

92ND BOMB WING WINS RIVERSIDE TROPHY



Admiring the Riverside Trophy are (left to right): actor Pat Buttram, guest speaker; Lt. Gen. John J. Murphy, Commander, Fifteenth Air Force; Lt. Gen. Archie J. Old Jr., USAF (Ret.), Commander of Fifteenth Air Force 1955-1965; Col. John R. Allen, Commander, 92nd Bombardment Wing; and Mr. Ray Tanner, Chairman, Military Affairs Committee, Greater Riverside Chambers of Commerce.

(U.S. Air Force photo by Sgt. Barry Trute)

The 92nd Bombardment Wing, located at Fairchild AFB, Washington, was awarded the Riverside Trophy on Feb. 9, during ceremonies at Raincross Square in Riverside, California.

Sponsored by the Greater Riverside Chambers of Commerce Military Affairs Committee, the Riverside Trophy annually goes to the bomber, missile, tanker, reconnaissance, or space surveillance unit selected as the most outstanding in Fifteenth Air Force. Some 25 organizations throughout the western United States, Alaska, and the Pacific compete for the trophy.

Lt. Gen. John J. Murphy, Commander of Fifteenth Air Force, and Ray Tanner, Chairman of the Greater Riverside Chambers of Commerce Military Affairs Committee, presented the trophy to Col. John R. Allen, Commander of the 92nd Bombardment Wing.

Six other awards were also presented during the ceremonies.

- Fifteenth Air Force Outstanding Bombardment Wing: 92nd Bombardment Wing, Fairchild AFB, Washington.
- Fifteenth Air Force Outstanding Strategic Missile Wing: 341st Strategic Missile Wing, Malmstrom AFB, Montana, commanded by Col. Dennis W. Heitkamp.
- Fifteenth Air Force Outstanding Reconnaissance Wing: 6th Strategic Wing, Eielson AFB, Alaska, commanded by Col. Benjamin F. Schneider, Jr.
- Fifteenth Air Force Outstanding Air Refueling Unit: 376th Strategic Wing, Kadena Air Base, Japan, commanded by Col. Richard A. Skovgaard.
- Fifteenth Air Force Outstanding Space Surveillance and Missile Warning Unit: 16th Surveillance Squadron, Shemya Air Force Station, Western Aleutian Islands, Alaska, commanded by Lt. Col. William T. Bowers.
- Air Reserve Forces Trophy: 141st Air Refueling Wing, Fairchild AFB, Washington, commanded by Brig. Gen. Dale R. Wainwright.

REUNION NEWS

Planning for our 40th Anniversary Celebration and Reunion is on schedule. While we believe that we have laid a good foundation for a memorable time of fellowship and camaraderie, we will continue to search for ways to make it even better.

As an example, we hope to have a special exhibit of 15th Air Force history at the March Field Museum. Curator, Mr. Dick Schultz, has allocated space for this and has volunteered to assist in building the exhibit. However, the success of this endeavor is dependent upon your response with memorabilia appropriate for display.

We are also attempting to raise funds to cover the expenses of flying in the restored B-17, "Sentimental Journey." While we have a B-17 on static display at our museum, we felt that an additional one in the air would be more than worth the cost and effort. Hope that this works.

Others are engaged in discussions with North American Rockwell to secure the outstanding aerial demonstration of Bob Hoover and the Rockwell P-51 Mustang. (Continued on Page 16)

More than 400 people attended the awards dinner which has been an annual event since 1978. Guest Speaker for the evening was Gene Autrey's sidekick, Pat Buttram, humorist and star of more than 100 television shows and 70 motion pictures.

Small Talk by The Director

First, let me respond to Bob Karstensen's pounce as published in Mail Call. He is most certainly one of our strongest supporters and I agree with the thrust of his comments. We **are** in the process of a membership campaign that is already reaching large numbers in both the retired and active communities. I pledge to redouble our efforts as we work toward our Nov. reunion.

Let me also share parts of my answer to Bob as it reflects my priorities for our Association. *I am determined to do all I can to provide services and benefits to our present members . . . I feel an obligation to those of you who have supported us from the beginning to insure that you receive a fair return for your trust and support . . . I intend that we be more than a reunion organization and am trying to build a solid foundation of service to our members that will insure that we grow and realize our full potential . . . 15th Air Force Association is going to be here for the long haul and I am determined that it will be an organization that you will be proud to call your own."*

We hope that you approve of our efforts to expand the SORTIE. It is our intention to stabilize our format close to what you see in this edition, with many of the features as standards for future publications. Let us hear if you have suggestions.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The enthusiasm and momentum of the Fifteenth Air Force Association is truly inspiring. Memberships are increasing daily, life memberships have almost doubled, member response to the clearing house is voluminous, and the 40th Anniversary Celebration committees are exceedingly active.

With all these encouraging signs, we still have concern over our membership renewal rate. It is presently about 42 percent and needs to be substantially increased to insure the membership base necessary to realize our major goals. If you have not renewed for 1983, we encourage you to use the coupon on page 15. We need you.

The Board of Directors joins me in expressing our appreciation for your support in developing our Association into a true service organization.



The Sortie is published quarterly on behalf of the members of the Fifteenth Air Force Association, Box 15, March AFB, CA 92518, a non-profit organization dedicated to the furtherance of the heritage, legacy, and traditions of Fifteenth Air Force. Contributions are tax deductible.

PRESIDENT	Murray A. Bywater Brig. Gen., USAF, Ret.
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR	C.E. Ben Franklin Lt. Col., USAF, Ret.
EDITOR	Wayne Corbett Lt. Col., USAF

Gen. Fellow's comments in Mail Call are representative of the many who caught our typo on the 97th BG. I must also apologize for misspelling Col. Fairfield's name in our life member column—sorry.

Several have expressed concern that the 1983 membership cards did not reflect founder status where appropriate. This was to assist us in an *en masse* mailing with very limited help. I hope that by next year I will have the capability to separate the mailing and processing so all founder members will again have a card which indicates their status. Be assured that all founder members are properly carried on the membership rolls.

We continue to lose track of our mobile membership. Please keep us posted when you change addresses.

We need your help in underwriting the cost of our long term operations. Our goals are to publish member directories, commission a 15th Air Force Memorial to be placed at the Air Force Museum at Wright-Patterson, start a scholarship fund, acquire the data processing capability to run an effective clearing house, establish a 15th Air Force Hall of Fame to honor those who have served with exceptional distinction, expand our 40th Celebration activities, and continue improvements in our SORTIE. Since we have tax exemption status, there are a number of ways for members to financially support the Association and enjoy tax benefits—cash, gifts in kind, memorial tributes, gifts of securities, and life insurance assignment are but a few. Consider the possibilities and if you are in a position to help, please advise us.

Finally, let me recommend Mr. Robert Wood's amortized life membership plan as reported in Mail Call. We now have five members who are amortizing the cost over an annual period.

TAPS

Ben -

In memory of our comrade
who now rests in honored glory

Colonel Norman D. Janney

Our heartfelt sympathy to his family and friends.

CORPORATE MEMBERS

We salute our corporate members who share in our heritage and are committed to the service of our country and the defense of our nation.

The McDonnell Douglas Corporation
Northrop Corporation
Howell Instruments, Inc.

We recognize and acknowledge Mr. Buddy Gilman, McDonnell Douglas; Mr. Robert J. Clark, Northrop; and our life member, Mr. John Howell, Howell Instruments for outstanding support and service to the Fifteenth Air Force Association.

MUSEUM EXHIBIT

With the assistance and cooperation of Mr. Dick Schultz, curator of the March Field Museum, we are collecting memorabilia for a special exhibit of 15th Air Force history to be displayed at the museum during our reunion week. We solicit your donations and loans for this purpose. Many have already responded with material which can be displayed at the museum in November, but used now as source for copy in the Sortie. We are grateful for your generous support. Printed material will be copied for our files and unless you have specified otherwise, it will be retained until after the exhibit. If this is not satisfactory, please advise.

Robert Kelley may have said it best in a recent letter which accompanied a very generous donation of material: "... these mementoes have sustained my link to another time and have provided vivid recall of many an unforgettable moment. It is gratifying indeed to know that there is a group of individuals striving to preserve that which so many of us have cherished in memory only, for so long. Though truly sad to see them go, I hope that these mementoes of my past help make the monumental task you have undertaken soon become a reality."

- Thanks, Bob.

HAIRY HERITAGE

Captain Richardson, a member of the 759th Bomb Sq, successfully completed a slow roll while test hopping one of the B-24's on the field!

LIFE MEMBERS

We make special recognition of our life members and thank them for their support at a time when we need it the most.

Lt. Gen. James H. Doolittle
Gen. James P. Mullins
Gen. Leon W. Johnson
Gen. Jack J. Catton
Gen. Paul K. Carlton
Lt. Gen. Archie J. Old Jr.
Lt. Gen. William K. Martin
Lt. Gen. William F. Pitts
Lt. Gen. Bryan M. Shotts
Lt. Gen. John J. Murphy
Maj. Gen. John A. Brashear
Maj. Gen. Harold E. Humfeld
Brig. Gen. Murray A. Bywater
Brig. Gen. William M. Constantine
Brig. Gen. Regis F.A. Urschler
Brig. Gen. E.G. Shuler Jr.
Col. Barrie S. Davis
Col. Martin E. Plocher
Capt. Revis G. Sirmon
Col. John S. Fairfield
Lt. Col. Paul R. Schulz
SSgt. Louis E. Cook

Robert L. Wood, Jr.
Col. David G. Wells
TSgt. Ernest J. Pellington
Max A. Dosland
TSgt. Archie Piirainen
Lt. Col. John E. Fernsler
Sherwood D. Johnson
Maj. Lawrence Langlois
Maj. I.W. Boswell
Lt. Col. Alfred M. Janssen
Col. Robert E. Kimmel
Lt. Col. George R. Olds
CMSgt. Robert Nicoletti
Col. John K. Coolidge
Col. Joe G. Manyo
Maj. Robert E. Lehnher
Col. Marvin J. Gottschall
Col. I. Louis Hoffman
Henry J. Kreiensieck
Lt. Col. Joedale T. Reesing
John S. Howell
Capt. Thomas F. Hart
Col. William E. "Bill" Lewis
Lt. Col. Donald L. Snyder



Ben Franklin, Executive Director of the Fifteenth Air Force Association, inspects a B-24 on display in the March Field Museum at March AFB, California. The Liberator is one of more than two dozen aircraft in the museum that will be on display during the Fifteenth Air Force 40th Anniversary Celebration at March AFB in November 1983. (Photo by Lt. Col. Wayne Corbett).

HAIRY HERITAGE

The "Fighting Mudcat" in 53 missions, according to MSgt. John Corbin, 22, of Poughkeepsie, NY, her crew chief, "took as much of a beating as any bomber took in its lifetime." According to a record kept by Sgt. Corbin, she sustained over 500 flak holes, had seven engine changes, fuel cells replaced twice, and bomb doors three times. The automatic pilot was shot out twice while the hydraulic system suffered the same fate four times; the rudder and vertical stabilizer once. The "Mudcat" also had a flat tire landing, coming back to base on that occasion on two engines.

AN ODE TO REUNION

*It's hard to believe forty years will have passed
When we meet in November for our annual blast
We all started as strangers at the time we first met
With the uncertainties of combat none of us could forget
But it did not take long for friendships to form,
For camaraderie to flourish far above norm
We cannot forget the danger and strife
That were constant companions, nor the value of life
Nor will we forget brothers no longer here
To them we will dedicate this fortieth year
Let us also remember, lest we forget
We had many good times with many more yet
Life is too short not to live it with zest
And a visit with friends takes cares off ones chest
Since we're no longer strangers and it's fun to remember
I fervently hope to see you all in November*

Bernard Bezinover

FIRST SURGEON JOINS

Col. I. Louis Hoffman, our first headquarters surgeon, recently joined our fellowship with a life membership.



OUR HONOR ROLL WE SALUTE YOU

301st BOMB GROUP

For outstanding performance of duty in armed conflict with the enemy. On 25 Feb. 1944, Thirty-one B-17 aircraft of this group took off to participate in the bombardment of heavily defended enemy aircraft factories and production centers at Hagensburg, Germany, in one of the first coordinated attacks by Air Forces operating out of different theaters against a target deep in the industrial heart of Germany. Ten aircraft of this group were forced to turn back shortly after takeoff, seriously decreasing the fire power and the formation strength, while enroute to the target. After the rendezvous with other wing units and without the support of friendly fighter escort, the formation encountered its first opposition near Flune, Italy, where it was attacked by more than one hundred enemy fighters. These were constantly replaced by fresh enemy planes until when the group reached the target, the total strength of the attackers was estimated at over two hundred hostile fighters. Throughout the intense and vicious air battle that took place enroute to the target, the 301st Bombardment Group lost eleven aircraft. However, with grim determination and spirit, a highly successful bombing run was made through heavy and intense barrages of enemy anti-aircraft fire, causing grave damage to be inflicted on this vital enemy manufacturing center and aiding materially in its almost complete destruction. Leaving the target area, the formation was again subjected to the fury of vicious enemy fighter attacks. Gallantly fighting their way through against almost incredible odds, the gunners of this group were credited with the destruction of thirty-one enemy planes, the probable destruction of six, and the damage of at least three additional enemy fighters. Of the crews that returned, seven crew members were wounded, three killed, and of the total participants, one hundred and ten failed to return. By the professional skill and loyalty of the ground crews, together with the conspicuous gallantry, aggressive courage, combat efficiency and devotion to duty of the air crews, the 301st Bombardment Group has distinguished itself, thereby reflecting great credit upon themselves and the Armed Forces of the United States of America.

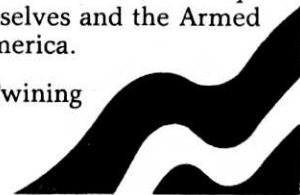
By command of Major General Twining

449th BOMB GROUP

For outstanding performance of duty in armed action against the enemy. After successive operations against Budapest, Steyr and Ploesti, this group was notified that on 4 April, 1944 it would prepare maximum

number of aircraft for a mission against Bucharest. The purpose was twofold; first, to destroy all rail facilities in the city; second, to engage and destroy the German Air Force in the air. With determination and esprit de corps ground personnel worked under the most difficult conditions to get all ships in the best mechanical state. With indefatigable efforts all personnel labored throughout the night to insure the success of the operation. On 4 April 1944, thirty-two B-24 aircraft of the 449th Bombardment Group (H), took off to fulfill the objectives of the Combined Chiefs of Staff. Due to adverse weather the planned rendezvous with other groups and wings of bombers was not successful. The 449th Bombardment Group became separated but with extraordinary gallantry continued to the target. Due to a very limited range the planned escort of fighters was unable to provide cover for this group on penetration or withdrawal. As the group entered enemy territory alone, it was attacked by approximately ninety to one hundred enemy fighters. Exhibiting extraordinary heroism the group joined battle with the enemy and thus achieved one of the objectives of the plan for the day. The interception of the enemy ships was well planned so that for a period of over one and a half hours a continuous fierce battle of immense proportions was fought. In the ensuing struggle the enemy used all types of aircraft and every known technique of aerial warfare. Rocket guns, cannon and machine gun fire, flak and aerial bombs were used by the enemy in a vicious attempt to halt this group. Despite the intense opposition, the group continued to the target and while still engaged in the air battle, skillfully dropped their bombs on the assigned target. By overcoming unusually difficult and hazardous conditions the group succeeded in inflicting tremendous damage on the Bucharest railroad facilities. The group's superior professional skill in flying excellent formation was directly responsible for their not losing more ships. As a result of the long air battle the group lost seven aircraft to enemy action. However, it more than achieved the second objective of the day's plan by being officially credited with destroying forty, probably destroying thirteen and damaging six enemy aircraft. The extraordinary heroism, professional skill and esprit de corps of the men of the 449th Bombardment Group (H), on this hazardous mission to Bucharest, and in successfully accomplishing the objectives of the day, has written a brilliant page in the history of aerial warfare, thereby reflecting great credit upon themselves and the Armed Forces of the United States of America.

By command of Major General Twining



OUR WAR STORIES

KISSES NOT BULLETS

On 29 May 1944, Major Samuel J. Brown, a Mustang pilot of the 31st Fighter Group, who was destined to become one of the leading aces of the theater, got three of the enemy in one operation.

After scoring the three victories, the sixth, seventh, and eighth, Maj. Brown wasn't too worried about the damage done to his Mustang in the day's battles until his oil line gave out while he was still five miles from home, and he was forced to bail out in a hurry. Gathering the folds of his parachute after landing, Brown had started trudging for his home base. Whistling and praying he would get back in time for chow, he walked down a dusty, ill-traveled road when, suddenly, he found himself surrounded by a crowd of jabbering Italian men and women, who had left their work in the fields and rushed to meet him.

Dropping his hand to his .45, he waited, wondering what was going to happen next. Did they wish him harm? He didn't know.

Never was a man more surprised. The women and the men too started showering the flustered pilot with kisses. He was a conquering hero. Blushing, the red-faced and quaking major struggled free only when the rescuing jeep pulled up alongside. The battle with the three planes he shot down, the major decided, wasn't as tough as the ones with the friendly paisanos.

Editors note: Extracted from XVPC. Courtesy of Ed Hodges

HAIRY HERITAGE

From the 459th Bomb Group, SSgt. William Wallace, 19, of Dundee, Wisconsin, brought back his bomber with 302 flak holes received in a Vienna barrage. Sgt. Wallace, engineer, carried oxygen to the wounded tail gunner, cranked the bomb doors shut and improvised a hoist to retract the ball turret. After returning to base, he cranked down the landing gear, kicked the nose wheel down, and then rigged up parachutes in the waist to serve as brakes. His only comment was, "I didn't go along for the ride."

It took both 2Lt. James Mellon, 22, of Pittsburg, PA, and his co-pilot, 2Lt. Robert Haas, Chicago, Ill., standing on the rudder bar, to keep their ship in even trim after three engines cut out returning from a bombing mission. Reports tell of the plane dropping from 14,000 feet to a few hundred feet in a matter of a few seconds.

Bringing her out of the steep dive, the momentum carried the plane back to an altitude of 13,000 feet where two more engines were induced to run.



P-38 Lightning of the 82nd Fighter Group. Courtesy: Col. Ed Hodges, USAF, Ret.

RESCUE

The most daring rescue in 15th AAF history was made by 2Lt. Richard T. Andrews, a fledgling 82nd Fighter Group Lightning pilot from Portland, Oregon. Capt. Richard E. Willsie, a veteran flyer of 60 missions over enemy territory, saw his left engine get shot out by heavy ground fire while his right, also hit, began streaming coolant fluid. "This is it," Willsie said to himself, and immediately called his flight that he was going in. Suddenly Andrews' voice came in over his radio: "Pick a good spot. I'm coming down after you!"

True to his word, the youthful pilot gingerly set his heavy craft down into the mushy furrows of a Romanian pasture and as near as possible to Willsie's plane. Then, while fellow pilots circled above, some at altitude against Nazi fighters, some down low to drive off Nazi trucks, the incredible drama was enacted on that square of enemy soil far behind the battle lines.

After setting fire to his plane, Willsie ran to where Lt. Andrews waited. The pilots threw out the parachute, crammed into the one cockpit, and with veteran Willsie at the controls, took off. Two and a half hours later they landed safely in Russia after a long stretch of blind flying through heavy rain.

As Andrews stepped from his plane upon return to his base in Italy, he was presented with a Silver Star by Maj. Gen. Nathan F. Twining, Commander of the 15th Air Force.

Editors Note: Extracted from XVPC, Courtesy of Ed Hodges.

OUR SORTIE

MEMBER REACTION

Reaction to renaming the Fifteenth Air Force Association Newsletter the SORTIE has been positive and enthusiastic since the name changed on Jan. 1, 1983.

Bud Markel, President of the 461st and 484th Bomb Groups Association, suggested the name SORTIE because that was the name of a Fifteenth Air Force newspaper published in Italy in 1944 and 1945.

"Congratulations on selecting SORTIE for the name of your publications," wrote Norv Gage of Elkhorn, Wisconsin. Gage enclosed a copy of a letter about the origin of the wartime SORTIE in 1944 from Col. Calvin Phillips who had the task of starting the newspaper.

Dick Sherwood of Anaheim, California, was the first to send in a copy of an original SORTIE to Association Headquarters. It was followed closely by copies from Lt. Col. Vic Metz, Arvada, Colorado; Lt. Col. John Whitley, Jr., Colorado Springs, Colorado; TSgt. William Cyr, Muskegon, Michigan; Gene Hall, Titusville, Florida and Lt. Col. Robert Kelley, Bellevue, Nebraska.

"We are very excited about getting issues of the original SORTIE," said Association Executive Director Ben Franklin. "We appreciate the issues that were donated to the Association and we also appreciate the issues that were loaned to us. We will get those loaned issues copied and returned to their owners in good shape."

Franklin said he would like to receive more issues of the original SORTIE. "In fact," he said, "we would like to reconstruct an entire set of the World War II newspaper."



These girls worked in the barber shop near the officer's club in Foggia, Italy, Spring of 1944. Courtesy: Col. Bob Coursey, USAF, Ret.



Red Cross operated Officer's Club in Foggia, Italy, Spring of 1944. Courtesy: Col. Bob Coursey, USAF, Ret.

ITALIAN ROOTS

Fifteenth Air Force's first successful wartime newspaper, the SORTIE, made its first appearance on Sunday, Dec. 24, 1944, according to the man who had the task of establishing the newspaper.

In a letter dated July 20, 1977, Col. W. Calvin Phillips, USAF (Ret.) related that when he reported for his new job as Deputy Assistant Chief of Staff, Personnel, Fifteenth Air Force, Bari, Italy, his new boss, Col. Dick Warner, told him his first job was to establish a Fifteenth Air Force newspaper.

"The idea of a paper had been discussed since Fifteenth was activated in November 1943," wrote Colonel Phillips.

"Through a major who headed British publishing operations in a fine 'requisitioned' Italian book-printing plant in Bari, I was able to schedule the printing on a weekly basis," said Colonel Phillips. "I had located a young first lieutenant former newspaperman, Arthur Anderson, to be the editor."

"We soon recognized that there would never be even a semblance of error-free printing with the Italian linotype operators . . . so we screened Fifteenth Air Force for former printers and came up with a crew which eased our error-caused headaches."

The SORTIE was distributed to the 90,000 people of the Fifteenth on a ratio of one to four or five persons.

"After a special Victory Edition on May 5, 1945, the 'Sortie' was retired with issue Number 21, Volume 1, on Sunday, May 13, 1945," said Colonel Phillips. "Its readers were by then busy being readied to go home or be redeployed to the Pacific."

NEWS FROM OUR SORTIE

Jan. 14, 1945

Maj. Gen. Nathan Twining, Commanding General of Fifteenth Air Force congratulated the 5th Bombardment Wing, "... the senior wing of our air force on the completion of two years of successful operations." ... Capt. Davis Joyce and the crew of his ditched B-17 were snatched from enemy crash boats by two RAF Walrus flying boats off the Adriatic coast of northern Italy ... John E. Pegg, a B-24 crew member, received a direct commission as a second lieutenant ... Sgt. E.E. Albright proudly displayed basketball jackets which his Adriatic Depot salvage outfit made from discarded English Army blankets.

Feb. 4, 1945

"Five Grand," the 5000th B-24 Liberator built, was returned to active flying after repair of extensive combat damage ... Corp. Cyril G. Levine, a B-24 gunner, took over for the wounded navigator and helped steer his crippled Liberator to Yugoslavia where the crew bailed out and were rescued by friendly Yugoslavians ... Bad weather caused Fifteenth Air Force to fly fewer missions in January 1945 than any month in its history ... Appearing at Fifteenth Air Force dances and parties was the popular band, the Squadronaires, featuring Corp. Jarvis Baumgardner, SSgt. Phil Worsencraft, MSgt. Jimmy Polk, Corp. Kenny Illick, Sgt. Ken Waltman, SSgt. Billy Kuby, Sgt. D.D. Jones, and Sgt. Tommy Croteau.

Mar. 4, 1945

Col. Arthur C. Agan and pilots of the First Fighter Group flying P-38s provided continuous daylight fighter cover for the principal attendees at the Big Three conference at Yalta ... Gen. H.H. Arnold congratulated Fifteenth Air Force for pushing its record breaking run of consecutive days of combat flying to 19 ... Corp. Hoyt Sargent was promoted to Sergeant Hoyt Sargent ... Col. Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., led the All-Negro Mustang Fighter Group on its 200th combat mission in Fifteenth Air Force.

Apr. 15, 1945

Fifteenth Air Force and the free world mourned the loss of President Franklin Roosevelt who died two days earlier ... Flying Fortresses and Liberators shifted briefly from strategic bombing to give air support to the new Eighth Army offensive, nicknamed Operation Plaster, in northern Italy ... Private First Class Richard W. Adams, age 17, celebrated completing two and a half years in the service and 15 months overseas ... More than 250 Italian civilians and an unannounced number of American and British servicemen were killed when a Liberty ship unloading aerial bombs exploded in Bari harbor.



Brig. Gen. William Lee, Commander, 49th Bomb Wing, 1944-45. Courtesy: Bud Markel and the 461st & 484th Bomb Groups Association.

May 8, 1945

While the ground forces were following the long, weary road to victory in Italy, the Lightning and the Mustang Fighters of Brig. General D.C. Strother's 15th Fighter Command were destroying the Luftwaffe in the Balkans, Greece, Hungary, Austria, Germany and northern Italy.

After the elimination of the enemy in the skies, the fighters attacked the enemy on the ground, knocking out his bridges, rail installations, gun positions, ammunition and fuel dumps, and retreating troops.

More than three thousand enemy planes have been destroyed in the air by the seven fighter groups of the Command since the individual groups began operations in this theater.

Since they started operations as a consolidated unit 2 April 1944, the Lightnings and Mustangs have destroyed 1488 enemy planes in the air and 865 on the ground.

Their first job was to provide escort for the 15th AAF's heavy bombers on missions to destroy the enemy's oil supply in Romania and the other Balkan countries and then knock out the enemy's war industry within the range of the 15th long range bombers.

Climax of the Lightnings' part in the Balkan campaign was on 10 June, 1944, when the P-38's dive-bombed the Romano-American oil refineries in Ploesti. With other P-38's as an escort, the Lightnings flew the longest range dive-bombing mission in the history of the Mediterranean theater. That day the First Fighter Group shot down 28 enemy planes.

In the last days of the campaign in the Mediterranean theater, the Mustangs and Lightnings turned from their long range escort missions to dive-bombing bridges in Yugoslavia, Austria, Germany, and northern Italy; to such strafing targets as supply lines, railyards, and trains. They did their job so well that since the first of the year, they destroyed more enemy locomotives than in the entire year of operations in 1944. They met and defeated the German jet planes and they hung up a remarkable maintenance record.

SORTIE

FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE

Vol. 1 No. 17 - SUNDAY, 15 APRIL 1945

PRINTED IN ITALY : FREE DISTRIBUTION

Allies Mourn Loss



The Late President Franklin D. Roosevelt

Maj. Gen. Twining's Message

The following message was broadcast by Major General Nathan F. Twining, commanding general, Fifteenth Army Air Force, on 13 April 1945:

I express the feeling of every officer, man and woman of the United States Fifteenth Army Air Force when I announce my organization's regret at the untimely death of our great leader and commander-in-chief, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt; the absence of whose wise and able

15th Air Force Flies Tactical Support To Aid Eighth Army Ground Offensive

Eighth Army Commander Declares 15th AAF's Assault On Troop Concentrations As 'Accurate And Effective'

Flying Fortresses and Liberators of the Fifteenth Army Air Force this week continued the assault against rail communications targets in northern Italy but on Monday and Tuesday shifted from strategic bombing to give air cooperation to the new Eighth Army offensive in northern Italy.

In "Operation Plaster", waves of silvery 15th AAF bombers laid fragmentation

Correspondent Notes Importance Of Austrian Oil Runs To Victory

By M. W. Fodor
Balkan Correspondent
"Chicago Sun"

P-51 Completes 70 Without A Return

Seventy missions without an early return because of engine trouble or mechanical failure were recently completed by a Fifteenth Army Air Force P-51 Mustang serviced by Staff Sergeant Langdon E. W. Forty to fifty missions about an early return is considered excellent; anything over that is very

In recent months people at home and even in this theater may have wondered why the Fifteenth Army Air Force struck so often and in such force at Austria, Vienna being one of their chief targets. With the Red Army's liberation of the city and with other portions of the country soon to be freed, these missions are now history, and it is possible for us to more accurately weigh their significance.

First of all, why did we chose

bombs on German concentrations and gun positions five thousand yards in front of the assaulting ground troops, on Monday along the Senio River and the following day along the Santerno River.

On Monday's mission, over 98.7 per cent of the 865 heavy bombers laid their lethal patterns squarely on the assigned target areas with such devastating effectiveness as to win the praise of the Eighth Army ground forces.

Major General Nathan F. Twining, commander of the 15th, received a message from the Eighth Army commander which declared, "the bombing by your forces was most accurate and effective."

To avoid possible errors in

United States, its armed forces and by all democratic peoples throughout the world. Let us, as we face the problems of the coming peace, remember the lessons which he taught us throughout the difficult years of his service to humanity.

forty-mission mark. Sergeant Wells' plane flew 18 missions on 18 consecutive days, requiring only routine maintenance during the period.

Bari Exp'osion Kills Hundreds

AFHQ—More than 250 Italian civilians and an unannounced number of American and British servicemen were killed, 1600 were injured and harbor installations and civilian buildings were damaged when a Liberty ship unloading aerial bombs exploded in Bari harbor at noon 9 April. Three other merchant ships caught fire as a result of the explosion, one of which was towed out of the harbor and beached. The fires in the other two were quickly controlled and extinguished. The cause of the explosion has not yet been ascertained.

Associated Press said that the ship blew up in a huge ball of fire and large numbers of panic-stricken Italians were injured by flying glass, doors, desks and chairs as the explosion shook the city. Several workmen in the thousand-year-old cathedral were killed when the roof collapsed. Italians carrying dead and wounded ran screaming through the downtown section.

Next of kin of all service and merchant marine casualties are being notified, and the port continues to work at full capacity. Essential repairs to the harbor installations will not take long to complete.

According to Associated Press, it was the second major catastrophe to hit Bari in two years. One thousand persons were killed, mostly United States and British seamen, in a German raid which occurred 2 December 1943.

Fifteenth Lauds Moosbierbaum Bombing By 455th Bomb Group

In a recent Fifteenth Army Air Force general order the 455th Bombardment group was cited for performance of duty in armed conflict with the enemy.

On 26 June 1944 36 Liberators, loaded with maximum tonnage, assumed the lead of the other wing groups on a mission against the Moosbierbaum oil refinery in Austria. Enroute to the target the formation was

attaced by eighty twin-engine and sixty single-engine fighters. Heedless of the seemingly overwhelming opposition, the group held its lead in the wing formation, bringing it through the enemy defenses for a highly successful bombing run. In the aerial battle to the target, 455th gunners destroyed 34 enemy fighters and held the groups losses to ten heavy bombers.



(Released by PWB through United Nations News Service)

PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT:

Yesterday was observed throughout America as a national day of mourning for President Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

The new President, Mr. Truman, in a formal proclamation said last night of Mr. Roosevelt: "He lived to see the first foundations of a free and peaceful world, to which his life was dedicated, but not to enter into that world himself. But, although his voice is silent, his faith is not extinguished."

WEST FRONT:

The optical instrument center of Jena has fallen, and General Patton's Sixth Armored Division has entered Zeitz, and was last night reported fifteen miles from Chemnitz and less than forty miles from Dresden. General Patton's forces are now nearer Dresden than Marshal Koniev's men who were last reported in the Goerlitz area, fifty miles east of the city. Other tank columns of the Third Army are thrusting into Bavaria and are less than thirty miles from the Czechoslovakian border. All German resistance has ended in Erfurt.

The threat to Berlin is hourly increasing. Ninth Army tank columns are today sweeping forward from the Elbe along the roads to the capital. Opposition is almost negligible. The Ninth Army is now on the Elbe near Stendal and it controls ten miles of the river in the Magdeburg area. American tanks are crush-

(Continued On Page Eight)

target? Vienna was Hitlerite Germany's most important industrial city. Today Vienna is the same size as Berlin. Berlin, because of the exodus of civilian and military personnel is reduced to a city of 2,200,000. Vienna now is the same size though when I left that city after Hitler's entry in 1938 the population was 1,700,000.

Formerly, the number one priority bombing target was oil. Once Germany controlled the oil of Romania, Poland and other countries. These were lost, and recent Russian advances depleted her of the Zala oil wells south of Lake Balaton, one of the richest she had outside Romania. There remained only the Austrian oil wells around Zisterdorf and Gbely which have been fully

(Continued On Page Eight)

stretches of monotonous plains south of the Po River which offered bombardiers none of the usual visual checkpoints, elaborate plans for marking the target areas were devised.

Ground Markers Used

Large ground markers, clearly visible from the air, and red smoke pots marked the way for the bombers. The Army artillery threw up a barrage which indicated the ground positions. At briefing, the crews were told to get the bomb-bay doors closed even if there were some bombs rattling around in the bay.

On both days, the bombing of the enemy positions was excellent. Twelfth Air Force mediums also participated in "Operation Plaster".

The remainder of the week the

(Continued On Page Eight)

15th Air Force Officer Relates 200 French Maquis' Experiences

Two-hundred former members of the French Maquis were taken to the States recently for combat crew training. They were under the supervision of a Fifteenth Army Air Force officer, Captain Robert B. Peck, who returned to his Liberator base.

Captain Peck says that the French were happy to be going to America for personal reasons and partly because they knew that now they would have enough to eat. During their fight against the Germans their rations had been so meager that even ordinary American rations aboard ship were so rich they could hardly eat them.

His two-hundred French were a cross-section of the entire country, though their activity had been mainly in southern France where the underground was the strongest.

Maquis Escapes To Spain

One of the Maquis, now training to become a gunner, escaped from a labor gang which wanted to put him to work in a Nazi

war plant. He escaped by train to the Spanish border.

As Spanish and German guards searched the train for stowaways he watched their legs moving by the car. They missed him. Half way to Madrid the Spanish found him, and he was put in a concentration camp.

Six months later he escaped, but after twenty days, he was captured again. He looked miserable, foot-worn and his clothes were tattered. Perhaps that's why the wife of the prison governor took pity on him. Instead of hard labor, he was sent back to the concentration area. His second escape succeeded; he reached North Africa.

Air Raids Kill French

Captain Peck learned something of the Allied bombings, too. A favorite German trick was to hold up the air raid siren until Allied bombers were over their target. First into the air raid shelters were the German soldiers and officials. Many French never made it.

MAIL CALL MAIL CALL MAIL CALL

Dear Ben:

... I approve of the name "SORTIE" as offered by my wing associate, Bud Markel ... And now that I have you to pounce upon, I'd like to, again, bring to your attention the need for an all out effort for membership. I would deem it of utmost importance that such a drive be instigated, and soon, that would offer those unfound candidates the chance to make plans for the November 10-13 gathering. The number of WW-II former members that would find an interest in the 15th AFA would surprise you, but first you have to reach them ... congratulations on the post of Executive Director and the fine job on the newsletter ... I hope my critique is accepted as constructive (I mean it to be) and that you will be in the forefront, always, with the 15th AFA. Keep 'em flying.

Robert Karstensen
Marengo, IL

Editor:

Am sending a copy of Sortie and a Mediterranean edition of Stars and Stripes ... I flew with "Allyns Irish Orphans" which was part of the 463rd Bomb or "Swoose" Group ... I plan to attend the Celebration.

Dick Sherwood
Anaheim, CA

Dear General Bywater:

Our mutual friend Frank English gave me your name and told me of the 15th AF Association. Enclosed is my check ... I served as a navigator in the 346th Sq. of the 99th BG ...

Jim Sopp
Kettering, OH

Dear General Bywater:

... I plan to become a life member as soon as I pay the IRS in April ... I'm proud to be a part of such a distinguished organization. Several of my good friends and comrades gave their lives in the service of our country as members of 15th Air Force. My membership is dedicated to their memory. God bless you.

Russell S. Bucher, MSgt., USAF, Ret.
Lancaster, PA

Gentlemen:

... In 1956 on the eve of the Suez crisis I became a member of the 22nd tankers at March. Early into the tanker tour I had a sinking feeling that I was being groomed for a permanent co-pilot seat in a KC-97 ... I was offered a position in Hq. 15th DITM, which I took - no questions asked ... My most embarrassing moment occurred while a captain and not accustomed to generals. After General Old pinned my oak leaves on he shook my hand and I responded, "Thank you, Colonel" ...

Cecil R. Hall
Oroville, CA

Dear Ben:

Enclosed are a XV Fighter Command history and a booklet on the 82nd Fighter Group ... I certainly hope that these can be of assistance in your tremendous task ahead. Will forward pictures of the "new" Italy when we return ...

Edwin S. Hodges, Colonel, USAF, Ret.
Fair Oaks, CA

Editors:

First, I want to commend you on the outstanding format of the Sortie. I was staff chaplain Hq. 15th AF 1957-1960 ... Second, I fully agree with the choice of the name Sortie for our publication. Keep 'em coming!

Henry C. Pennington, Chaplain, Colonel, USAF, Ret.
Henrietta, TX

15th AFA President:

General Autery appointed me project officer for the 3AD staff ... happy to enclose completed applications for seven new members.

Roger K. Pollock IV, Lt. Col., USAF
APO San Francisco 96334

Dear Editor:

I was a top turret engineer gunner on B-17's in WW II ... Enclosed are a few articles from the Stars and Stripes. Maybe you can use some of them. The only thing I have left from my experiences is a picture of my last crew.

John E. Wheeler
Mattoon, IL

Ben:

Howdy, I have a few things from the past that I am sending for your safe keeping. I was a pilot in the 32nd Sq. when the 301st was absorbed by the 15th. At that time we lived at and flew from a dry lake bed a few miles south of Tunis ... Enclosed is a picture of Lt. Tony Rossi ... he was among the first to become a POW from 15th ... shot down at Wiener Neustadt on 2 Nov. '43 ... During this time I spent 2 weeks in the Field Hospital at Cerignola, Italy. Although this hospital was not a 15th unit, they did take care of the casualties from our B-17 and B-24 units in that vicinity ... I know that a lot of people would like to see them represented at the 40th Celebration. I don't remember their designator, but some members undoubtedly will ...

Bob Coursey, Colonel, USAF, Ret.
Evergreen, CO

Dear Col. Franklin:

... On behalf of our organization and personally I wish to express our appreciation for your very generous donation and interest in American Ex-Prisoners of War, Inc. ... I do know Mr. Leonard E. Rose, although we have met only once, we did work together when Leonard was compiling a list of XPOWS from Stalag 4 & 6. We both were held in those camps and Leonard was organizing a reunion ...

Charles F. Miller, National Commander
La Jolla, CA

Dear Col. Franklin:

... I propose an individual member be granted one year within which to remit \$150, perhaps monthly or quarterly payments, for a life membership ... I was first member of Reserve Officers Assoc., ROA, to complete a life membership payment within one year ...

Robert L. Wood Jr.
Arlington, VA

Dear Sir:

Please note 2 cover copies of books I was able to obtain from the widow of Col. Bill Snowden, commander of the 455th BG-304 Wg. I was a tail gunner in the 756 BS, 759 Grp. ... wondered if the 15th AF Assoc. has need of such material. If so I would be glad to have photo copies made for the Assoc.

Ed Mull
Altamonte Springs, FL

Dear Ben:

Enclosed 1983 membership \$10 ... The heritage of 15th AF in Jan. Sortie is a little screwed up. The U.S. Strategic Air Forces in Europe was originally short formed as "USSAFE" as of 1/1/44. By 2/4/44 the people who worked on these things decided it should be ever after "USSTAF" ... It must have been a typo to call the 96th BG an initial veteran unit ...

Brig. Gen. Richard W. Fellows, USAF, Ret.,
San Pedro, CA

MAIL CALL MAIL CALL MAIL CALL

Dear Ben:

... Our group came out of the 12th in Tunis, and formed the 15th with Jimmy Doolittle as 1st C.O. after our move from Navarin, Algeria. With us at the time were 3 other B-17 outfits; the 2nd, 97th, and 301st. We were the nucleus of the 5th Wing ... It has always rankled those of us who were in Africa and Italy, that nobody seemed to know that we were alive—it was always the 8th that got the glory—rightfully so, up to a point, but we sure caught hell too ... Boy, was I ever glad to hear the 15th was making a comeback, not that they had gone away—heritage-wise, I mean ... The picture of me with El Diablo was taken when I got back from Yugoslavia. El Diablo was the B-17 Gen. Upthegrove flew across the Atlantic and then on his first 35 missions. It flew 100; its gunners shot down 14 German fighters, then we turned it into an executive transport and gave it to Gen. Upthegrove when he took over the B-24 wing ...

Frank H. English
Whittier, CA

Dear Sir:

I would like to make application ... I flew 24 missions with the 15th as a radio operator gunner. I was assigned to the 782 BS of the 465BG. We were shot down on March 22, 1945 over Vienna, Austria while flying group lead. Consequently almost all my contacts with former crew members or friends was lost as our crew was separated when we were taken POW.

Wendell V. Galbraith
St. Clair Shores, MI

Gentlemen:

... My tour of duty was from Aug. '44 to March '45. I was a gunner in the 776th Sqd. I have put together a short slide show to be shown at the 1984 reunion of the 464th in Nashville ... color shots of Canosa, Italy ... former base at Pantanella ... scenes of base, nose art, aerial formations ... would be happy to loan for your purposes.

Paul F. Lester
Dover, NH

Dear Ben:

The January Sortie stirred vivid memories of my only personal contact with General Twining ... I was a B-24 co-pilot, 485th BG, shot down 6/23/44 over Guirgu, Romania. Landed by chute in Bulgaria, wounded and hospitalized in Ruse, Bulgaria. Condition worsened ... never able to go to prison camp ... bombed by Americans, British, and Russians ... Russian Army moved in early Sept. ... 3 American war correspondents found us and took us by car through Russian troops to the temporary Hq. in Bucharest ... feeling of liberation first realized when Gen. Twining greeted us with fifth of Scotch. Three of us came out in this unofficial manner ...

Luke E. Terry, 1Lt., USAF, Ret.
Martinsburg, WV

Dear Ben:

I want to thank you for your fine letter and to extend to you, and all the members of the Fifteenth Air Force Association, my every good wish for success and happiness in 1983.

J.H. Doolittle, Lt. Gen., USAF, Ret.
Monterey, CA

CLEARING HOUSE CLEARING HOUSE

Editor:

... Is there a 463rd BG Assoc., or one for the 772nd, 773rd, 774th or 775th Bomb Squadrons? ... am seeking contact with members of this group ... I'd like contact with anyone who has a unit history ...

Jeff Millstein
Brooklyn, NY

Dear Sirs:

Could you find anyone who knew the Armament Chief of the original 758th BS, 459th BG by the name of "Sgt. Murphy"?

Joseph F. Maggioncalda, MSgt., USAF, Ret.
Garden City, MI

Editor:

... Over the past many years I have been out of contact with my old friends from 1944. I was with the 460th BG, 760th BS. If you have names and addresses of former members it would be interesting to get in touch again.

Clifford F. Larsson
Watertown, MA

Editor:

I am enclosing check for my 1983 membership ... I am also enclosing a list of names from the 485th BG, 830th BS ... I am hoping that somehow I may be able to locate the members of my crew. I last saw them in Italy after we were shot down ...

V. James Barison
Torrance, CA

Dear Sirs:

As a former member of the 449th BG, I am interested in contacting previous members of our "Flying Horsemen," B-24 Heavy Bomb Group.

Richard F. Downey, Lt. Col., USAF, Ret.
St. Louis, MO

Dear Sirs:

I have had luck recently contacting one of my old crew members, a Phillip T. Clark, now a member of 15th AFA. I'd like to locate some of my other members that may have joined ... 455BG, 741st BS.

Robert H. Armstrong
Des Moines, IA

Sir:

... Appreciate if you would forward my letter to Lt. Col. Milczarek since I do not have his address. We were in the same squadron during the war and would like to hear from him.

George Meurer, TSgt., USAF, Ret.
Tampa, FL

Editor:

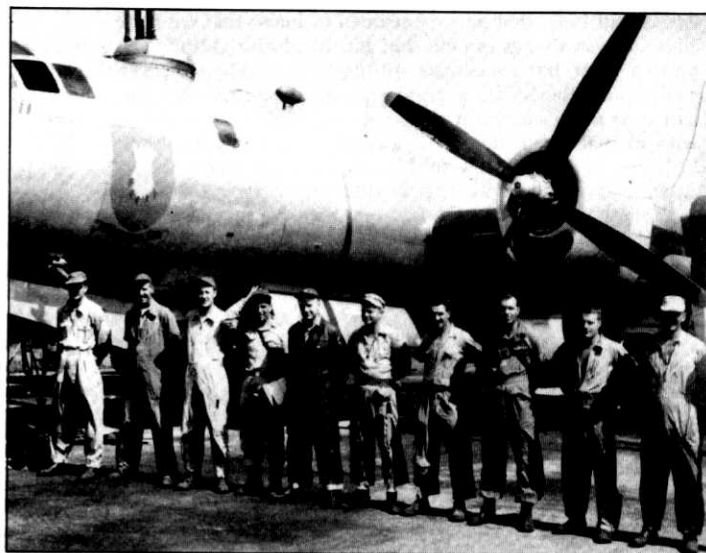
I was a member of the 449th BG, 716th BS as a tail gunner. I have lost all contact with my crew and all other members of the 716th. I hope through the 15th AFA I may run across old friends ...

George Williams
Albia, IA

OUR CREWS



Crew #74, 827th Bomb Sq, 484th Bomb Group. (From the left standing) Frank Etchberger, navigator; Tom Lensing, bombardier; Ray Camas, co-pilot; Ben Guisbond, pilot. (From the left kneeling) James Hill, nose gunner; Red Johnson, top turret gunner; Bud Markel, engineer-gunner; Glenn Lloyd, ball gunner; Bob Bradley, tail gunner; Bob Shortridge, radio operator. Photo taken in Topeka, Kansas, 1944. Courtesy: Bud Markel and the 461st & 484th Bomb Groups Association.



22nd Bomb Group crew, 1950. The only crew members identified are Maj. Dave Jones on the far left and Maj. Harold Strack, fifth from the left. Maj. Jones later served as Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff and is a member of the Fifteenth Air Force Association. Maj. Strack later served as a Brig. Gen. Courtesy: Col. Bob Coursey, USAF, Ret.



32nd Sq. crew in April 1944. Only identified crew members are: back row, second from the left is Capt. Edwin F. Harding Jr., Commander, 32nd Sq., 301st Bomb Group; back row, third from left is Capt. Robert J. Coursey, Ops Officer, 32nd Sq. Capt. Harding was 15th Air Force Comptroller 1949-1954. Courtesy: Col. Bob Coursey, USAF, Ret.



464th Bomb Group crew, Mountain Home, Idaho, Nov. 1943. (From the left standing) Lt. Sims, co-pilot; SSgt. Page, tail gunner; Lt. Lipton, navigator; SSgt. Bond, top turret & engineer; Lt. Preston, pilot; SSgt. Eddy, radio operator. (From the left kneeling) Sgt. Bucher, nose gunner; Lt. O'Connor, bombardier; Sgt. Sanford, waist gunner. Courtesy: MSgt. Russell Bucher, USAF, Ret.

15TH AIR FORCE AGAIN ANSWERS THE CALL

TAKE OFF

March Air Force Base B-29 Superforts of the 22nd Bombardment Group began taking off here last night for the Far East and probably action over Korea.

The Air Force declined to give the number of big bombers that took off or the number that will take off throughout the remainder of the week. Thirty of them reportedly are normally assigned to the group's three squadrons.

The base was swarming with newsmen, newsreel cameramen, and national magazine representatives as families lined March AFB runways last night and today to watch the take-off of their husbands, fathers, and sons.

The mood of the first section of the 22nd Bomb Group to take-off was reported grim. In keeping with the Strategic Air Command's policy of training airmen to leave at any time, crewmen had little more than a day's notice.

Capt. Harold W. Timmerman, 32, Ft. Worth, said he felt better about leaving than most pilots, although he had to leave his wife and two children in Riverside.

"I don't mind a bit myself," he said. "I like to be on the move."

"I don't think most of us really want to go," 1st Lt. Ernest Williams, a bombardier of Beaumont, said. "But we've been ready and expected it sooner or later."

Navigator William J. Rementer, a first lieutenant from Philadelphia who flew 10 missions in the European theater during the last war said "I don't like going. But it's something that has to be done."

The B-29's, the planes that battered Tokyo from afar and finally dropped an atom bomb on Hiroshima, were led on the flight from March by 32 year old Col. James V. Edmundson of Santa Barbara, Commander of the 22nd Group.

Orders directing the bombers to the Far East were announced in Washington, D.C., Monday after President Truman and top military officials canvassed the Korean situation.

Reprinted from the Riverside Daily Press, July 5, 1950. Clipping courtesy of Bob Coursey



Two 22nd Bomb Group B-29's named in honor of the Omaha connection: "SAD SAC" and "SAC MATE," Kadena Air Base, 1950. Courtesy: Col. Bob Coursey, USAF, Ret.



22nd Bomb Group B-29 named for the Mission Inn of Riverside on bombing mission over North Korea, 1950. Courtesy: Col. Bob Coursey, USAF, Ret.

LANDING

Their job in Korea done, the Ole Gray Ghost, Charlie's Wagon, and nine other Superforts of the 22nd Bomb Group are back home. And their commander says "we're ready to go again."

In the first mass flight of B-29's from the battlefield, the eleven heavy bombers thundered over the field Tuesday after a fourteen hour flight from Hawaii.

After debriefing and inspection, the grimy crewmen ran into the arms of their loved ones in an emotion packed welcome. Prayers of thanks mingled with the shouts of greeting, as the thirty-three piece band from Davis-Monthan Air Base played the Air Force Song.

Returning with the big bombers was Col. J.V. Edmundson, the group commander. With stitched eagles denoting his rank barely visible on the shoulders of his faded coveralls, the colonel declared: "Blow the whistle and we'll be ready to go again."

He said the bombers, which made their first attack July 11, dumped 5,500 tons of explosives and incendiaries in 550 sorties. They were used as attack bombers in supporting ground troops, as well as performing their usual jobs of strategic bombing, he added.

Eighty percent of his crewmen are World War II veterans. One Superfort out of the entire group of thirty planes was lost. Eleven crewmen were killed and three injured.

From a clipping donated by Bob Coursey.

PART III

THE HERITAGE OF FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE



B-24 of the 764th Sq, 461st Bomb Group, Torretta, Italy, 1945. Courtesy: Bud Markel and the 461st & 484th Bomb Groups Association.

Fifteenth Air Force flew its first combat mission from North Africa on its activation day, Nov. 1, 1943. Flying Fortress groups from the 5th Bomb Wing attacked both the La Spezia naval base in Italy and the nearby Vezzano railway bridge.

The next day the command directed its first strategic efforts against the Messerschmitt ME-109 airframe works at Wiener Neustadt, Austria, dropping 312 tons of bombs. The invaders encountered 120 to 160 enemy aircraft of which 56 were destroyed and another 27 probably were destroyed, while losing ten B-17s. This mission was considered to be the outstanding event of the initial four months of operations.

It was the intent of Pentagon planners that Headquarters Fifteenth move soon into permanent installations located in the heel of the Italian boot. On Dec. 1, 1943, the headquarters closed down officially and reopened for business the same day 475 miles closer to its assigned bombing arena across the Mediterranean at Bari, Italy.

The movement of units was phased so that no stand-down was necessary and operations continued for some time from both North African and Italian bases. On moving day, more than 100 B-17s bombed the Turin, Italy, ball bearing works and marshalling yards, and B-26s attacked bridges and railroad facilities at three locations.

On Dec. 19, 1943, Fifteenth made its first mass raid on Germany proper, attacking the Messerschmitt plant at Augsburg. On Jan. 2, 1944, air attacks began in preparation for the Anzio, Italy, landing.

The next day, Fifteenth's first commander, Maj. Gen. James H. Doolittle, was reassigned as commander of Eighth Air Force. He was succeeded by Maj. Gen. Nathan F. Twining who had served in the Pacific before his new assignment. General Twining, who years later would become Air Force Chief of Staff, remained as commander for the next 16 months.

With General Twining at the helm, 15th continued its bombing offensive in support of the Anzio operations. In the most intensive phase of this beachhead

isolation campaign, 600 sorties were flown between Jan. 16 and Jan. 22 against rail yards and transportation centers in central Italy.

The next major episode in Fifteenth's wartime history was one of the most controversial of the conflict. This was the bombing on Feb. 15, 1944, of the historic Benedictine abbey of Monte Cassino. While the strikes were requested in preparation for an assault designed to end the U.S. Fifth Army's month-long stalemate before the German's Gustav line, Lt. Gen. Ira C. Eaker did not approve of the abbey bombing, contending it would serve no useful military purpose. Whether or not the Germans used it as an outpost is still a matter of dispute, but with continued pressure from ground commanders concerned about the impeded advance up the road to Rome, Gen. Eaker finally agreed to the attacks.

(To be continued)

EDITORS NOTE: This series is an extraction from THE HERITAGE OF FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE 1943-1980, published by the Directorate of Public Affairs, Headquarters Fifteenth Air Force, March AFB, Calif.).

HAIRY HERITAGE

One of the rarest feats in flying, landing a B-24 with all four engines dead, was accomplished by Lt. Thomas Cawly Jr. of Worcester, Mass, when the plane he was piloting gave out of gas just before turning to land at its home base.

"We were at 2,500 feet when the engines cut out," stated the 459th pilot, "and I had no choice but to attempt a dead stick landing. I dove the plane in order to keep speed and pulled out just a few feet off a wheat field. After hopping a 20 foot ditch, we hit and rolled a few feet before hitting another ditch which tore off the right landing gear and the nose wheel. The ship buckled in several places but soon skidded to a stop and we all got out without a scratch."

EDITOR'S NOTE: I know that this sounds like a reunion tale, but was extracted from The Pathfinder, Feb. 27, 1945 edition. The original copy of the Pathfinder was loaned by Dr. Gordon J. Guetzlaff, Russellville, Arkansas.

"They say miracles only happen once in a life time and I guess I've had mine," stated Lt. George N. McQuire, navigator from Weehawken, NJ, after he and two other crew members had been blown out of a B-24.

After our No. 3 and 4 engines had been knocked out by flak over the target and half our wing shot off, we attempted to bail out through the escape hatch, but could not open it. We had dropped down to 5,000 feet and the next thing I remember, I was sailing out through open space. We had been blown out of the plane by a terrific explosion and still remained conscious enough to pull our rip cords and land without a scratch."

FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

PRESENT CARD NO. _____

DATE _____

NAME _____

MAILING ADDRESS _____
Number/Street City/State Zip Code☐ CHECK ENCLOSED (\$10) FOR 1983 MEMBERSHIP (TAX DEDUCTIBLE)☐ LIFE MEMBERSHIP (\$150) CHECK ENCLOSED (TAX DEDUCTIBLE)
(Make checks payable to 15th Air Force Association)

My present plans for the 40th Reunion at March AFB in November 1983:

☐ Definitely Attend ☐ Probably Attend ☐ Can't Attend ☐ UncertainMail check and renewal to: Fifteenth Air Force Association, P.O. Box 15,
March AFB, Calif. 92518

REUNION NOTICES

99th BOMB GROUP, Winrock Inn, Albuquerque, NM, May 13-15, 1983. Contact: 99th Historical Society, 2908 Aliso Drive NE, Albuquerque, NM 87110.

2nd BOMB GROUP, Menger Hotel, San Antonio, TX, Oct. 6-9, 1983. Contact: Dr. L.E. Ihle, 346 W. Mariposa St., San Antonio, TX 78212.

461st & 484th BOMB GROUPS, Williamsburg Hilton, Williamsburg, VA, June 3-5, 1983. Contact: Bud Markel, 1122 Ysabel St., Redondo Beach, CA 90277. (213) 316-3330.

97th BOMB GROUP (Eng, Africa, Italy), Henry VII Motel, St. Louis, MO, Sept. 16-17, 1983. Contact: Clarence Hammes, 15 Avilla Heights South, Alexander, AR 72002.

44th BOMB GROUP, 44th BOMB WING, 44th MISSILE WING, Rapid City, SD, May 26-29, 1983. Contact: Lt. Col. Thomas Pfeiffer, 68th Strat Missile Sq. Ellsworth AFB, SD 57706. (605) 399-2742.

AMERICAN EX-PRISONERS OF WAR, INC. Stouffers Inn on the Square, Cleveland, OH, July 20-22, 1983. Contact: American Ex-POW 1983 Convention, P.O. Box 34083, Cleveland, OH 44134.

459th BOMB GROUP, New Orleans, LA, Oct. 1983. Contact: Ed Murphy, 3711 Rue Delphine, New Orleans, LA 70114.

All personnel who were stationed at Schilling AFB, Salina, KS, Aug. 26-28, 1983. Contact: G.N. Waddell, C/O Salina Area Chamber of Commerce, P.O. Box 596, Salina, KS 67401.

The Halpro-376th Heavy Bomb Group Assoc., Daytonian Hotel, Dayton, OH, July 30-Aug. 1, 1983. Contact: Tim Holt, Box 727, Hutchinson, KS, 67501.

780th BOMB SQ. & other 465th BOMB GROUP personnel, Las Vegas, NV, Sept. 22-25, 1983. Contact: Bernard Bezinover, P.O. Box 107, Northridge, CA 91328.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Paul Ammon, Vashon, WA, wants info on a 12 page book of poems published in Italy during the war. He especially remembers "Ode to a P-38." Anyone help?

Frank English, Whittier, CA writes that the Greek Government is awarding a medal to those who flew missions to or near Greek targets during WWII. Write for info to the: Military Attache, Embassy of Greece, 2228 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20080. Note: Frank wrote them several months ago and has not heard to date.

David Klaus, Riverside, CA, wants contact with anyone who was in the 44th Bomb Wg. during the 1950's—also anyone in the 44th SMW, particularly the Titan I Sq., prior to 1970. Address: P.O. Box 5270, Riverside, CA 92517.

TARGET PLOESTI: View From The Bombsight. Leroy Newby, Webster City, IA, has written a book recounting our strikes on Ploesti. He served as a bombardier with the 460th and many of us who have read the draft manuscript, believe that he has captured the spirit of the time and the excitement (or terror) of the raids. With so little available about our WWII exploits, we commend Leroy's efforts to preserve a significant chapter of our history. Presidio Press, Aug. '83.



NCO Club Party, 461st Bomb Group, Torretta, Italy, 1944. Courtesy: Bud Markel and the 461st & 484th Bomb Groups Association.

FIFTEENTH AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION
P.O. BOX 15
MARCH AIR FORCE BASE, CA 92518



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April 1983

SORTIE

Page 16

REUNION NEWS (Continued from Page One)

Your director is working with the Air Force Audio-Visual people at Norton Air Force Base to construct a film record of our units and people over the 40 years of our history. With the kind assistance of Mr. Randy Fentress, who is one of the chiefs and fortunately, a veteran of 15th Air Force B-17 service, we are confident that these efforts will produce a movie that will rival "Gone with the Wind"!

Our Fifteenth Air Force "Band of the Golden West" will be providing a concert, dance music, and other entertainment over the course of the celebration activities.

Planning for a very excellent air show and arrangements for a massive static display of current and historic aircraft is proceeding smoothly.

A banquet, a dinner dance, reunion mixers, opportunities for unit and crew reunions, an annual membership meeting for association business, a golf tournament, briefings on current operations, opportunities for tours of So. California tourist attractions,

industrial displays, military demonstrations, memorial service, and time for tall tales are all being worked by 11 committees of active and retired members.

Our dates are firm for 10-13 November, 1983. Without the services of a convention center or large hotel, we must ask each member to make his own motel reservations by direct contact with an area motel. A list of motels with price ranges and reservation telephone numbers is included in this column. Since we are working to provide buses to shuttle between motel row and the base, we would prefer that you attempt reservations at one of the Riverside motels and use the San Bernardino motels only as a backup if Riverside fills up.

In June we intend to have a mass mailing to all members which will include a schedule by day, tourist literature, a pre-registration form, and prices of all banquet/dinner/golf options. We will confirm receipt of registration and all monies with a base pass and confirmation form.

I end with a passage from Bernard Bezinover's poem—

*Life is too short not to live it with zest
And a visit with friends takes cares off one chest
Since we're no longer strangers and it's fun to remember
I fervently hope to see you all in November*

HOTELS/MOTELS

Holiday Inn—Riverside
1200 University Ave.
Riverside, CA 92507
(714) 682-8000; SGL \$37, DBL \$45

Howard Johnson's Motor Lodge
1199 University Ave.
Riverside, CA 92507
(714) 682-9011; SGL \$38, DBL \$45

Mission Inn
3649 Seventh Street
Riverside, CA 92501
(714) 784-0300; SGL \$30, DBL \$40

Riverside Inn
1150 University Ave.
Riverside, CA 92507
(714) 682-2771; SGL \$34, DBL \$38

University Lodge
1860 University Ave.
Riverside, CA 92507
(714) 686-8262; SGL \$28, DBL \$34

Hilton Inn—San Bernardino
Interstate 10 & Waterman Ave.
San Bernardino, CA 92408
(714) 889-0133; SGL \$43, DBL \$57

Holiday Inn—San Bernardino
666 Fairway Dr.
San Bernardino, CA 92402
(714) 825-7750; SGL \$30, DBL \$35

UNCOMFORTABLE? MOVE TO ROME

According to a lieutenant stationed with the 459th Bomb Group, his mother stays right up to date on most subjects, but details of geography and current history are not included in that category.

Excerpt from a letter to her son "... of course I don't know where you are staying in Italy but when we were there some years ago we enjoyed the Hotel Continental in Rome very much, so if you are not comfortable where you are, I suggest you try to get accommodations there ..."