

Gary Larkin: Aircraft Salvager Extraordinaire

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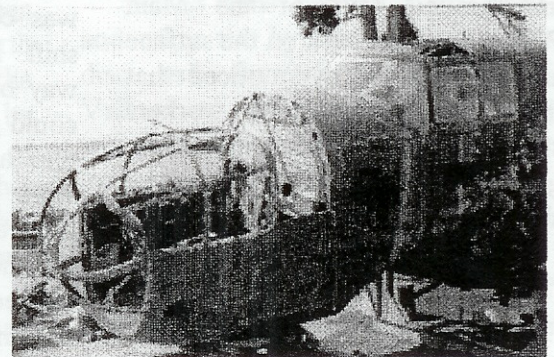
For 35 years, Gary Larkins has hunted and salvaged about 60 vintage airplanes around the world, selling most of them to museums. Several years ago, he raised a World War II P-38 Lightning fighter from 270 feet below the Greenland icecap. "I had a crew there for three months melting a shaft and cavern out around the P-38. Then they put me down the 27 stories into the icecap. I spent 15 days there disassembling the plane and sending the parts to the surface of the moving glacier."

Such feats have captured the attention of Hollywood, where plans for a movie based on Larkin's life are, reportedly, underway. Most likely, the film will depict the time Larkins and his salvage crew, Air Pirates, arrived in New Guinea to rescue another plane and found themselves in the middle of a revolution. "Mercenaries had been hired by the New Guinea government to wipe out the revolutionaries," says Larkin. "and (the mercenaries) figured I was CIA there to help the revolutionaries. I was captured and put in a small metal box for a week." Larkin says it took that long for U.S. Embassy officials to gain his release. "It's just part of the job," he adds.

To locate the downed planes, Larkin searches Navy and Air Force microfilm documenting more than 46,000 aviation mishaps,



he says, "The first thing I look for in a report is if the crew survived. If so, that tells me the aircraft is in pretty good condition." In the next issue of the Strafer, we'll take a look at how Larkin and the Air Pirates salvaged a B-25C from the depths of Lake Murray in North Carolina. Don't miss it!



From the Editor

Cliff Dillard



Another year has come and gone and I'm trying to figure out if I've gotten any wiser since last January. So far, I don't think so! I HAVE switched to a new job since the last edition of the Strafer was published. I am now working for the "American Coal Company." Even though I am still working at a coal mine, my job description is completely different. I had been employed as a Surveyor / Draftsman at my last job. I had been in the engineering departments of two different coalmines for the past 22 years. My new job is as a production supervisor, although so far my tenure with the new company has been somewhat tumultuous! I hired in with American Coal on December 9th, as an underground production supervisor at what is known as the "Millennium Portal" we have three different portals – each one is basically a separate mine in itself. After an 8-hour orientation class, I took an underground tour of the Main Portal. I arrived back on the surface around 5:00 pm and noticed that there were several workers standing around talking in various groups. Hanging around after a shift is over is nothing unusual, but I happened to overhear the term "Laid-off" spoken several times! I approached a group of guys and asked what was going on and they replied that the Millennium Portal had been shutdown today!

Great, my first day on the job and they shutdown the portal I was assigned to! I thought that this would be the shortest career in mining history! Needless to say, I was a BIT worried over the news, so I went in to the office to talk to my boss (who I had only had for a total of 10 hours now!) and asked him if I still had a job, he laughed and said "Yea, just keep showing up." The next day I was re-assigned to work at the main portal as a "Dead-work boss." This job meant that I was responsible for overseeing a group of workers to take care of any non-production work that needed to be done throughout the entire mine. I spent the entire shift riding around on a golf cart with the Mine Manager while he showed me around, not a bad shift really. On the next night, the party ended! I was given two crews of men to supervise, each group doing a different job in a different part of the mine – I still hadn't even seen the entire mine yet, so I had to ask people for directions so I could even find my crews! Fortunately, all of our work was completed by the end of the shift. I was even able to find my way back to the bottom area so I could get out of the mine, always a plus at the end of a shift! Things were going along just fine when after a week at this job, they laid-off another 155 employees and re-aligned the workforce yet again. I was moved to the North Portal and began work as a mine examiner. On our first night of examining,

The mine manager took us underground, showed us a copy of the mine map hanging on a wall and told us which areas to examine, a total of about 5 minutes of instruction! His last words were "Just make sure you make it out in time to sign the books so the day-shift can work. Examiner books must be signed before the next shift can enter the mine, this is to ensure that everything is safe for the on-coming shift. Unfortunately, none of us had ever even been to this Portal before and therefore had no idea of where we were going! As it turned out, we did manage to get the mine examined on time, but only after a few wrong turns, one of which cost me walking an extra 9,000 feet! The next night was much better and since then we have all gotten our routes down pat. Just when I thought everything would calm down a bit, management decided that we were not working enough hours (they do that to salary people from time to time) and announced that we were required to work one of our scheduled days off during the month! Not only that, but any problems that we do encounter underground and write in the books, we now have to back underground after working our shift and stay for two hours to correct the problem! I can't wait to see what they come up with next! Hope everyone had a good holiday season, and I'll catch you next time....

Cliff Dillard

Group President

Frank L. Dillard

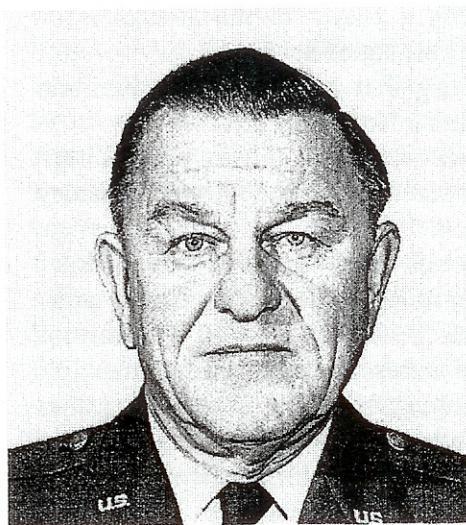
Greetings to my fellow Air Apaches! I hope everyone made it home safely from our reunion. Veteran's day was the 11th, and the sixty-first anniversary of the Japanese kamikaze attack on the Nelson is the 12th. It is almost midnight, very quiet and a time for reflection

I remember how especially lonely the holidays always seemed while I was in the service. My first military Thanksgiving dinner was just after I had completed basic training and I was enrolled in the Aircraft & Engine Mechanic's training program at Keesler Field, MS. It turned out my section was selected to play host to a local orphanage. I wasn't much older than some of the kids, but I enjoyed the company of the little tykes and it kept me from being too homesick until taps. The turkey dinners that followed didn't get any better.

Holidays, while in the military, were always so sad. Buddies were going on furlow or being shipped out to who knows where. A phone call home only seemed to make me feel blue afterwards, and routine Army life was depressing. I believe the Army had a secret policy of sending recruits as far away from home as possible just to make them angry and bring out the killer instinct in what had normally been nice young civilians. Many of you know that Ed Bina was the principal driving force behind the 345th Bomb Group Memorial at Wright-Patterson AFB

in Dayton, Ohio. Mrs. Julia Bina was kind enough to let me copy the documents and photographs in Ed's file. This material tells the story of the project from initial concept to completion. I am in the process of preparing the data contained in Ed's files for inclusion on our web site, where it will be available to all interested parties.

Many times we use the phrase, "What a small world."



Col. Ed Bina

Well, as I sorted through Ed's papers I learned that the monument was made from granite that had been quarried in Mount Airy, North Carolina. I also discovered that the quarry was owned and operated by Jeffrey Bauman, a former member of the 345th Bomb Group. What astounded me most was the fact that while I was attending North Carolina State College in 1950 I took a geology class field trip to that Mount Airy quarry! Unfortunately, I didn't know this when I first visited the site.



Our monument is beautiful and a fitting tribute to the memory of those that gave their all that we may enjoy the freedom we enjoy. The members of the 345th Bomb Group and the Association can be proud of this memorial. We owe a great deal to Ed Bina and his committee in creating such a lasting memorial to the 345th Bomb Group. If you haven't been to the Wright-Patterson Museum you have missed a great experience. Perhaps, we may elect to return to Dayton for a future reunion. If possible, you should plan to go on your own, or visit by way of our website.

Recently, Ken Gastgeb helped me update the Association Constitution & Bylaws. Copies of the latest revision have been distributed to all current officers and Executive Committee members. If you would like a copy please give me a call at (336) 724-6547 or send me a note at 963 Wellington Dr., Winston-Salem, NC 27106.

As time permits I will scan and copy the bylaws to a compact disc and forward to Paul Van Valkenburg for inclusion on our website. Then, they may be viewed online. Plans are to accumulate and include more historical information in our website archives. If you have anything to contribute we would be glad to prepare it for inclusion.

Until next time...

Headquarter's Report

by: Ken Gastgeb

A BIT OF HISTORY: *In 1942 the Japanese failed twice to take Port Moresby, the battle of the Bismarck Sea and the Coral Sea. After suffering these defeats the Japanese decided to go by land over the Owen Stanley Mountains. The following story of the "Fuzzy Wuzzy" was going on at the time the 345th arrived in Port Moresby, New Guinea...*

The battle for Port Moresby was raging in the mountains about 30 miles north of Port Moresby; the American and Aussie soldiers were waging a furious campaign against the Japanese through rain and mud without the aid of vehicles. Most of the supplies; guns, ammunition, food and what little shelter they were given, had to be carried on the backs of the soldiers and their faithful helpers – the "Fuzzy Wuzzies." Some of our first missions were dropping supplies and providing air support to those troops. After months of hard fighting our forces drove the Japanese back in one of the toughest battles of the South West Pacific Theatre.

Bill Darwin sent me the following article: "The Fuzzy Wuzzy angles with the fuzzy wuzzy hair." To carry supplies and carry out the wounded, thousands of Papuan boys were recruited for the Army by the New Guinea Administrative Officers, and in the words of General Vasey. "Without those boys we would not have advanced beyond a few miles into the Owen Stanleys – let alone across them. Those boys were to us what the Motor Transport

units were to the Desert Campaign." It is ironic that merely a few months before most of the "Diggers" who fought in Papua thought of these natives as headhunters and cannibals, but what they think of them now is clearly expressed in the simple little poem written by a Sapper on the Kokoda trail.

Many a mother in Australia,
When the busy day is done,
Sends a prayer to the Almighty for
the keeping of her son:

Asking that an angel guide him and
to bring him safely back –

Now we see those prayers are
answered, on the Owen Stanley
track.

Though they haven't any haloes,
only holes slashed through their ears
And their faces marked with tattoos
and with scratch pins in their hair
Bringing back the wounded just as
steady as a horse,

Using leaves to keep the rain off and
as gentle as a nurse.

Slow and careful in bad places on the
awful mountain track

And the look upon their faces makes
us think that Christ was black

Not a move to hurt the wounded as
they treat him like a saint,

It's a picture worth recording that an
artist's yet to paint.

Many a lad will see his mother and
the husbands see their wives,
just because the Fuzzy Wuzzies
carried them to save their lives.

From mortar or machine-gun fire, or
a chance surprise attack

To safety and the care of doctors at
the bottom of the track.

Message From the "Apache Princess"



Warm greetings to all my
friends in the 345th Bomber
Squadron! Our wonderful reunion
in Washington, D.C. is a delightful
memory for me still. I am still here
in California and Hollywood is as
busy as ever with charity events,
premieres and award shows. Last
month I attended a spectacular
charity ball that the Thaliens host
for the mental hospital wing of
Cedars Sinai Hospital. Debbie
Reynolds and Ruta Lee are always
chairpersons and many stars come
out to support the cause. Last week
there was a tribute to Jane Russel –
they showed some film clips,
including "The Revolt of Mamie
Stover" in which I co-starred. It
was fun to see her again! In May of
next year I'm attending a Veterans
get-together in Connecticut where
they will show "Sergeant York." I'll
be there to reminisce about
"Coop", health - weather
permitting! I hope the holidays
were a joyous time for you all!
Love, Your "Apache Princess"
Joan Leslie

Mission Memories: Saigon Harbor

I read your front-page story in the Strafer about the April 6th, 1945 mission with much interest. You are correct that Capt, George Musket, Operations Officer of the 501st squadron, was leading the strike of twenty-four B-25's and/or six planes from each of the four squadrons of the group. I was flying Musket's left wing when sighted the two frigates. The Jap frigates were large – or larger- than the Jap destroyers but were strictly gun ships. When hitting enemy ships in the open sea we attacked in two ship (plane) elements. I was flying the left wing of Musket and the plane flying his right stayed with him and he made the pass on the frigate. One of the planes from the second flight of the 501st came up on my right wing and we were the second element to hit the first frigate behind Musket. The element leaders made their attacks with their wingmen in tight formation on their right wings. In effect, the element leader fired both his guns and the guns of his wingman, who ordinarily and blindly, fired his guns when his leader fired his guns and dropped his bombs, which gave you the concentrated fire-power of twenty-eight forward-firing fifty-caliber machine guns (from both planes) each gun firing seven hundred fifty rounds per minute, and were loaded with armor-piercing, armor-piercing incendiary and tracer ammunition, in that order. What I remember the most about this second element attack on this frigate (following Musket) was flying down the muzzle of a huge enemy gun on the bow of the frigate that (when it fired) you could see a thirty or forty foot length

Of the twenty-four planes taking part in this strike, only the first two squadrons attacked and sunk the two frigates. The last two squadrons flew on up the coast and locating the rest of the convoy, worked them over pretty good. If you've never seen a big ship – particularly a Jap ship – stand up on it's tail and sink with the bow passing from view as it goes under, then you've really missed an inspirational moment. It was pleasure to see many such sights off the Indo-China Coast and I'll never forget them! For the complete story, read my book "We Band of Brothers". Later in the month of April 1945, the 501st was chosen to fly a minimum-altitude strike against enemy shipping in the harbor at Saigon. We flew seven hundred fifty miles south and staged out of Palawan Port-au-de-princes, Philippines, where the 13th Air Force was located and we landed on a runway surrounded by more operable B-25's than we had in the entire 345th Bomb Group. The story was that Macarthur called General Whitehead, CO of the 5th Air Force and told him to send his best and most-qualified minimum-altitude strafers-bombers to hit the shipping in Saigon Harbor. It seems that the 13th Air Force had problems that they never could reach Saigon for a strike, the story being that they ran out of fuel and couldn't make it to the target and always had to turn back. You know the rest of the story – General Whitehead sent us to Palawan and we flew the strike on April 27th, 1945.

We were supposed to have had B-24's coming over at high-altitude fifteen minutes before we made the low-level strike – they never showed – and we were supposed to have had a couple of squadrons of P-38 Lightning fighters to fly to cover and strafe the ships with us – they never showed up either! After flying around for ten or fifteen minutes over north of Saigon, we made our strike – giving every Jap gun emplacement advance notice, eight planes went in and only five came out. I sank the biggest ship in the harbor that day – a fifty-eight hundred ton merchant ship – and lost my wingman, Vernon Townley. Vernon was a close friend of mine and had flown several missions as my co-pilot. He was shot down with a massive blast of Jap ack-ack right over the ship. I had half of my right tail shot off and was going in on another ship down the harbor when I tried to pull up and realized that I didn't have any control surfaces on the tail section! I hit the mast of the ship as I passed overhead on the way out of the harbor. We had to fly that airplane, which was pitching like a bucking bronco, for seven hundred fifty nautical miles back across the China Sea to Palawan. Of the five aircraft that came out of Saigon Harbor that day, only two were in flyable condition to get us back to San Marcelina on Luzon. Everyone on the strike received the DFC and the Presidential Unit Citation – and col. Coltharp, the 345th Bomb Group CO, received the Silver Star.
By: Peppy Blount – 501st

A Christmas Story

By: *Ronnie Polaneczky*

It started last Christmas, when Bennett and Vivian Levin were overwhelmed by sadness while listening to radio reports of injured American troops. "We have to let them know we care" Vivian told Bennett. So they organized a trip to bring soldiers from Walter Reed Army Medical center and Bethesda Naval Hospital to the annual Army-Navy game in Philly, on December the third. The cool part is, they created their own train line to do it.

Yes, there are people in this country who actually own real trains. Bennett Levin – native Philly guy, self-made millionaire and irascible former L & I commish – is one of them. He has three luxury rail cars. Think mahogany paneling, plush seating and white-linen dining areas. He also has two locomotives, which he stores at his Juniata Park train yard. One car, the elegant Pennsylvania, carried John f. Kennedy to the Army-Navy game in 1961 and in 1962 in carried his brother Bobby's body to D.C. for burial. "That's a lot of history for one car," says Bennett. He and Vivian wanted to revive a tradition that endured from 1936 to 1975, during which trains carried Army-Navy spectators from around the country directly to the stadium where the annual game is played. The Levins could think of no better passengers to reinstate the ceremonial ride than the wounded men and women recovering at Walter Reed in D. C. and Bethesda, in Maryland

"We wanted to give them a first-class experience," says Bennett. "Gourmet meals on board, private transportation from the train to the stadium, perfect seats – real hero treatment." Through the Army War College Foundation, of which he is a trustee, Bennett met with Walter Reed's Commanding General, who loved the idea. But Bennett had some ground rules first, all designed to keep focus on the troops alone. No press on the trip, lest the soldiers' day of pampering

It started last Christmas, when Bennett and Vivian Levin were overwhelmed by sadness devolve into a media circus. No politicians either, because, says Bennett, "I didn't want some idiot making this trip into a campaign photo op." And no Pentagon suits on-board, otherwise the soldiers would be too busy saluting superiors to relax. The General agreed to the conditions, and Bennett realized he had a problem on his hands. "I had to actually make this thing happen," he laughs. Over the next months, he recruited owners of 15 other sumptuous rail cars from around the country – these people tend to know each other – into lending their vehicles for the day. The name of their temporary train? The Liberty Limited. Amtrak volunteered to transport the cars to D.C. – where they'd be coupled together for the round-trip ride to Philly – then back to their owners later. Conrail offered to service the Liberty while it was in Philly.

A benefactor from the War College ponied up 100 seats to the game – on the 50-yard line – and lunch in a hospitality suite. And corporate donors filled, for free and without asking for publicity, goodie bags for attendees: From Woolrich, stadium blankets. From Wal-Mart, digital cameras. From Nikon, field glasses. From GEAR, down jackets. There was booty not just for the soldiers, but for their guests too, since each was allowed to bring a friend or family member. The Marines, though, declined to offer. "They voted not to take guests with them, so they could take more Marines," says Levin, chocking up at the memory. Bennett's an emotional guy, so he was worried about how he'd react to meeting 88 troops at D.C.'s Union Station, where the trip originated. Some GIs were missing limbs. Others were wheelchair-bound or accompanied by medical personnel for the day. "They made it easy to be with them," he says. "They were all smiles on the ride to Philly. Not an ounce of self-pity from any of them. They're so full of life and determination."

Afterward, it was back to the train and yet another gourmet meal – heroes get hungry, says Levin – before returning to Walter Reed and Bethesda. "The day was spectacular," says Levin. "It was all about these kids, It was awesome to be a part of it." "One of the guys was blind, but he said, "I can't see you, but man, you must be beautiful!" "Says Bennett. "I got a lump so big in my throat, I couldn't even answer him."

498th "Falcons"

Mike Hasslbauer Assistant Group Vice-President



Happy New Year! I have just finished hanging a new 2006 calendar. It seems that 2005 evaporated right before my eyes! With a small pang of regret I gently drop my obsolete calendar in the trash bag with all the discarded tissue from last year's Christmas presents. LAST YEAR! It has a peculiar, far away, sound when you say it out loud for the first time. I hope all of you had a happy one. Many of those that attended the reunion in Washington, DC have said it was a memorable one for them. It was an eventful year for me - new job, and suddenly noticing how much the kids have grown in both physical and mental stature. It might be attributed to the advent of computers, television, cell phones, and interactive computer games or something I have failed to see, but I have noticed that kids are smarter than I was at their age. I sometimes wonder, late at night, if they aren't way ahead of me at my present age?

The year was also an eventful one for members of the 345th Bomb Group and the 498th Squadron. We started a campaign to establish an Internet Website for the registration and storage of historical information about the 345th Bomb Group WWII activities. The site will be accessible to all who are connected to the internet and are interested in the events of WWII in general, and the 345th Bombardment Group in particular.

Several members made generous contributions to fund the project. Paul Van Valkenburg is the ramrod, and is presently expanding the contents of our archives and working on a "knock-your-socks-off" home page layout. We are blessed to have people like Paul and Carol Hillman, one of Melvin Best's twin daughters. Carol has offered to record all of the back issues of our STRAFER on compact discs and incorporate them in our website files. Frank Dillard has agreed to provide his set of file copies for this project. Carol plans to involve her high school students in an interactive history lesson with the documents. Frank thinks he has a complete set of our newsletters, but time will tell and we may call on the membership to provide copies of things we may be missing. After we get the Bylaws, the Wright-Patterson Monument history and the complete set of STRAFERS installed we should have a great start for an interesting and informative historical record of our organization and it's members.

If you have written your military history we would appreciate having a copy to add to our site. If you haven't written your story you really should get started. We can use all the personal stories and photographs we can get. If you send photos, please identify the subject matter. If you send originals and wish them returned, please be sure to state this, along with full return mailing instructions to Paul Van Valkenburg, Frank Dillard or to the Strafer editor, Cliff Dillard.

When the business meeting at Washington, DC was adjourned last September the site of Reunion XIX was to be Austin, Texas. The preferred time was to include Labor Day weekend. It was pointed out that if there were any home football games at the University of Texas during that time it would be impossible to find a block of rooms in Austin at any price. Upon investigation, Lynda Kaplan, discovered that the "Texas Longhorns" are host to games scheduled for the first two Saturdays in September 2006. So, San Antonio it is. I personally hope Ben Miller and I can remember to see the Alamo. Last time the 345th held a reunion in San Antonio he and I forgot, and spent the entire time in the bar!

Lynn Lee has made contact with one of the San Antonio hotels close to The Riverwalk. This would be a very desirable location - provided they can offer all the services we require at an affordable price.

Carol Hillman has been in contact with the San Antonio Tourism Bureau and the Chamber of Commerce for other possible host hotels and tourist attractions.

Plan now to attend, and bring your children and grandchildren. Stay tuned for more news and details as plans are finalized. If you have any suggestions that will make our gatherings more enjoyable let one of us know ASAP.



499th "Bats Outa Hell"

Ben Miller Assistant Group Vice-President

Many things have happened after our great reunion in Washington. It turned out better than anyone had anticipated. I was glad to see so many wheelchairs, walkers and canes. Their presence told us this would be the reunion we really wanted. Every time we loaded our bus for one of the many tours, there were four wheelchairs, several walkers and an assortment of canes, along with an assortment of aids. My legs hurt so badly that I suffered from every step taken, but this is the one that had to be – the long anticipated gathering.

On the 20th of September, I went under the knife for "Lumbar Fusion." Upon awakening, the doctor asked if the pain in my legs was still there and I replied that it was all gone! What a relief! Too bad I hadn't had the surgery BEFORE we went to Washington. Speaking of Washington, the last time we saw the WWII Monument, they were pouring the footings. It's one of those things you must see to fully understand. Boghosian, of the 499th was told by his brother that he was listed as dead since WWII. He looked and sure enough, he was history. Now Connie, his wife, is wondering if the government owes her survivor's benefits for all the bygone years! What do you think? *(I think they should at least get something for the mental anguish they suffered from learning of his demise! Ed.)*

Since my back surgery my companion has been a back brace that looks like a suit of Armour, and is about as comfortable as one at times. I wanted a rest, but not this way. We had a tremendous windstorm a little over a week ago and it destroyed the best building on the farm. Funny how storms always seem to know which buildings are the most valuable! The storm also messed up several roofs and destroyed several trees that were over 100 years old. Here I sit, looking over the scene before me thinking about all the chain saw work that I need to do in order to clean this mess up and I'm restricted to a 30 pound weight limit, with orders not to pull a starter rope on any piece of equipment, no hammering and I've been told not get on any piece of machinery! It sure is rough to sit here and look at all that mess and not be able to do anything about it! We still give thanks that no one was hurt. We know that "The Maker" is still looking out for us.

It's good to hear from members from time to time, and from interested persons seeking information on family and friends. Recently, a young man wanted to know if anyone remembers a co-pilot by the name of Robert M. Gribble. He came into the 499th and was shot down on his first mission over Jefman Island on June 6th, 1944. He was in "Hell's Bells." If anyone knows any details on this incident, be sure to call Fred Mower or me at 1-800-239-0283, extension 2991.

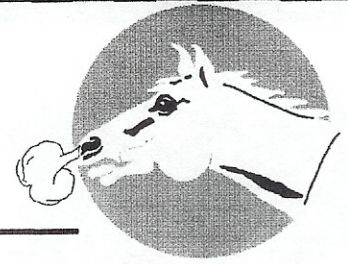
When my Grandparents celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary, I was around 14 years old. My Grandfather gave me my first cigar. I finished it and thanked him, but nearly got sick! Years later, I learned to smoke them and on the Thomas Nelson I sat down between two of my buddies to play cards, got the desire for a cigar and one of the fellows said to bring him one. So I ran toward my bunk in the next hold but was blown through the air before getting there when the Kamikaze struck our ship. My buddies were all killed in the explosion; I guess that cigar saved my life that day. Four years later, to the day, our first daughter was born. Every year on that memorable day in November she reminds me to smoke "Our" cigar. They sure don't taste as good as years ago.

Round engines from page 9

When you have started his round engine successfully, your crew chief looks up at you like he'd let you kiss his girl too! Turbines don't break or catch fire often enough, leading to aircrew boredom, complacency and inattention. A round engine at speed looks and sounds like it's going to blow up at any minute. This helps concentrate the mind. Turbines don't have enough control levers or gauges to keep a pilot's attention. There's nothing to fiddle with during long flights. Turbines smell like a Boy Scout camp full of Coleman lamps. Round engines smell like God intended machines to smell!

500th "Rough Raiders"

by: Don Wagner



Like Me, I hope you all feel like the reunion in Washington was one of our best. I extend me thanks to Murch and Vivian Leveton and the volunteers for making it so. For me it was extra special because my whole family was able to attend the reunion, spend some with their mom at Arlington National Cemetery, and be present at the 345th Group Banquet for the Philippine Liberation Medal awards. They even got a picture of me with out Apache Princess, Joan Leslie. In that regard, I just saw a re-run of Stage Door Canteen on TV in which she played a prominent role, and in my book she's as beautiful today as she was then.

I feel sorry for the guys who weren't at the reunion for whatever reason. For most of us the time is getting shorter and we need to reaffirm our "military family bonding" as often as the occasion presents itself. I hope we have our "bash" yet at Tucson in 2007. The Department of Defense had a tribute to World War II veterans on the Mall during our Washington reunion. While visiting the WWII Memorial, a camera crew interviewed Bill Lambert, Rex Reheis and myself. I recently received a DVD with our interviews, among others, on it. It was produced by a company called "Creative Resources for the WWII 60th anniversary Commemoration Committee." (Try saying THAT three times fast! ed.) and includes all the festivities on the Mall, at the Memorial and at Arlington. The DVD does not provide an address, but the phone number is: 1-800-479-1804 if you are interested in a copy.

Roger Lovett's getting his friend Bob Dole to spend some times with us was a pleasant surprise. During his talk I loved it when looking us over, he announced he was sorry but he'd left his Viagra at home! Politics aside, you couldn't help enjoying the man and his great sense of humor. The news that Don Fetterly suddenly passed away was a real shock to us all. The DVD's he showed in the hospitality room he had gleaned from the National Archives and the Library of Congress. They were in their raw state, but when I showed interest in them he presented them to me after our banquet. I prize the long conversation with him, his quiet unassuming and pleasant demeanor will be missed.

In the recommended reading department, I just read "Fire from the sky, A diary over Japan", by Ron Greer and Mike Wicks. The book is based on Herb Greer's (Ron's father) diary account of the fire bombing of Japan from B-29's. Greer was a radio operator who gives you a vivid first-hand picture of how it was, told with humor, including his early life and service life including the missions to the end of the war.

Copies may be obtained by contacting Ron Greer, 205 Harris Road, Jacksonville AR 72076-3603
Telephone: (501) 982-3626

Read any good books lately? If you have why not give the rest of us a heads up by sending in a short review so the rest of can check it out. Just send your review along with the book title, author's name and where you found it to the Strafer.

You can send them to:

cdillard63@hotmail.com

Thanks, Cliff Dillard - Editor

Dedicated to all those who flew behind round engines...

We gotta get rid of those turbines, they're ruining aviation and our hearing....

A turbine is too simple minded, it has no mystery. The air travels through it in a straight line and doesn't pick up any of the pungent fragrance of engine oil of pilot sweat.

Anybody can start a turbine. You just need to move a switch from "OFF" to "ON" after a while. My PC is harder to start.

Cranking a round engine requires skill, finesse and style. You have to seduce it into starting. It's like waking up a horny mistress.

On some planes, the pilots aren't even allowed to do it...

Turbines start by whining for a while, then they give a lady-like poof and start whining a little louder.

Round engines give a satisfying rattle-rattle, click-click, BANG more rattles another BANG, a big macho fart or two, more clicks a lot more smoke and finally a serious low pitched roar. We like that.

It's a guy thing...

When you start a round engine, your mind is engaged and you can concentrate on the flight ahead. Starting a turbine is like flicking on a ceiling fan; useful, but hardly exciting! *Continued on page 8*



501st "Black Panthers"

Paul Van Valkenberg

Assistant Group Vice-President

Happy New Year! Get used to writing the number 2006. Reunion 2005 (written for the last time?) in Washington, DC was great. I spent some time tending bar in the hospitality room and can report that all had a great time. It was certainly good to see familiar faces again and those of the many new 2nd and 3rd generation as well. For those that were unable to attend be assured you were missed.

The highlight of the tours, for me, was the World War Two Memorial. What made it so meaningful was being able to be there with so many veterans of the 345th. It was also moving to see other visitors approach our members to say, "Thank you!" and to have a chance to listen to a story or two from our members of the "Greatest Generation." By the end of the day I think we were all pretty beat from so much walking, but I know I, for one, will remember this trip for a long time to come.

The business meeting brought forth several new items of interest to the Group. It was decided that the Group should have its own website to help keep the memory of the 345th alive for generations to come. We have secured the web address of <345thbombgroup.org> and are working toward the development of a professionally designed web page.

We had a number of VERY generous donations to assist us in implementing this new project and getting things started. Michael Hasselbaur and I will be spearheading this project, and I'm sure between the two of us we will come up with something the Group will be proud of. I'll keep you posted on the progress of this new adventure.

One item of specific interest to the members of the 501st Squadron was the mix-up in the stewardship of their WWII mission reports. It appears that a Mr. Heidorf, son of a former member of the 501st Squadron, obtained the reports from our deceased past president, George Mordecai. Heidorf is not now, or ever has been, a member of the Association. Whenever contacted for copies of specific mission reports by members of the 501st or their family members, Heidorf demanded payment for the copies based on the number of pages requested, and in one instance refused to provide them. This problem was subsequently reported to our president, Frank Dillard. Heidorf was contacted by Frank and requested to return the files. Frank explained that we are the rightful owners and would like to have these historical records in our possession, in order that those who wish copies could have ready access, without charge. It was also explained that we would like to incorporate these files in the archives of our website as time permits.

Frank suggested to Mr. Heidorf that he copy any or all of the records he was interested in for his personal files and return the file copies to him. Frank promised to reimburse him for all shipping and handling charges, but was flatly refused. Heidorf contends that the files were his personally, that George Mordecai had given them to him, and he would not return them. It became impossible to reason with Heidorf. The discussion ended when Heidorf slammed the phone down following a string of shouted obscenities.

The Executive Committee will review the several options at our disposal to retrieve our records of the 501st Squadron's combat missions. Requests for copies of the files, for the present, are in a holding pattern.

Plans for reunion 2006 were discussed at the business meeting. As things turned out we will be going to San Antonio instead of Austin, Texas. More details will be reported as progress is made.

In closing, I would once again like to ask for your assistance in preparing the 501st Squadrons news page for the STRAFER. Please take the time to write down one of your favorite experiences and send it to me. I know we would all enjoy sharing it. Until next time.

Apache Bulletin Board

"The latest news"



New Strafer Schedule

The publication dates for the STRAFER have been revised, beginning with this (January 2006) issue. Formerly, our quarterly newsletter has been distributed in March, June, September, and December of each year. The problems with the old schedule were delays in delivery caused by conflicts with the seasonal December Christmas mail volume, and the lack of sufficient time between our annual reunions and the publication of the September issue to allow contributors ample time to include photos, reports and other information gathered during the reunion. As a consequence, much of the news about our reunions was never reported.

We trust that the new publishing schedule will meet with the approval of the officers and staff that contributes regular feature articles and our readers.

Article Submission

Have something you would like to see printed in the Strafer? Send it along to the editor.

Cliff Dillard

1203 Clubhouse Rd

Marion, Il. 62959

or email it to:

cdillard63@hotmail.com

The submission deadline for the

April issue is: March 15th

Photos should be black and white, emailed digital photos should be in .jpg or .tif format.

Seeking Information:

My father was Charles Pushetonequa (deceased) and he did the original design of the Indian head used on the 345th B-25s. He had told a story before being sent home. He was asked to paint the Air Apache logo on the bomber jackets for all the men and it sounds like he received about \$30.00 for each jacket. I saw one on e-bay once, it was a leather piece cut out from an old WWII bomber jacket, with a faded Indian head still visible on it. I was wondering if there were any surviving jackets out there on display in some museum, or if any association members might have one in their possession. It would make a nice piece of history to donate to a museum. Also, another story he mentioned was the General Macarthur told him that he would receive a medal after he got he back home. He stated that he never did. Anyways, if you could find some info on my first question that would be nice. Thanks, Adrian Pushetonequa.

Treasurer's Report

Checking Account:

Wachovia Bank \$3,974.42

Money Market:

Vanguard Prime \$22,276.12

Total \$22,250.74

In Memory of...

The members of the 345th Bomb Group would like to extend their sincere condolences to the families of our departed members and friends.

Harley Clayton - 499th ✓

November 28th, 2005

William E. Murray - 500th ✓

April 30th, 2005

George Culver - ✓

November 27th, 2004

Ray LeTourneau - 498th ✓

August 2nd, 2005

Leo P. Marchand - 498th ✓

August 2nd, 2005

Scott Hicko - 500th ✓

(son of Edward J. Hicko)

November 24th, 2004

James C. Lewis, Jr. - 500th ✓

April 20th, 2005

Avis Isler - 500th

September 8th, 2005 ✓

Don Fetterly - 500th ✓

October 20th, 2005

Thomas J. Seery - 500th ✓

December 28th, 2005

Michael F. Hochella - 500th ✓

September 13th, 2005

Harold D. Bagwell - 500th

September 30th, 2005

Evelyn P. Wade

(Wife of Dr. Charles H. Wade - 500) ✓

November 3rd, 2005

J. W. (Jay) Albright - 500th ✓

September 21st, 2005

Marie Albright

(Wife of Jay Albright)

November 11th, 2005

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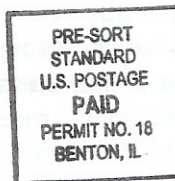
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345TH BOMB GROUP ASSOCIATION

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M/2005
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