



## 2ADA Folds; 392nd BGMA Going Strong

In early September, the Second Air Division Association met in Chicago for the last time. After 65 reunions, the 2ADA folded its wings due to decreasing membership and the advanced age of its veterans. After final bills are paid, general funds (currently about \$49,000) will be divided equally between the Heritage League and the Memorial Trust in England.

The 2ADA recently received \$80,000 from the estate of Bernard J. Newmark. These funds will be used to digitize the Memorial Library's 2AD records.

Heritage League president Marybeth Dyer pledged they will hold annual reunions and continue to perpetuate the legacy of the 2AD.

Convention coordinator/ 578th copilot Oak Mackey said about 150 people came to the reunion, including 39 veterans. The 392nd was well represented, with nine veterans and 16 other attendees.



Crusaders in Chicago. Standing L-R: Joe McNiell, Jack Rotzien, Aubrey Burke, Harvey Naber, Oak Mackey, Jim Goar. Sitting L-R: Bob Harned, Martha Bambauer (Gil's widow), Allen Duff and Tom Perry.

### Symposia

Mike Perry, Executive Director of the US Army Heritage Center Foundation, gave a stirring presentation on the US Army Heritage and Education Center (USAHEC) in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. He reminded 2AD veterans they were part of the US Army and that USAHEC is a fitting repository for their memorabilia. Its mission, after all, is to "tell the Army story, one soldier at a time." For more information, see [www.USAHEC.org](http://www.USAHEC.org).

392nd BGMA members Greg Hatton and Ben Jones gave informative talks on very different subjects. Greg, a POW expert, discussed the experiences of his father, 576th waist gunner Sgt Hyman J. Hatton, after he became a POW on

29 April 1944. Ben described the creation of the American Roll of Honor in St. Paul's Cathedral, London. It honors the more than 28,000 Americans who were killed in defense of the United Kingdom during WWII.

### 392nd BGMA Official Meeting

After Pres. Jim Goar called the meeting to order, Tom Perry read the 392nd BG prayer; Bob Harned (son of 578th Intelligence Clerk Robert G. Harned) led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Secretary Annette Tison announced that the Board of Directors approved a motion to combine the jobs of the Secretary and the Treasurer. All financial duties will transition to her. With our shrinking membership, this will streamline operations. Treasurer Bill McCutcheon was thanked for his many years of

service; he will continue to administer our PX.

Bill reported that our treasury continues to hover around \$20,000 in unrestricted funds. Jim Goar reminded Life Members that they don't pay dues. Since they are "riding the railroad with a ticket bought years ago" he urged them to send in a donation if they are able.

### Reports

Vice Pres. Bob Books noted that over 415 air and ground crew photos were added to [www.b24.net](http://www.b24.net) this year; the website gets over 300,000 visits annually. The 8th Air Force Historical Society is holding its reunion in October in San Antonio, Texas; next year, they will meet in Savannah, Georgia. The Executive Committee will decide where the

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## FROM THE EDITOR

**Reunion.** The reunion was wonderful! The 392nd had the largest number of people present plus the most veterans. We would have had one more except S.J. "Sandy" Elden broke his left hip two weeks before the reunion. He spent nine days in the hospital and says "I am still in in therapy but slowly but surely I am returning to a normal stance. I really missed being at this reunion and am really looking forward to participating in next year's gathering!"

**What does it mean?** Dino Santelli, son of 577th sheet metal worker Pvt Rudy Santelli, sent me a photo of a tail turret with the words "Shoot you're faded" painted beneath the plexiglass. Next to the words are a pair of dice, one showing five dots and the other four dots. Can anyone explain what this means? Did you ever see this turret at Wendling?

**11 Sep 1944.** 579th engineer Joe DeSario has a special reason to remember the mission to Hanover on 11 Sep 1944: "My home address was 495 Hanover Ave. on Staten Island. The number on our plane was 495. While flying over Hanover, Germany, the German fighters were not very friendly and I remember saying to the pilot, Capt Henry K. Porter, 'I live on Hanover Ave. and my house number is 495 but I do not really feel at home here today.'"

**PX Items.** To display or learn more about your Crusader heritage:

- Cap—new design!! 392nd BG Liberator embroidered on front, Crusader logo on back (see photo on page 10). Velcro straps in back for easy size adjustment. Made in the USA. Khaki. \$25
- Jacket. White, nylon, with 392nd and Crusader patches. Only one left, size medium. \$20
- Book.\* *The Liberators From Wendling*, by Col. Bob Vickers, \$35
- Book.\* *Remembrance of the Missing*, by Col. Bob Vickers, \$35
- Book.\* *My Combat Diary*, by 578th copilot Walt Cranson (autographed), \$10
- Book.\* *Country Boy, Combat Bomber Pilot*, by 578th pilot Col. Bob Tays, \$10. Only three copies left.
- CD only. 392nd BG Anthology, *20th Century Crusaders*. CD includes the 8th AF chronology, European War Strategic Bombing Survey, and WWII posters, \$15.
- 392nd BG photos, 73 minutes, available on DVD or VCR, \$10
- White 392nd BG patches, 3-4" diameter, only 4 available, \$10
- Print, *Liberators from Wendling*, by Frederick T. Searle. Image size, 11.5"H x 16.5"W, total size 20.5"H x 21.5"W. Depicts five olive drab 392nd BG B-24s,

including #42-7478, P-Bar, The Flying Crusader. Although the caption says they are "En Route to Berlin, 18 March 1945," the planes are actually from several periods in the 392nd's history. Signed by artist. \$20.

Prices include US postage; add \$5 for international mail. Due to limited quantities, items marked with an asterisk are available only to 392nd BGMA members or relatives. We also reserve the right to limit the number of books sold to any purchaser. For questions about the inventory, contact Bill McCutcheon. To order, send a check payable to 392nd BGMA to Annette Tison.

● **Five DVDs:** Three panels discussions on individual DVDs filmed at the 1993 Albuquerque reunion: Ground Support Teams Prepare for a Mission. Moderated by Group Transportation Officer Jim Goar, panel members were Station Ammunition Officer Charles Dye, 578th crew chief Ernie Barber; 10th Station Complement Sqdn personal equipment clerk Gil Bambauer; 578th flight engineer Norm Mellow, and Station Flying Control Officer Bernard Glettler; The Tough Missions (Bremen, Kiel, Gotha, Friedrichshafen, Politz, Berlin, Bernberg, Bingen and Wesel). Moderator Bob Vickers led a discussion by 579th Sqdn CO Myron Keilman, 579th pilots Vern Baumgart and J. Fred Thomas, 578th pilots/copilots Cliff Peterson, Carroll Cheek, J.D. Long and Dick Griffin, and 577th ball turret gunner Jim Buzick. The Early Days. 578th navigator Keith Roberts chaired a review by 392nd CO Lawrence Gilbert, Gil Bambauer, Jim Goar, Myron Keilman, Group Navigator Ken Paddock, and Group (later Division) bombardier Joe Whittaker. The fourth DVD shows the October 1989 return to Wendling including the rededication of the Memorial. The last DVD highlights the Albuquerque reunion, including many of the 250+ vets and family members present and an interview with Myron Keilman and 579th pilot Harrison Cassell. All five DVDs are yours for a donation of \$100, including US shipping and handling. For international shipping, add \$10 per order. For questions about the DVDs, contact Bob Books. To order, send a check payable to 392nd BGMA to Annette Tison.

● **392nd BG Commemorative Coin**, \$13.00. Send a check payable to 392nd BGMA to Annette Tison.

**Contact information for Bill, Bob and Annette is in the box at the upper left of this page.**

# President's Message



The 392 BGMA has, with a couple of exceptions, always met with either the 8AF Historical Society or the 2nd Air Division Association. This year's 2ADA meeting in Chicago was bittersweet as we witnessed the gallant 2AD strike their tents and fly off into the sunset. But it was time, said Oak Mackey, 578th pilot and past president of 2ADA. "We could not find the men for the jobs,

or the money to take care of them," he said. The Heritage League is picking up the gauntlet and will continue the 2AD's traditions.

Tom and Jill Scott, the Trustees of our Memorial at Wendling, represented us at the Cambridge cemetery on Memorial Day. They have been performing this duty for us for years, rain or shine, hot or cold. Jill laid the usual wreath of red, white, and blue flowers with a marker stating that it was from the 392nd.

We in the U. S. were fascinated by the TV coverage of the Queen's Golden Jubilee. In her letter to me, Jill described how Beeston celebrated it:

There was an enactment of the Coronation in the church with a very pretty 6 year old girl as the Queen and a 10 year old boy as Prince Philip. An old bus, the type that you will remember, went around the village twice to pick up the people who wanted to ride in it to come to the church, which was packed solid. Then they all came back to one of our barns where there was a long trestle table laid out with food. There was a display of local arts and crafts and in spite of sporadic showers, a Terrier race, and a dog show, all with the local 5 piece band playing. When all that was finished there was a barbeque at the local pub.

Jill summed it up: "A most successful, if wet, day."

Secretary-Treasurer Annette Tison has furnished me with some pretty significant figures concerning our present membership:

We are now at 350 members total, 40 less than last year. 150 are veterans (43%), 164 are second-generation or other interested persons (47%), and 36 are Friends (10%). 193 are Life Members, leaving just 110 who pay dues annually.

It doesn't require a Certified Public Account to see that there is not a lot of financial strength left in our organization. It behooves all of our Life Members to realize that they are riding the railroad with a ticket bought years ago and that they should start paying annual dues again.

Blue Skies,  
Jim Goar

**From the 392nd history for October 1944:** "One of the important station activities on the 31st of October was the collecting of overshoes from all men and officers. All this footwear was to be shipped at once to the men in the lines who needed it now worse than we do. Our supply was to be replenished later."

## REUNION from page 1

392nd BGMA will meet in 2013 after full details on costs, dates, and programs for both the 8th and Heritage League reunions are available.

The Nominating Committee, headed by Dennis Rogers, placed the names of Wally Blackburn, Jack Rotzien, Bob Books, and Annette Tison for re-election as Directors. His motion was unanimously approved.

Annette Tison advised members of the hard work Director John Gilbert does in England on our behalf. He was once again invited to the three-day Elmham Festival where he displayed dozens of 392nd BG photos and six tables of memorabilia. He could not attend the reunion but sent an American and British flag in his stead. Both had been blessed by The Reverend Jonathan Boston and flown at the Wendling Memorial in May 2012. They added a special touch to our gathering.

392nd BGMA coins were given to 578th pilot Allen Duff; he was not only the oldest veteran present (turning 95 in November) but also traveled the farthest to attend. 576th waist gunner Harvey Naber was presented a coin as it was his first reunion, he was the second oldest (94 in November), and he traveled the second farthest to attend. At "only" 87 years old, 579th gunnery instructor Jack Rotzien was the youngest veteran. Since he had been the youngest vet at the 2011 reunion and received a coin then, a coin was given to the next-youngest vet present, 578th tail gunner Joe McNiel (also 87 but Jack's junior by 11 months).

Oak Mackey, our representative to the 2ADA, said Richard Robert, current 2ADA president, was elected as the executor to "wrap it up." Oak is also part of the 2ADA's Dissolution Committee. There will be one more issue of the *2ADA Journal* to inform all members how the dissolution plan is being implemented.

VP Bob Books reminded everyone that the second generation members of the 392nd BGMA are fully committed to preserving the legacy of the Group. Considering themselves as "replacement crew," the 2nd gens will not "abandon the history and legacy of our veterans."

Recognizing their "extraordinarily meritorious achievement," Jim Goar presented the President's Award to five members. Recipients were Oak Mackey, for long service as a 392nd BGMA Director and as our chairman for the 2ADA; Tom Perry, for outstanding performance as a Director and 392nd BGMA Chaplain; Greg Hatton, for his work as a Director and Historian for POWs; Jim Marsteller, for his service as a Director and Historian of the Friedrichshafen mission (18 March 1944) when Jim's uncle, 579th engineer S/Sgt Everette N. Morris, was killed in action; and Ben Jones, for his work as a Director and Historian for Wendling. Ben had to leave early so his award was given him the previous day.

At the end of the meeting, everyone joined in singing Vera Lynn's famous WWII anthem, "We'll Meet Again." More than one tear was shed during this sentimental favorite.



# ANATOMY OF A MISSION, PART 3

Once the planes were aloft, airmen moved to their assigned positions. In some crews, it was routine practice for the tail gunner to be in his turret throughout taxi, takeoff and assembly so he could watch for planes coming too close. The ball turret gunner did not usually enter his turret until the plane neared the reach of enemy fighters.

## In Flight

As the plane climbed, the temperature dropped. There was no central heating or air conditioning; the temperature inside the plane was about the same as the temperature outside. Waist gunners stood in front of open windows for hours on end. Wally Blackburn, 579/6, served as both a waist and tail gunner. He says it was colder in the tail than in the waist but it was coldest of all in the nose, where the crewmen suffered not only from the cold temperature but also from the wind roaring through the gap between the turret and fuselage.

Electrically heated flying suits were therefore plugged in and rheostats adjusted to the desired warmth. When they worked, the suits were wonderful. There were many problems, though, especially for waist gunners. 576th gunner Bud Guillot on the Kamenitsa crew says, "Waist gunners were always kneeling and then standing up again, depending on where enemy fighters were and how they had to position their gun. As a result, the wires behind their knees would short out; sometimes they would burn the skin or catch fire." The suits didn't always heat evenly, with feet too cold and hands too hot, for example.

Radio operator Gerald Gersten, 577th, recalls a mission to the oil refineries at Harberg, Germany. Pilot 1/Lt Dale W. Enyart directed Gersten to open the bomb bay doors manually. He sprang into action so fast that his oxygen



Before the advent of the electrically heated flying suit, airmen used sheepskin-lined clothes to combat the cold. Here, 579th radio operator T/Sgt William Sullivan on 1/Lt Gordon Hammond's crew demonstrates his battle attire. A seat-type parachute is attached to his harness.

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## 392nd BGMA MEMBERSHIP FORM

Please look at the mailing label. Your membership status is shown directly after your name. "12" means your membership expires in December 2012 and should be renewed soon. LM means Life Member and FRND means that you receive the *News* with compliments of the 392nd BGMA. Send this form and your check (payable to 392nd BGMA) to Annette Tison, 9107 Wood Pointe Way, Fairfax Station, VA 22039. You may also join or renew on-line at <http://www.b24.net/392nd/join.htm>.

The Board of Directors has ruled that no Crusader will be denied membership because of financial difficulty, so if you're in straitened circumstances, check the Hardship Waiver box. If you feel that you can help the 392nd BGMA treasury with a donation, there is a provision for it below.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Ground [ ] Air [ ] Sqdn/Unit \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing address \_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone number \_\_\_\_\_

If a spouse, friend, or relative served in the 392nd, please give us his name and unit: \_\_\_\_\_

**Dues:** [ ] \$25/year if you want to receive the *News* by postal mail OR [ ] \$20/year for receipt by email  
Please feel free to renew for multiple years! Just let us know what your wishes are.

Hardship Waiver [ ] DONATION \$ \_\_\_\_\_ TOTAL ENCLOSED \$ \_\_\_\_\_

#### MISSION from page 4

mask and interphone headset came off and the cord to his electrically heated flying suit detached. Engineer T/Sgt Charles E. Aycock came to the rescue and reconnected all his cords. However, Gersten had been unplugged long enough that he lost all the toenails on both feet.

The B-24 was not pressurized. 578/9th Sqdn radio operator Bert Hinckley recalled that for breakfast on the morning of a mission, "we had fresh eggs and any other breakfast foods that would not generate abdominal gas. Non-pressurized flying meant that gas would expand to triple volume, at

altitude." Airmen were cautioned not to chew gum before or during high altitude flights as too much air was swallowed in the process which could lead to potential problems.

"The only protection the plane offered was the 1/8th inch aluminum skin," he said. "The only armor-plating was steel around the back and sides of the pilot and copilot. Everyone else had to depend on the flak vests and helmets."

Pilots sat on their parachutes; all other airmen generally used chest-type parachutes. Most turret gunners couldn't fit in their turrets if they wore a chute; men who *could* wear a parachute usually didn't as they were bulky and the added weight was exhausting. Therefore, airmen often left their parachute packs on the floor near their position with the hope that they could find them and have time to hook on a chute if necessary.

#### Oxygen

All crewmen were required to go on oxygen as the plane gained altitude. 579th navigator Red Sprowls recalls, "We generally were instructed to use oxygen around 8,000 feet. If it was a long mission we might delay using oxygen at this altitude in order to conserve the supply. Oxygen was also used to overcome the effects of too much celebrating the night before and it was not uncommon to don the oxygen mask even prior to takeoff."

A designated man made an "oxygen check" every 15 minutes. 578th tail gunner Joe McNiel says every person in his crew had a number, which they repeated during the check. If a man didn't answer, someone would go to his position to ensure he was ok.

Faulty oxygen equipment or a disconnected hose could cause death in minutes. For example, on the 2 Nov 1944 mission to the oil refinery at Castrop-Rauxel, 576th tail gunner S/Sgt Jack V. Negus was found unconscious, leaning out of his turret. He died soon after. Official reports say he suffered a heart attack, but navigator 1/Lt James McCutcheon's log noted that he died of anoxia, or lack of oxygen in the blood.

576th tail gunner John Rosenberg says his "first mission could have been his last if it weren't for the oxygen check." On 4 Dec 1944, he was having trouble with his turret guns. As he tried to fix the problem, he dislodged his oxygen connection. When he didn't respond to the next check, waist gunner S/Sgt Robert W. Brennan came back and revived him. "It was like being suddenly awakened from a very deep sleep," Rosenberg says. "I was startled, so I punched him!"

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This photo, looking toward the front of the plane, shows 579th ball turret gunner S/Sgt Richard Hoffman during a combat mission. Before takeoff, waist gunner Sgt Charles D. Martin was given a camera and told to get some combat photos. After Hoffman's turret was damaged by an ME-109, he went up to the waist area. Hoffman saw more ME-109s coming in with machine guns firing. He grabbed Martin's waist gun and was shooting back when Martin took this photo. Hoffman is wearing complete combat gear, including a flak vest (7.5 pounds) and flak helmet. The thick hose connects his oxygen mask to the on-board system (the oxygen came from the large tanks overhead). Two parachute packs are at his right foot. Parachute packs were bulky and cumbersome so about half the men who could wear chutes didn't; instead, they placed them near their stations to grab in an emergency, as Hoffman did. The thin cords connect him to the interphone (the on-board communication system) and an outlet for his electrically heated flying suit. The boxes in the background are probably filled with chaff. The machine gun belts for the waist gunners are visible on both sides of the photo. Even with their thick gloves, a gunner could hook on another belt in less than two seconds. The lens used to take this photo distorts the dimensions; it is not quite this crowded in the waist section!

## **MISSION from page 5**

If the mask didn't seal tightly, ice crystals formed on the face as the airman's breath froze. Blackburn says after flying four missions in four days, his face was extremely chapped and "Vaseline was the only remedy." 577th tail gunner Harry Walz comments that even something as simple as not shaving properly before a mission could keep the mask from fitting close enough.

Guillot recalls, "Lark Morgan, our tail gunner, smoked with his oxygen mask on. He would move the mask to one side of his face and stick a cigarette in the corner of his mouth and then pull a little of the mask over the lip holding the cigarette. One could easily judge the ferocity of each mission by the number of cigarette butts on the floor of Morgan's tail turret."

If a man had to leave his position for any reason, he unplugged the hose and attached a small "walk-around" bottle that held about 15 minutes of oxygen. They were also used in other emergencies. 579th pilot 1/Lt Harrison Cassell wrote his wife about the mission on 13 Nov 1943, "Just after we had hit the target (Bremen, one of the toughest in Germany) fighters were coming in from all directions and the top turret was busy spinning around tracking them. We had an oxygen filler hose connected to it & while spinning it came off—and before the radio man could get it stopped the oxygen all ran out of the system that supplies the nose. The nose turret gunner passed out. Then [bombardier William F. Cetin] passed out & [navigator Kenneth S. Bevan] called me about then. We kept passing around the walk-around bottles down to them and then they finally came to with Ken doctoring them."

In his journal, Cassell noted that right waist gunner S/Sgt Cecil Rothrock "passed out & was out for a good while. He also got his heel burnt and two toes frozen on the same foot."

### **Food and the Bathroom**

In a June 2005 interview, 578th copilot William Riddleberger said, "We did not eat or drink or relieve ourselves during the entire flight. Prior to the mission, each of us was given a chocolate bar and a fruit bar, but we rarely ate it during the flight. I would leave them in my locker, and eat them later on."

Gersten took a candy bar with him. It froze at altitude but he still gnawed on it when he got hungry. "After all," he says, "I was young and invincible."

If someone had to go to the bathroom in flight, there was a relief tube in the plane, basically a funnel that opened outside the plane. Memories differ as to where it was located. Blackburn's ground crew chief always put empty ammunition cans throughout the plane. If one was used during the flight, the airmen tossed it out over the water on their way back so the ground crew wouldn't have to deal with it. Flak helmets could also be used if necessary.

Most airmen simply didn't think of eating or using the bathroom during a mission as they were too focused on fighters and flak.

### **Interphone**

A B-24 was so noisy that communication was only possible through the interphone. It was an open circuit so everyone heard everything that was said. The navigator regularly informed the pilots of times and headings. When under attack, gunners advised each other of incoming enemy a/c (i.e., "two o'clock low, twelve o'clock high").

When a plane got hit by flak or fighter bullets, the interphone system sometimes stopped working; as a result, men positioned far from the damage were sometimes not aware that their plane was in serious trouble till they saw flames and smoke in the a/c or parachutes blossoming below.

### **Arming the Bombs**

As the first step in the arming process, a man had to go to the bomb bays and remove the safety cotter pins from the bombs. As the armorer-gunner on his crew, Guillot "was responsible to remove all the safety pins and serial number tags from each bomb in our bomb bays as soon as we got over the English Channel. The safety pins were there to keep the bombs from exploding if they were accidentally dropped on takeoff or on the English Countryside. I had to save each of those tags to turn in after each mission to prove the bombs were armed and ready to detonate on ground contact. I was to hook into the portable oxygen bottle, go through the small door to the bomb bay with my bulky flight suit and chest parachute harness on and walk down that narrow catwalk between the two bomb racks carrying that awkward portable oxygen bottle, wind whistling through the loose-fitting, noisy, rattling bomb bay doors while retrieving all bomb tags. I never attempted making that walk again with a portable oxygen bottle. I just held my breath."

### **Test-Firing the Guns**

At about 25 miles out from the English coast, gunners fired a short burst to ensure their guns were working correctly. Even this simple, routine task could have unexpected results. While at 19,700 feet on 29 Apr 1944, 579th pilot 2/Lt Dewey L. Gann noticed a large oil leak in the #3 engine. He feathered the prop and aborted. Inspection on the ground revealed that an empty shell case, ejected when ships in front of him test-fired their guns, had severed the oil line.

### **Radio Operator/Engineer Duties**

Radio silence was generally maintained, but radio operators always manned their sets, listening for Morse code messages affecting recall, diversion or change of target.

577th Sqdn engineer Gerald Cross says one of his main duties was to "transfer the gas as needs be and situations permitted—during a lull in the action, never during fighter attack or warning. Some planes were more gas efficient, so were some pilots. The position in the formation had a lot to do with throttle jockeying and increased gas consumption."

Joe DeSario, 579th engineer, said he usually transferred fuel after leaving the target. With the sight gauges as a reference, he moved gas between the tanks so that each engine had the same amount of fuel.

### **Chaff**

When the formation neared known flak zones, waist gunners were instructed to throw chaff out of the plane. These strips of aluminum were intended to mislead German flak radars about the formation's altitude.

### **Gunners**

An air-cooled Browning .50 caliber machine gun fired 750 to 850 bullets per minute at a velocity of 2,900 feet per second. Gunners fired only in short bursts so the gun barrel wouldn't overheat. Gunners constantly scanned the skies for enemy fighters, often staring into the morning sun in the process. DeSario says they had sunglasses "but they weren't the best

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in the world.” Cross remembers that “watching the skies for those rapidly growing black spots demanded constant attention. Once when the contrails were very dense, suddenly out of the trails popped the nose of a German fighter plane, the 20mm guns blinking red fire. He had come in too close for anyone to react with control. The German pilot was experienced enough to drop down slightly and get out of the scope of the top turret. The tail gunner opened up but froze to his guns, burning one up completely. The nose gunner reported seeing white explosions up front. The shells went on each side of the top turret, except one which struck the #2 engine, knocking it out without exploding. The whole attack took only seconds. It took much longer than that for me to do several ‘Our Fathers’.”

### **Mission Routes**

Routes were scheduled to avoid major flak areas as much as possible and to mislead enemy fighters about the intended target. Each route, then, included several course changes until the Initial Point (IP) was reached. The IP was usually an unmistakable landmark, both visually and on radar. At the IP, the lead plane alerted the formation to turn toward the target by signal flares or by opening its bomb bay doors. All other planes promptly opened their own bomb bays and made the turn while simultaneously aligning in trail. On the bomb run, Groups were usually two to five miles apart.

### **Flak**

Riddleberger said, “With our air speed at about 300 mph during the bombing run, we were subject to anti-aircraft fire for about ten minutes. Most of the Germans were using 88mm anti-aircraft guns for flak fire. At the time, the German 88mm gun was considered the best anti-aircraft gun in the world. On the ground, the enemy anti-aircraft guns were usually protected by bunkers or revetments. Flak fire was encountered in areas other than over the target.”

Almost every airman remembers missions when “flak was so thick you could walk on it.” In his memoir, 578th pilot Bruce McClellan calmly notes, “At an average of 1,000 feet per second, it takes 20 seconds for an 88 shell to reach our altitude. In that same 20 seconds we shall have traveled something more than a mile. It’s not exactly a turkey shoot for anti-aircraft guns.”

He then writes, “First, we see the black puffs. Then we begin to smell the black powder. A little closer and we see the ugly red burst itself and perhaps feel and hear the impact of small shrapnel fragments. Those we can live with if we have just a bit of luck. When it’s closer than that and shell bursts begin to toss the plane around, the odds are against us. We need lots of luck then.

“...as we approach a heavily defended area, the Germans employ the same sort of statistical analysis which we use to plot our course. Knowing from aerial reconnaissance the number and placement of enemy anti-aircraft batteries, we calculate a ‘flak clock’ which tells us how to select a route which reduces to a minimum the number of shells which can be flung at us while we are within range overhead. Conversely, the anti-aircraft defenders identify probable targets and calculate a mathematical ‘box,’ which they attempt to fill with enough shrapnel so that no plane, theoretically, can pass through

the box without suffering fatal damage. None of us ever doubted that German calculations for ‘boxes’ over major targets were accurate. It was terrifyingly awesome to see ahead a ‘box’ of German anti-aircraft fire through which you knew you had to fly in your gossamer craft if you were to complete your mission.”

### **Initial Point**

When the planes got to the IP, they made the final turn toward the target. As McClellan points out, they were then “on a fixed track, which simplified the calculations of anti-aircraft batteries. We had no options of course or altitude. Whatever the target—railroad yard, engine factory, refinery—it was a fixed point on the surface of the earth, and we had to navigate to a fixed point 20,000 feet or so roughly above it to accomplish our mission.”

### **Target**

On the target run, lead bombardiers set their bombsights to allow for range (altitude) and deflection (bomb drift to the left or right as it fell to earth). The other bombardiers set up the assigned drop pattern on their intervalometers. This device controlled the time interval between successive bomb drops; the shorter the setting, the less distance between bomb hits on the ground as the plane flew over the target. Before the Radio Bomb Release, bombardiers pressed a toggle switch to release their bombs as soon as they saw bombs fall from the lead ship. The time lag between the first and later releases was accounted for by the bombsight.

The toggle switch could be used to bypass the bombsight in an emergency; there was also a manual release that jettisoned all the bombs at once. As the practice of dropping on the lead plane became the norm, many planes flew without an officer bombardier. The man who pushed the toggle switch was known as the “togglie.”

After bomb drop, the lead plane continued straight ahead for a few seconds to allow trailing planes to drop their bombs and close the bomb bay doors. Then it made for the Rally Point. Chosen to be away from known flak batteries, the RP was where Groups reformed into defensive formations. As soon as possible, the radio operator in the Wing lead plane sent a “target bombed” signal to Division headquarters.

### **Hung-up Bombs**

Occasionally, a bomb did not properly release from both ends of its shackle and was “hung up.” This happened to 579th pilot Don Scharf’s crew. He says, “After we had dropped our bombs on one mission, a live 500-pound bomb was discovered hanging at an angle from one shackle in the bomb bay. We couldn’t land with a hung-up bomb as it might break loose when the plane touched down on the runway. When we got to a low enough altitude over the Channel, we opened the bomb bay doors and armorer/waist gunner Constantine Rigas had to walk out on the 10-inch wide catwalk without a parachute and try to pry the bomb loose from the shackle with a screwdriver. After much prying, in the frigid wind blast, he finally managed to get the bomb to fall away. Everyone breathed a big sigh of relief.”

[Editor’s note: These incidents did not always end so well. On 13 Feb 1944, 579th gunner S/Sgt William G. Dickison fell to his death in the Channel while trying to release a hung-up bomb. His body was never recovered.]

**See MISSION on page 8**

## MISSION from page 7

### Bailing Out

Guillot was told in training that “if it were necessary to bail out at extreme altitude, don’t waste time looking for a portable oxygen bottle; just bail out and don’t pull your ripcord. You may pass out for a couple of minutes but you will come to and have ample time to pull your ripcord and make a safe landing.”

Riddleberger concurs. “Above 20,000 feet, the temperature was usually minus 40 degrees inside the plane. Without gloves your hands would freeze to the guns or metal. If you had to parachute from 20,000 feet, you were instructed to free fall for a while so you didn’t freeze to death when you opened your chute.”

[Editor’s note: Current US Air Force reservist Ben Jones says that WWII airmen did not have oxygen bottles to use as they descended. “The amount of time from bailout to landing was fairly short; that’s why a lot of times you’ll hear the stories of guys blacking out just after leaving the airplane and then coming to on the way down. There are various formulas about how fast you fall; on average it’s about 30 feet a second but when the chute deploys that drops to around 10-15 feet per second (on today’s chutes). So a freefall would be about 5.5 minutes from 20,000 feet to 10,000 feet” when you would no longer need oxygen.]

### Return to England

With bombs gone and less fuel, planes flew faster on the return trip. After leaving hostile airspace, the bomber stream separated into Divisions, each with its own briefed landfall point. When 100 miles from England, badly damaged a/c began to divert to the nearest air base or the emergency landing fields at Manston or Woodbridge. Their landing strips were 1,000 feet wide and 12,000 feet long, perfect for planes whose hydraulics had been shot out or had other mechanical damage.

All planes began “letting down”—reducing altitude about 500 feet per minute—so they were down to just a few thousand feet by the time they reached the English coast. At that point, each Group made for its own station.

Gunners couldn’t completely relax until their plane landed, as on several occasions enemy fighters followed the bomber stream back to England and strafed some airfields.

### Wendling

The bases obtained an estimated return time when Flying Control picked up radio chatter. Operations was notified at once and the duty Ops Officer went to the control tower. The Ops clerk alerted all necessary sections, MPs were posted at the briefing room, and medical and fire department personnel went to their vehicles.

By this time, the formation was down to a few hundred feet. While in the landing pattern circuit, the engineer confirmed the wheels were down and locked. Planes with wounded aboard or severe battle damage fired two red flares and landed

first. Otherwise, the left aircraft of the lowest left element of the low squadron peeled off to land first, followed by the element leader and the third a/c. These planes were followed by the second lowest element. Meanwhile, the lead and high squadrons made a wide left-hand circle above the base until it was their turn.

Scharf recalls, “There would be three or more planes on the runway at the same time: one ready to turn off onto the perimeter strip, one or two spaced on the runway behind him, and one just touching down. It was a hairy thing to do because if we misjudged our spacing we would run up on the guy ahead of us and would have to pour on full power, jump over him, and go around again. More than once I had guys run up on me and then thunder a few feet over the top of our plane. It was very disconcerting since I couldn’t see them coming up behind me at over 100 miles per hour.”

“Sometimes,” Scharf continues, “badly damaged planes that were still in no immediate danger would circle until the rest of the group had landed to prevent blocking the runway in case they crashed on landing.” This procedure sometimes had deadly consequences. On 29 Apr 1944, for example, plane #41-29427 exploded while in a landing pattern circuit over Wendling. 2/Lt Bernard Fryman and the other nine men in his 579th crew were killed.

Planes with wounded personnel turned off the runway as soon as possible, halting on the taxiway or the nearest hardstand where the ambulance was waiting. The other Libs went directly to their dispersal points, having opened their bomb bay doors to vent built-up gas fumes.

DeSario says he often felt like kissing the ground and thanking God he had gotten back safely.

Editor’s Note: The next issue of the *News* will discuss refreshments given the returning airmen, crew interrogation, required reports, and aircraft damage assessment and repair by ground crew personnel.



Station 118, shown in this photo taken at 8,000 feet on 20 Apr 1945, was a welcome sight to returning Crusaders. North is at the top.



# GUNNER CLAIMS

A pre-printed Interrogation Form was used by S-2 officers to thoroughly document all claims by gunners that they had shot down an enemy a/c. It asked the tactics used by the enemy pilot, how close his plane came, what action the gunner took, where the enemy plane was hit, how much damage was seen, and how the plane looked and flew going away. Other crewmen who could verify the claim were named.

After all crews had been questioned, S-2 personnel created a Combat Duplication Check Form. Its diagram structure showed the direction, approximate time, and type of enemy a/c from all attacks; colored arrows showed whether the attacks came from above, below, or level. This visual aid helped S-2 officers determine if gunners were claiming credit for the same incident.

When all analysis was complete, the Interrogating Officer suggested the credit he thought the gunner deserved: no claim, damaged, probable, or destroyed. The claim forms were typed and submitted to 2AD where the final decision regarding approval and for what type credit was made.

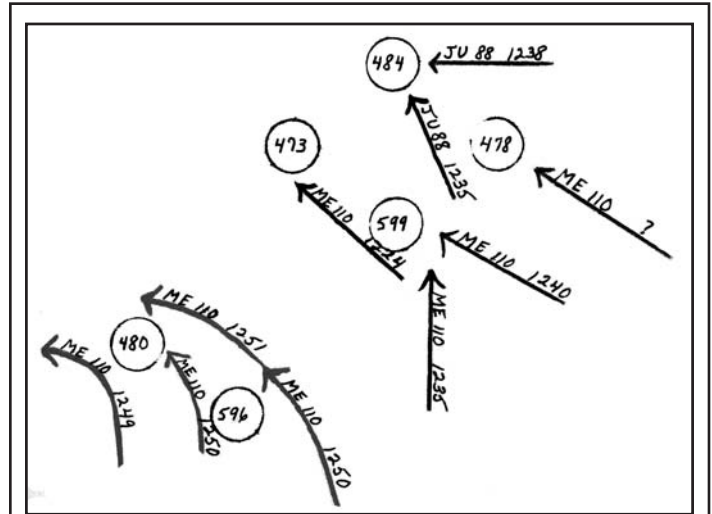
## 8 October 1943

Joe McNiel still remembers the fighter attacks during the mission to Vegesack. He "never thought the German Air Force had that many aircraft" and says the fighters were "on all of us like June bugs." His Interrogation Form is not quite as colorful: At 1612 hours at 22,000 feet, an FW-190 "came in and attacked ship below and then came up behind [my] ship and made turn past the tail, not attacking this ship." McNiel fired two bursts from 300 yards and "saw bullets entering plane" and then "the A/C exploded and went down." He got credit for destroying the plane.

Eight minutes later, ball turret gunner S/Sgt Mike Mancuso reported that a Ju-88 "circled from 8 o'clock from 900 yards to 530 and came in in a climb. Started firing at 800 yards and fired till e/a reached 400 yards." Mancuso fired 150 to 200 rounds and saw "tracers going in." Then, the fighter made a "slight right turn and headed down in a dive, smoking, and pilot bailed out." He got credit for destroying that plane.

## 7 July 1944

After the mission to Bernberg, 579th left waist gunner



This Combat Duplication Check Form shows the time and type of enemy fighter attacks against the lead block (578 and 579th Sqdns) on 4 Jan 1944. Attacks portrayed on the upper right were from below; those at left were level.

S/Sgt Donald E. Fowler requested credit for destroying an enemy plane, as did his engineer/top turret gunner T/Sgt Boyd A. Rodgers. Fowler's claim was rejected while Rodgers' was approved. Several weeks later, Asst. S-2 Officer 2/Lt John D. O'Neill wrote 2AD asking them to reconsider the claim. "Lt. [Henry J.] Leser, pilot of the A/C, feels certain that this is a just claim. He verifies the data and vouches for the witness and has asked us to inquire the reasons why the claim was not allowed."

On 6 September, O'Neill telephoned 2AD's Capt Throop for an update. In a hand-written memo about the conversation, O'Neill commented that Throop "says claim was not allowed because it was judged that the E/A [enemy aircraft] claimed was the same one claimed by T/Sgt Rodgers and credited as destroyed by him. He added that if Lt Leser thinks this judgment was in error and has reason to suppose it was not the same E/A, we should call again tomorrow." According to O'Neill's notes, Throop "says it's too near the end of the war to make anybody unhappy over a thing like this." Three days later, 2AD officially gave Fowler the credit he sought.

## FOLDED WINGS REPORT

Please report the death of a member or spouse and provide a copy of the newspaper obituary if possible.

Name of deceased \_\_\_\_\_ Unit/Sqdn \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Date of death \_\_\_\_\_ Survivors \_\_\_\_\_

Reported by \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

The 392nd BGMA is engaged in a fund-raising effort to financially support our website, www.b24.net. It contains the history of the 392nd Bomb Group. You could make no greater tribute to your loved one than a donation for this living and ongoing memorial to the 392nd. Please send this report, hopefully with your check payable to the 392nd BGMA-Website, but send it with or without it, to: Annette Tison, 9107 Wood Pointe Way, Fairfax Station, VA 22039

# REUNION PHOTOS



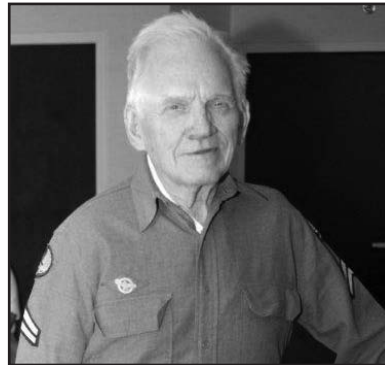
Tom Perry



At left, the design on the front and back of the new khaki 392nd BGMA caps, revealed for the first time at the reunion and for sale now.



Debbie and Martha Bambauer



Aubrey Burke and his WWII uniform shirt. Note the 8th AF patch on his right shoulder and the Honorable Discharge patch ("ruptured duck") on the front.



Bill McCutcheon



L-R: Bob Harned, Jack Rotzien, Robert G. Harned, and Bill Harned

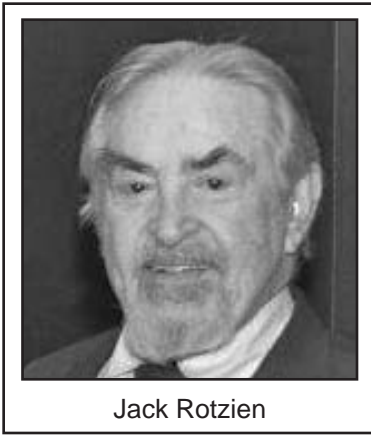


Debbie Goar Beigh

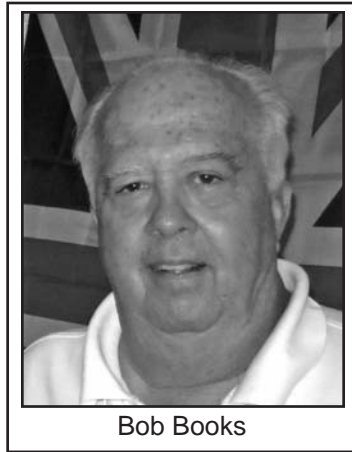


L-R: Jim Goar, Tom Perry, Oak Mackey, Allen Duff and Bob Harned discuss old times at Wendling.

# REUNION PHOTOS



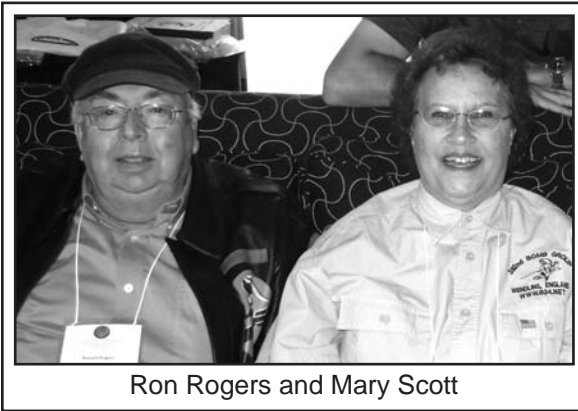
Jack Rotzien



Bob Books



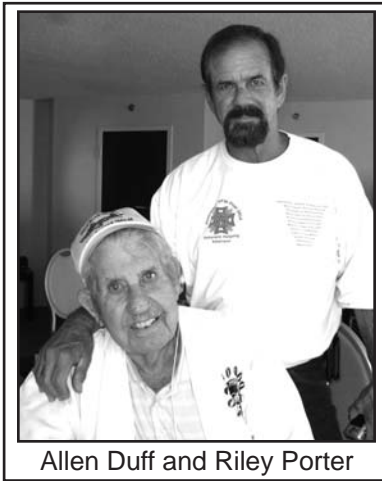
Oak Mackey examines the President's Award plaque presented him by Jim Goar. It recognizes Oak's long service as a 392nd BGMA Director and our chairman for the 2nd Air Division Association.



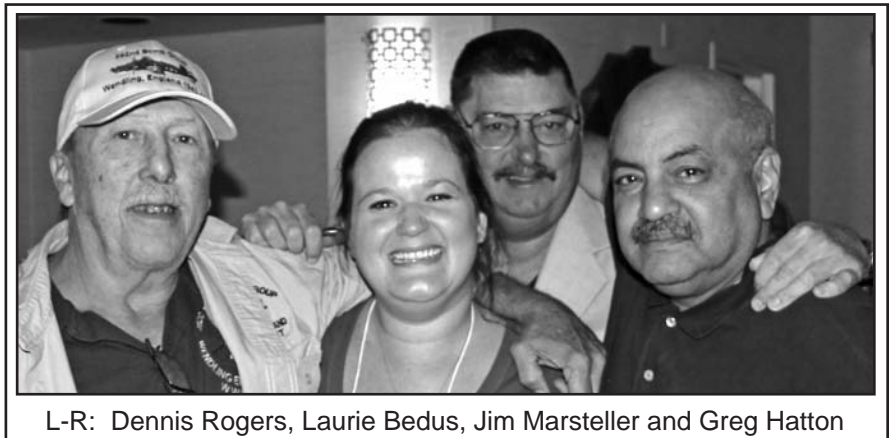
Ron Rogers and Mary Scott



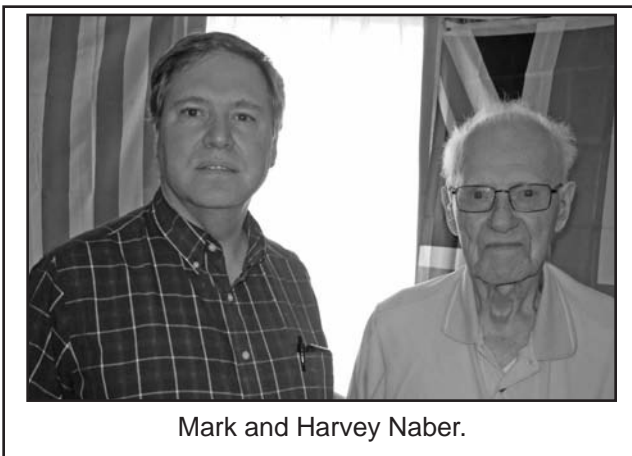
Ben Jones



Allen Duff and Riley Porter



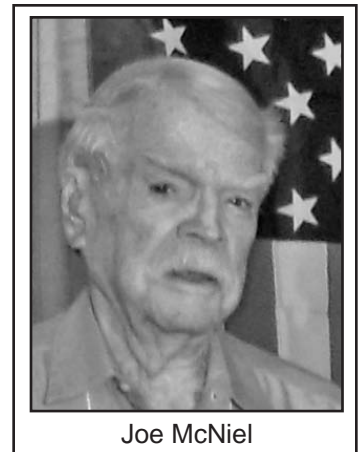
L-R: Dennis Rogers, Laurie Bedus, Jim Marsteller and Greg Hatton



Mark and Harvey Naber.



Annette Tison



Joe McNiel

## CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

by Tom Perry, 576th Sqdn Armorer

In the Bible book of John, Chapter 3, Jesus told Nicodemus, a Pharisee and ruler of the Jews, "...unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." St. Paul wrote to people who were born again in Romans, Chapter 8, "There is therefore no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the spirit. For the law of the spirit in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death." And in the book of Ephesians, Chapter 2, "For by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."

What a blessed assurance these words are to us.



**THE 392ND MEMORIAL  
AT WENDLING**

**But we...shall be remember'd;**



**We few, we happy few,  
we band of brothers.**



**For he to-day that sheds  
his blood with me  
Shall be my brother...**

William Shakespeare  
Henry V

392nd Bomb Group Memorial Association  
9107 Wood Pointe Way  
Fairfax Station, VA 22039  
USA

## ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

### First Class Mail

*Almighty God, Who has blessed us with the will and courage to do our duty, we praise You for our comrades whose death kept freedom living. We praise You also for giving us the years we have lived since their departure. We pray that You will strengthen and sustain our devotion to truth and justice, so that we may be faithful beneficiaries of their sacrifice. Continue Your mercy to our comrades; keep them in Your care; and bring us all at last into Your presence there to rejoice Eternally. Amen. — Composed by 576th pilot the Very Reverend Robert C. Martin, retired Dean of the Cathedral at Erie, Pennsylvania.*

## ∞ FOLDED WINGS ∞

Jerome K. Jones, 578, March 5, 2008

David P. Lim, 578, April 11, 2012

Leonard J. Cain, 576, July 19, 2008

Joseph W. Westbrook, 578, June 12, 2012

*Audrey Parke, wife of Ernie Parke, Assoc., June 16, 2012*

Edmund S. Olsson, 579, July 18, 2011

*Janet J. Olsson, widow of Edmund S. Olsson, 579, May 21, 2012*

Donald F. Mitchell, 576, July 15, 2012

George T. Ashen, 577, Sept. 16, 2007

Charles A. Buckley, 576, July 3, 2012

Milton M. Planche, 578, May 17, 2012

Willard A. Selby, 576, March 18, 2010

Robert C. Dieruff Sr., 576/9, May 30, 2012

Harold A. Hagopian, 579, April 25, 2012

Lynn D. McKim, 579/8, March 21, 2012

Joseph L. Taylor, 577, August 5, 2012