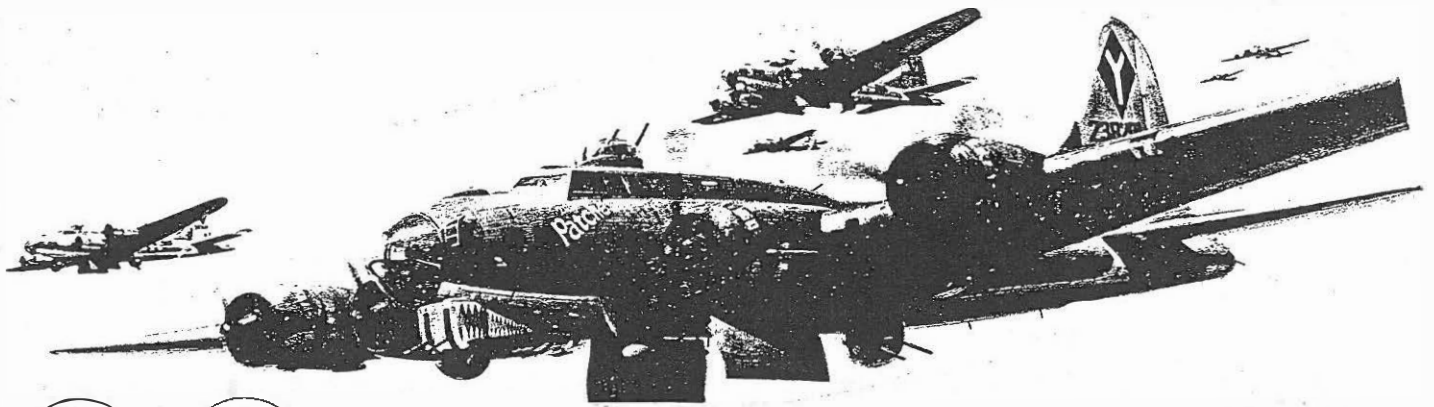


99TH BOMB GROUP



B-17 FLYING FORTRESS

1943 • • AFRICA/EUROPE • • 1945

395 COMBAT MISSIONS

THE 99th BOMB GROUP HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



VOL 22

FEBURARY 2002

Presidents Message

We hope you all had a good time over the holidays. Here is wishing all of you relatively good health and enjoyment in 2002.

Walt Montgomery and Bob Johnson have indicated that the reservations are beginning to come in for the Nashville Reunion. Please don't wait until the last minute to sign up. If for some reason you can not make it and you have signed up your money will be refunded. Walt is lining up a good program for the Saturday night dinner.

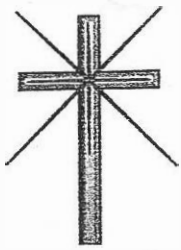
Bob Bacher has indicated that he is looking into Colorado Springs and New Orleans as possible sites for the 2003 reunion. Your Board will be working with him for a final decision.

You probably noticed in the November Newsletter that there can be complications in inviting many Associate members. We do need the help of our active Associate members particularly as we get older. Your Board will be discussing this problem at our Nashville meeting.

Look forward to seeing you in Nashville.

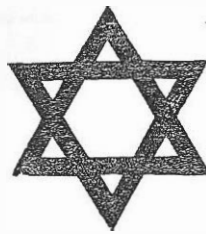
Best regards

Don Lawhorn



THE CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

TRIBUTE TO THE UNITED STATES
(This, from a Canadian newspaper, is worth sharing.)



AMERICA: THE GOOD NEIGHBOR

Widespread but only partial news coverage was given recently to a remarkable editorial broadcast from Toronto by Gordon Sinclair, a Canadian television commentator. What follows is the full text of his trenchant remarks as printed in the Congressional Record:

"This Canadian thinks it is time to speak up for the Americans as the most generous and possibly the least appreciated people on all the earth. Germany, Japan and, to a lesser extent, Britain and Italy were lifted out of the debris of war by the Americans who poured in billions of dollars and forgave other billions in debts.

None of these countries is today paying even the interest on its remaining debts to the United States. When France was in danger of collapsing in 1956, it was the Americans who propped it up, and their reward was to be insulted and swindled on the streets of Paris. I was there. I saw it.

When earthquakes hit distant cities, it is the United States that hurries in to help. This Spring, 59 American communities were flattened by tornadoes. Nobody helped. The Marshall Plan and the Truman Policy pumped billions of dollars into discouraged countries. Now newspapers in those countries are writing about the decadent, war-mongering Americans.

I'd like to see just one of those countries that is gloating over the erosion of the United States dollar build its own airplane. Does any other country in the world have a plane to equal the Boeing Jumbo Jet, the Lockheed Tri-Star, or the Douglas DC-10?

If so, why don't they fly them? Why do all the international lines except Russia fly American planes? Why does no other land on earth even consider putting a man or woman on the moon? You talk about Japanese technocracy, and you get radios. You talk about German technocracy, and you get automobiles. You talk about American technocracy, and you find men on the moon - not once, but several times - and safely home again.

You talk about scandals, and the Americans put their's right in the store window for everybody to look at. Even their draft-dodgers are not pursued and hounded. They are here on our streets, and most of them, unless they are breaking Canadian laws, are getting American dollars from ma and pa at home to spend here.

When the railways of France, Germany and India were breaking down through age, it was the Americans who rebuilt them. When the Pennsylvania Railroad and the New York Central were broke, nobody loaned them an old caboose. Both are still broke.

I can name you 5,000 times when the Americans raced to the help of other people in trouble. Can you name me even one time when someone else raced to the Americans in trouble? I don't think there was outside help even during the San Francisco earthquake.

Our neighbors have faced it alone, and I'm one Canadian who is damned tired of hearing them get kicked around. They will come out of this thing with their flag high. And when they do, they are entitled to thumb their nose at the lands that are gloating over their present troubles. I hope Canada is not one of those."

Stand proud, America! Wear it proudly!

This is one of the best editorials that I have ever read regarding the United States. It is nice that one man realizes it. I only wish that the rest of the world would realize it. We are always blamed for everything, and never get a thank you for the things we do.

WE ARE AT WAR AND I KNOW IF MOST OF US WERE YOUGER WE WOULD VOLUNTEER, SO THE BEST WAY IS TO PRAY FOR MILITARY AND COUNTRY AND WE KNOW WE WILL BE VICTORIOUS AGAINST THOSE WHO HAVE KILLED SO MANY AMERICANS.

FR Buck,

MEET ME IN THE STAIRWELL (author unknown)

You say you will never forget where you were when you heard the news on September 11, 2000. Neither will I.

I was on the 110th floor in a smoke filled room with a man who called his wife to say Good-Bye. I held his fingers steady as he dialed. I gave him the peace to say, Honey, I am not going to make it, but it is OK. I am ready to go. I was with his wife when he called as she fed breakfast to their children. I held her up as she tried to understand his words and as she realized he wasn't coming home that night. I was in the stairwell of the 23rd floor when a woman cried out to Me for help. I have been knocking on the door of your heart for 50 years! I said. Of course I will show you the way home - only believe in Me now. I was at the base of the building with the Priest ministering to the injured and devastated souls. I took him home to tend to his Flock in Heaven. He heard my voice and answered. I was on all four of those planes, in every seat, with every prayer. I was with the crew as they were overtaken. I was in the very hearts of the believers there, comforting and assuring them that their faith has saved them. I was in Texas, Kansas, and London. I was standing next to you when you heard the terrible news. Did you sense Me? I want you to know that I saw every face. I knew every name - though not all know Me. Some met Me for the first time on the 86th floor. Some sought Me with their last breath. Some couldn't hear me calling to them through the smoke and flames; Come to Me this way and take my hand. Some, chose, for the final time, to ignore Me. But, I was there. I did not place you in the Tower that day. You may not know why, but I do. However, if you were there in that explosive moment in time, would you have reached for Me? September 11, 2001 was not the end of the journey for you. But someday your journey will end. And I will be there for you as well. Seek Me now while I may be found. Then, at any moment, you know you are ready to go. I will be in the stairwell of your final moments. I Love You. God

The Peace Prayer

Lord make me an instrument of Your peace, Where there is hatred let me sow love, Where there is injury, pardon Where there is doubt, faith Where there is despair, hope Where there is darkness, light Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love; for it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

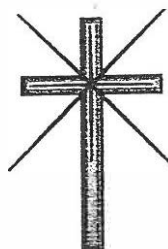
--A Prayer attributed to St. Francis of Assisi

FR MIKE

Rev Michael J Bucci



IN MEMORIAM



JAMES LEWIS SMITH

LOUIS E. WALKER

J. W. SPARROW

ELTON K. SCHRODER

HELEN LOUISE DRAIN

Day is done
Gone the sun
From the lakes
From the hills
From the sky
All is well
Safely rest
God is neigh
Amen &
so mote it be

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

Bernie:

The last part of October has made me leery of opening my mail, or answering the phone. From the Eighteen to the first of November I have lost four friends from the ninety-ninth. First was James Lewis Smith who pass away Oct.18 2001. He Really like coming to our reunion, he left behind his wife Marjorie they have married 57 year. One of the nicest lady you will ever meet. He also left behind a son Glenn and a daughter Susan, plus three grandchildren. 348 Squadron

Louis E. Walker pass away on Oct.21 2001 from the cancer. He moved from Plano, TX to Rockland ME. To be with his children. He had five plus one that pass away. He also had eight stepchildren with his wife Gloria Walker. 346 Squadron

We also lost J.W. Sparrow from Pinehurst, Ga. Member of the 416 squadron ground crew. He left behind his wife Boots Sparrow three sons William, Mark, and John also a daughter M.A. Sparrow, seven grandchildren and three great grandchildren. He left us on OCTOBER 23 2001

The other member our historian Richard Drain lost his wife Helen Louise Drain on Oct.28 2001 leaving behind, Dick and two boys and a girl. Dick is a member of the 416 squadron. Condolence, Sympathy and Love seem so small a offering when their Grief is so great.

Please remember you are still a member of the 99th BGH family, so please don't let a lost of a spouse keep you from attaining our reunions.

LOVE

5

Bob & Billie Bacher

Ford J. Lauer III
P.O. Box 203
New Cumberland, PA 17070-0203
(717) 657-9437

Mr. Bernie Barr
7400 Vista del Arroyo
Albuquerque, NM 87109

November 25, 2001

Dear Mr. Barr,

I hope this letter finds you in good health and fine spirit. I would like to say several things, hence this letter.

First off, I want to let you know that I spent the long Thanksgiving weekend updating the 99th Bomb group web site. The update was long overdue as the last update was in May. Could you please post a notice of the web site's existence in the 99th BGHS newsletter? I am not sure how well the word has gotten around, but over a thousand people have "visited" the site since I first posted it. The web address is:

<http://www.emulationdesign.com/fjl>

My son was gracious enough to let me post the web site on his personal web domain. Included in the recent update, is information concerning the Nashville reunion. Visitors can even print the reunion and hotel reservation forms from the web site. I first posted the site in December of 2000. Having noticed that several other bomb groups have web sites, I decided that it was past due for the 99th to have one. The original was very basic and crude. It has come a long way since then and I dare say it is comparable in quality to the other web sites. The story of the 99th BG is getting out.

Second, I want to let you know that I am in the process of preparing a computer CD ROM that contains all of the photos of the 99th BG collected by Colonel Lauer. There are many-many photos of airplanes, people, and the base. I will gladly send you a CD and you can use the photos in the newsletter or other ways as you wish. I do not consider the images to be my property. They are of American history and belong to the American people. At least that's how I look at it. I am so fortunate to have inherited my grandfather's photos. In all, he had over a thousand taken during his career. They are old and deteriorating, so I spent uncountable nights and weekends scanning and restoring each. They are all safe now in computer format.

Third, I paid membership dues to the 99th BGHS all the way back to the beginning in (I think) 1982. For this, Mr. Butler was kind enough to send me all the back issues of the 99th BGHS newsletter. I am glad to have them as they contain valuable information and

stories. It is my intention to scan every one of the newsletters as I did my grandfather's photographs. This will take some time however. Once this is accomplished, perhaps the 99th BGHS can establish some means to make all the scanned newsletters available on CD ROM. I am sure there will be much interest, especially from family members such as myself. I will keep you posted as to my progress.

Fourth, there is a photo on page 63 of "The Diamondbacks" of 99th BG B-17s crossing the Alps. This is an absolutely beautiful photograph. I have seen this same photo in other books. I would love to have a framing quality copy of this photo in a 16"x20" or even larger. I would imagine many other 99th BGHS members would be interested also. If you or one of the other members has one of the original "glossy" copies of this photo in 8"x10" then perhaps it could be arranged to have some copies made. The photo could be taken to a photo shop, Kinko's, etc. Such a photo shop would be able to resize and cleanup and sharpen the image as necessary, and print the copies onto real photo paper. There would be some cost for this however, so perhaps a survey could be conducted as to how many interested people there would be. Please kick this around see what you think.

That's about all for now so I will close. Take care and have a Merry Christmas.

Sincerely,



Ford J. Lauer III

ROBERT PENOYER
123 North New Ave., Apt. D
Monterey Park, CA 91755
rpenoyer@earthlink.net

Dear Mr. Barr:

I am writing to invite you and all the members of the 99th BGHS who have Web access to visit my new site. Among the material there is a page devoted to my father, Harold E. Penoyer. My father was the radio operator on the Devane crew, which was shot down over Gerbini, Sicily, on July 5, 1943. Here is the address of that page:

<http://home.earthlink.net/~rpenoyer/mydad.htm>

Anyone who visits that site will find pictures of my father (from 1943 and 1977, a year before his death), a picture of the crew, and a brief description of each of the crewmembers. You will also be able to see the back of the crew photograph containing notes about the crewmembers. Those notes are written in my mother's hand apparently at my father's direction.

Also available there is a description of my father's experiences while in the 99th. The information in that description was gathered with a lot of help from the members and publications of the 99th BGHS as well as other sources. Many footnotes have been included to facilitate the flow of the story while still including all available information. Anyone who reads the story should read all of the footnotes.

I hope the site will be informative for some and at least interesting to others. I invite anyone to contact me about factual errors or misspelled names.

Respectfully,



Thomas H. Carver
7720 Hampton Avenue, Apt. 207
Los Angeles, California 90046
(323) 874-0100

September 26, 2001

Dear Bernie:

Your interview, as published in the August edition of the 99th Bomb Group Newsletter was very interesting.

I was particularly interested in reading about the radar, and the presence of the "interpreter" in the lead plane. (Reference Newsletter, p. 39.)

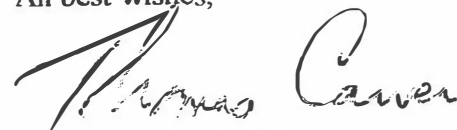
Strangely, although I have read several accounts of the 99th Bomb Group in World War II, and for that matter, as to other aircraft in the Mediterranean theater, I had never found any reference to the presence of a German language interpreter, on combat missions.

Insofar as I recall, we did not have the benefit of radar, during the missions that we flew in 1943.

In any event, I am sure that it would be of interest to other members of the group, if you would expand on the introduction of radar to the 99th Bomb Group's operation, and the activities of the German interpreter.

Just a suggestion.

All best wishes,


THOMAS CARVER

HI Thomas--I do know the arrival date of our radar equipped airplanes. they were there when I arrived in May of 1944. On the interperpor As I led the 99th Bomb Group I would receive info from the radio room about the German activities. John Henry says that the aircraft that he was shot down on was equipped with addition radio receivers so that his plane could receive German messages. If any can answer THOMAS please contact him. THANKS

Bernie

11/12/01

Dear Bernie -
Enclosed is a letter from a Gary Stoffo which we received and thought you might include in the newsletter - My daughter has taken Jim's name off of the Internet so we should be getting any more inquiries.
Also enclosed is a letter that Jim received early in October (this year) about 2 weeks before he died - It was so touching to me - I thought you might be interested - One of our grand daughters need it at Jim's Memorial service -
Take all is love with you -

Sincerely
Marge Smith

JAMES LEWIS SMITH

James Lewis Smith, 78, Raymore, MO, passed away October 18, 2001, at Research Belton Hospital. Memorial service will be 1 p.m. Saturday, October 27, at St. Luke's United Methodist Church, with a reception following. Memorial contributions may be made to St. Luke's United Methodist Church or to the Fellowship of John Fund at Foxwood Springs Living Center.

Jim was born in Clearfield, PA, on March 10, 1923. The family moved to New York City in 1937. He enlisted in the Army Air Corps in July 1942. He married Marjorie Grams on November 7, 1943, in New York City, after graduating from pilot aviation cadet training. He served as a B17 pilot with the 99th Bomb Group, 15th Air Force in Foggia, Italy. He flew 51 missions from July to December 1944, and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with two Oak Leaf Clusters. Partnered with family, he operated Smith Hardware in Hume, MO, from 1946 to 1953. Foreseeing the end of coal strip-mining, he started working at Bendix and moved to Kansas City. While at Bendix, he was in the apprenticeship program and became a tool and die maker. He retired in 1978 as a maintenance supervisor. Jim was a member of many community organizations: VFW as post commander, American Legion for 50 years, Red Cross, a 7+ gallon blood donor, Meals On Wheels, Selective Service Board and the Jim Smith Society. He volunteered at KC-VA. He was a past president of the 99th Bomb Group Historical Society and enjoyed attending the many reunions. He loved golf, especially with Smitty's Angels. He was an active member of St. Luke's Church for 33 years, serving on the finance committee, member of the United Methodist Men, and member of Wesley Class. Jim leaves his wife, Marjorie of 57 years; son, Glenn; daughter, Susan Giles; brother, L.B. Smith of Cincinnati, OH; and three wonderful grandchildren, Michael, Brooke and Jamie Leigh.

THIS LETTER CAME TO JIM JUST 2 WEEKS BEFORE HE DIED -
WE NEVER KNOW WHAT OUR WORDS DO!

DEAR MR. SMITH,

MY NAME IS DAN SCHMITZ AND I AM A MEMBER OF ST. LUKE'S CHURCH. I AM DOING SOMETHING THAT I HAVE WANTED TO DO FOR A LONG TIME. I AM SAYING THANKS.

A LITTLE OVER 4 YEARS AGO, DURING MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND, YOU GAVE A SERMON ABOUT SERVING IN THE WAR. I CAN'T REMEMBER IF YOU READ THE SCRIPTURE TOO, BUT I KNOW YOUR SPEECH CAME AT THE END OF THE SERVICE. I WAS DEEPLY MOVED BY WHAT YOU SAID THAT DAY - ABOUT YOUR STORIES OF COURAGE AND BRAVERY. I COULD ALSO SEE YOU HAD A STRONG LOVE FOR YOUR COUNTRY.

I HAD JUST MET MINDY MANN AND HAD STARTED GOING TO CHURCH WITH HER. I WAS A LITTLE SUSPECT ABOUT THE METHODIST CHURCH. IT DIDN'T SEEM LIKE CHURCH. IT DIDN'T SEEM FORMAL OR OFFICIAL ENOUGH. AFTER YOUR SPEECH THAT SUNDAY, I FELT PROUD TO BE ATTENDING ST. LUKE'S. I KNEW THAT IF ONE MEMBER WAS AS FORTHCOMING AS YOU, I WAS IN A SPECIAL PLACE. A SHORT TIME LATER MINDY AND I BECAME ENGAGED. A FEW MONTHS AFTER THAT I JOINED ST. LUKE'S. THE DAY I JOINED I THOUGHT ABOUT YOUR WORDS AND IT MADE ME FEEL GOOD.

THESE PAST FEW WEEKS HAVE BEEN VERY HARD ON OUR COUNTRY. SOME VERY BAD PEOPLE HAVE THREATENED OUR FREEDOM AND OUR WAY OF LIFE. THEY TRY AND RUIN WHAT OUR VETERANS HAVE GIVEN US. I TRY TO BE AS PROUD AND BRAVE AS YOU ARE.

I KNOW SIR THAT YOU AND I HAVE NOT HAD CONVERSATIONS BEYOND "HELLO" OR "GOOD-BYE". BUT I WOULD LIKE TO SAY THANKS FOR YOUR PATRIOTISM, COURAGE, BRAVERY, STRENGTH, AND FAITH. I SEE ALL OF THEM WHEN I SEE YOU.

I WILL CONTINUE TO PRAY FOR YOUR HEALTH AND YOUR FAMILY.

SINCERELY,

DAN SCHMITZ

Dan Schmitz

10

*answered
10/11/01*

Gary T. Staffo
6226 Garden Road
Springfield, VA 22152-1504
W 202-586-9577 H 703-866-2023
Gstaffo@gis.net
14 January 2002

Col. Bernie Barr, USAF Ret.
7408 Vista Del Arroyo, Ave., NE
Albuquerque, NM 87109
505-884-7970

Dear Col. Barr,

As we discussed, the following is a short factual article for the 99th Bombardment Group Historical Society Newsletter that will be sent out before the Reunion in Nashville, TN April 16-21, 2002 where we hope to present more details.

THE B17-F BOMBER CREW OF 4230446 MISSION # 95 - TATOI AERODROME, ATHENS, GREECE

INTRODUCTION

David Hill and I have embarked on this journey to learn more about our Uncles (Lt John C. Staffo, Bombardier; and T/Sgt William B. Hill, Radio Operator), the crew (listed below), and the history and airmen of the 99th Bombardment Group, 348th Bomb Squadron. In addition to the facts, we are eager to learn more about the people whose lives were touched by these gallant men. Everyone alive has benefited from these sacrifices, and it means a lot to surviving family members to learn that their loved ones have not been forgotten.

MISSION SUMMARY 10/10/43 FOR AIRCRAFT 4230446

This is the story of the men who were aboard aircraft 4230446 on October 10, 1943 flying from Oudna Field, Tunisia to bomb the Tatoi Aerodrome near Athens, Greece. Shortly after the bomb drop flak hit the bombardier compartment killing Lt. Staffo and fatally wounding the Navigator, Lt. Hantman, and knocking out the two inboard engines. As they fell behind and below the formation they were attacked by 6-10 enemy fighters resulting in the loss of another engine, two gunners being killed, and the Pilot, Lt Gilmore being severely wounded in the face. The order to bail out was

given and when last seen Lt Gilmore was standing between the two seats holding the aircraft level with the control column. According to the only survivor of the mission, the CoPilot, Lt. Rohrer (new to the crew and flying his 42nd mission as check pilot) five men parachuted from the plane and were strafed as they descended over the Gulf of Corinth. The aircraft crash-landed in a mountainside olive grove near Panaretti, Greece. After several hours in the water Lt. Rohrer made it to shore and spent the next several months fighting with Greek freedom fighters.

OTHER 99th BG AIRCRAFT ON THIS MISSION

In that flight the 348th BS aircraft were: Lead ship 946-Pilot Capt. Elliot, CoPilot Lt George W. Brandt; 948 Thunderbolt; 361 Wabash Cannon Ball; 504; 393 Lucky Lady-Pilot Lt Jim Connally, Check Pilot Lt Jules Horowitz; 471; 306; 470 Old Shep or Wolfpack?; and 459 Little Chum. From the MACR's 924 and 6615 we also know that aircraft 705 of the 347th BS was on this mission. Contact by any crew members is welcomed.

THE CREW

Lt. Samuel R. Gilmore, Pilot	Lt. George W. Rohrer, CoPilot
Lt. Morton M. Hantman, Navigator	Lt. John C. Staffo, Bombardier
S/Sgt Richard A. Cleaver, Engineer	S/Sgt Jack G. Stankus, Asst Engr
T/Sgt William B. Hill Radio Operator	T/Sgt Harold E. Wehby, Asst Rad
T/Sgt Richard L. Myers, Tail Gunner	T/Sgt Curtis W. Hinkle, Waist Gunner

*S/Sgt Francis C. Adams (Previously wounded, replaced by Hinkle)

Our deepest appreciation and gratitude and we look forward to any response. With great anticipation we hope to meet many of you in person at the 99th BG Reunion in Nashville, TN April 16-20, 2002.

Sincerely,

Gary T. Staffo E-mail Gstaffo@gis.net W 202-586-9577



John Bailey III
9539 Cissell Ave.
Laurel, Md. 20723

Dec. 5, 2001

To Whom It May Concern:

I would like to secure a 1-year membership for my father, John William Bailey Jr., in the 99th Bomb Group Historical Society. If at all possible I would like him to receive notification as a Christmas present. I have included my dad's war memories, which may be used in whole, or part for future issues of your newsletter.

His address is:

John W. Bailey Jr.
103 Shady Nook Ct.
Baltimore, Md. 21228

Briefly, my dad was born May 13, 1920. Entering the service in 1942, Dad eventually became a Crew Chief/Master Sergeant, serving in North Africa and Italy, in the 99th bomb group, 416th squadron. As stated in his memoirs, he is very proud of the fact that he never lost a plane in the war. After the war he married the former Doris Braun, and this past June they celebrated their 55th wedding anniversary. They have four children: John III (Jack), Susan, Stephen and Jim. They also have 15 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. Dad has lived almost his entire post-war life in Catonsville, Maryland, outside of Baltimore. He retired in 1985 from the Westinghouse Corporation. He enjoys gardening, woodworking, reading, putting together puzzles, spending time with his family, his church, and B17's.

Sincerely,



John Bailey III

John's War Memories

The year was 1941, and Hitler was trying to take over Europe. I was working at the Standard Oil Service Center in Washington D.C. My birthday was May 13, and I turned twenty-one that year. During that summer I tried to enlist in the Navy and the Marines, but failed to pass the eye exam. The Lord had something else for me, so I waited and was drafted into the Army on November 21.

I remember going to Ellicott City, getting on a streetcar, along with other boys, to report to the armory in Baltimore City. Our eventual destination was Camp Lee, Virginia. The days were busy with physicals, shots, exams and some basic training. We were issued \$10,000 worth of life insurance, which I foolishly reduced to \$1,000 when I was discharged. I set up an arrangement to have the greatest part of my pay put into a government-banking plan at 4% interest and government bonds.

During my spare time at Camp Lee I worked at a movie theater on the base. The sergeant said he would arrange for me to stay at the camp to continue work at the theater, however, I had the opportunity to take the exam to enter the Army Air Force for four years. I could see that if I remained as a draftee I would end up as a foot soldier in the infantry.

I passed the test, no longer a draftee. A few days later I boarded a train for an unknown destination, which turned out to be Jefferson Barracks, Missouri. I remember it was a rainy night there when we were issued bedding, sheets, blankets, and clothing. There we were interviewed and tested for the branch of service according to our aptitude. In December 1941, I was sent to the Airplane Mechanic School at Chanute Field in Rantoul, Illinois. We were kept busy with classroom study and work on airplane engines. I was also on KP duty a lot. I'm assuming it was because my last name started with B and the sergeant could not spell or pronounce the names at the end of the alphabet.

Rantoul was a small town without much to do. I spent time at the PX where I bought a 616 camera, which I still possess. Over the years I've taken hundreds of pictures with that camera. (In more recent years the pictures have been of Doris and the children, but of course, at that time I didn't know that God had them in my future.) My leisure activities included picking up cigarette butts and taking pictures of the guy's playing cards. I also have pictures of a guitar I never learned to play.

I was part of the 36th Technical School Squadron. It wasn't long, about April 1942, if I remember correctly, before our bags were packed and we were off to Connecticut to study Hamilton propellers. The best part of this time was our accommodations. We stayed at the Thomas Hardy Inn, two to a room, with meals served in the dining room by local girls. The Inn overlooked the Atlantic Ocean. The school was located across the island from Pawcatuck, RI.

I received orders in May 1942 to report to Tampa, Florida. School was over! I traveled by myself to Florida by train. I could have taken a side trip to Baltimore, but it was night and I was asleep. I arrived at McDill Field in Florida, completely unexpected! I was assigned to the 99th Bomb Group.

Here we did some aircraft work. I remember that it was hot and humid. I was glad when we boarded a train – for who knows where. Instead of sitting in a crowded car with thick smoke and abundant card games, I volunteered for KP. I did this for seven days! We traveled at a snail's pace to Boise, Idaho. At the time I did not know that we traveled through Rolla, Missouri, where I would one day live. I know this because we stalled on an upgrade near Newburg, MO. I remember getting off the kitchen car and standing by the track. What the problem was I'll never know.

The train finally arrived at Gowen Field, Boise, ID in June 1942. Here we worked on B17s while the aircraft crews were being trained. The planes flew at night and we had to wait until the planes returned for service. Sometimes we just slept on the floor until the planes arrived back at the base. Occasionally I would decide to fly with the night training. I remember sleeping in the tail section. I did this a few times until a plane crashed and I decided no more night flying for me!

Boise was a nice city. We were often given passes so I visited the city a lot. Also, I did some guard duty that summer and met some interesting characters. One was our cook who drank vanilla extract. It was during that summer that I was promoted to the rank of Sergeant by the line chief, because I was a responsible worker.

We left Boise for Walla Walla, Washington. This was a side trip and we never did know the purpose. There weren't any planes so we had nothing to do. I did get promoted to Staff Sergeant, however. Lester Hamm and I shared a room there. He was a Master Sergeant. I still have a picture of us in our room.

Around October 1942, we moved to Sioux City, Iowa. Here we worked on B17s. I worked on them at times with frozen fingers that winter, changing starters, generators, and making other repairs. Sometimes I flew with the flight crews. By that time I was a crew chief, T/Sgt. We would take off in horrible weather, and I was always amazed at how clear it was above the clouds, but getting back to the runway was a blessing, especially in terrible weather.

When Christmas of 1942 came I wanted to send gifts home. I went to Montgomery Ward, picked out the gifts, paid the sales person, and arranged for the gifts to be sent to the Baileys on Halls Shop Rd. in Maryland. Years later I found out the gifts were never sent. I had the receipts and got my money back.

On January 3, 1943, we left Sioux City for Mitchell Air Base in South Dakota. We rode in a 1900 vintage train car. It had a coal stove at the end of the car to provide heat. (It provided plenty of smoke as well.)

Mitchell Air Base was in the middle of nowhere. We did a lot of hiking. The first Sunday there, Abel Braswell and I went to the USO to be picked up to go to dinner with a local family. The Lord had plans for me that I was not aware of. Since we were too early, we went looking for a church to attend. Walking ahead of us were two girls going to the Baptist Church. They were not aware that we followed them. After church we went back to the USO. There was no one there in charge of assigning us to a family. As I looked out the door I saw this big Buick, I turned to Abel and said, "Let's go!" We were taken to Mrs. Gyerman's home and to our surprise we met the same girls, Doris and Ruth, which we had followed to church. I was on the phone the next day to Doris, and after that visited her regularly until we left for Tinker Field in Oklahoma. It was love! I loved Doris. One evening we went to hear the Mantovani Orchestra at the

Com Palace. (This was the big attraction in South Dakota. The building has scenes on both the outside and inside completely done in colored corn.) Before we left Mitchell in February, I got Doris to promise to wait for me and gave her my class ring to wear until I returned.

Tinker Field was another lay over until we were sent overseas. We were given a two-week leave to go home. I had a good visit with Mom and Dad and the family. The train was late getting into Baltimore and as a result I was twelve and a half hours late getting back from leave. There was a letter from Doris waiting for me

On March 17, 1943 I rode the train again to another destination, unknown. It turned out to be Camp Kilmer in New Jersey. It was another place with nothing to do. I often went to New York City to pass the time. My folks came to visit me for Easter on April 25th. I phoned Doris and made arrangements to send her roses for her nineteenth birthday, on May 3.

We left New York on the U.S.A.T.E.B. Alexander on Wednesday, April 28, 1943. I was fortunate to be in the Air Force, because we were on the top deck! The poor guys on the lower decks never saw the outside until we got to our destination. The sea was rough at times. I was blessed, I did not get seasick! On the tenth day at sea the ship broke down. Two destroyers that constantly circled our ship as we lay in the water protected us. The rest of the convoy went on ahead. On the thirteenth day at sea we arrived at the Port of Gibraltar. The next day we arrived in Oran, Africa. We camped that night, and then visited the city the next day. Living conditions were very poor. All I remember of this place was the barrels of gasoline and a lot of barrels were empty. I had been issued a Thompson submachine gun, which I never did fire.

In Africa I served at two different bases – one in Navarin and the other in Tunis, Algeria. I was a crew chief with the rank of Master Sergeant in charge of a crew of five men. It was our responsibility to keep the B17s repaired and in the air to perform their bombing missions. We lived in dry and dusty conditions. The wind would start blowing every afternoon. The Arabs would watch us taking showers. We rigged up a contraption with a barrel of water at the top with a showerhead. Our accommodations consisted of a six-man tent on an open plain, with no town nearby. As I look back I can see how blessed I was to be with five other men who did not smoke, drink, gamble, or visit prostitutes. We did have a base Chaplain and worship services, but rarely got to attend any church services. We were bombing Italy and other targets. The planes could be gone for as long as eight hours. One of my planes was named SMILEY, after a nickname the men gave me. I have one more memory of Africa. I got to visit the city of Tunis, and really enjoyed its French bread.

On December 11, 1943, we flew to our new base in Foggia, Italy. Since I was a crew chief I did not have to travel by boat. It was a four-hour flight. At this field, outside of Foggia, there were block buildings, a mess hall, headquarters, and supplies. Once again we lived in six man tents. As the men arrived at this new base, preparations began to get the planes ready for their bombing runs. We bombed northern Italy and all the way into southern Germany. These were eight-hour missions.

During the time while I waited for the planes to return, a radioman got me interested in radio. My first radio used headphones and was called a CAT-WISKER radio. It had

no tubes, no battery, just a piece of metal and a coil of wire. Since I had lots of time, my radio experience developed rapidly. I even built a working radio and sold it to an English soldier for forty dollars. (The English were on the other side of the field. They bombed at night, using two engine planes called Wimpys.)

Our days in Italy would begin before the sun was up. We could hear the mess kits rattle as we went to breakfast, then off to the line to preflight the planes. Each engine had to be checked and gas tanks topped off. The bombs were loaded the night before. An engine repair was the most time consuming job.

We did have rest camps. One was located in Rome. I went there two different times. I visited Naples, another rest camp, twice and I visited Pompeii outside of Naples. The rest camp I did not like was in the heel of Italy. There were no towns and nothing to do. I did ride a bicycle on country roads there. From there I was glad to get back to the air base. Overall, the rest camp in Rome was the best. You could visit the Vatican, Coliseum, catacombs, and other historical places.

The highlight of my days was getting letters from home, especially from Doris. Letters flew back and forth. I wanted to see her. It seemed like I would never get home. Days drifted into months and months into years. Almost two and a half years went by.

During the war none of my planes were lost. (The model Jack, my oldest son, made for me in 1996, the RABID RABBIT, flew over 32 missions without loss of life. There was damage on the plane from ground fire. The crew named the plane because of the nose art, a painting of a rabbit, riding a bomb, and eating a carrot.)

What happens around a six-man tent? We had a stove that used raw gasoline. One of the fellows had the misfortune of lighting the stove and being blown out of the tent. We had a lister bag that hung between three poles to keep our drinking water cool. The tent was just a place to sleep. We were on duty twenty-four hours a day. There was nothing but work and sleep, day in and day out. It wasn't fun. I was able to use the cigarettes issued to me to have my laundry done, however.

In May of 1945 the war in Europe ended. In June I was shipped off to Naples to go home. It took seven days on the ship Argentina to get to New York, arriving July 25, 1945. From there I went to Fort Meade in Maryland, and I was given thirty days leave. After the leave I had orders to report to Rapid City, South Dakota to work on B29s. Fortunately the war with Japan ended before my leave was up in August. I reported back to Fort Meade where I received an honorable discharge.

During my leave I did get to see Doris, who was visiting relatives in Pennsylvania. It was wonderful to see her after the long separation. I gave her an engagement ring and we were married June 7, 1946. My heavenly Father had it all planned out, bringing us together. I lived in Maryland, she lived in South Dakota. It took a war to get us together. As I write this in June of 2001, we have been married fifty-five years. Praise the Lord.



Season Greetings!

This will be a different Christmas for our country because of the September 11 events so I had decided to forego a lengthy newsletter but as I was preparing this letter Sue complained of severe pains in her front and back so we headed for the emergency room at Huntsville hospital (10PM). This was on Monday, December 3. 24 hours later gall bladder surgery was started. The gall bladder had developed gangrene for which antibiotics have been prescribed. She is now home and resting. Three months prior to this she was told that she has rheumatoid arthritis for which she is receiving medication.

My cardiologist keeps an eye on my heart. I had four stents placed in the back of my heart in January which made a total of six counting the two in November 2000. I had cataract surgery on both eyes this spring and summer and am restored to 20/20 vision.

We made a trip to San Antonio in April to attend my WWII 99th BG reunion.

Our second great grandson, IAN, was born in May.

I organized a community watch for our area whereby neighbors take turns patrolling.

Each Monday I volunteer at church by answering the phone and doing other small tasks.

We keep active in the Friendship Force. I am the newsletter editor for our bimonthly publication. As a part of Friendship Force, we entertained a family from Germany in our home for a week in October. Next year we plan to go to Vienna to stay with a family there.

HAVE A MERRY CHRISTMAS. Let us hear from you.

Chris & Sue
Chris & Sue

*SEE YOU IN
HUNTSVILLE?*

F. Howard
Burke

Date: Sept. 30. 2001 Food for Thought: From: Dr. Tony Kern, Lt Col, USAF (Ret)

Recently, I was asked to look at the recent events through the lens of military history. I have joined the cast of thousands who have written an "open letter to Americans."

Dear friends and fellow Americans,

Like everyone else in this great country, I am reeling from last week's attack on our sovereignty. But unlike some, I am not reeling from surprise. As a career soldier and a student and teacher of military history, I have a different perspective and I think you should hear it. This war will be won or lost by the American citizens, not diplomats, politicians or soldiers. Let me briefly explain. In spite of what the media, and even our own government is telling us, this act was not committed by a group of mentally deranged fanatics. To dismiss them as such would be among the gravest of mistakes. This attack was committed by a ferocious, intelligent and dedicated adversary. Don't take this the wrong way. I don't admire these men and I deplore their tactics, but I respect their capabilities. The many parallels that have been made with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor are apropos. Not only because it was a brilliant sneak attack against a complacent America, but also because we may well be pulling our new adversaries out of caves 30 years after we think this war is over, just like my father's generation had to do with the formidable Japanese in the years following WWII. These men hate the United States with all of their being, and we must not underestimate the power of their moral commitment. Napoleon, perhaps the world's greatest combination of soldier and statesman, stated "the moral is to the physical as three is to one." Patton thought the Frenchman underestimated its importance and said moral conviction was five times more important in battle than physical strength. Our enemies are willing - better said anxious - to give their lives for their cause. How committed are we America? And for how long? In addition to demonstrating great moral conviction, the recent attack demonstrated a mastery of some of the basic fundamentals of warfare taught to most military officers worldwide, namely simplicity, security and surprise. When I first heard rumors that some of these men may have been trained at our own Air War College, it made perfect sense to me. This was not a random act of violence, and we can expect the same sort of military competence to be displayed in the battle to come. This war will escalate, with a good portion of it happening right here in the good ol' U.S. of A. These men will not go easily into the night. They do not fear us. We must not fear them. In spite of our overwhelming conventional strength as the world's only "superpower" (a truly silly term), we are the underdog in this fight. As you listen to the carefully scripted rhetoric designed to prepare us for the march for war, please realize that America is not equipped or seriously trained for the battle ahead. To be certain, our soldiers are much better than the enemy, and we have some excellent "counter-terrorist" organizations, but they are mostly trained for hostage rescues, airfield seizures, or the occasional "body snatch," (which may come in handy). We will be fighting a war of

annihilation, because if their early efforts are any indication, our enemy is ready and willing to die to the last man. Eradicating the enemy will be costly and time consuming. They have already deployed their forces in as many as 20 countries, and are likely living the lives of everyday citizens. Simply put, our soldiers will be tasked with a search and destroy mission on multiple foreign landscapes, and the public must be patient and supportive until the strategy and tactics can be worked out. For the most part, our military is still in the process of redefining itself and presided over by men and women who grew up with - and were promoted because they excelled in -

Cold War doctrine, strategy and tactics. This will not be linear warfare, there will be no clear "centers of gravity" to strike with high technology weapons. Our vast technological edge will certainly be helpful, but it will not be decisive. Perhaps the perfect metaphor for the coming battle was introduced by the terrorists themselves aboard the hijacked aircraft - this will be a knife fight, and it will be won or lost by the ingenuity and will of citizens and soldiers, not by software or smart bombs. We must also be patient with our military leaders. Unlike Americans who are eager to put this messy time behind us, our adversaries have time on their side, and they will use it. They plan to fight a battle of attrition, hoping to drag the battle out until the American public loses its will to fight. This might be difficult to believe in this euphoric time of flag waving and patriotism, but it is generally acknowledged that America lacks the stomach for a long fight. We need only look as far back as Vietnam, when North Vietnamese General Vo Nguyen Giap (also a military history teacher) defeated the United States of America without ever winning a major tactical battle. American soldiers who marched to war cheered on by flag waving Americans in 1965 were reviled and spat upon less than three years later when they returned. Although we hope that Usama Bin Laden is no Giap, he is certain to understand and employ the concept. We can expect not only large doses of pain like the recent attacks, but also less audacious "sand in the gears" tactics, ranging from livestock infestations to attacks at water supplies and power distribution facilities. These attacks are designed to hit us in our "comfort zone" forcing the average American to "pay more and play less" and eventually eroding our resolve. But it can only work if we let it. It is clear to me that the will of the American citizenry - you and I - is the center of gravity the enemy has targeted. It will be the fulcrum upon which victory or defeat will turn. He believes us to be soft, impatient, and self-centered. He may be right, but if so, we must change. The Prussian general Carl von Clausewitz, (the most often quoted and least read military theorist in history), says that there is a "remarkable trinity of war" that is composed of the (1) will of the people, (2) the political leadership of the government, and (3) the chance and probability that plays out on the field of battle, in that order. Every American citizen was in the crosshairs of last Tuesday's attack, not just those that were unfortunate enough to be in the World Trade Center or Pentagon. The will of the American people will decide this war. If we are to

win, it will be because we have what it takes to persevere through a few more hits, learn from our mistakes, improvise, and adapt. If we can do that, we will eventually prevail. Everyone I've talked to in the past few days has shared a common frustration, saying in one form or another "I just wish I could do something!" You are already doing it. Just keep faith in America, and continue to support your President and military, and the outcome is certain. If we fail to do so, the outcome is equally certain. God Bless America Dr. Tony Kem, Lt Col, USAF (Ret) Former Director of Military History, USAF Academy.

Please forward this to everyone you know. I hope you agree that the message is very clear and must be understood by every citizen of this country.

BILL SMALLWOOD Sent this time saying that if this now sound a wake up call to all AMERICANS he doesnot know what will

C. Wm. Beringhaus

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Nov 20, 2001

Dear Walter:

A few months ago, I sent a letter about the restoration of a 97th BG B-17 E model that is being done here in Blue Ash, OH. Since the 97th was a member of the 5th Wing part of our gang so to speak, I thought a progress report might be of interest. The enclosed brochure tells the story of "My Gal Sal" and how the project came to be.

When this airplane came to Blue Ash, it was a real wreck - not so much from the wheels up landing but from the fierce winds and weather that battered the wreck for over 50 years. We, Mr. Bob Ready and a group of volunteers have completely restored the wings, the tail assembly, and have done a great deal of detail work on the back half of the fuselage i.e. installing the guns oxygen tanks etc. The engine restoration was done by the G. E. Co at their plant in Evendale, OH. The major restoration of the fuselage has and is being done by a professional restorer in CA. We are expecting that the front half of the airplane to be shipped from CA in December

I have been working on the project since last February and it has been a great experience. My hat is off to Mr. Ready and the entire restoration crew—a number of which are 8th AF vets and one a 15th AF vet. Check out the web site for progress pictures.

My dues check is enclosed and mv best to all 99ers.

Bill

Bill Beringhaus

This picture was sent in by DENNIS SHERWIN. Seen next page from DENNIS.



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9/22/01

Walter:

Fred enclosed a check of 15⁰⁰ for my dues for 2002.

also there is a picture of my crew taken in Tunis Oct 1943.

our plane is "Bad Penny" we had 31 missions and 6 fighters shot down.

Floyd Curkins, pilot, is in hospital recovering from flesh injury to his eye.

Back row:

Sgt Wood: waist gunner; Sgt Apple; waist gunner;

Sgt McCain, bombardier; Sgt Kerk Engineer + Top turret

Front Row:

Sgt Andrews, radio operator; Lt Dodge, pilot

Lt Sherwin, navigator; Sgt Klemetsen, ball turret

I do not know who to send this to. Please return it to me.

Dennis Sherwin

206 N. Venado av.

Thousand Oaks, Ca 91320

P.S. Forget to mention. We were 347th sq and believe we were 1st replacement crew.

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99th Bomb Group Historical Society
Walter H. Butler, Treasurer
8608 Bellehaven Place, N.E.
Albuquerque, NM 87112

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Permit 469



Assoc 2002
Robert H. Penoyer
Monterey Park, CA 91755

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