

ALTON A. KESTER, P.E.  
CONSULTING ENGINEER - STRUCTURAL  
23 POCONO DRIVE  
PITTSBURGH, PA. 15220  
412 - 921-7256

Oct. 13, 1993

Dear Russell,

This is just a short note to let you know how much my wife and I have enjoyed these past three 306th Reunions (starting with 1991). As you know, prior to my retirement in 1991, I was too busy travelling around the world and running my business to reserve even 3 or 4 days for Reunion attending. Any vacation time I had was reserved for my family. And, if a vacation could be worked into a business trip (it seems that it always was), we did it that way. We want to say that the Kesters appreciate the time and effort you and your wife put into the Association.

You mentioned that one of the future Reunions was scheduled for Orlando, Fla. As one who has been in Orlando many times in September, may I suggest a time period in October rather than September. The weather in Orlando in early September is unbearable - hot, humid, muggy. Besides, it's hurricane time; and, it's the last vacation period before the beginning of the school season.

M & Louise Kester

Last Name: Kester First Name: Alton MI:A

Street Address: 23 Pocono Drive Telephone: 412-921-7256

City State: Pittsburgh, PA. Zip +4 15220-3205

Winter Address: Same as above. We spend the months Mid-January through Mid-March in places such as Puerto Rico, The Virgin Islands, Arizona.

Date of Birth: 06/01/1921

Colleges Attended: Lehigh University - B/S in Civil Engr.  
Carnegie Institute of Technology  
(now Carnegie-Mellon Univ.) M/S in Structures  
Professional Engineer Certification 1952

Last Employment & Job Title & Retirement Date  
Vice President & Principal Owner of Micro-T, Co., Inc  
(Louise is President) Retired 10/31/1990

Serial Nos 13,112,736  
0-719,960

Date Joined 306th Mid-July 1944 Squadron: 369th Spec. Navigator

Special Duties  
Squadron Navigator - 369th March 1945 - Sept. 1945

No. of Missions Flown - 33

Date of last Mission - Royan, France  
and Leaflet Mission - Munch &  
Buchenwald

Date Leaving 306: Late Sept. 1945 Highest Rank - Captain

Other 8AF Units Served - None

Top service after 306th - US Air Reserve - Asst to C.O. Pittsburgh Squadron -

.USAF Res Retirement Date 1964

2a

Highest Rank - Major

Sept. 21, 1994

I

Dear Russ,

My wife and I enjoyed, immensely, the recent Reunion in Des Moines and the chance to visit, once again, with old friends. We both want to thank you and your wife and all the other people who are involved in organizing these affairs. Since we are both involved in organizing much smaller meetings, we are well aware of the time and effort involved.

As I asked you in Des Moines, may I please receive a copy of the <sup>mission</sup> flight order and intelligence report for the mission flown to Ruhland on 07 October 1944. It flew as lead team navigator with Maj. Flannagan as Command Pilot and "Buck" Dillon as Bombardier. That was the mission during which we saw for the first time jet A/c. after we turned off target and <sup>were</sup> returning to base. One other thing comes to mind; we encountered <sup>unusually</sup> strong head winds on the bomb run, and we were making 92k. ground speed.

My Own Personal Experience:

I arrived at Thurleigh in mid-July 1944 with the Gerry Carrazzone Crew. I flew my first mission to Dollbergen on Aug. 5th. On Aug. 8th I flew the Caen mission with Joe Murphy. Our ball turret gunner was killed and our radio operator was injured due to flak. On my eighth mission I, again, flew with Joe Murphy to Ludwigshafen on Sept. 8th. We flew No. 3 with a PFF and Lucien Peters as operator. The lead plane had to give way to the deputy, and we slid over to deputy. Prior to the bomb run the deputy's "mickey" malfunctioned, and we took over as lead. Shortly thereafter I was assigned to Lt. George Schneider's crew, and along with Larry Carroll as Bombardier we were formed into a lead team and became the 369th's primary lead team. Co-Pilot Dowan was made a First Pilot and given his own crew. Larry Carroll came to the 306th from a Special Operations Squadron based near Oxford.

After Schneider completed his tour on Dec. 18th, Larry and I were spotted around flying with other Lead Pilots. I flew the Dec. 24th Mission with Billy Cassaday as Command Pilot; the Dec 29th Mission with Col. Sutton as Command Pilot; and my 30th on Dec. 30 to Mainz with Major McKinney.

I was anticipating returning to the States to begin some brush-up correspondence courses with Lehigh Univ. in preparation for continuing my interrupted education.

My plans were derailed because in mid-January <sup>III</sup> after the Battle of the Bulge was officially ended, I was transferred <sup>on T-04</sup> to Alconbury along with many other four completers from the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Air Divisions. There we were formed into 5 man crews to be sent to the Continent to ferry back B-17's which had been repaired in the field in previously occupied Belgium, Netherlands, and Northern France. We, of course, had to carry all our belongings with us. We were ferried to Merville in Northern France where we were all temporarily housed in a school until we could be trucked to our assigned strip. All our bags were in one large area. When I returned to get my belongings I found that my B-4 had been rifled - my D.F.C., my Air Medal @ silver cluster, dress shoes, toilet articles, etc all stolen. I wound up at Air Strip B-53.

These field-repaired aircraft were accidents waiting to happen. We were taken to remote strips from which the 9<sup>th</sup> A.F. were flying. One of these strips, according to the Pilots with whom we bunked, were within two km of the advancing German Army before these Pilots and the planes were transferred Westward.

After a month of very hazardous flying duty IV  
getting these wrecks back to Alconbury, I contacted  
Mc Kinney and Cassaday. That day we brought back  
a plane which did not let the right flap  
down. When the pilot tried to raise flaps, it  
remained ~~down~~<sup>up</sup> and the left flap remained ~~up~~  
down. This, after the flaps worked O.K. on  
take off.

Mc Kinney told me that John Mac Pherson was  
returning to the U.S.A., and that the Squadron  
Navigator position would be available; but that  
I would have to volunteer for a 2<sup>nd</sup> tour. Let me  
tell you, combat flying was no more hazardous  
than what I was doing.

They had orders cut for me, and I returned to the  
36<sup>th</sup> on March 3, 1945.

I flew three missions thereafter

1. March 30: Bremen - Major Witt, C.P., Walter Rozett,  
Pilot, - Disney Bombs - We made four  
bomb runs
2. Royan, Seaport Southern France - April 14 - Major  
Cassaday, C.P., Don Carrier Lead Bombardier
3. Leaflet Mission to Munich, Dresden, Buchenwald -  
Major Mc Kinney, C.P.

I am not certain when I was promoted to Captain. I think it was sometime in early April.

Thereafter, the 369th was sent to Marrakech, French Morocco, on the Casey Jones Project.

After much agitation I was sent home in the latter part of September 1945, just in time to miss the Fall 1945 Semester at Lehigh, starting Feb 1946.

Once again, I was placed in a crew at Alconbury to fly a war-weary home. We flew the Southern Route - Gibraltar, Dakar, Natal, Brazil; Georgetown, British Guiana, Borinquen Field, Puerto Rico, Morrison Field, West Palm Beach. Prior to leaving the Squadron McKinney offered to request for appointment to the U.S. Military Academy, which I graciously declined.

While at Lehigh, I joined an Air Force Reserve Group based at Reading, Pa. I followed through when, after graduation, I located in Pittsburgh. I was about to be called up (I had received orders) for Korea. The President of my <sup>then</sup> employer, Dravo Corp., interceded, and my orders were rescinded. Thus ends my Saga with the Military Services.



Since I am now 75% retired (I still consult for AT&T),  
I have some spare time on my hands. If you  
feel you can use some help in and around  
Washington, D.C., or any other minor help, I can  
make myself available.

I messed up your yellow questionnaire. I have  
substituted the enclosed.

Al Kester

ALTON A. KESTER, P.E.  
CONSULTING ENGINEER - STRUCTURAL  
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PITTSBURGH, PA 15220  
412-921-7256

Nov. 26, 1994

Dear Russell,

In response to your short note in the October Echoes, if you think I could be of some use as a draftsman, I would so volunteer.

Prior to my enlistment in the Army Air Corps, I was a structural steel draftsman with Bethlehem Steel Corp., while I was attending Lehigh University.

I completed my B.S. degree in Civil Engineering from that University in 1949. For three years, thereafter,

I was employed by the Dravo Corp. as a Civil Engineer.

After receiving my M.S. I was employed as a Structural Engineer by Pittsburgh Bridge & Iron Corp. for three years. I then started my own company

specializing in steel erection from which I eventually evolved into the electronics industry. Although I formally retired from active participation in 1990,

I still consult for AT&T; COMSAT; and Bell Atlantic.

If you think I could help you, please call.

V. t. y.

Alton A. Kester

Cover  
11/26/94

ALTON A. KESTER, P.E.  
CONSULTING ENGINEER - STRUCTURAL  
23 POCONO DRIVE  
PITTSBURGH, PA 15220  
412-921-7256

Feb. 14, 2000

Dear Russell,  
Enclosed is my check in the amount of \$10.00.  
Please send me a copy of the publication,  
Casey Jones Project. 2/16/00

I was the Squadron Navigator for the 369th  
for the first part of this work. Our Squadron  
was based in Marrakech.

In early September 1945, Col. McKimney was able  
to get me released to come home to continue my  
education at Lehigh University. Unfortunately, I  
was too late for the Fall Semester 1945, but I  
did catch the Spring Semester of 1946.

I was able to graduate in the Spring of 1948  
along with Al Johansen, who was a Pilot for  
the 369th.

Thank You  
Al Kester

(over)

We had been registered for The St. Louis Renaissance. Unfortunately, in early September one of our sons was found to have a brain tumor. My wife and I had to transport him to the hospital three times per week for eight weeks to undergo radiation treatment. He is on the road back to recovery. We hope to make it to San Diego.

June 5, 2002

306<sup>th</sup> Echoes  
5323 Cheval Pl.  
Charlotte, NC 28205

Alton A Kester  
23 Pocono Drive  
Pittsburgh, Pa. 15220

Attention: Mr. Russell Strong

Reference: 4/02 article "Rough road to Berlin"

Please note: My father authored most of this letter in his classic "pen & paper" method. The letter was left unfinished, however I felt it necessary to forward it to your attention.

Dear Russell,

Your article in April 2002 edition of 306<sup>th</sup> echoes brings back old memories of that mission. The George Schneider (Snider) crew was the 369<sup>th</sup> lead crew that day. I was George's navigator on this mission. Buck Dillon was the bombardier. As a matter of fact, We had two navigators for this foray. The targets chosen by the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force were all very deep in Germany. Ruhland is located south east of Berlin, and south Frankfurt am Oder.

The Eighth was attempting to entice the Luftwaffe into the air. Their ruse was successful! That day we saw the first of the Luftwaffe's jets-two of them. Our briefed route had us crossing the North Sea, across Holland, through the Munster/Osabruck flak corridor; past Drummer Lake (Luftwaffe Control); north of Gutersloh and Bielefeld (Remember those lovely spots); south of, and quite close to Hannover, Braunschweig, Magdeburg, and Potsdam; Then to a point just south and east of Berlin. Unfortunately, our flak charts did not show flak extending as far south of Berlin as our briefed route took us.

On our bomb run which was from southeast to northwest, we encountered head winds exceeding 100 mph. We were barely crawling along only to find the target under a heavy smoke screen.

By sighting, we were able to compute the velocity and direction of the wind and compute A time and distance and enter this information into the bomb sight and let the old time Computer do its thing to "Bombs Away"!

Because of bad information as regards to flak south of Berlin, our low squadron took a Beating. Unfortunately, my navigation was too good. Had I been approximately five miles south of our briefed course, we would not have encountered flak until we got on our bomb run.

Very truly yours,

Alton A. Kester, Pittsburgh Pa.

Note: that is the content of the text of the letter. The information below was located on Two additional pages accompanying the letter. It reveals a geographic representation of distances of US locations compared to those in Europe. My 17-year-old son could understand more clearly the objective distances.

Pittsburgh-Wheeling 60mi.		Berlin 136km	
Columbus 132		to Mogdenburg	
Indianapolis 102		Braunschweig 75	(1km=.062mi)
	19		
Terra Haute 65		Hanover 63	
Effingham, Ill. 104		Oeynhausien 65	
St Louis 43		Onsabruck 64	
		Eneschede 82	
	_____	Apeldon 80	
	608 mi.		
Kansas City 250		_____	
	_____	565km	
	858 mi	70 Berlin Ruhland	
		_____	
		635 km	

Pittsburgh to St. Louis = 610 miles  
Pittsburgh to Kansas City= 860 miles

Netherland Coast (North Sea) to Berlin 635 km= 395 miles  
To Ruhland 705 km 430 miles

Thurleigh AFB to Dutch Coast

As always honored and humbled,  
James R Kester, Pittsburgh, Pa.

*I, My father has always maintained the Reich's (A. HITLER'S) decision  
not to advance the development of the "jet" as the  
turning point of the war*

369 BS
306 BG

Alton A. KESTER

23 Pocomo Dr.

PITTSBURGH, PA 15220

from Al Johanson

Phone call -  
6 Dec 85