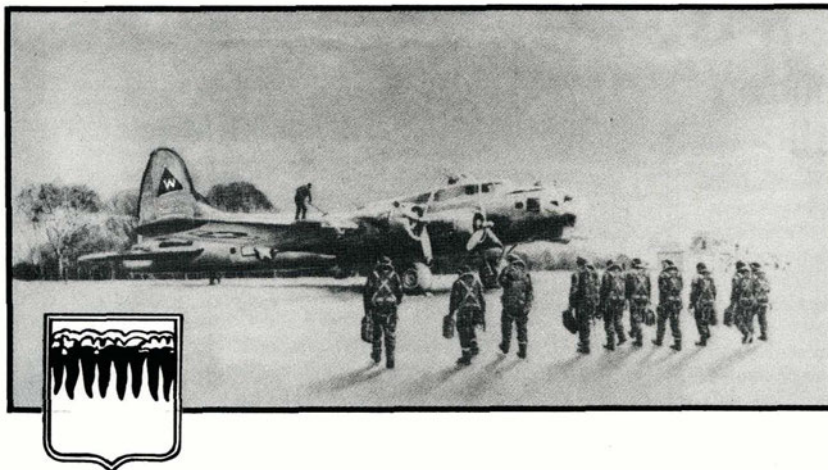




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398TH BOMB. GROUP MEMORIAL ASSOCIATION • 8TH AIR FORCE • 1ST AIR DIVISION • NUTHAMPSTEAD, ENGLAND

NO. 1 VOL. 1

FLAK NEWS

AUGUST, 1986



COL. FRANK P. HUNTER

The first issue of FLAK NEWS is respectfully dedicated to the memory of the 549 officers and men of the 398th Bomb Group who became casualties during the group's tour of duty as Nuthampstead in 1944-45.

Among those who gave their lives was the group's commanding officer, Col. Frank P. Hunter. The highly respected West Pointer lead the 398th from the time the original cadre was formed from out of the 34th Bomb Group at Blythe, California on March 1, 1943 until his death on January 23, 1945.

Hunter and his lead crew went down on a mission to Neuss, Germany. That story will be told on a subsequent issue of FLAK NEWS.

Colonel Hunter would have been 81 this year.

Just when you were beginning to think there was nothing new . . . you'd seen it all . . . here comes your first real, live edition of the 398th Bomb Group Memorial Association FLAK NEWS. Your old outfit has been given a new heading for a Target of Opportunity. President Bill Comstock issued a "well done" medal to George Hilliard for his many years as contact officer and newsletter editor and instructed him to turn over half of his monumental duties to Allen Ostrom. Thus, the print shop moves from Cincinnati to Seattle. The group contact job remains in George's capable and kindly hands. We sincerely hope you enjoy the new look, and covet your comments and news items.

398th On Alert For Reunion Festivities At Colorado Springs

"The Primary Target" for 1986 is Colorado Springs, Colorado. The dates are Wednesday-Thursday-Friday, September 10-11-12, with the majority of registrants staying over through the 13th to enjoy beauty of the Rockies and an evening "melo-drama" and dinner.

And some are coming early for a Wednesday morning golf tournament.

Reunion headquarters will be at the Hilton Hotel, where our group has a large block of rooms reserved until August 27. Chairman Dale Brown and Dorothy can be reached for additional and specific information at (303) 632-7080. His address is 2210 No. Circle Drive., Colorado Springs, CO 80909.

(Last minute registrations and other late surprises are not looked upon kindly by reunion chairmen!)

Among the reunion highlights being planned by ex-603rd lead bombardier Brown is a visit to the Air Force Academy, where the 398th will present a memorial plaque at a Sept. 11 ceremony. Our unit's plaque was designed by former 603rd pilot and operations officer Charles E. King of Jacksonville, Florida.

A trip to Pike's Peak, dance, luncheons, banquets, shopping, swimming and other activities are all being planned to make the 1986 meeting memorable and enjoyable.

The possibility of this being the best-attended of all 398th reunions is firmly anticipated.

Even while Colorado Springs has not happened yet, the 398th reunion machinery is gearing up for future meetings.

Already established are the dated and location for 1987: San Antonio, Texas, July 22-25, headed by Dallas and Geneva Ebest.

The 1988 location has not been determined, but in all probabilities it will be in the eastern part of the United States. Among the prominent cities submitting invitations are Dayton, Richmond, Norfolk, Nashville and Peoria. Over 18 locations are being considered by a five-member reunion site committee.

Post Tour

Traditionally, a number of reunion travelers like to schedule trips to other parts of the country (or world) following the meetings.

To accommodate these folks, the 398th invited Galaxy Tours of Wayne, PA. to arrange a trip after Colorado Springs.

Galaxy obliged with a "Best of California" tour from Sept. 14 to 20. This includes San Francisco, Monterrey Peninsula, Yosemite National Park and the Napa Valley wine country.

Cost is \$599 per person, exclusive of air fare. For additional information contact Galaxy toll free at 1-800-523-7287.

Pilot, Tail-Gunner Uncover The True Story

Two B-17's Collide On Way To Berlin

Historical buffs of the 398th agree that February 3, 1945 was one of the group's most tragic days. Those who made it to Berlin and back that day returned with the news that 18 men went down when two B-17's collided near the IP in the vicinity Lehmke, Germany.

What happened on this mission that caused such an untimely death plunge of two of our aircraft?

Details at the time provided few clues, aside from a terse "mid-air collision" in the intelligence report. One parachute. Period. The war was still on and there were more missions to fly.

Years later, as the 398th began to re-assemble its forces in reunion, it came to light that the one parachute belonged to Dave Bancroft, tail-gunner on the Perry Powell crew of the 603rd. Badly injured in the collision and at the hands of the German civilians, Dave met the pilot of the other ship, John McCormick of the 602nd and his toggler, Bill Logan, at Lueneburg. There were three survivors! For a short time.

Logan was killed while on a PW march near Nuernberg by a strafing U.S. fighter plane.

Bancroft and McCormick both survived their PW experiences, albeit Bancroft's injuries have haunted him most of the next 41 years.

McCormick left the Air Force for a time, returning for a 20-year stint at the beginning of Korea. He retired as a colonel after a B-52 tour in Viet Nam.

Yet, with two additional wars behind him, McCormick carried with him the agonizing mystery of how and why he and Powell collided . . . and the personal burden of the demise of his crew.

Mission Re-Constructed

With the help of the military archives, and some bird-dogging by McCormick, Bancroft and your editor, much information has been gathered to help re-construct that fateful mission.

But the most intimate and graphic description was offered by Jim Hanauer of Cincinnati, who was flying lead in low-low element of the lead 603rd squadron. Powell was on his right wing. McCormick was leading the low element of the low 602nd squadron.

Hanauer remained in the Air Force Reserve for some 30 years, retiring in 1974 as a colonel. His account of the February 3, 1945 mission is most precise and articulate, especially in reporting that Powell's plane broke up before the impact and that heavy prop wash undoubtedly brought about the series of fateful events.

Others On Crew

The Group Commander's Report reveals the following names on Powell's crew: Sam Walker, Bruce Phelps, Marvin Luckie, Clarence Harper, Robert Colgan, Albert Aleksyn, Thomas L'Estrange and Bancroft.

With McCormick and Logan were William Feinstein, Ray Woltman, Marvin Gooden, Joseph Stritch, William Garner, Reynaldo Garcia and Jack Withrow.

Both Bancroft and McCormick will be at the Colorado Springs reunion.

FORMATION PLAN: 398th Mission To Berlin Feb. 3, 1945

HIGH SQUADRON 600				LEAD SQUADRON 603				LOW SQUADRON 602			
Anderson Johnson				Ensign Smith				Hershberger Hall			
Sheffer		Trevorrow		Blythe		Brandstatter Steele		Shappell		Ashworth	
Dean		Kenyon		Aniello		Thomas		McCormick		Andrako	
Shimek	Sponholtz	Beatty	Baldwin	Overton	Tarr	Pinner	Stockman	Brown	Lamiel	Gray	Ferguson
Lipnick				Hyndman							
Sistek				Hanauer				Schipull			
Grinter		Riley		Selby		Powell		Saferte		Godfrey	

Hanauer Blames Accident on Propwash

Dear Allen:

I am writing in response to your recent letter regarding the Feb. 3, 1945 mission of the 398th BG. I remember the mission very vividly, and in fact the accident has been one of my most often told WW II "War Stories".

As I remember the mission prior to the accident, we frequently encountered moderate to heavy propwash. To me it seemed as if the group lead was trying to maintain a one minute interval behind the preceding group rather than the prescribed two minute interval for groups in trail at the same altitude. During a right turn we again encountered heavy propwash and spread out quite a bit.

After the turn the group started to close up and resume positions. I remember it seemed to take quite a while for my wingmen to catch up. The number three man, Selby, was back in position but number two, Powell, was still back a bit. Shortly after that, Powells' aircraft just seemed to split open in the fuselage, I think the break was at the aft end of the bomb bay; it was like cutting off a tree limb when the weight of the limb opens up the saw cut, the opening expands until it finally breaks off.

After breaking apart, the front portion looped up and over and hit McCormicks' airplane. The tail section just seemed to drift to the rear. While the break-up appeared to be in slow motion, I'm sure it was all over in just seconds.

I think it is very probable that McCormick never did see, or knew, what hit him, I also think that Dave Bancroft must have been tossed around a lot just before and during the break up.

My analysis of the cause of the break up is that Powell encountered moderate propwash and instinctively, and forcefully, pushed the nose down to get below the turbulence. I think that just as the control column went forward either he realized, or a crew member warned him there was an aircraft close below, and again he instinctively pulled back on the column. It was the sudden and forceful control movement, i.e. down-up, that caused the fuselage to fail.

I am disturbed to hear that this was reported as a mid-air collision. A "mid-air" implies that one or both pilots was negligent which was certainly not the case and it avoids consideration of contributing factors. As I see it, McCormick did not collide with another plane, he was the victim of falling debris. In the case of Powell's pilot techniques, I feel that the propwash situation was significant.

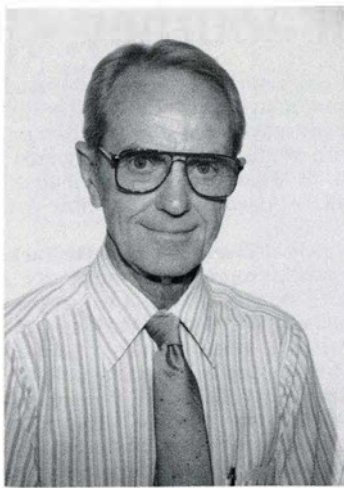
I hope this will be of some help in understanding what may have happened. In writing this letter I have gone over and over the events as I remember them in an attempt to be objective, logical and to remove any embellishments that may have crept in when telling and retelling a "War Story".

Allen, after 41 years I really don't know what I can say to McCormick or Bancroft in the way of help or encouragement, although I wish I could. WW II was a very tumultuous period; the skies we flew in over Europe were a hostile environment; most of us were young, inexperienced and not professional soldiers or airmen. Now, many years later, I think the reason most of us survived as we did, was not because of what we did, or did not do, it was because of the grace of God. WE did survive!

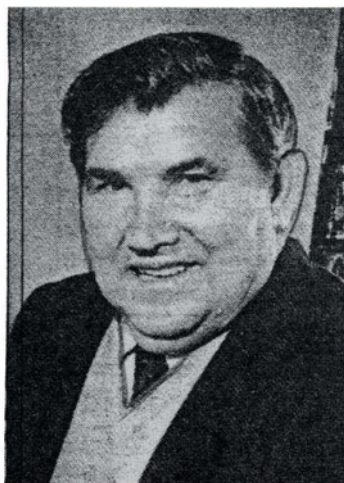
It was good to hear from you even though it was not the most pleasant of subjects. If you, McCormick or Bancroft have any question regarding my comments and remarks I will be most happy to add anything else that I can.

Sincerely,
Jim Hanauer

(Hanauer's letter was written on 1944 vintage stationery, depicting the 603 bulldog emblem and the name, "James A. Hanauer, Lieutenant Air Corps, Army of the United States.")



JOHN McCORMICK



DAVE BANCROFT

Burkhart Adds To Propwash Theory

Bob Burkart, lead navigator for the group on the February 3, 1945 "collision mission," concurs the theory submitted by Jim Hanauer that deadly propwash was the cause of the McCormick-Powell accident on the Berlin run.

He wrote of the account as if it happened yesterday, even submitting the headings he plotted during the entire flight. Burkart recalled that the group, which was leading the division, was so close behind the group ahead that the bombardier, "Lt. Wingate," directed the pilot, John Smith, to make a wide, slow turn so as not to endanger the squadron up ahead and below during the bomb run.

It was during this period that Powell's aircraft encountered such turbulence that the airframe buckled amidships and became a runaway missile.

It is likely that Burkhart, Hanauer, McCormick, Bancroft and other participants on that mission will have much to discuss at Colorado Springs.

398th Invited To Military Award Ceremony In Paris

An Opportunity To Participate:

Our membership must know that publishing and mailing newsletters of this type "don't come cheap." Thus, you are all invited to participate in the costs. Send your contributions to Jack Davis.

Jack will also accept your \$5.00 per year membership dues. Are y'all paid up?

YOUR OFFICERS

President
Col. Bill Comstock

Vice President
Art Harris

Secretary-Treasurer
Jack Davis

Unit Contact
George Hilliard

Group Historian
Jack Wintersteen

Board of Directors
William H. Jones

Harry Gray
Dick Frazier
Chuck Dreyer
Dale Brown
Ralph Hall

Public Relations
Allen Ostrom

The 398th Bomb Group Memorial Association has been invited to participate in the largest military award ceremony in the history of France!

This extraordinary event is scheduled for Paris October 25 through November 1, and has been called "Amis Pour Toujours."

"Friends Forever."

The government of France, anxious to tell Americans who fought for the liberation of their country, "We Are Still Grateful," will award 1,500 official WW II French Military Decorations to qualifying veterans of the Army, Navy and Air Force.

These will be pinned on all recipients by high-ranking French military officers, and may be worn on U.S. military uniforms along with other decorations.

398th Was There

The 398th, while arriving later in England than other 8th Air Force bomber units, nevertheless distinguished itself in the liberation of France. The group actively engaged in close support of ground troops in the D-Day invasion of Normandy, the breakthrough at Caen and St. Lo, the Eindhoven airborne invasion, the elimination of the Metz fortified area, the penetration across the Rhine, destruction of Ft. Royan in the liberation of Bordeaux, and many other bombing assaults that ultimately drove the Germans out of France.

In addition to the 1,500 individual medals, awarded to qualified recipients who make the trip to Paris, the 398th also may receive the Croix de Guerre. Very few Air Force units were given this prestigious award during WW II, thus it is being reinstated at the "Operation Friendship" ceremony in Paris. Substantiating information on behalf of the 398th has been presented.

A wide range of activities has been scheduled for the veterans and their families. Many will be hosted by the French government and its supporting Comite d'Action de la Resistance.

The job of coordinating this major undertaking has been awarded to Lt. Col. Hal Ryder (Ret.), longtime leader in veterans affairs and owner of Galaxy Tours, P.O. Box 234, Wayne, PA, 19087. Telephone 1-800-523-7287.

Galaxy took the 398th on its tour to England last May and is leading a post-reunion tour following the meeting in Colorado Springs.

Representatives Only

Because it would border on "impossible" to give every ETO veteran a medal such as the one being prepared for only 1,500, it is viewed that the recipients are representatives of our American forces and nation.

Interested persons from the 398th should contact Galaxy for additional information.

One additional highlight at the Paris ceremony will be awarding of a limited number of Legion of Honor medals. The 398th has been asked to submit the names and qualifications of deserving veterans, to be awarded by a high-ranking government officer at the ceremonies at the Court of Honor at the Hotel des Invalides. This is the most prestigious and honored military site in France.

Back To Nuthampstead: A Sentimental Journey

"Lest we forget" were the words in the back of our minds as 51 members and friends of the 398th returned to Nuthampstead for a nostalgic visit in early May.

The threat of terrorist activity failed to dampen our spirits as throughout our travels in both England and France the spirit of genuine welcome was most evident. But no place could match the bond of friendship poured out at our old base. **Wells, Barker, Osborn, Jenkins, Clark, Dimsdale, Tyler . . .**

And a hundred more who crowded around the memorial at the Woodman Inn for a memorial service and tree planting ceremony that left few with dry eyes. And some 400 more who came to the dance later the same evening to enjoy superlative 40's music.

More than a few of the guests came in British uniforms of the 40's. WRENS, WAF's, etc. Even one in a high-altitude, fur-collared flying suit!

"Lest we forget" came in the form of a "Service of Commemoration" conducted by local ministers, an honor guard from RAF Alconbury, regimental bands, a bugler from Alconbury Highschool who stirred many a heart with "Taps".

Tony Clark represented our English friends and **Phil Stahlman** the 398th as they laid a common wreath at the memorial. Later, **George Klux** and **Phil Reddy** laid a wreath on behalf of the 398th Memorial Association. **Malcolm (Ozzie) Osborn**, the local 398th historian and leader in developing the memorial, planted an aspen tree on behalf of our English friends. **Willis Frazier** represented the 398th in planting a maple. **Allen Ostrom** responded for the 398th, reading a greeting from president **Bill Comstock** and a letter of welcome from **Charles, Prince of Wales**.

At the evening dance, amid glows of warm friendship, **Ted Johnston** presented copies of "Clearing & Colder," a Boeing painting showing a 398th plane on a snow-covered hardstand, to chairman **Barry Tyler** and his committee including **Clark, Osborn, David Wells, Tony Barker, Vic Jenkins, and Robert and Wilfred Dimsdale**. (Baron Dimsdale, owner of much of the airfield property, died last year.)

In between all this activity at Nuthampstead, members renewed old memories at the Wood-

man Inn and enjoyed a "Ploughman's Lunch" plus more than a few of the pub's specialty refreshments. Also, trips around the perimeter of the old airfield on a hay truck pulled by a tractor. Also, airplane, rides offered by **Tyler** and other local small plane pilots.

"Lest we forget" also came on the following day on a visit to the American Military Cemetery near Cambridge. Here we found 13 names of our men on the Wall of the Missing. And then 16 crosses of those buried under the immaculate carpet of green. At a ceremony at the entrance monument **Ralph Hall** laid a wreath on behalf of the 398th.

Each airman contributed one name he wished to especially remember this day. One such name was **Colonel Frank P. Hunter**. Another was a buddy known only as "Tex". After all the names were read, the men joined in singing "Amazing Grace." It was a moment to remember.

A visit to RAF Alconbury, home of America's 10th Tactical Reconnaissance Wing, provided a startling awakening of how much U.S. air power has changed since "our" days.

Larry deLancey and **Stahlman** presented our Alconbury host with a photo of the B-17 they brought home from Cologne on October 15, 1944 . . . the nose completely blown open. **M/Sgt. Alan Burrell**, the articulate public information officer for the base, could only respond with "Wow".

Other "lest we forget" reminders came as we visited Duxford and the Imperial War Museum. Here the star attraction (naturally) was a B-17. Another B-17 was found at the RAF Museum at Hendon. A magnificent collection of British war birds. Here we witnessed a movie depicting the Battle of Britain. And we remembered "never have so many owed so much to so few." A tribute to those RAF pilots and their Spitfires and Hurricanes.

And so it went as the tour continued on to France and the Normandy invasion landmarks: Utah, Omaha, Arromanches, Ste. Mere Eglise, Ste. Marie duMont, Caen, St. Lo, Dieppe and more. How quiet St. Lo appeared as compared to D-Day, 1944 when it was pounded by a thousand bombers. **Willis Frazier** tried to locate "Fighter Strip No. 13," where he landed his crippled B-17 on a very short runway. No luck.

And we were thrilled to be included in the Liberation Day ceremony in the town square

at Ste. Marie duMont, **Ostrom** joining a French veteran in laying a wreath at the memorial. Later the mayor toasted Liberation Day with us with white wine and then joined us for lunch, at which time he distributed D-Day medals to each veteran. How could we forget?

At the Utah Beach Memorial **Ike Tacker** and **Sid Hardin** represented our party at the wreath ceremony. At the American cemetery at Omaha Beach, **Frank Yarmoski** and **Don Jillie** led the wreath ceremony. Others on the trip, not previously mentioned, were **Wally Blackwell, Jim Haas, Bill Hineman, Robert Knowles, Ray Stange, Morris Swed, Margaret Sigsworth, Claudia Smiley, Fred Parker** and **Paul Bence** (the latter an ex-Army combat Engineer friend of the Parkers).

The ladies of the tour, previously unmentioned except for **Sigsworth** and her daughter **Claudia**, were no less thrilled with the tour than the men folks. Perhaps even more so, recalling their spirit . . . and an occasional tear as they witnessed the men recalling the stark drama of their youth. They included **Dorothy Johnston, Olivia Jillie, Natalie Klux, Marilyn Hineman, Elaine Knowles, Doris Hardin, Geg Ostrom, Marjorie Hall, Margaret Parker, Diana Haas, Aileen Perkins, Ruby Frazier, Mary Reddy, Teedy Blackwell, Margaret Stahlman, Darline Bence, Jeanne Stange, Mary Swed, and Rosemary Yarmoski**.

It appeared that the 398th group was one of the few 8th Air Force tours that scheduled the beaches of Normandy in addition to their WW II homes in East Anglia. The mayor of Ste. Marie du Mont, accustomed hosting men from the infantry, airborne, tanks, etc., was impressed when we who had never set foot on France before had chosen to follow the trail of the land battle. Arromanches, Pt. du Hoc, Sword, Juno, Gold, Bayeaux, Caen . . . names from books and maps . . . suddenly became very real.

O Yes, we did visit London and Paris. But somehow, after "sorting it out," it was a quiet, out-of-the-way, all but unknown little place called Nuthampstead that was and still remains the reason for the whole trip.

— Allen Ostrom

398th Bomb Group Flak News

c/o Allen Ostrom