



Mess Halls at Station 118

There were several mess halls at Station 118: separate facilities for air and ground officers, a mess hall for air enlisted personnel, and two mess halls for ground enlisted men (with the squadrons and support units assigned to a designated mess hall).

Combat Officers Mess (COM)

The Combat Officers Mess is the only mess hall still standing. Thanks to its murals—still evident after almost eight decades—it is a vivid reminder of what once was. However, what one sees now is certainly different from what officers saw during the war years.

The internal layout of the COM changed throughout the war. For example, artwork was added, as was a fireplace. As a result, veterans' memories of the COM can seem to contradict each other, but could simply be from different dates or just reflect the passage of time.

Post-war, the building was remodeled for use as family housing (Director John Gilbert lived in it for eight years!), by a canning factory, and finally as JagSpares, which sold spare parts for Jaguar cars.

Throughout the decades, an indoor bathroom was added, all windows were replaced (and some converted into doors), some original doors



The camouflaged COM is aligned from southwest (on the left in the top photo and parallel to Dereham Rd.) to northeast. Despite the haphazard location of the bikes, the middle photo shows there were slots in the concrete path in which bikes could/should be parked! The building is at upper left. The bottom photo shows the COM from the back.

were enlarged or changed into roll-up doors, a ceiling was installed beneath the A-framed roof, internal walls and doors were added or removed, and the interior was repainted many times.

As a result, much of its wartime artwork was painted over or subject to decades of wear and tear which has destroyed it in many places. Other images were hidden from view behind drywall or above the added ceiling.

Nonetheless, this article will attempt to illustrate the Combat Officers Mess as it would have appeared to those who used it in WWII.

Editor's note: I am indebted to building owner David Coleman, who made several visits to the structure in order to answer my questions. 392nd BGMA Directors Ben Jones and John Gilbert and member Laurie Huntley helped me understand "then" and "now." If any readers have questions, different memories from past trips, additional photos or veteran accounts to add to this history, please contact me!

Veterans' Memories

576/9th navigator John Matt (known as Matishowski during the war) flew missions from 2 Oct 1944 to 25 Apr 1945. In his book *Crewdog*, he writes vividly of seeing the Combat Officers Mess for the first time. It was "painted in British camouflage colors, a low, square building like the Group headquarters, with black-out painted windows. To walk through the door was to be suddenly thrust back in time, to the movie *Dawn Patrol* perhaps, the version with Errol Flynn, with a bunch of young, clean-cut flyboys talking and laughing at the bar at the left of the large rectangular room. There was

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FROM THE EDITOR

The Whitnah Brothers. The *Berkeley* [California] *Daily Gazette* for 21 Oct 1943 reported the fate of two brothers.

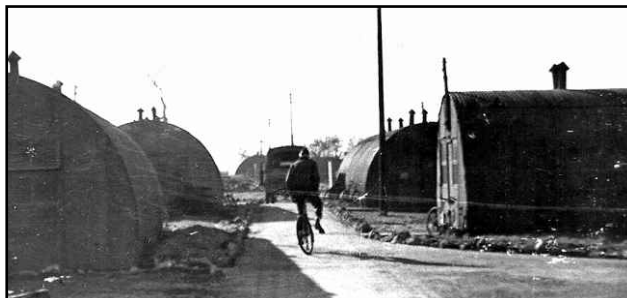
One was 579th Sqdn 2/Lt Joseph C. Whitnah, bombardier on 2/Lt William W. Clifford's crew, whose parents had just received a telegram that he was Missing in Action on 8 Oct 1943. During that day's mission to Vegesack, Germany, 15 Crusader B-24s were attacked by about 40 enemy fighters. Combat lasted almost an hour, with the 392nd losing two planes (including Clifford's).

Simultaneously, Kerwin, two years younger, was awaiting transfer to a Federal penitentiary for violation of the Selective Service Act. A conscientious objector, he was convicted in a San Francisco court of trying to evade the draft and sentenced to two years in prison.

Per the article, "When informed by newsmen that his brother was reported missing in action, Kerwin Whitnah said: 'It makes no difference in the status of my case. If I changed my mind it would only cheapen my personal convictions.'"

Nissen Hut Follow-Up 1. At the end of WWII, per https://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub_image.cfm?image_id=1053, Nissen huts were used "as emergency quarters for Germans who had been bombed out of their homes and for refugees and expellees as well. They were especially prevalent in the British occupation zone.... There was a time when as many as 10,000 Hamburg residents lived in these dwellings. The last Nissen huts were removed in 1958."

Follow-Up 2. Lest anyone think there were only a few, widely dispersed Nissen huts at Station 118, this photo shows how many and how close together they were. One also wonders how the men found their way to the correct hut under blackout conditions!



Follow-Up 3. In 2006, Ivan Collison wrote that he left Litcham School in 1942 at age 14 and found work on the air base at Wendling as a carpenter improver. He helped make shuttering for the concrete blast walls being erected at Honeypot Wood for the bomb dump. Following that, he "had various jobs on the airfield, including the erection of Nissen huts for the ground crews at most of the aircraft dispersal stands. We were told then that the airfield was to become 'American' with B-17s or B-24s. After a change over of 'contractors' we had various jobs including the building of accommodation sites, this being mostly Nissen ... huts. Communal Site No. 2 started with all the buildings that site contained; i.e., the CO's residence, mess halls, the flying officers club, gym, and various other departments..."

"I can recall the arrival of the first USAAF personnel, ground staff who were to cover the various sites and buildings (police, fire, PX, etc.). The arrival of the 392 BG aircraft came on a Sunday afternoon about 3pm mid-1943. They came in a southwest direction, circled around Litcham and Beeston villages, peeling off to land on the main runway. The following Monday morning as I was going to work around 7am with the cloud base fairly low I saw a strange aircraft come out of the clouds and to my horror I saw it had black crosses on the body and wings. I think it was a Junkers Ju99! It flew on for about 6 seconds then disappeared into the clouds again; there were no bombs or machine gunning. I suppose from that time on the Germans knew the 8th Air Force was at Wendling with a big D on their tails and wings."

392nd BG PX Items. PX Chair Bill McCutcheon reminds us that Veterans Day, the October reunion in Washington, DC, and Christmas are just around the corner while the July-August 2023 get-together in Norfolk is fast approaching. All are opportunities to show (and give) 392nd BG Crusader spirit! Current inventory:

- ◆ Blue shirts with Crusader logo. Available sizes: S-2, M-4, L-3, XL-4, 2XL-2
- ◆ Black shirts with Crusader logo. Available sizes: M-1, XL-1

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President's Corner



It looks like our hot weather is starting to wane and Fall is just around the corner. I enjoy the change of seasons and am ready for each one as it rolls in. We've had some pretty extreme weather this year and I hope it calms down soon and that none of you suffered any damage.

I hope a lot of you are planning to attend our annual membership meeting and reunion in Washington, DC/ Arlington, Virginia, in October. There's always so much to see and do in our nation's capital and the 8th AFHS has lined up some exciting tours and programs for us to enjoy. The 392nd BGMA will have a spacious hospitality suite where we can gather, visit and socialize.

We are going to have a display table in the hospitality suite so if you are planning to attend, I'd like to encourage you to bring a small display featuring your relative who was in the 392nd Bomb Group. We can only accommodate a limited number of displays so email Sue Williams at sneakypie@charter.net if you'd like to reserve a spot. Your display area will be approximately 2 ft. x 2 ft.

The hospitality suite will only be open when at least one of our board members is present to keep an eye on things. No one will be permitted into the hospitality suite without a name tag showing they are a registered attendee unless they are well-known by one of our members who is present. If your display contains items that you do not wish to leave overnight, you should secure them in your room.

The membership meeting will be broadcast via Zoom so those of you who can't be there in person can join us on your computer, iPhone, or other smart device. We will be electing directors to the board who in turn will elect the officers for 2023. The membership meeting will be Friday, October 21st from 9:30am–11:00am Eastern Time. It may not last the entire time, but feel free to pop in when you can, sooner rather than later. If you sign on well after the meeting has started and it doesn't connect you, it will probably be because the meeting has ended. The Zoom invitation will go out around October 18th so mark your calendars and plan to join us if you can't be there in person.

Our quarterly Meet & Greet will also take place during the reunion. We'll be set up in our hospitality suite on Saturday from 2:00 until 4:00 so anyone in the room can have a Zoom chat with those of you who have chosen to join in remotely. We usually have about 16 participants at our Meet & Greet sessions. Look for this invitation too around October 18th.

The National Museum of the Mighty Eighth Air Force in Pooler, Georgia, near Savannah, is making a concerted effort to give the B-24 aircraft greater recognition at the museum. There is a fully restored B-17 already there and the plan is to acquire a B-24, restore it, and have it on permanent display in a planned addition to the museum. We have sent a letter to their board of directors applauding

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◆392nd BG caps. Just 7 available.

◆392nd BG challenge coins. Many are available!

◆*The Liberators from Wendling* by Robert E. Vickers Jr. This book is out of print but we have 12 copies available.

◆*Wendling's Crusaders, The Men and Their Missions, Remembrance of the Missing*, also by Robert E. Vickers Jr. This book is out of print, too, with just 6 copies available.

◆*Preserving the Legacy* CD in 4 parts. Many available.

To see photos of, and order any of these items, please go to <https://b24.net/itemsForSale.htm>.

◆Not advertised on the website: *The Stardusters* by 577th copilot James J. Cassidy. Though based on actual events, this is a work of fiction that describes combat between July 1944 and March 1945. \$20 for US shipping; \$30 for international shipping. To order, contact Bill at wjmcc392@earthlink.net.

The Operations Room. This YouTube site creates battle map animations to illustrate important battles and events. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XZqdK0p2NzI> is about 8AF's mission to Schweinfurt on 14 Oct 1943. It focuses mainly on B-17 Groups but superbly demonstrates the complexities of forming up in bad weather and rendezvousing with fighter escorts—and how carefully crafted plans can be easily spoiled! See <https://www.b24.net/MM101443.htm> to learn how the 392nd BG fared.

July Zoom Meeting

Nineteen Crusaders attended the July 2022 Zoom meeting, including two first-timers.

Russ Anderton's wife Heather is the daughter of T/Sgt Joseph G. Crockett, radio operator on the 578th Sqdn crew of 2/Lt Jim C. Vaden. A few months ago, Russ and Heather reached out to the 392nd BGMA for information about his WWII service. Not only did our researchers put them in touch with member Ross Brown (son of crew copilot 2/Lt Norman Tichenor) but they also provided several photos of T/Sgt Crockett that the family had never seen before.

Englishwoman **Jane Plant** had previously joined us for the 2018 reunion in Wendling (and she was really glad she did)! Her father was 2/Lt Jack G. Holmes, copilot on 1/Lt John F. Menard's crew in the 579th.

The meeting began with a video by Friend Mark van den Dries of his 2014 visit to Wendling with expert guide John Gilbert. It can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YduAqjEb6RQ>.

The reunion in England/extension to Normandy was a major topic, but we don't yet have answers as to price and exact itinerary. Stay tuned!

Also discussed were what changes in format, etc., should be made to the 2023 Aubrey Award in order to attract more contestants. Some ideas were to have categories for PowerPoint and video presentations and/or have the essays due at the end of the school year. If you have more ideas, please contact Ralph.



News from Across the Pond

Germany

On 29 Apr 2004, News editor Annette Tison, husband Don, and her father Robert Franke dedicated a memorial in Dinklage, Germany, with the assistance of an Honor Guard from Ramstein Air Force Base and in the presence of about 100 Germans.

It was in honor of 579th Sqdn pilot 2/Lt Bert W. Wyatt and his crew, who were shot down and killed near that site 60 years earlier. 2/Lt Douglas N. Franke was the navigator.

The memorial was achieved due to the tireless efforts of local historian Markus Graw.

In 2014, on the 70th anniversary of the crash, Annette, Don, their son Dan, Markus and his two children honored the crew. Annette placed a photo of the 10 men at the memorial and then everyone took turns placing a rose at the memorial as the ten names were read.

Markus has placed a bouquet of ten flowers at the memorial on each anniversary, except during Germany's coronavirus restrictions. When he returned in April 2022, he discovered that the 2014 crew photo had been saved, preserved, and made an integral part of the memorial site by an unknown person.

The plane crashed near what is now a nature preserve. Many, many visitors walk its paths to view deer, goats, ducks and several varieties of trees and flowers. Now, they can also see the faces of ten young Americans.



The original crew photo was modified to show the two substitutes on 29 Apr 1944. Back row L-R: S/Sgt David E. Harbaugh, S/Sgt William S. Womer, S/Sgt Robert W. Monroe, Sgt Robert E. Thompson, Sgt John F. Sorrells, Sgt Alfred P. Archambeau. Front row L-R: 2/Lt Bert W. Wyatt, T/Sgt Byron E. Hassett, 2/Lt Douglas N. Franke, and 2/Lt Aubert M. Tufts.

392nd BGMA MEMBERSHIP FORM

If you get the News in print format, your membership status is shown on the mailing label directly after your name; "22" means your dues expire in December 2022. If you get the News via email, the email you receive with the pdf attachment will state the names of members whose dues expire in December. If you wish to join or renew, send this form and your check (payable to 392nd BGMA) to Bill McCutcheon, 20620 Milton Ct., Brookfield, WI 53045 or join/ renew on-line at <https://www.b24.net/memorialAssociation.htm>. **LM** means Life Member and **FRIEND** means that you receive the News with compliments of the 392nd BGMA.

The Board of Directors has ruled that no Crusader will be denied membership because of financial concerns, so if you're in straitened circumstances, check the Hardship Waiver box below. If you can help the 392nd BGMA treasury with a donation, please indicate the amount in the space below.

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

Mailing address _____

Email address _____ Telephone number _____

Please provide the name and unit of your Crusader relative/friend: _____

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: I am renewing for _____ years.

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

The 576th DOPE SHEET

by Lou Seguin

S/Sgt Louis W. Seguin was assigned to the 576th Sqdn on 8 Dec 1943 as a member of 1/Lt Edward F. Wittel's crew. He flew just two missions (22 and 30 Dec 1943). On 11 Jan 1944, he was reduced in rank from S/Sgt to Pvt "for cause" and on 1 May 1944, his Military Occupational Specialty was changed from armorer-gunner to clerk typist.

He thus became a member of the 576th's ground crew. He was author of the *576th Dope Sheet*. Only a few issues (from August to December 1944) have been found; they are at <https://digitalarchive.2ndair.org.uk/digitalarchive/Search?field=0&value=376/259>.

How did his bulletin get its name? "Dope" can mean information (especially from a reliable source) and in this aviation setting, a plasticized lacquer applied to fabric-covered aircraft. It tightens and stiffens fabric stretched over airframes, which renders them airtight, weatherproof, and increases their durability and lifespan. (The 465 Sub Depot's Paint and Dope shop had six men assigned.)

His newsletters reminded 576th Sqdn members of upcoming movies, inspections, blood drives, and current gossip for and about them. They are a window to everyday life in that unit.

Here are excerpts, with 392nd BG photos added.

12 Aug 1944. There is an enlisted men's dance tonight at the Enlisted Men's Club for the smaller units of the Base. The 576th is NOT cordially invited so be nice boys and stay away. If you must go some place, there's always the local pubs, the movie, the Aero Club where you may make goo-goo eyes at some Snack Bar Honey.

PLEASE come in and sign up the voting register. We must have the signatures of each and every man in the squadron as to whether they want to vote or not.

S/Sgt [John C. Buhner, 576th Sqdn Supply Sgt] and Sgt Brewer [perhaps Mike Brewer, 576th Photo Technician] both agree that when things close up on "Bank Holiday," they really close even to the "black market." Not a drop could they find.

14 Aug 1944. According to the headlines victory is expected by Christmas. If the prediction comes true, the Writer is going to make like a Xmas tree and get lit up.

The boys are picking up their [laundry] bundles a lot faster now because last week some of the G.I.s found a little note in with their returned clothes. It went something like this: "Dear Honey—How about a date? I fell for your name. My address is *****—Toots."

Famous last words: "Aw, heck, the war is just about over. You don't have to pull the black-out curtains."

18 Aug 1944. Tomorrow is inspection day again and by request (?) the Writer is re-publishing his little verse to cover the subject:

From Sunday to Friday be neat and tidy
And especially Saturday too,
'Cause when we inspect, we like to expect
The best that you can do.

24 Aug 1944. It seems [576th Pvt Russell Harger, airman basic] got lost the other night returning from a pub crawling mission and while he was trying to get back on the beam,

he met a native and asked: "Can you tell me how far it is to the Wendling Air Base?"

"Just about a mile from here as the crow flies," the Englishman replied.

"Thanks a lot," says Harger. "Now can you tell me how far it is if the crow had to walk it in this blackout, pushing this blasted bike with a busted tire and without lights?"

26 Aug 1944. Something we dread to look forward to: Spending another winter in the ETO with just a toy stove to keep us warm.

Of course the movie scheduled for this evening has something to do with life in the Army. It's called, *Make Your Own Bed*.

7 Oct 1944. Today is your last chance to vote under the Federal War Ballot set-up. You know, it's your duty as well as privilege to vote so if you have any intentions to do so, better contact [Capt Edwin T. Wood, 576th Assistant Sqdn Intelligence Officer] now. Otherwise let's not hear any griping or groaning if "your" man doesn't get elected.

8 Oct 1944. If it seems that Major [Edwin R. Dilworth, 576th Sqdn Mess Officer] is limping this morning, he is as the result of a nasty crash landing he took with his bicycle yesterday. A stick got stuck in the spokes. The Bike stopped. Major Dilworth kept on going.

CITATION: The Dope Sheet hereby commends all you 576th Type "O" blood men for the swell job you did in donating your blood to a worthy cause. Our Squadron volunteered practically 100%. It's deeds like that that warm our heart and makes us feel certain we can't lose.

We'd like to offer a suggestion to Birdie and Helen [Birdie Schmidt was American Red Cross Program Director at the Aero Club and Helen Malsed was her assistant]. Since the Aero Club now has a morning coffee hour and has the Snack Bar open in the evening for a bedtime bite, how about having a 4 o'clock teatime session or, better still, a cocktail hour?

10 Oct 1944. A bit sheepishly we admit that in yesterday's Dope Sheet the wrong information was given concerning the Bronze Battle Stars to your Spam ribbon. You're allowed to wear two all right but the dope about the reason you're allowed them was all wrong. So we'll start over again. The first star is for the Group's participation in the Air Battle over Germany and enemy-occupied country. The second is presented to you for the campaign in Western Europe. We hope we don't get any more criticisms on that. Anyway it all adds up to the same thing. You wear two Battle stars and it means an extra point on your demobilization score.

S/Sgt [Alan B. Clark, top turret gunner on the 576th's crew of 1/Lt Bernard Paroly], our Happy Warrior, makes this contribution to end all Gum-chum stories that were to end all Gum-chum stories. It seems that Clarke was walking down the main street when he was approached by a bit of a lad with the usual question. Clarke offered his apologies and said, "I'm fresh out but there's a soldier right around the corner who has a lot of it." To which the boy immediately replied, "Oh, yeah! Now you can tell me the one about the Three Little Bears."

11 Oct 1944. Since tomorrow happens to be 12 October 1944 which in itself is not too unusual because it follows

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the 11th, we would, however, like to say a word or two in behalf of Columbus Day...

Well, anyway, Children, in the year 1492 a guy by the name of Christopher Columbus gets the bright idea that the world is not flat but round and that somewhere on the other side of the ocean there is another country which he would like to visit. Of course no one would believe the poor devil but he was sincere in his beliefs and made up his mind to get ahold of a boat and find out for himself. However, there was a little matter of money he needed to finance the trip so what does he do? He goes over to the Queen of Spain and does a little brown-nosing possibly with the aid of a package of Yankee gum. Maybe something else entered into the deal too but we won't worry about that. Anyway, Columbus got the dough. In fact he got enough to buy three ships. Of course, Queen What's-her-Name had to hock her best set of false teeth but you know a woman will go to any extreme for a man with a good idea.

So Columbus hires a mess of men, hops on his boat and away he goes across the ocean. If we remember our history correctly, he started off in August and finally by October he pulls into New York Harbor or some such place. He and his men walk down the gang plank and they are met by a crowd of people, obviously natives. Columbus drops to his knees, kisses the ground and says, "Ah, India!" One of the natives speaks up and says: "India, hell...This is America."

And that was how America was discovered, Children. It didn't take the people in Europe long to learn how wonderful this new country was and soon they came from all over to make America their new home. And their first thought was to establish freedom...Freedom of Speech...Freedom of Press...Freedom of Religion. FREEDOM! ...A country at last where a person could call his soul his own.

At the moment, Children, we are away from America. We are away not because we want to be but because we must fight to protect that freedom from being snatched away from us. There is no doubt in our mind that we will win that fight—and soon. And when it is over we'll return to America to carry on our principles of freedom and let us hope that all other countries of the world will recognize in us what they lack.

Thank you, Mr. Columbus for discovering America.

16 Oct 1944. We'd like to believe that we were responsible for the Aero Club inaugurating an afternoon tea session from 3 to 5. But we still have to think of a way to sneak away from work.

22 October 1944. Of late we have been receiving an alarming number of "Disciplinary Action Reports" from just about every headquarters in ETOUSA ranging from 8th A.F. down to 392nd Bomb Group and the violations reported, though seemingly minor to the offender, are serious enough to cause something of an uproar here and about. Here are just a few of the things that GIs are picked for by M.P.'s: blouse unbuttoned; black ties; no chevrons; no headgear; pockets unbuttoned; wrong chevrons; no insignia; raincoat or overcoat unbuttoned; no dog tags.

Officers as well as Enlisted Men have been reported for these violations and all are equally subject to disciplinary action under [Articles of War] 104 for appearing in public

with improper uniform.

You all have been in the Army long enough to know what makes up a Class "A" uniform and when you leave the station you are expected to wear such a uniform. Failure to do so brings discredit not only upon yourself but the entire Service. A lapel insignia or an officer's insignia of rank is just as important to your dress as a pair of trousers, and certainly no one except, perhaps, a Section 8 case would be crazy enough to walk down Piccadilly Circus minus trousers.

A continuance of violations such as this will result, we promise you, in some drastic action which will be just as disagreeable to us to mete out as it will be to you on the receiving end.

One last word, dog tags are to be worn AROUND the NECK—not to be carried in your pocket.

31 Oct 1944. The end of another month...Tomorrow the beginning of another...So much closer to the end of the War...So much sooner to getting home...Election Day drawing nigh...Thanksgiving but a few weeks away...Christmas creeps upon us...New Years Eve will soon be here...The end of another year and we're still in the Army...!

7 Nov 1944. Over in that country called the United States today is Election Day and millions of people will dash to the polls and cast their ballot for the man who dishes out the best cigars.

And at the same time there will be millions of dogs dashing to poles and the ballot they cast carries about the same attitude that some voters have.

8 Nov 1944. LATEST ELECTION RETURNS FLASH!!! According to the 0800 hour news this morning, President Roosevelt is ahead in 32 States with an electoral vote of 387. Dewey is ahead in 16 States with an electoral vote of 144.

Our guess is that the boys who've been saying "Dewey" these many months are saying, "Well, I guess we don't" this morning.

16 Nov 1944. It is reported that the Nazis are changing the name of their secret weapon, "V-1" to "Ve lost."

You've been told of this before many, many times and now we are going to tell you again and this time it will be final. Any violations will result in harsh disciplinary action so don't say you haven't been warned.

In the first place there are concrete walks in this site which were built for a particular purpose—to walk on. They are the only authorized paths. Anyone found cutting across the area on other than the authorized paths will be reduced in grade and also be subjected to a courts-martial. This applies to bicycle riders too.

Bikes will not be ridden across the area off the sidewalks or authorized paths. In fact bicycles will not be taken to the barracks at all but rather will be parked in the racks provided for that purpose. Any bicycles found in the vicinity of the barracks will be picked up and the owners will be subject to disciplinary action. The excuse offered by most GIs for not using the bike racks is that they are afraid of having their bike stolen. This excuse will no longer be accepted because there is on the market a bit of a device called a "lock."

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20 Nov 1944. Everyone connected with it is having a big headache over the switch in crew and airplanes that took place yesterday. [Up to now, each squadron had its own lead crews. In this reorganization, lead crews from the other Squadrons were moved to the 579th and its non-lead crews were dispersed among the other three squadrons. Once the change was made and accepted it benefitted all squadrons, but getting to that point took some time.]

24 Nov 1944. Calling all Bostonites...Come Sunday afternoon, 26 November, the Clubmobile "BOSTON" will be over at Hangar No. 1 at 3 o'clock. This in itself is not out of the ordinary because the Clubmobile is around every Sunday but this time the Public Relations Officer has sent out a request to all GIs who claim Boston to be their home town to come around and have their picture taken. (Tsk, tsk, such grammar)... We know a guy who claims he's from Boston but the town wants to forget it.



Top: Several men from Boston responded to the 20 Nov 1944 *Dope Sheet* and other appeals. L-R, S/Sgt Joseph W. Timmerman, 579th Sqdn general clerk; Cpl Gaetano "Guy" Spinelli, 578th airplane armorer; and Sgt Joseph Distefano Jr., 578th Sqdn draftsman. The name of the hostess is not known. Bottom: The Clubmobile, which provided afternoon tea and snacks, was very popular with ground crew personnel!

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a big sooted-up fireplace in the center of the wall across from the main entrance with a couple of flyers sitting on a beat-up couch, sipping and talking. On the right were more beat-up couches and stuffed chairs, with more flyboys,

and beyond them, the entrance to the dining room. In the corner behind the stuffed chairs was an old, crank-up Victrola and a pile of records which I am sure some interior decorator had thrown in for atmosphere."

576th pilot Carl D. Scharf flew from 18 Jul 1944 to 6 Feb 1945. In *From Ploughboy to Pilot*, he notes that the COM "was down the road a few hundred feet and within walking distance of our hut. The squadron sites were separated by several hundred feet to a half-mile. The flight line, the administrative building, briefing room, and maintenance hangars were probably one-half to three-quarters of a mile down the road from the 576th site."

The Layout

It "was a long, low one-story masonry building. On one



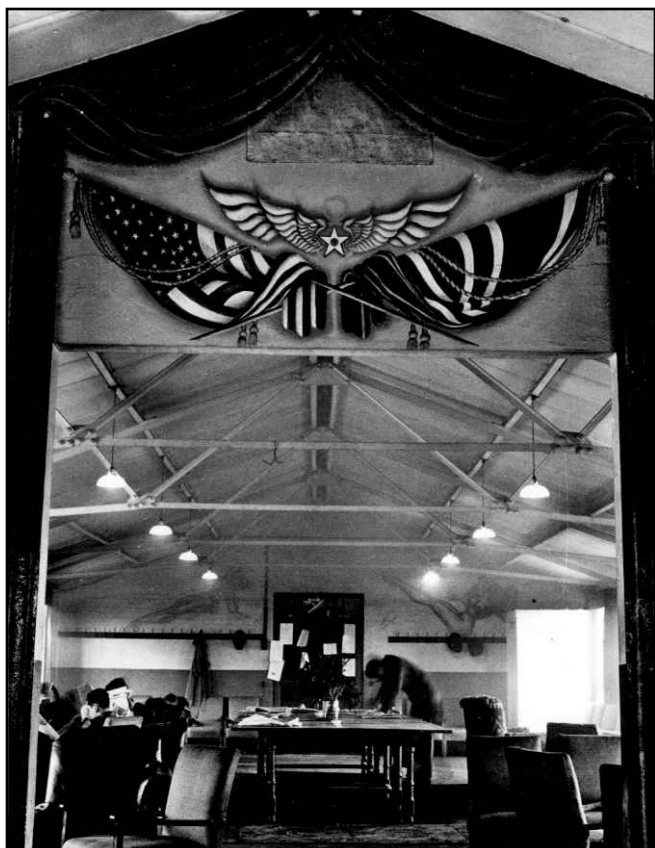
These photos show air officers enjoying Christmas dinner 1943 in the COM. Top: The empty table at the back right may have been the one set aside for the senior officers, who are shown in the bottom photo at that same dinner. Counter-clockwise starting at the foreground—Assistant Group Operations Officer James McFadden; Group Operations Officer Lawrence Gilbert; Group Executive Officer Joe Bush (in charge of everything not directly associated with combat operations); 577th Sqdn CO Clinton Schoolmaster; Mess Officer Albert Huber; unknown GI, likely on duty for the event; 576th Sqdn CO Clyde Gray; 579th Sqdn CO Myron Keilman; Group Navigator Kenneth Paddock; unknown, unknown.

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end, the dining and kitchen area had long tables and benches to sit on. On the far end were a table and chairs where the high-ranking officers sat.”

It is not known how large the kitchen was or how many men served there. According to a 5 Feb 1944 memo, there was a pay telephone in the COM.



Top photo: This door is thought to connect the dining room and the lounge, since it shows the pin-up girls on the far wall. It is dated 16 May 1944, when no missions were flown. Bottom: What remains of the mission list on the left, as one enters the lounge from the dining room. Its center section has largely disappeared.

The Lounge

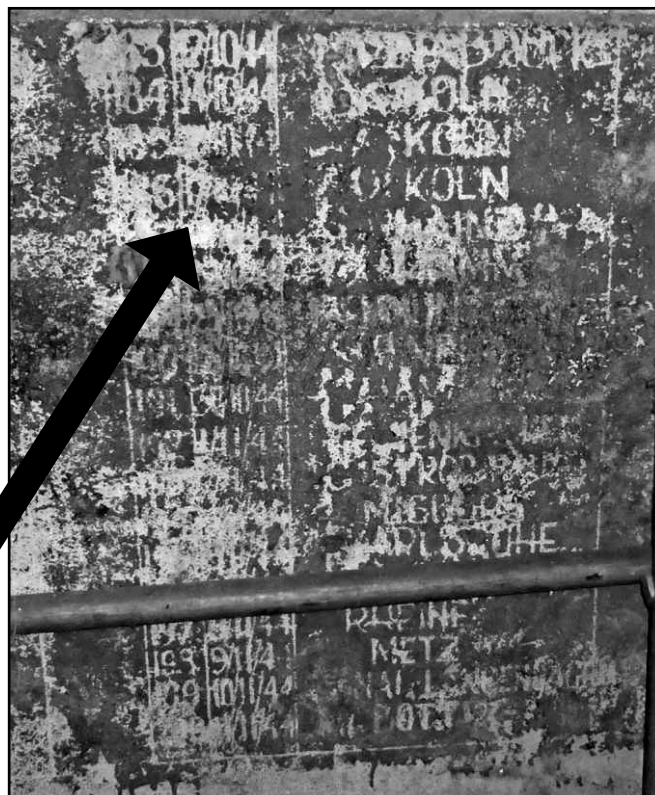
A door led from the dining room to the lounge. Enough original paint remains on the walls to show that lists of 392nd BG missions once flanked either side of this door on both the dining room and the lounge side. The lists on the dining room side are no longer legible.

Scharf said the lounge had “a fireplace and some easy chairs. The bar, which was located on the opposite end of the [COM from the] dining area, had a couple of windows that could be swung open.”

Once in the lounge, there were more mission lists on either side of the door. They are headed by the 8th Air Force emblem and “392nd BOMBARDMENT GROUP” in still vivid blues and yellows and relatively intact since they were above the post-war ceiling.

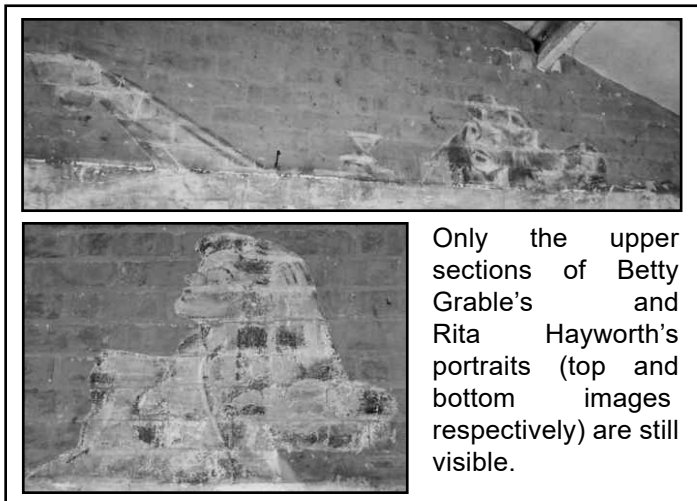
It seems unlikely that all 285 of the 392nd BG’s missions could have been listed on just these walls; where the other missions appeared, however, is currently unknown.

Visible on the lounge’s far wall, opposite the entry door, are paintings of WWII’s most famous pin-up girls. On the left is well-known actress Rita Hayworth, a major film star of the 1940s. At right is actress and dancer Betty Grable, who was famous for her long legs (so famous, in fact, that her studio insured them for \$1 million)!



The lower part of the mission list (below the scaffolding in the photo at left) names targets for the 18 missions between 12 Oct 1944 (Osnabruck) and 11 Nov 1944 (Bottrop). Even less remains of the mission list on the wall on the far side of that door—primarily column headings that said “Date, Target, E/A Destroyed, Probable, and Damaged” and missions between 19 Jul 1944 (Koblenz) and 6 Aug 1944 (Hamburg).

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The Fireplace

On the back (north) wall of the lounge was a fireplace. 578th copilot Jesse D. "J.D." Long Jr, who flew missions from 22 Dec 1943 to 26 Oct 1944, recalled, "In the early spring of 1944, ... the powers-that-be decided to install a large wood-burning fireplace in the Combat Officers Club. To this end a local English crew was hired to do the job. The first thing I remember was that in February or early March a big hole, about ten feet wide, was made in the side of the building. Then, while the cold wind whistled through the temporary canvas covering, the English builders sat down to read the blue prints—and we froze.

"Eventually, they decided what needed to be done and built the fireplace complete with large raised hearth, and finished it in a week or so—or more. On the appointed day of the dedication, a supply of twisted wood was gathered, everyone available assembled in the bar, we all bought drinks to make a toast. The fire was properly laid, and with great ceremony it was lit by someone in authority.

"Within five minutes the smoke was so thick in the club we could not see or breathe and had to evacuate the place. As far as I remember, the flue was eventually made to draw so we could have a small fire."

Keeping the fire lit remained a problem. 576th navigator Everett "Ike" Isakson (missions from 8 Aug 1944 till 5 Jan 1945) wrote, "When all the missions were grounded [due

to bad weather in December 1944], it was difficult to find an available seat in the flying officers' club. The attendant-barkeeper had a risky technique to keep the logs in the large fireplace burning. He'd approach the smoldering logs with a large tin can partially filled with gasoline. He'd douse the smoldering firewood with the accelerant, and he and all the officers in the immediate area would flinch and spring back as the explosion flared back."

The Bar

It is not clear whether the lounge and bar were originally in the same or separate rooms (and if two rooms, their sizes and how they were divided).

Scharf says, "On the wall of the bar room that separated it from the lounge area all of the Group's missions were painted on the wall. When we arrived there the Group had just completed its 100th mission [on 6 Jun 1944]. There was a slot machine along the wall under the list of missions. In addition to the mission list, there were murals painted on the end wall of the lounge area and on the wall behind the bar. They depicted B-24s in formation with the 8th Air Force logo and the words '392nd Bombardment Group' painted beneath them."



This mural of flying B-24s surrounding an eagle with a banner proudly showing "USAAF 392nd Bomb Group" is the most well-known. It was "discovered" in the mid-1980s when a wall was taken down. That may explain why it is still in relatively good shape, and its colors still vibrant.

See MESS HALLS on page 10

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 _____

Our website, www.b24.net, 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. Please send this report to: Debbie Beigh, 6284 Antler Ct., Zionsville, IN 46077-9089

MESS HALLS from page 9

579th copilot Oak Mackey (missions 2 Oct 1944 to 7 Apr 1945) remembered, "The mural of eagle and B-24s was on the interior wall which divided the two rooms and faced the lounge room. The bar was small, located in the south-east corner of the room."

Regardless of its exact placement, the mural showing B-24s in flight and a large eagle holding a banner is probably located in what was the bar area.

Additional Rooms?

David Coleman's analysis of the COM reveals that there are two large rooms (22 feet wide each) beyond where the bar likely was. Information on their original purpose awaits further research.

The Artwork

It is not known who created these paintings, mission lists, or the Liberators in flight mural. Jack Fritsche, Station Adjutant from the day the Group was formed, later wrote, "My stepfather, Col. H.D. Smith, was CO of Bovington and Chetlington (Combat Crew Replacement Centers) and he came up when we first arrived and told Joe Bush [Group Executive] and myself he would send a man up to paint the walls, which he did, although all I can remember are a lot of nude gals."

A potential painter of the flying B-24s and eagle was 579th Intelligence Clerk Sgt Richard G. Merchant. When he was in his teens, his mother was private nurse to the mother of well-known painter and illustrator Norman Rockwell. Due to his encouragement, Merchant entered art school.

He tried to enter the service three times, but due to poor health and blindness in one eye, he was turned down. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, however, he was drafted into the military. Upon completing radio and combat intelligence schools, he was assigned to the 392nd BG. His duties as an Intelligence Clerk included mapping out routes for the planes (showing where anti-aircraft batteries were in Germany and occupied France) and briefing/interrogating flying crews.

Merchant told his granddaughter that painting the mural of the planes and eagle was the only artwork he did at the 392nd and he did not get paid for it.

Ground Officers Mess (GOM)

The base was originally built for the RAF. While just one officer mess was satisfactory for all air and ground officers in 1943, it became inadequate as the number of Americans grew. Soon, a new mess was built for combat air officers, with ground officers continuing to use the original building.

It had a tennis court and likely similar interior layout to the COM, with a dining hall, lounge, and bar.

What is most often fondly remembered by 392nd ground officer veterans, though, was its ping pong table.

Station Ammunition Officer Charles Dye wrote, "The Ground Officers Club had a ping pong table and once or twice 806th Chemical Co. officer Oliver W. Rusling and I would play a couple of games before the evening meal."

Group Transportation Officer Jim Goar was an avid ping-pong player, daughter Debbie Goar remembers, having learned to play "in the Army."

He was close friends with 578th Ground Executive Bob Lane, who was frequently visited by Army nurse Marilyn



This rare photo of the GOM shows Group Armament Officer Capt Clair P. Burtner, 578th Sqdn Armament Officer Capt Walter M. Harris and Lt Robbins, position unknown. The sign on the building points to the Offices of Special Service, Chaplain and Red Cross.

Haglund. They met in April 1943 when she was stationed at Biggs Field in El Paso, Texas. She drove to Alamogordo to attend a party at the base and met Bob there. After air evacuation training in Kentucky, she boarded the *Santa Rosa* out of New York for Scotland and then on to England.

Bob left aboard the *Queen Mary* in July 1944 and they met up as soon as she could find him, in Wendling.

During her two years overseas, Marilyn made 120 hops between England and the Continent and five transatlantic trips with wounded personnel.

Jim was Bob's best man when the couple were married at Beeston St Mary Church on 11 May 1945.

Their daughter, Sharon Marcrander, notes that Marilyn's diary entry for 29 Apr 1944 said, "Left for Wendling about 4pm. Jim (Goar) met me at 7 and we found Bob about 8. Played ping pong and drank scotch all evening, had a grand time."

Enlisted Messes

There were two mess halls for enlisted ground support personnel (Mess No. 1 and 2) and one for enlisted combat airmen (Mess No. 3). No. 1 and No. 2 were located in communal sites (i.e., near housing, wash rooms and recreation), No. 1 in the "new" communal site and No. 2 near the "old" communal site.

There were "issues" from the beginning. Daily Memorandum #78, dated 29 Oct 1943, reminded the men, "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."

Each support unit was assigned to provide men daily for KP (Kitchen Patrol) duties. These non-cooking jobs included preliminary preparation of fruits and vegetables (i.e., peeling potatoes) as well as sanitation and cleaning of dining facility buildings and equipment. A 3 Nov 1943 memorandum indicated that at least 36 men (from 10 support units) were needed each day for each mess.

Per a memo two weeks later, Mess No. 1 served ground

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One of the enlisted messes.

men from the four bomb squadrons, the 10th Station Complement Sqdn, Finance, RAF, 317th Service Group, the Hospital, and all ground personnel working at night.

Mess No. 2 served the 74th Service Sqdn (from which the original cadre of men in the 465th Sub Depot would later come), 1825th Ordnance Supply & Maintenance Co., 1287th Military Police Co., 806th Chemical Co., 1217th Quartermaster Co., 392nd BG Headquarters, and the fire department.

In 1943, David Ward lived not far from the base and became friends with several GIs. Invited to eat with them on several occasions, he recalled that the mess hall



Enlisted men in line for Thanksgiving dinner 1944.

“operated on a ‘help yourself’ basis, which was new to us in England at the time... The airmen queued at one end, tray in hand, and collected the meal of their choice. The trays, the like of which I’d never seen before, were made out of a new material called PLASTIC. The trays didn’t break, chip, bend or discolor. A miracle product if ever there was one!”

As a young lad, 392nd BGMA Director John Gilbert ate several meals at the enlisted dining halls. As he remembered, he used a two- or three-section aluminum tray. Once, he wasn’t moving fast enough down the chow line and “custard went on top of the gravy!”

The walls of the Mess Halls were well-decorated, but especially for the holidays.

Editor’s Note: The December 2022 issue will include part 2 of this article, which will have photos and information about the CO’s house, the post office, the base hospital, control tower, the “Bungalow,” a beautiful mural of a sailing ship, and the Aero Club. If “your” building or favorite 392nd



Artwork in the enlisted messes.

art hasn’t been mentioned or described, please let me know! Even better: send me your photos and details!

RALPH’S CORNER from page 3

this plan and encouraging them to bring it to fruition.

Plans for our return to Wendling in 2023 are shaping up really well. I will poll the membership soon to see how many we might expect to participate so please be on the lookout for that email and give us your response.

Best wishes to you and yours,
Ralph

IDEAS AND INSPIRATION

by Char Heim

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

I cannot talk about political, territorial or conflict issues that exist so predominantly in our world now. There is too much hate and violence in our world to discuss in a meaningful way in this short column.

I believe we must journey back to the very roots of our humanity to find our way again. We are all fortunate visitors to this precious world that is a glorious gift to us. But in our endeavors to gain power, territory, wealth, we have lost our most important quality: we must have KINDNESS.

Kindness is seeing the best in someone when they cannot see it for themselves. Kindness is something anyone can give without losing anything of themselves.

Kindness can be healthy for us by lowering our stress, providing a feeling of well-being. It boosts self-esteem, productivity and guides us on a better future of leadership. Above all, kindness is contagious.

We all, of many nationalities and faiths, need to focus our energies on our humanity to man. It is not easy. Even the most determined hands can lose their grip. The clearest of minds can become cloudy. The strongest heart can shatter. The most eloquent tongue can falter, but kindness can prevail.

So please strive to be forgiving, be generous, be open-minded, be inclusive, but above all, always just be kind.



**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 Assoc.
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∞

Alfred H. Schumacher, 577th, August 2, 2022