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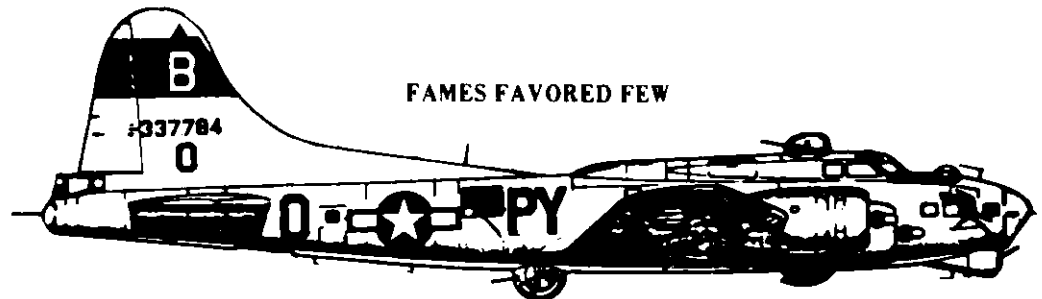
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92nd Bombardment Group NEWS



**Come On Down --- For The Reunion
You Still Have Time!
Call Perry Burnham (1-512-342-1864)**

OCTOBER 1988

Only Man In World to Hold Caterpillar, Boot and Fish Awards Promoted to Full Colonel

The only man in the world to hold the Caterpillar, the Boot and the Fish Awards, was promoted to the rank of full colonel in the U.S. Air Force Reserve.

He is David C. Besbris, a supervisory contracting officer at SAMSO.

None of the new colonel's odd awards are official, but all have become aviation traditions.

Caterpillar

The Caterpillar is emblematic of membership in the Caterpillar Club which is restricted to people who have bailed out of a plane in an emergency.

The Boot and Fish are honorary awards. The Boot is given to airmen shot down over enemy territory who walked to freedom. The Fish similarly denotes those who have bailed out in the English channel.

Believe-It-Or-Not

Winning all three of these awards is so unusual that Besbris was featured a few years ago in Robert L. Ripley's "Believe -It-Or-Not" series and on the radio program based on his collection of unusual occurrences.

Canada

Besbris started his military career in the Canadian Air Force after being rejected for physical reasons by the U.S. Army. However, in 1942 he was transferred back to our own air force.

He became a B-17 navigator with the 92nd Bomb Group in England, and participated in the first American

War heroes share bond of survival

In memoriam, 1988:

It was a war on a scale that words cannot describe. An entire generation, born since then, has nothing with which to compare it. How can you grasp the enormousness of a world engulfed, vast cities bombed to rubble, armadas of war planes sweeping over Europe and the Pacific, raining bombs, and deaths in the tens of millions?

They brought Joe Musial, now a retired Miami police criminal identification officer, back to the Belgian village of Macquenoise this month. They brought him and former pilot Howard Snyder back as heroes, to honor them with speeches and a torchlight parade. The emotional impact was stunning.

And Musial, 70, a man of quiet depths, walked over the ground where he almost died. And he thought back 44 years to Feb. 8, 1944, the day of smoke and fire. That's when the German fighter planes blasted his B-17 bomber and they went spiraling down, with Joe's left leg blown off and two crewmen dead and people bailing out. He told me, Saturday, what he thought about as he walked that ground two weeks ago, an old man remembering:

"The B-17 was in a descending spiral when I jumped. I blacked out momentarily, then came to and pulled my rip cord. The plane hit and broke up. My pilot, Snyder, came down in the woods, hung up in the trees. Three Belgians came and cut him free. I landed with my mangled leg....."

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He fought free of his parachute. A Belgian emerged from the woods and beckoned him to follow. German troops were searching for the flyers. The Belgians faced death for helping the Americans. The man saw Joe's leg, knew he couldn't walk, started to leave, changed his mind. He put a tourniquet on Joe to stop the bleeding and stayed with him until the Germans arrived. They took him to a village where surgeons removed what was left of the leg.

Joe Musial was a prisoner of war.

The B-17's ten member crew met differing fates. Gunner Louis Colwart and the radioman Ross Kahler died in the plane. Three crewmen, copilot George Eike, navigator Robert Benninger and waist gunner John Pindoch, were captured and executed by the German SS along with five other downed American flyers. Musial was one of the five survivors.

For the people of the rural province of Labotte Duhainaut, the crash of the great bomber was one of two critically memorable events of the war. The other event occurred Sept. 2, 1944, when a U.S. liberating force arrived, their vehicles emblazoned with white stars. A final German barrage killed 12 of those Americans.

Today, a Belgian memorial foundation headed by Dr. Paul Delahaye has bought that property and put up a monument and 12 gravestones. Dr. Delahaye was a child at the time. He wanted to preserve those memories for his own children, so they would know what the Americans did.

"I owe these people my life", Joe Musial tells you this memorial day weekend. "They risked their lives for us."

Few men I've met saw more combat. Early in the war, Musial survived the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and flew 72 missions on B-17s in the Pacific. Then he volunteered for more combat in Europe. The bomber streams flew high over Germany, dropping their deadly cargos, plowing through swarms of fighter planes and the ugly black blossoms of bursting flak. Struck bombers keeled over, plunging to their doom. Thousands of airmen died.

Later, Musial survived yet another bitter chapter of war. His memories of a year as a POW include a 21 day torment in solitary confinement. It never leaves you. There are perhaps 100 ex-POWs in South Florida, and he is commander of their Gold Coast Chapter. Many carry deep psychological scars.

"These are men who understand each other", he tells you quietly. "They speak the same language."

And the Belgian who saved Joe Musial, who put the tourniquet on his leg and waited for the Germans to come.....What of him?

"Nobody ever knew his name."

In memoriam, 1988:

Some heroes were anonymous.

Reprinted from "Miami Herald" May 29, 1988 issue.
Submitted by Walter Farrar.

WALL MURAL AT PODINGTON

Last Sunday I met the EWACS group on site at Podington, they surveyed the picture and pronounced themselves confident that they would be able to remove it in one piece. While there, they cleaned it and sprayed it with a film of preservative which will prevent further deterioration; it now looks better than it has for about ten years. It is just as well this has been done, as upon close inspection, it is obvious that the rate of deterioration was accelerating - colors have faded quite badly and the paint was flaking; however, considering its age and location in what is now a pig shed, it has lasted very well. Another factor which may perhaps add impetus to our plans is the strong rumor that Ernie Braddick, the owner of that part of the airfield which also includes the Tower and the Tech Site, is considering selling out to the company which runs the Santa Pod Raceway; if the deal goes through, they intend to apply for planning permission to re-develop the area as an industrial estate, which will inevitably involve the demolishing of the existing buildings.

If the building is not to be demolished, the EWACS group are under an obligation to restore it to a sound condition after removal of the picture.

However, we feel that one way or another it will be achieved (an expensive exercise) and that the picture will hopefully go to Duford to be exhibited in the US Aviation display. One thing is certain - the Big Picture is without a doubt the largest and best preserved example of 8th Air Force wall art still in existence in its original form; we must do all we can to ensure its preservation. The statement of the purpose of the Memorial Corporation includes: the Corporation will collect and preserve pertinent memorabilia and artifacts.: During the past few years the Corporation has been more than generous to the people and institutions in the Podington area and this is well recognized over here; however do you feel that a little help might be forthcoming in this project - but only if absolutely necessary?

Also, can anybody in the Group help a friend of mine in this project. He has just obtained a photo album, medals, citations and other documents relating to Sgt. William M Reaves, ASN 34407927. Sgt. Reaves was a member of the 92nd; he was MIA (date not known) and subsequently confirmed as a PW. The only clue to the approximate date of his time with the Gp. is the documented fact that he was awarded the Air Medal on 30 April 44. He also was married to an British girl, as the telegram from AAF 109 notifying him MIA is a British GPO telegram addressed to Mrs Reaves at an address in Reading, Berkshire, UK; unfortunately, the date stamp on it is illegible. We can find no mention of him in TRAB. Does anybody out there remember him? We would welcome any information at all.

Sincerely,

John P. Mills
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