

# 306th Echoes



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## Captive Audience

### The Brief Theatrical Career of a 306th POW in Nazi Germany

By David M. Guss  
Department of Anthropology  
Tufts University

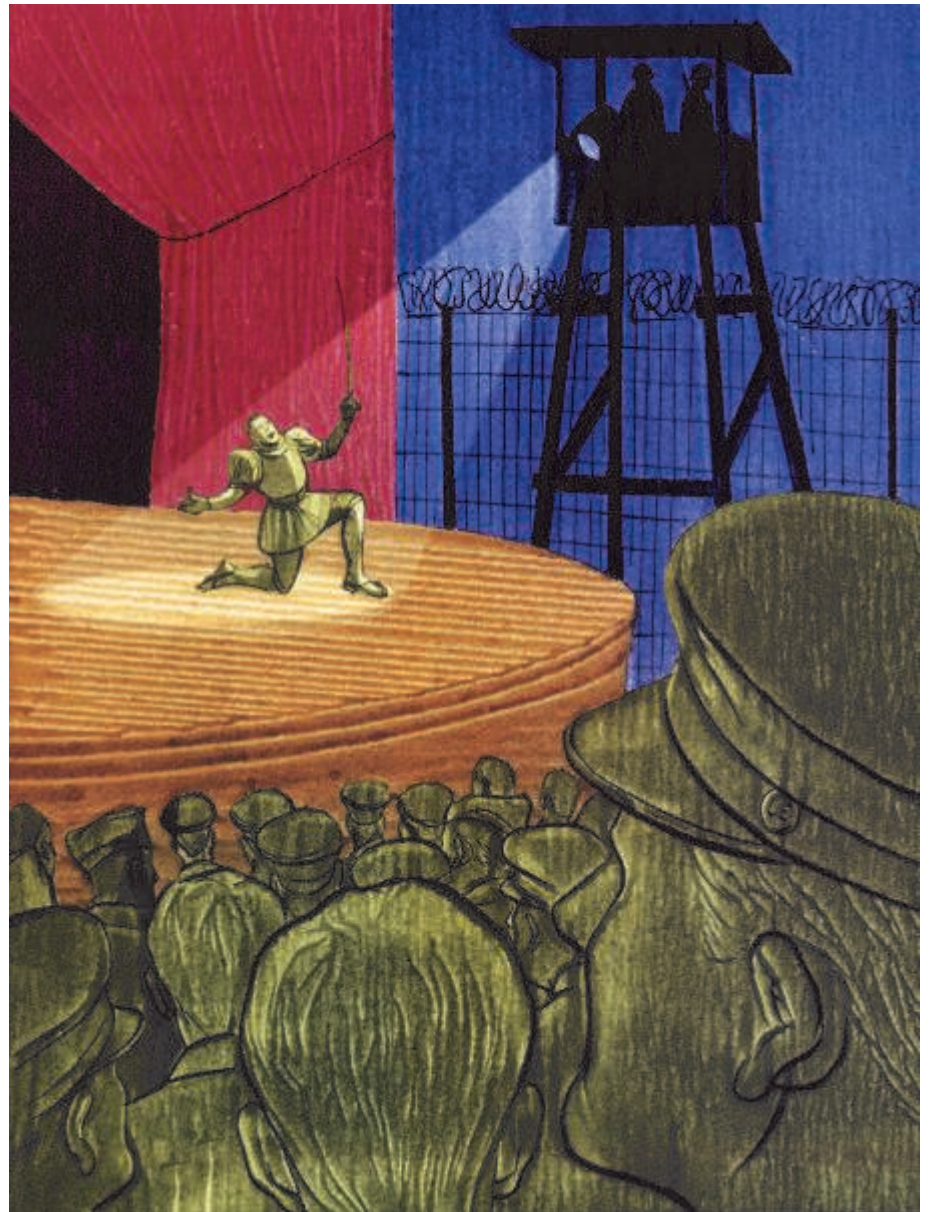
Illustrated by  
Alex Nabaum

(Editor's Note: This article was originally published in the Winter 2009 issue of *Tufts Magazine*. Reprinted with permission.)

Lieutenant Joe Consolmagno, 367th BS navigator, had planned to spend his 25th birthday on leave in London taking in a play in the West End. For months, ever since the early fall of 1942, when he had been transferred to England as part of the Eighth Air Force's 306th Bombardment Group, Joe had jumped at any chance to see a London show. The highlight was attending the opening night of *They Came to a City* and watching the playwright, J.B. Priestley, one of his favorite authors, come on stage to take a bow. Of course, there was also the matter of fighting a war, one he realized would probably be extremely short-lived, at least for a B-17 navigator such as himself.

The Boeing B-17, known as the Flying Fortress for its heavy armament, was a plane that could take a beating and also repel attack. Yet the average life of a B-17 over Europe was only eleven missions. At Tufts, Joe had been an economics major, and it wasn't hard for him to do the math. He knew that few fliers got far beyond a handful of missions. It was simply a question of whether he would be killed or safely bail out. But he was an optimist and had been brushing up on his college French, sure that he would be able to evade capture and return to England via the Pyrenees and Spain.

His first mission was the scariest. They were on a raid over Lille, France, when German fighters pounced on them, destroying two of the four engines, the radio, and part of the rudder. The plane took 2,000 bullets in all. A third engine was soon out, and the pilot prepared to ditch in the English Channel. At the last moment, a British Spitfire appeared, wiggling his wings for them to follow. Then it dropped its landing gear as a signal that there was a hidden airfield below. An Associated Press article from October 1942 reported the outcome: "The struggling bomber just cleared the hill and rolled onto a runway directly in front of a field of which the crew had never



known before. The crew agreed that their plane probably could not have flown another 100 yards." Miraculously, no one was hurt.

Not long after, Joe was forced to stand down on a mission because of a bad cold. The same crew, with whom he had trained, never returned.

Now, on April 5, 1943, Joe was about to take off on his eighth mission. He barely knew the men he was flying with, but the mission was supposed to be a milk run, an easy flight against an airplane assembly plant in Antwerp. Although the target was said to be lightly defended, it proved to be anything but. Before they even arrived, two of their engines were in flames from ground fire. Waves of German fighter planes followed, and the order to bail out was soon given. Four miles above the earth, Joe dived out head first. The jolt of his parachute ripped off one of his boots. As he slowly descended, a German fighter plane wandered by. "I braced to feel the shock of gunfire," Joe later wrote in an article. "But the enemy didn't fire. He circled me so closely that I could see his oxygen-masked face, and he waved. I waved back. It didn't seem appropriate to be impolite."

The understatement with which he recalled nearly being blasted out of the sky is typical Joe. Thin and fit, with the quick wit of a city desk editor, Joe welcomed me to his home in Englewood, Florida, joking that "you know you're getting old when you're interviewed by an anthropologist." Joe seemed comfortable in his own body, no matter that it was starting on its tenth decade. I was there to find out about his wartime experiences—how he wound up on the forefront of the theater scene in a German prisoner-of-war camp—and Joe was only too happy to tell me. With sparkling eyes and a ready smile, Joe exuded an air of mischief. Clearly, it had kept him young. Like many prewar Tufts students, Joe had grown up locally and lived with

his parents in Medford throughout college. But living at home didn't curtail his involvement in campus life. He was class historian, manager of the lacrosse team, a sports columnist, and, in his senior year, editor-in-chief of *The Tufts Weekly*. His real passion, however, was theater, which he discovered thanks to Marston Balch, the charismatic head of Tufts' drama program for 35 years.

Besides taking drama and playwriting with Balch, Joe acted in every production of his he could. "I loved playing the heavies," Joe recalled. His favorite show was Maxwell Anderson's *Winterset*, the story of an Italian-American's execution for a crime he didn't commit. But he also acted in other plays such as *Liliom*, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, and Sinclair Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here*, where once again he was the heavy. "I learned to direct by watching Professor Balch," Joe said. It was a skill he would soon put to use.

Joe went to work for the *Medford Mercury* upon graduation, but with war looming, he joined the Air Corps' Flying Cadet Program. Though he wanted to be a pilot, he soon washed out. "I'd never been in an airplane before and was always half sick," he told me. "I also kind of cheated on my depth perception test," a problem that led to repeated crash landings. When war did begin, he quickly reenlisted and even before Pearl Harbor was training as a navigator.



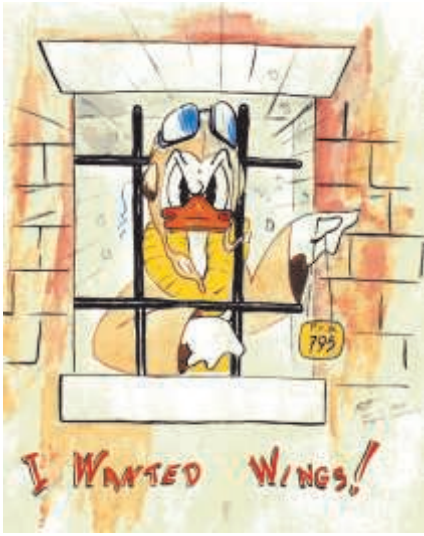
Left: Joe Consolmagno showing off his wings as a newly commissioned officer in April 1942.

Top: Joe Consolmagno (second from the left) with his roommates in the North Compound of Stalag Luft III, May 1943. The mound in front was created with dirt taken from one of the Great Escape tunnels.

It was after a stint guiding a Flying Fortress in the Pacific that Joe's bomber group was relocated to Europe and Joe found himself floating in the air four miles over Belgium. He landed unhurt in the middle of a shipyard just south of Antwerp. Before he could even untangle his chute, a German soldier was standing above him waving a

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**2010-2011 Student Interns:**

Chase Brazell (Russell Strong Intern)  
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## Obituaries

Please send obits as soon as possible after the death, to secretary (see contact information at left on this page below).

The secretary has learned of the following deaths:

- **Ahlstrom, Kurt A**, 369<sup>th</sup> pilot, died 9 Dec 05 in Yucaipa, CA at 88. He was POW from the 11 Apr 44 Stettin mission, when he and his entire crew miraculously survived the explosion of their B-17. He was held at Stalag 3 Sagan-Silesia Bavaria (moved to Nuremberg-Langwasser). After the war, he got his degree in accounting and was soon employed with Peat, Marwick, Mitchell CPA firm for several years. In the summer of 54 he went to work at Hughes Aircraft in southern CA. Within months he and Doris were blessed to meet and marry. They were always very active in their evangelical churches. Kurt retired at 63 from Hughes after 25 years and then worked as Business Administrator for First Baptist Church for 15 years. He and Doris had three children, the second of whom was a little boy with Downs Syndrome who only lived 17 months. He is survived by Doris, his wife of 51 years, their 2d, 3gcs.
- **Beach, Jack G**, 367<sup>th</sup> tail gunner (Frank M McCullagh crew), died 31 May 10, at 85, in Tucson, AZ, where he lived for 60 years. After WW II, he served the USAF in the Korean Conflict and then worked 36 years as a cable splicer with Mountain Bell and was in USCG Auxiliary for 25 years (retiring Vice Captain). He is survived by his wife Doris, 6c, 15gc, 8ggc.
- **Bennett, Francis (Frank) H**, 369<sup>th</sup> pilot, died 5 Mar 09, at 90. He flew with both the 305<sup>th</sup> and 306<sup>th</sup> BGs; he arrived at Thurleigh 29 Apr 44, left 24 Jun 44, and did 21 missions. He is survived by his wife, Edith.
- **Chase, Delbert W**, 369<sup>th</sup> bombardier (Kurt A Ahlstrom crew when downed), died 24 Jul 89 in Palo Alto, CA at 72. He is buried at Golden Gate National Cemetery, San Bruno, CA, where his marker shows he was a captain who served in Korea as well as WW II. The date he arrived at Thurleigh is unknown. On the mission to Stetten, 11 Apr 44, he survived when Ahlstrom's B-17 exploded and was taken POW. He was held at Stalag 3 Sagan-Silesia Bavaria (moved to Nuremberg-Langwasser). No survivor info.
- **Chrisjohn, Robert J**, 368<sup>th</sup> pilot & co-pilot ("Chris" Maurice Christianson crew), died 25 Feb 2007 in Alden, IA at 86. He arrived at Thurleigh 17 Jul 44 and completed his tour 29 Dec 44. In Feb 74, he retired from the National Guard as Brig Gen with 33 years in service (20 with the Guard). For the 306<sup>th</sup> Sep-91 reunion in Pittsburgh, PA, he arranged a trip to the nearby Air National Guard facility, including the 171st Air Refueling Wing, then-headed by his son Brig Gen Robert G Chrisjohn. His wife since Apr 42, Ila, survived him until her death 3 May 2010. She is survived by their 2c, 5gc, 7ggc.
- **Combs, Roger F**, 368<sup>th</sup> engineer or radio operator & waist gunner (Walter H Sumner crew), died 8 Aug 08 at 89. His wife Mary predeceased him by 7 weeks. No survivor info.
- **Crozier, Carl Jr**, control tower, died 11 Dec 08 at 84 in Littleton, CO. He is survived by his wife of 58 years, Jacqueline, 5c, 14gc, 2ggc.
- **Cutugno, Matthew M**, 369 waist gunner (Cecil C McKinney crew), died 17 Aug 08 at 85. His wife Rita Marie survived him until 25 Nov 2009. No further info.
- **Dimter, Charles R**, 423<sup>rd</sup> Squadron Bombardier, died 26 Jan 09, at 90, in Saint Petersburg, FL. He retired from Prudential Life Insurance after 31 years. He is survived by 2s, 1s-in-law, 1gs.
- **Enloe, Louis**, 367<sup>th</sup> engineer (Craig J Harwood crew when downed), died 14 Mar 07 at 90 in St Louis, MO, about 2 months after the death of his wife, America. After having had successful "confirmed kills" on earlier Apr 43 missions, he was POW at Stalag 17B, downed 17 Apr 43 in the Bremen mission. His first wife, Wanietta, died Feb 63; 4 yrs later he married America (Mickie) who died Jan 07. Louis was a farmer, truck driver, and heavy equipment operator in clay mining. He and Mickie were members of the World Wide Church of God. He is survived by 6c, 2step-c; 6gc, 4ggc.
- **Gill, Lyle E**, 369<sup>th</sup> waist gunner (Aldo Romanin crew), died 18 May 2010 at 84 in Lititz, Lancaster Co, PA. He was a computer systems analyst, an avid Pittsburgh Pirates fan, a family genealogy researcher, and served his Presbyterian church as Elder and church historian. He was predeceased by his wife and childhood sweetheart, Joanne and 2gc. He is survived by 3c, 7gc, 12ggc.
- **Giroux, Raymond P**, 449<sup>th</sup> Sub Depot airplane sheet metal worker, died 4 Feb 10 at 91 in Dearborn, MI. He is survived by his wife, Leona. No further info.
- **Guilfoyle, William A**, 423<sup>rd</sup> navigator (Harold Brown crew), died 6 Aug 2008 at 86. He arrived at Thurleigh 17 Jul 44 and departed 15 Jan 45, completing his tour. He and wife Mabel were on the May '87 tour of England. Mabel predeceased him 6 Feb 2001. No survivor info.
- **Harr, John B**, 368<sup>th</sup> co-pilot (Francis J Hoey crew when downed), died 16 Jun 09 at 94 at the Lake District Long Term Care facility in Lakeview, OR. He was POW 26 Nov 43 from the Bremen mission, and held at Stalag 1. He was predeceased by his wife Dorothy 12 Jan 07. No further info.
- **Holland, Gene W**, 367<sup>th</sup> waist gunner (Robert Ashley & Alfred D Hawley crews), died 22 Jan 09 in Pratt, KS, at 87. He was one of 12 combat men in the 306th listed in a Special Order of May 44 who were returned to the US after 30 missions for rest and recuperation. Each man then returned for a second tour of 20 missions. No further info.
- **Jacka, Willard C**, 367<sup>th</sup> (unknown duty), died 26 Dec 07 in Lincoln, NE at 87. Listed as a sgt in WW II at USVA Cemetery site. Survived by his wife. No further info.

## President's Corner



Greetings,

The 306th BG Association exists primarily because those of us who were proud to be part of the Group during WWII considered it one of the most significant experiences of our lives. It is truly a privilege to serve as its president, particularly as important decisions are made concerning its future. Your input to this decision-making process is most welcome. Please feel free to contact me or any other member of the board with your thoughts and recommendations.

Next year will be an exciting one for the Association. Please consider joining us for the reunion in San Diego and for the trip to England visiting Thurleigh and the other areas so important to the 8th Air Force during the war.

Walt Rozett  
 President



*Walter Rozett Crew — 369th BS: Front—Rozett, Lloyd Strode (CP), Michael Dramer (B), John Christenson (N),. Middle—Welton Shipley (BT), James Durham (RO), Elvie Hall (E). Back—Russell Sheldon (TG), Erskine Arbiter (WG), Julius Boersma (WG). This photograph was taken in Tampa, Florida before rotation to Thurleigh.*



Obituaries continued from page 2

- **Jackson, Ernest B**, 423<sup>rd</sup> engineer (Nelson W Hardin crew when downed), died 21 May 09 in Covington, GA at 88. After being downed on "Wampus Cat" 29 Mar 44 in the Brunswick mission, he was POW at Stalag 17B. He retired from Ford Motor with 30 years as superintendent; he was a member of Corinth Christian Church in Loganville and a Mason. He and his wife Mary, who survives him, married 7 Dec 45. He is also survived by 2c, 3gc, 2ggc.
- **Jacobs, John W**, 449<sup>th</sup> Sub Depot (unknown duty), 86, died 6 Jan 10 at the Alverno Nursing Facility in Clinton, IA. Post-war, he was in trucking. His wife of 10 years, Vernice, died 30 May 84. He was a member of the VFW, and was of the Catholic faith. He is survived by his brother-in-law.
- **Jones, Fred G**, 369<sup>th</sup> pilot of "Denny Boy" when downed, died 17 Apr 09 in Decatur, GA at 88. With engine problems, he crash landed 16 Jul 44 (Munich mission); he and his crew were immediately captured by German soldiers. While being driven from the crash site, the Germans' vehicle was attacked by French underground. Jones and his crew were escorted by the French to the Swiss border and housed in Switzerland until they departed on various dates back to England. During this time their classification was changed from MIA to evadees. Jones' surviving wife Elizabeth is an active volunteer at the VA Hospital in Atlanta. He is also survived by 1c. Elizabeth has donated his memorabilia to the 306<sup>th</sup> for our archival scanning and for transfer in 2011 to the Mighty 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force Museum in Savannah. The collection includes his certificate for flying 56 missions in the Berlin airlift, memorabilia from his time in Switzerland as an evadee including a photo and his report of the mission, a 4-day celebration in France in 2003 of Denny Boy's crew being rescued by the French, and an 8-page Dec 1946 newsletter for "Fellow Wearers of the Winged Boot." The newsletter includes 3 pages of names and addresses of men who were at some time during WW II in Switzerland, statements of the intent that the club should be formally organized, and a request for suggestions of locations for a national convention or a district meeting, how to defray newsletter expenses, and a method of electing temporary officers by mail.
- **Jordan, Edward Earl Sr**, 423<sup>rd</sup> co-pilot (Daniel W Gates), originally from Richmond, VA, died 30 Apr 07 in San Antonio, TX at 86. He attended the U of Alabama on a full football/basketball scholarship. He arrived at Thurleigh 28 Jul 44. Jordan was downed with Gates on the "Belle of the Blue" during the Ruhland mission on 12 Sep 44. He was POW at Stalag 1 Barth-Vogelsang Prussia. He fought in Korea, and flew on the last bombing mission there. He returned to college and graduated from Florida State Univ. LtC Jordan served in the Strategic Air Command and retired from the USAF in 1964. He had a second career with the TX Welfare Dept and then with the Surgeon General of the Army at Fort Sam Houston. He was an avid pilot, tennis player, basketball player, and joined the TR3 Club after rebuilding a '60 TR3 sports car. As a member of the Jamestown Society, Jordan had looked forward to celebrating the 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Jamestown, VA settlement in May 07. He was a member of numerous other societies, including the Ancient Planters and the Huguenot Society in VA and the Scottish Society of San Antonio. He is buried at Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery in San Antonio. He is survived by his wife, Sarah, 2c, 8gc, 1ggc.
- **Kaye, Herman H**, 423<sup>rd</sup> radio operator (Paul Reioux crew), MD, JD, PhD, died 27 Sep 10 in Beverly Hills, CA at 86. He served as President of the 306<sup>th</sup> BGA for the year of Oct 05 to Oct 06. His wife, Delores, preceded him in death. He was accompanied at a number of 306<sup>th</sup> reunions by his caregiver attendants Gloria and Kim. He had 2c, 2gc.
- **Lawlor, John J**, 369<sup>th</sup> tail gunner (crew of Andrew Kata when downed), died 2 Aug 08 in San Antonio, TX at 84. He was POW 8 Aug 44 (Caen mission) held by the Germans at a camp which was unidentified in the National Archives online database. He married Ruth, who survives him, in 1945. After earning his Masters from Syracuse University, his career was in Institutional Sales. He and Ruth were founding members of St Mark the Evangelist Catholic Church, and he was a Fourth Degree Knight in St Mark's KD Council. He is also survived by 6c, 16gc, 1ggc.
- **Murphy, Roger**, 423<sup>rd</sup> navigator (Douglas T Schrack crew), died 11 Jul 09 in Waukesha, WI at 85. He arrived at Thurleigh 24 Aug 44. Post-war, he received his law degree at the U of Wisconsin, was district attorney of Waukesha County in 61-71, was State Senator 71-80, was circuit court judge in Waukesha until his retirement in 99. He was preceded in death by 1d and is survived by his wife Arlene, 2s, 6gs.
- **Nelson, Eli E**, 368<sup>th</sup> gunner, who enlisted Feb 43 in AL, died 23 Feb 09 at home in Athens, AL at 85. He worked as a chemist at NASA on Redstone Arsenal for 33 years and sang in the choir for 20 years at First United Methodist Church. His first wife, Julia Woodruff Nelson, predeceased him, and he's survived by his wife of 16 years, Julia Hatchett Nelson, 2d, 6gc.
- **Perkins, Neal Howard**, 369<sup>th</sup> co-pilot (Raymond Birdwell), died 1 Jul 10 in San Antonio, TX at 92. He arrived at Thurleigh 17 Jul 44 and departed in Dec 44, completing his tour. No further info.
- **Perline, Abraham**, 423<sup>rd</sup> navigator (Nelson Hardin crew), died 23 Jun 09 in Tucson, AZ at 87. He flew 31 missions from Thurleigh between 28 Nov 43 and 6 Jun 44. He later worked as a reliability engineer both in private industry and government. His married Lois in 42; she passed away in May 07. He is survived by 2s, 2gs.
- **Peterson, Wesley D**, 368<sup>th</sup> pilot when downed (initially was co-pilot, William H Scheil crew), died 15 Apr 05 in Santa Ana, CA at 83. In the 5 Sep 43 mission to Stuttgart, his crew (other than the radio operator who was believed to have perished in the plane) bailed out 40 miles from the coast south of Dieppe. While four members of his crew were helped by the French and were successful evadees, Peterson and four others were POW. He was held at Stalag 7A at Moosburg, Bavaria, including work camps at Krumbachstrasse and Munich. Soon after the war he married Marge, who survives him, and then completed his degree at U of MN in electrical engineering. They moved to southern CA, where he had a long career with Collins Radio.
- **Phillips, Rudolph W**, 368 ball turret gunner (Rene C Fix crew when downed), of East Durham, NY, died in Dec 1985. He was a POW, held at Stalag 17B



## Visit the 306th Website

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

from 27 Mar 44 (La Rochelle mission). Post-war, his career was with Western Electric on Long Island and in upstate NY. He is survived by his widow Doris and 7c, and now 18gc, 5ggc.

- **Piepenbrink, Frederick**, 369<sup>th</sup> tail gunner (Jack S Henley crew when downed; earlier waist gunner on Richard Vogel crew), of Cohasset, MA, died 6 Feb 03 at 83. He had enlisted at Boston 13 Mar 41. He was POW (held by Germany at a location not known in National Archives database) when Henley's crew was downed in the Dresden mission of 14 Feb 45. Post-war he worked for the Cohasset Post Office for 34 years. His wife, Shirley, preceded him in death 19 Apr 96. At death, he was survived by 5c (one of whom died in 06), 6gc.
- **Ronczy, Edward L**, 367<sup>th</sup> navigator (Robert Sage crew), 90, died 12 Jul 10 at Addolorata Villa in Wheeling, IL, where his widow Jo still lives. They married in 1951 and attended many 306<sup>th</sup> reunions, where they were fondly known for their dancing prowess. Ed was a lab tech for an oil company for many years before retiring. He contributed many hours of service to the Boy Scouts and the VFW. Also surviving him are 6c, 9gc.
- **Ryder, Harvey B**, 369<sup>th</sup> pilot, died 16 Sep 10 in St Joseph, KS, at 92. He arrived at Thurleigh 13 Dec 44 and flew 30 missions before leaving in Jun 45. He was a practicing optometrist for over 50 years, an avid handball player, president of the St Joseph Gymnastics Association and the Northside Lions, a 32<sup>nd</sup> Degree Scottish Rite Mason, and a member of the College Football Hall of Fame since 06. He loved farming, raising cattle, gardening and playing golf. He is survived by his crew members Mel Loes and Andy Ness, and by Donna, his wife of 69 years and 1d, 1gs.
- **Thwaite, James E**, 369<sup>th</sup> radio operator (Robert H Wood crew), died 29 May 10 in Bethel Park, PA at 89. Their crew arrived at Thurleigh 12 Sep 44. He and June married in Aug 45. His career was with the Pennsylvania Railroad and its successors. June and James were both always active at Peters Creek Baptist, where he was long the financial secretary and a ready volunteer in the kitchen. He and June went on the May 77 Thurleigh trip. He was predeceased by one son and is survived by June, 5s, 5gc, 3step-gc, 2ggc.
- **Walsh, Claude L**, 423<sup>rd</sup> pilot, died 21 Sep 10 within days of responding to our mailing. He arrived at Thurleigh in the winter of 44 and after VE Day, flew with the Casey Jones Project until summer 46, completing his service at Istres, France. He was a dedicated elementary school teacher and principal for 32 years. After retirement, he and his wife volunteered for Habitat for Humanity, eventually going on numerous international Habitat trips, including Tijuana, Guatemala, Fiji, and Northern Ireland. He was passionate about bicycling and skiing. In addition to his wife of 35 years, Judy, he is survived by 4c, 2st-c, 6gc.
- **Walters, Eugene D**, 423<sup>rd</sup> waist (earlier ball turret) gunner (John A Bartlett, Jr. crew), died 17 Jun 10 in Terre Haute, IN at 94. He arrived at Thurleigh 5 Jul 43 and flew with pilots Charles Munger, George Reese, and J P Toombs, completing 13 missions before being wounded 11 Feb 44 over Saarbrücken. He retired in 1980 as a tool and die maker for J I Case. He was preceded in death by his wife Antoinette 27 Jan 04. He is survived by 2c, 4gc, 3ggc.

#### FAMILY:

- **Gary, Beckie, wife of Elwyn R Jr** (who was 367<sup>th</sup> co-pilot, Roy Marks crew), 81, died suddenly and unexpectedly of pneumonia 6 Jun 2010 at their Agape Senior Assisted Living facility in Irmo, SC. She had attended Queens College in Charlotte, was a former volunteer with Meals on Wheels and was a very active member of Ashland U.M.C. One son preceded her in death. Surviving are her husband, 2s, 4gc.





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pistol. Joe recalled the irony of his own calm delight in finding himself in one piece and the German's nervousness. He worried that the gun might go off by accident. "Für Sie ist der Krieg vorbei," the soldier said. "For you the war is over"—a phrase heard by every airman taken prisoner. "I think they were required to say it, but I also think I heard some envy in his voice," Joe said. Only later did he discover the true cost of the mission. The ground fire and fighters had pushed the bombers so far off course that only five bombs hit their target. The rest landed on the small Belgian town of Mortsel, killing nearly 1,000 civilians and wounding 1,300 more, many of them schoolchildren. It was Belgium's deadliest night of the war and a disaster that Joe would never erase from his mind.

The next day, his 25th birthday, was spent sitting in St. Gilles Prison in Brussels. Soon, though, he found himself in Stalag Luft III (short for *Stammlager Luft*, or "Permanent Camp for Airmen")—a large camp a hundred miles southeast of Berlin in what is now Poland. Immortalized in the film *The Great Escape*, it was the site of one of the most daring breakouts of the war when, in March 1944, 76 men crawled out of a 330-foot tunnel. Only three men reached home. Of those recaptured, 50 were executed. When Joe arrived nearly a year earlier, there were just over 200 Americans. Most of the prisoners were British and Commonwealth RAF officers, some of whom had been held for three years or more. While Joe helped with some of the tunnel's sand dispersal, he, like most of the Americans, simply observed and learned from the Old Hands.

Not long after arriving, Joe got his first taste of prison theater. As for getting involved, he "wouldn't even try." With such talented organizers as the future National Theatre director Kenneth Mackintosh and the actors Rupert Davies and Peter Butterworth, it was the site of a steady stream of high-quality productions of Shakespeare, Shaw, Coward, and others. In fact, Joe still recalls the brilliant version of *Bliethe Spirit* he saw more than 65 years ago. "At the start," he recounted, "the director stepped through the curtains, the audience stood to attention, including the German guests, and said in chorus, 'God save the King.' The Germans were visibly flustered, but the house lights were quickly doused and the play begun."

What he did decide to do was to start a paper. But for that he needed news, so he wrote to Bill Cunningham at the *Boston Herald* asking for letters "with sports and other news that wouldn't be forbidden by the censors of either side." While prisoners were permitted to send four postcards and three one-page letters per month, there was no limit to how many they could receive. Cunningham obliged by writing a long feature in August 1943 under the heading "War Prisoner Appeals to Bill: Consolmagno of Tufts Seeks News for Eagles in Nazi Cage." A week later, *The Tufts Weekly* picked up the story and ran its own front-page article, claiming that "Lt. Consolmagno is very definitely one of Tufts' heroes of the air, and his appeal for mail deserves an all-out Tufts response."

It worked. Within weeks, Joe was deluged with mail from people he'd never met. He even received a letter from his freshman English professor, the poet John Holmes. By this time, however, someone else had already started a camp paper, and Joe had been recruited into another scheme. Because of his experience in journalism, he was approached by the camp's clandestine intelligence and asked if he would be willing to join a select group in writing and deciphering coded letters. He quickly agreed, though it meant laboriously going through the volumes of mail now reaching him, coded or not.

The code, which the British originated, was based on a grid, with each writer using a different set of key words. Of course, none of the writers knew who any of the others were and simply passed the information on to a single commanding officer. The coded letters Joe received were all from strangers and often contained information on the arrival of contraband to be used in escape: maps in playing cards, money in vinyl records, compasses in clothing. "Once I got in the code business, every one of my letters was in code," Joe recalled. His family and his fiancée had no idea that Joe's letters were being intercepted and decoded before being resealed and delivered to them. The letters contained information from newly arrived prisoners who were debriefed on everything they had seen from the moment they were shot down. Joe continued receiving and sending military secrets over the next two years and was commended for his efforts by Military Intelligence at the end of the war.

By late summer 1943, some 2,000 Americans were crowded into Stalag Luft III, with more downed airmen arriving daily. The camp was bursting at the seams. At the beginning of September, the Americans were separated from the British and relocated in two freshly erected compounds, Joe going with the somewhat larger group to the South Compound. Within a month they were constructing a new theater, entirely built and paid for by themselves. Perfectly raked, with 340 comfortable seats made from Red Cross boxes, the theater would be the center of camp activity as well as a source of great pride. With a sizable orchestra pit, dressing rooms, a lighting system made from biscuit tins, and a catwalk for the spotlights, it was indeed an impressive venue. It even had a red silk curtain donated by the Y.M.C.A. "It was certainly a lot better than Jackson Gym," Joe laughed, recalling the basic structure that once sat near the old campus golf course and doubled as Tufts' theater.

The theater contained four classrooms for what became known as Sagan U, after the town in which the camp was located. Here prisoners taught courses in whatever expertise they might possess. Joe taught economics. Only later did he discover that the textbooks he used had been sent by Tufts football coach and economics professor Lew Manly. As Joe explained: "They came through the International Student Aid Fund, and it wasn't until after the war that I learned of their Tufts origins. By that time it was too late to thank Lew, to my lifelong regret. As sports editor of *The Weekly*, I had used his football teams as an outlet for my—literally—sophomoric humor, and he never had any reason to feel kindly toward me." One alum of Sagan U was Lyndon Johnson's future attorney general, Nicholas Katzenbach, a young B-17 navigator who in



Top: *Stalag Luft III's* production of *Kiss and Tell*, directed by Joe Consolmagno, ran at the same time as the original Broadway version. Right: In *Veni, Vidi, Vici*, a satire loosely based on Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Joe (second from the left) played "a nameless shadow to Marc Antony." Harry Joe Murphy (third from the left) was a co-author and producer.



Below, left: A guard tower at Stalag Luft III, painted by Claudius Belk in one of the log books the Y.M.C.A. provided to prisoners of war.

1945 returned to Princeton University, which gave him credit for his P.O.W. courses. The theater also housed a radio station—KRGY for *kriegie*, or prisoner—that broadcast through loudspeakers several times a day.

With all this activity, the camp sometimes resembled a college campus with barbed wire around it. Indeed, many British authors have compared German prison camps to "third-rate public schools." Of course, the camp experience depended on who was in charge and whether the camp was made up of officers or enlisted men. Some were in old castles and forts and others in specially constructed wooden huts surrounded by parallel barbed-wire fences with coils of concertina wire in between. The camps were organized according to the prisoners' branch of the service, with the responsibility for guarding them falling on the corresponding German one. Captured U.S. airmen, who eventually numbered more than 33,000, were guarded by Germany's air force, the Luftwaffe. The largest of these camps was Stalag Luft III, which would eventually house 10,000 prisoners in five different compounds.

Officers had it easier than enlisted men. While lower ranks were employed in jobs ranging from coal mining to agricultural labor, the Geneva Convention of 1929 stipulated that officers were not to work. Officers, who were generally of college age, therefore had plenty of time on their hands. Not only were recreational opportunities required by the Geneva Convention, but the Germans were anxious to provide diversions from escape and other subversive activities. They encouraged sports, education, and theater. "They'd much rather have you busy doing that than the other things," recalled Joe. "But of course we did the other things as well." In keeping with the convention, the Germans also paid the officers a percentage of their pay, half of which went into a communal fund to purchase supplies and services as needed.

Joe's memory of Stalag Luft III remains surprisingly positive: "It was the best camp, absolutely. It was the closest to what the Geneva Convention envisioned. The Luftwaffe were better. It's not popular to say, but it came from the top, the fact that Göring was head of the Luftwaffe." And yet even the Luftwaffe couldn't protect them after the mass escape in spring 1944, when Hitler ordered that every recaptured prisoner be executed. While the number was reduced to 50, the overall responsibility for the camp was transferred to the Gestapo.

With the new theater complete, Joe began devoting eight hours a day to the stage. No longer overshadowed by the Brits, he and the other Americans were finally free to run their own theater. The change was immediately noted in the shift the Americans made from the British playwrights of the West End to those of Broadway. Their first production was a variety show to which Joe contributed skits as well as acted. Called *Strictly from Hunger*, it ended with a medley of blackface pieces (then known as "levee scenes") that included such numbers as "Oh Susannah" and "Deep River."

Joe made his directorial debut with the second show, *Boy Meets Girl*, a 1935 Broadway comedy by Sam and Bella Spewak. His college drama experience was now put to use. "I learned the procedure of 'putting on a play'—from casting, to read-through, to walk-through, to rehearsals, to performance—by observing Doc Balch," he told me. "I recall his direction of actors, beyond traffic control, as pretty much hands-off. I think that 'Tell them what you want and get out of the way!' became my management style, whether it was directing a play, editing a publication, using military rank, or managing a corporate department." The show was reported in the March 23, 1944, edition of *The Tufts Weekly* under the headline "Joe Consolmagno, German Prisoner, Tries Hand at American Play Directing Behind Barbed Wire." Joe also helped organize a board called the Luft Guild to produce plays and run the theater.

Unlike the Royal Air Force fliers, many of whom had prewar theater experience, the Americans were mostly novice actors. "We found a part for anyone who wanted to act," Joe recalled. Unavoidably, ladies' parts were played by men. "For female roles we had probably a half dozen or so really good character actors in great demand by all the directors—an ingenue, a couple of leading ladies, and some convincing matrons," Joe said. "There was also a Carmen Miranda who could never act, but he always brought the house down with his specialty." While the male voice always came as a shock at first, it was "quickly submerged by the play action and the female cadence."

Continued on page 5



Continued from page 4

The South Compound theater offered a mix of drama, comedy, farce, and variety shows, for which there was no shortage of scripts. "We had an extensive library provided through neutral international agencies, and we tediously typed parts from collections on a decrepit typewriter," Joe remembered. "Some plays were sent in private parcels. We understood that we produced *Kiss and Tell* while it was still playing on Broadway."



The South Compound Theater, a photograph taken by a German guard.

Despite the effort that went into every production, plays ran for only four or five performances, just enough to allow each person in the camp to see them. Costumes came from a shop in Berlin, rented with prisoners' money and transported by a guard. "I signed the parole that they would not be used for escape purposes," said Joe, adding that the escape committee "had its own tailors who could make better civilian clothes than we could rent." There was also an excellent orchestra with instru-

ments provided by the International Y.M.C.A.

Of the many productions he directed, Joe's favorite was Philip Barry's *Philadelphia Story*, the play on which the 1940 Katharine Hepburn film was based. "We had good people," he recalled with satisfaction. "The Hepburn part was played by Jack Mann, a fighter pilot shot down over North Africa. He was our premier leading lady and was in great demand by all our producers." Bill Geiger, an American Spitfire pilot from the Eagle Squadron, played the Jimmy Stewart role. "Geiger was a perfect matinee-idol type—Barrymore profile, Coleman voice. It was a surprise seeing him at a reunion thirty years later as a gruff, portly physician."

"As I look back," Joe reflected, "the most important work we did was the theater, because it was an escape, both working in it and attending the theater. For the people in the theater it was both time consuming and attention consuming. It was even better than reading." A 1944 article in *Theatre Arts* went even further, claiming: "Much as theatre is needed by the fighting man, it is in the prison camp that the need becomes an urge almost as strong as hunger itself. Men will go to any length of ingenuity and courage to satisfy it."

On January 27, 1945, the curtain fell for the last time. Colonel Charles Goodrich, the senior American officer, interrupted a performance of *You Can't Take It With You* to announce that the camp was to be evacuated in 30 minutes. With the Russians approaching from the east, Hitler had ordered that all 10,000 prisoners be moved. They left at 11 p.m. in a column that stretched for 20 miles. It was a hellish, week-long journey through freezing snowstorms. Joe remembers it as the low point of his P.O.W. experience. The destination was Moosburg, a massive camp 30 miles north of Munich. Growing to more than a hundred thousand prisoners over the next several months, it made Stalag Luft III seem like a resort. Bedbugs, fleas, and lice forced the prisoners out of the huts and into tents, though the ground was sopping with raw sewage. "The camp resembled a giant hobo village," Joe would later write. Any theater or other organized entertainment was impossible as prisoners simply held on till the end. It came on April 29, when a tank battalion from Patton's Third Army finally liberated the camp. The following day, Hitler committed suicide.

As for Joe, he never returned to Medford. He took a job in New York writing for the *Journal of Commerce*. This led him to the Midwest, where he went to work for Chrysler. He also put together three collections of his own essays and edited several newsletters, including that for the former prisoners of war of Stalag Luft III. And his theatrical career? He received a special commendation for the work he did in the camp and its important contribution to morale. He also wrote two new plays, both of them performed at P.O.W. reunions. One of them was called *Tunnel Bierstein* and the other, with a fond look back, *Strictly From Hunger: A Farce in One Act*.

In 1975, Joe took early retirement and moved to Florida with his wife, Pat, with whom he had raised three children. By now he was an avid sailor, out on his Hunter 27 every chance he got. He also traveled. In 1993, he returned to Belgium at the invitation of a radio station commemorating the 50th anniversary of the disastrous raid in which he was shot down. It was a painful visit, but Joe felt that he had an obligation to return. And there were also two trips back to Stalag Luft III, in 1976 and 1995, both in the company of a group of veterans and their wives.

On his last visit, a fellow prisoner made a comment that struck Joe as particularly poignant: "This one guy came up to me, and he was kind of embarrassed, and he said to me, 'You know, the only thing I remember about you is people laughing.' And, you know, I was kind of proud of that, because I thought that was part of my job—to make people laugh." At Stalag Luft III, Joe felt that he had two jobs. The first was writing and decoding secret messages. The second was helping people escape. Not through a tunnel or under the wire but through theater and the power of the imagination.

~ ~ ~

JOE CONSOLMAGNO served as a navigator on the *James M. Stewart* and the *Clarence Fischer* crews in the 367th Bomb Squadron. He currently lives in Englewood, Florida.

DAVID GUSS is a professor in the department of anthropology, of which he is chair. His recent work has included an exhibition celebrating the glory days of the old movie theaters in Somerville, Massachusetts.

ALEX NABAUM holds a B.F.A. in illustration from Utah State University and lives in Utah with his wife and four children. His work has appeared in *Time*, *Newsweek*, *The New York Times*, *Rolling Stone*, *Fast Company*, and many other publications.

## Do You Know Any of These Men from the 423rd Bomb Squadron?

(If you do, contact Dr. Vernon Williams at (325) 280-3399 or [vwilliams@acu.edu](mailto:vwilliams@acu.edu))



### San Diego Reunion Sneak Preview Save the Date!

**October 27-30, 2011**

Thursday-Sunday morning Checkout

**Holiday Inn San Diego Bayside  
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*Singles, Doubles, Triples, Quads  
All the same price!*

*Full reunion details in January Echoes  
and on the 306th Website in early January*

## Visit the 306th Website

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

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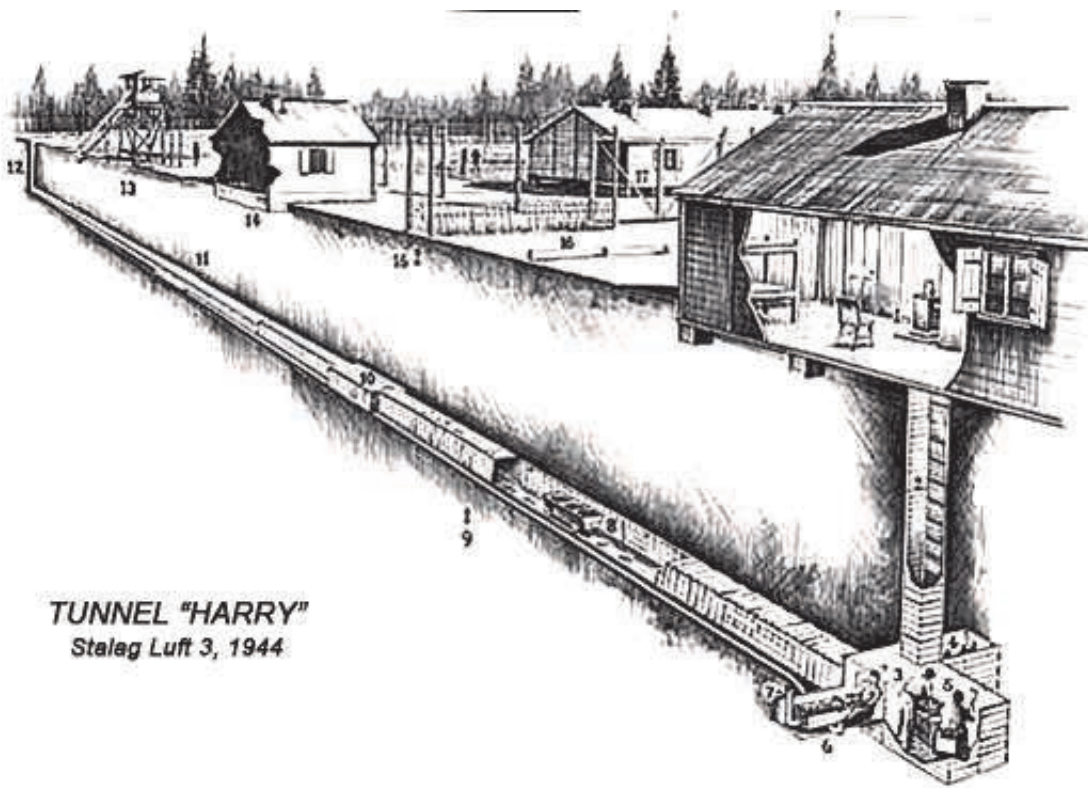
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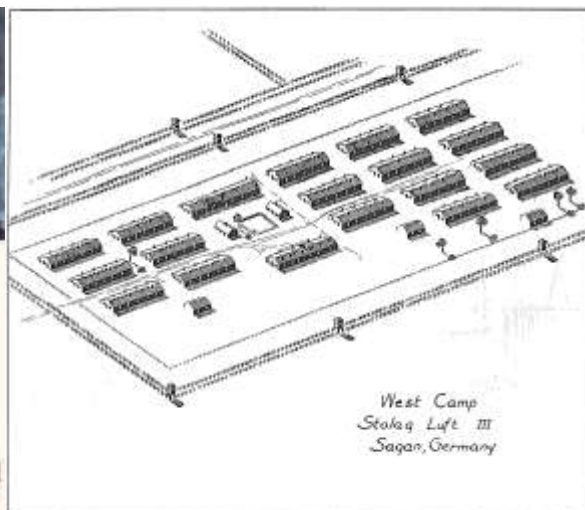
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306th Bomb Group Association  
875 S. Worth  
Birmingham, Michigan 48009

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date





**TUNNEL "HARRY"**  
Stalag Luft 3, 1944



## The Great Escape! Fact or Fiction?

By Trenton Dietz  
Thurman Shuller Intern

Hollywood has been making movies about World War II since before the war was even over. The result is an entire video library of films like *Casablanca*, *The Longest Day*, and *Saving Private Ryan*. One of these famous war films is *The Great Escape*, the story of an Allied escape attempt from a POW camp. *The Great Escape* is iconic and entertaining, but is it actually based in fact?

The film is at least loosely based on an escape attempt from Stalag Luft III located near what was then Sagan, Germany. Stalag Luft III was opened on March 21, 1942 and was evacuated on January 27, 1945 as the Soviet Army approached. During its operation, the camp housed both British and American airmen, some of whom were from the 306th Bomb Group. Stalag Luft III was built to deter escape attempts; but despite its purposeful design, it was the site of numerous escape attempts including what may be the most famous escape of World War II.

This escape owes much of its fame to the film *The Great Escape* which is certainly not a documentary retelling of the actual events of the "Great Escape." The characters in the film are often based on either specific individuals from Stalag Luft III or as composite characters, representing several actual individuals. However, even those characters who represent specific people do not have the same names as the people they represent. For example, Squadron Leader Roger Bartlett (played by Richard Attenborough) represents Squadron Leader Roger Bushell.

Obviously one of the most distinct characters from the film is Steve McQueen's "Hilts," also known as the "Cooler King." Hilts may have represented several different characters or character traits from the actual "Great Escape." It is likely that McQueen represented Flight Lieutenant Barry Mahon, an American involved in many escape attempts including the "Great Escape." Mahon had been part of one of the RAF Eagle Squadrons for American volunteers (explaining how an American could be in the British section of the camp). McQueen's famous motorcycle scene, however, was Hollywood fiction.

Interestingly, many of the details of the film are highly accurate. The methods for concealing the tunnels were well portrayed (though the tunnel names and the concealment do not necessarily align) and bed boards indeed were used in construction of the tunnels. Other details are not so well portrayed. For example, executions did not occur *en masse* but in small groups.

## Around the eighth air force

Special Dispatch to the 306th Echoes

Ellyn Craigie

Reporter At-Large

Greetings from Abilene, TX! Here is a brief update of upcoming events and items related to the Eighth Air Force that hopefully will be of interest to you.

**New York, New York**— On October 15th, the History Channel announced they would be airing their film, *WWII in HD: The Air War* on November 10, 2010 at 9PM EST. The film will be broadcasted several more times in November: November 11 at 1 am EST, November 13 at 5 pm EST, November 14 at 10 pm EST, and on November 15 at 2 am EST. This film retells the story of the Mighty 8th Air Force as they go into battle prior to the D-Day Invasion. This film includes some unseen stock footage of some aerial battles, airmen on the bases, and the devastation in Germany. The Luftwaffe perspective is also highlighted. So tune into the History Channel on November 10 to watch their latest installment on this wonderful series.

**Barksdale Air Force Base, LA**— The 8th Air Force Museum has begun restorations on a B-52 Model D. These planes began to fly in the Vietnam War and held 84 bombs in the bomb bay. For now, they are restoring the paint job and replacing some sheet-metal. They hope to have it ready and restored for the Barksdale Base's annual air show scheduled in April 2011.

Earlier in the year, the base restored a B-17 that belonged to Major General Lewis E. Lyle of the 303rd Bomb Group. He passed away April 6, 2008. He was the founder of the Mighty 8th Air Force Museum, and his monument along with his plane (newly restored) reside at the museum in Savannah, GA.

**Savannah, GA**— The Mighty 8th Museum is opening its doors for a special Veteran's Day. All military veterans will be recognized and will receive a special ticket price of \$5 all day. This event is scheduled to be held on Thursday, November 11, 2010 as an all day event.

The museum is also hosting the second annual, "Biggest Little Christmas Party." The party is a four-and-a-half hour long event at the museum where it includes a DJ, cash bar, 2 entrée buffet, and much more. From 6:30 to 7:30 PM there will be the cocktail hour right before the festivities begin. Dancing will go until 11PM. This wonderful holiday event is being held on Friday, December 17, 2010. Last year, this event was sold out very quickly, so make sure to make a reservation soon! A fifty percent deposit will be made at the time of the reservation and all money and forms must be in by December 1, 2010.

To contact the museum for more information about the "Biggest Little Christmas Party," write or call:

P.O. Box 1992  
Pooler, GA 31322  
Savannah, GA 31402  
Phone: (912) 748 - 8888, Ext. 108  
FAX (912) 748-0209





## Return of the Heroes

The 306th BG Association Board of Directors Move to Join The East Anglia Air War Project and Tour Wartime England One More Time

~ ~ ~

*"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. It is a chance for 306th veterans and their families to return once again to Thurleigh and visit many wartime sites. 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, 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. The air war from these pleasant meadowlands will soon be the subject of the first book to come out of Williams' decade-long research effort. Join him in retracing the story of the 306th and other bomb groups in the nearby 1st Air Division who flew their missions from these small villages and towns scattered across East Anglia and the Midlands.

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 - Portsmouth - Dover - Churchill's Estate - Cambridge  
Airfields in the Midlands - Airfields in East Anglia  
Thurleigh Memorial Museum - Bedford**

Tour Website: [www.306bg.org](http://www.306bg.org)  
and click on "Tour" button

**May 27-June 4, 2011**  
**9 Days/8 Nights Tour: \$1990**  
**\$800 Single Supplement**  
*Book your own flight.*  
*Flight and transfers not included.*

**Deposit Deadline: December 20, 2010**  
*(application form & itinerary available on 306th website)*

*For more information, visit the tour website or call  
Dr. Vernon L. Williams for additional details: (325) 280-3399*

306th Bomb Group veterans and their families visit the new Air Force Memorial during the Washington, D.C. reunion in October. Notice the changing fall colors behind this most handsome group. More reunion photos coming in the January *Echoes*.



Top: The James M. Stewart crew, 367th Bomb Squadron. This crew was later lost, but Joe Consolmagno, the navigator, remained at Thurleigh that day due to illness (see page 1 for Consolmagno's story). Front row: James M. Stewart (P), William Dickey (CP), Raymond Schmoyer (BT), Hugh Langan (WG). Back row: Thomas McMillan (RO), Charles Meriwether (E), Jack Wheeler (TG), John Creamer (B). Insert at top left: Joseph Consolmagno (N). 306th Bomb Group Archives.

Below: First Over Germany Dinner, presentation of framed print "Mission Return" to General Richard Newton, Deputy Chief of Staff for Manpower and Personnel, USAF. Left to right: Trent Dietz (Thurman Shuller Intern), Emi Johnson (Donald Ross Intern), Ellyn Craigie (Peg Haapa Intern), General Newton, Dr. Vernon L. Williams, historian. Photograph by Susan O'Konski.





# Museum Notes

## Thurleigh Airfield 306th Bomb Group Museum

### We Have Now Returned Home Safely From Our 20th Mission

by **Ralph Franklin**  
Keysoe, England

A big thank you to one and all for making this year's reunion such a great occasion. Being at our twentieth consecutive get together with so many special people we can call our friends makes our long trip over very worthwhile.

Having known Don Ross for many years, including spending time with him and his wife at his home in 1992 when we were making arrangements for the reunion to be held in England, it was very special to have one of his daughters and her husband as the first visitors to our museum soon after our return. I had previously arranged to meet them at the Bedford train station. It was obvious they enjoyed their tour and Sharon was particularly pleased to see a photograph of Don taken at the D-Day briefing in 1944. Before returning them to the station, the four of us had lunch at the Falcon with a glass of Bombardier bitter.

Now back to the reunion: one or two of you must be psychic as in my presentation at the business meeting I mentioned that the real gems we love to display are actual items as donated by you from your time at Thurleigh. Prior to me saying this, three friends had given us some of their precious World War II memorabilia. Phillip Mundell, a tail gunner with the Andrew Kata 369th crew, gave us a cigarette lighter as made by a German prisoner of war in England. With the limited material and tools available to them, they did a first class job. Two other items which I am sure will create a great amount of interest will be the items donated by 2nd LT William F Griffin, the co-pilot in the 367th ship *Umbriago* piloted by Charles C Wegener. They were shot down on September 12th 1944 on William's 33rd mission. As he floated down on his parachute, a FW190 pilot circled and saluted him. He fell into a pine forest northeast of Berlin, and when he hit the ground he smashed up both his knees and ankles. A part of a tree broke off and, in so doing, broke his back; with this amount of damage to his body, he had to spend eight months in a POW Hospital in Meinnigen, Germany. The camp was liberated by General Patton's 11th Armoured Tank Division. The items donated by William's family will enable us to create a first class display; we have his officer's A-Class tunic, his A2 leather flying jacket with original paintwork, and also a number of relevant photographs. Finally, we were given a first class collection of 26 wartime linen backed maps. This is where I feel very embarrassed as I have mislaid the note I made when they were handed to me, and I am unable to recall who made this kind gesture, but I can assure them they are very much appreciated as are all of the items. A big thank you to you all. We will be incorporating all these pieces of memorabilia in our displays in the near future.

On Sunday 15th August we arranged a special day at the Museum; the weather was good with the ever present airfield wind causing a few problems initially. After a short while all was resolved. The land girls, who were based at Milton Earnest Hostel during the war and were having a reunion, soon began arriving. For those not aware, these girls, officially known as the Woman's Land Army, worked to help feed the nation during the war years as men went to fight; at its peak there were eighty thousand women working on the land. A local caterer provided a very nice picnic luncheon for them; as our tribute Daphne and I provided champagne for all present to raise a glass in praise of their hard work on the farms when the men folk were away. And of course they provided wonderful partners at dances held on the base. A group of re-enactors from the Birmingham area, all looking very good in their '40s period clothing, also joined the throng to ensure we had a great day. A further group wishing to join the party was a World War II military enthusiast organisation with a selection of vehicles from the war years. It was not long before the dancing began, as on the day I provided appropriate music for such activities. The jiving was somewhat slower than 60+ years ago. A great time was had by all: we have had a number of requests to do it all again next year.

Bedford Autodrome now has a section at the eastern end of the airfield that includes the old 10,500 foot runway, constructed for the RAE after the war. This allows suitable aircraft to land. Recently I had a call from Jonathan's personal as-

sistant saying they were having a Rolls Royce day, and, to add to the occasion, a Spitfire would be arriving to give a flying display. Following this spectacle, the aircraft would be landing for their visitors on the day to have a close inspection. Jonathan would be delighted if we were able to join the crowd on this occasion as it was all very relevant to our work at the museum; we were thrilled to accept the invitation. On arriving at the Autodrome, we were transported out to a vantage point on the airfield from which we marvelled at the display. My research suggests the Spitfire was a MK19 built at Southampton in late 1944 or early '45; it had a long and varied career- finally being sold to the Rolls Royce Company in September 1996. The pilot for the day was Mark Lewis of Rolls Royce. The photograph was taken by Jonathan following the display.

Three days before we departed to attend the reunion, we had agreed to be host for around 200 cars taking part in this year's international motor sport association classic. We were one of the checkpoints for two of the 180 mile routes from different starting points around the country. As the participants began to arrive, so did the storm clouds. It became quite miserable, but believe me it didn't dampen the enthusiasm. As always, our family pitched in to help, serving the refreshments we provided both in the hospitality suite and the museum. They were very busy all day as we had over 400 visitors. As usual, Raymond was attempting to work miracles with his camera under pretty dreadful conditions at times. Some of the less experienced drivers made a complete mess of their map reading and were still arriving about one and a

half hours after the event had closed and Daphne and I had cleared and were about to leave for home. We advised security to stop any wayward drivers and send them to the next checkpoint. In spite of the adverse weather conditions, it was a real fun day with some really nice comments entered in our visitor's book with many



saying they are planning on a return visit when we open next year.

Daphne and I wish to take this opportunity to wish each and every one a wonderful festive season with the hope that next year brings health, wealth and, above all, happiness to you and your families.



*From top: Ralph Franklin, Mark Lewis and his Spitfire, Daphne Franklin; This was the oldest car present: a 1913 Buick Tourer; Mary Smith, onetime forewoman at Milton Earnest about to cut the celebratory cake made for the Woman's Land Army reunion. At left: A small crowd gathers as Ralph Franklin proposes a toast to some of the wartime land girls; visitors arrive to enjoy a cup of morning coffee (note the guys in the A2s, the far one has the 423rd Grim Reaper on the back); the military vehicles parked around the museum.*

