

# 306th Echoes



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## A Special New Book Includes the 306th

By Vernon L. Williams  
306th Bomb Group Historical Project  
East Anglia Air War Archives

*To Kingdom Come: An Epic Saga of Survival in the Air War Over Germany*  
By Robert J. Mrazek (published March 2011)

The 306th's own Martin "Andy" Andrews, pilot with the 423rd Bomb Squadron at Thurleigh is featured in this book, along with Generals Hap Arnold and Ira Eaker and a few others from nearby bomb groups who participated in the Stuttgart mission on September 6, 1943. The author weaves a fascinating story that reads almost like a novel, gripping and filled with drama. I highly recommend this new book to anyone who is interested in the Eighth Air Force and the 306th Bomb Group in World War II. You will learn a great deal about the forces at work that surrounded the 306th during those first years of war in "merry olde England."

A recent review of the book by Military Book Club is being circulated in several places, and it gives a good overview of the book:

*On September 6, 1943, three hundred and thirty-eight B-17 "Flying Fortresses" of the American Eighth Air Force took off from England, bound for Stuttgart, Germany. It was the largest force ever assembled against a single target in the war. The 20-mile-long armada of Fortresses was on a mission to bomb Nazi weapons factories at Stuttgart. Another force of B-24 bombers was tasked with flying diversionary raids across the North Sea and Holland in order to draw the Luftwaffe fighter squadrons away*

*The aerial bombing mission resulted in a staggering defeat of U.S. Army Air Forces. Not one of the Fortresses was able to locate its target. In To Kingdom Come Robert Mrazek presents a riveting account of the mission historians have labeled a "fiasco" and a "disaster." A Navy veteran and former U.S. congressman, Mrazek draws from a rich source of material, including declassified documents, confidential diaries, internal memos from top commanders and gripping first-person accounts from B-17 airmen to re-create the ill-fated air battle.*

*The man who propelled the mission into action, Colonel Henry "Hap" Arnold, was one of the first pilots to become a qualified army aviator in the newly formed branch of military aviation. Taught to fly by the Wright Brothers, Arnold was a staunch advocate for the expansion of the Air Force. In England, he slowly built up the Eighth Air Force, against the ongoing opposition of Winston Churchill and others. Arnold maintained that the division could bring Germany to its knees and quash its ability to wage war.*

*Such confidence was largely inspired by Boeing's resilient, four-engine heavy B-17 bomber. With a crew of 10, the plane bristled with Browning .50 caliber machine guns. Arnold believed that the Flying Fortresses could protect themselves by flying in tight formations that gave the machine gunners inside each plane interlocking fields of fire. The British did not share his optimism. They argued that conducting daylight bombing raids against heavily defended German military targets without long-range fighter escort would lead to crushing losses. In the end, they were right.*

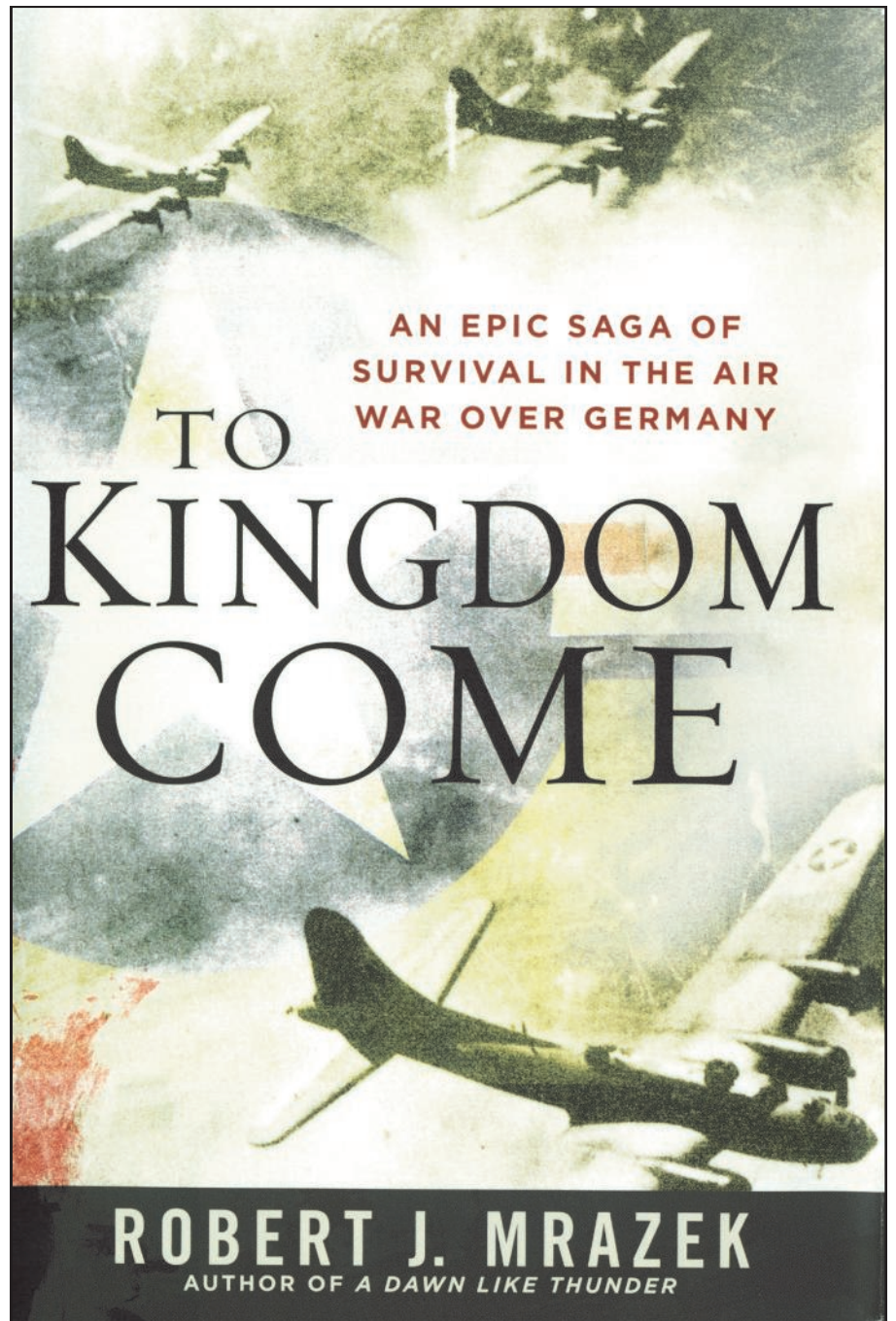
*During the mission, dense clouds obscured the targets and one commander's critical decision to circle three times over the city and its deadly flak proved disastrous. Forty-five planes went down that day and hundreds of men were lost or missing. The Stuttgart mission would become a defining moment in the conduct of the aerial warfare over Germany. Revealing both the astonishing valor of the airmen who survived being shot down, and the tragic fate of those who did not, To Kingdom Come is a stirring testament to the courage and sacrifice of American flyers in the face of incredible odds.*



Photo by Susan OKonski



Photo by Susan OKonski



## Another Starzynski Generation Takes Its Place in the Air Force

On June 17, 1944 Bob Starzynski was thinking about the future—his immediate future as his plane was going down. As the tail gunner on the Virgil W. Dingman crew, Starzynski did not have much time to worry. He had to get on the ground and try to avoid being captured. He did. Starzynski evaded capture and eventually made it back to England. During the war, he served in the 367th Bomb Squadron at Thurleigh. After the war he raised a family and just a few weeks ago, Bob was on hand to watch his great-granddaughter graduate from Basic Military Training at Lackland AFB, Texas, beginning another chapter in the Starzynski family service to our nation's Air Force.

"Indescribable and a great feeling,"

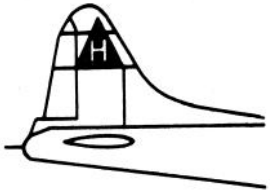
Bob remarked, after he watched Airman Jessica L. Kirstein march by in the graduation parade. Jessica's Air Force career will see her in the air, just like her great-grandfather. She is now on her way through advanced training and will serve with an in-flight refueling unit, helping to keep the war birds flying and on mission. The Starzynski chapter began over six decades ago when the world was threatened by tyrants who were determined to destroy democracy. Now the next chapter is underway. Under Jessica's watch, she too will serve our nation and work to keep us safe from tyrants and terrorists who threaten our way of life. All of us in the 306th Bomb Group Association family are proud of Jessica and send her out a message—well done and God's Speed!



306th BG Historical Collection



There were some fringe benefits for being wounded. Hurl N. Millikin, a 368th BS crewman, was wounded on the Frankfort mission on 29 January 1944. Hurl seems to be feeling no pain.



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#### 2010-2011 Student Interns:

Chase Brazell (Russell Strong Intern)  
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 Emi Johnson (Judge Donald Ross 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 obits as soon as possible after the death, to secretary (see contact information at left on this page below).

The secretary has learned of the following deaths:

- **Bentley, Robert K**, 423rd waist gunner (William Morgan crew), died 1 Jan 2011 in Long Beach, CA, at 93. He had remained a cheerful, steady presence at home despite suffering from Alzheimer's for 10 years. He flew 35 B-17 missions, keeping a notebook listing each mission, including each mission's pilot. After WWII, he was drafted from the reserves and served in the Korean War, with much of the time in Japan. After retiring from 39 years at the Ford Motor plants in southern CA, he enjoyed some golf, and travel to Alaska, Ireland, and Las Vegas. Survived by wife of 63 years, Eileen, 4c, 1gs.
- **Coleman, James Ray**, 368th pilot of 'Top Hat,' died 9 Jun 10 in Big Spring, TX, at 89. Downed near Charleville, France, 25 Feb 44 on his 11th mission (to Augsburg), his entire crew survived; POW at Stalag 3. Post-war, he farmed near Friona, TX; worked for Pan-Tex in Amarillo; and moved to Phoenix, AZ in 72 where he was a realtor until retiring in the 90s. He was active in Midway Baptist Church. Survived by wife of 32 years, Marilyn, 3s, 3gs, 2ggc.
- **Irons, Ben G.**, 423rd bombardier (Stephen Peck crew), died 27 Dec 10 in Santa Cruz, CA, at 92. Shot down on his 8th mission on 'Pecks Bad Boys' 28 Jul-43 (Kassel, Germany); POW at Stalag 3, then Stalag 7-A, he survived the forced evacuation from Sagan, Germany ahead of the advancing Russian Army, and subsequent winter 45 "March" to Moosburg, Germany. Ben had enlisted in the US Army in 38 before being transferred to the Army Air Corps. Before retiring in 58, he rose from private to major with his final years as a B-47 navigator in the Strategic Air Command. He married in 60 and in 62 graduated Summa Cum Laude from East Carolina U. He retired in 86 from 24 years with the Social Security Administration. They traveled widely both abroad and in the US. He was a member of First Congregational Church of Santa Cruz, Soquel (50 yrs), Elk, and SIRS. Survived by wife of 50 years, Mary Ellen, 3s, 5gc.
- **Larsen, Henry S**, Staff Sgt of Co C, 573rd Signals Aircraft Warning Battalion, 12 Mar 10 in Somerville, NJ at 91. Post-war, he received his Bachelors in Accounting & Finance from Rutgers Univ. He retired from Wilson Products Corp (division of Dart Industries) as Plant Manager in 79. He was extremely active with North Branch Reformed Church, serving on the Consistory and many committees. / He and his wife of 64 yrs, Grace, enjoyed traveling. He rests in Rural Hill Cemetery, Whitehouse, NJ.
- **Offord, Durwood "Dode" F**, 367th tail gunner, died 5 Jan 11 in the Panhandle of Texas, at 89, after his recent diagnosis of pancreatic cancer. He flew 50 missions in two consecutive tours between Nov 43 and Jan 45, with 30 days of rest leave in the US between. During that leave, he met Jolene, whom he married Mar 45; their 45 year marriage ended with her death to cancer in Apr 90. Post-war he retired in 82 after 37 years managing farm equipment stores for International Harvester in TX; afterward he worked 17 years in trucking. He and Elizabeth married in 91. He actively enjoyed friends, golf, travel, and serving Round Rock Christian Church. Predeceased by 1s, 1gd, he is survived by wife Elizabeth, 3s, 1d, 13gc, 2ggc, 3stepc, 8stepgc, 3stepggc.
- **Orr, Clifford Davis**, 423rd bombardier (Henry Wills crew), died 27 Aug 10, in southern CA at 92. He arrived Thurleigh 31 Jan 45. His wife, Seay, died in Jun 00, at 88. No further info.
- **Strasburger, Richard C**, of Scranton, PA died 20 May 10 at 93. While with the 306th he was assigned to the 4th Station Complement; he went on to serve elsewhere in England with the 322nd Sq of the 452nd Bomb Group. He was a retired employee of Marywood University, and a member of St Mary of the Assumption Church and the Daleville VFW. He was predeceased by his wife of 60 years, Marie, in March 08, and by 1s. Survived by 1s.
- **Tuohey, Carl W**, 367th bombardier (John K McAllister crew) of Medina, NY, died 23 Dec 09 at 85.

### Obituaries: 306<sup>th</sup> Family

- **Burgett, Louise**, died 3 Oct 10 in Tarrant Co, TX at 89. She was a Navy veteran; a member of TCU Woman's Exes; and a retired teacher. She was widow of Quentin, (367th pilot and POW, who d.Nov 2006. She was also preceded in death by 1s. Survived by 4c, 8gc, 9ggc.
- **Knowlton, Nelda**, died 17 Sep 10 in Harmony, MN at 85. She was widow of Jerry (369th co-pilot, Sandini crew), who died in Aug 97. Survived by 3c, 9 gc, 15 ggc.
- **Larson, Marion**, died 22 Oct 09 in Manhattan, KS. She was wife of Dr. Vernon C. Larson (423rd navigator, Joseph R Clark crew). From 59 to 62, their family was in Beirut, Lebanon, where Vernon was Assistant Dean of Agriculture at Univ of Beirut. They later spent 3 yrs in Nigeria and 3 yrs in India as Vernon served as Director of the USAID programs. From their permanent home in Manhattan, KS, they spent summers at their cottage in Interlochen, MI, near her extended family, and a wonderful place for reunion with children and grandchildren. She was preceded in death by an infant son and a granddaughter. Survived by Vernon, her husband of 63 yrs, 3c, 8gc.
- **Ryder, Donna**, died 6 Oct 10 in St Joseph, MO at 89, three weeks after the death of her husband Harvey B Ryder, 369th pilot.
- **Standish, Veronica R**, of Georgia, died 18 Oct 10, at 94. She was widow of William, 367th waist gunner (George Buckley crew) in original group, who died in Oct 97. Buried at Calverton National Cemetery. Survived by 2c, 9gc, 17ggc.

### Obituaries Not Recent; Not Previously Published (Arranged by Date of Death)

- **Gustafson, Ragnar Eugene** (367<sup>th</sup> navigator, Joseph W Pederson crew when downed), died 10 May 04 at 83 in Plano, TX. When downed 17 Jun 44 (Noyen mission) he became an evadee. No further info.
- **Laughlin, James H, Jr** (368<sup>th</sup> bombardier, Charles M Bayless crew when downed), died 15 Aug 03 in Sunset Beach, NC, at 82. Their B-17 was downed 25 Feb 44 (Augsburg mission); he was held at Stalag 1. No further info.
- **Nelson, Noris G** (367<sup>th</sup> Sq pilot & co-pilot, Shelby Scott crew) died 6 Aug 03 in Odessa, TX, at 79. He flew 16 combat missions in 44-45. Post-war he was involved in the family business. He flew often and enjoyed creating detailed, delicate model planes from strips of balsa wood and fine cheese cloth. Wife Frances predeceased him. Survived by at least 1c, gc, ggc.
- **Hoser, Harry W, Sr** (369th tail gunner, Keith Conley & Roy Vinnedge crews) of Fox Chase, PA, died 28 Jun 03, at 81. Wife Emily died Jun 00. Survived by 5c, 12 gc.



## President's Corner

Greetings,

With the dwindling number of those who served in the 306th, I want to encourage everyone, veterans and family, to join us at the reunion in October. Visiting the Air and Space Museum and the Midway will provide an opportunity to see how things have changed and how different aviation was in the Navy. See page 7 for reunion details. I urge you to get your reservation form to our treasurer, Joel LaBo, as soon as you can.

Beyond that, and more importantly, we will all appreciate being with others who are fortunate enough to have been part of the 306th family and who share our legacy.

Walt Rozett  
 President

*Obituaries Not Recent; Not Previously Published—Continued from Page 2*

- **Hoots, Harold G** (368<sup>th</sup> Sq) died 27 Apr 03 at home in Springfield, MO, at 77. He also served in Korea and Vietnam. Wife Frances may have survived him; no other info.
- **Wallace, George W** (368 engineer, Charles M Bayless crew when downed), died 7 Feb 03 in Austin, TX, at 80. POW 25 Feb 44 (Augsburg mission) at Stalag 3. No further info.
- **Gailey, Alfred C** (4<sup>th</sup> Station Complement) died 12 Jan 03 in Sandy, UT, at 84. He retired from the USAF as Major. He worked in Salt Lake City School District Office over building maintenance, retiring in 89. He served on the Sandy City Historical Museum Committee. Wife of 47 years, Velda, died 6 Aug 93.
- **Landrum, Julius** (369<sup>th</sup> bombardier, Richard Adams crew) died 1 Jan 03 in Fort Worth, TX, at 85. He was an original member of the 306<sup>th</sup> BG, and was POW from the Group's third mission, 8 Nov 42 (Lille), at Stalag 7A. He served in Korea. He retired as general counsel Commercial Standard Insurance Co. Predeceased by wife Joyce in Jun 91. Survived by 3c, 5gc.
- **Nagy, Thomas A** (3423<sup>rd</sup> waist gunner, James S Opdyke crew) died 30 Dec 02 in Perryopolis, PA, at 81. Wife Phyllis E died Sep 09; no other info.
- **Iafrate, Renato "Ray"** (369<sup>th</sup> tail & ball-turret gunner, crews of Ryder & Robert E Woods) died 11 Dec 02 at 76, in Greenville, RI. He was a renowned skate sharpener for hockey teams. His wife Mary, who died Jun 10, worked with Smithfield School Dept. Both volunteered at church in many capacities, and attended 306<sup>th</sup> BGA reunions. Survived by 2c, 3gc, 3ggc.
- **Allred, Clarence M** (367<sup>th</sup> ball turret gunner, William Wear crew) died 8 Oct 02 in Salt Lake City, UT, at 83. His crew arrived Thurleigh 13 Jan 45; missions continued to VE Day. Post-war he drove trucks, delivering goods throughout the Uinta Basin. His wife of 64 years, Florence died in Jan 00. He was survived by 3s, 2gc, 5ggc.
- **Powers, Wallace P** (367<sup>th</sup> engineer, Virgil Dingman's crew when downed 17 Jun 44 mission to Noyen, France) died 21 Mar 02 at Carbon Hill, OH at 79. As a POW he was held at Stalag 4. No further info.
- **Simpson, Kenneth D** (369<sup>th</sup> waist gunner, Robert Schoch crew; Barney Price crew when downed) died 18 Mar 02 at 80, in South Dartmouth, MA. He arrived at Thurleigh in late 43, and was POW from 26 Mar 44 (Pas de Calais mission) at Stalag 1. Presumably survived by at least 1d, who added him for Echoes in Jan 01 after he had a stroke. No further info.
- **Graham, Andrew L, Jr** (423<sup>rd</sup> bombardier, Loyal Felts crew when downed) died 5 Mar 02 at 81, in Pulaski, VA. He was POW from 9 Nov 42 (St Nazaire mission) at Stalag 7A. He worked with Appalachian Power for 37 years; served as Pulaski Town Councilman 23 years, and Mayor of Pulaski 4 years. Survived by wife Elrica; 2c, 4gc, 3ggc.
- **Mocharnuk, William** (367-368-369<sup>th</sup> deputy lead navigator (369<sup>th</sup> Mattson crew when downed) died 26 Feb 02 in Claremont, CA at 84. He was POW at Stalag 1 from their downing 10 Jan 45 (Gymnich mission). Post-war he graduated from Wharton School of Business, and moved to CA, where he was a real estate broker and taught real estate at Chaffey College. Survived by Mary, wife of 51 years, 5c, 7gc.
- **Robbins, Judson J** (367<sup>th</sup> waist gunner Ralph Malsom crew) died 7 Jan 02 in Trenton, NJ, at 85. As of our 06 Directory he was unmarried; no survivor info.
- **Whitaker, Herbert R** (369<sup>th</sup> nose & tail gunner, Jack Henley crew) died 7 Oct 01 in Sarasota, FL, at 77. He was a German POW from 14 Feb 45 (Dresden mission); his POW photo (identifiable only by his Serial #), was found by a researcher at the National Archives for our 306<sup>th</sup> archives. Wife Suzanne survived; no further info.
- **Reynolds, Wilbert L** (1208<sup>th</sup> QuarterMaster Co) died 30 Aug 01 in Springfield, MO, at 83. Survived by wife Nellie; no further info.
- **Hamilton, Jack M** (369<sup>th</sup> navigator, Alvin Schuering crew) of Hamburg Township, MI, died 12 Aug 01, at 80. He arrived at Thurleigh 1 Dec 43, and was POW from 29 Mar 44 (Brunswick mission) at Stalag 1. Post-war, he worked for General Motors for 30 years, retiring in 85. Predeceased by wife; no survivor info.
- **Rosser, Donald L** (876<sup>th</sup> Chemical Company) died 11 Aug 01 in Salt Lake City, UT, at 81. Predeceased in 68 by young teen son of pneumonia, and in Jul 94 by Bertha Ann, wife of 46 years. They had 6c. No further info.
- **Shipman, Frank W, Jr** (367<sup>th</sup> navigator, John K McAllister crew) died 6 Apr 01 at 77.
- **McClellan, Harry A** (control tower) died 26 Jan 01 in Virginia Beach, VA, at 77. No further info.
- **Crowl, Clarence J** (368<sup>th</sup> pilot & co-pilot, checking out Charles M Bayless as a first pilot when downed), died 8 Dec 00 in Titusville, FL, near his 81<sup>st</sup> birthday.. Their B-17 was downed 25 Feb 44 (Augsburg mission); he was held at Stalag 1. During the Korean Conflict, he flew B-52s. No further info.
- **Sheridan, John A** (radio operator; Virgil Dingman's crew when downed) died 24 Jul 00 in Sebring, FL at age 83. POW of Germany from 17 Jun 44 (Noyen mission) at an unspecified camp. No further info.
- **Prescott, Harold L** (367 pilot and co-pilot, Milton M Adam crew) of Lapeer, MI, died 6 Feb 00, at 78. His tour at Thurleigh was 7 Jun 44 to 1 Oct 44. No post-war info was found. Survived by Eileen, wife of 56 years, who died Oct 08. She was survived by their 2d, 4gc, 2ggc.
- **Downing, Bobby Joe** (423<sup>rd</sup> waist gunner, Dean C Rodman crew when downed) died 17 Sep 99 in Ardmore, OK at 78. He was POW from 8 Oct 43 (Bremen mission) at Stalag 3. He retired as co-owner and operator of Spreklemeyer Printing Co. He was president of Kiwanis; a city commissioner; and on the board of education. Predeceased by 1s. He & wife of 56 years, Janice, were both very active in church & community. She died Dec 07; survived by 2s, 3 dtrs-in-law, 6gc, 3ggd.
- **Owen, Charles R** (369<sup>th</sup> waist gunner, Keith Conley crew when downed) died 9 Sep 99 in Ontario County, NY, at 76. He was a POW of Germany from 29 Jul 43 (Kiel mission). Wife Purla died Sep 02 in Medina, NY. No further info.
- **Christian, William C** (368<sup>th</sup> tail gunner, Charles M Bayless crew when downed), died 17 Jun 99 in Kansas, at 75. Their B-17 was downed 25 Feb 44 (Augsburg mission); he was held at Stalag 4. No further info.
- **Feigum, James A** (368<sup>th</sup> radio operator, James H Butler crew) died 17 Aug 98 in Fargo, ND, at 76. Wife Virginia died Dec 08. No further info.
- **McTague, Harry D** (368<sup>th</sup> bombardier-navigator, Gordon Dobbs crew) died 7 Jun 98 in American Fork, UT, at 76. He retired from a 36-yr career as a supervisor for Geneva Steel. Survived by wife of 54 years, Betty, twin d, 6gc, 15ggc as of Jul 10.
- **Romanelli, Pasquale "Pat" J** (368<sup>th</sup> gunner, James H Butler crew) native of Delaware Co, PA, died there 30 Apr 98 at 79.
- **Huebotter, Richard C** (368<sup>th</sup> waist gunner, Dean C Allen crew) and POW, of Placentia, CA, died 14 Mar 98 of Pulmonary Fibrosis, at 75. Downed on "Hard to Get" 26 Aug 44 (Gelsenkirchen mission); held at Stalag 4. After the war, his career was in banking; he retired Jan 86 as VP of Operations for Security Pacific National Bank. Survived by his wife of 50 years, Elizabeth, 2d, 2gc. Buried at Loma Vista Memorial Park, Fullerton, CA.
- **Frazee, Malcolm C** (423<sup>rd</sup> pilot and co-pilot, Ferman "Jack" L Millette Jr crew) died 21 Jan 97 at Valley Center, San Diego County, CA at 73. He arrived at Thurleigh 30 Apr 44; by Jul 44 he had taken over the crew of Ellis Porter; he completed his tour 3 Sep 44. After also serving in Korea and Vietnam, he retired as Colonel. Wife Evelyn died Feb 95. No survivor info.
- **Wenrich, Paul R** (368<sup>th</sup> radio operator, Albert Rehn crew), originally from PA, died 30 Nov 96 in Orange Co, CA, at 75. Combat injuries of his left arm on 22 Mar 44 (Berlin mission) resulted in his later discharge. His wife Marion died Oct '00. No further info.
- **Vader, Richard H** (367<sup>th</sup> ball turret gunner, William Bisson crew) died 18 Apr 96 in Newberry, FL, at 76. He was POW from 14 Oct 43 (second Schweinfurt mission) at Stalag 17B. No further info.
- **Pagano, Joseph J** (369<sup>th</sup> waist gunner, Kurt Ahlstrom crew when downed), of Queens, NY, died 26 Dec 95 at 75. On 11 Apr 44 (Stettin mission), he was part of the crew surviving their B-17's explosion; he was POW at Stalag 17B. No further info.
- **Hawkins, Russell O, Jr** (423<sup>rd</sup> waist gunner; L O Parks crew when their crippled B-17 landed in Sweden) died 28 Nov 95 in Yakima, WA, at 70. He was interned in Sweden on 18 Jul 44. No further info.
- **Carroll, Charles M** (306<sup>th</sup> Military Police officer, 982<sup>nd</sup>) died 10 Sep 94 in Fairport, NY, at almost 73. He was the first Democrat elected in Monroe Co, NY. He served as a Justice, and later as Fairport Village Attorney. He remained active in the USAF Reserves until he retired both as LtC, and from law pursuits. Survived by wife of 43 years, Marie June.
- **Leach, Jim P** (423<sup>rd</sup> pilot, Norm Armbrust was his co-pilot) died 28 Jul 94 in Kerrville, TX, at 78. He was only at Thurleigh for the month of May 43, before he was detached to 303<sup>rd</sup> & 1 CBW, and then was transferred to 40 CBW in Aug 43. Survived by wife; no further info.
- **Eberly, James Hurst** (414<sup>th</sup> Air Serv. Grp), of Mechanicsville, VA, died 14 Dec 93, at 72. Survived by wife Joan; no further info.
- **Latscha, Walter V** (368<sup>th</sup> navigator, Richard M Weiser Jr crew), of Cincinnati, OH, died 13 Nov 93, at 71. He arrived at Thurleigh 4 Apr 45. Wife Mary Jane survived him. No further info.
- **Blucher, Earl L** (423<sup>rd</sup> gunner, Donald Cheney crew), of Dearborn Heights, MI, died 17 Oct 93, at 70. Survived by wife Rosemary, 3c, 3gd.
- **Glasscock, Lemuel A** (367<sup>th</sup> ball turret gunner, Arthur Mack crew), of Birmingham, AL, died 13 Sep 91, at 69. He was at Thurleigh with Bob Starzynski, when Bob recorded his name and address in his address book. No further info.
- **Anderson, Fred W** (367<sup>th</sup> navigator, Richard Breed crew), died 11 Dec 90 in IA, at 67. He had 35 missions at Thurleigh from Sep 44 to Jan 45. Post-war he was considered a pioneer in budgetary control and computers; he retired in 79. Survived by wife of 45 year, Lavonne, 2d, 1gs.
- **Dingman, Virgil W** (367<sup>th</sup> pilot; downed 17 Jun 44 mission to Noyen, France) died 14 Sep 90 at 70. He was an evadee. No further info.
- **Willey, Kenneth E** (368<sup>th</sup> waist gunner, Charles M Bayless crew when downed), died 16 Apr 89 at age 69. POW 25 Feb 44 (Augsburg mission) held at Stalag 9C. No further info.
- **Hensley, Billy J** (368<sup>th</sup> tail gunner, James H Butler crew), died 18 Sep 88 at age 63 in Geronimo, OK. Post-war he became a lawyer. No further info.
- **Blackwell, Jack E** (367<sup>th</sup> ball turret gunner, Joseph W Pederson crew when downed), died in Nov 86 in Panama City, FL at 67. When downed 17 Jun 44 (Noyen mission) he became an evadee. Enlisted as a married man from CA. No further info.

*Obituaries Not Recent; Not Previously Published—Continued from Page 3*

**PLEASE SEND IN YOUR ADDRESS AND CONTACT INFORMATION CORRECTIONS. WE NEED EMAIL ADDRESSES ON EVERYONE WHO HAS ONE.**

*Send corrections and additions to:  
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To:  
Veterans, Spouses, Children,  
Grandchildren, & friends of the 306<sup>th</sup> b.g.

I am writing this letter to remind all the 306<sup>th</sup> members, off- spring and friends of the memorial that was placed on the old air base at Thurleigh in the year 1982, this coming October it will be 29 years old. It has stood the weather, vandalism and has stood proud. The board directors over the past few years have talked of moving it across the airfield and relocate it at the 306th Museum, which we all feel it is the proper place for it now. It will be protected and every one who comes to the museum will be able to view it. Here is a ceremony every year on our anniversary of the 306th when they left England at the end of the war and returned home. This anniversary is celebrated by the grade-school children of the village of Thurleigh, they place flowers at the memorial in remembrance of all the Americans who served at the base. They also remember all those who never returned. I have attended the ceremony, which is very touching and when you as a veteran of the base understand that they are paying a very high tribute and their personal feelings for all of us who were there This memorial has been taking care of by Ralph Franklin, his wife, Daphne & their sons from early spring until late fall they cut grass, the area cleaned up the memorial is washed & cleaned the lettering periodically repainted, trees pruned and what ever else these grand people see and take care of. And all these years Ralph has never received any reimbursement what so ever for what they have spent as it was all done for the love of the 306<sup>th</sup> there is such a great binding between these people and us all. And I'm sure that you all appreciate what they have done. We owe them our gratitude.

Now I come to the hard part, over the years there has been some deterioration, and it has now come to the point that it needs repair work. Ralph has been getting estimates on moving it and repairing it as our organization becomes smaller and smaller. The donations are less and less I come to you for help. We need to raise some money to move this piece of history onto the field itself where it belongs with the museum. It's a legacy that will be there for as long as time itself. And we should be very, very proud of this memorial. What it tells of the 306th bomb group, fourth group of the Eighth Air Force to arrive in United Kingdom, first bomb group to bomb German soil thus as we are known "first over Germany" and the very last bomb group to leave Europe to come home and flew 341 missions. This is part of our legacy!

I ask of you knowing that we are in hard times and for some of us old people it doesn't get any easier. What you donate, no matter how small or how large you will be part of a great legacy being saved. I personally will see that a plaque is made up of all the donors' names. Not how much they donated, but just their names to show that you cared, and it will be given to Ralph to be put in the museum to show the British people that we also care. Not all the estimates are in as yet, but it looks like everything done will run between three to \$4000 American dollars. There are a few more estimates to come in. Again, please send a donation, no matter what amount. Make checks out to the following.

(306th. Memorial fund.)  
To our treasurer, Joel Labo  
875 Worth. Birmingham. MI.48009-6939

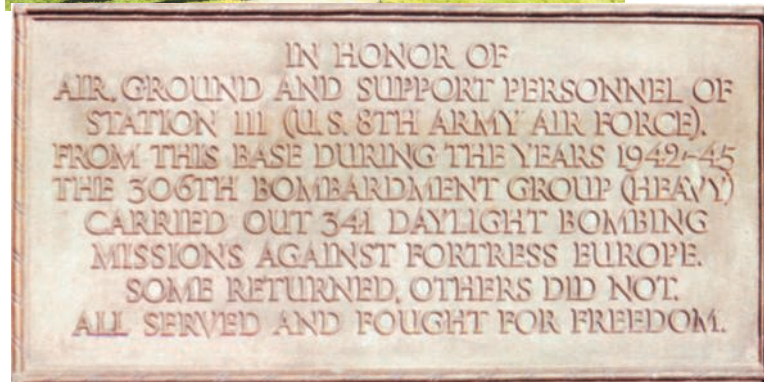
I would like to thank you all for your compassion and a great spirit of the group. I would like to give each and every donor, a big hug, a handshake and a very warm thank you!

Sincerely

*Rocky Rockwell*



Left three photos: The 306th Bomb Group Memorial at Thurleigh, a site where children and visitors often can be found paying their respect to the men of the 306th. At right, the 369th Bomb Squadron group photograph of the enlisted air crew members, no officers. This photograph came from Andy Ness who was engineer for the Harvey Ryder crew in the 369th. Above is the Ryder crew: Front row, (L to R) Lowell Mikles (CP), Oliver Minihane (N), Harvey Ryder (P); Back row: Ray Iafrate (BT), Jack Stright (WG), Joe Wurtemberger (RO), Andrew Ness (E), Melvin Loes (TG). Photos courtesy: Ralph Franklin, Andy Ness, and 306th BG Historical Collection.



## Memories in Manila Folders: Remembering the 306<sup>TH</sup> Bombardment Group

By Trenton Dietz

Thurman Shuller Intern  
306th Bomb Group Historical Project

(Editor's Note: I thought that the 306th BG family would like to see an example of the academic work that is being created and presented to the historical profession by the university interns who serve the 306th at Abilene Christian University. Trenton Dietz is one of our fine young interns who presented this paper to the Phi Alpha Theta Regional Conference on April 16, 2011.)

In high school, history is little more than a collection of names and dates. However, the more I mature as a historian, the more I see that history is made primarily of people. This is a lesson that I have learned many times as an intern with the 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association. Internships are highly valuable for undergraduate history students because they help teach such basic lessons as history's human composition before the student enters graduate level studies. To demonstrate the value of historical internships, I will describe my own experiences and how they have furthered my education as a history major. I will first address the background of the 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group and the Bomb Group Association, then move into the specific tasks of an intern with the 306<sup>th</sup>, and finally discuss the educational value of this internship.

### History of the 306<sup>th</sup>

During World War II, the 306<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group served in the Eighth Air Force in the European Theatre and was composed of four squadrons (the 367<sup>th</sup>, 368<sup>th</sup>, 369<sup>th</sup>, and 423<sup>rd</sup>). These squadrons flew the B-17 Flying Fortress, one of the most well-known heavy bombers of World War II. The Eighth Air Force launched raids against various targets in Nazi-occupied Europe and eventually attacked Germany, itself. The Eighth Air Force's targets included factories, marshalling yards, and essentially any part of the German infrastructure that supported the Third Reich's war machine.

Known for being the first bombardment group to bomb Germany in World War II, the 306<sup>th</sup> began its journey at Wendover Field in Utah in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor. Here the men of the 306<sup>th</sup> trained rigorously for several months in 1942 before they were moved in August to Westover Field in Massachusetts, where they patrolled the Atlantic for enemy submarines. Finally, in September, the men of the 306<sup>th</sup> moved to Thurleigh, England, and, in October, they flew their first combat mission.

Unfortunately, the early stages of the American Strategic Bombing Campaign were largely unsuccessful. American bomber crews had little or no combat experience and therefore had to learn many hard lessons in the hostile skies of Hitler's Europe. Anti-aircraft fire from the ground and fighter attacks by the Luftwaffe claimed scores of American lives. Also, the Allies at the time lacked a fighter with long enough range to protect the bombers all the way to their targets. Limited success and high casualty rates devastated the morale of the 306<sup>th</sup> in late 1942.

To combat these low spirits, high command replaced Colonel Charles Overacker, the commanding officer of the 306<sup>th</sup>, with Frank A. Armstrong. It was Armstrong who eventually led the 306<sup>th</sup> into Germany, earning the bomb group its motto "First over Germany" which it retains to this day. Armstrong would serve as the inspiration for the fictional character General Frank Savage (played by Gregory Peck) in the 1949 film *Twelve O'Clock High*. Over the course of the war, the 306<sup>th</sup> would support raids against such targets as Schweinfurt, Frankfurt, and Berlin. The bomb group also flew three missions in support of the D-Day invasion. By the time it left Thurleigh in December 1945, the 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group had built a solid reputation, a story that survives to this day.

It would not be until decades later, in the mid-1970s, that several former members of the 306<sup>th</sup> would form the 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association. This association facilitated annual reunions as well as the publication of a quarterly newsletter known as *Echoes*. Russell Strong, one of the founding members of the 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association, became the first executive secretary and editor of the newsletter. Strong began to build a collection of information on the 306<sup>th</sup> to support his work on *Echoes* as well as to further his research for a history of his old bomb group. Strong's research included travelling around the US, interviewing veterans of the 306<sup>th</sup>. *First Over Germany: A History of the 306<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group* by Russell Strong (published in 1982) demonstrated Strong's thorough investigation. Dr. Vernon Williams, a military historian and history professor at Abilene Christian University, called the book "one of the best researched and written unit histories to come out of World War II." Strong's compilation of his materials on the 306<sup>th</sup> had another result: the creation of the 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association Historical Collection.

In 2007, the Historical Collection was given to Abilene Christian University. Dr. Vernon Williams and several history interns took upon themselves numerous responsibilities for the preservation of the history of the 306<sup>th</sup>. They would write and publish *Echoes*, design a 306<sup>th</sup> web page, and digitize the entire Historical Collection so that it could be placed online. Since then, students at ACU have served as 306<sup>th</sup> interns every semester, continuing to work on *Echoes* as well as digitize the Historical Collection. This digitization process should be complete in late 2011 or early 2012 at which time ACU will hand the collection over to the Mighty Eighth Air Force Museum in Georgia. Dr. Williams and the interns are preserving the memory of the 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group in World War II.

### Tasks of a 306<sup>th</sup> Intern

As an intern with the 306<sup>th</sup>, I have three main tasks: digitizing the Historical Collection, writing for *Echoes*, and assisting in the reunions. All three of these tasks have important influences on my personal development within the historical field. These responsibilities also preserve the history of the 306<sup>th</sup> by making materials available to public curiosity, scholarly research, and (of course) the veterans and their families.

Currently the interns are digitizing Russell Strong's 306<sup>th</sup> correspondence files. This involves hours of scanning documents into computers. Interns must also identify special papers or items such as photographs that will need more specialized attention. This process can be extremely dull and tedious. However, the interns realize

that the digitization process will result in a wealth of material accessible to the public. The correspondence files contain a wide range of materials such as photographs, letters, newspaper articles, and even Christmas cards. Personnel updates in the files indicate what the veteran did both during and after the war as well as how the 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association can contact the veteran. Obviously, this enormous collection of information will be able to support a wide variety of research once it is online.

Not only will the digitization process make the Historical Collection available to the public, but it will also help preserve the collection. Many of the documents in the collection are suffering from age. They are in danger from various forms of decay such as rust from staples and paperclips and the destructive acidity of the papers. By creating digital copies of these documents, the 306<sup>th</sup> interns are helping to indefinitely preserve the history they contain.

The correspondence files are organized according to the veteran to whom the correspondence pertains. Therefore, interns scanning the files may spend hours working on materials about a single veteran. As the intern does so, he or she can gradually get to know the veteran, even though he may no longer be living. Often at the end of a file an intern will find an obituary sent to the 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association by the veteran's family. Strangely, though I have probably never met the people to whom these files pertain, I often feel a sense of loss when I find their obituaries because of my brief encounter with their lives.

One of the files that I scanned was that of Leland (or Lee) Kessler. My journey through his file demonstrates the strange connection that interns can form with veterans without even meeting them. Kessler enlisted in the military in January 1942, and in April he began his service in the 368<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron of the 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group. He completed sixteen missions before his plane was shot down in May 1943 and he was captured by the Germans. While a prisoner of war, Kessler saw a group of Jews being marched back to a concentration camp after working in a quarry. Those Jews that were not strong enough to continue the march were shot, including one who Kessler saw kiss a photograph just before being killed. Kessler got a closer look at the photograph and saw that it was of a woman and two children. Later, Kessler would use his skills as an artist to would recreate the scene in a drawing known as *The Hand* (see Figure 1 below). After the war, Kessler used his wartime experiences as inspiration for many of his artworks before he died in 2003.

Correspondence files can be chaotic. In Kessler's file, for instance, one of the first things that I learned about him was that he had built a large model of a B-17 and that

he was apparently very proud of that fact. I waded through photographs, letters, and newspaper articles about his model, wondering if the entire file revolved around his small-scale bomber. Gradually, however, I got to know Lee Kessler. I learned he had been shot down, he had been a prisoner of war, and he had drawn a beautiful picture inspired by his brief encounter with the Holocaust. By the end of the file, I felt almost as if Lee Kessler was a friend. Thus, when I found his obituary, I was surprised and disappointed. I had formed a brief but touching connection with a veteran. History had a face and a story, and it warranted my respect.



Figure 1

Thanks to the digitization process, that face and story will be preserved and, once the files are placed online, be available to the public. Others will be able to experience Lee Kessler's life in the same way that I did.

I also scanned the correspondence file for a veteran named Bill Houlihan. Houlihan joined the 306<sup>th</sup> in June 1942 and served as a medical non-commissioned officer. To this day, he is an active member of the 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association. I met Houlihan in the fall of 2010 at the 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Reunion in Washington, D.C. During the reunion, General Richard Newton, then Deputy Chief of Staff for Manpower of the U. S. Air Force, gave a speech at one of the dinners. In gratitude, the 306<sup>th</sup> presented General Newton with a historical photograph (see page 6) of Houlihan during World War II. Several months later, I worked through Houlihan's bulky file. For me, Bill Houlihan was not simply a name attached to a large stack of correspondence; he was a remarkable veteran with an energetic personality.

Another one of my responsibilities with the 306<sup>th</sup> is working on *Echoes*, the association's quarterly newsletter. Although interns sometimes volunteer to compose large research projects for *Echoes*, they are usually responsible for writing short articles requiring only basic research. Even these small projects, however, promote a detailed knowledge of the 306<sup>th</sup> by forcing the interns to gather information over topics such as German prison camps and the contents of airmen's survival kits. Writing

Continued on Page 6

Continued from Page 5

for *Echoes* gives the interns yet another way to learn about the daily life of the men of the 306<sup>th</sup> and, by extension, about the air war in general. These articles also contribute to public knowledge of the 306<sup>th</sup>, allowing others to share in the research results.

As an intern, I have also had the responsibility of editing large sections of *Echoes*. Because *Echoes* reaches a significant audience, the editing process is critical and must be thorough. Working with *Echoes* gives interns an appreciation for the amount and quality of work required for such a newsletter. This work also develops important writing skills. *Echoes* promotes familiarity with the 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group and with historical publications, furthering the interns' historical education.

An intern's third duty is assisting in the organization and especially the execution of the 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association's annual reunion. The tasks involved with this project vary widely but might be collectively summed up as "grunt work." Interns pack materials for transport to the reunion, organize nametags and directories for the reunion's many attendants, sell DVDs, set up presentations, and perform any number of other tasks. Because of the wide variety of their duties, interns gain perspective into many of the facets of organizing historical events such as these reunions. For a 306<sup>th</sup> intern, the annual reunion can be the most exhausting and exciting event of the year.

During the reunions, interns are encouraged to take opportunities to interact with the veterans. Although many people know veterans of World War II, rarely do they have the opportunity to engage these veterans in an environment so fully focused on the war as a reunion. For young history students, the reunion is an ideal environment for discussion and education. Interns can gain greater insight into the 306<sup>th</sup> by talking with men who actually served with the bomb group. This is yet another way that interns can increase their knowledge of a specific subject. The environment of open discussion holds remarkable potential to teach young history students.

One of the events of the 2010 reunion in Washington, D.C., was a visit to the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum. At the museum, I spoke with a veteran about his experiences in World War II, and he was able to reference exhibits that were in the room. By meeting and interacting with the veterans, interns are able to connect their work with specific people. Veterans and interns build friendships that promote a greater level of responsibility because the interns now know the people whose history they are working to preserve. Internships become personal responsibilities to veterans and their families rather than simply resume-building exercises. Though World War II history is fairly unique in that there are still people who lived through it (as opposed to the history of colonial America, for example), the knowledge that all history is connected to actual people who deserve respect is a critical element in the education of a historian. The 306<sup>th</sup> helps educate interns about their responsibilities to history.

**Furthering History through Internships**

Internships such as those offered by the 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association are extremely useful in training students for continued historical work. These internships provide hands-on historical experience, in-depth knowledge of a subject, and personal connections and responsibilities to history. They also allow for the preservation of important historical collections.

Undergraduate interns with the 306<sup>th</sup> have the rare opportunity to handle primary sources on a daily basis. Thus, they learn how primary sources are created and organized, preparing the interns for continued interaction with such sources. The 306<sup>th</sup> Historical Collection is certainly not a large-scale archive; however, it does contain a wealth of material on World War II. Experience in the Historical Collection could therefore serve as a basis for further archival training. Though most 306<sup>th</sup> interns will never make a career in archives, many are likely to interact with such collections in the future. Their time working with the Historical Collection can allow for a greater understanding of archives, giving them greater respect for the complex and sometimes difficult organization of primary sources.

Obviously, working with the 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association can also provide a relatively detailed knowledge of a particular portion of history. Through working with primary sources in the Historical Collection, researching topics for *Echoes* articles, and interacting with veterans at reunions, interns develop a deeper understanding of the Strategic Bombing Campaign in World War II. Not only do students handle primary sources, but they also have access to these sources for research and, in the near future, will be able to maintain that access through the association's website. The knowledge of the air war that these interns develop may serve as the basis for continued research on World War II, or it may simply point out the level of familiarity necessary for a historian to successfully engage a topic.

Interns with the 306<sup>th</sup> also build a sense of personal responsibility to history. Reunions dramatically connect the interns to both veterans and their families, building friendships and a sense of obligation to preserve the memory of the 306<sup>th</sup>. Archival work builds similar connections and enables the interns to get to know the veterans by examining their lives both during and after the war. Through reunions and archival work, the men of the 306<sup>th</sup> gradually cease to be simply names on papers; they are human beings with personalities, dreams, and families. The 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association provides a dramatic example of the humanity of history that interns will hopefully be able to carry into other areas of study.

The 306<sup>th</sup> internships also help preserve history by digitizing a large, deteriorating archive. The digitization process will allow the Historical Collection to continue to be a valuable resource and will provide greater access to that resource. Scholars, amateur historians, and veterans and their families will all be able to access the wealth of information contained in the 306<sup>th</sup> Historical Collection.

The 306<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group has a remarkable history that deserves to be remembered. Through digitizing the Historical Collection, writing and editing *Echoes*, and assisting in reunions, the 306<sup>th</sup> interns are helping to keep the memory of the bomb group alive. The 306<sup>th</sup> internships, as well as similar undergraduate opportunities, offer an incredible education for history students by giving them experience in handling primary sources, expertise on a particular subject, and personal responsibility for the preservation of history. For the 306<sup>th</sup> interns, history has lost much of its dry composition of names and dates; history has come alive. For these interns, it is an honor to preserve the memories of the 306<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group, memories contained in manila folders. ✈

*Photograph at left was presented to Lt. General Richard Newton at the First Over Germany Dinner held at the Washington, D.C. Reunion. Bill Houlihan, center, presented to photograph to General Newton.*



**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

**Registration Form**  
 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association Reunion  
 Holiday Inn Bayside — San Diego, California  
 27-30 October 2011

Registration fee (per person)..... x \$35.00 = \$\_\_\_\_\_

**Thursday, 27 October** (everything is free on this arrival day, including a Welcome Reception with a complimentary bar—5-6 pm Thursday in the hospitality room)

**Friday, 28 October**

Ladies Breakfast (7:30-9am)..... x \$28.00 = \$\_\_\_\_\_

San Diego Air and Space Museum Tour (10:00 am-3 pm)..... x \$35.00 = \$\_\_\_\_\_

First Over Germany Dinner (7 pm)..... x \$45.00 = \$\_\_\_\_\_

**Saturday, 9 October**

USS Midway Museum Tour (1:30am-5:00 pm)..... x \$35.00 = \$\_\_\_\_\_

Banquet (7 pm)..... x \$49.00 = \$\_\_\_\_\_

*Everything else on the schedule is free!*

**Total.....\$\_\_\_\_\_**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address w/ City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone # (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail \_\_\_\_\_

Squadron or Base Unit \_\_\_\_\_ Assigned Duty \_\_\_\_\_

*Please make checks payable to: 306<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association Reunion and mail to:  
 Joel LaBo, 875 S. Worth, Birmingham, Michigan 48009*

Please list the names and hometown for each person registered.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Is this your first reunion? \_\_\_\_\_ Veteran? \_\_\_\_\_ Family? \_\_\_\_\_

**Please call the Holiday Inn Bayside direct to make reservations:  
 1-800-662-8899 or 1-619-224-3621  
 Ask for 306th Bomb Group reunion rates:**

**\$105.00 (plus tax) Single, Double, Triple, or Quad Rooms—All One Price**

**Deadline for registration and hotel reservations is 5 October 2011.  
 Please help your 306th Bomb Group reunion planning,  
 register and make hotel reservations early. Do it today!**

**A full-sized hard copy of this form is on the 306th website: 306bg.org**

## Reunion Schedule At San Diego

**Wednesday, 26 October**

- Arrival - Pick up registration packets - Harborview Room (2 - 6 pm)
- Hospitality Room and Exhibits Setup Harborview Room (12 noon - 5 pm; 7 - 10 pm)
- Dinner on your own (hotel restaurants and other food venues close by)

**Thursday, 27 October**

- Arrival - Pick up registration packets - Harborview Room (8 am – 5 pm)
- Board Meeting Arlington Room (10 am)
- Sign up for Oral History interviews (8 am-5pm)
- Hospitality Room and Exhibits Harborview Room (8 am - 5 pm; 7 - 10 pm)
- Welcome Reception with complimentary bar, Harborview Room (5 pm-6 pm), compliments of the hotel
- Thurleigh at War film (10 am); Thurleigh Memories 11:15 Coronado Room
- The 306th BG Archives—From Start to Finish, a final report and presentation on the 306<sup>th</sup> Project at ACU--Dr. Williams Coronado Room (2-3 pm)
- 306<sup>th</sup> BG Veterans Roundtable, with 306<sup>th</sup> veterans telling their stories with a Q & A with the audience--moderated by Dr. Vernon Williams , Coronado Room (3:30-5:30 pm)
- Dinner on your own (hotel restaurants and other food venues close by)

**Friday, 28 October**

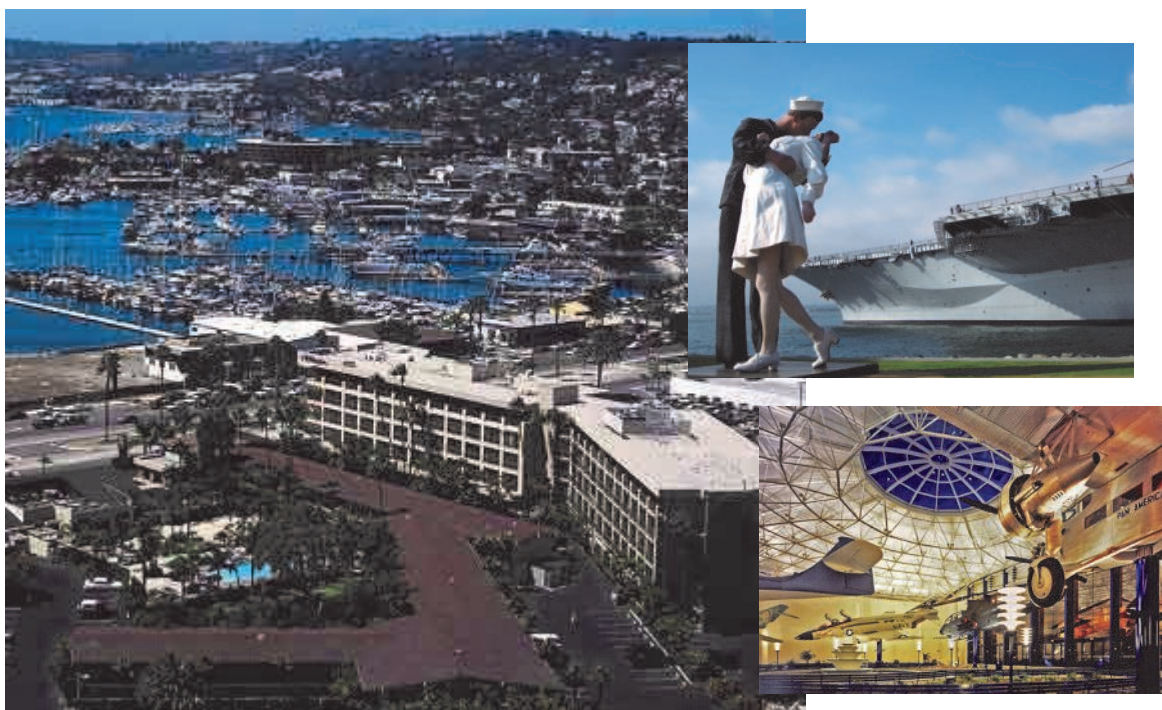
- Ladies Breakfast - Pacific Room (7:30-9am)
- Arrival - Pick up registration packets - Harborview Room (8am-5pm)
- Oral History interviews (pre-scheduled by appointment)
- Hospitality Room and Exhibits- Harborview Room (8am-5pm; 7-10 pm)
- Thurleigh at War film, Coronado Room (10 am)
- San Diego Air & Space Museum Tour (10 am-3pm)
- Second Generation meeting - Coronado Room (4 pm)
- First Over Germany Dinner, Poolside Deck (Cash Bar 6-7pm, Dinner 7-9pm) (Special Program Planned)

**Saturday, 29 October**

- Arrival - Pick up registration packets - Harborview Room (8am-5pm)
- Memorial Service—Tribute to the Fallen and Folded Wings Memorial, California Room (8:00-9:30 am)
- Business Meeting, California Room (10-Noon)
- Oral History interviews (pre-scheduled by appointment)
- Hospitality Room and Exhibits Harborview Room (1-5pm)
- USS Midway Museum Tour - (1:30 pm-5:00 pm)
- Thurleigh at War film (3 pm)
- Cash bar (6 pm – 9 pm )
- Veterans-only Group Photograph California Room (6:45 pm)
- Widows Group & Next Generation Photograph California Room (6:50 pm)
- Banquet, California Room (7 pm) (Special Program Planned)

**Sunday, 30 October**

- Farewells
- Check out
- Travel Home — See you next year!



### HOTEL RESERVATIONS

**Holiday Inn Bayside San Diego**

Please call the Holiday Inn Bayside direct to make hotel reservations

**1-800-662-8899 or 1-619-224-3621**

Ask for 306th Bomb Group reunion rates:

**\$105.00 Single, Double, Triple, or Quad Rooms—All One Price**

# Museum Notes

## Thurleigh Airfield 306th Bomb Group Museum

### A Moonlight Serenade Thanks for the Memories

By Ralph Franklin

*Editor's Note: This story was first published in England in April 1989. In it Ralph remembers the visit to Thurleigh by former members of Glenn Miller's Army Air Forces Band.*

For almost two years the aircrews of the 306th Heavy Bombardment Group had left the 64 hardstands at Thurleigh (Station 111) in their B17 Flying Fortresses to carry the fight to war-torn Europe with their daylight bombing missions; many failed to return to the comparative peace of the Bedfordshire countryside. The ground crews had toiled all through the long nights to ensure the aircraft were capable of transporting their lethal load of destruction to the target and return the relieved crews for another days battle.

On the 7th October 1942 - two days before the 306th Bombardment Group made an early morning take-off on what was to be the first of 341 such missions to Europe - a certain gentleman by the name of Glenn Miller joined the Army. At the age of 38 he would never have been called up as he was 3 years beyond the upper age limit, but by the summer of 1942, he had decided that playing in a civilian capacity with his by now famous band was not enough. So it was at the height of his success, he broke up the band and for patriotic reasons, volunteered for service in the Army.

The music of Glenn Miller was to become an inspiration not only to the Americans, but to all who were giving up so much in the cause of freedom. He had the pick of the top musicians from all the big bands in the States and created what was to become probably the best known and loved music of the war years.

Once 'D' Day arrived and the long trek across Europe began, it was decided that the now Captain Glenn Miller and his Army Air Forces Band should come to England. They arrived at Greenock on the Clyde on 28 June 1944.

After arrival in England the band were transported to London and billeted in a block of flats in Sloane Court Chelsea. These arrangements had been made many months earlier, and by the time the band had taken up residence, the Germans were bombarding London with their flying bombs.

It did not take long to realize that London was not the ideal place to be. As the band had been sent to London in the first place to fulfill a regular broadcasting commitment, any further move would have to be somewhere where broadcasting facilities comparable with those in London were available, and which were considered to be out of the range of the flying bombs.

The BBC had already moved some of their facilities to Bedford, and indeed the BBC Symphony Orchestra had been broadcasting from there since September 1941. On Sunday, 2 July 1944, Glenn Miller and the Army Air Forces Band moved from London to the comparative safety of Bedford.

And so began just over five months of a memorable association between the Bedford area and the famous Glenn Miller Band. During that time the airfields of Thurleigh and Twinwoods Farm featured prominently, as the vast majority of movements the band made by air to and from the venues they were to play at were from these bases.

The young men of the 306th were many thousands of miles from home and by mid-1944 were in need of something to remind them of those homes and the loved ones they had left behind in America. That tonic arrived on the evening of the 14 July 1944 in the form of a concert by the full Glenn Miller Army Air Forces Band. This was to be the first of many celebrated airfield concerts given for the GIs serving in this country.

That night, at Thurleigh, 3,500 men packed themselves into one of the four hangars on the airfield. They sat on the floor, they hung from the overhead beams, they just had to be there to hear their music. The opening tune was the by now famous *Moonlight Serenade*, and as Captain Miller walked out on to the makeshift stage, the welcome he received from those homesick men was something he had not experienced before. After the show he was heard to say that making all the money in the music business could "never have made me feel this rich."

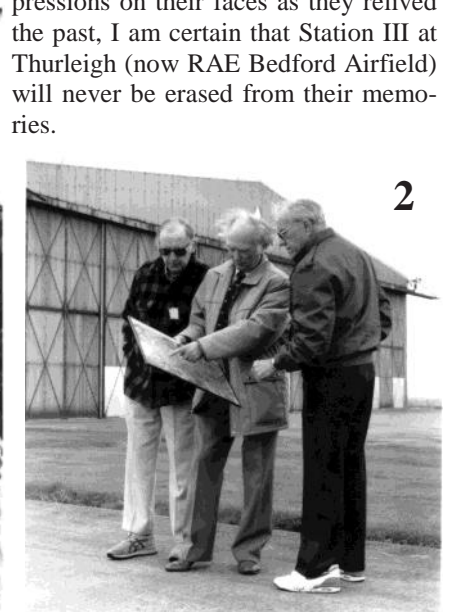
Among the members of the band that night were Master Sergeant Zeke Zarchy (lead Trumpet) and Staff Sergeant Jimmy Priddy (lead Trombone). Before joining the Miller Band, Zeke had played with many of the Big Bands of the 30s and 40s. These included Tommy Dorsey, Artie Shaw, Benny Goodman and Bob Crosby. Jimmy was discovered in the spring of 1940 by Glenn's wife Helen, when she and some friends went to hear Jimmy playing with the Tommy Tucker Band. When the civilian band broke up, Jimmy followed Glenn into the Army. On Monday, the 17 April 1969, it was my privilege and pleasure to conduct Zeke and Jimmy on a tour of what remained of the Thurleigh airfield they knew in 1944.

For many years now, as the only member of the 306th Bomb Group Historical Association working at RAE Bedford, it has been my pleasant duty to escort returning 306th veterans on a nostalgic return to the memories of their teens and early twenties.

Over the years with the visits of these now aged men of the 306th, I have heard some wonderful stories of their wartime exploits and have made some very good friends, even so the visit on 17 April was something very special to me. As we stood on the old hangar base, which during the 40s was the home of the Eager Beaver Squadron, I could see from the expressions on the faces of Zeke and Jimmy that the memories of those now distant times were still vividly implanted in their minds. You could almost hear the strains of the *Moonlight Serenade* once again on the wind-swept airfield.

As we continued the tour of the remains of Station 111 and I pointed out the various landmarks that still remained, I realized that a picture was forming in the minds of the veterans of the famous band; of the many times they ate in the Enlisted Men's Mess (now used by the Flying Club and as a store for Plant Services), and of the occasions they had spent by the then main runway (now the arrester runway) watching and waiting for the return of the B17s of the 306th. They both had such graphic memories of those months spent at Thurleigh.

After having been privileged to hear Zeke and Jimmy playing as guest artists with the Glenn Miller Orchestra (UK) at the Royal Festival Hall the previous evening, and witnessing the applause they received from the packed audience, I found it to be an even greater thrill to be the guide for their return to the past. The comparatively short time I was able to spend with these very likeable men from that memorable band has left me with a lot of pleasant memories. From the comments they made and the expressions on their faces as they relived the past, I am certain that Station III at Thurleigh (now RAE Bedford Airfield) will never be erased from their memories.



L to R—1) Ralph Franklin, Jimmy Priddy, Zeke Zarchy; 2) Zeke Zarchy, Ralph Franklin, Jimmy Priddy; 3 & 4) Glenn Miller and associates outside the 306th hanger on the day of the Miller concert at Thurleigh, 14 July 1944; 5) the Miller Band posing in front of their DC-3, Zeke is laying on grass extreme left and Jimmy is in the third row from the left. You can make out Miller on the extreme left edge of the image.

