



CAUSE ... AND EFFECT

The Story of the 8th Air Force

by Sgt. Ed Rosenthal, writer for *Yank, The Army Weekly*

On 8 May 1945, the Allies declared Victory in Europe. The 70th anniversary of that day was recently commemorated around the world. At about the same time, 392nd veteran A. Howard Thornton provided his original 18 May 1945 copy of the British edition of Yank, The Army Weekly. He was a waist gunner on 1/Lt Carl E. Myers' crew in the 577th and flew combat missions between December 1944 and April 1945.

That issue was devoted to the end of the war in Europe, with messages from President Truman and Prime Minister Churchill, the fact that "Celebrating London GIs Couldn't Forget Japan;" "How the Allies Beat the German Army" in Africa, Italy, France, Germany and Russia; 85 photos of "The GI's War in Europe;" and finally, this article. It details the birth of the 8th Air Force and is reprinted here verbatim. Photos of the 392nd BG have been inserted where appropriate.

A companion article in the next issue of the News will recount the early history of the 392nd Bomb Group.

When the Eighth Air Force dropped its last stick of bombs on Germany, there ended an American "experiment" which had become one of the most significant elements of victory in Europe. Wherever Lt. Gen. Ira C. Eaker was on V-E Day, he must have reflected upon this as the news came.

A little over three years before, only 10 weeks after Pearl Harbor, seven men sat at dinner in the Dorchester Hotel, London. They speared their spam with forks held in their right hands—then conspicuous and unorthodox. They held some equally unorthodox but less conspicuous convictions

about aerial warfare.

The strangers were Gen. Eaker and six other U.S. Army Officers, an advance detachment that had just arrived to lay the groundwork for an American Air Force of nearly 200,000 men in Britain which eventually was to send 2,000 heavy bombers and nearly 1,000 fighters over Germany between dawn and dark on a single day.

Their mission, of course, was secret. They made their ideas inconspicuous because those ideas were radical and contrary to conclusions that had been drawn by both Britain and Germany, the two greatest air powers then, from experience in the war up to that time.

During the few months of the Battle of Britain, the *Luftwaffe* had lost more than 2,000 planes in daylight attacks. The RAF had lost up to 50 per cent of the bombers it had dispatched on a single daylight mission. Both British and Germans had



The 392nd BG assembles for war on 18 Apr 1944. Arrows point to the assembly flares, which showed crews where to form up.

converted to night bombardment.

Daylight bombardment of Europe, since then taken for granted, was at the time controversial dynamite. Eaker wanted to keep the projected experiment secret from everyone except from the RAF, which generously agreed to provide the laboratory and many appurtenances. Much opinion on both sides of the Atlantic, and all the evidence, were against the plan.

In Normandy about two years later, a GI tanker in Lt. Gen. George S. Patton's Army radioed his love to a Thunderbolt overhead which had just knocked out a troublesome

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FROM THE EDITOR

Follow Ups. Roger Bean emailed with more information about 2/Lt John W. Reed's crew on 29 Apr 1944. He "spoke to a lady in Ingham, Norfolk, who in April 1944 was 14. She can remember seeing a lone USAAF airman who parachuted into the village. He emerged carrying his parachute. It was quite an event at the time! She can vividly remember he kept saying 'Sure' and within an hour he was gone." That man was likely copilot 2/Lt Harry C. Bate Jr. His next combat mission was 13 May 1944.

Janet Schoolmaster Engelmenn is the widow of 577th Sqdn CO Maj Clinton F. Schoolmaster. She shared a letter he wrote home about the mission to Berlin on 29 Apr 1944. "The boys ran a mission yesterday, went to the Big B in Berlin, naturally—turned out to be kinda rough and some do—they just happened to hit us this time—we lost 7 crews and quite a few wounded & killed. I lost one ship & crew—another (not counted above) flew home by himself on autopilot, bailed out the crew and the ship (Alfred II) crashed before he got out. He was an up & coming pilot, too—tough."

Janet says, "I have long felt that although the survivors were all heroes (even to fly once into that wasp nest of German fighters was heroic) that knowingly giving up your life to save others is the highest form of heroism. The young pilot of Alfred II could have jumped and saved himself but the plane would have crashed into the village. That is why they wish to put up a plaque to honor his name."

Maj Schoolmaster was transferred to 95th Combat Wing Headquarters and was killed on 25 May 1944 during his first mission with them.

Marge Braddock and husband Bill (radio operator on Capt Cliff Edwards' crew) were editors of the 392nd's anthology, *Twentieth Century Crusaders*. She still remembers hearing Bill and crewmate Norm Mellow talk about what happened when the 392nd BG got diverted to the RAF base.

She writes, "Part of the reason the General called out 2/Lt Joachim was that he did not have a hat on (since they came down with only the flying helmets) and Joachim should have been wearing the hat that designated who should salute whom." She adds, "The Limeys let the Yanks drink up their whole month's booze allotment, but sent them off to the tank base to eat because they could not afford to feed them. The whole 578th Sqdn came down there—a lot of guys, probably about 180 or so—and that is

why Bill got the Distinguished Flying Cross. He was the radio man that got the message about Wendling being socked in and asked for a repeat message that they should land elsewhere. He therefore saved all those guys from multiple crashes, which some groups were not able to emulate."

A look at the 392nd's mission reports reveals that the 392nd spent the night of 27 Mar 1944 with the RAF. The target was an airfield at Mont-de-Marsan, France, about 70 miles from Spain. Fourteen planes landed at RAF Boscombe Down in Wiltshire, where, according to our records, "their British counterparts entertained in grand fashion."

576th Bert Prost, gunner on the Wittel and Paroly crews, said he "was completely exhausted after reading about the mission to Politz on 29 May 1944. I made one mission to Politz, on 20 Jun 1944, but it was nothing like that one!" He also commented, "Sometimes, there'd be lots of flak in the air that exploded just ahead of you as you flew through the smoke. I often had the realization that if we'd been just a few seconds earlier getting to that spot, we'd have been goners."

Bud Guillot, a gunner on the 576's Kamenitsa crew who became a POW on 29 Apr 1944, also emailed. On 9 April, his crew was flying their second mission, to Tutow (which was just a few miles from Politz). "The weather was terrible. It was a major catastrophe forming up. Planes were scattered. It was a ragtag formation that headed for Tutow. Of course we were newbies and assumed this was normal. Anti-aircraft and German fighters tore us apart approaching and over Kiel. At one point, looking out of my left waist gun position I could clearly see Sweden. The only prayer I ever said in combat was, 'God, if it is in your plan that I get shot down during this war, please make it now.' (I figured that with any luck I could guide my parachute to Sweden during the descent.)

"The mission got a recall but our radio operator did not pick up the order. We saw planes peeling off and heading home but assumed it was because they had sustained heavy damage. We joined up with another scattered group that did not receive the recall. We followed the leader in this meager disorganized formation to the aircraft facility in Tutow. The clouds departed when we hit our IP and when we got to our target the skies were clear and we had perfect vision of our target and a good dropping pattern. As I remember, the flight home was uneventful.

"Usually at a debriefing, the room is a beehive of activity. Each man is given two shots of Scotch to encourage him to relax. Two of our crew did not drink alcohol so their four shots were equally divided to our cups. Each crew sat around one table and one debriefing officer debriefed that crew. So few crews had bombed Tutow that there were about three officers at each table. Sadly, we did not get the Scotch rations allotted for the 21 crews that turned back."



President's Message

We send the 392nd NEWS to English addressees, mostly for the unabashed reason of keeping our footprint alive there. One of the recipients is David Hastings, who has known us almost as long as we have known ourselves. In 1943 as a youngster he met the 389th at Hethel. We arrived at Wendling in 1943.

David has been a friend of the 2nd Air Division in general and the 392nd in particular all his life. He is a retired Governor of the 2nd Air Division Memorial Trust and he and wife Jean were leading cogs in the arrangements and execution of the seven reunions the Association held in Norwich.

He was one of the pilots of the Commemorative Air Force's B-24 Diamond Lil which made the epic Return To England flight in 1992.

I have attended three of the 2AD Norwich reunions and I was in the town square at King's Lynn with the rest of the 392nd when Diamond Lil flew over on her way in. What a thrill it was.

Another memory was at an earlier reunion when the attendance was in the hundreds; we filled a special train coming from London to Norwich. Upon our arrival the Brits were on the platform, the band was playing, and there were comely young ladies. Naturally dancing soon broke out with the visiting Americans. I remember approaching one of them who replied, "Sure, Yank, I'll dawnce with you."

On this page you'll find Annette Tison's coverage of last Memorial Day at the Cambridge Cemetery, where Ann Long placed a wreath for the 392nd.

In the post-war years I was privileged to have known Ann's father J. D. and mother Emily. J. D. was a man of great vitality; he trained as a fighter pilot but was sent to us as a bomber co-pilot. He was a past president of the 2AD Association and a steady attender of our reunions.

We have heard from our man in St. Louis, M/Sgt Allen Holtman, USAF (Ret). Allen, bless his Air Force Blue heart, faithfully flowers and attends the graves of the 43 Crusaders buried at the Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery every Memorial Day.

Blue Skies,
Jim Goar

Memorial Day at Cambridge American Cemetery

392nd News readers will remember that the Lord Lieutenant of Cambridgeshire, Sir Hugh Duberly KCVO, CBE, spoke at last year's Memorial Day ceremony at Cambridge American Cemetery in Madingley. After he was invited to speak at this year's service, his representative contacted the 392nd BGMA asking for information about the Group and if any of our veterans would be attending.

Sir Hugh is well aware of the 392nd BG, as a memorial to our 577th Sqdn 2/Lt John D. Ellis and crew, KIA on 12 Aug 1944, is within his purview.

Editor Annette Tison replied with statistics about the 392nd's WWII service and advised that while we did not know of any of our veterans who would be present, Ann Long, daughter of 578th Sqdn copilot J. D. Long, would be laying a wreath on behalf of her father and his comrades.

After the event, Ann emailed, "The Memorial Day ceremony was as moving as ever. It was a cool and cloudy morning but the grounds for the ceremony were full. I am having a hard time putting into words the emotion I had during Sir Hugh's speech. He talked about the sacrifice of so many Americans. Then he said the 392nd out of Wendling flew 291 missions and that the daughter of Captain J D Long Jr of the 578th Sqdn was here to honor her father and the other men of the 392nd by laying a wreath. He went on to say that J D Long Jr had flown 35 missions including the first wave of bombers on D-Day.

"As you can imagine, I was blown away when I heard the words '392nd' and then my father's name. The service is always very special but to have my youngest grandson turn to me and say 'that's Great Granddaddy he is talking about!' made a very special day very personal."

Here, in its entirety, is Sir Hugh's speech:

I am proud to stand here as Her Majesty the Queen's representative in the County of Cambridgeshire, to show our gratitude to all those who are remembered here at Madingley. Today we remember those American Airmen who gave their life to preserve our freedom. The heroes who took up arms to secure the freedoms that we enjoy to this day.

This year marks a significant anniversary. Seventy years ago this month, May 1945, the war in Europe finally came to an end with the surrender of the German High Command. The end of a war that had claimed the lives of many brave men and women. A war which brought our two nations together, a war that could not have ended as it did if the United States of America had not entered the fray, at the bleakest and most dire moment of the United Kingdom's history. A war that finally defeated the evil threat from the forces of Nazi Germany and their abhorred Dictator Adolph Hitler.

The anniversary gives us reason to reflect upon the global and lasting significance of that conflict and how much we, as the following generations, owe to those who stood up to that threat. Many of them paid the ultimate sacrifice so that we could grow up in a world free from the tyranny that had threatened our civilisation. We are here to pay tribute to those brave warriors.

All around this region of England are airfields from which US aircraft and their crew flew the missions that were so critical in bringing the war in Europe to a successful conclusion. Last year members of the 392nd Bomb Group Memorial Association were here to lay a wreath. I know that the daughter of one of those veterans is here today to lay a wreath on behalf of her father and his comrades. J.D. Long Jr a co-pilot in 578th Squadron flew 35 combat missions including the first mission on D Day. 392nd Bomb Group was stationed at Wendling in Norfolk (between Swaffham and Dereham), not many minutes flying time from here. The 392nd Bomb Group flew 291 combat missions. They lost 869 Airmen and 215 B-24s. What makes these sacrifices

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Panther ahead. At that moment, 1,500 Flying Fortresses and Liberators, with 700 Mustangs escorting them, were bombing hell out of Panther tank and Focke-Wulf fighter factories at Leipzig, deep in Germany. If the GI tanker had had time for philosophizing, he might also have reflected that the Focke-Wulfs weren't doing to him what the Thunderbolt was doing for him, and that there was just one Panther ahead instead of three.

Credit for this state of affairs is due in large part to the men who conceived the experiment, who pushed it through, and to the GIs and officers who died to make it work.

It wasn't easy.

An army of half-a-million men on heavy anti-aircraft artillery pointed skyward throughout Europe, and a potent *Luftwaffe* fighter force, just across the Channel, waited.

Nobody guaranteed Eaker success. He warned his men that it was not going to be "a game of patty cake" and that there would be heavy losses "before we can sweep in the blue chips."

At that time, the *Luftwaffe* ruled the skies over Europe in a darkening world. Bataan had fallen while the Eighth was engaged in the laborious business of obtaining fields, supplies, personnel and, most important, planes. (In the Spring of 1942 they had exactly one—a British Oxford which was used for transporting officers about England.) Gen. Douglas MacArthur needed planes and supplies in the Pacific. The Red Army had been pushed back toward Stalingrad, and Rommel had prepared his tanks for driving the bedraggled British forces out of Egypt. By early August, 1942, the Allies had sunk to a lower point than at any time in the last war.

Meanwhile, a trickle of officers, men and supplies had arrived in England to set up skeleton staffs for the Eighth

Air Force, which on paper called for 200,000 men—larger than the entire U.S. Army, including the Air Corps, had been three years before.

The spadework had started. Absorbing the RAF's extensive battle experience and obtaining fields and supplies on a lend-lease basis, the Americans began to pierce the black clouds of defeat. While Yanks and RAF men came to learn about each other's ways over mild-and-bitter, a firm friendship had grown between Gen. Eaker and Air Marshall A.T. Harris, boss of the RAF Bomber Command. At a small charity gathering in June, 1942, Gen. Eaker told his new British friends about the Eighth's plans in a speech noted for its brevity:

"We won't do much talking until we've done more fighting," he said. "We hope that when we leave, you'll be glad we came. Thank you."

On July 4, 1942, the United States didn't have much to celebrate. Although the American continent had not been hit (except for Dutch Harbor, in Alaska, and a few sporadic submarine attacks on the West Coast), the Germans and Japs were supreme in the air and on the ground. But the date has become important in Eighth Air Force history because it marked the first action by an American air unit over the European Continent. Six American crews in A-20 Bostons joined with the RAF in hitting an airfield in Holland. The mission was noted for the bravery of Capt. Charles C. Kegelman, a pilot who inaugurated the Eighth's tradition of bombing the target and returning—if humanly possible. After flak had shot away the right propeller and punctured the nose section of Kegelman's Boston, its right wingtip and fuselage scraped the ground, but the captain flew directly at a flak tower ahead, silencing it with his nose guns and returned on one engine to win the DSC from Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower.

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392nd BGMA MEMBERSHIP FORM

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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 _____

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

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That summer, English farmers and children who had learned their aircraft recognition by necessity during the *Luftwaffe* raids were amazed to see a new type of aircraft in the skies. It bore American markings and resembled no bomber they had ever seen. They wondered when these planes, which they came to know as Flying Fortresses, would cross the Channel and what the results would be.

The first answer came on Aug. 17, 1942, when the B-17E stretched its combat wings for the first time over Europe, attacking railway marshalling yards at Rouen, France. Escorted by RAF Spitfires, 12 Forts headed toward France that morning. A nervous audience had gathered at an airfield in the English Midlands to sweat out the return. Flying at 22,500 feet with perfect weather, the 12 planes dropped 21 tons on and near the target. In the lead Fort of the second section was Gen. Eaker, squirming in his seat from a mixture of excitement and a host of hornet stings he'd picked up during a duck-hunting incident the day before. The only casualties sustained were those of the navigator and bombardier of a Fort which collided with a flight of pigeons.

Six additional bombers, flying two diversionary missions, so confused the Germans that the formation of 12 was not reported until it was close to the target, at which time the enemy excitedly reported: "Achtung—12 Lancasters." Only a few interceptors approached the bombers and one FW-190 was shot down by Sgt. Ken West, a ball-turret gunner.

Headlines in all Allied nations proclaimed the successful feat. The ghost of Billy Mitchell grinned. This small beginning proved nothing in particular, but it was a beginning.

Mountainous obstacles still loomed to block the Eighth. Germany, as if scenting the challenge, had embarked upon a huge program to quadruple her already strong fighter force, the thousand-bladed sword expected to decapitate the Eighth. England was still a small island, shockingly vulnerable to air, land and sea attack. U-boats roamed the Atlantic, preying on supplies needed to wage air warfare from Britain.

Without fighters that could escort the bombers all the way to the target, large numbers of bombers were needed to provide massed firepower and to spread German fighter defenses by multi-pronged attacks. The strength in numbers upon which the success of the experiment was considered dependent accumulated slowly. Liberator groups came, and Lightnings for escort, only to be whisked away to Africa with many of the fledgling Eighth's key ground and air personnel for the North African invasion.

It was eight months after the first mission before the Eighth was able to put 100 bombers over a target.

But the pioneering old First Wing carried on through a 1942-43 fall and winter which threatened the existence of the Eighth. Ground crews scrounged and scraped to keep the pitifully meager supply of bombers fit for combat. Air crews were painfully aware of their losses, and the slowness of replacements. Like insurance men, they calculated the life-expectancy problem and came out with an answer of less than nil. Nevertheless, they went on slugging it out with the *Luftwaffe* and hitting the target. One squadron began operations in November, 1942, with 90 men, receiving a few replacements later on. After six months, the squadron

record showed 115 men killed or missing in action.

Meanwhile, Americans of the renowned Eagle Squadron transferred from the RAF to the Eighth in September, bringing their Spitfires with them, and later became famous as Col. Don Blakeslee's Fourth Fighter Group.

As the "experiment" entered '43, the *Luftwaffe* flexed its muscles with new strength, boasting 1,600 front-line fighters. New fighters were rolling off Nazi production lines in increasing volume. *Flieger Abwehr Kanonen* (anti-aircraft cannon) were multiplied into the most deadly flak defenses the world had ever seen.

Gen. Eaker was called to Casablanca in January, 1943, to report to the United Nations commanders on his progress. Though the still small Eighth had not yet been able to muster enough planes to penetrate into Germany proper, Eaker got the green light. On January 27 the Eighth passed an important milestone, when its bombers, 53 of them, crossed the German border for the first time, hitting U-boat yards at Wilhelmshaven with good results.

The situation picked up that spring and summer. The Allies had cleared off North Africa and moved on to Sicily. Stalingrad had been saved and the Russians were rolling the enemy back off Soviet territory in a successful summer offensive. Reinforced by men, planes and material from the U.S., the Eighth struck at a target only 80 miles from Berlin. An average of 630 Forts and Libs were now available, with more groups arriving each month. Long-range escorts, however, were still future history. There was no "mystery" about the *Luftwaffe* then, and bomber gunners knew as they left England that they would have to slug their way through.

In its first year of operations, the Eighth made 124 attacks, losing 472 bombers and nearly 5,000 men, dead or missing. For every bomber lost, four enemy aircraft were destroyed.

The Eighth began its second year of operations still without long-range fighter escort but with a terrific fury which cast a long shadow over Hitler's continent. The anniversary date—August 17, 1943—was celebrated with assaults on two of Europe's most important targets. More than 350 Forts pushed unescorted through swarms of enemy fighters to blast the Schweinfurt ball-bearing plant and an aircraft factory at Regensburg. The bombers hitting Regensburg continued on to Africa, marking the first of the Eighth's shuttle missions. In a three-hour battle with the *Luftwaffe*, 300 enemy fighters were destroyed for a loss of 60 bombers. The Regensburg attack cost the Germans at least two full months of production there, the equivalent of 500 Me-109s.

In July and August, the Eighth put the first crimp in the rising curve of German fighter strength. Successful blows at fighter plants and sharp gunnery sent German fighter losses higher and production of replacements lower. The *Luftwaffe* was operating in the red for the first time—but only temporarily.

Meantime, the Eighth's Libs had been called to Africa again. There they joined Ninth Air Force Libs to fly the long haul across the Mediterranean for the historic first attack on the Ploesti oilfields in Rumania, on Aug. 1, 1943, going in at smoke-stack height. After attacks on Rome and other targets the Libs returned to England.

Just as the Eighth threatened to gain supremacy over
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the German Air Force, the old bogey of winter weather pulled down a screen behind which German planes multiplied again.

Both sides worked feverishly for the crucial air battles expected as soon as the weather lifted. Against the Allies' double-pronged weapon of the RAF and Eighth, the *Luftwaffe* prepared to fight for its life.

Allied research laboratories and tacticians matched brains with the Germans in advancing methods of aerial warfare. Factories behind the American and German borders worked overtime to supply the combat units with the needed planes. Huge convoys delivered flyers and ground men to England for the coming air struggle. The High Commands of Allies and Germans looked to their air forces upon which the fate of Europe might depend.

During the early winter of 1943-1944, the Eighth had introduced long-range P-51 Mustangs capable of flying to Berlin and back. Lighter than Thunderbolts, less heavily armored, in the coming months of 1944 they were to escort bombers to every corner of Europe. Treated-paper fuel tanks had also increased the range of Thunderbolts, which showed a favorable score against the *Luftwaffe*.

Recognizing the growing danger of bombardment, the Germans resorted to underground factories, more deadly flak and new aerial tactics. In addition, the Hun had developed a new and merciless weapon—the V-bomb which was to attack London in the coming months.

Only by the time Maj. Gen. James H. Doolittle came to the Eighth as new C.G. in January, 1944, two years after this Air Force had been activated in Savannah, Ga., was its strength beginning to approach the original conception. Demands of world-wide war had not yet permitted the Eighth enough bombers to send 1,000 of them against Germany in a single day.

However, the Eighth was strong and growing stronger, and long-range fighter escort had arrived. This was historically important for, under cover of winter, German fighter production had expanded to a new high. With heavier armament and better tactics, German fighters had become more formidable.

Doolittle gravely considered the question foremost in his mind. Would the Eighth be able to cripple German fighter production before the increased strength and lethal power of the *Luftwaffe* crippled the Eighth?

Feb. 20, 1944, dawned cold and clear. The Eighth's first 1,000-bomber armada went after the German fighter industry in the first of a series of critical air battles. For six days, involving five devastating assaults on German plane plants, the battle continued in German skies. It represented a tremendous climax to a struggle upon which depended control of the sky and successful invasion of Europe.

As bombers streamed across the English Channel, escorted by hundreds of Thunderbolts and Mustangs, the *Luftwaffe* rose to defend their birthplace—aircraft factories. Furious battles were fought between fighter planes ranging from 30,000 feet to tree-top level. Names like Gabreski, Gentile, Zemke, Blakeslee, Johnson and Mahurin caught the public fancy, glamorizing a grim life-and-death struggle. American parachutes carried hundreds of airmen into

German prison camps. American GIs died violently as bombers exploded in mid-air, when German interceptors sneaked through the fighter screen to hit the Germans' greatest enemy of the moment.

Thousands of tons of American bombs brought death, devastation—and victory. In the five attacks, the Eighth damaged or destroyed aircraft plants accounting for 75 per cent of Germany's total fighter production. The hope of the *Luftwaffe* to match expanding Allied air might have been broken. Germany's monthly production had been pushed back below the 1942 rate.

One of the greatest battles occurred on Feb. 22 during a Liberator assault on a Messerschmitt plant at Gotha. For 700 miles and 3½ hours, the Libs were hit by enemy aircraft firing rockets, cannon and machineguns. The Germans attacked in waves of 30 to 40. Thirty-three out of 230 Libs were lost, but the plant was virtually destroyed and 75 Nazi planes were shot down by the Libs.

The Eighth's giant paw continued to sweep German skies, knocking down interfering aircraft and pounding installations while fighter pilots went down into the teeth of anti-aircraft guns to destroy on the ground the German fighters that didn't come up.

By June 6, the Supreme Commander could say to GIs embarking for the invasion of Europe: "Don't worry about the planes overhead. They will be ours."

And that's the way it was. The *Luftwaffe* was unable to contest the invasion itself.

Between August 17, 1942, and June 6, 1944, the Eighth had

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Top: #42-7466, Ford's Folly, is loaded with ammunition on D-Day. Bottom: On 7 Jun 1944, during the mission to Lisieux, France (about 30 miles southeast of Sword Beach), a camera in 2/Lt Harry A. White's plane, 579th, took this photo of Allied ships just off the invasion coast.

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destroyed 8,407 enemy planes in air combat and probably destroyed or damaged 7,697 more in the air and on the ground. The British Air Ministry conservatively estimated that at least 5,000 fighter aircraft were kept from action by Eighth Air Force bombardment of aircraft plants in the first five months of 1944 alone.

Concurrent with neutralization of the *Luftwaffe*, in May the Allied strategic air forces in Britain began the campaign against the life-blood of Germany's Wehrmacht—oil. By September, 1944, 75 per cent of the enemy's oil production as of March, 1944, had been stopped.

Paralleling this, the Eighth played a major role in salting down the invasion coast, cutting road and rail lines to isolate the battle area between the Loire and Seine rivers from German reinforcement, battering the marshalling yards, supplying the French resistance movement with guns and ammunition, dropping millions of leaflets on German cities, blasting V-bomb sites to spare London an even worse ordeal, and still blasting tank, half-track and motor-vehicle plants inside Germany at every opportunity.

Photo-reconnaissance planes mapped the continent for Gen. Eisenhower. Liberator bombers, the same that had blasted many German oil plants, temporarily became freighters and hauled gasoline to the continent to help keep Patton's Third Army rolling across France. Liberator crews packed bomb bays with weapons and supplies and parachuted them from low level to the Allied Airborne troops at Arnhem and Nijmegen, and again when the northern Rhine was crossed to begin the last great heave.

Strategic bombardment continued, for not until the day of Germany's complete surrender could it be certain that the Nazis would stop repairing and rebuilding the plants which were the source of their power to resist.

A captured telegram from Speer, Reichsminister of War Production, to Reichsleiter Bormann, Hitler's deputy, gives a glimpse of the havoc inside Germany: "The idea is spreading that reconstruction of oil plants is purposeless, since the enemy always finds a suitable moment, soon after resumption of work, to destroy them again..."

"All means must be employed to assure that the workers engaged in reconstruction of the plants shall not be crippled in their efforts..."

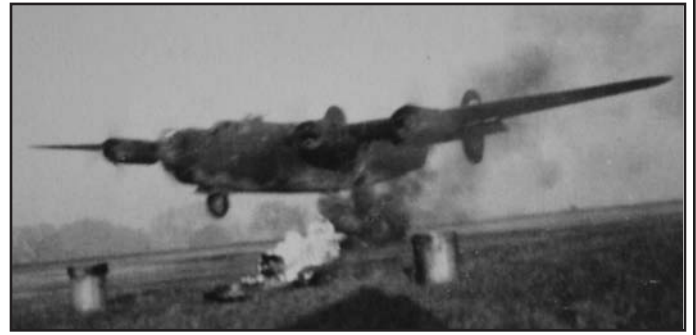
"We must not allow ourselves to give up hope that we must eventually be successful in gaining mastery over the enemy air forces..."

The message was dated September 17, 1944.

Even so, the Eighth devoted to tactical targets, or direct ground force support, about one-third of the entire tonnage of bombs dropped in 1944.

On Dec. 16, the winter weather was so thick that Rundstedt decided upon his counter-offensive, believing the Allied Air Forces couldn't leave their bases. Many agreed with him that they couldn't, but they did. The Eighth's bombers and fighters took off with visibility sometimes limited to 50 yards over runways coated with ice. The Eighth's largest force up to that time, 2,000 bombers and nearly 1,000 fighters, left their fog-covered British bases on Christmas Eve to help stop Rundstedt and save Bastogne by cutting roads and rails just back of the Bulge. This mighty air fleet was in

striking contrast to the 12 bombers which attacked Rouen on Aug. 17, 1942. Ground and air forces combined to stop the German push in that historic Christmas week.



The 392nd BG did its part on 24 Dec 1944, launching a maximum effort of 47 planes to targets at Ruwer and Pfalzel, Germany. This undated photo shows a Crusader B-24 in foggy conditions; the runway was lined with barrels filled with a flammable substance as a way to illuminate the landing strip. Base electrician M/Sgt Ben L. Vickers Jr. later devised an electrical lighting system for the runways. It was so successful that in March 1945 he was sent on Detached Service to North Pickenham to help them set up a similar system.

Short on oil and pilots, the *Luftwaffe* made a few more attempts to stop the tremendous bombardment, but the Eighth's fighter pilots cut them down again. The Eighth kept pounding at tank and armament plants, oil and rail targets, and jet-plane bases. In March, when the great heave came, the Eighth dropped a record 70,000 tons of bombs on Germany during the month, an amount equal to the total dropped during the entire first 18 months.

Germany was on the ropes.

On April 16, Gen. Carl Spaatz, USSTAF commander, announced that strategic air war was at an end in Europe and from then on the strategic forces must "operate with our tactical air forces in close cooperation with our armies." Signifying the change in its status, the Eighth undertook a new kind of mission in the first three days of May, dropping 3¼ million meals to the starving population in Holland.

By that time some figures could be assembled to show the vast size of the Eighth's efforts. Almost 700,000 tons of bombs had been dropped. Germany, alone, had caught 530,000 tons, or an average of one ton every minute, day and night, for a year.

Casualty figures showed that 43,687 fighter pilots and bomber crews had lost their lives in action or were missing in action. Another 1,923 were seriously injured.

Before the complete collapse, the Eighth's bombing line had narrowed to such a degree that targets were hard to find. The Allied troops had occupied cities and towns whose names had been headlined only a year before as bombing targets.

The Eighth has finished in Europe the job it began against a then-current opinion and precedent. Goering's boast that Allied aircraft would never fly over Germany sounds silly now—and it wasn't so funny when he said it.

Now the eyes of the Eighth are focused on Japan. There will be more than 12 bombers on its first mission there.

Salute the Ground Man!

Target Victory was a 2nd Air Division report “of, by and for combat flying personnel.” The issue for the week ending 11 Apr 1945 included a four-page “Salute the Ground Man” souvenir supplement. It began with an excerpt from a speech by 2AD commander Maj Gen William E. Kepner on 8 Apr 1945:

“As the final victory, which must be ours, draws near, we have thought it befitting to designate a week to recognize and commend the personnel of the ground echelon of 2nd Air Division for their tremendous efforts in creating this great team.

“I would like to take this opportunity to thank you, as I know every man who has had the opportunity to fly with the 2nd Air Division planes, would thank you if it were possible. The flying personnel know what your efforts have been to supply them with the means to perform their part of the team’s work, the long hours with little glory, and they are grateful. As your Commanding General, I wish to offer you my sincere congratulations and to commend you on a job well done.”

The supplement continued, “In March, 8th Air Force hit Germany with the largest forces and greatest tonnage in its history. 2nd Air Division starred in this record by topping the Air Force in precision-bombing accuracy. 2AD fighter planes reasserted their scoring leadership of the ETO—one group this week became the first unit to destroy more than 1,000 enemy aircraft. Beyond ready comprehension are the thousands of sorties flown and the tons of bombs aimed—vast in its execution is a single 2AD mission.

“Tribute is offered this week to those who accomplish 64 of the 68 key operations in every mission, but frequently are overlooked by press and public—the Ground Personnel of 2nd Air Division. Pictured here are a fraction of the equally-essential steps performed each time by 2AD personnel on the ground before the radio may announce ‘Liberators, Mustangs and Thunderbolts of 8th Air Force attacked German targets today.’

“Though they may be forgotten in the news flashes, the Ground Men, by their devotion to perfection, are earning the daily gratitude and praise of every combat flyer. Men with wings and men with other duties cooperate throughout each phase so that no one step, no one man, is independent—the maximum reward to each of them is the final effort of this entire Air Division.”

The accompanying photos illustrated the varied jobs of ground personnel. Captions were “8th Air Force Advises ‘Target for Today’”; “2AD Staff Conference Plans the Mission”; “Weather Checks the Route”; “Gen. Kepner

Consults Operations Staff”; “Code Orders to Bomber and Fighter Groups”; “Each Group Briefs Its Flying Crews”; “Ordnance Loads the Target Busters”; “Line Crews Groom Planes”; “Plotters Track the Mission”; “Another Axis Target Destroyed”; “Interrogation of Air Crews on Return”; and “Analysis of the Mission’s Bomb Photos.”

The last page of the supplement was filled with additional photos of ground crew personnel throughout 2AD.

In his book *The Mighty Eighth War Manual*, noted 8th Air Force historian Roger Freeman points out, “For every combatant in 8th Air Force there were 20 personnel in a supporting ground role.”

This article highlights the vital job performed by 392nd BG crew chiefs and their teams. Many of the anecdotes come from early issues of the *News*, the WWII Stories section of www.b24.net and the 392nd BG anthology, *Twentieth Century Crusaders*.

Crew Chiefs

These senior enlisted men were among the more visible ground crew personnel, as they were the link between the combat airmen and the maintenance team needed to keep their B-24 in the air.

A crew chief was responsible for keeping his assigned B-24s in working order, performing routine and required maintenance and repairing battle damage when possible. He and his team (usually three or four Airplane and Engine Mechanics) worked through the night, often in foul weather with little or no protection from the elements, to ensure their planes were in perfect mechanical condition.

They had only flashlights to work with, but the labor to be done was highly technical, requiring intense effort. There were thousands of things that had to be right so that a four-engine bomber would be properly armed and able to fly at high altitudes with a heavy load to a target that was difficult to find and often well defended.

What the ground crews accomplished could be called a *miracle* or a *problem*, depending on one’s point of view.

As 578th crew chief M/Sgt Ernest H. Barber explained, “Long after the war I met a guy named Jack Clark who said, ‘I’ve been looking for you for forty years! We came in off a mission one time, with an aileron shot off the plane and the whole crew just knew we could go out that night and not worry about the next day!

“The next morning, in comes the orderly to wake up the crew and get them to their briefing. They said: ‘Hey, we’re not going ... our

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In *Target Victory*, the photo at left was captioned, “Analysis of the Mission’s Bomb Photos.” It shows 2AD Photo Interpreter Capt (later Maj) Edwin Reed (left) and bombardier Capt Joe Whittaker. Both served in the same duties at the 392nd before being transferred to Division HQ. The photo at right was labeled, “M/Sgt Stephen J. Dergo and ‘Tovarich,’ named for his Russian ancestry. Crew chief with 392nd Bomb Group, he has sent Libs out on 136 missions, never had one mechanical turnback.” The plane was #42-51128 in the 579th Sqdn.

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plane's not ready!' The guy says: 'Well, according to our records, it is.' After the briefings, Jack got out to the line and told his copilot, Oak Mackey, 'You get around and check that right aileron. That thing's not ready to go.' Oak went around behind the plane and came back. 'I'm sorry, sir, but it is ready to go!'"

"The crew and I had stayed out all night, re-covering it with fabric, then lacquering over it to make it stretch tight. Our system worked, and that plane was ready to fly by dawn."

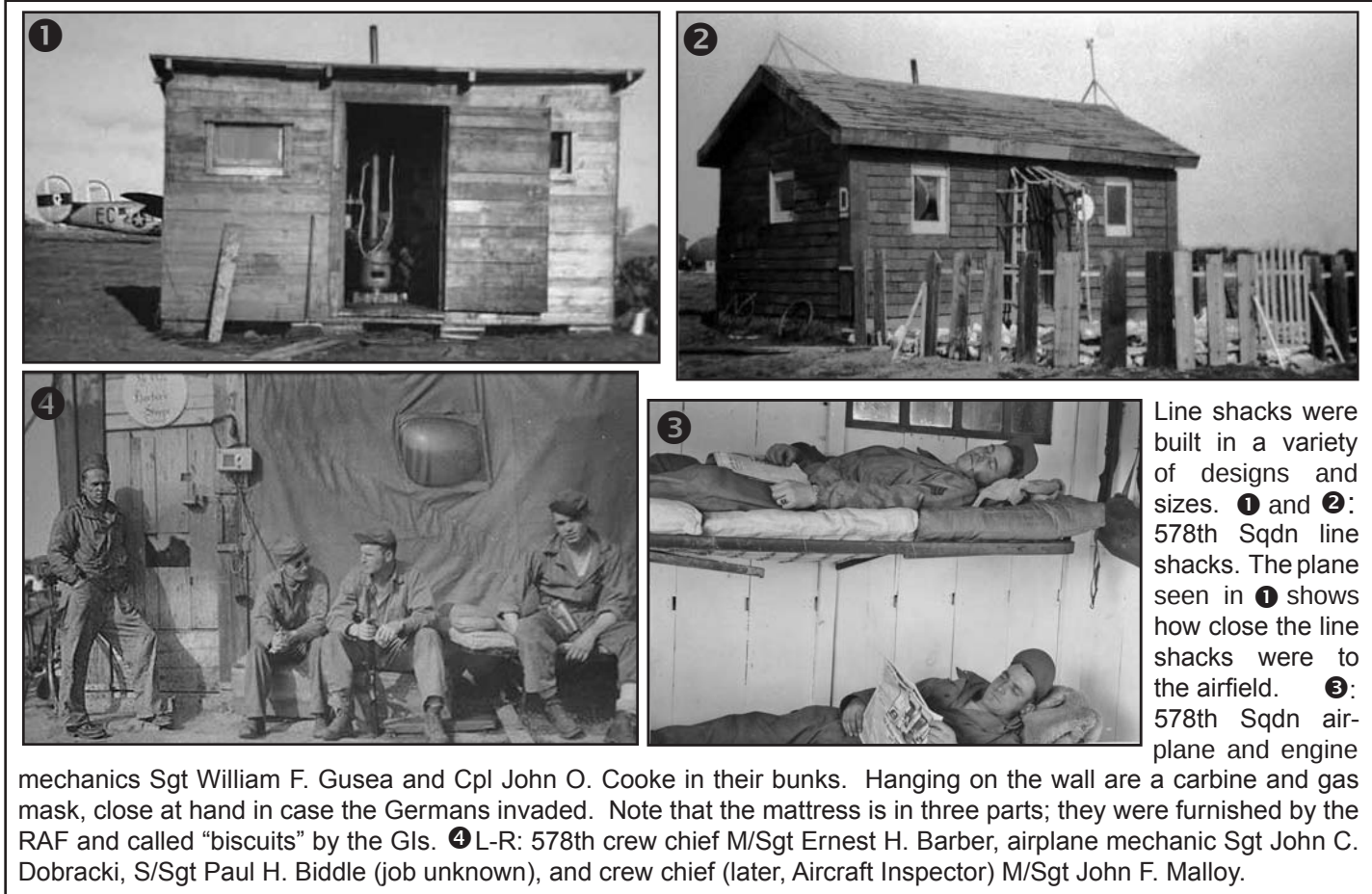
The ground crew had a proprietary regard for their planes and felt they were only "on loan" to the combat airmen. When one of their B-24s did not return, they grieved for crew and aircraft alike.

Line Shacks

As the 392nd settled down for the long pull, many of the tents that were used by ground crews were converted to shacks using any kind of lumber available, mostly crates that bombs were shipped in.

Line crews were working on the aircraft at all hours and in all weather so many of the crews literally lived in the line shacks, close to the planes they were serving. This caused much dismay to adjutants and first sergeants who favored orderly barracks life, but was much favored by engineering officers and flying crews who appreciated the line crews being near the line and readily available to work on the planes.

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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: Annette Tison, 9107 Wood Pointe Way, Fairfax Station, VA 22039

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M/Sgt Ernie Barber

Ernie Barber described his line shack: "On August 12, 1944 we ...moved into our new line shack that we had built mostly out of anti-personnel bomb boxes and a few articles we had obtained through midnight requisitions. We had two ground crews in it. We also built our own bunk beds so as to take up as little space possible.

"We built a brick fireplace with mantle and all but our main heat was a 30-gallon steel drum with holes drilled near the bottom so that the old oil that we drained out of the planes could have air to burn. It vented into our chimney but was made so that we could remove it for inspections that came fairly frequently. We also had an old hand crank Victrola to play our only record. I remember only one side—it was "Sweet Kentucky Babe."

"We all spent some well deserved sleep in it at times as it saved us from having to go all the way back to our barracks, and in cold or rainy days and nights. Even some of our air crews would come out and spend time with us; we always had hot coffee (not tea)."

Barber received the Bronze Star for maintaining #42-7518 for 32 missions without a mechanical abort. In fact, he crewed seven combat planes with a total of 143 missions without a turnback caused by maintenance or mechanical problems.

As testimony to what the ground crews had to do to each plane, during the 45-mission life of #42-52548, Jaw-Ja-Boy (a tribute to Barber's childhood in Georgia), he and his men replaced five engines, three superchargers, four carburetors, five compensating relief valves, a left landing gear and nose wheel and applied approximately 65 patches due to battle damage, including one on the left wing about a foot square.

Barber told this story about an eventful night at Wendling. "It was late on 13 Oct 1944. Delmer McCulley, one of my former mechanics who had been promoted to crew chief and had his own plane, and I had just finished a convivial visit to the Enlisted Men's Club. We were pedaling our bikes around the perimeter track, heading for our shack on the flight line. As we approached the end of the main runway we looked down its length to ensure no planes were landing or taking off and saw what we thought was a plane about to overshoot the runway.

"Sgt McCulley got off his bike and began waving his flashlight, trying to warn the plane's pilot where the end of the runway was. As the 'plane' passed right above us I saw that it was a V-1 buzz bomb. I yelled to McCulley, "HIT THE GROUND! IT'S A BUZZ BOMB!" I was already flat on my face, but McCulley just kept looking at it as it passed overhead, about 300 feet above us. Very shortly after the V-1 had cleared the runway, its engine cut out. Then, a silent 15- or 20-second pause, then it hit the ground and exploded. I felt the concussion from the blast pass over my head, but McCulley was still standing at the end of the runway waving his flashlight. Then the full blast hit him, knocking him to the ground. We also got an earful of noise from the massive explosion.

"As McCulley, still dazed, staggered to his feet, he said, 'We had better lay off drinking from now on if that's what

we get from it.' "

Note from Senior Editor and Group Transportation Officer Jim Goar: "When asked by younger people about 'The Greatest Generation,' I am prone to say, WWII was won by the Ernie Barbers of this country. Plucked out of rural Georgia barely out of his teens, within a year and a half he was in charge of a complicated B-24, the state of the art at the time in military aviation. His planes flew and flew and flew, in spite of damage from combat and incredible abuse from high altitude, over-loaded, formation flying."

M/Sgt John G. Coltran

Navigator Keith Roberts wrote about another crew chief in the August 1997 News:



L-R: 578th airplane mechanic S/Sgt Stanley J. Gondek, crew chief M/Sgt John H. Coltran Jr., and airplane mechanic Pvt John H. Conley Jr.

"M/Sgt John G. Coltran of Red Bank, NJ, a new chief in the 578th, was a handsome, square-jawed man who took meticulous care of his airplanes. "He also had the distinction of owning a pet chicken.

"The chicken was a hen who faithfully produced one egg a

day. Coltran and his ground crew fried the egg with great ceremony on the home-made stove in their hand-crafted line shack. Eggs served in the Crusaders' Wendling mess halls were powdered eggs, always scrambled, and served in compact heaps on metal mess trays. So, a real fried egg was a jewel to be treasured.

"The Vickers crew flew a Coltran prepared airplane which they had named Dugan, which sported a 4-leaf clover painted on each side of her nose. On days that the Vickers crew flew in Dugan, John Coltran donated a real fried egg to their diet, share and share alike. When Sgt Coltran and pilot Bob Vickers did the preflight walk around Dugan, the chicken followed in their footsteps.

"One day in early 1945, the Vickers crew was assigned a practice flight. They decided that, since Sgt Coltran's chicken was in the Air Corps, she really should log some flight time.

"So it came to be that the Vickers crew saved the chicken's life, twice. The first time was at about 2,000 feet when the chicken tried to fly out the open waist window and gunners Bill Nock and Tom Damuth caught her in time. The second life-saving moment happened when the crew clapped on an oxygen mask when she began to turn blue from lack of oxygen. After such stress, the chicken lost some feathers and refused to lay an egg for a week or so, but her recovery was complete. The Vickers crew was mightily relieved."

In recognition of his superb maintenance work, Coltran was awarded the Bronze Star in December 1944.

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577th Sqdn crew chief T/Sgt Carl C. Derby (far right) and two of his team pose by Monotonous Maggie's distinctive nose art.

T/Sgt Carl C. Derby

577th crew chief T/Sgt Carl C. Derby is fondly remembered by copilot Les Hadley. "He was extremely capable, quietly doing his job which was to keep #42-95151, Monotonous Maggie, ready. When he heard of a B-24 crashing miles away, he drove to the site and removed the armor plating that the crashed plane had and put it on

our plane to protect us. He also 'found' bullet proof glass for the cockpit after flak put a hole in the windshield directly in front of me."

Maggie survived 88 combat missions and was flown home at war's end, testimony to Derby's skill.

M/Sgt Hubert H. Lee

Per the 576th Sqdn diary for July 1944, "M/Sgt Hubert H. Lee, crew chief of the Flying Patch [#42-95131] went home on the 29th of July after two years in the E.T.O. Sgt Lee earned his place in Squadron history by saving aircraft No. 131 from the scrap heap when it landed in southern England with over 2,000 flak holes in it. He patched the battered wreck and it since became the war horse of the Squadron. M/Sgt Lee was awarded the Bronze Star for his efforts in maintaining the Flying Patch."

1/Lt Edward F. Wittel's crew flew 19 of their 30 combat missions aboard #131, including 20 Apr and 15 May 1944 when M/Sgt Lee flew with them. No wonder they included him in their photo on 31 May 1944!



Front Row: tail gunner Sgt Dominick A. Roti. Middle row, L-R: pilot 1/Lt Edward F. Wittel; radio operator

T/Sgt Cletus M. Jeffcoat; waist gunner S/Sgt Robert F. Williams; ball turret gunner S/Sgt Phillip M. Lancaster; waist gunner S/Sgt Bertrand J. Prost. Back row, L-R: copilot 2/Lt Warren R. Marsters; engineer T/Sgt Vernon P. Cannada; bombardier 2/Lt John C. Zuk; navigator 2/Lt John F. Karl; crew chief M/Sgt Hubert H. Lee.

Missions Flown

When they had time, ground crew personnel painted emblems on the sides of their planes to indicate missions successfully completed. The most common was a bomb, which represented a combat mission. Some of the early planes also displayed ducks that showed the plane had flown a diversion mission. (The 392nd BG was sent on several diversion missions in September and October 1943. These were feints in an attempt to get the Luftwaffe to pursue the diversion force and thus permit the real formation to fly unmolested to the target. If the Germans weren't fooled, the combat crews would not get credit for the mission, but a duck could be painted on the side of the B-24s. If the Germans were fooled and attacked the decoy formation, it then became a combat mission and the airmen did get credit.

This scenario occurred on 4 Oct 1943 when the 392nd's diversion worked all too well. The Germans attacked and three B-24s were shot down.



Top photo: 578th aircraft mechanics Cpl Chester G. Leonard and Sgt Ivor L. Weller watch crew chief T/Sgt Lowell D. Hale paint a bomb on the side of #42-7624, Flying 8 Ball. Bottom photo: ducks indicating f o u r diversions flown adorn the side of #42-7564, Alfred II. This, incidentally, was the ship



piloted by 2/Lt Reed on 29 Apr 1944. It was named after the none-too-smart swabbie in cartoons featured in *Collier's* magazine. The 577th had ships named Alfred (42-7485), Alfred II, Alfred IV (42-94961) and Alfred V (42-95118), but oddly, there was no Alfred III.

Editor's note: More articles about the 392nd's ground personnel will appear in future issues of the *News*. I have accumulated a lot of information about men, both well-known and unsung, whose efforts helped make the Crusaders into an exceptional unit. For example, who remembers that 577th Sqdn Adjutant and Mess Officer Capt Joseph R. Coppola found a British factory with a license to make ice cream and arranged to have that delicacy available for the November 1944 Thanksgiving feast?

CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

by Tom Perry, 576th Sqdn Armorer

The Lord God, creator of the Heavens and the Earth, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the Father of Jesus Christ, has promised to never leave or forsake us. God has not abandoned us. We have all been comforted and upheld at times of sickness and loss of friends and loved ones. We all have had to continue on in life through times of distress, loneliness and tragedies. We are sustained when we realize that God loves each and every one of us, and we are grateful for the time He has granted us, surviving comrades, loved ones and friends who have folded their wings. We have been blessed beyond measure by a loving, caring God.

MEMORIAL DAY from page 3

so real, even now 70 years on, is the thought that those aircraft and their crews probably flew over this very spot. One day looking down, now resting here forever. We have not forgotten them and what they have done for us.

Standing today in this beautiful spot on the outskirts of Cambridge under that flight path, we remember that Cambridgeshire and its neighbouring counties are still home to many serving US personnel. You are our neighbours and friends and have become part of our community and our way of life. Your Air Base Groups have been granted the Freedom of our towns. This is public recognition of the great affection and affiliation that has grown up between us; the value that each places on the other. Our wish is to make you feel at home while you are here in England and our appreciation of the contribution that you make to our communities through your participation, involvement and support.

We are honoured to be here amongst you today at this moving ceremony sharing with you your loss, and ever grateful that you are still alongside us. Living amongst us and with us; although far from home.

Today the threats that face our two nations are of a different kind, but our two nations still stand side by side in Joint Operations around the world. We look anxiously to aggression in Ukraine and continuing civil war in the Middle East. We celebrate the strong alliance between us which has enabled us to withstand the forces of evil, terrorism and despotism.

On an occasion like this, we are all thinking of the American and British Servicemen engaged around the world; recognizing the sacrifices that they are called to make in the service of their countries.

It is our wish and duty as the beneficiaries of those sacrifices to give grateful and respectful remembrance and to ensure that the cause for which they died shall live eternally. Today we honour the fallen who have made that ultimate sacrifice in that cause and particularly those who are remembered around us here.

To borrow the words of a leader in an earlier war, "Your sons have become also our sons
They now lie in the soil of a friendly country."

Their names inscribed on the Wall of Remembrance.
We in Britain remember them.

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

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Clockwise from top left: Ann Long and her two grandsons present a wreath in honor of copilot J D Long and his comrades in the 392nd BG; the wreath in place at the Wall of the Missing; Ann Long and family.



*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∞

Joseph M. Barnes, 578, March 16, 2015

Howard E. Bjork, 576, February 5, 2015

Ann E. Gephard, widow of Donald C., 578, January 31, 2015

Dorothy R. Kotsifakis, widow of Pete G., 579, March 22, 2015

William C. McGuire II, Assoc., March 25, 2015