



# THE PYRAMIDIERS

The Newsletter of the 98th Bomb Group/Wing Veterans Association

August 2010

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## Message from Bill Seals . . .

### *The Legacy Continues*



At 1500 hours on Sunday July 11, 2010, at Barksdale AFB, the legacy of the 98th began a new chapter with the reactivation of the 343rd Bomb Squadron.

As you know, the 98th has had numerous unit designations over its history; Bomb Group, Bomb Wing, Strategic Wing, etc. Regardless of its name the unit's record has always been outstanding. And while I don't wish to diminish a single moment of

its record, I think most of you would agree the greatest legacy of the 98th was earned during the periods it served as a bomber unit.

First as a B-24 Bomb Group during World War II; then as a B-29 Bomb Wing flying combat in the Korean War; and lastly as a B-47 Bomb Wing for a significant period of the Cold War. In my opinion, and many knowledgeable students of Air Force history would concur, the record of the 98th is unsurpassed.

As any of you who have read my previous thoughts on the B-47 era know, aerial refueling was an integral and vital part of our strategic bomber strike force. To put it bluntly, without tankers—we didn't have deterrence! I might also add they are as necessary now as they ever were. For that reason and others, those of you who served with the 98th ARS are an important element of our legacy. In fact our legacy as aerial refuelers continues with the 344th ARS flying KC-10s in support of the Air Force's worldwide missions.

For the past several years the legacy has continued to grow with the 98th Range Wing, and we appreciate their participation in our association. It is my understanding, that in the near future their

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## Message from Bill Seals

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designation as a wing will end, but the 98th will remain as part of the successor unit's name. We are sorry to lose the "Wing," but happy the 98th lives on in addition to the 343rd and 344th squadrons.

The reactivated 343rd is assigned to the 2nd Bomb Wing and is equipped with B-52H aircraft. As "Thirsty" Smith the squadron DO reminded me, this heavily modified B-52 "is not your Dad's B-52." With near state of the art bombing and navigation systems, these aircraft make the accuracy I was able to achieve in the 52s I flew 50 YEARS ago look down-right pathetic. As some of you have heard me say, I'd trade my eagles for a chance to fly the B-1. The capabilities of both the B-1 and B-52 are simply astounding.

The 2nd Bomb Wing is a unit of the recently established Air Force Global Strike Command whose mission is to develop and provide combat-ready forces for nuclear deterrence and global strike operations. The major units of the command are two B-52 wings (2nd and 5th); three missile wings (90th, 91st and 341st) equipped with Minuteman III ICBMs; and the B-2 equipped 509th Bomb Wing. Not to belittle the critical importance of the command, but I couldn't resist reminding "Thirsty" that this "isn't your Dad's SAC."

Our reunion at Savannah is just around the corner and I hope to see all of you there.

With Warmest Regards,

*Bill Seals*

## An Urgent Message for Members

A planned AUCTION will take place during the reunion in Savannah. If you have items you may wish to contribute, they would be most appreciated. They may be sent to the Reunion Coordinator or brought directly to Savannah.

## Our Vice President Shares Some Memories

All combat crews have had all kinds of combat stories. So I will inject a bit of humor. In my story, while in Cincinnati, Ohio for our 40th reunion, I met the Vice Commander of the 98th Range Wing at our hotel. We talked a little and I introduced myself. The Vice Commander said, "So you are Scroggins. I have heard so much about you and your buddy, that Cory Orne already."

So that was enough said. We both laughed about the many incidents and trouble we caused.

We were shot up over Munich, Germany and went down in Yugoslavia. Tito's Partisans got us for a few days. We got back to our base at Lecce, Italy and started flying again.

Sincerely,

*Ken Scroggins*

Engineer/Armorer/Gunner  
B-24 "Silver Queen"

## Comments from the Reunion Coordinator

Hello from the warm, sunny South. Hope all of you are well and are preparing for your trip to our next reunion in Savannah, Georgia. I am currently going to Shreveport, Louisiana for the 343rd Reactivation Ceremony. It should be an exciting and interesting affair.

Plans are now being confirmed for our next reunion in Branson, Missouri. Please reserve the dates of October 17-21, 2011.

I look forward to seeing all our members, friends and invited guests in the beautiful city of Savannah, Georgia this September.

*Dennis Posey*

P.S. Please note my new e-mail address:  
dennis\_posey@att.net

## Regarding the Reactivation of the 343rd Squadron at Barksdale AFB LA !!!

As most of you will recall, notice of the reactivation of the 343rd Bomb Squadron was included in our last newsletter, and even with the short time to respond, I'm proud to report that the 98th came through as usual. The weekend of July 10 saw about a dozen 98th veterans and an assortment of camp followers gathered at Barksdale AFB for the reactivation.

The weekend kicked off on Friday evening at Hanger 2 (casual bar at O'Club) and gathered speed Saturday with Barbeque and refreshments hosted by the men and women of the 343rd. A great time was had by all with everyone trying to top the last "war story." Our B-24 veterans were the center of attention (as they should be), with the younger members of the squadron holding them almost in awe.

Sunday began with a chance to view a B-52-H up close and personal as everyone had opportunity to walk around, climb into, and touch some of the switches and controls of the aircraft. Again stories flowed fast and furious. I can say without fear of contradiction, that both hosts and guests had a great time as we all stayed past the allotted time.

The reactivation ceremony and assumption of command by the 343rd Bomb Squadron Commander, Lt. Colonel Jeffrey A. Stogsdill, were both traditional military ceremonies and were conducted in the best tradition of the Air Force. Following recognition of Senior Officers and local leaders, our 98th group was introduced and received a resounding round of applause. Colonel Keith D. Schultz, the commander of the 917th Operation Group then conducted the ceremonies, followed by Dr. Thomas Watson who was the guest speaker. Dr. Watson spoke of his experiences as a radar operator with the 98th during the Korean War.

A reception and several presentations followed the ceremonies at the home of the 93rd Bomb Squadron, a sister squadron to the 343rd. All of our veterans received a bag of mementos including a digital video disk of the history of the aircraft that have been flown by the 98th. Herb Harper presented the 343rd with a large reproduction of the nose art depicting "Snow

White and the Seven Dwarfs." This presentation was in recognition of both the fact that the 343rd was known during WWII by that title, and the painter of the original art work, Amos Nicholson. To say the presentation was a tremendous hit, is an understatement. Amos was then presented a bottle of "liquid refreshment" as a replacement for the bottle he received for doing the nose art, and subsequently consumed by his tent mates. Bill Seals presented a model of a B-24 to the squadron with an inscription which reads: *Presented to the 343rd Bomb Squadron by the 98th Bomb Group/Bomb Wing Veterans Association upon the reactivation of the squadron. July 11, 2010.* Lt. Col. Steven Smith (Thirsty) presented the video he produced on the history of the aircraft flown by the squadron which was



The 98th Bomb Group presented the 343rd Bomb Squadron a model of a B-24. The inscription reads:

**PRESENTED BY THE  
98th Bomb Group/Bomb Wing  
Veterans Association  
July 11, 2010**

acclaimed by all as excellent. Following a lot of heartfelt thanks, and wishes for the future, everyone said good-bye.

Finally, I must say a word or two about our primary hosts for this event — Jeff and Thirsty. Without the

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## 98th Bomb Group Veteran's Association Scholarship Awarded

The 98th Bomb Group Veterans Association Scholarship in memory of Sgt. William Simons has been awarded this year to Miss Morgan Harper of Ellenboro, West Virginia. Morgan was chosen for her academic performance, dedication, leadership and service to her community. Attending Fairmont State University in West Virginia this fall, she plans to major in Art Education and pursue a career in teaching.

When asked what Patriotism means to her, Morgan responded: *"Patriotism is making choices that support what is right and wrong, including supporting our country when it is not always popular. It is the act of putting one's own life on the line to save another. It is the men and women signing up to serve our country in the military. Patriotism is everyone in America coming together to protect, support and serve those fifty stars and thirteen stripes which are the foundation of America."*

The officers and members of the Association hope this Scholarship helps to preserve the memory of all the brave men of the 98th Bomb Group, past and present, who put their lives in harm's way to fight for the freedom we enjoy today.

We send our congratulations and best wishes to Morgan as she begins this new chapter in her life!

To date this Scholarship has been funded primarily by donations for the video, *FORCE FOR FREEDOM, The 98th Bomb Group 1942-1945*, raffles held at the annual reunions, and direct donation. Any donations are greatly appreciated and can be sent either to the Scholarship Chairman, Suzanne Mioduszewski or Ken Laninga, Secretary-Treasurer.

## Reactivation of the 343rd

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many long hours they spent planning and making preparations for the events of the weekend, it simply would not have been the rousing success it was. Thirsty was our primary contact in getting a group together and did a yeoman's job in insuring we were there in the numbers we were. To put it another way, without him, I doubt we would have had more than six or seven attendees. The hospitality we received from everyone we came in contact with could not have been better. Not only was our every need fulfilled, it appeared that everyone of our hosts was determined that we have a super time — AND WE DID.

**THANKS 343RD!**

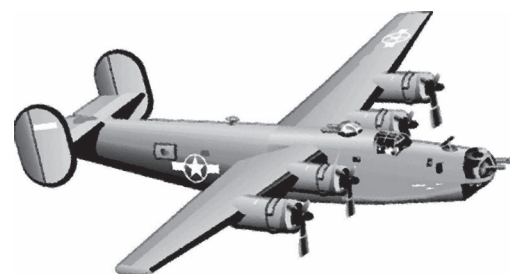
Bill Seals  
President



Also, if we can add those in attendance, the veterans were:

John Bynum	Dennis Posey
Geroge Clark	Bill Seals
Herb Harper	Roy Sells
Vernon Leon	Thomas Watson
Amos Nicholson	Cyril Weinberger
Robert Phillips	

Thanks.



## Desert Humor . . . . .

During these hectic combat days, there were a great many details assigned to the men of the 98th. Some of these details had nicknames or an alias, but the following detail was appropriately named.

This incident occurred during the days of the Libyan campaign while we were based near Tobruk. The camp was situated out in the desert and when nature called, latrines were set out in the "Blue" several yards apart.

These latrines were constructed of a steel "petrel" drum, buried in the sand with an old fashioned "one holer" to sit on and were affectionately called "Desert Lilies." When these "Lilies" became filled to capacity, it was necessary to bury them and move to more fertile pastures.

On this particular day, Friday, February 4, 1943, (it should have been Friday the 13th), the armament section of the 344th squadron was alerted to carry out this mission. The first "Lily" was buried according to army regulations.

Someone (name unknown, but no doubt one of the boys who had his head exposed to the hot desert sun too long) had a brainstorm and came up with the idea of giving the "Lilies" a first class military funeral.

The boys lined up, military-like, to the platoon leader's sharp commands — "attention right — shoulder arms" (with picks and shovels) — "forward march" (singing an appropriate song for the momentous occasion, until they approached the next "Lily.")

The platoon members were assigned different duties — some dug the hole, others carried the "casket" (pardon me, the can) — taps blown, flowers (yes, nature lovers actually found beautiful flowers in the desert) were laid on the grave. Deacon Pummel delivered the address with appropriate words and the firing squad, with picks and shovels, did their job with no casualties.

After each "Lily" was buried and covered, the procession moved to the next "Lily" where the firing squad stood at "Present Arms" a la militaire.

Major Carmack and his adjutant, roaring with laughter, were watching this historical ceremony. "The Major sent the orderly room clerks to Group Headquarters to try and locate a movie camera. By the time they found one, the fast working armament boys had completed their task and reported back to "Sack Time." The Major could not persuade the boys to re-enact the scene, as there was no section in the Articles of War that pertained to this particular type of warfare. Incidentally there was no citation for this either — only mission accomplished — enemy obliterated.

### As Flak Goes By (to the tune of *As Time Goes By*)

**You must remember this —  
The flak can't always miss,  
Somebody has to die.  
The odds are always too damned high,  
As flak goes by.**

**And when the fighters come,  
You hope you're not the one  
To tumble from the sky.  
The odds are always too damned high,  
As flak goes by.**

**One-tens and two-tens knocking at your gate,  
Sky full of fighters, got to kill that rate  
Bombs don't go away; salvo, don't be late!  
The target's passing by.**

**It's still the same old story —  
The Eighth gets all the glory,  
And still someone must die.  
The odds are always too damned high,  
As flak goes by.**

**Submitted by  
Joseph Rifkin**

## 98th Bomb Group and the Ploesti Experience

Many, many books, magazine and newspaper articles as well as personal manuscripts have been written on the USAAF raids on the oil refinery at Ploesti, Romania. More than 30 total raids were conducted on that target. The 98th Bomb Group participated in 15 of them from AUGUST 1, 1943 to August 18, 1944. Although the first raid on Ploesti happened on June 12, 1942 and was attributed to HALPRO, the fact is that HALPRO was made up of many former 98th Bomb Group personnel.

I know how boring statistics are, however to cover the whole spectrum of the 98th's involvement, I am going to dwell in that way to give a brief overview of the whole and overall 98th involvement.

**MISSION #1.** August 1, 1943 TIDAL WAVE (Low Level) mission.

The 98th generated 47 B-24s for this mission, even though many of the 98th B-24s were manned by mixed crews from the four other groups involved. Of the 47 98th aircraft; one crashed on take off. Six aborted before reaching the target. Seventeen went down in enemy territory, two were down at sea and 21 returned to friendly bases, although with major damage, dead and wounded crew members.

**Mission #2.** April 5, 1944

Thirty-two B-24s took off and all the aircraft completed the mission except for one which returned early with the top turret out and a gas leak.

**Mission #3.** April 24, 1944.

Thirty-eight B-24s took off. Again, all aircraft completed the mission except for one aircraft which returned with problems on engines 1, 2 and 4.

**Mission #4.** May 18, 1944

Twenty-nine B-24s took off. One had oxygen problems and returned early. Weather was a big factor. The 98th missed their rendezvous with the 376th. They continued to the target but did not bomb because of overcast. Credit for the mission was given. No sortie reports were recorded.

**Mission #5.** May 31, 1944.

Twenty-seven B-24s took off. Two aircraft returned early with engine and supercharger problems. All other aircraft completed the mission and returned.

**Mission #6.** June 1944.

Thirty-five B-24s took off. Three returned early with engine problems. One aircraft reported missing (Lt. Osborn). Lt. Kalb also had problems on return. One crew member KIA.

**Mission #7.** June 23, 1944.

Forty-two B-24s took off. Three turned back with mechanical problems. Seven ran into bad weather and became separated from the formation, did not complete the mission. All the rest were credited with a completed mission. Thirty-two aircraft were credited with mission complete.

**Mission #8.** June 24, 1944.

Forty-one B-24s took off. Five aircraft returned early; 36 aircraft over the target at 0940 hrs. Two aircraft reported missing (Stallings & Stumpff).

**Mission #9.** July 9, 1944.

Twenty-eight B-24s took off. Two aircraft turned back. Two aircraft lost (Puckett & Mato). Senseman's aircraft shot up; landed at Ban. Chance shot up, three crew members WIA landed at San Pan, Italy. Lt. Draut, 415th Sq., crash landed at VIS.

**Mission #10.** July 15, 1944.

Twenty-eight B-24s took off. Two turned back. Generators out, radio operator sick. Lt Smith, 345th Sq. in #463-I, down over target.

**Mission #11.** July 22, 1944.

Thirty-two B-24s took off. Six turned back because of various mechanical problems. Three aircraft lost. Puntteney and Guynes DOWN OVER THE TARGET. Chancellor MIA. Van Sickle crashed on North end of the field.

**Mission #12.** July 31, 1944

Twenty-nine B-24s took off. One aircraft returned early with gas leak; 28 aircraft over target at 10:54; 28 aircraft returned to base. Lt. Figg of the 345th Sq. in #916-I crashed on landing. Colonel Manzo was group leader.

**Mission #13.** August 10, 1944

Twenty-seven B-24s took off at 0640 hrs. Two aircraft returned early; 25 aircraft were over the target at 1054 hours. One aircraft went down over the target. Pilot was DRAUT. Acft. #047-F, 415th Sq. All other aircraft returned to base.

**Mission #14** August 17, 1944

Twenty-eight B-24s took off at 0530 hrs. Five aircraft returned early; 23 aircraft were over the target at 0955 to 1001 hrs. Twenty-one aircraft dropped bombs on the selected target. Two aircraft dropped bombs on Xenia Refinery. All aircraft returned. One aircraft from another group was seen going down.

**Mission #15** August 18, 1944

Twenty-six B-24s of the 98th took off between 06:13 and 06:26. Two aircraft turned back because of gas leak and glass out of nose turret. Three aircraft were down over the target. They were  
Baker, 343rd Sq. Acft. #858 C.  
Plane, 343rd Sq. Acft. #398 J.  
Dragner, 344th Sq. Acft. #185 N.

Although four groups were scheduled for this mission, two were not able to launch because of bad weather, so only the 449th and 98th were able to attack the target. At the crucial moment the PFF was inoperative in all lead ships, so all bombing was accomplished by offset methods.

The 98th was rated Superior for navigation on this mission. This was the last mission on Ploesti by the 98th Bomb Group.

## Mail Call

### “Bud” Day, Medal Of Honor Recipient

George Everett “Bud” Day (born February 24, 1925) is a retired U.S. Air Force Colonel and Command Pilot who served during the Vietnam War. He is often cited as being the most decorated U.S. service member since General Douglas MacArthur, having received some seventy decorations, a majority for actions in combat. Day is a recipient of the Medal of Honor.

Col. Day wrote:

I was shot down over North Vietnam in 1967; a Squadron Commander. After I returned in 1973, I published two books that dealt a lot with “real torture” in Hanoi.

Our president is branding our country as a bunch of torturers when he has no idea what torture is.

As for me, I was put through a mock execution because I would not respond...pistol whipped on the head...same event. Couple of days later...hung by my feet all day. I escaped and a couple of weeks later, I got shot and recaptured. Shot was OK... what happened afterwards was not.

They marched me to Vinh...put me in the rope trick—almost pulled my arms out of the sockets. Beat me on the head with a little wooden rod until my eyes were swollen shut, and my unshot, unbroken hand beaten to a pulp.

Next day they hung me by the arms...rebroke my right wrist...wiped out the nerves in my arms that control the hands...rolled my fingers up into a ball. Only left the slightest movement of my left forefinger.

So I started answering with some incredible lies.

They sent me to Hanoi strapped to a barrel of gas in the back of a truck. Hanoi...on my knees...rope trick again. Beaten by a big fool. Put into leg irons on a bed in Heartbreak Hotel.

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## More Mail Call . . .

### Comments from Col. Day continued from previous page

Much kneeling-hands up at Zoo. Really had a severe beating for refusing to condemn Lyndon Johnson. Several more kneeling events. I could see my knee bone through kneeling holes.

There was an escape from the annex to the Zoo. I was the Senior Officer of a large building but because of my escape...they started a mass torture of all commanders. I think it was July 7, 1969...they started beating me with a car fanbelt.

In the first two days I took over 300 strokes...then stopped counting because I never thought I would live through it. They continued day and night torture to get me to confess to a non-existent part in the escape. This went on for at least three days. On my knees...fan belting...cut open my scrotum with fan belt stroke, opened up both knee holes again. My fanny looked like hamburger...I could not lie on my back.

They tortured me into admitting that I was in on the escape...and that my two roommates knew about it.

The next day I denied the lie. They commenced torturing me again with three, six or nine strokes of the fan belt every day from about July 11 or 12th to October 14th, 1969. I continued to refuse to lie about my roommates again.

Now the point of this is that our president has declared to the World that we (U.S.) are a bunch of



torturers...Thus it will be OK to torture us next time when they catch us...because that is what the U.S. does.

## The Last Mission and the Pilot Is Shot . . .

Axis Sally, the female German radio announcer, had a ball with the news that the Joker had gone down. She told how the front part of a B-24 with a skull and crossbones, bearing the name "Joker" had been downed by German aircraft.

The Americans had now returned to their buccaneer days and were putting pirates in the skies to kill

innocent people. American journalists did not think much of the news about the Joker and Congress said that no ships in the future would carry such markings.

The incident that follows took place in August, 1944. World War II was beginning to slow down. Our crew had been stationed in Italy since April 11, 1944, flying bombing missions out of Italy over much of Europe.

By the first part of August, 1944 some crew members had flown the required 50 missions and were soon to depart for home.

The promise we had been given when we first started flying combat missions was: *After you finish flying a certain number of missions, you will not have to fly again for a very long time. You will be taken by truck to Naples, Italy, and there you will board a troop ship for home.*

Most of us looked forward to completing that last mission, it meant no more flying, no more worrying about whether this day would be your last day on earth. You tried not to think: *When am I going to get what is surely coming my way?*

Soon our only crew members left were the Pilot, Co-Pilot, Bombardier, Navigator and Radio Operator. The only time we remaining five crew members flew was when our squadron was to lead the Wing, which was about every three or four days.

The slower pace slowed our completion time and stretched it out by several more weeks. In the end, only Colonel Umberger and myself were left to complete our last mission together.

Umberger told me not to put my flight tag up until he told me to. By him being a Colonel, he might have inside information on the up-coming targets, their whereabouts and how tough the target would be (fortified that is).

One morning Colonel Umberger came in and said; "Bert, it's time. Put your tag on the flight board for the next mission and we can finish this thing and go home. The target is a small place in Northern Italy, only three flak guns, no fighters; it's a milk run for our last mission."

I could hardly wait for the next day to come. It would mean no more flying, no more flak, no more fighters, no more close to death experiences, no more worries. I was almost on cloud nine.

I wasn't really sure about that cloud nine. Don't you have to be an angel to float on a cloud?

**August 27, 1944.**

I awoke bright and early, had breakfast, got my radio log books and code sheets and asked some of the young

new crew members to help me out to the ship, because of my bad back.

This was the beginning of . . . of a beautiful day.

I was to fly as radio operator and top turret gunner on this last mission. It wasn't long before Colonel Umberger was telling the crew, "We're coming up to the target area and we'll start our bomb run in two minutes.

"Bert you hear that? It's our last one and we get to go home."

Umberger had no sooner said that when the first flak guns welcomed us to the target. It wasn't just three guns, but 25 guns. Jerry had moved more guns into the target area in the dark of night. They had our altitude and were right on target, they were using something called A NEW VERSION OF RADAR.

The German's new technology, RADAR gave them a method of detecting distant objects and determining their position, velocity, or other characteristics by analysis of very high frequency radio waves reflecting off of our ships.

We were getting one of the worst pastings that we had encountered in all the time we had been flying. One burst hit the ship and I heard the pilot shout, "They got me. The dirty b----- got me! They shot me on my last mission. Bert, they got me! They got me in my bottom!"

It was very hard to make out what was going on with Umberger screaming. All was chaos. Umberger had completely lost control. The normal questioning after taking on damage was, "Who has been hit? What is the damage report? Has every man checked in?" But, with this confusion no one was taking control.

I asked for a check-in and all stations reported in. All were OK. Only the pilot's position did not answer. I got the engineer's attention and asked him to take over the top gun position. As we passed he told me that the ship was OK.

About that time, Umberger pulled himself together and admonished the crew for talking so much on the intercom.

The Colonel was still sitting in his seat, when I got down from the top gun position. He was afraid to get

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## More Mail Call . . .

# The Last Mission

continued from previous page

up — he might see where he was hit. I grabbed a portable oxygen bottle and motioned for him to unfasten his seat belt so that I could help him.

“No, Bert. I don’t want to get up.”

“But Colonel Umberger, if you’re hit I need to stop the bleeding.”

I looked down at his feet. The flak had come through the bombardier’s compartment and hit the floor under the pilot’s feet. There was no floor, just the rudder pedals. You could look straight down into the navigator and bombardier’s compartment. No wonder Umberger didn’t want to move, that was enough to unsettle anyone. I reached down to unfasten his seat belt, but he held on.

“You have got to let me check you over, you know that.”

He let me unbuckle the belt and I carefully pulled him up and out of his seat. All the time he was saying, “They got me on my last mission. They got me!”

There was no blood on him and I could not see any blood on his clothes. I lifted the seat cushion out of the bucket seat that he had been sitting on. There was a two-inch by eight-inch gash in the bottom of the metal chair. When Umberger saw that he turned as white as a ghost but I continued to hold on to him.

It took a couple of minutes, but he was able to compose himself. I pulled down his pants and asked him to bend over. To my surprise there was no blood. So I asked him to pull down his jockey shorts. There I found a big red welt about the size of a grapefruit but the skin had not been broken.

I told Umberger that the flak had not cut him but he had the biggest rosette I had ever seen.

He told me not to talk dirty.

The cushion he had been sitting on had been stuffed with steel wool. I turned the cushion over. It had a long tear in the bottom cover and at the end of the tear, buried in the steel wool was a jagged two-inch piece of flak.

The top cover of the cushion only had three or four strands broken so I asked the colonel if I could see his pants. There were two or three strands of his trousers that had been cut by the flak, but it hadn’t cut his baby pink bottom.

Needless to say, Umberger latched on to that piece of flak as his reminder of “*Bad Day at Black Rock*,” or whatever they say way down there in Oklahoma.

That was the end of our missions. All of our original crew made it through the turmoil and danger, even the Ball Turret gunner who had to bailout on a previous mission.

*Jim Mitchell, Ball Turret Gunner, Extraordinaire.*

*Somehow Mitch was able to get out of the ball turret as the ship he was in began to fall out of the sky over Wiener Neustadt. Jim’s chute opened and carried him away from the target area. He was found by Freedom Fighters and eventually joined up with the great Marshal Tito of Yugoslavia, who then returned Mitch to Italy.*

*Mitch was changed; he was very quiet and did not want to talk about his experience. After welcoming him back we left to catch that last truck to Naples.*

I gave thanks to my maker for watching over us. Needless to say, I gave thanks more than once.

**Submitted by Lyle B. Wright**

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## AUDIE MURPHY

### “AN AMERICAN HERO”

Submitted by Dolores Haritos

One of America’s outstanding Medal of Honor winners was a young seventeen-year-old From Kingston, Texas called Audie Murphy. Orphaned at a young age and left to care for eleven of his young brothers and sisters. He became very skillful with a rifle used to kill small

game in order to feed his family. This skill served him well as he became a very resourceful and effective soldier.

In 1941 he enlisted in the Regular Army as an infantryman. His military career began in Sicily, Italy July 1943. Audie’s captain did his best to keep the small soldier (5’5”, 110 pounds) from fighting by making him a runner. Audie, wanting to fight, slipped off to join a fighting patrol.

Audie’s next action was in the invasion of Salerno on the Italian mainland. Here Audie again excelled as a soldier. While leading a night patrol, Audie and his



Public Domain Photo of Audie Murphy

men ran into a group of German soldiers. After fighting their way out of an ambush, they took cover in a rock quarry. The Germans sent a squad of soldiers in to get them out but were stopped by intense machine gun and rifle fire. Three of the Germans were killed and several more captured. For his actions at Salerno, Audie was promoted to Sergeant.

Audie missed the next invasion at Anzio due to a serious attack of malaria. He soon recovered and rejoined his unit just in time for some of the fiercest fighting of the war. For three days the Americans fought to escape their beachhead but were unsuccessful. The situation deteriorated to a stalemate with neither side gaining. This went on for months and the soldiers dug in for the long haul. Audie volunteered for numerous patrols and his unit came under artillery fire almost every night. Audie was soon evacuated from the front with another severe attack of malaria. Within 10 days he was back at the front. Soon after the unit was pulled out for a short rest. Audie was offered a battlefield commission to 2nd Lieutenant. Not wanting to leave his unit, he refused the promotion.

Once back at the front, Audie quickly surveyed his area and discovered that there was only one route the enemy armor could pass through. Audie heavily mined the area. When the Germans attacked, the lead tank hit a mine and blocked the road completely. The Germans withdrew but Audie wanted to ensure that they could not move the damaged tank. Taking a small patrol forward, Audie ordered them to cover him while he approached the tank. He first threw two Molotov cocktails at the tank. Neither ignited. A grenade he tossed inside was ineffective. The Germans guarding the tank began firing at him. Audie next used rifle grenades and finally managed to knock the tank treads off one side. For this action, Audie was awarded the Bronze Star.

On May 23, the 3rd Division finally broke out of the Anzio beachhead. After fighting their way to Rome, the Division was then ordered to a rear area for amphibious training. On August 15, 1944, the Division made yet another landing, this time in Southern France. Three hours after landing, Audie’s battalion was tasked with capturing an enemy artillery position high up on a ridge. The men of 1st Battalion slowly advanced up the slope, struggling all the way. As they reached the top, the Germans opened fire with deadly results. Every avenue of approach was covered by machine guns. Audie, whose platoon had been in the rear of the lines, moved forward, out of the line of ambush, and took stock of the situation. Half the unit was pinned down, the other half was being decimated by enemy fire. Audie could not reach the enemy positions with grenades and his carbine was ineffective. Slowly, he crawled down

*continued on next page*



# AUDIE MURPHY

## “AN AMERICAN HERO”

continued from previous page



the slope and reached the heavy weapons platoon.

Commandeering a .30 cal machine gun, Audie crawled back up the slope. Setting up the gun, he opened fire and quickly killed two Germans. With only one belt of ammunition, Audie used short bursts and forced the German gunners to cease firing and duck down. Once out of ammunition, Audie and another

soldier, Private Lattie Tipton, charged the first enemy position and quickly silenced it. As they prepared to charge the next position, Tipton noticed a German soldier waving a white flag. Standing up to take the soldier prisoner, Tipton was killed by a single rifle bullet. Audie was enraged by this act and picked up the German machine gun. He first charged one enemy position with grenades and the gun and killed both enemy soldiers in it. He charged several more positions and killed all of the soldiers within them. When it was over, they discovered that the artillery they had been sent to silence was a fake. They had been suckered into an ambush. For his actions, Audie was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

As the 3rd Division continued their advance, Audie was wounded in the heel by a shell fragment. He received the Purple Heart and spent two weeks in an Evac hospital. After returning to his unit, they were ambushed while on patrol. Audie, who crawled out



of the ambush zone, charged the enemy position and using two hand grenades, silenced it. For this action, which saved the lives of his patrol, Audie was awarded the Silver Star. Several days later, his platoon was ambushed again and several more soldiers were killed. Audie grabbed a radio and crawled forward to where he could see the enemy position. While under intense

fire, Audie called in mortar and artillery fire on the Germans. Official Army records indicate the indirect fire killed 15 and wounded 35 enemy soldiers. For this, Audie received his second Silver Star, three days after earning his first.

Several days later, Audie was ordered to the 15th Regiment's headquarters. Once there he was discharged from the Army as a Sergeant and then commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant. With his new rank, Audie returned to his platoon, this time to command it. On October 26, 1944 Audie was wounded again, this time in the hip by a sniper's bullet. He was evacuated to a hospital and spent the next three months recuperating. Rejoining his unit in January, 1945, Audie led his men against the German stronghold at Holtzwihr. For three days they attacked the fortress with no success. Soon, Audie was the only officer left alive. He took command of the company and organized the next assault. As they waited in the snow for the order to attack, six German tanks and 250 infantrymen approached from Holtzwihr. Being greatly outnumbered, he ordered his men to pull back. He called in artillery on the approaching enemy but did not stop them.

Audie decided to take action. Near his position was a burning tank destroyer. Audie climbed on top, and turned the machine gun on the approaching Germans. As he fired from the burning tank, the artillery began to land in earnest and the German advance faltered. For almost an hour, Audie continued to lay down fire on the Germans. When he ran out of ammunition, he dropped into the snow and discovered he had been wounded, his third, in the leg. Enemy soldiers lay dead just 10 yards from the tank destroyer.

For this daring feat, Audie was recommended for and received the Medal of Honor. His citation reads:

Medals pictured here (all of which were earned by Murphy) include (top left) Bronze Star, (bottom left) Distinguished Service Cross, (left to right, facing page) Silver Star and Legion of Merit. *Source of images: Wikipedia.*

We remember Audie Murphy for his outstanding career as a member of the 3rd Infantry Division.



Committee On Veterans' Affairs, U.S. Senate

Audie L. Murphy, Second Lieutenant, U.S. Army, Company B, 15th Infantry, 3d Infantry Division. Near Holtzwihr France, 26 January 1945.

MEDAL OF HONOR - By direction of the President, under the provisions of the act of Congress approved 9 July 1918 (WD Bul. 43, 1918), a Medal of Honor for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty was awarded by the War Department in the name of Congress to the following-named officer: Second Lieutenant Audie L. Murphy, 01-692-509, 15th Infantry, Army of the United States, on 26 January 1945, near Holtzwihr, France, commanded Company B, which was attacked by six tanks and waves of infantry. Lieutenant Murphy ordered his men to withdraw to a prepared position in a woods while he remained forward at his command post and continued to give fire directions to the artillery by telephone. Behind him to his right one of our tank destroyers received a direct hit and began to burn. Its crew withdrew to the woods. Lieutenant Murphy continued to direct artillery fire which killed large numbers of the advancing enemy infantry. With the enemy tanks abreast of his position, Lieutenant Murphy climbed on the burning tank destroyer which was in danger of blowing up any instant and employed its .50 caliber machine gun against the enemy. He was alone and exposed to the German fire from three sides, but his deadly fire killed dozens of Germans and caused their infantry attack to waver. The enemy tanks, losing infantry support, began to fall back. For an hour the Germans tried every available weapon to eliminate Lieutenant Murphy, but he continued to hold his position and wiped out a squad which was trying to creep up unnoticed on his right flank. Germans reached as close as 10 yards only to be mowed down by his fire. He received a leg wound but ignored it and continued the single-handed fight until his ammunition was exhausted. He then made his way to his company, refused medical attention, and organized the company in a counterattack which forced the Germans to withdraw. His directing of artillery fire wiped out many of the enemy; he personally killed or wounded about 50.

Lieutenant Murphy's indomitable courage and his refusal to give an inch of ground saved his company from possible encirclement and destruction and enabled it to hold the woods which had been the enemy's objective.



Audie L. Murphy rose to national fame as the most decorated U.S. combat soldier of World War II. Among his 33 awards and decorations was the Medal of Honor, the highest military award for bravery that can be given to any individual in America. He also received every decoration for valor that his country had to offer, some of them more than once, including five decorations by France and Belgium. Credited with either killing over 240 of the enemy while wounding and capturing many others, he became a legend within the 3rd Infantry Division.

While on a business trip on May 28, 1971, he was killed at the age of 46. A private plane flying in fog and rain crashed in the side of a mountain near Roanoke, Virginia. Five others, including the pilot, were also killed. Although Audie owned and flew his own plane earlier in his career at Hollywood, he was among the passengers that tragic day.

On June 7, 1971, Audie Murphy was buried with full military honors in Arlington National Cemetery. His grave site, near the Amphitheater, is the second most visited grave site year round. President Kennedy's grave is the most visited. [Source: Audie Murphy Google Website](#)





## To Members of My Command

March 25, 1945

This past week marked the completion of our group's 400th combat mission against the enemy. It is with a feeling of great personal satisfaction and pride that I complement the officers and enlisted men who have made this achievement possible.

Throughout the past two years and eight months of combat operations, the 98th Bombardment Group has proven itself to be one of the outstanding in the Army Air Forces. One of the oldest groups in combat, and having participated in many famous campaigns, the 98th has repeatedly dealt severe blows to the enemy. Few organizations of this kind have contributed more successfully toward the ultimate defeat of the enemy.

You and your predecessors have performed your duties with unstinting loyalty, devotion, and efficiency. That your work has borne fruit is manifest in the many commendations and citations received by the group from higher echelons. I wish to extend my sincere appreciation to the combat and ground personnel for their faithful and efficient performance of duty. We are justly proud to be members of the "Force For Freedom".

We want this war to end as quickly as anyone else. The 98th Bombardment Group does not look forward with anticipation to the passing of other combat milestones. It does, however, recognize in its 400th mission its determination to pass as many milestones as necessary in helping obliterate the enemy.

I congratulate you on a difficult task superbly accomplished.

### And Service Unit Personnel

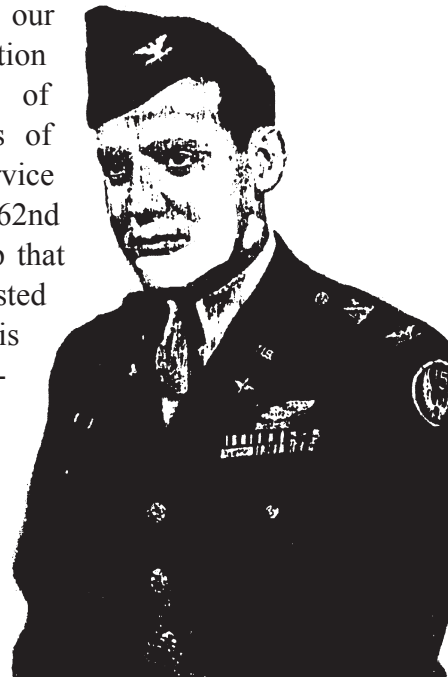
At this time, upon the completion of our 400th mission against the enemy, and on behalf of the officers and enlisted men of the 98th Bomb Group,

I wish to extend our sincere Appreciation to the members of the Service Units of the 323rd Air Service Group, and the 62nd Air Service Group that have so ably assisted in making this achievement possible. The units of the 323rd Air Service Group worked with us during the difficult days of February to November, 1943 and those of the 62nd from January, 1944 to the present.

We all appreciate the hard work and little glory that is the lot of the service units. Too frequently their effort is passed over lightly in view of the more spectacular bombing results. However, here in the 98th we are fully aware of the contribution you have made and are making in the accomplishment of our mission. We know what loyalty, ingenuity, enthusiasm, and efficiency, you have performed your duties and permitted us to drop more bombs on the enemy. We have always been proud to consider the 550th Air Service Squadron the fifth squadron of the 98th, and we shall continue to do so.

My thanks for a magnificent job well done.

*Colonel S. E. Manzo* (pictured above)  
*Group Commander*



Submitted by Joseph B. Rifkin

## 15th Air Force Records Set In September Bombing

Perhaps the most outstanding period of bombing this group has had in 32 months of combat operations fell in September 1944, when it set two Air Force records for bombing accuracy.

The first was for the highest percentage achieved by one group on a single mission, 97.2 and the second highest monthly bombing average—70.5.

During September, the 98th was called upon on 12 occasions to bomb targets in direct support of Russian and Yugoslav forces, besides attacking tactical targets in northern Italy, and strategic targets at Munich and Vienna.

Throughout the 12 missions in the Balkans, the 98th maintained an average of 76 percent of its hits within 1000 feet of the pinpoint, a hitherto unequalled example of sustained bombing accuracy.

All the railway lines leading from Greece and Bulgaria into Yugoslavia were put out of commission, while troop and supply trains were destroyed in the marshalling yards, where through traffic had been concentrated. A mission which the group led in Leskovac, Yugoslavia on September 6 is officially reported to have "destroyed the German army and Gestapo headquarters, wrecked the railway station and motor transport works and caused many enemy casualties.

The attack on Larissaa, Greece which the group led on September 22 proved so effective and superbly carried out that in a few days, Greek guerilla force were able to capture the town.

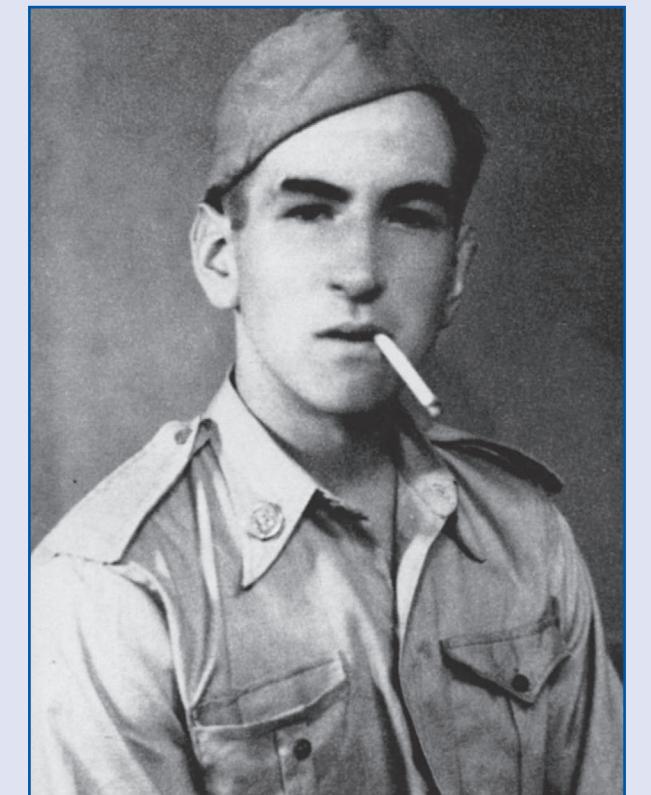
But without doubt the most astonishingly successful bombing was carried out in an attack on the Danube river railway bridge at Baja, Hungary on September 21st. Only one bomb from the full load of 75 tons was plotted outside the 1000 foot circle. That brought forth the amazing percentage of 97.2 for a single mission.

Submitted by Joseph B. Rifkin

## Too Young By Another Name

Every branch of the armed services claimed the distinction of having the youngest member in its outfit. The 98th was no exception having in the ranks of the 344th Squadron a boy who enlisted at the ripe old age of fourteen. Thomas Fletcher, alias Thomas Kincaid, was his name or as boys in the 344th knew him, Thomas Kincaid, alias Thomas Fletcher. Tom was young in actions but aged in heart. After serving in the armament section he volunteered for combat and flew his quota of missions including the famous low-level mission to Ploesti. On completion of his tour, he went home on furlough and his true identity was discovered as attested by the caption below.

*"TOO YOUNG. Tom Fletcher, 17, retired by the Army after 38 missions, including Ploesti, is doing the next best thing if he can't fight. The ex-tail gunner is building Curtiss-Wright bombers at Columbus while awaiting to 'grow up'."*





# The Women Who Serve our Country

While the C-5 was turning over its engines, a female crewman gave the G.I.S. on board the usual information regarding seatbelts, emergency exits, etc. Finally, she said, "Now sit back and enjoy your trip while your captain, Judith Campbell, and crew take you safely to Afghanistan."



.....  
 Above: A glimpse of your Editor when she was flying Air Evac in the Middle East. At Right: an all-female crew.  
 .....

An old MSgt. sitting in the eighth row thought to himself, "Did I hear her right? Is the captain a woman?" When the attendant came by, he said, "Did I understand you right? Is the captain a woman?"

"Yes," said the attendant, "In fact, this entire crew is female."

"My God," he said, "I wish I had two double scotch and sodas. I don't know what to think with only women up there in the cockpit."

"That's another thing, Sergeant," said the crew member. "We no longer call it The Cockpit. It's The Box Office."

### Quote of the Day:

Whatever you give a woman, she will make greater. If you give her sperm, she'll give you a baby. If you give her a house, she'll give you a home. If you give her groceries, she'll give you a meal. If you give her a smile, she'll give you her heart. She multiplies and enlarges what is given to her. So, if you give her any crap, be ready to receive a ton of s\_\_t.



## ..... Combat Crews

Above: The Crew of *The Joker*: Standing, L to R: John Thompson, Leo Carzoli, Joe Calabro, Eldred Chance. Kneeling, L to R: Robert Snyder and John Limanouski

At Left: The Crew of *Take Off Time*: Standing, L to R: R. Dudley, P. Haritos, F. Shapansky. Kneeling, L to R: W. Chivera, J. Moran, F. Ginter.  
 .....



*Response to Joseph B. Rifkin's comments in the May 2010 issue of THE PYRAMIDIERS by Major Robert W. Sternfels . . .*

Regarding a *Letter to the Editor* in May's PYRAMIDIERS by Joseph B. Rifkin, I know the Ploesti subject in depth and Rifkin's letter has a number of inaccurate statements.

My book called "BURNING HITLER'S BLACK GOLD" corrects stories in other periodicals. Two years interviewing principal people, the officer who planned the Ploesti my friend General Jake Smart, the actual leader General Keith K. Compton and others including Compton's co-pilot "Red" Thompson and Howard A. Wicklund, navigator, gave me valuable data in the "hands on" execution of the mission.

Rifkin made some unsubstantiated statements about General Ent. Proof of Ent's lack of involvement, in an interview with Compton shows that Ent was not part of the wrong turn theory. In one of my interviews, General Compton, said he asked General Ent if Ent would start Court Martial proceedings against Kane because Kane did not follow directly behind Compton. This exchange of words were after Compton told Ent he had made a navigational error and would Ent approve a change in plans and radio all the other planes...to bomb targets of opportunity. This was exactly Compton's statement and is recorded. ENT'S ANSWER...per COMPTON... "Keith I can't do that as you did not follow the mission plan either"...

Now if it was Ent's idea to turn, would he have answered Compton as he did? Of course not...Ent was just surplus baggage on the Ploesti...he probably was sitting in the radio operator's chair behind the co-pilot and was not navigating. I also asked Compton if he wanted me to state this in my book? He said "yes" ... it's in the book. The so called "icing on the cake" in one interview I asked the General C. if he would answer tough questions...he agreed to do so. Question: "Who was responsible for the wrong turn?" Compton: "I was totally RESPONSIBLE FOR THE WRONG TURN"...

Later in contacting other key officers...I asked the same question to Compton's Navigator, Harold Wicklund. Answer: "Compton told his co-pilot to follow a new heading"...so again it was Compton who was doing the duties of the navigator. Wicklund said he did not call Compton to correct the new heading as he and the bombardier were having a space problem at that moment where each wanted more area for their job. The navigator needed to spread his charts and the bombardier wanted to be able to use the machine guns.

In summary...Compton a year or so before his passing, gave me the true facts of the conversations in the cockpit of the leader at the moment when the wrong turn was made. Ent was not part of the decision to make the wrong turn...

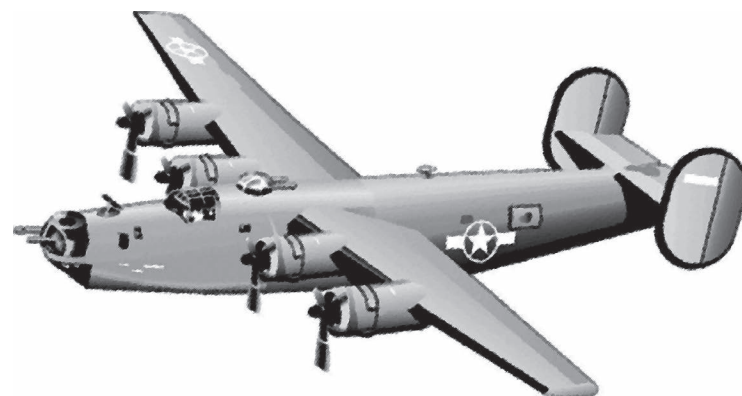
In Rifkin's letter that bombing the wrong target by the 93rd alerted the Germans is far from reality.

Were the Germans ready for us? You bet they were. Nothing that the 93rd did alerted the Germans. They knew we were coming but just did not know when...

Rifkin was in the 345th Squadron but apparently after my tour as Squadron Commander.

I was appointed as Commander about September of 1943 to March of 1944. None of my books show he was on the Low Level Ploesti.

*Robert W. Sternfels, Major USAF Res...*



My name is Donald Behr. I am the only son of Thomas Samuel Behr and Martha Haish Behr. My mother has lived with us for more than fifteen years, following my dad's death. For many years, she and I have enjoyed reading the Pyramiders Magazine. I am contacting you about several things.

Three weeks ago, I had the privilege, along with my middle son, to experience a short ride in the B-24 "Witchcraft" which is operated on tour with the Collings Foundation. Anyone who has any interest in the men who flew in the strategic bombing of WWII should consider a flight on the B-24 or B-17 as the Collings Foundation Museum tours the country. I am myself an Air Force veteran, and as a surgeon have had the duty and privilege of caring for many air crew members. But the flight on the B-24 was unbelievably enlightening. The noise, vibrations and close quarters of the plane made the reality of long missions intensely vivid and eye-opening. The night before the flight, my son and I reexamined the album of my dad's WWII memories. In fact, we took with us a blood chit, silken map of the Mediterranean and his Pyramiders certificate of three hundred combat hours.

Curiously, the certificate is dated and signed by John Kane on 01 August, 1943. I also reread an article about Dad giving a speech at a war-bonds rally after he had returned from combat, where he was serving as an instructor-pilot in Tennessee. It explains how he had dropped out of college after two years to become an air cadet. And how he had gone to North Africa, and completed a combat tour. And how he had finally returned home to America, and married his college sweetheart. My father was twenty-two years old at the time he gave this speech and had lived a lifetime of experience already. My son who took the flight with me will be twenty-two in June, and will complete his degree and begin graduate school shortly. Times have certainly changed. We certainly need to remember and revere what that generation did.

I am also looking for help because, among my father's things, I found a handwritten copy and a published copy of a poem that was titled *The Raving*, "written with apologies to Edgar Alien Poe." The poem was written between July '42 and July '43. I have previously spoken to B-24 crew members from North Africa who remembered the poem quite well. The handwritten copy is signed with the names of lieutenants Behr, Jobe and Robinson. What I am looking for is any information on the other two authors or their families/descendants. I have some photos and other writings from them, and I would love to share them and to hear more stories. I dearly wish that I had talked with my dad more about his experiences and I know that my sons would love to learn more, as well. I can't imagine that the other families wouldn't feel the same way. The first few and last few lines of the poem are as follows:

### **The Raving**

Once upon a mission dreary  
When of combat I'd grown weary  
I had flown a thousand hours  
And was sure to fly some more.

No more flying! No more missions!  
No more combat! Nevermore!!

This is what information I have on the other authors.

William S. Robinson, Serial Number 0-724222  
Entered the Air Corps from Houston, Texas

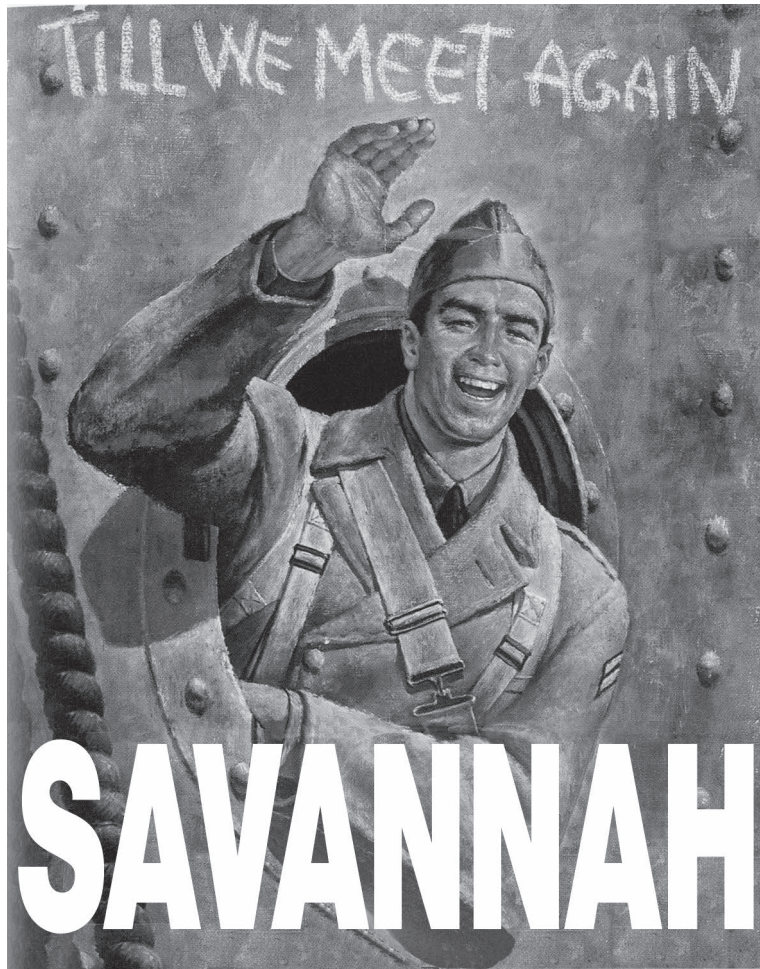
Fletcher H. Jobe, Serial Number 0-660494

If you have any information for me on these gentlemen or their families/descendants, or have information or interest about the poem, I would love to be in contact. My email address is behrranch@digitalpassage.com. Phone numbers: (h) 940-521-9828 and (w) 940-549-3564. Address: 1644 Rocky Mound Road, Graham, Texas 76450

Thank you,

*Donald A. Behr MD*





*The Pyramidiers* is the newsletter of the 98th Bomb Group/  
Wing Veterans Association. If you would like more information  
about our Association, visit our website at:  
<http://www.pyramidiers.com> or THE PYRAMIDIERS.