



Reunion in Norfolk

The 392nd BGMA reunion was held in Norfolk, Virginia, from 2-6 Oct 2019.

Thirty-four members, relatives and friends attended. Two veterans were present—465th Sub Depot machinist Aubrey Burke (who celebrated his 96th birthday with us) and 578th copilot Joe Cook, who became a POW on 7 Oct 1944.

We were blessed with many first-timers and others attending a reunion after a long absence. Among them were Ted and Jim Dudziak, whose uncle, 578th pilot 1/Lt Teddy Dudziak, was killed in action on 18 Nov 1943. Cathy Leonard came to learn more about the 392nd BG and her uncle, 576th radio operator T/Sgt Thomas J. Hoover, who was KIA on 8 Oct 1943. Frank Purner (whose father, 576th Sqdn navigator 2/Lt David J. Purner, became a POW on 29 Apr 1944) was present with his wife Judy. Mark Stasney, the son of 579th navigator 2/Lt Alvin J. Stasney, was accompanied by his wife Janet. Bob and Alice Tyler came in memory of Bob's brother, 576th pilot 1/Lt Ace W. Tyler, who was killed in action on 29 May 1944. Wendy Vowell's father-in-law became a POW while flying with the 15th Air Force; she wanted to learn more about the

POW process and the Air Corps experience in general. Ed Sortino accompanied Colette Swingle and her parents Don and Audrey Carey; Don's uncle, 576th pilot 2/Lt Clarence Stoltz, was KIA on 29 May 1944.

Military Aviation Museum

Our first outing was to the Military Aviation Museum in nearby Virginia Beach. It is home to one of the largest private collections of WWI and WWII aircraft in the world. Most of the planes are airworthy and flown at the museum during flight demonstrations and at air shows throughout the year. Some are the last flight-ready aircraft of their time, and all of them are one of a kind.

In the Army Hangar, our guide showed us WWII-vintage planes, including the P-51 Mustang, the Curtiss P-40, the B-25 Mitchell, the Spitfire, Hurricane, and three Polikarpov-designed Russian planes.

The Museum's Control Tower is unique. It is not a reproduction, but the actual "Watch Office" built for RAF Station Goxhill in Lincolnshire, England. The field opened in June 1941 and a year later, it became the first British base turned over to the 8th Air Force, as a site for P-38

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Rendezvous dinner attendees. Seated L-R, 578th copilot Joe Cook, Beverly Burke and 465th Sub-Depot machinist Aubrey Burke. Also: Mike & Debbie Beigh, Bob & Carol Books, Don & Audrey Carey, Ed Sortino & Colette Swingle, Marian Cook, Greg Cook, Doug Dovey, Jim Dudziak, Ted Dudziak, Greg Hatton, Laurie Huntley, Wendy Vowell, Cathy Leonard, Bill McCutcheon, David Parnell, Ron & Barbara Pierre, Frank & Judy Purner, Mark & Janet Stasney, Don & Annette Tison, Bob & Alice Tyler, Sue Geising Williams, and Ralph Winter.



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FROM THE EDITOR

New Officers. The masthead on the left lists the 392nd BGMA officers elected at the 2019 reunion. All of them have been members for many years and bring the same passion to our organization that their predecessors did. I continue as newsletter editor. Please be sure to send your checks for 2020 dues and PX purchases to Bill McCutcheon rather than to me! Folded Wings notifications should now be sent to secretary Debbie Beigh.

French Legion of Honor. 576th Sqdn tail gunner John P. Rumancik is the latest 392nd BG airman to be awarded the French Legion of Honor. In a 5 Feb 2019 letter, Consul General of France Christophe Lemoine informed John that "By decree of the President of the Republic of France, Mr. Emmanuel Macron, you have been appointed a Chevalier (Knight) of the French National Order of the Legion of Honor. This award testifies to President Macron's high esteem for your merits and accomplishments. In particular, it is a sign of France's infinite gratitude and appreciation for your personal precious contribution to the Allies' decisive role in the liberation of our country during World War II."

In an *Albuquerque Journal* article on 7 Oct 2019, John recalled the extreme cold during his combat missions, when temperatures aloft "reached 40 to 60 degrees below zero." It was sometimes so cold, in fact, that it "would freeze the oxygen masks, and you would have to squeeze and crush the ice from the sides of the rubber mask for oxygen." The photo on the right shows John flying in these very cold conditions in March 1945.

With no radar or air traffic control, John also noted that "Everything was based on visual sight. The weather was usually overcast and caused many mid-air collisions."



Website News. www.b24.net continues to get a large number of hits. In a recent 30 day period, for example, it had 8,729 visitors from over 28 countries!

Webmaster Bob Books recently posted several new videos that can be found at <https://www.b24.net/Videos.htm>. Two of them feature Sgt Joseph Ortiz and Sgt Bud Guillot discussing their 392nd BG and POW experiences.

Another video is the Utah Aviation Hall of Fame's documentary about Col Lorin Johnson before, during and after he commanded the 392nd BG. It includes many shots of B-24 Liberators; 392nd BG planes can be identified by the "circle D" or a black horizontal stripe on their tail fins.

Fire and Explosions. The last issue highlighted efforts by the 2101st Engineer Fire Fighting Platoon to douse a gas refueling truck fire on 5 Dec 1943. The photo below shows the results of their efforts.



The article also reported that #42-7510, El Lobo, needed extensive repairs and next flew on 20 Dec 1943. Alert member James Christner emailed that her mission that day also resulted in severe damage that took a month to fix. She didn't return to combat until 21 Jan 1944! See <https://www.b24.net/MM122043.htm> for more details and photos.

Memories. New member David Frakes is the nephew of 578th crew chief T/Sgt Lowell D. "Dutch" Hale. He emailed, "There are three photos of my uncle on your website. In one, he is seen painting on the *Flying 8 Ball* [#42-7624] wearing his bomber

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President's Corner



Greetings from your new president!

I want to express to all of our members how honored I am to have been elected president of the 392nd BGMA. There are some big shoes to be filled by your new executive board as Bob Books and Annette Tison leave their positions. I am fortunate to have a very dedicated and capable Board of Directors that I am confident

will rise to the occasion and do their part in meeting the challenges and new goals of our fine organization.

I'd like to take this opportunity to give you a little background on my connection to the 392nd BGMA. My father, 1st Lt. Ralph E. Lamma, was in the 392nd BG, 579th Squadron, and was killed in action on a bombing raid on the shipyards at Bremen. I was only eight months old and he saw me only two times during brief visits that he was able to accomplish by volunteering to ferry aircraft from Warner Robins, Georgia, to his base on Long Island.

Mother married Paul Winter when I was four years old and I had a happy childhood. It wasn't until fairly recently that I decided to find out more about my father and in my research discovered the 392nd BGMA. When I heard that their reunion was going to be in Savannah in 2013, only a four hour drive away, I knew that I was definitely going to attend and learn as much as I could about the organization and any information about my father that it could offer. I have attended every reunion since then and have visited Wendling three times. Being a part of the 392nd BGMA has been a true blessing and I intend to do my best to serve you well.

I am hopeful that as we enter the New Year, many of you will choose to become involved and share your expertise and ideas for the growth of our Association and ways that we can fulfill our mission to perpetuate the legacy and history of the 392nd Bomb Group.

I wish each and every one of you a Joyful Holiday Season.

Ralph

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jacket. After returning home, he gave that jacket to my father. When I was a kid, my sisters and I would wear that jacket, though we were so small it would drag the ground. It was a hoot! It still had the electric heating wires to plug into the plane.

"In 1975, when I was 12 years old, I broke my 10 speed bike and it needed to be welded. My Dad couldn't fix it but said my Uncle Dutch might be able to. I pushed it over the hill to his house, 3 or 4 blocks away.

"While fixing my bicycle, Uncle Dutch told me, 'I used to have a bicycle in England. I rode it out to the airfields. It was very handy.' I asked, 'What did you do with it when

you came home?' He said, 'I rode it to the end of the runway and hung it on a fence post.' I was in shock. In all seriousness, I asked, 'Can we go get it?' Oh boy, did he laugh out loud. 'No, no, it's long gone by now.' To me at that time my bicycle was my most prized possession and I couldn't imagine just hanging it on a fence post! I remember that day like yesterday. He got my bike all welded up and I was good to go.

"Years later in my parents' pictures I found this photo of Uncle Dutch's English bicycle.

"He was a great man. I just wanted to share this story with you."



Left: T/Sgt Lowell D. Hale and his English bicycle. Right: a hole in *Pallas Athene's* engine cowling that T/Sgt Hale and his crew did, indeed, fix overnight.

T/Sgt Hale was the crew chief for #42-100187, *Pallas Athene*, the GI Jane. Pilot 1/Lt Neely Young, who flew 23 missions aboard *Pallas Athene*, later said, "Lowell Hale was the greatest fixer in the 8th Air Force. He had three or four men working under him and they'd work all night long to fix whatever was wrong with her. The last thing I'd see as I left my hardstand was Lowell giving me a thumbs up and he'd always be standing at the hardstand to meet us when we returned." Lowell was "down to earth" and "a fine gentleman who was quietly efficient."

On This Day. The Air Force Historical Foundation publishes a daily email titled *This Day in Air Force History*. <https://www.afhistory.org/november-12-1921/> is about the first air-to-air refueling on 12 Nov 1921. I think you'll be amazed at how the refueling was accomplished. You may sign up to receive these daily updates at the same link.

Battle of the Bulge. This month is the 75th anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge. Many commemorative events will be held to honor the Allied soldiers who fought both the weather and the Germans, and especially the 19,200 who were killed in action during the counteroffensive. An internet search will provide more details about where, when and why these events will occur.

Information about the 392nd BG's efforts during this critical time is in the December 2008 *News* (<https://www.b24.net/Newsletters/Dec-2008.pdf>).

Happy Holidays! I hope your holidays are filled with joy and that the new year brings you happiness and above all, good health!

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Lightning fighters.

It is the only authentic tower of its type in the United States—and one of the original bricks was given to 392nd BGMA historian Annette Tison! It was displayed in our hospitality room throughout the reunion and is now a part of our memorabilia collection.



The control tower at the Military Aviation Museum in Portsmouth, Virginia, formerly at RAF Station Goxhill in Lincolnshire, England.

Tours and Attractions

On Friday, about half the group headed for Colonial Williamsburg, getting an unexpected treat when they saw a US Navy submarine submerge in the harbor during their bus ride.

The rest visited other attractions such as Yorktown Battlefield, site of the last major battle of the American Revolutionary War; USS Wisconsin (BB-64), which is now decommissioned but served in the Pacific during WWII, the Korean War, and Operation Desert Storm; the

MacArthur Memorial, which preserves and presents the story of General of the Army Douglas MacArthur and the millions of men and women who served with him in WWI, WWII, and the Korean War; and Naval Station Norfolk, the largest naval station in the world.

That evening, we boarded the *Spirit of Norfolk* for a dinner cruise around the harbor.

After a buffet dinner, we saw the US Navy's Atlantic Fleet—including three aircraft carriers—as we sailed by. Seeing the ships was a special treat for four year-old Henry Pitsch, great-nephew of T/Sgt Hoover.

Business Meeting

At our annual business meeting, President Bob Books welcomed the first-timers. He then reminded attendees that



Four-year old Henry Pitsch is ready to cruise!

the reason for our annual membership meeting was to fulfill the purpose of the Association as stated in Article 2 of our bylaws. He declared a quorum was present and reminded that costs for attending the reunion may be tax deductible for members, as delegates, since we are a non-profit organization, but to consult their tax advisor.

He also reminded everyone that the next reunion of the 8th Air Force Historical Society will be in Memphis, Tennessee, from 21-25 Oct 2020. Our Directors will decide whether to join with them or have another stand-alone reunion. Details will be in the March 2020 News.

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392nd BGMA MEMBERSHIP FORM

Your membership status is shown on the mailing label directly after your name; 19 and higher means your dues are up-to-date. If you wish to renew, send this form and your check (payable to 392nd BGMA) to Bill McCutcheon, 20620 Milton Ct., Brookfield, WI 53045 or join/ renew on-line at <https://www.b24.net/memorialAssociation.htm>. **LM** means Life Member and **FRIEND** means that you receive the News with compliments of the 392nd BGMA.

The Board of Directors has ruled that no Crusader will be denied membership because of financial difficulty, so if you're in straitened circumstances, check the Hardship Waiver box. If you feel that you can help the 392nd BGMA treasury with a donation, there is a provision for it below.

Name _____ Ground [] Air [] Sqdn/Unit _____

Mailing address _____

Email address _____ Telephone number _____

If a spouse, friend, or relative served in the 392nd, please give us his name and unit: _____

Dues: [] \$25/year if you want to receive the News by postal mail OR [] \$20/year for receipt by email
Please feel free to renew for multiple years! Just let us know what your wishes are.

Hardship Waiver []

DONATION \$ _____

TOTAL ENCLOSED \$ _____

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Frank Purner led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance, followed by a recitation of the 392nd BG Prayer by Mark Stasney. Don Carey read the names of the members, spouses, and Friends who have died since the last reunion.

Secretary Annette Tison presented the minutes of the last meeting, which were approved. She advised that we have 217 members and Friends, including 20 new members in 2019. Our newsletter is sent to six countries (the US, England, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany).

The Treasurer's Report was distributed, discussed and approved. In a nutshell, we are in good financial condition.

Vice President Ralph Winter advised that he had met with the Memorial Trustees in June 2019 and broached the idea of a new plaque for the memorial. We felt it should be replaced because the old plaque was badly weathered and the number of casualties listed on it (747) should be updated to 832, based on research done by Bob and Annette. The 392nd BGMA will fund the new plaque. The Trustees were very receptive and said they would inquire as to a company that could make and install it.

By Law Change

The proposed by law changes to add another Vice President and delineate his/her duties was discussed and then approved.

New Directors and Officers

Nominations chair Bill McCutcheon submitted Directors Greg Hatton, Dennis Rogers, and John Gilbert, whose terms expire this month, for reelection. He also proposed three members to fill vacancies formerly held by veterans: Sue Williams, Don Carey and Debbie Beigh; their terms would expire in December 2020, 2021, and 2022 respectively. There being no nominations from the floor, these six candidates were elected by acclamation to the Board of Directors.

Archiving the 392nd BG's History

Last year, Bob Books was tasked to research options for where to place our archives when the 392nd BGMA inevitably folds. His handout, *Archiving the 392nd BG History for Future Generations*, explained our two types of archives—hard copy and digital.

The hard copy archives include mission records; unit histories; veterans' letters, journals, and books; photos, past newsletters, and so forth. They are held by Annette Tison for her use in preparing the newsletter.

Bob noted, "Since the mission of the Association is to preserve the history and legacy of the 392nd BG, I believe it is our responsibility to do the best we can with this material by placing it where future generations could have access to it."

His research led him to five alternatives for the preservation of our physical archives:

- Set up a trust with two or three individuals for safekeeping of the source documents and website;
- Ask the Heritage League to safeguard our documents;
- Place the source material in a library or museum;
- Join another Group in England (such as the 466th BG) that has a building where our archives could be placed;
- Send them to the McDermott Library & Research Center

at the US Air Force Academy.

Ted Dudziak asked about memorabilia such as bullets, pieces of crashed planes, uniform insignia, etc. Greg Hatton said perhaps our books and artifacts could be used to create a cohesive collection. Ted and Greg will look into this further.

Our digital archives, at (www.b24.net), are massive, with over 600 links (some more than 50 pages long). Bob reminded us that with the rapid and constant changes in format (hard drive to floppy drive to CDs to thumb drive, for example) it would be impossible to create a digital archive that would not eventually become obsolete.

What has not changed over that same time frame, though, is the pdf format. Bob suggested that our digital files could at some point be converted to pdf format, placed on thumb drives—or used to publish books—that could then be distributed to libraries, museums, and schools in both the US and England.

Then, to show that what he was proposing is not a new idea, Bob read an excerpt from a 15 Feb 2001 letter he and second-generation members Jim Marsteller, Ben Jones, and Greg Hatton wrote to the 392nd BGMA Board of Directors and members.

It outlined their efforts to digitize the 392nd BGMA's records. "As this process continues, we are posting it on the 392nd BGMA's website which is currently receiving more than 3,000 visits a month. When this data is near completion, we then plan on also making it available on a digital media. A format (perhaps not now known) will be sent to libraries of universities, military facilities and museums around the world. This way anyone wanting to do research can have access to this data, as well as those who are on the Internet."

Bob was thanked for his hard work to research and present these ideas.

After much discussion, members voted to charge the Executive Committee (our President, Vice Presidents, Secretary and Treasurer) with making the final decision on where our files will go when the time comes, with a progress report at the 2020 reunion.

The meeting was then adjourned, at which point the Directors elected the following officers: President, Ralph Winter; 1st Vice President, Don Carey; 2nd Vice President, Sue Williams, Secretary, Debbie Beigh; and Treasurer, Bill McCutcheon.

Raffle

Enough room nights had been booked at the hotel to warrant a free night. We held a raffle for a free night's stay with the proceeds going toward the new plaque for the Memorial at Wendling. Bob Tyler was the lucky winner.

POW Presentation

Greg Hatton, who has spent decades researching what happened to an airman after he became a Prisoner of War, led a session about this, augmented by speakers in attendance or via video. See page 6 for a full report.

Rendezvous Dinner

New president Ralph Winter welcomed everyone. Then, as is the 392nd BGMA's tradition, we rose for the *2nd Air Division Association Fanfare*. This music blends the

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sounds of B-24 Liberator engines with the *Air Force Hymn* and ends with a stirring rendition of *The Star Spangled Banner*.

After a great meal, attendees Aubrey Burke and Audrey Carey were surprised with birthday cakes. Aubrey was turning 96 while Audrey had reached a younger milestone!

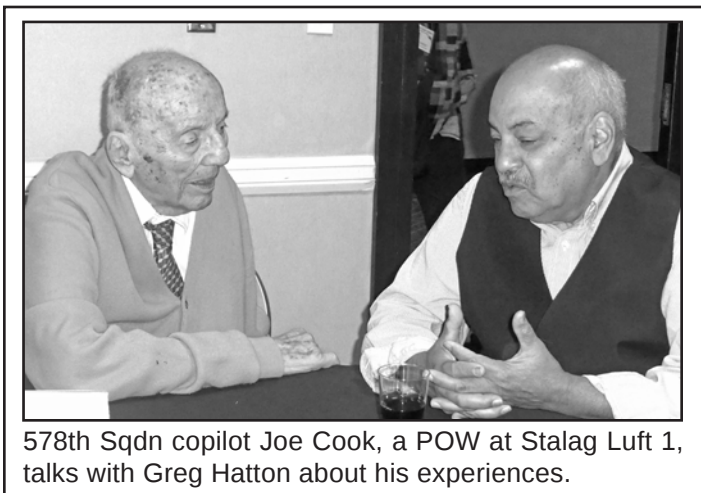
We then returned to our hospitality room for more fellowship, memories of our Crusader relatives, and anticipation of the next reunion.

The success of this reunion was due in large part to the advice, planning, and coordination of events by Donna Lee of Red Team Events. She helped us choose a wonderful city with lots of interesting places to visit and a well-located hotel with a great staff. Thanks, Donna!!

POW Presentation

Greg Hatton's father, 576th waist gunner Sgt Hyman J. Hatton, became a POW on 29 Apr 1944. Greg has spent decades researching the Allied airmen's POW experience in order to learn "the stories my father never told me."

His research can be found at <https://www.b24.net/powCamps.htm>, the internet's largest and most complete research on the WWII POW Stalag Luft camps.



578th Sqdn copilot Joe Cook, a POW at Stalag Luft 1, talks with Greg Hatton about his experiences.

As an overview, Greg advised, "Before the end of the war, 226,000 Allied military personnel were dispersed across Germany in 134 prison camps, including about 35,600 American airmen. Since these POWs were considered valuable hostages, the camps were established in far flung places. As the eastern flank of the Reich receded, POWs were evacuated westward. They were often left in boxcars on sidings in strategic cities, as the Germans hoped that they would deter Allied bomber attacks; later, they became bargaining chips for surrender terms.

"Initially, the German armed forces adhered to the Geneva Conventions. The policy for command and control of Allied prisoners became harsher as Heinrich Himmler's SS attempted to increase their grasp on the camps. [For example, Greg said, "In May 1944, guards were told to patrol the camps with fixed bayonets and that they could shoot prisoners without a prior warning. They were also permitted to fire randomly into the barracks whenever they

wished."]

"An airman might surrender to civilians, who would turn him over to the Volksturm or the Wehrmacht. The Luftwaffe would then take custody and transport him to Dulag Luft (near Frankfurt) for interrogation and processing. Officers and enlisted POWs were generally sent to separate camps. These could be called Stalags or Stalag Lufts, depending on when the camp was established and what branch of service ran it. (The *Lufts* were for airmen and run by the Luftwaffe.) In 1945, as the system collapsed, ranks and nationalities were evacuated together.

"During 1943, downed 392nd BG officers were disbursed to Luft 3 (at Sagan, in the German province of Lower Silesia but now in Poland) or Luft 1 (Barth, Western Pomerania, Germany). Both were originally established to hold English airmen. During that period, enlisted fliers were sent to Stalag 7a (Moosburg, Germany), an international camp. Before year's end, they were moved to Stalag 17b (Krems, Austria). In February 1944, enlisted POWs were sent to Heydekrug (Lithuania). Then in May 1944, Luft 4 was opened. It eventually held the bulk of enlisted POWs."

Joe Ortiz

Greg then showed the Library of Congress video interview with Joe Ortiz, recently posted at <https://www.b24.net/Videos.htm>, who spoke eloquently about being shot down and captured on 13 Nov 1943, his POW experience and the Death March.

Frank Purner

Frank's father, 2/Lt David J. Purner, was the navigator on the same crew as Greg's father. "On 29 Apr 1944," Frank told the attendees, "my father's crew was on their way to bomb Berlin. As navigator, he was in the nose of the aircraft near the bombardier. 2/Lt Harold G. Buzzi was my father's best friend and had recently been the best man at my parents' wedding.

"Dad told me Buzzi was the first to call out fighters at 11 o'clock. Fifty Focke-Wulfs in a block formation passed through their bomber formation and four of the eight planes from the 392nd lost that day were on the way down. Dad's plane was hit hard. With two engines out, a third on fire, the tail assembly nearly gone, fires throughout the plane and the bomb bay—with its full load of bombs—a roaring inferno, Dad was convinced he would never see his wife Louise again.

"They fell out of formation and the pilot was attempting to crash land the plane. Dad had motioned to Buzzi if he was going to bail out and Buzzi shook his head no. About that time, the bailout bell went off and dad slid out on the nose wheel cover to bail out. The plane went into a tight spin and his flight boots were ripped off his feet. Centrifugal force had him pinned half in and half out of the plane. He simply couldn't move.

"All he had to do was slide off that nose wheel and pull his rip cord, but he couldn't move. He could see the ground getting closer and closer and knew he was going in with the plane and sure death. Dad estimated that at about 1,000 feet there was an explosion and he was free, frantically trying to find his rip cord.

"He looked up and his chute was open and all but spilling.

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He always gave God credit for opening his parachute. He hit the ground hard with shrapnel in his broken foot. His first thought was 'I'm going to get to see Louise again.'

"Five crewmen, including Buzzi, went down with the plane.

"Smitty (S/Sgt Arthur M. Smith), the right waist gunner, had landed in the same field and called out to dad. They hid their parachutes and lay there watching German soldiers scour the area for downed fliers. They hadn't quite reached the target when they were shot down and while laying in that field, they watched the mighty 8th Air Force returning to England. Dad told me that had to be the lowest point in his life.

"Dad and Smitty avoided capture for three days. They were hiding in a wooded area when some children playing spotted them about dusk and went screaming the alarm. Soon, they were facing a very angry crowd of about 200 German civilians. They had pitchforks, rocks, clubs, guns, and spit. Dad and Smitty were both beaten and, with ropes around their necks, were being pushed toward a tree to be hanged.

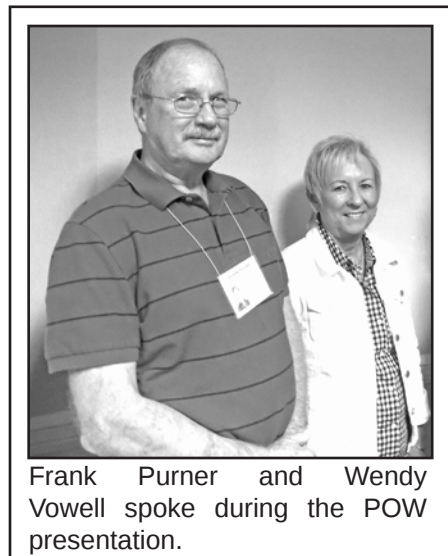
"This was the second time in three days that my father had faced certain death. Two older men with Lugers finally persuaded the leaders of the mob to turn Dad and Smitty over for interrogation. Dad thought they might have been WWI vets. Those men certainly saved their lives.

"They were turned over to Luftwaffe personnel and taken to a Polish slave labor camp. As they were leaving the camp three days later, a Polish prisoner handed Dad a pair of house shoes—the first time in three days he had anything on his feet besides his socks. They were transported to Dulag Luft by a troop train, standing between the feet of German soldiers in full field gear with fixed bayonets.

Dad told me that when they entered a tunnel, he just waited for a bayonet, but he again wasn't hurt.

"As they neared Frankfurt, Dad said he looked out the windows of the train and couldn't find a building that hadn't been damaged.

"The interrogation was very dehumanizing. Dad was placed



Frank Purner and Wendy Vowell spoke during the POW presentation.

in solitary confinement, where he passed the time reciting everything he remembered from school and church. In an act of compassion, though, a German returned Dad's wedding band.

"After interrogation he was transported for four days in a train box car with 150 men to Stalag Luft 3.

"As Allied forces approached, they were placed on a forced march to Stalag Luft 13d near Nuremburg, then

on another forced march to Stalag Luft 7. It was built for 10,000 POWs but there were over 120,000 in the camp. In a few days Patton liberated the camp.

"Dad later told me, 'There was a little white church in the immediate distance and GIs had raised Old Glory over that little church. I had been separated from my flag and all she stands for, and the protection she gives, for over a year. As I watched, the breeze caught her and she fluttered beautifully, and I began to cry. I cried like a baby, unashamed.'

"On April 29, 2000, Dad was interviewed by the *Johnson City Press*. He said, 'For 35 years, I couldn't talk about this situation. It was very traumatic, and it would just bring tears. I have grown sons who never heard my story until recently. I had one-on-one therapy for eight years. They got me to the point that...I feel a responsibility to go into the schools and talk to young people, from grade school through college. I want to keep public awareness up to a responsibility level so that we never, ever forget the many sacrifices it took to guarantee the American liberties and freedoms that we enjoy and take for granted today.' "

David Purner died on 17 Aug 2015.

Wendy Vowell

When Wendy Vowell's friend, long-time 392nd BGMA member Laurie Huntley, told her about the reunion, she jumped at the chance to learn more about what being a POW was like for her father-in-law.

She says, "Sgt Clayton Vowell, a waist gunner on *The Barr Fly*, B17G, flew with the 301st BG out of Lucera, Italy. He arrived in Italy on June 9, 1944, a day after his 20th birthday, and was shot down over Austria on July 26 1944. Five crew members died in the crash, five were captured.

"Clayton was a POW at Stalag Luft IV and was part of the infamous death march. He survived the war, came home, got married and started a family.

"The information from Greg Hattan has been invaluable in recreating Clayton's journey and in learning about the POW experience."

Joe Cook

After enlisting at age 18—"This was no act of heroism, it's just what you did then"—Joe Cook eventually became a copilot in the 578th Sqdn. On 7 Oct 1944, while on a mission to Kassell, Germany, his plane was hit by flak and the #3 engine caught fire. "We did everything right. The engineer, T/Sgt Charles F. Lang, turned off the fuel and shut down the electrics. I looked over my right shoulder and saw that the de-icer boot had burned away so I could see right into the engine. I knew we were a goner."

Pilot 2/Lt Robert H. Johnson set the autopilot, then hit the bail-out button and ordered everyone to jump. Six men, including Joe, got out just before an explosion blew the right wing off. Those still in the waist section were trapped in the plane by centrifugal force and killed.

"One of them was gunner S/Sgt Jose Castaneda. The day before we got shot down, some of the gunners went with him to vouch for his character and patriotism during a ceremony in which he became an American citizen. So he had been a US citizen for just one day."

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For more details about the crew's last mission, see the March 2016 News at <https://www.b24.net/Newsletters/March-2016.pdf>.

Joe spent the rest of the war in Stalag Luft 1. "I didn't know 'the big picture'; I was too close to it," he said. "Stalag Luft 1 was one of the better camps" and "was the only camp that wasn't evacuated, so there was no death march. Red Cross parcels saved my life, because otherwise we ate mostly turnips and rutabagas. When we were liberated, B-17s flew us to a camp in France where we were deloused before going home."

In August 2018, Joe did a tandem parachute jump from 14,000 ft, along with his daughter Marian and other relatives and friends. Two weeks before the reunion, he and Marian jumped again from 18,000 ft—a height that required them to be on oxygen. Their focus is now set on 25,000 ft, the flying altitude for B-24s.

He wants to pay tribute to the four men on his crew who didn't return home. But how to do it? Bring his crew photo on the jump? Bring a small B-24 model with their names on it? Put their names on a t-shirt? The News will report Joe's decision in a future issue.

Visitors to Wendling

Throughout 2019, 392nd BGMA Director John Gilbert showed many visitors around what's left of Station 118. All were eager to see where their relative had served and to hear the stories that John so willingly shares.

They were overjoyed to see the mural in Wendling Village Hall of B-24s flying over the village and more so at the sign declaring that the Mural would be kept in perpetuity to reflect the villagers' gratitude and memory of the brave men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice and as a symbol of appreciation and friendship between the friends, comrades and families of Britain and America.

S/Sgt Marshall Yorra

Mike and Kate Cominsky and other family members were the year's first visitors. Mike's uncle, S/Sgt Marshall Yorra, was a waist gunner on 1/Lt Douglas S. Rogillio Jr's crew. On 13 Dec 1943, they were forced to ditch during their flight back to England from Kiel, Germany; three men (including S/Sgt Yorra) were killed while seven became POWs.

Mike writes, "Our family, my wife Kate, my two sons, Marshal (named for his great-uncle) and Manny, my niece



L-R: Marshal Cominsky, Natasha May, Mike, Kate and Manny Cominsky. Their delight at seeing S/Sgt Yorra's airfield is obvious.

Natasha May and I were able to make our way to England in March to honor the memory of my Uncle, S/Sgt Marshall Yorra and his fellow crew members. While my mother, his sister, is now 92 and not able to go, our journey was all that we hoped it would be and more.

"John Gilbert, his family and the citizens of Wendling & Beeston were not only gracious and knowledgeable, but their welcome to us, 'the Americans,' underscored how meaningful the memories and relationship with the 392nd continue to be for all of us.

"Steeped in replays of the movie *12 O'clock High* and hours paging through the 392nd Website, the fields, runways, the Operations Building nestled inside Ben Burgess and the remaining Nissen huts were immediately recognizable, but John surprised us with much more.

As we entered the airfield, John produced a map, labeled "4/12/43" identifying the hardstands and parking locations of individual planes by serial number on 4 Dec 1943. The number #626, the last three numbers of Marshall's B-24,



Marshal Cominsky speaks with John Gilbert at *Liberty Belle's* hardstand location; Manny and Kate Cominsky are in the background.

jumped off the page. We quickly made our way around the perimeter to that exact spot, now an expanse of alfalfa, where the crew of *Liberty Belle* walked the last time to their plane. It could not have been more personal or emotional."

Editor's note: S/Sgt Yorra flew aboard *Liberty Belle*, #42-7626, on 6 of her 15 missions, including on 13 Dec 1943.

"In the Jewish tradition, it is customary when visiting a grave to leave a stone as a marker. In anticipation of our visit, I went to the cemetery where my grandparents, Marshall's parents, are buried and picked up a few rocks from there as well as from our home. As we stood at the spot of the hardstand, I produced the small stones from my pockets and passed them to my sons, my niece and my wife. We recited the Kaddish, the Jewish prayer for the dead, in honor of Marshall and his crew. Together we tossed the stones into the air, landing on the area of the *Liberty Belle's* last location on earth. As we did that, John picked up pieces of the adjacent stone taxiway and gave them to us. We returned home with those small pieces of England that now grace my grandparents' headstone."

Spring Visitors

In April, John showed Jeremy and Sarah Pierre around. Jeremy's father Ron is the nephew of 579th Sqdn waist

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gunner S/Sgt Martin C. Egler who was killed in a tragic accident on 22 Mar 1945. See <https://www.b24.net/MM032245.htm> for more information.

Next were Toni, Mark and Sarah Osojnicki. Their father/grandfather, 579/7th pilot 1/Lt Emil S. Osojnicki, flew combat missions between 26 Sep 1944 and 20 Apr 1945.

May brought Debra Kujawa, Managing Director of the 8th Air Force Historical Society, followed in June by 10 Crusaders in England for the Heritage League reunion. Their visit was detailed in the September 2019 issue.

S/Sgt Damacio E. Nogales Jr

In September, sisters Carmen Nogales Andrews (with husband Robert) and Yvonne Muirhead (with husband John) went to England on a two-fold pilgrimage.

Carmen explains, "We began our journey by visiting the Debach Airfield museum in Woodbridge, Suffolk, which is where our uncle, Cruz Nogales, served as radio operator with the 493rd BG. (Our Father, a waist gunner in the 577th Sqdn, was Cruz's little brother).

Historian and archivist Darren Jelley "provided us a wonderful tour that really set the stage for our visit to Wendling since the Debach Airfield Museum has been lovingly restored and kept by property owner Richard Taylor and a team of dedicated volunteers. It was at Debach that we could really visualize the airfield and base operations.

"I recommend folks try to visit Debach during their limited open hours. The historian at the Debach air museum gave my family many files of detailed information; over the years, he has built an amazing 493rd encyclopedia!"

Editor's note: The 493rd was the last heavy bombardment group assigned to the 8th AF and flew its first mission on D-Day. Initially a B-24 unit, it converted to B-17s in late August 1944.

"My Father and his brother only later realized their missions were so close in time. Uncle Cruz's 31 missions were from late June to late November 1944, so he finished just a few weeks before my Father's first mission on December 12. Uncle Cruz had a 3 week break in service while he recovered from a head injury (shrapnel pierced his helmet!) for which he was awarded the Purple Heart. Cruz thus flew aboard both types of bombers."

The family then traveled to Wendling, "My twin sister and I celebrated our 50th birthday visiting the site we had heard about all our lives. I built a loose itinerary taking cues from your September 2018 reunion, but I really had low expectations. I assumed your amazing itinerary was something done exclusively for large groups. I thought John would show us a couple of sites and we would invite him to lunch and be on our way—but we were in for a surprise!

"We met John at his home early in the morning. He had two packages for my sister and me with information, a DVD, and each of us a birthday card signed by his family! We loaded into John's car (at his insistence) so that we could all enjoy the view.

"The Nissen huts, murals, and equipment are, unfortunately, showing their age, but it was such a blessing for us to visit the places where our Father and his crew slept, worked, ate, recreated, and of course, loaded onto the airplanes. We are so grateful to all the landowners and business people who permitted us to walk around their property. Their kindness enabled us to really visualize where our Father had been."

"We also raised gratitude glasses of ale at two pubs—the Ploughshare in Beeston and the White Horse in Longham, both of which had photos and artifacts on display. We also



L-R: Yvonne Muirhead and Carmen Andrews at the Ploughshare, whose 392nd Lounge is decorated with many 392nd BG photos donated by John Gilbert.

walked around the outside of St Andrew & St Peter church in Longham and Beeston St Mary church. Our Father and his friends very likely visited both of them. Since they were

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FOLDED WINGS REPORT

Please report the death of a member or spouse and provide a copy of the newspaper obituary if possible.

Name of deceased _____ Unit/Sqdn _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Date of death _____ Survivors _____

Reported by _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

The 392nd BGMA is engaged in a fund-raising effort to financially support our website, www.b24.net. It contains the history of the 392nd Bomb Group. You could make no greater tribute to your loved one than a donation for this living and ongoing memorial to the 392nd. Please send this report, hopefully with your check payable to the 392nd BGMA-Website, but send it with or without it, to: Debbie Beigh, 6284 Antler Ct., Zionsville, IN 46077-9089

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medieval-era structures, we thought they were probably the oldest buildings most of the airmen had ever seen!

"We also visited some 12th century abbey ruins in Castle Acre (Castle Acre Priory)—a gorgeous complex that we imagined soldiers must also have visited!



Group Transportation Officer Capt James V. Goar's photo is proof that he had visited Castle Acre!

"John also shared details about everyday life from the perspective of a local British boy living and working the farm around the base and interacting with the American GIs and gave us many interesting, heart-warming, sometimes funny, sometimes tragic details about daily life at and around Wendling while the 392nd was there. His own story and military service is a humbling reminder of

gratitude in service. There was a touching moment where our husbands, both former US military, and John stood at attention and saluted the service of the people for whom that memorial stands.

"John Gilbert is the picture of generosity and passion! We are so fortunate and grateful that he is the person in Norfolk with the passion to preserve the history of the base. He is a walking encyclopedia! He gave his entire day to my twin sister, our husbands and me, making it a truly memorable all-day birthday for us; words cannot adequately express our gratitude."

Carmen added, "Dad had only words of admiration and praise for his crew and especially for 2/Lt Alfred J. Cohn for his expert piloting."

S/Sgt Thomas A. Hardin

Ten days later, Ron Hardin (with wife Amber Ross) and his half-sister Shirley Sirrell (with husband Paul) visited. Ron's father, S/Sgt Hardin was a cook, the Night Mess Sergeant per the Combat Officers Mess menu for Christmas 1944. Ron and Shirley had previously toured the base in June 2016, but it was the first visit for their spouses.

The entire 392nd BGMA thanks John and all who enable visitors to walk where their relatives had walked and see what their relatives had seen. Your kindness and generosity is greatly appreciated.

Snowy Day: 30 Jan 1945



Top: L-R: John and Yvonne Muirhead and John Gilbert watch as Carmen Andrews places a wreath at the 392nd BG Memorial in honor of S/Sgt Damacio Nogales. Bottom: Three veterans salute their country's flags and the 392nd Memorial. L-R, John Gilbert (Royal Norfolks, then Royal Anglians), Robert Andrews (US Army) and John Muirhead (US Air Force).



All three photos were taken on 30 Jan 1945. Top: the control tower; middle: two airmen walk past snow-covered buildings; bottom: a snowplow attacks the runway.

Remembrance Sunday 2019

Beeston

Memorial Trustee Jill Scott emailed, "Everyone was pleased to wake up on Remembrance Sunday, November 10th, to a fine, dry day—as it still was when we went into Beeston church. As we filed out at about 10.55am to stand round the Memorial in the churchyard for the brief Service and the 2 minute Silence it started to rain. It did not deter us. The names of the Fallen from the village during the 1914 -1918 war were read, the wreaths laid and the Silence held as the rain fell.

It had stopped when we came out of the church and made our way to your Memorial. It stayed dry for the Service, and even the wind stayed still. Canon Heather Butcher took the Service, as she had done at the church. Henry Dennett laid the wreath on behalf of the 392nd. Charles Brindley, Clerk to the Beeston Parish Council, laid the wreath on behalf of the P.C. The Rainbows and Brownies, who had processed up to the Memorial with their Banners, laid their wreath. As is usual now, it was one they had made themselves.

There was a very good and pleasing number of people at both Services. Many went on to the village hall for refreshments and warming cups of tea or coffee, or a glass

of wine organised by the Parish Council.

A few days before the Sunday, Rodney Walthew had washed the two flag poles at the Memorial. He did this in the rain. We have all given up waiting for a dry day to do anything outside! We wash them every November. Early on that Sunday Memorial Trustees Hugh Scott and Henry Dennett had taken down the old flags and raised new ones, which Kim Wheeler and Rodney Walthew raised and lowered at the appropriate times during the Service. The new flags have been taken down, the old one put back up to withstand the worst that the winter weather may throw at them.

Upper Sheringham

Doug and Celia Willies write from Upper Sheringham, Norfolk, England, that "Our Remembrance Service last week went well. The weather was quite traditional—cool and overcast but it managed to keep dry and for that we were thankful. Celia prepared the usual poppy posy—one poppy for each of the Waugh crew and we are glad to say the Memorial itself is still looking really pristine after its recent refurbishment. So, along with the crosses, two nice fresh flags and reading out their names, we are pleased to report that they continue to be NOT forgotten."



for the 392nd BGMA; the wreath made by the 1st Beeston Rainbows & Brownies and 1st Toftwood Guides which says "We Will Remember Them"; and from the Beeston with Bittering Parish Council with the message "We

Top left: The wreaths laid at the 392nd BG Memorial during the 2019 Remembrance Sunday service. L-R: The floral wreath with bright red, white and purple flowers placed

shall never forget." The other photos show the many Beeston residents who gathered to hear Canon Heather Butcher's words of remembrance.

IDEAS AND INSPIRATION

by Char Heim

daughter of Charles E. Dye, 1825th Ordnance Co.

"What we do for ourselves dies with us. What we do for others remains and is immortal."

This is the legacy of our Veterans. This is what I think about as I watch the videos of the Honor Flights for WWII and Vietnam veterans. These generations should never fade from our thoughts or our thankfulness. These men and women sacrificed their safety, wellbeing, families and their way of life for our freedom. We can continue to honor their heroics by encouraging our country toward balance, freedom, equality and sanctuary. Please remember our service people as the holidays daze us. We are protected by those putting our safety before their own personal needs. There is always a veteran "on watch" as we celebrate our families, freedoms, football and feasts. Let us be thankful for this.

Best wishes for a safe and prosperous 2020.



THE 392ND MEMORIAL AT WENDLING

to the right are four poppy crosses
placed by the family of
S/Sgt Damacio E. Nogales Jr.

**But we...shall be remember'd;
We few, we happy few,
we band of brothers.
For he to-day that sheds
his blood with me
Shall be my brother...**

William Shakespeare, *Henry V*

392nd Bomb Group Memorial Assoc.
9107 Wood Pointe Way
Fairfax Station, VA 22039
USA

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

First Class Mail

Almighty God, Who has blessed us with the will and courage to do our duty, we praise You for our comrades whose death kept freedom living. We praise You also for giving us the years we have lived since their departure. We pray that You will strengthen and sustain our devotion to truth and justice, so that we may be faithful beneficiaries of their sacrifice. Continue Your mercy to our comrades; keep them in Your care; and bring us all at last into Your presence there to rejoice Eternally. Amen. — Composed by 576th pilot the late Very Reverend Robert C. Martin, former Dean of the Cathedral at Erie, Pennsylvania.

∞FOLDED WINGS∞

Richard J. Harer, 576, November 20, 2019
Mary M. "Mickey" McMillan, widow of Hubert L., 579/6,
October 19, 2019
Jane Puchir, widow of John, 579, October 1, 2019
Catherine B. Smith, widow of Franklin, 577/9,
November 9, 2019
Robert H. Tichel, 579/7, October 9, 2019

In November 2008, Bob Tichel wrote, "The heroes of the war were not just those who fought on the land, sea and air but were also those people who stayed home and made all things possible for victory to be achieved.

"I saw stockpiles in England so large I was in awe just thinking how it all got there. In my wartime years, I lived well, fought well, and never felt that I was owed anything more than what I had. This is a great country!"