

457th Bomb Group Association



Est. 1971 ► Bentonville, AR

July 2025 Issue 100

DETAILS: 8AFHS 51st Annual Reunion

In Colorado Springs, the 457th Bomb Group Association is joining the 8th Air Force Historical Society for its 51st Annual Reunion, set for October 1 through 5, 2025, at the DoubleTree by Hilton. This gathering also celebrates the Society's 50th anniversary, bringing together veterans, members, and guests for five days of remembrance, education, and camaraderie honoring the 8th Air Force's World War II legacy.

The reunion features keynote addresses from General Gregory M. Guillot, Commander of NORAD, and General Stephen N. Whiting, Commander of U.S. Space Command, who will share insights on military history and modern defense. Attendees can explore the region's history through a scenic Jeep tour of Garden of the Gods and Cheyenne Canyon, a guided visit to the U.S. Air Force Academy's iconic Cadet Chapel, and a self-guided tour of the National Museum of World War II Aviation, showcasing restored WWII aircraft. Evening dinners foster fellowship, culminating in a formal gala banquet on Saturday, October 4. A memorial service at the Air Force Academy will honor fallen 8th Air Force members, and a marketplace will offer WWII memorabilia and Society merchandise.

Open to 8AFHS members and their guests, the event welcomes new members through registration. Accommodations are at the DoubleTree, with overflow at nearby motels such as Hampton Inn. Hospitality suites are limited and first-come, first-served. Registration closes September 1, 2025, and early booking is urged for hotel rooms and tours, some capped at 50 participants. Tours involve moderate walking.

For registration, hotel links, and the full schedule, visit www.8thafhs.org or contact info@8thafhs.org.



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President's Message

July 2025

Thanks to Carolyn DeLoach, our fantastic newsletter editor, we have a July 4 edition of 'The Fireball' for the first time in six years. But it also means I have to come up with an additional 'President's Message'. Since our annual meeting and elections are coming up at the beginning of October (see info about the Colorado Springs reunion on the front page), I'm going to focus on this year's election process, with more detail than was mentioned in the May issue of the newsletter.

Per our By-Laws, officers serve a 2-year term, with the President and Secretary elected in even-numbered years and Vice President and Treasurer in odd-numbered years. The four Directors serve 4-year terms, with one expiring each year. So this year we must elect a Vice President, a Treasurer and one Director.

The current incumbents in these positions are Bob Parker (VP), Adele Gilmore (Treasurer) and Cleo Giachino (Director). All are eligible for another term, and it's probably a safe bet the Nominations Committee will renominate them. But anyone else can still be nominated for any of these positions by submitting nominations to the Nominations Committee by August 15. The members of this year's Nominations Committee are: Lynda Thomas, Dorothy Enriquez and Nancy Archuleta. Their email addresses are listed on the left panel.

You can submit nominations to any of these people at their email addresses. Quoting from our By-Laws, the parameters are: "Only current Members in good standing [i.e., Life Member or annual dues paid for this year] shall be eligible to be nominated to Board membership or officer positions.

A nomination may be made by the Nominating Committee for any Member who meets the eligibility requirements, or may be submitted by any Member to the Nominating Committee:

1. A nomination may be made by a Member on his or her own behalf;
2. A nomination may be made for another Member only with the nominee's consent;
3. Nominations originating outside the Nominating Committee do not require a second;
4. Nominations may be made by Members from the floor during the general membership meeting; and
5. Members of the Nominating Committee are not precluded from being nominated for a position."

The slate of nominees will be submitted to the President by August 31, and the membership will be notified of the full slate during the following week.

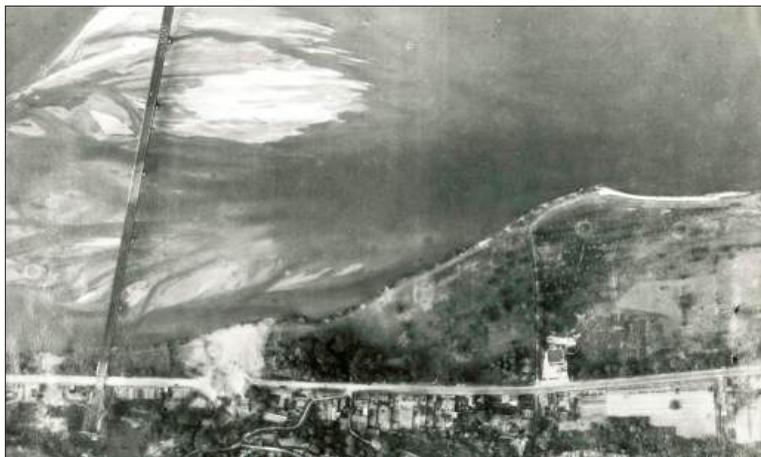
The election will occur by secret ballot during our annual meeting at 7:45-8:45 a.m. on Friday, October 3, in Colorado Springs (exact site to be announced). This year we will again make the meeting and the voting accessible by Zoom call for those who cannot attend in person.

If you are receiving this newsletter by surface mail instead of email, that probably means we don't have an email address for you and you will need to send me your email address in order to participate in the Zoom call.

Please plan to attend our annual meeting in Colorado Springs in conjunction with the 8th Air Force Historical Society. There are a number of great events planned that I'm sure you'll enjoy.

- EZ

The 457th's Canceled 4th of July Raid



The 457th's July 4th target the Saumur RR bridge, vertical line.
(PHOTO: *International Bomber Command Centre Digital Archive*)

On July 4, 1944, as General Omar Bradley ordered U.S. ground forces to mark Independence Day with strikes on German targets, the 457th Bomb Group prepared to join the effort with a mission against the Saumur railroad bridge—a vital German supply link between Paris and Bordeaux. Though not under Bradley's direct command, the group aimed to deliver a symbolic rain of American-made "fireworks" in bombs, but despite the high risks to the flight crews, weather scrubbed the operation, leaving the skies silent.

The Saumur bridge, a stubborn lifeline for German reinforcements moving to the Normandy front, had been bombed before but always rebuilt. The 94th Combat Wing tasked two wings to strike it, with the 457th contributing 24 B-17s to the lead and low boxes of the B Wing.

Major William F. Smith commanded the lead box, with Captain Mark Belcher as pilot, while Captain Jerome Godfrey led the low box, with Lt. William L. Brackley (photo below, standing center) at the controls. The crews, aware of the mission's dangers,

prepared for a perilous run over enemy territory.

Assembly at Glatton, England, went smoothly, a testament to the 457th's precision. But trouble brewed as the A Wing lagged, forcing the formation into several double drifts to maintain order. The route took the group over the Normandy beachhead, a poignant reminder of the Allied push. Crews braced for anti-aircraft fire and Luftwaffe fighters, risks that loomed large on every mission. Yet, the real enemy that day was the weather.

A thick undercast blanketed the target, obscuring the Saumur bridge entirely. With no visual on the objective and Pathfinder equipment unable to penetrate the clouds, the mission became untenable. The 457th, poised to unleash devastation, was forced to abandon the strike. The B-17s turned back to Glatton, bombs still in their racks, unscathed by flak or fighters but denied their chance to mark the 4th with a decisive blow.

For the 457th's crews, the scrubbed mission was a bitter pill. The high risk of facing German defenses was a known cost, one they accepted in order to disrupt the enemy's war machine. Instead, they returned to base, their Independence Day gesture grounded by nature's indifference.

While some units elsewhere fired red, white, and blue smoke shells in symbolic defiance, the 457th could only wait for the next call to the skies.

The story of this unfulfilled mission, preserved in the 457th Bomb Group Association's records, honors the crews' readiness and resolve. Their willingness to face danger on July 4, 1944, even if unrealized, reflects the spirit of sacrifice that defined the "Mighty Eighth."

For 457th's mission narratives, go to:

<https://457thbombgroupassoc.org/mission-narratives/>



Lt. Norman M. Chapman: A Pilot's Unyielding Courage



First Lieutenant Norman M. Chapman, a 750th Squadron pilot, displayed exceptional leadership and heroism during World War II. Born April 12, 1922, in New London, Connecticut, and raised in Groton and Manchester, CT, Chapman's valor commanding the B-17 Big Time Operator (serial 43-37606) epitomizes the "Mighty Eighth's" spirit. His courage under fire remains a powerful testament to bravery.

Chapman's wartime saga began boldly, buzzing his Connecticut home in a B-17 before deploying to Glatton, England—a daring act that drew a neighbor's complaint but revealed his audacious spirit. As a 750th Squadron pilot, he earned the Air Medal with One Oak Leaf Cluster for meritorious missions before his 13th and final flight. On October 17, 1944, Chapman led the 457th's 136th mission, targeting Cologne's marshalling yards.

Having faced Cologne's fierce flak on October 14, which tore a 3-foot hole in his wing, he knew the peril ahead. Yet, he steadied his crew—Lt. Oliver Wicks (bombardier), T/Sgt. Marshall Windham (flight engineer), S/Sgt. Joseph Budich (waist gunner), Sgt. Robert Brady (radio operator), Sgt.



"Big Time Operator" in the snow. Above photo shows the crash landing. (Photo courtesy of Todd Chapman)

James Dixon (tail gunner), Sgt. Carl Weibel (ball turret gunner), Lt. Raymond Mills (co-pilot), and F.O. Kenneth Johnson (navigator)—at 25,000 feet to disrupt Nazi logistics.

Over Cologne, clouds hid the target, and faulty Pathfinder gear forced a risky bomb run. As Wicks guided the drop, Big Time Operator took two flak hits—one under the cockpit, one in the #3 engine. Three engines failed, instruments died, and the fuselage was riddled with holes. Mills was killed instantly, and Johnson perished from shrapnel. Alone, Chapman kept the shattered B-17 aloft, a stunning feat of skill.

He confirmed his crew's status: alive, save for two. With Big Time Operator plummeting, Chapman chose to glide 60–70 miles toward Allied lines near Belgium or Aachen over bailing out in Germany. His crew's trust was absolute. Flying blind through clouds, he ordered gear jettisoned.

Learning Wicks' parachute was useless, he had Windham secure him for a crash landing. "I had great faith in him," Windham wrote in *The Journey Down*. Chapman glided to a belly landing on Holzman's farm near Prüm, Germany, stopping just shy of a hedgerow. Windham called it Distinguished Flying Cross-worthy. Chapman tended Wicks' wounds, but German troops captured the crew. Interrogated in Frankfurt, he was sent to Stalag Luft III in Sagan, Poland,

infamous for the "Great Escape."

Enduring scarce rations, he dropped from 185 to 130 pounds on his 6'2" frame. After two months, he was marched 350 miles to Stalag VII-A in Moosburg, a harsher camp, until liberation in April 1945.

Freed, Chapman returned to Connecticut, bearing the loss of his brother Donald in a Pacific B-24 mission. He married Barbara L. Hallett, raising four children: Cathy, Cynthia, Todd, and Holly. In 1989, he learned Wicks survived, sparking emotional calls after 40 years. Photos of Big Time Operator's crash site later stirred pride and pain.

Chapman's skill saved lives, guiding a broken B-17 and enduring captivity. His legacy honors the crew he led with unwavering courage.

**We Need Your Help
Finding 457th Veterans**

*If you know of any
surviving veterans of the
457th, please contact us.
Email Eric Zemper at
zemper@msu.edu*

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

Sgt. Arnold C. McQuaide: Grit in War, Grace in Peace

Arnold Chester McQuaide's life was defined by duty and service, a journey shared by millions of Americans during World War II. Born in 1915 in Lowell, Massachusetts, to James Chester McQuaide III and Ada Martha Ogley, Arnold grew up in a working-class town, graduating from Lowell High School in 1933.

He attended Lowell Textile School (now UMass Lowell) before enlisting in the Army. His path led to Atlantic City, New Jersey, where he served as a drill sergeant, training draftees. There, in 1942, he met Ruth Heacock, a paraprofessional nurse's aide at a home for crippled children. They married on December 6, 1942, as the war reshaped their lives. Like countless couples, Arnold and Ruth faced separation, their bond strained by distance and uncertainty.

A few months after their marriage, Ruth became pregnant with their son, Arnold "Chet" McQuaide Jr., and Arnold shipped out for England, likely in late 1943 after training in New Mexico, Utah, and Washington State, joining the 457th Bomb Group, 749th Squadron, at Glatton Air Base near Peterborough. Ruth, like millions of wartime wives, returned to her parents' small farm in rural northeastern Pennsylvania to await their child's birth. Their story—of a soldier abroad and a family holding strong at home—echoed across America.

At Glatton, Arnold worked as a B-17 mechanic, repairing bombers torn apart by enemy fire. The 457th flew dangerous missions over Nazi-occupied Europe, and damaged planes returned with bullet holes, shattered plexiglass, or blood-stained interiors from wounded or fallen airmen. "The cleanup alone was grim," Arnold later told Chet. The emotional toll of handling such planes was heavy, but Arnold and his crewmates patched fuselages and engines, keeping the B-17s flying. He sometimes joined test flights, enduring "hair-raising" moments to ensure repairs held. His ground role was essential to the air war's success.

Despite the strain, Arnold found moments of connection. His mother, an immigrant from Bradford, England, had relatives near Peterborough. He visited them, trading candy available to soldiers on the airbase for local produce and baked goods, sharing small comforts with his fellow airmen and English kin.

In 1945, as the war ended,

Arnold returned to the U.S., reuniting with Ruth and meeting young Chet, not yet three, on her parents' farm.

Like millions of GIs, Arnold set aside his uniform and embraced civilian life, settling into family and community. He and Ruth remained on the farm for the rest of his life, supporting her elderly parents and raising Chet, who later attended Penn State and Navy ROTC.

Arnold worked as a carpenter and construction worker for over three decades, initially in Columbia County, Pennsylvania, and later commuting to sites across Pennsylvania and neighboring states.

Arnold poured his energy into his community. He was a volunteer Santa, bringing joy to area stores, school and church celebrations, and, with Ruth's help, delivering gifts to families in need who might not otherwise have celebrated Christmas. He served 12 years as Millville's justice of the peace, led Cub Scout Pack 38, and guided youth through 4-H and Boy Scouting. A member of Rohrsburg United Methodist Church, Benton VFW, Washington Lodge 265, Caldwell Consistory, and the Carpenters' Union, he also sang with local groups. His and Ruth's dedication reflected the postwar lives of millions, rebuilding communities with quiet resolve.

Arnold cherished his 457th Bomb Group ties, hoping to attend a reunion in Vermont around 1990. Declining health forced him and Ruth to turn back. He passed away on September 6, 1993, at 78, and was buried in Millville Cemetery, Millville, Pennsylvania.

Arnold and Ruth's story—of love tested by war, sacrifice on the home front, and decades of service—captures the spirit of their generation. Their legacy, carried by Chet, who honors his father's quiet heroism, keeps the 457th's sacrifices alive. Through shared memories, Arnold's grit and grace endure, a tribute to those who shaped history.



Photo courtesy of Chet McQuaide.



PHOTO: Arnold with Ruth and Chet shortly after returning from England.

Photo courtesy of Chet McQuaide.

Homefront Headlines ...



LIEUT. JAMES B. CORRIHER.

Charlotte Flyer Reported Lost In Action Over Germany On November 2.

Second Lieut. James B. Corriher, son of Mr. and Mrs. J. H. Corriher of 1115 North Caldwell street has been reported as missing in action over Germany since November 2.

A graduate of Charlotte Technical High school, he entered the Army in 1940, and became an air cadet in January, 1943. He received his commission as a bomber pilot March 12, 1944, at Valdosta, Ga., and received further training at MacDill field, Tampa, Fla., before going overseas September 25, this year.

He was a star football and basketball player at Tech in 1939 and 1940. His brother, First Sergt. John H. Corriher, Jr., is in a signal operating company in the European theater, and another brother, Charlie, is at home. He has two sisters, Miss Joan Corriher, and Mrs. Madeline Watt, wife of Lieut. James B. Watt, who also is serving overseas as a transport pilot.

The Charlotte Observer
Sun, Nov 19, 1944 · Page 14

The LaFayette Sun
Dec 27, 1944 · Page 8

Somewhere in England.—Four sub-depot repairmen of the 457th Bomb Group have perfected a method for changing Fortress wing nacelles which eliminates the need to change the entire wing panel, thus saving many man hours. They are S/Sgt. Harlan W. Heeren of Lemars, La.; Bradford C. Driggers of East Point, Ga.; and Samuel N. Sloan of Kentucky and Sgt. Obie D. Smith of LaFayette, Ala., Sgt. Smith is the son of Mr. Noah Smith of LaFayette Route 1.

County Soldier Lauded For Sticking To Post

Remaining at his post at the radio of a crippled Flying Fortress until the plane was "ditched" into the North Sea, Staff Sgt. Virgil Hook, Jonesboro, has been cited for gallantry and commended as one of the three members who "with inadequate equipment" made possible the survival of the entire crew.

In a story released by the War Department, details of how the bomber, "Bugs Bunny," riddled from propeller to tail with flak and shells and hitting on only one motor, was guided back to safety by the ingenuity of a navigator with a hand compass, a radioman with an emergency transmitter, and a pilot with only half a control board, were released.

The plane, was badly crippled over Germany, with two engines shot up, radio, electricity and oxygen tanks put out of order and navigation instruments ruined. The story of the unusual cooperation began when one crew member risked a "blackout" himself to inch back to the tail of the bomber and secure an auxiliary tank for the pilot, Lt. Harry R. Stafford, Ava, Mo. The bomber finally lagged behind the formation, lost altitude and strayed from its course until the navigator, Lt. Arthur E. Slack, rigged up a hand compass, navigation set and charted the course toward England.

As the plane left enemy territory and seemed to be under control, further difficulties were encountered as the third engine gave out and clogged gas lines made the transfer of fuel from the disabled engines to the low supply impossible. While the pilot and navigator were putting together makeshift equipment to forestall ditching, Sgt. Hook made a hurried inspection of radio equipment

and found the entire set useless. As the plane lost more altitude, Sgt. Hook saw repairs were useless and set up an emergency transmitter which was carried as part of the ditching equipment. Starting to give signals before ditching, the radio was cranked alternately by members of the crew keeping up steady SOS signals.

The plane was hovering over the North Sea when the last engine gave out and Lt. Stafford ordered the crew in the radio room to prepare to ditch. During the time the ship was ditched and crew launched dinghies and left the doomed Fortress. Sgt. Hook still clung to the emergency transmitter, sending the message until even the supplementary radio became useless.

Shortly after the dinghies had left the plane, a patrol ship was sighted and a few hours later the crew, drenched to the skin but uninjured, was pulled out of the North Sea and put aboard a rescue ship.

Officials later informed the wrecked crew, that the constant SOS signal which Sgt. Hook had kept sending had enabled them to follow the movement of the plane and send the Air-Sea Rescue Service to their aid.

Mr. and Mrs. Virgil Hook, Jonesboro, parents of the radioman, said they recently were informed of the mission and notified their son had been awarded the Air Medal for gallantry in the mission. At present, Sgt. Hook and other members of the crew are spending a rest period at a Red Cross rest home in England, the parents were informed.

Sgt. Hook, 20, enlisted in the Army Air Force Feb. 16, 1942, when he was employed at Paranite Wire Co., here. He was sent overseas in March, 1944, to an Eighth Air Force station in England. He is a graduate of Jonesboro High School in the class of 1942.

Leader-Tribune
Marion, Indiana
Saturday, June 24, 1944

AN EIGHTH AIR FORCE BOMBER STATION, England — Second Lieutenant William G. Litogot, husband of Mrs. Florence Litogot, 624 Highland street, has joined the veteran 457th Bombardment group of the Eighth Air Force.

Lt. Litogot is a co-pilot of a B-17 Flying Fortress. He has spent many months training and preparing for the part he will play in the huge daylight assaults on the Nazi war machine.

He is a graduate of Theodore Roosevelt high school and prior to his entry into the Army Air Forces on December 5, 1942, he was employed by the Ford Motor company.

The Wyandotte News-Herald
Thu, Jan 04, 1945
Page 2

Wounded



Sgt. Goerrs

Waist gunner on a Flying Fortress, Staff Sgt. Robert H. Goerrs, 20, was wounded by flak Oct. 28 on his 12th mission over Germany. Son of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur C. Goerrs, 31 Wendel Ave., Kenmore, he was in his freshman year at Bethany College, West Va., when he entered the service in March 1943. He wears the Air Medal with one Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster and the Purple Heart.

The Buffalo News
Mon, Jan 22, 1945
Page 9

Sgt. Denver Harrington, serving in the 8th Air Forces in England many months, and his brother, Pvt. Richard Harrington with the Engineers Supply Command in France, had a happy get-together recently. Richard, having a few days leave, went to London and through the Red Cross learned that Denver was located about 70 miles from London. They had 24 hours together. They are the sons of Mr. and Mrs. Don Harrington, north of Bryan. Harringtons have another son, Harold, in the navy school at Great Lakes and their oldest son is home released from overseas duties, one of the first men sent from Williams county.

The Bryan Democrat
Bryan, Ohio · Thursday,
May 03, 1945

MR. and MRS. George Levasseur of Yakima have received word that their son, Stf. Sgt. George Levasseur, has been reported missing in action in the European theater of war. Sgt. Levasseur was a turret gunner on a Flying Fortress in the Eighth air force, stationed in England. Sgt. Levasseur is a graduate of Marquette high school here.

The Spokesman-Review
Sat, Nov 25, 1944 · Page 1

Enterprise-Courier
Thu, Jan 04, 1945 · Page 1

An Eighth Air Force Bomber Station, England—2nd Lt. William D. Bird, 21-year-old son of Mr and Mrs. William D. Bird, Sr., Charleston, Missouri, has joined the veteran 457th Bombardment Group of the Eighth Air Force.

Lt. Bird is a navigator of a B-17 Flying Fortress. He has been training and preparing for many months for the part he will play in the huge daylight precision bombing assaults on industrial and military objectives in Germany and Nazi occupied Continental Europe.

He is a graduate of the Charleston High School, Charleston, Mo. He then entered Missouri University, where he was a student prior to his entry into the Army Air Forces.

...News of the 457th



WITH VETERAN BOMB GROUP—Sergeant Robert C. Mooers, (right), 23-year-old son of Mr. and Mrs. Olin D. Mooers, Route 4, Houlton, and Sgt. W. C. Smallwood, (left), are serving with the veteran 457th Flying Fortress Bombardment Group of the Eighth Air Force in England. Sgt. Mooers is an airplane mechanic and propeller specialist. He is engaged in servicing and repairing mighty Fortresses to keep them in perfect condition for instant combat use. Training and experience gained through many months of hard work enable him to perform his duties in a highly efficient manner. He is a graduate of the Houlton High school. Prior to his entry into the Army Air Forces on August 19, 1943, he was engaged in operating a large farm with his father.

The Bangor Daily News, Bangor, Maine. January 01, 1945

Van Buren Staff Sergeant Killed In Crash Of Bomber

HARTFORD, Jan. 6—Staff Sgt. Robert Anthony Timmons, son of Mrs. Joda Coccrane, East Shepaard St., Hartford, and of Earl Timmons, of Sister Lakes, was one of the six victims in the crash explosion of the four-engined Flying Fortress which crashed Monday in a storm 65 miles east of Wendover, Utah.

A detailed message came to the mother last night confirming the death of Timmons. The Calvin & Ziever funeral home in Hartford has been advised that his body was cremated at Salt Lake City and that his ashes will reach them either today or tomorrow.

Memorial services will be held in Hartford at a date to be announced later.

Sgt. Timmons was a tall gunner,

21 years of age, with the 749th squadron and 457th group, AAB, Wendover Field, Utah. He had been in service one year and four months, enlisting from Dowagiac.

The mishap occurred to a new Fortress just issued. The group set out on a mission, and when 65 miles from Wendover they struck a severe storm. The plane developed motor trouble and iced. It struck a mountain and exploded. Five men jumped and four burned to death.

Besides his mother in Hartford and father at Sister Lakes, Sgt. Timmons leaves a half-brother, Mickey Cochrane, in Hartford.

The Herald-Palladium
Benton Harbor, Michigan ·
Thursday, January 06, 1944

The Waukesha County
Freeman
Fri, Feb 18, 1944 ·Page 2

OVERSEAS
First Lieutenant Charles R. Love, son of Mrs. Charles R. Love, Redding, Shasta County, is serving in England with the 457th Bombardment Group of the 8th Air Force as a squadron supply officer.

The Sacramento Beeday
Mon, Dec 25, 1944
Page 6

Sgt. E. R. Lee, brother of Mrs. Allen Warden, 807 Beechwood av., has arrived safely somewhere in England as a mechanic with the air corps. He was formerly stationed in Utah and his address is 751 1st sqd., 457th bombing Grp., APO 634, c/o Postmaster, N. Y.

John M. Gayden Wins Promotion

AN EIGHTH AIR FORCE BOMBER STATION, England—John M. Gayden, 21-year-old son of Mr. and Mrs. William H. Gayden, 1717 Heyward street, Columbia, has been promoted to the grade of sergeant. It was announced recently by his commanding officer, Col. Harris E. Rogner.

Sergeant Gayden, a gunner of a B-17 Flying Fortress, is a newcomer to the veteran 457th Bombardment Group of the Eighth Air Force. He has spent many months' training for the part he will play in the huge daylight precision bombing assaults on industrial and military objectives in Germany and Nazi occupied territory.

He is a graduate of the Columbia high school, where he was active in the sports program and a member of the football and track teams. He then entered The Citadel, and was a student there prior to his entry into the Army Air Forces on December 15, 1943.

The Columbia Record
Jan 01, 1945 ·Page 12

Now Staff Sergeant—

An Eighth Air Force Bomber Station, England—Robert W. Edwards, 22-year-old son of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas N. Edwards, Fort Mill, S. C., has been promoted to the grade of staff sergeant, it was announced recently by his commanding officer, Col. Harris E. Rogner. S/Sgt. Edwards is a radio operator of a B-17 Flying Fortress in the veteran 457th bombardment group of the Eighth Air force. He is a graduate of the Fort Mill High school, Fort Mill, S. C., where he took an active part in the sports program as a member of the baseball team. He then entered the University of North Carolina and was a student there prior to his entry into the Army Air forces.

Fort Mill Times
Jan 04, 1945 ·Page 1

WITH THE BOYS



Parents Receive Staff Sgt. Mack's Air Medal Award

Mr. and Mrs. Percy A. Mack of Cornwall have received the air

medal recently awarded their son, Staff Sgt. Percy A. Mack, Jr., at an eighth air force base in England. Staff Sgt. Mack, a gunner on a B-17 Flying Fortress, arrived in England about Oct. 1 and has completed several missions over enemy territory. The citation with the air



Percy Mack

medal reads: "For meritorious achievement while participating in sustained bomber combat operations over Germany and German-occupied countries. The courage, coolness and skill displayed by these officers and enlisted men upon these occasions reflect great credit upon themselves and the armed forces of the United States." Staff Sgt. Mack is with the 457th bombardment group.

The Burlington Free Press
Jan 02, 1945 ·Page 2

Parents Receive Son's Awards

Mr. and Mrs. John Poshefko, E. Catawissa St., Nesquehoning, yesterday received the order of the Purple Heart and the Air Medal, which have been awarded to their son, Sergeant John Poshefko. A member of the 457th bombardment crew (H) of the Army Air Forces, Sergeant Poshefko is a tailgunner on a Flying Fortress.

He received the Purple Heart on May 22 for wounds sustained when a bullet from a German fighter plane struck close to him, injuring his head with a piece of flying steel on a bombardment mission over European territory May 19.

The citation issued June 18 was given for "exceptionally meritorious achievement while participating in sustained bomber combat operations over enemy-occupied continental Europe. The courage, coolness and skill exhibited by him upon these occasions reflect great credit upon him and the armed forces of the United States." The citation was given by command of Brigadier General Williams.

The Morning Call
Jul 20, 1944 ·Page 16

The Herald
Thu, Dec 28, 1944 ·Page 4

An Eighth Air Force Bomber Station, England—2nd Lt. Vaughn D. Heidenreich, a bombardier of a B-17 Flying Fortress in the 457th Bombardment Group of the Eighth Air Force played host to his brother Sergeant Lelmar D. Heidenreich, who is with an anti-aircraft battalion stationed here in England. They are graduates of the Crystal Lake Community High school. Mr. and Mrs. Lester O. Heidenreich, parents of the boys, live at 409 Virginia street, Crystal Lake.

FINAL FLIGHT

"Patches and Prayers"



On November 2, 1944, the B-17G Flying Fortress, serial number 43-37532, known as "Patches and Prayers" (or "The Joker's Wild" depending on its crew) met a tragic end during the 457th Bomb Group's Mission 143 to the oil refineries of Merseburg, Germany. Piloted by Lt. James B. Corriher (see page 6), the aircraft was one of nine lost in a ferocious Luftwaffe attack, marking one of the group's darkest days in World War II. Seven of the nine crew members perished, while two survived as prisoners of war (POWs). This article recounts the mission, the aircraft's history, and the crew's fate, drawing from official reports and historical records.

Delivered to the U.S. Army Air Forces on April 26, 1944, in Cheyenne, Wyoming, B-17G 43-37532 made its way through Kearney, Nebraska, and Grenier Field, New Hampshire, before being assigned to the 751st Bomb Squadron, 457th Bomb Group, at Glatton, England, on May 23, 1944.

The aircraft, marked with a white "U" in a black triangle and a blue diagonal stripe on its tail, earned its dual nicknames from the crews who flew her. "The Joker's Wild" reflected a playful bravado, while "Patches and Prayers" hinted at the battle scars and faith that kept her aloft through perilous missions.

Mission 143, launched on November 2, 1944, was part of a massive Eighth Air Force operation involving over 1,000 bombers targeting synthetic oil refineries in central Germany. Led by Major Peresich, the 457th Bomb Group set out for Merseburg under total overcast, with excellent P-51 fighter cover promised. However, a critical navigation error by the lead Pathfinder Force (PFF) plane altered the group's fate.

As the formation approached

the initial point (IP) for the bomb run, the lead plane veered north, pulling the 457th away from the main bomber stream and its protective fighters. The group dropped its bombs on an unidentified target and began a right turn to rejoin the stream. The low squadron, including "Patches and Prayers," lagged behind during this maneuver, leaving it vulnerable.

Between 12:48 and 12:58, approximately 40 to 50 Focke-Wulf FW-190 fighters attacked the group from the six o'clock position, targeting the exposed low squadron. The assault, lasting just five minutes, was the fiercest air battle in the 457th's history. The attackers came in waves, with 20mm cannon shells lighting up the sky in white puffs. "Patches and Prayers" was hit during the first pass, sustaining critical damage. Two or more engines failed, and fire engulfed the right wing. The aircraft, piloted by Lt. Corriher, dove into the heavy cloud cover below in a desperate bid for safety, but its fate was sealed.

"Patches and Prayers" crashed approximately 2 km east of Leimbach and 8 km northwest of Eisleben, Germany. No eyewitnesses observed its final moments, and the Missing Air Crew Report (MACR) 10316 notes the confusion of the battle, with reports of unidentified B-17s exploding, colliding, or falling with burning wings and parachutes filling the sky. The 457th lost nine aircraft in total, with "Patches and Prayers" among the seven from the low squadron.

The crew of "Patches and Prayers" consisted of nine men, each with a vital role in the mission. Their names and fates were: Pilot: Lt. James B. Corriher – Killed in Action (KIA); Copilot: Lt. Jeremiah J. Healy – KIA; Navigator: Lt. Earl L. Hill – KIA;

Bombardier: Lt. Harold A. Doerr – KIA; Flight Engineer/Top Turret Gunner: Sgt. George P. Levassauer – KIA; Radio Operator: Sgt. Harry F. Gormley – KIA; Tail Gunner: Sgt. Robert J. Gunther – KIA; Ball Turret Gunner: Sgt. Gail E. Schatz – POW; Waist Gunner: Sgt. Daniel M. Willis – POW.

Seven perished in the crash or ensuing chaos. Lt. Corriher, Lt. Healy, Lt. Hill, and Sgt. Gunther were identified by their dog tags and buried, but the remains of Lt. Doerr, Sgt. Levassauer, and Sgt. Gormley could not be identified. Sgts. Schatz and Willis, positioned in the ball turret and waist, respectively, managed to parachute to safety but were captured and spent the remainder of the war as POWs.

The loss of "Patches and Prayers" and eight other B-17s underscored the brutal cost of the air war over Europe. The 457th's gunners claimed a heavy toll on the attacking FW-190s, and P-51 escorts eventually arrived to drive off the Luftwaffe, but the damage was done. The mission highlighted the dangers of navigational errors, and the vulnerability of bombers separated from their fighter escorts.

The story of "Patches and Prayers" is preserved through records of the 457th Bomb Group Association and the American Air Museum in Britain, which honor the courage and sacrifice of the crews who faced overwhelming odds. For the families of the seven men lost and the two who endured captivity, the mission remains a poignant chapter in the history of the 457th Bomb Group.

The skies over Merseburg on November 2, 1944, bore witness to both tragedy and resilience, as the crew of "Patches and Prayers" fought to the end in a battle that would not be forgotten.

Unsung Heroes

As part of the 8th Air Force Historical Society's 51st Annual Reunion in Colorado Springs, the 457th Bomb Group Association invites members to tour the National Museum of World War II Aviation on Saturday, October 3, 2025.

Located at 775 Aviation Way near Colorado Springs Airport, the museum showcases WWII aviation's technological and human stories. While lacking a B-17, it features two key trainers—the Fairchild PT-19 Cornell and Boeing Stearman PT-13D—that shaped 457th pilots.

The guided tour for reunion attendees includes the museum's collection and WestPac restoration facility, where aircraft like the SB2C-1C Helldiver are preserved. The PT-19 Cornell, a reliable low-wing trainer, bridged basic and advanced flight training. The Stearman PT-13D, a rugged biplane nicknamed "Yellow Peril," was the first aircraft most cadets flew, teaching controls and resilience in its open cockpit.

These trainers were foundational, preparing pilots for B-17s with the 751st Bomb Squadron. The museum's flyable PT-13D highlights their engineering and legacy. The tour also features 27 flyable aircraft, 3,000 artifacts, and a Link Trainer, connecting visitors to the 457th's history. Register for the tour via www.8thafhs.org, where pricing and schedules are listed.

The museum complements other reunion events, like the Garden of the Gods Jeep Tour. Join us on October 3 to honor the PT-19 and PT-13D, unsung heroes that launched the 457th's pilots into history.



ABOVE: Aviation cadets in front of their Kaydet, PT-13D trainer. (2nd from R cadet is the author's father, B. Hoyt DeLoach).



LEFT: Restored PT-19 at the National Museum of World War II Aviation in Colorado Springs.

FROM THE EDITOR...

As we commemorate Independence Day, I'm profoundly grateful for the flood of emails from you, our dedicated Fireball readers. Your heartfelt praise and steadfast support for our mission to preserve the 457th Bomb Group's legacy inspire every issue.

As editor, it's an honor to share the stories of the courageous men who put on their uniforms and bravely served in the 457th. Your encouragement fuels this endeavor. Please feel free to share your own articles. Those not written by me will carry the author's byline, ensuring our contributors are duly recognized.

In this July 4th issue we bring you "*The 457th's Canceled 4th of July Raid*," detailing the group's thwarted 1944 mission to bomb the Saumur bridge, and "*The Fall of Patches and Prayers*," recounting the tragic loss of B-17G 43-37532 during a fierce Luftwaffe attack.

Two features born from emails are here as well: "*A Pilot's Unyielding Courage*," chronicling 1st Lt. Norman M. Chapman's heroic leadership, and "*Grit in War, Grace in Peace*," honoring Sgt. Arnold C. McQuaide's service and life, both inspired by sons sharing their fathers' legacies via emails to me.

I urge you to keep sharing your relative's 457th experiences. Send me memories, stories, photos, or letters—whether of daring missions or quiet moments at Glatton—and I'll craft narratives to celebrate their service.

This is my commitment to preserving the 457th's spirit, ensuring their sacrifices endure for future generations. Your contributions are the soul of *The Fireball*.

Thank you for making this newsletter a living tribute to the men of the 457th. Let's continue to tell their stories together.

Carolyn DeLoach
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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*.

Fallen From the Clouds

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On battlefields, relics often surface decades after the battle. This is mainly because older generations kept the items as souvenirs or because local residents found practical applications for them. Here is a fascinating story revealed by the discovery of an old army bag.



This bag, "Musette Bag M1936," according to U.S. military specifications, surfaced in an old house in the vicinity of LaGleize, Belgium. The village is well known for having been the scene of hellish combat during the Battle of the Bulge. Beside an unusual rubberized texture, the musette bore the owner's name and serial number: Lt Donald V. Swain 0-687782. This type of bag, often carried by airborne soldiers, was thought to be from an 82nd Airborne trooper since that unit saw heavy action in the area.

The MIA Project's database revealed that Lt Swain's name was inscribed on the Tablets of the Missing at the Ardennes American Cemetery. The date of death was puzzling, May 28, 1944, four months before the liberation of Belgium! A call to the cemetery confirmed the date and shed light on the former owner's whereabouts. Donald V. Swain was a B-17 crew member of the 751st Bomb Squadron of the 457th Bomb Group.

The MACR (missing air crew report) added more information. The B-17G serial 42-97452 was lost at sea with all its crew after a bombing mission over Dessau, Germany, on May 28, 1944. The information was interesting but didn't answer two questions. What happened that fateful day and how did the bag end

up in Belgium?

A member of the 457th Bomb Group Association provided the key to the mystery. Jack Gumm, co-pilot aboard Lieutenant Auld's ship, recalled:

"...Swain had graduated from the Air Force Cadet training base in Ft Sumner, New Mexico, and we met just after at Ephrata, Washington, where we had joined the 457th. The first pilots had all had some training with B-17s. Swain and others who graduated with us were assigned to the group as co-pilots. We trained in Ephrata for a few weeks and were sent to Rapid City, SD, and took extensive training there. Afterward, we went from there to Wendover, Utah, for our final training phase. We were also assigned new B-17 bombers. We then flew the planes to England via Gander, Newfoundland, Iceland, and then Glatton, England ..."

The first aircraft arrived at Glatton on January 17, 1944, and the group flew its first combat mission on February 22. On May 28, 1944, the 457th flew mission number fifty-three. There were multiple targets, all related to the Junkers aircraft works at Dessau, Germany. The flight was uneventful until the different elements of the 457th took separate courses toward their different objectives. On the approach to Dessau, the 457th encountered a mixed force of fifty to sixty Me109s and FW190s, and several ships went down.

After the bomb run, and just as the formation departed for home, the craft piloted by Lieutenant Emmanuel Hauf sustained a Flak hit which set the right wing on fire. The damage to the wing was noticeable as it was on the leading edge and on the top surface, but the plane remained in formation. Over Belgium the plane began lagging behind and losing altitude.

Jack Gumm continued: *"I am probably the last man to talk to Lt Swain. He was the co-pilot in Hauf's plane. As usual co-pilots handled the radio communications. Hauf and our crew were in the same formation that day. ... Hauf and Swain were flying just above us. They got a direct hit in the right wing tank and the gasoline caught fire. The B-17 had neoprene lined gas tanks. If one was punctured, it was supposed to reseal itself. The shell that hit Hauf's plane exploded in the tank and made a hole too big to seal. At first there was quite a large flame and then the seal partially closed the hole, and the burning slowed. From our position in the formation I had a good view on the burning tank. We were at 22,000 feet, and, in the rarified air, the gas didn't burn too well. Hauf and Swain talked to me and my first pilot about whether to bail out or not and we discussed the best course of action. Hauf had his crew on alert to bail out over Germany but decided to stick with the formation. When we were close to the Belgian coast, our formation started to descend to 15,000 feet over the Channel. The fire in the tank immediately increased, and we told Hauf. He decided not to bail out until he reached England. About 40 K's from the English coast, the wing gave way and folded back. The B-17 went into a rapid flat spin. The centrifugal force was probably too great for the crew to bail out. We pulled out of formation and followed the plane all the way to the surface of the Channel. It sank immediately and no bodies were seen. We circled the area about five minutes, but no bodies came to the surface. ..."*

Though the circumstances under which the musette bag ended up in the LaGleize area will never be known for certain, it's reasonable to assume that the crew of Hauf's ship discarded excess gear to help keep their machine aloft, and the bag probably was among the items falling from the clouds. Beside Swain's name, which sparked the research, the bag also brought back to light

eight other forgotten names. The ill-fated crew remains lost at sea, never to be recovered. Their story had to be told.



PHOTO: Lt Hauf's crew pictured on May 22, 1944 after the Kiel mission. **Lt Donald V. Swain is standing, third from left.** INSET: 1Lt Jack Gumm. Lt Hauf's crewmembers were: 1/Lt Emmanuel Hauf, pilot; 2/Lt Donald V. Swain, Copilot; 2/Lt William R. Hawley, Navigator; 2/Lt Richard E. Jaqua, Bombardier; T/Sgt Willis H. Johnson, Aircraft Engineer & top turret; T/Sgt James J. Kilroy, Radio Operator; S/Sgt Paul R. Moore, Waist gunner; S/Sgt Walter Furtta, Ball turret gunner; S/Sgt Oscar A. Gascon, Tail gunner.

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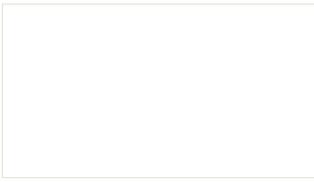
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