

303rd Bomb Group (H) Association, Inc.

*Might - In - Flight*

## “HELLS ANGELS” NEWSLETTER

VOLUME IX NUMBER 2

Editor: Bud Klint  
5728 Walla Fort Worth, TX 76133

MAY, 1985

### THE PREZ SEZ . . .

#### Special Report from Joe Vieira

It's a pleasure to welcome these new members into the greatest association in the 8th A.F. As you can see, we are growing bigger and bigger.

#### 358th Squadron

Charles M. Box  
Robert E. O'Donnell  
Marion B. Lewis  
William A. Rafferty  
Charles W. Schmeltzer

#### 359th Squadron

Peter C. Bandy  
George F. Hoofman II  
Traynum D. Goulding  
Robert L. Mattison

#### 360th Squadron

Henry M. Beben  
Eldridge C. Oberly  
B. J. Shipp  
Vernelle V. Johnson  
Dale E. Schneider  
Harrel A. Waltmire

#### 427th Squadron

Wesley J. Flanders  
Peter F. Kearns

#### Unit Unknown

James F. Green

My thanks is extended to all of our members who recruited or assisted me in the continuous drive to find our brothers who served in the greatest Air Force group that ever existed.

Members who joined our association in 1975 and 1980: Dues must be renewed this year. If you pay now, it's \$10 for 5 years. It appears that dues may be increased by the membership at our business meeting in Seattle in July to cover our constantly-increasing expenses. Check your membership card for the year you joined. If you have any question, contact me.

So far, I have received reservations for the Seattle Spectacular for 225 persons. I know there are 75 more who have reserved rooms, but have not as yet registered with me. Here's the count by unit as of April 10: 359th . . . 74; 360th . . . 52; 358th . . . 46; 427th . . . 43; Hdq. . . . 9; 1681 . . . 1. GOOD SHOW! It looks like this reunion will be a biggie! Those of you who haven't sent in your reservations, please, DO IT NOW! We have increased our block of rooms at the Red Lion Inn, Bellevue to 250, so we should be able to accomodate everyone in the same hotel.

Please, let's review the cost: EARLY BIRD package — covers the entire program, all activities from Wednesday afternoon, July 24 through noon Sunday, July 28..\$90 per person. WEEK-END package — for those arriving on Thursday, July 25. Covers all reunion activities except the Wednesday evening dinner at Sandpoint Naval Station..\$75 per person. The LOCAL side of the registration form is for persons who live in the immediate area, those who will be staying in RVs or somewhere other than the Red Lion Inn or for anyone, who for one reason or another, does not want to participate in all reunion activities. On this side of the form, you may select only those events which you want to at-

tend. Note that although the Boeing party on Friday is free, you must indicate your desire to attend. Boeing must know in advance how many people from each Bomb Group to prepare for.

The above reunion costs are for the 303rd events listed on your reunion program, only. You must make your own hotel reservations. Just keep in mind that hotel/motel/RV park facilities in the area are going to be saturated, so it's important to reserve your spot EARLY! If you plan to stay at the 303rd Headquarters Hotel, send your room reservation card direct to: RED LION INN, BELLEVUE, 300-112th Ave., S.E., Bellevue, WA 98004. Phone: (206) 455-1300 or, Toll Free, 800-547-8010. If you write or phone, you MUST indicate that you are part of the 303rd Bomb Group Reunion. This will entitle you to our special room rate of \$49 per day, single or double.

If you have misplaced your reunion packet or have any questions about making reservations, contact me at my address shown on the Application for Membership on the back page of the Newsletter. Let's also clear up the matter of my telephone number. The correct number is 305-989-9784. Feel free to call me, but not collect, please!

Remember the deadlines: Red Lion Inn — July 3, 1985. At the rate we're going, our block of rooms may be filled up before that, so please hurry! Reunion reservations to Joe Vieira — July 1, 1985. Remember, I have to record reservations, prepare name tags and individual reunion packets before I leave for Seattle. Your cooperation in getting your reservations to me well before the deadline will be appreciated.

Thelma and I are looking forward to seeing all of you and meeting members we have not met before. We hope YOU will be a part of our biggest reunion yet — The SEATTLE SPECTACULAR, July 24-28, 1985!



### THE CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

Rev. Merritt O. Slawson

#### What a Party!

Many of you were in Jr. High or just entering High School; others of us were in College when SHE was born in Seattle on July 28, 1935. This summer SHE will be 50 years old. Her birthday party, fittingly, will be at the place of her birth. I understand we are all invited. We didn't dream it then, but the young lady who was introduced to the world in 1935 simply as Model 299, was soon to be nick-named "Flying Fortress" and become a very important part of each of our lives about the time we

**214** finished High School or College. We went to England with her and for us, her "coming out" party was November 17, 1942, the day the 303rd flew its first combat mission.

She was a beautiful girl and many of you had a real love affair with her. You pampered and babied her; even gave her a pet name of your choice. In return, she gave her all for you. Perhaps some of you might want to re-name her if you had it to do today! She was loyal to us and did everything we asked of her and more. In memory of those who went with her to their glory and helped to make her immortal, I think these lines are appropriate:

#### LAST FORMATION

*I'd like to have a moment, Sir, up here, so close to You,  
To talk about the things I've done and things I've yet to do.*

*At times, I've left formation, to peel off and slip away,  
When, "Move in. Close up that gap." was the order of the day.*

*I didn't need my compass, no, not me. I thought I knew.  
So I've cursed and made excuses when my field was over-due.*

*But, each time I've lost my way, Sir, from my flight of fellow men,  
You've found and brought me safely to formation once again.*

*And I know that You are watching, Sir, as I walk Your halls of air,  
For the majesty of Heaven is about me, everywhere.*

*And when You form Your Squadron, Sir, and lead those men who fly,  
On their last and final mission to Your airdrome in the sky,*

*I ask that I may be there, Sir, to make that journey, too;  
With throttles on the firewall, Sir, let me follow You!*

THE AIRMAN, 1958 issue

("Chappie" writes that he and "Mama" are doing well and are excited about the coming Reunion. They have an adopted son living in Anchorage, Alaska. If "Chappie" stands the trip to Seattle OK, they will fly on to visit their son and then fly from Anchorage home to San Antonio, Texas. Several days after writing his original message, "Chappie" send this post script:)

After writing my piece for Chaplain's Corner, an interesting thing happened. Our daughter, whose children are in Jr. High and High School, was talking with her mother on the telephone. She told "Mama" that one of the men in the Regional Office she works for had to be off for a few days because of the death of his father at age 73. She said, "You know, Mother, it struck me suddenly, for the first time, that my mother and daddy are in their 70s. I just thought you all would be here forever. Now, I have to realize that my wishes and reality are not the same. I, too, must face the fact that this loss can happen to me." How true. Whether we like it or not, the ranks of the 303rd are shrinking. At 75, my memory goes back to 1914 - 1920 when the Civil War Vets were holding their last reunions. Then it was the last of the Spanish-American War veterans. Right now, the ex-doughboys of WW I are very few in number and our turn is on the horizon. Of course, at Molesworth, I was 10 years older than most of you except the Line and Staff Types. My doctor OK'd my trip to the Seattle reunion only on condition that I have my medical records with me in case of an emergency. This may be the last reunion I'll be able to make, but what a one to make! "The Old Gal's Birthday Party". I hope to see YOU there!

## NEWS RELEASE

Following is a suggested release which we would like to have you send to your local newspaper(s). Copy the article and send it to the attention of the City Editor. Better yet, deliver it personally. Be sure to insert your name and telephone number in the closing paragraph. Who knows, you may stir up some lost 303rder if you get this in the paper.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May, 1985

FLYING FORTRESS, WORLD WAR II LEGEND,  
TO BE HONORED ON FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY

A three-day birthday party for the famous B-17 Flying Fortress will be held July 26-28, 1985 in Seattle, Washington. Model 299, the prototype of the B-17 was rolled out and made its maiden flight on July 28, 1935.

Several thousand World War II air and ground crewmen and their families are expected to participate in the Boeing bomber's 50th anniversary celebration.

Veterans who flew and fought in the European, Mediterranean and Pacific theaters of operations will attend. Joining them in a weekend round of activities will be the men and women — the "Rosie the Riveters" — who built the airplanes and kept them flying.

Surviving Medal of Honor winners who received their medals for heroism while flying combat missions in B-17s have been invited as special guests.

At least two restored Flying Fortresses will be flown to Seattle to participate in "fly-bys" and to stand inspection. Several "little friends", World War II fighter planes that escorted the B-17s on bombing missions, also will be on display.

Friday, July 26, has been set aside as "Bomb Group Day" for the B-17 veterans and their families. The opening day will feature speeches, band music and airplane fly-bys. Weekend activities will be open to the public.

The name Flying Fortress came from a Seattle newspaperman's written description of the heavily armed airplane after he saw a photo of it being rolled from its hangar. Boeing later registered the name as a trademark. The Flying Fortress became widely known for its role in World War II, especially the pounding of targets in Europe. The B-17's ability to absorb battle damage and still return to base made it a favorite of allied crews "coming home on a wing and a prayer".

Douglas and Lockheed (Vega in those days) participated with Boeing in the mass production of the Boeing-designed B-17. In all, the three manufacturers produced 12,726 Forts. At one point in the later months of the war, Boeing's production rate alone reached 16 planes a day.

One of the more than 20 groups that have scheduled Seattle reunions to coincide with the B-17 anniversary celebration is the famous "Hell's Angels", 303rd Bomb Group. The men of this 8th Air Force unit were stationed at Molesworth, England from 1942 until the end of the European conflict in 1945. They flew more than 350 combat missions in the famous bombers. Molesworth is back in the news again as the next English site for deployment of Cruise Missiles. For more information about the plans of the 303rd, contact (insert your name and phone number).

## CAN YOU HELP?

I have been trying to trace the crewmembers who were flying 42-5482, Cat O' 9 Tails, of the 359th BS, 303rd BG from Molesworth, England on 14 October 1943. After the raid on Schweinfurt, with the aircraft badly damaged by enemy aircraft fire, etc. and some crew members injured, bail out was ordered over central England. The aircraft eventually crashed in my back garden. I still have a prop blade.

I have managed to contact some crew members who flew 20 missions in this aircraft, but were not flying on this mission, having been shot down on the 4th October at Frankfurt flying another B-17 as the Cat O' 9 Tails was in for repair on that day. I hope you can help.

Yours sincerely,

John T. Gell, 170 High Street, Riseley, Bedfordshire, England

## SWEDISH INTERNEES

At the next 8th AFHS reunion (October 17-20, Wichita, KS), I would like to see if we can get a few of us together for a mini-reunion. I would enjoy hearing from anyone who might be interested.

I would appreciate those interested sending this notice to any publications they think might reach some of the guys we were interned with. I have sent notices to Air Force and Air Classics magazines.

Any notice you send should mention that in order to attend the reunion you must join the 8th AFHS by sending \$10, name, address, ETO unit and length of service with the 8th AF to: 8th AFHS Membership, 495 N.E. Terrace, Miami, FL 33162.

Ernest J. Richardson  
10491 Marcia Ln., South Lyon, MI 48178  
Phone (313) 437-0140

## FIRST U.S. RAID ON GERMANY



Rear: Sgt. John Garriott, gunner; Lt. Jack Mathis, bombardier; Sgt. Calvin Owen, gunner; Sgt. Eldon Audiss, gunner; Lt. Jesse Elliott, navigator; Lt. Squire O'Connor, co-pilot; Lt. Joseph Trogan, observer; Lt. Harold Stouse, pilot; Front: Sgt. Donald Richardson, radio; Sgt. Houston Brown, gunner; Sgt. Theron Tupper, gunner.

One of our new members, Theron Tupper, sent this photo made by the U.S. Signal Corps following the Jan. 27, 1943 mission to Wilhelmshaven. That was the first penetration of the Reich by an American bomber force. It is one of few war-time pictures of Lt. Jack W. Mathis. Less than 60 days after this photo, Jack became the 303rd's first Medal of Honor recipient. It was on the March 18th mission to Vegasack and Lt. Strouse's crew was leading the 359th in "The Duchess". Mortally wounded by a flak blast that shattered the plexiglass nose, Mathis clung to his bombsight, completed the run, released his bombs and died at his post. It was the most accurate bombing job of the young American air war.

Theron says (as most air crewmen) that theirs was the finest B-17 crew. They flew to England in 1942 and after completing 18 missions, were sent back to the U.S. on the Queen Mary with Winston Churchill. He says that conditions and equipment left much to be desired in those

early days of 303rd action. Their crew was selected to report to the Pentagon and tell the Chiefs of Staff what equipment improvements were most needed.

As a waist gunner, Tupper recalls the frequent frost bite cases as a result of the full air blast into the waist, often at 60° below zero. This also caused icing in the oxygen masks and gunners frequently stuck the oxygen hoses in their mouths until the ice melted from their masks. Keeping the guns firing was another problem. Gunners experimented with all kinds of lubricants to prevent freezing and jamming. Then there was clothing. Tupper says they tried everything in those early days including R.A.F. issue, to try to keep from freezing.

Jack Mathis died in action. J. A. Garriott died in 1982. Five others in the crew photo are on the current roster of the 303rd BGA. Perhaps they will get together again in Seattle. Theron hopes to be there.

## “UNKNOWN” — NO LONGER!

Our last issue carried a picture of the ground crew of Knockout Dropper when the ship had completed 25 missions. We had no name for the second man in the picture and he was listed "unknown". That prompted an immediate response from Stanley J. Jacobs of Needham, MA. He identified himself and went on to say that he was one of the original members of Pafford's crew when the Dropper came to Molesworth. He worked on her 'til she was returned to the States after completing 75 missions. He said, "I painted the Big Bomb on her side when the Dropper finished '50' and he sent along two yellowed newspaper clippings to confirm that. He also related an interesting anecdote about the Dropper's 70th mission:

"A new crew came out to fly her. It was their first mission. I saw the pilot look up at that old B-17F and at the 69 bombs painted on her side. He appeared nervous, so I went over to talk to him. He said he would rather be flying the B-17G and it seemed to him the odds were against this old relic. I told him not to worry and assured him the old Dropper would find her way back. When the crew returned to Molesworth after the mission, the pilot was beaming. He told me he was glad he had his first mission in the Dropper because he had never flown a better plane. Old 605 handled like a baby!"

When Knockout Dropper was sent home, Jacobs was assigned to Old Black Magic. He saw her through 129 missions, until the end of the war. He closed his letter: "The 303rd made over 350 missions. I worked on two planes that flew a total of 204. My planes were over enemy territory

on more than 50% the 303rd's missions without losing a plane or crew. How's that for an 'unknown' from the 359th?"

## BOMBER CREW (B-17) DIARY by Major Edward J. Giering, U.S. Army, Ret.

This newly published book is a World War II 8th Air Force story that should be read by every WW II veteran, especially if he:

1. Flew in the Army Air Force
2. Was shot down over Europe during WW II
3. Was a prisoner of war in Germany

Even if none of the above applies, this story about the air war over Germany in WW II will give the reader a better understanding of what it was all about from the point of view of a lead ship radio operator/gunner who was a member of a bomber crew of the Hell's Angels Bomb Group - the 303rd.

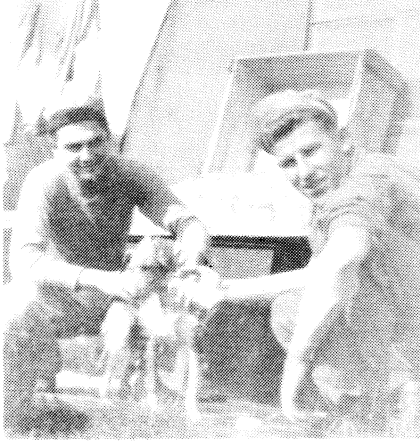
Available from the publisher: Sunflower University Press, 1531 Yuma, Manhattan, KS 66502-4228. Price: \$10.00

Editor's note: Above copy was furnished. I have not seen the book, do not know how many pages, whether it is illustrated, paper-back or what-have-you. I do know it was written by one of our 303rd members and I'm sure that's enough recommendation for any of us. As soon as my copy arrives, I'll be glad to review it. Meanwhile, you know any story of the 303rd has got to be worth more than \$10! Order your copy while it's fresh in your mind.

## 216 ...E BIG DOG BATH From Christ Christoff

One day, looking through my old photos of the 303rd, I came across the enclosed picture. It seemed to me I'd seen that dog somewhere recently. Then I remembered the "Hell's Angels" Newsletter story. I went through my back copies and re-read "The Odyssey of Homer" on page 4 of the Aug. 1984 issue.

My memory fails me a little, but I remember we saw this dog hanging around our hut in the 358th area. Somehow, we weren't doing much that day. Someone said, "He looks kinda dirty. Let's give him a bath." The other guy said, "Okay". Lucky me, I had film in my camera and recorded "The Big Dog Bath". I can't remember seeing the dog later. We were ground crew, maybe the flying crew had him.



Sgt. Olexa, Airman Homer, Sgt. Wisocky

I've been trying to track down the two guys in the picture with Homer, but no luck. If anyone knows anything about them, please let me know. My address is 876 W. 73rd Ave., Merrillville, IN 46410.

# DAILY EXPRESS

Thursday February 7 1985 • 20p • TV Pages 22 and 23 THE VOICE OF BRITAIN

## The battle of Molesworth



### Heseltine's army routs Cruise protesters

LABOUR fury erupted last night over the spectacular Army swoop that swept away a "peace" camp and made secure Britain's next Cruise missile base.

### IN THE SPOTLIGHT AGAIN

Most of you have read, or seen on TV, recent stories about Molesworth. Scheduled to be Britain's next Cruise Missile base, it has been the site of a "peace" camp for the past 3½ years. On Feb. 6, Defence Secretary, Michael Heseltine led a midnight raid to oust the "peaceniks" and secure the base with 7½ miles of barbed wire. It was reported that 1,500 Royal Engineers, 100 Defence Ministry police and 600 civilian police descended on the base, ousted the campers and fenced the entire perimeter of RAF Molesworth. Work on concrete shelters for the missiles is scheduled to begin in six months. The missiles will be deployed in 1988. For his efforts, Heseltine was called everything from "hero" to a "fascist in jackboots".

Thanks to all who sent clippings of this news story. Bob Black sent copies of several articles from the MANCHESTER (England) GUARDIAN. Christ Christoff clipped an item from the CHICAGO TRIBUNE. Gene Kelly sent a short paragraph that appeared in USA TODAY. Kay and Roy Westfall copied an article sent to them by friends in England. Ray Cossey sent the entire edition of the Feb. 7 DAILY EXPRESS in which "The Battle of Molesworth" made front page headlines. Along with the paper, Ray wrote: "I thought you might appreciate this copy of one of our leading National daily newspapers as it will show how the name Molesworth is now hitting the headlines some 40+ years since you 303rd guys were over here. Do not overlook the editorial comment on p. 8. It demonstrates that only a small minority are actively opposed to Molesworth being one of your Cruise missile bases. The great majority of us are totally in favour of the coming of these missiles as the only sensible way of making Russia think twice about having a go at us.

I regret that Theresa and I are having, for family reasons, to pass up on Seattle, but we do hope to come over either later on this year or early in '86."

The editorial Ray refers to reads as follows:

#### An Eviction Well Done

Evicting 200 or so trespassers from Ministry of Defence property at RAF Molesworth hardly ranks as a great military achievement.

Nevertheless, memories of the long-running Greenham Common farce remind us of the consequences of not acting speedily, firmly and overwhelmingly to end the obstruction by anti-Cruise protesters.

The Molesworth protesters had to be evicted, of course, in view of their determination to disrupt construction work at the camp.

The operation was well-planned and well-executed. Defence Secretary Michael Heseltine was obviously determined to avoid past mistakes. Mr. Heseltine deserves thanks, not least from those who live near the base.

One of the other articles from an English paper read, in part:

#### Smellies Kicked Out

The 1,200 people who live in nine surrounding villages were jubilant at being "liberated" yesterday. One said: "The troops have done a great job. I bet there weren't a dozen genuine peace campaigners at the site. The rest of the 'Smellies' were just layabouts and thieves."

### LETTER FROM BOB HEILIGER

I imagine it's about time I get off my duff and see if I can answer a few questions from the last few issues of "Hell's Angels" Newsletter. In the outstanding crew chiefs' picture, #1 standing on the wing is definitely me. #4 is Norman Cote, #10 definitely is Sgt. Wesley Gradoville.

I was on the crew of "Oold Soljer" when we first started operations in England. Sgt. Clyde Whitman was Chief and Chester French, Assistant Chief. A couple of our more famous pilots of that aircraft were Capt. Lewis Lyle and Capt. Walter Shaylor. Both became our Squadron Commander before moving on to bigger jobs.

Eventually some of our Crew Chiefs left for Russia on our short-lived "Shuttle Raids". We took off from England hoping to hit Germany from Russia on the return, but I guess it didn't materialize as planned. Anyway, I moved up to Assistant Chief under French and then to Chief when he left the Group.

We lost the "Oold Soljer" in an air encounter over England in about March, 1943. We had 19 missions at the time and were in the lead to reach 25. The first plane to reach 25 missions was to be sent back to the States with both ground and combat crew for a War Bond campaign. When we were knocked out, "Hell's Angels" got the honor. Just as well. Wouldn't you hate to be called the "Oold Soljers" Group?

Actually, I'm happy that I stayed in England and continued my mechanical experience with the help of the wonderful ground crew I had. Toward the end of the war I had Hubert Miller as assistant, John Hughes and Albert Vargo. We got two valuable additions from the flying crew: Gilbert Bengston and Alvin Etheredge. They had flown on my first "Iza Vailable" which we lost on its 54th mission. It crash landed on the coast somewhere returning from Pas de Calais, France. Sgt. Etheredge died in England of a rare spinal infection. I hope to see some of the others in Seattle.



**Crew of Iza Vailable: Sgts: Miller Boreen, French (crew chief), Hughes, Heiliger and Mike Levin (flight crew).**



**Cpl. Etheredge, Sgt. Miller, Sgt. Vargo and Sgt. Heiliger**

The picture above was made about March 31, 1945 when M/Sgt. Robert B. Heiliger became a member of the Air Force Hall of Fame. His citation read in part: "His aircraft, 'Sack Time' has completed 100 successful combat missions without an abortive. In all, Heiliger has crewed ships that completed 161 missions without an abort. His first ship of this record was 'Iza Vailable' which he crewed for one mission. His second was 'Iza Vailable Too' which he had for ten successful missions. This aircraft caught fire on landing after a mission and had to be salvaged. His third ship was 42-102544, 'Sack Time'. Since becoming a crew chief on March 19, 1944, he has never lost an aircraft in combat."

## INTERESTING FACTS

Prior to the 303rd Reunion in Britain last year, Rufus Charlton, 360th Squadron, did some research on the Molesworth area. He wrote a brief report on his findings. He gave a copy to Father Skoner and a few others, but forgot to furnish one for the Newsletter. He re-discovered it recently and sent it along.

### THE SHIRE OF HUNTINGDON AND THE B-17

The English Shire, or County of Huntingdon is most famous as the birthplace of the "Protector of the Commonwealth," Oliver Cromwell. Cromwell was born in the town of Huntingdon, in 1599. It is equally famous as the place of imprisonment of Catherine of Aragon, the daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella, who was Henry the Eighth's first Queen. Catherine spent the last four years of her life in Kimbolton Castle. She died there in January of 1536.

During WWII, Huntingdon County was closely tied to the 8th AF, particularly the B-17. There were 7 installations in the county associated with B-17 operations. These were:

Brampton, Headquarters of the 8th AF Bomber Command's First Air Division (originally the First Wing).

Diddington, the location of a General Hospital where many B-17 wounded were treated. After D Day, many casualties of the Invasion were treated there.

Alconbury, a B-17 base. The 93rd Bomb Group (B-24s) was the first Group on this base. They were here for the last four months of 1942, then the B-17s appeared. The 92nd Bomb Group moved in from Bovington in December 1942. It was a B-17 Combat Crew Training Unit until April, 1943. The 95th Bomb Group was stationed here from April to June, 1943. In the late summer, the 482nd Bomb Group was formed here. This was the original Radar Blind Bombing Unit. It served as Pathfinders for the 8th AF. There were two squadrons of B-17s and one of B-24s. Each squadron furnished lead crews for one of the three Air Divisions. In March, 1944, the 482nd went off operations to train Radar (Mickey) Operators for the rest of the war.

Glatton, base of the last Group assigned to the First Air Division. It was the home of the 457th Bomb Group from January, 1944 to June, 1945.

Kimbolton, first home of the 91st Bomb Group, prior to the beginning of their operations. The 17th Bomb Group (B-26s) was here for a month. Then, it became the home of the 379th Bomb Group. This group was commanded by Maurice (Mo) Preston, until October, 1944, then command was taken over by our own Lewis E. (Lew) Lyle, for the duration of the war.

Finally, we get to Molesworth. The first USAAF tenant was the 15th Bomb Squadron, from June to September, 1942. Then, for the duration of the war, it was the home of the 303rd (Hell's Angels) Bomb Group. You 303rders know the rest.

Abbots Ripton, home of the 2nd Strategic Air Depot, the major maintenance base for the First Air Division. It was located on the East Side of the Airdrome, at Alconbury. This outfit actually brought B-17s back from the grave. All of our flight crews owe thanks to this great organization.

## VILLAGES WE VISIT

Extracted from the series "The King's England"; The Counties of Bedford and Huntingdon, first published April, 1939, by Hodder and Stoughton, London.

Molesworth. It has a Yew Tree Farm with timbered walls under a thatch, and a pathetic patch of ground in an orchard where many dogs sleep. Faithful and much loved creatures they were, among them Tantalising Tommy, who died in Italy. One monument has a bird bath with a stone figure of a terrier.

The church has something to astonish us. The chancel, with angels in its roof, is modern, but the nave and tower are 15th century, and the north and south walls have paintings worth coming far to see. Both were the work of an artist 600 years ago, and though they were fading away when we called, we could still see St. Christopher and St. Anthony. St. Christopher is shown with his great staff and the Child on his shoulder. He wears a white tunic, a red cloak, and is fording a river full of queer fishes. A hermit at the door of what looks like a sentry-box is holding a lantern to guide him. Only the lower part of St. Anthony's figure is left, standing among trees with a bell in his hand. Jumping up in front of him is a pig with a bell round its neck. There is an 18th century oak pulpit and an Elizabethan chalice.

Brington. We wonder if Huntingdonshire has a quieter spot than this. There is a delightful thatched cottage 300 years old near a fragment of a wayside cross, a farm with two barns built before the Mayflower and a small church tucked away with a 14th century tower and a spire lit by three rows of dormer windows. The nave is 14th century and the chancel 15th. The font must be 700 years old. The altar table is 17th century and in the windows of the nave are fragments of rich glass, with oak leaves which have not withered in six hundred years.

## "Seattle Sepctacular"

303rd 1985 Reunion July 24 - 28

50th Anniversary Party for the B-17

## "ALBERT DE GROOTE" (Continued)

(Conrad Kersch had been in France for nearly 2½ months since being shot down on 26 March, 1944. He was pretty well accustomed to his new name, Albert De Groote, but he was restless and bored with cutting fodder for the livestock on the farm where he was hiding. Finally, he persuaded his host to talk to the Underground about letting him be of some use. Because of his persistence, it was agreed and he was scheduled to move. After an all-day bicycle trip, he was taken to the house of Jordain, Marthe, their son, Ceasar and the family dog, Madame Fleas. Jordain was an Underground leader and was especially interested in Kersch after learning that he was a native Chicagoan. That automatically made him a "gangster" to the Frenchman and he felt Albert De Groote was a natural for a "job" the Underground was planning.) We pick up the story at this point:

Steve, another Underground leader, and I sat at the kitchen table smoking and drinking wine as Jordain detailed the forth-coming "job". It had been decided that, since the Underground was short of money and food ration coupons, a likely source had to be robbed. A bank had been singled out. It was located in the City Hall building of a suburb of Armentieres. Jordain, it seemed, was a historian of the notorious Chicago hoodlum, John Dillinger and he had modeled our "job" after one of his bank holdups. Only five men were to be used: a driver, a safe man and three armed "hoods". As the plan unfolded, I became more and more excited. "Wow, me going on a bank job, just like in the movies!"

I was a bit surprised that Jordain and Steve hadn't asked beforehand if I would go along on this kind of Underground action. They just assumed that this would be a piece of cake for a Chicago boy. To me, it sounded like a great adventure and I felt that I had seen enough movie bank jobs to handle my part without too many goofs. I was to be the first one in the bank. Steve was to stand at the main entrance, inside the door, and intercept anyone who entered the building. A "hood" from another town was to help me corral the customers and bank employees. Another "hood" was a qualified locksmith. He would open and clean out the safe. Jordain would be at the curb in his front-wheel drive, four-door Citroen with the engine running. The trick was to move on split-second timing and with a minimum of noise since the Gestapo office was in the same building, just across the hall from the bank. It was agreed that if anything went wrong, it would be "every man for himself"! If there was any shooting, Jordain would wait only a few seconds before speeding away.

The next morning, Jordain and I got up several hours before sunrise. We had a nice breakfast and sat drinking coffee and smoking while waiting for the rest of our "gang". When we heard the usual coded knock, we doused the lights and opened the door. The other gang members slipped quietly into the house. All French houses were kept blacked out to make it more difficult for the Germans to orient themselves at night, either on the ground, in the air or at sea.

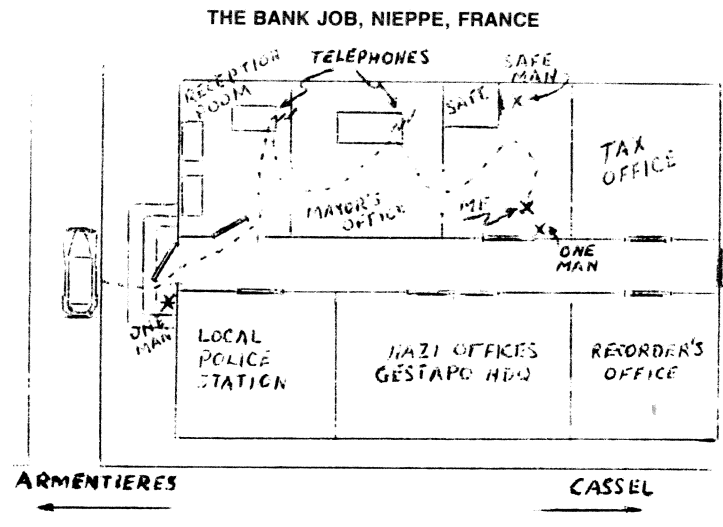
Our cohorts had brought a knapsack filled with pistols, ammunition, explosives and locksmith tools. Marthe issued large handkerchiefs which we were to pull over our noses as a disguise. After picking our weapons and ammunition, we reviewed the plans carefully to make sure that each understood what he was to do. Jordain finally decided it was time to move out. Thank God! The suspense of my first "job" was about to unravel me! Jordain's car was waiting in the driveway. We piled in. On signal, Marthe swung open the gates and we shot out onto the highway. Jordain had timed our arrival at the bank just after the doors opened to admit the early customers.

As soon as the car stopped at the curb, I followed Steve, at a leisurely pace, to the City Hall building. The other two men were a few paces behind me. Steve stopped inside the main entrance. I proceeded to the bank door on my left and entered. The room was crowded with customers and bank personnel. The shock of my first criminal escapade made me forget the French words I had been told to say: "Main montant" (hands up)! I also forgot to pull the handkerchief up over my face. In good western movie fashion, I motioned upward with my pistol. Although everyone seemed stunned, they understood the gesture, for all hands shot into the air as if attached to a string that someone had pulled. The elderly bank president blurted out a string of French words which I guessed were pleas to depart the premises. The other men arrived and we herded everyone into the next room which contained the bank's vault. The safe-man convinced the bank president that it was in his best interest to open the vault and soon, he and the other "hood" were dumping its contents into a couple of gunny sacks while I kept the crowd lined up against the wall. Suddenly, out of

the corner of my eye, I spotted a uniform. By pure reflex, I spun around and shoved my pistol into the ample belly of the bank guard so hard that my knuckles touched his uniform. He must have thought he had been shot for his breath exploded from his mouth and he began to jabber, looking at me with terror in his eyes. The scene destroyed the seriousness of the situation and my captive customers began to giggle. I glanced toward the Gestapo office, placed my finger to my lips and uttered, "Shhhh". The people understood and the room became silent again.

While the other two men continued sorting out the contents of the vault and filling the bags, I put one of my prized taylor-made cigarettes in my mouth only to discover that I had left my lighter at the house. I began frisking the bank guard. By his gestures he conveyed to me that he was a non-smoker and, instantly, two or three of my captive customers whipped out lighters and held them toward me. After lighting up, I motioned for them to resume their places against the wall. They smiled graciously and complied without comment.

When the safe-man and the other "hood" finished their work, we began an unhurried departure. As we passed through the main bank lobby, I stopped at the president's desk and tore the telephone loose despite his protest. We walked casually out of the building, piled into the car and Jordain sped off in a different direction from the one we had taken into town. In a round-about way, travelling little-used roads and pathways, we arrived at Jordain's house. Marthe had the gates open and Jordain didn't even slow down until the car was well into the yard. We unloaded the car, Jordain backed it into the little barn and we covered it with hay, all within a matter of minutes.



The other "hoods" changed clothes, gathered up all the weapons and hurriedly left the yard on their racing type bicycles. The gates were closed behind them. The sudden stillness of the house was frightening. We felt that something had to happen after such a thrilling adventure. Everything had gone too smoothly. Surely the local police and the Gestapo wouldn't tolerate a bank robbery without making someone pay for it!

That night we listened to the radio for any French news about the robbery. We heard nothing and finally switched over to the B.B.C. and absorbed some of the beautiful music played by the Glenn Miller orchestra. He had always been my favorite and I never missed an opportunity to relax to his music during the entire time I was M.I.A. The French people and the German soldiers all enjoyed his music as much as we did.

Through local police contacts and also from the bank president, Jordain found out that most of the money we had taken in the bank "job" was the military payroll for some of the German troops in the area. Converting Francs to Dollars, our take had amounted to roughly \$50,000. Of course, we also had taken more than enough food coupons to meet the needs of the Underground for some time.

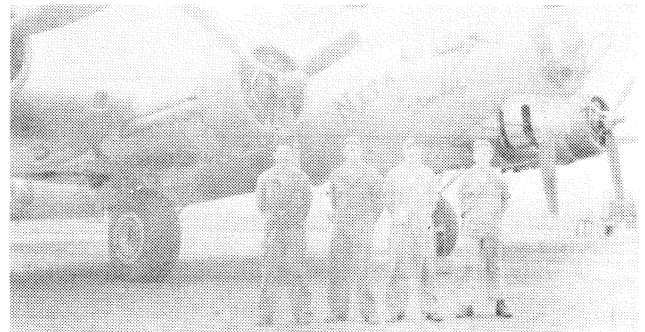
Without my knowing it, the money and coupons were picked up during the night and absorbed into the Underground chain. I felt very good for having been able to contribute to the war effort. The whole affair was a

bit ironic. Here I was, an American airman, still being hunted by the Germans and with a sizable price on my head, and I had helped rob them of their payday! Hopefully the problems I was creating for the Germans would help repay them for any discomforts my captured crewmates were suffering.

A few days later, one of the Underground members brought the local weekly newspaper to the house and Jordain read it to me. Because I had failed to cover my face, because it was apparent that I spoke no French and because of my dark blond hair, the Gestapo had deduced that I was an escaped Polish displaced person. The article went on to say that all of the "gang" were escaped D.P.s on a robbing spree to get money for food. A large reward was being offered for any information leading to our capture. We remained inactive for a time until the excitement died down, but Jordain kept busy planning other "activities" for the future.

### NUMBER 7 IDENTIFIED ???

Remember the photo of Outstanding Crew Chiefs in the last two issues? Until now we didn't have a guess as to the identity of the seventh man standing on the wing of the B-17. Harry Hall says, "I think I have the #7 Crew Chief. He is Albert Fox, C.C. of Neva, The Silver Lady. At last count she had 126 missions. Ask him. His membership number is 483."



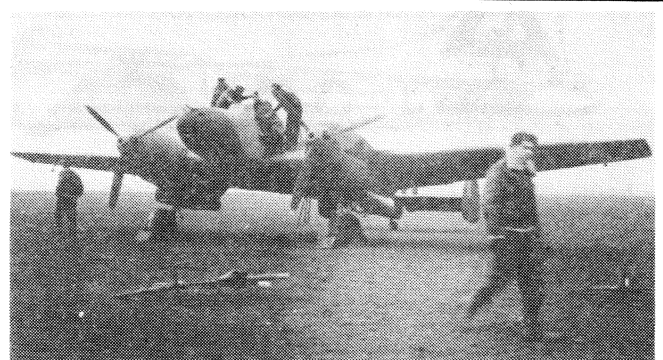
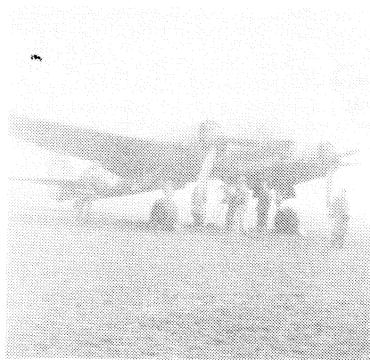
It's a poor print, but here's "NEVA, The Silver Lady." Al Fox is third from left, Hall is on far right.

Harry sent along a couple of snaps that may stir some memories.



Reunion with FFI buddies and families after the war. Picture was made in front of the bank at Nieppe. Kersch is in uniform, right of center. Bearded man kneeling in foreground was the FFI chief. At the time of this photo, he was in the French Senate.

Remember the captured German fighters that visited Molesworth?



### TAPS

We extend our deepest sympathy to the families and friends of these former members of the 303rd who have passed away recently:

**GERALD G. LITTLE**, 358th Squadron  
2038 Summit Avenue  
St. Paul, MN 55015

**DARREL SCHLEMMER**, 360th Squadron  
2279 Timberlane Avenue  
Simi Valley, CA 93063





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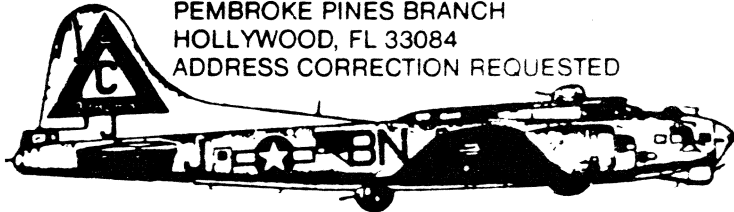
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