



Flightline



Newsletter of the 780th Bomb Squadron of WWII

March 2012

First Mission Flown with Group Commander

by Cleon S. Moore

On our first mission, each member of my crew was assigned to fly with veteran crews. On 4 December 1944, I flew my first mission to the marshalling yard at Villach, Austria, with the Col. Joshua H. Foster Jr. crew. Col. Foster was also the Group Commander. I was nose gunner in the lead plane of the formation.

During that mission we got shot up, and the crew chief said we were losing gas. Foster said he couldn't see any gas coming out of the plane. We had enough gas in the right tank to make it to Visz, Yugoslavia, for an emergency landing. If we could make it to Visz, the cargo planes could pick us up and fly us back to Pantanella.

When we flew over Visz, the gauges showed that we had no gas in the left tank, but the gas level in the right tank hadn't changed. So the commander decided not to land in Visz. If we could make it as far as the Adriatic Sea, we could bail out and ditch the plane. The commander did not want to abort the mission because he had to set an example to the other crews that were flying in the formation with him.

We continued over the Adriatic and returned



S/Sgts. A. F. Madison, left, and Cleon S. Moore, right, next to Guardian Angel, at Pantanella Air Field.

to Pantanella. Trucks met the crew at the landing strip, and the crewmembers reported to the crew chief describing what was defective with the plane so repairs could be made before we flew again. Afterwards, we found out the aircraft received 75 hits.

The first plane to land reported to the American Red Cross. The Red Cross ladies in the hospitality tent gave us coffee and donuts, and then we went to a briefing room to give a report on the kind and number of planes that had attacked us. We also reported which enemy planes we had shot down so the gunners would get credit for the shoot-down. After the flight debriefing, we went through the medical tent where we could have two ounces of bourbon.

I flew 22 missions before the war in Europe ended. I flew four or five missions as a substitute. On our days off, a few of my friends and I would show up at the 4 a.m. briefings when the

Interested in 2012 Reunion?

Joshua Hummel is still interested in knowing whether there is any interest in holding a 780th reunion in 2012. He suggests meeting in the Midwest or Burbank, CA area.

If you are interested, let Joshua know at (323) 652-2858 or summersun83@gmail.com.

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Nelson Honored at ID Veterans Day Events

Ashby Nelson and 22 other veterans from Idaho were honored this past Veterans Day at a Red, White and the Blue tribute.

The day-long gala celebration in Pocatello started with a flyover from the World War II *Mormon Mustang* that was piloted during the war by Gen. Roland Wright, a Blackfoot native. A parade and ceremony followed. The Nelsons then enjoyed a USO Stage Door canteen luncheon featuring food, celebrity waiters, live

musical entertainment, patriotic art, military displays and dancing.

The evening program included a cocktail reception and elegant dinner at the Stephens Performing Arts Center on the campus of Idaho State University. The keynote speaker was Idaho Cong. Mike Simpson. Betty says they were



Ashby Nelson

treated to a hotel room for the night as well as a huge bouquet of flowers and a special emblem ribbon for Ashby. "It was humbling and very special," she says.

A booklet of the evening event had a page for each veteran's biography and photograph. Ashby's bio read in part:

As an Air Force gunner in World II, Ashby Nelson learned a lot of lessons about life: discipline, focus and especially, hard work. During basic training, he wore a hole in the sole of his shoe that would go on to symbolize the kind of dedication he put forth for his country...

"The military taught me discipline. I think every kid needs to have a little bit of that. I know I needed that and I learned a lot from it and became a better person."

One of his fondest memories is the long nights spent in huts with his fellow soldiers while waiting for their next flying mission. They would play cards, talk and play jokes on each other long into the night. "If anyone got out of hand the whole hut would take off a shoe and throw it at the guilty party."

"You became really close to everyone you worked with because you were all out there doing the same thing... serving your country and at the same time trying to survive. We held a lot of reunions after the war as oftne as we could get together."

780th Invited to 781st Reunion in Branson in September

The 781st Bomb Squadron Association heard about the 780th folding and has invited our squadron to their reunion in Branson, MO, in September. The 781st will meet at the Grand Plaza Hotel from September 30 - October 4, 2012.

Here is a message from Carole Lee, executive secretary of the 781st:

That is so sad that your organization is no longer. We changed the 781st bylaws to include children and anyone interested in perpetuating the history of the 781st so they can become an Associate member by paying \$10 per year. Our secretary, treasurer, and one board member are now Associate members. We are hopeful they will help us continue even after their family member is gone. I will be 79 in March and was appointed the 781st executive secretary several years ago. My husband is 88 and the current president. We both still work part time and have good health so we feel we can keep the 781st going for a few more years. I understand the 782nd has not had any publications for several years.

For more information about the 781st's reunion visit their reunion website at: www.reunionproregistration.com/781stbombsquadron.htm, or contact Carole at clee75@q.com or (605) 339-1297.

Bible, Warm Flightsuit Provide Comfort During Mission Return

by Clifford W. Taylor

Bombs away, you have the controls," comes over the intercom.

The pilot would take over the controls and make a sharp turn off the target to get away from the anti-aircraft guns. The bombardier had flown the plane from the IP (Initial Point) - a geographic place on the ground about 10-15 miles from the target - to the target with the Norden bombsight.

The pilot would call for a damage report from each crew member, him first, reporting any engine damage or shutdown or loss of the plane's controls. Anyone who was wounded was next to report, then any large holes, loss of oxygen, or hydraulic or gas leaks.

The fighter planes that were providing cover would rejoin us as we left the target area. Sometimes they would be the P-51 Red Tails flown by the Tuskegee airmen. They provided the best protection of any fighter group.

As we flew south, past the Danube River approaching the Alps, and our fighter escorts were close by, it was time to relax and turn

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day's missions were planned. If any members of the crews that were supposed to fly that day were sick, they would get substitutes to join the crew for the mission. Pilots would ask for me to substitute for their crews. They called me the "Blue Nose Gunner." The pilots did not know my name, but they knew my reputation. I had done some training as a bombardier - all nose gunners did - so I could replace the bombardier if he got killed or was disabled.

Why did I volunteer to go on missions as a substitute? I wanted to get in my 35 missions so I could go home. Also, I was young enough so that I didn't know any better.

up the heat in the heated flightsuit. The view was beautiful. Different-colored fields and the snowcapped Alps. It was time to say my prayer of thanks to God, then get out the small Bible given to me by my mother.

My mother had sent this Bible to me when the crew was taking crew training at Davis-Monthan Field in Tucson in July 1944. The Bible is three inches by four-and-a-half inches and contains the New Testament and Psalms. It flew every mission with me and I read it through many times, made notes in it and circled different verses. Some notes are, "God, I love you now at 21,000 feet above Austria," above Psalm 27; "God was with me on missions of Nov. 16, 17, 18," over Psalm 23; and "We were over Munich, Germany about two hours ago." On November 20, 1944, I wrote, "God was our co-pilot - Bliedhammer Ge," and circled verses were 23 Psalms Verse 4, 1 John 2:15, 1 John 1:9, and John 16: 30-33.

As we got over the Adriatic Sea the P-51 Red Tails would come in close, wag their wings, give us a thumbs up or salute, and head to their base further north in Italy than our base. We went back to base and when you felt that thump and heard the steel mesh runway rattle you you knew you had come home. The Red Cross women would be waiting for us as we entered the Interrogation Room and would give us two donuts and a good cup of coffee. God was with me then when I was 18 or 19 years old. Now, 66 years later, he still stands with me and comforts me.

**What's Your Story?
Send it to
The Flightline!**

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Bob Hope USO Show: Thanks for This Memory!



Left: Bob Hope and Jerry Colona with Frances Langford at far right. Right: Hope and Langford.

George Kuchenbecker was lucky enough to see one of Bob Hope's USO shows and has this story to tell:

At a base in southern California Bob Hope and his gang put on a show in one of the hangars. I had staked out a place very close to the stage. This was the full Hope gang: the big band, Colona - the wisecracking side kick - and curvy Frances Langford, plus many more that I can't remember names for. The gist of the show was a western theme. When Langford was introduced she came on stage in tights and a bra, chaps and cowboy boots, and on her hips a pair

of pearl-handled revolvers. The guys in the crowd really went nuts for her getup. When it quieted down Colona, with his long black mustache and huge black bushy eyebrows cautioned Hope, "Be careful, she's packing 38's." To which Hope replied, "Yeah, and she's wearing two pistols too." Much laughter from the crowd.

Hope performed nearly 200 USO shows in so many theaters of war that it was often cracked (in Hope style) that, "Where there's death, there's Hope." He passed away in 2003 at the age of 100.