



*The 461st*

# Liberaider



Vol. 29, No. 1

JUNE 2012

SOMEWHERE IN THE USA

## Reunion Information

The 2012 reunion of the 461st/484th Bombardment Group (H) will be held in Indianapolis, IN. This promises to be another exceptional reunion with exciting tours and activities. See page 18 for details and sign-up information.

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## Prisoner for Freedom

Dr. Stanley E. Todd Sr. died Sept. 30, 2002, just days after the story on page 4 appeared in the Lexington (KY) Herald-Leader. U.S. Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY) noted the passing of his "friend and hero" with a tribute in the Congressional Record.

In May 2012, Becky Todd York, her brother Stanley Todd Jr., her husband Michael and their children James and Natalie traveled to Austria. There they met with Austrian researchers at the University of Graz, Georg Hoffmann

and Nicole-Melanie Goll, who have been working on a history of U.S. airmen shot down over Austria/Hungary during World War II, focusing on the atrocities committed against the airmen. The full story of Stanley E. Todd and his crew and others like them may never be fully known, but the work of these Austrian researchers is providing a wealth of information about the brave sacrifices these airmen made. Ms. York will share more of what she learned in a future piece.

*(Continued on page 4)*

## **WWII Air Facts**

Below is an excellent summary of the effort required in WWII. It focuses on the American side of things, but the British, Germans and Japanese expended comparable energy and experienced similar costs. Just one example for the Luftwaffe; about 1/3 of the BF-109s built were lost in non-combat crashes. After Midway, the Japanese experience level declined markedly, with the loss of so many higher-time naval pilots.

Most Americans who were not adults during WWII have no understanding of the magnitude of it. This listing of

some of the aircraft facts gives a bit of insight to it.

276,000 aircraft manufactured in the US.

43,000 planes lost overseas, including 23,000 in combat.

14,000 lost in the continental U.S.

The US civilian population maintained a dedicated effort for four years, many working long hours seven days per week and often also vol-

*(Continued on page 7)*

# *Taps*

May they rest in peace forever

Please forward all death notices to:

Hughes Glantzberg  
P.O. Box 926  
Gunnison, CO 81230  
editor@461st.org

## 764<sup>th</sup> Squadron

<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>
Diehl, Nolan	Red Bluff, CA	1092	08/15/2011
Mance, Thomas V.	N. Huntington, PA	1035	08/01/2011

## 765<sup>th</sup> Squadron

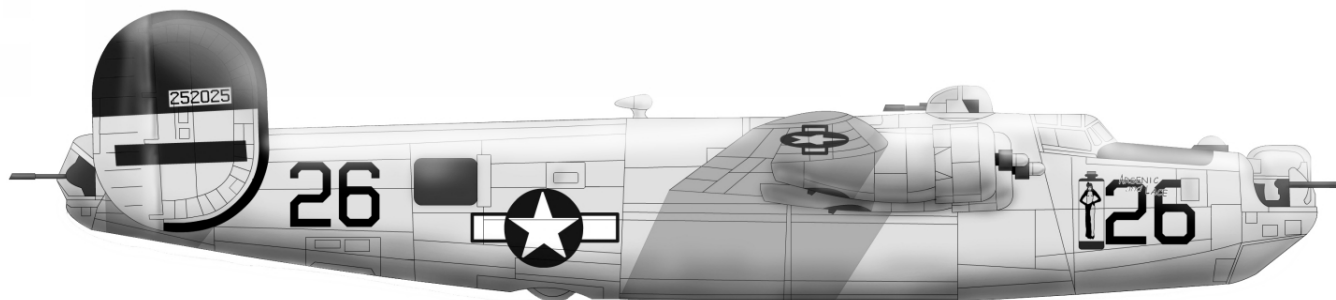
<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>
Blaney, John F.	Brooksville, FL	747	05/10/2012

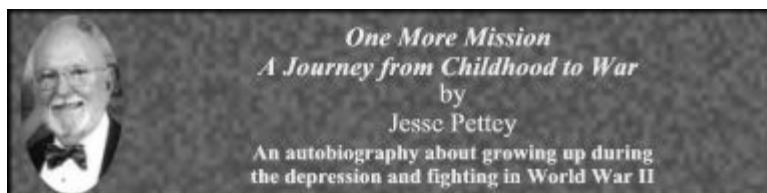
## 766<sup>th</sup> Squadron

<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>
Seiler, Donald L.	Mechanicsburg, PA	612	11/28/2011

## 767<sup>th</sup> Squadron

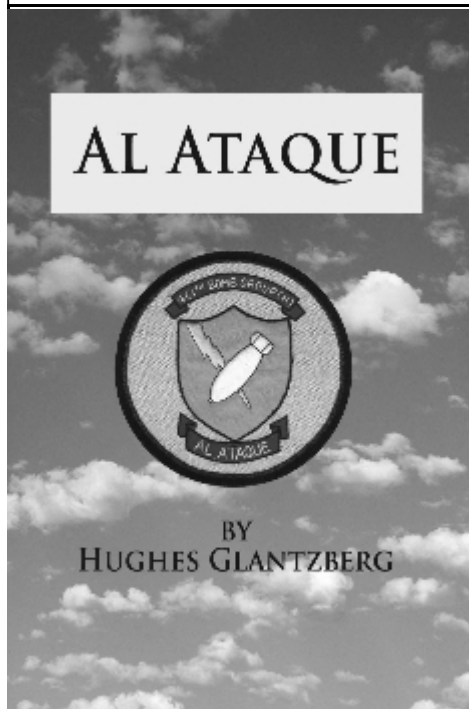
<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>
Barnes, Lloyd E.	Nashville, TN	612	02/15/2012
Carter, Richard F.	Concord, CA	1092	07/ /2011
Ostroff, Anton G.	Dallas, TX	612	12/28/2011





With a special interest in World War II and the 461st Bombardment Group in particular, I found this book excellent. Most of the men who fought during WWII were in their late teens and early 20s. It's amazing to be able to read about their activities. Liberaider Editor

Available from Amazon.com, Barnes & Noble and Xlibris (at a 15% discount) (<http://www2.xlibris.com/bookstore/bookdisplay.asp?bookid=11013>).



## Al Ataque

History / General

Trade **Paperback**

Publication Date: Nov-2006

Price: \$26.95

Size: 6 x 9

Author: Hughes Glantzberg

ISBN: **0-595-41572-5**

413 Pages

On Demand Printing

Available from Amazon.com, Barnes and Noble, Ingram Book Group, Baker & Taylor, and from iUniverse, Inc

To order call 1-800-AUTHORS

Trade **Hardcopy**

Publication Date: Nov-2006

Price: \$36.95

Size: 6 x 9

Author: Hughes Glantzberg

ISBN: **0-595-86486-4**

Al Ataque is an excellent book that describes the preparation a bomb group goes through before being deployed overseas as well as the problems of shipping over five thousand men and supplies along with some eighty B-24 aircraft from a stateside base to a foreign country. The book details the establishment of Torretta Field which was used by the 461st for the duration of the war in Europe. The 461st Bomb Group flew two hundred and twenty-three combat missions between April 1944 and April 1945. Each of these is described in the book. Personal experiences of veterans who were actually part of the 461st are also included.



## Music Bravely Ringing

by  
Martin A. Rush  
767th Squadron

This is the story of a small town boy who, during WWII, wandered onto the conveyor belt that turned civilians into bomber pilots. Initially awed and intimidated at the world outside his home town, he began to realize that this was an opportunity to have a hand in stimulating and challenging dealings larger than he had expected. He had a few near-misses, but gradually began to get the hang of it. His story is that like the thousands of young men who were tossed into the maelstrom of war in the skies. He was one of the ones who was lucky enough to live through it.

Available from Amazon.com, Barnes and Noble, Ingram Book Group, Baker & Taylor, and from iUniverse, Inc.

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This article is dedicated to the memory of pilot 2nd Lt. Raymon E. Spehalski, who lost his life when the plane crashed in 1945, and those who survived with Sgt. Todd that day: co-pilot 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Christ Dallas, Sgt. George D. Farley, S/Sgt. Luis R. Gugel, Sgt. Albert L. Keller Jr., Sgt. Walter E. Lechner, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. George Leasure, Sgt. Henry L. Moran Jr. and Sgt. John R. Rayburn.

## Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)

Sept. 25, 2002

### PRISONER FOR FREEDOM DAUGHTER HONORS HER FATHER'S SERVICE AS A POW

*Becky Todd York  
Contributing Writer*

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More than 100 of Kentucky's estimated 617 living former prisoners of war were honored Friday at the



Sgt. Stanley E. Todd, Sr.

Lexington Veterans Affairs Medical Center. It was part of the annual National POW/MIA Day, observed on the third Friday of September across the United States.

My father, Dr. **Stanley E. Todd Sr.** of Richmond, was among the invitees, having served in a German prison camp during World War II. Last year, he was on a cross-country Amtrak train trip and could not attend. This year, he wasn't there because prostate cancer has spread to other parts of his body, and he now lives at the Richmond Health and Rehabilitation Center, a nursing home he helped found in 1968. But on that day, I paused to honor those who have served our country. My brother Stan and I paid homage to our father's legacy of faith and courage by spending time at his bedside.

Only in recent years has my dad been willing and able to answer questions about being a nose gunner on a B-24 based in Italy; his experience being shot down; and his internment in Stalag 7-A in Moosberg, Germany. And only since staying at his home off and on these last months have I discovered some old photographs of his war years and a newspaper article about him from 1945 that I had last seen as a child. I was not allowed to talk to him about the article.

"Sgt. Stanley Todd Faced Firing Squad in Nazi Camp," reads the headline in a June 12, 1945, front-page article in The Richmond Register. In the piece, my father, interviewed at Richmond's Pattie A. Clay Hospital, recounts that he and 12 other airmen were stripped to the waist and placed against a wall to face a firing squad. Just as the Germans prepared to fire, a messenger ran to the officer in charge with an order declaring that the Americans were officially listed as prisoners of war and could not be executed.

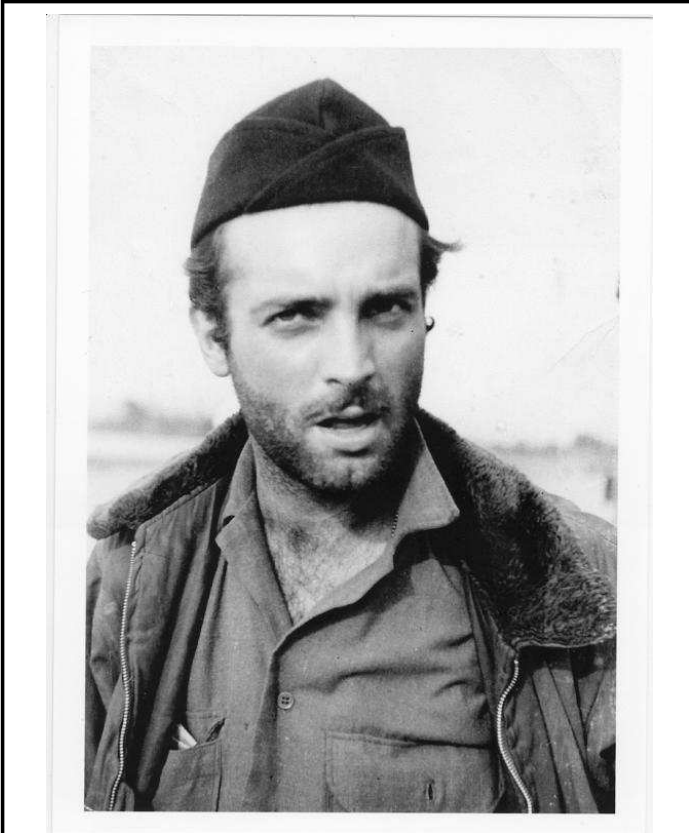
"That was a day I'll never forget," my father told reporter Betty Tevis, who years later would be our neighbor briefly in Richmond and then would marry a former colleague of mine at the Lexington Herald-Leader, the late Andrew Eckdahl.

But that day is one my father has tried hard to forget these last 57 years.

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"Some things are best left in the past," he told me recently, saying he didn't want to talk about that experience. "It was hell."



Sgt. Stanley E. Todd, Sr. upon release from POW camp.

Still, I have found myself wanting to know more about that part of his life, to know how it shaped the 22-year-old man who came back from that war. He returned, spent six months recuperating at a Veteran's Administration hospital, then met and married my mother within months and headed to the University of Louisville School of Dentistry, courtesy of the GI Bill.

He seemed to put the experience behind him and move on. He has led an active life of community and church service, and he has friends from all walks of life.

Last summer, my dad joined my family on a trip to Italy, where we planned to visit the town nearest his former air base. It was on the two-hour drive from Naples to Cerignola (pronounced CHAIR-in-YO-la) that my dad recalled first arriving in Italy in November 1944 and going on his first mission on a snowy Christmas Day.

"I never thought I'd come home alive," he told us.

In Cerignola, my husband learned just enough Italian to communicate that we were trying to find the old air base. We were given rather sketchy directions to a possible site outside of town. As we headed down a road that seemed to run through the middle of nowhere, surrounded by vineyards and olive trees, my father spotted an old house, and we turned down a gravel road and got out of the car. My dad turned to the house ahead. We could see the dome of the cathedral in town, 5 miles away. "This is it," he declared.

The cathedral dome had been the key checkpoint signaling to him and his B-24 crew members that they had returned safely to their base.

Shortly, a local caretaker came by and confirmed that, yes, this was the site of the wartime air base ("il bas-so").

We learned from him that many other former American pilots, bombardiers, navigators and gunners had made this trek back to see this place. They, after all, were the lucky ones.

About the same time, Stephen Ambrose's book, *The Wild Blue: The Men and Boys Who Flew the B-24s over Germany*, explained that my dad had one of the most dangerous and demanding jobs in the war. More than half did not come home. Many airmen crashed and died right on that site.

I learned only during the last two months the actual date and details of my father's last mission. Thanks to help from several wonderful Web sites, I was led to individuals at the 461st Bombardment Group and the American Ex-Prisoners of War organization who helped provide that information. I also am grateful for the help of Patti Leigh of the Prisoner of War Information System, who obtained from the National Archives the Missing Air Crew report of my father's last mission.

My father's B-24 flew into hellish flak, lost two of its four engines, and crashed on March 26, 1945, near St. Michael, Austria, a few miles from Graz.

It was a strange sensation to realize that on that same day 38 years later, my father walked me down the aisle

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at my wedding, to my husband, Michael.

My father and seven of his crew bailed out at 16,000 feet. The pilot also bailed, but his parachute caught on the plane, and he was killed. The others were picked up by Nazi SS troops and taken to a prison camp.

My father did not know what happened to the 10th crew member until he saw him at a 461st Bombardment Group reunion two years ago in Omaha, Neb. That man, now apparently the only other living member of the crew, told my father he got his foot hung up while trying to bail out. He eventually broke free, parachuted safely and was captured and taken to another prison camp.

Since Sept. 11, many Americans have experienced a renewal of patriotism, and others have felt a spiritual awakening. I know learning more of my father's experience has inspired me as I reflect on my father's abiding faith.

You live each day, do your best, help others, deal with adversity, move forward and trust. Each day really is a gift from God. We can honor our heroes by carrying on and making our own lives count for something.

---

Becky Todd York is a former reporter for the Lexington Herald-Leader. She lives in Vienna, VA, with her two children and husband Michael, who won the 1986 Pulitzer Prize while a reporter for the Herald-Leader. Dr. Stanley E. Todd, 79, practiced dentistry in Richmond for 33 years and has been a Madison County farmer. A former Richmond city commissioner, he is the chairman of the Richmond Housing Authority. He is a former chairman of the board of the Kentucky Heart Association. He also served on the board of the Kentucky River Foothills Development Corp., did dental missionary work in Haiti, is an elder of Richmond's First Christian Church and helped found a local clothing bank, the Richmond Little League and Stanton Woodcraft. He attended Eastern Kentucky University and graduated from the University of Louisville School of Dentistry.



Spehalski crew #87R-2 of the 764th Squadron. Stanley E. Todd (nose gunner) is in front second from the right.



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unteering for other work. WWII was the largest human effort in history.

Statistics from Flight Journal magazine.

## THE COST of DOING BUSINESS

The staggering cost of war.

### THE PRICE OF VICTORY

(cost of an aircraft in WWII dollars)

B-17	\$204,370	P-40	\$44,892
B-24	\$215,516	P-47	\$85,578
B-25	\$142,194	P-51	\$51,572
B-26	\$192,426	C-47	\$88,574
B-29	\$605,360	PT-17	\$15,052
P-38	\$97,147	AT-6	\$22,952

### PLANES A DAY WORLDWIDE

From Germany's invasion of Poland Sept. 1, 1939 and ending with Japan's surrender Sept. 2, 1945 --- 2,433 days. From 1942 onward, America averaged 170 planes lost a day.

How many is a 1,000 planes? B-17 production (12,731) wingtip to wingtip would extend 250 miles. 1,000 B-17s carried 2.5 million gallons of high octane fuel and required 10,000 airmen to fly and fight them.

### THE NUMBERS GAME

9.7 billion gallons of gasoline consumed, 1942-1945.

107.8 million hours flown, 1943-1945.

459.7 billion rounds of aircraft ammo fired overseas, 1942-1945.

7.9 million bombs dropped overseas, 1943-1945.

2.3 million combat sorties, 1941-1945 (one sortie = one takeoff).

299,230 aircraft accepted, 1940-1945.

808,471 aircraft engines accepted, 1940-1945.

799,972 propellers accepted, 1940-1945.

### WWII MOST-PRODUCED COMBAT AIRCRAFT

Ilyushin IL-2 Sturmovik	36,183
Yakolev Yak-1,-3,-7, -9	31,000+
Messerschmitt BF-109	30,480
Focke-Wulf Fw-190	29,001
Supermarine Spitfire/Seafire	20,351
Convair B-24/PB4Y Liberator/Privateer	18,482
Republic P-47 Thunderbolt	15,686
North American P-51 Mustang	15,875
Junkers Ju-88	15,000
Hawker Hurricane	14,533
Curtiss P-40 Warhawk	13,738
Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress	12,731
Vought F4U Corsair	12,571

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The 461st Liberaider  
461<sup>st</sup> Bombardment Group (H)  
Activated: 1 July 1943  
Inactivated: 27 August 1945  
Incorporated: 15 November 1985

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Grumman F6F Hellcat	12,275	craft accidents per month---- nearly 40 a day. (Less than one accident in four resulted in totaled aircraft, however.)
Petlyakov Pe-2	11,400	It gets worse.....
Lockheed P-38 Lightning	10,037	Almost 1,000 Army planes disappeared en route from the US to foreign climes. But an eye-watering 43,581 aircraft were lost overseas including 22,948 on combat missions (18,418 against the Western Axis) and 20,633 attributed to non-combat causes overseas.
Mitsubishi A6M Zero	10,449	
North American B-25 Mitchell	9,984	
Lavochkin LaGG-5	9,920	
Note: The LaGG-5 was produced with both water-cooled (top) and air-cooled (bottom) engines.		In a single 376 plane raid in August 1943, 60 B-17s were shot down. That was a 16 percent loss rate and meant 600 empty bunks in England. In 1942-43 it was statistically impossible for bomber crews to complete a 25-mission tour in Europe.
Grumman TBM Avenger	9,837	
Bell P-39 Airacobra	9,584	
Nakajima Ki-43 Oscar	5,919	Pacific theatre losses were far less (4,530 in combat) owing to smaller forces committed. The worst B-29 mission, against Tokyo on May 25, 1945, cost 26 Super Fortresses, 5.6 percent of the 464 dispatched from the Marianas.
DeHavilland Mosquito	7,780	
Avro Lancaster	7,377	
Heinkel He-111	6,508	On average, 6,600 American servicemen died per month during WWII, about 220 a day. By the end of the war, over 40,000 airmen were killed in combat theatres and another 18,000 wounded. Some 12,000 missing men were declared dead, including a number "liberated" by the Soviets but never returned. More than 41,000 were captured, half of the 5,400 held by the Japanese died in captivity, compared with one-tenth in German hands. Total combat casualties were pegged at 121,867.
Handley-Page Halifax	6,176	
Messerschmitt BF-110	6,150	
Lavochkin LaGG-7	5,753	
Boeing B-29 Superfortress	3,970	
Short Stirling	2,383	

Sources: Rene Francillon, Japanese Aircraft of the Pacific war; Cajus Bekker, The Luftwaffe Diaries; Ray Wagner, American Combat Planes; Wikipedia.

According to the AAF Statistical Digest, in less than four years (December 1941- August 1945), the US Army Air Forces lost 14,903 pilots, aircrew and assorted personnel plus 13,873 airplanes --- inside the continental United States. They were the result of 52,651 aircraft accidents (6,039 involving fatalities) in 45 months.

Think about those numbers. They average 1,170 air-

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ward, America produced more planes than Britain and Russia combined. And more than Germany and Japan together 1941-45.

However, our enemies took massive losses. Through much of 1944, the Luftwaffe sustained uncontrolled hemorrhaging, reaching 25 percent of aircrews and 40 planes a month. And in late 1944 into 1945, nearly half the pilots in Japanese squadrons had flown fewer than 200 hours. The disparity of two years before had been completely reversed.

#### Experience Level:

Uncle Sam sent many of his sons to war with absolute minimums of training. Some fighter pilots entered combat in 1942 with less than one hour in their assigned aircraft.

The 357<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group (often known as The Yoxford Boys) went to England in late 1943 having trained on P-39s. The group never saw a Mustang until shortly before its first combat mission.

A high-time P-51 pilot had 30 hours in type. Many had fewer than five hours. Some had one hour.

With arrival of new aircraft, many combat units transitioned in combat. The attitude was, "They all have a stick and a throttle. Go fly 'em." When the famed 4<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group converted from P-47s to P-51s in February 1944, there was no time to stand down for an orderly transition. The Group commander, Col. Donald Blakeslee, said, "You can learn to fly '51s on the way to the target."

A future P-47 ace said, "I was sent to England to die." He was not alone. Some fighter pilots tucked their wheels in the well on their first combat mission with one previous flight in the aircraft. Meanwhile, many bomber crews were still learning their trade: of Jimmy Doolittle's 15 pilots on the April 1942 Tokyo raid, only five had won their wings before 1941. All but one of the 16 co-pilots were less than a year out of flight school.

In WWII flying safety took a back seat to combat. The AAF's worst accident rate was recorded by the A

-36 Invader version of the P-51: a staggering 274 accidents per 100,000 flying hours. Next worst were the P-39 at 245, the P-40 at 188, and the P-38 at 139. All were Allison powered.

Bomber wrecks were fewer but more expensive. The B-17 and B-24 averaged 30 and 35 accidents per 100,000 flight hours, respectively -- a horrific figure considering that from 1980 to 2000 the Air Force's major mishap rate was less than 2.

The B-29 was even worse at 40; the world's most sophisticated, most capable and most expensive bomber was too urgently needed to stand down for mere safety reasons. The AAF set a reasonably high standard for B-29 pilots, but the desired figures were seldom attained.

The original cadre of the 58<sup>th</sup> Bomb Wing was to have 400 hours of multi-engine time, but there were not enough experienced pilots to meet the criterion. Only ten percent had overseas experience. Conversely, when a \$2.1 billion B-2 crashed in 2008, the Air Force initiated a two-month "safety pause" rather than declare a "stand down", let alone grounding.

The B-29 was no better for maintenance. Though the R3350 was known as a complicated, troublesome power-plant, no more than half the mechanics had previous experience with the Duplex Cyclone. But they made it work.

#### Navigators:

Perhaps the greatest unsung success story of AAF training was Navigators. The Army graduated some 50,000 during the War. And many had never flown out of sight of land before leaving "Uncle Sugar" for a war zone. Yet the huge majority found their way across oceans and continents without getting lost or running out of fuel --- a stirring tribute to the AAF's educational establishments.

#### Cadet To Colonel:

It was possible for a flying cadet at the time of Pearl Harbor to finish the war with eagles on his shoulders. That was the record of John D. Landers, a 21-year-

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old Texan, who was commissioned a second lieutenant on December 12, 1941. He joined his combat squadron with 209 hours total flight time, including 2? in P-40s. He finished the war as a full colonel, commanding an 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force Group --- at age 24.

As the training pipeline filled up, however those low figures became exceptions.

By early 1944, the average AAF fighter pilot entering combat had logged at least 450 hours, usually including 250 hours in training. At the same time, many captains and first lieutenants claimed over 600 hours.

#### FACT:

At its height in mid-1944, the Army Air Forces had 2.6 million people and nearly 80,000 aircraft of all

types.

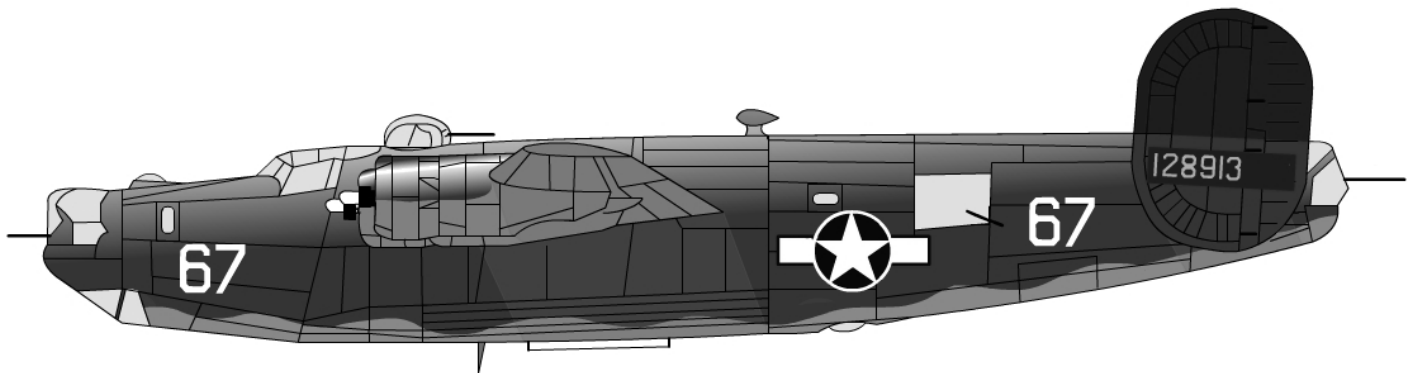
Today the US Air Force employs 327,000 active personnel (plus 170,000 civilians) with 5,500+ manned and perhaps 200 unmanned aircraft.

The 2009 figures represent about 12 percent of the manpower and 7 percent of the airplanes of the WWII peak.

#### IN SUMMATION:

Whether there will ever be another war like that experienced in 1940-45 is doubtful, as fighters and bombers have given way to helicopters and remotely-controlled drones over Afghanistan and Iraq. But within living memory, men left the earth in 1,000-plane formations and fought major battles five miles high, leaving a legacy that remains timeless.

All the toilets in New York's police stations have been stolen. Police have nothing to go on.



I do not enjoy computer jokes. Not one bit.

## World War II Facts

- The first German serviceman killed in the war was killed by the Japanese (China, 1937).
- The first American serviceman killed was killed by the Russians (Finland, 1940).
- 80% of Soviet males born in 1923 didn't survive World War II.
- The highest ranking American killed was Lt. Gen. Lesley McNair, killed by the U.S. Army Air Corps.
- Between 1939 and 1945 the Allies dropped 3.4 million tons of bombs, an average of about 27,700 tons of bombs each month.
- 12,000 heavy bombers were shot down in World War II.
- 2/3 of Allied bomber crews were lost for each plane destroyed.
- 3 or 4 ground men were wounded for each killed.
- 6 bomber crewmen were killed for each one wounded.
- Over 100,000 Allied bomber crewmen were killed over Europe.
- There were 433 Medals of Honor awarded during World War II, 219 of them were given after the recipient's death.
- From 6 June 1944 to 8 May 1945 in Europe the Allies had 200,000 dead and 550,000 wounded.
- The youngest U.S. serviceman was 12 year old Calvin Graham, USN. He was wounded in combat and given a Dishonorable Discharge for lying about his age. (His benefits were later restored by act of Congress).
- At the time of Pearl Harbor, the top U.S. Navy command was called CINCUS (pronounced "sink us"), the shoulder patch of the U.S. Army's 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry division was the swastika, and Hitler's private train was named "Amerika". All three were soon changed for PR purposes.
- Germany lost 110 Division Commanders in combat.
- 40,000 men served on U-Boats during World War II; 30,000 never returned.
- More U.S. servicemen died in the Air Corps than the Marine Corps. While completing the required 30 missions, your chance of being killed was 71%. Not that bombers were helpless. A B-17 carried 4 tons of bombs and 1.5 tons of machine gun ammo. The U.S. 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force shot down 6,098 fighter planes, 1 for every 12,700 shots fired.
- Germany's power grid was much more vulnerable than realized. One estimate is that if just 1% of the bombs dropped on German industry had instead been dropped on power plants, German industry would have collapsed.
- Generally speaking, there was no such thing as an average fighter pilot. You were either an ace or a target. For instance, Japanese ace Hiroyoshi Nishizawa shot down over 80 planes. He died while a passenger on a cargo plane.
- It was a common practice on fighter planes to load every 5<sup>th</sup> round with a tracer round to aid in aiming. That was a mistake. The tracers had different ballistics so (at long range) if your tracers were hitting the target, 80% of your rounds were missing. Worse yet, the tracers instantly told your enemy he was under fire and from which direction. Worst of all was the practice of loading a string of tracers at the end of the belt to tell you that you were out of ammo. That was definitely not something you wanted to tell the enemy. Units that stopped using tracers saw their

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- success rate nearly double and their loss rate go down.
- When allied armies reached the Rhine, the first thing men did was pee in it. This was pretty universal from the lowest private to Winston Churchill (who made a big show of it) and Gen. Patton (who had himself photographed in the act).
- German ME-264 bombers were capable of bombing New York City but it wasn't worth the effort.
- A number of air crewmen died of farts. (ascending to 20,000 ft. in an un-pressurized aircraft causes intestinal gas to expand 300%!).
- Germany lost 40-45% of their aircraft during World War II to accidents.
- The Russians destroyed over 500 German aircraft by ramming them in midair (they also sometimes cleared minefields by marching over them). "It takes a brave man not to be a hero in the Red Army". - Joseph Stalin.
- The average German officer slot had to be re-filled 9.2 times.
- The U.S. Army had more ships than the U.S. Navy.
- The German Air Force had 22 infantry divisions, 2 armor divisions, and 11 paratroop divisions. None of them were capable of airborne operations. The German Army had paratroops who WERE capable of airborne operations.
- When the U.S. Army landed in North Africa, among the equipment brought ashore were 3 complete Coca Cola bottling plants.
- 84 German Generals were executed by Hitler.
- Among the first "Germans" captured at Normandy were several Koreans. They had been forced to fight for the Japanese Army until they were captured by the Russians and forced to fight for the Russian Army until they were captured by the Germans and forced to fight for the German Army until they were capture by the U.S. Army.
- The Graf Spee never sank. The scuttling attempt failed and the ship was bought by the British. On board was Germany's newest radar system.
- One of Japan's methods of destroying tanks was to bury a very large artillery shell with only the nose exposed. When a tank came near enough a soldier would whack the shell with a hammer. "Lack of weapons is no excuse for defeat." - Lt. Gen. Mataguchi.
- Following a massive naval bombardment, 35,000 U.S. and Canadian troops stormed ashore at Kiska. 21 troops were killed in the fire-fight. It would have been worse if there had been Japanese on the island.
- The MISS ME was an unarmed Piper Cub. While spotting for U.S. artillery her pilot saw a similar German plane doing the same thing. He dove on the German plane and he and his co-pilot fired their pistols damaging the German plane enough that it had to make a forced landing. Whereupon they landed and took the Germans prisoner. It is unknown where they put them since the MISS ME only had two seats.
- Most members of the Waffen SS were not German.
- Air attacks caused 1/3 of German Generals' deaths.
- By D-Day, the Germans had 1.5 million railway workers operating 988,000 freight cars and used 29,000 per day.
- The only nation that Germany declared war on was the USA.
- During the Japanese attack on Hong Kong, Brit-

*(Continued on page 13)*

(Continued from page 12)

ish officers objected to Canadian infantrymen taking up positions in the officer's mess. No enlisted men allowed!

- By D-Day, 35% of all German soldiers had been wounded at least once, 11% twice, 6% three times, 2% four times and 2% more than 4 times.
- Nuclear physicist Niels Bohr was rescued in the nick of time from German occupied Denmark.

While Danish resistance fighters provided covering fire he ran out the back door of his home stopping momentarily to grab a beer bottle full of precious "heavy water". He finally reached England still clutching the bottle, which contained beer. Perhaps some German drank the heavy water...

- Germany lost 136 Generals, which averages out to be 1 dead General every 2 weeks.

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Did you hear about the cross eyed teacher who lost her job because she couldn't control her pupils?

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## Ways to Show Gratitude

- Tell someone face to face how much they mean to you.
- Write a thank you note (via snail mail).
- Send a post card.
- Pack your lunch and then give it to those you come across who need it.
- Put a sticky note somewhere random that'll make someone smile.
- Leave a creative smiley face for your spouse (I make mine with a banana and two apples in the kitchen).
- Smile ear to ear at everyone you see – it's contagious.
- Call someone you know is in a tough spot and just listen for as long as they'd like.
- Give your books a new home with a new mind.
- Call, email or write your closest 5 people in your life and let them know the unique impact they have on your life.
- Pay for the person's Starbucks who's behind you in line.
- Get a \$100 in 2-dollar bills from the bank and use them as your tip money – guaranteed smile.
- Get a doggy bag no matter how small your leftovers are. Give it to the first person you see who needs it.
- Buy a dozen sandwiches and pass them out to homeless folks in a busy area (one of my favorites).
- Give an anonymous donation of whatever you can afford.
- Buy a lottery ticket for a homeless person.
- Take that coat or jacket you never wear and give it to someone on the street (do this with anything you haven't worn in the past 6 months).
- Make a friend their favorite meal.
- Or buy them a bottle of wine and drink it together, slowly, with no agenda.
- Share an experience with someone you love- perhaps a sunset or special walk.
- Send one of my articles to someone you know could use it.
- Open a door for someone.
- When someone's having car troubles, instead of speeding by frustrated, stop to help.
- Give genuine compliments to those you hardly know (like a waiter or bus driver).
- Leave a huge tip (I love doing this with breakfast, since the bill is usually low).
- Donate a week of your life to a good cause
- Leave an inspirational book on the bus.
- Leave a \$2 bill (or \$1) on a random windshield.
- Take a picture for a tourist.

# Mercy Missions

by  
Sean Sims

Army Heritage and Education Center

*Sean Sims is a graduate of Messiah College, Class of 2008, with a BS in Biology. He served as a student volunteer intern in the AHEC in 2009.*

The final days of World War II did not immediately end the stress faced by all Allied soldiers. Despite the majority of German territory being securely in the hands of the Allies, many Allied soldiers anxiously awaited liberation in territory that had not been reached by ground forces. These Allied prisoners were in need of food and medical supplies to ensure their survival, which had become scarce due to the chaotic nature of the end of the war. Servicemen who found themselves in German hands, particularly Army Air Force officers interned by Luftwaffe personnel, were arguably better off than those who surrendered to other services of the German military. They certainly fared better than Prisoners of War (POW) in Japanese care. However, the conditions many servicemen faced after capture were both depressing and tedious. Becoming a prisoner of Germany began with a soldier hearing, "For you, the war is over."

Before receiving a permanent camp assignment, the serviceman would be interrogated for a period of time which varied due to how much useful information the German military felt that it could extract. Enlisted soldiers were felt to have very little useful information compared to their officers, and they could expect to be on their way to internment faster than their commanders. Travelling to a camp was a trying and likely dangerous experience late in the war. Cramped conditions with little food were only made worse by the possibility of being strafed by aircraft of their own side. On many occasions Allied prisoners were unknowingly and mistakenly killed by friendly fire. As the Reich crumbled, acute shortages in food and materiel for the Wehrmacht placed the needs of POWs very low on the list of priorities. At the end of the war, many prisoners were left to fend for themselves as their captors abandoned their posts.

POWs were subjected to both physical and mental duress. Therefore, swift repatriation of these servicemen was a high priority. It was of such importance to General Dwight Eisenhower that he addressed the 40,000+

prisoners and told them that swift efforts were being made to ensure their repatriation.

Following Victory in Europe (VE) Day on May 8, many prisoners still awaited liberation in Austria. By May 9, two stalags, in southern Austria, Wolfsberg and Spittal, required aid to sustain Allied prisoners until they could be reached by land. The camps lay within range of the American Fifteenth Air Force operating out of Italy. A B-24 bombardment group, the 461<sup>st</sup>, from the 49th Bombardment Wing stationed at Torretta Air Field southwest of Cerignola in southern Italy, was assigned the task of coming to aid the prisoners in these postwar missions. The 461<sup>st</sup> had flown 223 combat missions over the preceding twelve months. Now it would fly "Mercy Missions." A call for volunteers went out to fly to Austria. On May 9, the supply missions began and would continue everyday through May 16.

One such volunteer, a pilot from the 767<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron of the 461<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group recalls making his drops, "We went in at 200 feet below the ridge levels on each side, and had to throttle down to 145 MPH to minimize bursting the bundles which were dropped onto paneled grass fields adjacent to the camp then we had to throttle up quickly to make a hairy turn at the end of a box canyon to get out." Over the eight day period a total of 90 sorties were flown, in which 184 tons of food and medical supplies were dropped to Allied POWs. It must have truly been a wonderful sight to see. "One happy guy was sitting on top of the barracks roof, waving wildly, recalled a navigator who served with the 765<sup>th</sup> Squadron, also part of the 461st Group. With no danger from enemy aircraft the B-24 crews successfully relieved the former prisoners until they could be met on the ground.

The alleviation of the suffering of military and civilian victims of the war in Europe was to become a major task for the Allies. Efforts to contact, sustain and repatriate Allied POWs received great attention. The American military tradition of "leave no Soldier" is graphically represented in the actions and efforts of the Army Air Force during World War II. This tradition survives today in the U. S. military, as evidenced by the extensive efforts to recover fallen soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen from battlefields around the world.



# Oh To Be 24!

or

# Ode To B-24

by

Yvonne Higgins Messerschmidt

January 23, 1999

Flossmoor, IL

Tonight as I looked at some old clothes  
Hanging in the basement on a rack  
I saw something there and it really took me back  
For there was my husband's bomber jacket  
He had worn in the Second World War  
That old beat up leather jacket when he flew in a B-24  
Though scraped and scarred as the leather looked  
With frayed cuffs on each wrist  
The yellow stencil of 35 bombs was impossible to miss  
That stood for flying 35 missions in combat in Italy  
And the bomb groups insignia in vivid  
Color was still easy to see  
I picked up the flap of one pocket  
And inside I curiously did look  
And to my surprise and amusement  
I found my husband's "Little Black Book"  
It contained names like Betty and Bobbie  
And Daisy, Doris and Anna  
From towns where he had been stationed  
From California to Texas and Alabama  
Then there was Marion from Casper Wyoming  
To whom my husband was engaged  
When I read her name and address there I quickly  
Turned the page  
Was I feeling a wee bit jealous of a girl  
From so long ago?  
If I was it quickly vanished as on the next page it did show  
Something written in big bold letters and  
It made my whole being glow  
For there was my name and address  
And it was very plain to see

*(Continued on page 16)*

*(Continued from page 15)*

That when he wrote "Yvonne" there  
It was the last girlfriend there would be  
But seeing that old bomber jacket and black book  
Reminded me of my early love  
The wonderful joy and the passion  
That lit up the night skies high above  
I wish I could go back just one time  
And be that happy girl I was then  
In love with a handsome Lieutenant  
I'd marry all over again.

## **Old Soldier's Photos Never Die**

by

Yvonne Higgins Messerschmidt

January 18, 1996

Naples, FL

Handsome, young airman in  
The photograph from 1942  
How can that old, gray haired  
Man I see here now be you?  
Eyes so bright and chin so strong  
And mouth so appealing  
When I look at your old photograph  
I get that same old feeling  
But wars and years and life  
And tears all take their toll  
And turn that lad so young  
Into a man that's old  
I try to whisper sweet nothings  
Into his ear  
But he says "What?" and I give up  
Because he cannot hear!!

## Remo L. Bacchi

Remo L. Bacchi (Ray)  
36740741 764<sup>th</sup> Squadron S/Sgt. "R"  
March 2008

When I was 7 years old, my family, who were US citizens, left Switzerland and arrived in the USA in 1923 and settled in St. Louis. I became aviation-minded when Lindbergh made his Paris flight in 1927. Moving to Chicago in 1929, I attended high school and was attracted to the ROTC, graduating as cadet commander in 1934, and started my job as a machinist. A month later, I enlisted in the 132 Infantry Chicago National Guard and served 6 years, reaching the rank of sergeant.

The following year I was married to Trudy Stellmach. Being a machinist, I was deferred for 2 years and then drafted and assigned to the Air Force. I was sent to Lowery Field, Denver, CO to attend the Power turret and Gunsight school. Upon completion, I was assigned to Mountain Home AFB, Idaho. I was assigned to a bomb squadron, but never participated in the armament section.



S/Sgt. Romo L. Bacchi

I went to work on the 2,000 yard turret outdoor range, qualifying combat crews for score on Martin and Sperry ball turret. Several months later, I was ordered to Hammer Field, CA. I left, unknowingly leaving a pregnant wife who returned home to Chicago.



Romo and Frank Bacchi

Arriving at Hammer Field, I was assigned to the 764<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron armament section, which was in its last 2 months of training. I kept busy doing minor modifications on turrets of the new incoming planes. I volunteered to fly with the Air Echelon and was assigned to "Lucky Seven" whose nose art was 2 dice. I did not meet the crew until takeoff.

Arriving at Morrison Field, FL, I was deplaned, shipped to New York City, and flown by ATC C-54 to Casablanca. That was the start of a great event for me. I took the North African shuttle C-47 whose South African pilots never flew more than 600 feet altitude due to possible German fighters. First stop was Algiers, where we had a one-hour layover. I knew my older brother, Frank, a regular AF M/Sgt. with some 8 years of service, was stationed in Algiers the previous two years, assembling boat-shipped planes for our allies. I found out where he was based and ran across the field to the hanger. Upon approaching the side, a small door opened and a G.I. emerged. I told him my errand and he did not answer, but grabbed my shoulder in a fierce grip and said, "What's the matter, Ray, don't you know me anymore?" Then I recognized the voice. We had not seen each other for 4 ½ years. So we had a nice visit and I resumed my flight.

*(Continued on page 21)*

**461<sup>st</sup>/484<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group**  
***Annual Reunion***  
**September 20-23, 2012**

**ITINERARY**

**Thursday, September 20<sup>th</sup>**

Thursday - Sunday - Registration in Hospitality Room (Trophy Room). Hospitality Room will be open all day with refreshments. The Hospitality Room will not be open during the tours Friday and Saturday.

7:00 PM - Business Meeting in Victory Lane Room.

**Friday, September 21<sup>st</sup>**

9:15 AM - Bus tour of Indianapolis including Monument Circle, the State Capitol, the Scottish Rite Cathedral, the City Market, the Circle Centre Mall, White River State Park, Lockerbie Square and the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. Buses leave at 9:30 sharp. See Tour Itinerary 2012 A for details.

6:00 PM - Social hour in the common area.

7:00 PM - Separate Group dinners in Victory Lane One and Victory Lane Two.

**Saturday, September 22<sup>nd</sup>**

9:15 AM - Bus tour of Indianapolis including the Indiana War Memorial Plaza Historic District with two museums, three parks and 24 acres of monuments, statues, sculptures and fountains in the heart of downtown Indianapolis. Buses leave at 9:30 sharp. See Tour Itinerary 2012 B for details.

6:00 PM - Social hour in the common area.

7:00 PM - Reunion Banquet in Victory Lane Rooms One and Two.

**Sunday, September 23<sup>rd</sup>**

8:30 AM - Memorial Breakfast in Victory Lane Rooms One and Two.

**NOTE:** The tours mentioned above for Friday and Saturday are **MUCH** more extensive than is described here. There will be no shortage of interesting things to see and experience. For a detailed description of the tours, please visit your website, [www.461st.org](http://www.461st.org) and click on the Reunion button at the top left. As you scroll down, you'll see the reunion itinerary and a line that says "Tour Itinerary 2012."

**NOTE:** As reported in the December 2010 issue of this publication, the Association voted unanimously to pay for the cost of 461<sup>st</sup> veterans to participate in this reunion. These costs include: Registration Fee, Group Meal Costs and Tour Costs. When you fill out your registration page, please **DO** include the veteran in the "# of persons" section but **DO NOT** include the veteran in the "Sub Total" section.

# ***461<sup>st</sup>/484<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group-Reunion 2012***

## ***HOTEL INFORMATION***

- DATE:** September 20-23, 2012
- LOCATION:** **Radisson Hotel Indianapolis Airport**  
2500 South High School Road  
Indianapolis, IN 46241
- ROOM RATES:** \$79.00 per room, per night plus tax.  
Suites are available for \$119.00 per night.  
This rate will be good for three days prior to  
and three days after the reunion.  
There's a hot breakfast buffet available for a dis-  
counted price of \$10.00 per person (gratuuity not in-  
cluded) .
- RESERVATIONS:** (317) 227-6436 Contact Liz Monday - Friday 8:00  
AM to 4:00 PM to make your reservation.  
Tell them you are with the 461st/484th Bomb Group,  
booking code **Bomber Annual Reunion**.  
Major credit card required for guarantee.
- PARKING:** Free

**Free hotel shuttle to and from the airport 24-hours a day.**

**461<sup>st</sup> & 484<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Reunion**

September 20th - 23rd, 2012

Indianapolis, Indiana



Please complete and return this form by August 29, 2012. Cancellations CAN be made with a full refund if you find later that you cannot attend so please, get this form in soon. Late registrations, however, will be accepted.

Name _____ Group _____ Squadron _____		
Spouse _____ Family/Guest Names _____		
(Note: Please enter names as you would like them to appear on the name tags)		
Address _____ City _____		
State _____ ZIP _____ Phone _____ E-Mail _____		
Registration Fee	_____ @ \$12.00 per person # of persons including Veteran	Subtotal \$ _____ (Do NOT include cost for Veteran)
<b><u>Friday, September 21st</u></b>		
<b>Indianapolis City Tour with lunch at Indianapolis Motor Speedway</b>		
	_____ @ \$65.00 per person # of persons including Veteran	Subtotal \$ _____ (Do NOT include cost for Veteran)
<b>Friday Evening Dinner</b>		
Grilled Salmon	_____ @ \$25.00 per person # of persons including Veteran	Subtotal \$ _____ (Do NOT include cost for Veteran)
Roasted Turkey	_____ @ \$23.00 per person # of persons including Veteran	Subtotal \$ _____ (Do NOT include cost for Veteran)
Vegetable Lasagna	_____ @ \$21.00 per person # of persons including Veteran	Subtotal \$ _____ (Do NOT include cost for Veteran)
<b><u>Saturday, September 22nd</u></b>		
<b>Indianapolis Memorial Tour with Tour of Indiana Historical Society Museum with lunch</b>		
	_____ @ \$73.00 per person # of persons including Veteran	Subtotal \$ _____ (Do NOT include cost for Veteran)
<b>Group Banquet</b>		
Chicken Cordon Bleu	_____ @ \$23.00 per person # of persons including Veteran	Subtotal \$ _____ (Do NOT include cost for Veteran)
Herbed Prime Rib	_____ @ \$25.00 per person # of persons including Veteran	Subtotal \$ _____ (Do NOT include cost for Veteran)
Vegetable Primavera	_____ @ \$21.00 per person # of persons including Veteran	Subtotal \$ _____ (Do NOT include cost for Veteran)
<b><u>Sunday, September 23rd</u></b>		
<b>Memorial Breakfast -</b>	_____ @ \$19.00	Subtotal \$ _____
Fruit cup, Western style omelet, fried potatoes, juice & coffee	# of persons _____	(Do NOT include cost for Veteran)
<b>EMERGENCY CONTACT:</b>		<b>GRAND TOTAL \$ _____</b>
<b>PHONE:</b> _____		

PLEASE COMPLETE THIS REGISTRATION FORM AND MAIL ALONG WITH YOUR CHECK TO:  
461st/484th Reunion, Attn: Dave Blake, 648 Lakewood Road, Bonner Springs, KS 66012-1804



(Continued from page 17)

Next stop was Oran and then Tunis where I rejoined the 764<sup>th</sup> and "Lucky Seven". Then off to Italy and Torretta Field. We had pup tents for a week or so and then the pyramidal tents. We lost our C.O., Capt. Witte, when his plane crashed in a storm. I was a member of the firing squad at his funeral. With our new C.O., Capt. Goree, we did some practice missions and then the real ones. Several months later my tent mate and I renovated our tent. We put up four and a half foot walls of frag boxes, hot and cold running water, a small sink (1/2 of an accumulator), Italian faucets, and a regular door with a plexiglass top for better light. We kept this tent until the end.

When the Air Force closed their African units, my brother came up to Italy and became a crew chief in the only B-17 bomb group. I visited him several times until he was rotated home to complete 26 years of service.

And so I kept busy making sure that turrets were 100% operable, mostly replacing gun charging cables and patching plexiglass. Ten days after D-Day, I received a cable "Mother and baby boy doing fine." And so I passed out the cigars my wife had sent me.

And the missions kept on. When the supply missions started, I removed the ball turret from several airplanes. Don't remember ever putting them back. With the war's end, I had enough points and was transferred to the going home group. I left Naples on the *Frederick Victory* and was seasick all the time. I heard about the atom bomb while at sea. From Newport News, I went by train to Illinois for a furlough and discharge. Back to my old job as a machinist, and I also made my acquaintance with my son.

A year later I enlisted in the Air National Guard at Midway Airport in Chicago. I was in the armament section doing maintenance of central fire control on B-26 bombers. A year later I became NCOIC of the ordnance section and promoted to T/Sgt. When the unit was activated, I was discharged due to a technicality. I enlisted in the 9594<sup>th</sup> AF Reserve squadron, promoted to M/Sgt. and became the 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt. I participated in the nuclear airplane recovery program at Midway Airport. When that program was deleted, I transferred to O'Hare Field and secured the 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt. job in the 91<sup>st</sup> Aerial Port Squadron, AF Reserve. After 18 years, I switched to the Air Freight section. I retired as a CM/Sgt. with 31 years of service in 1974. In the meantime, I eventually went through several job changes and ended up as a night shift machine shop supervisor.

I retired at age 62, and when my wife died in 1979, I moved to San Diego, CA leaving 4 of my children behind. They were all settled in their careers. My fifth child was already in the San Diego area. I spent the next 24 years as a volunteer at the San Diego Model Railroad Museum and helped construct the layouts. The San Diego Model Railroad Museum in Balboa Park is the largest in the country which runs trains for the public every day. I was also the Friday train engineer, running trains for the museum visitors.

In 1980 I married Marie Matousek. In 1988 I was a widower again. Several years later I married Anna Barthel, and 10 years later I was a widower again. Now I'm in a private nursing home. I'm a wheelchair and bed patient at the age of 91, but am still alert.

As I gaze at the wall plaque in my room, in which are framed my service memorabilia, I think of the many men, living and dead, it took to earn two presidential unit citations.

**A soldier who survived mustard gas and pepper spray is now a seasoned veteran.**

## **461<sup>st</sup> Bombardment Group (H) Association Membership**

For membership in the 461<sup>st</sup> Bombardment Group (H) Association, please print this form, fill it out and mail it along with your check for the appropriate amount to:

Dave St. Yves  
5 Hutt Forest Lane  
East Taunton, MA 02718

If you have any questions, you can E-Mail Dave at [dstyves@pmn.com](mailto:dstyves@pmn.com).

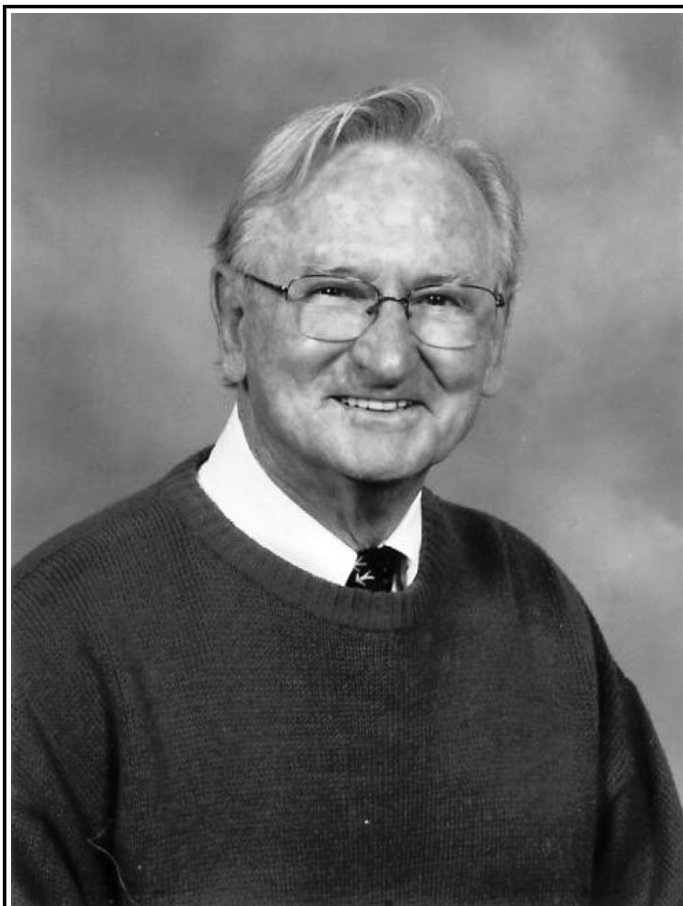
The 461<sup>st</sup> Bombardment Group (H) Association offers three types of membership:

- **Life Membership** – Men who served in the 461<sup>st</sup> during World War II and their spouses are eligible to join the Association for a one-time fee of \$25.00. This entitles the member to attend the annual reunions held in the fall each year, receive the newsletter for the Association, The 461<sup>st</sup> Liberaider, and attend and vote at the business meetings usually held at the reunion.
- **Associate Membership** – Anyone wishing to be involved in the 461<sup>st</sup> Bombardment Group (H) Association may join as an Associate member. The cost is \$10.00 per year. No renewal notices are sent so it is your responsibility to submit this form every year along with your payment. Associate membership entitles you to attend the reunions held in the fall each year and receive the newsletter for the Association, The 461<sup>st</sup> Liberaider. You are not a voting member of the Association.
- **Child Membership** – Children of men who served in the 461<sup>st</sup> during World War II are eligible to join the Association as a Child Member. The cost is \$10.00 per year. No renewal notices are sent out so it is your responsibility to submit this form every year along with your payment. Child membership entitles you to attend the reunions held in the fall each year, receive the newsletter for the Association, The 461<sup>st</sup> Liberaider, and attend and vote at the business meetings usually held at the reunion.

Type of membership desired:		Life: <input type="checkbox"/>	Associate: <input type="checkbox"/>	Child: <input type="checkbox"/>	Father's Name:
First Name:			Last Name:		
Street Address:					
City:		State:		ZIP:	
Phone Number:		E-Mail Address:			
Squadron:		Crew #:		MOS:	ASN:
Check No.			Amount:		

## Leonard H. Bathurst, Jr.

461<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group (H)



Leonard H. Bathurst, Jr.

Len was born in Altoona, Pennsylvania on May 4, 1924. Following graduation from high school he served as an aircraft sheet metal worker at Olmstead Field, Pennsylvania and at Byrd Air Base in Richmond, Virginia prior to enlisting in the Army on March 6, 1943.

Following his basic training in Miami, Florida, he attended ordnance schools (weapons and ammunition classes) in Arcadia, California and Sacramento's Air Base prior to being assigned to a newly formed B-24 Bomb Group in Mountain Home, Idaho. His next

assignment was with the 765<sup>th</sup> Ordnance Section of the 461<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group at Wendover, Utah, and then to Hammer Field, Fresno, California for the final overseas training phrase.

With the "Ground Echelon", he departed Fresno by train the evening of December 31, 1943. After about a week on a train they arrived in Virginia where the 765<sup>th</sup> boarded a liberty ship, "George S. Hanley" for thirty-seven days at sea. They made one stop in Sicily before arriving in Naples, Italy.

Len's overseas assignments included repair, storage, servicing, and maintenance of all squadron small arms not assigned to aircrews or officers. His primary "pre-mission" responsibility was to be available with last minute exchanges of any .50 caliber machine guns on board aircraft scheduled for the mission, and to provide assistance with any other ordnance services required for arming the aircraft with bombs, fuses, etc. During the remaining hours of the day, Len spent his time maintaining and servicing weapons.

After leaving the military service Len enrolled at Pennsylvania State University. After completing his work for a Bachelor of Arts degree and his teaching credentials, and a Master of Education degree, he taught in the public schools of Pennsylvania. While earning a Doctor of Education degree, Len taught at Penn State until the fall of 1954 when he accepted a faculty position at the California State University in Fresno, CA. After teaching for forty-one years at CSU, Fresno, Len retired and began a new career in the financial industry. On November 30, 2006 he decided to sell his business and retire permanently.

Len and Lynn have been married since March 2, 1946 and have two children – daughter, Karen Wilcox, and son Stephen. Although Stephen is deceased, his widow, Dawn, is still a very precious member of the family. They have three grandsons – Brandon Leong, Brayden Leong and Skye Bathurst.

I know a guy who's addicted to brake fluid. He says he can stop any time.

## Paul E. Blatz

1923 - 2008

Paul E. Blatz was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, August 29, 1923, the son of a newspaper editor. During World War II, he served as navigator in the 461st Bomb Group in Italy as a member of the United States Air Force. He entered Southern Methodist University and received his B.S. in chemistry in 1951.

Paul married Nancy McGraw in January 1952, (She was deceased in February 1965). He then married Eleanor Arlene Hoffman in 1965. Children: Francene, John, Roger, Bonnie, and Paul M.

In 1955, he received his Ph.D. in chemistry at the University of Texas, Austin, where his major professor was Roger J. Williams, former President of the American Chemical Society. The research involved isolation of a nutritional factor. In 1955 Dr. Blatz joined the Freeport Division of the Dow Chemical Company and did research in insecticide, monomers and finally polymers. In 1959 he joined the Mobil Oil Company in Dallas and engaged in preparation and characterization of water soluble polymers for drilling fluid additives.

After a year on the faculty of New Mexico Highlands University, he joined the faculty of the Department of Chemistry at the University of Wyoming in June 1964. He joined the Department of Chemistry at the University of Missouri-Kansas City as full Professor

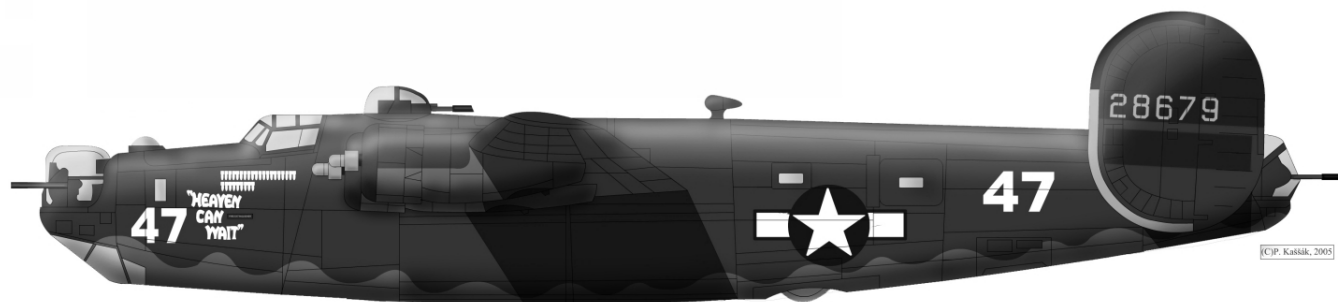
and Chairman in 1971. He taught as a professor in The School of Basic Life Sciences.

Paul directed the Ph.D. theses of the following people: Ashoka Paul 1987, Wasi Ahmed, 1976, Hajime Kawashima 1975, James C. Aumiller 1973, William D. Totharow 1973, Mow S. Lin 1972, Sobhi K. Al-Dilaimi 1971, Jonathan H. Mohler 1970, Nickly R. Baumgartner 1969, Raymond H. Johnson 1968, James O. Erickson 1967, David L. Pippert 1967.

M.S. Theses directed: Florence Barker 1973.

In 1975 he was the Invited Speaker at the 8<sup>th</sup> annual Jerusalem Symposium on Auantum Chemistry and Chemistry, Jerusalem. Achievements include establishment of relationship between electrosonic charge and wavelength in visual pigments. Paul wrote and published 41 (Full Manuscripts). Since 1964, Dr. Blatz has been interested in the chemistry of vision and in particular visualpigments, the complex substances found in the retina. Upon receiving light, the retina initiates a neural impulse which travels to the brain. His research has been supported by the Atomic Energy Commission and the National institutes of Health. He is a member of the American Chemical Society, Biological Society, AAAS, Sigma Xi, American Society of Biological Chemists and the American Society for Photobiology.

Paul E. Blatz, 84, passed away peacefully at his home in Padre Lakes, Ivins, Utah on Thursday, July 3, 2008.



[C.P. Kassak, 2005]

## Reflections and a Dream of Flight

By Herbie Teope  
www.TeopeSpin.com  
May 1, 2012

Case Bonebrake is in bed every night at 11 to watch *"The Jay Leno Show."* He laughs at jokes before turning off the lights and TV halfway through the program.

However, he doesn't fall asleep.

Instead, Bonebrake often stares into the darkness well into the early morning hours. His eyes eventually pierce the blackness to find the silhouettes of the walls and ceiling of his second-floor room at the Meadowlark Hills retirement community in Manhattan, Kan.

Bonebrake has no account as to why he remains awake, sometimes almost three hours after turning off the TV, but admits his thoughts aren't focused on anything specific.

Perhaps he reflects on a rewarding 91 years of life, which provided a wonderful 67-year marriage to Marie, who passed away in 2009, and three children, Richard, a medical doctor in Topeka, Kan., Cynthia and Veronica, who sadly lost a bout with ovarian cancer in 2001.

A grandfather of eight and a Kansas State University alumnus, Bonebrake's career as an engineer also offers memory lanes with jobs at his alma mater and Arizona. But only he knows what occupies his mind.

Ultimately, he drifts to sleep and two themes dominate his dreams: Hiking in a peaceful countryside overlooking a valley and piloting a B-24 Liberator bomber.

Bonebrake doesn't offer an explanation why he remembers those themes when he wakes up in the morning. However, he knows he never has a chance to experience the endings, especially with the bomber plane where his dreams surround taking off or landing.

Hearing of a B-24 isn't surprising once a person gets

to know Bonebrake, who is one of many World War II veterans residing at Meadowlark.

He is humble, preferring to downplay his role as a former bomber pilot with 20 combat missions or deflecting the label of decorated war hero to others. And his approach is highly common to those who saw combat in the 1940s.

"Veterans from World War II to the present are rarely forthcoming in telling their stories," the USO said in a news release announcing a 2012 Memorial Day tribute to World War II.

Still, many Americans who answered the call against the Axis powers were young, mostly in their late teens or early 20s, and those years of service arguably played a large role in shaping their lives and a nation.

Moreover, the veterans hail from an era where innocence was lost at an early age with responsibility to others and personal accountability that pales in comparison to today's "The New Me Generation."

"They're what made our country what it is now and he's an important part of that," Bonebrake's son, Richard, said. "I learned a lot of lessons from my father who was raised in hard times. That generation is what made this country great and those sentiments are sadly dissipating now."

The attributes of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century likely contribute to Bonebrake's modesty when it comes to sharing his war stories. But there's no denying the pride in his voice or observation of a noticeable change in his body language when he chooses to eventually open up.

Bonebrake initially sizes up the person across from him, as if asking himself if anybody really wants to know.

"We need to ask these brave men and women to share their stories, and then sit back and listen," the USO said in the news release.

Should a visitor genuinely heed that advice, they'll

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soon notice a twinkle in Bonebrake's eyes and a slight smile creasing his lips, a sign of approval. He leaves the room momentarily and returns with a handwritten flight log detailing missions and notes of his time over the not-so-friendly skies of 1944 Europe.

He quietly leans back in his chair, crossing his arms momentarily before his right arm moves upward, the index finger touching his temple as he collects thoughts from 70 years ago.

Finding a reference point, Bonebrake leans forward, elbows to his side, hands on his lap. He's open now and his voice is calm, devoid of emotion as the words flow.

A tale of growing up fast, camaraderie and contributing to victory in a war that changed the world is shared.

### **Answering the call**

It was early 1942 and the U.S. was at war following the Dec. 7, 1941 sneak attack at Pearl Harbor.

Bonebrake, a native of rural Rooks County, Kan., was 21 and had just completed his fourth semester at K-State when he dropped out of school to enlist in the military. He admits to being an "adrenaline junkie," so a path as a pilot with the Army Air Corps was natural.

He married Marie before the Air Corps assigned him to a year-long B-24 Liberator preflight training process that started at Pueblo Army Air Base in Colorado, then to San Antonio before ending at Mustang Field, Oklahoma City where he earned full co-pilot status and a commission as a second lieutenant.

During the process, Bonebrake was assigned to the same 10-man crew, designation Whalen – #39R after the main pilot, that he would eventually serve with in the European theater: pilot Russell Whalen; bombardier Jack Marchbank; navigator Joseph Rosdal; nose gunner Alvin Crawford; flight engineer Robert Dillon; radio operator Ross Mashon; tail gunner Malcolm Leech; top gunner Richard Braesicke; and ball

gunner LeRoy Veon, who at 17 was the youngest.

Bonebrake, then-22, was the elder of a crew whose average age was 20.

"We were kids," he said.

Upon completion of training, Whalen – #39R was assigned in October 1944 to the 765<sup>th</sup> Squadron of the 461<sup>st</sup> Bombardment Group as part of the 49th Bombardment Wing, Fifteenth Air Force, in Italy.

All that remained for the youthful warriors was a journey overseas to join the fight against Nazi Germany.

He remembers feeling uneasy on the deck of a ship looking out into the Atlantic Ocean as the Navy convoy carrying troops and supplies made an arduous 10-day journey across shark-infested waters patrolled by German U-boat submarines.

"We all worried about what would happen if we were attacked by a German submarine," Bonebrake said.

Further compounding the concern of a potential torpedo attack was the convoy only had a gray Navy oil tanker that flanked it on the right and a supply freighter to the left as a protection escort. Unknown to the men making the trip, the freighter's cargo included live 500-pound bombs, a fact not discovered until the convoy safely reached port in Italy and the overnight unloading began.

The next day, Bonebrake found himself on a truck being transported to Torreta Field where the 765<sup>th</sup> Squadron would be based. Displaying calm and relying on training, the men didn't have time to feel fear or have anxiety about joining the war effort.

Instead, they focused on the mission.

"There was no particular feeling except, 'Finally, we're going to fly airplanes,'" Bonebrake said.

For almost a month, the 765<sup>th</sup> participated in training flight missions before Bonebrake saw his first com-

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bat flight on Nov. 5, 1944, or Mission #126.

The flight marked Whalen – #39R's second combat mission, but Bonebrake didn't participate in the initial operation, as the Squadron assigned an experienced co-pilot in his place.

However, Mission #126 was the first for the original Whalen – #39R men that began the journey together in San Antonio and Oklahoma City a year earlier.

And the teamwork and growing camaraderie was never an issue as they entered harm's way.

"We were all familiar with each other," Bonebrake said. "We knew what we could do, what each other could do. We had confidence in each other. There was no particular feeling except on the first combat mission, I realized it was combat."

#### **From bombs to coffee**

Unlike ground forces that see the devastation on a battlefield from a personal level, the Air Corps' mission allowed flight crews to disassociate themselves from the effects of war.

"I didn't think of killing anybody," Bonebrake said. "What I thought of was destroying oil fields, railroad assembly lines and factories. I thought of destroying things, not people."

Bonebrake's first venture into enemy territory called for the bombing of the Florisdorf Oil Refinery in Vienna, Austria.

He felt no anxiety as he took the controls in his co-pilot seat and recalls Whalen – #39R being part of a "group of as many airplanes" as he could see once in flight. While en route to the target, the 765<sup>th</sup> encountered 25 single-engine German fighters which made a pass at the formation, according to the flight group's official website, [www.461st.org](http://www.461st.org).

No friendly planes were hit, but the enemy sustained one lost fighter, one likely destroyed and four damaged, according to the website.

The 765<sup>th</sup> encountered flak over the target, but suffered light damages as the bombs fell on the refinery. While the results of the bombing mission were unobserved, Whalen – #39R returned safely to Torreta Field and that was forever a success.

They were alive.

Each member had a preferred method to unwind and collect thoughts, a cool-off period from the adrenaline rush, upon returning from a mission.

As a co-pilot, Bonebrake wasn't required to attend the debriefings for pilots and bombardiers. He and the rest of crew returned to the squadron area in trucks where some went off alone to reflect, while others gathered with members from other crews.

For Bonebrake, returning from his first mission called for a cup of coffee and cookies from the Salvation Army dispensary station.

The routine would last for 19 more missions.

#### **Taking danger head on**

It takes special men and women to understand the reality of combat, to be brave in the face of fire.

While civilians on average will turn in the opposite direction from danger, trained professionals take a direct path to it.

Whalen – #39R was no different.

One such occasion occurred on a mission where Bonebrake observed a large ominous black cloud of smoke filled with bursting anti-aircraft fire.

"I remember thinking whoever is assigned to that target sure has a lot of flak to contend with," he said. "I didn't know how they'll get through it, and then we turned to head to that cloud."

Training kicked in and the entire crew focused on their objective of knocking out the target protected

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by the wall of flak. Bonebrake knew this was going to be tougher than a lot of the others, but he and Whalen – #39R never worried about getting hit.

Their plane was a safety net and served as a mental block to the dangers around them.

“We were in this box,” he said. “The fire would not affect us and I just somehow felt that immunity to it. I don’t know whether it came from training. I think it was just a feeling I had.”

That sense of security would serve Whalen – #39R throughout the war and it was tested during another harrowing experience that caused extreme duress in early 1945.

Bonebrake watched a projectile in what seemed like slow motion from his co-pilot chair. His eyes opened wide in bewilderment as an anti-aircraft shell reached its height of trajectory to the plane’s immediate front.

His B-24 was flying right to it.

“About 15 to 20 feet from our right wing, it exploded,” he said. “The crew, except for the nose gunner, was not aware. The explosion itself didn’t have a shockwave.”

However, shrapnel from the explosion damaged the plane’s oxygen and internal communications systems.

Additionally, a piece of shrapnel pierced a turret and miraculously went between the legs of the nose gunner without causing harm.

With the damage to the plane, Whalen and Bonebrake took immediate evasive action. Using hand signals, they communicated commands and their intent to everybody aboard – they would drop from the formation and fighter escort in an attempt to fix the problem.

Whalen – #39R was now alone over enemy territory.

That episode caused anxious moments and the turret

gunners were on high alert, scanning the skies for incoming enemy fighters, while Whalen and Bonebrake put in frantic calls for friendly fighter escorts.

And in what may have seemed like eternity, which Bonebrake estimated was actually three minutes in real time, a P-51 Mustang “Red Tail” from the famed Tuskegee Airmen of the 332<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group arrived to provide cover.

Segregation was still part of the culture in the 1940s, even in war, but Bonebrake had a deep appreciation and admiration for the Tuskegee Airmen.

“I’ve had conversations at the officer’s clubs with the Black pilots and I had respect for them because their education was a lot better than mine at the time,” he said. “They had to have degrees and all Whites had to have was to be in college to become a pilot. They were refined, knowledgeable, could discuss almost anything and were really pleasant.”

Still, the experience alone without fighter cover served as a reminder of war where dealing with potential death or bodily harm is an actuality.

And while Whalen – #39R tried to block it out with a feeling of immunity, Bonebrake knew the harsh reality throughout the time in Europe.

“I always felt we always came close because we usually had flak to contend with,” he said. “I remember a mission where a German Messerschmitt 262 fighter came through our formation vertically with two ‘Red Tails’ in hot pursuit. I was always thankful that we had escaped.”

### **The homecoming**

Bonebrake could feel a difference from enemy resistance in late April as Whalen – #39R embarked on what would be their final combat flight on April 26, 1945, Mission #226.

Bad weather caused the 765th Squadron to change targets from Northern Italy to the Lienz Marshalling Yard in Austria, according to [www.461st.org](http://www.461st.org).

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During the bombing run, the B-24 formation met no resistance from anti-aircraft fire or enemy fighters.

The war in Europe would end two weeks later on May 8, 1945.

“It was a feeling of relief for me,” Bonebrake said of the announcement of the war’s end. “For many of the members of the Squadron, it was a cause for celebration. Everyone had .45 pistols and there were a lot of bullets shot into the air in celebration and a lot of whiskey was consumed.”

As to the contribution of the Fifteenth Air Force, the group dropped a total of 303,842 tons of bombs against Nazi Germany, said Hughes Glantzberg, president and historian of the 461<sup>st</sup> Bombardment Group Association.

Bonebrake’s final flight in Europe occurred on May 9, 1945 and instead of dropping bombs, they dropped supplies to a prison camp in Spittal, Austria.

The 765<sup>th</sup> packed candy bars, fresh fruit, clothing in the form of socks, shirts and trousers, personal hygiene items and anything that could be spared into barracks bags that were eventually attached to cargo parachutes.

To deliver the packages, the crews pushed the bags out of the bay doors to the waiting and grateful camp below.

As the days following the war’s end progressed, Bonebrake was eventually transferred to another airfield for a highly anticipated airlift home.

A tempered excitement combined with gratification overcame him as he reflected on what Whalen – #39R accomplished in the nine months since arriving at Torreta Field in October 1944.

He joined the war with nine others to form a crew with an average age of 20.

They entered combat as kids; they left Europe as men.

All that remained for Bonebrake upon arriving on U.S. soil were two things.

“The first thing I did when I landed in West Palm Beach, Fla., was to get a chocolate molted milk,” he said. “And then I called my wife and told her I was coming home.”

### **A lasting bond**

It is often understood among men in uniform that a bond exists like no other. Words don’t have to be spoken or explain the link’s strength between those who entrusted others with their lives.

Most civilians who have never served don’t understand it, and that’s likely fine for brothers-in arms.

Bonebrake’s friendship with George Christie, a flight engineer, is a testament to that unbreakable connection.

His voice softens as he reflects with affection on their friendship and how he regrettably never saw him again after the war. The emotion is clear as he shares how their bond withstood the passing decades.

Co-pilot and flight engineer communicated consistently until Christie’s passing six years ago.

“I never saw him again after the war, but we always exchanged letters and Christmas cards,” Bonebrake whispers. “I stayed in better contact with him than anyone except my pilot, Russ Whalen, who passed away in 2006.”

Citing the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs in a 2010 article, “As WWII vets dwindle, accolades multiply,” between 800 to 1,000 World War II veterans die every day, the *Palm Beach Post* reports. And this has impacted Bonebrake’s former squadron.

The 461<sup>st</sup> Bombardment Group has annual reunions throughout the U.S., but the number of attendees has dwindled since 1985 as veterans of that era succumb to age.

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“The 461<sup>st</sup> originally had more than 5,000 men assigned in World War II,” Glantzberg said. “At the last reunion, we had maybe 20 veterans attending, so it is dropping dramatically. We will continue to hold reunions as long as we have veterans capable of attending.”

Bonebrake’s last reunion with his former crew occurred in the late 1990s, as sadly of the original 10 members of Whalen – #39R, only Bonebrake and the plane’s navigator, Joseph Rosdal, are alive today.

Still, keeping the memory of a great generation is important to many, including Bonebrake’s son.

There’s more to the men and women than just their historical contributions to defeating the Axis powers. The veterans of World War II played a vital role in shaping the world and still have more to contribute to society even in today’s tech-savvy culture.

“Most mammals live 10 to 12 times the length of time it takes to reach reproductive capability, so that means humans should last 120 to 140 years,” Richard said. “And if we had those generations sticking around, letting us know what it was like and the sacrifices they made for us, I think the world would be in a lot better hands with that experience and knowledge.”

### Revisiting the dream

“I never considered myself a hero,” Bonebrake said. “The old cliché of, ‘I didn’t do anything nobody else would’ve done,’ I understand it. Most of my life was spent outside of those three years in the military. I accomplished so many things in my professional life that I am proud of.”

Bonebrake’s family and friends are also proud of his professional accomplishments outside of his service.

But Bonebrake’s duty to the country should never be forgotten.

While he’s reluctant to fully accept his role as a war hero, Bonebrake knows his time in combat shaped him into the person he became.

In the meantime, a humble man goes about a daily routine at Meadowlark Hills.

He’s awake every morning at 8:30 and takes care of personal hygiene in his second-floor room before getting dressed to head downstairs for breakfast. And for Bonebrake, there’s no better place than Verna Belle’s Café where he’ll order his preferred meal of biscuits and sausage gravy, along with fried eggs cooked over medium.

After eating, Bonebrake returns to his room where he’ll make his way to his favorite chair in the living room, pull out a remote control and turn on his 52-inch flat screen TV.

The first program he’ll peruse is the community events channel to see if anything catches his eye before turning attention to other channels for intellectual morning game programs such as “*Jeopardy!*” or “*Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?*”

The retired engineer prefers those programs to keep his mind sharp.

Bonebrake skips lunch and spends the afternoon hours checking his email at 12:30 sharp. If there’s a good afternoon movie that piques his interest in the Meadowlark first-floor theater, he’ll head downstairs to watch and sometimes he’ll meet acquaintances for afternoon coffee.

Otherwise, Bonebrake goes about his day reading the newspaper, playing solitaire or reading online news stories before eating dinner at 5 p.m.

He’s in bed every night at 11 to watch “*The Jay Leno Show*.” The lights and TV are turned off halfway through the show and he’ll stare into the darkness.

Bonebrake is content with his schedule.

And as he eventually drifts into deep sleep, a hero finds himself yet again on a countryside hill overlooking a valley or sitting in the cockpit of a B-24 Liberator.

## Joseph Breshinsky

I am the one that bailed out over Corsica and landed on a tree in the mountains and wound up in the hospital for a week. All of the crew got out safely.

If memory serves me right we had just dropped our bombs and took a near hit from flak. I was temporarily blinded when the pilot put our plane in a steep dive. We dropped 9,000 to 12,000 feet. I could tell it was a controlled dive. Finally my sight returned and I heard movement from my nose gunner. I thought he was dead until I heard noises in the turret. I released him from the turret and he had the frightened look of a rat. He headed for the front wheel escape hatch and I started fighting him in the nose section. I jammed my fore arm against his throat until he almost collapsed. I then put my oxygen mask on him and he came to. He then asked me

why we were fighting. I asked him what did he intend to do when I released him from the turret. He told me he was going to jump out of the front escape hatch. Where is your parachute I asked him and he almost fainted?

We then headed thru the wheel tunnel to the flight deck. There I saw the bomb bay doors half open. I asked why and was told to look at the wings. There were holes in them you could walk thru. When we were over Corsica we were told we would have to jump. I started to tighten my leg straps but quit after securing one leg. The bomb bay doors were then opened and I and one of the crew got on the bomb bay cat walk. I told the crew man to get ready to jump. He said no. I told him to jump or I would throw him out. Finally he leaned over and rolled

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**Standing L-R:** Whalen, Russell G. (P); Bonebrake Case A. (CP); Marchbank, Jack F. (B); Rosdal, Joseph (N)

**Kneeling L-R:** Crawford, Alvin G. (NG); Dillon, Robert E. (E); Mashon, Ross (RO); Leech, Malcolm L. Jr. (TG); Braesicke, Richard A. (TT) Veon, LeRoy L. (BG)

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out. I got down on the cat walk and watched his chute open. When it did I rolled out the same way. When my chute opened, I thought the loosely tightened leg strap would castrate me. As I battled the leg strap I noticed I was descending faster than the first chutist so I stopped fighting the strap.

At 12,000 feet the ground looked like a soft carpet until I got close to the ground. I was swinging from side to side so I crossed my legs to protect the family jewels. My chute shrouded a 20-foot tree as I hit the ground on the back swing very hard. I thought my back was broken as I lay on the ground. Then slowly I tried to move my feet and they moved. I then thought if I could move my feet my back was OK.

I got up and looked down the mountain and laughed as hard as I could. A native found me and he was more interested in my chute than me. I tore off a piece of the chute for a souvenir and he took the rest.

He then started down the mountain looking for the first chutist. My right ankle started swelling and he loaned me his walking stick. We found the first jumper and for two hours the native had us looking for the first chute. Finally after 8 hours of walking up and down mountains we reached a road and a waiting ambulance.

Yes, I was on the Genoa mission. I was sorry to miss the invasion of southern France on the 16th of August. I was told it was something to see. At that

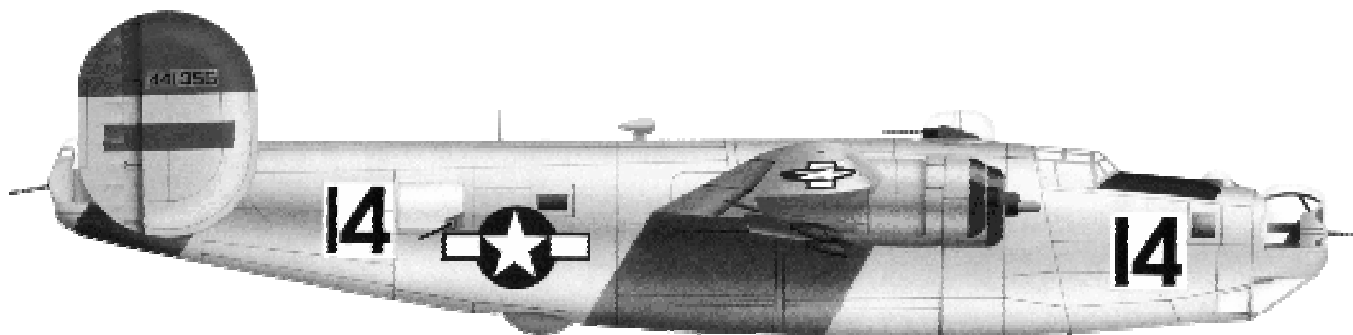
time I was in a Corsican hospital. In regard to the fire at Lyons, yes, I was there at that time plus 3 or 4 other times that week or two.

Some details of my missions are a little hazy. Originally I came over with the 454<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, Xmas of 1943. My first missions were in Jan. of 1944. On one of those missions we crash landed our B-24. Got a 3-day pass to go to Bari. On the way we hitched a ride on an English lorry. I was sitting in the back of the lorry with a load of vegetables. Our driver side swiped a truck going in the other direction. As a result I had a broken shoulder and a shattered elbow. Two months later I returned to the 454<sup>th</sup> BG. My original crew had finished their missions and I was placed in the personnel pool.

Shortly thereafter I got a call to replace a bombardier in the 461<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group who was killed by flak. While at the 461<sup>st</sup> BG I was used on a number of crews as a seasoned warrior. As to who the pilot was at Genoa, I am not sure. I was placed on crew #6.

Henry Courcier - Navigator, deceased 1955  
 Vincent Vino - Co-pilot  
 Robert Weir - Pilot, deceased 1969  
 Joseph Meyer - Bombardier, KIA  
 Joseph Breshinsky - Bombardier

As a result of the Genoa mission I received a Purple Heart and still have a piece of flak in one knee.





## Richard Carney

I was born in Barry County, Missouri and attended schools in the same county until graduating. A friend and I decided to head west to find work as we were in a deep depression in the Midwest and were going through the dust bowl days. For the younger generation, go to your favorite search engine on the computer to see what times were like during these trying times. We left Cassville, Missouri together with only \$5.00 between the two of us heading for California to find some kind of work. We hopped freight cars and hitchhiked until finally arriving in California. We did find work in construction.

We worked until December, 1941 when we entered the war against Japan. I tried my luck getting in as a pilot, but was unable to make it. My experience with machinery and construction work did put me in a position to get into the Army Air Force. I was at Wendover and Hammer Field as well as several other training camps. After training I was assigned to 461<sup>st</sup> Bombardment Group and sent to Italy.

I have a great memory of Col. Glantzberg as one of the finest men and officers I ever served under. When we arrived in Italy we only had tents to sleep in. Being an improviser we gathered several old spent German cannon shell casings and made a stack for an old barrel stove we made from a 55 gallon drum. It was cold and I suppose Col. Glantzberg, commanding officer, must have either seen the smoke or was told of it as he came by and spent the night in the tent with a few of us enlisted men. I was close to Col. G, Col. Knapp and others. We flew missions about every day or two.

I will always remember one dark morning as we woke early for mission duty. We were surprised to see a fighter plane on the field placed there during the night. It seems no one knew exactly where it came from. This plane was used by Col. G to herd all the B-24s as they headed off on a mission. I remember Col. Glantzberg would not ask his crew to do anything he would not do himself. On one

bomb run I remember him saying to me, "Sarge, I am going to fly in the gun turret of the B-24 today and I would like to fire the 50 cal. machine guns." I said, "OK, Sir, but wait until we get into formation. We will be the lead plane." After several minutes he came on the radio and said, "Sarge, is it OK to fire now?" I told him, "Yes!" and instructed him about how the triggers worked and in no time I heard several burst of machine gun fire.

After I finished my missions, I was sent back to the States to be discharged on a point system from the Army Air Force. I later got to thinking about the great experiences and pride we had in helping to defend our country against evil powers.

I was married after the war and my wife understood my wanting to make a career in the Air Force. I decided to sign up again but found because of military regulations I would have to go back at a lower rank and with a cut in pay. This may come as a shock, but I wrote a letter to General Eisenhower about my intent to re-enlist and the problem I encountered. Believe it or not, I received a letter from General Eisenhower telling me to try again. I did, and got my rank back and I served until retiring with a lot of time in Spain.

One more memory, while in Turkey and Spain they had a club called "pigeon shooting". I belonged to this club and one day I got a call from my commanding officer asking if we could get General Tibbets in on a shoot. After some string pulling General Tibbets and I shot pigeons for about four hours. General Tibbets was another great man as most know he was the pilot of the Enola Gay – the airplane that dropped the first atomic bomb on Japan. I recently met with him again at Bentonville, Arkansas.

I have kept busy taking care of bee hives. Here in my home town, I am called the "flag man" as I service flags and make sure they are clean and neat looking. I get called quite often with questions about the flag. I am so proud of our flag and our good country - the United States of America.

## Norman L. Elzeer

Norman L. Elzeer was born in Cleveland, Ohio. He was orphaned at the age of seven and raised by his grandparents in Ashtabula, Ohio. He graduated from Ashtabula High School in June 1941 and got a job tamping rocks on the railroad for \$.43 per hour because defense plants required age 18.

When he turned 18, he went to Cleveland and got a job with Parker Appliance assembling naval and aviation valves.

In the summer of 1942, Norm decided he'd like to be a fighter pilot. After getting released from the draft board, he signed up with the Army Air Corps and was given a written test. After that came the eye test, which he failed.

In December 1942, Norm figured that joining the Army Air Corps would be the best to become a pilot. He attended basic training at Miami Beach. He and a friend then decided to request gunnery school, but before they could submit a request, they were lined up the next morning and were told, "You men are going to gunnery school!" Gunnery school was at Tyndall Field, Florida followed by Apalachicola, Florida. He was then sent to engineering school at Sheppard Field, Texas for nine months.

After engineering school, Norm was assigned to Wendover Field, Utah for more gunnery training. He went back and forth many times before being assigned to the Hefling Crew #9 of the 764<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron, 461<sup>st</sup> Bombardment Group.

After three more months of training at Hammer Field in Fresno, California, he was ordered to Italy. Two gunners from the crew had to go by boat. Norm and Frank Chappel, the nose gunner, drew the "boat" straws. After several weeks of waiting in Newport News, Virginia, they boarded the troop ship General Mann and landed in Casablanca, Morocco, nine days later.

Air Transport Command flew them to Torretta Field, Italy.

While with the 461<sup>st</sup>, the Hefling crew hit the ME-109 factories in Vienna three times and Ploesti three times.

After several missions all over Europe, Norm's crew was sent to rest camp on the Isle of Capri for a week. One event that still sticks in his mind was being rowed into the Blue Grotto by an old gentleman (age 65). Inside, the old man sang Santa Lucia, and he was terrific.

Norm is disappointed in the Steven Ambrose book, *The Wild Blue*. He expected it to be about the entire Fifteenth Air Force, but the book turned out to be mostly about George McGovern. In it Ambrose states that McGovern's gunners were the first to paddle kayaks around Capri. However, Norm was on Capri in June and paddled a kayak every day including around the island.

Norm's crew left rest camp at Capri on June 8 and immediately flew three consecutive days, June 9, 10 and 11. On June 11 they went to the Giurciu Oil Storage near Ploesti, Romania, and were shot down. They bailed out over Yugoslavia and were in the hands of the Chetniks under the command of Draja Miholovic for sixty days.

The OSS set up a rescue mission and flew to a mountaintop and picked them up. Norm then spent three weeks in the hospital in Bari, Italy.

Norm has fond memories of being a part of a terrific crew. The three years he spent in the service were an experience he doesn't regret.

A great disappointment to Norm was that all four officers on the crew received the Distinguished Flying Cross while the gunners got nothing, not even an oak leaf cluster for their Air Medal. The gunners held off eighteen fighters for over twelve minutes and felt they saved the officers' lives. Norm does not resent the officers' getting the DFC. He simply feels the gunners played a significant part in that mission and also deserved an award. Colonel Glantzberg, Group Commanding Officer, did support the gunners by calling the officers together and telling them their lives depended on the gunners.

## Hjalmar Johansson

Hjalmar Johansson was born in Hollywood, California. He enlisted in the United States Army Air Corps during World War II, and was a nose gunner on a B-24 bomber. In December 1944, Mr. Johansson's plane was shot down over Czechoslovakia and he was held as a German prisoner of war for five months. Mr. Johansson currently resides in Montville, New Jersey with his wife, Mildred.

### **Please tell us about your background.**

I was born in Hollywood, California. Unfortunately, my father died when I was 5 months old. My widowed mother had no money, no insurance whatsoever and she, my brother, and myself ended up in New York City on East 69<sup>th</sup> Street. The only thing she could do to earn a living during the depression was run a rooming house, so she rented out rooms, scrubbed with her hands, and took care of her two boys--she brought us up real well.

When the war started, I was still in high school. I graduated when I was 17, and since I couldn't get into the Army until I was 18, I worked and went to engineering college in the evening. At 18, I got into the Army Air Corps. I wanted to be a pilot pretty badly--I built and flew model planes and dreamed of being a pilot my whole childhood. And finally at the University of Pittsburgh during my cadet training I got to the point where I actually piloted a Piper Cub. At that point, the Army decided that they needed gunners instead of pilots. So the Air Corps eliminated our entire class, and I was given the choice of transferring to the infantry or being a gunner. I opted for the Air Corps, and sure enough I was assigned to a heavy bomber crew of B-24's that, at the time, were one of the largest bombers in use. I was shipped over to Italy for a few weeks of training. Shortly after, I went on my first mission, which ended up being a one-way trip!

### **Can you describe what that mission was like?**

I was assigned to the Fifteenth Air Force, 461<sup>st</sup> bomb group, 767<sup>th</sup> Squadron as a nose gunner. Our first mission was to bomb the Odertal Oil Refinery in what is now Poland. Our planes left Torretta, Italy, and after being badly damaged by flak we were attacked by German fighter planes. Over half of our group was shot

down. Twenty-nine guys--my buddies, were killed on that raid alone and at least that same number were captured or missing in action. It was a rough deal, it was a long flight, and we never actually reached the target. We were hit by flak, which knocked a big hole in the wing, taking out the number-four engine. Shortly thereafter, the number-three engine went out--that's two engines on the right side--making the plane lose altitude.

Our plane was in trouble. It was difficult to steer, and we dropped down below the rest of our formation. The German fighter planes jumped on us because we were a cripple. They wanted to see us alone and out of the formation--it was hazardous for them to attack a formation at full strength, and they would go after the weakest plane. At least a dozen of them circled us alternately attacking the nose and the tail. We were just being shot full of holes.

As a kid, I enjoyed building model airplanes, particularly the flying models. One of my favorites was the ME-109, a German fighter plane. It was a very sleek, swift plane, high performance--a dandy looking plane. Unfortunately, in this experience, I didn't like them as much, because they started coming in on my nose turret on that mission. We were badly damaged, and those ME-109s were coming right at me. As a nose gunner, I was shielded by a thin Plexiglas bubble--that was all there was between me and the bullets. Those ME-109s--instead of being marvelous, sleek, lovely-looking aircraft that I remembered--turned into tarantulas. The machine guns in their wings flickered like little red lights and they resembled angry little eyes that were boring in on me. I just wanted to reach out, get my guns going, and smash them. I knew they were hitting the plane. So, my attitude toward the ME-109 changed considerably that day.

### **When did you know the plane was going down?**

Finally, the fighter planes left us. Either they ran out of ammunition, fuel, or they'd just had enough of us. I think I got one--I knocked part of his wing off as he went by, but they go by so fast that you don't really have time to be sure. We were heading east toward the Russian front lines, knowing that there was no way we'd make it back to Italy--it was too far for our crippled bomber. The pilot rang the bailout bell and I went

*(Continued on page 36)*

out. That was *some* experience. We never practiced jumping out of a plane, it was too dangerous, and so it was my first jump. All of a sudden coming down in my parachute there was total silence--after all the noise of the machine guns, the anti-aircraft fire, and the roaring engines--now, coming down there was just silence. Our entire 10-man crew bailed out successfully, which was rather miraculous. The pilot, co-pilot, the crew chief, and the top gunner bailed out maybe 15 minutes after we did. Romanian Partisans picked them up when they hit the ground and thus they avoided becoming prisoners of war. Unfortunately, I didn't have that good luck. I landed in a field and within two hours I was picked up and taken prisoner by the German Army. The Germans took us west to an interrogation center where things got a little bit rough.

### **What happened after you were taken into German custody?**

They started out by demanding all sorts of information; who we were, where we came from, and the names of my crewmembers; because they wanted to make sure they had captured all of us. They also wanted to know what targets we were bombing, what armament we carried, how many bombs, and how many planes in our squadron. I gave them my name, rank, and serial number, and that was all they got out of me. They said, "Oh we have ways to make you talk," and sure enough they shut me away in a little black solitary cell, absolutely dark, just big enough for a bed. It then became psychological warfare, where they'd come in at a moment's notice, shine lights in my face and ask the same questions over and over. I kept giving the same answers, and they said, "Well that's all right, you'll just have to stay here for the rest of the war." The thought of that was disheartening to say the least. After about four days of that, they transferred me to the next camp where I was reunited with my crewmembers, and I got to see the blue sky and the sun. What a treat!

### **What happened next?**

The Americans and the British armies were approaching from the west. This was early 1945, having been shot down in December 1944. The Allies were closing in on the Rhine River and we knew it--we could hear approaching artillery fire and planes going over, and we didn't see any opposition being mounted. We thought, "Oh boy, we're gonna be free men soon." When you're

a prisoner, the only thing you can think of is getting out of prison somehow or another.

Unfortunately, before the Allies could liberate us, the Germans put us in boxcars and sent us east on the railroad. Apparently the German high command thought they should keep some hostages, since they knew the war was going badly. We ended up in boxcars, like those in some of the holocaust films you see. We were supposedly being sent to another Air Force POW camp. There were 60 of us crammed in half a boxcar. Six guards took the other half of the car. We didn't have enough room for all to sit down--it was that crowded. So we all took numbers, everyone was assigned a "one" or a "two," and we took turns sitting down. There were no toilet facilities whatsoever, just cardboard boxes, which they would sometimes open the doors and dump out. There was no food. We begged for water at every stop. Sometimes they said, "Oh, the English have bombed the water supply--there is no water." This was their little joke. When we got to Berlin we were under attack by the English, who were bombing the rail lines. The Germans locked us in our train cars and left us exposed, saying, "I hope you enjoy your friends the British, they're coming to visit you and bomb the rail lines." The guards would then go down into air raid shelters. We just sat in the boxcars, which would roll from side to side, due to the concussions. There was no place to hide. You just hoped the bombs wouldn't hit you. After several days of that, they took us south to an all-purpose prison camp. We were dumped into Stalag IIIA in a town called Luckenwalde, Germany.

### **Can you describe the conditions at the prison camp?**

This was a camp that held thousands of prisoners of all nationalities. We were held in the most primitive of conditions. I was kind of lucky; we were in a barrack, while the others were out in tents during that very cold winter. Although we had no heat in the barrack--and it was terribly cold--we were three to a bunk and we huddled together, keeping warm that way.

Conditions were pretty rough. We were infested with fleas and lice. Without hot water, I had only one shower in five months. I didn't need a knife or fork, just a tin cup and spoon, and that was all you needed. Whatever food came, it was ladled out into your cup, and you took whatever they gave you. In the prison camp there weren't any mice or other small animals running around--

they would have been put in the soup pot immediately. What we ate or didn't eat was of primary importance. When your stomach is empty all you can think about is food.

German bread was supplied to us in small quantities. It was a very dark, hard, dense bread made, we were told, with sawdust, which helped to preserve it. It would actually keep for months without molding. We caressed and portioned that little piece of bread into the thinnest slice imaginable and then you would spend a long time thinking of what you were going to eat out of your Red Cross Parcel, how you would slice and savor it. It was in a way like a religious experience. If you had bread, you were going to stay alive. The prison diet supplied about 1,000 calories a day, which is starvation rations. My weight dropped from 150 pounds to about 110 pounds when I was finally liberated. Food became all encompassing. Usually in the service when men got together they ended up talking about their favorite girlfriends, and the pinup girls, and the pictures they painted on the side of the aircraft. In prison camp, we talked about food. We had tough, battle-hardened sergeants talking about how their mothers made meatballs--how she rolled the meat, and put the spices into it, and put the gravy on top, and everybody stood around just drooling. Sex and women were far behind.

### **What happened when you were liberated?**

The Russians liberated me in May 1945. I kept records, a diary of my time as a POW, and still have that diary, and a lot of other memories. Paper products were non-existent so I salvaged empty cigarette wrappers and used it for my diary. I believe the reason I can remember events as if it were yesterday is because I experienced them at the very impressionable age of 19, and under circumstances that were less than casual. It was pretty traumatic. Of course memory can play tricks on you. I've heard people recount stories and they improve the story as the telling goes on. I don't think that's true of my experiences. It was part of what I did; part of what happened, and I reacted at the time appropriately. Now, I can retell the stories, and though it's in the past--I can turn the pages of my diary and refresh and relive the actual experience.

### **What did you do after the war?**

Interestingly, after I came back from the Service, I went to college on the GI Bill and earned two degrees in engineering. I wound up designing, building, and selling oil refineries, which is ironic, considering I was shot down on a mission to bomb an oil refinery. I actually ended up selling oil refineries to the Germans. Being carefully selective, I used to amuse some of them by telling them that we blew up the old ones so we could build them new, state-of-the-art refineries. I did a lot of traveling as Vice President of international sales with the company I worked for. I logged about 4 million air miles total, traveling to every country you can imagine, 66 in all. I went to China right after Nixon and Kissinger opened it up and visited Baghdad regularly, so I got to know a lot of Iraqis. I lived and worked in Paris for five years and London for a year.

In 1947 I married a young lady whom I met in church. We sang in the choir together and we are still singing harmoniously 54 years later. I have three children and one 23-year-old grandson, Erik who lives in Hollywood.

### **You recently returned to Europe. What was that experience like?**

I actually went on a trip back to Czechoslovakia. A Czech airman's association that wanted to honor Americans who had helped liberate their country sponsored it. Several of our hosts had been young children who were on the ground, and witnessed the battle in which I was shot down. Private aircraft flew four other Americans and me to a town called Prerov, where we were wined and dined and taken care of by the Czechs. We ended up in our oil refinery target--which is now in Poland--and met the Polish people running the refinery.

Two German pilots also participated in the festivities and gave versions of the events of December 17, 1944. One of them, General Gunther Raal, was the number three Luftwaffe Ace, credited with 175 aerial victories. General Raal is a very unusual and interesting person. He was one of the most celebrated fighter pilots of the Luftwaffe. He now helps train German Air Force personnel in the USA, all part of a cooperative NATO effort. He and I got along quite well together and we agreed to meet again as soon as possible. We concluded with the comment that it was more enjoyable drinking beer than shooting at each other!

## James P. Harris, Jr.

After my tour of duty with the 461<sup>st</sup> at Torretta, Italy, my crew and I returned to the United States. We flew back via Dakar, West Africa, and Natal, Brazil to Miami. I was on leave at home in Washington, D.C. pending reassignment to Pacific Theater when V.J. Day arrived.

I was discharged, looked around awhile and Jim Hardee and I reenlisted and were stationed at MacDill Field, Tampa, FL. I stayed there as crew chief on the B-29 until June 1950 when the Korean thing started.

I was transferred to the Far East Command on some sort of special project that was canceled when we got to Japan. I stayed there about five months on B-29s. I went over to Korea as a replacement Flight Chief on -- What?? F-51s!! All I knew about the 51 was that it only had one engine and the pointy end went forward. The troops took care of me though. They said, "*No sweat, Chief. You take care of the paper work and keep the wheels off our backs*

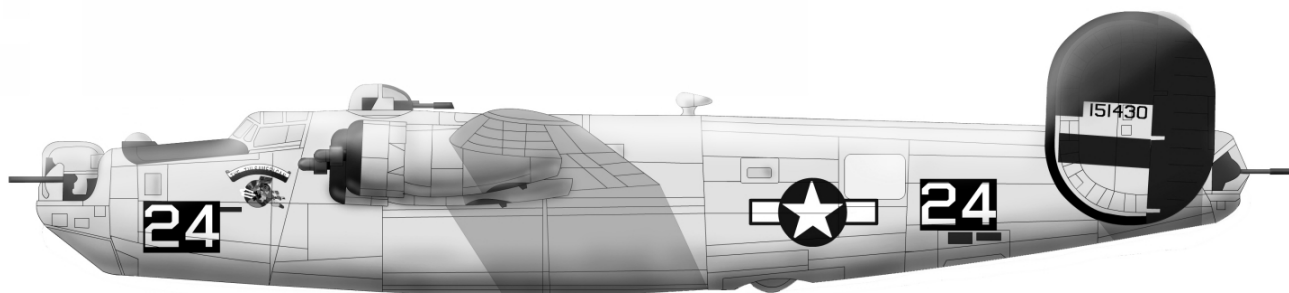
*and we will handle the airplanes.*" I stayed in Korea about 13 months and then rotated back to the States, assigned to an Air Force Reserve outfit at Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

I came up for discharge in Sept. 1952 and asked for assignment to either Bolling or Andrews due to hardship as result of my parents poor health. They said no way! I said good-bye, it's been fun.

I looked around for a job and saw an add in the paper that the Air National Guard was hiring. Talked to those folks and signed on in full time Civil Service capacity and weekend Military Reserve capacity. I worked for the DCANG on fighter type aircraft at Andrews AFB from 1952 until 1973 when I retired from Civil Service and retired militarily as CMSgt. in December 1977.

I've been riding the gravy train ever since.

Oh, I guess I should mention I have been happily married since September 1953 and we have two children and two grandchildren.



One day the tower received a call from an aircraft asking, "What time is it?"

The tower responded, "Who is calling?"

The aircraft replied, "What difference does it make?"

The tower replied, "It makes a lot of difference..... If it's an American Airlines flight, it is 3 o'clock. If it's an Air Force plane, it's 1500 hours. If it's a Navy aircraft, it's 6 bells. If it's a Marine Corps aircraft, the big hand is on the 12 and the little hand is on the 3. If it's an Army aircraft, it's Thursday afternoon and 120 minutes to 'Happy Hour.'"

## President's Corner

Two years ago when I took over as President of the 461st Association, I had an uneasy feeling in my stomach. I felt that the veterans were giving up their cherished organization. This was true in one respect, but it was true in other respects as well. It was true that they were giving up the management of their organization and allowing the children to run things from now on. This was a good move as it has allowed the veterans to sit back and enjoy the fruits of their labor knowing that the children would continue to run things in such a way that the veterans really could enjoy things.

But it's been true in another as well. There's always been a small cadre of children who have been willing to step up and help keep the Association going. These individuals know who you are. I don't need to list them by name. If I did, I surely would forget to mention someone and I don't want to do that. I will mention two groups though. The Reunion Committee has been doing a fantabulous job over the last several years at putting on a reunion that everyone has enjoyed. I can't sing enough praise for these young folks. I know everyone appreciates what they do. The current Board of Directors for the Association has been made up of children for the past two years. On behalf of the entire Association, I thank every one of you for taking a position to help with the management of the Association.

This being said, there's always a need for more help. The veterans have entrusted the operation of the Association to the children and we should all look for what we can do to help out. In addition to being the President, I've been serving in several other capacities—Webmaster and Editor of this newsletter. I would be happy for someone to step up and take either of these tasks over. Just let me know. I will gladly help in getting you up to speed. And I'm sure having new ideas would greatly enhance both the website and the Liberaider.

Speaking of the Liberaider, I was looking back over some of the articles in this edition. It seems that the children are stepping up to this challenge by contrib-

uting articles. I appreciate these and would like to encourage all the children to do more. In the past, the veterans have given us a number of excellent stories. I enjoy reading them as I put each issue together. As the ranks of the veterans thin, so do the number of articles I get for each issue. It's now time for the children to step up and tell their side of the stories. Although most of the veterans didn't talk much about their experiences during WWII, some did and more have been doing so in recent years. What did you hear? Send in your version of what went on in WWII. It may not be quite the same as hearing it from the veterans and I'm sure your interpretation may be a little different, but I, for one, would be interested in knowing your side of the story. I may even be able to go back into the archives of the Liberaider and put a veteran story in to enhance the story. The important thing is to submit your story so we have material to keep this publication going.

I guess I've rambled on enough for this issue of the Liberaider. I'll just close by saying that I'm looking forward to another fantabulous reunion this year. I hope everyone can find time in their busy schedule to come to Indianapolis. I hope to see all of you there. And don't forget that the 461st veterans attend the functions of the reunion for free. This includes the registration fee, the tours and the meals. Note the comment at the bottom of page 18.





## 461<sup>ST</sup> BOMBARDMENT GROUP (H)

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We're on the web!  
Visit  
**[www.461st.org](http://www.461st.org)**

## Webmaster Comments

The 461<sup>st</sup> website continues to grow. At this point, we have well over a gig of material on the Internet and it won't be too much longer before we exceed two gig. I never could have suspected that the website would be this large back in 2001 when I took it over and thought that 50 meg of space would be more than enough space for our website. It didn't take long for me to come to the realization that 50 meg was not going to be enough, but two gig seems unbelievable. I must say that I'm extremely please with the amount of material everyone continues to contribute.

This issue demonstrates a change in the contributions I've been receiving. To begin with, it's obvious that the ranks of the veterans is thinning and the contributions from the veterans has almost reached zero. This is not surprising since the 461<sup>st</sup> is almost seventy years old. As I typed that last sentence, I realized that next year will be the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 461<sup>st</sup>. I'll put a bug in the Reunion Committee to do

something special next year to celebrate this anniversary.

Having acknowledged the drop in contributions by our veterans, I want to thank the children and interested parties for stepping up and submitting material both for the Liberaider and for the website. A lot of the contributions are a little difficult to find on the website since it's so large, but if you want to find recent changes, I flag changed pages on the Site Map page. Flags stay for a month, but the date of the most recent change is there as well. More than 40 pages have been changed on the website so far this year.

The website doesn't mean much if people don't use it to investigate a veteran. I maintain a counter of the number of visits to the website. So far this year, we have had roughly 150 people visit. Some of these will write me to see if I have any additional information.