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FEATURE ARTICLES

SPECIAL FEATURES

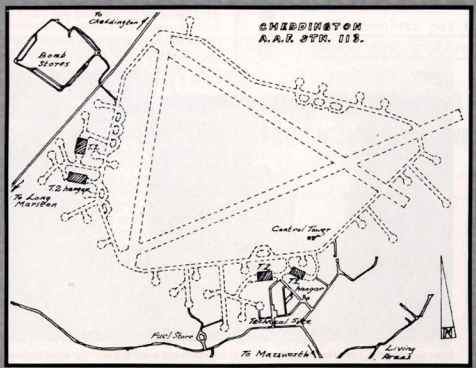
REGULAR FEATURES

COVER: Our cover painting, by Barry Bichler of Fairlawn, NJ, depicts an F-86F of the 25th F.I.S., 51st F.I.W., flown by Maj. John H. Glenn, Jr. The action shows one of Glenn's three combat kills in Korea. The plane being shot down is a North Korean MiG-15.

8th Air Force Newsboys — Cheddington Revisited

by Brian S. Gunderson

Navigator Brian Gunderson's first crew. Gunderson is fifth from the left in the back row. Aircraft Commander Captain Melton is fourth from right, back row, and the pilot was Lieutenant Ficker, fifth from right, back row.



Capt. Brian Gunderson broadcasting from the American Red Cross Rainbow Corner in London, England, in the BBC program "The American Eagle in Britain."

ALTHOUGH the night flight across the Atlantic had been smooth and uneventful, I hadn't slept a wink. Too many thoughts raced through my mind as I tried to remember events that had occurred almost forty years ago. I wondered what magical element had entered my life to make it so important for me to make a pilgrimage back to England to forge a link with the past and to see the last traces of an old World War II airfield that soon would be little more than a memory.

With the passage of time, the memories had begun to fade, and the ranks of colleagues with whom I had flown and later exchanged recollections had thinned. I felt that I was losing something that had been a very important part of my life for many years, and I didn't like it. I wanted to reach back into the past to relive once more the exhilaration of flying in that beautiful bird, the B-17 Flying Fortress, as well as remember the thrills and dangers unique to aerial combat.

Recalling those turbulent years had reawakened a longing for excitement and adventure. It had become very important for me to remember and hold onto a small, but very special, part of a war that I had been involved in. It felt good to know that soon I would be greeting old comrades, even though the number would be much smaller than I would have liked. I would be renewing feelings of friendship and camaraderie that, when we had flown together, were much deeper than most familial ties. It was the type of bond that had developed quickly during World War II between individuals who hadn't known each other before their bomber aircrew had been formed. They were to become the closest friends, primarily because of a deep-rooted knowledge that survival often depended upon the action taken, or not taken, by any one of them. The togetherness that resulted from such a relationship gave each crew member a stronger feeling of confidence that he would complete a combat tour in spite of the dangers he faced. It was for all of these reasons that I was returning to England where nostalgia, that wistful mixture of pleasure and sadness that accompanies a homecoming, would soon take over my life for a few short days in October.

Next to me on the Pan Am 747, my wife Doris dozed peacefully, not recalling memories of a deadly and sophisticated war fought high in the sky over Germany and Western Europe, where such strange words as Gee, H_2S, Mickey, and Boozer (all pieces of radar equipment), bandits (enemy fighters), flak (enemy antiaircraft fire), angels (acronym for altitude), corkscrew (a diving maneuver by a bomber to elude an enemy fighter), scramble (quick takeoffs, by fighters, to meet the threat of enemy attack), and "coned" (a plane caught in enemy searchlights), described just a few of the many elements that could determine a mission's success or failure. Because we had met after the war was over and were married in 1946, her role in the activities during the coming week would be that of a patient and understanding spectator. She realized how much this trip meant to me, and was being the good trouper she had always been about my longstanding infatuation with the events of almost four decades ago.

Although reunions of 8th Air Force units that had been stationed in England during the war years had become rather common, there was something special about the one I was going to attend. To begin with, we were going to dedicate a memorial to our old airfield at Cheddington and to all the personnel who had been stationed there, rather than to a particular Bomber or Fighter Group or Squadron. It was a unique airfield, where two special 8th Air Force Squadrons had been located, operating in relative obscurity throughout most of the war.

One of the squadrons was a radio counter measures unit, the 36th Bombardment Squadron (H). The B-24s of that squadron had the task of jamming enemy radio and radar, and from time to time, they put out spurious radio transmissions to confuse the enemy aircrews. Principal jamming equipment used by the B-24 aircrews was codenamed "Carpet" and "Mandrel." Carpet was a device that jammed the German Wurtzburg fire-control radars. Mandrel, on the other hand, was initially designed to interface with the enemy's early-warning radars such as the Freya and Wasserman systems. Another tactic used successfully by the B-24s was the dropping of "Chaff," which was the American equivalent of the Royal Air Force's "Window." "Chaff" was strips of thin metal foil, which were dropped in large quantities in order to create false images that the German ground radars interpreted to be a large bomber force heading in a certain direction. This provided a diversion for the real bomber force which was heading to a target in a different area. Such missions were called "Spoofing" missions.

The second operational unit at Cheddington was my old Squadron, the 406th Bombardment Squadron (H), a night leaflet squadron that initially used B-17 aircraft. Before the war was over, they had been almost totally replaced by B-24s. The Squadron Commander and the Operations Officer, who had flown all of their missions in B-17s, somehow managed to hold on to a couple of the "old birds" throughout the war.

Although "newspaper" leaflets had been dropped by the Royal Air Force Bomber Command for several years before the 8th Air Force became involved in this form of psychological warfare in August 1943, the Allied civilian populace was not formally made aware of such operations until April 1944. An article by reporter Bud Hutton on the front page of the Wednesday, 5 April 1944 edition of *The Stars and Stripes* carried the headline: "U.S. Dropping Leaflets Over Europe, Reich," with a subtitle "Bombs of Truth on Liar's Fortress." Subsequent articles by the same author appeared in the 7 April and 4 May 1944 editions of the same paper. The 7 April story was titled "World's Biggest Circulation — 'Newsboys' Air Force Delivers to Ger-

Brian Gunderson (l) and Reuben Hill (r), former members of the 406th Bomb Squadron in front of the old Briefing Room at Cheddington.

many," and the 4 May article was entitled "Giving the Lie to the Nazi Lies," with the subheading "Flying Newsboys Hit With Truth Till It Hurts." This article was written after Bud had flown a couple of missions with crews of the 422nd Bomb Squadron, 305th Bomb Group (H), including mine.

While it was true that public announcements about U.S. leaflet operations had been suppressed, it was common knowledge around the airfields where such operations were conducted, first at the 422nd Bomb Squadron (H), at Chelveston Airfield in Northamptonshire, and later by the same unit that was first redesignated the 858th, and subsequently the 406th Bomb Squadron (H), after it had been relocated to Cheddington Airfield (Station 113) in Buckinghamshire.

There were many replacement crew members who arrived at the local train station thinking that they would soon be dropping bombs on Hitler's Germany, only to be greeted, rather derisively, by village youngsters calling out, "Hey Yank, are you going to be another paper boy?"

Nevertheless, those of us who took off night after night to deliver propaganda newspapers and surrender leaflets to the enemy, or messages of hope and current news to military and civilian allies on the Continent, felt that the role of leaflet missions in the over-all war effort was truly significant. Yet, to date, the many volumes that have been written about air operations during World War II have paid only lip service to this special type of air operations. As air historian Dr. James M. Erdman, who probably has written more on leaflet operations in World War II than anyone, has stated: "It is almost unbelievable that so much printing at the time has produced so little in print about it." Aside from wartime security restrictions, maybe it was because such operations were overt and lacked the glamour of the covert, and often more spectacular, secret agent activities.

Another problem was the fact that several Royal Air Force and 8th Air Force leaders during the early part of World War II were highly critical of leaflet operations, primarily because they felt they could ill afford to divert even one aircraft from what they considered to be an all too small and rapidly diminishing bomber force, to drop nothing but "newspapers." For example, Marshal of the RAF Sir Arthur "Bomber" Harris, the colorful and controversial Air Officer Commanding in Chief, Royal Air Force Bomber Command, stated on page 23 of his book *Bomber Offensive*, ". . . the only thing achieved was largely to supply the Continent's requirements of toilet paper for the five long years of the war." On the other hand, Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Allied Commander, looked upon such operations during World War II in a more positive light. In a SHAEF report, he is quoted as saying, ". . .Allied psychological warfare grew from infancy to vigorous maturity," and ". . . I am convinced that the expenditure of men and money in wielding the spoken and written word was an important contributing factor in undermining the enemy's will to resist and supporting the fighting morale of our potential Allies in the occupied countries . . ." and, ". . . without doubt, psychological warfare has proved its right to a place of dignity in our military arsenal."

Prior to D-Day, only 500 million leaflets were dropped by U.S. aircraft out of the approximately 6 billion that were dropped by all aircraft flying out of English air

Message urgent

du Commandement Suprême des Forces Expeditionnaires Alliées

AUX HABITANTS DE CETTE VILLE

Afin que l'ennemi commun soit vaincu, les Armées de l'Air Alliées vont attaquer tous les centres de transports ainsi que toutes les voies et moyens de communications vitaux pour l'ennemi.

Des ordres à cet effet ont été donnés.

Vous qui lisez ce tract, vous vous trouvez dans ou près d'un centre essentiel à l'ennemi pour le mouvement de ses troupes et de son matériel. L'objectif vital près duquel vous vous trouvez va être attaqué incessament.

Il faut sans délai vous éloigner, avec votre famille, pendant quelques jours, de la zone de danger où vous vous trouvez.

N'encombrez pas les routes. Dispersez-vous dans la campagne, autant que possible.

PARTEZ SUR LE CHAMP!

VOUS N'AVEZ PAS UNE MINUTE A PERDRE!

Z.F.4

One of the leaflets dropped by Brian Gunderson and crew.

bases. After D-Day, it was a different story. Out of more than the 3 billion leaflets distributed, 405 million were dropped by Royal Air Force aircraft, 1.175 billion by regular 8th Air Force bomber units and 1.577 billion by my unit, a single squadron, the 406th Bombardment Squadron (H), formerly designated the 422nd and the 858th.

Most of the Royal Air Force leaflet operations in 1941 and 1942 were missions over France. The leaflet usually dropped was entitled *Le Courier de l'Air (News from the Air)*. These operations were given the code name "Nickels," which was used when the RAF aircraft wanted to make "in the clear" wireless transmissions during missions referring to their leaflet activities. Later on, those 8th Air Force units involved in dropping leaflets, adopted the same codeword.

I had transferred from the Royal Canadian Air Force in November 1944 to the U.S. Army Air Corps, after HQs 8th Air Force personnel were given permission by the Royal Air Force and Royal Canadian Air Force to contact Americans in their units and ask them to transfer to U.S. flying organizations in England. I had joined the RCAF before Pearl Harbor, primarily because friends I had gone to school with in Salisbury, England, during the middle 1930s kept chiding me in their letters "to come over and be cannon fodder with the rest of us." Because I had just turned eighteen, I was too young to enter the U.S. Army Air Corps flight training program in early 1941, so I headed north to Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, to enlist in the RCAF. After flight training in the navigator and bombardier programs, and instructing for one year at #9 Air Observer School, St. Jean, Quebec, I finally was posted to England. At the time I transferred in London, England, the U.S. air leaders were particularly eager to gain pilots and navigators with night-flying experience, as the missions to be flown by the first 8th Air Force squadron assigned to conduct leaflet operations, the 422nd Bomb Squadron (H), at Chelveston, would be flown at night. Several months before I was assigned to Chelveston, the 1st Bomb Division had received a message from HQ VIII Bomber Command (BC,S-1776), dated 29/0945 September 1943, ordering that six 422nd aircraft be prepared "to carry out extensive leaflet operations at night over Germany and occupied countries . . . as soon after October 1, 1943, as practicable."


SAFE CONDUCT

The German soldier who carries this safe-conduct is using it as a sign of his genuine wish to give himself up. He is to be disarmed, to be well looked after, to receive food and medical attention as required, and is to be removed from the danger zone as soon as possible.

PASSIERSCHEIN

An die britischen und amerikanischen Vorposten. Der deutsche Soldat, der diesen Passierschein vorzeigt, benutzt ihn als Zeichen seines ehrlichen Willens, sich zu ergeben. Er ist zu entwaffnen. Er muss gut behandelt werden. Er hat Anspruch auf Verpflegung und, wenn nötig, ärztliche Behandlung. Er wird so bald wie möglich aus der Gefahrenzone entfernt.

Part of a leaflet dropped behind German lines by Brian Gunderson.

The first 422nd leaflet raids were to Frankfurt, Germany, with the B-17s trailing RAF aircraft into that city, because there was fear on the part of some Headquarters staff personnel that a single B-17 penetrating Germany at night would be tantamount to suicide. However, in a few weeks the 422nd was on its own, successfully flying single aircraft missions to numerous targets in France. By 24 October 1943, HQ VIII Bomber Command assigned the 422nd Squadron exclusively to leaflet operations. Within weeks, operations were expanded to include missions to cities in Belgium, Holland, Germany, Denmark, and Norway. By then, the leaflets dropped

over France had been retitled *L'Amerique en Guerre* ("America in the War"). Those destined for Holland had the heading *De Vliegende Hollander* ("The Flying Dutchman"); those dropped over Norway were titled *Del Frie Norge* (*The Free Norway*); and those flown to Belgium were titled *L'Arc En Ciel* (*The Rainbow*). The leaflets that were dropped over Germany in time for breakfast reading were called *Sternenbanner* (*Star-Spangled Banner*). A special four-page paper, written especially for the German troops, was titled *Nachrichten fur die Trupe* (*News for the Troops*). All papers, most of them four-page editions with each page measuring 8½" by 10½", were printed in the language of the country over which they were dropped.

After the invasion of Normandy, "Surrender" leaflets and "Safe Conduct" passes, titled "Passierschein," were dropped behind the German lines. Each leaflet, 5¼" by 8½", contained the following statement in German and English: "The German soldier who carries this safe-conduct is using it as a sign of his genuine wish to give himself up. He is to be disarmed, to be well looked after, to receive food and medical attention as required, and is to be removed from the danger zone as soon as possible." They had such a significant impact on the morale of the civilian populace and the enemy soldiers being pinned down or overrun by the Allied armies, that German authorities meted out prison penalties, up to two months, if any of the German populace was caught with, or distributed, these leaflets. Military personnel were threatened with courts-martial and even death by a firing squad. During the nights of 5 June 1944 and 6 June (D-Day), 9 million leaflets were dropped, most of them copies of *Nachrichten fur die Trupe*. After the invasion of Normandy, SHAEF organized a leaflet campaign to capitalize on what they felt would be a feeling of hopelessness and panic on the part of German soldiers under fire on the front lines. The fact that so many German prisoners of war had copies of this paper, along with a "Surrender" leaflet, in their possession when they gave themselves up, indicates that the SHAEF planners were justified in concentrating their efforts on such publications.

Each leaflet was composed by special propaganda teams of the British Political Warfare Executive, supplemented by native-born writers from each of the countries over which the leaflets were to be dropped. Each edition to be dropped on German targets was designed to contain accurate, up-to-date domestic and foreign news, as well as human interest stories relating to the war. It was anticipated that such news, emphasizing troop homesickness, battlefield casualties, and food rationing at home, would breed discontent and foster dissension among the ground troops. While it was not expected that a single leaflet, or even several of them, would achieve instant success and result in mass hysteria on the part of the German populace, or large defections by soldiers at the front, it was felt that if they were picked up and read, day after day, doubts would be raised, and morale would be lowered, on the part of civilians and troops alike. The leaflets designed for the Allied civilian populace were liberally illustrated with pictures and cartoons. Each article was short and easy to read. Often there was a section in some of the leaflets which contained information about the times American broadcasts were beamed towards the continent, as well as the meter bands on which the transmissions could be picked up.

A leaflet bomb being "loaded."

Brig. Gen. Robert A. McClure, Chief, Psychological Warfare Division, SHAEF, during World War II, stated in a speech at a State Department Symposium, on 10 April 1950, "Except on the rarest occasions and under total circumstances, [psychological warfare] can never start or reverse a trend — it can only accelerate or retard one." It was this philosophy that called for crews of the 406th Bomb Squadrons to return night after night, week after week, month after month to Frankfurt, Berlin, Hamburg, Cologne, Essen, Dortmund, Munich, Hanover, and other cities in the German heartland, as well as to cities and towns in France, Belgium, Holland, Norway, and Denmark.

THE reunion I was about to attend was to dedicate a small monument outside of the old main gate to the airfield at Cheddington, to the memory of all personnel who had been assigned there during the war years. Some of the larger units included the 8th Air Force Composite Command, the 36th and 406th Squadrons, the Combat Crew Replacement Centers which preceded the two operational squadrons, the Hospital and Medical Dispensaries, the Military Police Companies, the B-24 Mobile Training Unit, the Ordnance Supply and Maintenance Company, the Quartermaster Company, the Signal Companies, the Service Groups, the Weather Squadron, and last, but most certainly not least, the Womans Army Auxiliary Corps Unit (WAACS).

The fact that we were having a reunion was due primarily to the efforts of seven very special individuals who lived in the towns and little villages surrounding Cheddington. It was this group, "The Fearless Seven," that was responsible for getting the Cheddington (Station 113) Association underway in early 1980, with the publication of a newsletter called *Cheddington Leaflets*. Some of them had been part of the airfield's activities during the war years, and others had been only children at the time, or had moved to the Cheddington area after the war was over. All of them had one thing in common, an undying interest in the operations that had been conducted from that airfield from 1942 until the end of the war in the European theater in the summer of 1945. They also had a burning desire to erect a memorial to all who had been stationed there, and to hold a dedication service that would help perpetuate the memory of the special operations that had been conducted from that airfield. The seven were Pat Carty, Ron Cox, Bob Kielian, Spike Milligan, Alan Moss, Arthur Reeve, and Gordon Turney.

After landing at Heathrow Airport, near London, Doris and I took a rental car up to Luton, Bedfordshire, where we would be staying at a hotel during the dedication activities. After checking into the hotel, I had my first opportunity to read the program that Pat Carty and the Cheddington Memorial Dedication Committee had so carefully planned and organized, with the help of many other local citizens, as well as British and American military personnel stationed nearby. I was particularly pleased to note that they had decided to set aside the first day for a trip to the American Military Cemetery at Madingley, near Cambridge. Although we had returned to Cheddington primarily for a special dedication celebration, to renew old friendships, and to remember the good times we had almost forty years ago, this trip to the cemetery would start our week long ac-

Left: 406 Bomb Squadron's B-17, ***Pistol Packin Mama.***

Below: Al Weill's B-17 painted black. The "W" on the tail is for "Weill."

tivities by putting everything into the proper perspective, as far as I was concerned. It would remind everybody that the price of World War II had been high, especially when one added up the number of human lives lost, most of them in their teens or twenties when they died.

The joviality of the evening before, when we had met at a Luton pub for a drink and get-acquainted session with everyone who had come for the reunion, was missing as the bus made its way slowly to Madingley along the winding, country roads, through villages undisturbed by the passage of time, full of mellow stone and thatched cottages. It was raining fitfully, and as I peered through the raindrops on the bus window, I found my mind straining to remember the events that led up to fifteen Cheddington airmen being buried in that military cemetery, and two more being listed on the Wall of Missing. Nine of those still buried there had been from my unit, the 406th Bombardment Squadron (H). It was easy to remember Gerben A. Coehoorn, a Flight Officer navigator from Sioux Falls, South Dakota, because that was where I had met my wife after the war, and he had been one of the new navigators I had checked out when I was Squadron Navigator. And then there was Lt. Col. Earle J. Aber, Jr., our Squadron commander. I don't think anyone who had been in the Squadron after he took command will ever forget how he had come to be buried in this hallowed ground, 30.5 acres donated by the University of Cambridge to the American Battle Monuments Commission. Just as the bus arrived at the cemetery, the rain stopped and the sun broke through and shone brightly on the 3,811 white crosses and Star of David headstones marking the graves of servicemen from every State in the Union, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines.

As I wandered along the fan-shaped paths, glancing at each perfectly manicured plot for the graves of airmen who had been stationed at Cheddington, I found my task had been made much easier than expected as the Cemetery Superintendent and his staff had thoughtfully marked all fifteen graves with a miniature U.S. flag. After searching for a few minutes, I found myself standing alone in front of that simple white cross with the inscription "Earle J. Aber, Jr., Lt. Col., 406 Bomb Sq., 305 Bomb Group (H), Wisconsin, Mar. 4, 1945." What it didn't say was that he had been born on 19 June 1919, in Racine, Wisconsin. Young in years, he had been endearingly known as "The Old Man" by all of us in the squadron. Like so many squadron and group commanders in 8th Air Force units during World War II, he had catapulted to the top as the result of a com-

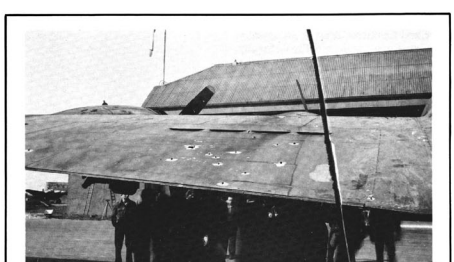
bination of circumstances. To begin with, he had been a top-notch pilot who had survived almost fifty night combat missions. Second, Group and Wing Headquarters had recognized his operational and leadership qualities by making him the Operations Officer and promoting him to the rank of Major. Finally, and unfortunately this happened all too often during the war, he had become the Squadron Commander when his predecessor had crashed and was killed. In Lieutentant Colonel Aber, the 406th had an outstanding leader who displayed infectious energy and inspirational leadership, and was well liked by all his personnel, in spite of his high standards and constant demands for excellence on the part of aircrew and groundcrew alike.

I had flown my fifty-first, and last, combat mission as his navigator on the night of 5 February 1945 when we went to Frankfurt, Germany. In spite of the fact that we had been targeted against one of the largest cities in Germany and had expected to encounter heavy antiaircraft fire and night fighter activity from the German Luftwaffe, we ended up with a relatively uneventful flight, for which I was extremely grateful. Such was not to be the case on the night of 4 March 1945, just one month later, when Lieutenant Colonel Aber decided to fly with a "makeup crew" (personnel who usually flew with a regular crew, but had missed a previously scheduled mission for one reason or other, and who were trying to catch up with their fellow crew members so that they could finish their tour together).

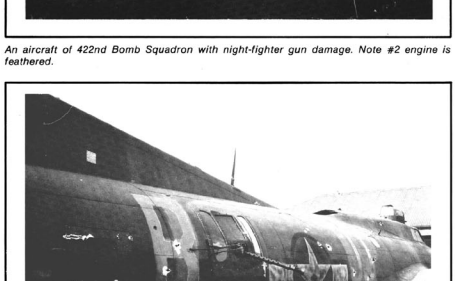
This mission was expected to be a "milk run" (an easy mission) to the Netherlands, dropping leaflets on Amsterdam, Utrecht, and Rotterdam. The flight out of England and over the targets had been routine, and the crew could visualize the news leaflets fluttering down to be eagerly picked up the next morning by the Dutch people.

Only two weeks earlier, on 14 February 1945, the Dutch Prime Minister Pieter Gerbrandy, had visited Cheddington, and, in a highly emotional speech, had told the 406th Squadron personnel how much it meant to the Dutch populace to receive the leaflets with their accurate recounting of the events of the war.

Shortly after Lieutenant Colonel Aber had turned the B-17 westward, after the last leaflet bomb had been dropped, and started the slow descent toward the designated entry point into England at Clacton-on-Sea, a series of events came together to produce one of the most ironic endings to an 8th Air Force bomber mission during the war. In the days preceding the mission, the German Air Force had cleverly used JU-88s at night to make hit-and-run bombing missions against airfields just inside the east coast of England, usually when RAF bombers were returning from the raids in order to add further confusion to the situation. After several nights of such activities, the British antiaircraft batteries along the coastline were understandably tired, frustrated, and "trigger happy." Unbeknownst to Lieutentant Colonel Aber and his crew, which included the co-pilot Lt. Maurice J. Harper, like me an ex-member of the Royal Canadian Air Force, and the navigator, Capt. Paul S. Stonerock, who also had planned to make this flight his last mission, the JU-88s had carried out another attack and were heading back to Germany. As the B-17 passed through 10,000 ft on the descent, a loud noise was heard and the plane shook violently. The crew didn't know what had happened. They first thought that they had collided with another aircraft. Then the plane was hit again, and all aboard quickly realized that the British antiaircraft batteries had zeroed in on them instead of on an outgoing JU-88. With tongues of flame streaking along the sides of the engines, and flight



An aircraft of 422nd Bomb Squadron with night-fighter gun damage. Note #2 engine is feathered.



A B-17 of the 422nd Bomb Squadron returns safely but with plenty of bullet holes from a night-fighter attack.

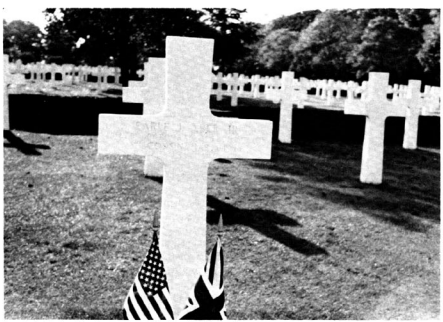
controls shot away, Lieutenant Colonel Aber and Lieutenant Harper struggled to maintain the plane in level flight. Finally, the "Old Man," in a strong, unemotional voice, directed the crew to bailout. Miraculously, one by one the crew was able to leave the aircraft, and, in some instances, their parachutes opened only seconds before they touched down on the marshy land that told them they had barely missed falling into the cold and unforgiving North Sea. All, that is, except Lieutenant Colonel Aber and Lieutenant Harper. Time had run out for them before they could leave the aircraft. The rest of the crew had seen a fireball explosion as the stricken aircraft crashed into the ground nearby. The next day, when search crews went to the crash site all they found of this great airman and outstanding commander was a hand with his Eagle Scout ring on it.

There was not much that one can do for the dead, but they should never be forgotten, especially those who gave their lives for their country in combat. As I prepared to leave Lieutenant Colonel Aber's grave site and join the others, I found myself saluting and softly saying a few words of prayer. After we had climbed back into the bus for the return trip to Luton, I looked back across this beautifully landscaped and very special bit of England and Thornton Wilder's words came to mind:

> All that we can know about those we have loved and lost is that they would wish us to remember them with a more intensified realization of their reality. What is essential does not die but clarifies. The highest tribute to the dead is not grief but gratitude.

The following morning, returnees like myself and those local English citizens who had seen the airfield evolve during wartime and wanted to be a part of this special dedication day, climbed aboard a vintage, green, doubledecker bus that Pat Carty and his friends had somehow managed to resurrect, and we headed out of Luton towards nearby Cheddington. Fortunately, the ride was a slow one. The narrow roads seemed to be designed to provide a rider with the opportunity and time to capture the scenic beauty and grandeur of the rolling hills and the patchwork quilt of fields dotted with sheep and cattle. Even though it was October, and most of the lush green landscape had assumed the more somber colors of fall, I was reminded of Charles Dickens' words, "Nature gives to every time and season some beauty of its own."

A training accident of the 406th Bomb Squadron. Oxygen caught fire on takeoff and the pilot bellied in; all escaped safely.



Lt. Col. Earle Aber's grave at Madingley Cemetery.

THE morning air was cool and damp with mist still hanging low over the fields as the bus made its way through the Buckinghamshire countryside. Each village that we passed through, despite the fact that it was only a few miles from England's "new world" city of Milton Keynes, had steadfastly refused to abandon its old country ways of life.

As we neared Cheddington and came to the crest of a hill, the driver brought the bus to a stop to let us get off so that each returnee could have his or her own impressions about that special moment. As my eyes swept across the horizon and picked out the remembered landmarks, mostly villages that had surrounded the airfield perimeter, I felt a sudden wave of sadness creep over me. The airfield that had played such a special role in 8th Air Force air operations during World War II was no more, showing the scars of decades of decline. Many of the buildings had been torn down, and much of what remained required a vivid memory to recall what they had been. I quickly realized that unlike English castles and cathedrals that still stand ageless, the last vestiges of a once active airfield, built less than forty years ago, and which had noisily intruded on the tranquility of this blissful countryside, had almost disappeared from view. The few remaining buildings showed the effects of neglect, as well as the results of numerous invasions by roving bands of gypsies who

Pictured here are two of the driving forces on the English side of the Association — Arthur Reeve (l) and Pat Carty (center, striped shirt) with Mrs. Carty and Arthur Reeve's son (r).

had taken everything of any value, including the plumbing (they sold the copper pipes for a tidy profit).

Although part of the perimeter taxiways and a few hardstands still remained, instead of B-17s and B-24 dotting the landscape, sheep, pigs, and cows now wandered quietly across the old airfield.

The bus continued its journey and with the help of Arthur Reeve, who had farmed the land before the airfield had been built, and who had stayed on to work as a groundsman for the Public Works Office, my memories of the airfield and the events that had occurred during my assignment there started to come rushing back.

With the help of a map of the old airfield, Arthur proudly pointed out where a particular building had been located, or where a unit had been billetted. First we passed where the hospital had been and then where the WAAC unit had been located. That was of particular interest to Lt. Col. Marjorie Hunt, U.S. Air Force (Ret.), one of the returnees, as she had commanded the first WAAC Detachment on the airfield, which had arrived in May 1944. She beamed with pride as the discussion concentrated on the outstanding support they had given to all units on the airfield during the war.

The bus slowed down and finally stopped by the area where the leaflet bombs had been readied for the missions. Unfortunately, because of illness, James Monroe, who had been the Squadron Armament Officer during my tour at Chelveston, was unable to attend the reunion and dedication. It was a pity, as he had played a very important role in the increasing success of our operations by designing a bomb that assured more accurate distribution of the leaflets over each target.

When the Royal Air Force dropped leaflets during the first years of the war, they had pushed them out of a chute into the slipstream. The likelihood that even one reached a designated target area was very slim, and the most likely reader of a fallen leaflet the following morning was a cow lazily munching grass in a French or German meadow. Later the RAF dropped bundles of leaflets tied with string and hoped they would burst open at a lower altitude by using an aneroid barometer and slip-pin mechanism. The success of this configuration was not much better than its predecessor. It was estimated that about 90 percent of the leaflets were dispersed at high altitude because of the erratic behavior of the barometric release, or not at all because a bundle never opened.

Jim Monroe realized that something more reliable and accurate was required. He felt that a frangible, lightweight bomb that would detonate at 2,000 ft over the ground could be the answer. First, he modified a large, laminated paper cylinder that had been used to ship incendiary bombs, equal in size to a 500-lb demolition bomb. He then added a pair of U-bolts on the side of the cylinder so that it could be hung from a bomb rack of a B-17 or a B-24, and be released by a standard shackle. After working on various fuses from the time he started his "bomb development" in the fall of 1943, he finally conducted the first test mission in February 1944. It was a success and a significant achievement, because distribution of the leaflets could be limited to an area one half to one mile square when the leaflet bombs opened at 2,000 ft above the ground. If leaflets were to be dropped over large cities, the fuse setting could be made for a higher burst. This was a vast improvement over any previous type of leaflet delivery. Reports that filtered back to England from resistance forces and captured enemy soldiers indicated that after we started using the Monroe bomb, our leaflets were reaching the designated target area much more often than had previously been the case.

After another brief ride on the bus, we stopped near the old main gate to wander through the living quarters area and then down to the flight line where a couple of buildings still remained. In addition, a local television team was standing by to interview us. Although I understood that after almost forty years a news story about dropping leaflets over enemy and Allied territory didn't lend itself to the "special report" headline category, I was a little surprised when the interviewer's first question to me was: "Is it true that you dropped both live and dead pigeons on your missions over Europe?" Realizing that the time allocated to my portion of the interview would be short when it was patched in with the cameo appearances made by other returnees for the regional news program that evening, I acknowledged that such was the case on a few missions, but refused to expand any further, claiming that security restrictions still applied. I was more interested in explaining the primary purpose and the positive impact of our leaflet operations. Fortunately, the interviewer sensed my desire, and my words on this aspect of our operations were emphasized during the evening broadcast.

Although dropping leaflets had been our primary mission, we also had dropped fake food stamps and ration cards, hoping to disrupt the German domestic economy, and there were a few flights when homing pigeons had been dropped. Although some were earmarked to be picked up by resistance forces so that messages could be relayed back expeditiously to England, other pigeon drops were designed to cause trouble for the Gestapo who were always looking for German citizens who might be willing to help the Allies. In the few cases that dead pigeons had been dropped, a message filled out in German by the psychological warfare people in England and signed with the name of a senior German party member, was designed to make the Gestapo believe that there were traitors at high levels in their government. I am sure that the extremely cold temperatures at high altitude (over 25,000 ft) took its toll on many of the live pigeons before they reached the ground. However, some of these hardy birds, with a unique navigation mechanism in their heads that enabled them to fly over 400 miles back to their departure point, completed their assigned missions.

A hen pigeon, Mercury, was one of the most famous of British homing pigeons re-

warded for exemplary wartime services. Mercury's medal, equivalent to an "Animal Victoria Cross," was awarded in 1944, with the inscription "For Gallantry." Mercury had flown 480 miles across the North Sea on 30 July 1942, with a message fastened to its leg, believed to have been from a Danish resistance group in Copenhagen, Denmark. Because of British regulations that restrict the publication of certain classified information for fifty years, we will have to wait until 1992 to have the contents of that special message disclosed.

Brian Gunderson presenting a picture of Cheddington airfield activities during WWII to the owner of The Swan Hotel in Cheddington, a favorite meeting place of airfield personnel. The picture will serve as a reminder of the U.S. participation in WWII.

Doris Gunderson in front of an old doubledecker bus used during the reunion.

OUR next stop was where the old airfield tower had stood and a couple of the operations, maintenance, and supply buildings still remained. Then we stood in front of the small building where so much of the important activity took place while we were on the ground, the Operations Briefing Room. The words still appeared faintly on the side of the building, but I wondered whether Bob Carty or someone else, in boundless enthusiasm, had enhanced them a little after thirty-eight years with some whitewash paint. It didn't matter, because I didn't need a visual reminder to once again recall the preflight planning that had been performed in that building prior to one of the night missions that I had flown during an October night almost forty years earlier.

As the fall days of 1944 waned and the period of darkness lengthened each day, the knot in our stomachs tightened a little, because we could anticipate missions calling for us to fly deeper into Germany, as opposed to the shorter flights over France, Belgium, and Holland. Fortunately, during the late fall months fog sometimes became a welcome ally when it caused scheduled missions to be cancelled. Even though it upset all the intricate plans of the 8th Air Force Headquarters staff at nearby Pinetree, it was such unexpected standdowns that gave the crews that extra day that was often needed to unwind, relax, and prepare for the next series of missions.

On the particular day I remembered, there would be no chance of fog postponing that night's mission. As I climbed on my prewar, but still trusty, bicycle and headed for the Briefing Room, it was a typical English fall day with gunmetal grey skies dotted with low hanging clouds scudding across the land. The stiff breezes would keep the night fog away and they would be helpful at takeoff time when we were always glad to have that extra lift that taking off into the wind gave your airplane as you roared down the runway, heavily laden with gasoline and leaflet bombs.

By the time I had reached the Briefing Room, other crew members were beginning to sit in their assigned chairs, awaiting the target assignments. Eight crews were to go out that night and, surprisingly, only three of them were scheduled to go to Germany. Not unexpectedly, our crew, because we were one of the most experienced, was selected to go to Kaiserslautern, south of Frankfurt.

Because we were going to a single target, where we would drop a planeload of leaflets, my preflight navigation mission planning would be much simpler than usual; all I had to do was plot my course into a single Initial Point and one Target, as well as the route home. On most missions, leaflet crews were assigned multiple targets, usually four or five, which required pinpoint navigation in the target areas as each drop point was only a few miles away from the previous one.

The briefings received from the Intelli-

gence and Weather Officers were most vital as far as the navigator was concerned. The Intelligence Officer would provide the latest information on the enemy's night fighter airfields, the location of searchlights and antiaircraft (flak) batteries, and special coded information, for our Gee electronic navigation equipment. The codes were changed daily to make it more difficult for the Germans to jam the equipment. The coded information was printed on rice paper so that the navigator could chew it up and swallow it if he had to bail out over enemy territory or was about to make a crash landing over German-occupied land. He also briefed the routes that Royal Air Force bombers would be following, which was especially important if we would be flying in the same area. The Intelligence Officer also provided each crew with an English translation of the leaflet they would be dropping during the mission, as they always had a keen interest in the messages they were carrying to both the enemy and the friendly civilian populace.

Weather encountered on a mission could be a helpful ally or a deadly enemy. That is why the weather forecasts the navigators received were so important, especially on the longer missions deep into Germany. Because of the prevailing westerlies at high altitude, we frequently had to fight headwinds to get back to our airfield in England. If the weather was expected to close in around our home airfield by the time we were to return, the navigator had to be prepared to make flight plan changes on short notice to divert to an airfield that still might be open. There was nothing worse than coming back from a difficult mission, an engine feathered (shutdown) because of flak damage, wounded crew members on board, gas reserves diminishing, Gee or H_2S radar navigation equipment inoperative, and fog rapidly closing in over most of the airfields throughout England. It was then that the navigator had to call on all his experience to use DR (dead reckoning) navigation to reach his home airfield or an alternate airfield that was not closed down.

In the latter stages of the war, two British inventions often meant the difference between an aircrew returning safely from a night mission, bailing out, or crashing into an English hillside, as the aircraft groped its way through the fog or low clouds in search of a glimpse of a familiar runway light.

The first of these aids was SANDRA, which proved to be of inestimable value and involved the use of searchlights. After some chaotic nights during the winter of 1940-1941, when Royal Air Force bombers returning to fog-shrouded airfields ran out of fuel, and crashed, either with the loss of crews or after they had bailed out, the seriousness of the problem became obvious. To counter this situation, Group Capt. J. A. Gray, Station Commander at Honington, directed that a searchlight be illuminated and pointed vertically up through the fog. This provided a glow of light over which returning crews could circle until they were given instructions to divert to another airfield which was still open. Other airfields quickly followed suit. During the following winter, searchlights of the Antiaircraft Command, which were located around the airfields for defense purposes, assisted aircraft by forming a cone over the surface of the airfield. The system was initially code-named CANOPY, when the searchlights were operated by the A A Command. Later the Royal Air Force took over the operation of searchlights near airfields (usually three or four to an airbase), and the operation was given the new code name SANDRA. In addition, these searchlights were used to direct aircraft low on fuel or without navigation aids to the nearest airfield by sweeping the beam back and forth in the direction of the nearest airfield. Searchlights were also used to warn pilots of the proximity of balloon barrages and areas under enemy attack.

Even more useful was FIDO (Fog Investigation Dispersal Operation when first developed by the British Petroleum Department in 1943. It was later renamed Fog Intensive Dispersal Operation by the Royal Air Force when it was applied operationally). Because fog had been taking such a toll of Royal Air Force bombers returning to their airfields from Germany, many of them low on fuel and crippled by enemy flak and night fighters, Prime Minister Churchill set in motion the experiments designed to clear the fog so that the aircraft could land safely. Finally, it was decided that burning off the fog, first by using a big battery of coke braziers, and subsequently a petrol burning system, was the only workable solution. The smoke that was created by FIDO fuel lines down both sides of the runway was a major problem but was dispersed by vaporizing the petrol blow-lamp fashion. In all, 15 United Kingdom airfields, including Gravely, Woodbridge, Manston, and Carnaby, were equipped with FIDO. A total of 2,486 aircraft were safely landed with the help of FIDO during the war, 1,200 of them at Woodbridge alone, although the experience was likened by some pilots to flying into a fiery hell!

WHILE the pilots, navigators, and bombardiers went to their respective special briefings and performed their pre-mission planning, the activity around the airfield perimeter and in the aircraft revetments was at a high pitch. The aircraft were fueled and ground crew personnel performed their last minute checks. The leaflet bombs, each of which contained 75,000 leaflets, were loaded and the gunners mounted their guns. Unfortunately, not enough credit has been given in print to the crew chiefs, the armament personnel, the radio and radar technicians, the parachute riggers, and the dozens of other ground crew specialists who were responsible for making certain that aircraft became airborne in time for an assigned mission and then performed, as required, to the target and returned safely. Their unique and important roles were aptly described in a Royal Air Force (or Royal Canadian Air Force) poem that I once saw pinned on the wall of a hangar in England, and later read in a postwar copy of a Royal Canadian Air Force magazine.

Our Ground Crew

Here's to the men with greasy hands
Who fuel our planes when we come in to land
Who fix the flak damage and stop the leaks
Who change the tires and oil the squeaks
Tend to the controls to make them fly straight
Wait for the planes when the pilots are late
Who smooth the scratches, rivet the panels
Check "Loud and Clear" on the radio channels
Who read off the writeups and make the repairs
Check lines and wires for chafing and tears
Who pull the chocks and check the wings
And do a million other things
That make an aircraft safe and ready to fly
So here's a salute to those hard-working guys
From a group of fliers who too seldom ponder
About the men who keep us up in the wild blue yonder.

No pre-briefing and mission preparation would have been complete without our Catholic chaplain, Father Rzaza, giving comfort and encouragement to each crew member before takeoff. Besides ministering to those of his faith, he was accepted by everyone, regardless of their religious beliefs, as a special friend. Father Rzaza would end each briefing with a general prayer for all who were about to embark in that night's missions, before hearing confessions from those aircrew members who were of his faith. His warmth, charm, sincerity, and deep and abiding faith endeared him to one and all. One night, when a mission had been cancelled and then suddenly

rescheduled, Father Rzaza was in the Officers Club when he learned that the crews were heading out to their aircraft to prepare for takeoff. With tears in his eyes — out of a feeling of frustration and sadness that he might not reach each crew member to bless them before they left — he roared around the perimeter track in a jeep and dashed into one plane after another to tend to "his flock." Somehow, almost miraculously, he made it to every plane and talked with each crew member. When he returned to the Operations building and collapsed in an overstuffed chair, the tears had been replaced by a smile that beamed from ear to ear.

One hour before takeoff, the flight crews would gather at their aircraft to start checking their equipment and to have a last minute talk with the crew chief and the armament personnel to make certain that everything was ready to go. A last cigarette was smoked, and a few jokes were told to cover the nervousness that was inside each crew member, whether it was his first mission or his fiftieth. Many crew members were superstitious and routines were followed before and during each mission so as not to break a good luck spell. It could be a walk around the aircraft in a certain way before entering it, hanging a good luck charm next to your crew position, or, like me, wearing the same white silk scarf every mission without washing it. I assure you that after my last mission it was hard to tell its original color with the sweat and dirt ground into it; but, I still have it stored away in a footlocker with other mementos. I also caused some consternation among my fellow crew members when I wouldn't turn back the #13 parachute that had been issued to me. I argued that I wouldn't tempt fate by asking for it, but since it had been assigned to me I used reverse psychology and stated that it must be a good omen.

Each plane had its special name and, in many cases, the art work that accompanied it was worthy of a budding Michelangelo. Who could forget such names as "We the People," "Anytime Annie," "Target for Tonight," "Pistol Packin Mama," "Paper Doll," "Swing Shift," "Tondalayo," and "Dinah-Mite"? To make it more difficult for the German searchlight and antiaircraft batteries to zero in on the night bombers, each 406th B-17 and B-24 was painted black and flame suppressors were installed on each engine to dampen light from their exhaust flames. After each mission had been completed, a silver bomb was painted on the nose, and if an enemy aircraft had been destroyed by one of the gunners, a silver swastika was added.

Once inside the aircraft, the pilots in the cockpit would perform the long litany of preflight checks. It was doubly important that each crew member check everything at his position very carefully. After the aircraft was airborne and you were flying in pitch dark, you didn't want to be groping for a parachute, a flak suit, a navigation sextant, a can of ammunition, or a piece of equipment. Only the navigator, in his curtained area, had a narrow beam light to help him perform his assigned duties. He had to be particularly careful that no light escaped to become a beacon for enemy nightfighters patrolling the skies over the Continent to home in on.

A flare fired from the control tower indicated it was time to start the aircraft engines, and the evening calm was shattered as they coughed into life in the cool night air. Each pilot carefully maneuvered his aircraft around the winding perimeter track to takeoff position. With frequent rains in the fall, winter, and spring, the ground on either side of the narrow perimeter track was usually wet and soft, and no pilot wanted to be the one responsible for having his aircraft mired off to one side, making it necessary for the other aircraft to enter an empty revetment, turn around, and taxi back around the entire field in the opposite direction in order to get into takeoff position.

Once airborne, each crew member had his assigned tasks to tend to before reaching enemy territory. Gunners would check their guns to make certain they weren't jammed. This was usually accomplished as soon as the navigator indicated the aircraft was over the English Channel or the North Sea, where it was considered safe to fire a few short bursts.

During the climb to altitude, each crew member closely monitored his oxygen supply and made certain that an emergency bottle was nearby in case the main supply was damaged by enemy flak or enemy fighter gunfire. Frequent oxygen checks, called for by the pilot, were standard during night missions. Crews prided themselves on being able to accomplish this check in seconds once the words "Oxygen check" were heard. It was like one continuous transmission as each member responded in order — "Tail, Left, Right, Ball, Radio, Engineer, Nav, Bombardier, Co-Pilot." (Tail, Left, Right, and Ball were for the Tail Gunner, Left Waist Gunner, Right Waist Gunner, and Ball Turret Gunner, respectively). A speedy oxygen check over the intercom was necessary so that the intercom would not be tied up if an enemy aircraft were spotted by one of the crew. These checks served another useful purpose as they broke the loneliness and feeling of fear each crew member had as the plane came ever closer to enemy territory.

Our mission to Kaiserslautern was going to be particularly interesting, as the Royal Air Force was targeted against nearby Frankfurt. Fortunately for us, the long wave of RAF bombers would provide a screen for us; they went in at a lower altitude because their heavy bombloads prevented them from going any higher. It also meant that after we had dropped our leaflets and were heading home, we would get a front-row seat of the activity in the air above Frankfurt and on the ground below.

As our plane crossed into Germany, pulses quickened as each crew member wondered whether the first enemy response would be searchlights and flak or a night fighter pouncing out of the dark. In addition, the bone-chilling cold at 25,000 ft added to the discomfort of the moment. In spite of silk socks and glove liners, and sheepskin jackets and wool-lined boots, the -40°C temperature made one yearn for the routine cold of the barracks back at the airfield.

As hoped for, the Germans were busy tracking and intercepting the Royal Air Force bombers as we proceeded to Kaiserslautern, and there were no indications from the German defenders that they knew we were there. There were a few brief moments when our hearts jumped into our throats because we thought that we had been hit by antiaircraft fire, but it turned out to be ice particles that were breaking off the propellers and hitting the side of the aircraft.

After we had dropped our load of leaflets and turned for home, I shut off my navigation light and looked out of the Plexiglas nose of our B-17 and saw a pyrotechnic extravaganza to the northeast which meant that the RAF bombers had reached Frankfurt. Bombs were still bursting and the size of the fire storm in the center of the city grew larger and larger. The city was lit up like an illuminated street map. It was an awesome and sobering sight. Once again, the citizens of one of Germany's largest cities had paid a devastating price for their leader's mistakes. It was a sight that is difficult to describe now and impossible to put into words then. We could see the German searchlights sweeping the skies until, finally, one picked up a British bomber. Others quickly joined it, and no amount of evasive action taken by the plane's pilot enabled him to escape the blinding glare. We watched and waited, but not for long, before the flak batteries on the ground opened up and found their mark. Within seconds, another RAF bomber with seven brave souls on board began its never-ending, twisting and spiralling dive to the ground. To a man, all of us aboard the B-17 wondered whether anyone had been able to bail out before the final crash came. If a wing had come off the RAF plane, or if it had started to break up after the first hits by the German antiaircraft fire, the likelihood of anyone parachuting to safety was

The 8th Air Force Memorial with the airfield light.

very small. "G" forces (the pull of gravity) would take over during the rapid descent, pinning each crew member to his position as if he had been glued there. Then there was a sudden flash in the sky and the huge orange ball that erupted told us that the German flak batteries had again found their mark. We also wondered which bombers had gone down. Was it "F" for Freddy, "G" for George, "V" for Victor, or "Z" for Zebra? Unlike the American B-17s and B-24s, with their descriptive names and paintings on the noses of the aircraft, most of the RAF and RCAF bombers were usually named after a letter of the alphabet.

Royal Air Force bomber losses on several occasions were extremely heavy when targeted against the largest cities in Germany; as many as 90 bombers were lost on a single raid. Actually, such heavy losses, when flying into heavily defended areas, whether it was B-17 and B-24 raids in the daylight or Halifaxes and Lancasters at night, were bound to occur. Each aircraft loaded with bombs, magnesium flares, and gasoline, was a time-bomb waiting to blow up the first moment an enemy fighter's tracer bullet or piece of flak penetrated a vulnerable spot.

As we headed home to Cheddington airfield, mesmerized by the sight in and over Frankfurt, we weren't ready for the sharp cry over the intercom from the tail gunner, "Corkscrew left." Our pilot reacted immediately as the plane performed a series of dives and climbs in a twisting and turning manner. Our tail gunner, ever alert, had spotted the ME 110 closing rapidly from the rear, firing both cannon and machine guns. Everything that was loose in the aircraft, including my maps and navigation equipment, was tossed hither and yon. However, that violent, but lifesaving, maneuver taken by the pilot, which often could pop the rivets in an aircraft, had prevented us from being hit, and we lost the ME 110, much to our relief. After checking with each crew member and determining that no one had been hurt, and that no damage had occurred to the aircraft, the pilot asked me for the heading home. Fortunately, there was no further enemy activity to contend with and we touched down safely at Cheddington, six hours and fifty minutes after takeoff.

Tired, both mentally and physically, our bodies craved sleep, but we still had to be debriefed. Crews, stiff and cold, with ears ringing from the aircraft engines' roar, and some still reliving the nightmares of a few hours earlier, went from table to table to respond to the usual questions. Were all leaflets dropped as planned? Was there any flak? If so, when did it occur and what was the intensity? Did you see any nightfighters? Were you fired on? Did you fire back? Do you claim shooting down an enemy fighter? Did your aircraft receive any battle damage? Was the Met' forecast accurate? Did anything unusual happen during the mission? Then it was all over, and, after those crewmembers who wanted it took their authorized shot of whiskey, we shuffled off into the predawn, cold air and climbed aboard the trucks that took us to the Mess Hall for breakfast. Most of us would have preferred to go straight to bed, but because combat crews returning from missions received two fresh eggs, as opposed to the usual powdered eggs and Spam, we would have felt cheated if we hadn't eaten them. Finally, back in our huts, with all the heavy flying gear removed, we flopped into bed and closed our eyes and forgot the memories, good and bad, of another day. Once again we had cheated overwhelming odds in situations where the chance of survival was measured not in years but in days, nights, and hours.

PAT Carty's voice interrupted my reminiscing when he asked everyone to return to the bus. It was time to proceed to the dedication ceremony. The moment of the unveiling, which had been awaited with such expectation by all of us, American and British alike, had finally arrived. First, we stopped at "The Old Swan" Hotel in the village of Cheddington for a pint of ale and lunch. Outside villagers gathered and cheered as we climbed aboard the World War II jeeps and trucks that had been resurrected for this special occasion. One old lady wanted to shake our hands and remind us that she had laundered and ironed shirts for the "boys" during the war. The misty, cool October rain still persisted, but it didn't dampen anyone's spirit. The Association's planners had anticipated a turnout of between 50 and 100 people, under the best weather conditions. By the time we approached the memorial site, across the road from the old main gate, we found a crowd of between 400 and 500 people, all of whom were in a festive mood. The atmosphere of love and affection displayed by the people of Cheddington and Marsworth, and the neighboring towns and villages, as well as their deep attachment to the events that had occurred nearly forty years ago, warmed our hearts.

Inside the main gate, a United States Air Force Color Guard raised the American flag (the Association had tried to get one with 48 stars but had to settle for one with 50). Assisting them were four Royal Air Force trumpeters and a single bagpiper. After flybys by an RAF Canberra from 360 Squadron, the only RAF squadron that still flies radar countermeasures missions and training, and a USAF RF-4C Phantom from the 10th Tactical Reconnaissance Wing, stationed at Alconbury Air Force Base, the unveiling finally took place.

The marble memorial stone had the following simple inscription etched underneath the 8th Air Force logo:

Dedicated October 1982
To The
U. S. 8th Army Air Force
Stationed Here

At the base of the memorial stone, the local Cheddington Association members had installed one of the last runway lights

that had been taken from the airfield. It had been wired, and when it is turned on for special occasions in the future, it will serve as a beacon to assist anyone looking for the memorial. While it is doubtful that any of us who had been stationed at Cheddington during World War II made any lasting impression on most of the people in the nearby villages and towns, that small memorial plaque with its simple words, will serve as a reminder for decades to come of the hundreds of American men and women who had been part of one of the greatest events in military history, and who had served their country nobly and well in some very special and unique roles.

The newspapers published the following day carried banner headlines which read: "Memorial to a Unique Unit," "Tears as Yanks are Honoured," "We'll Meet Again — And They Did." It truly had been a very emotional and happy experience that soon would be tinged with sadness as we said our goodbyes, vowing to return again and to keep in touch with each other.

For a brief few days, I had turned back the pages of history and relived the glories and sorrows of a war gone by. After drifting through four decades with nothing but memories, I had come back to where it all began. Now it was time to return home.

Brig. Gen. Brian S. Gunderson, President of the Air Force Historical Foundation, retired from the USAF in June 1974 after 30½ years of service. During WWII he flew as a navigator for two years with the Royal Canadian Air Force before transferring to the U.S. Army Air Corps in December 1943 in London. He served with the 8th AF in the European Theater of Operations, 1943-1945, as a combat crew and staff navigator in the B-17, logging 51 combat missions, 50 of them on night operations. General Gunderson is currently associated with BDM Corporation, a professional services company in McLean, VA.