



Flightline



Newsletter of the 780th Bomb Squadron of WWII

March 2010

39th Reunion set for September 14-16, 2010

Take a Gamble in Biloxi



As former flight crews and support, you know that no matter what - the mission must be carried out. That is exactly how Jim Rogers feels about the 2010 reunion.

As many of you know, Eve Rogers volunteered to host the 2010 reunion in Biloxi, Mississippi. We are very sad to report that Eve

passed away in November 2009 (see page 5). But her son, Jim, has picked up where she left off.

The reunion will be September 14-16, Tuesday through Thursday, at the Isle Casino Hotel in Biloxi. Rooms are \$65 per night for a regular (king or two queens). A room with a balcony is \$20 more. Jim twisted some arms to get the great rate. The hotel also is throwing in two free breakfasts per room each morning we are there. Evening meals will be the hotel's buffet, costing just \$11, and we can dine in the private and quiet atmosphere of our hospitality room, which will double as our banquet room. The squadron cannot bring liquor into the casino, but as you can guess the casino has plenty of bars. There will be a wet bar during the banquet.

Jim is still working out the details on what we might see and do in Biloxi, but it already sounds like he has put together a great reunion for us. We hope everyone can come, in memory of Eve. The mission is a go!

How to Make Reservations

Isle Casino Hotel - Biloxi, MS
1-866-ISLE-VIP or 1-866-475-3847
Group Code: 780BOMB

Hotel Contact: Fred Thomas, Group Sales Manager, 228-436-7814

Rooms: Standard rooms are one king or two queens, free wireless internet and cable, in-room coffeemaker, hair dryer, etc. Hotel has a spa and exercise room.

Reunion Contact: Jim Rogers, Baton Rouge, 225-272-4710 (h), 225-614-5784 (c), or email jimrogers.usa@gmail.com.

Transportation: Closest airport is in Gulf Port, 15 minutes from Biloxi. If you desire pick-up service from Jim, please call him in advance of the reunion.



Ground Crewman Recalls First Arrival at Pantanella

by Joe Sullivan

I arrived at McCook, Nebraska, assigned to the new 465th B-24 Bomb Group. After completing training, half our ground crews left for Hampton Roads, Virginia, where about 500 enlisted men and officers boarded the Liberty Ship Lambert Cadwalader, bound for Italy.

Our convoy of some 80 vessels spent 29 days at sea in the North Atlantic, from February 11 through March 10 of 1944, before landing in Naples, Italy. During the entire voyage I and other ordnance weapons men were assigned to relieve the ship's Navy gun crews by manning the 20-mm cannons in the gun tubs on the ship. My station was the gun tub immediately aft of the bridge on the port side of the ship. I was part of the night watch. Our task

lost that night. Another struck a mine in the same area, after the convoy had reformed and was in motion, but successfully made it to port. Remarkably, shortly after the torpedoing, while our convoy crept in the darkness through the Mediterranean, from my tub I watched a fully-lighted cargo ship, em-

...continued on next page



Entering Naples harbor, courtesy Frank Ambrose, 781st Bomb Squadron, www.frankambrose.com

was to load the 20's magazines in the event of an attack, and stand by to help the Navy gunners, if necessary.

Our convoy passed the the Straits of Gibraltar, two ships at a time, and sat idling as the convoy was reformed in the Mediterranean Sea. While in that condition one Liberty ship was torpedoed in the evening by a German submarine, and sank. I learned later that the 550 troops on board, and the crew, were all



780th OFFICERS **President**

Bob Bleier
1288 Rio Hondo Dr.
San Jose, CA 95120
408-268-2310
bobbleier@aol.com

Vice President

(vacant)

Treasurer

Ashby Nelson
255 S. First St. East
Preston ID 83263
208-852-2066
bettyandashby@peoplepc.com

Secretary

Eleanor Ball
1333 E. 84th Ter.
Kansas City, MO 64131
816-444-4684
ballinsky@aol.com

Newsletter Editor

Kathy Le Comte
869 S. Columbia Ave.
Springfield, IL 62704
217-787-6512
johnkath5@comcast.net



"Tent City," courtesy Frank Ambrose, 781st Bomb Squadron, www.frankambrose.com

blazoned with a huge lighted Spanish flag on its side advertising it was neutral, pass the convoy going in the opposite direction on our port side.

After passing through the Strait of Messina between Sicily and Italy, our darkened convoy passed Stromboli at night, and from my tub I watched fascinated as its volcano's fiery lava flowed down the volcano, lighting the sea.

The night we landed in Naples the convoy was bombed by a single German aircraft that I was told local anti-aircraft gunners named "Bed Check Charlie" as he did this regularly.

We embarked and were billeted in the University of Naples. Two days later Mount Vesuvius erupted, blowing grey volcanic ash, which covered everything exposed.

On the fourth day we departed by truck convoy for Pantanella, near Canosa, Italy, arriving on March 14, where we pitched tents in a storm of grey ash-filled snow. We worked for

two months to build a runway for our bomb group.

An 'English' Lesson

by George Kuchenbecker

It happened at a dance at the USO club in Bari.

Can you imagine dancing the Lindy - an advanced form of Jitterbugging I taught as an assistant to David Le Vay at the Marigold Ballroom in downtown Minneapolis - in GI brogans... those shoes that weighed five pounds each?

I had been dancing, many dances, with an attractive, very attractive, young lady. As the evening progressed we talked about a lot of things for quite a while. She spoke English well above the average Italian person we dealt with.

During one of our dances, a slow one, I commented on her good English and asked if she had picked it up from the GIs she was acquainted with. Her reply blew me away for my stupidity in even asking the question.

"No," she replied, "I studied English for four years at the university in Milan."

At that point I was speechless and wanted to disappear from the scene. I don't even remember what happened after that blunder. I also don't remember ever seeing her at the USO club again.

(Editor's Note: George went out on a limb - and a dance floor - to tell a not-so-flattering story. If you can top it - or even if you can't - let us know about it!)

**Did You Like These Stories?
(and the one on the back page?)
Now We Need Yours!**

Send or Email it to:

Flightline

Kathy Le Comte, Editor

869 S. Columbia Ave.

Springfield, IL 62704-2342

johnkath5@comcast.net

Your Letters

Notes, letters and emails sent to or forwarded to *Flightline*.

Kathy,

I graduated with Bob (Bleier) at the San Marcos (Texas Army Air Field) Navigation School in September 1943. Trained with the 465th at McCook airbase in McCook, Nebraska. Crew members included pilot Larry Brechtel, co-pilot Ralph Kissell, also Hulsber, Johnson, Sellars and Hamilton.

I had knee surgery in Denver in January 1944 and the 465th left for overseas while I was still in Denver.

Please keep me on your mailing list.

Thanks,

Donald Draeger

Dear Ashby and Betty,

Enclosed is a check for our dues. Larry had some health problems that kept us from the reunion but he is much better now. Hope to see you all next year.

Happy holidays and New Year,

Kathleen Nix (wife of Lawrence Nix)

Enclosed with dues paid to Ashby Nelson: "For the ones of us still standing."

Jim Alter

Kathy,

My uncle, Sgt. Bobbie T. Robertson, was a member of the 780th and was shot down and KIA over Vienna, Austria on October 11, 1944. My grandfather paid to have his remains brought back to Louisiana and in 1950 he was interred back here in the United States.

Being the only Robertson grandson who served in the military and who showed interest in the history of my uncle, I was given all his items that had been shipped back from Italy in 1944 to my grandparents.

Do you think any of the men who went through B-24 mechanics school or aerial gunnery school are still around? (Robertson completed B-24 Liberator Bomber Mechanics School at Keesler Army Air Field, Biloxi, Mississippi; and Flexible Gunnery School from Laredo Army Air Field, Laredo, Texas.)

From way down south in Dixie I remain,

Rickey Robertson

Peason Ridge Military Museum

Peason Historical Foundation, Inc.

22 Peason Rd.

Florien, LA 71429-3033

Greetings,

My name is Joshua Hummel, grandson of Robert F. Davenport. Although he passed away when I was quite young, his stories of flying have stuck with me. I am looking for any leads or information about his crew, career, anything really. Through Bob Bleier I have learned so much about the contribution of the 780th!

Thank you,

Joshua Hummel

230. N Kenwood St #239

Burbank, CA 91505

323-652-2858 (cell)

(Editor's Note: below is a picture of Davenport's crew. Anyone familiar?)



Back row, right to left: Richard Tennant, pilot; V.J. Kumpensmith, co-pilot; Frank Halub, bombardier; and George H. Kakaska, navigator. Front row, right to left: R.P. O'Leary, tailgunner; J.H. Kacene, engineer; B. E. DuPratt, assistant engineer; _____ Westenfield, unknown; Robert Davenport, nose gunner; C.H.K. Morgan, radio operator.

TAPS

James M. Halter, 88, died January 16, 2010, in Indianapolis. He was born March 12, 1921, in St. Louis, Missouri, to Ernest and Viola Halter. When he was two, he and his father, a young attorney, were crossing a street in downtown St. Louis when they were hit by a teenage driver. His father died shielding him. He grew up in St. Louis with his mother and maternal grandparents and spent summers on the Halter dairy farm in Flucom, Missouri. He recalled accompanying his grandfather in a carriage as they rode the Methodist church circuit.

James earned a law degree from Washington University. He volunteered for service in World War II and was a co-pilot on a B-24 Liberator in Africa and Europe. He continued in the Air Force Reserve in the JAG Corps until his retirement as a Lieutenant Colonel in 1980.

James married Roberta M. Radley on July 26, 1947. They had three children, Christine Plews (George), Fred Halter, and Nancy Halter; and four grandsons, Arthur, Matthew, Noah and Lincoln Plews.

He was buried with military honors at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery in St. Louis, where he went into service and where he was discharged, as was his father in the first World War. (Editor's note: With Jim's passing that leaves Ashby Nelson as the last member of his crew.)



Robert W. Dorrigan, 85, died January 8, 2010, in Gig Harbor, Washington. He was born March 6, 1924, in La Salle, Illinois. He was a resident of Bremerton, Washington, for nine years.

During WWII Bob was a ball turret gunner on a B-24 bomber. He was owner and operator of D-M Transportation in Concord, California.

Family members include his wife, Gerri; daughters, Sandee Dorrigan, Sue (Ray) Thiel, Bobbette (Terry) Cockrell, and Laurie (Keith) Hall; and grandchildren, Bobby Cockrell, and Dylan and Megan Hall. (Editor's note:

George Kuchenbecker delivered the chaplain's prayer for aircrews at Bob's service.)



Eva Hernandez Rogers passed away on November 13, 2009, at Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. She was 82.

Eva was preceded in death by her husband of 56 years, Matthew Rogers.

Eva is survived by a son, James E. (Beverly) Rogers, and grandson, Christopher Rogers.

She was a retired dental assistant and a loving mother, grandmother, aunt, and friend to all she met. (Editor's note: The Rogers and Steele families have been close friends since 1963, reports Tanya (Steele) Beitz.)

Kathy Le Comte
Editor, *Flightline*
869 S. Columbia Ave.
Springfield, IL 62704-2342

Keepin' 'em Flyin'
Thanks for supporting the
780th BS Association with
your dues.

Flightline

Adventures at Isle of Capri Rest Camp

by Cliff Taylor

On December 18, 1944, our crew, Capt. J.P. Dawson's, left for rest camp on the Isle of Capri.

When we arrived at Naples we ran into Lt. Robert Kaiser, our navigator, who had gone on the Blechhammer November 20 mission and was just getting back to Italy. On that mission he didn't fly with us but with Lt. Joe Norman's 780th crew in Able 4 position under Col. Lokker's tail. They flew through the flames of his plane and hit parts from the plane including one of the landing gear. They went to Russia. I believe we were the only two from the 780th in Able Box unless Lt. Campbell was in it. I know A1, A2 and A5 were from the 781st.

We took the ferry out to Isle of Capri. Our top turret gunner, Leo Bohlen from Iowa, had never been in a boat and didn't like it one bit.

We checked into the hotel, assigned rooms, and couldn't believe it. A room - not a tent, not a barracks - but a room, with four walls, a window, a bed with a mattress, sheets, a pillow, a bathroom with a real toilet, no board on a barrel or pipe sticking up out of the ground. There was a bathtub and hot water. It must be heaven.

The saloons had all the beer you could drink, not good beer but beer that you didn't have to use your PX ration card with which you got one or two cans a week.

One night the air raid sirens went off and all the locals headed for the shelters while all the air crews headed for the open to watch anti-aircraft from the ground instead of from 22,000 feet. One plane was up there and the search lights found it but the gunners couldn't hit it and it flew home.

We visited one of Tiberius Caesar's castles, took a boat through the Blue Grotto and had a local fisherman take us out in his fishing sailboat. We told him we were going to take over the boat and sail back to the U.S.A. I think he believed us.

Christmas dinner was turkey with chestnut stuffing, mashed potatoes, green beans, and pie, along with nuts, olives and other good eats.

On our way home we had to wait several hours in Naples and went into a restaurant. They offered spaghetti and horse meat steaks. Tried both. Weren't too bad.

Bob Bleir told me he went to rest camp at Mussolini's summer place in southern Italy. I never heard of it. Anyone have a story about it?