



What Happened to the B-24s?

This article was printed in the Winter 1994 issue of the Second Air Division Association [2ADA] Journal. Submitted by Dave Patterson, it was originally published in the Pantanella News, the periodical for the 465th BG. Their Libs flew 191 missions from Pantanella Airfield near Canosa, Italy.

At the end of World War II, the U.S. had a dilemma—what to do with over 200,000 aircraft in the U.S. and overseas. It was decided that the disposition of WWII aircraft would be handled by the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC) until 1946 when the War Assets Administration

(WAA) took over.

When the war ended in Europe, 5,000 planes, mostly heavy bombers, were flown back to the U.S. for redeployment to the Pacific. The war in the Pacific ended before any were transferred and they were sent to storage depots instead. After VJ Day, 16,000 aircraft were still overseas. Nine thousand of these aircraft were flown back to the U.S. The remainder were sold, salvaged or scrapped. Non-salable combat planes of the AAF [Army Air Forces] in Europe were demolished by grenades, pulled apart by tractors, or

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This photo was taken at Willow Run, Michigan, on 19 June 1945 and printed on the front page of *The Detroit News* four days later. Its caption: "Veterans of the Air Battle of Europe Back Home at Willow Run. More than 2,000 battle-scarred B-24 Liberator bombers are due at Willow Run to be reconditioned and stored for possible use in the Pacific. Above is a portion of the 400 ships that have already come to roost." All planes with the black horizontal band on the tail fins are 392nd BG a/c. From front to back: #42-95040, Silver Streak; #42-95250; #42-51194, My Prayer; #42-50650.



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FROM THE EDITOR

Lest We Forget. 579th Sqdn Commander Myron Keilman flew 42 combat and diversion missions with the 392nd BG, many as Command Pilot. He then wrote a recurring series of articles for the *2ADA Journal* titled *Lest We Forget*. Here is his contribution for the Spring 1993 issue.

During the months of April, May, June, July and August 1944, the whole Eighth Air Force flew their "breeches off." During the month of June, the 392nd alone flew twenty-six bombardment missions. We flew every day from the 31st of July through the 6th of August. Combat crews flew as high as five missions in a row. J. Fred Thomas and crew of the 579th Squadron flew his entire 30 combat missions in 68 days—including a three day pass to London and seven days flak leave (R and R).

This effort was noted by General "Hap" Arnold, Chief of the U.S. Army Air Forces, Washington, DC. His message to General Spaatz and forwarded by General Doolittle states: "The continued all out effort by your heavies day after day is most gratifying. It shows to all of us that your combat and maintenance are true teams. Please convey my appreciation to all concerned for their untiring efforts and my congratulations for the splendid results."

Great coincidence. When I email the pdf version of the September and December newsletters, I include a list of those whose memberships expire at the end of the year. Upon seeing the names in September 2017, Ted Dudziak emailed, "I see a member named Barry Bendel. Can you email him and ask if he knows me and my dad, Chet? We worked with a Barry Bendel at RCA Automated Systems in Burlington, Massachusetts, in the 70's." I contacted Barry, who did indeed remember the Dudziaks.

Ted's grandfather, 578th pilot 1/Lt Teddy Dudziak, and his crew were killed in action on 18 Nov 1943. Barry's uncle, navigator 2/Lt Alfred Hersh, was also in the 578th, from December 1943 through May 1944.

Ted also sent this photo of his license plate. He says, "It is a nice ice breaker with folks that



notice it. Maybe some other members will do the same in their states. The website is an incredible compilation of the Bomb Group."

Ernie Parke. In the December 2017 News, I reported the death of our long-time English Friend Ernie Parke. His family decided that all memorial gifts would be given to the Wendling Memorial Trust for the care and maintenance of our Memorial. Over £335 was donated in Ernie's memory. We greatly appreciate the generosity of Ernie's family and his many friends!

Never Too Old. 578th copilot Joe Cook, now almost 94, found a new way to fly. See <http://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/naperville/sun/ct-veteran-skydiver-naperville-11-113-20141111-story.html> and <https://www.facebook.com/iFLYUS/videos/10155088505767544/> for videos and Joe's words of wisdom.

8th Air Force Historical Society Roll of Honor. 392nd BGMA Director John Gilbert recently presented the 8th Air Force Historical Society (8AFHS) Roll of Honor and backdrop to Beeston Primary School. This photo shows the keen interest in this important WWII documentation at the school. L-R: Katy Barratt; Glyn Hambling, Unity Education Trust chief executive; Tegan Childs; Alfie Garrard; Archie Wiseman; and John Gilbert.



John had earlier presented Rolls of Honor and backdrops to other nearby schools at Litcham, Scarning and Colby. Beeston Primary is located just a half mile from the 392nd BG Memorial.

This book of remembrance stems from the Roll of Honor presented at St. Paul's Cathedral in London on July 4, 1951. It lists the names of over 28,000 American members of the military and Merchant Marines stationed or based in England or Ireland who were killed in action or in the line of duty during their defense.

In 2007, the 8AFHS embarked on a

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President's Thoughts



Greetings from the sunny gulf coast of Florida!

In February, I asked Director Ben Jones to start a Facebook page for the 392nd BG, which he did. We now have 50 members and the contributions by Ben, Greg Hatton, and others have been rich in historical content. To access, do a Facebook search for "392nd Bomb Group (H) Wendling." You won't be disappointed!

I recently received a nice compliment from Laurie Huntley about the website's "Anatomy of a Mission" article. You can find it under the "Missions" section of www.b24.net. It comes from a four-part article that Annette researched and prepared for our newsletter. If you haven't read that article about a typical bombing mission, from planning stages to final landing and interrogation, do yourself a favor and dial it up. In my opinion: One of the most complete articles ever assembled of the "hows" and "whys" behind every 8AF bombing mission in WWII.

Following that article—and after posting on the website all 392nd BGMA newsletters beginning in February 1986—I've been working on posting the *2nd Air Division Journals* and *8th AF News* on the website under "Past Newsletters." The *Journals* have many articles written by 392nd veterans including 579th Myron Keilman and 579/8th Oak Mackey. Several articles gleaned from the *Journal* are included in this issue, to demonstrate what you have to look forward to.

On that same link, I have also included several videos of seminars with 392nd veterans. Of particular interest are *How Ground Crews Prepared for Missions* by Jim Goar, *The Early Missions* by Keith Roberts and *The Tough Missions* by Bob Vickers. There are also several other 392nd-related videos that you will find interesting.

Newly posted in the Ground Echelon section is the history of the 403rd Air Service Group. Established in mid-April 1945, the 403rd took over the duties of many of its predecessor ground units, such as Air Sea Rescue, Control Tower operations, the Fire Department, Motor Pool, Post Exchange, Officers Club, etc. The history includes many interesting anecdotal stories of the men who did their part on the ground throughout the war.

Annette tells me that we have 17 new members so far this year. I believe that the emphasis on preserving the history and legacy of the 392nd Bomb Group has been one of the main reasons. Hopefully, with your help we can keep the momentum continuing. It isn't so much about getting the 392nd BGMA News—although more than worth the membership fee. It is about keeping alive the memory of our loved ones and those who served in WWII. If you have any in your family that are not members, please sign them up! See page 4 for information on how to "enlist" a friend or family member.

Please do your 392nd BGMA organization a favor: if you get the News by postal mail, please contact Annette and request it by email. This will save us printing and postage.

Paper publishing the newsletter is costly and uses resources that could be used in a more productive way to preserve the history of our loved ones.

Bob

PS: If you haven't registered for the Dayton reunion and are planning to attend, please call me for important information. My contact data is in the upper left corner of page 2.

Half a Mission Gets You

This article by 576th copilot Milton A. Henderson originally appeared in the June 1982 issue of the 2ADA Journal.

A person flying combat always takes for granted that it won't happen to him. Then, the day of reckoning comes and you are listed as Missing in Action. You always wondered what happened when a plane went down, and now you know. Our turn was Gotha—24 Feb 1944.

We were in B-24J #42-7511, 576th Squadron, 392nd Bomb Group. Capt Mervyn Johns pilot; I was copilot. Our crew was on its 22nd mission.

Just as we turned on the bomb run, six FW-190s came in at 12 o'clock level; eight more at 2 o'clock high. We were hit in #4 engine and the oil pressure zeroed out, so #4 was feathered. Another pass just after bombs away and they got #3 engine and set it on fire. Number 4 engine was unfeathered in hopes we could keep up with the Group, but since it had no oil, it promptly ran away. Johns put the airplane in a steep dive to try to blow out the fire; #4 tachometer had wound around beyond the numbers—screaming away. There was no question—get out and walk! He slowed the aircraft down for bail out, leveling off about 8,000 feet.

The bail out was accomplished, but not without a bit of unintended humor. When we rang the bell, prepare to bail out, the bombardier [2/Lt Eugene R. Sriver] was locked in the nose turret. He called the navigator [2/Lt Frank A. Silvasy] to let him out. And what was the navigator doing? Folding maps, putting things away neatly. He finally did open the nose turret door and out tumbled the bombardier. As the navigator was first of the two to bail out, he crouched over the open nose wheel doors, turned to the bombardier and said, "Push me." The size 11 shoes did that, post haste.

I made a free fall from about 7500 ft. to about 2000 ft. because we had been told the German fighter pilots might shoot you in your parachute if it looked like you might get away. You never think of the chute not opening while free falling and mine opened just as it was supposed to.

As I was coming down in my chute, I counted the others. Two chutes were missing. We later learned after the war that the graves registration teams had found the graves of waist gunner Felix Zerangue and engineer Jack Indahl. As I neared the ground, our B-24 had made a steep 360 degree diving spiral and was headed for me when a friendly hill came up between us.

The search party sent out by the Germans had about 8 people in it. They were coming on foot on a road that had a very elongated bend because of a long ridge covered with pine trees about a foot in diameter. I reasoned that

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hoisted by cranes and dropped on concrete blocks below.

All the surplus aircraft were sent to 113 storage sites throughout the U.S. There were 81 storage sites controlled by the RFC, 25 by RFC and WAA jointly, 21 by the AAF Storage and five were for storage and salvage—Clinton, Oklahoma, Naval Air Station being the largest with over 8,000 aircraft, all Navy.

Other large sites were Altus, Oklahoma; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Kingman, Arizona (which had over 2,200 B-24s in late 1945); Ontario, California; and Walnut Ridge, Arkansas. These fields would stretch for five or six miles with airplanes wingtip to wingtip. The B-24s were sent to these five storage sites along with other aircraft. The B-24s and other military aircraft were scrapped and the non-combatant aircraft were sold or scrapped.

Some new aircraft in the pipeline at the end of the war were flown directly from factory to scrap yard. New B-32 Dominators were flown from the factory at Fort Worth to Walnut Ridge to be broken up and melted down. As early as three months before the end of the war, dozens of B-24Js were flown from the factory to the scrappers at Kingman. Production had ended in late summer 1944 for Liberators at North American and Consolidated Fort Worth. All Liberator production was halted by June 1945. B-17 production was halted before this time.

As an experiment, the Air Force dismantled a Liberator and found that it cost more than the salvage value. It required 782 man hours to strip the plane, and the 32,759 pounds of junk took up more than an acre of hangar space.

Of a total of 41,820 aircraft in the U.S., 19,445 were sold, all non-combat type. The prices varied from \$200 for a BT-15 to \$100,000 for a Douglas C-54. A total of 22,375 were salvaged. The sale of some of the military aircraft to

the scrappers went for incredibly low prices. One sale at Clinton went for just under \$154 per aircraft for the lot of 7600 aircraft.

However, the sale price of a B-24 is listed by the WAA in one of their brochures as \$13,750. Also, this is for a plane to be scrapped, not flown, as there was a prohibition on the sale of bombers as flyable aircraft. The gas in the tanks



This B-24M, #44-51228, was the only Liberator in the Air Force inventory by 1951. In 2002, after it was completely refurbished, it was unveiled at the Imperial War Museum in Duxford. Although her original Airplane Serial Number still appears on her tail fins, the rest of the plane is painted as the 578th's #44-50493, Dugan.

in many cases could be sold for more than the price of the aircraft. Didn't the Air Force always have the gas tanks full?

In September 1944 there were 6,043 B-24s in Air Force inventory, and by 1951 only one remained, a B-24M used by Aero Icing Research Laboratory. If all the B-24s in inventory were scrapped, then totals of the nearly 19,000 B-24s produced were: 6,042 scrapped, about 6,000 lost

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392nd BGMA MEMBERSHIP FORM

Please look at the mailing label where your membership status is shown directly after your name. **"18" or higher means your membership is current.** LM means Life Member and FRIEND 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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in aerial combat, 3,000 lost in accidents and other causes, and 4,000 abandoned on foreign bases or cannibalized for parts.

At the B-24 salvage operations, engines and equipment were removed from the planes, then huge knives cut up the aluminum, which was melted down in 1250 degree furnaces in hours. The molten aluminum flowed into large ingots, some weighing 1500 pounds, and was trucked away.

The project was completed in 18 months.

The Navy had a simple way to dispose of some of their aircraft by pushing them overboard from carriers at sea.

Besides the 41,820 aircraft handled by the WAA and RFC, there were thousands of aircraft left behind at many overseas bases. India had one of those bases. It all began when the B-24 was chosen by the British for their South East Asia Command (SEAC). They received the Liberators under Lend-Lease between 1942 and 1945.

When hostilities ceased, orders came from the U.S. that Lend-Lease was to end and the SEAC Liberator squadrons were to be disarmed. They were disarmed by October 1945 and by March 1946 the squadrons were disbanded and aircraft flown to Chakeri, India, and stored pending destruction.

The aircraft were made unusable by smashing up all turrets, cockpits and damaging outer skin, and finally, collapsing the undercarriage. One photo shows over one hundred Liberators being destroyed at Chakeri.

When the British had to leave India upon independence in 1947, the task of destroying all the Liberators was not completed. The Royal Indian Air Force salvaged 39 Liberators which were received from Chakeri. Many of the Liberators were made serviceable by cannibalizing the aircraft. The Royal Indian Air Force squadron flew the Liberators from 1948 to 1968—20 years without a fatal accident.

It was from this squadron's Liberators that the world's surviving B-24Js came, now spread all over the world. The *All American* [#44-44052, currently called *Witchcraft*, is flown by the Collings Foundation] was one of these aircraft, as well as the one at the Pima Air Museum [#44-44175, painted on the right side as she was during her time with the Indian Air Force and on the left side as the 446th BG's *Bungay Buckaroo*].

The Aircraft Scrapping and Smelting Project at Storage Depot 41 at Kingman

Editor's Note: For more facts and photos about post-WWII a/c salvage and destruction, see <http://www.airplaneboneyards.com/post-wwii-military-airplane-boneyards.htm>. It includes this information:

The contractor for aircraft scrapping at Kingman was the Wunderlich Contracting Company of Jefferson City, Missouri, who received an 18-month contract from the federal government for \$2.78 million to reduce 5,400 aircraft to aluminum ingots.

Active duty military personnel typically flew the aircraft into Kingman, and civilian employees would handle parking and classification. To accommodate the large numbers of employees, tent cities were erected on site. In subsequent months, brand new aircraft directly from assembly lines

were even disposed of at Kingman.

Fuel was drained from the aircraft and sold. Aircraft engines were then removed and placed in rows on the desert floor.

By the time the planes reached Kingman, most of the ordnance (predominantly .50 cal machine guns and Norden Bombsights) had already been removed at other temporary storage depots. However, a few planes did arrive with some machine guns and a few Norden Bombsights, which were temporarily and securely stored. The guns were retrieved by the government, but the Nordens were 'demilled' using a sledgehammer.

Interior items of the aircraft such as radios, oxygen equipment, handguns, manuals, life rafts, fire extinguishers and instruments were removed.

The main aircraft airframe was then sliced into major pieces using a guillotine. Some hand cutting of smaller parts was also done.

The final step was placing parts into the smelter, or furnace, for melting. Three furnaces were operated at Kingman for melting about 70% of an airplane's metal components into ingots. The furnaces were run 24 hours a day, and could consume up to 35 aircraft a day.

The Wunderlich contract at Kingman was successful, and resulted in the recovery of significant resources: 46 million pounds of aluminum, 6 million pounds of aluminum from engines, 5 million pounds of aluminum propellers, 21 million pounds of steel, 1.6 million gallons of aviation fuel, and 256,000 gallons of oil.

A total of 85 reconnaissance aircraft, 615 fighters, 54 light bombers, 266 medium bombers and 4,463 heavy bombers were disposed of. These 5,483 aircraft scrapped by Wunderlich at Kingman generated \$7.5 million in gross income.

By July 1948, less than three years since the end of WWII hostilities, the job was done. A huge part of the American airpower fleet had been reduced to ingots. Storage Depot 41 and Kingman was returned to the county as a municipal airport.

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it would take some time for them to reach that bend, so after burying my chute in the foot deep snow, I hurried over the hill onto the same road and ran toward them—wanting to be in a position nearer to them so they would pass me before starting the search.

At the bend, I got off the road and into the timber and watched them pass by, about 100 ft. away. They had guns, pitch forks, and the like for weapons, not a very friendly reception committee. After they had gone past, I continued through the trees to the road on the far side of the bend, got on it and walked away as if I was one of the search party returning.

I walked across a field in foot deep snow to a railroad to head south, and home. A troop train went by. The soldiers waved and I waved back thinking, "You would be off that train in a hurry if you knew who I was."

This gave me confidence in my lack of identity, so I walked

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Getting the Men and Planes Home

By late spring 1945, all 392nd personnel knew it was just a matter of time before Germany surrendered. They were also fully aware that they would return to the US, go on leave for 30 days, and then reorganize to defeat Japan.

403rd Air Service Group

On 14 Apr 1945, the ground support commands were disbanded, with their personnel and functions transferred to the new 403rd Air Service Group. Its components were the Headquarters and Base Services Sqdn, the 653rd Air Materiel Sqdn, and the 829th Air Engineering Sqdn.

Headquarters and Base Services Squadron

Per their May 1945 history, "As the month opened all the personnel of the outfit were making wagers and sitting on pins and needles awaiting the end of the war. That is, the declaration of VE day in Europe. We all waited tensely and lost many a good pound sweating it out. Strangely enough when the actual proclamation itself arrived on the 8th of May most of the fellows shrugged their shoulders and then waited for news as to what in the hell would happen to us and when would we go to the Pacific. Most of the men did not celebrate the end of the war as all they saw and could think was that as far as a Yank was concerned the war was not over and that we would go fight our own war in the Pacific."

653rd Air Materiel Squadron

Per the 653rd's history, "The 15th of May [1945, we were] alerted along with the other Service Group Squadrons and the Bomb Group for return to the Zone of Interior [the USA]. This one order was the one we've worked and waited for for two long years. The joy was unanimous.

"Everyone was now in a fever. One meeting followed another, one teletype changed or rescinded the previous one. The men now worked both day and night crating and packing supplies and equipment. Hangar #1 was set up as a central place for preparing material for shipment. A space was allocated to each squadron as a work area, a power saw was placed in the center of the hangar for the use of all squadrons. A supply room was set up for the issue of redeployment materials.

"All reparable supplies and equipment were domestically packed and shipped to 3rd SAD [Strategic Air Depot].

"Items common to ground and Air Force were also domestically packed and shipped by truck and rail to the depots common to the respective branch of supplies.

"Serviceable Air Corps equipment was overseas packed and shipped to a BADA [Base Air Depot Area] holding depot.

"Serviceable Air Corps supplies were domestically packed and shipped to a BADA holding depot.

"By the end of the month all warehouses were cleared of all but the empty bins. Everything was packed and final paper work was prepared.

"On the 31st of May, we were paid in good old American greenbacks. All British currency was converted to U.S. currency. We were all happy.

"By the 4th of June all preparations for movement had been completed. Supplies had been disposed of, TAT equipment was boxed, files disposed of, show down of

clothing completed and shortages filled. We were then just 'Sweating it out.' "

[653rd equipment intended To Accompany Troops included the essential items they had to bring with them in order to function as soon as they arrived in the Pacific. A "showdown" was an inspection of a soldier's (or airman's) gear by a senior enlisted man or officer to ensure it was all present and in a usable status.]

Station Ammunition Officer Charles E. Dye also noted, "All of the bombs, fuses, fins and other ammunition had to be inspected and packed for ocean shipping to the Pacific. This was tedious work as we dared not get careless. We had lived through the war so we did not want to get killed packing up for shipment."

829th Air Engineering Sqdn

The 465th Sub Depot, now part of the 829th, was "busier than hell," according to its historian, 1/Lt George L. Griffith.

"The historic month of May will long be remembered by men in the ETO and especially by men of the 829th. The 829th, having spent the latter part of April getting activated and organized for war against the enemy in Europe, found itself, during the month of May, doing an about face and preparing for warfare against the enemy in the Pacific.

"On the 15th of the month the 829th received the news for which it had been waiting ever since coming overseas. This was the official notification that the 829th was being redeployed to another theater through the States. This means a thirty day furlough at home. This was wonderful news for the men, especially for those who have been overseas for almost three years.

"The 829th became a beehive of activity almost immediately. Modifications to aircraft were completed, hangar #2 broke all records in building new engines to insure perfect performance of aircraft redeploying by air.

"Packing and uncrating were started at once. All equipment not being used was packed first and other machines and tools packed when their operation needs dictated. Hangar #1 was cleared as soon as all planes were modified and a central packing and crating factory was established. The carpentry shop kept the power saw busy day and night cutting lumber for all organizations.

"By the 26th of the month packing was well along. On that date all Quartermaster, Chemical, Engineer and Signal items were shipped out to their respective depots. By the 30th of the month all Air Corps equipment had been loaded on freight cars and was ready for shipment to the depot. By the 1st day of the month all equipment which was to accompany troops was packed and ready, all men were processed, both for clothing, physical exams, records, and the outfit as a whole was ready to go.

"Since receiving the movement orders the men have worked both night and day in preparation for the move and have demonstrated the same skill, efficiency and close cooperation which was characteristic during the time when maximum effort was needed to meet operational requirements for the aerial offensive against the Reich.

"Another morale booster came on pay day. Instead of

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being paid in English Sterling, the men were paid in good old American 'cabbage.' From the expression on the men's faces, you could see that besides being glad of just being paid, they were glad to get a pocket full of our own currency."

Black Widow Flights

Meanwhile, crew chiefs and mechanics worked feverishly to get the planes in shape for their return trips to the US. The 392nd conducted at least two experiments (called "black widow flights") to determine just how many men and how much luggage could be crammed into a B-24 while still leaving it air-worthy.



This photo, taken during one of the black widow flights, shows just how tightly-packed the B-24 was. Second from left: nose gunner S/Sgt Thomas R. Fitzgerald; front right, waist gunner S/Sgt Frank M. Gayda.

On 4 May 1945, 578th Sqdn radio operator Tom Edgington later recalled, pilot-in-charge Maj Harley Sather "made a test flight to determine the feasibility of carrying 40 passengers plus crew of 10 on returning to the USA in a B-24." This sortie "lasted about 8 hours, making four round trips from the base to Liverpool. The fifth round trip was canceled when it was determined that the plan was not feasible."

Two days later, Maj Myron Keilman, 579th Sqdn CO, flew 10 hours with 45 men, each with 65 pounds of luggage.

Undoubtedly because of the lessons learned during these sorties, when 74 Liberators eventually departed from Wendling—carrying more than 700 combat airmen and 615 ground crew—none had more than 20 men aboard.

Which Planes?

Nearly 200 a/c assigned to the 392nd BG were casualties of the war—due to crashes in the US during training or in the UK from collisions or battle damage, being shot down in Europe, or having sunk in the waters between England and the continent.

Most of the Liberators flown back to the US by 392nd crews had survived scores of combat missions. #42-50409, Section VIII, had carried its crew—to battle and back again—on over 100 sorties. #42-51194, My Prayer, #41-28916, #41-29511, Eloise, and #42-78477, Miss Minnie II, nearly matched that count. Other ships had arrived at Wendling too late to fly any combat missions.

On Our Way!

Some of the crews aboard those planes had flown dozens of missions. Others—like five crews ordered to the 392nd

BG on 19 Apr 1945—saw Germany only on "trolley missions" in early May, when they flew ground crew personnel at low level over the defeated land, so they could see what their hard work on the ground had enabled the combat men to do in the air.

Departing airmen and passengers were ordered to "proceed on or about 28 May 1945 via Valley [Wales] by best available air route to Bradley Field, Windsor Locks, Connecticut, thence to Camp Miles Standish, Boston, Port of Embarkation."

Several memoirs specifically mention the trip home. 577th gunner Dick Esenwein recalled, "We took with us all our equipment and six ground crew with their equipment. We flew to Valley, Wales, and stayed a couple of days. We were flying this old war weary plane and all we saw sitting there were brand new B-24 planes by the hundreds."



Two 392nd BG planes during the mission to Schwandorf on 20 Apr 1945. The one on the left certainly exemplifies an "old war weary plane" like the one Dick Esenwein flew back to the US !

John Matishowski

576th navigator John Matishowski (who later changed his last name to Matt) flew the last mission of the war on 25 Apr 1945. After that, he wrote in his book *Crew Dog*, "The Eighth Air Force had one big job left to do, and that was to get everyone back home as soon as possible. Wendling emptied out quickly as Liberators were ferried back and the Base people and extra flight crews were sent southward by train to make the trip to the U.S. on ships like the Queen Mary. Some navigators like myself were kept behind to join ferry crews for return flights later on.

"Every night was 'going away party night' at the club and some of them got pretty wild as the pressure relief valves blew. The parties got smaller and smaller and as I awaited my orders, I managed to attend most of them...

"The day I got back to New York was the day the airplane hit the Empire State Building. It was July 28, 1945... [The a/c was] a smaller, twin-engined B-25 Mitchell, the kind which Jimmy Doolittle bombed Tokyo with... The pilot had been unsure of his position flying in low cloud, trying to make an approach and landing at Newark. This was before radar directed approach control had been developed and well organized instrument approach procedures had been designed, even in places like New York...

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"The B-25 hit the building, then the world's tallest, squarely between the 78th and 79th stories. Most of the bomber penetrated into the offices located there like a missile, its fuel exploding, washing rivers of flame through several stories. One engine passed through the building and came out the other side, falling on to the roof of a building below. The other engine also shot forward and hit a bank of elevators, and plunged down into the shaft of one of them....

"The excited, good feelings I had about coming home from the wars were pushed aside and that nagging dark feeling came upon me again, one which seemed natural while I was in combat, but which now, suddenly, was more noticeable. The B-25 had blasted a hole eighteen feet wide and twenty feet high where it hit. The two pilots and the passenger were instantly killed along with [eleven] people working in the building. The fire it caused was quickly extinguished but the damage was extensive and it took some time to determine that the building was still structurally safe. Looking up at the smoke, imagining the impact of the airplane crashing through the wall, I couldn't keep the picture of mangled and burning people from flashing into my mind and persisting, though I tried hard to push it all away. 'Isn't there any place I can go to get away from people getting smashed up,' I thought..."

H. Bruce McClellan

In his memoir, 578/9th Sqdn pilot H. Bruce McClellan wrote, "The telephone message came when I was in London. 'Captain, you're headed home in two days. You had better get back to the base tonight.'

"It didn't take me long to reach Wendling, turn in to the Quartermaster the night field glasses and .32 caliber carbine which I had purloined and hidden in my footlocker and complete the required paper work... As the senior Staff officer available I was to carry in a carefully sealed bag the orders for the group to fly to the States. We climbed aboard with a consignment of passengers and headed for the embarkation field in Valley, Wales.

" 'You can't go today,' said the weather officer. 'Iceland is closed in solidly and probably will be for two or three days.'

" 'What about the Azores?' I asked, knowing that the 'great circle' route across the North Atlantic could be navigated either by way of Iceland or the Azores.

" 'Well, I suppose you could do that,' was the response, and nothing could have prevented our immediate take off. So there we were at an Air Force Officers' Club on the Azores drinking cold American beer. And there we stayed for a week while the weather closed in on us. Eventually we were free to fly to Gander—a very different crossing from the east bound flight in July of 1944. In bright weather we cruised on autopilot, and I smoked a pipe and read *Crime and Punishment*. We were going home!"

"From Gander we angled southwest along the coast towards Bradley Field, near Hartford, Connecticut. Looking at the chart I realized that our course would take us near Deerfield [in Massachusetts, site of the premier college preparatory school attended by both McClellan and his father. The two also attended William's College in nearby Williamstown. This area was therefore very special to him.]

"Over Keene, New Hampshire, we broke into the clear and

began to let down on a southerly heading. Finally I picked out familiar landmarks just north of Greenfield and headed down the Deerfield River. Suddenly we were directly over the [Deerfield Academy] campus with the school buildings under our left wing.

"Banking sharply, I turned up over 'The Rock' and circled to return to the campus where I could see the American flag, the school band, stands full of spectators, and baseball teams about to start what I realized must be the traditional Commencement Day game. I increased the RPM and shoved the throttles forward as we did a chandelle [a controlled aircraft maneuver where the pilot combines a 180 degree turn with a climb] as an acrobatic salute.

"We flew on to Bradley Field, where we landed in a great crush of returning planes. While we had been weather bound on the Azores, others had flown through by way of Iceland, and I couldn't find anyone to take the sealed bag of orders which I had thought were so important. A thirty-day home leave came next, but ... I'm home."

McClellan's son Rob comments, "Deerfield is about 30 miles north of Wendover Field and must have been almost directly on the flight path. I can only imagine the glee Dad felt when he realized he'd have the opportunity to 'greet' his former teachers and administrators on his way past. I have heard it made quite a stir, and I can only imagine the sight and sound of a low altitude B-24 pass. It is wonderful to think of the smile that must have been on his face as he made those passes over Deerfield."

Walt Cranson

In *My Combat Diary, 26 Jan – 6 June 1945*, 578th copilot Walt Cranson wrote that he spent some time the morning of 31 May 1945 straightening up his hut. He and fellow copilot Frank E. Moser Jr. "got the place fairly well cleaned up but undid our results with our putting .50 caliber shells in the stove. Boy they made a racket—and smoke and flame! Stood in the door watching each time shells put in the stove. Hm! About 9:25 they started screaming, '10:00 take off—hurry up!' so, like mad we catch a truck, round up last belongings and off to the plane."

Pilot 1/Lt Thomas N. Sisson, Cranson, and their crew flew home aboard #44-50542, Agony Wagon. Cranson recalls, "Took off for Valley, Wales at 10:00 (English time) trying to beat a front moving in there. Had a screwy take-off with the load and 11 passengers...but made it. Nice trip. Saw Stone (our first camp in UK) and several nice towns. Last look at England...out around the mountains—over Irish Sea and then south to Valley."

The next morning, the two pilots, navigator 2/Lt Donald J. Greening and radio operator T/Sgt Robert L. Strausburgh attended a briefing on "weather, route, loading and navigation." Afterward, Cranson "got the boys and ship ready. Dug into bags for all the electric suits we had—and heavy clothing for our altitude assigned 8,000-10,000 ft and I know it'll be cold for the passengers anyway. Got 'em fixed up best I could..."

Cranson notes that his plane carried "3 sacks of mail, 5 boxes of K-rations, 3 five gallon cans of water, 11 passengers, 9 crew members, 28 pieces of luggage and 2,750 gallons of gas, for a total weight of 61,015 pounds

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on take off."

They flew first to Iceland, where they spent the night, then on to Greenland. "Soon we see the tremendous fields of solid ice and snow, as far as can see—level and white. Icebergs look green—much floating ice as we entered the coastline. Over the middle now—lots of rocky-bare peaks and valleys. Navigator spots the field nestled below and we begin the descent. I've never seen anything so breathtakingly beautiful in all my life. Blue water in endless valleys, greenish white icebergs floating there, green/grey hills, peaks, blue sky and white splotches of snow on peaks & crevices, a waterfall here as we circle down to traffic altitude (2000 ft). And there—man's little effort—a little white two-strip landing field just under one mountain and reaching into the Fjord and river...so pretty!!"

It was warm enough that one of the crew went wading and Cranson even "sunned about 4 hours."

At a 4pm briefing, it was learned that they wouldn't be taking off right away as they'd hoped. Instead, Cranson was told "the sad tale of their filling our gas tanks with dirty gas! Ran in some old rusty stuff out of barrels that had sat around 2 years—several fistfuls of slime had accumulated in nozzle of hose, etc. Boy, that burnt us up...lucky we caught it."

After chow, Cranson "went down to ship and tried to get them busy emptying the full 2,700 gallons and flushing and re-filling. Was some 2 or 3 hours getting started. And then very slow process draining thru those tiny pipes after syphoning out the most of it. I was still busy overseeing this... and everybody else starts take-off. For 3 hours we wait while it slowly drains out. Drip-drip-drip (it seems that slow)."

Finally, all was ready and the Sisson crew and passengers took off about 3 or 4 hours after the others. Eight hours later, they landed at Bangor, Maine, on 3 June 1945. It was four months to the day since the Sisson crew had left the USA for England.

Three days later, they took off on their last leg, to Bradley Field, Connecticut. Cranson noted that they "Circled [crew chief M/Sgt Arthur H. Knipe Jr's] hometown (Haverhill, Massachusetts) and the boys threw out 5 rolls of toilet

paper in various forms... he really went wild when he saw his house... yelled like mad... Sure glad we could do it for him—he enjoyed it—and naturally I did!"



2/Lt Cranson's very excited passengers, getting closer to home. M/Sgt Knipe is at the far right of the middle row.

RMS Queen Mary

Most of the 392nd BG returned to the US aboard RMS Queen Mary. Per *New York Times* reporter George Horne in a 21 Jun 1945 article, "A gallant lady of the sea, her gala pennants flying and her deep horn blasts resounding across the city, came up the bay yesterday to land the largest single contingent of American fighting men and women to come home from the wars.

"She was the Queen Mary, giant 81,235-ton liner of Britain's 'merchant navy,' and packed through her decks and labyrinthine cabins and compartments were 14,526 Americans—men of the Air Forces, dogfaces of Europe's million foxholes, Wacs, Medical Corps men, naval officers, Army nurses and seamen.

"All were bound for furloughs at home and most of them for more fighting in the war on the other side of the world...

"One by one the weary and hot companies marched down, their duffles touching end to end. At the bottom of the planks

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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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they were checked out on lists, and then formed in lines to await transportation. The two hospital units [the 112th and 107th General Hospitals, which served in England] went to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, by bus and train. Then came an air service group and several air engineer squadrons. They were followed by the headquarters and base service squadron. All went to Camp Shanks, New York.

"Five bombardment squadrons, numbering more than 700 men, came down and filed off the end of the pier to the [steamer] Sandy Hook, which was to take them up river for transfer to Camp Shanks.

"As the night wore on more hospital detachments, service squadrons and other units filed down, gratefully partook of the inexhaustible supply of milk, coffee and doughnuts brought to the pier by the Red Cross Emergency Canteen's unprecedented staff of 100 workers, and then set out together on the next lap of the journey toward home.

"They came as they went, but under different circumstances. When they left, most of them two years or more ago, they rode from Kilmer, Shanks and other deployment stations in darkened trains, marched silently onto the piers and into the blacked out vessels waiting to sail. Last night there were lights and music, and brighter prospects...

"The Queen was commanded by ruddy-faced Commodore Sir James G.P. Bisset, ranking skipper of the Cunard White Star Line.... Thousands of tourists remember Commodore Bisset, who was knighted for his war service.

"More thousands knew the Queen Mary before her ten miles of red carpet were rolled up and packed away, before

her partitions were altered for more serious duty and she steamed out of New York on the morning of March 21, 1940, wearing battle dress of gray.

"Since that day the Mary and her sister, the Queen Elizabeth, have carried 1,243,538 soldiers, most of them across the Atlantic. They are bringing them back now, and yesterday's voyage was the first wave in the returning tide."

In another article two days later, *The New York Times* proclaimed "The Mary Did Her Bit." An unnamed author noted that "The luxury liner Queen Mary, launched in 1934, was built to carry 2,100 passengers at a speed of about 32 knots... But another kind of destiny was in store for her.... Instead of 2,100 passengers traveling in style, she carried loads of 15,000 or more traveling to get where their services were urgently needed...

"The most amazing feature of the story [Captain Bisset] told reporters was its lack of narrow escapes. The Mary never saw a submarine, never fired her guns at a foe and was never fired upon. The Italians sank her once, but only on paper. The nearest she came to action was two years ago when a geyser spouted up 300 feet off her beam near the British Isles, but no harm came to her. No one was ever washed off her decks. No American soldier died of any cause aboard her. But going to sea all alone, relying on her speed for safety, she was ready for what might come. She is a modern vessel, complete with all the up-to-date gadgets, but we know that what took her through every danger was an old-fashioned thing—the heart of oak in captain and every member of the crew. Half a million American families have reason to be grateful to those British seamen who carried our boys safely over the great waters."



Still wearing her light grey war paint, RMS Queen Mary sails into New York Harbor on 20 June 1945 with thousands of American soldiers and sailors aboard. "Among the first and liveliest troops to debark," according to an article by Betty Moorsteen in *PM*, "were 150 members of the 392d Bomber Group."

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mission to create a similar version of that Roll of Honor, but including just Army Air Force casualties. Bob Books was tasked to provide a list of those names in digital format. He soon discovered that the names on St. Paul's Roll of Honor had never been digitized and a complete list of the names was not readily available.

With help from the Pentagon, we obtained a paper copy from the US Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

Bob, Ben Jones and I then began typing the names. Prisoners at Holman Correctional Facility in Alabama also helped transcribe the 28,264 names.

Analysis of the new database revealed that many names were missing from the original list. For example, in several cases when entire crews were killed in action, only some of their names were on the list. Careful research by 392nd BGMA historians of our own Roll of Honor and those for other bomb and fighter groups added more than 1,000 names to the list.

With this new list, the 8AFHS created a beautifully illustrated, digital Roll of Honor that could be updated as necessary and printed on demand. In September 2016, Ben designed the magnificent backdrop.

The 8AFHS has now placed a Roll of Honor and/or the ROH backdrop in 20 states, several locations in England and Ireland, and in Germany.

Ben notes, "We must bear in mind that when the original work was created (1946-1951), there was no central government database of casualties like we have today. With records scattered throughout Europe and the US at the various military headquarters, it was a tremendous undertaking. Records were then manually typed and re-typed, compiled and re-sorted dozens of times; errors could easily have occurred at any point in the process.

"With modern research technology, we can easily examine the original Roll of Honor and find discrepancies. However, our research has shown that despite the challenges they faced and the primitive conditions under which they worked, the team created a historic and artistic Roll that truly honors those whose names appear on its pages."

John says, "It was 75 years ago that the 392nd flew into the airfield near where these schools are located. The students are still eager to learn about these Americans."

For more information about the original Roll of Honor, see <https://www.stpauls.co.uk/history-collections/history/history-highlights/american-memorial-chapel-1958>.

Faces of Margraten. In 2004, Dutch 392nd BGMA member Peter Adriaans and his wife Ton adopted the grave of 579th engineer/top turret gunner S/Sgt Amos E. Doty at Netherlands American Cemetery near Margraten. Since then, they have often visited, placed flowers at his grave, and honored his sacrifice.

Peter recently called my attention to an event at the Cemetery called Faces of Margraten. As the program booklet points out, "War can overwhelm us... The large number of crosses paints a vivid picture of the enormity of war. It is what makes this cemetery an impressive site. Simultaneously, however, each cross highlights a life that ended too soon. We might easily forget this when we talk

about the war's big battles and casualty numbers. It is for that reason that The Faces of Margraten tribute does not want to remember all who fell, but wants to remember each and every person individually."

From 2-6 May 2018, photos of more than 5,800 individuals were displayed next to their graves and names. Peter provided Amos's. Nearly 20,000 visitors came to honor and pay their respects. Organizer Sebastiaan Vonk was pleased to see so many people looking at the photo tribute. "But what matters even more is the conversations that people were having. Listening to families talk about the meaning of war and freedom while walking among the photos. That is what it is all about."

S/Sgt Doty was married with a 1-year old daughter. On 19 May 1944, he was part of a bombing mission against Waggum Airfield just outside Brunswick, Germany. As the 392nd neared the target, it was met by about 150 enemy fighters who flew through the formation, six and seven planes in line-abreast, first attacking from the nose and then reversing direction to attack from the tail. The relentless assault continued for almost 45 minutes. Severe flak over the target was also encountered. Resulting losses from the 392nd included 2/Lt Charles Felsenthal's crew (10 KIA, including Amos), 2/Lt Robert Lang's crew (10 KIA), and 2/Lt Donald Prell's crew (8 KIA, 2 POW).

Netherlands American Cemetery contains 8,301 graves (including 31 Crusaders) and 1,722 names on its Wall of the Missing (53 from the 392nd). Every one has been adopted. We greatly appreciate what is being done to bring faces to the names and thus, make them individuals instead of statistics.



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down the railroad through a small town, acknowledging greetings with a raise of the hand or a nod of the head, but not speaking. Apparently this was customary of the German populace at the time.

The next town was larger. I could speak very little German, but I could understand it to some degree. I asked a German for a drink of water, but I could not say it like a native. He became suspicious. My ankle was swollen, either badly sprained or broken. He took me to the Mayor of the town, who in turn called the authorities.

Thus ended my missions with the 392nd Bomb Group and the start of sixteen months of prisoner of war time.

IDEAS AND INSPIRATION

by Char Heim

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

I recently saw a story on national news that honored the oldest living American veteran who was celebrating his 126th birthday.

We have recently celebrated Memorial Day which has given us another opportunity to be thankful to those who have served our country to keep it strong and free. These veterans do not generally speak openly about their wartime experiences but are silent heroes. As Martin Luther King Jr. said "In the End, we will remember not the words of our enemies but the silence of our friends."

As we honor our veterans, let us not forget those who were not combatants or service personnel. Out of conflict, American poets, inventors and writers have taught us peace, the concept of freedom, liberty and how to make our world a kinder place.

Be kind and forgiving to those you love and those with whom you have conflict. Do this daily in honor of our veterans and the strength of our communities.

Have a great summer.



Below: Before the 2018 Memorial Day ceremony at Cambridge American Cemetery, wreath-bearers are ready to present the wreaths. Note the American and British flags at each grave. Above: John Gilbert prepares to place a wreath in memory of all the Crusaders who never returned home. (photo by Alex Geldard)



392nd Bomb Group Memorial Association
9107 Wood Pointe Way
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USA

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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∞

William F. Davis, 577, April 21, 2018
Rosten R. DeFrates, 579, March 24, 2018
John S. Fenton, 576, May 20, 2018