

STRAFER



498th SQUADRON

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345th Bomb Group Reunion Association

June 1993

Taps Playing for Williams AFB

Editor's Note: Williams Field, where most 345th pilots received their flight training, is closing in September. This month the last of the personnel leave. Many members may find they share the feelings of these men interviewed by the Arizona Republic.

For Jack Haek and Ray McPherson, the imprints of Williams began in early spring 1942, months after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941. America couldn't produce pilots fast enough for warplanes rolling off assembly lines. "We landed at Sky Harbor on unpaved runways," Haek recalled. "The ride from there to Higley Field seemed like it was two hours. There wasn't much for roads, and the base was out in the middle of the desert and nowhere."

barracks were still under construction. A few base cadets were among the first graduates of a five-week training course, and prepa-

rations were under way for the first class of American pilots.

The base was called Mesa Air Base, Mesa Military Airport then Higley Field. Then, the War Department named it Williams Field in honor of Yuma-born 1st Lt. Charles L. Williams. He was killed near Oahu, Hawaii, on July 6, 1927.

The pace became hectic. In 1942, the base trained 1,044 pilots; 3,686 in 1943; 4,200 in 1944. "It was seven days a week of flying," recalled retired Col. Charles Falletta of Chandler, who arrived at Williams in June 1943 to allay any fears among cadets about flying America's latest warplanes. But Falletta said his message of reassurance to the pilots overlooked a few salient points. His script was written by the training command. "They didn't want me to tell those kids that malaria almost killed me and that there weren't any women over there," he said.

"We were just kids, having a lot of fun," said McPherson, who is 72. "Most of us were in our early 20s."

Over the years, the base has trained more than 26,000 pilots.

After the base closes, friendships and memories will be the only glue bonding such "Willy" alumni as Haek and McPherson. It was because of such relationships that McPherson moved back to the Valley from his home in Seattle. "That's why I decided this would be a good place to live," McPherson said. "I was married on the base and started my family there."

True facts

Colonel Clinton U True served originally as the executive officer of the 345th. Later he took over as the commanding officer. He was the first president of the 345th Reunion Association, serving for several years.

(please see "True story" on page 4)



Comments from the President

Vic Tatelman, President

I've just returned from Colorado Springs where the dates for our 1994 Reunion have been de-

ecided along with the hotel selection. The dates are September 8 - 10, 1994 and the hotel is the Sheraton Colorado Springs.

Kortemeyer is heading up program planning which promises to be exciting. In the discussion:

1. Tour of Falcon Air Force Base (all the you-wouldn't-believe electronics that decided target information in the Gulf War).
2. Trip to Cripple Creek (Colorado's answer to Las Vegas' Casino Gambling, only not as gaudy).
3. Tour of the Air Force Academy (lots of new facilities have been added since we were there last, including the world famous Gimbel Library. Only 10 or 15 people can be accommodated for the latter).
4. A bus ride through the Garden of the Gods and up Pikes Peak.

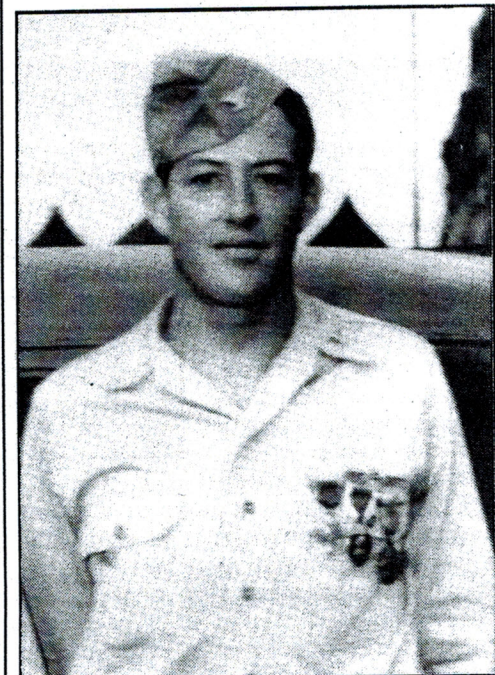
5. And a football game (Air Force vs. Brigham Young University).

In regard the latter, it's important that those of you who would like to attend the football game, let me know right away so that seats can be arranged. The price of the tickets will be about \$16 but don't send any money now, but do let me know if you will be going. You will be asked to pay for the tickets well in advance of the usual reservations questionnaire.

The Group Business Meeting and the Ladies Breakfast on Saturday morning will start at 9:00 a.m. as usual; however, those people going to the football game will have to leave the hotel at 10:00 a.m.. The game starts at noon.

A word (again) regarding the 345th Plaque Dedication: the ceremony will be held in the Air Force Academy Cemetery on Friday Morning, September 9, 1994. Bus transportation will be arranged (keep your fingers crossed concerning weather).

Let me have your suggestions and Comments; none of this is set in concrete yet, except for the football game and the dedication ceremony.

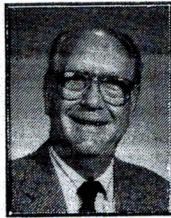


Colonel Clinton U True, Commander, 345th Bomb Group at Nadzab, New Guinea in early 1944.

Squadron Reports

498th Squadron

Merl G. Wooden
V.P. 498th Sqd.



Guess it's spring every place except Iowa. We had a three-to-four inch snow-fall April 15th (tax day). I know every part of the U S has its problem: in California and the Northwest it's earthquakes; too much rain in Texas and the Southeast; it's hurricanes and mosquitoes in Florida; tornados in Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska and the Dakotas; the upper Midwest and the Northeast it's too cold. However the weather in Colorado Springs at reunion time will be perfect. I know you'll enjoy the trip to the high country.

Our 498th had 104 members and guests at Columbus. Two other squadrons had more than we did. Lets make the 498th the biggest squadron at Colorado Springs in 1994.

Milan Vasevich, a bombardier and navigator in our squadron writes, "During my tour, we lost nine planes in the 498th. About a week before the war ended we had a mission to Japan to bomb bridges and other targets. We had just started using rockets at that time. They were fired by the pilot. My original crew was shot down on that mission and was captured by the Japs and was beheaded. I learned about that after the war."

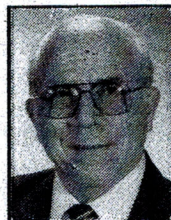
Milan was also part of the crew that escorted the Japanese Peace Envoy from IE Shima to Japan. So much has been written about taking them to the Peace table. We forgot someone had to take them back home.

I still think we could have a Squadron get together. In Columbus we couldn't get enough to say "I'll make it." Ten to fifteen couples would be enough to get the group together in an off year. Time is getting away from us.

To keep this column interesting, we need more input from you. We need your war stories and what you are doing now to pass the time. Are there any members out there who go camping? Keep those letters coming and save your changes for a great trip to Colorado next year.

499th Squadron

Benjamin F. Miller
V.P. - 499th Sqd.



Fifty years ago we embarked on the greatest adventure of our young lives by crossing the vast and unfriendly Pacific.

Alcatraz didn't look inviting, but many comments were made about trading places with some of the residents. After a few days, there were no more fresh water showers. The salt water soap made shaving painful, so we quit. The food left much to be desired, but it beat being seasick all across like a few of our people.

The fun part for the enlisted men was the day King Neptune held court on deck as we crossed the equator. The officers had to take the physi-

cal part for all of us. Some had hair and whiskers partly clipped, then mopped down with grease on a mop and washed down with a fire hose. Thanks to their sacrifice, we were all declared trusty Shellbacks.

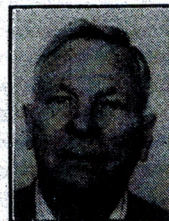
The rusty old President Johnson had frequent engine failures, the worst being one placid, moonlit night. Not a sound, then a submarine alert. Our Free French escort vessel darted all about, dropping depth charges and we were spared. Coming across oil slicks left by previous ships that had been sunk, did little to ease our nerves. Our prayers were answered, so we made it.

Reflecting on the past makes our reunions more meaningful with each one. This year the 499th Squadron will have a mini-reunion at Bearcreek Farms, the same place we had one two years ago. Those in attendance at the last one requested we go to the same place. It is a nice quiet place several miles from the nearest highway. The cabins, RV spots, restaurants, the live theater and other parts of the park are just right for people of our vintage.

As stated before, the dates are Sept. 16, 17 and 18. If you care to come early or stay later, this can be arranged if you don't wait too long to make reservations. RV spots are \$8.00 per day or 2 days for \$15.00. Double occupancy of cabins for the two day package will be \$149.95. We have a room reserved for our use for the 3 days complete with TV and VCR. Give some thought to what you might want to contribute toward this reunion. There are quite a few attractions nearby, but no travel agency is involved. The phone numbers for reservations are 219-997-6822 or 800-288-7630. If you have questions of other things, please call me at 1-219-547-4460. Be sure to check airline prices. It is usually less expensive to fly to Indianapolis, than to Ft. Wayne. There are two 18-hole golf courses nearby. See you then. Bearcreek Farms is at Bryant, IN on highway #27, just north of Portland, and about 45 miles southeast of Ft. Wayne, IN.

500th Squadron

Benjamin T. Muller
V.P. - 500th Sqd.



The dates are firm! September 5-8, 1993 for the '93 500th reunion - location, Hyatt Regency Peachtree center, Atlanta, GA. Our Georgia gang, Albright, Bynum and Reheis, have done a good job in making preparations and I know we will enjoy the fruits of their labor.

On a sad note: James McGuire battled many physical problems valiantly and finally succumbed in June of '92. His widow, Lois, relates that he was buried in Arlington National Cemetery. Jim was a POW in China for six months after being shot down at the end of WWII. Gene Lawless and I survived the ordeal with Mac. Mac served as a pilot in Korea and Viet Nam, retiring from the AF as CO of an airbase in

South Carolina. He will be missed.

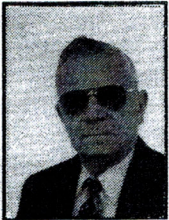
You can read about Mac and see a picture of his ship going down on pages 290-291 in the "Warpath." More on pages 317, 359 and ?

Lois and John, Mac's son, had a stainless glass B-25 made as a surprise for Mac several years ago. I contacted the craftsman (a hobbyist) who made it and he said would make B-25's for any who would like one. They are about 13 inches long and he can put any special insignia or name you would like on them. Contact Max Kaufman, #9 Cheyene Rd, Myrtle Beach, SC 29575 803/238-5027.

In the last *Strafer* I mentioned a book by Matsatsugu Ogawa, "Human Beings in Extremis." I have had a book seller searching for this book without results; have concluded that it has not been published in English, only in Japanese. Anyone for translating it?

501st Squadron

Virgil Gross
V.P. 501st Sqd.



Well, Spring has sprung and I hope things are as pretty other places as in Mississippi. Trees, flowers and shrubs are as beautiful as I have ever seen.

We went to Myrtle Beach in late March with Bob and Sybil Anderson and George and Evelyn Mordecai to make arrangements for the minireunion. It will be held at the O Creek resort on 7, 8 & 9 October. You should have received a letter from George with all the details so pick your partners and lets have a real good reunion. I think you will like our choice of location.

On our way back we stopped to see Jay and Billie Moore and had lunch with them. They both looked good and were in good spirits, but the cancer has recurred in Billie's lung, so she is back in chemo treatments, which is quite hard on the entire system.

Sybil Anderson had a breast biopsy and thankfully it was benign. Checked on Cecil Johnson and he is confined to a wheel chair. Jack Gronewald is recovering from knee surgery and is doing well. Received a letter from Kort Kortemeyer regarding the Colorado Springs reunion in September '94. It should be beautiful that time of year.

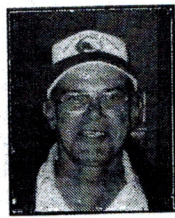
Please send any news about the Squadron to me so we can get it in the *Strafer*.

Address info

Your address label has a new feature. If your 1993 dues were received by May 1, there will be five stars above your name. If we have not received your check yet, there will be a blank line above your name. This was suggested by a member, who said it was used in another organization he joined. We hope it will help you keep track of things.

Headquarters Group

Ken Gastgeb
V.P. HQ Group



Several weeks ago I received a phone call from Eph G. Gamino from Oklahoma City. Joe was a navigator with the 500th Bomb Squadron. His story does not appear in the "Warpath Across the Pacific." The book has the plane number and says it was salvaged after an accident on August 23, 1945.

Joe Gamino was on board of that plane when it crashed and burned on IE Shima. He was injured and just barely escaped death. Joe would like to know if anyone in the 345th Bomb Group knows about the accident and who the people were in the back of the aircraft and if they got out or not. His brief account of the incident is as follows:

PLANE CRASH ON IE SHIMA

About two weeks after V. J. Day, a proficiency flight was scheduled for the 500th Sqd. with pilot, (not known), co-pilot Lt. Frederic W. Fuller and navigator, Joseph G. Gamino (me), and other random crew members whom I didn't know. Also two Sea Bees had gotten the pilots permission to ride along.

About 09:45 a.m. on August 23, 1945, taking off in B-25J-22, we had what I believe was a run-away prop. about three quarters of the way down the runway on take-off. The pilot decided to try to keep the plane on the ground; he jammed the wheel brakes on and both tires flew out and we kept right on going. We went to the end of the runway and were up in the air about a 100 feet, due to the air speed we had attained and the down slope of the ground down to the sea. When we hit the rocky ground, the plane immediately caught fire and there was a big scramble to get out of the plane. I know that the co-pilot, the pilot, and I, got out (in that order) by crawling out the wind-shield in front of the co-pilot. I suffered second-degree burns and three compression fractures of lumbar vertebra. It was a miracle and God's Will that we got out alive.

I was in the hospital in IE Shima, (where an unknown soldier brought me a snapshot of what was left of the plane, just rubble) and then transferred to a larger hospital in Manila, P. I., and eventually back to the good old U. S. A. on a Canadian Hospital Ship, and recovered.

If any other survivors are still living, or anyone that saw this crash can shed additional information on this happening, I would sure appreciate hearing from you. Perhaps we can meet at the next reunion at Colorado Springs, Colorado. Thanks in advance.

Joe's address and phone number:
Joseph G. Gamino
2425 N. W. 49th Street
Oklahoma City, OK 73112
Phone: 405-842-1 664

Thanks for the info

Many members are helping with information of address changes. It is very much appreciated. It helps us get *Strafer* to you quickly.

Group Bulletin Board

INVITATION:

Friday, 10/8/93, 10:00 a.m. dedication of 5th AF Memorial at USAF Academy. Includes plaque of 345th BG. Chosen by 5th AFMF Trustees as keynote speaker for the event: the 345th's own Maury Eppstein. No admission charged for this ceremony.



Lt. Chiappe & friends, 1943

Demand exceeded supply for the **Indian Head Lapel Pins** available at Reunion IX.



Minimum reorder resulted in small number remaining. Send \$5 check (\$9 for two) to:
Ken McClure
5661 Chowning Way
Columbus, OH 43213

INVITATION:

Friday, 9/9/94, 10:00 a.m. Special program at USAF Academy to dedicate 345th Bomb Group plaque on 5th AF Memorial. This event will be part of the agenda for Reunion X of the Air Apaches. No admission charge. You are invited to attend this event and the one above, especially this one, though

345th BG Pin sold at Las Vegas and Columbus reunions. A few remain. Send check for \$4.00 (which does cover postage) to:

Jerry Murphy
5208 Lynd Ave
Lyndhurst, OH 44124



A small number of **Air Apache 50th Anniv. Paperweights** are available. Send \$45 to:

Bill Croop
800 Highland Dr
Toledo, OH 43160

Seeking to buy 345th patches:
Ron R VanSickle
9605 Duffer Way
Gaithersburg, MD 20879

IN MEMORY OF

George Farough 501st Tucson, AZ
Robert H. Forsyth xxx Mch 8, '93.. Southern Pines, NC

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601/328-9369

Redoing Doolittle's Raid

By John Baeta

The 50th anniversary of James H. "Jimmy" Doolittle's raid on the Japanese mainland (April 18, 1942) was honored with a special flight over Doolittle's house on April 21, 1992.

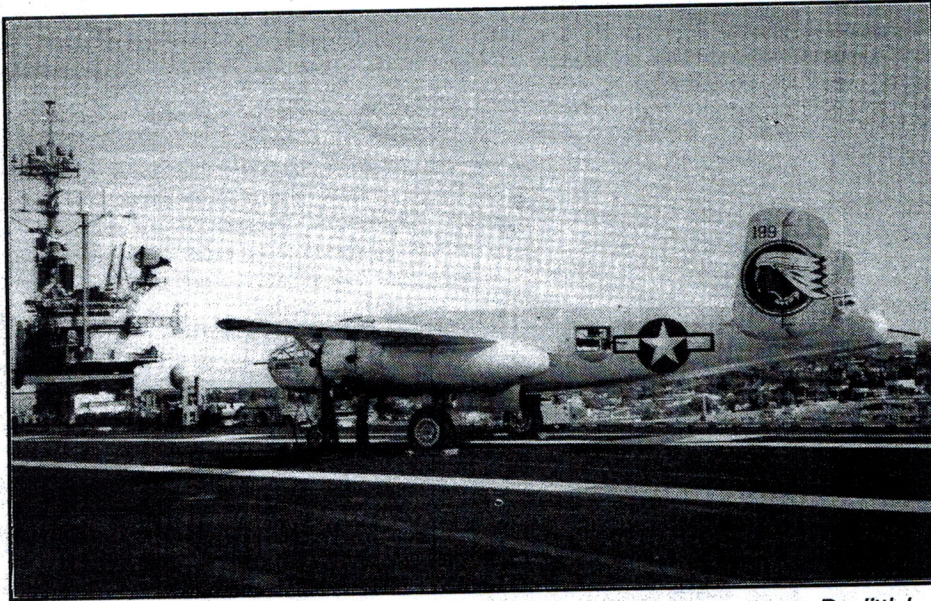
The event became a reality with the cooperation of the Defense Department, the U.S. Navy, and the effort of Joe Davis, Carl Scholl and members of Eagle Field, Dos Palos, California.

Two B-25s were selected for the launch and were carefully craned aboard the carrier USS Ranger, just a few days before the event. They were "In the Mood" owned by Robert Lumbard and "Heavenly Body" Mike Pupich's aircraft. What made it so

special for me, was that "In the Mood" has the 345th Indian Head logo on its tail. We were flown down to the San Diego Naval Air Station, on North Island, in a private Turbo Jet and billeted aboard the Ranger on Monday the 20th. I attended a banquet that evening at which the B-25 crew members were presented with Navy Wings. Among the many honored guests were Henry Potter, Doolittle's navigator and Travis Hoover, pilot of the second plane to take off on the raid.

On the following morning, the 21st, the USS Ranger sailed out to sea. After Commemoration ceremonies, followed by the loading of dummy

bombs, Captain Dennis McGinn turned the 80,000 ton carrier into the wind. The eight boilers churned out more than 280,000 horsepower as the ship sliced through the ocean at 32 knots. "Heavenly Body" lifted off first, followed shortly thereafter by "In the Mood." A cheer rang out from the spectators on board as the planes became air-borne. The launched



"In The Mood" awaits take-off from USS Ranger's deck to commemorate Doolittle's

B-25s were joined by other Mitchells and fighter aircraft and flew by the carrier in formation. The B-25s returned to the Naval Air Station to refuel and to load carnations into their bomb bays. That afternoon, they flew up the Coast to Carmel, where the flowers were dropped into the surf near Doolittle's home.

While returning to the harbor, those of us on board were invited to a brunch held below on the hanger deck. Centered on the deck was the ice sculptured B-25 rotating on its lighted pedestal.

It was a once in a life time event and I was thrilled to have been a part of it.

True story

(continued from page 1)

True was born and raised in New Orleans. It was in the depression that he won a scholarship to Tulane, but accepted an appointment to West Point. "My father said I to go to West Point and I said, sir" he says. He graduated in 1936 and was flying A-20s, at the time Pearl Harbor was bombed. He got the word in a phone call from his father-in-law.

True commanded Turner Field in Albany, GA (a training field for B-25 pilots) immediately after serving in the 345th. His full military career spanned 30 years.

"Getting together with the 345th was the highlight of my career," he says. He was a strict disciplinarian. "I've never seen a good unit that wasn't well disciplined," he says. And the 345th was the best. "It was an exceptional organization," he says. True says, like most people, his closest friendships were formed under the pressure of combat.

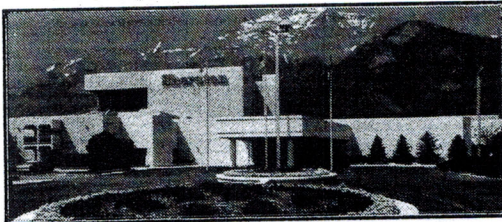
The 345th was originally to go to England and in the early days of the group he spent time making arrangements for that transit. When the 345th went to the south Pacific True was the executive officer and later the commanding officer

True is now retired and lives in Florida.

1993 Dues Payable

Please send \$15 annual payment to:
345th BG Reunion Assn.
KEN McCLURE
5581 CHOWNING WAY
COLUMBUS OH 43213

Reunion X



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