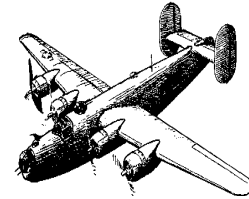


# Plane Talk



The Eighth Air Force Historical Society  
Virginia Chapter Newsletter

<http://www.8thaf-virginia.org>

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## Greetings From Your President:

On Saturday, September 15<sup>th</sup> we had a very pleasant and educational meeting and lunch at the Stonehenge Country Club in Richmond. Most attendees made comments about their association with the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force or the armed forces. Abe Firestone, with the able assistance of Anne Royster showed the film “Winning Your Wings” starring Jimmy Stewart. This film was made in 1942 and Abe said it influenced him to join the Aviation Cadets. I expect it had a similar effect on many a young man at that time in our history.

Next Spring will mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our chapter of the 8th Air Force Historical Society. When Chris Bowers founded the chapter to honor his and other Virginia fathers who served in the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force, little did he know that it would grow to the number that it did and last as long as it has. It all started with a meeting of ten Vets that Chris got together and by fall it had incorporated. Then in the fall of 1994 Jesse Pitts, with the help of his wife Monique, put out the first issue of *Plane Talk*. We Vets, with Veterans Day just passed, owe Chris a great “Thank You!”

Wonderful. This is a term I have used very sparingly in my lifetime but I’ll use it now. Elsewhere in this issue of *Plane Talk* you will the latest article by Frances Nunnally. Frances was an ATS member in England during WWII. She has written a “wonderful” account of life before, during, and after the fighting and the contribution and sacrifice the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force personnel made. As the Aussies might say, “Good on ya Frances.”

Again, I close by saying, “LET’S KEEP ‘EM FLYIN’!”

*Lew Burke*

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**WE NEED YOUR STORIES AND PICTURES! WE WANT TO KEEP *PLANE TALK* INTERESTING AND NEED YOUR HELP. PLEASE SEND YOUR STORIES AND PICTURES TO THE EDITOR.**

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## A NOTE FROM HEIDI NUNNALLY

I spoke with my mother tonight. Today marks the anniversary of Kristallnacht, which started 74 years ago today (Nov. 9-10), in 1938. On this night that year, my mother and grandmother went for a walk before retiring for the evening. The next morning, Mom was startled by the noise in the street below and looked out of her top floor window to see the shopkeepers across the street being thrown out, their windows smashed and their son arrested. That day, the Nazi Storm troopers ascended the spiral staircase and banged on my mother's apartment door. She and her family were forced to leave without their belongings. Their apartment was ransacked and their valuables stolen. It was two weeks before they were allowed to return.

I always try to remember this anniversary because it's one of the first stories Mom ever told me about her time growing up in Vienna. She first told it to me on a drive we took to the Shenandoah Mountains one year -- on that anniversary. I couldn't believe my ears! It's also the anniversary that I discovered Mom's best friend was still alive (after each thought the other had perished after Kristallnacht) and living in Vienna. They then reconnected after 65 years. Something good came out of something bad.



Heidi and Frances Nunnally

## RETURN TO LUXEMBOURG

RAMBROUCH, Luxembourg -- Roger Feller remembers the Luxembourg sky filled with B-17s on missions into Germany in 1944. And he recalls, as an 8-year-old, helping bring American fliers to shelter and eventual escape when they were forced to bail out over his country.

Nearly 70 years later, Feller is still grateful for their courage and sacrifice. "I'd do anything for Americans," he says. "If we had waited for the French to liberate us, we'd be speaking German now. Or Russian."

That's why, when he was contacted by the son of a bombardier who bailed out of one of those Flying Fortresses, Feller responded right away.



In Germany in connection with his position as ombudsman for Stars and Stripes, Ernie Gates wanted to take a side trip to find the house in neighboring Luxembourg in which his father, O.B. Gates Jr., had been hidden from the Nazis from July to September of 1944. Searching the Internet for connections, he found Feller's email on the website of a museum dedicated to the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force's 385<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group. Organized and maintained by Feller and friends, the museum memorializes the crews of a pair of B-17s that collided and crashed in Perle, very near Rambrouch, where Gates knew

his father had been hidden by a family named Claren-Rodesch.

Feller was the right connection. Immediately, he replied that he knew exactly the house in Rambrouch. A day later, he emailed to say he had contacted the owner of the house, whose son – a grandson of the Claren-Rodesch family -- would gladly drive down from Luxembourg City to show Gates through it.

So the meeting was arranged.

Jean Paul Hoffman had grown up in the three-story, pink stucco house, which is now vacant. His mother had lived there when her parents risked their lives to give 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Gates refuge as he waited for American troops to advance to the town. Hoffman knew well the stories of the American "evadee." He led Gates, Feller and his friends from the Perle museum through the house. Gates' father's room had been on the second floor. When German troops were near – sometimes as close as the family's attached building-supply business – the American flier hid in a secret space between the attic walls. After climbing the ladder to the attic, Hoffman pulled a small section from the plank wall, just large enough to climb through into a dusty, cobweb-filled, 2-foot by 7-foot space under the roof. On the inside, the hatch could be pulled flush and fastened with a wooden latch. As a boy, Hoffman had played in this secret compartment, and slid through the "escape" along the chimneyside from the attic into the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the adjacent business.

Today, the house is unoccupied but in good repair. Rambrouch remains a small town in the hill country near the Belgian border, dominated by a Catholic Church and cemetery, where Camille Claren and Anne Rodesch-Claren are buried, as is Jean Paul's mother, Yvonne Claren-Hoffman. From that church cemetery, Feller pointed to a tree-lined ridge a few hundred yards away, where he says an American P-47 pilot died in a crash on Sept. 10, 1944, the day before 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Gates was reunited with American troops. Feller and his friends dedicated a memorial to that pilot, Lt. Charles Parmalee of Ohio, attended by Air Force dignitaries from Spangdahlem Air Force Base not far away in Germany.



Feller and his friends maintain close relations with the Air Force at Spangdahlem. As they showed Gates through their museum in Perle later in the day, a flight of four A-10 Thunderbolts from the base saluted with a fly-by. This fall, Feller was scheduled to present a program at the base about the museum, World War II crash sites, evadee stories and other connections that keep the history alive. He and his friends show every day that the courage and sacrifice of the members of the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force are still remembered gratefully in the country they helped to liberate – and they are determined to keep it that way.

*Ernie Gates is the son of the late Ordway Gates and is the ombudsman for Stars & Stripes. More of his photographs can be found at*  
<https://picasaweb.google.com/116449089914157762652/Rambrouch2012>

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### **LATEST FROM FRANCES NUNNALLY**

Receiving Plane Talk always brings back vivid memories of World War II. On September 1, 1939 I was in London, listening as Winston Churchill came on the radio, announcing that “This Country is now at war with Germany.” It was the first day of a near-six year struggle that took millions of lives.

I was then a 17-year old refugee from Nazi oppression, having found refuge in Britain. For the next two years England's fate stood in mortal jeopardy. As Hitler swept across Europe, he still had his eye set on the greatest prize: England. Only the choppy English Channel stood between us and Hitler's tanks and troops. Lacking an Armada, the Nazis resorted to all-out Air Warfare.

In 1940 the horrors of the London Blitz unfolded. Night after night waves of German planes dropped incendiary bombs on the city, followed by regular bombs to blast open the burning buildings and spread the fires.

Every night we fled to the shelters set up on the Underground (subway) platforms, deep in the bowels of the earth. Families brought blankets, food, games for the kids. The government had erected makeshift cots on the platforms, but most of us had to sleep on the floor. In the morning we emerged onto London's rubble-strewn streets.

Food was scarce. We were rationed to one egg per week and a sliver of meat. Neighbors saved up sugar rations, then shared them to bake a birthday cake for a child. Milk was for babies only.

Then came Pearl Harbor and America's entry into the War. By that time I was serving in the Auxiliary Territorial Service (British Army) and was stationed in Bury St. Edmunds, a quiet little market town in East Anglia.

But soon things began to happen all around us. The Yanks arrived! American airfields began sprouting around us like mushrooms after a rain. At dawn the Fortresses roared out on bombing missions over the Continent. At night Bury St. Edmunds looked like Main Street, USA, as trucks brought in servicemen from nearby bases. Movie theaters and Pubs were filled to capacity. Dances were held in the local "Corn Exchange." That venerable building fairly shook, as the Yanks jitterbugged with their English partners.

Thanks to America's presence in England, the tides of War began to turn in favor of the Allies. The winter of 1944 had been particularly hard, with snow, ice and fogs. Coal was scarce and we shivered our way through the months in unheated barrack rooms. But then as the warm days of spring arrived, rumors began to circulate that an invasion of Europe was being planned by the Allies. It was all frightfully hush-hush and we looked over our shoulder, afraid that someone might hear us talk.

Then on June 6, 1944 it happened! Many, many young men, American, British, Canadian and others lost their lives on that fateful day. In our barrack-room we tacked a map of the world to the wall. We moved colored pins as the Allies fought their way across France into the heartland of Germany. I was a long and bloody struggle, costing many thousands of lives.

And then in May 1945, the War in Europe ended in victory. Church bells toiled and the lights went on in England after 5 ½ long years. People danced in the streets.

Yet for us, who had been able to flee the Nazi menace and find refuge in England it was not over yet. A long trek still lay ahead. What had happened to the families we left behind?

The tracks led to Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, Mauthausen and Theresienstadt. But there was no one left. No graves, just the memories.

My own way led back to Vienna, my former hometown. I crossed a continent in shambles, with Displaced Persons wandering everywhere. In Paris I was able to buy a bottle of French perfume, but looked in vain for a cup of coffee and a slice of bread. In Vienna I stood in front of the house where I was born and grew up. But there was nothing but emptiness.

As the past slowly faded, we worked, made homes, and raised families. For this normalcy of life we greatly owe thanks to the men of the Eighth Air Force who came to England and helped defeat the evil that threatened to engulf the world.

After close to 70 years, “Plain Talk” still talks of the way we were back then. Thank you Mighty Eighth and thank you Plane Talk for preserving the memories

*Frances Nunnally*

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## **AIR RAID IN LONDON (13 JUNE 1944)**

by William R. (Bill) Greenwell, Jr.

After completing their thirty missions over Europe, Bill Greenwell and his co-pilot Danny Fontinakes went to London for a few days of R & R.

On the evening of June 13<sup>th</sup> the air raid sirens over London came on, warning people of the danger of an approaching formation of aircraft. Considering that there had been no significant opposition over the beaches during the June 6<sup>th</sup> D Day landings, Bill and Danny were curious as to what kind of attack the Germans could mount over London.

They were staying at the Red Cross club in downtown London, so they went up to the roof to see what was going on. Londoners had become used to the drill – finding shelter in basement and subways. Since these two friends had just finished their thirty mission tour and survived everything that the Germans could shoot in their direction, they considered the risk of death to be insignificant.

It was a spectacular sight that night with searchlights, barrage balloons, and anti-aircraft guns firing at a single aircraft at a very low altitude – barely above the rooftops. They could tell from the concentration of fire that the plane was not flying near their location, so they continued to watch the events that were unfolding.

The engine of the plane made a sound like they had never heard before, similar to a large single cylinder engine running at a fairly low speed. The exhaust was loud, a popping noise that was not as frequent as the exhaust of a multi-cylinder engine. The exhaust was also very bright and a trail of flame followed the small plane as it flew on a straight course without any defensive maneuvering to avoid the guns firing in its direction.

The small plane continued on its course for a short time before the engine quit and it dove into the ground and exploded. Another poor pilot’s life sacrificed in this damn war thought the two friends as they went back downstairs.

The next day the newspaper reported the first pilotless flying bomb attack on the previous night. It explained that the Germans launch the buzz bomb from ramps on the coast of France. Guidance was fairly simple, a gyroscope for direction, a barometric altimeter, and enough fuel to go the distance between the launch ramp and the target. When launched they were assisted up to speed by a rocket until a pulse jet engine took over.

Modern warfare had seen the first aerial attack from one country to another using a self-guided missile. This was the V1. The next evolution was the V2, a true ballistic missile that traveled at more than 2000 miles per hour and was untouchable by any existing defense. Traveling faster than the speed of sound, the first indication of attack was the explosion of the warhead.

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## ANNOUNCEMENT

We are having our Christmas meeting and luncheon on December 8th at Stonehenge Golf and Country Club in Chesterfield. The meeting will start at 11:30 with lunch at 12:30.

This is the third meeting scheduled for 2012. This is a great opportunity to see and talk with fellow vets and 2<sup>nd</sup> Gens. As always, Stonehenge Golf and Country Club will serve a great lunch.

The Chapter will pay for lunch.

James Harvell needs to give the club an approximate head count a couple of days in advance so that they can plan. Please give James a call at (804) 744-1764 if you plan to attend. He can also give you directions if you're not sure how to get to Stonehenge Country Club.

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