

*Want to help separate
real history from hearsay?*



*Join the
Clayton/Deer Park
Historical Society.*

Illustration from the March 28, 1918 edition of the Farm Implement News.

Free — Take One

NEW VENUE FOR MEETINGS — EVERYONE'S WELCOME.

*Second Saturday of each month, beginning at 10:00 a.m.,
Behind (south side) Deer Park's City Hall — The West Side Annex of the Old Fire Station on "A" Street.*

THE
CLAYTON/DEER PARK
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Mortarboard

© C/DPHS

The C/DPHS is an association of individuals dedicated to the preservation of the history of our community. To the preservation of the region's oral history, literary history, social history, graphic and pictorial history, and our history as represented by the region's artifacts and structures. To the preservation of this history for future generations. To the art of making this common heritage accessible to the public. And to the act of collaborating with other individuals and organizations sharing similar goals.

Twenty-Six Missions: The Robert Willis Grove Story

by

Wally Lee Parker

*With the assistance of Gordon Grove, Mike Paulick,
Charles Stewart, Ken Westby, and many others.*

(Part Four)



... to England ...

It was the 27th of August, 1942. With the chill waters of the North Atlantic some 9,000 feet below, a loose formation of nine brand-new B-17F Flying Fortresses winged toward the gathering dawn. Those onboard still awake would have seen the last greenish glimmers of that night's Aurora Borealis fade into an otherwise empty sky. Whether Willis Grove or any of the young airmen could sleep as the 407th Bombardment Squadron droned

toward an unknowable future is hard to say. But of two things we can be sure. Their instruments told them they were headed toward the European war at an indicated 185 miles per hour. And in prior weeks the 92nd Bombardment Group's other three squadrons — the 325th, 326th and 327th — had traveled this same route. So at least a few things would be familiar once the 407th reached its assigned base in England.

Each of the squadron's Fortresses was stuffed with as many pounds of tools and

spare parts allowable. In one aircraft that assorted cargo included nine cases of bourbon whiskey — all of which had to be jettisoned mid-ocean after one of the bomber's engines died and everything nonessential was dropped to lessen the load on the remaining three.

The 92nd's B-17s were the first heavy bombers to fly the North Atlantic route in a single hop. Their bomb bays had been fitted with auxiliary tanks so each plane could carry an extra 500 gallons of fuel — the objective being to cross the 2,100 miles between the airfields at Gander, Newfoundland and Prestwich, Scotland without having to stop in Greenland to refuel as previous flights of B-17s had done.

The 92nd's groundcrews and heavy equipment had already crossed the Atlantic by ship and were waiting on the far side.

In the weeks prior to the flight over, the aircrews had first transferred from Florida to Westover Army Airfield near Springfield, Massachusetts, and then to Dow Army Airfield at Bangor, Maine. While at Bangor, the 92nd exchanged its well-worn B-17Es for the much more capable B-17Fs. They also once again engaged in antisubmarine patrols, this time in the waters off Boston.

As recorded in J. Kemp McLaughlin's book, *The Mighty Eighth in WWII: A Memoir*, the only act of war undertaken by the 407th during this period was the possible wounding of a whale by machinegun fire — that loosed through the nose of a craft by one of the squadron's bombardiers. Though the memoir doesn't identify which bombardier, then Lieutenant McLaughlin, as one of the group's pilots, doubtless knew.

After landing in Scotland, the 407th flew south to England to join the rest of the 92nd Bombardment Group at their new home base near the small village of Bovingdon, some 20 miles northwest of London.

Among the first news received after landing at Bovingdon was this disappoint-



Photo from the Gordon Grove collection.

Robert Willis Grove
*Photo probably taken while
92nd Bombardment Squadron stationed at
Bovingdon. Chalk on bomb appears to read
"From Sgt. Grove."*

ment. The 92nd's assigned job at the airfield was to staff the 8th Army Air Force's first Combat Crew Replacement Center (CCRC) — that designation meaning their task was to continue the training of arriving personnel prior to said personnel's transfer to actual combat units. With this reallocation came the stipulation that the 92nd would "*fly some combat missions while training replacement crews.*"

As part of its revised mission, the 92nd was ordered to relinquish its freshly acquired B-17Fs to the 97th Bombardment Group — the 97th having ten days earlier engaged in the 8th Air Force's first heavy bomber sortie into occupied Europe. In exchange for its brand-new bombers, the 92nd was given the 97th's well-worn B-17Es. While the exchange

Page 1881 illustration from 1943's "Pilot Operating Instructions for Army Models B-17." United States Army Air Forces.

made sense, not a small amount of grumbling seems to have occurred within the 92nd.

Grumbling aside, one morning just over a month later Willis Grove found himself preparing for the real thing.

... the October 9th raid on Lille ...

On the afternoon of October 9th, 1942, reports of a massive aerial raid into occupied France peppered the various afternoon editions of the *Spokane Chronicle*. Rehashing the prior day's events, the front page of the next morning's *Spokesmen-Review* blared "*U. S. Daylight Raid on Lille is Colossal Blow from Air.*" As with many wartime headlines, the real story was very different.

Located near the border with Belgium in northern France, the city of Lille's population at the beginning of World War II was around 200,000. As the crow flies, downtown Lille was about 175 miles from the 92nd's airfield at Bovingdon. The primary targets for the October 9th raid were the railroad, engineering, and manufacturing facilities located around the city's perimeter.

Several notable firsts were involved in this raid. Consisting of a mixed force of 84 B-17 Flying Fortresses and 24 B-24 Liberators, this was the first time over 100 heavy bombers were assembled for a single attack. This was the first time the 8th Air Force's B-24 Liberators were sent over occupied Europe. And this was the first time B-17s from the 407th Squadron were sent into action.

The initial claim of massive damage as reported in Spokane's newspapers proved wildly exaggerated. Most of the bombs fell wide of the mark, and only two enemy fighters were downed. Four American bombers were lost, and 48 damaged — two beyond repair. Ten airmen were wounded and 29 reported missing in action.

This was the first time most of these airmen had to deal with lethal countermeasures. Meanwhile the Luftwaffe was busy trying to learn how to down the American bombers. Some reports say the B-17's large size

was causing attacking fighters to open fire too soon and breakaway too early. This unfamiliarity is a common explanation why the Luftwaffe wasn't as effective early on in the war as it should have been. But statistics seem to suggest they learned soon enough.

As for the gunners on the Fortresses, the manner in which the interceptors dropped away after an attack reportedly led crewmen to believe they'd downed the attackers when actually few if any of the planes had been hit. Initially the airmen were shocked by how quickly each enemy fighter came into and then back out of range — just a few seconds. But the Americans would also learn.

... a mid-air collision ...

The October 9th raid was one of several instances in which the 8th Army Air Force's declaration that the 92nd Group would be allowed to "*fly some combat missions while training replacement crews*" was acted upon. The following account of Willis Grove's participation in that raid, and the mid-air collision most every story about the raid references, has been drawn from multiple sources — the most valuable being first-person narratives penned by certain of the men aboard the three aircraft directly involved in this notable sliver of history. What we don't have is Willis's own recollections of that event.

Regarding the last, there's nothing remarkable in that. As Willis's son, Gordon, noted, his father seldom talked about his part in the war — a reluctance not uncommon among that era's combat veterans.

Documents supplied by Gordon Grove indicate that on October 1st, eight days before the raid on Lille, Willis was elevated from the rank of Sergeant to that of Staff Sergeant. Documents gathered from other sources indicate that Willis was assigned as bombardier on a B-17E named Phyllis — tail number 19020 — for the October 9th raid. Phyllis, previously among the 97th Bombardment Group's aircraft, was one of the older 'E' series bombers the 92nd received in exchange

for the brand-new B-17Fs it brought over.

In some accounts Willis is mistakenly listed as "Lieutenant R. W. Grove." Our assumption is that since the 8th Army Air Force's edict against enlisted bombardiers was published the prior March, any mention of a sergeant flying as bombardier was assumed to be an error in need of correction. Regardless, on October 9th it appears no one fully aware of Willis's actual rank cared to object.

As noted, three aircraft played a part in the incident that scuttled what was to have been Willis's first combat mission. And as copilot on the aircraft causing — but otherwise uninvolved in — that midair collision, then Lieutenant James McLaughlin, author of the previously mentioned *The Mighty Eighth in WWII*, was one of the witnesses.

The pilot of the 407th Bombardment Squadron's lead B-17 for this mission was the squadron's commanding officer, Major Robert Keck. Below is an outline of what McLaughlin, flying as Keck's copilot, recalled of that morning.

Having been roused very early, the aircrews selected for that day's mission gathered in Bovingdon's briefing room at 6:00 AM. The briefing stated all airmen were to be at their aircraft by 8:00. Once airborne, the 92nd Bombardment Group's 325th Squadron would lead the formation. The 407th Squadron would cluster into a defensive group to the side of, and both above and behind, the 325th, (whether to the left or right of the lead squadron was not indicated in the reports) and the 327th would do likewise, though below and to the opposite side of the lead squadron. (*See diagram page 1886.*)

McLaughlin reported the 92nd began rising into a clear sky at 10:00 A.M. The aircraft formed up over the field, then climbed to 15,000 feet during the flight to the English coastline. At that point they fell into line behind another group heading to France, and all continued to climb.

Part of a typical grouping of three aircraft (*See diagram facing page.*), the plane trailing on Major Keck's left wing carried the

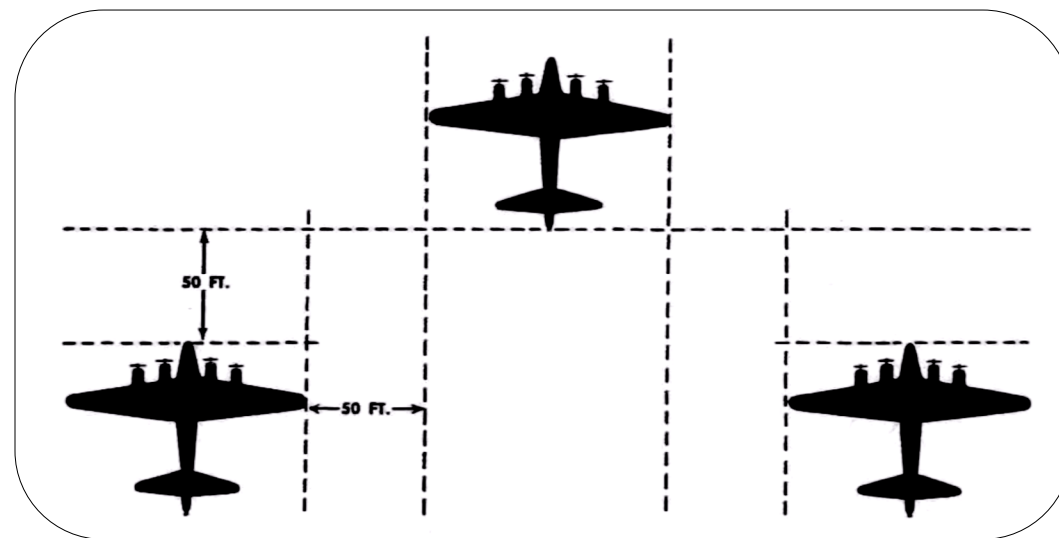
tail number 19051. It was nicknamed either Flaming Maybe or Flaming Mayme, depending on the source. Lieutenant Eugene Wiley was that ship's pilot. The aircraft on Major Keck's right wing — the previously introduced Phyllis — was piloted by Lieutenant James C. Dempsey. Wiley's and Dempsey's bombers were about to collide — twice.

Flying as an observer on Lieutenant Wiley's aircraft, the 92nd's security officer, Captain Joseph R. Harmon, made a report on the incident. In that report the following aircrew were listed as being aboard pilot Wiley's bomber, along with their duty stations: Lieutenant Donald Treu, copilot; Thomas H. Waldon, navigator; Lieutenant Joseph F. Thornton, bombardier; Staff Sergeant Lawrence V. McDaniel, top turret gunner (and probably flight engineer); Corporal Joseph J. Struske, waist gunner; Corporal Donald E. Hutton, waist gunner; Sergeant Everett K. Teaford, ball turret gunner; and Private First Class Forrest D. Irwin, tail gunner. The only position not covered in this list is that of radio operator — leaving the crew one short of its normal compliment of ten, unless Captain Harmon took that duty.

The crewmen on Lieutenant Dempsey's B-17 included Lieutenant James B. Foster, copilot; Lieutenant W. D. Toole, navigator; Lieutenant R. W. Grove, bombardier; Sergeant Sidney Hardaway, top turret (and assumedly flight engineer); Private First Class Stanley W. Brooks, (waist?) gunner; Sergeant John Paulick, (waist?) gunner; Staff Sergeant James M. Kirk, tail gunner. On this list the Phyllis is also flying one short with the absence of a (specified) ball turret operator.

As for the collision, the following is drawn primarily from Lieutenant Wiley and Captain Harmon's point of view as recorded in clippings from various (largely unidentified) sources provided by Mike Paulick, son of Sergeant John Paulick, acting waist gunner on Dempsey's ship.

Though Wiley did recall the "*takeoff and rendezvous*" as routine, he also noted, "*As we climbed out over the North Sea into the*



Minimum Clearances When Flying in Three Plane Vee Formation.

The above diagram, clipped from the 1944 edition of "Pilot Training Manual for the Flying Fortress B-17" as published by the "Headquarters, Army Air Force, Office of Flying Safety," outlines the minimal clearances required when flying B-17s in the basic three aircraft formation. The accompanying text states, "In flying the Vee formation, aircraft will not be flown closer to one another than 50 feet from nose to tail and wingtip to wingtip. Maintain this horizontal clearance whenever vertical clearance is less than 50 feet, thus providing a minimum of 50 feet clearance between wingtips as well as the line of nose and tail under all formation flying conditions."

sun, our windows began to frost up." As for why, he suggested it may have been because the "*silica gel*" needed replacement.

To lessen the possibility of vision being obscured by ice or frost, three of the B-17's particularly critical forward windscreens — the two pilots' windows and the bombardier's sighting window — were glazed with double panes of glass. As the aircraft gained or lost altitude, the pressure difference would force air into and out of the airspace between these panes. Since inward migrating air could introduce moisture that would turn to "*frost*" when chilled, a dehydrator tube was clipped next to each window. This unit was a length of clear plastic tube containing silica gel (actually granulated crystals of silica) that

had been chemically treated to change color as it absorbed moisture. The inside pane of each double-glazed window was perforated with a metal nipple allowing for the easy passage of air. A rubber tube ran from the nipple to one end of the clear plastic dehydration unit. As the air pressure changed with increases and decreases in the aircraft's altitude, moisture passing through the silica gel with any inflowing air was captured and held — keeping the air between the windows dry. Seeing the windows "*frost up*" as the bomber reached chiller altitudes — especially if that frost appeared to be condensing between the panes of glass — Wiley's first reaction would likely have been to check the color of the silica gel. If it were light blue or pink, he would have known the

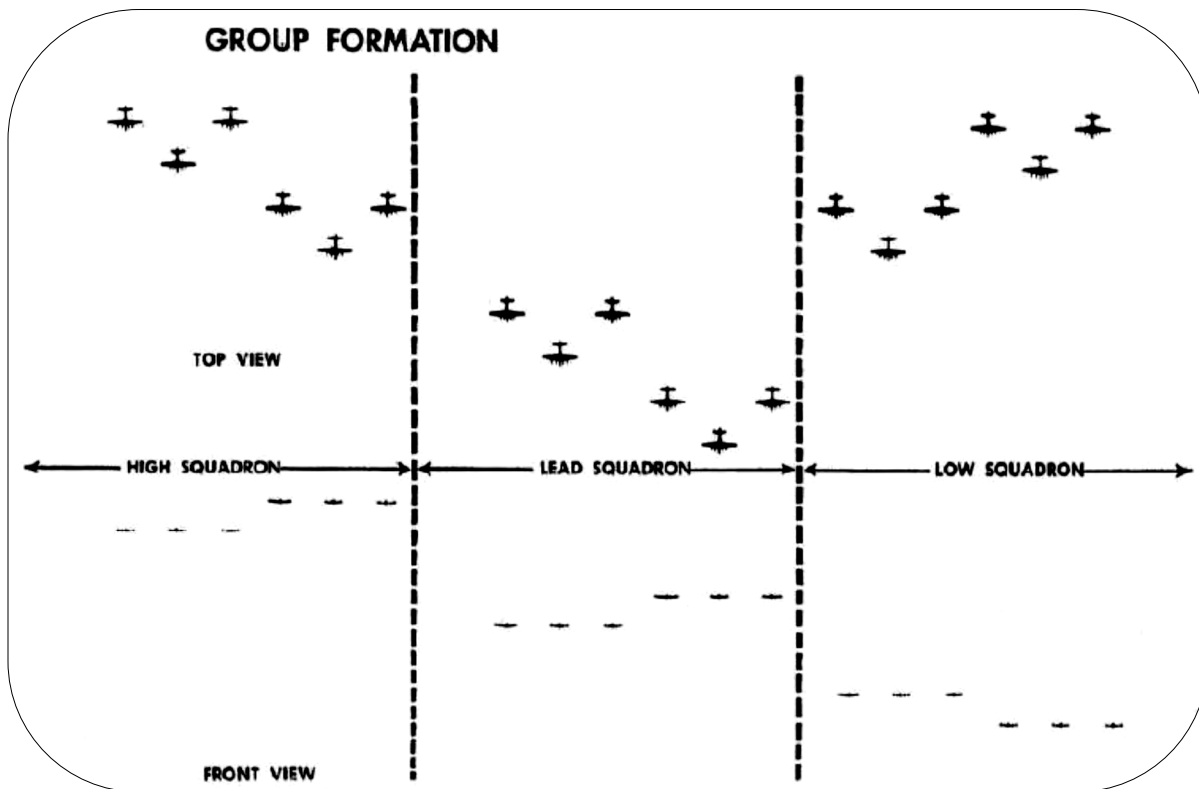


Diagram of Idealized Group Formation.

Clipped from the 1944 edition of "Pilot Training Manual for the Flying Fortress B-17" as published by the "Headquarters, Army Air Force, Office of Flying Safety," the text accompanying the above diagram states, "The high squadron flies 150 feet above and 100 feet behind the lead squadron with its second element stacked down and echeloned to the outside of the formation. The low squadron flies 150 feet below and 100 feet behind the lead squadron with its second element stacked down and echeloned to the outside of the formation." Within each squadron — in this diagram consisting of six planes in two three-plane elements — each element is separated by 50 vertical feet.

gel was in need of replacement — an error on maintenance's part.

Accounts differ as to how far from the coast of France the collision occurred. Captain Harmon places it "above the coast," while a notation in a book titled *92nd Bomb Group (H), Fame's Favored Few* placed it "about 20 miles west of Dunkirk." The gen-

eral consensus seems to be it was near the coast, but still over the English Channel or North Sea.

Captain Harmon reported the altitude at the time of collision as 24,000 feet, and the airspeed as 200 miles per hour.

In order to avoid the turbulence created by the lead plane's passage, as well as to

give sufficient time to react to any change in spacing, Major Keck's two wingmen would have positioned themselves at the same level but at least 50 feet behind the lead aircraft, and at least 50 feet either side of the lead aircraft's wingtips. (See diagram page 1885.)

According to Lieutenant Wiley's written account, the action precipitating the collision was Major Keck's piloting of the lead bomber. That assessment was shared by James McLaughlin, as copilot on Keck's plane.

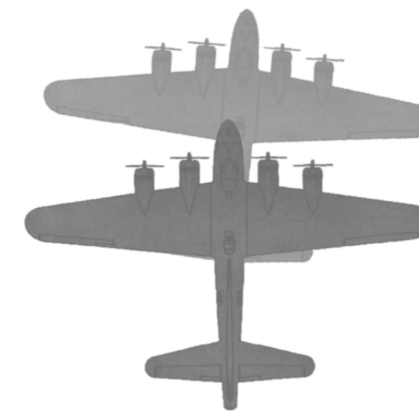
As Wiley perceived it from his trailing left-wing position, Major Keck — apparently believing he was about to overtake the lead squadron flying below — throttled back without warning. The result, Wiley stated, was that "Dempsey (on Keck's right wing) and I went by him like he was parked."

As noted in the aforementioned Army Air Forces B-17 pilot training manual, "It is particularly important for the leader to avoid violent maneuvers or improper positions which will cause undue difficulty for the wingmen."

In his report, Wiley suggested slowing the entire 407th Squadron could have been accomplished without Keck's abruptness, and in a manner that would have clearly communicated the lead aircraft's intent, by "S-ing back and forth." This is assumed to mean that by initiating a series of very gentle side to side slalom-like turns the squadron could have been slowed without any adjustment of the throttle. If done properly, that would have had little to no effect on the other bombardment squadrons within the entire bombardment group's formation. (See diagram facing page for textbook arrangement.)

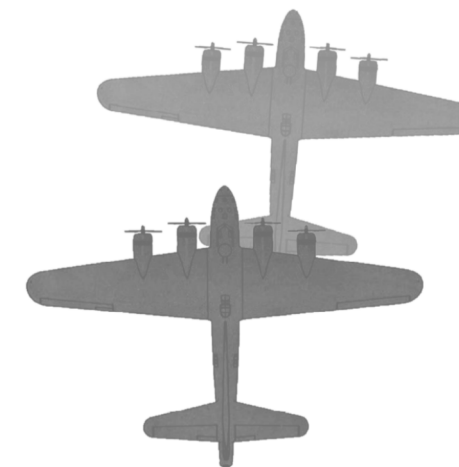
Having darted forward of the lead plane, Wiley and Lieutenant Dempsey both throttled back, and as Wiley reported, "tried to regain our positions."

Observing from the bombardier station inside the bubble-nose of Dempsey's aircraft, it's probable Sergeant Grove was also extremely surprised when the lead aircraft rapidly slid backward. That surprise would



Collision:

Above: As Dempsey's B-17 under-flies Wiley's craft, his vertical stabilizer strikes the bomb-bay doors of Wiley's airplane. Below: As Wiley pulled into climb mode and slowed relative to Dempsey's aircraft, the two bombers pull apart. As Dempsey pushed into dive mode, the vertical stabilizer and rudder on his tail rose up into the right side propellers on Wiley's bomber.



shortly change into something else as chaos broke loose at the other end of Dempsey's airplane.

Throttled back and once again behind the lead bomber, Wiley reported he started to ease forward — closing the distance between his craft and Major Keck's. That maneuver was hampered by the fact that a blinding morning sun and the frost inside the pilot's window "made it extremely difficult to see."

Suddenly Lieutenant Wiley saw Lieutenant Dempsey's aircraft crossing under and slightly ahead of his own. Wiley recorded Dempsey's direction of travel relative to his own as drifting "a little to my right."

Sergeant James Kirk, the tail-gunner in Lieutenant Dempsey's bomber, sat under the plane's rudder in a windowed box that gave him a view to both sides and the rear — meaning he could have seen Wiley's B-17 crossing above. That said, if the transparent plastic bubble of the ball-turret mounted on the underside of Lieutenant Wiley's bomber had been turned in the right direction, the belly-gunner, Sergeant Everett Teaford, curled inside the ball, would have likely had the best view of all as the two craft came together. But then, considering what was about to happen, neither of these gentlemen — Dempsey's tail gunner or Wiley's ball turret gunner — would have been in an enviable position for the simple fact that rapid escape to a safer part of their aircraft, or out of the aircraft entirely if the bombers should tangle into a falling mass of wreckage, would have been difficult — and doubly so for the airman folded into the ball turret.

That considered, we've yet to find any testimony from either of these gentlemen about what they saw, or any information about what the intercom chatter within either ship may have warned the pilots prior to or during the incident.

On seeing Dempsey below, Wiley stated that his first action was to pull back on the yolk — to gain some vertical distance by climbing. One consequence of that control input would be that the elevators — the flaps

on the trailing edge of the tail's horizontal stabilizer (essentially its rear wing) — would pivot upward, pushing the tail down toward Dempsey's craft. In Wiley's version of the incident, Dempsey's "rudder struck my bomb-bay doors" — said doors being just a few yards forward of Sergeant Teaford's ball turret.

We don't know whether the official determination states Dempsey's tailfin struck Wiley's bomb bay first, or whether Wiley's bomb bay struck Dempsey's tail first. The only thing subsequent events makes clear is that things could and would get much worse.

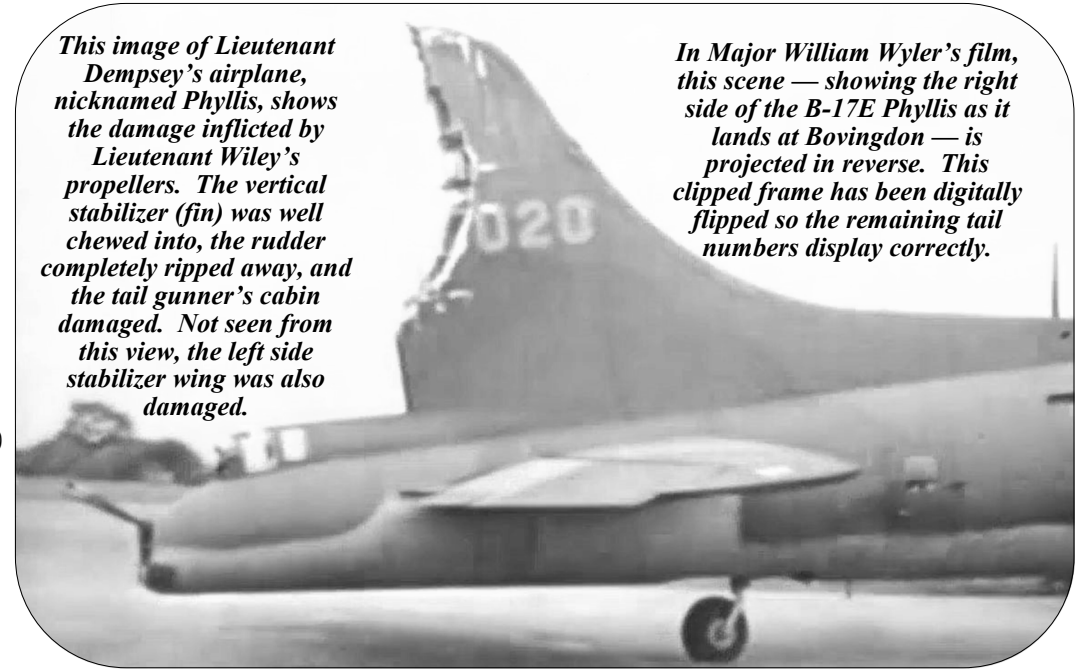
In response to something seen from the flight deck, or perhaps feeling the bump of the first collision, or maybe warnings shouted over the intercom, as soon as Lieutenant Dempsey realized there was another aircraft directly above, it's probable he pushed forward on his controls to gain some vertical distance from Wiley's plane. Said push would pivot the tail of Dempsey's plane upward as the nose dropped downward. As both aircraft continued to change position relative to each other, Dempsey's bruised vertical fin was pushed into the lower tips of the propellers spinning just forward of the above plane's right wing.

Whatever movements led to this second collision, the result was that shredded bits of Dempsey's dorsal fin and rudder were thrown in the direction the propellers were spinning — down toward the projection housing Dempsey's own tail-gunner, severely damaging Sergeant Kirk's machinegun cabin, but not, as a matter of sheer luck, the sergeant himself. Meanwhile debris slung down toward the left wing of Dempsey's horizontal stabilizer and damaged that as well. Next the debris sprayed across the gap between the two aircraft, some of it perforating the nose of Wiley's bomber and one or more of the fuel tanks in its right wing.

After his groundside inspection, Wiley described the damage to his bomber's

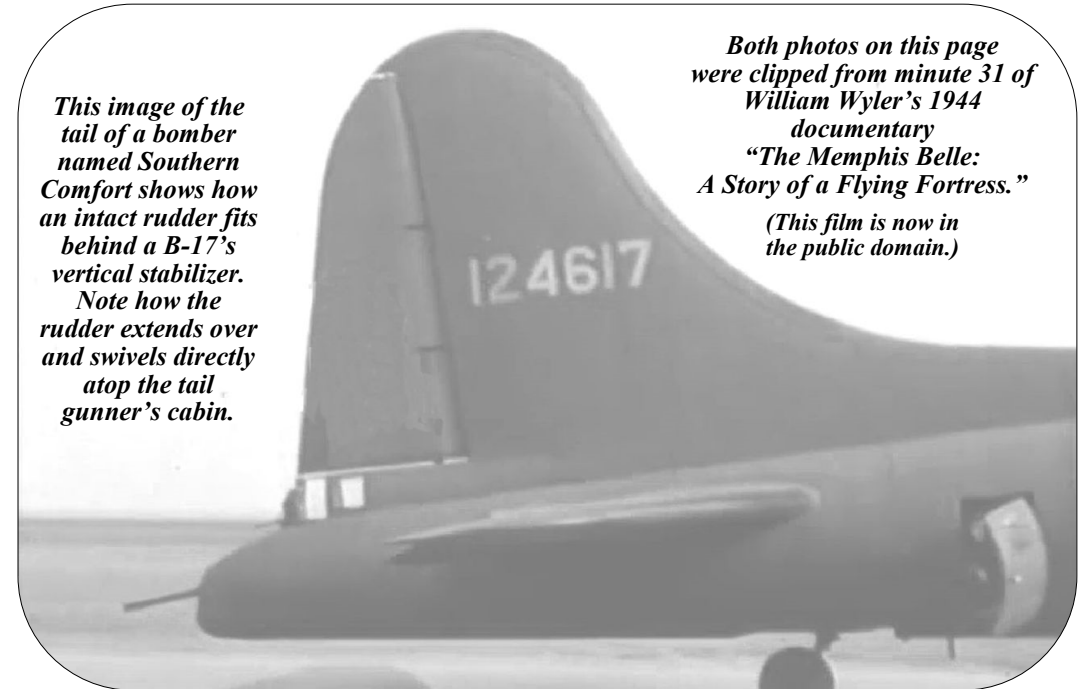
— text continues on page 1892 —

This image of Lieutenant Dempsey's airplane, nicknamed Phyllis, shows the damage inflicted by Lieutenant Wiley's propellers. The vertical stabilizer (fin) was well chewed into, the rudder completely ripped away, and the tail gunner's cabin damaged. Not seen from this view, the left side stabilizer wing was also damaged.



In Major William Wyler's film, this scene — showing the right side of the B-17E Phyllis as it lands at Bovington — is projected in reverse. This clipped frame has been digitally flipped so the remaining tail numbers display correctly.

This image of the tail of a bomber named Southern Comfort shows how an intact rudder fits behind a B-17's vertical stabilizer. Note how the rudder extends over and swivels directly atop the tail gunner's cabin.



Both photos on this page were clipped from minute 31 of William Wyler's 1944 documentary "The Memphis Belle: A Story of a Flying Fortress." (This film is now in the public domain.)



Crew of B-17E Number 41-9020 — aka Phyllis — October 9th, 1942.

Above — Left to Right: Pilot, Lt. James C. Dempsey; Co-Pilot, Lt. James B. Foster; Bombardier, Sgt. Robert W. Grove; Engineer, Corp. Sidney T. Hardaway (top Turret); Asst. Eng. Corp. Stanley W. Brooks (gunner); Radio Operator, Corp. R. B. Sandlin; Asst. R. O. T/Sgt. John Paulick (gunner); Rear Gunner, Sgt. J. W. Kirk. (Navigator Lt. W. D. Toole, not shown.)

Facing page: Taken from a slightly different angle, in this view Corporal Sandlin, the radio operator, is obscured behind Sergeant Paulick.

(These photos from the Gordon Grove collection.)



Both images, this and facing page, believed to be United States Army Signal Corps photos.

— text continued from page 1888 —

right side as similar to a large number of shrapnel burst — the appearance of which all these airmen would soon become well acquainted with.

But the most immediate problem for Wiley was that this second collision had “knocked all the prop ends off” both his right engines, with the spinning remains so out of balance “the ship started to vibrate badly” — meaning Wiley had to feather what remained of the propellers on both those engines.

With a large segment of Dempsey’s vertical fin and all of its rudder missing — Wiley stated Dempsey “peeled off and went straight down;” as if a hard splash into the ocean four and a half miles below was inescapable.

Flying as Dempsey’s bombardier, Sergeant Grove would have experienced this initial plunge from his front row seat inside the bomber’s transparent nose.

The 92nd Bombardment Group’s security officer, Captain Harmon, recorded his personal assessment as observer on Wiley’s ship this way, “Our first feeling was that our number was up.”

Considering the damage to his aircraft, Lieutenant Wiley decided the best course of action was to return to Bovingdon. Before landing in a damaged bomber, it was common practice to lighten the aircraft by dropping any remaining ordinance into the ocean. After Wiley jettisoned the bombs, the crew discovered the bomb bay doors, damaged by Dempsey’s tailfin, wouldn’t close. Concerned that flying through London’s airspace with his bomb bay doors open might invite groundfire, Wiley lowered his landing gear to suggest his intention was to land. But with two engines out, the bomb bay doors open, the landing gear down, the possibility of unseen damage that could result in a catastrophic failure at any moment, and the fact that he could barely maintain an airspeed of 120 miles per hour — only 30 or so over stall speed — Wiley decided to play it safe. He

asked his navigator to find the nearest landing strip on their current heading capable of taking a B-17.

The navigator located a small grass airstrip near the village of Delting in County Kent, some 35 miles after crossing the English coastline. Bovingdon airfield was another 55 miles, and that through the most heavily defended airspace in England.

On landing at Delting, Wiley contacted air/sea rescue to report Dempsey’s bomber may have gone down in the water. He then called Bovingdon to report they’d successfully landed at an alternate site, and that none in his crew were injured, though the plane was heavily damaged. That’s when Wiley learned that Dempsey’s aircraft, despite the way it initially dropped away, had made it all the way home to Bovingdon — likewise, with all crew uninjured.

Beginning with the squadron leader’s decision to slow in a manner not recommended during formation flying, the subsequent chain of events fed first on a small detail overlooked by the maintenance crew, then the split-second decisions of two flight crews already rattled by what would have been their first foray into enemy airspace.

Regarding being rattled, Wiley later learned it wasn’t a loss of control that caused Lieutenant Dempsey to peel away after Wiley’s propellers chopped away a fair portion of Dempsey’s tail. According to Wiley, Dempsey “thought the noise (of his tail being shredded) was machine gun fire from fighters, and that’s why he peeled off.”

While we can’t confirm Wiley’s recollection of Dempsey’s words, we can conclude that the responsiveness of Dempsey’s aircraft was so limited after the collision it likely constituted a hazard to the rest of the group — suggesting dropping from formation and trying to make it home was the only correct decision.

As to the difficulty of maneuvering with that kind of damage, society member and accomplished pilot Chuck Stewart explained, “Loss of the vertical tail and rudder

surfaces would have gotten the pilot’s attention, but would not have been a life-or-death emergency like loss of the horizontal portion of the tail and elevators would have. An aircraft is turned by banking using the ailerons and elevator, not the rudder. The upright tail and rudder assembly mainly provides yaw stability (directional stability). On a multi-engine aircraft loss of the vertical tail and rudder could be compensated for nicely by

differential power in cruise configuration (by applying more or less power to the engine or engines on one of the wings). Keeping the plane from yawing wildly (swinging left and right) while reducing speed and lowering the landing gear and flaps for landing would have been the real challenge.”

While coaxing the bomber home was an excellent piece of airmanship, the images obtained while and after Dempsey set his broken ship down at Bovingdon’s airfield have become iconic pieces of World War II’s visual history — history as represented by several remarkable photographs and a few seconds of film found folded into one of World War II’s both best and least known motion pictures.

... at minute 31 ...

In the spring of 1943, well respected Hollywood motion picture director William Wyler, at the time a Major in the Army’s Air Corps, was embedded with the 8th Army Air Force filming a public morale documentary about the first B-17 bomber and crew to complete 25 missions over occupied Europe.

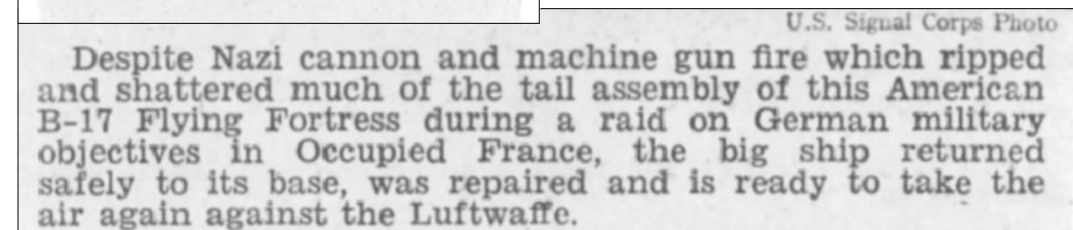
A Clipping:

With the source of this clipping unknown, this photo seems to have appeared in a number of newspapers in late 1942. The tail number and unique damage clearly identifies the aircraft as the 92nd Bombardment Group’s Phyllis. The accompanying caption is largely fictitious, though the suggestion that a brutally “ripped and shattered” Fortress could often remain airborne is accurate.



U.S. Signal Corps Photo
Despite Nazi cannon and machine gun fire which ripped and shattered much of the tail assembly of this American B-17 Flying Fortress during a raid on German military objectives in Occupied France, the big ship returned safely to its base, was repaired and is ready to take the air again against the Luftwaffe.

Clipping from the Gordon Grove collection.



What he came up with was 1944's classic *The Memphis Belle: A Story of a Flying Fortress*.

Though much of what was seen on-screen was shot aboard the Memphis Belle and other aircraft in the 8th Air Force's 91st Bombardment Group during actual missions, a lot was also bits and pieces of wartime footage from other 8th Air Force sources. Among those bits and pieces are a few seconds showing the flying fortress Phyllis landing at Bovingdon after the October 9th 1942 mission. There's also several seconds of the crew standing at the rear of the damaged plane. That extra bit of 16-millimeter film shows much the same scene as captured in the two still photos reproduced on page 1890 and 1891. And lastly there are several closeups of Phyllis's damaged tail. All this fits within minute 31 of the film. Oddly enough, the Bovingdon film strips were somehow printed in reverse — that evident since the Phyllis's tail numbers appear as a mirror image in the film.

While editing the film for its April,

1944 release, Major Wyler appears to have chosen to include the clips from 1942's Lille mission for no other reason than dramatic effect — the same dramatic effect that has kept the stills of Phyllis's crew resurfacing among air-war historians over all the decades since.

Whether Willis Grove knew these images were part of Wyler's film isn't known. If he did, that's something else he didn't, for reasons of his own, widely share.

All this aside, since the Phyllis never dropped its ordinance on the designated target, or even clearly penetrated into enemy-held territory before being forced to turn back, Willis Grove's first mission didn't count toward the twenty five he'd have to fly in order to be assigned to rear echelon service — or, in his case, the fighter pilot training he'd long desired. For Willis, those 25 plunges into what history records as some of the most hazardous combat duty of World War II still lay ahead.

... to be continued next month ...

"The Memphis Belle: A Story of a Flying Fortress."
Online Viewing Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

The entire 1944 film is viewable online via the following link to the Library of Congress.
<https://www.loc.gov/item/mbrs00009301/>

Leno and the Sleeping Angel.

by

Wally Lee Parker

The Antler Café was in the brick annex just to the south of the old hotel at the intersection of Deer Park's Main and Crawford. It contained a walled off lounge area — essentially a bar — so it kept longer hours than you might expect of a small-town restaurant. That made it a good place to stop for a late-night snack. And for the underaged, it

was about the only place to stop after the evening had worn on a bit.

As best I can recall, the last time I saw Leno Prestini was one such evening in 1962. Gripped by acute teenage boredom, I'd driven into town and found myself in a booth in the Antler. Leno was sitting by himself at the counter. Leaning upright on the stool next

The Pend Oreille County Museum is Open Weekends Throughout the Summer.
For more information, visit <https://www.pochsmuseum.org/>.

to him was what appeared to be a framed and shrouded canvas. When one of his acquaintances walked by, he swiveled around and asked, "Do you want to see my angel?"

They talked for a few minutes, and during the conversation Leno lifted the cloth cover off his new painting. All I could remember was a wash of cool pastels, trending toward blues and whites, and the clearly defined face of a winged woman; clear definition — combined with a somewhat to overwhelmingly ambiguous message — being Leno's style. Like most memories aged half a century, when I once again saw the image a decade or so back, the only way I was sure it was the same painting was the date — that being the year of completion Leno would scribe just below the signature on most of his works.

Leno, thin framed, short in stature, with skin roughened by a life in the sun and wind, would have been in his mid-fifties at the time he unveiled his angel painting. In 1908, with Leno just into his second year, his mother, Caterina, brought him and his older brother, Battista, over from Italy. The boys' father, Luigi, had immigrated several years earlier. By 1911 the reunited family had made their way to Washington State, and by 1912 to Clayton. A half-dozen years later, Luigi died — leaving Caterina a lifelong widow.

All that aside, running around in blue jeans and cowboy hat, in his last years Leno looked as well-worn as any other denizen of Clayton. And as well-worn as the town itself — if you know what I mean.

Back then Leno was the only example I was acquainted with of what everyone supposed a real artist to be. And I always wanted to talk to him. I was fascinated by what I read about artists in general, and even more so by the detached, bohemian lifestyle many artists reportedly lived — detached in the sense they didn't seem to know exactly where they belonged in this world, and bohemian as defined in the dictionary as a person, usually a writer or artist, who lives with little regard for societal expectations. That resonated with me back then, and it still does today

— though, due to my desire for the security of a home and the comfort of regular meals, only in theory. But other than an occasional nod and hello, I don't think I ever spoke to Leno. After all, it's hard to strike up a conversation when you're pretty sure you've nothing to say the other person would have the slightest interest in hearing. Most everyone I've talked to in the years since say that assumption was simply wrong. They say Leno was forever up for an interesting talk — or, if nothing else, an argument would do. And being a teenager, I could always find something to argue about — be it the meaning of art or the meaning of life. But any such opportunity was about to evaporate.

Early one morning in the spring of 1963, a few days after returning home from California, Leno shot himself. It was a lingering death drawn out over several weeks, though it appears he was unaware during the ordeal. As to the reason he made this choice, people often speak with a certainty I find elusive. Some say it was the fear of being debilitated by a stroke; having had a small one already. Some say it was the fretful wear induced by dealing with his recently deceased mother's chronic melancholy — a melancholy he seems to have inherited.

While either may be true, another possibility is evidenced by what are believed to be Leno's last two paintings — those done while staying at his brother's California residence.

According to Battista, in the several years prior to his death Leno had been spending a lot of time in California attempting to gain at least a semblance of recognition within the larger artistic community. Regarding such, things had not gone well.

Battista suggested Leno had been told his style was out of fashion. If he wanted to be accepted, he had to adopt a more modern presentation. One popular trend at that time (and still today) was toward thick applications of paint using something like a putty knife — a technique that seemed antithetical to the frugal sensibilities imposed by the Great Depression. In some of his last works we see Leno,



"Sleeping Angel," by Leno Prestini — oil on canvas — 1962.

*Photo by Wally Lee Parker.
Permission to use this image courtesy of
the Stevens County Historical Society & the Prestini Estate.*

possibly in desperation, beginning to experiment with this technique. And his last two paintings were given over to it entirely. Regarding those two richly colored landscapes, Leno seems to have been so disappointed he threw both in the garbage. Thankfully, Battista retrieved them.

While not easily recognizable as Leno's, these last paintings are clearly the work of an accomplished artist. But Leno must have seen something else in them. If he told someone what that something was, that revelation seems lost to history since all that knew him well have now passed on.

What has not been lost are most of his paintings. At a 2008 showing of the Stevens County Historical Society's extensive Prestini collection, while surrounded by seventy some examples dating from the mid-1930 to just a smattering of weeks before Leno's death, well-known regional artist David Govedare commented on how unusual it was to see such an inclusive representation of an

entire life's work in one room. To Govedare it was instructive, as well as impressive. Govedare and the other artists invited to this showing noted Leno's craftsmanship. What Leno saw in his mind's eye had been explicitly distilled into the images. If we see puzzling cyphers, they're intentional. If we see blatant exposition, that's intentional as well. The implication being, whether realistic or cartoonish, pastoral or disturbing, Leno's skill allowed him to represent exactly what he wanted us to see.

Every time I have a chance to see his work, I wish I'd had the wherewithal to talk to him. That said, Leno can still talk to us. That's the thing about artists. As long as their creations remain a part of the public's consciousness, at least a trace of what they wanted to say — and maybe even some of the things they loved to argue about — remain as well. All we need to do is take the time to listen.

— end —

Letters, Email, Bouquets & Brickbats

— or —

Bits of Chatter, Trivia, & Notices — all strung together.

... stories of the greatest generation ...

Over the years the *Mortarboard* has published four multipart articles detailing the military service of certain World War II veterans. While the early history of these people is solidly rooted in the local community, their wartime stories often take us far afield. That said, it's been an honor to remind everyone of the sacrifice once required of these formerly young men.

The first of these tales is a six-part article titled "*Tuffy's War: The Alvin 'Tuffy' Luhr Story.*" Beginning in the June 2009 issue (#9) of the *Mortarboard*, this story is based on seven tape-recorded interviews the *Mortar-*

board's current editor conducted with Mr. Luhr, as well as a tremendous amount of collateral research. The article recounts Tuffy's prewar life, as well as his time in a Europe bound infantry unit attached to Patton's Third Army.

Among the more emotionally difficult parts of Tuffy's story was his recounting of his visit to one of Hitler's just liberated death camps. And then there were the details our research uncovered regarding the unsettling in-the-line-of-duty death of one of Tuffy's younger brothers — Second Lieutenant Orland Luhr, United State Army Air Corps.

A three-part first-person recollection

of the Pacific war begins in the July 2011 issue (#39) of the *Mortarboard*. Under the title “*Becoming a Marine*,” this well-told story is sketched by a lifelong Clayton area resident, and the gentleman who lived it, Mr. Art Steltzing.

The next author begins his story with this observation. “*When I think about it, it seems as though it was in another lifetime or maybe two. So many things have happened, so much has changed, and I’ve tacked on more years than I ever expected since then.*”

The above is the first paragraph of Wey Simpson’s recollection of his experiences in the Pacific War, and its aftermath in occupied Japan. The first part appears in the *Mortarboard’s* April 2015 issue (#84) — with the rest continuing through three more issues. A skilled wordsmith, Wey has condensed the wartime portion of his autobiography especially for publication in the *Mortarboard*.

The last of these four stories is currently being serialized on the pages of our newsletter (part four in this issue, and at least

one more issue to go). “*Twenty-Six Missions: The Robert Willis Grove Story*,” differs from the other articles mentioned in that Willis passed away in 1992, so all we have to work with are various documents and scraps of memories held by others. Even if Mr. Grove were still with us, his son, Gordon, tells us his father seldom talked about the war. Leaving a question of whether he’d do so even now.

Of the men in these articles, Wey is the only one still with us — Tuffy having passed in 2013 and Art in 2014. Unless other families have documents, government records, personal letters and the like to bring forward, it seems doubtful we’ll have many more stories of the greatest generation to archive. If you have information that would prove us wrong, please advise.

If you’d like to read any of the articles mentioned above, follow the link in the box below, or contact the society via the means noted on the last page of this issue.

———— *Wally Lee Parker* ————

All Past Issues of the *Mortarboard* Can Be Viewed on Our Website:
<http://www.cdphs.org/mortarboard-newsletters.html>

Minutes of the Clayton/Deer Park Historical Society ———— June 8, 2019 ————

In attendance at 316 East Crawford on ‘A’ Street, Deer Park (Margaret and ‘A’ Street): Marilyn Reilly, Bill Sebright, Wally Parker, Pat Parker, Mike Reiter, Roberta Reiter, Mark Wagner, Tom Costigan, Rachelle Fletcher, Mary Jo Reiter, Lorraine Nord, Pete Coffin, Judy Coffin, Roxanne Camp, Ella Jenkins, Sue Rehms, Rick Brodrick, Larry Bowen, Mark Bryant, Diana Bryant, Jeff Clark, Chuck Lyons, Betty Deuber, Mark Deuber, Dick Purdy, Bill Odynski, Loretta Odynski, Don Ball, Elaine Ball.

Society President Bill Sebright called the meeting to order at 10:00 AM. He reported: 1) Jeff Lilly, Rick Broderick, Mike Reiter, and Bill Sebright moved our second glass display case from Joe Powlowski’s Precious Metals to the museum using Jeff’s trailer. 2) Jamie Mabbutt emailed a request for information on her Great Uncle Charles J. Mabbutt. We were unable to add anything to the information she had. 3) Mark Chouteau from Slaughterville, Oklahoma, called to get information on his dad, Terry Orin Eidsmoe, born 1940 in Deer

The Loon Lake Historical Society’s Summer Hours — Saturdays, 10 a.m. till 2 p.m.:
For more information, visit <https://www.loonlakehistoricalsociety.com/>.

Park. Also, his granddad, Orin Eidsmoe who died May 5, 1959, in Yakima County. Tom Costigan gave Mark Bill’s number. Pete Coffin produced 3 family trees for Mark. 4) Two World War II bombers (a B-25 and a TBM Avenger) will be at Felts Field until 4 PM today. A 30 to 40-minute ride in the B 25 costs \$495. 5) We received a \$50 check in honor of Betty Burdette. The donor mentioned how important Betty was to our Society.

Society Treasurer Mark Wagner reported the main checking account ended the month at \$8,865.23. There were deposits of \$837.00. A transfer was made to the web hosting account for \$500.00. Checks written were \$20.00 to Bill Sebright for postage, and one for \$126.31 for Wally Parker for supplies. The web hosting account ended the month at \$669.54 with a withdrawal of \$11.84. The Brickyard Day account is at \$1,892.06.

Society Vice President- No one has stepped forward to become Vice President.

Print editor Wally Parker reported: 1) One hundred twenty copies of the June *Mortarboard* (#134) have been printed for distribution. The PDF versions have been sent to the society’s website for posting and to the Loon Lake Library for on-demand printing. This 16-page issue contains part three of the editor’s serialized *Twenty-Six Missions: The Robert Willis Grove Story*, and an interesting piece by Peter Coffin titled *Motion Pictures in Deer Park*. 2) This summer’s events — Settlers Day, Brickyard Day, the Clayton Fair — present great photo opportunities. And it has become a tradition of sorts to present a photo essay — a montage of images from one or more of these events — in an autumn issue of the *Mortarboard*. Regarding any photos submitted for this purpose, it would be extremely helpful to remember the journalistic formula for obtaining a complete story: Who? What? When? Where? Why? Truth be known, a picture isn’t worth a thousand words, but each picture accompanied by the handful of words needed to answer the above questions can turn a string of apparently random images into an absorbing photo essay.



Sign Under Construction.
Mike Reiter and Rick Brodrick constructed the framework for the sign soon to front the society’s new home.
(Photo by Bill Sebright)

Webmaster Marie Morrill reported by email: 1) After more work than usual I have gotten the newsletter uploaded onto the web page. I have been on a chat trying to figure out how to “verify” our domain name. Crazy.

Mike Reiter reported: 1) Rick Brodrick and he dug holes, put in metal posts, and attached the wheel. Bill Sebright brought genuine Clayton bricks to help finish off the area. Mike and Rick attached the plow. Rachelle Fletcher is working on some mockups for the actual sign and will gather input at the meeting. 2) Genuine Clayton bricks represent the Clayton Brickyard. Railroad ties represent the railroad. The plow represents agriculture and the Arcadia Orchards. Without the wheel, we wouldn’t have the railroad, the sawmill, the brickyard, or for that matter, nearly anything. We couldn’t figure out how to incorporate a nuclear tipped missile into the display in case you were wondering.

Lettering and shape for the sign were discussed. After much discussion, it was decided to have a green sign and gold lettering on a 2 foot by 4-foot dome topped sign.

Mark and Diana Bryant bought the

Deer Park & Other Locations Currently Carrying Print Copies of the *Mortarboard*:
City Library, City Hall, Gardenspot Market, Standen Insurance,
Odynski’s Accounting, the Deer Park Chamber of Commerce, the Deer Park Library and the Loon Lake Library.

old Deer Park Creamery and hope to make it an event center. Right now, they are using it for family gatherings and going through the permit process. They are looking for history about the building. It was mentioned that Al Bishop built the creamery and Jim and Lena Wolfe worked there. Many people dropped off cream, bought ice cream, rented freezer lockers, and had meat cut there.

The green building at the corner of Fourth and Evergreen was discussed. It was once the Shell Distributorship and was owned by Dwight Boyd.

Clayton Brickyard Day planning is moving along. This year's flyers, T-shirts, and hats should be out next week.

Pat Parker moved, and Chuck Lyons

seconded, that Rick Brodrick and Mike Reiter purchase a 50" TV for up to \$400.00. After discussion, the motion carried unanimously.

Chuck Lyons thanked all those who helped get Betty Burdette's player piano and pump organ to the North Spokane Farm Museum. He also mentioned that the North Spokane Farm Museum is having its open house Saturday, June 22 from 9 to 3.

Next Meeting: Saturday, July 13, 2019, at 10:00 AM at our new building.

Meeting adjourned at 11:11 AM.

The Society meeting minutes submitted by Mark Wagner, acting Secretary.

— end —

Comments Policy

We encourage anyone with observations, concerns, corrections, divergent opinions or additional materials relating to the contents of these newsletters to write the society or contact one or more of the individuals listed in the "Society Contacts" box found in each issue. Resultant conversations can remain confidential if so desired.

Society Contacts

C/DPHS, Box 293, Clayton, WA 99110

Bill Sebright, President — sebrightba@gmail.com — (509) 276-2693

Wally Lee Parker, Editor of Print Publications — bogwen100@msn.com — (509) 467-9433

Website — <http://www.cdphs.org>

Editorial and Copyright Policy

Those contributing "original" materials to the Clayton/Deer Park Historical Society retain copyright to said materials while granting the Mortarboard and the Clayton/Deer Park Historical Society durable permission to use said materials in electronic and print media — including permission to reprint said materials in future Clayton/Deer Park Historical Society publications. Under certain conditions proof of ownership of submitted materials and/or a signed release allowing use may be requested. No compensation for materials submitted is offered or implied. All materials submitted are subject to editorial revision for content, language, legal exposures and so forth. Any material published as an exception to these general understandings will be clearly marked as to the nature of the exception.

Permission to Reprint Policy

When requests to reprint C/DPHS materials are received, such will be granted in almost all instances — assuming of course that we have the right to extend such permission. In instances where we don't have that right, we will attempt to place the requester in contact with the owner of the intellectual property in question. But, as a matter of both prudence and professionalism, in all instances a request to reprint must be made and must be made in writing (letter or email), before any C/DPHS materials are reprinted.

From "The Coast" magazine,
April, 1907



See Yourself in Print.

The Clayton/Deer Park Historical Society's department of Print Publications is always looking for original writings, classic photos, properly aged documents and the like that may be of interest to our readers. These materials should be rooted within, though not limited to, northern Spokane County, southeastern Stevens County, and southern Pend Oreille County. As for types of materials, family or personal remembrances are always considered. Articles of general historical interest — including pieces on natural history, archeology, geology and such — are likely to prove useful. In other words, we are always searching for things that will increase our readers' understanding and appreciation of this region's past. As for historical perspective; to us history begins whenever the past is dusty enough to have become noteworthy — which is always open to interpretation. From there it extends back as deep as we can see, can research, or even speculate upon.

Copyright considerations for any materials submitted are stated in the "Editorial and Copyright Policy" dialog box found in this issue. For any clarifications regarding said policy, or any discussions of possible story ideas or the appropriateness of certain types of material and so on, please contact the editor via the email address supplied on the same page.

— the editor —

About our Group:

The Clayton/Deer Park Historical Society was incorporated as a nonprofit association in the winter of 2002 under the title Clayton Historical Society. Our mission statement is found on the first page (upper left corner) of each issue of our newsletter, the Mortarboard.

Our yearly dues are \$20 dollars per family/household.

We are open to any and all that share an interest in the history of our region — said region, in both a geographic and historic sense, not limited to the communities in our group's name.