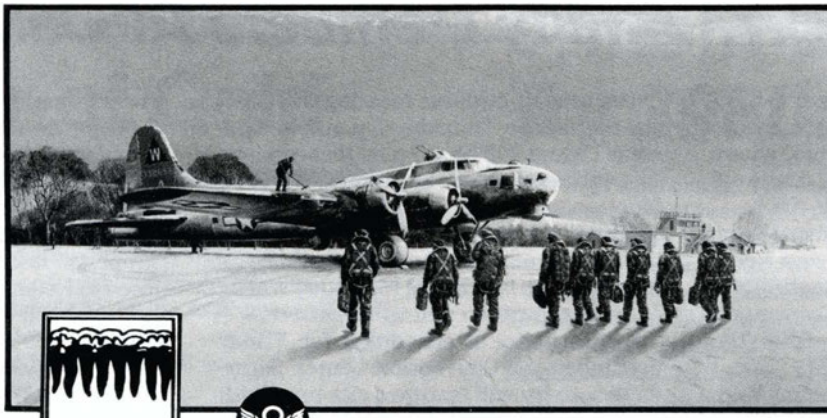




602



601



603



600

398TH BOMB. GROUP MEMORIAL ASSOCIATION • 8TH AIR FORCE • 1ST AIR DIVISION • NUTHAMPSTEAD, ENGLAND

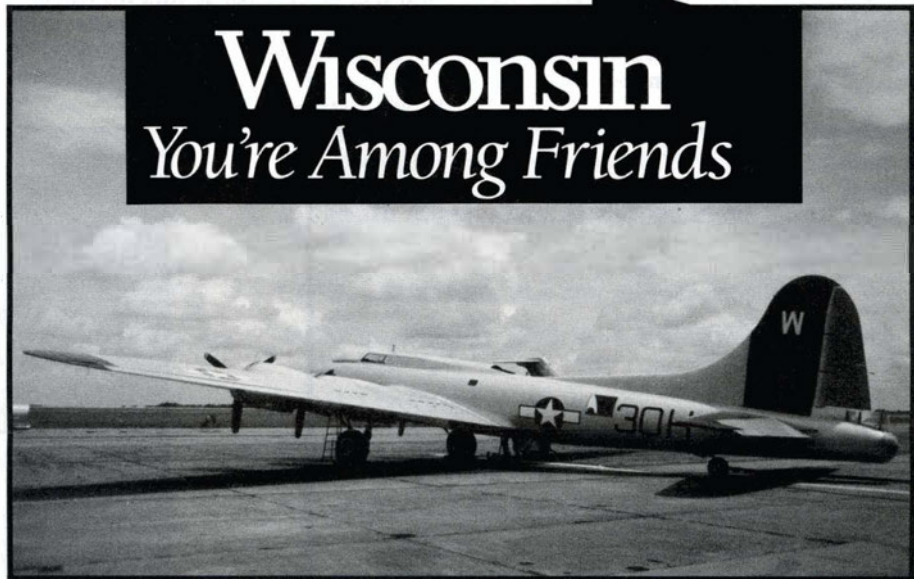
VOL.5 NO. 3

FLAK NEWS

JULY 1990



TIM WELLS of Nuthampstead raises a 48-star flag in memory of Paul Rich, 603rd pilot who was among those killed on the Merseburg mission November 21, 1944. The 46-year-old flag was given by Rich's family, to be flown "to destruction" at the old base. The families of Warren Johnson, 603 pilot, and Clarence Ehret, 1449 Ordnance, also sent flags to Nuthampstead and will similarly be flown on a new pole near the site of the old control tower. Tim is flag chairman for the "Friends of the 398th."



It Looks Like A Big One

Oshkosh, Wisconsin may not be the biggest and liveliest city on the list of 398th reunion locations, past or future, but it could well become the most popular and best attended.

The 1990 reunion is just around the corner — September 12-15 — and already there are solid signs that another 500-plus attendance will be reached. There are attractions at Oshkosh, like the gorgeous EAA Museum at Wittman Field just outside of town. And its B-17 arrayed in 398th colors. And Lake Winnebago. And Oshkosh B'Gosh.

But right up there as a reunion "attraction" is the city itself and its location in the heartland of Wisconsin. It is just a beautiful spot in the United States and obviously a lot of 398th members know this. Enough to already have completely booked all rooms in the headquarters hotel, the Oshkosh Hilton Hotel and Convention Center.

But not to worry! Just down the street on the shores of the lake is the Pioneer Inn & Marina. It is but a 10-minute walk from the Hilton to the Pioneer. Reservations may be made by calling (414) 233-1980. Rates are \$60 and \$70.

Space also is available at the Super 8 Motel, located near the EAA Museum at Highways 41 and 44. Reservations may be made at the Super 8 by calling, toll free, 1-800-943-1991. Rates are \$35 and \$45.

For further information contact reunion chairman Morris Swed.

Continued On Page 2

"Our" B-17 Awaits Members At Oshkosh

Continued From Page 1

The 398th reunion attendance record was set last year in Dayton, Ohio, where 522 members were registered. Little ol' Oshkosh could well surpass this figure.

Registration space and the Memory Room will be located at the Hilton, One North Main Street, but the business meeting and banquets will be held at the Convention Center, reached by overpass from the Hilton.

Registrations may be made starting Wednesday morning, September 12, although there is no organized activity this day. (Except for the golfers, who will tee off at 8 a.m. both Wednesday and Thursday.) David Haight will function as chairman, leading his golf squadron to the Lakeshore Municipal Golf Club.

The annual business meeting will open the reunion on Thursday, 3 p.m. The Welcome Dinner will be at 7 p.m. that evening. The entire group will be bused to the EAA Museum on Friday, 9 a.m., although a "shuttle" schedule will be in effect due to the large numbers. And because of the numbers, the luncheons for Friday will be at various location and by squadrons.

A 40's dance is scheduled for Friday evening at the Convention Center. Saturday's activity will feature a city tour, with a stop at the Manufacturer's Marketplace Mall. A Farewell Banquet winds up the reunion activities Saturday night.

While the EAA Museum at Wittman Field houses an incredible display of World War II aircraft, most 398th eyes will focus on a Flying Fortress sporting familiar colors.

It bears such identification as the Triangle W, 30 (for the 601st Squadron); the call letter H and Serial number 2102516. Plus the red tail and wing tip markings.

While the Fort has been known as "Aluminum Overcast," it became 398th "property" last year when the membership raised \$21,695.57 to refurbish the exterior and establish the "Hell From Heaven" identity.

The specific markings were selected in honor of Hal Weekley, a 601 pilot who was shot down on August 13, 1944, in the 398th B-17 bearing this serial number. After the war, Weekley became the pilot of the Aluminum Overcast and flew it extensively at air shows. It was through his efforts that the EAA and 398th joined forces for the renovation.



June 8, 1990

Dear Colonel Comstock:

Thank you for your letter of May 23, 1990. It is an honor for me to accept the book, 398th Bomb Group Remembrances, on behalf of the United States Military Academy. Your special gift, given in memory of Colonel Hunter, will serve to inspire our cadets to a lifetime of service to the nation.

Certainly, the Army Air Corps and now the Air Force have always been an important part of our combined arms team. After only a partial perusal through the book, I could feel the excitement, commitment, and sacrifice which were all so much a part of the Army Air Corps' contribution to victory in World War II. I found the account of Colonel Hunter's last mission, "I guess this is it," to be both gripping and poignant. Though I have been an infantryman my entire career, I have long held a fascination for those of you who flew bombing strikes in Europe. I have reviewed your staggering losses and other grim statistics over the course of World War II, and I cannot convey how much I admire and respect the courage that each of you had in the face of such odds. As part of my past reading, I discovered that crew losses for heavy bombers in Europe approached 90% (per 1000 crewman, we averaged 712 killed or missing and 175 wounded) -- what incredible courage each of you had to muster on each mission to continue the strikes in the face of such odds. I salute you and the members of the 398th Bomb Group Memorial Association for your defense of our freedoms and for your role in making this important remembrance available to our cadets.

Again, thank you for taking the time to make me aware of your organization, this marvelous account of aerial combat, and the heritage of your proud unit. I will ensure that this book finds a prominent place in our Academy Library for all to read and enjoy.

Sincerely,

David A. Bramlett

David A. Bramlett
Brigadier General, U.S. Army
Commandant of Cadets

Colonel William G.
Comstock USAF, Retired
Fairfax, Virginia 22031



PEGGY WELLS sits on the new bench near the Memorial at Nuthampstead. It had just been dedicated to the memory of her husband, David Wells.



NOW HEAR THIS — Evelyn Comstock seems to be receiving the word from both sides in this bit of vocal action. At left is Linda Ellis, tour director, and at right is Elaine Tyler, "honorable secretary" of the Nuthampstead "Friends of the 398th."

“If It Were Not For You Boys in 1944 ...”

Group Tour A Memorable Success

If reaching for ... and touching ... the heart and soul of our hosts and hostesses could in some way be used to measure the success of the 398th Bomb Group tour to Scotland and England, then for sure the tour was a “smashing” success.

If such things as love and affection ... and sweet memories ... could be used to measure the success of the tour, then for sure the tour must be labeled “perfect.”

Yes, there was the usual “touring” via plane, bus, train, taxi, car and on foot as the 36 members sojourned from Edinburgh to London and points in-between. And indeed see the beauty and soak up the history of these countries during the two-week tour period from June 21 to July 3, 1990.

But it was Nuthampstead, the “old base,” where the tour became personal. Not much left of Station 131 but for the Woodman Inn and parts of the runways and perimeter track and a few B-17 parking “Spectacles.” But the people of Nuthampstead (and nearby communities) are still there. Full of love for the returnees and full of such phrases as—

“If it has not been for you boys back in 1944 ... ”

Yes, they remembered us ... in many ways.

Like the Service of Remembrance,



THE TOUR GROUP took time out at Madingly to honor those men who died in action for the 398th. Wally Blackwell and Bill Comstock pause at the Memorial after presenting a wreath on behalf of their travelling companions.

honoring the air crews and support units who served at Station 131. The three engineer turret gunners on the tour — Martin Chavez, Wayne Doerstler and Don Jillicie — presented the wreath honoring the 296 men from the 398th who gave their lives during the conflict.

Tony Clark, chairman of the “Friends of the 398th,” laid a wreath on behalf of the community. Children from the nearby schools at Anstey and Barkway presented individual bouquets of flowers at the foot of the Memorial.

***They shall not grow old,
As we that are left grow old;
At the going down of the sun
And in the morning
We will remember them.***

To all this, add Taps, Raising of the Flags, Battle Hymn of the Republic, and the haunting strains from a distant Scottish bag piper and it was indeed a day to remember ... and see through eyes of tears.

Later, a “squadron” of small aircraft was made available to the visitors and all those who wished got a ride over the airfield. A few were lucky enough to get aboard a privately owned AT-6, known in England as a “Harvard.”

While many of the ladies visited the home of Robert and Francois Dimsdale at “Barkway House,” the men toured the field with historian Vic Jenkins.

Prior to the Nuthampstead activities, the party visited the American Military Cemetery at Madingly, near Cambridge. Bill Comstock, president of the 398th Memorial Association, and Board member Wally Blackwell presented a wreath at the memorial. Tour members then dispersed to seek out crosses of loved ones buried on the grounds or names engraved on the Wall of the Missing.

The Eighth Air Force suffered more casualties in World War II than the entire U.S. Navy. Over 47,000 casualties, including 25,000 dead. Thirty from the 398th are remembered at Madingly.

High Hall Farm at Anstey was the unlikely site of a memorable 40’s dance as the tour group concluded its visit to the old base. A big barn was converted to a dance and dining hall and over 400 showed up, with many decked out in their “Blitz Military” WW II uniforms. Jean Stange came to the dance wearing hubby Ray’s 603 navigator uniform! Ernie LaCoste has a new model A-2 jacket, but with 1944 vintage “GOTCHA” painted on the back.

Tony Clark and his “Friends” committee members were guests of the visitors at a dinner in Cambridge. Here they informed the 398th that their organization was not only “alive and well,” but indeed growing. The Friends displayed new caps and sweat



JOHNNIE FLEMING

Johnnie Fleming, a Korean War and Burma veteran from Kilmarnock, Scotland, but whose heart belongs to the 8th Air Force, has “his day” when the 398th tour party visited his home town.

Fleming, his wife, Marion, and friend Alex Richmond, met the coach at Dean Castle Country Park after an hour’s drive from Edinburgh. Built in 1350, Dean Castle contains magnificent tapestries, instruments, arms and armour, dungeon, great hall and battlements, and a residential palace.

And a room containing Fleming’s remarkable display of 8th AF memorabilia, collected the “hard way” by writing, phoning, visiting or otherwise contacting people willing to part with their photos, uniforms, badges, flags, medals, etc. The tour group was genuinely impressed with Johnnie’s collection and presented him with a special plaque from the 398th.

Later he accompanied the group to Culzean Castle, entertaining with WW II songs in both English and his native Scottish tongue. He also led the group to Prestwick Airport, where in 1944 many 398th airmen set down their B-17’s after their long flight over the Atlantic.

shirts they designed ... and were actively selling to “spread the word about the 398th.”

Once again Tony Weston of Nuthampstead came up with a novel gift to each tour member. This time a ceramic “piggy” bank in the form of an elephant, complete with “8th AF 398” between the elephant’s ears.

Continued On Page 9



Chaplain Capt Jeffrey Guild pays tribute to the nine aircrew and Penn villagers as they gather in the field for a remembrance service

Villagers and US Air Force remember wartime crash

Bucks Free Press

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AND PUBLISHING OFFICES
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Telephone: High Wycombe 21212

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Free Press House, Castle Street,
High Wycombe.

Photos reprinted from July 6, 1990 edition of **BUCKS FREE PRESS**, High Wycombe, England.

It was the final "event" of the 398th Scotland-England group tour. Just one more day of sightseeing in London and it was back home to reality.

But the "final event" turned out to be a "smasher," using a possibly archaic English expression to describe what we might otherwise call a "dramatic event."

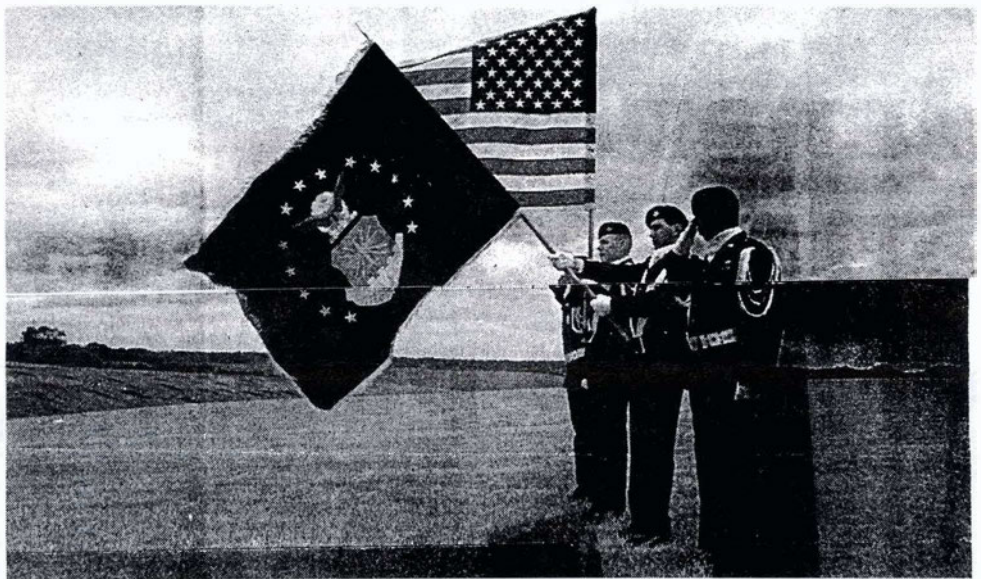
The village of Penn in Buckinghamshire is hardly a big-time British city. Hidden in the green countryside some 30 miles west of London, one has to have a reason for going out there. Possibly to see the birthplace of William Penn, founder of the State of Pennsylvania.

In the case of the 398th, it was to participate in a Service of Remembrance for a 600 Squadron crew that perished on the outskirts of the little community. Charles Searl and his men went down on the nearby Lude Farm on August 12, 1944. And every year since, these men had been remembered, along with Penn's own war time dead, at the 13th century Holy Trinity Church.

Vicar Oscar Muspratt, now retired, was the man behind this devotion that had endured for 46 years. He was there to greet the 398th party that included Charlotte France, sister of airplane commander Searl.

Also present was Bill Markley, then the commanding officer of the 600th Squadron, and his fellow 398th travellers.

And Mrs. Suzanne Wales, niece of Searl's co-pilot, Al Dion.



A Stars and Stripes and a banner of the United States Air Force honour the dead

ONE day 46 years ago, an American bomber plane crashed in a field near Penn killing nine young men. On Sunday, reporter CHRIS DIGNAN saw how a village and an air force have been drawn together

And Ron Setter, on whose Lude Farm the Fortress had crashed.

And Johanna Sienkiewicz, whose father, a member of the English Home Guard in 1944, was among the first to arrive on the crash scene after an hour's bicycle trip from High Wycombe.

Setter and Sienkiewicz, along with Peter Halliday, organized the day's activities that included a coffee and cookie stop, luncheon, and the service at the Lude Farm crash site. Canon Sam Day, himself a veteran, conducted the Penn church service, taking note of the many visitors from the United States.

"I perceive that these brave men did indeed perish in their attempt to keep their aircraft from crashing into the community," referring to Searl and his "Tomahawk Warriors," named in honor of Searl's hometown of Tomahawk, Wisconsin.

Charlotte France, who was 22 when she lost her only brother in the crash, was visibly shaken and wept openly at the Lude Farm services, held on the very spot of the B-17 death scene.

"I've waited all my life to be here," she said. "It's hard to believe all the lovely things these people have done."

Two flags — a Stars and Stripes and a Union Jack — flew proudly on this windy, threatening afternoon. A lone floral piece rested on the ground between the flags.

Chaplain Capt. Jeffrey Guild from the 7520th Air Base Squadron at High Wycombe (WWII home of the 8th AF) told the 150-strong crowd —

"We are gathered here to remember the young men who gave their lives for the cause of freedom in the world."

Continued On Page 10

German V-2 Gave Station 131 A Good Shaking

Ordnance Men Recall Jolt Near Bomb Dump

The guys who had the task of loading the bombs on the 398th B-17's took great delight in their work, oftentimes sending along such greetings as, "To Hitler, from Charley." Or "George", or "John", or "FDR".

But on a cold December morning in 1944 these same guys received an unexpected greeting from their counterparts across the Channel. The Germans had been sending their Buzz Bombs (V-1) toward England for a long time, and these could be seen and heard as they raced over East Anglia on a course for London. Quite often right over Station 131.

One Buzz Bomb did come down about a mile from the field during the summer, but on the morning of December 14, about 0500, the station was given a serious shaking by a V-2.

"It was a tremendous explosion," recalled Bill Carter of Clearwater, FL, then an Ordnance tech sergeant section chief with the 603rd Squadron.

"We were most fortunate that the V-2 hit where it did in the bomb dump area. Had it hit most anywhere else on the base there would have been a serious loss of life and equipment.

"Another 200 yards to the west and it would have hit directly in the 603rd bomb dump. It would have made a mess of about half the base and certainly many of the planes on that side of the field."

Even while missing all the bomb dumps, the V-2 still damaged 13 Ordnance huts, ac-



ONE OF 13 DAMAGED ORDNANCE HUTS

ording to George Klix of Bloomfield Hills, MI, who also was in the 603rd.

"The fuse storage hut took the main shock of the explosion," he said. "It was 150 yards from the impact point, yet the hut was seriously damaged. Boxes of nose and tail fuses were strewn around but luckily none exploded.

"The explosion went out in waves and apparently rolled over some buildings but doing much more damage to other objects nearby.

"As I recall, there was no disruption of our work schedules."

"Our main concern," said Carter, "was

about the time delay fuses in the hut. They contained glass ampules of acetone that controlled the time of detonation up to 144 hours so we isolated those until we were sure they hadn't been damaged.

"The V-2 caused two craters," Carter continued. "The rocket body and bomb load created a crater 10 to 12 feet deep and 25 across. The second crater, somewhat smaller, was caused by the exploding fuel cells.

Klix recalled being in London when a V-2 hit only two blocks away.

"It was quite unnerving to hear the explosion, and moments later hear the sound of its descent. It was like seeing lightning and then hearing the thunder."

The V-2 was 46 feet long and weighed 13 metric tons. It carried a half ton of high explosives. Launched from Peenemunde, Germany, its rocket engines carried it 65 miles into space before its guidance system directed it to its target.

The 398th Bomb Group made two missions to Peenemunde — July 18 and August 4, 1944. The group was led each time by 600 CO Bruce Daily. (Perhaps they were trying to get even with us.)

Ralph Ambrose, a London "Friend of the 398th" now living in Virginia, came up with the following information via the publication, "The Blitz, Then & Now."

"The V-2 that exploded on Nuthampstead December 14, 1944 was the 350th to land on British soil. A total of 1,115 eventually fell, the last being on March 27, 1945.

"The British Home Security code-named V-2's "Big Ben."

The V-1 Doodlebug was known as "Diver." All hits were classed as "incidents" in official channels."



BILL CARTER STANDS IN V-2 CRATER

Story of Escape From Nazi Death March



Quinn, Paris Said "No More of This"

BY JOHN P. QUINN
Radio Operator, Folger Crew
600th Squadron

Our ship for the mission to Leipzig on July 7, 1944 was called "Agony Wagon II", a somewhat used and abused B-17 of questionable air worthiness.

Nevertheless, Lt. Robert Folger led our crew aboard and we took off for our ninth mission for the 600th Squadron.

Other members were Raymond Hopp, co-pilot; William Moses, navigator; Charles Busbee, bombardier; John Paris, engineer; Calvin Harvey, ball turret gunner; John Schneider, waist gunner; and Louis Zeller, tail gunner.

The target was an oil refinery at Leipzig and the 398th led the Division with Gen. William M. Gross commanding the massed formations from the right seat in Captain Gene Douglas' lead 600 aircraft.

In the deputy lead plane was Col. Frank P. Hunter, 398th CO, and pilot Norm Rudrud.

The flight to the target was more or less uneventful, but as expected the flak became intense as we approached the target. By the time we dropped our bombs and were turning for home we took a burst directly under the top turret platform. It started a fire in the bomb bay which Paris and I managed to extinguish.

But there were more problems. We went into a shallow dive with No. 2 engine on fire and No. 2 throwing oil. Folger hit the CO2 and feathered No. 1 prop, but we continued to lose altitude. Folger said he was going to try for Sweden, but as we continued to lose altitude it became apparent that this was not much of an option. We bailed out at 12,000 feet.

We all landed safely near Halle and were quickly captured except Busbee and Schneider, who managed to evade for five days. Hopp was shot by the Germans under the pretext that he tried to escape. Zeller, who identified Hopp's body, said he was shot in the chest.

After processing, we were transported to either Stalag Luft IV or the Oflag at Barth. During the next six months of confinement we all suffered variously under the PW regimen from hunger, home sickness, breakdowns in morale, bouts with depression and despair.

By early January, 1945 the Germans apparently were beginning to recognize their plight. Although the Russians were advancing from the east and the Allies from the west, they decided to hang on to the prisoners as "bargaining ploys". On February 6, 1945, they started us on a mass evacuation to the west.

I found myself outside the barbed wire for the first time since July, 1944, and together with John Paris and 10,000 other "Kregies", headed into never-never land. This was the beginning of what was to become known as the death march. It was to last 70 days and cover some 700 kilometers. During its course we were to suffer varying degrees of severe hunger, malnutrition, dysentery and other hardships.

We were accompanied by an Air Force flight surgeon named Captain Leslie Caplan, who was the real hero of this adventure. He saved the lives of countless men during the march, including mine. At one point I had suffered 17 attacks of diarrhea in 24 hours. He cured that with a simple remedy of spoonfuls of charcoal from a supply he made every day.

Many of the sick would be dropped off at German hospitals as the column made its way across the wintry countryside. Many died.

We finally reached our destination, Follingbostel, near Hanover. After a few days the Jerries decided to start marching us back to where we came from.

Paris and I were both quite shook up at hearing this and we began discussing the possibility of escape. We agreed that any further marching was not for us and that we should make an attempt to get away.

We knew that the Allies, mainly British, were involved in a pincer move around Hanover and that if we could make our break at night we might get through the lines.

Back at Follingbostel we had traded some Red Cross cigarettes to some Russians for a small pocket knife, some dried greens and potatoes. We felt these would sustain us during our escape attempt, figuring wrongly that it would be only a couple of days. Actually, it took nine days!

We marched 20 kilometers that first day and we planned our escape. We also teamed up with two other men, Francis Heekin and George Robinson. Both were from Ohio.

That night we were housed in a large barn located on a small wooded knoll which provided us with a good view of our surroundings. We decided that we would all make a trip to the latrine around midnight and then head for a wooded area about 500 feet across an open field. Four of us going to the latrine at the same time should not cause any suspicion among the guards, we reasoned. And besides, they were probably just as tired from the day's march as the rest of us.

We had learned from the guards that the Allies were less than 30 miles away, so we took off in the direction of Hanover. We traveled by the stars, giving thanks for our youthful Boy Scout training.

What we did not know was that we chose the worst possible area of Germany to make our escape. It was known as the Luneberg Moors and consisted of swampland that had been partially drained for farming, and also as a hunting preserve. It was inhabited by sheep and cows... and wild boars! It was a virtual wilderness.

That first night was an experiment in learning. We tired quickly and had to rest frequently. But we tried to put as much distance between us and the column as possible.

At dawn we looked for a place to hide for the day. Here and there in the Moors there were isolated areas of trees that would provide us with cover. We slept and rested and then started walking again after sunset. This was our general routine for nine days.

At about midnight the second night we left the trail in a heavy pine forest, crossed a small drainage ditch and ducked behind some bushes to rest. Minutes later a German patrol came by and they could have reached out and touched us we were so close. Thankfully, it was too dark. And we held our breaths!

The next night we cooked our dried greens and potatoes over a small fire and continued our walking, guided by artillery fire on the horizon. Distant searchlights provided some light to help us across the swamp.

Soon we came upon what seemed to be a farm building. It was too dark to know for sure, but we decided to explore as our food supply was

July of 1944 was not a good month for going down on operational missions. See And 32 fatalities!

Not to mention crashes that wiped out The nine crews that went down due Nisewonger (603), Robert Folger (600), R Curtis Lovelace (600), Dallas Hawkins (lagher (603) and George Wilson (601).

Forty-six airmen became prisoners of plucked from the English Channel. And months as guests of the Germans, finally ment and forced marches and made the;

This story is about that break. The two and John Paris, engineer, on the Robert Fo was written by Quinn.

running out and this might be a good opportunity to replenish it. Heekin fell into one of those interminable ditches as we approached the building. Finally, we got to the small door and peeked in. It was pitch black and finding anything in there would be a problem.

It was deathly quiet for a moment, then all of a sudden the most inhuman roar filled the room and we all panicked. A half mile down the road we stopped, rested, and came to the conclusion it had to have been a bull who vented his anger at the intrusion. We continued on our way, wiser but still hungry.

Toward morning, a low hanging mist made it difficult to locate an appropriate hiding place. We went into what we thought was the forest, but as the fog thinned we began to discern buildings and houses. We were in the middle of a small village!

Cutting through the area was a shallow drainage ditch, so we decided to follow it. We also stopped here and there to pick up branches and debris to put over us for our daytime con-

Dried Greens, Potato Sk

cealment. As we were preparing to lie down, Frank spotted a bike rider coming toward our selected area. It was a German soldier, with a rifle across his back. Thinking fast, Frank continued to pick up branches, nodded his head and said "Gooten Tag." And prayed. The soldier grunted and kept going.

Day No. 5 was most interesting. While moving through an especially swampy area I managed to fall in and got good and soaked. We had discovered earlier that when this happened we could dry out rather well if we stripped to our long johns and lay down under blankets with a guy on either side. I know of no romance that developed from this activity.

Near dawn we began looking for a place to hide for the day. As we picked up and began to move out we remembered being startled by some kind of a large animal as it crashed off into the brush near our "drying out" site. In the early dawn we discovered we had bedded down right next to the lair of a wild boar! Nesting in the matted rushes were five little suckling baby boars.

Robinson suggested we kill one and cook it, which we did with the help of the knife we got from the Russian PW back at Follingbostel. It turned out to be a rather gruesome procedure, but we were desperate for food and had no choice. We took our "dinner" with us as we hunted for a hideout. We found what seemed

+

Mission No. 9 Took Only Nine Months

Scout Training Helpful In Survival

the 398th, with no less than nine crews en over Germany and two over France.

three additional B-17's. to enemy action were piloted by Boyd ymond Thornton (601), Tom Foster (603), 02), Wilbur Dwyer (603), Raymond Gal-

war, one evaded capture and two were two, who were captured and spent nine decided they had had enough of confine-break for freedom. men were John P. Quinn, radio operator, er crew of the 600th Squadron. The story

to be a perfect spot on a knoll with a view of the swamp in three directions.

We had our boar for dinner and then decided to go back after the other four. We armed ourselves with clubs for fear we might encounter the irate mother. Luckily she was gone and we made quick work of the other four and returned to our hideout.

It was an excellent hideaway. Not only good cover and well screened, but also a small creek nearby for our drinking and cooking water.

A German patrol came by later and we thought they had smelled our fire. They cast glances in our direction, but continued on their way.

Later in the day we began suspecting that we must be close to the front lines. Somewhere behind us a German 88 popped off a round at some unseen target every 15 minutes or so. After a while we hardly noticed the periodic interruption and we decided to stay for a couple of more days.

We had plenty of boiled water, but soon the

ns ... and Piglet Brains!

boar supply was gone. And besides, there was ever increasing military activity to suggest we had better move on. Off in the distance we watched a British Typhoon fighter shoot up a German supply train. And all the time this German 88 kept up his intermittent firing. We never found out what he was shooting at.

Before pushing off we had a meal of dried greens, potato skins ... mixed with the brains of the piglets. Tasted quite good!

We boiled some more water for drinking and took off. In a couple of hours we were walking down a dirt road toward a dark mass of trees. All of a sudden the world before us exploded as artillery shells came flying out of the woods. We hit the ditch but quick and just lay there helpless as the tracers and gun flashes put on a show for 20 minutes.

We decided it had to be Allied artillery, but also decided to wait for daylight to find out for sure. Soon we heard what we thought were truck motors, so Paris and Robinson decided to scout around. Heekin and I would serve as look-outs. Later Heekin also left to look around. When he did not return I went looking. And I soon found the three ... sitting around eating Nestle chocolate and drinking wine!

They had stumbled on a badly shot-up German supply wagon in a small cul-de-sac. This apparently was the target of the artillery fire the evening before. Scattered around were many

German field packs — in some of them they had found the chocolate and wine. We had a small but terrific party and decided to stay for a while and sort through the debris. We found some tea, bread, matches and articles of clothing. We were really living.

And then we came upon an abandoned Gypsy campsite, providing some food, clothing and cooking utensils. And best of all: mattresses!

We rested comfortably for a time, but unfortunately, Robinson and I both became quite ill. I ran such a high fever I passed out.

Paris and Heekin decided we needed medical help, so they took off in hopes of finding the source of the truck sounds we had heard earlier. When I woke up Robinson was gone, too.

Soon I heard the rumble of an engine, and much to my consternation here came a German half-track! I got up to start running when I saw a Jeep behind it. And in it was Heekin. The driver was a British Army officer and a Tommy was driving the half-track. I was wearing only what was left of my long johns, but I jumped up and started waving my arms. I dressed quickly

and joined them.

The British officer suggested we move out of these woods as there were still pockets of German soldiers in the area. As we drove down the road toward Celle, temporary HQ for the British army unit that found us, we picked up Robinson. He seemed to not have a care in the world, but obviously he was still "out of it" due to the fever. He remained to be treated by British medics.

Paris was sent on ahead to be treated for an infected cornea and I didn't see him again until after the war.

Heekin and I tried without success to hook up with the Americans. After three days of chasing from one airfield to another we finally flagged down a British Dakota and talked the pilot into flying us to England. Soon we were over the White Cliffs of Dover and landing at a Scottish air base. Our ninth mission for the 398th was finally over after nine months!

We spent three weeks at a general hospital near Cambridge, a month in London, and then sailed for home on an LST.

Epilog

Quinn lives in Williamsville, NY; Paris in Lakeland FL; Moses in Lakewood, CO; Busbee in Dallas, TX; Harvey in Minneapolis, MN; and Zeller in St. Louis, MO. Folger and Schneider are deceased. Hopps died at the hands of a German soldier, reportedly a 15-year-old boy. Both Zeller and Paris have visited the Hopps grave at the Ardennes American Military Cemetery in Belgium where 46 members of the 398th are buried or listed on the Wall of the Missing.



1990



JOHN P. QUINN

1944

Joe Joseph & The Miracle Hit

Joe Joseph, who again will be the "friendly PX entrepreneur" at the 398th reunion in Oshkosh, WI September 12-15 (he enjoyed his success last year at Dayton) has more behind his happy smile than meets the eye.

Like 57 more missions in a B-17 than probably all the men who did their normal 25 to 35 during the group's tenure at Nuthampstead in 1944-45.

How did this come about? Joe explains it as being "very young and no wisdom," after trying his hand as instructor at the aerial gunnery school at Kingman Army Air Corps Base.

"It was like being back in the minor leagues," he said. "No comradeship, no compassion and a horrible amount of politics." Only a few months before, Joe had returned to the U.S. after flying 57 missions with the 97th Bomb Group in 1943 out of Biskra, Algeria.

Joe was an engineer-turret gunner, flying missions to the eastern coast of Africa from Bizerte to Tripoli . . . and on to Italy. It was on a mission to the Borrizzo Air Drome in Italy that won for him the Distinguished Flying Cross. This for saving the lives of the ball turret and tail gunners when German fighters knocked out their oxygen system.

Two months previously, Joseph had been awarded the Soldier's Medal for heroism after their B-17 crashed on take off at Chateaudun, Algeria.

After his stint at Kingman, Joe was transferred to Gulfport, MS, where he hooked up with a "young dude" pilot named Newell Moy. Next stop was the 398th Bomb Group, 603rd Squadron. And another 26 missions before war's end for a career grand total of 83 missions!

Others on the Newell crew were Archie Kritchman, co-pilot; Charles Berthoud, navigator; Ken McLaughlin, bombardier; Robert Noterpole, radio operator; Benny Bracia, ball turret gunner; Homer Rhoades, waist gunner; and William Wight, tail gunner.

Joseph, who retired as a General Motors mechanical engineer, wrote the accompanying article for his local Defiance, OH newspaper in 1985 when he and wife Rozanne travelled to Seattle to take part in both the 398th and 97th Bomb Group reunions. And the 50th anniversary of the B-17 Flying Fortress.

BY JOE JOSEPH
Engineer-Gunner, 603rd Squadron

On Feb. 22, 1943, the Allies had been in North-west Africa just three months and 14 days, and they were having plenty of trouble. Instead of holding a half of Tunisia, as they once had, they now held a third. The British First Army, standing on a mountainous line from the Mediterranean to Medjezil-Bab and then southwest to the vicinity of Maktar, had held firm against the attacks by Von Arnin. The Americans, on the southern flanks, had everywhere given ground before the vicious probing of a force of Rommel's armor. A great arc of strong points had been lost, and now the German armor had pushed northwest through Kasserine Pass in a twin thrust for Tebessa and Thala. Thala, in German hands, probably would menace the right flank of the whole British army and probably force its withdrawal west.

The battered American First Infantry Division and some armored remnants were drawn up in a flat arc which started in the hills just southeast of Thala and ran southwest to the heights of Jebel el Hamia. Backing the whole American line was a small web of British and American artillery. The Germans, drawn up before this line just a few miles south of Thala, were threatening to punch through to the town, when Air Force headquarters, received a vaguely worded order directing it to bomb "the Kasserine Pass Area."

This didn't mean much to the two groups of Fortresses based at Chateau Dun, 150 miles to the east. The Kasserine Pass area covered a lot of territory, but an order was an order, so intelligence officers of the group studied all the front line messages they could find, and finally decided the Germans ought to be three miles south of Thala.

Early in the afternoon on the twenty-second we took off, loaded with fragmentation bombs, to see what we could hit. The weather was atrocious. Our sister group, the 301st., turned back,

but the 97th Group, of which I was a member, went on. Some place around Thala we caught a few glimpses of the fugitive earth and were able to pin point our position. Then the clouds closed their ranks again and the earth disappeared.

Under such circumstances, our group commander would have been justified in returning with his load, but we of the 97th wanted to help our men down there. So a trial and error bomb run was made over solid overcast at a point the group commander hoped would be about three miles south of Thala. We returned to Chateau Dun and glumly reported that the mission had been a washout, due to solid cloud coverage.

This unhappy report was sadly made a matter record. Then, at one o'clock on the morning of the twenty-third, the duty officer was called to the phone. Someone in a high British rear echelon — our office couldn't get the name — wanted to congratulate our group on a "jolly good show." The puzzled O.D. said, "thanks," and hung up. Later in the morning, several more messages of congratulation came in over the teletype and telephone, but none of them gave any details. The 97th decided it had done something worthwhile and wondered what it was.

We found out that night. A newspaper photographer, flown back from the front lines, happened to land at Chateau Dun. When he heard he was facing the 97th, he reacted with a bang.

"You're wonderful," he told a few of us gathered around him, "I know. I was right up in the front lines before Thala with the boys taking pictures, when a German armored column came up the road, looking for trouble. It looked very bad, because we didn't have much to put up against it. Then we heard this roar overhead. We couldn't see the planes because of the thick clouds.

"Well, there that column was, moving in on



JOE JOSEPH

us; and there were those planes, and between them was a group of clouds. It was sad, I'm telling you. Then, all of a sudden a bunch of dust bursts began to pop up all around the column. In a minute, you couldn't see the column at all for the dust and smoke. When it cleared away, there were a number of vehicles burning. There must have been a bunch of casualties, as everyone was riding uncovered and not expecting trouble. A little later they began pulling out everything they could save, and they never did come back. Say, how did you fellows do it, anyway?"

We had the wit to look mysterious.

Ed's 398th Roster Available For \$10

Ed Stewart of Fort Lauderdale has been collecting roster information on 398th personnel for several years. And he has faithfully planted this information in his trusty computer.

Most of it has come from the dues cards members send in each October. The compilation now exceed 1,400 names. And includes Name, address, phone, squadron, crew identification or job description, PW status, and post 398th military status.

The roster printout, as would be expected, represents an invaluable tool for the FLAK NEWS editor. But it is not designed solely for "official" 398th business. The printout is available to the membership for a \$10.00 fee.

Copies may be obtained from Ed Stewart, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33334-5248.



THE MEN OF THE TOUR — Left to right, front row — Ray Stange, Wally Blackwell, Russ Morrison, Jack Madlung. Center row — Allen Ostrom, Ralph Hall, Ernie LaCoste, Joe Spechuilli, Charles Sutton, Ike Alhadeff, Martin Chavez. Back row — Edward Jones, Bill Comstock, Keith Anderson, Don Jillicie, Wayne Doerstler and Walt Marsh.



THE LADIES — Left to right, front row — Gloria Chavez, Jeanne LaCoste, Debbie Mello, Cena Marsh. Center row — Barbara Jones, Teedy Blackwell, Maria Hunter, Ruthana Doerstler, Charlotte France, Anne O'Beirne. Back row — Evelyn Comstock, Jean Stange, Margaret Sigsworth, Geg Ostrom, Jean Madlung, Becky Morrison, Olivia Jillie.

Continued From Page 3

Among those who thought this gift was both unique and "hilarious" was Maria Hunter, widow of Col. Frank P. Hunter.

"You can be sure I will treasure this," she said with a twinkle. "Even if I am a lifelong Democrat."

In a "post tour" ceremony at the Memorial, flags of three deceased members were raised and lowered. To be raised again the future at the permanent American flag pole recently installed near the site of the old tower.

The flags of Col. Hunter and Vincent Moore, sent to England two years ago, will be replaced in due course by those of Paul Rich, 603 pilot killed on the Merseburg mission Nov. 21, 1944; Warren Johnson, 603 pilot; and Clarence W. Ehret, 1449

Ordinance. Appropriate certificates and photos will be sent to the families of Rich, Johnson and Ehret.

Ike Alhadeff, who had lost his "last man" bottle of Scotch to fellow pilot Sheldon (Bob) Nelson when he was shot down in 1944, was surprised with a new bottle from Nelson during festivities in Cambridge.

"I hope you will enjoy this one as much as we enjoyed our 'last man' bottle in 1944," wrote Nelson in a surprise note.

The 1990 tour was again conducted under the auspices of Galaxy Tours, Wayne, Pennsylvania. However, tour leader Mark Burton, who led the 1986 and 1988 visits, had "green card" problems, so gave up his tour guide seat to Linda Ellis of Winchester, England. She proved a capable and competent "stand in" for Burton.

After the tour Burton wrote—
"It was strange hearing that you were having such a good time and I'm not there with you. It is difficult to explain the affinity and affection that I have toward the 398th. I hope you all know how much I missed you. And I did not even get a post card!"

The "tourist" part of the 398th tour included Edinburgh and its many historical sights, the Trossachs region including Loch Lomond (it rained), Robbie Burns country and, of course, a variety of Scottish woolen mills and time for shopping.

The tour then headed south through the Lakes district of England, Hadrian's Wall, Carlisle, Moffat (woolen mills), Keswick, Blackpool (it rained), Stoke-on-Trent and the world famous Wedgwood china factory, Coventry and its cathedral built out of the ruins of their bombed out church, Stratford-Upon-Avon and the Shakespeare connection.

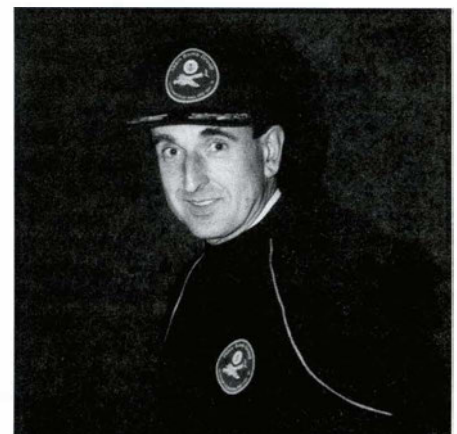
Then on the Cambridge to meet up with the Friends of the 398th. And that part of the tour that turned "motion" into "emotion."



BARRY TYLER displays the Christmas greeting he and Elaine received from 398th treasurer Ralph Hall. "He not only used an old grocery sack, but he wanted money back for the stamps. No wonder he is your treasurer," said Tyler.

1990 Tour Party

- Ike Alhadeff, Seattle, WA
- Keith & Charlyn Anderson and daughter Patti MacLane, Issaquah, WA
- Wally & Teedy Blackwell, Rockville, MD
- Martin & Gloria Chavez, Ancram, NY
- Bill & Evelyn Comstock, Fairfax, VA
- Wayne & Ruthana Doerstler, Lancaster, PA
- Leonard & Charlotte France, Phillips, WI
- Ralph Hall, New Bedford, MA
- Maria Hunter, Roanoke Rapids, NC
- Don & Olivia Jillie, Los Altos, CA
- Ed & Barbara Jones, Wild Rose, WI
- Ernie & Jeanne LaCoste and daughter Debbie Mello, Modesto, CA
- Jack & Jean Madlung, Monticello, IN
- Bill & Ada Markley, Riverside, CA
- Russ & Becky Morrison, Bathgate, ND
- Anne O'Beirne, Atlanta, GA
- Allen & Geg Ostrom, Seattle, WA
- Margaret Sigsworth, No. Ridgeville, OH
- Ray & Jeanne Stange, Westchester, IL
- Charles Sutton, St. Cloud, MN
- (Joe Spechuilli, Beverly, MA, and Walt & Cena Marsh, Salt Lake City, UT, traveling independently, joined the tour briefly in Nuthampstead; Sue Wales, niece of Searl crew member Albert Dion, joined the tour for the ceremonies in Penn)



WILFRED DIMSDALE models the cap and sweat shirt the "Friends of the 398th" designed to promote their growing organization at Nuthampstead.

It Was A Most Memorable Day At Penn

Continued From Page 4

After reciting Psalm 46, the stillness of the moment was broken with the firing of a 21 gun salute by seven Air Force airmen. The American flag and Air Force banner held by the color guard fluttered and danced in the gusty wind as the mournful tones of the Last Post then wafted around the valley.

"This is a moment that will not make international headlines," said Bill Comstock, president of the 398th Bomb Group Memorial Association as he concluded the dramatic service.

"But it is a story of love and helpfulness that will be difficult to duplicate.

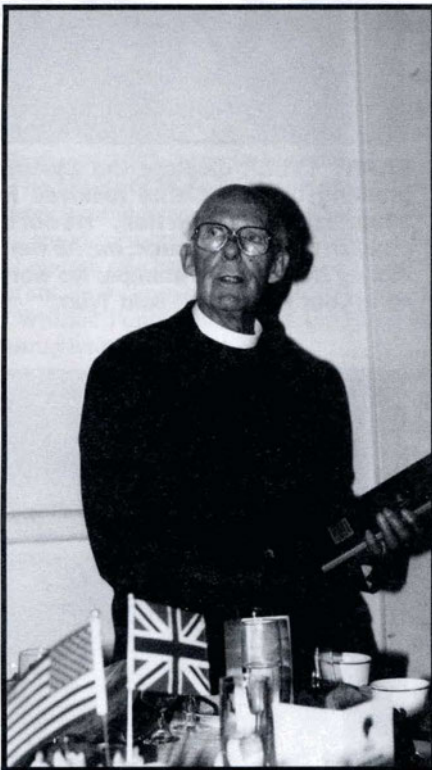
"Today is certainly one of the most important days for members of our group. We can't begin to tell you how much we appreciate what you have done to keep alive the noble sacrifice these men made. This must be unique — for 46 years you have remembered them. We many never know the cause of Lt. Searl's crash, but we do know that the sincere dedication of the caring people of Penn is truly responsible for what we have seen, heard and felt here today."

In addition to Searl, the other 600 Squadron names in the Penn Book of Remembrance are Albert Dion, Saul Kempner, Leo Walsh, James Beaty, Cecil Kennedy, Orville Wilson, Albert Knight and Alfred Bueffel.

Knight is buried at Cambridge, all the others in a common grave in Arlington National Cemetery in Washington DC.



THEY DID IT — Johanna Sienkiewicz, Peter Halliday and Ron Setter were the ones who "put together" the 398th tour visit to Penn. Here they receive a specially created, famed illustration as thanks for their work.



OSCAR MUSPRATT, retired vicar at Penn, kept alive the memories of the 398th crash victims at Penn for 46 years. Here he thanks the luncheon gathering for the special plaque given him for his devotion.



For Those Who Didn't Make It

TOP TURRET ENGINEERS Don Jillie (603), Martin Chavez (600) and Wayne Doerstler (602) shared the duty of presenting a floral wreath at the Service of Remembrance June 29 at Nuthampstead, honoring the men of the 398th who were killed in action.

"This Is What It's All About"

A Letter of Gold

Most people have "feelings" about situations — like how they feel about the 398th Bomb Group Memorial Association—and more often than not they keep these feelings to themselves. Not so with Ruth Melson of Shelbyville, TN, widow of C.W. (Buddy) Melson, tail gunner on the Al Stockman 603 crew.

Ruth sent in the most delightful letter, expressing what belonging to the 398th has meant to her.

Your Editor can only add one comment —

"This is what it's all about."

Thank you, Ruth.

"Thanks so much for FLAK NEWS. I enjoy it very much. Enclosed is check to help with the postage. I have six grandchildren and the three older boys remember their grand daddy and all the good times they shared together — hunting, fishing and camping.

"They thoroughly enjoy looking at Buddy's 'keepsakes of service'. And I have names on each of these for them to inherit when I am gone.

The year before Buddy died (1979) we had a crew reunion at our home. It came 33 years after the boys completed their 35 missions. Seven members and four wives attended. The Lord blessed us with beautiful spring weather and we so enjoyed the fellowship. There was laughing, crying, picture taking. And our local newspaper even came out for an interview and featured us in a big special in the paper. They gave each of us an 8x10 color photo.

"The thing I treasure most now as I look back on this day is the cassette tape we made. Each man told of his life since leaving England. What he had been doing all the past 33 years. And what being a member of this crew meant to him. Such memories.

"Two are deceased now, Jess Belcher and my husband. The others were Al Stockman, Earl Hoyne, Bill Parker, Chuck Wilbur, Regi Proctor, Frank Hippard, Bob Shearer and Floyd Deaton.

"I am so proud to be a lifetime member of th 398th. My heart goes out to all who served their country and to the loved ones of the deceased. May God bless you all."

Mrs. Ruth Melson, TN 37160

"Thanks for the crew listings in the January FLAK NEWS. I would offer a correction on #27, however. Perry Reid came down with meningitis in Nebraska and was replaced. Perry is now deceased. On #25 it should be 'Terrion,' not 'Berrion.' Also, enclosed is my \$25.00 check for Larry Paul's Nuthampstead VHS video. And I would also like a copy of the 1989 video of the Dayton reunion."

Ivan Hunter, Graham, NC 27253

(Editor's note: Thanks for the corrections. Your videos are on the way.)

"Wear your 398th jackets and caps. They attract! I was in Salt Lake City recently and a stranger came up to me and said, 'I haven't seen a 398th man since 1945. We had a great bull session with J. Dean Hill, a pilot in the 600th Squadron.'"

Frank Weiler, Yelm, WA 98597.

Moving? Please Let Us Know

Like much of the population these days, 398th members also move around a lot. And some get "lost" because they don't notify us. The Post Office has free cards that make it easy for you to tell us of your new address.

Christmas Gifts? Try 398th PX Dept.

Here is a reminder for those folks who annually have a problem buying just the "right" Christmas gift for their favorite 398th veteran ...

Do your shopping at Jack Wintersteen's PX.

A number of excellent and meaningful gifts are available, such as squadron patches and lapel pins; T-shirts and sweat shirts with B-17 logos on the front; photographs, squadron baseball caps, videos and much more.

Check out the "shopping list" below.

Among the "demand" items in recent months was the vintage 8mm movie film taken at Nuthampstead by Larry Paul in 1944. Ground scenes of Station 131 and lots of aerial footage. This old film was transferred to VHS video and is available for \$25.00. Proceeds to the 398th memorial fund.

Regular PX orders go to Jack Wintersteen, Danville, PA 17821.

Video orders go to Allen Ostrom, Seattle, WA 98177.

In addition to the Paul film, the 398th library also has available such VHS videos as All The Fine Young Men, The Last Mission, Double Strike, A Queen Dies Hard, Doolittle, B-17 50th Anniversary, and 1,000 Plane Raid. These are also \$25.00.

CAPS — \$7.00. Navy blue only. Specify squadron.

JACKETS — \$30.00. White, gold, navy, royal blue, lite blue. XL,L,M,S.

JACKET PATCHES — (only)\$4.00

T-SHIRTS — \$10.00. White, gold, lite blue, royal blue. XL,L,M,S. (B-17 on front.)

T-SHIRTS (childrens') \$10.00. White only 6-8, 10-12, 14-16. (B-17 on front.)

SWEAT SHIRTS — \$20.00. White or lite blue. XL,L,M,S. (B-17 on front.)

SQUADRON LAPEL PINS — \$5.00. Specify squadron.

BUMPER STICKERS — \$2.00.

MEMORIAL POST CARDS — \$1.00.

COLOR PHOTO — \$7.00. B-17 flying over Lake Winnebago, WI.

ALUMINUM LICENSE PLATE — \$5.00. With 398th LOGO

CANVAS TOTE BAG — \$8.00. With group logo

VISORS — \$7.00. White, with group logo.

BOLO TIE — \$8.00. Red cord with group logo.

BOOK — "398th Bomb Group Remembrances" — \$20.00.

LAPEL PINS (special) — \$6.00

SQUADRON and GROUP PATCHES — \$5.00. Specify squadron. Group patch is "Hell From Heaven."

Taps List To Be Updated In January

FLAK NEWS is being sent to some folks on our mailing list who have passed away. Family members continue to receive the mailing, and that's OK. But we would like to know of all deceased members so we can publish the names in the January, 1991 issue. Relatives are invited to remain on the mailing list as associate members. Use the 1991 Dues registration card which will come with the October FLAK NEWS issue.