

# 306th Echoes

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## Harold Twing: It's a Long Way From Thurleigh to Amarillo, Texas

By **Vernon L. Williams**  
Director, East Anglia Air War Archives  
Abilene Christian University

For those who knew Harold Twing at Thurleigh, he was a good gunner and well respected as an air crewman, one who could always be counted on in the heat of battle at 25,000 feet. For generations of high school students in Amarillo, Texas after the war, they knew nothing about Twing's World War II exploits. Mr. Twing, as they called him, owned Twing's Drive-In near Palo Duro High School on the north side of Amarillo. For many he was a man to be feared. Twing thought nothing of picking up an order of burgers and fries and delivering them himself to the car parked out front. While there, he made sure that everything was on the up and up. If you parked at Twing's Drive-In, usually you would have a great time with your friends and cruise on into the night down the main drag. If Twing caught you doing something you shouldn't, you knew that your parents would soon find out. Twing didn't need the police to maintain order at Twing's. His imposing personality generated respect and care. Just like the drive-in depicted in the old Happy Days television series, Twing's Drive-In was the in place to be for high school students. Now after forty or fifty years, these aging former high schoolers still like to talk about Twing's Drive-In and "dragging Polk Street," the main downtown thoroughfare in Amarillo. And Harold Twing stories are never far from the subject of conversation.

"Twing's, I thought, was the coolest place," remembered 1965 senior Don Taylor. "The first car I bought was a beat up old '52 Ford, and I couldn't wait until I could go down and sit at Twing's in my '52 Ford. It wouldn't hardly start, but it was just the thing to sit there in your car and just be seen ...to have a car and people driving through and seeing your car. Twing's, I don't remember much about the food, but I just remember that that was the place you wanted to be."

David Hall, president of the Class of 1965 at nearby Palo Duro High School, remembered Twing's as a special place. "Twing's was the place to be. I remember going there to see girls, ...and eat. I remember the vanilla cream Dr. Peppers we would get. Now they just want to make you throw up, but then they were really good. The hamburgers were good, the French fries were good, but you basically went there mostly for the socialization." After all these years, Hall's memories of Harold Twing are still vivid. "If Mr. Twing knew you by your first name, then that meant that you had been in trouble with him one or twice. Unfortunately, he knew me by my first name (laughter). It must have been all those guys I ran around with. It couldn't have been me."



For Sherry Graff, memories of dragging Polk and making the run from Twing's on the north side, downtown and back to Twing's, remains a memory just as if it were yesterday. "One of our worst fears was Mr. Twing, when we would swing

through [Twing's after dragging Polk Street], make the circle, and bless his heart, we feared Mr. Twing worst than we feared the cops at that time, because as you made the swing through Twing's, Gary Greene inevitably put his bottle in some girl's purse. Mr. Twing would personally bring out his wonderful French fries and his cokes and check every girl's purse in the car. If you were caught with it, mom and dad were called immediately and it was Billy bar the door. . . . but those were the fun days."

A respected father image at Twing's, Harold Twing remained silent about his World War II service with the 306th Bomb Group at Thurleigh



Left: The original three carhops hired by Harold Twing in 1956. Above, clockwise: S/Sgt Harold K. Twing with Red Cross personnel in front of the Bedford Red Cross Club, Bedford, England, circa 1943; Twing posing in front of his Niesen hut and crew bicycles in the 367th Bomb Squadron communal area, Thurleigh, England, circa 1943; Twing mixing up a milk shake at Twing's, Jane Twing in the background, circa late 1950s; and a stunning nighttime shot of Twing's, circa 1965. Courtesy Rocky Rockwell, Jane Twing.

near Bedford, England. Quiet and unassuming, he had left that part of his life in the past. Today, former students from Palo Duro High School are amazed at his wartime experiences and the contribution he made to the victory won over the skies of Nazi-occupied Europe. It is a story that has recently been brought to light in the 306th Bomb Group Historical Project, currently underway at Abilene Christian University.

In 2005 Dr. Vernon Williams interviewed Jane Twing, Harold's widow still living in Amarillo. In researching Twing's Drive-In for a documentary

*Continued on page 3*

### Ft. Worth Reunion Holds Some Special Promises

Take a look at the reunion schedule on page 7. It includes special plans for tours, a history exhibits room, a World War II Cinema room, oral history interviews, a Second Generation meeting, a Twelve O'Clock High dinner, a ladies breakfast, a Saturday night banquet that includes a special tribute to those veterans in attendance, a memorial service that will include a poignant tribute to the Fallen and a folded wings memorial, and the reunion ends with a Thurleigh Evening with a host of special activities, including the world premiere of a new film titled *Thurleigh at War*. Call the hotel today with your reservations and mail in your reunion registration to Joel La Bo today. See you in Ft. Worth!



Above: British fire engine on display at the recent 40th Combat Wing Reunion festivities held at the 306th Bomb Group Memorial Museum at Thurleigh. Ralph and Daphne Franklin did yeoman work to provide extensive publicity for the 306th Bomb Group and its history during the event, May 2009. Photograph courtesy Ralph Franklin (see story on page 8).



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The 306th Bomb Group Historical Association is a Federally tax-exempt organization and as a veteran's group is classified as 501 © (19).

## Obituaries

Please send the Association details of deaths or complete obituaries if you have them. Please send obituary information to the secretary:

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#### Obituaries Received:

- **Howard Balcom**, 367<sup>th</sup> pilot, died 18 Sep 08 in Natick, MA. He served in the Pacific with the 7<sup>th</sup> Air Force, as a flight engineer, completed pilot training, joined the Group 1 Sep 44 and completed 30 missions in Mar 45. He retired from New England Telephone with 36 years service. He leaves his wife Jean, 2c, 1gc.
- **Joseph Casino**, 368<sup>th</sup> navigator (Duane Clocksin crew), died 3 Oct 08 in Lakewood, NJ. He came to group 16 Feb 45, flew 25 missions, and participated in the Casey Jones Project. He earned a MS in mechanical engineering and worked for the Singer Co. He leaves his wife, Rose Mari.
- **Merle Geving**, 367<sup>th</sup> radio operator (Emmitt Sutherland crew), died 2 Apr 09 in Duluth, MN. He originated and operated Lakeside Transfer. He leaves his wife, Frances, 1c, 4gc, 2ggc.
- **Clifford Langley**, 369<sup>th</sup> tail gunner (Robert Riordan Crew), who replaced seriously wounded tail gunner John DeJohn, died 6 Apr 09 in Winchester, KY. On the 12 Dec 42 mission to Rouen, he was seriously wounded and downed the responsible German fighter. He was formerly Vice President of Allen Construction Co. After retiring he was a cattle and tobacco farmer. He leaves his wife Shirley, 2c, 4gc, 4ggc.
- **Irving Mills**, 423<sup>rd</sup> tail gunner (one of Mother Carey's Chickens), died 24 Oct 08 in Sonoma, CA. His plane was shot down on 14 Oct 43 mission to Schweinfurt, and he was a POW at Stalag 17B. He was survived by his wife, Joan, who passed away 17 Feb 09, 1c.
- **Denzil Parker**, 367<sup>th</sup>, died 5 May 03 in San Clemente, CA.
- **Lawrence Romano**, 527<sup>th</sup>, died 2 Feb 92 in Bronxville, NY.
- **COL Maurice Salada**, 423<sup>rd</sup> pilot died 5 Nov 07 in Dubois, PA. He joined the group at Wendover, completed 25 missions, was CO of the 368<sup>th</sup>, and Deputy Commander of the 306<sup>th</sup>. He earned a BS in Education and a MS in Public Administration and retired as a high school principal in 1980. He leaves 3c, 5gc, 5ggc.
- **N. Walter Schnurman**, radioman, died 26 Nov 08 in Hicksville, NY. After the war he worked for Grumman Aircraft, retiring in 1987 after 42 years with the firm.
- **James Tricoglou**, 367<sup>th</sup> tail gunner (Ben Peters crew), died 15 Feb 09 in Albuquerque, NM. He completed 34 missions in Jun 44, retired as a SMSgt from the Air Force in 1969 and the Post Office in 1980. He leaves his wife, Helen, 3c, 3gc, 4ggc.
- **John Watt**, 367<sup>th</sup> gunner (Louis Matichka crew), died 26 Nov 08 in Maplewood, MN. On the 14 May 44 mission to Berlin his plane ditched off the coast of Sweden, and the crew was interned, He worked as a real estate assessor. He leaves his wife, Lucille, 1c, 1gc.
- **Marvin Zahn**, 368<sup>th</sup> gunner (Duane Clocksin crew), died 19 Apr 08 in Menominee Falls, WI. He came to group 16 Feb 45 and completed 25 missions. He worked as an engineer and leaves 2c, 4gc.

#### 306<sup>th</sup> Family

- **Joan Edwards**, wife of 367<sup>th</sup> crew chief Williams Edwards, died 23 Oct 08 in Melbourne, FL.
- **Muriel Foose**, wife of 368<sup>th</sup> William Foose, died Jul 08. During the war she made resistors for radios in Bedfordshire.



The crowds at the 306th Bomb Group Memorial Museum for the 40th Combat Wing Reunion in May called for extra tent space with special displays (also known as the marquee). Ralph and Daphne Franklin and their family outdid themselves. Notice the large 306th banner from the Dayton Reunion in the back (courtesy of Rocky Rockwell) and along the left side, the historical displays from the Little Rock Reunion (courtesy Dr. Vernon L. Williams and the student interns from Abilene Christian University).

## President's Corner



Nearing the end of my term as president of the 306th Bomb Group Association, I have ambivalent feelings. First, I am grateful to Dr. Vernon Williams and his competent, dedicated staff of student interns for their scanning and grouping digital copies of 306th historical materials. Further they have maintained a high level of quality in organizing, composing and publishing the quarterly issues of the 306th *Echoes*.

As Reunion Chairman, Dr. Williams has planned and organized a varied and interesting program for the Ft. Worth Reunion, October 8 to October 12, 2009. The Reunion program is set out on page 7 of this issue of *Echoes*.

When you read these comments, if you have not already done so, I request that you immediately complete your Registration Form, mail it to our Treasurer, Joel LaBo, 875 S. Worth, Birmingham, Michigan 48009 and call in your room reservation to the Dallas/Ft. Worth Airport Marriott South direct at 1-800-228 9290.

John K. Hickey  
President

**Save the Date**

May 30-June 7, 2010

**“I’ll Be Seeing You”****A Tour of the Airfields of the Mighty Eighth**

Dr. Vernon L. Williams and the East Anglia Air War Project will be leading a tour of World War II England next summer. Williams has spent the last decade working on Eighth Air Force film projects in East Anglia and brings much to this tour. Follow in his footsteps, along the back roads of England and discover the people who lived near their “Yanks” during the war and encounter the airfields that remain scattered across the landscape of rural England. There is much left of the “community” that developed between the Brits and the Yanks so long ago. Soon to be the subject of the first book to come out of Williams’ decade-long research, join him in retracing the story of the 306th and many other bomb groups who flew their missions from these small villages and towns scattered across East Anglia and the Midlands.

All proceeds from the tour will benefit the East Anglia Air War Project and Williams’ efforts to preserve the history of the men of the Eighth Air Force and their contribution to the victory won over the skies of Europe. The East Anglia Project is the driving force behind the preservation of the 306th archives and the work of 306th student interns at Abilene Christian University. This tour will help fund their work.

**London - Dover - Churchill’s Estate - Cambridge  
Airfields in the Midlands - Airfields in East Anglia  
Thurleigh Memorial Museum - Bedford - Norwich**

**9 Days/8 Nights Tour: \$1890****\$800 Single Supplement***Book your own flight.**Flight and transfers not included.*

*For more information, visit the tour website: [www.oldsegundo.com](http://www.oldsegundo.com)  
Or call Dr. Vernon L. Williams for additional details: (325) 280-3399*



*Left: This portrait is inscribed to Harold from Mum. This may have been the wife of a famous Bedford taxi driver, who was well-known to all 306th personnel. Does anyone recognize her and can you provide a name? Above: Harold Twing, circa 1943. Below: The River Great Ouse, Bedford.*



*Twing continued from page 1*

film for the Class of 1965’s upcoming fortieth reunion, Williams discovered that Twing had been a gunner at Thurleigh. “What a small world it is. I told Jane that I had just been to Thurleigh, and that I had recently released a documentary film on the famous 306th Bomb Group, so she got out Harold scrapbooks and photographs, and we had a great time traveling back in time to Twing’s war years. It was stunning to see that his experiences added to my knowledge of the 306th, and that his photographs brought him into clear focus from across the years.

Harold K. Twing was a left waist gunner for the Kenneth A. Reecher crew. The crew assembled at Pyote, Texas and later went to Dalhart in the panhandle for additional crew training. By July 1943 the crew had arrived at Thurleigh and Twing flew his first mission on July 14th against aircraft assembly shops and airfield at Villacoublay. The crew’s first taste of combat brought home the reality that training was over. In the debriefing back at Thurleigh, the interviewer recorded crew observations that just after dropping on the target, they witnessed a B-17 in the group lead with engine on fire going down. It proved to be a sobering beginning. From July 14, 1943 to February 28, 1944, Twing flew twenty-five missions over Nazi-held Europe. He added both Schweinfurt missions (August 17 and October 14, 1943) to his list. For Twing none of his missions were easy, and he soon found out that there were more enemies in the air than just German fighters. Enemy anti-aircraft positions on the ground below posed the greatest danger to the air crews, especially on the bomb run. And there was always the unexpected . . .

On November 13, 1943 Twing received orders to fly a mission with Clyde “Sparky” Cospers’ crew. Although the weather was marginal, the takeoff was uneventful and soon the Flying Fortress named *Miriam* was circling high above the countryside as the group formed up for the mission to the Bremen submarine yards. Before the formation could form, Cospers’ aircraft flew into a developing thunder cell and the *Miriam* went into a diving spin, out of control. Cospers fought to regain control as the plane fell towards earth. Pulling out of the spin, Cospers ordered everyone to bail out. Twing left the ship by the waist position and the others followed quickly, fearful that the aircraft would break up. While Twing and the other crew parachuted to safety, Cospers saw that the descent was leading the *Miriam* was headed directly towards Princes

Risborough, a nearby town. Determined to force the plane over houses in the community, Cospers stayed with the ship and barely cleared the roof tops and crashed in a field beyond. The wreckage caught fire and blew up immediately, killing the pilot instantly. Twing landed on the nearby Vale of Aylesbury, a large area of flat land found next to Princes Risborough. He could see the burning wreckage in the distance, not knowing what Cospers had done to save the town. Princes Risborough continues to the present day to celebrate Cospers’ heroism. Twing never forgot the tragedy. The mission ended before it started and did not count as an official mission. Twing still had seven missions to go.

Flying with Lt. Fred Rector’s crew as a replacement in December, all seemed routine on the flight into target. During a crew radio check, the ball turret gunner and the tail gunner failed to respond. Rector sent the top turret gunner, Charles E. Vondrachek back to Twing and John M. Elliott in the waist to investigate. Twing checked on the ball turret gunner and found him unconscious. Twing used a portable oxygen bottle and revived him. “He became hysterical, tried to fight, and I passed out once myself before I finally got him into the radio room,” Twing reported. As it turned out both victims had passed out “from a lack of oxygen in the 50-below zero weather at 25,000 feet over Germany.” The two unconscious gunners were revived and placed in the radio room in blankets. They soon recovered, and by the time the Flying Fortress returned to Thurleigh, they suffered no ill effects. Lt. Rector declared that Twing, Vondrachek, and Elliott “simply brought two dead men back to life.”

Early during his twenty-five missions, Twing shot down one German fighter, writing home that he had “bagged his first Nazi and had a swastika painted under his window on the Fort[ress].” He ended his tour of duty with a Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with four oak leaf clusters. Before the war, Twing had worked for Braniff Airlines, but Jane explains that it was a long time after the war before Harold would fly in an aircraft again. There was a reason why he never spoke of those days to his Palo Duro High School friends. It was a hard journey, and for a time, one that he kept to himself.

**Correction**

*In the story on Cynthia and Thomas Boyd in the April Echoes, the caption published with the Clyde “Sparky” Cospers crew picture indicated that George Roberts was the only crewman still living. That statement was incorrect. Thomas R. Hill is still alive and well. So, news of his demise was “greatly exaggerated!” We would also like to correct first names for Hill and Kelly in that same caption. The correct names are: Thomas (not John) R. Hill and Eugene (not John) Kelly. These corrections are courtesy of George Roberts.*

**Visit the 306th Website**

[www.306bg.org](http://www.306bg.org)

# Poltava: The Shuttle Missions to Russia

Charles Brazell  
Maynard Smith Intern  
Abilene Christian University

The World War II narrative is laden with stories of missions, campaigns, and operations that have received little attention in the public sphere. Lost in the glory of more epic operations such as D-Day, the Battle for Britain, etc., are certain events that receive less attention but are essentially part of the WWII story. There are several U.S. aerial operations that fit this criterion, each one unique in its own right. *Operation Frantic* and the ensuing disaster at Poltava is one such episode. Far from being a success, Operation Frantic is widely



*This patch was issued to 30 ground personnel and two staff officers of the 306th when they were sent to Russia as part of the shuttle mission to Poltava, on to Italy, and then back to England. The Luftwaffe had knowledge of this and followed the eight planes to their destination, and after dark bombed and destroyed many of them on the ground.*

*The triangular shape represents the wedge driven into Germany and her satellites by the Allies. The word 'America' in Russian characters indicates the alliance between the US and the USSR, the elevated wings of the Eagle indicates alertness and action, and the design is in the colors of the United States. The patch was approved by the War Department on October 6, 1944. Courtesy Ralph Franklin and Rocky Rockwell.*

considered both a military and political failure.

The year 1943 witnessed a turning point in the European Theatre of Operations. As the Soviet Union began to push Germany back on the Eastern Front, the United States and Britain began initial planning for what would become known as D-Day, the invasion of Europe at Normandy. On June 10, the RAF Bomber Command and the U.S. Eighth Air Force jointly issued Operation Pointblank, marking specific targets. In September, the USAAF higher command began researching the logistics of running shuttle missions from Great Britain and newly controlled Italy to Russian territory.

The mechanics of a shuttle mission would be a variation on a regular mission from England to the target on the Continent and back to England. On a standard bomb mission, the bomber stream flies over the target, drops the bomb load, rendezvous with their formation, and heads back to home base. However, in a shuttle mission, the bombers make their bomb run but land at a different location from where they took off. For instance, in Operation Frantic, American bombers left Great Britain or Italy, and after dropping their bombs, landed at a base controlled by the Soviet Union in the East. There the Americans refueled, replenished bombs, and embarked on another mission, which eventually returned them to their original base.

The U.S. saw multiple benefits for implementing shuttle missions to Russia. Averell Harriman, U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union, and John R. Deane, head of the Moscow Military Mission, saw Operation Frantic as a means to set a precedent for Russian assistance in fighting Japan, primarily in the use of bases in far eastern Russia. General Hap Arnold, chief of the USAAF, was the first to propose shuttle missions to Soviet-controlled territory. For Arnold, the operation's biggest benefit was a practical one, increasing the number of directions from which Germany could be attacked. He also saw Sweden, Turkey, Budapest, and Vienna (given its predicted capture by Russia) as pos-

sible bases to conduct future shuttle missions. Carl A. "Tooney" Spaatz, chief of the Strategic Air Force, initially viewed Operation Frantic as unnecessary and preferred to expand the existing bases in Great Britain and Italy. In addition, he noted new long distance fighters nearing completion would assist and expand air operations from England. However, Arnold soon convinced him that shuttle missions could increase the tempo and update the strategy against Germany.

After Operation Frantic was approved, a rough proposal was presented by General John Deane to the Soviet Union at a Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers in October 1943. Although Stalin agreed in theory, he cited several drawbacks to the operation, noting that the logistical requirements required to stage the shuttle missions would detract from the flow of Lend-Lease supplies from the Persian Gulf area. The American-Soviet agreement called for Russian protection of the air base, and this provision jeopardized defenses elsewhere in Soviet territory. Further, Stalin argued, USAAF personnel would not be accustomed to the frigid Ukrainian weather. Of course, this was nonsensical but revealed Stalin's reluctance to comply with the USAAF requirements. Why Stalin agreed to allow American occupation of the bases is not certain, as extensive research of primary sources have given scholars no hint. One theory presented by Thomas A. Julian, suggests that Stalin did not want to "give the Western allies an excuse for postponing the long-awaited 'second front.'" Julian points out that this argument is not a satisfactory explanation as Stalin's motives and requires more study. He suggests the likelihood of more complex reasons.

It was not until March 1944 that Stalin gave his consent. During the four months, discussions centered on the details of Soviet support, the actual conduct of operations, and the location of the bases. There were numerous Russian stipulations. The USAAF requested the use of six bases; Stalin only granted three. The three Soviet bases were Poltava, Mirgorod, and Piryatin, all in the Kiev area of Ukraine. Poltava and Mirgorod were to be used to land the bombers, while Piryatin would serve as a base for the fighter escorts. Of the three, Poltava was chosen to be the center of operations for the remainder of the shuttle-mission project. It was at Poltava that Alfred A. Kessler, the commanding officer of *Operation Frantic*, orchestrated the operation. An agricultural town with a population of 130,000, Poltava's buildings had been razed during the German offensive.

The Soviet Union complicated progress. For instance, the USAAF called for a preparatory team with a minimum of 2,100 people, but Russia allowed a maximum of only 1,200. Every aspect of American

involvement was controlled and examined. When the initial echelon team of sixteen officers and six enlisted men were instructed to travel to Russia through Tehran, they denied entrance because they did not acquire visas (which they were told they did not need). It was not until Stalin was permitted to build a similar shuttle mission base in Italy that he granted visas to the personnel needed to proceed to Ukraine. These are but a few examples of the restriction of freedom and fairness applied to the USAAF throughout the course of Operation Frantic.

Even with the interference towards progress, the U.S. quickly staffed the three bases. The United States Strategic Air Forces in Europe (USSTAF) established a new Eastern command, headed by Colonel Alfred A. Kessler with its headquarters at Poltava. Five shiploads of supplies were sent to the Soviet Union via the Persian Gulf. This shipment included 12,393 tons of steel matting to extend the existing runways and taxiways. The runways in Poltava were 3,300 feet long and 1,900 feet long, respectively – both too short of the one mile necessary to land B-17s. The VVS (Soviet Air Force) established a Special Purpose Air Base unit, the 169<sup>th</sup> ABON under the command of Major General A.R. Perminov, as the controlling Soviet organization for the three bases. Americans in the Eastern Command spoke highly of Kessler's counterpart. However, he was replaced in the late fall by Major General Kovalev. The 169<sup>th</sup> ABON proved to be more helpful than the Soviet government itself, providing support services including physical security of the facilities, air defense, and labor for the extension of the runways and taxiways. It also provided some 34,000 Soviet 250-kg bombs for American use, though only 1,700 were actually ever used. Along with labor and weaponry, the Soviets delivered 346,000 tons of aviation fuel, oil, ammunition, and other supplies by truck to the three bases.

Operation Frantic proved to be a learning experience for the Soviet Union in multiple ways. The small numbers of American personnel that the Soviet Union allowed to be assigned to the bases necessitated ABON personnel to be trained to both maintain and arm the American bombers. In his book *A Strange Alliance*, John R. Deane draws an interesting connection between this and a Lend-Lease request made by Stalin in April. Stalin had asked that future Lend-Lease provisions made to the Soviet Union include 240 B-17s and 300 B-24s. The required Soviet involvement in the maintenance and arming of the American planes also served as a means to train technicians in anticipation of the request being honored.

*Continued on page 5*



*Russian mechanic assists American mechanics service a visiting task force bomber, circa June 1943, Poltava. East Anglia Air War Archives, Abilene, Texas. Despite the continuing lack of cooperation between Soviet authorities and American officials at the highest levels, air crews and their ground complement worked well with Russian military personnel and nearby civilians at Poltava.*

In his final report at the close of Operation Frantic, Kovalev reported that “the major problem for the headquarters staff was fulfilling their mission of studying the operational experience of the American air forces, and the life, customs and attitudes of the American personnel.” This had been accomplished successfully, however, by observation and interaction with the Americans by a selected group of ABON officers in a wide variety of work and social settings such as pre- and post-mission briefings, American movies, religious briefings, personal discussions, and so on.

After several months of preparations, the bases were ready for use. On June 1, 1944, Spaatz sent word to Poltava that the first mission would take place the next day. Bombardment groups from the Fifteenth Air Force in Italy were to target the marshalling yards of Debrecin, Hungary. This was planned several days before D-Day in an attempt to create a distraction from the west coast. The Second Bombardment Group and the Ninety-sixth Bombardment Group at Amendola, the Ninety-Ninth Bombardment Group at Tortorella Airfield and the 483<sup>rd</sup> Bombardment Group at Sterparone Airfield made preparations for “Frantic Joe” while the 325<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group at Lesina escorted the B-17s. Led by Lieutenant General Ira C. Eaker, the bombers of the Fifteenth Air Force headed across the sea at 06:55 hours on June 2, 1944, bombed the target, and set course for Poltava. The mission proved to be successful, and the air crews were welcomed enthusiastically by Americans and Russians alike. Eaker was the first person to step out, and as his first act, he decorated General Perminov with the Legion of Merit and presented the Russian with a citation expressing the gratitude of the United States for the part Perminov had played in preparing the bases for American use. Perminov humbly gave all credit to Kessler. In his recounting of Operation Frantic in *The Strange Alliance*, Deane says that “that day marked the high tide of [U.S.] military relations with the Soviet Union.” With teeming optimism, the U.S. immediately began working on plans for a second shuttle mission. Working through typical Soviet impedance, Deane finally negotiated a second target. However, the Luftwaffe would soon temper the excitement of Operation Frantic.

The second shuttle mission utilized the Eighth Air Force in the United Kingdom. Led by Colonel Archie J. Old, 137 B-17s and 63 P-51s arrived at the Eastern Command bases late afternoon June 21 after successfully bombing the Ruhland Oil Refinery south of Berlin. Unknown to the

air crews and their escorts, an He-177 performing reconnaissance followed them to Poltava, where the German pilot took several photographs and returned to a hidden German airfield at Minsk. After the war, Hermann Goering nostalgically recounted the events that night: “Those were wonderful times. . . . As we had a major attack planned on a railway nearby, we merely diverted it to your airfield.” The Luftwaffe attacked Poltava that night, destroying fifty aircraft and 248,000 gallons of 100 octane. One American and 34 Soviets were killed and numerous others seriously injured. The Russian anti-aircraft and fighter defenses performed miserably, failing to bring down a single German plane. The Luftwaffe’s bombing of Poltava was not only a disaster strategically, but also psychologically. As Deane later wrote, “the disaster sowed the seed of discontent, the Russians smarting and sensitive because of their failure to provide the protection they had promised, and the Americans forgiving, but determined to send their own anti-aircraft defenses as protection for the future.”

Following this major setback, American commanders debated whether to continue Operation Frantic, but they decided that the operation must continue. Between July 22 and August 6, six fighter missions by P-38s and P-51s of the Fifteenth Air Force were conducted. Bombing operations resumed once again in August, the Luftwaffe by this time no longer posing a threat. However, there was a looming uncertainty whether the operation would continue, and if so, under what conditions. Approaching winter weather, combined with Soviet procrastination finally forced abandonment of winter missions. The two uneasy allies agreed to retain Poltava over the winter months and resume shuttle bombing in the spring of 1945, if conditions justified. Two-hundred Americans bravely weathered the harsh Ukrainian winter. But by the spring, with the end of the war in sight, and the eastern front pushed so far to the west, shuttle missions were both impractical and unnecessary. For a few months into the spring, Poltava continued to be used to salvage American aircraft which had been forced to land behind the Russian lines and to care for American airmen injured in forced landings. On June 22, 1945, the remainder of the American forces had been completely evacuated, a year and a day after the Luftwaffe attack occurred.

Operation Frantic is today regarded as an example of the failure of American-Soviet cooperation during WWII. While claims by some historians that it was a direct prelude to the Cold War might be



Above: American and Russian servicemen stationed at Poltava talk to a 10-year-old boy who had been in uniform three years, as an A/A loader. Below: A B-17G undergoing repairs, circa June 1943, Poltava. East Anglia Air War Archives, Abilene, Texas.

further tension between the two world powers cannot be denied. Looking at the operation solely from an American point of view, we see an embarrassing instance of naivety and a failure to understand the dynamics of Soviet motivations surrounding their participation in the shuttle project. ✈



The Soviets turned out to be expert volleyball players and every night in the courtyard of Eastern Command HQ at Poltava, there were fast mixed games. Player fifth from right at bottom is Gen. Ira Eaker, circa June 1943, Poltava. East Anglia Air War Archives, Abilene, Texas.

### Were You at Poltava or Know Someone Who Was?

The 306th Bomb Group Historical Collection has very little on the experience of its men, air crews or ground personnel, at Poltava. If you served at Poltava or know someone in the 306th BG who did, contact Dr. Vernon L. Williams at the 306th BG Project in Abilene. Call 325-280-3399 or write: ACU Box 28203, Department of History, Abilene, TX 79699-8130.



2:03 PM  
06/02/09  
Accrual Basis

**306th Bomb Group Historical Association  
Profit & Loss by Class  
April 2008 through March 2009**

	Echoes	General Operations	Reunion	TOTAL
<b>Ordinary Income/Expense</b>				
<b>Income</b>				
<b>306th Programs</b>				
Books	0.00	344.75	0.00	344.75
PX Sales	0.00	350.00	0.00	350.00
Reunion Fees	0.00	0.00	16,679.75	16,679.75
<b>Total 306th Programs</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>694.75</b>	<b>16,679.75</b>	<b>17,374.50</b>
<b>Donations to 306th</b>				
Donations - Individual	0.00	10,713.06	2,683.00	13,396.06
Donations Legacies and Bequests	0.00	1,075.00	0.00	1,075.00
<b>Total Donations to 306th</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>11,788.06</b>	<b>2,683.00</b>	<b>14,471.06</b>
Interest Earned	0.00	154.63	0.00	154.63
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>12,637.44</b>	<b>19,362.75</b>	<b>32,000.19</b>
<b>Expense</b>				
<b>Awards and Grants</b>				
Russell Strong Scholarship	0.00	2,500.00	0.00	2,500.00
<b>Total Awards and Grants</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>2,500.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>2,500.00</b>
<b>Business Expenses</b>				
Accounting Fees	0.00	260.00	0.00	260.00
<b>Total Business Expenses</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>260.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>260.00</b>
<b>Operations</b>				
Lodging & Food	0.00	0.00	18,127.40	18,127.40
Office Supplies	0.00	30.96	0.00	30.96
Postage, Mailing Service	1,945.25	615.00	0.00	2,560.25
Printing and Copying	2,400.00	0.00	979.33	3,379.33
Transportation	0.00	0.00	1,334.00	1,334.00
<b>Total Operations</b>	<b>4,345.25</b>	<b>645.96</b>	<b>20,440.73</b>	<b>25,431.94</b>
<b>Total Expense</b>	<b>4,345.25</b>	<b>3,405.96</b>	<b>20,440.73</b>	<b>28,191.94</b>
<b>Net Ordinary Income</b>	<b>-4,345.25</b>	<b>9,231.48</b>	<b>-1,077.96</b>	<b>3,808.25</b>
<b>Net Income</b>	<b>-4,345.25</b>	<b>9,231.48</b>	<b>-1,077.96</b>	<b>3,808.25</b>

Page 1

### Photographs, Military Records, Letters Needed

The 306th Bomb Group Historical Collection still needs wartime materials. Russell Strong collected an extraordinary amount of 306th BG archival materials and memorabilia, but more is needed. Particularly urgent are crew pictures, many of the images in the Collection are Xerox copies or prints in poor condition. Look through your scrapbooks and personal collections and send what you can. Please include your instructions for return of originals or indicate your desire to donate the original to the 306th BG Historical Collection. All originals to be returned will be promptly mailed back to you as soon as the digital copies are made. Contact Dr. Vernon L. Williams, ACU Box 28203, Abilene, TX 79699 ~ Telephone (325) 280-3399.

### Donation Needed

We have found that the 306th BG digitalization project would be greatly enhanced and would accelerate our work if the East Anglia Air War Project could purchase at least one duplex scanner. The appropriate make and model has been identified, and the cost is about \$600. A donation in that amount would be a tax deductible gift, if any individual in the 306th would like to help in this very specific way. The duplex scanner would make a real difference in our preservation work, particularly in the 306th BG Digitization Project and the Eighth Air Force preservation work in general. If interested, please call Dr. Williams at 325-280-3399 or send your tax-deductible gift to Dr. Vernon L. Williams, ACU Box 28130, Abilene, TX 79699-8130. ✈

*Left: A B-17G flies once again over the stately meadowlands of Thurleigh. On May 24, 2009 at 2:50 pm in the afternoon, the Sally B made an approach over your 306th BG Memorial Museum in tribute to the aircrews and ground personnel who served at Thurleigh during World War II. With bomb bay doors open, the bomber made its pass. Courtesy Ralph Franklin and family.*



### DONATIONS FOR THE 306TH BOMB GROUP ASSOCIATION

Those who are able are asked to make an annual contribution to keep everything running smoothly in our Association. There are no dues—so your gift is needed to support the 306th operations. Your gift is tax-deductible.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Street and No.

\_\_\_\_\_  
City, State & Zip

\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone No.                      306th Unit

\_\_\_\_\_  
Email Address



Send to:  
Joel LaBo, Treasurer  
306th Bomb Group Association  
875 S. Worth  
Birmingham, Michigan 48009

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

### Registration Form

306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association Reunion  
 Dallas/Ft. Worth Marriott South Hotel — Ft. Worth, Texas  
 8-12 October 2009

Registration fee (per person)..... x \$25.00 = \$\_\_\_\_\_

**Friday, 9 October**

Museum Tour - Texas Civil War Museum, Texas BBQ Lunch, ..... x \$42.00 = \$\_\_\_\_\_ and C.R. Smith American Airlines Aviation Museum (9:30am-3pm)  
 Prices include BBQ lunch.

Twelve O'Clock High Dinner - Trinity III (7 pm)..... x \$39.00 = \$\_\_\_\_\_

**Saturday, 10 October**

Ladies Breakfast - Trinity III (7:30-9am)..... x \$28.00 = \$\_\_\_\_\_

Ft. Worth Western Heritage Tour - Includes museums, cattle..... x \$29.00 = \$\_\_\_\_\_ drive recreation, lunch on your own in the heritage area, Billy Bobs, shopping (9:30am-3pm)

Banquet - Trinity III (7 pm)..... x \$41.00 = \$\_\_\_\_\_

*Everything else on the schedule is free!*

**Total.....\$\_\_\_\_\_**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address w/ City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone # (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail \_\_\_\_\_

Squadron \_\_\_\_\_ Assigned Duty \_\_\_\_\_

*Please make checks payable to: 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association Reunion and mail to: Joel LaBo, 875 S. Worth, Birmingham, Michigan 48009*

Please list the names and hometown for each person registered.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Is this your first reunion? \_\_\_\_\_ Veteran? \_\_\_\_\_ Family? \_\_\_\_\_

**Please call the Dallas/Fort Worth Airport Marriott South direct to make reservations:  
 1-800-228-9290  
 Ask for 306th Bomb Group reunion rates:  
 Group Code is: bgabgaa  
 \$99.00 Single or Double Rooms—All One Price**

*Deadline for registration and hotel reservations is 17 September 2009.  
 Please help your 306th Bomb Group reunion planning,  
 register and make hotel reservations early. Do it today!*

## Reunion Schedule At Ft. Worth

**Thursday, 8 October**

- Arrival - Pick up registration packets - Foyer to Trinity III (2 - 6 pm)
- Board Meeting (2-4 pm) Little Bear Board Room
- Oral History interviews (2-5pm)
- Dinner on your own (Rivercity Grille in hotel and other restaurants close by)

**Friday, 9 October**

- Arrival - Pick up registration packets - Foyer to Trinity III (8am-5pm)
- Oral History interviews (9am-5pm)
- Hospitality Room and Exhibits- Trinity III (8am-5pm; 7-10 pm)
- Cinema Room WWII Movies - Trinity I (9 am - 3 pm)
- Museum Tour - Texas Civil War Museum, Texas BBQ Lunch, and C.R. Smith American Airlines Aviation Museum (9:30am-3pm)
- Second Generation meeting - Trinity I (4 pm)
- 306th BG Web Demonstration - What's new on the 306th BG web and how to do research from your computer - Dr. Williams - Trinity I (5-5:45 pm)
- Twelve O'Clock High Dinner - Trinity III (Cash Bar 6-7pm, Dinner 7-9pm)

**Saturday, 10 October**

- Arrival - Pick up registration packets - Foyer to Trinity III (8am-5pm)
- Ladies Breakfast - Trinity III (7:30-9am)
- Business Meeting - Trinity III (9:15 am)
- Oral History interviews (11:30 am-5pm)
- Hospitality Room and Exhibits- Trinity III (1-5pm; 7-10 pm)
- Cinema Room WWII Movies - Trinity I (9 am - 3 pm)
- Ft. Worth Western Heritage Tour - (11:15am-4:30 pm) includes museums, cattle drive recreation, lunch on your own, Billy Bobs, shopping.
- Cash bar - Trinity III (6 pm – 9 pm )
- Veterans-only Group Photograph-Trinity III (6:45 pm)
- Widows Group & Next Generation Photograph Trinity III (6:50 pm)
- Banquet - Trinity III (7 pm)

**Sunday, 11 October**

- Arrival - Pick up registration packets - Foyer to Trinity III (8am-5pm)
- Memorial Service, Trinity III –Tribute to the Fallen and Folded Wings Memorial (9:00-10:30 am)
- Oral History interviews (1-5pm)
- Lunch on your own.
- Hospitality Room and Exhibits- Trinity III (1:30 -5pm)
- *Echoes* - Meet with your new *Echoes* staff. Question and Answer (2:00 pm)
- An Evening at Thurleigh—
  - ◆ A Thurleigh Museum Video Presentation by Ralph Franklin
  - ◆ Thurleigh at War– New film premiere and presentation by Dr. Vernon L. Williams – Trinity I (7:00-9pm)

**Monday, 12 October**

- Farewells
- Check out
- Travel Home — See you next year!



## HOTEL RESERVATIONS

**Dallas/Fort Worth Airport Marriott South**  
 Please call the Marriott direct to make hotel reservations

**1-800-228-9290**

Ask for 306th Bomb Group reunion rates:  
 Group Code is: bgabgaa

**\$99.00 Single or Double Rooms—All One Price**

**Dr. Vernon L. Williams**  
 Reunion Chairman  
 vwilliams@acu.edu  
 325-280-3399

# Museum Notes

## Thurleigh Airfield 306th Bomb Group Museum

### Our Empire Day: May 24, 2009

by **Ralph Franklin**  
Keysoe, England

Empire Day was first celebrated on the May 24, 1902, the date of Queen Victoria's birthday, and became recognized as an annual event. It remained an essential event for more than 50 years, celebrated by countless millions of children and adults, an opportunity to demonstrate pride in being part of the British Empire. Political correctness appears to have 'won the day' when in 1958 Empire Day was re-named Commonwealth Day.

On Sunday May 24, 2009, we attempted to restore the spirit of those now distant times when we had our own Empire Day at the 306th Bomb Group Museum, only this time it was the Empire of the 40th Combat Wing.

As many of you know, Thurleigh was the home of the 40th Combat Wing Headquarters, and it was for this reason that Daphne and I arrived at the decision for our museum to celebrate the heroic deeds of the three Bomb Groups who flew under the banner of the Wing: 92nd BG at Podington, 305th BG at Chelveston, and the 306th BG at Thurleigh.

2009 had been a year of extreme weather conditions for our area, more snow, more rain and frost. As May drew ever closer, our prayers were more intense for big improvements. We began to think we had failed when, on Monday, May 18th, the company arrived to erect the large marquee (see photo on page 2) we had ordered in which to hold our Service of Remembrance and presentations by various dignitaries who had agreed to grace our event. The rain poured down, and the wind blew, and as you all know, it really blows on an airfield, but by the end of the day it was up. We returned home very disappointed with the weather conditions, but another piece of the jigsaw was in place. A short time later the excitement of the occasion really escalated when a message from Elly Salinboe informed me that her B-17, the "Sally B" was available, if we were still interested. We jumped at the idea and came down rather quickly when she quoted her price of £2000. Had I enough courage to beg from our sponsors one more time? Decisions had to be made, I made the phone call, "Hello Darren, just to inform you everything is coming together very well, the marquee has been erected today. One other small item, can you find another £2000 to cover the cost of a B-17 flying display?" "Just leave it with me, Ralph, I will come back to you" was the reply. After about ten minutes the phone rang, I gingerly picked it up, "You can go ahead and book the B-17, we will cover it." From that moment on, I knew all was going to be alright.

On our return the following day to run electrical power into the marquee for the amplifiers, music, microphones and items required, the rain had stopped, but the wind was even stronger. We overcame all the obstacles and by the weekend, all was in place. Also our prayers were answered as by Saturday the 23rd, the conditions had changed dramatically. Daphne and I retired to bed, two sleepy people with the knowledge that all was well for our big day, after months of planning, it had finally arrived.

By this time the excitement of the occasion was getting to us and, we didn't sleep much. This helped with our plans to be at our second home very early. It was not always so during the war years, but the tranquility of Thurleigh as the day dawns is something to behold. With a clear blue sky and glorious sunshine, we were set for a great day.

It was not long before the first of our display vehicles, both military and civilian began to arrive. To ensure they were parked as required, we had a retired Sergeant Major on hand to supervise the staging process. The vehicles were handled by a local RAF Cadet Force who performed to a very high standard. The time passed so quickly, it was soon time for me to leave to meet up with the official party at our 306th Memorial on the old 40th Wing Headquarters site. Here a short service was conducted by Captain David Zavala, Chaplain of the 423rd Air Base Squadron USAF. This was followed by the laying of floral tributes by Peg Albertson, wife of the late Joe Albertson 369th Squadron, and Group Captain Steve Lloyd from the Air Historical Branch RAF Northolt, on behalf of the Royal Air Force.

Following this service I had to make a quick return to the gathering crowds at the museum site to welcome our distinguished guests for the day, the Lord Lieutenant of Bedfordshire, Samuel Whitbread and Colonel John Jordan of the 501st Combat Support Wing, Alconbury. Samuel Whitbread serves as the official Queen's Representative in the area. Other invited guests included the Speaker of the Mayors Chamber, Bedford, and the Mayor of Rushden.

When all our guests had arrived they were invited to sit down for lunch in the Monaco Suite. This was to be a rather special occasion with the menu being new to many, particularly our American visitors. With our son Graham busy in the kitchen placing the food on the plates in a very professional manner, and our two daughters-in-law doing an equally splendid job being waitresses, Daphne and I sat down with our guests to a first class lunch of a very regional meal, consisting of a Bedfordshire Clanger and fresh salad. The Clanger recipe has been handed down over the years and consists of a light pastry filled at one end with meat, and the other end a sweet apple desert. The comments from those dining were all very favourable, and a tasty lunch was obviously enjoyed by all.

The previous day I had the pleasure of meeting Lt. Col. Greg Johnson and his team of Instructor Pilots from the 306th Flight Training Group, Colorado Springs. They had flown over to join us for this very special occasion. We had agreed to meet to ensure that their multi-media equipment from the States was compatible with that in the Monaco Suite. Following the meal our VIPs were treated to

an audio visual presentation by Greg and the team about their work and activities in teaching new cadets at the Academy. During the afternoon other presentations were given to our general visitors, with first rate comments from all those attending.

By midday large crowds had assembled and were enjoying our many exhibits, and of course, the museum, dedicated to the 8,500 of you who served at Thurleigh during the period 1942 to 1945, and many displays depicting aspects of wartime life in and around the airfield.

Excitement then increased when I announced to the crowd, if they were to look low to the east, they would get the first sight of Britain's most successful WW11 bomber, the Avro Lancaster. What a sight and what a sound as those four Merlin engines purred low across the airfield in front of the applauding public, making a number of passes before this giant of the wartime sky flew off into the wide blue yonder.

As our visitors filed into the marquee, the talk was of the wonderful aircraft they had just witnessed, not knowing there would be another beauty of the skies to follow later, as it had not featured on our programme for the day, due to my acquiring it very late on Monday evening.

I opened the proceedings with the first official welcome of the day, and then requested all to stand for the posting of the colours, and the playing of the National Anthems of our two great countries. Captain David Zavala then conducted a formal remembrance service to a crowd of approximately 300 in and around the marquee. Due to the superb weather, we were able to raise many of the side panels. The Lord Lt. then gave a first class speech with very much detail, it was obvious his advisors are of the quality expected of his position. Our biggest surprise came when he mentioned our museum, saying it is really first class when you realise it is basically a one man team, or to be more precise, one man and his family. He sat down to great applause.

Group Captain Steve Lloyd introduced his speech by saying his task was to paint a picture of life here at Thurleigh and across the airfields of the Wing around the time the various groups arrived at their appointed bases. He certainly achieved this with a complete history lesson, so much so that when I received the news that a certain lady was due to visit us, we had to interrupt the proceedings. This was the time I had been waiting for, to break the news to all that we were about to witness a return to Thurleigh of America's most famous WW11 bomber the B-17 "Sally B" (see photo on page 6). This serene old lady introduced herself to the admiring crowd with a low fly past across the airfield, and then proceeded to treat us to a lengthy flying display showing all aspects of this lovely aircraft, which culminated in an approach from over Galsey Wood with a simulated engine fire. As she climbed away to return to Duxford, my mind wandered back in time to recall that famous Army Air Force song "Here we go into the wide blue yonder." With great applause from the crowd, we said our goodbyes to the "Sally B."

On returning to the marquee everyone settled down to hear from our final speaker Col. John Jordan, 501st Combat Support Wing, RAF, Alconbury. I then responded with a vote of thanks to all concerned for their presentations. This concluded the formal part of the day.

The day did not end there as the crowds continued to tour our museum and other exhibits, with many visitors dressed in period costumes of both the military and civilian attire of the 1940s. One lady and her American friend pushed a baby around in a pram. Among the vintage vehicles included Jeeps with various attachments fitted, heavy vehicles including a Dodge ambulance and a fire engine (see photo on page 2) of the period. Among the civilian displays were classic motorcycles, a wonderful example of a 1920s Bentley and a Bedford brewery delivery truck. A number of MG sports cars from the wartime era were also on show. With the background of Galsey Wood, these classic machines created a wonderful spectacle.

One other aspect which helped to make the day such a great success were the food outlets we had on site, they included burgers and hot dogs American style, Bedfordshire Clangers and cakes British style, and of course, our small food bar in the museum had a very busy day with their light refreshments, tea, coffee and soft drinks. Our helpers for the day did a great job.

Unfortunately this wonderful day had to come to an end. As the shadows lengthened across the old airfield, my mind wandered once more as I tried to imagine what it would have been like some 65 years ago, on May 24, 1944 when the group left this peaceful airfield on yet another mission to Berlin. Four members of one crew would never see Thurleigh again, lost when their aircraft went down. This is what these occasions are all about, and we know that we did not let them down. To end a perfect day, Daphne and I relaxed with the official party seated on the outside decking by the River Ouse at the Falcon Inn, Bletsoe. A place I am sure still remembered by many of you.

