

**AFEHRI File 19-10**

**Research Materials/Source Documents  
ENLISTED FIRSTS**

**FILE TITLE:** Sgt Elmer N. Horey, First Enlisted Navigator

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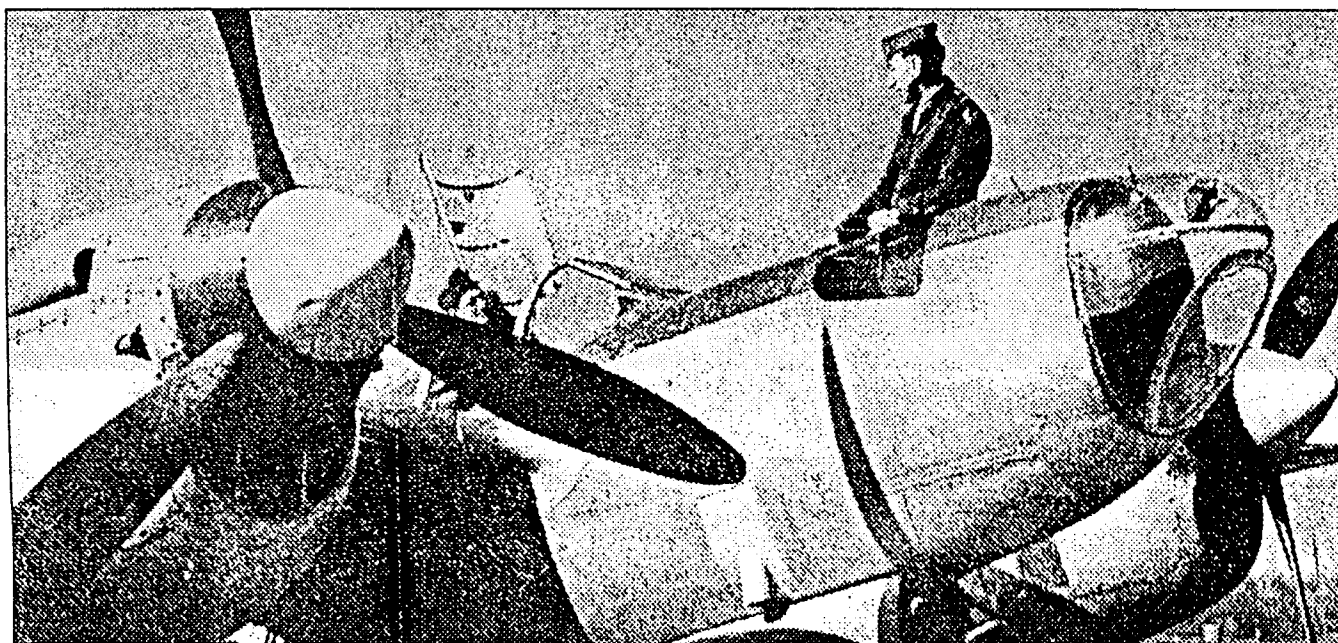
# CROSSHAIRS

Volume 8 / Number 3

Official Newsletter  
**BOMBARDIERS, INC.**  
500 Jackson St #1407, Daphne AL 36526-7035

September 1993

## BOMBARDIERS IN THEIR P-38s?



(Bombardier Unknown, Photo from July 1945 *Air Force Magazine*, Pg 19)

## YOU BET YOUR DROOP SNOOT!!

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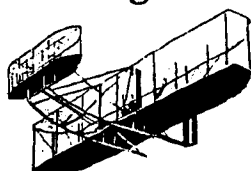
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## FIRST (ONLY ?) ENLISTED NAVIGATOR?



392nd Bomb Group

Jim Goar and Birdie Larrick, co-editors of the 392nd Bomb Group newsletter entitled *NEWS*, wrote in their May 1993 issue of some most interesting information that turned up a rare specimen--an enlisted navigator.

1. From a 392nd Bm Gp tailgunner, Jack Stewart, it was learned that *The Encyclopedia of the World's Combat Aircraft* printed, among its many aircraft sketches, one of the 392nd's B-24 #42-109835.

2. In an entirely unrelated disclosure from another 392nd gunner, Jack Bode, the **Revel Company**, aircraft model makers, used the same number markings on a B-24 model they produced.

3. This stirred research activity on the part of the *NEWS* staff who learned from the author of the book *The Liberators From Wendling* that the original B-24 had been shot out of the skies 11 April 1944 while on a mission to Bernberg, Germany.

4. Records indicated this 392nd aircraft was actually flying the mission as part of the 44th Bomb Group! The Germans reported 9 of the 10 crew parachuted; were captured and interned as POWs; and the co-pilot was killed by enemy 20mm fire.

5. The bombardier of the crew was listed in the article as 2Lt Sunny J. Craig but further checking with the navigator on the mission revealed that the correct name was 2Lt Sunny J. Gragg of Midland 43-11 (5 Aug 1943). [Ed: See 'Searching For' article in this edition on page 41].



Sunny J. Gragg

6. The navigator manifested for the mission was **Sgt Elmer N. Horey**. The story behind him flying as an enlisted navigator is something in itself!

Horey was on his 7th combat mission when his B-24 was shot down on 11 April 1944. His first four were flown as right waist gunner and his last three as navigator, all as part of the 576th Sqdn, 392nd Bomb Group flying out of Wendling, England (Station 118).

How did he become crew navigator?

Apparently from his records it was learned that Sgt. Horey had previously been "within weeks" of graduating from the Army Air Force navigator's school at Hondo, (San Antonio) Texas. Horey says his air work was good but something went wrong with his applying an angular value to a celestial calculation during a written examination and pfoof, he was 'washed out', reclassified as a gunner, and on his way to join a forming B-24 crew!



Elmer N. Horey

After his fourth mission as a gunner he was given a navigator check ride. When he attempted to turn in the navigator's tools and equipment he had checked out for the ride, he was told 'to keep it all; that he would from then on fly as a navigator!'

Not only did the 392nd have an acute shortage of navigators but the navigator on his crew had been sent off to Pathfinder crew school and Horey was told that he was his crew's 'replacement navigator!' Also, somewhere along the line he was told that he would be advanced in rank, most likely to a flying officers' rank [flight officer or 2nd lieutenant].

Sgt. Horey never saw any of the officers of his crew after their shootdown. The last time he saw his bombardier was just before bailout when Lt. Gragg was screaming for help in getting out of the front turret! Sgt. Horey opened the turret door for him and followed him in bailout over the nose wheel!

Horey remained a POW; never heard anything more about being advanced in rank; and was never awarded a Purple Heart after breaking an ankle when he hit the ground. His Mother had been given his earned Air Medal, (awarded posthumously) and did not learn of his being a freed POW until Elmer called her from Buffalo, enroute home!

But, **Sgt. Elmer N. Horey** can claim the unique distinction of having served in the 8th Air Force as an enlisted navigator! There doesn't appear to be many who can make that claim....in fact this writer knows only of one--**Sgt Horey!**

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**FOR INFO ON FROM WHOM AND HOW TO ACQUIRE VITAL RECORDS (Births, deaths, etc)** send \$2.25 to U.S. Government Printing Office, Dept SSMC, Washington, DC 20401 and ask for publication stock number 017-022-01196-4...provides info about individual vital records maintained only on file in State or local vital statistics offices. [Ed: For youse guys interested in genealogy and tracing bombardier 'lost souls'].



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# THE DRAINS OF NEWS



## 392nd BG Memorial Association

VOLUME 8

MAY 1993

### RETURNING A/C CRASH LANDS NEAR BASE

#### ALL WALK AWAY; CREW SERVED TEA BY VILLAGERS

It was New Year's Eve, 1944, and the 392nd was briefed for a mission to Euskirchen, Germany. 29 a/c began takeoff at 0800, in intermittent snow and rain showers.

During the bomb run the low squadron was hit by 12-15 enemy fighters. Two crew members of Lt. Majesky's crew of the 577th were wounded and the bomber landed in Belgium.

A/C #44-010528 with the 576th's Lt. Blakely in command had returned to Wendling but due to a landing procedure mix-up had to go around and all engines quit as the tanks went dry. Blakely was able to crash-land the a/c near Beetley, a village about 3 or 4 miles from the base.

The entire crew walked away from the crash, with one of them sustaining a sprained ankle. The nearby villagers hastened to the crash scene with hot tea and biscuits for the grateful airmen.

The crew had another close call on Jan. 16, 1945, when they were hit by AA fire and crash landed at Luneville.

Then on March 25 on a mission to Magdeburg the Blakely a/c was hit by friendly fire from the tail turret of another a/c and went down in flames. Five bailed out and became POW and five were KIA.

Two survivors are Richard Spades, the radio operator-gunner, and Stanley Robens, the tail gunner. Robens went by the name of Rubenstein in 1945. (See accompanying Profiles for details on Spades and Robens).

Spades was on board when the a/c crashed at Beetley. Robens was not. Let Richard Spades tell his story:

"I do recall that we had lost fuel but we made it back to Wendling. In our landing approach a smaller plane cut in front of us and to avert collision Blakely nosed upward and recircled the field. We didn't make it as all engines

The New Year's Eve, 1944, crash at Beetley.

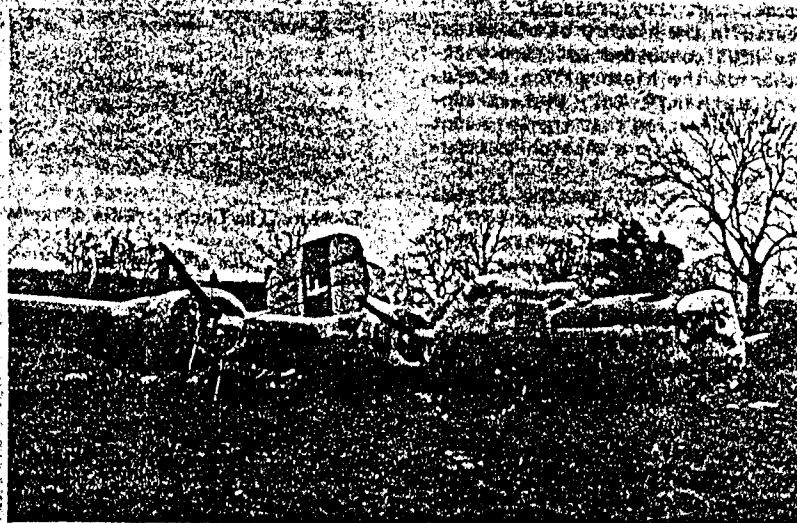
(Photo courtesy Richard Spades) failed. We were headed nose first into the ground when the plane with Blakely's help righted itself as we hit the ground. Nobody was hurt.

"Some English people were quickly on the scene and gave us tea and cookies." And now, as the radio commentator says, for the rest of the story.

Denis Duffield, as most Crusaders know, has been a staunch friend of the 392nd for years. He and wife Hilary live at East Dereham and show visiting Yanks around the old base. At reunions they act as hosts to the returning servicemen.

The Beetley crash happened practically in Denis' back yard. Denis was only a boy at the time, and for all the years that he has been interested in the 392nd he has wanted to find out about the crew of that airplane. All the information he had was the date of the crash and the a/c number.

Shortly after Christmas of last year, Bob Vickers' continuing research came up with the crew loading list of the a/c. Two of the crew were members of the 392BGMA, and soon the whole story was pieced together.



Here is Denis' story about the crash, in his own words:

"It happened on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon around 3-3.30 p.m. Me and my old Dad were out poaching rabbits at the time in some fields at the back of our home. At that time if you caught a rabbit you caught a dinner as meat was rationed and scarce at that time in England.

"We heard some cracking and banging and then less than five minutes later we saw the flares and we ran to where they were going up as we knew then that it was a plane down.

"When we arrived there we found all the crew members standing by the a/c, as there was no fire. I think the only injury was a sprained ankle. We spoke to all the crew and were given some of the goodies that they had no further use for.

"I still have the mechanic's cap I found at the wreck."

"I think the lady who brought the tea and biscuits to the crew members was a Miss Mary Beckett who lived in a farm house just opposite the crash site. If the a/c had gone a little further it would have ended up in her front room."

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RECEIVED MAY 5 1993

# B-24#42 - 109835 IS SHOWN IN ENCYCLOPEDIA

## SAME 576 SQDN A/C USED BY REVEL CO TO MAKE MODEL

The Encyclopedia of the World's Combat Aircraft, by Bill Gunston, was produced by Chartwell Books in 1976. Among the many aircraft depicted in it was a 392nd B-24, #42-109835. Jack Stewart, a tail gunner on the Marx crew in the 578th, brought it to the attention of the NEWS. Then an entirely unrelated correspondence, the NEWS learned from Jack Bode, also a gunner but in the 576th, that the Revel Company, a maker of model airplanes, had also used the same markings for a model that they produced.

Interested in the history of the actual a/c, the NEWS consulted Col. Bob Vickers, author of the history "The Liberators From Wendling." Col. Vickers supplied the information that the ship went down Apr. 11, 1944, on a mission to Bernberg, Germany.

The US report stated that the a/c was flying with the 44th Bomb Group and was heavily damaged by enemy aircraft attacks in the target area. Two engines caught fire and the landing gear dropped. Five chutes were reported seen. The German report said that 10 crewmen were aboard and 9 parachuted out and were taken POW. The co-pilot, 2nd Lt. George P. Callaghan, was killed by enemy 20 mm fire. The B-24 crashed near Koethen, Germany, and Lt. Callaghan was buried near there by the Germans.

The crew list was as follows:  
2/Lt. Edward J. Conneran, pilot  
2/Lt. George P. Callaghan, co-pilot  
2/Lt. Sunny L. Craig, bombardier  
Sgt. Elmer W. Horey, navigator  
S/Sgt. Joe T. Still, radio op.  
T/Sgt. Alton W. Kramer, asst. radio op.  
S/Sgt. Harry B. Sooy, engineer  
Sgt. Charles A. Repley, asst. eng.  
S/Sgt. Leon K. Ross, armorer-gunner  
S/Sgt. Walter W. Hanna, armorer-gunner

The NEWS was able to contact four of the crew and their stories follow:

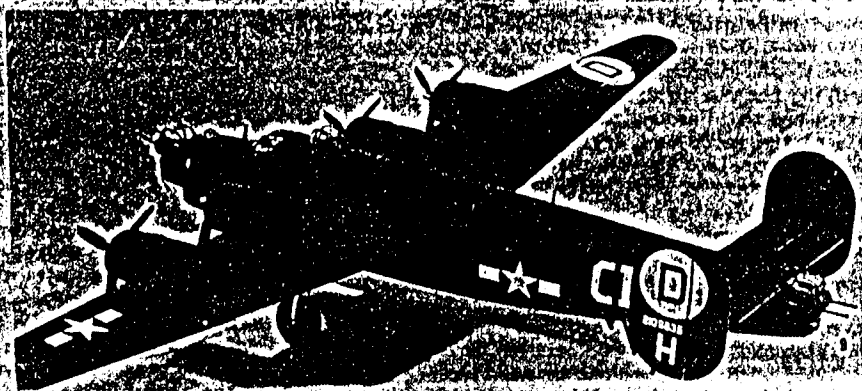
**ELMER HOREY:** "When our regular navigator, Lt. Kramer, went to PFF school, the crew was of course short a navigator. I was within two weeks of finishing navigator school when I was washed out and I was fairly well qualified. The squadron gave me a chance to check out, and they must have been satisfied with my work because I was the navigator of the crew on three missions that we flew before being shot down. So I was a rare bird, an enlisted navigator."

"I bailed out right behind Lt. Craig, the bombardier. Over the nose wheel with my arms wrapped around a popped chute, and luckily it opened. The a/c blew up right after I exited. I broke my ankle when I hit the ground."

**WALTER HANNA:** "I landed in telephone wires, but my body was only a yard or so



B-24 in "The Encyclopedia of the World's Combat Aircraft." Photo courtesy Jack Stewart.



Same B-24 as produced as a model by the Revel Company. Photo courtesy Jack Bode.

from the ground. The Germans helped me out of my harness, but then I had to shimmy up the telephone pole to disengage the chute. I broke my ankle when I landed. My regular parachute was in for service, and the substitute that I was issued was only a 20 foot one, so I descended rapidly. About the only good thing I could say about it is that it was better than nothing."

**CHARLES REPLEY:** "We were on our seventh mission. The enlisted members of the crew spent the rest of the war at Stalag Luft 17."

Alton W. Kramer died in 1988. The NEWS was unable to contact any of the other crewmen.

**T/Sgt. Richard J. Spades** was the radio operator-gunner on the Blakely crew in the 576th, arriving at Wendling Dec. 4, 1944. (See accompanying story, "Returning A/C Crash Lands")

He returned to the US in June 1945 after liberation from POW camp.

He graduated from the University of Arkansas in 1950, and has been in the credit and insurance business in Baltimore and Atlanta. He now owns and manages his own real estate business in Black Rock, Arkansas.

He and wife Ina Ruth live at 6th and Elm, Black Rock, AR 72415. They have four children and 9 grandchildren.

MAY AIR ANNIVERSARY  
Three Army planes made first group cross-country flight-1912.

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Crew - Topeka Kansas - Nov. 1943

L. to R. 2nd Lt S. G. Cragg, 2nd Lt B. P. Callaghan 2nd Lt Krimmer 2nd Lt E. J. Connerman  
 1st Lt Sgt. R. Blackman Sgt. W. Hanna Sgt. L. Repley Pvt. Horey Sgt. J. Still, Sgt. H. Sooy

\* Blackman left the crew in Ireland

We wanted to name ~~our~~ our plane -  
 "My Ass'n Draggin"

JUL 30 1993

pix returned

JUL 30 1993

Done  
 LC

refer to pg. 11

Sep. 93 x-hrs

Horey 2. + i f  
 Horey 4. + i f

SCAN

Mr. Horey,

Thank you for loan  
 of picture. Enclosed is  
 a copy of the article  
 that is in Sept. '93  
 edition of CROSS HAIRS.

Best regards,

Linda

FOR COL HUMPHREYB

Horey, Elmer N.



Sgt. ELMER N. HOREY IS IN BOTTOM ROW, 4TH FROM  
LEFT