



VOLUME VIII

NUMBER 3

SEPTEMBER 1985

# MENDLESHAM MEMORIES

34TH BOMB GROUP H

4



7

18



391

## OBSERVATIONS

### RIDE 'EM COWBOY

Howdy Pardners!!

How're y'all. Ahm shore lookin' for'ard tuh seein' y'all in Wichita cum October. Mah ten gallon hat an' ridin' chaps an' spurs is all reddy fer thet thar trip nex' month.

All kidding aside, if you haven't made your reservations by the time you read this, rush right out and do so. We'll have us a bang-up ole time in the good ole west. And the 34th is capable of becoming the number one group of the 8th AF Historical Society.

As to the newsletter, let me say that I am disappointed in most of you. When I took over this job and in compiling the first two issues, I found it necessary to crop a lot out of the letters sent to me by Ray which he had received from you. But since I have asked that all material for the newsletter be sent to me, it's as if someone is closing off the tap. Letters are few and far between. Believe me, a short note is appreciated and, if inserted in the newsletter, will be of interest to all the membership.

My wife, Rose, has brought to my attention the fact that, although, in most cases, we men fought the war, our unit now consists of almost as many women as men and that there should be a column specifically set aside for the women. I would like to hear from the ladies on this. First, whether you would like the idea and secondly, what you think the title of the column should be. Come on, girls. Write me and let me know how you feel about it.

In the last issue, we began the "A Funny Thing Happened On The Way To The War" column with a story from George Ritchie, our crew's bombardier. Frankly, I thought it was hilarious, and you would, too, if you'd only try to visualize the situation in your mind. However, since nobody has submitted another story, our crew has had to come up with another. This time it is one of my experiences and I hope you find it at least amusing. Come on, guys, write in to me. If we are going to keep this newsletter interesting, it has to be a group effort. Ladies, if your husband has ever told you about one of his funny experiences, do as Rose did; insist that he write it down. On this and all other sections of the newsletter, I need your help. Without your input, the output will only be so-so and I cannot be satisfied with that.

Eli Baldea  
Editor

4 September 1985

Greetings:

The members of the 34th Bomb Group are again preparing for our rendezvous with the 8th AF in Wichita. We will have our base of operations at the Wichita Royale Hotel. We have been assured that our meeting room will be adequate for our needs, and Wayne Howarter has said that it is an excellent hotel. We have a good representation of the Mendlesham visitors among our registrants, and I am sure they will be glad to tell all about the old base and surrounding country side.

The schedule of events for our group will be:

Officers and Board of Directors meeting - Thursday, 13:00 - 17 Oct.

Unit meeting - Friday, 13:00 - 18 Oct.

Unit dinner - Friday, 19:00 - 18 Oct.

These events will be held in the Wichita Royale, the meeting room will be open at all other hours for socializing.

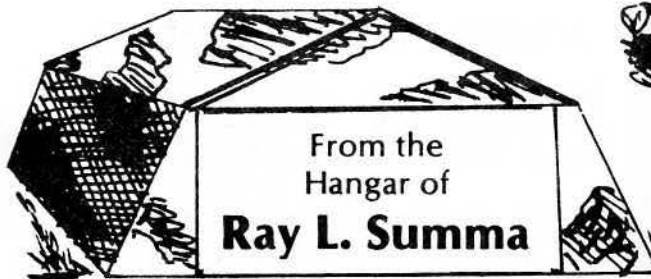
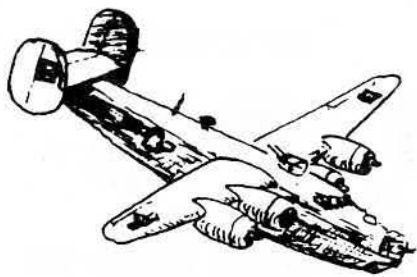
The Nomination Committee is hard at work, and will have picked a well qualified slate of officers for your approval. The committee is Randall Martin - chairman, Walter McAllister, Gerald Pine and Robert Wright, with this capable committee you can be sure that those selected will uphold the ideals of the 34th Bomb Group.

We will select our reunion site for our 1986 reunion, and all present can help us make this decision. The 8th AF will be meeting in Hollywood, Florida Oct. 8 to 11 at the Diplomat Hotel.

The balance of the reunion will be whatever you have signed up for. I would suggest that every member attend the General Membership Meeting on Friday, 18 October, 09:00 to 12:00, remember your vote will help decide on any proposed changes. Bring your Western gear and be in style for the western barbecue on Thursday.

Regards,  
Harold

**LET'S BE  
IN WICHITA  
OCT. 17-20, 1985  
REGISTER NOW!**



Fellow Members of the 34th B.G. Ass'n.

First of all I want to thank those of you who took the tour back to England with us. I am sure you had a good time and that the trip back to the Old Base at Mendlesham brought back a lot of memories to all of you as it did to me. To those who missed this tour, you missed a good time. Maybe tho, we can plan another one before we are too old to enjoy it.

The last two days in London were really wet ones, were they not? Typical English weather. First comes the good days as we had at Mendlesham, and then the damp ones.

Hannah and I and her sister Gwyneth, Millie and Vern Ames, stayed over and took tours thru Wales and Scotland. If you thought the weather was wet in London, it was worse on the tour, for it was cold and we had rain everyday for two weeks. But in spite of this we all enjoyed the tours of Scotland and Wales. We saw a lot and missed seeing a lot. Maybe someday we can go back and see what we missed.

As you know the Wichita Reunion is fast approaching. You can see by the list those who are going. It is still not too late to join us, maybe not at the same hotel but one close by. You, out in Kansas, who are not going, why not drop by and see some of your old friends?

Our hotel will be the Wichita Royale and I am told it is really nice. It is just a short walk from the Broadview, the headquarters hotel. We will have an extra size banquet and hospitality room, which will be rooms Royale East and West. For banquets, the rooms will hold 250 people. They are divided by a sliding door. This sounds like a place to be comfortable. We should not be crowded as we were at Nashville, during the Sat. nite banquet.

Hannah and I will arrive on Wednesday morning and hope to meet you as you come in. I do have an early Thursday meeting but will join you after the meeting.

Take a good look at the TAPS list. Many of our friends are passing on; who can say who will be next. Why not decide to come to one of the reunions, before it is too late. Come to this one at Wichita or come to the one in 1986. Remember in 1986,



Gerry Pine and Ray Summa with Ian Hawkins at the 390th BG. Museum at Framlingham, Eng.

we of the 34th will have a reunion of our own. Place and time will be announced at the Wichita Reunion this year. Several places are being studied at this time.

Now as Treasurer of the Ass'n., I want to thank all of you who have paid their 1986 dues, even tho I had to send out delinquent notices to some of you. Many of you still have not sent in your 1985 dues and quite a few of you have sent in your 1986. Do not forget, if you want to receive the 34th B.G. newsletter, you must be paid up at least thru 1984. Due to the high cost of printing and postage, we have had to drop those who are not paid up or who have never paid. As the new year rolls in, we will drop those who have not paid up thru 1985.

In the June newsletter, I made a mistake when I told Eli that "Mac" Keech was the Liaison Officer between the British land owner and the Air Force, I was wrong. He was the Liaison Officer between the Royal Bomber Command and the 3rd Bombardment Division of the 8th AF. Sorry about this but I am not infallible, I do make mistakes.

Your Unit Contact,  
Ray L. Summa

## TAPS

COZZENS, Homer G. 1970  
Concordie, KS

BASNIGHT, Jack 1975  
Richmond, VA

BARTELS, Willard  
Norwood, MN

BARTHLEMOW, Gordon  
Mineville, NY

BENSON, Carl A.  
Plainville, CT

DUFNER, Ralph  
Hermann, MO

GRAFF, Otto  
(7th Sqdn.) McAllister's Crew  
Elizabethtown, NJ

GUSTAFON, John  
Aberdeen, WA

HIGHFILL, Kenneth O.  
Atkinson, KS

HURLBURT, JR., William E.  
Sedalia, MO

MEHL, Fred  
(Crew Chief)  
Holyrood, KS

OBERWEATHER, Lee  
Garden City, MO

OLIVER, John R.  
Culver, KS

PIASCIAK, Joe  
Gardner, MA

SAIN, James  
Cardwell, MO

TROUPE, Jack  
Aberdeen, WA

WIGGINS, Robert L.  
Rolla, MO

# Notes From Our Friends

## GRADY DEATHERAGE

I hope this finds everything O.K. on your end and that you had a safe return home and a wonderful time at the 34th Reunion. As for me, I was thankful that I was able to go, for, in all sincerity, my health was really not up to making the trip. If it had not been for the help of my friend and other helping hands, I just would not have attempted it at all. However, it was possibly the last chance I would have had to have been there with the Group and it really meant a lot to me. I missed the memorial service at Maddingly on Sunday, June 7th, but my friend and I visited the cemetery on Tuesday and I saw the wreath laid by the 34th and took a photo of it.

I taped Roger Freeman's talk Saturday evening and it came out O.K. I do not have the facilities to make copies for everyone, but, when time and my health permits, I will get several duplicates made and send them to several of the fellows who might be interested in making more copies for others that might want them. I also have a taped interview with George and Joan Stedman that I made during a visit to their home in 1978.

In addition to my enjoyment at seeing so many of the 34th and many of my English friends, there were additional highlights to my trip. I flew with British Airways both going and returning. When the Captain heard that I was returning from a reunion of a WWII combat unit, he invited me up into the cockpit where the co-pilot allowed me to sit in his place. From the way the pilot was grinning, I think he enjoyed my being there almost as much as I did, but not quite!

## HAL CAROTHERS

Today my Mendlesham Memories, Vol VII, No. 2 arrived and I quickly discovered that this issue was the second under your editorship and I had not received the first issue. I hope there is a spare copy of that issue that you can send me, I would like very much to read it and am looking forward to reading the future issues. Cheers on a great job.

## BILL CREER

We hope you arrived home safe and sound. Our trip back was long and largely uneventful. We stayed over only 3 days and then went down in the British Virgin Islands sailing with my son-in-law, daughter, and grandchildren. Came back at the end of the month of June.

Vi joins me in sending our best wishes. Hope to see you in Wichita.

## GERALD PINE

Again, we would like to offer our congratulations on another very fine publication of the Mendlesham Memories. A well-done job, done well. The England trip was well covered. The notes from all over are great and your added touches here and there have brought forth another outstanding issue.

Wanda and I are enjoying a fast-vanishing summer, and are looking forward to the round-up in Wichita. Put on your 10 gallon sombrero, your crap-kicking boots - saddle up your Sunday horse (the one with the side-car so mother can enjoy also) and get prepared for the sit in on the top rail of the old corral. We're headed West!!

## "PETE" GRAY

Hope you folks made it back from England O.K. That was a nice trip, wasn't it? Sorry to be so late in sending you my report of the trip to Mendlesham. Had been out of the hospital only four months and hadn't fully recovered from what they did to me. Was completely exhausted on my return. Spent over two weeks just trying to get back on my feet. And one leg - the one they took the vein from - continues to swell up when I stay on it too long. The scar runs down the inside of my leg and is a full 30 inches long. But the doctor says it is doing fine. Hope he knows what he's talking about. It was nice seeing you folks again - hope you are planning on being in Kansas this fall. Meantime you all take care of yourselves - and may the road ahead be always free of boulders and may the wind be always at your back. (That's an old Southern saying that I made up!)

## REVEREND FRED BROOKS

I don't envy you the job you have taken on for the 34th. I know how Ray sweated the many problems of continuous contact with everyone. I had occasion to talk to Ray and he suggested I tell you at once that I cannot be at the forthcoming convention of the 8th AF in Wichita. The annual synod (convention) of the Episcopal Diocese will be at the same time. Being a priest leaves me little excuse not to attend so I must be there. However, if it is agreeable with everyone, I should like to continue as Chaplain to the 34th for as long as you want me. Perhaps next year, when we have our own get-together, I can be there with Mardell.

## JOHN BLOCZYNSKI

Just a few lines to thank you for the newspaper and the nice write-up in Mendlesham Memories. My wife and I had a great time in England and on the cruise. BUT!!!

After I received the June copy of the MM, I ended up in the doghouse. It seems that I had been over there with the wrong woman. My wife's name is Margaret (Marge to her friends), not Maria. I do hope you'll correct that "little error." (Editor's note: Sorry; I thought we had it right)

Thanks again for everything and if any of my crew show up in Wichita, say "Hello" to them for me. We won't be able to make it but we'll be thinking of you. Lift one for me. Maybe next year!

## ERNEST F. DUKES, JR.

I do enjoy reading Mendlesham Memories - wish I had heard about the 34th BG Assn. earlier. I joined the group in Blythe in November, 1943 as the 18th Sqdn. Communications Officer and went to England with the ground echelon by ship. I was Communications Briefing Officer until February, 1945 when I was transferred to the infantry. I finished the war in the 106th Infantry Division outside German-held Lorient in France.

I enjoyed reading about Lt. Blevins' adventures. He was the

Continued to page 4



## NOTES FROM OUR FRIENDS...

( CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3. )

18th Sqdn. Intelligence Officer and had a bed next to mine in the 18th ground pounders Nissen hut. He had acquired a .45 caliber automatic pistol from the effects of a crewman who had been shot down and when Blevins didn't return, I appropriated the piece in turn. I carried that gun all the time I was in the infantry and took it back to the US when I returned in 1947. Finally, my conscience troubled me and I turned it in. The irony is that a .45 turned up missing in my unit supply a year later and I had to pay Uncle Sam for it. So, instead of having a pistol I hadn't paid for, I paid for a pistol that I didn't have!

Incidentally, I have wondered for years whether the 34th ever lost any aircraft to fighters (aside from that intruder a few days after D-Day). I don't recall any such losses while I was there, which seems quite remarkable. Keep up the good work!

### LYLE GRADEN

A lot has happened since I wrote you last. Got a hold of Tony Lauby from the 18th. Had a nice visit and he showed me pictures of the old base. Sure brought back memories. Then in March, I had a very pleasant surprise. Gen. LeBailey stopped by to see me. How nice! He had been visiting with Tony and he came to see me. He was also from Idaho (Pocatello) and I had flown with him twice as engineer. He is still the same nice guy.

We had an air show in Yakima, WA in July and the Arizona Wing of the CAF had a B17G "Sentimental Journey" on display and did a fly-by. Got to spend a half hour inside it and showed my son all about our "17's". I forgot how big the top turret was and had a hell of a time getting up in it. Do you suppose weight may have something to do with it? So long for now and best wishes.

### WILLIAM ORTON

Read the announcement of the 8th A.F. Reunion at Wichita in the June American Legion Magazine and would like to know more about it. Trying to remember back over 40 years ago, I hereby submit the following:

I served with the 8th Air Force, 34th Bomb Gp. in England, Station 156 at Mendlesham. I was assigned to the 1446 Ordnance, Supply, and Maintenance Co. during the period from November, 1943 to August, 1945. Just before each mission was ready for take-off it was my responsibility to check each airplane to make sure each crew member had a Flak suit on board. My home town was Blackfoot, Idaho, and at that time I believe the Group Commander was from Pocatello, Idaho. I cannot remember his name. My company commander was Capt. Frinrock, and my 1st Sgt. was Wester. I would appreciate any information concerning the reunion.

### WILLIAM BROWN

I have received the newsletters and am glad to get them. I was a Sgt. in charge of the Cryptographic Room at 34th BG. Headquarters. Lt. Gus Grandel, Robt. Caldwell, Glen Goodnaugh and Janson worked in our room. I lost track of all 34th BG people when we were discharged in 1945. I am just retiring and am in the process of recovering from a 5 By-Pass heart operation and coming along fine. Would have loved to have been in England for the May 20 reunion of the 34th. Looking forward to receiving additional newsletters and rosters.

### RAY GRINROD

Since last seeing you I've had two heart attacks and open-heart surgery - Triple By-Pass, Feb. 22, 1985. I am fit as a fiddle today. Even better than I've been in 20 years. No sign of a heart

condition. Before it came on suddenly, without warning. Regards.

### "MAC" KEECH

Your Mendlesham Memories flatters me a lot in the last issue. However, it seems to be a bit off target. I in no way represented the land-owners of the several of your bases in England. If I had been that, I would be a rich man today. My job was that of being Liaison Officer between the Royal Air Force Bomber Command and your 3rd Bombardment Divn. of the 8th A.F. I was responsible for setting up several of your stations for operations. The gem of all these to me was Mendlesham. As a result of all this the name of 34th Bomb Group is imprinted on my heart.

## REUNION '85

The Eighth Air Force  
Historical Society

Wichita, Kansas - Oct. 17-20, 1985

Now that the Mendlesham Reunion is over, let's all plan to meet again in Wichita in October. Following is some of the pertinent information we have at this time.

The central activities hotel will be the Broadview Hotel supported by two other downtown hotels, Holiday Inn Plaza and Wichita Royale. The 34th will all be housed in the Wichita Royale. Room rates will be \$43.00 Single/ \$48.00 Double occupancy per night.

On Wednesday, Oct. 16th, the 8AF Golf Tourney takes place for those of you who want to get there early and participate. Also, the 8 AFMMF BOD Meeting takes place that afternoon and the Unit Advisory Group meeting follows.

On Thursday, Oct. 17th, registration for the rest of us is carried on from 0830 to 1730. Unit hospitality rooms open at 1000 hours. The Air War Symposium will be from 1300 to 1630. From 1315 to 1630, the Ladies' Tour in London double-decker buses covers much of the scenic environs of Wichita. From 1745 to 2230, we board buses to visit Wichita "Old Cowtown," a Western BBQ, the Frontier Village Museum, and 3 great shows for entertainment.

On Friday, Oct. 18th, from 0900 to 1200 there is a general membership meeting and the General Eaker Trophy Awards ceremony. From 1300 on, the unit rendezvous meetings are held in their respective meeting rooms. Ladies can visit the Ladies Hospitality Room for a program and refreshments until 1600. At 1900 hours the Unit Rendezvous Dinners and Meetings are held.

On Saturday, Oct. 19th, from 0930 to 1500, we take buses to McConnell AFB for the 8AF Open House Day with special programs, displays, etc. At 1900 hours, the 8AF Gala Banquet and Dance begins in the Convention Center.

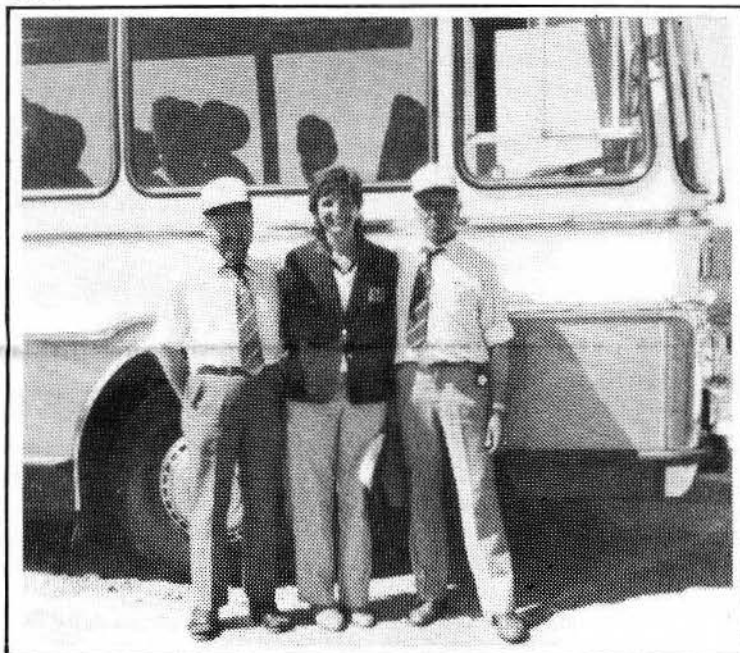
On Sunday, Oct. 20th, after breakfast, there will be a short memorial service from 0900 to 0920 before we all bid our fond adieus and head for home.

I'm sure we'll all enjoy the weekend. Let's make a good showing in numbers for the 34th BG. We have one of the most active groups around, so make all those other groups sit up and take notice...If you can make it - - BE THERE!!!

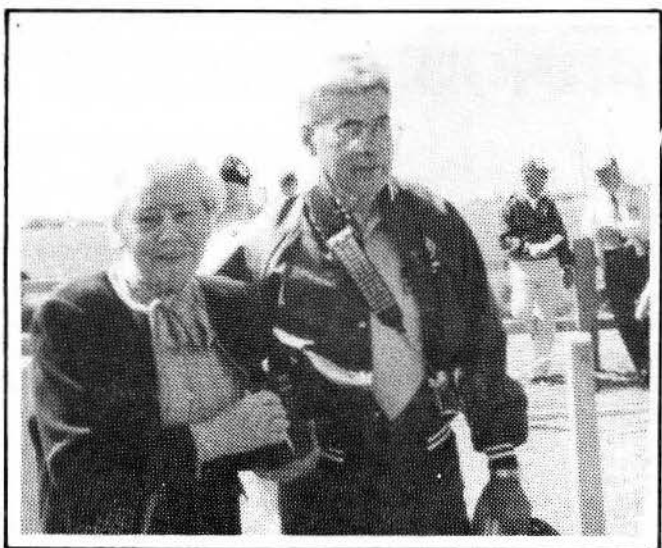
# Don't Forget To Send Your Dues!



Left to right, Joan Steadman, Gerald Steadman, Vivian Creer, Charlotte Steadman, Rose Baldea at Mendlesham Memorial site.



Tamarac Tour Guide - Carol with our coach drivers, Maurice Nichols and Roy Jackson



Joan Steadman with Ray Summa at Memorial site



Close-up of Mendlesham Memorial Plaque

*(Legend)*

*To the American airmen of the 34th  
who in valor gave their lives to the victory  
that made real the challenge  
for world peace and unity.*



Mendlesham Memorial



# A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE WAR



By ELI BALDEA

In April, 1944, after several months of operational training at Blythe, California, the 34th Bomb Group was heading overseas. Our B-24, Captain John Silver, was one of many to be flown over via the southern route. From Morrison Field, West Palm Beach, Fla. our route would take us to the island of Trinidad; Natal/Belem, Brazil; Dakar, French West Africa; Marrakech, French West Africa; and finally to Mendlesham, England.

However, upon leaving Marrakech, we were advised that Mendlesham airfield was socked in and were instructed to land at an RAF Base in Belfast, Ireland. After several grueling hours of avoiding false radio-directional signal beams, etc., we did land at Belfast.

No sooner had we been guided to a hard-stand and engines shut off and we were surrounded by RAF types full of good cheer. It was decided that we would flip a coin to see which officer would take care of the other officers' luggage and billeting. Our co-pilot lost the toss and had to remain while the other three officers were escorted to the RAF Officers' Club to be treated royally.

One of the RAF hosts had been hunting that day and had shot a hare which was in the process of being prepared for dinner and, of course, we had to join him in that. Not bad, I must say.

However, to the point of the story. I was the kid of the crew, only nineteen plus some months of age, and not much of an experienced drinker. Along with dinner, the drinks never stopped coming. It seems we (with a large complement of RAF types) totally drank up all the whiskey in the house and, eventually, ended up drinking Guinness' Stout, a dark, creamy, thick, ale-like drink.

That put the finishing touch on my innards. I had to heave and rushed to the washroom to do so. However, I never quite made it and, as you might guess, made a mess of myself. Now, I decided, I must get these messy clothes off and go to bed. I had had enough. By this time, our co-pilot had joined us and he told me to follow this road about a mile and I would come to a transient billeting area. All I need do is find hut #14 and take any bed in it. The others would work around me when they got in. It sounded simple enough so I set out.

Let me tell you, in a total blackout, such as was standard procedure there, it isn't easy to follow even a paved road. The sky was overcast, no lights showing, and purely by feel did I finally arrive at the billeting area after many falls, stumbles, etc. It must have taken me an hour to cover that mile walk.

Now that I had arrived, I must find hut #14, so I set out to look. Wouldn't you know it? It was so dark I couldn't see the numbers on the ends of the huts. By this time I was so frustrated I just sat down and cried drunkenly.

Some young man (I'm sure he was American by his speech) heard me and came out of his hut to see if he could help. I blubbered that I couldn't find hut #14. He brought out a flashlight, lifted me to my feet, guided me to #14, undressed me, put me to bed and went back to his own quarters. To this day, I have no knowledge who did me the good turn, but I also have never forgotten it.

## WICHITA '85 REUNION ADVANCED REGISTRANTS AS OF SEPT. 12, 1985

M. AMES	2	E. MACIEL	2
K. ANDERSON	1	J. MARTIN	1
P. ANDERSON	2	R. MARTIN	1
W. ARMSTRONG	2	J. ODOM	2
V. ATWATER	2	E. OLSON	1
B. BABCOCK	2	G. PINE	2
R. BAER	2	D. PONTIOUS	1
S. BAGLIO	2	H. PROVINCE	2
E. BALDEA	2	E. ROSE	2
R. BUSH	2	H. RUTKA	2
P. BUSS	4	F. SAUERMILCH	2
H. BUTLER	2	D. SCHRUPP	2
T. CANNOCK	2	R. SCHWARTZ	2
D. CASLER	1	P. SHULL	2
B. CHEEK	1	F. SIVRET	2
B. CREER	2	J. SLOVNE-SMITH	1
W. FELKER	2	B. SOTHERN	2
J. FILLMAN	2	R. SUMMA	2
C. GIBBS	2	R. TAVASTI	2
R. GRADIN	2	H. TOBIASON	2
W. GRAY	1	L. UNDERWOOD	1
W. GRIFFIS	1	E. WAITE	1
B. GRIMES	2	H. WILLIAMS	2
T. HABIGER	2	B. WRIGHT	1
R. HALE	1	R. WRIGHT	2
J. HANN	2	F. YATES	1
A. HANSON	2	M. RUSSELL	2
V. HOLCOMB	2	T. KING	1
J. HOOD	1	P. SHULL	2
P. HOWARD	2	J. BLAIR	2
W. HOWARTER	2	J. BLAIR	1
W. JACKSON	1	D. WINDSOR	1
M. JACOBBAUSKI	2	E. VANNATTER	2
A. JOHANSON	2	D. ALLEN	1
D. JORDAN	2	W. SOUDERS	2
H. JURGENS	2	F. CRABTREE	2
E. LAWLER	2		
K. LOCKWOOD	2		
M. LOPEZ	1		
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>130</b>

### CORRECTONS:

John Bloczynski's wife's name is Margaret (Marge), not Maria.

Omitted from the list of those who attended the reunion at Mendlesham were Ken and Rene Humphries. Sorry!

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

"FLYING CONTROL MINI-GROUP FORMING" - If you worked in or around any tower, please write: Lou Dubnow, 1189 Galesmoore Court, Westlake Village, CA 91361

\* \* \* \* \*

A Mr. Earl Coates of Columbia, MD has in his possession an A-2 flight jacket with the insignia of the 391st Bombardment Sqdn. as well as that of the 34th BG. The back of the jacket is painted with the word "Queenie" on the upper left and just below, now barely visible, a pin-up girl. Anyone who might have some idea of who flew "Queenie" and/or could put Mr. Coates in touch with someone who might have more information or a photograph of the plane, please contact Ray Summa who will pass on the information.

\* \* \* \* \*

## NEW MEMBERS

Bess, Leonard E.  
4647 Basque  
Santa Maria, CA 93454

Keech, G.F.  
25 Cammo Rd.  
Edinburgh EH 4 8EF  
Scotland

Brown, William O.  
975 Bingham Lane  
Stone Mountain, GA 30083

Wick, Donald E.  
Bank of Turtle Lake  
Turtle Lake, WI 54889

Gustafson, Paul M.  
P.O. Box 184  
Hiram, Ohio 44234

Hardy, Miles I.  
6112 Clover Lane  
Richmond, VA 23228

Swanson, Samuel C.  
4200 Gardenia Ave.  
Long Beach, CA 90807

Loftin, Lloyd  
c/o Texan Newspaper  
1305 Elm Ave.  
Dalhart, TX 79022

Wright, Leonard L.  
318 N. Park  
Bonner Spgs. KS 66012

Lodermeir, Harold  
3323 Elkhorn Blvd.  
No. Highland, CA 95660

Neal, Garland M.  
1038 Hunters Creek Dr.  
Dallas, TX 75243



## ADDRESS CHANGES

Owens, John, 2423 Old Falls Rd., Niagara Falls, N.Y.  
14304

Thomas, Harold E., Rt. 6, Box 43L, Austin, TX 78737

Jackson, Walter G., 1236 Milton Lot 57, Springfield, IL  
62702

Ritchie, George, 4822 Cavalry Green Dr., Manlius, NY  
13107



### "MENDLESHAM - 1985" by "PETE" GRAY

It was a warm day in early June, back in 1945, when the 34th Bomb. Group flew its last mission from the base at Mendlesham, Suffolk, England.

That time though, instead of heading eastward toward Germany - as they had done so many times in the past - the planes turned westward!

Target - the U.S. of A. - for the War was over, at last, and the 34th was going home!

Now - forty years later, on another warm day in June (1985) a small group of former members, and their wives, had met at Kennedy Airport in New York City for a flight back to England and a visit to the old base at Mendlesham!

There is just one word that best describes the planes that fly the Atlantic these days - HUGE!

It's hard to get a real idea of their size, however, until you look

toward the front of the fuselage where you see these two tiny windows where the pilot and co-pilot sit!

These windows look like fly-specks on the immense white body of the plane!

That's when you begin to figure that there's no way anything as big as this is going to get off the ground - except with a der-rick!

I heard one passenger say he had a seat in row 54!

Now back here in Virginia, there's no theatre, ball-park, or anything else big enough to have that many rows of seats!

My seat was in the middle of the plane, right next to a nice young English couple. We made several attempts at a conversation, before we finally gave up - their accent was so strong I couldn't understand a thing they said!

Sure glad I don't have an accent!

Our take-off was delayed for over an hour - seems they had to replace a generator.

Roy Tavasti wondered why it would take them so long to change it - said we had a lot of B-17 mechanics on board who could probably do it in 15 minutes, or less!

When we finally took off, the pilot announced that we would be flying north, up the coast of New England and towards Newfoundland, where we would swing out over the Atlantic and head for England. And, he said, our flight would take just about six hours during which time, we would cover some 3600 miles!

That meant we would be flying about 600 miles an hour!

Can you image that - 600 miles per hour! (Remember how the old B-17's flew at a steady 160 miles per hour, empty or loaded - it didn't make any difference!)

And - sure enough - six hours later we touched down at Heathrow Airport in London, where we boarded a bus that took us up to Ipswich.

The weather was perfect - 75 degrees and not a cloud in the sky, and the English countryside was simply beautiful! Everything was all lush and green, with flowers everywhere!

At Ipswich, we stayed at the Post House Hotel - the same one that we stayed at on our previous visit, two years ago!

We all took it easy that afternoon, trying to catch up on our sleep, but the next morning, after a wonderful English breakfast we boarded two buses that took us up to the 34th memorial, - near Mendlesham. This is located just off the Ipswich - Norwich highway - right at the end of the old main runway.

Again, the weather was perfect and about half the population of the village had showed up for the service.

The good people of Mendlesham have done considerable landscaping around the memorial - planting many rosebushes and even several trees.

They've even put up a sign across the highway with an arrow that points to the "34th Bomb. Group Memorial."

Since Father Fred Brooks was unable to make the trip this time, the services at the memorial were conducted by the Vicar from one of the local churches and a wreath was laid in memory of those who died in the skies over Europe, so many years ago.

We spent several hours there, meeting with our British friends after which we boarded the buses again for the trip into Mendlesham Village. Here we split up into two groups for lunch at the two pubs - one group going to the "Fleece" and the other to "The Kings Head."

Randall Martin - as you might expect - had lunch at both, along with numerous "mild and bitters!"

The afternoon was spent roaming the familiar streets of the village, talking to the people and seeing some of the sights we had known so many years ago!

Continued to page 8

From the collection of:

Joseph K Marks

Pilot, 4th Sq., Crew No. 12, April - Aug 1944

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### "Mendlesham 1985" continued

Even the wives seemed to enjoy this - they had heard about this place many times and were fascinated with what they saw.

Late in the afternoon we returned to the hotel at Ipswich, to rest up for the banquet to be held that night.

The guests of honor at the banquet were the 10 ladies of the British Legion who - for over 35 years - had placed flowers on the memorial on so many occasions!

There were over a hundred people at the dinner who heard a short, but delightful after dinner speech by Gerald Pine after which the ten ladies were introduced. As each individual lady's name was called out, she was asked to rise after which she was presented with a small gift as a token of thanks from the 34th Bomb. group.

The next morning (Sunday) we again boarded the buses for another trip into Mendlesham where we would attend the morning services at the 900 year old village church.

This church has fascinated me ever since I first saw it back in 1944.

As we entered the sanctuary, the first thing I noticed was the floor. It had been constructed out of solid rock and - after centuries of use - was worn down at least **six** inches! Even the pews, hand carved from thick oak beams, were smooth and polished from hundreds of years of use!

The church dates back to the year 1075 A.D. - shortly after the invasion of William the Conqueror in 1066. And - despite its many years of existence - it shows few signs of deterioration. In fact, it is in remarkable condition and it looks as if it will be there for another 900 years - easily!

The 34th almost filled the church that morning and I thought how pleased Father Brooks would have been if he could have been there!

After the service was over, and as we filed out, we passed a large tray where you could leave an offering, if you so desired.

Now, no one had even mentioned an offering, but as each 34th B.G. member passed the tray he placed a bill in it. And every one was either a 5 or 10 pound note!

I was one of the last to leave and by the time I made my contribution, there was a small mountain of bills on the tray!

I don't know how much we contributed but it must have been hundreds of pounds!

Needless to say, the Vicar was quite impressed and made it a point to visit each bus before we left to thank us! That was bound to be one of the largest offerings his church had ever received!

As the buses drove away from the church and down the main street of the village for the last time, it seemed the whole population was out on the sidewalk waving good-bye!

We were on our way up to Cambridge but we made one last circuit of the old base. As the buses circled around it, you had to look long and hard to even find anything that would indicate that we had been there at all.

All you could see was one great big wheat field!

Even the 7th Squadron's Engineering Office and its adjacent hardstand had disappeared since our last visit there, just two years ago!

About all that's left is several pieces of the old taxi-strip, and some old buildings which few could identify.

Most were surprised that so little was left and everyone seemed to have a sort of let-down feeling at this sad state of affairs.

Still - what could you expect after 40 years!

We were surprised to find the old base hospital was still there - it's now used as a storage place for farm equipment.

The bus pulled up right beside it and we sat there for a few minutes just looking at it. No one had much to say - most were thinking of how busy this place was during the war years.

This melancholy state of affairs was broken when one of the wives, (I think it was Eli Baldea's wife) turned to me and said, "Pete, what kind of nurses did they have - men or women?"

I stopped and thought for a second, and then I had to admit, "I don't know - I never was in the hospital."

"Me neither," someone else replied, "except sometime for just a short inspection."

"Yeah," said another, "a very short inspection!"

Then from somewhere up in the middle of the bus, a voice called out, "She looked clean to me Doc!"

For a minute, there wasn't a sound - then everyone on the bus just roared with laughter!

If ever a history is written of the 34th Bomb. Group, that war-time expression will have to be included!

It's as much a part of the 34th history as the planes we flew!

Every former member recalls it!

That's the kind of a trip it was - and for those who haven't as yet made a trip back to Mendlesham - don't wait too long to go!

Just remember - we ain't getting any younger!

"Pete" Gray  
7th Sqd.