



367th Fighter Group newsletter – Issue # 18 - DECEMBER 2023

Table of contents

- 1 – The advanced landing grounds in France, part 6
- 2 – Attack of a German Feldmarshall !
- 3 – Honoring the pilots, part 11
- 4 – Books and URL



Dear Friends and 367th Fighter Group members,

The 367th fighter group has crossed France from Normandy to the east in a kind of frog leap advance. In this new issue, the first article will deal with one other advanced landing grounds, one of the last ones before the final move to Germany.

We will also see how the 367th fighter group has obliterated a castle in which General Kesselring and his staff were attending a meeting. This mission was an example of long and precise preparation, good timing and last minute adaptation.

I wish you a good reading.

Olivier Le Floch

The advanced landing grounds in France, part 6

After a long time at A-68 Juvincourt, compared to other advanced landing ground (ALG), the 367th fighter group had to make another move farther to the east of France. The new field was in the outskirt of Saint-Dizier and was coded A-64. It was a large airfield created just before WWI and still in use today by the French Armée de l'Air. This airfield had been bombed by the allied Air Forces and so had to be repaired by the 926th Engineer Aviation Regiment of the IX Engineer Command before being considered as operational. This ALG was made of two runways.



Bombing of the Saint-Dizier airfield by the heavy bombers of the 8th Air Force. The aircraft on the left is a B-24 Liberator. The two runways are clearly visible on the pictures (USAAF)

367th Fighter Group newsletter – Issue # 18 - DECEMBER 2023

The monthly report of the 392nd fighter squadron gives some details of the move to Saint-Dizier : On or about the 3rd of February we moved from site A-68 into the outskirts of Saint Dizier, remember. A nice little village is Saint Dizier, with winding canals, and every narrow cobblestone street seemed to have a history all its own. The boys strung wire, pitched tents, built a shower room, established a shower room, built a motor pool, dispensary, and Orderly room, all in two days flat. Sgts Raycovich, Owens, and Neas moved into a shell-torn house and built a room out of what was left. T/Sgt Reginald Henry (Reggie) and his buddy moved into a cozy, two man shack, complete with everything but hot and cold running water. Some of the men, including M/Sgt Stephenson and S/Sgt Jim Davis found a big, green house with one room left intact—this was quickly converted into living quarters, and later referred to as « Castlelane ».

There were plenty of pretty girls in St. Dizier, too, mademoiselle who couldn't quite « parlez the anglais », but who could –well ! It didn't take the boys long to discover this, and soon they were clamoring for passes to St. Dizier. It is an accepted fact that Cpl. John Tuttle almost broke his arm typing pass applications at the Orderly Room.



On this aerial picture of 1958, the ALG A-64 is on the middle and the town of Saint-Dizier is on the right. One can see the Marne river on the west of the base and south of the town. The black line on the north of the base is a canal (© IGN). Laneuville-au-Pont is not on the map but was less than one mile to the south west of the airfield

But good things are short lived, so just after getting dug in and set up, we had to move out of town, and quite some distance from « grande place ». Here again there was the usual scramble for available buildings. Our mess Sergeant found a good spot for the mess hall, M/Sgt Louis (Tige) Stire found a building for the Enlisted Men's club, and soon the area was transformed from a trash pile into an orderly camp site. There was plenty of lumber on hand, stack after stack of it, and one could hear hammers and saws from dawn to dusk.

The boys built sidewalks, floors and elaborate doorways in their tents. Even General Weyland heard about our winterized tents and promised a visit. Out of scrap lumber, bomb boxes, and ordnance equipment, there appeared benches, tables, desks, chairs, fancy wash stands, and even clothes cabinets. Surely nowhere is the inventive genius of the American Soldier more evident than in an air corps squadron like this where boys from the machine shops and farms of vast America have that « Yankee Know How ». Soon we had a little city laid out along the taxi-way, with an electric light every tent, with sidewalks, fences, a long row of stove pipes silhouetted against the sky-line. About this time Uncle Sam started handing out 7 day rest leaves to England. Almost without exception everybody wanted a chance at this. Each department worked up its own rotation plan, and the first



Ground crew of the 392nd FS in front of a hand made shelter at an advanced landing ground. The man on the right is Jay Love (David Serluco/archives 367th FG)

367th Fighter Group newsletter – Issue # 18 - DECEMBER 2023



Bertel Koed, Larry Morris and Jim Griffin in front of a P-47 Thunderbolt of the 392nd FS at Saint-Dizier (Bertel Koed via Fred Koed / archives 367th FG)

group left here on 22 February 1945. We are expecting the boys back almost any day now with a lot of stories about the English lassie and English ale, of London and Scotland. And of course there is always the dogface desire to « sack up » for a few days, get away from the old army routine (especially the 1st Sergeant who is always able to the finger on you for KP or guard duty).

Ed Whigham, radar officer of the 392nd FS gives a long statement on the move to Saint-Dizier ALG:

In late January 1945, the advanced echelon of our Fighter Group was ordered south to the town of St. Dizier, France, to establish a base nearer to Gen. Patton's Third Army, for which we were providing aerial support. After the Battle of the Bulge the next major objective was to get across the Rhine River into Germany; and Patton was chomping at the bit to have his Third Army first across.

I recall being in our Group flight operations on March 7, 1945, when our intelligence officer began receiving a message that a unit of the Ninth Armored Division of the First Army had found the Rhine railroad bridge at Remagen still intact and had begun to fight its way across. Our Fighter Group provided air cover after the Army captured the Remagen Bridge, once flying a ten-hour patrol over the area. A bridgehead across the Rhine was quickly established but at that time was not expanded into a major thrust into the German heartland. Though Patton's Third was not the first across, on March 22 he crossed at two locations and began immediately to enlarge the bridgeheads and thrust into Germany along a southern route. It was not likely that the 367th would tarry long in St. Dizier.

When we arrived at St. Dizier, for the first time our group headquarters officers were housed in a French chateau. Before then on the continent we had lived in tents or former German barracks. The American military's policy was that our military units could use facilities belonging to French civilians or the French government only if the German army had used them. The chateau in St. Dizier had been used by the Germans, hence our occupancy of it. What we didn't know was that at one time the Germans had used it as a brothel. We had been there several weeks before that information became generally known throughout the Group and spawned a crop of hilarious jokes. Shortly after our arrival in St. Dizier the mayor contacted our CO and told him that they planned to hold a celebration of the city's liberation and wanted to invite the officers of the 367 Fighter Group to be the guest of honor. It was decided that the most suitable way to celebrate was to have a victory dance, and the CO asked me to work with the local organizing committee since I spoke some French. Fortunately, the chair of the committee was a charming French lady, Madame Barbouteau, who spoke fluent English, which was most fortunate since my French was strictly limited. When the pilots and other officers of our Group learned of the invitation they were ecstatic—they would have a chance to meet the local mademoiselles. The evening finally came, the officers were in their best available attire, and the local mademoiselles were there in droves. But accompanying them were mama and papa, the children, the local young ladies.

367th Fighter Group newsletter – Issue # 18 - DECEMBER 2023

grandparents, aunts and uncles, and a host of other relatives. The local French people was as anxious to see the young Americans who flew those planes always overhead as the young pilots were to meet and flirt with. It was an enjoyable and successful occasion, and getting to know Mme. Barbouteau was an unusual pleasure. Monsieur Barbouteau was an official of the Banque de France who early in the war moved his family to St. Dizier because of food shortages and other problems in Paris. Both were well educated and pleasant conversationalists. I visited in their home several times, and they were always gracious hosts. As the weather turned to spring, our schedule of assigned missions became more intensive. By the time we were at St. Dizier our Group was an experienced combat unit and had suffered a large number of casualties for which we were constantly receiving replacements. Nevertheless, every time a flight returned from a mission, all eyes scanned the sky to see if any planes were missing. Usually a mission consisted of three to nine flights of four planes each (twelve to thirty-six planes in all) and the four planes in each flight flew in a V-shaped echelon. Thus a quick scanning of the sky told you how many planes were missing, but not which pilots. Only rarely, in fact almost never, did personnel ask openly and directly the pressing question who did not make it back, although they learned soon enough as a result of mission debriefings and conversations with the mission pilots. Only rarely did I see fellow pilots and others openly lose emotional control when they learned that a close friend had been lost. This may seem unfeeling or even cruel, but it was a form of unspoken discipline that just grew up and seemed necessary to hold the outfit together emotionally. This may be an appropriate time to say something about the young men who served as pilots. Each was a unique personality, but they all placed their lives on the line every time they crawled into that cockpit—just piloting a military aircraft under combat conditions was dangerous. And in the face of determined German pilots and the ever more concentrated anti-aircraft fire, they always faced potential disaster. Now, in my later years, as I look back, I marvel at how most maintained their composure. Sadly, some did not survive, but many of those who did must have suffered severe internal turmoil. Very wisely American military planners established a rotation system for combat pilots, and after a specified number of missions (my memory is forty missions for fighter pilots) they were sent back to the United States for leave. You can imagine the mounting pressure as pilots got near the number of required missions—we actually had pilots killed on the last mission before rotation.



Men of the 367th FG, probably on a canal close to the ALG Saint-Dizier, on a boat made of a dinghy (David Serluco / archives 367th FG)



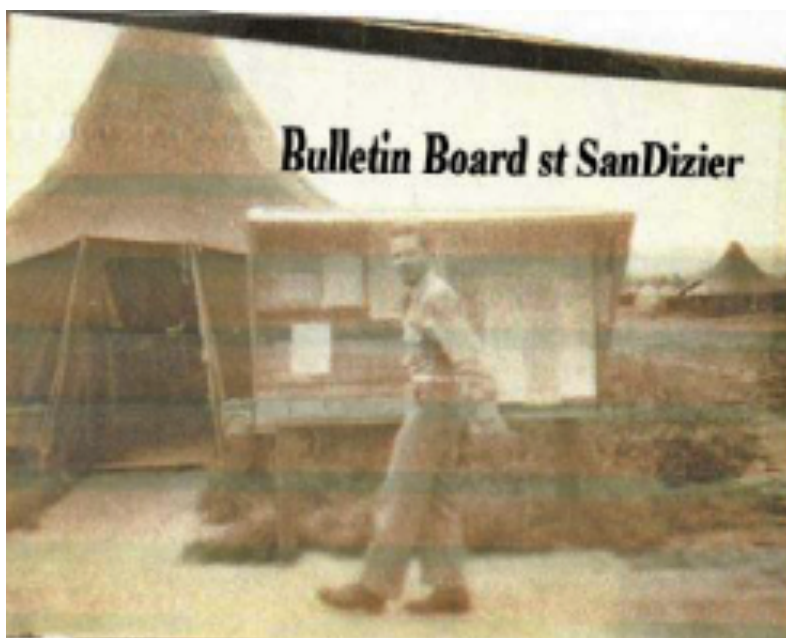
The ALG Saint-Dizier is on the left corner, just above is the canal (named canal between Burgundy and Champagne), on the right is the Marne river and top right is the city of Saint-Dizier. All the white dots in and around the airfield are bomb craters (© IGN)

367th Fighter Group newsletter – Issue # 18 - DECEMBER 2023

For the 393rd fighter squadron, the monthly report for February 1945 is rather light : The first day of February 1945, found us lashing out destruction on the enemy from A-68. On the second day of the month the air echelon left A-68 and arrived at A-64 the same day. The Ground Echelon followed the next day. The first mission of the month, which took place on the first, was a B-26 escort to Koblenz, Germany. Lieutenant Box led the mission, and the results of the bombing were unobserved because of the weather.



Lieutenant Box and his P-47 « BUCCANEER ». Lt Box led the first mission of February 1945 for the 393rd FS. (Don Packham via Kellee Packham / archives 367th FG)



Lieutenant « Pinks » Pinkerton, 393rd FS, at Saint-Dizier (Vernon Truemper / archives 367th FG)



Saint-Dizier saw its lot of accident too. On the left was the P-38 « PISTOL PACK'UM » of lieutenant Don Packham of the 393rd FS. According to Jack Peterson's diary, Don was hit by flak on 16 February 1945 and was forced to belly land. Fortunately Don escaped the wreck safely. As one can see, the P-38 was a total wash out (Don Packham via Kellee Packham/archives 367th FG)

Donald Gelhaus in his book « Lightning Bolt » wrote the following statement : « We flew the last mission from Juvincourt February 1, escorting a bomber mission to Koblenz. The target area was overcast but the bombers made their drop. Quite a bit of flak sought us through the overcast, but no German fighters came to challenge us. We could find no targets through the heavy overcast so we returned to the base.

The next few days were spent moving the Group to Y-64 at Saint Dizier, France, 80 miles southeast of Juvincourt. Saint Dizier was a sea of mud. The runway was metal runway planking used to cover the ex-Luftwaffe runways. The Luftwaffe fighters were a good bit lighter than ours, enabling them to use grass fields for landing strips. Our heavier airplanes mired in mud. The problem was resolved by laying matel planking of perforated strips of steel pinned together. It did the job, but it set up quite a racket as our aircraft rattled and

367th Fighter Group newsletter – Issue # 18 - DECEMBER 2023



Billet of the 392nd fighter squadron officers close to Saint-Dizier (Jean-Luc Gruson / archives 367th FG)

clattered the length of it in take off, or touchdown after a mission. Once more we found ourselves in quarters vacated by the Luftwaffe, but were pleasantly surprised this time when we found that the Group that occupied them ahead of us had done considerable work on them. We found room for a few improvements, and because the weather once again held us on the ground, we turned our ingenuity to some minor remodeling. We had the luxury of using the hot showers that French coal miners used in coal mine not far from Y-64. We drove to the mines in jeeps or other GI vehicles to get to the coveted showers and it was a great treat to be able to take shower with hot water !

Another way we spent our time while idled between missions was doing a lot of shooting. Quite a few of us were gun enthusiasts and of course lots of guns and ammo were available. We were never our Colt .45 automatics and we fired them a lot at various improvised targets. We also had .30 caliber carbines that we fired. And we did a lot of collecting and trading of German rifles and handguns. A generous supply of 'liberated' ammo was available for us as well. There was no formal firing range for rifle and handguns but on most the bases there was a trap set up for us to shoot 'clays' with shot guns.»



The two photos above were taken in the Jard park in Saint-Dizier. The first photo is the bandstand and the second one was taken from this bandstand (David Serluco/ archives 367th FG)

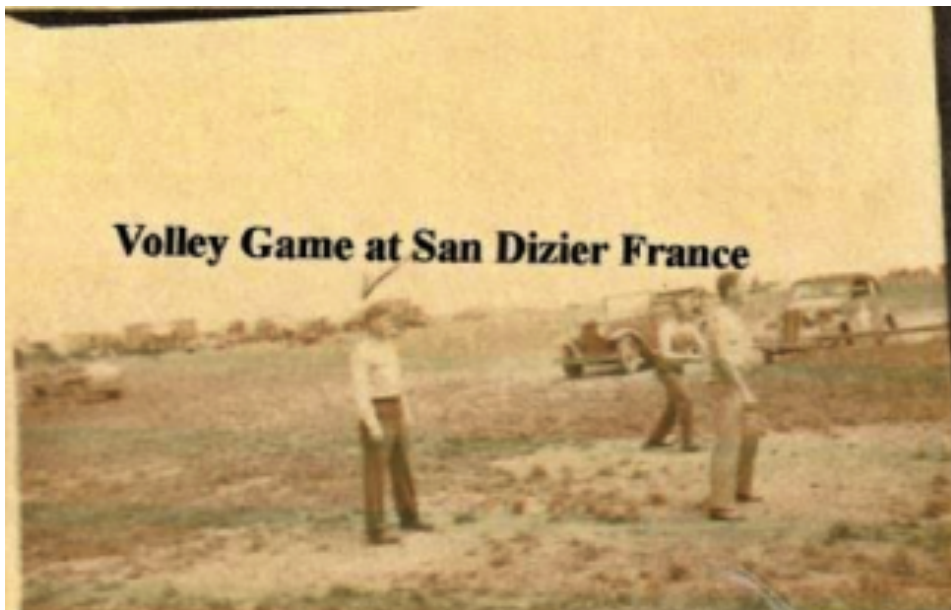


Lieutenant Don Gelhaus, 393rd FS , in the cockpit of a P-47 Thunderbolt (author collection / archives 367th FG)

367th Fighter Group newsletter – Issue # 18 - DECEMBER 2023

For the 394th fighter squadron, the monthly report for February 1945 is was rather detailed : *“In the first weak rays of dawn on February first, an advanced party or the Air Echelon loaded tents and duffle bags on the two-and-a-halves and started the eighty mile jaunt to A-64, Saint Dizier. The convoy rolled through Chalons sur Marne, south-east along the Marne Canal into Vitry le François, and the east to Saint Dizier. The trucks finally stopped on a taxi strip opposite a miniature lake which rippled over our intended living area. After much parley the vehicules were driven over the sodden ground and tents were pitched in fields adjoining the taxi strip. On the second the remainder of the Air Echelon moved in and the third saw the arrival of our planes on their return from an escort mission to Arweiler, Germany.*

Back at A-68 the Ground Echelon had dispatched the squadron on escorts of B-26's on the first, the second, and third. During the next four days after the departure of the planes they completed the task of moving camp and then joined the forward echelon. Weather forced the suspension of operations until the sixth giving men added time to set up. The rain-soak, saturated fields soon became a sea of mud with tires ruts sunk from twelve to eighteen inches into the yielding ground. Every movement was an effort as men slipped and struggled through the gumbo mud. One bright spot appeared during these dreary days however as Tech Sgt Bob Bounds drew the squadron's rations from an Eight Air Force Quartermaster depot, and for one glorious week our pork and sausage diet was supplanted with steaks, chickens and hams in great abundance.



Volley-Ball game at A-64 Saint-Dizier (Vernon Truemper/ archives 367th FG)



Another belly-landing at Saint-Dizier of a P-38 Lightning of the 394th FS (Bertel Koed via Fred Koed / archives 367th FG)

367th Fighter Group newsletter – Issue # 18 - DECEMBER 2023

Not until the move of the 405th Fighter Group (a P-47 Thunderbolt unit of the Ninth Air Force) did the squadron escape this site. On the ninth Major Piepper arranged to reestablish the squadron on a model site then vacated which boasted such luxuries as raised walks and two hangars. In the meantime the officers found the solution to their overcrowded billet in the form of a handsome chateau. The Chateau soon resembled a well established fraternity house complete with a Polish, French-speaking house mother called 'Mom'.

Dick Brennan in his diary does not mention the move to A-64 Saint Dizier but he gives more details on the place:

« February 4 – Went to church. Moved our gear into another room I liked better. Crowded field. Planes all over. 3 Fighter Groups. Bathe restricted to European Continent for getting in too late to make the move. G. Croker arrived in the Droopsnoot with both Bathe and Andes crammed in the nose. Today we got a Presidential Unit Citation.

February 6 – We have new quarters about two miles from field, a château. B Flight has two rooms. 4 in one and 5 in the other. Swell room with fireplace and lavatory. Very nice and clean. Steam heat and huge clothes closets. I had to break out with clean sheets. Nice cuisine with caretaker, wife and kids to do the cleaning and keep the fires etc. Even hot water. Wonderful. We're going to have our own mess for a change. »

Ernie Snow, one the propeller specialist of the 394th FS wrote in his diary : "Jan 30. Orders come that we are to move to Saint Dizier. Feb 1 we start to load trucks. Feb 2 move to new field A-64. We had to pitch our tents in a mud field. And this is the stickiest mud I ever was in. Feb 8 we get all trucks in and are normal again, we are like a big carnival at times. We lost Lt. Collier today. Feb 10 We move to other side of field, across a canal ».



394th FS billet at Laneuville-au-Pont, close to Saint Dizier. According to captain Claude Cely, pilot of the 394th FS, the squadron took up residence in a chateau on a bluff overlooking the Marne River (Dick Brennan via Connie Brennan /367th FG archives)



Another view of the castle. The roommates Captain Cely in this castle were William Pieper and "Doc" Ellery, the squadron flight surgeon (Claude Cely via John Cely / 367th FG archives)



Another view of the same castle but from the other side. The picture was taken in 2002 by John Cely, son of captain Claude Cely (John Cely / 367th FG archives)

367th Fighter Group newsletter – Issue # 18 - DECEMBER 2023

Attack of a German Generalfeldmarschall !

The 367th FG was awarded a second Distinguished Unit Citation for a specific mission which took place on 19 March 1945. This mission was the bombing of the headquarters of General Kesselring who, a few days ago, had just replaced General Von Rundstedt as commander in chief of the west front. The target was the castle of Ziegenberg, it's bunkers and tunnel complex.

The Field Order No 243 from the headquarters of the XIXth TAC (Tactical Air Command) signed by General Weyland gave the following orders :

C. MISSION/IEAB-1 367 will load 2 squadrons of 16 A/C (aircraft) 2X 1000 8-11 sec delay 1000 lb general purpose bombs with 8 to 11 seconds of fuse delay) and 1 squadron, 16 A/C napalm to attack target to be furnished. Any additional A/C operational will be used in this attack. TOT (take off time) to be furnished with briefing material.

Rufus Dye, of the 392nd fighter squadron said during an interview : « *it was a group effort. A young fellow in our squadron, he was a flight officer (this pilot was Al Diefendorf), he again was one of the best navigators I had ever seen. This kid could look at the ground and tell you where he was. He was flying with the group commander (Al Diefendorf was flying with Lt Col. McTaggart, the C.O. of the 392nd FS, see next page), this was a hush hush briefing, we didn't know where we were going. I was leading an element (the 3rd and 4th aircraft of a flight) that day, the 392nd squadron. We took off and three quartets of the way up, Diefendorf I was told, « ok Dief you got it ». And we did a real bang up job on a sting of barracks.../...It went really well all the squadrons got good hits on it ».*



Wreck of the castle of Ziegenberg after the attack by the P-47 Thunderbolt of the 367th FG. This is the front view of the L shaped building (archives 367th FG)



Wreck of the castle of Ziegenberg after the attack by the P-47 Thunderbolt of the 367th FG (Don Packham via Kellee Packham / archives 367th FG archives 367th FG)

Statement by Allen J. « Dief » Diefendorf : « in C Flight of the 392, Cap Oldham, Flight Commander, usually took the AM mission and I led the PM mission. During the AM of 19 March I think Gabby (Oldham) was airborne with 4 when Gp. Intell appeared to have something ‘hot’ in. I went to Mimi’s to eat early with a proposed 4 ship PM mission line up on the scheduling board for C flight. When briefing time neared, it was apparent something was up. I looked at the Squadron Ops schedule board – noting a helluva lot more people stomping around than usual – and was shocked to see the following 392 line up.

P-47 :	H5-Q	Diefendorf
	H5-K	Adams
	H5-D	McTaggart
	H5-I	Witters
	H5-B	Rogers
	H5-C	Miller
	H5-W	Abel
	H5-F	Colt
	H5-N	Satterwhite
	H5-T	Hunter
	H5-S	Dye
	H5-V	Baize
	H5-V	Cockburn
	H5-I	Derby



Another photo of the same L shaped building as the one on the previous page (archives 367th FG)

A quick query of Lt. Col. McTaggart revealed « I had the ball ». The Group briefing began and as I remember :

- (a) 394 lead Matheson and Chickering 2 each 1000 lb. Bombs, full ammo load, color film in all lead and element leads
- (b) 392 second – same load (Diefendorf)
- (c) 393 third – with napalm and guns
- (d) Radio silence mission all the way
- (e) P-51 Recce birds behind us
- (f) Intelligence background

One year in getting intelligence on where forward wall headquarters was ; use of « plants » in prison and escaped prisoners, starting as far back as North Africa. Intelligence put together all this info and came up with the Ziegenburg, Germany, facility – Von Rundstedt's alternative west headquarters.

Anyway, T O T (take off time) was 1200 hours – mandatory meal time for German staff. I'm not sure of specific target pictures but at least area coverage and that the town was at the point of a large V woods. Taxi-take-off with ½ flaps was normal but hairy for the guys that forgot half flaps and went under those huge power lines off the runway there at Conflans airdrome (west of Metz). We headed out on course towards Frankfurt with the 394 on the left, 392 center/right and 393 joining the right. As I remember the 394 got close to Frankfurt and the flak was extremely hea-

vy. The 392 went between Frankfurt and Hanau out of necessity and all flights took evasive action. I S'd back to course north of Frankfurt and saw the 394 pretty far on my left. Briefed tactics were not to fly directly to the target so as not to cause an air alarm. The target being rather near – north of Frankfurt, the 392 was fortunately back together. I saw the V woods and then the target, clearly visible, 100% sure. I broke radio silence with (I think) : « 'Knobhole' lead, I see the target ». After 2 or 3 seconds a voice came back (really not recognizable at the time but it had to be Col. Chickering or Lt. Col. McTaggart – either or both were enough authority for me !) I push it up – turned left 30 degrees and Jack Adams and I went down almost in formation in about 30 degree of dive. We had 8 – 11 sec. delay fuses for the reinforced concrete and we went low. I picked the front door of the four story building where it joined the large tower. I fired a long burst of gunfire to record the target, then pickled and pull off at 500 feet – worried about Jack Adams as No. 2 and going long because I was dropping low. (We) I pulled out with 4 – 6 G's and up to the left. Fortunately 3 and 4 were spaced behind and I saw my 2 each 1000 pounders go off at the base of the tower – then No.2. direct hits but the smoke was terrible. The rest of the 392 dropped on one pass and the 394 came over while we orbited high. The whole area was now blanketed with smoke and the 393 had hardly any good targets to drop napalm on. The mission returned safely and that evening we had some live photography from Recce. The target had really been cloberred but the smoke prevented full coverage. The town of Ziegenburg was 75% destroyed also.

Post script : a visit was made to 100 Wing some time later. I saw the Intelligent file which revealed approximately 37 soldiers died in the first four bombs. A total count was never made. Many casualties occurred, both civilian and military, although the town was largely a military facility. A visit to the complex after V day revealed the total destruction. Photos were available. The reinforced concrete was 3' to 4' thick and a tunnel led from the four story castle proper, about 100 yards to another building which remained untouched – because all the smoke drifted exactly over it. A purported statement by General Von Rundstedt after the war : « They had the audacity to bomb my headquarters » and another unfounded report was that both he and several other high ranking officers at lunch were injured to various degrees by a falling chandelier and debris. Those escaping into the tunnel were safe – unbeknown to us – as I don't the tunnel being briefed



Lieutenant Al Diefendorf during his DFC presentation. He earned this decoration for his role in the Von Rundstedt's HQ mission (Al Diefendorf via David Diefendorf / archives 367th FG)

Wreck of the castle of Ziegenberg after the attack by the P-47 Thunderbolt of the 367th FG (William Norris via Linda Norris / archives 367th FG)



and of the smoke problem (the strike photos – which I have let us off the hook on this). While at Bad Soden, I remember a high ranking Russian General being taken to the castle by Col. Chickering and of a Group fly-by sort of simulating the attack. »

A 9th Air Force report dated on 25 March 1945 states: Recent reconnaissance of the results of a fighter-bomber raid on German Army Headquarters, West, located west of Bad Nauheim, 14 miles south of Geissen, indicates that the east wing of the castle was completely destroyed and that the remainder of the building was seriously damaged. An adjoining building, suitable for officers, was also seriously damaged and a barracks building in the same area was leveled.

Using its most experienced pilots the 367th Fighter-Bomber Group commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Edwin S. Chickering, Oil City, Penna. Selected Major Charles F. Matheson, Birmingham, Mich. Veteran of 90 missions and a West Point graduate to lead the mission. The squadrons composed entirely of precision dive bombing veterans, participated in the attack.

Two squadrons of 14 and 16 planes each came in on the target by 1/35 in the afternoon. The first pilot to drop his bombs on the target was squadron leader 1st Lieutenant Allen J. Diefendorf, Pittsburg, Penna., who said « Coming in over the target we caught them completely by surprise. I went in at 450 miles per hour and laid both 1,000 pound bombs in the front door. The concussion alone would probably have killed the people inside. »



S/Sgt Bertel Keod, 392nd FS, before what was left of the castle of Ziegenberg after the attack by the P-47 Thunderbolt of the 367th FG (Bertel Keod via Fred Keod / archives 367th FG)



Wreck of the castle of Ziegenberg after the attack by the P-47 Thunderbolt of the 367th FG (archives 367th FG)

The second squadron was led by Assistant Group Commander lieutenant Colonel Robert C. « Buck » Rogers, Omaha, Neb. « Our briefed mission » said Colonel Rogers, « was to destroy the castle, and we did just that. It is incredible if anyone remained alive under such intense fire and concussion. It had the element of surprise and the destruction of the primary target seemed almost complete. »

The third squadron of 11 planes came in just as the first two squadrons were leaving at 1:55. It was led by 1st lieutenant Clyde H. Box, Birmingham, Ala., who commented : « As we were leaving, the buildings looked like the Schloss-Sheffield iron furnaces in Birmingham on a busy day. What was still standing was burning and smoke poured up from the whole area. »



Major General A. R. Shaparov visiting the wreck of the castle of Ziegenberg after the attack by the P-47 Thunderbolt of the 367th FG. From left to right : X, Col. Chickering, General Shaparov, X, Cap. Angelo Serluco, the public relation officer of the 367th FG (David Serluco / archives 367th FG)

HONORING THE PILOTS – The Shelburn network

This time we will not honor a specific pilot but an organization which helped allied airmen to escape capture and which organized their return to England. But if we do not honor one pilot of the 367th FG we will see that one of the outfit had been involved in this adventure.

This pilot was the commanding officer of the 393rd fighter squadron, major William A. Jones. As written in the Dynamite Gang book, Bill Jones flew all the missions of the 393rd FS between the 9th and 24th of May 1944. The first missions were, most of the time, long bomber escort mission. On 24 May the 393rd FS flew such an escort mission to Berlin and for the first time Bill Jones decided not to go for the second mission of the day. After some rest he changed his mind and decided to go. For this second mission of the day the 393rd FS had to dive bomb the airfield of Saint-Brieuc close to the north coast in Brittany, in the north west of France. Unfortunately, Major Jones' P-38 was hit by the anti-aircraft fire. His left engine was knocked out and the plane was set on fire. The only option for him was to bail out. Being at low altitude, around 500 feet according to his evasion report, he managed to land safely although he had both eyes badly bruised and one knee banged up. Major Jones walked through this area for a few days during which he had been helped by some French farmers. But the big change occurred when he was put in the hands of a resistance group. After days of moves and even an attack of German soldiers he ran into other men of the resistance who knew a way to arrange his return to England. This return was made possible thanks to the Shelburn network.

This network was created in November 1943 by two agents of the British secret services. The aim was to help allied airmen to reach the village of Plouha, north of Saint-Brieuc. From there they were hidden in houses of the village and its neighbourhood until the coded message was transmitted through Radio London. The trip between Plouha and the beach during a night without moon was very dangerous between mine fields and German patrols. The men had to walk in single line holding the hand of the man in front. The last part of the path was really dangerous as the men had to reach the Bonaparte beach right in the middle of a cliff. This cliff was so stiff, that they had to slide down on their bottom. Once on the beach the men were taken by barges to a vessel of the Royal Navy hidden offshore and waiting for them .



Little Bonaparte beach in Plouha, on the coast of the Channel in Brittany. The very steep path through the cliff can be seen at the corner of the beach. And believe me, its really steep !

367th Fighter Group newsletter – Issue # 18 - DECEMBER 2023

All in all, eight extraction were successfully organized between January and August 1944. 135 airmen and 7 agents were successfully sent back to England thanks the Shelburn network. What was accomplished by the men and women of this network is something that has to be honored. If they had been caught by the German soldiers or by the far more tyrannic Gestapo, their future would have been torture and probably death. Unfortunately, it has been the fate of 25 members of this network.

Major William Jones was among the men who left the Bonaparte beach on 24 July 1944. The ship of the Royal Navy anchored at the port of Dartmouth on the south west coast of England. Next, Bill Jones was taken to London to be debriefed on his evasion and also to make sure that he was really Major Jones and not someone pretending he was William Jones. For this, captain Carroll Joy, who took command of the 393rd FS after Major Jones was shot down, went to London to testify that William Jones was really William Jones.



Bonaparte beach. This is from this beach that Major William Jones left France on the night of 24 July 1944

Books, DVDs and Links

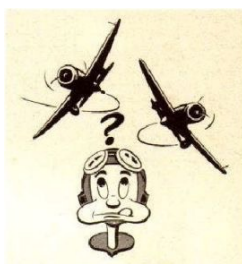
With the following link, you will watch the interview of Jack Hallett for the « Memoirs of WWII ». During this interview Jack explains how he wanted to be a fighter pilot. The story of John Lund's A2 flight jacket is very moving :

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-fSnneHR60>

This newsletter will certainly go up to issue #19 or #20 as I have not much available material to write additional articles.

Feel free to send me your own articles and I will add it in a new issue.

Coming in the next Newsletter



- The advanced landing grounds in France, part 7
- Entertain the troops
- Honoring the pilots, part 12