



*Fortress for Freedom*



# 388<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group (H) Association

**8<sup>th</sup> Air Force, 3<sup>rd</sup> Air Division, 45<sup>th</sup> Combat Wing  
Station 136, Knettishall England, 1943-1945**

**333 Total Missions**

306 Combat Missions, 19 Aphrodite Missions, 5 Chowhound Missions, 1 POW Mission, 2 Revival Missions

388th Bombardment Group Headquarters

Station 136 Weather Detachment, Fersfield Air Base (Aphrodite Project), 434th Headquarters Squadron,  
860th Squadron, 684th Squadron, 434th Air Service Group, 1211th Quartermaster Company, 1284th Military Police Company,  
273rd Medical Dispensary 1751st Ordnance Supply and Maintenance Company, 2019th Engineering and Fire Fighting Platoon,  
452nd Sub Depot, 29th Station Complement, 587th Postal Unit, 877th Chemical Company, 214th Finance Detachment  
560th Bombardment Squadron, 561st Bombardment Squadron, 562nd Bombardment Squadron, 563rd Bombardment Squadron

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**388TH REUNION  
COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO  
2011**

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## From the President's Desk

Life is FUN! Every day we have the opportunity to exercise our own personal freedoms. However those freedoms are not really free. They are paid for by the sacrifices, in too many cases, the ultimate sacrifice, of the men we strive to honor in this newsletter. The preservation of their memory through historical sites, displays, and memorabilia such as the Memorial at Knettishall, the City of Savannah B-17, and the 388<sup>th</sup> display at Hill Aerospace Museum are 3 great opportunities to share the legacy of these great men for all time.

For 63 years now members of the 388<sup>th</sup> BG Assoc. have come together at the annual reunion to share in the fun. At the banquet in Colorado Springs there were well over a dozen 1<sup>st</sup> time attendees. Many who may have just been able to attend the banquet, and others, part of, or all 4 days of excitement and entertainment. It is my sincere hope you will come back and join us again. To those friends or family members who come regularly, please invite them back! Yes it may seem a little awkward at first not remembering everyone's name or knowing just who they are, but I assure you it becomes infectious spending time with these **Living Legends**. You will find yourself more excited to come again each year looking forward to hearing a new story or seeing that one individual again. So much so, that you'll find you can hardly sit still and wait for the next reunion.

At Colorado Springs I spoke of **OUR** mission. Each year having fun, going someplace new for the next reunion, meeting new people, learning, sharing, and preserving the history of these great men, well that is it. We can't even imagine some, probably any, of the exploits these men experienced at such a young age. And yet we have the unique opportunity to spend time, one on one, with these hero's. But as was stated in the previous newsletter, **time is running out...** Opportunities to share these annual events with the Original Members is growing shorter by the day and then it will be up to us to teach and share their history through memories, real life accounts, pictures, and whatever means we have available to us to document the events of their lives.

The Bomb Group Association supports all 3 of the projects or displays mentioned above on an ongoing basis in our efforts to honor the Original Members of the 388<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group. Most recently project "Ultimate Sacrifice", a significant contribution to the restoration of the "City of Savannah", and the completion of a new 388<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group display at Hill Aerospace Museum are the Associations most recent undertakings. We continuously make improvements, expand, and helping to maintain each of them so that others may never forget that **"Freedom Is Not Free"**. Donations are coming into the Assoc. coffers almost daily to support these worthy causes, but no contribution is more important than each of us actually participating in some form or another.

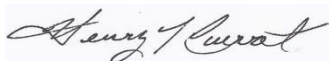
So now we are back to having fun. At this year's reunion we will take a dinner cruise up and down the Savannah River, spend time in the Mighty 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force Museum, home of the 388<sup>th</sup>'s **City of Savannah**, share in another Great Evening of Entertainment during our banquet, and have the opportunity to spend some time in one of America's oldest cities, Savannah, Georgia. But deeper than that, each of us, you personally, will be helping to carry on the legacy of what many of your fathers, grandfathers, family, and friends did during W.W. II. They gave you the right to gather in freedom and have that fun.

During the reunion you will be the recipient of months of hard work by Jennifer Wammack, putting together and planning the event. There are PX items to purchase hats, books, and this year, the Associations beautiful new Challenge Coin will be available along with other items. But most importantly, you can take personal pride in knowing that you have helped to support and preserve the history of the 388<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group and those who served in it.

**We are the future of the 388<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association.** When the occasion arises to share information about the Association with others, they are amazed at the number of association members and years our organization has been in existence. It is a lot to be proud of! All who served during W.W. II, or any veteran for that matter, deservedly, hold a special place and respect in the hearts and minds of all Americans. But the 388<sup>th</sup> BG is unique in that the membership and organization, is strong and has a desire to perpetuate its existence. Sadly many other groups or squadrons are small in numbers and as the members depart on their last mission, slowly move closer to extinction. It is no small or unimportant fact that the 388<sup>th</sup> still exists today as the 388<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing. It is a continuation of the 388<sup>th</sup> Legacy.

So come and continue to share in the fun each year. While the perception may be that you are merely enjoying some time off and a little vacation, you are a part of a "Much Bigger" project. You personally are one of many, a curator if you will, protecting, sharing, and **"Preserving for All Time"** the legacy of the "388<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association" and the "Greatest Generation".

SO LETS HAVE SOME MORE FUN!!



### New Members:

#### Peter Veyna son of Victor M Ruiz(decd) 563rd Sqd

Only one new member to report in this issue. I have received a number of emails from people who indicated they are going to join but I haven't seen their names yet. To continue receiving the printed or electronic Newsletter you do need to be a member of the Association. So please complete registration form on the back page of the Newsletter or send your check to renew membership.

## Thank you for your donations

### General Fund

Challenge Coin Sales  
Irv Boxer  
Marin Ennis for Printed Newsletter Cost  
Harold Johnson  
James Morrow  
Rickard Sundblad  
P Hansel Young  
Joseph Patterson IMO John H Fischer and  
R.E. Thompson

### Memorial Fund

Irv Boxer  
388th Bomb Group Foundation

## Project Ultimate Sacrifice

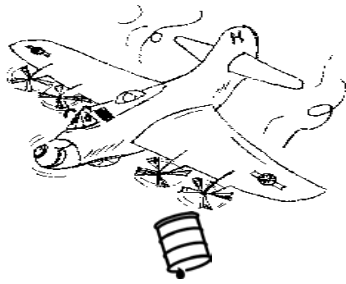
We would like to thank the following members whose contributions in the last two quarters have brought us nearly \$2,700 closer to our goal of \$16,500.

John Anderson	Joe & Barbara McAllister
Paul & Frances Ammons	Jim Morrow
Ralph Becker	Harry Sprague
Ruth & Paul Castleberry	David & Esta Stewart
Richard & Renee Cook	Dick Timberlake
Jack Edwards	Neil Walker
Arthur Fixel	Carol Walker
Lt Col Patrick Lewis	Charles Woodford
Vincent Lukas	Terry Woodford-Thomas
Richard Keil, <i>in memory of David Price</i>	
Donald Sjaardema, <i>in memory of the Harold Peach crew</i>	

To specify that your donation is for this particular fund, please write "Project Ultimate Sacrifice" in the memo section of your check. Mail checks, payable to the **388<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association Inc.**, to Tom Dennis Treasurer 5753G Santa Ana Cyn Rd #438, Anaheim CA 92807



## The Lighter Side



My father was a waist gunner on a B17, and he told me they disposed of their latrine 55 gallon drums by taking them up (they would freeze on the way up) and they would be thrown out over Germany. He'd say "We'd imagine some German soldier getting hit with 55 gallons of frozen s\_ \_ t !

## CHALLENGE COIN

We are excited to be able to offer a military "Challenge Coin" to you. The tradition of challenge coins is attributed to the Army Air Corps during the First World War. These coins have become very popular with active duty units over the past few years and it seemed like a good idea for us. A challenge coin is a small coin (1 ½ inch diameter) bearing an organization's insignia and carried by the organization's members. In some units, they are used to prove membership when challenged and to enhance morale. In addition, they are also collected by service members.

You may have seen the US Air Force Academy coin for sale in their gift shop (it was \$8.) These coins are also used as a token of thanks. For instance, I will be giving a coin to each of the cadets that performed the posting of the colors at our formal dinner in Colorado Springs. So, buy one for yourself, one for each of your kids and grandkids, a couple to give away. Our initial order will be for 300 coins. We are intending to sell these for \$7 each (plus shipping at cost) with all the profit going to the Project Ultimate Sacrifice extension to our Memorial in Knettishall. If you'd like to order a coin (or several) please let me know. An artist's proof is shown. The proof shows 1942 – 1945 (dates organization begins and ends).

This will be changed on the final version to 1943-1945 (time at Knettishall).

**Greg Staples (see my contact info on page 2)**



## HISTORICALLY SPEAKING...

By Dick Henggeler, Historian

### History of the 388th

There are basically two books that capture the history of the 388<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group in a complementary manner. Both books cover the short history of the 388<sup>th</sup> from early 1943 through August 1945. Both books have lots of great photos and describe many aspects of the 388<sup>th</sup> – (e.g. short history, missions, statistics, base life, recreation, ground support, combat crews etc.).

The first book is "Fortress for Freedom – The History of the 388<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group" by Edward L. Phillips. The first edition was printed in 1946 in a brown cover with the 388<sup>th</sup> BG emblem embossed on the cover. The second edition is from 1957 but I have never seen one of these. (If anyone has one of these please let me know). The 3<sup>rd</sup> edition was printed in 1973 with a blue cover. It was revised by Edward J. Huntzinger. This edition has most of the same articles in the same order but varies the photos somewhat. There are some new photos and others are placed in different places in the book.

The second book is "**The 388<sup>th</sup> At War**" written by Huntzinger and first published in 1979. It has a blue hard cover with the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force emblem printed in gold. This book has similar photos to the first but a different format. The bulk of the book describes each of the 315 missions using the original mission reports generated at the time. Also included are lists of crew members shot down during the mission. A formation map showing the relative positions of the various crews in flight is provided for some of the missions.

The original editions are out of print but sometime available on internet auction sites. Softcover reprints of these have been published recently.

## Last Chance for the 388th At War!



There are fewer than 50 copies left of Ed Huntzinger's chronicle of the 388<sup>th</sup>'s 314 missions, from Amsterdam in July 1943 to the last revival flight in May 1945. This softbound 8.5 x 11, 272-page book is packed with photos and graphics.

Every penny of the \$45 cost (which includes s/h) goes directly to our Association's treasury.

To order your copy, make your \$45 check payable to the **388th Bomb Group Association** and send it to our treasurer Tom Dennis Jr. at 5753G Santa Ana Canyon Road #438, Anaheim CA 92807. Please allow 4 weeks for delivery.

**Minutes of the 388<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group (H) Association**  
**62nd Meeting of the General Membership**  
**September 3, 2011**      **Colorado Springs, CO**

The 62nd meeting of the 388<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group Association general membership was called to order at 10:05 a.m. The meeting was attended by 54 members and 14 guests. Following the flag salute led by President Greg Staples, the invocation was given by Jim Cotton.

#### **Minutes**

Since all attendees received a copy of the 2010 minutes at the meeting, a motion to waive an oral reading was seconded and carried by a majority vote.

#### **Treasurer's Report**

President Staples announced the resignation of Treasurer Bit Snead, to take effect October 1. Appreciation and gratitude was extended to both Bit and Marvinna for their 20+ years of service to the Association in a standing ovation by the members. A treasury report will be published in an upcoming issue of the **Fortress of Freedom** newsletter.

#### **Board Business**

Following up on Alvin Lewis' request that there always be a position on the Board filled by an original 388<sup>th</sup> BG member, Sr Director Jim Morrow proposed a revision to Article IV of the Bylaws. The position of Director at Large shall be reserved for a 388<sup>th</sup> BG Association member who served during World War II. The proposal was voted upon and accepted by the membership.

Wayne Daniels, liaison to the **388<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing, Tactical Fighter Wing, and Fighter Bomber Wing**, reported that communications remain open with Hill Air Force Base in Ogden. The new commander at Hill is Colonel Scott Young.

Jan Pack-Singer, liaison to the **388<sup>th</sup> Memorial Trustees** in England, shared a brief history behind the Memorial's successful installation of the two wing stones, which include the 623 names of men killed while in service to the 388<sup>th</sup> BG. Due to the ever-shifting exchange rate and an unavoidable increase in British sales tax, the final project cost comes to \$17,470.

***We still seek donations for Project Ultimate Sacrifice.***

Jim Morrow, liaison for the "**City of Savannah**" B-17 restoration at the Mighty Eighth Air Force Museum in Pooler, GA, told of the continuing restoration progress made on the plane and said that attendees to the reunion next year will be impressed with what they see.

Rob Staples is coordinating CafePress, our online PX. Members expressed interest in items being added. Greg Staples introduced the idea of a 388<sup>th</sup> Challenge Coin memento and collector item. Members were very interested and Greg is placing an initial order of 300 coins. The estimated cost is approximately \$10 per coin.

Secretary Linda Soo reported that the Association received 24 new memberships during the year: 4 annual, 18 associate life memberships, AND 2 life memberships! Correspondence with members by mail, e-mail, and telephone is welcome. Please send updated address information to her so that the membership list and newsletter mailing list are kept current.

Newsletter Editors Tom Dennis Sr and Tom Dennis Jr (assisted by Barbara Dennis) ask members to continue to send personal stories and articles for publication in the newsletter. Members who choose the electronic version of the newsletter help the Association save money by eliminating postage costs.

Vice President Henry Curvat said that in accordance with the name that is recognized by the IRS, our newsletter now has the name, *Fortress of Freedom* 388<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group (H) Association (deleting "Inc.").

An internet status report was given by Greg Staples. The 388<sup>th</sup> BG Association is listed on Facebook. He has also updated the 388<sup>th</sup> website, **[www.388thbg.org](http://www.388thbg.org)**.

Historian Dick Henggeler continues to research and add items to the the Association's data website, **[www.388bg.org](http://www.388bg.org)**. He is also maintaining the 388<sup>th</sup> Research Library.

Corporate Agent Rickard Sundblad is keeping the Association's corporate records organized and updated.

#### **New Officers**

The responsibilities of the three incoming Board positions were read before nominations were opened. In accordance with the By-Laws, including the revision for the position of Director at Large, written votes were counted and the positions were filled as follows:

1<sup>st</sup> Vice President: Ben Forrest, Jr.

(Rotates to President and then to Senior Director)

2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President: Rick Thompson

Director at Large: Harry Sprague

Beginning October 1, 2011, Tom Dennis Jr. will assume the responsibilities of the office of Treasurer.

Thank you to members Steve Butner and David Miller who were also nominees for Board positions.

#### **Reunions 2012 and 2013**

New Reunion Planner, Jennifer Wammack, shared information about plans for next year's reunion (Aug. 29 – Sept. 1) in Savannah, GA. Our host hotel is the Embassy Suites and the Mighty 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force Museum will be a venue for several activities.

Oklahoma City, OK and Rapid City, SD, were submitted as the possible Central U.S. locations for the 2013 Reunion. Both have Air Force bases nearby, as well as many other attractions. After discussion, members voted for Oklahoma City. A date in mid-September or October, 2013 is being considered.

#### **From the Floor**

Rachell and Joel Rary were congratulated and thanked for planning this year's Reunion in Colorado Springs. Approximately 130 people signed up to attend, including 29 life members of the Association.

August Bolino shared his story about the bronze B-17 model at the Air Force Academy (see Fall 2011 issue).

Business was concluded and the motion to adjourn was seconded and carried by a unanimous vote. The meeting was adjourned by President Staples.

Respectfully submitted,  
Linda D. Soo, Secretary

## Merry Christmas From The 388th

Two names that are synonymous with each other are Percy Prentice and The 388<sup>th</sup> Memorial in Knettishall. Percy has a long standing relationship with the 388<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association going way back to the days when Knettishall was a thriving active base. Many stories revolve around Percy's days of youth spent on and around the base while those serving and defending our freedom were stationed there. We need to hear many more stories of that relationship.

Following the war Percy Prentice never forgot about his new found friends who helped save his country. So much so that when the Memorial was placed at the old base entrance it just seemed natural for him to make sure it was and would always be maintained and presentable to the public. For over 25 years he has carried on that tradition and been mowing, cleaning, and keeping up with the general maintenance of it.

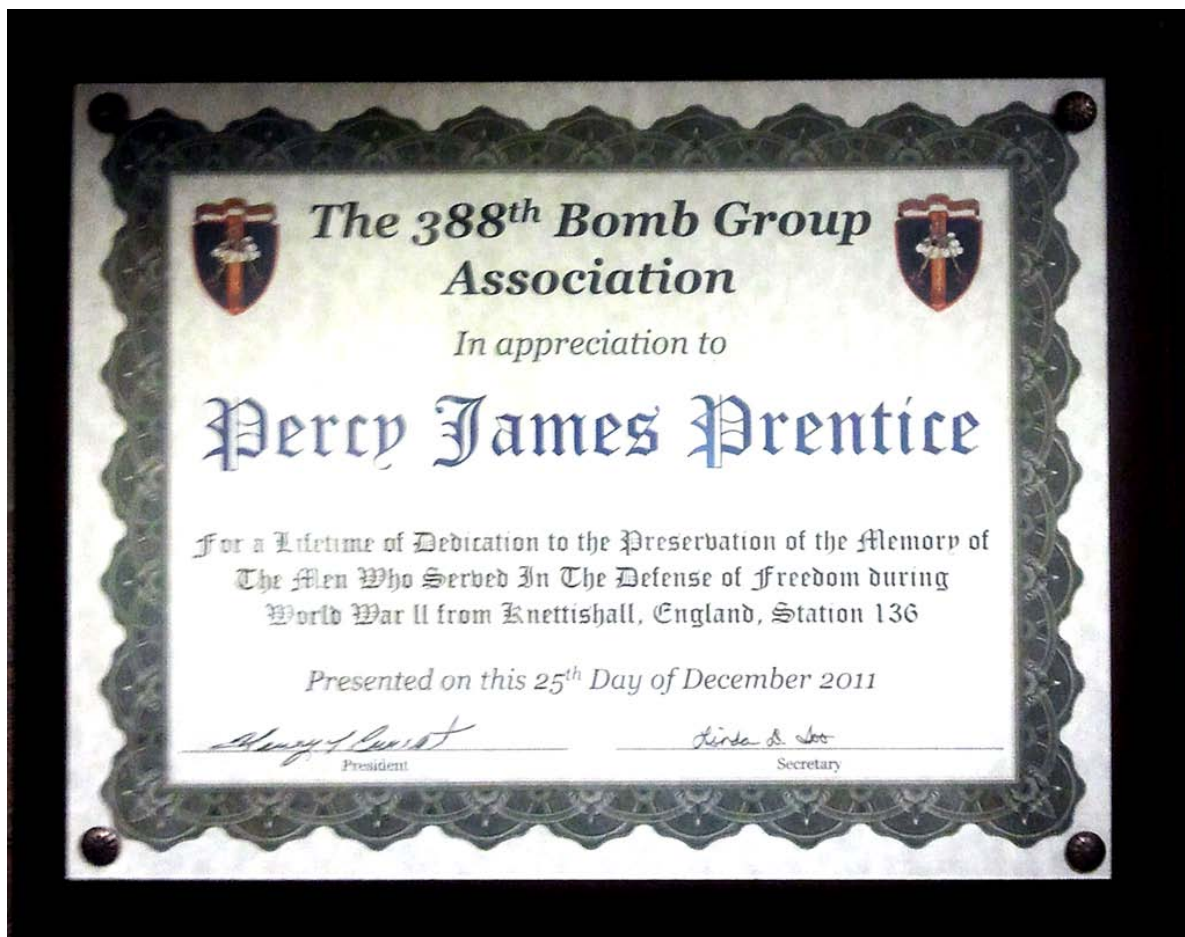
Those who have been fortunate enough to visit the Memorial, read about the expansion, "Project Ultimate Sacrifice", or have seen pictures and articles of the 388<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Memorial, can see its splendor and magnificence. It is always immaculate in its presentation and that is all due to the efforts and dedication of one, Percy Prentice.

Percy's years of service were brought to the attention of the Association by some of the original members who felt strongly that we needed to recognize his service and dedication to the Association. Thus plans were set into motion for the Association to send out what may be its 1<sup>st</sup> ever Christmas present.

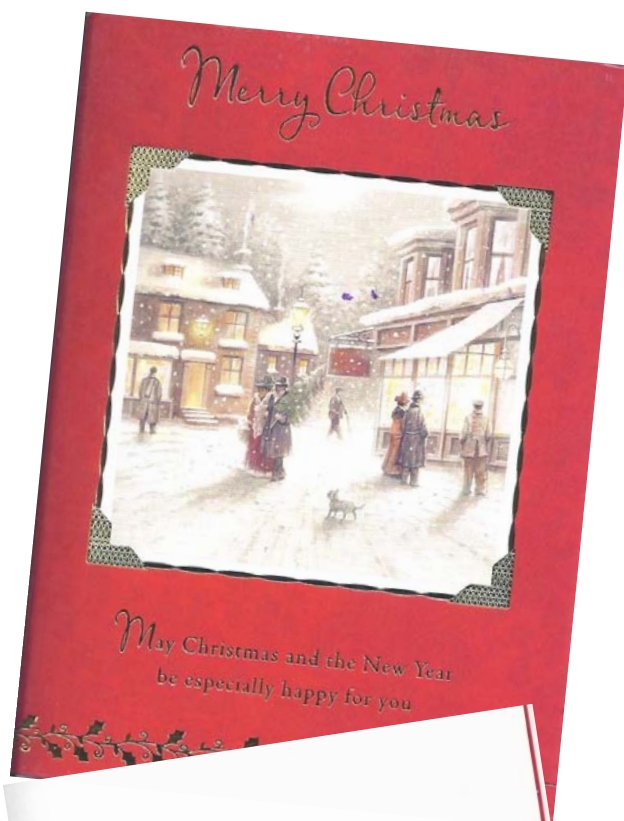
Pictured is the *Certificate of Appreciation* which was sent this year to Percy, along with a monetary gift, for Christmas. It is a small token of gratitude for his dedication to the memory of the 388<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group. The legacy of the 388<sup>th</sup> veterans and history they represent is priceless. This is yet another wonderful example of the strong bonds and relationship which were formed during one of the most horrific crimes against humanity that has ever occurred.

As you read this, the 388<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Assoc. continues to hold annual reunions, publish its quarterly Newsletter, and celebrate Freedom. The tradition lives on. The 388<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Assoc. wishes to, once again, thank men like Percy Prentice for their dedicated service to this memory. THANK YOU PERCY!

The 388<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Assoc., Inc.

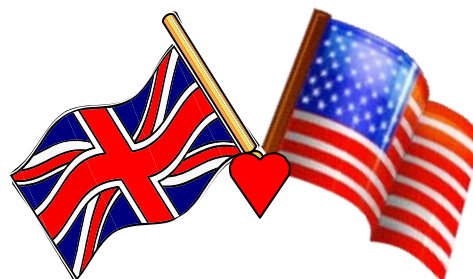






To Tom and Family  
and all 388th People

Warmest wishes  
Good Health Good Luck  
and God Bless You All  
Perry J. Coetzee  
Love You All.





COLORADO SPRINGS

2011





# 388<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL REUNION





# MORE COLORADO FUN







The "City of Savannah"  
&  
The City of Savannah

**DO NOT  
MISS OUT!**

**AUGUST 29<sup>th</sup> thru SEPT 1<sup>st</sup>**

- **WWII History Restored**
- **Exclusive Dinning Experiences**
- **Acquaint Yourself with a 278 Year Old City**
- **Float the Mighty Savannah River**
- **Reminisce with Good Friends**

# Telegram Typo Gives Widow False Hope

Winifred Balboni's letter, written to the War Department on May 31, 1945, was polite and to the point.

"I know you are terribly busy and my problems are small, but your kind letter and the telegram I received both said my husband Second Lieutenant Donald L. Balboni was killed in action on August 2 in Germany.

"This is hard to understand because on August 2 he was seen in a hospital in Paris, France at 5:00 p.m. His left arm was wounded slightly because as the boys floated to earth in their parachutes the Germans shot at them. I know the Germans have done some terrible things and for them to shoot my husband would just be routine.

"The point for sending this letter is to find out on what facts are [sic] the War Department declaring my husband dead. I have had no proof as to make me believe he is dead. They have made mistakes and especially here in Rhode Island, as boys are walking in on their families who have been declared dead and one boy walked into the church where his requiem mass was being said. Another reason for this letter is because I am a stubborn Irishman.

"Please believe me when I say I understand that you have done your duty by your kind letter, but please, General, if there is only some proof that I may receive I am sure the uncertainty in my mind and heart would be cleared up, as it is I am still hopeful of his safe return because of the conflicting news.

"Thanking you for your patience I am,

Mrs. Donald Balboni"

Winifred Balboni was right to question the information she had received from the War Department. In August 1944 she had received a telegram that her husband was missing in action in France; several weeks later, she had learned from Ernest Furfaro, her husband's engineer/top turret gunner, that he and Lt. Balboni had ridden in the same truck to a German hospital outside Paris.

On August 2, 1944, Balboni's B-17G *Fourth Term* was knocked out of formation during a mission to take out the V-2 rocket storage depot at Mery-Sur-Oise, 15 miles north of Paris. It was their thirteenth mission.

After flak blew off the Plexiglas nose and put the ship into a spin, Balboni sounded the bail-out alarm. Only co-pilot Willard Spangler remained behind, and not by choice—in his haste, Balboni had grabbed the parachute closest to him ... Spangler's. Unable to find another parachute, the co-pilot returned to his seat to struggle with the controls. He was able to pull *Fourth Term* out of its dive and made a safe crash-landing near L'isle-Adam, some four miles from the target.

As the airmen drifted earthward through exploding flak, they realized they were also being shot at by small arms



The Donald Balboni Crew, 563rd Squadron

fire. Ernest Furfaro was hit in the ankle; Donald Balboni was struck in the upper left arm.

When they were being taken to the hospital, Furfaro later recalled, Balboni was bleeding heavily, and the Germans gave him a shot of morphine to help with the pain.

As more and more wounded airmen began to overflow the wards of the Luftwaffe hospital at Eubonne, Furfaro lost sight of his pilot. A few days later, with the Allies pushing toward Paris, the Germans fled, taking only their paperwork, and leaving the wounded in the care of French civilians. Days later, fearing the Germans might return, the hospital was evacuated. After Paris was liberated, Furfaro was found in a French home and was transported back to England. He did not know about the airman known only as Unknown X-44, who had been quietly buried at Eubonne Cemetery.

In January 1945, American burial teams disinterred Unknown X-44 for transport to the temporary American cemetery at Solers, France. From his clothing, they identified the remains as Donald Belboni. But there was a problem—neither the Central Records Unit nor the AG Casualty Division had a Belboni on record.

All Eight AF units were instructed to search their records, and in February Captain Samuel L. Clark, 388th BG Adjutant, reported that, in all likelihood, the body found was that of Donald Balboni. Based on this information, the lieutenant was declared dead and a telegram was sent to his widow.

But the telegram contained an error; it stated that Balboni had died on August 2 in Germany, not in France where his wife knew he had last been seen.

Mrs. Balboni's letter prompted a swift review of the records, and in late June she received a clarification ... and an apology.





## We Get Mail...

Have been reviewing my last issue of the 388th Newsletter and I can't tell you when I enjoyed an issue more. Each time the letter arrives, I look for some news that I can refer to - this issue had several.

From the President's desk, mention was made about the Liberty Belle crashing and burning. I cried when I saw it on fire on the evening TV News. That plane had been to our local airport and I had a walk thru for ole time sake. One less B-17 left in our part of history.

I was saddened to hear of the death of Capt. Lester Hess of the 561st Sqd. I knew him at the base because I helped service (RCM) his plane "*Heavens Above*". He and his crew flew me home after the war and I never got a chance to thank him for the safe journey home to Bradley Field in Connecticut. The flight across the Atlantic was quite an experience for I was assigned watch duty in the nose as there were many planes flying both ways on the route home. Two things happened that I will not forget. First, as we took off from Holyhead in Wales, a fast fog bank rolled in off the Irish Sea. Les pulled back on the yoke and we flew into a deep "peasouper" and came out in the clear at about 1000 feet or so.

When we arrived in Iceland, the field had a heavy cloud cover, so we circled - again Lester brought us down safely. It was still quite a ride. We had two days on the ground and then were off to Goose Bay and then home.

I hope Lester's children read the Newsletter as I want them to know how grateful I am that he was such a good pilot. I admired him very much.

A little more news. Last week there was a 388th reunion in Arlington Hts, Illinois - Mine...not scheduled! It happened by chance. As I was leaving our local hardware store, a gentleman with an 8th patch on his shoulder came thru the door. I stopped him and said I was a Vet from the 8th also, was he? Yes, and I was stationed at a place you probably never heard of, Knettishall in East England, was his reply! My ears rang with the news. It was former Major James Ostler of the 563rd Sqd. He was a navigator and part of the early arrivals at the 388th. We exchanged notes and last week had a long lunch talking about our many experiences. After 2 1/2 hours, we were winded but agreed to keep in close touch. We have lived about a mile and a half from each other for almost 45 years - neither of us knew about the other. My three children went to the same high school with their children. We are now checking to see if they were in the same classes. I met his wife, Audrey, and she is most pleasant - we're getting together soon.

The news about the Memorial is great. We have seen the first one a number of times. Our first visit to Knettishall was made in 1982, just after I retired from A.T. & T. We have been back to the area 5 or 6 times and have become close to George and Margaret Stebbings at

"Little Patches". Have spent many an evening with them - I was saddened to hear of his death. He did relate to us his relationship with the 388th at the tender age of 14. He was really close to many of us who served.

We stayed with David Alcott and had a great time. In Hopton, we got to know Jean and Terry Banks. They too were in our many visits - they saw the base being built and Jean's Mother worked in the enlisted men's mess hall.

I was a ground crew with the RCM group. We serviced all the craft with the radar jamming equipment. Sadly, I've never seen any mention of our group in any newsletters. It would be nice to somehow acknowledge our part of the war.

Enclosed is my check to be used for the Memorial in the U.K.

Sincerely,  
Richard E. Cook  
561st Sqd. Corp. Mechanic

*Dear Richard,*

*Thank you for your interesting letter. Loved hearing about your "mini" reunion with James Ostler of the 563rd. Hey, here's an idea, why don't you invite him and Audrey to join you in Savannah for next year's reunion! We'd all love to meet him and just for 'ole time sake' you can get up and personal with another B-17, the newly refurbished "City of Savannah". We've added his address to our mailing list so he will get this issue of the Newsletter. If he would like to continue getting them, he can fill out the membership form on the back.*

*And we agree most heartily in regards to stories of the men who serviced those planes. I have often heard my father, who was a pilot at Knettishall, comment on the importance of the ground crews. The flight crews flew the missions, yes, but it was the ground crews who made those missions possible! The trust level they had for those men must have been enormous every time they climbed into those aircraft!*

*So, how about it Guys? We know there are stories out there and we'd love to hear them. We'll take funny incidences, heartwarming tales and interesting adventures. So get on it, we have an issue to fill in the Spring and we want to see some articles about those unsung heroes who kept those B-17s flying!*

Sincerely,  
Your Editors



## Col. (Ret) Francis J. (Hank) Henggeler



### 1916 - 2011

Col. (Ret) Francis Joseph (Hank) Henggeler passed away on December 15, 2011 at the age of 95. He was born on a farm in Clyde, MO to Joseph and Mary Henggeler on December 3, 1916. From a very early age, Hank knew he wanted to fly. He always wore a leather flying helmet to school as a youngster. Being a farm boy, he learned many skills that would later help him during the war. When he was 18, he used the instructions from a Popular Mechanics article to build a wind generator using a rewired Model T alternator and hand carved wooden propeller. With a set of car batteries, he installed a single light bulb in his parents' living room. It was their first electricity.

Francis attended two years at Conception College near his home before joining the Army Air Corps prior to World War II. After a year of service as a radio operator, he applied for Officer Candidate School so that he could become a pilot. In 1942, Hank was a B-17 Instructor Pilot at Wendover Field, Bosie, ID when he was hand selected by Capt. Chet Cox to be the original 563<sup>rd</sup> Squadron Commander.

After training and organizing his squadron, the unit was deployed to England to join the war. Each crew crossed the Atlantic in their own B-17. Hank piloted his staff in Lightning Strikes. He was assigned a specially trained navigator for the trans-Atlantic flight. At that time there were essentially no navigation aids for crossing the Atlantic. Planes had to hop across the ocean landing in Greenland, Iceland and then Scotland. On the Iceland leg, Hank was doubtful of the bearings provided by navigator and often requested verification. Finally, a flight instrument's display receiving a transmission from Iceland flipped 180 degrees. From this Hank knew for certain that they were not on course but due south of Iceland. Hank turned north and found their airfield. If he had not done that, they would have continued flying until they ran out of fuel and ditched in the ocean. This very thing probably happened to his Kamholz crew.

Hank was a command pilot and participated in 27 combat missions. As a command pilot, he did not have a crew but occupied the copilot's seat with the overall responsibility of the planes in the group. His missions included some of the 388<sup>th</sup> most famous – the very first to Amsterdam which Ann Frank referred to in her diary; the first D-Day mission (Hank was deputy commander

of the mission where the 388<sup>th</sup> lead the entire 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force); the Brux Mission (Hank was the commander); and Poltava, Russia Mission (Hank was in charge of returning crews home by way of Tehran and Egypt after the Germans had destroyed most of their B-17s on the ground)

Hank was known to be fearless. During a bomb run, all planes had to maintain a constant speed and constant direction. To alter either would require the bombing to be aborted and the mission to fail. On one mission, Hank's group was flying beneath the lead group in front of them. There was plenty of separation at the start. However once the bomb run began, the difference in wind speeds at the two altitudes caused the two groups to begin to close in on each other. The bomb bay doors were open and Hank could see the bombs about to be released in the aircraft above him. The bomb release point was near but the two groups were dangerously close. Hank's pilot was extremely nervous as the lower group continued to line up directly under the lead group. Hank then said they would hold their position while he counted to 5. If the bombs had not release then, they would abort. The pilot already was convinced that they should abort and pull back on the throttle. After the count of 3, the bombs above were released and dropped immediately before them. Almost at the same time Hank's bombs were released. Later Hank was to say that as the bombs dropped past, he could read the lettering painted on their sides.

When Col. Cox became Group Commander after Col. David was transferred, Hank took Col. Cox's former position as Group Air Executive Officer. In March of 1945, the war in Europe was winding down and Hank returned Stateside to prepare for deployment to the Pacific Theater. It was at this time he met Dorothy Merrigan. Then in August 1945, the war in Japan ended. In September Hank and Dorothy were married and they lived the Air Force life in many places until 1970. At that time Hank retired as a Colonel and they then returned home to Nodaway County, Missouri.

Francis received an MBA from Northwest Missouri State University and became the Maryville City Finance Director for 10 years. He was a member of the Knights of Columbus, a Deacon of St. Gregory's Catholic Church of Maryville, and a board member of Conception Abbey. In their final years, Francis and Dorothy lived in Kansas City area.

Francis is preceded in death by his wife of 53 years, Dorothy. He is survived by his sons, William, Joseph, John and Dick. He has 14 grandchildren and 4 great grandchildren.



# Taps



## BETTE LETO

Elizabeth Jane "Bette" Leto, widow of 388th BG past historian Oreste Leto, Jr., passed away Sept. 3 at Jenner's Pond Assisted Living in West Grove, PA. She was 88. Mrs. Leto had previously lived in Kennett Square, PA for nearly 55 years.

A graduate of Shippensburg State Teachers College, she taught at Mount Pleasant School in Wilmington, DE for eight years before her marriage to Leto in 1952. They had been married for 54 years at the time of his death in 2006.



Leto

A life-long member of the Kennett Square Presbyterian Church, Mrs. Leto also served as secretary of the Kennett Township Historical Committee for several years and was a former member of the Four Seasons Garden Club of Kennett Square. She and her husband contributed generously to the educations of their nieces and nephews, as well as to a number of charitable organizations.

Mrs. Leto is survived by a brother, Dr. John Bengel, and several nieces and nephews. Burial was at the Union Hill Cemetery in Kennett Square.

## WILLIAM R. MACKEY

William Ralph Mackey of Midwest City, OK died Aug. 24 at age 86. Known to friends and family as Ralph, he joined the Army Air Corps shortly after high school and served as bombardier on the Hess and Carroll crews in the 561st Sqd. He flew eight missions between March and April 1945.

Mr. Mackey graduated from Oklahoma A & M with a BS in agriculture in 1948. Returning to active duty in 1952, he earned his fighter pilot's wings and served in the Korean War as a pilot and flight instructor.



Mackey

Mackey Vending, the business founded by Mr. Mackey and his wife Pat, grew to become one of the largest vending companies in Oklahoma. Mr. Mackey's Memberships included the Midwest City Rotary, OSU Alumni Association and OSU Posse Club.

Mr. Mackey is survived by daughters Kathy Roach and Karen Reed; four grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. He was predeceased by Pat, his wife of 67 years; and by his son Andy.

## JAMES E. PAUL

James Edward Paul, 85, passed away Feb. 3 in Martinsburg, PA. He was a waist gunner on Paul Patten's 563rd crew and flew 30 missions between June and October 1944, primarily in the B-17F *The Princess Pat*. Awards included the DFC and Air Medal with three oak clusters.

Born in Altoona, PA, Mr. Paul graduated from Altoona High School and attended Penn State. He worked as an engineer with Bell Telephone, retiring after more than 35 years of service. He was a member of the First United Methodist Church, Hollidaysburg; the Bell Pioneers and Clearfield Lions Club.

Survivors include daughter Nancy Civils, sons Richard, Charles, John and Dennis; nine grandchildren and ten great-grandchildren. He was predeceased by his Phyllis, his wife of 56 years, in 2001. Internment with military honors was held at Alto-Reste Park Cemetery.



Paul

## WILLIAM F. RELLSTAB, JR.

William Frederick Rellstab, Jr. passed away at his home in River Ridge, LA on Sept. 16. He was 86. A navigator at age 19, he flew 40 missions (beginning with D-Day) with the Harry Beatty crew in the 562nd Sqd. He returned to the U.S. as a captain, and later became a major in the Army Reserves. Awards included the DFC and Air Medal with oak leaf Clusters.

Following the war, Mr. Rellstab resumed his education at the University of Pittsburgh, receiving a BS in engineering. He later earned an MS in economics. In 1946 he moved to New Orleans, LA to become a partner in a tugboat and barge company. He then accepted a position at J. Aron Co., a coffee importing and sugar refining business, where he rose to the position of vice president. He moved to the Kearney Group (a coffee warehousing firm) where he retired as president; and continued working as a consultant to the Dupuy Storage and Forwarding Co.



Rellstab

A strong believer in community service, Mr. Rellstab was a president of the New Orleans Traffic and Transportation Bureau, vice-president of the Foreign Relations Association, and commissioner and president pro-tem of the N.O. Public Belt Railroad. Civic memberships included the N.O. Chamber of Commerce, Board of Trade, International House and Foreign Trade Club, among many others.

A member of the St. Charles Avenue Presbyterian Church for 60 years, he helped raise funds for the New Orleans Symphony Society and for WYES-TV.

Mr. Rellstab is survived by Ouida, his wife of 29 years; son William; and step-children Cielie Clemenceau and Martin Muller; and seven step-grandchildren. His first wife, Gertrude, died in 1970.

Memorial services were held at St. Charles Avenue Presbyterian Church.

*Taps notices may be sent either to our secretary Linda Soo, or to our newsletter editor Tom Dennis. Photos are always appreciated.*

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ZIP CODE \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
SQUADRON \_\_\_\_\_ POSITION \_\_\_\_\_ AIRCRAFT NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
PILOT \_\_\_\_\_ NO MISSIONS \_\_\_\_\_ POW (DATE) \_\_\_\_\_ STALAG LUFT \_\_\_\_\_  
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