

451st Bomb Group Newsletter No. 26 March 2025



Published for the preservation of our 451st heritage.

451st Bomb Group Association Manager
Jonathan Tudor
12605 Goldenrod Avenue
Bradenton, FL 34212

Newsletter Editor
Marsha Morris
225 4th Ave #B205
Kirkland, WA 98033

Cell: 207-730-0465 Email: b24xtrajoker@gmail.com

Email: morris225@comcast.net

MANAGER'S MESSAGE

Happy birthday Ted Rogal (101 on 1/1/25)!

This edition of the newsletter features the story behind *One Perfect Rose* (1948), excerpts from the books *Fortress Ploesti* and *The Cruel Sky*, both with 451st connections, and a look at Twisted Twigs Genealogy for military records research. It also includes a recap of the 2024 15th Army Air Force Reunion and details on the upcoming 2025 reunion.

I hope you enjoy the newsletter!

Jonathan

One Perfect Rose – A Story of Heroism and Unrequited Love

The mission of October 16, 1944 was to the Herman Goering Benzol Plant in Linz, Austria. Benzol was a synthetic fuel derived from coal to produce gasoline and oil. The 451st would lead the mission, which also included the 461st and 484th Bomb Groups. The 451st crew of 42-78683 included Albert W. Johnson (pilot), Gustave H. Meissner (co-pilot), Nathan U. Feuerstein (navigator), Rober C. Donovan (bombardier), Blaine A. Briggs (nose gunner), Valentine B. Lawless (upper turret), George F. Spheer (lower turret), Kenneth D. Nowling (right waist gunner), Lane B. Plummer (left waist gunner), Orville W. Richey (tail gunner), and Steve W. Kelley (ROM). The crew was a mixture of regular and replacement airmen. Only nine days earlier several of the replacement crew had survived a harrowing mission to the Vienna Oil Refinery in Austria, with multiple wounded on board, making an emergency landing on Vis. For more on this mission see “Plan Baker Red Force = A Misson to Vienna” in the Stories section on the 451st website <https://451st.org/default.html> or click on the following link:

<https://451st.org/Stories/Pdfs/Plan%20Baker%20Red%20Force%20=%20A%20Mission%20to%20Vienna.pdf>

The briefing and take off were described as routine. However, en route to the target the emergency door handle for the nose wheel door was accidentally brushed against releasing it into the Adriatic. Soon after the nose section of the plane was “freezing”.

Flak was described as moderate/heavy and inaccurate; there were 162 guns defending the Linz area, and overlapping guns in adjacent areas. Just before reaching the drop point the left waist gunner announced “fire in number one”, as a result of the flak. 42-78683 quickly fell out of formation. The crew hung on the interphone waiting for the bail out orders. However, according to the navigator no flame was visible, only a dark stream of oil leaving the #1 engine. Next, the plane was hit by flak in one of the fuel tanks, knocking out another engine. The plane began to rapidly lose altitude, so the crew began to throw everything loose overboard including furniture, flak suits and flak helmets. About twenty-five minutes after target time the order to jump was given. According to the MACR, ten chutes were seen to leave the ship, all floating down to the valley with the exception of one, who crashed into the side of the mountain. T/Sgt. Lawless’ hands and face were frozen, as he was saturated with gasoline. He had unselfishly put his arms in the hole in the gas tank trying to stop the leak. The temperature in the unpressurized plane at 23,000 feet would have been around -30 degrees F. Lt. Meissner put the chute on Lawless and Capt. Johnson said he left the ship just before himself, who was the last man out. Speculation was Lawless was unable to open his chute on account of his frozen hands. T/Sgt. Lawless was buried on October 20, 1944 in Cemetery Eieeners. All other crewmen were ultimately captured and held at Dulag Luft West.

And now, the rest of the story....

When Valentine Lawless joined the Army Air Force, he made plans in the event he did not return. He wrote a will bequeathing the residue of his estate to his brother Edward, for a “special purpose”. Then he wrote a letter to his brother with instructions, to be opened only in the event of his death.

Lawless directed proceeds of his estate be used to send “one perfect rose” each Saturday morning to a girl “whom I have loved very dearly”. She was never to know from whom it came. As Valentine said in his letter, “My idea is to furnish the girl with the pleasure of receiving a rose – not to have her think of me because I sent it to her”.

The letter identified the girl as Mildred Fitzpatrick of Norfolk, VA, and specified that the contents of the letter were not to be divulged. Lawless got to know Ms. Fitzpatrick when they worked together at the Southern Stevedoring Company in Norfolk, VA before he enlisted in the Army Air Corps.

The Norfolk City Court of Law and Chancery, where the will was admitted to probate, decreed that Edward was given title to all funds realized from the estate and all other property..., and that he should carry out his brothers wishes.

This story of love enduring beyond death became known when Valentine's sister Margaret took the matter to a higher court. She contended that her brothers request was not practical and wanted the money divided among his heirs.

Edward contended his brother's letter and its request is a matter of conscience, but declined to qualify as executor making his sister administratrix.

Margaret took the case to the Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals. Upholding the appeal, the court held Valentine Lawless did not sufficiently identify the letter within his will and that his instructions as to a "special purpose" were too vague. The court directed that the estate of approximately \$3,600 be distributed according to law among his sister, two brothers, and five nieces and nephews.

Sources:

Nicky U. Fox, 2002, "Extra Joker"

MACR: <https://451st.org/MACRs/451st%20MACRs/42-78683/42-78683%20Combined.pdf>

Maxwell AFB Historical Records: Reel B0595

Wilmington Daily Press Journal, August 9, 1947, Page 1

The Virginian-Pilot, April 27, 1948, Page 7

The Roanoke Times, April 27, 1948, Page 2

The Cincinnati Post, April 27, 1948, Page 17

Pittsburgh Sun Telegraph, June 20, 1948, Page 84

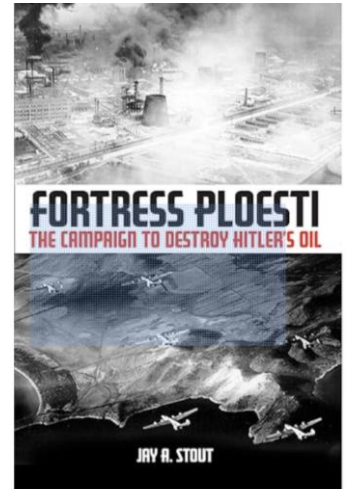
Dr. Peter W. Becker, "Luftwaffe Lovers – The Role of Synthetic Fuel in WWII Germany",
<https://luftwaffelovers.blogspot.com/2016/05/the-role-of-synthetic-fuel-in-world-war.html>

FORTRESS PLOESTI: THE CAMPAIGN TO DESTROY HITLER'S OIL by Jay A. Stout

This book was brought to our attention by Gene Jones. It provides an excellent history of the campaign from 1943-1944 to destroy the oil refinery at Ploesti, Romania. The 451st B.G. was a significant participant in that campaign.

On May 5th, 1944, the 451st B.G. was part of the mission to bomb the oil refinery at Ploesti. One of the crew on that mission flew *Devil's Duchess*.

Devil's Duchess was one of the oldest planes in the 725th Squadron. The initial crew included Bert Brown – Pilot, Hugh Hedger – Co Pilot, Richard Gould – Navigator, Joe McCaskill – Flight Engineer, Nick Kovalchik – Radio Operator, Charles Christy – Bombardier, Milford Harrison – Ball Turret Gunner, Joesph Jones – Nose Turret Gunner, C.T. Campbell – Gunner & J.A. Todd – Gunner.



On May 5th, Bert Brown's crew were on R&R on the Isle of Capri. The plane was reassigned to Paul Krueger's crew for the Ploesti mission. That crew included Paul Krueger – Pilot, Robert Barmore – Co Pilot, Charlie Joines – Top Turret Gunner, Lyle Clark – Ball Turret Gunner, George McDonald – Tail Gunner, Arch Eakins – Waist Gunner, and Maurice Kelly – Waist Gunner.

The following excerpt from Jay Stout's book details what happened to *Devil's Duchess* and the mission crew.

"Second Lieutenant Robert K. Barmore, of Verona, New Jersey, had arrived in Italy on the previous month.² As a member of the 451st Bomb Group based at Castellucia, the 23-year-old was assigned as the co-pilot aboard *Devil's Duchess* on May 5, 1944, one of seventy-one B-24s from the 47th Bomb Wing that were assigned to hit the main Ploesti marshalling yards. As the formation departed its assigned initial point and turned onto the bombing run, its crew could only barely make out the preceding formation as it punched through an unbelievably thick cloud of antiaircraft fire. A moment or two later, Barmore and the rest of the *Devil's Duchess* crew was flogging through the same barrage of flak bursts.

The B-24 crew dropped their bombs on target and the pilot, 2dLt. Paul Krueger, put the bomber into a left turn for the rally outside of the target area. It was then that the ship was caught by several bursts of flak. Immediately it became apparent that the bomber had been mortally hit, as every engine but the left outboard had to be feathered. Barmore remembers, "I knew that we were in trouble now, Paul Krueger gave me the controls, rang the emergency alarm bell—the signal to bail out—and was out of his seat fast. His oxygen had given out and he went to the radio table to get oxygen. After I took over I knew for sure that we would not get home."

Barmore's oxygen supply had also been cut off. As he ripped his mask from his face, the rest of the crew started to leave the bomber. The nose gunner bailed out almost immediately, along with the navigator and bombardier. A moment later SSgt. Charlie Joines, the engineer, stumbled down from his position in the top turret. His face and hands were covered with blood. Barmore left his seat and tended to Joines's wounds, which turned out to be largely superficial face and head cuts caused by splintered glass from the turret.

By now, with no hydraulics and all but one engine shot out, the plane was spiraling downward, out of control. Nevertheless, Lyle Clark, the ball turret gunner, made his way up to where Barmore was tending Joines. Both waist gunners had been hit and badly wounded, and they needed help. Barmore, Joines and Clark started back through the fuselage of the careening bomber. In the meantime, with the situation growing more desperate, Lieutenant Krueger bailed out through the nose wheel well.

Clark and Joines made their way through the bomb bay and jumped out through the camera hatch. Barmore, who was wearing a bulky seat pack parachute, got hung up in a bomb rack and couldn't move. Caught in the howling slipstream, he was soaked by an inflammable mixture of hydraulic fluid and fuel that spewed from torn lines. Finally he broke free. When he reached the waist position he found the tail gunner, SSgt. George McDonald, administering first aid to SSgt. Arch Eakins, one of the waist gunners. The other waist gunner, Sgt. Maurice Kelly, had been badly hit below the hips and couldn't move. McDonald was able to get Eakins out the camera hatch, and Barmore ordered McDonald to bail out as well. "I got Kelly's chute on and asked him if he could just pull the release if I pushed him out. He said he could, so I pushed him off the hatch."

With no time to lose, Barmore followed. "The ground looked awfully close when I went out, so I pulled the ripcord as soon as I felt wind in my face. When the chute opened the plane was on fire on the ground and I was certain that I would land in the fire."

Barmore landed close by, but not in the raging fireball that had been *Devil's Duchess*. He was the first one to touch down. Kelly and McDonald landed soon afterward, and he quickly made his way to where the wounded waist gunner was lying motionless. "He had nothing much left from his upper legs on down, but seemed to suffer no pain. I gave him a shot of morphine from the escape kit and tried to make him comfortable." The two men were soon joined by a group of Romanian farmers, one of whom brought up some water for Kelly. After a bit, McDonald appeared, limping from a rough parachute landing.

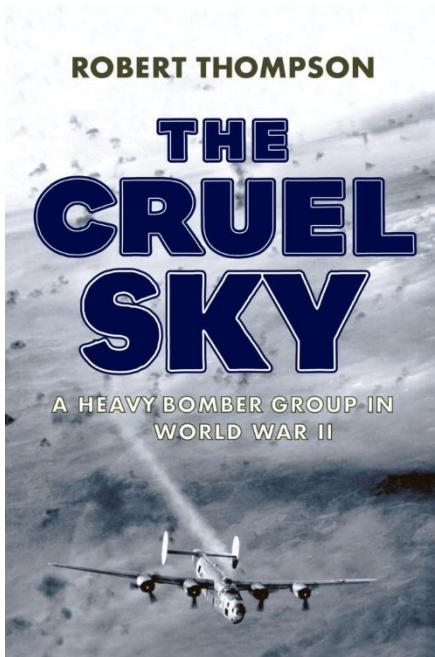
Two village policemen and some of the peasants eventually carted the three men to the local police station. Kelly was too far gone and died later in the afternoon. "A very old woman put candles in his hands, blessed him, and cried as though he was her own".

Barmore found out later that the other waist gunner, Arch Eakins, also died. He and the surviving crew members were imprisoned in a Romanian POW camp."

Footnote 2 – R.K. Barmore, Letter to author, 28 January 2002. All subsequent references to, or quotes by Barmore are derived from this source.

Book is available on Amazon – FORTRESS PLOESTI: THE CAMPAIGN TO DESTROY HITLER'S OIL – Jay A. Stout

https://www.amazon.com/Fortress-Ploesti-Campaign-Destroy-Hitlers/dp/1932033181/ref=sr_1_1?crid=1AJU5J488ALPC&dib=eyJ2IjoiMSJ9.oGD5XfGehSHeE8chax1id2qp0Jn5EzNuCPmJhsmQ1f6h6z2ycUcDAVoghefP2xBW01DnDgqErbKtsT4f3Qs3_5rSI0SEQs9OhoHhM11QtsOygdJuYjMZJPYulKVD6d.qpV-KdKiONhwTwyq_z5spylB9rGml_L_UAOAJ6T-qQs&dib_tag=se&keywords=Fortress+Ploesti&qid=1735579766&s=books&srefix=fortress+ploesti%2Cstripbooks%2C148&sr=1-1



Robert Thompson is the son of Harold Thompson, Pilot with the 451st Bomb Group. He is an historian and former career military officer, serving on B-52 bombers. He has a BA in history from Texas Tech University and a graduate degree in military studies from American Military University. He is author of a number of books, including [*Suddenly Soldiers: The 166th Infantry Regiment in World War I*](#) and [*Nine Desperate Days: America's Rainbow Division in the Aisne-Marne Offensive*](#), both of which were finalists for the Army Historical Foundation Distinguished Writing Award. He lives near St. Louis, Missouri.

Here is an excerpt from the book, which will be available in May:

The Jagdflieger of the Luftwaffe's JG 51 likely could not believe their eyes. After taking off in their Bf 109s from the new base near Niš, Yugoslavia, on the afternoon of April 5, 1944, the Jagdfliegerführer for JaFü Balkan had vectored them toward a formation of American bombers. As they approached the lumbering American planes from above and to the bombers' rear, instead of the massive column of enemy aircraft they anticipated, they saw a small group of only four B-24s below—an easy target.

JG 51 was a highly experienced fighter gruppe, having been in combat since the war's earliest days. They had fought the fighters of the RAF in the Battle of France and the Battle of Britain in 1940 before moving to combat Soviet pilots along the Eastern Front. However, in March 1944, as Romanian oil refineries, such as the largest at Ploesti, came within range of bombers from the new American Fifteenth Air Force, they were transferred to the airfield at Niš. From there, they could oppose any Fifteenth Air Force formation heading from their bases in southern Italy toward targets in Romania, particularly those headed for the oil complexes at Ploesti.

The Bf 109s and a group of Romanian IAR 80 fighters quickly organized themselves for the attack, with the Romanian pilots set to make the initial assault. The first of the IAR 80s dived from the bombers' nine o'clock position, sweeping into the formation and firing its guns before being hit and shot down by one of the bomber's nose turret gunners. Meanwhile, the JG51s Bf 109s broke to their left. They climbed about one thousand feet above the bomber formation, placing the afternoon sun at their back, complicating the enemy gunners' task. Once they were ready, the Bf 109s dived down from the B-24s' seven to eight o'clock position.

The bombers' gunners opened fire as the swiftly approaching German fighters reached a range of about five hundred yards. But their efforts to defend their planes accomplished little. The German fighters opened fire with their 7.92mm machine guns and 20mm cannon with devastating effects. Across the bomber formation, engines and wings quickly caught fire, and the bullets smashed into and through the B-24s' thin aluminum skin. In one bomber, machine gun bullets from a Bf 109 entered the cockpit, shattering the instrument panel. At the same time, another had one of its rudders blown away. It did not take long before all four bombers were on fire and began to fall from the sky. Parachutes soon appeared as desperate American aircrews abandoned

their planes, and seconds later, three of the four B-24s exploded, leaving nothing but large jagged pieces spiraling to the earth in flames.

A link to the publisher's catalog appears below. It will also be available from Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and other booksellers.

<https://www.westholmepublishing.com/book/cruel-sky-thompson/>

Twisted Twigs – Official Military Personnel Files

If you've been frustrated about trying to request military records, only to learn that they were lost in the 1973 Fire (<https://www.archives.gov/personnel-records-center/fire-1973>) there is another option available. For a \$20 deposit you can submit an order, and if records are found the pricing is as follows:

<u>Page Count</u>	<u>Cost</u>
1-20	\$20
21-40	\$35
41-60	\$50
60+	\$65

Here is more information about this service: <https://twistedtwigsgenealogy.com/product/army-air-corps-ompf-2024/>

Step 1: Use the following link to submit your order and pay the deposit.

[Army and Air Corps Official Military Personnel File \(OMPF\) for WWI/WWII/Korean War Veterans](#)

Step 2: Submit their Veteran's information using the following link:

[Submit Your WWI/WWII/Korean War Veteran's Information](#)

2024 15th Army Air Force Reunion Recap

This year's reunion was held in Tucson, AZ from October 26 – 29. 235 people registered for the event, including 1 veteran, Sanford Jones, 455 BG (pictured below).



Speakers at the reunion and pictures

Sunday Service Chris Carins: <https://youtu.be/UWuv6CrY8VQ>

Jim Peck, Landing strip in Vis in the Adriatic Sea: <https://youtu.be/olE2sGL3bm0>

John Mollison - Teaching History: <https://youtu.be/e1lq3QkQrNs>

Jerry Whiting, treatment of captured fliers: <https://youtu.be/GsmkdoQ9eJ0>

WW2 Bomb Group Bomb Group reunion in Tucson Az 2024 Opening Night:
<https://youtu.be/9Hgul6EdmA>

John Mollison Being a geek and Stories: <https://youtu.be/HqdDao3lrzY>

John Bertram WW2 in the movies: <https://youtu.be/FtDITLgrsdo>

2024 15th Army Air Force Reunion Day One: <https://youtu.be/D9mKZcrlc4E>

WW2 Bomb Group Reunion Sonora Desert Museum & Old Tucson Trip: https://youtu.be/gIsT35AU_zQ

Pima Air & Space Museum and San Xavier Del Bac: <https://youtu.be/5JMPUrP8YhQ>

WW2 Bomb Group Last Evening events: <https://youtu.be/XWq-xxqEU-k>

2025 15th Army Air Force Reunion

The 2025 Reunion is planned for September 25-28 in Rapid City, SD. Please see the link below for all information currently available:

<https://451st.org/Reunion/Reunion.html>

LAST FLYBY

Here are the death notifications since our August 2024 Newsletter:

451st Member	Squadron	Duty Position	DOD
Brockmeier, Elmer M.	726 th	Bombardier	05.01.2024
Malone, Paul E.	727 th	Co-Pilot	03.29.2024
Milnor, Joseph K.	725 th	Radio Operator/Waist Gunner	12.28.2024
Nordgren, Donald L.	727 th		05.21.2016
Pendleton, Andrew L.		Bombsight Engineer	09.26.2024
Reily, James D.	724 th	Bombardier	07.__.2016
Ryan, James W.		Pilot	04.24.2014
Schaffner, Donald R.	727 th	Pilot	02.20.2024

THANK YOU, DONORS!

Donor	In Tribute To
Jones, Gene Joseph	In memory of Joseph Jones, 725 th Squadron, Nose Turret Gunner
Rogal, Chuck	In honor of Ted Rogal, 726 th Squadron, Co-Pilot
Wainscott, Leslie T.	In memory of Capt. William M. Tuney, 725 th Squadron, Pilot

Should you desire to honor a crew mate or family member, please send the full name and duty position of the person being honored. Please send to:

451st Bomb Group
c/o Jonathan Tudor
12605 Goldenrod Avenue
Bradenton, FL 34212

OR

Zelle® to 207-730-0465

OR

Venmo to <https://account.venmo.com/u/jontudor>

FINANCIAL REPORT

The 451st Bomb Group Association does not charge annual dues. Your generous contributions help cover expenses for printing/mailling the newsletter, and for maintaining the website, 451st.org. Please let us know if an electronic version of the newsletter is acceptable in lieu of a paper copy, as that helps lower costs.

451st BG Association Financial Report

Beginning Balance August, 2024	\$11,459.52
<u>Income</u>	
Donations	\$250.00
Interest	<u>\$265.93</u>
Total Income	\$515.93
<u>Expenses</u>	
Website Security 2 years	\$311.76
August Newsletter	<u>\$504.42</u>
Total Expenses	\$816.18
 Ending Balance January, 2025	 \$11,159.27