

# MENDLESHAM

VOLUME II NUMBER I



# MEMORIES

MARCH 1980

## 34TH. BOMB GROUP

I promised to print you a story about some of the things, which happened to the 34th Bomb Group, during the war. This is one of the stories. It was sent to me by Jack Blackham, an Engineer on B24s and B17s, from the 4th Sqd. I will try to print it as he sent it to me. This is the story of his B24 and his Crew and what happened on the night of June 7th 1944

Dear Ray

Perhaps this story would be of interest to the readers of the 34th Bomb Group Association's newsletter, "Mendlesham Memories". I will tell the story as I remember it

### The Night of the Intruders

By Jack Blackham, AEG of the 4th Sqd.

My Crew was formed in Blythe Ca., Jan 14th 1944, consisting of; Lt Wilmer J. Drescher, Pilot; Lt. Francis C. Rowley, Co-pilot; Lt. Antoni Grabowski, Navigator; Lt Ken Humphrey, Bombardier; S/Sgt Jack Blackham, AEG. S/Sgt Carrol E. Forister, ROG; Sgt Willard Johnson, AG; Pvt Robert D. Erisch, BG; Sgt, William R. Reschke, BG.

We received our new, camouflaged, B24, S/N 42-9491, in April 1944. Our Crew Chief was Charles J. Reilly. After our Crew and plane had been checked out and we had flown several flights, we were sent overseas, by the way of Lincoln Neb. and Florida. While in Florida we had a picture of an Indian girl, with not many clothes on, drawn on a sheet of paper, we were going to call our plane "Sweet Sioux" and have the picture painted on the side of the plane. This drawing and a box of Florida dirt, which our Radio Operator, had picked up, were placed on top of the radio, in the radio room. We did not get a chance to have the picture painted on the plane. We left Florida for So America and then onto Africa. From Africa, we flew to our destination, Mendlesham, England, where we joined the rest of the 34th Bomb Group.

We flew the first Mission with the 34th B.G. on May 23, 1944. D-Day was our 5th mission and we flew two missions that day. Because of heavy clouds and poor visibility over the target, along with freezing conditions we were unable to drop our bombs on the second mission and returned to the Base, at Mendlesham, with them.

Next day was June 7th and we were alerted for an early mission at 0600 hours, the target Nantes, France. After a successful run over the target we dropped our bombs and returned to Mendlesham, this was about 1200 hours. Upon arriving at the Base, we found ourselves alerted for another mission. This time it was an Air Field at Tours, France. While waiting for our plane to be refueled and rearmed we went to dinner and to the briefing about the target. The whole Group was to be involved as it was to be a maximum effort, in support of the D-Day action, with the 490th and 493rd BGs. flying with us. It was a combat wing effort of the 93rd wing. About 60 planes from the 34th were involved.

While we were waiting for the 'start engine' time, I was talking to one of the Ground Crew and was telling him how the Beach head looked and that it was something to see, He immediately became excited and said he would like to fly this mission with us, I knew we had fighter cover all the way and would not be over enemy territory except for a short time, so I told him, if there was any mission to go on, this would be the one. He asked his Crew Chief what he thought and was told, he would be wise to stay on the ground but he still wanted to go, so he asked the Pilot, who told him, yes, but



he would have to look out for himself. About 15 min. before start engines, he changed his mind. It was probably the greatest decision he would ever make, because of what was to happen later that night.

We took off on the mission about 1530 hrs. The weather was clear over England but cloudy over the target. We were over the target about 1930 hrs. and it was still day light, for England was on double War time and it did not get dark until about 2030 hrs. We had no trouble over the target, we dropped our bombs and headed for home. As we came over the Coast, we could see the lights on the ground, going out ahead of us. The Enemy must have been in our formation and we did not notice him. The first time I noticed anything wrong, was, when from my top turret I could see holes appearing in the wing and metal pieces flying from the wings. I could only see about as far as our wing tips. (There has been some talk that our guns were pulled and we were relaxing, but this is not true, for all our guns were ready and all turrets were manned except the ball turret. I wish to hell the ones who made that statement had been with us that night, we could have used their help) About this time the enemy hit us again for the second time and the Radio Man received a message, to turn out all navigation lights and head for a field in Western England, as there was an enemy plane in our midst. We were still air worthy except for our hydraulic lines, which had been shot out. About this time I came out of my turret to help and the enemy hit us for the 3rd time in the wing tanks and set us afire. This time we had to bail out as we were going to crash. I was told the enemy hit four of our planes that night, one crashed into the equipment hangar and set it afire and another crashed near us. Two B24s landed at a Mosquito Base in Western England, almost on top of each other, they were taking no chances. The only plane to land at Mendlesham that night belonged to one of the Sqd. C.O.s. After landing, he and one of the Crew went back to the waist guns and started to fire at the enemy plane, as it made another pass at the field.

By this time we were afire and our Navigator and two gunners were dead and the rest of us hit the silk. It was night and it was dark and we could not judge the distance from the ground and I hit hard for we had bailed out at about 1200 ft. After I hit the ground, I stood up, to find out where I was hurt. I found I had sprained my knee and had a sore spot in the middle of my back. I wanted a cigarette awfully bad but did not have anything to light it with. I had seen a house up the road and I walked to it. I knocked on the door and it was opened by an old couple who could not understand me, for they were unable to talk or hear. I immediately turned away and made my way back to where I had left my chute, by one of the hedge rows. Glancing around, I saw a house which had been obscured by the hedge row. As I made my way to the house, an armed man stepped from the hedge row. I immediately told him I was an American and had to jump from my burning plane, which was still burning about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile away. He said "Oh you are a Yank, come in and have a spot of tea until they come for you". I went into the house and was drinking tea and talking to the farmer, when a Jeep from the Base drove up for me. I gathered my chute and we started back to the Base.

As we approached the Base, one of the guards fired a rifle at us. The driver of the jeep threw on the brakes and stopped, He then shouted the pass word and we went on into the Base and over to the middle of the field, where Major Joe Eaton was standing. I reported to him and he asked if I was hurt. I told him just my knee and back. he told me to report to the hospital and then took my chute. I told him I was hungry and would like something to eat as I hadn't eaten since noon and here it was early morning. He told me to get something to eat and then report to the hospital. After eating I reported to Dr. Harry Morgan at the hospital, who asked if I was injured. I told him about my knee and back he advised me to stay at the hospital the rest of the night to see if any complication developed. Next morning Dr Morgan came and asked how I felt, I told him ok except for the ache in my back and knee. He told me to walk down the corridor, while he watched me. He then told me, if I wanted to, I could go to the Sqd. area and rest up for a few days and report back if anything went wrong



In about five days I felt better and I did not report back to the Hospital.

I would like to say here, I did not go back to see the plane, after the crash, but I did talk to my Crew Chief, Charles Reilley, who had gone to see the crash. He showed me a German bullet which had been embedded in one of the engines, he was keeping it as a souvenir. I was told later, upon examination of the wreckage, it was found that our guns were still in place, loaded and ready for use. The last piece of the plane I saw, was in 1971, when I met our Radio Man, Carrol Forister, who showed me a knife, made from parts of the plane. An Englishman had salvaged several pieces of the plane, he had found in the field, near the crash and had made a knife from the pieces. He had given it to Carrol as a souvenir.

I reported back to duty and with two new men, Arnold Woeful, as tail gunner and Leonard Beillas, as a ball gunner, we started to fly once again. Our first mission, after the crash, was over the V1 sites in France. It was an easy mission, with practically no flak. We were not over enemy territory very long. I know the ones, who had bailed out that night, were thankful for such an easy mission.

We flew many missions after this and in Sept. 1944 we changed to B17s on which I flew two or three missions and finished my tour and was sent home to the States.

In 1974, at a party for some German soldiers, at Ft Bliss Texas, there were five German Colonels, who were on their way home to be discharged. While I was telling one of the Colonels about the crash, on the night of June 7th 1944, one of the others told me he was the Commanding Officer of the field in France, from where those night fighters had taken off. He remembered one of the Pilots telling him about it, after the mission. He had both Ju88s and Me 410 night fighters station at the Base. He promised to look up the records when he arrived home and send them to me, but for some reason, he failed to do so. I still believe he was the C.O. of the Fighter Field in France, from where those enemy planes took off from, the night of June 7th 1944.

Thank you for writing my Story

*Jack*

This is the end of the story as written to me by Jack Blackham, Engineer of the plane "Sweet Sioux", which was shot down the night of June 7th 1944, by enemy planes. I want to thank him for the story and for the help he has given me, since I became Contact Man for the 34th Bomb Group. He has sent me several names and addresses, among whom was his Crew Chief, Charles Reilley, and Leonard Beillas.

I have a little to add to the story, I recently received letters from two of Russ "Swede" Lindstrom's Crew, who were in one of the planes, "The Dugan Wagon", that night, which was diverted to a Base in Western England. It happened to be a Mosquito Base, but they went in any way, There was another B24 landed right, almost, on their tail. In landing, the wing of the plane struck a building and had to be left for a couple of days to be repaired. Upon examination of the plane, a German shell was found in the Tail Turret. The names of those two men who have written me are Walt Strudivan and Gordon Breeding. Have you written to Russ yet? By the way I want to thank Harold Witham for sending me their names and addresses.

At this time I want to thank all who have sent in new names and addresses, There are too many of you, to name you all, as I would like to. Just keep up the good work and we will soon be the great Bomb Group we were at one time.

I had a report from Malcolm Corum, on the progress of the charter and he says it will be done soon and will be sent to the Directors to be signed. I know you are wondering about the Directors, but in order to get the Charter done, it was necessary that we for the first time, appoint some of the ones who first started the 34th Bomb Group Association, along with the required three from Texas, where the Charter was written. Yes, most states require, three Directors, as a beginning, from the State where the Charter is written.

Fortunately, we had three such men from Texas, who have worked very hard since they have become members, They are: Malcolm Corum, who for the present time will be the Keeper of the Charter. Jack Blackham, whose story you have



read, These two are from El Paso Texas. The other one from Texas is Ken Humphreys, from Ft Worth, Texas. Ken was the Bombardier on the plane with Jack Blackham, when it was shot down by an enemy fighter, June 7 1944. The other Directors will be, Bill Cheek from Lakeland Fla. Grady Deatherage from Collinsville Va., both of whom have been with the 34th Bomb Group Association since it was organized. Ray Summa, your Contact Man from Anderson, Ind. who is trying to write to you all. Bob Wright Wright, of So Bend will be an alternate Director. Bob has been in attendance to all the reunions since the Group was first started. There will be more, if needed to be. and I think there should be. The more we have working the better the Group will become. Please have patience with us, for all of this is new and we will do our best. At least let us try and if we fail, there is always an election, and you can vote in whom ever you choose. The Board of Director will probably meet early, before the reunion in Orlando and will have worked something out. We need all the help we can get, so if any of you have any suggestions that will help, please feel free to send the suggestions in to any of the above mentioned Directors, Their addresses are in the lists you have received. Doug Underwood, who also has been in the Organization since it was started will act as our Advisor. Doug lives in Montgomery Ala. and as you know, is the Archivist for the 8th Air Force Historical Society and other Organizations. He was asked to be on the Board Of Directors, but declined, as he was covered up by his other work. He has access to all the records, at the Historical Research Center at Maxwell Field. Doug will be able to help us a lot as the Advisor. None, of the Board of Directors, get paid for what they are doing and I know that a lot of long distance calls have been made, for the good of our Organization and paid for by the members of the Board, from their own pockets.

This brings me to a most painful subject, which I am reluctant to write about. We are again in need of money to send out our newsletters and as you know it cost money to have the Charter written, so we do have to pay a Lawyer something. Some of you have been sending in donations, which has kept our Newsletter and the search for our missing men going. If all of our members contribute an average of \$5.00 to the 34th Bomb Group Association, we will be able to do the thing we want to. Some have contributed more than that to our organization and I appreciate it very much. I have had some membership cards printed (I think they look pretty nice), and I will send out to each one who contributes, \$5.00 or more, to the 34th Bomb Association. Please send a stamped envelope for the return of the membership card. As you know, right now, until we get functioning, my wife and I are writing all the letters and membership lists. We do have the help of those who are sending in names and addresses, and of course the advise of the ones who will be on the Board of Directors, as well as the help of Ruth and Henry Jurgens. I do want to say all money which is donated is accounted for and put down in an account book for anyone who want to go thru it. I do this for the IRS, for when we get the Charter all ready, they will want to look at the books. I promise they will be ready.

I do need some help. I have an old Roster of the 34th Bomb Group and the flight lists of those who flew home, which I would like to have broken down by states. Some of you who are still working and your secretaries have a little time, might like to take on the job, or if some of you want to do the job your self, let me know and I will send you the papers. There are two lists some of the names appears on both lists. There will be about 2500 names altogether. This is only one part of the men who were in the 34th Bomb Group. Some of the names and addresses of the men who went over with the Group, as Flyers, are missing. Do any of you have names and addresses not appearing among the ones on our list, if so please send them to me? I use these lists to locate some of our men.

I would like to thank the person who placed the article in the Retired Officers Magazine, about the 34th B.G. trying to find their former members. It has done quite a bit of good. It is no wonder our Air Force after the war was so good. It was made up of men from the 34th Bomb Group. Most of the ones who appear on the newest list, have retired from the A.F. I am receiving letters



and phone calls every day asking about our Organization and when we are going to have a reunion. The only answer I can give right now, is we are having a "Unit Rende-vous" at the 8th Air Force Reunion in Orlando, Fla. Maybe then we will be able to set a date for a Reunion of our own. Please be patient for we are working on it. We must find someone who will take the job as Reunion charman and see it thru. Are there any volunteers?

As some of you know, my wife and I have been taking a vacation, twice a year in Virginia and No. Carolina. This year we will start in May. Last year we went south and then up the coast to Delaware. We stopped in Martinsville Va. and saw Grady Deatherage and his wife, Edith, also Arnold Prillman and his wife, Georgia. We had a wonderful time with them, that evening. The next morning my wife and I went on to Atlantic Beach and from there we went to Richmond Va, where we met Henry and Ruth Jurgens, as well as some more of the 34th B.G. people. "Pete Gray from Va. Beach came up to our Motel and we called F.A. Bristow who came over and took us to the Medowbrook Resturant, owned by Junius and Virginia Cobb. There we met Tom and Virginia Snelling. F.A.'s wife Opal met us there. We had a real good dinner and after Cobb had closed the resturant, we really had a good time, telling things, which happened to us, while we were in Blythe and Overseas. It was real early in the morning when we broke up and went back to our Motel. I felt sorry for "Pete" as he had to drive all that distance back to Va. Beach. Next time "Pete" stay at the Motel, with us.

Yes, I said next time for we are going to do it again. This time it will be in May. The Dover Air Base at Dover, Del. is having Open House May 4, from 10:00 to 4:00. My wife and I are planning to be there, we will leave here about April 30th and go to Henry and Ruth Jurgen's, who live about 12 miles north of Dover, at Smyrna, Del. They have asked that anyone from the 34th who are planning on going to the Open House, to stop by and say hello. For anyone who will stop by, we will have some eats and something to drink. There will be plenty of talk and some pictures, new and old, to show. If you have some old pictures, bring them along. You will have a good time and will meet some of the ones from the 34th B.G. How about it? All we ask, is to let Henry and Ruth know a head of time, in order to be prepared. The Jurgens address is, Rd1 Box 274 Smyrna, Del 19977. Ph 302 653 7373. You all have my address, my phone is 317 644 6027. There are quite a few of you near Del., so why don't you drop by and see the planes on exhibit and see "Shoo Shoo Baby" a B17 which is being restored at the Air Base?

From the Jurgens, my wife and I are going to Hyattsville, Md. to see my sister, for about a week. If some of you, who can't make the Open House, want to call and talk to me, the phone number is 301-459-0174. My sister and her husband are named Ivan and Alma Harpster.

From here we will be going to Richmond Va, and meet with some of the 34th from around there. We will be at Junius and Virginia Cobb's Resturant, The Medowbrook, ph 804-275-9030, 3819 Walmsley Blvd. Richmond Va. We will be there on Friday nite May 9th, if you care to join us. Every one will pay their own way and I am sure you will have a good time, Bring your cameras and pictures to show, If you can not get hold of Junius Cobb call F.A. Bristow 3805 Stratford Rd. Ph 804 272 6623. Try to call in advance, so we will know how many will be there.

When we leave Richmond, we will head south to Atlantic Beach, N.C. to rest up for awhile and then to Charlotte N.C., where we will again meet some of the 34th people. We will meet Dex. Jordan and Jim Watkins, who are from around Charlotte, who will have something for us to do and people to meet. Their addresses are; Dex Jordan Rt #1 Huntersville, N.C. 28078 Ph 704 875-2266 Or business ph. 704-377-6387. Jim Watkins 108 Elmwood Dr. Salisbury, N.C. 28144 Ph 704-633-4991. Try to let them know in advance, if you will be able to be there. As before, everyone will pay their own way. Bring your Cameras and pictures. The date for this Sat. May 17.

From here we will travel home, for about that time the June letter will have to be written. I am hoping to pick up some stories from this trip.

I have some good news, Grady Deatherage, who suffered a heart attack last Oct. has improved and is back to work, watch your self Grady, we need you to help the 34th B.G. I will see you also in May.

Just a little message to Roland Beach. Thank for sending those pictures



to John Woolnough. No, I haven't sent the pictures, you sent me, to John Woolnough. I have sent him some but will include those in the next bunch I send. As where to find The History of the 34th B.G., which was written after the war, I do not know, for I am trying to find one myself. I keep looking in all Flea Markets and all used book stores, they do turn up there some time. All the people from the used book stores, know me by now and will save the book for me. I did have the loan of one, from Ralph Murphy, last summer when he was here, but I have sent it back, Doug Underwood investigated about having the book reprinted but found the plates had been destroyed by the Government and the cost to have it reprinted was prohibitive, as the Government requires the cost be subscribed before the book can be reprinted. I would like to see it reprinted and another one printed, which would show more of the action, Maybe, some day, some one will take the time to have it done. Are there any volunteers?

I received a letter from John Woolnough, Editor of the 8th Air Force News, requesting pictures for the new book he is publishing. He wants clear pictures showing interesting things about the Group. Pictures of the Flying Crews and planes, also those who show the nose art on the plane, pictures of crashes, battle damage, Picture of the tower at Mendlesham. Pictures of the 1st Sgts. 18th Sqd's. Tent City. When he wrote me in Jan., he stated he had received no pictures from the 34th Bomb Group. These must be in to John, by April 1st. 1980 to get in the book. They will be carefully screened and the best of the pictures will be used. When you send them, be sure and identify them as much as you can. Try to identify the Sqd. and anything else which will help him. Write your name on the pictures as you will get them back, for all pictures are returned, when the book has been printed. Come on now and let us see that John has plenty of pictures of our Group. Show him we really care. We were not featured in the other book "The 8th Air Force Album", which he published, so now is our chance to show the other Bomb Groups we are still alive and growing. Be sure and mark all pictures, 34th Bomb Group.

There have been some address changes since last Dec. Now that we will be bulk mailing, it is necessary, we have the correct address on all letters we send out. If the address on the letter you receive, is not correct, please send me in a correction. Do any of you know the address of Harry O'Grady or J.A. Anderson? The addresses I have are not correct. I have written the Postoffice of the two cities and have been informed they had never been listed at those addresses. Walt Witham has a new address; 3393 Citrus Lane, Cincinnati, Ohio 45329; Felix Williams, 2717 25th St. Wells Hotel Gulfport, Miss. 39501; Tom King 3330 Templeton Gap Rd #3. Colorado Spgs, Col. 80907; Wm. L Kelley 112 Mallard St. West Monroe, La. 71291, Bill has moved back to his old home town from Prairie Village Ks. Some of you 34th men from around there will probably be hearing from Bill; Don Mann has moved back to his home town of Great Falls Mont. 618 5th Ave N.W. 59404; Charles Metz, 914 Tidal Pond Rd. New Port Richy, Fla. 33552. Charles has joined several others of our Group who live in Fla. There is a Fla. chapter of the 8th Air Force Historical Society, see Aida Kaye about it. I did have one of the names wrong, Paul Leare, should have been Paul Teare, I am sorry about that. Paul, I had a letter from your friend Dex Jordan in N.C. who mentioned your name.

My wife and I want to thank all of you for the Christmas Cards and letters we received at Christmas time, we enjoyed them all. I am only sorry we could not send cards to everyone. Our thoughts were with you all that day. There are some of you whom, I have not heard from. How about a letter from you? Do you like our newsletter, The Mendlesham Memories. Let me know?

You know it is sad when I receive letters, telling of the passing of some of our men, who were with us in service. I received some letters in Jan. telling of the passing of several of our men. I received the letters almost all one day. I received a letter from Mrs. Charles Cook, widow of Major Charles Cook of the 4th Sqd. telling of his death in May of 1979. She also wrote to say that Joseph Ray had been killed in a crash after the war, in Germany. I received a letter from Mary K. Pounders, telling of the death of Ralph Pounders in 1975, Ralph was one of our Crew Chiefs. I also received a letter from Mrs. Alice Ginalski telling about the death of her husband, Joseph Ginalski, from a heart attack, in Oct 1977. I received a letter from Anton



Behnken of Box 59 No Dayton Station, Dayton, Ohio 45404, telling of the death of his father Anton Behnken Sr. in Jan 1975. The address of the others will be in the membership list except that of Mrs Joseph Ray, whose address I do not have at this time. She lives in Albuquerque, N.M. If you remember these men, why not drop a line to their Widows or Children.

We have another lady on our list, who is very interested in the 34th Bomb Group, for she had a brother killed, while on a bombing mission with the 34th Bomb Group in Dec. 1944. She is Miss Rosemary Fryer, sister to Lt. Austin Edward Fryer, of the 391st. Sqd. A tree has been planted by Rosemary in honor of her brother at Pace Hall, El Paso Texas.

I have just received a letter from Joe Edwards, from the 391st, telling of the death of his Tail Gunner, Carl E. Stahl, in 1978. If any of you have knowledge of the passing of any from the 34th, please keep me informed.

How many of you would want our Sqd. emblems, if we were to have them reproduced, also the 34th Bomb Group pins? We are in need of a color photo of the 7th Sqd. emblem. If you have one please take a color photo of it and send it too me. It is the Hawk or Eagle with wing extended in flight. The emblem of the 34th as you know is the shield with the inscription "Valor to Victory" at the bottom. Such as you see at the beginning of this letter.

I had a call from Doug Underwood, Archivist for the 8th A.F.H.S., who ask me to tell everyone, he is a little behind, in his research, due to the amount of requests. It takes a little longer, than first anticipated, to do the research. Doug is doing a wonderful job, for the Society and those, who have requested records. Doug has helped me very much in the research for our missing men. He asks that all who have request, please include as much information as possible for it will speed up the research. Doug lives in Montgomery Ala. close to Maxwell Field, where all the Historical Records of the Air Force are kept. Doug has access to all of those which are declassified. Doug was a Lead Bomardier from the 4th Sqd., while in the 34th B.G.

Do not forget the tour to England in Sept. '80. for information, write to 8th A.F. Friendship Holidays, P.O. Box 1304, Hallendale, Fla. 33009. If you are anticipating making the tour, better get your letter in as quickly as possible for the tour is filling up rapidly.

Make plans now to join the 34th Bomb Group at the 8th Air force Reunion in Orlando Fla. Oct. 29 to Nov 2, 1980. You, who want to fly your own plane, to the Reunion, will have a place to land and park your Air Craft. I have received an advanced brochure about the Reunion and it really sound good. I will send more information and a brochure of the reunion in the next letter. We of the 34th are to have a "Unit Rendez-vous" (This means a mini-reunion) on Friday afternoon at 1400 hrs until -----.

Do not forget to send those photos to John Woolnough, Editor of the 8th Air Force News, Box 438, Hollywood, Fla. 33023 (you thought I was going to forget the address). The photos must be in by April 1st. Give him plenty for a good selection and show the other Bomb Groups, the 34th is still alive and growing.

Again, I want to thank all of you, for the letters, Christmas cards, calenders and donation you sent since I have taken the job of Contact Man. To all of you I have't heard from, how about a letter from you? That is the only way I know, if I am doing the job, as it should be done. My wife, Hannah, and I both appreciate hearing from all of you, so keep those letters coming.

If any of you are close to Anderson, Ind, while on a trip, feel free to stop by and have a cup of coffe and chat awhile.

Your Contact Man from the 34th Bomb Group

*Ray L. Summa*



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