



# THE PYRAMIDIERS

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

February 2012

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## Message from Bill Seals . . .



### *Christmases Past*

This past Christmas season I was in a reflective mood one evening as I read an advertisement for a local theater's production of Charles Dickens' "*A Christmas Carol*." When I'd finished reading the newspaper, my mind began to wander back to my family's Christmases in the 1930s. Times were very hard for my family during these years of the **Great Depression** as we, like millions of others, struggled to make ends meet. Some way we

survived, but the difficult times split the family apart, and we entered the 1940s a family of four—my Mother, Sister, Brother, and me. Times were still extremely difficult as we had to depend on help from family. Remember, there was no federal or state aid for people who were down and out, and most churches were nearly as poor as we were.

As my memories turned to Christmas of 1941, I remembered that our situation had finally become a bit brighter. Mother had found a position as a school teacher, and although the salary was meager and was paid in script worth about 80% on the dollar, we were paying our own way. The improvement in our lives was in sharp contrast to what was occurring around the world. **The world was at War!**

In Europe, Hitler had overrun most of the countries with his blitzkrieg tactics, and was threatening the lifeline of the British with his submarines in the North Atlantic, and would soon be sinking shipping off our East Coast and in the Gulf. But he had made a decision that would have a huge impact on the outcome of the war, perhaps the determining factor, the invasion of Russia. The Japanese had taken Manchuria and most of the desirable part of China. They were in the process of taking nearly all of the Southwest Pacific and Southeast

**continued, next page**

Asia, and had destroyed the American fleet in the Pacific, except for our aircraft carriers.

America was ill-prepared to go to war. While our industries had begun to manufacture some war materials as part of the lend-lease program for Great Britain and Russia, it was very small in proportion to the amount that would be required. Our Army, including the Air Force, stood at 1.7 million poorly trained men, with practically no arms—the little that had been produced had gone to our allies. One gets some idea of how ill-prepared we were when you consider it took three and a half years to procure the equipment and train sufficient troops to mount an invasion of Europe, and the better part of four years to defeat Japan.

What the Nazis and the Japanese had underestimated was our absolute love of freedom, and our tremendous capacity to produce the armaments and supplies necessary for America and our allies to win unconditional victory. Americans were united behind a cause, perhaps as they had been never before and would never be again. Every man, woman, and child (who was old enough to understand) was totally behind our efforts to win the war. There were war profiteers and people who shirked their duty to be sure, but they were such a small minority as to be insignificant. We Americans were mad that the Japanese had attacked us in a sneak air strike on Pearl Harbor even as their diplomats were in our capital for peace talks. We went to war with a vengeance, men volunteered for the armed forces by the millions, and by Christmas 1942, we had an Army of 5.4 million men and had added one hundred air groups. American industry had ramped up to levels of war production that were unimagined a year earlier. **America was at War!**

Suddenly, my mind was in the present and I began to compare our situation today with our situation seventy Christmases ago. America had again been attacked unexpectedly on September 11, 2001, by a radical Muslim group intent on changing the political geography of the world. As in 1941, our response was prompt, but in the minds of many Americans, our objectives were unclear and our strategy poorly

conceived. Ten years later, we are still fighting in both Iraq and Afghanistan; militarily in Afghanistan, and politically/financially in Iraq. The gains that we have made have come at great costs, both in terms of the sacrifices of our fighting men and women, and in terms of the tremendous financial costs.

We have just begun a national debate over the future roles of our armed forces, and over the amount of resources we are willing to expend on those forces. Concurrently, we have been unable to agree on a solution to our spiraling national debt. Hopefully, this year's elections will put a focus on these critical areas and we will select representatives and leaders who are able and willing to deal with those issues which threaten our values and our very way of life. **Let us pray so!**

See you in Colorado Springs in September.

With Warmest Regards,

**Bill Seals**  
**President**

## 98th's Force for Freedom Scholarship Is in Memory of Sgt. William H. Simons

The 98th Bomb Group/Wing Veterans Association will award their \$1,000 Scholarship to a 2012 graduating high school senior who will be continuing their education at university, community college, technical or trade school. The applicant should have at least a 2.5 grade point average in high school, completed three quarters of their senior year, and be recommended by an active member of the Association. The young person should be a patriot who believes in the American ideals and have a clear idea of what they want their continuing education to do for them and their chosen career.

Application packages are available from the Scholarship Chairman and should be requested by the

continued on page 4

Hello and Happy New Year to all of you! It's hard to believe so much time has passed since we were in Shreveport. 2012 has been a momentous year already for our family as we just saw my oldest grandson, a recent graduate of the University of Toledo, off for the US Coast Guard Training Center in Cape May, New Jersey. It made me think of what it must have been like for so many other families, albeit in different times, to see a loved one off to serve their country. I think of my Grandmother who had to say goodbye to three of her sons, and the pride she felt and showed with the blue star flag that hung in her window as long as she lived. It is truly an honor to have met so many of you who have served and to be a part of your Association.

Thank you to all who have been sending in your dues, which are \$15 per year. As a nonprofit organization, our memberships run July 1 through June 30. Although we no longer send out membership cards, you will find the number following your last name on the address label of the "Pyramidiers" newsletter indicates the year your membership is paid through. Please be sure to provide me with any address changes to prevent your missing out on one of our great newsletters and saving us from the return-postage fee. Also, if you have an email address please share it with us. Contact me if you have any questions regarding your status.

I'm excited to hear that we will be going to Colorado Springs for our next reunion. It was one of my Dad's favorite places and I hope many of you will be there with us!

Think Spring! This is especially important for those of us in the North!!

**Susie Mioduszewski**  
**Secretary/Treasurer**



We all recognize, at some point, time marches on with or without our approval. There are times in our lives when we are happy about this and times we are not. But, time still marches on.

Then there are the moments in our lives where time marching on just seems really strange. After 15 years of doing something I really loved and giving it up because of the march of time, I am at that strange place now. But, this old boy is just happy to still be here, not just for my own pleasure, but also for those who care about me. It brings a smile to my face and a tear to my eye just knowing that changes—even those very dear to your heart—are not the end, but the beginning of something new.

Let me share a bit of a note I recently received from a dear friend, let's call it *Happiness!*

A 92-year-old, petite, well-poised and proud man, who is fully dressed each morning by eight o'clock, with his hair fashionably combed and shaved perfectly, even though he is legally blind, moved to a nursing home today. As he maneuvered his walker to the elevator, the aide said, "I will provide you a visual description of your room, including the eyelet sheets that have been hung on the window."

"I love it," the man stated with the enthusiasm of an eight-year-old having just been presented a new puppy.

"But you haven't seen the room; just wait," replied the aide.

"That doesn't have anything to do with it," he replied. **Happiness is something you decide on ahead of time.** Each day is a gift, and as long as my eyes open, I'll focus on the new day and all the happy memories I've stored away just for this time in my life."

Let me say this, my title has changed but, my memory bank is not yet full. So now as time marches on I will be filling it with new memories. Hopefully for a long time to come.

**Dennis Posey**  
**Vice President**

## Departed Comrades...from inside and outside the 98th

**Robert T. Rutledge** passed away on Dec. 16, 2011. Captain Rutledge was a member of the 98th Bomb Group, 343rd Squadron. He served as a navigator, and was the recipient of a Purple Heart. Many of us were lucky to have met and gotten to know him at the 2009 Albuquerque Reunion which he attended with his daughter, Rhoda. In his later years he turned author, putting together and publishing his World War II Memoirs; compiling stories, documents, photographs, memorabilia, and commentaries. This he did for his family but, fortunately for us, he decided to share—resulting in an absolute treasure and ‘must read’ for all. He will be interred at Arlington Cemetery on Mar. 12.

Chief Master Sergeant **Warren P. White** of Lutz, Fla. passed away, Jan. 10. He served his country honorably during World War II, Korea, and Vietnam before retiring from the U.S. Air Force. In his retirement, he devoted many hours helping children as a member of the Shriner’s Association of Tampa. He was a member of the 98th Bomb Group, 345th Squadron serving in North Africa. One of his favorite stories was when “Killer” Kane’s plane was badly damaged by flak, the ground crew worked all night to repair the holes, using anything they could find—including Spam cans—which they would turn face-in before riveting in place. In the morning they were standing proud of what they had accomplished until Kane showed up to inspect the plane and became furious at the sight of a patch on the side of the plane that said ‘Spam;’ which he thought was done on purpose by someone trying to be ‘funny,’ rather than by accident by someone with no sleep! We remember Warren as a great friend of the 98th Bomb/Wing Veterans Association.

A great and new friend of our Association, **Robert E. Hathorn**, age 89, passed away on Jan. 15 in Cincinnati, Ohio. Bob attended our 2011 Shreveport Reunion honoring Ploesti Veterans. He was a great guy who entertained us all with his stories and ‘singing.’ He participated in four missions over Ploesti as a member of the 449th Bomb Group, 718th Squadron.

**Stewart Fulbright** (pictured above, right) was a Tuskegee airman. Tuskegee crews participated in bomber escort missions in the ETO in 1944. They proved to be most proficient in their protective role, losing fewer bombers than other groups providing escorts. A new movie portrays their service.



FULBRIGHT FAMILY VIA GOLDSBORO NEWS-ARGUS

Mr. Fulbright was one of about 1,000 men trained in Tuskegee.

### Stewart Fulbright, WWII pilot

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
DURHAM, N.C. — Stewart Fulbright, a trailblazing black educator and pilot during World War II as one of the Tuskegee Airmen who later served as the first dean of the North Carolina Central University School of Business, has died. He was 92. His son, Edward, said Mr. Fulbright died in Durham, N.C., on New Year’s Day after a short illness. A funeral is planned for

today at Covenant Presbyterian Church. Born in Springfield, Mo., Mr. Fulbright enlisted in the Army Air Corps in 1943. He was one of about 1,000 men trained in Tuskegee, Ala., as the first black pilots, navigators, and bombardiers in the US military. He worked at NCCU from 1947 until his retirement in 1982, becoming the first dean of the business school in 1972.

### Force for Freedom Scholarship continued from page 2

sponsoring member. They consist of a form to be filled out by the person applying for the scholarship and one by the sponsoring member of the 98th who will mail the completed package, including the applicant’s high school grade transcript, to the Scholarship Chairman no later than May 1, 2012. Applications will be reviewed by the Scholarship Committee and their selection will be announced by the President by June 10.

We believe it is important that today’s young men and women know the contributions made by the men of the 98th to insure their freedom, and in turn pass on their stories to future generations so they are never forgotten.

## 98th Bomb Group/Wing Veterans Association Financial Report

### Income statement for year ending: June 30,2011

<b>Income:</b>	
Membership Dues	\$3,339.00
Contributions to Scholarship Fund	2,577.00
Contributions to Memorial Fund	659.00
Memorabilia Sales	1,241.98
Interest	23.85
Reunion Fees	<u>18,543.00</u>
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$26,383.83</b>
<b>Expenses:</b>	
Reunion Expenses	\$20,535.69
Memorabilia Items	490.00
Postage	2,117.96
Web Site	500.00
Scholarship	1,000.00
Misc. Expenses	<u>619.00</u>
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$25,262.65</b>
<b>Surplus for the year</b>	<b>\$1,121.18</b>

### Balance Sheet as of: June 30, 2011

<b>Assets:</b>	
Checking Account	\$26,732.36
Savings Account	<u>1,236.04</u>
Total Cash	\$27,968.40
Total Assets	\$27,968.40
<b>Liabilities:</b>	
Scholarship Fund	\$2,317.04
Memorial Fund	<u>905.00</u>
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>\$3,222.04</b>
<b>Retained Surplus Funds</b>	<b>\$24,746.36</b>
<b>Total Liabilities and Retained Surplus Funds</b>	<b>\$27,968.40</b>



## 98th Bomb Group — Active Members — Roster Update

### ADDRESS CHANGE

LAST NAME	FIRST NAME	M.I.	ST ADDRESS	CITY	ST	ZIP	SQD
Broe	La Vern	E.	104 6th Ave NW	Waterford City	ND	58854	344
Crevensten	Arthur	S.	1316 Woodruff Ave	Jacksonville	FL	32205-7195	343
Frey	Albert	E.	2907 Gardenia Rub Ln #21	Ruskin	FL	33570-2862	343
Sells	Thelmon (Roy)	L.	516 Hummingbird Lane	Little Elm	TX	75068	344
Simmonds	Donald	L.	519 Apgar Vw	Columbia Falls	MT	59912-9441	344
Willingham	Nelson	H.	13357 Monroe Rd 611	Paris	MO	65275-2777	343
Kalous	Paul	J.	PO Box15	Eureka	WI	54934-0015	343
Opsata	Mrs. Andrew	W.	929 Trosper Rd SW Apt A204	Tumwater	WA	98512-8123	H

### DEPARTED COMRADES

LAST NAME	FIRST NAME	M.I.	ST ADDRESS	CITY	ST	ZIP	SQD	DOD
Rutledge	Robert	T.	PO Box 2759	Lake Arrowhead	CA	92352-2759	343	12-16-11
White	Warren	P.	20200 County Line Rd	Lutz	FL	33558-5074	345	1-10-12
Hathorn	Robert		7392 Ridgepoint Dr #6	Cincinnati	OH	45230	449	1-15-12

## In His Own Words . . .

The following mission briefings are shared by **Kenneth E. Ackerman** who served in the Army Air Force in 1944 as an Aircraft Observer, Bombardier, and Aerial Gunner. He describes his role in bombing missions in Northern France and discusses what it was like to travel home on a French ship.

Unit and Group Commendations from Lt. Col. S.E. Manzo and Ernest L. Walters, Lt. Col. Adjutant (by command of Brigadier General Hugo Rush) follow Ackerman's text.

### August 15, 1944

St. Tropez—forty 1000 pound bombs. Southern France invasion. Went to briefing 11:00 P.M. on 8/14. Started engines 2:30 A.M. on 8/15. Fog was so heavy could hardly see the end of the wings. Specht and crew were next ahead of us on take off. Plane blew up when wheels were raised. Four gunmen in tail of plane were rescued. Specht pilot of plane walked past our window in castle just before we went to briefing and said, "here is where I go down in history or just go down. Pray for me." We said, "we fly tonight too." The 98th lost four ships on take off, all blew up. Another loss over sea on way to target.

Of twenty eight crews at take off we were one of two that made it to the target. Bombed at 12,000 feet. Landing boats were closer to beach than we were when bombs released. We hit beach beautifully digging forty fox holes in beach for a distance of 1,500 feet. Bombs hit beach 7:27 troops 7:30.

As we crossed Corsica they were taking B26s off on Corisca field with six planes on runway taking off. At the beach there were battleships in so close they were looking down the barrels of their 14" guns to take out gun impalements. An 88 opened up on us as we dropped bombs. A navy plane took off an aircraft carrier so close in that it appeared from 12,000 feet to take out the 88 battery on the take off. There were two battleships, four aircraft carriers and 125 destroyers under us as we went in to drop bombs.

### October 10, 1944

#### Vicenza, Italy Mission time 6.0

Flew as navigator second plane of attack unit. Comet flew as bombardier. Weather closed in at northern end

of Adriatic. Landed with bombs. Got credit for mission, which finished me up with 50 missions. Total of 276.3 hours of combat time.

### October 11, 1944

Flew as navigator with Christy to Naples. Picked up a load of 98 personnel. Washed out nose wheel on landing. Plane plowed a path past end of runway without nose wheel.

### October 15, 1944

Went to Naples to wait for ship back to States.

### November 1, 1944

Went on board ship, a French ship with French crew. Received card for eating at Captains mess and 75 seventh army troops to look after. (They had been through North Africa, Anzio and Southern France invasion.) I thought I was tired, but not compared to these 75 soldiers.

### November 17, 1944

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

As I remember on loading on the French ship with French crew, I was given the responsibility to look after the area that had made up part of the old ballroom on the ship. The duties included the 75 American soldiers that had been through North Africa, Anzio and Southern France. Along with the duties I got a pass that got me around the ship and to the Captains dining room, French waiters, a plate size of steak at least once every day and walks on the deck.

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

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

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

In entering New York harbor we unloaded our stretcher patients first and while waiting a Red Cross worker came up the gang plank and asked if there was something she could get us. I checked and came back and told her my group would like milk and newspapers. Elections had taken place since we left Naples. She said "that she could do" and seemed relieved that was all they asked about. One of the soldiers told me it had been three years since he had fresh milk.

HEADQUARTERS  
98TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP (H) AC  
APQ 520 New York, NY

26 August 1944.

SUBJECT: Commendation.


TO : **1st Lt. William H. Eskles, 0816647, AC, 545th Bomb Squadron (H), and Combat Crew.**

1. On the recent operation of 15 August 1944 ("D" Day) in support of the landings on Southern France, you were required to perform one of the most difficult missions ever asked of a combat airman. You and your crew had to take off with a heavy bomber loaded to capacity with bombs and fuel, on an unusually dark night without moon, and under instrument weather conditions with a ceiling of zero and a visibility of less than one-half ( $\frac{1}{2}$ ) a mile caused by a thick ground fog. The hazards of the take-off were increased by the mental hazard after having witnessed one of the first planes crash and explode on take-off. Then you had to form by Squadrons and fly a night Squadron formation for about three hours until dawn, when Squadrons formed into Attack Units and proceeded to the invasion beach.

2. In order to perform this mission you and your crew were required to fly many night formations during the preceding month in addition to flying your normal combat missions. You exercised exceptionally good faith and loyalty while perfecting your night formation flying, especially since you were not told the reason for the practice.

3. The effect of the action of the Air Forces on that day are evident to all. The Naval and Army Commanders attribute their easy successes largely to the action of the Air Forces prior to "D" Day and on "D" Day. The mere presence of our bombers overhead served to bolster the morale of our invasion forces and lowered the morale of the enemy.

4. I wish to commend you and the members of your crew for your whole-hearted cooperation and unselfish devotion to duty which made this most difficult and vitally important mission so extremely effective.

  
S. E. MANZO,  
Lt. Colonel, Air Corps,  
Commanding.

Additional Commendations on Following Pages

HEADQUARTERS  
98TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP (H) AC  
APO 520 New York, NY

SUBJECT: Commendation.

30 September 1944.

TO : All Officers and Enlisted Men, 98th Bombardment Group (H).

1. We started the month of September with two specific aims known to all of you. First, we were going to set a new bombing accuracy record for one mission, and second, we were going to lead the entire Air Force in bombing accuracy for the whole month. We have accomplished both aims. We set a new Air Force record for one mission by scoring 97.2% within one thousand feet of the aiming point when we attacked the Baja Railroad Bridge, Hungary, on 21 September 1944. We led all the Groups in the Air Force with an average of 70.5% within one thousand feet of the aiming point for the entire month, which included eleven scores. This monthly average also sets a new high over the previous record of 59.5% which the 450th Bomb Group achieved for the month of August.

2. Every officer and enlisted man in the Group has reason to be justly proud of this record. Everyone, those on the ground as well as those in the air, had a hand in it. I wish to commend each man for the important part he played in establishing this record. As long as we continue to put the bombs within one thousand feet of the aiming point, the target will automatically be taken care of.

3. One record remains unbroken. No group, as yet, has achieved the perfect score of 100% within one thousand feet of the aiming point. Our goals for the month of October are, first, to get that perfect score, and second, to lead the Air Force in bombing again. Let's prove without a doubt that we are the crack bombing outfit of all times.

*S. E. Manzo*  
S. E. MANZO  
Lt. Colonel, Air Corps,  
Commanding.

## Letter to the Editor

Congratulations and thank you for another superb newsletter. I do want you to be aware of one correction for future reference. On page -6- of the November 2011 newsletter the caption for photo #12 says my father was shot down twice over Ploesti. He was shot down twice during the war, but not over Ploesti. His plane was crippled by flak over Florisdorf, Austria and again over Komarom, Hungary. On both occasions his plane made it to Yugoslavia before the crews bailed out and crash landed, respectively.

I hope this clarification is helpful. I can only imagine the time and diligence that goes into publishing each newsletter.

Your Obedient Servant,

*Earl Testy*

## For Your Information

AVIATION HISTORY (March 2012) provides some interesting commentary.

This magazine features "the truth" about Operation "Tidal Wave" and more information about the Ploesti Low-Level Bombing Raid on August 1, 1943. Bob Sternfels discusses his experience flying with Colonel Smart as a passenger. Colonel Smart was the architect who conceived the strategy for achieving military goals.

*Bill Seals*

HEADQUARTERS 47TH BOMB WING  
APO 520

GENERAL ORDERS )

12 October 1944.

NUMBER 23 )

COMMENDATION OF UNIT..... I

SECTION I -- COMMENDATION OF UNIT.

The outstanding performance of duty of the 98th Bombardment Group (H), in tactical support of the Allied Forces in the Mediterranean theatre during the month of September 1944, is deemed worthy of the highest commendation. During this period the 98th Bombardment Group was called upon on twelve occasions to bomb targets in direct support of the campaigns being waged in the Balkans by the Russian Army and by the Yugoslav Forces, in addition to attacking other tactical targets in Northern Italy and strategic targets at Vienna and Munich. The main task consisted in disrupting the enemy communications in Greece, Yugoslavia, and Hungary, in order not only to prevent the flow of supplies to the enemy's front lines but also to harass and check the enemy's attempt to withdraw troops from Rumania, Bulgaria, and Greece. To accomplish this task it was necessary to hit transport airplanes on the ground, to destroy troop and supply trains in marshalling yards, and above all, to cut the railway lines and destroy the bridges. It was clear that nothing but the most accurate bombing would accomplish the objective, especially in the case of single-track railway bridges where direct hits on minute targets were the only ones which would fulfil the mission. Realizing the importance and the difficulty of these missions, every member of the 98th Bombardment Group contributed his maximum efforts throughout the entire month. The results of the campaign fully justified this all-out effort, whether they measured in terms of bombing accuracy or in terms of damage done. Throughout the twelve missions flown in support of the Allied ground forces in the Balkans, the 98th Bombardment Group maintained an average of seventy six (76) percent of its hits within a thousand (1,000) feet of the pinpoint, a previously unequalled example of sustained accuracy. All the railway lines leading from Greece and Bulgaria into Yugoslavia were put out of commission, while troop and supply trains were destroyed in the marshalling yards, where the through traffic had been concentrated. A mission which the Group led to Leskovac on 6 September is officially reported as having "destroyed the German Army and Gestapo Headquarters, one hundred (100) Motor Transports and armored vehicles in the town, wrecked the railway station and Motor Transport works and causing many enemy casualties". The attack at Larissa which the 98th Bombardment Group led on 22 September, through such unfavorable weather that the mission seemed doomed to failure, proved to have been so superbly executed that within a few days the Greek guerrilla forces were able to capture the town. But without a doubt the most astonishingly successful bombing was carried out in an attack on the Danube River railway bridge at Baja in Hungary on 21 September. Only one bomb from the full load of seventy five (75) tons dropped by the Group was plotted outside the thousand (1,000) foot circle. The official percentage for this mission was 97.2 within 1,000 feet, which is estimated to be a record for bombing by any Group. The Group holds two Air Force Records, one, 97.2 for a single mission by an entire Group, and the other, 70.5, for the continuous operations of the Group for the month of September 1944. Such results reflect the superior quality of leadership on all the missions flown. The gallant and heroic efforts of all the men who participated on those dangerous and hazardous missions, together with the untiring and enthusiastic efforts of all the ground personnel of the 98th Bombardment Group was a great exhibition of esprit de corps. This Group's outstanding professional skill, devotion to duty, and gallantry in combat, has upheld the highest traditions of the Military Service and has reflected the highest credit upon themselves and the Armed Forces of the United States of America.

By command of Brigadier General RUSH:

OFFICIAL:

s/ Ernest L. Walters  
t/ ERNEST L. WALTERS  
Lt. Col., Air Corps,  
Adjutant.

A TRUE COPY:

ERNEST L. WALTERS  
Lt. Col., Air Corps,  
Adjutant

*Charles R. Burton*  
CHARLES R. BURTON  
Major, Air Corps.

# History of the 98th Bomb Group

The 98th trained for bombardment missions with B-24 Liberators during the first half of 1942.

The group was alerted and departed for the Middle East on 15 July 1942, arriving in Palestine in late July 1942. The 98th was initially assigned to the USMEAF (United States Middle East Air Force). However, the USMEAF was dissolved on 12 November 1942. At that time, the 98th came under the 9th Air Force. It flew its first mission to Mersa Matruh, Libya on 1 August 1942, with the aircraft being serviced by Royal Air Force personnel until 98th maintenance personnel arrived in mid-August 1942.

It supported the British Eighth Army in its westward advance from Egypt into Libya and Tunisia. It bombed shipping and harbor installations in North Africa, Sicily, Italy, Crete, and Greece to cut enemy supply lines to Africa and to prepare for the Allied invasion of Italy. The 98th earned a Distinguished Unit Citation (DUC) for action against the enemy in the Middle East, North Africa, and Sicily from August 1942 to August 1943. It received a second DUC for participation in a low-level bombing raid on enemy-held oil refineries at Ploesti, Romania, on 1 August 1943. On this raid, of 47 B-24s launched, only 21 returned safely. One crashed on take off with the loss of all crew members except two. Six aborted before reaching the target. Seventeen went down in enemy territory. Two went down at sea. The Group Commander, Col. John R. (Killer) Kane was awarded the Medal of Honor for his leadership.

The 98th was under the command of the 12th Air Force in September and October 1943. From 1 November 1943 it was under the 15th Air Force and moved to Italy. It flew many long-range missions to France, Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Romania to bomb enemy heavy industries, airdromes, harbors, oil fields, and communication centers. On another raid on Ploesti on 9 July 1944, Lt. Donald Pucket sacrificed his life trying to save three of his crew members who could not or would not bail out of their doomed B-24. Donald Pucket was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously for his sacrifice.

In the summer of 1944, the 98th participated in the invasion of southern France, assisted in the Soviet advance into the Balkans, and supported the partisans

and guerrillas in Yugoslavia and neighboring countries. It flew a total of 417 missions and earned a total of 15 battle streamers as well as two Presidential Unit Citations.

The group returned to the United States as the war was ending in Europe, where it trained in preparation for movement to the Pacific Theater. It was re-designated the 98th Bombardment Group (Very Heavy) and equipped with Boeing B-29 Superfortresses, but the war with Japan ended before redeployment.

The 98th was deactivated as a group on 10 November 1945. However, the 343rd, 344th, and 345th Squadrons were reassigned to B-29 groups. The 343rd Squadron was assigned to the 40th Bomb Group at March Air Force Base, California, and deactivated on 27 November 1946. The 344th was assigned to the 444th Bomb Group at Davis-Monthan Field, Arizona and deactivated on 1 October 1946. The 345th was assigned to the 462nd Bomb Group at McDill Field, Florida and deactivated on 31 March 1946.

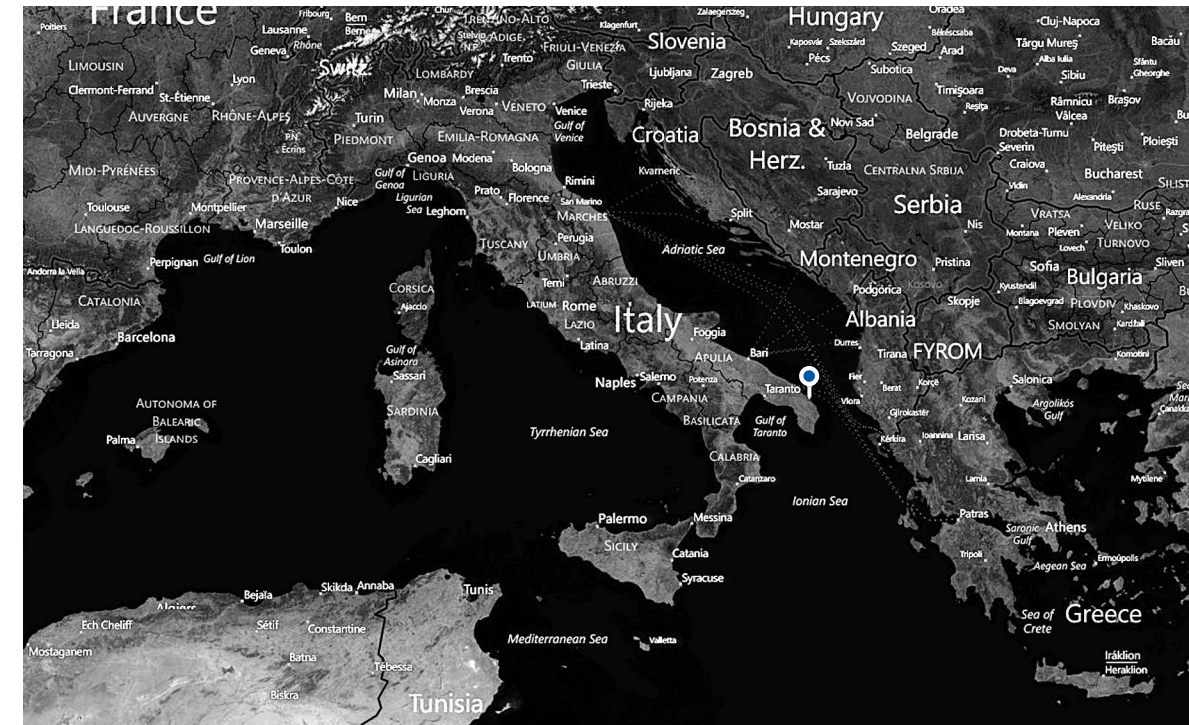
## Lecce Airfield Utilized by the 98th in 1944–1945

*The following text is from Wikipedia . . .*

Lecce Airfield is an abandoned World War II military airfield in Italy, which is located approximately 5 km southeast of Lecce in the Salentine Peninsula. Built in 1943 by United States Army Engineers, the airfield was primarily a Fifteenth Air Force B-24 Liberator heavy bomber base used in the strategic bombing of Germany. Lecce was also used by tactical aircraft of Twelfth Air Force in the Italian Campaign.

Known units assigned to the airfield were:

- 98th Bombardment Group, 17 January 1944-19 April 1945, B-24 Liberator, (15AF)
- 82nd Fighter Group, 10 October 1943-11 January 1944, P-38 Lightning, (12AF)
- 416th Night Fighter Squadron, 27-30 September 1943, Bristol Beaufighter (12 AF)



The map above gives the approximate location of Lecce Airfield (white/blue circle). Below the map (left to right) are the emblem of the 98th Bombardment Group, a B-24, the emblem of the 12th Air Force and the 15th.

Closed after the war, Lecce Airfield today is a collection of agricultural fields, with its main runway clearly visible in aerial photography. Large areas of disturbed land indicate the remains of some wartime features also some of the former taxiways have been reduced to single-lane farm roads, however the vast majority of the airfield and ground station have been redeveloped.

As of 2009, some flying activity has returned to the field through the Vega Aeroclub of Lecce. The A/D should not be confused with Lepore Airport just a few miles to the east, still less with the military Galatina Air Force Base to the south of the city.

*References cited by Wikipedia*

This article incorporates public domain material from websites or documents of the Air Force Historical Research Agency.

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## Martha Raye, Presidential Honoree

Many people may not remember Martha Raye, actress, singer, comedienne, nurse and honorary full bird colonel. An outstanding American, she dedicated her

life primarily to providing nursing care, encouragement and entertainment for servicemen. She is remembered for her contributions during World War II traveling



### Martha Raye cared for her troops from WWII to Vietnam.

The images shown span Martha Raye's time with the U.S. Armed Forces. The image at bottom, left is circa 1943 and may be from North Africa. Colonel Maggie was usually seen in uniform.



to Africa, England and Vietnam. Although she had no formal education she relied on her experience as a candy striper in her early years. Her continual dedication to wounded men was reflected in her title. Colonel Maggie. She began entertaining the troops in 1942 and spent nine years traveling back and forth to Vietnam sometimes staying as long as six months. During a period of 50 years she served the military which she loved. She wore the uniform proudly in the trenches, in the mud and dedicated her life totally to military service. Her attire was a complete male Army Green uniform including Army Combat Boots. One incident recorded in 1967 saw Colonel Maggie on board an aircraft transporting dead and wounded troops to USAF Hospital in Pleiku, Vietnam. A captain questioned her participation to the surprise of all, she pulled on her right collar and said, "Captain, see this eagle, I am a full bird Colonel in the U.S. Army reserve and a nurse with a surgical specialty, now take me to your wounded." At the field hospital in Pleiku she would frequently cover a surgical shift in order to provide a well deserved break to a nurse. The troops loved her and she was a delight. By going to Vietnam, Colonel Raye was considered a "hawk." Hollywood

blacklisted her for more than ten years. She was denied the opportunity to earn money but that didn't phase her. She was content to sing the National Anthem on many occasions and to lead others in the Pledge of Allegiance. Another interesting fact was her fear of flying. She would drink herself into an alcoholic stupor in order to participate in trips. On occasion an airline would refuse her service because of her conduct which they deemed unacceptable.

Her reputation continued to grow among veterans who viewed her as an angel. She never had reporters nor TV cameras on her visits. She was there because she wanted to help the troops. She never tried to shelter herself from harms way and refused evacuation to a safer place during an enemy attack. She was known to assist in the operating room for 13 hours and worked without sleep or rest until all the wounded were treated. Colonel Maggie, Martha Raye, was an honorary member of the Special Forces and received her prized Green Beret and the title of Lieutenant Colonel from President Lyndon B. Johnson himself.

Martha Raye was born Margaret Teresa Yvonne Reed and died October 19, 1994 and is buried in the Military Cemetery at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. She was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in November 1993 by President Bill Clinton.

Martha Raye was also awarded the Jean Hersholt Humanitarian Award for her work with Charities.

Martha was a remarkable woman who deserves to be remembered for her fifty years of totally dedicated military service.

Submitted by:  
**Colonel Dolores J. Haritos, USAF (Ret)**

THANK YOU  
FOR YOUR SERVICE,  
COLONEL  
MAGGIE!

## REFLECTION

### It Happened One Day As God Was Passing By

by Lyle B. Wright

#### The Gold Mine or the Pilot

As the story goes . . . a Mrs. Umberger found herself in a rather high stakes poker game with other wives and officers from the base. They got pretty giddy and many folded, but Mrs. Umberger could do no wrong.

Eventually the deed to a gold mine was put in the pot. You guessed it, the lady won the whole pot, gold mine and all.

Now a certain Colonel, who was in charge of the base, wanted that gold mine and said so.

"If you don't give me that paper I'm going to ship your husband's tail overseas."

She was a bit taken aback, but he was not going to get her gold mine. She had won the mine fair and square.

"Well you're not going to get your hands on my gold mine. So go ahead and take my husband. I was going to dump him anyway!"

How is one to look at something like that? The lady got to keep her gold mine and got rid of her husband all at the same time.

The Colonel lost out all the way around.

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A pilot, by the name of First Lieutenant Arthur (Art) Umberger, got a new assignment.

The crew came out on top. We got a man that was a good old Oklahoma farm boy; good natured, happy-go-lucky, dedicated, honest, trustworthy, could swear like a trouper and—as time would prove—was one of the best damn pilots possible for the crew.

Lt. Umberger had flown many hours in B-24s and was at that time the top instructor for the base, so the base's loss was this crew's gain.

continued, next page

# It Happened One Day . . .

continued

One of the first things that the new pilot did was to check out each crew member. [What are you supposed to do? When are you supposed to do it? Now show me.] He was interested in the person as well as what he could do.

It was only a few days later that Lt. Umberger proved his value. The ship and the new crew were heading down the runway for take off, just at the crucial point of no return, (Rotation) the number four engine stopped.

Lt. Umberger knew he must not stop the takeoff or the ship would crash at the end of the runway. Instead, he gave her all she had. He red lined all three remaining engines and lifted the right wing up, then the whole ship became airborne.

Well, we were up. But now what? The aircraft was heading straight at the mountain with the right wing being held high.

Usually the pilot would fly around the mountain. Mottola asked Umberger: "What can we do?"

The pilot said: "There's one chance. Everyone hold on to something. The mountain has a gully right down the middle of it and I'm going to put that right wing up and we're going down through that thing sideways!"

PSALM 23:4. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; the rod and thy staff they comfort me.

The mountain came up at us fast. At the last moment the right wing, with the dead engine, went up high and we plunged into and down the gorge on one side, just feet from each wall. As the ship began side slipping toward the bottom of the gorge, the valley opened up and the ship leveled off on the far side.

What a ride! He had done it; the unthinkable. Umberger had done it! The control tower was calling for the crash trucks to go to the mountain pass, but our pilot called the tower and told them we were all safe.

He said: "It will take a little time to gain altitude so we can come back over the mountain and besides, we needed time to change our drawers!"

Needless to say Lt. Umberger was our hero and the talk of the base for a long time to come.

*The following article was produced by Air Force Global Strike Command*

## 98th Bombardment Group Reunion: *An Evening with Heroes*

Posted 10/25/2011

by Lt. Col. Jeffrey Robinson  
Air Force Global Strike Command Public Affairs

10/25/2011 - BARKSDALE AIR FORCE BASE, La. – Members of Air Force Global Strike Command honored the command's heritage Oct. 21 during the annual 98th Bombardment Group reunion recognizing the famed "Ploesti Raiders."

Lt. Gen. Jim Kowalski, Air Force Global Strike Command commander, provided keynote remarks for the event, held at the Barksdale Club.

Kowalski reminded attendees the "importance of the Ploesti Raiders is not just what they did, but what they left behind," explaining that the Air Force's core values of "integrity—service—excellence" captures the commitment of today's Airmen to live up to the legacy of the Ploesti Raiders.

In the early morning hours of Aug. 1, 1943, 178 B-24 Liberator bombers with 1,751 Airmen took off from Benghazi, Libya, on a low-level bombing mission to strike Nazi-controlled oil refineries in Ploesti, Romania.

According to Air Force history, attacking the heavily guarded oil refineries meant certain losses, yet these courageous Airmen pressed ahead to accomplish their very difficult mission.

In all, 310 Airmen lost their lives, 108 became prisoners of war, and only 88 of the original 178 B-24s returned to base that day. Five Medals of Honor were awarded—the most for any single air action in history. Many more missions were flown over Ploesti, and the Allies eventually prevailed in shutting down the Nazi oil production.

Two of the Medals of Honor presented were also available for viewing at the event: the Medal



presented posthumously to 1st Lt. Lloyd Hughes, who was killed in action, and the Medal presented to Col. John "Killer" Kane, who led the 98th Bombardment Group.

Several of the attending Raiders faced anti-aircraft fire and enemy fighters during the raids. Tech. Sgt. Bob Rans' plane was shot down on the mission Aug. 1, 1943, and he was a prisoner of war in Romania for 13 months before he was liberated by the Russians and repatriated through Italy. Tech. Sgts. Louis Staudenmeier and

Lt. Gen. Jim Kowalski, commander of Air Force Global Strike Command, presents a coin to Tech. Sgt. (ret) Robert "Bob" Rans during the 98th Bombardment Group reunion. The event honored World War II veterans who participated in the Ploesti Raids in Romania from 1943-1944. Rans was involved in the first bombing missions of Ploesti oil refineries to cut off fuel supplies to German enemy powers during the war. (U.S. Air Force photo/Master Sgt. Corey A. Clements)

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## 98th Bombardment Group Reunion continued

Herk Streitburger were on later high-level missions that struck Ploesti from Italy. On their 50th mission, their plane was shot down and they also spent time as prisoners of war.

During the reunion, Kowalski highlighted the Raiders' influence in defining the Air Force's "Airmen's Creed," particularly the line, "I defend my country with my life."

Kowalski summed up the event with a famous line from Will Rogers, saying "We can't all be heroes, but some of us get to sit on the curb and clap."

Also in attendance at the event were 8th Air Force commander, Maj. Gen. Stephen Wilson; 2nd Bomb Wing commander, Col. Timothy Fay; and representing the 307th Bomb Wing, Lt. Col. Dave Leedom, commander of the 93rd Bomb Squadron. The event was hosted by the 307th Bomb Wing.



**The 98th Bomb Group/Wing Veterans Association** reunion was held in Shreveport, Louisiana October 17–21, 2011. The focus of this meeting was to honor veterans of the famous raids on the oil refineries in Ploesti, Romania in 1943–1944. The photo above pictures 17 survivors of that famous raid who attended the reunion.

Front Row, Left-Right: Harry Shell, John Testy, Ken Scroggins, Reid Waltman, Bob Rans, Philip Tarpley, John Osgood, Ralph Donnelly, Alex Tejada, Lou Staudenmeier.

Second Row, Left-Right: Walker McNutt, Charlie Steffens, Joe Abbondonelo, Herk Streitburger, George Kaskaska, Robert Phillips, Bud Rosch.

## *An Evening with Heroes*



Lt. Gen. Jim Kowalski, commander of Air Force Global Strike Command, listens to World War II veteran Staff Sgt. Bernard L. "Bud" Rosch describe a bombing mission during the 98th Bombardment Group/Wing Veterans Association reunion. Rosch was a radio operator in a B-24 bomber for the Ploesti Raids in Romania from 1943-1944 and was honored during the reunion. (U.S. Air Force photo/Master Sgt. Corey A. Clements)

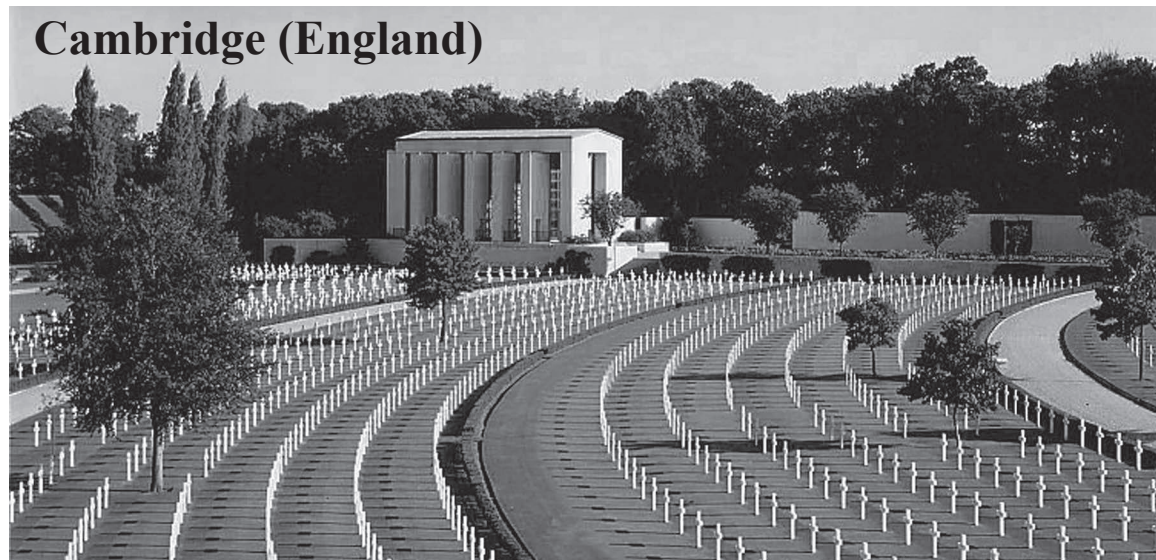
## Lest We Forget the Final Resting Places Far from Home

A multitude of brave, young Americans gave their country the ultimate sacrifice, and were laid to rest an ocean away from home. The following images show cemeteries in Europe where American service personnel are buried.

**Brookwood  
(England)**



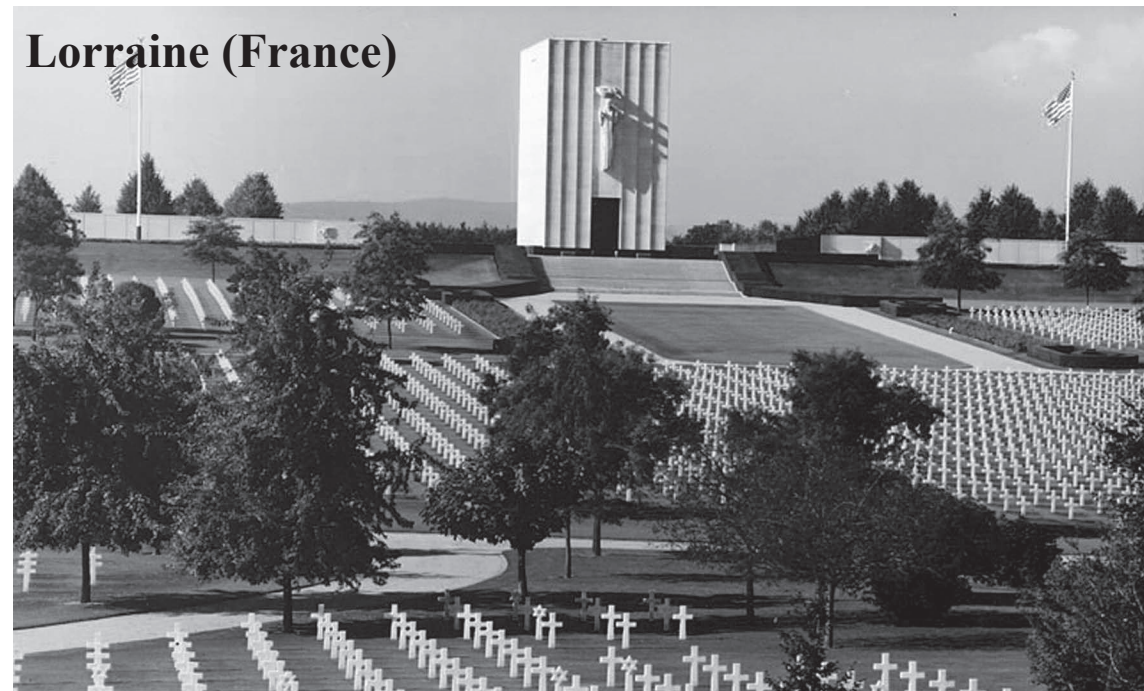
**Cambridge (England)**



**Henri-Chapelle (Belgium)**



**Lorraine (France)**

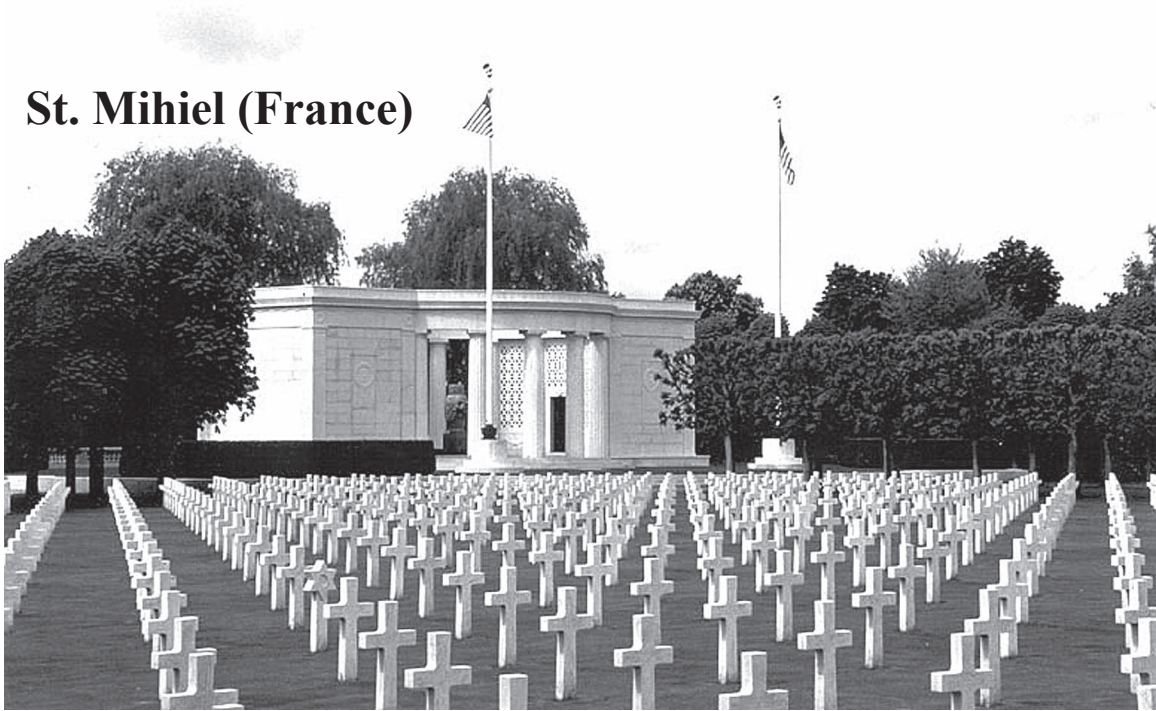


**Luxembourg (Luxembourg)**



**Meuse-Argonne (France)**





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