

392nd Bomb Group Memorial Association

NEWS

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GOTHA

On 24 Feb 1944, the 392nd BG flew its 41st combat mission, to Gotha, Germany. By the end of the day, the 392nd had lost seven planes and crews but had also performed so admirably that it was later awarded its only Distinguished Unit Citation. The information that follows, from the Citation documentation and 392nd BG reports, has been slightly edited for spelling and format.

Narrative of Operation

In the Fall of 1943, the parent works of the Gotheair Waggonfabrik at Gotha, Thuringia, was the largest German producer of twin-engine fighters and accounted for 30 percent of the total twin-engine fighter production. In addition to final assembly, it assumed an even more important role in the production of all the major components such as wings, fuselages, tail units and control surfaces for its own assembly, and supplied many of these items to the Miag plant at Brunswick and the Messerschmidt plant at Augsburg, for the assembly there of ME-110s and ME-410s. This plant therefore was the most valuable single target in the twin-engine fighter complex.

In the strategy of the plan "Argument," the Liberator Second Bombardment Division (BD) was assigned the task of destroying this important factory at Gotha. Many weeks passed awaiting a break in the weather that would enable the Eighth Air Force to visually bomb the high priority targets in Central Germany. On the afternoon of the 23rd of February, the next day's target reached the Division. It was the long awaited Gotha. The all important weather "high" that brought visual bombing conditions with it had moved into Central Germany and now the Division had the opportunity to strike the German Air Force (GAF) a smashing blow at the heart of its twin-engine fighter production.

The mission as set up for the 24th of February called for an assignment of three B-24 Combat Wings (CWs) on Gotha, five B-17 CWs on Schweinfurt and five B-17 CWs on Kreising, Tutow and Posen.

The plan of the Second BD called for the assembly plant to be attacked by three Groups of the 2nd CW, leading the Division and two Groups of the 14th CW, the 392nd and 44th Bomb Groups. The German Air Force Station and factory airfield were to be attacked by three Groups of the 20th CW. The route in called for 2nd Division's B-24s to effect a penetration on the same course as the B-17s of the 1st Division, but at a lower altitude. Fighter support was to be

shared with the 1st BD, with fighters flying above the B-17s.

The 392nd BG with three 12-ship sections, followed by the 44th BG with three 12-ship sections flying high right, was leading the 14th CW, the second Wing in the attacking force.

The enemy initiated his attacks against this formation when it reached the Dutch Coast and a savage battle continued for the next two hours and a half. The 2nd and 14th CWs bore the brunt of these attacks aided only by sporadic fighter support, as the B-17s flying above the B-24s shielded this formation from the umbrella fighter cover.

As the winds on the Continent proved to be weaker than forecasted, the formation gained approximately two minutes for each 100 miles flown, and consequently arrived at the places of rendezvous well ahead of the fighters and thus did not receive adequate support.

The course of the two Divisions forked as they neared
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BEYOND COURAGE

At 8am on 12 Aug 1944, 15-year old English firefighter Ernie Havis was bicycling home after a night on duty. When he heard the unmistakable sounds of an airplane crash, he headed for the impact site instead. He spent the next few hours collecting the remains of 577th Sqdn 2/Lt John D. Ellis and crew. Then and there, Ernie vowed to one day erect a memorial to the ten men who had perished at Cheshunt, on the northeast outskirts of London.

It took much longer than he had envisioned. On 22 Jan 2011, though, Ernie stood before an audience of over 250 people to dedicate that memorial.

Ernie spoke of "those ten young brave lads" who came out of the clouds and saw the town below. Despite "difficulty controlling their damaged aircraft, as seen by witnesses at that time" the Ellis crew "stayed with their bomb laden vessel and crashed it on the edge of Cheshunt Town away from the houses. They could have bailed out but they stayed with their stricken bomber, thus saving hundreds of lives."

His voice ringing with conviction, Ernie said, "That is true courage of the highest order." During his time as a teenage firefighter during WWII and the decades since, Ernie has "tried to understand their courage and bravery." He finally realized that "I am not in their league. Ten true gentlemen

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FROM THE EDITOR

Combat Tour Length. In the September 2010 issue, 577th copilot Les Hadley asked if anyone's combat tour length was shorter than his, three months and a day. A recent note from Calvin Carter, navigator on 576th Gene Hubbartt's crew, documents a much shorter time flying in combat. Calvin writes that the mission to Magdeburg on 15 Feb 1945 was the first flown by his crew. They were "shot down and captured after flying four hours. German POW until April 29, 1945. How is that for a short tour??"

Follow-Ups. We've received two emails in regard to our story about Field Marshal Lord Ironside. David Hastings, former member of the Second Air Division Association's Board of Governors, writes, "Interesting to read your article on Field Marshal Lord Ironside. As you know he took the salute at the Norwich VE Day Parade in 1945 and when planning the 1995 Parade we managed to get his son, the present Lord Ironside, to be on the saluting base." John Gilbert, the 392nd's representative in England, met General Ironside a few years after the war. John had just joined the Army Cadet Force at age 12. There was an awards ceremony and Lord Ironside was the presenter. John still remembers how impressive he looked in his uniform.

Many, Many Thanks!! I've been exchanging emails with 392nd BGMA members David and Sylvia Strahan. Sylvia's uncle, S/Sgt Frank G. Bleickhardt, was an S-27 German Voice Interpreter with the 392nd, KIA on 28 Jan 1945. The Strahans have been researching Frank's duties and what the S-27 program involved. As part of their investigation, they obtained from the Air Force Historical Research Agency a file with most if not all of the 392nd BG's military orders and Daily Bulletins from September 1943 to May 1945. The Strahans were kind enough to send me a copy of those records. I am slowly adding names and information to my aircrew and ground personnel databases; I have also found interesting tidbits that will appear in future issues of the News. On behalf of the 392nd BGMA, I thank the Strahans for their generosity.

S-27 Program. If you know anything about the S-27 program—even something as simple as where their radio equipment was installed in a Liberator—please let me know. The Strahans will appreciate your information and I'll include it in a future News article.

Thanks, Part 2. Several veterans have recently sent me photos and anecdotes. All are much appreciated and all help to preserve the legacy of the 392nd. One

photo, though, had an immediate impact. Sandy Elden, who worked in 577th Ordnance, sent me a picture of 16 of his buddies in the ordnance section. He could only remember four of their names. Three weeks later, I got an email from a man inquiring about his grandfather, Pvt Edward L. Millegan. A quick look at my roster showed him as a member of 577th Ordnance. I sent him Sandy's photo and Millegan was soon identified. Sandy has kindly offered to answer questions about Millegan's duties and what life as a bomb loader was like. This is the most wonderful aspect of my involvement with the 392nd BGMA—helping people today connect with their relatives in WWII. It's perhaps even more significant than usual in this particular situation—Millegan's grandson is currently serving in Afghanistan.

Photo IDs. In the photo of the Crusaders dance band on page 7 of the December 2010 News, the man at the far right of the front row has been identified as 576th navigator 1/Lt James R. "Dick" Longenecker. The man sitting third from the right in the front row is probably 579th gunner T/Sgt Nevin Geary.

June issue. For the June 2011 issue, I would like to include an article about "Wendling Weddings." If you got married while stationed with the 392nd at Wendling, please contact me! I would like to know how you met your future wife, what the procedures were for getting permission to marry, when and where your wedding occurred, and when your bride traveled to the US. Any photos you have of the event would also be appreciated.

Please renew!! If the number "10" is located after your name on the mailing label, your membership has expired. Please renew ASAP. We urge Life Members and those who renew annually to consider changing from postal mail to email delivery. Currently, 74 of our 395 members get their newsletters via email, saving us \$146 annually in postage alone.

President's Message



Our parent organizations have scheduled their reunions in the Fall this year, the 2nd Air Division Association Sept. 17-22 with a cruise to Bermuda and the 8th Air Force Historical Society Oct. 11-16 at St. Louis.

According to our By-laws, the Executive Committee will choose which reunion we will join. Early consideration by the committee leans toward 8AFHS, primarily in consideration of our Western members. Since we have plenty of time, final decision will come after consultation with the Board of Directors and comments from the membership. You are particularly invited to send your comments to any member of the Executive Committee: Jim Goar, president; Bob Books, vice-president; Annette Tison, secretary; and Bill McCutcheon, treasurer. Our contact information is in the upper left corner of page 2.

We recently received a very interesting posting at the web site. It was from James E. Goolsby, and here it is verbatim:

"I've been flying the B24J for the Collings Foundation now for some 10 years. I like the B-24 the best. I've got a lot of time in a B-17 also. It was a better airplane, just not pretty and really needed more PR. When you look at the numbers, she was the best at everything. I am proud to have flown one and I am proud to meet the men who flew them at a time when it really counted. God bless them and the B24."

As a non-rated paddelfoot, I'm not qualified to comment further, except an observation that anyone could make: If my memory serves me correctly, the B-17 became operational sometime before 1937 and the B-24 in 1940 or 1941. This means that the Air Corps had a matter of years to observe the B-17 and order a better aircraft for the new and improved model. What it got in the B-24 was increased range and a larger bomb load, two very important tactical characteristics.

So, you pilots, do you have anything to add to Mr. Goolsby's remarks? We're addressing Larry Bachman, Vernon Baumgart, William Case, James Cassity, Carroll Cheek, Gerald Douglass, Harry Downs, Allen Duff, Lester Frazier, John Griffin, Les Hadley, Richard Harer, Wildrick Hart, John Howenstein, Aldon Jensen, Raymond Johnson, Thomas J. Jordan Jr., Bill Jurczyn, Frank Koza, Al Lishka (later Lester), Olen Levell, Oak Mackey, John W. Martin, Jim McGregor, William Riddleberger, Donald Scharf, Wade Sewell, Roland Sabourin, Bruce Sooy, Lou Stephens, Bob Tuchel, Oscar Weed, George Winans, and Neely Young. I apologize if I left out any pilots and hope you'll respond anyway.

As usual, Editor Annette Tison assisted in the preparation of this column.

Blue Skies,
Jim Goar

And speaking of pilots... a list titled "Pilot and Copilot Time" dated 1 May 1944 was among the 392nd BG documentation provided by the Strahans. Of the 144 names, these are

the 15 pilots and copilots with the most flight time as of that date: Irvine A. Rendle 4,285 hours; Myron H. Keilman 2,422 hours; Clinton F. Schoolmaster 1,674 hours; Warren A. Polking 1,670 hours; Jacques L. Francine 1,632 hours; Lawrence G. Gilbert 1,546 hours; Malcolm K. Martin 1,207 hours; Owen H. Filkel 1,161 hours; Clifford E. Edwards 1,138 hours; Melvin H. Graper 1,128 hours; Charles L. Lowell 1,115 hours; Robert D. Copp 1,099 hours; James A. McGregor 1,076 hours; Jacob Weinheimer 1,051 hours; and Leonard J. Barnes 1,036 hours.

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Gotha, the Forts going to Schweinfurt and the Libs continuing on to Gotha. After this split, approximately 100 to 150 enemy FW-190s, ME-109s and rocket-carrying ME-110s, ME-210s and JU-88s viciously attacked the B-24 formation which was uncovered for bombing. These attacks were made from all positions with the enemy fighters relentlessly pressing home their attacks. Stragglers that fell out of formation were immediately shot down.

As the 392nd BG neared the Initial Point, the units of the 2nd CW, the lead CW, were observed to be proceeding on divergent courses. The Command Pilot of the 392nd was forced to make an immediate decision, either to follow the leader of the Air Division to a questionable target and maintain the integrity of the Division formation, or to lead the 392nd and the 14th CW on a separate course that might later prove to be erroneous, and which would certainly expose his isolated formation to even greater enemy attacks. He chose the latter alternative and the Wing, maintaining perfect formation, fought its way through the flak defenses and into the target area. The 392nd BG bombed the target with pin-point accuracy and virtually destroyed it.

A savage running attack was maintained by the enemy for over an hour after the target had been bombed, during which the formation was attacked by wave after wave of enemy fighters which raked it with machine gun, cannon and rocket fire. The desperate enemy even tried air-to-air and cable bombing in a vain effort to break up the formation. In this bitter fighting and in battling their way back to the coast, the 392nd lost seven planes to the enemy and thirteen additional planes suffered battle damage. Their gunners claimed 23 enemy fighters destroyed, 4 probably destroyed and 2 damaged; they were awarded confirmed claims of 16, 1, and 5.

Four aircraft returned early, leaving a total of 32 dispatched. Of these, 29 attacked the primary target, dropping 87.25 tons of bombs, over one-third of the total tonnage dropped on this target of highest priority, the Gotheard Waggonfabrik.

Subsequent photographic coverage indicated that bomb damage had been extremely severe, with 24 buildings destroyed, 11 almost destroyed, 14 severely damaged, and 10 damaged. Reconstruction during a 16-week period following this devastating attack was very meager, attesting to the thoroughness and accuracy with which the Gotha Mission of the 24th of February had been accomplished.

392nd Mission Reports

Capt James N. McFadden, 392nd Operations Officer, reported further details. "About 1215 hours the first enemy
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fighters were seen to be making attacks on stragglers of the B-17 groups ahead. Later they were seen attacking B-24s of the 2nd CW. This action persisted on to the target. Anyone aborting or straggling was immediately attacked and shot down....During the bomb run fighters attacked hard. Though the lead section only suffered one or two attacks the high section lost six planes."

High block lead bombardier 1/Lt George J. Jackson noted that "Intense fighter opposition was encountered all along the run. Five passes were made at our section from the front and low in an attempt to disrupt my run." He then reported simply, "My bombs hit the target."

In its *Detailed and Evaluated Report of Enemy Aircraft Encountered*, the 392nd said, "Tactics used by enemy aircraft (a/c) were the 'figure eight,' 'sisters,' 'triple threat,' 'sneak attacks,' and 'swooper.' Most variations on these were normal variations accommodating the tactical situation. The tactics of the enemy a/c were somewhat less troublesome than the persistence of the attacks. E/A attacked from all quarters, but emphasized the attacks from 11-12 o'clock and 6-7 o'clock. Many attacks were pressed to within 75-100 yards. One new tactic used quite extensively was that of attacking one ship concertedly in three or fours from twelve or six o'clock and then turning back through 180 degrees to attack the ship thus forced out of formation."

In analyzing friendly fighter protection, the teletype said, "Cover from P-47s was excellent. The P-47s consistently engaged the enemy and destroyed several. The protection afforded by P-51s and P-38s was practically nil according to our crews. P-38s giving target coverage remained 5 to 7,000 feet above our formation and failed to come down to give assistance despite numerous green-green flares fired and direct requests for help over command channels. As a

consequence of low-level attacks from enemy a/c, the high altitude coverage was ineffectual."

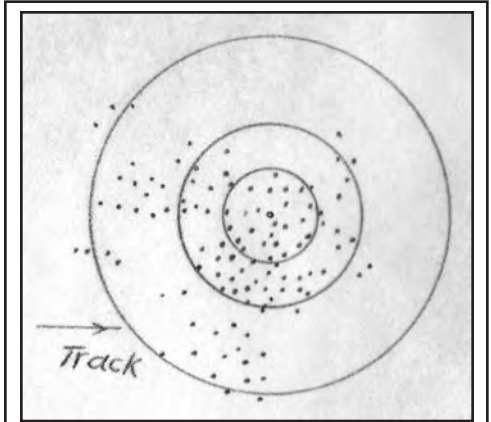
Reaction by the Top Brass

Congratulatory teletypes flooded in. BrigGen H o d g e s , Commanding General of the 2nd Bomb Division, wrote the 14th CW, "Your bombing today was magnificent.

Every man in your outfit should be damn proud of this demonstration of how to destroy the German Air Force. My heartiest congratulations to you, your Group commanders and the officers and men of your units."

The next day, BrigGen Hodges wrote all 2BD stations, "I am confident that you destroyed Gotha yesterday... Our losses are a great blow to us, but it is my hope that a substantial number of them are now prisoners of war. Our only comfort is derived from the fact that their contribution to the war has been a decisive one, and by hastening final victory will save the lives of untold numbers of their comrades in the air and on the ground."

A few days later, Gen H.H. "Hap" Arnold, Commanding
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This 8th AF bomb plot shows that of 110 bombs that could be identified as from 392nd BG planes, 23 percent fell within 500 ft of the aiming point, 64 percent within 1,000 ft of the A.P. and 97 percent within 2,000 ft of the A.P.

392nd BGMA MEMBERSHIP FORM

Please look at the mailing label. Your membership status is shown right after your name. "10" means your membership **has expired** and you need to renew **promptly**. 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 Bill McCutcheon, 20620 Milton Ct., Brookfield, WI 53045. 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 wish to receive the News by postal mail OR [] \$20/year for receipt by email

Hardship Waiver []

DONATION \$ _____

TOTAL ENCLOSED \$ _____

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General, USAAF, wrote: "With relentless determination demanding the respect of everyone in the AAF, you are driving home an attack which is destroying Germany's very vitals. The strongest defense a desperate enemy can devise are not stopping you. You have had heavy losses but you are inflicting heavier ones on the enemy. Your attacks on Regensburg, Leipzig, Bernburg, Gotha and other fighter factories so vital to the enemy are wiping out German fighter production and laying the foundation for decisive and final operations in the future. For continuing to deal such destructive blows at the heart of Germany, I send all of you my best wishes. For the superb job you are doing, I commend all ranks—from top to bottom."

2nd Bomb Division Citation

On 28 Feb 1944, BrigGen Hodges cited five 392nd BG airmen for "outstanding achievement while participating in a highly successful heavy bombardment mission on 24 February 1944." They were Command Pilot LtCol Lorin L. Johnson and from the 579th Sqdn, pilot 1/Lt James A. McGregor, navigator 1/Lt Roy Swangren, and bombardiers 1/Lt Thomas Kennedy and 1/Lt Robert E. Good.

The citation noted that "Despite the difficulty of accurately identifying landmarks because of the snow-covered terrain, the intensive pre-flight study of the target and its vicinity by the above crew enabled them unhesitatingly to advise the Command Pilot of the correct course to the target. His formation was already undergoing heavy and persistent fighter attacks. He was forced to make an immediate decision: either to follow the leader of the air division to a questionable target; or to pursue a separate course that might later prove to be erroneous and which would certainly expose his isolated formation to even greater enemy attacks. He chose the latter alternative, with the result that, although a substantial part of his force was lost to enemy action, the attack was successfully concluded and the target virtually destroyed.

"The professional technique and teamwork displayed by these officers as evidenced by the direct hits obtained

on the target; the determination displayed in pressing the attack so successfully in the face of severe enemy opposition; and the ability to exercise cool judgment under fire in making a momentous decision reflect great credit upon themselves, their organizations, and the Armed Forces of the United States."

Announcement of Distinguished Unit Citation

On 20 Apr 1945, Col Lorin Johnson, now the 392nd's CO, sent a memo to all unit commanders that the Group "has been awarded the Distinguished Unit Citation for outstanding performance of duty in armed conflict with the enemy on 24 February 1944, when the group attacked and virtually destroyed their assigned target at Gotha, Germany, despite almost overwhelming odds of flak barrages and vicious attacks by approximately one hundred and fifty (150) enemy fighters in a two and a half hour aerial battle.

"For this distinguished act a Distinguished Unit Badge may be worn as a permanent part of the uniform by all individuals who were assigned or directly attached to this group on 24 February 1944. However, those individuals who are subsequently assigned or attached may wear subject decoration as long as such assignment or attachment exists.

"The badge consists of a blue ribbon 1 3/8 inches in width and 3/8 inch in length, set in a gold colored metal frame of laurel leaves, approximately 1/16 inch in width. It will be worn on the right breast centered over the pocket. Issuance of Distinguished Unit Badges will be made to all members of the group as soon as supply is received."

THE DISTINGUISHED UNIT CITATION FOR THE GOTHA MISSION

The 392nd Bombardment Group (H) is cited for outstanding performance of duty in armed conflict with the enemy on 24 February 1944.

The Group dispatched 32 B-24 type aircraft, the maximum number available, to bomb the most valuable single target in the enemy twin engine fighter complex, the aircraft and component parts factory at Gotha, Germany. Of these, one was forced to turn back shortly after take off. Flying as

the lead group of the second Combat Wing in the Division formation, they were attacked by the enemy upon entering the Dutch coast. In the bitter aerial battle that ensued, the Group was viciously attacked for over two and a half hours by approximately 150 enemy fighters, consisting of FW-190s, ME-110s, ME-210s and JU-88s, who raked them with cannon and rocket fire and even attempted air to air and cable bombing in a vain effort to disrupt the formation.

As the 392nd Bombardment Group neared the Initial Point, the units of the lead Combat Wing were observed to be proceeding on divergent courses. The Group was faced with the decision to follow the lead units of the Air Division to a questionable target and maintain the integrity of the Division formation

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Bombs from #42-99981, BTO, fall toward the target at Gotha. This 578th Sqdn plane was manned by 1/Lt Cliff Peterson and crew.

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or to pursue a separate course that might later prove to be erroneous and which would expose the Group formation to even greater enemy attacks. The Group chose the latter, and maintaining perfect formation, valiantly fought its way through the flak defenses to bomb the target with pin-point accuracy, virtually destroying it.

Although seven of their aircraft were lost to the relentless enemy in the battle into and from the target, and an additional thirteen aircraft suffered battle damage, they accounted for the confirmed destruction of sixteen enemy fighters, the probable destruction of one and the damage of five additional fighters.

The destruction of this high priority target was a serious blow to the GAF and was a contributing factor to its impotency in the invasion of Continental Europe.

The aggressive courage, determination to do their task at all costs, and combat efficiency of the air crews together with the professional skill and devotion to duty of the ground personnel of the 392nd Bombardment Group (H) have reflected great credit on themselves and on the armed forces of the United States.

Editor's note: The Distinguished Unit Citation was awarded to units of the Armed Forces of the United States and co-belligerent nations for extraordinary heroism in action against an armed enemy occurring on or after 7 Dec 1941. The unit must display such gallantry, determination, and esprit de corps in accomplishing its mission under extremely difficult and hazardous conditions as to set it apart and above other units participating in the same campaign. The degree of heroism required is the same as that which would warrant award of a Distinguished Service Cross to an individual. The award will normally be earned by units that have participated in single or successive actions covering relatively brief time spans. In 1966, the Distinguished Unit Citation was renamed the Presidential Unit Citation.



This photo, taken at 18,000 ft by a/c 42-7473 in the lead squadron, shows the first bomb bursts directly on the mean point of impact (i.e., target). Aboard were Maj Myron H. Keilman and 1/Lt Vernon A. Baumgart and crew, 579th Sqdn.

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gave their lives for many. That day I made a promise that I would one day have a memorial built there in recognition of their unselfish actions, and it is a privilege and an honor to finally realize that promise in their memory. They will not be forgotten."

The Mission

English researcher and 392nd BGMA member David Parnell reminded the audience about the events of 12 Aug 1944. "On that Saturday morning, experienced pilot John



David Parnell, who planned and organized the ceremony, tells the audience about the mission on 12 Aug 1944. He also pointed out that seven of the ten men in Ellis's crew were under the age of 23. The American flag draping the memorial was manufactured in 1944.

Ellis and a crew of nine took off with 34 other B-24 Liberators from their base at Wendling, Norfolk. Their mission that day was to attack an airfield north east of Paris [Juvincourt] which was being used by the German Luftwaffe. The weather that morning was heavy overcast and by the time the group had formed up close to the north Norfolk coast, the sortie was already running half an hour behind schedule.

"The group headed south on a course for Brighton in Sussex but at 7:47am, flying at a height of 18,500 feet just north east of London, something happened. A mysterious mid-air incident occurred causing 29 tons of bomb-laden aeroplane to start tumbling from the sky with the subsequent death of all on board a few minutes later. And yet if it were not for the actions of those on the flight deck, the death toll could have been catastrophically higher."

Call to Remembrance

The Rev. Jane Dicker led the audience in a Call to Remembrance: "At this significant time we pause to honour all those who laid down their lives in war, particularly remembering those from other shores, who in those years answered the call to serve and as a result lost their lives.

"On this day we especially remember: [pilot] John D. Ellis, [copilot] Samuel C. Stalsby, [navigator] Robert B. Cox, [engineer] Stanley F. Jankowski, [gunner] Clare W. Hultengren, [radio operator] John H. Holling, [gunners] Jay V. Cable, Jack O. Shaeffer, Frank Minick Jr., and William C. McGinley."

After the memorial was unveiled, the "Star Spangled Banner" filled the air. With hands over their hearts, the small group of

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Americans in attendance sang their national anthem.

Then, The Rev. Dicker reminded the audience that “We have gathered at this place at this time to remember with gratitude and pride these ten young Americans who served in war and conflict. Ordinary Americans from all places and segments of national life were sent overseas and ‘into battle’ to resist tyranny and aggression and to preserve freedom. Today we especially honour the memory of all American airmen who died in the service of our nation in this campaign, these wars. We remember them. We honour their memory.”

“Today,” she said, “we call on all of you here to recognise the service to our nation given by all war veterans. We dedicate ourselves to the ideas for which our nation fought in many wars. We value freedom. We resist tyranny. We look to the day when more and more ordinary men and women in the world may enjoy freedom, live in peace with their fellow citizens and rejoice in the life that God has given them.

“We remember with pride these ten young men who paid the supreme sacrifice in the defence of our freedom.”

Col Sonny Blinkinsop, USAF attaché at the American Embassy in London, then spoke about the great privilege it was for him to attend the ceremony as a representative of the Air Force which the ten men had served so well. He also presented Ernie with a well-deserved Certificate of Appreciation signed by the U.S. Ambassador to the United Kingdom, the Honorable Louis B. Susman.

It says, “With grateful appreciation to Ernie Havis for his exceptional dedication and life-long commitment to establishing the Liberator Memorial in Cheshunt, Hertfordshire, United Kingdom. You recognized the selfless sacrifice of ten U.S. airmen who lost their lives on August 12,

1944, after steering their aircraft away from the town of Cheshunt and its hundreds of citizens. Your distinguished efforts will remain in the hearts and minds of the American people and all who visit the Liberator Memorial.”

Wreaths

After the “Last Post,” a minute of silence and “Reveille,” 17 wreaths were laid—by Richard Beazley, Vice Lord Lieutenant of Hertfordshire and the Queen’s representative; Col Blinkinsop; 392nd BGMA News editor Annette Tison; Ellis’s daughter Mary Lee Hughes (less than a year old when her father was killed) and her children, Annette Todaro and Michelle Hatata; the Right Honourable Charles Walker, Member of Parliament; Councillor Mark Mills-Bishop, Mayor of Broxbourne; other prominent members of the local government; airmen from the USAF and RAF; the Royal British Legion and Royal Naval Association; and men from the local police and fire departments.

The program ended with “God Save the Queen.”

What Happened?

Although since disproven, it was initially thought that Ellis had collided with a B-17 from the 398th BG. An English witness at the ceremony was convinced that a B-26 Marauder clipped the Lib’s tail fin. However, 576th pilot Carl D. Scharf saw what really happened above the clouds.

In his memoir, *From Plowboy to Flyboy*, he wrote about the poor weather during assembly, which had already caused six planes to abort. “The atmospheric conditions caused a dense concentration of contrails to form. The contrails actually merged and formed their own cloud, so dense that we couldn’t see the groups in front of us. This was a dangerous situation because of the turbulence caused by the unseen groups ahead. Sitting in the pilots’ seats, all the propellers of all the planes turned to the right, or clockwise. This caused a spinning vortex behind the planes, much like a horizontal tornado spinning to the right.

“One of our planes, piloted by Lt John Ellis, was flying above and to my right. Without warning, he and I ran into this horizontal tornado-like turbulence and my plane flipped 90 degrees to the right. I managed to bring it back to a level position at the same instant Lt Ellis’s plane must have flipped completely upside down and spun past me just off of my right wing tip. We were probably at 17,000 to 18,000 feet at the time and climbing.

“I was shocked and turned the plane over to the

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Ernie Havis at the grave of 2/Lt John D. Ellis in the Cambridge American Cemetery.



The two side panels give the names and ages of the 392nd BG’s Ellis crew. The center inscriptions says, “Close to this spot on 12th August 1944 An American B-24 bomber laden with bombs crashed and exploded following a mid air incident. As the plane fell from the sky it was steered away from our town of Cheshunt thus saving many lives. All ten crew on board perished as a consequence of this brave and courageous act. This memorial is dedicated to the memory of those American airmen who made the ultimate sacrifice in the name of freedom for our country. Ernie Havis—Firefighter WW2”

STALAG LUFT 17b

392nd BGMA member Ron Sichau provided his father's documents and sketches from Stalag Luft 17b. 577th radio operator T/Sgt Walter R. Sichau, on 1/Lt Dexter E. Tiefenthal's crew, was captured 18 April 1944.

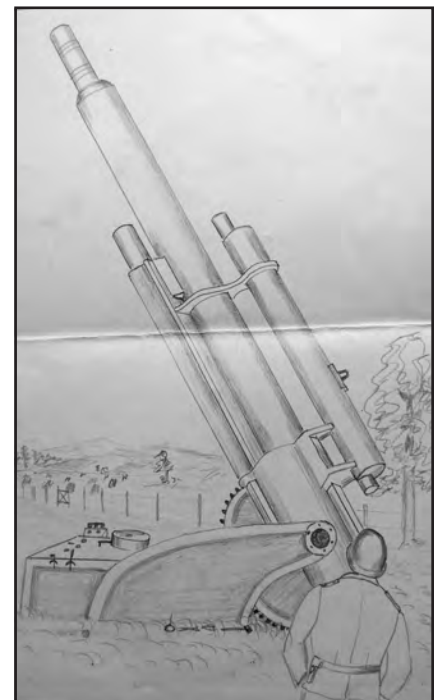
KSF. MANNSCHAFTSSTAMMLAGER XVII B
GNEIXENDORF
TEILLAGER DER LUFTWAFFE
LAGERFÜHRUNG

JAN. 1, 1944

CAMP REGULATIONS

- [1] EVERY GERMAN OFFICER MUST BE SALUTED. WHEN SALUTING, HANDS OUT OF POCKETS, CIGARETTES AND PIPES OUT OF MOUTH.
- [2] ALL GERMAN SOLDIERS IN CHARGE OF ADMINISTRATIVE OR GUARD FUNCTIONS (INCLUDING AUXILIARY GUARDS EITHER IN UNIFORM OR IN CIVIL CLOTHES WITH ARMBANDS) AND ALL ARMED FORCE OFFICIALS, IF ON DUTY, ARE SUPERIORS TO THE PRISONERS OF WAR. THEIR ORDERS HAVE TO BE EXECUTED UNCONDITIONALLY AND IMMEDIATELY.
- [3] ROLL CALL IS MILITARY DUTY! SO BLOUSE AND OVERCOAT BUTTONED, MILITARY (NOT CIVIL) CAP AND SHOES!
- [4] EVERYONE WHO AT SIGNAL FOR ROLL CALL, DOES NOT FALL OUT IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY SHOWS DISREGARD TO-WARDS HIS COMRADES ALREADY STANDING ROLL CALL.
- [5] ONLY THOSE HAVING A SPECIAL WRITTEN PERMIT FOR A SPECIFIED TIME FROM THE DOCTOR ARE ALLOWED IN THE BARRACKS DURING ROLL CALL.
- [6] WHILE ON PARADE KEEP QUIET, AND OBSERVE MILITARY DISCIPLINE (NO SHOUTING, SMOKING, NOR PLAYING)!
- [7] AFTER ROLL CALL LEAVE IN FULL ORDER (NO RUNNING FROM PARADE GROUND)!
- [8] ALL PRISONERS OF WAR, EXCEPT UNABLE, HAVE TO CARRY OUT WORKS CONCERNING THEIR OWN BENEFIT. THOSE REFUSING TO WORK WILL BE FORCED TO
- [9] CHOW DETAIL, WHEN WHISTLED OUT, HAVE TO FALL OUT IMMEDIATELY
- [10] EVERYBODY TO BE DELIVERED INTO INFIRMARY, ISOLATION, OR HOSPITAL, AS WELL AS SUCH DETACHED TO SPECIAL WORKS OR SERVICES, HAVE TO GIVE THEIR NAMES, SECOND NAMES AND NUMBERS TO THEIR BARRACK CHIEF WHO HAS TO INFORM THE RESPECTIVE GERMAN COMPANY CHIEF.
- [11] PRISONERS OF WAR IN ISOLATION ARE NOT ALLOWED TO PAY VISITS OUTSIDE OF ISOLATION NOR TO RECEIVE VISITORS NOT ISOLATED
- [12] THOSE TOUCHING WARNING WIRE OR ENTERING AREA WARNED NOT TO WILL BE FIRED ON WITHOUT WARNING.
- [13] HANGING UP LAUNDRY, BLANKETS ETC. ON ANY BARBED WIRE IS STRICTLY PROHIBITED. HANG THEM ON THE STAKES DESTINED FOR THIS PURPOSE.
- [14] MISPLACING DOG-TAGS HAS TO BE REPORTED AT ONCE.
- [15] PRISONERS OF WAR WHO HAVE TO LEAVE CAMP FOR ANY REASON (E.G. FOR HOSPITAL, DELOUSING, WORKS OUTSIDE OF CAMP SUCH AS UNLOADING RED CROSS PARCELS) ARE NOT ALLOWED MORE THAN ONE PACKAGE OF CIGARETTES OR TOBACCO. EXCESSIVE QUANTITIES WILL BE CONFISCATED.
- [16] ADDRESS REQUIREMENTS, WISHES ETC. ONLY TO YOUR BARRACK CHIEF WHO WILL PASS THEM ON TO THE GERMAN "COMPANY CHIEF."
- [17] CONSULTING HOURS FOR GERMAN "COMPANY CHIEFS" ONLY FROM 9 to 10 AND 15 to 16 O'CLOCK BY BARRACK CHIEFS ONLY.

(GEZ) KÜHN
OBERST u. KOMMANDANT



WAR PRISONERS' AID OF THE Y.M.C.A.

T/Sgt Sichau made his sketches (page 8) and kept his POW memorabilia in a "War-time Log" sent to him and scores of other POWs by the War Prisoners' Aid of the Y.M.C.A. (Young Men's Christian Association). Here is the letter that accompanied Sichau's Log:

Dear Friend, As its title-page indicates, this "War-time Log" is part of a special remembrance from the folks at home. The other articles in the packet are more or less perishable, but this is intended to be kept as a permanent souvenir of the present unpleasantness.

If you do not want to keep a regular diary or even occasional notes on war-time experiences, these pages offer many other possibilities. If you are a writer, there is space for a short story. If you are an artist (some people are) you may want to cover these pages with sketches of your camp, caricatures of its important personalities, whether residents or authorities. If you are a poet, major or minor, confide your lyrics to these pages. If you feel that circumstances cramp your style in correspondence you might write here letters unmailable now, but safely kept to be carried with you on your return.

This book might serve to list the most striking concoctions of the camp kitchen, the records of a camp olympic, or a selection of the best jokes cracked in camp.

One man has suggested using the autograph of one of his companions (plus his fingerprints?) to head each page, followed by free and frank remarks about the man himself. The written text might be a commentary on such photographs as you may have to mount on the special pages for that purpose. The mounting-corners are in an envelope in the pocket of the back cover. Incidentally, this pocket might be used for clippings you want to preserve, or, together with the small envelopes on the last page, to contain authentic souvenirs of life in camp.

Perhaps you will discover some quite different use for this book. Whatever you do, let it be a visible link between yourself and the folks at home, one more reminder that their thoughts are with you constantly. If it does no more than bring you this assurance, the "Log" will have served its purpose.

Yours very sincerely, WAR PRISONERS' AID OF THE Y.M.C.A.

THE POW EXPERIENCE

576th Sqdn navigator 2/Lt David J. Purner was shot down on 29 Apr 1944 and captured the next day. He was held in Stalag Luft 3, endured the forced march to Nürnberg in January 1945, marched to Moosburg in March 1945, and liberated by Gen George S. Patton on 29 Apr 1945. Here are Purner's thoughts on his POW experience, taken from his article in the "WWII Stories" section of www.b24.net.

To reflect a bit on the POW experience and life in a POW camp, let me say it is a very dehumanizing thing. I was reduced to the status of an animal struggling merely to survive. This became the name of the game: SURVIVAL. The will to survive can be an extremely motivating force. In the POW experience, as you lose control of your life, a feeling of utter helplessness sets in; then you suddenly become very bitter and a driving desire to survive engulfs you. I don't know that I could name the worst or the most demoralizing aspect of the POW experience, but I will try to enumerate a few and not necessarily in the order of their importance:

1) The bitter cold that constantly gnawed at the bones. We grubbed out pine stumps with tin cans in order to have fuel. It was tedious and time consuming, but then we had plenty of time.

2) The constant fear for life resulting from beatings, threats and personal observations. Hitler and Dr. Goebbels, his propaganda minister, had promised the German people repeatedly, that the "terror fliers" who had bombed Germany would not survive the camps to leave Germany. I was convinced this was no idle threat.

3) Constant and prolonged hunger, resulting from a prolonged starvation diet. After the Red Cross parcels were depleted, I ate grass soup with horse bones in it. We cut cards so the lucky man could eat the marrow from the bones.

4) The depression and anxieties resulting from not knowing how long this incarceration would last; one year, ten years, or forever. And not knowing how our loved ones were fairing.

5) The deplorable filth. There was no soap and little water available. One cold water spigot served 350 men. We tried to clean the floor and table with sand and bricks.

See PURNER on page 11

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

LAST 392ND POWS

On 2 Mar 1945, members of 2/Lt Willis G. Blakeley's crew, 576th, became the 392nd's last POWs. Radio operator S/Sgt Richard J. Spades remembers the day well.

"It happened on the way back from Magdeburg; in fact, another five minutes and we would have been over friendly territory. Bullets raked the plane and we were on fire from one end to the other."

Pilot 2/Lt Willis G. Blakeley, copilot 2/Lt Harold A. Schoelerman, navigator 2/Lt Charles S. Walker, nose gunner S/Sgt Edgar R. Talley, and engineer Pfc Frank A. Amodio went down with the plane. Spades, waist gunners S/Sgt Robert J. Flesey and S/Sgt John L. Law, tail gunner S/Sgt Stanley J. Rubenstein, and S-27 German Voice Interpreter S/Sgt Herbert M. Halpern successfully bailed out.

Prisoner of War

Spades landed right next to the German artillery unit that had shot at him on his way down, hitting his chute. He fractured his leg on landing and was told by a 14-year old member of the artillery battery, "For you, the war is over." He admired Spades' watch and Spades gave it to him in hopes he would help him get away. There was no chance of that, though, as other Germans came too quickly.

Under guard, Spades hobbled to Minden, where he was joined by another group of German soldiers who had Halpern. Halpern was greatly worried that a mob lining the streets and shouting at the airmen was going to attack him because he was Jewish. Soldiers intervened and protected the airmen. They got pushed a bit, but no one was hanged, which was Spades' main concern.

Spades and Halpern shared a jail cell that night with Rubenstein and Law. They were not given anything to eat or drink.

The next day they were taken to the train station by a few German soldiers. While waiting for the train, the soldiers gave the four airmen no food, but two beers apiece. The soldiers treated the airmen very nicely during the trip to Frankfurt. Then even shook the men's hands as they left the train.

At the German interrogation center at Dulag Luft, Spades' leg was finally examined. By now, it was solid black from toes to knee. Bandages were wrapped tightly around it, and he felt better immediately. Within a few days, though, Spades was marched—in the rain—to a POW camp near Nürnberg and the wrappings disintegrated.

Then he was marched to Stalag 17b at Moosburg, where he was kept the rest of the war.

Asked what he remembered most about his time as a POW, Spades replied, "April 29, 1945—the day we were liberated. The POWs had known for a few days that we were on the verge of being liberated. We knocked the fences down and used the wood for fires and no effort was made to stop us. Some POWs even wanted to escape, but an American POW Colonel told them they were safer in the camp so they stayed put." Their patience was rewarded when Combat Team A of the US 14th Armored Division entered the camp.

In the US

Spades returned to the US on a Liberty ship filled with other ex-POWs. They were taken to Camp Miles Standish, about

40 miles south of Boston. On his first day there, he was shocked to see radio operator T/Sgt Joseph K. VanDeven, who had lived in his hut at Wendling. VanDeven told him the 392nd BG had returned to the US the day before. And, for the first time, Spades learned the circumstances of his being shot down.

"Run Away Gun"

VanDeven said there was quite an inquiry at the 392nd when the formation returned after the mission. Apparently, a machine gun in another 392nd plane had "run away" and inflicted the damage to Blakeley's ship before it could be controlled.

Many years later, Rubenstein told Spades that the unfortunate gunner suffered from mental problems. "I've always felt sorry for that man," Spades said, "because no one would have done that deliberately."

He commented, "We were kind of an expensive crew. We left one plane in Luneville, France, crashed another in England when we ran out of fuel, and then got shot down in Germany."

Editor's note: This was not the first time a machine gun on a 392nd Liberator "ran away" but it is the only documented case with such tragic consequences.

COURAGE from page 7

copilot, unbuckled my belt, stood up, and moved over to the side window just behind copilot Floyd B. Call's head. The Ellis plane was spinning downward violently. Before it disappeared into the undercast about 5,000 feet above the ground, I could see the wing ailerons and other control surfaces had been torn off and were tumbling through the air behind the plane. After the plane had vanished into the clouds, I got back into my seat, completely drained."

Lee Williamson

Over the years, Ernie had written dozens of letters requesting funds to build the memorial. Lee Williamson, a long-time friend, happened to be visiting when Ernie received another rejection letter. When Ernie explained the situation, Lee said then and there that he would finance the memorial. The beautiful red granite marker thus honors not only the Ellis crew but also a wonderful friendship.

"Beyond Courage" Charity

Lee and Ernie are also creating the "Beyond Courage" charity, which will assist Britain's wounded warriors. David

Parnell, who is completing a book about the Ellis crew, will donate all proceeds to this charity and to the 392nd BGMA.

Information on how to buy the book will be provided as soon as it is available.



Ernie Havis (left) and Lee Williamson (right) with an artist's sketch of the memorial. Photo from the Hertfordshire Mercury.

PURNER from page 9

We shaved the hair from our bodies, but we still became vermin infested. I had bedbugs. I had body lice. I had fleas. As I tried to sleep in terribly overcrowded quarters (24 men slept in a space normally devoted to four men), my wrists and ankles and hips were eaten raw. The toilet facility was a G.I. can with a board across the top, which invariably overflowed each night. Most of us suffered from dysentery and jaundice.

6) The complete lack of health care, both medical and dental, became a big problem as the war dragged on, and my physical conditioned worsened. By the time I was liberated my body weight had dropped to 95 pounds.

A POW's QUESTION FOR EMILY POST

579th Sqdn bombardier 2/Lt James W. Hammond became a POW on 5 Nov 1943. He spent the rest of the war in Stalag Luft I. His son, 392nd BGMA member James P. Hammond, tells this anecdote from his father: The Germans issued a gruel of barley as part of the POWs' rations. More often than not, there would be large-shelled, grub-like weevils in it. He remembered scooping them out of the porridge and putting them on the table. He said you would be sitting around the table and hear the bang, bang, bang, of the men hitting the worms with their spoons. One of the men sent a POW letter to Emily Post, the columnist. In it he explained the situation and then wrote, "I am at a loss as to the way of disposing of said 'large worms.' Some say eat them; but if I do I vomit. Others say place them at the side of your plate; but then everybody else vomits. Please advise me on the proper etiquette." Unfortunately, Hammond never told his son what her answer was.

FROM THE FILES

Daily Bulletin, 11 Jan 1944. The following memo from the 2d Bombardment Division is quoted for your information and necessary action:

Care of Typewriters

1. Far too many typewriters in this division are being abused in such a fashion as to necessitate minor repairs on them. This entails the loss of the machine for a period of time running frequently into weeks. 2. Typewriters in this theater are controlled items and every machine is vitally needed. 3. The following instructions regarding care of typewriters must be strictly complied with. (a) Place covers on machines at night. (b) Clean machine of dust and erasure residue at least once daily with typewriter brush. (c) Machine will not, under any circumstances, be oiled by operator. (d) Do not erase over sigment and type bars. Move carriage to right or left when erasing. (e) If mechanic is available have machine checked at least once every six months. (f) Never attempt repairs. This must be done by qualified mechanic. (g) Do not abuse machine; treat it as though it were your own.

Editor's note: This memo reminds us that once upon a time, a typewriter was a high-tech machine!

Daily Bulletin, 14 Jan 1944. Effective 0001 hours 8 Jan 1944, Headquarters VIII Bomber Command will cease functioning as a command and administrative

headquarters. Subordinate organizations of the VIII Bomber Command remain assigned to the Eighth Air Force and all communications will be addressed to the Commanding General, Eighth Air Force, AAF Station 101, in lieu of the Commanding General, VIII Bomber Command.

Daily Bulletin, 20 Feb 1944. All officers and enlisted men are cautioned to refrain from open speculation on future operations, ship and troop movements, allied or enemy secret weapons and the countermeasures, as well as international negotiations concerning military operations. Such discussions are often influenced by unrecognized partial knowledge and to the enemy analyst their trends are significant. The safe rule is to talk of non-military subjects when within hearing of non-military people.

Daily Bulletin, 30 Apr 1944. All personnel are cautioned against moving or disturbing any missile dropped from an airplane. Persons discovering any missile will immediately contact Station Ordnance who will remove it.

GOAR RECENTLY HONORED

Long-time News editor and current 392nd BGMA President Jim Goar was recently named a *Gem* by the Clinton County [Indiana] Historical Society.

Gems are "Persons who serve, volunteer and generously share their time, talents and resources." Awardees "shine brightly in the community; they fill voids, pick up the slack, and share the loads of many." They "lead by example, often behind the scenes, creating opportunity, assisting with challenges, and making a difference in the lives of the citizenry of Clinton County."

Hmmm...That's exactly what Jim has done for the 392nd BGMA for the last twenty years!

NEW PX ITEM

A new item is being added to our PX. It is a short-sleeve white polo shirt with the Crusader emblem embroidered in red, gray and black. Cost is \$25 if you can pick up the shirt at the 2011 reunion or \$30 if you want it mailed to you. Sizes available are S, M, L, and XL. Please send your check payable to "Bob Books" to Bob Books, 1432 Little Creek Dr., Pensacola, FL 32506. Orders may also be placed on-line at www.b24.net/shirt. The photo below shows what the shirt will look like, but please note that the style or color may change slightly based on what's available when the order is placed.

All proceeds will be used for research expenses.



CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

by Tom Perry, 576th Sqdn Armorer

I have recently found comfort reading the Psalms in the Bible. Psalm 23 reads, "The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters, He restores my soul. He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Jesus said in the 10th chapter of John: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me and I give them eternal life and they shall never perish."

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

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

First Class Mail



**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

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 Very Reverend Robert C. Martin, retired Dean of the Cathedral at Erie, Pennsylvania.

∞FOLDED WINGS∞

John H. Conley Jr., 578, Apr. 12, 2005
Alfred P. Cline, 576, Dec. 9, 2010
Milton A. Henderson, 576, May 21, 2010
Robert C. Martin Jr., 576, Jan. 11, 2011
Lawrence D. Jacobson, 578, Dec. 25, 2010
Colleen Michel, wife of George, 576, Dec. 13, 2010
Walter E. Brown, 8th AFHS, Mighty Eighth AF Museum,
Mighty Eighth AF News, Feb. 23, 2011
Edward W. Cole, 577, Feb. 26, 2011
William S. Long, 579, Feb. 17, 2011
John B. Rodriguez, 579, Mar. 9, 2011
Walter S. Meeker, 576, Mar. 11, 2011