



THE PYRAMIDIENS

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

February 2014

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Pieces of My Mind

Greetings to All,

As I write this in mid-January, I know that some of you have had a brutal winter already and it may not be over yet. I hope none of you have suffered an injury, or had damage done to your property.

Here on the coastal plains of Texas we've had the coldest temperatures we've had in several years. Several nights were in the 20-30 degree range, and at sunrise one morning the temperature was 19 degrees. Needless to say, this cold weather

has done a number on all of our tropical plants and shrubs. Most of our landscaping, including mine, look like they have been sprayed with agent orange. The local nurseries will do a great business when spring arrives. But like many events, there is a bright side to this as we will have a lot less insects come summer.

As you may recall, the May 2013 issue of this newsletter had a couple of articles about the Doolittle Raiders, and based on information provided by Tom Casey, the Raiders historian, I added an epilogue to one story. According to Casey, the 71st and final reunion of the Raiders was held April 18, 2013 at Eglin AFB, where the Raiders had done much of their training for the mission. Tom described the Raiders' tradition of drinking a toast each reunion in memory of those who had died during the previous year, and said in recognition of the Raiders' advancing age that they had drank their final toast. There was wide coverage by the media, and I assumed the "Raiders" had passed into history as a group. I was wrong! Last fall the "Raiders" were in the news again when the Air Force Museum hosted three of the four surviving Raiders. During the event, the three opened the bottle of 1896 (Doolittle's birth year)



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Pieces of My Mind

continued from front cover

cognac and drank their “final” toast. I guess the moral of the story is, “Don’t believe everything you hear or read.”

Our own reunion schedule and registration form are included in this newsletter. We hope you will be able

to join us in Rapid City in August. I promise you will have a GREAT time.

With Warmest Regards to All,

Bill Seals

Address Changes

LAST	FIRST	M.I.	ADDRESS	CITY	ST	ZIP	MEMBERSHIP
Bergstrom	Terry	J.	8781 Hidden Woods Ct	Dexter	MI	48130	B-47 / 345 SQD
Easterday	Kenneth	P.	3010 Fellowship Dr	Whitehall	PA	18052	B-24 / 344 SQD
Jette	Joseph	R.	25 Wood Rd	Lincoln	RI	02865	B-24 / 345 SQD
Kirschner	Robert	W.	13910 E Peppertree	Wichita	KS	67228	B-24 / 344 SQD
Wright Jr.	John (Jack)	M.	104 Millers Run	Garnet Valley	PA	19342	B-24 / 415 SQD
Chrispin	Matthew	W.	PO Box 138	Fredericktown	OH	43019	Associate
Gibbs	Mrs. Luverne	D.	6614 SW Garden Home Rd	Portland	OR	97223	Honorary
Heath	Mrs. Anna Mae		670 Floyd Bennett Dr	Melbourne	FL	32901	Honorary
Schneider	Mr. Tony		1775 Powder Mill Rd, #202	York	PA	17403	Honorary
Sewell	Mrs. Mary	B.	7531 Humboldt Ave	New Port Richey	FL	34665	Honorary
Skavang	Mrs. Phyllis		263 Locust St	Seward	PA	15954	Honorary
Skryja	Mrs. Ray	J.	950 Diablo Rd, Apt 148	Danville	CA	94562	Honorary

Deceased

LAST	FIRST	M.I.	ADDRESS	CITY	ST	ZIP	MEMBERSHIP	DOD
Bolling Jr.	Walter	H.	42425 Black Bayou Rd	Gonzales	LA	70737	B-24 / 345 SQD	11-14-2009
Donnelly	Ralph	E.	19647 Panther Court	Grass Valley	CA	95949	B-24 / 415 SQD	11-15-2013
Garrett	Afton	E.	437 Hoggard Mill Road	Windsor	NC	27983	KC-97 / ARS	11-20-2013
Jorgenson	Glade		940 Queens Dr	American Fork	UT	84003	B-34 / 343 SQD	12-27-2012
McKinley	Daniel	A.		Dodgeville	WI		B-24 / 343 SQD	5-6-2003
Perkins	William	B.	1925 Harden Blvd, Lot 28	Lakeland	FL	33803	B-24 / 343 SQD	11-2009
Sheldon	Raymond	K.	750 S La Posada Cir., Apt 30	Green Valley	AZ	85614	B-24 / 345 SQD	10-28-2013
Vlahakes	Peter	L.	156 Cedar St, Apt 12012	Livingston	NJ	07039	B-24 / 343 SQD	5-20-2011
Wysocki	George	I.	1101 S San Remo Ave	Clearwater	FL	33756	B-29 / 344 SQD	1-23-2014
Evans	Mrs. Edward	N.	3827 Connon Place	Bronx	NY	10463	Honorary	
Howard	Mrs. Elizabeth	V.	PO Box 262	Saint John	WA	99171	Honorary	
Westheimer	Mrs. Doris		11722 Darlington Ave #2	Los Angeles	CA	90049	Honorary	

As this issue was being prepared we learned “Big George” Wysocki, our Sergeant-At-Arms and long-standing member of the 98th Bomb Group Veterans Association, was admitted to hospice care (after a long illness). He passed on January 23, 2014. We will miss him as we do all our deceased brothers and sisters. We extend our sincere sympathy to his family.

New Members

LAST	FIRST	M.I.	ADDRESS	CITY	ST	ZIP	MEMBERSHIP
Difante	Archie		HQ AFHR / RSA, 600 Chennault Cr	Maxwell AFB	AL	36112	Associate
Jorgenson	Mrs. Alice		940 Queens Dr	American Fork	UT	84003	PB-24
Vlahakes	Mrs Effie		156 Cedar St, Apt 1202	Livingston	NJ	07039	Honorary

Message from the Secretary . . .

I regret to tell you the 98th Association has lost another of our members belonging to the *Greatest Generation*. 1st Lieutenant Ralph Donnelly, 98th Bomb Group, 415th Squadron, completed his earthly mission on November 15, 2013 in Grass Valley, California at the young age of 89. So many of us have had the privilege of getting to know Ralph and his ‘boys’ over the last few years at our reunions. A handsome man with a wonderful smile and outlook on life, he was always good for fun and stories, and a sport at getting around to activities even as it became more difficult for him. Then he was watched over by Michael, Tim, and Kevin, and he delighted at having them accompany him to the reunions. It was easy to know Ralph by the character of the sons he raised, who cared for him so deeply.

He enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corp in 1942 out of high school. After basic training and flight school, he was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant and assigned as a pilot of B-24 Liberator Bombers. At age 19 he was shot down on his first mission into Germany on the B-24 nicknamed *Red F Freddy*, and by the grace of God and the Tuskegee Airmen, he survived to tell the story of that “almost last mission” as he called it. His article, *Flying Sideways*, published in **Bomber Legends Magazine**, is one not to be missed. After that near fatal flight, he returned to fly another 31 missions, including the Ploesti Mission. He was awarded The Distinguished Flying Cross, Purple Heart and two Air medals.

After World War II he returned to San Francisco to run Anna’s Danish Cookie Company with

his father and raise a family. At age 80 he volunteered to drive for Meals on Wheels, delivering food to the “older people” (as he put it). He retired from that position in 2013, just prior to his 89th birthday!

It’s not all that often you can say you have met a hero . . . Ralph was a hero.

So that we never let anyone forget all our other comrades in arms, we need to work to keep this a viable organization. We need more new members and associates to work together to ensure this Association, that meant so much to those who began it back in the 50s, lives on. Please send in your dues (now \$20) and let us hear from you. The newsletter belongs to you, and we want to include your stories.

Susie M.



Kevin, Michael, Tim and Ralph Donnelly.

“For the Freedom of Ones

Part 2

Editor’s Note: In our last issue (November 2013), John Torrison began the story of Waist Gunner Ray Noury, his crew mates, and their ill-fated flight over German-occupied Czechoslovakia in 1944. In this issue, John takes up the story after the crash that claimed the lives of the full crew — save Ray.

“On 22nd of February 1944, an American bomber was shot down and fell to the garden of Jan Bocek on hill Dubec (forest Chejlava). There were crowds of people from the surroundings gathered around the place of disaster. It was not possible to see the plane, because it was dug deeply in the ground and was on fire. Steam was going out of the plane during the whole week. Torn bodies of the crew were gathered and by German order, the town of Pradlo bought a coffin and the remains of the bodies were buried in the presence of the mayor Vaclav Brezak, gravedigger Frantisek Holy and police. There appeared a wreath on the grave after some days.” **from the “Chronicle of Pradlo”**



“The remains of the fallen soldiers were buried in the cemetery in Pradlo. In the year 1946 a mass was served in St. Jacobs Church in Prague for the victims of this disaster. After the communist takeover in 1948, all memorial meetings for fallen American airmen soldiers in our country were forbidden. The memory of the fallen American airmen was still alive among the citizens of Pradlo. Immediately in the year 1989 a cross was built near the crash site and two years later in 1991, the plane was excavated by three young men from our village: Jiri Kolouch, Tomas Tykal, and Roman Novak”

Vaclav Rojik, Mayor of Pradlo, Czech Republic 2/20/2004

Digging into the Past

The three boys walked up the gravel road carrying their shovels and buckets by the fields of young potato plants. As they walked by the ancient stone walls, Jiri remembered his grandmother’s story of the day so long ago, one that had started so joyous, but would end in such shock and sadness. Marketa Solarova told him that she had been at this farmhouse for a wedding celebration, filled with laughter and dancing. But the noon sky was shattered by the drone of airplane engines and bursts of machine gun fire, and suddenly there was the explosion that shook the stone barn and the ground beneath them. She would run with her friends up the

road and into the woods, only to see such horror that she never returned to that place again.

Sixty years later, Jaroslav Kubik would remember what he, at age five, saw in the woods on Dubec Hill. “Few days after crash my parents load me and my younger brother on sled . . . My memory release scene of red and yellow snow, pieces of uniform, and sheets of metal hanging on bold branches of tree. My mother pointed to one branch where human hair stuck and wind wave it. Lots of metal scattered on the ground and further crashed aircraft . . . still smothering,

Foreign and Far Away”

strong smell of burned rubber, German soldier with rifle guarding this aircraft wreck.”

The three young boys hesitated for a moment as they stood on the edge of the field. They were leaving the daylight of May and entering into the deep shadows of the Chejlava forest. They had walked here not to work in the fields but to dig within a crater by a cross in the woods. Jiri was only 15 when the villagers erected a small cross at the crash site after the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989. The boys did not know what treasures they might find, but they were ready to unearth what they could from that lost moment in time.

All that summer of 1991 the boys would dig. It was dirty and wet work because the large crater kept filling up with underground water. But what they were finding surprised even them. Not only did they find large pieces of twisted metal, but also three engines, a propeller, landing gear, a radio, five M2 Browning machine guns and hundreds of 50 caliber bullets. By digging down fourteen feet, they also found many personal items, a crumpled pocket watch, folding knife, a medal of the Immaculate Conception, and most importantly five dog tags: one each for Harold Carter, Joseph Altemus, Roy Hughes and two for my uncle, Wayne Nelson. It would take years of research before Jiri would know all of the details about the B-24J and the crew that crashed on Dubec Hill, February 22, 1944.

Flying into Czechoslovakia

“The Skoda Works led a charmed life until the end of World War II. On the night of 16 April 1943, Bomber Harris sent out more than 300 Lancasters to make the long flight to Pilsen, Czechoslovakia, where they would bomb the Skoda Works. Since the target was far beyond the range of Oboe, the attack used H2S. The H2S operators mistook the town of Dobruška for Pilsen (a 12-mile error) and a large mental hospital for the Skoda Works. Two hundred eighty-five bombers proceeded to deluge the area with 691 tons of bombs, a nightmarish absurdity that even Franz Kafka would

have found difficult to express. At the end of May 1943, in the remaining large raid of the month, Harris tried again for Pilsen. This time 150 bombers correctly identified the target, but landed almost all their bombs in a field outside the plant.” **from History of Skoda Works**

On February 22, 1944 “a portion of the 98th bomb group formation arrived above Pilsen and dropped a portion of its bomb load to the surrounding of the city and hit among other also the test firing range of Skoda Works, then located in the northern part of the city.” **Vladislav Kratky, Director of Skoda Museum Pilsen, CR; August 21, 2001**

After flying their February 22nd mission to Regensburg, three B-24 Liberators were the first American bombers to crash into, then, Czechoslovakia. That day would be remembered by the Czech people as the beginning of the end to their nightmare of German occupation.

The first B-24 crashed about 12:15 p.m. just over the German border near the village of Pocinovice, West Bohemia. This crash was in an annexed territory where all the Czech citizens had been removed. The bomber, piloted by Lt. Joseph Merkle, was reported to explode in the air. Only one crew member survived and he was arrested by the Volksturm as he walked into the village of Slovice. Another crewman, with a crushed chest, was found dead in a tree, fourteen days later.

The second B-24J 42-731138, piloted by Lt. George Goddard, was attacked over Pilsen by 46 Messerschmitt BF110 and crashed in the Chejlava forest on Dubec Hill about 12:30 p.m. As an explosion ripped off the #4 engine and part of the right wing, the bomber rolled and went into a steep dive. Ray Noury, wearing a torn parachute, fell from the plane and landed in a snow covered field. Later a Czech villager, Frantisek Slajs, would remember that day:

“I heard the noise of the aircraft . . . saw six aircrafts flying away, firing machine guns, one wing of aircraft rushing to the ground, and fuselage burning. The falling

leaf and the burning fuselage. I notice a parachute and on it flyer, as (it) falls near the forest called Chejlava. I ran quickly to the place . . . when I came to him, his first question with 'CZECH' then he asked again 'CZECH or GERMAN' I could understand him and told him that I am Czech. I delivered him from the parachute . . . he) was in a green jumpsuit." Translated from Czech book, "Operace Argument," by Karel Foud, Jiri Kolouch, Vladislav Kratky, and Jan Vladar

Jiri Kolouch was encouraged by all that was found at the crash site. He began to search for old newspaper articles, but with the German censorship, he only found one story about the crash in an old local school newspaper. Years later he did find, in the neighboring village of Chocenice, a police report about finding Ray.

"When people came to Ray, he sat on his chute, no boots only socks. His first question was 'Czech or German?' so the people answered that everyone Czech (to his delight). He had a crucifix in his hand. One leg was bleeding. Very much snow and very cold day. The men used a coat as a stretcher and Ray was moved on the road in front of Chocenice, and then by carriage to the police office. Chief made a fire in the stove, Ray was numb with cold. Some woman brought him a brandy. Ray offered a cigarette, then from the pocket he pulled out a silk map and wanted to know where occur. Everyone willing and showed that he was in Czechoslovakia. Ray's leg was dressed. Then Gestapo arrive and carried him away to city of Blovice."

Ray would remember none of those moments. He would never know how or why he had survived the massive explosion and free fall from the plane. His first clearly recalled memories would begin days later, waking up in a boxcar, as a POW, heading for Frankfurt, Germany.

The third B-24, "Black Magic," piloted by Lt. Donald Malas, crashed at about 12:40 near the village of Lhenice. All of the crew parachuted safely but were promptly arrested by the Gestapo. In 2002, Merl Vanderhoof, the flight engineer, would tell me about his last mission. *"Regensburg was our 38th . . . , but we barely took off with the #3 engine at only 1/2 power. Fighters attack over target and took out the #1 engine. We fly east, badly crippled for time to get out tail gunner*

with injured leg. He bailed out thru escape hatch. I bailed out last with pilot sitting at opposite ends of the open bomb bay."

After the war's end and forty years of communist oppression, many of the details of these crashes and those who died would be lost. But the stories of courage and sacrifice would be kept alive by those who would not forget them.

Identifying the Plane and Crew 1985–1994

Jaromir and Martin Kohout, from the city of Pilsen, were perhaps the first to start looking into what had happened on Dubec Hill. They interviewed an eyewitness who thought an aircraft, possibly an Allied plane, had crashed in the woods. But the dates, details of events, and the true origins of the aircraft (American or English) remained unknown. In June of 1985, the Kohout brothers located and started digging around the crash craters, finding a 50 caliber cartridge from an M1 Browning machine gun; they concluded it must be a US plane. The next summer not only did they find pieces of metal with B-24J markings, but they also talked with a local villager who invited them to see something he had carefully preserved all those years: photos of the crash site and a partial right wing which had landed over a mile away.

Jaromir and Martin Kohout would continue to investigate this crash, the crash of "Black Magic," and the crashes of all the air battles of 1944-1945. They later established the SLET-Pilsen Museum, dedicated to remembering all those who fought in the air war over Czechoslovakia. By December of 1990, they had identified most of Lt. Goddard's crew and would soon start writing to Ray at his home in Rhode Island.

But some letters that Ray received were very confusing. Manuel van Eyck, a former US army soldier with Czech heritage, wrote to Ray Noury in the fall of 1991. Manuel was writing his book "Silent Heroes" about the WWII Czech air war and had visited many of the crash sites of planes lost in Czechoslovakia. But for some reason, Manuel thought that Ray and his crew had crashed near the German border and that Ray had been arrested as he walked into the village of Slovice.

Stating he had some of Ray's B-24, Manuel even mailed to Ray pieces of Lt. Merkle's B-24.

Soon afterwards, Ray received a letter from another historian in the Czech Republic. It proved to clarify some of the confusion after Ray had it translated from the original Czech. Jaroslav Raska, the author of the letter, wrote that the villages of Slovice and Bukovec had mixed up the crews' names while commissioning a commemorative plaque for the crews that had died near their towns; they had mistakenly used the names of Ray and Lt. Goddard's crew. Because of this insight, Jaroslav was negotiating with the village of Pradlo for them to obtain the wooden plaque for their B-24 memorial. On the plaque was carved in English, the date of the crash, the crew's names, and the inscription, *"They Braved the Storm, We Might Have the Sun."*

While some of Manuel's original information had been corrected, his interest in uncovering and honoring the past would soon prove instrumental in returning a precious object to a woman he did not know.

A Father's Ring

For years Vaclav Majkut did not know what to do. He studied the gold ring his family had found at the Dubec Hill crash site. He ran his thumb over the prominent, capital E at the center of its intricate design. He squinted at the letters scratched on the inside: GMG. He wondered if he would ever know who owned this ring. But in the spring of 1992, when Vaclav heard an American in Pradlo was asking questions about the Dubec crash, he knew where to begin to find his answer. Shortly after Vaclav and Manuel met to discuss who owned the mysterious ring, Manuel learned the correct names of the men who had crashed and died on Dubec Hill; Manuel quickly concluded that GMG was Lt. George Marvin Goddard of Ennis, Texas.



Skipper, as a young girl, loved to travel to visit her grandparents in the small town of Ennis. They told her many stories of her father, who had died in the war, four months before she was born. Walking through town, Skipper welcomed the way the neighbors and old family friends of her father and grandparents called out to her with a friendly wave and a smile: "Good morning, Little Skipper!" She listened intently to their stories about the father she never met, to the stories of George's high school days playing football, of George's college days studying acting. And as much as these stories helped her feel she knew her father in some ways, Skipper knew very little about his service during WWII or his final days. As an adult, Skipper would inherit some photos of George, his war medals, and a flag. Then in 1993 a phone call from Colonel Oates brought Skipper another step closer to her father.

In his efforts to find Goddard's family, Manuel wrote a letter in February 1993, to the Ennis police sheriff, Dale Holt, who promptly called retired Lt. Colonel Charles R. Oates. Charles had gone to high school with George and was happy to help in trying to find George's family. After many phone calls, he tracked down George's daughter Skipper, married and living in Kansas City, who was delighted to talk to someone who had known her father. When Colonel Oates sent Skipper the ring, which she learned had been entombed in the skeleton of her father's B-24J so many years ago, Skipper said, "It was like a ghost walked into the room." Skipper, in possession of her father's ring, also came to learn the many stories of how the Czech people had preserved and honored her father's crew and their sacrifice.

By 1993 Ray was retired. He had turned down a job offer as a government translator after the war and returned to civilian life. He married, raised six children, and owned the Chapel Four Corners Market, not far from his hometown. But he carried pieces of shrapnel in his legs and arm, and he often thought of the ten men who

never made it home. That fall, Ray received invitations from Pradlo to attend the 50th anniversary memorials, planned for the next year. Although he was unable to attend due to his health, Ray resumed his search for the other crewmen's families. Thanks to letters his mother had received in 1944 after the families first corresponded upon learning of their missing sons, Ray was able to gather the hometown names of his crew mates. He wrote letters to their local newspapers. He told his story and the new information he had learned, hoping a family member would read, understand, and contact him. He did not get a reply.



February 20, 1994: Ray added photos of John Goldbach and William Boyce to the article (shown above) in his search to locate any of the crew families.

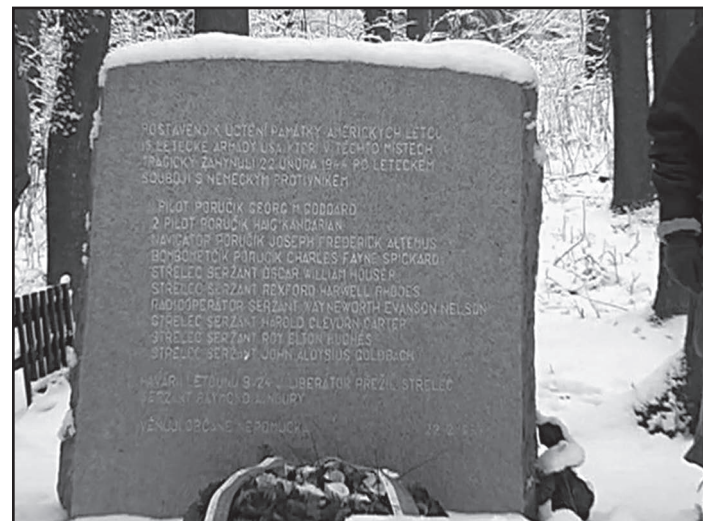
Finding Ray

Compared to spending a summer digging for clues buried at a the crash site, finding Ray with internet technology was easy. Based on a note that Grace Altemus added to Ray's 1945 letter stating "Ray told me, he would be at his home in Rhode Island until August . . ." a Yahoo search enabled my brother,



May 8, 1994: A new memorial plaque is dedicated in the village of Pradlo beside the monument for Czech Fallen Soldiers. Colonel Motyka, from the American Embassy in Prague, attends the dedication and a ceremony at the Dubec Hill crash site.

For the 53rd anniversary, a new memorial stone is dedicated at the Dubec Hill crash site. It includes the names of all of Lt. Goddard's crew.



George and I to locate and finally meet Ray Noury in June of 2002. Ray welcomed us as family into his home and into his life. We talked for hours about the crew, their days together, his search to find their families, and the letters with stories and photos from the Czech Republic.

Amazingly, in that same week, Grace, the widow of navigator Lt. Joseph Altemus, wrote to Dennis Posey and Herb Harper. She read about the 98th reunion and was searching for any information about her first husband. "I don't even know Joe's ID number . . . and have nothing left of Joe except for his navigator's wings. I carry in my heart beautiful memories and the knowledge that I was well loved."

Herb wrote back to Grace within days and also to his contacts in the Czech Republic. In September, Grace received a letter from Jan Vldar of Pilsen, CR. He wrote that he and friends had excavated the Dubec Hill crash site and "among the wrecks we found identification mark of your husband. Now at crash site and at village a little memorials (during the komunist period, it was impossible)." He also stated that he and his friends were writing a book about the air battle over West Bohemia.

That summer, because Ray had remained active with the 98th, Herb Harper was able to help me contact Jaromir Kohout of the SLET Museum. In August, I found a Nepomuk town webpage (written in Czech) that seemed to be about Lt. Goddard's B-24J 42-73138. It listed the crew members, and with the help of town officials, I soon was in contact with Jiri Kolouch. That was the real beginning of Ray and my family finally understanding what had happened to the crew and how carefully the townspeople had preserved the their memory.

"On Behalf of My Crew"

On September 20, 2002 Ray, along with his family and friends, gathered in Manville Park by the WWI Soldiers Memorial, where he was awarded a special honor. Ray received the USAF Distinguished Flying Cross for his actions on the Augsburg, Germany mission of December 19, 1943 when he helped save fellow waist gunner, William Boyce. Pilot Lt. Goddard must have made the recommendation while Ray was in the hospital in Foggia recovering from his injuries, because the paperwork was already accepted when Ray returned stateside in 1945. In his speech that day, Ray thanked everyone and said, "I can accept this honor, not on my behalf, but rather on behalf of my crew."

During that fall, Jiri Kolouch began working with the town of Nepomuk on a museum exhibit dedicated to the crew. I asked Jiri if we could obtain one of Wayne's dog tags that had been found in 1991. Jiri agreed, and by November, my family had Wayne's ID, displayed in a simple wood frame with a three star service flag for the three Nelson brothers who served in WWII.



Valders, 1943: Wayne Nelson, my brother Robert, Russ Nelson, my brother George, and Billy Crystal.

A Grateful Nation Remembers

In December 2002, the Nepomuk Museum exhibit was opened. It displayed many of the items found during the excavation, as well as the research and interviews conducted by Jiri Kolouch and his friends. The room was filled with many large items: engine parts, oxygen tanks, and landing gears as well as glass cases containing the smaller, personal items retrieved from the earth. The exhibit was honored by the visits of American Ambassador Craig Stapleton during the 59th anniversary in February 2003, when he attended the annual ceremonies for Lt. Goddard's crew, and by the President of the Czech Republic, Vaclav Klaus, during an official visit in October, 2003.

Throughout 2003, we kept sharing family stories and photos, while looking for other crew families. In the summer, we were invited to attend the 60th anniversary memorial, so Ray, my brother, George, and I decided that we would all travel there together.

Finally in December with the help of Herb Harper, we were able to contact Grace Altemus. Even though she had received one letter from the Czech Republic, she finally was able to learn more about the crew and her beloved Joe, after so many years of wondering. She called Ray; they spoke about Joe and all that Ray had learned. Grace was amazed by the respect and honor that was given to the crew all these years. She would later say: “Any doubts about the goodness of people has been restored.”

A Liberator Returns

In February 2004, Ray, George, and I flew from New York to Prague.

Ray was worried, “Who am I...after sixty years, to go back when most of the people there are all gone?” Ray’s concerns would vanish as the next five days were filled with joy and celebrations by the Czech people for his return. There were crowds of people in Pradlo and Nepomuk, who just wanted to see him, get his autograph, or shake his hand. Some private moments



Images from the Nepomuk Museum

Top: Jiri Kolouch, Madam Klaus, Nepomuk Mayor Pavel Jiran and President of the Czech Republic Vaclav Klaus. Middle photo: Exhibit Opening December, 2002: Nepomuk Museum Director Jan Stvanova and Nepomuk Mayor Pavel Jiran.



happened when the Kohout brothers drove us up the gravel road to Dubec Hill to the remains of Ray’s B-24. We would read the crew’s names beside a cross by a crater in the woods.

But the most important moments were meeting friends who had helped us with our search. Mayors Pavel Jiran and Vaclav Rojik, Manager, Jiri Holec, Shoda Director, Vladislav Kratky, the Kohout brothers and

historian/author Karel Foud were just some of people who we finally met. We also made new friends: Jim Frank, who was born near Pradlo and had escaped in 1948 for America; he would translate for us; Petr Jencik, who hosted a lavish banquet and translated Czech into French, which Ray loved, but would only confuse us who didn’t speak Czech or French. Ray was overwhelmed to meet Vladimir Pelcer, who was one of the men who found Ray sitting on his parachute in the snow. We would spend an afternoon with Jiri Kolouch’s parents in their home, where Ray received another surprising visitor: Jaromir Ruzicka. Jaromir’s father was in the group who found Ray in the snow and Jaromir was there to return Ray’s gloves, the very gloves he wore the day of the crash, the gloves Jaromir’s father had saved all those years in hopes that Ray would someday return. During that wonderful afternoon, we also met Jiri’s grandmother, Marketa, whose stories had inspired Jiri’s imagination and respect for those unknown airmen who had died so long ago.

We did not meet Jiri Kolouch for he was ‘six months at sea,’ but we did see the just published book that he and his friends had written. **Operace Argument** chronicled the actions of the 15th Army Air Force based in Italy during the Big Week of February 20-25, 1944. We proudly received several copies of the highly researched book, which included over fifty pages about the Regensburg mission and the three B-24s lost in the Czech Republic.

As we returned to our homes, we all decided that we needed to let our families know the kindness and gratitude we had been given. To do so, George organized a memorial for Wayne with a Nelson family reunion in our hometown of Valders, Wisconsin. Ray and I tried to locate Lt. Goddard’s daughter, Skipper, based on stories we heard in Nepomuk.

Nepomuk’s regional manager, Jiri Holec, who helped me many times before, was able to contact Vaclav Majkut, who had returned Skipper’s ring. Vaclav had Skipper’s address since he had been writing to her for many years. Soon Skipper was talking to Grace and Ray, and making plans to meet Ray near Boston. Ray, who had bought gifts for Skipper back in Italy in 1944, still had more gifts for her. When they met, weeks later,

Ray gave Skipper a stack of letters that her mother had written to Ray’s mother during the war. They opened a window for Skipper into her mother’s life and all that she had gone through. “Those letters were all so hopeful and about how Ray would somehow survive. It was a part of my mother that I never knew.”

George, meanwhile, was very busy organizing Wayne’s memorial for Memorial Day weekend. He arranged for a new headstone for Wayne and contacted the entire Nelson family, who were now widely scattered. He also wanted to include the Valders and local Czech communities. Soon, family from Alaska and California, Florida and New England would arrive for the celebration. Members of Wayne’s high school class of 1939 attended, including Billy Crystal, who enlisted and trained with Wayne and also flew in a B-24. The local Thompson Burkhard American Legion #28 provided the honor guard. The Wisconsin Czech Choraliers sang, Jim Frank flew in from Oregon, and Jaroslav and Jane Kubik drove down from Winnipeg, Ontario. We were also honored to have Herb and Joan Harper and several members of the 98th in attendance, as well as Ray’s oldest son Paul and his wife Pauline, who drove over from Michigan for a weekend of remembrance and celebration. We organized a **B-24 Liberator Display**: a WWII exhibit with uniforms, photos, and articles about the B-24 and Czech memorials for Wayne’s crew. But equally important, there was an **Avenue for the Fallen Soldiers** with the name and a flag for each veteran from the Valders area who had died in their service to America since 1918.

In May 2009, Ray would make one more journey to the Czech Republic, not only to honor his crew but also to thank all those who had helped to remember them throughout the years. It was *Liberation Festival Week* in Pilsen. On this trip we had the honor of witnessing thousands of Czech families line the streets of Pilsen, watching and applauding as hundreds of restored American WWII Jeeps, half tracks, motorcycles and trucks passed by. This was just part of their yearly celebration commemorating the day General Patton’s troops entered Pilsen in May, 1945. We talked to several US Army and Czech veterans who return in remembrance, and we even met George Patton’s grandson. More importantly, Ray and I finally met Jiri Kolouch in Pradlo. On this trip, Ray proudly wore his

uniform, which was greatly appreciated by all those who came to see him. New memorials were dedicated on Dubec Hill; a twenty foot stainless steel “Leaning Obelisk” and ten granite blocks, one for each fallen airman.

On that May day, eighteen years after three teenage boys began their search, hundreds of American and Czech citizens stood beside a crater in the quiet woods and listened to Ray’s words of joy and gratitude. As

I stood there with Ray, we saw, reflected within the crater’s still water, the face of the enduring spirit of humanity.

Some Americans today may struggle to fully appreciate why the people of the Czech Republic give days of respect and honor to Ray’s crew and all who sacrificed in the liberation of Europe. Just as the villagers of Pradlo and Nepomuk had remembered their liberators for all those forty years under the rule of communist



oppression, and then marked those memories later with their yearly memorials to an unknown crew, the emerging stories of sacrifice in the cause of freedom during WWII, continue to be passed onto future generations.

In the summer of 2013, another person would find his way into Ray’s life. William Boyce’s son would search for a man whose name he only vaguely remembered. William Boyce, the fellow waist gunner who Ray helped to save during their mission to Augsburg, Germany in December 1943, had a son who only knew the scars from the injury that his father had suffered but little else about his father’s service. On that summer afternoon, a father’s son and Ray would share stories of those young men and smile in moments of remembrance and redemption.

One day after the 70th anniversary of the Augsburg mission, Ray Noury died surrounded by his loving family and friends. His life and the courage and sacrifice of all those who became a “force for freedom” will be remembered not only by their families and those that knew them, but also by ones foreign and far away.



The memorial Leaning Obelisk and granite blocks on Dubec Hill.

98th Bomb Group / Wing Veterans Association Force for Freedom Scholarship In Memory of Sgt William H. Simons

The 98th Bomb Group / Wing Veterans Association will award their \$1000.00 Scholarship to a 2014 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 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, 2014. 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 ensure their freedom and, in turn, pass on those stories to future generations so they are never forgotten.

Mystery Solved,

by Gary A. Lambertsen, LtCol, U.S.M.C. (Ret.)

The pilots and crews of the 98th Bomb Group (BG) of WW II and beyond were a brotherhood of countless American heroes that answered their Nation's call to service when their country needed them most. Many of those individuals have left us over time. The few that remain are in their late 80s to their mid 90s. Very, very few of the original Ploesti Low Level Raiders and Southern European bomber crews still remain with us to a point that they can share the first-hand accounts of their bombing missions while serving within the 9th Air Force in North Africa, or the 15th Air Force in Southern Italy during WW II. For that reason, the basic appreciation for what those individuals accomplished, along with any of their single acts of heroism will have been lost, unless we remain committed to keeping the memories and the individual accounts of their actions alive so that subsequent generations can understand and appreciate the personal sacrifice that those young American servicemen endured during the combat operations of WW II.

My relationship to the 98th Bomb Group comes by way of my Uncle Robert Lambertsen, who was a radio operator, waist gunner and photographer in the 344th Bomb Squadron of the 98th Bomb Group within the 9th and 15th Air Forces. During the times of my youth, my Uncle Bob talked very little of his military service in North Africa and Southern Italy. He mentioned being shot down on 11 June 1944 after a completed bomb run over oil installations in Constanta, Romania and landed in Turkey, at which time he and his crew were interned for two months until they were evacuated and returned to the 344th Bomb Squadron in Southern Italy. One commander that my Uncle Bob mentioned often was that of his Group Commander, Col John "Killer" Kane, who was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions over the target during the 1 August 1943 Low Level Raid on the Ploesti Oil Refineries. For that reason, I elected to read and research everything

that I could on Col Kane and the 98th Bomb Group. That research, along with the personal connections that I have encountered with the veterans, concerned family members, and interested associate members of the 98th Bomb Group have formed the basis from which I have written this article. To me, the specifics of this untold story and final disclosure of an individual pilot's flying skill and heroism possess all the makings of a mystery novel or a Steven Spielberg movie that ends in a compelling human interest story which I will attempt to describe.

My quest as an amateur military historian has led me to a series of Col Kane's personal memoirs that were published in four separate journals of the *American Aviation Historical Society (AAHS)* which I found and purchased from a vendor on Ebay several years ago. On page 34, in the Spring 1983 edition of the AAHS, Col Kane recounted the actions of one of his recently joined co-pilots. *Note:* during Col Kane's recounting of the following incident, he has NEVER mentioned the below co-pilot by name, and therein begins the interesting part of this story.

Col Kane begins by recounting that he assigned a 22 plane bombing mission to a late afternoon launch on 7 April 1943 from Benghazi to the ships in the Harbor of Palermo, Sicily. The planes were to attack the target at two minute intervals at staggered altitudes. Once over the target, this unnamed co-pilot's B-24 bomber encountered a blinding flak burst directly in front of the B-24 which blew out at least one windshield panel of the plane. Realizing that the pilot was not flying the plane, the co-pilot turned his flashlight on what was left of the now headless pilot's twitching body. With virtually no night flying experience and the entire plane's navigational instrumentation destroyed, this co-pilot maneuvered his B-24 on a harrowing 620 mile flight back to his airfield in Benghazi. During this

Hero Exposed

flight, with 165 MPH winds blowing in his face, the co-pilot flew in and out of a vertical spin and through a series of thunderstorms. Without the stars or a visible horizon by which to stabilize his bomber or navigate from, but with the aid of a British radio locator, the co-pilot returned the plane to the airfield at Benghazi, thus saving the eight lives of his remaining crew members. After making three passes over/around the airfield at 0350 in the morning, and without the aid of any landing instrumentation, and never having landed a B-24 at night on his own, this co-pilot belly landed his airplane on the muddy desert airfield without any additional casualties. For his actions, Col Kane recommended this co-pilot for a decoration and sent both he and his crew for a week of leave in Palestine. It is my understanding that this co-pilot received the Distinguished Flying Cross for his actions on what would have been his second combat mission.

Now, as I fast forward 70 years in today's world where I shared the above combat mission account with

my son, Captain James Lambertsen, who is a C-17 transport pilot and presently serving with the 16th Airlift Squadron in Charleston, South Carolina. After discussing the details of Col Kane's account of this combat mission, I asked my son, James, what flight restrictions or psychological counseling/treatment would a squadron commander and his flight surgeon place on a pilot and flight crew in today's Air Force that suffered/experienced a similar situation during a combat mission? Needless to say, James looked me in the eye and said, Dad "the Air Force shrinks would have pulled me and my crew from any type of flight status for quite some time until we could be mentally and physically cleared for even the most routine flight/mission!"

Armed with the date of the mission and destination, I accessed the Tara Copp website. For those that may not know, Ms. Tara Copp is the granddaughter of Capt. Richard Harris of the 343rd Bomb Squadron. Ms. Copp is a professional photographer who resides



within the Washington DC area. She has unselfishly photographed and posted every combat mission manifest and video account of the 98th BG that resides within the national archives and has placed it on her website. Thus, the Tara Copp Website provided me with the mission and detailed crew manifests of the 22 B-24s that flew the Palermo Harbor mission as described above. So, with the basic information as described in Col Kane's memoirs and the detailed crew manifests of that mission, I was able to determine the specific name of the co-pilot and the KIA pilot from the 345th Bomb Squadron that Col Kane so vividly recounted 30 years ago in his memoirs. Additionally, I was able to determine from previous mission manifests that this was only the co-pilot's second combat mission and his name was 2dLt Hilary Blevins and the pilot's name was 2dLt. Ray. G. Marsh. Further research on 2dLt Blevins revealed that he returned from his leave period in Palestine and quickly returned to the cockpit of a B-24 two weeks later on 25 April and he flew his first full pilot mission on 14 July where he started to train for what would become the 1 August Low-Level Ploesti Raid. As luck or fate would have it, within four months 2dLt Blevins, now a full pilot, took command of a B-24 named "Snake Eyes" with a crew from the 389th Bomb Group during the Low Level Ploesti Raid. He flew over the Astro Romano/White Four target in the fourth flight behind Col Kane. Snake Eyes sustained major damage over the target, but managed to limp back and crash land on, of all places, the Island of Sicily.

Shortly after I placed a name on the face of the aforementioned B-24 pilot, I visited a WW II veteran's memorial website in February of 2011 where I found a post from Mary Maisner, the niece of a WW II B-24 pilot. Mary posted a comment and asked if anyone knew anything of her Uncle Hilary Blevins who flew B-24s during WW II. Wow, I answered her post right away and left her my contact information. Unfortunately, I returned to the website several times, but never received an answer to my response. Fast forward two years. In December 2012, I received a letter from Hilary Blevins' niece, Mary Maisner. She apologized for losing contact in the letter, and provided me with her telephone number and requested that I call

her, which I did. Essentially, Mary's Mom, Hilary's youngest of five sisters and Mary's siblings knew absolutely nothing about their Uncle Hilary's combat actions. Up until now, I was probably the only person alive that knew or cared about the name of the unnamed co-pilot that Col Kane had mentioned in his recounting of the 7 April Palermo Harbor mission. I explained to her where and who he served with. I covered his actions during that fateful 7 April mission back from the Palermo Harbor target along with his actions on the Low Level Ploesti Raid, and his crash landing at a fighter base on the Island of Sicily. Additionally, via Tara Copp's website, I was able to provide her with an actual combat camera video and sound briefing of the 5 April Palermo Harbor Mission of which her Uncle Hilary would have been in attendance. Incidentally, that briefing took place with a B-24 named the "Vulgar Virgin" as a backdrop. Note that the Vulgar Virgin was lost over the target on the Low Level Ploesti Raid four months later. What a coincidence for me, in that I maintain a signed/numbered lithograph print (520/1000) of the Vulgar Virgin by Michael Wooten on the wall above my desk in my office which is signed by 12 survivors of that mission, to include Major Robert Sternfels.

Mary informed me that Hilary had been shot down one more time over Italy and remained in the hospital for weeks/months upon returning to the United States. I have determined that his last recorded mission was more than likely over the Rome Aerodrome on 29 November 1943. Wow, to put all of this in perspective, one pilot, 50 completed combat missions and two and possibly three B-24s shot out from under him, and all within a 12 month period...how did that generation create such great men?

What makes this story more interesting is the insight that Hilary Blevins' adult children provided me during a recent conversation. Apparently, as fate would have it, upon returning home from the war is Southern Europe, Hilary Blevins visited 2dLt Ray Marsh's widow, Mrs. Rosealie Marsh to personally offer his condolences and explain the actions that caused her husband's death a year earlier. They developed a close relationship and were soon married. Hilary began flight training for

the new B-29 in Colorado Springs but was removed from permanent flight status as a result of experimental medical treatments that he suffered from a severe and prolonged case of rheumatic fever. After the war he relocated to Riverside California, settled back into society and started to raise a family that included a son and two daughters. Over time, he became a music teacher at Bloomington Junior High School, in Bloomington, California and played the trombone in a local band as a professional musician. For whatever reason, only his closest immediate family members, through his wife Rosealie, ever came to know or understand that they were standing in the shadow of a true American hero, because Hilary Blevins never discussed the details of his combat experiences with his extended family or close friends! I can only imagine how many of his former students rolled their eyes at Mr. Blevins, their music teacher, and wondered if he had every done anything of significance in his life other than teach music and play the trombone in a local band. Fortunately, Hilary Blevins never had to prove anything about himself to anybody, and that must have been what made him so special. I wish that I could have met this great American in person!

My historical accounts of the above events should be looked upon as a labor of love that I felt was my duty to complete and share with those that are interested. If not provided with Tara Copp's website, its associated database, and the quest for answers by a niece that wanted to know more about her beloved Uncle Hilary or Uncle Mouzon to his family, his story would have never been told, and thus lost with time. However, the fact remains that the 98th Bomb Group consisted of thousands of skilled pilots and crew members that have accomplished many of the same acts of heroism. Many of those brave Americans like 2dLt. Ray Marsh and 1stLt Gilbert Hadley never returned home to fulfill their dreams with their families and loved ones after the war. As best we can, and with the fleeting time that remains concerning our WW II veterans, we should make it our duty to articulate and recognize the individual combat actions that they, along with the 98th Bomb Group, made to our great nation during WWII.

REFERENCES:

Journal, American Aviation Historical Society, spring 1983, Page 34

Tara Copp Website. Missions, Page 9 of 45, frame 7 Mission 90, Palermo Harbor

Page 9 of 45, frame 6 Mission 89, Palermo Harbor

Video (audio): 5 April 1943 mission

Black Sunday, Ploesti, by Michael Hill, Pages 84, 93, and photo on 161

The Ploesti Raid Through The Lens, By Roger A. Freeman, Pages 67, 145

Crew members of B-24, SNAFU, 7 April, 1943

Marsh, Ray. G.,	2Lt	Pilot
Blevins, H,	2 Lt	Co-pilot
Nowak, Nat,	2 Lt	Navigator
Vegelen, E.F,	2 Lt	Bombardier
Baird, R.L	Tsgt.	Eng/ L. Waist
Creighton, J. E.	Tsgt	Radio/ R. Waist
Kline, I. I.	Ssgt	Tail turret
Foster, E. J.	Ssgt.	Top Turret
Chapman, J. H.	Ssgt	Tunnel Gunner

Respectfully Submitted,

Gary A. Lambertsen, LtCol, U.S.M.C. (Ret.)

CORRECTION

For all you geographically smart readers, **YES**, the B-47 Memorial we covered in the November 2013 issue of *THE PYRAMIDIERS* is in Comfrey, Minnesota—not Wisconsin. Our apologies for the error. By the way . . . there is also a Comfrey, Wisconsin, but it is not the home of the Memorial.

Reunion Schedule • August 24–28, 2014

98th Bomb Grp/Wing Veterans Association

Hotel: Rushmore Plaza Holiday Inn, 505 N Fifth St, Rapid City SD 57701

Reservations: (800-Holiday) or (605) 348-4000; mention Booking Code BVA

Hotel Rate: \$110.00 Inc — Guaranteed until July 15, 2014.

Day 1 Welcome Dinner “Gateway to the Black Hills” and “City of Presidents”

The expedition led by LtCol George Custer and the discovery of gold brought an influx of settlers into the Black Hills of South Dakota. Rapid City was founded in 1876 by a group of disappointed miners, who promoted their new city as the Gateway to the Black Hills. The City of Presidents project began in 2000 to honor the legacy of the American presidency. Each of the sculptures is [privately funded](#).

Day 2 Tour & Lunch – Buses Depart 09:30

Mount Rushmore National Memorial, one of the most recognized landmarks in the world started as a dream of Doane Robinson, a South Dakota Historian. Carving started in 1927, completed in 1941. Crazy Horse Memorial: carving started in 1948; still a work in progress. Next, we visit the city named for “Custer” !!!

Day 3 Tour & Lunch – Buses Depart 09:30

Ellsworth AFB, one of two bases for the B-1 Bomber. During the Cold War, Ellsworth AFB was home to six different ICBM Missile Squadrons: Titan and Atlas.

Day 4 Tour & Lunch – Buses Depart 09:30

Custer State Park; Establish back in 1912. It is a 71,000-acre vacation paradise, a summer home for President Calvin Coolidge, hunting for President Theodore Roosevelt; home to abundant wildlife including one of the nation’s largest free-roaming buffalo herds, making it common to encounter a “Buffalo Jam” while driving in the park.

Day 5 Banquet & Ladies Event

09:30 – Ladies Event bus departs (**Casual Dressy**)

09:30 – Executive Board Meeting

10:00 – Association General Meeting

18:30 – Cash Bar Opens

19:00 – Association Banquet

Please Any question or concern regarding the Rapid City Reunion Contact:

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

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

... See you in Rapid City ...

Reunion Registration

98th Bomb Grp/Wing Veterans Association

Registration Fee \$75.00

Last Name _____ First _____

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

Address _____ E-Mail _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Sqd _____ Years _____ A/C _____ Duty _____

Spouse/Guest Last Name _____ First _____

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

Address if different _____

Banquet Food (it’s gonna be good) A previously Selected Combination Plate

Aug 24 Day 1 – 6:30 PM – Cash Bar Opens
7:00 PM – Welcome Dinner

Aug 25 Day 2 – 9:30 AM – Buses Depart for Tour & Lunch – Mount Rushmore,
Crazy Horse & City of Custer \$42.00 x _____ Persons = \$ _____

Aug 26 Day 3 – 9:30 AM – Buses Depart for Tour & Lunch
Ellsworth AFB \$32.00 x _____ Persons = \$ _____

Aug 27 Day 4 – 9:30 AM – Buses Depart for Tour & Lunch
Custer State Park \$48.00 x _____ Persons = \$ _____

Aug 28 Day 5 – 9:30 AM – Bus Departs for Ladies Event (Casual Dressy)
\$20.00 x _____ Persons = \$ _____

9:45 AM – Executive Board Meeting

10:15 AM – Association General Meeting

6:30 PM – Cash Bar Opens

7:00 PM – Association Banquet

Reunion Registration Fee \$75.00 x _____ Persons = \$ _____

Scholarship Fund (donation) \$ _____

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

Total \$ _____

Make checks payable to: **98th Bomb Grp/Wing Veterans Association**. Please return completed registration form & check to: Ms. Suzanne Miodusezski

1137 Joyce Lane

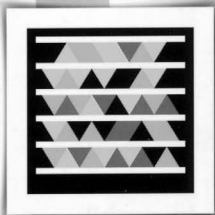
Ann Arbor, MI 48103

The Good Lord willing we will tell those wonderful stories again this August !!!



The City of Presidents

Historic Downtown Rapid City, SD



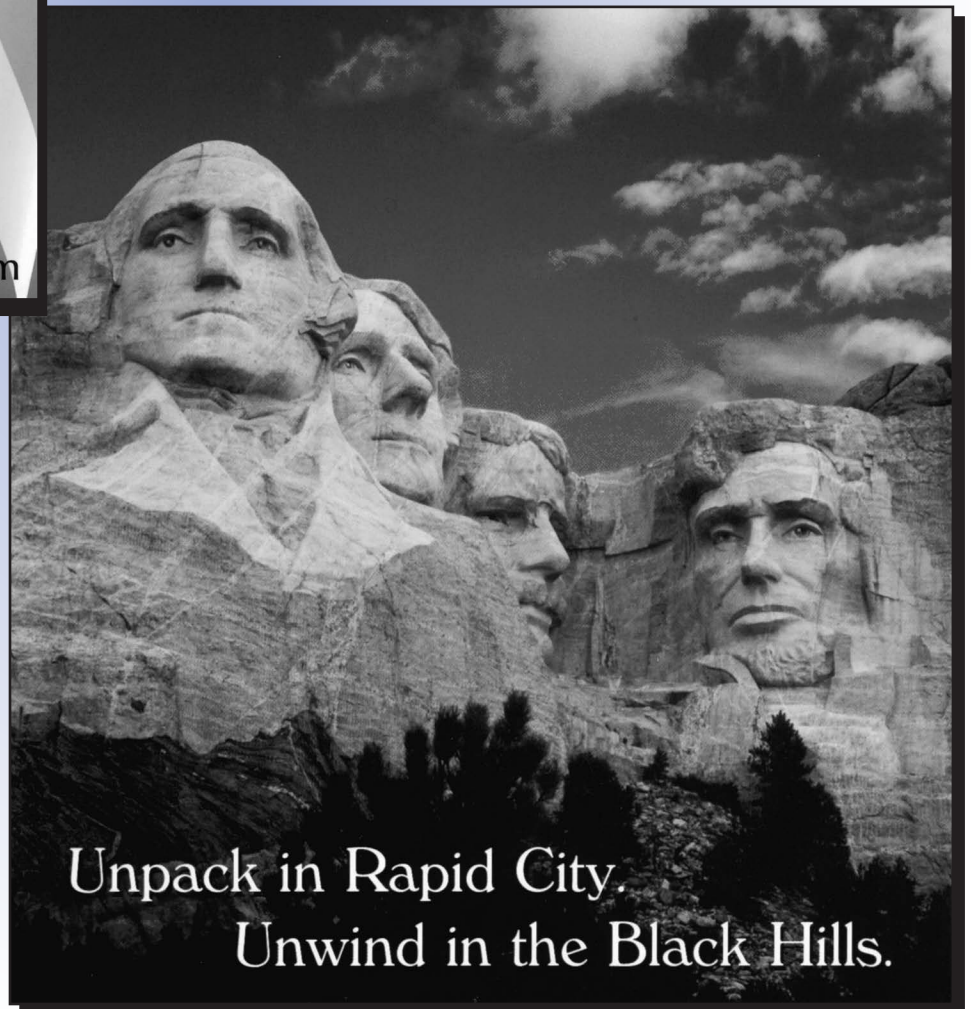
www.CityofPresidents.com

Join Us in Rapid City!

Our next reunion site is another **must see** within our Great United States.

If you're interested in history, come join us in South Dakota. You will learn how Rapid City, "Gateway to the Black Hills," began as a mining town and grew to be a leading trade center for the upper mid-west. In the 40s the Rapid City Army Airbase—later to become Ellsworth Airbase, an Army Air Corp training base, was established. As a result, the population nearly doubled. Of course Rapid City is also home to Mount Rushmore. But there is so much more you'll discover when you visit our next reunion site.

Please see the registration forms inside for all the details regarding our next reunion!



**98th Bomb Group
Wing Veterans
Association**

**2014 Reunion
Rapid City, SD**

Aug. 24 - 28, 2014

**Unpack in Rapid City.
Unwind in the Black Hills.**