

306th Echoes

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Twelve O'Clock High

A Comparative Look at the Film and the 306th Bomb Group in World War II



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Motion pictures based on historical events have not always been successful in bringing the historical story to the screen. Unlike books where complicated scenes are developed over large numbers of pages, the screen writer and television director have a limited amount of time with which to explore a scene and do not have at their disposal as many avenues of expression as authors as they weave in and out of the storyline.

In January of 1943 Major General Ira Eaker, who commanded the 8th Air Force in England, relieved Colonel Charles "Chip" Overacker of command of the 306th Bomb Group at Thurleigh and replaced him with Colonel Frank Armstrong. General Eaker had become concerned with the 306th's mission performance, along with the growing morale and discipline problems at Thurleigh. The 306th Bomb Group and the relief of Overacker are used partly as the model for the motion picture *Twelve O'Clock High*. Bernie Lay and Sy Bartlett, who later wrote the screenplay, were members of General Eaker's staff. Bernie Lay accompanied Eaker to Thurleigh and was present when Overacker was relieved of his command. Later Lay drew much of his story for *Twelve O'Clock High* from his experiences with Eaker, beginning with the relief of Overacker. Lay named his fictional bomb group the 918th taking the 306th and multiplying each digit by three.

This paper will examine the film and the history of the 306th Bomb Group during World War II. Did the film's story present an accurate portrait of the 306th's history and how much of the screenplay was fiction? How does the film contribute to our understanding of the historical events that took place at Thurleigh and in the air war that unfolded on the European continent? What applications of these motion picture dramatizations and the historical record have been made to subsequent military practice? These and other observations provide clarity to the impact that these literary and dramatic presentations made on the post-WWII generation.

During the fall of 1942 the 8th Air Force began its campaign against German industry and its battle with the Luftwaffe, the German Air Force. During this time period few bomb groups had reached the European Theater and Eaker had limited assets with which to carry out his mission. The young aircrews in the newly formed Bomber Command faced an

almost impossible task, given the heavy losses, little fighter coverage, and poor weather conditions. Eaker's mission was to take the war to Axis targets in Europe from bases in England. Of the handful of bomb groups stationed across the East Anglia landscape in 1942, the 306th arrived at Thurleigh near Cambridge to join the fledgling air war being waged across the European Continent.

Overacker's tenure at Thurleigh was marked by a decrease in discipline within his command. His group reported an increasing number of aircraft aborting missions prior to reaching their objective. The first missions for the 306th Bomb Group targeted German military installations in France. Without long range fighter support for missions deep into enemy territory, groups could not risk long missions due to the threat of constant attack by German fighters. The 8th Air Force was neither prepared nor experienced enough to begin missions over Germany. These early and shorter-ranged missions limited exposure to German fighter intercepts and proved to be stepping stones for later missions deep into the European Continent.

In the movie *Twelve O'Clock High*, Colonel Davenport is the portrayed as a commander who is loved by his men and his peers. He is a model officer who flies missions with his men and is constantly working to prepare his group for the coming missions. Davenport's character cares too much for his men's welfare and personally suffers from the loss of his crews. It is this emotional tie to his men that erodes his ability to command and make the tough decisions necessary to improve discipline, handle morale issues, and intervene in the deteriorating operational efficiency in the bomb group.

Overacker, in the 306th Bomb Group, is very close to his men and attempts to become one of the guys at base parties and other social events. Some officers inside his command observed that he drank frequently and made several speeches at group events while he was intoxicated. But other officers describe Overacker as business-like and likeable. Despite Overacker's popularity with his men and his willingness to assume personal risk as he led missions and demonstrated his abilities as an effective pilot, there is evidence that he suffered from the same deficiencies exhibited by his movie counterpart, Davenport.

The first mission for Overacker and the 306th targeted Lille, France on



October 9, 1942. The group supplied twenty-four B-17s for the mission as the planes formed up and departed England. Three of the aircraft aborted before reaching the target and the group lost Captain Ben Olsen and his crew of ten to enemy fighters after falling out of formation. A month later the 306th lost three additional B-17s to enemy action and took twelve aircraft out of service due to damage sustained in battle. Two of the twelve aircraft were salvaged and replaced with new aircraft during the month of November. Five aircraft would be not be available for the next mission.

November was the first full month of combat for the 306th Bomb Group, and it was a costly one at that. A total of eleven aircrews were lost during the month. Nine crews were lost in two raids on November 8th and 9th. As the missions unfolded, the bomb group encountered severe enemy opposition. In the raid on November 8th the 306th launched another raid on Lille, France, losing three B-17s. During this mission a crew was lost shortly after bombing the target when the aircraft fell out of formation and several Focke Wolf 190s ambushed the hapless crew and shot the flying fortress down. Another aircraft commanded by Lt. Robert Riordan suffered severe battle damage, including a damaged stabilizer and the loss of their number one engine. Several aircraft in the group fell behind to escort Riordan's crippled plane back to England. With the formation slowed and vulnerable to enemy fighters, German aircraft pursued the group and the 306th was forced to engage in a running fight back to England. Riordan made a safe landing, despite the loss of his left wing tip and number one engine. The 369th Bomb Squadron sent four aircraft to maintenance adding to the group's dwindling aircraft inventory.

The following day the 306th lost six more aircraft due to enemy action over St. Nazaire. The 367th Bomb Squadron lost one B-17 and five more severely damaged. Three of these planes reported taking structural damage and landed at other bases where they required repairs before they returned to Thurleigh. In debriefing aircrews reported that the altitude on the raid was too low and blamed the



operational plan for the losses. During this early phase the war planners were still experimenting with ways to increase the accuracy of bombing runs on targets. One tactic set bombing altitudes below ten thousand feet, but while this process improved bombing performance, it allowed German flak batteries to track the attacking bombers and score more hits. The losses for these two missions totaled nine combat crews lost and twenty-four aircraft suffering from major damage. These growing losses and damage sustained by the group destroyed the morale of the 306th. Overacker, who had been very close to his men since training days in Westover, Utah, failed to set in motion reforms that could have mediated the continued struggle in the months ahead.

The motion picture *Twelve O'Clock High* mentions these missions either directly or indirectly. The last mission that Davenport leads as the commander of the 918th Bomb Group is the St. Nazaire mission. However, in the movie the navigator misses a check point and the result is that the group gets caught out in the open, giving the Germans the opportunity to zero in on them from the ground. Another reference to the St. Nazaire mission occurs when Davenport protests to General Savage the order to bomb a target below ten thousand feet. The target also happens to be a group of submarine pens where Bomber Command had had a difficult time striking a successful.

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Visit the 306th Website

www.306bg.org



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Obituaries

Please send the Association details of deaths or complete obituaries if you have them. Please send obituary information to the secretary:

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Obituaries Received:

- **Harold J. Aiello**, 423rd mechanic and crew chief, died at home 26 Dec 07 in Toms River, NJ. He leaves his wife, Josephine, 1d, 3gc.
- **Thomas E. Boyd**, 367th engineer (Clyde Cosper crew), died 7 Jan 08 in Lake Wylie, SC. His was the only 367th plane to complete the 14 Oct 43 mission to Schweinfurt. Before retiring in 1986 he was in sales and management. Thomas leaves his wife, Cynthia, a war bride, 3s, 5gc.
- **Lowell Burgess**, 369th pilot died 20 Feb 08 in Lebanon, IN. He arrived with the 306th Apr 1944 and concluded combat in Aug 1944. He was a farmer and cattle feeder.
- **Roy E. Connally**, 367th navigator (Wilford Bergener crew) died 6 Nov 07 in Durango, CO. He came to the Group on 16 Feb 45 and completed 11 missions. Later he entered and completed pilot training. Roy earned a Ph.D. in psychology from the U. Colorado and was a college professor for 20 years. He was cremated and per his request his ashes will be scattered at the end of an airport runway. His wife, Marie, died in 2004. He leaves 1d, 1gc.
- **James W. Freel**, 423rd tail gunner (William Fortson crew), died at home 15 Apr 07 in South Bend, IN. He joined the Group 29 Apr 44 and completed a 32-mission tour in early August. Postwar he was a lithographer. He leaves his wife, Mary Kay, 2d, 2s, 9gc.
- **Doran L. Gillette**, 369th toggelier and POW, (Barney Price crew), died 22 Jan 07 in Arvada, CO. His plane was downed on 26 Mar 44 mission to Pas de Calais. A graduate of U. Idaho as a Mining Engineer he worked with Monsanto Chemical Co and the Bureau of Land Management. Doran leaves his wife, Zelma, 1d, 2gc, 6ggc.
- **Luverne Halvorson**, 423rd copilot, (John Baldwin crew), died 23 Feb 08 at Truman, MN. He joined the Group 25 Feb 44 and after completing 7 missions returned to the US 16 Aug because of complications following surgery. He farmed and drove a school bus. Herky left his wife, Arlys, 2d, 1s, 4gc, 1ggc.
- **Roger W. Haining**, 368th navigator (Richard Hartshorn crew), died 17 Jul 07 in Woodinville, WA. He joined the Group 28 Nov 44 and finished his tour in April 1945. In 1955 he graduated from the U. Minnesota with a dentistry degree and retired in 2000. He leaves his wife, Lois, 1s, 3d, 4gc, 3ggc.
- **Edward J. Hennessy**, one of the 369th Bomb Squadron's original pilots, died 2 Feb 08 in Las Vegas, NV. He joined the squadron upon graduation from pilot training in June 1942, completed his 25 missions in May 1943, and returned to the US, where he became a flight instructor on B-17s and B-29s, prior to his discharge in 1945. He leaves 2c, several gc.
- **CMSgt. Russell G. Houghton**, 368th ground crew, died 2 Oct 07 at the VA Hospital Hospice in Tucson, AZ. Hoot joined the Group at Wendover as an aircraft mechanic and was one of the few people small and brave enough to crawl into a wing to repair/replace damaged superchargers and fuel tanks. At retirement he was an aircraft maintenance superintendent at Kirkland Air Force Base, Albuquerque, NM. He leaves 1s, 5gc, 7ggc.
- **Denis E. McCarthy**, 368th engineer (William Ruffin crew), died 28 Dec 07 in Livonia, Michigan. He completed a 35-mission tour between July and December 1944. After many years with Sears he retired in 1985. He leaves 2s, 6gc, 9ggc.
- **William J. McGonigle**, 423rd gunner (Charles Toner crew), died 31 Jul 07 in Bear, DE. After a 32-mission tour with the 306th, he was a B-29 tail gunner in the 15th Air Force. He was a stationary engineer for Sun Ship Co. until he retired in 1981. He leaves his wife, Elizabeth, 1d, 1gd.
- **Alvin "Bill" Miller, Jr.**, 367th armorer gunner crew), of Mission Viejo, CA, died 19 Aug 07. He graduated with a BA in Political Science from UCLA in 1952 and recently retired from Recovery Systems where he served as President and later as Chairman of the Board. He leaves his wife, Beverly, 4c, 10 gc.
- **Garland Montague**, 367th bombardier died at home 20 Feb 08 in Raleigh, NC. He was a member of Robert Barr's crew and became a POW 12 Sep 44 on a mission to Ruhland, Germany. Montague retired from the US Department of Agriculture in 1976. He leaves his wife, Anne, 1s, 2d, 4 stepc, 11 gc, 4ggc.
- **Douglas A. Snow**, 423rd waist gunner (William Fortson crew) died 11 Jan 08 in Durango, CO. He arrived at the Group 29 Apr 44 and completed a 32-mission tour in early August. For many years he was the bookstore manager for a private school. He leaves his wife, Marta, 3s, 5gc.
- **John W. Stright**, 369th waist gunner (Harvey Ryder crew), died 5 Aug 05 in Murrysville, PA. He attended Robert Morris Business School in Pittsburgh and worked in banks for 35 years retiring as a tax officer. He leaves his wife, Marjorie, 3c.
- **Anthony J. Thro**, 367th radio operator (William Wood crew) died 25 Dec 07 in St. Charles, MO. He flew 25 missions between May and October 1944. Thro worked as a production planner for 30 years. He leaves his wife, Vera, 5c, 12gc.
- **Robert Weltner**, 423rd pilot, died 20 Aug 07 at Eustis, FL. He joined the Group 27 Nov 43 flew a 29-mission combat tour and departed 28 Apr 44. He was a graduate of Syracuse U. and retired from the funeral home business in 1985. He leaves 3c, 7gc, 8ggc.

President's Corner



Spring has arrived! The warmer weather and longer days are most welcome.

The 306th board of directors is busy throughout the year to keep the organization running smoothly. We have an exceptionally talented group of officers, directors, and committee chairmen. I thank them for their dedication and fine work

Thanks to Treasurer Joel LaBo for his work on behalf of the 306th BG Association. The 306th's financial report will be published in the next issue of *Echoes* and will appear thereafter in each July issue of our newsletter. Many of you requested this information prior to the annual meeting. Using this publication plan, members will have a complete financial picture of the Association before arriving at the annual reunion each year.

Did you know that 1900 copies of *Echoes* are mailed to members each quarter? In addition, 100 copies go to the 306th Museum in Thurleigh. We can thank Dr. Williams and his staff for producing and distributing such a stellar publication.

Please plan on attending our reunion in Little Rock, Arkansas, on Oct. 29-Nov 2. The Phalens have been busy planning reunion activities, and we look forward to experiencing their Southern hospitality. The reunion will take place at the Peabody Hotel (*Arkansas' Only Five-Duck Hotel*), and I am sure you will find the accommodations outstanding. See page 7 for complete details and a registration form.

Joe Conroy
President

40th Combat Wing UK Reunion Tour

Wednesday pm May 20th – Sunday am May 31st 2009

For the first time since 1945, the former members of the 92nd, 305th and 306th Bomb Groups and their families are invited to join us in England and celebrate the heroic deeds of the 40th Combat Wing, who together flew daily missions into occupied Europe from the East Anglian airfields of Podington, Chelveston and Thurleigh.

Our group stay will be at the atmospheric Swan Hotel Bedford, beside the banks of the Ouse River, at the heart of Bedford Town. A place steeped in local history, dating back to the 15th century. The Swan is very much a piece of 'Ye Old England' but with 21st century facilities.

Tour to include:- Welcome Reception Buffet, 40th Combat Wing Celebration Dinner and Farewell Banquet, Memorial Day Group Breakfast. Plus as part of the daily tours there are 2 x afternoon teas, and 7 x lunches.

Guided tours to:- Woburn Abbey and Woburn Safari Park, The Shuttleworth Old Warden Vintage Aircraft and Motor Vehicle collection, plus its nationally renowned Swiss Gardens, Bromham Water Mill, RAF Hendon and the national collection of the history of the RAF. Tour of the ancient Kings College Cambridge, plus the world famous wartime 'Eagle' Pub located in the centre of Cambridge City.

Highlights include:- 40th Combat Wing Day, a celebration of the history of the Wing and its three component heavy bomber groups. To be held at the 306th Bomb Group Museum, the home of the 306th, and the former home of the 40th Combat Wing Headquarters site.

This is a privately organised and run tour, aimed specifically at and for the benefit and enjoyment of the veterans and their families. It is hosted by the UK members of the 305th Bomb Group Memorial Association, with the kind assistance of their counterpart Associate Contacts and respective Officers of the 92nd and 306th BG Associations.

- **Couple/Two people sharing Pounds Sterling £1975.00 total**
- **Single person (includes supplement) Pounds Sterling £1450.00 total.**
- **Excludes ALL air-land and travel costs from point of departure USA/return home.**
- **Excludes ALL insurances – Personal/travel/health.**
- **The tour package commences and ends at The Bedford Swan Hotel**

For full descriptions, booking forms and further instructions

Please email Ian White, organiser, at – IW.305cando@googlemail.com

Or write to:- Ian White, 305th BGMA, Stable Cottage, Lower Dunge Farm, West Ashton, Trowbridge, Wiltshire BA14 6AX, England.

Twelve O'Clock High continued from page 1...

blow. These brief descriptions in the dialogue on the two missions mentioned in the motion picture mirror the real situation on November 9, 1942 when the 306th bombed St. Nazaire.

In the film the 918th Bomb Group is nicknamed the "Hard Luck Group" for its high battle losses and the bad luck dogging them. This nickname, along with the accidents and mishaps, leads the group to believe in their nickname and the disasters that they are facing. It's this belief in their bad run of luck that lowers morale at the base and causes problems for Colonel Davenport.

Just as in the film, the 367th Bomb Squadron of the 306th Bomb Group carried a similar moniker, the "Clay Pidgeon Squadron." The nickname grew out of the losses suffered by this squadron early in the war. This name was given to them by a reporter who was passing through the group and noted the severe losses that the group seemed continuously to take.

As a result of the high casualties in the group, the 306th began to face a severe morale problem. Bill Houlihan, a medic in the 306th Bomb Group, described the feelings felt by combat crews who were going up on missions with "no light at the end of the tunnel." At this time in the air war, combat crews in the 8th Air Force flew missions until they were shot down or the war was over. In other words most crews knew that they had no chance to survive. It was not until 1943 that the twenty-five mission mark was set to give the crews a set number of missions to fly. 306th Flight Surgeon Thurmon Shuller had much to do in pushing higher command for a mission limit. Houlihan remembered his experiences in the hospital where crewmen came to sick call stating that they could not make the next mission and that they needed a break.

In November 1942 Eaker, along with his superior officer, General Carl Spaatz and King George VI of England, visited Thurleigh and other surrounding bases during an inspection trip. Accompanying Eaker was Sy Bartlett who later co-wrote the script for *Twelve O'Clock High*. What Eaker found at the base did not impress him and in fact he commented to Spaatz that he believed he needed to relieve Overacker of command. The early inspections were designed to persuade the British that daylight bombing was important towards the victory in Europe. However, the poor inspection at Thurleigh reflected badly on not only Overacker and the 306th, but on Generals Eaker and Spaatz and their ability to influence the British on a proper strategy for the air war against Germany.

Despite the month of December, which brought the 306th improved casualty rates, morale continued to plummet. On December 20, 1942 the group bombed Romilly, France and lost three B-17s. However, the group shot down a confirmed twelve enemy aircraft and six possibles. The 306th while attacking Rouen, France, fought a running battle with German fighters while making two runs over the target, giving the German defenders too many opportunities to shoot them down. Lt. Marlen Reber's crew commented on the mission saying that the group, "circled all over France." During the mission Riordan's aircraft was shot up again, but he and his men shot down a confirmed four enemy fighters and had two more claims that were considered to be probable.

In spite of reports of increasing success against targets in December, a growing number of aircraft continued to abort their mission prior to reaching their targets. On December 30, 1942 the group took off with seventeen bombers and eight of the aircraft turned back due to either mechanical failures or other problems with the aircraft or crew. The aborting aircrews caused the remaining aircraft in the group to return to base since the formation did not have enough aircraft to provide an adequate defense against the German fighters or make an effective run on the target.

The 306th's developing discipline problem, due partly to low morale and partly to Overacker's unwillingness to make the needed hard decisions. Eaker's patience finally wore thin after the January 3, 1943 mission on the torpedo storehouse at St. Nazaire. The commander of the First Bombardment Wing, Brigadier General H. S. Hansell, commented on how the aircraft were too separated from each other before making their bombing run on the target. The next morning General Eaker, Frank Armstrong, and Beirne Lay made a surprise visit to Thurleigh. Eaker wanted to see if things were really as bad as they had been in November. When arriving at the gate at Thurleigh, Eaker was surprised and angered when the gate MP waved him through the gate without inspecting the vehicle or offering a salute. After making his inspection of the base and surrounding facilities, he decided to relieve Overacker and replace him with Frank Armstrong. It was Eaker's belief that Overacker had become too attached to his men and would not discipline the men under his command. Eaker was convinced that a lack of military propriety existed, and this was one underlining cause behind the problems that plagued the group.

In the film Colonel Davenport was relieved of his command and replaced by General Savage. Viewers get the impression that Savage had several weeks to effect more discipline in the group and develop a better combat unit. The movie includes a training period for the 918th Bomb Group where the men had a short break in combat to prepare for the coming missions. Savage uses this critical time period to shake up his command structure, promote and demote men to different crews, and to learn about the strengths and weaknesses of his command.

In the 306th Armstrong did not have the luxury of time to prepare his men for the next mission and install the same changes that Savage made in the movie. Colonel Armstrong's charge by Eaker was to fix the problems that were plaguing the group and to train a successor to take over as commanding officer of the 306th Bomb Group. Armstrong was given about a week and a half to begin to make the changes he felt necessary to install discipline into the group at Thurleigh. The first mission for the group after Overacker's relief was on January 13th. During this mission three B-17s returned to base prior to hitting the targets and lost two others in a collision while over the target area. Had the collision not occurred, the mission would have been one of the most successful missions for the 306th since beginning operations in 1942. The group did not make the same improvement over one or two missions that the fictional 918th Bomb Group enjoyed in the movie. Despite these differences, the 306th Bomb Group does gain improvement in overall performance under Armstrong and his later successors.

On January 27, 1943 Armstrong led the group on the first raid into Germany by the 8th Air Force. The target was Wilhelmshaven, Germany, an important naval base and support facility for German operations in the North Sea. This mission proved to be one of the easier missions for the 306th Bomb Group despite its location in Germany. Crews reported that fighters attacking them were inexperienced and did not present much of a threat. Wilhelmshaven served two purposes: 1) it was the first mission over Germany and 2) it provided valuable intelligence about German naval movements that would soon be used to intercept and prevent German naval elements from conducting raids on Allied shipping.

On February 2, 1942 the 306th successfully bombed Emden without a single aircraft lost or aborts. During the mission the group, along with other 8th Air Force groups in the formation, faced fierce opposition, fighting fifty-four engagements with enemy fighters. The attacking force lost five bombers, four from the fighters and another aircraft lost when it collided with a Focke Wulf 190.

In *Twelve O'Clock High* the mission where all the aircraft returned safely to base is the last mission for General Savage commanding the 918th Bomb Group. The 306th's February 2, 1943 mission to Emden may well have been the model for that climatic mission providing for a dramatic ending for the movie. However, General Savage's nerves get the best of him, and he is unable to lift himself into his plane or go on the mission. Despite the fact that he still wants to fly with his men, it appears as though he has suffered a mental breakdown. Savage sat in his office in a daze until all the aircraft returned, and then he snaps out of his trance. This part of the movie however has no basis in fact and is not modeled after Colonel Armstrong. Instead, Armstrong handed the group over to Colonel Claude E. Putnam, who became the third commander for the 306th Bomb Group.



King George VI visits the 306th at Thurleigh early in the Group's tenure at Thurleigh. Lt. Colonel Charles Overacker stands to left of the King.

Despite being an accurate portrayal of the 306th Bomb Group in the early months of the war, *Twelve O'Clock High* provides only a glimpse of what happened to the 306th during this time period in their history. The long standing value of *Twelve O'Clock High* rests not in the blow-by-blow account of the history of the 306th Bomb Group at Thurleigh, but in its treatment of leadership. Since its release in 1949, the film has been used in Air Force educational institutions to teach leadership to generations of officers destined to receive their own command in the air service. The Davenport/Overacker failures in command and the Savage/Armstrong model for leadership have remained effective tools for developing principles of leadership in the Air Force for over a half century. For the veterans of the 306th Bomb Group, the film keeps their history alive and their service that began during World War II continues to be a beacon for those who have followed.

The American Red Cross

From the Middle Ages to Wartime Thurlough

by Lindsay Klar

The Maynard H. Smith Intern
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The origins of the Red Cross are founded further back in history than I ever imagined. The first recorded incident of a completely impersonal act of compassion, transcending race, creed, and beliefs, and purely seeing a suffering soldier in need of care, dates back to 1000 A.D. Who would have known that on the eve of battle, Haldora the Dane would set the precedent for the Red Cross organization to come? This idea of providing aid to all in need continued with the Knights Hospitalers of the Middle Ages, the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul on the battlefields of Sedan and Arras in 1654, and Florence Nightingale in the Crimean War with her modernization of the nursing profession. This idea would soon evolve into a more modern application by a man named Henri Dunant.

In June 1859, at the Battle of Solferino in Italy, Monsieur Dunant and a group of women from local towns banded together and provided the much needed care to wounded soldiers, regardless of the side for which they fought or the nations from whence they came. After witnessing the harsh realities of war and the terrible inadequacies of military medical care, Dunant began to speak out for action, publishing the pamphlet "A Souvenir of Solferino." The publication circulated throughout that part of the world and the pamphlet caught the eye of the president of a philanthropic organization in Geneva, Switzerland, Gustav Moynier. Taken by Dunant's ideas, Moynier appointed a commission to explore the possibility of creating an organization in all countries comprised of permanent volunteers who would provide aid to the wounded in time of war without the distinction of nationality. The commission was called The Committee of Five and included General Dufour, Monsieur Dunant, Dr. Theodore Maunoir, Dr. Louis Appia, and Monsieur Moynier. The committee later extended an invitation to several European countries to meet and discuss various ways to put Dunant's idea into operation. On October 26, 1863 delegates from 14 European governments and 7 philanthropic societies met at Geneva and developed a system of volunteer relief in times of war. The First Treaty of Geneva, or the International Red Cross Treaty, was signed in August 1864, and thus the official organization of the Red Cross was born.

In the midst of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, an American woman named Clara Barton witnessed the incredible and efficient system of the Red Cross. After becoming acquainted with members of the movement in Geneva, Ms. Barton incorporated the idea in the United States, creating The American National Association of the Red Cross. The U.S. took its place among 31 participating nations on March 1, 1882 when President Chester A. Arthur signed the Treaty of Geneva. The American Red Cross matured over the years and eventually received Federal recognition on August 22, 1911 when President William H. Taft formally acknowledged the group that became the national organization that we are familiar with today.

As defined by the Charter of the American Red Cross (ARC) in 1905, the purpose of the ARC is to provide volunteer aid to the sick and wounded of armies in a time of war, to act in matters of voluntary relief in accordance with military and naval authorities, and to continue a system of national and international relief in time of peace caused by famine, floods, fires, and the like. Less formally, the duties of an American Red Cross volunteer include providing a comfortable bed and space in an environment that promotes recovery, as well as providing skilled medical and nursing care, hospital supplies, food, and recreational opportunities. Never were the duties of the American Red Cross as widely used or as absolutely imperative to U.S. soldiers at home and abroad as in World War II.

At the peak of Red Cross activity in 1945, there were 7.5 million volunteers and 39,000 paid staff. By the war's end in September 1945, 16 million military personnel had been served, including 1 million combat casualties, and the American public had contributed over \$784 million in support. The Red Cross' involvement in World War II pre-



dated the United States' entrance in the war. After Germany invaded Poland in September 1939 beginning World War II in Europe, the Red Cross became the primary provider of supplies for civilian victims in accordance with policies set down by the International Red Cross Committee. In February 1941, the Red Cross began a Blood Donor Service for the armed forces in anticipation of the United States' entry into the war. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the American Red Cross quickly assembled a large volunteer force and a growing staff to prepare for the much needed war relief for the conflict that loomed ahead.

At home, millions of volunteers worked in hospitals, produced supplies for victims, operated training programs in nutrition, first aid, and safety, and created victory gardens to boost morale. Abroad, the Red Cross volunteers and staff served as field directors, operated clubs and clubmobiles for the troops, and were connected with military hospitals, as well as hospital ships and trains. At its peak, the American Red Cross overseas operated 1,800 recreational facilities staffed by 5,000 paid workers and nearly 140,000 local and American volunteers. There were 500 clubs on bases, 400 facilities for military personnel on pass or leave, 75 rest homes for combat air crews, 190 snack bars and canteens on remote air strips, and 300 mobile canteens, all serving an staggering number of soldiers throughout Europe.

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Colonel Frank Armstrong, new commanding officer at the 306th Bomb Group, waits with Red Cross personnel on the control tower for aircraft to return from a mission. Circa early 1943.



Women & the 306th Archives A Photographic Essay

By Erin Shilcutt
Leland Kessler Intern
Abilene Christian University

Women played many roles at Thurleigh and in the surrounding area in Bedfordshire. In the images above, all drawn from the 306th Bomb Group Historical Collection, you can see women assume many roles during World War II. Some worked for the Red Cross serving coffee and donuts, staffing entertainment venues, arranging social activities, and supporting the 306th Bomb Group personnel and their mission against Hitler's stranglehold on Europe. These Red Cross professionals created a home away from home and made a real difference in boosting the morale of officers and men at Thurleigh. The staff of *Echoes* salutes the Thurleigh and Bedford Red Cross.

Red Cross continued from page 4...

Located five miles north of Bedford in Bedfordshire, England, the United States Army Air Force base at Thurleigh was home to the 306th Bomb Group (Heavy), one of the most successful operational bombardment groups during World War II. Originally a British base for the Royal Air Force, the base at Thurleigh was transferred to the USAAF in December 1941. Just as the American Red Cross' staff and volunteers were vital to operations on war fronts and in hospitals, they were equally as imperative to GIs serving on air bases as well. The Red Cross' Aero Clubs in Bedford and Thurleigh were the center of normalcy during a time of harsh reality for those stationed there. Consisting of a living room, library, game room, dance area, and snack bar, each club became a GI's source of recreation, entertainment, and relaxation. The Aero Clubs gave soldiers a place to write letters, watch motion pictures, read, play games, or simply talk with the Red Cross ladies who worked there. At Thurleigh, playing cards and listening to guest speakers were routine activities offered, with the snack bar taking center place. The snack bars were extremely important at each club, providing sandwiches, coffee, tea, and sweets, as well as stationery and cigarettes.

Introduced in 1942, clubmobiles provided portable services around the base, equivalent to the Aero Club's snack bars. Using buses formerly owned by the Green Line London Bus Company, clubmobiles were converted single-deck buses that housed a kitchen equipped for preparing donuts and coffee, as well as a small lounge, a victrola with music records, and books. Each clubmobile was operated by a local British driver and three American Red Cross girls who distributed donuts and coffee, as well as newspapers, gum, and cigarettes.

One of the seminal events in memory at wartime Thurleigh was the visit of the British Royal family. According to Peg Haapa, club director of the ARC on base, the visit was initiated by a volunteer at the Bedford town club who happened to be a cousin of the Queen. A lunch/reception was held in honor of the family, which included the King, Queen, and Princess Elizabeth, with five general officers, and several escorts in attendance as well. Peg remembered the Queen's excuse for the absence of Princess Margaret was their uncertainty if she would be well-behaved. The highlight of the event was Princess Elizabeth's christening of one of the airplanes belonging to the 306th, perhaps the only plane in the entire USAAF so honored, according to Peg.

The significance of the American Red Cross to the soldiers who fought in World War II seems to be difficult to fathom by those who did not experience their care. The Red Cross at Thurleigh hosted kings, queens, princesses, and thirty-five hundred Americans. The volunteers and staff of the ARC were a source of comfort and compassion, their services a center of recreation, wellbeing, and strength, and a little bit of home in faraway England in time of war. For many officers and men of the 306th Bomb Group, the Red Cross has remained a poignant and personal memory for more than a half century—a memory that brings back a time of great drama when ordinary people performed extraordinary things. Today almost all the buildings are gone, the runways have disappeared, the B-17s no longer wait on the hardstands, and the pleasant meadowlands in the surrounding countryside only hint at the drama that played out at Thurleigh so long ago. On a visit to the 306th Memorial Museum at Thurleigh today, if you listen carefully as the winds blow gently through the trees nearby, perhaps you can catch a lingering wisp of the laughter and music coming from where the old Aero Club once stood. Can you hear them?

Marty Lenaghan, Kim Collise, and the 306th Bomb Group Archives make the long journey to Abilene

The 306th Bomb Group Association owes a debt of gratitude to Marty Lenaghan and his sidekick, Kim. They trucked the 306th Archives from Michigan to Texas in an arduous journey that finally ended at the campus of Abilene Christian University the early evening on November 18, 2007. Every box and filing cabinet had to be unloaded and moved down the length of the Administration Building to the elevator and muscled up to the third floor. Working with Dr. Vernon L. Williams, the two stevedores moved the entire collection to its holding space and locked behind closed doors.



306th Bomb Group Historical Collection waiting in storage in Michigan. Marty shot these two photographs of the collection before loading it into his truck for the trip to Texas.



Above, left to right: Professor Vernon L. Williams, Kim Collise, and Marty Lenaghan relax after a long night of unloading the 306th Archives. It was after 10 pm when the trio went searching for dinner and found this Chili's open and welcoming. Over the meal the three discusses the future of the 306th BG Association and the contribution that student interns will play in that story. After a good night's rest, Marty and his sidekick turned north and made for the long journey home. It was a job well done!

Russell Strong Adds to the Collection

As Russell Strong closed out his home office and found additional 306th historical odds and ends—or as the British would say, bits and pieces, he has been sending them to Abilene to be placed into the 306th BG Archives. They have been incorporated into the collection.

As a professional historian I have been very interested to see what has been collected over the years by Russell. The 306th BG Archives is a very special collection. The contents of that collection is a reflection of Russell's work for the 306th, and it is very revealing. It is an amazing collection of historical documents, photographs, and manuscripts. The correspondence collection is massive and significant. A part of the overall collection will be digitized and go up on the website in 2008. As that happens all of the 306th family will begin to see what over thirty years of work by Russell has yielded. Thank you, Russell, for a job well done!

DONATIONS FOR THE 306TH BOMB GROUP ASSOCIATION

Those who are able are asked to make an annual contribution to keep everything running smoothly in our Association. There are no dues—so your gift is needed to support the 306th operations. Your gift is tax-deductible.

Name

Street and No.

City, State & Zip

Telephone No. 306th Unit



Send to:
Joel LaBo, Treasurer
306th Bomb Group Association
875 S. Worth
Birmingham, Michigan 48009

Date

Registration Form

306th Bomb Group Association Reunion
 Peabody Hotel — Little Rock, Arkansas
 29 October – 1 November 2008

Registration fee (per person)..... x \$25.00 = \$ _____

Thursday, 30 October

Hot/Cold Breakfast Buffet - Reserved Room (7 am - 9:30 am)..... x \$17.25 = \$ _____

Southern Hospitality Buffet - Salon C (7 pm)..... x \$49.00 = \$ _____
 (Fried Chicken, Barbeque Ribs, Fried Catfish Filets)

Friday, 31 October

Hot/Cold Breakfast Buffet - Reserved Room (7 am – 9:30 am)..... x \$17.25 = \$ _____

Little Rock Air Force Base Tour & Lunch (Departure 9:30 am)..... x \$25.00 = \$ _____

Hot Springs Guided Tour & Garvan Gardens with Lunch (9 am – 5 pm)..... x \$79.00 = \$ _____

Saturday, 1 November

Hot/Cold Breakfast Buffet - Reserved Room (7 am – 9:30 am)..... x \$17.25 = \$ _____

Marlsgate Southern Plantation Tour & a Two-Course Lunch with Wine (11:30 am– 2:30 pm)..... x \$47.00 = \$ _____

Traditional Banquet - Salon C (7 pm)..... x \$41.00 = \$ _____
 (Three course Chicken Piccata Dinner)

Total.....\$ _____

Name _____

Address w/ City, State, Zip _____

Phone # (____) _____ E-Mail _____

Squadron _____ Assigned Duty _____

*Please make checks payable to: 306th Bomb Group Association Reunion and mail to:
 Joel LaBo, 875 S. Worth, Birmingham, Michigan 48009*

Please list the names and hometown for each person registered.

Is this your first reunion? _____ Veteran? _____ Family? _____

Please call the Peabody Hotel direct to make reservations: 1-800-732-2639
 Ask for 306th Bomb Group reunion rates:
 \$134.00 single and double, \$144.00 triple, and \$154.00 quad.

Deadline for registration and hotel reservations is 1 September 2008.

Reunion Schedule At Little Rock

Wednesday, 29 October

- Arrival - Pick up registration packets - Arkansas Ballroom (2 - 6 pm)
- Sign up for Oral History interviews
- Dinner on your own (many restaurants within walking distance)

Thursday, 30 October

- Arrival - Pick up registration packets - Arkansas Ballroom (8am-5pm)
- Sign up for Oral History interviews
- Oral History interviews (9 am - 5 pm)
- Hot/Cold Breakfast Buffet - Reserved Room (7 am - 9:30 am)
- Cinema Room WWII Movies - Manning Room (9:00 am - 3:00 pm)
- Board Meeting - Arkansas Ballroom (10 am)
- Clinton Presidential Library - (on your own - ride trolley - lunch at Café 42)
- Second generation member meeting - Manning Room (3 pm)
- How to Preserve Family Papers and Photographs Workshop - Dr. Williams - Manning Room (4 pm)
- Cash bar - Salon C (6 pm – 9 pm)
- Southern Hospitality Buffet - Salon C (7 pm)

Friday, 31 October

- Hot/Cold Breakfast Buffet - Reserved Room (7 am – 9:30 am)
- Sign Up for Oral History interviews
- Oral History interviews (9 am - 5 pm)
- Cinema Room WWII Movies - Manning Room (9 am - 3 pm)
- Little Rock Air Force Base Tour & lunch (departure 9:30 am)
- Hot Springs Guided Tour & Garvan Gardens with lunch (9 am – 5 pm)
- How to Do Family History Oral Interviews Workshop - Dr. Williams – Manning Room (3:00 pm)
- Dinner on your own (many restaurants within walking distance)

Saturday, 1 November

- Hot/Cold Breakfast Buffet - Reserved Room (7 am – 9:30 am)
- Sign Up for Oral History interviews
- Business Meeting - Arkansas Ballroom (10 am)
- Marlsgate Southern Plantation Tour & a two-course lunch with wine (11:30 am – 2:30 pm)
- Oral History interviews (1-5 pm)
- How to Preserve Family Papers and Photographs Workshop - Dr. Williams - Manning Room (3 pm)
- Clinton Presidential Library (on your own – ride trolley – lunch at Café 42)
- Cash bar - Salon C (6 pm – 9 pm)
- Veterans-only Group Photograph—Salon C (6:50 pm)
- Traditional Banquet - Salon C (7 pm)

Sunday, 2 November

- Farewells
- Check out
- Travel Home — See you next year!



Hotel Reservations

The Peabody Hotel in Little Rock
 Please call the Peabody Hotel direct to make reservations

1-800-732-2639

Ask for 306th Bomb Group reunion rates:
 \$134.00 single and double, \$144.00 triple, and \$154.00 quad.

Phelan Family Reunion Committee
 Jim and Paula Phelan
 Dick and Anna Phelan

Museum Notes

Thurleigh Airfield 306th Bomb Group Museum



The photographs at left and below illustrate the new war brides exhibit just installed in the 306th Museum at Thurleigh (see story at right). Using the original wedding dresses, the Franklin's have recreated some special memories. 1) Exhibit depicting Joe and Peg Albertson's wedding 2) Joe and Peg Albertson's wedding, 14 July 1945 3 & 4) Exhibit depicting Hoot and Monica Houghton's wedding 5) Hoot and Monica Houghton's wedding 12 March 1945.



The 306th and their Wartime Brides

by Ralph Franklin
Keysoe, England

The GIs began to arrive in 1942, only a few at first, then suddenly they were everywhere, animated, brash young men, pouring into a war-torn Britain where the prevailing shades of life were grey, from the drizzling skies to the dust swirling round the craters of bombed out buildings. The country was crowded with unfamiliar uniforms, but none had the impact of the GIs.

Smaller towns and villages that had never seen a foreigner before now had Hollywood heroes, chests covered in medal ribbons, proficiency bars rattling impressively. 'Blimey, they even get a medal for shooting a gun' was the comment from one British soldier.

They strutted into pubs, cafes and local dance halls looking as if they had stepped off the silver screen, in their well cut uniforms, doubles of the film stars the girls adored, and so glamorous compared to the British boys in their thick clumsy battledress.

The villages around the airbase in North Bedfordshire did not escape this friendly invasion. When Station 111 Thurleigh became the home to 3000 members of the 306th Bomb Group, they soon integrated with the local communities and quickly obtained a taste for the warm beer.

Out of necessity bomber airfields were constructed in rural areas surrounded by farmland. With the shortage of young men away at war, the Women's Land Army was formed. They were billeted in hostels around the countryside, two of which were situated about two miles from Thurleigh.

Approximately a half mile from the Milton Ernest Hostel was a public house named the Swan, a regular meeting place for the guys and gals. One evening in the fall of 1944 a group of Land Girls headed for the Swan for a relaxing drink after a hard days work at the farm. Among the group was a young and pretty Peggy Davis. At about the same time Walter "Joe" Albertson of the 369th arrived at the pub, the first time each had visited this particular venue. They began to talk, and so their love story began. The wedding took place at Christ Church, Luton on 14 July 1945.

The dress we have in our museum display is the one seen in the 1945 Albertson wedding photograph. As times were hard in the UK after almost six years of war, the dress was second-hand, being first used in the late 1930s. Joe had a problem with his Service Dress after using it since his arrival at the 306th in 1942, so he borrowed one from a buddy which had seen a lot less service.

The other wedding we feature is that of Russell "Hoot" Houghton of the 368th and Monica Warboys of Luton. They were married on 12 March 1945 at St. Peter de Merton Church, Bedford. Monica was also a Land Army Girl based

at Milton Ernest Hostel. Before his death last year, 2007, Hoot asked Danny his son to ensure the wedding dress was sent over to England for inclusion in our museum display. Before doing so, Danny arranged to have the dress restored. It looks wonderful considering it is now almost sixty-three years old.

We believe this display adds yet another dimension to the life and times of the 306th Bomb Group at Thurleigh.

