



# CERIGNOLA CONNECTION

*455th Bomb Group Association Newsletter*

**Spring, 2010** Editor, Craig Ward, 813 Peterstow Drive, Euless, Texas 76039  
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## Message from the President

**By Carl A. Barr (743),  
President, 455th BG Assoc.**

Sixty-five years ago!!  
WOW ... That was the day that I touched down at LaGuardia Field in New York, after completing my combat tour in the 455th Bomb Group.

It was the morning of my twentieth birthday ... kind of hard to forget!

Like some of you, I have one of those baseball style caps with "WWII Veteran" embroidered on the front. It also features three ribbons ... American Defense, EAME, and WWII Victory Medal.

When I wear it, which is not often, I find that people seem to show a special sort of respect. They frequently speak words of appreciation.

We are considered

"special", but only because we are still here sixty-five years later. It is a good idea to allow yourself to be recognized in that capacity sometimes.

Students in today's schools do not have much exposure to information about WWII. It is ancient history, and they don't have time for it.

I have frequently been invited to share memories of that time with students, veterans groups, churches, and other organizations. I would encourage you to seek such opportunities as a means of keeping the memory alive. That is a primary purpose of this organization ... The 455th Bomb Group Association.

Our first electronic Board of Directors meeting was conducted in a telephone conference. It was intended that it be recorded, but it did not work. We hope to find a more efficient way before the next meeting in November.

Hughes Glantzberg has developed a website for 15th Air Force units, including pages for the 455th Bomb Group.

The web address is:  
<http://www.glantzberg.us>

Best Regards,  
Carl A. Barr, President

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Mario Capocefalo, his son Mike, and a helper performing the monthly cleaning of the San Giovanni Chapel.



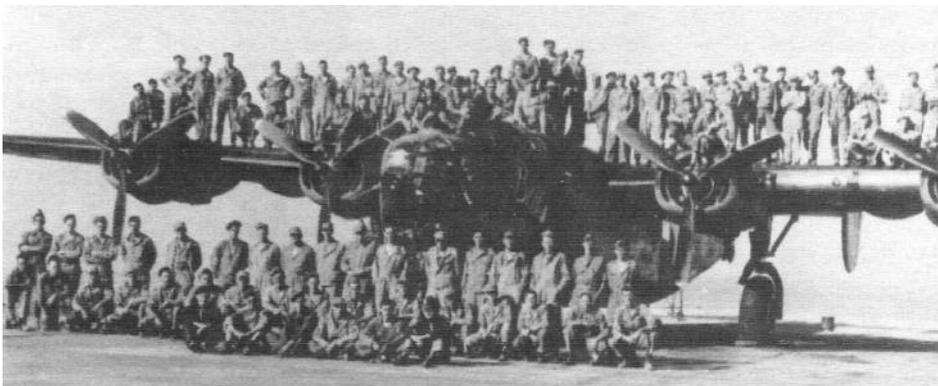
Left to Right:

Col. Bill Holloman (Tuskegee Airman, based at Ramitelli Airfield)

Senator George McGovern (741)

Gene Fioretti (friend of Mario Capocefalo)

At the D-Day Museum, New Orleans, La.



## I Want to Be a Pilot

by a Fifth Grader

I want to be a pilot when I grow up, because it's fun and easy to do.

Pilots don't need much school. They just have to learn numbers, so they can read instruments.

I guess they should be able to read maps, so they can find their way if they are lost.

Pilots should be brave so they won't be scared if its foggy and they can't see, or if a wing or a motor falls off they should stay calm so they'll know what to do.

Pilots need to have good eyes, so they can see through clouds. They can't be afraid of lightning or thunder, because they are closer to them than us.

The pay pilots make is another thing I like. They make more money than they can spend. Most people think airplane flying is dangerous, except pilots don't, because they know how easy it is.

There isn't much I don't like, except girls like pilots. All the stewardesses want to marry them, so they always have to chase them away so they won't bother them.

I hope I don't get airsick, because if I do, I couldn't be a pilot.

***I would have to go to work for a living.***

"I take exception to saying that our Washington politicians are spending like drunken sailors. When I was a drunken sailor, I quit spending when I ran out of money." - Sen. John McCain

**455TH BOMB GROUP  
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**Carl Loiocano**  
T/Sgt. USAAF  
**Craig Ward**  
Son, Lt. J. T. Ward  
Editor, *Cerignola Connection*

**REGISTERED AGENT**

**John F. Davis**  
Col. USAF (Ret.)

Available Now!

**Vulgar Vulture Logo Stick Pins**

Each pin is one and one quarter inch in diameter  
Each pin has a brass-colored finish and four-color enameled logo  
Each pin is secured with a standard "frog" fastener on the back side  
Make checks payable to: 455<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association  
Mail to the association at: P.O. Box 93095, Austin, TX 78709-3095

**Great Gifts!**

Order quickly to ensure processing for Christmas



On the left: a 455<sup>th</sup> GROUP pin, \$4 each  
On the right: a SQUADRON pin, \$6 each  
Squadron pins are available for each of the four squadrons. The 740<sup>th</sup> has a yellow bomb, the 741<sup>st</sup> has a green bomb (pictured), the 742<sup>nd</sup> has a black bomb, and the 743<sup>rd</sup> has a red bomb.

**Dear Editor,**

I was wondering if I could still order the Vulgar Vulture Logo Stick Pins that were shown in the Fall 2009 *Cerignola Connection*. The one I'm interested in is the 455th GROUP pin. If I knew which squadron Dad was in, I would also order that one. All I know is that he was in the "H" group, and was the nose gunner in the "*Dazzlin' Duchess*". Thank you for any info you could provide.

Roy Sadler  
roy\_sadler\_15@comcast.net

**Dear Roy,**

We do have pins left. Our history shows a Sgt. Jacob R. Sadler in the 743rd squadron. Was that your dad? The "H" stands for Heavy (as in heavy bombers—B-24s or B-17s). Thus, your father was in the 455 BG(H) which was the only 455th Bomb Group.

The group logo pin is \$4. A squadron logo pin is \$6. You can mail a check payable to 455th Bomb Group Association to:  
455th Bomb Group Association,  
Attn: Greg Riggs  
P.O. Box 93095  
Austin, TX 78709

**Dear Editor,**

I just found your Association info online. My father, William A. Ulsh, was a belly-gunner for 742 squadron, 455th BG, flying B-24G # 42-78200, "Oh My Aking Ass".

I have a full list of the crew members, and am trying to find them or their descendants. Dad passed away a few years ago, but he instilled a great love and respect for these men within me. I hope you can help.

Sincerely,  
William A. Ulsh, Jr.  
williamulsh@comcast.net

**Dear Editor,**

Do you have any knowledge whether the crews of the 455th BG were awarded some type of certificate on completion of their tour of duty? They had different titles such as *Lucky Bastard Club* or a Certificate of Valor.

Regards,  
Rowdy  
oz12325@yahoo.com

**Dear Editor,**

My grandfather was in the 742nd squadron during WWII. I did some research, and found him in the rolls of the 455th BG history book.

His name is Robert Sisterman, who died in 1998. I never got to talk to him much about his service, as he never really said much.

The reason I am contacting you is to see if you know of any way to obtain the *Vulgar Vultures* patch for the 742nd. I desperately want to have a couple of these patches.

I figured my best bet was to contact your group.

Thank you for your help.  
Scott Erickson  
scottaerickson@aol.com

**Dear Editor,**

I just received the Fall, 2009 issue of the *Cerignola Connection* and enjoyed every word.

My Dad, T/SGT Norris T Boswell, S/N 16162334, 15th AF, 455th BG, (742), foreign service from Sept 18, 1944 to April 28, 1945, will turn 86 years of age on Dec. 22, 2009.

I saw the notice of availability of the *Vulgar Vulture* logo stick pins on page 3, and would very much like to purchase two of the 742nd Squadron pins, one for my Dad and one for me. My Dad's original leather *Vulgar Vulture* squadron patch was stolen in a home burglary several years ago, so this would make for a great birthday present for him.

I have my Dad's original bomber wings and have them attached to my original style bomber jacket, and would love to add the squadron pin to the jacket.

Respectfully,  
Blake E Boswell  
bboswellb@cox.net  
877-641-4818

**Dear Editor,**

I am the nephew, and adoptive brother of Lt. William A. Beck (742). He died when his plane was shot down on May 6, 1944, on a mission to Romania.

Three people survived the shoot down of the plane:

Lt. Joe Bunata, Co-pilot,  
Lt. Dowling, Bombardier,  
S/Sgt. John Crummey, top turret gunner and engineer.

Mr. Crummey is the only one who is alive today, and I am in frequent contact with him. I know he has no email but his address is as follows:

John Crummey  
45 Griffin Road  
Deerfield NH 03037  
1-603-463-8361

I know Mr. Crummey would love any correspondence about the Bomb Group you could send him. He is in good health today, and was proud to be a part of the 455th.

Shortly after he parachuted out of the plane, he was taken prisoner by the Bulgarians. He spent five months in captivity until his release.

Thank You.  
Ted Beck  
2300 Woodsong Trail  
Arlington, TX 76016  
817-429-6238  
tedbeck@comcast.net

## **Final Flight**

### **Raymond M. Shrader Sr. (742)**

took his Final Flight on January 17, 2010, age 87.

Mr. Shrader was quiet, but proud of his service to the country. He was a good man, and he led a good life. He told me to be there for Mom, so I have orders to carry out.

Robert N. Shrader, Son of Raymond M. Shrader, Sr.  
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Ted Tronoff (742)  
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(Dr.) Stanley Vogelfang (741)  
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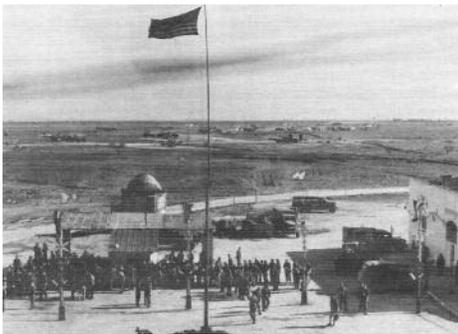
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War hero Art Jibilian  
dies at age 86

The lone surviving member of 1944's *Operation Halyard* has died at 86.

Jibilian, a radio operator, was nominated for the military's highest honor for his actions during a five-month period in 1944, rescuing hundreds of people from a German-occupied area in Serbia.

Jibilian was one of three operatives of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), who parachuted into central Serbia in August, 1944 to rescue what he thought was 50 downed airmen.

"We didn't find 50," Jibilian would later say. "We found 250!"

Over the next six months, Jibilian constructed a landing strip, and coordinated evacuation flights and medical help at night, as the people in the Serbian village housed and protected the soldiers.

The mission was documented in Gregory A. Freeman's 2007 book, "The Forgotten 500."

"With the passing of Arthur Jibilian, our country has lost a true American hero," Freeman said in a statement. "Arthur's brave work in rescuing downed American airmen in World War II must never be forgotten, and I am honored to have known him. He was the quintessential American hero — humble, modest, quietly proud, but ferocious in seeking justice."

He received a congressional honor for his duty in 2008 by U.S. Rep. Bob Latta.

**Dear Editor,**

I had a good video about B-24s at the 2009 reunion. I mentioned it at the business meeting, but there was no provision for showing it. Thanks to Tony Corsello and his daughter Jane, it got worked out to show at the final banquet.

Most of the veterans have probably seen it or something like it, but I thought the wives and children might find it interesting. It shows the low-level raid on the Ploesti oil fields with official Air Force films, and then shows the officers at a meeting deciding on how to proceed, using P-38's for dive bombing to neutralize some of the anti-aircraft guns.

Then it showed the high level raids to finish the job in which the 455th BG participated, including many of the veterans at the reunion, including myself.

They also have the captured German films, which show the anti-aircraft guns shooting at us, and guys fighting the fires we started.

One of the sons of a veteran helping me with the projector said he had a copy at home. He said you can find it on the internet if you know how. It shows the fighters attacking, and the B-24 gunners shooting back at them.

The name of the video is: "*B24 Liberator -- View from the Cockpit*".

Best Regards,  
Frank Hosimer  
fghosr@hotmail.com





## Words Of Wisdom

Clint Smith, Director of Thunder Ranch, is part drill instructor, and part standup comic. Thunder Ranch is a firearms training facility in Arizona. Here are a few of his observation on tactics, firearms, self-defense, and life as we know it in the civilized world.

The most important rule in a gunfight is: Always win, and cheat if necessary.

Don't forget, incoming fire has the right of way.

Make your attacker advance through a wall of bullets. You may get killed with your own gun, but he'll have to beat you to death with it, cause it's going to be empty.

If you're not shootin', you should be loadin'. If you're not loadin', you should be movin'. If you're not movin', someone's gonna cut your head off and put it on a stick.

When you reload in low light encounters, don't put your flashlight in your back pocket. If you light yourself up, you'll look like an angel or the tooth fairy. And you're gonna be one of 'em pretty soon.

Do something. It may be wrong, but do something.

If you carry a gun, people will call you paranoid. That's ridiculous. If you have a gun, what do you have to be paranoid for.

Don't shoot fast, unless you also shoot good.

### **Dear Editor,**

I found your email address on the 15th Air Force Website. I am writing you about my uncle, Lt.Theodore Voudouris. He was killed during the war, June 1944. He flew the B24J "Tail Wind". Does anyone know anything about him? He was in the 454th Bomb Group in Cerignola, Italy. I am hoping that you may know something. There was no information for the 454th group on the website, so I elected to contact the 455th BG.

Also, have you ever heard of the *Mad Bomber* incident which was what killed my uncle. We have heard things over the years, but always felt something was missing. If you have or know of anyone who has knowledge of my uncle or the incident, our family would like to know anything that you can tell us. We are all in our late 50's and early 60's now.

Thank you for your service to our country.

Steve Voudouris  
916 812-1957  
stevestrat@earthlink.net

### **Dear Steve,**

I have attached a photo of a B-24 with the nose art "Tail Wind". It is copied from "Classic Vintage Nose Art", Gary Valant, 1987, page 145. The notation on the photo identifies it as an 8th AF aircraft, but it may be very similar to the one which your uncle flew. I have no knowledge about the incident to which you refer.

I hope one of our newsletter readers can help.

Best Regards,

Carl A. Barr  
President, 455th Bomb Group Association  
carlbarr@bellouth.net



The war was ugly and unpleasant, but Americans sometimes celebrated the trappings that went with it, including what we know today as 'nose-art' (the term was not used during the war). Many Fifteenth crew members had been teenagers in the late 1930s when Orson Wells' radio broadcast of 'War of the Worlds', adapted from a story by H G Wells, terrified millions of Americans. Now, B-24 Liberator crew members could don their very own 'Man from Mars' attire, as illustrated here. When not being used to ape for the camera, the high-altitude clothing, flak jacket and oxygen mask could be extremely uncomfortable. This anonymous gunner hailed from the San Giovanni-based 455th BG (AAF via William N Hess)

**455thBG, 743rdBS  
Cerignola, Italy  
B-24's "TeePeeTime Gal"**



## Final Flight

Wylie Smith (743), USMC, USAF

Maj. Wylie Smith, Ret. (743) passed away Sunday, March 8, 2009 at Air Force West in Riverside, CA. Maj. Smith, Pvt. USMC, served aboard the *USS Arizona* from 1937-1939. He was discharged in 1941 prior to WWII. When WWII broke out, Smith joined the US Army Air Corp, went through flight school, and became a Navigator in the 455th BG, 743rd squadron. Smith retired as a Major. Wylie went on through college, and received his Doctorate Degree.

Maj. Smith, along with other Marines, served as orderlies to Rear Admiral Chester Nimitz. The role of an orderly included being a messenger and errand runner, as well as being a body guard to the Admiral. Other duties were being a "playmate" to the Admiral's young daughter Mary, who would come aboard with her mother on Sundays when the ship was in port. Mary was very spoiled. On one occasion, one of the orderlies couldn't cooperate. Mary Nimitz saw him standing post outside the admiral's spacious cabin and said, "Come in and play with me."

"I can't," he told her. "I'm on duty." "You'd better," she replied. "My daddy owns this ship, and he'll fire you."

The Marines enjoyed this duty as Admiral Nimitz was such a pleasant individual to work for. When I started getting together with Jim Vlach for our Saturday morning history lessons, Jim would invite Wylie and Dora to join us for lunch along with Jeanne. Later I found Wylie, Dora, Jim and Jeanne were all from Nebraska. My wife and her Mother are also from Nebraska. So on one Saturday we all got together and I took photos of the "Nebraska Gang".

With My Best Regards to the 455th Bomb Group Association,  
Shipmate Willie Smith, USMC

## FINAL FLIGHTS

### Rudolph C. Denke, Sr. (742)

Rudolf Conrad was born on December 16, 1920, in Quickendorf, Germany the son of Rudolf and Emma (Wienroch) Denke. When Rudy turned three the Denke family moved to United States. The family lived in Manchester, Connecticut for a short period of time before moving to Brooklyn New York where Rudolf lived until he went into the service. Rudy served his country in the United States Army Air Force.

In 1943, Rudolf was united in marriage to Carol Branum in Clovis, New Mexico. After their marriage he was sent overseas and was in charge of Interpreting Language for the Air Force. On one of his missions Rudy's plane was shot down and he was taken prisoner and kept at Stalag Luft IV until the end of the war. During this time they forced the prisoners to march over 800 miles. He was freed by the Americans and hospitalized for a short time before returning home to his wife, Carol who at that time was living in Spring Valley, MN.

Shortly after his return home the Denke family moved to New Jersey where Rudy worked as a salesman. They lived there until 1958 when they moved to Rapid City, South Dakota and then to Minnesota. The couple retired to San Antonio, TX where they took care of a mobile home park and in 2000 moved to Alexandria to be close to family.

Rudolf died on Friday, August 14, 2009, at the VA Hospital in St. Cloud. He is survived by his wife, Carol; two sons: Rudy & wife, Pat of Alexandria, Dennis & wife, Cheryl of Wenatchee, WA; daughter, Marsha of Minnetonka, MN; ten grandchildren, fifteen great grandchildren and one brother, Jerry of Florida.

### George A. Theodore (742)

passed away January 3, 2010, aged 85. He flew from Cerignola, Italy in 1944 as a member of the crew of Lt. J.D. Naler.

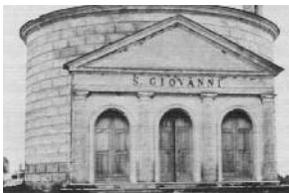
He was a Staff Sgt. and served as a tail gunner.

He was, and his family is, proud of his service in the US Army Air Corps.

Philip A. Theodore  
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Atlanta, GA 30305  
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### Charles Rohler (743)

of Broken Arrow, OK., died December 26, 2009. He was a navigator.



### Jack Phelps (740)

of Dallas, Texas, died on August 7, 2009 of lung cancer.

Jack courageously went through the radiation treatments with flying colors, but developed radiation pneumonitis, and died within a couple of weeks.

I thank God that he didn't suffer a long time - he only had great difficulty breathing for a couple of days.

Jack spoke so highly of you and the *Cerignola Connection*, and thought you were doing a great job as editor.

I received the most recent newsletter, and noticed that Jack is still listed. Sadly you can remove his name.

Jack was buried at Restland Memorial Cemetery with full military honors. I think the honor guard was from Fort Bliss, and they did a beautiful job.

Best wishes to you,  
Betty Phelps



#### **Editor's Note:**

Previous editions of this newsletter have recollections of veterans (my father included) who witnessed a horrific 1944 crash and explosion of a B-24 taking off from San Giovanni.

The photo of the crash's mushroom cloud aftermath (above) was provided to your editor by Jack Phelps in 2008.

### Warren D. Buchanan (741)

Dear Editor,

My name is Wendy Buchanan from Reedsville, PA. My grandfather, Warren D. Buchanan (741) was a tailgunner on a B24 bomber in the 455th Bomb Group.

We absolutely loved receiving your newsletter. On April 3, 2010, my grandfather took his Final Flight.

Being involved with his military history has been such an important part of my life. While going through some of his belongings I realized he had saved much more from the war than what he had originally shared with me. I knew he had saved many pictures and medals, but he literally saved everything.

I have both of his jackets, his gloves, an MRE, a detailed description of every mission which he logged himself, and so much more.

The pictures are absolutely spectacular. He took many pictures of nose art and other planes at the airfield.

How do we go about getting his obituary in the next issue? Our subscription to the newsletter was in his name and he just passed it along to us to read, how would we transfer that into our names? Also, are there any aircraft of which you need pictures of?

I thank you for taking the time to read my letter.

Sincerely  
Wendy Buchanan  
146 Greenfield Drive  
Reedsville, PA 17084  
717-667-2429

# Nazi-Era Pilot Helped Lead Germany's Postwar Military

By STEPHEN MILLER

One of Nazi Germany's most formidable fighter pilots, Günther Rall survived the war to become a leader of his country's rehabilitated military during the postwar period.

Mr. Rall, who died Oct. 4 at the age of 91, was credited with shooting down 275 planes during World War II, making him one of the most lethal fighter pilots in history.

A decade after the war, he returned to the military, where he helped establish and then lead the West German Air Force. He also developed strong military ties to the U.S., undergoing training on U.S. fighter jets during the Cold War and eventually serving as a top official in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

A squadron commander for most of the war, Mr. Rall flew more than 800 missions over France, England, Crete and the Eastern Front, where he and the fliers he commanded downed less-advanced Russian planes in large numbers. He was shot down several times but evaded capture by Allied forces until shortly before the end of the war.

"He was one of the most outstanding fighter pilots of the 20th century, an extraordinary marksman" says Von Hardesty, a curator in the aerospace division of the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum in Washington.

Raised in a small village in southwestern Germany, Mr. Rall joined the German Army in 1936 at the age of 18, but after studying at the War College in Dresden he decided to switch to the Luftwaffe, the German air force. He qualified as a fighter pilot in 1938 and shot down his first plane when Adolf Hitler's army invaded France in the spring of 1940.

After France fell to the Germans, Mr. Rall took part briefly in the Battle of Britain, during which he was made a commander. His squadron was next ordered to Romania and then to Crete.

After Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, Mr. Rall's unit returned to Romania to protect oil refineries under attack by Russian bombers.

Shortly after he had shot down his 36th plane, in 1941, his own



World War II pilot Günther Rall, a leader in Germany's postwar military, developed strong ties to the U.S. Above, on a test flight in St. Louis in 1971.

plane was hit by a Soviet fighter. Crash landing behind German lines, his back was broken in three places and he was told he might never walk again. But he was flying within a year. During his convalescence, he fell in love with his doctor, Hertha Schön, and the two later married.

His new wife was of Jewish descent, but her family was protected because of her husband's status as a decorated war hero, according to Colin Heaton, a professor of history and military studies at the American Military University, an online college based in Charles Town, W. Va.

By his own account, Mr. Rall met Hitler three times during the war. The Nazi leader conferred on Mr. Rall one of Germany's highest military accolades in 1942. At each meeting, the German dictator seemed more unhinged, Mr. Rall later said.

"It was clear to me that this man was a little out of his mind" when they met for the last time, in 1944, Mr. Rall told Mr. Heaton in a 1996 interview published in World War II magazine.

Mr. Rall contended that he was personally opposed to Hitler and Luftwaffe chief Hermann Goering during the war. He once said, like many of his contemporaries, that he had heard reports of death camps but didn't believe them.

Mr. Rall was shot down eight times during the war and sustained serious injuries. The last

time was in 1944, when he had his left thumb shot off and his plane shot down during a dogfight with U.S. forces over Germany. He parachuted to safety, landing in a field near Berlin.

It was Mr. Rall's last combat flight, although he remained in the air force as a commander.

As the war wound down in 1945 and his unit's fighting capability was diminished, Mr. Rall decided to walk home from a base near Salzburg. He was captured by American forces and held in Britain with other German prisoners of war.

After a decade working in business, Mr. Rall rejoined the military in 1956 to help build a new air force. West Germany had just been invited into NATO, and the U.S. began training Mr. Rall and other Luftwaffe veterans as part of a plan to create a bulwark against the Soviet Union. He was appointed head of the German Air Force in 1970, a position he held until 1974, when he began a two-year term as military liaison to NATO.

In recent decades, he was a popular presence at gatherings of World War II fighter pilots in the U.S., the U.K. and Russia. He became friends with the American pilot Col. Hubert Zemke, whose wingman had shot off Mr. Rall's thumb.

According to Mr. Heaton, who attended several such meetings with Mr. Rall, "To fighter pilots, politics didn't matter. They just got together and got drunk."

Email remembrances@wsj.com

## FINAL FLIGHTS

**Charles W. Wilson (743)**

died Feb. 25, 2009 at his home.

Mr. Wilson was born Feb. 18, 1924, in Lincoln County, to Henry and Nola Wilson. He was an award-winning farmer in Amite County, where he set new precedent with his conservation techniques.

He served in the U.S. Air Force as a tail-gunner.

**Alvin Rielve (740)**

took his final flight on November 21, 2008.

Al was Master Sergeant heading up the Armament Section under Capt. Shimrock.

**Lt. Franz Gerber (742)**

of Bruce, Wisc., passed away March 15, 2008.

**John Nash (740)**

passed away Sept. 11, 2009 from a fast-acting cancer. He had been a solid member of the 455th BG Board of Directors until a degenerative eye disease prompted him not to run for re-election a few years ago.

He was commissioned in May, 1943.



The crew desperately struggled to regain control. They shut down No. 4, but the propeller would not feather and continued to windmill until it eventually froze. Returning to Cerignola was out of the question. Captain Richard J. von Schriltz decided to divert the crippled Liberator to an airfield behind Soviet lines at Pécs, Hungary. He ordered the crew to jettison weight to stabilize altitude. Unfortunately, a piece of equipment ejected from the front of the plane struck the radome, rendering it inoperable. Without radar, and with the B-24 folded into a thick undercast at 11,000 feet, navigation was nearly impossible. Compass, airspeed and wind information from the morning's briefing were all they had to go on.

Chaos prevailed as weight shedding continued in earnest. Machine guns were dismantled and hurled out, along with ammunition. Crewmen popped the rivets holding oxygen tanks and threw the tanks out. Finally, the Liberator steadied at 8,000 feet.

When the navigators estimated they had arrived over Pécs, von Schriltz put the plane into a spiral descent through the undercast to visually identify their location. He instructed navigator 1st Lt. Charles M. Brazelton to call out every 100 feet of descent. Around 4,000 feet, they could make out the ground, but the anticipated airfield was nowhere in sight. The navigators gave von Schriltz a heading based on sighting two rivers that they assumed to be the Danube and the Drava.

In the tail turret, Lashinsky huddled defenseless, having traded his two .50-caliber machine guns and ammunition for altitude. Only the skeletal remains of the perforated cooling barrels allowed him to mount a faux defense. He turned the turret and aimed the useless barrels at three fighters bearing down on the stricken Liberator.

The B-24 suffered repeated additional damage from the fighters' fire. The aft section filled with white smoke and something resembling

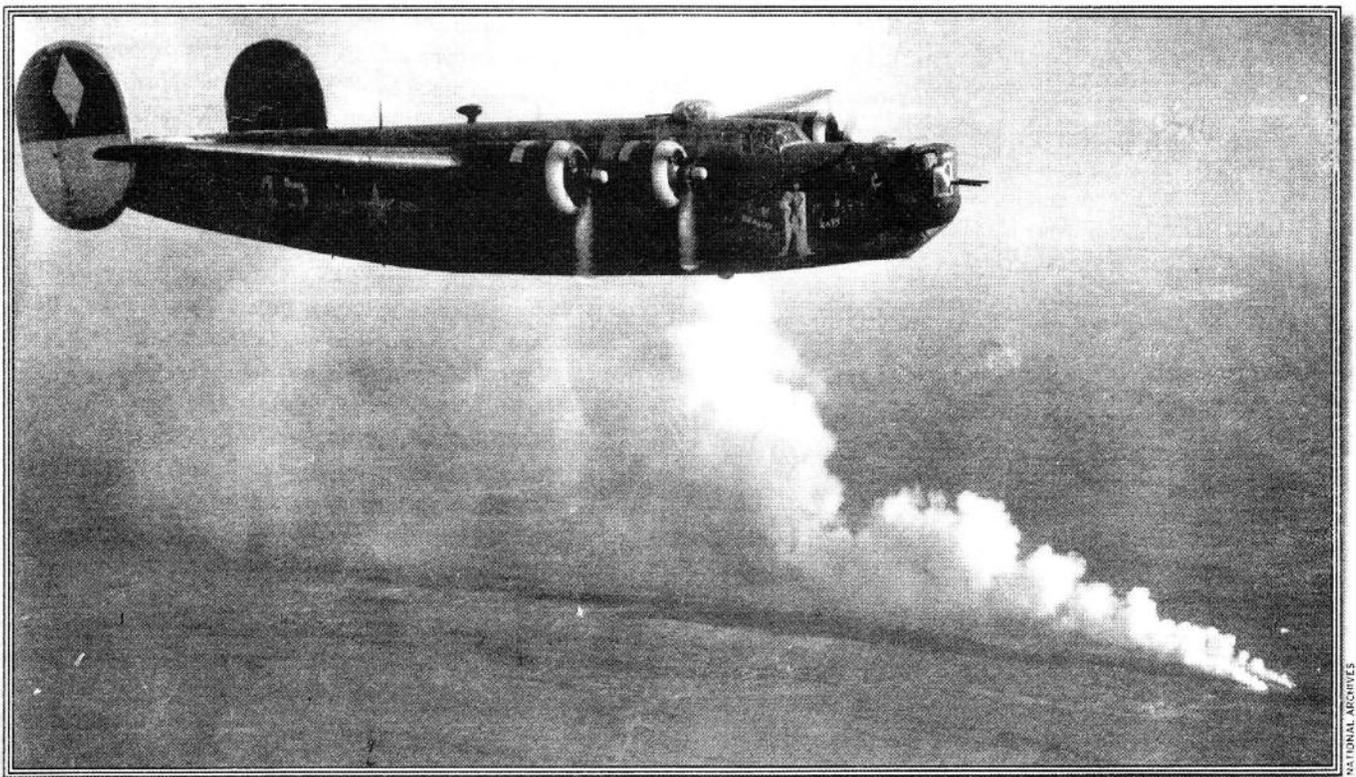
confetti, probably from a shell burst in the belly radar turret that scattered the debris of paper capacitors. Von Schriltz had no choice but to order a bailout.

**B**all turret gunner Art Colton delayed his exit, signaling Lashinsky to get to the forward side of the escape hatch, but the tail-gunner waved him ahead. As Colton jumped, the hatch fell closed, leaving Lashinsky alone in the bomber's waist. What he saw next terrified him. One of Colton's flying boots was jammed between the hatch and its frame.

Lashinsky recalled the moment with chilling clarity: "I had a mental picture of Art hanging out of the plane, held by his foot stuck in the hatch. I faced a dilemma. Had Art struck his head on the aircraft? Was he conscious or unconscious? How could I help? I reasoned I could hold him from falling with my right hand and open the hatch with my left. To this day, I still believe the feat was possible. I grasped the boot, opened the hatch and was relieved to have only the boot in my hand."

Kneeling, face to the rear, Lashinsky dived headfirst from the crippled B-24. During his freefall tumble he saw the Liberator about 1,000 yards above and ahead of him. Suddenly two shell bursts flashed just below the wing, and the bomber's landing gear dropped out of the retracted position.

As he fell, Lashinsky's mind reeled. He and his crew had already miraculously survived the loss of three B-24s (see sidebar, P. 47). The grinding stress of yet another life-or-death episode nearly overpowered him. "For a brief instant the thought of not pulling the ripcord crossed my mind," Lashinsky recalled. "I wearied of coming face to face with death so many times in my short lifetime. But realizing what I was contemplating amounted to suicide, I dismissed the thought."



A Fifteenth Air Force B-24H flies over a smoking target in Austria. Lashinsky's last mission, to a Vienna oil refinery, ended in his capture.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES



Dioman-top turret gunner Walter Lipps, who served with Lashinsky, shows off flak damage sustained on February 21, 1945.

His chute deployed, Lashinsky's descent was now accompanied by unexpected new hazard: Bullets hissed and snapped close by. He sped the shroud lines, spilling air first from one side of the chute, then the other, oscillating and increasing his descent rate.

Two other crewmen were recovered unscathed by the Soviets, who nursed a third back from near-death. Three did not survive. Second navigator 1st Lt. John A. Coates was wounded as he descended in chute. He was picked up by the Soviets and treated at a field hospital in Siklos, but died during the night. The Soviets buried him near a chapel in a Catholic cemetery in Siklos. In the late 1940s, graves registration teams recovered his body for reburial. First navigator Lieutenant Brazelton, who had been severely wounded in the abdomen, died on the Gordisa farm of Ozslar Ferenc. Brazelton crawled a few feet, collapsed and died. Ferenc later claimed to have buried him, and went further that Swabian German residents pressed into service by the Soviets reburied the airman. The remains of radar officer 1st Lt. Charles S. Adams have never been recovered.

After a hard landing in an area bristling with barbed wire, Lashinsky stood up and found himself directly in front of a trench line. "A trench occupant beckoned me with his finger to come into the trench," Lashinsky said. "I jumped in to face about 10 Germans armed with rifles with fixed bayonets. The bareheaded one extended his hand and said, 'Pistol.'" Lashinsky surrendered his Colt .45. As a POW, Lashinsky endured several harrowing incidents during his captivity. A German commander, speaking English, ordered Lashinsky to strip and hand his clothes to a colleague. "I did as I was told and I stood stark naked among them," he said. "I felt more vulnerable and exposed than I had minutes earlier. I fully realized that the Fifteenth Air Force would not have the slightest notion of our fate or location. If the Germans decided to execute me, the world would never know." The Americans had heard rumors, later confirmed, that Adolf Hitler had ordered captured airmen executed because they were "gangsters." Lashinsky's captors discovered a prayer book in his pocket. They beat his face hard with it, admonishing him that he shamelessly carried a prayer book yet killed women and children. They asked what

## Liquidation of Three Liberators

Frank Lashinsky's crew had already lost three B-24s before their March 12, 1945, final mission. Lashinsky began to wonder if his number would soon be up. "I realized that each time I escaped alive from a perilous situation, the law of averages was closer to catching up with me," he recalled. "Consequently, I was more fearful in each succeeding mission."



COURTESY OF FRANCIS LASHINSKY

Staff Sergeant Frank Lashinsky in 1945.

The crew picked up a new Liberator in Topeka, Kan. They made stops in Manchester, N.H.; Gander, Newfoundland; Santa Maria, in the Azores; Marrakech, Morocco; and then Tunis, Tunisia. The Tunis touchdown was smooth, but the right landing gear began to wobble, then broke off. The wing dipped down, tore the prop from the outboard engine and bent the other. The B-24 skidded off the pavement and ground to a halt, a total loss. "Only later did I realize how lucky we were," said Lashinsky. The accident report cited a defective casting as the cause.

The crew's sixth mission, on October 14, 1944, was to bomb the Odertal synthetic oil refinery near Oswiecim, Poland. They had been assigned a war-weary B-24 and the "Tail-End Charlie" position in the formation. The engines failed to develop normal power, and two superchargers began to malfunction. The crew struggled to keep up, at the cost of excessive fuel consumption. At the bomb run's initial point the group increased speed, and Lashinsky's B-24 fell farther behind. It dropped its bombs over an obscured target, then turned for home, losing altitude rapidly. Low on fuel, and with the Adriatic and the Dinaric Alps to cross, the crewmen chose to parachute into Bosnia. "I wondered if I would be paralyzed with fright as I fell, so I pulled the ripcord very soon after exit," Lashinsky said. "I was surprised how calmly I reacted when the chute failed to open. I clearly reasoned out several possible responses, then yanked again, this time with success." Fortunately, the entire crew was rescued by Marshal Tito's partisans and returned to its base a few weeks later.

On February 21, 1945, Lashinsky and his crew led their group to bomb Vienna's railroad marshaling yards. After dropping its bombs, the B-24 was struck by flak. "After a surge of fright I realized we were still flying," Lashinsky said. "I calmed down, picked up and still own a piece of flak that somehow missed me." A gaping hole had opened inches behind the pilot and just feet in front of the wing root (see photo, above left). The upper escape hatch in the radio compartment was torn away, as was the plexiglass dome on the upper turret. A .50-caliber machine gun had its cooling barrel ripped off and the barrel bent 90 degrees. A large-caliber flak shell—most likely 88mm—had hit the plane but failed to explode. The B-24 limped back to base, and was subsequently scrapped.

G.W.

he would say if told he was to be executed. Whenever queried, Lashinsky only responded with his name, rank and serial number.

His captors questioned him about the recent firestorm bombing of Dresden, asking if he had participated. Lashinsky was not aware of the bombing. When he responded with the customary name, rank and serial number, Lashinsky said his inquisitor "sprang to his feet instantly, like a spring uncoiling. A torrent of loud, strong and I assumed Teutonic curses were hurled at me. Even though I did not understand a word of it, there was no question I had provoked his extreme anger." Miraculously, without a further word, the Germans returned his clothing and told him to dress.

Lashinsky and five of his fellow crew members became hostages of the retreating German army. Loaded into a troop train with flak guns on flatcars, they traveled by rail through Croatia into Germany. The six B-24 crewmen, 10 other Americans, 13 Bulgarian officers and a Russian officer shared half of a "40 and 8" boxcar (originally designed to hold 40 men or eight horses). A barbed wire barrier down the middle separated them from their guards in the other half. Allied fighters strafed the fleeing train during its long journey, and it was also bombed in Brod. The prisoners went days without food. They drank from streams and rivers.

A month later, the train was parked in a marshaling yard in Regensburg, Germany. Air raid sirens sounded, and the guards aban-

doned their prisoners, leaving them locked inside the boxcar. Bombs struck nearby, igniting fires in surrounding trains. The POWs broke out of their boxcar by pulling the iron-barred window from the car wall and hoisting the smallest man through it to the ground. He undid the latch, and the men escaped to a quarry beyond the railroad yards. The guards saw the men and approached with sheepish looks on their faces, presumably because they had abandoned them.

It soon became obvious the guards were hoping to be captured by the Western Allies—preferably Americans. They seemed to regard the prisoners more or less as safe conduct passes to be used for their eventual surrender. Amid increased indications of a German collapse, however, the guards conceded they no longer considered the captives their prisoners. The POWs agreed to surrender the guards to Americans if an opportunity presented itself.

The guards and prisoners set off on foot for their eventual destination, Stalag VIIA in Moosberg. It took about 2½ weeks to get there, walking by day and spending the nights in barns. On April 25, 1945, they finally reached Stalag VIIA, and the guards turned the prisoners over to the camp commander. It was the last the POWs saw or heard of them.

On April 29, a flight of North American P-51 Mustangs buzzed the camp. "They were warning us that attack was imminent," recalled Lashinsky. The prisoners all cheered. The message became even more emphatic when the Mustangs began to dive and strafe the camp



The crewmen who flew with Lashinsky (kneeling at far right) included (standing, from left): pilot Richard von Schrititz, copilot Stanley Iverson and navigator Charles Brazelton; and (kneeling, from left): William Taylor, Lipps, Albert Beauchemin, Craig King and Arthur Colton.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF FRANCES LASHINSKY

imeter. Lashinsky and his fellow detainees lay on the floor of their racks—questionable shelter, but better than nothing.

After the planes withdrew, Lashinsky witnessed the drama unfold outside the main gate. A few of the guards had their arms raised above their heads. A Sherman tank slammed through the unopened gate, with infantry close behind. The prisoners would learn their liberators were members of General George S. Patton's Third Army.

"They proceeded to the flagpole, lowered the swastika and raised Stars and Stripes," Lashinsky remembered. "Unless you've experienced captivity by a foreign power, you never have experienced this singular thrill, to see your own flag raised, restoring your liberty. Seeing this event in memory even today, during a flag raising ceremony, can choke me up and bring tears to my eyes."

Twenty-seven thousand prisoners were freed that day, the largest single liberation of Allied captives in World War II. "Patton arrived wearing his signature battle dress, complete with ivory-handled colvers," Lashinsky said. "He addressed the freed men briefly, standing up in his jeep. Then he left to continue pursuit of the enemy."

Nearly six decades later, in January 2004, Frank Lashinsky received a phone call at his Pennsylvania home from Chief Petty Officer Dennis Friedbauer at the Pentagon, part of a team working in the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, POW/Missing Personnel Affairs. Friedbauer was working the case of 1st Lt. Charles Adams, the crew's still unaccounted for paratrooper.

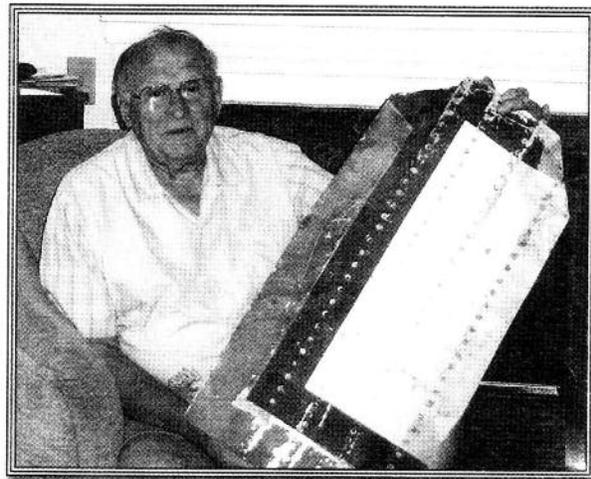
Friedbauer had visited Gordisa, Hungary, and the site outside the town where Lashinsky's B-24 crashed. Although the bomber's markings had been obliterated in the conflagration, identification was made from serial numbers on portions of two machine guns that remained in the wreckage. Friedbauer had examined the area and interviewed residents, including eyewitnesses to the crash, and also reviewed archives relating to the incident. He and Lashinsky talked for hours by phone and for seven more hours face to face. Contact was made with other surviving crew members.

Friedbauer sent Lashinsky pictures taken at Gordisa showing the crash site and pieces of wreckage. Via the Internet, he introduced Lashinsky to Nandor Mohos, a young Hungarian interested in World War II. "Nandi," who spoke English, had investigated a number of sites where American planes had crashed. He and the Pentagon team had traveled more than 1,000 miles in Hungary looking for the remains of missing airmen. He provided Lashinsky with maps that pinpointed an area where the crew had parachuted.

Lashinsky's desire to learn more about that fateful day 59 years earlier compelled him to return to Gordisa. At Friedbauer's urging, and knowing that his recollection of the incident might assist in the search, Lashinsky and his wife Dorothy committed to the trip. The Hungarian language barrier was the last obstacle. Nandi agreed to accompany the Lashinskys and act as their interpreter.

At Cerignola they toured the former airfield, site of the final departure for the ill-fated Liberator. It was now planted with wheat. They visited the ruins of a wine cellar that had been the bomb crew's briefing room. The Lashinskys were received by Cerignola's mayor, and learned that the father of legendary New York City mayor Fiorello La Guardia had emigrated from the town.

After driving up a mountain abutting Pécs, the group took an elevator



**Frank Lashinsky holds a souvenir of his final mission, acquired during a recent visit to Hungary: a section of his last B-24's wing.**

to the observation deck atop it. Nandi pointed out the location of the airfield that had been the crew's destination. It was now a housing development. Pécs' open pit coal and uranium mines were still visible but now idle.

When Gordisa's mayor, Lukacsne Kislaki, received the group at her home, two other important guests were present. Jozsef Kovacs and Sandor Pupos, who were 15 and 11 at the time of the incident, had been eyewitnesses to the B-24's death throes.

Soon a TV crew arrived at the mayor's house for filming and interviews. The entourage walked down the unpaved street to Janos Szabo's house, where a group had assembled. In the backyard, several pieces of aluminum airplane skin were propped against the fence. Lashinsky examined them as TV cameras rolled. The group then rode a horse-drawn buggy to the area where, Kovacs and Pupos indicated, the plane had come down. Returning to Gordisa, they were driven around and shown the town.

While the Lashinskys attended church in Harkany, Nandi went back to Gordisa to secure a portion of the wreckage for Frank to take home. The piece he brought back was about 3 feet by 20 inches and included one of the blue-outlined white side bars that joined the circle, enclosing the white star, in the insignia painted on the wing surfaces. Lashinsky wanted a piece that would fit in his luggage and could be easily transported, but Nandi insisted the artifact should remain as is.

Nandi carefully packaged the wing piece and wrote a note in Hungarian to explain the unusual parcel to airport security personnel. Lashinsky showed the note to security and customs officers, who did not question him further. He returned home with a piece of the Liberator that had held him aloft just long enough for him to bail out—and also with a sense of closure about the event that had changed his life so many years ago. †

*Gary Wright is an Illinois-based freelance writer with a special interest in aviation history. He is a "friend" member of the Air Forces Escape and Evasion Society (airforceescape.com). He suggests for further reading: The Forgotten 500, by Gregory A. Freeman; and B-24 Liberator Units of the Fifteenth Air Force, by Robert F. Dorr.*

### Editor's Note(s):

The subject of this article, Frank Lashinsky, is a Past President of the 455th Bomb Group Association.

My apologies for the missing letters on the left side of the left column of this page. This was un-avoidable.

## The Scariest Mission

by Doug Beauvais

Dear Editor,

*I have read the last couple issues of the Cerignola Connection, and love the stories in there from the vets.*

*My dad, S/Sgt Ray Beauvais (741) kept a diary of his fifty missions, and I would like to share with the vets what my dad always told me was his scariest mission.*

*My dad passed on about three years ago. Although my dad was the funniest guy you would ever want to meet, his most amazing trait was that he showed no fear . . . ever. This was evidenced when he challenged my 12 year old son to bungee jump while vacationing in South Carolina. As they ascended to the jumping area, my son was petrified. The lady in front of them was so scared she started crying and turned around. My dad, in his fearless funny way, decided that he was going to swan dive head first and he did without hesitation. My son was not about to let this old geezer one-up him so my son jumped as well. No fear . . . ever! I guess after reading what he went through in his 50 missions, how could you fear anything afterward?*

*I hope you can share this mission with your readers.*

*Thank You.*

**Doug Beauvais**  
**[dbeauvais@datapro.com](mailto:dbeauvais@datapro.com)**

Date: June 26th, 1944

Target: Moosbierbaum

(Crude oil storage, refinery)

Position: Tail Turret

Ship: 517 *Irish Lassie*

Load: Eighteen 250-lb. bombs  
(Double load)

Credits: 2 missions

Flight spot: Number 2 position

Low flight, 2nd section.

**We got stuck at the end of the runway and took off late. By the time we got caught up with the flight, we had to take number 6**

**position. As it turned out, I guess we were lucky, because the crew that took our position went down.**

This was absolutely the worst mission to date. In fact, they could not get any rougher and still come back. The 15th Air Force really took a beating, and our group took the worst of it.

Our squadron (741) lost three ships, 743 lost one and 742 lost six out of seven ships. Not one of them was knocked down by flak ... all fighters.

I was late for briefing. When I got there, I saw the map, and I knew it was going to be rough because it was a target around Vienna. We joined the formation over the Adriatic, and took the Number 6 position.

We crossed the coast of Yugoslavia, and headed towards Austria without any trouble. We were almost to the I.P., and picked up an escort of P-38's (we were supposed to have P-51's). They were returning from a strafing run.

Just before we got to the I.P., somebody shouted "fighters!", and they were not kidding. There were ME-110's, ME-210's, ME-410's and JU-88's, all twin engine fighters. I don't know exactly how many, but there were at least 25.

A couple of fighters made a pass at our ship, and I claimed a probable on one ME-110. I think I hit him in the left wing near his engine. The P-38's came to our rescue and started dog fighting them.

When the fighters first attacked us, it was a nose attack. They came in formation, right through us. I was glad when the P-38's took after them.

The fight lasted several minutes. I thought the worst was over; then, the navigator thought it could have been a trap to pull our escorts away from us.

It turned out that way.

Just before "bombs away", we got hit again and I mean "HIT!", this time by FW-190's and ME-109's, single engine fighters. I have no idea how many there were, some estimates were as high as 300.

I'm not one to doubt it.

There were so many coming in at us, you did not know which one to shoot at. I knocked down one for sure, and I know I hit plenty of others.

They were shooting rockets at us, and we got hit plenty. I saw B-24's go down left and right. Some of the German fighters were so bold that they flew formation with you! They really did!

My right gun jammed, and I could not bring the ammo up to it. I only had the left gun, and sometimes it stopped while fighters were bearing down on me. One fighter damn near got me, he hit the horizontal stabilizer. The rocket exploded about two feet away from me, and it was head high. I think it was the fighter I shot down.

A little later, another rocket came through the waist and hit my ammo for the left gun. That left me with 250 rounds, and I used them up in a hurry. I found myself without any ammo and plenty of fighters still around.

The rockets kept hitting us, and doing plenty of damage. How we kept from getting

knocked down I don't know.

One rocket came through the waist and knocked out our trim tab cables. The one that broke my ammo belt also put little holes all over the ship. The left waist gunner, Vincent, was hit by 20 MM in his flak suit, knocking him down and drawing blood from his rear end. He thought he was knocked off.

Another rocket came through under the waist window (low) and made a hole big enough for me to stick my head out of. That one got Weeks, the right waist gunner. Weeks got hit kind of bad, he had a bad flesh wound just above the left knee and a piece of frag went into his right arm.

A rocket hit the wing and tore a hole big enough for me to fall through. The hole was three feet long and two feet wide. Another rocket hit the lead edge of the right wing, and tore a big hole in the main spar.

One of the rockets that went through the waist went into the bomb bay, and wrecked the hydraulic system with a hole in the hydraulic reservoir.

We had lots of holes in that aircraft. I don't know how many. I know there were at least eight extra large holes. When the hydraulic system was hit, the fluid covered the ball turret, and the gunner could not see anything. The top turret guns were out of order. We were in bad shape!

There were still a lot of fighters coming at us at six o'clock. I would call them out to the ball turret gunner, and he would shoot without knowing

how close they were. I was trying to direct his firing. It succeeded in making the fighters break away, and probably saved us.

I died a thousand times watching the fighters come in on me, and I couldn't fire a shot. I thought of a lot of things during that time, but I surprised myself by keeping a fairly clear head. I almost got out of the turret once to put on my chute to bail out, but decided if the ship was OK. I was safer in the turret. I'm glad I decided this. That decision may have saved my life.

The ball gunner got out of the ball turret because he couldn't see anything. He put on his chute and was going to bail out, but then he looked out and a ME-109 was right along side of us. He grabbed the waist gun and shot him down.

The running fight lasted over one-half hour. If I had known just how badly we were damaged, I probably would have bailed out.

The fighters finally left us, and we had a little breathing spell. We now had to sweat out the ride back to the Adriatic, which is a LONG way.

The flak was very accurate over this target, but we did not pay much attention to it. The GE-AIC gave our altitude, so all of the flak was near us. It did not bother the enemy fighters either because they flew right through it to hit us.

I saw three or four B-24's blow up. I only saw one chute open, but I know there were a lot more. We lost three men from my original crew; Hugging, First

Engineer; Harrington, Co-pilot; and Miller, Bombardier. I wondered who was next. I hoped and prayed.

On the way home, the sweating was not over. Our hydraulic line was shot out and we needed pressure for the landing gear, flaps and brakes.

We circled the field until all the ships landed. Then, we dropped the landing gear, and it wouldn't work!!! It just dangled for the longest time. The first engineer, Merfield, started cranking the landing gear down and it finally locked. He then kicked out the nose wheel and it locked as well. The co-pilot pumped the flaps down all the way. I don't know he did it, after seeing that big hole in the wings and flaps.

We had 700 lbs. of pressure left in the accumulator for outside brakes, enough to put on the brakes . . . once! We rigged up a couple chutes and set them up at the waist windows to help us brake.

The pilot made a nice landing. He hit the brakes, which slowed us down a lot, but then he released the brakes and we had no more brake pressure. The pilot gave the signal to let out the chutes which worked wonderfully. They slowed us almost to a stop. We started veering to the right, so the pilot gunned the engines and straightened us out. The plane again got out of control, so the engines were cut, and we headed for a ditch. The ditches were about three feet across. We jumped the ditch, and finally came to a stop.

A bunch of fellows ran out to us, along with ambulances. I jumped out the waist window and patted the ground. The medics got Weeks out of the plane and put him on a stretcher to take him to the hospital.

We went to debriefing, told them the story, and got our fighter-kills confirmed. The ball gunner got two fighters and one probable, and the nose gunner got two fighters. I got one fighter with one probable. The photographer got one fighter. Vincent got one fighter.

Seven in all for our plane. One ship in our squadron claimed eleven fighters.

We were due two days off. I hoped we would get them.

I needed the rest!

**Editor's Note:**

**See excerpt of this mission from the 455th BG History Book, in the box to the right >>>>>>>>**

**Editor's Note:**

My father, Lt. J. T. Ward (740), was flying Co-pilot on the Carlton Hansen crew during this mission. I remember him speaking to me of this mission when I was a teenager. I believe Dad would be in total agreement with S/Sgt. Beauvais' assessment of this mission.

*This was also Lt. Ward's Scariest Mission!*

Excerpt from the book:

*455th Bomb Group (H), Flight of the Vulgar Vultures, 1943-1945*

First Lt. Harold Gorski received the DFC for bringing his heavily damaged B-24 back to base from a mission over Moosbierbaum, Austria on the 26th of June, 1944.

His formation was under repeated attacks by enemy fighters. His crew destroyed three enemy fighters, probably one other, and damaged two. Harold's plane was badly damaged, and some repairs were made during flight to get back to base.

A successful landing was made without further damage. All of Harold's crew was awarded the DFC, as follows:  
2nd Lts. William R. Crim, Bill L. Disbrow and James A. Scott, Jr.;  
T/Sgts. John E. Merfield and Stephen Vicinski;  
S/Sgts. Raymond R. Beauvais, Dale F. Magnusson, Kenneth J. Vincent and James E. Weeks;  
Sgt. Mark S. Blackman.

**455TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP (H)**  
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May we publish your e-mail address in the newsletter? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

Current members may retain this form and use it to report a future change of address or other contact information. The form can also be given to anyone interested in membership. Please return completed forms to: 455th Bomb Group Association, P. O. Box 93095, Austin, Texas 78709-3095. This information is strictly for the internal use of the 455th B.G. Association, and will be kept confidential.

**Dear Editor,**

I have been trying to find David Stedman (742) for more than sixty years. Thanks to the publication of his stories and photo in the *Cerignola Connection*, I found him!

David and his wife of 62 years live in Houston. Joan and I will be there in March, 2010. We'll get together with them, break bread, and tell lies (of course, David will out-do me in that department, as he always did!).

David and Don Hodgkins, our Co-pilot, were the only members of our crew I have not been able to locate. Don was from Barrington, Illinois, and I believe his father was a set designer for the film industry.

Prior to coming into the Army Air Corps, Don ferried planes to England. He was most adventuresome. At one time, life in Cerignola was not exciting enough, so without permission, he hitched a ride to Cairo and partied for five days.

Fortunately, during those five days the weather didn't allow us to fly. When Don returned, he was promoted from Warrant Officer to 2nd Lt.!

Talk about luck!

I thank you again for selecting David's stories & photo to publish.

With best wishes, I am,  
W.R. "Dye" Contratto (742)  
5532 Taft Ave.  
LaJolla, CA. 92037  
858-459-3430

**See Photo at Right >>>>>>>>**  
**Photo taken March, 2010**  
**Two Comrades in Arms Re-unite**  
**Dave Stedman (left)**  
**W. R. Contratto (right)**

**Dear Editor,**

I am looking for any information I can get on Edward W. Bright (740). Ed was the navigator on Jack Preston's crew. He was from Ohio, and had attended Kent State University.

Jack and our Co-pilot Bob Biro are both deceased. If you know Ed, ask him if he would like to go back to Trinidad and drink some more warm rum and coke cocktails. He will know who's asking!

On our way to our base, we spent a few days in Tunis. The mountain spring water was so cold that we had to RUN through the showers. After arriving at our camp outside Cerignola, we decided to take a GOOD shower.

We got on the truck and rode to the showers. After a good cleaning, we got back on the truck, and by the time we got back to the tent, we were dirtier than we were when we left.

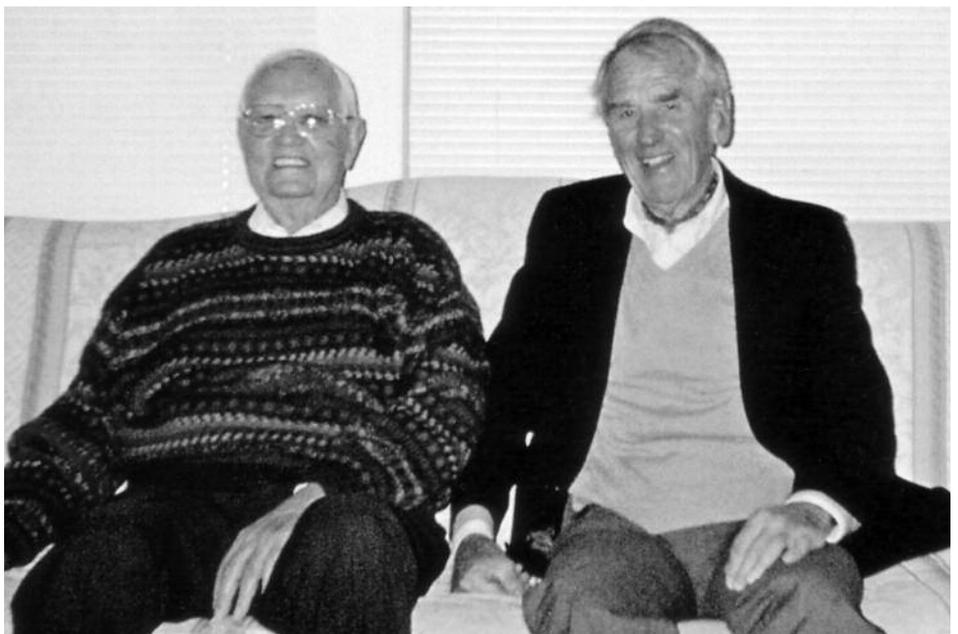
Our tent was on the edge of the camp, which was in the middle of a wheat field. The wheat surrounding the camp was about six feet tall and dried out.

At the bottom of the hill, in back of our tent, was a small creek. We sometimes went down there to bathe. One day, on the way down to the creek, one of us threw away a lit cigarette. By the time we came back, there was a small fire. By the time we got water to the fire, it was out of control!

The next thing I knew, the whole camp was out fighting that blaze to keep it from Richard Jenkins' tent and the officers' club.

Once the fire got by the club, we just let it go. I never did tell anyone who threw that lit cigarette, until now. **Actually, it was ME!**

Sincerely,  
Daniel B. Mason  
5800 Royal Club  
San Antonio, TX. 78239-1405





Waiting to take off for Munich Rein Airdrome, March 24, 1945.



Inside Tent # 5 (740)



Tent # 5 (740), inherited from a crew that returned home, Spring 1945



F. Lee Thorne Crew at 50th reunion, Tucson AZ, March, 1996

Back Row: Frampton, Thorne, Bergman, son of Sislo  
Front Row: Winter, Juza, Funk, Pusilo, Noll, Dickinson

**Editor's Note:**

The photos above were sent to your Editor by Maj. Edward F. Hughes (740). The gentlemen in the photos (and their tent) were part of F. Lee Thorne's replacement crew, who were based at San Giovanni from January through July, 1945.

# Keelhauling — The Hard Way

by Frank Liberato  
as told to Barrett Tillman

USN, courtesy Frank Liberato, CAPT USNR(Ret)



Things were going pretty well for LTJG Frank Liberato in flight training, until his advanced training CarQuals in the Hellcat aboard USS Monterey (CVL-26).

CarQuals. To the tailhook aviator, they're the final shoals on the course to Wings of Gold. Everything else in the training syllabus—from Marine DIs to procedures checks—is aimed at identifying those who can "hit the boat" and excising those who can't.

Of course, most student Naval Aviators do hack it. They log their required traps and cat shots, pin on those precious wings and get on with the program. The first rampmonster is behind them and they've proven (to themselves as much as anyone) they can routinely perform the one evolution which distinguishes the tailhooker from every other kind of airplane pilot on earth.

Once in a while—not often, but frequently enough to keep things interesting—something happens. The pilot with the right stuff sometimes comes up against unavoidable circumstances. Thus, are originated some of Naval Aviation's better sea stories.

Something happened to Frank Liberato during his CarQuals which keep him in practice with a spectacular sea story over 30 years later. By his own admission, he's told it so many times that his delivery, timing and emphasis have attained professional entertainment standards. Unlike many such yarns, however, it has nothing to do with, "There I was, flat on my back at 20,000 feet." In fact, Frank Liberato's tale goes in quite the opposite direction.

On 6 August 1953, LTJG Liberato was one week from winning his wings. He'd logged the fifth of his required eight traps while flying out of Barin Field in an F6F-5 Hellcat. He knew the area well. He's that rare creature, a Naval Aviator born and raised in Pensacola. In fact, he claims his initial interest in flying was sparked by the early realization that all the good-looking girls in town were being commandeered by guys with gold wings. Equally remarkable, his wife Patty is also a Pensacola native.

But Frank's ticket to Pensacola came the long way 'round. After graduation from Annapolis in 1951 he was "stashed" in USS Monterey (CVL-26) for eight months before entering flight school. Thus, on that bright summer day as he taxied up Monterey's flight deck for his next launch it was almost like old home week.

But the aspiring Naval Aviator didn't feel quite at home yet. His flight had been kept waiting on Barin's ramp for two hours before flying out to the ship. Now, as the sun beat down hotter than ever, the flight deck officer signaled Liberato to run up his engine. "I crossed



Artist's rendition by Norm Pecore

myself a couple of times as part of the preflight routine," Frank draws in his southern accent, "then I released the brakes."

It was about a 300-foot deck run, with the R-2800 pegged at 56 inches and 2,800 rpm. Two-thirds of the way down the deck the Pratt-Whitney quit.

Frank knew the procedure: retard the throttle, and sure enough, the power came back. He applied full throttle to continue the run when the 2800 quit again. Reducing power to 30 inches, Frank nervously shoved forward once more. The engine froze. He was going to get wet.

"Always land straight ahead." That fundamental dictum flashed through Liberato's mind as he quickly checked the other ditching procedures. Canopy latched open, harness cinched down tight, feet above the rudder pedals to avoid being trapped. He cycled the landing gear to avoid overturning on impact—and waited. And waited. "It was my first experience with time compression," he says.

The Hellcat was making only 55 to 60 knots at impact, but it hit the water "with a hell of a jolt." Frank found himself sitting in waist-deep water as he unstrapped and braced his hands on the canopy rail to turn and check the ship's position.

The position was, in a word, imminent. Frank caught a glimpse of the bow directly overhead. He instantly turned, bracing himself for the collision. Over 10,000 tons of CVL hit the floating six-ton Hellcat at 27 knots.

Frank's plane was flipped forward and down "identically like the Dilbert Dunker." Underwater, he found himself at about 135° from the vertical with water pressure from Monterey's passing keeping him in the cockpit.

Frank waited for the turbulence to stop. But it didn't. With an eerie calmness, he thought, "This is a hell of a way to die." The irony was that he'd qualified as OOD underway in Monterey while stashed awaiting entry to flight training. "It's gonna be a shame I won't see the little boy my wife's gonna have. Might as will give it a shot."

Pushing out of the cockpit with his legs, Frank found himself free. The gulf water was clear and pleasantly warm, as he knew it would be. After all, he'd grown up in the area. When he looked up he clearly saw the shattered F6F wrapped around the ship's bow, "as a tin can would stick to an ax if you chopped it."





Actually, the bow had neatly sliced into the *Hellcat's* midsection. Witnesses on the flight deck saw the elevators pop to the surface, one on either side.

On impulse Frank began swimming in the direction he was pointed—down. “No, dummy, that’s the wrong way.” He swam up to the keel, where it was light enough to see daylight out both sides. Time compression was still in effect, even though *Monterey* was passing overhead at 27 knots. Frank remained extremely calm, giving little thought to how long he’d already been underwater.

He recorded his observations in almost detached fashion. Chiefly, he marveled at the layer of turbulence, six to eight inches thick along the bottom. “Doggone,” he thought, “I didn’t know that was down here. I thought that was just a surface phenomenon.”

Facing aft, Frank couldn’t tell which side was closest. So he felt the keel and determined his left hand was a little higher than his right. “I’ll just haul ass out to starboard,” he thought, so he pushed off, swimming on his back, still holding his breath.

Then he heard “a very nasty sound.” *Chunk, chunk, chunk.* “Oh, no,” his mind registered. “The propellers!”

At the Saturday morning matinee, this is where they’d stop the frame and say, “Come back next week, boys and girls.” But Frank Liberato has no such device. He simply admits that he suffers a blank spot at this point. He assumes he was swept through the screws and miraculously escaped dismemberment. But his next clear recollection is standing 10 to 15 feet in the air, vertically, facing starboard. Apparently he’d been sucked into the propellers’ vortices and shot upwards, emerging in the wake.

Momentarily suspended in midair, Frank looked left and clearly read *Monterey* on the ship’s stern. “I felt like I was in one of those Tom and Jerry cartoons,” he grins. “You know, where the cat runs over the cliff and scrambles to get back. Well, I didn’t make it, either. I dropped back into the wake.”

Tumbled in the churning white water, he swam out to starboard. He could still see activity on the flight deck as everybody looked forward. Instantly irritated, he shouted, “Hey, you bastards, here I am *behind* you!”

“The lord punished me for my uncharitable thoughts,” Frank says, “because I emptied my lungs, lost bouyancy and sank.” That was the only water he swallowed.

Now concerned about remaining afloat, he took off one shoe and prepared to toss it away. Then it struck him. He was wearing half-wellingtons (a fighter pilot trademark—he was slated for VF) which cost almost \$50. So he opted for Plan B. He put the shoe back on and inflated his mae west.

Frank became aware of a pain on his head. He ran his hands over his face and found blood on them. He’d sustained a quarter-inch cut on his right cheek. Satisfied other portions of his anatomy were intact, he pulled the dye marker. When it sank, he experienced another moment of outrage. The damn dye marker *sank*. How’n hell is anybody supposed to find him? Not till much later did he learn it was supposed to sink. Tethered at the end of a cord, it created a larger pool of dye than otherwise. Yes, LT Liberato, Your Navy knows what it’s doing.

Frank caught a glimpse of the planeguard destroyer but lost sight in a swell. Concerned about being passed by, he took off his helmet and waved it aloft. But he needn’t have worried. The DD had him in sight and dove to, putting a swimmer in the water. Judging by his bloody face, the crew thought he’d need help.

The swimmer came next to Frank. “Are you all right, sir? Can you hold on to this life ring?”

“Sure.”

“Can I help you?”

Frank handed over his helmet. “Hold my hard hat. But don’t lose it.” It looked like a geologist’s pick had been at work on it—pitted, gouged and punctured. But Frank wanted it as a souvenir.

The destroyermen had a jacob’s ladder over the side. The swimmer asked, “Can you make it, sir?”

“Yes. But don’t lose my hard hat.”

Frank put a foot in the lowest rung of the ladder. Again the solicitous swimmer asked, “Are you all right?”

“Yeah, but don’t you lose that hard hat.”

Hauled aboard, Frank was quickly inspected. Drenched in 115/145 octane gasoline, he had a headache and a cut cheek. The officer of the deck inquired, “Are you hurt?”

“No, but don’t let that guy lose my hard hat.”

That night he was transferred to a tug and headed for shore—with his hard hat.

First thing ashore, Frank called Patty. She knew something was wrong. “Are you hurt, dear?”

“No, I’m all right. (And I have my hard hat!)”

“What about the plane?”

“It’s totaled, a complete loss.”

Frank said he’d be back in a couple of hours, implying that Patty could wait up for her recently-endangered husband to return to hearth and home. “Well,” she said, “I’m tired. I’ll put on some coffee for you and go to bed.”

Frank’s mood instantly changed. “At that moment I knew I had married myself a real fighter pilot’s wife. She was totally unconcerned.”

And he had his hard hat.

The following afternoon Frank reported to the Barin Field safety officer for debriefing. He was slated to complete CarQuals and would conduct FCLP before proceeding with his final traps next day. Meanwhile, he needed new flight gear. So Frank went to the supply office to draw new equipment.

Bureaucracy reared its ugly head. The rule was that in order to obtain a new item, you had to turn in the previous issue. Finally, Frank fessed up and admitted he’d really like to keep his faithful old hard hat as a souvenir. Something to show the boy, you know.

The supply type was entirely unsympathetic. He took the much-abused hard hat, tossed it into a 55-gallon barrel and gave Frank a new one off the shelf.

Newly fitted out, Frank did bounce drill that afternoon. Next day he made three more traps and a cat shot and he was qualified—46 hours after his first arrested landing.

But the story didn’t quite end there. He’d qualified and won his wings—that was the good news. The bad news came in the form of an accident report attributing the aircraft loss to pilot error. Upon review of the evidence, the safety office decided Frank had run his fuel tank dry. So there he was—a fresh-minted aviator with one strike already against him.

Dad to the rescue. Frank’s father happened to be chief engineering inspector for Pensacola and its outlying fields. He carefully noted the sequence of events, with emphasis upon the two hours engine time spent before takeoff. Liberato the elder then provided a list of at least eight other causes for engine failure under those circumstances, having proved the first tank would have run dry well before that launch.

Thus vindicated, Frank commenced a 21-year career with active and Reserve units. He flew tours with VF-103, ATU-206 and BTG-9 before completing photo school in 1960. As OinC of *Enterprise's* VFP-62 detachment, he was involved in the Cuban missile crisis. Upon resigning from active duty in 1964 he continued flying *Crusaders* at NAS Dallas and eventually commanded VF-703. He retired as a captain in 1972 with 496 traps and now manages system safety programs for Vought Aero Products. He is also Tailhook Charter Member 56.

But Frank always returns to his *Monterey* escapade and the 2½ minutes he spent underwater. “It’s a grand sea story,” he says. “I flew 3,900 hours after that, and the worst thing to happen was a blown tire or two.”

If only he’d kept that hard hat. . . .

#### Editor’s Note:

The subject of this story, Capt. Frank Liberato, is the father of my life-long friend, Mark Liberato. Capt. Liberato told me this story in person. Fantastic details!

Capt. Liberato went on to fly *Crusader* reconnaissance jets during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Thanks, Capt. Liberato, for your Navy service !

## **A MESSAGE FROM 455TH BOMB GROUP ASSOC. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GREG RIGGS**

There is not a great deal of news this time from my position. Good news is that the logo pins advertised in the newsletter have generated a total of \$880 income (minus mailing costs) so far for the Association. The pins themselves were a generous donation by one of our members and are greatly appreciated. There are still some of each type available, with the group pins being the most numerous, and the 741st pins being in lowest supply. In addition to the pins, another member made a generous cash donation of \$375 which is also greatly appreciated.

On a less positive note, twenty-one people have been removed from the mailing list since the first of the year because annual dues have not been paid. Seven of those were relatives of original 455th Bomb Group members rather than members themselves. I strongly encourage all of our annual members to go ahead and buy a life membership for only \$60. It removes the annual burden of remembering to pay dues.

Craig Ward and I continue to get positive feedback from the membership, which is very encouraging. We both view this as a labor of love, in appreciation for the freedoms you preserved and passed down to our generation. Service is a privilege. Thank you.

*Greg Riggs, Executive Director, 455th Bomb Group Association*



### **Dear Executive Director,**

I would like to pass along a comment which the late Bill Crawford may have mentioned. Our original crew started with Bill L. Rogers as our Chief Pilot and Aircraft Commander. Our first combat mission took place Aug. 1, 1944. We flew our first 17 missions in six weeks before being shot down over Belgrade, Yugoslavia. As a result of that incident, we lost half our crew to injuries or by choice of other crew members. The balance of our tour took another four months because of inclement weather.

As a result of our original crew, we no longer had a crew of regular members. We flew a crew of whatever was available at any particular time. I felt like we had become orphans in our own unit, unlike your father (Lt. Col. Clarence E. Riggs) who was one of the originals in the 740th.

Regards,

Curtis Diles, Jr., 5361 Pathview Dr., Dayton, OH. 45424

cdiles@woh.rr.com

### **Dear Curtis,**

My dad was indeed fortunate in many ways. His plane was one of only two original planes still flying combat at the end of his 50th mission. He flew all but one mission with the same crew. He and his crew finished their 50 missions together. They were very close and stayed in touch throughout the years. Then there is also the obvious – he stayed alive, wasn't wounded, and wasn't shot down.

Thanks for the insight into your background and crew.

Greg Riggs

Executive Director, 455th Bomb Group Association

**455th Bomb Group Assoc., Inc.**

**P.O. Box 93095**

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