

44th Bomb Group Veterans Association



8 BALL TAILS



Vol. 8 Issue #4

Journal of the
44th Bomb Group
Veterans Association

Spring 2007

Non Profit Veterans Association

EIN # 68-0351397



Available Jones 42-40780

Available Jones and its crew arrived in England, and was assigned to the 67th Squadron. Immediately they were dispatched to Benina Main, in preparation for the secret mission to be flown, August 1, 1943. They flew four missions to Sicily, in preparation for General Patton's assault, then to five to Italy. (The Jones crew had no way of knowing, but nine days after Rome was hit, Mussolini would be overthrown.) On August 1 *Available Jones* joined the stream of planes led by Col. **Leon Johnson**, following the railroad tracks to that smoke-filled fiery furnace that was Ploesti.

Available Jones was undoubtedly named by his pilot, **Fred Jones**, who apparently liked the cartoon, Sad Sack. As always, Sad Sack continued to suffer rejection on the plane that helped make history - **then was ditched!!!**.

Can anyone name the maintenance man on this picture, who blew the sand from the four engines and kept the plane operational for its ten missions from the Libyan Desert?

44TH BOMB GROUP VETERANS ASSOCIATION BOARD 2006 - 2007

President: George Washburn
11505 N. Armenia Avenue
Tampa, Florida 33612
Phone (813) 932-6425
E-Mail: liberatorpilot@msn.com

Vice President/Historian:
Roger D. Fenton
21539 East Alyssa Court
Queen Court, AZ 85242
Phone (480) 893-3761
E-Mail: lomadanger@aol.com

Secretary/8 Ball Tails Editor:
Ruth W. Davis-Morse
2041 Village Circle East
York, PA 17404
Phone (717) 846-8948
Fax (717) 846-6688
E-Mail: rdavismorse@aol.com

Treasurer: Richard (Dick) Lynch
109 Jason Road, Box 518
Conrad, IA 50621-0518
Phone (641) 366-2414
E-Mail: r_blynch@netins.net
(first 3 letters r_b)

Immediate Past President:
Roy Owen
108 Wawona Place
Chico, CA 95928-8429
Phone (530) 891-9157
FAX (530) 891-9157
E-Mail: owen44bg@sbcglobal.net

*(Web Page courtesy of
X-Mission, Salt Lake City, Utah)*

Archivist & Director: C. W. "Will" Lundy
2519 Westville Tri.
Cool, CA 95614-2008
Phone (530) 886-8636 (Winter)
P. O. Box 315, Bridgeport, CA 93517
(Summer) Phone (760) 932-7349
E-Mail: cwlundy@sbcglobal.net

Director: William Ward
120 B Heritage Hills
Somers, New York 10589-1317
Phone (914) 277-5830
E-Mail: bhward8@aol.com

Decorations & Awards Director:
Robert Lee Aston
830 Cardinal Drive
Elberton, GA 30635-2606
Phone (706) 283-1337
leeaston@elberton.net

U. K. Representative:
Steve Adams
28 Bassingham Road
Norwich, England NR3 2 QT
Phone/FAX 011-44-1603-400221
E-Mail: s.p.adams@btinternet.com

Director: Sterling L. Dobbs
P.O. Box 825
LaGrange, Texas 78945
E-Mail: b24dobbs@yahoo.com

Custodian of the Web Site:
Arlo Bartsch, Webmaster
42 Promesa Drive
Hot Springs Village, Arkansas 71909
Phone 501 922-5247
E-Mail: afbas@aol.com

The 8-Ball Tails[©]

Official Journal of The
44th Bomb Group
Veterans Association,
Inc.[©]

Compiled, written and published tri-yearly at 2041 Village Circle East, York, PA, by Ruth W. Davis-Morse, Editor. Printed and mailed Bulk Rate at York, PA under USPS Permit #323. All original written material such as letters, stories, excerpts from personal diaries or memoirs, drawings and photos submitted to this journal will become the property of the 44th Bomb Group Veterans Association and will be copyright protected except where noted. The text and photos are otherwise reproduced from official USAAF and USAF documents and photos which have been released for publication. Permission is granted for the contents of this journal to be reproduced specifically for personal archives. Otherwise,

Visit our website @ www.44thbombgroup.com

copyright material herein may be reproduced by the journal of other incorporated non-profit veterans organizations so long as this publication is properly credited and prior permission is granted by the editor. (June 2003)

Those submitting letters, stories and photos to the editor or historian must do so with the understanding that this material will most likely be published in this journal as a matter of interest to the members/subscribers of the Association and this journal. While every attempt will be made to answer all of the material received, there is no explicit or implied guarantee that an answer will be provided or published. Except for specific requests for the return of original documents and photos, all material submitted will become the property of the 44th Veterans Association, Inc., or its successors.

AVAILABLE JONES DITCHED (AND EVERYBODY SURVIVED)

Enroute to the White Five target in Ploesti, **Fred Jones** approached the target down the railroad track at the altitude of approximately 100 feet. The target was already on fire, having been bombed by the 93rd Group. They dropped their bombs at their specifically identified target, then went down the deck as low as they could. Suddenly the haystacks opened up and revealed their hidden guns. They shot out the #4 engine, and a shell between the two waist gun positions, wounding both gunners in the legs. The plane broke one balloon cable; but continued on. Next they were beset by fighters.

T/Sgt. **Leo Spann**, engineer, described the attack, "We lost speed and dropped out of formation, and the fighters jumped us. With the two waist gunners badly injured, the enemy A/C came in so close to us, it seemed we could almost touch them. We figured that we had shot down four of them, and they finally left us, but the #4 engine had frozen up and with a flat propeller, it caused a hellava drag. The propeller would not feather!

"We started trying to gain altitude to clear the mountains ahead. We threw everything that wasn't tied down-all of the guns, ammunition, equipment, etc. When we finally arrived at the coast, our #3 engine was failing. The oil pressure was almost gone and the temperature was much too high. Lt. Jones asked me how long I thought it would last, and I estimated about 30 minutes at the most. We decided to feather #3 engine and see if we could fly with the other two, but they were

on the same side! If we couldn't fly, we were going to ditch it on the beach.

"I feathered the prop, Jones and the Co-Pilot got the plane levelled out, but we could not maintain our altitude. So we began making plans to ditch. We flew onward for approximately forty five minutes before we were forced to ditch. The time was about 1840 - at least that is the time that my watch stopped. We all managed to get out of the plane and into our life rafts, even though the tail gunner and the navigator were slightly injured in the ditching.

"The next morning a German submarine came by, started to help us, changed their minds and took off, leaving us. Then, at approximately 1500 hours, a small three - engine Italian seaplane sighted us, landed and picked us up and took us to Brindisi, Italy and to the hospital there."

All nine members of the Fred Jones crew became POW's-Jones, **Elbert Dukate**, Co-Pilot; **Adolphus Sweet**, Navigator; **Albert Bernard**, Navigator; **Leo Spann**, Engineer; **Michael Lillo**, Radio Operator; **Robert Becker**, Asst. Engineer; **Anthony Savettierre**, Waist Gunner, **Michael Sigle**, Tail Gunner. **Dukate** and **Sigle** escaped and returned to England. All POWs met at Camp Lucky Strike in May 1945.

Ed. Note: This ditching in the Mediterranean preceded the Hruby experience, which was in the English Channel. I have been informed that there is one more ditching with all crew surviving. Can anybody name it?



GEORGE WASHBURN'S PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Taking over the president's position in this manner was not a very pleasant experience. We were spending Christmas in Dubai and in my daily e-mail checking learned of Paul's passing. It was a real shock to us as a few days before we departed Florida, I talked with Paul. He told me of his upcoming operation in his usual up-beat manner. I got to know Paul quite well in the last 4 or 5 years and thoroughly enjoyed his company.. We both discovered that the world is really a small place. It turned out that one of his sales engineers at Weyerhaeuser regularly called on me at the power company in New England . We had purchased some of their laminated wood structures and I had once toured their facility in Salem Oregon , but had never met Paul.

I will have a difficult time in trying to match Paul's abilities such as chairing our meetings in such a relaxed manner. I will try to get some of his ideas completed, such as getting all the squadron histories into the web site.

For those of you who do not already know me, I was in the 68th Squadron from July,1944 to December, 1944. I completed 35 missions-19 as copilot for **Elmer Kohler** and 19 with my own crew. I inherited the crew of **Thurston E. VanDyke** ,who, flying as copilot with an experienced crew on his first mission , was one of four survivors of a ditching on July 11. Van was hospitalized and his crew flew as fill-ins until they all got together with me on my first mission as pilot-- the low level supply mission to Holland on Sept 18. Van returned to action in late November and flew 2 missions as copilot for Elmer Kohler, then flew as my copilot on my last 2 missions with his old crew! He then went on to complete his tour as pilot. I returned to the US in January-still only 20 years old.

Thanks to the devotion and work of our faithful secretary, Ruth and husband Perry, plans for our 2007 reunion in Branson, Missouri are going forward. Hope to see many of you there this fall.



BOB NORSEN REMEMBERS THE DAY THAT *LEMON DROP* FLEW TOO HIGH



Bob Norsen

"We were on a test flight, to see why the guns were misfiring when we were in combat. We were losing planes and lives because we couldn't return enemy fire. The oil in the guns was freezing, and they either wouldn't fire, or fired very slowly. We got new oil, and my

crew was assigned to test its viscosity at twenty to fifty degrees below zero. I was told to take the plane to 28,000 feet and see how the guns fired at that altitude with the new oil.

"I told the Co-pilot to take the plane to 33,000 feet, while I went back to oversee the gunners. He put the plane on Auto-pilot in a steep climb. I did not know that he had gotten his oxygen tube disconnected and had passed out.

"I was walking around the back of the plane, carrying my oxygen tank, checking on the gunners who were testing the new oil.

"Meanwhile, without his portable oxygen, T/Sgt. **Clarence Strandberg** left his post for a nature call, and before he got back, he passed out. When I saw Strandberg on the

floor, with **Adolph Brzozowy** giving him oxygen, I rushed to the front of the plane. Everyone was passed out -- **Charles Mott** and **Eddie Waite**, engineer and Top Turret Gunner. **Henry Krutsch**, Tail Gunner had sat down and leaned against the wall., and could not be revived. Brzozowy, Waist Gunner, and I were the only two who were conscious.

"We were at 39,500 feet and climbing. I quickly reduced power and put the plane in a high dive on Autopilot. We were coming down 10,000 feet a minute. When we were at 3,000 feet, I levelled off and found the first available emergency field.

"The interrogator could not believe what I told him about the A/C's performance. He said it was impossible. The plane could not go that high, and the wings would have fallen off with that rapid descent.

"However, my instruments showed that *Lemon Drop* really did fly to 40,000 feet and really did come down 3,000 feet a minute."

Editor's Note: There are no records of any other plane withstanding such stress, yet returning to fly again. The test did show the value of the new lubricating oil. Another discovery came from this trip: Tech instructions for the .50 calibre guns were to tighten, then back off two turns. Instead, Norsen and the gunners found that they worked better when they were backed off four turns.

One man was lost, others had some physical problems, but the test made it safer for the air war to continue.



THE LATE REGINALD CARPENTER'S EXPERIENCE IN HORSEFLY (THEN ON TO ONE MORE CRASH)

Every Ploesti experience is unique, and the events of the mission haunted this pilot until his death in 1996. *Horsefly* suffered considerable damage over the target, one engine was knocked out, and **E.M. Rumsey**, Co-Pilot and **J. F. Manquen**, Radio Operator were wounded. They were losing gas from a severed gas line, and a Me 109 managed to get a shot at the A/C, knocking out a second engine. They continued on over the sea, losing altitude due to the loss of two engines. When a third engine failed, they prepared to ditch.

The plane glanced off the water, then hit again. The ditching tore off the rear fuselage section, just aft of the wing. All nine crewmen were in the nose section per instructions. Seven men got out and released the rafts. Two were not able to get clear of the sinking ship, and they drowned when it went down.

The survivors floated all night and most of the next day until a Wellington Air-Sea Rescue spotted them. They dropped supplies and water, then circled them until relieved by a second Wellington. Finally, that night at 1930 hours, they were rescued by the Air-Sea-Rescue Service.

A TRIBUTE TO HIS ENGINEER

When **Vincent Huenerberg** passed away, Carpenter wrote the following message to his wife. "On the low level Ploesti mission, August 1, 1943, when we were forced to ditch in the Mediterranean Sea, Vincent was the first crewman to go out the top hatch. The aircraft's tail was torn off and it was sinking nose down very rapidly. Vincent swam to the left dinghy hatch, which was now under water, and attempted to deploy it, but the door was jammed and he could not open it. Rapidly, he swam over to the right dinghy hatch, and fortunately he was able to open it and deploy the dinghy. When I finally got free of the cockpit and came to the surface, the first thing I saw was Vincent standing in our one and only dinghy, pulling all the survivors into it. If it were not for his courage and determination to deploy that remaining dinghy, we would have all perished. All who survived owe their lives to Vincent E. Huenerberg, the best Engineer a pilot could have. Regrettably, S/Sgts **Walter Brown** and **Edward Durand** were crushed on the flight deck when the top turret tore loose from the fuselage, and they were unable to escape."

TWO MONTHS LATER ON *L-BAR #42-41017*

It was a second trip to the Messerschmitt plant at Wiener-Neustadt for 1st Lt. Carpenter, and the Luftwaffe was ready for this raid. About seventy fighters flew through the formation, flak was heavy, and ten planes went down.

L-Bar was struck and three engines caught fire. Five of the crew were KIA. Five survived and became POW.

Then VE Day came, prisoners were released, and everyone went back to the ZOI. However, the war hung heavily on Carpenter for the rest of his life. In a letter he wrote to his friend **Bill Cameron**, he said, "Having lost seven crew members -- two when I ditched in the Mediterranean on August 1, 1943 and five on October 1, 1943, it has left me with a severe 'Survivor' Guilt' emotional problem. It is difficult for me to discuss the experiences. For this reason I have been very fearful of attending any of the reunions. It is so painful for me to recall those missions that I have shied away from any contact with other 67th Squadron members."

Ed Note: I hesitated to include the personal story of Carpenter's unending sorrow over the loss of members of his crew. However, I feel a need to tell our readers that sixty two years later, veterans are still suffering from tragic memories of what happened when their youth was lost to the noble cause of freedom.

THE MATHEMATICS OF ORIGINAL CREWS 68TH SQUADRON, 44th Bomb Group (H)

(Number of missions flown by the 18 Original Pilots & Co-Pilots)

Eight of the original pilots and co-pilots were KIA:

Malcolm Howell (13), Roy Erwin (3), Thomas Cramer (16), James DuBard (5),
Maxwell Sullivan (7), Roland Houston (28), Duane Nelson (6), and Henry Kaitala (4)

Three became POWs:

James O'Brien, (20), Robert Ager (11) and Theodore B. Scarlett (15)

One was WIA and returned to ZOI:

Wilmer Garrett (22) (Wounded in Action)

Five completed their tours (25):

George Jansen, W. D. Hughes, Walter (Tommie) Holmes, John Diehl and
Reginald Phillips

Missions where losses occurred: Kiel, Germany-2; St. Nazaire, France-1; Leece, Italy-1;
Abbeville, France-3; Lemmer, Holland-2; Ploesti, Romania-1;

Ed. Note: The average number of missions of the original crews was 15. This was in 1943. As Howard Moore stated: "The Luftwaffe was slaughtering us."

MEMORIES OF SIDNEY R. BOLICK RCAF, RAF, AAC, USAAF, CARGOS, THEN--RESERVES

I spent nearly five years in military service WWII as a Pilot in the Royal Canadian Air Force, the British Royal Air Force and the United States Army Air Corps.

On 1 June 1941, three days after graduating from high school in Lowell, North Carolina and two weeks before my 17th birthday, I boarded a Greyhound Bus at Lowell for Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, and enlisted for Pilot Training in the RCAF, using altered documents that showed me to be two years older than I actually was. I went through Reception Centre and Pre-Flight School in Toronto; Elementary Flying School at DeHaviland Tiger Moths at Oshawa, Ontario; Advanced Flying School on a twin engine Avro Ansons at Hagersville, Ontario, graduating 1 March 1942 as a Sergeant Pilot.

Joining the RAF

After ten days leave, I reported to the Overseas Debarkation Center at Halifax, Nova Scotia, and was put on a ship in a convoy that sailed to Liverpool, England. In England I was attached to the RAF, and sent to Flight Instructor's School. After completing a four week course, I was assigned to No. 1 Standard

Beam Approach School at Stradishall, near Cambridge, where I taught other pilots Instrument Flying and Instrument Landings. On one particularly bad night, with two students, I was forced to abandon an Airspeed Oxford training plane and bail out, as landing conditions were impossible. Fortunately, no one was injured.

Next assignment: USAAF

By late 1942, units of the newly formed U.S. Eighth Air Force were arriving in England and beginning daylight bombing missions against German targets on the Continent. In February 1943 I was transferred to the USAAF to the Bovingdon Replacement Depot with the rank of Flight Officer.

On March 16, 1943, I arrived in Shipdham, and was assigned Co-Pilot on the **David Alexander** Crew in the 68th Squadron. Then that crew was broken up. Next I was assigned as Co-Pilot to **Walter T. "Tommy" Holmes**. However, before I could fly my first mission, I came down with pneumonia and was in and out of the hospital for about a month. When I was finally returned to Flight Status, my seat

on the Holmes crew had been taken by another RAF Transferee.

During the next four months I had three more bouts with pneumonia, and when the Group left for North Africa on July 1, I was in the hospital again, and was left behind at Shipdham, missing the Ploesti Mission and the second trip to North Africa to support the Allied landings on Sicily.

When the Group returned to England, we started to get the new B-24 H's and J's as replacement aircraft. These ships had nose turrets with twin .50 calibre machine guns, and it was necessary to train the Bombardiers and Navigators on these turrets. I was made Squadron Gunnery Officer and given the responsibility for scheduling and overseeing this training.

Pilot in the Tail Turret

By November 1943, I had been in England for eighteen months and at Shipdham for eight, and still hadn't flown my first mission. I was getting desperate to get my missions in, so when a directive came down from Wing Headquarters that each Group was to have a Pilot in the tail turret of the lead ship on every mission, to keep the pilot advised of how the formation was doing, I promptly volunteered.

From December to March I flew ten combat missions as Tail Gunner/Observer and Co-Pilot. On one mission as Tail Gunner/Observer, I shot down a Me-109 and was awarded an extra Oak Leaf Cluster to my Air Medal. In December of that year I was given a battlefield commission to 2nd Lieutenant.

I flew my first mission as Tail Turret Gunner - Observer on 5 December 1942, and flew a total of nine missions in that capacity during December, January, February and the first two weeks in March.

Finally, a Co-Pilot, and then.....

The first week in March, I was finally assigned to a crew as Co-Pilot. 1st Lt. **Hollis R. Nichols** had just been checked out as first pilot and given a crew that had just arrived from the States, all but the Co-Pilot. I was assigned as his Co-Pilot.

We flew a few practice missions together with other new crews. Then on 18 March 1944

we flew our first actual combat mission. We were bombing the Dornier aircraft factory at Friedrichshafen, Germany. Just after we dropped our bombs over the target we were hit by flak in the number three engine and were unable to maintain our altitude. Rather than be taken prisoner by the Germans, we turned across Lake Konstanz to Switzerland and bailed out. We were picked up by the Swiss and interned in a camp at Adelboden, and later at Davos. In September, after the Allied landings in Normandy and in the south of France, I escaped into France and made my way back to England.

Ed. Note: Eight planes were lost on this mission: 66th lost one; 67th lost 2; 68th lost 2; 506 lost 4. 62 men were interned in Switzerland, of which 39 returned to England; five were KIA; 14 became POW; one evaded and returned to England.

After being interrogated in London, and going back to Shipdham to clear the base, I was sent to Prestwick, Scotland, and was flown back to the U.S.

After fourteen days leave and a few days at a Redistribution Center in Miami, I was assigned to the Aerial Gunnery School at Tyndall Field, Panama City, Florida. I flew gunnery trainees around in a B-24 as they fired at tow targets or at splashes in the water of Appalachicola Bay. It was very boring work, so in May of 1945, I jumped at the chance of transferring to Air Transport Command.

Next assignment: Cargos

I was promoted to 1st Lt. and sent to C-54 Operational Training School at Homestead, Florida. I graduated from that course in August 1945, just after Japan surrendered, and was assigned to Hamilton Air Force Base, San Raphael, California, where I flew C-54's on the Central Pacific Run from California to Hawaii and the other Central Pacific islands, hauling supplies out and bringing troops home.

I went on inactive duty in March 1946, but remained in the Reserve as a 'Weekend Warrior' for several more years until the pressure of making a living in civilian life made it necessary to give it up.

LETTER FROM SHIPDHAM

Well guys, we have had our regulation 70 MPH plus winds across the airfield for this winter, and once again the old Station stood up to it well and we had no damage, either to structures or to aircraft. Unfortunately we cannot say the same for our friends and neighbours at nearby Old Buckenham (Station 144 in your day), they took a huge hit on one of their (new) hangars and lost the door and part of the roof. Sadly at least two planes were completely written off and several others damaged, some quite badly, though we are told they are repairable. The only good news was there were no human casualties on either airfield that day.

I am delighted to report that we did indeed have a visit from the family of a 44th Veteran, John A. Gray, who was a navigator. Both John's son and young grandson arrived a few weekends back and stayed with us most of the day. They spent quite a while going round and filming the Museum and were able to take a tour round the old base and had a chance to wander through the old control tower. Shipdham Aero Club was going to present them with a copy of the book 44th Bomb Group in Norfolk, that Steve Adams and I had written, but the taxi driver who ferried the Gray family to and from the airfield that day was so taken with their story, and their reason for coming to Shipdham Airfield, that he insisted in buying the book so that he could be the one who gave it to them. John's son James kindly presented the museum with a framed photo of his father and his crew taken in the US just before they headed to Europe. While at Shipdham he flew in Puritanical Witch, Flak Magnet and Galavantin' Gal. We were delighted to receive the crew photo and were able to get it in place and hung before the family left.

We read with sadness that the plans for a 'Last Hurrah' visit had fallen by the wayside, though we quite understand the reasons. As mentioned in 'Tails' we over here will keep your memory going and send you reports and photos. We will not forget.

Nor will the British schoolchildren either. You recently published a poem by a young English Schoolgirl Shana Cross, from the Scarning Primary School, not far from the airfield. A couple of years ago we hosted 30 or 40 children from that same school and told them a little about you guys and what you did, then took them all flying, (all for the first time in their lives.) My guess is that that flight and your stories will stay with those children for the rest of their lives. Let us hope so.

We had our CAA / Shipdham Aero Club Safety evening last month and hopefully we will all be better and safer pilots because of it. We invited folks from other nearby airfields, Little Snoring, Horsham St Faith (now Norwich International Airport) Old Buckenham, Seething and Andrewsfield; all airfields who can trace their ancestry back to WWII and most with a strong USAAF connection. The CAA pools safety information with your own FAA and a fair amount of the filmed material shown that evening was from Stateside. Funny how pilots both sides of the Atlantic tend to make the same sorts of mistakes!

England is still in the grip of winter at the moment, so our new grass runway is still very wet and un-usable, though we still try to fly as often as the Norfolk weather will allow. We have the first sign of early spring flowers, so there is hope for more flying activity soon at your old home. There are a lot of pilots sitting round in the clubroom drinking coffee, waiting to fly...some things don't change that much...

Best wishes from your friends here in East Anglia.

Peter



Mike Fusano, General Leon Johnson's driver, shows off his Commander's first automobile.

A CRASH LANDING THAT MADE HISTORY

The late ROCKWELL GRIFFITH in *H-BAR*

According to **Will Lundy**, the Ground Crew sat transfixed, watching *H-Bar* approach the runway with one wheel down, three uncertain engines and the gas tank nearly empty. **Ursel Harvel**, Photographic Officer of the 44th BG, was on hand to take this picture; and later, to record the event in his book, *Liberators Over Europe*.

"Lt. Griffith (67th Sq.) switched his Liberator over to AFCE to conserve gasoline for the long trip from Kjeller, Norway. As the southern tip of Norway slowly faded from view, Lt. Griffith's Liberator, which had fallen slightly behind the formation, was suddenly subjected to a surprise attack by a formation of approximately fifteen ME-109s and JU-88s.

The battle was brief but vicious with tail gunner, **Sgt. Forrest S. Clark**, shooting down one of the Nazi planes as Lt. Griffith went through violent evasive action which was only partially effective. The Liberator was seriously damaged. **Sgt. William T. Kuban**, Ball Turret Gunner, was seriously wounded. Griffith's plane had fallen to an altitude of 3,000 feet before he could get it completely under control, and with a seriously wounded crewman aboard, he was faced with a three hour trip over icy, white-capped waters of the North Sea...

"... For one hundred and eighty minutes, he alternately babied and bullied the huge ship along on one good and three uncertain engines."

Griffith's story is a legend in 44th history. Only one wheel in the landing gear went down. Rather than risk the well being of his entire crew, he ordered a bail out for all except Kuban and his Co-Pilot **Lawrence Grono**.

With an enrapt audience on the ground, with crash trucks, fire engines and ambulance

on standby, Griffith and Grono slowly brought *H-Bar* to the runway, balancing their craft until the left wing tip lowered steadily until finally touching the ground. *H-Bar* was a total loss, but the entire crew was safe.

No crew member has ever expressed more gratitude for his life than **Forrest Clark**, gunner, who has dedicated much of his life to placing his pilot's story in historical sites. Recently he wrote a very detailed description of the life and times of this hero to whom he owes his life.

"When I saw General **Leon Johnson** walking across that airfield with my pilot, I knew at that moment that he had saved our lives that November day in 1943. He had brought us

home...

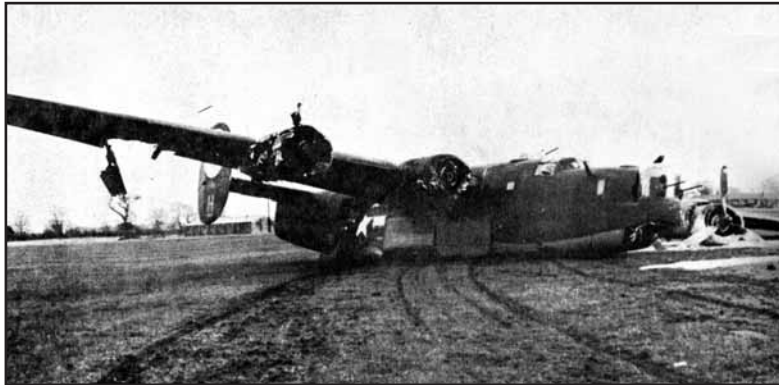
"...Griffith showed his piloting skills by getting us in the narrow fjord at BW-1 without crashing into the glacier as others had done..."

"...He in a very real sense was one of the under-rated pilots, and yet he never asked for any

hint of recognition. He was a true hero. Finally on the Lechfeld mission of 13 April 1944, badly losing fuel, we diverted to Swiss territory after the bomb run. We knew we could not make it back to the base..."

"... Now I shall tell things that perhaps nobody knows about Griffith. He and our navigator **Bob Weatherwax** had to put **Dave Edmonds**, our Bombardier, in the shower to sober him up before missions..."

Through Clark's efforts, Griffith is being memorialized at the Mighty 8th Air Force Museum in Savannah, Georgia; the WWII Memorial in Washington, later at the U.S. Air Force Memorial in Arlington, Virginia. This issue of *8 Ball Tails* will be sent to the WWII archives of the Folk Life Center at the Library of Congress.



Downed plane

FROM THE DIARY OF T/SGT SAM CERVELLERA Radio Operator on the Fred Stone Crew 22 April 1944

This was our first mission, and the target was the rail center of Hamm, Germany. It can be compared to Chicago as a nerve center. We confronted Flak as soon as we hit the German coast and all the way to the target. Some was very accurate, as **(Robert) Ryan** heard it hit the Ball Turret. Over target one third of our bombs went out. I pulled the salvo cable, and the rest went out. The waist gunners saw it flatten a two story building to the right of target. I stood on the cat-walk until flak got too accurate. My hands were almost frozen. We saw only three fighters, FW 190s, but they did not come in our formation. We had good top cover by P-47s and P-38s. They sure looked nice out there. There was a B-24 blown up to our right and low by the coast of France. Three chutes opened. We also saw a B-26 outfit plaster heck out of an airfield off the coast of France. The flak was low. It was almost sunset now, 9:40 PM, and Jerry took advantage of it and followed us in our formation to land. I wish I had a gun instead of a radio up there. The CO was pleased with our bombing. I was pleased with my salvo job. Stone was pleased with crew in general. A darn good crew. The crew said there were no atheists up there. Was I scared, no no, not yet anyway. I hope the rest are as easy. I was a little tired, but who wasn't? We won't have to go back there for a long while...29 more to go.....

Crew: **Merritt Derr**, Co-Pilot; **Andrew Patruchuk**, Navigator; **Glen Hartzell**, Nose Gunner/Toggier; **Charles Brown**, Engineer/Top Turret Gunner/**William Strange**, RW Gunner; **Robert Faust**, LW Gunner; **Morrie Meunitz**, Tail Gunner.
(The 44th did not sustain any losses on this mission.)



ANYTHING TO HELP A FRIEND

Tony Mastradone, Medical Technician, (67th Sq.) got decked out in a new uniform to serve as Best Man in a recent wedding at a WWII show in Reading, Pennsylvania.

A POST-WAR EVALUATION

Albert Speer, Minister of Arms and War Production in Nazi Germany, to Ira Eaker, Commander of USAAF, "The real importance of the air war consisted in the fact that it opened a second front long before the invasion of Europe. That front was the skies over Germany...If you had repeated your bombing attacks and destroyed our ball-bearing industry, the war would have been over a year earlier."

This meeting was arranged by Gerald Gross, Navigator on the Thomas McKenna crew, later publisher and author.

Age is the best possible fire extinguisher for flaming youth!!

AVIATION THOUGHTS (from Roy Owen)

About rules:

- A. The rules are a good place to hide if you don't have a better idea and the talent to execute it.
- B. If you deviate from a rule, it must be a flawless performance; e.g. if you fly under a bridge, don't hit the bridge!

If you're going to fly low, do not fly slow.

You can't fly forever without getting killed.

Ed. Note: The average person can't get off this planet alive anyway.

SIGNIFICANT DATES

1 May 1942

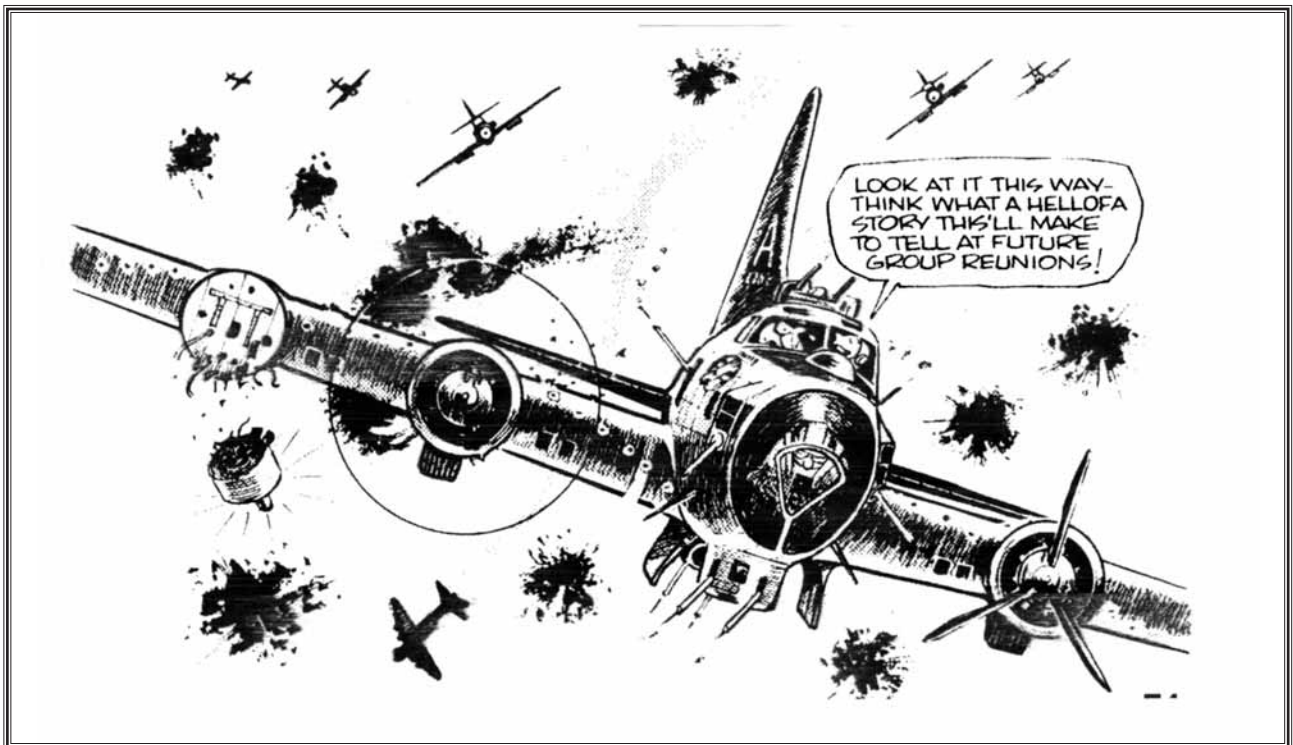
The USAAF accepted the first B-24D from the Ft. Worth Consolidated plant. By late 1942 40% of the Consolidated work force were women. By 1944 the Consolidated-Vultee payroll included more than 101,000 workers in ten states, operating 13 modification, research & operating divisions.

8 May 1945

VE Day

31 May 1945

All B-24 production terminated.



MONUMENTS

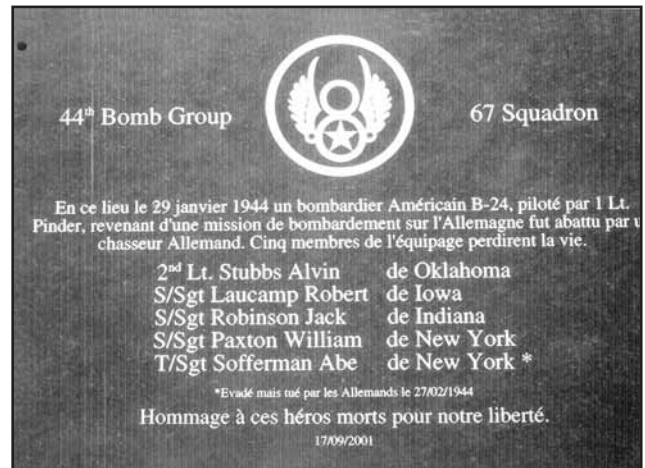


Bob & Bernice Reasoner with plaque

The late **Paul Kay** wanted monuments listed, so that anyone visiting that country could find them. **Robert Reasoner**, a survivor of the crash of *Bat Outa Hell* on 3 January 1943 provided this picture of the bronze plaque, honouring the men who were lost that day.

The **Roy B. Erwin** crew was on a mission to St. Nazaire. On the return, a navigational error brought several planes to Wales where they ran out of fuel and crashed. The pilot, Roy Erwin; Co-Pilot **Clark Swanson** and Navigator **Thomas Deavenport** were KIA. **John Gavin**, Bombardier; **Hylan Simmons**, Engineer; **Thomas Laskowski**, Radio Operator; **Delbert Perry**, Asst. Engineer; **Lanvilleo McCarty**, Asst. Radio Operator; **George Kelsey**, Gunner and **Robert Reasoner**, Tail Gunner were all seriously injured and hospitalized.

Bob and Bernice Reasoner were present to see the plaque raised for his lost crew members. It is located in Haverfordwest, Wales.



Plaque at Winbrin

PLAQUE AT WINBRIN, BELGIUM

Peter Loncke, Belgium Airman and 44th BG Member, sent this photograph of the plaque that commemorates the losses of the **Harold Pinder** crew on X-Bar. The mission was to Frankfurt, Germany, bombed via PFF on 29 February 1944. The Liberator was attacked by both Me 109s and FW 190s. Harold Pinder, pilot described the attack: "We took 20 mm hits under the flight deck that cut the control cables. The A/C dove out of control. I remember the wing afire and at least the #4 engine knocked out." Three gunners were KIA: The fourth gunner became POW, along with the pilot & co-pilot. He sustained wounds from the crash. The Bombardier was KIA; Pinder and **Abe Sofferman** evaded, then both were captured. Sofferman was KIA by his captors; the Co-Pilot was POW, evaded, repatriated, then died. Pinder became POW.



Gratenois, France

PLAQUE NEAR GRATENOIX, FRANCE

This monument near the town of Gratenois, France was erected in honour of the **Frank Sobotka** crew. Three members were KIA, the pilot, **Clair Shaeffer**, Engineer (father of Lois Cianci) and **Thomas Capizzi**, Radio Operator. Four of the crew became POWs: **Frederick Butler**, Navigator; **August Smanietto**, Ball Turret Gunner; **Andrew Ross**, RW Gunner and **Charles Shockley**, LW Gunner. Two evaded and returned to England: **Milton Rosenblatt** and **Abraham Teitel**.

...continued on page 14



The people of Hammilkiln, Belgium honored the crews that were lost on the Wesel mission, The *Southern Comfort IV* was lost on that mission. Two survivors of the Chandler Crew were **Louis DeBlasio** and **Robert Vance**. Also lost on that mission was *K-Bar*. All members of the **Leonard Crandell** crew were KIA. **Anibal Diaz**, flying in *Joplin Jalopy*, fell from the plane and was KIA. **John Delaney**, flying in a P-47 went down after dropping white phosphorus on the Anti-Aircraft crew that succeeded in knocking out four B-24s that were dropping supplies to the British paratroopers who had just crossed the Rhine River.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

GROUP PERSONNEL SECTION February 1945

On the second day of the month, Technical Sergeant **Hugh G. Bentley** of this Headquarters returned to the station after an absence of a little more than six months. Sgt. Bentley is an administrative clerk, who, in July 1944 was placed on Detached Service in Sweden. He was one of the trained AGD team, composed of a Major, a Captain, and four enlisted men, which arrived in Stockholm on August 1944 to handle all administrative matters pertaining to American personnel interned in that country. What a life -living in a hotel in Stockholm, wearing civilian clothes, and drawing per diem. Sounds like a soldier's dream, yet Sgt. Bentley tells us how anxious he was to return - guess that proves that we've got a really good outfit.

When this administrative team arrived in Sweden, they found more than one thousand (1,000) American airmen and more than one hundred (100) American aircraft, eighty-five (85) percent of which had been repaired and placed in commission. They stepped in and took over an outfit that was fairly well organized and running smoothly. This condition, of course, was quite surprising, as everything was set up and run by internee personnel. Internees were treated very well here, having been given superior quarters and rations and

recreational facilities were more than adequate. They even received occasional passes into Stockholm.

Perhaps we can attribute this high exemplary treatment to the efforts of the Swedish military officer in charge of all interned personnel, Major Count Felk Bernadette, the nephew of the King. It was through his keen and fair interest, his foresight and initiative, and his sympathetic understanding of the problems, that the entire program could be so successful. In return for this, the internees always conducted themselves in a manner becoming that of the best American soldier.

One by one the internees were all repatriated, until now there was no further need for a staff of trained administrative personnel to handle their affairs. So Sergeant Bentley has returned to the group with fond memories and stories galore. He is once more engaged with duties in the Group Personnel Section.

THE REST OF THE WAR STORY FEBRUARY 1945

The Battle of the Bulge had ended. Germany was in full retreat from the Eastern front. Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin met in Yalta. American and British troops were nearing the Rhine River. On the other side of the world, the Marines landed on Iwo Jima.



MAIL & E-MAIL

Larry Herpel, nephew of **Virgil Fouts**, is hoping someone will dig into his old photos from the war and find a very rare picture. *Cactus* (#41-24191), piloted by Fouts, was on its first mission on 22 March 1943. The target was the sub pens and docks at Wilhelmshaven. The plane was shot down by enemy A/C and probably crashed in the North Sea; there were no survivors. This was the first mission of the 506th Squadron, also the first plane and crew lost by the 506th. They had been in Shipdham for only a few weeks.

Is it possible that somebody photographed the plane on the way across the pond? They flew across in late February 1943. Could a picture have been taken stateside--Albuquerque or Wendover--when the crew was in training? If anybody happens to have the picture, it will be greatly treasured by his nephew, Larry.

Ed. Note: There are probably dozens of boxes of photos stored in many veterans' attics. This is a good time to dig them out and locate people who would treasure them.



From Steve Adams we received this picture of the Richard Hruby crew with the Royal Navy Crew that picked them up from the English Channel. The account of Hruby's successful ditching appeared in the Winter 2007 issue of the *8 Ball Tails*. The picture is part of the Mark Brotherton collection.



From **George Washburn**: Upon reading **Robert Lehnhausen's** tribute to **Herman "Joe" Eckstein** in the winter issue, I was reminded of an incident that occurred on one of our missions, which I have always meant to put in writing. Many years ago, at a 44th reunion in Dayton, Ohio, I telephoned Joe, who lived not too far away and urged him to come down to the reunion. He came that afternoon and we immediately recognized each other after parting ways in 1944. Joe went back home that evening and returned the next day with his wife, Millie. They stayed for the rest of the reunion. At the banquet, I was asked to relate some of my experiences and told this one. Last year at our reunion in Washington, Joe's son, Tony and granddaughter, Hannah, called on us one evening, so I also told them about this incident.

The mission of Oct. 18, 1944 was to Leverkusen, Germany. and was flown in very bad weather. The 44th lost 3 crews that day--all after leaving the target area. It is believed that **LT. Bakalo** of the 67th Squadron collided with **Lt. Dayball** of the 68th. Also lost was **Robert Lehnhausen's** brother, **Edward**. Lightening struck the tail of his plane, causing the deaths of the entire crew. There would have been one more crew lost if it were not for Joe Eckstein's presence of mind and piloting abilities.

We were flying in the #3 position on the left wing of the lead ship. Returning from the target, we were led into the top of heavy clouds at 24,000 feet. As we went into the soup, I had Joe take over as it would be easier for him to hold formation than me (flying cross cockpit). The visibility was very limited and we lost sight of the lead when he started a turn to the right. I took over and on instruments started a 180 degree turn to the left to get away from the formation. After rolling into a 15 degree bank on the artificial horizon, the airspeed started to climb. I applied back pressure, but the airspeed continued upwards. At about 220 Miles per hour, I became completely disoriented and even felt that we were upside down. Joe said "are you all right" to which I replied "no". He then said "Do you

...continued on page 16

want me to take it". Thank God I was not too proud to say "Yes". As he took over I remember seeing (a little late) the turn and bank indicator (needle and ball). The needle was pegged to the left and the ball was all the way to the left. We were in the classic " Dead man's spiral". The artificial horizon still indicated a 15 degree level turn and had failed.

Joe, properly, had been scanning all the instruments and very quickly had analyzed the situation.. He proceeded to level the wings using only needle and ball and after a series of ups and downs got the airspeed stabilized in level flight. We then reset the artificial horizon and completed the turn back out of the clouds. It was clear over Brussels and I let down and landed at a field with steel landing mats and lots of mud. There we waited a few hours until the storm passed by- loaded up another crew whose ship was disabled and flew back to Shipdham in clear weather.

I will never forget that incident and am certain that I would not have recovered from that spiral. We all owed our lives to Herman " Joe " Eckstein. Not only was he an outstanding pilot, but an unassuming real gentleman. I am sure all his family are very proud of him as we all are.



MORE ABOUT RAMSTAFFEL (That's 'Ramming' in German)

"It was an old strategy with a new twist," wrote Donald L. Miller, author of *The Story of World War II*. In desperation to beat the USAF formations that were successfully reaching war production industries, the Germans introduced heavily armoured twin-engine fighters, Zerstorers. The Mustangs chewed them up. The next idea was called the Sturmbock, or Battering Ram, made up of a more strongly armed and armoured fighter, a modified Fw 190 with enhanced armour plating, a bullet resistant canopy, two auxiliary fuel tanks and five fearsome guns. Flying in waves of up to forty planes, this eight-ton 'flying tank' became for a short time, the most lethal bomber destroyer of the war.

The Zerstorers pilots declared great success at bringing down USAF bombers. If a Sturm Group pilot failed to score a direct hit on an enemy bomber, he was bound by a solemn oath to ram it. Although they had frightful numbers of casualties, these daring young Germans were driven by the belief that if their country fell, no mercy would be granted the German people.

On a mission to Kassel, the 445th Bomb Group was leading the 2nd Air Division. The bombs were released at Gottingen, 20 miles from Kassel. Then they were hit low and from the rear by three Sturm Groups. The Sturmbocks hung from the Liberators' propellers and savaged the exposed undersides of the bombers. One Liberator after another was turned to smoke.

One Sturm pilot said, "When I couldn't shoot the bomber down, I remembered the commitment to ram. "My left wing sawed through the bomber's rudder. My wing was so damaged, I couldn't control the plane. I was pulled out of the cockpit and my chute opened..."

To deal with this new strategy, the 8th Air Force sent fighter formations ahead of the bombers to break up the Sturmgruppen. The P-51s massacred the slow flying Sturm Group, along with the faster Me 109s that flew with them. Among the outstanding Mustang pilots was Chuck Yeager, who destroyed five Me 109s over Bremen, making him the 8th AF's first 'ace in a day'.

Since July, General Jimmy Doolittle had been receiving reports of small numbers of jet fighters and rocket-powered planes that were shadowing his bomber formations. They would fly at a safe distance from the bombers and taunt them with their performance capabilities, but rarely engage. The AF intelligence was most worried about the Me 262, the fastest A/C in existence. It flew 540 mph, about 100 mph faster than the Mustang, and it ran on diesel fuel.

Despite Germany's great production ability, Allied planes succeeded in destroying their delivery system. Of more than 1,200 Me 262's available, fewer than 200 made it into combat.

...continued on page 17

However, as reported in the previous 8 Ball Tails, Oberst Hermann picked up the ramming idea and organized the Elbe Fighters. His plan was to assemble 5,000-6,000 feet above the bomb formation; each pilot would pick a target and dive straight down on it, slamming into the weakest structural part of a heavy bomber-the section of the fuselage just in front of the tail assembly. A well placed hit was capable of breaking a bomber in two.



Liberator from 448th BG torn completely in half.

Hitler and Goring approved Hermann's plan, but only air cadets could be used, not veteran pilots. These inexperienced airmen were easily knocked out of the sky by the Mustangs and Thunderbolts that pursued them relentlessly.

At first these battle collisions were considered the outcome of enemy fighters pressing their attacks too closely and going out of control when disabled by defensive gunfire. Further information revealed that the oft rumoured 'Ramstaffell' was at last reality.

When the 9th Armored Division captured the Ludendorff Bridge at Remagen, air support kept the enemy from sending in reinforcements. A major blitz on the 25 Marshalling Yards kept the German Army at bay. Production of planes and weapons in the nation's industrial regions was slowed to a crawl. The Luftwaffe was also running out of pilots. On 25 April 1945 the 44th flew its last mission. VE Day was May 8th.

Ed. Note: Research information provided by Bob Lehnhausen.



Alfred Cataldo (Squadron Draftsman/ Aircraft Mechanic) in a letter to **Will Lundy**: "Pete" the Rooster was our mascot for the 464th Sub Depot. I remember how Pete got high on a half pint of 3.2, or maybe it was Mild & Bitter. Then somebody slipped that poor old rooster an energy pill from an escape kit on D-Day. That bird got up on the bike rack and crowed for about 24 hours. He stayed awake with the rest of us!



From Brad Wallingford, nephew of the **Bartley Twins**: If anyone has flown in *Sabrina III*, *Down De Hatch* or *Passion Pit*, I'd like to hear from you; also I'm looking for other crew photos with these aircraft. If anyone remembers the Bartley twins, I'd like to hear from you. 712 S. 91st S. 91st E. Avenue, Tulsa, OK 74412 Tel. (H) 918 260-1386; (W) 918 445-2445.



A HERO'S BURIAL FOR GENERAL WILLIAM BRANDON.

General Brandon (a Major at that time) was pilot on *Suzy Q*, flying with Col. **Leon Johnson** to Ploesti. A set of circumstances brought him to this assignment. Right after the briefing by General Ent, Col. Johnson announced that 'Pappy' Moore, **Bob Kollimer** and **Bill Brandon** would draw straws to determine who would be pilot on

this low level mission. Moore drew the short straw, so he was chosen; however, he completed his 25 missions and asked to return home. Kollimer drew the second shortest, so he was the back-up. He flew the low level practice missions. Brandon did not expect to fly, but in his own words, 'fate decreed otherwise'.

In a letter to Bob Lehnhausen he said, "At about 8 PM the night before the mission, Bob came to my tent to tell me he had the Crud, but intended to fly the mission anyway. I told him 'no way', that there was too much riding on that mission, and Col. Johnson was not a B-24 pilot. (I don't think he ever landed one.) I then went to Col. Johnson's tent. I informed him of Kolliner's problem and said, 'I had better go get some sleep'. He nodded his concurrence, and that's how I ended up in the cat-bird's seat.

Ed. Note: Brandon is noted for his modesty. He avoided the reporters, in order that Leon Johnson would be given all the credit for having led this group to White Five.



From Delores Moore, wife of the late **Robert Moore**: My husband wrote a documentary of his war experiences for our three sons. In his colourful description of return home, he said, "I received my discharge September 24, 1945. I could have waited for the train, but a bus was leaving at 6 PM that evening, so I took the bus. I stood in the well next to the door for six hours before I got a seat. I rode the bus for about a week, and swore I would never get on a bus again."



From Susan Alexander niece of **Thomas Cordes**: Tom's picture is on a web site of a Netherlander who is honouring the men interred in the Margarten Cemetery. The web site is: <http://www.basher82.nl>.



BUZZING AROUND THE INTERNET

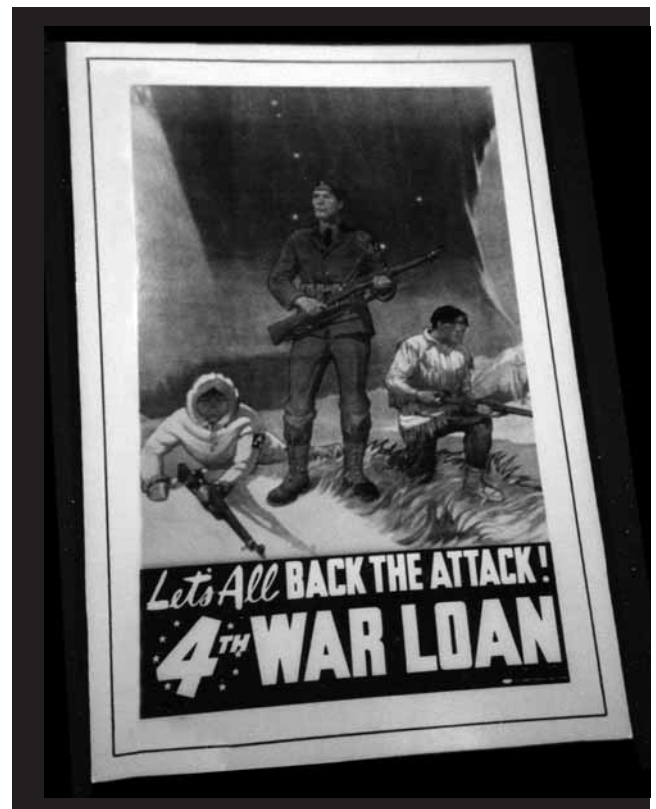
The aviation minded reader might enjoy the discourse between the pilots of Qantas airlines and their ground crew, as appears on their 'gripe sheet':

*Pilot: Something loose in the cockpit
Solution: Something tightened in cockpit*

*Pilot: Dead bugs on windshield
Solution: Live bugs on back order*

*Pilot: Evidence of leak on right main landing gear.
Solution: Evidence removed*

*Pilot: Mouse in cockpit.
Solution: Cat installed.*



Mary Aston's Sales Project

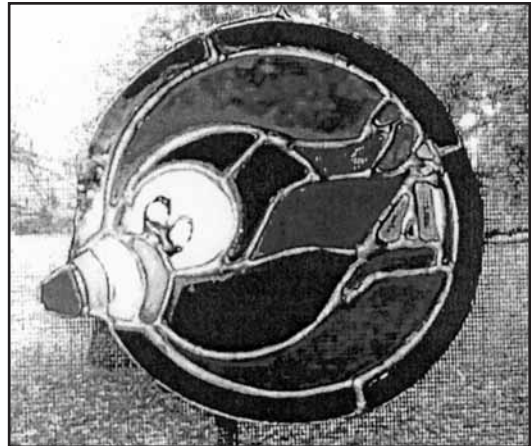
WWII Lapel & Hat Pin
 8th Air Force - DFC - Air Metal - Purple
 Heart - POW - ETO - WWII victory
 \$9.00 each + \$0.39 postage (each)
 (no photo available)

Proceeds go to 44th BGVA
 Place order with Mary Aston (706 283-1337)
 Mail check to
 830 Cardinal Dr., Elberton, GA 30635



Sun-Catcher

Diameter is 14" with attached chain to
 hang in a window
 \$100.00 + \$20 for UPS packing and
 shipping = \$120.00



Sun-Catcher

Diameter is 5.25" with attached loop
 hole to hang in a window; similar to
 14" logo, but no lettering
 \$50.00 + \$10 for UPS packing and
 shipping = \$60.00



Sun-Catcher

Pelican-67th Bomb Squadron, 44th
 Bomb Group-8th AF (The only 44th
 squaron to have its own logo)
 Diameter is 14" with attached chain to
 hang in a window \$100.00 + \$20 for
 UPS packing and shipping = \$120.00



New Air Force Pin
 United States Air Force
 60th Anniversary
 1947-2007

\$12.00 each + \$0.39 postage (each)

The 44th Bomb Group is still searching for a salesman to replace the late and beloved Sam Miceli. If you have a little time to run a mail order business, we need you, call me, Ruth Davis-Morse, Secretary. 717 846-8948



**Mr. STEPHEN ADAMS
OUR U.K. REPRESENTATIVE**

"Steve" unquestionably holds the record for our longest and busiest supporter in England! His interest in our Group and our records surely goes back to his early youth when the school children in East Anglia remembered our B-24s flying overhead or based so near them in their early days. When we made our quick departure in June-July 1945, headed for home and then onward to Japan, our vacant airfields must have offered them great opportunities to visit and to learn more about us.

It was in the mid 1970s when Irene and I first learned about the 2nd Air Division and their Memorial Library in Norwich, and their reunion was scheduled to take place in Norwich. There was no question, we must and did attend that one! At that time Irene and I were met by three of these youngsters - Steve Adams, Paul Wilson and David Morgan. They wanted to show us their collections of data about the 44th BG and Shipdham Airfield. Even way back then they had managed to accumulate a considerable number of photos and data.

Steve did not drive, but Paul did, he had a car, and the three of them spent most of their available weekends on our old base, learning as much about it as they could. Paul was on crutches, having been seriously and permanently injured in an accident, but managed to go everywhere that Steve and David wanted to investigate.

Time and the elements had caused considerable damage to our old, abandoned buildings. Wind and rain had damaged many roofs, with rust eating away at the reinforcement iron rods in both the walls and the roof of the control tower itself. The interior walls of some of these buildings

where our artists had painted various artwork and scenes, were seriously threatened. So Steve, who at that time worked at a roofing supply company, obtained the necessary materials and spent many weekends making repairs.

When Doug Genge, owner of the Monster Crane business that is now established next to our Control Tower, saw Steve busy repairing, and learning that (by then) I, we, were interested in an attempt to put a new roof on the tower to save it from further rusting and decay, he became involved as well. Doug spent several thousands of Pounds on both the new roof as well as two complete exterior walls. I sold his lithographs of the tower to many of our members, and this money went to those repairs and to our new organization of 44th BGVA.

Steve has always been a collector of photos of the base, our men and our planes, and continues to do so. He "surfs" the Web, looking for any photos of our planes, our airmen, our personnel. He bids on them all, and has managed to obtain many to add to his collection. Over the years, I have swapped many photos with him, with him doing most of the work and expense of copying. Also, he obtained our current personnel rosters, wrote many letters to people, hoping to get a copy of their crew photos, their airplanes, etc., as well as to share his collection with them.

In addition, he also has been very active in helping us with the difficult job relating to our aircraft names and aircraft identity numbers. The reason for that problem is that in most of our records, only the last three digits of an airplane's full number was utilized. All too often we had more than one aircraft with the same last three digits. So Steve has spent considerable time and effort

while working with Tom Brittan and our Group historians to positively establish the correct identity number.

When Phyllis DuBois was in charge of the American Room, she worked with Steve and Paul Wilson (and others) to assist her whenever American guests visited the Library, wanted to visit our old base as well. She would telephone these volunteers, who would then guide them to and around our base.

Steve also has been instrumental getting our Master Data Base CD installed in the three computers utilized in the Norwich Library within the new The Forum building in Norwich - the same building in which the 2nd ADA's American Room is located. So our entire computer Master Data Base is not only available within our American Room, but through out the entire Norwich Main Library.

Steve also works act as "postman" in Norwich with each issue of our 8 Ball Tails. Ruth Morse sends him several copies of our 8 Ball Tails bound for England in one bundle. Then Steve must go through his routine to get them all distributed to each individual person.

Steve also handles our Memorial Day wreath laying ceremonies at the American Cemetery near Cambridge each year. That includes the selecting and paying for the wreath itself. John Page had volunteered to perform this ceremony for many years but lately, Steve has done it himself.

Although we originally set up a bank account in Norwich with which to cover his

expenditures on our behalf, he has never once utilized that fund. Although we've tried to "twist" his arm to force him to utilize that fund, he still will not do so.

Back in the time period when our organization was identified as 44th BG HMG , early 1990s, we failed to locate a 66th Squadron member who would research and compile the history of the 66th Sq. One or two actually agreed to do so, but no "history text" was ever prepared. It was at that time that Steve volunteered to take on that task, as well. Todd, Kiefer and I supplied Steve with background history for that Squadron. When Steve submitted his work for printing, his printing company advised him that a Squadron book would not "sell". Or, in other words, they felt they would not make a profit - too limited an "audience".

So Steve enlisted the assistance of Ron Mackay, they replaced that Squadron text with an overall Group coverage, utilized his extensive supply of photos, and completed their fine book, "The 44th Bomb Group In World War II". It is still available for sale.

Quite obviously, Steve has contributed a great deal of work and substance toward our rich history. In doing so, he has surely become our FRIEND, INDEED! And for that, we owe him many thanks and our sincere gratitude well beyond what we can repay.

So, from all of us, we most sincerely thanks you, Steve & Janice

Will Lundy
P.O. Box 315,
Bridgeport, CA 93517



You can always tell luck from ability by its duration.

REGARDING THE 2007 REUNION

The Board of the 44th BGVA tried to arrange the finances of our Reunion in the way we have become accustomed -- each paying the hotel separately. First, Perry Morse's daughter Ellen Kelly worked out a good agenda with the Tourist Bureau Representative. Then Jackie & Lowell Roberts volunteered to visit the area, and fine-tune the arrangements. We think that the best possible schedule has been made at the best possible price.

Transportation from the nearest airport, Springfield, has been a challenge for the Roberts to arrange. If you are driving and can carpool with other members, that would be great. Shuttle service is being worked on. The next *8 Ball Tails* will provide further information on that service. Car rentals will be available through Enterprise at the rate of \$71 for the three days. A number of Board members will be driving, and expect to help with transport. **NOBODY WILL BE LEFT SITTING AT THE AIRPORT.**

Next: It is important that you register early, no later than July 2nd, 2007. We realize this is asking a lot for a Labor Day Weekend. If you register and have an unexpected problem arise, we will refund your money.

If you are flying, please let us know what time your plane will arrive in the Springfield/Branson Airport. We are working on transportation to the hotel.

Branson entertains many military organizations. The schedule of events, offered to us looks like a lot of fun. All the amenities are there for gatherings and recollections of heroic, sad, and sometimes funny happenings that carved your lives, sixty two years ago.

44TH BOMB GROUP VETERANS ASSOCIATION GRAND PLAZA HOTEL 245 N. WILDWOOD DRIVE, BRANSON, MISSOURI 2007 REUNION SCHEDULE

Lodging: Grand Plaza Hotel for 3 nights stay

Friday, August 31, 2007

Registration 9:00 A.M. to 5:00 PM

Welcome Reception 6:00 PM

(Dinner on your own)

Sunday, September 2, 2007

Breakfast

6:00 P.M. Banquet

Cash Bar

Saturday, September 1, 2007

Breakfast

9:00 A.M. Membership Meeting

5:00 P.M. Cash Bar

6:00 P.M. Squadron Dinners

Monday, September 3, 2007

Breakfast and Goodbyes

OPTIONAL SHOW PACKAGE

Saturday, September 1, 2007

12:00 pm Showboat Branson Belle

or 1:00 pm Titanic Museum

Sunday, September 2, 2007

10:00 am Red Skelton Tribute

2:00 pm Veterans Memorial Museum

44th BOMB GROUP VETERANS ASSOCIATION

REUNION REGISTRATION

August 31-September 2, 2007
Grand Plaza Hotel, Branson, Missouri

Please fill out a form for each registrant

Please Print or Type. All Information Must Be Complete

Last Name _____ First Name _____

Spouse/Guest _____ Squadron _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Phone _____

Per Person Pricing: Single: \$456.00 Double: \$308.00 Triple: \$266.00 Quad: \$245.00
Please indicate bed preference: King _____ Double _____ Single _____

Includes: Welcome Reception, three free breakfasts, Hospitality Room, free parking,

Squadron Dinner. Please indicate choice of entrée:
_____ Chicken _____ Shrimp

Banquet: Please indicate choice of entrée:
_____ Prime Rib _____ Salmon _____ Chicken

OPTIONAL TOURS:

Saturday September 1, 2007

12:00 pm Showboat Branson Bell (with lunch) \$60.00 each
or 1:00 pm Titanic Museum \$30.00 each

Sunday, September 2, 2007

10:00 am Red Skelton Tribute \$36.00 each
2:00 pm Veterans Memorial Museum \$19.50 each

Payment

Number of Registrants (See Prices Above)

Single _____ \$ _____
Double _____ \$ _____
Triple _____ \$ _____
Quad _____ \$ _____

Tours: Show Boat \$ _____
Titanic Museum \$ _____
Red Skelton Tribute \$ _____
Veterans Memorial Museum \$ _____

Extra nights are \$99.00 per room per night, all taxes included. If you are planning on spending extra days before or after the Reunion, please inform us of your plans. It will help our treasurer get the correct information to the hotel.

Please send checks to 44th BG Treasurer:

Richard Lynch, 109 Jason Road, Box 518 Conrad, IA 50621, 0518



FOLDED WINGS

*What's hallowed ground? 'Tis what gives birth
To sacred thoughts in souls of worth!*

*Peace! Independence! Truth! Go forth earth's compass round;
And your great deeds shall make earth all hallowed ground.*

BAKER, LANNING #19279 68th Squadron 12 August 2006 T/Sgt. Baker was an Engineer/Top Turret Gunner on the **Joseph Kessler** crew. They were part of the group that went on the first North African tour of operations. Their first mission 13 August 1943 was to the Messerschmitt plant at Wiener Neustadt, Austria. After two raids to Italy, they returned to England and bombed strategic areas in Holland and France. Then, sent back to North Africa, they were part of the second raid to Wiener Neustadt. Seven planes were lost, one crash landed in Sicily; and the Kessler crew, flying in *Margaret Ann*, did an emergency landing on a grass runway near Bari, Italy. Three members of the crew were wounded.

Upon returning to England, on 8 April 1944 Baker flew with **William Altemus** in an unnamed plane to Langenhagen, Germany. Attacked by enemy A/C, the plane caught fire. Lanning and three others parachuted out, were promptly captured and became POW. The pilot and six members of the crew were KIA.

In his 22 missions, Lanning flew with a number of pilots - **Joseph Kessler, Baxter Weant, W.D. Hughes, Raymond Hamlyn** and **William Altemus**.

After the war, he became a Hospital Administrator. He and his wife Kathleen lived in Ft. Wayne, Indiana.

Cardinal, Oliver J. #19652 68th Squadron December 2006 T/Sgt. Cardinal was Flight Engineer on the **Elmer K. Kohler's** crew, many times flying with 44th BGVA's President, **George Washburn**, who was Co-Pilot. His FW's report coincides with the death of a crewmate, **Lester 'Jim' Dietz**. Cardinal flew twenty five missions, the first on 11 July 1944. His mission assignments show the progress of the war after D-Day. On the request of General Patton, they bombed the Germans troops trying to escape the St. Lo area, as the Allies were steadily moving eastward. They bombed the railway stations, industries and fuel producing industries in Germany, most of the time flying in *Corky*. They also flew in *Flak Magic* and *Lili Marlene*. Cardinal's last mission was 30 November 1944.

DeBerry, Harmon #19966 67th Squadron 1 January 2004 T/Sgt. DeBerry was the Engineer/Top Turret Gunner on the **Russell Pellow** crew. On one occasion he flew with **A.J. Hardy**, Command Pilot. His first of 28 flights was 5 August 1944 at the time when knocking out A/C factories and rail transportation had high priorities. Most of his flights were into Germany; three were into France. The Pellow crew flew in *Glory Bee, Myrtle the Fertile Turtle, Judy's Buggy* and many unnamed A/C. His last mission was March 14, 1945.

FOLDED WINGS

Dietz, Lester J. "Jim" #20005 68th Squadron
November 2004 T/Sgt. Dietz was a Radio Operator on the **Elmer K. Kohler** crew. He was a member of the same crew as **Oliver Cardinal** whose FW report appears above. He, too, flew with Co-Pilot **George Washburn**, President of 44th BGVA. His flights took him to sites in France and Germany, flying in *Corky, Flak Magic* and *Lili Marlene*. He flew 34 missions from 16 July 1944 to 30 November 1944.

EGAN, WILLIAM #23193 67th Squadron 7
February 2007 1st Lt. Egan was a Bombardier on the **James Hill** crew. He flew 26 missions, the first on July 2, 1943, his last on March 12, 1944. Completing that number of missions during those early days was a miracle, as ten missions was considered a surprisingly lucky number.

The Hill crew's introduction to combat was on arrival to Benina Main, where they were first dispatched to Italy and Sicily. They were part of the group that flew to Ploesti and succeeded in making it back, stopping first on the island of Malta. They were on both raids to the Messerschmidt plant at Wiener-Neustadt in Austria. Upon returning to England they flew to Germany and France. Calaban succeeded in coming out of these missions, battered and battle-worn. When these missions were completed, they were the only surviving plane in the 67th. Commander **William Cameron** stated that *Calaban* was the most shot-up plane that kept coming back. Most of the flights were in *Calaban*, but they also flew in *Princess Charlotte, Sure Shot, Earthquake McGoon, F For Freddie, Raggedy Ann II* and *D-Barfly*. In addition to flying with James Hill, Egan also flew with **Roland Gentry**, and with Command Pilots **Richard Butler, Dexter Hodge** and **William S. Aldridge**.

Bill and his wife Teresa have two grandsons who graduated from the Air Force Academy. Bill had the honour of commissioning one of them as an officer in the USAF.

Gavett, Franklin #20339 66th Squadron 4
August 2002 T/Sgt. Gavett was the Radio Operator on the **William Ogden** crew, but for unknown reasons that crew flew only one mission, 31 July 1944 to Ludwigshafen, Germany on *B U Baby*. Undoubtedly they were given other non-combat assignments which are not recorded in the Database.

Hawkins, Alfred G. #20587 506 Squadron 3
January 2007 S/Sgt. Hawkins began as a gunner on the **Thomas Waters** crew, but before his tour was completed, he served as Togglier, and on one occasion, as Bombardier. His first mission was August 9, 1944. On one mission of his 33 missions, he flew with the **Clyde Horsley** crew. He flew in many different planes: *I Walk Alone, Down De Hatch, Shack Rat, Chief's Delight/Chief Wapello, Southern Comfort III, Tuffy, Puritanical Bitch/Puritanical Witch, Sabrina III* and *Joplin Jalopy*. His last mission to Koblenz was 2 January 1945.

After the war, Hawkins was employed as an Electronic Technician. He and his wife Charlotte bought a home in the country where he could enjoy gardening. He was also a golfer. The couple had six children. They resided in Swanton, Ohio.





FOLDED WINGS

Heskett, Donald #20640 66th Squadron 30 June 2003 Lt. Heskett's first mission on 21 August 1943 was as a Flight Officer, flying as Co-Pilot with **Joseph Flaherty** on *Princess Charlotte/Sure Shot*. His second mission as a Flight Officer was with **Thomas Hobson**. On his third and all following missions, he had his own crew. On the raid to the Chemical Works at Ludwigshafen on 30 December 1943, the *Bull of The Woods* was attacked by FW 190s, knocking out the controls, whereupon Heskett gave the 'bail out' signal. The Co-Pilot and RW Gunner were KIA by the fighters; Heskett, the Bombardier, Radio Operator, Ball Turret Gunner, Left Wing Gunner and Tail Gunner all managed to evade and return to England. The Navigator evaded, was later captured, and was a POW until released by the Patton Army. Heskett escaped by walking across Portugal.

Hodge, Dexter #20681 66th Squadron 4 July 2006 Col. Hodge was among the first group to fly to England. He had already distinguished himself before entering the 44th BG. In 1940 he graduated from Texas A&M and was commissioned 2nd Lt. with the Army Reserves. He served with the 69th CAC at Ft. Crockett Texas. On July 9, 1941 he vacated his commission and enlisted in the Flying Cadets and became a pilot. He was re-commissioned 2nd Lt, and was assigned to the 66th Squadron at Barksdale Field, LA, serving as B-24 Instructor Pilot, Squadron Operations Officer and Squadron Commander. Next he was assigned to the 44th BG HQs as Group Operations Officer, later as Deputy Group Commander. From Barksdale he flew 18 night time antisubmarine missions, and during that time was promoted to Lt. Colonel.

The Database credits Hodge with 25 missions, the first 12 December 1942. At that time formation flying was very new to American airmen, so Hodge frequently accompanied planes in combat as Command Pilot, sometimes as Co-Pilot, expressly to study the success of formation flying. (*According to Bob Norsen, frequently as many as three men of high rank flew on these planes for the purpose of studying combat techniques in formation. The pilots were too busy flying the plane to study the formation.*)

Hodge flew in many planes: *Avenger, Sad Sack, Fascinatin' Witch, Queen Anne, Forky II, Scrappy II, Queen Marlene, F For Freddy, M'Darling, Mr 5 by 5, and Phyllis.*

He was part of the group that went to Benina Main in Libya, and flew as Co-Pilot with the **Robert E. Miller** crew to Ploesti. His last mission was 26 April 1944. After the war, Hodge and his wife Mertie moved to Bryan, Texas, where he became a rancher and also engaged in Real Estate sales. The couple raised two sons.

Kabak, Samuel #20872 66th Squadron 19 October 2000 The Database has no record of the activities of this member who served in the 44th BG.





FOLDED WINGS

Lasco, Henry #23239 66th Squadron 10 February 2007 1st Lt. Lasco was a pilot on *Sad Sack II*, and after one flight to France with **Joseph Flaherty** on *Queen Anne*, he and his crew were off to the Libyan desert. They bombed the marshalling yards at Messina to keep Germans from supplying troops to Sicily, in preparation for the upcoming invasion. Catania was next, knocking out the communications system; then on to strategic sites in Italy. After that, the Lasco crew practiced low level flying, in preparation for the historic flight to the white target at Ploesti.

At 'Bomb's Away' Lasco's Navigator was killed; ME 109's attacked; the Bombardier and Engineer were hit; then a bullet went through Lasco's jaw, rendering him helpless. The right rudder of *Sad Sack II* was gone, the left wing went down. The Co-pilot was not able to control the plane which was already on fire. It crashed in a cornfield.

Four members of the crew became POWs; five were KIA. Lasco's crew members have very warm memories of his upbeat attitude when all were in a hospital in Budapest. Despite his serious injuries, he was able to make them laugh.

After undergoing orthopedic and plastic surgery, Lasco became an accountant with the 3 M Company in the Aerospace Sales Engineering Department. He and his wife Nancy retired to Rio Verde, Arizona. The couple have a son and two daughters.

Lowenthal, Gerald #21145 506 Squadron September 2006 Lowenthal was a Life Member. He resided in Maywood, Illinois. No information is in the database about this member.

Moore, Robert A. #21394 67th Squadron 26 October 2006 T/Sgt. Moore was sometimes an Engineer/Top Gunner, sometimes Tail or Waist Gunner with a number of different crews. Most of his flights were with **R.W. Bethel**; but he also flew with **Richard Wynes** and **Herbert Bayless**. On one mission he flew with **Wayne H. Middleton** as Command Pilot; another with **Walter I. Bunker**, C.P. Moore's first mission with the 44th BG was 7 August 1944; his last, 8 March 1945.

Before being assigned to the 44th BG, he had flown fourteen missions with the 489th BG. This group was disbanded, as their losses had been so tragically high.

In his 35 missions, Moore flew on ten different A/C: *Shack Rat*, *Southern Comfort III*, *Consolidated Mess*, *Sabrina III*, *Down De Hatch*, *Clean Sweep/Dragon Nose*, *Phyllis*, *Mi Akin Ass*, *Fearless Fosdick* and *Miss Marion*.

Robert and Delores Moore, married for over sixty years, had three sons. They resided in Morgantown, West Virginia.

Selvey, Nicholas #21996 2 December 1999 There is no record of the activities of this member of the 44th BG.

Vahrenkamp, William #22382 66th Squadron No information about this member of the 44th BG. He resided in Ft. Worth, Texas

Vaughn, Alvin R. #22403 68th Squadron 28 March 2006 Sgt. Vaughn was a Maintenance Man, specializing in care of Electrical Equipment. After the war he first became a farmer; then entered the ministry, serving for fifty years.

Vaughn and his wife Mary had one son and one daughter, five grandchildren and one great grandchild. They resided in Forest, Mississippi.

Come to Branson and have fun. Join your old buddies, the members of the 44th Bomb Group.



**44th Bomb Group
Veterans Association**

P.O. Box 712287
Salt Lake City, Utah 84171-2287

NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
YORK, PA
PERMIT NO. 323