



Flightline



Newsletter of the 780th Bomb Squadron of WWII

December 2009

Kuchenbeckers Visit Places 780th Bombed *European Tour by Boat*



Gloria and George Kuchenbecker overlooking Budapest and the Danube River. At right is one of the few remaining bombed-out buildings from WWII. The lighter red brick denotes post-war renovations.

by George Kuchenbecker

Gloria and I had the trip of a lifetime this summer.

We cruised the rivers of Europe from Amsterdam to Budapest on the ship *Viking Legend*. The ship is 440 feet long with shallow draft to allow it to navigate the rivers. That worked pretty good until we got to Regensburg, Germany, and found the Danube with six inches less water than the ship needed.

We started our journey in Amsterdam. We walked into town and were amazed at the public transportation options available. Diesel buses, electric buses, street cars, light rail and subways. As we got into the center of this large city we noticed three very prominent features: lots of cars, lots of people and hundreds of bicycles. Another thing that was very apparent was the almost total lack of automobile horns blaring. The bicycle riders seemed totally at ease riding in all the traffic.

We then decided to go to the Anne Frank house where Anne and her family hid from the Nazis for several years. They were eventually betrayed by a neighbor and taken away to Auschwitz where Anne perished. Her father survived and returned to Amsterdam after the war. We found the house incredibly small and extended from the third floor to the attic. He restored the quarters but did not include any furnishings save for a table, some chairs and the bookcase that concealed the door to their quarters.

On Day Two we boarded one of the many large canal boats for a canal cruise through the city. We cruised by some of the residential areas and saw the exceptional architecture of the homes along the canals. Three stories or more and built right to the sidewalks. And bicycles everywhere. Some of the bicycle parking lots had hundreds of bikes locked up waiting for their owners to get them for the

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Howard Precup Passes

Bob,

We wish that this could be a happy “Christmas” letter, but recently Dad passed, and we thought that you might want to know.

Howard and Bea always lived in the house that Dad built in Aurora, Illinois. They enjoyed traveling and the 780th reunion was an annual event. They enjoyed the adventure to a new location and visiting. He shared a few favorite time-war stories, but the war was clearly the event of his life. So much so that he painted a B-24 on a basement wall. It’s now hanging in Jim’s garage [see photo at right].

Since Mom passed, he spent five years living alone in Aurora, then moved to an Independent Living Center in Zionsville, Indiana, to be near Jim’s family. After about six months he decided to move to Arizona, live with JoAnn, and be near Mark’s family. That worked very well for the last five years. He was healthy enough to attend the 780th reunions until the last couple of years. JoAnn has taken great care of him and he enjoyed the Arizona sunshine, pattering around the house, taking old/broken things [e.g. vacuum cleaners and motors] apart, going to bingo & casinos, and smoking his pipe. He was mobile and healthy for a 91-year-old. That all changed in June. He fell in the house and broke his hip. Then things got rocky [see chronology below]:

14 June - Fell and broke hip, taken to hospital.

15 June - Surgery to mend hip, plates and screws to stabilize. Diagnosed with End Stage Chronic Kidney Disease, anemia, and Congestive Heart Failure.

25 June - Transferred to a rehabilitation facility to get him up and walking.

29 June - Re-admitted to hospital for Congestive Heart Failure.

06 July - Transferred to a rehabilitation facility to get him up and walking.

20 July - Re-admitted to hospital for Con-

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gestive Heart Failure.

23 July - Transferred to a rehabilitation facility to get him up and walking.

18 Aug - Transferred to JoAnn's house. Home Health nurse visits and daily care.

31 Aug - Re-admitted to hospital for Congestive Heart Failure. Diagnosed with late stage Pancreatic Cancer.

04 Sept - Transferred to JoAnn's house. Home Health nurse visits and daily care.

09 Sept - Passed

Otherwise, life goes on.

Jim's oldest, AJ, is a junior in environmental science at Indiana University. Will is a senior in high school, planning his college career as a business management major. Jim was recently laid off as a regulatory scientist at Lilly, and then hired back as a senior research scientist at Lilly. Jayne continues as a librarian.

Mark is still a rocket scientist working at Orbital on one of their military applications. Mark's oldest, Sarah, is a high school senior (and a National Merit Scholarship finalist) and is planning her college career to link up with her ambition to be a lawyer. Mike is a freshman in high school - planning his college career in information technology/software engineering. Margaret holds the place together.

JoAnn's retirement had been occupied with taking care of Dad.

The Precups - Jim, Mark, and JoAnn

Brief Obituary

Howard Otto Precup 91, of Mesa, Arizona, passed away Wednesday, September 9, 2009, at his daughter's home. He was born March 8, 1918, in Aurora, IL. Howard was employed as a Master Mechanic / Welder at the Burlington Railroad for over 20 years, and then at the Dial Soap Plant for 10 years. He served in the National Guard and enlisted in the Army Air Corps during World War II. He obtained the rank of Technical Sergeant. He served as a stateside instructor and then as a radio



One of the surprises at the Oklahoma City reunion was the chance to see and read a copy of *Words of War - Wartime Memories: Oral Histories from WWII Vol. IV*. Christine Plewes, daughter of James Halter, brought the book. The book features memories by our very own Bob Bleier, Edward Gluklick, James Halter, Louis Lindeman, Frank Love, John McParland, and Ashby Nelson. For more information about the book or to order, contact: Kathryn Lerch, Park Tudor School, 7200 N. College Avenue, Indianapolis, IN 46240, or email her at: klerch@parktudor.org. Excerpts from the book will be featured in the March issue of *Flightline*.

operator on 30+ bombing raids over Southern Europe. He married Bernice Oberwise on September 17, 1949, in Batavia. They resided in Aurora for 46 years and had been long time members of the Holy Angels Church. They enjoyed traveling and the 780th reunion was an annual event.

Your Letters

Squadron Treasurer Ashby Nelson sent a dues reminder to members in September and asked that members reply with an update of what they've been doing. Here are the responses that "Spud" received.

Received your letter of September 17. Thanks for the info, and we were glad that the reunion went well. Sorry that we didn't make it, but my wife, Pat, has had over two years' worth of serious medical problems that messed up a lot of our plans. She's still "not out of the woods" and, if there isn't any improvement in the near future, we will be limited as to what can be done. I'm not all that great health-wise, but right now am "navigating" (no pun intended) fairly well. Of course, at our stage of life that can change quickly, as you know. Anyway, keep us posted since things "could" improve.

A couple of weeks ago there was a B-24 / B-17 fly-in at Lancaster County Airport (only about 20 miles from our York location) which I attended and had a great time for two days, seeing the "old bucket of bolts," and, at the request of the Collings Foundation reps, I stayed by the Lib and answered questions. Surprisingly, the attendance was gratifying and the interest on the part of the crowd was equally gratifying. Lots of family members of WWII aircrews. There even was a Lancaster resident from the 781st.

I tell you, we reminisced about Pantanella. All in all it was enjoyable for this "old codger."

Enclosed is a check for the dues.

*Regards,
John McParland*

My name is Jacquelyn Russell and I am a niece of S.C. Womacks. S.C. resides at our veterans home here in Winfield (Kansas). He has been a resident for four years. He was recently moved to 24/7 care. He has no real health issues. His mind is good but his body is tired. His wife passed away six-and-a-half years ago so my husband, Ralph, and I are his caregivers. He has two grandsons, Darren Womacks, who graduated from Annapolis, lives in Albuquerque and has two children; and Michael Womacks, who lives locally. He will be 90 years old in February 2010. We appreciate your interest in him.

Jacquelyn Russell

Hope your collection effort goes well for 2010. Appreciate that you and Bob Bleier are keeping me informed.

Gene Caputo

Just a note to tell you that Bart and I are doing fine. We are in good health and very thankful for that.

We have plans to go to Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, for the winter, which we have been doing for the past 14 years, and will continue to do as long as we are able.

Hope to get to Mississippi for the next reunion. Will look forward to where in Mississippi and when.

*Our best to everyone.
Bart and Helen Branch*

We tried to make the reunion this year! Even had reservations. But our daughter, Connie, had her baby three-and-a-half weeks early so we had to cancel at the last minute.

I hope you and Betty are doing well.

Mom has moved from assisted living to full nursing care. She still can get up and around some. Alzheimer's is no fun!

It's hard to believe Dad has been gone for four years. Everyone appreciates your work as treasurer. I enclosed a little extra for dues.

*Gail Howard
Everett Kron's daughter*

Enclosed is our check for annual dues of the 780th.

I don't remember most of the names of the squadron when we were all in Italy. I was the

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Letters, from page 4

last guy added to the 465th the night before they left McCook and boarded the train for Camp Patrick Henry and then aboard a brand new troop ship called the Admiral Eberly. You were probably an officer and flew back to the USA. The troop ship took us to Trinidad and then they shipped one third to a northern South American air base. Another third stayed in Trinidad and the rest of us wound up in Puerto Rico right next to the ocean. As soon as we got there I walked down to the beach and met a gorgeous girl named Mercedes. She took me all over the island during the three months we were there. My primary job was typing up the officers' pay vouchers every month which barely left enough time to visit the places of interest in Italy with two companions.

Best wishes,
Greg and Gloria Lewis

Enclosed is a \$25 check for dues.

I am just a retired reservist with an Air Force / Navy background. I was a flight engineer on C-130s in the Air Force.

Paul Jarvis

I have been retired for 23 years now from both the telephone company and from the A.F. Reserves. Aside from a triple bypass and an aorta artery repair job I am still here and enjoying every day by getting up each

morning.

Ord A. Campbell

Sorry we missed the 2009 reunion. Bertha had a heart attack in June due to heart blockage, requiring a stent. Everything seemed OK until August. An irregular heart beat began causing problems, so they installed a pacemaker. She was just recovering when it was time for the reunion and couldn't travel, so I canceled our reservations.

Like you, I thought that would be our last reunion. Glad to hear that another reunion in 2010 is planned. Certainly plan to attend the 2010 reunion reunion but at this age - no guarantees!!

Ed Rostedt

It's been a lonely couple of years since T.P. passed away. I'm living with a younger widow who goes to our church. Her husband and Peyton were great, great friends and both "students of the Bible."

Peyton was honored this year by being elected to his high school "Hall of Fame." I accepted for him. It was very nice.

Hope you can read this. I have Parkinson's so am quite shaky. My best to you and all the 780th!

Marilyn Walton
widow of T.P. Walton

I am enclosing my \$25 check for dues for the year for I will always be a 780th squadron member in my heart.

This is a special day for me since it was 9/28/45 that I was discharged at Ft. Dix, NJ, and returned to civilian life.

Claire and I were married on 6/22/46 and have three great kids, four grandchildren, two step-grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren.

Unfortunately Claire, my life companion, has been suffering from Alzheimer's disease for several years. On top of that she fell on July 26 and broke her hip, thereby requiring a partial hip replacement. With the help of a 24-hour-a-day live-in caregiver she is improving and I am surviving.

Thanks to the squadron organization I was able to become reunited with my long lost cousin Marilyn Miers Walton, wife of now departed T.P. Walton. We talk occasionally and reminisce about contacts we had as teenagers and other long-forgotten family matters.

May God continue to bless you and yours with good health and a sound mind.

Sincerely,
Harold W. Miers

Not much to tell about me. We spend part of our summer at a lake in Michigan and winters in Florida. My health is OK except for my legs have given out and I walk with a cane. I will be 90 on October 6 so maybe that is part of it. Always glad to get the Flightline. I was a POW so

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don't know a lot of the names.

Take care,
Howard Keil

My wife is writing this for me. I'm partially disabled due to a stroke I had some years ago. Most of the time I'm in a wheelchair. But I'm really getting along OK with the help of my wife. She and I and our cat Abbi are very happy together. We have a big family now - 20 great-grandchildren. We enjoy them all.

*Best regards to all of you,
Unsigned
P.S. I enjoy getting my Flightline regularly. Thank you.
(Editor's note: Please contact Flightline so we know who has all those great-grands!)*

Just a note to say Dora and myself would consider it an honor to be listed as honorary members in your group and I would like to say that I was glad to meet all of the people at the reunion. I have not in my time met so many people with a happy outlook on life. Hope to see all of you in Mississippi next year.

*As ever,
Nolan and Dora Rains*

Thanks again for your work for the 780th. I am doing very good but a few problems keep me from attending the reunions. I wish I could.

I retired almost 25 years ago

and in 1988 the pastor of our church, Westminster Presbyterian, asked my wife and me if we could take over running a food pantry sponsored by the church. We did and now have started our 22nd year running it. In those 21 years we have given out 2,425,000 lbs. of food in 97,000 food parcels to needy households. We have 15 additional volunteers that keep us solvent. We have fun and it keeps us young. When asked, "Why have you done this so long?" we tell them we believe it is what God wants us to do.

Someone told me years ago there are three parts to life: learning, earning and returning. We are returning.

*Yours in Christ,
Cliff and Helen Taylor*

Thanks for your recent note and reminder to pay the required dues.

I keep in touch with Bob Bleier and he recently posted a few photos that I sent him and included in Flightline. He gave Joe Sputnik credit as a joke.

This past June I visited my POW roommate from Stalag Luft III who lives in the Orlo-ney Islands. It was from the north compound that the Great Escape took place.

Recently I attended a POW/MIA Recognition Ceremony at the Pentagon. A beautiful affair.

*Best regards,
Joe Spontak, not Sputnik*

I was drafted in March 1943. I had infantry basic training. I hated it. I applied to the Air Corps in June 1943 and was accepted. Here is a list of my camps or bases I was in: March 43, basic - Camp Wolterer, TX; July 43, Miami Beach, FL and waiting for assignment; Sep 43, Burlington, VT - college training; Dec 43, Nashville, TN, cassified as navigator; Jan 44, Maxwell Field, AL, pre-flight training; March 44, Harlington, TX, aerial gunnery; May 44, Selman Field, LA, navigation training; Oct 44, graduated as a second lieutenant and navigator wings; Dec 44, Pueblo, CO, met my crew for overseas assignment; Jan 45, deployed to Italy, my crew got a new B-24 to fly to Italy; Mar 45, flew my missions (15 when the war in Europe ended); July 45, Sioux Falls, SD, waiting for assignment for radar in B-29s; Aug 45, war ended in Japan; Oct 45, Camp McCoy, WI, discharged back to civilian life; Oct 45, went back to my old job as a grocery clerk; Aug 48, worked in a bank as bookkeeper, auditor and assistant cashier; Spring 54, bought a 160-acre farm - still have it. Farmed it until 1989 when I retired, rented it to my son; Aug 62, ran for elective office as county treasurer and got elected; June 89, retired from public service; Nov 07, moved off the farm into assisted living

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Letters, from page 6

as my wife and I are both crippled and have to use walkers for mobility. Could write more but I tire easily.

Al Langer

Enclosed is the yearly dues of \$25 for membership into the 780th Bomb Squadron Association. I received my Flightline today and saw that everyone who attended the reunion this year in Oklahoma had a great time. Sounds like the reunion in Biloxi will also be interesting and great. My wife and I hope to attend that reunion.

My wife Patsy and I are doing well. I had to have a pacemaker installed in August 2009. And needless to say, it helped me out greatly. And after over 27 years with the Louisiana State Police I effectively retired as of 9/30/09. My wife and I live out in the country and for the first time in my life I have a nice fall garden and have been gathering squash, cucumbers and peas. I am the historian for the area in which I live and am a member of the Heritage Families of Peason Ridge. Our families were moved from their homesteads by the U.S. Army in 1941 in preparation for the national emergency. After 67 years the U.S. Army and Ft. Polk finally recognized the sacrifice of our families. Twenty-nine homesteaders and settlers, many whose families settled on Peason Ridge in 1818, along with over

50 sharecropper families, were given from 8 to 30 days to move whatever they could to wherever they could find a home place. I also have a small military museum or a very large collection of items from the Civil War to the present. I also am a member of the Military Vehicle Preservation Association. I have five restored military vehicles, two Jeeps, and a Dodge weapons carrier plus trailers for these vehicles. So as I retire I have plenty to do!

Thanks very much and have a blessed day!

Rickey Robertson

Here are my dues. You asked for a note on what we're doing now. I've bene retired since 1988. Efforts since have mostly been as a fulltime volunteer, protecting seniors and taxpayers rights from the mischief of those ingrates we elect to public office. One task I've nearly finished is a book on my life for the family, requested by my two daughters. For fun, I've enclosed the Introduction so you can get a feel for what it's all about. I did pluck out a part of a chapter describing my WWII history, covering our trip to Italy during the war, that some of our squadron members may remember, and included it also.

Respectfully,

Joe Sullivan

(Editor's note: Joe's submission will appear in the March issue of Flightline.)

TAPS

My sister, Kathy Ruttenbur Hanna, passed away on November 6, 2009. My mother, Pat Ruttenbur, Kathy, and her husband, John Hanna, had recently been to the reunion, where they had a wonderful time.
Mary Goettee

★★★

My wife, Alice, has passed away.

Harold L. Worman

★★★

Bob Semeyn died on Sept. 22, 2009. I know he would want his dues sent in - he was so very proud to have been in the 780th Bomb Squadron. I have heard many stories about his war years (sometimes for the third or fourth time!!)

Norma Semeyn

Dues are Due!

If you haven't sent in your dues for \$25, please do so now to:

**Ashby Nelson
780th Bomb Squadron
255 S. First St. East
Preston, ID 83263**

ride home from work. A hustling bustling city.

Day Three the *Legend* cast off the dock and we were on our way on the canals of Netherlands. The villages we passed were all very picturesque. All had at least one tall church steeple - and more bicycles. Cars were small and there were an abundance of trains both freight and passenger.

From the canals we joined the Rhine River for our trip through Germany. We passed Cologne, Koblenz, Rudesheim, and docked at Mainz. We left Mainz and joined the Main river and into another of the 65 locks we would pass en route to the Danube. We visited Wertheim and Wurzburg where we docked for the night. The next day we visited Rothenburg and then continued on to Nurenberg and Regensburg.

At Regensburg we joined the Danube. We had a great walking tour of the city. Although our guide was the worst of the trip we did learn a lot about the city. After I cautiously asked about damages suffered in the bombings we learned most of the raids had been on the Messerschmidt factory near the edge of town. That surprised me as I had been on several missions to Regensburg. In Nurenberg in response to the same question we were shown several buildings that had suffered a lot of damage. One in particular was a large three- or four-story brick building that had been commandeered to serve as headquarters for the local Nazi commander. It had suffered a direct hit near the middle of the structure that left a bowl-shaped void top to bottom. It was easy to see the result as in the reconstruction the bricks were a much lighter shade of brick red.

When we returned to our ship we were told the boat had to stay in Regensburg as the Danube was too low for the ship to pass. We finished off our day with another great dinner

and entertainment in the lounge.

The next day we had an early breakfast and boarded the bus for Passau. In response to my question about damage from bombing I was told they had none as there was nothing in Passau worth bombing. We visited yet another magnificent cathedral and enjoyed a concert on the massive organ.

When we got back to the ship we were told the Danube had gone down some more and that the ship could not proceed. The rest of our tour would be on a bus. That's not all bad as the German buses are really a great way to travel.

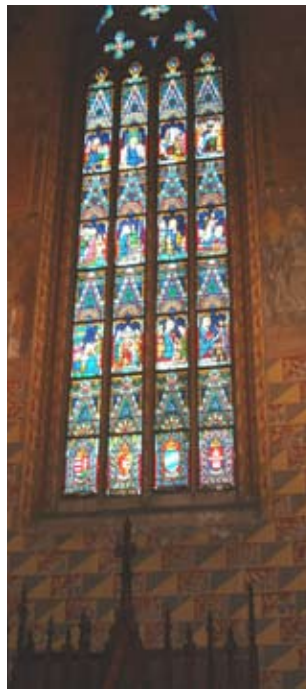
The next day we took a bus to Munich and had a good, long bus tour of the city and its stories. We then returned to Regensburg for our farewell dinner on the boat and to pack for the trip to Vienna as we would leave the ship for the last time.

Our trip by bus to Vienna had a stop in Melk and a tour of the spectacular Melk Abbey. We arrived in Vienna in the evening, coming into town on the same street as we had in 1993.

On our first dull day in Vienna we had a great, long bus tour of the city, ending at St. Stephen's Cathedral. It is just as spectacular as I remember from before. And again I thanked the powers that were in USAF at the time for declaring that this and other cathedrals were OFF LIMITS for bombing. St. Stephen's did suffer some collateral damage from fire on its wooden roof, started by embers from other burning structures. It is now fully restored from 1945 damage and efforts to remove the remaining smoke damage are continuing. The restored exterior areas are spectacular. The stained glass windows are second to none that I have been privileged to see. As in Cologne, they had been removed for protection from bomb damage and reinstalled after the war.

That evening we enjoyed a concert presented in a small but elegant hall that dates back

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Do You Remember?

by Cliff Taylor

3414 Charlotte St., Erie, PA 16508, cwt.tailgunner1@verizon.net

The squeal of the brakes while taxiing the B-24?

The outdoor urinals on the sidewalks in Bari?

After several hours at the EM Club, trying to hit those urinal pipes not with your legs but with the urine?

That bad gin and whiskey at the EM Club?

After a mission, getting coffee and donuts from the Red Cross, then going down to the Medic tent to get a double shot of whiskey? Does anyone know why we got that whiskey? (*Editor's note: I think it was to take the edge off after risking your life. Question: did it work???*)

Hoping that the frozen urine you threw onto the bomb bay doors would hit an anti-aircraft gunner?

At briefing, trying not to wet your pants when you saw what the target was today?

Hoping for the red flare from the control tower that would cancel a mission?

The bomb dump blowing up?

Hugh Hough cleaning up at the craps table, going back to his tent with the pockets in his flight suit filled with that paper money?

The time you held three A's at the Club and lost to a full house?

Swimming in the river until someone got malaria?

The corned beef that you couldn't chew?

The horrible-tasting water from the Lister bag that hung behind the Operations Building?

The lime pit that permanent EM provided so we could make mortar for our Tufa rock tent walls?

Listening to Axis Sally? When we came over we spent four days in Gioia and lived on the plane, eating K-rations. The radio operator got her on the radio. Good music. The Isle of Capri, beds with sheets and pillows? Christmas dinner was turkey with chestnut dressing.

Coming back from the EM Club and falling into a slit trench?

Trying to kill a bird at six feet with a .45 caliber buckshot shell? (can't do it.)

When they built the skeet range? Great fun.

Rome Rest Camp? I was there May 1, 1945. Jack Bentley, tailgunner from Erie, 780th, was there, half his crew and several others.

100 years or so. There was a small but very good orchestra, 18 to 20 pieces, good dancers, good vocalists.

The next morning we headed to Budapest where we had another great bus tour of a truly beautiful city. That night we stayed at the Corinthia Grand Hotel Royal - the abso-

lute grandest hotel I've ever been in let alone been privileged to spend a night in.

On our final day we woke up early - 3:30 a.m. - for the ride to the airport. We were airborne at 7:15 a.m., bound for Amsterdam. Then we boarded our final flight home, arriving in Seattle at 11:30 a.m. Great trip but I'm tired.

Kathy Le Comte
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Keep 'em Flyin'!
Send in your 2010 dues to continue receiving the *Flightline*.
See page 7 for details.

Flightline



For the past several years the December issue of *Flightline* featured Bill Edwards' impersonation of Santa Claus. Due to timing this year his photo could not be used. Instead, here is the Christmas card my grandfather sent to my grandmother in 1943. He signed it "Daddy" because my father was 17 months old. I hope this card brings back memories of the cards you sent.



Happy Holidays!