

## Ed Erickson Shares Story of Lost Gold

Somewhere beneath the murky depths of the Adriatic sea lay five cylinders containing countless dollars of US government gold bullion. Exactly where they are nobody knows. But Ed Erickson knows they are there. That's because he released the cylinders out of his transport plane, together with other matériel, in a moment of crisis in 1944.



Ed Erickson and his wife Betty told the story to your editor and Kevin Callahan at their home in Roseville. It's a great tale. And we wanted to hear it and print it for all to read. As Ed tells it, the gold was meant for Italian partisans to pay for war supplies. As was often the case with gold, it never reached its destination.

Sometimes the gold would mysteriously disappear. This time, though, the plane delivering the gold had a fuel problem mid-way through flight. The fuel tanks had not been connected properly by ground crew. Flying over the Adriatic Sea in the darkness of night, Ed's plane was quickly running short of fuel. To conserve fuel and make an emergency landing, he and his crew were ordered to dump everything to lighten the load.



After their emergency landing, the crew was debriefed. At that time, for the first time, they learned the identity of their secret cargo. It was Uncle Sam's gold they had pitched into the sea. There were no repercussions, though. The crew had done what it was ordered to do to save plane and crew alike in darkness over sea. They had not been told beforehand they were transporting gold bullion.

Ed Erickson's story highlights the cost of war in terms of national treasure. War is expensive. It results in primitive barter economies that rely on scarce, hard commodities as a medium of exchange and a store of value. The most important of these is gold. But shipping it is a team effort that often relies on interaction with nefarious characters under cover of darkness. Gold is often hijacked or lost during transfer. But in wartime it is necessary to get it to people in battle zones who can use it to buy influence, cooperation or to buy basic supplies and weaponry.

That the gold often doesn't get to its destination is a high cost of the whole nasty business of war

Luncheons are Wednesday, 11:15 AM  
K of C Hall, Bloomington, MN.  
See our website: [www.8thmn.org](http://www.8thmn.org)



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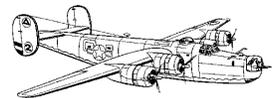
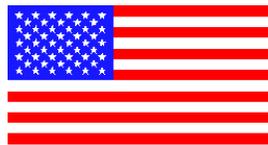
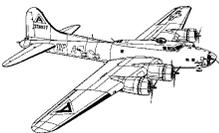
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*Newsletter prepared and edited by Lawrence Sagstetter, 1696 E. Third St., St. Paul, MN 55106,  
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**Recte Faciendo Neminem Timeo – "I Fear None In Doing Right."**





### President's Report By Steve Marks

We had an excellent Christmas party at Mancini's in St. Paul. One of our members, Ben Vickery, belongs to a barbershop quartet that provided the entertainment. Stan Turner did his usual good job of being master of ceremonies.

There were eight special guests attending that we gave special recognition to. All have been extremely helpful and attentive at the airshow at the Blaine airport in July. They are: Shelly Supan, Roger Hansen, Steve Shumaker and Craig Schiller. We were happy to show our gratitude by presenting plaques of thanks to all. One other supporter who wasn't at the party was Greg Herrick who has always supported us. Thanks again. I look forward to working with them again at this summer's airshows.

We lost two members, Cliff Digre and Dwight Olson, at the end of last year. Both of them will be mightily missed. Dwight will be missed for the items he would bring to the luncheons to sell. Cliff always had a smile on his face and a warm, boisterous "Hi". We also lost a volunteer at the Knights of Columbus (Tom) who was not only a server for our luncheons but was a great person and a veteran.

God bless you and rest in peace gentlemen.

Our board of directors has stayed the same as last year, with no change in officers. My heartfelt thanks to all directors and officers for their hard work and devotion.

With Memorial Day upon us, keep all who are serving and have served in your prayers. We are still in hard times around the world and those who have served have sacrificed much so we can keep our freedom.

Remember those who have been wounded or killed. Pray for not only them, but their families as well.

May God Bless America and keep us steadfast.

-Steve Marks.

### Chaplain's Message

"When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that that these men had been with Jesus."

Acts 4:13

Peter and John had been with Jesus for 3 years. They were common men who had learned from the Son of God, Jesus. They had listened as Jesus taught, prayed and watched how Jesus interacted with people. All of us should do no less.

-Bob Clemens

"The enemy's air superiority has a very grave effect on our movements. There's simply no answer to it."

- Field Marshal Erwin Rommel (on air power during the Normandy invasion)

"No enemy bomber can reach the Ruhr. If one reaches the Ruhr, my name is not Goering. You may call me Meyer."

— Hermann Goering, German Air Force Minister, addressing the German Air force, September 1939.



## Editor's Notes

- Lawrence Sagstetter

**My, how the months fly by!** It's already Memorial Day. But the newsletter drought has ended. It's been a while since I brought you the story of Harold Laursen. That was a great interview. I visited him at his Farmington farmhouse. Harold had a lot of great stories to tell, a bounty of memorabilia to examine.

He welcomed me without question into his home. Showed me everything he had. Then with all of his information in hand, I went and spelled his name incorrectly in my write-up. Sorry I mis-spelled your name, Harold. I think I got it right this time.

**The Mancini's Christmas parties are a terrific source** for making friends and gathering extraordinary stories from those who lived to tell them. It was at the 2011 party that I was introduced to Ed Erickson. "You have to get his story," I was told.

This past December at Mancini's I made a point of meeting with Ed again. I called him the very next day to see him and his wife Betty. I went to their house in Roseville with Kevin Callahan. Kevin is a trained lawyer. He knows how to interview people. And so I let him ask the questions, while I mostly listened and took notes.

The story we got is one for the ages. And we got it on film. Kevin films all of his interviews and posts them on YouTube. Then he links them to the 8thmn.org website. So you can go to the 8<sup>th</sup> site, click on videos in the home page heading. And you can see Ed Erickson, Betty and myself all on video.

**Never in his life did Ed Erickson** ever imagine he would be on YouTube.com. But he is! He has a remarkable story. Now the world knows about it. And it will be there forever. How incredible is that! Ed Erickson is a rock star – even if he did mistakenly dump millions of dollars of Uncle Sam's pure gold bullion into the depths of the Adriatic Sea.

What a story! And what a terrific couple Betty and Ed are for letting us come into their home on a cold December night.

**Mary Berg** singlehandedly raised nearly \$600 so the 8<sup>th</sup> could buy a new TV for luncheon presentations. And a 50-inch TV, at that. The TV is big. The screen is beautiful. And the sound is terrific. It is a welcome replacement for the old, dated one.

In the photo, Mary stands next to her newly acquired TV as Gary Birchem, with his back to the camera, readies it for viewing.



Kevin Callahan has built on Mary's efforts. He had the idea to post luncheon agendas and upcoming events on the TV. During lunches, the TV is used as a monitor so all can view 8<sup>th</sup> related news and information. After lunch, the TV is switched to video to support that day's program, be it a speaker or DVD.

Mary was the force multiplier in raising funds to buy the TV. But it has been a team effort to get it up and running, to maximize its use. 8<sup>th</sup> members are grateful for the efforts.

**Through the efforts of Kevin Callahan**, the 8<sup>th</sup> AFHS of MN was awarded a grant of \$3,827. This is a Minnesota Historical and Cultural Heritage grant. Funding is via a sales tax add-on approved by voters a few years ago. In our case, the funds will be used for oral history transcription of World War II veterans' experiences.

In other words, Kevin will use the granted funds to record our members' stories on video. He will transfer videos to DVD, for archiving. This is a project Kevin has taken on by himself. He has uploaded some 144 videos onto the internet site YouTube.com.

That's a tremendous amount of time-consuming work. It involves traveling the metro area to meet veterans. Kevin interviews them. Records them. Then he has to edit and burn video to DVD. It takes time to upload them to the internet for all to see. But Kevin loves the work. He loves hearing and recording for posterity veterans' first-hand accounts of their efforts in WWII.

**8<sup>th</sup> luncheons have included** many terrific speakers and programs in 2013. The Bloomington Sun published a story with photos about the luncheons at K of C Hall. This has prompted more attendance with many new faces, new members.

Former Governor Al Quie stopped by one day to sign books and talk about exploring the West by horseback. Roald Knutson talked about his days as a Sheriff's Deputy. John Uldrich provided new details on the Doolittle raid. News and photos from these presentations and others will be included in future newsletters.

**Luncheons are always hosted** by the comedy tag team of Bob Clemens and Vince Parker. Hope to see you at the next one.

## **FREEDOM**

**- A Poem by Franc Linc, ex-POW**



**We were liberated by General Patton and his Third Army.**

**He came into camp, standing in his jeep,**

**Hands on hips,**

**Brandishing his two ivory-handled pistols,**

**While the United States flag was raised.**

**There was not a dry eye.**

**A half-century has gone by.**

**We watch our flag raised to the sky.**

**We have a tear in our eye.**

**We hear the national anthem.**

**We have a tear in our eye.**

**We see old glory parade by.**

**We have a tear in our eye.**

**We hear taps.**

**We cry!**

## **Operation Carpetbagger, as Experienced by Ed Erickson**

Our crew, after picking up a new Liberator B-24 in Lincoln, NE, came over the northern route to Goose Bay, Labrador and Reykjavik, Iceland, then on to a modification center in Scotland. There we boarded a train, which eventually delivered us to a place where waiting trucks transported us to Harrington field. The 801<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group was stationed there in support of Operation Carpetbagger, to be joined later by the 492<sup>nd</sup> Bomb Group.

There we learned that we were to fly at night helping the French underground, the Maquis. The planes had only four guns: top and tail turrets. The belly turret was removed to make a large opening for dropping supplies and personnel. This opening was called the “Joe Hole” after secret agents we only knew as “Joes.” Along with the reduction in armament, crews were reduced from ten to eight men.

After a short training period in England, we were flying successful night missions, dropping equipment and operatives to French resistance fighters. The secret of success was pinpoint charting of the course after briefing by the Intelligence Section. Lt. Sanderson, the navigator, and I, Ed Erickson – the bombardier, worked closely together to plan the safest route to be taken while staying away from known enemy gun emplacements.

Lt. Sanderson, during the mission, worked in a lighted compartment. I, on the other hand, had to be able to see in the dark to locate and verify

checkpoints along the way. I found that by placing seven layers of wax paper from K-ration packages over the lens of a two-cell flashlight, I could see the checkpoints on the map and on the ground without my eyes undergoing any change from one to the other. The maps we were provided were excellent.

At this time, a tour consisted of 25 missions.



We had almost that many when the tour length was changed to 30. When we were close to 30 missions it was increased to 35. The length of a tour

increased incrementally from there.

General Patton’s tank corps was now developing a fuel shortage. The Carpetbaggers were called upon to help deliver gas to keep his campaign going. Bomb bay tanks were used along with the wingtip tanks, which were disconnected from the main tanks to facilitate unloading upon landing in Belgium.

Bombardiers were not utilized during this operation, probably because pinpoint navigation was not required in this situation. My crew flew four gas missions. By then the crisis was over.

Next, the 859<sup>th</sup> Squadron received a new assignment: to continue the Carpetbagger operation from a base in Brindisi, Italy. This move came in the last week of December, 1944. There we became part of the 2641<sup>st</sup>

Provisional Group commanded by Col. Monro MacCloskey. His squadron, the 885<sup>th</sup>, had been involved in Carpetbagger missions for some time before we arrived in Brindisi.

We flew night missions across the Adriatic Sea to various parts of Yugoslavia dropping supplies and operatives to the partisans and having good success. None of these missions were exceptionally long. Our next mission was to be long – from Brindisi on the heel of the Italian boot to the northern border of Italy over high, rugged mountains. It was also to be one of our most dangerous and exciting missions.

The date was February 25<sup>th</sup>, 1945. We proceeded uneventfully to the target area. Everything was in readiness as we approached. But the target was not there that night. The navigator and I verified that we had the exact location. After searching further around the area we decided the target had been scrubbed for the night.

Lt. Sanderson, checking drift, ground speed, etc., was aware that there had been a big change of wind direction, now coming from the west at gale speed. Before he could arrive at a heading, we were far out over the Adriatic Ocean. Now came the discovery by the engineer, Sgt. "Pop" Cox, that he was unable to transfer gas from the wingtip tanks to the main tanks. We were stunned when the sudden realization came that we were in a deadly crisis. Sgt. Cox knew immediately what must have happened. The engineering staff back in England had neglected or forgotten to re-connect the tanks. We were going to run out of fuel in a very short time.

Co-Pilot Lt. Haldeman began calling the emergency call "May Day." Over and over, hoping to make contact with someone who could help us. I, myself, was more than a little

skeptical about any results from a distress call in the middle of the night from a lone airplane out there in the blackness.

Knowing the seriousness of the situation, the pilot, Caption John Fox, started remedial action immediately. He ordered everything that was loose to be dropped in order to lighten the plane. I ordered Sgt. Maccone, the dispatcher, to throw everything in the waist out through the "Joe-hole." But to keep the "Joe" from jumping out, I tripped the salvo lever and everything dropped into the depths of the Adriatic Sea.

After what seemed to me a long period of time, there came a definite response to our distress call. To me, this was no less than a miracle. Eventually we were given a heading to the nearest airfield where we could land. This was Foggia, about halfway up the east coast of Italy. On this new heading our ground speed was further reduced because now we were flying directly into the wind. It seemed to me that we were moving only inch by inch approaching the Italian coastline. Capt. Fox proceeded to gradually gain altitude, for a little extra insurance.

I looked in on Sanderson. He was busy with his navigation. I told him to get his chute and life raft strapped on. He just kept on with his calculations. The waves must have been 20 feet high that night so we would not have lasted long in the drink anyway.

Luck was with us. We made it to Foggia airfield. And here Capt. Fox made one of the smoothest landings ever. He had learned his trade well. Sgt. Cox checked the remaining gas supply and determined that we had, at the most, ten minutes left.

When we got out of the plane, our “Joe” calmly filled his pipe and had a smoke. After refueling we returned to Brindisi.

We had been a very successful crew. After what happened, however, I did not consider it unusual to be called upon for an explanation of the events that had taken place. Col. MaManus, the commanding officer, called in Capt. Fox, Lt. Haldeman and Lt. Sanderson. They learned that it had been especially important to complete this mission. Or, at the least, to return with the cargo which had been entrusted to us. We had done what had to be done. And this was understood by command. But the cargo I had ditched into the Adriatic was several million dollars in gold bullion at what was then about \$35 an ounce. Who knows what it would be worth today at prices over \$1,400 an ounce.

Col MacCloskey of the 885<sup>th</sup> Squadron in his book, “The Secret War,” makes reference to another mission in which the cargo was gold. This was delivered to the target. But the person expecting it never received it. The gold was spirited away mysteriously. Where it went no one knows.

We finished our tour at Brindisi, accumulating 56 missions total.

*-1<sup>st</sup> Lt Edmund M. Erickson, Bombardier, 859<sup>th</sup> Squadron, 801<sup>st</sup>-492<sup>nd</sup> Bomb Group.*

**Lou Martin** was recently awarded the Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award. In the photo (top – right) Mr. Allan Hoffert from the Minneapolis FAA flight Standards District Office presents the award to Lou.



## Folded Wings

The end of 2012, we lost Cliff Digre. In November, Cliff Digre called me. He wanted to know how to sign up his family for the Mancini’s dinner.



Cliff, Bernice & Family, circa 2011.

Cliff had never been to any of the 8<sup>th</sup> AF Christmas parties. This time he was excited to go. It was something he really wanted to do.

He wanted to bring his whole family, children and grandchildren included.

But he never made it to Mancini's. A week or two beforehand he died of a sudden heart attack. Cliff left his children and grandchildren with a terrific legacy. He left them with his experiences and memories written down in a book, "Into Life's School."

Cliff also left his kids a multi-million dollar speaker business to run that he built from nothing: MISCO. The story of Cliff and MISCO was described in past issues of this newsletter. Earlier this year there was a feature article written about MISCO on the business page of the Star-Tribune.

In many ways, it was a blessing that I got to know Cliff Digre. He shared his stories with me. Introduced me to his family. Taught me his values. He had a remarkable life. He lived the American dream.

### Tom Griffin



Maj. Thomas C. "Tom" Griffin, a B-25 bomber navigator in the audacious Doolittle's Raid attack on mainland Japan during World War II, has died. He received a B-25 flyover at his burial.

Griffin was a regular visitor to the Wings of the North AirExpo shows at Flying Cloud Airport. Griffin died less than two months before his fellow Raiders' final annual reunion, April 17-21

in Fort Walton Beach, in the Florida Panhandle where the Raiders trained for the attack.



### Boots Blesse



Though not a member of the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force, fighter ace General "Boots" Blesse was a regular presence for years at AirExpo. He was a friend of the 8<sup>th</sup> and will be greatly missed. In March he received full military honors including a flyover at Arlington Cemetery.

Due to federal budget constraints Air Force flyovers have been curtailed. But an exception was made in the case of Boots Blesse because of his long and distinguished career.

Here are a few of Blesse's more memorable quotes:

“Keep the aircraft you are attacking in sight. Once you spot him you can’t take your eyes off him for one second or you’ll come back as one of the many who had him cold and let him slip away.”

“Guts will do for skill but not consistently.”

“When in doubt — attack!”

### **Doolittle Raiders Gather for Final Reunion.**

From left to right: Lt. Col. Richard Cole, Lt. Col. Edward Saylor and Staff Sgt. David Thatcher in the hangar dedicated April 16 to Saylor at Eglin Air Force Base.

The importance of the reunion being the final one is



“overblown,” Dick Cole said, “but apparently the public likes it so we have to live with it.”

A private gathering will be held this year, where the final four will sip from a bottle of Hennessy cognac from 1896, the year mission commander James Doolittle was born. They will toast one last time to all of those who made the mission.



**Anoka County Airport - Jane's Field Blaine MN**

*"Return of the Big Bombers"*

**Weekend of July 20th, 2013**

**Golden Wings Museum, Blaine Airport**



# An Evening with Eagles Dinner and Symposium

**Saturday, July 13, 2013**

\$47.50 per person **Order Tickets** (order your tickets early, this event sold out last three years)

5:30 pm - social hour 6:30 pm -dinner and symposium

Minneapolis Marriott Southwest Hotel, 5801 Opus Pkwy, Minnetonka



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**Jim McDougall, PBY Catalina Black Cats Ordnanceman, on his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday.  
With wife Von.**