



344TH BOMB GROUP ASSOCIATION

EDWARD HORN - PRESIDENT 561-626-2497

46 BALFOUR ROAD EAST * PALM BEACH GARDENS, FL 33418

www.344bg-b26.org b26_344thbg@hotmail.com

CHRISTOPHER HORN - SECRETARY/TREASURER

LAMBERT AUSTIN - EDITOR EMERITUS



MILK RUN

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER of the 344TH BOMB GROUP ASSOCIATION

Volume XX, No. 1

June 2010

LAMBERT AUSTIN – GOOD BYE OLD FRIEND, AND THANKS

Lambert Austin, for years acting as the glue to keep the 344th together by being the Secretary, Treasurer, and Milk Run Editor, passed away on the 10th of March, 2010. He was born in Steubenville, NY, on December 31, 1921, to Homer Austin and Katherine Fay Austin. After graduation from high school in New York, he joined the Army Air Force in the ETO. He served with the 344th Bomb Group, 497th Bomb Squadron, as a Martin B-26 crew member, and completed his 65 missions, earning two Purple Heart Medals in the process.



Lambert is predeceased by his brother, William Austin; sister, Mary Katherine Palmer; son, Glenn M. Austin Sr.; and daughter, Phyllis M. Austin. He is survived by his wife of 66 years, Eva Marie; son David Austin; son Lambert D. Austin and his wife, Faith; daughter Daphne Austin Dyer and her husband, Charles; 10 grandchildren, 6 great-grandchildren, and numerous nieces and nephews. His final resting place in Glenwood Cemetery, Houston, Texas.

2010 REUNION INFO INSIDE – NORFOLK, VA SEPTEMBER 22ND to 25TH

Norman Polk's 344th BG / 497th BS War Diary – February 14, 1945

February 14, 1945, a Ninth Air Force Bomber Command directive ordered the 344th BG of the 99th Bombardment Wing to Participate in a bombing raid over Engers, Germany. The target was a bridge spanning the Rhine River over which the Germans were supplying their front line troops.

On that date, the ground forces were fighting on a line some 30 miles west of the Rhine River. The briefing was held at 12 noon where we learned that Lt. Jones and his crew were to fly the lead position of the low flight in the third box. The bomb load consisted of four 1000 lb. General Purpose bombs with instantaneous fuses in both nose and tail.

We were expecting the worst as we left that briefing room. We all looked around as if it were to our last time. There was an unusual quietness as we neared our plane. Each man went about his duties in much the same way, but the usual joking was absent as we waited for takeoff time. The reason for this tenseness I can't explain. It wasn't that we hadn't been on rough missions before, and we had bombed targets in the Ruhr before, and we'd crossed the Rhine at

some of its hottest spots.

The flak suits were checked. Dudley, the tail-gunner, had checked all the machine guns. Meyers, the engineer and top-turret gunner, had checked our gas supply and had taken care of his other duties. Knight, the navigator, was in the radio room plotting the course. O'Brian, the bombardier, and Light, the co-pilot, were in their respective positions. After I'd finished checking the radio equipment and coding instructions, I started for my position at the waist gunner's station. Jones, the pilot, tapped me on the shoulder: "It won't be bad Polk", he said. I couldn't find an answer, so I just nodded.

In five or ten minutes our engines were checked and we were set to go. Dudley and I always made a habit of shaking hands just before we started down the runway. I could tell from his eyes that he knew that something was to happen.

At 2:45 pm we had crossed the bomb line and started for the Initial Point. We hadn't experienced a burst of flak until we made a left turn at the I.P. some five minutes south of the target. We were flying straight up the middle of the Rhine as all hell broke loose. In all my previous 47 missions, I'd never seen flak so intense and so accurate. Our left wing plane received a direct hit and went down in flames, then the number 5 plane followed by the right wing plane. Half of our flight was gone and we had at least two minutes left before our bomb release. By this time our waist and tail were perforated with holes ranging in size from a penny to 3 inches in diameter. The interphone silence was broken by O'Brian's voice informing Jones we had just seconds to go before bomb release. At that instant, I felt a stunning blow on the back of my head. Unconsciously, I raised my hand to my helmet to discover a dent of at four inches wide. Directly above my head just aft of the turret was a hole in the skin of the plane just about that same size. Bringing me back to the present, O'Brian's voice exclaimed: "Bombs away!" Immediately, Jones racked the ship on its left side beginning our evasive action – but not soon enough. A muffled explosion and a sudden jar and I saw our left wing go by the waist window in flames. It was missing up to the engine nacelle.

I knew there was no time to take my flak suit off or even pull the guns free of the window. Fortunately, I always fastened the one side of my parachute pack to my harness when I got scared, and I don't mind telling anyone I was plenty scared. There was only one thing to do – take that one chance in a thousand that I could squeeze through as I wore my flak suit, helmet, and my pack still only half fastened. Luckily, I could force my head and shoulders out before the plane started spinning. I was pinned there while the flames from the engine licked my face. The plane fell some 5000 feet. Only by an act of God was I flung free some 9000 feet above the ground.

The horizontal stabilizer clipped me on the calf of my leg just as I fell off to the side. Seconds later, the plane I was just in blew into a thousand pieces. I felt positive that I was the only one alive out of an original seven crew members.

Evidently my shrouds were torn loose as I cleared the plane, because my pack was floating above me about six feet. I managed to pull the pack down to me and pulled the rip cord. It opened immediately with a tremendous jerk. As I viewed the formation many miles up ahead, I could see that not a plane remained of our original flight of four, and our squadron of 48 was decimated.

Editor's note: Norman Polk passed away 15 Sept, 2009. He was the only survivor of his plane's crew. 4 other planes were shot down on that mission: Capt. Brennan's plane (495th), Lt. Holm's plane (496th), Lt. Nelson's plane (497th), and Lt. Meppen's plane (497th).

A Close Call, by Jack K. Havener (Pilot, 497th)

Uncle Sam always wanted value for his dollar and this was certainly applied to the payloads of World War II bombers. A combat overload was more the rule than the exception, especially with the B-26s, which we regularly flew off at 40,000 pounds gross, when the manufacturer's maximum recommendation was 37,000 pounds. Every bomber pilot's dread was the loss of an engine on or soon after takeoff. We B-26 men were almost conditioned into believing that if this happened, a crash was inevitable. Confidence was maintained because you

hoped it only happened to the other guy. This time it didn't – it happened to me.

On Sept. 12, 1944, our 344th Bomb Group was briefed to bomb strong points at Forêt de Have near Nancy, France. I was flying first pilot in *Johnny Come Lately* with 1st Lt. William R. Hunter as my co-pilot. I had flown co-pilot for Hunter a few days previous in his regular lead ship and now he was flying "co" for me (but not in my *Terre Haute Tornado*). On those extra missions we normally carried our regular crew with the exception of the bombardier and navigator. Lead bombardiers were zealously relegated to lead missions only, so this routine gave wing position bombardiers a chance for extra missions also. On this one we had Phil Dolce, one of the few remaining sergeant bombardiers, on board. Since we were flying a wing position, we didn't need a navigator.

We had just taken off to the northeast and were about halfway through the first turn to join the balance of the flight on our left, when the right engine started sputtering and losing power. We were only 1,000 feet from the ground and, as we frantically clawed the pedestal controls trying to get some life back into the engine, we realized we had a serious problem. Naturally, we couldn't gain altitude, so we abandoned the attempt to join the flight and turned on the downwind leg of the traffic patten trying to maintain flying speed.

When it was obvious that the engine would not respond, I gave Hunter the order to feather the prop. Although I had trimmed for single-engine operation, we were still losing altitude, so I gave Staff Sgt. John Skowski, our engineer-gunner, the signal to pull the emergency bomb salvo release. He always stood between the two pilots on takeoff to keep an eye on the instruments. He immediately pulled the release to dump the four 1,000 pounders we were carrying, turned around to watch the bomb bay doors open and snap shut after the salvo, and greatly relieved the tension in the cockpit when he yelled, "We got a haystack, Lieutenant!"

Hunter kept calling out airspeed as we continued on the downwind leg and radioed the control tower, informing them of our situation and requesting permission to land immediately. In a very cool tone, the tower operator came back telling us he had a formation still taking off, and could we please hold for a bit until all the ships were off? Hunter and I stared across at one another in disbelief and he replied, "Hell no! We're on one engine just above stalling speed and we're coming in if we have to land on the taxi strip!" His ruddy face turned even redder as he blasted this to the tower in a manner that only Willy could do. There were no further transmissions from either source from then on.

We were so low (no more than 500 feet) that we couldn't see the field to our left, but knew we were on a correct downwind heading and would begin our approach turn when we sighted the St. Giles church steeple at Great Hallingbury a couple of miles off the southwest end of the runway. Then pre-stall vibrations set in and I told Hunter, "We can't make it. Let's land on the RAF fighter field just ahead of us." Before he could answer, the RAF field loomed ahead where tractors were pulling mowing machines across the center of the grass strip. How do you decide what to do in a situation such as this? Sacrifice two lives on the ground in hopes of saving six lives in the aircraft – possibly wiping out the aircraft in the process – or saving two on the ground and trying for the Stanstead runway?

As if reading my thoughts, Hunter said, "We've got to make it! Just keep her from stalling and do a flat pylon turn around the steeple!" I agreed and began a gentle turn to the left with the steeple as my bearing point. Not wanting to lose any more altitude than necessary, I kept the turn very shallow and silently prayed a thanks to Mr. Ranson, my primary flight school instructor, for drilling into me the intricacies of a correct pylon turn. As a result, we rounded out the turn just southwest of the steeple and homed in on it to the northeast, looking for the end of the runway.

It's hard to believe but my top-turret gunner, Staff Sgt. J.E. Smith, who had dropped out of his turret and crawled into the navigator's chair when the engine quit, swore that I lifted the right wing to clear the St. Giles steeple. This done, I had Hunter drop the gear and flaps at the same time and I chopped the throttle over the end of the runway, still managing to unwind the trim and keep her straight. With my preoccupation in winding our lateral trim, I didn't have

time to adjust elevator trim on the roundout (flat as it was), and can thank Hunter for helping me pull back on the control column to keep us from going in too steeply.

Luckily, we had consumed enough time during our slow-flying transit of the traffic pattern to allow the rest of the formation to take off and the runway was clear for landing. Crash trucks, ambulances, and the inevitable Group Commander's jeep raced alongside us as we touched down and braked to a halt about halfway down the strip.

The usual ground-kissing ritual was performed by the entire crew after we exited the aircraft and my right arm was quivering from the crew shaking my hand. Staff Sgt. Raymond C. Sanders, my radio-gunner, said it was the only time he ever kissed a man when he planted a big one on my cheek. Under the circumstances, I didn't mind at all.

Col. R.F.C. Vance's jeep careened up and he uncoiled that big frame and strode over to me. I thought, "Oh, oh, I'm going to catch hell now for aborting." Aborting with questionable cause was a "no, no" in the 344th, and lately there had been some obvious incidents of "featheritis." My emergency was legitimate and I was prepared to tell him so.

I saluted and returning it he asked, "What happened, son?" I related how she'd cut out after takeoff and, despite all action by my co-pilot, we kept losing power so we had to salvo and shut her down. To my surprise, he stuck out that big paw and said, "Congratulations, son. You did a magnificent job of bringing her in and saving the airplane and your crew!" I was almost too taken aback to murmur, "Thank you, sir," as he shook my hand. I stood transfixed as he turned on his heel, climbed back in the jeep, and motioned his driver to move out, yelling to us to all go over to the flight surgeon for a shot of whiskey.

Just at that time, Technical Sgt. J.Q. Grierson, the plane's crew chief and the Master Sgt. line chief arrived and were looking at the suspect engine and giving me jaundiced glances, so I opted to go with the aircraft as it was being towed back to the hardstand to try and find out what had caused the loss of power. Back at the hardstand, as the line chief ran the engine up to full power time and again with no drop in manifold pressure or the faintest hint of a sputter, I had the uneasy feeling that he was thinking, "Well, another pilot with featheritis." The next time he ran her up there was a definite sputtering and loss of manifold pressure. This repeated itself on subsequent run ups and he admitted that there seemed to be fuel starvation.

Further investigation revealed a perforated carburetor diaphragm which prompted a maintenance directive and all engines in the group were checked for this fault. I never did find out how many more were faulty, but I do know they found some on other aircraft and, as a result, all diaphragms were replaced. It was one of those quirks that doesn't show up on a ground check but would only manifest itself under full power load in flight. I was vindicated!

After a meal at the mess, Hunter, an intelligence officer, and I, took off in the *Oxford* *Airspeed* to plot the location of the jettisoned bombs. Re-tracing our previous calamitous flight pattern as best we could, we found that Skowski was right. We had completely demolished a large haystack in a farmer's field but had caused no other damage or injury. Of course, the bombs hadn't been armed so the haystack was clobbered by impact alone. The armament crew retrieved the bombs and our personnel officer made arrangements with the farmer to pay for the damage.

By the time we were ready to take off in the *Oxford*, I had recovered from the shock of the experience but had developed a bad case of the jitters, so had prevailed upon Hunter to fly the *Oxford*. Old steel-nerved Willy rose to the occasion and, as we were starting our left turn after takeoff, I slyly reached over and pulled the right throttle back just enough to create a noticeable loss of rpm, yelling, "Oh no! Not again!" Hunter's startled look changed into a grim as he saw what I was doing and we laughed like idiots, bleeding off plenty of pent-up emotions.

Editors note: Jack Havener was one of the original pilots flying their planes over to England via the southern Atlantic route and completed his 65 missions. He is a published author of a variety of articles and books on the B-26.

V-Mail

Edna M. Christ, 494th – Sent 9th AF Book.

P.H. Faver – Sent bomb damage photos.

Austin Lambert – Sent Pima correspondence.

Jack Havner – Sent several 344th articles.

John H. Eckert – Son of Lt. John Keeler Eckert, pilot of B-26 *Jonara*, KIA 8 March 1944.

James Osgood – Inquiring about his uncle, Sgt. George Osgood, 495th.

Hermine Jacobs – Wife of Lt. Harvey Jacobs, pilot, 497th, originally with the 8th AF.

Rachel Beaird – Granddaughter of Leland "Ed" Embrey, pilot of B-26 *Solly Mill*, 494th.

Karl Bud – son wrote for his father, who was Tail Gunner on the Valkyrie, 57 missions, 497th.

John Lingley – 497th, sorry to miss Colorado Springs, hopes to attend in Norfolk.

Jean Polk – wife of Norman Polk, radio operator of *Shirley Ann*, POW 14 Feb, 1945.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Dues & Donations – Paul W. Conkle (\$100); Francis Lawrenz (100); John Lingley (100); Archie McLachlen (10); Jerry McKinney (25); Edward F. Hillis (25); Rusty (Edward) Miller (50); Henry Albonesi (40); P.H. Faver (25); John H. Eckert (30); Louis Offenberg (50); Larry C. Alberts (25); Robert E. Ahern (40); Anthony Bozich (25). **THANKS TO ALL OF YOU FOR THE SUPPORT OF THE 344TH!**

Beginning Checking Balance = \$4648.96

Ending Checking Balance = \$4672.02

Expenses – \$823.16: Printing and supplies \$426.86 Postage \$58.30 Reunion Advance \$338.00

Income – \$846.22: Dues & Donations \$845.00 Interest \$1.22

LAST FLIGHTS

Edward Miller, 495th, 1966, Whittier, CA

Leo Fenster, 497th, Jan 1999, Los Angeles, CA

Joe Felix, 495th, 2009, Torrance, CA

John Harold Robinson, 496th, 17 June 2009, Surfside Beach, CA – Pilot

Walter Greenawalt, 495th, 17 April 2009, Kutztown, PA

William E. Davis, 495th, 24 May 2009, Marion, KS

Billy G. Nelson, 496th, 17 August 2009, Sun Lakes, AZ

Norman Polk, 497th, 15 September 2009, Orlando, FL

Phyllis Marie Austin (daughter), 497th, 15 January, 2010, Houston, TX

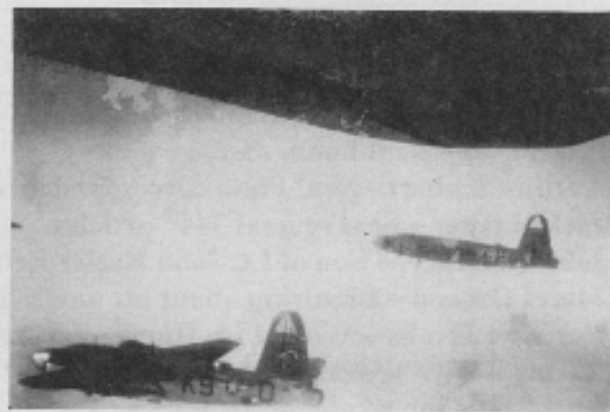
Derwood S. Tubbs, 495th, 4 February 2010, Westfield, PA – Radio-gun on "Sexy Sal", 65 Missions

Lambert Austin, 497th, 10 March 2010, Houston, TX

Jules Theobald, 497th, 15 March 2010, San Antonio, TX

Harry Dalhemimer, 496th, Cortland, NY





344th BGA Reunion - Schedule of Events

Wednesday Sep 22nd

2:00pm Registration/Hospitality Room Opens

**The tours require minimum of 30 participants, fully refundable if minimum number not achieved; within 30 days only refundable if medical emergency; operators not responsible for delay, injury and/or cancel due to mechanical problems and/or "Acts of God" incidents and conditions.*

Thursday Sep 23rd

Norfolk City Highlights Tour

Noon - 4:00 pm \$38 ea.

This tour includes a nice sampling of downtown Norfolk highlights. We will see the inner harbor, travel by the Chrysler art museum, see the Armed Forces War Memorial, a visit to General MacArthur's Memorial, see the historical Ghent district, and visit the Navy Yard where many ships are moored (Includes - Coach, Driver, Guide, Fees, light walking).

Friday Sep 24th

Nautical Museum, Harbor Boat Tour

11:30 - 4:30 pm \$45 ea.

On the tour, we first make a visit to Norfolk's Nautical Museum - there are numerous exhibits depicting the history of ships; your visit also includes being able to board and see the famous battle ship "Wisconsin"; there is a small snack bar in the museum for your convenience; at about 1:30pm we'll make our way only a short way to the Harbor Rover, the excursion ship that takes us about the inner harbor to see many sites - the tour is fully narrated; you will get an excellent view of the Norfolk Navy yard on this tour, there are sodas, water, numerous small snacks available on board (Includes - Motor Coach, Fees, Nautical Museum Boat excursion, Driver, Moderate Walking).

Friday Sep 24th

Special Dinner / Entertainment Evening

6:00 - 9:00 pm \$39 ea.

Tonight you will be attending a special dinner / entertainment event right in our hotel. You will enjoy a pleasant dinner and then a very special musical entertainment experience. We will have a nice style 3 course meal that will be followed by entertainment. It's convenient, and sure to be a fun time for all. (Dinner, Entertainment, right at the Hotel).

Saturday Sep 25th

10:00 am

344th Bomb Group Business Meeting

6:00 pm

Cocktail Hour / Cash Bar

7:00 pm

Farewell Dinner / Entertainment

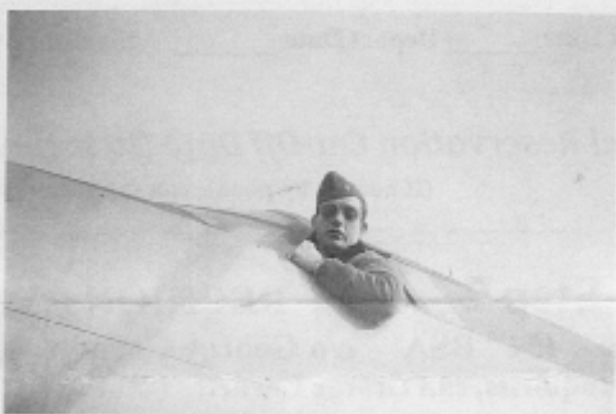
10:00 pm - 12:00 am

Hospitality Room Open

Farewell Dinner

6:00 - 10:00 pm \$37 ea.

Tonight we will have our traditional farewell for this reunion, cocktails, a nice dinner, with a musical background; After a relaxing day around our hotel, we will have this event. The cocktail hour will start at 6:00pm, the dinner (a 3 course meal, duct entrée meal) will be at 7:00pm. A wonderful time to see all your friends, and say farewell till next year, it's sure to be a night to remember, see you there in your dress ups (Dinner event at Hotel).



Step 1 Hotel Accommodation Reservation – Norfolk, VA 2010

(You must make your own reservations for Hotel)

Reunion Dates, Sep 22nd Wed - Sep 25th Sat

454th / Air Force Reunion – 2010

Room Rate Avail, Sep 19 to Sep 27

Check in 3pm, Check out Noon

Rate: \$89 per room + 13% tax + \$1 room tax = \$101.57 / night

Free Parking

The following information will be needed to make a reservation:

Holiday Inn Express

1570 North Military Highway

Norfolk, Virginia 23502

757-213-2231

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Credit Card # _____ Exp _____

Arrival Date _____ Depart Date _____ Signature ** _____

** (if reservation mailed to hotel)

*** Hotel Reservation Cut-Off Date (to secure \$89 Rate) Is August 25, 2010**

(If booked by phone, call the hotel directly (757) 213-2231, ask for reservations)

Step 2 REUNION REGISTRATION

Mail to: 454th BSA c/o George Cornett 8250 E. Obispo Ave Mesa, AZ 85212

Inquiries, call George Cornett (480)-984-3676

Name _____ Group – 344th Sqd _____

Name 2 _____ Name 3 _____

Address _____

Phone # _____ E-mail Address _____

Arrival Date _____ Departure Date _____

344th Bomb Group Assn. 2010 Norfolk, Virginia Program

| | | | | | | |
|--|--------|------|---|-------|---|-------|
| Registration Fee | | \$10 | x | _____ | = | _____ |
| Norfolk City Highlights Tour | Sep 23 | \$38 | x | _____ | = | _____ |
| Nautical Museum, Harbor Boat Tour | Sep 24 | \$45 | x | _____ | = | _____ |
| Special Dinner / Entertainment Evening | Sep 24 | \$39 | x | _____ | = | _____ |
| Farwell Dinner / Evening | Sep 25 | \$37 | x | _____ | = | _____ |

Total _____ = _____

-OR-

All the above

\$169 x _____ = _____

Checks should be made out to: 454th BSA

Note- No Registration Fee for members who only attend the Banquet.

Emergency Contact – Name _____ Phone _____

(Full Refunds, if canceled prior to reunion) **Registration Mail In Deadline – Aug 25, 2010**