

306th Echoes

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Supporting the Air War on the Ground

The Ground Echelon Experience at Thurleigh, England, 1942-1945



By Lindsay Klar
Thurman Shuller Intern
Abilene Christian University

As those of you who served as air crews in the 306th Bomb Group began to make a difference against targets in the ETO, the ground echelon developed a support strategy that kept your aircraft in the air, your air crew operational, and provided for almost every aspect of daily life for you and the rest of the 3,500 Americans based at Thurleigh during the war. It was during the darkest days of 1942 and early 1943, when these unsung men and women faced an impossible task as they provided support for the difficult missions that lay ahead—all without setting foot into a Flying Fortress or leaving the ground. Their contributions to victory were made on the flight line and in the mechanical shops, in the administrative offices and staff areas across the base. There were those who ministered to your health, spiritual, and personal needs. There were men who fed you, lessened your fears, restored your faith, patched your plane, and tended to your wounds. They filed your paperwork, operated your cinema, and supplied your clothing. They served with dedication and perseverance, contributing to your success, in

jobs far less glorified, but equally as imperative as your own. These people on the ground were made up of countless officers and men in the Army Air Force, women in the Red Cross, and British civilians who lived and worked around Thurleigh throughout the war. These men and women contributed to the final victory in innumerable and immeasurable ways, making that victory possible.

The 306th Bomb Group included an elaborate and well-trained ground echelon, which ultimately became the backbone of the bombardment group, a sophisticated support system, without which the 306th Bombardment Group could not operate. The ground echelon included various detachments to assist in air operations, provide equipment, and personnel support. Overseeing this complex support network incorporated the Group headquarters, squadron headquarters for each operational squadron, and a service squadron. These ground support teams included medics, flight surgeons, quartermasters, aviation ordnance, weather squadrons, military police, maintenance companies, and



staff personnel for every task needed in the military organization. Group headquarters was arranged into four sections, organized in accordance to the traditional U.S. Army structure: (S-1) Personnel, (S-2) Intelligence, (S-3) Operations, and (S-4) Support. Each squadron headquarters was structured similarly to the Group's and included six technical support and maintenance sections: Mess, Armament, Ordnance, Communications, Medical, and Engineering. Each section supported the four squadrons' aircraft, equipment, and personnel.

The largest organization of ground personnel were assigned to the service group who provided for the requirements of the bombardment group as a whole. These support personnel performed various duties such as rebuilding engines and props, avionics, air frame repair to flight control, airfield security, firefighting, the Post Exchange (PX), special services, mail, transportation, communications, radar, and meteorology. Run-

ning a military base during World War II was not a simple feat. Thousands of air and ground personnel were needed for the planning and operation of the daylight bombing campaign against German-occupied Europe. At Thurleigh, near Bedford, England, the 306th soon took its place in the elaborate campaign that played out over the skies of Europe.

The home for the 306th was, in fact, a small city, housing approximately 3,500 men and a small number of women. The built environment at Thurleigh included housing and various facilities that included a gymnasium, cinema, chapel, library, and so on. Consequently, cinema operators, chaplains, chaplain assistants, librarians, and others were needed for their operation. Thurleigh was to be an independent unit, a self-sufficient entity. When the 306th arrived in England in August 1942, the British countryside was war torn, suffering from three years of war, the loss of loved ones, heavy German

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SAVE THE DATE!

2009 Fort Worth, Texas Reunion

October 8-12, 2009

Details coming in the January Echoes . . .

Visit the 306th Website

www.306bg.org



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The 306th Bomb Group Historical Association is a Federally tax-exempt organization and as a veteran's group is classified as 501 © (19).



Obituaries

Please send the Association details of deaths or complete obituaries if you have them. Please send obituary information to the secretary:

Albert McMahan
 272 N. Peachtree St.
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Obituaries Received:

Sam Angelle, 367th gunner, died 16 Jun 07 in East Lake, OH. He worked as a mechanical engineer and in sales. He left his wife Ann, 2c, 2gc.

Erskine Arbeiter, 369th waist gunner (Walter Rozett crew), died 18 May 07 in Corvallis, OR. He completed 32 missions and served in the Casey Jones Project. Postwar he was a farmer/bowling alley manager/mechanic. He leaves 2c, 1gc.

Marvin Barker, 423rd ball turret gunner (Harold Brown crew), died 25 Jun 05 in N. Ogden, UT. His crew arrived at Group 17 July 44 and completed their 35 mission tour in Dec. He owned and operated a farm/dairy. He left his wife Ramona, 4c, 15gc, 5ggc.

Milton Bassett, 369th ball turret gunner and POW (Young Newsom crew), died 29 August 07 in Bristol, CT. His crew arrived at Group 27 Apr 44 and was MIA/POW 16 Sep on mission to Bohlen. He was a stock broker, banker and retired from the Credit Bureau of Connecticut in 00. He leaves 1s.

Herbert Bellet, 423rd radio operator (Harold Trease crew), died 15 May 05 in Norristown, PA. He was a furniture retailer until his retirement in 1980. He left his wife, Carole, 2c, 4gc.

Albert Berman, 423rd tail gunner (Wilbur Weiland crew), died 18 May 06 in Needham, MA. His crew came to Group 03 Apr 44 and completed combat in Jul. He retired in 1985 as the purchasing agent for a printing company. He leaves his wife, Edith, 2c, 2gc.

William Blair, 368th armorer, died 11 Nov 03 in Spur, TX. After the war he worked for the post office retiring in 1981. He left his wife, Florene, 2c, 2gc.

Harlan Bleiler, 423rd, died 6 Apr 08.

Charles G. Bowers, 423rd navigator (Martin Andrews crew), died 11 May 08 in Parkville, MD. On the 6 Sep 43 mission to Stuttgart his flak damaged plane landed in Switzerland where the crew was interned. Postwar he was a salesman. He leaves his wife Constance, 4c, 9gc, 2ggc.

Cyril Busch, 369th navigator (Harlin Laughlin crew), died 19 Apr 08 in Germantown, TN. He completed a 30-mission tour in Mar 45. He graduated from U. Louisville, was a FBI agent for 30 years and VP for security for a major bank. He leaves his wife Carol, 2c, 1gd.

Frank Childers, 449th Sub Depot clerk, died 27 Apr 07 in Gallipolis, OH.

Albert Christensen, 367th, died 30 Aug 98 in Estherville, IA. He was a farmer. He left his wife Betty, 4c, 8gc, 3ggc.

Robert Christenson, 369th pilot, died 19 Feb 98 in Walled Lake, MI. He arrived at Group 3 Feb 45, flew about 15 missions and participated in the Casey Jones Project. He left 4c, 10gc, 12ggc.

Delmar Cockrum, 1628th Ordnance Company, died 1 Feb 03 in Plymouth, MI. He farmed and sold fruit and vegetables. He left 7c, 6gc, 5ggc.

George Cowan, 368th copilot (William Moroz crew), died 18 Jun 05 in Buford, GA. His crew joined the Group 1 Oct 44 and his plane was downed by flak 15 Oct and he was MIA/POW. He served in Korea as a pilot and maintenance officer. Afterwards he was at Warner-Robbins AFB as a technical writer. He left his wife Esther, 2c, 6gc, 2ggc.

Linus Curtis, 449th Sub Depot, died 10 Jun 1996 in Hood River, OR.

Rolly Davis, 369th waist gunner (Alfred Johansen crew), died 25 Oct 07 in Largo, FL He arrived at the Group 8 Jul 44 and completed a 35-mission tour in December.

Benjamin Deblinger, 369th, reported as deceased 25 Feb 94.

Douglas DeLaVars, 367th photo lab technician, died 6 Dec 06 in Fairborn, OH. He retired from the AF with 23 years service. He leaves 1d, 2gc, 3ggc.

David W. Dillon, 423rd tail gunner (John Delapoer crew), died 25 Aug 05 in Rock Springs, WY. He joined the Group 21 Jul 44 and completed a 30-mission tour in Apr 45. After the war he worked for the railroad. He leaves 4c, 6gc, 4ggc, 1ggc.

John P. Dillon, 369th bombardier (John G. Davis crew), died 12 Jan 07 in Worcester, MA. He completed a 32 mission tour in Nov 44. After the war he earned an Ed.M. degree and retired after 40+ years as an elementary school principal. He leaves his wife Shirley, 2c, 5gc.

Robert Edwards, 368th pilot, died 22 Jun 07 in Ocean View, DE. He completed a 35 mission tour in Jan 45. After the war he was a lawyer, business owner, and commercial property developer. He leaves his wife Gertrude, 1d, 1gd.

Arthur Frazier, 367th medic, died 11 Jul 08 in Humphrey, AR. Postwar he was a sweet potato farmer. He leaves 2c.

Marvin Gilmore, 369th tail gunner (Clifford Tinkham crew), died 2 Oct 07 in Parkersburg, WV. He completed 34 missions in May 44. After 35 years as a civil engineer at DuPont he retired in 1991. He left his wife, 4c, 7gc.

Orville Graham, 367th tail gunner (Arthur Mack crew), died 4 Dec 04 in Los Angeles, CA. He completed 62 missions. He was a longtime manager of a VW/Audi/Porsche dealership. He leaves his wife Gloria, 3c, 5gc.

Luverne Halverson, 423rd copilot (John Baldwin crew), died 30 Feb 08 in Truman, MN. Due to health problems he completed only 7 missions. He farmed and drove a school bus for 28 years. He leaves his wife Arlys, 3c, 4gc, 1ggc.

Col Nelson Hardin, 423rd pilot, died 3 Jan 08 in San Antonio, TX. On the 29 Mar 44 mission to Brunswick, Germany he was shot down and a POW. He retired from the Air Force with 27 years service in 1969. He leaves his wife Dolores, 2c, 2gc.

William Hovekamp, 367th tail gunner (Kelly Ross crew), died 23 Mar 07 in Louisville, KY. His plane was shot down 5 Apr 43, and he became a POW. He retired from servicing vending machines. He leaves his wife Rose, 3c, 8gc, 4ggc.

Alfred Johansen, 369th pilot, died 25 May 07 in Doylestown, PA. Flying "Steady Hedy" the crew completed 35 missions in December 44. After the war he earned an industrial engineering degree from Lehigh U. and retired from a manufacturing plant in 1984. He leaves his wife Elaine, 2c, 2gc.

President's Corner



As we end our first year of reorganization, the 306th is a cohesive and productive organization. We have an outstanding group of officers, board members, and committee chairmen who have worked diligently to create a sound foundation for our future.

The families of Jim and Dick Phelan have spent a year planning our reunion in Little Rock. The reunion schedule is exciting and interesting, and I hope you can attend.

Judy and Bernie Hermley report we have 943 members in our association. If you know of any 306th vets that we have not contacted, please have them write to Judy at 4314 Bob Stikes Blvd., Jay, FL 32565.

I am pleased to announce we have quite a few 2nd generation members and many will be attending the Little Rock reunion. They are our future, and we must continue to solicit younger members to our association.

As my term comes to an end, I want to thank each of you for all the cooperation and support you have given me. It has been a distinct honor to serve as president of this great and historic association. Thank you.

Joe Conroy
 President

40th Combat Wing UK Reunion Tour

Wednesday pm May 20th – Sunday am May 31st 2009

For the first time since 1945, the former members of the 92nd, 305th and 306th Bomb Groups and their families are invited to join us in England and celebrate the heroic deeds of the 40th Combat Wing, who together flew daily missions into occupied Europe from the East Anglian airfields of Podington, Chelveston and Thurleigh.

Our group stay will be at the atmospheric Swan Hotel Bedford, beside the banks of the Ouse River, at the heart of Bedford Town. A place steeped in local history, dating back to the 15th century. The Swan is very much a piece of 'Ye Old England' but with 21st century facilities.

Tour to include:- Welcome Reception Buffet, 40th Combat Wing Celebration Dinner and Farewell Banquet, Memorial Day Group Breakfast. Plus as part of the daily tours there are 2 x afternoon teas, and 7 x lunches.

Guided tours to:- Woburn Abbey and Woburn Safari Park, The Shuttleworth Old Warden Vintage Aircraft and Motor Vehicle collection, plus its nationally renowned Swiss Gardens, Bromham Water Mill, RAF Hendon and the national collection of the history of the RAF. Tour of the ancient Kings College Cambridge, plus the world famous wartime 'Eagle' Pub located in the centre of Cambridge City.

Highlights include:- 40th Combat Wing Day, a celebration of the history of the Wing and its three component heavy bomber groups. To be held at the 306th Bomb Group Museum, the home of the 306th, and the former home of the 40th Combat Wing Headquarters site.

This is a privately organised and run tour, aimed specifically at and for the benefit and enjoyment of the veterans and their families. It is hosted by the UK members of the 305th Bomb Group Memorial Association, with the kind assistance of their counterpart Associate Contacts and respective Officers of the 92nd and 306th BG Associations.

- **Couple/Two people sharing Pounds Sterling £1975.00 total**
- **Single person (includes supplement) Pounds Sterling £1450.00 total.**
- **Excludes ALL air-land and travel costs from point of departure USA/return home.**
- **Excludes ALL insurances – Personal/travel/health.**
- **The tour package commences and ends at The Bedford Swan Hotel**

For full descriptions, booking forms and further instructions

Please email Ian White, organiser, at – IW.305cando@googlemail.com

Or write to:- Ian White, 305th BGMA, 24 Pipit Rise, Bedford MK41 7JS, England

Or contact Ralph Franklin, National School Cottage, Mill Hill, Keysoe,

Beds MK44 2HP. Telephone from U.S. 011-44-1234-708715

Email: 306museum@nscmh.fsnet.co.uk

Obituaries continued from page 2...

Charles Kaelin, Group Operations draftsman-cartographer, died 13 Mar 07 in Canton, OH. Postwar he was a steel worker and renowned local artist. He never married.

Lloyd Karr, 369th lead crew radio operator, died 11 Apr 00 in Roanoke, VA. He completed 35 missions. He retired in 1981 as a captain in the Roanoke fire department. He left 2c, 8gc, 2ggc.

Erwin Keepman, 369th bombardier (Alfred Johansen crew), died 26 Jun 08 in Oconomowoc, WI. His crew joined the Group 8 Jul 44 and completed a 35 mission tour in Nov. He retired in 1988 as a Waukesha engine sales representative. He leaves his wife Margaret, 4c, 13gc, 3ggc.

Richard Kern, 369th ball turret gunner and POW (Byron Bryant crew), died 25 Nov 05 in Topeka, KS. His plane was shot down by rockets 14 Oct 43. He retired as service manager of a Topeka Dodge dealer in 1985. He left 1s, 3gc, 8ggc.

Kenneth Kinzel, 423rd tail gunner (Robert Davenport crew), died 10 Dec 07 in Dement IL. He joined the Group 4 Apr 45 just before the end of the war. He retired as the plant manager of a cable manufacturer after 42 years. He leaves his wife Linda, 6c, 7gc, 8ggc.

Ray Kristoff, 368th ball turret gunner, died 30 Aug 06 in Coventry, CT. He completed 30 missions and was credited with an enemy fighter. He was plant manager of a grain feed mill and retired at 55 for health reasons. He leaves his wife Annette, 3c, 6gc, 9ggc.

Frank Krzyston, 368th pilot, died 26 Aug 2005 in Orangeburg, SC. He joined the Group 21 Apr 44 and completed 35 missions in early Sep. After the war he owned and operated an insurance agency and retired in 1994. He left his wife Wanda, 3c, 9gc, 5ggc.

Rudolph Laitinen, 423rd armorer, died 14 Jan 01 in Two Harbors, MN. Postwar he worked in an iron ore processing plant retiring in 1978. He left his wife Helmi, 5c, 6ggc, 3ggc.

Col John L. Lambert, commander of the 423rd died 14 Jun 08 in Largo, FL. He joined the Group at Wendover in mid-Sep 42, flew a special mission in the Battle of Midway, and in England completed 26 missions. Postwar he interviewed captured Luftwaffe pilots concerning their strategies and tactics, visited sites the 306th had bombed to analyze effectiveness, was a pilot in the Berlin Air Lift, assigned to duty in Japan during Korean conflict, and Air Attache in Helsinki, Finland. He leaves 2c, 2gc, 2ggc.

Walter Lanius, 369th bombardier (George Walter crew), died 6 May 08 in Baltimore, MD. He joined the Group 12 Sep 44 and completed his combat tour in Jan 45. He retired from AT & T in 1985. He leaves 3c, 6gc.

Everett Malan, 367th radio operator, died 17 Jun 05 in Arkansas City, KS. He completed his 25th mission 25 Jun 44. Postwar he retired as a college professor. He leaves 1c.

Lawrence Marks, 368th pilot, died 15 Feb 05 in Oshkosh, WI. He completed 5 missions before war's end and participated in the Casey Jones Project. Postwar he worked for Kimberly-Clark until he retired in 1980 and then had a flying school until 2000. He retired as a LTC from the Air Corps Reserve in 1974. He left his wife Carolyn, 4c, 4gc 2ggc.

Jack Marshall, 368th bombardier (William Reece crew) died 3 Apr 08 in Pittsburg, PA. He flew a 30-mission tour between May and July 44. After the war he worked in the steel fabricating business and retired in 1997. Marshall leaves his wife Nancy, 3c, 7gc, 5ggc.

Alden Maynes, 368th copilot (Robert Ehrler crew), died 21 May 05 in Phoenix, AZ. On 24 May 44 his plane was downed by flak, and he became a POW.. He was a general contractor for many years. He retired from the Air Force Reserve as a LTC. He left his wife Colleen, 4c, 37gc, 30ggc.

William Neilson, 367th navigator (Frederick Mitchell crew), died 7 Aug 06 in Monroeville, PA. He joined the Group 31 Jan 44, completed 31 missions and was in the Casey Jones Project. He retired as a clinical psychologist in 1984. He left 3c, 2gc.

Edward Orsted, 1208th Quarter Master Company, died 15 Jul 05 in Racine, WI.

Edward Peterson, 369th co-pilot (Raymond Braun crew), died 20 Apr 08 in Fullerton, CA. He completed a 37 mission tour in Jan 45. Post war he retired from automobile sales in 1992. He leaves his wife Mary, 2c.

Jose Pinela, 368th toggler, died 25 Jan 07 in Orwell, VT. He completed 35 missions. After the war he retired from Disney World in 1987. He leaves his wife Barbara, 4c, 5gc, 3ggc, 1ggc.

Eugene Pollock, 369th navigator (Mack McKay crew), died 16 Mar 05 after several years with Alzheimer's disease. He was the first officer and second 8th AF member to complete a 25-mission combat tour. During his tour he developed the Pollock gun site, a more accurate version of the standard 50 caliber machine gun site. He left his wife Crockette, 1c, 2c.

Albert Pugh, 449th Sub Depot turret repair, died 20 Apr 08 in Sublimity, OR. He retired from the Oregon Highway Department in 1989. He leaves 3c, 2gc.

Barney Rawlings, 367th co-pilot (Eldon Burrell crew), and later a lead pilot died of melanoma 8 May 08 in St. George, UT. Between 3 Aug 44 and early Jan 45 he flew 35 missions. After the war he became a singer, emcee, and executive director of the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority. In 1988 he co-chaired the Las Vegas reunion. He retired from the Army Air Corps Reserves as a MG. He leaves his wife Christine, 4c, 5sc, 28gc, 27ggc, 2ggc.

Hjalmer Risberg, 1024th explosives ordnance, died 26 Apr 07 in Titusville, FL. He retired as a MSgt in 1968 with 27 years service. He left 4c, 5gc.

Thomas Roberts, 369th navigator (Richard Vogel crew), died 21 Feb 08 in Ridgeland, MS. His crew joined the Group 27 Apr 44 and completed a 30 mission tour in mid-Aug. He retired from the Air Force as a LTC.

Charles Rodgers, 449th Sub Depot tool and die maker, died 5 Jan 07 in Emporia, KS. He retired from working as a tool and die maker and fruit farmer in 1979. He left his wife Jean, 2c.

Eli Rogers, 423rd engineer and POW (Edwin Pipp crew), died 18 Nov 06 in Williamston, NC. His plane was shot down 1 May 43, his 13th mission. After the war he worked as a plumber. He left his wife Elinore, 2c, 3gc, 6ggc.

Tor O Rydberg, 449th Sub Depot carpenter, died 11 Feb 07 in Massapequa Park, NY. Postwar he worked at Grumman for 26 years. He leaves his wife Jean, 2c, 3gc.

Elmer Sandberg, 369th bombardier/radar operator (Barney Stevens crew), died 15 May 06 in San Bruno, CA. Sandberg completed a 30 mission tour in Feb 45. He retired from the State of California and leaves 2c.

Frederick Schaak, 423rd ground radio operator, was killed in an automobile accident 6 Dec 07 in Denver, CO. He was a farmer/rancher his entire life. He leaves 2c, 5gc, 2ggc.

Daniel Schlessel, 368th died 30 Mar 08 in the NYC area. He joined the group Jun 42 and was discharged in Sep 45. Danny, without question, was the most loved member of the station hospital during his three years with the 306th.

Fred Sherman, 369th pilot, died 28 May 08 in Fayetteville, AR. He arrived with the Group 15 Jan 43 and upon completion of a 25-mission tour was assigned to Texas as a flight instructor for the B-52 Superfortress and flew combat missions in the Vietnam conflict. His last post was Vice Commander, Headquarters Command USAF, Bolling Field, Washington, DC. He was predeceased by his wife, Annie Jo. He leaves his wife Ruth, 5c, 9gc, 11ggc.

Robert Shultz, 367th radio operator, died 23 Dec 06 in Lutz, FL. His was one of the 5 306th planes to complete the 14 Oct 43 mission to Schweinfurt. He graduated from U. Miami and was office manager of a fertilizer company for more than 40 years.

James Snoddy, 367th bombardier, died 24 Jan 08 at Richard M. Campbell Veterans Nursing Home in Anderson, SC. He joined the Group 7 Oct 44 and completed a 35-mission tour in Feb 45. He was a retired employee of Startex Mills. He leaves 1c, 2gc, 1ggc..

James Stelzer, 368th engineer and POW (Theodore Jankowski crew), died 4 Jan 07 in McKinley, TX. His plane was shot down 17 Apr 43 on the mission to Bremen. He was a lifelong farmer. He leaves his wife Frances, 2c, 5gc, 3ggc.

Col Edwin Sterling, 368th pilot, died 20 Jun 06 in Houston, TX. After several combat missions he transferred to Hqs Eighth Air Force Operations and Intelligence. He served as Dir. of Intelligence for the 5th Air Force in Korea and Deputy Dir of Intelligence for Vietnam and later was Commander of Aeronautical Charts Center. He retired from the AF in 1970 and was with NASA for 10 yrs.. He left his wife Shirley, 2c.

Col Alfred Switzer, 369th pilot, died 3 Feb 07 in Kissimmee, FL. He joined the Group 25 Mar 44 and completed a 25-mission tour in July. He remained in the Air Force and retired in 1968. Afterwards he was purchasing agent for Brown and Root retiring in 1980. He leaves his wife Bertha, 2c, 1gc.

John Thach, 369th radar operator, died 9 Nov 05 in Germantown, TN. He completed 13 missions. After the war he was a meteorologist at the US Weather Bureau for 36 years and retired as a LTC from the AF Reserve. He left 2c, 4gc, 3ggc.

James Tynan, 367th ball turret gunner (Richard Breed crew), died 8 May 05 in Wantagh, NY. He flew 35 combat missions. He retired as a sanitation worker in 1977. He leaves his wife Harriette, 3c, 5gc.

Liberto Villanueva, 449th Sub Depot parachute rigger, died 23 July 06 in Tucson, AZ. He was in the AF Reserve and retired from the Red Cross.

Chester Vosburg, 423rd gunner, died 15 Oct 07 in Woodland Hills, CA. He flew 16 missions and was involved in the Casey Jones Project. He retired from the California Department of Transportation in 1988. He leaves his wife Bertie, 3c, 4gc, 2ggc.

A Leader Among Men

Robert Riordan and the Battle for Europe

by Luke Truxal
Russell Strong Intern
Abilene Christian University

As the American daylight bombing campaign began in the fall of 1942, the 8th Air Force faced the daunting task of launching missions with limited resources against Axis targets in Europe. Robert “Rip” Riordan, a pilot in the 306th Bomb Group, became an early leader in the 369th Bomb Squadron. His time spent with the 306th lasted from the group’s first mission in October 1942 until September 1944. His flying abilities and leadership were instrumental in helping the group through some of the more difficult months of combat early in the war.

When the 306th Bomb Group joined the air war in Europe in 1942, the Group was tasked with the burden of flying missions against a more disciplined and experienced German fighter command. This proved to be a deadly combination for American Eight Air Force during late 1942 and early 1943. One of the original groups in the Eighth Air Force, the 306th Bomb Group suffered during their early missions as the crews struggled against their experienced German adversaries.

Lt. Riordan and his crew arrived at Thurleigh and were assigned to the 369th Bomb Squadron in the 306th Bomb Group. The 306th flew the Boeing B-17 F, “Flying Fortress” and the soon found that the Model F had no defense from attack by enemy fighters at the nose of the aircraft. The disciplined and experienced German pilots, the lack of Allied fighter cover for missions deep in occupied territory, and the need for additional armament on the B-17 F were all issues that Riordan, the 306th, and the Eighth Air Force faced during the early stages in the air campaign against the Axis.

On the morning of 9 October the men of the 306th woke with great anticipation for their first mission as a bomb group. Robert Riordan recalled his feelings years later, “I and my crew were excited - this action was why we were here. I don’t recall being apprehensive, but we all probably were.” The mission for most 306th crews went smoothly, but Riordan and his crew dealt with a mechanical problem that threatened his B-17. The control cable at the tail of the aircraft was cut, and the oxygen system was damaged. Instead of aborting the mission, Riordan and his crew carried on with the mission. Over the next months Riordan created a reputation as a pilot who was, “gung-ho for flying missions to completion-no abortions, period.” Early on the 306th suffered from mission aborts, one of the reasons behind the eventual relief of Colonel Overacker, the Group’s first commander. After the mission Riordan and his crew received a commendation from Colonel Overacker, for staying in close formation and protecting the squadron leader’s crippled aircraft after the lead plane had been severely damaged during the mission to Lille.

A month after attacking Lille, France on their first mission, Riordan and the 306th revisited the target. The mission did not go well for the Riordan crew. The formation made their way to the target area where the bombers were forced to make two runs over the target. The group recorded hits on both the primary and secondary targets. As the mission continued, the German air attacks on the formation intensified. During the fighting Riordan’s plane, *WaHoo*, became the target of increased attacks, and the aircraft began to trail behind the formation. His aircraft took 20 mm hits on his left wing, and Riordan lost his left wing tip. The formation, lacking escort fighters, slowed down to protect Riordan’s aircraft from enemy fighters and engaged in a running fight on the return to the English coast. This action may have very well saved Robert Riordan and his crew from being shot down behind enemy lines. The Cranmer crew, flying nearby, observed the attacks on Riordan and the damage that the aircraft sustained. From his vantage point, Cranmer reported that the number one engine was out of action, along with the left wing tip shot off. Despite this damage Riordan maintained control of his damaged aircraft and returned to England where he landed it safely. In their debriefing the Cranmer crew noted Riordan’s bravery during the fight and his extraordinary piloting skills as he navigated his wounded B-17 out of harms way where he made a successful landing. Though not reported in his interrogation session Riordan lost one crew member, Sgt. John DeJohn. DeJohn was hit by shrapnel in the abdomen and left arm. DeJohn survived the wound, but he lost the use of his left arm and later was medically discharged. After landing, the full extent of the damage sus-



Visit the
306th
Website
www.306bg.org

Top photograph—Robert Riordan crew. Left to right, standing: Robert Riordan, pilot; Raleigh Holloway, waist gunner; George Spelman, navigator; Charles Davis, ball turret gunner; Orville Schulz, radio operator; John Owens, tail gunner; Albert McMahan, waist gunner; Anthony Santoro, engineer/top turret gunner; Gerald Rotter, bombardier. Kneeling: Edward Maliszewski, co-pilot. Bottom photograph: Robert Riordan.

tained in combat was greater than originally believed. The ground crew reported that both the vertical and horizontal stabilizers were severely damaged and full of bullet holes. The elevator received extensive damage from bullets, and the tail gunner’s compartment needed to be replaced due to damage sustained during the mission. The fuselage was badly torn underneath the waist gunner’s position, and the number one propeller needed to be replaced. The damage sustained in battle by the aircraft was so vast that the aircraft’s flying status became indefinite.

In November King George VI visited the base at Thurleigh. Accompanying the royal party were Generals Ira Eaker and Carl Spaatz. Eaker commanded the Eighth Air Force in England, reporting to Spaatz who commanded all American Army Air Forces in Europe. Riordan and his crew were surprised to be introduced to George VI, “the King was very interested as I pointed out all the places where my plane had been hit and damaged on its last raid.” Riordan also recalled how all the generals and the King were surprised that he had brought his aircraft back home.

After the inspection at Thurleigh, things did not become any easier for Riordan and his crew. The crew was temporarily transferred to the 423rd Bomb Squadron for a mission against Axis targets in Rouen, France. This mission proved to be one of the more dangerous missions for Robert Riordan during his time with the 306th. During the mission the group was attacked by as many as fifty enemy fighters, including ME 109s, ME 110s, and FW 190s. Not only did the Germans attack the bomber formation in large numbers, but they also began to use new tactics for attacking B-17s formations. Riordan’s crew reported in their post mission interrogation that the Germans focused their attacks on the nose of the B-17. The Germans also came in much closer when making their attack runs on the formation of B-17s. Another crew, under the command of Captain McKay, reported that they received attacks from several different angles. However, most of the attacks focused on the front of the aircraft and at least fifty passes were made on aircraft in the 306th formation.

During the fighting Riordan’s tail gunner S/Sgt. Clifford Langley received a laceration to his leg from a 20 mm round that hit his position. Despite his wounds S/Sgt. Langley shot down an enemy fighter, one of the four claims made by the Riordan crew. In a remarkable feat of flying ability, Riordan brought in another shot up B-17 and landed safely at Thurleigh. The aircraft had lost its number four engine, and his number three engine had to be feathered when his altitude was above ten thousand feet, and had several guns shot out, including the tail gun and the top turret gun.

Continued on page 5...

Continued from page 4...

The 28 March 1943 mission targeted the marshalling yards at Rouen, France. Riordan was assigned to be the lead plane in the formation with Major Henry Terry as his co-pilot. Terry at the time was commanding the 369th Bomb Squadron. Flying group lead for the 306th spoke well of Riordan's flying skills and the ability of his crew to operate efficiently. Riordan, recently promoted Captain, had demonstrated that he was one of the more dependable pilots in the 306th. By this time he had completed his twenty-five mission tour of duty, and from this point forward, further participation in combat missions became voluntary.

Riordan, an excellent pilot in combat, also demonstrated leadership as a commander in the 306th. One of longest serving officers with the 306th Bomb Group, Riordan later served for more than a year as a squadron commander. On 22 June 1943 the 306th Bomb Group underwent some major changes in their command structure. Colonel Claude Putnam received a promotion and became the operations officer for the First Bomb Wing and Lt. Colonel George L. Robinson replaced Putnam at Thurleigh. Another commander who transferred out was Lt. Colonel James W. Wilson, who had been the deputy group commander. Major Henry W. Terry, who commanded the 369th, was selected for the job, and Robert Riordan, who had previously distinguished himself in previous missions, was promoted to major and squadron commander.

It became Riordan's responsibility to lead aircraft from his own squadron into combat and fly group lead more frequently on missions. Riordan led the 306th on a mission to Villacoublay, France on 24 August 1943. As group leader Riordan flew at the head of the 306th's formation during the mission. Positioned at lead position in the formation exposed Riordan's aircraft to attacks by enemy fighters.

During this mission twelve ME 109s attacked the 306th formation focusing on the lead aircraft. After the Germans made their first pass, American P-47 fighters chased down the attacking enemy aircraft. In the later years of the war, the 306th's formations faced little resistance from enemy fighters, but the anti-aircraft fire during this mission proved extremely accurate, damaging seventeen of the eighteen B-17s in the formation. The bombing results for Riordan's first lead mission reported as fair, with fifty-four tons of bombs used in the mission.

Riordan's command of the 369th Bomb Squadron was exemplary. During November 1943, the 306th flew five missions. Under Riordan the 369th Bomb Squadron flew the highest percentage of sorties at 29.03 percent, dropped the most bombs totaling 29.93 percent, and had the most flying time. Riordan's policy on mission abortions also came through in his record for the month of November 1943 with the lowest percentage in crews aborting their mission within the 306th Bomb Group at 14.29 percent. The squadron with the next best percentage in mission aborts was the 367th with 28.57 percent—double that of the 369th.

The mission to Bernberg, Germany on the 22 February 1944 proved to be a real test of Riordan's leadership. Riordan, now a Lieutenant Colonel, led the 306th formation towards Bernberg. As soon as the fighter escorts left the formation German, ME 109 fighters attacked the formation but the group was able to stay in a tight formation as they sustained heavy attacks. When the bombers arrived north of Koblenz, twenty to thirty FW 190s attacked the 306th from 11 to 1 o'clock, lined abreast. After a fifty-minute air battle, the German fighters veered off to finish any B-17s that were lagging behind.

The lack of fighter support for the 306th during this mission left the formation extremely vulnerable to fighter attack, and the Germans took advantage of the 306th's situation by attacking the formation throughout the mission with large numbers of fighters. Fortunately the 306th had a reliable pilot and leader in Riordan, who was experienced in defending against fighter attacks without the luxury of escort fighters. The early months of the air war provided Riordan with the experience to be able to lead the formation towards the target despite the massive attacks against his force.

Riordan and the formation continued towards the target at Bernberg. The flak encountered along the way to Bernberg and Bonn was so heavy that experienced crews reported that it was, "the most intense and accurate they had ever seen." Despite these difficulties Riordan was able to get the formation over Bernberg where the 306th destroyed the target. Strike photos taken during the mission demonstrated that the bomb accuracy was excellent.

After the bombing run on Bernberg the group turned toward home. If Riordan and his crews thought the worst was over, they were wrong. With no fighter cover on the return leg, the Germans again attacked the bombers furiously. Approximately seventy-five enemy fighters jumped the formation on the route back to England. Riordan and the 306th encountered ME 109s, FW 190s, and ME 210s and in one instance, the



306th was not the only group to suffer during the fighting that day. Crews reported seeing four other non-306th B-17s go down enroute to the target.

This mission speaks well of the 306th and Riordan, who despite the nine abortions and heavy fighting, were still able to hit their target at Bernberg effectively, while flying deep into occupied territory without sufficient fighter coverage. This appears to be the most difficult and costly mission that Riordan led for the 306th Bomb Group. On later missions Riordan faced little opposition from enemy fighters and enjoyed excellent fighter coverage, accurate bombing results and no losses.

Riordan's tenure as squadron commander for the 369th Bomb Squadron ended in September 1944 when he was promoted to deputy commander of the 92nd Bomb Group. Riordan's impact on the 306th Bomb Group during his time as a pilot and as a squadron commander was invaluable to the group's success. As one of the original members of the 306th, he gained valuable experience that proved necessary as he led the 369th Bomb Squadron in the months that followed. Riordan's leadership provided inspiration to others in the 306th, serving with the 306th Bomb Group from its inception until September 1944. By the time he departed the 306th, he had served with the group through some of its darkest days. As Riordan assumed his new duties with the 92nd Bomb Group in the fall 1944, the tide had turned. D-Day and the invasion of Europe had begun a new phase of the war. The Germans were on the run and the Axis forces' days were numbered. Riordan would be on hand to help deliver the final blow that would spell the end to Hitler's quest to destroy free people everywhere.

Germans fired rockets into the formation. Later some of the crews reported that it appeared as if the German fighters, "feared no interference from our fighters at the time."

The group reached Thurleigh with heavy damage to the attacking force. Out of the thirty-nine aircraft that took off on the mission, nine had to turn back early. That lowered the attacking force, from thirty-nine B-17s to thirty. Seven of the attacking bombers were lost during the operation—a 23.33 percent loss on the mission. The

DONATIONS FOR THE 306TH BOMB GROUP ASSOCIATION

Those who are able are asked to make an annual contribution to keep everything running smoothly in our Association. There are no dues—so your gift is needed to support the 306th operations. Your gift is tax-deductible.

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

_____ Date

Museum Notes

Thurleigh Airfield 306th Bomb Group Museum



MUSEUMS | THURLEIGH

COUNTLESS HOURS of effort, lots of research and more than a little love for the subject bore fruit on July 27, 2002 when the 306th Bombardment Group Museum was opened at the former Thurleigh airfield, north of Bedford. Guest of honour on that day was Dr Jonathan Palmer of Bedford Autodrome who had provided the museum with one of the few surviving wartime buildings on the site.

Jonathan was on hand again at another ceremony at the museum on May 27 this year. Introducing these proceedings, he said that the Autodrome was: "honoured to be the custodian of such a great treasure."

Many people work behind the scenes at the 306th, but it owes its existence to an extraordinary couple with the kind of vigour that makes most around them gape: museum founders and curators Daphne and Ralph Franklin.

Both were being recognised by the US-based East Anglian Airwar Project with the presentation of the George Bledsoe Award. Professor Vernon Williams of the Airwar Project described the museum as "a quite extraordinary creation" and said that in his travels in the area he had been struck by the "sense of community [towards the 306th] by the villages and towns".

'First over Germany'

Work began on the land north of Bedford in July 1940, with the creation of a station for Bomber Command. On January 16, 1942, 160 Squadron formed there, with Consolidated Liberator IIs, but it left for India the following month. A longer association was developed with 18 Operational Training Unit which flew Vickers Wellingtons and trained Polish bomber crews.

Everything changed in September 1942 when the first components of the Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress-equipped 306th Bomb Group arrived. Its first mission took place on October 9, and the 306th became the first Eighth Air Force unit to bomb Germany.

For this it became known as 'The Reich Wreckers'. Even in the depths of the war this wasn't seen as 'good copy' by some sources and the 306th was often referred to by the

Right

In July 1944, Princess Elizabeth visited the 306th at Thurleigh to name a 367th BS B-17G 'Rose of York' in her honour. The Princess is seen with group CO Col Claude Putnam. The 'Rose' went on to complete 62 missions before ditching on February 5, 1945; the Princess went on to be a Queen.

US NATIONAL ARCHIVES



Bigger inside!

The founders of the exceptional 306th Bomb Group Museum have received international acclaim - **Ken Ellis** reports

There is a display within the museum that explains what the locality meant to the men of the 306th. Robert 'Rocky' Rockwell of the 306th wrote to the village of Keysoe as follows: "Thirty-three times I came 'home' over your village and 33 times I thanked God I was still alive."

The Bledsoe award is given in memory of a Consolidated B-24 Liberator pilot who flew with the famous 'special ops' unit, the 'Carpetbaggers', at Harrington, north-west of Northampton. Daphne and Ralph - to be found at the museum almost constantly - were deeply moved by the presentation.

Right

The 306th BG Museum's building is an original wartime structure and is full of treasures.

press as the more acceptable 'First over Germany'.

As the B-17Gs touched down on April 19, 1945, the 306th completed its 342nd and final combat mission. No wonder the group had developed such strong ties with the local community; the 306th had stayed longer at a single base and longer in England than any other Eighth Air Force combat unit.

Post-war, Thurleigh gained more





Displays range from the home front, the land army to 'GI brides'.



fame as one of the homes of the Royal Aircraft Establishment, with a galaxy of fascinating types that were tested and developed at the airfield. A huge runway, hangar and wind tunnel complex soon changed the shape and nature of the former bomber base.

Depth and quality

Located as it is in a wartime building, the 306th BG Museum sticks to telling the tale from 1940 to 1945. The emphasis is on the Eighth Air Force days but with plenty to see relating to the RAF tenure and what life was like in general during that time. The depth and quality of the displays is something to behold.

including a Browning 0.303 machine-gun.

In the first display room is the device that could put a bomb into a pickle barrel - in theory - a Norden bomb sight. This prized exhibit was donated by bombardier George Kerr who also passed on his A2 leather flying jacket.

George is another man impressed by the work the museum is doing. Before shipping the Norden east, he staged a 'farewell party' for it with his pilot, Roy Trask, in March 2006.

Close to the chapel is a replica of the Congressional Medal of Honor awarded to gunner Sgt Maynard H Smith of the 306th's 423rd BS. Maynard was on his first mission

The museum chapel and library.



Well deserved transatlantic recognition for Daphne and Ralph Franklin.

100 Years of British Flight

A FlyPast team, headed by Nigel Price, has produced a special publication dedicated to the centenary of flight in the UK. It covers the development of aviation in Britain from Cody and Roe to the Eurofighter Typhoon. Articles include: *Gallery of Fame*, a 'tour' of the major exhibits in the Science Museum; *Paper Planes* - a brief selection of projects that never saw the light of day; and *Building the Airliners* - how Britain helped to shape commercial aviation. See page 73 for more details or take a look at www.flypast.com



306th Bombardment Group Museum

Where? At Thurleigh, north of Bedford. Best approached from the A6. Close to the villages of Sharnbrook and Bletsoe, follow signs for Bedford Technology Park and Bedford Autodrome.
When? Open every weekend and Bank Holiday 10.30am to 4.00pm between March 1 and October 31. Parties of six or more outside these times by prior arrangement.
Contact: Tel 01234 708715 email 306museum@nscmh.fset.co.uk www.306bg.co.uk

on May 1, 1943, when practically everything that could go wrong did.

He fought an intense fire within the bomber; helped the badly-wounded tail gunner and used the waist guns to fend off constant attacks by fighters. The full story of his valour makes any wartime derring-do movie look tame!

We started a Doctor Who theme on page 84 and we'll keep it going here. During his speech, Bedford Autodrome's Jonathan Palmer explained that the museum building had particular qualities. Go from room to room and you will eventually notice that you are in a Bedford version of the timelord's TARDIS - there is more room inside than out!

All of this and much more awaits visitors to Thurleigh. The award to Daphne and Ralph is very welcome. Those that are fortunate enough to have met them know that they are very special people.

TARDIS stands for Time and Relative Dimensions in Space, of course!

Bombardier George Kerr donated his A2 flying jacket and a Norden bomb sight.



At 06:10 on May 8, 1944 B-17G 42-38008, piloted by 2nd Lt Louis Matichka took off from Thurleigh, bound for Berlin. Louis and his crew were with the 306th's 367th Bomb Squadron and they dropped on target at 11:11 from 27,000ft (8,230m).

Things started to go wrong and the B-17 lost two engines and was low on fuel. They took the decision to head for neutral Sweden but had to ditch in the Baltic. The aircraft broke in two, but the crew survived.

In 2001 Swedish diver Magnus Andersson located the wreck by sonar. In 2004 he visited the museum to discover more about the 306th BG and was impressed with what he saw. Not long after, components salvaged from the Baltic arrived at Thurleigh.

Editor's Note: Reprinted by permission, the August 2008 issue of Flypast contained this two-page story of Ralph and Daphne Franklin receiving their well-deserved George Bledsoe Award in May this year. The Bledsoe Award is awarded to deserving persons who have made a difference in the preservation of military aviation history and the Franklins were the first to receive this prestigious award in England. Their groundbreaking work in developing and operating the 306th Bomb Group Memorial Museum made them the obvious choice for the Bledsoe Award. A large crowd was on hand for the presentation and celebration. The Flypast article presented the 306th Memorial Museum in high fashion as readers got a glimpse of the museum and some of its impressive exhibits. The following members of the 306th BG Association participated in the event at Thurleigh on May 27th this year: Dr. Vernon L. Williams, Director of the East Anglia Air War Project; Colonel Susan O'Konski (Ret.), Vice-President of the 306th Bomb Group Association; and 306th Bomb Group veterans Carl Groesbeck (368th Bomb Squadron) and Philip Mundell, (369th Bomb Squadron).



continued from page 1...

bombing in the cities, and extensive rationing. Much of the goods and services needed to build and operate Thurleigh had to come from the United States. After the long and desperate years of war, the British were in no position to provide such assistance.

The ground personnel experienced a very different war than the aircrews. Air crews usually remained at Thurleigh for two to three months, spending their time flying missions or waiting on weather to clear to fly more missions. Their tenure at Thurleigh was linked to the number of missions flown. Upon reaching that number, the air crew rotated back to the United States for reassignment—usually teaching at training bases. The ground personnel assignment at Thurleigh was considerably longer, usually remaining with the 306th until the end of the war or continuing to serve in the months that followed the end of the war in Europe. While their work continued to be tied to the air operations in each squadron, the long assignment in England provided more access to British families and recreational places such as pubs and cinemas in nearby Bedford. Passes and leaves added more experiences and opportunities to travel outside of Thurleigh, taking leave to places like London and Scotland. Many of the ground personnel had close relationships with the British who lived around the base. The very accommodating and gracious British people often invited the 306th men into their homes, adopting them as their “American sons.” The Americans were easily incorporated into the British families, eating meals with them, playing games, inviting them on base for a movie or ice cream, acting as close sons and brothers in place of those family members who were away at war. These Americans found mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters who were quick to welcome them into their families. Many of the British mothers often voiced the hope that somewhere far away, another family treated their sons with the very same kindness and welcoming that they did with this American mother’s son at Thurleigh.

The Americans’ relationship with British children was particularly significant. Many children grew attached to the members of the 306th. The base in Thurleigh hosted children to various events, from movies at the cinema, to Christmas and ice cream parties. Due to the heavy rationing, the children had never seen ice cream, oranges, or bananas, making meals on base very special events. Although these

British children are now well into their 70s and 80s, they still remember with great fondness the ice cream, candy, parties, and influential relationships they held with the American members of the 306th.

Another memory of the war for the British children were the Americans and their bicycles seen throughout Thurleigh and the surrounding countryside. One of the first things Americans purchased soon after arriving in England, the bicycle became their primary source of transportation, riding them to the mess hall, the PX, or into the numerous villages surrounding base. Many times their barracks were located far from their duty stations so their bicycles became essential for transportation to and from various parts of the base. After the Americans arrived, Thurleigh soon became littered with bicycles. One serviceman commented after the war that his favorite past-time was to go to the mess hall late at night and watch all the other men who had too much to drink attempt to ride their bicycles back to base.

English pubs became an irresistible attraction for the American soldiers. Finding pubs very different than bars back in the United States, the members of the 306th discovered that pubs were the center of all social activity in England. The pub around Thurleigh became a frequent destination for the 306th men, socializing until closing or until the beer ran out. Despite the American’s often loud and brash behavior, the British continued to be extremely grateful for what they were doing, letting their conduct slip by without comment.

The local British Women’s Land Army contingent was another group who touched lives at wartime Thurleigh. The women in the Land Army worked on farms throughout rural England, relieving men for service in the armed forces. These women lived very much like their American neighbors, residing in barracks-like hostels. The Land Army women became a fixture in the lives of the Americans. They attended dances on the base, including the first Glen Miller concert in England staged in one of the hangers near the flight line. The women were captivated by Americans, looking at them as movie stars. “The Americans were very smart in their uniforms, quite dashing in comparison to the typical British soldier in his rustic and ill-fitting tunic.” Many of the British women dated the American boys, some casually, some seriously, resulting in several marriages during the war.

The Americans showed up in Thurleigh almost overnight, becoming a significant fixture of the community. By the end of World War II the importance of the 306th to the local British community was apparent, they had become family. With the coming of war’s end and the closing of the World War II-related operations at Thurleigh, the time eventually came for final departure. The American aircrews and ground personnel had left their mark on the British, leaving behind memories that remain to this day. As the years have passed and as the Twentieth Century gave way to a new century, the air crews who flew their missions from Thurleigh continue to remember the contribution made to their survival by the men on the ground. Their British cousins in the nearby villages have grown old as well. Although the memories are distant and few remain who remember those times, the British and their families will never forget the drama that played out at Thurleigh or the men who came into their midst for such a brief time.



SAVE THE DATE!

2009 Fort Worth, Texas Reunion

October 8-12, 2009

Details coming in the January Echoes . . .

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*Dr. Vernon L. Williams, Reunion Chairman*