

# 306th Echoes

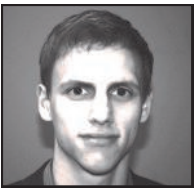


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## Warbird: The Design, Development, and Deployment of the B-17

By Trenton Dietz  
Russell Strong Intern



*Editor's note: Trenton Dietz has researched and written a compelling overview of the B-17 Flying Fortress, its design history, development, and deployment into the war effort to units such as the 306th Bombardment Group at Thurleigh. The article originally was written as a scholarly paper with copious sources and footnotes. The editor has a copy of the complete paper. For those readers interested in the sources for any particular part of this essay, please contact the editor (see contact information on page 2).*

The B-17 Flying Fortress was not an isolated aircraft concept but was a part of a much larger picture of American ideas on air power. During World War I, the United States had very little concept of air power; many men of the United States Air Service flew foreign-built aircraft such as the French SPAD S.XIII. During the 1920s, the dismal situation of American military aviation, dominated by ground officers, saw little improvement. Fortunately, American designers began to inject ingenuity into military aircraft in the 1930s with such examples as the Martin B-10 bomber. Born into this awakening awareness of the necessity for air power, the B-17 would go on to exemplify America's aeronautical might, a strength which had been almost non-existent a few years earlier. Through its innovative design and its development through combat experience, the B-17 became an important part of the American arsenal, serving in all theatres of World War II and making its most important contribution in the skies over Europe.

### Design

Seeking a new multi-engine bomber to replace the Martin B-10, the US Army announced a competitive "fly-off" to take place in August, 1935. Several aircraft manufacturers such as Douglas and Boeing decided to participate in the event, hoping for lucrative Army contracts.

While there were indeed four-engine bombers in 1934, most bombers had only two engines. Those that did have four engines used the additional power to lift heavier loads, making them large, lumbering aircraft. But Boeing was about to take a new approach to the four-engine layout: rather than using the extra engines to increase lift, Boeing would design a plane with the size of a two-engine bomber and the power of four engines. This revolutionary thought would increase the performance of Boeing's aircraft, hopefully setting it apart from the other entrants in the Army fly-off. The result of their efforts, the Model 299, would have a wingspan only about eight feet wider than that of the Douglas DB-1 (another entrant) but twice as many engines.

On September 26, 1934, the Boeing Board of Directors approved the project, assigning \$275,000 to the development of the Model 299. While this amount of money was impressive for 1934 (when the US was suffering from the Depression), it would not be enough to complete the prototype. According Edward C. Wells, "Ultimately the cost would total over \$660,000. . . . as much or more than the total resources of the company at the time." Wells was only twenty-four when he became the Assistant Project Engineer and the principal design engineer for the Model 299; he would continue to be a part of the development of the aircraft, earning himself the nickname "Mr. B-17." Other sources give different figures than Wells for the amount spent on the Model 299, but all agree that the cost was well over \$275,000 (at least \$432,034) and that the amount represented a severe financial risk for Boeing.

The result of Boeing's massive financial risk was the Model X-299, quickly renamed the B-299 when the Army complained that the "X" designation sounded too much like other experimental Army projects. The prototype for the 299 was ready to begin testing on July 17, 1935 and had its first flight on July 28, flown by Boeing pilot Les Tower. Running out of time before the Army fly-off at Wright Field, Boeing put the 299 through a very short period of flight testing (just over fourteen hours). Then, on August 20, Boeing flew the plane to Wright Field in a record time of nine hours and three minutes.

The B-299 would go on to become one of the most famous planes of World War II with one of the most recognizable names: the "Flying Fortress." This name was coined by Dick Williams, a reporter for the *Seattle Times*, who noticed how the plane bristled with no less than five machine guns; Boeing quickly copyrighted the name. Little did Boeing know how appropriate the name "Flying Fortress" would be: the B-17 would continually prove its ruggedness and the B-17G would be armed with thirteen machine guns as opposed to the original five. Nevertheless, the current 299 was exciting enough to gain more publicity than any single plane since the *Spirit of St. Louis* in 1927.

Despite immense publicity, the unique four-engine approach, and an impressive performance in the fly-off, the 299 prototype met with disaster on October 30,



Top: The Boeing B-299 above Seattle on a test flight. Design elements of Thurleigh's B-17 F and G models can be seen in the early design. Below: The wreckage of the B-299 crash site in October 30, 1935. Courtesy Boeing Aircraft.

1935. Air Corps Chief Test Pilot Major Ployer Hill piloted the plane while Boeing's Les Tower, the first man to fly the 299, accompanied him as an observer; several other people such as a representative of Pratt & Whitney (who had made the engines for the plane) were also on board. To keep the control surfaces of the wings motionless while the plane was on the ground, the 299 was equipped with an "elevator gust lock" that Major Hill forgot to disengage before takeoff. Edward Wells explains the result of the oversight:

The plane took off with the elevator gust lock still engaged, went into a steep climb, aggravated by the reverse control action of the tabs moving on the locked surface, stalled and crashed, almost leveling out again as it struck the ground. The Air Corps pilot, Major Hill, was killed in the crash, and Les Tower, who was standing in the cockpit as an observer, died later of burns and injuries.

Despite the 299's superiority, Boeing was disqualified from the fly-off; instead, the Army placed an order for 133 Douglas B-18s.

Notwithstanding the tragedy of the first 299, the plane had impressed the Air Corps. On January 17, 1936, the Army ordered thirteen B-299s with slight improvements and one airframe for static testing. The Army designation for the B-299 was YB-17, though it changed to Y1B-17 on November 20, 1936 (however, the Y1B-17 designation had nothing to do with changes to the actual aircraft). At the end of the Y1B-17's service testing, the designation was changed once again to simply B-17.

Gradually, the B-17 became an important part of the US arsenal. Germany's rapid gains in Europe (including the defeat of France) decimated hesitations in Washington concerning heavy bombers, and on July 12, 1940, the Army assured Boeing that it would order an additional 512 B-17s. To keep up with the Army's demand for the Flying Fortresses, Boeing had to work with Lockheed (a subsidiary of Vega Aircraft Corporation) and Douglas beginning in 1941; deliveries of B-17s from these companies began in mid-1942. In total, over 12,700 B-17s would be built: 6,981 by Boeing, 2,750 by Lockheed-Vega, and about 3,000 by Douglas (sources disagree on an exact number for Douglas). On April 13, 1945, more than nine years after the Army had ordered thirteen B-299s, the last B-17 built by Boeing was delivered to the Army.

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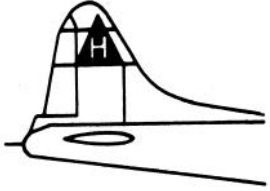


### Echoes Continues to Appear Four Times a Year

Since October 2007 *Echoes* has been produced by Dr. Vernon L. Williams and the East Anglia Air War Project at Abilene Christian University. To better manage the production time necessary to produce each issue, the publication dates during each year have been changed to: Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall. The expectation is that *Echoes* will arrive about the same time each quarter. Using the new publication scheme, Dr. Williams and his volunteer staff will be able to serve the 306th Bomb Group Association, veterans, and 306th families more efficiently.



Ground crew on Eager Beaver turning the prop prior to start up. Photograph courtesy 306th Bomb Group Historical Archives.



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**2011-2012 Student Interns:**

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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:

- **Broussard, Joseph W**, 367<sup>th</sup> assistant crew chief, of Grand Chenier, LA, died 9 Sep 11, at 91 after a long, courageous battle with diabetes. Joe was at Thurleigh four years, an assistant crew chief servicing (among other planes) 'Skipper' which flew 72 bombing missions without a single aborted flight. Post-war he worked for Crain Brothers, and completed his working career as a postal carrier. A life-long member of St. Eugene Catholic, he enjoyed alligator trapping, duck hunting, shrimping on his dock, and many other outdoor sports, as well as travel when his health permitted. Survived by his wife of 65 years, Ada.
- **Cain, "Bill" Charles William**, 367<sup>th</sup> waist gunner (crew of George Mapes, on 'Methuselah 969'), 87, of Shreveport, LA, died 15 Aug 11. His missions at Thurleigh in May-Sep 44, included the 1<sup>st</sup> Schweinfurt mission. Post-war he retired from the US Postal Service and Southern Research Co. For many years, Bill and his family enjoyed attending our reunions until health precluded that; they last attended in Savannah. Preceded in death by his wife LaVonne and 1d; survived by 2s, 4gc, 5ggc.
- **Couture, William**, 369<sup>th</sup> tail gunner (Lloyd Johns crew), of Jewett City, CT, 88, died 16 Apr 11 at home. The crew arrived Thurleigh 13 Apr 44. Post-war, he worked 40 years as Test Foreman at Pratt & Whitney. He was an avid fisherman and loved to travel. His first wife Genevieve died in 86; in 89 in Hawaii, he married Shirley, who survives him along with 2c, 3stepc, 3gc.
- **Crowl, Clarence J** [more info just received; see April 2011 "Not Recent" obit], 368<sup>th</sup> pilot & POW, who died at 81 in Titusville, FL 8 Dec 00: after WWII and Korea, worked for NASA; Rollins College grad; survived by wife Anne, 2s, 1gs.
- **Fay, Dudley H Jr**, 369<sup>th</sup> navigator (Craig Powell crew; John P Noack crew when downed), of Trumbull, CT, died 4 Sep 10, at 86. He arrived at Thurleigh 13 Sep 43, and was POW from 11 Dec 43 (Emden mission), held by Germany at Stalag Luft 1 Barth-Vogelsang Prussia. He graduated Georgetown Univ 48 and Harvard Advanced Management Program 66. He had a career in advertising for many years in CT, and ended his working career with ten years for Merrill Lynch in Palm Springs, CA before returning to CT in 01. He was a Life Master with the American Contract Bridge League; a passionate reader and writer; and a political supporter. He enjoyed travel and golf. Survived by 4c, 4gc.
- **Gesiriech, "Gus" Florian L**, 368<sup>th</sup> ball turret gunner (Frank Krzyston crew), 89, originally a farm boy from Stuart, NE, and longtime resident of southern CA, died there 10 Jun 11. Gus was a last-minute substitution to the crew due to a crew-member's emergency appendectomy. They arrived at Thurleigh 21 Apr 44 and flew on 'Weary Bones.' He flew 36 combat missions, two of which were on D-Day. Post-war he moved to CA where he met and married Delores Jean. After having his own motor business, he began work for Lockheed Aircraft in Burbank; his position as their Field Rep for the F-104 took the family to Germany ('60-'67); and as Field Rep for the L-1011 to Athens, Greece, Japan, Hong Kong, and Saudi Arabia. He enjoyed country music and growing vegetables and nuts. After retirement, he finished his GED and even taught classes on the electrical systems of aircraft at Antelope Valley College. Jean survived him for less than a month; they are survived by 3c, 3gc.
- **Goodwill, Forest W**, 369<sup>th</sup> crew chief (including for 369<sup>th</sup> pilot Robert P Riordan), 94, a native of PA, died 17 Sep 11 in Sebring, FL where he'd lived for 25 years, surrounded by his family. With the Group, he left Wendover 11 Aug 42 as aircraft mechanic, and rose at Thurleigh to crew chief MSgt by Mar 44, when he became the first 369<sup>th</sup> man to receive a Legion of Merit medal when honored for his splendid record in servicing combat aircraft; he left Thurleigh 19 Jul 45. He praised the first-ever 306th-only Reunion in states (Omaha Sep 83), as much better than 82 Cincinnati reunion with 8<sup>th</sup> AFHS. Post-war he worked 40 years at Talon, Meadville, PA, retiring in 80. In Crawford Co, PA, he was a member of Grace United Methodist and Masonic Lodge 234; served on Board of Supervisors of his township several years; and he could fix anything, which he was often called to do. His wife of 64 years, Hazel, who survived him 16 days to 3 Oct, had been widowed by WWII prior to marrying Forest. She had worked at GCI in Saegertown, PA, then at Talon, Keystone View Co, and in the Saegertown schools' cafeteria, retiring with Forest in 80. She was active in the Rebekah Lodge of the Odd Fellows; the Women's Improvement Club; Grace United Methodist; and also served as a Girl Scout leader and was active in her children's schools. Forest and Hazel both enjoyed gardening, boating, fishing, traveling, playing cards, and entertaining family and friends. Always active, she taught many to water-ski while Forest drove the boat; she skied on her 65<sup>th</sup> birthday. They are survived by 2d, 4gc, 7ggc.
- **Hathaway, "Joe" Joseph R**, 423<sup>rd</sup> radio operator gunner (Forrest Stewart crew), 87, died 17 Jan 11 at his home in Glendive, MT. Joe's crew reached Thurleigh in Sep-44; their combat missions included serving on the lead crew of B-17s. After discharge in 45 Joe and his brother bought Red Trail Meat Market in Glendive. In the Korean War, Joe was recalled to serve as an Air Communication Flight Instructor. Following discharge, he became an agent for NY Life Insurance Co, qualifying for the Million Dollar Round Table that year and each year until retiring in 88. He served on the Boards for Glendive Community Hospital and (as Chairman) for Glendive Public Library. Preceded in death by 1s, Joe is survived by Patricia, his wife of 61 years, 6c, 12gc, 3ggc.
- **Holbert, Roy K**, 369<sup>th</sup> engineer & POW (Howard J Snyder crew on 'Susan Ruth'), longtime resident of Knoxville, TN, died there 30 Jan 10 at 88. POW from 8 Feb 44 (Frankfurt mission) at Stalag Luft 4 and was a part of the 86-Day March across Poland and Germany. His memberships included charter member of the Smoky Mountain Chapter of American Ex-prisoners of war; military order of the Purple Heart; lifetime member of Disabled American Veterans; 8th AFHS; Stalag Luft IV and VI Association; and successively several Baptist churches. Post-war he studied electrical engineering at Univ of Tn. He retired from Union Carbide Y-12 Plant at Oak Ridge, TN, after 31 years of service. His wife of 64 years, Levonia, survived him until 6 May 10. Survived by 2s; 1gs.
- **Hudgins, Lewis A**, 368<sup>th</sup> waist gunner & ass't engineer (Albert Rehn crew), died at 88 in Doraville, GA 16 Apr 10. He reported to Thurleigh 19 Nov 43. Member of North Peachtree Baptist for 52 years. Survived by 1s, 2step-s, 5gc, 5ggc.

*Obituaries continued on page 3*

## New Officers and Directors Elected at San Diego

**Donald Snook**  
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**Allan Lawson**  
 Directors, 2011-2014

**Vernon L. Williams**  
 Reunion Chairman, Director, Historian, Editor  
 Serves at the Pleasure of the Board

Obituaries continued from page 2

- **Jimro, Albert**, 369<sup>th</sup> Airplane Repair Crew No.5, died at 94 in Boardman, OH, on 20 Apr 11. Al served 4 years servicing B-17s. Post-war he worked for Open Hearth in Struthers and Butler Steel Mill, and later for General Fireproofing, in Youngstown, OH, retiring after 39 years of working on the assembly line making office equipment. For many years, he also worked and drove cars at John Thompson & Sons Used Cars. In recent years he kept active making bears for the sick and elderly with the senior group at Trinity Fellowship Church, Boardman, and attended a senior group in Youngstown, where he worked in the kitchen, helping to clean up after meals were served. He loved watching and attending car races, country music and polka music. Survived by his companion of 63 years, Esther Thompson.
- **Knight, James N**, 423<sup>rd</sup> waist gunner (crews of Harold Fossum & John Lockard), died at 87 on 3 Jan 11 in St. George, UT. The crew arrived at Thurleigh 3 Apr 44 with Fossum as pilot and Lockard co-pilot for 25 missions on 'Little Lulu.' Lockard then continued as pilot for missions 26-35. Knight flew more than 50 missions in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Air Forces. Post-war he earned his BS in Education at Utah State Univ in 50 and married that Nov. He was a coach and secondary school teacher for nearly 40 years, while also working for Hi-land Dairy. He was an avid horseman, sportsman, golfer, and square-dancer. In St George, he served as volunteer to the annual Senior Games, and in Salt Lake City he chaired the Special Events Committee for the 91 National Square Dance Convention. Survived by Betty, his wife of 60 years, 2s, 4gc.
- **Livingstone, Roy E**, 367<sup>th</sup> engineer (McIntire & Watson crews) & POW, 88, died 7 Apr 11 at Bay Pines V.A. Medical Center, Dunedin, FL, of lung cancer and COPD. He reported to Thurleigh 12 Mar 43 with McIntire; POW at Stalag 17-B from the 17 Apr 43 Bremen mission with Watson. Post-war he was an advertising executive; a golf sports writer; publisher of the US Golf News Magazine; and he founded the Senior Golf Association of Florida. He served as director of an American ex-POW Foundation. Preceded in death in 91 by his first wife, Grayce, in 2000 he married Dorris, widow of a POW. Survived by Dorris, 2 stepc; 2gc; 2ggc.
- **Lord, Lester L**, 423<sup>rd</sup> radio operator (crew of John A Bartlett, Jr), 88, of Baytown, TX, died 30 Oct 10. Reported to Thurleigh 5 July 43. Included in his 26 missions were the first raid over Germany, and bombing of heavy water facilities at Telemark, Norway. He was gunnery instructor for B-29 crews bound for the Pacific. Post-war he was Graphic Arts Technician and Photographer for Humble-Exxon Research & Development, retiring after 37 years. Survived by wife "Vi" (Viola), 3c, 6gc.
- **Manning Sr, William F**, 369<sup>th</sup> waist gunner (Lloyd Johns crew), died 11 Sep 11 at home in Westbrook, ME, at 88. His crew arrived at Thurleigh in April 44. Post-war he served many years in the Army National Guard, and was employed at S.D. Warren paper mill in Westbrook 35 years until his retirement. He was a member of American Legion Post 197, and a Mason. He enjoyed hunting, fishing, snowmobiling, and spending time with family. Preceded in death by 1s in infancy, he is survived by Norma, his wife of 50 years, 6c, 5gc, 8ggc.
- **McKay, Robert G**, 367<sup>th</sup> radio operator & engineer (Howard Balcom crew), of the Cleveland, OH area, died 10 Mar 11 at 92. His 30 missions at Thurleigh, Sep-44 to Mar-45, included their B-17 being lead position 21 Jan-45 for 8th AF mission to Aschaffenburg, Germany. He retired after 39 years from Gliden Durkee. Preceded in death by his wife Betty; survived by 1d, 2gc, 2ggc.
- **Moss, William T**, 368<sup>th</sup> radio operator (Bruce Swango crew), resident of TN, died 1 Nov 10 at 86. Was at Thurleigh 11 Dec 44 to 19 May 45. No further info.
- **Nelson, Harold R**, 367<sup>th</sup> waist gunner (John Heraty crew), died 30 Jan 11 at home in Sioux City, IA at 86. He reported to Thurleigh 3 Jul 44 and completed a tour of 35 missions. Post-war he was a member of Local 18 Plumbers and Steamfitters more than 50 years, working for Carlson Plumbing and retiring from Interstate Air Conditioning in 82. He enjoyed gardening, fishing, and his memberships in Trinity Lutheran, the Eagles Club, American Legion Post 64, and Veterans of Foreign Wars. Preceded in death by his wife Margaret in 02, he is survived by 2c. 3gc.
- **Smith, Bartlett 'Bart' E**, 367<sup>th</sup> pilot & co-pilot (Kenneth Starks crew), of Mason, MI, died 8 Nov 11 at 91. Post-war he worked at various jobs, including at REO when they were designing and manufacturing rockets, while also managing the airport in Mason in the late 40s and early 50s. He was a flight instructor; flew for Jewett Ambulance Service; built an RS-15 sailplane; and was a professional musician playing bass fiddle in local area big bands and dance bands. He was an accomplished carpenter; had a computer before most people knew what one was; built clocks; flew model aircraft; and was active in genealogy, tracing his family tree, including his gggg-uncle Jessiah Bartlett (second signer of the Declaration of Independence) and on back as far as the era of Charlemagne. Bart, was intelligent, gentle and kind. He loved his family and many good friends. Preceded in death by Donnajane, his wife of 40 years in 90, he is survived by 1d.
- **Smith, Lyle Richardson, MD**, 369<sup>th</sup> waist gunner (Richard Buttorf crew), 88, died 3 Sep 11 at his home in Kingsport, TN. The crew arrived Thurleigh 12 Apr 44; 'Steady Hedy' was the first B-17 to complete 100 missions, and Smith was on the first crew, completing 31 missions including the first daylight bombing of Berlin and the invasion of Europe on D-Day. Post-war he returned to Beloit College to finish his Bachelor's; taught at Cumberland County High; attended Cornell Univ Medical College in NYC; completed internship and residency at Philadelphia General Hospital in internal medicing; and set up his practice in Kingsport in 53. During his service to area people, he delivered about 3,000 babies. He was president of staff at Holston Valley Medical Center in 65 and served on the executive committee 21 years. He held a degree in Theology from the Univ of the South (Sewanee) and was a lector 40 years at St Paul's Episcopal Church. After his retirement, he enjoyed many years of teaching English Medieval History at East TN State Univ at the Kingsport Allandale Center for Continuing Education. He was a 50+ year 32<sup>nd</sup>-degree Scottish Rite Mason, having been raised to 3<sup>rd</sup> degree in 45. Predeceased by his first wife Peggy Ann, mother of his children, and 1s, he is survived by his wife Sarah, 2c, 4gc.
- **Yearous, Lester J "Jerome"** 369<sup>th</sup> engineer (crew of John G Davis), 88, of Fayette Co, IA, died 9 Jun 11. Post-war he was a farmer, entrepreneur, and began working in real estate and appraisals after the death in 89 of Marion, his wife of 44 years. The family enjoyed fishing, camping, and travel across the US and Canada. He was well-read, and a self-taught historian with an insatiable curiosity about people and history. He enjoyed a lifetime vocation of creative woodworking. Survived by 2c, 3gc, 4ggc.

## Family:

- **Edlund, Harriet**, widow of Lawrence Edlund (368<sup>th</sup> radio operator, William Ruffin crew; Lawrence died May 88 at 70), lifelong resident of eastside St Paul, MN, died 28 May 11 at 90. Survived by 1s, 3gc, 5ggc. No further info.
- **Hillabrand, Audrey** (widow of Richard Hillabrand, 423<sup>rd</sup> bombardier, Earle Schafer crew; Richard died Dec 09 at 87), of East Islip, NY, has apparently died within the last year. They had no children. No further info.
- **Jackson, Betty DuBois**, widow of Travis DuBois (423<sup>rd</sup> radio operator, Harry Hill crew; Travis died Sep 89 at 66), of Waco, TX, died 26 Aug 09 at 83. Betty was a career elementary teacher and counselor. She held memberships in AAUW, Baylor Round Table, McLennan County Retired Teachers Association, and a 50-year member of Columbus Avenue Baptist. She was devoted to her family. Her lifelong passion was taking family photos, and collecting family history and memorabilia. Preceded in death by her first husband, Travis, she was survived by her husband Harold Jackson, 2c, 2gc.
- **Jang, Ruth**, widow of Harry Jang (367<sup>th</sup> navigator on George Mapes crew; Harry died 24 Dec 97), died 20 Jul 11 at 101 in Loma Linda, CA. Ruth was born in Korea, and was a registered nurse here for over 45 years. She and Harry were regulars at 306<sup>th</sup> reunions for years. Survived by unspecified number of children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren.
- **Mapes, Foncyne**, widow of George Mapes (367<sup>th</sup> pilot who died 13 Jan 01), of Stafford, TX, died 5 Nov 10 at 76. Foncyne and George were married 29 years. She was a Service Representative for Southwestern Bell and AT&T for 20+ years, and was a talented seamstress who made quilts and costumes for First United Methodist Church pageants, including a Frosty the Snowman costume for George for a Christmas pageant. For more than 25 years she was 'The Gardener' in and around the church, directing many seasons of vegetables grown for thousands of pounds of food for Inter-faith ministries to Fort Bend County needy families. She was a naturalist, camper, explorer, hiker, and fisherwoman; was devoted to her church and choir; and a loving care taker for George and her brother. Survived by 4c, 6gc.
- **O'Konski, Almeda**, widow of Adrian O'Konski (368<sup>th</sup> navigator on Walter Sumner crew; Adrian died 17 Sep 93 at 75), of Sturtevant, WI and formerly of Kewaunee, WI, died 11 Sep 2011 at 93. She was the aunt of 306<sup>th</sup> active participant Susan O'Konski. As a young woman, Almeda attended beauty school in Rapid City, SD, and worked there as a beautician for several years, meeting her future husband Adrian there. They married in Jan 45, and as the war ended returned to his hometown of Kewaunee, WI. She was a member of St Therese parish and active member of St Hedwig Rosary Society. Survived by 2c, 2gc, 7ggc.
- **Olmsted, Eva L**, wife of Walter Olmsted (369<sup>th</sup> tail gunner on Billy Casseday crew & Sqdn gunnery Sgt), of Williams, AZ, died 8 Jan 08, at 88. Survived by her husband of 62 years, Walter, 3c, 3gc.
- **Spence, Rachel**, died 28 Apr 11 in New Bern, NC, at 88. She graduated from University of Oxford in 39 with a degree in physiotherapy, and was a physical therapist at Rex Hospital, Raleigh. She and Daniel M Spence (Group communications & 368<sup>th</sup> cryptographer, who died Nov 08 at 91) were married 65 years. Survived by 3d, 5gc, 7ggc.

## Obituaries Not Recent; Not Previously Published (Arranged by Date of Death)

- **Groover, Ralph H**, 367<sup>th</sup> radio operator (John L Davis crew), 84, of Orlando, FL, died 14 Dec 09. The crew reported to Thurleigh 29 Aug 44. He stayed in the military for a career spanning three decades, reaching full colonel, and served in military intelligence, learning Russian and German. From the mid-70s, he had a career in Orlando real estate, and worked in varying areas of interest until he was 75. Survived by his wife of 57 years, Joanne, 4c, 8gc, 1ggs.
- **Grothe, Roy W**, 368<sup>th</sup> tail gunner (John Gassler crew), of Manchester, PA, died 11 Oct 09 at 88. His 26 missions at Thurleigh were 3 Nov 43 to 27 Mar 44. Post-war he worked at Cochran Brass Co. for 43 years, and later served as an elementary school's crossing guard. He was a member of Alert Fire Co. in Emigsville, VFW Susquehanna Post 2493 in Mt Wolf, and Pleasureville American Legion Post 799. Survived by Evelyn, his wife of 65 years, 2c, 5gc, 6ggc.
- **Smartt, Ernest Clifton Jr**, 368<sup>th</sup> radio operator (John M Kelly crew), longtime resident of Harvest, AL, just south of TN, died 3 Mar 09 at 86 in Fort Worth, TX, near his son. He was a carpenter, artist, and photographer who loved his family. He was predeceased by his wife Lee, 1s; and 1gd; survived by 2c, 9gc, 18ggc.
- **Dykstra, Tunis**, 367<sup>th</sup> ball turret gunner (crews of Eldon Burrell, & Robert L Cardon), of Brunswick, GA, died 27 Mar 08 at 84. He suffered severe neck injury when downed with Cardon 28 Sep 44 (Magdeburg). In Oct 06, he was preceded in death by his wife, Marge; survived by 6c. No further info.

**PLEASE SEND IN YOUR ADDRESS AND CONTACT INFORMATION CORRECTIONS. WE NEED EMAIL ADDRESSES ON EVERYONE WHO HAS ONE.**

Send corrections and additions to:  
 Barbara Neal, Secretary  
 P.O. Box 682530  
 Park City, UT 84068-2530  
 secretary@306bg.org

Obituaries continued from page 3

- **Edward ‘Ken’ Fox**, 369<sup>th</sup> engineer (crews of Robert Hoyt & John P Noack), died 17 Jun 07 in Martinsburg, PA at 87. From his 13<sup>th</sup> mission (Schweinfurt 14 Oct 43, with Noack) severe wounds he received resulted in his return to the US in early 44. Survived by Minnie, his wife of 62 years, 2c. No further info.
- **Griggs, Frederick**, 369<sup>th</sup> engineer (Lloyd Johns crew), died 7 Mar 06 in Baton Rouge, LA at 82. With Johns at Thurleigh, Griggs flew 29 missions 13 Apr to 16 Aug 44. Post-war, he was a software developer and salesman. Preceded in death by his wife, Una Marie and 1s; survived by 4s, 9gc, 10ggc
- **Kozlowski, Anthony**, 423<sup>rd</sup> First Aid man, from Beaver Co, PA, died in Ambridge there on 16 Jan 06 at 81. He arrived Thurleigh 1 Jul 43, and in early 44 was sent on temporary duty to 1<sup>st</sup> Bomb Div. No further info.
- **Weiland, Wilbur C**, 423<sup>rd</sup> pilot, of Orangeburg, SC, died 5 Jan 06 at 86. He arrived Thurleigh 3 Apr 44 and completed his tour in Jul 44. After their limping return to Kimbolton from the 15 Jun 44 Nantes mission, their number 3 propeller fell off at touch-down, slicing into the number 4 prop. Following six years of active duty, he stayed in the Reserves many years, retiring as LtCol. Post active duty he was an engineer for various companies. His wife Muriel survives, with their 4c, 8gc, and now 13ggc.
- **Polnick, Gilbert V**, 367 medical tech, who grew up in nearby Lee Co, TX, died 3 Jul 2002 at Schulenburg, TX at 82. He was single when he enlisted at Ft Sam Houston. No further info.
- **Justice, Walter R**, 367<sup>th</sup> engineer (George Mapes crew), died 27 Jan 02 in Rochester, NY at 80. He reported to Thurleigh 9 May 44 and flew at least through 13 Aug 44, being promoted to TSgt 2 Jun 44. No further info.
- **Stepenaskie, ‘Step’ Michael J**, an original, 367<sup>th</sup> radio operator for the group, died 5 Dec 01 at 86 in Oklahoma City, OK. At Thurleigh from Jul 43. He retired at Tinker AFB from the USAF as a Sr MSgt after serving 20+ years, living in Midwest City, OK. Afterward he worked for US Postal Service and the VA Hospital. He spoke fondly and often of the men with whom he served at Thurleigh. He enjoyed reading WWII history, crossword puzzles, a cold beer, and Polish home-cooking. Survived by his wife of 58 years, Nettie, 2c, 3gc, 7ggc.
- **Hrnciar, John**, 423<sup>rd</sup> bombardier (Thomas Hedley crew), who enlisted from NJ, died 20 Aug 01 in San Bernardino Co, CA at 79. He reported to Thurleigh 28 Nov 44. No further info.
- **Reed, W[illard] Dale**, 368<sup>th</sup> pilot and POW, died 30 Oct 2000 at 80. Long a resident of Hot Springs, AR, his vet gravemarker, showing he was a Major, is in Dayton, TN. Reed was POW at Stalag Luft 1 from downing 11 Jan 44 (Halberstadt mission) in which five of the crew were killed. He was a widower in our 94 and 99 directories. No further info.
- **Hill, Orville C**, 369<sup>th</sup> radio operator (various crews - originally on Craig Powell crew), longtime resident of Apollo, PA, died there 22 Jun 99 at 78. The crew likely arrived just prior to 2<sup>nd</sup> Schweinfurt mission on 14 Oct 43 (when Powell, as co-pilot for Willard H Lockyear, was taken POW). No further info.
- **Kelly, Gene M**, 368<sup>th</sup> radio operator, unknown crew(s), died 5 Jan 97 in Saint Louis, MO, at 72. Surviving him are his wife, Marilyn who reportedly is well and apparently travels often, 9c, 17gc, 7ggc. No further info.
- **Jones, Frank E Jr**, 423<sup>rd</sup> pilot & co-pilot (Thomas Hedley crew), whose crew mates knew he hailed from Hollywood, CA, was apparently the man of that exact full name who died in southern CA, in Temecula, Riverside County, on 27 Apr 1996 at 79. He arrived at Thurleigh 28 Nov 44 and was there at least through mid-Apr 45. No further info.
- **Fortson, William D**, 423<sup>rd</sup> pilot, died 13 Dec 1995 at 74. A 5<sup>th</sup>-cousin of 306<sup>th</sup> Board member Charles Neal, Fortson was a native of Pinellas Co, FL. He had served 1.5 years in the US Infantry before his 3.5 years in the Army Air Corps. He was at Thurleigh from 29 Apr 44 to Sep 44 when he completed his tour. Post-war he was a pilot for Pan American Airways. In Jul 43 he married Frances Bradbury in St Petersburg, FL; they had at least 2c.

- **Edmondson, Albert J**, 369<sup>th</sup> medic – First Aid man, died 4 Oct 95 in Berryville, AR, at 84. No further info.
- **Kalish, Michael**, 368<sup>th</sup> navigator (crews of John M Kelly and Charles M Bayless when downed), longtime resident of McLean, VA, is apparently the man of that name who died there 9 Sep 95 at age 74. POW from 25 Feb 44 (Augsburg mission) at Stalag Luft-1. His wife had preceded him in death. No further info.
- **Templeton, ‘Snuffy’ Harry W**, 368<sup>th</sup> ambulance driver, who was a lifelong resident of Sutter Co, CA died there 20 Jul 95 at 75. He was an original with the Group, at Thurleigh from 1 Jul 43. When he enlisted at Sacramento, he was single. No further info.
- **Fraley, Robert Edward**, 369<sup>th</sup> bombardier (various crews including Nathaniel Bliss and Gilbert E C VanderMarliere), died 6 Feb 93 in Tucson, AZ after just turning 72. His tour at Thurleigh was from 3 Apr to late Jul 44, during which time he was promoted to 1Lt. His USVA marker at National Memorial Cemetery, Phoenix, shows him as 1Lt who served in both WWII and Korea. No further info.
- **Uhrich, Raymond James**, 369<sup>th</sup> navigator (crew of William R James, who was checking out Gilbert E C VanderMarliere as pilot when downed), died 16 Dec 91; buried in Peabody, MA. Uhrich arrived at Thurleigh 18 Apr 44 with James’ crew, just 6 days before their downing 24 Apr (Oberpfaffenhofen mission); POW at Stalag Luft 3 Sagan-Silesia Bavaria (Moved to Nuremberg-Langwasser). He apparently stayed in the USAF, as his gravemarker shows he was a Major. As of 27 Nov 43, he was a single resident of San Francisco with one year of college when he initially enlisted as a Private in Air Corps at Ft Douglas, adjacent to the campus of Univ of Utah, Salt Lake City. The POW index listed him as 2Lt, resident of NE when captured. No further info.
- **O’Connell, Joseph G**, 368<sup>th</sup> ball turret gunner and POW (crews of Bruce McMahon, and W Dale Reed when downed), from Albany, NY, died 14 Oct 89 at 76. He reported to Thurleigh in Aug 43 with McMahon’s crew. He was POW at Stalag Luft 4 from downing 11 Jan 44 (Halberstadt mission). No further info.
- **Copeman, James R**, 369<sup>th</sup> waist gunner (crews of Craig Powell, Wm R James, & Gilbert VanderMarliere when downed), of Irwin, PA, died 10 Jul 89 at 71. He was POW from 24 Apr 44 (Oberpfaffenhofen mission) held at Stalag 17B. No further info.
- **Minor, Eugene**, 369<sup>th</sup> radio operator (crew of Lloyd Johns), apparently died 17 May 89. Post-war he returned to college to complete his final year studying for the ministry. He then went to Mexico, serving as a missionary. No further info.
- **Arrison, Glenn D**, 423<sup>rd</sup> pilot (& co-pilot pictured with Wilbur Weiland crew), died in Dec 88 in St Petersburg, FL at 69. He completed his Thurleigh tour 31 Jul 44. No further info. The Secretary would welcome info re who was on Arrison’s crew and when they arrived at Thurleigh.
- **Canedy, William F**, 367<sup>th</sup> engineer (George Mapes crew), died in Jul 88 in Greenfield, MA, at 67. He reported to Thurleigh 9 May 44 and flew at least through 2 Sep 44, being promoted to TSgt 2 Jun 44. No further info.
- **Lastinger, Walter W**, 369<sup>th</sup> tail gunner & POW (Craig Powell crew; with William R James who was checking out Gilbert E C VanderMarliere when downed), who was born in GA and enlisted from FL, died 13 Feb 84 at 66. POW from 24 Apr 44 (Oberpfaffenhofen mission) at Stalag 17-B Braunau Gneikendorf near Krems Austria. No further info.
- **Henley, Billy J**, 367<sup>th</sup> tail & waist gunner (James Butler crew), is apparently the man of that name who had been a TX insurance clerk prior to enlistment, and who died in Jan 84 in San Augustine, TX at 61. The crew completed 28 missions Feb 45 to Feb 46. No further info.
- **Daniels, Richard L**, 369<sup>th</sup> bombardier and POW (Howard Snyder crew on ‘Susan Ruth’), native of NJ, died 20 Sep 83 at 63. Reported to Thurleigh 21 Oct 43; POW from 8 Feb 44 (Frankfurt mission) held by Germany at Oflag 9A/H Spangenberg-Kassel Hessen-Nassau, Prussia. Survived by his pre-War wife, Virginia, until 31 Jan 91; they had 13c of whom several have died. No further info.
- **Trettin, Harold**, 369 First Aid man, native of MN, died in Minneapolis 20 Apr 79 at 65; buried at Ft Snelling National Cemetery there. From Social Security, we can tell he was a long-time or retired railroad worker. No further info.
- **Sumner, Walter H**, 368<sup>th</sup> pilot, a native of San Diego, died 15 Sep 75 at the VA Hospital in Los Angeles, CA. He was at Thurleigh from 15 Jun to 12 Oct of 44; Jan-Mar 45 he was at Hendricks Field, FL flying B-17s and B-29s; Apr-Aug 45 in Alamogordo, NM with 98<sup>th</sup> BG (heavy), 345<sup>th</sup> Sq. In 51 was Squadron Pilot at McCord, WA flying C-54s. Post-military, he worked in the insurance and newspaper businesses and struggled with a long illness from which he died. Survived by 2d, one of whom died in 2000; 1gs.

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## Plan to Attend the Savannah Reunion at the Marriott Savannah Riverfront October 25-28, 2012

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**See the Winter 2012 Echoes for Details**

*Obituaries continued on page 7*

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Warbird continued from page 1

### Development

The first production B-17 was the Model 299M or B-17B; however, this version of the B-17 was significant mainly as a stepping stone for B-17Cs and Ds. On July 21, 1940, the B-17C had its first flight. Its design included such improvements as self-sealing fuel tanks, armor, and a modified bottom gun position. The B-17C would be the first of the B-17 series to see combat. However, it did so not as an American plane but in the service of the Royal Air Force (RAF).

Before entering the war, the US provided twenty B-17Cs to the RAF for use as trainers. In need of heavy bombers, the RAF sent these B-17s (designated as Fortress Is by the British) on high-altitude bombing missions into Europe, the first being against Wilhelmshaven, Germany on July 8, 1941. The results were poor. At extreme altitude, the Fortresses experienced mechanical problems due to the frigid air above 30,000 feet. Additionally, bombing accuracy was terrible; this was partially due to the fact that the cautious Americans had removed the mythically effective and extremely secret Norden bombsights from the Fortresses sent to the British. Whatever the case, the first appearance of the B-17 in combat was not encouraging, demonstrating some of the plane's weaknesses that desperately needed modification. Some of these modifications were ordered as early as May, 1940 when Colonel Oliver Fields demanded that Boeing incorporate powered gun turrets and a tail gunner position for the B-17E. But the resulting plane would, unfortunately, arrive too late to replace all of the B-17Cs and Ds in use by Americans in the Pacific Theatre.

The B-17E was a very distinct from its predecessors. According to an unknown pilot, "We built the early models of the Flying Fortresses, from old 299 up through the B-17D, as defensive airplanes. They were to protect our shores, to defend the nation. All that changed with the new B-17E. Now, there was a weapon that was offensive all the way."

The Model 299-O that would serve as the basis for the B-17Es, Fs, and Gs included larger tail surfaces (and a distinctive dorsal fin), powered turrets on the top and bottom of the aircraft, and a tail turret. This dramatically changed aircraft was, according to aircraft historian Peter Bowers, "the first, true strategic bomber." Delivery of the B-17E commenced in September, 1941, and, on August 17, 1942, several of these planes were sent on a mission to Rouen, France in the first American raid in the European Theatre.

But even before September, 1941, engineers were working on a new version of the B-17 that would incorporate over four-hundred improvements. Though the B-17F would not be the last version of the plane, that later G model would not improve performance, making the F model the highest performing version of the B-17. The improved B-17Fs quickly replaced the B-17Es. Though some of the 3,405 B-17Fs would serve in the Pacific, they operated primarily in Europe and North Africa. Unfortunately, the B-17F had a weakness: like the E model, its lack of armament in the nose made it vulnerable to head-on attacks.

Between the F and G models, there was an odd off-shoot of the B-17: the YB-40. In Europe, B-17s were getting shot down by the German Air Force (the Luftwaffe) in alarming numbers; this was partially due to the lack of an escort fighter that could accompany the long-range bombers all the way to their targets. The XB-40, essentially a B-17 with heavier armament and armor, was born in an attempt to fill this defensive gap. The aircraft underwent testing in November, 1942, and then went to Wright Field where the Army approved a service-test version of the plane (meriting the new designation YB-40). This plane carried more than 11,000 rounds of ammunition (compared to 3,900 in early B-17Fs and 4,625 in early B-17Gs). Unfortunately, the YB-40 failed because the added weaponry and armor made it too heavy to keep up with the B-17s once they had jettisoned their bombs.

Nevertheless, the YB-40 did make at least two contributions to the air war. First, the design helped develop a chin turret that would be used on some B-17Fs and all B-17Gs in an effort to discourage head-on attacks by enemy fighters. And second, the YB-40 undermined a German tactic of using captured B-17s to lure American aircraft away from their formations into Luftwaffe traps. Upon seeing a straggling B-17, a YB-40 left its formation and came alongside the other aircraft; after confirming that the straggler was indeed a German B-17, the YB-40, with its dramatically increased armament, opened fire, discouraging further German use of the tactic.

First flying on May 21, 1943, the B-17G incorporated a final solution to the problem of head on attacks: a turret mounted under the nose of the aircraft. Perhaps even more striking visually, though, was the fact that from January, 1944, production B-17s no longer had camouflage paint; while this modification improved performance by reducing weight, it also concerned airmen who thought that the bright silver aircraft would be easy targets. However, combat experience quickly showed this fear to be unfounded. This plane would be the last and most numerous production version of the B-17. Some 8,670 B-17Gs were built: 4,025 by Boeing, 2,250 by Vega, and 2,395 by Douglas.

The B-17 was a reliable aircraft that would be used in various roles besides bombing both during and after World War II. Several B-17s were converted to search-and-rescue planes able to carry and drop lifeboats. Others were used in reconnaissance, testing, transport, and fire-fighting roles that necessitated at least some design modifications. In 1943, a B-17E became General Douglas MacArthur's personal transport. Modest conversions (often with new designations) were common for the B-17, testifying to the adaptability and reliability of the aircraft. However, these modified versions are little more than side-notes in the legacy of the B-17 that was forged in the skies of World War II.

### Deployment

The B-17's role in the Pacific Theatre of Operations literally began on the first day of the war. On December 7, 1941, as Pearl Harbor and the surrounding airfields were being attacked by Japanese planes, twelve B-17s were completing their journey from the continent to Oahu. Unarmed, the Fortresses were unable to fight back when they were attacked by Japanese aircraft; even so, only one B-17 was destroyed while others were damaged in the air or in rough landings on golf courses. Though the B-17 would have a stunted career in the Pacific, it would serve in many types of missions including strafing, strategic bombing, and, most significantly, reconnaissance.

At the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor, there were thirty-five B-17s from the 19<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group stationed in the Philippines: nineteen at Clark Field and sixteen at Del Monte. Within hours of the attack on Pearl Harbor, both of these airfields came



*B17E, an early version of the Flying Fortress using in training the first bombardment groups assigned to the Eighth Air Force in 1942. Later the F model quickly replaced the E model in training and soon the early operational bomb groups fielded large numbers of the F model for missions in 1942-1943. Soon the G model became the standard until the end of the war in 1945. Photograph courtesy U.S. Air Force.*

under attack, with Clark Field losing all but two of its B-17s and one of the B-17s at Del Monte taking heavy damage. For several days, the 19<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group would attempt to fight off the invading Japanese forces. The Fortresses were used in low-level attack runs on disembarking Japanese troops, using machine guns to harry the enemy in a manner for which the B-17 had never been designed. The use of the B-17s to rake troops and the planes' resilience to the lightly armed Japanese fighters caused the Japanese to refer to them as "four-engined all purpose fighters." But neither the "fighters" nor all the American efforts in the Philippines were able to withstand the Japanese. As the islands fell under the invaders' might, the 19<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, beginning on December 17, 1942, began to leave for Australia.

Early actions of B-17Cs and Ds in the Pacific quickly demonstrated weaknesses in the models, weaknesses that would eventually be corrected. One such weakness was the lack of protection from the rear which would be corrected by the addition of a tail gunner in the B-17E. The appearance of the B-17E confused Japanese pilots as to the armaments of the B-17; American airmen in Cs and Ds augmented this confusion by poking black-painted sticks out of the rear of their aircraft. But the Fortresses were still vulnerable to frontal attacks, leading to field modifications that added forward firepower and eventually to the B-17G.

According to historian Gene Eric Salecker, "When hitting a stationary target, the Flying Fortress could not be beat." However, the Pacific Theatre was filled with ships and convoys, mobile targets that airmen had found more difficult to destroy. On December 10, 1941, the B-17 had flown its first American bombing mission against Japanese ships off of the Philippines and had dismally failed, hitting perhaps two vessels. In the epic Battle of Midway, the Fortress showed a similar inability to hit enemy shipping, again scoring perhaps two hits. Despite this lack of results, the B-17 did engender fear, scattering the Japanese fleet at Midway and making the carriers vulnerable to dive-bomber attacks. Salecker writes that "Japanese naval commanders had a natural fear and a high degree of respect for the Flying Fortress." Still, the overall performance of the B-17 in bombing moving targets was unimpressive.

In an effort to improve bombing effectiveness against shipping, General George Kenney and his aide Major Bill Benn developed a new kind of bombing called "skip bombing." This tactic required bombers such as B-17s and B-25s to fly at low altitude (about two-hundred feet) at speeds above two-hundred miles per hour and release several 500- or 1,000-pound bombs with delay-fuses only sixty to three-hundred feet from the ship. These bombs would literally skip along the surface of the water until they hit the target. According to Kenney, "In the few seconds remaining [before the bomb went off], the bomb should sink just about far enough so that when it went off, it would blow the bottom out of the ship." Meanwhile, the bomber would gain enough distance from the ship to avoid being damaged by its own bombs. The new tactic became an effective and often-used trick, improving the bombers' ability to disrupt enemy shipping. James T. Murphy, a B-17 pilot, recalled an instance of skip bombing:

When we had dropped our bombs on the second ship, [my crew] yelled, "Pull up! Pull up!" I did and just cleared the mast of the second ship. Our tail gunner said we missed its tower by five or ten feet. Our bottom turret gunner said it was so close he just closed his eyes and prayed.

Fortunately, the tactic harried enemy shipping in addition to getting on the airmen's nerves. But even with the newfound potential of skip-bombing, the B-17's use as a bomber in the Pacific Theatre was becoming increasingly limited. The Fortress proved far more useful as a rugged reconnaissance platform than as a bomber, and this strength, ironically, would lead to its being phased out of the Pacific Theatre.

In the Pacific Theatre, reconnaissance was critical. It was relatively easy to hide entire fleets in the vast expanses of the world's largest ocean, a fact that Japan had proven with its attack on Pearl Harbor. America needed a way to spot enemy fleets from long distances. The B-17, with its long range and heavy armaments and armor, proved effective in this reconnaissance role. Battles such as Guadalcanal and Midway demonstrated what Salecker calls "the perfect use of the B-17 in the Pacific," namely, reconnaissance. Lieutenant General Hubert Harmon was frustrated that the B-17 was not being used for its original purpose of bombing (especially after November, 1942), but his complaints were undercut by official Navy praise of the Fortress for its scouting abilities in the Battles of Santa Cruz Islands and Guadalcanal.

As the war in the Pacific turned in favor of the Allies, the US military began to use a strategy in which it would only attempt to take islands that were considered militarily important. This "island hopping" campaign meant that combat often occurred far from the nearest airfield, a significant problem for the B-17's limited range. Gradually, the Navy began to acquire PB4Ys, Navy versions of the Consolidated B-24 Liberators. With its longer range, the PB4Y was better suited to the reconnaissance mis-

sions that had formerly been assigned to the B-17, leading to the end of the B-17 in the Pacific. By the end of 1943, the B-17 was phased out of the Pacific Theatre.

Beyond the Pacific, the Flying Fortress was also used in the invasion of North Africa (Operation Torch) in November, 1942 and continued to see action in North Africa and Italy. Operations in the Mediterranean Theatre were primarily tactical until the creation of the Fifteenth Air Force on October 30, 1943. Operating from Foggia, Italy, the Fifteenth AF could launch raids against Germany. In February, 1944, the Fifteenth AF would participate in the Allied air offensive now known as "Big Week," losing more than thirty B-17s. While the sacrifices of the Fifteenth AF in Big Week were tragic, they were only a fraction of the losses of the Eighth Air Force operating out of England: 105 B-17s and 53 B-24s. The men who flew the B-17 in the Pacific and Mediterranean Theatres deserve remembrance, but the Fortress is most remembered for its participation in the strategic bombing of Fortress Europe.

The story of the B-17's combat operations in Europe is closely tied to that of the theory and practice of strategic bombing. This theory was developed in the inter-war years by men such as Giulio Douhet, Hugh Trenchard, and, most importantly for the US, William "Billy" Mitchell. According to strategic bombing theory, bombers could be used decisively to destroy an enemy's cities and civilians, rendering army and navy power unnecessary. During the 1930s, American theorists refined the idea of strategic bombing; their version would necessitate unescorted, self-defending bombers destroying very specific targets in order to cripple the enemy's economy. Because of the precision needed for this strategy, the Americans would have to operate in daylight to maximize the bombardiers' visibility. It was this theory that the Eighth AF would attempt to put into practice.

As previously mentioned, the Eighth AF began operations by sending a small force of B-17Es to attack Rouen, France on August 17, 1942; the bombers experienced no losses on this first mission. But as the bombers began to operate outside the range of their escort fighters, losses began to mount; uninhibited by Allied escort, German fighters could now pounce on the lumbering heavy bombers. The B-17s faced attack by Messerschmitt Bf 109s and heavily-armed Focke-Wulf 190s. Like the Japanese, the Germans favored head-on attacks to avoid the B-17's tail turret and capitalize on the light forward armament.

The bombers of the Eighth AF flew in formations designed to provide mutual protection. Colonel Curtis LeMay, commanding officer of the 305<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, refined these formations in an effort to provide even greater mutual support and improve bombing results. The German fighter pilots feared these formations that could regularly bring several .50-caliber machine guns to bear on a single fighter. To compensate, Luftwaffe aircraft were often equipped with heavy armor and armament (including rockets in some cases) that made them vulnerable to more maneuverable escort fighters. However, in the early days of the European air war, these escort fighters were often non-existent.

Late 1943 would clearly demonstrate the necessity of long-range escort fighters. On August 17, 1943, sixty B-17s were destroyed during an attack on Schweinfurt, Germany. High-command had chosen to target Schweinfurt for its ball bearing plants which were thought to be vital to the German war machine. Elmer Bendiner, a navigator in the Eighth AF, later wrote, "The battle we were to fight that day was meant to be a vindication of the concept of strategic bombing." In his book *The Fall of Fortresses*, he seems to resent the fact that this theory would be proven or disproven by his life or death. In only four missions in October, the Eighth AF lost 148 bombers including 60 during another raid on Schweinfurt on October 14. Of the fighter opposition on the second Schweinfurt mission, Bendiner writes, "Never had we seen so many Germans in the sky at one time, and never had their attacks seemed so well coordinated." Perhaps even more frustrating, the attacks against the ball bearing industry did not seem to inhibit the German ability to wage war. Summarizing the Schweinfurt raids, Donald Miller grimly states, "American air planners needlessly sacrificed the lives of young men who were unable to fully appreciate the desperate nature of their missions." Such is the legacy of Schweinfurt.

One reaction to the devastation that occurred beyond the range of fighter escorts was experimentation with the B-40. As mentioned above, the heavily armed B-40 would hopefully provide long range protection for the bombers. But the idea had failed by August, 1943, and the YB-40s were removed from combat. What the Eighth AF really needed to continue its bombing campaign were fighters that could protect the B-17s and B-24s all the way to their targets, fighters that many "experts" believed to be impossible to develop.

But the experts were proven wrong. Improvements to fighters such as the Lockheed P-38 Lightning, the Republic P-47 Thunderbolt, and the North American P-51 Mustang allowed for increased protection for the heavy bombers. By December, 1943, these long-range fighters had ensured the continuance of America's strategic bombing campaign. The P-51 was particularly adept in these long-range missions. Historians disagree on the importance of the famous Mustang. Donald Miller says of the plane, "[the invasion of Normandy] was made possible by the introduction into the war of an air machine few believed could be built," but Kenneth P. Werrell describes it as "important, although overrated." Whatever the case, these long-range fighters would provide critical protection against the Luftwaffe.

In February, 1944, B-17s from the Eighth AF participated in a massive campaign known to history simply as "Big Week." As previously described, from February 24-28, bombers from both the Eighth AF and the Fifteenth AF attacked German fighter production. Despite heavy losses, Big Week proved the effectiveness of strategic bombing. Shortly thereafter, the Eighth AF turned its attention to transportation and, much to the frustration of the Luftwaffe, Germany's oil industry. The lack of fuel meant limiting both combat and training: Luftwaffe pilots often had less than seventy-five hours of flight time before entering combat. Strategic bombing and the B-17 had dealt a heavy blow to Germany's ability to make war. By April, 1944, the Allies had won the battle for air superiority.

Air superiority would prove an important factor in Operation Overlord, the Allied invasion of France. Rather than continue to bomb strategic targets, the Eighth AF focused on more tactical targets in support of the Allied troops now pouring into northern France. By the end of the summer of 1944, the bombers had returned to strategic missions, and, on October 2, the Eighth AF launched 836 B-17s and 296 B-24s in its first thousand-plane raid against targets in Cologne and Kassel, Germany. Severely crippled, the Luftwaffe presented far less of a threat to the heavy bombers. As the war in Europe drew to a close, the Eighth AF switched to tactical

missions for lack of strategic targets.

The Third Reich was on the brink of destruction. Anglo-American troops, having defeated Germany in the Battle of the Bulge during the winter of 1944-45, were continuing to advance, and another Allied force was fighting through Italy. Meanwhile, Soviet troops were approaching Berlin from the east. The last combat mission for Eighth AF B-17s came on April 25, 1945 when 307 planes attacked airfields in Czechoslovakia. A few weeks later, on May 8, 1945, Germany surrendered. By "V-E Day," 106 English-based squadrons and 24 Italian-based squadrons were using some 2,800 B-17s. Between them, the Eighth AF and the Fifteenth AF had lost 8,237 bombers and 29,000 crewmen killed in action (compared to 20,000 US Marines in the entire war). The victory in Europe had come at a high cost.

The American theory of strategic bombing that the B-17 was supposed to carry into practice had severely shifted. Clouds and smoke had made precision bombing difficult and sometimes impossible. Also, the theorists had severely over-estimated the ability of bombers to penetrate enemy airspace without taking heavy losses. However, destroying specific elements of the German economy had indeed proven effective; it had simply taken a long time to determine what those elements were. Raids on ball bearing plants had less effect than did later attacks on Germany's oil industry and transportation system. But in one aspect, the visions of bombing campaigns had proven extremely incorrect: air power had not rendered naval and ground forces obsolete as demonstrated by Operation Overlord.

Though various entities would continue to use the B-17 in such fields as transportation and fire fighting, the B-17s most prominent use, as a strategic bomber, had come to a close. The B-17 had journeyed a long way since its birth in 1934 as the Model 299. The hard lessons of combat had brought about dramatic changes (such as the addition of eight machine guns), continually making the plane more adept in its important role in the strategic bombing campaign. During World War II, the B-17 was outnumbered by the B-24, yet still managed to drop a greater tonnage of bombs. It had shown itself to be rugged and adaptable, serving in roles for which it had never been designed. Gene Salecker says of the Flying Fortress, "The B-17 was the most rugged bomber flown in any theater in World War II and would always be regarded with awe and admiration as the rightful 'Queen of the Sky.'"



Top: Paper Doll, a B-17G assigned to the 306th Bomb Group at Thurleigh, receives some well deserved maintenance following a mission over occupied Europe, circa 1943-1944. Photograph courtesy 306th Historical Archives. Below: Boeing B-17s of the Eighth Air Force lined up and waiting for combat as replacements for strategic bombers, England. Photograph courtesy East Anglia Air War Archives.



Visit the 306th Web

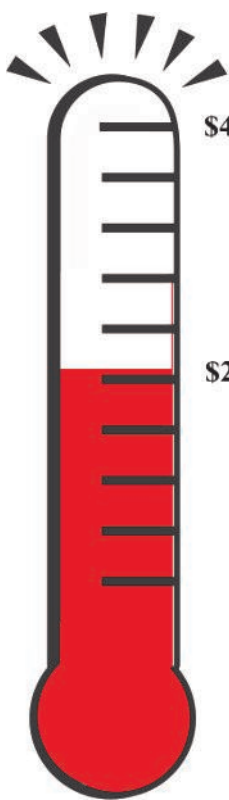
[www.306bg.org](http://www.306bg.org)

Obituaries continued from page 4

- **Bloedel, Donald G**, 423<sup>rd</sup> waist gunner (Wallace W Wood crew), died in Dec 71 at age 46. No further info.
- **Frey, Raymond**, 423<sup>rd</sup> ball-turret gunner (William H Baker crew), native of MI, died at 48 in a vehicle accident in Fremont, MI, on 16 Aug 70. His crew arrived Thurleigh 2 Mar 45, so he also served in the mapping Casey Jones Project before heading home. Post-war received his private pilot's license and flew for several years; was employed at Wolverine Express in Grand Rapids, MI, and farmed in Fremont, MI in his off time. In July 43 had married Eldora Shoemaker at AAF base in Childress, TX. Survived by Eldora until July 96; 2d, and now 6gc, 7ggc.
- **Brockway, Fred A**, 423<sup>rd</sup> navigator (Wilbur Weiland crew), died 11 Mar 65 at 47 in an auto crash at Castle Rock, CO. He arrived at Thurleigh 3 Apr 44 and completed his tour in Jul 44. No further info.
- **Armstrong, Halley**, 352nd Service Sq medical tech, died in Dec 64 at 54 in TX. No further info.
- **Kemberling, Clifford C**, 368<sup>th</sup> ball-turret gunner (Marlen Reber crew), who was last known to be a resident of Branson, MO, died 24 Oct 64 at 51. He was an original vet of the Group, and was the 48<sup>th</sup> enlisted man to complete a tour at Thurleigh; he departed 1 Dec 43. No further info.

- **McQuinn, Vernon A**, 423<sup>rd</sup> waist gunner (Wilbur Weiland crew), who enlisted at Ft Leavenworth, KS, died at 30 on 7 Apr 52, and was buried in Wichita. The crew reached Thurleigh 3 Apr 44; completed tour in Jul 44. From his vet marker, we know that McQuinn, either before or after that, also flew in the 555<sup>th</sup> Bomb Sq, part of the 386<sup>th</sup> BG (Medium). He was married when he enlisted; no further info. [The 386<sup>th</sup> BG was constituted 15 Nov 42, activated 1 Dec 42 with B-26s, moved to England Jun 43 and was with the 8th AF at Snetterton Heath and Boxted before Sep 43, when it was at Great Dunmow; it became part of 9<sup>th</sup> AF in Oct 43, and converted to A-26s shortly after the Ardennes campaign; in Jun 45 it was redesignated 386<sup>th</sup> BG (Light) and returned to the US, Jul-Aug; inactivated Nov 45; redesignated 386<sup>th</sup> Fighter-Bomber Group activated Apr 56 and assigned to Tactical Air Command]
- **Wilkins, Bertram** (367th togglier, Shelby Scott crew), of TX, was KIA at age 26 (unmarried), on 29 Dec 50 in Korea, where he was pilot in the 51st Fighter Interceptor Group. He had 21 missions in WWII with the 306th. 1st Lt Wilkins was awarded the Purple Heart, the Korean Service Medal, the United Nations Service Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, the Korean Presidential Unit Citation and the Republic of Korea War Service Medal.
- **Winchell, Ford L** (369th tail gunner, Richard D Adams crew), from OH, died 23 Mar 50 of tuberculosis at 32. He was an original member of 306th BG. POW from the Group's third mission 8 Nov 42 (Lille), at Stalag 3. No other info.

**Moving the 306th Memorial Fund**



\$4,550 ~ Our Goal

\$2,525 ~ Raised

**Rockwell Urges 306th Families to Continue to Donate**

At San Diego in October, the 306th BGA Board of Directors voted to fund the balance needed to move the 306th Memorial at Thurleigh. Plans are now underway to move the Memorial from its present location outside the former base location and position it at the 306th BG Memorial Museum complex. See the stories on this project in the last two issues of Echoes (April and July 2011).

In order to expedite the work to accomplish this move and assist Ralph Franklin in his management of the project, the Board voted to use treasury funds to complete the funding.

Rocky Rockwell suggested that families who have not done so by now, can still donate to the project, lessening the amount needed to draw from the 306th BGA treasury. Send all donations to our treasurer, Joel LaBo. See page 2 for Joel's contact information.



*The Veteran's Roundtable made its appearance at San Diego. 306th BG veterans Norm Armbrust, Bill Houlihan, and Walt Rozett told stories of their experiences at Thurleigh and answered questions from the audience. The session was moderated by Dr. Vernon L. Williams. Plans are underway to have three or four veteran's roundtables at Savannah in October 2012. Photograph courtesy of Charles Neal.*



*Front row: Robert Carleton, Walter Olmsted, Bill Houlihan, Ken Wait, Epifanio Campos, Don Snook, Walt Rozett, Bob Hitchcock, Richard Brown. Back row: "J.J." John J Gaydosh, Allan Lawson, Stan Burns, Joe Hammer, 'Paddy' Padraic Evans, John Young, 'Dave' E D Woellner, Wayne Stellish, 'Ron' Roland Lissner, Norm Armbrust, 'Mickey' William Griffin. Photograph courtesy of Charles Neal. More reunion photographs will appear in the next Winter 2012 issue.*



**Plan to Attend the Savannah Reunion at the Marriott Savannah Riverfront October 25-28, 2012**

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See the Winter 2012 Echoes for Details

# Museum Notes

## Thurleigh Airfield 306th Bomb Group Museum

### This Year's Story and Plans for the Next

By **Ralph Franklin**

Keysoe, England

There is a saying, often used, 'time flies when you are having fun'. This is very true for Daphne & I, as it seems only a short time since I was standing before you at our get-together in Washington and building up more great memories of many wonderful times we have spent with the 306 family, this being our 22<sup>nd</sup> consecutive time we have travelled the miles to be with you all. Believe me, friends, this one seems to be one heck of a trip – I think we must be getting old! But believe me, we consider it has all been worth the effort, as we have had such great times with you people and are very proud to count you all amongst our circle of friends.

Of course, we now have additional opportunities to meet many others associated with the 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group when they visit us at the museum. You may not be aware, but next year we are delighted to announce it will be our 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of opening. Again, time flies when you are having fun seems to be relevant here. The time has flown, we have fun but the hard work is still there. We do have our moments of disagreement but in the main, we work as a team and this has seen us through this long period of time and when many of our visitors have questioned how we are able to do it, I inform them it is dedication to the 306<sup>th</sup> members and their families, this is something we intend to do for many years to come.

There are, of course, a few disappointments along the way, one in particular earlier this year, being the cancellation of Vernon's proposed tour 'Return of the Heroes One Last Time' due to lack of interest for one reason or another. I started working on my plans as soon as I returned from the Washington reunion. Talking to some of you at the Washington reunion who came over in 1992 for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, it soon became apparent you would prefer the main event to be on the airfield. I started to make arrangements for such a day, and evening in the form of a small flying display, wartime military vehicle groups agreed to join us for the day. Also, a World War II re-enactment group agreed to give a display. Mobile food outlets were to be onsite during the daytime events. For the evening dance, I booked the 18-piece Mainline Big Band, who I know re-create the Miller sound very well. A catering company had been booked to provide the food for the evening.

On 10<sup>th</sup> February, I called Vernon, in a very happy mood, to inform him all was looking great for a very good event. Then the flack hit me with his response, 'I am so sorry Ralph, I had to cancel yesterday, as I do not have enough bookings to make the tour viable'. To say the least, I was very disappointed as I think we were in for a good time. I sat down with a large Jack Daniels, the next day I started to ring round, first to apologize, then to cancel all my bookings, another Jack Daniels helped to ease my disappointment.

As with all disappointments in life, you have to overcome them and continue as before. Once again, we are having a good year with visitors from many parts of the world, with some returning for a second and third time, you know friends, the 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group still lives on in the UK, in particular at Thurleigh, Bedfordshire.

One very special couple visited this year – they were the daughter and son-in-law of Ralph and Nell Bordner, as many of you know, we've built up a very strong family relationship with the Bordner and Franklin families over many years and it was a sheer delight to have Tom and Lilian staying with us for a few days. It was Tom's first visit to our museum and as he said afterwards, he was both surprised and amazed at the amount and quality of our exhibits. This, in some small way, will make up for our sadness and disappointment with not being able to travel to Illinois to stay a while with Ralph and Nell, something we have always done on previous reunions. In recent years, Ralph has been resident in a nursing home, but we have been able to collect him and take him home on a daily basis, unfortunately earlier in the year, Nell developed back problems. She has had an operation, which has left her somewhat immobile. It has been very difficult in convincing her we would not be able visit with them this year. Tom and Lilian have supported us in our decision.

As I say, this year's visitors have been many and various, we are pleased with the number of school children we are getting now. Also, many more disabled visitors – our displays are all at ground level and our museum is registered as 'wheelchair-friendly'. This helps tremendously. Other coach parties have been from various types of day centres, we have had cultural tours, archaeological and history societies, heritage groups and of course military old comrade groups. These usually develop into some very interesting discussions and wonderful stories. This season we have welcomed a Vintage Motorcycle Club, with about 80 motorcycles filling our car park. We also had a Vintage Vehicle Organization. All their members arrived in a period London double decker bus. We had a great evening with them. It has been a great year for us. Apart from the Bordner family, I must mention two or three others that come to mind. Literally, a flying visit by Marti Wegener, a Delta Airlines pilot flew to England on April 14<sup>th</sup> after travelling from London, I arranged to meet him from Bedford Train Station early next day. We had a few hours at the museum, I then transported him back to the station, he travelled to Heathrow from where he flew back to the States. Marti's dad was a pilot with the 367<sup>th</sup>, Bill Griffin being his copilot. James Kirkpatrick, his wife and two friends were also amongst our visitors. James' dad was a 369<sup>th</sup> navigator, I believe with the Jack Spaulding crew. One other I will mention is Guy Consolmagno – his dad went down on 5<sup>th</sup> April 1943. His dad Joe was a navigator in the 367<sup>th</sup> crew of Lt Fisher.

We were delighted recently when we had a call from the Pentagon, wishing to set up a visit for one of their 3\* member of staff to visit the museum, the letter was followed by an email to confirm all was genuine. Just an idea of the wide range of visitors we are getting now.

On June 25<sup>th</sup>, we were asked if we would be prepared to put on a display to mark the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Thurleigh Sports and Social Club. We reluctantly agreed, it meant a lot of additional work for us, we did manage to put on a good show and the local reporters gave us a lot of praise. From our point of view, we learned a lot, 'We will not do such a thing again'.

One further item I would like to bring to your attention is the moving of the Group Memorial from its current site to the Museum site on the airfield. I have spoken to the Palmer organization. They would welcome such a move. This idea has been agreed by your Board of Directors. I have acquired two price quotes from different stone masons, they were sent to Joel earlier in the year, I have not yet received any type of reply. The former 40<sup>th</sup> Combat Wing site has been demolished for some time now. It is totally overgrown with rubbish. Daphne and I are working hard to keep our area looking good. It is becoming more difficult as time passes, with that awful site behind it. To add to this, the local vandals are very busy at nights – we are working even harder to clear our site of the nasties they leave behind. These include such things as food packaging, paper, needles, condoms, drink bottles and cans. Believe me, folks, it is very unpleasant work at times. We are just managing to keep on top of the situation at the moment, as we are often told by passers-by, we always keep it looking so nice and as we have for the past 30 years, we will continue to do so. Hopefully, it will be possible to get it moved in the very near future, to fit in nicely with an event we will be able to celebrate next year.

As I said at the beginning, next year will mark our 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of opening our museum. This will mean a lot to Daphne and I, and indeed our family. As I have said before, Jonathan has always said he's sure we sleep at the museum, as he never seems to pass the place when we're not doing something onsite. We opened the museum in July 2002 and we are in the process of making plans to celebrate the occasion in July next year. A situation has now arisen, whereby we received a request from the East Anglian Air Ambulance organization for permission to hold a fundraising event at our museum site on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> July 2012. We have agreed to combine both events in a themed event marking not only our 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, but also the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 306<sup>th</sup> bomb group at Thurleigh. Our vision for the day is to have an assembly of historic military and classic vehicles. If we are able to secure sponsorship, we hope to get the B17 Sally-B. I mention this here, in the hope that if any of you are planning a trip to England next year, you are able to pay us a visit at this event on the 8<sup>th</sup> July.

In closing, can I say what a pleasure it is to be with you for yet another wonderful reunion and to say how honoured I have been to serve you all these years. As many of you know, our association with the group began in 1942/43 when the 306<sup>th</sup> arrived in Thurleigh. Things were a little different then, as my family only lived less than a mile from the base, where my brother and I had some great times and received better food than we did on the meager rations we were getting in war-torn England. The war came to an end; the old base was developed to become the major R & D airfield in the country. During this time, I was doing my time in the RAF. I was demobbed in 1955 and having trained in radar in the air force, I was able to acquire work in air traffic, where I spent the next 38 years, until the establishment closed in 1994. It was during this time that I became your representative in the UK – I am still enjoying that position today, now with the addition of the museum. Yes, friends, it has been a wonderful association with the group and somewhere along the way, I met a little lady, who became my wife and as I mentioned earlier, we still work as a team and this year, we celebrated our 58<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary. Thank you for being our friends over so many years and in the words of Vera Lynn's famous wartime song "We'll Meet Again" – so until then, God bless you all and thanks for listening. ✈



Ralph and Daphne Franklin appear to be enjoying old and new friends while others in the background are busy working the registration desk or taking a tour back through time as they peruse the exhibits and displays scattered throughout the hospitality room. Photograph courtesy of Charles Neal. ✈