



## AIR SHOW & REUNION BIG SUCCESS

The Thunder over Michigan air show drew many Crusaders to the August reunion in Detroit. Nearly 60 people, including 19 veterans, attended at least part of the 392nd's activities.

Other bomb groups and Stalag Luft III POWs also held reunions in Detroit.

The air show included planes ranging from the PT-17 Stearman to the F/A-18C Super Hornet. The large crowd soon learned that the planes got faster and louder as they got more modern. A formation of eight B-17s and a trio of P-51 fighters enthralled everyone there. The lone B-24 had to land early due to oil problems but was repaired in time for afternoon flights.

As usual, our hospitality room was the focal point for fun, fellowship, and education. Host Ben Jones kept food, spirits, and conversation flowing freely.

### Business Meeting

The annual business meeting opened with the playing of the 2ADA Fanfare and the Pledge of Allegiance. Then, President Jim Goar presented a plaque to 578th Sqdn pilot Carroll Cheek. It recognized his skill as a pilot on 33 combat missions, his wisdom as a Director since the formation of the 392nd BGMA, and his dedication to the Wendling Memorial. Carroll, who had announced his decision not to run for re-election as a Director, was named Director Emeritus.

Treasurer Bill McCutcheon reported a boost in our coffers this year due to a significant increase in dues and donations and no major expenses.

In new business, Communications Committee chairperson Annette Tison announced the creation of a new ad hoc Membership Committee. Its members will contact each of our veterans and obtain an oral history of their service with the 392nd. (See the article on page 3 for more details.)

The Board of Directors voted to discontinue Life Memberships. The status of current Life Members will not change.

The 392nd BGMA is working to renew our non-profit status. Vice President Bob Books was asked to explore if becoming an educational organization will best meet our needs.

### Elections

Dick Giesing and Jack Rotzien were elected to fill Director vacancies in the Class of 2012 created by the deaths of Gil Bambauer and Stan Zyborg. Jim Marsteller, Tom Perry, Greg Hatton, Dennis Rogers, John Gilbert, and George Michel were elected as the Class of 2013.

### 2011 Reunion

The next reunion of the 8th AF Historical Society will be in Omaha, Nebraska, in July or August 2011. The 2nd Air Division Association will meet in Dallas, Texas, in early September 2011; Maxine Mackey will be the reunion coordinator. The Executive Committee will decide where the 392nd will hold its 2011 reunion and announce it in a future issue of the News.

### Attendees in Detroit

Present at the reunion in Detroit were Larry Bachman with friends Alan Bloomquist, Wally Bohrn and Randy Penrod; Laurie Bedus with 15th AF veteran Dr. Elliot Sweet; Wally Blackburn; Bob and Carol Books; Carroll and Mabel Cheek; Meredith and Betty Church; Jim Christner; Doug Decker; Winfield

and Betty Jo Denton with Kim Denton-Hill, Roger Hill and Tiffany Hill; SJ and Odes Elden; Dick Giesing with Douglas and Sue Williams; Jim Goar and Debbie Goar Beigh; Greg Hatton; Ben Hoste with Doug and Mary Hoste Reith; Allen and Tom Jones; Ben Jones; Tom and Barbara Lowrey; Oak and Maxine Mackey; Jim Marsteller; Bill McCutcheon; Joe McNiel; George Michel; Perry and Jon Onstot; George Richner; Dennis Rogers; Jack Rotzien; Roland Sabourin; Ron, Bob and Rick Sichau; Annette Tison; Bob and Wanda Tuchel; Tom Wilson; and Chuck Wheelwright.

### Tucson and New Orleans Reunions

At the 8AFHS reunion in Tucson were Charles and Helen Dye, David and Renee Green, Anthony Ferdinando and Chad Hankins, and Martha and Rick Bambauer.

Present at the 2ADA reunion in New Orleans were Bob Books and Oak and Maxine Mackey. About 150 people attended in all, including 52 veterans.



392nd BGMA President Jim Goar (right) presents a plaque to long-time Director Carroll Cheek in appreciation for his service to the 392nd.



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## FROM THE EDITOR

**Combat Tour Length.** Les Hadley, copilot on 1/Lt Phil Anundson's crew, writes, "Our combat tour with the 577th was three months and a day. That includes two aborts, a recalled mission, and a week in a flak house. Was that any sort of record for speed in completing a tour?" At the other extreme, it took 18 months for 579th lead pilot 1/Lt Harrison S. Cassell's crew to finish their missions. If your combat tour was shorter than Les's or longer than Harrison's, please let me know! I'll publish the results in the December issue.

**392nd PX.** A new item in the 392nd BG PX was unveiled at the Detroit reunion. Shown at upper left, it's a one-inch round pin of the Crusader emblem, small enough to be worn on a lapel, tie, shirt or hat but large enough to attract attention. Perfect for Crusaders of all ages and genders! The price is \$7 each or three for \$20, which includes US postage and handling. International orders, please add \$4 per order. Make your check payable to Bob Books and mail to him at 1432 Little Creek Dr., Pensacola, FL 32506. All proceeds go to the 2nd Generation research fund. Only a limited supply is available, so please place your order ASAP!

**Book.** Several years ago, Dutch member Peter Adriaans adopted the grave of 579th Sqdn engineer S/Sgt Amos Doty (KIA 19 May 1944) at the Netherlands American Cemetery. Peter recently sent me a copy of the book *Crosses in the Wind* by LtCol Joseph James Shomon. He commanded the 611th Quartermaster Graves Registration Company during its 18 months in the ETO. The book describes the enormous care his unit took as it buried over 21,000 American casualties, including many in the original US military cemetery at Margraten.

Appendix 1 quoted these statistics about "The Price of Victory" from a report of the Chief of Staff of the US Army, 1943 to 1945, to the Secretary of War:

American Revolution—80 months, 4,044 battle deaths = 50 deaths/month  
Civil War (Union)—48 months, 110,070 battle deaths = 2,293 deaths/month  
Civil War (Confederate)—48 months, 74,524 battle deaths = 1,552 deaths/month  
WWI—19 months, 50,510 battle deaths = 2,658 deaths/month  
WWII—44 months, 201,367 battle deaths = 4,576 deaths/month

**The 392nd and Royalty.** John Gilbert, our representative in England/new Director, and wife Doris were recently invited to a review and garden party at Buckingham Palace. It celebrated the 150th anniversary of the military cadet movement in England. The Cadet Force is a voluntary organization that instructs youths ages 12 to 18 in subjects including military training and first aid. It promotes achievement, discipline, and good citizenship. About 9,000 guests attended, but John and Doris were the only invitees from the Norfolk Army Cadet Force. They were formally

presented to Prince Charles and Lady Camilla, a singular honor.

This was not the 392nd's first brush with royalty. On 3 Aug 1944, 18 members of the 10th Station Complement Sqdn toured Sandringham, the estate of King George VI. In the photo at left, below, they are in the Trophy room.

On 8 Aug 1944, B-24 #42-50387 was christened "Birdie Schmidt ARC" in honor of American Red Cross program director Birdie Schmidt. The photo at right, below, shows attendees (left to right) Birdie Schmidt, Frances and Mary Roche, Morris Roche (Lord Fermoy) and LtCol Lorin Johnson (392nd BG CO). Frances was Princess Diana's mother.



# President's Message



Our reunion and Annual Meeting at Detroit in August was an outstanding success. I can't remember a greater attendance: 19 vets in war-weary condition, 14 2nd-generation members bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, and 23 spouses, children, grandchildren and guests.

It was held jointly with the 8AF Historical Society and the Yankee Air Force. Yankee AF put on an air show called "Thunder Over Michigan" and indeed it was. We were visited by several late model fighters whose pilots wrung them out to provide plenty of thunder. A covey of P-51s added to the noise with that familiar sound. Also present was a fly-over by a B-52, after all these years still a formidable weapon. And there were 8—count 'em, 8—B-17s, flying over in formation. (Not too tight, fellas, after all we're not huddling up for a close bomb pattern.) Not the least was the Collings Foundation's B-24, which developed an oil leak on take-off and did not participate in the morning fly-overs.

The convention ran very smoothly, primarily due to the efforts of your officers from the second generation: Vice-President Bob Books, Secretary Annette Tison, Treasurer Bill McCutcheon and Director/hospitality room host extra ordinaire Ben Jones, aided by Director Dennis Rogers and Laurie Bedus.

We elected four new Directors and made Carroll Cheek Director Emeritus. Carroll, our only living founding Director, made it his life-time effort to reconstitute and enlarge our Memorial at Wendling. It stands proudly honoring the 392nd and the fallen warriors that we left behind.

I received a report from Charles Dye about the 8AF Historical Society's convention in Tucson. He reported attendance of about 300, but only a few Crusaders were present. Most of us opted to attend the meeting at Detroit.

Just before Annette locked up this issue I had the extraordinary experience of a telephone conversation with Father Robert Martin, the 576th pilot turned Episcopal priest who is the author of our 392nd Prayer. He was an attendee at the Detroit reunion, but we failed to make connection. He told me that he was once a member of the Association, and we hope to welcome him into the fold again.

Before I sign off: Please keep me in your loop by furnishing me with questions, comments, and participation. And please let Annette Tison know of any newsworthy events in your life. Did you lead a parade? Address a Commencement? Win a Lottery? Bite a dog? Our contact information is in the box in the upper left corner of page 2.

Blue Skies,  
Jim Goar



At the Gala Banquet, Jim Goar (right) and 491st BG navigator F.C. "Hap" Chandler (long-time supporter of the 8AFHS, 2ADA, and the Museum), remember old times.

## NEW MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

The purpose of the just-formed Membership Committee is three-fold. 1) To obtain our veterans' oral histories. This information will supplement the official records pertaining to combat crews and augment the limited information available about our ground support members.

2) To request photos of your time at Wendling. Your picture of a buddy might be the only one that shows him during his wartime service. Committee members will gladly scan your photos and promptly return the originals to you.

3) To ask if you are in contact with 392nd BG veterans who aren't members of our organization. We'll provide them a copy of the *News* and an invitation to rejoin their comrades in the 392nd BG.

Members of the Committee are Debbie Goar Beigh, Laurie Bedus, Greg Hatton, and Dennis Rogers. Please be ready to share your photographs and tell them your stories when they contact you. After all—you may be the only one who remembers a particular event, so please help *us* preserve *your* legacy.

## 392nd KIA Interred in CA

The remains of 578th Sqdn gunner S/Sgt John P. Bonnassiolle were interred in Colma, CA, on 10 Aug 2010.

He was the ball turret gunner on 2/Lt Robert R. Bishop's crew. On 29 Apr 1944, while flying near Hanover, Germany, the 392nd was attacked by about 50 enemy fighters. 2/Lt Roland Sabourin's crew saw Bishop's plane pull away from the formation and reported that it "looked like the right elevator was shot up badly. No chutes."

After the war, the bodies of bombardier 2/Lt Thomas Digman and engineer Sgt James T. Blong were identified and buried per their family's wishes. The names of the other eight men were listed on the Tablets of the Missing at the Netherlands American Cemetery.

In early 2003, John's sister Paulette Gooch began researching what had happened to her brother. She contacted Enrico Schwartz, the German leader of the volunteer group Missing Allied Air Crew Research Team (MAACRT). In an amazing coincidence, they had just begun investigating Bishop's fate.

She also contacted [www.b24.net](http://www.b24.net) and through us, Bud Guillot. He was a waist gunner on 2/Lt William Kamenitsa's crew. After Bud was taken prisoner, he saw the smoke rising from Bishop's crash site just a few hundred yards away.

At the crash site, Enrico painstakingly searched for any evidence of the men or their plane. He found bone fragments and, incredibly, the nametag from John's flying jacket.

The search had a special urgency because John's mother, Marie Kelley, was 101 years of age. Paulette and Enrico were giving her the first real information about what had happened to her son so long ago.

In October 2003, Paulette and son Shawn traveled to the crash site near Meitze, Germany, and spoke with eyewitness Willy Gudehus. He saw the B-24 spiraling down and confirmed that everyone in the crew was killed in the crash. About an hour after impact, a bomb exploded, destroying what remained of the plane and sending debris far and wide.

**See BONNASSIOLLE on page 7**

# THE EARLY MISSIONS

*It was 67 years ago this month that the 392nd BG took off on its first combat mission. This article focuses on that event and the mission on 4 Oct 1943 when the Group suffered its first combat losses. 2nd-generation member Laurie Bedus, great-niece of 579th Sqdn navigator Capt John Slowik, assisted in writing this article.*

In early September 1943, there were only four operational Liberator units in England: the 44th, 93rd and 389th (all just returned from Africa) and the most recent arrival, the 392nd. As the newest unit, the 392nd was not yet fully equipped. It had the fewest planes of the four Groups (24) and the fewest combat crews (32). On the other hand, it had not yet flown any combat missions so it had the most available

planes (22) and combat crews (22) of the four Groups.

To prepare for combat, the 392nd flew numerous training missions over the bombing range at Sutton Walk, Lincolnshire, and the Wash. After one such practice on 3 September, then-1/Lt Slowik noted in his journal, "We can fly good formation and the Groups who fly good formations are the ones who come back."

After another drill on the 5th, he wrote, "At present I'm too ignorant to be scared but just as curious as all hell to see what will happen."

## 9 Sep 1943: Abbeville

On this day, the 392nd entered combat for the first time.

**See MISSIONS on page 5**



These two photos show airmen who had just landed after a practice mission on 8 Sep 1943. The photo at left shows a bag used to carry items like helmets, oxygen masks, etc., to the plane. In his left hand, the airman is holding a packed chute; in his right hand is his helmet, an oxygen mask, and what appears to be a gun holster. The photo on the right probably shows a navigator or bombardier. He is holding a folded-up flak vest; on the ground are three chutes and a harness. Next to the nose wheel is a navigator's briefcase, which holds maps, charts, and tools for navigation. Just visible under the fuselage to the right of the nose wheel flaps are three .50 caliber ammo boxes.

## 392nd BGMA MEMBERSHIP FORM

Please look at the mailing label. Your membership status can be found right after your name. LM means Life Member, FRND means that you receive the News with compliments of the 392nd BGMA, and the number shows the year that your membership expires.

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>.

If you feel that you can 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.

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/year if you wish to receive the News by postal mail OR [ ] \$20/year for receipt by email

Hardship Waiver [ ] DONATION \$ \_\_\_\_\_ TOTAL ENCLOSED \$ \_\_\_\_\_

## MISSIONS from page 4

The targets for all four Liberator Groups were airdromes in France: the 392nd and 44th BGs to Abbeville/Drucat, the 93rd to St. Omer/Fort Rouge, and the 389th to St. Omer/Longueness.

### 392nd Target

Little has been reported about the exact target except that it was the airdrome at Abbeville/Drucat, France—home of the infamous yellow-nosed FW-190 fighters, the “Abbeville Kids.” However, an undated memo from 2AD HQ, with a hand-written annotation of “9/9/1943,” raises intriguing questions about what the target really was.

According to the memo, a just-completed study by M.E.W. [England's Ministry of Economic Warfare] had revealed that “vital machinery” was located at the airfield. It was “the only source” of this equipment in Germany and was “absolutely necessary in the manufacture of aircraft and engines. The extremely vital machinery is considered irreplaceable at this time—in fact it is believed that this machinery could not be replaced for the duration of the war.”

“The reason for extreme haste on this mission,” the memo continued, “is that the vital machinery at this plant is to be moved below ground within the next few days.” It added, “This attack follows the policy of hitting the German Air Force in every possible way.”

Targeting instructions were included in the memo. “Stress the extremely small area of the target. Target area only 500 feet in diameter. The building that must be hit houses the vital machinery and is 200 feet x 75 feet. This whole attack has been designed to destroy this machinery, for example, the bomb loading is designed to damage the machinery, not necessarily to destroy the building.”

### Tactical Report of Mission

The 2AD's Tactical Report of Mission, 9 Sep 1943, gives detailed information about this historic sortie.

The four Groups took off between 0530 and 0545 and “assembled with some difficulty due to considerable fog and low stratus in their areas.” Specifically, “The 392nd took off with a visibility of less than 200 yards.”

The 44th (lead) and 392nd (low) left the coast 13 minutes late, “meeting their fighter cover on its way home.” Luckily, they “bombed the target without opposition.” Despite their many practice runs, there were unforeseen problems at bombs away. “The 392nd, dropping on radio signal, was interfered with by a strike report on the same frequency.”

The 392nd's 18 a/c dropped 43.2 tons of bombs from 23,000 feet at 0847 hours. The planes landed about 1040.

### Results

The 392nd did well for its maiden mission. The 2AD's Bombing Results report said the 392nd's first bursts “struck squarely on the MPI [Mean Point of Impact; i.e., target]. The main weight of bombs landed in the wooded dispersal area on the north side of the airdrome. If any planes were parked in the dispersal area they can be assumed to be destroyed.”

Additionally, 22 percent of our bombs fell within 1,000 feet of the MPI and 55 percent within 2,000 feet. (As a point of reference, the 93rd BG—which set “a fine example for the other Groups” with its bombing accuracy, had 44 percent within 1,000 feet and 82 percent within 2,000 feet.)

When the crews were interrogated, 1/Lt Charles C. Holloman's reported that the result from their sixteen 300 pound bombs was “very good.” 1/Lt Harrison S. Cassell's crew said their bombs were “right in there.” 1/Lt Robert D. Copp's crew in the 577th noted that the “target looked deserted—no activity.”

### 2AD Critique

In a meeting on 10 Sep 1943, 2AD Commander Gen James P. Hodges met with Group leaders. 392nd CO Col Irvine “Bull” Rendle made these comments about the mission: “We thought we could not maintain a speed of 165; however, at 160, our pilots complained of being uncomfortable at flying at such a low speed. We would prefer to cruise and bomb at 165, with a maximum altitude of about 24,000 feet. High altitudes will increase fuel consumption considerably, and we are right on the ragged edge up there with the loads we are carrying. The radio bombing device worked well in spite of interference at the crucial moment by the 44th BG sending in their strike report. If leading groups would wait a few minutes before sending their strike report, it will give all Groups a chance to drop their bombs on radio signal.”

### Public Reaction

The next day, the *Stars and Stripes* reported that the 9 September mission included “More than 1,000 sorties over the invasion coast and airfields of Northern France in the most powerful assault they have ever made in one day...A new record was set both for the total number of targets hit in a single day and the total number of bombers dispatched in the most widespread, large-scale attack ever carried out by Eighth Bomber Command.”

### Crew Reaction

1/Lt Slowik flew with Rendle and the Holloman crew in the lead plane. In his journal, he wrote that he was excited to be flying with his original crew. He noted that “The first hour of the flight was the worst. I've never worked so hard keeping track of where I was. You couldn't see anything because of the ground fog.” He mentioned hitting “a little flak at the coast. Personally I didn't see it—if I had I'd have been scared stiff—just felt a few bumps.”

579th Sqdn pilot James McGregor doesn't remember this mission because “it was a breeze.” 578th tail gunner Joe McNiel felt the same way, saying “It was a pretty easy mission. No one was hurt and we didn't lose any planes, so it was successful.”

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392nd Commander Col Irvine Rendle (center, with cigar) celebrates successful completion of the first mission.

## MISSIONS from page 5

### 4 Oct 1943: Diversion, Frisian Islands

On 4 Oct 1943, the 392nd's role was to fly a diversion toward the Frisian Islands off the coast of northwest Europe.

A diversion was an attempt to draw enemy fighters toward a decoy formation and thus enable another formation to fly unmolested to the real target. If the Germans didn't attack the decoy group, the diversion force would not get mission credit. Such was the case with the 392nd's diversions on 6, 23, 26, 27 Sep and 14, 18, and 20 Oct 1943.

If the diversion worked—and the decoy formation was attacked—the airmen would receive mission credit.

On this day, the feint worked all too well. The Group met heavy flak as well as 30-50 single- and twin-engine enemy fighters. Three B-24s were shot down—our first combat losses—with 15 more damaged by 20mm cannon.

#### The Mission

The 392nd's lead plane took off at 0730. The course was flown as ordered except that 10/10 overcast made navigation difficult. Increased winds put the easternmost turning point almost over Heligoland, just 29 miles from the German coast.

According to the 2nd Air Division's Diversion Critique, "Generally, the first attacks were on the lead three airplanes. The front turret worked very well. I believe that is what changed their attacks. The first 20 percent of the time spent was on frontal attacks. During that time, there was such a spray of tracers that I thought all we had was tracers. There were frontal attacks made after that, but not as many."

A 392nd teletype reported that "The enemy attack was fearlessly pressed home, the pilots taking 'terrific chances.' Three and four a/c on at least five different occasions dove through the formation... There were about 18 ME-109s, 9 FW-190s, and 3 ME-110s. They attacked mainly from 11 o'clock to 1 o'clock from above, though a number of attacks were made from 6 o'clock."

The Telephone Report added that the German pilots were "very experienced and able."

The last plane landed at 1301.

#### First Losses

The three crews shot down were from the 579th Sqdn; all

had been in the high group. 1/Lt Brian T. Smith's crew, in 42-7474, Satan's Flame, was the first to go down. The B-24 was last seen at 9,000 feet, losing altitude with one or more engines on fire. Three or four parachutes were seen.

1/Lt James A. Feuerstacke's crew, with 579th CO Maj Donald A. Appert as command pilot, was aboard 42-7481, Whiskers. They were the lead ship. An enemy fighter which had been knocked out of action by our gunfire crashed into a/c #481. A violent explosion followed and the Liberator was last seen disappearing into the clouds below, completely out of control and missing its right wing.

Some witnesses reported that the explosion pushed #481 into 42-7471, Filthy Annie, with 1/Lt Orval S. Morphew's crew aboard. Others, like 578th pilot 1/Lt Albert Lishka, thought that Morphew was the victim of German fighters. Regardless, #471 was last seen at 10,000 feet falling in a mild spin and pursued by four enemy fighters. A wing tip and tail assembly had been damaged or torn off; only one or two chutes were seen.

#### German Ace Heinz Knoke

German fighter ace Heinz Knoke was part of the attack force. In his memoir, *I Flew for the Führer*, he wrote, "... we are tearing into the enemy with every gun blazing. I head full speed for the nose of a Liberator. Fire! Duck away sharply beneath the giant fuselage to avoid a collision, keep on going right on through the formation, pull up hard in a climbing turn to the left, and then round back again.

"My salvo has had its effect. The Liberator swerves, drops out of the formation, and heads away in the opposite direction.

"...As soon as my Liberator is separated from its brethren, and beyond the range of their guns, I close in under the fat belly and continue firing until it is in flames. The Liberator burns very much faster than the more streamlined Fortresses. Eight men immediately bail out..."

Knoke continued, "The heavy crate glides away down. I draw up alongside and stay within 60 to 100 feet of it, certain that no living soul can still be aboard. I can distinctly see the great holes punched by my cannon-shells in the nose and [tail].

"Suddenly I notice the flashes in the [tail] turret. Too late! A salvo of fire smashes into my crate. My engine bursts into flames at once. There is no response when I move the controls.

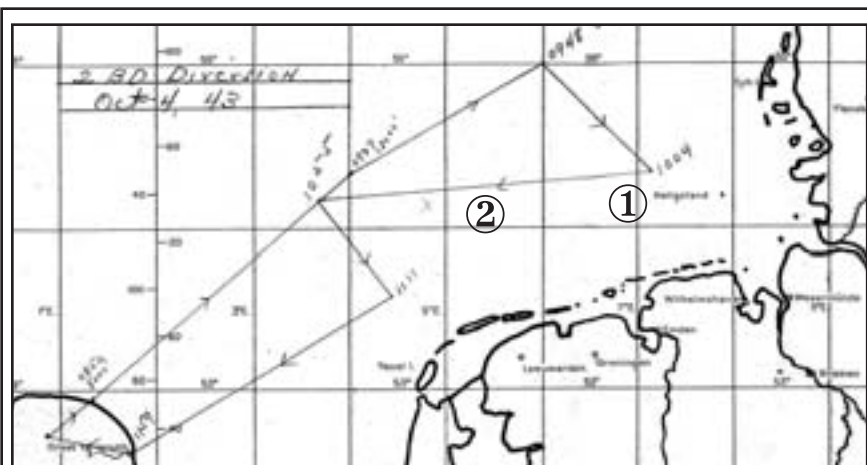
"Once again it is time for me to hit the silk... Several hundred feet below I observe the other parachutes. This is one time the Americans and I go bathing together."

Another fighter dropped Knoke a rubber raft; he was rescued two hours later. By war's end, he had 33 confirmed aerial victories including 19 US heavy bombers (16 B-17s and 3 B-24s).

#### S/Sgt Samuel E. Dedmon

It is not known which tail gunner knocked Heinz Knoke out of the sky. However, another successful tail gunner was S/Sgt Samuel A. Dedmon, a 30-year old Native American in 1/Lt Lishka's crew. He became the first 392nd airman to be awarded the Silver Cross, due to his efforts on 4 Oct 1943.

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This chart shows the route taken by the 392nd and 44th BGs on 4 Oct 1943. ① shows the general area of turnback while ② shows the approximate area where the German fighter attacks occurred.

## MISSIONS from page 6

From his bed in the infirmary, Dedmon told 578th S-2 officer Capt Holmes Alexander, "I was back there in the tail turret, not thinking much about anything when someone hollered through the interphone, 'Fighters coming in at 12:00.' I heard the shooting in front and was wondering whether I'd get a chance to use my tail guns when all of a sudden something exploded right in my turret and I was blown backward into the fuselage. I never saw or felt a 20mm shell explode before, but I knew damned well what it was.

"I sat up and saw one of those ME-109s about a thousand yards off our tail. He'd seen our tail turret hit and he figured there was no one there to stop him. So now he was coming in straight and level for the kill.

"I scrambled back into my turret and waited. The fellow kept coming, holding his fire. So I held mine. At 500 yards he opened up. I set him plumb in my aiming ring and let him have it. But still he kept coming—closer and closer—his guns blazing. I could see my tracers bouncing off him. He got in to about 150 yards, I guess, and then he flew into pieces. Just like that—flew into little bits."

Dedmon saw the fighter pilot fall from his blazing ship. At the time, his plane, 42-7489, Malfunction, was the last ship in the formation as the other sections were "now flying almost abreast."

14th Combat Wing CO Gen Leon Johnson pinned the Silver Star on S/Sgt Dedmon in a 12 Oct 1943 ceremony.

### Returning to Base

Jim Goar, then 578th Sqdn Supply Officer, still remembers seeing the planes return. "When they came back from the first mission they were in perfect formation and peeled off for landing in perfect order. This formation was ragged and some landing gears were sagging. We could tell that they had encountered serious enemy fire."

Capt Alexander also watched the planes return. He later wrote that "For forty minutes our men had fought their maiden battle some 20,000 feet above the sea. Our group had lost three bombers, but twelve of the enemy had gone down too.

"Yet the real story wasn't in these figures. It never is. A year or so ago these boys had been drinking milkshakes at the corner drugstore; or having their girls to the freshman prom; or making the beginnings of what looked to be a normal livelihood. Today they had shot and been shot at; had seen blazing planes and human beings fall from the sky. They had fought and licked an enemy. That was the real story."

### Was It Worth It?

579th Sqdn CO Myron Keilman later wrote, "Was the effort worth the loss? Was it successful? We took heart from what the *Stars and Stripes* reported:

'The Eighth Air Force announced yesterday that the Forts' blow at Frankfurt—aimed principally at the Germans' largest metal aircraft propeller plant, in a suburb of the city—had been carried out with the lowest loss ratio to date, on a deep penetration of Germany. Fifteen heavy bombers were lost in the day's operations, which included Fortress blows at other targets in the city and in western Germany and a diversionary feint of Liberators over the North Sea to lure Nazi fighters away from the Frankfurt raiders. The Libs were successful, headquarters said, in raising a swarm of enemy fighters, a

number of which were destroyed in 'repeated and reckless' attacks on the Libs. So furious were the battles over the North Sea that one Me109 rammed a Liberator, both planes going down. In the day's operations, the heavies shot down 56 Nazi fighters and escorting Thunderbolts got 19.'"



1/Lt Albert Lishka's men were one of the original 578th Sqdn crews. Here, they pose with their damaged a/c after they returned on 4 Oct 1943. L-R: bombardier 2/Lt Oswald E. Brockway, pilot 1/Lt Albert Lishka, engineer S/Sgt Harvey C. Halstead; navigator 2/Lt James C. Moorhead, copilot 2/Lt Barney Feld, gunner S/Sgt Harold E. Dohm; and radio operator S/Sgt Frank C. Clark. S/Sgt Dedmon was probably at the hospital. Names of the men on the ladder are not known.

## BONNASSIOLLE from page 3

After leaving Meitze, Paulette and Shawn visited the Netherlands American Cemetery, where the superintendent asked Shawn to lower the American flag at sunset, a rare privilege. Enrico also gave Paulette her brother's nametag, which she brought home to her mother.

In 2005 and 2007, the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command recovered more bone fragments. DNA testing identified Bonnassiolle's remains and those of waist gunner Sgt John Harringer, who will be interred in Cleveland in October 2010. Other remains, which cannot be individually identified, will be interred in Arlington National Cemetery next summer.

Marie Kelley passed away at 103 years of age, before John's remains had been identified. Nonetheless, she was happy that she knew what had happened to him and that the Gudehus family who owns the crash site property so generously allowed their farmland to be excavated.

## STORIES FROM THE REUNION

578th Sqdn tail gunner Joe McNiel recalled a mission in November or December 1943 where they used the chaff chute to throw counterfeit money over France and fake ration coupons for meat and sugar over Germany.

Dick Giesing was an instrument technician in the 465th Sub Depot. When the B-17 crashed on 23 Jan 1945 (see the March 2010 News), he went over to see the wreckage after dinner. No one else was there, so he unscrewed a manufacturer's data plate from the fuselage. He eventually had it mounted on a plaque, which he gave to Annette Tison.

577/9th tail gunner Winfield Denton remembers watching two P-51 pilots see how close they could come to the 392nd's flagpole. On their second pass, one clipped about 3 feet off the top. (Winfield later heard that the pilot called his base and asked, "Do you remember the two P-51s that left a while ago? There's only one now.")

Meredith Church was a 578th Sqdn radio mechanic. Before every mission, he'd set the frequencies for the radios. He then repaired or replaced any radios that were damaged during a mission. His oldest son was born while he was overseas; he was 17 months old before Meredith saw him for the first time.

579/7th pilot Bob Tuchel mentioned that under ideal conditions, a B-24 used about 200 gallons of fuel per hour, 50 gallons per engine.

[Editor's note: I examined the Fuel Usage Reports for the 392nd's missions on 22, 24, 27, and 29 April 1944. The 68 planes listed used an average of 284.5 gallons/hour. Consumption by individual planes ranged from a low of 203 gallons/hour to a high of 370 gallons/hour. Planes on the 4 Oct 1943 mission averaged 330 gallons/hour with a high of 360 gallons/hour. These statistics demonstrate there was nothing normal about combat!]

Bombardier 2/Lt Allen V. Jones dropped by the hospitality suite and gave thrilling details about his last mission (21 Jun 1944). Not surprisingly, he spent most of his time at the Stalag Luft III reunion. After all, he was in that POW camp for ten months and at Wendling for only two months.

### Ben Hoste

Ben Hoste had a lot of stories to share. A mechanic in the 576th Ordnance Section, he was responsible for keeping 7 bomb service trucks, 14 bomb trailers, and 2 jeeps in working order. Although not required to load bombs, he often did.

Tired of working on his vehicles out in the elements, Ben collected enough bomb crates to build a garage. He asked his supervisor (probably 1/Lt Lloyd H. Reed) for permission to go to a nearby sawmill and get some 2 x 4 boards. At the sawmill, the owner asked to see his official paperwork. Ben replied, I don't have any paperwork, but I do have candy and cigarettes. He got his lumber!

While walking from the mess hall to church one morning, he ran into his cousin, an engineer in the 579th Sqdn. Ben and T/Sgt Alfred P. Rinke had several pleasant get-togethers before Rinke became a POW on 22 Apr 1944.

He also remembered that one air crew had a Newfoundland dog, which they kept locked up in their barracks when they flew. The dog escaped one day when the crew was scheduled for a mission. Ben saw the dog follow his crew's plane down the runway until it took off.

## 2nd-GENERATION ATTENDEES

Several 2nd-generation members attended in hopes of learning more about a relative's time at Wendling.

### T/Sgt Walter R. Sichau

Ron, Bob, and Rick Sichau wanted information about their father, 577th Sqdn radio operator T/Sgt Walter R. Sichau. He survived a ditching on 5 Mar 1944 (see Dec 2009 News). Then, on 18 Apr 1944 while flying to Cuxhaven with 1/Lt Dexter E. Tiefenthal, he was shot down. Six men were killed; four, including Sichau, became POWs.

While browsing through the reference books in our hospitality room, the brothers saw the article in *20th Century Crusaders* their father had written about the ditching (page 114). Bob later said that "reading Dad's story was like bringing him back to life."

### S/Sgt Raymond E. Hamment

Tom Lowrey and wife Barbara came by the hospitality room to thank 392nd researchers for providing information about Tom's cousin, S/Sgt Raymond E. Hamment. A gunner in the 576th Sqdn, Hamment was originally assigned to 2/Lt Tennie W. Peterson's crew. After six missions, he became a "permanent substitute" and flew with 11 different crews between October 1944 and March 1945. Hamment was badly wounded during Operation Varsity, the low-level resupply mission on 24 Mar 1945. Pilot 2/Lt Lester Frazier landed in Belgium so that he and Sgt Hervy Z. Latour could get medical attention. Hamment died later that day in an Army field hospital.

In addition to telling Tom about his cousin's missions, 392nd researchers had put him in touch with Don Mitchell, who was also a member of the Peterson crew and provided the photos of his crew that are posted on [www.b24.net](http://www.b24.net).

Coincidentally, Tom served as a dental technician in the 8th Air Force during the late 1950s.

### T/Sgt Chester D. Decker

Doug Decker's father was T/Sgt Chester D. Decker. Engineer on 2/Lt Andrew S. Champion's crew in the 576th, he joined the 392nd in Alamogordo. They flew together until December 1943, when copilot 1/Lt Walter T. Hebron Jr., became first pilot. Decker flew with him until 18 Mar 1944, when their plane suffered severe battle damage and they had to land in Switzerland. Decker was interned in Adelboden. 576th radio operator George Michel, interned there on 11 Jul 1944, answered Doug's questions about what captivity in Switzerland was like.

### 2/Lt Thomas Wilson

Tom Wilson looked for 392nd attendees at the air show. His father, 2/Lt Thomas Wilson, was copilot first on 1/Lt John Eggleston's crew and then on 1/Lt Allen Duff's crew. Oak and Maxine Mackey later provided Allen's contact information. In a subsequent phone call, Allen told Tom a lot about their missions together.

### T/Sgt Daniel D. Connor Jr.

New member Jim Christner is the cousin of 579th radio operator T/Sgt Daniel D. Connor Jr. He and the other members of 1/Lt John B. Peyton's crew were killed when their plane exploded over RAF Manston after severe damage from enemy fighter attacks on 20 Feb 1944.

*If you can provide more information about any of these airmen, please contact the editor.*

# PICTURES FROM THE REUNION

continued on pages  
10 and 11



This photo of 392nd BG veterans was taken after the general membership meeting. Sitting, L-R: Dick Giesing, Wally Blackburn, Carroll Cheek, SJ Elden. Standing, L-R: Oak Mackey, Jack Rotzien, Charles Wheelwright, Jim Goar, Joe McNiel, George Michel, Roland Sabourin.



Bob and Carol Books



One of the B-17s that took part in the flyover at the air show.



George Michel, Laurie Bedus, and Bill McCutcheon



On display at the air show, the Collings Foundation's Liberator is painted as Witchcraft from the 467th BG.

Ben Jones  
and 352nd FG  
pilot George  
Nunemacher



## 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](http://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



Debbie Goar Beigh and Jim Goar



Joe McNeil, Roland Sabourin, Ben Hoste



Phil Blanchard, Jack Rotzien, Andrea Rotzien



Jim Christner



Hospitality Host Ben Jones



Doug Decker and George Michel

Part of  
the B-17  
flyover



Oak and Maxine Mackey



Dick Giesing and the data plate from B-17 #42-107213



Meredith and Betty Church



Judge SJ and Odes Elden



Alan Bloomquist, Wally Bohrn, Randy Penrod and Larry Bachman



Bob, Ron, and Rick Sichau



Jim Marsteller, Greg Hatton, and  
Dennis Rogers



Bob and Wanda Tuchel



Jon and Perry Onstot



Crewmates George Richner Jr. and Wally Blackburn



Betty Jo Denton, Tiffany Hill, Kim Denton-Hill, Roger Hill,  
Winfield Denton



Annette Tison and Allen Jones



A P-51 escorts a B-17 at the air show.



Carroll and Mabel Cheek

## CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

by Tom Perry, 576th Sqdn Armorer

I have made frequent references to scripture verses in the Bible because this is one of the ways God speaks to us.

He reveals His love for us and calls us to receive eternal life as a free gift. As He says in Romans Chapter 10 verses 9 and 10, "That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Also His invitation is well expressed in Matthew Chapter 11 verse 28, "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

The Lord bless you and keep you.



**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

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

## ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

### First Class Mail

*Almighty God, Who has blessed us with the will and courage to do our duty, we praise You for our comrades whose death kept freedom living. We praise You also for giving us the years we have lived since their departure. We pray that You will strengthen and sustain our devotion to truth and justice, so that we may be faithful beneficiaries of their sacrifice. Continue Your mercy to our comrades; keep them in Your care; and bring us all at last into Your presence there to rejoice Eternally. Amen. — Composed by 576th pilot the Very Reverend Robert C. Martin, retired Dean of the Cathedral at Erie, Pennsylvania.*

## ∞FOLDED WINGS∞

Col. George C. Player, 578th, June 28, 2010

William H. Richeson, 576, May 26, 2010

Darrell M. Pratt, 578, March 11, 1995

Walter C. Lienemann, 576, June 10, 2010

Robert E. Fletcher, 578, July 6, 2010

Albert F. DeStefano, 578, Feb. 28, 2009

Albert Chauvin, 578, Jul 16, 2010

Ellen E. DeSario, wife of Joseph, 579, June 25, 2010

Berman M. Fausnaugh, 576, July 16, 2010

Raymond R. Flugel, 577, Sept. 12, 2010