



315th Newsletter

Published by
WORLD WAR II 315th TROOP CARRIER GROUP ASS'N.

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READERS ARE CORDIALLY INVITED TO SUBMIT MATERIAL FOR THE NEWSLETTER. PLEASE ADDRESS ALL SUBMISSIONS TO THE UNDERSIGNED:

Edward M. Papp, Editor
315th Newsletter
200 Bryant Avenue
Glen Ellyn IL 60137

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PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Benjamin Franklin once remarked that "if a man could have half his wishes, he would double his troubles." I suppose, in most cases, Ben was right. Where I part company with him is that I **wish** the 1994 Reunion of the WWII 315th Troop Carrier Association would set -- or at least, come close to -- setting a record for attendance. Certainly, this would not **double** my troubles.

In retrospect, when we were kids, 50 years seemed to be so far in the future that it was not always considered an attainable goal. And for some, it was not. However, for those of us who were fortunate enough to attain that goal -- and then some -- it has enabled us to create and experience the many blessings of advancing years. Enjoying family, friends and pursuit of our favorite form of endeavor in the workplace -- that's what LIFE is all about.

And now, we have just celebrated the 50th anniversary of the invasion of Europe and our participation in it. Let's complete the celebration by attending our reunion in St. Louis on Oct. 5 - 9, 1994. The site is accessible, the amenities are first class and renewed friendships will never be any more meaningful. It might take a little effort, but the effort will be worthwhile. Those of you who have attended reunions know what I'm talking about. If you have never attended a reunion, **GIVE THIS ONE A TRY.**

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY::

Live each day to the fullest. Get the most from each hour, each day, and each age of your life. Then you can look forward with confidence and back without regrets.

John F. Andrews

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Following are a number of letters and notes received from 315th Association members written in response to a request from John Andrews asking them to write their thoughts about the 315th Troop Carrier Group, the importance of their association with the Group and why they would like to see as many Association members as possible at the St. Louis reunion. We reprint their messages as they were received.

A few words of persuasion from Bernie Pleasant....

I made a lot of friends during the years I served in the Air Force after WWII. Most of them were dear friends but they were different from the old 315th friends I made during WWII. As a matter of fact, I have forgotten the names of most of them. I will remember my old 315th friends UNTIL I am put 6 feet under ground.

I encourage, (maybe "plead" would be a better word), if so, I plead with all our 315th Association personnel to please try to attend our reunion in St. Louis in October. Our reunions have always been interesting and entertaining and they have continually gotten better. I fully expect our reunion in October to be the most enjoyable and entertaining one we have ever had. Please make a special effort to attend our reunion this year.

Some of you guys (like Stan Smith) who have lived a sheltered life, will probably be able to attend when you are a hundred. The *unsheltered* ones like myself may not make it that long. Please meet me in St. Louis.

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And this in a note from Bob Gibbons.....

All through my career of 33 years in the U.S.A.A.F. and then to the succeeding years in the U.S.A.F., it is remarkable to me how my thoughts frequently went back to my old friends in the 315th - Lyons, McClelland, Stark, Peterson, Mandt, Brinson, Munson, Campbell, Smitty, Pleasant, etc. etc. and down the line. I guess going to a reunion is somewhat of a sentimental journey for me and at my age, there are not many journeys left.

Those of you who are undecided should remember how old friends in the Group are delighted to see you and disappointed when you cannot attend. One of my major thoughts about the guys has always been how we - all of us - molded a group of young, inexperienced Americans into a cohesive, trained and mission-oriented pilots of a Group with a major mission in the greatest invasion in the history of the world. I'm sure many of our Group occasionally look back on our experiences and marvel that we came through it unscathed. What you should realize is that all of you contributed your part to being part of an outstanding effort...one which you should remember and a reason to get together occasionally to remember what we all did together.

I learned many things while associated with the 315th - all of which influenced me later in life. People - all of us - respond when a good job is rewarded with praise and most importantly, when mistakes are made you help the person who made the mistake by pointing out where the error occurred. Discipline is great, but is of absolutely no use unless you help that person to become a better person for that experience. Another thing I learned from my experience with the 315th was Mission Orientation - always remember what your job is and the mission of your organization is and don't let anything extraneous to that objective influence you.

To me, many of the lessons I learned while in the 315th were important and had great influence on my life. It is one of the reasons I'm grateful to have the opportunity to see old comrades occasionally. I owe them one! Hope to see you all in St. Louis.

Jake Sternoff writes a most interesting letter...

Dear Ed: I should handwrite this because as you'll see, I'm a bad typist. I've wanted to tell this story for a long time. It starts out with my being unhappy, but ends well.

It goes like this: When I was about twelve years old, I wanted to join the Boy Scouts, but my father continually said "No!". He had served four years in the Czarist Russian army from 1891 to 1895, and he always told me how rough it had been. In addition, he had the impression that because of the Scout uniform, the government would give me "preference" in case of a military draft. So, I never joined the Scouts and never expected to be a soldier.

But, whose draft number was called first? You got it! I'd registered in the fall of 1940 and was told to report for induction in December of 1940. When my father dropped me off at the induction station, I waited 'til the last moment, then asked my father, "Pa" ...yes, we called him "Pa" in those days, as many others did; I asked him "Do you remember you wouldn't let me join the Boy Scouts?" He looked at me and answered "Yes, I remember", and he started to cry. I was the youngest child, and I know he felt bad. But, within a few months when he saw what a good life I had at Stockton Field, California where I eventually put on forty-eight pounds in eight months, he felt better.

I was a cook and then Assistant Mess Sergeant before Pearl Harbor, right after which I went into the Air Cadets, and by time I got my pilot's wings, the P.T. program caused me to lose thirty-six of the forty-eight pounds, to a trim one hundred and sixty! Well, by that time, my father was proud of me, and I think he appreciated the military. He never got over how well we ate in our services, compared to what he had in Russia! And, finally he was proud his son had become "a soldier"!

Fortunately, I was assigned to the 315th...and I, like all the others, have said many times "those were the best years of my life!" The Group "found" me and I attended my first reunion in 1980 at New Orleans. Haven't missed one yet, and don't intend to either. It is my hope that anyone who was in our Group who has never come to a reunion will come this year to St. Louis. Like all of us, I deeply cherish the friendship and camaraderie and trust it will go on for many more years. And Ed, particular thanks to you and Bob Cioer and the others who have always extended your efforts to get the word out, and worked so hard for all of us.

Sincerely, Jake

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Carl Fittkau writes about his feelings concerning the 315th...

TO THOSE THAT AIN'T BEEN THERE YET:

I just possibly might know why. When I received the invitation to the first general 315th reunion at Savannah, I had mixed feelings. There were people I very much looked forward to seeing again, but I worried about it bringing up painful memories of those who could never attend.

In the end, I decided to go...the right decision for maybe the wrong reason.

When I came back, early in 1945 I was assigned to Atlantic City as an instructor in what was to become an R&R, and I was told that in view of my rather lengthy overseas service, I would not be sent overseas again. With this assurance, I married Margaret and we went to our first post.

It turned out that we were the leading edge of a wave that was about to displace from Atlantic City an organization that had spent a rather comfortable "war"...to say the least...while other folks were experiencing shots fired in anger. The traditional skunk at the lawn party was more welcome...i.e.: at a Base officers' dance, the only people who spoke to us were the Base Commandant, Col, Snyder, and his adjutant. I should point out

this was not unduly onerous because we did have good relations -- although transient -- with my "students" passing through and I was mustered out five weeks later.

However, I didn't want Margaret to think the Atlantic City attitude was representative of the Air Corps, and particularly the 315th. To prove the point, I decided to take her to Savannah. We've been to every reunion since except one when Margaret was ill, and we've enjoyed any number of "mini" reunions on the East Coast. We've appreciated re-establishing warm and deep friendships and a renewed bonding that I never thought possible.

In later years -- at least in our later years -- our friendship circle has narrowed...some flee to warmer climates, others just disappear. So to widen it with people who have shared difficult experiences, and renew the good and bad times of our youthful times together is a particular joy. I recommend it to all of you.

I realize that good intentions are frequently frustrated by procrastination. For that factor, recall Whittier: "The saddest words of tongue or pen are these: it might have been."

I look forward to meeting old friends and making new friends in St. Louis. I want Margaret to see all of you. As she knows, you are good people

[Editor's note: Carl Fittkau is a former president of the Association]

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And J. S. Smith sends a nifty note for all of us to remember....

Thomas Wolfe is said to have warned, "You can't go home again." And there may be some truth to that. We 315th Group members can't return as we were to Aldermaston, or Blida, or Spanhoe, or Amiens; those temporary homes we had more than fifty years ago. Yet, there is a way we can return; to exchange memories -- the good, the bad, the ugly, the ribald -- with those with whom we shared a unique and unforgettable experience. It's called a reunion. And in St. Louis from October 5th through 9th, the 315th will go home again.

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And from Cog, the reunion "prime mover", we received this....

It began in Savannah, Georgia in 1977. Bill Brinson and I had kicked around the possibility of a reunion in several telephone conversations. I remember telling Bill in a phone conversation that if we were going to do it in this world, we had better get started. His reply was "Let's do it!" He suggested Savannah and I replied I didn't care where we had it. Bill made the arrangements and with the able assistance of Ed Papp and Duncan McRae, we had our first reunion in 1977.

This letter is addressed to those of you listed as active members on the 315th Roster who have never attended a reunion. Time is fast running out! It is now over 50 years since D-Day. This year's reunion in St. Louis is the most centrally located one ever. For many of us, it may be the last opportunity.

Over the years, those who have attended, almost without exception, have returned. In the beginning, the wives were "iffy". They asked "who wanted to go and hear a bunch of old men tell war stories?" But, they, too have returned year after year. The stories turned out to be true about the men and the women proved to be the most compatible I have ever known.

Savannah in 77, Dallas in 78, New Orleans in 80, Chicago in 82, San Francisco in 84, Seattle in 86, San Antonio in 88, Norfolk in 90, Albuquerque in 92, and now in St. Louis. Husbands, wives, children and yes, grandchildren have attended. Each reunion has added

new faces. Each has been hosted by former Group members and all have done a wonderful job. Members, too numerous to name, have continue the successful beginning.

As I mentioned earlier, time is running out. The list of deceased on the roster grows longer year after year. Why not take this opportunity to attend the upcoming reunion and relive those years of long ago when we were thrown together for reasons beyond our control. I would sure like to see many of you in St. Louis, and I know that many others who have attended past reunions join me in wanting to see you. SEE YOU IN ST. LOUIS!!!!

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From Bernard Brown, who, with his wife Bette, hosted the Albuquerque reunion:

I think we should do every thing possible to encourage our members to really make an effort to attend our St. Louis reunion.

Albuquerque was great...a good turnout to renew old friendships and relive old times. I would like to personally invite all those who haven't attended one of our reunions to COME.

Our reunions are for all our buddies. Rank has no significance. I know there are some of you out there who have felt that only officers attend. Many of our enlisted men have attended, and have continued to return to each reunion we have. We served together in every area of work and all are welcome. Please come and join us...you may just meet an old buddy you enjoyed serving with and renew an old friendship.

There are many of you who have thought of coming and just made excuses. Now, St. Louis is close to all, so please make the effort. WE want to see YOU!!!

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Bill Brinson checks in with a good idea in the third paragraph.....

While it will be slightly more than 50 years (when we meet in early October) since the 315th participated in the Normandy invasion, let's go full throttle and make this 1994 reunion a mini-invasion of the Missouri city. We might even call it "Operation St. Louis">

It won't compare in size, of course, to all the Eighth and Ninth Air Force people who were on ships off the coast of Normandy in June (we probably didn't know many of them, anyway) however, if we can look forward to most of our "regulars" returning, and encourage others who might be wavering, to attend, we should have a good turnout.

I propose that each member who plans to be in St. Louis review the Members Roster and select an old friend or acquaintance who has never attended a reunion, or one who might be undecided, and write or telephone him and tell him that we would like to see him again. If applicable, tell him to forget about being grayer, balder, heavier, partially deaf or blind or wheelchair-bound, but if he can make it (even if only for a day) to sign up and go.

Several have already been picked out who will receive letters from me. Two live not too far from St. Louis: "Fogey" Fogelsong and "Blue" Collison, and Ernie Henner and Morris Brown, each who have attended one, will get a prodding.

There are many others. Select one or two from the Roster, get out pen and ink, and say "Come join us. We've been missing you".

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And, to round it out, a note from our St. Louis hosts, Jim and Audrey Fidler:

The 1994 Reunion plans in St. Louis have been completed except for a few small details. I am making arrangements to have nice weather which we usually have that time of the year.

As your hosts, we are looking forward to seeing all of you at the October reunion. Thank you for coming.

Jim and Audrey Fidler

We've talked with a few ex-troop carrier guys (not part of the WWII 315th Troop Carrier Group) and, without exception, after they've heard about our reunions held every two years, they would say "I sure wish my old outfit did something like that. What I wouldn't give to see some of my old friends again!"

When you stop to think about it, the chance to see some of the people you served with in the 315th at one of our reunions is something special.....and to see them in such pleasant surroundings as the great reunions we've been having is *really special*.

Sure, it might take some doing....some extra effort to make the trip to St. Louis, but one thing is for certain: you will never forget the occasion.....will always remember the pleasure of seeing old comrades once again and hearing and telling the stories of the adventures we shared back in those days when we were young.

So please think about it; and if the St. Louis reunion is the first one you will have attended, we can promise you will have a wonderful time!

In the April issue we began reprinting Terence Monmaney's account of the Greenland Expedition Society's epic struggle to salvage some of the P-38s which had been abandoned on the Greenland icecap after they had landed there because they were running out of fuel. Following is the conclusion. The article originally appeared in *FORBES* magazine

The heart of Ice Camp was a row of eight semi-cylindrical tents. There were bunkhouses (as many as a dozen guys worked there at a time), a mess hall (four tons of food had been brought in when the camp was set up, in early May), and a few utility huts, including the big one over the shaft. The shaft was about 12 feet wide, four feet across. It felt deep—one of those yawning holes that arouse a fear in you and yet draw you to the edge. I was astonished at how casual the crew was around this gaping menace. Once, Gordon Scott, the main holologist, stepped up, straddled the shaft, held on to the overhead beam with one hand, and adjusted a chain winch with his other hand—no safety rope, no spotter. You would think he was changing a light bulb.

Scott was six-foot-six and heavily muscled, and his blackish beard approximated a fur mask. Some of the guys referred to him (behind his back, I think) as Sasquatch. He lived in a village near Anchorage, where he captained a fishing boat in the summer and ski-patrolled in the winter. "Most of the people here are from the South, and haven't been around a snow environment much," he told me. "They're in a survival situation the moment they step out of the aircraft—no joking. The second night we were here, the wind cranked up to seventy knots. Blowing snow. Ugly."

Of all the various challenges facing the G.E.S., the greatest, of course, was to find a reliable, affordable method for sinking a deep shaft into solid ice 2,000 miles from home. Plenty of approaches were proposed or attempted. Some sharpies at Georgia Tech advised the G.E.S. to use a big laser to zap down to the planes. An engineering firm retained by the G.E.S. recommended jack-hammers. For a while, a Vermont construction firm linked up with the G.E.S., and in 1990 put a team to work on the ice sheet. The construction guys brought along

a modified silo unloaded—in effect, a 16-foot circular saw blade—which they were going to grind down to a P-38. They attained a depth of 125 feet before they quit; all told, they spent nearly half a million dollars, or about \$4,000 a foot.

The G.E.S. finally struck upon the secret for penetrating the ice: hot water. In the long and glorious history of man's attempts to go places, no one ever melted their way anywhere until a G.E.S. member named Don Brooks, who is an automobile parts dealer from Douglas, GA, built the Thermal Meltdown Generator. Because it sometimes burrowed around rather than bored straight down, it came to be called the Gopher.

The Gopher resembled the top of a rocket: cone-shaped, about four feet in diameter. Copper tubing was coiled tightly around the outside of the nose. Hot water was pumped through the copper coiling. Radiating heat, it nosed through the snow and ice. Like a smart bomb, it had a guidance system; it slid down a long steel pipe running from the surface to the aircraft. It took several days for the Gopher to reach the aircraft. Around the clock, from mid-May to late July, the crew ran the Gopher, melting one four-foot-diameter shaft after another in a row, until there was one big shaft. Contrary to the experts' dire predictions, the shaft, which was not reinforced, was as stable as a well drilled in bedrock.

Once the crews reached the P-38, they sprayed hot water all around it to melt out a cavern—a hangar. It did not cave in. Then they went to work dismantling the plane and hauling parts to the top. The plane, everyone was amazed to find, was in good shape. "If it had been out in the air or at the bottom of some harbor, it would have picked up a lot of corrosion and wear and rust by now," explained Brooks. "On this one, though, anything that isn't bent is practically perfect." Gary Larkins, a veteran salvage expert, who is currently the Director

of Recoveries at the Institute of Aeronautical Archaeological Research, a nonprofit group located in Sacramento, Calif., was flown to Ice Camp to help dismantle the P-38. "There was no corrosion at all," he said. "The bolts just came undone as though you were working on a brand-new plane. That's a strange feeling. The engines were still full of antifreeze. My hope is that that means they didn't warp or crack. The aircraft was just beautiful."

Such authoritative testimony notwithstanding, I had my doubts about the plane's condition. The P-38 parts piled on the snow at Ice Camp—wings, nose piece, engines—to my unprofessional eye did not look museum-worthy, never mind airworthy. Then, one night, the boys put on a little demonstration that blew my doubts away. Having removed the 20-mm. cannon from the plane's nose, they disassembled it, cleaned and oiled it, reassembled it, and strapped it to the back of a snowmobile. The electric trigger was connected to a car battery. A steel drum stood 30 yards away. For extra fun, one of the guys, a former Army ammunition specialist, filled the drum with gas, water and detergent. "Homemade napalm," he said. They loaded the gun with a 20-mm shell that had an explosive tip. Someone hit the trigger and the cannon boomed, the drum exploded. (Though it didn't burst into flames, to the disappointment of many.) I asked the former ammunitions man where he managed to find a fresh new shell for such an old gun. "Hell," he drawled, "we got that one right out of the P-38's magazine." He showed me one of the 50-year old shells. He shook it—a faint rattling. The powder was dry.

The P-38, a twin-engine Lockheed fighter, was one of the oddest American warplanes ever built. (The "P" was for "pursuit.") It appeared to have three fuselages—a long one for each engine, with a tail sticking up at the end, and the middle one, half the length, in which the cockpit (for one pilot) was situated. It looked like a flying trimaran. The Germans called it "the fork-tailed devil", and the Japanese called it "two planes with one pilot." In its heyday, the P-38 was the fastest plane in the sky, with a top speed of 450 miles an hour;

heavily armed, it carried four 50-caliber machine guns and a 20-mm. cannon. All told, more than 10,000 P-38s were built, but today there are only five in the world that still fly, making it one of the rarest and most valuable warbirds. The last flyable P-38 to change hands sold at auction a few years ago for \$1.6 million. The way G.E.S. figures it, then, the six P-38s under the ice sheet are worth at least \$9.6 million. Maybe throw in a few extra hundred thousand for their historical value. (As for the B-17s, they gophered down to one in 1990 and found it squashed. The other may be salvageable. Or may not be.

And so while there's big money on ice up there, this curious quest, it seems to me, was mainly about something else, something less tangible. No doubt part of the appeal has been the promised of that rarest or contemporary experiences—the virgin adventure. (Outer space and the ocean floor may officially be the last frontiers, but aside from Epps and his boys, no one has really explored th realm of ice.)

And then there is the curious pleasure, mentioned to me by all the expeditioners, the reddest necks included, of literally reaching back in time. A young physician named Wes Stricker, who runs his own medical testing firm in Columbia, MO, has given more than a hundred thousand dollars to the G.E.S. Why? "It's the love of these airplanes really, what they represent," he told me one day as we stood in the snow outside the mess hall. "There's something special about them. They're still fresh. It's like opening a time capsule. My Dad was in World War Two. I don't know, maybe this is my way of understanding what he went through."

I suspected that even the hardnosed Epps, who cleans his fingernails with a Buck knife he keeps sheathed on his hip, had a soft spot for aviation days gone by. His father, Ben T. Epps, was 19 when he built and flew the first airplane in Georgia, in 1907, only four years after the Wright brothers went aloft at Kitty Hawk. Then, in 1937, when Pat was three, his father was killed in his own plane. Not to place too fine a point on it, but it seemed to me that Epps, working so fervently to uncover a buried airplane—well, might that not represent a

kind of attempt to recover the father he never really knew? "No," he said emphatically, waving aside my citified Freudianism as though it were a gnat. What interested him, he said, was the challenge of the task and the weird beauty of the place. "Seeing the plane down there—it's neat, there's no question. The ice. It's spooky down there, it's dangerous, it's chancy. The likelihood of something bad happening—you think, you hope, and yet who knows. Heck, all of a sudden—the ball game's over."

One night, I donned a slicker suit and a miner's hat, and went down the hole. A guy took a picture of me as I was getting strapped into the bosun's chair, and the wide grin on my face can only be described as idiotic—elation shot through with fear. As I stepped off the platform and swung out over the hole, peril skittered up my spine. They lowered the chain a few feet, and the crewman who was going to be my guide, a former Army ranger named Sam, climbed into a bosun's chair directly above me. We hung there like a brace of trout, and then began our descent.

By 60 feet or so down, we were out of earshot of the generators, and all we could hear was the trickle and splash of water. Most of the water was runoff, seeping into the hole from up glacier. The walls of the shaft were bluish white. This was a transition one—packed snow being compressed into ice. We saw that that process, known as firnification, was complete by around 70 or 80 feet—the so-called firn line. Above the firn line, the glacier was snowy; below, dense ice. In mid-summer, with the sun melting a good deal of the snowy surface, the glacier, Epps had told me, "was like a saturated sponge on a kitchen counter." The porous snowy top held lots of water, and the excess water ran along the hard icy shelf toward the coast—and down into the hole. Sump pumps at the bottom drained the great puddles and pushed the water back up.

The deeper we sank, the older the ice was. And the most wonderful thing was that this was time travel on a human scale, measured not in eons or centuries but in seasons. At 260 feet, we dropped through the ceiling of a great cavern and into the

summer of 1942. Electric lights illuminated glistening walls of ice—blue as lapis, green as Spanish glass. Here and there were pools of water. It seemed to be pouring rain, and the sound of drops hitting ice and water was loud and echoey. And there was the smell of oil. Quarts of oil spilled out of the P-38's engines when they'd been removed. Somehow, the smell of the oil made the feeling of the past more potent.

By the time I got down to it, the plane had already been stripped of everything that could be unriveted or unscrewed. All that remained in the hole was the P-38's body. The canopy was off. I could read the cockpit instrument gauges, move the throttles. And though dented and banged, the body itself still looked like an airplane—not crushed.

Sam had helped strip the plane. Working morning to night down in the hole, he and Larkins and some others ate military rations and stood by the electric lights to get warm. "Imagine 15 hours down here," Sam said. "You were so miserable. It was a joke. To remove the plane's nose section, which held the guns and a camera portal, Sam lay on his back in the icy water for six hours, and punched out each of the 400 rivets. As we stood there in this intraglacier space, I said I could see that part of the appeal of his leaving his airport job in Macon and coming up here and working on the planes was that he got to be in this marvelous environment.

"That's the only appeal," he said, adding "I came for Greenland. As a little kid I loved Vikings. I was always drawing pictures of Vikings—you know, Leif Eriksson with a big chest and horns on his head." Sam, I should point out, is six-foot-two and weighs 230 pounds. He was a competitive powerlifter in the Army. He has platinum hair and startling blue eyes. Often, he wore a fur hat around the camp, even on those bright warm days when he wore shorts and no shirt. He looked more like a storybook Viking than anyone I've ever met.

The G.E.S. chose to retrieve this particular P-38 because its pilot, Harry "Chicken Head" Smith, had landed it so gingerly; he'd killed the engines, feathered the props, and glided down. Smith, in addition to being a fine pilot, was also a stirring narrator, to read the debriefing

papers he wrote after the rescue. Of this crash landing he wrote (in the historical present), "Hold 'er off with the props, just turning till she stalls...bump...snow flies, the old crate slides along and that's all!! Another landing! Didn't even bend the props, of course she won't be taking off soon." And he added "Damn, this crate is too sweet to throw away here."

The airmen who would become the Lost Squadron left Presque Isle, ME on July 4, 1942, and reached Goose Bay, Labrador, later that day. Rain and clouds grounded them in Goose for a week, after which they flew the next leg to a United States Army base on the west coast of Greenland. On July 15, they set out for Reykjavik. Flying in tight formation, with three P-38s flanking each B-17, they passed over the ice sheet of southern Greenland and then cleared the towering mountains of the island's east coast.

It is worth recalling that they undertook this mission across frigid seas and through wild weather without the benefit of electronic navigation systems or even radar; instead, they reckoned by magnetic compass (which was highly erratic that close to the magnetic pole), map, radio and wristwatch. Over the North Atlantic, they hit heavy weather and received word that the airfield at Reykjavik was closed. They turned back—only to hear that the airfield they'd started from was also socked in. There was another airfield, at the very tip of southern Greenland; they headed there. But the cloud cover grew thicker, above and below them, and they lost sight of land, the horizon, and the sun. With no navigational fix at all, they flew in circles. The temperature inside the aircraft, which were not heated, was 40 degrees below zero. "I'm colder than one of those Alp dogs' nose," Smith later recalled of the flight. "My fingers are sure as hell frozen." By now, the airmen had been aloft more than eight hours, and the P-38s, whose range was shorter than that of the B-17s, no longer held enough gas to reach any airfield.

Lt. Bradley "Mac" McManus, who was flying a P-38, dropped through the clouds, saw the Greenland ice sheet, buzzed the surface, and decided that it resembled concrete. He was the first to land.

Smith watched from above, and here's what Smith remembered seeing and thinking, complete with his suspenseful dots: "There's a guy with guts...Mac levels off in a low flat approach, his wheels touch, white spray kicks up behind him like dust and.....he's down and rolling; watch it, man! Damn! That's all for him...the crate rolled about 200 yards and then flipped like a shot rabbit." A minute later, Smith saw McManus crawl out from under his upside-down plane and wave. A gleeful Smith dove for speed, pulled out into a near vertical climb, and spun—"the most beautiful slow roll you ever saw," one of the pilots said.

The other pilots bellied onto the snow, with the gear up. Meanwhile, the B-17s circled above the ice sheet, frantically sending out an S.O.S.; after an hour, they bellied down too. When the pilots collected themselves, they found that McManus had a gash on his left arm, but otherwise he was OK. "We were amazed," Smith recalled. They dressed McManus's wound and poured whiskey down his throat. As for the rest of them—nine on one B-17, ten on the other, plus the five other P-38 pilots—they were not even scratched.

The Flying Fortresses became just fortresses, where the 25 men slept. They set up an outdoor kitchen under a B-17's tail span, and constructed a stove out of an engine cowling. There was little for them to do but mill around, play cards and wonder if their S.O.S. had been received. Three days later, an Army C-47 (a DC-3 to civilians) flew over the makeshift camp, and disgorged bundles that floated down on parachutes. There were sleeping bags, matches, tinned rations, whiskey. A bottle or two broke—rye on the rocks.

The rescuers finally arrived a week later—one on skis, another astride a small dog sled. Navy officers, they were stationed at a weather outpost in Angmassalik, a hundred miles up the coast; to reach the lost airmen, they'd traveled aboard an ice-breaker to the nearest shore, then trekked eight miles across the ice sheet. The airmen—healthy, but weak and frazzled—now had to walk across that seemingly endless field of dense, wet snow. The trudge lasted 17 hours. Some men fainted. At the shore, a small boat carried them out to the ship.

Smith reported "Once, I said the coast of Greenland was the sweetest thing I ever saw—that's retracted, 'twas the steak those navy boys gave us on that cutter."

There is a wonderful photograph of McManus and another airman standing next to the upside-down P-38 shortly after McManus wriggled out of the crushed canopy. The image is blurry, but several generations removed from the original snapshot, but the theme is clear. It's about jauntiness. The plane lies on its back, with the landing gear sticking up like the legs of a dead donkey. The view is frontal—you look down the gun barrels. Another airman, who's wearing a leather helmet, leans back against an engine casing and gives a sideways look; he seems annoyed, or maybe he is just squinting in the sunlight. McManus, 23, the squadron's youngest pilot, gazes directly at the camera. Ruggedly handsome, he wears high leather boots and a shearling flight jacket with the collar turned up. He sports a wide, cocky grin, as though he had not only just shot a hole-in-one but had predicted it.

McManus still carries himself with that Air Corps élan, I gathered when we met on the ice sheet. That summer's expedition coincided with the 50th anniversary of the Lost Squadron's landing and the G.E.S. flew several dignitaries and sponsors out to Ice Camp to celebrate the occasion. His hair was thin and his skin liver-spotted, but he wore his cap at a rakish angle, and mischief seemed to gather around the corners of his eyes. Sitting with the G.E.S. guys around the mess table one night, he said that not long after he and his fellow airmen were rescued from the ice sheet, he went over to England on the Queen Mary, which had been commandeered as a transport. He flew 85 missions in Europe (in a P-38 and a P-41) scoring three kills. One of the G.E.S. guys asked him about combat. "The flak was so thick you could walk on it!" he said, and then laughed, tickled, I think, to try on the old swagger.

On July 15, 50 years to the minute of the landing of the Lost Squadron, Epps put on a little commemorative ceremony over by the Gopher hut. By and large, the enormous potential for hokiness was not realized. (Although when Taylor tried to

lead all these super-patriots in song by playing "America" on the harmonica, not one seemed to know the words.) The sky was cloudless, the temperature about 45 degrees. The P-38's wings were propped up in the snow as a backdrop. So the speeches could be heard, the omni-oppressive generators were turned off. The arresting quiet made the vastness more palpable. In the middle of the ceremony, Ice Man buzzed overhead in the Dornier, waggled the wings and landed. Taylor kicked things off by reciting the "walking-through-the-valley-of-death" psalm. Epps recounted the G.E.S.'s checkered history. An elderly fellow named Oran Earl Toole also spoke. An ex-Navy man, he was stationed at Angmassalik during the war, and he was on the rescuing cutter when the airmen stumbled aboard. For his part in the commemoration, Toole read the roll of the lost airmen and also of their rescuers, down to the dog handler.

It was McManus's turn, and as he headed for the speaker's spot, I wished him luck. "Fire when ready!" he said, and laughed. He stood before the crowd, thanked Toole again for helping to rescue him, and gave a lightly self-deprecating account of the squadron's mishaps. As McManus reminisced, the lost time seemed to catch up with him, or to reconstitute itself somehow, so that for an instead he might as well have been standing there clapping the snow from his flight gloves and watching Chicken Head salute his survival with a roll of the Lightning. McManus's eyes welled up and his voice broke as he struggled to say "No one can fully appreciate the effort" — pause— "that this group, the Greenland Expedition Society has expended in reaching this point where we have successfully seen the retrieval of the P-38— Harry Smith's airplane. To Pat Epps and Richard Taylor and all the members of the Greenland Expedition Society, I would like to add my personal congratulations" pause— "pardon me, a very emotional experience, to think that 50 years ago we were here, we were desperate, we were forgotten, and now a plane has been recovered from a depth of 260 feet, and we're all here and we're all wearing smiles."

The P-38's hulking triple fuselage weighed three tons. And though the crew had melted the shaft to accommodate the piece, the shaft was in fact a foot or so too narrow. Hauling the piece up, a crewman said, would be "like stuffing a marshmallow up a wildcat's ass." An understatement, perhaps. It took the crew about a month just to widen the shaft (spraying it with hot water, chipping away with pickaxes) and drag the center section up— inches at a time. Then began a Keystone Cops routine in which they tried to get the fuselage off the ice sheet. Calling from the camp's satellite phone, Epps contacted the United States Air Force, the Icelandic Coast Guard, the Danish Navy. A U.S. Congressman was called. Epps, master salesman, somehow failed to convince any of the world's military forces to do his hauling. Then again, he has come to expect snags. This whole Scotch-fueled, testosterone-crazed, sun-blinded expedition has been a carnival of problems. As on the day Epps took off from the camp in the ski-outfitted DC-3 (Brooks' airplane) loaded with machines and passengers and an engine burst into flames and he had to coax the burdened old airship a hundred miles across the icy harbors and high snowy ridges on one straining prop, through jagged peaks onto the runway in Kulusuk—the first air emergency in his 40 years of professional flying. You know how much it costs to replace a DC-3 engine in Kulusuk, Greenland? Problems? How about the time Epps was riding in a single engine ski plane, got lost in the all-but navigable sky over Greenland, ran out of gas and ditched on the ice sheet? A helicopter from an airport on the island's west coast delivered \$400 of gas to him—for \$5000.

He has a reputation for pushing the limit, for romancing the edge, and I mentioned that to him. "I don't think I'm dangerous," he shot back. "It's all within the capabilities. Hell, I wouldn't do something if I thought it was exceeding my capability. The job ain't going to get done unless you push. In flying, or whatever, you try and leave yourself an out, a backdoor. I always leave myself an out."

Eventually, the G.E.S. solved the fuselage problem. A Greenland Air helicopter hauled the piece to Kulusuk; it took a couple of hours and cost only \$50,000. The piece was then loaded on a freighter to Denmark and the

United States. By now, the P-38's parts have been collected in a hangar in Middlesboro, KY, where J. Roy Shoffner, principal sponsor of the summer's expedition is overseeing the aircraft's rebuilding.

It's likely that in future summers the G.E.S. will recover more of the Lost Squadron's aircraft, and that they will do so fairly smoothly and speedily, what with a decade of crazed R&D to draw on. To hear Epps tell it, though, he's easing out of adventuring. He's done his part, has had his fun making a lot of high-priced experts look like fools. Sure, he says, all the "No's" got to him, even made him consider quitting, but then, he goes on, there would come a tap on his shoulder. "Somebody like Brad McManus would say to me, 'Hey, I hope you get 'em out' or some 16 year old says 'I've been following this thing in the papers and I hope you all do it.' Pretty soon, you're doing it because they want you to, not so much any more because you want to. Everybody's got their own reasons for seeing these planes brought back and those reasons get to be very personal."

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The complete illustrated story of the Lost Squadron, including the rebuilding of the rescued P-38 will be chronicled in a book to be published by Hyperion/Madison Press Books in 1994.

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**WITH DEEP REGRET, WE RECORD
THE DEATH OF THESE COMRADES**

C. S. Kibler

March 9, 1994

Alfred Norton

Date unknown

Pasqual Trevisani

February 20, 1994

From time to time, we reprint articles and/or information about the C-47, the aircraft that was/is "the finest aircraft the mind of man ever conceived". Those of us who served in the 315th Troop Carrier Group well know the truth of the statement. The C-47, to us, is more than an airplane: it is a reminder of our youth, a representation of the camaraderie we experienced during our service, and the means by which we were able to serve our country. A recent issue of the *San Francisco Examiner*, dated Sunday, May 1, 1994 carried an interesting story of the journey which was to be made by a WWII DC-3. Written by Don Martinez of the Examiner staff, the story recounts how a company called Otis Spunkmeyer Inc. committed one of the DC-3s it owns to the project.

OAKLAND -- A little gem of aviation history is being outfitted here with the latest hardware and extra fuel tanks for a 6,000 mile flight to Normandy, where it will take its place in the 50th Anniversary celebration of D-day, the invasion that turned the tide for the Allied forces in World War II.

The 55-year old DC-3 that once belonged to Gen. H. "Hap" Arnold, the "father of the Air Force," will join the SS Jeremiah O'Brien and hundreds of other vintage vessels and aircraft from around the world for the monumental celebration in France June 6.

The old bird, recently restored to its polished aluminum glory and decked out in World War II trim, will leave Oakland's North Field May 9 for the nine-day flight.

"We will probably beat the O'Brien by a couple of days," said Chief pilot Dale Collier, referring to the restored Liberty ship that set sail out of San Francisco April 18 with a crew of old salts, some her original crewmen.

The plane, the first military DC-3 ever built, is powered by twin 1,400 horsepower engines. It has seen a lot of mileage since it rolled out of the Douglas Aircraft Co. assembly plant in Santa Monica in October 1938.

After serving as Gen. Arnold's flying command post until 1945, the plane saw commercial airline service, with an airborne locker-room for Southeast Missouri University (which used it to transport athletic teams to games throughout the Midwest) and also saw duty as a Civil Aeronautics Authority aircraft.

It is currently owned by San Leandro-based Otis Spunkmeyer Inc., the nation's largest producer of frozen cookie dough and other goodies. [Editor's note: we ran an item about this company and its use of Douglas aircraft in a previous issue of the *Newsletter*].

So why does a cookie company need its own air force? It has a second DC-3 which, like its sister plane, can be chartered for nostalgic flights around the Bay Area.

"We bought the old planes as promotional tools," said Jane Bretl, Spunkmeyer marketing manager. "Goodyear has its blimp, we have our DC-3s"

Along with Collier and co-pilot Stew Carson, who crewed bombers in World War II, company officials had been planning a worldwide promotional tour for about a year.

"Then I remembered that this is the 50th anniversary of the Normandy invasions and everything just came together," said Collier. "This is going to be a great adventure."

Spunkmeyer brass wouldn't discuss how much the adventure will cost, except to say "a bundle." Collier and Carson have been busy the last few weeks overseeing the refurbishing and modification of the plane.

Officially, the C-47

Veterans of World War II, the Korean War and even Vietnam had a variety of names for the DC-3s, from Goonie Birds to Sky Trains.

The plane's official military designation was the C-47, although the prototype version flown by Arnold was called the C-41.

Gen. Dwight Eisenhower, commander-in-chief of Allied Forces in Europe, said the plane was among the four pieces of equipment most vital to Allied victory -- the other three being the Jeep, the bulldozer and 2 1/2 ton truck, according to Geoff Macfee, a Spunkmeyer spokesman.

Yet equipment that hadn't been invented when the aircraft made its maiden flight now is being installed in the cramped cockpit.

The gear includes a high-frequency radio, required for trans-ocean flights, and a

Trimbell global positioning system, which gathers information from no fewer than 20 satellites to determine a plane's location.

"We are also taking a couple of life rafts, arctic survival gear and a few days' worth of emergency rations," Collier said, "but we hope that stuff stays packed up all the way."

The passenger list hasn't been finalized but it will probably include a couple of friends and neighbors.

Collier and Carson hope to cruise at an average speed of 140 knots per hour and fly "as much under 10,000 feet as possible, because we're not pressurized."

The extra fuel tanks will give the plane an 1,100 gallon capacity; the plane burns about 100 gallons of fuel per hour.

"Best ever built"

The ambitious journey will be broken up into about 10 legs.

"I think the hairiest part of the trip will be the 700 nautical miles between Iceland and Glasgow, Scotland, because there won't be anything under us but the Atlantic," Collier said with a tight grin.

Both crewmen said they had complete confidence in their venerable aircraft.

"The DC-3 is believed by many pilots to be the best airplane ever build," Collier said. "During the war they used to fly with huge holes shot out of them...Guys would bail out at what they thought was the last minute and then watch the plane land by itself."

Carson, who is 68 still wears his battered World War II leather flight jacket, said he was champing at the bit to get started.

"She's going to take us," he said with a seasoned squint in his eye. "And she's going to bring us safely home."

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And while we're talking about the C-47, here's some more information on the background of the planes we flew. From the book *Fifty Glorious Years...A Pictorial Tribute To The Douglas DC-3* we quote:

"As the 200th DC-3 came off the line in 1939 war clouds were looming in Europe; and wisely the development of a military

variant was in hand. The first US Army Air Corps DC-3s were those commercial orders taken over on the production line. These received the designations C-48, C-49, C-50, C-51, C-52 and C-68. At the time of Pearl Harbor in December 1941, a total of 289 DC-3s and DSTs were in US airline service and in May 1942, 92 of these were impressed into military use becoming sub-types of earlier models, namely C-48B, C-49D, E, F, G, H and C-84. This included the very first DST NC14988 which became a C-49E.

For troop transport the C-53 Skytrooper was ordered in June 1941 with further contracts following for the C-53C and C-53D variants. In April 1941 a handful of impressed DC-3s went to the RAF serving in India with 31 Squadron, and in the Middle East with 267 Squadron. Most were flown out by Pan American Africa in US civil markings.

The Santa Monica factory, which produced all DC-2s and DC-3s could not cater for the C-47 production orders, so with government aid Douglas built a new factory at Long Beach adjacent to the municipal airport. A second factory was opened in 1942 at Oklahoma City and produced the C-47-DK, C-117-DK and a few C-47-DK amphibians. Under the huge Lend-Lease agreement hundreds of C-47s were delivered to Allies forces direct from the factories in the livery of the nations involved.

Those for the RAF were ferried via Montreal to Prestwick, or Nassau to the Middle East and India. The 700 C-47s for Russia were delivered via Fairbanks, Alaska by US ferry crews. By far the largest number, nearly 2000 went to the RAF who adopted the name "Dakota" for the transport as did the RCAF, RAAF and RNZAF who operated the type. Some of the RAF Dakotas were diverted to South Africa and a few are still in use by the SAAF. Further Lend-Lease C-47s went to China, Brazil and France.

Many volumes would be required to describe the wartime activities of the "Gooney Bird" military transport which served with distinction in all theaters of operation. Suffice to mention that Douglas C-47 production for 1944 numbered no less than 4,853 transports, with 1,586 being produced between April and June. These included 1,237 USAAF Skytrains, 48 US Navy R4Ds, 218 RAF Dakotas, 7 RCAF, 8 RAAF, 4 SAAF, 2 RNZAF, 4 China, 3 Netherlands East Indies and 56 for Russia."

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Some time ago, Ziggy Zartman, one of our favorite correspondents, promised to send "a little something" describing his personal reactions to the D-Day mission flown by the 315th Troop Carrier Group. The promised manuscript arrived a few days ago, and a first reading confirmed the fact that Ziggy hasn't lost his narrative skills, sense of humor and perceptive eye. We hope you will enjoy it as much as we did.

D-DAY REMEMBERED..... Frau Rommel needs new shoes!

We didn't know it at the time, but Field Marshall Rommel's birthday gift to his Frau in 1944 MADE OUR DAY. In early June that year, with all of Spanhoe's troops sequestered, the 310th Squadron engineering personnel (like other 315th line troops) were very busy hustling to paint the five, two foot wide, stripes (3 white, two black) on the wings and fuselage of the Group's planes and gliders. These special (surprise) markings would identify the myriad Allied aircraft participating in round-the-clock sorties during OPERATION OVERLORD...code name for the joint task force (two million plus Allied attack and support troops) planning to invade German-occupied Northern France. A lesson learned earlier on the Southern Front (during the invasion of Sicily)...all planes were striped so that the Allied navies, armies and airforces would not target them...recalling Operation HUSKY, when the US Navy shot down twenty-three Troop Carrier Aircraft, C-47s overflying Allied naval vessels while enroute to the drop zone on Sicily.

Not mentioned, the six thousand-man British/Canadian task force that in 1942 was obliterated during an invasion attempt near the coastal port of Dieppe on France's northern border. Prior to that, the last successful invasion 'cross the Channel was in 1066 when the Normans, heading in the opposite direction, climbed the white cliffs of England during their invasion and conquest.

Charles DeGaulle, uniformed leader of the French Resistance Forces during almost four years of occupation, eagerly promoted the third front, but offered little more than sketchy "intelligence" concerning German operations and the promise of sabotage that would interrupt Nazi strategies. And, during the several months of our training and troop build-up, the enemy

stayed busy too...stockpiling munitions and equipment; heavily mining all beaches, the shallow water approaches and the mapped shipping lanes; erecting sturdy tank obstacles and traps; sighting-in all tactical target areas from the concrete bunker guns that lined the Channel coast; and digging connecting tunnels. Also, the Field Marshall in command, Erwin Rommel, the "Desert Fox", who was defeated in North Africa only after blockades deprived him of reinforcements and equipment, was in a vengeful mood, ready, he felt (from his castle Headquarters northwest of Paris) to show "Monty" his "stuff". Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery, who defeated him in North Africa, it was rumored, would lead the main attack on the defending Wermacht.

By the late Spring of '44, Field Marshall Hermann Goering's remaining Luftwaffe forces were pretty much needed to defend the "Fatherland" thus, not a serious threat to the OVERLORD operation. FRIENDLY FIRE was the main concern. Vast numbers of planes, much variety among the Allied markings, a plethora of aircraft types, and numerous close-support sorties, all would test the reaction tendencies of armed warriors fearing the "faces of battle"...most in their first combat role. Ironically, post-invasion debriefings would later reveal that US Army Air Corps planes, this time with the initiative, bombed and strafed friendly ground forces on several occasions...the ravage of war balancing the scales!?

The much-heralded 'TOP SECRET', broad in scope, weather harnessed, invasion of Northern France...to get a beachhead across the Channel, forcing the Hun unlike WWI, this time, to do battle on THREE fronts, was imminent.

In mid-March a year earlier, Premier "Gulag" Joe Stalin, the USSR member of the big three (Roosevelt, Churchill, Stalin) sent urgent letters to both Winston and Franklin pushing for a third front, not satisfied that the Siberian-style winter storms had already

stalled the German invaders on the Eastern Front....early Spring mud even then precipitating Russian army successes as the heavy equipment of the Krauts bogged down while horse-drawn guns of the Reds maimed both enemy machines and men. The mustacheod, villainous (unbranded then for the 40 million deaths at his order according to a recent TV documentary), Joseph, again, would get his way! On the Italian (Southern) front Allied troops were approaching the outskirts of Rome; the beachhead at Anzio, northwest of Rome, still pinned down by German forces.

Until then, invincible on the ground and their defenses seemingly impenetrable, the Third Reich conquerors of France held a good hand, but the mad, shouting Chancellor didn't play it well! The Channel stormy, Rommel had earlier been enticed (the Allies would never attack in such weather) into a meeting with der Fuhrer and a visit with his family (June 6 was his wife's birthday) and he had purchased, in Paris, a handmade pair of suede slippers for her and *thus he was not at his post during the critical first 24 hours* (his stated concern) when the attack got underway (resulting in seven Panzer units not being deployed until too late). Hitler, himself, asleep at Eagles Nest, his mountain retreat in the Austrian Alps, unaware of unfolding events, had given orders NOT TO BE AWAKENED. And, our poker-faced bluffs kept the Krauts perplexed. A Montgomery "look-alike" would show up, promenading in Lisbon in early June, a Patton "phony" would be reported in the Dover area mustering his troops for a Calais landing..another ruse. Radio broadcasts from Scotland hinted that a landing in Norway was imminent..some more trickery. Also, unknown to Hitler's generals, a Polish cryptographer, who had sought asylum in England as he waited (in vain, as we know the dream never materialized) for Major General Sosaboskie and the First Polish Parachute Regiment to drop from the skies and free his homeland. Meanwhile, as a key member of a group of cryptology geniuses gathered together by British intelligence had deciphered the German system (called ENIGMA) for coding and encoding its military messages, enabling the Allies to react to all intercepted transmissions. Again,

knowing that the Cherbourg peninsula lacked a major, useable port, the Jerries would be surprised when the Allies showed up with a mobile harbor to be anchored offshore—an urgently needed facility if the beachhead troops were to receive the tonnage of supplies needed to hold and later break out in the thrust toward the "fatherland" borders.

NEPTUNE, the Troop Carrier facet of OVERLORD....to "vertically envelop" the enemy by landing *behind* the coastal front was the coded focus of our mission. The several months of intensive day and night training exercises concluded....reality time was now clock ticks away! Back in the arsenal of democracy, the ZI, on the morning of June 6, FDR would be announcing that the invasion was underway...asking the nation to pray for the troops....asking that they successfully complete their mission to preserve freedom and democracy.

Leading Task Force "A", the 505th, 507th and 508th Parachute Infantry Regiments of the 82nd Airborne Division, was the youngest, fightingest general the 52nd Troop Carrier Wing would drop: Brigadier General James L. "Jumping Jimmy" Gavin, the tough kid from Mt. Carmel Township, who grew up just down the road a few miles from my home town, Shamokin, PA. It would be one of his paratroopers who drifted onto the church steeple at St. Mere Eglise....to be memorialized in the *Stars and Stripes* and in stateside rotogravure highlights (remember those brown picture sheets?). It would be his troopers who would liberate the first town in occupied France, St. Mere Eglise, "old Glory" signifying that the key conjunction of highways and railroads on the peninsula were in GI hands. It would be his troopers who would roust the enemy from the hedgerows when they didn't respond with the requisite clicks of a cricket (Allied troops had been issued crickets for ID purposes)....his troopers who would cope with the farmlands purposely flooded by the Germans. It would be General Gavin, the young paratroop leader from the anthracite coal regions, who on D-Plus 4, from his Cherbourg "stronghold" would send out a field-grade courier with a message to the 52nd Wing aircrews: "you have my

appreciation for a job darn well done" ..meaning our rigid training paid off that night in the clouded, tracer-arched, shell-bursting, moonlit skies over the Cherbourg peninsula 50 YEARS AGO!.

No fan, spectator, observer ever had a better seat to unfolding history than we did that moonlit night, when the Supreme Commander, "Ike" just hours earlier, coping with deteriorating weather, made his decision "We'll GO!"

Below, viewed from the open cockpit side window, the glistening, foamy wakes of the endless invading ships...battleships (the NEVADA, damaged at Pearl Harbor, flagship of the sea armada) and destroyers bombarding the coastal gun revetments from deep water, while minesweepers clearing the way, landing craft churned toward rendezvous points, some occupants already seasick from the tossing, rolling boat ride...the soothing drone of the "skytrains" synchronized engines, brief reflections of the buddies who were killed during the dangerous and intensive training exercises...the hot, calming cup of can-brewed G.I. coffee, compliments of the Crew Chief...the stirring in the back end as the munitions and equipment-laden paratroopers awkwardly attempted to catch glimpses through the small cabin windows of the Allied fleet underway below, their veteran jumpmaster at the duct-taped open doorway awed by the sheer magnitude of the battle formations wherever he gaped...the nervous excitement of this wonderment of frenzy as we went forth to WAR! We were over the dark, choppy, cold waters of the strait separating the Isles from the Continent. IT WAS NOT YET D-DAY...the main beach landings still hours away. Meanwhile, hundreds of heavy, medium and light Allied bombers would pummel the coastal gun emplacements and key inland rail and road conjunctions that provided access for the "support" haulers. Some coastal guns were silenced; yet, equally effective (we learned later) were follow-on, small advance patrols of Rangers who scaled coastal cliffs on climbing ropes to knock out key gun positions. Unknown to me at the time, my younger brother, Bill, with Darby's Rangers at the Anzio beachhead in Italy had been

wounded and captured...a POW on his way to a Stalag in the "fatherland".

ONWARD...ONWARD, THE CLOCK TICKING BEYOND MIDNIGHT!! Then peering through the windscreen at the long line of planes ahead; dull blue formation lights defining our flight path, that wonderful "high five" feeling of "nice move" leader when Colonel Hamish McClelland, then our Commander, suddenly confronted with unexpected (unbriefed) tracer illuminated, anti aircraft fire from the Channel Islands ahead on the right side, calmly applied Scottish power to the controls, easing our line of nine plane "V's" into a shallow left turn, taking us further out of range (remember?)

The lightning speed of events after watching the Normandy western peninsular shoreline disappear in the low coastal clouds...eyeballs glued to the plane on which you focused..not wanting to lose the formation as we quivered in and out of the cumulus buildup..the tension during the GREENLIGHT MOMENTS WHEN CHUTE CANOPIES FILLED THE NIGHT SKIES, and we assumed the "low and slow sitting duck mode"...the low level, moonlit erratic and evasive tracer arcs and ground shell blasts kinda highlighting events, roller coaster "ride" to the waters of Normandy Bay (visibility good now, but by sun-up it would be heavily misted...the turn and climb to 3,000 feet in the designated escape corridor..and, the cruise back to England's shores with machines of war above, below and to both sides..the greatest military invasion force humankind had ever assembled, charging shoreward below: NEVER AGAIN WOULD OUR EYES VIEW ANYTHING SO SPECTACULAR!!

For the next two weeks, if you weren't flying, repairing planes, cooking for the troops, requisitioning supplies, repacking parachutes, nursing the wounded on evacuation flights, accumulating intelligence data, feeding the paper mill, planning...whatever your duty "to God and Country", you were either glued to the radio or reading *Stars and Stripes*...or just, maybe listening, if you were in the 310th, to one of my war stories. YEP! Fifty years ago, there WE WERE!!!

Those of you who returned to the ETO as surviving friends of Kilroy, participating in the D-Day 50th Anniversary, '94 invasion of Europe (I didn't) only now know that it was easier, in some ways, to have been one of the GIs on 6 June 1944. than to have been a veteran standing quietly remembering as TAPS mournfully bugled the conclusion of each event during the commemorative ceremonies. Tho I've never seen the endless rows of white and grey crosses at the Omaha Beach military cemeteries, I did read their message on a plaque placed where Lincoln stood at Gettysburg".....*we have come to dedicate a portion of this battlefield as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives...*". I've also read that, but for Lady Luck, the Allies would have been driven back into the cold, dark waters of the Channel. And, that's true...IF, that is the way YOU personify the inexplicable power that reacts with the Souls of humankind...for, as the combatants observed the "enemy" getting closer, prayers, silent and aloud were uttered on both sides of the line.!

An interesting footnote: Gloria, a year ago, browsing in Parachute's lone art gallery...I got into conversation with the lady running the "store". Turns out, when the Germans blitzkreiged beyond their Sigfried Line and around Andre Maginot's Fortress to swiftly take over Paris and occupy France, she was enrolled in an exclusive school for girls located on one of the Channel Islands..either Guernsey or Sark, I can't recall which, but I think it was Sark. She happened to be on holiday in England when the French surrendered...never returning to complete her interrupted education. Now a friend, she too has a repertoire of war stories...many much more painful than mine! With a level of couth several layers higher than mine, it didn't surprise me to learn that she was a friend of the Dame, who, until her death not long ago, ruled over the British outpost of Sark, smallest, I think, of the Channel Islands. Site of a finishing school for maturing young ladies...offshore duty post for Nazis deploying batteries of anti-aircraft artillery, Sark Island might have been a place we'd never forget, had those enemy gunners been more patient and not given away their

position that moonlit night 50 years ago! Now, with hindsight, it was Frau Rommel's birthday and Hamish's gentle left-bank maneuver that MADE MY (OUR) DAY ON 6 JUNE, 1944!

Gotta go...I must find Gloria. I need a hug!

Ziggy

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**Letter from Fr. Gerard Thuring,
Honorary Member 315th Association**

Recently we received a letter from Father Thuring dated June 21, 1994 in which he gave news of the "Longest Day" celebrations taking place in Holland and told of the unveiling of the General Gavin monument at Groesbeek which ceremony was attended by Mrs. Gavin and three of her daughters.

The dedication and industry shown by Father Thuring as he carries on his work of compiling historical data on troop carrier missions, casualty reports and related matters is truly astounding and most heart-warming. We all owe this dedicated priest a great deal of gratitude.

Fr. Thuring mentions a piece which appeared in the July, 1986 issue of the *315th NEWSLETTER* which wondered about what happened to 1Lt. Romeo S. Farese after he left the 315th Group. Well, here's the answer as supplied by Fr. Thuring: Farese went to 322/451 Bomb Squadron where he flew missions. Apparently, Romeo was killed while on a mission and was buried in the US Temp. cemetery Solers/Melun in France. His last interment was in Danville National Cemetery, Danville, Virginia.

If any reader happens to have copies of the crew & aircraft listings of the B-5 and B-6 Serials for Operation VARSITY, 3/24/45, Fr. Thuring would greatly appreciate a copy which would facilitate his survey and record of 315th losses on the VARSITY mission. His address: Fr. Gerald Thudding, Liberation Museum 1944, Sint Antoniusweg 2, 6562 GM GROESBEEK, Holland

NEWS OF AN INTERESTING BOOK WRITTEN BY OUR FRIEND ROGER A. FREEMAN, AND PUBLISHED IN MAY, 1994

Some of our readers have met Roger Freeman when they've visited Britain during the past few years and have come to respect Roger's dedication and knowledge in his writings about U.S. participation in WWII, the aircraft we flew and the airfields from which we flew them. Roger is the author of some 40 books on World War II aviation, as well as numerous pamphlets and magazine articles, and specializes in American Air Force history and aircraft.

A new book *UK AIRFIELDS OF THE NINTH...THEN AND NOW* published just a few months ago was written by Roger A. Freeman and edited and designed by Winston G. Ramsey is highly recommended to our readers...in fact, to anyone interested in the history of the airfields and the missions of the Ninth Air Force planes which flew from them. Of special interest to members of the WWII 315th Troop Carrier Group Association are the pages devoted to SPANHOE, Station 493 in the section "Northern Troop Carrier Bases."

It was a real thrill to see the eight photographs, and the map of the airfield and surrounding countryside and to read the text which described the base itself, the arrival of the 315th on the base, an account of the training and the missions flown by the four squadrons of our Group.

The book is a beautifully printed hardbound book, 8 1/2" x 12" with hundreds of photographs of air bases with text describing the bases and the outfits who occupied them. We quote from the dust jacket of the book:

"The US Ninth Air Force began as a headquarters for USAAF units in the Middle East in 1942-43 but it is better known for its role as the major tactical air force for operations in north-west Europe in 1944-45.m

Charged primarily with the support of ground forces in the invasion of Normandy, the Ninth fielded a variety of aircraft -- liaison, fighter, bomber and troop carrier -- and operated from over 60 airfields in Britain. Within these pages all are explored and photographed on the ground and from the air, ranging from the troop carrier bases of central and southern England; the bomber airfields in Essex and the New Forest, and the advanced landing grounds in Kent and Hampshire -- temporary expedients to enable fighters to give close support to the battlefield.

Then, the airfields were in the front line, vibrant and full of activity as men and machines prepared to do battle. Now, they have adopted new faces: as centres of industry and international aviation or venues for leisure activities and motor racing. Some still retain their war-like status as military bases while others have returned to the plough as the wheel turns full circle. But for all, their place in history is assured, recorded and presented here 50 years after the battle."

[Editor's Note: I will have a copy of *UK Airfields of the Ninth...Then and Now* with me in St. Louis so you can examine it and see why it would be an excellent addition to your personal library. Specifics on the book: Size 12"x 8 1/2", 256 pages 510 illustrations. Price \$59.95 ISBN 0 900913 80 0 HARDBACK]



Robert M. Davis, Treasurer
WWII 315th Troop Carrier Group Association
7025 Wind Run Way
Stone Mountain GA 30087

Dear Bob:

Here's my check for \$10.00.....1 year's dues to the Association
20.00.....2 year's dues

NAME.....SQUADRON.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY.....STATE.....ZIP.....

Thank you, thank you, thank you.



DON'T FORGET TO SEND IN YOUR REGISTRATION

Please print all information and send the form and
your check to Bob Davis at the address given.