

392nd Bomb Group Memorial Association

NEWS

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BROTHERS

Several relatives served with the 392nd BG, including at least two sets of brothers. Here are their stories.

The Hurley Brothers

William F. Hurley, born in 1911, enlisted on 23 May 1942. Alec, two years younger, enlisted on the 25th. After attending engineering and gunnery school together, they were assigned to 1/Lt Robert L. Egan's crew, with William the engineer and Alec a gunner.

The men were initially sent to North Africa as a replacement crew for the 93rd BG, then to England for duty with the 389th. Bob recalled that after they had flown three missions from Hethel, "The 389th was sent back to North Africa. There were no extra airplanes for replacement crews so my crew was sent over to the 392nd" in early September 1943.

The 577th crew's first foray was a diversion mission on 23 Sept 1943. They flew regularly after that, including one mission where they had a very close call.

26 November 1943

According to VIII Bomber Command's Narrative of Operations, the mission on 26 Nov 1943—its 138th—was the "largest operation to date." Seven B-17 Combat Wings and two B-24 Wings (including the 392nd) attacked targets at Bremen, Germany, while two more B-17 Wings flew to targets near Paris.

The 392nd led the 14th CW with two 12-ship sections; the second section was stepped up and to the right. Planes were loaded with eight 500-pound General Purpose and 16 M-47 100-pound incendiary bombs.

Per the Field Order, "Crews will be especially checked for complete winter flying equipment in addition to electric suits. Particular attention is invited to checking guns, racks, turrets, bomb bay doors, etc., to insure best possible operation at extreme low temperatures expected."

392nd lead bombardier 2/Lt Walter F. Joachim reported,

"We were to drop from the flares of the B-17's third division. The altitude was to be 23,000 feet indicated. Due to the fact that the mission was to be a pathfinder mission it was necessary for us to follow close behind the B-17s. They led us in and climbed to an altitude of 28,000 feet. We followed them and in so doing pulled away from the rest of the division.

"At the target the formation was spread out all over the sky. Many difficulties were found in the group due to too high an operating altitude.

"I dropped my bombs from the B-17 flares and the ships that had followed dropped their bombs from mine due to vapor trails obscuring the flares. After bombs were away it was possible to observe from landmarks that we had hit the city.

"It is noted that higher than 23,000 feet the troubles a bombardier has are greatly increased. There were many frozen bomb doors and faulty releases."

Before they crossed the enemy coast, bombardier 2/Lt Morton Salsberg later wrote, 2/Lt Egan called the engineer (William) out of the top turret because the oil pressure on the #2 engine was quite low. He attempted to feather the

prop (i.e., turn the blades parallel to the direction of flight), but it ran away (spun wildly) instead.

"The ship lost altitude rapidly at a rate of about 2,000 feet per minute. It was obviously necessary to leave the formation and try to head back to England, if possible. Having been at 23,000 feet, at our rate of descent this would have been impossible. The pilot (or copilot) ordered all unnecessary equipment thrown overboard. Also that the bombs be dropped.

"The ship continued its rapid descent with no signs that the equipment was jettisoned, nor that the bombs dropped had

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The Egan crew in front of #42-7645, Poco Loco. Standing L-R: navigator 1/Lt Warren B. Harris; copilot 1/Lt Frank G. Basham; pilot 1/Lt Robert L. Egan; bombardier 2/Lt William L. Gray. Kneeling L-R: ball turret gunner S/Sgt John F. Salisbury; radio operator T/Sgt Frank B. Pope; tail gunner S/Sgt Billy S. Kennedy; waist gunner S/Sgt Alec Hurley; engineer T/Sgt William F. Hurley; waist gunner S/Sgt Olson Stognor.



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FROM THE EDITOR

2016 Reunion. There's still time to register for the October 2016 reunion in St. Louis. We'll have a large hospitality room; now we need to fill it with Crusaders! See <http://b24.net/reunion/default.htm> for the registration form and all the details.

Follow-Up. 392nd member Marge Braddock (widow of 578th Sqdn radio operator Bill Braddock) emailed about two articles in the March 2016 *News*. The first concerns Joseph M. Cook's last mission while aboard #42-94966, Madame Shoo Shoo. "I am very familiar with Madame Shoo Shoo from Bill and crewmate Norm Mellow's conversations.

"After Norm finished his combat tour as an engineer, he frequently helped crew chief Art Knipe, so was very familiar with his two planes. The first, Ford's Folly [#42-7466] went down on 11 Sept 1944 while on its 52nd mission. Art was now short a plane and Madame was assigned to him on the 17th. When she went down just a few weeks later he was bereft."

She then provided a story about commander Col Lorin Johnson from John Matt's autobiography, *Crewdog: A Saga of a Young American*. During the war, Matt flew with the 576th and 579th Sqdns as 2/Lt John Matishowski and was the navigator on 1/Lt John Beder's crew. I was so impressed with John's book that I included the anecdote and additional excerpts on pages 10-11. More will follow in the September 2016 issue.

Update from England. I received information from Jill Scott regarding recent action by the Trustees of the 392nd BG Memorial in Beeston. Husband Tom's health is such that he has resigned as an active Trustee and son Hugh has assumed that position. Henry Dennett, son of an RAF bomber pilot during the war (and the man who laid the 392nd BGMA wreath at the Memorial on Remembrance Sunday in 2014 and 2015) is also taking an active interest in the Memorial's upkeep.

This spring, a new person was hired to maintain the grounds. "Although he no longer lives in Beeston," Jill writes, "his family does and he maintains his ties to the village." His annual fee is several hundred pounds lower than the amount billed by his predecessor. Jill says this lower charge reflects "a very considerable amount of goodwill... The improvement can be seen!"

The conifer hedges that surround the Memorial (visible in the photo on page 12 in better days) are succumbing to a disease that is killing off similar hedges throughout England. "We have made the decision that the time has come when these must be taken out and replaced with a different type of hedge. This work will be done by volunteer labour led by Hugh and Henry" with the removal of the dead hedge this summer and replanting likely in the fall.

In hopes of offsetting part of the cost, Jill "placed a paragraph in our *Church & Village* magazine ... [that is] distributed to every house in the 9 villages in the Upper Nar Group of parishes [and] sent a letter to 25 local companies and farmers. The response...has been heartening, more than £735.00 to date. When considering the present financial constraints (not to mention the uncertainty over the outcome of the Referendum, something you must have heard about!) I think this response demonstrates the recognition local business people have of the support your countrymen gave this country during the last war, and the importance of the 392nd Memorial in this village. It will help us to continue looking after the Memorial and grounds in the way in which all of you and we want them to be maintained."

I speak for every 392nd BGMA member when I thank Tom for his many years of dedicated service to our Memorial and extend our appreciation to Hugh and Henry for taking on new roles in its upkeep. We especially thank the local community for their support in the project to replant the hedge.

If any member would like to contribute, please mail a check to me (address at upper left) payable to "392nd BGMA" with "Memorial Maintenance" in the memo line. I will ensure the funds are forwarded to the Memorial Trustees.

French Legion of Honor. Two members told me they have applied for this French medal. 578th pilot William D. Case qualifies because he flew the mission to Royan, France, on 15 Apr 1945. He remembers that the bombs were filled with napalm while they were in the bomb bays. Some overflowed and he was really worried about what might happen once aloft. He also recalls that Col Johnson had a rule that if you were driving a vehicle on base and passed someone who was walking, you had to stop and give him a ride.

576th tail gunner John Rumancik is also eligible for the medal due to a flight to Royan, but his was on 14 Apr 1945.

He recently took a ride in a B-24 for the first time since he walked away from one after his flight home at the end of the war. When the Collings Foundation's B-24 flew in to Albuquerque, New Mexico, in early April 2016, John put on his leather jacket with the Crusader patch and took his wife to visit "his" plane. After seeing the patch, one of the pilots immediately said, "Oh, Wendling!" John was an instant celebrity. He and his wife were given free tours

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President's Message



Those who have attended the 392nd's reunions in the past few years are familiar with the soul-stirring 2AD Anthem and Fanfare. To those who have not heard this music, it is rendered in brass and begins with the National Anthem followed by a recording of B-24s taking off on a mission. After that comes the Air Force Anthem, ending with a soul-searching

note that soars upward and gradually fades out. To me, this emulates the fourth element of the Last Man Formation which soars upward and disappears.

We were lucky to have obtained a copy of it and it is always a part of our reunion activities.

It was first performed at the 1990 2AD reunion at Norwich. David Hastings, as usual the head of the Brit side of the meeting, commissioned Ken Meazey, leader of the Anglian Big Band, to compose it to be played at the Cathedral service. I was there and I feel certain that every American present in that magnificent Cathedral, amid the pomp and pageantry that only the Brits can muster, felt the hair raise on the back of his or her neck.

I had felt that the 392nd should send Ken some kind of indication of how we appreciate his work, but David tells me that he passed away this June 2nd at the age of 87.

As Judy Garland once sang, "Meet Me in St. Louis" and we'll hear the Fanfare again.

Blue Skies,
Jim Goar

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of the B-24 and B-17 and went through each from nose to tail. Many people asked questions about his wartime experiences.

Then, the pilot asked John if he wanted to go for a ride... for free. As his father later spoke about this adventure and being in the tail turret once again, son John Jr said it "was like watching a young kid with his first ice cream cone. I reveled in his excitement from this. Mom was also excited and was so proud of him and how he was enjoying it. They spent 9 hours there. Not bad for 90½ year-old youngsters!"

The Ploughshare. I got several emails concerning The Ploughshare, a pub in Beeston familiar to everyone assigned to the 392nd BG.

Its owner intends to tear down the historic pub (parts date to 1620) and replace it with houses. Villagers have formed a non-profit company, Beeston Community Enterprises Ltd, and are working feverishly to raise the £350,000 needed to purchase the pub plus additional funds to refurbish it.

Their goal is to turn The Ploughshare into a Community Pub owned and run by local shareholders.

More information about the effort and how you can help is

available at www.beestonploughshare.com, on Facebook at Save Beeston Ploughshare or on twitter at the_ploughshare. Please contact beestonploughshare@gmail.com if you have questions.

The website notes the 392nd's presence in Beeston during WWII and says, "The Ploughshare was where the men relaxed and socialised. Some say the pub is home to a ghost of one of the 747 airmen who gave their lives to the war."

www.b24.net Update

by webmaster Bob Books

On May 5, 2016 we added an aircrew roster spreadsheet. It includes 79,308 entries of all 3,914 airmen sorted by last name with the dates, target names, aircraft numbers and squadron numbers for each mission they flew. The link is listed on the main page of www.b24.net and under the Resources/392nd BG Questions section of the website.

In addition, the website includes:

- A spreadsheet of all 459 aircraft flown by the 392nd BG with their complete serial number, squadron, call letter, name, date assigned to the 392nd, date removed from the 392nd inventory, number of missions flown and final disposition. Many entries have links to photos, nose art and Missing Air Crew Reports (MACRs). The ships are listed in numerical order *by the last three digits of their serial number*.

- All 64 MACRs listed both by date and by pilot's name and linked to their associated mission page.

- The complete crew load lists and mission summaries for all 285 combat missions and additional non-combat sorties, including diversions and trolley missions. Crew name entries are listed throughout the mission pages, each with position, squadron, and aircraft flown. The crew load lists also show who was flying in each plane on each mission.

- Our Honor Roll with 1,447 names showing rank, position, fate, date, MACR, aircraft, and hometown of those KIA, captured or interned, in alphabetical order by last name.

We continue to add photos of the aircrews and ground support personnel. So far, we have posted at least one photo for over 69% of the combat airmen. We have a roster of 3,052 ground personnel, but far fewer photos of them....

If our website does not currently include a WWII-era photo of "your" Crusader in uniform *but you have one*, please email a jpg scan to me at books@b24.net.

Our website is the result of thousands and thousands of hours of work by dedicated 392nd BGMA volunteers AND hundreds of veterans and relatives who shared their photos and memories.

Our goal is to keep this priceless memorial treasure of the 392nd Bomb Group available for future generations and we have a fund set up to do just that. Please consider making a donation for that cause. Simply use the form on page 4, check the "Donation" box, write "website" in the memo line and mail it as directed.

All donations will be placed in the Website fund and used solely for that purpose.

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A feathered prop.

helped. All flak suits, ammunition boxes, and extra ammunition were thrown out. After approximately five minutes of effort, #2 prop was feathered, altitude 15,000.

"With the plane still losing altitude, #4 prop suddenly ran away. The pilot ordered all the guns thrown overboard despite our proximity to the coast of Holland. The navigator [2/Lt Warren B. Harris] cautioned against the removal of all guns, and I left the nose gun in.

"Still losing altitude, I realized that the ship would either ditch or turn back to Holland. I inquired about the bombsight. The copilot asked me if I could remove it. I did so, throwing it out the bomb bay. The operation was conducted under oxygen conditions.

"At approximately 10,000 feet, the ship was brought under control (#4 prop having finally been feathered) and flew on an even keel. The pilot asked the navigator the direction to the nearest coast (which was Holland). The pilot then decided that he would attempt to return to our base on only #1 and #3 engines. We did so after much trouble.

"In the opinion of all concerned, the work of the pilot was an extra-ordinary performance. No one member of the crew thought the ship would be able to return to our base, at the moment of the trouble."

One 577th a/c was lost. #42-7493, Gregory the Great, with pilot 2/Lt Henry P. Bolick Jr's crew aboard, was last seen having difficulty staying in formation as the Group crossed the enemy coast going in. It crashed just off shore at Friedrichskoog-Spitze, Germany, with everyone killed.

11 April 1944

The Hurley brothers did not fly every mission together, so when the other men in the Egan crew finished their combat tour on 21 Mar 1944, both Hurleys still had a few more combat missions to complete.

On 11 Apr 1944, the 392nd's target was an airfield just outside the city of Bernburg, Germany. William was flying with 1/Lt Thomas F. McNichol's crew and Alec with 1/Lt Robert D. Copp's.

Between 15 and 20 FW-190 and Me-109 enemy fighters pressed their attacks from the IP to the target. Flak during the bomb run was intense and accurate.

Three planes did not return.

1/Lt McNichol was the lead pilot for the 577th, flying #42-52754. Before reaching the Dutch coast, he contacted deputy lead 2/Lt Dexter Tiefenthal by radio and reported that he was having supercharger problems. The ship left formation soon after and headed toward England. No trace of plane or crew was ever found.

It was believed that 579th pilot 1/Lt Walter B. Sherwood's plane, #42-52654, Nightlife Nellie, was hit by bombs dropped by another Group flying overhead. It immediately caught fire, turned over on its back, and went into a spin. Only two men—engineer T/Sgt Raymond E. Todd and radio operator T/Sgt Donald C. Mohr—were able to bail out.

The 576th's 2/Lt Edward J. Conneran crew was attacked head-on by enemy fighters as they began the bomb run. Copilot 2/Lt George P. Callaghan was killed by shell fragments and both the #3 engine and the interphone failed. As the a/c left the formation, ball turret gunner S/Sgt Leon K. Ross later reported, their ship was hit repeatedly from "every direction" and caught fire. Soon after the nine remaining men bailed out, #42-109835 exploded in the air.

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392nd BGMA MEMBERSHIP FORM

Please look at the mailing label. Your membership status is shown directly after your name. **"16" or higher means your membership is current. Thank you!** LM means Life Member and FRND means that you receive the News with compliments of the 392nd BGMA. Send this form and your check (payable to 392nd BGMA) to Annette Tison, 9107 Wood Pointe Way, Fairfax Station, VA 22039. You may also join or renew on-line at <http://www.b24.net/392nd/join.htm>.

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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Later

William and the men in the McNichol crew were killed on their 25th mission, which would have been the last in their combat tour. Their names are inscribed on the Wall of the Missing at Cambridge American Cemetery in England.

Alec—who at this point could hope that his brother was a POW—still had missions to fly. He had about a week off, then resumed work.

He completed his combat tour by flying both missions on April 27. In late May, he was placed on temporary assignment with the 10th Station Complement Sqdn for duty with the AA Defense Unit. It is not known when he transferred back to the US.

Birdie Schmidt, program director for the American Red Cross Aero Club at Wendling, later wrote of an incident that occurred around D-Day. “A donation came to the Red Cross Prisoners of War Fund in the form of a biscuit tin filled up with British coppers. When the money was counted, we found £5-5-2½ (5 pounds, 5 shillings and 2½ pence). S/Sgt Alec Hurley brought it to us. His brother, T/Sgt William Hurley, and he were on the same crew. One day brother Bill flew with another crew and become MIA. Maybe Bill would turn up a POW. At any rate, his buddies hoped the coppers would help. This story inspired others to contribute their coppers in ensuing months.”

Bob Egan said, “The disappearance of Tom McNichol’s plane was a double tragedy for the Egan crew. Not only did we lose one of our own men, but the Egan and McNichol crews had shared Nissen huts and were all close friends.

“The Hurley brothers were memorable men. In later years, at national conventions and 392nd stand-alone gatherings, people would recall the two tall, gray-haired flight crew members. I’m proud to say I was their pilot.”

The Darling Brothers

Louis Darling was a photo lab technician while his younger brother Lockwood flew with a combat crew.

Lockwood

After enlisting on 10 Apr 1942, Lockwood became the engineer on 2/Lt Paul F. Shea’s crew. They came to the 392nd BG per military orders dated 4 Dec 1943 and were assigned to the 579th Sqdn.

Their first mission was 24 Dec 1943. Lockwood and his crew flew regularly from then on, including to Gotha on 24 Feb 1944.

On 6 Mar 1944, the Shea crew took off to Genshagen, Germany, aboard #42-7473. Visibility was just 100 yards with a layer of fog to about 50 feet above ground.

Flying Control saw their plane clear the runway. One minute later, they heard an explosion. It was determined that the a/c had risen above the fog layer, then likely had a power failure and crashed about 2,000 yards from the end of the runway, near Great Dunham. All ten men were killed.

Louis

Louis was a commercial artist when he joined the military on 1 Jan 1942. Orders from Station 145 at Rackheath dated 17 Feb 1944 transferred him to the 392nd where he was assigned to the 579th Sqdn for a time and then to Group HQ.

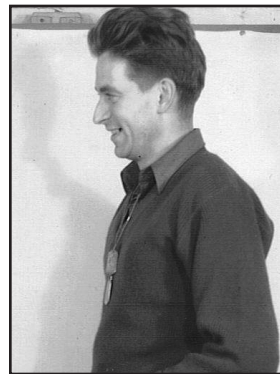
He was with the 392nd for the rest of the war.

Harvey DeVoe was also a photo lab technician, but in the 578th. He remembers Louis as “a private fellow” who “wasn’t a big talker.” He does recall a conversation when Louis told him about his brother’s death. “We talked a bit—but not much,” Harvey says, “and that was it. I’m sure it hit him hard and I didn’t push him for any details.”

Due to wartime security and the natural separation of air and ground crews, Harvey doesn’t know if the brothers were aware they were at the same base for about two weeks or if Louis only realized it when he learned the circumstances of Lockwood’s death.

After the War

Once stateside, Louis returned to his art. While working for William Morrow and Company, he was assigned to illustrate Beverly Cleary’s first book, *Henry Huggins*, in 1950. That was the start of a wonderful partnership that ended only with Louis’s death in 1970. In between came twelve books filled with childhood favorites Ramona and Beezus Quimby, Ellen Tibbits, Ribsby the dog, motorcycle-riding Ralph S. Mouse and many more.



Above: 392nd BG Photo Lab Technician S/Sgt Louis Darling. The illustrations show the wide range of his artistic talent: Ramona; Ribsby; Pinwheels Flying.



If you’re near Amherst, Massachusetts, between now and 27 Nov 2016, The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art is
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having an exhibit titled *Louis Darling: Drawing the Words of Beverly Cleary*. The exhibit marks the 100th anniversary of Louis's birth in Stamford, Connecticut, on 26 Apr 1916 as well as Beverly's 100th birthday on 12 Apr 2016.

Per the Museum's website, "After completing his art studies at the Grand Central School of Art in New York City in 1937, [Louis] went into commercial and fine art. In the 1940s, he began illustrating children's and young adult books, collaborating with numerous artists and authors. In addition to illustrating his own stories and Cleary's books, Darling worked in tandem with his wife, Lois Darling, to illustrate Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962). His signature style won him a John Burroughs Medal, awarded annually to the author of a distinguished book of natural history, for *The Gull's Way* in 1965."

"Darling's vision, matched with Cleary's words, helped define these stories as modern classics. Her timeless themes—a botched birthday party, a missing dog, anxiety on the first day of school, and a father losing his job—are as relevant today as they were in the 1950s."

Author Tony DiTerlizzi curated the exhibit. In an article titled *Once Upon a Time It Was 1950* on The Horn Book website, he writes that "in recent editions Darling's illustrations no longer accompany Cleary's texts. His art has been gradually replaced as the books are re-branded, re-packaged, and re-launched in an attempt to appeal to new audiences.

"...Nevertheless, there is a charm, an allure, of viewing a bygone era through the lens of Darling's art. I get the same feeling when looking at a *Saturday Evening Post* cover by Norman Rockwell."

DiTerlizzi concludes, "Though we are celebrating Beverly Cleary's 100th birthday, Louis Darling should not be lost or forgotten. His drawings are as vibrant, chaotic, and lively as ever—a reflection of childhood from yesteryear to share with children of today."

Col Lawrence G. Gilbert: Last 392nd BG Commander and First 392nd BGMA President

Many 392nd BGMA members will remember Lawrence Gilbert since he was our President from the Association's start in December 1985 through November 1994, when he was promoted to Chairman. He served ably in that position until his death in March 2009.

He was also an original member of the Group and served as Operations Officer, Deputy Group Commander/Air Executive and as its last CO.

His interest in flying began at an early age. He was born in a farmhouse near Pleasant Lake, Indiana, that happened to be on the airmail route between Cleveland and Chicago.

It was during the 1920s and few farms had electricity. The government came to the Gilbert farm with an offer to bring electricity to their home if they could put in a beacon tower. The tower was needed as airmail pilots flew point to point at night, following light beacons on their visual flight path. His

first job, for which the government paid him three dollars per month, was to look for burnt out bulbs in the beacon tower.

After the tower was put in, a steady stream of single-engine, open cockpit biplanes carrying mail regularly flew over the farm. The young Gilbert was often out in the field waving to the pilot with a sheet on a broomstick, watching and hoping for waggled wings. This experience was the beginning of a lifetime love of airplanes and flying.

Gilbert studied aeronautical engineering from 1938-1940 at Tri-State College in Angola, Indiana, where he learned to fly. He entered Air Corps cadet training in February 1941 at San Antonio, Texas.

Col Gilbert stayed in the Air Force after WWII service and had various command and staff assignments in the Military Air Transport Service, including six months with the Berlin Air Lift and a two year tour in the Philippines.

He retired from military service in 1961, moved to Winter Park, Florida, and was involved with Air Groves Inc. (for active and retired Air Force members) and in citrus grove and hotel management.

Here is part of his 392nd BG story. It comes from an interview on 16 Sept 1989 by 392nd BGMA researcher Greg Hatton. It has been condensed and edited to fit this space.

I graduated from flying school in September 1941, just a little before Pearl Harbor. I had three months duty in Orlando, Florida, flying twin-engine Douglas B-18s.

After December 7, our unit immediately started anti-submarine patrol off the coast. The German subs were quite a threat to allied and American shipping around the Key West area and up towards New York and a number of ships were sunk just off the coast. My submarine patrol continued until February 1942, when 30 of us were assigned to Pendleton, Oregon, to join the 34th BG (a four-engine B-17 outfit).

I had about 300 hours total flying time, including flight school. Within a week, I was miraculously designated an instructor pilot on B-17s, to instruct and check out pilots just out of flying school who had less flight time than I. We alternated between Pendleton and Tucson, Arizona, before being assigned to Spokane, Washington.

The mission was the same: to train youngsters fresh out of flying school and assemble them with a crew. We had bombardier instructors, navigator instructors, and so on. We were attempting to train a complete crew and have it join a Group in its final phase of training. That was a new concept which was later expanded and exploited with a separate entire command. We were a quasi-operational bombing group. I guess we could have gone over to England as we were and done a creditable job, but for lack of an organizational plan.

We were in Blythe, California, in December 1942. About a month later, very suddenly, orders came to report for duty and help form the 392nd Bomb Group. It was formed, first on paper, then it was given a number at Tucson. There, a handful of people came in (ground and air) and we started to flesh it out.

I was assigned to it along with my Squadron Commander, then LtCol Irvine Rendle. He had gone to flying school back in 1937, but there were not enough slots for commissioned

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officers in the lean, mean Army Air Corps of that day. He did a stint with the airlines, but as the war clouds gathered over Europe, he was recalled back to full active duty. Bo Rendle was my CO with the 34th BG and he was an excellent leader. He was to become an inspirational combat leader.

In those days, things moved fast. He was quickly elevated from Squadron CO to Group CO. I went from Instructor-Pilot to Operations Officer. The Intelligence and Communications Officers from the 34th, who had been with him since Pendleton, helped take command of the 392nd.

Rendle and quite a number of us were set to go overseas with the 390th BG (a B-17 outfit). At the time we were snatched out of Blythe, we were flying B-17s, but Rendle and I had a few hours on B-24s. That may be part of the reason they put the finger on him to start up the 392nd.

I well remember when he called me up in the middle of the night and said, "I've just been given command, not of the 390th, but of the 392nd Bomb Group. I'm taking a four person cadre down to Tucson to start the Group. Would you go with me?"

It was a bit of a psychological shock and it raised my eyebrows. Hey, you're not going overseas with those B-17s guys, you're starting a new B-24 unit!

I stayed with Rendle through the training period at Tucson, El Paso and Alamogordo and finally Topeka, Kansas. There, we formed the Advance Party and left for England 30 days ahead of the rest of the Group.

Capt Caley, Lt Elder, LtCol Rendle and myself departed on 16 Jul 1943. When we first landed, General Doolittle flew up from London.

We spent a month at the Headquarters of Bomber Command, where we were briefed by the Eighth Air Force staff on how the war was being fought. We would face many

challenges when our Group got over there.

I was the third CO for the 392nd. We each had two deputies—the ground executive officer and the air exec. The Group Commander was, naturally, the overall administrator and leader of the base. There had to be one voice to speak for that base. Principal staff assistants (ground and air) were under them.

The Squadron Commander's sphere of responsibility would be to decide "who is going to fly tomorrow." If his squadron happened to be assigned to lead the Group that day, then he would have to select the lead crew for the six or nine element section. He might say, "Cassell...no, he's on leave so I'll have to select another crew." If it was a difficult mission, then he would try particularly hard to pick the best crew he had. If his squadron was not leading the

Group, then he wouldn't worry quite so much about who was leading his squadron.

He would also concern himself about who was on that lead crew's wing. If the lead crew had to abort, the deputy lead would slide in and take over. The deputy crew was even more critical on a mission where the squadron had the lead.

Everything was operating at a terrific pace...it was almost frantic. At that time, I was the Group Operations Officer. That meant briefing all the crews. You know, walking down the center aisle to the podium, turning around and pulling down the screen, away from the map. I would point and say, "Gentlemen, this is the target for today... this is the bomb load for today..."

I didn't get into a lot of details, like the radio call signs or how much anti-aircraft fire to expect. That would be covered by the Intelligence or Communications Officers. I would give the formations: "The 579th will be leading today...the 578th will be flying high and right...the 577th will be low and left."

The center was called the slot position. Originally, we'd fly four squadrons with the fourth squadron down low and to the rear. This proved to be an awfully unwieldy formation. When you tried to make a gentle turn, the formation could get scattered. We cut it down to three squadrons. Nine airplanes were cut down to six per squadron for the same reasons. Nine planes proved too difficult to turn in formation. The high right element would slide way out there and almost get lost out of sight. The low, left squadron would slide underneath you and take ten minutes to let 'em get back out on top of the division.

Quick maneuvers were impossible, unlike a fighter plane who could just swing over. A bomber formation had to be turned very gently and the lead crews were briefed along those lines.

I would fly as the Command Pilot and alternate with the Group CO. Initially, for the first five or six missions, we'd be in the right seat (where the copilot normally sat). That was the custom with the Groups when we got there. We and the other Groups started finding problems and finally the word came down from Second Air Division that: Henceforth, the Command Pilot should stand up between the seats of the pilot and copilot for the complete duration of the mission, from take off.

Basically, our job was to look around the formation and get the Group together, so that we were in the right position in the bomber stream. That meant we were so busy with the radio that we were no help to the pilot. Meanwhile, after an hour or so, the fatigue factor would set in, because the pilot was as busy as a one armed paper hanger, flying the plane. Normally, the copilot would help in the chores of flying the aircraft. When the Command Pilot was in that seat, he was in no position to deal with the aircraft.

So it came to pass that we stood up between the seats, in a kind of crouch. We couldn't stand up, full length, for eight to nine hours after takeoff. You got plenty tired, but the strain was such that you didn't think about it until after you landed.

Air Exec Duties

The Group Commander held the ultimate responsibility. If
See COL GILBERT on page 8



392nd BG Operations Officer Maj Gilbert on 4 Nov 1943.

COL GILBERT from page 7

he had to go away, on temporary duty to Bomber Command, the Air Exec would assume command of the Group. The Ground Exec remained in his position.

I remember a difficult time when Rendle took leave for a week. His last words before leaving were, "Don't let them take any of our good people." Sure enough, while he was gone, orders came down for us to transfer a lead bombardier out.

The 14th Combat Wing covered our three Groups—the 44th, the 392nd and the 491st. At Division Headquarters, if some other outfit suffered heavy losses... why, they'd reach down into an experienced Group like ours and transfer someone out.

I objected and said that he was vital to the performance of his squadron and we couldn't spare him. Well, they wouldn't take no for an answer. I tried to stonewall it because Col Rendle had been quite emphatic—in fact, blunt—about that point. We wanted to keep our Group's integrity, so I held out for as long as I could. The thing finally went over the top, when the Wing Commander insisted, in no uncertain terms, "That man must be transferred. The demands of the job are greater here and you'll have to find someone to replace him."

Command authority being what it is, I had to comply with the request. I was not looking forward to Col Rendle's return, but at least I knew we had enough good men within the 392nd to fill the gap.

[That bombardier may have been Maj Joseph B. Whittaker, who was transferred to 2AD HQ in April 1944.]

Your job as an Air Exec is to look for men who are interested in doing their assignments as well as they possibly can. The Air Corps, at that time, had many men who were not there of their own free will. My job, as administrator, was to get to know my men as well as time permitted...to find out who was willing to be trained for higher responsibilities, or a job that you had a need for. New people were being sent in with limited amounts of training and we had to bring them up to an operational level. This was done on a squadron level, where the Commanders could get to know their people and find out if a man was willing, eager and able.

"If I give this man a tough job to do, can I dismiss this job from my mind and know that he's going to carry it out? Or do I have to check on him tomorrow and the next day to see how he's doing? Did I give the right man the job?"

That's a crude description of an administrator or foreman. The foreman very quickly finds out who he can depend on and who he has to watch constantly. We were lucky to have a steady flow of good men to put into key positions within the squadrons.

Formation Assembly

It's ironic, but the beginning of the missions was perhaps the most demanding in terms of skill and teamwork, especially if the weather was bad.

The assembly procedure began with the lead aircraft climbing to a preassigned altitude and reaching the Group's assembly beacon. We would start a wide circle to the left, making sure not to encroach on a neighboring Group's assembly. The next aircraft would come up thirty seconds later, find his leader and begin a ten mile circle through the

crowded skies.

At frequent intervals, the leader would fire flares out of the top of his airplane to help the rest of the Group converge on him. There were bunches of aircraft milling around and as you came up through the clouds you might be too far away to read numbers or tail markings. You'd head for the radio beacon and look for the green or orange flare that was your color for the day.

If everything went well, it took about 18 minutes for 36 airplanes to complete take offs. The assembly was usually allotted 25 to 30 minutes to get completely and tightly formed and start to the next checkpoint. Timing was critical. If you were leading the Wing, you'd arrive at that checkpoint first and the other two Groups behind you followed at about two minute intervals.

The Wing assembly point had a built in arrangement if you were running late. The maneuver patterns were laid out such that you could cut a corner. To pick up time, the Group could cut that corner, move inside and arrive at the proper place, at the proper time. If they cut it too hard and got there about the same time as the other lead Group did, it was time for evasive action. A wide sweep out to the right and back would kill a minute or two; then you could fall into proper place behind them.

Shortly after we got into operation, each Group was assigned a "War Weary" fighter aircraft. This was to help with the strays during the Group formation and to find the Group leader. You could fly right up next to him; then, if you saw one of your people maybe lost and way off in the distance, you would buzz right over to him and waggle your wings. Radio communication was held to a minimum, so you'd point "this way" and take off. The stray would immediately turn and head in the right direction.

After the Group was formed, the fighter aircraft's job was to be a shepherd dog weaving in the strays and helping the lead aircraft find his proper place in the bomber stream as it crossed the Channel. If you were in bad weather or running a little late, you couldn't always be sure that the Group ahead was the one you were supposed to be tacking on to. That meant shooting on ahead to confirm their identity and buzzing back through the clouds to find your guys again. Our formation might be over-running the Group ahead, so we might have to swing way out to kill time. It was the air traffic control of its day.

We had a P-47 and the Group Commander, I and the Squadron leaders were checked out in it. Since the fighter had no guns—and we had no training in fighter tactics—we would leave the Group at the far side of the Channel to come back home.

US Fighter Escorts

Normally, there were regular fighter escorts (P-47s) almost from the beginning of bomber operations. The first few missions in late 1942 may not have had escorts, but by early '43, P-47s were there and available. The problem was that it did not have adequate range to go with the bombers into Germany. Its gas consumption was heavy; even with a drop tank, it had to turn back and go home before the target was reached. The Luftwaffe would wait until our fighters turned and then would pounce on the bombers in great strength.

See COL GILBERT on page 9

COL GILBERT from page 8

We also had P-38s for escorts, but they were not very effective in our theater of operations. Aside from the problems of range, there were technical problems. It couldn't turn as tightly as the German fighters at high altitude. Without an engine up in front of him to provide cockpit heat, the pilots were half frozen.

By April 1944, the P-51 had made its appearance and was beginning to make its mark. We first had them as early as January, in small numbers—but then they came in an avalanche. In spite of this, breaks in coverage still happened. A fighter group was supposed to do an escort job but might have been late in taking off, perhaps because their base was fogged in. Until they caught up with the bombers, the Group would be without their assigned cover. The Germans could see all this on their radar, and then...Wham!

There was a concentrated drive, starting in February 1944 and lasting until April, to try to render the Luftwaffe an impotent force. They wanted to eliminate the threat to our D-Day landing forces. By April, things had changed to where their fighters had to be careful to choose their place of attack...and that meant looking for breaks in our coverage. Loose formations were also prime targets because of their decreased firepower.

The esteem in which the American fighter pilots held the B-24s was not high; the B-17, by the nature of the beast, was able to fly tighter, more compact formations, than we could. Most B-24 pilots will tell you that it was a difficult aircraft to hold in formation. It was physically demanding and after 20 or 30 minutes at altitude, you were worn out.

Initially, we attempted to fly with the B-17s because there were not sufficient numbers for them to route us independently. From July of 1943, we were scheduled by necessity with the Forts because of the limited fighter cover available. They were bombing at 27,000 feet, which was four to five thousand feet higher than the optimum altitude for the B-24. It was not a comfortable ride, although we could stay with them by pulling excessive power. The wing lost a lot of its efficiency up there and we burned up tremendous amounts of fuel. It was something like a boat on a lake... just mushing along. The tail would drop down and that nose would tip up and the engines would suffer badly.

We realized that until fighter cover came along, of the nature of the P-51, we had to limit our penetrations to areas where the P-47s could go with us. This way, we could acquire a target at 22,000 feet and the airplane would perform much better. You could use cruise settings that would conserve fuel, at that altitude. When the Mustangs came along, we went deeper and deeper into Germany, with fighter cover all the way.



Top brass are debriefed after the 392nd BG returned from a mission to Brunswick, Germany, on 19 May 1944. L-R: likely 578th Sqdn lead bombardier 1/Lt Walter F. Joachim, an unidentified general officer, 392nd CO Col Lorin L. Johnson, 14th CW Commander Gen Leon W. Johnson, and Operations Officer LtCol Lawrence Gilbert.

In April 1944, we were putting up all-out assaults with the primary targets being German airfields and aircraft factories. Hamm was a big railroad junction, which was, of course, heavily defended. Junction yards, such as the one in Berlin, were a pretty high priority. We had to make sure that the Germans were unable to reinforce the beach-heads at Normandy.

On 1 Apr 1944, the target briefing was for Ludwigshafen chemical plants. It was very bad weather in Germany and the mission was led by a Pathfinder radar ship. The formation

See COL GILBERT on page 10

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

COL GILBERT from page 9

was split up by the time they reached Lake Constance on the Swiss-German border and unaware they were off course. We ended up bombing Schaffhausen, a few miles inside Switzerland. It turned into an international incident and there was a big board of investigation. It was, fortunately, a rare occurrence, but it marked the beginning of a period where we ranged far and wide over enemy territory.

There were several occasions when German fighters followed our bombers back to England. Towards the end of the month [22 Apr 1944], there was an unusually late mission to Hamm, which encountered stiff resistance from fighters and flak. The returning aircraft were coming home in the dark and when the fighter escort had left, they thought they were in safe territory. The attack occurred when the bombers had dispersed and were getting ready to land. It seems the Germans had been flying above the formation and there was some kind of a snafu with the British radar. Normally, they would have picked up unfriendly fighters coming back across the Channel.

These attacks were generally ineffective, but there was one desperation raid in 1945, on a crystal clear night, when a single German fighter came across and strafed us. Our B-24s were lined up along the dispersal area, all silver and glistening in the moonlight. This was in contrast to the olive drab of 1944. It must have been quite a sight to that German pilot. Streaking across the Channel, perhaps from the Dutch coast somewhere, he had remained at low altitude. About seven of our airplanes were heavily damaged and put out of commission. Four or five more got shot up to the point that they didn't fly for at least two weeks.



#42-50390 after being strafed by a German fighter pilot on 20 Mar 1945. The ship was repaired and flew back to the US in June.

25-year old with what might be considered a pretty heavy responsibility. At times I couldn't believe the decisions that were entrusted to me; then I'd look around at the upper echelon, who were only a few years older than me. It was a very sobering experience and it's hard to put into words what you feel when we lost crews.

You didn't dare let it dwell in your mind for long; chances are that by the time you found out you had lost six crews, you were well into planning for the next mission. At the end of April 1944, we even had a day with two missions, a very rare thing. The men on those crews could well have been just names and numbers so maybe it did not have an

Our own anti-aircraft guns started firing. Then the RAF night fighters showed up and attempted to chase down the German. Our guys were reacting to everything and shooting at the RAF as well as the German. It was a panic situation at Wendling that night.

We went over to England in 1943 and I was a young



Lawrence G. Gilbert in 1943.

immediate impact on you. The weight of the job was at times, inexorable and crushing. There had to be enough crews ready to fly the mission, and we were accountable to put up 27 aircraft the next day. One was left to his own devices in dealing with losses.

I stayed in the service until 1961, but my years with the 392nd Bomb Group were the greatest experience of my life.

After a visit to the 392nd BG Memorial decades

after the war, Col Gilbert said, "This brings back a flood of memories. Thoughts went through my mind of the people that we'd lost flying off those runways and memories of the men that were there, the ground crews that worked night and day to support us, all of it without question or complaint.

"We owed so much to those people that we had there. Every last man gave his all to the best of his ability."

Crewdog: A Saga of a Young American

by John Matt

2/Lt John Matishowski flew with the 576th and 579th Sqdns as navigator on 1/Lt John Beder's crew. After the war, he changed his last name and continued flying in the Air Force. Crewdog covers his childhood and service during WWII through military retirement in 1963. The book is available at amazon.com.

John writes descriptively of his arrival at Station 118 in late September 1944 and his experiences there. The following excerpts have been lightly edited for space and content.

First Impressions

The Group Commander, Col Lorin Johnson, was standing there waiting for us as we came over the tail gate of the G.I. truck that had taken us from the railroad station to the base. He looked young enough to be one of us kids and he probably noted our surprise when we saw the full chickens on his cap and on the shoulders of his leather A-2 jacket. The Colonel was a handsome, medium sized guy who gave us a Hollywood smile and a firm handshake and made us think he had been holding up operations until we got there, just the way he did with all the new crews. He looked and acted exactly as a Group Commander should, which also means you behaved yourself when he was around.

Some of the brass from our new and immediate home, the 576th Bomb Sqdn, came out and we all talked for a while. They had the confident, old-pro look of men who were just about finished with their combat tour, and carried no hint of the ultimate doom which would soon befall some of them not long after we got there.

Next, the truck driver took us to the sergeant's quarters,

See CREWDog on page 11

CREWDOG from page 10

where our guys were to share a medium-sized hut with another crew. Then they took us to our huts, all painted in British brown-green-black camouflage. We were set up two to a hut, each with corrugated iron sides which curved from floor to ceiling and with just enough room for two cots, two folding chairs, a folding table somebody left behind and one of those—if you'll excuse the expression—goddamn stoves. The stove was our only source of heat, and as the winter approached, keeping the thing going got to occupy our minds almost as much as combat.

We were allotted one box of coal per week which we lined up for at the fenced-in coal pile behind the latrine on specified days and later on, we made individual sorties to the pile on unspecified days. Can you imagine—officers and gentlemen sneaking up to a hole in the fence at dusk, looking furtively around as we picked out nice, goose-egg sized lumps and dropped them into sacks which we hid under our coats as we sauntered back to our huts. "But, dammit, we're combat men and deserve to be warm," we would think, with just a little tinge of guilt.

Meanwhile, on that first day at Wendling, we dropped off our gear and bedding and had the driver take us to the Officer's Club. It too was painted in British camouflage colors, a low, square building like the Group headquarters, with black-out painted windows. To walk through the door was to be suddenly thrust back in time, to the movie *Dawn Patrol* perhaps, the version with Errol Flynn, with a bunch of young, clean-cut flyboys talking and laughing at the bar at the left of the large rectangular room. There was a big sooted-up fireplace in the center of the wall across from the main entrance with a couple of flyers sitting on a beat-up couch, sipping and talking. On the right were more beat-up couches and stuffed chairs, with more flyboys, and beyond them, the entrance to the dining room. In the corner behind the stuffed chairs was an old, crank-up Victrola and a pile of records which I am sure some interior decorator had thrown in for atmosphere.

Nobody, but nobody wanted to talk about combat missions. The old heads who were well along in their tour had a lot of questions about what things were like back in the States and gave us a lot of hard, usable information concerning social activities as it involved English girls.

Even the newer crews, who didn't have a lot of information about social activities, didn't want to talk about combat. They were the ones who taught us how to steal coal and how to hold on to your own bicycle even though they all looked alike when the club closed. The same problem applied to your hat, which was thrown into the checkroom when you arrived;

we were told that the only crewmen who finished their tour with the same hat they started with were the ones who left ten minutes before the barkeep called "Time Please!" There wasn't much use worrying about it; the only ones who did were those who made a fetish of wearing their own hat.

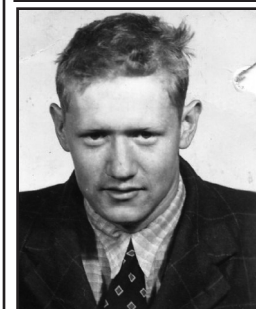
We slept a little late the next morning, and my first impression when we awoke was that an earthquake was taking place. The metal sides of the hut shook, the stuff on the shelves bounced around, the very ground vibrated with a low, rumbling sound. "What the hell?" I started to say, when Sam [likely copilot 2/Lt John A. Samsell], in his usual calm way, said, "The formation is just about together and they're passing overhead." He was right, as he usually was, and we listened as the thunder peaked and then started to diminish as they headed for the coast.

Our first move was to get dressed and hitch a ride to the supply hut, where we bought bicycles that belonged to crewmen who had finished up and departed for home, or to guys who sat in some Stalag, or to guys who were finished with bicycles forever. Then we pedaled down to the Club and showered and had some breakfast, which consisted mostly of "square eggs" which came from the powdered egg can and were made into square omelets. We ate them along with big, thin toasted slices of English bread and G.I. coffee, which was soon to make a tea drinker out of me.

It wouldn't take too long for us to discover that a local farmer set up shop every morning not too far from our site and sold real eggs out of the back of his tiny Morris Minor pickup. The eggs were fresh and sold for sixpence, about a dime in those days, and we would take them back and boil them on top of the stove in our canteen cups.

We didn't have too much time to sit around as we had a lot of learning to do, and went through a number of briefings, including tips on how to evade capture if you bail out in enemy territory. We even took mug shots with mussed-up hair and rumpled civilian clothes for use on faked travel cards and were given instructions on how to use the evasion kits which we were to carry on all the missions. They also told us about the bunchers and the splashers—the British radio beacons—which were set up for navigating in the local area and could help you find your way home.

Details about the Beder crew's first mission and more of John Matt's experiences with the 392nd BG will appear in the September 2016 issue.



Escape photos of unidentified 392nd BG airmen, retrieved by the Germans after they had been captured or killed. Note the fire damage in the bottom photo.



The Combat Officers Mess with many bicycles parked outside.

IDEAS AND INSPIRATION

by Char Heim

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

Memorial Day has recently passed. Too often this day is regarded as an opportunity for a 3-day weekend, the official start of the summer season and a day devoted to getting great deals at the mall. We must remember that the true meaning of Memorial Day goes far beyond backyard barbecues and mattress sales.

Each day should mark a remembrance and thankfulness to soldiers and airmen who died for the freedoms we enjoy today. These men and women of the armed forces dedicated themselves to their country and the cause of freedom. Despite almost insurmountable challenges, they persevered and succeeded.

For those who survived the conflict, may Memorial Day be a source of pride, patriotism and accomplishment. We must, however, also remember and honor those who paid the supreme sacrifice in war-torn, hostile land and skies and were left behind, but never to be forgotten. To these heroes—many who have no permanent resting place—let Memorial Day mark their courage, dedication and selflessness.

“The dead soldier’s silence sings our national anthem.” God Bless America!



**THE 392ND MEMORIAL
AT WENDLING**

**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 Association
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∞

Anthony P. “Tony” Ferdinando, 576, April 7, 2016
George W. Bacon Jr., 579, May 26, 2016
Blanche Keilman, widow of Myron, 579, March 11, 2016
Kenneth L. Seaton, 578, Aug. 16, 2015
Benjamin F. “Red” Whitmore Jr., 578, June 7, 2016