



Crewdog, part 2

Here is more of 576/9th Sqdn navigator John Matt's autobiography, which is available at www.amazon.com. His crew had been at Wendling exactly one week when they flew their first mission on 2 Oct 1944.

"Give me a thirty-second countdown after this guy ahead goes," said Big John [pilot 2/Lt John Beder].

We were all a little tense as we moved and stopped, then moved again toward the take-off position. The go flare had been fired from the tower and the assembly marker aircraft, first in line at the head of the runway, took off. The queue moved up after each take-off as the loaded, lumbering Liberators nosed down and sent out a squeal each time the brakes were applied. Our turn was next when the Liberator ahead surged forward down the haze-shrouded runway. "Thirty, twenty, ten, nine, eight..." I counted the seconds as the needle swept around on my hack watch... "three, two, one, go!"

Big John eased the four throttles forward deliberately and the props bit into the misty air and then we too were gone, first reluctantly, then picking up speed so slowly it seemed like forever and finally, we bumped

the ground slightly a few times and we were off. Now was a crucial moment because loss of power in an engine on this heavily laden bomber could send us ploughing into the dirt, or stalling out and pranging in head-first; either way was fatal. We sort of held our breath while Sam [copilot 2/Lt John A. Samsell] kept a close eye on the engine gauges as the Liberator slowly dragged itself upward and the big landing wheels tucked themselves in. And then the moment passed us by as the airspeed crept up and suddenly we were up above the haze layer and into the clear.

Some of the tension seemed to drop away with the haze as we now had more to do than just wait. We could see the Libs which had taken off before us turning and climbing in a sweeping arc to the left, all chasing the gaudily-painted assembly plane, and we gave chase too.

The formation was already taking form as we slowly gained on the leaders, who flew in climbing assembly circles so that following bombers could catch up. There were so many

other bomb groups forming over this one small part of East Anglia that Big John and Sam checked again and again to make sure we were forming on the right leader. As we came closer we could see the 392nd Group tail markings clearly, a black horizontal bar across the center of the silver rudders, so now there was no doubt.

I stood between the pilot seats and watched Big John slowly slide the Lib into position on the right wing of the second "v" in our squadron and then hold it as the formation continued its climbing assembly turn. We were toward the rear of the last of three squadrons in the 392nd Group, so although we were not tail-end Charlie, we were close to it.

All of us re-checked the flimsy again to make sure of what the next signal flare from the leader would mean. Almost all of this gigantic, complex maneuver was performed with minimum radio traffic, from the time of the green go flare

to the leader's signal flare at the start of the bomb run, since the Germans could monitor most signals if they were passed by radio. Our anchor in the "formatting" maneuvering was a radio beacon called Buncher Five not too



The 392nd BG's assembly ship, #41-23689, Minerva, before the tail stabilizer markings were re-done.

far from Wendling. We would pass over this checkpoint twice, once during the Group assembly, and again at the final assembly altitude of 13,000 feet. There, the Groups would fall into their positions in the 14th Wing as the bomber stream set course for the "coast out" checkpoint, Great Yarmouth.

Because of our aircraft's position on somebody's wing, the navigator in the Group lead aircraft was navigating for us, and my main duty was to "follow" the lead navigator and have an accurate position and heading home at any time if we had to leave the formation. Celestial navigation was not practical on our bombing missions, so my main effort was to keep track of ground checkpoints when I could see them.

I had some time to look around in wide-eyed, excited wonder at all of this massive undertaking which we were part of. [Bombardier] Jack Murray had a little more to do since he flew as nose turret gunner and had to make sure, when we reached the target, that the bombs went away,

See CREWDOG on page 4



392nd BGMA Officers

*President and
Editor Emeritus*

Jim Goar
1555 N. Main St., #106
Frankfort, IN 46061
goar@accs.net
(765) 654-4609



Vice-President

Bob Books
books@b24.net



Secretary/Treasurer

News Editor

Annette Tison
9107 Wood Pointe Way
Fairfax Station, VA 22039
dtison5401@aol.com
(703) 690-8540



PX Chairman

Bill McCutcheon
20620 Milton Ct.
Brookfield, WI 53045
billm@b24.net
(262) 784-5606

FROM THE EDITOR

My Mistake. Alert 392nd BGMA member Jim Christner asked if I had mislabeled the ducks in Louis Darling's painting on page 6 of the June 2016 issue. I had indeed. The correct title of the piece is "Pintails Whirling In" rather than "Pinwheels Flying." I apologize for my error.

News. A three part documentary about 578th radio operator/top turret gunner Robert D. Davis will premier in the summer of 2017. Titled *Before I Forget* (also the name of his memoir), it tells the story of Bob's military service, being shot down on 29 May 1944, imprisonment in Stalag Luft #4, and the 500 mile march (referred to historically as The Death March) from that camp in the spring of 1945. It will include many 392nd BG photos. For more information—and to view the trailer—see www.BIFtheSeries.com.

Dutch researcher John Meurs has recently published a book about the 64 aircrews who did not return to England after the mission on 29 Apr 1944. *One Way Ticket to Berlin: A Day in the Life of the Mighty Eighth* starts with basic information from their Missing Air Crew Reports that are supplemented with survivor accounts and letters, recollections from relatives, photos, and much more. The 847-page book devotes 81 pages to the 392nd crews piloted by 2/Lt Leo E. Ofenstein, 2/Lt William T. Kamenitsa, 2/Lt Fred C. Shere Jr, 2/Lt Robert R. Bishop, 2/Lt Gerald E. Rogers and 2/Lt Bert W. Wyatt. There is also a chapter for Capt Joseph A. Higgins Jr, whose crew flew 17 missions and 3 diversions with the 392nd before being transferred to the 389th BG as a lead crew.

The book is available for \$25.00 at www.quailridge.com (search for "John Meurs") and www.amazon.com.

John's interest in the 8th AF dates back to his childhood in Apeldorn in The Netherlands. When he was nine years old, a B-17 crashed behind his house on 26 Nov 1944. His first book, *Not Home for Christmas*, is about 8AF losses on that day. It is also available from Quail Ridge Press and www.amazon.com.

578th copilot Oak Mackey writes, "Perhaps you already receive the *2ADialogue*, maybe not. Go to www.2ndair.org.uk/digitalarchive and prepare to be astounded. The

amount of information in there is truly amazing."

He is absolutely right! I went to the website and searched for "392nd Bomb Group." The photos, memoirs, and documentation provided by 392nd BG airmen is incredible. Look for yourself!

Oak also sent a copy of the Summer 2016 issue of the *Dialogue*. Its front page announces that "Over 30,000 images of original photographs, letters, memoirs and other documents are available online for the first time following the launch of our new Second Air Division Digital Archive in May. The new digital archive website...tells the story of a vital part of Norfolk's World War Two history, through the records of the courageous men and women of the 2nd Air Division USAAF.... We're particularly excited that the State Registers from the American Red Cross Service Club at Bishop's Palace in Norwich are now online. Each of the four surviving registers is arranged by American state name and details the American servicemen who visited the Club between 1943 and 1946. Service personnel would sign the current register on their first visit to the club, giving their name, date of visit, home town, and Army Post Office number. They would sometimes also provide their service number, rank, full home address, bomb group and squadron numbers and even scribble notes to their friends. The facebook of their day, servicemen could consult the registers to find contact details of other serving personnel from their home state and use the APO system to initiate correspondence." Please let me know if you find your name!

Reunion Meeting Video. 392nd BGMA Vice President Bob Books will attempt to video the membership meeting so those unable to attend the reunion can see what went on. The meeting will begin at 8:30am on Thursday, October 20; Bob will try to have a link to the video posted at www.b24.net/meeting by noon that same day. If computer glitches prevent the



effort, a notice to that affect will be posted.

Reunion. If you're attending the reunion (or want to be ready for Veterans Day), consider ordering a 392nd shirt or hat to show your Crusader heritage.

The order form is at <http://b24.net/392nd/lit.htm>. We have 17 khaki hats and 1 blue hat available **See EDITOR on page 3**

President's Message



Tom and Jill Scott, Trustees for the Wendling Memorial, report both good news and bad news. The bad news is that the magnificent hedge surrounding the grounds is dying.

The good news is that the Wendling community is responding with donated money and labor, the labor by the Henry Dennett family and Tom and Jill's son Hugh. (For

further details, see Annette's complete account in this edition on page 11.)

In the eighties and nineties, the Associations of both the Second Air Division and the 392nd were robust. The 392nd, being an integral part of the 2AD, with them made many pilgrimages to Norwich during this time. From Norwich many of the various Groups fanned out to their old bases, and the 392nd went to Wendling and joined the villagers there for Services at the Memorial.

Now, with the passage of time, to the 392nd the Memorial is more of a memory than an actual place.

But to the Wendling community and to all England, it is a reminder of their valor when they alone faced the Nazi horde and, as Sir Winston Churchill said, never, never, never gave up.

See you in St. Louis.

Blue Skies,
Jim Goar

EDITOR from page 2

in our PX as well as 2 size Small, 3 Medium, 3 Large and 5 Extra Large short-sleeve polo shirts.

Escape Photos. The June 2016 *News* included some escape photos recovered by the Germans from captured 392nd BG airmen. 578th tail gunner Joe McNiel (on 1/Lt Robert E. Fletcher's crew) called to say that he still has all his escape photos plus the leather case he carried them in during sorties. His missions were from 9 Sep 1943 (the Group's first combat mission) to 26 Mar 1944, when he completed his combat tour.



Joe McNiel in his 1943 escape photo and at the 2014 Nashville reunion.

Updates from England

We've heard from several of our friends in England about recent activity on our behalf.

Waugh Crew Memorial

From Sheringham, Norfolk, Doug and Celia Willies report that "we had a visit in late June from Liz and Chris Trussell of Lake Zurich, Illinois. Liz is the daughter of Lt Jim Barton who was co-pilot of B-24 'Alfred' [#42-7485] that crashed close by on 4 January 1944 with five men killed. We had received a letter from them about a fortnight before their visit 'out of the blue' and it came as a lovely surprise. I have corresponded with her mother Mary every Christmas since we had the memorial erected in 1994 and that accounted for the means of contact.

"We visited the crash site and the local memorial one day and the next we had arranged for a visit to Wendling through John Gilbert and met up with him at 10.30 that morning. The weather just about kept fine (!) and we enjoyed an interesting visit, followed by a lengthy lunch in Dereham before taking them back to their hotel in Cromer. All very much enjoyed by ourselves and, I am sure, by Liz and Chris. I had also arranged for them to visit the 2AD Memorial Library in Norwich but unfortunately we ran out of time.....! We are hoping they will return!"

The Waugh crew memorial is just outside the front door of All Saints Parish Church in Upper Sheringham. The lettering on the marker was recently redone and it looks new again! The inscription says:

*Remember before God with Thanksgiving
the gallant Crew of B24H 'Alfred' of the 392nd BG, USAAF
which crashed near this spot on 4th January 1944
whilst returning badly damaged from a mission to Kiel.
In gratitude also to those who aided the survivors
in the common cause of freedom.*

*2/LT COLBY A. WAUGH, Pilot, KIA
2/LT ARTHUR L. COUND, Navigator, KIA
2/LT VIRGIL E. THOMSON, Bombardier, KIA
S/SGT DON C. BELDEN, Gunner, KIA
S/SGT EDWARD R. MURPHY, Gunner, KIA
2/Lt JAMES W. BARTON, Copilot
T/SGT LESTER L. WAGNER, Engineer
T/SGT PARKE V. KENT, Radio Operator
S/SGT EARL J. JOHNSON, Gunner
S/SGT HENRY WILK, Gunner*

Lest We Forget

According to Doug's research, "Alfred" likely got hit by flak just before bombs away that knocked out one of the four engines. Considerable structural damage was suffered, especially to the wings, and the radio no longer worked.

Despite their best efforts, the pilots could not keep up with the formation. Lagging behind, they were attacked by enemy fighters and received further damage.

As they flew across the North Sea, all three remaining engines stopped completely—twice—but the pilots managed to restart them by putting the nose down and going into a dive. Things were so desperate that the pilots gave the order to prepare to ditch. Luckily, before that had to happen, the men saw land.

See ENGLAND on page 10

CREWDOG from page 1

either by Radio Bomb Release—RBR—signal from the lead bombardier which automatically triggered our bomb releases, or by means of his own salvo switch if the RBR hung up. This is the way things would be until—and if—we got to be a lead crew.

When we reached 10,000 feet Big John ordered everyone to get set up on oxygen and I went down to my position in the nose to hook up my oxygen mask and set the mixing valve. Then I re-checked my electrically heated suit and gloves because the air which came streaming through chinks around the front turret would make the temperature inside the airplane same as the outside, -32 degrees Centigrade at the bombing altitude. We were not pressurized: no wonder Liberators were often called “whistling ----houses.”

The formation passed over Buncher Five for the last time at the assembly altitude, headed eastward for Great Yarmouth, and began the long, slow climb to the bombing altitude of 23,000 feet. By this time, the 392nd Group had been worked into position as the second of three Groups in the 14th Wing which was formed into a massive, stepped-down “v”.

The whole 14th Wing had been maneuvered into its place as the second of three wings flying one behind the other in the 2nd Air Division bomber stream. Somehow, the leaders of this operation had gotten over 300 Liberators, loaded with fuel and bombs, each in their assigned slot in their formations, in their desired spot in the sky, on time and on the correct departure heading for the bombing mission.

One of the two B-17 Flying Fortress Divisions—the Third—was not so lucky and the crashing and the dying started early. While forming to bomb the Henschel Motor Works at Kassel earlier in the day, two Forts came together and one of them crashed, but the crew was able to bail out. Another

two collided during assembly near Hitcham and 16 of the 20 or so crewmembers were killed. The formations had to reshuffle positions to fill in the blanks and proceed with the mission as if nothing had happened.

Our Division had also been scheduled to bomb the Henschel works but late intelligence had found a massive buildup of enemy trains at the railroad marshalling yards at Hamm, at the northeast end of the heavily industrialized Ruhr Valley. The trains were intended to supply a new offensive against our armies which were rolling forward in France at this time—October 2nd, 1944—four months after the D-Day landings. The original field order was cancelled and a new one quickly issued calling for an attack on the yards by the 2nd Air Division Liberators.

We came up on Great Yarmouth and as the English coast fell away behind us, there was a rustle of activity aboard as the gunners got ready to test fire their turret and waist guns. The Channel is wide at this point where it enters the North Sea, and when I informed Big John we were sufficiently clear of friendly territory, he gave permission to fire. There were great thudding noises as the gunners let go, firing down toward the water in short bursts, and you could feel the heavy recoil shake the airplane. All the guns checked out okay and were re-safetied for the moment, and everybody sat back again, watchfully waiting.

“How we doin’, Matt,” asked Big John, to break the tense silence, and I could look out and see the enemy-occupied coast clear enough to be able to tell him “we are a little north, maybe 5 or 6 miles.” I checked my chart again. “Looks like the leader is trying to get closer to the middle of this flak-free corridor near Ymuiden we’ve got marked on the flak coverage chart.”

There was silence again except for the laboring engines

See CREWDOG on page 5

392nd BGMA MEMBERSHIP FORM

Please look at the mailing label. Your membership status is shown directly after your name. **“16” or higher means your membership is current. Thank you!** 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 \$ _____

CREWDOG from page 4

on the climb and the amplified sound of each quickening breath I took through the oxygen system. And then we were on the coast, and somebody was yelling "Flak!" and sure enough, I could look down and see some black puffs far below as they tried to track us. It was our baptism of fire and, at the moment, it didn't look too impressive. The idea of a group of blood-angry people on the ground aiming large cannons at us with the idea of destroying the bombers in which we sat and killing us did not immediately come to mind. Later, perhaps.

The leader passed on the code word to begin dispensing chaff, the bundles of foil strips whose radar reflections painted jagged blips on the enemy radar altitude scopes, and as the flak puffs fell further below, it was obvious that the stuff worked. Apparently, the corridor was not so flak-free after all.

We were across Holland before we knew it, straight across the Zuider Zee just north of Amsterdam, and then the German border came up, the gates to the Fatherland, and time suddenly picked up speed. All of our surroundings: the farmlands and cities below, the skies in which we flew became threatening and it seemed a lot could happen to us, all of it bad, and there wasn't much we could do about it.

The leader shot off another flare as we arrived at control point Three and the formation made a ponderous turn to the south, "uncovering" so that the Groups maneuvered from the defensive, massive wing front to the attack formation of a line of Groups headed straight for the I.P., the Initial Point, the start of the bomb run.

We were at the I.P. in what seemed like seconds and altered course a little to the left and this was it, everything we had trained for, everything we had been waiting for. We would bomb by radar because of expected cloud cover, but it seemed less than forecast. We came abeam of Munster, which meant we had three minutes to go and the flak started. The flak we had encountered at the coast had not prepared us for what we now met as we approached the target. A long curtain of black smudges formed across the sky before us, raining down shards of steel on the Groups as we pressed on.

And now the clouds below became more scattered, and the marshalling yards at Hamm spread out before us, the largest such yards in Germany, full of rolling stock with military equipment. The flak was becoming more intense as we approached the great sprawl of tracks and waited for the "Bombs Away!" In the middle of all this, Jack called me on interphone and said, "Look at your target chart. Is the leader heading for the right aiming point?" He was only two feet away in his turret, and he looked back at me through the little window, questioningly.

But now we were in the center of the barrage and we could hear muffled pops as the bursts stayed with us and the batteries tracked us. I remember a thought flashing by: what if one of those 88s or 105s came right through the floor where I was standing, when—Blam!—a great black burst of flak exploded right in front of our nose and if it didn't hit Jack it could have scared him to death, but he was okay.

Someone started yelling, "Evasive action! Evasive action!" but the leader paid no attention. Then I began to notice with

gathering dread that we had sailed completely beyond the yards and still hadn't dropped our bombs and Jack looked around at me, his look of confusion matching mine. At this point a calm voice cut into my consciousness; it was the leader saying, incredibly, "We're coming around for another run." A black, deadly anger welled up in me as the flak fell away for the time being, and I truly think I could have strangled the possessor of that calm voice if I could get my hands on him. My mind emptied itself of all the epithets I had learned up to now, along with some I had just created. We went around in a great, agonizingly slow circle, back into position for another bomb run. The lead bombardier had not been able to get his radar bombing act together, so here we came again.

We gave the man his second run and it was just as bad as the first time, but we made it and Jack yelled "Bombs away!" as his RBR light came on. Our system had received the drop signal from the leader, and he flicked his toggle switch to make sure ours went too.

We turned off the target toward the east and the flak quickly fell away again. I tried to look out of my left window to see what happened to our first bomb load dropped in anger, but there were too many clouds, too much smoke for me to see, so we would have to wait for the bomb camera photos, provided we got home to see them. The line of attacking Groups proceeded to the Rally Point to the east of the target after all the bombs were dropped, and as the formations turned first northward, then westward toward home, they formed again into the defensive, winged "v" front to prepare for fighter attacks. The course home was laid out to avoid heavy flak concentrations in the area, and to pick up a reverse of the penetration route for the return through Holland.

About this time the whole crew was feeling pretty relieved. Despite facing the German flak twice, no Group aircraft was knocked down and we had reached the target and dropped our bombs. For myself, my fear-driven anger had evaporated at the rally point and I began to feel a little sheepish, and also thankful I hadn't said anything out loud. And how I envied the possessor of that calm voice, who, in the middle of the flak, a man just like me, who could think about an 88 coming through the floor just as I did and disregard it, and get on with the bombing. Could I ever be like that? I made a vow to myself just then, in the middle of my first mission, that I would sure as hell try.

We re-crossed the German border and came abeam of Amsterdam where the slow letdown began. Crewmembers started to unhook oxygen masks and sneak a smoke despite the hazards of smoking on oxygen. Thoughts of getting on the ground and out of the chute harnesses and Mae Wests and heated suits and all the other uncomfortable gear prevailed.

I watched as some of our fighters showed up, some Mustangs, who patrolled above us in lazy, sweeping arcs. Our relative motions gave them a grace and apparent speed which was as unreal as it was beautiful. From somewhere in our formation, from someone who watched the P-51s as I did, a radio voice called out, "Hey, little friend, how about a slow roll?"

See CREWDOG on page 6

CREWDOG from page 5

One of the fighters above us suddenly swept up into a beautiful, precise roll. In that instant, just as he reached the top, he was struck by a direct flak burst and disappeared in a flash of light. Only pieces remained and they fluttered down toward the green-brown checkerboard earth, glinting in the sunlight as they fell. There was some yelling and scrambling around as we awaited more flak, but our gunners had already been dumping what chaff they had left from the bomb runs and the puffs chased the foil strips down and behind us. The firing had come either from barges or railroad flatcars moved in to cover the often used route we had flown, and would be withdrawn and moved in again some time.

I tried to peer back toward where the Mustang fell and could see nothing, not even a trail of smoke. I have often wondered who that young man was who couldn't resist showing off that great little fighter. Perhaps at some time when he was a teen-aged kid, he had come close to an airplane for the first time, on some sunny afternoon, and reached out and touched it, and the magic reached back and gripped him too and carried him to that point over Holland on that day. Sometimes, even now, when I hear the name "Mustang" I think of this event, the first time I had seen an airplane shot down, this first blood, and no matter what I am doing, a pang of regret strikes my heart.

The intelligence hut was still crowded with aircrews when we got there, even though we were one of the last Liberators to peel off and land and, being new at post-mission procedures on our first mission, it took extra time to get unplugged, unsnapped, unzipped and unloaded. The place was a riot of noise as the flyboys sat around sipping on several ounces of Old Overholt medicinal whiskey, courtesy of Uncle Sam.

The debriefings weren't taking very long because nothing unusual was being reported and when our turn came, this Captain looked at Big John and said, "Notice anything new on this trip?" and all Big John could say was, "This was my first trip. I wouldn't recognize something new if it bit me in the rear end." We all laughed and that was the end of it.

We got up and went into the intelligence library where a sergeant was in charge of the booze. He asked us each to sign in while he poured a nice, healthy splash into aluminum canteen cups. I noticed the sign-in roster was very long and included names like Napoleon Bonaparte and Adolf Hitler along with real names. I came to find out that the sergeant would pour a whiskey for anyone two or three times, provided the drinker signed the roster each time and didn't use the same name twice.

[Engineer Sgt James P.] Morley, [radio operator Sgt Raymond S.] Murgatroyd and the gunners [Sgt William D. Merchant, Sgt Calvin H. Roever, Sgt Robert H. Schodrof and Cpl Robert P. Carr] took off and the two pilots, Jack Murray and I found seats and sat there sipping the strong liquor, suddenly too drained and tired to move. We were more relieved than anything that we made it through the first one, but also in a slight state of shock. Were they all going to be like this? And it wasn't only the enemy activity, but all the noise and cold, and sucking on oxygen for hours on end from a mask strapped tightly around our faces, and mostly, the weight of all that crap we had to wear the whole trip: the

long johns, the heated suit, the flight suit, the Mae West, the chute harness, the big boots. And on the bomb run: the flak vest and helmet, the weight of which really wore you down by the time you got to the rally point. Of course, some of us sat on the flak vest rather than wear it—first things first.

We sat there, not thinking about anything except finishing the drink and getting a shower and maybe some food. Now had we been more experienced combat men, we might have noticed that something unusual actually did happen, something that didn't quite add up. Why, we should have asked, did the chaff work over the Dutch coast but not on the bomb run? Over Holland the descending tin foil drew the flak bursts like a magnet, but on the bomb run it seemed to have no effect at all, and the bursts stayed with us like a swarm of hornets.

We were also to learn, as time went on, that news concerning our Group's combat losses was not circulated routinely; you usually heard about it over at the Club. For one thing, it often took days to get the loss picture all sorted out since some of the aircraft that did not return with the Group may have landed elsewhere for any number of reasons, or may have made it over the target and most of the way back, only to ditch in the channel or crash land on somebody's farm.

News of losses by other B-24 groups or the B-17 divisions was even more difficult to come by, partly because of security and mostly, I think, because it wouldn't serve much purpose to tell us and let us dwell on it. After all, the bombers were going to go as soon as the next field order came out, no matter what.

I'm Finished!!!

While the previous article shows the uncertainty and anxiety of a first mission, the following letter highlights the euphoria of completing a combat tour. It was written by T/Sgt Donald Cummings (engineer on the 577th's 2/Lt Douglas N. Ambrose crew) to his wife Dolly. She shared it with Cummings' mother and sister, and it was provided to the 392nd BGMA by a niece. It has been lightly edited.

Friday Afternoon, April 28, 1944

My darling wife—I hardly know how to begin this letter to you—but without hesitation I shall give you the news and then go into a fuller explanation as I go on. Yesterday I completed my tour of duty. You have no realization what a relief it is to be able to say this and how happy I am to be able to sit here and tell you. Darling, we have made the grade—and that is wonderful in more ways than one.

Now to go on a bit more slowly and tell you a little about us. I think I have a right to tell you something now. First I would like to say we completed our tour in four months less two days, or we made a mission on an average of one every four days. We did this with no member of the crew injured, although we had more than four hundred holes put in the ship during that time. We did it by completing every mission we started on; never once turning back, and doing whatever was necessary in flight so that we need not turn back. We did it without having any malfunctions of equipment due to personal or human negligence or lack of knowledge.

See CUMMINGS on page 7

CUMMINGS from page 6

As a crew we have the best record of any that has started or completed a tour of duty of this field. We were, and without too much friction among ourselves, strictly on the ball. It has paid; it was worth every effort; it has made us a good bunch of fellows.

We took Alfred [#42-7546, Alfred II] over from a crew that had put sixteen missions on it and then were transferred elsewhere. We ourselves have flown 26 of our 30 missions in this ship: the other four in others for various reasons. The ship now has 48 missions without once turning back because of mechanical failure—truly a wonderful record.

Editor's Note: The day after this letter was written, Alfred II was badly damaged during a mission to Berlin. Pilot 2/Lt John W. Reed IV nursed it back to England where nine of the crew successfully bailed out. The plane crashed near Walcott, Norfolk, with Reed the only casualty.



The crew poses in front of #42-7546, Alfred II. Standing L-R: navigator 2/Lt Vernon A. Lindberg; bombardier 2/Lt Joseph F. Tierney; copilot 2/Lt Winston Dorrell; pilot 2/Lt Douglas N. Ambrose. Kneeling L-R: radio operator T/Sgt Gordon H. Sawyer; gunners S/Sgt Grant W. Oasheim; S/Sgt James A. Davis; S/Sgt Earl A. Hall; S/Sgt Harold D. Dunham; engineer T/Sgt Donald L. Cummings.

Twice, recently, before we were through, someone else has flown it and had something happen: both times it has been human error. It was therefore not counted against the ship. The first time it was a supposed gas leak—engineer didn't fully understand his system and was pumping his own gas overboard. The second was the loss of a generator—engineer didn't watch his indicators closely, nor properly adjust the regulators, and as a result burned up a perfectly sound piece of equipment.

I really have stuck my neck out on generators. Let it be known that it is the human and not the mechanical that goes wrong—proved it by never once having trouble. I shouldn't say trouble, because I had plenty, but always found it was something that could be righted once one went after it. There were without doubt hundreds of hours of labor and repair put in on Alfred during our tour, yet we cornered all his ills, put our fingers on the spot—kept the ship going in the air—and set it up right before we started again. Without a doubt I spent more hours checking than most engineers;

had myself checked more than most engineers. Ground crew and flying crew—we really got along—just loved to get something on one another. It didn't happen often, but the important point was that it wasn't overlooked. I say we had the best crew chief in the ETO [European Theater of Operations]. He says they had the best engineer in the ETO. No matter—the result was good.

To say the least we are all very happy about being through and can now look back at some of the things that happened and get a chuckle out of them. We did follow the rules pretty well—such as wearing the proper clothes, taking good care of our flying equipment, wearing the steel protective suits and helmets and all the other odds and ends that should be observed.

I'll never forget the day a big hunk of flak came thru the dome and hit me in the head—the shattered plexi-glass was floating all over the radio-man, pilot and co-pilot like so many snowflakes. It put a big dent in my steel helmet and hours later I still had a terrific headache, but thanks to the helmet I still had my life. Well anyway, I called up to say I was O.K. and as I was talking another hunk came thru the other side of the turret and hit me in the head again. It startled me so I let up on my talking button before I had finished what I was saying. Naturally the words ended in a sort of groan and everyone thought I had been killed. A few seconds later I got back to talking again, but I sure had a time making everyone believe I was really O.K.

Then there was the time [ball turret gunner S/Sgt Earl A.] Hall, poor fellow, had a bad case of the "runs" and had to leave his turret any number of times throughout the flight and undress in 40° below zero weather. What we smile at now is the fact that during one of those times we were under attack by enemy fighters with flak bursting everywhere and here was Hall in his birthday suit. We often ask him what Jerry would have thought if he saw a man floating down to earth clothed only in a parachute. However, none of it was funny that day.

Then there was the time [right waist gunner S/Sgt James A.] Davis was standing at his position and for no good reason bent down to pick up something from the floor and when he straightened up there was a big hole right through the ship where he would have been. He claims to this day he bent over to say "Allah." But we have our own ideas.

Once I thought I smelled something burning and called the pilot. He asked everyone to check up and [navigator 2/Lt Vernon A.] Lindberg comes back and says, "Hell! It's me, I'm on fire." So he was, too, and before he could put it out it burned all the rear out of his clothes. Sure was a funny sight when we got down. Wasn't so funny at 38° below zero though for him.

Once, too, my heated suit went out about five minutes after I turned it on and I rode for seven hours at 40° below zero. It was out for four hours before I told the pilot because I was afraid he would turn back—after that it made no difference because we were on the way back anyway. I lost about 10 pounds that day just from shaking. About two hours of rubbing got me back to normal again without so much as a frostbite.

There was the time I had to put radio operator [T/Sgt Gordon
See CUMMINGS on page 8

CUMMINGS from page 7

H.] Sawyer in my turret while I did a round of repairs—hydraulic system and what not all shot up and I wanted to make repairs while we still had fluid enough left to insure getting the wheels down for landing when we came back. He was so excited he put his fingers on the triggers and there goes a whole stream of lead right through our own formation—luckily no one caught any of it. From then on I used to check on him to see the triggers were locked. He still says he wasn't excited, but we have our own ideas about that.

I could go on and on. There are many things like that—some very funny if they turned out well and some very pathetic if they turned out some other way. I know we all sat by, here in our little hut, and did some tall thinking more than once. This little old steel house is made for twelve men; in other words, it is just large enough for the enlisted men of two crews. When we came here originally it was empty and we moved in with another crew—they taking one side and we the other. At the present writing that other side has its fifth crew—you may imagine our feelings at different times during our stay here—you can also appreciate our present sense of relief. Enough said.

We are now entitled to a ten day furlough and will take it very soon. Our flak-leave never came to pass—I'm not kicking. I guess others needed the rest more. Now, however, I shall really enjoy this leave.

Now that our real job is completed we will break up as a crew. We all go before a board and they and we shall decide what is best for us to do.

Hall, [S/Sgt Harold D.] Dunham, [S/Sgt Grant W.] Oasheim—gunners all—want to go back (to the States) and go thru flying school. They are young and I think they will get every consideration. [2/Lt Winston] Dorrell (co-pilot) wants to go back and start out as a ship's commander himself—they will probably give him the chance. [2/Lt Joseph F.] Tierney (bombardier) I don't know about—he has said nothing to me so far. [2/Lt Douglas N.] Ambrose (pilot), [2/Lt Vernon A.] Lindberg (navigator), Sawyer, Davis and myself are attempting to stay here. I think they want us and our main job would be to instruct new men in our own particular job. I think it would be fun—not all the stiff regulations one would have to put up with back home—and still here putting out where it will count the most.

In a few days I shall know definitely what I am to do and shall try to tell you something about it. As for combat itself, I promise I won't stick my neck out again unless it becomes a required duty.

I have written no one else as yet—fact is I thought I would leave it up to you to spread the news.

Love, Don

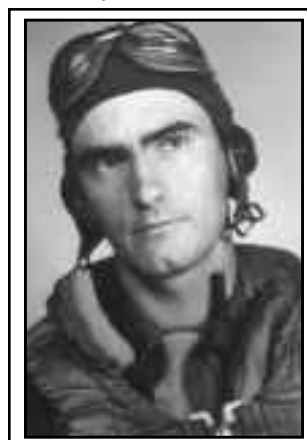
PS. Please take note: I know this letter will be just what you have been waiting for—just one little word of caution. Lt. Dorrell and T/Sgt Sawyer were grounded while we made two flights so still have two to make. I am confident they will make it, but for the sake of the folks back home please don't write or say anything to either of the above families until you hear from me that they are through.

Editor's Note: The two men did indeed complete their combat tours.

The Rest of the Story

After reading an entry in her brother's WWII diary, 392nd BGMA member Marie Williams asked for more details about the mission to Magdeburg, Germany, on 3 Mar 1945.

576th tail gunner S/Sgt Joseph F. Berry was on 1/Lt John G. Daley's crew. After his 28th mission, he wrote, "...Hit



S/Sgt Joseph F. Berry

oil refinery visually, one of Germany's biggest ones left. Plastered target, left big smoke columns, fires. Flak heavy, accurate. Bandits seen. Jet Me-262s. Had heavy contrails. Saw several scrambles. Also P-51 shot down and B-24s collided. Almost had collision in own formation. Found out later at base jet was coming in on our contrails. He was going for us as we were lead ship. Ship behind, nose gun, saw him

and shot him down. Probably saved our lives. Couldn't see him because of contrails. That night e/a came home with RAF, shot up truck near base, killed driver. Was rough mission—flak, fighters."

Here is the story behind S/Sgt Berry's diary account.

3 March 1945

The 392nd BG was ordered to return to Magdeburg. Per the main briefing, they had "soundly smacked" the same target the day before but it was anticipated that bombing it again would "finish the job completely." Loaded with ten 500 pound General Purpose bombs each, 20 planes began take-offs at 6:20a.m.

The target was the synthetic oil plant 4½ miles northeast of the city, "one of the last remaining fuel plants supplying the German war machine."

2AD's Intelligence Annex to the mission directive noted, "Enemy capabilities in target area will permit him to have 300 single engine enemy aircraft airborne in opposition to bombers... Harrassing attacks by Me-262s can be expected in target area, on route in, and on withdrawal, operating in elements of two to four."

Per the Photo Interpreter, the lead squadron laid down "a very scattered pattern that started in the target and went on to the dock area along the river" with 54 percent of their bombs within 2,000 feet of the target. The second squadron had "a very compact pattern" but it was unfortunately 3,800 feet short and to the right of the MPI, a gross error.

German Fighters

The two B-24s that collided belonged to the 448th BG. A survivor later stated that "eight miles from the target, the plane ahead and to the right was hit by a jet-propelled fighter and immediately went out of control and jumped straight into the air and landed on my plane."

Just two other men from the Libs were able to bail out.

The 392nd's Mission Teletype reported that "three to six jet-propelled a/c, probably Me-262s, observed in dog fight with fighter-support, P-51s. One e/a attacked our Group

See BERRY on page 9

BERRY from page 8

and is claimed as destroyed."

Per 576th Sqdn nose gunner S/Sgt John P. Malley's Combat Claim, at 10:22am and 24,000 feet he saw an Me-262 follow two B-24s down. It "then came up from almost



This photo of a 392nd BG formation, date unknown, shows contrails in which enemy fighters could hide.

directly underneath. [I] began to fire when enemy a/c was 2000 yds away, kept firing until Me-262 broke away, just under our plane, about 500 yds below. Me-262 then passed out of [my] sight, smoking. Then navigator [F/O Sherman L. Vealey] saw pieces breaking off of Me-262 and plane fell apart."

On 18 Mar 1945, 2AD agreed that S/Sgt Malley destroyed the jet. He had been flying with 1/Lt Thomas A. Jones' crew, whose position in the formation was directly behind 1/Lt Daley's.

Cpl Edward D. Ferrell

Enemy fighters did follow Allied a/c to England that night, just as the 392nd's liberty run was bringing airmen back to base after an evening out. Around 1a.m. on 4 March, the convoy was on the Litcham-Kings Lynn Road (about four miles from the base) when it was strafed by a twin engine German intruder. Per the 579th Sqdn history, that fighter, "in a single pass, killed one of the drivers, Cpl Edward D. Ferrell, and fired a 20mm shell through the pants leg" of Group Technical Radar Officer 1/Lt Stanley P. Gessel.

Cpl Ferrell thus became the only 392nd ground support person to die because of enemy action as well as the last WWII fatality in the County of Norfolk that occurred on the

ground and was attributable to the enemy.

577th doctor Capt John O. Halley escorted Cpl Ferrell's body to the US Military Cemetery in Cambridge, where he was buried on 6 Mar 1945.

On 21 Aug 1945—after the 392nd BG was back in the US—Cpl Ferrell's mother wrote to the US Army, "...we shall miss him terribly but God knows best and makes no mistakes. Thank you for your sympathy and we



Cpl Edward D. Ferrell

were made happy to have Sgt Miller of his Group who came to see us... The War Dept and all connected have been very nice to our family and my minister Rev. Shepherd read my son's Chaplain's letter at his memorial and added the gold star to our church flag [after] taking off the blue one. But now [the war] is all over, we hope, [and] we have only memories."

A few days later, his sister wrote the Army to ask when Cpl Ferrell's remains would be returned home. Her anguish is obvious: "Sir, it's only those who have lost their loved ones who really knows what this war meant. I am heart broken and I loved my kid brother with all my heart. We were very close pals and he was so young, only 21 to leave us now. No one knows the heart aches of yearning to see his face once again and hear his laughter.... He was overseas for 22 months and was supposed to be safe and his death was a great shock to us."

In July 1948, Cpl Ferrell's body was brought home for burial in his hometown of Zanesville, Ohio.

Editor's note: S/Sgt Berry's diary entry shows that even so late in the war, missions were not "milk runs" and the Luftwaffe could still inflict damage.

No 392nd crews reported a near collision in their formation.

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

ENGLAND from page 3

Survivor Henry Wilk later wrote, "Just as we got to the coast, the engines cut out for the third time and we never did pull out of the dive. Lt Waugh did do his best to make a belly landing but our wing got caught in a grove of trees and spun us into a hill, nose first."

Eyewitnesses said the engines were spluttering and misfiring and it appeared that the pilot was trying to land in a long field. However, it seemed to them as if the plane side-slipped into the trees, possibly caught by the strong north-easterly wind blowing off the sea. Regardless, the Liberator nosed into the ground near the small village of Upper Sheringham.

2/Lt Waugh, 2/Lt Cound, 2/Lt Thomson and S/Sgt Belden were killed in the crash. The others were taken to a hospital in Cromer, where gunner S/Sgt Murphy died four days later.

2/Lt Barton had a broken leg and damage to one eye. He was in Cromer Hospital for at least a week before being transferred to an Army Field Hospital where he was a patient for about two months. His eye problem never fully cleared up so he was eventually returned to the US.

The injuries suffered by T/Sgt Wagner and S/Sgt Johnson were such that they could no longer be on flight status. T/Sgt Wagner became an airplane and engine mechanic at the 392nd before transferring to the 389th BG in May 1944. S/Sgt Johnson also joined the 392nd ground crew but in January 1945 was transferred to the infantry.

S/Sgts Kent and Wilk were the only survivors who resumed combat duty. Kent became a POW on 27 Apr 1944. Wilk finished his missions on 27 May 1944—and attended the dedication of the Memorial to his crew in 1994.



The newly refurbished Waugh crew memorial.

Wendling

392nd BGMA Director John Gilbert frequently hosts Crusaders and relatives visiting Wendling and Beeston. His tours usually include Wendling Village Hall, with its painting of B-24s flying over the town; Jagspares, site of the Combat Officers Mess; Ben Burgess Beeston, built over and around the Operations Building; and Edor Rowland's farm, where Site 8 once stood. If time permits, they end with a visit to John's home to see his 392nd BG memorabilia and share a meal with wife Doris and son Adrian.

In June, John met with Ron Hardin, his half-sister Shirley Sirrell, and his son Trevor. Ron's father, S/Sgt Thomas Hardin, was the Night Mess Sergeant per the Combat Officers Mess menu for Christmas 1944. Ron shared a photo of his father and the other cooks taken before that Christmas meal.



Cooks before Christmas dinner 1944 in the Combat Officers Mess. S/Sgt Hardin is seated second from left.

July's visitor was Jim Young, son-in-law to 2/Lt John L. Henrickson (copilot on the 576's 2/Lt Frank R. Dugger crew). A pilot himself, Jim had just flown to Norwich with his copilot to deliver a plane there to KLM.

Although it was late afternoon when they arrived, Jim and his friend decided to go to Wendling for a quick visit. They stopped at Ben Burgess Beeston and met manager John Rupp. After showing them around, he called John Gilbert to say that he had two Americans visiting and asked if John would be able to meet them.

John Gilbert then "spoke to Jim on the phone and arranged to meet him at his hotel that evening. I spent two hours showing Jim some memorabilia and photos of the base which I gave him on a DVD to take back to his wife, Jana.

"Jim left early the next morning. He later emailed to thank me for coming to visit him at the hotel and said his wife was 'blown away' by the DVD. Jim said they will make coming back to Wendling together a priority."

August's visitors were 578th pilot Cliff Peterson's daughter Kristi Kalajian, her son Leo and daughter Lyra. Two years ago, John gave Kristi's brother Doug a tour. When Doug learned Kristi was traveling to England, he urged her to contact John and see the base herself.

John says, "I picked Kristi and family up for a full day's visit to Wendling base. A sentimental journey was to Site 8 (Edor Rowland's farm) where 1/Lt Peterson had been billeted. We then went to my home in Cawston to view my memorabilia, etc., for a few hours. Doris layed on drinks and eats before I returned them to their hotel.

"Kristi, Leo and Lyra were 'over the moon' with their visit to the base and our home."

The Ploughshare Pub

Christine Robinson, an active member in Beeston Community Enterprises Ltd., sent an update on local efforts to save The Ploughshare Pub: "We have been very busy applying for funding from various government groups set up to help local people to buy pubs in danger of demolition. The applications are going well.

"We have also started our fundraising events, which have been wonderful successes.

See ENGLAND on page 11

ENGLAND from page 10

"On August 17th, 2016, we went 'live' with our crowdshare offer giving anybody interested in helping us to save The Ploughshare the opportunity to own a small piece of the pub helping to preserve it along with its history. The Community Share Offer is now live on Crowdfunder, so you can quickly and easily buy shares online."

Christine adds, "If any of your members have photographs or stories of The Ploughshare that they would be happy to share with us for a scrapbook (to be displayed in the pub when we re-open it) or for media purposes, that would be

fantastic."

For more information, testimonials, or to contribute, go to <http://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/beeston-ploughshare/>. To view villagers talking about the importance of The Ploughshare to their communities, see <http://www.itv.com/news/anglia/update/2016-08-29/villager-try-to-raise-enough-money-to-buy-their-local-pub/>.

Incidentally, Henry Dennett is Chair of the organization. He laid the wreath on behalf of the 392nd BGMA at the last two Remembrance Sundays and is also helping restore the Memorial grounds, as seen in the article below.

The 392nd BG Memorial

The hedge that surrounded the Memorial and parking lot—much of it dead or dying—has been removed. Memorial trustee Hugh Scott (son of Tom and Jill Scott) operated the heavy machinery, Henry Dennett's wife Louise and son Edward assisted, and Henry took photos of the event to share with us.

We in the 392nd BGMA appreciate both the "sweat equity" of these individuals and the financial support provided by local residents and businesses.

The next phase—replacing the hedge—will commence in the fall. A new evergreen hedge, possibly laurel or yew, will be planted. Photos will be provided when the work is completed.

If any member would like to contribute to this effort, please mail a check payable to "392nd BGMA" to Annette Tison, 9107 Wood Pointe Way, Fairfax Station, VA 22039 with "Memorial Maintenance" in the memo line. She will ensure the funds are forwarded to the Memorial Trustees.



Going, going, gone.... The top photos show the work in progress; the dead and dying portions of the hedge are clearly visible and illustrate why removal of the hedge was necessary. The bottom photos show the site after the hedge was taken out on three sides. The section behind the Memorial and flags was taken out at a later date because that area was water-logged and needed several weeks of good weather to dry out before work there could begin.

Editor's note: We in the 392nd BGMA sincerely and gratefully thank all our English friends. Their kindness and generosity are an integral component in our mutual goal to perpetuate the legacy of those who served our countries and the 392nd Bomb Group so well.

IDEAS AND INSPIRATION

by Char Heim

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

We have recently celebrated another Labor Day. This is a holiday traditionally associated with the end of summer, winterizing cottages and boats and preparing for back to school.

Let's remember that the real tradition of Labor Day is to honor America's hard working citizens. Our nation's success depends on the dedication and commitment of our workforce, from the smallest, perhaps seemingly inconsequential position to the top CEOs and politicians. Every job makes a meaningful contribution. As Martin Luther King Jr is quoted: "All labor that uplifts humanity has dignity and importance and should be undertaken with painstaking excellence."

America is often regarded as the most powerful, wealthy and generous country in the world. This reputation is a direct result of the loyalty and diligence of USA workers.

As we move through this month, let us not forget the tragedy that befell our country 15 years ago on September 11th. The devotion of so many emergency workers and other laborers kept our nation strong and steadfast. God's blessings to these individuals as well as the victims and the families touched by this atrocity.

God Bless America. See you in St. Louis in October.



**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

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

∞FOLDED WINGS∞

Richard L. Giesing, 465th Sub Depot, July 18, 2016

Henry W. "Hank" Allen, 578, January 24, 2016

Aldon H. Jensen, 577, May 20, 2016

Bertrand J. Prost, 576, July 1, 2016