

392nd Bomb Group Memorial Association

NEWS

Volume 24

September 2009



FALL MEETINGS ATTRACT MANY CRUSADERS

Reunions in Cincinnati and Chicago were a great success.

8th AFHS, Cincinnati

As is typical, Crusaders featured prominently in the program. The highlight was the first-ever symposium about the POW experience. It was coordinated, arranged, and led by Greg Hatton; his father, 576th waist gunner Sgt Hyman J. Hatton, became a POW on 29 Apr 1944. He never talked to Greg about his experiences, so Greg has spent years uncovering the "Stories My Father Never Told Me."

Panelists included Dr. Vivian Rogers-Price, Director of the Research Center at the Mighty Eighth Air Force Museum, who discussed POW holdings there; author Dr. Arthur Durand, who spoke about the status of the Geneva Convention in WWII and today; Dr. Tamara Haygood, who discussed German medical treatment for POWs; author Marilyn Walton, who talked about retracing the route taken by her father (2/Lt Thomas Jeffers, 458th BG) during the death march; and Navy Chief Petty Officer John A. Gray, WWII analyst for the Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office. He spoke about their role in recovering missing airmen.

Historian Heidi Stark moderated a discussion featuring ex-POWs. T/Sgt Joseph Garber (96th BG, Stalag Luft IV), Col Alexander Jefferson (332nd FG/Tuskegee airman, Stalag Luft III) and 2/Lt Robert Doolan (92nd BG, Stalag Luft III) described the similarities and differences of their experiences.

Chief Petty Officer Gray was also part of this panel. He spoke about the difficulties and triumphs in recovering missing WWII airmen.

8th AFHS president Mark Copeland complimented Greg on the outstanding program and invited him to present a follow-on POW symposium at the next reunion.

578th Sqdn pilot Bob Vickers was a panelist in the symposium, "Courage over Fortress Europe." At the gala banquet, he was presented the President's Award in recognition of his many years of dedicated service to the 8th Air Force Historical Society.



Greg Hatton's POW symposium was an outstanding success.

Memorial Service

The official membership meeting was held at the Cincinnati reunion. The program began with a memorial service, planned by president Jim Goar, celebrating the life of Col Lawrence G. Gilbert.

The service opened with a recording of a brass fanfare of the Air Corps song and the National Anthem. Tom Perry, 576th Sqdn ordnance and Group chaplain, recited the 392nd BG prayer. 578th Sqdn pilot/POW Lou Stephens then read

the 23rd Psalm. A heart-felt eulogy from 578th Sqdn pilot Carroll Cheek asked the simple question, "Where do we get such men?" (The full text of the eulogy is on page 5.)

The service ended with everyone singing Vera Lynn's well-known song, *We'll Meet Again (Don't Know Where, Don't Know When)*. The attendees were urged to "sing your hearts out because the Colonel is listening."

Business Meeting

To align our functioning committees with the By-Laws, their leaders will now be called chairmen, not vice-presidents.

The treasury, recently audited by Tom Perry with no discrepancies

found, is adequate but not robust.

Carroll Cheek reported that the Memorial in Wendling is in great shape except for a recurring problem with the flags being stolen or defaced. Therefore, they are generally replaced only before ceremonies such as Memorial Day or when visitors are scheduled to arrive.

Re-elected to the Board of Directors were Gil Bambauer, Wally Blackburn, Stan Zyborst, Bob Books, and Annette Tison. Oak Mackey was chosen to fill the vacancy left by Col Gilbert's death. The Board elected Jim Goar as President, Bob Books as Vice-President, Annette Tison as Secretary, and Bill McCutcheon as Treasurer.

It was noted that the Ploughshare, the pub near the base, is now closed. Its memorabilia is housed in the Wendling Village Hall.

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FROM THE EDITOR

Reunions. I thoroughly enjoyed the reunion in Cincinnati. The POW symposium that Greg Hatton conceived and organized was well-attended and a resounding success. Congratulations to Bob Vickers, whose extensive contributions to the 8th AFHS were recognized at the gala banquet. I also heard lots of stories which will eventually make their way into the News.

Attention ground crew personnel! The histories of the 10th Station Complement Sqdn, 465th Sub Depot, 1217th Quartermaster Co., 1287th Military Police, 1825th Ordnance Co. (supplemented by Ammunition Officer Charles Dye's military memoirs), and the 2101st Engineer Fire Fighting Platoon have now been posted on our website. All are illustrated by many photos. To view the histories, go to the "Ground Crews" tab at the top of the main page of www.b24.net.

The history of the 403rd Air Service Group has also been posted. This short-lived unit was created by 8th Air Force General Order #52 dated 12 April 1945. The order disbanded the 392nd's ground support units as of 2400 hours on 14 Apr 1945 and then activated the 403rd Air Service Group and its three squadrons: 403rd HQ & Base Services Sqdn, 829th Air Engineering Sqdn and the 653rd Air Materiel Sqdn. Personnel and functions of the old units were transferred to the 403rd ASG.

In Recognition. 578th Sqdn pilot Bob Vickers has placed a memorial to the 392nd BG on the Wall of Honour at the American Air Museum in Duxford, England. It is "In honour of the Ground Support and Air Operations personnel of the 392nd BG 8th AF, Wendling, England."

Update on the Weinheimer crash. Emails from the son of tail gunner Sgt Robert Duffy and the daughter of pilot 2/Lt Jacob Weinheimer give many new details. In a letter to Sgt Duffy, navigator 2/Lt Marvin Gurwit wrote that the a/c was hit in the left wing by flak while over Dunkirk; several of the crew were injured. The plane dropped from 18,000 to 10,000 feet. Just 20 minutes later, the plane impacted about 100 yards off the beach at Westgate-on-Sea, Kent, killing four men. Weinheimer was pinned behind the control wheel. Copilot 2/Lt George C. Marshall, the only uninjured man, helped Gurwit out through the escape hatch and into the shallow water. Marshall then dragged Duffy onto a wing. After English soldiers and aid-men arrived, Marshall helped them free Weinheimer from the wreckage.

2/Lt Weinheimer told his daughter that they had limped back on one engine, barely above sea level. He was heading for the extra-long, extra-wide landing strip at Manston, but "they did not quite make it," crashing about five miles away. The

impact broke Weinheimer's back and crushed his ribs and pelvis.

Sgt Duffy told his children that just before flak hit the plane, an officer called him forward, for reasons he didn't remember. Soon after he moved past them, the oxygen tanks exploded. He was on the flight deck when the plane hit the beach—probably the reason he wasn't killed—though he also suffered a broken back and other injuries.

I asked 578th Sqdn pilot Roland Sabourin and 576th Sqdn radio operator George Michel for technical help so I could understand these new details. George said the drop of 8,000 feet might have been on purpose, to get them low enough that they wouldn't need oxygen masks. He concurred with Duffy's thought that being on the flight deck saved his life. "This I can believe as there was no place in the waist area to strap yourself to for support...you and cartridge boxes and anything loose just went flying when the plane busted up during a crash."

Roland says that the plane was probably "in a slow descending flight path; maintaining airspeed above stall speed assisted the pilots in controlling the a/c and eking out whatever distance they could in their attempt to achieve a controlled crash. I believe the pilots did an admirable job getting to where they could be rescued, especially on one engine." He also commented, "I am amazed that anyone survived in the front end of the plane. I believe they were fortunate in getting as far as they did. It was possible that the good engine could have been the #3 which would have made it a little easier to fly; regardless, it was a bear of a job and probably used the energy of both pilots."

Weinheimer's daughter said of her father, "The fact that he lost half his crew weighed heavy on him the rest of his life."

Update from England. John Gilbert, "our man in England," has been very busy showing visitors around what's left of Station 118. In July, he escorted John Clendening (son of 577th Sqdn radio operator T/Sgt Roger Clendening) and his family. In October he will give Doug Semler (son of 579th Sqdn navigator 1/Lt Robert Semler) and his wife a tour and in November, John will show an English researcher around. The Clendenings were extremely thankful to John and to the British landowners who allowed them to traipse around their property. The 392nd also appreciates their kindness!

President's Message



At the reunions of the 8AF Historical Society and the 2nd Air Division Association this summer, it was announced that the 8AFHS would meet next year at Tucson July 19-24 and the 2ADA at New Orleans in October.

The news of the Tucson meeting was met with some alarm at our meeting at Cincinnati, with members voicing objections to the intense summer heat.

Likewise, the Executive Committee had some reservations about the 2ADA's New Orleans venue, citing the perceived higher room rates there. Alternatively, there was some discussion of a stand-alone for the 392nd in 2010.

A decision need not be made for some time, so we have an opportunity to consider it. Your Board of Directors would like to have member input on the matter, so call, email, or write me or any Board Member with your thoughts. My phone is 765 652 0941, the email is goar@accs.net, and the address is 1555 N. Main St., #106, Frankfort, IN 46041.

☆

The 392nd has always pursued a policy of sending newsletters to selected persons and addresses in England, aiming to keep fresh our footprint there. We are sending 20 copies into the Wendling and Norwich areas; 2 into London, and 5 to other locations in or near East Anglia, including 2 to an aircraft recovery unit and museum in Lincolnshire.

Recently we received a message from John Batchelor, a noted Brit artist. His newsletter had given him word of the passing of Birdie Larrick and he wanted to express his sadness, referring to her as a "special lady." The paths of Birdie, Mr. Batchelor, the American Air Museum at Duxford and the 392nd crossed some time ago concerning a proposed commemorative plate featuring Birdie's namesake a/c, the Birdie Schmidt ARC. The plans never came to fruition, but Birdie, Mr. Batchelor, and the 392nd remained fast friends.

☆

A few days ago I had a great phone conversation with Dr. George Barger, our former Chaplain and for some 15 or 17 years the author of the "Chaplain's Corner," pithy one paragraph features in the newsletter.

George was a bombardier in the 577th. I never made his acquaintance at Wendling, and our friendship over the years was by the correspondence route. However, I felt great affinity to him because he has Hoosier roots.

Although he graduated from the Divinity School of Butler University, a Disciples of Christ institution in Indianapolis, he ended up an Episcopal priest and a Ph. D, both teaching at the university level and filling a pulpit.

I asked him once how a Disciples of Christ young man became an Episcopalian, and he told me, tongue in cheek, "I moved from Indianapolis to Chicago and the Episcopal Church was the only place I could find that served Communion every Sunday."

When asked how he was faring, he reported that he is suffering balance problems and is not teaching in the classroom. Instead, he is teaching a course on the Internet. And as for preaching, he is now just a member of the congregation.

So, George is like the rest of us. Following the words of Theodore Roosevelt, he is "doing the best he can with what he has."

☆

Not having heard from Roland Sabourin for some time, I finally made connection after a failed phone call and a couple of emails. Finally reached at his Fair Oaks, CA, address, he reported that he is well and looking forward to celebrating his 90th on Nov 8.

My phone call to him was transferred to his answering machine, and I thought that I had reached a wrong number because the voice didn't sound as I remembered it. His later email said that he "put a little French" into his answering machine, which is no doubt why I didn't recognize his voice.

Roland was a pilot in the 578th and he remained in the Air Force, retiring as Col and having commanded a SAC Wing.

Blue Skies,
Jim Goar

REUNIONS from page 1

Bob Vickers, author of the two definitive books about the 392nd, has graciously signed over the copyright of both books to the 392nd BGMA. This will ease getting reprints made in the future.

Dues Increase

Because of rising printing and postage costs, the membership voted to raise the annual dues to \$25; however, those who opt to get the News via email will get a \$5 discount and need only pay \$20. The renewal form on page 4 reflects the new fee structure.

Reunion Dinner

The panelists from the POW symposium joined our Group for dinner. The evening began with a reading of the 392nd prayer by Tom Perry and a moment of silence in honor of Col Gilbert. President Jim Goar asked the veterans to stand according to their positions and also recognized the former POWs; each group was greeted with enthusiastic applause.

He thanked Greg Hatton for his exceptional work in organizing the POW symposium. "Greg was researching POWs before anyone else. His father was injured in the death march; Greg saw his suffering and early understood what part the POWs played in the war." In a gesture of thanks, Greg and Jim presented each panelist with a print of P-Bar, the Flying Crusader (a/c #42-7478).

Bob Doolan, a B-17 navigator, later commented that "Anyone could fly a B-17; it took a hell of a pilot to fly a B-24!"

Hospitality Suite

Host Ben Jones filled the room with memorabilia and created a welcoming environment for all to enjoy. Dr. Rogers-Price was a frequent visitor and taped interviews with Tom Perry and Bob Harned for the Museum's Oral History project. Two veterans of other Groups also found a home with us. Dr. Elliott Sweet, 465th BG, was the guest of Laurie Bedus; Peter Ruplenas, 486th BG ground crew, and his son John so enjoyed themselves that they have become members of the 392nd BGMA!

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REUNIONS from page 3

Attendees

Present at the 8th AF Historical Society reunion were Laurie Bedus and Dr. Elliott Sweet; Wally Blackburn, joined by several family members; Bob Books; Carroll and Mabel Cheek; Luc Dewez, our man in Belgium; Allen Duff and daughter Judy McCoy; Jim Goar and daughter Debbie Beigh; David and Renee Greene; Bob and Jane Harned and daughter Ginny Turner; Jim Marsteller; Bill McCutcheon; Perry Onstot and son Jon; Tom Perry, joined by several family members; Fredi and Rodney Proveaux and son Tylar; Dennis Rogers; Jack Rotzien and daughter Christine Messer; Lou and Delores Stephens; Annette Tison; Bob Vickers and son Mark; Chuck and Irma Wheelwright; Stan and Helena Zybort with Helena's son Jack Przystupa.

2ADA, Chicago

Oak and Maxine Mackey welcomed Crusaders to the Second Air Division Association reunion. Oak has been the 392nd's representative to the 2ADA for many years and a past 2ADA president. This year, he and Maxine took over the registration process after the sudden death of long-time membership director Evelyn Cohen (see related story on page 11).

At the reunion, Oak was elected Membership Vice President. He says, "To one and all, if you have 2ADA membership problems I am the guy you should go to. Mailing address: Oak Mackey, 6406 E. Presidio St., Mesa, AZ 85215; phone (480) 641-3033; Fax (480) 641-0506; email, oakmackey@msn.com.

Bob Books updated the attendees on what occurred at the business meeting in Cincinnati. The session began with a moment of silence in memory of Col Gilbert.

Reunion attendees were Bob Books; Judge S.J. and Odes Elden; Richard and Rita Giesing; Bill and Renella Jurczyn; Oak and Maxine Mackey; Bill McCutcheon; and John and Ruth Muka.

2010 Reunion

The next reunion of the 8th AFHS will be in Tucson, AZ, from July 19-24, 2010; the 2ADA is tentatively planning a reunion in New Orleans in October 2010. With concerns raised about the heat in both locations, the decision about the 2010 reunion will be made at a later date and announced in a future issue of the News.

A THANK YOU FROM GREG HATTON

On the 21st of August, I was part of an extraordinary cooperative effort which took place at the 8th AFHS reunion. Eleven panelists converged on Cincinnati in order to share their expertise about Air Corps POWs with the attendees. They arrived, enthusiasm intact, from Georgia, Texas, New Jersey, New York, Nebraska, Michigan, Florida, Virginia and Ohio.

What made the event remarkable was the cooperation and enthusiasm which the audience of one hundred reflected back to them. From the opening remarks of Dr. Arthur Durand at 1 pm, to the last words of Heidi Stark's panel discussion at 4 pm, they held to their seats. After the event, scores assembled in the adjacent lobby to chat with the authors, filmmaker, academics and former prisoners.

Were it not for the efficient and seemingly effortless support by the green-shirted 392nd Second Generation, this affair might never have gone so well. The moment the participants arrived in the auditorium with their presentations, Ben Jones took them in hand and "knocked their socks off" with high octane upgrades of the slide shows. Once invested in their work, he could do no less than set up and project them on his own computer.

Laurie Bedus stood in for me as a welcoming committee of one, as she escorted arriving senior citizen VIPs. When the program notes ran out, she took it upon herself to print more and distribute them.

See THANK YOU on page 11

MEMBERSHIP FORM

If you feel that you are in a position to help the 392nd BGMA treasury with a donation, there is a provision for it below. 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.

Send this form and your check (payable to 392nd BGMA) to Bill McCutcheon, 20620 Milton Ct., Brookfield, WI 53045.

Name _____ Ground ☐ Air ☐ Sqdn/Unit _____
Associate ☐ If you're joining or a member because a spouse, friend, or relative served in the 392nd, please give us his name and unit: _____

Mailing address _____

Email address _____ Telephone number _____

Dues:

☐ \$25 if you wish to receive the News by postal mail OR ☐ \$20 if you wish to receive the News by email
Life Membership: age 61-65, \$120 ☐; age 66-70, \$96 ☐; age 71 and up, \$78 ☐

Hardship Waiver ☐ DONATION \$ _____ TOTAL ENCLOSED \$ _____

A COMRADE IN ARMS— LAWRENCE GILBERT

This eulogy by Carroll Cheek to his long-time friend was delivered at a memorial service during the Cincinnati reunion.

At the end of the Korean War movie, *The Bridges of Toko-Ri*, the commanding officer, portrayed by actor Frederic March, reflected on the professional, personal and ultimate life sacrifice of the hero played by William Holden and said, "Where do we get such men?"

As I reflect on the life of Lawrence G. Gilbert I ask myself that same question. Where do we get such a man?

Lawrence Gilbert—Col Gilbert to many, Larry to some, Gil to most of us—was a man of great irony.

The irony is that this humble cheerful man was a warrior for his country, a comrade in arms, a friend to many and I am honored to say—A Close Personal Friend to me.

As a young boy growing up on a farm in Indiana, he was always dreaming and thinking about airplanes, never realizing that he would someday be a pilot and commander in the great war of liberation.

Like the veterans in this room, Gil saw the great tragedy of war and in the midst of conflict performed his duty—completed his mission.

He led many of us through the most significant time of our lives. I am sure you feel the same.

Years later, after retirement, he continued to serve through his leadership in the formation and growth of the 392nd Bomb Group Memorial Association—our association.

I first met Gil when I arrived at the Wendling air base in April of 1944. I was a new lieutenant; he was the Group Executive Officer.

I left the base after 33 combat missions in the fall of that



578th Sqdn pilot Carroll Cheek remembering his friend Larry Gilbert.

year. I did not see Gil again until an 8th Air Force reunion many years later. I discovered we had a common interest—the restoration of the monument at the Wendling airfield and by that effort the recognition of the sacrifices of the men of the 392nd. We spoke and met many times to further that goal. Over the years that

relationship evolved into a great friendship.

We shared our lives. We trusted each other. I never trusted any man more. We spent a lot of time with each other. We planned, traveled, ate, drank and laughed throughout this country and England. The details of some of our adventures will remain confidential—your imaginations will tell a better story than my edited recollections.

How do we best remember him? I will not presume to know the answer for you—I will speak for myself and my family and say he is best remembered as a true kind gentleman. He was a gentle man. Again here is the irony—this gentle man made many decisions in war that led to placing his fellow man in peril. He did it out of duty—not for self-advancement, promotion or other personal gain.

Throughout those days and beyond—he retained a sense of cheerfulness. This approach to life is something I will forever admire. As my wife Mabel and my son can testify, there was nothing more refreshing and happy than to hear Gil sing early in the morning.

It is a rare occasion for me and I believe most of us to get up in the morning and sing. It was a rare occasion for Gil to get up and not sing. We all remember him leading at the end of each meeting, in perfect pitch, the singing of "God Bless America."

I miss this man. I have already shed my tears at his passing. I now smile as I reflect on the good life led by this great, humble gentleman.

Gil answered the call to arms. He defended his country. He rose to the occasion and did what needed to be done. He did what many in this great country have done. Where do we find such men? We find them right here.

Our final prayer is—Gil, may God bless your heart and your gentle soul.

Amen.

Mission accomplished.

Carry on.

A UNIQUE CONNECTION

F/O Calvin J. Carter, navigator on 2/Lt Gene Hubbart's crew, has an unusual link to both Birdie Schmidt and Col Gilbert. His crew was shot down on their first mission, 15 Feb 1945, while aboard #42-50387, Birdie Schmidt ARC.

Hit by flak during the bomb run, they lost the #1 and #2 engines and were unable to feather #2. The crew bailed out; four were captured by a mob of angry German civilians.

The men were all mistreated, but their Jewish nose gunner/toggler Cpl Paul Glassman got the worst of it. He was stripped down to his coveralls, taken into a barn, and beaten. He managed to break away but was shot, then put in a horse-drawn cart and covered with hay.

Carter, radio operator Cpl Raymond Laskowski, and waist gunner Cpl Richard P. Schad were held in a nearby alley. A man wearing a swastika in his suit lapel hit them all with his fists; he then struck Carter in the head with a rifle butt.

The Germans got a rope, tied the three airmen around their necks, and attached the rope to the same cart in which Glassman had been thrown. They were led to the other end of town, where some German soldiers awaited. Since the soldiers were standing in front of a dirt bank, Carter was sure they were going to be lined up and shot. He remembers thinking, "I'm going to find out what it's like to be dead."

Instead, the Americans were taken to a military jail, where their other crew members soon joined them. The tired airmen were allowed to sit on the floor of the jail, except for

See HUBBARTT CREW on page 11

10th SCS: First at Wendling

The 10th Station Complement Sqdn was not only the first of the 392nd's ground units to be activated (15 Apr 1943) but was also the first to arrive at Wendling (1 Jul 1943). According to its history, the unit then "made the field ready for the arrival of the 392nd Bomb Group and attached units which moved in on 2 Aug 1943."

The mission of the 10th was to operate base utilities, telephone/teletype circuits, flying control, transportation, communication, Post Exchange, and similar auxiliary services. Its workers included the CO's orderly, electricians, carpenters, cooks, bakers, chaplains, truck drivers, flying control and communications personnel, welders, AA defense gunners, and painters—in short, everyone needed to support the day-to-day operations of the Group.

Gil Bambauer was a parachute rigger in the 10th. He says that when they moved onto the base in 1943, "Potatoes were still dumped near the mess hall's back door. Later they arrived in large tins (dehydrated) causing many happy KP workers."

Bernie Weisberg

Bernie Weisberg fondly remembers his time with the 10th. "The guys were a great bunch to be associated with, particularly S/Sgt Levi Lingle and S/Sgt Paul R. Kozlowski. They were older than I was (but I was only 18½). They were also sheet metal workers; they took me under their wing and always called me the kid and looked over me.

"I can remember one day we were on top of a B-24 doing repairs when one of them pulled out a chaw of chewing tobacco and offered me a chew. I declined but they asked, do you like apple juice, to which I replied I do. Well, they said, it tastes just like apples, so I took a bite. It goes without saying I got so dizzy I almost fell off of the wing and they laughed so hard, but they were great guys along with all the others on the base.

"Of course one of my most memorable moments at Wendling was on May 8th, 1945; we were playing softball when the announcement came over the loudspeaker that the war was over in Europe."

Anecdotes from the History

The official history of the 10th includes many stories about its personnel. Pfc Thomas J. Bittar was an air field controller out in the Caravan. "On one occasion, he was noted to run into the middle of the runway jumping up and down and waving his arms to prevent a ship from landing as the one ahead of him had crashed. The pilot saw him just in time to prevent landing and tore off for the blue of the sky. It seemed that the pilot refused to notice the red flares coming from the Control Caravan and Tom prevented the pilot from landing. It would have been TS if the pilot had landed."

Pvt Rudolph D. Lindgren and Pfc Anastas A. Panteck were "men of no rank but stout hearts and stomachs. It is their unholy task to see to it that all the grease traps on the base are properly cleaned and maintained daily. Surprisingly, the gripes of these boys are nil."

The undermanned Base Utilities section was hard-pressed to accomplish all its duties. In July 1944, its personnel had "been restricted to the base and are working night and day pouring concrete on the runways and doing the other many

See 10th SCS on page 9



Oak and Maxine Mackey



Luc Dewez & Dennis Rogers



Annette Tison



Christine Messer and Jack Rotzien



Judy McCoy and
Allen Duff



Bill McCutcheon



Jon and Perry Onstot



Tom Perry with Brian & Dianna Nestor

PHOTOS FROM THE REUNIONS



Jim Marsteller



Ken, Brenda, Wally & Darryl Blackburn with Megan Steven



Mabel and Carroll Cheek



Debbie Beigh and Jim Goar



Hospitality host Ben Jones



Tylar, Fredi, and Rodney Proveaux



Lou and Delores Stephens



Renella and Bill Jurczyn



Ginny Turner with Jane and Bob Harned



Chuck and Irma Wheelwright



Bob and Mark Vickers



Laurie Bedus and Dr. Elliott Sweet



Renee and David Greene



Rita and Richard Giesing



Greg Hatton and Bob Books



Odes and Judge S.J. Elden

A Twist in the Tale and the Fate of the Ellis Crew

Two Englishmen have recently completed their research into what happened to 577th Sqdn pilot 2/Lt John D. Ellis and his crew. All were killed in a crash on the northeast outskirts of London on 12 Aug 1944.

John A.W. Harris was 11 years old when he saw the smoke rising from the crash site; his uncle was the first fireman on the scene. John's findings, complete with several maps and photos, appear on the 12 Aug 1944 mission page on www.b24.net.

David Parnell lives not far from the crash site and is writing a book about the events of that tragic day. His article appears below.

With the arrival of the 8th Air Force in the UK during 1943, most towns and villages in the southeast of the country became quite accustomed to the heavy drone of American B-24 and B-17 bombers thundering overhead with their deadly cargo destined for German-occupied Europe.

For the small town of Cheshunt in Hertfordshire, August 12th 1944 should have been similar to any other day in wartime Britain, but at 08.00 hrs that morning an incident occurred which would shake the town to its roots. B-24 #42-95023 piloted by 2/Lt John D. Ellis came hurtling through the low cloud base, crashing into the ground and exploding in a ball of fire.

Local opinion was the ship had been involved in a mid-air collision with a B-17 from the 398th BG at Nuthampstead, Hertfordshire. However, a simpler reason for the loss of the ship and all ten crew now appears probable.

Weather conditions for the mission to Juvincourt A/F were less than ideal with a heavy grey sky and cloud base rising in places from 1,800 to 10,000 feet. In fact, six of the 35 ships from Wendling failed to rendezvous with the lead ship and aborted the mission.

After an early morning briefing, the Ellis crew took off at 05.28 hrs on a course to Buncher 5, near Saffron Walden, Essex.

According to the 392nd's report on "Aircraft Not Attacking," a/c #023 had crashed over the UK about two hours after take off. Cause of the accident was unknown, but not due to enemy aircraft. On another document, it was reported that the ship had crashed over the northeast outskirts of London with no survivors. It was last seen in a flat spin with the tail assembly broken off.

The Ellis ship hit the ground at 08:00 hrs, burst into flames and then exploded some three to four minutes later. The next day, a national newspaper reported that the initial cause of the crash was a mid-air collision with B-17 Tomahawk Warrior from the 398th BG.

However, studying the flight and rendezvous times of the B-17 brings this theory into serious doubt. Tomahawk Warrior (Searl crew) took off from Nuthampstead at 06:18 with the intention of group formation at Buncher 17 near Debden. With the thick cloud cover, this proved impossible and the ships were told to reform at Splasher 11, Southampton. No response was received from 2/Lt Searl and it was assumed he was now on a flight path to Southampton.

The likely flight path would have taken him over or close to where he crashed at Penn, Buckinghamshire. Searl's ship crashed at 07.25 hrs, some 67 minutes after take off.

Therefore, the two planes crashed 35 minutes and 28 miles apart. One other aspect of the incident is the B-17 reportedly came in first with one and then with two engines on fire. Surely if an impact had occurred between the two aircraft the damage sustained would have been far more severe?

Virtually all eyewitness reports make reference to the Ellis ship being in some kind of a spin, with two stating the tail was either off or damaged. I am particularly intrigued by one comment that a/c 023 "may have iced up" and this theory sounds most likely to have caused the tragedy.

A climb through 8,000 feet of very dense cloud would have caused a considerable amount of ice on the wings had the heating elements not been deployed or malfunctioned. If a large chunk of ice broke off and hit the tail, it would have caused not only the damage seen by other crews but also a serious spin.

Witnesses on the ground also heard the sound of engines "starting and stopping," suggesting the ship was still spinning before it emerged from the clouds some 1,800 feet above the ground.

Control of the ship would have been very difficult. If the props had not been feathered before the dive, the engines would have been damaged through excess spin speed, making it even more difficult to keep the ship aloft.

During the final moments before the crash, Ellis appeared to have gained an element of control but unfortunately the ship came in too steep, hit the ground and burst into flames.

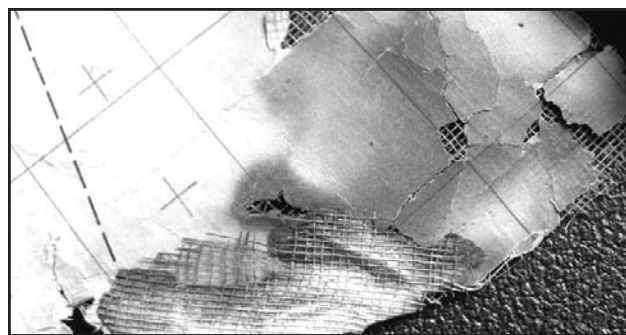
In recognition of what was viewed as Ellis's deliberate effort to steer the ship away from their town, residents of Cheshunt raised funds for a memorial plaque to the crew. It now hangs in the Cheshunt town library with a duplicate in the visitors center at Cambridge American Cemetery.

David Parnell

Hertfordshire UK

Acknowledgements: Annette Tison, Malcolm Osborne, Cliff Bishop and others of 398th BG Memorial Association UK.

BOROUGH OF BROXBORNE
LIEUTENANT ELLIS WAY



Top photo: In 1995, during the "50th Anniversary of VE-Day" events, a road near the crash site was renamed in honor of the 392nd's 2/Lt John D. Ellis. Bottom photo: This scorched navigator's map floated down shortly after a/c #023 crashed and exploded. It is now at the Lowewood Museum in Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire. Photos from David Parnell

10th SCS from page 6

jobs about the base. The Squadron Commander upon request gave them a helping hand and removed them off the duty roster for a period of two weeks."

All members of the 10th Station Complement Squadron worked very hard. As proof, in August 1944 1/Lt Calvin Daughdrill was named the 10th's Adjutant, Transportation Officer, Mess Officer, Supply Officer, Postal Officer and last but not least Squadron Historical Officer.



When the RAF turned over Station 118 to the Americans on 14 Sep 1943, ground support personnel—probably from the 10th SCS—were busy working on the runways. Gil Bambauer knew about the ceremony but had hangar duty and could not attend.

FROM THE HISTORIES...

577th Sqdn, Sep 1944: "The number of missions needed for a combat tour has been increased to 35 but the crews have made surprisingly little complaint. Most of them seem to realize that while the flak has become worse the danger of attack from enemy aircraft has lessened."

465th Sub Depot, Oct 1944: "With painting at its peak, the latrines came in for a bit of rejuvenation. This painting eliminated the artistic figures draped on the walls. The elsen cans in the latrines were also cleaned, repaired and painted. The urine cans proved to be inefficient for their purpose, so construction of larger ones was under way. Fifty-gallon oil drums, modified with a hole cut out and handles welded to the side, served the urine can purpose adequately. 'Used Beer' was painted on each drum inasmuch as the contents of the can amount to just that."

...AND TODAY'S NEWS

In its 5 Oct 2009 issue, *Time* magazine reports that "At age 92, Dame Vera Lynn became the oldest living artist to notch a best-selling record when her collection of World War II-era songs, *We'll Meet Again: The Very Best of Vera Lynn*, shot to No. 1 on the U.K. album charts. Lynn's 24-song compilation coincided with the 70th anniversary of the start of the war." She first recorded *We'll Meet Again* in 1942 and told *Time* that it is the song "that means more to me than anything. It was the optimistic song, about the end of the war."

Mission to Kassel

The 392nd flew back-to-back missions to Kassel, Germany, on 27 and 28 Sep 1944 with no casualties on either sortie. However, on the earlier mission, the 445th BG lost 25 ships—the highest loss for a bomb group in any single 8th Air Force operation.

Here, engineer Sgt Harris B. Albright of 2/Lt John E. Ross's crew describes the second trip to Kassel.

Of course we were all very superstitious. The four leaf clover, rabbit's foot, the same socks, touching the left front tire when entering the plane. You name it, we had it.

On the 28th of September, 1944, on our third mission, we were getting heavy flak damage over Kassel, Germany. Ammo was going off from being hit by the flak. Lt Ross asked me to go back and check on the crew and plane.

--Cpl Eugene Arnold, the tail gunner, was lying on the floor. He had had the wind knocked out of him from trying to jump out of the tail turret backwards.

--Sgt Van Brooks, the right waist gunner, was in shock. As he had been straightening up from getting a handful of chaff, he looked up and saw that the chaff chute was gone and had been replaced with an eight inch hole.

--Cpl Wally Blackburn, the other waist gunner, was also on the floor. He had been hit by flak just above the ankle.

I applied first aid to Blackburn's ankle, then made in-flight repairs to the plane. I threw out the spent cartridge shells from the ammo that had "cooked off" and hurriedly replaced them with good shells. Then I re-linked the cartridge belts and hooked up the belt again. I plugged up the holes in the fuselage as best I could.

When we got back to Wendling, Lt Ross notified the base that we had a wounded man aboard. We were met by an ambulance. Since Blackburn had already been bandaged up, they just told him to report to the Infirmary to have his wound checked out.

We wouldn't let Blackburn go to the hospital because we didn't want them to keep him. We wanted to finish our missions as a unit. So we dressed Blackburn's wound in the barracks. Our superstition kept Blackburn from receiving the Purple Heart he should have received.

Thanks to the people who made our planes and the ground men who kept them flying, we finished our 35 missions without an abort and we dropped our bombs on 34 of our targets. The one time we had to hold our bombs was when a plane from the low squadron flew under our open bomb bay. We then bombed a target of opportunity.

[Editor's note: In February 2009, Wally Blackburn's grandson Michael submitted the paperwork to get Wally his long-overdue Purple Heart.]

A "Dry Land" Ditching

In response to the editor's request for ditching stories, 577th Sqdn navigator 2/Lt Russell Williams and gunner S/Sgt Al Schumacher from 2/Lt William J. Clower's crew teamed up to present this account of their "dry land" ditching.

The 16 Jan 1945 mission to Lauta (Dresden) was the Clower crew's 15th. The plan called for us to meet at the I.P., make the bomb run, then take evasive action in a large circle and head for the English Channel and home.

Flak had already cost us an engine and we could no longer keep up with the rest of the formation and continued south. Two P-51s came to look us over, gave us a salute and left us to fend for ourselves. Al had gotten a bomb out that was "hung up" in the bomb bay while Russ kept track of our location and depended upon the pilot to make necessary decisions.

We continued to lose altitude and airspeed. We all continued to stare at the feathered props (by this time, we had lost #1 as well) when Bill called, "Russ, where the hell are we?"

After some rapid dead reckoning and map consultation, Russ told Bill that there was an emergency field near Nancy, France, and gave him a heading of 300 degrees. However, we continued to lose airspeed and altitude, and over the intercom came the fateful words, "Guys, we aren't going to make it! Make up your minds—do you want to bail out?"

We all voted to ride the plane down. At that, we were all told to take crash positions. Bill and copilot Harry Reel stayed at the controls and everyone else went in crash positions. We could all feel the plane losing altitude rapidly and then we heard Bill say, "Oh, no, Harry!" From training and landing instincts Harry had hit the landing gear lever, but it should have stayed up under the conditions of the land and snow covering.

The next few minutes were all a continuous bouncing and noise as we plowed our way through brush and small trees. A landing gear flew past a waist window, and then everything was silent. We all broke out into a cheer and then quickly got out of our mangled plane. We were all alive, uninjured but for bruises.

We were all praising Bill and Harry for the wonderful crash landing when we saw some flames. We then ran like hell to get away from the plane.

Two spotter planes from Nancy circled over us. One managed to land, checked if anyone was injured, then took off with Bill. Much later, a truck with Bill aboard came to pick us up.

The rest of the story was making our way to Paris where a C-47 was waiting to take us back to our base. We later discovered that we crashed very close to the front lines and the land wasn't in American hands for very long.

The day after getting to our base we were once again flying a bombing mission over German-held territory.

[Editor's note: A circuitous route was planned for the mission. As a result, 19 a/c landed on the Continent due to low fuel or battle damage, with their crews returned to Station 118 on the 17th. According to Group historian Col Bob Vickers, the 392nd had only eight serviceable B-24s at the end of the day and was thus stood down, not flying another combat mission until 21 January.]



When the 392nd's bombers reached the primary target, the oil refinery complex just north of Dresden, it was obscured by smoke and clouds. The lead squadron with 9 planes then elected to bomb the nearby aluminum works at Lauta, with excellent results.

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: Jim Goar, 1555 N. Main St. #106, Frankfort, IN 46041

THANK YOU from page 4

Dennis Rogers was everywhere at once, the sergeant at arms who set up displays, arranged seating, and completed the scores of preliminary tasks that insured a great show.

Familiar and friendly faces sat in the front rows to buoy this nervous moderator: Bob Books, Jim Marsteller, Bill McCutcheon, Annette Tison, the Greenes, Stan Zybort, Jim Goar, Tom Perry... the cast of our 392nd BGMA.

The POW Forum worked well because everybody in that room wanted it to be a success. I'm grateful for everybody's efforts. It was a team effort.

Sincerely,
Greg Hatton

EVELYN COHEN, ONE OF A KIND!!

by Oak Mackey, the 392nd's 2ADA Chairman

If you were a member of the Second Air Division Association in 1954, you mailed your annual dues to Evelyn. If you were a member in 2009, you mailed your annual dues to Evelyn. Non-stop for 55 years she was the Vice-President of Membership, and she did it her way.

Yes, she was a loner, working long hours stuffing dues notices into envelopes, addressing, and putting stamps on.

Also, there was a constant flow of address changes to record, new members came in, there were deaths, all this information had to be put in the files and recorded in the 2ADA roster so that the Journal could be accurately mailed out to all members.

All of the above was not enough; for most of those years she was also the Chairman of the Conventions Committee. There were no other committee members—she did it all by herself, and that's the way she wanted it.

It must have been 1991 when I was first elected Group Vice-President of the 392nd BG, and so began my encounters with Evelyn. She brooked no nonsense from a new Group VP, yet if a request for something special was made she gave it her full attention and the request was usually granted.

The 392nd BG always had a Hospitality Room provided at all conventions; if we needed a Meeting Room, she found one for us.

The 1995 Convention was in Norwich to commemorate the 50th Anniversary after WWII. A British gentleman, Doug Willies of Sheringham, had researched the crash of a 392nd BG B-24 in the outskirts there on Jan. 4, 1944. 2/Lt Colby Waugh and crew were returning from a mission to Kiel with two engines out, trying to make it back to base, crashed in a small field on a hill south of town, five survivors, five casualties.

Beginning in 1992, Willies had located family members and the one crew member still living, Henry Wilk, tail gunner. In 1994, there were ceremonies at the All Saints Church and a monument to the crew was placed in the church yard. When Willies learned the 1995 Convention would be in Norwich, he immediately asked me if the 392nd BG members could possibly come to Sheringham to view the monument and enjoy a full day of festivities in the Sheringham area.

To make a longer story short, I asked Evelyn if she could provide a coach for the 392nd so we could go to Sheringham.

The first answer was a curt "NO." After she learned what it was all about, she said, "Maybe." A few days later she called and said we would have a coach.

That was Evelyn, she only had about seven thousand details to work out for the convention, yet she took time to find the 392nd a coach.

She loved us all, now she's gone. She died June 25, 2009.

Editor's notes: 1) One of the survivors from Lt Waugh's crew was T/Sgt Kent V. Parke. His second close call is detailed in the June 2009 News, when he bailed out of 2/Lt Weinheimer's badly damaged plane while it was still over France, shortly before it crashed at Westgate-on-Sea, Kent, England. 2) After Evelyn's death, Oak was asked to become Temporary VP of Membership in the critical weeks before the September convention. In his typical unassuming way, he said yes. At the convention, he was elected as the 2ADA's permanent VP of Membership, which he will hold concurrently as the 392nd's representative to the 2ADA.

HUBBARTT CREW from page 5

Glassman. He was forced to stand in a corner of the cell facing the wall.

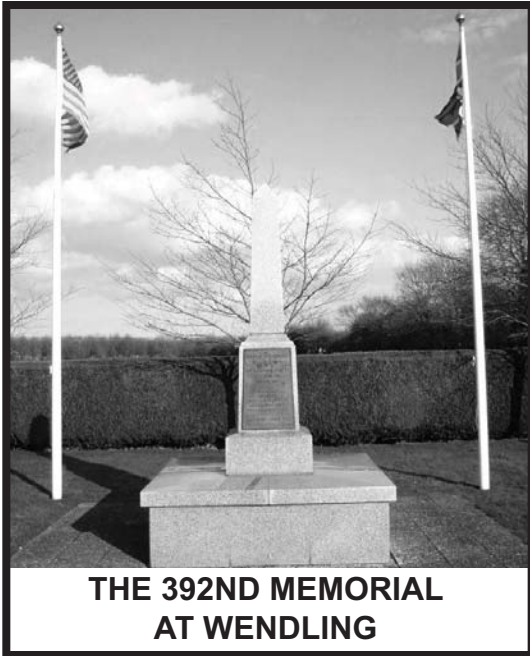
Tail gunner Cpl Howard L. Neumann, who spoke fluent German, asked their captors what would happen to them. He was told that the officers and enlisted men would go to separate POW camps but "the Jew" would be sent to a concentration camp. Glassman was singled out for physical and verbal abuse throughout their trip to Dulag Luft, where Carter lost contact with him.

After the men arrived at the interrogation center, the bullet was removed from Glassman's body. Instead of a concentration camp, he was sent to Stalag Luft III.

Carter says, "We were fortunate that Col Gilbert had told us, as a new crew, to take our .45 automatics and bury them in the bottom of our footlockers. His reasoning was that if shot down, we would likely be killed if we tried to shoot our way out. He was right!!!"



Birdie Schmidt and Col Lorin Johnson, 392nd CO, in front of her newly-christened plane, a/c #42-50387. It was shot down on its 63rd mission while being flown by a crew on their first combat mission.



**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 VI**

CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

**by Tom Perry,
576th Sqdn Armorer**

In a recent incident, two men in Florida were arrested because they prayed before eating while they were on public school grounds. This caused me to think about the many times we feel the need to pray and how circumstances have changed and do change our approach to prayer.

Before and after briefing, our air crews were fervent in prayer, asking God to protect them and to bring them back to our base safely. Some of the ground crewmen also prayed for their safe return from the missions. These were heartfelt and earnest. It is almost natural for us to pray when facing danger or difficulties.

My prayer for you is, "The Lord bless you and keep you, The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you, The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace."

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∞

Stephen J. Gurney, Assoc, Aug. 3, 2008

Robert C. Elston, 577, June 8, 2009

Evelyn Cohen, 2ADA, June 25, 2009

Robert E. Semler, 579, June 21, 2007

William E. Smith, 576, Feb. 1, 2009

Jerome Hough, 576, Nov. 6, 2008

John G. Buschman, 578, July 13, 2009

Irving C. Dupuis, 576, June 28, 2009

Lorn W. Matelski, 579, Jan. 2, 2008

Michael Sumislawski, 576, Sept. 12, 2008

Ray J. Parker, 576, June 1984

Thomas G. Holmes, 577, June 5, 2009

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

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

First Class Mail