

306th Echoes



306th Bombardment Group Association

Need Help In Six-State Search List

We would like to recruit each one who receives this issue of "Echoes" as a voluntary searcher for others who served with the 306th. About 10 of those listed in the last issue have now been found, and we continue our listing with this issue.

These are the WW II era cities listed in various places for these men. But, we need your help in trying to locate them. First try phone books, then newspaper morgues, libraries, and any other place your curiosity may take you.

ILLINOIS--Belleville - Richard W. Trenary; Chicago - Jack W. Basel, Walter J. Bieloga, Paul W. Christenson, Clinton C. Collins, Loras J. Connolly, John R. Geimer, Walter Garr, Joe D. Koziel, Rodger C. Lewis, Edward L. Maslanka, James Mason, James E. McDonough, George F. Meltzer, Richard L. Newport, Sam Niemec, Edward L. Riha, Fred P. Sherman, Edward J. Stokoski, Joseph J. Thompson, Wm. F. Wagner, Douglas G. Wright, Jerome B. Zlotowski, Max D. Houston; Colfax - Beryl Harris; Danville-Raymond L. Norris; Elgin-William L. Pleasant; Hebron-Leith C. Lemmerhirt; Kankakee-Harold A. Abney; Lake Forest-Howard Lentz; LaSalle-Ralph W. Milton; Oak Park-John A. Bartlett, Jr.; Ottawa-Raymond F. Kenney; Peoria-Howard Shelby; Rantoul-Marion J. Northway; Rock Falls-Roy A. Vandrew; St. Elmo-Dewey O. Jones; St. Francisville-Richard E. Litherland; Waukegon-Patrick J. Spellman; West Frankfort-John J. Giballi.

INDIANA--Boonville-Jack C. Webb; Carlisle-Eugene D. Walters; Evansville-Charles M. Comstock, Archie H. Garrett; Fort Wayne-Bernard Howenstein; Gary-Wm. L. Utley; Indianapolis-J.C. Thurne; Liberty-Wm. J. Hamilton; Milan-Freeman C. Nickelson; Mill Creek-Lester B. Parks; Logansport-Donald W. Murphy; New Harmony-Wade Gwaltney; Richmond-Jack E. Skiver; Sandborn-Harold E. Anderson; Shelburn-R.W. Pierce; South Bend-Harris N. Palmer; Kirklint-Robert L. Stevenson; Union City-John H. Jessup; Vincennes-Wm. W. Neddo.

IOWA--Adel-John Eben; Cedar Falls-Maynard D. Dix; Davenport-Edward C. Shriker; Des Moines-Dudley J. Allen; Dubuque-Benj. Wagner; Fort Dodge-Donald J. Bonnell, Carl Johnson, Darwin E. Neff; Fort Madison-Farris R. Rashid; Gravity-Ivan L. Johnson; Hamburg-Floyd

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Crew Reunion

Rapid City, SD, and Paris, TX, and 34 years separated the top and bottom pictures for Bob Welter's crew, which had its first reunion Sept. 29, 1977. The identification of the top picture is, front row left to right: Robert W. Welter, pilot; Theodore Hallock, bombardier; Ed F. West, navigator, and Taylor Leedy, copilot. In the back row are: Ivan McCoppin, waist; C. Mitt Comstock, ball; James V. Poston, radio; Audrey Klepper, waist; Carl O. Metz, tail, and George J. Peterson, engineer. Hallock was unable to attend the reunion and Peterson is deceased.

They joined the 423rd Squadron in late 1943, and flew their missions in the early months of 1944. They came to the reunion from Boston to Albany, OR, and from St. Cloud, FL to Syracuse, NY. They are planning a second reunion in 1979 in Colorado.



11 Commanded Other Units

Eleven men who served with the 306th at one time commanded other units of the Eighth Air Force during World War II.

Claude E. Putnam, who came to the 306th as Group Operations Officer and was the third Group C. O., commanded the 91st Bomb Group at Basingbourne, 12/12/43 to 5/16/44.

Henry W. Terry, an original pilot and later Group Air Executive and Deputy C. O., also commanded the 91st, 5/14/44 to 5/30/45.

James S. Sutton, Group C. O. in late 1944 and into 1945, commanded the 92nd Bomb Group, Bovingdon and Conbury, 3/27/42 to 5/1/43.

James W. Wilson, original 423rd Squadron commander and later Group Air Executive, commanded the 92nd, at Podington, 9/27/44 to 8/4/45.

Frank A. Armstrong, Group C. O. in January and February, 1943, commanded the 97th Bomb Group, Polebrook, 7/31/42 to 9/27/42. He was later First Wing C. O.

William S. Raper, 367th Squadron C. O., Group Air Executive and Deputy C. O., commanded the 303rd Bomb Group, Molesworth, 10/29/44 to 4/19/45.

Curtis LeMay, the original Group Executive Officer at Wendover, Utah,

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306th Again Tops Reunion Attendance

For the third year in a row, the 306th Group turned in the largest number of registrants for the Eighth Air Force Reunion, 6-9 Oct.

Thus St. Louis followed in the pattern set at Miami Beach and Dayton, and an even larger number of 306th men is expected in Washington, DC, next October.

Those registering, by organizations, were:

367th - Robert Ashwood, John Bloom, Joseph W. Broussard, John C. Conlin, John E. Corcoran, Dr. A. W. Erb, Raymond W. Fortin, Wm. H. Gentle, James W. Haywood, Donat Heon, Robert B. Hermann, George Klucick, Al LaChasse, Edward Leahy, James Lenaghan, Donald MacDonald, Archie Nesbitt, Hugh Phelan, Walter Pilat, Helmut V. Roeder, S.J. Ross, John L. Ryan, Donald Sheridan, Robert G. Shultz, Charles E. Vondrachek and John Walkenhorst.

368th - Ralph Bordner, Wallace Boring, Dellon Bumgardner, Robert J. Chrisjohn, Joe P. Gabrish, Louis Gilbert, Aylett E. Jacobson, Bennie Jefferies, Leland Kessler, August Krajcik, Charles N. Levy, Joe Marciano, Elbert G. Odle, William Risso, Robert S. Stevens, Thomas Stillson, and Andy Vangalis.

369th - Glen Bryant, Wm. M. Collins, Wm. Colantoni, Wm. Flanagan, John Hickey, Roy Holbert, John Howard, Casey Jones, Jerry Knowlton, Joe Mynatt, Melvin Schrader, Earl Schwab, Wm. Slenker, George Stahl, James Wirth.

423rd - George C. Berner, Warren Borges, Henry C. Cordery, Harry Doles, Wm. Guilfoyle, Norman D. Hill, Russell O. Hawkins, John Horkulic, Howard Hutchison, Charles E. Jordon, George W. Johnson, A. J. Nahabedian, Arthur Resser, Howard Roth, Douglas Schrack, Earl Shapland, Joseph Terrana, Howard Turner and Robert Williams.

449th Sub Depot - Wm. R. Carlile, E. W. Kocourek, Dr. James R. Seaman, and E.A. (Bill) Williams.

Group Hdgs - Wendell Hull, Thurman Shuller, James Sutton, Donald Upchurch.

Some of these men served with more than one organization at Thurleigh, and in such cases the first was selected for this listing.

'Sweet Pea' And An English Sweetheart

This selection was taken from the book, **Skyways to Berlin**, by Maj. John M. Redding and Capt. Harold I. Leyshon. It was published in 1943 by Bobbs-Merrill, one of two such books to come out at that time about the early days of the Eighth Air Force. In it there are several selections featuring men of the 306th.

Another such volume and equally scarce, is **First of the Many**. In the next issue of **Echoes** we will feature a selection from it.

MAUREEN HAD a real Army suit, with pants, and the pants had pockets. Never once did she get her chubby little hands out of those pockets, except when a heaping plate of G.I. rations was put at her place of honor in the enlisted men's mess of the 367th heavy bombardment squadron.

The historian of the First Wing will do well to record December 20, 1942, the date of that first visit by three-year-old Maureen, a war orphan, to her foster fathers at a muddy operational station in England.

For three heartbreaking months, in the early days of First Wing's offensive against German submarine bases in occupied Continental Europe, the hard-luck Gremlins rode the props of one squadron. The run-of-mine luck was none too good in those days and an insurance actuary's figures on a combat crew man's chances of lasting the war out would have been clammy statistics indeed.

For a while the squadron was ordering replacements after almost every raid. Down at the replacement center when a pilot, navigator, bombardier or gunner was ordered to report to the hard-luck outfit, the boys sat down and wrote careful letters home, letters so cautiously worded that discerning wives and mothers felt new fears mount as they read between the lines all and more of what the writer had tried to conceal.

Of the many who worried over the ill luck of the squadron, its leader, Major Harry Holt, stood easily and constantly at the head of the class. After flying with them to the hot spots at Saint-Nazaire, Brest and Lorient he came back to collect last effects and to write sympathetic letters to next of kin. Maj. Holt had forsaken a family naval tradition and an Annapolis education to join the Army Air Corps. He was getting the action he had asked for, but he had not foreseen this painful letter writing as part of his job.

Men who flew and serviced the heavies will talk about the hard luck of the squadron long after the war is ended; but no one will have a satisfactory explanation. The gremlins! Major Holt doesn't believe in them. When you command a heavy bombardment squadron you stow your imagination carefully away in your foot locker and leave it there for the duration.

Before it began taking on green replacements, it was a well-trained squadron. It flew a tight formation. Its gunners were among the best in the group. It got more than its share of Jerries. It also took more than its share of losses. The Group commander and the Wing general tried shifting the squadron around in the checkerboard of the sky. They tried letting it lead the formation. They tried it as a rear echelon. They tried sandwiching it in the middle of the parade of Fortresses

and Liberators. But for those three long months it always was the same story. Somehow, Jerry managed to single the squadron out for his concentrated fighter attack.

The right wing ship became an odds-on bet not to return from a mission; or if it did manage to limp home, there would be many of the wounded inside its sievelike fuselage. So Major Holt assigned the lead position to his senior pilot and flew the number-two hot spot himself. More than once the Jerries shot the Major's Fort to ribbons; but Holt was a masterful airman and he managed somehow to fly the wrecks home, usually with most of his crew intact.

Hard-luck stories are not favorite topics in an officers' lounge at an operational station. When a name is scrubbed from the combat-crew board it passes from the lips of pals also. They try to remember that. But occasionally somebody slips, like the young lieutenant who described the outfit as "the claypigeon squadron." The name stuck in memory and was repeated often enough to deepen Holt's brooding. A magazine writer came along and did a piece about Holt and titled it "The Clay-Pigeon Squadron." That marked low ebb.

As is so often the case, when things could get no worse, they suddenly got better. The squadron went back for its fourth trip over Lorient, where the Huns had concentrated their flak and their best fighters in a determined effort to save one of their principal Atlantic sub bases from destruction from the air. Holt and his boys were prepared to take another bad pasting. Instead, they came through with only a few flak notes where it didn't count and one 20-mm. penetrating shell through the pilot's plexiglass of the number-two wing ship. It missed Holt's head by inches and caused no damage. A couple of previously favored squadrons took the hard licks, instead.

Major Holt will never be able to tell you why the luck changed. He was afraid to believe it had until they went to Wilhelmshaven in January and came through without a scratch. He still had his finger crossed, figuratively, when he led the squadron across the Channel some days later to pound the crack German fighter base at Abbeville. That was really asking for trouble. There was trouble, all right, but all of it was for the Jerries. The American bag of enemy fighter aircraft destroyed that day made big headlines back home.

One of the Fortresses that particularly distinguished itself over Abbeville was the "Sweet Pea," a battle-scarred veteran named only a few weeks before in honor of little Maureen, daughter of the squadron. At a bomber station people and things seldom wear their christened names, but always the nickname is descriptive. Like "Sweet Pea" for golden-haired, chubby-faced Maureen. It fitted, like the brass-buttoned Army blouse she wore, resplendent with Air Corps wings for her cap and lapels. The official brass had been authorized by the commanding general on application of the foster fathers.

It might be well to remember the beginnings, as well as the date, of Maureen's joining up with the squadron. It all coincides so closely with the time of the welcome change of luck.

Only a few days before Maureen for



Maj. Harry Holt



Capt. John Ryan

the first time put on her Army suit, complete with pants and pockets, three noncoms of the squadron had come to London looking for an orphan to adopt. It was to be a morale builder. The men of the squadron might have a better outlook if they had something to think about besides the men lost over Lorient, Saint-Nazaire and Brest.

SWEET PEA

The three proud noncoms had come to London bearing a heavy musette bag laden with E101 (over four hundred dollars), mostly in silver and oversize British pennies. The money was the contribution of the enlisted men to the British Orphans Fund sponsored by the "Stars and Stripes," the Army's official newspaper. It was money enough to supply the extras for one orphan for nearly five years. Corporal Irvin W. Combs led the detail as chief foster father, because his contribution had been the largest. With him, in the role of foster uncles, were First Sergeant Arthur E. Ward and Staff Sergeant Louis A. Dabney also unstinting contributors to the fund.

Spending their brief leave, they had come to see "our baby." Secretly they hoped it would be a boy. Then they'd call the new mascot "Butch."

But it wasn't a boy. Red Cross workers produced for their startled eyes chubby-faced Maureen, with golden curls and very blue eyes. There was a brief awed silence, which Maureen was the first to break. "I like the nice soldiers," she announced matter-of-factly.

The tall corporal swallowed hard, and there went "Butch." He reached for "our baby." Maureen came to him willingly enough, planting a chubby arm around Combs' neck. At that moment the bond was sealed. Maureen became the daughter of the squadron right then.

When the clouds break over any one of a dozen German targets across the Channel, the heavies are off with their bellies full of bombs. That's the way it

was the day Maureen came to visit the squadron, and to christen the ship which was being named "Sweet Pea" in her honor.

Early that morning as Maureen, accompanied by a Red Cross welfare worker, was approaching the squadron's home nest in an Army jeep, the Flying Fortresses were circling over the countryside to gain altitude and knit into the tight formations that would fly to a distant target in France. Among them was the Fort of Captain John Ryan. High on the right side of the Fortress's nose was the name "Sweet Pea", stenciled there in anticipation of the christening.

It was high noon. At the long board table of the enlisted men's messroom Maureen sat in an elevated bombardier's chair. Before her was a plate of steaming G.I. rations that interested her more than the admiring glances of her doting fathers.

It was high noon in Occupied France. A cloudless sky over Romilly-sur-seine was dirtied with ugly blotches of brown flak. A formation of Flying Fortresses plowed into the mess. Among them was the big bomber "Sweet Pea."

It was a half-hour past noon and Maureen stood on an uncarpeted throne made of an empty cartridge box placed under the wing of a reserve Fortress, left behind as a hospital ship if needed. Standing on tiptoe, she could touch a blade of one of the starboard propellers with her chubby fingers. Someone dabbed her finger tips with red paint, then pressed them onto the shining blade. The "Sweet Pea" had been christened in absentia.

It was a half-hour past noon over Romilly-sur-Seine. The bomber "Sweet Pea" had made its run over the target in company with its mates of the "clay-pigeon squadron." It was heading for home when the Focke-Wulfs swarmed in.

"Here they come," warned Second Lieutenant Gerald Simmons, the copilot.

"Pilot to combat crew: Give 'em hell, boys, or we'll be late for our date with that little blonde."

The "Sweet Pea" was dancing crazily in severe evasive action, but the Focke-Wulfs were faster, more maneuverable. One closed in and chewed a third of the bomber's horizontal stabilizer off with a single explosive cannon shell.

Another shell blew the life raft out of the "Sweet Pea" and it caught--dangling grotesquely from the splintered stabilizer.

A large chunk of wing disappeared as another explosive shell found its mark. One of the superchargers was knocked out and only three of the bomber's engines were pulling. Machine-gun bullets damaged one aileron.

Up in the pilot's compartment Ryan and Simmons wrestled with the controls to keep the badly vibrating bomber from going into a spin.

It was almost one o'clock at the bomber station in England and the christening ceremony was ended. For a few minutes, at least, the ground crew men of the squadron has been permitted to forget about what might be happening to their pals across the Channel.

It was almost one o'clock and the gunners of the "Sweet Pea" were weating at their battle stations in the

306th Aircraft

Below are a few of many plane pictures which Russ Strong has collected. Unfortunately, we cannot always match plane numbers with names, etc. What data can you supply on these? Or any other planes?



BANSHEE 41-24488, 369th, down 17 April 43, Bremen



WE PROMISED 42-102578, 367th



LITTLE AUDREY 42-29477, 369th

below-zero nearly five miles up.

Second lieutenant Robert Hermann caught the upturned belly of a Jerry fighter in his machine-gun sights and sent him twisting down in flames. A minute later Staff Sergeant William E. Kellum set another Focke-Wulf afire.

It was nearing two o'clock at the bomber station in England and a restless crew awaited the return of the bombers. There had been many fearful waits like this. Mostly the fears had been justified. Someone suggested it would be better for Maureen and her escort to go home now.

It was near two o'clock and the cliffs of Dover showed as a thin white lifeline across the plexiglass in front of Captain Ryan's eyes. The "Sweet Pea" was lurching, straining at every strut, but slowly clawing her way homeward.

Suddenly the attacking Focke-Wulfs veered off. The battered crew of the "Sweet Pea" looked around and saw a swarm of Spitfires racing for the fight. The rear cover had kept its rendezvous.

From then on it was a question only of masterful flying. Ryan and Simmons knew how to nurse a crippled ship down to a successful landing.

It was three o'clock of the afternoon of December 20, 1942, a date of the historian of First Wing might well remember.

The "Sweet Pea" had come home to keep its date with the beautiful blonde. More important, every ship of the "clay-pigeon squadron" had also come home, and through the toughest opposition Jerry could offer.

Deceased

- Bycott, Andrew G. 368th, 1962
- Clymer, Gerald F. 367th
- Conley, Robert J. 369th, 9 Dec 74
- Curry, James R. Jr., 368th
- Fassig, Bertram L. 369th, 1944
- Gramm, Edward F. 369th
- Johnson, Bayard 367th
- Machosky, John 368th, 1972
- McClung, Dr. James E. 368th, 26 Nov 76
- McKim, Dr. Charles P. 369th, 19 Jul 63
- Mountain, Wm. 432rd
- O'Sullivan, Jeremiah F. GpHq, 1 Jun 74
- Porter, James S. 423rd, 1975
- Powell, Craig S. 369th, 21 Dec 76
- Struckhoff, Virgil 367th, 13 Oct 77
- Stutts, Jasper I. 423rd, Jun 71
- Warminske, Zygmund 423rd
- Whitten, Harris R. 368th
- Willoughby, Martin L. 423rd, 1974
- Wilson, Archie F. 367th, 16 Nov 76
- Wreay, Eldon 423rd, 14 Sep 69
- Young, Wallace W. 369th

Here's How To Get Tour At Thurleigh

If you are planning a trip to England, and want to revisit your old haunts at Thurleigh, you should be forewarned that it is now a classified government research establishment, and as such does not entertain casual visitors.

However, it is possible to get in with a bit of planning and with the help of Keith Paull. A dedicated 306th



DURATION PLUS 42-31726, 367th



THE DINGLEBERRY KID

11 Commanded Other 8th Units

(From page 1)

commanded the 305th Bomb Group, Grafton Underwood and Chelveston, 6/4/42 to 5/15/43. He also was later Third Air Division Commander. **Delmar Wilson**, Group Executive Officer and the first group Air Executive, commanded the 305th for a brief period. **Henry G. MacDonald**, Group Executive Officer, was the 305th commander from 10/23/44 to 4/22/46.

Some even wandered in among the B-24s.

William H. Cleveland, Group Operations Officer in the early combat days, later ran the 466th Bomb Group, Attlebridge, 11/11/44 to 2/17/45.

Hudson H. Upham, the last combat Group C. O., also commanded the 492nd Bomb Group, known as the Carpetbaggers, at Harrington 12/2/44 to 4/16/45. These dates are at variance with those shown in Roger

Freeman's **The Mighty Eighth**, but this editor and Freeman have reconciled them.

Of the group commanders, Putnam, Armstrong, Cleveland and Upham are deceased. Putnam, both Wilsons, Raper, LeMay and Armstrong all became general officers; although only Armstrong and LeMay were general officers with the Eighth.

Historian Needs Help With Records

What is a historian looking for? More personal reminiscences, photos of people, planes, equipment, combat damage, etc.

Former members of the photo unit at Thurleigh have been most accommodating in making their personal files available, and many, many others have searched in attics, closets and garages to come up with some unusual shots. We will welcome others, as they help tell the total story.

We are still looking for Group, Station, Squadron and other units records for the entire period. We have Group orders from 1 Dec. 43 through the end of the war, but others are sketchy. If you have any, please contact Russ Strong, and he would like an opportunity to copy them.

Plane names and numbers are still needed to round out the story as well. Crew chiefs and other ground crew members may have data that would be useful.

Plan 306th Museum At Thurleigh Base

Bill Collins left his A2 jacket in Bedford this fall, and Louis Cowley has sent his medals over there.

These will soon be among some items of 306th history displayed at the main gate reception area at Thurleigh, reports Keith Paull.

Because of the British sense of history, and the desire to preserve in the Bedford area some recollection of the 1942-45 presence of the 306th Bombardment Group, a small museum collection is being gathered.

If you wish to contribute any items, send them to Mrs. June Paull, honorary secretary; 2 The Lodge, High Street, Clapham, Bedford MK 41 6AJ.

Keith assures us that such items will never fall into the hands of souvenir peddlers but will be considered as permanent loans, and will be recoverable by the donors at any time.

researcher on the other side, Paull has made arrangements with the security officer at Thurleigh for 306th veterans who wish to see the place.

He needs notification seven days in advance of a planned visit so that he can get necessary clearance. Paull, or his wife, June, can be contacted at 2 The Lodge, High Street, Clapham, Bedford MK41 6AJ.



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Each issue is prepared and printed in Laurinburg, NC, and editorial contributions are welcomed and should be sent to the editor. Mailing is from Poland, OH, and new addresses, changes and deletions should be sent to the contact man.

