



# *Flightline*



Newsletter of the 780<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron of WWII

December 2014

## **780<sup>th</sup> to join other 465<sup>th</sup> squadrons in Kansas City, Missouri in 2015**

**T**he 780<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron has been invited, along with the 781<sup>st</sup>, 782<sup>nd</sup>, and 783<sup>rd</sup> squadrons of the 465<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, to join four other 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force bomb groups for a reunion in Kansas City, Missouri, September 24-27, 2015.

The group elements that will meet include the 451<sup>st</sup>, 461<sup>st</sup> and 484<sup>th</sup> Bomb Groups from the 49<sup>th</sup> Bomb Wing, the 465<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group from the 55<sup>th</sup> Bomb Wing, and the 455<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group from the 304<sup>th</sup> Bomb Wing, which is organizing the event.

The groups are meeting in a middle-of-the-country location in order to keep the reunions going. In addition to activities that include everyone, it is expected that groups or squadrons will have a place and time to meet individually.

Many arrangements already have been made, with particular detail given to cost, convenience and, of course, camaraderie. The reunion will be held at the Hilton Kansas City Airport Hotel. A free shuttle runs between the airport and hotel every 15 minutes, around the clock. Room rate is \$99 per night and includes a full, hot breakfast buffet for two, per day, plus two drink coupons, per

day. For those who would travel by car there is free parking.

Registration is Thursday afternoon. The itinerary includes tours that are promised to be "short and sweet," round table discussions, and veteran presentations. Plans are still being finalized but likely tour options will be the highly regarded Harry S. Truman Library and Museum, and the National World War One Museum.

The Gala Banquet will take place Saturday evening. A tour and dinner is planned for Sunday, so everyone is asked to stay through Sunday to enjoy all reunion activities.

A registration fee has not been set yet. As soon as the fee is set and added to the registration form the form will appear in *The Flightline*. A reunion

website has been set up at <http://www.gordons.ws/reunion2015/index.html>.

This concept of joining several bomb groups together for a reunion was tested just this November with great success, with more than 200 in attendance. Hopefully the 780<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron will be a part of the reunion in 2015. Stay tuned!



# Your News & Letters

Editor's note: From Tanya Steele Beitz' Facebook page November 30: *Ron and Tanya Beitz have had three weeks that shook their lives in several wrong directions these past three weeks. I suffered a stroke, and Ron had an issue with his heart. He was on one (hospital) floor and I was on another. Able to return home yesterday and today I'm blessed to be feeling much improved on both our parts.* Tanya had some small health setbacks in December but she's still on Facebook, so that is a good sign, right? We hope Ron and Tanya are feeling much better soon and that they can attend the Kansas City reunion in September.



Hi Kathy,

*I'm writing to let you know that you can email The Flightline to me to save money.*

*Also, I am wondering if you have ever written a story about Honor Flight in The Flightline? I had the opportunity to be a guardian on an Honor Flight Central Florida trip last spring. It was such a thrill to see so many WWII veterans enjoy this one-day amazing adventure to see our nation's capitol and the beautiful war memorials. Any WWII veteran can go on an Honor Flight, with all expenses paid by the local chapter. Encourage your readers to check it out at: <http://www.honorflight.org/>*

All the best,

*Lisa Warren  
daughter of John Stock,  
deceased in 2005*

Editor's note: Lisa, thanks for mentioning Honor Flight. I get so focused on 780<sup>th</sup> news that I forget the bigger picture of something so important and relevant as Honor Flights. I hope all our veterans and their family will seek out the free Honor Flight program in their community and take advantage of it. It doesn't matter if you are in a wheelchair or otherwise can't get around well. That's all taken into account. The excursion lasts just a day, so you won't have to be away from the comforts of home very long. And as a reward, you will visit the fantastic National WWII Memorial that is a part of YOU. Please make it a goal in 2015 to take an Honor Flight to Washington, D.C.



Dear Kathy,

*The Flightline is dear to all 780<sup>th</sup> Squadron members and I am sure to their friends. Therefore as one who served with and in it I am enclosing a check hoping others will do the same.*

*My heartfelt thanks for your efforts and interest in keeping the faith of Flightline.*

*Best wishes,  
Ad Honkala  
1500 Westbrook Ct.  
Apt. 2101  
Richmond, VA 23227*

*P.S. Would you know the name of the Liberty ship that carried a large part of the ground crew to North Africa? We left about the end of February 1944. Capt. Davis was our head officer at the time, I believe. If so, my email address is [auhmid@gmail.com](mailto:auhmid@gmail.com).*

Editor's note: I tried to find out the name of the Liberty ship but I didn't get very far. Does anyone else remember the name of the ship?



Hi Kathy,

*As always, I enjoyed reading the last edition of Flightline. My father, Jack Smith, served with the 780<sup>th</sup>, 465<sup>th</sup> in Italy. Your story about Harry Larson (September, 2014) immediately caught my eye as I am sure he was a member of the same crew. Would you happen to have any information as to how I may contact Mr. Bill Sturm, e-mail, etc.? I would really appreciate any help you could give me.*

*Thanks and keep up the good work.*

Reta Smith

Editor's note: I put Reta and Bill in touch and Bill was able to give Reta some information. I'm so glad we are able to help each other out preserving the history of our veterans and the 780<sup>th</sup>.



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Dear Kathy,

I am enclosing a check to help pay for *The Flightline*. Enjoy reading it as we all were in the 465<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group. I served with the 782<sup>nd</sup> Squadron on Capt. Ross Koiles crew as a ball turret gunner, with 33 sorties. The picture on the back of the June newsletter is the V Grand as you can see 5000 on the nose. We flew one mission in this plane. We were

on the mission Nov. 20 when Col. Lokker was shot down and killed by the Germans. Often wish someone would have a copy of the pilot's flimsy for that day - Nov. 20, 1944 - and it could be put in your newsletter. Enclosed an article about the mission on Nov. 20. I had 220 hours of combat time. Thanks for your good work getting out the newsletter.

Albert Riffle  
782<sup>nd</sup> Squadron

Editor's note: Do any 780<sup>th</sup> pilots have the "flimsy" for November 20, 1944? The 780<sup>th</sup> lost one crew on that mission. If you do or can tell me what government agency or research facility might hold these records I certainly would publish it. In the meantime, the article Albert mentions is on page 5.



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## **THANK YOU!    THANK YOU!    THANK YOU!**

I cannot say how humbled I am by the outpouring of financial support for *The Flightline* following my announcement in the last issue that funds were running low. I am ever so grateful for donations from the following:

**Penny Showers, in memory of cousin Robert C. Carlen, bombardier  
Ad Honkala, gunner**

**Albert Riffle, 782nd Bombardment Squadron**

**Cheryl Hewitt, in memory of father Cleon S. Moore, nose gunner**

**John Ackerman, in memory of uncle Joe Kling, gunner**

**Ed Gluklick, pilot**

**Bill Edwards, gunner**

*The Flightline* will be flying for many more years because of these donors, and to those who contributed previously. Your gifts mean so much. I also want to thank everyone who writes, emails, calls and sends in stories, diary entries, photos, and clippings. While money makes it possible for me to publish, there's no point if I don't have something to share with everyone. Please check through your files and send me your 780<sup>th</sup> memories, or the adventures life took you on after the war. Clearly, *Flightline* readers want our newsletter to continue.

I hope to hear from you soon. And again, thanks.

Your grateful editor,

Kathy Le Comte, granddaughter of S/Sgt George J. Le Comte  
replacement tailgunner, Vern Larson Crew

KIA 11 Dec 1944 over Vienna, Austria; his first 780<sup>th</sup> mission

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Dear Kathy,

Thank you for once again producing a wonderful issue of *The Flightline*! You have done such a good job with the publication, and all of the 780<sup>th</sup> guys and families are forever indebted to your hard work and loving attention to the war efforts of the brave Air Corps members.

I am sending a contribution toward publishing costs of *The Flightline*. Use it as you see appropriate.

Sincerely,

Cheryl Moore Hewitt

Daughter of Cleon S. Moore,  
nose gunner, 780<sup>th</sup> Squadron



Dear Kathy,

Your continued commitment to publish *The Flightline* is truly heartwarming and I'm sure it is appreciated very much by all of us ol' codgers still around.

The news of the passing of Jim Alter, Ned Hayes and Harry Larson is saddening. I flew missions with all of them. The safety of those missions depended on the complete cooperation of each crew member. It's easy to realize these were all good, decent and patriotic men and I'm proud to have known them.

I remained in touch with Jim Alter through the years so I'm very depressed to hear of his passing, but it must come to all of us. I'm including my latest "news note" to bring you up to date.

With fond regards,  
Frank Diederichs

Editor's note: Cheryl and Frank, thank you for your kind words about and support of *The Flightline*. You both have expressed how great your losses are, and there's nothing that replaces these great men. All of our guys are truly from "The Greatest Generation." I take some solace in that they were, are, and always will be, the greatest.



Dear Kathy,

'Twas a pleasure to speak with you. 'Tis good to know that *The Flightline* is not dead yet.

The bad news is an overambitious publisher of books that one of my granddaughters met - with whom she spoke at some length as to my travel, work and idiocies - is in the process of writing a biography of little old me. My ego has ballooned and swallowed me up like the vain lout that I really am. Anyway, before publication I'll send you a copy to read, edit or discard.

Like all the rest of the nonegenarians with whom you associate, I thank you for your attention and warn you (again) not to step on my snakes.

My best regards to all,  
Ed Gluklick

Editor's note: It is always a trip to read a note from or speak to Ed. He's never at a loss of words that I need to think

about before understanding! Truly, it's fun to read and/or listen to Ed. I look forward to reading his biography. Frank Diederichs reported in September that he's working on his autobiography. I hope others are recording their memories of the war, too.



This is a good place to mention that I also recently spoke with Brad Branch, son of 780<sup>th</sup> veteran Bart Branch. The Branches hosted the 2006 reunion in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. You also may recall that Brad produced a great documentary, *On the Wing*, about the air battle over Ehrwald, Austria, that resulted in the loss of a 780<sup>th</sup> aircraft. Lee Engelhorn talks about that mission in the documentary, and other 780<sup>th</sup> veterans appear also. The producers also revisit what remains of the Pantanella airbase. If you haven't seen the documentary, contact Brad to purchase a copy. Brad says his father is doing well and Lee not so well, unfortunately. Brad also mentioned he hears from Ed Gluklick. It was great to hear from Brad.



Another call came from Phil Dague, nephew of 2nd Lt. Robert Kissel, bombardier, who was lost on the same August 24, 1944 mission that Penny Showers' cousin Robert Carlen

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## 780<sup>th</sup> crewmember lost on mission

# Exploding 465 BG plane appears in *Life*

Editor's note: Col. Jim Wray, USAF Ret., was the 781<sup>st</sup> Squadron Operations Officer. Below are some of his recollections as printed in *BRIEFING*, Spring 1981.

*We flew practice missions out of Oudna #1, 20 miles south of Tunis, Tunisia, for two months, moving on to our combat base in Pantanella, Italy, in April 1944.*

*Col. Charles Clark took over the 465<sup>th</sup> (from Col. Elmer J. Rogers) as we arrived at Pantanella. Maj. Clarence Lokker took over the 781<sup>st</sup>.*

*In October [ed.: actually November], Lokker was shot down, with photos of his Liberator blowing up making *Life* magazine. Col. Lokker and his co-pilot were blown free of the aircraft, but Lokker was shot soon after parachuting to earth, and the co-pilot was captured and made a POW. Before that mission was back on the ground the group commander - now Col. Joshua Foster - gave me the 781<sup>st</sup>,*



*Blue "I", also known as 853 from the 783<sup>rd</sup> squadron, left, was the lead aircraft piloted by Lt. Col. Clarence "Jack" Lokker, commanding officer of the 781<sup>st</sup> and command pilot, flying the lead position on the November 20, 1944 mission to Blechhammer. According to the Missing Air Crew Report, Blue I was hit by anti-aircraft artillery (88mm) between the #2 engine and the fuselage while over the target and the wing started to come apart as the crew bailed out. Five of the crew managed to parachute safely but six were trapped and killed. Credit: b24bestweb.com.*

*which I commanded through V-E Day.*

*The 465<sup>th</sup> started flying combat in May 1944. Early losses were about evenly split between flak and fighters. When we got P-38 escort, our losses to fighters fell to practically nil.*

*(Editor's note: The 780<sup>th</sup> dispatched four planes on this mission, two completed it. The*

*plane piloted by Joe Norman was damaged after reaching the target and limped to friendly territory. The plane piloted by Ord Campbell ran out of fuel near Italy's "spur" and the crew was ordered to bail out. 2nd Lt. Arthur H. Bernstein's parachute failed to open over the Adriatic, where two other crewmembers landed. They brought Bernstein to shore.)*

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was lost on (different crew, two 780<sup>th</sup> crews were lost that day). Penny's letter appeared in the September issue. Phil very much appreciated the Harry Larson mission list that also appeared in September, and the article by Frank Diederichs that was published in

March, as they both reminded him of his uncle's mission history. It never ceases to amaze me how interwoven our stories are. I plan to publish a story and photos about the August 24 mission in the March newsletter, in honor of Carlen and Kissel and their crews.

*Kathy,*

*Wanted to let you know that my friend, Joseph J. Kling, who was a crewmember on my uncle Sgt. Bobbie T. Robertson's crew (KIA 10/11/44, Vienna) passed away on August 19, 2014. Joe had celebrated his 97<sup>th</sup> birthday on July*



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20, 2014. Joe and his close friend, Janie MacKenzie, attended several 780<sup>th</sup> reunions. My wife, Patsy, and I were able to meet Joe for the first time at the Biloxi Reunion (2010). He was able to give me details of the mission that my uncle was killed on that our family never knew about. I kept in touch by phone and letter with Joe over the years and got to be a great friend. Joe will be buried on October 3, 2014 with full military honors at Great Lakes National Cemetery in Holly, Michigan. The last crew member of Everett Kron's crew will be laid to rest. Hope you can use this story and photos in an upcoming Flightline.

Thank you so much for all the hard work you are doing in keeping the story of the 780<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron and its heroes alive through Flightline. I look forward to receiving my copy from you! Even though Patsy and I only got to attend the Biloxi Reunion, we will never forget the hospitality and friendship shown us by the 780<sup>th</sup> family! Sure would like to hear from family members of other crewmembers who served with my uncle.

God Bless America!  
Rickey Robertson  
22 Peason Road  
Florien, LA 71429-3033

Editor's note: We're glad that Joe met Rickey and passed on information about that last mission. Pictures of Joe and Rickey, and more of Joe's war reminiscences, appear at right.

## Kling passes on war experiences



Rickey Robertson, left, meets Joe Kling for the first time at the 2010 Biloxi reunion. At right they pose in front of the 780<sup>th</sup> Squadron banner.

Editor's note: Joe Kling was interviewed by his hometown newspaper in 2004. Many thanks to his nephew, John Ackerman, for sending the article. Here are two excerpts concerning his service in World War II:

*We were replacements. We got over there in Italy in August and we practiced a little bit and then we flew our first flight on October 11, 1944. The war was on and it had been on for a couple of years so we kind of lucked out getting there then. You didn't have as much trouble as the other, earlier pilots had when they only averaged about four or five missions that were going out of England and Italy. When I went over our biggest problem was the anti-aircraft guns. They would even tell you how long you were going to be in range and how many guns were shooting at you. They would give you the approximate time of the shooting.*

On facing flak and shells:

*There were things you sat on in the plane like what you would put on for X-rays at the dentist. A lot of us took an extra piece and you would sit on that. We were in range (of the anti-aircraft guns) for eight to ten minutes over the worst targets, like Vienna or Munich, and they would tell you to protect yourself and you would take an extra piece to sit on.*

*You would watch this stuff bursting around and I found out earlier that if you didn't see red, you wouldn't get hit, but if you saw some red and it burst, then that is when you would get some of the shell. You would hear it hitting the plane and I had*

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# TAPS



Joseph J. Kling, of Walled Lake, Michigan, died August 19, 2014, at the age of 97. He was born July 20, 1917, the seventh of nine children, and was raised in Sebewaing, Michigan. Joe enlisted in the Army Air Force in 1941 and became a nose gunner on a B-24 Liberator bomber, flying 35 missions from Italy. He served until 1945. When Joe returned home he tried out to be a baseball umpire. He spent two years umpiring in the minor leagues. Later he returned to Michigan and spent 52 years in the barber trade. His entire family consisted of barbers: his grandfather, father, five brothers, three brothers-in-law and four nephews. Joe had other interests as well, including hunting, pool, and owning and playing horses. He was interred with military honors at Great Lakes National Cemetery in Holly, Michigan.



Lawrence Nix, 90, of Northport, Alabama, passed away September 1, 2014. "Firpo" was born September 21, 1923, in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. He served in the U.S. Navy, U.S. Army Air Corps HHC 31<sup>st</sup> Armored "Dixie" Brigade, and the 780<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron during World War II, and retired as Sergeant Major in the National Guard. He was a loving husband to Kathleen, nee Campbell, for 64 years, and a fond uncle to many nieces and nephews, as well as others. He was preceded in death by his wife, Kathleen; brothers, Earl Nix and Elbert Nix; and parents, Clifton and Thelma Nix. Survivors include his brother, Roy (Sue) Nix, and many nieces and nephews.



Sam Marie, USAF Ret., 90, passed away in San Antonio, Texas, on January 4, 2014. He was born August 15, 1923, in Houston, Texas. During World War II he flew 51 combat missions out of Italy as an enlisted lead bombardier with the 783<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Squadron. He was awarded a combat appointment to First Lieutenant, as well as the Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters, the European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal with six service stars, and two Presidential Unit Citations. When his squadron held their first reunion 40 years later, he was honored to be selected as their first president. After his retirement from the Air Force he returned to the oil business which he first engaged in at the age of 13. He also was involved in real estate development in Corpus Christi. Honorary pall bearers were members of the 783<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Squadron Association, past and present. He was buried at Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery with full military honors. He is survived by his daughter, Lynda Marie Taylor; son, Robert Marie; two grandchildren; and a great-granddaughter.

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*several pieces coming behind me and I didn't think of it much the first time or two but then after that, it was quite exciting. I was 27 years old and of the ten members of our crew, five of them were only 18 years old and I was like*

*an old man. I remember on the way over there that these younger guys were talking about how many Germans they were going to kill but I was more worried about coming back. One of our guys got killed on the first ride, then they changed their minds a little bit. Then they knew it was a two-way street.*

Kathy Le Comte  
Editor, *Flightline*  
1004 Williams Blvd.  
Springfield, IL 62704-2832

## *Flightline*



### **The Lupton Girls - Then & Now**

Many of you have asked to see a recent picture of my daughters. My first 780<sup>th</sup> reunion was in 1998 in Dayton, five years before my twins, Lydia and Claudia, were born. Audrey came along two years later. At top, from left, are Lydia, Claudia and Audrey from the 2007 reunion in Indianapolis, wearing 780<sup>th</sup> bibs from Jack and Eleanor Ball. And at right as they appear today, ages 11, 11 and 9 - holding their bibs. The 780<sup>th</sup> has been a part of my kids' lives from the beginning, and all of you are like family to me! I hope to see some of you in Kansas City in September, and I will continue to keep in touch with ALL of you in 2015 through *The Flightline*.

