



THE PYRAMIDIERS

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

August 2016

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Pieces of My Mind

Greetings to All,

As this will be the last issue my ideas will appear in this space, and as I have several items to cover, I will get right to them.

The next issue of this newsletter will be published in December rather than the usual November date. The reason is that the staff needs additional time, following our October reunion, to collect the photos from the reunion, and to write and edit the articles on the reunion. Next year, the newsletter will be published on a quarterly schedule beginning in March.

Sadly, I must report that due to an avoidable technical error by the company that was hosting our web site, all of the content on our site has been lost. All that remains is the template for Word Press, the software used to create the content. As many of you know, our web site, thepyramidiers.com, was a pet project of mine. The association spent hundreds of dollars, and I spent hundreds of hours to create the site. To say I'm unhappy with the hosting company would be a huge understatement! Unfortunately, short of an expensive law suit against the company for damages, there is little the association can do. A more technically knowledgeable web master than I, perhaps, could have prevented the loss. This would, however, meant hiring a professional to manage the site at additional cost. The bottom line is, I did the job and no one regrets the loss more than I.

Now for a much more pleasant subject. Dennis tells me that all the foreseeable details for our San Antonio reunion have been worked out and that we are all ready to have fun. After the twenty years that he has been running our reunions, when he says we're ready, I know we are in



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Pieces of My Mind *continued from page 1*

for a very special reunion. If you haven't registered yet, please do so soon. Hope to see you there.

Finally, as I intimated earlier, this issue marks the end of my tenure as president of our association. The nine years I've been honored to serve have been the highlight of my post Air Force years. My wife, Connie, and I have made friendships that will last for our lifetimes. Meeting and getting to know many of our Veterans and their families has deepened my appreciation for their

contributions and sacrifices to our nation. I have met Heroes and been awed by their humility. I loved all of them and cried when we lost them. I personally believe I have grown as a person as a result of being a member of our association. For all of this we are grateful.

Thank you.

With Warmest Regards to All,

Bill Seals

Message from the VP/Reunion Advisor

I will admit that I am considerably slower and much more forgetful than I was back in my working life. I also have more time on my hands than some of you who are still there (*working that is*). I spend lots of that time trying to remember the things I should be doing. Unless I write it down when I do remember something, I forget it again—just a vicious circle. Sure hope none of you are affected with that dilemma!!!

But I'll tell you one thing I did remember to do. I made my plans to attend the 98th Veterans Association REUNION. I registered early.

I ask you to **PLEASE** get your registration done and mailed while you are thinking about it. That way those folks planning the REUNION don't have to wait until the last minute to finalize all the details!!!

We want see you in San Antonio!!!

For the Record

New Members

L-NAME	FIRST	MI	ADDRESS	CITY	ST	ZIP	POSITION	AC	SQD
Hart	Mrs. Norma		25 Leonard Trail, Apt 307	Weat Worth Village	TX	76114	Honorary	B-24	415
Kirschner	Robert	W.	2714 No Beacon Hill Ct	Wichita	KS	67220	NG	B-24	344
Pease	Ashton		66499 Rosewood Road Trail	North Liberty	IN	46554	2016	B-47	OMS

Deceased

L-NAME	FIRST	MI	ADDRESS	CITY	ST	ZIP	AC	SQD	DOD
Elkin	Russell	T.	1751 N Mockingbird Ln	Midlothian	TX	76065	B-24	345	02/17/2016
Neher	Albert	R.	11205 Ensley Ct	Henrico	VA	23233	B-29	345	03/13/2016
Knight	Lyle Lt Col (ret)	F.	1617 W Temple Ln, Apt 4306	South Jordan	UT	84095	B-47	344	06/20/2016
Puckett	George	W.	800 Lake Rd	Belton	TX	76513	B-29	343	02/14/2015
Spolski	Andrew		102 Antlers Trace Dr	Cox's Creek	KY	40013	B-29	345	06/24/2016
Chilcott	Robert	M.	777 Calabria Dr	Santa Barbara	CA	93105	B-24	343	06/22/2016

Message from the Secretary/Treasurer

Hello to all! I hope you are enjoying your summer that promises to be one of the hottest on record! Soon we will once again have the opportunity to be together in beautiful, historical San Antonio for the 51st Reunion of members of the 98th Bomb Group Veterans Association. If you haven't registered, it's not too late!

With August fast approaching, I cannot help but think of 1 August 1943 and Operation Tidal Wave—the air attack by bombers of the United States Army Air Corps based in Libya and Southern Italy on nine oil refineries around Ploesti, Romania; which was part of a strategic mission to deny petroleum-based fuel to the Axis. This mission was one of the costliest for the USAAF in the European Theater, with 53 aircraft and 660 air crewmen lost. It was the second-worst loss ever suffered by the USAAF on a single mission, and its date was later referred to as “Black Sunday.” The Five Medals of Honor and numerous Distinguished

Service Crosses awarded to Operation Tidal Wave crewmembers made this group the most highly decorated group in the history of the Army Air Corp and today's Air Force. Most of our founding members were part of this mission in various ways, whether in preparation or participation. As we remember, reflect, and say a prayer for them, it is only fitting we read Col. Kane's words as a tribute to all those brave young men . . .

“To you who fly on forever, I send that part of me which cannot be separated and is bound to you for all time. I send to you those of our hopes and dreams that never quite came true, the laughter and showery tears of our boyhood, the marvelous mysteries of our adolescence, the glorious strength and tragic illusions of our young manhood, all these that were and perhaps, would have been. I leave in your care, out there in the Blue.”

—John Riley Kane

2016 98th Bomb Group Veterans Association Scholarship Awarded

This scholarship is awarded annually in honor of the late William H. Simons and the men of the 98th Bomb Group, which is the most highly decorated Group in the history of the US Army Air Corps (receiving two Presidential Citations), and remains so in today's US Air Force. This year we have selected Ashton Pease of Liberty, Indiana to receive the 98th Bomb Group Veterans Association Scholarship Award of \$2000.00. The hard work she has demonstrated both at school, in her community, and her church warrants this recognition from us.

Ashton plans to attend Ball State University where her studies will prepare her to become a physical therapist, working with geriatric communities, helping patients to regain strength and balance that will make a difference in their lives; and also helping those who have been wounded when they return home.

To Ashton, **Patriotism** “means having pride in your country. It means defending your freedoms and liberties while protecting your brothers and sisters around you. Patriotism is the inexplicable sense of pride I feel every time I see our flag wave in the air. Also, for me it means praying daily for the people that keep me safe, and vowing to keep others around me safe.”

The officers and members of the 98th hope this Scholarship helps preserve the memory of these brave men who put their lives in harm's way to fight for the freedom we enjoy today, so that they are never forgotten.

Best Wishes to you, Ashton!

Edgar Fergus

Editor's Introduction:

*Between the months of January and April 1945, there were several forced marches of allied POWs being held in eastern Germany toward the west. After the war, these marches acquired names such as: **The Great March, The Great March West, The Back March, etc.***

Edgar's story is about his participation in one of those marches. It is presented as he wrote it, and is accompanied by a letter from Robert Young who sent me the story. It has been reformatted because some of the photos he included were not, unfortunately, of reproducible quality.*

On a personal note. It has been my great honor to know several of the men who became POWs while they flew missions with the 98th. Among them are Herman "Herk" Streitburger and Louis "Lou" Staudenmier who also made one of the forced marches. When I read and hear their stories I am always amazed at the tremendous desire to live it must have taken to survive such brutal treatment under conditions that are difficult to comprehend. Moreover, most of them came home, made the necessary adjustments, and lived productive lives. If the word "greatest" is ever deserved by a man, these men should be at the top of the list.

*Robert Young's letter follows at the end of Edgar's story

Historical Background:

As 1945 began, the allies were in the final phases of defeating the Nazis. The Russian Armies were advancing rapidly from the east as the American, British and the other western armies slowed or paused in their advance from the west. These actions were required of the western allies by the decision that the Russians were to be the first into Berlin. Needless to say, this decision did not sit well with all of the American Army commanders—General Patton in particular. But for once, he obeyed General Eisenhower's orders and his 3rd Army had to be content to liberate several of the Nazi concentration camps, and to start to set up a form of government by the Germans to replace Nazi rule.

Part One

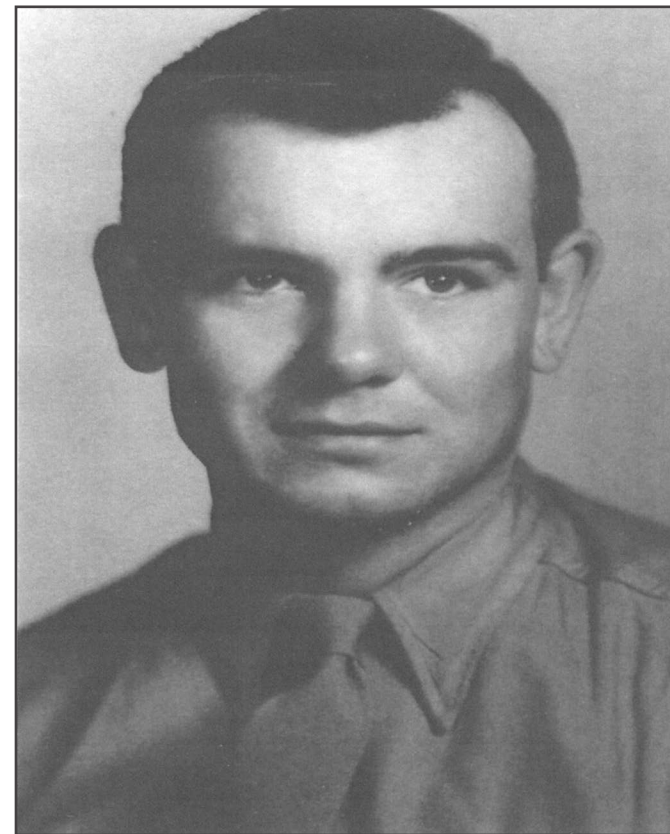
After training in B-24s in Pocatello, Idaho; Sioux Falls, South Dakota; Harlingen, Texas; and Tucson, Arizona, it was great to be heading overseas where the action was. We sailed out of Norfolk, Virginia in early June 1943 and arrived in Casablanca, Morocco seven or eight days later. We did a lot of zig-zagging and backtracking to avoid submarines as we neared the coast of Africa. During this time of the war we were not in a convoy, just one lone ship on the high seas.

After landing in Casablanca we were immediately assigned to submarine patrol at Port Lyaute. We were patrolling the waters off the coast of Africa between Gibraltar and the Canary Islands. We were not too happy with this, we had the crazy idea that we wanted to fight the Nazis. As it turned out we did not have long to wait. The low level bombing raid on the Ploesti, Romania oil storage area, in which we lost nearly 200 B-24s, sealed our destiny. We were immediately off to the 98th Bomb Group in Benghazi, Lybia.

Our flights crossed the Mediterranean Sea barely above the waves. This was to avoid being picked up on radar for as long as possible. In those days we had very little fighter support due to the long flight over the Mediterranean. We had used this tactic on all of our previous missions to Bari, Taranto, Foggia, Naples and others. It was very rare to return to base and not find several shrapnel holes in the plane.

Today September 3, 1943 our flight plan took us around Italy over the Adriatic Sea so as to approach today's target, the rail yards at Pescara, Italy. As we neared our target we increased our altitude to 20,000 ft for the bomb run. It was at this time that we were attacked by swarms of Berman ME 109 fighters. A very few minutes later our plane was hit and began to fall out of formation. When this happens several fighters will concentrate on the disabled plane. By being in the top turret I had a birds-eye view of what was happening.

WWII Prisoner of War



Edgar as a young airman.

One half of the tail section was shot away and fell. Almost instantly engines 1, 2, and 4 were on fire. Next the wing section outside of #1 engine folded down and dropped off.

I had felt a slight pain in my foot. As I released my turret seat to drop to the flight deck, I saw my shoe laying there in shreds, with only a scratch on my foot. Our flight engineer was standing on the deck too horrified to move. His name was George Nekos from Kingston, NY. I had trained with him for several months. I could also see the pilot and co-pilot struggling to get out of the cockpit. When a plane is out of control it is very hard to move. I did manage to get the hatch to the bomb bay open; this was a mistake as it was engulfed in fire. I closed the hatch and the plane seemed to level off and it was easier to move. I opened the escape hatch

Edgar's Note To His Children

(The message below accompanied his story)

As you read the following you will soon see that I am not a writer. My grammar leaves a lot to be desired. However, Charlotte has asked me for several years to inform you of my war experiences. This will give you a rough idea as to how I spent part of my life. In all I was in the Army Air Force 3 years, 2 months, and 14 days.

August 3rd 1942–October 17th 1945.

After 50 years I was very vague as to the location of prison camps in Europe. I contacted the Ex POW Headquarters in Arlington, Texas for a lot of the enclosed information. Hope this to be of some interest to all of you.

I love you all very much,

(Signed) Dad

on the top of the plane and was able to exit this way. This was designed to be used only when ditching at seas. There were many antenna wires, but I managed to avoid most of them. I have no idea as to how close I was to the plane when it exploded, but I could feel the concussion and it seemed as if it was pushing me away. We still had our full load of nine 500-pound bombs so it was quite a blast. Luckily I had not pulled my ripcord as yet. Had my chute been open it probably would have deflated. I could see pieces of the plane float down like leaves in the wind.

Then I had the most lonesome, eerie feeling, absolute quiet with our formation of B-24s disappearing in the western skies. A single ME 109 flew by as I was

floating down; he tipped his wings and flew away. After what seemed like hours, I landed in the Mediterranean Sea. I was thanking God all the way down that on this day I had worn my Mae West (life jacket) for the first time and that the ME 109 had not shot me while in the chute, as I had seen happen before.



Like so many other US cities and towns, Matthews, Indiana kept track of its citizens in uniform. Edgar's name is in the first column, second from last.

Now I was in the water about two miles off the coast of Italy. The Italians made no effort to rescue me, just waiting on shore for me to get in as best I could. I can still see the Italian soldiers and many not too happy civilians carrying pitchforks. I do not think I would have made it into Pescara if it were not for the soldiers. The civilians were mad, and they had reason to be. One of the soldiers saw my water soaked Elgin watch and took it. After being in salt water a couple of hours it wasn't worth much.

In Pescara jail infirmiry I was given a medical check of all of five minutes. I had lots of cuts and bruises but luckily no broken bones. I did later see the pilot and co-pilot and learned we were the only survivors of a crew of ten.

I was then taken to a jail cell, my own private quarters. There was one small window at ground level. By this time as you can imagine, I was about as depressed as possible. I was thinking what a mess I was in stuck in a little jail cell in Italy with not a friend for hundreds of miles. Also I was nearly starved, having had breakfast in Benghazi very early in the morning, and now it was late in the evening. You can imagine how elated I was to see two small girls at my cell window offering me two little loaves of bread. I was so sorry I had nothing to give them in return. Needless to say if I had had anything I would gladly have given it to them. I never have tasted anything so good. They seemed happy in being able to give me something. So I was wrong, I did have two little friends in Italy.

After a few days in this little cell I was taken to the train and along with hundreds of other airmen and infantry soldiers, crammed into box cars for the trip to Germany. There I was to spend the next 20 months as a Kriegsgefangener. That will be covered in part two of the WWII experience.

I am not able to give the exact dates after being shot down. I did keep some records but this was confiscated in one of the many searches.

Edgar Fergus
ASN 35363625

Part Two

It was a long, hard depressing ride in a cramped boxcar from Pescara, Italy into Germany. A few days earlier we were in North Africa looking forward to many bombing missions into Europe. Now as prisoners we were out of the battle, just hoping to survive till the end of the war. We were so far into enemy territory, and not being able to speak their language, all hopes of escape were very remote. The boxcars were loaded so full of POWs it was not possible for all to sit down at the same time. We took shifts, and for the next several days we stopped on many sidings, and unloaded for needless roll calls, but much needed rest room stops. Our food consisted of black bread and water. As I recall the train consisted of eight to ten cars all loaded with POWs.

After about three days we were entering Austria via the Brenner Pass. On our way, as we found out later, to Stalag 7A, Moosburg, a Bavarian town, about 35 kilometers northeast of Munich. This camp consisted of lots of transient prisoners. The Nordlager held new prisoners for only a few days, to be searched, interrogated and deloused. The Sudlager held only Russians. The Hauptlager consisted of Yugoslavia, British, French, and Americans. Treatment here was rather harsh with barely enough food and extremely overcrowded. For not falling out for roll call quick enough, we were forced to stand at attention outside for hours at a time. We showed as little annoyance as possible at this and it was discontinued after a few days.

One night we were called out at 2100, 2400 and 033 hours. Another instance, we ventured out into the compound to watch a bombing mission on Munich. This time we were chased into the barracks by guard dogs. Food here consisted of a hard biscuit and weak coffee for breakfast, boiled potatoes and sometimes a barley soup for lunch, evenings were very erratic, sometimes a piece of black bread and a green watery soup that looked like it contained grass. The bread contained no yeast and would keep forever. Some we had would have 1939 stamped in the loaf. It was almost black and very hard to cut, but in our situation it tasted almost good enough to eat. I forgot to mention, on special occasions the barley soup contained small portions of horse meat, very red meat.

Clothing was in very short supply. We were given used coats and pants, nothing matched. We never knew who had worn them before. With winter coming on we were glad to have anything.

It was at this camp, while walking around the compound, I saw a friend I had been in training with in Texas. We talked for a few minutes, and I told him I would come over to see him that night. I had forgotten this until a couple of years ago when I received a call from Bill Bartells. He was at the grocery across the street here on Ft. Myers Beach. He and his wife June came over, and in our conversation, he mentioned that I had crawled under the fence to visit him. Now it is

hard to believe I would take that chance. I guess at 21 years old I felt different than I do now.

After a few weeks here, it was back to the boxcars for a continuation deeper into Germany. After another long slow ride, cramped into boxcars, we arrived at Stalag VIII C, Sagan, Germany. This camp was approximately 70 kilometers southeast of Berlin. Here we were to spend the next several months. The conditions were the same as before. Only here we needed firewood to heat the barracks, and it was in very short supply.

We were heading into our first winter in captivity, not knowing what to expect. It was a long time until spring, and we had many harrowing experiences. I'll only tell you of a few. One instance, seven POWs from another barracks escaped. They were returned in a few days. We were ordered to stand outside and watch as they were shot. They said this was to show us how ridiculous it was to try to escape. At this camp we were given a burlap bag filled with straw, and one very scratchy blanket. We could never decide how they could make it so rough. We were given very little for fuel, so some

The Crew that went down on the B-24 Liberator, *Nightmare*, on a mission to Sulmona, Italy, September 3, 1943.

Only Edgar Fergus, Herman Stephens, and Warren Johnson survived that day.

Pilot: Herman E. Stephens, Fayetteville, NC

Co-Pilot: Warren Johnson, Glendale, CA

Navigator: Donovan Astle, Green Rive, WY

Bombardier: Unknown

1st Engineer: George Nekos, Kingston, NY

Radio Operator: Edgar Fergus, Matthews, IN

Asst. Radio Operator: Valex Colon, Houma, LA

Gunner: Tom Samo, Cleveland, OH

Gunner: Ives Gouin, Chicago, IL

days we would only go out for roll call and spend the rest of the day in bed trying to keep warm.

After a few weeks we began getting Red Cross parcels. These contained small tins of fruit, vegetables, Spam, a chocolate bar and cigarettes. If you did smoke, this was a very good place to quit. Cigarettes were a good trading commodity. The guards really liked American cigarettes, and would smuggle in eggs in trade. Not being a smoker I fared pretty well. It was at this camp that we were able to con a guard into bringing in parts of a crystal radio in trade for cigarettes. We could pick BBC in London at night and keep up with the war pretty well. We would tell the German guards of a battle they would be furious as to how we got our information. We would be called out in formation for barrack searches at different times of the day or night. They were never able to find the radio. It was worth standing out in the cold just to see the frustration.

It was at this camp that I became very sick. It was determined after several trips to the dispensary that I had strep throat. I was very amazed that they took me into Sagan to the hospital and was given penicillin. This was in very short supply in Germany and they stated I could only have a small amount. I was given other medication also and remained in the hospital for



Typical items in a Red Cross parcel for POWs.

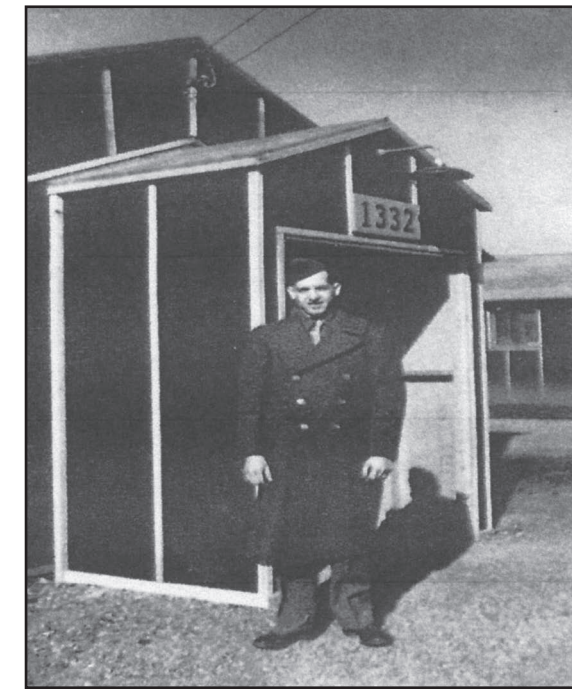
several days. I never knew why they did this, but am sure I would not have survived otherwise. I never knew of any other POW being taken to the hospital before or after that time.

In late summer of 1944 it was again back to the boxcars. This time we were off to East Prussia. Stalag VI, Heydedrug was near the Baltic Sea. As we traveled, all we could see were pine trees. The camp was in a pine forest, a very pretty area considering the circumstances. As for the conditions, it was as before only in shorter supply. Also it was apparent the German guards were much tenser than before. We were at a loss as to why we were moved here which is much closer to the Russian front. Our concerns increased into the fall and winter as the Russians were moving south of us through Poland.

As time continued we were close to being cut off from Germany. So after spending several months here, around January 1, 1945, we were back in the boxcars. This time we were off to Memel, Latvia. Here we were loaded into the hold of a coal barge, the Isteburg.

Cruising down through the Baltic Sea, amid mines set by the Germans and allied navies, it was a harrowing experience. We were only allowed on deck to use the primitive restroom facilities. We had one sad experience on the ship. A POW named Getsey from Cleveland, Ohio went berserk and jumped from the deck. The guards fired several rounds of ammunition, and he was not seen again. We felt that for us to make it through these treacherous waters without incident, somebody was looking after us. We were on board two or three days before docking at Sweinemunde on the Oder River. We were happy to have this behind us, not knowing what lay ahead.

Our newest boxcar was about to shake off the tracks. We had arrived at the rail yards in Sweinemunde minutes before an allied air raid. Needless to say, we were all about to panic. The raid lasted for about 20 minutes, and when we were let out of the car it was complete devastation. The tracks were curled up like pretzels. It was incredible, but all the cars containing POWs were unharmed. We were marched to another part of the rail yards and again loaded on other boxcars.



Training Days... Before Edgar flew overseas, one of his training stops brought him to Sioux Falls, SD. At far left, he is pictured (on the left) with Dick Brady. Shown on the right is Bill Bartells for whom Edgar would risk an under-the-fence visit while a POW.

Our ride to the rail station in Tyshow, Germany took about two hours. After unloading we were handcuffed for the run to Keifheide at bayonet point with guard dogs. The dogs bit several POWs and some were prodded with the bayonets. I did not see anyone too severely injured. The handcuffs were pretty inferior and most of us had them off by the end of the run. We buried them in the dirt—this infuriated the guards, but as far as I know they never found them.

Stalag Luft IV was in a very chaotic condition. The Russian army was continuing to push westward, and the allied forces were closing in from the west and south. Camp conditions continued to deteriorate. We heard there were Red Cross parcels at this camp, but they did not have permission to distribute them. We were wondering how long before we were in the boxcars again. We did not realize that the railroads were in such disarray that riding days were over.

Early in the morning on February 6th, we were ordered to fall out with our belongings. It was very cold and we had very little clothing. For the next few weeks we would be marching across Germany, eating mainly what we could find along the road. We slept in barns part of the time, other times we slept in the open fields. Machine guns were set up around the perimeter. We

were told to stay flat on the ground until morning. Lots of nights we would awaken in a snowstorm. The snow at least was good to eat, much better than the German water. POWs even ate snow when it was black with coal soot. Sometimes it was all there was.

One day we were hiding in the ditches being strafed by allied aircraft. This happened on two occasions that I can remember. I am sure there were casualties, but I cannot recall any at this time.

On one occasion we were passing a car loaded with kohlrabis, similar to turnips. I reached out and grabbed a couple and passed them into the rank of POWs. A guard with a dog gave me a good raking over the coals, but they couldn't find them. And to my dismay, I didn't find them either.

Many instances occurred on the march. On occasion bayonets were used on POWs for no apparent reason. Dogs were also allowed to attack if a POW should fall out of rank. There were lots of reasons for this to occur, such as malnutrition, exhaustion, hunger, or even sore feet. Many of the POWs had severe blisters on their feet. Some were infected and bleeding. Many of the shoes did not fit, some has no socks, or so holely they did no good. Some men had bad cases of frostbite. Dysentery was very prevalent. Many would fall out,

some were carried along for awhile, others were left by the roadside, and these were never seen again. The Germans did at times obtain a cart, we would load three or four on, and take turns pulling them.

Some barns we stayed in had sections with dry straw, we were seldom allowed to use. We would be herded into another section of the barn where animals had been. They told us if we slept on the dry areas their farm animals would not stay there. At least it was better than out in the cold. Some nights it was estimated the temperature was around 0 degrees. On several occasions we would observe large bins of potatoes in barns. They told us they were for the German troops, not for us.

During this march we would be under the jurisdiction of the nearest POW camp. The commander of that camp would be in charge at that time. When we neared another camp another person would take over. Our treatment varied a lot with these changes. Some had no use for “American gangster” as we were called. Others knew the war was lost and treated us halfway decent. We did have a guard named “Big Stoop.” He had a habit of hitting with an open hand and ruptured several ear drums. Luckily I avoided him. He was a very large man, like most guards had been returned from battle on one of the fronts. These soldiers had been fighting our armies and had no use for us.

The forced march continued across northern Germany until around April 1st. We had now arrived at Stalag 11B, Fallingbostal, Germany. This was about 80 kilometers southwest of Hamburg. This camp was overflowing with prisoners. We were ordered to stay in a field outside camp. In the morning we were off again. It seemed we had no destination, as if we were waiting for the end.

On the night of April 5th we were locked up in a barn just a few kilometers outside of Fallingbostal. When we awoke in the morning we were amazed to find no guards. Very soon we observed a staff car approaching. We were happy to see that it was a British colonel. He informed us that the front had gone through during the night and we were on our own. In a few minutes he

was gone, and there were quite a few tears shed in the old barn.

Tom Moore was my companion on most of the march. Tom was from Fort Smith, Arkansas and a very good friend during this harrowing experience. We decided to head down the road on our own. We didn't realize the dangers. After walking several hours we heard marching ahead. We hid behind some buildings as some straggler SS troops marched by. They were the most feared because most were only 16-18 years old and were taught to hate Americans. They still had their rifles and could have been trouble. This happened on another occasion also.

We were now on wheels. We found a couple of bicycles in a yard and could make better time. We could see planes landing a few kilometers ahead. As we approached the landing strip, we came onto a group of German soldiers. We saw they were carrying no weapons and looked like a beaten army. We approached cautiously and were told that they wanted to surrender, but were afraid to enter the airfield ahead. So here were Tom and I leading them in.

During the summer of 2007, a video interview with Mr. Fergus telling his POW story was recorded. This interview can be seen at the Library of Congress Veterans Project website: www.loc.gov/vets.

There were no incidents, and we were off to the operations tent for directions. They were too busy to be of much help, but that evening we got a big break. We were still in the British army zone. If I remember correctly, we were sitting in a mess tent eating, in came a British colonel. After telling him of our ordeal in getting here, he informed us that he was flying to Brussels, Belgium the next morning, and we were welcome to join him. You can imagine how elated we were. That night we were listening to BBC on the radio and learned of the death of Franklin D. Roosevelt. What a beautiful sight the next morning high in the sky heading for Brussels, miles from prison.

I think we were the first ones in from the march, at least in Brussels. The British were very good to us, clean clothes and decent food for the first time in 20 months. Here only a few days then boarding a train (coach) for Namur in southern Belgium. We were finally in American custody.

We were very anxious to be on our way home, but the Army doesn't work this way. After several days of doing nothing and some debriefing, we were shipped to LeHavre, France. Here we had another several days of paper work before boarding a ship for Norfolk, Virginia. After arriving in Norfolk we boarded trains for Miami, Florida. Here we were to spend the next several weeks. The Air Force had taken over the President Madison Hotel on the beach for returning airmen. We were interrogated quite thoroughly. Dietitians saw that we had the right food; otherwise we were on our own.

Our next flight was to San Antonio, Texas for discharge on August 17, 1945.

Before 1945 I have no knowledge as to the exact length of time spent in each camp or the exact days of moving from camp to camp. I had kept a diary about all of this but during one of the searches late in the forced march, it was confiscated. In the past few weeks I have talked to several former POWs and the POW national headquarters in Texas and acquired much of the information for this paper. I have tried not to bore

you with too many details, but hope you can get an idea as to how I spent 20 months of my life.

Incidentally, a few weeks ago, after 50 years I called Tom Moore. He still lives in Fort Smith, Arkansas.

Edgar Fergus
POW #77053

After the War

After the war, Edgar returned to Indiana. With his brother, Warren, he purchased and operated the Blackford County Canning Company in Hartford City. In 1981, the business was sold. Edgar and his wife, Charlotte, moved to Ft. Myers Beach. Edgar was not yet ready for retirement because after just a year, he began to handle maintenance for Dolphin Watch condominium—and continued to do so for the next 30 years.

Edgar passed away January 28, 2016 in Ft. Myers Beach, Florida. He was 94; a husband, father of four, grandfather and great-grandfather.



The information above and photo were part of Edgar's obituary.

Robert Young Sent the *Edgar Fergus Story* to THE PYRAMIDIERS . . .

Bill Seals
President and Editor
2526 Plumfield Lane
Katy, TX 77450

First, thank you for holding things together at the Pyramidiers. I am a grateful reader who has cheered and shed tears over the many stories of brave young Americans.

I served four years in the USAF (1948-1952). I entered A&E school at Kessler AFB and later was transferred to Sheppard AFB to instruct in I-2 branch of the A&E school. I transferred to the flight line and was a line mechanic, and an alert crew member. Eventually I became a Flight Mechanic on B-25, C-47 and C-45 aircraft.

One of my early memories of Basic Training was viewing a movie of the Aug. 1, 1943 Ploesti raid. Fifty-two years later my neighbor Ed Fergus shared that he was in the 98th Bomb Group and was an ex-POW. Ed was encouraged by his family to tell his story. (enclosed) I had encouraged Ed to submit it to you. Ed gave me all of his Pyramidier issues and his EX-POW Bulletins. He had used them as a resource for his story as well as Herb Harper who we met during a trip north. Herb helped us identify the plane that Ed was shot down in (Nightmare, 41-11896) He was the top turret gunner. He was on sub patrol when the low level raid on Ploesti occurred.

I am sorry to say Ed passed away January 28, 2016. I wanted Ed's story to be told and I have asked his wife Charlotte and his family for their blessing. It is much too long in its form and will have to be edited to fit your magazine. We respect your judgement in this.

Robert B. Young
2088 Estero Blvd., Apt 48
Ft Meyers, FL 33931
239-463-4210

PS. Say hello to Herb

An Historical News Article Regarding the Same March Recounted in *Edgar's Story*...

The Forced March From Stalag Luft IV

Though the Bataan Death March is probably the most well-known, the fact is that the men who were involved in the Stalag Luft IV march endured just as savage of conditions, and 1300 of them did not make it to the end. According to a speech given before Congress by Senator John Warner in 1995, "Men who for months, and in some cases years, had been denied proper nutrition, medical care were forced to do something that would be difficult for well-nourished, healthy, and appropriately trained infantry soldiers to accomplish."

The late Doctor (Major) Leslie Caplan, an American flight surgeon who served as medical officer for 2,500 of the men in Stalag Luft IV, summed it up by saying, "It was a march of bitter hardship...We marched long distances in bitter weather and on starvation rations. We lived in filth and slept in open fields or barns. Clothing, medical facilities and sanitary facilities were utterly inadequate. Hundreds of men suffered from malnutrition, exposure, trench foot, exhaustion, dysentery, tuberculosis and other diseases."

Senator Warner told Congress that many survivors of that march ended up with maladies that affect them to this day, and many others are amputees. "I trust that these comments will serve as a springboard for a wider awareness among the American people of what the prisoners from Stalag Luft IV—and all POW camps—endured in the spirit of freedom."

Final Editorial Notes Regarding the *Edgar Fergus Story*

Ed's pilots name was Stevens which I used to verify the missions Ed flew on.

I received an Email from csgregg@stthomas.edu that listed missions flown on August 19, 23, 25 & 28. All completed and returned. The mission on Sept. 3 was to Soloma in "Nightmare." Ed was in the 343rd Bomb Squadron.

One comment: in part 1, a reference is made about the losses on the Ploesti raid as being 200 and there were only 50 more or less. (Editor note: I have seen a wide range of numbers for the losses on the raid. The total number I came up with after much research is 45 aircraft. One aircraft crashed on takeoff and another crashed enroute. 36 were lost in the target area and another 7 were shot down by fighters on the return routes.) The other consideration is would they have had nine 500-pound bombs in the "Nightmare." (Editor note: Depending on the mission, the B-24 could carry a variety of bomb loads. Nine does seem a bit unusual, but not unheard of.)

The Stevens crew was shot down on the second day that the German aircraft were equipped with rockets. Ed recalled that Stevens was telling the gunners to fire but the Germans were out of range due to the advantage of the rockets.

Ed's brother Warren served in the South Pacific. He said they never talked about the war, so he was sad that he knew nothing about Warren's experience. Warren passed away many years before Ed.

She Never Met Her Father, a World War II Pilot, But She Knew ‘He Was a Hero’

By Matt Soergel. The following originally appeared in *The Florida Times-Union* and on the website *jacksonville.com*, May 30, 2016

Before she was even born, before anyone knew if she would be a boy or a girl, the crew of the Miss Fortune, a B-24 Liberator, called her “our Little Skipper.”

After all, the father-to-be, George Goddard, was the bomber’s pilot, the Skipper. At 23 years old, he was the old man of the crew, and his men liked to tease him about becoming a dad. But it was all in fun.

“George was so proud and so were we,” one wrote after war. “He got a razzing from all of us quite often, but he took it swell.”

Little Skipper was born June 3, 1944, three days before Allied troops hit the beaches of Normandy to take Europe back. Her given name was Vancil, after a grandmother’s maiden name, but she was always called Skipper — and still is.

Skipper Miller, who grew up and still lives in Jacksonville, reckons the name is a far sight better than Vancil. And she likes the connection it gives her to her father, a man she never got to meet.

Lt. George Goddard, the pilot of Miss Fortune, died Feb. 22, 1944, after his plane was shot down on a bombing run from southern Italy to an industrial plant in Regensburg, Germany. After encountering flak and enemy fighters, it crashed into the countryside of what was then Czechoslovakia, one of three American bombers lost on that mission.

Nine of the 10 men on the plane died with Goddard: Haig Kandarian, Charles Spickard, Joseph F. Altemus, Roy Hughes, Wayne Nelson, John A. Goldbach, Rexford Rhodes, Harold C. Carter and Oscar W. Houser.

Only Ray Noury, the right waist gunner, survived. He escaped Miss Fortune with a damaged parachute and plummeted to the snowy earth, reaching for the crucifix around his neck before he blacked out.

After the war, Noury wrote a letter to the families of Miss Fortune’s crew, saying the Skipper knew the mission would be a tough one.

“George called us together. He said, ‘Boys, it’s Regensburg and you can expect the worst. No fighter escort so keep your guns working and your eyes open at all times. Check in often and report if anything goes wrong ...’ He appeared a little nervous for the first time since I had known him. That may have been on account of the ‘Little Skipper.’ (His little baby girl he never saw.)”

Goddard grew up in Ennis, Texas, where he was a high-school football hero who enrolled in college to be a teacher before he enlisted. He met his wife, Evelyn, in Jacksonville, her hometown, where he spent a few months before leaving for the war, and they were married May 22, 1943.



Their daughter Skipper was born in Texas, where her mother was living with George’s parents. Though Evelyn moved back to Jacksonville and remarried after George’s death, she made sure Skipper knew her father’s family.

Skipper spent summers and vacations in Ennis, where her grandparents liked to put her in her best dress and take her to the one-street downtown so people could meet George’s baby girl. George had been their only son, and they were so proud of him.

The people of Ennis were proud, too, of the football star and native son, his daughter said. “People would come up to me and say, ‘Oh, we loved your dad. What a great guy he was.’ I grew up knowing he was a hero, something special.”

Photographs of George Goddard with his Purple Heart medal in the home of his daughter, Skipper Miller. George Goddard was a B-24 pilot who was shot down and killed flying the Miss Fortune over the Czech Republic in 1944 during WWII. His daughter Skipper Miller, never met her father but keeps his memory alive and has taken part in the annual memorial for the crew in the village that took care of the only survivor of the crash. (All photos in this article were taken and published by: *The Florida Times-Union*/Bob Self)

The story of the plane Goddard piloted is told in a recent book, “Miss Fortune’s Last Mission,” written by Bill Boyce and John H. Torrison, with John DeMers. Boyce’s father was a member of the Miss Fortune’s

crew, but an injury kept him from being on its last mission. Torrison's uncle, Wayne Nelson, was among those killed.

Boyce said it's not exactly clear what happened to Miss Fortune that day, though it might have taken some evasive maneuvers since it crashed 150 kilometers from the target, after dropping its bombs.

It smashed into the snowy ground near a small town named Nepomuk, in what is now Czechia. Many townspeople were drawn to the site; nearby, one found Noury, the man who fell from the sky, and took him home, calling a doctor to tend to his wounds.

Germans soon came for him, and he spent the rest of the war in a POW camp.

Though Germans occupied Nepomuk, a wreath appeared at the crash within days.

In later years, memorials to American troops were not allowed in Czechoslovakia during Communist rule, but the people of Nepomuk and surrounding villages never forgot the Miss Fortune: After the fall of Communism in 1989, they erected a memorial to the crew, and each year hold a ceremony for the men lost there.

Boyce traveled to Nepomuk in 2014 for the 70th anniversary of the crash. Over the years, he said, the villagers had excavated the crash site, where there's still a crater in the ground, and built a more elaborate memorial there. They also established a museum about the plane in the town square, where they display dog tags, pieces of wreckage, engine parts and photographs.

"People are very serious about remembering this crew, very emotional. I watched people crying during these ceremonies," Boyce said. "The war started very early for them and they were subject to Nazi occupation for many years, so they have a very strong feeling of appreciation and respect for the American troops who liberated them."

It smashed into the snowy ground near a small town named Nepomuk, in what is now Czechia. Many townspeople were drawn to the site; nearby, one found Noury, the man who fell from the sky, and took him home, calling a doctor to tend to his wounds.

After the end of Communism, a Czech man digging at the crash site found the Skipper's 1938 class ring from Ennis High School. He later gave it to an American and, through some detective work, it was eventually returned to the pilot's daughter in the early 1990s.

It was as if a ghost, she said, had walked into the room.

In recent years, Skipper Miller visited and became friends with Noury, the survivor. He told her stories and gave her letters that her mother had written to his mother. After that, her dad's old friend would call her every Feb. 22.

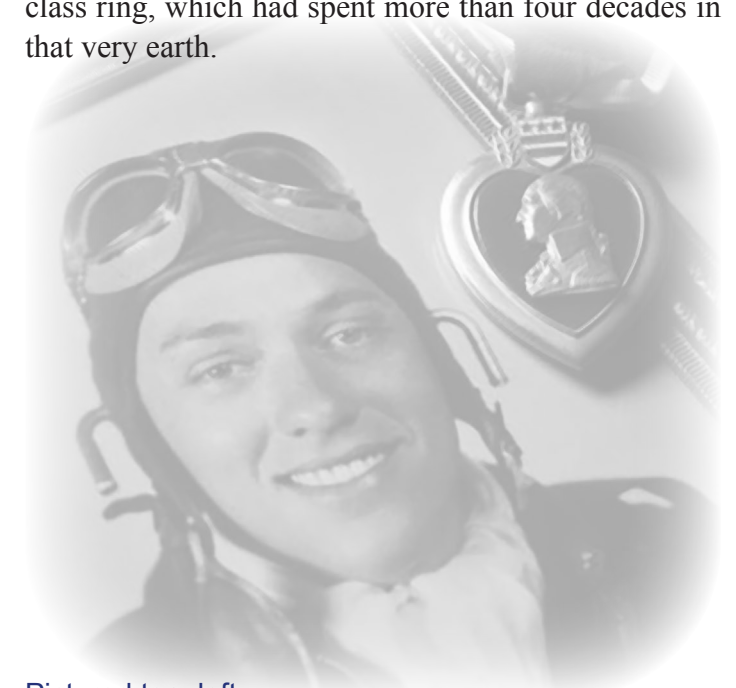
"Let's remember the crew," he'd say. She'd call him on Memorial Day and other holidays, until he died in his home state of Rhode Island late in 2013.

In 2005, Skipper Miller went to Nepomuk for the annual memorial to the Miss Fortune. In a rental car, she



became part of a convoy to the crash site, a procession that included numerous World War II vintage vehicles.

People on the side of the road waved American flags, and villagers told her how much the sacrifice made by her father meant to them. At the memorial site, down a dirt road in the woods, someone had put a photograph of her father inside a plastic bag and tacked it to a tree. And on a chain around her neck, she wore her father's class ring, which had spent more than four decades in that very earth.



Pictured top, left: Skipper Miller holds a copy of the book about the last flight of her father's B-24 during World War II. George Goddard and all but one member of the crew of *Miss Fortune* were killed.

Pictured bottom, left: George Goddard's 1938 class ring from Ennis High School in Texas was found by a Czech man digging at the site of the B-24's crash and returned to his daughter, Skipper Miller, in Jacksonville.

Reunion Schedule • October 10–14, 2016

98th Bomb Grp/Wing Veterans Association

Hotel: Holiday Inn Riverwalk, 217 N. St. Mary's Street, San Antonio, TX 78205

Reservations: 1-800-Holiday (465-4329) or (210) 224-2500

Hotel Rate: \$139.00 inclusive – Guaranteed until August 15th, 2016.

Complimentary self-parking

Day 1 Oct. 10 Welcome Dinner

Welcome to San Antonio, the Alamo, home of Air Force Basic Training and lots of smiley-face memories!!!

Day 2 Oct. 11 Free Day!!! — No events scheduled

Remember, we are right on the river, and the river tour boats stop at our hotel!!!

Day 3 Oct. 12 9:00 a.m. — Buses depart for City Tour (with guide) and Lunch

Let's all go see why San Antonio is so important to Texas and all American History. Did you know San Antonio's Spanish Mission (1718) is halfway (1150 miles) between the first American-established Spanish Mission in Saint Augustine, Florida (1565) and the first Spanish Mission in San Diego, California in (1769).

Now that's trivia you needed to know!!!

Day 4 Oct. 13 9:00 a.m. — Buses depart for Fredericksburg, Texas Tour (with guide)

We will tour the Admiral Nimitz Museum/National Museum of the Pacific War.

Fredericksburg is a really nice German town — lots of shops and great food.

Day 5 Oct. 14 Association Meetings, Banquet & Ladies Event

9:30 a.m. Executive Board Meeting

10:00 a.m. Association General Meeting

10:00 a.m. Ladies Event — Bus Departs 10:00 a.m.

6:00 p.m. Buses Depart for Lackland AFB

6:30 p.m. Cash Bar Opens

7:00 p.m. Association Banquet

Please Any question or concern regarding the San Antonio Reunion Contact:

Dennis Posey Tel: (770) 971-3972 Email: dennis_posey@att.net

Bill Seals Tel: (281) 395-3805 Email: colbillyseals@hotmail.com

Reunion Registration

98th Bomb Grp/Wing Veterans Association

Registration Fee \$80.00

Last Name _____ First _____

Name as you would like it to appear on your name tag _____

Address _____ E-Mail _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Sqd _____ Years _____ A/C _____ Duty _____

Spouse/Guest Last Name _____ First _____

Spouse/Guest Name as you would like it to appear on name tag _____

Address if different _____

Banquet Food Choice: This information will appear in our May newsletter, but please register now if you plan to attend as it will help us with many planning details. We will obtain your meal preference when the choices are finalized. Your choice later will NOT increase your costs.

Reunion Registration Fee \$80.00 x _____ Persons = \$ _____

Banquet Food Choices _____ #1 Roasted Stuffed Chicken Breast

_____ #2 Prime Rib

Oct 10th Day 1 Welcome to the 2016 98th Veterans Assoc. Reunion

6:30 p.m. / Cash Bar Opens – 7:00 p.m. / Welcome Reception (Heavy Hors d'oeuvres)

Oct 11th Day 2 Free Day, No scheduled tours

A day to roam far and wide and spend money!!!

Oct 12th Day 3 9:00 a.m. – City Tour + Lunch \$25.00 x _____ Persons = \$ _____

(Lunch IS included — and enjoy a wealth of Texas and American historical sites)

Oct 13th Day 4 9:00 a.m. – Fredericksburg Historical Venues/City and Museum Tour

We will see historical sites in the city and the Admiral Nimitz Museum.

\$12.00 x _____ Persons = \$ _____

Oct 14th Day 5 9:30 a.m. Executive Board Meeting

10:00 a.m. Association General Meeting

10:00 a.m. Ladies Event (Dressy Casual)

\$20.00 x _____ Ladies = \$ _____

6:00 p.m. Buses Depart for Lackland AFB

6:30 p.m. Cash Bar Opens

7:00 p.m. Association Banquet

Scholarship Fund (donation) \$ _____

Annual Association Dues \$20.00 x _____ Persons = \$ _____

Total \$ _____

Make checks payable to: **98th Bomb Grp/Wing Veterans Association**. Please return completed registration form & check to: Ms. Suzanne Mioduszewski, 1137 Joyce Lane, Ann Arbor, MI 48103

Safe travel; see you in San Antonio!!!



San Antonio

Oct. 10–14, 2016

**Hope to see you there!
Please see info on
pages 18-19 and register
as soon as possible!**