



Flightline



Newsletter of the 780th Bombardment Squadron of WWII

October 2019

Son seeks squadron help in researching father **Pilot, gunner families 'connected' 75 years after shootdown over Vienna**

The internet is a wonderful thing when it connects us to information and people that were next to impossible to find before websites and email were at our fingertips.

In August I received an email from Randy Klug who is researching his late father, LTC Richard C. Klug (ret.). Like many World War II veterans, Col. Klug didn't talk much about his war service, leaving his son with few facts to work with.

His father had trained as a P-38 pilot but due to the heavy losses of bomber crews there was a shortage of multi-engine trained pilots, so Klug was pulled out of fighter training and became a B-24 pilot. Randy knew his father was shot down on 11 October 1944 on a mission to a motor-pool on the southeast edge of Vienna.

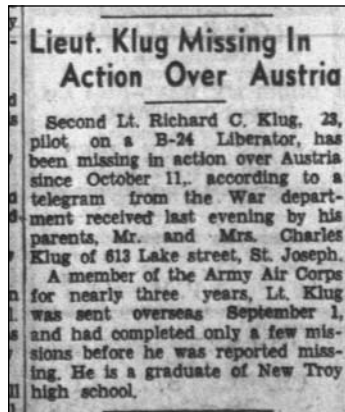
"My father was convinced that all his crew got out of the aircraft and that he saw good chutes for all. The story I remember is that Dad was

having trouble controlling the plane after it was hit. He ordered the crew to bail out and all but

the engineer did. The engineer had moved into the co-pilot's seat and was helping my father control the plane. After the crew exited the plane the engineer and my father bailed out. What little he did say was that he felt he let down his crew and many lost their lives because of that failure. At some level that haunted him to his dying day."

Through the 465th Bomb Group website Randy learned his father was with the 780th Bombardment Squadron. Randy then contacted *Flightline*, asking for a crew photo and any information about his

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Hometown newspaper articles about then-Lt. Richard C. Klug's loss in Austria and his being reported a prisoner of war in Germany, found at newspapers.com.



LT. RICHARD KLUG

Your News & Letters

Kathy,

My name is Drew Squyres. I am compiling a book containing all the photos, letters, POW telegrams, and context around my father's experiences in WWII.

Weldon Squyres was a radio operator with the 782nd Squadron out of Pantanella. He was shot down on the July 5, 1944 mission to Toulon, France, and again on the August 3, 1944 mission to Friedrichshafen, after which he was a prisoner of war.

I just returned from the 75th anniversary memorial of that air battle over Ehrwald, Austria, in which eight B-24s came down. I also hiked with Brad Branch (Ed.: son of 780th pilot Bart Branch and producer of the film, On the Wing (see December 2016 issue of The Flightline) to the site of my dad's aircraft on Hohe Munde mountain, and was able to bring home some small pieces of it.

In your June 2014 issue for the 780th BS, there is an article about that Aug 3 mission which includes the drawing of the formation as it was attacked. It is attributed to Paul Jarvis. I would like to ask you if it would be possible to get a quality copy of that drawing, and anything else that may pertain to the mission. Thank you very much.

Best wishes,
Drew
805-440-0325

Editor's note: Drew and I corresponded late this summer, and I emailed him the drawing he requested. I just recently found Paul's email address and sent it to Drew. I hope they can get in touch with each other soon. It sounds like a great book Drew is going to write about his father. *Ironically, the next letter here is from Paul, but it came months before Drew's. I need a secretary!*



Dear Kathy,

I was wondering if you ever heard of a book entitled "780th Memories" published in 1946, privately published? It reputed to have about 160 pages with lots of crew photos and other settings.

Very Respectfully,
Paul Jarvis

Editor's note: Yes, Paul, not only have I heard of 780th Memoirs (correct title) but I have an original copy. It was compiled by Maj. Charlie Davis of the 780th. I once saw an original copy for sale on the internet for around \$300!

A picture of it is appears here. If you watch eBay or other websites with World War II memorabilia it might



turn up. I consult *Memoirs* frequently for articles in *Flightline* - such as this issue. And see the following email I received for another way the book is still being used:



Kathy,

I am good friends with Lisa Warren and after many years of friendship found out that both our fathers were bombardiers on a B-24 in WWII. She passed along a newsletter which is great and said you may be able to add me to your email list. If this is possible, this would be wonderful.

John Hazelroth

Editor's note: I am honored to add you to *The Flightline* mailing list, John! I mail/email the newsletter to about 115 squadron veterans, widows, family members, other squadrons and friends like yourself.



Good morning.

I don't know if you have been following the changes I've been making to the 465th website, but I have added a lot of information over the last few weeks. I have a book on the

780th Squadron that contains about 150 pages. From this I have expanded the roster for the 780th and created a section for the air echelon. Granted, the photos coming from the book are not the greatest quality, but it has allowed me to fill in a lot that I didn't have before. Please take a look when you have time and let me know what you think. ...

Up until now, I have had a section on the website for the air echelon with photos of the crews that I've received. As I said above, I've added a great deal to this section for the 780th Squadron. I don't see any problems with this section, but it seems to me that the website is missing a lot of personnel that were just as critical to the success of the 465th as the crews flying the missions. In the book I mentioned above, I have several pages of photos ranging from Staff to Orderly Room, Operations, Medical, etc. I'm thinking of adding a new section to the website for the Ground Echelon to contain these photos. Do any of you have photos that would fit in this new section?

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Editor's note: Hughes is president of the 461st Bomb Group and webmaster for a number of bomb groups, including the 465th. I have been in touch with Hughes about identifying the 780th crew photos he has posted at www.465th.org.

Currently the crew photos are identified by a number (for example, 75-1) which signifies the crew is pictured on the top of page 75 in *Memoirs*. The last names of the crewmembers appear under the photo. I would like to help Hughes identify the crew by pilot's name, such as the Theena Crew, the Halter Crew, etc. Anyone who recognizes the pilot's name or

face in the photos can help, so if you'd like to take a look and help Hughes out, please do so! I hope to find an afternoon soon to look at the photos but I won't be able to identify all of them. And if your crew isn't pictured, please consider emailing a good quality jpeg to him or send a good quality duplicate to the address above.

Logan attends 15AF reunion in Dallas

Our very own Pat Logan attended the 15th Air Force Bomb Groups reunion in Dallas in September. On the last day they toured the Frontiers of Flight Museum at Love Field where Logan, bottom right in a squadron cap, met Harley Bridger, bottom left. Bridger was assigned to the 782nd Squadron to replace a crew shot down on August 3, 1944. "Amazing that several of the guys at 95 were still walking around like they were 60," Pat said. "Two even drove to Dallas from Maryland and Arkansas. Supermen!"

More information about the reunion will appear in the December issue of *Flightline*.



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father's last mission. Using websites such as fold3.com and newspapers.com, the squadron history book *780th Memoirs* and email contacts, exacting details about the 11 October mission are now known.

According to *780th Memoirs*, bad weather resulted in only nine missions being flown in October 1944, with one loss - the Klug crew. Reports claimed over the target the Klug aircraft took a direct hit from flak over the target, causing the bomb bay to burst into flames. Eyewitness accounts indicated that three to nine men bailed out of the aircraft before it disintegrated.

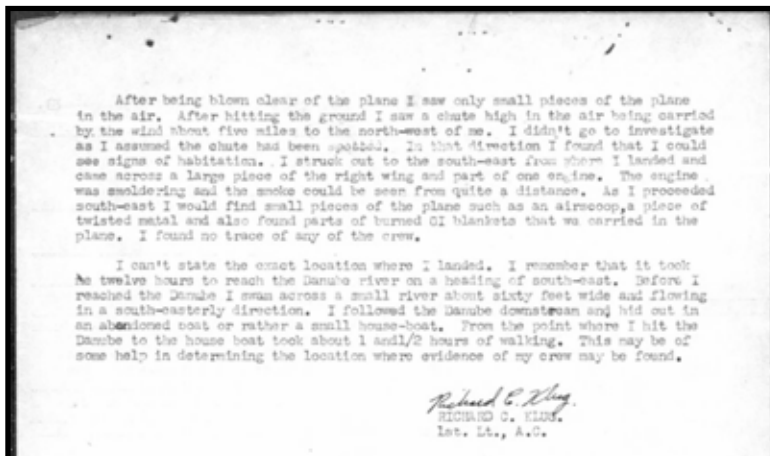
Flightline shared this information with Randy but more came from fold3.com. Fold3 has various records pertaining to American military service including draft, service and pension records; photos and diaries; and, in this case, missing air crew reports (MACR). MACR 9058 is a 38-page report containing eyewitness accounts of what happened to the Klug aircraft. Robert Hazeleaf, a 780th gunner in a neighboring aircraft, gave this statement:

I was standing in the left waist window when I saw Lt. Klug's plane (Red "F") hit by flak. However, this was before we came into the most intense flak area. As the pilot pulled the plane away from the formation, flame was coming out of the bomb-bays. He seemed to be holding the plane carefully in order to give his crew a chance to get out. After this, the plane simply fell to

pieces. First the tail dropped off and then the whole thing just seemed to disintegrate.

Other witnesses, including Harold Denzin and Howard McIlroy from the 780th, stated the Number 1 engine, waist and bomb bays all were on fire and that the plane lost altitude quickly.

Of great interest to Randy, the MACR also contains post-conflict reports from the crew who bailed out and were taken prisoner - including his father, the pilot. In his report Klug describes what happened to him after he bailed out:



Lt. Klug's statement to U.S. military authorities after liberation, found in the Missing Air Crew Report.

After being blown clear of the plane I saw only small pieces of the plane in the air. After hitting the ground I saw a chute high in the air being carried by the wind about five miles to the northwest of me. I didn't go to

investigate as I assumed the chute had been spotted. ... I struck out to the south-east from where I landed and came across a large piece of the right wing and part of one engine. The engine was smoldering and the smoke could be seen from quite a distance. As I proceeded south-east I would find small pieces of the plane such as an airscoop, a piece of twisted metal and also found parts of burned GI blankets that we carried in the plane. I found no trace of the crew. ... It took me twelve hours to reach the Danube river on a heading of south-east. Before I reached the Danube I swam across a small river about sixty feet wide and flowing in a south-easterly direction. I

followed the Danube downstream and hid out in an abandoned boat or rather a small house-boat. From the point I hit the Danube to the house boat took about 1 and 1/2 hours of walking.

Pilot Klug, bombardier Eugene Jurenek, and engineer William Ratliff were taken prisoner and held at Dulag Luft West. Ratliff also was injured and hospitalized. The rest of the crew was killed in action.

Randy was overwhelmed by the details in the MACR, especially his father's own description. He compared the "new" information from the MACR to what his father had told him decades later:

Incredible! Thank you so much. While I had never seen this statement it matches with my memory of the few details Dad shared. Until recently it was never clear about how dad got out of the aircraft. I remember him talking about the wreckage and in my young mind it sounded like he crash landed. Then he sent me a shadow box with his original wings, rank insignia, etc., and one of the items was his membership card in the Broken Wing Club meaning he had bailed out. Dad did suffer some injuries and I remember he still had shrapnel in his legs. Because he went into a POW camp he wasn't treated by a U.S. military doctor so the wounds were never officially documented. The result was he was never awarded the Purple Heart. Decades later I was working in the Pentagon and found out he could request a Correc-

tion of Military Records to get the Purple Heart. He refused to let me pursue it.

While the MACR was a great find it wasn't the only information *Flightline* had for Randy. *Flightline* put him in touch with squadron family member Rickey Robertson. Rickey is the nephew of Klug's waist gunner, Bobbie Robertson, who was among the seven crew killed in action. Rickey is the caretaker of his uncle's memory. He also inherited his uncle's trunk from his grandparents, who went to their graves not knowing the complete story. What little they did know came from Ratliff, who visited Bobbie's parents:

... After the war he came and talked with them (a surprise) and he told them of the mission over Vienna and of how the B-24 was hit and the pilot hit the bail out alarm and they began to bail out.

He mentioned the pilot (Lt. Klug) kept the B-24 flying long enough and level enough for the crew to exit the burning aircraft. He mentioned hearing Uncle Bobbie talking on the intercom (and it is noted in the MACR) that one member was either wounded or unable to bail out and he helped get him out of the plane. He helped get his buddy out of the burning B-24 so that he could open his chute and escape to safety. Sgt. Ratliff also told of the treatment he and others captured that day received. It was terrible treatment until the end of the war. He also mentioned that he, along with the



Joe Kling and Rickey Robertson

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WWII difficult topic for German exchange student

My apologies for the lateness of this issue of *Flightline*. This month (October) my family is hosting a high school-aged German exchange student. Her name is Eva and she is from Ingolstadt in Bavaria. My daughter, Lydia, who is a high school junior and studies German, will stay with Eva in Germany next June. I spent all of September - the usual month for *Flightline* - getting Eva's room ready and finishing some long overdue projects around the house. Our family is having a great time with Eva. So far we have cheered at a high school football game, visited Starbucks and Dairy Queen, shopped at the mall, carved a pumpkin and roasted marshmallows in our fire pit.



Eva, second from left, with our family.

Eva likes hiking and hockey so we hiked in southern Illinois and tonight everyone (minus me) is at a St. Louis Blues hockey game (I'm a Blackhawks fan anyway). But there's some work going on as well. Today Eva and a friend gave a PowerPoint presentation, in English, about World War II from the German perspective. Eva was lamenting this. She told my husband, John, that her friends were assigned easier topics - such as about her hometown - but it was her next remark that almost made me cry. She said talking about World War II was hard because "we killed a lot of people and we lost the war." John is an historian and says World War II is complicated, ever more so for Germans. So I wonder: what does the war mean to Germans today? I sympathize for this young woman who seems to carry some guilt about events from 75 years ago. Eva's presentation went well and I hope she knows that the war is the past. After Lydia's stay with Eva in Germany ends we plan to meet her in Vienna, where I hope to find where my grandfather's plane crashed and where he was buried by the Germans. This has been a dream of mine for 25 years. In a way, I have Eva to thank for making it finally happen. *Kathy*

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pilot and one other crew-member, actually stayed on the B-24 until it was away from the target area before they managed to get out. They were captured and later that night the three crewmen who had been captured were brought back into town and they identified the deceased members of their crew that the Germans had recovered.

Rickey himself had received first-hand information about his uncle's fateful mission. He met squadron member Joe Kling at the 780th reunion in Biloxi, Mississippi in 2010. The meeting didn't come a moment too soon as it was the last official squadron reunion, and Joe passed away in 2014. Joe was the last surviving member of Joe and Bobbie's original crew.

"Joe was in the same living quarters with my uncle at Pantanella, and he and the first sergeant packed my uncle's personal items in his footlocker and mailed it home," Rickey stated. "I was given this footlocker and items by my grandmother before she died and was told to always keep this history alive."

Joe and Bobbie may not have been flying with the same crew on 11 October 1944, but Joe

TAPS



Bill Larson passed away March 9, 2019, in Michigan. He was 96. He was born July 13, 1922 in Oklahoma City, the son of William Hans Larson and Hazel Christie. He had one brother, Robert, who predeceased him last October. Bill served in the Air Force during World War II, stationed in Italy as a bomber turret-gun repairman. After the war, he earned a degree in mechanical engineering, and moved to Detroit to work in the auto industry. He was employed with Holley Carburetor. In Detroit he met Kathleen, a school teacher, at the Grande Ballroom.

They were married in 1950. She passed in 1981. They had three children, William of Houston, Texas; Gary of Saginaw, Michigan; and Barbara of Houston. Bill later married Hilda, who survives, along with her children Steven, Barbara and Mary; and five grandchildren, four step-grandchildren and one great-grandchild. He loved auto racing, owning a series of English sports cars and touring the United States in his 1950 MG-TD and traveling around the world.

was one of the few to have first-hand knowledge of what happened.

"Joe was flying in the B-24 directly behind Lt. Klug's plane and saw it get hit. He also told me he saw several of the crew bail out over the target, then they were past them on the bomb run. When I told Joe that my grandparents went to their graves not knowing actually all about the mission he told me that he would have come personally and talked with them but he thought that the AAF had given them all the info."

Randy was deeply appreciative of the new information Rickey and *Flightline* were able to provide, especially as it confirmed what Randy remembered his father telling him.

"Thank you so much," Randy replied via email. "Reading between the lines, those few seconds between being hit, catching fire, and eventually exploding must have been earth shattering. Almost brought me to tears. A bit of a flashback as my wife and I were working in the Pentagon on 9/11. While we were not injured or in immediate danger we did see fire and smoke behind us as we evacuated the building. No time for panic at the time but devastating later on. Of the 124 people killed in the Pentagon seven were close

friends and co-workers. Sounds like a two or three martini night tonight."

Rickey is thankful as well for Randy finding the 780th, and for his father being a brave pilot who "did everything he could to allow the crew to escape."

"Thanks, Randy and Kathy, for blessing me with the opportunity to learn more of this mission and the crew and that we are a special family in the 780th!"

Do you have a photo of Klug Crew?

If you have a photo of Klug or his crew, please email Randy at rklug@sbcglobal.net. This was the Klug crew on 11 October 1944:

Pilot	Klug, Richard C.
Co-pilot	Huey, Walton L.
Navigator	Jackson, Robert P.
Bombardier	Jurenec, Eugene C.
Engineer	Ratliff, William R.
Radio Operator	Arzt, Bert D.
Waist Gunner	Robertson, Bobbie T.
Nose Gunner	King, Billie B.
Ball Gunner	Ziklo, Victor S.
Tailgunner	Giblin, James T.

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Flightline



NTSB drone photo via Associated Press

Seven were killed and six injured when the B-17 Nine O Nine, owned by the Collings Foundation, crashed shortly after takeoff from a Connecticut airport October 2. Among the dead are the pilot and co-pilot. The 75-year-old pilot had more than 7,000 hours experience flying a B-17 and had flown for more than 20 years with Collings. He also was the plane's safety officer. The Flying Fortress experienced a "rough mag" with its Number 4 engine and was returning to the airport when it struck approach lights 1,000 feet from the runway and contacted the ground 500 feet short of the runway. It then veered off the runway before colliding with vehicles and a tank of de-icing fluid. The National Transportation Safety Board is investigating. This incident is a reminder of the dangers and thrills of flying in these aircraft, even today. The 780th offers it sympathies to all those affected.