

“Late Pass!”



THE CALL SIGN FOR GROTTAGLIE TOWER



449TH “FLYING HORSEMEN”

FALL 2009 ISSUE

449TH BOMB GROUP ASSOCIATION

18TH REUNION PLANNING

The President’s Corner

The 18th Reunion of the 449th Bomb Group Association is scheduled for April 8-12, 2010 in Washington DC (Crystal City). We are returning to the same hotel which hosted our September 2001 Reunion, the Doubletree Hotel (Crystal City). This will be an eventful occasion made more so by the presence of the Chief of Staff of the United States Air Force, General Norton Schwartz, who is scheduled to be our Reunion Banquet speaker. This is a great honor for the 449th BGA. Every 449th Veteran and family should make this an occasion not to be missed. General Schwartz’s Biography and more details on the 18th Reunion are in separate articles in this issue.

We have just finished proof reading our soon to be published Directory from the 449th Bomb Group Association’s 17th Reunion held at Rapid City, SD Sept 28 - Oct 1, 2008. I am pleased with the “product” which has hundreds of hours invested in it by your Secretary Mary Crowley and dedicated volunteer Denise Riegel. The Directory contains many photos from the 17th Reunion and a lesser number from the 16th Reunion. The real plus in this Directory is the updated database of our membership and a number of new crew lists never before published. None of our histories documented the replacement crews that came after the original cadre to replace the crews that were being shot down in increasing numbers. The information on the replacements is incomplete but is a “work in progress.” As the final draft of the Directory was completed and we began to shop for a publisher, the Association was contacted by Richard Lapham, the owner of a printing plant in San Marcos, CA. Richard is the son of Don Lapham (deceased), a 719th copilot and one of the earliest members of the Association. Richard volunteered to print our Directory at no cost to the 449th BGA which, needless to say, is a huge gift to us. THANKS RICHARD! Hopefully, we will be able to mail the Directory to members by early December.

It is with sincere regret that I have accepted the resignation of Al Allen, the 449th BGA Treasurer. Al feels that his health situation might begin to interfere with his duties, particularly at the busy reunion time now approaching. Our sincere thanks go to Al for an absolutely outstanding job during his years as Secretary and then Treasurer. As is our procedure, an audit of the financial records was conducted when Al turned over the Treasurer’s records. The auditor was highly

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18th Reunion

April 8-12, 2010 -- Washington, DC

449TH READIES FOR 18TH REUNION

CALLING ALL 449TH BGA MEMBERS -- please begin to prepare yourself and your guests for a reunion to be remembered. On April 8, 2010 all roads lead to Washington D.C. a second time to celebrate the 18th Reunion of the 449th Bomb Group. Our reunion site is the Doubletree Hotel Crystal City located at 300 Army Navy Drive, Arlington, VA 22202.

We have completed arrangements for four days filled with memorable tours and sightseeing events. You will have the chance to visit, but not be limited to, the Air Force Memorial, the World War II Memorial, and the Vietnam Memorial. Also on the agenda will be the Air and Space Museum, as well as the sacred grounds of Arlington National Cemetery. In addition, there may well be some surprise sites available.

This is all planned together with our traditional get acquainted social on the first night, the individual squadron dinners on the second night, and the always popular memorial breakfast on the final morning. The Reunion will conclude with the banquet dinner on the final evening.

I have talked with some of the guests who made the last reunion their first, and they all wished they had come to the earlier reunions. Don’t be standing on the outside looking in, get your reservations in early.

For reservations call 1-800-222-8733 and ask for the 449th Bomb Group Rate which is \$99 per day. We look forward to seeing to you in April.

-- Lloyd Rosen

The Secretary’s Report

With great anticipation the 449th Directory will be in the mail very soon. Thanks to the tireless efforts of Denise Riegel, the monumental task of tackling the master database and tracking down our 449th BG veterans and families has been extremely productive. Researching and responding to the numerous requests we receive weekly will continue to be ongoing. I am still bewildered as to how this was ever accomplished without the assistance of a computer or the web!

With regards to the Oral History taping done at our last reunion in Rapid City, SD, we did hit a major snag: The video tapes had to be backed up first before a CD could be burned. Unfortunately, this task had to be done in real time and the

(Cont’d on page 6 -- “Secretary’s Report”)

Robert Simons Awarded Silver Star

On September 13, 2009 Robert Simons (717th SQ Nose Turret Gunner) was awarded the Silver Star for a heroic act while returning from a combat mission to Ploesti on 5 May 1944. This belated award came as a result of a records review by the Air Force requested by Simons and endorsed by Congressman Howard Coble (US Representative, North Carolina). The details of Simons' action are described in the citation accompanying the award which reads in part: "*On that date, Sergeant Simons voluntarily risked his life to secure damaged lines his aircraft sustained as a result of enemy anti-aircraft fire while on a bombing mission.... The courageous action enabled the aircraft and the crew to safely return without the loss of life. ...*"

Details of the award presentation can be found in the newspaper article by John Chappell in "*The Pilot*" (Southern Pines NC newspaper) dated September 16, 2009. (www.the.pilot.com)

We will have an appropriate acknowledgement of this honor awarded to Bob at our Washington Reunion next April.

-- Floyd Trogdon

Always a Good Story

My late husband, Jack Steele (Original SQ. CO of 716th, Col. USAF Ret.), always had a funny joke or a good story.

The true tale about Jack was that he was so skinny when he went to sign up for the Army Air Corps that he filled up on bananas so he could meet the minimum weight requirement!

And, he often joked that his mother's cooking was so bad and so tasteless, that the army chow tasted really good!

After Jack retired, his mess sergeant, Mike Appelbaum, met him in a Florida produce store and recognized him at once. Mike said, "You haven't changed a bit Jack, just your hair is gray!"

A really wonderful friendship developed after that between Jack and Mike. Jack had always spoken about how he had enjoyed all the army food, especially Mike's hot, freshly baked bread from the Italian ovens in Grottaglie. It seems that Mike was resourceful in negotiating with the Italians for fresh eggs, too. We had the pleasure of Mike's company when we went back to Italy with the 449th Bomb Group. Mike remarked that those years during the war were the best years of his life. Mike actually stayed in Grottaglie to continue the tour for a couple of weeks after we left for home. He wanted to revisit all the little shops, homes, and people hoping to recognize a face of perhaps one of the young boys he hired to help at the mess. As stated by the Mayor of Grottaglie, the 449th BG saved the Italians from starving. I was so sorry that we lost Mike too soon.

-- Mrs. Connie Steele

An Unexpected Experience

Mission #52, the sub dry-docks at Toulon, France, April 29, 1944. We lost an engine as we approached the target area. Unable to maintain formation, we dropped out and flew at a lower altitude. Still wanting to reach the target we followed the Group and went in after them. Needless to say, the "*Queen of Hearts*" sustained major flak damage in and out of the target. We then proceeded to go to the US Air base in Corsica where we landed safely and enjoyed a brief stay waiting for someone to pick us up and return us to Grottaglie. This provided us with an opportunity to borrow a jeep and see quite a bit of the Island, which reminded me of the Northwest. It was an unexpected experience, and I have hoped that sometime I could go back there

-- Jerry Scroggs, 717th, Pilot

Reunion Banquet Speaker -- USAF Chief of Staff, General Norton Schwartz

General Norton A. Schwartz, Chief of Staff of the United States Air Force, will be the featured speaker at the 18th Reunion Banquet. General Schwartz is the senior uniformed Air Force officer responsible for organization, training and equipping of 680,000 Regular, Guard, Reserve and civilian personnel serving in the United States and overseas. As a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Schwartz functions as an adviser to the Secretary of Defense, National Security Council and the President. Prior to assuming his position as AFCS, General Schwartz served as Commander, U.S. Transportation Command, Scott Air Force Base, Illinois. USTRANSCOM is the single manager for global air, land and sea transportation for the entire Department of Defense. During his tenure, General Schwartz led TRANSCOM's efforts in support of operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom and the Global War on Terror.

General Schwartz graduated from the U.S. Air Force Academy in 1973. He is an alumnus of the National War College, a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, and a 1994 Fellow of Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Seminar XXI. He has served as commander of multiple organizations including the Special Operations Command-Pacific, Alaskan Command, Alaskan North American Aerospace Defense Command Region, and the 11th Air Force.

General Schwartz is a command pilot with more than 4,400 flying hours in a variety of aircraft. He participated as a crewmember in the 1975 airlift evacuation of Saigon, and in 1991 served as Chief of Staff of the Joint Special Operations Task Force for Northern Iraq in operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. In 1997, he led the Joint Task Force that prepared for the noncombatant evacuation of U.S. citizens in Cambodia.



Update on Grottaglie. Alenia Aeronautica, an Italian company, is playing a key role in the manufacturing of the Boeing 787 Dreamliner aircraft. The plant, located in Grottaglie, produces the horizontal stabilizer and the central and aft sections of the fuselage, 14% of the aircraft's structure. The fuselage section is loaded on a modified 747 and flown to Everett, Washington for assembly. As I write there is a work-stop on the project for a design problem. Boeing says the problem can be resolved with a minor modification. Problems in building new aircraft have not changed over the years.

Who was there first? Grottaglie had two previous Bomb Groups before the arrival of the 449th BG.

47th BG: 15 Sept-15 Oct 1943, A-20 Havoc (12th AF)

321st BG: 15 Oct-20 Nov 1943, B-25 Mitchells (12th AF)

(Maurer-Maurer - Air Force Combat Units of World War II - Maxwell AFB, Alabama: Office of Air Force History. ISBN0892010975)

This reference lists the 449th BG arriving on 4 January 1944. (I arrived there on 17 December 1943!)

On the Web: Saga Of Sunshine This is an excellent article about the capture of a B-24 from the 719th Squadron (Serial # 42-52106) forced to land at a German airfield. Mark Melchiorre (son of Angelo P. Melchiorre, Tail Gunner) did an excellent job in putting this bit of history on line. The Germans have added their history of the capture, including on-line videos. There are some very interesting links at the end of the file. To access this site do a Google search on "Saga of Sunshine."

-- Clay Henry, 449th BG Historian, 716th Sq., Messenger Crew, Flight/Eng

"Grottaglie Redux"

My wife, Roberta, and I enjoyed cheese and olive oil gifts from a Grottaglie producer. Well, it happened this way. On a vacation trip to south Italy we detoured to Grottaglie and were surprised. The surrounding land itself is green and lush, not somber, dry, empty and neglected as it was in 1944-45. (Why? Water! Irrigation!) Second, the airfield, now an Italian Air base, still has the very same ancient control tower. We could not enter the base and the armed security did not even like cameras.

Then it was off to town where we met a guy with an unusual ring. It had a photo of *Il Duce* smack in the middle. Yes, there was still the stench of fascism, but the stench was not overpowering. Next we came upon a young man who came running over to us with a book. It was in English with photos. What book you might ask? The 449th book, acquired when our Group visited several years ago. He loved the book. This was not some ordinary Grottaglian, he was the grandson of a man who had been one of the town barbers in 1944! Remember the barber, with the lather soap cups on the mantle? (Remember the soap cups once owned by non-returning air crew guys? I do.)

Next, we were happily escorted through the narrow streets. On arriving at a little shop, our new friend graciously gave us gifts of cheese and olive oil. Now that was tasty stuff, which we continued to enjoy throughout the remainder of our trip to Taranto and Sicily. Imagine: no flak, no flak suits, no bandits, no meat wagons, no tents, no outdoor latrines, no mud, no acrid smell of oil, no missing buddies, no K rations, no .50 caliber ammo -- but cheese, olive oil and verdant grass! Messagel? Yes, everything changes.

Cheers and Ciao!

-- Bill Hirsch, 717th Sq., Neville Crew, Navigator

Then and Now

My 40th mission was on 15 July 1944 -- Pilot, John Scroggs; aircraft, *Peerless Clipper*; target, Ploesti oil fields. As expected, heavy flak was experienced over the target and, after dropping our bomb load, we were badly damaged by flak and German fighters. We lagged behind the returning formation, but managed to get back over Yugoslavian territory, where we were forced to bail out of our trusty B-24 which had "given up the ghost." All crew members made it out safely, but we became separated on the ground.

I was picked up by some guerillas and spent the next three to four months with them hitting a few towns under German control. Eventually we formed up with a huge convention of American and British airmen. We stayed around the mountains for several months until, lo and behold, two Americans were air dropped in. They set up communications with Italy by radio. Finally, a deal was struck and a bunch of C-47's came over to pick us up. Accompanied by U.S. fighters, the C-47's landed on an airstrip we had made in a flat part of the mountains. Everyone was returned back safely to USAF HQ in Bari. After examinations and interrogations, we were sent back to our individual units. We were welcomed back with open arms, since it was thought we had crashed. (Apparently, no one had seen our crew bailing out at the lower altitude, and all were presumed dead.)

Later, we were sent home. Many relatives had previously received dismal notes of our losses -- needless to say they were overjoyed to find us alive and well.

As for me, I stayed in the USAF, earned a regular commission, and served for 26 years. I retired as a Lt. Col. and got a job teaching at the Daytona State College (Florida) where I eventually became a department chair. I just retired and am enjoying life in the nearby town of Ormond Beach, Florida.

-- Bill Callam, 717th Sq., John Scroggs Crew, Navigator

Two Baskets

Many times I heard someone say, "How come you got into the Air Corps and my son did not make it?"

Let me tell you my story. I reported to Fort Custer, Michigan on August 20, 1943 along with about thirty other men from Muskegon, Michigan. After going through physical exams and receiving our uniforms, we were given various tests. Some of the tests were written and some were physical, regarding hearing and seeing capabilities.

About three days later, some of us were called up for interviews by officers who would determine if we were prospects to be Volunteer Flight Trainees. My friend "Whitey" was interviewed immediately ahead of me. I heard the Major ask him, "Soldier, do you want to fly?" Whitey replied, "No Sir, I want to be in the ground force." The Major made a note on Whitey's papers and put them in one of two baskets on his desk. I was asked the same question but my answer was, "OH, YES SIR, I WANT TO FLY!" The Major made a notation on my papers and put them in the other basket. I knew that I had made it that far.

The next morning Whitey's name was called, along with several other men, and they marched off. I did not see Whitey again until December, 1945. We both made it through the war. He was on the ground in the South Pacific and I in the AAF in Italy.

-- Fred Movey, 716th Sq., McKinley's Crew, Waist Gunner

White Christmas

It was a dark, wet, overcast day on December 25, 1943 at the Army Air Corps base in Mountain Home, Idaho. At 6 A.M. we received word in the barracks that our bomber crew was to fly a training mission in one hour. It was the first Christmas away from home for seven of the ten-man crew, and as we trudged through the darkness to the flight line our thoughts were on our homes and what our loved ones were doing at that hour.

As the B-24 lumbered down the runway and lifted off into the murky sky, we were all feeling lonely and dispirited. Having only been together for a few weeks, the crew had not yet established a feeling of closeness. With everyone at their battle stations, and accompanied by the constant drone of the engines, the separation was magnified. We flew for an hour with the gloom inside the plane matching the gloomy view outside.

Suddenly, through my earphones came the sound of music. The radio operator had zeroed in on a local radio station far below us. Bing Crosby was singing "White Christmas" and at that instant we broke through the clouds into a world of sunshine. As far as the eye could see there were white, fluffy clouds covering the whole earth. The scene was magnificent. The words and music tingled every cell.

We were ten men separated from everyone else on earth -- separated from ourselves by turrets and bulkheads -- experiencing in our individual worlds a collective spirit of Christmas that would last a lifetime.

-- Eugene Sullivan, 719th Sq., Dorton Crew, Tail Gunner

My Last Mission – Ploesti!

On July 20, 1944, plane #33, piloted by Bill Dorton, was badly damaged by flak over Friedrichshafen, Germany. As tail gunner on that plane I was on my 49th mission. Just one more to go and I'd received assurances I would be held down until a "milk run" was scheduled. Two days later, July 22, our group was scheduled for an "all out" mission to Ploesti. Because #33 was being repaired, Dorton's crew was not scheduled to fly.

Early in the morning someone came to our tent and said, "Sullivan, you're flying tail gunner on the lead plane." A million thoughts raced through my mind. My last mission, and its Ploesti! I'm flying without my crew and without our faithful plane that had carried us safely through 49 missions!

I can't recall the plane or the pilot who flew our "Mickey" ship but it was probably the C.O. for we were leading the group. On our way to the target we were hit by flak just after we crossed the Yugoslavian coast. Our hydraulic system was knocked out. The fluid covered the turret and froze. Unable to see, I was directed by the other gunners as to the location of the German fighters. The bomb bay was covered with hydraulic fluid, which made it difficult for the engineer to manually crank the bomb bay doors open. As we approached the target the pilot made a decision to use the last fluid in the line to open the bomb bay doors because the other planes were dropping on our lead.

Despite the smoke screen which covered the target, the raid was a success, but we had trouble ahead. As we approached the field the landing gear had to be cranked down manually. The pilot had to land knowing he had no brakes. The fire trucks and ambulances waited below. Here I was, on my last mission, back over our own airfield and still wondering if I was going to make it.

The ship hit the runway clean and the pilot reversed the engines, but we continued at great speed past the end of the runway and through the field. When a ditch loomed up ahead of us the pilot swerved the plane and we came to a halt in a great cloud of dust. The ship tipped sideways on a broken landing gear.

I jumped out the waist window fearing we were going to blow up. Just then I saw the emergency vehicles pulling away from our plane as a crippled ship with dead crew members aboard was coming in downwind and was about to land on top of us. At the last second the wounded pilot pulled back the controls and missed us by inches as they pancaked on the runway with parachutes operating as brakes.

I knelt and prayed that God had spared me on my last mission -- to Ploesti!

-- Eugene Sullivan, 719th Sq., Dorton Crew, Tail Gunner

Updating of Mailing List

Mary Crowley, our 449th BGA Secretary, maintains the mailing list database for the Association. Please send her any address corrections. Also, please forward to Mary the report of any deceased veteran. These actions will help to ensure that our mailing list database remains up-to-date and accurate.

The Crazy Things We Did

My last mission was against an ammunition dump in Casarsa, Italy, 26 April 1945. It would be an 8-½ hour trip.

While in the service, I was a heavy smoker and on our flights of eight or more hours I would really be craving a cigarette. On our return flights, when we got down to about 12,000 feet, I would take off my oxygen mask and light up. This gave me two immediate results: satisfaction for my nicotine craving and an instant headache. You know with stupid acts such as this, we had not one, but several Guardian Angels watching over us.

Our tent was located just below the mess tent, the officer's club, and the drainage ditches were not too far from us. We had unusual odors throughout the days and nights. We also had rats, and they seemed to like the Pabst Ette crackers my Mother used to send me. I kept the crackers on top of a packing crate at the head of my bed. More than once the rats would get into them and then miss their footing and fall on my sleeping bag. For that reason I kept the bag zippered all the way up so that I had only a small opening for breathing. Luckily for me, they never found the opening.

There were hazards in just our daily lives. Some of the airmen would clean their uniforms in gasoline. Occasionally, the gas would flame up or explode causing serious burns. Our crew was either too smart to do this or perhaps were not as obsessed about having clean uniforms.

Another hazard was the liquor served at the officers club: gin and grapefruit juice seemed to be the prevalent available libation. This was our usual drink as we sat and talked about the day's mission and our plans once we returned home. Better than the gin and juice was the portion of bourbon offered to each crew member as we came off the plane after each mission. This was, I believe to relax us prior to our debriefing. There were several of our crew who did not drink, so those of us who did would pair up with one of these non-drinkers and generously take his portion. I don't know if this helped in debriefing information, but it did make it a much more relaxing experience. You can imagine that we were more than a little upset when we heard that the WCTU (Women's Christian Temperance Union) was attempting to prohibit this practice of serving these portions of liquor after our mission. To our knowledge, nothing came of their efforts.

-- Lew Anderson, 719th Sq., Debnam Crew, Co-Pilot / Crew Pilot

American Ingenuity

In October, 1944, the 716th Squadron was occupying the old wooden Luftwaffe/Italian air force barracks -- four of them as I recall. We were still sleeping under mosquito netting even though the nights were cold. We were heating the barracks with those makeshift "rings" into which dripped 100-octane aviation fuel, piped in by tubing from a drum just outside. It was a sure recipe for disaster.

Early one morning someone came running through the barracks shouting, "FIRE!" Someone else responded, "Go back to sleep you dumb **% %&&. We have a mission this morning." But, almost simultaneously, we saw smoke creeping into the room. Within minutes, all four wooden barracks had gone up in flames. We grabbed a few possessions and literally dove out the window because the doorway was already impassable.

Fast forward now a few weeks. We started to build tufa-block houses with much help from "paisano" Italian masons. These block walls were topped with the dark army tents. There was no electricity in our area. As the days became shorter, we started to use flashlights for the trips to the latrines.

But, American ingenuity came through again. Our tentmate, Flight Officer Gene Gosfield, was a jazz buff and could identify each player in a jazz band simply by listening to the record. One of his favorites was a new young singer named Peggy Lee. Gosfield had a record player and he had her record, but no electricity. One dark night, he teamed up with pilot, Lt. Bill Farrington, and super-scrounger, Sergeant Hake, to "moonlight acquisition" a generator and wiring from the British/Aussie side of the field. (We never asked just where). Suddenly about 0300, a light went on and the record player blared out Peggy Lee singing, "*I Could Cry Salty Tears*." It woke up a lot of guys and cheered up a dark, cold night in the 716th.

-- G. Robert (Bob) Ruff, 716th SQ., Farrington Crew, Co-Pilot,
1st Pilot last 20 missions

Major Yandell

I thought of a rather funny event that occurred on the ground with an encounter between Major Yandell and myself, an administration officer in the 717th Bomb Squadron.

One day there wasn't anyone around our tent except for myself. I had gone outside and was standing in the back area. I heard someone walk up on the gravel path leading to our tent. Since I didn't know who the person could be, I decided to go around to the left side of the tent so that I would not be seen. Just my luck! The guy came around the left side and I met face-to-face with the Major Yandell.

Major Yandell proceeded to chew me out in a nice way about some small pieces of paper he observed on the gravel floor of our tent. Being in a combat zone, the thought struck me as funny and I began to laugh. (I was very wrong!) The Major was a nice guy and dismissed me, going on his way without further comment. However, the next time I saw my pilot Captain John Desmond, he told me, "Benny, please don't laugh in the Major's face again!"

A wonderful group of officers we were fortunate enough to have! Later, I was fortunate enough to make friends with a gracious Major Yandell.

-- Ben B. Smith, 717th Sq., Desmond Crew, Gunner

(Cont'd from page 1 -- "*President's Corner*")

complimentary of the meticulous, precise records Al kept and has given the 449th BGA high marks on the audit. Al certainly intends to continue in the Association and is looking forward to attending the Washington reunion. We are fortunate indeed to have a highly qualified 449th member, Wally Green, 717th Sq., volunteer to take over the Treasurer's position. Wally will serve as Acting Treasurer until the formal election of officers at the 18th Reunion. The transfer of records and establishment of bank accounts have already taken place and Wally is working the job. Thanks to Al and Wally for making this a seamless transition.

In September, one of our 449th BGA Members, Robert Simons (717th), was belatedly awarded the Silver Star for "gallantry in action" in connection with his action on a combat mission on May 5, 1944 that resulted in "preventive loss of personnel and aircraft." More details are in a separate article in this issue. This is a great honor for Bob and we will recognize it at the next reunion. Bob has reminded us of a B-24 exhibit at the Space Center at Hampton, VA which features Rudy Acosta as Radio Operator/Waist Gunner, Ben Yedlin as Ball Turret Gunner and Bob Simons as Nose Turret Gunner (all 449th members). Certainly, this would be an interesting site to visit if you are ever in that area (a short driving distance from Williamsburg, VA).

As I close, I want to recognize the tremendous asset the 449th has in its 2nd Generation members. Since the start of the 17th Reunion, the 2nd Generation has done much of the "heavy lifting" and plan to continue to do so. I personally have benefitted greatly from their help and, once again, offer my sincere thanks for their energy, dedication and contributions to the mission of the 449th BGA.

-- Floyd H. Trogon, President

(Cont'd from page 1 -- "*Secretary's Report*")

first go-around did not produce the quality we expected. I am happy to report that all have been redone and I am now looking for a professional to volunteer and donate his/her time required to complete our project.

Finally, with my role and duties as secretary, I would like to apologize to anyone who might have been overlooked or did not receive a response. Due to the tremendous renewed interest in WWII 449th BG affiliation, and the worldwide exposure from our website, we have been "bombarded" with requests for information. Though the time element with each request sometimes appears overwhelming, the "target" is to identify those airmen never listed in the 449th BG database.

The following story is an example of our research success, but with an unusual twist of fate. I received an email from Lt. Col. John Cappello, Air Attache' DAO Belgrade, Serbia. He in turn had received a phone call from a local resident who was given the task of returning a WWII pilot's ring to its rightful owner. All Lt. Col. Cappello knew was that the ring was given to a Serbian soldier while he had been interned in a POW camp with an American pilot. The inside

of the ring was engraved with the name *Leo Fergus* and a date. Cappello knew the pilot had to come from the 15th AAF. He had hit a dead end with his research because there appeared to be only one Fergus (in the 449th BG) but the first name and dates did not fit.

There was indeed a pilot by the name of Fergus in the 449th, but his first name was not *Leo*. As it turned out, the engraving in the ring was read incorrectly and was actually *Geo* (George). The date inside the ring referenced his graduation as a pilot.

George T. Fergus, Jr. and his crew, aboard *Two Ton Tessie*, were shot down on 29 May 1944 over Wiener-Neustadt, Austria. All crewmen became POWs. I was able to confirm the location of the notorious Camp Nuremberg-Langwasser in Upper Bavaria, where they were sent. Soviets, French, Belgians, 606 Serbs and 45 Americans occupied this camp.

The only confirmation and reference to Fergus came from the 449th BG archives. He was not a member of the Association, was not living, no immediate relatives were found. There were no records of marriage, newspapers articles, cemeteries, property ownership, or personal history. Only his enlistment and POW records existed. Basically, he was "off the radar."

His enlistment document showed that he was from Tennessee and the US Census did indeed confirm and identify his immediate family. The only death record found was in March 1959 in the state of Florida. The man was 36 years of age. How could a "good'ol boy" from Tennessee stray from home and family and end up in Florida? Everything about his young life suggested that he probably was married with young children at the time of his death and that his wife would have remarried. An intense search on the Internet followed.

The search led to a newspaper article from Marietta, GA. "Sixty-two years after WWII, an Air Force uniform was donated to the local military museum." It had been worn by none-other than Mr. George Fergus. Optimistically, I sent out a couple of emails to members of the Fergus family tree from Tennessee. Days later I received two email responses -- one from a niece, the other a nephew-in-law. Both confirmed their relation to George and the date of his death. But, the next clue came from the nephew when he added a P.S. "I also know there is a nice picture of him in the WWII Memorial Registry."

With great haste I opened the Internet site. George Fergus' wife had remarried and she (Mrs. Marvia W. Northcutt) had submitted the information to the WWII Memorial. Mrs. Northcutt currently lives in Marietta, GA as well as her son, George T. Fergus III. With great joy I reported back to Lt. Col John Cappello. By now the ring should have found its rightful home.

A lesson to be learned from this is that sometimes we don't always look in the easiest place . . . like our backyard! Veterans, register with the WWII Memorial today!

-- Mary Crowley, Secretary

449th Missions of "Big Week" -- February 20 - 25, 1944

In late 1943, Strategic Air Forces Headquarters formulated plans for an intensive, coordinated campaign to bring the combined strength of the 8th AF and the 15th AF to bear against the German Air Force and its supporting industrial base. The plan -- known as OPERATION ARGUMENT -- was executed during the period February 20-25, 1944. The dual objectives of OPERATION ARGUMENT were to destroy the German aircraft-production facilities on the ground, and to force large-scale air battles to destroy the enemy fighter forces in the air. These six days subsequently became known as "Big Week," and were eventually viewed as the operation which effectively "broke the back" of the German Air Force. During this period, 3,800 bomber sorties were launched by the combined 8th and 15th Air Forces against targets deep inside the Third Reich. The 15th Air Force contributed 500 sorties to this total effort, and lost 89 heavy bombers in the process. The 8th Air Force losses were listed as 137 heavy bombers.

The 449th Bomb Group carried out three missions in support of OPERATION ARGUMENT. On February 22, the 449th launched its first attack on a strategic target inside the German homeland: the ME-109 manufacturing complex known as Obertraubling at Regensburg, Germany. When the planes in the Group's formation arrived over the Regensburg area, they found the target to be completely obscured by cloud cover. The Group dropped its bombs by ETA. Bombing results were unknown. The Group was met by an enemy fighter force estimated at 35 to 40 planes. Four B-24s went down over enemy territory in the ensuing air battle. Two others received mortal damage -- the crew of one bailed out over friendly territory and the other crashlanded at a friendly field. On the 23rd, the 449th launched an attack on the ball-bearing factory -- known as Steyrwaffen Walzergerwerke -- located at Steyr, Austria. Tragedy struck during take off when the B-24 with Jeutter's crew aboard went down immediately after leaving the runway. As the Group reached the target area, it was attacked by a force of 30 to 40 enemy fighters which succeeded in downing one of the B-24s. Bombing results were excellent. Direct hits were scored on the ball-bearing factory buildings with the result that "only one building appeared to be standing" at the time the last aircraft in the formation reached the target. A Group stand down was ordered on the 24th. On the 25th, the 449th made its final contribution to "Big Week" as the Group attacked the Prufening Messerschmitt complex at Regensburg. The 37-1/2 tons of 500-pound bombs hit "right in the middle of the target. Immediately thereafter, a huge column of very black smoke rose to a height of 4,000 to 5,000 feet." As soon as the bombers rallied off the target and emerged from the flak, the formation came under heavy attack from a mixed enemy fighter force. The enemy fighters were "extremely aggressive," and "attacked in pairs, threes, fours and fives." The attacks were "continuous from the target to the mountains at the Austrian border" and "were pressed home with great vigor." Three 449th B-24's were lost to the enemy fighters.

The 449th paid a heavy price for its contribution to "Big Week" -- eleven B-24's were lost. The 716th Squadron bore the brunt of the losses having lost seven planes. A total of forty-three 449th airmen died during the course of "Big Week," and seventeen became POWs. Thirty-one other airmen successfully evaded capture after bailing out over enemy territory.

Summary of 449th Losses in Big Week

Mission Date	Squadron	Losses			Pilot/Crew	Aircraft	
		KIA	POW	Evaded		Name	Serial No.
22 Feb 44	716	3	7	10	Browning	Stinky the B. T. O.	42-64462
	716	7	3		Moore	Ramp Tramp	42-07700
	716				Bird	Pistol Packin' Mama	42-52146
	716				Kinerd ¹	The Wise Virgin (#1)	41-28616
	717				Morton ²	Dragon Lady (#1)	42-52134
	719				11	Woodle	Guardian Angel
23 Feb 44	717	10			Jeutter ³	Tempress	42-52107
	718	7	3		Wingfield	Sleepy Time Gal (#1)	42-07745
25 Feb 44	716	6	4	10	Knapp	Shack Wolf	41-29194
	716				Bradley	Sophisticated Lady	41-29214
	716	10			Forbes	(Unnamed)	42-29217
Totals		43	17	31			

Notes:

- 1 - Crew bailed out over friendly territory
- 2 - Crashlanded on return near Foggia, Italy
- 3 - Crashed on take off

The narrative reports, filed on the day of each mission, listed the total number of victories scored by Group gunners against the enemy fighters. For the three missions the results were thirty-one enemy fighters destroyed, eleven probably destroyed, and three damaged. -- Bill Shepherd, 2nd Generation, Nephew of Charles Shepherd, Porter's Crew, 718th SQ.

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Please send your stories, photos, letters to the editor, poems, cartoons, jokes, etc. for “LATE PASS!” or call her

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***On Hearing My Dad’s Story From
George Ditzhazy, Co-Pilot 719th***

I had the wonderful opportunity to meet my dad’s co-pilot, George Ditzhazy. George was not able to attend the reunion in South Dakota so my sister and I drove to Palm Desert, CA to meet him and his lovely wife, Ruth. We had a great day getting to know them as “Ditzzy” shared his WWII photos and relayed their stories.

It was a wonderful opportunity to video his oral history for our group project. At my request, Ditzzy talked about mission #104 flown on 26 July 1944. My dad, along with Ditzzy, and the rest of Bill’s crew bailed out of *Bucket of Bolts #1* over Graz, Austria. For ten days the crew evaded the Germans, and with the assistance of the Partisans were returned across enemy lines to safety. (The crew eventually went on to complete their 50 missions.) Ditzzy’s stories about that time

period were fascinating. But the best part was that these were my dad’s stories, too. I was not able to film Dad’s oral history, but in sharing his stories, George told my dad’s stories for him.

If you’re a 2nd Generation ask those questions about WWII that you have been thinking of. If you’re a 1st Generation airman, share those stories with your children and grandchildren. Better yet, ask them if they would like to go to the next reunion with you. I wasn’t able to attend a reunion with Dad, but sharing stories, reading the historical books and meeting others from the 449th has been a memorable way to get to know my dad before he was “Dad.” The value is Priceless!

-- Denise Riegel, Daughter of Rodger Meek, 716th Sq., Navigator