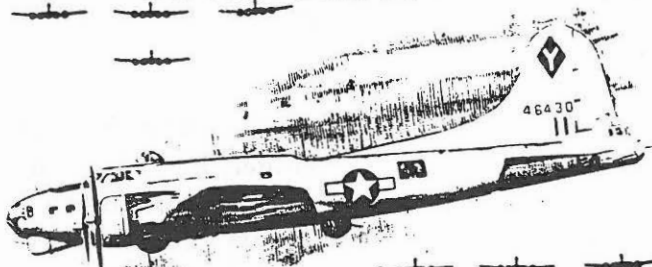


99TH BOMB GROUP (HEAVY) HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



The Group Flew B-17 'Flying Fortresses' For A Total Of 395 Combat Missions In 14 Aerial Campaigns From North Africa and Italy To Bomb European Axis Targets During 1943, '44 & '45.

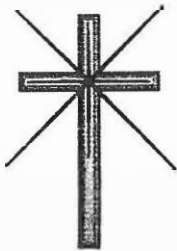
The Group Was Decorated With Two Presidential Distinguished Unit Citations.

Vol.21 No. 1

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May 2001

IN MEMORIAM



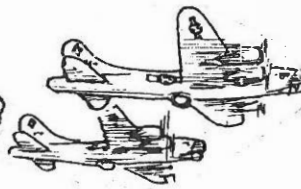
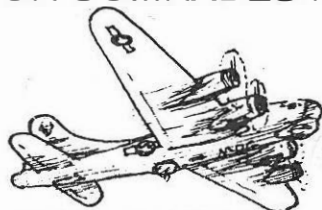
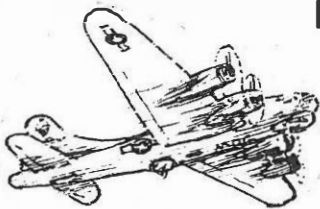
TAPS
STEVE AMUNDSON 416TH
EDMOND E. MASECH 348TH
REX GREATHOUSE
ROBERT G. PHILLIPS
JOE L. WARNEHK 347TH
RAYMOND V. SCHWANBECK COLONEL USAF (RET.)



NEW MEMBERS
CHARLES (HUGH) SHIELDS ASSOC.
2432 CONNOR AV.
JOPLIN, MO 64804



Members send sincere prayers and sympathies to the families and friends
MAY OUR COMRADES REST IN PEACE



PRESIDENTS MESSAGE

When you read this we will have returned from the San Antonio Reunion. Arkie Clark has indicated that we have over 150 signed up to attend that event. I am sure we will all have a good time.

Sorry to report that Roy Worthington has not been feeling well and that is the reason you have not received the Newsletters in their usual manner. Roy has been taking care of the printing for 10 years and we owe him a lot for the fine manner in which he did his work. Roy will be turning over the printing activities to Bernie Barr and they will be taken care of in Albuquerque.

Roy Worthington was able to go to Palm Springs California along with Fred Leiby. They found that things were very expensive there and it would be impossible to get a room for much under \$100 per night. Also you can not get a direct flight to Palm Springs and commuter flights were also expensive.

In light of these facts we are looking into another location for the 2002 reunion. Possibilities include Omaha Nebraska and Colorado Springs Colorado.

We will undoubtedly have more stories to tell after the reunion.

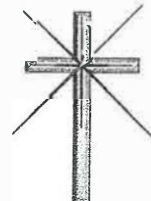
Don Lawhorn



PS-Plans are now being made to hold our Bomb Group Reunion in 2002 at the MAXWELLHOUSE HOTEL, NASHVILLE, TN APRIL 16-21.

CONGRATULATIONS to Col. Raymond Schwanbeck the last combat commander of the 99th Bomb Group for his selection and his induction into the ARIZONA HALL OF FAME. The Arizona Aerospace Foundation inducted Ray at this year's Hall of Fame ceremony held April 21, 2001 at the Pima Air & Space Museum in Tucson, Arizona.

The 346th Bomb Squadron 99th Bomb Group has been reactivated as the 346th Test Squadron Test Operations Flight, 318th Information Warfare Center, Air Intelligence Agency, Air Combat Command, Lackland AFB, TX. If you can provide any historical materials or information pertaining to the 346th WWII service from activation to inactivation and post war service please contact - Kirkwood S. Hawthorne 310 Highview Drive, San Antonio, TX 78228-1846 ph 210-434 2174 Email: ksh572@aol.com. Dick Drain is being contacted for historical information.



THE CHAPLAIN'S CORNER



The Most Beautiful Tapestry

As I faced my Maker at the last judgment, I knelt before the Lord along with all the other souls. Before each of us laid our lives like the squares of a quilt in many piles. An Angel sat before each of us sewing our quilt squares together into a tapestry that is our life. But as my angel took each piece of cloth off the pile, I noticed how ragged and empty each of my squares were. They were filled with giant holes. Each square was labeled with a part of my life that had been difficult, the challenges and temptations I was faced with in everyday life. I saw hardships that I endured, which were the largest holes of all. I glanced around me. Nobody else had such squares. Other than a tiny hole here and there, the other tapestries were filled with rich color and the bright hues of worldly fortune. I gazed upon my own life and was disheartened. My Angel was sewing the ragged pieces of cloth together, threadbare and empty, like binding air. Finally the time came when each life was to be displayed, held up to the light, the scrutiny of truth. The others rose, each in turn, holding up their tapestries. So filled their lives had been. My angel looked upon me, and nodded for me to rise. My gaze dropped to the ground in shame. I hadn't had all the earthly fortunes. I had had love in my life, and laughter. But there had also been trials of illness, and death, and false accusations that took from me my world as I knew it. I had to start over many times. I often struggled with the temptation to quit, only to somehow muster the strength to pick up and begin again. I spent many nights on my knees in prayer, asking for help and guidance. In my life I had often been held up to ridicule, which I endured painfully, each time offering it up to the Father in hopes that I would not melt within my skin beneath the judgmental gaze of those who unfairly judged me. And now, I had to face the truth. My life was what it was, and I had to accept it for what it was. I rose and slowly lifted the combined squares of my life to the light. An awe-filled gasp filled the air. I gazed around at the others who stared at me with wide eyes. Then I looked upon the tapestry before me. Light flooded through the many holes, creating an image. The face of Christ. Then our Lord stood before me, with warmth and love in His eyes. He said, "Every time you gave over your life to Me, it became my life, My hardships, My struggles. Each point of light in your life is when you stepped aside and let Me shine through, until there was more of Me than there was of you."

FR Mike Bucci

99th BGHS Chaplain

REX GREATHOUSE FAMILY

November 12, 2000

99th Bombardment Group
c/o Bernie Barr
7408 Vista Del Arroyo Ave., NE
Albuquerque, NM 87109

Dear Bernie:

It is with a sad heart that I write to tell you of the death of my dad and your friend, Rex Greathouse.

On Thursday, November 2, he died, after a beautiful day with family and friends. If a person could design the day they go, it couldn't have been a better one. Dad lived in a nursing home in Topeka since June 25th of this year, and as the daughter in town, I had the opportunity to spend time with him and take care of things for him. On this particular day, I took Dad to an early blood work appointment at the V.A., a visit with the doctor and we had a memorial service to attend for my 51 year old cousin. Between the activities, Dad spent some time at my home with his cat (we adopted from him), and he wanted to get dressed up, complete with cowboy boots to attend the memorial service. My cousin Larry was a great guy, and Dad had a special fondness for him. After the service, we went to my aunt and uncle's home (sister of my Mom) for lunch and time with family. It seemed that day that Dad was enjoying the pleasures of life, as he commented on how great the food tasted and how good the people looked. In the afternoon, my husband took him back to the nursing home and all the staff told him how spiffy he looked in his suit. An hour or so later, they called to say that he had died. He'd taken a nap, gotten up to get himself a glass of water, and while he poured it, he died. There was a nurse in the room, and she said that he was gone before he hit the floor.

At his funeral, the pastor said that Rex Greathouse was made from a different bolt of cloth, and it is so true, but he also was a man with honor and love for his country. We made a display of the places he'd been and it was so wonderful to have this collage of his photos of seas and deserts to steering wheels, and riding a buffalo to viewing the cockpit of an airplane. We had a military burial at Farmington cemetery in Wilson county and his flag will fly at the Fredonia cemetery on each Veteran's Day.

I was so glad to have met you all at the reunion in September. I know that it was a very important event for my Dad, and while he could never express it, I know he loved you all for being a very important part of his life.

Affectionately,

Barbara Greathouse Kieffer

2211 SW 33RD • TOPEKA, KS • 66611
PHONE: 785-266-2478

December 15 00

Dear Bernie,

Everything was going very well this year except on 17 November I had emergency heart surgery. I was in severe pain. After five doctors conferred, it was decided to install two stints in an artery on the front of my heart. Also discovered was an aneurysm on my aorta which will need attention in January. Then to top it off I had gone to an eye clinic last week complaining that it seemed like people were all driving with their bright lights but found the problem to be cataracts which will be a later operation.

Otherwise things are ok. We baby sit our three year old great grandson each morning M-F except on alternate weeks he goes to his other great grandparents in Cullman AL.

We made two trips to Illinois this past year in addition to a trip to Jacksonville FL to attend my 99th Bomb Group reunion and a three week trip to England and Ireland in September. We arrived in England just as the fuel crisis occurred but the people we stayed with had just filled up their vehicles with petrol. We thoroughly enjoyed Ireland and its emerald green country sides.

In October we were hosts to a 29 year old girl from Brazil. She was one of twenty visiting with Friendship Force.

We enjoy hearing from you. Keep in touch.

Chris & Sue
Chris & Sue (Christensen)

Email Hchrist425@AOL.com Phone [256] 519 6501

P.S. Just received word that Warren Christensen died the last part of October. He was going on a trip but had a heart attack in the airport at Seattle. He was on life support for ten days.

BUSY SEPTEMBER 1943

edited by Hugh Shields

Dean Shields, pilot of B-17F tail No. 229473 *Yankee Doodle* (347th Sqn) wrote to his fiancée, Mary Huston. Mary, in turn, typed the following narratives onto carbon newsletters for their families and friends. The following story is included in a larger collection of letters Dean wrote and stories he has told in more recent years. Based at Oudna, near Tunis, 473 *Yankee Doodle* and other bombers targeted Southern Italy in support of Allied landing efforts at Salerno.

Text of the 1943 newsletter is set off by indentation. Footnotes and a glossary are added as explanation for readers not necessarily fluent in military aviation history.

[September 8, 1943]:

"These last 10 days have been wonderful - wonderful because they have given us just about all the flying we can take. I've upped my missions to 46. Think of it, only four more to go!!! Old *Yankee Doodle* has stood up wonderfully - almost perfectly, in fact, since getting her fifth No. 3 engine on. She's averaged almost eight hours in the air a day."

Dean is enthusiastic to fly because it puts him closer to 50 missions and a trip home. July and August were slow in terms of flying, and now the pace had quickened as the buildup of the Salerno landing [invasion of Italy] was on.

"She [473] is a sight - all covered with long, black, oil streaks from the engines, for all of them leak a lot of oil now, dirty gasoline down the wings where the ground boys have overflowed tanks in the dark, the bottoms of the wings are black with oil from the tanks, coolers, drains, carbon and barrel oil from the exhausts, tail and stabilizers covered with oil and everything that drips is blown back, blue-black powder burns around the turrets and waist windows from the guns. There are a few new holes here and there, and she is terribly dirty inside."

Dean was comfortable describing his airplane and its many mechanisms. He had grown up in rural Iowa around machines, and took a personal interest in the care and operation of "his" plane. Sometimes his descriptions sound like movie newsreel narratives of the period. Perhaps that upbeat, confident tone was judged more likely to get past the censor.

"Oh *Yankee Doodle's* stable boys [ground crewmen] are on the job all right, but they have been busy working on other planes that come home with troubles. There is no time for cleaning off grease. She is loaded with bombs now, and the boys are pumping in gasoline. She will be ready to knock off [mission] number 47 in the morning. Compared with the other airplanes, I believe *Yankee Doodle* has more of her original parts than any other ship of the 'originals.' One original has 55 missions. *Yankee Doodle* still has three original engines. It has been an unusual coincidence that I should draw four bad engines for No. 3."

The high attrition of No. 3 engines on *Yankee Doodle* would be an enduring mystery.

"*Yankee Doodle* may lead the group in the number of pursuit downed. Yesterday she brought her total to 12 for sure. There are three more we may possibly get credit for if we win the [coin] flip where two or more fellows got the same pursuit. She still has her original brakes, which is a feather in my hat, even if I do say so myself. Everyone burns up brakes in cross winds, etc. I'd still have the original tires if some Colonel had made a decent landing at Tripoli one time when he took my plane. I've never sheared a tail wheel pin. (The tail wheel locks from the cockpit and a pin will shear before severe side drift will break or spring the tail wheel assembly.) Everyone gets one of those too in a cross wind."

Cross wind landings were a way of life at their previous base, Navarin, during the summer months.

"There are little motors, etc. we've saved by proper use that are every day troubles to others. Don't get me wrong, for I'm only a tenth of the crew. The rest of the boys have done a wonderful job of taking care of their equipment too. Until yesterday we had only burned up one gun barrel, that is a good record for men who have shot 800 to 4,000 rounds on many missions. Of course, last night we accepted nine new barrels, but we still haven't drawn our share. [Dean will explain later why all the new 50-caliber gun barrels were necessary]. Only once have we gone over the target without every gun working. Once a top turret gun wouldn't work. Several times shells have broken in the chambers, jamming the guns. Oh we're proud of our 'baby', and we are going to have our picture taken again one of these days with her. Oh yes, and we're the only crew in the squadron 100 per cent original and unscratched! That we can thank our Lord for, for certainly He was with us on every mission."

"Humes is flying a crew of his own now [Bill Humes was crew 12's original co-pilot]. I have a flight officer from a B-26 for a co-pilot. He is a boy, but very capable, and I believe he will take over *Yankee Doodle* when we finish."

Dean speculates on his future following completion of 50 missions. Will he get to go home, or remain in North Africa?

"There have been lots of boys sent on to training schools [as instructors] for new crews here in North Africa after they had finished their fifty missions. Gee, I hope they don't do that to me. I want to go home. I still have some hopes, though. They can't take everyone and make instructors out of them."

Dean now explains the reason for *Yankee Doodle's* being issued 9 new gun barrels with: "Yesterday we went to Casa Foggia¹ again. I led the third element."

He recently recalled: "Each combat mission had a 'tail end Charlie' crew that would leave formation to assist any aircraft in trouble. This job was rotated through the squadron crews. Early in September, that job was assigned to Crew 12 in '473 *Yankee Doodle*. September 7, 1943 - The [99th Bomb] Group put up 23 planes, three 6-ship elements in Typical V formation and a 5- plane fourth element in the slot behind. As we crossed the Italian coastline, two group planes turned back with equipment problems and were replaced with 1 of our five planes. German fighters were up and doing some serious flying, 60 to 75 of them."

"Forty-five or fifty of the bastards² jumped us at the coast. We fought them for fifty minutes. We were the last squadron over the target, hence they picked on us. My right wingman [tail No. 460] got hit in No. 2 engine. An oil line on the front of the engine was punctured letting oil spray back on the exhaust and catch fire. It would smoke a while and then burn a while. Boy what a smoke! That also drew all the pursuit³ onto us, for they look for a cripple."

Art Cozine, *Yankee Doodle's* bombardier, recalls that on this, his 50th mission, "the enemy fighters were on us like flies flying across Italy to Foggia and then they hit us again while flying back across Italy south of Naples".

"The pilot [of 460] tried to 'feather the prop,'⁴ but it wouldn't feather, so he gave it all the power he could until it ran out of oil. At least he could stay in formation

¹ Southern Italy, near the Allied landing at Salerno.

² See "Luftwaffe," Appendix A.

³ See "pursuit," Appendix A.

⁴ See "prop feathering," Appendix A.

that way for a little while. A few minutes later another ship from the lead element lost a No. 3 engine and feathered it, but fell back slowly. I gathered him up and slowed down for him for about that time my wing man's engine [460] 'froze' breaking the crankshaft and letting the prop turn in the breeze like a runaway wind charger⁵ in a 150 mph wind."

Dean, recently: "Flak broke an engine oil line on our right wingman's plane. The oil blew onto the exhaust manifold. Sometimes 'big time' smoke, then flames off and on. The prop would not feather, when the engine ran out of oil, it froze up but the prop continued to turn, to 'wind-mill'."

Art Cozine, up in the nose of 473, recalls hearing the runaway prop on 460 as a whine, and wondering along with 460's crew where that prop might go if it came loose.

Dean: "We continued on course toward Foggia, adding two more planes to our much slower and lower squadron, now five. We turned to the Group return course and they overtook us [at a] much higher [altitude] and helped us in fighting these fighters. Not until we were well out to sea did their [Luftwaffe] fighters return home."

"I called the squadron leader [of the main formation], and he slowed up some for us, but we couldn't keep up in their tight formation, hence 'Jerry'⁶ gave us four, Humes, flying my left wing, 460 on the right wing, and Bankhead from the lead element, a supreme[?] working over. For twenty minutes they came at us from all sides, and to quote observers in other squadrons, 'there were as many as seven pursuit going down in flame at once.' I lost a lot of altitude so that we could get out to sea more quickly. We were hit by flak⁷, and the boys [in the disabled aircraft] were in no condition to do much dodging, but we missed a lot of it. We all four made it all right. One man was killed and two wounded, but we made it."

"The four of us may have gotten twenty or more pursuit. The boys are claiming thirty, but two may be claiming the same plane. It will take a week or more to be sure. Humes and Bankhead went to the home base I went to Sicily with 460. The prop was red hot and about to fall off by the time we landed. It took 15 minutes to stop turning. We took off the prop and I flew the plane with three engines home. Some thrill, [with] so much to think about."

Dean recalls: "Three of our 'tail end Charlie' squadron then set a course for home (Tunis). Our wing man (460 *Cotton Eyed Joe*) and (473 *Yankee Doodle*) eased our way to an emergency field built on the South shore of Sicily. 460 stopped 6 feet short of a 10 foot ditch where we waited for the prop to stop turning and cool off. 473 flight engineer Bob Carlton and I, with the tools he carried, removed the prop dome, feathered the prop and with rope found along the shore line, tied each prop blade to the cylinder behind it so that it would not turn in or out going home. Both crews, except Carlton and me, were loaded into 473 along with heavy weight items from 460, to fly to Tunis."

Art recalls that 473 stayed until 460 took off and that Bill Humes piloted *Yankee Doodle* for the homeward leg. Dean remembers that the airfield was the jump off point for several thousand paratroopers (awaiting the Salerno landing), whose commander took a personal interest in this bomber with a problem. The officer wanted to know what he, Dean was going to do about a disabled plane nosed up to a ditch and apparently obstructing the airfield. The two airmen quietly went about their repairs, while troops stood around and their officer hovered nearby.

⁵ Wind-driven generator used on farms before rural electrification.

⁶ A nickname for the Germans

⁷ Anti-aircraft gunfire

"Bob and I backed 460 away from the ditch by setting one wheel brake and powering up the outboard engine on that side; backing the other wheel 4 or 5 feet each time until we could execute a 180 degree turn. There was a strong cross wind. As we taxied out, a C-47 landing bounced several times, then wiped out its landing gear, blocking 'our' runway. This field had another strip about 90 degrees to 'our' runway but the wind now was very much against us. To control the B-17 during strong cross wind take-off, less power was used on the wing away from the wind. No problem using 'our' runway but now the cross wind on this runway was against us, just the opposite of our plane. Bob and I considered our chances for such a take-off. We finally decided that Bob would manually control the outboard engine on the 'up wind' side to 65 inches plus/ minus manifold pressure for more power from it (56 inches normal max) and I would use the opposite inboard engine for as much power possible, then bring the other outboard engine up as soon as we could. The take-off was a little 'hairy' but we were soon over water and back home. #460 was back on line with a new engine and more patches a few days later."

Dean earlier noted that this runway ended with a cliff at the sea shore, about 70 feet above the water. The plane 460 took off, dropped down to just above the water, where the extra life kept it in the air long enough to pick up speed, add power, and improve its wind heading.

Dean explains the need for conserving aircraft by recalling the 99th BG's beginnings in Boise. He recalls that in November 1942 the 99th had only five B-17Es, one out for an engine change, another awaiting new tires, leaving only three airworthy B-17s to train 30+ crews.

In his 1943 letter, Dean returns to the scene of the air battle:

"My wrist is still lame from flying formation as best as I could for over an hour and a half. As I've said before, I never want to see another pursuit. I actually thought that yesterday was 'it'. I sat there wondering what the plane was going to do when it got hit. I was more afraid for the boys in the tail, as I heard that terrible thud and 'Tinnie' sound as 20mm⁸ hit and exploded. They dropped three aerial bombs⁹ on us. One exploded just below us. It raised the ship about two feet. The concussion was terrible. It raised so much dust in the cockpit that I could hardly see, and had to open the window. Carl [Bob Carlton] fired directly over the nose about 100 round burst. It shattered both windshields. The pursuit exploded 300 yards in front of us. We had to fly through the smoke it left. I'm ready to quit this job. One might go on twenty more missions before it happens again, but only one well placed 20mm will do the job. Only luck kept that shell out of the cockpit yesterday and away from all of *Yankee Doodle's* boys. Now, you see why all the new gun barrels. Six pursuit for 5,000 rounds of ammunition, 9 gun barrels and \$200 worth of patches and damage to *Yankee Doodle* - not a bad trade. We [473] lost no lives though."

Tsgt Bob Carlton earned a Distinguished Flying Cross and received credit for shooting down an FW190 and an ME109 on this mission. By the end of his tour he had also earned an Air Medal with 9 oak leaf clusters.

"It is official! Italy has surrendered. I'm so thankful even though I do wish I had four more missions. It may mean me home a month or two later. Even I can hear the prayers of gratitude for the hundreds I saw on the water today."

While Italy surrendered, the German Army, of course, wasn't buying it. Italy would remain a battleground for almost two more years. The Salerno landing (September 9)

⁸ See "Cannon, 20mm," Appendix A

⁹ See "Bomb, aerial," Appendix A.

didn't go well, and a maximum effort was underway by the Air Forces to support the beachhead, actually dual beachheads, as they failed to connect after landing on both sides of that port city. Dean said the B-17s flew toward the beachhead where they checked in by radio to receive their target instructions as they crossed the Italian coast. They bombed a grid location in daylight, without really seeing their targets. The planes were mostly loaded with 20-pound fragmentation bombs¹⁰. *473 Yankee Doodle* flew one and sometimes two missions per day during this period.

Dean and the other members of Crew 12 completed their 50 missions and went on to other vocations in the war effort. Dean returned to the U.S., was married, and went on to train B-17 crews at Rapid City, SD.

Hugh Shields worked in flight test at Edwards AFB, CA during the Viet Nam era. Dean designed automated sawmill machinery. Hugh began noting his father's airplane stories in the early '80's while they both worked and lived at various sawmill job sites.

[email: hshields@clandjop.com]

APPENDIX A—GLOSSARY OF TERMS

- Axis** Germany, Italy and Japan collectively made up the Axis powers, while Great Britain, the British Commonwealth countries, the U.S., Russia, China, France, Poland and others comprised the Allied forces.
- Bomb, fragmentation** 20-pound bomb used against enemy airfields and as anti-personnel ordnance. Bomb made by placing explosive inside a steel coil spring, designed to fragment into many small bits of metal. Dean said that a parked airplane hit by a fragmentation bomb might look normal from a distance, but would be riddled with holes, rendering it useless.
- Bomb, aerial** Bombs sometimes dropped from German aircraft into Allied bomber formations
- Cannon (20mm)** Two types of machine guns were generally used in aerial combat: the 50-caliber machine gun and the 20mm cannon preferred by the Luftwaffe. The cannon shell exploded at a given distance from the gun barrel, whereas the 50-caliber shell was not explosive.
- Censor** Private correspondence from the war zone was censored to assure that base locations, plans and other potentially damaging information did not fall into enemy hands. Dean indicated in his letters that the censors gradually allowed the letter content to include more war stories as the spring and summer of 1943 rolled around.
- Element** A group of six bomber aircraft arranged in two V formations, one above the other. Each V was comprised of a lead and two wingmen. The element could turn while remaining in formation.
- Foggia** Located near the "spur" of Italy's boot. F. the site of several German Luftwaffe airbases, to become home of the US 15th Air Force during the fall of 1943, once the German army had been pushed north.
- Luftwaffe** German air force. Mainly fighter aircraft in the Mediterranean theatre defending Axis-held cities and industrial targets from Allied bomber attacks.
- Prop Feathering** Variable pitch propellers were standard on WWII combat aircraft. If an engine quit, the propeller created considerable drag, unless its pitch could be adjusted, or "feathered" into the wind. If pitch control was lost, then the choice was to try to run the engine dry of oil, hoping it would "freeze" and cause the prop to snap off without hitting another part of the aircraft.
- Pursuit** Fighter aircraft were called pursuit through the end of WWII. For example the P-47 Thunderbolt and P-38 Lightning were designated "pursuit" with the P prefix, though we call them fighter aircraft today. Pursuit conjures up an image of the WWI aircraft venturing across the front lines into enemy territory then chased back across the front by enemy pursuit planes.

¹⁰ See "Bomb, fragmentation," Appendix A

COMBAT FORMATION FLYING, OUR WARTIME THRUST AND LIFELINE; OUR REASON FOR BEING.

Understanding formation flying, its reason for being, and its various positions is important in understanding the offensive and defensive philosophies exercised in the Precision Daylight Bombing. Our group consisted of four squadrons: the 346th, 347th, 348th, and the 416th. All squadrons would put up the same number of aircraft, so that a normal mission which required seven aircraft from each squadron equaled twenty-eight for the group. If it were a maximum effort, each squadron would put up nine aircraft for a total of thirty-six aircraft for the group. All aircraft except the mickey (lead) aircraft had thirteen fifty caliber machine guns; the mickey had only eleven guns because the radar (mickey) antenna occupied the space where the ball turret would normally be located. The reason for the formation flying was both offensive and defensive; defensive because with the twenty-eight aircraft grouped closely together, it bristled with 362 fifty caliber machine guns, manned by the greatest gunners in the world, that could devastate enemy fighters. Groups that flew good tight formation were not bothered by Nazi fighters; the Krauts just didn't have the guts to tangle with B-17's in good formation. Offensively, at "bombs away" if all 28 or 36 aircraft were in close formation, and since every aircraft released their bombs when the leader released his bombs, a tight bomb pattern would result, and an enemy railroad yard, fuel refinery, factory or troop concentration could be wiped off the map with one strike.

The basic fighting formation for the B-17 in our group was the three ship element, which consisted of a lead aircraft, with two wing men; if it were the squadron lead aircraft (which was number one), number two would be on the right wing, number three on the left wing; if it were the second element lead (number four) aircraft, it would have number five on the right wing and number six on the left wing; if it were a normal (seven aircraft) mission, number seven, (tail end charlie) would fly in the "slot," or if a maximum effort (nine aircraft per squadron) mission, number seven would lead the third element, with number eight on the right wing and number nine on the left wing. The element leads maintained a vertical clearance of about fifty feet and was positioned about twenty-five feet behind the tail of the element ahead. Wing tip clearance was from five to ten feet both horizontally and vertically. When a formation was attacked by enemy fighters, the position of both wing men changed slightly; the right wingman elevated his position, and the left wingman lowered his position, both about ten feet. This

permitted the gunners of the element lead a clearer view of the fighting area, otherwise the wingmen would block the vision for the element lead gunners; it was also easier for the pilots of both wing positions, especially the aircraft in the left wing position, since he was flying across cockpit. Psychologically, if the second element of the group lead maintained a solid position, which was attained when the second lead element pilot could "box in" the lead aircraft horizontal stabilizer through his top escape panel window, then the entire formation generally flew great, if his position was poorly maintained, the entire formation would be rather sloppy, and subject to enemy fighter attack.

Walter Ericksen from The Dalles, Oregon, was one of the outstanding second element leaders in the entire USAAF. Overall, however, the quality of the entire formation depended on the smoothness and combat experience of the group lead pilot, if he made only minor power adjustments, gentle shallow turns and did everything "on schedule," his group formation would be good; but one fast steep turn or a three hundred sixty degree turn would ruin the integrity of the groups offensive and defensive posture, and subject it to enemy fighter attack, and, a poor bomb pattern. Occasionally, senior officers fresh from the states, and without combat experience, became group lead pilot because of their rank, and wreaked havoc on the group by terrible leadership-ask anyone in the group, especially those in the 347th, about the "mad colonel", and the 29 December, '44 mission to Innsbruck.

Some of the AAF's finest group leaders were Colonel Ford Lauer, Lt. Col. Al Schroeder, Major Bob Schaffer, and, modestly but honestly, myself. The 347th was loaded with great wing men, to name a few: C.E. Evans, Dewitt, Holdsambeck, Ericksen, Bittle, Torres, Ryan, Marshall, McLendon and many more, several of whom became element and squadron lead pilots. Herb Holdsambeck and C.E. Evans were the two best formation pilots in the entire war-no doubt about it. Herb also became an outstanding squadron lead pilot. As the squadron operations officer for about five months, I was blessed with great talent at all air crew positions, and my record as a combat group leader speaks for itself;-we lost only two aircraft to flak (27 February, 1945); none to fighters, and we hit targets!

The group's offensive and defensive combat formation, from the frame of reference of an attacking fighter pilot, had the vertical and horizontal (side-on) appearance of a giant diamond; with the fore and aft appearance of twenty one aircraft in "step-up" echelon line abreast, with a low squadron beneath the center of the echelon. One hundred eighty five guns protecting the group from the fore (front) and one hundred and four guns protecting from

the direct aft (rear). The group consisted of the four squadrons, in positions: Able, Baker, Charlie, and Dog. The group lead squadron was Able; the second, Baker squadron, was positioned to Able's right, about half a squadron length to the rear, and with sufficient vertical clearance which would permit it to pass above Able; Baker was a difficult position to fly, because if Able made an unscheduled or steep right turn, the squadron lead pilot of Baker would lose visual contact with Able, and to avoid a possible midair collision, Baker would turn further to the right and really get out of position; experienced combat group lead pilots never made unplanned turns without notifying the group, and never, never made three hundred sixty degree turns. To the lower left of Able was Charlie squadron; its position was about half a squadrons length behind Able, and with vertical clearance below Able. Charlie was on the inside of the racetrack rendezvous pattern, and with a good group lead, it was easy to fly. The fourth squadron was Dog; it positioned itself in the "slot", this was the "low squadron", in-trail of Able but maintaining vertical and longitudinal clearance with Charlie. Dog position was also easy to fly, but slightly more engine power (and fuel) was required to maintain its position because of a slightly lower true air speed.

With the group properly formed in formation, and viewed "head on, side on, or tail on" it was nearly impregnable from fighter attack. I had the honor of leading the 99th Bomb Group six times using this formation, and was never attacked by Hun fighters; they would look us over, but did not engage us. If they had attacked, our gunners would have blown their damned heads off; again, no real German guts. They would still pounce on a straggler, like a cowardly jackal,-but to come out and fight-the Hun just didn't possess that amount of courage; proof: we were defeating him in the skies of his own back yard, and he couldn't do much about it; he made the mistake of playing ball with the big boys, and he simply wasn't in our league, when it came to matters of achievement, courage and flying skill.

Getting into formation with another aircraft had been practiced since Aviation Cadet days; now it would be put to use here in combat to help defeat an enemy-Nazi Germany. Formation flying isn't at all difficult as long as you work like hell, and keep your eye totally fixed on the leader. The general philosophy being "do as I do"; if the lead aircraft lowers its right wing, you lower yours at the very same instant; if the leader turns to the left, or climbs, or dives, so must you; if he changes airspeed so must you, and if he flies directly into the side of a mountain, your aircraft had better be in its proper formation position at the crash site, or your spirit will be "walking tours," forever! Routine, daylight VFR (clear weather) formation flying can

be picked up quickly; night formation requires more concentration, but can be learned; its the flying formation through clouds and cloud layers many thousands of feet thick that is the most difficult, stressful and dangerous. The natural tendency when entering a cloud mass is to loosen up the formation, but then you may lose sight of the leader--you know he is very close to you but you can't see him and a midair collision may occur--(very stressful). so, instead of loosening up the formation, close it up, and put all of your trust in your leader and in the Lord.

Upon entering a cloud mass, the group and squadron leaders really "lock on" to their heading and power settings for what seems like hours and hours (and it often was) Then break out on top of the clouds at 25,000 feet, hit the target with radar, and see the smoke from the oil refinery, that had been your target, burst through the cloud tops at your altitude; then again enter the top of the overcast, and descend to VFR conditions under the cloud mass, the same way you got on top in the first place--very carefully.

Flying good formation depends on your ability to "put and keep the aircraft where you want it to be; and your ability to "place absolute trust" in your leader. Achieving the aforementioned formation flying, placed us in Aviation's elite, as world class pilots. In addition, we were as tough and brave as the Minutemen at Lexington, the Marines at Iwo Jima, the Navy at Midway, and the Army troopers at Normandy. We were "American class". Bring on the gash darn Hun,-he would be "ours". We did meet him in the skies over Nazi occupied Europe, and we defeated him in the air, and on the ground, by destroying his manufacturing capacity, and his lines of communications, thereby denying him the ability to wage war - Daylight Precision Bombing - "he was ours".

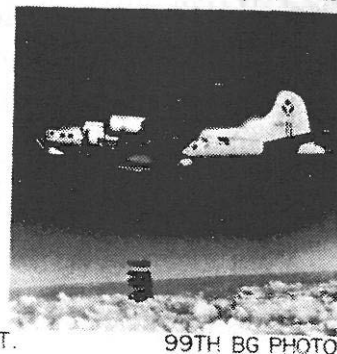
Getting a squadron of seven B-17 aircraft off the ground at 30 second intervals required three and one half minutes; a group of 28 aircraft in 14 minutes. In order for them to rendezvous in an orderly fashion, by both squadron and group, a carefully executed procedure was put into effect. The procedure involved a counterclockwise turn around a ten minute racetrack pattern, with all turns by the group leader being one and one half degrees per second (half needle width) which made each 180 degree turn a two minute turn; this accounted for four minutes for turns at either end of the racetrack, then the straight-away between the ends was three minutes on each side for a total of ten minutes for the pattern. This pattern was oriented on the takeoff runway heading and its reciprocal, and was an excellent pattern for rendezvous purposes.

The first time around the group leader would be at approximately 1,500 feet in altitude, with his squadron (Able) formed, consisting of two elements of three aircraft, plus number seven (tail end charlie); the second time around, Able would be at about 3,000 feet, with Baker squadron formed, its position during the forming of the group was to Able's right, slightly below, and in trail; the third time around, Able would be at about 4,500 feet, with Charlie squadron formed to the left and slightly below Able, and on the inside of the pattern; the fourth time around, Able would be at near 6,000 feet, with Dog squadron formed, and in formation, slightly below Charlie and in trail. As the group lead (Able) made his final turn completing the racetrack pattern, the group headed for Wing rendezvous, Baker applied additional power to attain its position above and slightly to the rear of Able (the lead) squadron. The group was on its way to "hit the Hun", with two hundred eighty of Americas finest fighting men, and some prayers.

Twenty-eight B-17 Flying Fortresses in proper formation, and at a relatively low altitude, bristling with power and might, is a beautiful and frightening sight not soon forgotten.



1944 SEPTEMBER 1944						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
PROT. SERVICES 1000 & 1900 SUN					1	2
CATH. SERVICES 0900 & 1800 SUN						
JEWISH SERVICES 1900 FRI						
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
SHOW NITES MON. WED. *% SAT.						



the 8th AF, if one flew 25 sorties, back home they would go. Again, not in Italy. If all the missions were the long variety, one could go home after 25 sorties/50 missions. If not, well, one got to fly a lot more, according to Ryan. This mathematical maze would come to affect the young second lieutenant toward the end of his combat tour.

"My first mission was flown on Saturday, Nov. 11, 1944 and I flew as co-pilot with a Lieutenant McClenden," Ryan said. It was common practice at the time for new pilots to fly as co-pilot on a few missions before being released to command their own crew. "It was an early return and I got credit for four hours of combat time, instead of for flying a mission. Didn't get credit for a sortie." More flying time and it didn't count. His next flight would earn him credit for a sortie (two missions). It was to the marshaling yards in Munich, Germany. Ryan recalled inaccurate but heavy flak marked that sortie, and again he flew as co-pilot. The mission itself lasted seven hours, 50 minutes, for a total flying time of almost 12 hours. Luck was with Ryan and his crew that mission.

"As we pulled off the target, I looked out to the right on top of the wing, and there was a big six-inch hole the size of a cigar box lid in the wing," he said. "It turned out that a flak shell had gone through the wing about four inches from the number four gas tank. It was a miracle the tank wasn't hit and explode with us on board!"

Ryan's third mission, on November 18, 1944, was to the oil refineries at Florsdorf, near Vienna, Austria. This would be his first mission in command of his own aircraft and crew, flying the number three aircraft in formation. Ironically, the Judy Ann flew in several of the same mission packages as Ryan's Rascals flew in, but they were never to actually fly her in combat.

November 1944 saw the Rascals' first introduction to jets, Messerschmitt Me-262s, in addition to Me-109 fighters. Three B-24 Liberators flying literally beneath Ryan's group were attacked by the 262s and shot down on a single pass by one of the German jets. One of Ryan's gunners, Corporal Vincent C. Manzella, would not be flying with the Rascals on a mission over the Odertal oil refinery in Germany in December 1944. The formation, which included Ryan's crew, was jumped by "at least nine Me-109s and Focke-Wulf Fw-190s. Manzella's plane was racked by 10 millimeter cannon fire; he was killed by a direct hit from one of those cannon shells and his aircraft. "Slipstream," was lost in action. Ryan and his crew had flown Slipstream on a mission just two days earlier, to Brux, Czechoslovakia.

January 1945 saw Ryan's Rascals involved in a mission over Vienna, Austria. The flak over the heavily defended target was both accurate and heavy, according to Ryan. "I got two bursts of flak almost direct, with about 30 holes in the right wing and nose, and more holes in the left wing. The oxygen (system) was shot out from the radio room back to the tail of our plane, so I had the men come up to the front of the aircraft to get oxygen bottles so we could get back all right." Ryan said, "all but my tail gunner, Binder. He came up to the radio room and thought there wasn't enough room in the cabin for him, so he remained in the radio room, to sacrifice his life for the rest of us. I tried to get him to bring him into the cabin with the rest of us. I tried to get him recognition for his selflessness, but it didn't go through,"

Their plane was so badly damaged that the crew dropped out of formation rather than slow up the rest of the group, and began throwing everything out of the plane they could to lighten the load. In their frenzy to lighten the plane their navigator inadvertently threw out the navigation maps as well.

"What the h---did you do that for?" Ryan asked him, "How the h--- are we gonna get home if we get lost?"

The Rascals did make it home safely on that mission, Ryan bringing his Fortress back to

Tottorella safely and without harm to his crew. The actions earned 1st Lt. Ryan a Distinguished Flying Cross for "...results...so exceptional and outstanding as clearly to set him apart from his comrades..." during the mission to and return from Schwechat.

Subsequent missions saw Ryan and his crew witness to the myriad of horrors known only to combat flyers, especially those of heavy bombers. On one mission, Ryan said, two other B-17s in an adjoining group took direct flak hits and went up in clouds of black smoke.

The 99th, however, did not suffer the same fate as many other heavy bombardment groups in the war. Ryan learned after the war that the 99th BG had the record for numbers of enemy aircraft shot down in their two-year "lifespan." Their gunners shot down some 420 aircraft all told, more than any other in the 15th Air Force. The six B-17 groups and 8 B-24 groups in their theater of operation. Their loss record was also therefore the best in the 15th, with a loss rate of just 73 out of 10,000 sorties, equating to a loss rate of less than three-quarters of one percent. "I didn't complete my 35-sortie package, though, as on my last few sorties (numbers 30-34) I developed the bends (due to the high-altitude flying involved), which played heck with my left knee," Ryan said. "Doc Newman gave me some pain pills and with each subsequent trip I took more and more pills. After 34th sortie, I came in for bigger batch of pills and the doc said 'Ryan, I've been thinking about you. You're all done. Your combat tour is finished.' So I wound up with 34 sorties flown instead of 35." Using the formula for accumulating missions and sorties flown, Ryan flew 34 total sorties, but accumulated a total of 61 combat missions. Ryan's last mission was flown over Bolzano, Italy on April 26, 1945, lasting just over six and one-half hours.

Originally, he was planning to separate from the service after the end of the war, but one of those little ironies of life changed things some.

"I was standing near the end of a very long line at the demobilization center in San Antonio when this lieutenant came walking up and down the line asking for volunteers," Ryan recalled. "He wasn't saying for what, just that he needed volunteers. I got to thinking 'here I am with a new wife and a daughter (by this time), and what was I gonna do when I got out?' So I volunteered along with my co-pilot, 1st Lt. Charles Kinhead, for reassignment in the Air Corps."

Capt. Ryan was then an adjutant instructor pilot, teaching new pilots the intricacies of the C-45, B-17, AT-6 Texan and other aircraft. Following promotion to Major in the regular Air Force, Ryan became an Air Force data processing manager for several years before being assigned to Headquarters, 5th Air Force at Taegu, Korea in 1952, for a one-year assignment as a combat reporting officer.

Lt. Col. James Ryan retired in 1964, after 24 years of service, and was employed for the next 13 years by General Electric, Honeywell Systems Inc. and Control Data Corporation and National Cash Register Corporation as a computer operations manager before retiring for good in 1977.

In 1987, his former flight engineer, Paul E. Brenneman, celebrated his 50th wedding anniversary in Akron, Ohio. He contacted the remaining members of Ryan's Rascals to attend the festivities, and a tradition was born; Ryan's Rascals have had reunions every year since then, rotating between locations chosen by the crew member hosting the subsequent gathering.

Ryan's Rascals have flown in two other Flying Fortresses since the end of the war, the "Fuddy Duddy," from the National Warplanes Museum, Geneseo, N.Y. and the "909," owned and flown by the Collings Foundation of Stow, Ma. In 1983, they attended the 50th birthday celebration of the B-17 at the Boeing offices in Wichita.

At that reunion of Fortress crews, as always seems to happen, stories come cropping out of long-forgotten memories.

RYAN'S RASCALS

Chuck Klasek, Staff Writer

The European Theater of War (ETO) in World War II had its share of story and glory for the Army Air Forces. The story of air forces in WWII encompassed more than the legendary Eighth Air Force and "Twelve O'clock High," just ask the pilots and crews of the Mediterranean-based 15th Air Force. Just ask retired Lt. Col. James R. Ryan and his B-17 crew, known as "Ryan's Rascals."

Young Jim Ryan had been flying, albeit on the "sly" for some time before the war. "I had been flying with a friend for a while, and knew pretty well how to fly by the time the war broke out," Ryan said. The 24-year-old production expediter for Boeing Aircraft in Wichita, Kansas qualified for Army Air Corps flight training at what would be later known as Scott Air Force Base, Ill. He enlisted at nearby Salina, Kansas, and promptly volunteered for flying duty.

In January 1944, he earned his wings at bomber school in Blytheville, Ark., and attended B-17 training at Sebring, Fla., before meeting his crew in late spring of that same year. As with all crews, the newly assembled group began doing everything as a unit, to build cohesion. Amidst all this hubbub, Ryan took time to take care of truly important matters, marrying his fiancée, Julia Mae Devine, a distant relative of Maj. Gen. Clarence Tinker, on May 20, 1944. Then it was back to the war.

The crews in the Fifteenth saw the same sights and shared the same experiences as their England-based brethren. In fact, they saw some of the most harrowing and hard-fought air campaigns in Europe. Nazi and Italian-occupied locations such as Ploesti, Linz, Vienna, Salzburg, Maribor, Odertal, Augsburg, Bologna, and Berlin felt the devastation visited upon them by the crews of the Fifteenth.

Ryan and his crew were part of the 347th Bomb Squadron, 99th Bombardment Group (Heavy), based in Tottorella, Italy. The 347th and three other squadrons comprised the 99th BG, the 346th, 348th and 416th Bomb Squadrons. Unlike crews in the Eighth who stayed with their aircraft for the duration, Fifteenth crews stuck together and rotated aircraft with each mission. Their symbol, however, is the radar-equipped Flying Fortress they ferried from Langley Field, Va. across the Atlantic, the Judy Ann.

The rascals were separated from Judy Ann as soon as they landed at Bari, Italy, mainly because of the rare radar capability she brought with her. She would become a "Pathfinder" for The 348th Squadron, leading the way to the target du jour.

Their navigator to that point, Vince McDonald, was also taken away from the Rascals, as he was specifically qualified in radar navigation. (He was posted to the 97th Bomb Group, was shot down on his 17th mission and made a Prisoner of War after being hidden by the Partisans and subsequently captured by the Germans.)

Ryan and his crew literally flew into a "Catch-22" in Italy. The rules stated at first that aircrews had to fly 50 combat missions to complete a tour and rotate back to the States. The new rules were naturally, different; now you had to fly 35 sorties. Shorter, right? Not even close. "The sortie rate for us was changed in mid-tour (for me) to 35 sorties," Ryan said. Now it was even longer!" The rationale was that, in Italy, the combat missions were generally of longer duration than those flown by their northern brethren. If a 15th crew flew one of these longer missions, 1 covering a certain distance, the crew got credit for two missions. By comparison, in

"Midway through our combat tour, our waist gunner, Sgt. Burton "Bud" McDeavitt, threw his parachute bag into the aircraft prior to takeoff. After we took our place in the formation, he unzipped the bag to retrieve his oxygen mask. As he looked at the bag, he saw the bag begin to move. The zipper moved back some, and McDeavitt was shocked to see a huge rat exit his parachute bag! He grab bed his 45 pistol to shoot the rodent, however, that could've cut a control cable or worse," Ryan said. The panicked gunner then realized he didn't have to do anything a tall; the altitude would do all the work of ridding the rodent. "We just avoided the rat for about 20 or 30 minutes at altitude (about 29,000 feet), and the sub-zero temperatures took care of his houseguest. He found the rat a while later, picking it up by its tail and dropping it onto the floor, frozen like a furry ice cube."

And what are the rest of the Rascals doing to day? Radio operator James Berger is retired from a career with AT7T; Co-pilot Charles Kinkead is retired from a career in the plastics industry. Engineer Paul Brenneman retired from Goodyear Tire and Rubber Co. and tail gunner Calvin Binder became a farmer in his native Kansas and an insurance agent prior to his retirement. Ball turret gunner Bert Bunnell is unaccounted for to this day, along with bombardier Frank Susko.

Last Combat Commander Dies

Raymond V. Schwanbeck Colonel USAF (Ret), 88 passed away May 3, 2001, in Phoenix. Raymond was born May 16, 1912 in Humbolt, AZ. He graduated from Ash Fork High School and Arizona State Teachers College at Flagstaff (Now NAU). During College, he joined the Arizona National Guard. Following graduation, he enlisted in the Army Air Corps in 1934 and became one of the finest B-17 pilots in the Corps. He served in the 2nd, 19th, 463rd, and 99th Bomb Groups. Upon retirement, and after serving his country for 28 years, he returned to his beloved Arizona. Col. Schwanbeck was honored with induction in The Arizona Aviation Hall of Fame on April 21, 2001 and he was a member of the retired Officers Association, Order of Daedalians, the 19th Bombardment Association, and The 99th Bombardment Group.

He was preceded in death by his wife of 45 years, Melouse; brother, Herman; sister Evelyn; and parents Robert and Francis. He is survived by his wife Bennie Jo, daughters Sue (Art) Meyer of Tucson, Melanie (Carl) Bienz of Phoenix, Son Victor (Betty) Schwanbeck of Tucson and stepson Tony (Pam) Sargent. He is also survived by seven grandchildren, six great-grandchildren and numerous nieces and nephews, and childhood friend Don Cox.

Through the history of world aviation
Many names have come to the lore.
Great deeds of the past in our memory will last,
As they're joined by more and more.

When man first started his labor
In his quest to conquer the sky,
He was designer, mechanic and pilot
And he built a machine that would fly.

But somehow the order got twisted,
And then in the public's eye,
The only man that could be seen
Was the man who knew how to fly.

The pilot was everyone's hero.
He was brave, he was bold, he was grand.
As he stood by his battered old airplane
With his goggles and helmet in hand.

To be sure, these pilots all earned it.
To fly you have to have guts.
And they blazed their names in the Hall of Fame
On wings with bailing wire struts.

But for each of these flying heroes
There were thousands of little renown,
And these were the men who worked on the planes
But kept their feet on the ground.

We all know the name of Lindbergh,
And we've read of his flight into fame.
But think, if you can, of his maintenance man.
Can you remember his name?

And think of our wartime heroes,
Gabreski, Jabara and Scott.
Can you tell me the names of their crewchiefs?
A thousand to one you cannot.

Now pilots are highly trained people,
And wings are not easily won.
But without the work of the maintenance man
Our pilots would march with a gun.

So when you see mighty jet aircraft
As they mark their way through the air,
The grease-stained man with the wrench in his hand
Is the man who put him there.

REMEMBERING THE FORGOTTEN MECHANIC



Howard E. Brown
M/Sgt. Crew Chief

C. Wm. Beringhaus

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February 6, 2001

Dear Bernie:

I have something that I believe our 99'ers will find very interesting. There is a chap (Bob Ready) here in Cincinnati who has salvaged a B-17 and is in the process of restoring it. This ship—from the 97th BG ditched off the coast of Greenland on June 27, 1942. I just recently found out that this is in progress and will try to become involved in the project.

Mr. Ready has a terrific web site with progress pictures etc. I think anyone who has a soft heart for the world's greatest airplane will find this site most interesting.

The web address is: www.ultimatesacrifice.com

Regards,



Bill Beringhaus
416th Sqdn.

99th BGHS
Statement of Income and Expenditures
Fourth Quarter 2000

General Fund	21966.30
Reunion Fund	11749.76
Balance September 30th 2000	33716.06

Income:

Dues and Donations	1023.00	
Interest Gen Fund	118.10	
Interest Reunion Fund	107.10	
Total	1248.20	34964.26

Expenses:

Postage	300.00	
Printing	1700.00	
Reunion	112.00	
Total	2112.00	32852.26

Balance 31 December 2000	32852.26
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General Fund	21177.40
Reunion Fund	11744.86

JOHN HENRY, 99th BGHS auditor has audited the financial records for 2000 and has affirmed that the records have been properly maintained in accordance with accepted practices. The records are true and correct.

