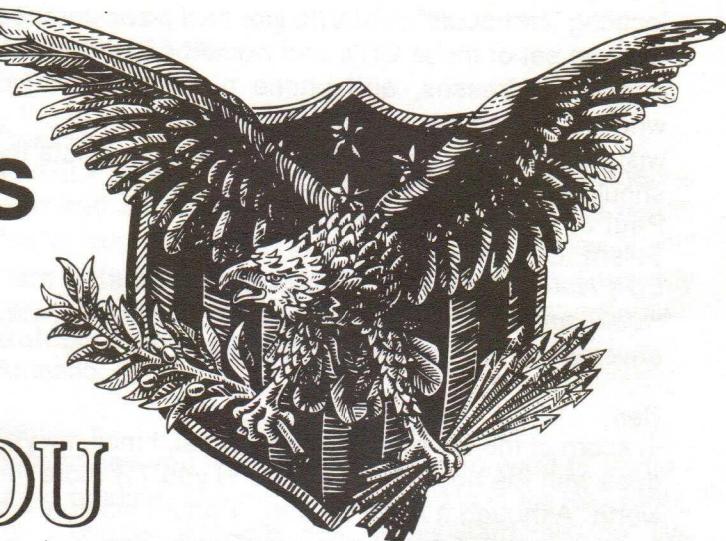
†	†	†	†	TAPS	★	★	★
Edward L. Barker					Miles Hoelzel 82 FG		
Leon Brodsky 450 BG					Kent E. Jones 459 BG		
Lynn R. Coil 99 BG					Joseph P. Kenny 455 BG		
Frank C. Collins 463 BG					Joe Kraft 463 BG		
Jack A. Compton 455 BG					Walter P. Lepski 92 BW		
Glenn R. Cooter 454 BG					Herbert J. Lippert 97 BG		
Whitney Cushing 376 BG					Ped G. Magness 97 BG		
Julius D'Amelio 301 BG					Charles McKew 484 BG		
Frank S. Day 459 BG					Edward J. Murphy 459 BG		
Myrl Geminani 463 BG					W. Calvin Phillips 456 BG		
Ed Gilhooley 460 BG					A.C.E. Shepherd 483 BG		
Orie L. Graves 450 BG					Charles H. Smith 483 BG		
Charles R. Hall 22 BW					William D. Tatler 2 BG		
Charles A. Harford 484 BG					Clair V. Troup 450 BG		
Henry B. Hewett 484 BG					Hilliard Volin 99 BG		

# OUR HONOR ROLL

## Ground and Support Crews



## WE SALUTE YOU



We depart from the normal format of this section to include a special salute to our unsung and too often forgotten heroes as excerpted from Melvin McGuire's book: "Most of the true heroes in Italy were the ground and support crews. These were the flyers' heroes. They labored twenty-four hours a day to keep our planes in the air.

They fought their battles not against the enemy but against time, equipment, and the elements. The war was physically and emotionally hard for them - and long. Ground crews were not rotated after a number of missions like the flight crews. Most had started with the Group in North Africa and remained there for the duration of the war. They lived and worked in extremely rough conditions. They never had adequate personnel, parts, or equipment and very few niceties of life. They worked outdoors with no hangers or shelter from the weather.

The pressure was especially hard on our mechanics and other ground crew. They knew if they made a mistake, planes could be lost - lives could be lost. Our bomber was crewed by ten men who were totally dependent on the ground crew. So, they gave it everything they had to ensure that their crew had the best they could give - and always lived with the fear that a mistake could cost lives.

I don't know when they slept. Their job started when the

airplanes returned from the daily missions. When you landed, generally the first person you saw was the Crew Chief. Very quietly he asked, 'How was it? Did everything work well? Is there anything wrong? Did the shrapnel knock out anything important?' They began their work while the aircrews de-briefed. While the aircrews ate supper and went to their tents or prepared for the next mission, the ground crews worked. They worked throughout the night. By midnight, asleep in our tents, we could hear the sounds of engines being run up and tested.

While the mechanics patched the holes and worked on the engines, the armorers and technical crews were also hard at it. The armorers loaded the bombs which was extremely hard and physically dangerous work. You could tell the armorers - they generally had fingers and toes missing or bandaged feet and hands - yet they worked through the night and the cold and the rain!"

These were special people and too often forgotten heroes. All of us salute them for a job well done!

By the determination, outstanding professional skill, and devotion to duty of our ground and support crews, the Fifteenth Air Force was able to render an invaluable contribution to the Allied war effort, thereby reflecting great credit on itself and the armed forces of the United States.

# MAIL CALL ★ MAIL CALL ★ MAIL CALL

Dear Ben:

I wrote earlier about the use of the Phonedisc CD's in locating "lost souls" (Vol VIII, No. 1). I have purchased my own set of these CD's and would be glad to look up names, addresses, and phone numbers for anyone who would find this useful. You can publish this if you wish. So long as I am not deluged with requests there should be no problem. I'll be glad to do it.

**Paul S. Kuhns Jr. (464 BG)**

Salem, OR

*Ed's Note: While Paul did not ask, I am sure that he would appreciate a self-addressed & stamped return envelope if you respond to his generous offer.*

Ben:

In scorn of the life membership appeal, I mail my yearly dues with the hope that I can send you 7½ more years worth. Although it is 10:30 a.m., I pour myself a vodka tonic and grateful that it is not "Chelly Brandy" - write the dues check, reflect on my past associates, dead & living, and offer thanks that I was a part, and still am, of the 15th Air Force!

**Don Ruttenbur (465 BG)**

Atlanta, GA

Dear Col Franklin:

Thank you for your letter and info on the 15th Air Force Association. Am enclosing my membership application.

**George R. Pynn (450 BG)**

McMinnville, OR

Ben:

I believe the photo on page 18 of the Sortie of "B-24s over Budapest" is actually a photo of B-17s. I enjoy the Sortie and I hope to make a reunion sometime. I am sending my dues and a memorial donation.

**J. Irvin Davis (99 BG)**

Spearman, TX 79081

Dear Ben:

I received my copy of Sortie and as usual, I found it very interesting from front to back. I was a B-17 pilot with the 99 BG, 349 BS at Foggia, Italy. One photo on page 18 seems to be identified incorrectly (B-24s Over Budapest). I obtained one of the original photos and there were four B-17s. The dent in the leading edge of the right horizontal stabilizer is the clue. I wonder how many old 15th AF vets noticed?!

**Phil Newman (99 BG)**

Reidsville, NC

*Ed's Note: We received more letters pointing out this error than for any other mistake in our 13 year history.*

*We were testing your attention to detail as you approach "middle age" - you all passed! Actually, the caption was correct and the photo was wrong. We have run the correct photo on page 18 in this issue.*

Dear Colonel Franklin:

Thank you for your sympathy and your concern. Glenn died a week ago on May 20. It is a sad time for us all. Glenn was very proud of the time he spent in the Air Force and kept in touch with his many friends from his days in Italy. I was not able to pass on your message to Glenn but I do thank you for your kind words.

**Eleanor Cooter (454 BG)**

San Diego, CA

Dear Ben:

Enclosed is a donation for the Memorial Fund. Our 50th anniversary reunion in Norfolk was outstanding, but the death of Col Hugh Graff created quite a void in our ranks. My son Greg is stationed at Nellis AFB. He's now a Colonel but says I don't have to call him "Sir"! I hope your health is still improving.

**Ed Riggs (455 BG)**

Tulsa, OK

Dear Col Franklin:

I greatly appreciate the fine work you fellows are doing to keep the 15th Air Force memory alive. Thought you might like to have the enclosed news article of one of the finest aircraft that flew in WW II. It was assigned to the 454 BG at Cerignola, Italy. According to the 454th history (Flight of the Liberators), this plane flew 133 missions, the most flown by any aircraft in the Group. It would be of great interest to know if any other B-24 or B-17 flew a greater number of missions. Perhaps the readers of Sortie would provide me with info. Keep up the good work. I always love to see Sortie arrive.

**John H. Monsees (454 BG)**

Reidsville, NC

Dear Ben:

Still proud to be a member and I thank God that the 15th Air Force is part of my heritage.

**Steve Frazier Jr. (97 BW)**

Honolulu, HI

Dear Ben:

We missed you at our last reunion. Hope you are doing OK health-wise. Good luck on your Memorial Fund drive. I hope you get a good response from the 460th.

**George Bishop (460 BG)**

Mesa, AZ

# MAIL CALL ★ MAIL CALL ★ MAIL CALL

Dear Ben:

The beauty of your words kindled hope and joy deep within our hearts. Kent was proud of serving his country and proud of his comrades that served by his side. We look forward to joining you at reunions.

**Mrs. Kent E. Jones (459 BG)**

Saratoga Springs, NY

Dear Mr. Franklin:

The application and other items you sent were greatly appreciated. I am enclosing my annual dues. My overseas tour was with the 465 BG, 780 BS from July 1944 until June 1945 when we returned our aircraft to the States. Your letter was very inspiring.

**L. Bernie Jones (465 BG)**

Santa Fe, NM

Dear Colonel Ben:

Thank you for your kind letter. I am honored to be a Korean Veteran of the 92 BG, 327 BS of the 15th AF stationed at Spokane and Fairchild AFB prior to and during the Korean War. I will support you as much as I can and agree with your comments in your letter. Take heart in knowing that my son and his son have been instilled with the values of self-sacrifice and devotion to our country. Enclosed check is payment for my life membership. God bless you and your family.

**Paul J. Kelly Jr. (92 BG)**

Warminster, PA

Dear Ben:

Thanks a million for use of the photo - it came out great. Enclosed is a donation for a good cause, the Fifteenth AFA Memorial Fund.

**Jim Althoff (465 BG)**

Atherton, CA

Dear Ben:

Your letter to the Symposium was read by me, simultaneously translated into Romanian, and received with applause from the 200 or so Romanian WW II veterans, historians, and civilians. I had a wonderful visit.

**Benedict Yedlin (449 BG)**

Princeton, NJ

Dear Ben:

I know I speak for all the members of the 455th in thanking you for the war stories about our Group in the Sortie: the latest being about the bravery of Capt Harold F. Schuknecht, our 741st flight surgeon, who risked his life to save the pilot of a burning B-24. Dr Schuknecht became a noted ENT specialist after the

war and is highly regarded by his contemporaries throughout the world. We all appreciate the great job you are doing and enjoy reading the Sortie.

**Al Asch (455 BG)**

Rockville, MD

Dear Ben:

Well!!! Phonedisc does work. I finally found someone who had a computer with Phonedisc and as a result, found our ball turret gunner - Harold Barley. I still haven't found our nav, Ralph R. Hollibaugh. Evidently he doesn't have a phone. Look forward to the Sortie.

**Golden Nathan Jones (465 BG)**

Amarillo, TX

Dear Ben:

Nice to see you feeling better. Look forward to Sortie - great reading. The memorial donation is for Ray Klotz, my navigator. He was KIA on his 33rd mission. We would have been close friends today if he had lived.

**Ken Sheridan (455 BG)**

Merrillville, IN

Dear Ben:

We appreciate the material you sent and have already cut out articles that document Escape and Evasion of 15th AF men. Congratulations for the fine work you are doing on the 15th AF Memorial. We believe it requires the continued effort of groups like yours to keep the facts alive so young people can learn about the sacrifices made for them. Keep up the good work.

**Clayton David (AF Escape & Evasion Society)**

Hannibal, MO

Dear Sir:

I served in the 15th AF from May to December 1944 as a navigator 'Mickey operator'. I was initially assigned to the 454 BG, 739 BS but soon transferred to the 455 BG, 743 BS. As a 'Mickey operator' I also flew with the 456 BG and the 459 BG when they led the 304 Wing. I would appreciate info on joining.

**Roderick W. Clarke (454 BG & 455 BG)**

Alexandria, VA

Dear Ben:

I would like to enroll a "Mickey Man" who lived in our tent. These guys only flew with lead crews. He is Robert V. Casey. He did not make the AF a career but we loved him dearly. You are doing a great job under what must be trying circumstances. Thanks for your good work and we pray for your continued healing.

**Charles L. Brown (450 BG)**

Bedford, TX

# OUR SORTIE

4 FEB 1945 SORTIE

## 376TH FLIES 400TH

Attacking targets in southern Austria, the 376th Liberator Bombardment Group flew its 400th combat mission this week. Originally destined for operations in the Asiatic theater, the 376th has earned three Distinguished Unit citations since it entered combat in June 1942. On its initial mission, it bombed the Ploesti oil fields from high altitude for the first effort by American heavy bombers against targets in Europe. In a later mission to Ploesti, the famed low level attack of August 1943, the group earned a unit citation.

Entering the theater, the group was halted in Egypt and ordered to give aid to the British Eighth Army, then making a supreme effort to check the attacks of the Afrika Corps on Cairo and the Suez. In this role, the 376th struck at Axis targets from Tobruk to Tunis. For outstanding efficiency in these attacks, it was awarded its first unit citation. Leading other groups, it was the first Air Force unit to be based in Africa, the first to be based in continental Europe, the first to attack the Italian fleet, and the first to bomb enemy targets in Greece and Crete. The outstanding bombing attack on the oil refineries at Bratislava, Czechoslovakia in June 1944 won the group its third unit citation.

## NOTHING COULD BE "FINAH"

The GI's of the Fifteenth Air Force selected Dinah Shore as the outstanding radio singer in a "Sweetheart" contest conducted by the Air Force Expeditionary Station. Closely following Dinah was torchy Billie Holliday. One unit cast their votes in unison for Vera Lynn, although the station has only one of her records.

## HEAVY DEFENSES

The Silesian cluster of synthetic oil plants produces 25 to 30 percent of Germany's total output. As a result of the heavy Nov and Dec poundings by the Fifteenth, the production of these plants was cut to approximately one tenth of their capabilities. These results were achieved in the face of ever growing German defenses with forest-like flak belts, smoke screens, and increased radar installations. The Reich has made its synthetic oil plants its number one defense priority. A year ago these plants had 30 to 35 flak guns. Today there are more than 300. These plants now pack more AAA fire power than the total in the Berlin area.

## OIL SHORTAGES

The shortage of oil has sharply reduced the use of the Luftwaffe. Although it has more than 2,000 first line fighters, they are only employed when conditions are extremely favorable in an attempt to conserve gasoline. It is reported that in most German towns, supply trucks cut off their motors when entering the towns and are towed by horses to save gas and oil.

## GUNNER MEETS GENERAL

Standing immobile as the American came forward, the German general had lost none of his arrogance. There was nothing impressive about the sergeant. He was just a short, friendly-looking fellow, his face haggard with strain. A few minutes before, he had parachuted down from a crippled airplane while enemy bullets filled the sky about him. After landing he had crouched in No Man's Land hoping for the best. Appearing to make a decision, the general extended his hand briskly. "Jon Davis," he said in a haughty voice - "Berlin." For a moment the sergeant looked surprised, then offered his hand, speaking in the same tone of voice. "Wolfe," he said - "Cleveland."

Events had moved fast that day for SSgt Nicholas J. Wolfe. First there was the flak over the target, then a sudden burst which ripped at the plane and threatened to plunge it into a fatal spin. Over Yugoslavia Wolfe and his crewmates parachuted; targets for the rifle fire of the Germans below. "We weren't all lucky," Sergeant Wolfe said somberly. "One of our waist gunners was killed before our eyes." Yugoslavian partisans were engaging the enemy as he landed and soon both sides detached themselves and raced toward him. "There was nothing I could do but wait and pray, but it was alright. The Partisans got there first and we worked our way back to their lines with bullets whizzing over our heads all the way. "Captured just shortly before, the general was standing there perfectly cool, which was more than I could say for myself. The odd thing was he toned down considerably after that first minute and seemed ready to talk. When I asked if he thought Germany could still win the war, he shrugged and said something about hoping for the best. Apparently his outfit had been cut off for some time with no news of the outside. He knew nothing of the Allied troops fighting on German soil and seemed deeply shocked to learn of it." As a souvenir of his experiences in Yugoslavia, the sergeant has a German dagger given him by a Yugoslav Partisan.

# OUR CREWS



**461 BG Crew.** (top from left): John A. Young, Pilot; Alexander Gulis, Co-pilot; William Griggs, Eng; Willard Wisehart, Bombardier; & Robert Casey, Navigator. (Bottom from left): Warren Crook, Ball gunner; Charles Winchester, Radio; Jennings Ashton, Waist gunner; Leonard Comingore, Nose gunner; & William Hall, Tail.



**99 BG, 416 BS Crew.** (top from the left): Steve Lucas, Navigator; A.K. Baum, MO; Donald Sherman, Pilot; Ben Swift, Co-pilot; & Oscar Greenlund, Engineer. (bottom from the left): Allen Willis, Waist gunner; George Goodburn, Ball gunner; Duane Yates, Tail gunner; Richard Willis, Engineer; & Everett Cassidy, Gunner.



**450 BG, 721 BS Crew.** (top from left): Robert Ferris (dec), Pilot; Verdell S. Hanner (dec), Bombardier; John Reville (dec), Navigator; & Wesley S. Kozienka (KIA), Co-pilot. (bottom from left): James Raleigh, Nose; John McMonagle, Engineer; Charles Pappas, Ball gunner; Walter Modzelewski, Tail; Steve Hornacek (Dec), Radio; & Harold Lake (Dec), Waist.



**455 BG, 740 BS Crew.** (top from left): William R. Leonard, Ray Douglas, Harry W. Anderson, Charles E. Stark, John C. Grim, & Henry N. Lekan. (bottom from left): James Booth, Joseph B. Cadwalader, Peter C. Demitriev, & Gillis E. Ekstrom.

## Staff Sergeants Have Identical Army Careers

Two staff sergeants from neighboring towns in Missouri, Marvin Gerschen and John K. Fick, have had Army experiences so identical that even to them it is amazing.

"Getting our promotions at the same time was unusual enough," remarks Fick, "but when we both received the Air Medal at the same ceremonies recently, I was even more surprised."

After completing basic training, together, they were in the same class at the Laredo, Texas gunnery school. Almost reconciled to the fact that they would be separated upon the completion of the course, they were surprised to find that they had both been selected to remain at the school as instructors.

Later when some men were sent to the Central Instructors' School at Ft. Meyers, Florida, these two soldiers again found themselves living and studying together in a new environment. Completing the advanced work, they returned to Laredo.

### Texas To Italy

"From Texas to Italy, it's been the same story. We were together on the train to the port of embarkation, slept in the same hold and looked at the wide expanse of ocean over the same rail, and now teach gunnery in the same department over here. Can't I ever get rid of that guy?" complains Gerschen.

Duty in Italy has coincided with the similarity of their lives in the States. Living together in their winterized tent, their clothing problem is greatly simplified. Sizes of all garments being the same, they have no trouble wearing each other's uniforms. They were elevated to their present grade on the same day last fall.

EW: Fine Missions

## Veteran Plane Flies 100th

Completing her 100th combat as a part of her group's 200th mission, "Tepee Time Gal," Fifteenth Air Force Liberator, came home on three engines Sunday after an attack on the Linz, Austria railyards. During her 1000 flying hours, four air crews have completed their combat tour with her and "Tepee Time Gal" has dropped nearly 250 tons of bombs and destroyed four Nazi planes.

"Tepee Time Gal's" crew

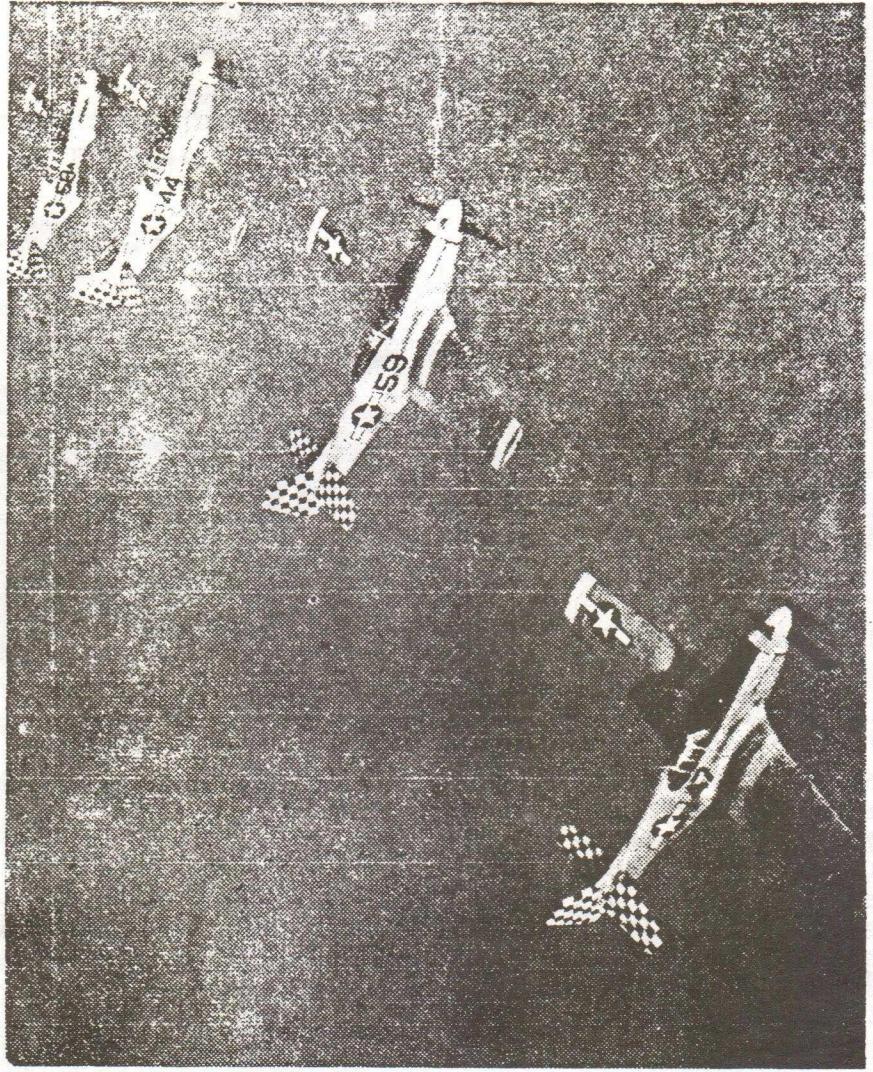
chief, Technical Sergeant Henry M. Jennings, says, "Despite her 100 missions, 'Tepee Time' can still compete with any plane on the line."

## Air-Scoop Heats P-51

Helping to solve the problem of the cold temperatures encountered by pilots at high altitudes, Staff Sergeant Harold D. Otoson, a Fifteenth Air Force crew chief, has devised a scoop to place over existing warm air ducts in P-51 Mustangs. This scoop provides a ram-air effect for the warm air coming through the coolant radiator.

After numerous pilots reported that the existing warm air duct did not provide sufficient heat at high altitudes, Sergeant Otoson introduced the modification. After installation of the scoop three times as much heat is obtained, and pilots report comfortable temperatures in the cockpit at 30,000 feet where it is often 60 degrees below zero.

## Checkertails



Flight of a 15th AF Fighter group Checkertails led by Captain Harry A. Parker in plane number 59. Captain Parker is the top-scoring American ace now flying combat in this theater. He has 11 aerial victories.

## Two Runways For Take-Off

Perhaps the only Fifteenth Air Force Fortress pilot on record to use two runways for the same take-off is First Lieutenant Meyron D. Edwards.

Taxing down the runway for a take-off on a mission to an oil refinery at Vienna, Austria a short time ago the tail wheel on Edwards' plane failed to touch

## Chuteless Gunner Walks Back To Base

Known as the man who bailed out without a parachute, Corporal James E. English Jr., B-24 tail gunner, recently returned to his Fifteenth Air Force base.

Finds Extra Chute

"We struck a powerful up-and-down draft," says English. "The shock was so terrific, I thought that we had run into

## Twin Fortresses Serve Same Group

ledge of gunnery as it is used in combat, Flick and Gerchen have flown together on five bombing missions over Europe. "All we're looking forward to now," states Sergeant Gerchen, "is to stand up together to get those discharge certificates. That day can't come too soon for either of us."

## Mechanic Recognizes His Old B-24 Engine

Thumbing through engine forms of newly requisitioned, reconditioned Pratt-Whitney engines a few days ago, Master Sergeant John S. Vnuk, Fifteenth Air Force B-24 technical inspector, noticed one which had previously been in one of his Liberators back in the States.

Two Flying Fortresses which came off the Douglas assembly lines together and thus have consecutive serial numbers flew their first mission eight days after arriving overseas, pounding the rail road yards at Linz, Austria.

Second Lieutenant Melvin E. Layne who piloted "874" on her first mission commented, "She's certainly a swell ship, with plenty of power and enough pep to stay with any formation."

Pilot Berill E. Landstrom was well pleased with "873" as well: "We brought our new plane back from her first mission without a single scratch from enemy fire or a successful and long run."

## Position: *Left* *Front* *Right* *Top* *Bottom*

Edwards already had pulled his wheels off the ground when the concussion shook the Fortress, forcing it down on another runway running parallel to the runway running parallel to the one he had just used. Before the plane could get back to the ground Edwards gave his engines the gun and continued taxiing along the second runway.

Then Edwards began climbing, circled above the airfield and fell into formation for the mission. His tail gunner, Private Andrew Sajsa, sat dejectedly in the radio room looking back at the twisted tail, wondering what good was a tail gunner without guns and wishing he had stayed in bed.

Besides ripping out the tail, the tail wheel had torn the control cables which gave Edwards a bad time on the mission.

Arriving at his base after the mission, Edwards, with the help of his co-pilot, made a fairly smooth wheel landing despite the handicap.

## Bomb Group Flies 200th

Activity on the 200th bombing mission of the Fifteenth Air Force Liberator group commanded by Colonel Horace D. Aynesworth Saturday consisted of participation in the great coordinated Allied air offensive against the Reich.

During their twelve months of operation in Italy, the group has flown over 6,000 sorties, dropping over 10,500 tons of bombs on enemy targets and destroying or damaging over 300 enemy planes.

My parachute harness was unbuckled at the time, but even while we were going into the spin, I didn't waste any time in snapping those buckles."

**Drop 6,000 Feet**

While the pilot fought at the controls, the ship dropped 6,000 feet and then straightened to level flight.

"I heard the ball gunner yelling and pointing out the left waist window," continues English. "I took one look at the tail of our ship and saw that the rudder was gone. Then I made a bee-line for the camera hatch door.

"During the spin, ammunition belts had been dislodged and I was lying on top of the door, and a place to rest.

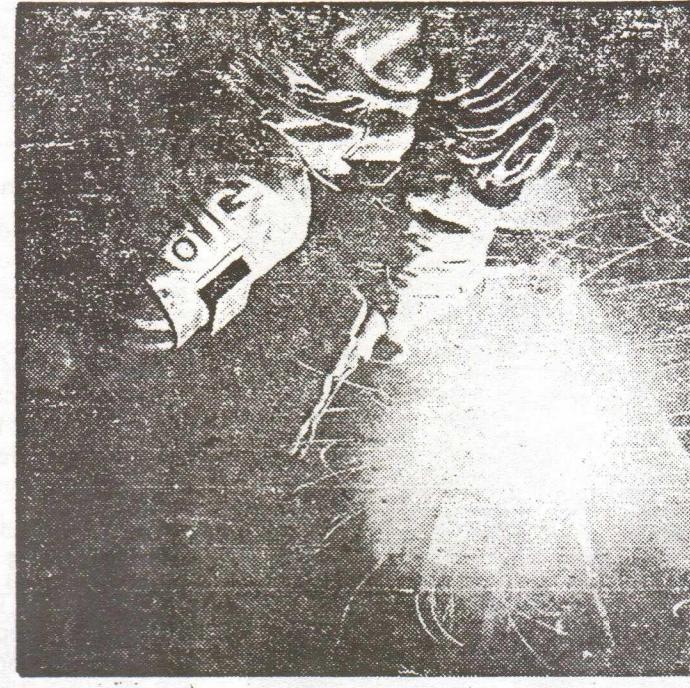
## Inventor



(Photo by Michael Smette)

Technical Sergeant Edward D. Blunck, inventor of a generator flasher assembly which saves time and manpower in preflighting twin-engine fighter planes, makes an adjustment in the junction box of a P-38.

## Man From Mars?



(Photo by Sargeant W.

This is not a man from Mars, but an Army welder doing a repair job at an ordnance company in the 15th AFSC. Welding the torch while clad in this steel helmet is Sergeant William G. Dach, who repairs everything from heavy bombers to trains and bumpers on Army vehicles.

# OUR 15TH AIR FORCE TODAY



Lt General Walt Kross

In May, the President nominated Lt General Walt Kross, our 20th commander, to become the Director of the Joint Staff in the Pentagon - the number three job behind the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. General Kross will be succeeded by Lt General Bruce Fister. General Fister currently commands the Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC), headquartered at Hurlburt Field, Florida. This is an exit interview with General Kross.

**SORTIE:** General, your time with us was short. Did you have time to unpack?

**GEN KROSS:** Barely. If General Archie Old is the Alpha, I'm the Omega! Ten months wasn't very long to make an impact - or enjoy the thrill of flying with aircrews again, but I made the most of it - setting the record for 3-star flying that still stands!

**SORTIE:** What were the key events during your tenure?

**GEN KROSS:** Clearly two historic events stand out - shared by us Fifteenth Air Force "actives" and all Fifteenth Air Force Association members. First, is the passing of our first commander, General Jimmy Doolittle, a sad and poignant day for all of us. Second, was the celebration of the 50th anniversary of our "Fighting Fifteenth". This happened at an important juncture - our headquarters had moved to Travis AFB only months earlier. The anniversary allowed us to forge an unique bond between our "new actives" in the airlift and tanker business - and the long standing members of the Fifteenth Air Force Association.

**SORTIE:** How would you best describe this "coming together"?

**GEN KROSS:** When a C-141 engine mechanic came up to me and told me how impressed he was to serve in the same numbered Air Force as the retired gunner he had just met, I knew the professional melding was underway. The gunner, an

unassuming gentleman, had been over Ploesti five times.

**SORTIE:** Six months ago you said Fifteenth Air Force continues to have a central "core" mission that will keep it in the forefront of American airpower for a long time. Is that just as true today?

**GEN KROSS:** More than ever. Global air mobility is most often the weapon of choice of our national leaders. We continue to fly in support of Bosnia Ops - with both KC-135s and C-141s. We carried US forces out of Somalia. And we remain ready for any contingency - from Korea to Kigali (Rwanda).

**SORTIE:** Do you have any final thoughts, General, as you leave the job as our Fifteenth Air Force Commander?

**GEN KROSS:** This was the best assignment anyone could have. I got to improve readiness in many ways; to advocate for long needed improvements our aircrews and support people have been wanting for years; and to improve the ways we recognize our highly talented people for their efforts. And as a bonus, I got to know many members of the Fifteenth Air Force Association - and I plan to be a member and strong supporter for life. To all of you - keep the flame alive!

**SORTIE:** General, all of us offer our heartiest congratulations on your selection as Director of the Joint Staff! The assignment is well deserved and we wish you the very best as you accept the challenge. You have been a strong supporter and an encouragement and we thank you - but most of all, you have been our friend and we shall miss you. All of us appreciate the confidence expressed by your generous support and we pledge to continue our work with renewed determination. We will most certainly "keep the flame alive". Thank you for allowing us to remain a part of the "Fighting Fifteenth". We wish you God's speed until we meet again.



Lt General Bruce Fister

# OUR WAR STORIES

## OH FOR A JEWISH MOM!

On 16 December, the **2nd Bomb Group** woke to a very heavy fog. The worst winter in fifty years had descended over the European continent - and it was a mission day. About the same time as we were boarding trucks for the flight line in Amendola, the Nazis launched a major offensive against our unsuspecting divisions in the Ardennes.

Forty miles south of Amendola at Pantanella, Donald Stern was preparing for his first mission as a tail gunner with the **465th Bomb Group**. As the crew was briefed on the information needed to survive if shot down, Don was faced with a problem that the others didn't have - he was a Jew. Fifteenth Air Force made arrangements to provide false identity for Jewish airmen because of concerns that the Germans singled them out for "special" treatment if captured. Everyone wore dog tags and they were stamped with a "P" for Protestant, "C" for Catholic, or "H" for Hebrew; or you could leave it blank. Don opted to leave his blank. His mother had also worried about the possibility of his capture. Before he left the States, she taught him the Lord's prayer and insisted he memorize it verbatim - just in case!

For this first mission, Don and his crew were assigned *Flamin' Mamie*, a well known Liberator and the pride and joy of a 781st squadron lead crew that was not flying that day. The target was Brux and the 465th was to make their bomb run about ten minutes after B-17s of the 2nd Bomb Group completed their run and cleared the target. While enroute to the target, their #3 engine turned loose and the pilots had trouble feathering and began to drop behind the formation. Since they couldn't keep up, the Group leader ordered them to turn back. To their great disappointment, they were forced to turn back from their first mission. After making the turn, #4 engine quit. While the pilots worked frantically to feather the engine, they were smothered by flak. When dumping all loose equipment failed to stop their descent, the pilot ordered them to bail out.

Don was captured by three German soldiers almost immediately after landing in an open field. He rejoined the majority of his crew at a detention center in Linz where they were questioned by professional interrogators. The German officers immediately noticed that Don's religious preference was missing from his dog tags and accused him of being a Jew. Don, knowing that he was going to be singled out for special treatment, denied being a Jew. Another officer walked into the room and checked Don's dog tags. He very smugly said, "If you aren't a Jew, you are either a Catholic or a Protestant. If you are a Catholic, say the Catechism. If you are a Protestant, say the Lord's Prayer." Without a change of expression, Don recited the Lord's Prayer for the crestfallen officer. At that point, they decided Don wasn't a Jew and he was returned to his crew. From Linz Don was

taken to a Stalag Luft where he remained until liberated at the end of the war. Don still gives thanks for a Jewish Mom.

If discovered, Don would probably have been placed in a special camp where prisoners were starved, beaten, or put in ovens. Many Jewish airmen disappeared and were never accounted for. The Germans never quit trying to find Jews among the POWs. As for their compliance with the Geneva Convention, you only have to look to the Malmedy Massacre, where the day after Don was captured, the First SS Panzer Division slaughtered 130 American infantrymen who were captured during the Battle of the Bulge.

*Condensed from an account in "Bloody Skies" (see pg 17).*

## 2 BG GUNNER COULD HIT ANYTHING

Wilbert C. Knecht, a **2nd Bomb Group** waist gunner, could hit anything - including his own plane! On 14 May 1944, he flew a mission to bomb bridges at Bolzano, Italy. When they turned in over the coast, they immediately ran into flak. Then two groups of 109's came up behind them - one group went high and the other lined up four abreast at seven o'clock level. The high group stayed in a high orbit while the level group with yellow nose spinners attacked them four at a time. After their pass, they would break into a dive and then climb back up and get in line again. As they broke off, the next bunch would start their firing pass. Wilbert was at the left waist and would follow them down after they broke off until they were out of range, then swing up in time to pick up the next bunch. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw one of them roll over and start back up beneath them. Wilbert gave him his undivided attention. The 109 never fired its guns, fell over on its back, and went into a dive. Wilbert alerted his tail gunner to watch for the fighter hitting the ground and his kill was confirmed. Next a group of P-51's came in high and tore into the 109's that had been watching the show. The group that had been attacking them hit the deck and headed for safety.

During their damage check, the tail gunner reported that the left horizontal stabilizer and elevator had been hit by 20mm. Wilbert took a quick look and realized that he had inadvertently hit it twice. The plane was flyable and they returned home safely. When they landed, the engineer officer was waiting and angrily asked for the ball and the top turret gunners. Wilbert quickly confessed to his indiscretion and the officer began "tearing him a new one". When his pilot saw what was happening, he patted Wilbert on the back and gave the engineering officer a lesson in how to really "ream anus". A couple of days later Wilbert learned that the high group of 109's was a graduating class of cadets watching how the "Abbeville Kids" did it. Wilbert never got credit for his kill.

*Courtesy: Wilbert C. Knecht (2 BG).*

# OUR WAR STORIES

## MANY LITTLE FRIENDS TO THE RESCUE

XV Fighter Command under the leadership of Brig Gen D.C. Strother was committed to the survival of escorted bombers and relished a good fight to save them.

A few moments after 10:15 on the morning of 2 April 1944, approximately 50 ME-109s, FW-190s, and MC-202s jumped a bomber mission enroute to the Walzlagewerk Ball Bearing Plant at Steyr, Austria. They attacked level in head-on passes, seemingly eager to engage the P-38 Lightnings of the **82nd Fighter Group**. Another formation of enemy fighters was stalking above the action at about 35,000 feet, evidently hoping the escort would be drawn away and allow them to attack the bombers unmolested. But not today - the 82nd dusted three of the attacking ME-109s and the rest fled. The first battle was over but another was soon to start.

Picking up the bombers at 10:45, P-47s of the **325th Fighter Group** provided escort that warded off another German attack on the bombers by 21 ME-109s, destroying three with others damaged and probably lost.

At 11:30 sixteen more enemy fighters attacked the bombers but were immediately engaged by P-38s of the **1st Fighter Group** who had assumed escort. The battle lasted thirty minutes with other enemy fighters joining the melee in an attempt to reach the bombers. But the Lightnings prevailed and eight enemy fighters went down in the futile attempt.

When the **14th Fighter Group's** P-38s picked up the bombers at noon, Jerry came in again still looking for trouble. He found it! Of the 70 to 75 enemy fighters that attacked, at least 18 never lived to fight again.

With outstanding help of many "little friends", the bombers made a successful attack on the ball bearing plant - while 32 of the Luftwaffe fighters were destroyed. Our losses - one P-38 was lost in a belly landing near its home base.

Source: "XVFC One Year Escort" & Don Bremer (XVFC)

## DON'T CALL ME SIR

My twin brother, Earl, and I flew 50 combat missions as navigators in the 722nd Bomb Squadron. We even flew one mission together and of course, several missions in different elements. We were members of the original **450th Bomb Group** and two of the few who made 50 missions. Most people do not realize that before the "Sullivan case", brothers could request to stay together. After our combat tour, we were interviewed and we suggested that it wasn't such a good idea as we felt we had flown 100 missions each - sweating one another out.

Earl's crew was shot down but he was not flying with them on that fateful day. He was flying with me in a plane off their wing when they took a direct hit. No one survived.

Although we were also hit by flak, we made it back. Earl was not with his crew because he was selected by the Colonel to be his navigator for this mission. The 450th was going to fly along our lines as a morale booster before we headed for the marshalling yards at Abessandria and we had three navigators in the lead ship to make sure we were on course - Earl, the head navigator; a "mickey" navigator; and I was the pilotage navigator flying as the nose gunner.

When someone called on the interphone and asked me, "How many minutes to the IP?" I replied, "15 minutes, sir." The reply came back, "You don't have to call me sir. This is your brother!" Like everyone else who survived, we received our Air Medals and clusters. Earl outdid me by receiving a DFC for his superb work over Ploesti on June 6 - a day the 450th Bomb Group will always remember.

Courtesy: Courtney Shanken (450 BG).

## BIG FRIEND TO THE RESCUE

On 30 June 1944, leaving Blechhammer South, a B-24 of the **460th Bomb Group** emerged from a cloud to a sickening sight - a ME-110 poised for the kill behind a solitary and badly mangled B-24. The helpless, flak-riddled bomber was trapped in the fighter pilot's gunsight 600 miles from home. It was the cat toying with the mouse. In a dramatic reversal of roles and in the spirit of the 460's Black Panther proudly emblazoned on his plane, the angered bomber pilot peeled over and dived the four-engine bomber on the unsuspecting fighter pilot who thought he was the attacker! The engrossed fighter pilot had no chance against the bomber coming out of the sun with its guns blazing. The fighter went down in flames and the crippled bomber was saved.

Source: Ted Newby (460 BG) in "The 15th Air Force Story".



# OUR WAR STORIES

## COST OF LIBERTY

The Battles for Black Gold (oil) culminated with the last mission on August 19, 1944. The Romanian Government ousted the Germans on August 23, 1944. In that span of time, 314 bombers (each with ten men) and 111 fighters were shot out of the skies over Romania. The lives of 3,251 airmen were put in jeopardy. Only 1,277 men (39%) returned - indeed, life expectancy for a bomber crew was not very high in those days.

Source: "Passage To Valhalla" by Bill Fili (450 BG).

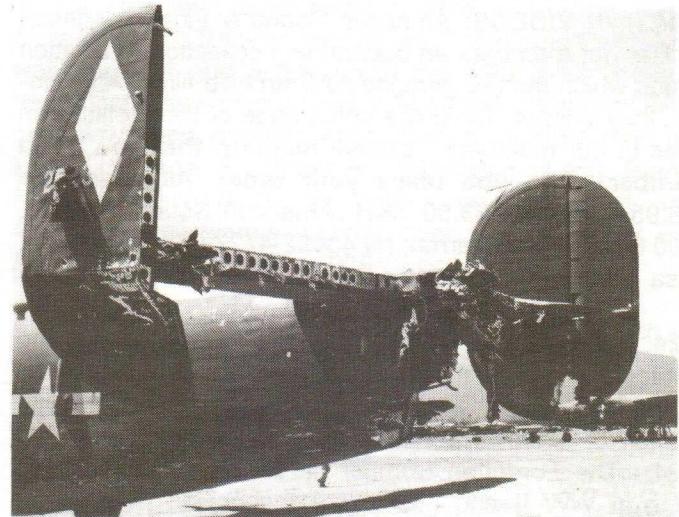
## MID-AIR

We were on a mission with our **459th Bomb Group** headed for northern Italy. I was leading a box of four 759th Bomb Squadron planes. Even before we reached Florence, several aircraft aborted so there was only one plane on my right wing. Enroute we had noticed a plane from the wing in the box ahead and above repeatedly drifting back and then powering forward. He was causing us some concern and my top turret gunner was quite uneasy. Suddenly, he drifted farther back and we all asked, "What the hell is he doing? Watch him!" Then I felt a massive shudder of our plane - the controls shook, and we started down. Art Drogemeir yelled over intercom, "We've been hit and we've lost Mike (Mike Maloney, our tail gunner)!" I didn't know how badly we were damaged and I tried to gradually slow the plane from its dive. Our navigator, Bill Pape, seemed to call almost immediately with a heading to Corsica. As we turned to the new heading, we all looked to see what had happened to the other bomber. Its number 3 and 4 engines were out and it was making a slow spin to the ground. From the damage, we knew the co-pilot had to be severely injured (actually he was dead). As we watched four or five chutes opened and then the plane crashed. We had a badly damaged tail section and a full load of bombs. What to do? On our way to Corsica, we picked a target of opportunity and unloaded our bombs. After a very gradual and careful descent, we landed safely at a B-25 base on Corsica. The British officer who met us complimented us with "a good show, eh what!"

Courtesy: Donald Stevenson (459 BG).

## LOOK NO HANDS!

In Sept 1944, my brand-new B-24 crew and I were enroute to Marrakech, North Africa for assignment with the 760th Bomb Squadron of the **460th Bomb Group**. About an hour out of the Azores we spotted a B-17 up ahead. A quick check with binoculars confirmed that it had gunners aboard who had trained with ours. Amid cries of "Let's pass 'em, Skipper," I decided to go it one better. Gaining a couple of thousand feet, we started a descent with the throttles firewalled, rapidly closing on the unsuspecting Fortress. As



Stevenson's B-24 after landing on Corsica

we drew abreast, I feathered the outboard engine adjacent to the Fort and we blithely passed them, waving to the astonished crew. I later discovered that those early props didn't always un-feather. If that had happened and we had had a real failure on another engine, we would have gone nowhere but down! Obviously, the Good Lord takes care of the young and foolish - but it was a great morale booster.

Courtesy: Nils B. Jensen (460 BG).

## BIG BIRD

Flying Fortresses sometimes have tough breaks. Fitted with four new engines and new turrets, "Biggest Bird" was being groomed for its 100th mission. **463rd Bomb Group** crew chief TSgt Guilford Jones had an eye on a new 15th Air Force record. This B-17 had been under his care since it had been assigned back in the States. During its 99 missions, the plane had had 12 engine changes and 9 wing changes. When it returned from a mission to Ploesti, it was so badly damaged that the engineering officer, Capt Amick, had decided to scrap it. On a promise he would put his ship back in flying condition, Sgt Jones was allowed to save her from the junk heap. Not only did the "Bird" fly again, but she was still leading the Group when all the other original ships had either gone down or been replaced. So outstanding was Sgt Jones' record that he was awarded the Legion of Merit. Her demise was sudden and inglorious and took place a few minutes before takeoff on what would have been her 100th mission. Without warning the landing gear collapsed. She settled to the ground while Sgt Jones watched helplessly. Her props dug through the steel landing mat and her wings folded. Sadly Sgt Jones watched while "Biggest Bird" was towed to the junk pile.

Source: "History of 463 BG" courtesy of John Boyett.

# BULLETIN BOARD

**AVIATION VIDEOS:** American Sound & Video continues to offer our members an outstanding collection of aviation videos which feature genuine AAF archive films. Additionally, they will pay 15 AFA a percentage of the profits from sales to our members - **please mention that you are a member when you place your order.** All videos are \$19.95 each plus \$3.50 S&H. American Sound & Video, 7290 Miller Drive, Warren, MI 48092-4727 (800) 869-6379. (Visa & Mastercard are accepted).

**B-24 AT WAR - PLOESTI (V-2111)** : Features exciting footage of the Ploesti missions and coverage of the planes returning to base with battle damage; plus the 1986 reunion of aircrews from the Ploesti low level raids; and B-24 - The Forgotten Bomber -its true contributions and value in WW II and its lack of recognition revealed in poignant detail. B/W & Color. 75 Minutes.

**THE B-24 STORY (V-5884):** This exciting saga takes you from Willow Run's assembly lines to the B-24's Global Operations and on to Ploesti! B/W. 74 Minutes.

**FLYING THE BOMBERS - B-17 (V-2113):** Learn to fly the B-17. Everything from pre-fit inspection, flight, & emergency operations to the induction system. B/W. 2 Hours.

**B-24 AUTHOR:** Al Lloyd has written a superb pictorial history of the B-24 titled *Liberator - America's Global Bomber*. It traces the design, development, and world-wide employment of the Liberator. Histories of operational units are presented by theater of operations and a summary of each of our B-24 Groups is included along with a concise history of 15th Air Force's major operations. The extensive photo collection is worth the purchase price. Order for \$39.95 plus \$4 S&H from Pictorial Histories Publishing, 521 West Bickford, Missoula, MT 59801.

**455 BG AUTHOR:** Bob Armstrong's forthcoming new book, *Angel On Our Wing*, is an excellent account of our aerial combat during 1944-45. It is "your" story and we highly recommend it. While only working drafts have been available to date, publication is expected soon. Info from Bob at: 2600 Littel Ave, Des Moines, IA 50321.

**460 BG LOST SOUL:** Each time I read Sortie, I think about one of my "lost" crew members. His name is Clinton Kelly Mitchell of Enid, OK. I was the pilot and he was the ball gunner on a 761 BS crew. Perhaps Sortie can reach a reader who can furnish me some information. The rest of his crew would certainly appreciate it. Six of us are still living. Gerald S. Armstrong, 20711 Clare Ave, Maple Heights, OH 44137.

**ALL ARE WELCOME:** B-17 Combat Crewmen & Wingmen, a vet's group established in 1972, is opening its membership to B-24 crews, escort pilots, and their support personnel. For a sample of their newsletter, contact B-17 Combat Crewmen, P.O. Box 482, Southgate, CA 90280.

**2 BG LOST SOULS:** I am looking for three of my crew from 429 BS: David L. Brody, Claude A. Kenney, & Duane D. Donovan. Fred A. Dantonio, 6006 Balcones Ct #30, El Paso, TX 79912-3340.

**450 BG AUTHOR:** Bill Fili has written an excellent account of his crew's experiences both in battle and as a POW in Romania. A companion of this book is a riveting 1½ hour video of actual combat. *Passage to Valhalla* may be ordered for \$18.95 plus \$2.50 postage and the video for \$16.95 plus \$2 postage from Filcon Publishers, 33 Northgate Village, Media, PA 19063. If you order both for delivery in one package, postage will be \$3.

**LOST B-29 CREWMEN:** Trying to find men that were in the 485 BG B-29s (VH) assigned to Sioux City Army Air Field and Smoky Hill Army Air Field, KS. The Group was inactivated on 4 Aug 1946. Robert S. Deeds, 117 Mel Simon Dr, Apt #1, Toledo, OH 43612-4735.

**463 BG LOST SOULS:** Looking for two members of my original 463 BG, 775 BS crew from Foggia in 1944: Arthur A. Rossler, pilot and Fredric R. Simmons, bombardier. Charles Homitsky, 4150 Steiger St, Pittsburgh, PA 15234.

**BIG FRIENDS:** Do you remember me? I flew a P-51 in Italy in 1944 where most of my missions were long range escort. On the way home, I would often pick up a straggler and fly top cover in a zig zag pattern until we reached the coast of Italy. I would then put down flaps and fly tight formation for a few minutes. Several of the crew would always wave to me from the waist gun area. My 325 FG plane had a brightly painted yellow & black checkerboard tail and a large number "81" was on the side. I would like to hear from anyone who might remember me. Lucien W. Philips, 1945 Forest Green Dr N.E., Atlanta, GA 30329.

**CASPER ORT:** Want to contact anyone who was stationed at Casper, WY 1942-45 or took their ORT on B-17s or B-24s there. James Hardee, 1864 Herman St, Atwater, CA 95301.

**LOST GUNNER:** Trying to locate John S. McGinley of Allentown, PA. He was a waist gunner of the "Miss America 44" crew. John H. Monsees, 1336 Linville Dr, Reidsville, NC 27320.

# BULLETIN BOARD

**15TH AIR FORCE WW II MEMORIAL CAP:** When Ross Strode was making arrangements for the dedication of the 15th Air Force Memorial Bench at the Air Force Museum, he had caps made to be worn by those attending the ceremonies. The caps are white and the front panel is inscribed "15th Air Force WW II" at the top, either a B-17 or B-24 in the middle, and "Africa-Italy 1943-1945" at the bottom. If there is sufficient demand, we may be able to include other aircraft. The caps are \$7 which includes postage. They may be ordered from Ross at 1525 Poplar Dr, Fairborn, OH 45324. Orders must be in batches of 24 to get this price, so be patient after submitting your order.

**449 BG LOST SOUL:** As the crew pilot in the 717 BS I was assigned to fly back to the States with a new B-24M model to retrain on B-32s for the Far East. On landing I was assigned two rail coaches full of POWs to take west to Camp Atterbury in Indiana from which I was to re-join my crew in Fargo. I had carted home some 200 precious combat photos, records, and memorabilia only to have them lost to a fire. My crew was never reassembled and since I lost all data about them in the fire, I have only been able to locate four of them. I have been looking ever since for: Murray Levitas, James Peerman, James Carr, Natalie Rueben, Leonard Deusch, & Everett Odam. Dick Asbury, 415 Bond Place, Cincinnati, OH 45206.

**2 BG AUTHOR:** *Bloody Skies* written by Melvin McGuire is a great account of "our war". You will laugh and maybe cry, but you will enjoy it to the last of its 424 pages. It is available in hard cover for \$22.95 plus \$2.25 S&H. Melvin McGuire, 1060 S. Main, Las Cruces, NM 88005. See excerpts in War Stories & Honor Roll.

**THE SWOOSE:** Robert Zetterstrom writes that The Smithsonian Institute Press has published an excellent book (1993) titled *Odyssey of the Swoose*. Since our 463 BG was known as the "Swoose Group", we are all proud of the name given to the oldest B-17 that served in WW II. The 463rd Historical Society is trying to convince Uncle Sam to speed up the restoration and display of such a fine old warrior and solicit your help. *Ed's note: Military displays are apparently not politically correct - a case in point is the difficulty in getting the Smithsonian to complete the "Enola Gay" display. Letters from concerned WW II Vets might convince them that we are proud of our heritage and want both aircraft displayed and honored.*

**LOST B-24 CREW:** I trained with a B-24 crew. We met at Clovis and trained at Pueblo. We then shipped to Langley Field where we flew air sea patrol. When we were ready to ship overseas, our crew was split up because medical

supply personnel were badly needed in Europe. Since there were two flight engineers, we flipped and I lost. So I went by boat and ended up in the 99th B-17 Group. I heard that they ended up in a B-24 Group in Italy and were shot down and possibly killed. Can a member help me locate: George F. Cheshire, Woodland, Long Island; Robert R. Dean, Bronx, NY; John Kane, Chicago, IL. The rest of the crew were shipped all over. Robert Bacher, 692 Abbe Rd N., Elyria, OH 44035.

**ALL BUT A FEW:** Thanks for your help in our search for our 449 BG crew (Pilot Leonard Waine). Everyone is now accounted for except Lt John W. Rowland, Lt Donald Phelps, and SSgt Robert Rosengren. Albert Martin, 2313 Hidden Valley Dr, Santa Rosa, CA 95404.

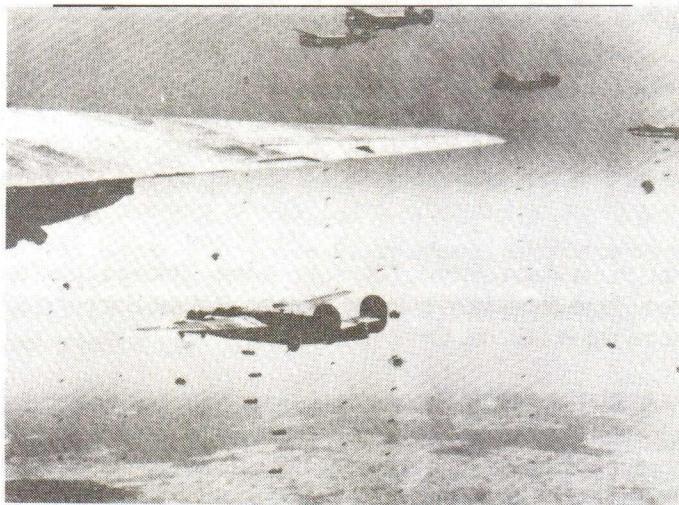
**450 BG AUTHOR:** The Honor Roll Citation to the 450th Bomb Group in the last Sortie related the story of their heroic attack on the Prufening Factory at Regensburg. Harold Cooke and his crew were shot down on that mission and Harold has written an excellent account of their last mission and his subsequent experiences as a POW. "It All Began" is uniquely illustrated with drawings he made while a POW in Stalag Luft I. Order from Harold for \$16 at 622 E. Victoria St, South Bend, IN 46614. He is touch with David Martin & Lucius McClellan, but has lost contact with the rest of his crew and would like to hear from them. He would also like any information about the other losses on this mission to Regensburg.

**RETURN TO ITALY:** Member Costa Chalas of Rainbow Travel has planned a tour to Italy for those who served in the area. The tour will depart 20 April 95 and return May 8. The tour will visit Catania, Taranto, Manduria, Grottaglie, Foggia, Naples, Pompeii, Anzio, Rome, Grosseto, Follonica, Venice, Milan, Florence, Pisa, etc. For info, write him at 64 Trapelo Rd, Cushing Square, Belmont, MA 02178.

**AIR SHOW:** The CAF will host AIRSHO 94 at the Midland Texas Airport Oct 8-9, 1994. It will feature a WW II air-power demonstration. Tickets 800-223-7469.

**LOST 483 BG DAD:** I lost my Dad (Allen J. Cain) eight years ago. He was in the 483 BG, 815 BS. We know very little of his experiences in WW II. He talked about a gunner named Bosler, a radio operator Rabbitt, and an engineer Donohoe the most, but he lost contact with them years ago. He also talked about being shot down and some kind people hiding him until he could be picked up in a clearing and returned to his base. Any information about our Dad would be appreciated. Jenny Wallace, 282 Shady Valley Rd, Hot Springs, AR 71901.

## PART XXX THE HERITAGE OF FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE



B-24s over Budapest.

### NAZI ARMOR

Since the beginning of the European war, the German army had made extensive and successful use of armored vehicles. After the debacle at Stalingrad, the Germans greatly expanded production of Panzer tanks, tank destroyers, and self-propelled guns. They turned out almost 9,000 units during the first half of 1944 and showed promise of attaining a rate of 2,500 per month by December 1944.

To Allied air commanders, the surest way to victory and to deprive the enemy of armor and heavy equipment was to destroy fuel and lubricants. However, in August, General Spaatz ordered Eighth and Fifteenth Air Forces to bomb ordnance depots and tank assembly plants whenever possible giving these targets priority second only to oil. It would be clearly impossible to keep the enemy from obtaining guns and ammunition, since the German armament industry was both huge and efficient, but it was hoped that a systematic bombardment of key factories might deprive the enemy of critically needed Panzers and self-propelled guns.

### 15TH ATTACKS PANZERS

From August to November 1944, the strategic air forces waged a rather inconclusive offensive against German ordnance depots and tank assembly plants. Eighth and the RAF launched extensive campaigns against plants in Germany and Fifteenth hit Panzer plants at St. Valentin, Steyr, and the Skoda works at Pilsen. During October, Fifteenth crews also struck the sprawling ordnance depot in Vienna and factories at Graz, Linz, and Milan.

It was clear by the end of October that the offensive was not decisively affecting the re-equipment of the German armies. Even though above ground buildings had been

destroyed, underground production of armor continued without major interruption. General Marshall visited the ETO during October and laid plans for an all-out offensive to bring the war to an early conclusion. If the German army could be forced into surrender within a few months, it mattered little how many tanks were produced in the interim. The effort was virtually abandoned by the first of November. Tanks and ordnance depots received little attention for the next three months.

### FIFTEENTH DESTROYS OIL

Since the beginning of the oil offensive the Fifteenth Air Force had dropped 27,000 tons on Nazi oil producing targets and the campaign had been more effective in terms of destruction than most Allied experts had dared to hope. Yet thousands of workers (often slave labor) worked around the clock to make repairs and the bombing campaign had to be continued without interruption, often attacking the same targets repeatedly.

During the first weeks of December, Eighth experienced bad weather and could only provide limited support to the Allied effort against oil. Fortunately, Fifteenth Air Force was able to continue a sustained effort. The Fighting Fifteenth sent approximately 450 heavy bombers against Blechhammer North, Blechhammer South, Odertal, and Floridsdorf on 2 December and bombed the synthetic plant at Moosbierbaum on the 11th. On the 12th our crews attacked Blechhammer South again, and Brux and Linz on the 16th.

### FIFTEENTH MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

On 16 December, the Germans launched their last major offensive of the war against our troops in the Ardennes - commonly referred to as the Battle of the Bulge. The enemy's Ardennes offensive was possible only by garnering every drop of fuel that could be found over a period of weeks and this effort provided only a five day supply. Due to the outstanding success of Fifteenth's oil campaign, this last desperate gamble depended for its ultimate success on the capture of Allied stores. When this failed, the enemy's limited fuel supplies were exhausted and the Panzers stopped in their tracks. Trucks were abandoned on the roads. The flow of supplies came to a halt and the offensive was lost. German soldiers, who were not captured, began the long walk home. Their leaders knew that their best efforts had ultimately failed - not because their tanks were destroyed - not because their soldiers were overrun - but because Allied strategic forces had destroyed their fuel. When the final chapter was written, the insistence of General Spaatz and General Twining on continuing the campaign against oil proved to be one of the most decisive decisions of the war. **Fifteenth Air Force - its crews and ground support personnel - made the difference!**

-To Be Continued

From: *The Army Air Forces in World War II, Vol III, Office of Air Force History*

## OUR LIFE MEMBERS . . . WE SALUTE YOU

(Continued from page 2)

Walter K. Schaffner	TSgt George J. Skiadis	L/Col Frederick Stowell	G.R. Van Natten	Maj Richard T. Wibalda
Col John S. Schifferer	L/Cpl Bryant L. Smick	Capt John E. Strang	Neale E. Van Wagner	Col Floyd E. Wikstrom
D.E. Schippers	John M. Smidl	Raymond Strautman	Fr Robert Velten	Kenneth L. Wilcox
L/Col Horst R. Schoene	<b>H.D. Smith</b>	L/Cpl Ross D. Strode	W.D. Versteegen	Col Sherman W. Wilkins
Jack C. Schoonover	<b>MSgt Richard E. Smith</b>	Kenneth E. Strong	Dr Carlos Vest	Col Richard G. Wilkinson
Capt Robert W. Schuetz	Col Robert G. Smith	Capt Millard E. Stroope	Robert F. Vest	Irvin W. Williams
Dr Harold F. Schuknecht	TSgt Dan O. Smith	Capt Donald Strutz	Forrest E. Vest	L/Col Paul R. Williams
Col Philip L. Schultz	Ted Smith	L/Col Lawrence Stumpf	Maj Allen Neal Vickrey	Fred B. Wilmot
L/Col Gerald K. Schuman	Norman W. Smith	Maj Adrian Swain	Frank E. Vodarick	L/Col Clarence F. Wilson
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L/Col John J. Scott	Garel E. Smith	Col John R. Sweeney	L/Col John F. Waguespack	Kennard Wilson
Gerald H. Seacat	L/Col Donald L. Snyder	Al Sykes	Col Eugene N. Waldner	<b>1Lt Robert I. Wilson</b>
SSgt Robert S. Seidel	L/Col Fred A. Sommer	TSgt Angelo P. Synodis	Jack B. Walker	A.R. Winter
Maj Holger A. Selling	SSgt Alex J. Sonkoly	Victor C. Tannehill	Col Robert E. Walker	L/Col James W. Wirth
CMSgt William R. Setchel	Maj Warren Sortomme	Ralph Tash	Col Jack G. Walker	Dr T. William Witalis
SSgt George A. Setser	L/Col John C. Speight	Joseph P. Tassone	2Lt Don Coin Walrod	Theodore H. Wolf
TSgt Warren E. Shaffer	Maj Reed Sprinkel	Col D. Dave Taylor	L/Col Bruce W. Waltz	SSgt William C. Wilfinger
Courtney D. Shanken	<b>1Lt Robert P. St Germain</b>	Frank Tellis	Harry R. Watkins	Capt Robert L. Wood
Irving Shapiro	Nancy Stafford	Col Austin K. Thomas	1Lt Arnold H. Watzrous	L/Col Sumner R. Woods
Maj Milburne C. Sharpe	TSgt Norman M. Steinbauer	Thomas S. Thomas	Edgar E. Weakley	Howard P. Woodyard
William B. Shea	John F. Stephen	L.C. Thompson	Norma Webb	L/Col William W. Wright
Emmett A. Shearer	L/Col John E. Stevens	Capt Edward D. Thompson	Douglas B. Webendorfer	Tom Wright
James G. Sheehan	William R. Stevenson	Eldon J. Tobias	Joseph J. Weiner	Capt John A. Young
John Shlapak	Ralph S. Stevenson	Maj Forrest T. Tolson	Col David G. Wells	1Lt Perry E. Zaback
Maj Paul J. Siler	Col Albert G. Stewart	Robert J. Tompkins	Maj Nimrod Wells	Owen R. Zachritz
L/Col John W. Simeroth	Clifton J. Stewart	Harold T. Toomey	L/Col Thomas N. Weygandt	Duane C. Zeits
Col Jerry L. Sinclair	Bert E. Stigberg	Capt George E. Tudor	Col William J. White	Robert B. Zetterstrom
Col William D. Sinclair	Clifford W. Stone	Emil P. Uhler	CMSgt Charles R. White	Richard A. Zirm
Capt Revis G. Sirmon	Thomas H. Story	Capt Robert F. Van Every	Col Rayford B. Whitley	New members in bold print

WE SALUTE OUR PATRON MEMBERS  
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**VICTOR K. MEEKER**  
**REED & RITA SPRINKEL**

WE SALUTE OUR CORPORATE MEMBERS  
**McDonnell Douglas \* Northrop**  
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## REUNIONS

**2 BG/BW:** Kansas City, MO. 7-10 Sep 95. Kemp F. Martin, 806 Oak Valley Dr, Houston, TX 77024.

**20 Air Depot Gp:** Dublin, OH. 25-28 Aug 94. Norman Lane, 3666 Lakestone Circle, Hilliard, OH 43026.

**32d Photo Recon:** Sep 94. Al Ostergaard, 1003 Tulip Lane, Ellisville, MO 63021.

**48 FS:** Orlando, FL. 16-20 Oct 94. David R. Miles, P.O. Box 51069, Jacksonville Beach, FL 32240-1069.

**301 BG/BW:** St Louis, MO. 6-9 Oct 94. 301 Vet Assoc., P.O. Box 47843, San Antonio, TX 78265.

**376 BG:** Austin, TX. 31 Aug - 4 Sep 94. William V. Barnes, 4304 Denton Circle, Waco, TX 76710-4847.

**414 BS:** St Augustine, FL. 28 Sep - 1 Oct 94. Irving S. Schumer, 441 Falconrock Ln, Agoura, CA 91301.

**429 BS:** Albuquerque, NM. 8-11 Sep 94. Sam Pachanian, 8711 La Sala Del Sur NE, Albuquerque 87111.

**450 BG:** San Diego, CA. 29 Sep - 2 Oct 94. Doid K. Raab, 5695 Ireland Rd N.E., Lancaster, OH 43130.

**454 BG:** New Orleans, LA. 30 Aug - 4 Sep 94. Ralph Branstetter, P.O. Box 678, Wheat Ridge, CO 80034.

**459 BG:** Omaha, NE. 15-18 Sep 94. Albert C. Dhaenens, 3048 Vane St, Omaha, NE 68112.

**460 BG:** Hampton, VA. 29 Sep - 4 Oct 94. Bob Cutler, 19135 US Hwy 19 A16, Clearwater, FL 34624.

**461 BG:** Hampton, VA. 12-16 Oct 94. Frank O'Bannon, P.O. Box 36600, Tucson, AZ 85740-6600.

**463 BG:** Las Vegas, NV. 12-16 Oct 94. Gene Parker, Rt 3, Box 188, New Matamoras, OH 45767.

**464 BG:** Wichita, KS. 22-25 Sep 94. Irl Mitchell, 230 S. Ashley Park, Wichita, KS 67209.

**465 BG HQ/781 BS:** Tucson, AZ. 10-13 Oct 94. Jim Althoff, 2 Mt. Vernon Lane, Atherton, CA 94027.

**484 BG:** Cruise ship "Ecstasy". 7-11 Nov 94. Bud Markel, 1122 Ysabel St, Redondo Beach, CA 90277.

**485 BG:** Memphis, TN. 14-18 Sep 94. Earl L. Bundy, 5773 Middlefield Dr, Columbus, OH 43235.

**Swiss Internees:** San Diego, CA. 27-29 Oct 94. Vic Fabiniak, 2310 E. Liberty, Vermilion, OH 44089.

**Pilot Class 44-G:** Colo Spgs, CO. 4-6 Aug 94. Charles Brown, 3018 Shady Knoll Ln, Bedford, TX 76021.



## Fifteenth Air Force Association

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SORTIE

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## FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION

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