

# 306th Echoes



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## Russell A. Strong to Receive the George Bledsoe Award Posthumously

By Vernon L. Williams  
Director, East Anglia Air War Archives  
Abilene Christian University

The East Anglia Air War Archives announced today the Russell A. Strong will receive the 2010 George Bledsoe Award posthumously.

The Bledsoe Award is presented to those individuals who have made significant contributions to the preservation of WWII military aviation history. Russell's selection for this prestigious award was based on his life-long work in creating a significant archival collection of WWII historical materials related to the 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, his writing and publishing the 306<sup>th</sup> Echoes and other pieces relating to the history of the 306<sup>th</sup>, and for his seminal work on the 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, *First Over Germany*. His contributions to preserving the 306<sup>th</sup> BG His-

torical Collection and his publishing activities stretching over a half a century, represent a significant addition to historical knowledge. Using the resources available to him over the years, he single-handedly created a valuable historical resource that will contribute to our understanding of the air war in England, and the impact those WWII events had on the men of the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force.

Russell's family has been notified of the award and plans are underway for a special commemoration ceremony to be held in 2010. Discussions with family members are in progress, and we hope to announce specific plans for the award ceremony in the January *Echoes*.



Navigator Russell A. Strong in April 1944 at Alexandria, LA, just prior to overseas movement with his crew. Front row, left to right: Milton M. Adam, pilot; Harold L. Prescott, co-pilot; Russell A. Strong, navigator; and Arthur Vann, bombardier. Standing, left to right: Robert W. Conger, engineer/top turret gunner; Peter Perrari, radio operator; Jack Skiver, ball turret gunner, Clifford Redd, waist gunner; John Pluta, waist gunner; and Robert Prior, tail gunner.



Top views: DC-3 American Airlines flagship at the C.R. Smith Aviation Museum in Ft. Worth. Reunion visitors enjoyed their tour of the museum and had a chance to climb aboard the old DC-3. Photographs courtesy Susan O'Konski.

### Send Address Changes and Obituary Notices to Barbara Neal, New 306th BGA Secretary

The 306th Bomb Group Association has a new secretary. Barbara Neal, niece of Alfred "Buddy" Lubojacky (KIA 14 February 1945 on the Dresden mission) assumed the duties of Association secretary at the Ft. Worth

reunion. Please send Barbara any changes you have in your contact information. Obituary notices should be sent to her as well.

The Association thanks Albert McMahan for his tireless service as the outgoing secretary. Contact:

Barbara Neal  
P.O. Box 682530  
Park City, UT 84068-2530  
Telephone (435) 655-1500  
Email: secretary@306bg.org

### New Film To Be Released in December on the 306th BG and Their British Neighbors

Old Segundo Productions announced today the upcoming release in December of *Thurleigh at War*, a new hour-long film about the 306th Bomb Group and her British neighbors during World War II. The film is the sequel to *Thurleigh Memories*, a film about the history of the 306th Bomb Group and still available through Old Segundo's website.

In *Thurleigh at War*, 306th veterans and British families remember Thurleigh and the area around Bedford during the war. The film includes British Land Army girls stationed at Milton Earnest and Bolnhurst near Thurleigh and young boys who lived near the Thurleigh base on nearby farms and in the surrounding villages. Together with 306th men who served in the air crews and in the ground element, they give voice to the human story of the war and the impact that the Americans made in the skies over Europe and in the countryside throughout Bedfordshire. Using newly discovered wartime footage and surviving photographic archives at the National Archives in Washington, D.C., these two films places the story of the 306th Bomb Group in its rightful place in history.

Proceeds from the sale of both films benefit the East Anglia Air War Project and assists in the preservation of the history of the Eighth Air Force in World War II England. Either film can be ordered online at [www.oldsegundo.com](http://www.oldsegundo.com) or by calling toll free, 1-888-562-8451.

**THE 2010 REUNION  
WILL BE IN  
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

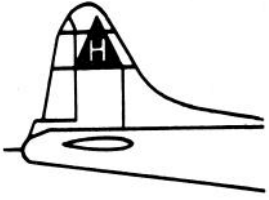


**LOOK FOR DATES AND DETAILS  
IN THE JANUARY ECHOES  
AND ON THE 306TH WEB**

**Visit the 306th Website**  
[www.306bg.org](http://www.306bg.org)



William J. Starzynski and Barbara Starzynski Lechman volunteer to be a part of the exhibit at the American Airlines C.R. Smith Museum in Fort Worth.



#### Officers:

Sheldon Beigel, President  
*president@306bg.org*  
 Judy Hermley, Vice-President  
*vice-president@306bg.org*  
 Barbara Neal, Secretary  
*secretary@306bg.org*  
 Joel LaBo, Treasurer  
*treasurer@306bg.org*

**Directors:** Em Christianson, Grover C. Goode, J.D; William Houlihan; Walt Lubojacky; Charles Neal; Robert Rockwell; Walter Rozett; Vernon Williams.

#### Past President:

John Hickey  
*past-president@306bg.org*

#### Long-Range Planning Committee:

Charles Neal, Chairman  
*planning@306bg.org*

#### Secretary:

Handles all changes of address, current records, obituaries, and correspondence.

Barbara Neal  
 P.O. Box 682530  
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*secretary@306bg.org*

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**306th Echoes** is published four times annually: January, April, July and October. *Echoes* is mailed free of charge to all known addresses of 306th personnel, 1942-1945. Contributions in support of this effort may be remitted to the treasurer.

#### 2009-2010 Student Interns:

Kathryn Barnard (Judge Donald Ross Intern)  
 Chase Brazell (Russell Strong Intern)  
 Jamalin Harp (Peg Haapa Intern)  
 Lynn Holliday (Michael Roskovitch Intern)  
 Mackenzie North (Thurman Shuller Intern)  
 Julie Eichelberger (Leland Kessler Intern)

*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:

Barbara Neal  
 P.O. Box 682530  
 Park City, UT 84068-2530  
*secretary@306bg.org*



#### Obituaries Received:

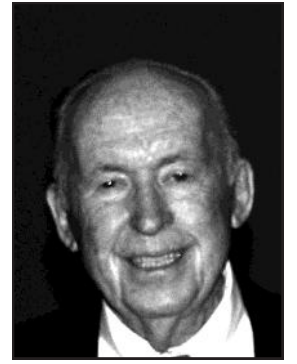
- **Victor L. Rose**, 369<sup>th</sup> ball turret gunner (Dale Briscoe's crew), died 10 Oct 09 in Vestal, NY. He also flew as a B-17 gunner, and flew 53 combat missions over Europe and the Pacific. He worked as a self-employed building contractor, building many fine homes, and as Building Maintenance Supervisor for the Town of Vestal. He leaves his wife Ann Marie Rose, 4 c, 12 gc, 21 ggc.
- **Robert Boylson**, 367<sup>th</sup> tail gunner (Eldon Burrell crew), died 20 May in Covington, KY. He joined the group 17 Jul 44 and completed 35 missions. He retired from AT&T.
- **Albert Desrochers**, 367<sup>th</sup> waist gunner (Joseph Hess crew), died 15 Feb 09 at Gosnell Memorial Hospice House in Scarborough, ME. He joined the group 22 Sep 44, completed 19 missions, and participated in the Casey Jones Project. He was a carrier for the US Postal Service, retiring in 1980. He leaves his wife Ruth, 3c, 4gc, 1ggc.
- **James McDonough**, 367<sup>th</sup> tail gunner (William Morgan crew), died 20 Nov 08 at the Sam Rayburn Veterans Center in Arlington, TX. He completed his combat tour in Feb 45. Postwar he was a self employed commercial artist and retired in 1976. He never married and leaves 1s.
- **Roy Ranck**, 368<sup>th</sup> pilot, died 17 Dec 06 near Gardner, KS. He joined the 306th 4 Jul 43 and on the 9 Oct mission to Gdynia, Poland his plane was seriously damaged and the crew bailed out over Samsø Island and crew was POW. Postwar he managed a furniture in Kansas City. His wife Betty predeceased him. He left 3c.
- **Vernon Ray**, 367<sup>th</sup> waist gunner (Eldon Burrell crew), died 14 Jul 09 in Indianapolis, IN. He joined the group 17 Jul 44 and completed 35 missions. Post war he was a machine tool salesman retiring in 1985. He leaves his wife Armetta, 3c, 6gc, 4ggc.
- **James G. Seymour**, 423<sup>rd</sup> co-pilot (Wilbur Weiland crew) and pilot, died 18 Mar 09, at Highland Regional Hospital, Sebring, FL. He joined the group 03 Mar 44 and 24 Jan 45 completed a 35 missions. He worked for GE, RCA and National Telecom retiring in 1981. He leaves his wife, Gloria, 1c, 3gc.
- **Russell A. Strong**, 367<sup>th</sup> navigator (Milton M. Adam Crew), died 2 October 09, at Wilora Lake Healthcare Center, Charlotte, NC. He flew 35 bombing missions between 15 Jun 44 and 26 Nov 44. From 1978 until 2007 he served as secretary and membership chairman of the 306th Bomb Group Association and edited the quarterly newsletter, *306th Echoes*. In 1982 he wrote *First Over Germany: a History of the 306th Bombardment Group* which tells the group's history from October, 1942 to April, 1945. He also published *306th Echoes, 1975-2007*, a complete collection, and recently printed a photo collection of the 306th crews. He leaves his wife June, 5c, 9gc, 4 ggc.



### New Crew Picture Added to 306th Bomb Group Collection

Nena Leary sent this photograph of the George Berner crew. Nena and our Vice President Judy Hermley are the daughters of ball turret gunner Joe Brennan, who flew 32 missions with the 306th Bomb Group. Left to right, (back row) A.J. Moore, waist gunner; Bill Finklestein, bombardier; T. Haitach, engineer; L. McCowan, navigator; Joe Brennan, ball turret gunner. (front row) Travis DuBois, Jr., radio operator; Harry Hill, co-pilot; Rudolph Mason, tail gunner; George Berner, pilot; Irving W. Johnson, waist gunner.

## President's Corner



Another year passes by.....

The Ft. Worth Reunion marks my farewell as President of the 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association. I am happy to say that the reunion also marked some stunning new developments that bodes well for our Association and our future. Sheldon Beigel was elected our new president and serving with him are three second generation family members: Vice-President Judy Hermley, Secretary Barbara Neal, and Treasurer Joel LaBo. It doesn't end there. We welcomed three new directors to serve with our continuing Board members: Em Christianson, Walt Lubojacky, and Charles Neal. All of these new leaders promise great energy in serving us in the next year, and each will play an important role in the work of the Association—in fact, they already have begun.

Charles Neal has agreed to serve as chairman of our new Long-Range Planning Committee, as efforts are underway to establish a new chapter in our Association's history. Look for news soon on the exciting new initiatives emerging from the work of Charles and his committee members.

Our 306<sup>th</sup> BG Interns did another wonderful job at the Ft. Worth Reunion. See page 3 in this issue of *Echoes* for a photograph of the interns in the reunion hotel and read about the details of their contributions to our reunion. They certainly represent the best and brightest of our nation's youth, and I think our country will be in good hands as they soon will finish their education and begin the next phase of their lives.

I look forward to serving as your Past-President and Chairman of the Nominating Committee during this coming year. See you in Washington, D.C.

John K. Hickey  
 President, 2008-2009

## Save the Date

May 30-June 7, 2010

### *“I’ll Be Seeing You”*

### *A Tour of the Airfields of the Mighty Eighth*

Dr. Vernon L. Williams and the East Anglia Air War Project will be leading a tour of World War II England next summer. Williams has spent the last decade working on Eighth Air Force film projects in East Anglia and brings much to this tour. Follow in his footsteps, along the back roads of England and discover the people who lived near their “Yanks” during the war and encounter the airfields that remain scattered across the landscape of rural England. There is much left of the “community” that developed between the Brits and the Yanks so long ago. Soon to be the subject of the first book to come out of Williams’ decade-long research, join him in retracing the story of the 306th and many other bomb groups who flew their missions from these small villages and towns scattered across East Anglia and the Midlands.

All proceeds from the tour will benefit the East Anglia Air War Project and Williams’ efforts to preserve the history of the men of the Eighth Air Force and their contribution to the victory won over the skies of Europe. The East Anglia Project is the driving force behind the preservation of the 306th archives and the work of 306th student interns at Abilene Christian University. This tour will help fund their work.

**London - Dover - Churchill’s Estate - Cambridge  
Airfields in the Midlands - Airfields in East Anglia  
Thurleigh Memorial Museum - Bedford - Norwich**

**Tour Website: [www.oldsegundo.com/tour](http://www.oldsegundo.com/tour)**

**9 Days/8 Nights Tour: \$1890**

**\$800 Single Supplement**

*Book your own flight.*

*Flight and transfers not included.*

**Deposit Deadline: December 8, 2009**

*For more information, visit the tour website or call Dr. Vernon L. Williams for additional details or a free information packet: (325) 280-3399*



## Interns Make a Real Difference

The Interns did it again! Working hard to make the reunion a success, you saw their hands in just about everything that happened in Ft. Worth. They manned the registration desk, designed and built the 30-panel photographic exhibition for the Hospitality Room, participated on the many programs, led the tour buses, contributed to the video presentations throughout the reunion, scanned documents and photographs, and worked diligently to solve problems and assist the 306th families you see in the photograph displays on pages 6 and 7 of this issue.

Some of our interns went “above and beyond” in producing some special programming for the Ft. Worth Reunion. Kathryn Barnard’s “Tribute to Veterans” honored every veteran at the Saturday night Banquet and those absent veterans who were represented by family members at the event. As the veteran or families stood, Kathryn delivered a brief story about that veteran’s wartime service and their memories of those days so long ago. Kathryn’s moving individual tributes marked the high point of our evening.

The interns are back at work at the digital lab, digitizing the 306th BG Collection. Since Ft. Worth, they have finished the complete mission report record group and are closing in on several other sub-groups of records. The new scanners (see page 3) have made a real difference for our 306th work.

## Visit the 306th Website

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

*The 306th BG Interns for 2009-2010 at the Ft. Worth Reunion: Left to right, Jamalin Harp (Peg Haapa Intern), Julie Eichelberger (Leland Kessler Intern), Lynn Holliday (Michael Roskovitch Intern), Chase Brazell (Russell Strong Intern), Mackenzie North (Thurman Shuller Intern), and Kathryn Barnard (Judge Donald Ross Intern).*



# Among Pioneers: R.C.'s Service in England

Raymond C. Ennis  
Centreville, Virginia

*Editor's Note: Found in the 306th BG Historical Collection is a series of first person accounts, both unpublished typescripts and published memories. Among these was a loose leaf story about Raymond Clyde Clifton (Smiley's crew), written by Raymond C. Ennis. Clifton perished on his sixteenth mission to Bremen on 17 April 1943. I have excerpted the story of his last mission from the overall account. vw*

## The Mission

The mission day on 17 April 1943 began at 5:30 a.m. Aircrews had been alerted the previous night that there would be a mission the following day and command pilots were told they would carry maximum fuel loads. Most of the crews also knew that it would be a big one since men were being called back from leave, according to one author, to crew as many aircraft as possible. Crews began breakfast 30 minutes later. The mission briefing began at 7:00 a.m. and lasted for about an hour. During the briefing, aircrews were told by the group commander that they were to fly a maximum effort mission against the Folke-Wulf Flugzeugbau (aircraft factory) just south of Bremen, Germany. The group commander was then followed by the group operations officer who briefed the formations to be used, formation leaders, radio frequencies, and flight routes. Then came the intelligence officer who showed a picture of the target and told the crews of the 450 anti-aircraft guns that could be brought to bear against the bomber force. The final briefer was the weatherman. Weather on 17 April for Bremen was a rarity for Germany, clear with unlimited ceiling. Then, as Lt. Mort Fega of the 305th [from nearby Molesworth] described it, the crews were issued "a Mars Bar and directed to the chaplain of our choice."

Crews undoubtedly met this announcement with mixed emotions. While they most likely did not relish the prospects of attacking what would be a heavily defended target, it did give them a chance to strike back at their most feared opponent, the FW-190, which was manufactured at the facility.

Crews then drew flying gear, in those early days fleecy-lined suits, and navigation charts and assembled at their aircraft at 8:45 a.m. By 9:00 a.m. crews had entered their aircraft, installed the guns and hooked into the aircraft intercom system. At this point, the aircrews began starting engines and warming them up with taxi start time set for 9:15 a.m. The first aircraft began its takeoff roll at 9:45 a.m.; Capt. Smiley's aircraft took off two minutes later. All 306th aircraft were airborne by 10:05 a.m. All 26 aircraft immediately began to climb out for the 306th group assembly area, a block of sky about four miles wide and ten miles long approximately five miles east of Oxford. Here in a process that took about 30 minutes, the group would form into its combat formation.

The formation used that day consisted of a new compacted formation developed earlier in the month by General Haywood Hansell and Colonel Curtis LeMay (see Compact Group Formation figure at right). In this formation each bomb group was to array its aircraft in a box about 1150 feet wide, 900 feet high, and 650 feet deep. In each box would be 18 or so aircraft. This would give each of the formations about 200 guns with which to

form an interlocking pattern of self-defense fire. The 306th operations plan called for the 423rd Squadron to lead the group. The 367th was the low squadron, and the 368th the high squadron. R.C.'s aircraft, piloted by Capt. Smiley, was lead for the 368th.

The men of the 368th probably were thankful, in a silent way, for their formation position. It had the advantage of protection against head on attacks with the leading 423rd below them and another group formation that would fly above it once the final formation was assembled. The unlucky squadron was the 367th because of its low position, a position crews nicknamed the "Coffin Corner" and "Purple Heart Corner." Squadrons assigned to this position were rotated from mission to mission because of the vulnerability of the location.

Once the groups had assembled in their individual areas, they then proceeded to the strike assembly point. In this location the individual groups assembled into a two-echelon formation of four B-17 groups. The first echelon, the 101st Combat Wing, was led by the 91st Bomb Group with the 306th below and a composite group of 91st and 306th aircraft above. The second echelon, the 102nd Combat Wing consisting of the 303rd and the 305th Bombardment Groups, followed several minutes behind in a similar arrangement.

The strike force departed the assembly area at 10:30 a.m. leaving it sufficient time to cover the nearly 400-mile flight route to Bremen by the assigned time over target of 1:00 p.m. The route that day took the strike force northeast from East Anglia out over the North Sea on a course that paralleled the Dutch Frisian Islands (see track chart on page 5). The mission against Bremen represented about as deep as the B-17Fs of the day could fly. After clearing the Dutch islands the force turned right and penetrated German airspace over Emden, Germany and flew directly to Bremen. All together, 115 B-17s took off with only nine aborts, including two from the 306th, a low abort rate for operations in early 1943. This meant that 106 B-17s would penetrate German airspace, making the raid the largest Eighth Air Force attack to date.

Despite an uneventful assembly, the group had the misfortune to be spotted by a German patrol aircraft off the Frisian Islands. This aircraft radioed the contact to its controller who then alerted German Air Defense controllers. This gave German air defense command personnel an additional hour more than they normally would have had. General Hansell, 101st Combat Wing commander, claimed in his after action report on the raid that German fighters crews were instructed to "go into the attack regardless of everything" and to pursue the bombers until the fighters had exhausted all their ammunition.

After the bombers made their turn and entered German airspace, their crews spotted the first of what would total about 150 single-engine fighters, mostly FW-190s with a few ME-109s, but with several twin-engine ME-110 fighters and JU-88 bombers modified as night interceptors. All reacting aircraft were armed with heavy cannon armament, 20-mm or larger. The FW-190s and ME-109s conducted slashing attacks against the bomber formations while the less nimble ME-110s and JU-88s conducted either stand-off attacks at a range of 1,000 meters with 40-mm cannons or attacks

against individual B-17s that had fallen out of formation because of damage.

The first fighters spotted, about 45 FW-190s, initially flew parallel with the B-17s, but about 2,000 yards to their left outside the range of defensive fire. The fighters then accelerated and turned in front of the bombers at about 1,500 yards out and 200 to 300 feet above the bombers to set up a classic above, head-on or "12-o'clock high" attack. The fighters then dove on the bombers, opening fire at about 600 yards and continued through the formation, spraying bombers with fire as they went. This attack was timed to strike as the bombers were most vulnerable, just as they were changing their formation to begin their bombing runs. The fighters, in line with their instructions, pressed home this attack in spite of a heavy German flak barrage that endangered both friend and foe alike.

Bombers from both the 91st and the 306th dropped good bomb patterns, but at a heavy price. Of the 531 1,000-pound bombs dropped, enough hit the target area to destroy half the factory, according to German records, but 16 bombers, ten from the 306th and six from the 91st, went down. All but one of the stricken bombers was hit in the initial FW-190 attack. The 102nd Combat Wing suffered no losses and inflicted little damage having bombed wide. The loss-rate for the mission, nearly 16 percent, was the highest suffered by the Eighth Air Force to this point in the war and would be exceeded during only a handful of missions during the remaining two years of bombing operations over Germany.

The Eighth Air Force after action report on the attack made the following observations about the losses suffered by the 101st Combat Wing: "It cannot be categorically asserted that formation quality was the sole or principal cause of losses of the

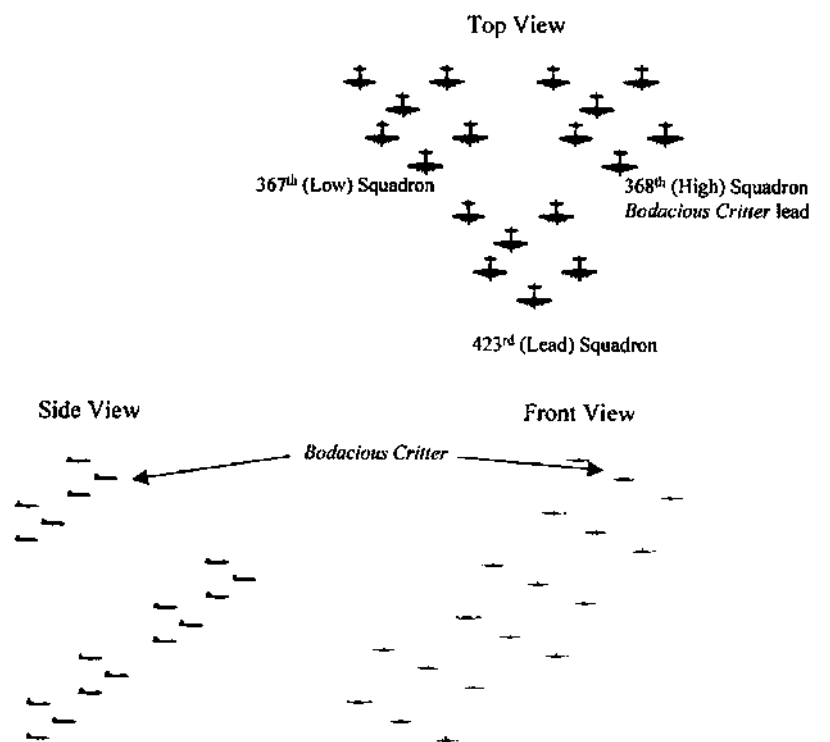


101st Combat Wing, although it was almost certainly a contributing, and perhaps major cause. Various other factors must be considered. Thus, it has been the evident policy of the enemy on all recent raids to concentrate on the leading element in order to break up our bombing run. This was strongly evident in the present case by the fact that enemy fighters, although present in force for a considerable time, withheld their attacks until we had passed the initial point and our bomb bay doors were down. Then, too, our bombing run carried us into one of the heaviest flak concentrations ever assembled." This report went on to state that General Frederick Anderson, who was the commander of the 4th Bombardment Wing, went along with the 102nd Combat Wing to observe the mission, opined that the 101st Combat Wing would have fared better had it not been scattered.

The 368th combat diary described the raid this way: "17 April - Bremen - Today we were given certainly the most vital target to date and the toughest, the

## Compact Group Formation

(April 1943)



The compact group formation developed by Gen. Hansell Haywood and Col. Curtis LeMay in April 1943 and first used over Bremen on 17 April 1943. The formation was designed to array 18 or so B-17s in a box of airspace approximately 1,150 feet wide, 900 feet high, and 650 feet deep where they would be able to provide overlapping and supporting fires. Capt. Smiley's crew in *Bodacious Critter* was lead crew for the high squadron on 17 April.

Focke Wulf plant itself. To hit this target, and hit it hard, as we unquestionably did, the 368<sup>th</sup> made its greatest sacrifice of the war. Sharing the lead with the 91<sup>st</sup> Group, our group took the brunt of a desperate fighter attack and severe flak. Of our six-plane formation, Lt. Maxwell Judas and his crew alone succeeded in getting back to base. Capt. Smiley, and Lts. Fred Gillogly, Theodore Jankowski, Glenn Lally and Robert Miller were all forced down over Germany. Our formation broke up just after the bombs went down, and "Judy" found himself alone with only two engines operating, and incidentally, a main wing spar shot through, the top turret out and the bomb doors stuck down.

[Among] the missing crews are: Capt. Walter N. Smiley, 2nd Lt. Avery L. Ewan, 1st Lt. Wilbur N. Breunig, 1st Lt. Martin M. Strauss, T/Sgt. Donald B. Hepler, T/Sgt. Raymond C. Clifton, S/Sgt. Roderick C. Clark, S/Sgt. William R. Payne, S/Sgt. Lawrence J. Sliff, S/Sgt. Roy E. Staff

The official version of how *Bodacious Critter* was lost was described in Missing Air Crew Report (MACR) 15518, which states, "This aircraft is believed to have turned back toward the enemy coast at 54 deg 10 min N-06 deg 40 min E, and is believed to have crashed into the sea." MACR 15518 most likely is based on a post-mission debriefing of the sole surviving 368th aircrew, that of Lt. Maxwell Judas. Handwritten notes of this debriefing state, "14:05 Lt. (sic) Smiley—turned back toward coast of Germany [at] 54° 10' N— 6° 46' E—possibly 4 chutes out before Smiley must have hit water (1 B-17 blew up on hitting water—was this Smiley?—it sank immediately) This aircraft [was] at 1000 feet then—apparently [it was] Smiley"

Russell E. Strong in his book on the 306th accepts this version when he wrote that Capt. Smiley's aircraft made it to the target to drop his bombs after being hit in the first FW190 attack. The aircraft then turned back toward the North Sea some 60 miles away. After flying out over the water, Capt. Smiley apparently decided that the aircraft would not make it back to England and attempted to return to the German coast only to crash at sea with no survivors.

This version, however, raises two questions. First, it fails to account for the possibility there were four survivors from the aircraft. While it is possible that the four chutes reported by Judas's crew were for crew members who failed to survive the jump, a more likely explanation is that this crew saw another aircraft in distress. It is relevant that nearly all remaining B-17s lost that day had at least one survivor and many had multiple survivors. This version also raises the question of why the crew was unable to bail out of the aircraft given the 20 minutes or so it flew under control

after the FW-190 attack. A possible explanation is that the aircraft commander initially thought his aircraft was sufficiently flight worthy to return to England only to change his mind once over the North Sea. Once over water, the crew might have chosen not to bail out in favor of a ditching at sea because of the low probability of being picked up before cold North Sea water and the resulting hypothermia took its toll. The aircraft, then, either exploded as it neared the surface of the water or suffered a non-survivable crash on ditching.

But, there is some support for a different version. Robert Seelos, a good friend of Smiley's who also flew with the 368th, told me by email that he had heard that Smiley's aircraft was severely damaged in the initial FW-190 attack and that all crewmembers in the front of the aircraft (including R.C.) most certainly perished in this initial attack. The aircraft then immediately went into a terminal dive from which it did not recover. Seelos, who had been shot down and captured during the 5 April mission against Antwerp, wrote that he had been told this by a fellow 368th pilot when they were reunited in a German POW camp in the summer of 1943. This individual had been shot down on 17 April as well and had witnessed Smiley's crash.

This version, if it were accurate, would suggest that Smiley's aircraft crashed on land or possibly the Weser River and not in the North Sea as we all had been led to believe. While this version seems more consistent with the facts as reported by American observers, it is not supported by German records that normally recorded the serial numbers of aircraft found on German territory.

In sum, we probably will never know the real story.

### Thanks to Scanner Donors

The East Anglia Air War Project now has three new high speed scanners in the lab, and the 306th Bomb Group digital project has already benefited greatly from having these machines to use. The mission reports are done—much earlier than expected. The interns are busy at work scanning many kinds of documents so watch the website over the next weeks as the new research material makes its appearance.

Special thanks to the following who donated funds to make possible the purchase of the new duplex scanners:

- Em Christianson
- John Hickey
- Bill Houlihan
- Walter Lubojacky
- Albert McMahan
- Charles and Barbara Neal
- Susan O'Konski
- L.J. Persac, Jr
- Rocky Rockwell

Plus many others contributed when Barbara Neal, our new secretary, passed the hat at Reunion

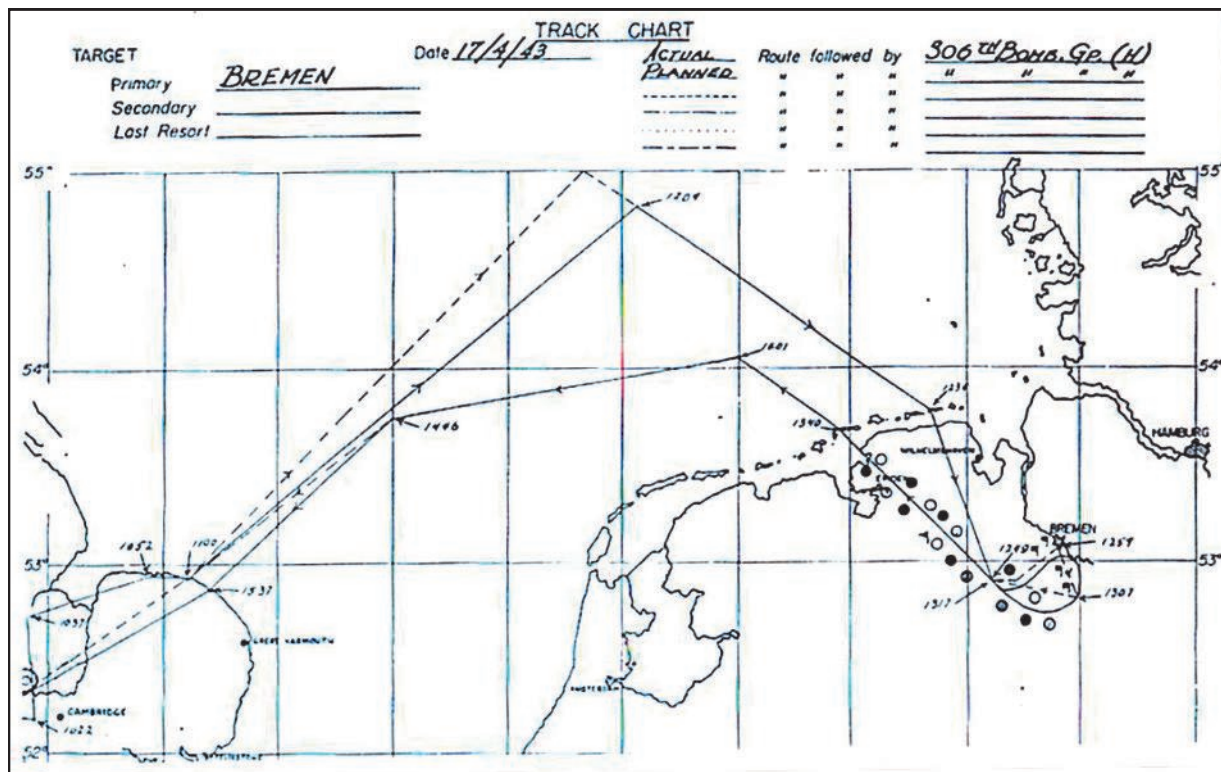


### Photographs, Military Records, Letters Needed

The 306th Bomb Group Historical Collection still needs wartime materials. Russell Strong collected an extraordinary amount of 306th BG archival materials and memorabilia, but more is needed. Particularly urgent are crew pictures, many of the images in the Collection are Xerox copies or prints in poor condition. Look through your scrapbooks and personal collections and send what you can. Please include your instructions for return of originals or indicate your desire to donate the original to the 306th BG Historical Collection. All originals to be returned will be promptly mailed back to you as soon as the digital copies are made. Contact Dr. Vernon L. Williams, ACU Box 28203, Abilene, TX 79699 ~ Telephone (325) 280-3399.



The Thurleigh Control Tower showing the deteriorating condition towards the end of the 20th century, before it was torn down.



### 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.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street and No. \_\_\_\_\_

City, State & Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone No. \_\_\_\_\_ 306th Unit \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

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



\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



**Bottom Photograph/Wives, Widows, & Sisters, back row standing, left to right—**Mary Ellen Irons, Jane Twing, Ruth Rockwell, Rita Beigel, Louise Starzynski, Bernardine Persac. **Seated, left to right—**Margaret Jennings, Donna Hammond (Second Generation), Mary Bennett, Margaret Stellish, Em Christianson, Elizabeth Hickey, Carolyn Tate, June Wait.

**Group Pictures:**

**Top Photograph/Veterans, back row standing, left to right—**Jack Persac, Robert “Rocky” Rockwell, Albert McMahan, Howard Roth, Walter Rozett, H. Graford Jennings, Allan Lawson, Don Snook, J.J. Gaydosh, William “Bill” Houlihan. **Seated, left to right—**Thurman Shuller, Sheldon Beigel, Wayne Stellish, Robert Starzynski, John Hickey, Ben Irons, Norman A. Armbrust, Philip Mundell, Kenneth A. Wait (his first reunion), Roy Stafford (his first reunion). *Not pictured: Carl Groesbeck and Ed Sandini*

**Middle Photograph/Second Generation, back row standing, left to right—**Elaine Twing, Ken Twing, Treasia DeLair Hendricks, Frank Shuller, Walt Lubojacky, Betty Lubojacky, Carol Petrucka, Gary Armbrust, Joe Jennings, Charles Neal, Barbara Neal, Carol Wait Sewell, Steve Sewell, Donna Hammond, Charlie Hammond, Barb Starzynski Lechman, William J. Starzynski, Mark Giraldi, Susan O’Konski. **Seated, left to right—**Joel LaBo, Cary Jennings, Kay Jennings, Daphne Franklin, Ralph Franklin, Judy Hermley, Margaret “Maggie” Shuller Davis, Mary Beth Shuller Carney.





1) John Hickey 2) Joel LaBo 3) Norman Armbrust, Gary Armbrust, and Rocky Rockwell 4) Susan O'Konski, Phillip Mundell, and Carl Groesbeck 5) Mary Beth Carney, Dr. Thurman Shuller, William "Bill" Houlihan, Frank Shuller 6) Sheldon Beigel 7) Albert McMahan 8) Luke Truxal, 12 O'Clock High Dinner speaker and former Russell Strong Intern, 2007-2009) 9) William J. Starzynski, Robert Starzynski, Louise Starzynski, Barb Starzynski Lechman, Mark Giraldi 10) Bernardine Persac, Jack Persac 11) Judy Hermley, Ben Irons, Mary Ellen Irons 12) Margaret Stellish, Wayne Stellish 13) Roy Stafford (first reunion), Barbara Neal (in background) 14) Charles Hammond, William J. Starzynski 15) William "Bill" Houlihan, Bernie Hermley 16) Exhibits in Hospitality Room 17) Carol Petrucka, Donald L. Snook, Wayne Stellish, Margaret Stellish 18) Head Table: Albert McMahan, Carolyn Tate, Sheldon Beigel, Rita Beigel, John Hickey, Elizabeth Hickey, Em Christianson, Ruth Rockwell, Robert "Rocky" Rockwell. 19) Rita Beigel, Walt Lubojacky (Walt entered the winning bid for this wonderful 306th BG quilt wall hanging. Rita spent over 50 hours making the piece. All proceeds benefited the 306th BGA.) 20) 306th BG crowd waits for the opening film at the Texas Civil War Museum during the Ft. Worth Reunion. Color photographs in this issue courtesy Susan O'Konski and Vernon Williams.

# Museum Notes

## Thurleigh Airfield 306th Bomb Group Museum

### Some Special Memories from Thurleigh by Ralph Franklin Keysoe, England

*Ft. Worth Reunion, Texas.* As Daphne and I were getting ourselves organized to attend this year's reunion, it once again occurred to me that my life has been linked to the 306th Bomb Group in many ways since 1942, soon after you arrived at Thurleigh. Not only were the girls attracted to the young men in uniform, the young boys, particularly if you lived less than a mile from the base, found much to interest us. There was, of course, the wonderful aircraft filling the sky continuously. We also became enthralled with the vast array of military vehicles and paraphernalia in constant movement around the small village roads. Living locally had many advantages particularly when the guys used to invite us to the barracks in the evening. We would sit around the pot-bellied stove making popcorn, and having great fun scrambling around the floor, picking up the corn as it popped and frequently jumped out of the pan. These treasured early memories will never leave me.

The war came to an end and suddenly, the countryside was a lot quieter, but not for long. As most of you know, your old airfield was selected for development and was to become the major Research and Development Establishment for the country. Once again the trucks began to roll through the villages, only this time to transport material to build what was to become known as The Royal Aircraft Establishment, which included a 10,500 ft. runway.

It was during this time that I was serving in the Royal Air Force and unaware that the decision to train on radar would be the best ever in my working career. When I eventually left the service, the airfield at Thurleigh was just ready for operational status. The Ministry of Defense (MOD) was in the process of recruiting staff, I applied, was accepted and spent the next 38 years working in the Air Traffic Control Tower. When my interest in the 306th became known to the MOD, I was given a special permit to escort returning veterans around an otherwise high security base. This phase on my association with the group continued until the RAE closed in 1994.

So for the first time since 24 July 1941, this area of North Bedfordshire ceased to be an airfield. The new owners invited me to continue with my tours for returning veterans, this was the beginning of yet another stage of my life with the 306th. This continues today, only now the centre of attraction for visitors of all types from many different parts of the world is the Thurleigh Airfield 306th Bombardment Group Museum.

To Daphne and I this has become our second home, and Jonathan Palmer referred to it, when he said he was proud to have this treasure on his famous Bedford Autodrome site, which occupies over 400 acres of the old airfield. I suppose I can now claim yet another stage in my life with the 306th, and long may it continue. You know friends we are now into our 8th year with the museum. Doesn't time fly when you are having fun? In the main it is fun, and we meet some wonderful people. This year has been no exception. In early April we had a couple of characters from Northern Ireland. They are involved with a group that have taken a great interest in

Bill Melton's aircraft which still nestles beneath the waves just off the coast. They suffered engine problems after leaving Gander on the way over, they ran short of fuel and didn't make land again. As our great friend Lee Kessler always said, he wanted to be there when the divers went down to the wreck as he wanted his share of the bourbon that was on board. I mentioned this fact to Jonny and Niall when they stayed with us for 3 days. Their reply, with a big smile on their face, no Ralph we didn't find any such bottles down there. We did, however, sample one or two glasses whilst they were with us.

**May 12th**—We had a great day with Em Christianson, we had arranged to meet her at the Bedford train station and transport her to the museum, we gave her a good tour, adjourned for lunch at that well known pub by the river Ouse, The Falcon at Bletsoe, a venue used by many of you during WWII. Being in England Em decided to order fish and chips. I can still see the look on her face when her lunch arrived. It was an enormous piece of fish. Em fought it bravely, but was defeated and we had to call for a container to take it home. We then went to the Memorial and afterwards back to the museum. It was difficult to say our goodbyes as she departed for London after such a lovely day.

**May 24th**—I gave my report in Echoes, but I will just have to mention it again—the 40th Combat Wing Day. It really did turn out to be a wonderful day with the crowning glory being Sally B arriving low over one of the remaining T2 Hangers on the airfield. This lovely old aircraft always attracts great applause and emotions wherever it goes, our event was no exception—and to have the Lancaster at our show was something Daphne and I will treasure for a long time. Of course our great disappointment was the absence of 306th veterans on the day.

**July 17th**—This year was the 10th anniversary of the opening of Bedford Autodrome, once again Jonathan Palmer included the museum in his events to celebrate the occasion. Not only did he advertise us prior to the event, on the day he ran buses every 30 minutes to and from the Autodrome. As you can imagine we had lots of visitors and a large number have been back to have a second look.

**September 11th**—This became a very nice but emotional day when we welcomed Mary Shipler and her two brothers to our displays at the museum. In fact we met them at Bedford Bus terminal, as they had travelled by an inter city coach from the American Cemetery at Cambridge. Their father 2nd Lt. John Mockus was the co-pilot on the 368th plane piloted by 2nd Lt. Charles Crooks. They were involved

in a mid-air collision with the 423rd plane of 2nd Lt. Lorn Wilke on their return from a mission to Kassal. Both planes crashed at Greenham Common killing all but two of the men. Wilke landed on the wing of a C-47 parked on a dispersal on this troop carrier base, which was situated about two miles southeast of Newbury, Berkshire. Very much later than originally planned, with fond farewells, the family journeyed on to Newbury with the intention of visiting the crash site the next day.

**September 13th**—Yet another interesting event, on this occasion we played host to a classic car organization. Again it was time to call on the family, our sons and their wives answered the call. The girls spent a busy day in the hospitality suite, serving refreshments to the hungry travelers as they had travelled many miles before arriving at Thurleigh. Once again from correspondence we received, the museum was a big interest to them. We are becoming well known for this type of event which pleases us a great deal. The previous examples were given to let you know that we are having many parties booking to visit us apart from our regular hours of every weekend from March until October. Daphne and I feel this all seems to be good for the future, and our efforts to remind the public at large of the history of a great Bomb Group, I can assure you the Group's fame will live on now that the museum has become so well established. We say that we close at the end of October on a regular weekend basis, but the interest continues well after that, as we left to come over to the reunion, we have bookings until the 6th December.

One final note of interest, being the one who introduced Dr. Vernon Williams to the 306th, I feel I can claim another success story as he has worked so hard for the Group. We first met several years back when this quiet gentleman entered the museum, his first words to me were, are you responsible for this? I am afraid I am was my reply, have you found something wrong? On the contrary I find it very good, it's a first class display, and I may well be able to help in some small way. What a great meeting that turned out to be. Following this he stayed with us at our home on some of his visits he was making to East Anglian bases. We then agreed to meet at the next Group reunion, at the moment I forget which one, that's not really relevant, but as the saying goes, the rest is history, and what a great job he is doing for this Bomb Group. As none of us know what the future holds, can I say what a pleasure it is to be with you all on this very special occasion, this being our 19th consecutive reunion, and as usual we are enjoying it tremendously. So from Daphne and I, thank you all for your friendship.



Ralph and Daphne get into the swing of things at the Ft. Worth Reunion. This issue's Museum Notes are Ralph's remarks to the reunion crowd.

