



# STRAFER



498th SQUADRON    499th SQUADRON    500th SQUADRON    501st SQUADRON

345th Bomb Group Reunion Association    Quarterly    Volume 16, Issue 1, March 1998

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## FELLOWSHIP AND FUN REUNION

by Ken Gastgeb

We are on the final COUNT DOWN for our FELLOWSHIP AND FUN Reunion at San Antonio. We were forced to change horses, or rather Hotels, in the middle of our planning. Every thing was set up at the Holiday Inn Hotel when we received some shocking news. The Hotel was going to be renovated and will not be able to handle our reunion. Lynn Lee, Bill Cavoli and Jerry Seirs of the Holiday Inn, immediately went looking for a Hotel. They searched, bargained, and did whatever it took to find one that was suitable for our reunion. Their decision was the Radisson Hotel at the Downtown Market Square. There are places of interest within walking distance from the Hotel.

We have lots of fun things planned. Be sure to get there early enough on Wednesday to join in on the Ice Breaker at 6:00 PM. A display table will be in the Hospitality Room, at scheduled times, to display arts and craft items, photographs, drawings, paintings, needle work, etc. Bring one or two of your favorite items to show others of your artistic talents. We have two Tours scheduled and both will have us back to the Hotel in the early afternoon. There will

be plenty of time to rest up for the evening activity. After the meetings Saturday morning, there is free time in the afternoon and an evening party of chips, dip and drinks. Hospitality Room will be open most of the day.

If you like to sing, in a sing-a-long some of the songs of yesteryear, bring along your best singing voice. The volunteer services of any one or group, that has some experience in directing group singing, is requested.

Also we will appreciate it very much if a couple of you guys or and gals that plays a guitar or banjo or both to bring it along

and we can have a good old fashion ho-down or sing along. That would really make it an Air Apache WESTERN NIGHT that would never be forgotten. I still remember the night at a Reunion when we had the Squadron singing groups. That was really great so we do have the talent to have a Great Time. Please write or call me so that we can get this project organized.

Follow the instructions in filling out the Registration Form. Please get your reservations in early to give us time to make final preparations.

*please see "Reunion" on page 4*



### President's Comments

Lynn Lee  
President

The last Strafer with the story of the preparations for the invasion of Japan was a chilling revelation. I shudder to think of what would have been if President Truman had not been the type of man he was and would not have dropped

the bombs on Japan. His famous statement, "If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen," says it all. The 345th would be a much smaller organization than it is today. Thanks President Truman, you were my type of guy!

I'm sure if you would call your newspaper in your town and offer this story to them, there are a lot of fellows in your area who would appreciate reading about it. God bless all and may 1998 be a good year for each of us and our loved ones.

## Squadron Reports

### 498th Squadron

Frank Dillard

Asst. Gp. V.P. - 498th Sqd.

By now we should have broken, or badly bent, all of those noble New Year's resolutions. Time sure flies! At least the gray days of southern Illinois winter seem to pass rapidly. I stay too busy for cabin fever by sketching, building model airplanes, writing poetry and reading. If your interests are similar, let's swap notes. As a widower, I do housework (very reluctantly), and date a very pleasant lady, when she's not babysitting a new granddaughter.

I heard from Mike and Evelyn Coloff recently. Mike celebrated his 83rd birthday last November. A belated Happy Birthday, and many more, Mike. Mike informed me that Pat Aloia passed away on Thanksgiving Day, after a long illness. Our ranks are dwindling far too rapidly for comfort. If there's someplace you want to go, something you want to buy, or something you want to do, my advice is go there, buy it, and do it, before it's too late!

Ken Gastgeb is doing a great job as reunion chairman. He evidently forgot Old Soldier's Rule Number One: A good soldier never stands when he can sit, never sits when he can lie down, and never, never gets volunteered into anything. Speaking of volunteering, Ben Miller (499th) and yours truly will be in charge of the hospitality room at San Antonio and we'll need help. If you can spare an hour or so to tend bar, or just act as host, Ben and I would appreciate it.

My old buddy, George Flynn, gave me a Christmas subscription to Aviation History Magazine. The March issue features an article about B-25s and the 499th's Dirty Dora (with Vic Tatelman as pilot) made the cover. You may want a copy. Two other publications devoted solely to the B-25 are the Squadron/Signal Publications: B-25 Mitchell In Action (Aircraft No. 34) and Walk Around B-25 Mitchell (Walk Around No. 12). There are many photographs and artists' renditions of 345th Bomb Group aircraft in these books.

### 499th Squadron

Ben F Miller

Asst. Gp. V.P. - 499th Sqd.

The December Strafer was outstanding. We were told that we were scheduled for the invasion of Japan, and we knew it would be at an enormous price.



The "Gone With The Wind" article should erase all doubts about the decision to drop atomic bombs.

When I was a youth my uncle loaned me the book "All Quiet on The Western Front." It was a story of a young German soldier who lost his life on the last day of the war. It haunted me on our last day, when we were told that Japan had surrendered around mid-morning. That night we were under aerial attack for 1½ hours. Our island was covered with stacks of wooden crates containing a variety of explosives. There were artillery shells, 50 Cal. ammo, bombs, and many barrels of alcohol, gasoline, etc. On Japanese radio they said they would use gas on us, and that was scary, creating a frantic search for gas masks. They dropped phosphorus bombs, with the long looking things over the following day. We found many of the wooden crates had been charred by the phosphorus, but because they were too high, the metal was cooled. A chain of explosions would have cleaned off the island. Dirt was too shallow to dig fox holes, so we were at their mercy. Never were more prayers said and answered than during this period.

The next few weeks weren't any fun. Most of the old-timers in the group kept their clothes clean and waited to go to Okinawa. They decided who could go home by a point system. Another member of the group and I had 84, but it took 85 to go home. One day we were authorized two more battle stars, and they gave me 20 minutes to check out and pack. It was done in 10. It was a sweat job flying to Okinawa in a combat weary B-25 that shook and vibrated like a C-47. We headed home in a new troop transport, and we spent two days fighting heavy seas, in the Typhoon the Japanese prayed for in "Gone with The Wind."

### 500th Squadron

Ken Stufflebeam

Asst. Gp. V.P. - 500th Sqd.

We are coming to you for the first time in the new year with best wishes for all for a good year. Can we not say that the year of 1997 was a good year, especially for those of the 500th who attended the reunion in San Antonio?

I received the information from Ken Gastgeb concerning the group reunion that is to be in San Antonio in the early part of September of 1998 and it appears that the planners did a great job of setting it up. My thanks go to Bill and Kathy Cavoli and



to his daughter, Kathy Rubin, for being in on the planning. I did not want to go back to Texas again as I had just recently turned from attending the 500th reunion.

I would like to have some news to publish, but I have not received any correspondence from anyone, except Lee Grosse, who told us that he and Henrietta planned to go to Phoenix to stay for a few weeks. Come on 500th, send us some news if you want to be published.

### 501st Squadron

George Mordecai

Asst. Gp. V.P. - 501st Sqd.

I received a letter from a history buff from Leeds, England with a request for Peppy's address. It seems that he was able to get a copy of "We Band of Brothers" and is interested in getting an autograph from the "great one." We will have to be careful when we go to England they will now know of our exploits and at least what we were capable of back in those days. Ah to be young again.

I received e-mail from the son of a former member of the 501st who makes documentaries. He wants to research our organization for possibilities. I'll try keep in touch and let him know about our reunion in San Antonio.

I am still receiving letters about our trip to Branson. All say it is great to get together with old friends and relive our trials and pleasures. They are all looking forward to this September when we can meet the rest of the friends from the other squadrons. The ones who were missed the most were Chet Burns and the Valentine brothers. In my last epistle to the Strafer I neglected to mention that Fran and Virg Gross and Dee & George Musket were at Branson. I heard about it from them. Dee, we will have a ceremony with Fran relinquishing her throne as the greatest shopper in the 501st. Long live the Queen.

I received a letter from John Cook with his usual contribution. John has been faithful ever since I became treasurer of the 501st. He must think of us when he makes out his taxes. Thanks John it helps when it becomes time to do a mailing.

1997 is history, seven members of our squadron passed away during the year. Of course those are only the ones we received notice about. Rico Pallotta, who died on January 4, was a pilot and accomplished accordion player and distinguished himself in the education field. He established an innovative program for dealing



with severely disturbed children. It's considered among the top five in the country.

This is a sign of things to come. We are reaching the age where the odds are against us. It is time to start planning our enjoyment while there is still time. Each year it becomes more difficult to make the effort to get our pleasures in. Plan on coming to San Antonio September 9 - 13 and meet all your old buddies from the time when Uncle Sam sent you to a paradise in the South Pacific. See you in San Antonio.

### Headquarters Group

August Ouellette  
Asst. Gp. V.P. - HQ Group

The first thing is to wish everyone who sees this report a very happy new year. Here's hoping it will be as good as, or better than, last year.

Now that we've gone by the holidays it's time to "buckle" down and start working on the San Antonio Reunion in earnest. It won't take long for September to roll around.

Like Ken Gastgeb said after the committee meeting in October in San Antonio, "The plans are all on paper and all that remains is to execute." Just remember that it takes more than the 10 or 12 members of the committee to pull this thing off.

The bottom line is: everyone working together will make it easier for all concerned.

I'm still hoping that Joan Leslie Caldwell (our Apache Princess) can make it.

The Hudson N.H. American Legion Post, every year on the Sunday before Pearl Harbor Day, has a breakfast, short parade and ceremony at the bridge and town common. Not many cities or towns around here do that and I've wondered if many of our members have attended anything like that. Personally, I've been to quite a few, if the weather isn't too cold or snowy. The town has a "Pearl" survivor and I believe there are four in the state.

Not much more to report from here, so I'll just remind all of you to try and volunteer helping one of the committees at the reunion. In the meantime, take care of yourselves and may "God bless."



## Group Bulletin Board

# Reunion XII

September 9-13, 1998  
San Antonio, Texas

## 1998 Dues Payable

Please send \$15 annual payment to  
345th BG Reunion Assn.  
DICK FEUCHT  
12500 TOLLGATE RD  
PICKERINGTON OH 43147-9161

Watch for your next  
*Strafer*  
in June. Please submit all items for it by May 1

*Reunion Committee Standing, L-R: Ken Gastgeb, Mary Elizabeth Gamble, Kathy Rubin, Bill Cavoli, Melba, George Mordecai, Dee Musket. Kneeling L-R: Ben Miller, Frank Dillard, Gus Ouellette, Lynn Lee*

### PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION

A ribbon is available to those who qualify for the Presidential Unit Citation. Contact your Congressman for a form and instructions. Our group was awarded the Philippine Presidential Unit Citation.



## IN MEMORY OF

|                                |     |                     |                      |
|--------------------------------|-----|---------------------|----------------------|
| Pat Aloia                      | 498 | 11/25/97            | Washington, PA       |
| Charles A Blatherwick, Sr.     | 499 | 10/16/97            | Blue Anchor, NJ      |
| Lenore Cotler (wife of Irving) | 500 | 1/22/98             | Hicksville, NY       |
| Edward W. Coombs               | 500 | Post Office reports | Totowa, NJ           |
| Robert A. Cross                | 498 | Post Office reports | Los Angeles, CA      |
| Russell B. Diemer              | 501 | 12/27/97            | Spring City, PA      |
| Franics J. Efta                | 500 | Post Office reports | Wilbaux, MT          |
| James O. King                  | 500 | 1986                |                      |
| Edward A. Kosiba               | 498 | 2/97                | Westport, CT         |
| James B. Murphy                | 500 | 1/21/98             | Colorado Springs, CO |
| Ricco F. Pallotta              | 501 | 1/4/98              | Chagrin Falls, OH    |
| Francis E. Stein               | 498 | 7/15/97             | Bicknell, IN         |

Please mail notices of deaths to Strafer. See next issue deadline on Bulletin board

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# Royal Apache invitation

by Ken Gastgeb

Joan Leslie, our Apache Princess, attended our reunion in San Antonio a few years ago. Everyone enjoyed seeing her and many talked with her and got her autograph. There is a good chance that she will attend our reunion this year. In a conversation with her on the phone and in a couple of letters she explained that she had a very busy schedule. She said she would like very much to be there with us and would try to fit the reunion into her schedule. The schedule of the many events she attends is made up a year or so in advance

She sent two pictures, one of the time when she began her stardom and the other a current one. She is beautiful, and hard at work making appearances at various events and is serving on the committee of her favorite charity, St. Anne's Maternity Home, in California. I know she would like to visit with us, however if she can't she will be thinking about us. We Air Apaches are fortunate and proud to have such a beautiful "Air Apache Princess."

You can get to know Joan Leslie very well using the home page address: <http://humanitas.ucsb.edu/depts/english/research/grad/kerry/joanframe.html>

If you don't to the Internet at home, you can probably find a library where the staff will help you log on to the page.

*Joan Leslie's letter, November 4, 1943*

"Dear Sgt. Gastgeb:

I am very proud and honored to be the pin up girl for all "the fellows in your tent." And I hope the following photograph accompanying this letter is the kind, sort, or pose you wanted.

Your letter from far off in the southwest Pacific (?) made me happy to know that you boys are getting more pictures and perhaps some U.S.O. shows to bolster up your morale and lessen the monotony.

It isn't all fun and glory to have to hold down the outlying posts as you are doing but it is gratifying to know there are men like you with faith, courage, and integrity that are manning such out of the way places. Please believe that I mean this!

Keep up the good work, hang on to your grit and CARRY ON!

Sincerely, your pin up girl,

*Joan Leslie"*



## Joan Leslie Movies on Video

High Sierra • Sergeant York • The Male Animal • Yankee Doodle Dandy • This Is the Army • The Sky's the Limit • Thank Your Lucky Stars • Hollywood Canteen • Rhapsody in Blue • Born to Be Bad • Man in the Saddle • Jubilee Trail (Left picture taken in 1945. Picture above taken in 1996)

## Bat nose job

Phil Gath (499) sent this photo home in 1943. The photo he mailed showed the strafing modifications. Someone, probably a censor, carefully cut out the Bat's nose, found a greenhouse nose exactly the same size in another photo, cut it out and taped it into the hole. You can't tell it's been done, unless you see the tape on the back, or the gun protruding down and forward in front of the nose.



## The Waite

by Wallace Gebhart (501)

The September Strafer brought back my memories of November 12, 1944 on the SS Morrison R Waite anchored off Leyte, when the kamikaze pilot dove his plane into the #1 hold of our ship, killing and wounding many members of our organization. I was spared as I was Sergeant of the Guard at the time and had just completed getting everyone below deck and was heading amidships. Captain Shetron, who was officer of the guard, remained posted at the stairway leading down to the personnel quarters. Sorry to say he was among the dead after the attack. I was the lucky one.

I still have the letter of commendation I received in April of 1945, signed by General Crabb, for my efforts in getting a lot of the wounded to medical aid.

## Reunion

(continued from page 1)

I feel that I must make a remark about the article, "Invasion of Japan," in the last issue of the Strafer. Who would have thought that we may have been involved in such a gigantic Military Operation. After reading the article and talking with or writing to others in our Group, we all had the same opinion. We were glad it ended as it did.