

PARHAM AIRFIELD MUSEUM

NEWSLETTER SEPTEMBER 2019



Registered Charity Number 284146

FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Thank you to all those who have visited or sent cards, emails and best wishes after my accident. I am doing well and am very lucky that my injuries were not far worse. I am quite an 'impatient' patient and am finding it very frustrating not being able to do all I want to do! I'm looking forward to getting back up the museum soon, although I've resigned myself to the fact that I may have to take a 'back seat' on the initial parts of the new building project in autumn.

We are pleased to announce that we have been nominated for the *Suffolk Museum of the Year Award* (under 15,000 visitors). Judging takes place this month, with the award ceremony on 30th October. We will let you know if we are successful.

We have had several interesting visitors recently, but are holding these until October's newsletter for a bumper visitor feature.

Peter Kindred

NEW POW EXHIBITION

Our latest exhibition is devoted to the memory of the 731 airmen of the 390th who became Prisoners of War. It is housed in the extension to the Nissen Hut Chapel. Exhibits are brought to life with personal accounts, diaries and video recording. Some of these items were shown elsewhere in the museum but many are recent acquisitions.

Those who were lucky enough to bail out of their stricken bomber had to run the gauntlet of local people, who were encouraged to treat them as "terror fliers" by Dr Goebbels, Hitler's Propaganda Minister. Once in official custody they faced interrogation, basic medical treatment if needed, then a long journey to

one of the Luftwaffe's prison camps. Many of the officers were incarcerated in Stalag Luft III, famous for the "Great Escape".

It usually took several weeks for their families to be informed that they were *Missing in Action*, and even longer for confirmation that they were alive but a Prisoner of War.

Once a POW, the main enemy was boredom. Every effort was made by the officers to encourage learning, reading, physical exercise and entertainment. Nutritious food was scarce in Germany and the "Kriegies", as they were known, were very dependent on Red Cross food parcels. Letters to and from loved ones were rationed and censored, taking months to arrive. Prisoners produced their own newspapers which were sometimes reproduced along with photographs in the newsletter that the Red Cross circulated to families at home.



The focus of our room is the new board that lists all those 390th airmen who became POWs. Digitally printed wall panels tell the story of example crews and folders are provided for those visitors who wish to study the information in more detail.

Lt. James R Wicker, 571st Bomb Squadron, was co-pilot of *North Star*. On 7 July 1944 the crew were on route to the Merseburg Leuna plant in Germany with Lt. Wicker on his 27th mission when they collided with another ship over the Dutch coast. Only Wicker and one other crew member survived. Wicker spent the rest of the war in Stalag Luft I, on the Baltic, until he was liberated by the advancing Russians. We are grateful to Jill Wicker-Gooding, his daughter, for giving us his considerable archive. It includes moving correspondence and intricate drawings, some serious escape maps and others done in jest. We



also have a collection of small pieces of wreckage from this crash in a box on the wall from Joss DeGroot along with the piece of tail gun mount donated by Jill Wicker- Gooding.

Lt. Ed. Weldon of 571st squadron was pilot of *Rick o' Shay*, which was one of the eight 390th Bomb Group B17s that failed to return from the Munster mission on 10th October 1943. The entire crew survived, and Lt. Weldon was imprisoned in Stalag Luft III, East of Berlin. There he had charge of distributing Red Cross parcels. When the Russians drew near, they were evacuated at two hours' notice and spent weeks travelling on foot and in cattle trucks until they arrived at Moosburg, South of Munich. They were liberated by General Patton's army and eventually made it home via France and the UK. We have various items from Weldon's time as a POW, including a photo of his daughter Jay-Louise signed by General Eisenhower, who had bought champagne for Weldon's group of officers. Jay-Louise had been born on the day the Missing in Action telegram arrived. It is due to her generosity that we have this archive, which includes original documents and some fascinating examples of POW newspapers and cartoons.



Our knowledge of the Weldon crew is deepened by the journal of Sgt. Marion Laird, the flight engineer. We have his moving account of the forced evacuation, *The Long Road Home*, together with numerous poems, drawings and other items of historical interest in his camp journal. These important documents have kindly been given by Robert and Becky Laird.

The new room also benefits from a range of glass fronted, back lit cabinets, a generous gift from Aldeburgh Museum. The cost of the wall panels was met in part with a grant from the Suffolk Association for Museums.

Do please visit and look at our new displays!

Peter Senior



TEA DANCE

A reminder that our tea dance will be from 2-6pm on Sunday 6th October. Please contact Kevin and Maureen on 01728 668 271 for tickets or more information. Tickets can also be bought on the door.

FROM OUR ARCHIVIST

AIRMAN OF THE MONTH



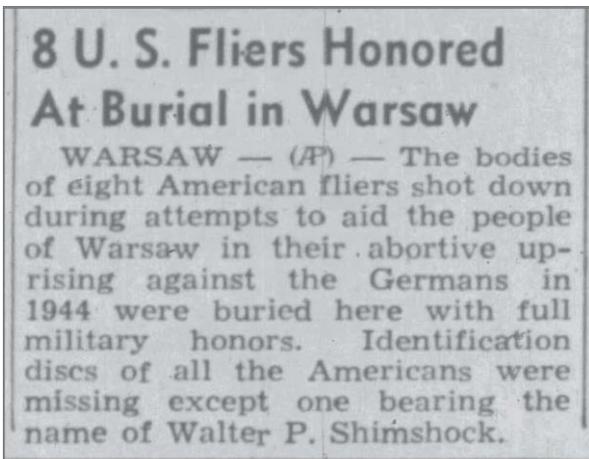
WALTER P SHIMSHOCK

28th April 1925 – 18th September 1944

Walter was born in Minnesota and trained as a Tail Gunner. He flew 15 missions from Station 153.

On Mission 191 to Warsaw Poland at 13:42 hours A/C175 'I'll Be Seeing You' was hit by flak and attacked by fighters. The aircraft peeled out of formation to the right with #4 engine afire. The left horizontal stabilizer began to disintegrate. The bomb load (containers) were dropped and the waist escape hatch came off. The aircraft went down in a controlled glide to 8,000 feet at which altitude it exploded at 13:44 hours. Two chutes reported.

Walter is buried in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He was 19.

A yellow registration card for men born on or after July 1, 1924. The card is filled out with handwritten information for Walter Paul Shimshock. The fields include: SERIAL NUMBER 193, NAME (Print) WALTER PAUL SHIMSHOCK, ORDER NUMBER 12895, PLACE OF RESIDENCE (Print) 707-19 Ave NE, Maple Henn MN, MAILING ADDRESS same, TELEPHONE none, AGE IN YEARS 18, PLACE OF BIRTH Henn, DATE OF BIRTH APR 28 1925, NAME AND ADDRESS OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS Walter Shimshock, 707-19 Ave NE, EMPLOYEE'S NAME AND ADDRESS Catholic Life Shop, 27-28-82 St NE, MAPLE MN, and PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS same. The card is signed at the bottom by Walter Paul Shimshock.

GENERAL SUMMARY

SEPTEMBER 1943

Nine missions were flown during the month of September, but on three of them no bombs were dropped due to cloud covering the targets and another only four of twenty-four aircraft bombed, again because of weather.

The outstanding event of the month was the group participating in its first mission whereon bombs were dropped on Pathfinder flares. This was mission no.17, the attack on Emden, Germany targets of 27 September. A glance at the month's operations record indicates the need for PFF A/C bombing; on four of the nine missions cloud prevented all or part of the fortresses from bombing.

Seven of the assigned targets were in France and two in Germany, three of the targets were airfields, two were aircraft industries; two were other military industries; one a port and naval yard; and one a secret "aeronautical installation" at Watten.

Only one Flying Fortress was lost in the month's operations. At the time, this extremely low loss rate seemed highly significant. But the heavy losses sustained by the group in October more than off-set September's low record.

The Group was officially credited with destroying 20 enemy aircraft, probably destroying 2 and damaging two in September.

Bombs dropped were 500#, 1000# and 2000# GPs.

Jennie Smith

MEMORIES FROM VETERANS OF THE 390th

Ray McFalone and his wife Sally have spent many hours recording first-hand stories from the 390th veterans. He has kindly agreed to share some excerpts from this priceless collection.

Miss Carry's Door

They told us he only had one story. We were in the midst of videotaping thirty-five 390th veterans at the reunion in Washington DC in September 2005. The taping schedule was completely full. But we couldn't resist the idea of a guy with one story. So we made some time to fit him in. His name is Robert "Bob" Neining. He was a left waist gunner who flew 29 missions between December 16, 1943 and April 20, 1944. This is his story.

Bob began by telling us "*Our pilot, George Temples, was only 20 years old, but he was a very good pilot.*" It was January 29, 1944 and they were flying "*Miss Carry*" (No. 230325) on a mission to Frankfurt, Germany. *We were over Germany when our ball turret gunner comes on the radio and says 'there's a B17 underneath getting too close'. All of a sudden there was a tremendous jolt. We had been rammed by another plane. Our pilot came over the radio 'Bail out! Bail out! We're going down!' I was in the waist. I checked my*

parachute, which was hooked on to my chest. I went over to the door to try and open it so that we could bail out. I couldn't get the door open. The other waist gunner (Ralph Johnson), radio operator (Richard McClelland), tail gunner (Vincent Brady) and ball turret gunner (Ralph Birk) all tried to get the door open but it wouldn't open. The stress was really something. We were supposed to bail out, but how do we get out? Then all of a sudden the co-pilot called 'Don't jump, we're gonna be alright!' One of the engines was smoking but they were able to feather it.

We couldn't keep up with the formation and so we turned back for the base in England. We went low over the treetops to avoid German fighters. If we were spotted, we were dead ducks. We landed at the air base where crippled planes landed (Woodbridge). After we landed, I thought we'd have to go up to the front hatch and get out that way. Then I thought I'm going to try that door again. The door opened easily. I thought in the years that followed that God had a hand in keeping that door from opening and not letting us bail out over Germany.



Many years later Bob recalls that - *There was a time that I was quite sick and I didn't think I was going to live another day, but I pulled through. Afterwards, I spoke with my son-in-law and he says 'Pop, the door wasn't ready to open yet'. Reflecting back on his time in service with the 390th, Bob says "it was a great experience even though it was dangerous times. We were lucky to survive those 29 missions."*

[Note: The other plane involved in the collision was called "Eight Ball" (No. 230334). Part of its right wing broke off and it crashed into Lake Constance. All crewmembers survived and were taken as POWs.]

Ray McFalone

BRITISH RESISTANCE ORGANISATION MUSEUM

75TH ANNIVERSARY TRIP TO VERRIERES AND ROM

As many of you know, in the BRO Museum we feature the story of the activities and betrayal of the men of Operation Bulbasket as it is one SAS operation where we have absolute proof of the participation of seven former Auxiliars.

With the 75th Anniversaries of the attack on the Operation Bulbasket camp on 3rd July 1944 and the shooting of the 31 survivors of the attack on 7th July I decided I would like to visit those places that I had read and learnt about over the last few years.

Dr Will Ward from Coleshill Auxiliary Research Team (CART) was also planning to go so we teamed up. Will is extremely knowledgeable about Bulbasket having researched it extensively.

On the afternoon of 30th June I set off for Portsmouth to meet up with Will to catch the 11pm ferry to Caen. With a four-berth cabin to myself I spent a comfortable night before a rather too early alarm! Cross channel ferries have certainly changed since my last ferry crossing 30 odd years ago.

Having disembarked we headed straight for Pegasus Bridge. Although nearly a month after the 75th Anniversary of 'D' Day we were nevertheless there at about the time that the gliders would have swooped in. Seeing the three monuments where three gliders landed in the thin strip of land between the Caen canal and the river Orne shows what an amazing piece of flying it was.



Three steles showing the landing points of the three gliders

Leaving Pegasus Bridge behind, we headed west into Brittany before turning south. Around midday we stopped in Parthenay for lunch before heading off and arriving at our destination, a little hamlet just outside Rom, about 2.30pm. After a short rest we set off to visit some of the Operation Bulbasket sites.



Right, St Sauvant Memorial with a recently laid SAS wreath



At the side of the road in the Forest of St Sauvant is the memorial to the thirty SAS and one USAAF pilot who were shot on 7th July 1944 following the attack on the Bulbasket camp on 3rd July.

A footpath to the right of the memorial takes you into the forest where there are three steles at the site of each of the mass graves found later on in 1944.

Leaving St Sauvant we visited the nearby village of La Branlerie. On 27th June 1944 the Maquis

liberated the prisoners of a nearby German Internment Camp. The village was a base for the Maquis and in reprisal the Germans attacked the village burning it to the ground. In the battle, four of the Maquis were killed. Another twenty seven were captured, tortured and executed.



The bakery at La Branlerie



We next visited the cemetery in Rom in which the thirty one victims of the 7th July shooting are buried.

Four of the victims lie beneath their known headstones to the right of the picture.

Twenty six lie in the communal grave with their headstones in alphabetical order. Beneath the notice board you can make out the solitary grave purporting to be that of Lt Bundy USAAF. However, it is now thought that, in fact, he may be in the communal grave and his grave holds the remains of one of the SAS. Quite rightly their remains are not being disturbed as they died together so they lie together. Between the Bundy grave and the four known graves is a plaque to the wounded men captured and murdered on 13th July.



Having visited Rom we returned to our base. In anticipation of the commemorations and laying of a wreath I had put out my suit, shirt and regimental tie. Heading south from Caen I suddenly realised that I did not have my suit with me so was not exactly prepared for the occasion. Having explained my predicament to our hosts, John and Carol, the following morning they drove us to a local village market where I was able to buy a jacket for five Euros!

In next month's newsletter I will continue with our visit to the Forest of Verrieres and the official commemorations.

Chris Pratt