

457th Bomb Group Association



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May 2025 Issue 99

2025 Annual Reunion and Meeting in Colorado Springs

The 457th Bomb Group Association invites members to our 2025 Reunion and Annual Meeting in Colorado Springs, Colorado, October 1-5, held alongside the 51st Annual Reunion of the 8th Air Force Historical Society.

Our Annual Membership Meeting, set for Friday, October 3, from 7:45 to 8:45 a.m. in the Association's hospitality suite, will include elections for Vice-President, Treasurer, and one Board of Directors seat. Zoom access is available for those unable to attend in person. Nomination and election details are on page 5 of this issue.

Register at www.8thafhs.org. The site provides comprehensive information on registration materials and exciting tours planned for the reunion, including the US Air Force Academy visit with lunch, Garden of the Gods Jeep Tour, and National Museum of WWII Aviation.

Attendees must be members of both the 457th Bomb Group Association and the 8th Air Force Historical Society. The headquarters hotel this year is DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Colorado Springs, 1775 E Cheyenne Mountain Blvd, Colorado Springs, Colorado, which will fill up quickly, so register early. Alternative hotels are available nearby if needed.

Join us to salute the 'Fireball Outfit,' reconnect with friends, and celebrate our shared history.

Below: This Memorial Day banner was designed using a photo, taken by The Fireball editor, of the 457th's stained glass in the *Chapel of the Fallen Eagles* at the National Museum of the Mighty Eighth Air Force, in Savannah, GA.



This Issue:

President's Message	2
Above and Beyond	3
Final Flight	4
Last of the Gremlins.....	5
Nominations and Elections.....	5
Homefront Headlines.....	6
A Crew Chief's Life.....	8
Water Pump Update.....	9
From the Editor.....	9
Digital Legacy.....	10
Membership Form.....	11



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President's Message May 2025

With this issue we welcome our new newsletter editor, Carolyn DeLoach from Georgia. She has a lot of experience with newsletter production, so we're looking forward to seeing what she produces for us. Carolyn's father, Benjamin H. DeLoach, was a pilot in the 751st BS, and Carolyn has had a keen interest in the 457th BG. Her position as Executive Director of the Charlton County Historical Society and the Lois B. Mays Historical Research Center has put her in a good position to dig up lots of information on the 457th BG that she has been passing on to our website.

Speaking of our website, webmaster Erwin de Mooij continues to do a great job with our website. As I've noted before, our website over the last few years in Erwin's hands has become one of the largest and most informative of any of the WWII bomber group websites.

One of Erwin's latest additions to the website has been an article on the names of the roads on the Glatton airbase. I wasn't even aware that the 457th personnel had assigned names to the roads on the base, and it's fascinating to read about them. Many of the names come from bases and areas where the group trained in the US before deploying to England. Check it out at <https://457thbombgroupassoc.org/streets-ave-roads-at-glatton/>.

We currently have close to 200 members in our Association. About a quarter of those on our list have not yet paid their 2025 dues (\$25). If you are one of those, please send a check for your dues to our Treasurer, Adele Gilmore. Her address can be found in the left column on this page.

This year's annual meeting, as noted elsewhere in this issue, will be on October 1-5 in Colorado Springs, in conjunction with the 8th Air Force Historical Society meetings. At that meeting we will be holding elections for two officers (Vice President and Treasurer) and one Board of Directors position. Information about nominations and the election will be sent by email this summer. (If we don't have your current email address, please send it to me.)

Please plan to join us for this meeting; the activities planned by the 8th AFHS have always proved to be very interesting and enjoyable.

As a heads up, at our recent board meeting, it was decided that our next tour to Glatton and the UK will be at the end of May next year, to coincide with the Memorial Day services in the UK on the last Monday in May. We plan to use the same tour company that did such a great job for us in 2023. Exact dates of the tour and further information will be announced as soon as they are available.

Finally, please take a moment on Memorial Day to remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice to preserve our freedoms and our democracy.

Eric D. Zemper, PhD
President, 457th BG Association

Above and Beyond: Duty's Last Call

Lt. John Benjamin Folsom, Jr.

Editor's Note: This series, "Above and Beyond: Duty's Last Call," honors the airmen of the 457th Bomb Group who served with courage and sacrifice in the Second World War. Lt. John Benjamin Folsom, Jr., known as Johnny, was my father's co-pilot and best friend. Physically similar and both Southerners, they were an exceptional air combat team, guiding their battle-damaged B-17 back to England time and again. My father never recovered from Johnny's loss and rarely spoke of it. Only after his passing did I get the facts of Johnny's final mission. This article honors Johnny's sacrifice.



Born on Christmas Day, 1921, in Sumter, South Carolina, John Benjamin Folsom, Jr. was the only son of Benny and Gertrude Hunt Folsom. Raised in a close-knit community, he developed a keen eye for detail. His quiet determination shone through in his youth, shaping his later resolve. A talented engraver in his father's jewelry store, he studied engineering at Clemson University until enlisting in the Army Air Corps in July 1942. He trained as a pilot in California and Arizona.

In fall 1943, Johnny arrived at Rapid City Air Base, South Dakota, joining Air Crew #442 as co-pilot under Lt. Benjamin Hoyt DeLoach. Their shared Southern roots and striking resemblance forged a quick bond. Both named Benjamin, they created confusion: Johnny, "Benny" at home, was "Johnny" in the Army; DeLoach, "Hoyt" at home, was "Benny" in the military. Calling "Benny" prompted both to respond.

In April 1944, Air Crew #442 sailed to England. "That first training flight, they returned soaked with sweat," recalled navigator Lt. Norman Franz, "but they had a long talk and figured it out as a team. From then on they flew straight and tight, bringing us home every time."

Johnny's first mission was on June 14, 1944; the 457th's Mission #66 to Villaroche Airfield, France. Heavy flak and enemy fighters downed six B-17s, with nine airmen killed. Although shaken by his baptism of fire, Johnny emerged unscathed. Thereafter, DeLoach and Folsom's teamwork consistently brought their battle-damaged bombers home, mission after mission.

By August 1944, Johnny had flown over twenty-five missions with DeLoach and other pilots. On August 6, while DeLoach was on R&R after flying his 25th, Johnny was offered a promotion if he flew one more mission before taking R&R. He volunteered and climbed into the cockpit with pilot Lt. Vincent L. Frost in B-17 #42-97131, called "Home James." It was the 457th's Mission #104 targeting the Daimler-Benz Engine Works in Genshagen, Germany and it would be the fourth mission for Frost and his crew.

The bomb run faced thick flak. After bombs away, flak hit "Home James," igniting the left wing. Chaos ensued: tail gunner Daniel Taylor was unresponsive, radio operator Chester Bartoszewicz unconscious. Frost sounded the bail-out alarm, but Johnny urged, "Stick with it," hoping to save the plane. While the rest bailed out, Johnny stayed at the controls.

Five crew members parachuted to safety: Robert W. Danaher, Earl A. Peronto, Frost, and Hubert D. Remp, who saved Daniel Rice. A sixth figure bailed out moments later, but his parachute caught on a wing and witnesses watched him plummet to his death.

"Home James" exploded, crashing near Michelsdorf. Johnny, Taylor, Bartoszewicz, and Solomon H. Bernstein perished. Johnny and Taylor's remains were buried in a local cemetery; the other two were unidentifiable and buried together. Witnesses reported it was Johnny who steadied the B-17, enabling five crew members to escape, at the cost of his life.

DeLoach, returning from R&R, found a stranger in Johnny's bunk and was told by 751st Squadron command that it was Johnny whose parachute snagged on the wing.

The 457th Bomb Group flew 236 missions, striking vital targets across Europe. Their precision and resilience disrupted enemy supply lines, often at great cost. Lt. John Benjamin Folsom's sacrifice mirrors the group's unwavering commitment to duty and reflects the 457th Bomb Group's courage. His dedication to his crew stands as a testament to the bonds and valor of those who served.

Final Flight: Normand Ronald Menard, Last of His Crew



Technical Sergeant Normand Ronald Menard, who passed away on November 18, 2024, at 100, was a decorated World War II veteran whose service with the 457th Bomb Group showcased courage and dedication. Menard's role in the air war over Europe left a lasting legacy with the 457th Bomb Group Association.

Born in 1924 in Claremont, New Hampshire, Menard enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Forces in 1943 after graduating from Commerce High School in Worcester, Massachusetts. Serving under Lt. Victor F. Pfendler, he was a flight engineer, top turret gunner, and occasional radio operator on B-17 Flying Fortresses.

His technical skill and calm under pressure were crucial during 25 combat missions, braving enemy flak and fighters. He earned the Air Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters, and in 2021, France honored him with the Legion of Honour Medal for his role in liberating Europe.

Menard's first combat mission was on November 26, 1944, targeting the Misburg, Germany oil refinery. The bomb run overshot the initial point, with clouds and smoke obscuring the target, forcing a second pass through a crucible of intense, accurate flak.

His final mission on April 20, 1945, saw his B-17 fly as lead for the 748th Bomb Squadron to the Seddin, Poland marshalling yards. This 25th mission, the 457th's last in combat, highlighted his resilience and skill. As the last of Pfendler's crew, his passing brings a storied chapter to a close.

Menard's wartime service forged his character, with contributions reaching well beyond the skies over Europe. After returning home and marrying his beloved wife, Irene, in 1947, he built a life of service in West Boylston, Massachusetts. Through Menard's Auto Body, his leadership in the West Boylston Fire Department, and his involvement with veterans' organizations like the Harold N. Keith American Legion Post 204, he remained a pillar of his community.

The 457th Bomb Group Association honors Tech Sergeant Normand Ronald Menard for his extraordinary service, his courage in the skies, and his enduring commitment to those around him. His memory will live on in the stories of his missions, the family he cherished, and the community he helped shape.



The Fireball – Spring 2025 – Page 4

We Need Your Help Finding 457th Veterans

The passing of Tech Sergeant Normand Menard, the last of Lt. Victor F. Pfendler's crew, reminds us of the dwindling number of 457th Bomb Group veterans.

If you know of any surviving veterans of the 457th, please contact us.

You may contact any of the officers listed on

***Page 2
OR***

***Email Eric Zemper at
zemper@msu.edu***

***Help us honor
their service
and preserve
their stories.***



CREW PHOTO

Menard, kneeling, 2nd from left, with his crew mates.

The photo was taken on April 11, 1945, the 457th's last mission. The flight crew leading the attack for the 748th Squadron that day was composed of Lt Victor Pfendler, Capt John Weber, Lt John Freese,

Lt. John McCulloch,
Lt Vaughn Heidenreich,

Sgt Norman Menard,

Sgt Robert Edwards,

Sgt Sam Dike, and Sgt Ralph Ice

Honoring SSgt. James J. Rodel: Last of the Gremlins



Staff Sergeant James "Jim" Rodel, the last surviving member of his B-17 crew, passed away on October 6, 2024, at 99 in Eau Claire, WI.

Born August 16, 1925, in Weyerhaeuser, WI, Jim was inspired at 17 by recruiting calls for "Men of 17 ... you too can have wings," and enlisted in the Army Air Forces days before his 18th birthday. Assigned to the 457th's 748th Squadron, as tail gunner, he served as the youngest member of the B-17 crew "Thy Will Be Done," nicknamed "Junior." From 1944 to 1945, he completed 35 missions over enemy territory, earning the Air Medal with One Oak Leaf Cluster for heroism and meritorious aerial feats.

Each mission tested his courage against German fighters and flak. Over the North Sea, enemy fire disabled two engines, forcing the crew to jettison gear—"We stripped it down to nothing," Jim recalled in a 2021 Leader-Telegram interview—to reach England.

In Berlin, flak pierced his tail gunner seat. He downed two German fighters in one mission, later reflecting on his German immigrant father's heritage.

On February 19, 1945, his final mission near Belgium brought heavy flak but safe return, ending "a lifetime of worrying" in 35 flights.

His crew, "the Gremlins," led by pilot Donald Zeiler, survived all missions, a miracle Jim attributed to skill, luck, and ground crews. "They never got any write-up," he said, "but we got all the glory."

Chronicled in the 2019 book *James J. Rodel and the Crew of 'Thy Will Be Done'* by Dan Monfre, Jim's memories reveal war's toll. The Dresden bombing, killing



The Gremlins. SSgt Rodel is kneeling, 2nd from left.

over 25,000, lingered painfully. Yet, his faith shone, praying for his crew's safety before each flight. "We survived the sky over there," he said at 96, grateful amid 405,399 U.S. deaths and 670,846 wounded.

Discharged on September 28, 1945, Jim affirmed, "I just wanted to be part of it. I'm glad I did it."

Post-war, Jim married Ardis in 1949, raised four children—Diana, Tom, Jean, and Brenda—and built a career in lithography.

To the last, Jim remained a devoted husband, father, and grandfather. A quiet, kind man with sharp wit and steadfast faith, he lived proudly as an American patriot, championing the nation's greatness.

A devoted family man and patriot, he leaves five grandchildren and ten great-grandchildren.



Nominations and Elections Open for 2025

The 457th Bomb Group Association is calling for nominations for key leadership roles as we prepare for our Annual Membership Meeting on October 3, 2025, in Colorado Springs, Colorado. This is your opportunity to shape the future of our organization by nominating dedicated members to serve in critical positions.

Nominations are now open for two officer positions—Vice President and Treasurer—each for a two-year term, as well as one Board of Directors position for a term to be determined. The Vice President role is currently held by Robert Parker, and the Treasurer position by Adele Gilmore, both of whom are eligible for re-election. The Board position up for election is currently held by Cleo Giachino who is eligible for another term.

Any member in good standing, whether a Life Member or with current dues paid, may submit nominations. To nominate a candidate, contact any member of the Nominations Committee by August 1, 2025: they are Robert Parker, Adele Gilmore, or Nancy Archuleta. Their email addresses can be found in the Association's Officer and Board register on Page 2 of this issue.

Voting will occur during the Annual Membership Meeting, held in conjunction with the 51st Annual Reunion of the 8th Air Force Historical Society. Only members in good standing attending in person or via Zoom call will be eligible to vote. Members receiving this newsletter by mail must provide an email address to zemper@msu.edu to participate in the Zoom call if unable to attend in person.

Your participation in this process ensures the continued strength and legacy of the 457th Bomb Group Association. We encourage all members to engage in this vital democratic tradition.

Homefront Headlines

T/Sergt. LeRoy R. Ford, 22-year-old Flying Fortress top turret gunner from Tulsa, has seen a lot of Nazi military and industrial targets blown apart in the more than 20



SERGT. FORD

Eighth Air Force bombing attacks in which he has participated. Holder of the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with three Oak Leaf clusters, Ford flies on the Fortress named for President Roosevelt's little scotty, "Mr. Fala."

"I think the outstanding part of all our attacks on European targets is the bombing," Ford said recently. "You can see the bombs walk right up to the target and blast it open. And," he added, "that sure looks good to us, because that's what we're up there for."

The son of Mr. and Mrs. Charles A. Ford, 45 North College, the sergeant is a graduate of Central high and worked for Banfield Brothers Packing company, as a meat packer, before entering army service.

Tulsa World (Tulsa, Oklahoma) ·
Wednesday, Jan 5, 1944 · Page 2

Daily News (New York, NY) ·
Tue, Apr 25, 1944 · Page 41

Hit by Flak, He Kept on Firing

A chunk of flying flak, which hit him in the head, couldn't stop Sergt. Richard T. Trundy, 32, of Brooklyn, as he dished out hot lead to Hitler's Luftwaffe over Germany. The sergeant stuck to his machine gun till his bomber was back safe in England.

Word of his wound was disclosed yesterday at the War Department. According to his proud parents, Mr. and Mrs. Reuben R. Trundy of 427 73d St., Brooklyn, Sergt. Trundy, a radio man and gunner on a bomber, was on his eighth mission over Hitlerland. He was hospitalized but is reported to be recovering.

The sergeant, his mother said, has a sort of hereditary interest in Brooklyn Bridge. His paternal grandfather, also named Richard Trundy, supplied the cornerstone for the bridge from his Maine quarry. Mrs. Trundy's father, Reuben Riley, an engineer, was a trustee of the bridge corporation.

Bricka, Europe B-17 Co-Pilot, Put on Inactive Status by Army

First Lieutenant Hays Bricka, AAF, of 1510 North Avenue, veteran of 30 missions over enemy occupied Europe as co-pilot of a B-17, returned to the States, and has been placed on inactive status.

Overseas seven months, the pilot's most memorable experience occurred on his very first mission. Returning from a flight over Germany, he was forced to "ditch" his ship in the English Channel. Striking the water with terrific impact, the Flying Fort buckled and sank almost immediately, and Lt. Bricka found himself 15 feet under water before he could free himself from entanglements in the cockpit.

Coming up to the surface, he found five other members of his crew struggling in the water, two of them seriously injured. Four of the 10-men crew were lost. The survivors floated around in the freezing Channel water an hour and a half before being picked up by an Air-Sea Rescue launch.

Another highlight of his 30-mission tour of operations came three months later when they hit a dense haze, instrument bombing conditions, and, in his own words, "the very roughest enemy flak opposition we'd ever seen." Although taking several hits on the ship—one shell burst in the bomb bay—Bricka and his crew came through without a scratch. They later counted more than 100 flak holes in the ship.

Lt. Bricka and Mrs. Bricka, the former Miss Marjorie Chamberlain, have an eight-months-old daughter, Elizabeth Ann.

Holder of the Air Medal with four clusters, he wears three battle stars on his ETO ribbon, four campaigns over Normandy, Northern France and Germany. Based in England, Bricka flew with the 457th Bombardment Group of the Eighth AAF making 22 runs over Germany, seven over France, and one over Belgium.

Having enlisted in October of 1942, the 22-year-old veteran was released from service with 86 points. He received his commission as second lieutenant at Stuttgart, Ark., an advanced flying school, and was promoted overseas.

A graduate of New Rochelle High School, Pawling Prep, and Amherst College, Lt. Bricka is the son of Mr. and Mrs. G. W. Bricka of 1510 North Avenue.

After a 30-day leave at home, he was sent to the Redistribution Center, Atlantic City, N. J., from where he was transferred to instructors twin engine advanced school at Moody Field, Ga. Later at instrument pilot instructors school, Bryan, Tex., Bricka was an instructor at Moody Field and at Bryan.

On July 6 he was returned to Fort Dix, N. J., and given terminal leave for 13 days, after which he was released from service.



HAYS BRICKA

The Standard-Star
(New Rochelle, NY) · Saturday,
Aug 11, 1945 · Pg10

AN AIR SERVICE COMMAND
(Somewhere in England)—Lt. William B. Byle, the son of Dr. and Mrs. A. S. Byle, of 311 Second street, Fort Myers, recently received a short orientation course at this station, especially designed to help newly-arrived air force soldiers prepare for a new kind of life in a combat theater. Lt. Byle has been tutored in the English monetary system, life in a new country... a complete course aimed at assisting him to adjust himself more readily to his new surroundings.

News-Press (Fort Myers, Florida)
· Sun, Apr 30, 1944 · Page 8

Parachute Saves Life After Fall from Plane

General Hears Flying Son Lost; Then Told He's Safe

A U. S. EIGHTH AIR FORCE BOMBER BASE IN BRITAIN—(P)—Col. Samuel Greason, arriving to visit his son while a 1,000-bomber attack on Berlin was in progress, was one of the first to learn that Lt. Craig P. Greason's plane had failed to return.

The next day the father was among the first to learn that his son was safe in a crash landing on the continent.

The colonel was in the control tower as the returning planes were checked off one by one. All of the 457th group's Flying Fort-

resses returned except his son's. The father was in chapel the next morning when he was notified the missing plane was safe on the continent.

The entire crew was brought back by transport plane several hours later, and the father heard from his son how the plane had been riddled by flak before it reached the target, how it got its bombs away and then managed to reach friendly territory with one engine shot out and two others damaged.

The colonel, a former district court judge of Nassau county, N. Y., is from Garden City, Long Island, N. Y. He now is on Gen. Eisenhower's staff.

Tampa Bay Times
(St. Petersburg, Florida) ·
Sunday, Feb 11, 1945 · Page 3

Men of the 457th in the News

B-17 Tail Gunner, Home From Europe, Says Nazi Flak Hardest to Stomach

By JAMES S. WATTERSON

While he doesn't look back at either one with pleasant memories, German fighter opposition is easier to stomach than German thrown flak, in the opinion of Staff Sergt. Harry L. Young, tail gunner of a Flying Fortress now home on a 21-day furlough after riding a B-17

on 22 missions over enemy held territory.

"You can at least get a shot at an attacking German plane," Sergeant Young says, "but there's nothing you can do about flak. You just have to sit tight and sweat it out."

The slim gunner is spending his

furlough with his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Harry G. Young of 113 Cedar Grove avenue. He holds the Air Medal and Oak Leaf clusters.

His B-17 was named Paper Doll but it did not have the physical characteristics of the plaything it was named for.

The Luftwaffe and the Nazi anti-aircraft men tried desperately to bring the Paper Doll down as it either droned toward or from its target for the day.

"The German fighters came at us on at least five of our missions but we succeeded in getting away without severe damage or casualties. But it was different with flak. We returned from only two missions without being riddled by shrapnel from the German anti-aircraft guns. It was ticklish business," Sergeant Young says.

The Cedar Grove avenue youth, formerly a cross-country and track man at Bulkeley school, was given leave home after 22 missions because he says, "there were plenty of gunners over there and they apparently wanted to give us a rest."

With a bombing unit of the First division of the Eighth air force in England, Sergeant Young was over German targets so familiar to American newspaper readers, Berlin, Munich, Leipzig, Schweinfurt, etc.

He estimates that the Paper Doll dropped at least 44 tons of bombs

on enemy positions in the course of the 22 missions.

His ship was always too high or else he was too busy looking for the Luftwaffe to see the bombs hit their mark, but he says he could always see the smoke from the explosions about four or five minutes after the bombs went plummeting down.

Asked about the fate of the other Fortresses in the numerous flights, Sergeant Young says that some of them weren't as lucky as the Paper Doll.

"I've seen some hit," he related. "Sometimes all of the crew got out safely because you could count their parachutes opening. And again, sometimes only half the crew managed to leap."

Sergeant Young didn't participate in the aerial operations on D-Day, June 6, but got into action five days later when the Paper Doll struck at a Nazi target in the Paris area.

The crew of the B-17 came through all of the missions without a scratch, despite the fighter opposition and flak. The young tail gunner entered the air forces Oct. 14, 1942. He has five months overseas service behind him. He has a brother, Frank, in the marines and a sister, Lorraine, in the WAVES.

The Day, New London, Conn., Thursday, Oct 5, 1944 · Page 3

Tells of Howard Lang's Death

June 30, 1945—Dear Mr. and Mrs. Lang and Family—I want to extend my sincere sympathy to you folks in the loss of your son and brother, Howard. I know the rest of the boys of the crew deeply regret the loss of our three crew members. We had all been flying together for quite some time and had become very close friends.

Howard was capable and dependable, which is very important on a bomber crew.

I'll try and give you all the information that I know of our last mission. We were flying our sixteenth mission and our target was Hamburg. Our plane was hit by flak just as we were crossing the German coast line off the North Sea near Wesemunde, Germany.

We were at an altitude of 27,000 feet when hit. Our right wing and tail assembly came off very quickly. We all bailed out immediately. Howard was not hit in the plane. Lt. Angier landed near where Howard landed and he told me that Howard's parachute did not open. There are several reasons why his chute might not have opened. He might have been hit by a piece off the plane. He could have been unconscious because of the lack of oxygen, and flak could accidentally have hit him on the way down, but not probably.

The rest of the crew were taken prisoners of war as soon as they hit the ground.

If there are any questions you folks would like to ask, I will do the best I can to answer them.

I'm enclosing a few pictures of the plane we flew across, etc.

Again I want you to know that words can't express my feelings in your loss.

Sincerely,
Lt. Samuel E. Cashman
Co-Pilot

Chatsworth Plaindealer (Chatsworth, Ill) Thursday, July 12, 1945 · Pg.6

Missed Bail-Out Order, Flies Bomber Home

MIAMI BEACH, Fla. (AP)—T-Sgt. David C. Foltz's past observations on the piloting of a B-17 stood him in good stead when he and four other crewmen didn't hear the pilot's order to bail out.

The 25-year-old Republic, Pa., gunner received the Silver Star for taking over the controls of the plane after it was hit over Germany and flying it back to Allied territory.

Arriving at the army air forces redistribution station here for re-assignment, Foltz said neither he nor four other members of the crew heard the pilot's order to leave the plane.

"One of us happened to walk forward," Foltz said, "and we discovered that we were alone in a pilotless plane. I'd fooled around the controls of a B-17 on training missions, so I volunteered to fly it."

Foltz said his first act was to put the plane into a 14,000 foot dive to put out the fire. Then he flew the bomber back to Allied territory in France and gave the order to bail out.

The World-News (Roanoke, VA) · Tuesday, March 6, 1945 · Page 2

AIR FORCE MEMBER REPORTED MISSING IN ACTION

Word was received in town on Saturday from Mrs. Louise Labe, of Robesonia, that her brother, S/Sgt. Delos Reigle has been reported missing in action over Germany since November 2nd. Sgt. Reigle is the son of the late Norman and Lydia Helt Reigle, formerly of town and the nephew of James and Arthur Helt and Mrs. Charles Uhler.

He entered the U. S. Air Corps early in 1943 and has been serving with the 457th Bomb Group, 750 Squadron. In his last letter written to his sister the day he was reported missing, he stated that he expected to have completed his missions on Thanksgiving and was looking forward to coming home for Christmas. He had been awarded the "Distinguished Flying Cross" and the Air Medal with 3 Oak Leaf Clusters.

Lykens Register Friday, Dec 01, 1944 · PG 1



CHARLES TRIPP

First Lieut. Charles Tripp, navigator on a B-17 bomber based in England, is in Wichita on 26-day leave after completing his thirty-first mission over enemy-occupied Europe. Lieutenant Tripp is visiting his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Otto Tripp, 448 North Spruce. A veteran of seven months overseas combat duty, the youthful airman holds the air medal with three oak leaf clusters, the D.F.C., the European theater campaign ribbon, and the presidential unit citation which was awarded his 457th bomb group of the Eighth air force for having the month of July, 1944.

He also wears two battle stars, one for participation in the pre-invasion day air offensive, and the other for military operations following D-day. A former student of Kansas State college, the lieutenant entered service in October, 1942. His father, Otto Tripp, is employed making B-29 bomber planes at Boeing.

Cpl. Denver P. Harrington, 35548-945, 457th Bomb Group, 751st Sqdn., A. P. O. 9396, c/o Postmaster, New York, N. Y.

Sgt. Edward L. Wilson, son of Mr. and Mrs. W. E. Wilson, 6311 N. Commercial avenue, waist gunner on a B-17 with the 457th bombardment group of the Eighth AAF in England, is a patient at McCaw General hospital, Walla Walla. He was wounded by flak while on a mission over Berlin and was returned to the States.

KEEPS 'EM ROLLING
"Keep 'em Rolling" is the watchword of the automotive maintenance men of the Ordnance Section of the 457th Bombardment Group in which SGT. Raymond Payne is an auto mechanic.

Folsom Killed Over Germany

A Crew Chief's Life at Glatton: The Story of Charles "Chuck" Pirtle

Among the unsung heroes of the 749th Bomb Squadron was Charles Horton Pirtle, Jr., known as "Chuck," who served as crew chief for the B-17 "Ace of Hearts" (B-17 #43-37733). His military service, rooted in a strong mechanical background, exemplifies the critical role crew chiefs played in keeping the 8th Air Force's bombers mission ready.

Born on December 26, 1919, in Granite City, Illinois, to Charles and Harriet Cady Pirtle, Chuck grew up with a natural aptitude for mechanics. Standing 5'7" and weighing 140 pounds, with distinctive red hair and blue eyes, he enlisted in the Army at 18 on September 17, 1935, and served three years with Company C, 138th Infantry.

After his initial service, he worked as a mechanic in St. Louis, Missouri, sharpening skills that would later prove invaluable. Chuck had registered for the draft on July 1, 1941, and on October 19, 1941, married Mary June Green, just weeks before the Pearl Harbor attack. He re-enlisted on January 6, 1943.

Arriving at Glatton Air Base in early 1944, Chuck joined the 457th Bomb Group, assigned to the 749th Bomb Squadron under the 8th Air Force's 1st Bombardment Division. As a crew chief, he was responsible for the maintenance and operational readiness of "Ace of Hearts," a B-17G that flew numerous missions over Nazi-occupied Europe. The 457th's operations included strategic bombing during "Big Week" in February 1944 and support for D-Day and the Battle of the Bulge.

A crew chief's role was both technically demanding and high-stakes. Chuck's typical day began before dawn, often in the cold, damp conditions of the English countryside. Working on open dispersal pads where B-17s were parked, he conducted daily inspections of the aircraft's four Wright R-1820 engines,

checking for oil leaks, worn components, or battle damage from previous missions.

His tasks included inspections, repairs, serving, coordination, pre- and post-flight checks. He acted as a liaison with specialists like armorers (for bombs and guns) and radio technicians for complex repairs. It was also Chuck's responsibility to certify the aircraft as mission-ready before takeoff and assessing it after landing for any issues reported by the flight crew.

Chuck's mechanical experience from his civilian days was crucial, enabling him to troubleshoot complex systems under tight deadlines—often with missions scheduled within hours. The pressure was immense, as a single oversight could endanger the nine-man flight crew.

Under Chuck's care, "Ace of Hearts" faced significant challenges. On June 25, 1944, during a mission to Montbartier, France, the aircraft was hit by flak near St. Lo. Despite the damage, the pilot, Scott Ormsby, managed to return the plane to Glatton, though four crew

members bailed out and became prisoners of war. This incident highlights the crew chief's critical role in ensuring that even battle-damaged aircraft could be



repaired and returned to service. Another incident occurred on February 14, 1945, when "Ace of Hearts" sustained a landing accident with pilot Dick Peterson, possibly due to mechanical issues or combat damage, further underscoring the relentless demands on Chuck and his team.

Life at Glatton Air Base was a mix of grueling work and fleeting moments of relief. The base, built in 1943 by the US Army's 809th Engineer Battalion, was a bustling hub with approximately 2,900 personnel, of whom only about 500 were aircrew. The remaining 2,400, including Chuck, were support personnel who

maintained aircraft, fueled planes, loaded bombs, and performed countless other tasks. Crew chiefs worked long hours, sometimes 15-hour shifts, in open-air conditions, battling frostbite in winter or mud in spring. The constant roar of B-17s and the emotional toll of seeing damaged planes—or none return—cast a somber shadow.

Despite the challenges, the camaraderie among the ground crew offered solace. Off-duty, Chuck and his friends visited pubs in nearby Peterborough or attended Red Cross-organized dances, forging bonds that sustained morale. Letters from Mary June were a lifeline, offering personal connection amid the war's uncertainty. Anecdotes from Glatton suggest a tight knit but sometimes somber community, with new arrivals feeling isolated amid veteran crews' focus on survival.

The crew chief's relationship with their aircraft was deeply personal. Chuck knew every quirk of "Ace of Hearts," from its temperamental systems to its battle scars. He briefed pilots on the plane's condition and incorporated their feedback into repairs, ensuring reliability. The pride Chuck took in maintaining "Ace of Hearts" reflected the broader ethos of ground crews, whose high maintenance standards were praised by aircrews.

Discharged on October 14, 1945, Chuck returned to St. Louis, Missouri, reuniting with Mary June. They settled into civilian life, raising their daughter and building a stable future. Chuck resumed work as a mechanic for an automobile company, applying the precision he honed at Glatton. Tragically, both his daughter and wife preceded him in death.

Chuck was living in the Ozarks River Manor, an assisted living facility, when he passed away on June 13, 2002, at age 82, leaving a legacy of service during WWII. He was buried in the Missouri Veterans Cemetery in St. Louis. His service as a crew chief at Glatton Air Base exemplifies the dedication and skill of the ground crew who supported the 8th Air Force's bombing campaigns.

From his early days as a mechanic in St. Louis to his critical role maintaining "Ace of Hearts," Chuck's story highlights the unsung heroes of WWII. His post-war life as a family man and mechanic further illustrates the resilience of the Greatest Generation. For the 457th Bomb Group Association, Chuck's legacy serves as a poignant reminder of the vital contributions of all who served, both in the air and on the ground.

Update on Glatton Water Pump



The 457th Bomb Group Association is excited to update members on the status of a historic portable water pump (above) used by fire crews at Glatton Air Base during WWII. Originally purchased by member Paul Kelly from a farmer near Glatton, the pump was offered to the Association after Kelly's job-related move. The Board of Directors unanimously approved its purchase at Kelly's original cost. Initially cared for by UK historians Angie and Tim Newell, we extend our gratitude for their stewardship.

Following no response from the Glatton Airfield Flying Club regarding a permanent home, President Zemper transferred the pump to Clyde Dodson. Dodson is now restoring the artifact and plans to display it at his Nissen hut. In recognition of his efforts to preserve WWII memorabilia, the Board, on May 4, 2025, unanimously passed a motion by Robert Parker, seconded by Lynda Thomas, to grant Dodson a lifetime membership. We are thrilled to see this piece of Glatton's history preserved and will keep members informed on its restoration and display.

FROM THE EDITOR...

Please allow me a moment to introduce myself as the new editor of "*The Fireball*". My name is Carolyn DeLoach, and I'm thrilled to serve the 457th Bomb Group Association. At 74, I've returned to my roots on DeLoachs Dairy Farm in Folkston, GA, where I was born and raised.

My father, Lt. Benjamin Hoyt DeLoach, a 751st Squadron pilot, met my mother, Betty, while he was training at Rapid City Air Base, during his 457th Bomb Group service. Though both have passed, their romance and his wartime legacy deepen my bond with this organization.



My life has been a tapestry of diverse experiences. With a degree in Analytical Chemistry, I embarked on a career that took me from Top Secret research in the U.S. Air Force to the corporate world, where I ultimately became director of operations for an international chemical company.

After retiring, I found a new calling teaching advanced chemistry and physics. Yet, my true passion lies in historical research and writing, which has led to three published books, two non-fiction and one fiction. I've also owned and operated two small-town newspapers, honing my skills in storytelling and community engagement.

Today, as Executive Director of the Charlton County Historical Society in Folkston, Georgia, I'm dedicated to preserving the stories that shape us. Editing "*The Fireball*" feels like a natural extension of my journey, especially given my father's service with the 457th.

I'm eager to share your stories, honor our shared history, and keep the legacy of the 457th Bomb Group alive.

I pledge to make this newsletter a vital source of Association updates and a heartfelt tribute to our veterans.

Carolyn DeLoach

charltonhistoryandmore@gmail.com

Hear Ye!
Hear Ye!

***The 457th BGA
is planning a U.K. trip,
May 20–27, 2026,
for Memorial Day,
with a potential visit to
France/Belgium war
graves. Details in the
November issue of
The Fireball.***

How Many Are Still Flying?

By Eric D. Zemper

Currently there are six flyable B-17s, five in the US and one in the UK. They are:

- 1) Madras Maiden/Ye Olde Pub** — owned by Erickson Aircraft Collection, Madras, OR.
- 2) Sentimental Journey** — Commemorative Air Force, Mesa, AZ.
- 3) Memphis Belle** — based in Anaheim, CA. (The original Memphis Belle is a static display at the USAF Museum in Dayton, OH.)
- 4) Aluminum Overcast** — Experimental Aircraft Association, Oshkosh, WI.
- 5) Yankee Lady** — was at the Yankee Air Museum in Belleville, MI, but now in private collection in California.
- 6) Sally B** — at the Imperial War Museum in the UK.



457th Bomb Group Soars Online: A Digital Legacy

The 457th Bomb Group Association proudly maintains a vibrant online presence, thanks to our Webmaster, Erwin de Mooij, from the Netherlands. Erwin's technical expertise has elevated the 457th Bomb Group website to one of the world's premier WWII aviation sites. Our Facebook group page also thrives with nearly 2,000 members, connecting our community globally. Visit us online to explore our legacy!



457th Bomb Group Association Membership Dues & Subscription Form

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