

# POOP from Group



791st



790th



789th



788th

Newsletter of the 467th Bomb Group Association

August 1, 2014



Frank Prokop, honored at Memorial Day Parade, Dearborn, Michigan, May 2013

## Frank P. Prokop, 467th BG Pilot and POW

\*\*\* Fascinating account of the fateful first \*\*\*

**Berlin Mission, April 29th 1944, and the story of one of three crews who failed to make it back.**

Frank's first-hand account and surprising recent German discoveries are featured, Page 8

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# President's Message

*By Brian Mahoney*

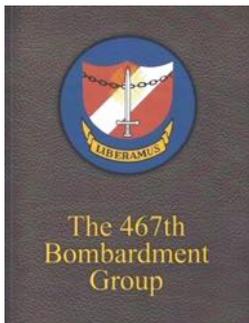
Many have responded with Mail Fund contributions, for which we are extremely thankful. We would still encourage others, especially if you receive the POOP via US mail, or would like to help us subsidize it going out to veterans and widows. It is of course our traditional main expense. A few have been generous with donations in memory of veterans recently lost, so there is a sadness mixed in with this.

Your Directors and officers are now looking a little further out with strategic planning. We may tap some of you formally or informally in the coming months for your views on what we should be at this time in our organizational lifecycle... for now, we are looking forward to another joint reunion in Kansas City, MO, between mid-April and late May, 2015, date soon to be determined.

Our group has stepped up to an equal role in the planning, in a joint committee that gives the 492nd's Fran Gramberg a well earned break. She and Norma Beasley before her set a high bar, which the joint committee members all bear in mind! Please watch our website for final date and hotel information by mid August, and then mark your calendar! Ann Pooch and Jay Shower have been reaching out to Texas and Kansas 467th BGA folks, and may widen the net further, hoping we can bring some back to more active status via real fun in KC, MO. So far, they have had encouraging results and rekindled a handful of connections. Thanks!

Cindy Stevens has been giving our webpage (<http://www.467bg.com>) a good deal of needed care and updating, and I commend you to 'come back' or bookmark it for the first time, if you want to see a refreshed outline of the Association and stay in touch. Nice work, much appreciated!

Kevin and Kelli Coolidge, as a long sustained labor of love, harvested quality scans of many of our veterans' papers, diaries, photographs, and official group papers, as any who attended conventions from 1995 onward will recall. The current board asked whether the Association might have access or even stewardship of the very considerable and priceless collection, and we are delighted—but not surprised—at their exceedingly generous reply. It is my honor to announce that the Association



The 467th BG Association is delighted to offer a Softback limited edition of the original 1947 Allan Healy "467th BG History". This fifth and final edition has text reformatting and photographic restoration by Colin LaRussa, also a fully revised and comprehensive Addendum. Price \$50 + \$5 shipping - payment via check or PayPal

Available from David LaRussa,  
8570 N. Mulberry Dr., TUCSON, AZ 85704  
TEL - (520) 322-9827 [alarussa7@msn.com](mailto:alarussa7@msn.com)

# President's Message Continued

will be caring for the **Lt. Myles Coolidge Memorial 467th BG Archive**, in both electronic and 'hard copy' collections. Our talented Editor and hard working director Andy Wilkinson, with his long 467th association, has the right perspective on this: "Without their efforts at reunions, numerous trips to The National Archives at College Park, and thousands of hours spent collating all this material, we wouldn't today have the means to understand the history and to reference facts with anecdotes and memories. It is largely through them we can tell the 467th Story and continue to probe deeper into the minutiae of the Rackheath experience." We will work closely with them in the coming handovers and continue to solicit their guidance on best practices and occasional research puzzles and matters of historical interpretation. That, and these two know how to have a lot of fun!

We are encouraged by many different efforts and contributions, and want you to work with us to 'Keep the candle lit.' May this find you well and enjoying every day.

- Brian Mahoney [BriCamera@mindspring.com](mailto:BriCamera@mindspring.com)

## 467th BG Association Attendees at our joint 2014 New Orleans Convention

Valerie Corvino  
**Norman Felbinger**  
 Mary & Norma Felbinger  
**Ernie Haar (492nd & 467th)**  
 Peter Horne  
 Tom Johnson  
 Maggie Mahoney  
**Jim Sherrard**  
 Beth Sherrard Brode  
 Jay Shower & Ann Pooch  
 Cindy Stevens  
 Mary Unthank  
 Andy & Tom Wilkinson  
**Joseph Zbikowski**  
 Shirley Lowe

### Veterans in Bold



467th veteran Jim Sherrard in New Orleans

## Folded Wings

**Stanley T. Bekeritis** - 790th Admin 2012 March  
**Martin Frank Bezon** - H2X Oper. 791st 2012 April  
**Charles E. Deardorff** - Pilot 790th 2012  
**Isaac W. Fesmire** - Aircrew 790th 2014 April  
**Edward Hooton Jr.** - Asst. Ops. Off. 789th 2013 Sept.  
**Col. James D. Hudson** - Pilot 788th/791st 2013 March  
**James "Jim" O. King** - Navigator 2013 July  
**Virgel W. Miller** - Aircrew 789th 2014 April  
**Vernon W. Rigsbee** - Original 791st Pilot 2008 Dec.  
**Edwin F. Rowehl** 2007 Sept.  
**William "Bill" P. Scharrschmidt** - Bombardier  
 788th/791st 2014 April  
**Richard K. Sutton** - Aircrew 790th 2012 March  
**"Jack" E. Thompson** - Orig. 790th Pilot 2014 April

Please send news of "Folded Wings" also Obituaries to 467th BG veterans or prominent Associates where we will be honored to record names in the newsletter. Details to our President and Membership/  
 Data Manager  
 - Brian Mahoney [BriCamera@mindspring.com](mailto:BriCamera@mindspring.com)



# News From Station 145

*From David Hastings MBE*

We are now well into the Summer and life is quite hectic in the Rackheath area as we are still battling against the plans to build a "new Eco Town" on the old airfield, but we miss Perry terribly at our meetings and it also seems very lonely as a Base Contact without him.

The Marker is being well looked after by the Parish Council and they have enlisted the help of a Veterans Organisation who really understand what the 467th Marker stands for. Jean has also been helping them with the weeding and Roger and I replaced both the flags ahead of the D.Day Anniversary. Talking of Flags we used our last set of American 5ft x 3ft flags (Stars and Stripes and a Union Jack) given by the late Geoff Gregory which is sad as they wear so much better than those made here in the UK. If anyone in the USA might be willing to donate a set or sets to us this would be wonderful and deeply appreciated.

Great to see the Heritage League in Norwich although no 467th and we arranged for David Dunnett our great Cathedral organist to play the 2nd Air Division USAAF Fanfare at the end of Evensong, which brought back many happy memories especially as we had the composer Ken Meazey with us. Ken was delighted with David Dunnett's arrangement as it had never been played on the organ before. Nice that several members of the public came up after the service to say how moved they were by the Fanfare. We enjoyed the reception afterwards at the Maids Head and we also attended the Heritage League Meeting at the Forum which was fun.

The D.Day 70th Anniversary gave us many memories and also helped the younger generation to understand the price of the freedom they enjoy today. Does not seem possible that it was seventy years ago since we stood in our garden in Norwich late at night on June 5th and saw the huge air armada going overhead.

On the social scene many of you will be pleased to know that the locomotive "2nd Air Division USAAF" IS still hauling passenger trains on the Bure Valley Railway and at the AGM of the Railway I was invited to ride in her cab on the special train from Aylsham to Wroxham. Also glad to say that the "Green Man" has re-opened under new Management and we have had good reports but it appears that the 467th memorabilia is missing. Also the "Sole and Heel" is still going strong and providing excellent meals including Fish and Chips. Finally the "Coffey Crew Gates" are still much admired at the Church as is the special 467th room.

So there you have it and as always as you can see the 467th Bomb Group will never be forgotten.

David Hastings  
Base Contact.



## Notes from the Editor



It was a real pleasure to enjoy the company and camaraderie of veterans and members from the 467th and 492nd BG in another memorable convention held in New Orleans during April. You can read of all our activities and rich program in the special “convention report” featured on page 12. Above all, we salute the presence of our wonderful veterans, many entering into their 90’s but willing as ever to share memories and experiences that took place in Europe 70 years ago.

I encourage as many as possible to join with us next year in **Kansas City, MO**, and fully engage in this unique gathering before it’s too late. Anticipate dates, full details, and registration for the 2015 Convention in the coming December POOP Newsletter or periodically check our web site at [www.467bg.com](http://www.467bg.com) for earliest available details.

### TREASURY NOTES:

Our Treasurer, Kerry Davis, reports the 467th BG Association has an operating balance of **\$3,937.71** as of 1st July. The cost of producing the April issue of POOP including printing and mailing, was **\$718.21**. This continues to be our chief expense providing hard-copies of the newsletter for our veterans and widows and are sincerely grateful to those providing donations to the “Mail Fund” or “POOP” to enable this to continue successfully. Donations since the last issue have amounted to a commendable **\$1260** ensuring we continue to provide hard copies of “POOP” to those who don’t have computers to take an electronic version in a pdf format or “ePOOP.” Our grateful appreciation to:

**Andy Bohnenstiehl, Julian Ertz, K. Fletcher, and A. Irene Prichard. A special mention to Ursula Scharrschmidt who made an exceedingly generous donation in memory of her husband, William “Bill” Scharrschmidt, whose obituary can be read on page 7.** We deeply appreciate your continuing support and ask donations to enable future issues be sent by check to Kerry (address on page 2) and specify “Mail Fund” or “POOP”.

**FOLDED WINGS:** This issue of POOP has enabled us to include some retrospective “Folded Wings” that for a whole variety of reasons have only been brought to our attention recently. News of deceased former 467th BG Association members sometimes reaches us slowly, occasionally a year or so later. We remain committed to record and honor those former 467th BG veterans in the newsletter and welcome the opportunity to publish all “Folded Wings” also on-line obituaries. Please refer details to our President and Membership/Data guy, **Brian Mahoney**.

**OTHER ITEMS:** It was great to have **Bob and Connie Gerringer** from California visit Rackheath and Norwich during May. Bob’s Dad was “**Ted**” **Gerringer** former 791st Sq. Bombardier, then Group Bombardier, before further promotion and transfer to Wing HQ. Two busy days took in a tour of the base site including the restored control tower and Rackheath Hall. They spent overnight in Salhouse with **Jill and James Watt** before breakfast at the new B24 Business Lounge and Café the following morning, then a brief visit to the 2nd Air Division Memorial Library in Norwich. We were warmly greeted by all the staff who were busy gearing up for the visit of the Heritage League the following week, before it was time for our return trip to London. Bob and Connie promised a return visit to Rackheath before too long.



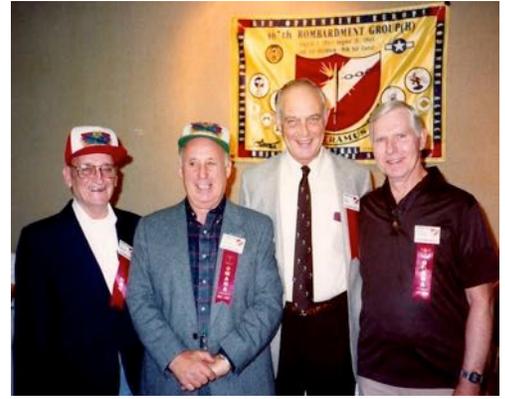
*Bob Gerringer surveys the former Rackheath Airfield from the restored Control Tower*



A reminder to drop by at **Chris Collins** excellent 467th BG Facebook Group Page for photos, discussion, etc. Search “467th Bombardment Group”

## Editor's Notes...continued

**Harry Tanzer** sent an extensive package of photos featuring literally hundreds of pictures taken at previous 467th, 2nd Air Division, and Southern Californian Section of the 8th Air Force Historical Society, conventions and gatherings going as far back as the 1980's. I picked out the photo (featured to the right) of Harry's Crew#20 taken at the 467th convention held in Omaha back in 1990. The caption on the rear reads: "Omaha 1990....First time together since 1945". Pictured are left to right, Ed Mahoney (engineer), Harry Tanzer (radio-operator), Lewis Owens (gunner), and Norman Felbinger (Crew#20 Pilot and crew commander).



## Obituaries

### **Martin Frank Bezon, H2X (Radar) Operator, 791st**

PORT HENRY, N.Y. — Martin Frank Bezon, age 90, of 24 Tobey St., Port Henry, passed away at the Syracuse V.A. Hospital on April 16, 2012. Martin graduated from Port Henry High School in 1941. Following high school, he began working at Republic Steel. In 1942, after Pearl Harbor, he volunteered for the Army Air Corps Cadet Program. After going through infantry training, he was accepted for flying duty. He received his wings as a second lieutenant at Kirkland AFB in Albuquerque, N.M. Martin flew combat missions in Europe on B-24s as a radar/navigator/bombardier. He was the last surviving member of Crew "92," 791st Bomber Squadron, 467th Bomb Group, 8th Air Force, shot down over Berlin on March 18, 1945. He was awarded the Air Medal with four oak leaf clusters, the Distinguished Flying Cross, American Campaign Medal, Victory Medal WWII, E.A.M.C. Medal with four bronze stars and the National Defense Medal. In 1946, he worked for the National Geological Survey in Alaska. He was recalled to active duty in December 1949 during the Korean War. Upon discharge, he resumed his former job at Republic Steel until the mines closed in 1971. He was employed at Amerada Hess until he retired.

### **Edward Hooton Jr., Assistant Operations Officer, 789th**

Edward Hooton Jr. of Pensacola, FL, passed peacefully on September 18, 2013. He was born on October 7, 1923 in Elizabeth, New Jersey. He graduated from Thomas Jefferson High School in Elizabeth and joined the Army Air Corp. at the age of 18. Ed attended flight training school at Maxwell Field, Alabama and upon completion in 1943 was assigned to the 8th Army Air Force (The Mighty Eighth) based in England where he flew both the B-17 and B-24 heavy bombers. During the war Captain Hooton flew 30 missions in the B-24 Liberator earning him the American Campaign medal, the European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign medal, and the World War Two Victory medal. He was also awarded the Air Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters, and the Distinguished Flying Cross for extraordinary achievement and courage. Ed's most memorable mission was being in the first wave of planes to fly over France during D-Day.

During his career Ed maintained his commercial pilot's license, was a member of the Confederate Air Force, and remained active in the Air Force Reserves retiring at the rank of Major. Remembering his earlier years in Florida, the sun, beach, scuba diving, spear fishing, and sailing, Ed moved back to Pensacola in 1991 and became active in the Coast Guard Auxiliary where he taught navigational courses, participated in many flotillas, and volunteered duty at the N.A.S. lighthouse. He was also a volunteer at the N.A.S. Aviation Museum. Ed was a 32nd degree Scottish Rite Mason and member of the Shriners' Hadji Temple. He served as Wagonmaster, Master Traveller, and was a member of the State Board of Florida for the NCT. Ed regularly visited the Shriners Children's Hospitals in Florida, Louisiana, and Texas.

# Obituaries



## **William "Bill" Paul Scharrschmidt, Bombardier 788th/791st**

William Paul Scharrschmidt, age 92 of Neenah, formerly of Medford, passed away peacefully early Monday, April 28, 2014 at his home. He was born June 27, 1921 in the Town of Hammel, WI to the late Ewald and Jennie (Frey) Scharrschmidt. On February 22, 1946 he married Ursula Russell and the two were blessed with four children. Bill attended Cleveland School in the Town of Hammel and graduated from Medford High School. He then attended the University of Wisconsin-Madison where he studied Civil Engineering. He also enlisted in the U.S. Air Force in July 1942 as a Bombardier where he received 2nd Lt. Commission in 1943. He flew 30 missions, 18 of them as lead-Bombardier on a B-24 as a part of 8th Air Force, 2nd Air Division, 467th Bomb Group European Theater of Operations, where he earned a ribbon with five battle stars, an Air Medal with four Oak Leaf Clusters, a Distinguished Flying Cross, and the Purple Heart for wounds received over Magdeburg, Germany on mission 8-16-44. He returned to inactive status as a 1st Lt. in November of 1945. Thereafter, he joined the Wisconsin National Guard, 32nd Division from 1949 through 1954 where he served as Captain of Intelligence Section.

After his service to our country, Bill worked as a Treasurer at Time Federal Savings Bank where he was eventually elected to many other positions, such as Board of Directors, Vice-President and Secretary, and even President and Chairman of the Board. He retired on January 1, 1987 after 40 years.

Bill was extremely active in his community. He was an elected alderman of the 1st Ward of the Medford City Council in 1953, and again in 1955. As a part of the Medford City Planning Board, he served from 1971 to 1995, and was also a charter member of the Medford Swimming Pool, established in 1955, and was a member of the Medford Curling Club. He also served as a board member of many different committees, including the Medford United Givers Fund, Memorial Hospital of Taylor County, Sunburst Youth Homes, Inc., and Kiwanis Club. He also served as an elected Director of Wisconsin Savings and Loan League, the United States League of Savings Association, and the Medford Chamber of Commerce. Bill and Ursula were longtime members of United Church of Christ where he was elected to church council in 1975, and then elected President for two terms in 1976.



## **Virgel W. Miller, Aircrew 789th**

Miller, Virgel W. age 89, of Stacy, on Monday, April 7, 2014 at his home. Virgel was born on February 3, 1925 in Minneapolis to Earl and Selma (Bergquist) Miller. He graduated from Patrick Henry High School. He enlisted in the Army Air Force in 1942 serving in WW II as a nose gunner for the 467th Bomb Group 2nd Air Division, stationed in Rackheath England a member of Moffett Crew. He was awarded five air medals and four battle stars. He met the love of his life, Maureen Lemancik and they married on Valentine's Day in 1946. They enjoyed 68 years together. Virgel was a parachute packer for the Air Force Reserve at Minneapolis/St. Paul Airport. Virgel and his wife owned and operated Corral Drive-In on West Broadway in Minneapolis. Virgel was the first president of the local 1997 charter of AFGE (American Federation of Government Employees). He became the National Vice President of AFGE covering the states of MN, SD, ND, NE and IA. He was re-elected ten times without opposition. Virgel was chairman of the budget and finance committee for 300,000 union members. He retired in May 1990. He was a member of the VFW Everett McKay Post, Bloomington, MN; American Legion Post 0230, Royal Arch Masons of MN and Shriners of North America. His passions included the farm, family, friends, the Union and flying. He also loved hunting, fishing, softball, hockey and playing cards.

# MISSION #16

## BERLIN

**FRIEDRICHSTRASSE STATION  
29TH APRIL 1944**

***Pilot Frank Prokop describes events that befell his crew and major discoveries uncovered 65 years later.***

One can't begin to imagine the sense of trepidation for air crews attending briefing during the early hours of 29th April 1944 when the Field Order from 8th Air Force HQ revealed the target as central Berlin. For the fledgling 467th flying its 16th combat mission with an expected journey time of 8 hours plus, with 6 hours flying above 10,000ft and the crews relying on oxygen, it was likely to be a severely testing mission.

The target was the Friedrichstrasse Railway Station a network of elevated and underground tracks linking north to south and east to west. The mission purpose was to strike a real blow to Berlin's railroad passenger traffic system. This was one of the few places where passenger facilities were important



*Lt. Frank P. Prokop pictured early 1944*

enough for air attack. Destroying the railroad station would cause a tremendous dislocation of employees in war industries. The 8th Air Force called for a massive strike utilising 3 forces each comprising of 4 combat wings with the 467th part of the third force comprising the 2nd Bombardment Division groups and contributing a total of 252 B24s.

Twenty-eight crews from the 467th were selected for the mission with two squadrons of 14 aircraft, with the first squadron allocated to fly high-right of the 466th BG, the second squadron to fly high-right of the 458th BG. Frank Prokop's Crew were assigned to this second squadron flying number#3 position off the left wing of the Squadron lead, the Bob Sheehan Crew#61, with C.O. of the 790th, Fred Holdrege, command pilot.

The first 467th crews departed the runway at Rackheath at 0715 hours and began a steady climb toward Splasher#5 on the Norfolk coast at Cromer to begin the assembly process with the 466th and 458th BG at 16,000ft. After forming up with Wing and Division the formation left the coast at Great Yarmouth four minutes late and proceeded to cross the enemy coast over Holland several miles south of the briefed track. The 467th second squadron was reduced to a 12 ship element when two crews (Dickinson and Keaton crews) returned to Rackheath experiencing supercharger problems. Further problems emerged as the arranged fighter support escort failed to rendezvous with the B24 force, leaving it critically exposed as it continued eastward. The briefed route was picked up after the Dutch coast and the formation headed toward the Wing Initial Point with further climb to 24,000ft with bombing planned at the target at an altitude of 24,500ft.

At just past 1100 hours and approximately 47 minutes away from the target at Berlin with the B24 formation approaching north-east of Hannover, an estimated 60-80 single-engine fighters identified as Fw190 and Me109 aircraft, attacked the B24 Formation from head on.

Pilot, Frank Prokop takes up the story: **I distinctly recall a head on confrontation with an Fw190, during which I felt**

a "thud". The right inborn engine was on fire also the tail-section was severely damaged and I began to fall behind the formation. As a defensive tactic, I headed for the deck to gain whatever protection I could from flying lower, thus limiting the fighter pilots' options on direction of attack. On the descent I felt another sudden "thud" and the control wheel went completely limp. The plane began to tumble with engines roaring and on fire. The co-pilot and I also began to tumble, with centrifugal force plastering us against the various walls of the pilot compartment. I gave up trying to escape from the plane since the force pinning me to the wall was so great. I must have passed out and when regaining consciousness -- all was quiet. It then dawned on me that perhaps I was out of the plane. Confused as to what had happened I eventually pulled the rip cord of the parachute, with my face covered with the oxygen mask I descended into a large field to be greeted by farmers, one with a pitched fork! They held me captive until the local guard came and took over. I was now a German POW! After an overnight stay in the town jail, I was transferred to Frankfort for interrogation then moved to Stalag Luft III in Sagan.

Although Frank, co-pilot Robert Pittman, and waist-gunner Sgt. John Burgelin, survived the attack on their B24, seven of the crew were killed and initially buried in the local cemetery where the aircraft came to ground near the town of Uetze.

Fast forward to the year 2009 and Frank reveals some incredible and surprising new discoveries. "About a year ago I received an email out of the blue from Darren Hill who it turned out was the great nephew of my tail-gunner, Leroy Hill, one of those who perished that day. Darren asked I tell him all I knew about his uncle. After a few email exchanges, all communication ceased until summer 2009. Apparently Darren had continued his research and was now in contact with Rüdiger Kaufmann, an engineer with VW and a historian of the Air War with an interest



*The Rißland brothers with Rüdiger's son, point to the 1944 crash site at Dahrenhorst*

following investigations near his home area north of Brunswick. His own Father was taken POW in Tunis and spent time in England and finally held in Texas until the end of the war. It was Rüdiger's aim to locate the crash site and hopefully recover some remnants of the plane and put them on display in a small museum."

In a series of emails Rüdiger went on to describe how he visited the small village of Dahrenhorst where Frank's B24 finally came to ground in a small wooded area to the north. He was looking for some eyewitnesses and to pin-point the exact location of the crash. As luck would have it,

Rüdiger was able to locate two brothers by the name of Rißland, who as children in 1944 witnessed the crash and able to accurately pin-point the spot where Frank's B24 came down. This in turn enabled Rüdiger and his team to scour the site with a metal detector and unearth some small parts of the stricken bomber which had remained buried and undisturbed for the last 65 years.

But the most significant find was an original oxygen tank from the B24 that the Rißland brothers had preserved and even added a valve in order to use the tank to make schnapps. They kindly donated the oxygen tank to Rüdiger's small museum.

## *Frank Prokop Story Continued*

Rüdiger was able to make another remarkable discovery. Living in the nearby town of Uetze was another eye-witness by the name of Mrs. Elfriede Surburg aged 87 (in 2009). It was her father, Heinrich Hornbostel, who was feeding cows that morning on the 29th April 44 when Frank floated down in his parachute in the same field. Armed with a pitch-fork (remember Frank's recollection!) and in the company of some others, they took Frank captive and awaited for Luftwaffe teams to collect the new prisoner. In the meantime, Heinrich was able to secure the precious silk parachute and bought it home without the knowledge of the Luftwaffe.

After the end of the war in 1946/47, the Hornbostel family were still in possession of Frank's silk parachute and decided upon fashioning the silk to make various clothing garments and items including a wedding-dress. Mrs. Surburg was duly married wearing the wedding-dress made from Frank's parachute and remarkably, the silk wedding-dress remains today! This amazing discovery prompted Rüdiger to contact Frank directly to share the story of this most unusual find. Mrs Surburg was delighted to learn Frank had survived the War and very happy to have made use of the parachute in such a special way. She also had enough of the parachute to send some small parts to Frank as a memento.

Frank also received from Rüdiger fragments of the windshield, a cover of an instrument panel, and some smaller metal pieces, all found following a search with a metal detector.



*Mrs. Elfriede Surburg with her wedding-dress made from Frank's parachute.*

But the story does not quite end here. The fierce air-battle over the skies above Hannover and on toward the target of Berlin and back prompted Rüdiger to look at German Fighter Pilot Reports. With some great detection it was believed the Prokop B24 was attacked by Oberleutnant Hans-Heinrich König flying an Fw190 while assigned to I./JG11. The pilot is credited with bringing down no less than four B24s that day, two in the vicinity of Hannover (including Frank's B24) and two more in the Nienburg area as the B24 formation was returning from the target at Berlin. Hans-Heinrich König was himself killed a little over 3 weeks later in an air fight near Kaltenkirchen on the 24th May 1944. He was credited with 28 "victories" before his loss in May.

In summary, the Berlin mission of 29th April 44 was a severe and bruising encounter for the 8th Air Force and especially for the third force of B24s who flew the majority of the mission exposed without fighter-cover. Bombing results for those crews who managed to reach the target was "fair to good" but far short of what was anticipated. Losses included a staggering 63 heavy bombers of B17 and B24s (excluding those planes crashing back in England) and 15 fighters. The 2nd Bombardment Group lost 26 B24s, 18 due to German fighter attacks. For the 467th BG, three B24s failed to return including the lead-ship from the first squadron carrying C.O. of the 788th Squadron, Bob Salzarulo and Group Bombardier, John Low. The 790th Sq. John Gavin crew were struck by flak over the target and only made it a little way back. Final

## Frank Prokop Story Continued

breakdown of 467th personnel losses was 12 killed in action, 14 POW, with 5 evading capture after baling out over Holland and linking up with Dutch Resistance.

Frank was evacuated from Stalag Luft III toward the end of January 1945 when approaching Soviet troops were estimated to be just 16 miles away. **"As to evacuation--we were awakened in the night of Jan. 27, 1945 and told to gather whatever personal belongings we could, as we were to be evacuated. We stood for hours in line in the bitter cold, covered with our blankets. We marched for hours in the cold, with no food and only snow for hydration. On the march--cold took its toll. I saw German guards supporting POW's and POW's supporting German guards--even carrying their rifles. It made me wonder: "What the hell are we fighting about?!" On one occasion we were strafed while marching and all took cover in the woods on the side of the road. We didn't know by whom we were strafed. I don't know how long we marched but ultimately we ended up in a boxcar--standing room only! The stench was awful but I was lucky to be one of the first ones to board and I found a spot along the wall with a small hole for ventilation. I do not know how long we were on the train. At some point we were housed in some kind of factory but I can't remember if it was before or after the train ride. Ultimately I ended up at Moosberg (Stalag Luft V11-A) and remained there until liberated on the 29th of April 1945".**

Frank and the huge number of POWs now relocated here were liberated by the U.S. 14th Armor Division when their tanks rolled into the camp and took surrender of the garrison. For Frank, it was exactly 1 year to the day from embarking on the fateful Group Mission#16; the day twelve 467th air crew paid the ultimate price, seven of them fellow crew.



*Oberleutnant Hans-Heinrich König who was credited with the shooting down of the Prokop B24 and three other B24s on the 29th April 1944.*



*Oxygen Bottle preserved from Frank's B24 and later used to make schnapps*

Postscript: My sincere thanks and gratitude to Frank Prokop, now a retired MD aged 92 years young from Dearborn, MI. and wife Madeline, for providing materials and wonderful assistance in producing this article for "POOP". A huge note of appreciation too for Rüdiger Kaufmann in Germany who has thoroughly researched the incident and provided background and details including many of the photos. Please note all photos are strictly copyright of Rüdiger for a potential book. - *Editor*



*Frank celebrating his 90th Birthday in October 2011 accompanied by wife Madeline and six children.*

# *Our New Orleans April 2014 Convention*



Located in the historic Warehouse District, a stone throw from the River, walking distance from Jackson Square and the French Quarter, the Hampton Inn offered a perfect place to come together once again for our 2nd official joint reunion-convention with the 492nd BG.

A number of early-birds arrived the day before in order to get a head start sampling the local delights, particularly a chance of trying the renowned New Orleans' cuisine. A brief heavy downpour that evening did not spoil our first opportunity to meet again with friends, knowing the following day most

folk would be arriving to join in the fun and the highly anticipated reunion would get under way. Temperatures were a little unseasonal, particularly at the start of the week but it was not long before blue skies replaced grey and coats and woollens discarded for warm spring attire.

Fran Gramberg, daughter of Howard Heckmann (492nd), reunion-planner supreme and stepping down after many successful past Group gatherings, applied finishing-touches and supervised the setting up of our Hospitality Room as more and more swelled the numbers as the day went on. Great to see so many familiar faces from not only last year in San Antonio but those rejoining the reunions after several years. Besides picking up our "Welcome Packets" the evening commenced with our "Welcome to New Orleans Buffet" of red Beans & Rice/Chicken Gumbo.

An early morning start Wednesday as we were bound for the renowned New Orleans National WWII Museum which was to include taking of the Group Photo and an official welcome and presentation. Those fitter members of the party opted to walk to the Museum as it was only a few blocks distant and easily accessible on foot. A continuous shuttle also operated the five minute journey. Once a D-Day Museum, now a National WWII Museum the facility has expanded extensively with some outstanding exhibits and displays. Highlight for the Group was a viewing of Tom Hanks "Beyond All Boundaries" shown in 4-D with special effects combined with archive footage. Solely shown at the Solomon Theater within the Museum this atmospheric and compelling narration, many of first-hand accounts coupled with moving props, enhanced lighting and sound effects, makes an exhilarating experience. A number chose to enjoy a Matinee Lunch with the "Victory Belles" 1940's vocal group.

That evening it was a short trip to the renowned Mulate's Cajun Family Restaurant where great cuisine was accompanied by a live Cajun band. Back at the Hampton Hotel, the small bar area was proving popular, others enjoyed the evening air by the courtyard pool-side and a chance to hear those "Old War Stories" once again and conversation in to the small hours.

The Hampton's old oak-flooring, high ceilings, and exposed beams provided a great backdrop for our excellent buffet breakfasts before it was time to board the buses for the City and Lighthouse Tour. Nothing better than having a knowledgeable and experienced tour-guide to get the most out of the city. The bus journeyed through the famous French Quarter with its usual hive of activity and fun before our first stop at the "Cities of the Dead" cemetery. Because the city is built on a swamp, the deceased have to be buried above ground here in elaborate stone crypts and mausoleums. Over time the cemeteries, with elaborate sculptures and other decorative artwork embellishing the tombs, have come to resemble small villages, hence are known by the nickname of "Cities of the Dead." Next stop was to the newly restored Lighthouse (following Hurricane Katrina) located out at Lake Pontchartrain where it was quite breezy. More very informative guides spoke of the history and subsequent rebuilding of the Lighthouse, also the extensive plans for coastal restoration, restoring wetlands, and developing lines of defence to protect against further hurricane damage. An ambitious project that seeks to make the region sustainable for the future.

## *New Orleans 2014 Convention Continued*

Back on the bus and a further leisurely drive around the environs of New Orleans where we passed Fats Domino's house, and sadly viewed numerous properties remaining blighted by "Katrina", while newer properties were elevated on supports above the ground, and one even designed to "float" if needed. A stop for lunch New Orleans style with a Po-boy at a popular and busy local establishment before continuing sightseeing during the afternoon.

Our evening comprised of an excellent Mardi Gras Themed Dinner at the hotel followed by a raffle and silent auction organised by the 492nd which was a lot of fun and a great way of raising funds. We were treated to Howard Heckmann's (492nd vet.) traditional "Rainmaking Raffle Dance", a wonderful reprise from last year's San Antonio convention. Lots of opportunities to chat with our veterans while some of the more adventurous opted for a late visit to the French Quarter.

Our final official day of the New Orleans joint convention presented some distinct choices of activity, as well as being warmest day of the week. A good number opted for the historic two Plantation Tour taking in the Oak Alley Plantation on the shores of the Mississippi River with its spectacular quarter mile avenue of 250 year old Oaks and historic grounds. The Laura Plantation was a former Creole sugar farm with many buildings reflecting the experiences of slave-life for the 170 who lived here. A smaller number chose to take the Eco-swamp tour exploring the wetlands of the Honey Island Swamp and great opportunities for photographing alligators and the wild life of the river swamp.

After return to the hotel there was good attendance at the open Joint Business Meeting of the 492nd and 467th BG. We voted positively to hold a further joint reunion in 2015 with the 467th taking the lead for the planning following Fran Gramberg stepping down after organising numerous highly successful reunions. A joint planning committee to be formed was also agreed before we took a vote on the location for the 2015 reunion. Four potential places were discussed and subject to mini presentations before Kansas City, MO. won the day on the popular vote, although it was close.

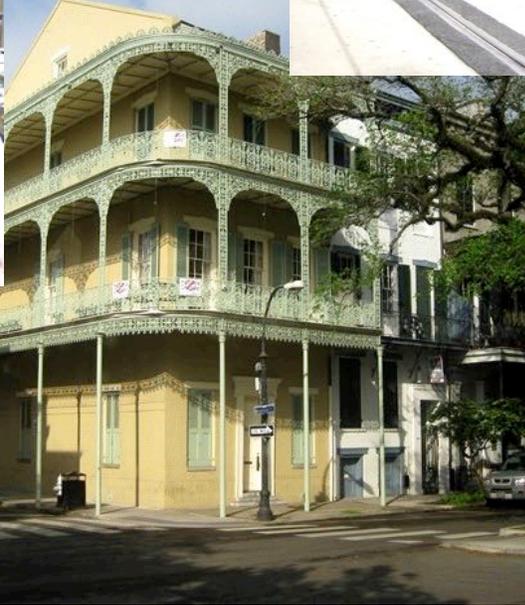
The evening commenced with a moving Memorial Service to veterans and friends no longer with us and included the reading of names of those recently departed and lighting a candle of remembrance to each. The Remembrance Table was set for the Banquet to make us mindful of those Missing In Action or Prisoners of War.

Our final convention Banquet was swelled by some additional family members including niece of our 467th President Brian (Maggie), also presence of the Honor Guard. It concluded with a wonderful tribute to Norma and her late husband "Bill" Beasley (492nd). Founding members of the 492nd organisation, convention planner for the 2nd Air Division Assoc., part founder of the Heritage League, as well as author and editor of numerous newsletters and publications. Highlight was the presentation to Norma of a scaled replica B24 painted to match Bill Beasley's own plane, presented by veteran Ernie Haar who served with both the 492nd and 467th BGs. This brought to a close another highly successful and enjoyable gathering between the two special groups and great anticipation of doing it all again next year in Kansas City.

(See our New Orleans convention photos provided by Tom Johnson, Peter Horne, & your Editor on the following pages.)

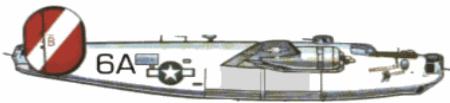


*Tribute and presentation to Norma Beasley*





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*467th and 492nd BG veterans who graced us with their presence in New Orleans this April.  
Left to right, Ernie Haar (492nd & 467th), Al Blue (492nd), Kay Craig (492nd), Howard Heckmann (492nd), Joe Zbikowski (467th),  
John "JP" Harper (492nd), Jim Sherrard (467th), & Norman Felbinger (467th)*