



The 461st

Liberaider



Vol. 37 No. 1

JUNE 2020

SOMEWHERE IN THE USA

Reunion Information

The 2020 Bomb Groups Reunion will now include a total of twelve bomb groups. This year we will be going to Albuquerque, NM. Please check out the details on page 18 and sign-up information on page 17. I say this every year, but it's true that this definitely promises to be another fantastic reunion thanks to the Reunion Committee.

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Last Flight of Crew #14

Prisoner of War Story

Across Europe Homeward Bound

by

Trefry A. Ross
S/Sgt.
Radio Operator
right waist gunner

Fifteenth Air Force
49th Wing
461st BG

765th Squadron
Cerignola, Italy - near Foggia

"Alright you guys, out of the sack. Come on, let's go! Keerist! You wanna sleep all day! - come on, let's go - - Jesus, watta bunch!" My eyes open slowly, and staring at me in the dark is the orderly with his

(Continued on page 4)

Liberation

by
Paul Hartal

The snow melted. But spring came reluctantly and slowly. Although the days now became longer, it was still rather cold. In the skies more airplanes flew than birds.

I was hungry and starving. Yet being deprived of adequate nourishment for long months, coupled with the brutally harsh conditions that existed in the

concentration camp, eventually made me lethargic. I became feeble, enervated, languid and phlegmatic. Surrounded by barbed-wire fence, I was moving around the lager of Strasshof in my worn-out wooden shoes and dreaming about food. I was eight years old.

One brisk and sunny day I roamed around the barracks. The blue vault of the sky was cloudless. Quiet and peaceful.

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Taps

May they rest in peace forever

Please forward all death notices to:

Hughes Glantzberg
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Gunnison, CO 81230
editor@461st.org

Headquarters

<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>
Norris, Nye E.	Columbus, OH	787	12/17/2018

764th Squadron

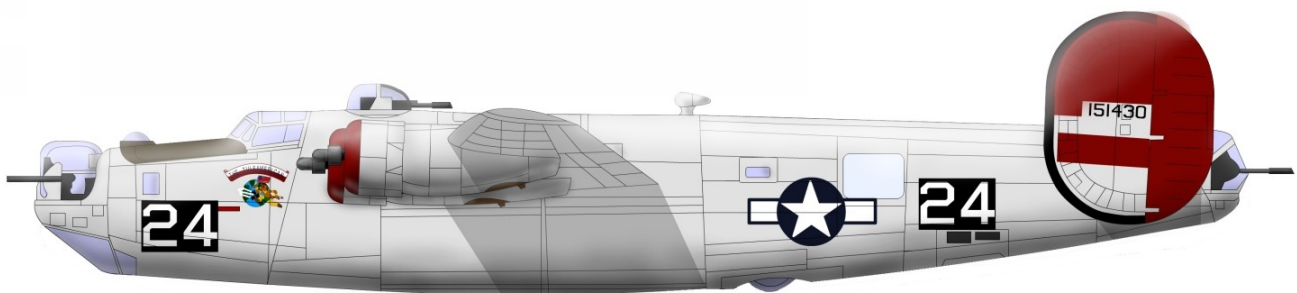
<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>
Brown, Jeff L.	Marble Falls, TX	1092	01/06/2018

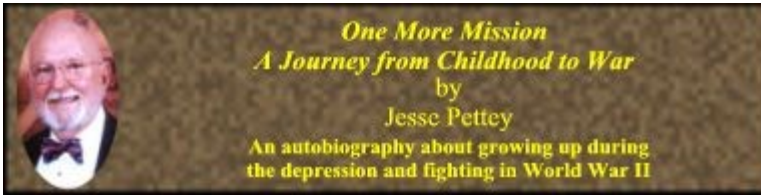
767th Squadron

<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>
Miller, Robert F.	Southwick, MA	612	05/01/2018

767th Squadron

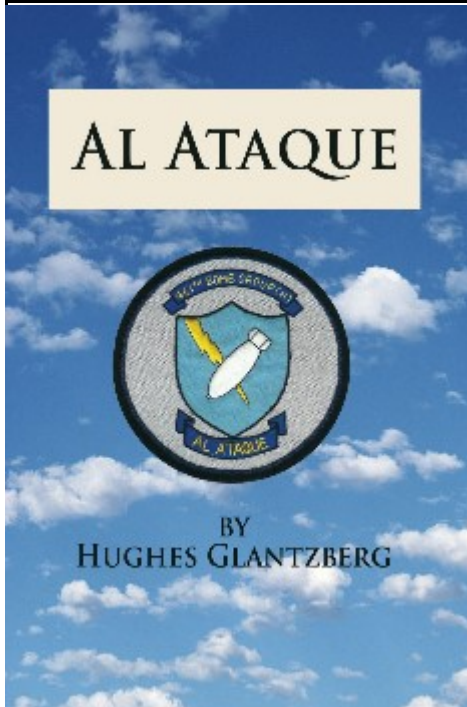
<u>Name</u>	<u>Hometown</u>	<u>MOS</u>	<u>Date of Death</u>
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With a special interest in World War II and the 461st Bombardment Group in particular, I found this book excellent. Most of the men who fought during WWII were in their late teens and early 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

Trade **Hardcopy**

Publication Date: Nov-2006

Price: \$36.95

Size: 6 x 9

Author: Hughes Glantzberg

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

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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flashlight. It's 3:00 AM and time for another flight over enemy territory. I lie there trying vainly to remove my body from my warm sack; and sack it was. In order to keep warm we (the enlisted men anyway) used to crawl into our mattress covers - which in essence were sacks - - this way we could keep a little warmer. The original "Italian sleeping bag" you might call it. Anyway, I'm lying there listening to "Putt-putt" get a razzing from Frank. Putt-putt is Fred Gaul, the flight engineer, and called Putt-putt because one of his jobs is to fire up the little gasoline engine (like a power mower) which powers the airplane until the engines are started. Frank Yesia, the ball gunner, is a wise guy. Frank is from Cicero, Illinois, home of the gangsters, and although Frank is far from the so-called "toughnut", he is still held in awe by a few of us as having come from that tough part of Chicago - Al Capone's old stomping ground. Anyway, he's needling Putt-putt, the youngest of the crew, and the "goat". We all have a good laugh and finally manage to shake ourselves from the sacks.

Our enlisted men's tent was comprised of six men: Thomas Diebert, S/Sgt., top turret gunner; Joe Mergo, S/Sgt., tail gunner; Roy Doe, Sgt., nose gunner; Frank Yesia, Cpl, ball gunner; Fred Gaul, Sgt., flight engineer-waist gunner; and I, right waist gunner-radio operator. We were a close knit crew. I think we were possibly the most congenial crew in Italy. We all got along great. The officers, who lived in a separate tent in another part of the airfield, were considered by us as "regular guys". They were a good group. I know this "camaraderie" was not universal. I firmly believe we had a unique crew, and it was a shame it all came to an end this 17th day of December 1944.

So here we are, struggling into our clothe, each man dressing as he saw fit - it was an informal uniform we wore - we weren't going to stand inspection or bow before the C.O., so we chose the most comfortable and warmest clothing each preferred. I usually wore my O.D.'s (wool shirt and pants) for warmth. We later picked up our

electrically heated suits, parachutes and oxygen masks at the flight line. We finally get dressed and stagger over to the hall for breakfast. One thing I can say about combat crews and combat flying - we never wanted for a warm place to sleep or good things to eat. It was hell over the target but, before and after, we had it pretty dammed good! So here we are, eating our eggs and bacon, plenty of it, along with coffee and toast, and razzing each other about last night. Wow! What a night that was. First, I'd like to explain how it was when we weren't flying. One night we had movies or played ping-pong. The next night the Enlisted Men's Club was open. So, on alternate nights it was either movie, or the Enlisted Men's Club. The movies weren't bad, held outdoors, usually an old Betty Grable or Bob Hope movie, but anything was ok as long as it had a few laughs in it. The Enlisted Men's Club was just the mess hall - after 8:00 pm. It was a bar, period, but the drinks were cheap enough - 50¢ each, or three for a dollar. Needless to say, we all ordered three at a time. There wasn't much choice - I can't remember for sure what else there was, but I know we always had 101 proof British Rum and grapefruit juice from the kitchen. It made a potent drink and, at three for a dollar, it didn't take many to relieve our frustration and anxieties. So, at breakfast this morning we were discussing the last night's events. It wasn't much - after six, nine, or twelve rum and grapefruits we were feeling no pain. Roy Doe was singing over and over, "Roll me over in the clover, lay me down and do it again, roll me over in the clover, lay me down and do it again ---". I can still see it as plain as yesterday - and hear Roy singing. It wasn't long before he was out of it, so we got the stretcher and lugged him home to the tent. Knowing 3:00 am was going to come around quite soon, we all joined Roy and flaked out. So here we were a few hours later, eating like nothing had happened, (I wish I could do that now) and razzing each other.

Breakfast over, we had to go to the general briefing for the flight and then we went to our respective special briefings. My Radio Operator brief-

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ing usually consisted of frequencies for the day, and I picked up my chaff (aluminum foil) which I threw out over the target to foul up the enemy radar. Next stop was the plane. Each man had a specific job to do - a general pre-flight. We checked our guns, loaded them - I checked the radio equipment, etc. We put on our electrically heated suits - which were thin suits, similar to thermal underwear, laced with wiring, and had a plug which we plugged into a jack on the airplane. Over the electrically heated suit we put on a heavy jacket and pants which protected the relatively thin and fragile electric suit and was heavy enough to protect one from the cold in the event of an electricity failure - even though it seemed as if you were freezing to death. So here we were, all dressed up and no place to go - as it were.

Tom Qualman, the navigator, comes by and says, "Well, it looks like we're sitting around here for while. The magneto on #3 is kaput and we'll have to wait for it to be fixed." Before long we are wondering if we are going to make it. You'd think we'd be tickled pink to be able to abort even before leaving the ground but, as I had said before, we weren't a "normal" crew. Even when we had first arrived in Italy we wanted to fly the very next day, but training and other events took precedence over foolish actions. So, even after a good number of missions, 'We were still itching to fly. Finally came the order to get ready. We were going to fly! If we could get off and catch up with the rest of the group, we could go. Keerist! You'd think we were going on a picnic instead of a deadly bomb run.

We're off, climbing through the grey overcast to find the sun at 20,000 plus. Where is everyone? Jesus! - We're all alone, We'll never make it -- but we try. Soon, far out over the Adriatic, we spot the rest of the group and try to catch up. We are heading for Blechhammer - the oil refineries - the dreaded target - No. 2 on the list, right after Berlin. The second toughest, and the longest distance from Foggia. All of a sudden I'm feeling cold. What the hell, my electric suit must be go-

ing out. Keerist! It's freezing! About this time, I look out the left waist window and see the group way off to our left. I'm wondering to myself what the hell they are doing way over there, and here we are flying tail-end Charlie when we should be right wing (as we had worked our way up) but, having left the ground late due to magneto trouble, we had to settle for what we could grab and that was easing into the slot at the ass end.

I couldn't help but think about what we had been through, all the previous missions, all the flak, all the tension, watching the others go down, fail to come back, working our way up from tail-end Charlie to right wing. Boy! Only one more to go and we would be squadron leader! I recalled the first few days when I talked with some of the crews that had been here for awhile. We were talking about R&R (that's short for "rest and rehabilitation"). It was a known fact that our rest camp was on the Isle of Capri, on the far side of Italy from where we were. So, I innocently asked - "Well, how is it on the Isle of Capri - how's the wine - what are the girls like?" He laughs, and remarks, "Who knows? No one has ever lasted long enough to get their 25 missions in and go!" It didn't take long to find out what the score was. Day by day crews didn't come back - and now we were heading for the same fate, although we didn't know it then.

So here I am, freezing to death I thought, and wondering how come we're all alone - when over the intercom comes Joe's voice, "Fighters! Here they come!" Almost immediately his exclamation was followed by the sound and reverberation of his guns. I'm looking out the waist window but can't see any fighters as they were to my rear and high, but it wasn't more than three or four seconds from the time Joe yelled when it sounded like rain on a tin roof, and the 20mm shells from the fighters were ripping through the roof of the plane, missing Putt-putt and me by inches, and exploding into the forward part of the plane. The oxygen bottles on the deck near the bomb bay doors blew up and caught fire. I

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was encased in a sheet of flame, my clothes were on fire. The aircraft took a violent lunge upward. I was knocked flat to the bottom of the plane and momentarily stunned. You see, Putt- putt and I, being waist gunners, just stood up - we were not sitting in a seat or turret, strapped down with safety belts - so with any violent maneuvers of the aircraft we found ourselves hanging on for dear life or being thrown around like rag dolls. Now I was on my knees looking for my parachute, the interior of the plane was a mass of fire. I found my chute (it was a chest pack and I had to snap it on the harness which I was wearing). It seemed like hours - I couldn't lift it - it felt like a ton. Little did I realize then that we were in a flat spin, and I was under negative "G" forces.

I finally managed to get the chute snapped to the harness and then, just as I dove head first through the waist window, I saw Putt-putt standing there watching me and assumed that he followed. I hadn't wasted any time once I was able to move. I just knew I had to get away from the fire. I didn't even take the time to disconnect my oxygen mask, intercom, or electrical suit. In the ensuing dive through the window I just ripped everything loose as the slack in all the wires was taken up. My oxygen mask was torn from my face. Due to the centrifugal force I didn't clear the side of the aircraft and my left foot was caught on the window sill. I kicked back with my right foot and suddenly I was free - - falling through the bright sunshine. Pulling the ripcord was an involuntary act - I don't remember actually doing it. God, it was quiet - so peaceful - so still. I looked around - - - nothing - - - no chutes - - - no planes - - - the overcast was way below, no ground in sight, bright sun overhead and clouds below. I couldn't get over how quiet it was; then I began to panic - - it felt like I was just hanging there. There was no sense of motion - nothing close to relate a downward drift to. I just knew I

was stuck. How the hell was I going to get down! All of a sudden I found I couldn't breathe! I was in pain! I didn't realize it then, but I was suffering from lack of oxygen. It was a horrible feeling. I couldn't stand it. I wanted to end it - -

now! I tried to unsnap my chute. I couldn't do it because of my weight. I wanted to unbuckle my harness and free myself so I could fall free and quick to relieve my misery, but I couldn't get the harness unbuckled either - because of my weight. It was approximately 12:05 pm - - at about 26,000 feet - - I passed out from lack of oxygen.

The next thing I knew, I was under the clouds and coming down near a village. I could see various buildings - - a church spire quite prominently. There was snow on the ground and I saw that I was about to come down in a plowed field on the edge of town. I could see some figures running to where I was about to land. I was coming down backwards. I reached up to shift the risers of the chute to try and turn around -- when I hit the ground. I hadn't realized how fast I was descending and hit the ground unexpectedly, and immediately folded up like an accordion. It was probably a lucky thing as I did not brace myself, but landed like a limp rag and, therefore, did not break any bones. I lay there for a few seconds getting my breath back. I wiggled my toes to make sure my back wasn't broken -- it had felt like I had broken every bone in my body. Just as I struggled to my feet I remembered the figures I had noticed running across the field. By now they were close upon me. I could see they

were German soldiers. They were shouting and yelling, "pistola, pistoa" and making gestures by holding their hands under their right armpit. They wanted my Colt .45 automatic pistol. We had been issued the pistol and shoulder holster, but were advised not to carry it as it was very unlikely we would be in a position to use it. Generally, the situation was such that an armed airman was treated badly by the Germans - as opposed to better treatment for an unarmed airman. Anyway, the German soldiers were having a foot race to see who could get to me first and get my pistol. I suppose I should say, at this point in my story, that I could have "John Wayne'd" it and pulled out my .45 pistol and shot the first five or six soldiers - - like in the movies -- and then stood there while the rest shot me full of holes; but then I wouldn't be here writ-

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ing this story - would I? You see, I had landed just across the road from a German army camp, and had literally thousands of soldiers to welcome me to their country. The first soldier to reach me was disappointed to find no pistol, so he took my helmet instead. The helmet and my parachute was all they took. I was not molested in any way.

I was then escorted to the Commandant's office, where I received a cordial welcome and had a nice chat with the Commandant - who, by the way, spoke fluent English. I had bailed out at 12:01 pm. It was 29 minutes later when I hit the ground - 12:30 pm when I had first glanced at my watch. It is now almost 1 :00 pm, and the Commandant has offered me a cigarette and a glass of brandy. I'm sitting there petting his big Irish setter and feeling relaxed and free. It is just beginning to penetrate my senses that the war is over - - for me anyway - - selfish though it may sound. I tell the Commandant my name, rank and serial number - discuss my home and family, and exchange a few pleasantries. No military or vital security information was discussed whatsoever. After a few moments, I noticed him looking at me rather oddly, as if he were worried about something. He picked up his phone and made a short call. About this time my eyes were beginning to feel rather strange - a tight sensation - no pain, but a feeling as though I couldn't blink my eyes. A moment later the door opened and a doctor entered. He gave me a brief examination and spoke to the Commandant in German. I did not know what he said. The doctor left in a few minutes, and no sooner had he gone then two soldiers, in full uniforms, with Schmeiser machine pistols, appeared and the Commandant

said they would escort me to town. He wished me well, we shook hands and I was off. The town center was about three miles away, and we walked. We had walked several hundred yards before my thoughts brought me recollections of stories we had heard about the Germans. The farmers would stick you to death with their pitchforks - - the doctors had enormous hypodermic needles to fill you with poison - - the soldiers would march you to a remote spot in the forest and shoot you - - and on and on -- my imagination ran rampant with all the thoughts. I was positive these two soldiers were going to kill me. They spoke no English and I no German. They would motion and point with their machine pistols the direction I was to take. Right into the woods, along a narrow and isolated path - - this was it - - I just knew it! At first they were along side , one on each side; presently, they were talking among themselves and were slowly getting behind me. The slower they walked, the slower I walked. I wasn't about to let them get behind so they could shoot me.

Well, it wasn't long before the path widened and we were on a road. A few houses appeared and then the town. I was taken to what looked like a school (at any rate, it was very similar in appearance to the grammar school I had attended when a child). They took me into the kitchen - a huge area that had been turned into a makeshift first aid area. I received another brief examination, and then appeared the dreaded hypodermic needle. I swear it looked to be about two feet long and four inches in diameter. It was a size I had never seen before, but I was assured it was only a tetanus shot. Next I was ushered into the auditorium where there were about two dozen air-

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

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men, none of whom I had seen before. It was now about 3:00 PM, and I sat there wondering what would be next. About every 15 to 30 minutes, two or more airmen would be brought in. The room was slowly filling up and yet one I knew appeared. I was beginning to wonder, "Christ! Did I jump out too soon?" It had been done before. Maybe I'd panicked and left a crew now on its way home. Then I thought back -- looked at my flying suit (I was quite a sight!). My flying suit was in shreds, blackened from the fire, holes completely burned through in spots. I finally convinced myself I couldn't possibly have been burned like this and the plane still be flying.

About 4:00 PM, they brought us some black bread and coffee (ersatz) which I couldn't eat. I didn't like the taste of either, and I wasn't hungry, later on I would have given anything to have that glorious piece of black bread - which was soon to come to taste like rich cake. My eyes were now beginning to swell shut and I could hardly see. The pain was beginning, and I was slowly comprehending that I was burned worse than I thought. My helmet and oxygen mask had protected my head and face, with the exception of the area around my eyes. My goggles were on my head, riding high on my forehead - they were too uncomfortable to wear (sound familiar?), so my eyes had been burned, and not having access to a mirror I couldn't see the extent. About 5:00 PM, an orderly came up to me and said that when it got good and dark they would put me in an ambulance and take me to a hospital. I think it was about 8:00 PM, when they led me to the ambulance.

I was met by a sound I will never forget - - the voice of Tom Noesges, bombardier, who was lying on a stretcher with a broken leg. It was a voice out of heaven. Not only was I among friends again, (the auditorium, by 8:00 PM, had filled almost to capacity and I still hadn't seen anyone I knew) but my worst suspicions were allayed. I now knew for certain that I hadn't jumped too soon. I believe Tom was as glad to see me as I him. I know, for myself, it was a

grand and glorious reunion. We were taken to a train and eventually ended up in a hospital in Brunn, Czechoslovakia, where we received our initial treatment. I remember quite well being given a bath upon arrival, by female nurses, and not being able to see, my embarrassment was well hidden. Tom Noesges and I were in the same room with two other Americans. Shortly thereafter (about two weeks later) I had recovered enough to travel, and one of the other prisoners-of-war and I were taken to a regular POW camp for interrogation - - leaving Tom Noesges at the hospital.

EPILOGUE

The aircraft of Crew #14, a B- 24 Bomber, 15th AAF, 49th Wing, 461st B.G., 765th Sqdn., flying out of Cerignola, Italy (near Foggia), was shot down by enemy fighters over Troubky, Czechoslovakia at 12:01 PM, December 17, 1944. Upon being hit by enemy 20 mm cannon shells, from either FW-190 or ME-109 German aircraft, it immediately caught fire and within minutes exploded. The main portion of the aircraft with six bodies, crashed near the village of Troubky. Four airmen were able to parachute to safety.

Those who gave their lives were:

West, Thomas K.	1st Lt. Pilot
Diebert, Thomas E.	S/Sgt. Top Turret Gunner
Mergo, Joseph G.	S/Sgt. Tail Gunner
Doe, Roy L.	Sgt. Nose Gunner
Gaul, Frederick H.	Sgt. Waist Gunner/Eng
Vesia, Frank C.	Cpl. Ball Turret Gunner

They are buried in a mass grave near Troubky, Czechoslovakia and have a marble monument with a bronze plaque, donated by the villagers of Troubky, to commemorate the day these American boys gave their lives so that Czechoslovakia could be free.

The four survivors are:

Kasold, Edward	2nd Lt.	Co-Pilot
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Noesges, Thomas	2nd Lt.	Bombardier
Qualman, Thomas	2nd Lt.	Navigator
Ross, Trefry A.	S/Sgt.	Waist Gunner/Radio

These men returned to the United States following cessation of hostilities in Germany in June 1945. Although these men have since passed away, they were living in various parts of the United States. Tom Qualman in Georgia; Tom Noesges in Illinois; Trefry Ross in California; and Edward Kasold's whereabouts are unknown.

IN MEMORIAM

*From Duluth Newspaper
about 1946*

A monument dedicated to the memory of a Duluth youth and five of his companions will show the world that Czechoslovakian patriots have not forgotten how American soldiers fought and died for them. The Duluthian, Sgt. Roy L. Doe, the late son of Mr. and Mrs. L. K. Doe, 128 South Sixth--third Avenue West, will be one of the dead heroes honored on August 15, 1946, when the monument is unveiled in the village of Troubky, Czechoslovakia. When the war department released the meager information regarding the death of their son.....(copy of paper unreadable).....rectory of father Nepustil. The Germans ruthlessly stripped the dead fliers of all valuable personal possessions and equipment, and orders were issued to bury the six bodies in a ditch beyond the cemetery.

IT WAS AT THIS POINT that father Nepustil and the Czech patriots vowed to show their appreciation for the sacrifice the Americans had made for them.

After urgent pleading by the townsmen and the village priest, the German command relented and gave permission for a military funeral for the six fliers. Obtaining the willing help of the local casket maker, father Nepustil had individual coffins made.



(Continued from page 1)

But suddenly airplanes appeared in the high azure. Hundreds of humming iron birds were flying in unison. Then small feather-like clouds began to appear around the airplanes. Slowly the tiny puffs filled the entire dome of the firmament with a carpet of white feathers. In the white carpet there were holes from which you could see the blue color of the atmosphere. The white puffs were created by the German anti-aircraft shells fired from artillery batteries on the ground.

Many years later I read stories of American and British aviators who flew dangerous missions during the Second World War. To them the flak looked very different. From the airplane they saw the exploding anti-aircraft shells around them as irregular patches of dark smoke or shapeless black balls. Thus, what looked to me from the ground, as harmless small white clouds were in fact deadly explosions. During the war German flak shot down thousands of allied airplanes. Anti-aircraft shells could shatter a plane into pieces, or blast it out of the sky. Sometimes the flak hit the bomb cargo on the aircraft and turned the flying fortress into an exploding huge fireball.

I think that the small feathery white clouds that I saw around the planes from the ground were not the exploding shells themselves but mare's tail generated by the flak. They were somewhat similar to the long and narrow stripes that airplanes frequently draw in the upper air. I remember from my physics class that at high altitude the water vapor condenses around the tiny fuel grains emitted by the aircraft engines. It turns into minute water particles by the cooling air. So the white wispy patches that I saw in the sky during air raids were an after-effect of the flak. The anti-aircraft shells blasted metal shrapnels in every direction. Yet the explosion also pul-

verized shell parts into a smoky dust that at high altitudes condensed the water vapor into puffy cirrus clouds. So the fire created water.

During air raids we didn't go into bomb shelters. For the prisoners there were no bomb shelters at the concentration camp.

My mother left the barrack early in the morning for work. I was supposed to keep an eye on Vera, my three-year-old sister, but I am not sure that I excelled in this role. I was drifting around aimlessly in the barbed wire camp. When the airplanes appeared in the sky I watched them mesmerized.

Escorted by P-28 and P-51 fighter airplanes, large formations of B-17 and B-24 squadrons flew over Strasshof for bombing and strafing missions. They often attacked military installations, oil refineries, and railroad marshaling yards in nearby Vienna. A garden village bordering on the Austrian capital, Strasshof lies just twenty-five km away from the city of waltz. A favorite target of the air raids was Wiener-Neustadt, another suburb of Vienna.

Strasshof was surrounded by pine forests, part of the legendary *Wiener Wald*. Among other things, it inspired in the nineteenth century the famous waltz of Johann Strauss, *Tales from the Vienna Woods*. But now the forest did not arouse the muses. The sounds of war replaced the sounds of music. Once during an air raid I suddenly heard the sharp and loud coughing blasts of a heavy machine-gun hidden somewhere in the woods. It was firing at a low-flying aircraft.

When iron birds appeared aloft, strange things could happen. Sometimes paper fell slowly from the sky, like tree leaves in autumn. They were British or American leaflets in German. On several occasions as I watched the planes flying high in the air, glit-

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tering pieces of silver strips started to descend from above. They trickled and danced in the wind. These shining metal ribbons resembled the silver tinsel that decorates Christmas trees. Bomber crews dropped from the planes these glistening bands in enormous quantities in order to disable the anti-aircraft cannons of the Germans. Spreading like a huge tinsel carpet in the air, the falling chaff distorted electronic data and caused false reading on the German radar screen.

I did not know it then but in those days the Russians were already advancing on Berlin along the extended eastern front. By the end of March, the Soviet forces of Marshal Zhukov were not very far from Strasshof. About seventy miles eastwards the Red Army clashed in fierce battles with the remnants of the German army in the Lake Balaton region of Pannonia. By April 4, 1945, the Nazis were pushed into Austria and the Soviets completed the liberation of Hungary.

The Red Army fought on a very wide front. As a matter of fact it began an offensive against Vienna on March 16, even before German resistance was crushed in Hungary. Zhukov's soldiers battled the Germans in brutal street combats. The Soviets managed to secure the Austrian capital on April 13.

However, a couple of weeks before the fall of Vienna into Russian hands, the Nazis decided to evacuate the prisoners from Strasshof. One day yelling German soldiers ordered us to assemble in front of the barracks of the concentration camp. We were surrounded from all sides by barbed wire fence. The guards in the watchtowers aimed their machine guns at the assembly. The soldiers organized us into columns. They opened the lager gate and soon we were marching to-

ward and unknown destination. My mother carried my little sister in her arms. Vera just turned four years old of age. I was pacing alongside with them.

We reached the railroad station of Strasshof. Here the Nazis pushed us onto crammed cattle wagons. Oh, here we go again, I thought. Being on this train was not a new experience, but the tedious familiarity of a *déjà vu*. The train reminded me of an earlier voyage in a similar cattle wagon from Hungary to Austria. I remembered the journey to the concentration camp. It was an inhuman and a nightmarish trip that lasted for three days. About eighty terrified Jewish men, women and children of all ages were crowded in each freight car. The wagons were sealed. By the end of the ride, even before we arrived at the concentration camp, some were dead because of the heat, the thirst and the exhaustion.

So now here I was in Strasshof on this Austrian cattle wagon, onto which the Nazis boarded again a crowd of frightened people. The Germans locked the doors. We sat on the floor and waited for the train to depart. But the train did not move. Instead, all of a sudden, the sirens began to howl, warning of the danger of an immanent air raid.

I heard this blood-curdling loud sound many times before, although my experience of bombing attacks until then was not bad at all. It seemed almost as if the worst part of an air raid consisted in the ominous cry, in the unnerving scream of the sirens. The roar of the sirens was both a doleful moan and a spine-chilling hysterical wail.

Be that as it may, this time the sirens were right. A horrific air raid followed. Bombs began to fall and burst into deadly flying pieces with deafening noise. The cattle wagon started to tremble and shake as if prepar-

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ing for take off.

The rumbling detonations were unbearably loud. The bombs exploded with ear-piercing thunder, causing devastation, panic, and shock. People were screaming in ultimate terror.

Mother pulled Vera and me under her protecting arms. We all lied on the wagon floor as mother tried to shelter us with her body. A dreadful hell opened its bloody gates. It wanted to tear us into pieces by flying shrapnel, to swallow us in melted asphalt, to consume us in flames of fire. The bomb attack did not last long. Nevertheless, the indescribably scary experience had etched itself into my memory for a lifetime.

When the air raid was over, the Germans opened the doors of the cattle wagons. We got off the train and stood on the platform of the railroad station. Now the place was transformed into a hellish nightmare. But what I saw was not just a bad dream. It was a real abyss, a horrible scene of torment in a catastrophic inferno. Fires were raging everywhere. The railway lines were broken in several places. The enormous power of bomb explosions bent the tracks into different directions. They looked like huge paper clips twisted and curved by giant hands.

Several wagons of the train were destroyed in the bomb attack. Freight cars were derailed and overturned. Our own wagon managed to stay on the rails but its wall was perforated by many shrapnel. The holes almost formed a continuous line at waist height. Death and serious injury were just an inch away. Mother saved our lives by pulling us onto the wagon floor when the bombs started to fall.

Others, however, were not so lucky. Many

were killed and injured in the air raid. Covered with blood, I saw a girl of my age carried away by her mother. I used to play with her.

Panic-struck Germans ran here and there. This was the first time that I saw dead and wounded German soldiers. They were lying on the ground or carried away on stretchers. Their uniforms were soaked with blood. Their faces beneath the helmet now lost the habitual arrogant expression of the "master race". Watching these wounded and dead German soldiers made me realize that they were not invincible after all; that they were vulnerable just like anybody else.

The bombing of the marshalling yards at Strasshof prevented the Nazis from transporting us into Germany. The strange irony of this terrible air raid was, that in spite of being almost killed by our liberators, the attack probably saved our lives.

After the bombing raid the Germans returned us to the concentration camp of Strasshof. A few days passed without particularly notable events. Then one cloudy morning a young Jewish man came to our barrack. He was panting. He said something about the German guards and that a soldier hit him with his gun butt. It was not clear to me at that time what he was talking about; but years later I understood. Apparently what happened was that the Germans began to abandon the concentration camp. This man tried to take advantage of the confusion and to sneak out of the lager. Then a German guard noticed him. The prisoner was lucky that the guard did not shoot him. But nevertheless, he received a blow from the butt-end of the German's rifle.

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One crispy day in early April I was moving aimlessly around the camp. The sun was shining but the air was cool. Suddenly, I noticed a mysterious stranger that seemed to appear from out of nowhere. He moved in my direction and approached quickly with a peculiar rocking movement. He proceeded with assurance and as he got closer he gave me a friendly smile. I found this quite unusual because an amiable gesture was a very rare commodity in those days. I looked at him and noticed that he was dressed in an unfamiliar way. He wore a black leather jacket and held his hands on a weapon with a pockmarked barrel and a circular cartridge magazine. I never saw a uniform and a weapon like this before. The strange soldier said nothing, just continued to walk. Soon he passed by me and before long he disappeared from sight. The smiling infantryman with his peculiar machine gun and black leather jacket was the first Russian soldier that I met. As he crossed the concentration camp the front was moving with him onward through Strasshof. As he passed me, along with him, the front was passing me too. It left behind a deceptive aura of the unawareness of a momentous turning point in my life enveloped in the delusive silence of a fleeting war episode. The passing front just gave back my freedom from enslavement and I didn't know that.

Yet liberation did not occur in a sharply defined moment. It was a process. The war did not end yet. Fighting with the Nazis in the defeated Third Reich continued until early May. Conditions in Austria now were still utterly confused, turbid and perilous. We could not go home yet.

Stalin's commandos were combing Strasshof in search of Nazis. Mind you, notwithstanding the friendly smile of the first Soviet soldier that I met, subsequent encounters with

the Red Army were not always that pleasant, to say the least. Actually, the second Russian soldier that I met threatened to kill me, together with my mother and little sister.

We were in the barracks. Suddenly a Russian soldier kicked the door open and aimed his machine gun at us. He was tall, wide-shouldered and wore a padded, dirty green uniform. His coarse face was distorted by a cruel expression. I think that he was drunk. After all, the daily ration of combat units in the Red Army also included a generous allowance of vodka. Anyhow, this Soviet infantryman was raging with anger. Brandishing violently his weapon, he yelled furiously in Russian with a husky voice: "Nyemtzi, Nyemtzi" (Germans, Germans). Moving around with nervous agitation he shoved my mother, sister and me to a corner. He checked carefully everything in the room before he left. He scared the daylight out of us.

I also felt frustrated and sad that I could not explain to him that for us he was our redeemer; that we were on his side. I wanted to tell him that we were his friends, not his enemies. But we did not speak Russian; and even if we did, I am not sure that he would have listened. Even when people do speak the same language they still may not be able to transcend the limits of communication, or the boundaries of their current physical condition, mindset and vision.

The Romans, who were astute observers of human nature, used to say, "man is a wolf to his fellow man" (*homo hominis lupus*). This is true even in times of peace, and moreover in times of war. Armed human conflict debases the ultimate value of life. Killing a human being, mind you, is not a big deal during war. It turns into a trivial thing, or even into a desired goal. After all, this is what soldiers

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are trained for: To kill the enemy.

Once I heard a story from a friend of a former Jewish partisan. One day during the Second World War the partisan knocked on the door of a Ukrainian peasant. He asked the farmer to give him food. The Ukrainian stared at him for a while and said that he had no food. The partisan did not argue with him. He just shot the peasant through the heart. He interpreted the refusal to supply him with food as a sign that the farmer collaborated with the Nazis. After the war the ex-partisan immigrated to America wherein he became a respected citizen. Such are the vagaries and paradoxes of war.

But let me return to Strasshof. The Red Army liberated the concentration camp on April 9, 1945. However, it did not complete yet the conquest of Vienna. Intense fighting went on for a few more days. Allied air raids already caused cataclysmic destruction in the city of Beethoven and Mozart. Now the horrendous human slaughter and material devastation continued. The air raids, artillery bombardment, street battles and scorched earth tactics rendered parts of the Austrian capital into ghost towns. The suburb of Wiener-Neustadt had been razed to the ground.

However, by April 13 Marshal Zhukov's divisions took full control over Vienna. Three days later they launched a heavy offensive against Berlin. The German capital already was severely damaged by air raids. Now artillery shells and combat from house to house reduced the city to rubble. In the end of April when most of Berlin was already in Soviet hands, the Fuhrer finally got the message that he had lost the war. His plan to enslave the world for a thousand years under the boots of the "master race" of the Third Reich evapo-

rated in smoke and fire.

It was easier for Hitler to make a world war than to marry his mistress. Nevertheless, on April 29 he decided to marry Eva Braun in his bunker. On the following day the Nazi dictator and his newly wed wife committed suicide. *Sic transit Gloria mundi* (thus passes the glory of the world), the Romans used to say.

In any case, the fuhrer in reality never harvested shining glory but bloody terror and death. For, glory can stem merely from constructive accomplishments, whereas the Nazi dictator brought upon the world only unimaginable suffering and destruction.

Hitler and his followers were motivated by xenophobic venom, which culminated in their frenzied hatred of the Jews. Their evil oppression of other nations dragged the world into a brutal war, unprecedented in history for its horror and scale. On the European continent alone almost 40 million people died in the war. The Soviet Union lost twenty million human lives. In Poland by the end of the war about 5.5 million people died, half of them were Jews. On the eve of the war an estimated 10 million Jews lived in Europe. Six million of them perished in the systematic mass slaughter of the *shoah*, as the catastrophe is called in Hebrew. The Genocide that the Nazis set into motion wiped out entire ethnic minorities, including the murder of half million Gypsies.

Instead of the promised millennium, the Third Reich lasted for twelve nightmarish years. It ended in suffering and chaos, in death and defeat. Between 1939 and 1945 seven million Germans died, most of them

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civilians.

Although our liberation from the concentration camp of Strasshof did not bring immediate deliverance, the hardest part of the ordeal was over. It was most unnerving to wait for the departure but eventually the great day arrived and we set off for home. We were of course very excited. However, to return home was not an easy task. As a matter of fact, the voyage back to Hungary turned to be arduous, exhausting and dangerous. In the beginning we could not find means of transportation. So mother found somewhere a wheelbarrow and made it as much comfortable as possible for my sister. Pushing Vera on the wheelbarrow, mother and I made our way on foot, walking along the Danube River from Vienna to Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia. Known also as Pressburg in German and Pozsony in Hungarian, the city was in earlier centuries the capital of Hungary. There were no bridges left across the mighty Danube because the Germans destroyed them. Did it change its color since the nineteenth century? I do not know if Johann Strauss really saw the Danube as a blue river or just used his poetic license. In any case, to me the Danube looked gray, notwithstanding the famous waltz of the Viennese composer.

Since then lots of water flowed down between the banks of that formidable river and the long wanderings of the war had ended many years ago. Nevertheless, the lonesome odyssey of haunting memories through the hidden chambers of consciousness continues for a lifetime.

Yet history itself is bigger than memory and the story is still incomplete. Ironically enough, despite the frailty of eroding memory, in many respects now I know much

more details about the events concerning my liberation than when they unfolded. Mind you, I always was curious about the identity of the raiders of our train in that Austrian railroad station. Who were they? Were they British or American? I did not rule out even the possibility that it was the Russians who bombed us. How many planes did participate in the air raid? And what happened in the skies during the attack? Where are the pilots now? Throughout the years I posed these intriguing questions and others to myself many times without avail.

Recently I was searching the Internet for information about Strasshof during the war. To my immense surprise and excitement I discovered the air force unit that attacked our train at the railroad station. I also found out the name of the mission leader, as well as of the names of two other pilots who participated in that air raid. Led by Major Poole of the 461st Bomb Group from the 15th American Air Force, it was Mission No. 203, which almost killed us on the train. This bombing attack took place on March 26, 1945. It was my sister's birthday. She did not get even a piece of cake.

According to the documents published on the web, the airplanes attacking the marshalling yard at Strasshof dropped 100-pound general-purpose bombs "which brought excellent results." They destroyed "the west choke point of the yards", states the website, "and started large fires".

On January 21, 2002, I wrote a letter to LTC USAF Ret. Frank C. O'Bannon, Jr., Past President of the 461st Bomb Group (H) 1943-1945 Inc. I asked for more information about Mission No. 203. He immediately replied.

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HOTEL INFORMATION

The Sheraton Uptown Hotel

2600 Louisiana Blvd NE, Albuquerque, NM 87110

Room rates are \$118 per night plus tax. Room includes a full, hot breakfast buffet for 2 per room.

Eleven ADA accessible rooms are available. If you need to make your reservation by phone, please ask for the hotel SALES OFFICE directly Monday - Friday 8am-5pm at 505-830-5781 MST; you may leave a message outside of business hours and Nichole will return your call. Please mention Bomb Group Reunion to receive the group rate. Room rates are good from September 8 - September 16, 2020. There is much to see and do in Albuquerque. You might want to consider extending your stay to explore.

- If you need a handicap accessible room or have ANY other special needs or requests, please tell them when reserving your room. This is important so they know how to plan.
- Free parking
- Rooms are large at 400 SF. Many updates have been recently completed.
- Each room has a mini refrigerator.
- This hotel is ranked #8 of ALL Sheratons nationwide for customer service.

**Airport to hotel shuttle is available by contacting Roadrunner Shuttle & Charter Co. 24 HR
Dispatch: 505-424-3367 to make arrangements and give them your flight information.
To receive discounted reunion pricing, mention Bomb Groups.**

BOMB GROUPS REUNION

September 10—13, 2020 Albuquerque, NM



Veteran/Fallen Hero _____ Group **461st** Sqdn _____ Highest Rank _____

Registrant Name: _____ (One Form per Registration Packet)

Address _____ City _____

State _____ Zip _____ Phone _____ Email _____

Name Tag Names (Include Veteran Relationship): _____

Registration fee _____ # people _____ @ \$15.00 each Sub Total \$ _____

DO NOT Include 461st Veteran

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 10TH—Welcome dinner, Mexican Buffet

people _____ @ \$42.00 Sub Total \$ _____

DO NOT Include 461st Veteran for meals

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 11TH— NM Veterans Memorial Tour, lunch and Memorial Ceremony and visit to Kirtland AFB

people _____ @ \$65.00 each Sub Total \$ _____

Individual Group Dinners

Roast Beef. # people _____ @ \$40.00 each Sub Total \$ _____

Chicken Corona # people _____ @ \$40.00 each Sub Total \$ _____

Vegetarian Lasagna # people _____ @ \$40.00 each Sub Total \$ _____

DO NOT Include 461st Veteran for meals

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 12TH

All Groups Banquet

Carved Prime Rib # people _____ @ \$50.00 each Sub Total \$ _____

Seared Salmon Filet # people _____ @ \$50.00 each Sub Total \$ _____

Basil Olive Risotto & Grilled Vegetables # people _____ @ \$50.00 each Sub Total \$ _____

DO NOT Include 461st Veteran for meals

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13TH

Lunch at Furr's Fresh Buffet and tour of the National Museum of Nuclear Science & History

people _____ @ \$65.00 each Sub Total \$ _____

Farewell Dinner — BBQ Buffet # people _____ @ \$32.00 each Sub Total \$ _____

DO NOT Include 461st Veteran for meals

Do you need a wheelchair? Yes _____ No _____ GRAND TOTAL \$ _____

Emergency Contact _____ Phone# _____

Please send this form along with your check payable to Bomb Groups Reunion to:
Bomb Groups Reunion Attn: Dave Blake | 648 Lakewood Rd. | Bonner Springs, KS. 66012-1804
Registrations must be received by September 3, 2020. No changes may be made after that date.

REUNION AGENDA

Thursday, 9/10 Arrival and Check In Day

Registration desk and hospitality room is open from mid-morning - ?? There will be deli sandwiches, various snacks and drinks throughout the day.

6:15 PM – An optional informal welcome dinner (most likely an Italian buffet with extra help to carry plates for our folks) followed by a short welcome and information meeting.

7:15 PM – A greeting time and informal informational meeting.

The hospitality room will reopen after the dinner meeting until ??

Friday, 9/11

9:00 AM – Depart the hotel to tour New Mexico Veterans Memorial with lunch and Military Memorial Ceremony at the Veterans Memorial.

12:30 PM – Depart for an afternoon visit to the 512th Squadron at Kirtland Air Force base for an open house and aircraft and equipment displays. Possible 9/11 remembrance ceremony on base. ***THIS TOUR IS NOT FIRM AS YET. MORE INFO TO COME ON THIS. ID WILL BE REQUIRED FOR SCREENING. PLEASE INCLUDE YOUR DRIVER'S LICENCE NUMBER, STATE AND EXPIRATION WITH REGISTRATION. CHECK www.461st.org FOR UPDATES!***

2:30 PM – Depart Kirtland Air Force base for the return trip to the hotel.

5:00 PM – Social hour for Individual Group Dinners beginning with a cash bar at about 5:00 PM.

6:00 PM – Dinner is served. *Hospitality room is CLOSED between 5:00 PM – 7:30 PM*

Hospitality room will reopen after the Individual Group Dinners and remain open until ??

Saturday, 9/12

8:30 – 9:45 AM – Ladies Crafts Demo

10:00 AM – 4:00 PM - Veterans Presentations today. Individual speaker times TBD but will have about a 15 minute bathroom break in between each session,

12:00 PM–2:00 PM – Lunch on your own.

5:00 PM – Veterans group picture taking. Location TBD.

5:15 PM – All Groups Banquet Social Hour; Cash bar opens.

6:00 PM. Dinner is served. *Hospitality room is CLOSED between 5:15 PM – 8:30 PM*

7:00 PM – Entertainment provided by Bob Hope, aka Bill Johnson.

8:30 PM – Program ends, hospitality room reopens until ??

Sunday, 9/13

9:00 AM – Optional Church Service led by Chaplain/Captain Chris Cairns

10:30 AM – 483rd BGA Private Military Memorial Ceremony

Noon, 12:10 & 12:20 - Stagger departure from hotel for lunch at Furrs Fresh Buffet and tour of National Nuclear & Science Museum

4:00 PM – Depart the museum for return to the hotel.

6:00 PM – Informal Farewell dinner. Hospitality room reopens after dinner until ??



The 2020 Bomb Groups Reunion

461st Bombardment Group (H)



...a note from the reunion committee chair.

Dear 461st Veterans, family and friends,

I don't have to tell you how crazy life has been since our country basically locked down in mid March. We have all been trying to avoid the COVID-19 virus and going to great lengths to do so. The reunion committee has been paying close attention to the developments nationwide in fighting this pandemic.

Of course the question is, "Is it safe to hold our beloved reunion or not?"

As of this writing in mid May, the committee is cautiously optimistic that we can move ahead as planned for our September reunion; after all the reunion is still four months away, allowing that much more time for things to get further under control and be safe for us to meet. However, as of this writing it is impossible to say positively that we will or won't be able to meet safely in September. But as I said, as of now, we are planning on meeting as scheduled.

As the summer progresses, should conditions be such that we cannot meet safely, we will make an announcement on the 461st website, www.461st.org. For those who register for the reunion, you will be notified by email if possible, or by phone and a full refund will be made quickly.

I feel that we have a good program lined up for this year and personally, I'm excited to see everyone again and have some fun! Our host hotel assures me that they have undertaken a very rigorous cleaning regimen and will continue to do that. Please consider going ahead and reserving a hotel room and sending me your registration. This really helps in planning for logistics. The hotel will allow you to cancel a reservation for ANY reason up to 48 hours of your planned arrival and you may also receive a FULL refund from the 461st for ANY reason should you need to cancel.

If you have questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to call me (Dave Blake) at 913-523-4044 or by E-Mail at reunion@461st.org. You can also call Hughes Glantzberg at 970-209-2788 or by E-Mail at president@461st.org.

Dave Blake

461st Bombardment Group (H) Association Membership

For membership in the 461st 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.

The 461st Bombardment Group (H) Association offers three types of membership:

- **Life Membership** – Men who served in the 461st 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 461st Liberaider, and attend and vote at the business meetings usually held at the reunion.
- **Associate Membership** – Anyone wishing to be involved in the 461st 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 461st Liberaider. You are not a voting member of the Association.
- **Child Membership** – Children of men who served in the 461st 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 461st 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:		



2020 REUNION TOURS

Friday, September 11, 2020—The New Mexico Veterans Memorial. The bus will drop you off just outside of the Visitor's Center, right next to the World War II section of the grounds. The total memorial grounds are ex-

pansive so you can explore and visit as few or as many of the sections as you choose. Seating throughout the park to stop for a break is plentiful. We will also have many wheelchairs on hand for our veterans.



The visitor's center is like a small museum in itself so be sure to allow time to explore inside!

While at the Visitor's Center we will gather in the meeting room for a box lunch without the box! From there we will move to the courtyard that is just outside "in back" of the meeting room for



our Military Memorial Ceremony conducted by our Reunion Chaplain, Captain Chris Cairns, who is an active duty Army Chaplain whose Grandfather, Col. Douglas Cairns was the final commanding officer of the 485th BG.

Following the tour and Memorial Ceremony we will be treated to an open house on Kirtland Air Force base hosted by active duty members of the 512th Squadron whose lineage takes them back to the 376th BG

Sunday, September 13, 2020—After a stop at Furr's Fresh Buffet for a delicious lunch we will visit the National Nuclear & Science Museum. There we will learn more about the origins of nuclear energy, how "the bomb" was made and delivered. Outside on display are aircraft to deliver nuclear weapons and a tower like the testing was originally done with. This is a fascinating museum that you won't want to miss.



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In his letter of January 24, 2002, Colonel O'Bannon says, "there were 24 planes that took off" for the Strasshof raid. One of these "aborted due to a fire in one engine before the target". He points out that another bomber "was hit by flak over the target and eight known crewmen were seen to get out of that plane".

According to the website of the 461st Bomb Group the flak at Strasshof was slight and inaccurate. Nevertheless, "two planes failed to return to the base and two others were hit". Second Lieutenant Raymond Spehalsky was one of the pilots whose plane was hit by the flak. He was forced to leave the formation and his plane crashed. However, fighter pilots escorting the mission later told the bomber-pilots of the formation over the inter-communication system that "they had seen eight chutes open from the plane before it crashed". I believe that in his letter Colonel O'Bannon refers to these crewmen.

The website of the 461st Bomb Group also mentions the aircraft flown by 2nd Lt. Lloyd R. Heinze in Mission No. 203. On its way to the target Pilot Heinze's plane was hit by anti-aircraft cannon fire over Strasshof. He managed to navigate the bomber and it "was seen at good altitude with an engine on fire near Pecs, Hungary".

So these are some of the stories of the flying men from the 461st Bomb Group who had participated in Mission No. 203. They are altogether strangers to me and at the same time their lives and mine are connected through the whimsicality of fate and the capriciousness of history. I have admired the courage of freedom fighters in the Second World War, especially the bravery of those young aviators who flew dangerous missions risking their lives to liberate the world from

the claws of evil. They are my heroes and brothers.

The pilots and crewmen who took part in Mission No. 203 were aware that their target was the marshalling yard at Strasshof but were unaware whom they bombed. They possibly saved my life and at the same time they almost killed me. Now owing to the technological marvels of the electronic age, the bombers and the bombed can communicate, or even meet and hug each other in the spirit of brotherhood and freedom.

Such are the uncanny paradoxes of war and peace.



President's Corner

Yes, I know. I know! If you've read this newsletter in the past, you know that some of the content has appeared in previous issues. I'm sorry about that, but I am completely out of new material. I really don't want to stop publishing the Liberaider as there is important information I need to tell everyone about—the reunion information. This information needs to be given out. I could publish those few pages and let the Liberaider shrink in size, but it's already smaller than past issues. I also know there are new people reading the Liberaider who never saw the original issue containing the repeated material. As a result, I hope you enjoy reading some old material presented in a slightly different way.

Coronavirus

Okay, that word has been on everyone's tongue for the past few months. I'm getting tired of hearing about it as I'm sure a lot of you are. Unfortunately, this pandemic is not going away quickly. As I write this article, there still is no vaccine for this virus. Even if a vaccine was available today, it would still be months of testing before it could be approved for general use. We can hope that something will happen and a cure will be available shortly, but we must also think about what it will mean if we don't have a cure soon.

Most of us have been isolated (quarantined) for the better part of two months now and are ready to start living again and get our lives back to normal. I'm with you on this as I don't like being cooped up. We shouldn't rush into removing the restrictions too quickly though. There are still new cases out there but the numbers are trending down.

My hope is that thing will be settling down before long and our reunion can happen as planned. Dave Blake and committee have put together another fantastic program for September. I don't want to see this cancelled. I made plans to attend some time ago and don't want to miss out on seeing everyone in Albuquerque in September.

I'm thinking positive. I believe that we can have the reunion. I've registered and I hope everyone will go ahead and submit a registration form along with your check so Dave can complete final preparation. If it turns out that we are unable to have our reunion, we will all get our money back. We won't be out anything. Let's consider it money in the bank. Dave needs registrations for last minute planning. Let's help him out.

Jet lag is nature's way of making you look like your passport photo.

Three people were sentenced to die at the guillotine. The first was a lawyer. He was led to the platform, blindfolded and had his head put on the block. The executioner pulled the lanyard, but nothing happened. To avoid a messy lawsuit, the authorities let the lawyer go free.

The next was a priest. They put his blindfolded head on the block and the executioner pulled the lanyard, but the blade didn't go down. They thought it must have been divine intervention, so they let the priest go.

The last person was an engineer. He waived his right to a blindfold, so they led him to the guillotine and put his head on the block. As he lay there, he shouted, "Hey, wait! I see your problem!"

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