# **FORCE FOR FREEDOM -**

# E PYRAMDERS

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

February 2011

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# Message from Bill Seals . . .



# Greetings to All,

The scuttlebutt you've been hearing is true! Our reunion this year will be in Shreveport, LA from the 17th to the 21st of October. The reunion is dedicated to those veterans who participated in at least one of the raids flown by 15 Air Force against Ploesti. These veterans will be identified as "Ploesti Raiders" at the reunion, and we are developing special programs to recognize their

bravery, accomplishments and sacrifice.

If you were assigned to one of the bomber groups on the date the group flew one of the missions—*You are a Ploesti Raider*. It matters not whether you were an aircrew member, or on KP on that date—*You are a Ploesti Raider*. To you we extend a special invitation to attend this reunion.

As a reminder, in addition to the August 1, 1943, low level raid, 15th AF flew 19 or 20 missions against Ploesti between April 5 and August 19, 1944. These missions were flown by 21 bomber groups, and we have attempted to extend an invitation to all the members of those groups who were involved in the raids. Our hope is that a significant number of the raiders will be able to attend. If you know any of the Raiders, please extend an invitation to them. We will be honored to host them.

It is with a heavy heart that I report the loss of one of our long time members and ardent supporter. Mrs. Alberta Albritton passed away on January 6, 2011. The wife of a highly respected former

# Historically Speaking by Herb Harper

To those who attended our 2010 reunion at Savannah and heard the announcement that I was giving up the historian's position, it has been done. Your NEW Historian is Mr. Devon Powell of Columbia, MD. Devon's Grandfather was Jerome Casper, a 344th Bomb Squadron B-24 pilot. Capt. Casper's primary aircraft was "Hey Doc!" S/N 42-109813-J lost on 11-11-1944 with another crew. Capt. Casper did survive a landing accident in "Hey Doc!" on 03-20-1944. Devon's Email is: 98thbg.historian@gmail.com

Looking back some eighteen years ago, we did not have an association historian at the time President Jerry Custer asked me to take on the task. Without any prior experience, little documentation and a lot of help from our fellow members, I was able to get started and began to collect documentation. Most of my time was taken up by trying to respond and answer questions from relatives and researchers. At the time, this was done in longhand as computers and the internet were new and, for me, rather expensive. I did not even own a typewriter, however did splurge and bought a word processor. Earlier, I had made friends with George Baroni, editor of the quarterly newsletter and author of the book "STORY OF THE 98th, 1942-1945." This 300-page, limited edition, book with hundreds of photos of personnel and events of the 98 is RARE, hard to find and rather expensive. George was, considered by many, the foremost authority on the history of the WW-II 98th Pyramidiers.

As I progressed, I began to obtain official documents from sources such as AFHRA (Air Force Research Agency) at Maxwell AFB, AL. I also learned that many of the 98th history documents had been lost as the 98th evacuated Italy in 1945.

I also became aware that NARA (National Archives and Records Administration) at College Park, MD archived the most complete historical records file in the United States. Recently, Tara Copp Connelly (daughter of Richard C. Harris, former 343rd Sq. Commander in Italy) lived in the area. She has done a tremendous job, recording history and Sortie Reports of 98th missions during WW-II. You can review her work by going to the "Links" page of our WEB.

As my health began to wane, I began to search for someone to take on the historian's job. With this change having taken place, I want to mention other imminent changes, relative to the 98th association as well as changes in active 98th units.

By now most everyone will know that Ken Laninga has relinquished the Sec/Treas. duties to Suzanne Mioduszewski and her sister Laura.

The 98th Range Wing at Nellis will have a command and structure change later this year. I do not have many details at this moment.

Those of you who were with the 98th at Lincoln AFB, NE already know how closely the 98th and 307th Bomb Wings worked together. Now, I have received information that the newly reactivated 343rd Bomb Sq. (B-52s) will soon come under the command of the 307th Bomb Wing at Barksdale, LA. The 307th is scheduled to be activated at Barksdale to replace the 917th Wing presently there. Details of these changes are sketchy at this time.

As I move on, I wish to thank ALL who have been of great assistance and apologize to those I have failed to give the answers you need. I will stay keenly interested in the 98th and try to continue to be of assistance in any way I can.

# **President's Message**

continued from previous page

president of our association, her spirit will be sorely missed. Our condolences and prayers go out to her family and friends.

Watch for details for the reunion and the registration form in the May newsletter. I hope to see all of you there.

With Warmest Regards,

Bill Seals President

# Should I salute or place my hand over my heart?

The following text comes from Afterburner -9/2010.

Public law 110-181 states "all persons present in uniform should render the military salute. Members of the Armed Forces and veterans who are present but not in uniform may render the military salute.

All other persons present should face the flag and stand at attention with their right hand over the heart, or if applicable, remove their headdress with their right hand and hold it at the left shoulder, the hand being over the heart.

Citizens of other countries present should stand at attention. All such conduct toward the flag in a moving column should be rendered at the moment the flag passes."

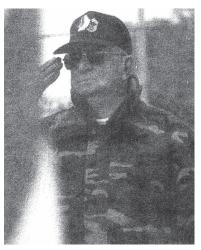
To clarify, retirees may salute or place their hand over their heart to render respect to the U.S. flag.

# **Message from Your Editor**

# To Our Valued Members:

As we welcome in the New Year let me take the opportunity to wish you good fortune and especially good health. Those of us that strive to provide you with an interesting Newsletter will continue to bring you new and fascinating articles. We are fortunate to have many resources from which to obtain material. On occasion our contacts do not meet publishing dates unfortunately and some material does not get published. Please note that we are endeavoring to promote accuracy especially in meeting deadlines. We are always making an effort to improve our Newsletter. At various times especially around the holidays delays may occur and delivery of your Newsletter may be late. Your continued patience and support of our efforts is very much appreciated. In the new year we intend to continue articles concentrating on members of the greatest generation this country has ever seen. We intend to secure its memory.

Dolores J. Haritos Editor



U.S. Air Force Photo by Josh Plueger



# **Bananas & Milk Duds**

In the following article, writer Rick Reilly details his experiences when given the opportunity to fly in an F-14 Tomcat. If you aren't laughing out loud by the time you get to "Milk Duds," your sense of humor is seriously broken.

# Reprinted by permission of Rick Reilly. Published by Sports Illustrated.

This message is for America's most famous athletes: Someday you may be invited to fly in the back-seat of one of your country's most powerful fighter jets. Many of you already have. John Elway, John Stockton, Tiger Woods to name a few. If you get this opportunity, let me urge you, with the greatest sincerity . . .

Move to Guam.

Change your name.

Fake your own death!

Whatever you do.

Do Not Go!!!

I know.

The U.S. Navy invited me to try it. I was thrilled. I was pumped. I was toast! I should've known when they told me my pilot would be Chip (Biff) King of Fighter Squadron 213 at Naval Air Station Oceana in Virginia Beach...

Whatever you're thinking a Top Gun named Chip (Biff) King looks like, triple it. He's about six-foot, tan, ice-blue eyes, wavy surfer hair, finger-crippling handshake—the kind of man who wrestles dyspeptic alligators in his leisure time. If you see this man, run the other way. Fast.

Biff King was born to fly. His father, Jack King, was for years the Voice of NASA missions. (T-minus 15 seconds and counting. Remember?) Chip would charge neighborhood kids a quarter each to hear his dad. Jack would wake up from naps surrounded by nine-yearolds waiting for him to say, "We have liftoff."

Biff was to fly me in an F-14D Tomcat, a ridiculously powerful \$60 million weapon with nearly as much thrust as weight, not unlike Colin Montgomerie. I was worried about getting airsick, so the night before the flight I asked Biff if there was something I should eat the next morning. "Bananas," he said.

"For the potassium?' I asked.

"No," Biff said, "because they taste about the same coming up as they do going down."

The next morning, out on the tarmac, I had on my flight suit with my name sewn over the left breast. (No call sign—like Crash or Sticky or Leadfoot. But, still, very cool.) I carried my helmet in the crook of my arm, as Biff had instructed. If ever in my life I had a chance to nail Nicole Kidman, this was it.

A fighter pilot named Psycho gave me a safety briefing and then fastened me into my ejection seat, which, when employed, would 'egress' me out of the plane at such a velocity that I would be immediately knocked unconscious.

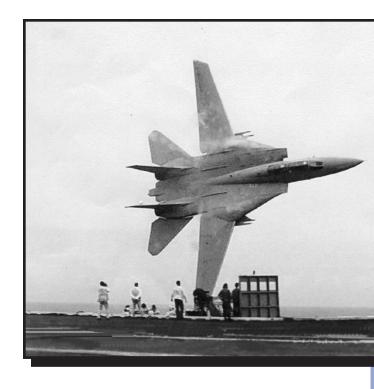
Just as I was thinking about aborting the flight, the canopy closed over me, and Biff gave the ground crew a thumbs-up. In minutes we were firing nose up at 600 mph. We leveled out and then canopy-rolled over another F-14.

Those 20 minutes were the rush of my life. Unfortunately, the ride lasted 80. It was like being on the roller coaster at Six Flags Over Hell. Only without rails. We did barrel rolls, snap rolls, loops, yanks and banks. We dived, rose and dived again, sometimes with a vertical velocity of 10,000 feet per minute. We chased another F-14, and it chased us.

We broke the speed of sound. Sea was sky and sky was sea. Flying at 200 feet we did 90-degree turns at 550 mph, creating a G force of 6.5, which is to say I felt as if 6.5 times my body weight was smashing against me, thereby approximating life as Mrs. Colin Montgomerie.

And I egressed the bananas.

And I egressed the pizza from the night before.



And the lunch before that.

I egressed a box of Milk Duds from the sixth grade.

Because of the G's, I was egressing stuff that never thought would be egressed.

I went through not one airsick bag, but two.

Biff said I passed out. Twice. I was coated in sweat. At one point, as we were coming in upside down in a banked curve on a mock bombing target and the G's were flattening me like a tortilla and I was in and out of consciousness, I realized I was the first person in history to throw down.

I used to know 'cool.' Cool was Elway throwing a touchdown pass. But now I really know 'cool.' Cool is guys like Biff, men with cast-iron stomachs and freon nerves. I wouldn't go up there again for Derek Jeter's black book, but I'm glad Biff does every day, and for less a year than a rookie reliever makes in a home stand.

A week later, when the spins finally stopped, Biff called. He said he and the fighters had the perfect call sign for me. Said he'd send it on a patch for my flight suit.

What is it? I asked.

"Two Bags."

This is an actual fly by during deployment of the nuclear aircraft carrier USS Stennis. The pilot was grounded for 30 days but he likes the picture and thinks it was worth it. YIKES!

# I love my country

It's the government I'm afraid of

**God Bless America** 

# **Paul & Ploesti**

by Sean Miskimins, AMM Curator

Long before he was the first Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force, Paul W. Airey was one boy in a sea of young men fighting a ferocious air war against Germany. A mission took him to one of the most feared Axis-held bomb targets in all of Europe:

The Romanian Oilfields at Ploesti.

This is the story of those Ploesti missions and a young Technical Sergeant named Paul Airey... During World War II (WW II), the oilfields located at Ploesti, Romania were considered to be the "energy source" behind Hitler's war machine. The Ploesti refineries were estimated to provide as much as 20 million barrels of oil to Germany per year, or roughly 33% of the fuel needed to sustain Hitler's planes, tanks, trucks and ships. Simply put: Cut off Ploesti and you would tremendously slow down, if not completely halt Hitler's plans for world domination. In 1943, Romania was still far inside Third Reich territory; therefore, a successful attack on the Romanian oil refineries would have to come from the air, which meant the attack would have to come from the Army Air Force (AAF).

# Paul & Ploesti continued from previous page

The plan to assault, and hopefully obliterate, the Ploesti refineries called for a Sunday attack in an attempt to keep Romanian workers' casualties low and provide the attacking crews better visibility of their targets. The plan, however, was two-sided:

If the AAF raiders could see the refineries better in the daylight, so could the Germans. The German antiaircraft (flak) gunners as well as the Luftwaffe fighter pilots defending Ploesti would be able to see the American B-24 bombers in the day's bright sunlight. To ensure even more bomb dropping accuracy, it was decided that the AAF B-24 Liberators would conduct a "tree top" raid, attacking from only 500 feet. This raid, known as OPERATION TIDAL WAVE, would be launched Sunday, August 1, 1943.

1,700 men, half of them enlisted, would converge on Ploesti from their launch point in Benghazi, Libya where they had trained for weeks to practice for this low-altitude attack on the five separate oil refineries located within a thirteen-mile radius of Ploesti. The men were from the 8th and 9th Air Forces, and more specifically from the 44th, 93rd, 98th, 376th and 389th Bomb Groups.

In 1943, Ploesti was more heavily defended than Berlin as the Romanian city boasted forty 6-gun batteries of the famed German 88mm anti-aircraft guns. With that sort of defense, the American aircrews truly had a daunting task to complete their mission and return unharmed from the 2,700-mile (roundtrip) mission.

Sunday morning, the 177 B-24s and the 1,700 Airmen flying in them encountered sheer chaos while passing over Ploesti. Haystacks "sprang to life" revealing German anti-aircraft guns inside. German Messerschmitt Me-109s, Junkers JU-52s, JU-87s and Heinkel-111s as well as Romanian IAR-80s all left the ground, with Luftwaffe (German Air Force) pilots aboard, to attack the US bombers and defend the refineries. B-24s took anti-aircraft shell (flak) hits, killing crewmen, while sending others parachuting from the damaged B-24s — a dangerous task at such a low altitude as sometimes parachutes failed to open below 500 feet. Those parachutists who survived the bailout were greeted in a variety of ways once upon Romanian soil.

Most of the parachutists found by German soldiers were quickly arrested. Some of these injured men were even refused treatment at a German field-dressing station where the German doctor snapped, "You killed my wife and daughter on a raid over Germany. I order my men to do nothing to help you." Other American parachutists were found by Romanian citizens who no longer wished to be under German rule. In some cases, these Romanians hid the Americans from the German soldiers and tried to help the AAF men evade capture.

Still, other wounded bombers managed to drop their payload and get back out over the Mediterranean Sea before they had to "ditch" (water crash-land) their Liberators. Additional aircrews crashed in nearby neutral Turkey where they were interned for the remainder of the War by the Turkish government.

While the daylight raid afforded the American attackers a great view of their targets — the oil refineries, the German defenders also had a great view that day and the Luftwaffe marksmanship took a toll on the AAF. In all, the Americans had lost 62 B-24s, and 532 Airmen were killed, wounded, captured or missing — a very high loss for one mission. It was estimated that we had destroyed 40% of the Ploesti refineries production capabilities for a six-month period, but the Germans refuted those high destruction numbers. Whatever the results, the facts were this: The United States had NOT destroyed the Ploesti refineries and those refineries would have to be attacked again.

The "Tree Top" attack was one of the costliest raids of the entire war for the AAF in terms of men and planes. Some changes to this low altitude daylight raid would have to be made. Allied attacks would still target Ploesti during the day, but they would attack from a more standard altitude of four to six miles above the target area. It took the AAF a while to recover from "Tidal Wave," but in early 1944, the AAF would return to attack Ploesti. Unbeknownst to him, one of the young Airmen to bomb Ploesti from this new "highaltitude" was destined to have a bright future in the enlisted Air Force. His name was Paul Wesley Airey.

Paul Wesley Airey was a 20-year old Technical Sergeant who served as a radio operator and aerial gunner aboard a 485th Bomb Group (B6) B-24. As a part of the 15th Air Force's 485th BG, Airey flew They appeared to be "waiting" for him. This was no welcoming committee. "They beat the hell out of me," on the May 31, 1944 mission to Ploesti. When asked declared Airey. "They were irate and angry." about the raid 55 years later in 1999, he remembered: "We had 481 bombers on that eight-hour mission and This ended Paul Airey's WW II service as he would lost only sixteen planes. We were dropping our bombs now embark upon several trains on his way to the final from somewhere between 19,000 to 24,000 feet (nearly destination of the Stalag Luft IV prison camp. At the 5 miles above the refineries) because of the heavy flak numerous stops along the way, German guards on the being shot at us by the Germans. The Germans also trains were not needed so much as to prevent Airey and used smoke machines to try and obscure the target as his fellow captured Airmen from escaping as they were we flew over." to protect the Americans from the mobs of German From April to August 1944, 5,500 allied bombers citizens on the platforms who were anxious for some bombed the refineries at Ploesti, losing only four "payback" on these soldiers Hitler and his propaganda percent of their planes. This was a far cry from the machine had dubbed "Terror Fliers" (bomber crews 35% losses the AAF took during the low-level daytime who were supposedly targeting German civilians).

raid over Ploesti on August 1, 1943.

TSgt Airey made it safely to Stalag Luft IV, but Bombing the Ploesti oil refineries had proven fatal for he would endure harsh conditions there (including many an AAF Airman in WW II, but Airey returned surviving a 90-day "bread march" from the Baltic Sea) unscathed. Ironically his luck would run out less than as a "guest" of the Germans for the next 10 months two months after he bombed Ploesti. On a July 1944 until he was liberated by the British Army in May of 1945. By that time, the formerly healthy-looking B-24 mission to bomb another German oil refinery — the Florisdorf oil refineries located near Vienna, Austriacrewman had shrunk from 150 pounds down to just Airey and his B-24 crew were shot down on his 28th 100 pounds. combat mission. He recalled:

The future CMSAF would need several months of "The aircraft was hit by flak shortly after bombs away. recuperation back in the U.S. during the summer and fall of 1945 before he would be "ready for action." When I can recall the pilot feathering one engine and then the other. By this time we were well across the Danube he was indeed recovered, he decided to reenlist in the River (out of Germany) and were over Hungary, which AAF. As for the Ploesti oil refineries, the Romanians was an ally of the Germans. I can remember the oil surrendered the refineries to the advancing Russian pressure in the third engine started going down and "Red Army" on August 23,1944. By the time the War ended, the refineries at Ploesti were operating at only the pilot said, 'Get out!' If that third engine goes, the thing's (the B-24) going down like a lead sled. We all 20 percent of their capacity, thanks to the courageous and dedicated efforts of thousands of young Airmen bailed out." like Paul Wesley Airey.

Airev acted quickly. His prior 27 missions had shown him what happened to bomber crews who didn't William Chivalette contributed to this article. bailout quickly enough ... Airmen pinned to the floor Permission to reprint Paul & Ploesti, by Sean Miskimins, is of crashing bombers due to the tremendous centrifugal granted by the Air Force Sergeants Association. force which wouldn't allow them to get up and get to the escape hatches ... Fortunately, the 20-year old **Reunion Reminder** Massachusetts Airman safely exited the bomber and floated down towards Hungary in his parachute, Please tell everyone destroying his Morse encryption code sheet on the wa you know with ANY down. Being so young and carefree, he even chose connection to the pass the last few moments of his descent by lighting u Ploesti missions a cigarette on the way down. (August 1, 1943 and As he passed through the clouds he could see a grou April 5 – August 19, of farmers gathering near where he was going to land 1944) to join us!

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The following is a fantastic story related by the actual radar navigator bombardier who participated in the incident. While preparing to release bombs they sustained a direct hit and were in imminent danger of exploding. The crew survived in a fuselage of fuel and devastating fumes.

# Surviving "The Ides of March," 1945 by John Pesek

March 14, 1945 was much like most other days at the 98th Bomb Group's Air Base near Lecce, Italy. The mission to attack a railroad bridge was scrubbed, so we did not have to "sweat" its return. We had breakfast at the Officers' Mess, with two farm-fresh eggs each bought from the Italian farm women selling them. After dinner in the evening we stopped by "Operations" and read our crew was assigned to fly on March 15. I learned that I would be flying as a radar navigatorbombardier in aircraft "Green S," 344th Squadron and, by coincidence, the rest of the crew were mostly the crew with which I arrived the past summer. As I was one of only three radar operators in the Squadron, I flew with several different lead crews, but infrequently with my own.

The 344th Squadron flew as the Group Lead on March 15, so we launched two radar-bearing aircraft in positions No. 1 and No. 2 of nine in formation. The lead aircraft was piloted by our Operations Officer, Captain Donald Schmid, while our Squadron Commander, Lieutenant Colonel van Sickle, was co-pilot and I believe the Group Navigator flew with Schmid's crew on this mission. Our craft flew deputy lead to complete the mission in case the lead aircraft did not reach the target. Members of the crew in addition to me were Capt. William Seitz, pilot; 1st Lt. William Lowery, co-

pilot; Tech. Sgt. John Morion, engineer-tech.; Tech. Sgt. Allen Brown, radioman and waist gunner; Staff Sgt. Robert McVey, tail gunner; and Staff Sgt. John Collins waist gunner. In addition to me at the radar station on the flight deck, 1st Lt. Martin Freedman was the assigned bombardier, replacing 1st Lt. Kachadoorian. There was an assigned navigator at the regular station in the nose, and still another who flew in the nose turret for pilotage observation thus replacing our Sgt. Wayne Fuller. The radar antenna rotated within a protective inverted dome that replaced the ball turret aft of the bomb bay so Sgt. Albert Enyeart, our ball turret gunner, did not fly. The dome was manually lowered by the radioman after takeoff. The posted bomb load of twelve 500-pound RDX bombs suggested we would have an industrial target, and the full fuel load told us it would not be a short "milk run." We slept on that — without further speculation — but the historic significance of the Ides of March was well known.

We received wake-up calls, ate breakfast, then donned our flying clothes, picked up chute packs and Mae Wests and went for briefing on the day's mission. Seitz summarized the briefing from the flimsy given to pilots; "Mission 395 Target, Schwechat Oil Refinery South of Vienna, Austria. Bombing altitude 24,000 feet, bomb load twelve 500-pound [explosives]. Stations 0835;



Wreckage of planes from previous missions at the emergency air strip near Zara, Yugoslavia. (Photo by Brown.)

engines 0855; Taxi 0905; Takeoff 0915. 98th Bomb Take-off weather at 0915 was good as our group Group leading 47th Wing; IP Panhagen 340 degrees launched 34 planes, and the aircraft, Squadrons, Groups to target." and the Wings joined the 15th Air Force formation on time to depart the remote rendezvous point. The guns Many were uncomfortable when they saw the target were test fired and Freedman armed the bombs once was Schwechat Oil Refinery on the south side of the the formation was over the Adriatic. The mission was huge Vienna industrial target, an area fortified with uneventful until after we reached the initial point and numerous anti-aircraft guns. It was more hazardous started the bomb-run. The navigator and I compared than many targets because we would come into range notes on the wind direction and velocity and concluded of ack-ack batteries early in the bomb run. We were that we would have a head wind out of the northwest given the route to be flown; first to Tistino Point, Italy at about 90 knots. Our bomb-run would take longer and northward to Bos Novi, Yugoslavia including the because the ground speed would be reduced by close to times for rendezvous and check points along the route. 90 knots but the distance was still the same. We would The bomb-run would be in a northwesterly direction, be in range of the ack-ack gunners longer; improving starting at the initial point, Panhagen, Austria 32 miles their chances of hitting more of us while in their range. from the Refinery, and at 22,000 feet. Our bomb-In addition, we had broken clouds to partly cloudy run track was 328 degrees climbing to the bombing skies, permitting the ground gunners also to have visual altitude of 24,000 feet for the planned bomb drop at tracking of our large formation. They could closely 1330. Other information included weather conditions determine our track and velocity over the ground and en route and estimated winds aloft; they were not the altitude, because the first two varied very little but favorable. We were promised air cover but we did not we gradually climbed 2000 feet during the bomb run, know if it would be "Red-Tail" P-51s or the P-38s. so our altitude was fixed late in the bomb run. The flack Finally, a Royal Air Force intelligence officer gave us started to burst early in the bomb-run and appeared to two sets of secret coordinates, locating two air strips be endless. It took its toll; at least two aircraft from our that the Yugoslavian Partisans expected to occupy for Squadron formation of nine were seriously damaged.

the day during the time the mission was expected to fly over, in case any aircraft were in trouble and in danger Flying in the "second" lead aircraft, I followed the of not making it back to base across the Adriatic. These track for the bomb run on my radar screen. It was coordinates were written down by the navigators but continued on next page not further identified.

The Seitz Crew: Back from left; Robert McVey, Allen Brown, Albert Enyeart, Wayne Fuller and John Collins; front from left, John Pesek, William Seitz, William Lowery, John Morton and Reuben Kachadoorian. (Photo by 98th Bomb Group.



# Surviving "The Ides of March," 1945 continued from previous page

correctly established early by the radar-navigator and the bombardier in the lead plane. Recently Seitz confirmed that we not only were the deputy group lead but the "deputy Wing lead" in the formation "flying Green S-#361 [a] nearly new B-24 with radar." Freedman had the information in our bombsight and had the target intermittently in sight between the clouds. Simultaneously, I had the target on the radar screen, verified the drift and called the bombsight angles to him and he verified them in the bombsight "rate" progression. We were prepared to drop the bombs if the lead plane failed to do so. When bombing in formation on missions, the other bombardiers in the Squadron would have the lead plane in sight, and drop their bombs on cue when the lead plane dropped. Over Schwechat on March 15, 1945, the lead plane dropped out of formation very shortly before the bombs were to be released and we became the lead for a brief period. Almost coinciding with "bombs away," our aircraft sustained a direct hit by an 88mm projectile through the left wing about six feet from my position on the flight deck. Mercifully it did not explode on impact.

Sixty-five years later, Pilot Seitz wrote; "We were Deputy wing lead. The flight was uneventful until the last minute of the bomb run when we encountered flack right on course at our altitude. The first volleys were ahead of us but in the next volley an 88 [mm. projectile] went through the [left] wing of the aircraft taking out part of the main spar and right through the #2 gas tank but did not explode. Thank Goodness. This shell caused the [left] wing to come up and when I leveled the plane the wing leader had been hit and was in a steep bank. I looked over my left shoulder to take the lead and saw the gas pouring out of the wing by #2engine. I quickly put the mixture control in the cutoff position and hit the feathering button for #2 engine and told Lowery, the co-pilot, to turn the switches off on #2 engine."

Co-pilot Lowery recently wrote, "Regarding the time of the lead plan dropping out of the formation was just a matter of seconds [before] when we were hit. I remember Bill said, 'WE'RE HIT' and he started to assess the damage. #2 prop ran away, and as Bill was busy I started to feather #2 Prop. The prop started to slow down — but Bill said 'NO' so I unfeathered the prop. A few seconds later Bill then feathered the prop."

The round entered the lower leading edge of the left wing, inboard and immediately next to the No. 2 engine nacelle and emerged from the top of the wing a little aft its entry below. It pierced one of the fuel cells but did not destroy the wing spar (the wing stayed intact). As the bombs were dropped, the bomb bay was filled with fuel that blew against the aft bulkhead and mostly heavy fumes entered the rear compartment that housed the radio operator the rear turret gunner and the other waist gunner. According to plan, we rallied sharp left but instead of being able to stay in formation, we lost altitude and were flying alone. Seitz added, "I don't know what happened to the rest of the formation from this point on. The #2 engine would not hold the feathering position. I had to keep hitting the feathering button. During this time it seemed like all the guns in Vienna were taking a shot at us. Jamison's was the only ship that came to see what happened and see the damage to our ship. I told him not to get too close as the ship was in danger of exploding. I think due to the oil getting cold, the feathering finally held."

Lowery had this to say about the early seconds and next minute or two, "I never did know what happened to the lead plane. Shortly after falling out of the formation, the #3 plane [Taylor's] radioed ... they were closing in on us to check our situation. Bill told them to stay away since we could blow up and no use of them being damaged."

With much of the fuselage full of flight fuel and fumes, our aircraft was in imminent danger of exploding if there were an electrical spark of any kind, almost anywhere on the aircraft. Members of the crew were warned not to touch the rheostats that controlled the temperature of the heated flying suits and not to unplug them, nor to do anything about the gun heaters in the turrets and the waist guns. We could not wander far from our assigned positions until the flight was over. I also told Allen Brown to raise the radar dome but not all the way up so as not to break the circuit powering the rotation. Once it was raised to reduce the drag, my radar was not functional, so I could do nothing more but "sweat it" as most of the others. First we sweated



Damage done where the projectile exited the Inspecting the damage on top of the wing; from left, Pesek, wing. (Both Photos by Brown.) Seitz, (Martin) Freedman, Lowery and Morton.

blowing up and second we sweated the loss of fuel evening on a C47. About 20 people were on the C47 for Engine #1 and we did not know if its fuel supply going back to Italy, but I cannot remember where we would sustain it to the end of the flight. Lowery recalls, landed or how we got back to Lecce." (One from the "Morton immediately started to transfer fuel from #2 other crew had been killed in action.) tank to #1, but realized it was wrong so reversed the It may have been easier for us to locate the strip because Lowery, our copilot, had unexpectedly visited that emergency air strip on 15 February 1945 as Air Discipline Officer (ADO) flying with Bonnifield's crew on mission 380 to Vienna Matzleinsdorf marshalling yards. They lost engines 4 and 3 in succession while over Yugoslavia. Lowery described the incident, "We started to lose altitude and were instructed to get rid of as much as we could to lighten the aircraft. We tossed everything loose overboard. The navigator said that he had heard at a briefing that the English were establishing an emergency strip somewhere in the area." He went on, "A strip came into view with a Spitfire and a C47 at the south end of the strip. Bonnefield decided to land there rather than bail the crew out. When we rolled to Yugo, as the Partisans controlled the field. We landed at a stop we were met by Tito's Partisans and a British major. He asked what we were doing there as no one was supposed to know of the strip. Then he noticed the two feathered props. They [emergency air strip] were not yet operational. We wanted them to fly us in the C47 and take us home. No way — they took us to Ban and escorted us to the AF HQ. The navigator coming out of the wing. We were very fortunate the gave them the location and I believe the strip became operational [before March 15]."

transfer from #1 to #2 tank." The bomb bay doors were not completely shut in order to dissipate the fuel and fumes entering the bay from the wing, and to serve as an exit in case it was necessary to bail-out later. The immediate decision was to ride the plane down at least away from the target area where parachuting crew members would have a better chance of evading capture. In further recollection, Seitz wrote; "The bombardier, Marty Freedman came to the flight deck from the nose to see what he could do to stop the gas from coming into the bomb bay. John Pesek (Radar navigator) and Norman Whalen, Jamieson's navigator were talking and decided that our best bet was to try to fly to Zara, Zara with no trouble. When we stopped and the ground crew was motioning for us to shut the engines off, I thought we were on fire so after putting the mixture controls off, I told Lowery to turn off the mags and main switch. I left the plane via the top hatch and off the nose with Lowerv right behind. Some fuel was still shell didn't explode and we didn't catch on fire. I can remember telling us that we would be flown out that continued on next page

# Surviving "The Ides of March," 1945 continued from previous page

The pilot and navigator selected the strip near Zara. Not long before his death, Norman Whalen, a second tour navigator, wrote the coordinates from his records as "44-04N 15-28E" and a 4200-foot landing strip. This was about 250 nautical miles south and a little west of the target — a significant distance for a disabled aircraft. We did not start the auxiliary engine or "putt-putt" under the flight deck, but the hydraulic system was functional and operated without sparks so the landing gear was lowered into place and we had a smooth landing on the runway.

Sometimes things do not always happen as planned. Lowery wrote, "Before landing, Bill instructed me to radio when we were on the ground to so advise of the landing OK. I was to cut off the power and secure all switches and then depart the aircraft. When we came to a stop I started to radio our landing, I noticed Bill on top of the cockpit running off the nose turret. I thought if Bill was excited I damn well better be also, so I left everything and got the hell out of there, exiting the same way. I had to go back later to turn off the switches and to check what I had left undone." I (the author) exited through the bomb bay carrying the auxiliary scope of the radar as the Mickey operators were instructed to do in this situation. I never heard anything about it after submitting it to Operations.

We all distanced ourselves from the plane intact, and were met by some uniformed men who wore red stars on their caps. Looking around, it was obvious that others had been less fortunate than we as there were numerous wrecked planes that obviously had to make wheels-up landings at this emergency strip. While we



did not crash-in, our "Green S" would remain there, too. We commonly had fighter cover for our missions, either by the Red Tail Tuskegee Airmen flying P-51s always out of sight unless we needed close support for a damaged aircraft, or else from P-38s that flew close support and which we always saw. Seitz wrote: "Fighter cover, which I can't remember seeing, patrolled the whole area to the target. Someone probably called the fighters but I sure didn't see any." Lowery added, "I do not remember if there was any fighter escort on this particular mission."

A Royal Air Force plane, was there waiting as promised at the briefing that morning, Seitz continued, "Brown, the radio operator had the camera and took pictures. I think the plane [taking us out of Zara] was a C-47; we may have come back to Brindisi [Italy] as the British flew relief missions to Yugo from there." After the whole mission had passed, we boarded and took-off to Italy, and then made it to Lecce for dinner and to sleep in our own sacks. We had survived our "Ides of March."

This overall experience may have been particularly poignant for Bill Seitz as he commented; "On the last mission of my first tour a B-24 from the 343rd Squadron was hit in the left wing and caught on fire. I can still see the left wing explode and the ship go down. In a way, he may have been preparing for our episode because he often must have thought, "What would I have done." Nevertheless we all are thankful to both pilots for knowing what to do, and doing it, and especially to Bill Seitz who was awarded the Silver Star Medal for valor in combat, to add to his Distinguished Flying Cross and Air Medals, each with Oak Leaf Clusters. His bravery under fire made the rest of us braver.

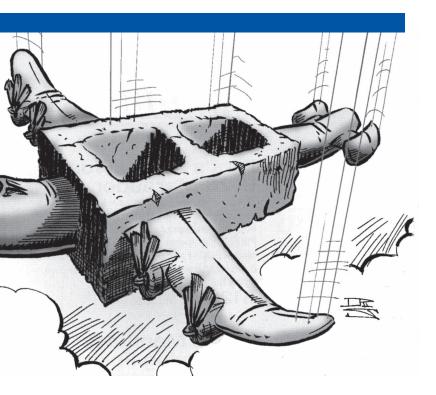
Written personal observations and manuscript reviews by William Seitz, pilot, and William Lowery, co-pilot, are gratefully acknowledged.

The 88mm projectile entered at the juncture of the nacelle and wing at the point of bright light; Lowery, Seitz and Brown in front of feathered prop. (Photo by Brown.)

# "Glide" **Characteristics** of the Lib: An Oxymoron

Some of you other old airplane drivers may remember the "glide" characteristics of the B-24 (best known to me as the PB4Y-1) when you lost power on all four engines. I was introduced to this one day in 1944 while transitioning from PBYs (the lovely old twin engine Catalina) to the Libs. I might note that my few hundred hours in P-boats, including horsing one of them into a nose high attitude for a full stall landing on the water,

I was shoving forward on the yoke, for the airspeed had built up my arms enough to deal with the Lib's indicator was rapidly unwinding and the rate of descent heaviness on the controls. indicator was pegging down. That didn't do the job, so We were cruising at 5000 feet, returning to our base at I rapidly rolled-in nose down tab, all the time thinking, NAS Hutchison, Kansas after a few hours of instrument "My God, we are going to land long!" I was still training and general air work. About 10 miles south of rolling in down tab as I glanced at the airspeed and the field my instructor called Hutch tower requesting the still rapidly unwinding altimeter and then back up a straight-in approach to runway 36. Tower cleared and saw the runway looming up over the nose turret! us for the straight in, advised wind from north and We were going down like a rock. Seconds later I called barometer setting. He then told me to line up for 36, for full flap, horsed the yoke back, rapidly crankingmaintain 5,000 feet and tell him when the approach in nose up tab, rotated, flared-out and a fully stalled end of runway 36 disappeared under the ball turret on 4Y-1 crunched down on the numbers at the approach the nose. That made me more than a bit curious, but I end of 36. I'll bet our tail skag was off the end of the rolled the Lib, lining her up to runway 36 as instructed. runway when we touched down! As we rolled out, When the approach end disappeared under the nose, I my instructor leaned over and shouted, "See how she notified him of such. He immediately pulled all four glides!" That's how I learned that with power off, the throttles back to idle (15 inches manifold pressure Lib had all the glide characteristics of a brick, albeit for zero thrust), dropped the gear, moved the mixture a "flying one." Slight exaggeration, as its approach controls to full rich, dropped half-flap and shoved profile without power (sink rate) was about one foot all four props to high RPM. He looked across the down for each foot forward. All in all, it was a damn cockpit at me and said, "Maintain airspeed and land good aircraft, but a glider she was not. her, call for full flap when ready!" My plane captain Keith Young (first mech) who was sitting on the jump seat with his E-mail byandky@gateway.net headset on had obviously heard our conversation over the intercom. A brief glance at his face across my right



shoulder indicated that he, as well as I, didn't have the foggiest notion how we were going to avoid overshooting the runway.

# A Man I've Never Met (but Can't Help but Want To Remember)

by Devon Powell, Historian, 98th Bomb Group

Jerome C. Casper was born on December 10,1919, in Brooklyn, NY. The eldest and only boy of four children, Jerry, as he came to be called, was in love with flight. With airplanes. And when the war formally came in 1941, like so many young men at that time with patriotism — and with defending his country and the world, he wanted to fly.

Some people just know what they want to do. What they want to "be." Jerry wanted to fly airplanes. He wanted to fix airplanes. He wanted to know everything he could know about aviation and mechanics — and he wanted to be the best. Not having met him (which is something I would have very much liked), but having seen how much of his time was spent in or around airplanes, I think it's safe to say he probably was most "at home" in the air.

The start of his journey in becoming a United States Armed Air Forces (USAAF) Captain of the B-24 Liberator "Hey Doc!" in the 98th BG, 344th Squadron, was after graduating from Haaren High School in 1938, where he majored in aviation. Before graduating, he took a job working nights as an airplane mechanic in 1937 at Floyd Bennett Field, in Brooklyn, NY. He spent hours and hours at the airfield, even more when in 1939 he was also hired as a flight instructor and began training others. The more he learned, the more he wanted to know...

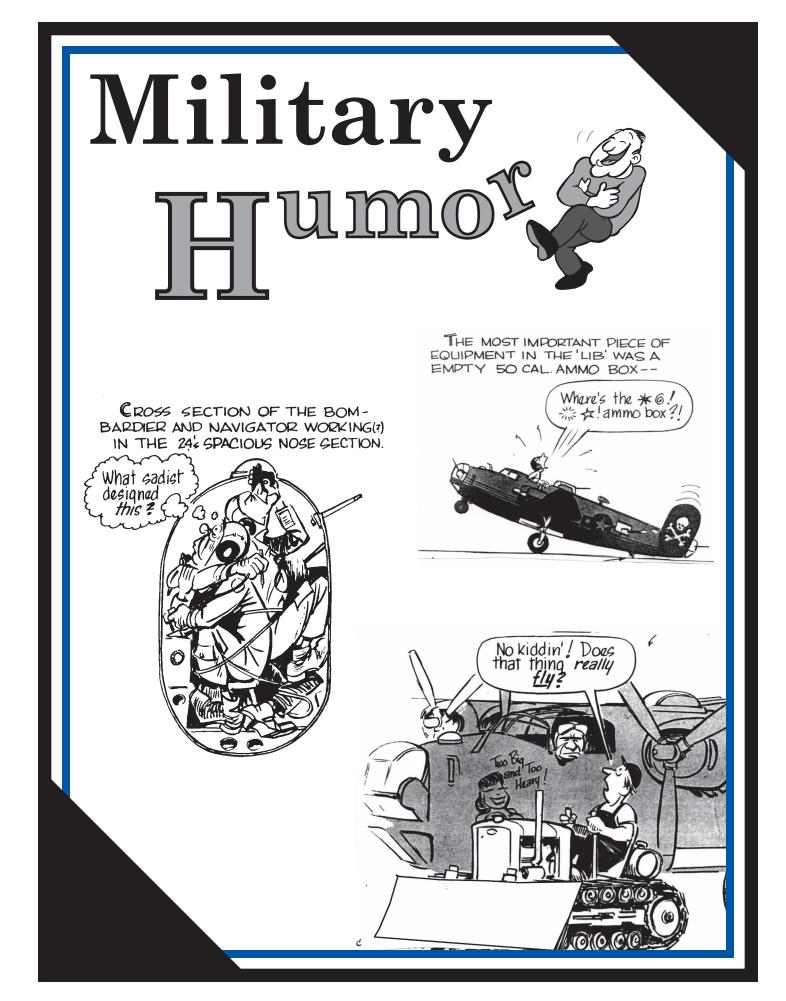
Working for the Brooklyn Flying Service and Municipal Flying Service for four years, I was told by the youngest and last remaining of his siblings that he once won a contest at Floyd Bennett for "landing on a dime...really. Actually landing an airplane on a ten cent piece!" According to military records, he logged 1902 hours as a flight instructor at Floyd Bennett, primarily in a single engine, 250 H.P. aircraft.

In 1939, the rumblings of the war starting in Europe were burning brightly in him, and Jerry wanted to fly in the efforts against Nazi Germany. Initially he was refused enlistment in the USAAF due to his eyesight. Determined to be involved and fly in the war, he left his job at Floyd Bennett on February 20,1941, and from February 25, 1941 — May 24,1942 was commissioned by the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) as a 1st Lieutenant after enlisting and attending RCAF Officer Training School at Manning Depot in Toronto, Canada for six weeks. From there, he moved on to Pilot Transition training in Picton, Ontario for another six weeks, then went to Bombardier School in Saskatchewan for a month, before finishing another month in Radio/Wireless school in Winnipeg.

After completing training, in August of 1941, he became a Staff Pilot and Assistant Squad Commander with the RCAF, logging another 527 hours of flight time. According to RCAF records, he also served as an instructor at the No. 3 Wireless School and No. 5 Bombing and Gunnery School.

Despite the fact that he was helping train others and was a part of the war effort, he ultimately wanted to fly for the USA and the USAAF and get more directly involved. With the US moving towards formally declaring war on the Axis powers, Jerry sent several letters in early December of 1941 to various branches of the military, including the Naval Reserves, to see if he would be accepted as a pilot. He received replies from the US Navy Department Bureau of Navigation (from at the time Chief of Bureau C. W. Nimitz) and from the Adjutant General of the War Department on December 15, thanking him for his interest, but informing him that his services were not required.

Then, on December 26, 1941, a second letter from the Adjutant General of the War Department arrived. Apparently once the US became formally engaged in the war with the declaration passed by Congress on December 11 against Germany and Italy (and three days prior against Japan), the US found that it needed experienced pilots, and so despite his eyesight, Jerry was enlisted to active duty with the USAAF on May 25, 1942. He was ordered to report to Randolph Field, nearby San Antonio, Texas, where upon arriving in June he spent a month taking a Basic Instructors course before being sent to Harlingen, Texas for the next two and a half months for Maintenance courses.



# A Man I've Never Met

This was just the beginning of Jerry's USAAF military training. Remaining in Harlingen for the next 16 months, he initially trained at the Harlingen Airfield Gunnery School (HAGS) logging 500 hours as a gunnery pilot, qualifying on AT-6, AT-11, AT-17, AT-18 and B-34 aircraft from July to December of 1942. In January he logged another 500 hours before completing a final 200 hours between July 1 and September 9,1943. Shortly after he was promoted to Captain . . . a little over a year and four months after he was enlisted for active duty.



The next step was moving to Tarrant Field in Ft. Worth, Texas where he began training as a B-24 pilot on September 11, 1943. In November, he transferred to bases in New Mexico, Colorado and Virginia where he completed his B-24 phase training in December. As of January 1, 1944 he was assigned to the 420 Battle Squadron, 302 Battle Group headquarters at Langley Field where he completed Chemical Warfare and Malaria Control training, was qualified for flights to 30,000 feet, and authorized for overseas duty. Jerry was sent to Italy for combat duty on February 5, 1944. He had just turned 24 . . . and he was finally going to do what he'd set out to do from the start.

On March 18, 1944 he was assigned to the 15th Air Force, 98th Bomb Group's 344th Battle Squadron, arriving at the squadron's headquarters in Leece, Italy. During his three tours of duty with the 344th (March 18 – May 11; May 11 – June 30; July 1 – August 3) as Captain of the B-24 Liberator "Hey Doc!", he completed 51 combat missions in the European Theater of Operations, with over 280 combat hours and logging 4400 hours of flight time. He served as the lead on

# continued from page 14

eight combat missions, including one on April 3,1944 to bomb strategic targets in Budapest, Hungary, and in which he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. He was also awarded an Air Medal and three Oak Leaf Clusters for meritorious achievement in aerial flight while participating in sustained operational activities against the enemy during his second tour.

Even after reading all of the mission reports from 1942-1944, getting familiar with the names of pilots and crews, it's difficult to imagine someone — let alone entire squadrons of personnel — going out on mission after mission with anti-aircraft fire going off all around you, enemy aircraft trying desperately to shoot you out of the sky, and the likely intense and heavy burden of duty to country and responsibility for the survival of one's self and crew, as well as for others in the squadron.

It's hard to imagine . . . these brave young men. These heroes. Jerry asked for this. He wanted it. It's what he maybe knew he was meant to do. He kept all of the men on his crew safe — those that called themselves the "Green Ooples" — for all of those combat missions. Though it was damaged on occasion, the "Hey Doc!" survived to fly each and every one of those missions. She, and the crew who flew her, did their job well.

Jerry returned from the war on August 31,1944 and was formally granted separation from the USAAF on September 5. Civilian life found him returning to Brooklyn, NY and his life as a father of his daughter born at Randolph Airfield nearly two years prior, and the husband of his beautiful wife, whom he'd married on February 3, 1941. He took a job as a pilot for a private corporation, primarily shuttling executives between New York and Washington, D.C., among other places.

Irony is a word that is often misused and even more often misunderstood. In Jerry's case — the definition of, the word "incongruity between what might be expected and what actually occurs," is entirely accurate. After surviving so many possible and altogether likely occasions where he may have died in combat flying over Europe, the enemy that finally caught up with him was one you'd probably not expect — Mother Nature. Piloting a group of company executives back from a meeting in Washington, D.C. to New York in late November of 1945, a relatively strong storm destroyed the plane they were in, sending it into the Hudson River where all aboard were killed. back of photos that had been passed down to me, I felt a tightness in my chest. A sense of pride and love for a grandfather I never knew. A sadness for the fact that I never got the chance.

I can only hope to aspire to be someone who is as brave Remembering this brave man through distant memories and dedicated as Jerry seems to have been, and it is and photographs, paper and some other memorabilia, my honor to keep his memory — and the memories is unfortunately all I have been afforded — being that of all such brave men who served in the 98th Bomb Group — alive for future generations. It is my hope my mother was the two-year-old he returned to from the war. Even she was robbed of the opportunity to others can appreciate the sacrifices, dedication and really know him, and cannot remember anything about service of these men (and women), and honor them, as him. As I was writing this, pulling information from I believe they should be, by not allowing such efforts those military documents and notes scribbled on the to be forgotten.



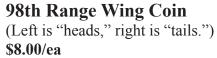
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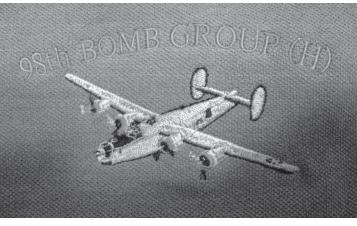
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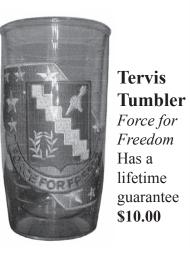
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