

POOP from Group



791st



790th



789th



788th

Newsletter of the 467th Bomb Group Association

JUNE 2026

Norwich Awaits



THE RACKHEATH CONTROL TOWER LOOKING A PICTURE in the late April sun and looking forward to host us on BASE DAY during the anticipated September Norwich 2026 Reunion. An exciting program aimed to present something of the flavor and essence of the “Friendly Invasion” as we retrace the footsteps and experience the sights and places once familiar to the 2nd Air Division Army Air Forces in Norwich and beyond. The full Norwich 2026 Reunion package including schedule, registration, hotel accommodation at the historic Maids Head, (and even a surprise or two) are contained this issue.

***** Norwich 2026 Reunion Full Package *****

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The 467th
Bombardment Group
The Rackheath Aggies

Rackheath Pathfinders
Site#6 (467th USAAF)



467bg_assoc



President's Message

By Yvonne Caputo

yvonneauthor4@gmail.com

Goosebumps. I have experienced them every time I have visited Norwich and the Rackheath area. It is what I wish for those who will be with us for the 467th reunion this September. Goosebumps. They are what I am using to tempt those who are on the fence about coming.

When we visit Site 6, can you stand on the concrete that was once the officers' club and smell the cigarette-filled room and hear the laughter of those men having a moment or two of ease between missions? Can you see the sergeant's shower in the diorama and shiver imagining the cold water as it poured over them? Can you smell the aroma of the food being cooked in the officer's or the sergeant's mess? Can you sit in the cinema and hear the giggles when watching a love scene in the movies, knowing beneath the laughter there was the longing for a loved one?

There is nothing quite like standing on the runway and imagining what your father, or grandfather, or uncle, or distant cousin experienced when they were on that same runway those many years ago. Could you close your eyes and see the line-up of B-24s as they are about to take off for a bombing mission over Germany or France? Can you hear the drone of all of those engines? Can you feel the vise around your heart, wondering which of those planes and which of those precious men wouldn't be returning on that flight?

I look forward to hearing goosebump stories from not only those who have been to reunions before, but also from those who are coming for the first time.

Notes from the Editor

Please send news/articles to
 Editor - Andy Wilkinson
andy467th@gmail.com

ANNUAL REUNION 2026, RETURN TO NORWICH, MAIDS HEAD HOTEL, SEPTEMBER 20 – 25: (6 nights)

Delighted we are able to reveal the full itinerary for the September gathering in Norwich with a schedule offering a rich program of events and some special places you will enjoy visiting, A focus on the unique USAAF experience and their imprint on base villages and the city of Norwich with the opportunity to walk in those same footsteps as we explore the lasting legacy and indelible memories of yesteryear. A busy week of activity but we have built-in free time midweek on Wednesday afternoon, enabling opportunity to relax or do your own thing as we spend the day in Norwich. Ensure to return your completed registration with payment to Keith Hughes (Treasurer) in good time for us to reconcile final numbers and note the **cutoff date no later than 15 August**. Our special room rate at the Maids Head is held until **20 August**, so ensure to make an early reservation. We are highly excited at the prospect of welcoming your return and you can expect a genuine warm reception with renowned Norfolk hospitality in a week guaranteed to provide smiles and lasting memories in equal measure. Make sure you're aboard and we look forward to seeing many of the wonderful 467th family in September.

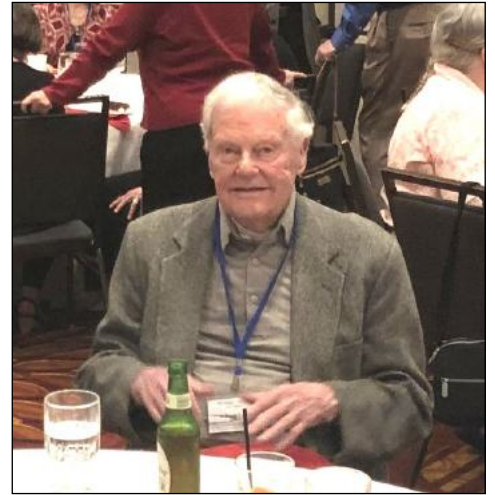
FOLDED WINGS:

More sad news to learn we lost another two of our dwindling number of surviving veterans in recent months, Merle J Brinkman and John "Will" Noden. Merle Brinkman was an astounding 105 years young and we believe possibly the last of those 467th among the original cadre who trained at Wendover and flew their brand new B-24 to England. Radio Operator in the 791st Wells Wescott crew they participated on the Group's very first combat mission 10 April 1944 and he was among the first of the 467th to complete their missions in late June 1944. Majority of those combat missions were aboard the B-24H BUGS BUNNY, the ship they flew over to England. Obituary is found on page 18.



Merle Brinkman left, alongside co-pilot Wendell Pirtle, first members of the crew to complete their missions late June 1944. Pictured right in October 2000 Merle Brinkman with Wendell Pirtle on a visit to see pilot, Wells Wescott, center.

Will Noden was navigator on the 790th Jimmie Thomas crew, a replacement crew arriving Rackheath in 1945. They flew combat in the months of March and April, most notably on the “perfect-drop” mission of 14 April to Pointe de Grave, obtaining an 8th Air Force and Group record as the most accurate bombing of the entire war. They also had the distinction of participating in the Group’s final combat mission of WWII before returning home with crew and passengers reassigned to the 791st. Will was a regular at reunions over the years and many will remember him a friendly and personable gentleman always open to a chat and willing to share his memories and experiences.



REMAINING BUILDING:

One of the few remaining buildings still in existence in what was the Technical Site of the base are the original crew lockers and drying rooms located close to the Tower where returning crews would deposit flying equipment and commence debriefs immediately after landing. These days the building has been substantially updated with new roof, double-glazing, exterior cladding, and appearance much changed from the war days. However, parts of the building particularly toward the rear, reveal the original construction of fading rendering and exposed brickwork and appear much of how they would have looked in 1944/45.



The ever resilient former crew locker rooms continue to remain part of the current Rackheath Industrial Estate.



EMAIL AND ADDRESS CHANGES: report changes to, Brian Mahoney, who deals with membership details including notifications of Folded Wings and obituaries. researcher@brianmahoney.com

Folded Wings

Merle J. BRINKMAN - Radio Operator 791st, October 2025

John W. NODEN - Navigator 790th, February 2026

Please send news of "Folded Wings" and obituaries of 467th BG veterans and obituaries of prominent associates to Brian Mahoney researcher@brianmahoney.com

MISSION STATEMENT

The 467th Bombardment Group Association keeps alive the memory of the legendary WWII 467th Bombardment Group (Heavy), its remarkable performance within the Eighth Air Force, and the heroic sacrifices of its members. We honor their service by conserving their records and stories, promoting historical research, and hosting educational and social programs.

You can contribute to our efforts through a deeply appreciated DONATION to our Association PayPal/Credit-Debit Card account which is tax deductible. Link [HERE](#). THANK YOU sincerely for supporting our aims and determined endeavors. All donations will be acknowledged personally and in the POOP from Group newsletter.

The 467th Bombardment Group History by Allan Healy

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

We also have limited copies of the book available through our 467th Post Exchange. Contact Keith Hughes keithalanhughes@icloud.com



The Team, The Ship, The Player



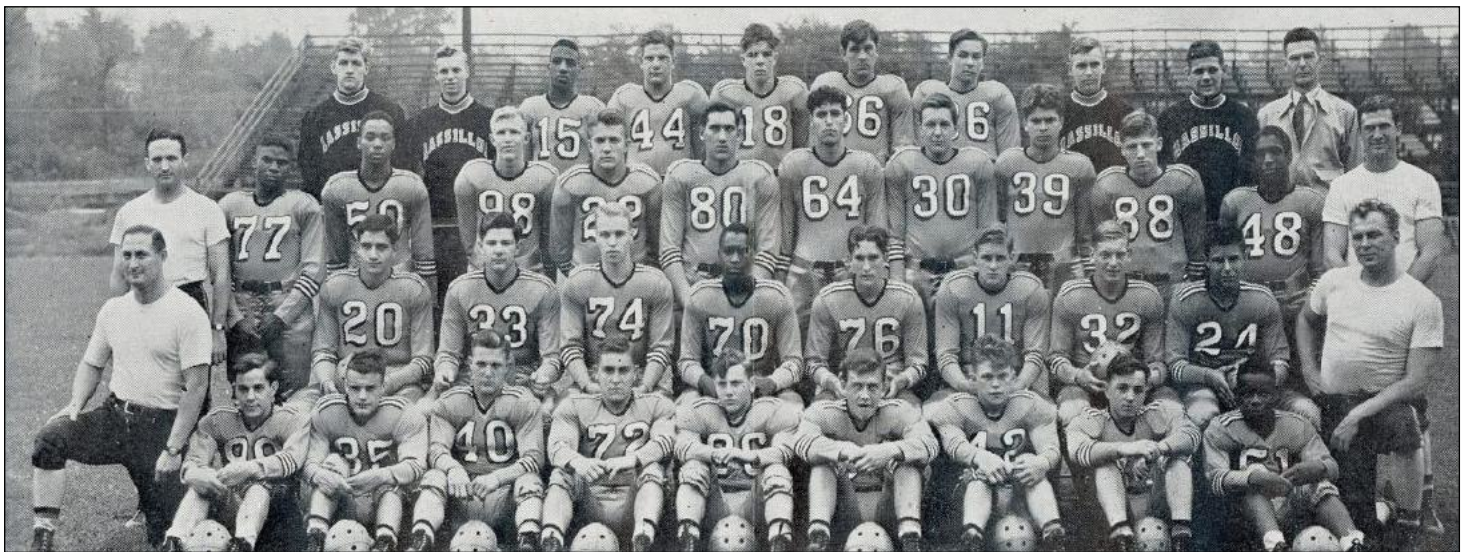
Rackheath's unique link to a high-school football team from Massillon, Ohio.

Much has been written among these pages concerning the history of the B-24J MASSILLON TIGER; its naming in tribute to the local Ohio football team; journey over to England from US manufacturing and modification centers; the ship's lengthy combat record; its return to the US after the war with crew and 467th passengers and final demise at an aluminium smelting-center.

It was with great surprise to receive communication late last year from Curtis Edwards with the previously unknown detail, his grandfather **Dave (David) W. Edwards** not only served as a waist gunner in the 790th with the 467th, but also played high school football for the Massillon Tigers in 1941 and 1942 and enlisted in 1943 before graduating. We knew of several links to 467th personnel at Rackheath who were residents of Massillon but never (until now) a former football player for the Tigers and active airman in the Group.

Keen to follow this up, Curtis Edwards has kindly forwarded illuminating family history concerning his grandfather, particularly his two seasons with the Tigers team, and post-war life after completing 35 combat missions out of Rackheath.

Dave Edwards was born in January 1925 at East Greenville a suburb of Massillon, Ohio, to parents David and Jenny (Bloom) Edwards and was one of four brothers.



The 1941 season Massillon Tigers team who finished as state champions. Dave Edwards is front row in number 42 shirt



The following 1942 season Massillon Tigers who finished third that year. Dave Edwards, second row number 15 shirt.

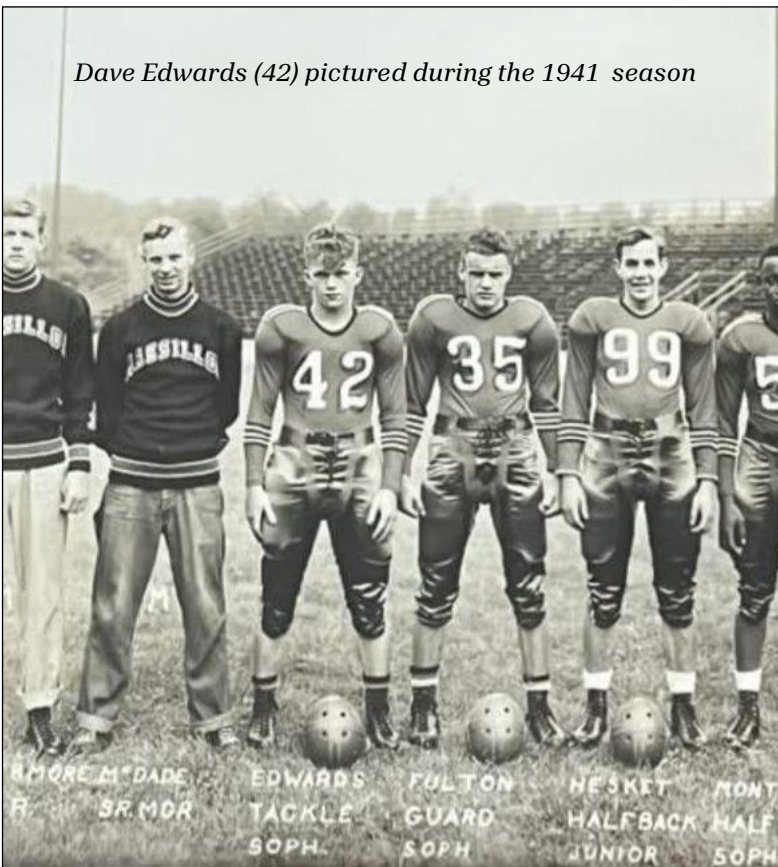
Aged 16 years, Dave featured in the successful 1941 season for the Tigers who went on to win the state championship that year. He wore the #42 shirt and pictured front row in the season team photo. His position is listed as Guard. The following season the Tigers finished third in the state championship and Dave Edwards is pictured second row up wearing the #15 shirt. His position for this season was Tackle.

David turned 18 years old in January 1943 and believed to have enlisted to the Army Air Forces early. In March 1943 he married Jeanne Anne Simon and before going overseas their first child Judy was born. They would end up with eight children in all.

In the Army Air Force David was selected for a gunnery role and completed phase training to be assigned

to the fledgling Lt James W McFarland Crew, who, as pilot, was relatively senior in years, aged 26.

It is unknown the crew's method and route to England but they would have arrived early October 1944 at one of the Combat Crew Replacement Centres (likely Stone 70th RD) before finding themselves assigned to the 790th squadron at Rackheath. Without a doubt, Dave Edwards would have observed the aluminium finished B-24J occupying the 789th hardstand bearing the distinct artwork of the team mascot OBIE, with the name MASSILLON TIGER prominently emblazoned across the nose. Despite being almost 4,000 miles from home, it would have been a sweet reminder and a great source of pride for him.



Dave Edwards (42) pictured during the 1941 season

B. MORE	M. DADE	EDWARDS	FULTON	HESKET	MONT
R.	SR. MGR	TACKLE	GUARD	HALFBACK	HALE
		SOPH.	SOPH.	JUNIOR	SOPH.

David's only minor regret as a member of the 790th squadron was that there was little possibility of the McFarland crew ever flying aboard as crew of the MASSILLON TIGER, but it would have been comforting to view the ship daily throughout the winter and spring months at Rackheath.

Following pilot Lt James McFarland's first orientation mission as a co-pilot, the crew commenced flying combat as a unit on the 21 November mission 1944 to target Hamburg aboard BOOMERANG. Coincidentally, the MASSILLON TIGER was also present on the mission with the 789th Lt William May crew.

Their second mission on the 29 November to a railroad viaduct at Bielefeld also saw the MASSILLON TIGER participate with the 789th Lt Frank Watson crew aboard.

New Year's Day 1945 saw Dave Edwards and the McFarland crew commence their eighth combat mission to a railroad bridge at Guls with the 788th losing MASSACHUSETT'S GAL. The McFarland crew had found themselves flying a variety of 790th ships during combat but the mission of 29 January was significant in that the crew were assigned the legendary WITCHCRAFT for the first time. They safely racked-up a further eight missions during the month of February before again assigned to WITCHCRAFT on the 4 March mission to Stuttgart. At this stage Sgt Dave Edwards had completed 22 combat missions and the fine spring weather through the rest of March meant the 467th were assigned almost daily combat.

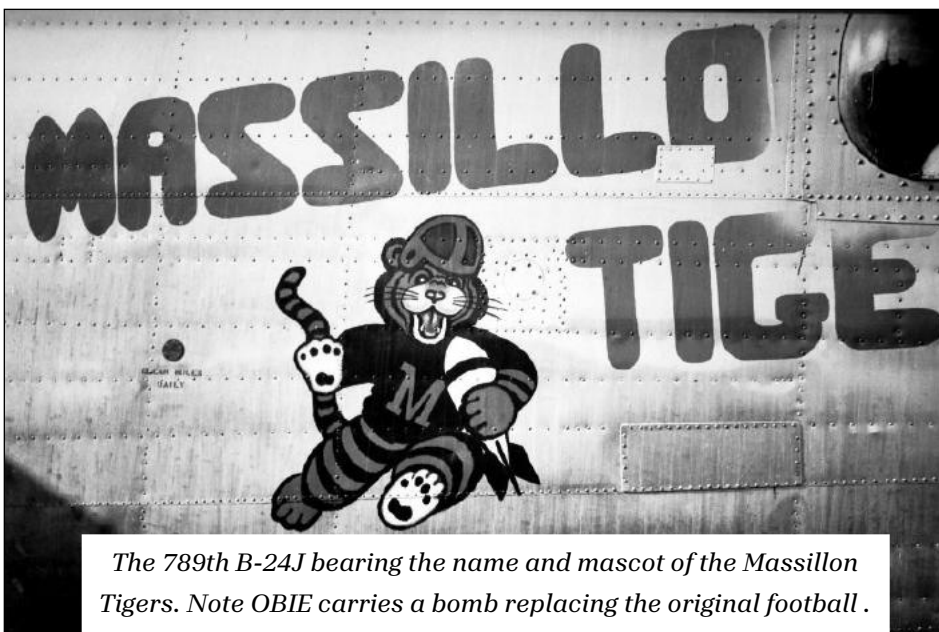
With the war in Europe close to reaching an inevitable conclusion, targets throughout April meant flying times often in excess of 8 hours with crews experiencing long days with tired minds and bodies. A third assignment to fly WITCHCRAFT was on 8 April with a fourth on the 15 April which Sgt Dave Edwards and the other regular gunners were not present due to the nature of ordnance. This was the only occasion the 8th Air

Force dropped petroleum gel (napalm) contained in cardboard casing with the target entrenched German troops and gun emplacements guarding the entrance to Bordeaux harbour.

The final crew mission was the Group's penultimate 21 April mission to Salzburg, again assigned to WITCHCRAFT, and was completed safely. The crew had achieved an enviable record of 35 missions with none of the crew reported injured throughout six months of combat.

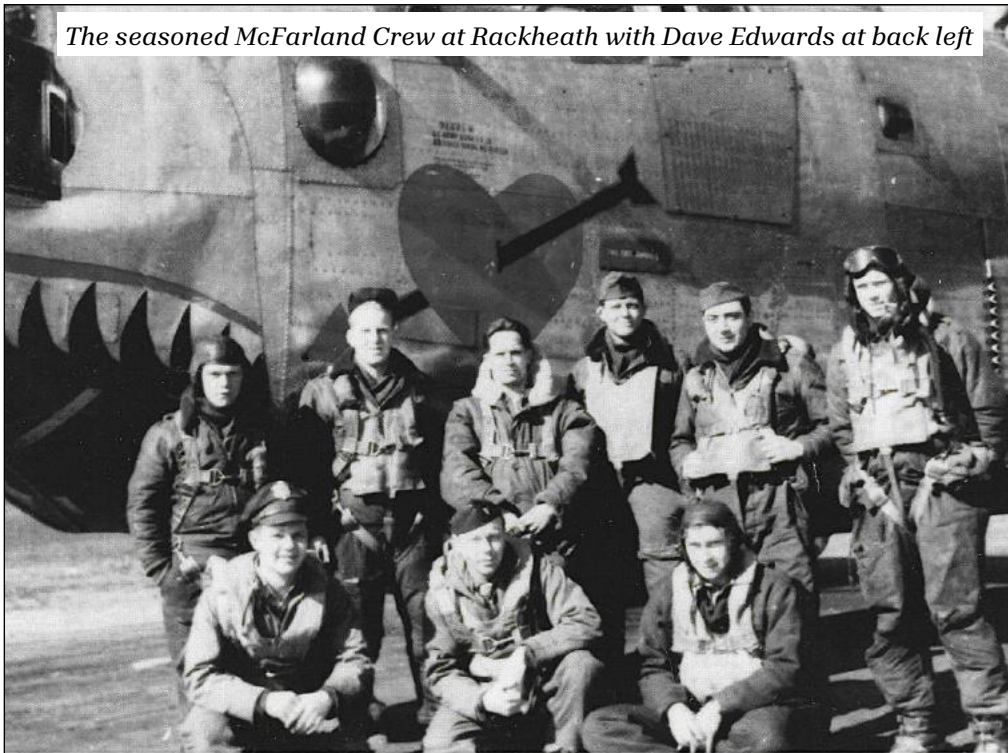


Early photo of the McFarland Crew undergoing training in the US. Dave Edwards, gunner, pictured standing first left.



The 789th B-24J bearing the name and mascot of the Massillon Tigers. Note OBIE carries a bomb replacing the original football.

The McFarland crew were among those selected to fly a B-24 back to the US with ten passengers in June 1945. Curiously, the three original gunners including Sgt Dave Edwards were not part of the returning crew. Their means and method of return to the US is unknown.



After the war Dave Edwards returned home to Massillon, Ohio, where he went to trade school to become a tool and die maker producing parts for the auto industry. In 1955 the family settled in Traverse City, Michigan, where Dave worked for Parson's Manufacturing, making precision tools, dies, molds, and jigs for parts manufactured for the aerospace industry.

Outside of work, he had a wide range of interests and a playful personality. He loved comedy and enjoyed practical jokes and was known to play harmless pranks on his family, always with a sense of humor. Curtis Edwards remembers his grandfather engaged with current events and a keen viewer of Walter Cronkite on CBS Evening News.

He was also an outdoorsman who loved hunting, fishing, and spending time in the woods. Family vacations often involved trips to Michigan's Upper Peninsula, especially in the years following the opening of the Mackinac Bridge, where he enjoyed exploring and sharing those experiences with his family. Hunting season



was especially important to him, and he often planned his time off around it, enjoying the tradition alongside relatives.

A creative and skilled craftsman to the very end, Dave Edwards lived a life dedicated to building, thinking, and improving the world around him. We are forever grateful for his selfless service as a member of the Greatest Generation—standing alongside brave men, David unhesitatingly answered the call.

Return to Norwich, Sept 20 - 25

SCHEDULE: (Given times subject to adjustment)

Sunday 20 Sept ARRIVALS DAY: Collect your "Welcome/Information Pack", meet and greet with friends and opportunity to explore the local area. Perhaps a leisurely stroll around Norwich Cathedral opposite the Maids Head Hotel, or try a pint at the Adam & Eve, one of the oldest pubs in England. Dinner on your own, or in a group at place of your choice, many close by. Extend your stay, arrive the day before as several are planning.

Monday 21 Sept RACKHEATH BASE DAY:

09:30AM Coach departs for extensive tour of the discoveries of lost paths, buildings, blast-shelters and more at Site 6 communal site, Rackheath base. Stand in the Officers Club and imagine those officers winding down after a mission, warming themselves beside the fireplace, writing a letter, enjoying a game of cards, perhaps a drink at the bar. Box lunch provided by the B-24 Café.

12:30PM Board coach to Salhouse Rail Station, unchanged since the Group arrived by train in March 1944. Stops at remains of the main runway, the Group Memorial Marker and wonderfully restored Control Tower. Stand on the same platform as the senior officers awaiting return of the day's mission and view the former airfield site. Opportunity for solemn reflection. Resume tour to the Golden Gates and Rackheath Hall.

5:00PM Board coach return to Maids Head. Dinner on your own at the hotel or at any of the many nearby options.



Tuesday 22 Sept AMERICAN MILITARY CEMETERY MADINGLEY, IWM DUXFORD and AIRFIELD:

08:00AM Coach departs for Madingley American Military Cemetery, a beautiful and serene location in the Cambridge countryside where 64 of the 467th are laid to rest or recorded on the "wall of missing".

11:45AM Board coach for nearby Duxford, one of the UK's premier air museums including the American Air Museum featuring many aircraft associated with the history of Anglo/American cooperation since WW1. Special emphasis on the 8th Air Force includes a wonderfully restored static B-24. Other hangars include restoration projects and many rare types. An active airfield home to a multitude of warbirds, often providing impromptu displays. Lunch on your own at the varied food outlets at Duxford.

5:00PM Coach departs for return to Maids Head. Dinner on your own at the hotel or at any of the nearby options.



Wednesday 23 Sept NORWICH AMERICAN LIBRARY, FREE TIME, NORFOLK CLUB:

09:30AM Depart hotel for short walk to the magnificent FORUM housing the American Library. Learn of the legacy of the Memorial Room, a gift from the veterans of the Second Air Division in memory of almost 7000 comrades who gave their lives. Addresses and special presentations.

Afternoon is FREE TIME, further explore Norwich or option for free guided walking tour of War-time Norwich with local historian and author, Neil Storey.

6:00PM Gather in Maids Head Foyer for three-minute walk to the historic and exclusive Norfolk Club for a group dinner of a hot buffet with invited friends including presentations.

9:45PM Depart for return to Maids Head.

Thursday 24 Sept NEW FARM AVIATION MUSEUM, TRADITIONAL ENGLISH AFTERNOON TEA:

09:30AM Coach departs for visit to New Farm Aviation Museum. Includes a special Rackheath Room containing many artifacts found or excavated from the airfield and soil over the years. They regularly continue to search and add to the collection, a real Aladdin's cave of items.

1:00PM Coach departs for a very special and surprise destination where you will enjoy a traditional English Afternoon Tea. We can guarantee you will thoroughly enjoy this great location.

4:30PM Board coach return to Maids Head. Dinner on your own, hotel, or many nearby options.

Friday 25 Sept FLIXTON SITE 4 USAAF COMMUNAL SITE, HARDWICK HANGAR PARTY, TRADITIONAL BANQUET:

09:00AM Coach departs for Flixton and the remarkable preserved and extensive former USAAF Communal Site. Pretty much the whole site still exists and represents a unique time capsule of base life for the 446th BG. Experience a guided tour and get to explore inside several of these historic buildings and touch history.

12:00PM Board coach for nearby Hardwick and Hangar Party at Maurice Hammond's facility. Ride WW2 military vehicles, and view the collection and restoration projects, explore the 93rd BG remains.

4:00PM Board coach for return to Maids Head.

6:30PM Our week concludes with our traditional banquet of a hot buffet in the ornate wood-paneled Oak Room at the Maids Head with guest speaker(s) and invited guests with pre-dinner drinks served in the adjoining Yard Bar.

Saturday 26 Sept: Departing breakfast for those moving on. Why not extend the stay and experience the special Norwich experience with friends and locals in the warm spirit of Norfolk hospitality.

RECOMMENDED TRAVEL TO NORWICH: Simplest method of reaching Norwich is to fly into AMSTERDAM then connect with KLM Airlines on the short 45 minute flight to Norwich which run 4 times a day during the week. Delta Airlines have a tie with KLM so would be the airline to choose and hopefully a seamless connection. At Norwich Airport a 15 minute taxi (or Uber!) ride and you reach the Maids Head.



Return to Norwich 26

Maids Head Hotel September 20 - 25



Built on the success of the 2023 Reunion and by overwhelmingly popular demand, we make a further visit to Norwich, England, and once again our base for the week will be the historic Maids Head Hotel. Overlooking the 900 year-old Norwich Cathedral and located in the heart of the city with a wide choice of pubs, restaurants, historic buildings and all manner of cultural attractions just steps away.

RESERVATION DETAILS, MAIDS HEAD HOTEL:

Sunday 20 September to Friday 25 September, 2026. (6 nights)

Classic Doubles @ £155.00 (sole occupancy @£135.00)

Executive Double Rooms also includes Executive Twin Rooms @ £175.00

Single Rooms @ £115.00

Rates are per room per night and include full English breakfast and VAT @ 20%. These special reunion rates to apply for any additional nights requested by guests, however, there will be a £30.00 per room supplement for staying on a Saturday night. For room details and facilities at this traditional and historic 4-star hotel, see [Maids Head Hotel](#)

Reservations to be made by email to <Groups@maidsheadhotel.co.uk> and in the Subject line state "ID 2609467THB" and clearly register the type of room, names of guests, arrival date and departure date (number of nights), additional requirements such as lift accessible/walk-in shower, with payment method (credit/debit card number including expiry date). Reservations may also be made by telephone to Alex Hassall (Reservations Manager) Monday-Friday to the Maids Head, **011+44+1603-209955**. Payment automatically taken 30 days prior to arrival. Ensure cancellation is made 30 days prior to arrival. Why not extend your stay and maximise enjoyment of the vibrant, historic city of Norwich and its host of attractions.

Email Andy Wilkinson <andy467th@gmail.com> for travel advice or questions relating to the Reunion 26.

NORWICH 2026 REUNION, 20 - 25 September

Registration Form and Check, send to Keith Hughes by 15 August

<i>Registration</i>	<i>Per Person</i>	<i># of People</i>	<i>Sub Total</i>
Includes all common activity fees, bus transportation, Banquet Buffet Dinner at Maids Head, Dinner Norfolk Club, Entrance to IWM Duxford, Trad English Afternoon Tea, Box-lunch, Welcome Pack, gratuities, etc.	\$300		

Any specific dietary requests or need we can assist with:

TOTAL REMITTANCE \$.....

Badge Information Name

**Please attach sheet if needed for larger party.
CHECKS PAYABLE to 467th BOMB GROUP ASSOCIATION

DIGITAL PAYMENT via ZELLE
Contact Keith for details**

YOUR ADDRESS:

Your Phone Home _____ Cell _____

Your Email _____

**Remittance Check payable to 467th Bomb Group Association and mail to:
KEITH HUGHES, 950 Holly Circle, Ormond Beach, FL 32176 NO LATER THAN **15 August:**
Phone 386-868-8206 (c) Email keithalanhughes@icloud.com**

Date and time you plan to arrive in NORWICH _____



Letter from Rackheath

By Ivan A. Barnard Ivanbarnard999@btinternet.com

Having recently decided to clear out my loft, and not realising that in all the crawling about on my knees the damage I was doing to myself, I am now in the sick bay slowly recovering from a self-inflicted illness called housemaid's knee.

At the time of writing this letter, Monday 25th May, it's Memorial Day when I would normally be at the Cambridge American Military Cemetery laying a wreath on behalf of the 467th Bomb Group Association. Trevor Hewitt of New Farm Aviation Heritage Group will be laying poppy tributes to the 458th BG, 466th BG and 96th Combat Wing, and has arranged for his wife Carol to lay the 467th wreath on my behalf. The wreaths are traditionally laid in front of the Wall of the Missing. The wall, some 500 feet long, contains the names of approximately 5,100 who have no known grave. In the words of Gen. John J. Pershing, "*time will not dim the glory of their deeds.*"

Via RAF Lakenheath



Memorial Day at Madingley, Cambridge, on an extremely hot day which included the moving wreath-laying ceremony conducted at the Wall of Missing. A short video of the ceremony can be viewed [here](#).

Site 6 News

The winter months have predominantly been concerned with digging out the pump and condensing equipment chamber, situated in the Office Mess kitchen boiler house. The chamber some 4'6" deep, 10' long and 5'6" wide had completely been filled in with lumps of concrete, brick rubble and soil. It has been a mammoth task to initially empty it, then photograph and record its archaeology, and subsequently refill it. Other brick rubble collected from elsewhere around the site has also been placed in the chamber, with a final layer of soil into which grass seed has been sown. This huge task has been undertaken and completed in true Pathfinder style, with enthusiasm and dedication to the job in hand. Notably one Saturday, work continued in a snowstorm.

The ground levels in and around the service road to the Officers' Mess kitchen have been considerably reduced in height so that the landscape is now in keeping with the 1944 photographs of the area. The usual maintenance tasks of sweeping the foot paths and the concrete foundations of the buildings and other such items continue as and when required.

Adjacent to the enlisted men's dining halls is an area shown on the site plan as the washup. It contains the base of a building approximately a metre above ground level, with steps leading in one end and out the other, possibly forming a one-way system of entry and exit.

Our intention over the coming months is to totally restore the retaining brickwork wall that surrounds concrete base of the building. For this work to proceed safely and securely the area has been Harris fenced off, thereby providing a secure working compound. Hundreds of existing bricks that have been collected from around the site have meticulously been cleaned and are being prepared for reuse. Fortunately, Pathfinder Al Spaul has an electric cement mixer and a local businesswoman has kindly donated a generator to power it.



The mystery "raised platform" area at Site 6 awaiting some restoration and tidying to the surround

The Cartwheel

During a dig on one of the Rackheath airfield dump sites by members of the New Farm Aviation Museum, a large cartwheel was dug up. All the circumstantial evidence points to the fact that this is the cartwheel that once stood outside the Officers' Club, as can be seen in the 1944 photograph. It appears to be the same diameter, it has the same number of spokes, six of the spokes in the 1944 photograph appear to be painted white, traces of white paint were found on the cartwheel that was dug up. Considering the wheel has been buried for some 81 years it is in remarkably good condition. I have thoroughly steamed cleaned one side. Then applied a coat of wood hardener, then progressively applying a wood filler as and where necessary. Hopefully it will be substantially restored ready for the reunion visit in September.

Related News

Some months ago, David Hastings informed me that the small spot light that lights the Memorial Marker was not working. Pleased to report the Clerk to the parish council has now had this repaired.

Many of you will know Orla Kennelly, Trust Librarian at the American Library in Norwich for the past seven years. During that time Orla has overseen the library refurbishment, endured the pandemic, illness, and contributed to the highly successful Silver Wings event last September. She has also attended a couple of Reunions in the US including joining with us in Savannah last autumn. In April Orla left the Library to take up an exciting heritage post in London and we wish her well in her new position and thank her for the time invested in Norwich promoting and safe-guarding the legacy of the Second Air Division for future generations. Orla remains keen to keep in touch with the folk at the library and wider community and promises to make every effort to come and join with us during our September Reunion.



Obituaries

J. Wilson "Will" NODEN, Navigator, 790th



The Honorable J. Wilson Noden passed away at the age of 101 the morning of February 19, 2026, at his home in Titusville, NJ. This remarkable man spent his life in the service of others. Among his innumerable accomplishments, he was a lieutenant in World War II, serving as a navigator for the 467th Bombardment Group flying missions out of Rackheath, Norfolk, England over Europe. After the war, he obtained his law degree from Rutgers University eventually becoming a judge for the Superior Court of New Jersey presiding mostly over juvenile cases. He was always fair and just, earning him the deep respect of the community at large. He was an athlete, winning a gold medal at the 2005 Senior Olympics in Racquetball and still went to the gym twice a week well into his nineties. He was also a longtime attendee and supporter of the Titusville United Methodist Church.



Editor: Many will remember Will Noden (pictured center with left Jack Weyler and right John Harper) attending numerous Group Reunions over the years and was one of the last of the veterans to continue to do so. Here he is taking part in a fascinating Q&A session during the Hartford Reunion back in 2019. A wonderful gentleman fondly remembered by all who had the pleasure of meeting with him.

Obituaries

Merle J. BRINKMAN, Radio Operator, 791st



Merle Jurden Brinkman, 105, lifetime resident of Belgrade Township, passed away Tuesday, October 28, 2025 from natural causes.

Merle (family name Flip) was born July 21, 1920, in Mankato to Jurden and Lea (Whitten) Brinkman. After graduating from Mankato High School, he, along with friends, relatives, including future wife Lathea Laase, moved to southern California to work in the wartime aircraft manufacturing industry.

Merle and Lathea were married on June 14, 1942 in Inglewood, California, where he worked until enlisting in the Army Air Forces at the age of 21.

Merle's WWII wartime service began as a school-trained Morse Code Radio Operator which rapidly afforded him the rank of Technical Sergeant (T/Sgt E-6). He was assigned to a B-24 Heavy Bomber crew. His airplane, the Bugs Bunny, so named by Command Pilot Wells Wescott, came complete with Bugs Bunny nose art.

His crew trained stateside, then flew the aircraft to South America, and on to northern Africa and finally to England, where they were assigned to an 8th Air Force Heavy Bombardment Group. When more than 70% of heavy bomber crews were killed, MIA, or POWs, this virtually intact aircrew and airplane completed all thirty required missions. Each air crewman was subsequently awarded the two highest Air Force medals: The Air Medal and The Distinguished Flying Cross.

After World War II Merle and Lathea returned to the Brinkman family farm in rural North Mankato where they raised four children. But that and full-time farming wasn't enough. In addition to working part-time at ADC St. Peter, Merle spent 22 years as the Belgrade township Motor Grader/Snowplow Operator, and 26 years on the MN State and Nicollet County ASCS committees. Still not enough, Merle and Lathea along with their many, many, good friends, neighbors, and relatives, enjoyed ballroom and square dancing, fishing, hunting, bike riding, and golfing. Merle didn't start golfing until his 70s but managed to hit a hole-in-one at Terrace View! Merle and Lathea also spent endless winters in Arizona and Hawai'i.

At age 94, Merle was able to participate in Honor Flight, the nationwide free program that flies WWII, Korean, and Vietnam veterans to Washington DC to tour the memorials. It was a long day. The flight home saw the exhausted young guides napping, but the wide-awake old veterans couldn't stop talking.

Merle was able to remain on the family farm until the last few years of his life which were then spent in Assisted Living. A heartfelt thank you to all the caregivers at New Perspective and Oak Terrace.



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ORDERS AND ENQUIRIES TO KEITH HUGHES keithalanhughes@icloud.com

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