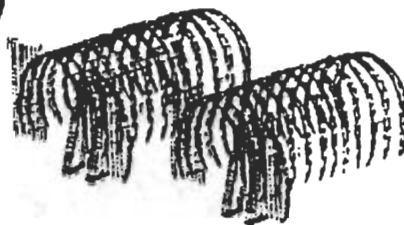


449th "FLYING HORSEMEN"



"Late Pass!"

"LATE PASS" WAS THE CALL SIGN FOR GROTTAGLIE TOWER--

MARCH '96 ISSUE

449th BOMB GROUP

ITALY REVISITED

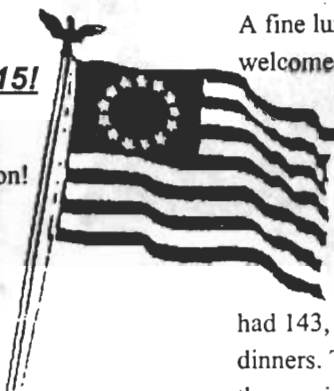
HEAR YE - HEAR YE!

Total Attendance, 8th Reunion 615!

If you didn't make it to the 8th reunion at Williamsburg, ya'll missed a wonderful occasion! The weather gave us a beautiful fall week, and the Fort Magruder Inn was as nice a setting as we have ever experienced. When you add a fine program with the above, it makes a most memorable event.

Many members had arrived Sunday, and Monday was a busy day with many more early arrivals. Registration continued Tuesday, with the first official event being the **Get Acquainted Buffet**, held outside in the hotel garden. 485 attended this first gathering and enjoyed great food and entertainment by a drum and fife corps in their original 1775 costumes. This was the theme carried out throughout the reunion.

Wednesday kicked off with a 9:30 a.m. **tour of Langley Air Force Base**. About nine buses took about 40 minutes to move 405 folks to the first stop - a first hand review of the **F117 fighter**. Several young Air Force Captains were on hand to describe the unusual plane and answer questions. Then on to a nearby hangar to get a close up look at the **F15 fighters** - and several fellows even got to crawl in and check the instruments (one or two could hardly get out, for some reason!).



A fine lunch was served at the NCO Club, and we were welcomed by the Base Commander, Col. Looney, an Air Force Academy graduate, already on the promotion list to B/G. Our Floyd Trogon had arranged this fine tour.

That evening, **EACH SQUADRON HAD A SEPARATE DINING ROOM** for their own gathering and program. The 716th had 144, 717th had 143, 718th had 124, and the 719th had 135 at these dinners. There were 6 registered from Headquarters. Again the special "1775 entertainers" visited each dining room for a skit on Revolutionary times.

Golf day was Thursday, with 56 contestants competing at the nearby course at Fort Eustis. The Army Post is only a few

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Scene from the Memorial Breakfast on Friday morning. The Ball Room was full for each event there.

IN THIS ISSUE

8th Reunion Report ... The Story on the Italy-Europe Tour following the Williamsburg Reunion ... Anderson Crew *717th) Downing and Internment in Bulgaria ... Listing of PX Items Available ... More Information on the "Buzzer" ... Report on 1997 Reunion ... Chaplain Corner and More...

minutes away, and all reports on it were very favorable. No other events were planned for this day, allowing many folk to visit the old town of Williamsburg, and some on to Jamestown and Yorktown.

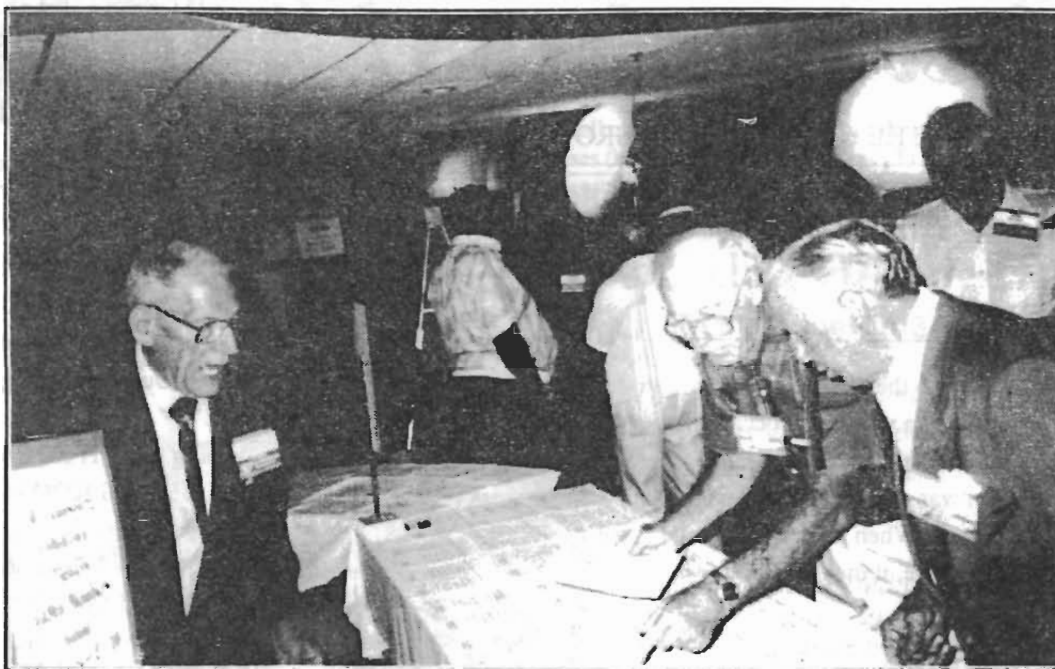
Buses were available from the Hotel door to these historic places each day of the reunion. Special priced tickets were also made available for each of these attractions. There is so much to see in this area, and many members took advantage of these wonderful opportunities to share some 200 plus years of American history.

The final day, Friday, began with the **MEMORIAL BREAKFAST** with some 425 attending. We had 14 more names to add to our deceased list since the January newsletter. Reverend Jim Shanahan presented both the Invocation and Benediction. John Lynn's choral group had two selections and the main address was by our own Floyd Trogdon.

The **ASSN. BUSINESS MEETING** on Friday re-elected the Cabinet Officers for another year. Plans to print History Book #4 and to reprint History Book #3 were discussed. The treasurer asked for a call of hands for each suggestion and it was decided to send letters to the membership regarding this in order for the Cabinet to make a decision. It was unanimous that a special letter to the Tuskogee Pilots Association be sent to acknowledge our thanks, gratitude and appreciation for their service to the War effort and to the support of our own airmen in WW2 as given by Wallace Osborne, 716th Sq. The discussion regarding Las Vegas for the 1997 reunion was discussed and ultimately decided to accept

the planned dates of the Air Force Convention.

Col. Randolph had a slight stroke and was just beginning his road back to better health. A report in January found him in great spirits, taking his doctors instructions and getting ready for the reunion in Las Vegas in 1997! Gen. Elliott called to cancel his attendance due to an illness of his wife, Bonnie! The illness was later diagnosed as a reaction to her medication. Both Frank and Bonnie sent their regards and included



The registration area. L to R, John Aulner, Jim Miller and Floyd Trogdon working on the banquet seating. This is a good time to thank the many members and spouses who gave such great help to the registration area and the sales desk. We couldn't do it without you! Thanks a million.

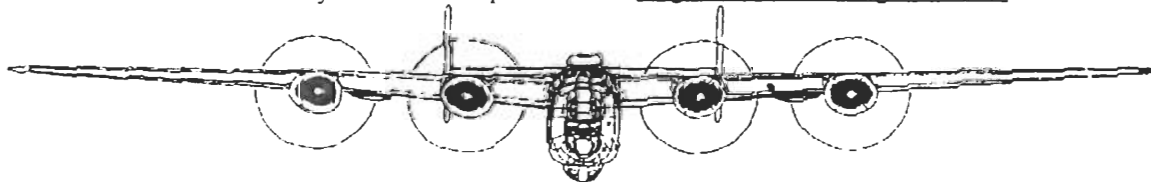
the information that Randolph and Frank had just missed their first reunion of the eight held! Both are in the plans for the 9th Reunion! We sincerely missed Col. Randolph and Frank Elliott.

The **REUNION BANQUET** was held in Richmond hall, with 546 seated for this final event. The evening highlight was the

"mystery speaker", who turned out to be Patrick Henry. He was introduced by the "town crier", accompanied by the Fife and Drum Corps. Patrick Henry delivered his famous "Give Me Liberty, Or Give Me Death" speech, with all the exhortation of the period. What a great way to end this reunion in this historic atmosphere.

The reunion committee is to be commended for the fine results of their efforts. Headed by Lee Kenney and Ken Kinsinger, others were John Burchill, David Cotogni, Don Meyer, Floyd Trogdon, and George Willoughby.

Total registration shows 307 members, 259 spouses and 49 guests for a final figure of 615.



449th VISITS WWII SITES

Our Memorable Trip To Italy, Austria, and Germany

Sat. 9/09 - buses arrived at the Ft. Magurder Hotel in Williamsburg at exactly 10 a.m. to take **128** of us to Dulles Airport to begin our **Post-Reunion Trip** that would take us back 50 years. We drove 30 cars to the George Washington Hotel that would allow us to park our cars there for the two weeks we would be gone. The buses followed us, picked us up, and we arrived at Dulles and Luftansa at 1:00 p.m. checked our bags and had 4 hours to spare. After lunch we boarded a 747, on time, with a full load. On to Frankfurt to change planes. Ticket and boarding pass said gate B-11 but Luftansa changed the gate to A-12 without notifying anyone. I had to go through 2 passport checks to get from B-11 to A-12. Finally after an hour and a good long walk, I got everyone to gate A-12. Then Luftansa said, because of the Italians we would be leaving an hour late. I went up to the counter and told them that 64 of us going from **Rome to Brindisi** had only an hour layover. I convinced them, they should telex Rome to hold our Brindisi Alitalia flight. When we got to Rome, the Central Holidays Tour Guide was waiting for us and took over. It was a great relief to let them. They got us on our Brinisi flight and **the other 64 on the Bari flight** (Atlanta could not take all 128 on the same plane). We got to Brindisi but no bags. Our tour manager, Massimo Stagni, spent about 45 minutes making arrangements to get our bags to the hotel at Taranto. I had my carry-on so I could take a shower, shave and brush my teeth before dinner. The dinner was great and well received. Bags arrived while we were at dinner although a couple were lost and damaged by Luftansa.

Mon. 9/11 - woke up to a beautiful morning. Went out on my balcony and looked at **the beautiful bay of Taranto**. Weather - clear, sunny and 75 degrees. Loaded the buses and **drove to the town of Grottaglie**. At City Hall we met the Mayor, Vice Mayor, and the man who was **Commander of the Base** before us and also after we left. After **welcoming speech by the Mayor**, I accepted several history books from the Mayor and a **beautiful Grottaglie Ceramic Vase**. The vase will be sent to Colonel Randolph for safe-keeping. I presented the Mayor with our History Books 1,2, & 3. Which I also signed for the Mayor. After numerous picture taking, we boarded our buses and with police help we got through town, and had a police escort out to the base. **There** we were met by the **Italian Commandant, Navy Captain Cucci**. After welcoming us with coffee and refreshments, I presented the Captain with a copy of Hollie Wilkes 449th print. Trogdon, Sass, Steele and myself signed it for each of the Squadrons.

We got back in the buses to tour the base. Surprisingly **the old Group Headquarters Bldg. was still intact**, as was the old Officers Club and a few hangars were still standing. The Captain said they would renovate some of the buildings. The metal grid that was used for parking areas was still there. It was difficult to identify where the old Squadron Areas were, but we

finally were able to figure where each was. I asked the Captain Cucci if we could go out to the runway. He said he would have to check because the Base was an active Italian Navy Base and part of Nato. Shortly afterwards, he said a Jeep would be by. It came by with a "follow me" sign and the three buses drove down the old runway that we had taken off so many times, 50 years ago. The old runway was not paved but everyone felt that they had been given their youth to live over again.

I was finally able to orient myself as to **where** the 718th Squadron was. What threw me off was that a new local road and a Italian toll road had been built by the railroad tracks that was **the boundary** of the 718th. We finally left the base **knowing that even though 50 years had passed, it was like yesterday**. **Went back to the hotel for lunch hosted by the local Italian Officials**. We then boarded the buses again to drive to **Sorrento**. **Passed Mt. Vesuvius** and the town of Salerno and we could see the Isle of Capri. It was dark when we arrived in Sorrento. It was so beautiful, the town was so festive, colored lights, narrow streets and full of people. The bus drivers were a wonder to behold, maneuvering their buses through the people, cars, and narrow streets. We arrived at 8:10, checked in and went down to a 4 course dinner in a beautiful dining room. The Sorrento Hotel is a 5-star hotel and looks it. What a wonderful day.

Tues. 9/12 - great breakfast. **Had time** to look over the Hotel, beautiful swimming **pool, grounds** and lobby.

Continued on Page 4



Boarded buses to go to **Pompei**. Great guided tour of the ruins, not enough time but certainly worth it. On to the **American Cemetery in Nettuno, passing by the Abbey of Montecassino**. I signed our group in at the cemetery. Mike Nestoff found the grave of his Ball Turret Gunner. There are graves of 33 449ers and the names of 34 MIA's on a wall at the memorial. Really an emotional experience. Arrived at the Holiday Inn in **Rome** about 7:00 p.m. Dinner on our own. Had White Onion Soup, Bread, and Wine. Just right!!!



Wed. 9/13 - wonderful **guided tour of Rome**. In the morning and another in the afternoon. Some went on a noon tour of the **Sistine Chapel**. Even got to see **the Pope** in front of **St. Peter's Church**. It was raining slightly, off and on, but he was under cover and the thousands in the square didn't seem to mind. Had dinner in a great local restaurant in the hills. Wonderful food, all the wine you could drink, and some great entertainment.

Thurs. 9/14 - left Rome, everyone talking about marvelous dinner last night and what a great time they had. Drove to **Assisi**, home of St. Francis. Walked through the town and up to the churches. There is the lower church and the upper church. One built on top of the other. Drive to **Florence**. Stopped in hills overlooking Florence for view and a **group picture**. First snafu when we got to the hotel Roma. Rooms for the doubles but only 7 singles for 8



singles. All hotels were full. I went by cab to **Delta Florence Hotel** where yellow bus was staying. Because Delta was a few miles outside of town, **the evening meals were on the house**. The two buses in town were on their own for dinner.

Fri. 9/15 - buses picked us up at 9:00 a.m. for a tour of

the **Tower of Pisa**. I was surprised that the tower was leaning much more than I realized. Pictures do not do justice to the amount of lean. **The Basilica** was beautiful. Tour of Florence in afternoon including **Michelangelo's "David"**. Also stopped at Leather Factory and Gold Stores. All had dinner at Chiochioli Restaurant. Another great Italian dinner and great service. Back to hotel at 12:00. Wake-up call at 7:30 for ride to Venice.

Sat. 9/16 - leave at 9:00 for drive to **U.S. Florence Cemetery**. There are 30 graves of 449ers and 45 names on the Wall of the MIA's. Ed Latta found two of his crew members on the Wall. It was raining hard but it didn't stop most of us getting out to view the Memorial and the Wall. Beautiful!!! And so moving. We drove to **the town of Bologna**. We were going to stop to see if anything was left of the target area we bombed but decided to go to the town. Had an enjoyable visit to the town because of its beauty and it stopped raining. On to **Venice**. We were in three different hotels but were all 4-star hotels. We were at the **Ramada** and it was beautifully furnished in Venician marble. Dinner at hotels was included, ours was wonderful as usual.

Sun. 9/17 - went into old town by bus and boat. **Tour of city** included visit of a glass factory. Then all 128 of us



boarded **Gondolas** for a ride through the waterways. Everyone loved it. More time for shopping, people watching, etc. Back to the hotels for happy hour and another great Italian dinner. Early to bed because we will be up early to drive to Vienna.

Mon. 9/18 - **drove to Vienna, passing by Wiener Neustadt**. This was one of our most difficult targets because of the flak. We could see it plainly from the highway. The drive **through the Alps** was beautiful. Arrived at hotel Prince Eugen about 6:00. It is across from the Railway Station and Marshalling Yard that we bombed a number of times. A problem because the German Agency that Central Holidays used, moved 40 people from the Red Bus to another hotel down the street. All had dinner around corner from the Prince Eugen hotel. German dinners not up to Italian food. Central Holidays had wine and book on Austria sent up to the rooms of the Red Bus folks in other hotel.

Tues. 9/19 - **guided tour of city** including Hofberg, the **Imperial Residence**, and the **State Opera House**. (Bombed and destroyed in March 1945). Went to **Florisdorf** another

Continued on Page 5

target of ours, not much to see. Dinner tonight at Grenzia Restaurant (extra). Those of us who went, enjoyed it.

Wed. 9/20 - left in rain driving to **Salzburg**. Went by local roads to **Moosbierbaum**. Moosbierbaum was an oil refinery which the 449th bombed 8 times. It was heavily defended. We stopped just outside of town where we had a good view of the refinery. Thomas (one of our guides) talked to a German lady when we stopped for picture taking. She said she remembers the bombings but was thankful for us not hitting the town even though it was less than 2 KM from the refinery. She waved to us as we drove away. I'm sure that by evening everyone in town knew who were on the buses that came to their sleepy little town. Drove through beautiful countryside, passing by picturesque towns and farms, on the way to the Autobahn. **Passed by St. Polten, Linz, and Wels** (other targets of the 449th). The Autobahn was a good landmark to find targets and I.P.'s (initial point). Arrived at Salzburg Hotels in time for a guided walking tour of the town. Thoroughly enjoyed the sights. Dinner at our hotel, and early to bed to get rid of cold.

Thurs. 9/21 - leave for Munich with a stop at

Berchtesgaden and a local Schnaps Factory. Great tasting and shopping. Had lunch in town (paid for by the German Tour Co. that changed hotels for the Red Bus in Vienna). More shopping then on to Munich. Dinner on our own, but since **the real Oktoberfest** was only two blocks from our hotel, most went there and had a great time.

Fri. 9/22 - morning tour of city. especially **Castle of Leopold and Maximilian**. One of the largest complexes I have ever seen. This afternoon some of us took a **special tour to Dachau, the Concentration Camp**. The Germans seem to want to hide it. Directions to the Camp were hard for the bus driver to find and follow. It was difficult to realize that there were as many camps as were shown on the wall - hundreds of them. Pictures told the stories. This afternoon we went back to Oktoberfest to see it in the afternoon. Still a big zoo, midway crowded, two big beer halls were jammed. Tonight we go to Munich's famous Hofbrauhaus. Everyone had a wonderful time, food, beer, entertainment, and so much more.

Sat. 9/23 - went with everyone to the Airport, 121 going back, 7 of us are staying for a little longer. Again

Continued on Page 6



128 of our 449ers at Michaelangelo Park, Florence, Italy, 15 Sept. 1995

Luftansa changed things to suit themselves. Everyone was supposed to leave from Munich at 9:45 a.m. but they changed it so that 1/2 had to leave at 6:35 or 7:01 to go to Frankfort. All left Frankfort together to go back to Dulles and Williamsburg or home. Jim & Dee Miller and I rented a car and drove to Berchtesgaden and the General Walker Hotel. The Walker is an Armed Forces Rec. Hotel. The first night we had rooms with baths down the hall. What a letdown after the 4 & 5-star hotels we had on our trip. The next two nights we had better rooms with baths. The General Walker is being turned back to the Germans Sept. 30 after 50 years being run by the Americans.

Sun. 9/24 - day of rest - needed it after the Reunion and trip. Good food and very reasonable at the Walker. Went to Konigsee for sight-seeing and shopping.

Mon. 9/25 - took tour of the **German Bunker System** under the hotel. Went back to the Schnapsfactory, then went on a tour up to **Hitler's Eagle's Nest**. Great engineering feat to put a road up there. Scary bus ride up, then walk through a 200 yard tunnel to a elevator that goes up about 450 feet through rock to the Eagle's Nest. We could see the fireplace the Il Duce gave to Hitler, made out of beautiful red Italian marble. Most of the buildings are now restaurants and Gift Shops. What a view from the top. You can

see Salzburg, Konigsee. Everything is so green and beautiful, just like in the movies. Then the clouds came in and it was difficult to see anything. Ride down was much easier.

Tues. 9/26 - left at 4:30 a.m. to drive car back to Munich and plane back to Frankfort and Dulles.

Reflections: I started working on this trip three years ago. I contacted a number of travel agencies, including Patrick A.F.B., AAA, National Ones, Local Ones. Nobody seem to be able to do what I knew our group wanted. Finally I talked to Shirley Lurcott of "Good Friends Travel", who in turn got in touch with Sergio Bigini V.P. of "Central Holiday Tours". These two agencies did everything I had hoped for and so much more. The accommodations, meals, attractions, buses, drivers, and most importantly the tour guides were all first class. The value was more than anyone could have expected. What can't be measured was the emotions we felt being greeted by the Mayor of Grottaglie, the reception of the Italian Navy and the Tour of the Old Base, and certainly the visits to the two Cemeterys. **This was what the trip was all about.**

By Lee Kenney

449th Vice President

8th Reunion Chairman and Tour Leader

449th ITALY-AUSTRIA-GERMANY TOUR TAPE!!!!

.... A VHS VCR COLOR & COMMENTARY TAPE IS AVAILABLE TO ALL MEMBERS. The **Tour Report** is given in this "LATE PASS" Issue, and the **Tour leader** will send VCR Tape Copies for only \$15.00 each, postage paid! Write to him for your copy(ies);

Lee Kenney
149 Augusta Way
Melbourne, FL 32940

You will see all the color of the areas, sense your presence, and review your memory of the WWII base!

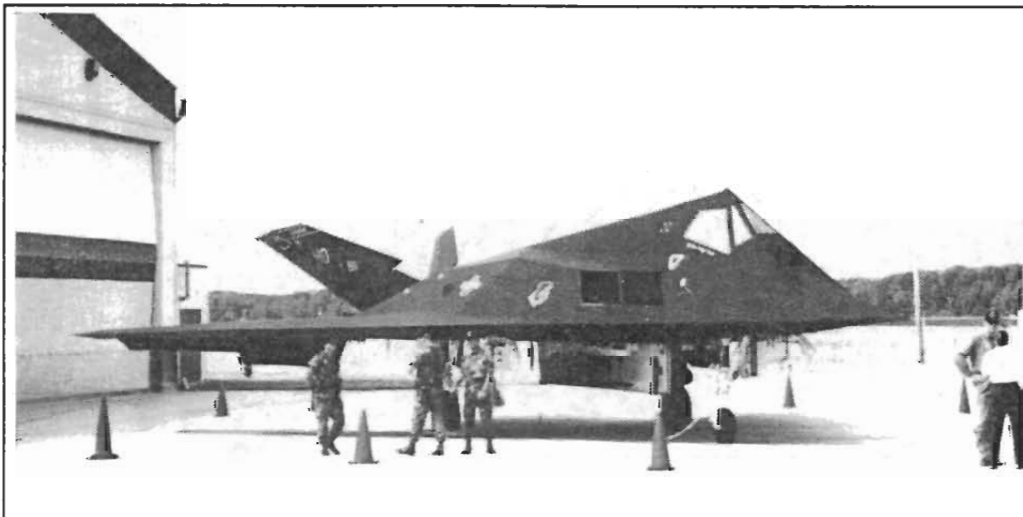


Photo taken during our visit to LANGLEY AFB, Sept. 95 ... we, at first, said ... "this thing will never get off the ground" ... but we had seen the TV combat photos of its bombing accuracy and stated ... "this is what was needed on those narrow R.R. bridges in WW2" ... WOW!!!

HISTORY BOOKS: REPRINT #3 OR PRINT A #4 BOOK?

This was the big question during the business session of the 8th Reunion! With recent reunion attendees numbering many first time attendees the 449th Cabinet was faced with requests to make history books available to those that were not able to obtain copies of the 2nd history volume, Book #3. At the same time newly found 449ers had not been able to submit articles or photos to be considered for History Book 1-2, or the follow-on Book #3!! Thus we had "arms raised votes" for both!!! Even during the reunion we were able to see that we could not do both ... reprint #3 and do a #4 Book!! .. but just how could we not make an effort? Thus the Treasurer, Jim Miller, suggested that we send out notices to the full membership for orders for a possible reprint of Book #3, with their checks attached .. said requests to be held until the total numbers were available. Finally, when January 96 rolled around, the treasurer made it known to the Cabinet that **the number of requests with their funds were not enough** to cover the minimal book printing costs to the Association, and certainly not be able to do a Book #4 also! After cabinet discussion **it has been decided to print a Book #4** which will provide publication of many articles and photos not available before, and to the full membership rather than to just those that were unfortunate to miss the Book #3. With the present treasury balance, the programmed estimate costs for the coming

1997 reunion, and the larger number of sales expected for a new book, the Cabinet made their decision. So a Book #4 is **being assembled by the Assn. Historian, Dick Asbury**. He has been collecting articles and photos for the past few years (since Book #3 was printed prior to his becoming the Historian) and requests that those who have stories to relate, photos to be considered for publication, to forward them to him right away!!! Yes, identify all those in your photos, print (or type) your articles ... and if you must write, please do so as legibly as possible (it is so easy to read the wrong spellings). Asbury remarks: "I will endeavor to have Book #4 available for the April 1997 Reunion, if at all possible, depending upon cooperation from all members of the Association as well as with our contractors!!" In all events, the Cabinet will keep the membership advised when to order the book, and what it will cost (yes, this will take a special letter mailing several months from now!!)

SEND YOUR ITEMS FOR BOOK #4 TO: 449th B.G. ASSN. HISTORIAN, RICHARD T. ASBURY, 415 Bond Place, Apt 2-C; Cincinnati, OH 45206-1872. **Note:** if you have only your WWII photo, or a prized snapshot you plan to submit, do not expect it back; **have a negative made and then have other positive prints made from your new negative** and hold on to your WWII or prized snapshot!!

(A report from the Association Historian, dated just prior to the Reunion)

449th ANEURYSM MEMBER REPORT:

The "Board Meeting" of The American Aneurysm Foundation at DEL-MAR's Resort and Spa "L'AUBERGE" was quite "the" success! PRESS RELEASES were written and delivered. Then I showed the Board the January and May 449th's "Late Pass" Newsletters with two full pages devoted to the Foundation's cause. Immediately I received requests for copies of the Newsletters and they were made when I got back and shipped this week!

I was quite pleased to enlighten other members of the board to the fact that the 449th BGA was formally on the leading edge of such a serious and ambitious project! A photograph of Mary Lapham as she presided in her Presidency of the Foundation's Board Meeting on 17 May 1995 ... was enclosed.

The story appeared in the press the next day in the northern edition of The San Diego Union-Tribune. There should be others and I was hopeful - that I would be sent the articles so that they can be circulated among the 449th persons who have an interest in this effort.

The "Daedalus Flyer" published a nice article about the "donation" of our History to The Daedalian Foundation's library via Colonel Randolph! They did appreciate the gift of our History Book 1-2.

While in San Diego we stopped at the San Diego Aerospace Museum and Colonel Randolph autographed a History Book to the Publisher & Editor George Welsh of "Briefing" The Journal of the International B-24 Liberator Club.

Dick Asbury; 449th Historian

GROUP & SQUADRON UNIT EMBLEMS:

DURING STATESIDE TRAINING AT ALAMOGORDO, COL. ALKIRE, 449TH BOMB GROUP STATED: (in his comments to the bomber crews); ... "Whatever You Do, Do It So It Makes Sense!"

The 716th Bomb Squadron then added the scroll to the bottom of the adopted squadron emblem, "SAPIENTIAM FERIMUS"!... the Latin translation was never explained to the post-war group members, **perhaps some did remember** only to forget over the years. **Secy. Downey called** the professor of Latin at the St. Louis University (**Jesuit School**) and talked with Prof. Miller. After hearing and verifying the word spelling he reported that it meant "We Have Wisdom", "or similar meaning".

Just when the scroll was added, before or after Col. Alkire was downed in combat is not known. Today's analysis to the translation just might mean, as an answer to Col. Alkire's statement, that the 716th Sqdn. crews replied..."We Do Make Sense".

Unfortunately the Squadron emblem along with the emblem of the Bomb Group and the emblem of the 719th Bomb Squadrons, were not accepted by the Army Air Force to be recognized as "official emblems", due to reasons explained; the 719th had a geographic reference (Mt. Vesuvius); the 716th emblem with the top hat on a skull was already a squadron emblem of a fighter unit, and the Group emblem was a "copy of the flying red horse of the Socony-Vacuum Petroleum Co". The 717th and 718th Sqdn. emblems are "OFFICIAL EMBLEMS OF RECORD!" The other three have become historic emblems of WWII!

Mr. VICTOR SAVULESCU
MAYOR



PLOIESTI CITY HALL - OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

2, REPUBLICII BD.
PLOIESTI, 2000
ROMANIA
TEL: 044 / 115982
FAX: 044 / 113829

THE 50th ANNIVERSARY REUNION

Greetings from the City Hall of Ploiesti and from the Ploiesti War Veterans Association

We are honored to have the privilege of sending our best wishes to you on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Fifteenth Air Force first combat missions (8 Jan.1944) and for the 51st anniversary celebrating the origin of the 449th Bomb Group (1 May 1943).

The city of Ploiesti, the most important oil center of Romania, has a tradition in having friendship relation with American people, because of the American and Romanian joint ventures in the oil industry. The people of Ploiesti were doing business with American companies and, although, the American Air Forces have heavily bombed our city during WW.II, we were aware that the American bombing missions were necessary to shorten the war and to destroy the German war machine that was depending on our oil supplies.

We believe that such important events as your Reunion is, have a major contribution to the efforts made to bring peace and freedom to the world.

Please, convey our appreciation to all who participate in this reunion and our best wishes for a successful program.

We wish to our brave former "enemies" and to the American people - peace, success and prosperity.

Respectfully,

Victor Savulescu
Mayor of Ploiesti City

"BUZZER CRASH INFO. ANSWERS 51 YEAR MYSTERY"

... the Ferry Flight to Return Combat Complete Veterans to U.S.

Ever since the flight of 9 Dec. 1944, the answer of its demise had never been known to fellow members of the 449th Bomb Group. Aircraft serial number 41-29307, named "Buzzer", had flown over 77 recorded combat missions only to become stripped of her guns and made into an administrative ferrying aircraft. The ship, former combat no. #04, was of the 719th Bomb Squadron, her crew chief was Sgt. Bart Peluso, who had also crewed another bomber, "Los Lobos". Many search missions made by fellow squadron and group aircrewmembers were flown in the search for the reported loss of the ship, for it carried personal friends of several aircrews. All search reported "no sightings". FINALLY THE END STORY CAN NOW BE TOLD!

After more than 50 years, the finding of missing aircraft answers are rare! Despite this rarity, **Ben Yedlin**, former ball gunner on Norm Rogers 719th crew has come up with the final story. When the 449th NEWSLETTER for "Winter '92" was published, pages 8 & 9 listed the names of our 449ers who had been returned for burial in U.S. National Cemeteries. Among the names of those in Jefferson Barracks Natl. Cem., St. Louis, MO., were those of names that were on the "Buzzer" Dec. 9th, '44 flight! This "perked up the ears" of several 449th Association members! But the question remained ... where was the aircraft found? Was it the one reported in 449th History Book 1-2, pages 52-53? were all those on the flight found, for not all 16 mens names were on the grave marker! Yedlin who completed his full combat tour in mid-July '44, was genuinely interested. Through his efforts we received confirmation that the ship had been converted to ferrying status (quite possible the ship that had been converted to ferrying status (quite possibly the ship that John Vest flew to Cairo to return Bulgarian refugee POW's ... story in this news issue), obtained a copy of **Missing AirCrew Report (MACR) #10576** and noted its report: "ship was last seen at take off, weather reported bad, with visibility 8-10 miles, 5/10 to 6/10 cloud cover". The report also indicated "weapons removed, ship converted into ferry ship". From this report, and that of the 449th History Book listing of the 16 names, Yedlin began his search!

The crew assigned to fly as the mission crew were; 2 Lt. Julian Caldwell as the Pilot with a partial crew of his own; **2 Lt. John Boswell** (co-pilot), **2 Lt. Albert Marple** (navigator), **S/Sgt. Manuel Suarez** (Flt. eng.), **S/Sgt. Albert Ganim** (Radio Operator). The seven (7) men who had completed 35 combat flights each, the new full tour for combat rotation that had just been established by 15th Air Force (rather than the previous formula for rotation which could be more than 35, yet in some computations be over other Command rotation policies) was a surprise announcement and the loading list was made for a Dec. 9th take-off for Pamigliano Airport, Naples, Italy. **These veterans were: 1st Lt. Joseph Brehun, 1st Lt. Roy Groeger, 1st Lt. Fowler Doyle, T/Sgt. Donald Erickson, T/Sgt. Joe L. Gettys, Jr., T/Sgt. Ralph Ballou, and S/Sgt. Alex Eckerling.** They were carried on the ships manifest as "passengers". Four other men were permitted to board this ferry flight, and posed a problem: "why were

these men on the ship"? The Squadron C.O., Maj. Bill Allen was asked in 1992 if he remembered the flight and answered, "only that it was never found"! The Squadron Operations Officer, Capt. Robert McKee, and had signed the Missing AirCrew Report, and approved the loading list had passed away and thus his information was lost. **The additional passengers were: 1st Lt. William Stevens**, who had his own 719th crew; **1st Lt. Francis Baldwin**, another crew co-pilot; **1st Lt. Ellis Arieff**, another crew Bombardier, and **Pfc Paul Watson**.

Just prior to the 8th Reunion of the 449th Bomb Group in Sept. 1995, Ben Yedlin announced that he had received the information that **the wreckage of the ship and recovered bodies was found! An Italian woman had found the wreckage in July 1945, after the snow covered area cleared up!** The site was in the Picientini Mountains of the Appennine Range, near the village of Oliveto Citra, some 60 miles southeast of Naples and 30 miles northeast of Salerno (the spot was plotted to be on a direct line between our home base at Grottaglie and the intended destination). The wreckage was **at the bottom of a steep gorge**, given by the finder to be **about 5-6 hundred yards deep**. Thus answering why our search craft could not see the wreckage because of snow cover and forested gorge. In the days since that Dec. 44 flight, many 449ers had remembered and wondered!!! The exact time that the aerial search of the 449th was called off is not remembered, but memory still remains of the times that Aldrich, Ketring, and other 719th bomber crews flew "practice missions to include search" were flown.

The surmise for **the crash cause has never been given an official answer**; 449th pilots and aircrew members agree that the weather conditions required the ship to fly a lower altitude, remembering that the large volcano of Mt. Vesuvius was the peak to avoid! Experience was not the answer, for Lt. Caldwell and his crew had flown at least 8-10 combat missions, as given by Assn. Secy. R. Downey, a close friend of fellow St. Louisian, Joe Shields, Lt. Caldwell's bombardier who was not on the flight!. This left Yedlin with the story missing information of **whose crew the seven combat veterans had been on? And still, why the other four men were there?** The combat crew information for the 7 veterans came easily; Lt. **Bache's crew** completed their missions in Dec. 44 but part of the crew had a few more to fly; **five of his crew were on the flight; Doyle, (Co-pilot); Erickson (flt/eng.); Gettys, (Radio/Op.); Ballou (Nose gun.) and Eckerling, (waist gun.)**. This accounted for 12, but the "why" of the four remaining still was unknown. Finally pieces of information came in; **Lt. Arieff** was the former bombardier on Mealey's crew (name changed to O'Malley post War). O'Malley reported that Arieff had bailed out safely (flak damage to Vienna) on 13 Oct. '44. Follow-up information was found that 9 of his crew were taken POW, and Arieff had landed in Yugoslavia, had evaded capture and was returned to allied territory after suffering severe frost bit. Ellis Arieff had just been released from the hospital and "boarded the ship to obtain his needed four hours of flying time per month for pay

Continued on Page 11

purposes". **Francis Baldwin**, was co-pilot on Charnes crew; his crew navigator, Lawrence Hamblen, reported in '95 that "Baldwin had just heard that his son had been born and was **going to Naples to find presents**". **Pfc Paul Watson** information, given at the Group reunion Sept. 95, was "Watson was an administrative non-aerial rating airman"... **going along for a B-24 ride and a visit to Naples**". **1st Lt. Stevens**, combat crew pilot information came from one of his crew, Carl Beaty, armorer-gunner, who stated, Lt. Stevens had wrangled a 3 day pass from the C.O. and "**was going to visit Rome**". **thus all 16 on-board reasons were uncovered!!**

In his pursuit for information, Yedlin has made contact with many relatives of most of those on the ship. he plans to visit the locale and talk with those of the finders family. She had made contact with American authorities who sent Graves Registration Units to recover the remains. A letter from Sen. Bill Bradley, N.J. to Yedlin, signed by a "U.S. Army Chief of Casualty Support Affairs explains: the eight men at Jefferson Barracks Natl. Cemetery could not be identified individually, but from the MACR report. The other 8 were buried in designated points by the next of

kin." Ben went on to find that Julian Caldwell, in Lodge, SC (pvt. cem.); Albert Marple to the Sicily-Rome Military Cemetery, as were Francis Baldwin, and Donald Erickson. Manual Suarez in the Long Island Natl. Cemetery; Ellis Arieff in a private cemetery in Philadelphia, Pa.; Fowler Doyle in a private cemetery in Lexington, KY; and Ralph Ballou in a private cemetery in Cedar Rapids, IA. Those that are buried at Jefferson Barracks Natl. Cem., St. Louis, MO., Section 82, Grave 148-B, are; John Boswell, Albert Ganim, William Stevens, Paul Watson, Joseph Brehun, Roy Groeger, Joe L. Gettys, Jr., and Alex Eckerling.

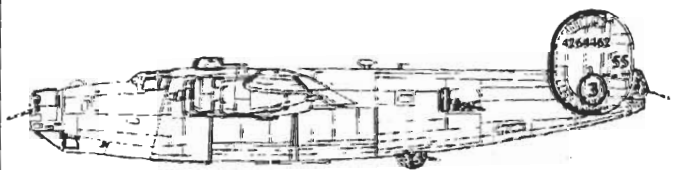
So the mystery, or mysteries, have been answered! Thanks to Ben Yedlin for his dedication to all of the situations; his personal compassion, certainly. He, in turn, thanks all those that have offered time and information; the Italian woman and her family who found the wreckage; the members of the Graves Registration Unit, many members of the 449th Group, non-military assistances from private parties, and, of course, the relatives of the 16 men. Sometime this spring Ben plans to make a trip to Italy with hope to give his (and our) personal thanks to that family.

written by the Editor "Late Pass"

449TH GROUP C.O. RECOVERING FROM STROKE

It took a stroke to keep Jack Randolph from attending the 8th reunion of his WWII bomb group. In mid-summer, 1995, Col. Randolph suffered his stroke and was unable to continue his unbroken string of reunion attendances. From the very onset of the 449th Association beginnings he had been present in the nucleus of planning and giving his expertise regarding the events of the Group. When it came time for the Sept. 95 reunion in Williamsburg, VA, Jack and his wife, Nell, called the Reunion Commit-

tee to report his health and regrets. Announcements regarding his progress were made at several times during the reunion. A large "Get Well" card was circulated amongst the reunion attendees and forwarded on to both of the Randolph's. Col. Randolph sends his personal wishes to everyone in the 449th Assn. and a heartfelt "Thanks" for the thoughts and prayers given for him. **Follow up calls in Nov., Dec. & Jan. received the good news that he is not only doing well, but is making plans to attend the 1997 Reunion!!**



HEARD AT THE REUNION!

George Willoughby, 716th Supply Sgt. and former U.S. Army Bandsman at Jefferson Barracks, MO. (pre-449th in WWII) stated: "I built the 716th E.M. Club: it became a very popular hangout for all the Group enlisted men! After a while we threw a big party and invited WAC's and Nurses from several installations all around So. Italy! And were we surprised when so many showed up! Later on in that party we noted that most of them were outside, voluntarily swimming in a very large mud hole!" Now that must have been some party, George! And how many more of the 716th men remember that?



Don Tuttle, 716th Tail Gunner on Willdings crew, was the Champion Pumpkin Grower in Maine in 1994. This beauty weighed in at 475 pounds, and took four men to load it in this pickup. Two vines produced eight pumpkins. The smallest at 275 pounds. All this with the help of 31 year old chicken manure and enough water to float a battleship, per Don.

"REFLECTIONS"

A Message From Our Chaplain:

Feb. 22, 1944, holds a special memory for me. Our crew, piloted by Alf Morton, 717th Bomb Sq., had hit Regensburg, Germany and their fighters and flak had done damage to us with much fuel being lost. About 20 minutes from home base two of our engines began cutting in and out, our fuel had run out, and Morton rang the "bail-out bells." Hovering over the aft camera hatch I said prayers that, my chute would open, but if it didn't that our Heavenly Father would "take care of my life and soul if it was not His will for me to survive", and dived head first out the camera door and waited until I cleared the plane before pulling my rip cord, only to note that the shrouds were entangled around my right leg and the chute was only partially open. I was finally able to untangle and landed safely over allied territory of So. Italy.

Several years later while preparing a message on prayer I remembered this experience. After reflecting on those pre-jump prayers I realized that God had definitely granted both of my requests!

Doubtless, each of us can remember those special times in our lives when we have called on God to meet our special needs that we faced. We can all be grateful that we still have that same God who still hears and answers prayer.

Let me direct your attention to the historic biblical story of Joshua. Joshua had called all the tribes of Israel together and reminded them that God had taken care of them, for he knew that his days were fast coming to an end. In the 23rd and 24th Chapters of the Book of Joshua, he relates a reminder to his brethren of how God had cared for them and issued a challenge to them in Joshua 24:14-15. "Now, therefore, fear the Lord, and serve Him in sincerity and in Truth; and put away the gods which your father served on the other side of the river, and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve, whether the gods which your father served, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land ye dwell; **but for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.**"

As we reflect on the physical threat we faced and defended with our lives, over 50 years ago, we are now facing a spiritual threat, which not only threatens our physical freedom but threatens our **eternal** freedom with our God.

We offered our best then ... dare we do less now?

Rev. Jim Shanahan
717th Flt. Eng.
Chaplain, 449th BG Assn.



INTERNATIONAL B-24 LIBERATOR CLUB

B-24 • PB4Y-1 • PB4Y-2 • LB-30 • C-87 • RY-3 • C-109 • Liberator I-VIII • F-7 • AT-22

15817 Bernardo Center Drive, Suite 102, B1-24, San Diego, CA 92127-2353
(619) 679-3732 (619) 679-1957 Fax

The International B-24 Liberator Club is dedicated to preserving the history of the B-24 Liberator bomber and its derivatives. Consolidated Aircraft Company designed the Liberator in 1939 in response to the Army Air Corps' request for a long range bomber. The company produced over 18,000 of the twin-tailed aircraft for use during WWII at plants throughout the country including San Diego, California; Willow Run, Michigan and Ft. Worth, Texas.

The club keeps alive the memories of its designers, crews and admirers and has done since its creation in 1969. Started by the late Robert McGuire, a former B-24 combat photographer, the club has defended the Liberator's reputation for over 25 years. Not considered the most attractive or graceful of WWII's flying arsenal, the Liberator nonetheless provided an uncomparable service during

the second world war and during the Korean conflict.

The Briefing, the club's quarterly publication, is distributed to over 3,000 club members, as well as to schools, veterans organizations and museums worldwide. by sponsoring aircraft exhibits, flying displays and speaking engagements, the club continues to educate the public about an historic aircraft whose first mission took place long before many of today's citizens were born. Club membership is \$15 per year for U.S., \$18 overseas, and includes a subscription to the organization's highly acclaimed, Briefing. For more information, contact George Welsh, Manager, International B-24 Liberator Club, 15817 Bernardo Center Drive, Suite 102, Box 124, San Diego, CA 92127-2322 • Tel: Voice/Fax: 619/679-1957.

P.S. ALL THE ORIGINAL 449TH ASSN. MEMBERS NAMES CAME FROM ARTICLES IN THIS "BRIEFING" NEWSLETTER IN 1982! and 1983!

TAPS



The following names have been received by the News Editor/Assn. Secy. for addition to the growing list of names of those deceased since the beginnings of the 449th Bomb Group Assn., March 1983.

Adsit, Donald	716	NG on McGrath crew. 3 July 95
Aldrich, Ray	719	Pilot. 28 Feb. 96
Beaty, J. D.	719	G on Geisel crew. Oct. 93
Boyance, Rudy	716	NG on Dalrymple crew. In 94
Davy, H. Jim	718	F/E on Bills crew. 1 April 95
Doyles, Francis J.	719	NG on Baer crew. Jan. 95
Eaton, Mrs. LaReda	Hon. Sq.	Widow of Don, P in 719th. In 95
Edmondson, John R.	717	Nav. on Bohn crew. Jan. 19, 96
Elser, Mrs. Jean	Hon. Sq.	Widow of Frank, Bomb on Engel crew. In 95
Eury, William L.	HQS	Gp tech. in Flt Sgn. Sectn. 17 Sept. 95
Ford, John W.	717	WG on Bohn crew. 13 Mar. 92
Good, John C.	718	Armament. In 94
Goyt, Raymond C.	717	F/E on Ross crew. 12 Nov. 94
Hammer, Arno R.	716	CP on Hoffman crew. Sept. 95
Harrison, Ollie	716	Bomb Sight Tech. 6 May 95
Howard, Gilbert P.	716	Sq. Intel. Officer. 12 Sept. 89
Joseph, John A., Dr.	HQS	Group Dentist. 29 Feb. 96
Jungling, Harry E.	717	Sq. Cook. 2 Feb. 95
Kallewaard, Mrs. Marian	Hon. Sq.	Widow of Pete, NG on Peters crew. In 94
Keller, Charles	719	G on Stubbs crew. 11 Nov. 95
Kilroy, William C.	716	R/Op on Anderson crew. 24 Oct. 95
Martin, Denver	719	NG on McKee crew. 4 Nov. 95
McDonald, Daniel J.	718	Comm. section. Aug. 95
Melanson, James H.	719	TG on Mugler crew. 27 Oct. 95
Nairn, Robert L.	716	G on Kinerd crew. In 95
Nelson, Harold B.	718	Bomb on Webb crew. 27 Jan 96
Paffenbach, Earl W.	719	TG on Ackerly crew. 2 May 95
Romer, Don	719	Bomb on Charnes crew. June 95
Russell, Paul	716	CP on Oien crew. 6 July 95
Small, James	719	CP on Garrison crew. 10 Sept. 94
Schroer, Charles J.	718	WG on Porter crew. 17 Nov. 94
Sorenson, Chester W.	716	CP on Willding crew. 16 Nov. 92
Spence, Henry L. Jr.	718	F/E on Petz crew. 22 Mar. 95
Stillman, Hershell	718	G on Waller crew. April 95

NEW NAMES ADDED TO ROSTER (Since May 95 "Late Pass")

Yes, we continue to receive names from those who have "just heard about the 449th Assn." ... thus it does give us a lift when we see former WWII names come in!! Here are some added since the last newsletter.

Aldrich, Vera	Hon. Sq.	Widow of Ray
Altenbrandt, Junior	716	Armament
Angorola, Richard	716	(awaiting his response)
Baer, Mrs. Phillis	Hon. Sq.	In memory of brother, Stephen Morrison
Baker, Karl E. & Ekinor	718	Nav. on Bender crew
Bayard, Frederick C.	717	CP on Hancock crew
Beifcher, merle & Louise	717	Bomb. on Lawrence crew
Bresnehan, Donald & Joann	716	R/Op on Benton crew
Brogger, Paul J.	Hon. Sq.	In honor of Uncle, J. Brogger, KIA, 719th Gunner.
Cebollero, Frank A.	716th	Comm. section, Orig. Cadre
Cellilli, Bennie	719	BG on J.W. Olson crew
Chonka, Mrs. Sylvia	Hon. Sq.	Widow of John, 717th Gunner on Fowler crew
Copley, John	716	Crew Pilot
Daniel, Mrs. Wilma	Hon. Sq.	Widow of William, TG on Ross crew
Davis, Philip D.	719	Ordnance, Orig. Cadre
Eaton, Delles G.	Hon. Sq.	In memory of his brother, Don, Crew Pilot in 719th
Elliott, Robert & Alice	719	Crew Pilot
Hammer, Mrs. Nell	Hon. Sq.	Widow of Arno, CP on Hoffman crew
Harlan, George	718	Nav. on Wright crew
Hirsch, Wm. & Roberts	717	Nav. on Neville crew
Jungling, Mrs. Darlene	Hon. Sq.	Widow of Harry, 717th Cook
Keller, James	Hon. Sq.	In memory of his father, Charles, Gunner on Stubbs crew
Litzinger, Warren C.	716	WG on Bornemeier crew
McCain, Earl S.	717	Nav. on Keyes crew
Mercer, Charles & Patsy	717	CP on Neville crew
Nelson, Mrs. Helen	Hon. Sq.	Widow of husband Harold, Bomb. on Webb crew
Neville, Harry & Dottie	717	Crew Pilot
Pissare, Emmanuel	717	Armament, Orig. Cadre
Podkul, Chester E.	719	Ordnance
Quinn, Edwin A.	718	BG on Babcock crew
Reimsnyder, Lester & Martyne	717	Bomb. on Neville crew
Reiss, Victor	716	Comm. section
Romer, Mrs. Ruth	Hon. Sq.	Widow of Don, Bomb. on Charnes crew
Shapow, Saul & Rhonda	718	NG on Fouts crew
Warren, Gerald & Mary	716	TG on Boremeier
Westvold, Robert & Beverly	719	Nav. on Brooks crew
Williams, Chet & Audrey	718	Fouts crew R.Op.
Young, Mrs. Anita	Hon. Sq.	Widow of Harold, F/E on Powers crew

BOOKS *** JACKETS *** VCR TAPES

JACKETS: (Do read these offers, each are great!)

* **449th GROUP JACKET:** Read the Sales notice regarding these jackets, in this Newsletter!

JACKET (SEEN AT THE REUNION) worn by Emil Brenckman. Emil sent us this info: "I got my embroidered jacket from "Air Memories", Naval Air Station Bldg. 1880-B, Ft. Worth, TX 76127. Call Robt. Adams; (817) 377-0724 or Fax (817) 377-1709." Emil says that these jackets run a little smaller than usual, so you might want one larger?

* **WANT YOUR A-2 JACKET PAINTED? Name Tag? Army A.F. Patch? Your AIRCRAFT?** Write or call: AIR NOSTALGIA, Military Aviation Art. % J. Signor; 714 Atlantis Rd., S.E., Palm Bay, FL 32909-4811, (407) 724-1246.

449th Secy Comment: "I sent him my WWII A-2 jacket for him to paint our crew ship, "Darling VI" ... it came back great!"

BOOKS:

* **PLOESTI RAIDERS:** by 449er Myles O'Neill. Myles and his wife were both members of our Assn. and each taken by cancer. His book has been read by many. We learn that one of his daughters is carrying on his book offer. It is filled with 449th combat information. Write: Mrs. Kathy Giller, 9233 Stirrup Path, Sebring, FL 33872, (941) 382-4706. The softbound books are the same price, \$9.75 each ppd.

* **"ESCAPE I MUST":** Harvey E. Gann, sole survivor of Ben Kendall's crew, 718th Sq., 449th Bomb Gp., relates a powerful story. A member of the original cadre of the Group, he is downed over Udine Afd, No. Italy and relates his experiences and several escapes! A top turret flight

engineer gunner. Good volume of 199 hardbound pages for a WWII collection! Available from: Woodburner Press, P.O. Box 3927, Austin, TX 78764 or from the author for a signed copy; Harvey Gann, P.O. Box 4106, Lago Vista, TX 78645. Price: \$27.50 ppd.

VCR TAPE SHOWN ON NATIONAL TV

"B-24 BOMBER CREW" by Benedict Yedlin.

This 57 minute tape describes the experiences of the ten man crew of Lt. Norman Rogers, 449th bomb Group, in mid 1944 of WWII.

Introduced by Lloyd Bentsen, the tape covers personal interviews of each of the members of the crew; their personal feelings of their combat actions, the fighter attacks and into the heavily defended Ploesti flak target areas. Their aircraft, "Buzzer", and its crew chief are part of the story. For anyone interested in WWII combat operations, this video is well worth seeing.

Several months ago the tape was shown on the History Channel of its national programming, seen by many. Letters and reviews have been received by Yedlin, among them are; a personal attribute from Ex-Sen. and ex-U.S. Secy of the Treasury, Lloyd Bentsen; the Dept. of Veterans Affairs, Dallas, TX; the History Museum, Prahova County, Ploesti, Romania; the U.S. Army Institute, Carlisle Barracks, PA; Eastern Washington Univ., Spokane, WA; Holly Culver, Cable Tele. Network; CTEC Cable Systems, Somerville, NJ; Aerospace Education Center, Jacksonville, AR.

The tape is available from the author: Benedict Yedlin, 1000 Herrontown Rd., Princeton, NJ 08540-7799. Each cy is \$29.95.

"MAXIMUM EFFORT PAINTING"

The painting and reproduction copies of Hollie Wilke's Trust continues to receive high praise and attention throughout the aviation interested communities. Sales and distributions have continued to the point that the 449th Bomb Group is being recognized in many circles.

Lt. Col. Wilkes, USAF Ret., reports; "I am particularly pleased that the original oil is in General Fogleman's *USAF Chief of Staff) conference room and one of the prints is over the desk of Dr. John White (Deputy Director of Defense). these were personal choices made by these men, over hundreds available. Dr. White remarked: "I wanted something that showed PEOPLE". Hollie, former 449th Bomb Group Acceptance Engineer to Col. D. Alkire, and the recipient of a field promotion to the Group Engineering Officer, also lists the following print recipients:
15TH A.F. MUSEUM

SAC MUSEUM, Offutt AFB, NE

EXPER. AIRCRAFT MUSEUM, CA.

KEESLER AFB (many displays, 120,000 mechanics trained here).

A.F. MUSEUM, DAYTON, OH

PIMA MUSEUM, TUCSON, AZ

ARMY TRANS. MUSEUM, FT. EUSTIS, VA

ANDERSONVILLE POW MUSEUM, GA (in honor of former WWII POW's)

ALL FRESHMAN CONGRESSMAN of the 104th CONGRESS

MANY MEMBERS OF THE 449TH BOMB GP. ASSN.

EACH GOVERNOR ATTENDING (at the 22 State Gov. Conference)

THE A.F. EDUCATION FOUNDATION

A few (less than 100) prints are available from: WILKES TRUST, 424 Cove Dr., Biloxi, MX 39531. Image size is 15" x 25", print size is 20 x 28. Advertised retail price, each is \$125.00, plus shipping \$10.00. 449th members call him; (601) 388-8729 for into. and signed prints.

ANDERSON CREW, 717th SQ., DOWNED AND BECAME BULGARIAN POW'S!

The aircrew had trained at Gowen AAF, Boise, Idaho, and shipped out for Topeka, KS, to pick up a B-24. After being assigned a new B-24, serial no. 41-28846, we took off for Morrison Fld., Fla. and a few days later left on 15th March 1944 for overseas, taking the Caribbean route to S. America and across the Atlantic to Africa and on up the continent. Bad weather accompanied the crew, forcing them to make an emergency landing at an unknown airfield. The soon learned that it was an abandoned German fighter strip undergoing removal of mines and booby traps. Ultimately they arrived at Grottaglie on the evening of 4-4-44, the day of the Groups Presidential Unit Citation Mission to Bucharest. They were assigned to the 717th Sq. On their mission of the 24th June 1944 they lost an engine and began to turn back only to be hit by five attacking ME-109's, just south of Sofia, near the town of Samakov, Bulgaria. (History book #3, page 241 gives a report). Ball gunner Russell Biaggne continues from the pint of being captured. They were first held and interrogated at an artillery garrison near Samakov by a German Col. from the North Africa Corps. and some Bulgarian Officers. Two weeks later we were moved by truck to Sophia where we were held on the top floor of a former American College in Sophia ... more interrogation by Bulgarians and German Gestapo, this time. The conditions here were much worse than at Samakov ... Biaggne states: "I am all for giving nothing to the members of those Balkan states, except for them to annihilate each other". Soon we were again moved, to a former Turkish outpost at Shuman, on the N.E. corner of Bulgaria. This was Bulgaria's principle POW compound! It held about 330 allied POW's, most were flying personnel; British, South African, Australian and American. Also held were two Yugoslavian crew of 8 men each, trained in B-24's in the U.S.; two brothers from the Netherlands and one Greek Commando were remembered to be among this compound. The ranking Allied Officer was a Major Smith from Atlanta, GA with a British Major being the C.O. of his men ... his military job was suspected as being a paymaster to the Yugo. Partisans, and then the opposing force of "Chetniks", and finally for the Communist group under Mihailovich ... no one knew for sure!

The POW compound consisted of a main stone bldg. with barbed wire fencing around it, a small stone building with 3 holes in the floor for latrine purposes, located 100 yards away. It held a WW1 vintage German field kitchen, its wheels removed, which was "the kitchen". Near the entrance of the big building were two rooms; the room on the right was for the enlisted men, and one of the same size on the left for officers. The enlisted room was a platform 6 ft. wide and one foot off the floor which ran along three sides of the room. The men slept on this "ledge", shoulder to shoulder, and in the same manner on the floor. We each were supplied with one blanket, an enamel cup, a small

enamel bowl and spoon. The entire area was infested with vermin' lice, fleas, bed bugs and rats. The night toilet consisted of two buckets which were placed in the room corners near the foyer. All of us had diarrhea, so you can imagine why no one wanted to be on the "Clean-up detail" each morning! The bundle of willow branches tied together for a broom plus water left over from "cleaning our enamel eating utensils completed the "cleaning equipment"! During the day much of our time was spent squatting over the holes in the floors, which always had a waiting line. The Officers fared a little better since they were in smaller numbers. They had steel double bunks, but the same vermin and toilet facilities. Our daily routine consisted of forming in front of the main building for a head count at 0600 hours, back into the building until 0800 hours to line up for "breakfast". This was one cup of tea, brewed from linden tree blossoms, a small piece of bread made from bran and as hard as a rock! Twice a week we received a spoonful of orange marmalade. The main meal consisted of a bowl of soup, made from whatever was in season at that time. Our first month it was dried bean soup, the second month it was green pepper soup and our third month it was cabbage soup, we never saw a potato, water was for drinking only, and then rationed from a barrel mounted on a small two wheel cart. This was filled from a mountain stream about 3/4 mile down the side of a mountain by the compound. A detail of 8-10 men assisted a small donkey to haul it back up the mountain, it holding 150 gallons. Everyone wanted on this detail for the guards permitted you to bathe in the stream, even though it was ice cold! One could only stand its cold for about 5 minutes maximum. Biaggne states: "I never made the water detail, although I did make the 'honey pot' and wood chopping details!" Those not on these details spent their time walking back and forth between the main building and the fence. When the sun came out, and not often enough, we sat around picking "cooties" and smashing nits that were in the seams of our trousers. We did not have an opportunity to wash ourselves or our clothes, so we would strip down and sun bathe at every chance. "The Bulgarian Prison Commandant was a Captain Flagin and personified the Slavic mentality", stated Biaggne ... "a pox on him and may he rot in hell".

In the first week of September 1944, the Russians were at the Bulgarian border and gave the Bulgarians an ultimatum, Capitulate and declare War on the Germans or be slaughtered. And since the Bulgarians were allies of Germany they still had never declared war on Russia! So, naturally, they capitulated with the specifics that all allied prisoners were to be released, as well as political prisoners, immediately! Our Major Smith was flown to Sophia to make arrangements to have POW's flown out by 15th A.F. aircraft. We were marched down the mountain to Shuman and given a Turkish bath! The first real bath that we had

Continued on Page 17

since being captured! We then boarded a train and headed for Sophia, the country Capital, but got diverted to Turkey instead! The rumor was that we were going to be recaptured and used as ransom to the Bulgarian Communists. Biaggne reports aiding a Greek officer, an amputee, to escape from the train by hiding him under a baggage rack. He wonders to this day if he ever made it out? The remaining released POW's crossed into Turkey near the town of Pathion. From there by train to Istanbul and marched in formation to the waterside docks boarding a ferry to a cruise ship anchored in the Bosphorus Straits. It was named the S.S. Ege where we received excellent treatment .. great food, beer, wine, hot showers, and since we were in Turkey we were required to wear Turkish uniforms with new G.I. shoes. Several days of this pleasure resulted in being reformed and onto another train to a British Army Base in Aleppa, Syria. Here we relinquished our Turkish uniforms and reissued G.I. uniforms and flown to another British Base in Cairo, Egypt! We spent several days being debriefed and sight-seeing. It was at Paine Airfield that we were loaded onto 15th air Force B-24 bombers for return to Italy! Biaggne does not remember all the details of the return procedures but does list his return to the 449th Base at Grottaglie, spending a week with the 717th Squadron and shipped to Naples, to await transport where we boarded the U.S. George Hann, arriving at Norfolk, VA and sent to Camp Patrick Henry. It was here that we were split up and reassigned to various Commands in the United States.

On Tuesday, September 19th, 1944, THE STARS AND STRIPES ran this exact article (taken from an original copy from Biaggne).

It can be found that the items that Biaggne did not mention are listed in this article, giving him his reasons to hate those that enforced the conditions met by the allied POW's under Bulgarian domination. Another report given by former Lt. John Vest reports the operations met in returning the 300 Bulgar prisoners to 15th A.F. Hqs. ... both in this issue of our "LATE PASS" Newsletter.

Written by Russell Biaggne to R. Downey, Editor.

Grim Airmen Agree Bulgar Prisons Brutal

By Cpl. PETER FURST
(Stars and Stripes Staff Writer)
A 15TH AAF BASE IN ITALY,
Sept. 17 (Delayed)—More than 300 Allied airmen, released from the barbed wire PW enclosures at Shumen, Ruschuk and Sofia, Bulgaria, through Allied diplomatic pressure and Red Army bayonets, were landed at this field today—grim, fatigued and solemn.

Trains, trucks, ambulances, transport planes and bombers had carried them from Bulgaria through a small tip of Greece, through Turkey and Syria, across Egypt, the North African desert and the Mediterranean.

They left their planes quietly, one by one, some stumbling out on crippled feet, some carried out on litters. Tired, worn out and starved, they were a direct contrast to the 1,000-plus who so jubilantly left their planes at this same base on Aug. 31 and Sept. 1, after their evacuation from Bucharest.

But some Americans are still tossing their fever-wracked bodies in Istanbul hospital wards after being taken off the Sofia-Istanbul express by Turkish and Allied medical authorities because they were too sick to be moved even another mile.

One who returned said, "Hell, it looks good, doesn't it?"

But for Bulgarian negligence, more of these men would be walking today. But for Bulgarian brutality, a lot more would have been on these planes.

A Georgia major, who was one of the prisoners at the Shumen camp, said, "Some of my men were beaten with sticks and a rubber hose. Several were hit with rifle butts and pistols about the head and shoulders. Treatment, at least until the Russians moved closer to the Bulgarian border, was generally rough."

There was no evidence, all repatriates agreed, that any Americans or other Allied personnel were shot or otherwise executed once the authorities got hold of them. There is definite evidence, though, that some were killed by civilians, either while floating to earth by parachute, or on the ground.

Some may still be in hiding in the mountains, aided by friendly peasants. Others have reached Marshal Tito's Yugoslav territory. Some are still in Bulgarian hospitals.

REUNION ALBUMS

We have a very few of the current Reunion Photo Albums available, if you would like a copy for a friend or relative send check (\$15.00) and mailing information to our Treasurer, Jim Miller.

A NEW BOOK ABOUT THE 449TH

Of Men And Wings

*The First 100 Missions Of
the 449th Bombardment Group*

----- By D. William Shepherd -----

This book presents in chronological fashion a detailed account of the first 100 missions flown by the 449th from January through July 1944. The story of these missions is woven around the wartime diary of S/Sgt. Charles shep-

herd, a tail gunner on one of the Group's original aircraft. The detailed mission accounts are based primarily upon information extracted from the USAF's historical archives. The 400-page, 8-1/2x11, hardbound volume contains 71 photographs, 51 route maps and extensive appendices. Cost is \$30.00 plus \$3.00 shipping (Florida residents add \$1.95 sales tax). Order from Norfield Publishing, P.O. Box 16672, Panama City, FL 32406.

SPECIAL OPERATIONS MISSION TO CAIRO THE RETURN OF OUR BULGARIAN POW'S!

In September 1944 orders were received from 15th Air Force to send a total of 15 B-24 aircraft to Cairo, Egypt, on a secret mission. The ships were to be equipped with troop seats to carry 15 passengers each and a flight crew of five; pilot, co-pilot, navigator, radio operator and flight engineer. One 449th crew was selected, that of Aldrich's crew of the 719th Squadron. Aldrich as pilot, John Vest co-pilot, Brehun as Navigator, Boggs as flight engineer and Powell as radio operator.

Upon arrival at the Cairo Airport they were met by a mission Liaison Officer and told that they were a part of the 15th A.F. flights to return over 200 ex-prisoner of War allied and U.S.A.A.F. Airmen to Bari, 15th A.F. Hqs. The POW's had escaped from the prisons in Bulgaria when their guards and camp military units fled from the oncoming Russian Army. The Cairo air base was named Paine Field and controlled by the Air Transport Command.

Stories about the imprisonment in the Bulgarian Camps were atrocities. Aircrews were pitchforked, some burned alive, some beaten to death, starved and in less than 60 days individuals had lost 40 pounds or more! One report from a friend of John Vest, a flying classmate Lt. Dopp, became skin and bones going from a 185 lb. conditioned body to a 143 lbs. at the time of his pick-up.

While at Paine AB, ATC in control, the escorting crews were required to wear their O.D. (olive drab) uniforms while the ATC personnel wore khaki's; the escorts were required to remain on base unless in khaki (and none of us had khaki, states J. Vest). On the 6th day each of the 15th AF B-24's loaded their 15-16 POW's and departed for Bari, Hqs. for the 15th AF. Our landing arrivals were spaced 3 minutes apart, aligned facing a Command Reviewing line and each manifest of men were formed in front of each ship and "presented arms" to Gen. Twining and Staff. A band played, the colors were presented and a review held in the honor to the POW's! The POW's were then transported to the hospital for examinations and treatments. The escorting B-24 aircrews returned to their home bases.

John Vest, a present 449th Association member, provided the information for this report/story at the reunion in Williamsburg, September '95 to the undersigned. Vest continues in his story.

"I never respected the personnel assigned to the A.T.C. for the rest of the War because of their mistreatment to transient combat crews!" Lt. Vest had his reasons for he

became assigned to the 329th ATS/MATS Unit at Capodocchino Base, Naples, Italy, flying VIP's on various flights in-and-out of many ATC Bases. He suspected that those in ATC "just did not want any part of combat or those associated with combat". He received the comments from his friend, Lt. Dopp, that the peasants of Bulgaria hated the allied airmen because of the bombers "dumping bomb loads" on their return flights from Ploesti and other Romanian targets, onto their farming fields, along with other objects (helmets, flak suits, guns, etc. as the bombers off loaded their damaged ships to remain aloft)... thus all captured airmen received very harsh treatment before being taken to prisons! Vast continued, saying; "I looked up Lt. Dopp at march AFB in 47-48, he was back to standard weight but wrinkled and gray haired, had a limp with health checkups every 90 days because of his enduring treatments in his Bulgarian prison.

This writer contacted Robert Anderson, whose 717th bomb crew became Bulgarian POW's when downed 24 June 1944. Remembrances of their imprisonment are still vivid but his remembrance of their return is all but forgotten. Bob reported that seven of his crew are still living; six are Assn. members; Robert Anderson, pilot; Lewis Riggs, Nav.' John Devine, Bomb.; Kenneth Leonardi, Flt. Eng.; John Watson, Radio/Op.; Robert Johnson, Top Turret; and Russell Biagne, ball turret. Three are deceased; Don Lober, co-pilot; Jack Justice, nose gun; and Joe Kapish, tail gunner. All ten of his crew survived WW2 and were reassigned individually upon release from 15th A.F. processing. Each of these survivors have their own remembrances to relate. Our 449th Assn. extends a grateful thanks for their return via one of our own crew and for those other crews who successfully returned the Bulgarian POW's. To the ex-POW men and families, a belated greeting of "well done", your survival speaks for your fortitude, your 449th membership for your continued love of country. Do accept our wishes for your health and peace of mind. Only those who have endured what has been endured can really understand. Thanks to John Vest for his report and to the 717th Anderson Crew, a statement copied from a VFW Magazine, some time ago... "The Taste of bread that is shared has no equal"... we, of the 449th have "tasted of the bread of life for these past 51 years"... let us all continue to give thanks to Him who provides all life and sustenances.

Written by "Late Pass" Editor



LEE KENNEY,
Assn. V.P., Reunion
Chairman and Tour Leader



B/Gen. FLOYD TROGDON,
Programs Speaker and
Committeeman



JIM MILLER,
Treasurer, Programs and
Committeeman



REV. JIM SHANAHAN,
Chaplain

**449th BOMB GROUP
ASSOCIATION**

8th Reunion

Williamsburg, Va.
Sept. 1995

*Program Planners,
Activities and
Participants*



DICK DOWNEY,
Secy., and "Late Pass"
Editor



JOHN LYNN,
Sng., Leader
and "Mixer"



DICK ASBURY,
Historian and
Memorabilia Items



FRANK PRIOR,
(at Trevi Fountain in Rome,
tossing his coin!)
Reunion Photographer

THE 449th BGA NEWSLETTER
Late Pass Compiled and written by

R.F. Downey, Secy.
 4859 Stanhope Drive
 St. Louis, MO 63128
 (314) 892-4597

Send your items for newsletters, photos and info. to Secy.; call him regarding your items.



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... "we haven't forgotten"

The Sicily-Rome Cemetery, at Nettuno, Italy, was visited by our Reunion Overseas Tour on Spetember 12, 1995. Sixty-nine of our 449ers are buried here.

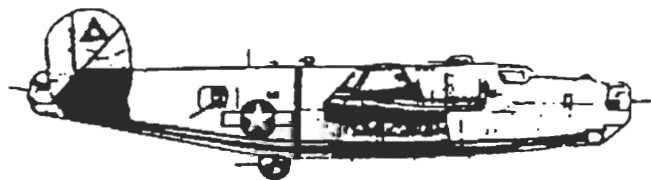
The tour also visited the Cemetery at Florence, on the 14th of September where the 449th Bomb Group has 76. Each visit was a solemn occasion.

449th Bomb Group Assoc.

Jim B. Miller, Treas.
 125 Forest Lake Drive
 Simpsonville, SC 29681

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