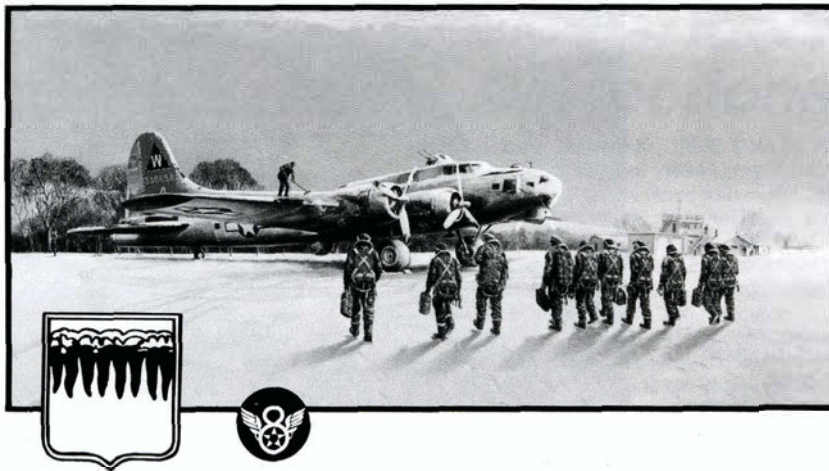




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398TH BOMB. GROUP MEMORIAL ASSOCIATION • 8TH AIR FORCE • 1ST AIR DIVISION • NUTHAMPSTEAD, ENGLAND

VOL. 4 NO. 4

FLAK NEWS

OCTOBER, 1989

Mission Alert For England Next Summer

A "Mission Alert" is on for June, 1990! The 398th is headed for a familiar target—Station 131 at Nuthampstead, England.

Once again, a Group Tour to England (and Scotland) will be led by Galaxy Tours of Wayne, PA, considered No. 1 in the field of leading veterans tours to the "old bases."

This will be the fourth trip back to Nuthampstead. The 1990 dates are June 20 to July 3 (with a "pre-tour" option for those who wish to get a head start with a week's travel in Scotland.)

All arrangements will be made by Galaxy. They have provided the registration form inserted in FLAK NEWS. All necessary information is contained in the blue insert. Members (and friends) interested in the 1990 tour are invited to call (toll free) to Galaxy Tours and ask for Mark Burton. 1-800-523-7287. add on to mission alert

Unlike the last two trips, there will be no continent tour this time, but the trip will begin with four days in Scotland, where many crews first landed in Prestwick and others visited for "flak leave."

Also on the itinerary is a stopover at Stratford-Upon-Avon for a bit of Shakespeare before moving to the "primary target" at Nuthampstead.

A special ceremony is being planned at Penn, on the outskirts of London, where for 45 years the citizens of that community have been remembering a 398th crew that crashed in their midst.

Reminder!

Please! If you have moved, or are planning a move, send a change of address notice to FLAK NEWS.

398th Bomb Group On A Roll; Record 522 Share Dayton Reunion Memories



We Remember

THIS PLAQUE and an oak tree were dedicated at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base Museum Memorial Park in Dayton, Ohio on September 22, 1989.

The ceremony, part of the 398th reunion activities, attracted most of the 522 reunion registrants. President Bill Comstock gave the dedication address, saying "we are proud of our contributions while members of the 398th, and have chosen this plaque and living tree as a symbol of these beliefs."

Col. Richard L. Uppstrom, USAF (Ret.) accepted on the part of the museum, of which he is the director.

The plaque and tree are "dedicated to the honor of those airmen of the 398th who valiantly served in defense of the free world."

The 398th Bomb Group Memorial Association is on a roll!

Another new attendance record was broken as the group met in its annual reunion last September in Dayton, Ohio.

When all the returns were in, the count was set at 522, surpassing the 465 standard set in Richmond, Virginia a year ago.

The numbers taxed the facilities of the Stouffer Plaza Hotel, and many of the attendees spilled over to other hotels, motels and RV parks.

But it was not merely the "numbers" that made the news at Dayton. The three-day event (week-long for many) provided the time and location for nostalgia and memories of days gone by to flourish and grow.

"I haven't seen you since we bailed out over Munich..."

"Whatever happened to...?"

"Ya remember that night in Hitchin when we...?"

"I see where Charlie passed away last year..."

Opportunities to share and compare were afforded at three evening banquets at the hotel and a special luncheon at the Wright Patterson Air Force Base Officers Club.

And...at the marvelous WPAFB Museum and Memorial Park, on the busses that toured Dayton, in the Memory Room, in the guest rooms, in the lobby, in the nearby restaurants, on the golf courses. Wherever two or more veterans were seen together, usually identified by their distinctive baseball

Continued on Page 2

Record Turnout At Reunion

Continued from Page 1

caps, one could pick up such words as "Nuthampstead," "on the line," "mess hall," "square eggs," "walk-around bottle," "Cambridge," etc.

While the reunion was tuned to good fellowship, good food, good memories, good (?) golf, there were surges of quiet pride and reverence. Such as the dedication of plaque and oak tree at the Memorial Park. Taps, the haunting, lilting melody offered by the VFW bugler, reminded the gathering of buddies who paid the ultimate price.

And for sheer, flat-out Americanism . . . such as rarely offered in today's world of "rights," was the luncheon speech delivered by Col. Michael W. Turner, chief, 2750th Air Base Wing, Public Affairs, Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio.

Col. Turner, with more than 3,800 hours of flying hours in his 22-year Air Force career, delivered a speech on "Duty" that brought frequent cheers and many tears.

Especially moved by Col. Turner's historical recounting of the Battle of Britain were Ron and Joan Spicer, reunion guests from Nuthampstead, England, and neighbors to Peggy Wells and the late David Wells. Spicer served with the British Army during World War II and was a survivor of the Dunkirk evacuation.

(A copy of Col. Turner's speech is available to 398th members. Write to Robert Hart, 311 Washington St., Wilmington, OH 45177.)

Reunion chairman Hart and his wife Eloise earned the praise of their fellow members for their handling of the arrangements, no small task what with 522 guests in tow.

The Harts seemed to have something special for everyone, even helium-filled balloons that captured the attention of all who entered the hotel. By the final evening, all had been adroitly "found" and were on their way to homes all around the nation.

Greg Anderson, vice president of the Experimental Aviation Association (EAA) of Oshkosh, Wisconsin, made a special trip to Dayton to invite the group to visit the world famous EAA Museum and Eagle Hanger next fall in Oshkosh.

(The next 398th reunion will be held there Sept. 12-15, 1990.)

Anderson was joined in the special invite by Hal Weekley, who reminded the gathering that the world's only B-17 painted in 398th colors is the star attraction at the Oshkosh Eagle Hanger.

Anderson again thanked the 398th for



My Hero!

ELOISE HART, who shared reunion chair duties with husband Bob, pretends that the good looking mannequin is her pilot hubby of years gone by. (Dream on, Eloise.) This model; and several others in WWII flying gear, were furnished by the Dayton Chapter, Association for Living History for the enjoyment of the 398th Bomb Group.

providing the funds to accomplish the paint job.

"You have to see this in person to appreciate how beautiful this airplane is today," said Anderson. "Please come next September and be our guests at the museum."

Among the many surprises at the reunion was the great number of members attending for the first time. Nearly 75 indicated it was their first visit, suggesting that the group is still in a growth mode.

Among the first timers was Stephen Quinn, a local Dayton product and member of the 603 Ross Howden crew. He read a poem he composed in 1944. It is reprinted on Page 9 of FLAK NEWS.

Making the group's many dancers super happy was the appearance of the WPAFB "Show Band." Scheduled only to play a concert, they extended their program at the last minute, adjusted their music and played for a dance floor full of pleased dancers.

The final evening banquet saw a multimedia production called, "Backroads of America," produced and narrated by Don Van Polen of Mt. Vernon, Washington.

One of the many members who related to the "backroads" identification, coming from Princeton, Wisconsin, was Morris Swed. The former electronics specialist of the 602nd Squadron, and his wife, Mary, will handle the reunion activities next year in Oshkosh.



"Thanks, Bill"

COL. RICHARD UPPSTROM accepts a hand shake from 398th president Bill Comstock after Comstock presented a plaque and tree to the Wright-Patterson AFB Museum on behalf of the men and women who served with the 398th Bomb Group in World War II. Uppstrom is director of the world famous museum.

Oshkosh! B'Gosh! For 1990 Reunion! San Diego In 1991

No sooner had the smoke cleared from the 1989 meeting in Dayton but what plans were being laid for the next Big One.

It will be Oshkosh, Wisconsin, B'Gosh! for the 1990 Reunion.

Dates will be September 12-15 and the headquarters hotel will be the Oshkosh Hilton and Convention Center. While Oshkosh might be labeled as a "small" town by some standards, and possibly identified by many with those famous overalls, the Wisconsin city boasts the world's largest "fly-in." That means 16,000 aircraft!

And one of the finest airplane museums anywhere.

And the only airplane museum featuring a B-17 decked out with 398th Bomb Group colors.

San Diego Is '91 Pick

It will be San Diego in 1991!

After looking at more than a dozen proposals and possibilities, the 398th Board of Directors unanimously voted to hold the 1991 reunion in the Southern California city.

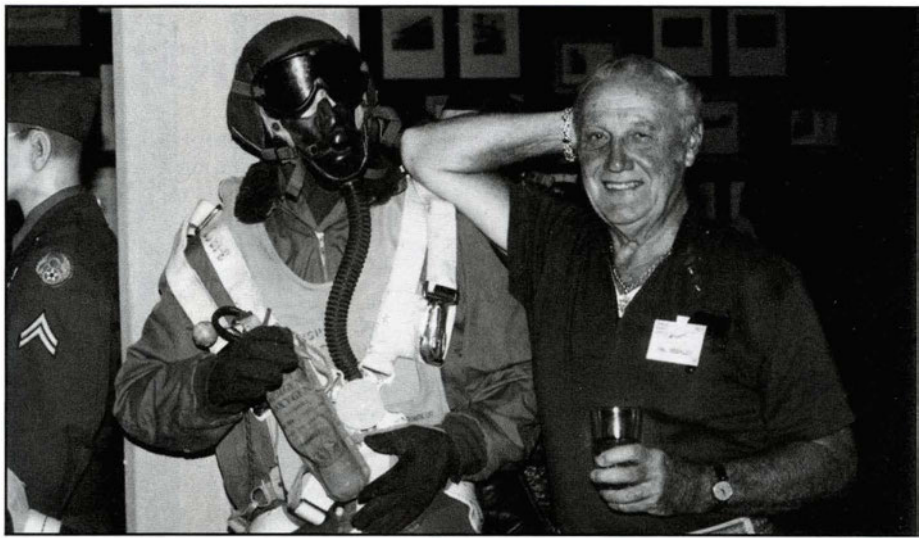
Further, it was agreed that the event be held during a period in the late fall or early winter. A decision on the specific dates and headquarters hotel will be made when a reunion committee visits San Diego in November.

Californians represent the largest state population group in the 398th, a statistic noted by the Board at its executive meeting in Dayton.

Board Holds Dues At \$5 Per Year

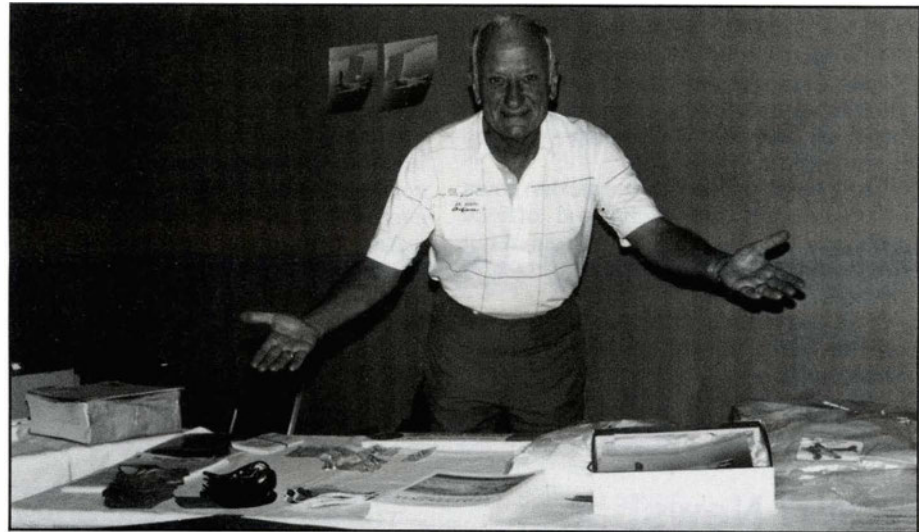
Because the membership of the 398th has been so generous in its financial support — dues, memorial fund, FLAK NEWS, PX purchases, special projects, etc. — the Board of Directors voted at its executive meeting at Dayton to maintain the annual dues at \$5.00.

Members are invited to pay their 1990 dues at this time, using the enclosed notice. The optional "Roster Information" is for new members, or for those who have never submitted the requested personal information. This group information is recorded by Ed Stewart on a special computer print-out, and is available for \$10.00.



Hi Ya' Buddy

HAL WEEKLEY, who has spent a lot of time in a B-17, chums up to an ol' buddy all decked out in the proper flying gear of 1944. Hal was telling his buddy that the EAA's newly re-painted B-17 at the Oshkosh museum carries the colors and marking of his 601st Squadron Fortress, from which he and his crew bailed out — No. 2102516 H. Weekley even invited his friend to come to Oshkosh next September to see museum's star attraction. His buddy said he would think it over.



Reunion's Star Salesman

JOE JOSEPH had the job of selling PX items at the Dayton reunion. He and wife Rozanne did such an outstanding job there was precious little left to sell when it was all over. Jack Wintersteen, 398th historian and PX chairman, sent word that the inventory was being restocked and supplies would be available from his "storehouse" in Danville, PA. Joe and Rozanne are already signed up for PX duty at the next reunion in Oshkosh, September 12-15, 1990.

Board Votes Memorial Fund Increase

Possibly the most significant bit of business conducted by the 398th Board of Directors at the reunion in Dayton was the decision to increase the funds in the Memorial Fund from \$10,000 to \$20,000.

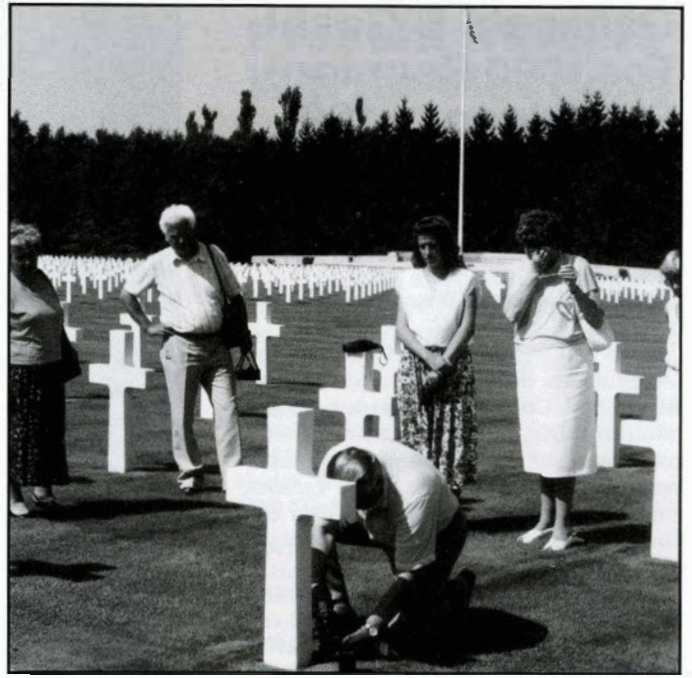
This is the money that has been placed at the disposal of the American Battle Monuments Commission for the perpetual care of the 398th Memorial in Nuthampstead. The fund is administered by trustees Ralph Hall, Dick Frazier and Sarah Gayle Hunter Randolph.

Harry Gray, the Board's CPA counsel,

pointed out that the interest generated by the present \$10,000 limit no longer provides sufficient funds to pay the annual care and maintenance bills.

"Our memorial at Nuthampstead is now beautifully maintained," said Gray. "And surely we want to keep it that way."

The board determined that all extra monies received, such as revenue from book sales and special appeals, would be used to establish the Memorial Fund at \$20,000.



A Living Tree Grows, Nurtured By Peace

In the summer of 1988 a bus load of 398th Bomb Group members journeyed to Neuss, Germany, there to meet with local citizens who remembered the day in 1945 when an American B-17 bomber crashed in their midst.

The two groups met in the garden court of the mayor and exchanged official greetings, which grew and blossomed not only into official, but personal friendships.

It all started with the words engraved on the 398th plaque presented to the Neuss hosts —

“We came in our youth to wage war; we

return in our elder years to share the peace.”

A living tree was planted in a park near the crash site, a symbol of that peace. Each 398th visitor and each German participant lifted a shovel full of dirt to commemorate the moving and emotional event.

And the tree grew and flourished. And so did the mutual respect. This past summer, after a visit to the tree site, several Neuss residents journeyed to the American Military Cemetery at Ardenes, Belgium to further perpetuate this newly established US-German friendship.

They sought out the grave site of Col. Frank P. Hunter, 398th CO who was among those who perished in the crash. Here they paused to light candles of remembrance by the white cross. The Neuss party included Mr. & Mrs. Alfred Wilms, Mr. & Mrs. Manfred Konig, Mr. & Mrs. Kiefer, Gertrude Peiffer, and Alexandra Kremer.

Federico Gonzales, the lone survivor of the crash, and his wife, Anna, plan to visit Neuss again next year to help perennialize the love and respect born of a common desire for peace.

WWII Newspaper Headlines On EAA “Wish List”

The curator of the EAA's Hanger in Oshkosh, WI has asked the 398th for some special help in developing an exhibit called, “Aviation in the News, WW II.”

“We would like to display several actual newspapers with aviation-related headlines,” said Ron Twellman of the EAA.

“Our current holdings of wartime papers are mainly about the war's end. What we need are more concerning events from the beginning and middle years, such as the Battle of Britain, Doolittle raid, Midway, Ploesti and other major wartime highlights.”

Members are asked to search their foot lockers and albums for newspaper headlines on these events. Sent to Ron Twellman, EAA Aviation Foundation, Wittmen Field, Oshkosh, WI 54903.

THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WASHINGTON, THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA 18 September 1989

On behalf of the President of the United States and the Department of Defense, I salute each of you as you gather for this reunion of the 398th Bombardment Group. The 398th's legend spans an exciting time in our Nation's history.

As you commemorate the 45th anniversary of your air battles, it is important to note that the key to victory is not just aircraft but the dedication, skill and courage of those who fly and maintain them.

I congratulate each of you, including those who are present only in spirit, for such gallant service in defense of our Nation and the cause of freedom. Your dedication and commitment to excellence has won the 398th Bombardment Group an important place in aviation history. I send my best wishes for a most memorable reunion and every continued success.

—DICK CHENEY—

398th Book Sells; All Publication Costs Retrieved!

Much to the relief of treasurer Ralph Hall, it can now be reported that the entire cost of producing the history book, “389th Bomb Group Remembrances,” has been paid!

Revenue received from the book sales surpassed the costs, which included printing, mailing, art production and promotion. Total costs came to \$14,312.78.

“The 113 books sold at the Dayton reunion put us over the top by \$474.10,” said the elated treasurer.

“We still have 251 books in our inventory,” continued Hall, “and funds realized from these sales will go into our Memorial Fund.”

The books may be purchased for \$20.00 postpaid by writing to Ralph Hall, 398th Bomb Group, New Bedford, MA 02740.

MEMPHIS BELLE

Filming Was Almost Finale

Steven Carter, a college student living near Duxford, England, had the rare (and almost tragic) opportunity this past summer to man the machine guns of a B-17 and capture a rare insight into what the Flying Fortress air war was really like.

A member of the Sally B team, England's only remaining flying B-17, Carter flew in most of the five Fortresses during the filming of "Memphis Belle," a modern "re-make" of the William Wyler documentary filmed shortly after World War II.

Besides the Sally B, other B-17's brought to England for the filming included Bob Richardson's "Museum of Flight" from Seattle; Dave Tallichet's "Square D" from Chino, CA; "Lucky Lady" from France and another unnamed B-17 from France.

The filming took place at Duxford (not far from Nuthampstead); at an unoccupied RAF base at Binbrook, Lincolnshire; and at the Warner Brothers Pinebrook Studios near Windsor Castle.

Producers of "Memphis Belle" are David Puttnam and Catherine Wyler, daughter of the late William Wyler. Matthew Modine plays the role of Memphis Belle pilot Robert Morgan.

Carter, who has been with the Sally B team for several years doing a variety of maintenance and repair jobs, got his chance to play an air crew support role. A role that nearly cost him his life and the lives of nine others aboard the French B-17.

Also in on the aerial action were seven P-51's and three ME-109's.

"We shot three weeks of aerial footage at Duxford and three weeks at Binbrook," said Carter. "I was glad I was able to do all this as it served as a great experience and gave me a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and insight as to what the air war was really like.

"For example, we did a lot of firing with our 50 caliber guns, using blank ammunition. When we were shooting at the 109's, I

If This Story Sounds Familiar, Turn To the Next Page And Read It Again

found it was very difficult to be prepared to shoot even though I was briefed as to which direction they would be approaching from.

"I also found that the field of fire was not as great as I once assumed. Especially from the cheek guns. And then there always seemed to be the risk of hitting one of our own B-17's whilst following a 109 through the formation.

"I would guess that I bagged at least 40 109's during the course of the filming, making me a high-scoring ace!"

Carter, experiencing the kinds of trauma so familiar to combat crews, went on to recount other "near-misses" hardly unknown to the 40's generation.

"Bob Richardson's B-17 arrived at Duxford with a knocked engine, giving us all some raised eyebrows.

"Then the next day I was aboard one of the French Forts when it blew an engine to bits over Norfolk. I've never seen anything like it. A cylinder had been blown right off the engine, pushing all the cowlings off. The piston, con rod and push rods followed and took a chunk out of the tailplane on their way. Thankfully, we were able to come home on three engines."

But the worse was still to come —

"After moving up to Binbrook, I was on board one of the French B-17's ready to take off for some air-to-air filming. About half way down the runway something happened to one of the tires or possibly the undercarriage. We veered off the runway, crossed the perimeter track, got airborne, hit a tree and large gravel pile and crashed into a field in a ravine.

"This all took about 25-30 seconds to happen, a long time to wait thinking your life might soon be over. As soon as the plane hit the ground it caught fire, so it was a case of getting out quickly but trying not to panic in the process. Boy! Is that difficult!

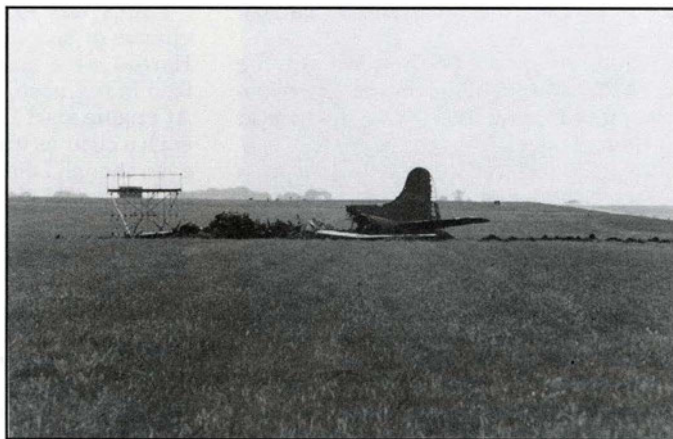
"I never believed that a metal plane of that size could burn so easily and so quickly. I estimate that the entire centre section and



**STEVEN CARTER
B-17 Gunner, 1989 Version**



**MEMPHIS BELLE OVER EAST ANGLIA
Peaceful Flight . . . For the Moment**



**ONE FORTRESS DIDN'T MAKE IT
Familiar Sight in 1944 . . . and 1989**

cockpit was gone within two minutes. I was in the cockpit and had to exit out the rear. I just shut my eyes and clanked out of what felt like a hot oven. I never want to go through that again.

"Anyway, I am still here and although nervous I continued to fly during the filming. I would add that Bob Richardson and his crew were fantastic. A really nice bunch."

No one aboard the aircraft was killed, the most severe injuries being a broken leg and an assortment of cuts and bruises.

Carter concluded his report with a comment on David Wells, chairman of the Friends of the 398th, who died suddenly last June —

"I was saddened to learn of the death of Mr. Wells. He had come to Duxford with one of the 398th veterans and I showed them through our Sally B. I am sure that he was a man whose work and personality will be missed by many."

No Forgetting Christmas Mission

It all may have happened 45 years ago, but for more than a few the mission on Christmas Eve, 1944 continues to ring loud and clear.

Lou Stoffer of Centralia, Washington has that date circled in his 398th diary. . . as if he could ever forget it. Lou flew as engineer-gunner on the Don Grinter crew of the 600th Squadron, and he has supplied the story of these dramatic events.

Others aboard the Grinter B-17 on this mission were James White, co-

pilot; Francis Harrod, navigator-bombardier; David Flores, navigator trainee; Harold Johnson, radio operator; William Davidson, ball turret gunner; Kenneth Kiser, waist gunner; John Contento, tail gunner; and Stoffer.

The mission, for the Grinter 600 crew, and the Leland Zimmerman crew of the 602nd, ended just north of the end of the main runway. All aboard the Zimmerman B-17 survived. But others in the Grinter aircraft were not so lucky. It could have been worse.

BY LOU STOFFER

Engineer-Gunner, 600

DECEMBER 24, 1944 — Mission to Coblenz. Since our last mission on December 15, we had been sitting on the ground waiting for improving weather. Everyone knew a maximum effort was coming up. The Germans had launched the Battle of Ardennes (Bulge). Things were in a turmoil in Belgium and our armed forces needed air support badly. On December 23, along about 16:00, word came down that tomorrow's mission would not go. Sitting around the pot bellied stove in our Nissen hut our crew decided to go to Hitchin for a few hours' relaxation.

I had made it a point not to go out before a mission, as I felt it to be an omen of bad luck. But now, the mission had been scrubbed so we went out and had a great time. Francis Harrod, who usually was a loner, came along and in the course of the evening became acquainted with a young lady, and set up a date for the following evening. We had to run to catch the last train at 22:00. The station was about a mile from town and we almost missed it.

When we got to Royston we got the word that the mission was on. Everyone knew it before we ever got to the base at Nuthampstead.

A few hours later we were ousted from our sacks and sent to briefing - Coblenz. Then the usual getting our gear together . . . oxygen mask, parachute, flak suit, flak helmet, Mae West, escape kit and some nourishment to sustain us, generally a candy bar and maybe an orange. The the wait outside the equipment room for a ten-wheeler to come along and take us out to the plane. Free of charge and no tipping allowed.

Our plane was at the edge of the 600th area not far from the engineering tent. We were assigned a war weary B-17 with lots of missions under its belt. On one of these missions the vertical stabilizer had been nearly shot off by a runaway top turret gun. The plane looked unique with light brown vertical fin, patch holes covering various flak holes. It had so many holes in it that the air literally flew thru it. We had flown it several times so it was no mystery to us.

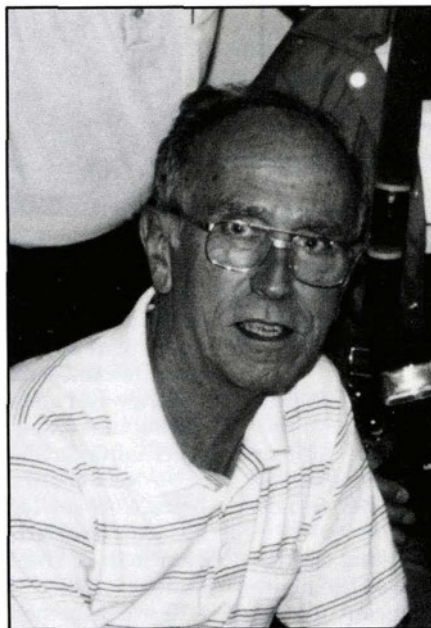
This was our crew's 18th mission. Don Grinter had five less.

The night before I had written home to my mother stating tomorrow I would be over the hill on the downward slope. This

was a bad omen as I had never said anything as to what we were doing before. We were fueled and loaded with 100# bombs. It was frosty that morning and we had lots of frost on the wings. Grinter asked for deicing fluid, but was told none was available. How about brooms to sweep the stuff off the wings? The same answer, none available. At that moment Grinter, with great foresight, had the engineering officer sign our flight log as the facts were stated.

Being this was a maximum effort we would have to take off even if one wing was missing. About this time the mission was delayed a short time and David Flores decided to go back to the hut and get his dog tags as he had forgotten them. Flores asked me if I needed something from our hut, I told him I could use a towel. On this mission Flores, who was a washed out navigator, was being checked out by Harrod as a navigator. John Conrad, who flew as our navigator on later missions also was a staff sergeant.

Flores was excited and elated at his chance of becoming a navigator. He and Harrod were busy getting things organized in the nose, checking this and that. At engine start I handed the crew chiefs each a cigar as was my custom and ritual, even though I didn't smoke. They lit them up and would give us a good luck wave.



LOUIS STOFFER

The start was smooth and we moved out travelling the south perimeter to the north-south runway. We moved up a spot at a time as each plane took off. As we reached the end of the runway we interlocked one plane west, one plane east, but when the west plane (Sponholtz crew) was to move in position he hesitated, (40 years later James Brockman of the Sponholtz crew confirmed this fact) and we moved out of position filling his position.

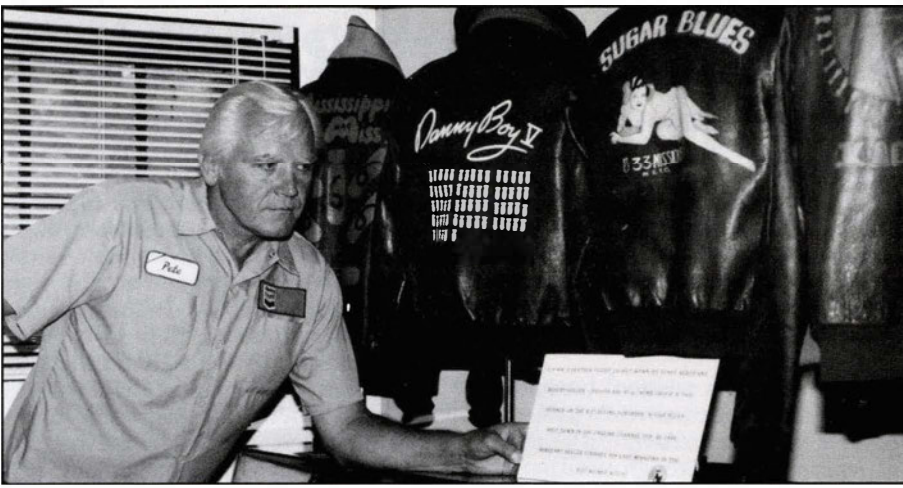
One plane after another roared off, at the usual interval. Here we stood with engines roaring, brakes set. In 30 seconds we moved out, thus began Grinter's 13th mission. Half way down the runway Grinter heard a report of black smoke on the end of the runway. He was later to remark he almost aborted the take off. Another plane had just crashed (Zimmerman).

Everything was normal as we hit 120. As we lifted off the 17 began a slow roll with the left wing vertical to the ground. At 300 feet altitude, with super human strength, Grinter and Jim White wrestled the control column to the right and brought the plane level. The Fort began to vibrate and shake as the props bit into the air in a violent stall characteristic, losing altitude. Back in the radio room the crew men immediately assumed the approved ditching position sitting on the floor, interlocking legs back to the front. We stomped into a bank at the end of the runway losing our gear, bounced into the air, pancaking into the Gypsy Farm Oak Forest, plowing into large trees like they were mere match sticks. We were on fire after the first bump.

As we settled to a stop Grinter pulled the main switch cutting the power. I had ducked behind the armor plate of the co-pilot's seat. When we came to a stop, I looked around. Grinter and White seemed OK and I mentioned we ought to get out. For some reason I took the route through the fiery bomb bay back to the radio room. Grinter and White just jumped out forward as most of the nose was gone.

White ended up on the ground with his leg wrapped around his shoulder, it was badly broken. (He spent the next four years in and out of hospitals.) I continued through the bomb bay and into the radio room. Here the others were fighting to open the top escape hatch as the back of the plane was on fire. Also, the ball turret

Continued on Page 7



PETER WESEN

Living in the same Washington city as "survivor" Lou Stoffer is another man with a most interesting (to 8th Air Force folks) hobby.

Peter Wesen, who works for a Centralia oil distribution company, is a collector of World War II memorabilia. The basement of his home houses a remarkable collection of "stuff" like oxygen masks, walk-around bottles, flying suits, ground crew jackets, boots, radio headsets, helmets, squadron & group patches, medals, goggles, books and a broad array of historical items relating to the great air war.

He even has a Norden bomb sight!

Wesen inherited some of his collection from his uncle, a former B-17 tail gunner. It is his goal to build a permanent display facility in Centralia.

At least a few members of the 398th might be interested in contacting Wesen should they have no other person or organization wishing to inherit their memorabilia.

Your FLAK NEWS editor can supply Wesen's address, plus the addresses of other Air Force museums in the United States and abroad who might be interested in such memorabilia.

Contento Received Soldier's Medal

Continued from Page 6

had mashed up and jammed the radio room door so it could not be opened. With unknown strength, Harold Johnson broke out the overhead hatch and out we went one by one until I was last. My shoulder had been separated and I could not use my left arm. Also, some object had hit me on the back of the head causing a lot of pain. I came out of that hatch like a rocket, climbing on smoking radio gear. Even with one arm, I actually think I cleared the hatch but I landed badly on my separated shoulder with my foot caught in a lost wing panel and all the time this wing is on fire. I could not move, when a voice came to me.

"Stoffer, if you are going to move, move now."

I moved. At that moment John Contento and Kenny Kiser came back to assist me. About this time a ground crew man came up and led me to an ambulance. Contento and Kiser went to the front of the plane and assisted White and pulled David Flores out of the nose. Harrod was caught in the wreckage and couldn't be removed.

For his effort and for his complete disregard for his safety, Contento received the Soldier's Medal.

Other ground people arrived and helped in the rescue effort. Probably not more than two minutes had passed between the time of impact and the time of explosion. I was lying in an ambulance maybe 30 seconds when the whole thing went up — nothing but garbage and tinsel

a thousand feet straight up. The blackest cloud you ever saw.

It took me about two seconds to get out of that ambulance and run with everyone else to the middle of the airfield. There was a mess of bombs left that could go off with the heat of the fire even though they were not armed. Out in the middle of the field we turned around and looked at the plane. Out of that fire came Grinter. . . untouched, unscratched, nonchalant, but of course in shock. On our way to the base hospital the bombs began to explode from the heat of the fire.

While at the hospital we learned Flores and Harrod had died. Jim and I were transferred to the 4205 US Hospital Plant, Walpole Estate across the road from the 91st Bomb Group at Bassingbourne. After a few days Jim went home to the US in a cast, head to toe like a mummy and spent several years recuperating. I spent eight days at the hospital while the rest of the crew went to Scotland on flak leave. On Jan. 20 the crew resumed flying missions.

The night of the crash the boys went back to the Cock Pub in Hitchin and had the painful duty to tell Harrod's date that he was gone. She took it extremely hard. Flores was buried at Cambridge Military Cemetery. I have paid my respects to him on three visits to his grave site. Harrod was returned to the US and is buried in a private cemetery.

ABMC Offers Many Grave Site Services

The American Battle Monuments Commission is the agency charged with the care and maintenance of the American Military cemeteries overseas.

There are many such cemeteries, no less than eight in Europe, where many of the men from the 398th who were killed in action are buried. Or memorialized on Walls of the Missing.

A number of services are available from ABMC to people who wish to honor a loved one. The American Battle Monuments Commission address is Casimir Pulaski Building, 20 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20314-0300.

Typical of these services is the floral piece placed at the grave of Ted Kline, a member of the Sam Palant 601 crew. While there is a charge for the floral arrangement, a photo is provided free of charge. Photos of the grave sites or Tablets of the Missing are provided free of charge, as are many other services.

The Kline grave is at Ardennes, Belgium. The floral display was provided by his family and members of his crew.



The crew went on and each man completed his combat tour. We had 30 people who flew with us at various times. We left two other aircraft in questionable shape, one in St. Thron, Belgium, and one at Woodbridge, England. These sustained considerable combat damage and it is doubtful if they ever flew again.

As a result of the Nuthampstead crash, no one ever again took off in the nose in Grinter's aircraft. This was one rule we stuck with

We came to the base on Oct. 5, 1944 with four crews as replacements. By the time we finished our tour on April 1, 1945, only eight of the 40 crew members were left. The rest were either casualties or prisoners of war.

Pilot Remembers Mission Weather Problems

BY RAY ARMOR

Pilot, 600th Squadron

On the Dec. 24, 1944 mission we led the high group. Target was the airfield at Koblenz, Germany.

This mission turned out to provide good examples of the problems the English weather dished out to the Eighth Air Force. Sometimes the weather was more of a hazard than enemy action.

Most of our missions involved taking off early in the morning, and there was frequently a heavy ground fog, which required that we take off under instrument conditions. Usually we would break out by the time we got to 1,000 feet. Missions were not scheduled unless it was expected that weather on the return would be adequate for safe landing, but it didn't always turn out that way either, as this mission was to prove.

I can remember lots of times taking off with no forward vision from the cockpit because of the ground fog. It was necessary to keep the plane straight down the runway as it raced past. This was not a very comfortable way to take off, with a plane heavily loaded and carrying a full bomb bay.

Enroute weather was sometimes a problem, making it difficult to form up the group, and to get the group in battle formation with other groups for procession over the target. Usually, however, the

weather was eventually far below us. In the earlier days, a mission was scrubbed if the target was not expected to be visual. Now, however, we had a "Mickey" plane and a "Mickey" operator, which enabled us to bomb by radar. This also gave us a false sense of security, as we felt, perhaps incorrectly, that the German anti-aircraft fire was less accurate if the gunners had to rely on radar.

Occasionally, on a mission, we had to fly through hazy weather while in formation. This was particularly difficult. A pilot learns to fly through weather by relying on his instruments, but when flying formation he dared not take his eyes off the plane ahead to even glance at the instruments. In effect, the wings of the plane ahead became the artificial horizon normally provided by instruments, but it was very deceiving, and the pilot sometimes felt that he was flying in a sharp bank or a climb or dive, although he knew this wasn't the case. Formation flying for five or six hours, on oxygen most of the time, was very taxing at best, but flying in formation under conditions of poor visibility was exhausting.

This mission to Koblenz was one of those in which we took off in a heavy ground fog. Unfortunately, two planes crashed on takeoff.

The mission itself was fairly routine, after we got above the weather. It was a

long mission, but flak was scattered and inaccurate, and no enemy fighters were sighted.

Returning to England, we found that weather was still bad at our base, and we were diverted to Ridgewell and Rattlesdon. Thirty-six bombers, all arriving at one time for a landing, create quite a traffic problem. It doesn't help any when the pilots are all suffering from fatigue and the planes are all running out of gas! Then visualize what happens when another group is diverted to land at the same field at the same time. I remember looking out and seeing two other planes on the final approach with us, one on each side, each of us trying to "out-chicken" the others, as we didn't know if we had enough gas to go around. Then land right behind someone else and race to get off the runway before the guy behind ran up our tail.

But we made it, and nearly everyone else did, although there were some near misses, both in the air and on the ground, and some planes were run off the runway and stuck in the mud.

After interrogation, the long ride home in the dark in trucks. Some didn't get home until late afternoon on Christmas Day.

They Met Again Half A World Away *But Death Intercepted The Second Conversation*

BY TOM OVERTURF

Orderly Room, 603rd Squadron

Summer vacation was over and the usual rush to line up classes had begun. It was September 1940 and I was beginning my senior year at Polytechnic High School in Long Beach, California. I had decided to enroll in a class titled "Speakers Workshop" and learned to my dismay that a prerequisite of one year public speaking was required to join this elite speakers group.

The teacher said that if I attended an extemporaneous speaking contest along with four or five other aspirants, and was judged worthy, I could be considered for the class.

I remember the contest was held on a Saturday and we were all given copies of the Readers Digest. We were told to pick out an article, go off in a corner and study it for 30 minutes and give a 15 minute speech on the subject.

I finished my speech and sat down while the others paraded up to the

podium and did likewise. Finally the teacher informed us that the contest was being judged by a former Speakers Workshop graduate, who was now attending the University of Southern California.

The judge stepped up to the microphone and called out the name of Tom Overturf as first prize winner. I then was summoned to the front of the room and presented with a box of candy and hand shake by the judge. His name was Don McCordindale.

You can appreciate the surprise and shock four years later when one dismal, rainy day a replacement crew reported in to the 603rd orderly room and I looked up to see 2nd Lt. Don McCorkindale standing there. I jumped up, gave him a friendly salute and said, "Do you remember me?" He said, "I sure do."

It was late afternoon and the Paul Rich crew looked tired and wanted to find their quarters so they soon left the orderly room.

I never saw him again. I wanted to talk about Long Beach and find out what he had been doing since 1940, etc.

Everybody had a job to do and the crews were flying or sleeping or in town whenever possible. They seldom had reason to drop in to the orderly room.

I heard a number of times later what a fine pilot this Paul Rich was, and I wanted so much to touch base with McCorkindale and find out how our paths happened to cross again a half a world away.

Getting word about a missing crew was always hard for us who had the job of waking up the crews for missions. But 21 November 1944 was the most difficult day. Five from the 603rd went down this day. Including the Rich crew.

And my friend from Long Beach, Don McCorkindale.

“Thirty Thousand Feet”

We soar aloft in “Seventeens”
To Hitler’s hidden stores
Of gasoline and other things
He needs to guard his captured shores.
We climb above the friendly clouds
Below, the Channel coast is clear,
We check our guns and oxygen;
For death is instantaneous here.

“Coast in” at 20,000 feet
We start again to climb.
There are “bandits” in the air today,
And they’ll strike at any time.
Your throat gets dry and chalky
And you’re looking all around,
Wondering if God’s at thirty thousand feet
The same as on the ground?

There’s a running fight with “Jerry”
And your heart begins to pound.
You think of home and mother.
Yes, the same as on the ground.
Number one is burning now.
You pray till it goes out.
We’re a long way from the target
And there’s flak along the route.

Three engines overburdened
And the flak bursts all around.
Isn’t God at thirty thousand feet
The same as on the ground?
Your target’s up ahead now
And you get your bombs away.
The ground below is blazing
Where “Jerry’s” oil stores lay.

The flak is really close now
You can almost hear the sound.
Isn’t God at thirty thousand feet
The same as on the ground?
Number four is throwing oil
And he “feathers” number three.
The tail gunner’s badly wounded
And Chuck’s bleeding at the knee.

You’re miles behind the “Jerry” lines
No friendly fields around.
Isn’t God at thirty thousand feet
The same as on the ground?
You’re losing precious altitude,
And strive to plot a course
Around the Jerry flak guns
And all his hateful force.

You pray a bit and think a bit
And steer the pilot ‘round.
Wondering if God’s at thirty thousand feet
The same as on the ground.
The Rhine is just below us now
Luxemburg’s in sight.
We’re coming up on Brussels; Ross,
Steer fifteen to the right.

We’ll hit the coast at twenty two,
Can you keep her up that long?
We’re now at thirteen thousand
With two engines going strong.
Turn left to steer ‘round Dunkirk
And we’ve cleared the coast at last.
We cross the Cliffs of Dover
But our fuel is going fast.

The base is off at “one o’clock”
We fire a red-red flare.
The Doc is there to meet us
And dispense his tender care.
You lift your eyes to Heaven
Thanking God that you have found
That he’s at thirty thousand feet
The same as on the ground.

*By a Tired Old Navigator
(Stephen Quinn - 603rd)*

Oxygen Problem Answered The Question

Stephen Quinn, who flew as navigator on the 603 Ross Howden crew, lives in Dayton, Ohio, site of the recent 398th reunion. Ironically, he did not join the association until contacted this year by his pilot, Howden, and gunners Jose Echevarria and Ken Newbrough. Reunion chairman Bob Hart urged him to read his poem at one of the evening banquets. It is cheerfully reprinted in FLAK NEWS.

Quinn said he penned “Thirty Thousand Feet” on September 21, 1944, during a period when his crew was more or less idle after piling up several missions in a very brief period.

But his assurance that God was indeed at 30,000 feet as well as on the ground came on September 27, 1944, during a mission to Cologne.

Flight Surgeon Capt. Lewis P. Hunter provided the historical details in his medical report after treating Quinn upon his return to Nuthampstead that day —

LT. STEPHEN R. QUINN, 0-717499, 27, 603rd Squadron.

“Navigator, regular position, 33 missions. Aircraft was going over target at 26,400 feet and remained at this altitude throughout the incident. While coming in to the target area, prop wash threw the patient to the left, thereby unknown to him, disconnecting the oxygen tube from the regulator on the wall. He felt himself becoming light-headed and dizzy and fumbled for the connection at his mask, which indicated he realized his condition but thought that his mask connection was at fault. He became unconscious almost immediately and was revived later when his condition was discovered by the togglier for a routine oxygen check as soon as the bombs were away and the bomb bay doors were closed.

“A large D-2 walk-around bottle was used for a short interval after the togglier discovered that the wall connection would not function, but was used only until he could plug patient’s oxygen hose into another outlet of the demand system.

“The wall connection was at fault, as it was found that the oxygen tube pulled away from the connection and could not be plugged in again. A-14 modified mask was used with demand oxygen system.”

The togglier who brought Quinn around after being unconscious for three minutes was Orville Nelson.

No question God was on duty at 30,000 feet, just as on the ground.

And good ol’ Orville was on duty at 26,400 feet.



THE DFC . . . 44 YEARS LATER
Don Coffee (Right) Receives Medal From Gen. Baumler

Those infernal, everlasting "cracks" that Air Force documents have always fallen through, but rarely recovered, opened up just long enough recently to spring loose the Distinguished Flying Cross for former 601 navigator Don Coffee.

Thanks to some dogged determination . . . and a helping hand from his ex-CO, Tracy Petersen . . . Coffee received the DFC from 14th Air Force commanding officer, Brig. Gen. Dale R. Baumler in ceremonies

at Forces Command, Fort McPherson, Georgia on August 31, 1989.

The DFC citation, lost in the rush for home during VE days, was to honor Coffee for his stint as lead navigator for the 398th, 1st Combat Wing and 1st Division.

"Yes, it came 44 years late, but you can be sure my family and I are ever so proud," said Coffee. "But thanks must go to Tracy for his help and to a lot of fine folks at the Air Force Personnel Center for digging out the records."



Preview of 1990 Reunion

THE EAGLE HANGER is a top attraction at the EAA Museum in Oshkosh, WI, site of the 1990 reunion. And holding down a prominent spot on the display floor is a B-17 with those proud, distinctive marking of the 398th. Only the wing tip shows here, but the rest is just as beautiful.

Present Officers Win Re-elections

Apparently holding to the axiom, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it," the voting membership of the 398th Bomb Group Memorial Association voted to return all present officers for another year.

The balloting, along with other required business transactions, was held on Thursday afternoon, September 21, at the Stouffer Plaza Hotel in Dayton.

President

Col. Bill Comstock
 Fairfax, VA 22031

Vice President

Art Harris
 Lake San Marcos, CA 92069

Secretary

Dalton Ebbeson
 Wausau, WI 54401

Treasurer

Ralph Hall
 New Bedford, MA 02740

Unit Contact

George Hilliard
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Jack Wintersteen
 Danville, PA 17821

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William H. Jones
 Florence, AL 35630

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 Farmington, MO 63640

Dick Frazier
 Newalla, OK 74857

Wally Blackwell
 Rockville, MD 20850

Dale Brown
 Colorado Springs, CO 80909

Public Relations

Allen Ostrom
 Seattle, WA 98177

Letters, Letters

"Because our crew (Godwin) was shot down on our fifth mission (June 25, 1944) I really never had a chance to get familiar with the base or with many people in the group. The new book, REMEMBRANCES, has enlightened me greatly. And thanks to the officers in the Association, particularly George Hilliard, five of our crew are now in touch."

John H. (Herb) Wilson, Middlesex, NY 08846

"The photo in the January FLAK NEWS of the B-17 without a tail brought back some stark memories. I was the navigator on the plane. John Hahn was the pilot and Bruce Daily was the squadron CO flying as CA pilot. I recall that the group made a second pass over the target at Derben because of cloud cover, but our 600th Squadron still could not drop because we were still in our turn. On the third pass we caught a flak burst and lost the tail and the tail gunner. A guy named Wallace Kasch, who was on his final scheduled mission. Hahn and Daily managed to fly the plane home, but we were told that the rest of the tail could go at any time and we could bail out rather than risk a landing. We all chose to stay with the plane and they brought it in just fine, although we ended up in the mud at the end of the runway. Thanks for the memory."

Bob Kuchta, Madison, TN 37115.

"Please convey our thanks to the members of the 398th for all their letters and prayers following David's passing last June. I still can't believe he won't be coming through the door and saying, 'Are there any letters from the States, Peg?' My son, Tim, and I are determined to keep the business going. It is best to keep as busy as possible. Thanks to you all. Looking forward to seeing some of you on the tour to England next year."

Peggy Wells, Nuthampstead, Royston, Herts, SG8 8LT, England.

"My wife, Becky, enjoyed REMEMBRANCES so much that we want five more books for our sons and daughters. It is really a masterful job."

Russ Morrison, Bathgate, ND 58216.

"I had a very nice experience last February. Our ball turret gunner, Bill Clack from Texas, called me to McDill AFB where his son, Lt. Col. Billy S. Clack, assumed command of the 62nd Tactical Fighter Training Squadron. That was quite a thrill for us. To say nothing about Col. Billy's proud parents."

Bob Rebillot, Clearwater, FL 34621.

"My sincerest thanks to all of you who had a part in raising my brother's flag at the memorial at Nuthampstead. And for sending back the beautiful scroll and photo. You must certainly know how much this meant to me and my family. God Bless all of you, and our "Friends of the 398th" at Nuthampstead."

Ted Lewandowski, Lyndhurst, NJ 07071

Lots of PX Items Available For Christmas Gifts

Members of the 398th Bomb Group . . . and their families . . . are reminded that the group's PX Department is stocked with many items that make excellent Christmas gifts.

The last FLAK NEWS (July, 1989) carried a listing of the products and prices. Those who found the PX tables at the Dayton reunion depleted of many of the items may be assured that new supplies have been ordered and will be available for Christmas delivery.

Write to Jack Wintersteen, Danville, PA 17821.

Many VHS videos, such as "All The Fine Young Men," "Double Strike," "Target for To-day," and others are available from your FLAK NEWS editor, Allen Ostrom, Seattle, WA 98177. Each film is priced at \$25.00.