

NEWS & COMMENT

FROM OUR MEMBERS

FAMOUS FLIGHTS

Jack Robinson, Jr., Arlington, Texas

Most famous flights in the WWII period occurred after the war was over. Regarding a review flight for the commander of the Russian army at Magdeberg, Germany, just after the war, I asked "Snag" whose idea the dirty word was, who approved the flight, and who led the flight. The answer to all three questions was "Snag" Grossetta. His letter reads as follows: "There were no serious repercussions, but it did cause quite a stir amongst all the military personnel in Braunschweig. There were lots of people there including the XXIXth TAC Hqs, 2nd Armored Division Hqs, a general hospital and numerous miscellaneous units. One practice show was in the evening shortly after dinner and many of the people were outside relaxing. Of course the TAC people knew we were coming and most of them were out to see how we looked. In fact, within minutes after we went over in the nasty formation one of the controllers was on the radio asking, 'Who's leading that flight?' I didn't open my mouth. But some smart alec in the flight piped right up with, 'Wouldn't you like to know?' That's all the conversation there was, but when I got back to Handorf I told McDonald to tell anyone calling for me that I had gone to Paris on a three-day pass. There were no calls. Everyone took it for the good joke it was.

"Years later I met Alex De Seversky at Maxwell Field. We were talking about the flight and he had been in Braunschweig and seen it. He laughed and said it was the funniest thing he had ever seen.

"Now here is the story: My group, the 406th, was stationed at a small German field at the village of Handorf, just outside Munster when the war ended. We were enjoying the relaxed life of 'occupiers' with plenty of softball, volleyball, German beer, etc., and very little flying. Then it happened that General Simpson, C.G. 9th U.S. Army, decided to stage a review for the commander of the Russian Army from just across the Elbe River at Magdeburg.

"The XXIXth TAC was invited to participate in an aerial review. Col. Dyke Meyer, Operations Officer, XXIXth TAC, called me about three days before the big show and asked that we practice spelling out USSR and CCCP in aerial formation to be flown as part of the aerial review. We practiced long and diligently with nine *Jugs* in each flight to form the letters. We would fly by the reviewing stand in the formation USSR, make a 180-degree turn within sight of the parade ground while shifting to CCCP and come back across the field. We

were darn proud of our work and accomplishment. Then on the morning of the day before the review, someone from TAC called and requested that we fly the formation headquarters that evening and, IF IT WAS GOOD ENOUGH, they would let us fly the next day for the Russians. Needless to say, I was quite miffed to think that we had to be approved by TAC before we could participate, so the rest of the day we practiced four more letters.

"That evening we did fly over Braunschweig where TAC headquarters was located. We went by first in four flights of three-ship VEEs, executed a 180 and came back over town spelling out USSR, and a quick 180 and the next pass read CCCP. Our final pass read SHIT. You have never seen a group of fighter pilots fly such good formation in an effort to make sure our feelings were legible from the ground. We stayed in the nasty formation all the way back to Handorf, going out of our way to pass over as many fighter bases as possible.

"XXIXth TAC allowed us to fly in the review but held their breath for fear we might be indiscreet enough to insult the

Russians, thus creating an international incident. Perhaps we should have done just that."

P-51H-MANG INSIGNIA ERROR

Joseph G. Handelman, DDS, Bowie, Md.

While glancing back over Part II of David R. McLaren's Fall 1980 article on the P-51H, there was an error on page 221. The photo of the Maryland Air National Guard's "Guardian Angels" has a caption stating that the Mustang's nose art is a "Mighty Mouse" cartoon character. The insignia is not a Mighty Mouse, but is a boxing-gloved Baltimore Oriole. The Maryland state bird is the Baltimore Oriole. The home of the 104th Fighter Squadron has always been at Baltimore, also the home of baseball's American League Orioles.

The 104th put the "Fighting Oriole" on the cowlings of its first postwar aircraft, P-47DS. The bird was next placed below the cockpit area on P-51Ds and P-51Hs. Next to carry the insignia was the Sabre; first Canadair-built F-86Es and then F-86Hs.





B-45A IN THE BONEYARD

Leon Cleaver, Vermilion, Ohio

Reference the photo of B-45A 47-14 in the Forum of Flight on page 316 in the Winter 1984 *Journal*, I thought that it might be noteworthy for the record to show the final resting place of this Tornado. The photo was taken at the Naval Ordnance Station, Indian Head, Maryland, during October 1972 and was being offered as scrap through Property Disposal. There were five sections of fuselage with some tail surfaces left and the instrument panel still had most instruments in it with radio call of 7-014. The remains were sold to a salvage dealer in Merrifield, Virginia. As a sidelight, a large section of fuselage from a B-29 was sold as scrap during January 1977 at Indian Head. What other tidbits lurk here?

PLOESTI REBORN

Leroy W. Newby, Webster City, IA

In the 12 months ending August 18, 1944, over 6500 U.S. bombers of the 9th, 12th and 15th Air Forces dropped over 14,000 tons of bombs on the city of Ploesti, Rumania, shutting down six of the 11 refineries in the largest oil refinery complex in Europe. The remaining five were reduced to about 20% of normal production.

Retreating German soldiers attempted to raze and burn the few remaining undemolished cracking plants, distilling units and other key buildings, but loyal Rumanians drove them off and prevented such action.

Many historical buildings and architectural monuments were leveled in the 24 air attacks on the city. German smoke screen defenses were so effective it forced bombardiers, in the midst of one of the heaviest flak barrages in the world, to guess at target locations and drop bombs indiscriminately over the general area of the city.

Ploesti's first birth certificate was dated 1597, but its second one coincided with its emergence as the world's first oil boomtown in 1856. Shortly thereafter nearby Bucharest became the world's first city to be illuminated by gas lights.

After the war Ploesti was again reborn, now boasting some of the most modern oil refineries in the world. The rubble of war is gone and the remaining monuments and architectural landmarks are enshrined as

national historical sites. The spelling of their country's name was changed to Romania. They have a Statue of Liberty in front of the Palace of Culture. Two of the refineries have large swimming pools.

The rich crude of the Prahova Valley is flowing at record rates into refineries surrounding the "white town of black gold," where twilights are always purple and even the starless nights are brilliant. . . . Travelers approaching the city are heard to say, "There is a smell of oil in the air, we're getting near Ploesti."

Although American bombers unfortunately destroyed many cultural edifices, domestic dwellings and lives, the Romanian people do not hold a grudge against Americans. They were under German rule and forced to work in the refineries to supply oil and aviation gasoline for Hitler's war machine. The city itself, surrounded by oil refineries, was an obvious high-risk neighborhood.

When the low-level bombers came to Ploesti on August 1, 1943, American casualties were high, but all who were killed at the target were given a decent burial. Romanian women even held wakes for the fallen invaders. A German soldier asked why the women cried for the dead Americans, and was told, "We cry for these boys because we know American mothers will soon be crying."

This Romanian attitude surfaced some 40 years later in the Mason City, Iowa, library on October 21, 1984. I had been scheduled to give a talk on *Tidal Wave* (the low-level mission) to the Friends of the Library, and received a call from the State Department asking if a Mr. Ioan Grigorescu, a Romanian writer, could visit with me in Iowa as part of his research for a book on *Tidal Wave*. As a 13-year-old boy he had witnessed *Tidal Wave* from underneath the bombers. At the Library of Congress he had seen a book I had written about the human side of the bomber's war against Ploesti. I suggested he join me in Mason City, which he and a State Department interpreter did.

Mason City first burst upon the dramatic world a few years ago as River City in *Music Man*, but a hundred Friends of the Library were privy this day to an unscripted dramatic scene that rivals anything written by the masters.

When I completed my chart talk describing the five-bomb-group attack that somehow went awry, Ioan Grigorescu came upon stage with his interpreter and told of leaving church midafternoon to an incredible sight. For the first time, there were barrage balloons encircling the city. "What's going on?" With that, hordes of four-engine bombers swooped over nearby houses, sucking up the roofs! Bombers crashing in the nearby woods. A river on fire. Total panic by people who had no warning of an air raid.

At the conclusion of his talk, a lady asked him how he felt about being on the same

stage with a man who had been dropping bombs on him 40 years earlier. He replied, "Mr. Newby did not come to destroy my house, rather to shorten the nightmare the world was going through." He then came over and gave me a big Balkan bear hug. Not a dry eye in the audience!

In his Christmas card, he told me my book on the bombing and destruction of Ploesti oil production is now in the Ploesti Oil Museum.

TARGET PLOESTI—OMISSIONS

Leroy W. Newby, Webster City, IA

Following is the author's response to a review of his book, *Target Ploesti* by AAHS Board member Mauno Salo, which was published in AAHS Newsletter No. 71, p. 7, explaining why some of his material was left out. Editor

As to the lack of detail on pre-combat, my manuscript was cut from 106,000 words to about 90,000. The training and trip over were curtailed quite a bit, as well as a number of what I thought were interesting "ground adventures" cut out. The editor was trying to keep the book from being priced out of the market, so we cut everything that was not combat related. I could almost write another book on the "outtakes." My blind date with a movie star in Tucson; I was too dumb to know who she was (Shirley Ross, who costarred with Bob Hope in *The Big Broadcast of 1938*). The time I spilled a full tumbler of water on Claudette Colbert's lap at the Masquers Club party for the cadets from Santa Ana. Jack Benny, sitting next to her, said some unfunny things about my lack of dexterity. The time I was sitting on an outdoor latrine discussing my laundry with two women from a nearby (Italy) village. My nighttime trip through the Casbah with my .45 in my hand. All these and many more never made it into the book.

I had to tone down the ending because the editor (I think she was a women's libber or something) was a bit offended by what happened on the boat ride home. There were several civilian entertainers aboard, and the girls were totally aloof to us returnees. They wouldn't even acknowledge a hello when passing one of us. A petty officer told me it was worse on the previous trip, but the guys fixed the girls. After a day out about six fliers went to the dispensary, in 30-minute intervals, to get a "pro." The ship's captain got wind of it and put all the girls under house arrest and confined them to their quarters for the nine-day trip. That is one of the best "war stories" I know.

As to my training, I went to Nashville for classification, where I was told I would go to bombardier training. After two months at Santa Ana preflight training, I went to Victorville for actual bombing training. This lasted 12 weeks. We dropped about 25 prac-

tice bombs and then 40 record bombs. Once we started the record bombing (five bombs per flight) we had to maintain a CE (Circular Error) of under 230 feet, cumulative. All bombing records are factored to 11,000 feet, even though we usually bombed at 7000 feet. Our scores were multiplied by a factor greater than 1.0. Had we bombed from say, 16,000 feet, the score would be multiplied by a factor less than 1.0. When a cadet got near or over 230 feet CE he was given a "check ride" by another instructor. Failure to pass a check ride usually meant a washout of the student.

The really good students would have a CE well under 200. A CE of 150 was very good.

We spent a month at Davis-Monthan Field in Tucson where the crew was formed, and we had some aerial gunnery practice, along with considerable ground school on gunnery. I learned to bomb standing up in a B-24D. These old war relics were frightening. Libs would go off on a training mission and never come back. They were blowing up by the numbers. Finally they banned smoking aboard the planes, and required us to crack the bomb bays open on takeoff and landing. You could smell gasoline all the time on board.

We survived DM and went on to Chatham Field in Savannah for nearly two months. There we received our flyaway B-24Js with the new Emerson Electric nose turret. All planes had the Black Panther painted on the nose.

The highlight of the training was when we bombardiers got to drop a real bomb on a big white rock in the ocean at the Myrtle Beach bombing range. (I missed the rock.) The main effort there was formation flying and navigation flights. On a navigational flight to the Florida Keys we sprang an oil leak in the bomb bay and made a nonscheduled stop at the naval air field at Boca Chica, where we stayed overnight.

From Chatham we went to Mitchel Field in New York for a few days staging, then on to Morrison Field, Fla., for embarkation.

We stopped at Trinidad and Belem overnight, and then on to Forteleza for a few days, awaiting an ATC flight to Dakar. As we were passengers on a B-24 up to that point we had to leave the Libs, as they would not take extra men and baggage on the overseas flight.

From Dakar we went to Marrakesh, where our A-1 top priority ATC pass enabled us to bump *anyone* not flying to a combat zone. We enjoyed bumping several high-ranking officers on leave, who attempted to pull rank on us.

From there we went to Algiers. We liked it so much we stayed around for several days. Then on to Tunis where we joined our group at Oudna Air Field. The rest is in the book.

RUTH NICHOLS

T. R. Judge, N. Cambridge, Ont., Canada

Re: Ruth Nichols by R.M. Valerioti (AAHS *Journal*, Spring 1984), the article consistently refers to St. Johns, New Brunswick. It should be St. John, New Brunswick. St. John's is in Newfoundland which, in the 1930s, was not yet a part of Canada.

70th ANNIVERSARY FLIGHT CHACHET

Mauno Salo, Lake Elsinore, CA

Don Thomas of Dunedin, Fla., a primus collector of airline baggage labels, wartime naval air navigation instructor and a senior sea and air radio operator of long tenure, has forwarded an interesting pilot-autographed flight cover commemorating the 70th anniversary flight, January 1, 1984, of Florida Aviation Historical Society's replica Benoist flying boat of the world's first scheduled airline. Don not only designed the chachet, but the special local stamp (yellow) and the Post Office cancellation stamp as well.

CURTISS R3C-CORRECTION

Merle C. Olmsted, Paradise, CA

Reference the photo at top of page 109, Vol. 30 No. 2, Summer '85. This fine photo depicts Jimmie Doolittle standing on the float of a Curtiss R3C racer, and has been published countless times since 1925. In most cases the caption writer has told us that this illustrates Doolittle and the airplane with which he won the Schneider Trophy in that year.

It is difficult for me to understand how this statement is consistently accepted when a cursory examination of the airplane should immediately raise serious doubts. As is well known, Doolittle's airplane was the same machine in which Cy Bettis won the Pulitzer Race earlier that same month (October 1925). It had, of course, wheel landing gear and its fuselage was painted black. A week or so later, the airplane was at Baltimore, now on floats, for the Schneider. It still had a black fuselage, and black floats. The airplane, still in existence, still has a black fuselage and floats.

How then can we reconcile the light-colored fuselage in the reference photo? It is obviously not the aircraft that Jimmie flew in the Schneider. It is simply one of the navy airplanes and it is easy to guess what happened. The airplane was moored there, Jimmie was there, and some photographer said, "Jimmie, step out on that float and we'll take your picture." Jimmie, ever obliging, did so, and started decades of incorrect captions!

It is of interest to note that Tom Foxworth, in his monumental work, *The Speed Seekers*, was not fooled. In his caption, he tells us it was not Doolittle's airplane. Also shown is an almost identical photo, but with George Cuddihy, USN, on the float, and probably taken within a few minutes of the Doolittle photo.

For further proof, there are differences in panel lines in the cockpit area, and Jimmie's airplane did not have a tail skid, as this one does.

DC-2 AND THE MELBOURNE RACE—ERRATA

Mauno Salo, Lake Elsinore, CA

Regarding the article, "DC-2 and the Melbourne Race," AAHS *Journal* Vol. 29, No. 4, p. 256, someone has taken the liberty to change Holland to Hollywood (line 12) in my lead-in. Also, Henk Kavelaars' first name was changed to Hank (line 13). It's indeed unfortunate that Henk did not live to see his article in print, for he died in October 1984, and had been sending me corrections and updates until the very last. He would have turned 67 in December.

Henk was a POW of the Japanese during WWII, and I had hoped to learn more of his life in captivity. Can anyone enlighten us on this subject?

