



T/Sgt Ward M. Sackal Honored in France

During Memorial Day 2015 events at Rhône American Cemetery in Draguignan, France, 578th Sqdn engineer T/Sgt Ward M. Sackal was honored. He and eight other members of 1/Lt Thomas R. McKee's crew were killed on 31 Dec 1943;

Ward, 1/Lt McKee, copilot 2/Lt Thomas G. Walker, navigator 2/Lt Robert S. Dinsmore, and bombardier 2/Lt Lee Simons are buried there.

This recognition was due to efforts by Christine Gorder, who knew Ward for three unforgettable months in 1943. During the event, she, Ward's niece Ellen Sackal, her husband Donald Sturges, and Franco-American Society president Christian Humbert placed a wreath in Ward's memory.

A special ceremony also took place using the American flag sent to Mrs. Alice Sackal by the U.S. War Department when her son was buried in 1948.

Why Ward was singled out from the 860 Americans interred there or the 294 listed on the Wall of the Missing is a story 72 years in the making.

Tucson

In January 1943, Tucson, Arizona, was a small desert town of about 45,000 people. However, thousands of airmen—including 392nd BG flyers—were training nearby at Davis-Monthan, Marana and Ryan Army Airfields. To boost the morale of these military personnel so far from home, the United Service Organizations (USO) sponsored dances every weekend at the Young Women's Christian Association, twice monthly at the nearby Pioneer Hotel and sometimes even at the airfields.

According to then 17-year old Christine, "It was quite

amazing to meet and talk with these young men from all over the country. It was a very unusual and exciting time, but there was always the undercurrent of uncertainty. Would this young man from Indiana or that one from Idaho make it

safely through the war? Would they see their loved ones again? The question was always there."

It was at a dance that Christine noticed "an adorable sergeant." Her diary entry for 28 Jan 1943 reveals that he "introduced himself as Ward Sackal and, oh, I almost swooned when I looked at him. He's just adorable—about 5'7", dark hair, and so cute. He danced with me all evening."

The attraction was mutual and they saw each other whenever they could. If Ward was flying or Christine busy with her studies at the University of Arizona, they'd telephone or write letters.

"The times were very serious," Christine recalls, "but we didn't talk about it very often. It hit home though when he told me one night that he had just made his will. I was awfully upset to hear that, but he seemed to be all right with it.

"We really had fun together, but we knew down deep that this would soon end and he would have to leave. It's true that we were just kids, but feelings run very deep. I

dreaded the day when he would have to ship out."

On March 20, they had a wonderful time together. Christine says that as they danced cheek-to-cheek, Ward sang softly to the strains of "Moonlight Becomes You." She did not

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Top: Christine Gorder and Ward Sackal in 1943. Bottom: L-R, Donald Sturges, Ellen Sackal, Christian Humbert and Christine Gorder have just laid a wreath at the Rhône American Cemetery in Ward's honor.



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FROM THE EDITOR

You Have Our Support. This issue has more information on ground support personnel whose work enabled the combat airmen to do their jobs so well. We should also remember the millions of Americans back home who served the war effort by making airplanes, ships, tanks, jeeps, rifles, uniforms, tents and every other needed military item.

They sometimes found a way to express their best wishes directly to the servicemen who benefitted from their work. On one combat mission, 579th Sqdn navigator Manny Abrams happened to look up from his navigator's table. There, on a bulkhead partially hidden behind some hydraulic lines, was written "God bless you boys." He still remembers that moment.

Attention Gunners! Group gunnery instructor Jack Rotzien sent an article by David Sears from the April/May 2015 issue of *Air & Space* magazine. Titled "How to Become a Ball Turret Gunner," it begins, "Gunners on World War II bombers had only a microsecond to estimate an attacking fighter's range, speed, path of attack, and bullet ballistics. During attacks that themselves lasted merely seconds, the gunner had to make those mental calculations, then align his weapons and sights, praying that the guns wouldn't jam or the barrels melt. To teach bomber crews how to survive these aerial attacks, the Army Air Forces opened schools in isolated locales with favorable flying conditions." There, airmen learned how to shoot by going to the movies. If you ever used Waller gunnery equipment or a "Jam-Handy" trainer, you'll enjoy reading this article at <http://www.airspacemag.com/military-aviation/how-become-ball-turret-gunner-180954667/?no-ist>. It even quotes Jack and 578th radio operator Bob Davis!

Updates from England. In December 2014, 392nd BGMA Director John Gilbert presented the President's Award plaque on behalf of President Jim Goar to John Rupp, Branch Director of Ben Burgess Beeston. Mr. Rupp told his higher-ups about the award and information about it was included in the February 2015 issue of the company's quarterly newsletter.

The article noted, "The current offices and stores [of Ben Burgess Beeston] operate from the original headquarters with the airfield and control tower a few hundred yards

to the South. The plaque shows one of the actual Liberator B-24 bombers that was part of over 70 that were based at Wendling during the war. About 3,800 combat airmen and 4,000 ground personnel served at Wendling. During the 22 months that the base was operational, 869 airmen lost their lives.

"Since 1985, when John started at Beeston, he has hosted hundreds of veterans and their families who have chosen to revisit the site. Unfortunately most of the veterans have passed away now, however, John was delighted to welcome a retired rear gunner and navigator during the summer of 2014. The men were both in their mid-nineties and remembered much of what the base was like. They were pleased that the building had been preserved and is being used to sell American originating John Deere tractors!" (They were Harvey Naber, 576th, and Tom Shrum, 577th.)

Station 118 was about 20 miles from Sandringham (the royal family's estate), where His Royal Highness Prince William now has a home. The newsletter reported that Beeston employee Stuart Edge "recently sold and installed a John Deere ride-on lawnmower to Prince William. When delivering, Stuey was met by Prince William and Prince George, who was particularly excited to sit on the seat of his father's new purchase! So much so, that once his Dad had decided it was time to get off, he screamed and screamed! Good work Stuey!"

John Gilbert was invited to Litcham School and spent an entire day speaking to 100 pupils studying WWII history. They were so excited about his presentation that John was asked to come back later to meet with the 30 students who would be taking their exams.

At right, John is flanked by pupils at Litcham School holding some of his memorabilia: L-R, a gas mask (displayed on a doll), the book *Legacy of a Lead Crew: The Boys of the "Sally Ann"* (the story of 1/Lt Harrison S. Cassell Jr.'s crew by his son, Dr. Allen McGarry Cassell); the book *Holland Drop Zone* by Mark van den Dries (which describes how the German

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President's Message



I am recovering from minor surgery but do not yet have the energy to write this column. I do plan to attend the reunion in Omaha and hope to see you there!

Blue Skies,
Jim Goar

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occupation impacted the lives of residents of Zeeland, The Netherlands, and their heroic efforts to help members of 1/Lt James A. Gerow's crew evade capture in September 1944); a retractor; a canteen; a .45 Colt revolver; and a .303 rifle.

Editor's note: Both books are available in our PX. Contact Bill McCutcheon for details about these and other items for sale. See page 2 for his address and phone number.

John guided several more 392nd BG visitors around what's left of Station 118, including Peter J. Dupuis (whose father, Irving C. Dupuis, was a 576th Sqdn navigator), his wife and son. Another guest was George Abbott White, a friend of 578/9th pilot Bruce McClellan.

Our condolences are extended to the family of Hilary Duffield, who died on July 30. She and husband Denis, also deceased, were the 392nd's points of contact in Wendling for many years and warmly welcomed all visitors. John Gilbert represented the 392nd BGMA at her funeral.

392nd BG commanders. The December issue will include information about each of the 392nd's commanders—Col Irvine A. Rendle, who led the the Group from activation through D-Day; Col Lorin L. Johnson, who was the steady hand from June 1944 through May 1945; and Col Lawrence G. Gilbert, who brought the Group back to the US and would have taken it to the Pacific if necessary. If you have anecdotes to contribute about any of these men, please contact Annette using the data on page 2.

Goodbye and good luck! After 29 years working with Norfolk Library Service and 24 years with the Second Air Division Memorial Library, Lesley Fleetwood hung up her helmet and goggles on 28 Aug 2015. She is now enjoying retired life in "the wild blue yonder." Best of luck, Lesley, and many thanks for the countless hours of assistance you've provided 2AD veterans and relatives!

Time to re-enlist! If the number "15" appears after your name on the mailing label, it means your membership in the 392nd BGMA is almost up. If you want to renew for 2016, please follow the instructions on page 4.

From the Files: The Early Days

Daily Memorandum #70, 21 Oct 1943. China dishes, mugs and cups are not to be removed from any of the mess halls. Personnel now in possession of any china will return same to their respective messes. The practice of using china in lieu of the standard mess kit is prohibited. Pets will not be

fed from mess hall china.

Memorandum #85-1, 23 Oct 1943. UNAUTHORIZED USE OF GRASSED AREAS BY MOTOR TRANSPORT AND BY PERSONNEL

1. The static nature of the present situation must not be allowed to create a false feeling of security. The practice of camouflage discipline should be carried on now more than ever before.

2. The following is an extract from a letter of complaint by Air Ministry Officials and well applies to this Station. "Vehicles using the perimeter track do not hesitate to take a short cut for no apparent practical reason.

a. From the point of view of camouflage, the existence of motor transport tracks across the Airdrome gives the enemy a first rate indication that the Station is fully operational.

b. From the point of view of maintenance, the vehicles using the grassed areas in the future will cut deep ruts, causing breakage in the mower with which it is expected to keep down the grass next year."

3. Paragraph 2a and 2b above, also pertain to the use of unauthorized paths by personnel of this Station. All personnel shall use the Roads and Sidewalks provided with the exception of the three (3) authorized paths listed below.

a. Path from Old Communal Site to WAAF Site.

b. Path from Site No. 1 to Old Communal Site.

c. Path from Site No. 4 to New Communal Site.

Memorandum, 25 Oct 1943

TO: All Drivers of Motor Vehicles on this Station

1. In order to keep the streets and roads as free of mud as possible no vehicles will be driven or parked off the road or streets for any reason whatsoever, any driver or anyone that directs a driver to drive his vehicle off the hard surfaces anywhere on the station other than around the perimeter and motor pool will be subject to court-martial and fined.

2. All officers and M.P.'s will stop all vehicles that they see violating this order and get the name and organization of the driver and report it to Station Headquarters where proper action will be taken.

Daily Memorandum #79, 30 Oct 1943

4. All personnel are warned not to walk, ride, nor in any way mark-up the soft concrete, which is being laid at various places on this station. Disciplinary action will be taken against any and all offenders. This will be brought to the attention of all personnel.

Memorandum, 1 Dec 1943

1. In the last 24 hours there has been approximately \$500 worth of damage done to government property by fire. At the same time a half a million dollars worth of tools and equipment could have been destroyed if the wind had been in the right direction. This all came about by one man not thinking what the results of oil and gasoline would do if used to start or stimulate a fire in a stove.

2. Fire orders have been issued to all units on this station. Read them and see that they are read to all personnel. Check for violations.

3. Gas and oil will not be used to start fires.

WARD and CHRIS from page 1

notice anything different, but suddenly "something went terribly wrong. Without any forewarning, Ward stopped calling me. Every day I expected to hear from him, but he didn't call or write me. I was very upset and perturbed."

Christine fretted and worried. She saw Ward with two of his crewmates a few days later but they could not talk privately.

It was the last time they saw each other. The crew left on 4 Apr 1943 for further training with the 392nd BG at Alamogordo, New Mexico. "It had been a very brief and very sweet romance in very uncertain times. And so it ended. We never said goodbye."

In late 1944, she contacted the War Department and eventually learned that Ward had been killed in action. Only in that moment of utter disbelief and despair did she realize she had loved him very much.

The Sackal Family

In December, Christine wrote Ward's family to tell them what a fine young man he had been and how she shared in their grief. She asked if they would be willing to send her a photo of Ward "as it would help me remember him better."

When Christine got a package from his mother, she "opened it very carefully and peeked inside. When I saw his face, I just gasped. It was so like him! A beautiful, large portrait of Ward in his dress uniform! He was so young and handsome with his wonderful smile. All I could do was stare at him and weep."

Finding Answers

She married, had children and lived a good life—but always yearned for details about Ward's final flight. In March 2010, she found www.b24.net. The section about the 31 Dec 1943 mission to St. Jean d'Angely, France, had details from 392nd BG files and information provided in 2005 by French researcher Bernard Ballanger.

She emailed the 392nd and we immediately put Christine in touch with Bernard. In June, she flew to France.

She went first to Rhône American Cemetery to pay her respects at Ward's grave. She left photos of Ward, his crew and his plane with Cemetery personnel and, due to their interest, sent more information when she got home.



In 2010, Christine looks at Ward's name on the memorial to his crew.

Then she met Bernard, who took her to a memorial to the McKee crew, unveiled 31 Dec 1947 by the group French Memory. A service of remembrance has been held there every year since. She laid a wreath with the inscription, "Brave Heroes Never Forgotten." Bernard played "The Star Spangled Banner" in their honor.

Another site was a street in the nearby village of Montlieu-la Garde; in 2003, it was renamed "Rue du 31 Décembre 1943" in homage to that fateful day.

Bernard also showed Christine the beautiful scenery of southwest France.

She returned to the Cemetery in July 2011 to visit Ward again. She learned that when the staff guides students around, they routinely stop at Ward's grave. He was now a part of their interpretation program and they "use his memory to explain to younger generations the sacrifices his generation made in the cause of liberty and freedom."

Christine has been present on several occasions when French and American students were brought to Ward's grave. After describing the uncertainty of the times and the

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392nd BGMA MEMBERSHIP FORM

Please look at the mailing label. Your membership status is shown directly after your name. **"15" or higher means your membership expires in December. Please renew now!** LM means Life Member and FRND means that you receive the *News* with compliments of the 392nd BGMA. Send this form and your check (payable to 392nd BGMA) to Annette Tison, 9107 Wood Pointe Way, Fairfax Station, VA 22039. You may also join or renew on-line at <http://www.b24.net/392nd/join.htm>.

The Board of Directors has ruled that no Crusader will be denied membership because of financial difficulty, so if you're in straitened circumstances, check the Hardship Waiver box. If you feel that you can help the 392nd BGMA treasury with a donation, there is a provision for it below.

Name _____ Ground [] Air [] Sqdn/Unit _____

Mailing address _____

Email address _____ Telephone number _____

If a spouse, friend, or relative served in the 392nd, please give us his name and unit: _____

Dues: [] \$25/year if you want to receive the *News* by postal mail OR [] \$20/year for receipt by email
Please feel free to renew for multiple years! Just let us know what your wishes are.

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

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dangers that lay ahead for him, a staff member asks the students to place themselves in that scenario. Christine says, "They are very quiet and pensive and it is obvious that they have been very moved."

Then, Christine is introduced to them. "They are amazed to see the girl from the story! I speak to them for a few minutes and when I tell them that I still care for this young man and have never forgotten him, we all shed some tears together, including the boys."

Mission to France, 31 Dec 1943

The 392nd BG was leading the 14th Combat Wing to an airfield southeast of St. Jean d'Angely, France. Take-offs for 27 ships, each loaded with twelve 500-pound general purpose bombs, started at 8:01am.

The formation crossed the French coast 20 miles south of



This route map shows the long way to St. Jean d'Angely. 392nd a/c were in the air about nine hours.

their intended point. (This may have resulted when 392nd planes had to drop 1,000 feet in altitude just before reaching the coast in order to cross under a B-17 Wing.)

Soon after turning north to correct that error, the lead bombardier mis-identified the Initial Point, where the planes would make their final approach to the target.

In the confusion, a 577th Lib accidentally released its bombs 25 miles short of the target; a 578th plane dropped its bombs then as well. Another 578th ship bombed two miles short. Bomb bay doors jammed on a third 578th ship and its bombs were jettisoned in the Bay of Biscay.

Photo analysis showed at least two hangars and adjacent buildings were "blanketed" and 12 enemy a/c destroyed.

Overall, though, the 392nd had just 47 percent of its bombs within 1,000 feet of the target and 73 percent within 2,000 feet. The 44th BG, its partner in the 14th CW, did much better, achieving 81 and 99 percent—the best by far of any Group in the 2nd Bomb Division that day.

No flak was observed and fighter cover was good.

Five 392nd ships landed at Shipdham with the 44th BG. The last to return to Wendling set down at 5:21pm.

Losses

Aboard #42-7605, 1/Lt McKee had tacked on to the rear of the 445th BG's formation, reason unknown. Due to their own navigational error, that Group bombed its alternate target, an airdrome about 45 miles southwest of St. Jean d'Angely. A French eyewitness remembers that during the bomb run, "German fighters were attacking from every direction" and 1/Lt McKee's plane was likely hit during this firestorm.

Only two men were able to bail out. One was killed by enemy fighters while still in the air. The other, tail gunner S/Sgt Anthony F. Malavasic, was captured.

There was another casualty that day. #605 exploded in

the air and fell in several pieces near the little village of St. Vivien. A burning wing (with an engine still attached) fell on the home of Mrs. Yvonne Bourdejeau. She died on 20 Jan 1944. Annual commemoration ceremonies at the McKee memorial always include a visit to her grave.

576th plane #42-7537, Jungle Princess, crash-landed near RAF Swanton Morley, about 3½ miles east of Wendling. Per 578th crew chief Ernie Barber, "At one of our reunions I was talking to the copilot, 2/Lt Robert M. Berger. He said that as the plane was skidding towards a house, everybody on board was hollering St-o-o-o-o-p! It came to a stop with the leading edge of the left wing right in front of the front door. All got out. One of them went up to the front door and knocked. When an elderly lady came to the door, he told her he was sorry but he was so happy that they didn't harm her house and that they would send someone after the plane."



This photo shows how close #537 came to the house.

Reflections

Now 89, Christine muses, "After the Memorial Day ceremony this year, I realized that I have done everything I could do to commemorate and to honor Ward. I have arranged for him to receive a rose each month as well as flowers on his birthday and other holidays. I will continue to make my yearly pilgrimage to Rhône Cemetery as long as I am able. Of course, Ward will remain in my heart forever."

Editor's note: A French television station prepared a short documentary of the Memorial Day ceremony at Rhône American Cemetery entitled "A Tribute to Chris and Ward." It can be seen at <http://canal-d.tv/videos/memorial-day-2015-hommage-a-chris-et-ward/>. The spoken words are French but the pictures speak for themselves.



McKee crew enlisted men after the 4 Oct 1943 mission. On the back of the photo, S/Sgt Murphy wrote, "One hell of a fight. I do mean it was." L-R, tail gunner S/Sgt George J. Mislinski, waist gunner S/Sgt Marion E. Nuzum, ball turret gunner S/Sgt Charles Harrod, waist gunner S/Sgt Horace G. Murphy Jr., radio operator T/Sgt Thomas C. Morrison, and engineer T/Sgt Ward M. Sackal.

Early History of the 392nd BG

The 392nd BG was activated per military orders issued 26 Jan 1943 by Headquarters, Second Air Force, Fort George Wright, Washington. The cadre came mainly from the 34th and 39th Bomb Groups, both B-17 units.

The new Commanding Officer was LtCol Irvine A. Rendle, former CO of the 34th BG and a flying officer with over eleven years experience in all types of aircraft. Also from the 34th BG: Ground Executive Officer Maj Joseph Bush, Adjutant Capt John Fritsche, Group Operations Officer Capt Lawrence G. Gilbert, Group Bombardier 1/Lt Joseph B. Whittaker, Group Navigator 1/Lt Kenneth I. Paddock, and Group S-4 (Supply) Officer, Capt Harold G. Finch.

Air Executive was Maj Lorin L. Johnson from the Topeka Air Base. From other units came Group Flight Surgeon Maj Robert M. Holland, Group Intelligence Officer Capt Percy B. Caley and Group Photo Interpreter Capt Edwin Reed.

The next month, military orders transferred Rendle, Fritsche, Finch, Gilbert, Paddock and Whittaker from Blythe Army Air Base, California, to Davis-Monthan Air Base at Tucson, Arizona, "to meet 392nd Bomb Group." Initial training began there.

In March 1943, key flying personnel and a lead crew from each Squadron were sent to the Army Air Force School of Applied Tactics in Orlando, Florida. There, all were educated on and made acquainted with operational procedure in the various theatres, with emphasis upon the European.

Alamogordo

Concurrently, hundreds of officer and enlisted personnel were being relocated to Biggs Army Air Base at El Paso, Texas, to form the Ground Echelon. After three weeks of "organizational throes" at Biggs (as described in the 392nd's history), the Group was transferred to Alamogordo, New Mexico, for the remainder of the first, second and part of the third phase of training.

About the middle of July 1943, the Flying Echelon was moved to Topeka, Kansas, to finish the third phase of training and await assignment overseas. They made many training flights in B-24 D and E models but later that month, began receiving new B-24 H model aircraft. Although the 392nd would be the fourth Liberator unit in England (hence its tail insignia of "D"), it was the first equipped with the H version, whose Emerson nose turret and twin .50 caliber mounted machine guns were a deadly surprise to enemy fighters.

Training was a serious business. During the 392nd's time stateside, 36 airmen and one ground crew passenger were killed in plane crashes.

On 16 Jul 1943, an advance party—Rendle, Gilbert, Caley, and Group Communications Officer 1/Lt Carl W. Elder (who had joined the Group in April)—left Topeka for England. After flying by way of New York, Goose Bay, Labrador, Iceland and Scotland, they reported to 8AF Headquarters. After briefings, the men proceeded to 2nd Air Division HQ to learn how missions were planned and then to several B-17 Groups for orientation on combat operations while waiting for



Top: In the US, the 392nd flew model D B-24s. Their distinctive "greenhouse" nose turrets could not move and their machine guns had limited flexibility. Bottom: The 392nd flew the first H model B-24s to England. Their electronically-powered Emerson nose turrets could rotate horizontally, giving a wider range of fire, and their two machine guns could move vertically as well.

the flying and ground elements of the 392nd to arrive. (The men could not confer with the three B-24 Groups already based in England as they were in North Africa preparing for the missions to the Ploesti oil fields.)

Toward the end of training in Alamogordo, the 392nd had a "going away" party in the White Sands area of New Mexico. 578th crew chief Ernie Barber recalled, "The sand was so white and dazzling it was almost blinding. We had cold drinks, cold beer in kegs and lots of food. I never understood why we didn't have the party up in the cool mountain air of the Ruidoso Mountains, but I imagine the Big Brass felt we couldn't get in too much trouble at White Sands after drinking all the beer we wanted."

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Before the 392nd BG departed Alamogordo, New Mexico, they Passed in Review before a General. This artistic photo shows the color guard in the center of Group marchers. Carrying the US flag was 578th crew chief M/Sgt Ernie Barber, flanked by 578th welder Sgt Dock Jirel Jr. and gunner Sgt Edward H. Ivey Jr.

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The 392nd Bomb Group ended its stay in New Mexico with a parade. Its time in Alamogordo was immortalized forever when that word was used in England to mean that a mission was cancelled.

Moving to England

On 18 July 1943, the Ground Echelon departed Alamogordo by train for Camp Shanks, New York, and then boarded the Queen Mary on 24 July. After an uneventful voyage, the ship docked at Greenock, Scotland, on 30 July. As the men formed up on the dockside, they were greeted by a Scottish bagpipe band. They went by train to the station at Wendling and then by truck to Station 118, where they were welcomed by the advance party. They immediately began to settle in and prepare for the air crews and planes to fly in.

Ernie Barber recalled, "Our airplanes hadn't yet arrived as parts of the concrete taxi strips were still being laid. Mud was everywhere and it was difficult not to bring it into the barracks, which were one story buildings with a potbellied stove in the middle of the center aisle. One of the first things we were told was, 'Please don't use any of your American ingenuity on the barracks,' whatever that meant...."

The 579th Sqdn was the first to fly east, per orders dated 8 Aug 1943. The nine crews were 1/Lt Charles C. Holloman, 1/Lt Orval S. Morphew, 2/Lt James A. McGregor, 1/Lt Brian T. Smith, 1/Lt Harrison S. Cassell, F/O Edward W. Kubale, 1/Lt Louis A. Sefranek, 1/Lt James A. Feuerstacke, and 2/Lt Wallace W. D'Aoust. Each plane carried a passenger, including Squadron Commander Capt Donald A. Appert, Capt Myron H. Keilman (who became Sqdn CO after Appert

was killed on 4 Oct 1943) and other important Squadron personnel.

The 578th departed next per orders dated two days later. Crews were 1/Lt Clifford E. Edwards, 1/Lt Thomas R. McKee, 1/Lt Jim B. Kirksmith, 2/Lt Albert L. Lishka Jr., 1/Lt John J. Reade, 1/Lt John G. Buschman, 1/Lt Robert E. Fletcher, 1/Lt Douglas R. Steinmetz and 1/Lt James B. Stauder. Commander Capt Clinton F. Schoolmaster was one of their passengers.

The 576th was dispatched on 31 Aug 1943: 1/Lt Alfred Scarlata, 1/Lt James H. Roper, 2/Lt Andrew S. Champion, 2/Lt Henry C. LoPresto, 1/Lt Leonard J. Barnes, 2/Lt Charles L. Lowell, 1/Lt John R. Becker, and 2/Lt Donald K. Clover. An additional plane was ferried to Presque Isle, Maine, the departure point, by Maj Johnson. It may have been intended for 1/Lt Robert D. McCorkle's crew. They had crashed on 25 August with three men killed so did not fly overseas with their squadron.

It is not known when the 577th Sqdn departed the US but its pilots were 1/Lt Melvin H. Graper, 2/Lt Henry P. Bolick Jr., 2/Lt Samuel H. Layton Jr., 1/Lt Frank Marfia, F/O James N. Taylor, F/O Raymond P. Lambert, 1/Lt Frank Gonseth Jr., 2/Lt Leo G. Breckenridge Jr., and 1/Lt Robert D. Copp.

All crews started from Presque Isle, Maine. The 576th and 579th aircrews were routed via Goose Bay, Labrador, Greenland, and Iceland. The 577th and 578th crews flew via Newfoundland. Some crews also stopped at Nutts Corner, Northern Ireland.

The 579th Sqdn aircraft and crews arrived at Wendling on 15 Aug; the other squadrons landed soon after.

At Wendling

As the planes came, their crew chiefs thoroughly checked them over and then signed forms accepting them into the 392nd's inventory. In turn, the ships were ferried four miles south to the 3rd Strategic Air Depot at Watton. There, Ernie Barber said, "they replaced the thin Plexiglas cockpit windows with bullet-proof glass, about an inch and a half thick, and installed metal armor plate on the outer fuselage sides of the cockpit to protect the pilot and copilot."

Conditions were primitive. In letters home, 579th Sqdn S-2 (Intelligence Officer) Capt Laurence C. Gram told his wife he lived in a barracks with about 15 other men. The quarters were Nissen huts, a structure formed with corrugated metal sheets attached end-to-end in a half cylinder shape. Two enlisted men cleaned the barracks. Between the beds was a stand with a shelf and three hooks on each side. The quarters had no running water but used a water truck parked outside. There was a sink; to wash, one filled a bucket with water from the truck and poured it into the sink. When finished, the sink was drained into a bucket. He noted that this was "backwoods, northern Wisconsin style."

Gram soon started using the officers' club, which had hot water, showers and baths. He got up in the morning and headed off to the officers' club for a shower and then before dinner he went there to take a bath. Each evening they were required to dress for dinner. The lavatory was in a separate building which they called an "ablution" and had no running water; that came later. They used chemical toilets with a "regulation seat" and called them "honey buckets."

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Top: When 392nd BG ground personnel arrived at Wendling, they found mud everywhere. Bottom: One early task was to pour concrete for additional hardstands and new roads throughout Station 118.

HISTORY from page 7

Training was intense, including a diversion mission on 6 September. A diversion was an effort to fool the Germans into attacking a decoy formation and thus allow the “real” formation to proceed unmolested to their target. If the enemy attacked the diversion force, the bomber crews got credit for a combat mission. If the diversion failed to rouse the Luftwaffe, they didn’t get credit.

The 392nd’s first designated combat mission was to Abbeville, France, on 9 Sept 1943 with more diversions flown on 23, 26, and 27 September and 14, 18 and 20 October.

Early Casualties

On 4 Oct 1943, the 392nd was dispatched to fly a diversion toward Denmark. The Luftwaffe rose up in force and shot down three planes. The diversion thus became a combat mission with the 392nd’s first losses due to enemy action.

By that time, however, five 392nd BG personnel had already been killed in the line of duty while in England. On 30 Aug 1943, two mechanics and two airmen were killed when the plane they were aboard crashed as it was being ferried to Wendling from the supply depot at Burtonwood (in Lancashire during the war but now in Cheshire due to boundary changes).

On 22 September, a gas truck driver was killed when he was struck by a plane propeller.

By 31 Dec 1943, the 392nd had been on 21 sorties. Twenty planes had been lost and only 18 of the original 35 crews remained. Of 85 pilots and copilots on the muster rolls on 1 July, only 35 remained at the end of the year. Added were 56 crews, bringing the total number of crews to 66 at New Year’s Eve.

Administration

Group Commander LtCol Rendle was, of course, in charge of the entire station. He had two deputies, Ground Executive Officer LtCol Bush and Air Executive Officer Maj Johnson.

LtCol Bush was responsible for the administration and all problems of the non-flying personnel. In addition, he oversaw the mess halls for both flying and ground personnel. He therefore was in charge of over 3,000 people, ranging from cooks, bakers, welders, and drivers to line mechanics and instrument repair technicians.

Maj Johnson was responsible for the day-to-day management of the combat airmen. As Col Gilbert explained, “When we were fully manned, there were three 10-man crews per plane. These would be distributed among 36 to 40 aircraft. Three crews with 10 men per crew meant that we had 1,200 people combat-ready and available to fly missions. With men in hospital, on leave or in training, we’d reach our full complement.

“If we were flying every day, we had to rely on more than one crew to man an aircraft. Seven consecutive combat missions would tax a crew’s stamina quite heavily, so we had to account for sickness and rest leave, as well as replacements for injured crewmen.”

Editor’s note: Manning levels and number of aircraft varied throughout the 392nd’s time in England. The most planes ever dispatched on a single mission was 48, but the 392nd had many days with two or more missions which also severely taxed men and planes.

On 20 June 1944, Col Rendle was transferred to take

command of a new Bomb Wing, the 95th. Air Executive Col Johnson assumed command and LtCol Gilbert became Air Executive. Col Johnson was transferred in May 1945 and Col Gilbert became the 392nd BG’s last commander.

The 392nd returned to the US in June 1945 and was inactivated 13 Sept 1945. It was redesignated “392nd Bombardment Group (Very Heavy)” and activated 30 Jul 1947 but redesignated as “Light” in June 1949. It was inactivated on 10 Nov 1949 but in the 1950s some of the squadrons were activated as missile experimental and training units in Strategic Air Command. Its successor unit, the 392nd Strategic Missile Wing was inactivated on 20 Dec 1961.

The 576th Sqdn lives on as the 576th Flight Test Sqdn, part of Air Force Global Strike Command, Vandenberg AFB, California.

CHOW

When the 392nd BG arrived in England, its numbers were relatively few. All officers ate in one mess hall; all enlisted men were assigned to eat in one of their two mess halls.

Enlisted Men

As the number of air crews increased, so did the infrastructure needed to support them. By October 1943, there were three mess halls for enlisted personnel. Mess #1 (the new Communal Site Mess Hall) and #2 (the old Com-Site Mess Hall) were for ground personnel while #3 was exclusively for combat flyers.

Each organization was required to provide personnel for Kitchen Patrol (KP) duty for their assigned mess. These men helped the cooks prepare and serve the food and then washed the dishes and cleaned up at the end of each meal. Some men were on “Permanent KP” but most were just assigned for periodic stints on KP.

Throughout 1944-45, the hours for each dining hall and who was to eat there frequently changed, but no new mess halls were built.

The Daily Bulletin for 11 Jan 1944 announced that a ground officer would be assigned to inspect Mess Halls #1 and #2 on a daily basis. On his duty day, the officer was to eat all three meals at his assigned mess hall and “report in writing to the Station Commander as to the food served and general conditions of the mess hall.”

Later that month, the policy was broadened to include Mess Hall #3: “Each Squadron will select from among their combat officers, one officer per day, during their scheduled weeks, to eat his meals, inspect and supervise the conduct of the combat crew enlisted men at mess. Officer will supervise the conduct of the enlisted men, see that men do not wear hats, waste food or appear in a dirty condition. He will inspect the cleaning of plates by the enlisted men to determine that men eat all the food they take.”

Station Ammunition Officer Charles Dye recalls being very well treated when he had mess hall duty. After inspecting the kitchen and how the food was being prepared and served, he would eat at a small table so he could “view the attitude and decorum” of the enlisted men—but he does not remember actually inspecting their plates.

In December 1943, the Red Cross Aero Club was opened.

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A recreation facility for enlisted personnel, it included a room where snacks were available as well as a bar.

By June 1944, more and more combat crews were surviving their required number of missions. Many stayed at the 392nd, either transferring to the ground crew or awaiting orders back home. A Daily Bulletin thus stated, "The enlisted Combat Crew Mess is not to be used by personnel who have completed their operational tours. The Ground Mess assigned to the squadron is to be used by these personnel. The Enlisted Men Combat Mess draws rations for operational crews only. Any additional personnel who eat at that mess are doing so at the expense of the operational crews."

Personnel

It took a lot of people to feed a bomb group and its support units. Assigned to each mess hall were cooks, bakers, butchers, stock room clerks, food buyers, assistants at all positions, and, of course, those on KP.

Overseeing each mess hall was a Mess Officer and a Mess Sergeant. Every month, all officers gave some money to their assigned Mess Sergeant who then used the funds to augment the menu with fresh fruits and vegetables bought in local markets. Some 392nd enlisted men also gave money to their Mess Sergeants in hopes of better or fresher food.

Undoubtedly the most well-remembered Mess Officer was Maj Albert B. Huber, in charge of the Combat Officers Mess. As 576th Sqdn pilot Burrell Ellison wrote, "He was the most ingenious man that I ever knew. There seemed to be no limit to the ways he could serve Spam. Cooked Spam, raw Spam, Spam salad, Spam and powdered eggs, Spam and rice, Spam sandwiches, boiled Spam, fried Spam, Spam and Brussels sprouts—ad infinitum. The Combat Officers affectionately referred to the dining room as 'Huber's House of Horrors.' I recall that when Lt Huber was promoted to Captain, he had himself paged over the loudspeaker system for two days—he was proud of that promotion!"

578th copilot Oak Mackey remembers a day in November 1944 when he went to lunch "and spotted a pile of dead chickens in the small parking lot at the end of the Officer's Mess. Someone, the cooks or cooks' helpers, had to pluck and clean all those chickens. Sure enough, we had chicken

that evening at dinner. Now, apparently they were old for the meat was a little tough but it was great to have something different."

579th pilot Don Scharf adds, "On the back side of the Combat Officers Club building [i.e., the north side] there was a grassy fenced-in yard. Once in a while there would be an old cow in the yard for a day or two and then it would disappear. A couple of days later we would have steak."

579th navigator Manny Abrams happened to glance out the window one day and saw a GI kill a cow with a .45 pistol; beef was served for dinner soon after.

Enlisted Messes: The Food

Joe McNiel, 578th tail gunner, said he "got fed good at Wendling." He particularly recalls the British bread and being served lots of chicken and lamb. There was also dehydrated food, "but if you're hungry, you'll eat anything, especially when compared to what the British had to eat." He remembers British friends telling him, "You Yanks brought Spam to us and we're grateful for it."

Many airmen "liberated" food from the kitchens and brought it to British friends in thanks for their hospitality and to augment their meager food supplies.

Gunnery instructor Jack Rotzien remembers "very bland food" that required "lots of salt and pepper" as well as dried potatoes, dried eggs and dried milk—"add water and you've got GI food!" He remembers quite fondly an English lad named Kyle "whose father owned the six acres off the end of one of the runways. He raised hogs and made the best pork sandwiches. Kyle would visit the base and sell his sandwiches to all the airmen. We'd tip him quite well and by the end of the war, he probably had enough to go to college."

He says the mess hall was really noisy and thinks they were served on metal trays.

On the other hand, 579th waist/tail gunner Wally Blackburn says he used his government-issued mess kit for meals. He remembers getting real eggs mixed with powdered eggs, chipped beef and gravy and canned fruit.

The type of food served before missions was specifically chosen so it wouldn't cause gas. With non-pressurized ships, abdominal gas could cause problems as the planes

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FOLDED WINGS REPORT

Please report the death of a member or spouse and provide a copy of the newspaper obituary if possible.

Name of deceased _____ Unit/Sqdn _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Date of death _____ Survivors _____

Reported by _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

The 392nd BGMA is engaged in a fund-raising effort to financially support our website, www.b24.net. It contains the history of the 392nd Bomb Group. You could make no greater tribute to your loved one than a donation for this living and ongoing memorial to the 392nd. Please send this report, hopefully with your check payable to the 392nd BGMA-Website, but send it with or without it, to: Annette Tison, 9107 Wood Pointe Way, Fairfax Station, VA 22039

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gained altitude. 578th radio operator Bob Davis says, "I decided once to have pancakes instead of scrambled eggs. Spent most of the climb to altitude lying in a fetal position on the flight deck due to the pain."

576th radio operator George Michel flew only "9½ missions since I became a POW halfway through #9" but he still remembers the food. "I thought that the chow was good to great. The one thing that always seemed very obvious to me was that the chow hall was giving away the kind of mission it was going to be before we ever got to the briefing room.

"How? When you stuck your tray up for eggs, if they were scrambled and had a kind of greenish tinge to them, and the toast was burned a bit and soggy, and the milk had been created from powdered milk stirred up, I knew it would be a run-of-the-mill mission. I ate a lot oatmeal on those days!

"On the other hand, if the chief cook was standing at the head of the line offering the option of poached or fried (over light) eggs instead of the great, scrambled fresh eggs, with fresh milk and delicious toast, with fresh orange juice... I kind of anticipated the briefing would be full of surprises. Oh yes, and there might be fresh oranges at the end of the line."

Photo technician Harvey DeVoe says, "In the early days, the food was marginal, but as time went on and shipping lanes became open, it improved in both quality and quantity."

Per 465th Sub Depot Instrument Technician Dick Giesing, "We didn't do too bad for food. The cooks had four big coal-burning stoves that they cooked on. It was the job of the 'fireman' to keep those fires burning all day. On KP, we mopped the floor, got the frozen stuff out to thaw and did other similar jobs. I had a place to sleep and three meals a day; lots of folks had it much worse."

English Reactions

Ted Parsons was one of about 30 men assigned to the RAF Detachment at Wendling, most involved in weather, radio or communications systems in support of air operations. They ate in the 392nd's mess halls. He wrote, "After two years of RAF food, the quality and quantity of the USAAF rations was a revelation. Tomato juice and toast for breakfast, pork and lamb chops for lunch, peanut butter, all kinds of fresh fruit, coffee by the gallon, etc. The food was abundant and we all fully realized how very fortunate we were."

David Ward was a young lad living near the base who was also invited to eat at an Enlisted Mess hall. "A comprehensive selection of dishes was served from a long counter, with items of food available consisting of all the many things unobtainable in wartime Britain: large meat steaks, ice cream, oranges, pineapples, etc. The airmen queued at one end, tray in hand, and collected the meal of their choice. The trays, the likes of which I'd never seen before, were made out a new material called plastic. The trays didn't break, chip, bend or discolor. A miracle product if ever there was one.

"The mess hall was illuminated by a most impressive concealed lighting system, which consisted of several lights fixed to the ceiling with a large parachute draped down towards the floor. Either the parachute or the actual lighting was peach-colored; the result was very effective."

As a young lad, John Gilbert had a few meals at one of the enlisted dining halls. He thought the food was great! He used a two- or three-section aluminum tray to collect his food. Once, he wasn't moving fast enough down the chow line and "custard went on top of the gravy!"

Ground Officers Mess

Charles Dye recalls that after a few months at Wendling, a new mess hall was built just for ground crew officers. The old facility was re-designated for combat officers only.

The Ground Officers Mess had a kitchen area, a large dining room and a lounge area big enough for a ping pong table and a very small bar. Charles says, "Three or four people could crowd around the bar. There were a couple of enlisted bartenders who served only mild and bitter beer, but if you tipped the bartender enough he could also manage to find some Scotch.

"Everyone went through a chow line, so Chemical Officer 1/Lt Oliver W. Rusling and I would frequently play ping pong while waiting for the line to ease up. Other officers played checkers to pass the time."

Just outside the Mess was a tennis court.

Combat Officers Mess

The COM also had a kitchen, dining room and lounge/bar. The building—and its beautiful murals—still exist as

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Top, Christmas dinner 1943. Clockwise from bottom: Asst Group Operations Officer James McFadden; unknown; Group Navigator Kenneth Paddock; 578th CO Warren Polking; 579th CO Myron Keilman; 576th CO Clyde Gray; Mess Officer Albert Huber; 577th CO Clinton Schoolmaster; unknown GI; Ground Executive Officer Joe Bush; Group Operations Officer Lawrence Gilbert. Bottom, The south side of the Combat Officers Mess. Like all buildings at Station 118, it was camouflaged.

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JagSpares, which provides used parts for Jaguar cars. A list of all combat missions flown was on one side of the dining hall; on the other were paintings of Betty Grable and Rita Hayworth. The magnificent mural of flying B-24s inspired everyone in the lounge.

Hank Allen, 578th Sqdn lead navigator, remembers “fresh eggs on missions days, otherwise it was powdered eggs” and “they served mutton a lot, which I didn’t really like.”

Oak Mackey says, “The early breakfast for crews going on a mission always included fresh eggs prepared to order—up, over, scrambled, any way you wanted. Also, there was warm toast made from good English bread served with real butter and jellies, a variety of fruit juices, plus pancakes. Remember, these crews would get no lunch as there was no meal service on our B-24s.

“For those who were not on a mission, breakfast was quite another story. Regular breakfast served between 7am-9am was coffee and pancakes, maybe juice.”

According to Oak, “Food was served buffet style and I cannot remember if it was served on large dinner plates or on metal trays. The amount of food was certainly adequate though monotonous, frozen veggies had not been invented in the 1940s, vegetables came from cans. Potatoes were served at every lunch and dinner, usually mashed, sometimes otherwise. We had pork more often than beef and I don’t recall having fish. Like all the ground personnel at Wendling, the cooks did an excellent job under the circumstances making life for the combat crews as pleasant as possible. My tour of duty at the 392nd BG was September 1944 to April 1945; maybe during summer months fresh vegetables were available.”

“I do remember my uniforms got tighter and I gained weight!”

There’s probably no finer tribute to the many Crusaders who served in the Mess Halls and kitchens.



Left: Archie, a combat cook. Note the meat cleaver in his left hand and onions in his right. Below, cooks at the Combat Officers Mess. This photo was taken by the chimney on the north side of the Mess.



These photos show one or more of the 392nd's mess halls. From top: Christmas dinner 1943 (note the woman and flag painted on the wall). Easter 1944 (note the rabbit to the right of the stove). Thanksgiving 1944. On the wall are listed pairs of states (this photo shows Oklahoma/Pennsylvania, Ohio/Oregon and Nebraska/New Mexico) and tablets naming each of the Group's squadrons and supporting ground units. Painted on each triangle is the silhouette of a comely woman in a suggestive pose. Another special occasion as shown by the boxes of Roi Tan cigars on each table. If you can identify these mess halls, please contact Annette.

CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

by Annette Tison, News editor

Tom Perry has been writing the Chaplain's Corner for the News since March 2008—my first issue as editor. He recently told me that due to health issues he will no longer be able to serve.

I am sure Tom knows these words of comfort and encouragement from Isaiah 40:28-31: "Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."

Many thanks, Tom, for your years of service to the 392nd BGMA.



**THE 392ND MEMORIAL
AT WENDLING**

But we...shall be remember'd;



**We few, we happy few,
we band of brothers.**



**For he to-day that sheds
his blood with me
Shall be my brother...**

William Shakespeare
Henry V

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

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

∞FOLDED WINGS∞

Clyde W. Smith, 576, June 9, 2015
Joseph L. DeSario, 579, April 24, 2015
Edwin Reed Jr., Associate, June 27, 2015
Eileen N. Klug, Friend, April 14, 2015
Norma Jean Kopecky, spouse of Raymond H., 579,
June 16, 2015
Harris Albright, 579, June 28, 2015
Robert W. Sprowls, 579, May 25, 2015
Hilary Duffield, Friend, July 30, 2015
M. Neely Young, 578, June 7, 2015
Charles D. Wheelwright, 578, May 27, 2015
Norman J. Mellow, 578, July 18, 2015
James A. McLaughry III, 576, June 30, 2015