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

VOL 20 NO. 3

FLAK NEWS

JULY 2005

Mighty Eighth Is New Home For The Hansard Prop

September 7-8-9-10, 2005:

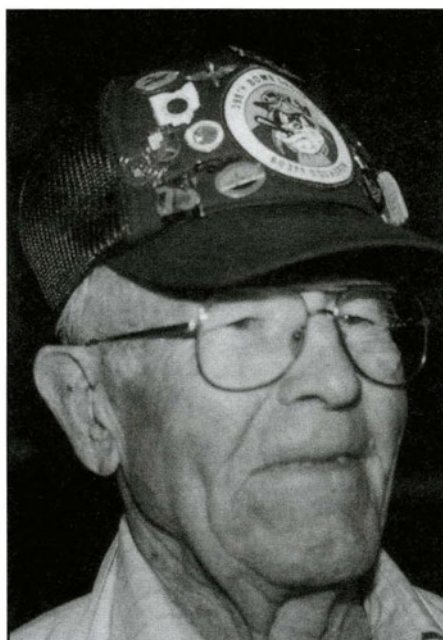
REUNION NEARS FOR 398TH

“The Propeller” has come home. . . home to a place where it may be seen and pondered over for generations to come. “Home” is the Mighty Eighth Heritage Museum in Savannah, Georgia, and the “Hansard Prop” is now there thanks to the efforts of many people in both the United States and England.

Michael Telzrow, director of Research and Interpretation for the museum, accepted the prop blade from Wally Blackwell, president of the 398th Bomb Group Memorial Association at a ceremony in the Museum’s Rotunda on Saturday, May 21, 2005.

Also on hand to enjoy the “coming home” celebration, were Teedy Blackwell; Lee Anne Bradley; Bob & Jane Bowen; Joe and Rozanne Joseph; Hal and Billie Weekley; Alan & Sandra Averhart; Dan, Kim and Josh Cantwell; and a throng of visitors who happened to be in the Rotunda at the time.

“The Prop” had come a long way and had taken 61 years. It began with a 600 Squadron B-17 crash on Reed Hall Farm which resulted in the deaths of the pilot, Vell Ardell (V.A.) Hansard, co-pilot Bob Davis and navigator William Baker. Their plane had run out of gasoline while groping in “zero-zero” weather trying to find their Nuthampstead airfield on returning from a mission to Merseburg on November 25, 1944. They crashed a scant few miles from Station 131 after six crew



GEORGE HILLIARD

He was the classic “contact man”, the connection between the 398th ground crews and the combat crewmen that flew the Forts. A Master Sergeant “flight chief” then, and a Master “contact officer” in the years that followed. It is largely due to his dedication that the 398th Memorial Association flourishes today.

George R. Hilliard died on March 15, 2005. He was 87.

The 398th was only one of many Air

The ranks may well be thinning as the years continue to take their toll, but don’t tell this to the 200 of more members of the 398th Bomb Group Memorial Association who will be at the upcoming 22nd annual reunion.

Always a four-day event, the meeting is scheduled for Wednesday-Thursday-Friday-Saturday, September 7-8-9-10, 2005 in Overland Park, Kansas. For the non-Mid-westerners, this city is a “suburb” of Kansas City, KS, which is a “suburb” of Kansas City, MO.

The KC Airport is due north of Overland Park, and the hotel is easily reached from the airport and via a number of major freeways.

See the April FLAK NEWS for travel information, Registration Forms and information on the hotel and tours.

The Marriott Motel (Overland Park, KS) will be headquarters for the reunion. Prospective attendees are urged to call the toll-free number for registration – 1-800-228-9290.

The caller needs to specify “Overland Park” and “398th” to qualify for the special \$84 room rate.

Registration begins Wednesday morning, according to Reunion Chair Sharon Krause and will continue through Saturday morning. The days are filled with tours and other activities.

Sharon may be reached (for missing

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Magical Attraction:

Wally Gearing Up For "One More Peek"

BY WALLY BLACKWELL

President 398th Bomb Group Memorial Association

Our tour and travel experts – Allen and Barbara – have been busily planning for another 398th return to Station 131, our World War II home in Nuthampstead, England.

They have settled on the 10-day period between May 31 and June 9, 2006, which should give us all plenty of time for consideration and planning.

Some of us have been there before, but we can't resist the opportunity for "One More Peek." Nuthampstead really has become a magical attraction.

There has been an interesting trend in recent returns. The last time it seemed that there were as many of the second and third generation 398ers as the veterans. This is a very happy event.

It is such a joy to be with our English friends, some new, some old, to see and learn what "used to be" at the old base.

I truly enjoy touring the remnants of the old field, describing to fellow tour members (and Friends) where "things" were and what events happened there. To be sure, there have been some sober moments, but always an assurance of how important it was for us veterans "back then" and equally so for the younger generation seeing these sights for the first time.

The 2006 return has been carefully planned to provide as complete yet economical tour as possible. This means "Nuthampstead" and all it has meant to the 398th, plus a few days to enjoy London, like the London Eye, The River Thames (for a luncheon cruise) shopping plus a tour to Windsor Castle.

(I note that The Queen has been made aware of our England visit.)

I really believe that there are many of the "young'uns" who will want to take the opportunity for this chance to see "what Dad did" and get some answers to questions that you may never have had a chance to ask.

There is no limit to the number we can sign up. I urge you to join Teedy and me and enjoy a once in a lifetime experience.

Texas, "Plus" States For Dues

Six Mid-West states and Texas get the honor of giving support to the "care and maintenance" of the 398th Bomb Group Memorial Association in this July issue of FLAK NEWS.

Members in these states must pick up no less than one-fourth of the annual dues, the life blood of the association. The states represent one-fourth of the membership despite being the fewest in number of the four regions.

Dues envelopes (\$20) have been inserted for members in the following states – Texas, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois and Ohio.

If members living in these six states should find the envelope missing, simply send your \$20 check to Jim Haas, Perry, IA 50220-0163. Additional gifts for FLAK NEWS or for remembering a friend or buddy, will be gladly received by Haas, the Dues Chairman.

Remember, neglecting the dues can result in the cancellation of your FLAK NEWS "subscription."

REUNION

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Registration Forms, etc.) at address – Plymouth, MI 48170-2870.

Tours are scheduled Thursday, Friday and Saturday, with the two banquets set for Thursday and Saturday nights at the Marriott.

The Association Board officers will meet Thursday morning, according to president Wally Blackwell with the general membership meeting set for after lunch – 2 pm – (when the ladies are off seeing the Hallmark Center and other sights in Kansas City).

Another city tour is set for Friday and a visit to President Truman's hometown of Independence, MO is scheduled for Saturday. The 398th Bomb Group "fellowship" continues throughout.



Elaine and George Hilliard

Continued From Page 1

Force stations that enjoyed his services, Japan and Honolulu being only a pair of stops during his 21-year war and post-war military career.

It was fitting that Hilliard was awarded (by a grateful 398th) a B-17 ride near his hometown of Cincinnati in 2003. The ride in the Aluminum Overcast was made even "more perfect" when his son, Skip, was able to accompany his father. The 2003 reunion in nearby Covington, KY marked his final 398th "contact."

President Wally Blackwell said –

"There are only a few things in life that are really precious. And perhaps the most important is the friendship of a true friend. George Hilliard was a treasured 398th Bomb Group member who had more friends than anyone can imagine."

And from England came this message from Malcolm (Ozzie) Osborn. –

"George Hilliard 'kept the big birds flying' and ensured that friendship and fellowship continued for so many years afterwards. He will be sadly missed.

At the conclusion of Hilliard's funeral service his nephew read a poem, whose closing lines read –

**"OUR COUNTRY IS IN MOURNING
FOR A VETERAN DIED TODAY."**

And all the 398th agreed.

Haley Mills Is Theater Sub

Reunion attendees at Overland Park should take note of the change in the Theater/Restaurant venue for Wednesday evening, September 7, 2005.

"TWO CAN PLAY" will be seen rather than "GOOD NIGHT GRACIE," as advertised in the April FLAK NEWS. The new play will feature international star Haley Mills in a romantic comedy about an estranged couple who run into each other at a class reunion.

Tickets to the dinner/play will be on a first-come, first-served basis, according to reunion chair Sharon Krause.

Plan Ahead For England:

JUNE 2006 TOUR SET

For those folks who enjoy the beauty of "planning ahead," here is their kind of news –

The ENGLAND TOUR for 2006 is now less than a year away.

The dates are May 31 to June 9 – five nostalgic days of "back to the old base" coupled with five glorious days in London Town.

Nuthampstead, Station 131, Woodman Inn, Anstey, Cambridge, Madingley, Duxford and more – all laced with memories of the 398th Bomb Group's mission in World War II.

Not to mention the people who make it all happen – our "Friends of the 398th."

And then to "wrap it all up" before flying home – Windsor Castle, The London Eye, River Thames luncheon cruise plus some additional stops along the way like Harrod's for some out-of-this-world shopping. Harrod's has to be seen to be believed.

We'll be staying at the beautiful Gonville Hotel in Cambridge, amidst the storied colleges that make up this great university town. The same English town that since WW II has been intimately associated with the two other B-17 bases that made up the 1st Combat Wing along with Nuthampstead and the 398th – Bassingbourn (91st) and Ridgewell (381st).

In London, it will be the Kensington Close Hotel, a short block off the famous shopping street of Kensington and a two-minute subway ride from Harrod's.

Barbara Fish is doing the travel details, preparing air routes to/from London for folks coming from the many cities around the US.

Allen Ostrom will do the tour "coordinating," his 11th such "junket" since the tours began in 1986.

Tour Land Costs Set At \$2495

In keeping with the "Plan Ahead" theme for the 2006 England Tour, the price of \$2495 has been established for the land costs, an extraordinarily decent price considering the quality of hotels, coaches, tours, meals, etc., for 10 days in England. (Cost is per person, double occupancy.)

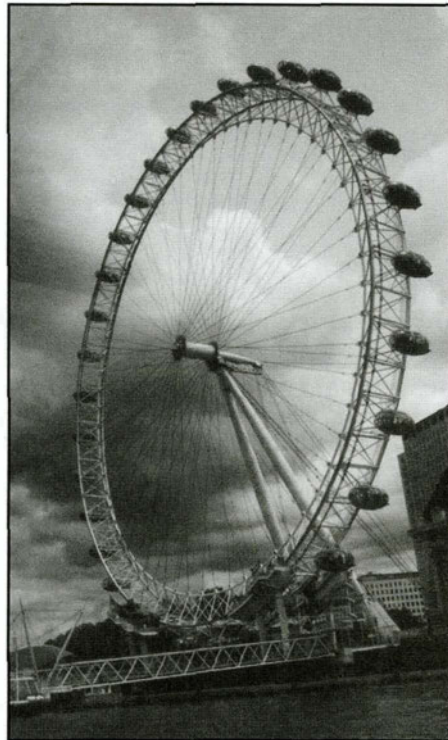
Barbara Fish will send the complete tour brochure with itinerary to interested persons. She will also counsel on airline travel to London, including intermediate flights to the gateway cities.

She can be reached toll free at 1-800-808-0154.

E-mail – barf@casadelink.com.

Mail – 160 SW 162nd St., Seattle, WA 98166-2305.

Think ENGLAND 2006.



**THE LONDON EYE
Awaits 398th Tour Party**

"Fortresses" A Winner

"Fortresses Over Nuthampstead," the 272-page historical chronicle of the 398th Bomb Group, has proven a solid hit with the initial buyers.

"Marvelous," "wonderful," "a gem," "superb," are only some of the comments describing Cliff Bishop's book on the Triangle W and its two-year life span in World War II.

"I only wish some of our departed buddies had lived long enough to enjoy this book," said one happy member.

The book may be purchased from the 398th PX manager Carolyn Widmann, Noblesville, IN 46062. Price is; \$65.00 (See Page 11).

"Fortresses" may also be purchased directly from the publisher – Cliff Bishop, East Anglia Books, Station Road, Elsham, Bishop's Stortford, Herts CM 22 6LG, England. www.eastangliabooks.com.

Copies of the book will be available at the 398th reunion in Overland Park, Kansas September 7-10, 2005. See April FLAK NEWS for more reunion information, as to tours, registration, etc.



WINDSOR CASTLE

Dear Mr Ostrom,

The Queen wishes me to write and thank you for your letter, and for the April copy of *Flak News* which you enclosed.

Her Majesty thought it kind of you to let her see 398th Bomb Group Memorial Association's latest newsletter, and was interested to learn that another tour to England is planned for 2006.

The Queen hopes the group will greatly enjoy being back in England, and thanks you very much for your kindness in writing.

*Yours sincerely,
R. Chenda E.H.M.
Lady-in-Waiting*

"Star Attraction"

A Christensen "Czech Special"



It will have been 60 years since his father and seven others died in Czechoslovakia after their B-17 was shot down by German fighters. But on June 17, 2005, Donald Christensen, son of the 603 pilot of the same name, was the "star attraction" at an air show and special memorial service at Slany, Czech Republic.

Christensen was accompanied by his wife, Miriam; son Jeffery Donald Christensen; grandson Peter Jacob Christensen; and stepson Joah McGee. A ceremony was scheduled on June 17 at the Christensen Memorial adjacent to the Slany airport, very near to the spot where the WW II crash took place.

Arrangements for the Christensen participation in the ceremony were made by Jan Zdiarsky, representing the "International University Center for Air Sports" in Prague and Milan Spineta, director of Slany's Air Stars celebration.

The Propeller Comes Home

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members managed to bail out.

Almost everything had been recovered from the crash site – except this prop blade from one of the Fort's four engines. Kept for many years by the Handley family on the farm, it was presented to the 398th in 1994 and retained in England by Friends of the 398th Chairman Wilfrid Dimsdale.

After much discussion on “what to do with it,” it was for businessman Peter Brooke who lives in a thatched roof home in Anstey, to say, “I’ll see to it that it gets to America.”

And he did. And to the delight of the 398th membership and those of the Hansard crew family members who came to Savannah for the ceremony – Sandra Averhart, niece of navigator Baker; and Dan Cantwell, wife Kim and son Josh. Dan’s father, Bob Cantwell, was the radio operator and successfully bailed out from the stricken plane along with Willie Colclough, Jim Fowler, Ed Briskie, William Lake and Ken Hesterley. Colclough is the lone still-living member of the crew.

Sadly, the daughter of pilot Hansard was unable, at the last moment, to join the Savannah Ceremony.

“My husband had just undergone a heart operation and I simply could not leave him,” said Sandra Hansard Springer of Memphis, Texas.

The post-war re-marriage of her mother was such that she heard little or nothing of her Air Force father until her late teens. “It had taken all these years to learn this wonderful story about him and then I could not be there. One day soon my husband and I will be there to see that propeller.”

The “quest” for bringing the prop “home” was generated by Sandra Averhart of North Fort Meyers, FL., who had not been born at the time of the World War II tragedy. Later, her parents, also touched by the loss, told Sandra about her uncle and “those words touched my heart and have always remained with me.”

The desire to bring the prop home came upon hearing that the two men who found it – Chris Handley and Douglas Crowther – had given it to the 398th during the England Tour in 1994.

Cantwell, upon returning home after the war, helped the Baker family cope with their loss by frequent visits. And filling in the missing 21st mission



THE PROPELLER from V.A. Hansard’s Fortress, for many years buried in the soil of East Anglia, was presented to the Mighty Eighth Heritage Museum on May 21, 2005 by 398th president Wally Blackwell (left) to the Museum’s Michael Telzrow (right). At center is Sandra Averhart, niece of the crew’s navigator, William Baker, who was instrumental in bringing the prop home from England.



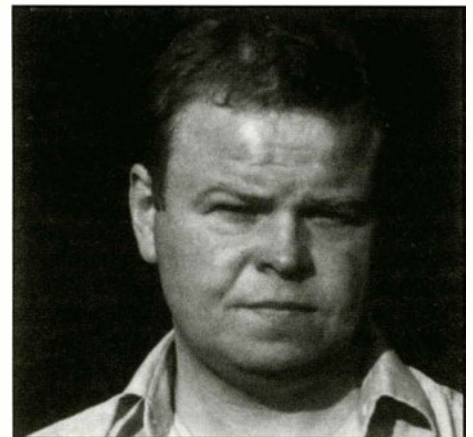
DAN CANTWELL (right), son of radio operator Bob Cantwell, was at the “Hansard Prop” ceremony in Savannah, GA along with his wife, Kim and son Josh. It was an emotional, tear-filled event for the family members.

in Baker’s “war diary” – the mission on November 25, 1944.

At the Mighty Eighth ceremony, Averhart spoke poignantly about her uncle and the dramatic days that followed the War Department’s dreaded news. She also added the words her uncle had written following his 18th mission (also to Merseburg) –

“If I live to be a thousand, I will never forget today. A physical impossibility. Flak. . . very, very heavy and very accurate for 25 minutes to the target. . . solid wall of black sky. . . the sun couldn’t shine through.”

Will those who pass by and look upon the “Hansard Prop” in the coming years understand such words?



PETER BROOKE
He Did The Shipping

THE ART OF “BUNCHING UP”

1000 Heavies! How Did They Do It?

BY BOB KRAFT
602 Squadron Lead Navigator

By the end of 1944, over 1000 B-17's and B-24's in 41 Eighth Air Force groups were tactically based over the entirety of East Anglia, England. Weather permitting, these heavy bombers could fly on a daily basis against German military targets arranged in squadrons of 12, groups of 36 and combat wings of approximately 108 airplanes. Fourteen combat wings flying sequentially over a given location could take an hour to pass over.

Tight formation flying for American heavy bombers was the secret to successful daylight bombing in Europe in WW II.

The German Luftwaffe fighters gained great respect for the combined firepower of closely grouped B-17's and B-24's, each armed with 12 50 calibre machine guns.

The RAF continued their night bombing, but did not use tight formation flying. They flew individually to targets directly from their home fields, whereas the 8th Air Force bombers required up to 1 1/2 hours to “bunch up” before departing England in formation.

The logistic puzzle involved in making this happen was one of the major challenges facing lead pilots, navigators and other crew members. After 60 years, I am sure much has been forgotten, but incredibly, certain activities just don't seem to dim with time.

I was talking to Allen Ostrom, ex-tail gunner, editor of the 398th FLAK NEWS, at last year's “D-Day Plus 60” celebration and I expressed to Allen that one of my toughest jobs was to help assemble the First Combat Wing of B-17's (three groups) and have them at the right place at the right time headed in the right direction.

Here are some of the problem tidbits that my pilots and I shared during those assembly moments in the lead plane. Remember that this was ideally accomplished with radio silence. Remember too, that in the winter the take-offs, 36 of us from the 398th, were done in the darkness of pre-dawn. Our group-lead airplane was usually allowed first take-off. The skies over East Anglia were soon full of B-17's and B-24's plus fighters, and even the many RAF planes returning from their night missions.

After our early morning briefings, transporting to our planes, taxiing and taking off, we flew eastward toward our own dedicated radio station, some seven miles away – the Debden Buncher. Our buncher gave us a place to meet and a radio beacon to help us find such a place. It was also helpful when we returned

from a mission being able to “home” on this signal to find our air field and to facilitate a single file of airplanes descending through the cloud layer to our Nuthampstead base.

Our planes would reach the designated assembly area over the Buncher following a predetermined climb of about 400 feet per minute and at a speed of about 150 MPH. The heavily loaded planes took the better part of 30 minutes to reach formation altitude, remembering that they carried some 5,000 pounds of bombs, a full gas load, a crew of nine or more, plus ammunition for 12 machine



guns, flak suits, oxygen and cold weather gear, etc.

From the time the group headed for rendezvous with the 91st and 381st over 90 minutes would have passed.

The assembly altitude depended on the weather, which sometimes didn't open up until 15,000 or more feet.

The climb would take place in a “race-track” pattern generally between Debden and back to Nuthampstead, (steering clear of other nearby groups also “Bunching Up.”)

Our lead plane would lower its landing gear and fire colored flares as identification markers for the other arriving planes to form on. The 398th would form into a lead squadron, with the high squadron to the right and above and the low squadron to the left and below. The normal squadron had 12 planes, some-



BOB KRAFT
19-Year-Old Navigator

times more if one was added in the “slot” position to one of the elements.

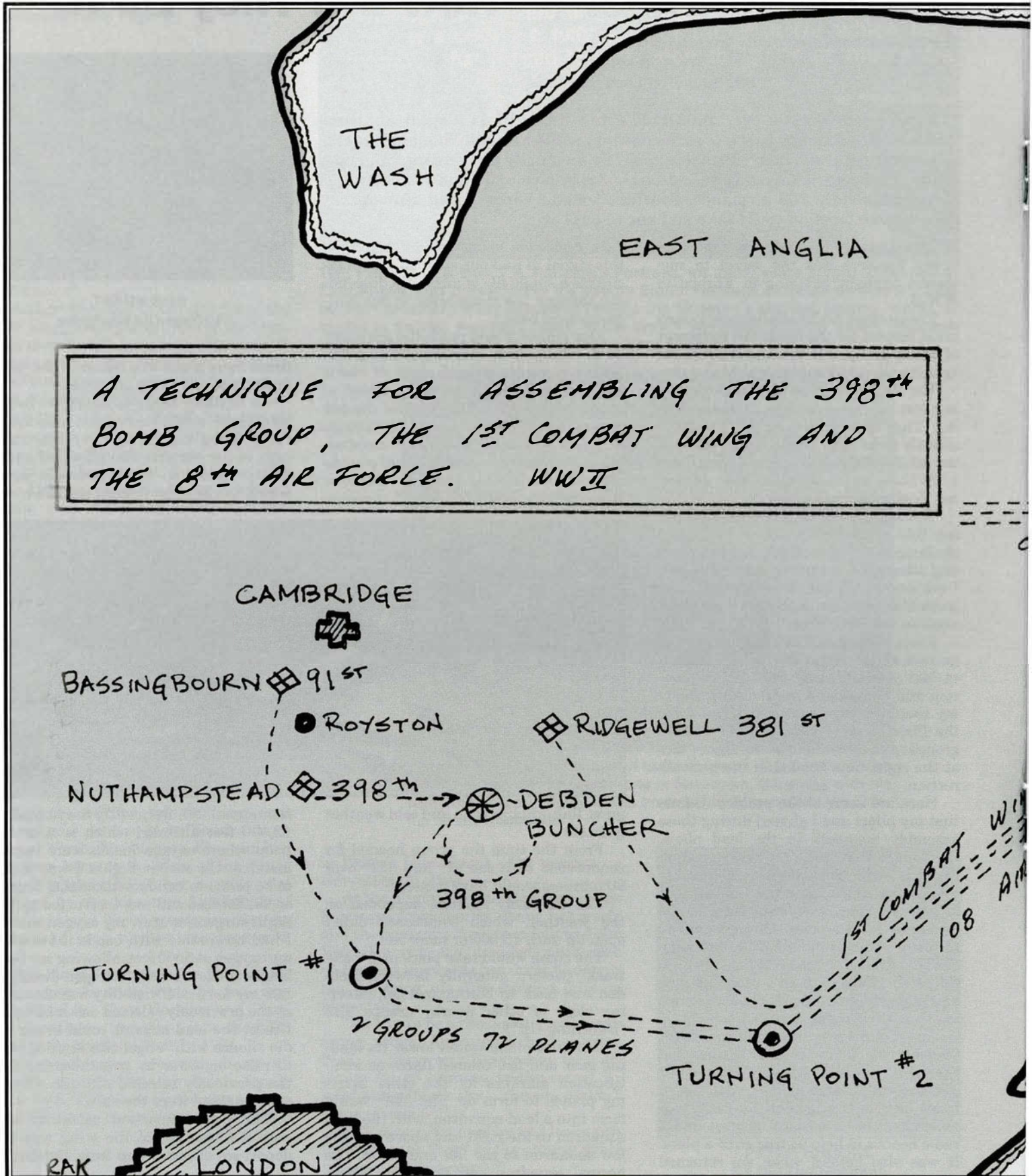
As daylight began to break, we in the lead plane would start counterclockwise turns using the Buncher as the north edge of our pattern. The pilot had an indicator arrow on his instrument panel which would point toward the radio sta-

tion signal. We frequently assembled at 12,000 feet altitude, which is near the point where oxygen masks were recommended. On earlier flights I was found to be prone to bends with aching fingers at 29,000 feet and was instructed by the flight surgeon to start my oxygen earlier. I had no trouble with bends if I started my oxygen at 8000 feet, allowing my body longer to blow off the nitrogen dissolved into my tissues. If visibility was obscured at the previously selected assembling altitude, the lead aircraft could break radio silence with “angel two or devil two” to raise or lower by two thousand feet the previously selected altitude. Clouds over England were the rule.

The most important secret to successful formation of the wing was the departure of our group from Debden at

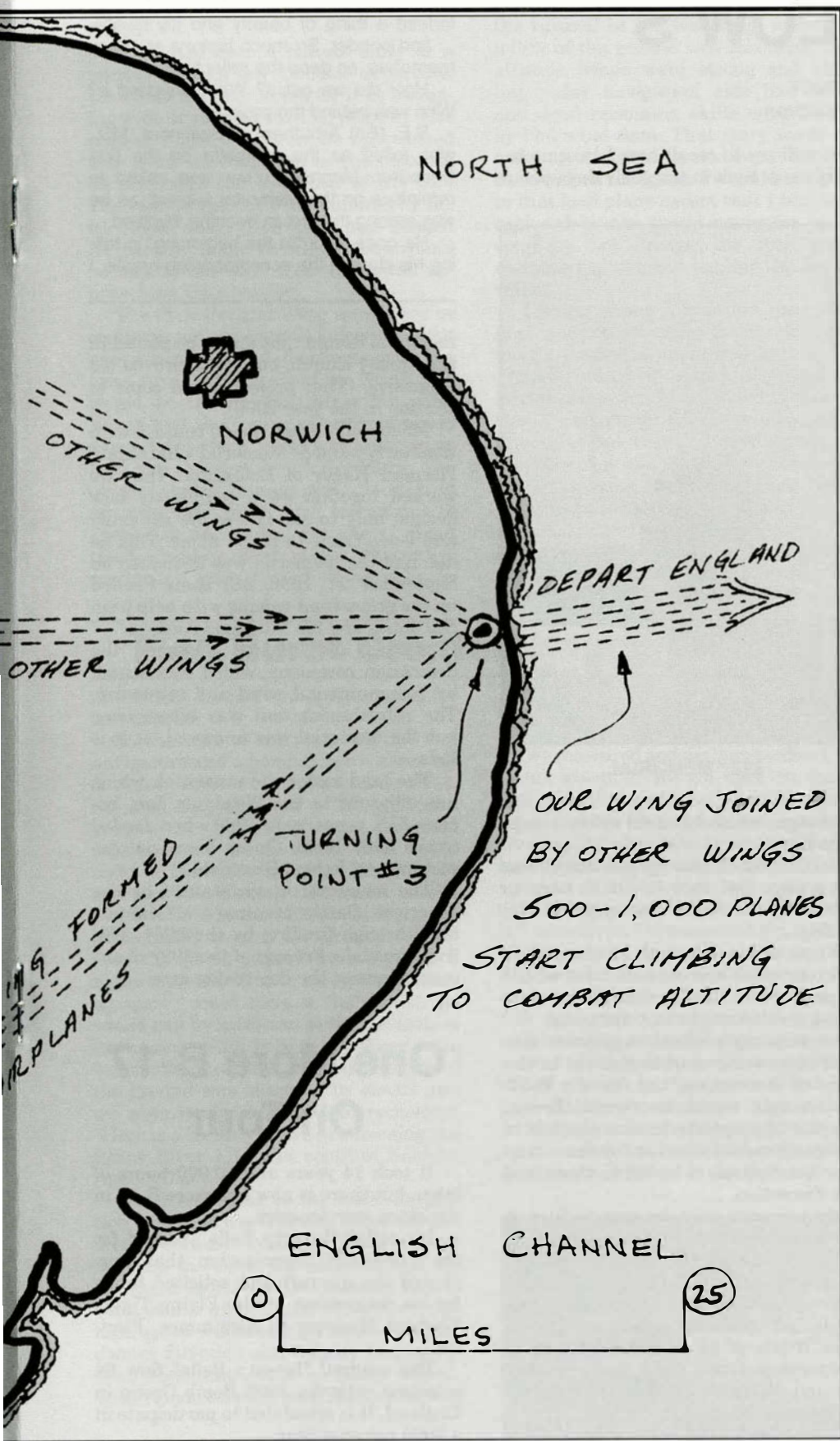
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How The 398th Joined The Navigator Explains The Intricacies of "Burn



A TECHNIQUE FOR ASSEMBLING THE 398th BOMB GROUP, THE 1ST COMBAT WING AND THE 8TH AIR FORCE. WWII

Bomber Stream "Pitching Up" In East Anglia



Assembling The 8th Armada

Continued From Page 5

the right minute going in the right direction and the corresponding departures from their dedicated radio beacons of the other two groups in our wing. On this hypothetical mission, we shall say that the departure from Debden was to be 07:03 hours and it was now 06:46. We had 17 minutes before our departure and we would be passing over Debden flying west. My pilot and I had decided on two 8 ½ minute turns as we started our counterclockwise pattern. The 91st Group from Bassingbourn would meet us at our first turning point falling one minute behind us. Our group had been forming well but they still would have 17 minutes to find their proper place in our formation.

Most lead pilots knew how to make an eight minute, 360 degree turn but I was there to help them. I had my Gee navigation equipment on my desk in the nose of the aircraft and could take a fix to give us our position once every 20 to 30 seconds. These fixes were accurate to approximately 100 yards in this part of England. The Gee navigation system was developed in England during WWII using pairs of stations scattered around the country similar to Loran, used for transoceanic navigation. The equipment we had in the plane could separate the signals from the two station pairs by measurable microsecond time delays. Gee was not useful to us over continental Europe.

I was drawing a circle on my map and I could estimate if it would be an eight minute turn or too big or too small. We came around to Debden at nine minutes and I told my pilot we would have to tighten the circle to eight minutes for our last time around. I had him adjust his circle for that last trip around with

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Memorial Reminiscing:

DESIGN WAS FRAUGHT WITH HIGH'S, LOW'S

BY ED ARBUTHNOT
Navigator, 601st Squadron

After much thought and jogging of memory, I will try to recall how I became involved in the Memorial project at Station 131. This was back in the early days of our association in the mid-70's

We had just elected Bill Comstock as our president, and he would go on to serve for 20 years.

I was first made aware of the memorial by a dear friend, Harold Stallings, 601 pilot from Texas. We had resided together in a corrugated ice box fondly called, "Hut #9, WAAF Site."

Stallings told me about a couple of young men named Ozzie and Vic, who had been asking about putting up a 398th memorial at Nuthampstead.

Anyway, I made contact with these men (Osborn & Jenkins) and there ensued a rich and friendly relationship via letter and audio tape. In 1977 my wife, Joyce, and I invited them to be our guests in the US whenever and for however long they chose. And in October of that year there began the "Americanization" of Malcolm Osborn. Sadly, Vic could not come as he was severely diabetic and his physician advised him against the trip.

It was a wonderful time. Ozzie fit in everywhere and was adopted by our friends. We jibed, joked, and poked fun at each other. He prided himself on having taught us how to speak English. For instance, he pointed out that what we thought was "carry out" was really "take away." And so it went.

One of the highlights of his visit was the afternoon we spent with Col. Hayward Braddock and his wife, Minnie, at their home in Alexandria, VA.

One evening while we were all relaxing in the bar (which Ozzie renamed "Arby's Chequers" after the pub near the old base), Ozzie brought up the subject of the memorial. He pointed out that some of the groups had already erected memorials at their old bases and it was time for the "greatest" group to do the same.

This was all new to me but I reacted with enthusiasm, and I told him I thought it was a tremendous idea and encouraged him to pursue it. And that I was sure that the membership would "buy" it.

Being a mechanical engineer, Ozzie asked me what my ideas for its design might be. My initial thought was that it should be distinctive and unique, or different from what others have done. I promised to send him suggestions as to



398TH MEMORIAL

the design, which he could either accept or ignore.

Col. Braddock also agreed that it was a fine idea, but that it would have to be "run by the board" for approval and funding.

When Ozzie left and I returned to work, our office was overwhelmed with a big project and I really didn't have time to give much thought to a memorial.

Anyway, my original suggestion was a self-supporting marble slab cut in the shape of the vertical tail fin of a B-17. The triangle would be carved therein with the appropriate bronze plaques of the squadrons attached to the same. Any other inscriptions to be left to Ozzie and Vic's discretion.

My ultimate mistake was to turn it over to an architect friend to sketch up, who entirely misconstrued the concept. However, I sent it off to Ozzie with many misgivings. Of course, it didn't fly. While the design appeared simple enough on paper, it proved to be quite complex in construction. Ozzie tried many companies and all agreed it was too complex and too expensive.

Ozzie even looked into a stained glass

The Memorial – In The Beginning

The 398th Memorial at Nuthampstead is indeed a thing of beauty and joy to see. . . and ponder. So much history, so many memories, so deep the reflections.

How did we get it? Who designed it? Who was behind the project?

S.E. (Ed) Arbuthnot of Baltimore, MD., who toiled as the navigator on the 601 Squadron Magness crew, was asked to reminisce on the Memorial subject, as he was among the first to become involved.

He goes back "to the beginning" in telling his story in the accompanying article.

memorial design that might be placed in the Anstey church, but it too, proved too expensive. (That project would come to fruition in the year 2000).

Meanwhile, Ozzie made contact with the newly named "Memorial Chairman," Herman Hager of Louisiana. The two worked together on a completely new design, only to see Hager die suddenly and leave Ozzie to finish alone. This he did, and the memorial was dedicated on September 21, 1982. Bill Ganz headed up the group fund-raising with help from Bill Jones and his "Alabama Auction."

Osborn and Jenkins arranged the dedication ceremony, which was struck by a monumental wind and rainstorm. The refreshment tent was blown over, but the memorial was unmoved, as it is today.

The land under the memorial, which lies adjacent to the Woodman Inn, became U.S. property in 1988 when deeded to the 398th Bomb Group Memorial Association by Robert Dimsdale.

The memorial is maintained by the American Battle Monuments Commission through funding by the 398th. Wilfrid Dimsdale, Friends of the 398th chairman, oversees the day-to-day care.

One More B-17 On Tour

It took 14 years and 80,000 hours of labor, but there is now one more B-17 in the skies over America.

It's called "Liberty Belle," named for the non-profit organization that purchased the aircraft and solicited funds for its restoration at the Flying Tigers Warbird Museum in Kissimmee, Florida.

The original "Liberty Belle" flew 64 missions with the 390th Bomb Group in England. It is scheduled to participate in a 2005 national tour.

How The Combat Wing Was Formed

Continued From Page 7

many Gee fix corrections and we came over Debden at 7:03 headed for our first turning point and the rendezvous with the 91st.

If we had been a minute early or a minute late on our Debden departure, we would have corrected for it by sweeping wide or short at turning point #1 (See map on Pages 6 & 7). As we approached this point we could see in the distance on our right the approach of the 91st. The two groups, the 398th followed by the 91st, now made their turn and headed for turning point #2 where they would be met by the 381st from Ridgewell approaching from our left.

The First Combat Wing would now be complete with Ridgewell following about one minute behind Bassingbourn. The third turn, at the coast of the North Sea, would be the meeting place for other Wings and the timing of arrivals would depend on which Wing was selected to lead the Division or 8th Air Force. The course across Europe was planned in advance with small turn corrections to avoid flak and to fool the enemy about the destination of our target. This entire production was created in advance by

a gift from heaven. For those who read of the Dresden-Prague debacle (January 2005 FLAK NEWS) it is easy to see the turmoil in the lead ship, when visibility of the ground was obscured, high altitude winds were strong and shifting, radar navigation aids had failed and dead reckoning skills were flawed by bad wind data. That story made me wake up at night in a cold sweat because as squadron navigator I would have been in that lead plane except that I had been replaced by the group navigator to accompany Col. Ensign, the 398th group commander, who was leading the 1st Division.

Talking about a crowded nose compartment, occasionally thrown into turmoil, my worst memory was a mission to Munster where we had just passed the initial point (IP) and started our bomb run. I remember debating whether to put on my flak vest in that crowded nose compartment and fortunately decided in the affirmative. About 30 seconds before "bombs away" we took a flak explosion under our nose. We were thrown into chaos. I was lying on the floor, disconnected from my intercom; my bombardier was wounded in his right hand and my pilot

Flak Burst Created Havoc In Nose

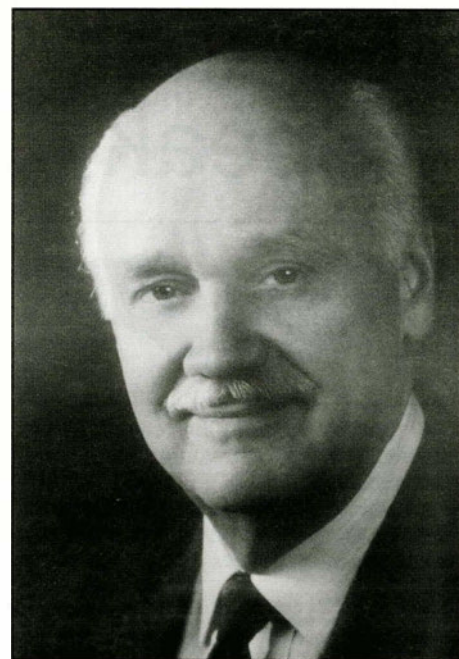
the 8th Air Force Bomber Command for this mission.

In the nose of our plane we had two navigators and a bombardier – a wee bit crowded. After about September, 1944, the lead ship also had a "Mickey" man or radar navigator, located in a darkened area near the middle of the ship, to the right of the radio operator. The Mickey operator had a small CRT radar screen which looked at the reflections of signals transmitted toward the ground. Whenever the plane passed over a town, a highway, a coastline or river, the Mickey navigator could have a "fix" which he would call by intercom to the navigators in the nose. And believe me these were wonderful fixes for us, particularly if the ground was obscured by clouds and we were navigating by dead reckoning. "Here is a fix for you, we are crossing the Rhine River 1.3 miles south of Koblenz right NOW".

Dead reckoning is the basic navigation we would use when all other supplements were not available. Dead reckoning uses the clock, the compass and the air speed indicator. The missing link is what is the wind doing? With the fickle high speed winds of high altitude which change direction and velocity frequently, dead reckoning could be badly flawed. With clouds below, a good Mickey fix was

started his "bombs away" turn without a new heading from his navigators.

We recovered and my bombardier lived to tell about it. We got back on course and, after I was able to establish myself again and we were able to help our bombardier, I tried to take inventory of what had happened. I learned about bleeding wounds at 40 degrees below zero, our cabin temperature. The blood freezes if left uncovered. Correspondingly, it bleeds if you cover it up to allow it to warm. I had been hit by a piece of flak in my mid chest which bounced off the steel in my flak vest striking me under the chin. I still have the piece of flak, caught in the canvas of my flak vest, which could have ended my life. Another piece of flak had passed through my oxygen mask making two holes but fortunately not hitting me. Another flak fragment had made a hole in my map. We were lucky that day.



BOB KRAFT

Bob Kraft, the writer of the article on how the 398th B-17's formed up for the combat missions, is really Dr. Robert A. Kraft of Hillsborough, California.

Kraft was the navigator on the 602 Squadron crew piloted by Richard (Dick) Griffin before being drafted for Squadron lead. He flew six missions with Griffin and 24 as either Squadron, Group or Wing lead, some again with Griffin, who had moved up to lead pilot.

Now retired at age of 81, Kraft returned home from the war to pursue a medical degree from the University of Washington. After a brief career in family practice, he studied pathology at the University of California and then became the pathologist at Peninsula Hospital in Burlingame, CA. He also added a specialty in nuclear medicine.

In retirement, Dr. Kraft maintains a hobby in mining history, emphasizing mining "lighting and water wheel power." A widower, he has a daughter and two sons. He lives at Hillsborough, CA 94010-6173.

Air Force Evolution

Aeronautical Division
U.S. Army Signal Corps –
July 18, 1914 to May 20, 1918
Air Service –
May 21, 1918 to July 2, 1926
Air Corps –
July 2, 1926 to June 20, 1941
Army Air Forces –
June 20, 1941 to September 18, 1947
U.S. Air Force –
September 18, 1947 to present.

Gunner Speak



A superbly written story called, "Aerial Gunner Training," is featured in the latest issue of BOMBER LEGENDS. It is a "must read" for anyone who manned the Air Force guns in World War II combat. (Vol 2 No. 2, Barnes & Noble).

Be My Guest

Tail-gunner Bill Durst was so impressed with the first issue of BOMBER LEGENDS magazine that he gave subscriptions to the four still-living members of his 601 Hollis Dalton crew – Phil Stahlman, Harold Kanable, Bill Schwan (and himself).

'Chute of A Story

Beef barley soup, a nurse and a parachute are all part of a "after-we-got-shot-down" story in the latest issue of BOMBER LEGENDS magazine. It was written by 601 tail gunner Ralph Hall, who was left behind at the Holland crash site by his "lets-get-out-of-here" crew mates because of piece of flak in his "hip" area.

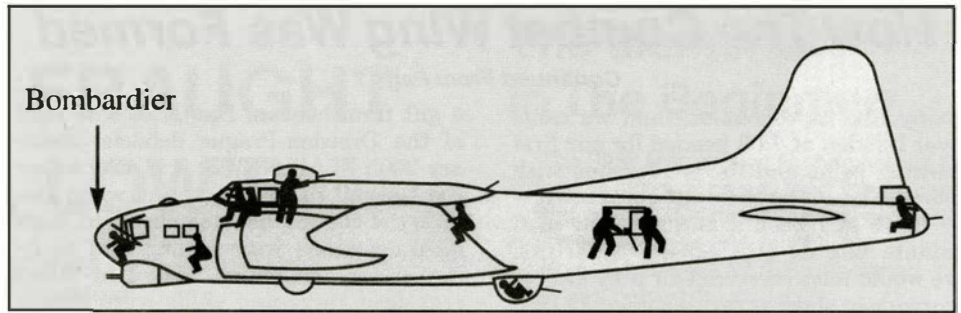
Stahlmans Represented

What are the odds that every member of a family of 10 scattered about the country, will become members of the 398th Bomb Group Memorial Association? Probably monumental.

Phil Stahlman (Florida), 601 pilot, is a member (naturally) along with wife Marge. Both have long been active in reunion and tour activities. But they have six daughters and two sons, living in five different states.

Two daughters – Elaine Jurs (Pennsylvania) and Kathy Zinn (Virginia) – joined in recent years. Then daughter Dorothy Ahl (New York) took it upon herself to bring in the rest – Theresa West (California), Ginny Loggins (Alabama) and Christine Stahlman (New York). And finally, the sons – Philip and Francis (New York).

Now they are 10, the same as Phil's B-17 crew.



The Bombardier

The basic principle of any bombing mission was to deliver the bombs accurately on the target. To navigate through clouds or to evade and counter the enemy's defenses was an achievement in itself, yet everything depended upon the bombardier's ability to hit his target. The bombardier's main tool was the Norden bombsight, a top secret piece of equipment the Allies guarded throughout the war. On a mission, the bombardier's real job began at the IP. This was the point at which the bombing run on the target began; from this point on, the bombardier would fly the airplane through the bombsight linked to the autopilot. The plane would have to be flown straight and level to the release point through flak and fighter attacks. Few, if any, bombers equaled the B-17 in visibility afforded to the bombardier. Sitting behind the bombsight in the plexiglas nose gave him an unrestricted view for his mission. The Norden simplified the bombardier's job considerably by taking into account factors of altitude, airspeed, ground speed and drift to automatically calculate the bomb release point.

The optical sighting mechanism of the bombsight was a small telescope. The bombardier would first locate the target by looking over the instrument and through the plexiglas nose. Once the target was located he would try to line it up in the telescope, often requiring several head up glances to find the target again. There were two cross hairs on the telescope, one to show drift left or right

of the target, the other to show rate of closure. When the two indicators met the bomb would automatically release.

Originally the bombardier had a .30 caliber machine gun in the plexiglas nose but this was soon changed to a more effective .50 caliber. In late 1943, a powered chin turret was added to help combat frontal attacks and became standard equipment on the B-17G.



This presentation is part of a living History created by the Arizona Wing of the Commemorative Air Force, Mesa, Arizona. Other similar crew positions will be presented in future issues. Special thanks to the CAF and the Sentimental Journey.

"The Thrill Of A Lifetime"

"Thank you for sending me copies of your book, REMEMBRANCES, and the photo of CLEARING & COLDER. My only regret is that it had taken me so long to discover the 398th Association and the information in FLAK NEWS on my father and the memorial at Slany, Czech Republic. But I am also thrilled that I had the opportunity to travel to Slany this last June and to pay homage to my Dad, his 603 crew and the people of the Czech Republic who erected that beautiful memorial. It was the thrill of a lifetime."

Don Christensen, Salida, CO.

"My husband, Bud Bailey, passed away this year and I would ask for advice on where I might send his collection of aviation magazines and all the FLAK NEWS since the beginning. Please keep me on the mailing list."

Mrs. Annabelle Bailey, Dallas, TX 75229-2907

BRIEF-things

Bob Kraft, the navigator/doctor who wrote the "Bunching Up" story and drew the assembly map, also has a talented daughter – **Angela Kraft Cross** – an MD eye surgeon and professional organist/pianist; this summer she had concerts at the National Cathedral in DC and at the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. . . our ex-airline pilots (and there are several) should chat with former 727 pilot **Russ Reed** and ask how he used the old WW II "FIDO" technique to land his fog-bound jet at Portland some years ago. . . this being the 70th anniversary of the B-17 should cause many to remember that wonderful 50th celebration in Seattle in 1985. . . our **Ted Johnston**, then with Boeing, had the responsibility of bussing the visitors from the many hotels to the various events (plus ordering up box lunches by the thousands). . . the members of the 1995 tour to Pilsen will remember the young, handsome tour guide, **David Frous**; he is now stationed in London as part of the Czech foreign service. . . **George Hilliard** did many wonderful things for the 398th during and after the war, not the least of which was beginning the compilation of the list that we now call "Taps" and is printed each January in FLAK NEWS. . . after seeing how spectacular **Kevin Belfield's** B-17 model looks hanging from the Woodman Inn's dining room might prompt others to send the Woodman additional two-foot models (Like the ones that were made for the 1985 reunion in Seattle). . . this last spring saw a pair of 398th sons and their families visit Station 131 – **Bob Lamons Jr.** and **David Driscoll**; the latter also brought his dad's casket flag to be flown on the tall pole near the old tower, turning it over to "flag-keeper" **Peggy Wells**. . . escorting the US visitors was a very busy **Ozzie Osborn**, enjoying his "task," but also becoming physically "washed out" as result of an "unidentified, pesky, illegitimate, infectious bug" that he was named "Fred." our good friends operating "Sally B" in England are also feeling "washed out" upon discovering that the new EU insurance regulations will cost them an astonishing \$2,000 extra PER HOUR to operate their B-17. . . the Sally B flies in memory of the 79,000 US airmen who lost their lives in WW II. . . while in medical school years later, **Bob Kraft** remembered that "blood from wounds tend to freeze at 30,000 feet if left uncovered and flows if covered and warmed". . . (that's called learning the hard way). . . **Evelyn (Comstock) Rhodes**, noting that **Prince Charles** and **Camilla** were married at Guild Hall in Windsor remembered that this is where the 398th England Tour party in 1996 "rubbed elbows" with **The Queen** and **Prince Philip**. . . Guild Hall is a stone's throw from Windsor Castle. . . **Bill Frankhouser** is mighty proud of his grandson, **Derek**, whose essay on American Military Veterans won first prize and \$100 from Amvets Post 19; **Derek** attends Lancaster Christian School in Lancaster, PA. . . the great British aviation magazine, FLY PAST, has a fine tribute to the B-17 in celebration of the Fort's 70th birthday; plus a color photo of the 398th memorial at Nuthampstead . . . still proud of her brother after 60 years, **Guendolyn Lynn** paid her FLAK NEWS dues by describing her brother (**Marvin Luckie**) this way – "he paid the ultimate price on February 4, 1945" . . . in what she described as "almost as good as a flight in a B-17," **Elaine Tyler** booked a flight on an RAF Dakota (C-47) to celebrate VE/VJ Day, and helped drop thousands of poppies on the English countryside. . . The "Hansard Prop" program in Savannah last May was successfully held indoors at the Mighty Eighth Heritage Museum, but the activities scheduled for outdoors on the same day were cancelled due to heavy rains. . . the horrendous "insurance travesty" threatening England's B-17, Sally B, prompted president Blackwell to direct a "please help us correct this EU Regulation" letter to president Bush. . . 2006 England Tour information is documented on the group web site – 398th.org – and via the 398th E-mail system. . . a coach load of 35 passengers would be nice (twice that number would be even better). . . accommodations at the Woodman Inn's Bed & Breakfast are available for the tour, but only for those who make very early reservations via our Barb Fish (1-800-809-0154).

398th Bomb Group PX (The Second Generation)

ORDER FORM

Qty.	Item	Unit Cost	Total
	BOOKS		
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_____	398 th History (1946 Copy)	\$20.00	_____
_____	WW II Odyssey (Frankhouser)	\$19.00	_____
_____	The Youngest Crew (Wagner)	\$19.95	_____
	(All books postpaid)		
	JEWELRY		
_____	Diecast B-17 Model (1/10 scale)	\$9.00	_____
_____	Squadron lapel pins (Indicate 600, 601, 602, 603)	\$5.00	_____
_____	Group lapel pin (Hell From Heaven)	\$5.00	_____
	LOGOS		
_____	B-17 Jacket Patch (rectangular)	\$4.00	_____



	PHOTOGRAPHS		
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_____	Control Tower postcard	\$2.00	_____
_____	398 th Memorial Postcard	\$2.00	_____
_____	Aluminum Overcast (8 x 10)	\$2.00	_____
	MISCELLANEOUS		
_____	Sun Catcher w/logo	\$10.00	_____

NOTE: Many other item such as T-shirts, caps, golf shirts, tote bags, bumper stickers, etc., will be available at the 398th Reunion September 7-10 at Overland Park, Kansas.

Cost Of Items Ordered	\$ _____
Delivery And Handling Add \$4.00	
Or \$5.00 if Order is Over \$20.00	\$ _____
Total	\$ _____

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