

William D. Reeder
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Russell A. Strong
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Dear Russell;

Thanks for the nice article by John Regan in the most recent issue of Echoes. I have fond memories of John, he was one fine leader in the air and on the ground. I can remember his "missions to the White Horse in Luton" when he would pick up a load of some of the more "uptight" guys in the squadron, load them in his "desert buggy" and go to the White Horse Pub to get good and drunk and forget it all. Somehow the world seemed more livable the next morning, even through the haze of a horrible hangover.

I remember also his leadership in the air when leading the group on a ME110 factory in West Germany (Oberpfaffenhofen???) during the "Big Week in February." ('44). John held us together in close formation, calling the shots against repeated relays of Me109's then FW190's and then again ME109's. My plane took eight 20mm hits but the engines kept going and we were able to maintain a fair position in formation. When our allotted 8,000 rounds of ammo were gone, he took the formation over the flak areas of Cologne in order to rid ourselves of the fighters who were not well coordinated with the flak gunners. We lost a few but it would have been much worse without the talent of a 23 year old Lieutenant Colonel by the name of John Regan. He must have been the youngest or nearly the youngest L/C in the USAAF. I have spoken his praise many a time over the years. He is a true hero.

Two copies of Echoes came in my mail box this time. One was addressed to Ira Bagwell who lived here in Clarksville. Ira died a while back. His wife and son still live here. I think it would be appropriate to drop Ira from the mailing list now since he has been dead for almost two years.

If you can, would you add the following person to your list:

Mr. David Burger
230 Ocean Parkway #d10
Brooklyn, NY 11218-3257
Tel. 718-435-4114

I have sent a \$25 check to Des Moines which should defray the cost of his mailing for some time to come.

Dave was a VERY effective ball turret gunner on my crew in the 368th from our arrival in November of '43 to his completion of tour in May of '44. He had several kills to his credit, if I remember correctly.

I had not been in touch with Dave since we parted company at Thurleigh in 1944. Using the "People Finder" in the YAHOO search engine on the Internet, I looked up Dave Burger whom I remembered as being from Brooklyn. Sure enough, the second name I called was "my Dave Burger." Dave is a gutsy little guy (5'5", 125 lbs.) who was a most valuable member of our crew.

When he answered the phone and I identified myself there was a long pause and a difficult reply. Dave was crying his eyes out. He said, "I never thought anyone would care enough to contact me!" After regaining his composure, we began to talk and talk we did for an hour or so. Dave is in difficult circumstances, having lost a foot. He is in a wheel chair pretty much confined at home in the apartment which he shares with a grandson. He is pretty bitter about the lack of support which he has received from the Veteran's Administration.

Dave told me, "There are two things which I never told you when we were flying together which I want you to know now. I never wanted you to know then but now I want you to know while there is still time."

Dave went on to say that when he was flying his missions with me that he was only seventeen years of age. He said, "You know I am Jewish. I lived as a boy with my parents in Czechoslovakia. They came to the US early in the war to escape the death camps. I applied to enter the US but was refused because I was too young. Reapplying I gave my age as twenty one and was accepted for entry. But when I arrived in the US I was subject to the draft. So I volunteered for gunnery training and was accepted. Then I ended up on your crew."

"What was the second thing you wanted me to know?", I asked. "Well when we were hit by all the 20mm rounds on that mission in February of '44, I was hit with some shrapnel in my left leg. I didn't want you or anyone else to know for I thought I would be grounded for a time and would have to finish out my missions with some other crew. Instead I went into town to see a civilian doctor who put six stitches in my left leg. It was rough curling up in that ball turret with those stitches in my leg but it came out alright."

Dave worked for some years in New York as a taxi driver but is now at home with his grandson. Dave seems to be in difficult circumstances and needs a boost to his morale. I have corresponded with him but have received no further replies for several months. It would be appreciated if you would add Dave to your Echoes mailing list.

Finally, I want to thank you again for all the work which you do to keep the "threads" of the 306th family knitted together. My cousin, Harold Robinson, of Collierville, Tennessee is doing the same sort of thing for the 8AF Historical Society of Tennessee. Harold was a waist gunner in Jimmy Stewart's B-24 Squadron in England. He travels a lot

and spends a lot of time on his 8AF projects. He was in on the opening of the Museum at Savannah. He has written a good book, "A Reason To Live", about his WWII experiences in the USAAF. You could write a good book about your peregrinations on behalf of the 306th, the people you have met and the stories you have heard; not to mention your own story in following the "306th family."

The stark truth inherent in your listing of those lost in battle in the current issue of Echoes is food for thought about the futility of war. Keep up the good work. Keep the faith.

Sincere best regards. Maybe we shall meet at Savannah in '98.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bill".

Bill Reeder