

344TH BOMB GROUP ASSOCIATION

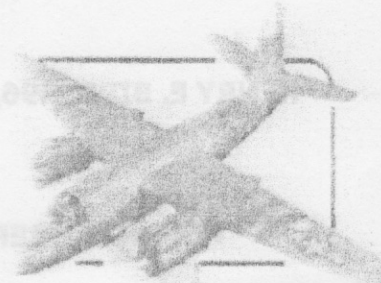
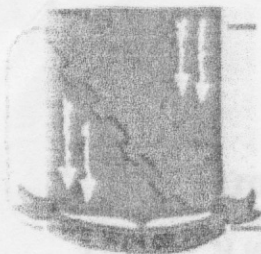
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MILK RUN

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER/344TH BOMB GROUP ASSOCIATION

Volume XXVII, No. 1

June 2016

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Our next reunion will be in Tulsa, Oklahoma, on September 22 – 24, 2016. It is recommended to arrive on Wednesday, September 21, and to depart on Sunday, September 25. I hope to see as many of you as physically able to make the trip. Remember, historical documents and photos are always welcome. I trust that you will enjoy the stories of Remembrance and Honor that are included in this issue. We need to keep the memory alive of the sacrifices made by the members of the 344th Bomb Group during World War II.

LAST FLIGHTS

ANTHONY BOZICH	494	Salt Lake City, UT	12/31/2015	Bombardier "Gravel Gerty"
JOHN BEDDINGFIELD	495	Meridan, MS	2/8/2011	Sgt, Engineer/Gunner
WOODROW JERMAN	497	Burke, VA	11/17/2010	
ELWOOD L. STREBEL	495	Hatings, MN	12/11/2010	
PAUL MERSHON	495	Denver, CO	3/21/2015	Bombardier/Navigator
HARVEY JOHNSON	496	FT. Washington, MD	6/8/2013	Lt. Col. (retired)
GENE WITZ	496	Skokie, IL	1/26/2010	Pilot, 35 Missions
JAMES E. LAWRENCE	495	Arlington, TX	7/8/2013	Pilot
STANLEY CRAWFORD	497	Morgantown, WV	2/16/2003	Sgt.
NATHAN (BOB) ACKERMAN	494	Chevy Chase, MD	1/11/2016	Bombardier, 66 Missions
WILLIAM E. WHITNEY, JR.	496	Quilcene, WA	1/10/2015	Co-Pilot POW Stalag Luft 3
DAVID A. PHILLIPS	495	Pinetops, NC	5/13/2016	Sgt. Mechanic/Gunner

UNABLE TO FORWARD

HOPE DE NEEN 496, Sevierville, TN; NORMAN E. DWIGHT MSC, Turlock, CA; ERNEST MANDEVILLE MSC, Glastonbyrt, CT. If you have any info on these members, please contact us.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

PAUL M. CONKLE 496, Pompano Beach, FL; MRS. JAMES MECUM 497, Galva, IL; JAMES REYNOLDS 497, Tomball, TX; JOSEPH CROSSAN 494, Downington, PA; APRIL AUSTIN MSC, Prairieville, LA.

NEW ARRIVAL

HENRY E. BIRD 496, Downers Grove, IL, Capt., Communications Officer.

FINANCIAL REPORT – current checking account balance: \$8819.33 (6 June 2016)

Dues and Donations: MARK G. KELLER \$200; STEVEN M. GOODSON \$120; LTC JOHN H. ECKERT \$100; SUSAN CARLSON WHEELER \$100; DON KORKOWSKI \$50; TED E. TERRILL \$50; CHUCK CARLLEY \$50; BOB HANES \$40; ALLAN W. ARNESON \$40; SUSAN B. GLEB \$30; CAROL KAY CONDIT \$25; C. JAMES HARDESTY \$25. These members are very special people. Some contribute yearly. Others are first timers. But they are the force that allows the 344th to survive, via the MILKRUN, or the website. THANKS FOR ALLOWING US TO REMEMBER THE 344TH BOMB GROUP.

V-MAIL

CAROL CONDIT – In memory of her father, Donald E. Larson, pilot with 494th, and a friend of Otto Kirpatrick.

JOSEPH CROSSAN – New address, and that only two of his crew remaining from the 494th.

LTC JOHN H. ECKERT – In memory of his father, 1st Lt. John K. Eckert, a pilot with the 494th, KIA on March 8, 1944, and resting in Cambridge American Cemetery.

SUSAN GELB – In memory of Nathan (Bob) Ackerman, a bombardier with the 494th and 66 missions; from the "Cabin John, Maryland, Womens Book Club". His daughter-in-law Ilene Ackerman is a member.

An excerpt from "WALKOUT", by Lt. Col. Henry C. Woodrum, just after bailing out of his plane 42-107608, Y5-T of the 495th, on the May 28th, 1944, mission over Paris. This was their replacement plane after Capt. Lusius Clay belly landed the "Shopworn Angel" on it's thirteenth mission when the gear hung up:

"I pulled too hard on the lines and spilled some air, just missing the chimney. Then, I slammed flat on my back onto the concrete tiles lining the steep roof. Stunned, I began slowly sliding down the steep slope of the roof. The blow of landing knocked my breath away, and even though I clawed feebly for a hold, I kept sliding toward the edge. I saw my chute settle slowly over the chimney behind me just as I dropped over the edge, unable to prevent myself from falling to the ground. The shock I got when the slack in the shroud lines pulled me up about two feet above the ground was tremendous.

As I gasped for air, my hand found the metal disk of the chute release, and I pounded on it violently. As the harness fell away, I fell the last two feet, shrugged out of the Mae West life jacket, and stumbled toward the back of the house away from the street. My groin hurt like hell.

I heard German vehicles stopping out front. After a few steps, the pain in my groin intensified. It hurt like hell, and I wanted to lie down and grab my crotch while I caught my breath. But, as I came around the corner of the house, an old woman moved across the back porch and stopped suddenly, throwing up her hands with a startled look as I appeared. She turned and scurried into the house. I continued across the backyard and stuffed my pistol, still strapped in its holster, into one of the hollow-centered cement blocks stacked there. Our instructions were to ditch sidearms in the event of imminent capture.

I heard German voices shouting out in the street. I saw no place to hide, so I walked on behind the next house, turned the corner, and headed for the sidewalk. I noticed a canvas drop cloth spread on the ground with several cans of paint on it. I picked up a can with a brush in it.

Carrying the bucket, I tried to look casual as I crossed the yard to a low fence. I stepped

over it to join a group of people gathered on the sidewalk and moved to the back of the crowd of people who were intently watching the Germans pile out of their trucks. The Germans were milling around in front of the house where my chute still dangled from the chimney. I stood among the French civilians watching as German soldiers ran through the gate. A portly German officer stood in the backseat of an open staff car, gesturing directions. I was feeling pretty clever when a man moved to my left elbow. He stood there for a moment before turning to give me a full-face stare. "He knows who I am. I wonder what he'll do?"

As he turned back to watch the Germans, he pulled a pack of cigarettes from his pocket and offered me one without turning his head. I glanced quickly at the man, who turned and smiled. I nodded and took a cigarette. He struck a match and gave me a light. Again, I nodded my thanks. I smoked the cigarette and almost choked as I inhaled the strong tobacco.

The chubby German officer stated giving his troops hell. Red faced and screeching, his chest puffed out, and he gasped for breath as he shouted, furious that they hadn't caught me yet.

The Frenchman nudged me with his elbow. He motioned with a sideways nod of his head for me to follow, and we walked pass the car, not six feet behind the German officer's back. When we reached the vacant lot I'd been aiming for, the guy turned and walked along a three-strand barbed wire fence to a spot opposite a bunch of grape vines in full leaf planted in rows running parallel to the fence. Their leaves were bright green in the sunlight.

He pulled me close and mumbled, "Hide." He motioned to the vines. "Hide inna boosh." Then he took the paint bucket and walked away.

Editor's note: Lt. Woodrum remained hidden by the French until the Liberation of Paris. Along with his plane, four other 344th planes were shot down during the morning mission to Paris. One plane (Ed Horn's), was lost on the afternoon mission to Amiens. Four of Lt. Woodrum's crew would become POWs. The tail-gunner was KIA.

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LIVING CONDITIONS AT THE THREE BASES IN EUROPE, by Emlen L. Martin, co-pilot, 496th.

Our living conditions, while spartan, were never too bad and I was always thankful that I wasn't in the infantry. In England, the versatile Quonset huts served many purposes and proved adequate shelter. After moving to the Vexin region of France (northwest of Paris) in September 1944, some of us in the 496th managed to make use of a long, single story wooden structure for living quarters. It was divided into a series of rooms off a hallway accommodating two to eight individuals in double bunks. The entire structure backed on an artificial embankment that protected us from wind and made it more difficult to spot from the air. Coal and wood from the local area fed stoves in each of the rooms. We were quite comfortable through the harsh winter of 1944. This airfield near Cormeilles en Vexin had been a German base and an earlier target for our bomb group. Our building was about the only one left more or less intact. It was interesting that the airfield was well camouflaged with fake houses scattered about to make the place appear from the air to be a village. (photo, Jack Havener showing off his Stansted bunk)



Our group later moved to an airfield outside of Florennes, Belgium. While we initially were in tents, about a dozen of us set out to create better accommodations. Building materials were gotten primarily from derelict structures on the airfield, and soon we were housed in a three room architectural wonder! There were two sleeping rooms with built-in bunks, each housing six to eight individuals on either side of the central lounge area. There was no running water, of course, but we did manage to string power to our new quarters. The squadron supply officer was among those in the group, and his help was extremely valuable in acquiring materials and tools for this project.

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In a past issue, we covered an incident of a B-26 Marauder appearing to be taking off of the deck of a Japanese carrier during the Battle of Midway. But, we haven't covered whether a Marauder can act as a life raft. Here is John Guiher's account of his rafting experience after a B-26 crash and survival at sea, while on their way to Ascension Island in May of 1943, while flying the Southern Route to England:

"The pilot said, "Here we go!", so I pulled the handle release to spring the raft door free (while I held on to a hand grip with the other hand). When I heard the plane beginning to hit the water and the water rushing in, I pulled the raft release handle all the way to release the raft. The moment the plane began hitting the water I could hear the crashing and the water beginning to rush in – seconds passed, I never knew how many – that was it – sitting with my back toward the instrument panel and pedestal, hitting my head and shoulder and tearing my shirt because my one handed grip was not strong enough to withstand the force created by the crash. (I thought this would be a smooth belly landing. This was NOT good thinking).

From the impact of the crash I must have been temporarily knocked out. Finally, when I was aware of what was going on, I found myself in this dark hole or compartment and knowing I was under water, I knew I would have to get to the surface pretty soon or I would drown. I didn't panic, but started getting my wits together. First, I was alone in this dark chamber (navigator and radio compartment) and it was filled with water and I wasn't sure how many fathoms deep. Then I spotted this round hole where the light could be seen on the outside. I thought this to be the navigator's hatch and I started moving toward it. However, something had me blocked and I couldn't get to the opening, but I kept my eye glued to the opening as I ducked under the debris trying to get there.

Finally, I reached the opening and worked my way through. Once outside, I pulled one of my Mae West cylinders to inflate half of it and the other I would save for an emergency. Then I started swimming for the bright surface above. Between the Mae West pulling me upward and my swimming, it felt like I was really zooming up a ladder toward the sky.

I remember breaking the water and popping up in the air above my knees. Everyone cheered. Co-pilot Lt. John R. Stokes has told me that before I surfaced they had been crying because they didn't think I had survived the crash landing. Pilot Capt. Cletus Wray was on the undertow from the plane as it sank. The radioman, Pvt. Harry C. August, was swimming and floating nearby.

Through all of the debris was saw the aeroplane come floating to just beneath the surface before it rolled to one side and a wing tip surfaced, expelling the trapped air before sinking out of sight.

We waved good-bye to Lt. Johnson and his crew flying above us, and that they had slowed down and kept with us until we had all climbed aboard the raft before they departed for their destination – Ascension Island.

Editor's note: The crew was on the raft for 3 days before 10 ATC planes (C-47's) finally spotted them. This was after waves and storms and multiple capsizings, as well as one gull landing on Lt. Guiher's head. The next morning, they were picked up by the light cruiser U.S.S. Marblehead, which took them to Natal, Brazil, and then a flight back to Homestead, Florida, and eventual reassignment to new crews with the 344th.

+++++REUNION REGISTRATION 2016 – TULSA, OK.+++++

COMPLETE AND MAIL TO: GEORGE CORNETT

8250 EAST OBISPO AVENUE, MESA, AZ 85212

QUESTIONS: GEORGE CORNETT 480-577-6299 or CHRIS HORN 561-818-8811

PART A) Name _____ Bomb Grp – 344th Sqd _____

Address _____

Address _____ Phone _____

Guests _____

Arrival Date: _____ Departure Date: _____

Unit Registration Fee (Hospitality Room) \$10 _____

City Tour and Air Museum (1 – 5 pm) Thurs, Sept 22 \$39 _____

Claremore Tour/Roy Rogers Museum (12 – 6 pm) Fri, Sept 23 \$43 _____

Special Entertainment Dinner Friday Evening, Sept 23 \$39 _____

Farewell Dinner Event Saturday Evening, Sept 24 \$39 _____

(unit registration fee waived if only attending Farwell Dinner)

All events included with Registration Fee of \$170 each

Total Attendees # _____ X \$ _____ = Total Due \$ _____

Make checks payable to 454th BSA. (full refunds if cancelled prior to Reunion)

Emergency Contact Name and Number _____

NOTE: MAIL THE REUNION REGISTRATION NO LATER THAN AUGUST 26TH.

Part B) HOTEL RESERVATIONS – PLEASE MAKE YOUR OWN RESERVATIONS

MAIN DATES: Sept 21 Wednesday to Sept 24 Saturday (4 nights)

DOUBLETREE, WARREN PLACE HOTEL 918-495-1000 or 918-497-2183 for special needs.
Reservations: 800-801-1317, 1, 1, then *.

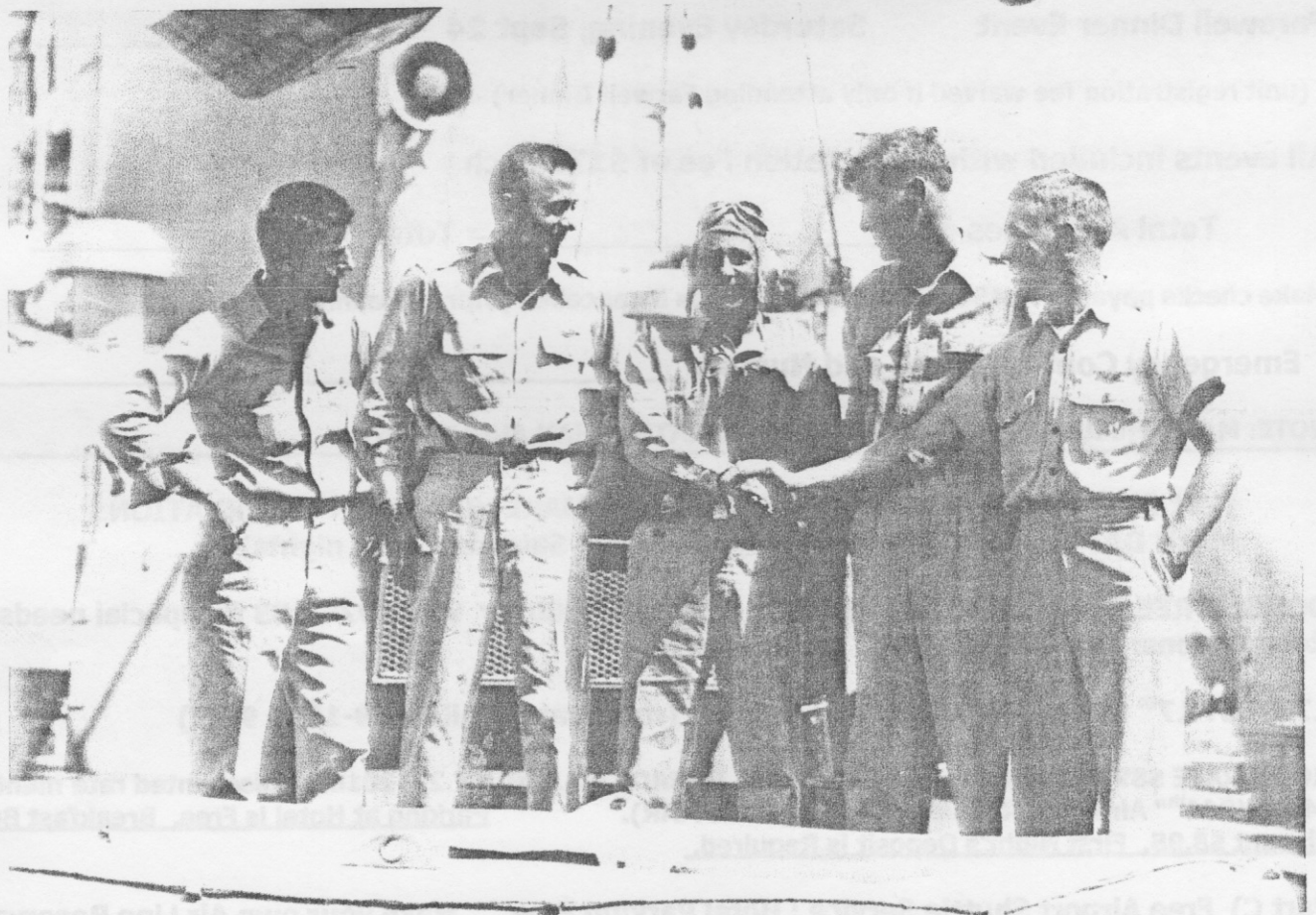
17 WEST 17th STREET TULSA, OK 74119 (room rate available 9-18 to 9-27)

ROOM RATE \$89 PER NIGHT + 13.5% Taxes, IF MADE BY AUGUST 29, 2016 For discounted rate mention "454th/344th" Air Force Reunion (Booking Code MAR). Parking at Hotel is Free. Breakfast Buffet discount \$8.95. First Night's Deposit is Required.

Part C) Free Airport Shuttle Service ; Hotel Parking Free. Make your own Air Line Reservations.



John Guiber's Rafting Experience after a B-26 Crash and Survival at Sea



John Guiber's rescue at sea.

Left to right: Pvt. Harry C. August, Radioman; Lt. John R. Stokes, Copilot; P. A. Gamach, C.A.P., USN;