

NEWS



392nd BG Memorial Association

VOLUME 6

FEBRUARY, 1991

THE BIRDIE SCHMIDT ARC: #42 - 50387

Named after the 392nd's popular and personable Red Cross Club director, it was christened at Wendling on Aug. 10, 1944. It was flown by the 576th's Hoffman crew, and they completed their tour in it.



Shown at the christening are, standing: 2nd Lt. Donald C. Wise, bombardier; 1st Lt. Henry W. Hoffman, pilot; 2nd Lt. James H. Randall, navigator; Birdie Schmidt (now Mrs. Birdie Larrick); 2nd Lt. Chester E. Gorton, co-pilot; Cpl. William H. McNutt, radio operator; and S/Sgt. Robert F. Goo, tail gunner. Front row: T/Sgt. Robert E. Boney, engineer; S/Sgt. Otto B. Sanders, ball turret gunner; S/Sgt. John A. Kama-cho, waist gunner; and S/Sgt. Virgil H. Dopson, waist gunner.

The ground crew was M/Sgt. Joseph Haluko, Sgt. John E. Kappeler, and Sgt. John J. McDonough.

The Group knew little about the fate of the airplane, except that it went down Feb. 15, 1945 on a mission over Europe. It turns out that it was its crew's first (and only) mission, and the flight was beset with mechanical problems. It was hit by flak and was abandoned by the crew over Muhlhausen, Germany.

Birdie Larrick recently received a letter from John C. Kenyon, the co-pilot, and it was the first news she had heard about the fate of "her" airplane. Excerpts from his letter follow:

"When our crew approached our assigned aircraft, we were surprised to see the Red Cross emblem and the good looking gal painted on the fuselage. We knew nothing of the plane's history, nor had we met Birdie. We vowed to find out about it when we got back, but we didn't make it back.

"It was a mission that had problems from the start. We were a half hour late in getting off due to a faulty prop governor being repaired, and we took off in a complete fog. We did get to our formation over the channel, however, after having the #2 engine run away (same faulty prop governor) and having electrical problems. We were hit on our bomb run over Magdeburg, losing both #1 and #2 engines, and the latter had a prop that wouldn't feather. However, we were manageable but were dropping about 1000 feet a minute and eventually had to bail out in the clouds at 5,000 feet.

"Later that evening the crew were all brought together at Nordhausen in various stages of repair- the nose gunner had been shot and some of us had a few bruises, but we all survived and made it back to the States eventually. I was separated from the rest due to illness and spent most of my time on the road retreating with the German Army. Due to transportation problems we walked most of the way. When we did get on trains, they were continually attacked by our own fighters which had, in March 1945, complete mastery of the skies. I finally wound up at Stalag VII A Moosburg, and was liberated April 29."

(continued on page 4)

Crash Scenes Visited: History Found in Pieces of Twisted Metal

By Jim Goar

Nearly 50 years have passed since Allied and German planes criss crossed the skies over Great Britain and Europe in World War II. Many crashed, due to combat, weather, or other mishaps. Countless lives were lost, but there were also many miraculous survivals.

The passage of the years has softened the impact of those perilous times, and another generation has shown an awakened interest in them. Clubs, formed for the purpose of researching them, have sprung up in England and the Continent, particularly in the Low Countries. The 392 BGMA gets inquiries from these organizations, asking about specific crashes that the club is investigating.

While in England for the Second Air Division Reunion in the summer of 1990, I looked into several of these incidents, in order to report them to the 392nd membership.

Boston is about 50 miles northwest of Wendling, and on 13 July 1944 a 579th B-24 crashed near there at Wrangle Common. The entire crew perished except S/Sgt. Mark Osment, the right waist gunner, who was able to parachute from the falling aircraft. The target for the mission was Saarbrücken, but the weather over the assembly area was very bad, with turbulent clouds and icing conditions. But let Mark, now retired and living in Benton, Kansas, tell the story: (See Profile, this issue)

"Takeoff was at 5:30 a.m. in rain and heavy overcast. We had icing conditions for awhile but the ice left and the aircraft resumed normal flight. A few minutes later, however, the ice reappeared and this time the aircraft, including the propellers was covered with very heavy ice and the propellers ran away and the aircraft was out of control.

"At this time I attempted to leave through the waist window but was caught half in and half out and was semi-conscious from striking the side of the aircraft. A few seconds later I was thrown clear, pulled the ripcord and then lost consciousness.

"I regained consciousness on the ground. I remember talking to 2 children and members of the British Home Guard. I was

placed on an ironing board and transported to an RAF hospital.

"I later learned that no one else survived the crash."

The rest of the crew were: 1st Lt. Norman J. Hunt, pilot; 1st Lt. Peter B. Roetzel, co-pilot; 2nd Lt. Willaim J. Hession, navigator; T/Sgt. Walter L. McKinzie, Jr.; T/Sgt. Harold C. Wilkinson; S/Sgt. W. E. Caurington; S/Sgt. Daniel L. McEwan; and S/Sgt. Leonard A. Jackson.

The bombs aboard the aircraft did not explode, but gave the local authorities many anxious moments as the crashed aircraft burned fiercely. Finally, however, the fire died out, the bombs were disposed of, and the crash site bulldozed in.

In September 1989, the Lincolnshire Aircraft Recovery Group excavated the site, and found an engine, a propeller, flying equipment, and many other artifacts. They are on display at East Kirkby airfield, a nearby former RAF Bomber Command base. The airfield and its hangar, control tower, and other buildings are being maintained as a museum by a private owner.



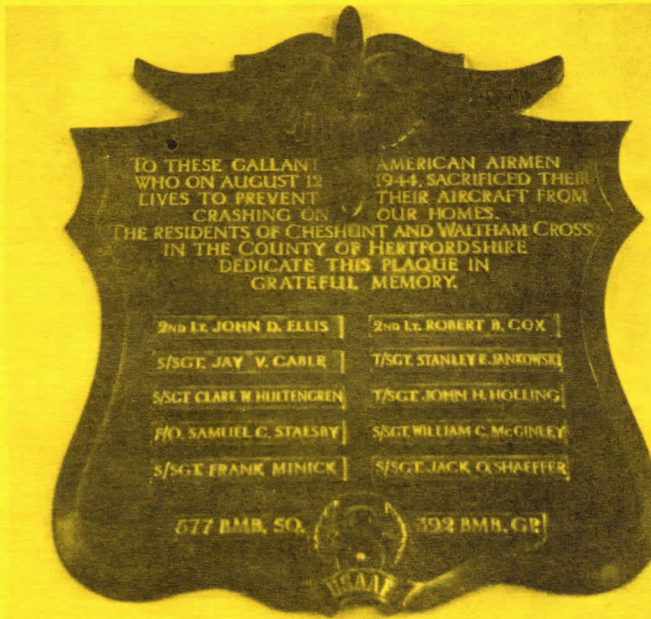
The Lincolnshire Recovery Group hoisting a propeller out of the crash site at Wrangle Common, near Boston

Ian Blackamore, of Boston, and Peter Wood, of Giltbrook, Nottinghamshire, are members of the Recovery Group and were my guides when we visited the site. Also with me were Ben Jones, the teen-aged 392nd BGMA associate who lives at Litcham, and his father, Mervyn.

* * * *

The Placque on the Wall at Madingly Cemetery: A Puzzle

On a wall at the American cemetery at Madingly is a placque, pictured below. It has a duplicate in the library at Cheshunt, a town just north of London.



The placques were placed by the citizens of Cheshunt, because it was generally thought that the falling aircraft was deliberately steered clear of the town by its crew. The pilot was 2nd Lt. J. D. Ellis, 577th. The entire crew died in the crash.

The crash occurred on 12 August, 1944. Bob Vickers in his history, "The Liberators From Wendling" says that the target was an airfield in France, and the assembly weather was very poor.

About the same time as the Ellis plane crashed, a B-17 from the 398th Group at Nuthumstead also crashed, and it is believed that the two might have collided in the clouds.

The other members of the crew were F/O Samuel C. Stalsby, co-pilot; 2nd Lt. Robert B. Cox, bombardier; T/Sgt. S. F. Jankowski; T/Sgt. J. H. Holling; S/Sgt. C. W. Hultengren; S/Sgt. W. C. McGinley; S/Sgt. F. Minick; Sgt. J. V. Cable; and S/Sgt. J. D. Shafer. It is interesting to note that no navigator was on board.

A local historian at Cheshunt, Mr. Peter E. Rooke, has done an exhaustive study of the incident. He was 17 years old at the time and remembers the crash vividly.

He interviewed many witnesses and concludes that it is impossible to say that the aircraft was steered away from the

town, or that on the other hand it was completely out of control and crashed without any direction from its crew.

"It is unlikely that we shall ever know. We can only be thankful that the Liberator crashed where it did, either by the sacrifice of Lt. Ellis or by providence, and not upon the town", Mr. Rooke said in his book, "Cheshunt at War".

* * * *

The natives who live around Wendling know where the crashes occurred. If one is equipped with a metal detector, one can go to a site and soon unearth small bits of metal.



Denis Duffield is shown above pointing to the area where P-Bar came down, a mile or so short of the runway. (See the May 1990 issue for Ben Alexander's account of the crash)



Ben Jones and Jim Goar prospect in a stubble field for parts of the famous P-38 flown by Pat McCarthy. The Beeston church steeple can just be made out in the background.

THE BIRDIE SCHMIDT ARC: A/C #42-50387

(continued from page 1)

Col. Lawrence Gilbert, a war-time commander of the 392nd and now the Association's president, had this comment on Kenyon's experiences:

"It's a remarkable story right from the start and a real credit to the courage of the crew. It would seem they would have been justified in aborting the mission shortly after take-off in view of their mechanical problems but elected instead to carry on. Another group of unsung heroes and we had many of them in the outfit."

Of the original crew, it is known that Hoffman is deceased. Boney, Dopson, Kama-cho, and Sanders are alive and kicking and are members of the association. Their profiles, along with John Kenyon's, are to be found elsewhere in this issue. There is at present no information on the rest of the flying crews or the ground crew.

Birdie Larrick left the Group in 1945 and went to the Continent with a Red Cross Showmobile. After the war, she taught English in Florida, was widowed, and now lives in Columbus, O. Her profile can be found in the August, 1986 issue of the Newsletter.

* * * *

INQUIRY FROM ENGLAND

We have received a letter from Mrs. Barbara Bishop of Dereham, asking about Wendling messhall personnel, particularly S/Sgt. Lutz, the 578th's mess sergeant who was in charge of the EM mess.

Mrs. Bishop was a little girl at the time, and remembers being invited to childrens' parties at the Base. Her father was Walker Peskell, who was a civilian worker at the mess.

Her address is 2 Briar Close, Norwich Road, Dereham, Norfolk NR20-3BG, England.

She would be glad to hear from any Crusader who remembers her or her father.

WENDLING PICTURES RECOVERED

A treasure-trove of some 300 pictures taken at Wendling has been discovered.

They were from the collection of Joe L. Mason, a technician in the Group photo-lab. When Mr. Mason died, his widow was unaware of the 392nd BG Memorial Ass'n, and was about to dispose of them. By a peculiar circumstance, Mr. Ian Hawkins, an Englishman who is interested in the 8th Air Force, heard about them through an acquaintance in the Confederate Air Force. He contacted Mrs. Mason and secured some 900 pictures.

Mr. Hawkins has been connected with the 390th BG Memorial Ass'n, a B-17 outfit. He contacted John Conrad, the 392nd's vice president for 2 AD, and John met with him at Norwich and with Jim Goar and Fred Thomas picked out about 300 that would add to the 392nd's archives.

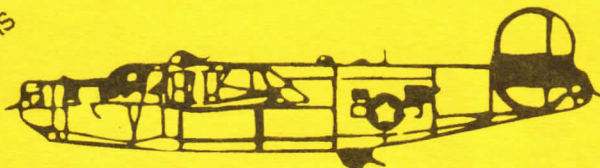
A great many of them are pictures of individual aircraft, both on the ground and in the air. Others show crews and Wendling scenes. Two representative shots accompany this article.



Sweating Out Orders to Take Off

(continued on page 5)

BUMPER STICKERS



392nd BG Memorial Association, Inc



Ernie Barber has secured a supply of these bumper stickers (actual size 3 1/2 x 15) and will send you one (or more) for \$1.25 each, postpaid. All proceeds go to the Memorial Fund. Write Ernie at R. 1, Box 371-2, Lincolnton, Ga. 30817.

Name _____ Sqdn _____ Assoc _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

[] check if this is a gift membership

MEMBERSHIP DUES

Dues for 1991, \$12 _____ []
(If an IM (for life member) or a 90 or higher number appears after your name on the address label, Charley Dye says you're paid through that year. IF DUES ARE NOT PAID, PLEASE SEND IN YOUR CHECK AT ONCE. WE DON'T WANT TO LOSE EVEN ONE MEMBER.

Life Membership:

Age 61-65 \$120 _____ []

Age 66-70 \$ 96 _____ []

Age 71 and over \$78 _____ []

ORDER FOR PRINT, "FLYING CRUSADER"

Signed copy at \$55, postpaid _____ []

Unsigned copy at \$30, postpaid _____ []

NO LIMIT

PX ITEMS

Black 392nd BG cap w/gold braid, Summer, \$9 _____ []

Black 392nd BG cap w/gold braid, Winter, \$9 _____ []

White nylon jacket w/ 392nd and
Crusader patches, \$20 _____ []

Book, "Liberators From Wendling", by Col.
Bob Vickers, \$25 _____ []

Add \$1.50 per item for shipping cost _____ []

Total _____ []

Send with check to Charles Dye, Treasurer, 7217 Leslynne Dr. NE,
Albuquerque, NM 87109

- 6 -
PROFILES

S/Sgt. Mark Osment was the right waist gunner on the Hunt crew in the 579th. He joined the Group at Wendling in April 1944 and flew 24 combat missions before his crew was lost in an ill-fated crash. (See story, this issue, "Boston Wrangle Common Crash.")

He was an employee of the Veterans Administration from 1950 to 1969 and is now retired. His wife is Ione, and their address is Box 151, Benton, KS 67017.

* * * *

2nd Lt. John C. Kenyon was co-pilot on the Hubbard crew in the 576th. They went down on their first mission, on The Birdie Schmidt ARC. (See story, this issue)

He married his high school sweetheart during flight training and after the war he graduated from Wesleyan University in Connecticut. He was with the Aetna Insurance Company for 32 years, retiring in 1982.

They have two sons and one daughter, and four grandchildren. They live at 307 Training Field Rd., Chatham, MA 02633.

* * * *

S/Sgt. Otto (Sandy) Sanders was the ball turret gunner on the Birdie Schmidt ARC, serving in the 576 and 579 squadrons. The crew's pilot was Pop Hoffman.

He joined the Group at Wendling in April, 1944.

Post-war, he was an operating engineer for 30 years, retiring in 1985.

He and spouse Marguerite live at 3350 Meridian Road, Columbus, OH 43232. They have two daughters and one son, and 3 grandchildren and one great-grandson.

* * * *

S/Sgt. John A. Kamacho was a gunner on the Birdie Schmidt ARC crew, Capt. Bill Hoffman, pilot. He was in the 576th squadron, joining at Wendling in Sept. 1944.

He is self-employed in the excavating and building wrecking business in Seattle.

He and wife Kitty live at 321 NW 125th St., Seattle, WA 98177. They have 5 children and 1 grandchild.

(See story, this issue, on the Birdie Schmidt ARC.)

* * * *

8th AF observed its third birthday with a 1,000 plane raid on Germany, Jan. 28, 1945.

* * * *

8th and 15th AF's began six day strikes against Germany on Feb. 20, 1944.

T/Sgt. Robert E. Boney was flight engineer on The Birdie Schmidt ARC. He joined the Group in May, 1944, and served in the 576 and 579 Squadrons.

He went back to High School to finish his education after the war. He went to work for the U. S. Postal Service in 1945, and retired on disability Dec. 31, 1974.

His better half is Alpha, and they live at 589 Clifton Road, Sumter, SC 29153. they have three daughter and one son; and 8 grandchildren.

* * * *

S/Sgt. Virgil Dopson was armorer-gunner on the Birdie Schmidt ARC. He joined the 576 squadron at Wendling in May 1944.

Called back to service for the Korean War, he served as senior weapons supervisor in the 133rd Fighter Group of the South Dakota National Guard. Later, was was in the Colorado Air National Guard.

In civilian life, he was in the retail business with Montgomery Ward for 35 years, in South Dakota and Colorado.

His wife is Phyllis, and they live at 593 31 Road, Grand Junction, CO 81504. They have a son and daughter, and five grandchildren.

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Dr. Emil F. Riha was Capt. Riha, the Group dentist. Many a 392nd tooth was worked on by Doc Riha with his foot-operated drill.

After the war, he opened his practice at Bismarck, ND, and retired after 45 years of dental practice.

He and wife Margaret have two daughters and one son. They live at 500 West Blvd., Bismarck, ND 58501.

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USAF adopted slate-blue uniform Jan. 25, 1949.

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PX NOW OPEN

Carwin and Henriette Thomason, the operators of the 392nd's PX, have completed their move to their new address and are ready to process orders.

If you would like a cap, jacket, or Bob Vickers' history, "The Liberators From Wendling", fill out the blank found elsewhere in this paper, and send it with your check to Charley Dye, whose address is at the bottom of the order blank. Charley will send your order on to the Thomasons.

392 BGMA ACTIVE IN NORFOLK LIBRARIES

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The 392nd BG Memorial Ass'n is helping to perpetuate the memory of the American war-time presence at Wendling. Memorabilia and American books are being furnished the Beeston primary school and the Litcham high school libraries.

This is in addition to the work being done by the 2 AD library extension at the East Dereham library.

By the inclusion of the Beeston, Litcham, and East Dereham libraries, the scope of the main 2AD Memorial Library at Norwich is widened.

Wendy Carter is the 392nd's representative at the 2AD library at Norwich, and also our representative for the East Dereham, Beeston, and Litcham libraries.

Quinton Wedgeworth, the 392nd's guru on the Group's aircraft identification, has a problem.

A/C No. 42-110096 is pictured on page 250 of Bob Vickers' history, "The Liberators From Wendling", with the name Good Conduct painted on the left nose section.

Now comes a new batch of pictures obtained from the 2AD Library (see related story, this issue) which shows the right side of 096 with the name Sharp Character.

According to Quinton, 096 was a 577th a/c, but was transferred to the 492nd Bomb Group Aug. 9, 1944.

If anyone has any information on why this ship evidently had two names, write Quinton c/o the editor of this paper.

* * * *

NEW DIRECTORY IN THE WORKS

A new directory of the 392nd Bomb Group Memorial Ass'n. will be published sometime within the next few months. The name and address of every known former member of the 392nd will be in it. The May newsletter will carry information on how to send for it.

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WENDLING PICTURES RECOVERED

(continued from page 4)



photo by Eastern Daily Press

Shown above at the presenting ceremony at the Beeston school are Jill Scott, chairwoman of the Beeston Parish council, Mr. Brian Wilson, W.O. Paul Johnson of the Air Training Corps, Headmistress Mrs. M. Street, Ben Jones, 392nd Associate member in his Air Training Corps uniform, and Mr. Dick Mason. Messrs. Wilson and Mason were instrumental in the preparation of the print, "The Crusaders From Wendling".

At an earlier date, Carroll Cheek presented four American books to Litcham high school.

* * * *

FOLDED WINGS

Robert Buckles, 579

Kenneth G. Fahrenbruch

Edmond J. Patnaude

Hervey Stetson, 576



Bombs Away!

Some 65 of them were already at the 2nd AD Library at Norwich, and the Library copied them and they have now been received by the the 392nd. They will go into Ernie Barber's famous notebooks for all to look at when the 392nd meets.

The remainder are being copied by the 390th and we will get them later.

COLONEL RENDLE WAS NO MARTINET

by Jim Goar

Col. Rendle, the Group's first commander, had a presence which brought instant respect from his juniors, both officers and enlisted men. But he also had a sense of humor, to which I can attest.

I was probably one of the most junior second lieutenants in the Group when it fell my duty to accompany the colonel on one of his infrequent barracks inspections.

I was much in awe of the great man, and was trying very hard to be at my best. So I harkened back to the days when I was a drill sergeant, and when I called "Attention", I summoned up the loudest and raspiest voice I could.

When we left the barracks, the colonel turned to me with a twinkle in his eye and said, "It's okay to leave the linoleum on the floor, lieutenant."



In the picture above, the colonel is lighting up his cigar after leading the Group's first combat mission on Sept. 9, 1943, to Abbeyville, France.

* * * *

US Strategic Air Forces in Europe activated Jan. 1, 1944.

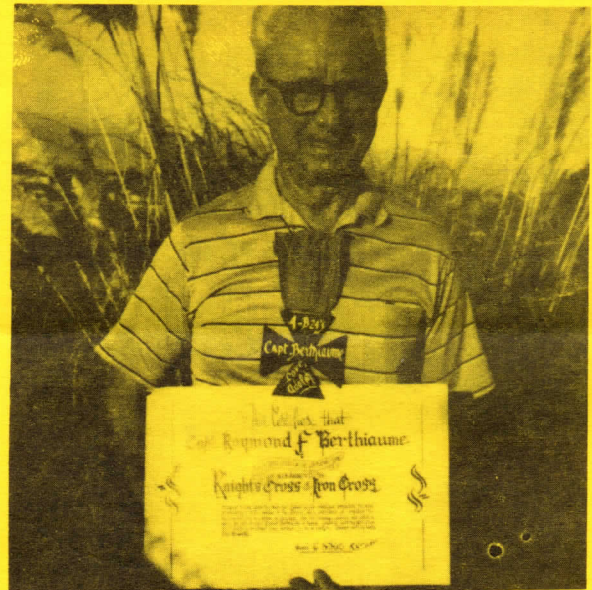
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PROFILE

Both flight and line personnel have been known to say that the B-24 could sometimes be unpredictable, both in flight and while being taxied.

At Wendling, there was an accident involving a taxied B-24 belonging to the 578th, resulting in some small damage to the aircraft.

The late Bill Metz, then station Ordnance Officer, thought that the occasion should not go unnoticed, so he fashioned an Iron Cross and it was awarded in a fitting ceremony at the Ground Officers' Mess to then Capt. Ray Berthiaume, the 578th's Engineering Officer. The citation read "awarded for damaging an American aircraft."



Ray was one of the original cadre of the 392nd, joining the Group at Tucson in March 1943. He stayed in the Service after the war, and had assignments in Germany, China, and Washington, D. C. In China, he was advisor to the Nationalist Chinese Air Force. His duties were generally related to aircraft maintenance, and he was a deputy CO of a mobile repair squadron and executive officer to the Deputy Chief of Staff Maintenance, Hq. Air Defence Command.

He retired from the Air Force in 1964 as Lt. Col., and in civilian life has been a motel manager, site administrator for a Planned Unit Development, and has been connected with other private business ventures related to real estate.

His address is 24147 Outrigger Drive, Box 5764, Canyon Lake, CA 92380. He is married to Lynn, and they have a son, a grandson, and a great-grandson.

1991 MEETINGS OF 2ND AIR DIVISION ASS'N AND 8TH AIR FORCE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The 2nd Air Division Ass'n. will meet July 3, 4, and 5 at Dearborn, Michigan and the 8th Air Force Historical Society will meet Sept. 18-22 at New Orleans.

As usual, the 392nd BG Memorial Ass'n. will meet during both conventions, but the official annual meeting of the 392nd will be at Dearborn with the 2nd Air Division. At that meeting, Directors and Officers will be elected, and any other such business that comes before the association will be acted upon.

* * * *

DUES! DUES! DUES!

The label on this newsletter will tell you if your dues are paid up. If the number following your name is 91 or higher, Charley Dye's records show that you are paid through that year. If LM appears after your name, that means you're a Life Member and are paid up for life. If nothing appears on the same line after your name, you're delinquent in your dues.

As President Gilbert announced in the last edition, no newsletter will be sent after April 1, 1991 to a person whose dues are not current.

There is a blank form elsewhere in this paper that you can use to accompany your dues payment. The payment can be \$12 per year for any number of years, or you can follow the formula for becoming a Life Member.

If your situation is such that payment is a hardship, drop a line to President Gilbert or any Director and you will continue to receive the newsletter.

* * * *

CRUSADER PATCHES

Joe Landers, whose textile company made up the Crusader patches which were given out at last year's conventions, has procured a new supply. He is donating the patches to the association, and the charge for them, \$1.50, will go to the Memorial Fund.

Order direct from Joe at 116 Wolf Ave., Malverne, NY 11565, but be sure your check for \$1.50 each is made out to 392nd Bomb Group Memorial Ass'n.

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BOMBARDIERS NOTE

The Association has just learned that there is a memorial association for bombardiers. And, they are staging a convention at Las Vegas 6-10 May, 1991. If interested, you can get more information by writing Bombardiers, Inc., 200 Van Buren St., Daphne, AL 36526.

Also, bombardiers might be interested in the article on their specialty that appeared in the December 1990 issue of Airforce Magazine.

* * * *

First American Air Headquarters in Europe during WW II was established on Feb. 22, 1942.

FOLDED WINGS REPORT

Name of deceased _____ Sqdn. _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Date of death _____ Survivors: (Send copy of obit from newspaper if possible)

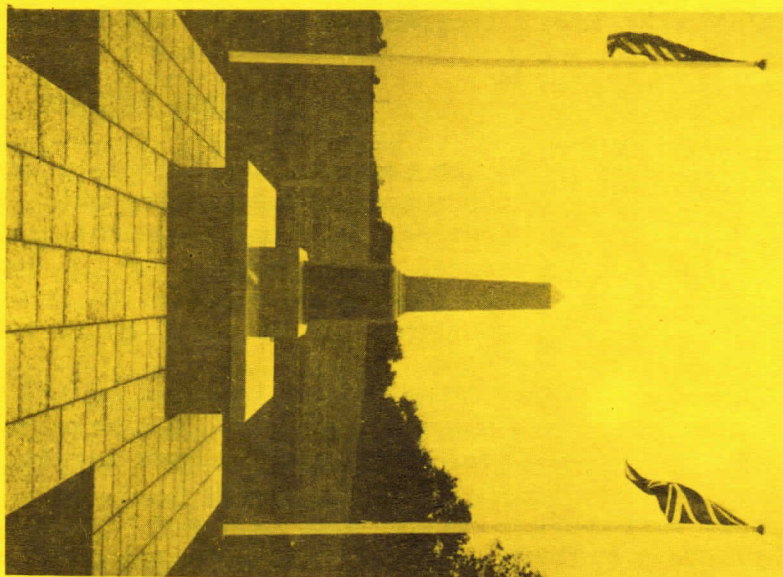
Reported by _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

[] Record a memorial contribution to 392nd BGMA in my name, check made out to 392nd Bomb Group Memorial Ass'n., enclosed. Send this report to J. D. Long, Jr., 102 Kemp Road East, Greensboro, NC 27410.

NEWS

392nd BG Memorial Association



THE REFURBISHED MEMORIAL AT WENDLING

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