

306th Echoes



306th Bombardment Group Association

2 Reunions Take Group To England, Cincinnati

Some 306th veterans are becoming aware of the fact that they cannot be in two places in early October.

At Thurleigh there will be the dedication of the new memorial to the men of the 306th Bomb Group. The January issue of *Echoes* contained detailed information on travel to England.

Indications are that a number of 306th men and their wives will be going to Bedford for this event.

Plans are being made to welcome everyone back to the base, and though it is different, it is still Thurleigh. Unlike many WW II fields, Thurleigh is still in active use for flying.

While all of this is going on, another contingent will be in Cincinnati and Dayton for the eighth annual reunion of the 306th Bomb Group and the 8th Air Force Historical Society.

On Wednesday, 6 October, there is being planned an Air War symposium featuring Escape and Evasion, and POWs. This follows last year's highly acclaimed gathering in St. Paul.

The big day for the 306th will be Friday when a special dinner is being planned in Cincinnati. Ralph Bordner is heading the planning for the evening. More details will be available in the July issue of *Echoes*.

On Saturday there will be a dedication at the Air Museum at Wright-Patterson AFB, Dayton, of an 8th AF memorial. Back in Cincinnati that evening will be the traditional banquet and dance.

Who were the "Bunny Biters?" This inscription was found in a 368th barracks at Thurleigh some time ago before the building was demolished. Does anyone know what or who the "Bunny Biters" were?



'First Over' Now Ready For Readers

Some thought the mails were playing tricks on them, and others just waited patiently. The author knew there were no tricks, but he was impatient if anything.

Finally, on April 21 the books arrived en masse in Kalamazoo, Michigan, after a quick trip from North Carolina. By that time the author had seen one copy and was anxious to get on with the mailing to those pre-publication purchasers. The address labels were in hand and the Jiffy Bags were waiting.

First Over Germany, A History of the 306th Bombardment Group, was finished; but the story of the 306th goes on, and future issues of *Echoes* will follow the saga as new material is uncovered.

The book is 325 pages, plus a 2,500 name index of 306th personnel who appear between its pages. There are about 75 pictures. But the first thing anyone notices is the book jacket, which was taken from a painting done by Lee Kessler, 369th engineer, who some years earlier had painted his plane going down over Wilhelmshaven May 21, 1943.

The first critical acclaim came in the *8th AF News* from editor John Woolnough, who had been privileged to read galley proofs while the book was being completed.

Echoes will continue to carry an order form, but it is not necessary to cut up your issue in order to place a request for a book. Just send your check for \$20 to Russell Strong, 2041 Hillside, Kalamazoo, MI 49007, and a book will be placed in the mail quickly, postage paid.

As many of you know, this was a seven-year odyssey from the beginning of research at Dayton, OH, to completion. But it could not have been done in the way that it was without the cooperation of a great many 306th people. Nearly 500 were interviewed in person, over the telephone and by mail. Others

(Turn to page 2)



Col. Warren Borges, 423rd pilot, is the current president of the 8th AF Historical Society.

Is There a Photographer?

The *Echoes* editor needs photographic help. This has been provided for the last couple of years by Casey Jones, 369. But a new job in a new place has stilled Casey's creative contributions. Someone out there who has a yen for photography and a home darkroom could be of significant help to the editor. Any volunteers?

From all reports the 306th Bomb Group Restaurant at Sarasota, Fla., is continuing to do an excellent business. On your next trip to the southland be sure to include this among your stops, for lunch or for dinner. Reservations are almost a necessity for dinner.

Mystery of J. C. Melaun Resolved

have never been able to locate. And the copilot, Bob McCallum, was killed on Black Thursday.

I later found a roster of 306 enlisted aircrew members published in the Special Orders of 1 May 1943. Snuffy and other crewmen were there, but there was no J. C. Melaun.

Phone calls to other men of the 423rd of that time came up with nothing.

I began to have doubts as to whether such a person had ever existed, or had someone else flown and used a fake name? Had it been someone out of the 423rd I felt that Johnson would probably have known them.

And therein lies the answer. J. C. Melaun was a member of the 410th Bomb Squadron, not a 306th unit. But it was a squadron of the 94th Bomb Group which then had two squadrons training at Thurleigh. Four crews of the 94th arrived on April 20, and Melaun must have come with his crew between then and May 1. Evidently crewmen were short on this morning and Melaun gained some combat experience, perhaps more than he bargained for.

Discovery of his 410th squadron designation was found in General Order #61 of the Eighth Air Force, issued 20 May 1943, in which a Silver Star medal was awarded to Johnson, who "knowing that the airplane might disintegrate at any minute, and with complete disregard for his own safety, skillfully kept his plane in the flight formation enabling two of his crewmen to eventually extinguish the flames. The bravery and skill displayed by Lieutenant Johnson in remaining with and returning his airplane to a friendly base after all chances to save it seemed gone, reflect the highest credit..."

Sgt. William W. Fahrenhold, Johnson's engineer that day, also received a Silver Star: "Displaying great bravery and skill, Sergeant Fahrenhold, with utter disregard for his own safety, went into the radio compartment which was a mass of flames, to aid the ball turret and nose gunner in extinguishing the flames. After the fire was extinguished Sergeant Fahrenhold returned to his guns

In writing *First Over Germany* there were often questions for which there seemed no complete answers. Sometimes considerable digging turned up nothing of value.

One of these instances occurred in the story about Snuffy Smith and the 1 May 1943 mission that resulted in a Medal of Honor.

The crew interrogation report is a rather curious document, and in particular the name of the nose gunner stands out—"J. C. Melaun." Can anyone identify "J. C. Melaun?"

I really doubt it!

I checked my card file of 306th people and came up dry. I looked in various other records over a period of a couple of years, but found nothing. As the book was nearing completion I became even more concerned.

A telephone call to L. P. Johnson, pilot for the mission, gave me no answer. He could not remember the man. The navigator was Stanley Kisseberth, whom we

306th History

(From page 1)

contributed all kinds of records and other material. A small group gave generously to a research fund that enabled the author to visit people and record repositories, actions vital in searching out much of the detail. It was really a team effort in getting together the mountain of data and reducing it to a coherent whole.

The book also points out the tremendous effort put forth by Col. John L. Ryan who critically read every word of the manuscript and used a lot of red ink.

Where now? *Echoes* will continue as long as the editor is able and the readers support it. We are doing more without a membership dues program than any other group, and with the cooperation of many of you we can continue.

Order your copy today of

FIRST OVER GERMANY, A History of the 306th Bomb Group

To: Russell A. Strong
2041 Hillside
Kalamazoo, MI 49007

Please accept my order for _____ copies of *First Over Germany* at \$20 each, a total of \$_____.

name

mailing address

Make check payable to Russell A. Strong



Sweet Pea — the Shirley Temple lookalike as the Americans remember her.

Sweet Pea, the GIs' little sweetheart turns up after 40 years

A SEARCH for a missing orphan girl by former GIs who adopted her during the war, ended happily this week.

The girl, nicknamed Sweet Pea by the American airmen at Thurleigh, was found following an appeal in a national newspaper. Maureen Eason, 43, of Wallington, Surrey, was a pert, three-year-old blue-eyed bombshell in the Shirley Temple mould when the airmen picked her up in London in 1942.

"It is so exciting," she said. "It has all happened out of the blue. I have kept all the cuttings and things they gave me for all these years but thought that was the last I'd hear of it."

The airmen thought they would be adopting a boy and made a uniform for 'him'. Instead they were presented with Maureen and she still has the uniform they made for their adopted orphan.

The woman who started the search for Maureen is Mrs Connie Richards of Pavenham Road, Oakley. She is a member of the 306 Bombardment Group's historical association and has met many of the GIs when they came back to Bedfordshire.

"The men were always asking about her, wondering where she is now and asked if we could find her," she said. Sweet Pea's husband read the article in the paper on Monday morning and immediately rang them.

Mrs Richards was delighted when she heard the news. "I was over the moon. I am so excited, God knows what the Americans will be like! It's wonderful news, absolutely fantastic. I can hardly



Connie Richards, the Oakley woman who has found Sweet Pea.

believe it and the whole association is dying to find out what she looks like now."

Dozens of former GIs are returning to Thurleigh this October for a special reunion and for the unveiling of a memorial in the village to 306 Bombardment Group. Sweet Pea will be a guest of honour.

"It has just been one of those nostalgic stories with a happy ending," said Mrs Richards.

and warded off repeated attacks by enemy fighter planes."

Melaun also received a Silver Star "For gallantry in action." The remainder of the citation is the same as that for Fahrenhold.

This same General Order also cites 1st Lt. Alden T. Mann and Leo R. Kisamore for Distinguished Flying Crosses. Mann was a 367th

pilot and Kisamore was his copilot on 15 May 1943 when his plane went into the North Sea 20 miles north of Helgoland on a mission to Wilhelmshaven.

Melaun soon left the 306th and went with the 94th to its permanent station. According to a cousin who still lives in Seagoville, TX, Melaun died in action later in the war.

WHERE'S SWEET



Ain't she sweet . . . Maureen in 1942

GIs search for missing war babe

HUNDREDS of former GIs are hunting for a little orphan girl they adopted during the war—and called Sweet Pea.

The blue-eyed three-year-old won the hearts of the 306 Bombardment Group when they met her in 1942.

For five years, Sweet Pea—real name Maureen—was supported by the American airmen at their base at Thurleigh, Bedfordshire.

They even named a

Flying Fortress bomber after their pint-sized pin-up.

But after the war, Maureen lost touch with her adopted family of GIs.

Now the Yanks are planning a special reunion at Thurleigh in October—and want Sweet Pea to be guest of honour.

Mrs Connie Richards, of the squadron's historical association, said: "Maureen would now be

41. But no one knows where she is, or even if she is still alive."

Mrs Richards explained how the American airmen originally thought they were going to adopt a boy.

They made a uniform for him and chose a name—Butch.

But at the rendezvous in London, "Butch" turned out to be blue-eyed Maureen.

She captivated the GIs

By MURIEL BURDEN

THE SUN FINDS SWEET PEA?

Lost war babe's a mum herself now

By MURIEL BURDEN

SWEET PEA — the wartime orphan girl hunted by hundreds of former GIs — has been found by The Sun.

The cute little three-year-old who won the hearts of an American bomber squadron back in 1942 is now a happily-married mother of two.

And 42-year-old Mrs Maureen Eason is all set for a nostalgic reunion with the Yanks who nicknamed her Sweet Pea.



1942 . . . Sweet Pea in her mascot's uniform

"I'd love to see them all again," said Maureen yesterday. "I used to call them all uncle and they really looked after me."

Maureen's husband Richard called The Sun after he read our story about the little girl who became the pint-sized mascot of 306 Bombardment Group during the last war.

Invited

The U.S. airmen wanted to invite Sweet Pea to their reunion dinner in October but they had lost all trace of the orphan they knew only as Maureen.

The former GIs tried to track down Maureen

THE SUN, Wednesday, March 3, 1982



1982 . . . Maureen gives son Mathew a hug

Picture by ROGER BAMBER

with the help of the Red Cross and Salvation Army.

But when they drew a blank, they contacted your ever-loving Sun.

And we came up trumps within a day of our story appearing!

Mrs Connie Richards, of the squadron's historical association, said last night: "This is fantastic. It just shows what The Sun can do."

Maureen will be the guest of honour at our banquet. I know all the Americans coming over for the reunion will be so pleased to see her again."

For five years the U.S. airmen looked after Sweet Pea at their base at Thurleigh, Bedfordshire.

They made a special uniform for their blue-eyed mascot . . . and even named a Flying Fortress after her.

Presents

Maureen, of Link Lane, Wallington, Surrey, still has the Bible given to her by the men of the so-called Clay Pigeon squadron but her little uniform has disappeared.

"I had it for years

but lost it when we moved recently," said Maureen.

"It would just about have fitted my five-year-old son Mathew now."

Maureen, who also has another son, Tony, 22, remembers little about her time with the GIs, except that they were all very kind.

"They were always buying me presents and sweets," she said.

Maureen added: "Being discovered like this has given me a bit of a shock. But I'm thrilled they think so much of me."

WHERE'S SWEET PEA?

The Sun story that helped track down Maureen

40 Years of 306th History Observed at RAF Mildenhall

The planes are all jets now, but there is still a Boeing name for the giant KC-135s of the 306th Strategic Wing. Their base is Mildenhall, an hour and a half by car from Thurleigh, and 23 miles northeast of Cambridge.

Today's 306th fliers know something of the origins of that famous number, and when the 40th anniversary of the founding of the 306th Bombardment Group (H) was to be observed January 30, Col. Richard Giordano, today's wing commander, invited Russell Strong, 306th historian and editor of *Echoes*, to come to England and speak at a banquet.

Strong, living in Kalamazoo, MI, was a long way from a Strategic Air Command base, but flew to K. I. Sawyer, AFB, 20 miles south of Marquette, MI, and at 15° below zero joined a crew there that was headed for Mildenhall. A stop was made en route at Pease AFB, NH, and at 3 a.m. January 28 they left for England, taking along four F-16 fighters, which they refueled several times before passing them to another tanker north of the Azores.

Landing at Mildenhall in late afternoon, Strong was met by Col. Giordano, and then met Gordon and Connie Richards. Eventually, they arrived at the Oakley home of the Richards, to the northwest of Bedford.

The big event came on Saturday when the 306th British enthusiasts took their memorabilia to Mildenhall for an exhibition during the day. This display was visited by many of another generation of aviators. That evening in the officers' club more than a hundred gathered for a dinner, style show and Strong's address.

Behind the rostrum was a very large aerial photo of Thurleigh. A large cake, suitably decorated, celebrated the event, and the hit of the evening was the style show of WW II uniforms. A colonel's uniform fitted Col. Giordano perfectly and he wore it. In all, 10 Americans modeled the various uniforms and drew great applause from the audience.

Strong discussed the history of the 306th, told tales about some of the legendary figures in the group, and then contrasted the fliers, planes and equipment of another day against those of the current 306th Wing.

Lt. Gen. Robert T. Herres, a young teenager during WW II, was another honored guest. He is the present commander of the Eighth Air Force stationed at Barksdale AFB, LA, and altered his schedule in Europe to be present on this occasion. He has commanded the Eighth since July 1981, and is a 1954 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy.



Connie Richards presents Col. Giordano a framed photo of Station III-Thurleigh for his office.



Russell Strong tells tales of another 306th at the 40th anniversary banquet at Mildenhall.

Other guests for the occasion were Brig. Gen. George D. Ledbetter, Brig. Gen. John J. Doran, Jr., Col. and Mrs. Richard G. Horne, and Col. and Mrs. Charles W. Bartholomew.

Both Gordon and Connie Richards had been of great assistance to Col. Giordano and his staff in making arrangements for the dinner, and Gordon was the commentator for the style show.

Other Britishers of note there were Mr. and Mrs. John Mills, Mr. and Mrs. Cyril Norman and John Hadfield from Bedford, along with Mr. and Mrs. Louis Pennow.

Roger Freeman, author of *The Mighty Eighth*, and his wife were also guests for the evening.

At the conclusion of the event, the Richards presented Col. Giordano with an aerial picture of Thurleigh, and Strong gave the colonel a color rendition of the book jacket for his new history of the 306th. Col. Giordano presented both Strong and Richards with plaques commemorating the event, and Gen. Herres was presented with a Toby mug, similar to the one shown in the opening movie scene of *12 O'Clock High*.

The 306th Strategic Wing came into being 15 August 1976, and has been at Mildenhall since 1978.

Almost by accident, James Czinder, a 368th Squadron veteran, was in Bedford and participated in the evening's event.

Strong returned to Bedford with the Richards, and then visited in London and Cambridge before being flown back to Dover AFB, DE, February 4 aboard a KC-10, which brought back to the States two F-111s.

Harold Lightbown, an original 369th gunner with Capt. John Howard's crew, has been honored by the Camp Curtis Guild Squadron of the Civil Air Patrol, for his continued support and assistance. Long a Boston printer, "Lighty" completed a combat tour and then was commissioned as a gunnery officer in June, 1943.



Roger Freeman and his wife discuss the two "Eighth Air Forces" with Lt. Gen Robert T. Herres, today's Eighth commander.



Do these look familiar? The array of 10 uniforms put together by the 306th group of the Friends of the Eighth.



A large birthday cake celebrated the 40th anniversary of the 306th Bombardment Group-306th Strategic Wing.



Col. Richard Giordano presents Gordon Richards with a plaque

You Can Help Keep English 8th Enthusiasts in Good Uniforms

The British "irregulars" who are keeping the memory of the 306th Bomb Group alive in England are enthusiastic about their collection of WW II memorabilia. They have done an excellent job to this point in assembling uniforms, but there is a need which can only be met by 306th veterans.

To make their exhibitions even more authentic they could use a whole host of personal gear that all of us took for granted while we were using it.

If you have any of these items and would like to have some one take care of them for you, then send them along to Gordon Richards, 14 Pavenham Road, Oakley, MK43 7SY, Bedford, England. Be assured, anything sent to them will be very well cared for, and will be returned upon request.

Among the things that would help them are the following:

A-2 jackets with the four different squadron insignia

B-10 jackets and leggings

Leather flying jackets and leggings

Oxygen masks, both demand and constant flow

Blue and green heated suits

Gas mask containers

Navigator's brief case

Flight bag

Musette bag

Hats in a variety of types and sizes

Shoes

One-piece fatigues

Two-piece fatigues

Hack watches

An aerial octant

Enlisted and officers' insignia and decorations

Fatigue hats

Leggings

Blanket, with U.S.

Quilt

Foot locker

Blouses, battle jackets, pink and green trousers, hats

Duffel bag

These are just the things we came up with in a conversation at the Richards' home. If you can help, drop them a line.



John Mills, left, and Lloyd Richards model MP attire of another day beside a tolerant air policeman at RAF Mildenhall.

Strong Tells Tales of Men And Planes at Mildenhall

During the course of nearly three years in combat operations, the 306th Bomb Group flew 541 combat missions against the enemy in France, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and Norway.

The 306th had been created by the signing of documents in Savannah, Georgia 40 years ago; the group was formed and trained at Wendover, Utah, through the spring and summer of 1942; its final staging and acquisition of new B-17 aircraft at Westover, Mass., and in early September 35 aircraft left Westover for England.

Unfortunately, only 33 planes reached the combat theatre. One blew up off the coast of Greenland with all crewmen lost, and a second ditched off Magilligan's Point, Ireland, and the crew walked ashore. The plane was washed out to sea, and the legend is that a goodly supply of spiritual comfort went with it.

But, the 33 remaining planes did reach Thurleigh, with the young pilots and their crews finding great difficulty in picking out the field from the welter of new fields sprouting across England at the time. Thurleigh was an old RAF base and had been used for some time as an operational training site, and later as home for a Polish RAF unit.

The men of the 306th did their best to verify the English adage that they were "over paid, over sexed, and over here." But they were ready for combat on September 28, and flew their first mission October 9.

The 306th was the fifth American heavy bomb group to arrive in England. Rather quickly others departed for North Africa, or were withdrawn from combat. The 306th became during its history the group serving the longest continuous period in combat, and the group to serve the longest at one base among 8th AF units.

It also for some months led the 8th AF in losses. One crew of the 367th Squadron went down on the first mission, and it did not take many months for this squadron to be tagged as the "Clay Pigeons." Their losses were high, and for nine months the 367th led the 8th in losses. As a historian of the 306th and a onetime Clay Pigeon, I shudder at the numbers of times the group lost from three to five planes and three of them would be from the 367th.

Combat losses in the early months were hard on the young crews. Charts were drawn, discarded and redrawn which showed that there was no way in which an original combat crewman could possibly survive a 25-mission tour. The men believed this as one after another crew failed to return, or dead and dying crewmen were brought home. The first air evacuation in the European theatre occurred on October 10. Sgt. Arthur Chapman on Oct. 9 first had a hand blown off and then took a bullet through the chest. He was alive when crews returned to Thurleigh and was flown by C-47 to a large base hospital for the specialized treatment he needed. Unfortunately he only survived a week.

While there were those who knew they would never go home, 25 percent of the original combat crewmen did complete their 25-mission tours. But deaths, critical wounds, prisoners of war and evadees were numerous as well.

Replacement crews and equipment came in an almost imperceptible dribble, and it was not until April of 1943 that the supply lines filled sufficiently to replace the losses that were being suffered by the 306th.

At the same time pressure was applied constantly from Washington to get more planes over more targets on more days of the month. Sounds familiar doesn't it? One can only observe that those who were applying the pressure had never been in a position to sustain or participate in aerial combat operations out of England over any extended period.

Because of weather, lack of planes, lack of spare parts, and lack of personnel, the 306th like all other groups in the 8th found it impossible during the first year to operate much more than 12 days a month. This was never enough for General Arnold, and to read his correspondence with Gen. Eaker is enough to make one's blood boil. "Maximum efforts" were the order of the day, and a young flight surgeon for the 306th took on everyone in a terse memo he wrote that passed through channels and created a tremendous stir. He stated that commanders were then getting all they could out of the bomber crews, and that the maximum effort idea was destroying morale without accomplishing the end results desired.

To understand some of the problems facing the flyers of that day, you must remember that the B-17 was the first four-engined bomber created for the Army Air Forces which actually flew in any sustained combat operation. It was a pioneer large plane. Its design, created in 1935, was vastly different from any other aircraft. Its armament, and its capabilities, had only been dreamed of a year or two before. Because of all of this it quickly acquired the name "Flying Fortress." Unfortunately, the Luftwaffe proved that it was not quite all of that.

Also remember that the B-17 had a tail wheel, so three point landings were in order; it was not pressurized; flight crews wore individual heated suits; there was no heating system in the drafty plane; when I was flying indicated air speed in formation was 150 miles per hour; we generally bombed above 23,000 feet and under 30,000 feet; radar did not become available until mid-1944 and then only in the lead aircraft; and on a normal mission when you got to the target you dropped 5,000 pounds of bombs.

We were young, we were adventurous and we had a mission to perform. We were dedicated to the task at hand. Like school children, we were delighted when a day off came. But we also bent to the task and went forth to do battle with the best that could be offered at the time.

We also had an experience that I'll bet none of you present-day flyers here can claim—we often flew in brand new airplanes, hot off the ferry run from the States. In fact, when my own crew flew its first mission 15 June 1944 to Nantes, France, we were in a brand new B-17 G. The reason we had a new plane as a neophyte crew was that all the other crews had planes they liked and a new one held no particular attraction for them. Later we were privileged to fly in some not so new planes as well. But in reading through the records, at the time I was flying was no plane on the field that was a year old. Generally, they didn't last that long.

The 306th forged a proud tradition in combat, but also had a good thing going on the ground as well. As a young second lieutenant, plucked out of the middle of my freshman year in college, given a year of training and then sent off to combat, I even sensed the rapport and esprit that existed throughout the group. There was a cohesiveness between clerks and gunners, pilots and mechanics, navigators and the technical men, bombardiers and others. The ground people knew what they were there to do and they did it exceedingly well. The flyers went about their business with a solid dedication to the work before them. There were always people crossing over between the flyers and non-flyers. Particularly in the early days of World War II there was a considerable number of ground personnel who became gunners and flew their combat tours, almost out of necessity, to fill the ranks of those killed, wounded and missing.

Now I would like to talk with you a few minutes about the men of the 306th. Since beginning my writing project I have interviewed about 500 men who at some time or other served with the 306th during combat days. I have found them absolutely fascinating. I have traveled across the United States seeing these men, staying in their homes, meeting their wives; but I have gotten to know them from the colonels to the privates. Only one man has refused to talk to me, and I suspect he had nothing to give me.

There are also a number whom I will never meet, but whom I have come to "know" through the stories told by others.

Arizona Harris is one of those, an Arizona farm boy who became the group's first big hero on 3 January 1943. As the waters of the Bay of Biscay closed over his top turret, Arizona's guns were still seen firing at a German fighter plane. And later the family of Arizona Harris received his Distinguished Service Cross.

I know Snuffy Smith, the 306th's only winner of the Congressional Medal of Honor. Snuffy was flying his first mission for L. P. Johnson's crew. A navigational error brought the 16 planes over the harbor of Brest, France, at 500 feet, and three planes quickly went into the water with only four survivors out of 30 men.

Snuffy's plane was on fire, riddled with anti-aircraft fire from the radio room on back. Snuffy came out of his ball turret to find three men frantically bailing out. He only saw the fire, an attacking FW-190 and critically wounded Roy Gibson, the tail gunner. Snuffy treated them all: driving off the fighter, extinguishing the fires, and situating Gibson so that he would not drown in his own blood. Johnson and Bob McCallum,

an ill-starred co-pilot, fought the stubborn plane back to England. As they touched down and began their roll out, the plane broke in two at the wing roots and was discarded.

Robert H. Smith and his crew went to Bremen in May 1943, underwent a savage fighter attack, flew through a flak barrage that was almost unbelievable, and somehow emerged with a stricken airplane out over the North Sea and headed for home. The plane was really not flyable any longer, but they kept on, dropping lower and lower until Smith told his crew to assume their ditching positions. With this done there were no guns in action and a lone German fighter trailing them came in again. That same Bob McCallum got out of his copilot seat and into the top turret. From there he shot down the attacker, the 11th confirmed kill of the mission for "Dearly Beloved," and became the only copilot in 8th Air Force history credited with shooting down an enemy fighter.

Smith and McCallum then did a great job of ditching the plane, the crew got into its two life rafts. Strict military discipline prevailed, and thirty hours later they were rescued by a British ship in the gathering gloom of their second night on the water. One man later told me that the biggest problem he faced was the terrific case of hives he acquired from his wool uniform laced with copious salt water.

Jack Ryan was a newly-minted squadron commander for the 367th in March, 1943, when he went on another combat mission. Within 24 hours after being promoted he was hanging in a parachute over France. He didn't hang there long as he probably went out no more than a thousand feet off the ground. When he hit he broke his shoulder, several ribs and was in generally poor condition. Ryan was a former French teacher, well conversant with the language, and came to hearing an old peasant woman say, "Oh, the poor boy. What will we do with him?"

Unfortunately for Ryan they did nothing, and he was left alone for five days. When the underground had established that he was indeed an American and picked him up he had a temperature of 104°. Ryan did survive and after six weeks or so of recuperation and travel in France he was flown out one night on a courier plane. He said later that had he seen the plane in the daytime, rather than at midnight on a moonless night, he would never have ventured into it. But he came back, saw extended service in the 8th AF, and then continued to serve long after the war.

A number of other 306th men were evadees, forty-four in all. Some stayed for six months or more in France, some fought with French Resistance forces, one man was down in France for less than 24 hours and was flown out because of injuries.

Glenn Loveland was shot down on another Bremen mission in June of 1943, landing deep in Germany, quickly imprisoned. But Glenn was one of those who could not bear the thought of extended imprisonment, so he began to plan an escape. He found it easy to get out, difficult to talk one's way back into prison camp when free. He escaped several times as he perfected his technique and his equipment, and finally made a breakout in Northern Austria. In about a year after leaving his airplane, he was into Italy and had an amazing tale to tell about his experiences.

The 306th flew the first mission to Schweinfurt, and came home unscathed, while the 8th was losing 59 planes. But the second raid in October 1943 was another story, and this time the 306th was in the center of the fighter onslaught, losing 10 airplanes out of fifteen that went into Germany. Eighteen had taken off and three aborted. Thus, only five planes staggered home. The group leader for the day says that he rang the alarm bell for his crew to bail out. When the bell didn't work he kept on flying his battered airplane and brought home just four others.

To some this was a turning point in the bomber campaign, and it seemed about to fold. Even in well-flown formations the bombers were no match for 150-200 determined German fighter pilots.

But at this time there was lurking just over the horizon the P-51, the greatest fighter plane of the war. Designed for low altitude work, it was trimmer and much lighter than the P-47 which was regarded as a high altitude plane. Soon the two craft were traded and each found its best working area. The older P-38's were phased out. From then on the skies were flooded with P-51's and the Luftwaffe began to suffer tremendous losses.

The 306th in January of 1944 lost nine planes on a mission to Halberstadt: the losses continued steadily, although not quite as dramatic as a year before. This was because there were planes and crews ready to replace the losses. Three days after ten went down at Schweinfurt the crews and planes had been replaced.

The 306th flew the "Big Week" missions in late February 1944 as the 8th systematically set out to wreck the German aircraft industry. But it was probably the attack on oil refineries that really turned the trick. Charts of petroleum refining tell a dramatic picture of the decline of all kinds of fuels for the Luftwaffe. And the Wehrmacht as well. Did you know that in the Battle of the Bulge in late 1944 German ground units were almost universally supplied by horse-drawn conveyances?

As 1944 developed, the 306th was flying its share of ground support missions, first to soften up the defending Germans, then to isolate the beachhead area, and finally to assist in disrupting communications as the troops stormed ashore at Normandy. There were missions to St. Lo, when again the heavies were tried in front line bombing, something for which they were ill equipped by orientation, by equipment and by skill.

Losses began to taper off, but still planes were missing on a number of missions. Men were still dying, but the proportions were shrinking, and this gave comfort to everyone. Also, the technical improvements included bombing equipment, navigational aids, personal equipment, and the chin turret which provided two forward firing .50 caliber machine guns remotely controlled inside the nose.

But the B-17 was still a very cold workroom, and it was necessary to wear heated suits, boots and gloves to survive in the lengthy missions at high altitude. In the early days missions were usually not more than six hours, but in 1944 they were frequently from eight to 10 hours. This meant considerably more time at altitude. The oxygen equipment had been vastly improved since the early days, and that increased the comfort.

On 12 September 1944 the 306th lost nine planes on a long mission to Rhuland, which required flying all the way around Berlin. The survival rate was fair of those shot down. Those of us who had never seen a fighter attack before were amazed and appalled at what happened to our formation in just one pass through by the enemy.

In late 1944 rumors began to spread that the war would soon be over, and this went on for the final six months. Finally, on 19 April 1945 the 306th flew its 341st and final mission of the war.

During the war there had been at work a group of planners trying to decide what would happen to men and equipment. The 8th was itself scheduled to go to the Pacific. From Fall 1944 on top men were being siphoned out of the 8th to assume top command and staff jobs in the Pacific. Someone with unusual wisdom realized that with men and planes in Europe now was the time to conduct an aerial mapping survey of Europe and North Africa. The 306th "won" that assignment, and those young crews who had flown partial tours or no combat missions were assigned to the myriad nearly new B-17 Gs available and shortly after hostilities ended the 306th was engaged in "Casey Jones." This massive project went on for a year as the 306th moved about on the continent and even into North Africa to complete this monumental task.

The 306th had an illustrious combat history. Of the men who served in its ranks, 12 went on to become general officers in the postwar USAF, including Curtis LeMay. He was the group's original deputy commander as a lieutenant colonel. One man told me that while LeMay was in the 306th he never saw the man smile. Indeed there was little to smile about then. LeMay moved on to the 305th group and took it to combat. Some of you more senior officers may have encountered Al Bowley, Joe Belser or Lester Kearney along the way. All sharpened their flying skills with the 306th and won promotion to captain with the unit. None of them became commanders with the 306th, but later all earned two stars.

While I was with the group Maj. James Cheney was the group navigator. From 1970 to 1974 he was judge advocate general of the Air Force.

Eleven men who served with the 306th during hostilities also commanded other groups in the 8th during the war. I think the general officer record and command record of the 306th were exemplary.

As you may know, the original story that opens the book and movie, *12 O'Clock High*, was taken from the 306th. Col. Charles Overacker was the first commander and on 4 January 1943 he was replaced by Gen. Ira Eaker. Both Overacker and Eaker hold me the story, basically the same story. It was a dramatic event as Eaker named Col. Frank Armstrong as the new commander. Lt. Col. Bierne Lay was in Overacker's office when the confrontation took place, and when he co-authored the book that became the leadin to the story.

Exploits of the 306th are related in *Skyways to Berlin* and *First of the Many*, two early books on the 8th Air Force. Two major stories in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1943 tell of the exploits of the 306th. One relates the dramatic story of Capt. Robert Williams and his crew as they fought their way home from the German subpens on the west coast of France. The other tells of the Clay Pigeon Squadron and its hard luck commander.

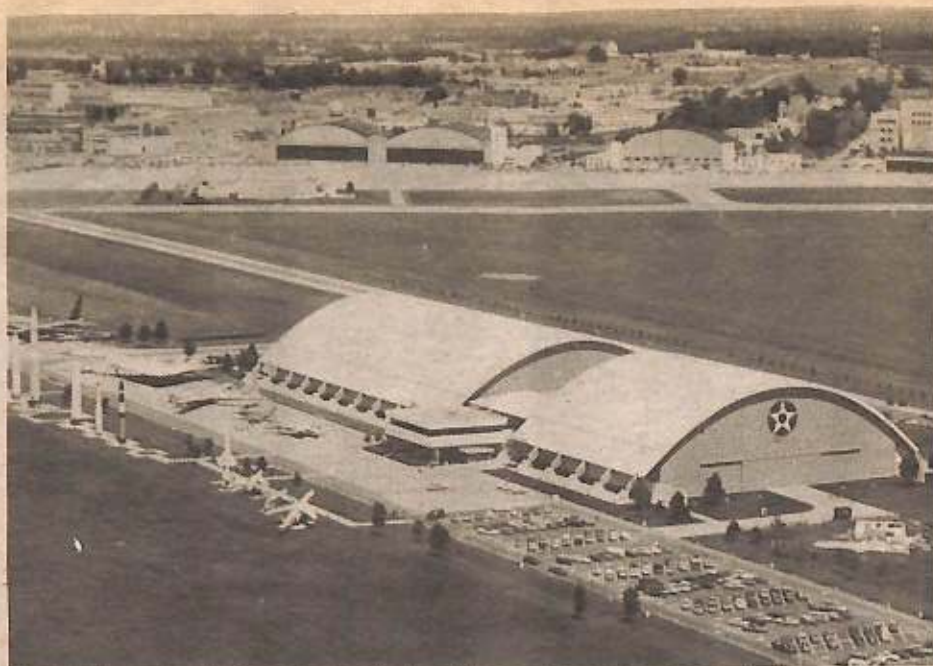
The 306th ad several stories in Time magazine, the New York Times and other publications of the day.

The 306th was not unknown during the war, but in the years after the way I began to think that it had been non-existent. No pictures of it were ever published, and nothing was told about it. It was out of my own frustration in these areas that came my desire to chronicle the story of the 306th Bomb Group.

To that end seven years ago I began researching the group, plowing through government archives, and then searching for men who could tell me about their exploits. I count among my friends now the three living group commanders, twelve of the nineteen living squadron commanders, a whole host of top staff officers, and hundreds of men who flew the planes, served the planes and worked in the myriad tasks about an air base.

As members today of the 306th Strategic Wing, you have a proud heritage to uphold. During its combat experience the 306th lost 177 planes; 738 men were killed in action; 885 became prisoners of war; 69 were interned in Sweden or Switzerland; 44 evaded capture in the occupied countries, and one escaped from a German prison.

But I would be remiss if I did not also tell you that they were also a



Above loom the two huge hangars of the USAF Museum at Wright-Patterson AFB, Dayton, WW II planes are inside, while many of the larger more contemporary craft are parked out of doors. The WW II quonset, which will have an interior taken from a 306th barracks, is at the lower right.



The WW II portion of the displays is shown, an area which will prove fascinating to most men of the 306th.

Deceased

Benjamin T. Compton, 367th cook, officers' B mess, 31 May 75 at Greensboro, AL.

Edward F. Dickhaus, 367th gunner (McDonough's crew, 1944), 24 May 81 in Cincinnati, OH.

Arthur F. Evans, 369th radio operator (Ehrler's crew, 1944), 17 Feb 82 in Scammon, KS.

Charles Fontane, 368th bombardier (1944), 1981 in Bunkie, LA.

Walter P. Kuenstler, 369th pilot (1945), 11 Feb 82 in Philadelphia, PA. He was a former Ft. Lauderdale, FL, yacht broker.

Paul Milakovich, 423rd engineer (Leach's crew) and POW (26 July 43 at Hanover with Armbrust), 21 Oct 81 in Glendora, CA.

Col. Olin O. Odom, Jr., 369th navigator (Buttorff's crew) and POW (24 April 44 at Oberpfaffenhofen with Tarr), 9 Oct 81 in Abilene, TX.

Ferdinand H. Onnen, 367th pilot (1943), 10 Oct 81 in Baltimore, MD, where he was president of Towson Ford Sales.

Raymond V. Zielinski, 367th, 1976 in Freeland, MI.

Are you registered with the Veterans Administration as a former POW? You may be potentially eligible for new benefits made possible by recent legislation. The Prisoner of War Health Care Benefits Act of 1981 makes it easier for former POWs to establish entitlement to compensation for certain disabilities.

good party group. I survived the second anniversary party in September 1944, which was regarded as the best bash ever thrown at Thurleigh. It lasted three days, even though some flew a mission on the third day. It was kind of like a county fair, a college homecoming, and a fraternity beer party thrown all into one and all over the base. Some of the guests didn't go home for at least a week.

The wish I bring from the 1,600 men whom we have found across the U.S. who served with the 306th in 1942-45 is that you feel as much pride in the 306th Strategic Wing as those of us in another day felt in the 306th Bombardment Group.

Tonight I am proud to speak for the 306th Bombardment Group and to wish you men the very best in the years ahead. We believe in you and we believe in America.

Newly-Found



Gilbert Roeder, onetime 368th pilot, has provided us with two recent pictures of the birthplace of the Eighth Air Force. It all began 28 January 1942 in Savannah, Georgia. The plaque above explains about the event, and the building below is where the first orders were issued. Out of this came the 306th Bomb Group.



Writer Says 8th Did Useful Job

"The record of bombing in Europe neither proved nor disproved the utility of strategic airpower. The bomber offensive against Germany could not alone win the war, but it was useful in paving the way for final victory on the ground by destroying the Luftwaffe, scrambling Nazi logistics, perhaps even by justifying the delay until 1944 of an invasion of France that might have been disastrous in 1942 or 1943, the target dates of many American planners."

"The Slide to Total Air War"
by Michael Sherry.
The New Republic, Dec. 16, 1981.
Vol. 184, No. 24.

Nine of Crew Living, Six Get Together

Last September Bob Welter's 423rd crew gathered for its biannual reunion in Plymouth, MA. They came to Thurleigh 27 November 43 and flew through the early part of 1944.

Nine of the men are still living and six of them came with their wives to the gathering, including Welter of Fayetteville, NY; Taylor Leedy, copilot, Junction City, OR; Ed West, navigator, West Quincy, MA; James V. Poston, radio operator, Dallas, TX; Mitt Comstock, ball turret, Plano, TX, and Carl Mwtz, tail gunner, St. Cloud, FL.

Continuing 306th Research

Although the new history of the 306th is completed, there will be continuing research conducted on the group in attempting to bring together an even more complete picture. This involves the ongoing search for men who served. If you wish to assist in this effort, send your contributions to

Russell A. Strong
2041 Hillsdale
Kalamazoo, MI 49007

Name _____
Address _____

- Alford, Lionel, Boeing Military Airplane Co., 3801 S. Oliver, Wichita, KS 67210 367.
- Barulich, Anthony F., PO Box 82, Buttonwillow, CA 93206 368.
- Blood, Leon J., 600 Central St., Stoughton, MA 02072 367.
- Borchers, James R., PO Box 2227, Fort Wayne, IN 46801 368.
- Byrd, James R., 474 Blackbird Ln., Madison, WI 53704 367.
- Casseday, Billy, Box 67, 506 S. 1st St., Dayton, WA 99328 369.
- Connally, Roy E., PO Box 814, Sanford, FL 32771 367.
- DeVack, George, 1165 Prevost St., San Jose, CA 95125 368.
- Fiske, David E., PO Box 63, Swanton, VT 05488 369.
- Flattum, Fritz, PO Box 632, Portage, WI 53901 449.
- Harkin, Theodore A., Ironcraft Const. Co., Broadwater Trading Estate, Worthing, West Sussex BN 14 BNL, England 369.
- Harry, Charles F., Box 105, Fairland, IN 46126 369.
- Heberg, Harvey H., Rt. 1, Box 500, Iota, LA 70543 368.
- Hill, Charles D., 2511 Wycliffe Rd., Baltimore, MD 21234 367.
- Hudson, Finis, Hickman, NY 42050 369.
- Ingram, Grover C., 6819 Dial Dr., Dayton, OH 45424 369.
- Kirby, James, Rt. 4, Box 346, Easton, MD 21601 369.
- Kirkham (Wagenfohr), Frank A., 21 Temple Ave., Whetstone, London N20, England 367.
- Lambert, Aloysius, Wisconsin Veterans' Home, King, WI 54946 367.
- Latscha, Walter V., 5618 Antonius Dr., Cincinnati, OH 45238 368.
- Manning, Paul V., 7 Meadow Ln., Bridgewater, MA 02324 423.
- McNeil, William, 3351 S. Hwy. 15, Monte Vista, CO 81144 367.
- Metcalf, Jack D., 3407 Vernor Rd., Kent, OH 44240 423.
- Palomski, Rudolph B., 153 Dawson St., Ishpeming, MI 49849 367.
- Mitchell, Freeman R., 1220 S. Oneida St., #12-207, Denver, CO 80224 367.
- Stevens (Silverman), Barney, 13700 Tahiti Way 237, Marina del Ray, CA 90291 369.
- Taylor, Harold G., Rt. 1, Box 99, Seaboard, NC 27876 368.
- Toth, Dennis, 4051 Ridge Rd., Willits, CA 95490 368.
- Traver, Marvin E., 200 S. Dolliver, Pismo Beach, CA 93449 423.
- Vik, Al W., 204 Marengo Ave., Forest Park, IL 60130 449.
- Yarsky, Frank H., 215 W. Vine, Wheatland, IA 52777 369.

'8th AF News' Gives Major Play to 306th

When you read the April issue of *8th AF News* you may think it's another issue of *Echoes*. Not quite, but the 306th is a dominant element in this particular issue.

Another version of the Snuffy Smith store occupies pages one and two, while page three features a review of the new history of the 306th, along with mention of the 306th Bomb Group Restaurant.

The 306th is also mentioned several other times in this issue.



British Seek Location Of Thurleigh Dump

Was there a dump at Thurleigh?

The English memorialists of the 306th would like to know just where it was so that they could examine the site and see what might be uncovered. Write Gordon Richards with the location, as well as you can remember it.

A metal detector may do the rest.

306TH ECHOES is published four times annually by the 306th Bombardment Group Historical Association, in January, April, July and October.

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Each issue is prepared and printed at Kalamazoo, MI, 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.

More Issues of 'Echoes'

Here's my help for future issues of *Echoes*!

I enclose \$_____ to support the production and mailing of the 306th *Echoes*. I also want to support continuing reunion activities for those who once served.

Name _____
Address _____
Mail to: Wm. M. Collins, Jr.
2973 Heatherbrae Drive
Poland, OH 44514