

# 339th

# Fighter Group Association

Station F378 – Fowlmere, England



# NEWSLETTER



Volume 20, Issue 2

June 2000

Editor: Stephen C. Ananian

# San Antonio Here We Come!

Reunion 2000

By S.C. Ananian

With this issue the countdown to our reunion in San Antonio begins! Set aside the dates October 18 - 22.

Larry Powell our Reunion director has made arrangements at the Four Points Sheraton Riverwalk Hotel for our reunion. The nightly rates are \$89 plus tax. This rate applies for two nights before as well as two nights after, so if you wish to extend your stay, at these low rates, you may.

See forms in centerfold for details. For those of you driving to San Antonio there is **NO** RV parking. Automobile parking is an extra \$5 a day! Transportation from the airport is via airport shuttle. San Antonio Transport will charge \$8.00 one way, \$14.00 round trip to the hotel.

Send in your reunion registration coupon (also enclosed) to our Treasurer Bill Guyton, so we may know who is coming as well as your banquet dinner preferences. If you will add the names of people accompanying you on the back of the form, that will make our job with the "Name Tags" easier. Also fill out your Unit dinner preferences and send them in.

Since many of our group may have been in San Antonio before we have arranged for only one formal side trip. A visit to Scenic Fredericksberg, which will include the Admiral Nimitz Museum, and the L.B.J Ranch! The hotel lobby has many pamphlets of guided tours. Our unit directors have planned for unit dinners so that you may meet and dine together. Larry has a poolside hospitality room set aside for our group to socialize and have drinks with no cost to you.

San Antonio is the hometown of our CO John B. Henry. There is much to see, the Alamo, the Riverwalk shopping area and great Mexican stores! If you have never been to a reunion before or haven't been to one in a while, make sure you come to this one! Just read the mail in the "Editor's Corner". A lot of our buddies say that this is one they will make every effort not to miss! Do not miss seeing them. So fill out the enclosed forms and mail them in.

Thank you Larry Powell, Ila Dearey, and John Henry, Jr. for your assistance. God willing, I'll see you all in San Antonio!





## From the Desk of Jim Starnes

By James R. Starnes

*Permanent Columnist 505<sup>th</sup>*

Steve Ananian's front-page story in the April issue evoked considerable comment. "**How the Holes Got in the Swiss Cheese**" was a well-written April Fools joke with a few facts thrown in to sell the readers. The story was so good that at least one pilot wrote that he recalls that mission and that it took forever to fly back to Fowlmere into that headwind. Sorry, but there never was a bomber force commander who let a fighter pilot tell him where to drop their bombs. It was my privilege to lead a few missions as "Armstrong" and I even saw a few targets hit near the Swiss border where the Rhine River enters Germany. Much as I would like credit for preventing a Swiss disaster, it never happened.

There are a few other holes in Steve's tale. The lead bombardier never dropped a smoke bomb at the "Initial Point" of a bomb run. Sometimes the lead aircraft would fire a flare at IP. A pair of phosphorus smoke bombs at "Bombs Away" usually marked the target. By that time it is too late for anything except "Look out below!" Also, the Ruhr Valley is probably less than 200 miles from the Swiss border. Anyway that was a great April Fool's Joke. Just don't tell that story to your grandchildren - they are not that gullible.

All of us were in awe of the long train of bomber formations, which usually preceded us into Germany. Some times we would have target and withdrawal support responsibility, and that meant passing many formations along the train to reach specific boxes of bombers near the target and relieving the fighter group which escorted them to the target. It was an impressive sight we will never forget. I recall one occasion when we escorted B-24s to a target near Stettin on the Baltic coast. The route in was across Denmark, then over the Baltic until near Stettin, then reversing course, thereby avoiding most of the flak over Germany proper. While over the Baltic on the way in, many miles from land two B-24s collided and lazily spun down to the water. A few chutes were seen, but of course they had no dinghy like we wore attached to our chute harness. Those who bailed out were doomed by the frigid waters of the Baltic just like the crewmen who could not get out. It was a tragic loss of lives not due to enemy action or weather, but most likely pilot error.

During mid-April Tom Penrose and I received page proofs of the new edition of the 339<sup>th</sup> history for review and corrections. You will recall that Slick Penrose agreed to assume responsibility for providing Turner with revisions to correct many mistakes in the first one. Several members gave Slick a listing of errors they found, and Bob Irion probably provided the best summary of errors. The second edition is 40 pages longer than the first. It has a number of color photos, many of them obtained since the first edition was published. It also contains photos of the group staff, medical officers and pilots missing from the first edition. There was also several articles left out, such as the fine flight surgeon article by Dr. Fred Scroggin, the 18<sup>th</sup> Weather Squadron Detachment's contribution by Herman "Stormy" Mondschein. As well as major coverage of the 1786<sup>th</sup> Ordnance operations at Fowlmere, Mary "Kopius" Williams article on the Red Cross, and the article on aces of the 339<sup>th</sup>, Slick also added the fine POW article by Al Manke, which was written after the history was printed. Turner Publishing has incorporated the many corrections to the page proofs which Tom Penrose and I provided from our review. They expect to publish the new edition in July 2000 and have given us another opportunity to order copies at our 25% discount prior to publication. That is plenty from me for now. See you in San Antonio.  



Enoch B. Stephenson, Jr. 503

# Bombing The Submarine Pens

## BATTY TV BOMB

**By Enoch Stephenson**

*Operations Officer 503<sup>rd</sup>*

(If you recall in the last issue I had received an E-mail from a Eric Brothé in France. His research had revealed that the 339<sup>th</sup> had escorted bombers that dropped an experimental bomb called "Batty TV". Tom Penrose wrote and asked, "What did they do, put a Zenith TV on a bomb and drop it?" Well almost! As soon as the last issue was in the mail I got this response from Enoch Stephenson, 503<sup>rd</sup> Operations Officer.) S.C.A.

Enoch writes: -

"You mentioned the inquiry by a Frenchman as to a raid on 17 August 1944. I remember the occasion, but not many details. My Form 5 shows a five-hour mission on that date. Quoting from a 55-year-old memory, I believe that I led a flight of 8 P-51's, escorting two B-17's. We had been briefed that the lead B-17 would carry a radio-controlled, high explosive bomb and the second bomber would guide the bomb into the submarine pens at Brest. We had flown to a base about one hour from Fowlmere where we were briefed. The mission was uneventful and went smoothly. We observed the entire operation from three or four thousand feet. After bombs away, we made a 360-degree turn, but we couldn't see anything. I have always wondered about the success or failure of the effort. I hoped that the bomb had reached its target and had successfully blown the sub pens to smithereens, but I have never known of a follow-up." *Enoch Stephenson*

*I queried Roger Freeman, author (The Mighty Eighth) about the mission. Roger replies "The Batty raid on La Pallice on 08/17/44 involved a single B-17 carrying two GB-4 TV guided bombs. Apparently both missed the target as the mission was classed as 'unsuccessful'. The mission is mentioned on page 104 in The Mighty Eighth War Manual." (There is also an account of this mission in the "History of the 339<sup>th</sup>".) S.C. Ananian*

Then this last E-mail from Eric in French. I translate, "Of the few bits of information at my disposal, the device was a B17 radio controller (3<sup>rd</sup> Air Division / 8<sup>th</sup> AF USAAF), having on board 2 tons of explosive, the bombs crashed in the sea before attaining the objective. I am currently awaiting documents from the Public Records Office in London (UK) where I was able to find references in the archives concerning this mission. I will let you know what they contain. If you have access to photos or of documents concerning this raid, I am quite interested."  



# Ham 'n Cheese

**By Steve Ananian**

Pilot 505

S/Sgt. Joseph Nicholas and I

Since the first reunion in 1980, Isabel and I return every year to meet old friends and look for faces from the past. To date, I have not been able to locate my crew chief. We are still looking for S/Sergeant Joseph C. Nicholas, Gary, Ind.. Anyone out there got any hints? We meet and socialize with a lot of our ground crews, but no one seems to know whatever happened to Joe!

The relationship that existed between a pilot, his crew chief and ground crew (and for that matter all the ground crews) is a tough one to explain. The respect and camaraderie was not as simple as one might expect. It wasn't officer versus enlisted man, but the respect went deeper than that. It existed on the whole flight line, the whole group! The ground crews looked after me like my older brother would. If I didn't look well the crew chief would ask about my health. Why, he would have even grounded the plane to keep me from flying. Never did, but the willingness was there! This would have been a great sacrifice on his part. It meant he would take the blame for his plane not being ready, and forfeit the opportunity to get a medal.

On the other hand, that aircraft was his and you had better take care of it. I almost felt like a high school kid on a date. I better bring her home happy and well. Yet when I got into the plane, and my crew chief strapped me in, the umbilical cord was attached, pilot and "bird" became one!

I recall one day in particular, landed at our emergency field at St. Trend in Belgium. Not sure of the reason, probably had trouble getting all my fuel out of my external wing tanks, and had to drop them before they were empty. On the way home I was forced to leave the group and refueled at "Hotdog", (St. Trend). The facilities there were quite primitive at the time, you had to pump gasoline by hand from 50-gallon drums. This took quite a while and when I returned it was well after dark.

Flying at night during the war was not a piece of cake. There was no moon, no lights on the ground or in the air (wartime "Black Out"). The sky was clear, I was flying by starlight. To make it worse there was a "Buzz Bomb" protection system in effect. The ATS girls manning the anti-aircraft batteries would shoot at anything that crossed the coast.

If you passed that hurdle one had to try to locate Fowlmere and then land in absolute darkness. Don't misunderstand any good pilot could do it, it just meant you could

*Continued next page*

not sleep on the job! I tell you this, to merely set the mood.

After landing, I pulled to the end of the runway and turned onto the perimeter strip. Off in the distance I saw a light blinking at me from my parking area. As I pulled close, I could see three figures in the dark, my ground crew! They were guiding me in by flashlight. I cut the engine, Joe hopped on the wing, gave me a smile and a "How did it go? Is everything OK?" I explained I had run short of fuel, and the plane was OK. He asked, "Sir, have you eaten?" Then it hit me, it was 10:30 PM except for the bar of chocolate that I carried with me, I had not had a bite since breakfast at 6:00 AM! I replied, "No". Joe held up a paper bag, and said, "I thought you might be hungry," and handed me the bag with two sandwiches and a canteen cup full of black coffee (just the way I like it). I sat there in the dark on the ground, and ate while I watched them work by flashlight on my "bird".

Early next morning, they strapped me in, and waved me off. As the formation climbed to gain altitude, the sun rose and I wondered if my crew had even slept last night? The day before, after the group returned they remained, sweating me out. When I returned they worked through the night and got the plane ready. They will probably eat breakfast, maybe take a nap, and wait my return. How did they do it? How did they service these "High Performance Aircraft" out in the open under those conditions?

In 63 missions I never had an "abort". Never had my guns "jam" in a dogfight.

Those guys, all of them, were the best!

When it comes to sandwiches, that was the best I ever ate!



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## Swiss Airforce

Do you wonder whatever happened to your plane? Here's a clue! An E-mail from Tom Penrose reads, "Stephen, I have been talking to a guy in Switzerland who is writing a book on P-51's that ended up in the Swiss Airforce. He said that the 339th Mustangs below all became Swiss AF planes.

### 503rd FS

44-72310 D7-D (became J-2045 with the Swiss AF)

44-72896 D7-S (became J-2078)

### 504th FS

44-72495 5Q-F 'Itzawhiz' (became J-2031)

### 505th FS

44-72384 6N-S 'Elizabeth Jane' (Cecil Byrd) (became J-2022)

44-72725 6N-M 'Iron Bird' (became J-2102)

44-74074 6N-D 'Lucky Boy' (Archie Towers) (became J-2126)

from Martin Kyburz



## Condolences

Jennie Chapel, wife of Paul A. Chapel armorer, 504 has informed us that Paul passed away on January 24, 1993.

George McFarlane Assist. C/Chief 505<sup>th</sup>. Newsletter returned marked deceased.

David Levin supply HQ, newsletter returned marked, "Do not send Newsletter" by Mrs. Levin.

Danald Quale, of armament reports the death of his wife Susanne on January '98. Don was diagnosed with cancer 7 years ago. His last reunion was in 1985. Donald says he has every intention of joining us in San Antonio. We are looking forward to that!

Mrs. Jean Heiliger widow of 503<sup>rd</sup> Crew Chief William B. Heiliger informs us that Bill died on July 8, 1999.

Alfonso Rivera Crew Chief 505 informs us that his wife Mayra passed away on Dec. 15 '99.

Raymond Bellman, Crew Chief 503 informs us that his wife Irene passed away on April 16<sup>th</sup> of Congestive heart failure. Irene had three strokes in the past twelve years. The last one in February of this year had left her completely bedridden.

Betty Brunken wife of cook (503<sup>rd</sup>) Howard Brunken writes; - "My husband, Howard was very proud to have served in the 339<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group. Howard had many fond memories regarding his association with other members of the group. He read the Newsletter from cover-to-cover. I'm sorry to inform you that Howard passed away on February 13, 2000. He had suffered with Parkinson's Disease for several years, which caused loss of mobility to a degree. On Dec. 3<sup>rd</sup> '99 he suffered a severe attack which required admission to the hospital for what we hoped would be for recovery. He contracted Pneumonia after 10 weeks and his death was very swift. Please inform your members"

Our condolences to all the above families!



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## Roster Changes

Change James Hanson to 255 College Cross Apt 83, Norfolk, VA 23510

Change Bill Langohr to 980 S. STATE RD. 13, PIERCETON, IN 46562

Change Mrs. Ila Dearey to 4917 Ravenswood Dr, Unit 652, San Antonio, TX 78227

Change Earl Gertz Zip Code to 85215-2840

Change Alfonso Rivera to 11902 Persuasion Drive

Change Joseph Yeselski to 880 N. Lee Court, Hazelton, PA 18201

Change Warren G. Kuhnert Zip Code to 07644

Change Mrs. G. P. Harry to 909 Shoreline Cir., Ponte Vedra Beach, FL 32082-2742

Change Clarence B. Meier to 1608 East 4 Road

Change Thomas G. Sams to 105 Boot Hill, P.O. Box 8080, Horseshoe Bay, TX 78657-8080

Change Fitzhugh Lee Zip to 28411

Change Joseph D. Pennell to 193 Vincent Rd., Dedham, MA 02026

Change Donald Zeine to 106 Encino Drive, Pueblo, CO 81005

Change John C. Withers to 207 Vancouver Court, Massanutten, VA 22840

Change J. Larry Sutton to 5322 Bayshore Ave., Cape Coral, FL 33904

Delete George McFarlane

Delete David Levin





# Editor's Corner

by **Stephen C. Ananian**

Great hero that he is, Jim Starnes denies the whole story in the last issue about "How the Holes Got in Swiss Cheese"! His modesty amazes me!

The above photo of me and the one of Jim are escape photos. Do you still have yours? Send them in and we'll run an "Escape Photo Section".

Sad news: - on March 18<sup>th</sup>, Vernon D. Carr, pilot 505 was in a serious smoking accident and his room caught fire. "Vern" was in critical condition for a while; he is now slowly recovering. His family asks for our prayers for his complete recovery.

The fire destroyed all of his WWII memorabilia. Those of us who know Vern are copying photos etc. to send to him. Any of you, who wish, may contact him through his daughter. Send mail to - Vernon D. Carr, c/o Josephine Howland-Putnam, 50 Moseley St., Boston, MA 02125. He is at the New England Sinai Hospital and Rehabilitation Center 150 York Street Stoughton, MA 02072.

Many thanks to Clarence B. Meier (armor 504) and his wife Lucille for their \$30 donation for the newsletter. Dittos to Con Hatfield fire fighter for his \$25 donation.

Bob Kuhlman writes, "I have not attended recent reunions not for lack of interest, but because of time constraints and the need to monitor my wife's health. She has not had nor endured anything of a life threatening nature, rather a series of afflictions that keep her off balance and inhibit long term planning and commitments. I must admit she does face major surgery for the removal of her right kidney, which is contaminated, and completely shutdown. Recovery is forecast for 3 - 4 months."

James Wells, base communications writes. "Missed the last two reunions and sure missed seeing everyone. I had a heart attack in July '98, was hospitalized, and had surgery. Wife is not well, so we hope to mend and be able to attend in the future".

Amen to that James!

Just located another member of the 339<sup>th</sup> thanks to Jim Sterling's Web page. Grandson of pilot Roland W. Smith 504<sup>th</sup>, contacted us via e-mail, and we are in touch!

Hal Burch writes, "Sorry it took me so long to reply to your newsletter item. I do hope the newsletter will continue. I do look forward to it. As for the reunion, I cannot plan to attend as much as I truly would like to see San Antonio again. I went through Pre-Flight there (44E) at the San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center (now Lackland) and years later jet qualification at Randolph. I won't go into detail about my physical problems, only to say that the past 2-3 years especially, have not been good. In that time we have exhausted all known treatments, to no avail. Briefly, my spinal cord and nerve system has been effected, some 'short circuited' if you will. My ability to walk quite limited, as to distance, and endurance is zilch. The only option left open is surgery. My Doc. says absolutely no guarantee as to the outcome. Seems mine is a 'one of a kind' problem, though in the MS family."

Some college-age aspiring journalists have come up with a magazine called **Ghost Wings**. Issue number 3 has an article in it by our own Jim Hanson, pilot 505, (boxing P-51 on Masthead). He tells of flying Photo Reconnaissance during the Korean War. As I wrote last month, Jim folded his wings after 29 years of service, 60 years of continuous flying and **28,000** hours in the cockpit. I recommend you read that issue.

Those on the web can find it at - [www.ghostwings.com](http://www.ghostwings.com)



# Mailing List Update

If you have not sent in your update do so now. If you have filled one out, just ignore this. We are attempting to update our mailing list. If you wish to continue to receive this newsletter and notices of future reunions, please fill out this form and mail to me at the address below.

If you do not wish to destroy your newsletter, just photocopy this form or drop me a postcard with your correct name and address.

**339<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group Association, Inc.**  
c/o S. C. Ananian  
4 North Orchard Farms Ave.  
Simpsonville, SC 29681-4866

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

First

Middle

Last

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (if you wish) \_\_\_\_\_

e-mail \_\_\_\_\_



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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

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