



CERIGNOLA CONNECTION

455th Bomb Group Association Newsletter

Fall, 2004 Editor, Craig Ward, 813 Peterstow Drive, Euless, Texas 76039
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2004

2004 marks a 60th Anniversary for many members of the 455th Bomb Group. Most of you were either transiting TO Italy in 1944, or returning FROM Italy 60 years ago.

Either way, the task that you were traveling to, or from, six decades ago was the most important and consequential job of the last century.

Many events that occurred during the first 40 years of the twentieth century led the world into global conflict.

Many events that have happened SINCE the end of that terrible struggle are a CONSEQUENCE of the war.

Your contribution to making the world "safe for democracy" can never be repaid, nor can you ever be thanked enough. The newly opened World War II Veterans' Memorial in Washington, D.C., although 60 years too late, is hopefully a small start.

This newsletter has several items related to the opening of the memorial.



President's Message

William Gemmill, Lt. Col (ret.)



Time flies when you're having fun. It's hard to believe that it has been almost a year since our Orlando reunion. I sincerely hope that all of you have enjoyed life and good health in the intervening months. Carole and I have made several trips during that time, the most recent of which was to Maryland and Washington, DC, with a three-day stop at Myrtle Beach on the way home.

I thought you might appreciate my thoughts regarding my visit to the World War II Memorial in Washington.

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Editor's Note:

The subjects of this NYT article about the WWII Memorial, Edward Foley (741) & Howard Cooper (740), served in the 455th Bomb Group.

Seeking a Familiar Face, Veterans Settle for an Ear

WASHINGTON, May 27 - As Howard Cooper of Staten Island was telling his war stories on Thursday, Edward Foley of Berwick, Pa. was just a few feet away telling his. The men were not immediately aware of each other and certainly had no idea that their paths had crossed nearly 60 years ago in a small Italian town.

But someone listening to Mr. Cooper happened to notice that Mr. Foley's cap bore the insignia of the same bombing group, the 455th, that Mr. Cooper served in. As soon as Mr. Cooper saw it, he walked over and said his unit had been stationed in the small town of San Giovanni.

"Is that where you were?" he asked Mr. Foley.

"Yeah, San Giovanni," Mr. Foley said, his eyes widening. "That's where I was."

(continued next page, right column)

President's Message (cont.)

We were there exactly one week after the official opening on that gorgeous, sunny day that was so beautifully covered on television. The difference, one week later, was the weather: cold, windy and wet!

The area covered was far smaller than I had expected it to be. That fact, however, did not detract from the grandeur and beauty of the memorial. On the contrary, it is "awe-inspiring"!

I thought of each and every member of the 455th, those still with us, and those no longer here.

I felt obligated to wear my VFW cap complete with B-24 and 15th Air Force pins. That, coupled with my cane, apparently made me stand out, because I received so many requests for photographs that I should have charged a fee! The cane, by the way, was not because of any new infirmity, but just because of the long walk from parking (if you could find a space). It's well worth having a cane with you if you plan to visit.

The closest reference to members of the 455th was the words "AIR WAR IN EUROPE" chiseled into the granite base of a fountain in front of the European section of the memorial. Surprisingly, at least to me, was the absence of any specific geographic areas for which we, as well as all other veterans of the war in Europe, received battle stars. I suppose they were too numerous, and there's just so much granite available.

The monument is ringed on the north and south sides by columns representing our 48 states and possessions during the war. On most of the columns or at their base, there were many old photographs, flowers and memorabilia in honor of veterans who had entered the service from those states or possessions. All such items are collected daily and are stored in an adjoining building.

As the cold, wet day came to a close, Carole and I were sitting on a chilly granite wall when another veteran wearing a CBI cap (C h i n a - Burma-India) sat down with us. We started chatting and I learned that he too flew in B-24s in that theater of operations. He was visiting from Colorado, and he made me think of our dear friend and great 455th Executive Officer Gus Wendt because he complained bitterly about the lack of a B-24 at the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum.

I'll close with warm regards, and the hope of seeing all of you in October of 2005.

Bill Gemmill
President, 455th BG Assoc.



Foley & Cooper (cont.)

The first day of a four-day tribute to World War II veterans in Washington worked out exactly as planned. The huge white tent, designated as Reunion Hall, connected a pair of veterans for a moment.

While they did not know each other back in the day -- Mr. Cooper, 79, was a tailgunner in the 740 Squadron; Mr. Foley, 87, was a cryptographic officer in the 741 Squadron -- they chatted long enough to determine that for a few months through early 1945 they had been stationed less than a quarter of a mile apart.

"That was really great, to run into him," Mr. Foley said. "To meet someone who experienced the same thing -- well, I just didn't expect it."

Memories are playing a big part of the tribute as tens of thousands of World War II veterans arrive in Washington for a swirl of activities that includes the official dedication of a new memorial on Saturday as well as discussion groups, swing bands, military displays and the chance for old war buddies to bump into one another.

Organizers of the tribute have gone to great lengths to help veterans connect. A Web site invites them to sign in and provide contact information -- more than 2,500 are listed so far -- and the Reunion Hall was designed to allow veterans to fill out information forms and post them on message boards under the name of their unit.
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Foley & Cooper (cont.)

Shortly after the tent opened on Thursday morning, the boards were filling up, and veterans crowded around, looking for familiar names.

Most of the notes were written by veterans, urging other members of their unit to contact them by telephone or e-mail. Others came from family members of veterans who are ill or have died, seeking information from people who served with them.

It quickly became apparent that instant connections, like Mr. Cooper's meeting Mr. Foley, were the exception.

"I'd be stunned if I found anybody here I served with," said Arthur Piatt, 77, of Bethlehem, Pa., who served in the 81st Infantry in the Pacific. "I looked at the names up there, but I didn't recognize anyone."

Neither did Vernon Crow of Shawnee, Kan., a Navy veteran who served in World War II, Korea and Vietnam. "Serving in World War II made an impression on you you'll never forget," Mr. Crow said, as tears filled his eyes.

Many veterans who failed to recognize a name or face were happy enough to tell their stories to anyone who would listen. Bill Clark of Pagosa Springs, Colo., who served on the U.S.S. Vigilance in the Pacific, wore his old Navy uniform and talked about how proud he was that America was finally thanking World War II veterans with a memorial on the

Mall.

Mr. Clark helped raise more than \$7,000 to build it, he said, and interviewed veterans to record their stories for posterity. But he expressed disappointment that the memorial was so long in the making. It has been 17 years since the concept was first contemplated, and the memorial is opening at a time when the youngest World War II veterans are in their mid 70's.

Robert Anderson, 81, of Cookeville, Tenn., who served as a navigator on a plane shot down over the Netherlands in 1944, was scanning the message board for a familiar name from the 8th Air Force 381 Bomb Group. Mr. Anderson survived 15 months as a prisoner of war before Patton's forces came through southern Germany to rescue him.

He marveled at how united the country was over the war effort in those days and, like other veterans, said it bothered him that more Americans were not showing the same kind of support for the war in Iraq.

"In our school system, we were taught patriotism," Mr. Anderson said. "As the brunt of my education, I learned respect for the government. It wasn't until later that divisiveness set in, pulling people apart. That's what we've got now."

Mr. Piatt agreed, pointing to a fracture that he said began during the Vietnam War.

"It's appalling to me the way people are acting today, as opposed to how they did during World War II," he said. "If the

country was like that then, I don't know if we would have won. We'd probably be speaking Japanese or German now, if we were here at all."

Courtesy New York Times

More Information about the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier

This must take a special kind of person:

How many steps does the guard take during his walk across the Tomb of the Unknowns and why?

21 steps. It alludes to the twenty-one gun salute, which is the highest honor given any military or foreign dignitary.

How long does he hesitate after his about-face to begin his return walk and why?

21 seconds for the same reason as answer above.

Why are his gloves wet?

His gloves are moistened to prevent his losing his grip on the rifle.

Does he carry his rifle on the same shoulder all the time, and if not, why not?

He carries the rifle on the shoulder away from the tomb. After his march across the path, he executes an about-face, and moves the rifle to the outside shoulder.

How often are the guards changed?

Guards are changed every thirty minutes, twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year.

(continued next page, left column)

What are the physical traits of the guard limited to?

For a person to apply for guard duty at the tomb, he must be between 5' 10" and 6' 2" tall and his waist size cannot exceed thirty inches.

Other requirements for guards of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier:

- * They must commit 2 years of life to guard the tomb, live in a barracks under the tomb, and cannot drink any alcohol on or off duty for the rest of their lives.
- * They cannot swear in public for the rest of their lives and cannot disgrace the uniform or the tomb in any way.
- * After two years, the guard is given a wreath pin that is worn on their lapel signifying they served as guard of the tomb. There are only 400 presently worn.
- * The guard must obey these rules for the rest of their lives or give up the wreath pin.
- * The shoes are specially made with very thick soles to keep the heat and cold from their feet. There are metal heel plates that extend to the top of the shoe in order to make the loud click as they come to a halt.
- * There are no wrinkles, folds or lint on the uniform.
- * Guards dress for duty in front of a full-length mirror.
- * The first six months of duty a guard cannot watch TV.
- * Every guard spends five hours a day getting his uniforms ready for guard duty.

Editor's Note:

The following story was submitted by Herbert R. Efflandt (742). It is another example of the "small world syndrome". Herbert can be reached at 6012 Ainsdale Ct., Dallas, TX. 75252, (972) 713-0064.

My sister and brother-in-law, Anita and George DeShazo, own a home in a subdivision near Houston, Texas. One day George was talking with a neighbor about World War II.

The neighbor, John Magee, told George he was a Waist Gunner in the 15th Air Force in Italy at San Giovanni Air Field. George told him that his brother-in-law was also stationed there.

Note: Anita, George, my wife Virginia, and I visited Italy in 1980. We went to Cerignola and San Giovanni. So George was familiar with the Air Base. My wife and I were with Lou Hansen when the Italian adventurers (thirteen couples) made the trip to Italy.

George found out Magee was in the 743rd, and Tom Ramey was his pilot. (For those of you with the official history book of the 455th B.G., see page 247 for a picture of Ramey's crew). John Magee joined Ramey's crew in the states and flew to Italy with him.

Virginia and I visited Anita and George in Houston, and got to meet John Magee and his wife, Claribel.

I left my album of pictures, the 455th history book, and all my old copies of the *Cerignola Connection* with John.

John was the oldest of the crew at 29. Ramey was 21. John had his 90th birthday November, 2003.

John was sick the day Ramey was shot down and didn't make that flight. He finished his missions with other crews and returned to the states.

John flew a total of 42 missions with Ramey. He also spent R & R time with Ramey on Capri. He said they had a great time.

After returning home, John wanted to forget about the war and has little contact with former squadron members.

He sold optical equipment until his retirement. He is an avid golfer.

The photo of John below was taken at his home in Houston in July, 2004.



Do the coupons below look familiar? If you tried to buy gasoline during World War II, and you didn't have these coupons, you were out of luck!



Air Force Prayer

O, Lord, we thank you for the men who fly,
For fighting soldiers who aren't afraid to die,
For men whose heart is tough as steel, whose courage makes the enemy reel.

For pilots, brave and true,
For wills their task to do,
For men who guide the planes,
Through the fog, mist, and rains.
For men who work upon the ground, their skill is good and sound.

For Air Force men everywhere;
For them, we ask this prayer.
And, last of all to Thee we praise, for guiding hands along airwaves,
For presence with us every day,
O, Lord, this prayer we ever pray.

The days are now numbered
But still it is clear,
It's only a short while,
That I can remain here.
But I shall ever love you,
Though I'll be far away

I'll be fighting, ever fighting
For you,
and the good ole U.S.A.

"The Chinese use two brush strokes to write the word 'crisis.' One brush stroke stands for danger; the other for opportunity. In a crisis, be aware of the danger ... but recognize the opportunity."

Richard M. Nixon (1913 - 1994)

Available for purchase ...

459th BG BOMB DAMAGE CD

We have received a letter from Ried M. Waltman, the Vice President of the 459th Bomb Group Association, advising us he has a CD containing 470 photos covering targets they hit from their first mission on March 1, 1944 through their mission #242 on April 18, 1945.

The 459th Bomb Group was located in Italy, and was a member of the 304 Bomb Wing, as was the 455th Bomb Group. Thus, this CD should be of interest to many of our members.

This CD will play on all computers, except Apple. The price is \$15 for a mailed CD. If you desire more than one CD the cost would be \$15 for the first CD, and \$10 for each additional CD mailed to the same address.

If you desire a copy (or copies) of this CD, please mail your order, with your check to:

Ried M. Waltman
100 CR SE 4297
Scroggins, TX 75480-3036
(903) 860-2352

If any of our members have photos or other material that would complement this CD, Mr. Reid would like you to send it to him. He wants to construct a sequel to the original CD.

CD Table of Contents

- * 15th AF History
- * 459th BG History
- * Bomb Damage Photos
- * Combat Mission List

- * Aerial Photo Mission List
- * Giulia Field
- * Mission Briefings 1944
- * Mission Aerial Photos
- * Flak Maps
- * Fighter Escorts
- * Isle of Capri Rest Area
- * WWII Songs & Cartoons
- * Dedication

455th BG Assoc.

Reunion, 2005

The 455th BG Association reunion is planned for Kansas City, Missouri in October, 2005. The gathering will be held in a downtown hotel, but the exact venue and dates are pending.

No other information is available at this time, but be assured the Spring, 2005 issue of the *Cerignola Connection* will have all of the details and reservation documents.

We hope to see you all in Kansas City next year.

FINAL FLIGHTS

Sgt. Arthur Henry Eads, Sr.

Armorer/Gunner (742)

Sgt. Eads passed away July 27, 2004 at age 84. His aircraft was the "Miss I Hope", and his pilot was Lt. William Solley. He was stationed at San Giovanni Airfield from November, 1944 to September, 1945. He flew a total of 23 missions over Europe prior to the end of the war.

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Editor, *Cerignola Connection*

FINAL FLIGHTS

Lt. Col. John Van Lent

*One of the founders of the
455th BG Association*

Lt Col. John J. Van Lent, 93, died November 18, 2003, at his home in Muscatine, Iowa. Col. Van Lent was born on May 21, 1910, in Muscatine, the son of John C. and Martha Mozer Van Lent. He married Marian V. Roth on October 10, 1946, at the St. Mathias Church in Muscatine.

John was a graduate of the University of Iowa and was a Finkbine Scholar. He had been employed for 28 years by HON Industries. At his retirement in 1975, he served as Advertising Manager and Special Products Sales Manager of the HON Company. He was active in office furniture trade circles, and served as a director of National Education Industries Assoc.

John was a World War II veteran and one of the original members of the 455th Bomb Group from mid-1943, until the groups' deactivation in September, 1945, at San Giovanni, Italy. He flew in a B-24 from Langley AFB in December, 1943, to North Africa and then on to Italy.

He had many personal friends within the squadron. After the war, he returned to civilian life, and was one of the four founding members of the 455th Bomb Group Association in 1986. He participated in the writing of the original Group Charter and By-Laws.

John will be deeply missed because of his knowledge, humor, and integrity. His contributions to the Bomb Group and 741st Bomb Squadron were monumental and will never be forgotten. His service made a substantial contribution to the cause of freedom during World War II.

He is survived by his wife, Marian Van Lent of Muscatine; two daughters, Anne M. Van Lent of Princeton, New Jersey, and Jeanne Curcio and her husband, Peter, of Cape Coral, Florida; and two grandchildren, Katherine M. Curcio and Peter John Curcio.

Lt. James E. Councilman

Dr. Councilman passed away January 4, 2004. He served with the 455th BG and received the Distinguished Flying Cross for the role he played as pilot of a plane that was badly shot up over Linz after a bomb run.

He had a very interesting career as a swimming coach at Indiana University, winning a total of 23 Big Ten Team Championships, six team NCAA Championships, and, as twice head Olympic Coach had the two most successful U.S. Teams in our country's history. He was recently awarded a special USOC award, which will be named for him and given each Olympic year to the person judged to have contributed most greatly to any sport. He was also named the oldest to have swam the English Channel (in 1979), when he was 58 years

old. His book "The Science of Swimming" is considered the bible of the sport; it went to twenty two printings.

He is survived by his wife, Marge Councilman, and leaves many other loving family members and friends.

Andy Graham

742nd squadron pilot

From Goshen Washington, Mr. Graham took his final flight April 24, 2004.

Samuel Speakman

Tech Sgt. (741) in charge of the photographic section.

Sgt. Speakman, age 85, passed away on March 2, 2004. He was born June 22, 1918, and was a graduate of the University of Delaware.

He served in the U.S., France, Normandy, Rome and Rhineland. He was awarded the Bronze Star medal. He had resided in Bonita Springs, Fl.

Herbert Weaver

Radar Bombardier (Mickey)

1st Lt Herbert Weaver (740) passed away in Ocala, FL. on May 17, 2004.



George S. Patton

Son of the famous Army General

George S. Patton, who became an Army major general and was the son of the famous World War II general, died Sunday, June 27, 2004, at his home in Hamilton, Mass. He was 80.

He was a cadet at the U.S. Military Academy during World War II when his father, Gen. George S. Patton Jr., rose to prominence as one of the most beloved and feared Allied military leaders.

The younger Patton graduated from West Point in 1946 and spent 34 years in the Army. After his father's death in an automobile accident in 1945, he legally changed his name from George Patton IV to George Smith Patton. (There was no George Patton III.)

He was a company commander in the Korean war and was a colonel during three tours of duty in Vietnam, where he commanded the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, called the "Blackhorse" regiment. Much like his father, the younger Patton received plaudits and criticism for the zeal his forces demonstrated in battle.

"Find the bastards and pile on" was his unit's motto in Vietnam. "I do like to see the arms and legs fly," he once told his soldiers.

Over the years, Gen. Patton was often asked about his father. "He didn't dwell on it," said his wife, Joanne Holbrook

Patton. "It was a fact of life." He usually said, "Yes, of course there is a responsibility, but it's also a privilege."

Besides his wife, survivors include five children, six grandchildren, and one great-grandson.

Col. Robert Morgan

Swaggering WWII Colonel Who Flew the Memphis Belle

Retired Col. Robert Morgan, the pilot and commander of one of the most famous airplanes of World War II, the Memphis Belle, died earlier this year in Asheville, N.C. He was 85.

He was hospitalized last month, after falling after an air show, and also had pneumonia.

As portrayed in interviews, Col. Morgan appeared to blend swagger and humility in a manner that won him many admirers, and he became a popular figure at air shows.

The Memphis Belle, named in honor of Col. Morgan's girlfriend, was described as the first of the heavy B-17 bombers to complete 25 European missions and return with its crew to the United States.

The daylight missions were carried out at a time of great hazard and severe losses to planes and crews, who contended with intense anti-aircraft fire and the machine guns and aerial cannons of swarms of enemy fighters.

Years later, Col. Morgan told a reporter of briefing his men

(continued next page)

before a mission. "Look, guys," he told them, "if only one airplane comes back today, it's going to be us."

The airplane and its crew were the subject of a wartime documentary and later the inspiration for a Hollywood movie.

After completing the 25 missions, Col. Morgan and his crew toured the United States in 1943 to boost morale and help sell war bonds.

Col. Morgan then returned to combat, flying 25 missions over Japan in the new B-29 bomber. His first mission in the Pacific was the first B-29 raid on Tokyo.

An article that appeared in the News & Record in Greensboro, N.C., offers an account of the relationship between Col. Morgan and Margaret Polk, the young woman for whom his B-17 was named.

The account, apparently based on a book that Col. Morgan co-wrote, reported that on his return to this country in 1943, he and Ms. Polk wished to wed but that the Army Air Forces, recognizing the appeal of the couple's romance, urged delay.

In time, the marriage plans were shelved, but the couple were said to have remained friends until she died in 1990.

According to the newspaper account, Col. Morgan visited the set of the 1990 film inspired by the

Memphis Belle. He was asked how he could be more effectively portrayed.

"Be more egotistical," he said. He also recognized his debt to the airplane in which he flew, recounting one incident in which a German fighter nearly shot off his bomber's entire tail.

"It was on fire, and chunks of it were falling off," he said. He added that he dived 5,000 feet to extinguish the flames and the plane flew home with half a tail.

Col. Morgan, according to an Air Force biography, was born in Asheville. He attended the Wharton School of Finance at the University of Pennsylvania and entered the Army Air Corps in 1940. He was commissioned a second lieutenant five days after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Col. Morgan retired from the Air Force in 1965, and subsequently spent much of his time in the real estate business in North Carolina.

Survivors include his wife, Linda Dickerson Morgan. They married in August, 1992, in a ceremony held under the wing of the Memphis Belle.

Can you help?

If anyone has an extra copy of the Spring and / or Fall 2002 editions of the *Cerignola Connection*, please mail them to the Editor at the address on the front page. Or, if you have any editions from 1996 or earlier, I need them as well. Thanks in advance for your help!

Can you help?

Thanks to all of you who responded to Mark Bowles' question about the book "Angel on our Wing".

The author of the book, Robert H. Armstrong (741), passed away prior to the book being completed. His copilot was Ed Soderstrom. Their story is in the Ambrose book "The Wild Blue". Mr. Armstrong was in Italy from Oct., 1944 thru April, 1945. Their aircraft was the Yo-Yo.

Robert Armstrong, John J. Van Lent, John Davis, & James Bates founded the 455th BG Association.

Editor

Can You Help ? (re-run)

Dear Editor,

Is Anyone Familiar With a Crew Ditching Offshore Grado, Italy?

I am Firmino Granziera and I live in Grado, a little area of Northern Italy (40 NM east Venice; 20 NM south Udine) on the coast of Adriatic Sea. I am an aviation enthusiast.

I write to you in the hope of reconstructing a history of a B-24 and it's crew ditching in the Easter period 1944 or 1945, about 4 NM offshore of Grado. The only sure date in my possession is a dog-tag with the name Harris Huey, number US 53324868, that we found in a wreck. The number 33 on the dog-tag could be another number as it is difficult to read

clearly. It would be wonderful for me to know the names of the crew and their histories. Thank you very much for any help that you can give me. I hope to hear from you soon.

Yours sincerely,

Firmino Granziera
Via e. Dandolo 5
34073 Grado (Gorizia), Italy

Can You Help ? (re-run)

Dear Editor,

I just learned of your newsletter, the *Cerignola Connection*. My brother, Lt. Arnold D. Luxenberg, flew out of Cerignola in 1944. In fact, he was on Mission 83, July 22, 1944, and was one of the crew members who perished as a result of the mid-air collision on the flight home.

I'm in the process of building a history of my family, and I'm trying to learn more about my brother. We were fairly close, despite the fact that he was four years older than me, and had his own circle of friends. Also, because of the depression, he left home early to take a government job out of town to help support the family. As a result, we had too little face-to-face contact from the time he was 18, and I only 14. Add to that the fact that once he went into service, he never came home on a furlough. He went from one school to another without having a break.

I'm hoping to find some of his colleagues who knew him

and could give me some details of his life--especially the crash that took his life. He graduated in the Class of 44-4 on March 18, 1944, from Selman Field in Monroe, La. After graduation he was shipped out west to a base at Pueblo, Colorado, and from there to Topeka, Kansas for final training before going overseas. While in Colorado, he married his childhood sweetheart, Ruth. He went overseas in June, 1944.

I would be deeply grateful if you could ask your readership if anyone knew my brother, and if they have any stories to tell about him. I realize I should have started this search years and years ago, but now I'm trying to make up for lost time. Any information I can get at this late date will be much appreciated.

Sincerely,

Leon Luxenberg
11117 NW 65th Court
Parkland, FL 33076
(954) 575-3210
LeeLux@att.net

Can You Help ? (re-run)

Dear Editor,

My brother, Michael Mason, has been in touch with you previously. We are still looking for information on my father's bomber crewmates. My father, Staff Sergeant Bob Mason of Toledo, was assigned as the tailgunner on a B-24 Liberator. He was assigned to the 455th Bomb Group, 742nd Squadron,

stationed in San Giovanni, Italy. His unit arrived in Italy in January or February, 1944.

We are also looking for a picture of his plane. I believe it was an -H or -J model. The plane was named "Seldom Miss", and the nose art consisted of a female archer holding a bow at full draw. We saw photos of the plane when we were children, but my dad apparently destroyed them before he died in 1997. I believe this was the plane they were in when shot down after bombing a target in Poland, on December 26, 1944. I think that the aircraft loss report for this is MACR #10748.

Would you be able to post this information in your organization's newsletter? I have posted it over the Internet on the Army Air Forces website. We would very much like to contact anyone who knew our father, especially surviving members of his crew. They also may be able to provide us with a picture of the plane.

Please advise as to any other steps we might take in this regard. Feel free to call me collect at home, telephone: (419) 472-9080. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Mark L. Mason
5514 Ginger Tree Lane
Toledo, Ohio 43623-1066

Great Truths

Growing old is mandatory;
growing up is optional.

455th BG E-Mail Roster

Below is a list of e-mail addresses of 455th members. If you want your e-mail address included in this roster, please send it to Craig Ward at 813 Peterstow Dr., Euless, TX. 76039, (817) 540-1068 or email aphp@comcast.net.

Harry W. Anderson (740) San Antonio, TX.
pomganny@aol.com

Gene V. Benson (740) Livingston, MT.
dayflyguy@mcn.net

Jack Blum (741) New Port Richey, FL.
jblum15677@aol.com

Winfield S. Bowers (741) Mount Dora, FL.
winbow20@aol.com

Marlin L. (Bud) Brown (742) Lake Placid, FL.
barbud@htn.net

Robert Caldwell (741st) Prescott Valley, AZ.
re7306@aol.com

Saul L. Cayne (742) Boynton Beach, FL.
sasl/51@aol.com

Howard Cooper, Staton Island, NY.
howgladcoop@worldnet.att.net

Robert (Bob) Collette, St. Petersburg, FL.
dotybob1@juno.com

James A Cowden (742) Tuscaloosa, AL.
jcowden@earthlink.net

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fishn928@aol.com

Bill Crawford
Westerner01@earthlink.net

James P. Daly (740) Aberdeen, NJ.
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Great Lies in Aviation

I've got the field in sight.

I've got the traffic in sight.

Of course I know where we are.

If we get a little lower, I think
we'll see the lights.

So Much...Too Late!

Mrs. Theresa Wittman McLaughlin of Hollywood, Florida, is proud to announce that her late husband, Major William Wittman, Jr. has been awarded the "Distinguished Flying Cross" for "extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight" in a B-24 Liberator Bomber over enemy territory in Europe during the Second World War.

He served first in Australia and then New Guinea.

It was while he was serving in New Guinea he was transferred back to the U.S. to begin training for Flight School. He graduated in a year or so and "I pinned the silver wings on his chest." "Oh, Happy Day!" as he would say.

After flight training, he was shipped overseas again, without leave. He was now part of the 455th Bomb Group (H) and stationed in Italy, flying fifty missions over enemy territory in Europe.

The Citation reads:

This is to certify that the President of the United States of America, Authorized by Act of Congress, July 2, 1926, presents The Distinguished Flying Cross to First Lieutenant William Wittman, Jr. for extraordinary achievement in aerial flight.



CAF WEAVES ITS MAGIC
OVER McGOVERN,
AMBROSE

What began as an opportunity to honor renowned World War II historian Stephen Ambrose turned into two excited and exciting new members of the Commemorative Air Force (CAF). As a result of their great experiences during the Fina-CAF AIRSHO 2003, former senator George McGovern and Andy Ambrose, son of World War II historian Stephen Ambrose, both joined the CAF.

On Sept. 26, 2003, a large crowd gathered in the Jimmy Doolittle Memorial Garden at Headquarters in Midland, Texas, to dedicate a bronze statue of a B-24 in honor of Stephen Ambrose. Guests of honor were McGovern, featured in Ambrose's book, "The Wild Blue," and Andy Ambrose.

During the tribute in the garden, McGovern told the assembled crowd that Ambrose was highly regarded as a tough-minded historian who wrote "The Wild Blue" because he felt B-24s didn't get fair play during the war. He said that many American reporters freely covered the flights of B-17s, since they flew from England, but the B-24s flew mostly from North Africa or Italy where the English language was scarce so less was written about them. "Ambrose wanted to correct that imbalance," said McGovern.

Andy Ambrose told the crowd that his father was a great writer because he asked people about themselves---where they

grew up; what the Depression was like and who their parents were-not just about the first time they picked up a weapon.

Ambrose was an honored guest throughout the AIRSHO weekend. McGovern's schedule required that he depart Midland early Saturday morning, but he managed to squeeze a lot of activity into a few short hours. After the ceremony in the garden, McGovern and Ambrose both participated in a press conference for members of the Midland-Odessa media, and then they were whisked off to the lobby of the American Airpower Heritage Museum to autograph copies of "The Wild Blue." At 3 p.m., it was off to the general membership meeting, where McGovern and Ambrose were introduced to CAF members.

After the membership meeting, McGovern and Ambrose took advantage of a few spare minutes for rides in CAF aircraft. McGovern opted for a ride in the CAF's P-51 Red Nose with Col. Stan Musick at

the controls while Ambrose flashed a jaunty "thumbs up" as he and his pilot taxied out in the bright yellow Stearman PT-17 assigned to the Utah Wing.

That evening both attended the American Combat Airman Hall of Fame in downtown Midland, Texas, where they joined hundreds of others paying tribute to those being inducted that evening. It was McGovern's final event before leaving early the following morning.

Ambrose, however, attended AIRSHO both Saturday and Sunday with a high-energy enthusiasm that was fun to watch. In addition to watching the show, he rode in the B-24/LB-30 "Diamond Lil" and toured the CAF airshow grounds for a close look at the planes on display. Ambrose's escort was challenged to keep up with him as he made the most of his weekend.

The CAF was pleased to welcome both of these honored guests & is doubly pleased to welcome them as new members.

Andy Ambrose proudly looks at a bronze sculpture of a B-24 dedicated to his father, Stephen Ambrose, at the Commemorative Air Force Headquarters in Midland. Stephen Ambrose published more than 20 books, including *Band of Brothers*.



A Letter from
Robert Fortson, Waist Gunner
& Armor Gunner

After reading my Spring 2004 Cerignola Connection, I want to report that I had the same experience happen to me that happened to T/Sgt Ledbetter and S/Sgt Peck.

I don't remember what mission it was, but we were carrying fragmentation bombs that day. When we dropped our bombs, I heard something bump against the side in the bomb bay. I checked to see what was wrong and found the bomb shackle had malfunctioned and released one end of the shackle but not the other end. The bomb hung with the arming wire pulled out of one of the bombs and the little propeller was fluttering in the wind. Pilot William A. Crawford decided the bomb should be released before landing. So, when we got down to 15,000 ft., Robert Furtson, Armor Gunner, and I got out on the catwalk and released the cluster, shackle and all. While doing this, I skinned my forehead, but didn't notice it.

When we taxied in to the hardstand, Colonel Kool was waiting to welcome us back from a hard mission and saw blood on my forehead and had his aide take me to the medic's tent. They were going to write me up for a purple heart, but I told them I didn't want it because they would notify my parents that I was wounded in action, and it would worry them too much.

I was later called to the operations office and

reprimanded for not saving the bomb shackle!

Major William A Crawford was my pilot and Lt. Roy Johnson was the Co-Pilot. I was awarded a certificate of Valor a few year's ago for flying 51 missions. I am 72 years old and going strong.

Best Regards,
Ralph L. DeSelms
404 S. Maxwell St.
Ulysses, KS 67880

Pictures and description below
courtesy of Gen. Gene Hudson
(741).

The large picture was taken in March or April, 1944. The tent was set up to serve hot coffee and donuts to the aircrews after a mission and, as you well know, the open doors of the building behind the tent is the 455th B.G. briefing room and crew debriefing room. These crew members, in line, are waiting for coffee, donuts and debriefing. The second and smaller picture is of my crew enjoying the coffee and donuts and waiting to be debriefed.

Editor's Note:

My father, Lt. J. T. Ward (740), said many times when I was growing up that he "hates waiting in line!"

In his words, "I waited in so many lines in the Army, I never want to be in a line again!"

After seeing the photos to the right, I'm starting to understand what he meant!



Editor's Note:

Frank Lashinsky (pictured below) visited Hungary earlier this year on a quest to visit a B-24 crash site. His description of the trip starts below his picture. An article about the trip, written in a Hungarian newspaper, follows Frank's story ...



We visited the crash site May 22 in the town of Gordisa Baranya Province, accompanied by a young Hungarian, Nandor Mohos. His wife Marica, and baby daughter Esther, were with us from May 20 through May 24, 2004.

CPO Dennis Friedbauer of the Pentagon in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, POW / MISSING PERSONNEL AFFAIRS, contacted me late in January inquiring with regard to the case of Charles Adams, a member of our crew whose remains have not been located after our bailout on March 12, 1945.

Dennis and his associates had visited the crash site using information from the Graves Registration Team. In the late 1940s, they located two others from our crew, Charles Brazelton and John Coats. Brazelton, Coats, and Charles Adams were the three MIAs from that crash.

Six of our crew had been

captured and three had been picked up by the Soviets. Dennis called to see if I or others from our crew could provide leads to assist a further search.

Nandi had helped Dennis in Hungary, traveling over 1000 miles searching for other MIAs. Nandi is an engineer with Nokia. In their earlier visit they had located eyewitnesses. Dennis arranged for Nandi, who spoke English, to be our guide.

We were received by the mayor of Gordisa, who held a luncheon in our honor. We appeared on TV, radio, and in the newspaper. I brought home a section of the wreckage, about 32 inches by 17 inches with a portion of the Air Force Insignia on it.

Frank Lashinsky
*Former President
455th BG Association*

The following is a Pentagon translation of the article in English :

Go to the link below, and you can see the article that was in the Hungarian newspaper.

<http://www.dunantulinaplo.hu/index.php?apps=cikk&d=2004-06-08&r=7&c=315571>

The Hell Traveler Liberator
Gunner

The aircraft slammed into the field adjacent to Gordisa with a tremendous explosion. Francis J. Lashinsky was a sergeant serving as a gunner on an American B-24 Liberator

when their aircraft was shot down, and became a prisoner of war practically on the last day of the Second World War.

The great-grandfather gentleman just returned to Baranya to reflect. The aircraft crashed by the gardens of Gordisa, two crewmen died, and the rest became prisoners.

Jumping out of the aircraft, and reaching the ground alive, in itself was a miracle. The boot of the preceding jumper stuck in the hatch. It had to be pried loose. There was utter chaos. Having cleared the aircraft, he opened his parachute, the bullets already whistling by all around. He was exactly over the front line. It was with great fortune that he reached the ground alive. Luckily it wasn't among SS troops, for it would have immediately resulted in a shot through the back of the head. The Wermacht let him live, in fact, in the first moments of his capture the German soldiers let him know that they were counting on him in the case of their becoming POWs of the Americans.

This was not the first time that an aircraft on which Francis J. Lashinsky served on was shot down.

Nandor Mohos, a developmental engineer for Nokia, toured the veteran around Hungary at the American's request. He was able to piece together for him the exploded shreds of that memorable day, March 12, 1945.

(continued next page)

The American 15th Air Force, stationed in Italy, was attacking the Florisdorf oil refinery outside of Vienna on that day. The Liberators of the 455th Bomb Group took off from San Giovanni airfield. Not long after dropping its bombs, while still over the target area, one of the B-24s was hit by anti-aircraft fire. The aircraft pilot contacted the remaining aircraft of the formation that due to the inflicted damage he would change course for the airfield at Pecs since it was already in Soviet hands.

They were continuously losing altitude. They made way in a southeasterly direction over a blanket of clouds. Their navigation equipment also became nonfunctional, and they could only estimate their position. When they thought they were close to Pecs they sunk below the cloud layer to get oriented. To their great misfortune, they popped out of the cloud cover at the exact time when the frontline was pushing north from the Drava River.

Hell broke loose.

They received heavy anti-aircraft fire from both sides of the front. The pilot ordered the crew to bail out. The members of the 12-man crew were able to bail out and parachute from the bomber up until the last moment. Six of the crew landed in German territory and were captured. Three landed in Russian territory. Two of their companions landed in between the sides, in No Man's Land. These two were gravely injured in the shower of bullets.

Lt. Coats was dragged by a Russian patrol into a fox hole. Both eventually died from their wounds.

The crew members who were in Russian hands wound up waiting with members of other aircrews for circuitous ground transportation back to their bases. At the Pecs airfield, after ceaseless vigilance, the Americans were able to refuel a Liberator which had made an emergency landing due to lack of fuel and fly it back to Italy.

Francis J. Lashinsky, former tail gunner, and his wife, Dorothy, visited our home to search for the scene of the events that occurred nearly 60 years ago.

This was not his first crash. They were shot down over Bosnia and forced to parachute out. They were fortunate then. They landed in territory held by Tito partisans. They made it back to Italy and continued their bombing raids.

The face of his wristwatch is decorated with a parachute, the symbol of the Caterpillar Club. Other pilots with this nickname belong to a group of airmen who have been made to jump from aircraft with parachutes. Of course they carry this nickname with pride.

Of the three Americans who died, one has yet to be recovered.

Mrs. Zsuzsanna Kislaki-Lukacs, the Mayor of Gordisa, received the group along with the Lashinskys at the Lantos farm and enjoyed a good meal while discussing history past. There are several unknown

soldiers interred in the corner of the Gordisa cemetery. For the time being nothing is known for sure about the missing Lieutenant.

Janos Szabo, a Gordisa resident presented a piece of aircraft wreckage to Mr. Lashinsky. Pieces of the wreckage were scattered below Szabo garden in the past. He kept several pieces.

Joszef Kovacs, a Harkany resident, saw the aircraft crash. He was fifteen years old. He remembers there were tremendous battles in Dravaszabolcs, Dravapalkonya, and the Gordisa area. They evacuated us from Gordisa.

We wound up in Kistotfalu. From there, authorities took us for community work, such as digging foxholes in the south side of Tenkes. We saw more smoldering wrecks, among them the one on which Mr. Lashinsky served.

We looked over by the Gordisa gardens, where the aircraft crashed with a tremendous explosion. Last year there was an American General here. We showed him all the places as well. They are still searching for the missing Lieutenant. Maybe one day, they will find him.

Jozsef Kovacs said the KIAs were buried in different places, such as the Kovacshid, Gordisa, Harkany, and Pecs cemeteries. The best guess is the American soldier Charles Adams was taken to the Gordisa cemetery.



The "Queen Liberator"

The following poem was found on a bulletin board in Stalag Luft III August 1944 by Don Durant (POW). Author Unknown

Until now her name's hardly been mentioned
Still they've praised all the others before
And to extol here is not my intention
Though her merits are more than a score

She was needed and born for a reason
And she has every right to be proud
To me it's almost high treason
To slander her good name aloud!

It's a visible fact she's no beauty
And her lines are no work of art
But she's up there doing her duty
A patriot right to the heart.

She's a queen in the sky and she knows it
She ignores all ridiculous rib
She was named for a queen and she knows it
Perhaps that's why they christened her "Lib".

She goes where the fighting is toughest
Be it Berlin, Ploesti or Kiel
And she fights where the fighting is roughest
She's as hard as true tempered steel.

When the haul is too long for others

Or a load too heavy to pack
She's out there ahead of her brothers
Braving both fighters and flak.

On a run she's as smooth and as steady
As the pillars of old Hercules
If it's bombing you want then she's ready
Just a few of her merits are these.

I could list two or three dozen
Of her virtues that I've known and seen
As she fights along side her first cousin
The commendable B-17.

It is said that queens live and die proudly
For freedom, for country and more
But none fight for these things more proudly
Than our "Liberator", the B-24.

Time Magazine 2003 "Person of the Year"

The American G.I.

They swept across Iraq and conquered it in 21 days. They stand guard on streets potholed with skepticism and rancor. They caught Saddam Hussein. They are the face of America, its might and goodwill, in a region unfamiliar with democracy. The American G.I. is TIME's Person of the Year.

Modern history has a way of being modest with its gifts and blunt with its reckonings. Good news comes like a breeze you feel but don't notice; the markets

are up, the air is cleaner, we're beating heart disease. It is the bad news that comes with a blast or a crash, to stop us in midsentence to stare at the TV, and shudder.

Maybe that's why we are startled by gratitude. To have pulled Saddam Hussein from his hole in the ground brings the possibility of pulling an entire country out of the dark. In an exhausting year when we've been witness to battles well beyond the battlefields---in the streets, in our homes, with our allies---to share good news felt like breaking a long fast, all the better since it came by surprise.

And who delivered this gift, against all odds and risks? The same citizens who share the duty of living with, and dying for, a country's most fateful decisions.

Scholars can debate whether the Bush Doctrine is the most muscular expression of national interest in a half-century. The generals may ponder whether warmaking or peacekeeping is the more fearsome assignment. Civilians will remember a year wrapped in yellow ribbons and duct tape.

But in a year when it felt at times as if we had nothing in common anymore, we were united in this hope: that our men and women at arms might soon come safely home, because their job was done. They are the bright, sharp instrument of a blunt policy, and success or failure in a war unlike any in history ultimately rests with them.

Courtesy: Time Magazine

Letter from a Proud
Granddaughter

Dear Editor,

Tom Ramey was my grandfather, which is a very simplified description. To me he was always "Papo", which is the short version of the nickname "Papo Tom" he had my entire life. Having a Papo meant many things to a little girl, or even a big one. He was a playmate, friend, fishing buddy, constant source of amusement, pilot to my co-pilot during our adventures by car, and the reason I soak up WWII history like a sponge. More importantly, he was my hero, the light of my life, and I thank God for letting me have him for 31 years.

As many of your readers know, Tom Ramey passed away April 5, 2003. His death was a tremendous blow to me, especially in a year in which I lost four other family members. I have been reading the Cerignola Connection for many years, and all the lovely things that have been printed about him have meant so much to my family and I, even if they make me cry more often than not. It is a huge comfort to realize that he had such an impact on the lives of others, as he had on mine.

I have long been a fan of the B-24 Liberator and WWII history; it is quite easy to understand why. I have become an avid collector; the fruits of my labor now decorate my guest bedroom, along with Papo's medals and pictures. When my mother sent me a copy of an

online article written by an ESPN.com writer who took a B-24 flight with his father and brother, I knew I wanted to have the same experience. The Collings Foundation owns and operates the last remaining B-24 Liberator still flying, nicknamed The Dragon and His Tail, and it travels the country to allow the public to view and take historic flight experiences. I arranged to have my flight experience in April 2004 to honor the first anniversary of Papo's death.

As a bonus, I surprised my mother with a seat on the same flight. My grandmother, Pearl Ramey, also came to town, and having three generations of Ramey women in my apartment was special in itself.

After months of waiting, the morning of the flight finally came. It was perfect weather in Las Vegas, if a bit windy, but I came prepared and wearing my 455th BG ball cap. Many pictures were taken as we waited for the crew to arrive, and chills went down my spine as I read the names of all the benefactors printed on one side of the aircraft, some of which are members of the 455th BG. We entered the plane through the bomb bay doors. Actually, "climbed" would be a better description of how we got aboard, swinging up onto the catwalk then squeezing through a very narrow doorway, followed by more climbing around the ball turret area to reach our "seat" on a very narrow ledge behind it, facing the rear of the plane.

Neither my mother nor I is a gymnast, although we faked it pretty well, but we decided that once we were down we were STAYING down because of the cramped quarters. Of course, this would not remain the case....

Once we were all seated and strapped in, the engines roared to life and we began to taxi. Not surprisingly, the noise was near deafening, and Mom and I became adept at hand signals pretty quickly. Without even realizing it, we became airborne and were free to move around the plane. Unable to resist, Mom and I climbed down the ball turret and began to move about the rear of the plane.

Wherever possible, the aircraft is preserved in its original condition, so we see a lot of vintage oxygen canisters, ammunition boxes, wires and cables, and mysterious bits of metal. Space inside is at an extreme minimum, much less than you can imagine, and I marvel at the thought that 10 grown men in heavy flight gear could have maneuvered successfully inside the B-24. We explored the tail, although I passed on actually sitting in the tail gunner's seat because I know if I wedge myself in there I am never getting out without either a large shoehorn or a crane.

Instead, I spent the majority of the 30 minute ride hanging out the waist gunner's port, my hands clasping the handles of the guts of a big 50 cal. machine gun. The view of

the hills and mountains surrounding Las Vegas below is exquisite, and I scarcely notice the strong wind whipping my hair everywhere, as I am busy snapping digital pictures of the interior and exterior views. Mom is a little more adventurous and attempts to head toward the cockpit.

She turns back, however, after learning from another passenger how little there is to hang onto while on the catwalk, and how narrow the space is. We were informed by our crew that we were not to step on the bomb bay doors in flight, as they would suddenly open. I have yet to decide whether that was fact or fiction. All too soon our 30 minutes were up and we had to return to our seats for landing.

I'm sure most of you are familiar with the sensations of being inside a B-24 Liberator. For me, though, the experience was more than just physical. For me it was also a chance to finally experience something that Papo had talked about so often during both my childhood and adulthood. It was like a spiritual Graceland, and I felt a little closer to Papo that sunny day. Because our takeoff and landing were so smooth, I imagine Papo was in that cockpit too, guiding the hand of the lady pilot so that his daughter and granddaughter would return safely. And he was probably there too when Mom climbed into his pilot's seat and gripped the wheel, a few tears in her eyes. I managed to contain my own tears until we were on the tarmac, listening to an older

gentleman tell his grandkids a story about those who flew the B-24 during WWII.

This experience was one that I will never forget, and one that I would gladly repeat if given the opportunity again. I hope to make another spiritual "quest" in the next couple years, as Mom and I have talked about a pilgrimage to Cerignola to see Mario and his collection of memorabilia. Hopefully we will see a little bit of the young man Papo was at that time.

To you brave men who had the courage to answer your country's call and endure countless hours inside the B-24 Liberator, I thank you.

To those of you who have assisted in the assembly or maintenance of the planes Tom Ramey flew so that he could come home safely and become such an important part of my life, I thank you.

To those of you who remembered him so fondly when he was so ill and after he died, I thank you.

To our current servicemen and women serving overseas, I thank you.

God Bless all of you.

Teri Valenzano
Las Vegas, NV



Top photo: Tom Ramey (bottom row, far left)

Bottom Photo: Collings' B-24
"Dragon and His Tail"



Dear Editor,

First I want to thank you for taking over the huge job of Editor of the C.C.

Tom Ramey was a good man and did a very good job over the years. We will all miss him.

I would like to give you what I think would make good copy for a future CC, but first let me identify myself. My name is James E. (Jim) Bates, I was on Lt. H.R. Schoenes' crew. We were one of the original crews that formed up the 743rd. Sqd. in the 455th BG. The name of our plane was " Sweatn' It Out!".

I was the first Armorer, left waist gunner, & my rank was T/Sgt. On our 39th mission to a target in northern Italy, due to engine trouble, we fell back from the main group and were jumped by six ME 109s. There was a big air battle. We managed to shoot down (4) of the ME 109s, but not before I was seriously wounded. We crash landed on a small British Airfield, north of Bari, Italy. That was the end of my missions and flying, as I spent eight months in a VA hospital.

As you may know, our dear old friend Tom Lyle Mitchel was the original "KEEPER OF THE NEST". He did his best to keep us all together and informed us on what was going on, but as the years went by and his health failed, that was the end of the "Keeper". So Bob Armstrong (741), from Des Moines, Iowa, picked up the pieces of what was left of the old files that Mitchel had. Bob then

started to communicate with a few of us that lived fairly close to him in the MidWest, It was decided that four of us would meet in Davenport, Iowa. The four consisted of Bob Armstrong, (741), John F Davis, (741) John J. Van Lent, (741), and myself, James E. Bates, (743).

At this meeting it was decided we would incorporate and found the "455th Bomb Group Assoc. ", as it is known today. So the original incorporators are the four members listed above. After this, it was decided we would have a Reunion and hold an election of Officers. I think it was about this time that Louie Hansen came into the picture, because he put together the whole reunion program along with his wife. I can't leave her out !!

I have looked thru my old records and for the life of me, I just can't come up with what the years were, or even where the reunion was held.

Now for more good copy, I think it would be nice to list all of the past Presidents and the year served. I have enclosed the letterhead, envelope and one of my old calling cards, showing the first "Slate", that was elected at this reunion. General Gene Hudson nominated me, and I was pretty proud to be the first President of the 455th BG Assoc.

Incidentally, I did all of the art work on the enclosed photos.

Yours truly,
Jim Bates



Dear Editor,

The story of Mario in the last edition of the Cerignola Connection brought back a flood of memories. My navigator, Harry Jordan, 1st Lt., and the only other survivor of our crew, called it to my attention. I had really almost forgotten this very humorous combat incident.

In 1944, Mario Capocéfalo was our tent-boy, errand-runner and complete candy and food moocher. He was 13 years old, weighed about 70 pounds and, as I was soon to find out, tough as nails.

On a "stand down" in August, 1944, I was out in front of our tent throwing an issue trench knife at a bale of hay set up 30 to 40 feet away. Mario cruised by and watched for a moment and then challenged me to a knife-throwing contest for money. We agreed to 50 Lira as the prize.

We would get three throws each at a 12-inch ring tacked to the hay bale. I hit it then he hit closer to the center. I hit again and he hit it again even closer to the center. As I had already lost, I threw the knife and missed the bale completely.

Mario was on me in a flash, demanding his winnings.

I had every intention of paying him but I told him he had to wait until payday. And if I was "shot down" before payday, he was out of luck.

By this time, Harry was rolling on the ground laughing. But Mario was not at all amused, told me he would not wait and would fight me for the prize. I told him O.K., but I would hold one hand behind my back until I had finished with him.

Mario was on me like a tiger with arms and legs wrapped around me and, try as I might, I could not shake him off.

By now Harry was in hysterics and so was I. I said "Mario! You win. Let go." And I paid him his prize plus.

Harry and I were laughing with tears in our eyes. Mario took his money with his head held high and his dignity totally intact.

Mario was really a fine little man and I will never forget that moment in "combat". Harry will never let me forget it.

Best Regards,

1st Lt. Gene V. Benson (740)
115 High Ground
Livingston, MT 59047
49 and one-half missions (it's that half-mission that almost got me!)



ROB STERKEL/SUN-TELEGRAPH

Billy Ray of Chappell, right and Mario Capocéfalo of Cerignola, Italy display a poster and a photo book from a program held in June of 2002 that showcased the American soldier's presence in his hometown of Cerignola during World War II. The two met during the war in 1944. Capocéfalo recently visited the United States and made it a point to include a visit to his old friend in Chappell.

Great Lies in Aviation

I fixed it right the first time. It must have failed for some other reason.

Turbulence spoiled my landing.

I only need glasses for reading.



Photo courtesy of M/Sgt Lloyd C Kestner (740)

Combat Crew # 7445

Rear L-R

Lt Hagen, Co-Pilot

Lt Kirtley, Pilot

Lt Larma, Bombardier

Lt Michaels, Navigator

Front L-R

S/Sgt Kerley, Nose Gunner

S/Sgt Gajewski, Ball Turret

S/Sgt Kestner, Tail Gunner

T/Sgt Spencer, Flt. Engineer

T/Sgt Ross, Radio Operator

S/Sgt Schultz, Waist Gunner.

Combat crew training taken at Gowen Field, Boise, Idaho Summer and Fall 1944. Flew final training mission with Wing Commander Col. Killer Kane Medal of Honor winner from the Polesti Oil fields raid.

Arrived at the 740th sq. in Nov., 1944. Flew 20 + combat missions before the war ended in May, 1944.

We flew our Aircraft back to Bradley Field Conn., July, 1945.

Lt Kirtley and Lt Larma stayed in service and retired as Lt Col.

Lt Hagen got out and went into Dry Cleaning Business.

T/Sgt Spencer went into Oil Business.

T/Sgt Ross established a furniture factory, and passed away in 1962.

S/Sgt. Schultz went into the Reserves and applied for pilot training and advanced in rank to Lt/Col. He died in 1975.

S/Sgt Kestner stayed in the service and retired as M/Sgt in 1966. He then worked at Civil Service at the Naval Depot at Cherry Point, N.C. for 15 more years & now resides at New Bern, N.C.

Great Truths

Time may be a great healer,
but it's a lousy beautician.

Wisdom comes with age, but
sometimes age comes alone.

Frankfurt, Germany
Airport Controllers

Frankfurt Intl. Airport controllers are renowned as a short-tempered lot. They not only expect one to know one's gate parking location, but how to get there without any assistance from them.

So it was with some amusement that we (a Pan Am 747 crew) listened to the following exchange between Frankfurt ground control and a British Airways 747, call sign Speedbird 206:

Speedbird 206:

"Frankfurt, Speedbird 206 clear of active runway."

Ground:

"Speedbird 206. Taxi to gate Alpha One-Seven."

The BA 747 pulled onto the main taxiway and slowed to a stop.

Ground:

"Speedbird, do you not know where you are going?"

Speedbird 206:

"Stand by, Ground, I'm looking up our gate location now."

Ground (with quite arrogant impatience):

"Speedbird 206, have you not been to Frankfurt before?"

Speedbird 206 (coolly):

"Yes, twice in 1944, but it was dark, and I didn't land."



Rear L-R

J. Wooley - Radio Operator
Bill Heitkamp - Tail Gunner
J. McGee - Nose Gunner
R. Kuntz - Ball Gunner
A. Czaratowisz - Engineer
W. Pulver - Waist Gunner

Front L-R

B. Ludeman - Navigator
A. White, Jr. - Bombardier
J. Helbig - Pilot
I. Warhofting - Copilot

Photo courtesy of:
William Heitkamp
10321 Georgetown Place
Las Vegas, NV 89134
702-360-8853



My Pills

A row of bottles on my shelf, caused me to analyze myself.
One yellow pill I hope to pop, goes to my heart so it won't stop.
A little white one that I take, goes to my hands so they won't shake.
The blue ones that I use a lot, tell me I'm happy when I'm not.
The purple goes to my brain, and tells me that I have no pain.
The capsules tell me not to sneeze, or cough, or choke or even wheeze.
The red ones, smallest of them all, go to my blood so I won't fall.
The orange ones so big and bright, stop my leg cramps in the night.
Such an array of brilliant pills, helping to cure all kinds of ills.
But what I'd really like to know, is what tells each one where to go?



Do you Recognize ?

To: Members of 455th BGA
From: Craig Ward, C.C. Editor

Please forgive me for taking a small editorial liberty.

I'd like to find out the names and squadrons of the gentlemen that are in this photo with my father, Lt. J. T. Ward (pilot, 740). Lt. Ward is second from left.

Do you recognize anyone? Thanks for your help !

Editor's Note:

My family recently came across a "treasure trove" of old letters dated 1943 & 1944. They are love letters back and forth between my newlywed parents, Lt. Ward and his bride, Mozelle. There are also several letters from friends of my mother's; friends who had recently lost their husbands in combat.

The mission described below by the wife of a pilot killed during a mid-air collision was related to me by my father when I was a teenager.

He was in formation behind and below the two aircraft that collided. Debris from the explosion almost knocked his aircraft out of the sky.

The following excerpts from a friend's 1944 letter to my mother is a gut-wrenching account of what hundreds of thousands of women went through during World War II. (Some names were omitted.)

May God Bless the warriors who fought the war, and the brave wives and mothers back in the USA who kept the home fires burning.

Dearest Mosie,

I have heard more about the crash, but before I tell you, please promise me that you will not tell (wife) or (wife). It won't do either of them any good in their conditions ***(Editor's Note: both wives lost their husbands in the crash. One wife was pregnant)***.

I didn't really want to tell you for fear it would upset you but I thought maybe you should know. It does help to have someone to talk to.

It seems that they had been out on a raid, and successfully completed it. They were heading back to their base. The Major said that after the raids were completed the co-pilots took over to give the pilots a rest. (Pilot) was not flying the

ship.

They were over the sea coming into Italy, when suddenly they got caught in backwash from the props of the lead ship. He lost control of the ship and it fell and hit the ship beneath it. The two burst into flames and crashed into the water.

No parachutes were seen but six of the bodies of (Pilot's) crew were found on the shore. (Pilot) was not among them. That was why he was listed as missing. They didn't find any of the bodies of the other crew and we don't know who it was yet.

I asked the Major if there was a chance that (Pilot) might be alive and he said it was one-in-a-million. It would have to be a miracle, because falling from that height, the impact alone would be fatal.

Gosh Mosie, sometimes I think he must be alive, and other times, I wonder how he could possibly be. My mind just seems to be going round and round in a whirl until I actually think I'll go crazy.

I keep thinking if only (Pilot) had been flying, maybe it wouldn't have happened. If only it had been a minute sooner or a second later, it might not have happened.

Sometimes I feel so shaky, I'm even taking vitamins to try to give myself a little ambition. It seems as if I don't have an ounce of energy. I feel so empty and lifeless, and I don't really care if I ever work again.

Nothing seems to interest me. You can't let my family know how I feel, because they

worry so much about me. All I can think of is the loneliness and emptiness.

Was my life really meant to be this way? Gosh, what do you suppose people do with their lives when it seems as if half of everything is gone? I keep wondering ... will God really give him back to me or am I crazy to wish and pray for it?

My brain just seems to be in a turmoil. I guess I'll snap out of it like everyone else.

Well, that's the story anyhow. I know it's not a very pleasant one. I hope it doesn't worry you much, and I feel sure that J.T. will come back all right. I pray for him every night. I feel sure that God would not take him away from anyone as swell as you are.

Love,
(Wife)

Take Me Up Today

O Lord, take me up to the mountain top, let me see thy Holy face.

Take me up to the mountain top, let me feel Thy saving grace.

May my soul catch fire, from the heavenly Host,

Take me up to the mountain top, to see the Holy Ghost.

Been a long time since I've seen Thy face,

My heart's aching sore and sad.

Take me up again today,

O Lord, my friend,

I pray.

Unknown author, 1941

Attention:
All 455th BG Association
Members

Remember that your membership dues pay for the costs of this newsletter, along with many misc. expenses related to the Association's activities. If you haven't paid your 2004 dues yet, please mail your check for \$15 to the 455th BG Assoc., Attention: Gus Wendt, PO Box 149, Castroville, TX. 78009.

Note your mailing label on this newsletter. If there is a number 96 or 97 on the top line, you're going to be dropped from the newsletter mailing list. This number indicated the last time you paid your annual dues, and we haven't heard from you since then. Thus, we are deleting those names from our newsletter mailing list.

To re-establish having your name on the mailing list, please send \$15 for 2004 dues to P.O. Box 149, Castroville, TX. 78009.

EDITOR'S SQUAWK

I have received several excellent written personal histories from members of the 455th BG Assoc. They include memories, photos, documents,

and other memorabilia related to their time in the military. These fascinating stories are too lengthy to produce in their entirety in this newsletter. Editing them down would not do these stories justice.

I have created a website on which I have posted these stories and pictures in their entirety. Friends, families, researchers, and historians can access these personal histories & photos via this internet website.

To date, I have posted the following stories on the website:

Walter Dragich ... *The Uninvited over Moosbierbaum*
Arthur Tilley (742) ... *P.O.W.*
James Smith ... *Grand Adventure, 1943*
Milt Kaplan ... *Operation: Reunion, November, 1944*
Kenneth Lacey ... *Photos, stories, & records from 50 missions in a B24*
John Carey, Jr. ... *DFC, 53 years later*
Billy G. Ray ... *50 Combat Missions over Europe*
George Defenbaugh, Sr. ... *Ask the Reason Why Before You Do or Die!*
Sy Gaynes ... *Ferrying Toward Combat*
Robert Foernsler ... *B-24 "YoYo", missions & crews*

Robert Black ... *Missions, Bail Out, POW, and Liberation!*
Edgar Keltner ... *"All Hell Can't Stop Us!"*

In addition, another page of the website has many of the previous editions of the **Cerignola Connection**, going back to 1997. The only reason there aren't more is that I am not in possession of many of the earlier editions of the newsletter. If you have any editions of the *Cerignola Connection* that go back to 1996 or earlier, please forward them to me for inclusion on the site.

If you do not have access to the internet, try public libraries, family members, and friends as possible resources for online access.

To access the personal histories page, go to:

[www.awardphp.com/
transcripts.php](http://www.awardphp.com/transcripts.php)

To access the archived back-issues of the C.C., go to:

[www.awardphp.com/
veterans.php](http://www.awardphp.com/veterans.php)

Other pages on the website are related to a part-time, DFW-area personal history service business. No business solicitation is intended.

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