



THE PYRAMIDIERS

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

August 2014

OFFICERS

BILL SEALS

President, Editor, & Webmaster
2526 Plumfield Lane
Katy, TX 77450
281-395-3005
colbillyseals@hotmail.com

DENNIS POSEY

Vice President
& Reunion Coordinator
1780 Chasewood Park Lane
Marietta, GA 30066
770-509-7734
dennis_posey@att.net

SUZANNE MIODUSZEWSKI

Secretary/Treasurer
Scholarship Chairperson
1137 Joyce Lane
Ann Arbor, MI 48103
734-678-3838
suzannes@me.com

LURA HAYES

Assistant Secretary/Treasurer
15275 Payne Road
Marysville, OH 43040
937-644-1158
wjhayes@imetweb.net

BONNIE HENSEL

Memorabilia Chairperson
317 Bristol Drive, Apt. C
York, PA 17403
717-848-9546
bjhnewstart@hotmail.com

HERB HARPER

Historian Emeritus
3290 NO. Pone Road N.W.
Georgetown, TN 37336-4809
423-336-2768
BOMBGRP98@aol.com

Pieces of My Mind

Greetings to All,

Funny how we come up with ideas on occasion. As I was struggling to think of something to write in this space, my eyes fell upon my *Veterans of Foreign Wars* calendar which was open to the month of July 2014.

The first items to catch my eye were the two small U.S. flags which call attention to the two days in the month when we should display the flag in remembrance of significant events in our history, the fourth and the 27th. Everyone knows the 4th is

the anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, but what about the 27th? This year that date marks the 61st anniversary of the end of the Korean War. Sometimes referred to as a “police action,” make no mistake it was a **war**. According to the DOD, there were more than 36,000 American service men and women killed, 8,176 missing in action and over 100,000 wounded in action. The 98th Bomb Wing flew 36 bombing missions consisting of over 7,000 sorties during the war and lost 17 aircraft. Having paid this very high price to defend South Korea from the communists, the “Forgotten War” should never be forgotten.

Rather interestingly, the next day, the 28th, marks the one hundredth anniversary of the beginning of World War I. Even with America’s delayed entry into the war, we lost over 100,000 killed in action and over 200,000 wounded. This bloody war killed between five and six million allied service men and women and wounded 11 to 12 million, many of whom were maimed for life. These figures alone are certainly sufficient reasons to mark this date in our history.

The last date to catch my eye was the second of July. On this date in 1926 the U.S. Army Air Corps was established in recognition of the



continued on page 2

Pieces of My Mind

continued from front cover

growing role of airpower as evidenced by its use during WW I. The Air Corps became the Army Air Force in June of 1941 as America slowly began to prepare for the coming war. Following the distinguished record of American air power during the war, an independent United States Air Force was established by the National Defense Act of 1947. And as they say, “the rest is history.”

Now don’t you agree that it is funny how we sometimes come up with ideas? All it took was a page in a calendar and a little time on the internet.

Hope to see all of you in Rapid City.

With Warmest Regards to All,

Bill Seals

98th Bomb Group Scholarship Awarded

The 98th Bomb Group Veterans Association Scholarship in memory of Sgt. William Simons has been awarded this year to Kristen Lowery of Dexter, Michigan. Kristen was chosen for the dedication and hard work demonstrated both at school, and service to her community. She has been a proud member her high school’s marching band and during her several years as a Girl Scout she served as a leader in her troop’s Color Guard.

I also believe that political participation is a form of patriotism. Voting and other forms of political participation indicate dedication to your country and an interest in its affairs. Patriotism means having pride in your country.”

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 (including her grandfather, B-24 pilot Bill Lowery), past and present, who put their lives in harm’s way to fight for the freedom we enjoy today.

Congratulations and best wishes to Kristen as she begins this new chapter!

To date this Scholarship has been funded primarily by donations, a portion of the membership dues, and raffles held at the annual reunions. Any donations can be sent to the Scholarship Chairman, Suzanne Mioduszewski.

Recent Donations:

- \$450 in memory of Peter Haritos
- \$50 in memory of Tracey McKenna (Jack)
- \$200 gift Anka Nassi (Sam)
- \$440 Rapid City Reunion Attendees

She will begin her planned career as an environmental engineer at Michigan Technical University this fall. She intends to use the skills and knowledge she will acquire to work on improving the quality of the environment, specializing in either air quality or water quality.

When asked what Patriotism means to her, Kristen answered: *“To me, patriotism means being respectful of your country, its symbols, and its members. It means you respect the veterans and members of the armed forces. It also means you respect the symbols of your country. An example of this is removing hats for the Pledge of Allegiance and the National Anthem.*

New Addresses

LAST	FIRST	MI	ADDRESS	CITY	ST	ZIP	AC	SQD
Ahl	James (Col.)	E.	1620 E Champion Ct, Unit 152	Fullerton	CA	92831	B-29	344
Palmer	Walter	J.	2334 TuscanHills n	Las Cruces	NM	88011	B-47	HQ
Peterson	Harold	E.	300 Hadwiger, No 116	Edmond	OK	73034	B-24	344
Pitts	Denny	L.	7849 Cedar Lake Rd	Oscoda	MI	48750	B-29	345
Just	Mrs. Carmella (Walter)	M.	4966 Chablis Court	Fairfield	OH	45014	B-24	415

Message from the Secretary . . .

Here we are getting ready for the August newsletter and our Reunion in Rapid City is fast approaching! Given the time of year, the distance, and the age and health of some of our members; it appears we are going to have a good group. I know we have all been looking forward to being together once again, and I understand more than ever now why these times meant so much to my Dad. These once-a-year gatherings are time to take from our everyday life, not only to connect with each other, but also to remember the legacy of the 98th Bomb Group and those who are gone from us and those who can’t be with us this year—John, Bill, Ralph, Bob, George, Peter, Russell, Jack, Lloyd, Homer, Jerry.....

I would be remiss not to mention the passing of a wonderful gentlemen and friend, Peter Haritos. Those who were lucky enough to meet Pete and talk with him will remember his soft voice and winning smile. As part of the greatest generation, Peter left college to join the U.S. Army Air Corps. He was stationed in North Africa and Italy and participated in 50 missions in Europe, including the Ploesti Raids. Peter’s military career included active participation of great intensity throughout WWII. He functioned as an Engineer Gunner and he was awarded the Air Medal plus the Meritorious Service Medal for his courage and defense of the country he loved. Returning home, he continued serving in the USAF Reserves from which he retired with the rank of Chief Master Sergeant. Pete also shared a great gift with us—his devoted wife, Dolores, whom you will remember as serving faithfully as our wonderful newsletter editor for many years. Our very deepest sympathy to Dolores and family.

We must do all we can to continue to support this organization that meant so much to our founders! Think of those you served with and their families and get the word out to them about joining this great organization. The newsletters alone are more than worth the \$20 dues fee. Let’s get some new members on board!!

Susie

Deceased

LAST	FIRST	MI	ADDRESS	CITY	ST	ZIP	AC	SQD	DOD
Carlson	George	R.	3001 SW 24th Ave, Apt 512	Ocala	FL	34471	Member	B-29	344 07/05/14
Chance	James	C.	292 Swanson Lodge Rd	Troy	MT	59935	Member	B-29	344 04/17/14
Haritos	Peter	T.	5 Elmbrook Rd	Bedford	MA	01730	Member	B-24	345 05/21/14
McCown	Homer	P.	3467 Ridgewood Dr	Hilliard	OH	43026	Member	B-24	HQ 03/31/14
Page	Russell	B.	3009 Dartmouth College Hwy	North Haverhill	NH	03774	Member	B-24	344 01/21/14
Pearlman	Jack	L.	2000 North River Rd	West Lafayette	IN	47906	Member	B-24	344 04/18/14
Smith	Lloyd	D.	1651 County Road 995	Ashland	OH	44805	Member	B-29	344 05/09/14
Gibbs	Luverne	D.	6614 SW Garden Home Rd	Portland	OR	97223	Honorary	B-24	345 03/30/12
McEvoy	Phyllis (Lester)		403 Putnam St	West Hazelton	PA	18202	Honorary	B-24	345
McKenna	Tracey (Jack)		2431 S. Elba Road	Lapeer	MI	48446	Honorary	B-24	344 04/03/14
Driscoll	Jerry		PO Box 1244	Perry	FL	32348	Associate	B-24	345 05/26/14

New Members

LAST	FIRST	ADDRESS	CITY	ST	ZIP	MEMBERSHIP	AC	SQ	MEMBER	RELATION
Wikstrom	Ellen	337 Ellis Point Rd	Aurora	NY	13026	Associate	B-29		1st Lt Allen F. Fraser	Daughter (Notes: killed at Yakota on take-off 2/7/52)
Lowery	Kristen	7180 Palmer	Dexter	MI	48130	Scholarship 2014	B-24	344	William Lowery	Granddaughter

World War II Overseas Diary

of Kenneth E. Ackerman F/O T123901; Lt. 01695431

Editor's Introduction: I received this diary a few years ago and have tried to find space in this newsletter to include portions of the diary in an issue. Finally, there is space to do it justice. I have only included selected entries—not because there are any uninteresting entries, space simply does not permit inclusion of the full diary. I have reproduced Ken's diary entries as he wrote them without an attempt to correct grammar or spelling because I wanted to reproduce the diary in Ken's words. If you would like a copy of the full diary, I'll send a copy to you.

The dated entries are preceded by some of Ken's remembrances. As you read on, please remember this was written by hand by Ken when he was nearing his eighties and he was trying to remember events that occurred over fifty years before. When I try to remember events that happened when I was flying combat missions only forty some years ago, I don't do nearly as well as Ken, and you certainly don't want to try to read my handwriting.

F/O Kenneth E. Ackerman
July 2001
100 Colonial Way
Columbus, OH 43235

To My Grandchildren:

At the request of John,* after his father told him I had a so called diary of my missions in Italy during 1944, I put this together.

This so called diary consists of a combination of mission briefing notes made at the time regarding missions, material from my 201 file (personnel file), my Flight Log Book, and strike pictures taken from our plane, or one of the others in our 345th squadron.

I thank my wife Sue for her ongoing interest in putting this together and our neighbors Janet and Janis Schaffer for organizing materials and running the original copy on their computer.

[Signed:] Ken Ackerman

**Editor's note: John, mentioned above, is one of Ken's grandchildren.*

As I remember, Bob Holm was our crew navigator. Bob was the only college graduate on the crew and at 26 considered by all of us as the old man. He took me under his wing, taught me navigation in addition to the brief course in Bombardment School. Flying to Italy by way of South America and Africa we had lots

of time (for navigation) including some for celestial navigation. In Brazil the Southern Cross was beautiful as part of night navigation. After we got to Italy, he talked me into renting a box at the opera in Lecce with him, and as we attended he explained the plot to me. One opera we missed and the Italian family next to us

were quite relieved when we made it to the next opera. They feared we had not made it back from a mission. So this is when I first saw Madame Butterfly, etc.

The navigator-bombardier area in the nose of the B-24 was quite limited. First you crawled alongside of the nose wheel under the co-pilot seat to get there. The navigator stood up at his navigation table. The bombardier on his knees over the bomb sight in front of the navigator's area. To get to the nose turret the nose gunner would come through the area, for the nose turret was in the area above the bombsight. When first getting to the area each would hook up their communication cable, then at 9,000 feet altitude his oxygen and at about 15,000 feet your heated suit, so that meant six cords, tubes, etc. in the area. In addition you wore enough extra clothes in case you got shot down, along with a 45 colt. The colt was mostly for trading purposes if you went down in an area where there were allied sympathizers. On top of this was your parachute harness, including a backpack containing a machete, compass, maps, money and chocolate. The parachute was a snap on one that you put in a corner, except when things got a little rough, then you put it on. On top of this was your may west if need be for floating in the sea. Next at the target or if you were expecting enemy guns you would put on flak jacket and metal helmet. The metal helmet fit over your earphone as well as the top of your head. The war time planes were built fast, in quantity with few conveniences (for the crew). The wind blew through the area so the navigator used thumb tacks to hold his maps in place.

It was cold and just before you got busy at the target area you would remove oxygen mask and remove the ice from the mask and your nose. For the navigator there were silk gloves that helped some. As you started down the bomb run you were quite cold, temperatures -20 C plus, but by the time the Germans had figured out your target and lined up their guns knowing you had to go to a certain route if you were to hit the target you warmed up. In fact as you left the target you would be perspiring.

As things eased up after the bombs were away Holm's bladder would need emptying. With no conveniences Holm would remove his helmet and proceed to fill it, then placed the helmet on the nose gear door. The urine

would freeze solid in short time and later Holm would knock it out of the helmet. Except on one mission the Germans had moved in guns we did not know about, with the first burst of flak, Holm grabbed his helmet and placed it on his head. I'll never forget the expression in his eyes as the urine dripped over his oxygen mask.

Talking about conveniences, the first three months we lived in tents and just behind our tent was a slit trench with a box like seat the length of the trench. I remember our co-pilot Peterson got what we called the G.I.'s, and as he was sitting over the trench an older Italian woman stopped by for a conversation, so he came back to the tent to wait for her to leave. Then when he went back to the trench, there she was ready to resume the conversation.

After we moved into the Castle (the villa the squadron moved into), there was a both room and in the bath room there was an extra piece of equipment. I took the peculiar piece to be some kind of urinal and when I leaned down to flush the thing, I got a stream of water in my face. The farm boy had never seen a bidet.

There were some close calls. A folk wolfe 190 came in from the sun and raked us with gunfire. One of the 30 caliber slugs cut the throat mike from Love's neck (top gunner, radio operator leaving only a red welt on his neck and hole in the plane showing its path).

The waist gunner, Burbine, had a piece of flak cut his heated suit electric cord so neatly that it took close examination to see the cord was even there.

In the nose Holm the navigator was leaning over to adjust the heat on his suit when a piece of flak came through where his head was most of the time. As Holm stood up another piece of flak came through where his behind had just been.

Bob Holm and I separated after I started flying as a navigator. I did fly on his left wing once when he was lead navigator for the wing (112 planes).

June 6, 1944 is of special note. When we go to briefing at 11:00 A.M. there on the screen was the English Channel. I said to Holm we cannot make it back there today. At that time briefing started. The Group Intelligence Officer stated, "American troops are landing on the beaches of Normandy. For the most part

15th Air Force will be going to southern Germany to keep the Germans from moving airplanes and support towards France. Since oil is important to support any movement the 98th will going back to Ploesti.”

On all missions we had P-51, or P-38 fighter cover, or both except where I stated otherwise.

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May 18, 1944

Homestead, Florida- open orders an hour after takeoff- destination Italy.

May 27, 1944

Leece, Italy- 98th Bomb Group, 345th Bomb Squadron.

May 28, 1944

Pilot Eckles and navigator Holm went to southern France. We set up tents. We got to the 98th Bomb Group, 345th Bomb Squadron on May 27, 1944. 98th Bomb Group made up of four squadrons. Each squadron was scheduled to put up twelve planes each mission. (We seldom had that many planes available. After June 1944 we seldom had more than seven crews per squadron available.)

May 29, 1944

Weiner Neustadt Airdrome Messerschmitt factory. Over target 10:10, 8.5 hours mission time. Credit two missions.

Heavy antiaircraft fire. JU 88's dropped butterfly bombs on us going into target. Fighters hit us for about thirty minutes after leaving antiaircraft area. 150 fighters in the area. Flew 7th position third box 98th group, 47th wing. Heavy losses for wing. Our group came through well, except for holes in planes.

May 31, 1944

Ploesti railroad yards—credit two missions. 194 guns [*in target area*]. Takeoff 5:50, 8.0 hours mission time. 22,500 feet elevation dropped bombs. Temperature -22 degrees C. Flak was hitting heavy, but we only got five holes in our B-24.

Axis Sally welcomed each of the Lt. Eckles crew to the 98th Bomb Group in Italy by name, rank, and serial number. Not good for the nerves radio Berlin.

June 6, 1944

Ploesti—credit for two missions. Take off 5:15. Target 9:20. Mission time 7:7 hours. Dr. Rehm flew in 391, white. Had 10-500# bombs. Romano Americano refinery. Tough mission. Sky full of flak. Much of it 155 mm. After target, 5 FW-190's lobbed 20 mm at us.

Roberts the tail gunner got a probable kill on one of them. Only two holes in our ship. Lost 345th plane, pilot Dave Osborne. The Yugoslav Chetnicks rescued them. They got back to Italy after 66 days.

June 11, 1944

Constanta- credit for two missions. Mission time 8.3 hours. Constanta is on the Black Sea. It is listed as longest mission flown in Europe? One group of P-51's flew cover going to target. A group of P-38's flew cover over the target. The P-51's were back to fly cover on way back.

Smoke cover over oil storage. Could not see target, but could see oil fires we started. Black Sea beautiful. Went in on preset heading, were on collision course with another group.

June 18, 1944

Ploesti- no mission. Weather closed in after briefing, before takeoff. 31st fighter group was to fly cover for us.

June 23, 1944

Briefed for Ploesti. Weather closed in crossing the Danube River, turned back. Tried to bomb rail yards at Nis, Yugoslavia. We could not see target. Flak heavy.

Records show that I went to Ferrara, which is not true. Got credit for mission. hurt my wrist that evening plying volleyball.

June 24, 1944

Ploesti- took off. Weather closed in, turned back. Flying white N. No credit for mission. Went to hospital and it was determined wrist was broken, so was grounded

from high-altitude flying. Went to Rome on leave for a week.

While out for broken wrist flew low level navigation trip with Colonel Nelson. During period crew bombed Toulon, Budapest, sawmill in Yugoslavia and Ploesti.

July 14, 1944

Budapest, Hungary-mission 6.5 hours. Three boxes of window (radar jamming material) per aircraft. P-38 escort. Target elevation 354 feet. 5-1,000 lbs. bombs, lost power in one engine. Dropped bombs in rear bomb bay. Dropped four bombs at target. Hit oil storage and railroad. Did not drop Danube Bridge.

Extra gunner wounded (Bernadit) two wounds in his leg. Got five holes in ship. Five ME 109's made pass at us. We could plainly see pilots. They missed us and we missed them.

July 21, 1944

Mestre, Italy- railroad yards. Target was to be Horsching, Austria. Flight position 4-3-1 P P-38 cover (Horsching). . 10 seconds, -.25 bomb firing interval 25 feet. Ran into weather. Bomb Mestre railroad yards just outside Venice. Had quite a bit of flak. Made run of 255 degrees, so was in flak ten minutes.

Chunk of flak came in between pilot and co-pilot. Hit engineer in flak suit, knocked him out. He came too okay in a few minutes. Concussion knocked pilot and copilot from controls momentarily. Short a gunner, so I flew as gunner after dropping bombs.

July 22, 1944

Ploesti, Romania-8.8 hours mission time. Credit for one mission. Americana Romania oil refinery. 241-245 guns at target. On course 8:34 at 9,000 feet. Target time 11:15; ten 500 pound bombs. .10 seconds, .025 tail fuse.

Ploesti not bad for us, one flak hole in engine cowling. We were shot at in Yugoslavia. and flak was heavier over Ploesti. Our ship was the only one in the squadron that came home ready to fly the next day. Fellow in our squadron was shot down over the target. The fighters also got a green ship.

July 24, 1944

Genoa, Italy- 7.5 hours mission time. Port facilities and oil storage and railroad sidings. Escort intercepted us at 11:37. Dropped propaganda leaflets and ten 500 pound bombs. Things went very well, very little flak. Hit four boats, everything around the pin point, results excellent. Saw Monte Christo and Elba and Corsica on way to target.

July 26, 1944

Markerdorf, Austria- airdrome near Ft. Poltin, 40 miles from Weiner Neustadt. 8:25 on course at 7,000 feet at San Vito, Italy. 306th fighter wing flew cover. Flew 823A airplane 21,500 feet bombing altitude.

Tough mission. Went by Weiner Neustadt up flak alley over Vienna. Circled over Vienna waiting for 450th bomb group to go over target. They were out of position. We were in heavy flak 21 minutes. Luckily we got only seven holes, largest one through camera door. Dropped leaflets, missed target with bombs because of weather.

July 30, 1944

Lipse-Nagrskanizan, Hungary.

Flew white 823A. Takeoff 6:35 with no escort. Mission time 6.4 hours. Gasoline plant and oil field. Target time 10:20.

On first run could not find target. We turned and came back. In the meantime the 376th Bomb Group had bombed and destroyed the target. Our bombs did not do a lot of good. No fighters, no flak, excellent results.

As I remember two 250 pound general purpose bombs hung on the racks, fourteen had gone out at the target. I had tried electrical release. I had tried to salvo the remaining two, they were still there. If we did not get rid of them they would probably drop on the cement runway at landing. I waited till we got below 10,000 feet on the way home, so I would not need to carry any oxygen bottle as I picked them out. With a screw driver and hanging over open bomb bay door, to say the least I was apprehensive as I got rid of them into the upper Adriatic Sea.

July 31, 1944

I did not fly with crew. Went to 98th headquarters and received battlefield commission As 2nd Lieutenant.

August 1, 1944

Ploesti- mission cancelled because of weather and 98th celebration of anniversary of low level Ploesti mission by 98th was held.

Shipping was slow, so we got our first beer rations in Italy. Flew them up to 20,000 feet for two hours to cool the beer. Good party.

August 6, 1944

Toulon, France-8.2 hours mission time.

Bombed submarine docks and underground submarine pens. Eight submarines located at Toulon. Had ten 500 pound bombs, 50 feet interval. Went in at 23,500 Feet, temperature -25 degrees C., position third group, third squadron. 98th was second group.

Made nice run into target. Flak heavy, but only got one hole. Caused a lot of commotion In harbor. Hit three ships, nineteen other ships headed for open water.

August 10, 1944

Ploesti, Romania-Southern oil refinery. Sixty enemy fighters in area. 7.1 mission time. Smoke screen over target. Bombed on radar, hit to the right of target. Flak heavy, the group lost one plane. All ten men bailed out over target. Saw other groups lose four planes over or near target. Got two flak holes, one in nose turret and one above pilot. Not a bad mission for Ploesti and for us.

August 13, 1944

Flew with Captain Nelson to check next day's lead plane.

Moved into castle. Big improvement over tent. Nice room for the four of us. Second floor outside entrance. Over barbershop across from squadron headquarters.

August 15, 1944

St. Tropez. Forty 100 pound bombs. Southern France invasion by Allies. Went to briefing at 11:00 PM on

8/14. Started engines 2:30 AM . Fog was so heavy could hardly see the end of the wings. Specht and crew were next ahead of us on takeoff. Plane blew up when wheels were raised. Four gunners in tail of plane were rescued. Specht the pilot of plane walked past our window just before briefing and said," here is where I go down in history or just go down. Pray for me." We said, "we fly tonight too." The 98th lost four ships on takeoff, all blew up. Another was lost over sea on way to target.

Of twenty eight crews at takeoff, we were one of two that made it to the target. Bombed at 12,000 feet. Landing boats were closer to beach than we were when bombs released. We hit beach beautifully, digging forty fox holes for a distance of 1,500 feet. Bombs hit beach at 0727, troops at 0730.

As we crossed Corsica, B-26s were taking off and there were six planes on the runway waiting to takeoff. Off the beach there were battleships so close to the beach that the gun crews were aiming down the barrels of their 14" guns to hit enemy gun emplacements. An 88 open up on us just as we dropped our bombs. A navy plane taking off from a carrier looked so close to the shore that from 12,000 feet it appeared to take out the 88 battery on takeoff. There were two battleships, four aircraft carriers and 125 destroyers under us as we went into drop our bombs.

August 18, 1944

Ploesti- mission time 6.7 hours. Takeoff 6:00, target time 9:51. Flew 823A, now our regular plane.

Lost an engine and a turbo on another engine five minutes before target. Dropped bombs and headed home. We got a little flak. The 98th group lost three ships. We go home okay. Changed #2 engine before ship flew again.

August 20-21, 1944

Flew with Captain Nelson (later Colonel Nelson) to check out next day's lead plane.

Captain Nelson was from Coffeyville, Kansas and commanding officer of our 345th squadron.

August 22, 1944

Vienna, Austria-mission time 7.5 hours, credit for two missions. Labau oil storage. Bombs four 1,000 general purpose. P-38 escort. Flew fifth position in first squadron. First group dropped window (radar protection) and propaganda leaflets.

In flak ten minutes, got ten holes in ship, one piece hit my helmet and raised it up on my head, small dent. Sheldon landed at Fogia on two engines. MacAnich came back on three engines. Got 100% of bombs in 2,000 foot circle. Very good for full group.

August 27, 1944

Avisio Trento, Italy-mission time 7.1 hours. Brenner pass railroad bridge. Flew 4th position, second squadron, first group.

Flak on mountain to our left as we went into target. Missed by 300 feet. Hit bridge well Got home without mishap, but did burn up # 4 engine to keep up with formation on way home.

August 28, 1944

Got my clothes from the states. I had brought a good supply with me because I had packed bombsight in extra clothes coming over.

September 4, 1944

Got checked out as navigator, Crew except for Holm are at Capri. Flew with observation plane, not on a mission

Lead ship blew up on takeoff. Everyone got out.

Smith got back from Ploesti. Three men were saved on crew. Shiffs was the pilot, Henderson the bombardier. Shot down early August. (1970, correction six men were saved).

The Russians overran Romania in mid-August and the Romanians surrendered after the Nazis withdrew from the country. The allies were able to gather all the POWs held by the Romanians together and returned them to Italy. (Editor's Note)

September 10, 1944

Vienna, Austria-mission time 7.9 hours. Credit for two missions. Southern ordinance depot. Expected 75 enemy fighters. Had 28 P-38s for escort for 47th wing alone. Were third wing over Vienna that day. Target time 10:39. 98th lost two ships, 15th Air Force lost 24 planes. In flak 14 minutes. Got hole in top turret dome and bombardier's panel. Vienna looked nice from the air. Saw more ships go down than ever before in one day. In 28 minutes lost 24 ships. Saw a folke wolfe take out a B-24 and a P-38 in one pass.

September 12, 1944

Munich- mission time 8.4 hours. Allach aircraft engine factory for folke wolves. P-38 and P-51 escort, three groups. Bombed from 23,000 feet. Actual 22,700 feet.

Going to target White 1, Sheldon pilot, second position turned back(short on gasoline). Next 1st position Captain Nelson (20 minutes from target) lost two engines and turned back. We went from third position to first position. Adams and Mayfield collided while changing positions in the formation and went down in a spin. Three men got out.

We lead the three remaining planes to target. My bombs did not hit target. Two planes that went over target with us made it back to Ansonia (just behind enemy lines). We got back to home field. Flak heavy but no holes in our ship.

Lost last engine on landing. Did not realize how much trouble we were in till I saw fire trucks and ambulances along runway.

September 13, 1944

Avisio, Italy- mission time 7.3 hours. Colonel Manzo, 98th group commander lead. Target was Avisio viaduct. No escort. Six 1,000 pound bombs. Flying fourth position, second squadron, 1st group.

Flak very accurate and not too heavy, but they were really shooting at us. Got two flak holes. One top turret, one left wing. Hit target, destroyed.

It was the 98th Bomb Group's 300th mission of the war. Dropped three spans of the railroad bridge.

September 16, 1944

It was my second anniversary in the army. Went practice bombing in the morning. In afternoon General Twinning presented the group with a Presidential Citation, and recognized us for completing 300 missions.

September 19, 1944

Mitrovica, Yugoslavia-mission time 4.7 hours, shortest ever for me. Target railroad bridge. Flew with Captain Nelson, squadron commander leading the bomb group that day, as nose turret navigator. (The nose turret of the lead plane is a lonely position).

Did not drop bombs on target. Bombardier did not drop on 1st pass and on second pass was pushed left (collision course) as bombs dropped. Other three squadrons of group did good job. No flak.

September 24, 1944

Athens. Greece- Athens airfield. Flew with Harrington in second position as bombardier. Also as second navigator in nose turret. Set up bomb sight. Dropped forty 100 pound bombs. Cover airfield well. Several large German transports on field.

That evening Flight Surgeon grounded me for three days. He found me asleep standing in the chow line.

Ken's mission this day was the 15th consecutive mission he had flown. (Editor's Note)

October 10, 1944

Vicenza, Italy-mission time 6.0.

Flew as navigator second plane of attack unit. Comet flew as bombardier. Weather closed in at northern end of Adriatic. Landed with bombs. Got credit for mission, which finished me up with 50 missions. Total of 276.3 hours of combat time.

November 1, 1944

Naples, Italy. Went onboard French ship with French crew. Received card for eating at Captain's mess, and 75 Seventh Army troops to look after. They had been through North Africa, Anzio, and Southern France invasion. I thought I was tired, but not compared to these 75 soldiers.

November 17, 1944

Landed in New York. Came back by convoy on a loaded ship. How I got Captain's mess, French chef and steak every day, I do not know.

As I remember on loading on the ship I was given the responsibility to look after the area of the ship that had been part of the grand ballroom. My duties included watching after 75 American soldiers. Along with the duties I got a pass that got me around the ship and to the Captain's dining room, French waiters, a plate sized steak at least once every day and walks on the deck.

Just as we were about to leave Naples harbor, medics loaded 400 stretcher patients from the local army hospital. At the same time on the other side of the ship, we loaded what was called in Naples "De Gaulles harem," seven beautiful for most part blondes. That was the last time I saw them until we unloaded them in Algiers. I had met the girls in Naples, in fact one of them gave me the key to her room. But on investigation and seeing all the guards at the hotel I was easily discouraged. The French has tried to get the Americans to move them to southern France, but had been turned down, so this was the route taken.

My 75 soldiers were no problem, though, I was concerned about some of them. They had been in combat over a period of three years and for seventeen days some of them hardly moved. There was one regulation, no gambling. I tried to ignore it, but upon entering the area, right in front of me was a big crap game. I was upon them before someone yelled attention. I returned their salute and said at ease. Then I said I want to see the ranking sergeant over here. A staff sergeant came over and said: "one, you know the instructions on gambling, two, your observation should have told you that this in the way I enter the area, three, over there is an area I never go." He saluted, I returned the salute and walked on. In five minutes the entire group were in the area I did not go.

We did have a submarine scare about one half day after leaving Gibraltar. The two sub-chasers and destroyer with our convoy dropped some depth charges and we manned our guns, but in a short time it was over.

On entering New York harbor we unloaded our stretcher patients first and while waiting a Red Cross worker came up the gang plank and asked if there was

something she could get us. I checked and came back and told her my group would like milk and newspapers.

Elections had taken place since we had left Naples. She said "that I can do" and seemed relieved that was all they asked for. One of the soldiers told me it had been three years since he had fresh milk.

Ken flew his first combat mission on May 29, 1944 and his final on October 10. During this period the 98th flew 79 missions and Ken flew 39 of them. The group lost 23

aircraft for a loss rate per sortie of 1.2%. Interestingly, the loss rate per month varied very little during the entire 417 missions the 98th flew. There were, of course, missions where the loss rate was much higher—the low level mission being the highest. The losses due to enemy fighters decreased as allied fighter escort for the bombers increased in number and range, but the losses to flak increased as the enemy added anti-aircraft guns. During the war the 98th flew 8,900 sorties on 417 missions and lost 108 aircraft.

Just 60 Years of Change . . .

One evening a grandson was talking to his grandmother about current events. These included a school shooting and a computer hacking story on the evening news. After their initial comments, the grandson asked his grandmother how life had changed since she was born.

The Grandmother replied, "Well, let me think a minute. I was born before: television, penicillin, polio shots, frozen foods, Xerox, contact lenses, Frisbees and the pill. There were no credit cards, laser beams or ball-point pens. Man had not yet invented pantyhose, air conditioners, dishwashers or clothes dryers. We hung clothes out to dry in the fresh air, and man hadn't yet walked on the moon.

"Your Grandfather and I got married first, then lived together. Every family had a father and a mother. Until I was 25, I called every man older than me, 'Sir.' After I turned 25, I still called policemen and every man with a title, 'Sir.'

"Our lives were governed by the Ten Commandments, good judgment, and common sense. We were taught to know the difference between right and wrong and to stand up and take responsibility for our actions. Serving your country was a privilege; living in this country was a bigger privilege. Draft dodgers were people who closed front doors when the evening breeze began to blow.

"We thought fast food was what people ate during Lent.

"Having a meaningful relationship meant getting along with your cousins. Time-sharing referred to the evening and weekend hours that family spent together—not purchasing condominiums.

"If you saw anything with *Made in Japan* on it, it was junk. The term 'making out' referred to how you did on your school exam. Pizza Hut, McDonald's, and instant coffee were unheard of. We had 5- & 10-cent (five and dime) stores where you could actually buy things for 5 and 10 cents.

"Ice-cream cones, phone calls, rides on a streetcar, and a Pepsi were each a nickel. And if you didn't want to splurge, you could spend your nickel on enough stamps to mail one letter and two postcards. You could buy a new Ford Coupe for \$600, but who could afford one? Too bad, because gas was 11 cents a gallon. In my day, grass was mowed. Coke was a cold drink. Pot was something your mother cooked in, and rock music was your grandmother's lullaby. Aids were helpers in the Principal's office. Chip meant a piece of wood. Hardware was found in a hardware store, and software wasn't even a word.

"We were the last generation to actually believe that a lady needed a husband to have a baby. We volunteered to protect our precious country. No wonder people call us "old and confused" and say there is a generation gap.

The grandson thought his grandmother was very old. After all, he was 13 and anyone a generation older than his parents seemed ancient. You, however, might be quite surprised to know that his reminiscing grandmother was just 61 years old. She was born late in 1952.

Just over 60 years . . . and the changes have been monumental! Something to ponder.

U.S. Soldiers' and Airmen's Home • Washington, D.C.

History of the U.S. Soldiers' Home

Beautiful, century-old buildings stand as testament to the rich history that makes up one of America's oldest veterans' retirement homes. The Soldiers' Home was established in 1851, as an "asylum for old and disabled veterans." Four of the original buildings still stand and are listed as national historic landmarks. Two of the buildings, Quarters 1 and Anderson Cottage, served as the summer White House for U.S. presidents—Chester Arthur, Rutherford B. Hayes, James Buchanan and, most notably, Abraham Lincoln.

Lincoln lived at the Soldiers' Home in what is now called Anderson Cottage during our nation's most turbulent history, the Civil War. Not only was it a break from the hot, humid city, but also from the intense political pressures of being president. In fact, Lincoln spent one-fourth of his presidency at Soldiers' Home, and it was here that he wrote the last draft of the Emancipation Proclamation. In 1865, Lincoln's wife, Mary, wrote to her friend Elizabeth Blair Lee, "How dearly I loved the Soldiers' Home."

Historic Anderson Cottage was constructed in 1842-43 as the home of George W. Riggs, who went on to establish the famous Riggs National Bank in Washington, D.C. In 1851, the cottage and farm land surrounding it was purchased by the government to form the core of what is today the U.S. Soldiers' and Airmen's Home.

This Early Gothic Revival cottage served as the first quarters for the "inmates" of the "asylum." They lived here for approximately five years, until they moved into the Scott (now called Sherman) dormitory to the east of Anderson Cottage. This building also was the home's first hospital and guest house and is where the women were housed when they were first admitted to the Home in 1954.

The Cottage was named after Maj. Robert Anderson, who commanded the Union's Fort Sumter S.C., where the Civil War's first volleys were fired. Anderson, along with Jefferson Davis and, most important, Gen.

Winfield Scott, fought to establish a soldiers' home for nearly 25 years.

Congress finally approved a bill in 1851, following the Mexican War. In charge of American troops during the war, Scott now was considered an American hero. He returned with \$150,000 that was paid to him by Mexico City, in lieu of ransacking. He paid off his troops, bought new supplies, and offered the remaining money to Congress to establish the Soldiers' Home.

Since the home's beginning, operational funding came from the soldiers (and later, airmen) themselves. A permanent trust fund was established nearly 150 years ago, and was fed by monthly, active duty payroll deductions of 25 cents, when the average pay of a soldier was \$7 a month. All fines and forfeitures from the Army, and later the Air Force, came to the USSAH and, combined with the monthly withholding, provided the principal support for the home throughout its history.

The U.S. Soldiers' and Airmen's Home Today

Nestled in the heart of our nation's capital on 320 acres of secure, park-like setting, nearly 1,300 veterans have found a home. No longer called "The Old Soldiers' Home," the U.S. Soldiers' and Airmen's Home is a thriving community that offers 20-year retirees and certain veterans a haven of retreat. It is also a perfect example of "*The Military Taking Care of Its Own.*"

During its nearly 150-year history, USSAH has evolved from an "asylum for the old and disabled," to a retirement community that offers a secure and comfortable lifestyle filled with activity. Whereas "inmates" once lived in eight-man squad rooms, all of today's residents have private rooms, and many have private baths and walk-in closets. Private vehicles are allowed with ample parking available, and amenities such as cable TV, air-conditioning and elevators are in every building.



Both of these structures are part of the U.S. Soldiers' and Airmen's Home. The building below is known as Anderson Cottage and once served as a part-time residence for U.S. presidents, including Abraham Lincoln.

Three meals a day are served in a modern cafeteria that seats 1,400 people. The facility offers a wide variety of food, including short-order and special diet lines and salad bar. A city within a city, the Home has its own banking facilities and post office, as well as three chapels, a new fitness center/gymnasium and a six-lane bowling alley. The home's private bus leaves daily to take residents to a nearby race track, shopping mall, Smithsonian museums, and many other attractions.

For those interested in hobbies, there are arts and crafts shops that cater to everyone's talents, such as woodworking, ceramics, photography, oil painting and picture framing. Near the well-groomed, nine-hole golf course and driving range are garden plots and two tranquil lakes, which offer sport fishing for crappie, bass, bream and catfish.

Health care services range from community nursing and assisted living in the dormitories, to primary, intermediate and skilled care at the King Health Center. This 200-bed, well-equipped, longterm care facility received a three-year accreditation with commendation from the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations. Licensed specialists in dentistry, optometry, podiatry, internal medicine and diabetes are available, as well as professionals in physical, occupational and recreational therapy, and speech-language pathology.



A shuttle bus leaves the home six times a day for Walter Reed Army Medical Center, where residents receive acute care and have access to some of the country's finest doctors and surgeons. Other local hospitals include the Washington VA Medical Center and Bethesda Naval Hospital. To sum up, the home is a total life-care community that adds to an active resident's life now, and provides important services to meet any needs he/she will have in the future.

The home is, after all, a special place for special people. For additional information, please call 1-800-422-9988, visit www.afrh.com, or write:

Public Affairs Office, USSAH Washington, DC 20317

Courtesy of the Armed Forces Retirement Home (AFRH)

The Bridges at Toko-Ri

The Real Story

by CAPT Paul N. Gray, USN, Ret,
USNA '41, former CO of VF-54

Recently, some friends saw the movie “*The Bridges at Toko-ri*” on late night TV. After seeing it, they said, “You planned and led the raid. Why don’t you tell us what really happened?” Here goes.

I hope Mr. Michener will forgive the actual version of the raid. His fictionalized account certainly makes more exciting reading.

On 12 December 1951 when the raid took place, Air Group 5 was attached to Essex, the flag ship for Task Force 77. We were flying daily strikes against the North Koreans and Chinese. God! It was cold. The main job was to interdict the flow of supplies coming south from Russia and China. The rules of engagement imposed by political forces in Washington would not allow us to bomb the bridges across the Yalu River where the supplies could easily have been stopped. We had to wait until they were dispersed and hidden in North Korea and then try to stop them.

The Air Group consisted of two jet fighter squadrons flying Banshees and Grumman Panthers plus two prop attack squadrons flying Corsairs and Skyraiders. To provide a base for the squadrons, Essex was stationed 100 miles off the East Coast of Korea during that bitter Winter of 1951 and 1952.

I was CO of VF-54, the Skyraider squadron. VF-54 started with 24 pilots. Seven were killed during the cruise. The reason 30 percent of our pilots were shot down and lost was due to our mission. The targets were usually heavily defended railroad bridges. In addition, we were frequently called in to make low-level runs with rockets and napalm to provide close support for the troops.

Due to the nature of the targets assigned, the attack squadrons seldom flew above 2000 or 3000 feet; and it was a rare flight when a plane did not come back without some damage from AA or ground fire.

The single-engine plane we flew could carry the same bomb load that a B-17 carried in WWII; and after flying the 100 miles from the carrier, we could stay on station for 4 hours and strafe, drop napalm, fire rockets or drop bombs. The Skyraider was the right plane for this war.

On a gray December morning, I was called to the flag bridge. Admiral “Black Jack” Perry, the Carrier Division Commander, told me they had a classified request from UN headquarters to bomb some critical bridges in the central area of the North Korean peninsula. The bridges were a dispersion point for many of the supplies coming down from the North and were vital to the flow of most of the essential supplies. The Admiral asked me to take a look at the targets and see what we could do about taking them out. As I left, the staff intelligence officer handed me the pre-strike photos, the coordinates of the target and said to get on with it. He didn’t mention that the bridges were defended by 56 radar-controlled anti-aircraft guns.

That same evening, the Admiral invited the four squadron commanders to his cabin for dinner. James Michener was there. After dinner, the Admiral asked each squadron commander to describe his experiences in flying over North Korea. By this time, all of us were hardened veterans of the war and had some hairy stories to tell about life in the fast lane over North Korea.

When it came my time, I described how we bombed the railways and strafed anything else that moved. I described how we had planned for the next day’s strike against some vital railway bridges near a village named Toko-ri (The actual village was named Majonne). That the preparations had been done with extra care because the pre-strike pictures showed the bridges were surrounded by 56 anti-aircraft guns and we knew this strike was not going to be a walk in the park.

All of the pilots scheduled for the raid participated in the planning. A close study of the aerial photos

How were we going to silence those batteries long enough to destroy the bridges?

confirmed the 56 guns. Eleven radar sites controlled the guns. They were mainly 37 MM with some five inch heavies. All were positioned to concentrate on the path we would have to fly to hit the bridges. This was a World War II air defense system but still very dangerous.

How were we going to silence those batteries long enough to destroy the bridges? The bridges supported railway tracks about three feet wide. To achieve the needed accuracy, we would have to use glide bombing runs. A glide bombing run is longer and slower than a dive bombing run, and we would be sitting ducks for the AA batteries. We had to get the guns before we bombed the bridges.

There were four strategies discussed to take out the radar sites. One was to fly in on the deck and strafe the guns and radars. This was discarded because the area was too mountainous. The second was to fly in on the deck and fire rockets into the gun sites. Discarded because the rockets didn’t have enough killing power. The third was to come in at a high altitude and drop conventional bombs on the targets. This is what we would normally do, but it was discarded in favor of an insidious modification. The one we thought would work the best was to come in high and drop bombs fused to explode over the gun and radar sites. To do this, we decided to take 12 planes; 8 Skyraiders and 4 Corsairs.

Each plane would carry a 2000 pound bomb with a proximity fuse set to detonate about 50 to 100 feet in the air.

We hoped the shrapnel from these huge, ugly bombs going off in mid air would be devastating to the exposed gunners and radar operators.

The flight plan was to fly in at 15,000 feet until over the target area and make a vertical dive bombing run

dropping the proximity-fused bombs on the guns and radars. Each pilot had a specific complex to hit. As we approached the target we started to pick up some flak, but it was high and behind us. At the initial point, we separated and rolled into the dive. Now the flak really became heavy. I rolled in first; and after I released my bomb, I pulled out south of the target area and waited for the rest to join up. One of the Corsairs reported that he had been hit on the way down and had to pull out before dropping his bomb. Three other planes suffered minor flak damage but nothing serious.

After the join up, I detached from the group and flew over the area to see if there was anything still firing. Sure enough there was heavy 37 MM fire from one site, I got out of there in a hurry and called in the reserve Skyraider still circling at 15,000 to hit the remaining gun site. His 2000 pound bomb exploded right over the target and suddenly things became very quiet. The shrapnel from those 2000 lbs. bombs must have been deadly for the crews serving the guns and radars. We never saw another 37 MM burst from any of the 56 guns.

From that moment on, it was just another day at the office. Only sporadic machine gun and small arms fire was encountered. We made repeated glide bombing runs and completely destroyed all the bridges. We even brought gun camera pictures back to prove the bridges were destroyed.

After a final check of the target area, we joined up, inspected our wingmen for damage and headed home.

Mr. Michener plus most of the ship’s crew watched from Vulture’s Row as Dog Fannin, the landing signal officer, brought us back aboard. With all the pilots returning to the ship safe and on time, the Admiral was seen to be dancing with joy on the flag Bridge.

From that moment on, the Admiral had a soft spot in his heart for the attack pilots. I think his fatherly regard for us had a bearing on what happened in port after the raid on Toko-ri. The raid on Toko-ri was exciting; but in our minds, it was dwarfed by the incident that occurred at the end of this tour on the line. The operation was officially named OPERATION PINWHEEL. The pilots called it OPERATION PIN HEAD.

The third tour had been particularly savage for VF-54. Five of our pilots had been shot down. Three not recovered.

I had been shot down for the third time. The mechanics and ordnance men had worked back-breaking hours under medieval conditions to keep the planes flying, and finally we were headed for Yokosuka for ten days of desperately needed R & R.

As we steamed up the coast of Japan, the Air Group Commander, CDR Marsh Beebe, called CDR Trum, the CO of the Corsair squadron, and me to his office. He told us that the prop squadrons would participate in an exercise dreamed up by the commanding officer of the ship. It had been named OPERATION PINWHEEL.

The Corsairs and Skyraiders were to be tied down on the port side of the flight deck; and upon signal from the bridge, all engines were to be turned up to full power to assist the tugs in pulling the ship alongside the dock.

CDR Trum and I both said to Beebe, "You realize that those engines are vital to the survival of all the attack pilots. We fly those single engine planes 300 to 400 miles from the ship over freezing water and over very hostile land. Overstressing these engines is not going to make any of us very happy."

Marsh knew the danger; but he said, "The captain of the ship, CAPT. Wheelock, wants this done, so do it!"

As soon as the news of this brilliant scheme hit the ready rooms, the operation was quickly named OPERATION PIN HEAD; and CAPT. Wheelock became known as CAPT. Wheelchock.

On the evening before arriving in port, I talked with CDR Trum and told him, "I don't know what you are going to do, but I am telling my pilots that our lives depend on those engines and do not give them more

than half power; and if that engine temperature even begins to rise, cut back to idle." That is what they did.

About an hour after the ship had been secured to the dock, the Air Group Commander screamed over the ships intercom for Gray and Trum to report to his office. When we walked in and saw the pale look on Beebe's face, it was apparent that CAPT. Wheelock, in conjunction with the ship's proctologist, had cut a new aperture in poor old Marsh. The ship's CO had gone ballistic when he didn't get the full power from the lashed down Corsairs and Skyraiders, and he informed CDR Beebe that his fitness report would reflect this miserable performance of duty.

The Air Group Commander had flown his share of strikes, and it was a shame that he became the focus of the wrath of CAPT. Wheelock for something he had not done. However, tensions were high; and in the heat of the moment, he informed CDR Trum and me that he was placing both of us and all our pilots in hack until further notice. A very severe sentence after 30 days on the line.

The Carrier Division Commander, Rear Admiral "Black Jack" Perry, was a considerate man, but his official character would strike terror into the heart of the most hardened criminal. He loved to talk to the pilots; and in deference to his drinking days, Admiral Perry would reserve a table in the bar of the Fujia Hotel and would sit there drinking CocaCola while buying drinks for any pilot enjoying R & R in the hotel.

Even though we were not comfortable with this gruff older man, he was a good listener and everyone enjoyed telling the Admiral about his latest escape from death. I realize now he was keeping his finger on the morale of the pilots and how they were standing up to the terror of daily flights over a very hostile land.

The Admiral had been in the hotel about three days; and one night, he said to some of the fighter pilots sitting at his table, "Where are the attack pilots? I have not seen any of them since we arrived." One of them said, "Admiral, I thought you knew. They were all put in hack by the Air Group Commander and restricted to the ship." In a voice that could be heard all over the hotel, the Admiral bellowed to his aide, "Get that idiot Beebe on the phone in 5 minutes; and I don't care if

you have to use the Shore Patrol, the Army Military Police or the Japanese Police to find him. I want him on the telephone NOW!"

The next morning, after three days in hack, the attack pilots had just finished marching lockstep into the wardroom for breakfast, singing the prisoners song when the word came over the loud speaker for Gray and Trum to report to the Air Group Commander's stateroom immediately. When we walked in, there sat Marsh looking like he had had a near death experience. He was obviously in far worse condition than when the ships CO got through with him. It was apparent that he had been worked over by a real pro.

In a trembling voice, his only words were, "The hack is lifted. All of you are free to go ashore. There will not be any note of this in your fitness reports. Now get out of here and leave me alone."

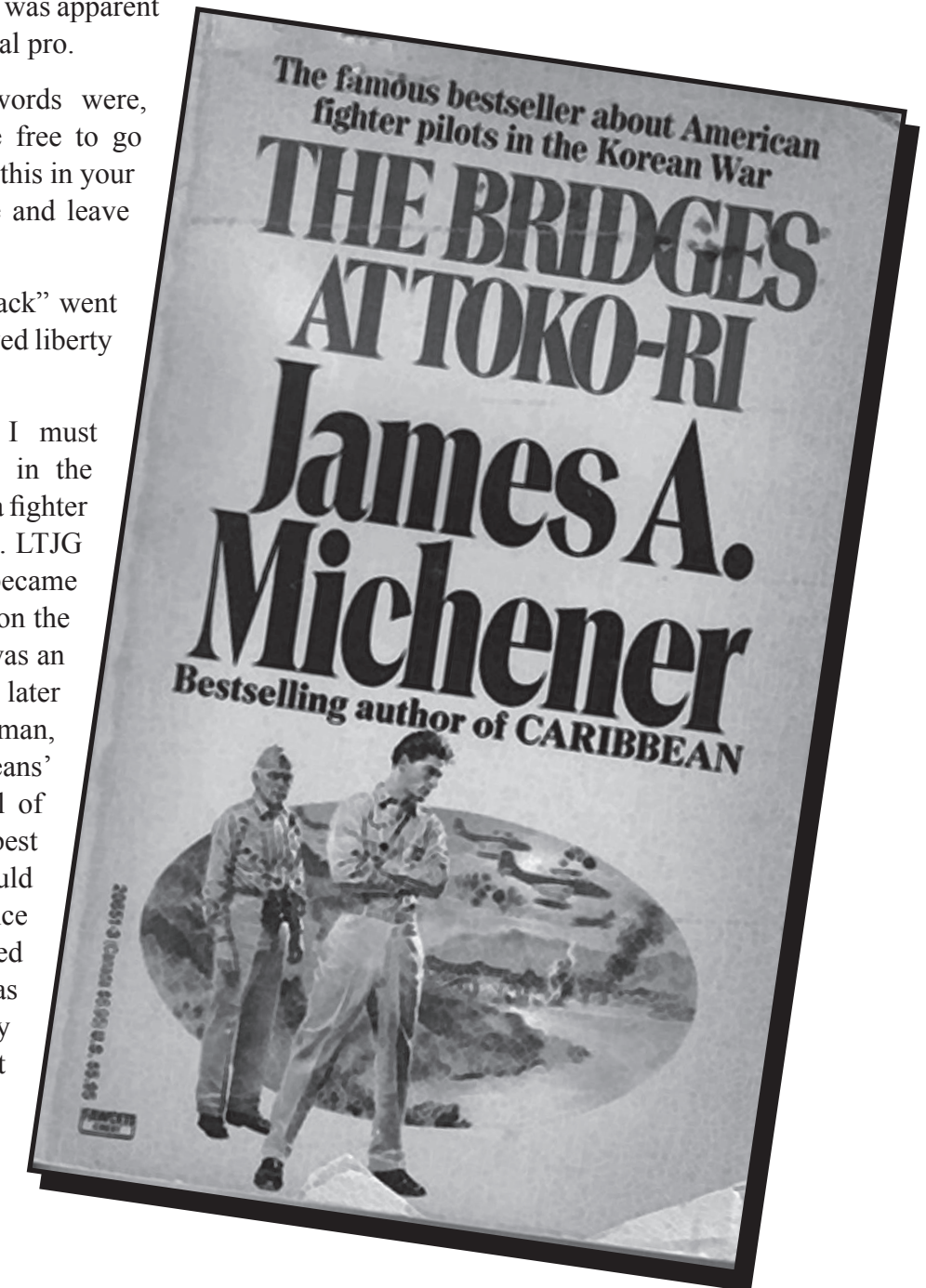
Posters saying, "Thank you Black Jack" went up in the ready rooms. The long delayed liberty was at hand.

When writing about this cruise, I must pay homage to the talent we had in the squadrons. LTJG Tom Hayward was a fighter pilot who went on to become the CNO. LTJG Neil Armstrong another fighter pilot became the astronaut who took the first step on the moon. My wingman, Ken Shugart, was an all-American basketball player and later an admiral. Al Masson, another wingman, became the owner of one of New Orleans' most famous French restaurants. All of the squadrons were manned with the best and brightest young men the U.S. could produce. The mechanics and ordnance crews who kept the planes armed and flying deserve as much praise as the pilots for without the effort they expended, working day and night under cold and brutal conditions, no flight would have been flown.

It was a dangerous cruise. I will always consider it an honor to have

associated with those young men who served with such bravery and dignity. The officers and men of this air group once again demonstrated what makes America the most outstanding country in the world today. To those whose spirits were taken from them during those grim days and didn't come back, "I will always remember you."

As the actor Admiral asked at the end of the movie... "Where do we get such men?" The impudent response is... "Any Bar!"



C-130A Hercules on Display in Arkansas Has Storied Past

This C-130A Hercules was the 126th built by Lockheed Aircraft Corp. of Marietta, Georgia. It was accepted into the Air Force inventory on 23 August 1957.

On 2 November 1972, it was given to the South Vietnamese Air Force as part of the Military Assistance Program. A few years later, the aircraft would be involved in an historic flight.

On 29 April 1975, this Herk was the last out of Vietnam during the fall of Saigon. With over 100 aircraft destroyed on the flight line at Tan Son Nhut Air Base, some of them still burning, it was the last flyable C-130 remaining. In a very panicked state, hundreds of people were rushing to get aboard, as the aircraft represented a final ticket to freedom.

People hurriedly crowded into the Herk, packing in tighter and tighter.

Eventually, the loadmaster informed the pilot, Major Phuong, a South Vietnamese instructor pilot, that he could not get the rear ramp closed due to the number of people standing on it. In a moment of inspiration, Major Phuong slowly taxied forward, then hit the brakes. The loadmaster called forward again stating he had successfully got the doors closed.

In all, 452 people were on board, including a staggering 32 in the cockpit alone. Using a conservative estimate of 100 pounds per person, it translated into an overload of at least 10,000 pounds. Consequently, the Herk used every bit of the runway and overrun before it was able to get airborne.

The target was Thailand, which should have been 1:20 in flight time, but after an hour and a half, the aircraft was over the Gulf of Siam, and they were clearly lost.

Finally, a map was located, they identified some terrain features, and they were able to navigate. They landed at Utapao, Thailand after a three-and-a-half hour flight.

Ground personnel were shocked at what “fell out” as they opened the doors. It was clear that a longer flight would almost certainly have resulted in loss of life. In the end, however, all 452 people made it to freedom aboard this historic C-130.

Upon landing, the aircraft was reclaimed by the United States Air Force and assigned to two different Air National Guard units for the next 14 years.

On 28 June 1989, it made its final flight to Little Rock Air Force Base and placed on permanent display.

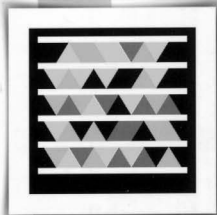


The last flyable C-130 out of Saigon on 29 April 1975



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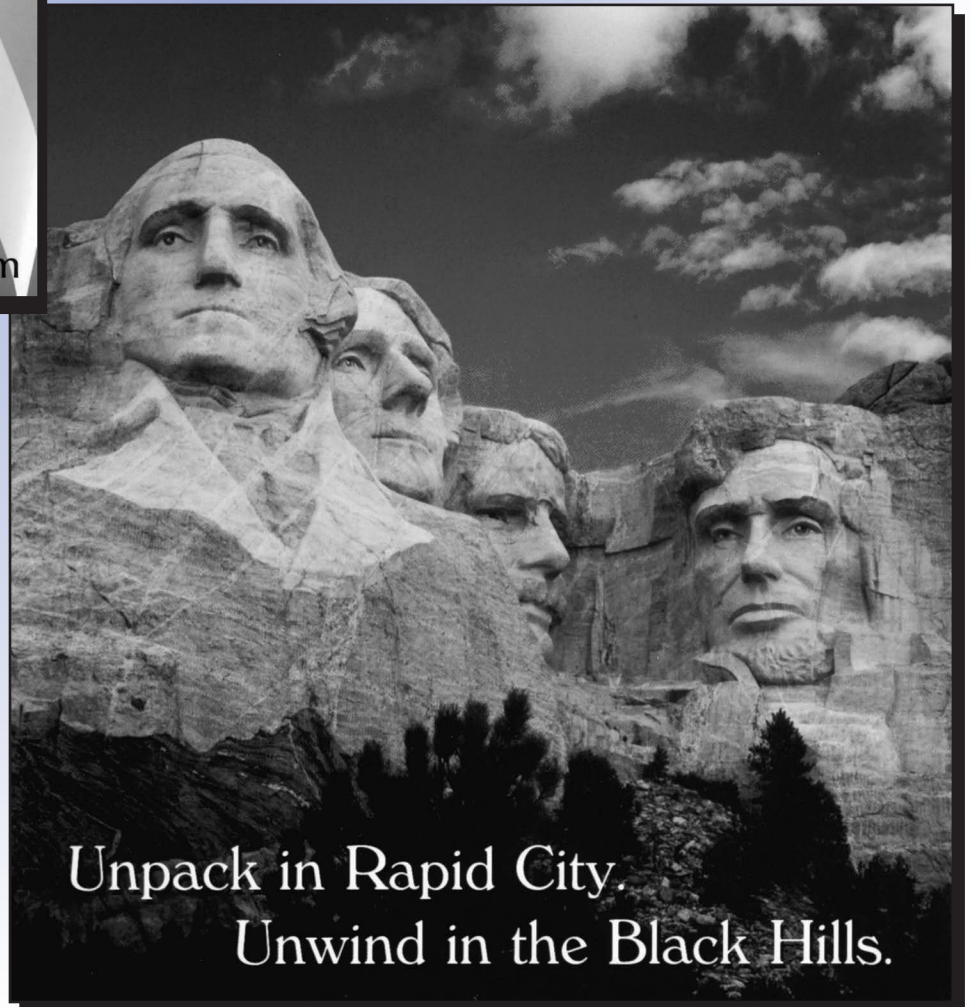
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