



PANTANELLA NEWS

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2018 REUNION DAYTON OHIO

the 98th, the 376th,
the 451st, the 455th,
the 460th, the 461st,
the 464th, the 465th,
the 484th, and
the 485th...

THE 2018
Fifteenth Air Force
Bomb Groups REUNION

Sept 13-16
Dayton, OH
home of
the
National
Air Force Museum



photography & layout by John Bertam

2018 781ST BOMB SQUADRON REUNION

PANTANELLA NEWS

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PANTANELLA NEWS

781st BOMB SQUADRON (H)
Part of the 465th Bomb Gp. 15th AF
Italy 1944-1945

Flew 191 Missions over Southern Europe dropping thousands of tons of death and destruction to the enemy. Shot down 25 enemy aircraft. Received two Presidential Unit Citations in Seven Battle Campaigns.



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<http://465th.org>

President's Letter



Dave Blake and his Group AF Planning Committee did a bang up job with the 2018 Reunion in Dayton, OH. Of the 28 veterans in attendance, the 465th Bomb Group had nine. Five of which were

781st Squadron, two were 782nd and two were 783rd. We were proud to have 1/3 of the veterans there from the 465th Group. Keep up the good showing fella's. I am looking forward to the 2019 Bomb Groups Reunion in Dallas, TX.

Some of you will remember I had my 90th Birthday Party at our Reunion in Charleston, SC. This picture is from my 95th Birthday Open House this Veterans Day in our church. I had family from California, Montana, Phoenix, Illinois, Florida, Missouri, Alaska, and Switzerland here. I had friends I hadn't seen for 20 years come. I am blessed to have so many years.

— Orren Lee

Date Set for 2019 Reunion in Dallas, Texas

September 19-22, 2019 will be the date for the Bomb Squadron Reunion. The reunion will be in Dallas, TX at the Wyndham Garden Dallas North Hotel.

2645 Lyndon B Johnson FWY
Dallas, TX 75234.



A Story of Togetherness

Recently we sent surveys to veterans on the mailing list but no way to contact them. We received Melvin Derry's form back with the following story on the back.

I know you hear all the "stories of togetherness" but here is ours!

My husband was Dennis Flaherty, tail gunner on the R.J. Smith crew. Melvin was nose gunner on the same crew. My husband passed in 1995, Mel's wife passed in 1996. Mel's home town was Baltimore,

MD, Dennis hometown was Bellingham, Washington, clear across the country. Because of "Squadron Reunions" their crew got together at several reunions and in 1997 so did Mel and I.

We are forever thankful for the fond memories we have beginning in 1986 at Colorado Springs.

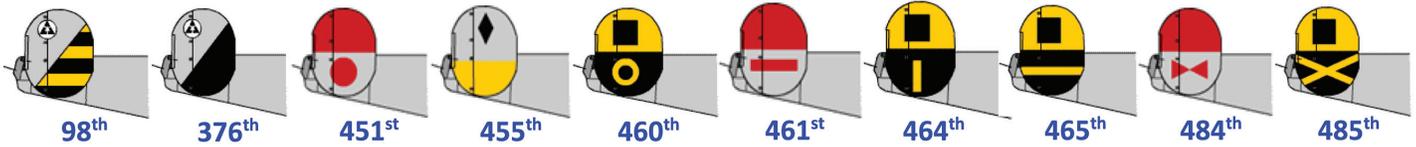
Sincerely,
Ruby Flaherty

MEMBERSHIP DUES:

Associate Member dues are \$10.00 per year. Dues are recorded on your Newsletter label. Remit to 781st Bomb Squadron Association and mail to:

Carole Lee, Squadron Treasurer, 4700 S. Cliff Ave. #308, Sioux Falls, SD 57103

2018 REUNION REPORT



In Dayton, OH we had 10 Groups represented. They were the 98th, 376th, 451st, 455th, 460th, 461st, 464th, 465th, 484th & 485th Bombardment Groups (H). We were happy to have the 464th this year. The Group on the other hill at Pantanella. New to this reunion was a Welcome Reception on Thursday evening with assorted cheeses in addition to fresh fruit and vegetable trays with dip, coffee and fruit punch hosted by the Hotel.



Reunion was held at the Crown Plaza Hotel in Downtown Dayton

Friday morning was at the National Museum of the United States Air Force which started with a private time with ropes down visiting a B-24. Following that was a special presentation of a commemorative Presidential Unit Citation medals to each veterans by a General Officer from Wright-Patterson AFB. A slide presentation with a 'then and now' picture of each veteran present was very moving. After the medal presentation a traditional Military Memorial Ceremony was conducted by Chaplain/Captain Chris Cairns, Reunion Chaplain. As a part of this memorial ceremony

a multi part wreath was presented. The wreath as a whole represented the combined effort of our bomb groups that worked together in the 15th AF to secure victory over the Axis powers during WWII. The wreath had removable sections with each section representing a Bomb Group. Individual members were to take their part of the wreath to their marker in the Memorial Gardens outside on the museum grounds. Carole is seen holding a section for the 465th which we took to the 781st marker. A picture is shown of the veterans at our marker. This was a very special time for all in attendance.



Carole Lee with Flowers for Memorial

Friday was the Individual Group Banquet. I special time for the 781st to get acquainted with the other squadrons that make up the 465th BG. We had 9 veterans in our group as President Orren refers to in his message. A time when they reminisced a bit as we took pictures. Such a special time.

Saturday was a "stay in house" day. It featured an expanded program of



Frank, Ken, Orren & George at Memorial

Veterans speakers. Saturday evening was the all Veterans Group Picture and the Banquet. The Sons of the American Revolution presented and posted the Colors dressed in authentic Continental Army uniforms.

Sunday was a church service hosted by the 376th. Those wishing to explore the museum more were provided with bus service. An alternative tour of Second Street Market was available and a Farewell dinner was served in the evening. The end of another fantastic reunion with everyone saying 'see you Dallas!'



Gathering at Memorial Site

465th Bomb Group Attendance

781st Bomb Squadron

Ken & Liz Wiggins

J KEITH LANCASTER

Jay Kert Lancaster

ORREN LEE & Carole

Jill Munce

Karen Myhre

GEORGE HAUSOLD & Veni

Glen Hausold

KEN REHN

Ron & Teresa Carlson

Dave Rehn

Bill Rehn

FRANK JASICKO

Becky Stuker

Dallas Stuker

Mike & Julia Deslatte

Lowell & Betty Knobloch

Jeffrey, Matt & Bryce Kopp

Greg Soucy

Rodger Soucy

Lance & Georgia McKinnon

David, Daniel, Desiree & Damian

McKinnon

782nd Bomb Squadron

HARLEY BRIDGER & Katy

ALBERT RIFFLE

Scott Riffle

783rd Bomb Squadron

Mary Samargian

Ani Samargian

Leo & Becky Meyer

Mary Walton

Kay Huston

Tom & Ann Tennille

HAROLD WINTERS

Susan Davala

CONNIE MAFFEY & Afra

John & Anne Maffey (son and granddaughter of Connie & Afra Maffey)

Paul & Callum Maffey (son and grandson of Connie & Afra Maffey)

Marie Buonforte (daughter of Connie & Afra Maffey)

Carolyn Buonforte (granddaughter of Connie & Afra Maffey)

Susan Maffey Rakfal (daughter of Connie & Afra Maffey)



Discovery of "Patches"

Thomas Scalese, Jr. sent this story he found from the internet the day after his father died. His father could never remember the name of the plane he was in when he was shot down.

FROM PANTANELLA TO PLOESTI

The 15th Army Air Force, based in Italy, sent hundreds of B-24 Liberators against the Romanian oilfields at Ploesti on June 6, 1944. This target, one of the main suppliers of oil to the war machine of the Third Reich, had been attacked many times before, but always managed to remain in operation.

Flying out of Pantanella, Italy, the 465th Bomb Group, part of the 15th AAF, lost 4 crews, for a total of 41 men, on this raid.

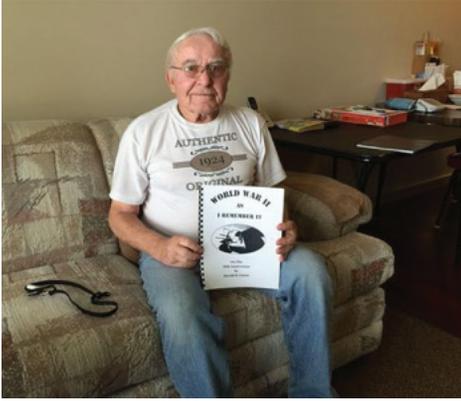
B-24 tail# 42-52449, nicknamed "Patches", was hit by enemy aircraft over Bucharest. One witness observed, "...almost immediately, I saw two chutes leave the plane. The plane made a left bank 90 degrees from my position. At this point my attention was attracted by the fighters...the last time I saw the plane it was only a small spot..."

Fortunately, the entire crew was able to bail out. They were held as Prisoners of War in Bucharest, Romania until August, when they were returned to the United States.

The "Patches" crew were:

- 1st Lieutenant Kenneth M. Martin (Denver, CO)
- 2nd Lieutenant Rex L. Struble (Otisville, MI)
- 2nd Lieutenant Robert L. Williamson (Alexandria, VA)
- Staff Sergeant Donald L. Merkel (Glenvil, NB)
- Staff Sergeant Thomas Scalese (Reading, PA)
- Staff Sergeant Gerald J. Simmons (Reynoldsburg, OH)
- Staff Sergeant Kenneth G. Foden (New York, NY)
- Staff Sergeant Francis P. Little (River Rouge, MI)
- Sergeant Wilburn Vorhier (San Macos, TX)

#24



Credit for the following article goes to the Great Falls Tribune, Great Falls, Montana. It is an interview of Frank Jasicko, a 781st Bomb Squadron veteran, who was a prisoner of war in WWII. This is how Carole Lee made contact with Frank Jasicko and inviting him to join the reunion in Dayton.

The number '24' is special for Frank Jasicko.

"I got married when I was 24," he says. "My birthday is March 24, 1924. I flew on B-24s. So anytime I have to pick a number I always pick 24. But so far it hasn't paid off."

It certainly didn't when the Great Falls man and nine others were making their 24th mission on a B-24 bomber in July of 1944. The plane was shot down – it was the second time in six months the crew had been forced to eject over enemy territory – and this time they were all captured by the Germans. For the next nine months, Frank Jasicko was a prisoner of war. It was a terrible time for a Montana man used to roaming free in the Treasure State timber.

Frank, 93, was born in Tracy, Montana. "You know where that's at?" he says, sipping on a glass of milk. He is all alone in the lunchroom at the Grand View assisted living facility this day, sitting at a window table. A server brings him a small sugar cookie. "Here you are, Mr. Frank," she says. He smiles and thanks her, then asks a visitor to join him.

"My dad was a coal miner," he says. "But he died when I was 11. So I had to kind of take over being the head of the family. I went to school and had jobs on the side. I worked at the Safeway store and I worked setting pins at the bowling alley. That's just the way life was."

Frank's parents were from Slovakia. Three of his older sisters were born there. Louis and Agnes Jasicko came to the U.S., but then moved back to the old country. "My dad came back over here prior to World War I, and he was going to send for my mother," Frank says. "But it was too late. During the war, see, they didn't let anyone come over. My dad and mother were separated 13 years." They eventually were reunited, but not for long. Louis died in 1936. "It was miner's consumption," Frank says. "His lungs were shot."

Frank went to Great Falls High, where he balanced studies and work the best he could. There wasn't really enough time for sports, but he played football as a senior. He joined the Bison football team in 1941.

Then the next year Frank joined the war effort. "I signed up a year after Pearl Harbor," he says. "A bunch of us went in together. Must have been 10 or 12 of us. We had consecutive serial numbers. If you enlisted, you could pick the service. We all picked the Air Force (then called the Army Air Corps)." Frank says they were all friends. "Most of them now are dead," he says softly.

Frank trained as an engineer-gunner on a B-24 bomber. His team flew out of Italy. Fifty missions were required to earn a discharge and a trip home. And that, Frank says, was a difficult proposition. "I got shot down a couple times in 1944," he says.

"We were shot down on our 13th mission, hitting the target of Ploiesti, Romania. Oil wells. It was a heavily defended target. We got hit by flak over the target and lost two of our four engines." The men all bailed out near Yugoslavia. They were found by "Tito's Partisans," a pro-Allied group that hid and helped the men. And within 10 days the entire group was safely back in Italy.

Frank and his crew members enjoyed a brief "R and R" respite. "It was a week on the Isle of Capri," he says. "You ever hear

of the Isle of Capri? There was a famous song about it." He smiles. "I can tell you the words," he says. "Or would you rather have me sing it to you?" He laughs softly, then begins. "It was on the Isle of Capri that I met her, the blue Italian skies above ... As I kissed her sweet hand I could see, she wore a plain golden ring on her finger. It was good-bye to the Isle of Capri." Frank smiles. But only for a moment. For soon it was also good-bye to freedom.

The rescued crew members thought they were headed home. Instead they were soon back on the B-24. "We didn't want to, but what the hell are you gonna say? That's what we signed up for," Frank says.

The bomber flew at 20,000 feet or higher. No pressurized planes back then. It was often 30 or 40 degrees below zero. Frank was a waist gunner. A large gap provided room for his weapon. The cold was



miserable. "Not fun," Frank says. The men persevered. But 10 successful missions later, the B-24 crew was in trouble again. It was their 24th mission. "We were over Vienna, Austria, bombing some ball-bearing plants," Frank says. The flak was horrendous. "We knew we weren't going to make it back," Frank says. "We thought we might make it to the Mediterranean Sea, but we thought 'why take a chance on ditching?' We'd bailed out before and been OK." So they parachuted out.

CONTINUED...

"I recall it was a very empty feeling when you hit the ground," he says. "You're down in the damn mountains and you don't see a soul. You don't even know what country you're in, really." They had bailed out over what they thought was an area held by Tito's Partisans. "But it wasn't," Frank says.

The Germans incarcerated the men in a Budapest jail. The SS took all their dog tags and for the next nine months the men were prisoners of war. Six months were spent at Stalag Luft IV in Poland. "Then the Russians started making their drive to Berlin," Frank says. "So they put us on the march. And we marched for 600 miles." Frank falls silent.

Much of the march was during a frigid winter. "We didn't sleep in any goddam motels, I'll tell you that," Frank says. "We slept outside on the ground. We didn't have our clothes off for 80-some days. Can you imagine? The lice ..." Frank's eyes well with tears. He shakes his head and takes another sip from his glass of milk. For several minutes, he says nothing.

Life as a POW is unimaginable for many Americans today. "I got one letter in those months I was in the prison camp," Frank says. "It was from my brother-in-law writing to tell me about my family." The Red Cross delivered the letters. Any responses from the POWs were censored by the Germans. "That's just the way it was," Frank says. He weighed 185 pounds as a 17-year-old football player at Great Falls High. He estimates he was 130 or 140 after months as a POW. "We had potatoes, mostly. And I think soups," Frank says. "But mostly potatoes. In the camp the Red Cross would send us parcels. They were very good but we didn't get very many. We split it between four guys."

The days were long. What kept him going? "I just kept thinking that I wanted to get home to my family," he says. "What were my sisters, my brothers-in-law and my mother doing? My mother was alone. I worried about her." He finishes his cookie. "I don't like to waste food," he says. "You see that garbage can over there? There was a time when I'd give my right arm for what is in that garbage." He looks up

for a moment. "But we wanted to live. So you think about girls," he says. Then he smiles a bit. "But not when you're hungry," he says. "When you're hungry you think about nothing but food. And the hell with the girls. But otherwise you thought about girls." And now his 93-year-old eyes twinkle. "I still do to this day," he grins.



Frank Jasicko

Does hatred for the enemy linger?

Frank says revenge was not a motivation, though treatment from his captors was not altogether kind. Frank recalls a guard using a wooden slat to whack the POWs at times. Sometimes for no apparent reason "I got hit a few times," Frank says. That wasn't all. "On the march if you didn't do exactly what they wanted you to do, they had dogs (German shepherds) and they'd sic 'em on you. And they didn't understand English, the dogs didn't." Thoughts of revenge, though? No. "That wasn't what we were thinking about when we got freed," he says. "We thought, Geez, I'm going home." Did he ever think of escape? "Well, that was your duty. Supposedly," Frank says. "But where in the hell are you going to escape to? You're in Germany and can't speak German. And all the farmers are German." He shakes his head.

Finally, mercifully, with the Germans increasingly on the run, the POWs were left unguarded. A Canadian tank outfit came upon the group. "And things got a lot better," Frank says. Not soon thereafter, the war was over. "That was a happy day," Frank says. "We raised some hell then, you better believe it."

Frank married Fran in 1948. In Great Falls. They had two children. There are several grandchildren and great-grandchildren in the family. "My kids are all retired," he says with a small smile. "And if you don't think that makes you feel old ..."

Frank worked as a bookkeeper, and then as a construction contractor. He enjoyed Great Falls. And he has no regrets about enlisting in the Army Air Corps. "It was kind of expected," he said of the military service. "If I didn't enlist they would have taken me (via the draft) and I'd maybe met up with a different fate. You went with the idea that you could get killed, that's for sure. But you just had to go with it. "When you're 18 you think you've got the world by the tail."

Having lost his father as a young boy, with a family that included his mother and several sisters, Frank grew up quickly. "I had to go to work," Frank says. "And be the man of the house." The leadership qualities forged from that difficult upbringing served him well when he ejected from the B-24. "Nothing really bothered me," he says. "I figured I could do this and I could do that." He pauses.

"I'm satisfied with my life," he says. "I met all the challenges I could and I'm still here."

Holidays such as Memorial Day or Veterans Day hold special meaning for Frank. But there is no celebration. "I have a few people who call me and wish me Happy Veterans Day," he says. Then Frank, who lost his wife Fran in 2005, pauses once more. "It was a long time ago," he says. "I'm still trying to forget it. But yes, every once in a while I think about it. When all my crew members were still living we had reunions. But now I'm the only one left. And that's why I feel like I should talk about it a little bit. For them." He wipes his eyes. "I'll tell you, when you were over a target and flak was coming up, boy you would pray," he says. "Just pleading with the Lord to spare you one more day." He bites his lip hard.

"I've had a good life," he says. "I can't complain. I just wonder why I'm still here."

— Scott Mansch, *Great Falls Tribune*

FOLDED WINGS



BRAUD, HENRY, CHARLES

November 17, 1924 - November 20, 2018.

Charles Henry Braud (Bubba) passed away on

November 20, 2018 at the age of 94. He was born in Thibodaux, La. on November 17, 1924. Bubba graduated in 1942 from Thibodaux College where he played football and was named as a tackle for the All State team in 1941. In 1943, he enlisted for service in WWII. He served with the 781st Bomb Squadron at the Pantanella Air Base in Italy.

Following the war, Bubba married the love of his life, Mamie Rita Blanchard of Labadieville in 1950. Bubba was employed by Humble Oil (now Exxon) where he worked in various locations throughout the southern states for over 34 years.

Bubba always looked forward to attending the 781st Bomb Squadron Reunion held in different parts of the country. He and various members of his family attended these reunions since 1986. In the earlier years, he drove his travel trailer with Mamie, at times expertly maneuvering mountainous roads across the country from coast to coast. His father had worked at an automobile dealership, and taught him to drive when he was only 10 years old.

In his spare time, Bubba enjoyed using his talents in his woodworking shop making furniture and picture frames for Mamie's artwork. Following his retirement from Exxon, he and Mamie participated in many regional arts and crafts festivals - Mamie displaying her paintings and Bubba's woodwork. His grandchildren have enjoyed items built just for them - rocking horses, child-size tables, chairs, stools, and swings.

Bubba was a Eucharistic minister at St. Genevieve Church for many years and in later years served as an usher. He was an active member of the Knights of Columbus and was Grand Knight in 1989. He enjoyed his volunteer work making gumbo and working the Bingo games. In addition, he was a member of the Fourth Degree Council #376 and the Knights of Columbus honored him with numerous awards.

Survived by his wife, Mamie Rita Blanchard Braud of 68 years, his four sons, Charles Henry Braud, Jr (Janie) of Baton Rouge, James Edward Braud (Theresa) of Slidell, Thomas Leo Braud (Sara) of Houston, and Robert Anthony Braud of Labadieville.

Bubba's love of family and church was exemplified throughout his life. He carried a copy of a Prayer to Saint Pio of Pietrelcina and made copies to give all his children and grandchildren. Bubba was blessed with a long and fruitful life. "Well done good and faithful servant" Matthew 25:23

DURCKEL, PAUL

October 13, 2013.

ERWIN, HARVEY

September 23, 2017.



JONES, WINSON

November 5, 1925 - July 9, 2018.

We are listing Winson Jones in our Folded Wings. We give him credit for us joining the Bomb

Groups Joint Reunions. He is the one that called us at our hotel in Dover, DE to invite us to the reunion in Kansas City, MO. We are grateful to Winson. We were about to discontinue reunions if it had not been for his call.

Winson Jones, a prominent Northwest real estate investment broker, died July 9, 2018, due to cancer. Winson was born November 5, 1925 at Chalmers, Indiana. In 1943 he enlisted in the United States Army Air Force and served as a top-turret gunner on a B-24 Liberator Bomber during World War II. Following training, mostly at the age of 18, he flew 35 missions over Europe with the 451st Bomb Group (15th Air Force) operating from a base in Southern Italy. On his very first mission his Bomb Group encountered heavy opposition from German fighter planes, resulting in the loss of 9 of the 27 bombers participating. His Bomb Group received the Presidential Unit Citation for this mission. During his war service, his Bomb Crew survived a forced landing off Yugoslavia and hundreds of flak holes in its plane. While there were two casualties, all crew members survived. Winson always

considered this experience to be the most difficult challenge of his lifetime, coupled with the feeling that he subsequently was more or less living on borrowed time. He served as Manager for four National Reunions of the 451st Bomb Group.



SCALESE, THOMAS

May 10, 1924 - July 1, 2018.

Thomas Scalese Sr., 94, of Sinking Spring, passed away July 1, 2018. He was the beloved husband of Minerva E. (Miller) Scalese, with whom he

celebrated 67 years of marriage.

Born in Kent, OH. Tom was a 1942 graduate of Wilson High School. In addition to his wife, he is also survived by his two children, Thomas Jr., husband of Mary Scalese, Sinking Spring, and Mary A. Staley, wife of Troy Denzer. He is also survived by his two grandchildren, Kimberly A. Staley and Emma L. Scalese.

He was a United States Air Force veteran serving during World War II. He was shot down over the Ploesti Oil Fields in Romania on his first mission age of 19. After bailing out at 25,000 feet in 20 degrees below zero weather, with having had no instructions on how to use a parachute, he encountered several villagers who came after him with pitchforks and shovels. When they discovered he was an "Americano" they thought he was there to liberate them from the Germans. He was then discovered by the Germans and was held as a prisoner of war for three months.

Tom was employed by Penn Optical as a tool room foreman for 40 years, until his retirement in 1986. He was an avid bowler until the age of 90 averaging in the 170s. He also enjoyed fishing, pinochle, bocce, crossword and jig saw puzzles. Tom loved making all around him laugh and smile with his stories.

Our thoughts and prayers are with all our fallen comrades who have found everlasting peace. You have served your country well. We will remember you forever.



781st "PANTANELLA NEWS"

Orren Lee, President
4700 S. Cliff Ave, #308
Sioux Falls, SD 57103



PANTANELLA NEWS

