

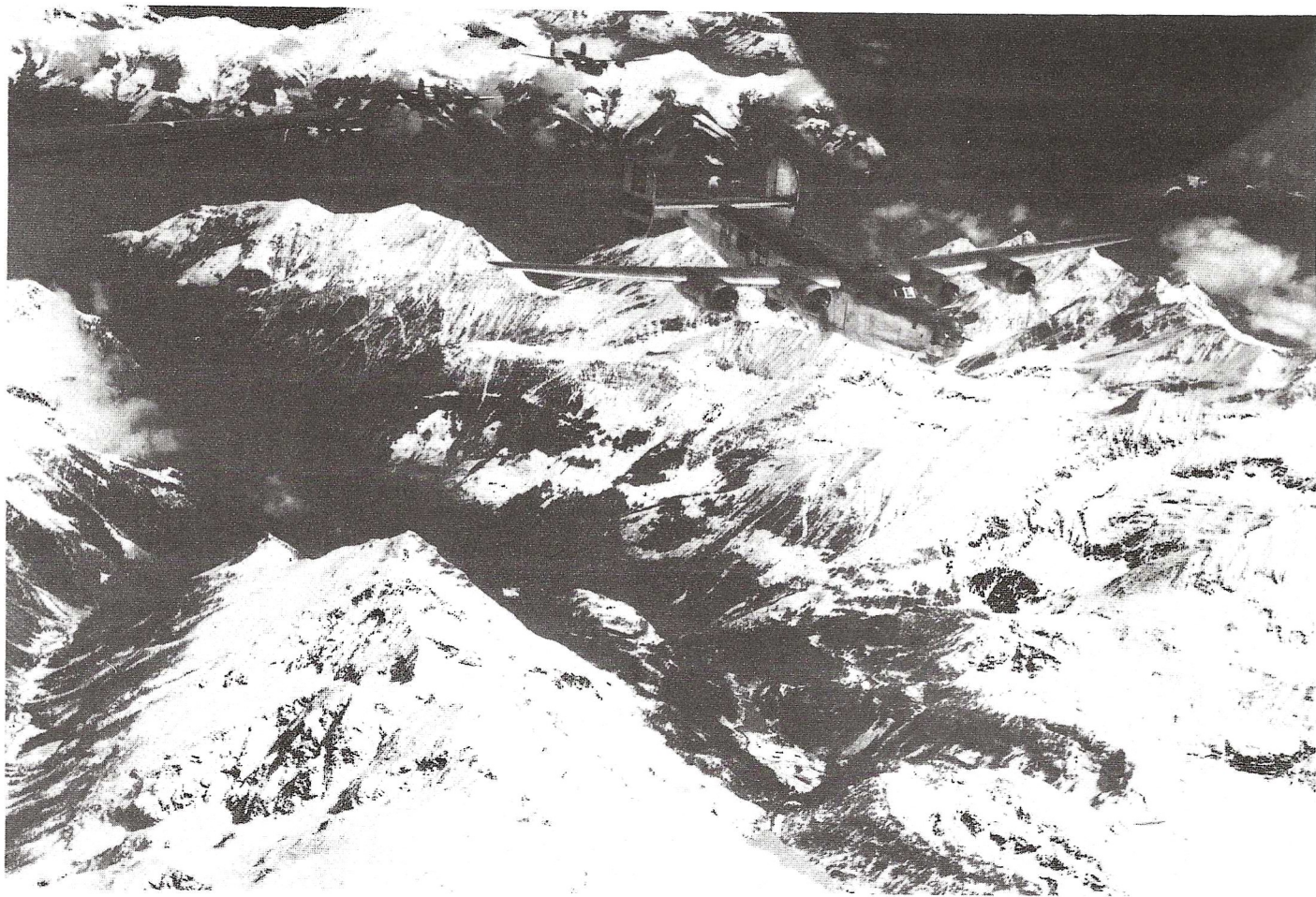
781st BOMBARDMENT SQUADRON (H) AAF

465th Bomb Group (H)

Second Reunion

Dayton, Ohio
17 to 20 September 1987





In the Beginning —

The following background is repeated from the 1986 Reunion Booklet for those who have no copy of that document.

This is the story of the first reunion of the 781st Bombardment Squadron (H) AAF, held at Colorado Springs, Colorado on 11-15 September 1986.

But the story did not begin at Colorado Springs. It began when the 465th Bombardment Group (H), with its four Squadrons, was activated on 1 August 1943, at Alamogordo, New Mexico on General Order Number 78, Second Air Force, dated 29 May 1943.

And more particularly on 16 August 1943, when the first cadre personnel were assigned to the 781st Bombardment Squadron (H) AAF, at Davis-Monthan Field near Tucson, Arizona.

The unit trained at Pinecastle, Florida; Camp Kearns, Utah; McCook, Nebraska; and Tunis, Tunisia prior to beginning combat operations at Pantanella Army Air Base near Canosa in the Ofanto River valley of south central Italy.

The first combat mission of the Squadron was flown to Podgorica, Yugoslavia on 5 May 1944. And the last, number 191, was flown to North Italy on 26 April 1945.

Germany surrendered on 7 May, the war in Europe was finished and the Squadron's mission was completed. The air crews flew all of our planes from Pantanella on 23 and 24 May, and a few ground personnel were transferred to other units.

The remaining members left on 25 May en route to Port of Spain, Trinidad where the Squadron was broken up to provide support for the Air Transport command, returning U. S. troops from Europe. As of 2 July 1945, 2 of-

ficers and 44 enlisted men remained. The unit was officially inactivated effective 31 July 1945, under authority of General Order Number 10, Hq. 1107 AAFBU, dated 29 July 1945.

Almost forty years passed and 6 June 1984 marked the 40th anniversary of D Day in Europe. This landmark date generated considerable publicity and started many veterans reminiscing about their wartime associations.



Among these veterans was James C. Atthoff, a former pilot in the 781st Squadron. Jim had maintained contact over the years with Ernie Van Asperen and Ben Donahue, also former 781st Bomb Squadron pilots, and he

began to wonder about his former crew members and where they might be and what they had been doing.

And he began to telephone and write to their wartime addresses and he searched and he searched and he searched and he finally found two of them, Hugh Cooper, Bombardier and Jim Oursler, Engineer. His success in finding these members from his own crew led him to a decision to broaden his search and to start

an organization made up of all members of the 781st Squadron.

Jim was aware that the 783rd the 465th Bomb Group already organization. He knew several of and had flown with some of them.

In August of 1985, the 783rd Ass its second reunion, at Dayton, C was in 1983) and Jim was invit which he did - hoping to learn fi periences. On the second day of





the group went to Wright- Patterson Field to visit the Air Force Museum and one of the attractions was a walk through an old B-24.

As he waited to go through the plane, Jim began chatting with the man standing next in line, exchanging information about wartime assignments. This man turned out to be James Marcel Snyder, a mickey operator (radar navigator) who also had been a member of the 781st Bomb Squadron. And there the 781st Bomb Squadron Association was born.

Jim assumed responsibility for locating members in the western half of the United States and Marcel took on the eastern half.

When he returned home, Jim dug out an old yellowed, dog-eared 1985 roster of 781st officers with wartime addresses and he began telephoning and writing letters. He found an astounding 35% of those he tried to contact and an enormously enthusiastic response.

By October he had located 50 men and he started publishing the Newsletter, which he optimistically and typically labeled, "Number One". And in that Newsletter he already was proposing a 781st Squadron reunion to be held at Colorado Springs in September of 1986, anticipating perhaps something over 100 members plus wives might attend.

Thus was the beginning of the 781st Bomb Squadron Association and its First Reunion.