

"HELL'S ANGELS" NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 111 NUMBER 1

MARCH 1979

SNAP! CRACKLE! POP!

Cereal's Slogan Helps Reunite
Wartime Bomber Crash Parties

By GENE KUHN

For Christian H. "Ace" de Guitaut, the long search is over.

He has finally located the third survivor of a B-17F Flying Fortress shot down Jan. 3, 1943, during a daylight bombing raid on the heavily defended submarine pens of German occupied St. Nazaire on the Bay of Biscay.

The third man is Alan E. Magee of Hialeah, Fla., the bomber's ball turret gunner. But he has no recollection of parachuting from the craft. Severely wounded, he landed and plunged through the roof of the St. Nazaire railroad station.

De Guitaut, then 15 but a full-fledged member of the French resistance, and a classmate, Francois de Marion, saw the bomber hit by the intense barrage of anti-aircraft fire and then taken under attack by a pair of Focke-Wulf 190's.

They watched with horror and fascination as gunfire from the German fighters sheared off a section of wing and the bomber went into a flat spin, crashed and burned near where they were standing, gripping their bicycles.

"It was so close that for a minute I thought it was going to

fall on us," de Guitaut said. "I turned my eyes from the plane and saw two parachutes. I knew they would fall in the water."

As soon as the B-17 hit the ground, the boys hurried to the broken plane ahead of the German soldiers, found no one alive and hastily gathered up belts of ammunition, draping them over their bicycles, to keep the ammunition from the Germans and turn it over to the resistance.

De Guitaut also picked up some of the partially burned navigation charts before they scrambled away from the wreckage for their homes in nearby La Baule. The wing section had fallen, they learned, in the town square, Place des Palmiers.

But there was one thing about the bomber, incongruous under the circumstances, the painting on the nose, a caricature of three mice astride a bomb and the label: snap! crackle! pop!

"As a kid we ate Rice Krispies in France, too," de Guitaut said. In 1950, he came to this country, settling in Fresno. He had often wondered what fate befell the two crewmen he had seen plucked from the water, and the memory of the painting on the bomber remained fresh in his mind.

In 1973, during a Gathering of Warbird show of which he is a founder, someone handed him a copy

of Hell's Angels containing an article and photos of B-17s by Steve Birdsall of Sydney, Australia, an aviation writer.

"I was busy and didn't open it until I got home that night," de Guitaut said. "Then my heart just stopped. There was a picture of snap! crackle! pop!"

The caption identified the aircraft as having been shot down Jan. 3, 1943, over St. Nazaire after its fifth mission.

The search was on.

De Guitaut wrote to Birdsall, who suggested he get in touch with Master Sgt. George Parks, secretary-treasurer of the 91st Bomb Group Memorial Association. He was invited to speak at the association's reunion in September where he described the downing of the bomber, coupling it with a request for any information on survivors. De Guitaut also presented the charred charts to retired Maj. Gen. Stanley T. Wray, who had commanded the 91st.

Wray turned the charts over to the Air Force Museum at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio, and some time later de Guitaut received a letter from the museum, giving him the names of the two crew members, 2nd Lt. Glen M. Herrington, the B-17's navigator, and Sgt. James I. Gordon, the gunner, along with a Las Vegas address for Herrington and a Humboldt, Kan., address for Gordon.

De Guitaut located Gordon by placing a call to Humboldt. Gordon, it turned out, was living in Corpus Christi, Tex., and with another phone call, de Guitaut was in touch with the first survivor.

Gordon inquired about Herrington and Magee, the first indication there might be a third survivor. All three had been taken prisoner. But about Magee he said: "I doubt he's alive, because he had a hole in his back big enough to cover your hand. The Germans told him he had six months to live."

A Fresno Bee story of de Guitaut's search was picked up by a wire ser-

vice and about 10 days later, de Guitaut received a call from Las Vegas. It was from Herrington.

"I understand you're looking for me," he said.

Herrington had an unlisted telephone number, accounting for de Guitaut failure to reach him.

A reunion in Las Vegas was arranged and de Guitaut learned that a wound in Herrington's leg had forced its amputation while he was in prison.

There was still the matter of confirming whether Magee had survived. De Guitaut wrote Rep. B. E. Sisk for help. Magee's name was given as Allen Magee, and it was with this name that Sisk's office started.

Larry Adams, Sisk's legislative assistant, sought aid from Air Force officials, the Internal Revenue Service, the Social Security Administration, the Veterans Administration and the Foreign Claims Settlement Commission, among others.

Then came a letter from the Albert F. Simpson Historical Research Center at Maxwell AFB, Ala. It contained the now declassified war diaries of the 303rd Bomb Group and the 360th Bomb Squadron. It also gave the name and address of Magee's mother, Mrs. Doretta Magee in North Plainfield, N.J. The diaries straightened up the matter of Magee's name (Alan).

Adams brought Rep. Millicent Fenwick of New Jersey into the picture. Yes, she knew of some Magees in the North Plainfield area. Adams placed a call to an Earl W. Magee.

"It was pure luck of the draw," Adams said, for Earl was Alan's brother. Another phone call and de Guitaut had found the third survivor.

Magee, who said in a telephone interview he sustained 28 wounds, gave this account of the B-17's last bomb run:

"I was on my seventh mission. Our target was St. Nazaire. It was my third time over the target. On this mission I flew as the ball turret

gunner.

"Near the target and on the bomb run, there was so much flak and the B-17F seemed to be going so slow that I felt like getting out of the plane and running ahead, telling it to catch up to me. It seemed like we were standing still.

"All of a sudden I was hit in the face, and the turret sight was knocked out. With the front glass broken out it was impossible to stay in the turret to operate it.

"I reported the ball turret was not operative, and that I was hit and couldn't see. I was then told to come topside.

"In the ball turret you cannot wear a regular chute. You wear the harness and the chest pack stays outside the turret on the floor. The first thing you do when you are out of the turret is to attach the pack on your harness.

"When I was out of the turret and went for my chest pack, I saw it had a large hole in the middle of it and one end seemed to have been damaged. I didn't bother putting it on.

"I made my way to the bomb bay, which was open, and the radioman was getting ready to bail out. The B-17F was now on fire and in bad shape. We seemed to be getting hit at will. We never got the alarm to bail out.

"The next thing that happened, which sounded like hail hitting the plane, was that I was hit on my left shoulder, side and back, (and) with this direct hit, the B-17F went into a tight spin to starboard and I was thrown up to the top of the plane near an open hatch where the radioman-gunner mans his gun.

"The next thing I remember was trying to reach the open hatch. I don't know why I wanted out without a chute on but the plane was on fire and going down. I blacked out at this point, not having an oxygen mask on since leaving the turret.

"The last thing I remember was

that I was at twenty some thousand feet, trying to get out of a burning plane.

"The next time I came to I thought I got hit again and said to myself, 'The hell hit me now.' I was getting tired of getting hit.

"I again blacked out with what hit me- or I guess I should say what I hit. I went through the roof of the St. Nazaire railroad station.

"I came to again and asked whoever was trying to help me if they were German or French, and when they said Germans I again blacked out."

Magee had a broken leg and ankle "and left arm nearly torn off my body and back shot up."

He said he attempted to escape, but again blacked out. "When I again came to," he said, "I was carried to a building. I don't know how long I stayed there.

"I was shot down a few minutes to noon and got to the hospital at midnight.

"The doctor who did the operation on my face, nose, arm and back couldn't speak English. He told the nurse who did speak English he would try to save my arm, and if he couldn't, it wasn't because I was an enemy.

"I was told that the doctor even saved my teeth that were so loose I thought I would be without teeth. I was in the hospital a month and a half. The German doctor did a great job on my face, putting my arm back in good shape and leg, knee and ankle. I was treated well by the Germans in the hospital.

"I guess I should say to sum up this whole mess I was up at twenty some thousand feet without a chute and found on the roof of St. Nazaire railroad station, France.

"I don't know how I got there, but here I am, thanks to God." The 303rd Bombardment Group's diary has this entry, which leaves unanswered the question how Magee survived: "Only two parachutes were seen to open from the ships that went down."

Listed as killed in action are the other members of the snap! crackle!

pop! crew: 2nd Lt. Arthur I. Adams, pilot; 2nd Lt. Gene A. Witterstetter, co-pilot; 2nd Lt. Michael L. Libonati Jr., bombardier; T/Sgt. Dennis C. Hart, engineer; S/Sgt. Edward W. Durant, assistant engineer; and S/Sgt. Alfred M. Union, radio operator.

Magee, employed as a Delta Air Lines ticket agent in Miami, is scheduled to retire this month. De Guitaut now hopes to arrange a reunion with the survivors. He also hopes to return to his former home and dig up the ammunition he hid under the back steps.

THIRD REUNION TAKING SHAPE

In coordination with the Reunion Services, Inc., we have arranged a tentative schedule for the Dayton Reunion. There will be other activities in addition to those on the schedule such as a fashion show, golf, etc. If you have any comments or recommendations, please, let us have them so that we can do all that you feel should be done.

1979 Dayton Reunion Proposal to be held at Stouffer's Dayton Plaza Hotel

Early Bird Package (Aug 23-26) Cost: \$151.00/single
 \$235.00/double

Thursday-Aug 23:

Check in and register

2100 hours Cocktail Reception (cash bar)

Friday-Aug 24:

0830 hours Early Bird Breakfast

1300 hours Shuttle Bus to Air Force Museum

1800 hours Cocktails (cash bar)

1900 hours Dinner (Ham Steak)

Saturday-Aug 25:

0830 hours Coffee and Danish

0900 hours Business Meeting

1300 hours Shuttle Bus to Air Force Museum

1830 hours Cocktails (cash bar)

1930 hours Banquet (Prime Rib)

Sunday-Aug 26:

0830 hours Breakfast

Weekend Package (Aug 24-26) Cost: \$111.00/single

Friday-Aug 24: \$177.00/double

Check in and register

1800 hours Cocktails (cash bar)

1900 hours Dinner (Ham Steak)

Saturday-Aug 25 & Sunday-Aug 26: Same as Early Bird Package

Those that do not need to stay in the hotel may take part in all the items listed in the WEEKEND PACKAGE (except hotel accommodations) for the price of \$42.00 each. Guests may be brought to the Friday night Dinner for \$14.00 each. Guests at the Saturday Banquet will be charged \$18.00 each. There will be a registration fee of \$5.00.

Hospitality room will be available from 1400 hours on Thursday until 1200 hours Sunday Aug 26. Extra nites at the hotel: \$32/sgl \$40/dbl per nite.

The Reunion Brochure will be mailed to the membership about 60 days before the reunion. You should send in your registration as soon as possible. Advanced Registration is essential for a smooth reunion. Write or call 1-305-644-6447 with any recommendations: Charles J. McClain, President

YOUR ASSISTANCE REQUESTED

Two English writers, Martin Bowman and Martin Middlebrook, are requesting the assistance of the members of the 303rd Bomb Group in compiling information for their respective historical documentations of World War II.

Mr. Bowman is looking for general information: personal stories and accounts of incidents during WW II. Please contact him at 131 Aylsham Rd., Norwich NR3 2AD England.

Mr. Middlebrook is looking for specific information. He is particularly interested in those members who were involved in raids on Hamburg, especially the operations of July 25 & 26, 1943. He would like to contact those who were either in the air or part of the ground crew, those who help in the planning of the raids or those who might have documents connected with the raids. He is also requesting information about the surviving members of B-17 #42-29606, shot down on July 25. Please send your name and address to 48 Linden Way, Boston, Lincs., PE21 9DS England. He will respond with a questionnaire concerning your particular involvement in those operations.

POSTSCRIPT: FERRIS' B-17

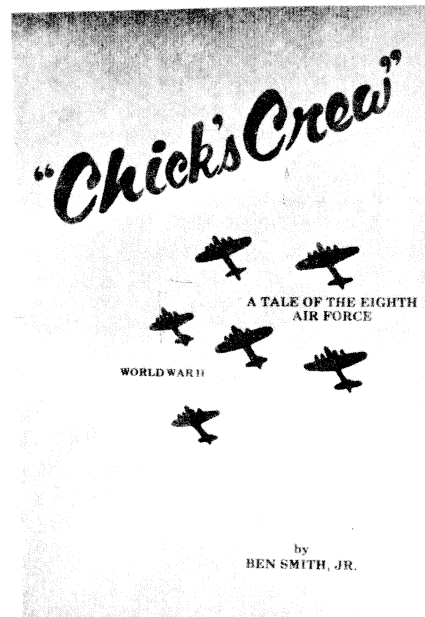
We just wanted everyone to know that the balance of the money from the sale of Kieth Ferris' picture of the B-17, sold at the mini-reunion in D.C., has gone into the 8th AF Historical Society Memorial Museum Fund. The total over costs was \$27.00.

RESERVATIONS

Those wishing to place their reservations now for the 303rd's reunion August 23-26, 1979 in Dayton, Ohio, contact: Reunion Services, Box 4738, Hollywood, Fla., 33023.

VOLUNTEERS

To insure a smooth and pleasant reunion in August, I need a few helpers from the Dayton area. If you are willing to assist, please write Chuck McClain at 693 Darcey Drive, Winter Park, Florida 32792. Or call 305-644-6447. I will visit Dayton in May, and we will have a brief meeting at that time.



BOOK SHELF

Chick's Crew, by Ben Smith, Jr., 1978, 8½x11, paperback, 66 pages, \$5.00 postpaid. Order from the author: 107 Albany Avenue, Waycross, GA 31501.

In this little booklet, Ben Smith, 303rd BG gunner, shares his combat experiences with his readers. He illustrates the booklet with drawings he made during World War II. Though the scope goes little beyond the horizon of one crew, Haun Dawg Smith does transmit feelings shared by many 8th Air Force servicemen.

359TH SQUADRON



THE 359TH SQUADRON has had a lot of "firsts" during its first 300 missions. The first Congressional Medal of Honor awarded in the E.T.O. went to a 359th bombardier, First Lieutenant Jack Mathis, who died over his bombsight in the nose of the "Duchess" after dropping his bombs on Vegasack. As squadron lead bombardier he helped the Eighth Air Force do its first real precision bombing of its young career.

The Squadron's next claim to fame was in the old "Knockout Dropper," which was the first heavy bomber of the Eighth Air Force to finish 50 and then 75 missions. The old Fort lasted more than a year and a half of tough combat before it was finally retired to training centers in the U.S. along with the rest of the 359th's older planes.

The group's first mission to Berlin was led by the 359th with Lt. Col. Richard H. Cole, the present commander, flying the lead.

The first gunner in the E.T.O. to complete 75 missions was T Sgt. Kurt J. Hermann III, who flew 50 missions in Africa before being assigned to the 359th where he completed his next 25 hops.

To movie-struck girl friends, 359th men can claim that the great Clark Gable, complete with ears and

white silk muffler, flew his first mission in the old "Eight Ball."

With such a large air force in operation now, it is hard to draw a fine line that proves that one outfit or another is first or best in anything. The main idea is to keep in the top section and there the 359th has always been. The engineering section has done its part by turning out an enviable record of mechanical efficiency in its aircraft. Longevity of service is the password here and is reflected in the records of planes like "Knockout Dropper" with 75 missions, "The Duchess" with more than 50, and "Thunder Bird" and "Old Black Magic" with more than 100 missions each. No other squadron can boast of so many old-timers as these, and there is no reason to suspect that the "Thunder Bird" and "Old Black Magic" will not keep going indefinitely.

Several members of the engineering department have won the Bronze Star and Legion of Merit for outstanding work in all kinds of weather, mostly bad. The Soldier's Medal for heroism was awarded to S Sgt. Kenneth Shanahan and Pvt. Clyde V. Engholm of the refueling unit for extinguishing a fire in their refueling truck that threatened to engulf the base fuel dump.

Even with the pressure of 300 missions and countless "dry runs," however, the 359th men have found some time for fun. Taking an active share in sports, the 359th furnished star men for the baseball team. They include Sgt. William (Red) Craddock who pitched the "Hell's Angels" team to victory for the Eighth Air Force championship in 1943, and Lt. George Zitzler who hurled the team to the division championship and to the semi-finals in the Eighth Air Force in 1944. T Sgt. Carl Murphy played first base for the team.

Some of the credit for the 359th's success in combat can be traced to its outstanding squadron commanders. Colonel Eugene A. Romig, now with the 94th Combat Wing, led the squadron through the early days when the flyers were first taking part in the aerial war on Germany. He was succeeded by Lt. Col. William R. Calhoun, who flew many long and tough missions with the 359th until he was relieved by Lt. Col. Cole. Each of these men has been partly responsible for the accomplishments of the 359th in combat and have played a great part in making the squadron the efficient, smooth running organization it is today.

Commanding Officer

LT. COL. RICHARD H. COLE,
Elizabeth, N.J.

Lt. Col. Cole was assigned to the 303rd in the fall of 1943. At that time he held the rank of major, having been previously a Group Operations Officer with an anti-submarine command group stationed in Newfoundland. Col. Cole was well qualified to take over the squadron and lost no time in getting into the



swing of things. He is a fighting commander and has led his squadron on some of the most outstanding of the 303rd's missions. He is well into his second operational tour and will continue until the war in this theater is concluded.

Col. Cole graduated from Rutgers University in 1938. He entered the Air Corps as a cadet and was commissioned a 2nd Lt. in May, 1940.

**APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP
AMERICAN EX- PRISONERS OF WAR, INC.**

2620 North Dundee St., Tampa, Fla. 33609

Enclosed find membership dues for 19 _____ which includes
subscription to the XPW Bulletin.

Husband and wife \$10 Single member, \$7

Nickname while interned if any _____

NAME (please print) _____

MAILING ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

Please check your status: Ex-POW, Southeast Asia

Ex-POW, Korea Ex-POW, Pacific

Next of Kin Ex-Civilian Internee

Is this a renewal? Ex-POW, Europe

Military Unit when taken prisoner? _____

What Camps were you in? _____

Learn about our Medical Research Packets such as Packet #5- What every wife should know before she is your widow; answers to Social Security, Insurance, burial procedures, allowances, etc., a wife's approach to POW problems, what a pathologist should look for in an autopsy.

KREIGIE KORNER

May we say again, all of you ex-POW's should join- if not for yourselves, for your families. Learn about Public Law 95-479 section 305- it pertains to you! Any ex-POW having problems in dealing with the VA should contact: Dr. Carl Fyler
510 Mills Bldg.
Topeka KS 66612

He can direct you to proper authorities or sympathetic congressmen.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Please complete this form and mail it along with your check for dues (\$10.00 FOR FIVE YEARS DUES) to: Van White, 815 San Mateo S.E. Albuquerque, N.M. 87108. Make checks payable to: 303rd Bomb Group (H) Association.

DATE: _____ RETIRED MIL GRADE OR RANK: _____
(If applicable)

SQUADRON: _____ CREW OR DUTY _____
(If flying and not pilot, give pilot's name)

NAME: _____, _____, _____
(LAST) (FIRST) (M.I.)

ADDRESS: _____, _____
(Street or Box #) (City)
_____, _____, _____
(State) (zip) (Phone)

WIFE: (FIRST NAME): _____

(Members signature)

(IF ALREADY A MEMBER SEND THIS TO ANOTHER 303RDER)

H. F. Jenkins
P.O. Box 33072
Granada Hills, CA 91344