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Three B-25s fly over South Carolina during a training exercise. Jim Bina found this photo in an old trunk on a trip home and passed it along for this edition of the *Air Apaches Strafer*. One can only imagine the photos, artwork, letters and memorabilia that are tucked away in old footlockers, steamer trunks and boxes in the attics of the homes of our Greatest Generation. If you come across any of these kinds of items, please consider scanning them for inclusion in our history project or consider donating them for preservation.



## PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By: Jim Bina

Greetings to all. I hope that everyone had an enjoyable summer and stayed cool. It has been a burner, hasn't it?

An important date in history is rapidly approaching and the 345<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association will be in the right place - Columbia, South Carolina - at the right time - November 11, 2012 - to commemorate this significant moment in time, the commemoration of the 345<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group. The well-known and fearsome Air Apaches (formerly the Tree-Top Terrors) were activated at Columbia Army Air Base on November 11, 1942. We, the Veterans, family and friends of the 345<sup>th</sup>, encourage everyone who is able to attend this auspicious occasion, the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this most noted air group who came together and wrote several pages into the history books.

On a recent trip home, I came across some photos that had been rolled up and stored in a trunk for the past 65 years or so. The photos, three large format, black and white photos (20 X 24 inches) presumable of AAF origin, are of a B-25 training flight somewhere over South Carolina. Further, I have tracked down the history of one of the three aircraft:

- 13278, Aircraft in foreground – assigned to the 470th Bomb Squadron, 334th Bomb Group. This aircraft crashed 3 miles north of Great Falls, SC, Feb 25, 1944. One bailed out, 5 killed in the crash.
- 30279 – Unknown at this time, further research is needed.

- 29813 – Unknown at this time, further research is needed.

The 334th Bombardment Group was last assigned with the Third Air Force stationed at Greenville Army Air Base, South Carolina. The unit was inactivated on 1 May 1944. Their primary mission was to train replacement aircrews for combat.

As of the last week of August, we have about half of the rooms booked in Columbia, very encouraging! Once again I encourage you to get your rooms booked and registration forms in quickly. We have included the schedule of events for the reunion in this Strafer but be advised that this schedule is flexible, mainly because the USC vs. Arkansas football game has not been fully scheduled, they haven't set the kick off time! I've never heard of this. Please keep this in mind when reviewing the schedule of events.

I'm looking forward to seeing everyone again and I'll also be looking for new faces and friends. We'll see all of you in Columbia!

Jim Bina





**FALCONS**  
**498<sup>TH</sup> SQUADRON**  
By: Chuck Myers

**SHIP INTERDICTION 6 APRIL 1945 NEAR  
COAST OF CHINA (SWATOW-AMOY AREA)**

Distance from Luzon to Swatow-Amoy:  
500+ statute miles

Take off: 0645 hours

Time over Target: 1100 – 1200

Contact with Japanese ships: ~ 1130

Weather at target: overcast <1500',  
intermittent rain, visibility 4-7 miles.

Sea surface: rough, wave height 3-6': not  
great for ditching.

An alert on VHF radio informed us of  
contact with two Japanese Naval elements  
(Destroyer Escorts). Our pilots fired test  
bursts of nose/package .50 cal. guns.

*I noted that my flight lead (Johnny)  
could not fire his guns (system  
malfunction).*

Tally-Ho enemy ships about 3 o'clock  
from our course. They are about a mile  
apart heading SW. I am flying in close  
formation position on Johnny's right wing  
and not sure of position of other Apache  
flights. Captain Johnson hand signals for  
me to take the lead and attack (his guns  
are not working). I break to the right and  
begin flying a path to intercept the nearest  
ship (perhaps the one in the picture on the  
cover of the Strafer magazine). I assume  
other flight members are following me but  
later concluded that they may have paused  
for more appropriate positioning with  
other squadron's attackers. It appears that  
I am the first to attack this ship and I now  
see other B-25's coming in from other  
directions. A passing thought: *perhaps this*

*will confuse the enemy gunners.* In any  
event, I'm committed, so I opened fire as  
we close.

The Japanese ship has a main  
battery 40mm and many 25mm guns; I  
choose to attack head-on with our 12-.50  
caliber machine guns. I'm directing my fire  
into the bridge and the main battery. As I  
close with our bomb bay doors open, co-  
pilot F/O Blase releases a bomb and we  
pass over ship at mast head altitude.  
Shortly thereafter, co-pilot informs me  
that we are streaming black smoke from  
our right engine. I reduce power and  
feather the right prop while shutting down  
the engine. As we slow from attack speed,  
we begin a gentle left hand turn eastward  
into the good engine and toward home  
plate, still flying very low. Although I had  
memorized the flight manual, this is my  
first experience at flying a B-25 on one  
engine. We continue to maintain radio  
silence.

I am very worried about survival  
because no one has previously made it  
home from this area on one engine.  
Fortunately, I have a new airplane and it's  
the "critical engine" that is operable. A  
minute later, LT Bronson from the 499<sup>th</sup>,  
observing our problem, pulls up onto my  
right wing and communicates that he will  
escort us. He suggests that, to minimize  
the distance, we should head for an  
emergency airstrip at Laoag on northern  
Luzon, Philippines. I concur and we embark  
on a course he prescribes; I assume he has  
a navigator aboard his airplane (all crews  
do not include a navigator).

I order our crew to dismantle and  
dump all equipment not needed (guns and  
whatever; if it's not welded, dump it) to  
reduce weight. I jettison our remaining  
bombs and begin firing our 12-.50 caliber

gun rounds in small increments hoping to avoid a loss of airspeed from the recoil. While the crew is stripping the inside of the airplane, I slowly climb to about 1500 feet, striving to gain enough altitude so they might bail out if we lose the remaining engine rather than ditch because the sea surface looks pretty rough and uninviting. Our Fifth Air Force experience of survival from ditching has not been encouraging.

Our climb speed is only 148 mph; it's a delicate situation. Eventually we attain an altitude of 1500'. At this altitude we attain a cruising speed of 155-160 mph and calculate that we are burning about 150 gallons of fuel per hour. If we can maintain this condition, we should make it to land.

The damage to the right engine (we learn later) is from a 25mm round which (during the head to head duel) entered the oil cooler inlet duct and detonated; ergo, we had only a few seconds to "feather" the engine. At that point, others probably thought we had gone in because we did not communicate with anyone (radio silence was strictly adhered to in those days; we assumed enemy fighters were in the area). We had been provided info on alternative fields on the China mainland where we might land if we could find them; I chose not to try that.

I later learned that Captain Johnson and the balance of our flight continued further SW and contacted the heavily armed destroyer *Amatsukzi*. He attacked with no forward firing guns and was shot down as was LT Herick of the 500<sup>th</sup>, no survivors for either. The nose guns were our primary defense; without them, we make a great target at fifty feet in a head on attack.

Three hours and ten minutes later, we arrived at Laoag (which I had never seen before and noticed a ditch or ravine just beyond the far end of the runway). I had more than a bit of concern about making my first single-engine approach and landing with a B-25, having been warned about the marginal capability of the airplane to execute a safe "go-round" if I should overshoot the runway. Ergo, I came in too fast and after cutting power, during the flare, realized we were gliding a couple of feet above the runway and I was afraid to try to take it around. Fortunately, I recalled a trick an instructor had demonstrated for me during a similar situation in a twin-engine AT-10 wherein he dumped the flaps so we abruptly fell out of the air onto the runway. I repeated it and the airplane immediately made contact with the runway in time for me to brake to a stop. We had used every foot of runway and probably burned out the brakes. Engine shut down time: 1445 hours. Whew!

Our escort landed and took us on board and back to San Marcelino. By the time we landed and got to the Air Group area, the others had debriefed and departed to their tents for Aussie beer and whatever. Having missed the Air Group debrief probably explains why the account in Hickey's fine book, *Warpath Across the Pacific*, bears no resemblance to our adventure. We were devastated to learn that one of our most experienced flight leaders, Captain Johnson and crew, had been shot down and did not survive. On the plus side, a few hundred enemy sailors also went to the bottom of the China Sea, but in my view it was not a fair trade.



## BATS OUTA HELL

### 499<sup>TH</sup> SQUADRON

By: Jim Mahaffey

From April to July of 1944 we fought wearily up the New Guinea coast to Hollandia and continued to the Celebes by refueling near Biak. On 13 August, the 499<sup>th</sup> hit Wasile Bay in the Halmaheras. Lt. George Voiter took a hit in the left engine and continued his circle to the target, but lost altitude and hit the water, breaking off a wing as the airplane came to rest about 25 yards off shore. Two crewmen emerged and gave first aid to another. The rest of the squadron, led by Lt. Hubert Summers, hit the target, then circled the downed men and contacted *Dumbo*, the name for the Catalina. The squadron had to leave after 90 minutes, leaving the downed crew to their fate. Post-war searchers said the Japanese probably recovered one body from the plane and buried it on shore and guessed the survivors were caught and executed. I still applaud my rescuer, Lt. Herb McPike, who had flown 18 months before rescuing us. He had flown all that time looking for downed planes and we were the first crew he had found. He died after the war before I could locate and thank him.

On 28 August, Ed Bina had just been given a plane as first pilot. He flew several boring training missions and was assigned a strafing mission at Biak. He and his crew made several runs over their target and were headed to form up with the group about 20 miles out when a cylinder on the left engine blew out and tore about an 18 inch hole in the cover. After talking to the engineer, he decided to gain altitude and

meet the group, but before they got there, several other cylinders blew, spewing gasoline into the wing and soon into the cabin. Bina decided to head down for a water landing, but before they got down, flames swooped into the cockpit when Lt. Melvin Bell jettisoned the top hatch. The flames scorched the arms and faces of the three men before they splashed down. Ed wondered if he was alive, then he decided he would get out and help the other men escape. He went back to help the radio man out the side window and they jumped out just as the plane sank. They had just one life vest between them but there was no need to call a Catalina because the cruiser *Long Beach* had seen them go down and sped toward them. Its crew lowered a life boat and within minutes they were aboard. They spent the night on board and described their sumptuous meal to squadron mates when they got back. That same day, Lt. Charles Phillips, a new pilot with the 499<sup>th</sup>, was landing at Mokmer airdrome at Biak and got a green light to land. A P-61 night fighter landed on top of him and the two planes skidded to a halt at the end of the runway and burned up. No one was hurt badly.

Another one that was close to me was on 19 September on a mission to the Molucca Sea. Lt. Ed Reel and Sgt. Sherwood Singer on Doodle, Jr. noticed oil leaking from the left engine. I noticed Doodle Jr. because I flew several missions in it with Lt. Ken McClure. They climbed to about 8,000 feet to clear the mountains on the Halmahera's.

A common gripe of mine occurred; the engines ran out of oil, got hot and there was no oil to feather the props, so down the plane went. Sgt. Johnson radioed for help. Lt. Reel put the flaps



## **ROUGH RAIDERS**

**500<sup>TH</sup> SQUADRON**

**By: Kelly McNichols**

down and put the tail down, and the plane skipped on the sea once before landing. It went in nose first and settled at a 45 degree angle with the tail up. Lt. Reel got a bloody nose off the instrument panel and got out really quickly, with Lt. Yakiw just behind him. Yakiw had just joined the 499<sup>th</sup> a few days before; what a welcome we gave him! Lt. Driscoll, the navigator, stayed to help Singer, who was stuck. Sgt Dubois was fitted into a May West because he could not swim, but shortly after the plane sank, the vest burst and he stayed afloat by holding onto a broken box of K rations and a flotation seat.

The men were about 35 miles west of the Halmaheras and all around them was Japanese held territory. Wakiw was thinking "*Drowning in the Pacific, what a hell of a way to die.*" That was what I had thought too when my plane was shot down in the Admiralty Islands.

About 30 minutes after the crash, B-24s from the 90<sup>th</sup> Group arrived in the area. The men in the water mashed the bags of marker dye and put it in the water. The first Liberator dropped a raft but it caught on the tail, so they departed. Another B-24 tried to drop a raft, but it got caught inside and was only dropped after it was deflated with a knife.

The B-24 circled for a couple of hours before having to leave for home, but they had reached the Catalina through fighters on the VHF radio. Johnson leaned back and remarked "*I think that is a Cat over there*" just before the rescuers arrived.

See you at the reunion in November!

During my younger days, my father encouraged me to dismantle various items just to discover how they were constructed. He shared that his father had prompted him to do this. Dad mentioned tearing apart an old foot pump organ when he was a child during the '20s and '30s. I think the organ would be rather valuable today. I have encouraged my kids to explore how mechanical objects are assembled. As a family, we have torn apart non-functioning microwave ovens, radios, fans, as well as other things, for the education. As a kid I remember many "projects" became pieces never to be reassembled. Once, as an adult, I deconstructed a hydraulic steering motor from a combine just to see what was in there and felt very fortunate to get the thing back together. There were way too many pieces in there with close tolerances.

Since mechanical objects have always fascinated me, I seem to gravitate to other individuals who share the same interests. It seems that some people have an innate ability to understand the field of mechanics and how things are constructed, while others don't. I know an individual who I would consider brilliant in certain fields. This person once told me when he opens a car hood and peers into the engine compartment, "The whole thing is a mystery." In life, it seems some individuals are drawn to certain occupations based on skills and interests. I thought about what it took to keep all those aircraft flying

during WWII under grueling conditions and considered the men who toiled long hours toward that goal.

Two episodes from TV shows come to mind about the struggles facing ground maintenance crews. The first is from a documentary produced by Smoky Hills Public TV several years ago entitled "Bombers on the Prairie - The Battle for Kansas." The show explored the development of the B-29. Since many of the systems on the complex aircraft were designed concurrently, many mechanical bugs surfaced late in the process. Since some of the planes were assembled in Wichita, many modifications were performed at various Kansas airfields. These ground crews toiled in heat and chilling cold, often in the open outside of hangars, to get these planes ready for overseas combat. Kansas winters can be brutal and mechanics were forced to work in the elements with bare hands to get the job done. Imagine handling delicate parts with fingers numb from the cold. In the summer, heat could be just as bad. Often wrenches were so hot, water was used to quench them. These dedicated mechanics performed what some considered minor miracles during terrible weather conditions.

A second example is of the PBS documentary from ten or so years ago, "B-29 Lost in Time". That show followed the exploits of a privately funded crew trying to recover the B-29 *Kee Bird* from a Greenland lake. The plane landed on a lake during WWII while on a ferry flight. The crew spent two summers working to recover the plane only to have it destroyed by fire while attempting a takeoff. The crew chief had a medical problem and died as a result of delayed treatment because of

the remoteness of the plane. Even though there was ample opportunity to evacuate the gentleman, he chose to stay and work on the plane. He passed away at a hospital, as the postponement of treatment had been too long. I know this incident didn't happen during combat but nonetheless it serves to show the dedication of an individual for whom the goal was more important than immediate physical comfort.

I have had conversations with several members of the 345<sup>th</sup> BG over the years about experiences from many years ago. While working on the *Seabiscuit* crew memorial in '05, I was fortunate to speak with the Crew Chief of that plane, Harold Estey. Mr. Estey mentioned that he had named that plane and considered it his. It was common for crews to have this pride in their planes. I've heard of this attitude many times. Harold shared how flight crews came back with palm fronds and antenna wires dangling from the plane which upset him greatly. I think he felt sadness not only for the lost crew but for the plane as well when it went down on 6 April 1945.



A 345<sup>th</sup> B-29 coming off a treetop height strafing attack against a Japanese installation in the hills just south of Wewak, New Guinea (Joe Solomon). Hitting the tops of palm trees caused the fronds to become stuck in various parts of the airplane.

In talking with flight crews, many think the maintenance crews were the unsung heroes of the War in the SWPA. Working in the open in the rain and heat of the theater, one can only imagine the hardships faced by these men. Former 500<sup>th</sup> BS pilot Bill Zimmerman summed it up when he indicated these men were very resourceful and didn't get the respect for the jobs they performed.



Armorers load the .50 caliber nose guns on a 345<sup>th</sup> B-25 at Tacloban, Philippines 23 Feb 1945 (Vic Tatelman).

Shortly before he passed away, 500<sup>th</sup> BS Operations Maintenance Officer Gene Cole related an incident. During a run up on a B-25, or any aircraft for that matter, the magnetos would be checked to see if both on each engine were operating properly. If the RPM dropped below a

predetermined amount, there was problem with the mag. Gene said that there was excessive RPM drop on a particular plane. Even though he was an officer and generally didn't get greasy working on aircraft, he did in this case. He suspected that one of the magnetos was out of time. He checked and indeed that was the error. He felt good that he was able to help in isolating the problem. This is but one example of the devotion of the people working on the planes. I've heard of other examples of crews working all night to get a plane ready for morning takeoff.

Today it is difficult to imagine the difficulty in supply of spare parts and terrible physical working conditions of the maintenance crews during combat. I've seen pictures of men working on planes with nothing but a few palm trees for shade. The work environment was many times horrific. Consider that many of the planes were modified with eight gun noses in the field during the course of the war. The ingenuity of these men in keeping the planes flying should never be forgotten. Their dedication to duty and tireless work ethic in performing their job are attributes we all should attempt to emulate.



## HEADQUARTERS

By: Ken Gastgeb

On November 11, 1942, the 345<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group was born.

On that date, a group of us rookies that had just graduated basic training were assigned to the Group along with others. I was assigned to the 498<sup>th</sup> Orderly Room as a typist. Day by day the Group got larger and larger. In six months

we were combat ready. We sailed across the Pacific and became a member of the Fifth Air Force at Port Moresby, New Guinea. In the 30 months we spent overseas, we participated in nine campaigns. On November 11 this year, we celebrate our 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary. I think I can say for all the original members of the Group, "A Great Big Thank You" to all you sons, daughters and friends of members for carrying on the Reunions as a remembrance of what the Group accomplished during the war.

Because of my health, I'm sorry that I will not be able to attend the reunion. However, I will be there in spirit.

Happy Thanksgiving and God bless you.

## THE BUS DRIVER MISSION

By: Vic Tatelman

With the signing of the surrender documents on board the USS Missouri in Tokyo Harbor on 2 September 1945, the war in the Pacific came to an end. There were, however, several areas in the Far East where Japan still had stationed troops; Korea was one such country.

On 5 September, I was assigned a mission to lead a flight of six airplanes of the 499th Squadron, which were to take General Hodge and his staff to Keijo (the Jap name for Seoul) to accept the Jap surrender of Korea. The plan was to take off from Ie Shima early the next day (6 September), fly to Okinawa to pick up the General and his staff and fly to Kimpo (the airport just outside of Seoul) where the Jap commander and his staff would be waiting.

The next morning, with good weather, we left Ie Shima about 0600. Our airplanes were fully armed with our

regular crews in place. We landed in Naha on Okinawa where the General was waiting. I asked General Hodge to ride with me and assigned the other members of his group to our other airplanes.

The weather was good the entire leg and we arrived over the Kimpo Airport about 1000. I could see the people lined up in front of the terminal building but what was a bit shocking was the 50 or more Jap fighter aircraft parked in an adjacent area.



These Jap airplanes looked ready to fly. (Vic Tatelman)

I held the flight in formation circling the field while my jaw dropped to my chest; the main runway was just too damned short. I told the flight to keep circling while I would attempt a landing. I dropped out of formation, flew out to about a 5 mile approach and lined up with the runway. I don't think I ever flew a B-25 that slowly. The wheels touched the runway at the very end and the roll stopped practically at the far fence. I radioed the others and all landed safely. I had my flight engineer park the planes precisely wing tip to wing tip: I wanted to impress the Japs standing in formation in front of the terminal building. I asked General Hodge to wait until all of his

people were dismounted before his approach to the Japs. I wanted to make sure all were ok. He selected 4 or 5 officers plus his interpreter and walked to the head of the Jap formation. The two commanders exchanged salutes and I could see a conversation was taking place.

I later learned through the interpreter that the Jap commander offered his sword to General Hodge but Hodge declined to accept it saying *“No, you save it for your grandchildren; they will cherish it as coming from you.”* At the conclusion of the ceremony they all went into the terminal building.

I was in a quandary: what was my next step? Our mission plan was clearly stated-all planes were to return to base that afternoon. But I began to think: *“What the hell, the war is over and we are in a very exotic environment. Why can't we stay here for a day or so?”* I went into the building and sought out the General's adjutant. I explained what I wanted and he immediately made arrangements for hotel and transportation.



General Hodge and the Jap Commander exchange salutes. (Vic Tatelman)

As soon as radio communications were set up, I sent word that the weather was so bad that I didn't want to expose

some of our new pilots to instrument formation flying. I hoped the weather charts back on Okinawa didn't reach as far north as Korea.

Two large, open bed trucks soon appeared and after I explained to my troops what we were going to do, we climbed onto the trucks and were taken to the Chosen Hotel, one of the finest hotels in the Far East. We were given the whole top floor; I was assigned the presidential suite, with a white jacketed waiter just outside the door.

What luxury! It was explained to me that I had some kind of status as the leader (I guess that came about because I was the flight leader). The furniture in the suite was extremely luxurious and all white and *“satiny.”* The little bar in the room was filled with all kinds of liquors and the ice bucket was always full.

The political community in Seoul must have thought that I had the ear of General MacArthur because I had visitors from all the political parties pointing out the credentials of one man or another who should be the first democratically elected president in 50 years. Syngman Rhee's group was one of them and he was later elected as Korea's first president.

Enough of politics! I was now concerned about mess for our crews. I called down to the manager's office as I wanted a separate dining room for our people and asked what was on the menu. Shock and surprise: NO FOOD in the hotel, just apples. I got the room and sure enough on each plate was an apple. So, we all ate apples for two days.

At the end of the second day I announced that we'd take off 0900 the next day. I arranged for our trucks to take us out to the field about 0800 to check and

pre-flight the airplanes. All went well, the weather was good, and all the airplanes were ready to start at 0900.

The trip back to Ie Shima was uneventful. However, I did get holy hell from Max Ferguson when I climbed out of the airplane and I can't blame him since I did keep six airplanes and crews away from whatever schedules had been planned. I was lucky that my punishment wasn't more severe than Max's tongue lashing.

### COLUMBIA VETERANS DAY PARADE RE-SCHEDULED

We have just received official confirmation that the Columbia Veterans Day Parade will be held at 11:00 a.m. on Monday, November 12 and not Saturday, November 10 as previously reported. This will have an impact on our schedule as, unfortunately; Monday is likely to be a travel day for many of us who will be attending Reunion XXV. However, there are many choices of alternative activities for Saturday and we will keep attendees posted as plans evolve. *For reunion attendees who registered for and paid for the parade, there will be an alternative activity and for those who don't want to participate, a parade refund will be made at the reunion. The registration form in this newsletter reflects the change in schedule.*

For those who haven't made their travel plans and would like to be in Columbia for the parade, the Doubletree Hotel does extend the convention rate through Monday night. The reservations number for the Doubletree is 803-744-

0142. Use the group name "345<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group" when making reservations.

### A LITTLE PIECE OF HEAVEN

By: Vic Tatelman

After living in tents with mud and filth for three years, when we finally reached Clark Field, we thought we would finally live like civilized people.

Marty Wood, who was the squadron Executive Officer at the time, preceded the rest of the squadron on the move from San Marcelino. His job was to head-up the group who were to establish the squadron area at Clark.

While he was busy with his assigned duties, he also rounded up a group of Filipino laborers to build a house for the seven of us.

The house was built mostly from bamboo and straw matting, with two bedrooms, a living room, a kitchen and a bath.



499th officer quarters at Clark Field, Philippines.  
(Vic Tatelman)

The shower was off the bath – a slotted bamboo floor with straw mat walls; a 35 gallon P-40 belly tank was suspended over the little stall for the water supply,

which was hosed down to a perforated coffee can. Voila! A perfect shower!

Ed Egan “liberated” a gas powered refrigerator on one of his forays into Manila. He and I worked like demons trying to convert it to electric power. The move to le Shima cut off our efforts.

The several months we lived in our house was pure heaven compared to our previous existence.



The seven of us who called the place home. Back row, l-r, Max Ferguson, Vic Tatelman, Morris Bradshaw and Bob Post. Front row, l-r, Ed Egan, Walt Barnes and Marty Wood. (Vic Tatelman)

As of this writing, two of us are still living out of the original seven.

### A CALL FOR AGENDA ITEMS

This is a call for agenda items for the upcoming Annual Business Meeting of the 345<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association. The business meeting is tentatively scheduled to be held in the afternoon of Sunday, November 11, 2012 at the Doubletree Hotel, Columbia, South Carolina. Any member in good standing who wishes to bring business to the attention of the Executive Committee of the Association

should submit their agenda item(s) to Andy Decker, Secretary, 345<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association, Dennis O’Neil, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President, Kelly McNichols, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President, or me, James Bina, President, for inclusion on the business agenda. All agenda items must be submitted no later than October 15, 2012.



### DISPATCH FROM COLUMBIA

By: Mary Sloan Roby

Although there are some final details still to be worked out for our upcoming reunion, there is a lot of interest and excitement throughout the Columbia area. Many members have been sending their registrations in. We hope you are planning to attend and hope you will contact your friends and family to urge them to attend, too.

Clint and I recently traveled to Columbia to visit the hotel where we will be based and are happy to report that the Doubletree is very nice and comfortable. The breakfast buffet is generous and comes with the room. It is not too far from the airport or downtown Columbia, has a free shuttle from the airport, and lots of free parking if you are planning to drive.

We’ve met with Fritz Hamer from the South Caroliniana Library. He is the curator of written materials and is

preparing the special exhibit that we will see at the opening reception on Friday evening. We also met with Tracy Power at the SC Historical Marker Commission—he will be finalizing the copy for the marker recognizing the extraordinary history and accomplishments of the 345<sup>th</sup>. And, we spent a very worthwhile afternoon at the SC Military Museum. Their staff members are very well versed in WWII history and I know everyone will enjoy visiting the museum, which has an Air Apaches patch in its collection!

Because the planned Veteran's Day parade was moved from Saturday to Monday (a day when most of us will be departing for home) we have had to make some changes to the schedule that will probably preclude official parade participation. Of course, attending the parade would still be an option for anyone who can stay an extra half day or so.

We hope there will not be too many additional changes in the schedule, even though we have not finalized all our plans. If needed, however, adjustments in cost will be made.

Be sure to take a look at our Facebook page, where new meeting details will be posted. If you have a Columbia story, I'd love to hear it, so please send me an email if you do. The best way to reach me is via email at [msroby@verizon.net](mailto:msroby@verizon.net) if there are questions. I am very much looking forward to seeing all the members of the 345<sup>th</sup> in Columbia!!

## Tentative Schedule

**Thursday, November 8.** On your own today as the B-25(s) arrive at Owens Field. There's a possibility that some veterans will be able to fly on Thursday afternoon.

Of course, the arrival and flights are weather dependent. Registration at the hotel.

**Friday, November 9.** Today is the first day of the educational sessions—Columbia during the War and a session about war letters, orders, photos, uniforms and other types of mementoes we all have. If you have a collection you are interested in preserving or perhaps donating, there will be lots of good information to learn. In the afternoon there will be a trip to Owens Field, where the B-25 Skunkie, which crashed in Lake Murray, sits in an historic Curtiss-Wright Hangar. The opening reception will be held in the early evening at the South Caroliniana Library that has put together a special exhibit on the 345<sup>th</sup>. This exhibit will be up from November 1 through December 20.

**Saturday, November 10.** Educational sessions will continue at an offsite location still to be decided. These roundtable sessions will focus on the tools used by the 345<sup>th</sup> and also on the airplane itself. We hope our vets will bring their experiences to these sessions. We are hopeful of visiting Fort Jackson, where the nation's newest National Cemetery is located, on Saturday afternoon. Saturday evening, you will be on your own to take advantage of the many restaurants and attractions in downtown Columbia. *Note: There will be a University of South Carolina Gamecocks vs. Arkansas Razorbacks football game either on Saturday afternoon or evening. We don't know when game time will be announced or if any tickets might be available.*

**Sunday, November 11.** Currently, we plan to have the dedication of an historical marker recognizing the 345<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group and its formation at Columbia Army Air Base, now Columbia Metropolitan Airport. The dedication will be followed by an early lunch and an opportunity to meet local WWII aficionados, collectors, and authors. Squadron meetings and the annual business meeting of the 345<sup>th</sup> will be held in the afternoon, back at the hotel. Closing out the reunion will be the annual banquet, with a final chance to mingle with our 345<sup>th</sup> veterans, families, and friends.

**Monday, November 12.** Unfortunately, a recent schedule change has moved the Columbia Veterans Day parade to 11 a.m. on Monday. Because most of us will be leaving on Monday, we will not be able to have an official role in the parade; those who can stay in Columbia a little longer could still attend.

[The 2012 reunion graphic was created by artist Seth Deitch. Thank you, Seth!]



## **YOUR ARRIVAL IN COLUMBIA**

Your welcome to Columbia can begin as soon as you deplane at Columbia Metropolitan Airport - where Columbia

Army Air Base was located during WWII. An exhibit in the main corridor, adjacent to the USO Room, observes the 70th anniversary of both the opening of the airbase and the audacious Doolittle Raid. Contributors to the exhibit include a curator, an author, and a number of collectors - all of whom you are likely to meet during your reunion stay.



Artist Scott Huffer's depiction of the B-25 from which the late South Carolina Raider Horace "Sally" Crouch released bombs over Tokyo targets is one element in the exhibit at Columbia Metropolitan airport.

## **GOOD READING—NEW BOOKS ABOUT THE 345<sup>TH</sup> IN COLUMBIA**

By: Clint Roby

I never had the good fortune to meet my father-in law, Eugene B. Sloan; he passed away when my wife Mary was a teenager. At that young age she had never talked to him in detail about his war experiences. He did leave behind a lot of papers (orders, flight log, etc.) and over the past number of years we have been trying to reconstruct a time line of his war experiences. According to the papers he saved, following completion of his bombardier training in Roswell, New Mexico, he was assigned to the Columbia

Army Air Base Replacement Depot, to report there by 21 February 1944, which was the day before his 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday.

He was assigned to BOQ 121, and we have found maps of part the base in his papers. He was only there for a couple of weeks. On 8 March 1944 Lt. Sloan along with other officers, some of whom would later become members of the 345<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, were assigned to report to Greenville Army Air Base and the 334<sup>th</sup> B.G. He was at GAAB until June 15<sup>th</sup>, and had his first flight in a B-25 on March 14<sup>th</sup>. He apparently made about 50 flights in B-25s before leaving Greenville for his next station, Hunter Field, Georgia. Other than a few brief letters to his mother, we didn't know much about what his time in Columbia and Greenville was like.

Recently, we have discovered two books that shed light on what life was like at CAAB and GAAB. In her book "Cornfield to Airfield: A History of Columbia Army Air Base," Rachel Haynie has collected photos, including those of two base photographers, and personal stories from military personnel and civilians who were stationed at or worked at the base, or who lived near the base.

Several chapters are dedicated to the 17<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, one of the early groups stationed at CAAB, from which came the Doolittle Raiders. While the 345<sup>th</sup> stay in Columbia was only for a few months, several events are described that occurred during that time: the occupation of new hospital buildings in November '42, a celebration honoring the heroes from Pearl Harbor at the 1<sup>st</sup> anniversary, and a Christmas party including 75 children from the Epworth Children's Home Orphanage in Columbia. In addition to the many photos, indexes include lists of the

principal units stationed at CAAB and a list of the men, and one WASP pilot, who were killed in action while serving their country at CAAB. Some of base photographer Bill Hamson's photos can be viewed at the Richland County Library's Local History Digital Library at <http://www.richland.lib.sc.us/>.

Dr. Courtney Tollison's book, "World War II and Upcountry South Carolina," concentrates on upstate SC and includes a chapter on Greenville Army Air Base. GAAB primarily trained B-25 replacement crews, ground crews, and aviation engineering battalions. Amongst other training, flyers from GAAB practiced bombing at lakes Issaqueena and Greenwood. A B-25 that flew from Greenville and ditched in Lake Greenwood was recovered recently, partially restored, and is now hangared at Owens Field in Columbia. Dr. Tollison's book also contains many photos, including gunners assembling their guns blindfolded, airmen in a raft during ditching practice, and base radio-host Norvin Duncan during a broadcast. The book also describes some of the many ways residents of Greenville and upstate SC supported the base troops and the greater war effort.

### The Combat Crews

By: Joe Solomon

This narrative is about the enlisted men in the combat crews. This is about the young fellows that were an integral part of those crews that participated in the air strikes against the Japanese who were entrenched on the northwestern coast of New Guinea. Our planes were based at Jackson Strip just outside of Port Moresby.

As the war went on, we would follow the enemy from New Guinea to Biak, then to the Philippines and finally to Ie Shima.

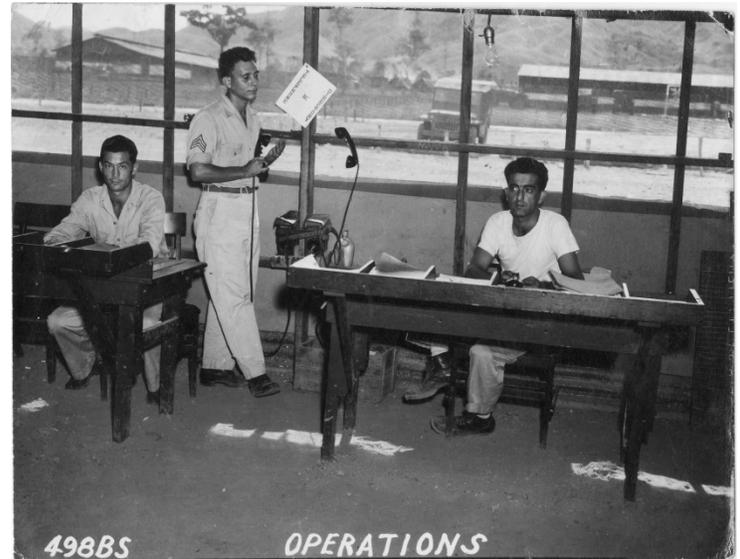
My story will concern itself with the radio operators, engineers and gunners assigned to each crew in addition to the pilot, co-pilot and the navigator, who also acted as the bombardier. Our planes were B-25s medium bombardment designed to drop 250 or 500 lb. bombs from an altitude of anywhere between 12,000 and 20,000 feet.

Before leaving the United States, these planes were modified to include eight 50 caliber fixed guns in the nose and a 50 caliber gun on each side for strafing purposes. These guns were activated by the pilot and used primarily during low level attack runs flying just above the tree tops. These targets would include enemy planes on the ground, ammunition dumps, barges and troopships. This fire power along with the heavy bombs proved to be very effective against the enemy, particularly on terrain such as New Guinea and other islands in the Southwest Pacific.

The planes were also equipped with swivel guns in the waist, tail, and upper turret, operated by the engineer, radio operator and gunner, especially when under attack from enemy fighter planes. Our squadron was assigned 16 B-25s and about 60 crew members. With good weather our planes would average two to three flights per week.

As chief clerk in operations, one of my duties was to assist the operations officer in the selection of crews for the various missions. Whenever possible, the same six crew members would be scheduled to fly together as a unit. This would greatly enhance their performance and efficiency, particularly while under

attack. Once the flight schedule was prepared, it would be posted outside of the operations office for all strikes, thus allowing the crews to know if they were scheduled to go or not.



Inside the 498<sup>th</sup> Operations room (Joe Solomon).

Our participation in the war against the Japanese covered the years 1942 thru September 1945. We were all young then, with the average age of the enlisted crews 19-22. The ages of the flight officers ran from 23 thru 28. Throughout those times, I would notice the courageous attitude always displayed by the crews. One would think they were going on a picnic, particularly during the early missions.

As time went on, and after having flown a dozen missions or more, the boys seemed to quiet down and adopt a more serious attitude towards their missions, especially when they found that they were being fired on every time they went over a target. That is when the seriousness of the war finally penetrated and the probability of not making it back to home base started to make an impression.

Following some of their missions, many of the planes would return to base with bullet holes in the fuselage, one

engine out, or wheels that wouldn't lock in place, making landing a real hazard. Often a member or two of the crew in various planes would be seriously wounded. Then, of course, the time came when a plane or two just never came back. The heavy losses sustained during the early days never deterred us from our objective of destroying the enemy.

It would be difficult for me to explain how badly the returning crew members felt after these losses. They were a closely knit group and most had attended gunnery school together in the States. In the face of all this, they never hesitated to perform their missions as they were trained to do. You could see that they wanted to come out of this alive and return home.

An arbitrary figure of 50 missions was used as a goal for the pilots before they would be eligible to return to the States for reassignment. A lot of the crews were successful, but many others never made it. I would be hit hard by the losses since I knew them so well and had tried to guide them in the operation of their duties. For those that had successfully completed their missions, there was great joy and celebration. We were all so happy for them. They would be on their way home in a couple of weeks. Replacement crews were arriving daily so that there was no interruption in our schedules.

Whenever we had losses, and there were many, I suffered greatly. Even four years over there did not help to overcome the feelings of a great loss when a crew went down. After all these years I can still remember quite clearly those men that we lost. Occasionally, in the past, I would hear from some of the ones that made it home, thanking me for my help during the

bad times over there. It was a nice feeling to hear from them in this way.

After the war, our squadron, like so many others, would have reunions every three years. My wife Marie and I attended one in San Antonio and one in Columbus, Ohio, and were reunited with a lot of the remaining crews. Everyone had stories to tell, but most of all, they were grateful to be home. I shared those feelings with them. I still do now.

### BEFORE WE WERE "AIR APACHES"

By: Ken Gastgeb

On 27 February 1944, T/Sgt H.R. Bartlett of the 501<sup>st</sup> won a contest to come up with a Group title for the 345<sup>th</sup>. He submitted the nickname "Tree-Top Terrors" on the spur of the moment and came out the contest winner.

Group Commander Col. Clinton True awarded Sgt. Bartlett a bottle of gin for his clever nickname that combined the tactics of bombing and strafing from minimum altitude with the emotion that anyone on the receiving end of the attack would have experienced because of the noise and devastation being rained down upon them.



**345<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Reunion XXV & 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary at CAAB—  
Registration Form (reflects schedule changes as of August 12, 2012)**

Name		Spouse/Additional Guest Name(s)	
Address			
City, State, Zip			
Home Phone		Cell Phone	
E-Mail			
Arrival Date	Departure Date	Squadron	

<i>Events and Fees</i>	<i>Cost</i>	<i># Attending</i>	<i>Totals</i>
Registration Fee ( <i>non-refundable</i> )	\$50		
<b>Friday, November 9 Educational Sessions; Trip to Owens Field &amp; SC Military Museum; possible B-25 rides; Opening Reception</b>			
Educational Session I (No charge for veterans) *	\$40/\$0		
Box lunch for Educational Session Attendees & Field Trip	free		
Field Trip to Owens Field & SC Military Museum	\$25		
Opening Reception at the Caroliniana Library; CAAB Exhibit	\$25		
<b>Saturday, November 10 Educational Sessions; Trip to Owens Field; possible B-25 rides</b>			
Educational Session II (No charge for Veterans) *	\$40/\$0		
Box lunch for Educational Session Attendees & Field Trip	free		
Field Trip to Owens Field & Fort Jackson	\$25		
Dinner on Your Own			
<b>Sunday, November 11 Marker Dedication Activities and B-25 flyover; Business Meetings and Banquet</b>			
Historical Marker Dedication and B-25 Fly-over	\$15		
Barbeque Lunch	\$20		
Squadron Meetings	No Charge		
345 <sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Business Meeting	No Charge		
Banquet with Speaker	\$50		
<b>Monday, November 12 Note: The Veteran's Day Parade has been rescheduled from Saturday to Monday at 11:00 a.m.</b>			
* Discounted Registration for both Educational Sessions = \$75	\$75		
<b>Please send completed registration form and check for the total amount made payable to the 345<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association to Mary Sloan Roby, Treasurer, 1916 E Pratt Street, Baltimore, MD 21231</b>			<b>Total Due</b>

Please indicate your Banquet Meal Choices:

# _____ Beef	# _____ Chicken	# _____ Fish	# _____ Vegetarian
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Please indicate any special services you will need in order to attend the reunion:

_____ Wheelchair	_____ Other, please describe
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**Make hotel reservations as soon as possible by calling the Doubletree at 803.744.0142, using Group Name "345<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group." Group Rates are only available until October 19, 2012.  
Follow us on Facebook for a website address for online reservations.**

# BULLETIN BOARD

## IN MEMORY OF:

The members of the 345<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association extend our sincere condolences to the families of our departed members and friends:

Lynn A. Lee (501) 21 January 2012 Abilene, Texas  
Haldene A. Cope (498) 22 April 2012 Alva, Florida  
Andrew E. Simko (499) 3 May 2012 Ashburn, VA  
Keith Dougherty (500) 17 June 2012 Williamsburg, Iowa

## GOOD READING

*As we prepare for the upcoming 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the activation of the 345<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association this November in Columbia, SC, we have acquired many interesting books related to WWII activity in the Palmetto State, many with personal stories relating to Air Corps training and the Pacific Theater. Unless stated otherwise, most books are available from Amazon.com or other on-line sites.*

**"A True Flyer: memories of a World War II Air Apache,"** Lieutenant Colonel Jay W. Moore, USAF, Retired. Edited by Senath Rankin. Self published. Order through [lulu.com](http://lulu.com) or [amazon.com](http://amazon.com)

**"Air Combat at 20 Feet—Selected Missions from a Strafer Pilot's Diary,"** Garrett Middlebrook, AuthorHouse, Bloomington, IN 47403. 800.839.8640. [www.authorhouse.com](http://www.authorhouse.com)

**"Cornfield to Airfield: A History of Columbia Army Air Base,"** Rachel Haynie with primary photography by Bill Hamson, U.S. Army Air Corps, Retired. Commemorative Edition, 2011. Ellerbe Press, 801 King Street, Suite G., Columbia, S.C. 29205. [info.EllerbePress@gmail.com](mailto:info.EllerbePress@gmail.com)

**"Honoring South Carolina's World War II Heroes of Flight,"** Rebecca Pepin, Wentworth Printing, Inc., West Columbia, SC 2003. Order from Celebrate Freedom Foundation, 455 St. Andrews Road, Suite C1, Columbia, SC 29210. 803.772.2945. [CelebrateFreedomFoundation.org](http://CelebrateFreedomFoundation.org)

**"No Ordinary Lives...the Life and Times of Chapin Area World War II Veterans,"** Colonel (Ret.) Tom Fincher. (No publisher information is provided.)

**"Wings and a Ring: Letters of War and Love from a WWII Pilot,"** Rene Palmer Armstrong, Tate Publishing & Enterprises, LLC, 127 E. Trade Center Terrace, Mustang, OK 73064. 888.361.9473. [www.tatepublishing.com](http://www.tatepublishing.com)

**"World War II and Upcountry South Carolina,"** Courtney L. Tollison, PhD, The History Press, Charleston, SC 29403. [www.historypress.net](http://www.historypress.net)

**"World War II—Hometown and Home Front Heroes: Life Experience Stories from the Carolinas' Piedmont,"** Edited by Margaret G. Bigger, A. Borough Books, 3901 Silver Bell Drive, Charlotte, NC 28211.



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