

THE STRAFER

VOLUME 31 ISSUE 3

September 2013



USA! USA! USA!



The Evolving Era of the Air Apaches

The President's Corner

By: Jim Bina

The XXVI Air Apache Reunion is upon us, just mere weeks away! We have an exciting time lined up for those that will be heading to Houston. Our reunion planners have outdone themselves this time with the events they've planned. Look inside to get all the details. Of special note, and an event I've wanted to host for a long time, is the hangar dance on Friday night. This is a first for our reunions and should be a smash hit, with a 40s era live band and visits from some very special guests. So guys, be sure to get that uniform pressed and don't forget to bring a corsage for your best girl!

I've secured the services of a company to refurbish the 345th Bomb Group Memorial at Dayton, Ohio. After an exhaustive and nonproductive search for the architects and builders of the monument (quite the story) I've found a local company to do the work. They will clean the stonework, redo all the lettering, and polish and preserve all the brass work. The cost for all this will be \$1,000, a fair price. While we've agreed to set aside money in the treasury for this work, we are also requesting donations from Air Apache families and friends. I'll lead off with my contribution of \$100. Anyone else wishing to make a donation in memory of an Air Apache please let me know so I can have it published in the next Strafer. Thank you in advance!

I'll keep this short, and looking forward to seeing everyone in Houston!

Jim Bina, President

There's been some barracks talk floating around about future reunions. Yes, it's true as some of us have been discussing what the future will bring for the 345th. As I explain below, and which will be the center of discussion at the upcoming 345th Bomb Group Association Business Meeting on Sunday, October 27, 2013. If you can't make the meeting in person please contact me before the meeting with your viewpoints.

It's becoming very apparent that the 345th Bomb Group reunions, *as we know them*, may very soon be changing dramatically or maybe coming to an end. I knew it couldn't last forever but I was hoping we could last a couple more years – and maybe it can. It's a hard fact to face that maybe the Houston reunion might be the last of the big hoopla's we've come to know. It's all up for discussion.

Registrations for the Houston Reunion are down significantly this year in comparison to previous years, primarily because our Veterans are just not able to travel as they used to, and the families that come with the Veterans are also tapering off. The fewer folks that show up, the greater our expenses become. If you are already registered for the Houston reunion, it will be one of those "you should have been there" events. If you are wondering about attending the Houston Reunion, please consider attending as this may be the last 'big one'.

What does the future hold? That's a good question and that's up in the air right now. The options being considering for the future are few but one thing is for sure, I believe we will do nicely with a less grandiose affair that we've come to know. One thing under consideration is a downscaled reunion based around the Texas Flying Legends Museum in Houston. It is the TFL's ambition to open their facility to reunion groups to become a reunion destination, and the welcome mat is out for the Air Apaches.

Perhaps a gathering at the 345th Bomb Group Memorial in Dayton. A dramatically different approach to ponder. My bottom line, I still want to afford the Veterans, those that are able, an opportunity and location to gather and enjoy the camaraderie of their fellow Air Apaches, to swap stories and to educate young folks of the dedication, pride and valor of these men. I still consider that is the mission of the 345th Bomb Group Association to preserve the history. The stories and the artifacts of the Air Apaches, honor those brave young men who went to war during their countries time of need, and to educate those that want to know more about the best and most fearsome air outfit of WWII, the Air Apaches.

Well, that's my vision.... Please let me know of your thoughts concerning this new concept.

Have a safe trip to Houston and I'm looking forward to seeing everyone there!

Jim Bina

Preserving the Air Apache Legacy

This message is primarily for the second and third generations of Air Apaches - how are we going to preserve and promote the legacy that our preceding generation, the brave men of the 345th Bomb Group, fought and sacrificed for? How do we keep the legacy alive of what these men did for us? It's come down to our generations to take on this responsibility of not only preserving this proud legacy, but also to educate our succeeding generations of the bravery, sacrifice and devotion to duty that these men exemplified by simply doing their job in a time of need for our country.

As you may know some of us have been in touch with museums across the country in an effort to gain museum space for an Air Apache exhibit. The museums I've checked with, such as the National Museum of the Air Force and the National Museum of the Pacific War in Fredericksburg, Texas, simply do not have the floor space to dedicate to any single unit. This is a recurring theme. Items and artifacts that

would be donated to these museums would probably be stored in a warehouse and out of sight – I don't think we want that. These museums are receiving huge amounts of photos, artifacts, and documents from individuals that are overflowing the warehouses of these museums, most of which will remain in boxes and out of sight for maybe several more generations.

Further, how do we educate our younger folks of what these men did and how they lived and went about doing their job during this time of strife and war. I recently attended a couple of WWII reenactments here locally in northern Virginia. These events are very popular across the country and the attention to detail and accuracy are amazing. One thing became very evident to me were the youngsters that were in attendance. Watching these elementary school-age children crawl over the tanks and observing the reenactments got me to thinking of just how much do they know about this significant event in American history? What can we do as second and third generations to relate what our parents, grandparents and uncles did during these times? I believe it starts with us. We will be soliciting ideas for educational programs and searching for artifacts in the near future. Watch for announcements in The Strafer.

We are in very preliminary talks with the Texas Flying Legends Museum about gaining some museum space for a 345th Bomb Group exhibit, and as I mentioned those talks are very premature but the TFL has expressed interest in allowing us exhibit space. So far this is the best option I've come across with in my search for exhibit space. More to come as we continue our discussions with them.

I want to start an open discussion of how to establish an education program for our succeeding generations and how we can educate and inspire the youth of our families, and those who seek knowledge. I will dedicate a portion of our time at the upcoming business meeting for this subject where we can discuss and explore how we can promote the history of our greatest generation. Your input will be generously accepted. It's up to us, we are the keepers of the Air Apache legacy.

Jim Bina



FALCONS
498th Squadron

By: George Givens

We are now in the time frame for all the events in the history of the Air Apaches that occurred exactly 70 years ago! After the dedication of the signs at Columbia Airport last November, the group stated it's "Warpath Across the Pacific"! Their first combat mission was June 30, 1943, two squadrons, 498th and 500th to Bobdubi and two squadrons 499th and 501st to Salamaua in New Guinea.

My dad, George A. Givens, started his quest to eventually join the group on his eighteenth birthday, September 27, 1943. He rode a trolley to the old post office building in Pittsburgh for the swearing-in ceremony to join the US Army. There were several hundred young fellows and he did not recognize anyone in the crowd. They were taken as a group from the old post office on Smithfield Street to the Pennsylvania Railroad Station at Grant Street and Liberty Ave., where they boarded a train for Fort Indiantown Gap Army induction Center outside Harrisburg, Pa. This is where he received his uniform and started "Army" life.

July 1945

My visit to Manila after the big battle

We had moved to the Philippine Islands after getting original orientation where I joined the group at Biak Island, Dutch New Guinea on February 4, 1945. We were operating out of San Marcelino air strip and then moved to Clark field on May 12. My very first "mission" was to Wewak on February 14, 1945, however, these, and my first 9 'Missions', were used for orientation for new crews to get used to 345th procedures and getting us acclimated to combat operations. These missions were not added to our official list of combat missions. Our first real combat mission was on March 4, to Ling Kang

Bay, French Indochina (Vietnam). By May 27, we had over 20 missions under our belts and I was sent to Australia on June 1, for 14 days of 'R n R'. We came back and flew about three more missions. Then we were on a small break from operations as the group was getting ready to move to IE Shima and given some time to relax and the group sent us to Manila to the enlisted officer's rest area for 5 days. One of the main roads into Manila is Rizal Boulevard, a beautiful 4 lane road with a park like island dividing the inbound and outbound lanes. Some of the blocks heading into town saw some heavy fighting which was quite evident. At one spot in the island was a site one would only see in war. There was a marble statue of a monk riding on a donkey who had somehow become beheaded during the fighting. The monk's posture had his hands outstretched and his palms facing upwards. Some G.I. placed the statue's shot off head in the hands. A few blocks further along we passed a bombed or shelled building. The only thing left standing was a sewer pipe sticking up to where the second would have been, on top of the sewer pipe, in all its glory, was a commode.

As we were passing a large hotel in downtown Manila none other than General Douglas MacArthur himself was striding out to get in his staff car, sun glasses and corn cob pipe just like his pictures. The battle for Manila was over and the city declared secure and after we were billeted in our quarters we went out to tour the city. It was a nice big house which had "real" beds and showers. So a group of us were going to Manila to view the 'sites'.

Although some savage fighting had taken place most of the city was still intact. One of the places that saw heavy fighting was the big baseball field. The Japanese High Command ordered Manila an open city and for Japanese forces to evacuate as the American forces closed in on it. One of the few decent things they did in war. However, one of the hot heads of a bushido general disobeyed the order and kept his troops there to fight and die almost to the last man. He commanded the Japanese Imperial Marines, and though the average Japanese were small in stature, to be a member of the Imperial Marines you had to be at least six feet tall. From what we heard these babies were as tough as our U.S. Marines, warriors all.

The nip marines barricaded themselves in the sub structures under the grandstands and our infantry called in the armor. They blasted

holes in the grandstands and went after the Japanese marines with Sherman tanks. The ball park had to be torn down and rebuilt.

The next site we saw where there was fierce fighting was the Manila Library building, a once beautiful building in a park like setting. It very much resembled the Lincoln Memorial in Washington. D.C. , with rows of columns around the outside. Bullet holes and artillery blast craters were all over this building and the area around it. We went inside looking for souvenirs; the place was really a mess. I walked into one room and saw a dust covered, scruffy Japanese officers boot lying on the rubble strewn floor. Two brownish shin bones protruded from it shattered off just below the knee. The rest of the body had been removed. I gave the boot a kick and a rat scurried out, squealing. An American sailor came down a litter strewn main corridor and informed us there were six dead Japanese at the top of the elevator shaft cable room that had not been removed yet, so we decided to investigate. The elevators were in the sub basement with the cables coiled on them like a big bowl of spaghetti. The building was 4 stories high and the elevators were exposed. The only way to the top up on the roof was to climb the elevator shaft which had ladder rungs built right into the walls. I was the first one up and as I climbed I wondered how the GI's fought their way onto the roof. Since I was the first one up the ladder, as I got near the top an odor assaulted my nose. It made me reel back for a moment as I knew the odor was dead bodies. The 3 guys below me wanted to know what was going on and I said the odor was pretty bad. As I looked through the hatch to the cable room a dead Japanese marine was right at the edge of the opening. I flinched again because the dead Japanese was staring right at me with open eyes and it scared me. I climbed in with the others right behind me. Six of the biggest Japanese I'd ever seen lay dead. Their pockets were turned inside out. They had been searched and the blood on their uniforms was black from exposure to the elements. There were three heavy machine guns at the window openings. There was evidence of shell fire that destroyed the room and killed its tenacious defenders. There were 3 anti-aircraft guns with their dead crews laying here and there. I think the guns were 25 mm cannons because they were in double mounts.

Then we climbed down and went over to the old city inside Manila called Intramuros.

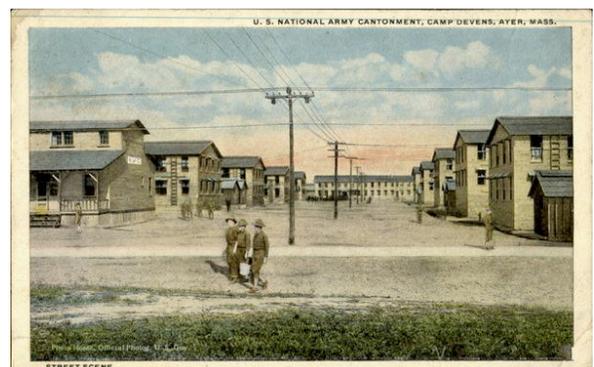
This was where the Japanese had held out with 30,000 Imperial marines and sailors from all the Imperial fleet installations. Wow what a mess. In typical Japanese fervor everything was destroyed. One hundred thousand Filipinos died during this horrific battle which lasted from Feb 3 to March 3, 1945. The only structure standing, but damaged, was the church of San Agustin.

In the previous issue of the Strafer, Joseph Solomon contributed a piece that had the end of the war as its focus. Here, he's offering an account of the early days leading up to active duty.

CAMP DEVENS, AYER, MASSACHUSETTS

About four p.m. the driver announced that we were now entering the base. We were ushered into a large room where we were sworn in. This was a very serious occasion and no one was cracking jokes or laughing. The captain who read the oath of allegiance to us looked huge and impressive in his uniform. Next came assignments to barracks and canvas cots. Again everyone was quiet and thinking about the home we had left a few hours earlier.

There were about thirty cots in our barracks and the only heat we had was from a potbellied wood stove. The rest of the day was spent feeding wood to the stove to keep warm. At six p.m. we were escorted to the mess hall to eat, and then back to the barracks to spend the longest night of our young lives. They say the first night is the hardest. Very little conversation was going on and some had started to write letters, forgetting that they had just left there twelve hours ago.



Old postcard of Camp Devens



**499th SQUADRON
"BATS OUTA HELL"**

BY BILL PAULIS

During November 1944, our 345th Bomb Group was stationed on the San Marcolina Strip (Lengayon Gulf), Luzon. We were called to fly a mission. We got up before the sun rose, arriving at our 499th B-25. We were greeted by our ground crew. They made sure our plane was ready to fly.

We all climbed aboard with my pilot Clifford Sisso from Vader, WA, CO/Pilot/ Navigator Whittington from Ohio, our Chief Engineer Joe Becktel from Bangor, ME, Joe Babin, Tail Gunner from LA, and me, Radio Operator from Eatonville, WA.

Our headquarters had received a message from one of our submarines patrolling off the southern China coast. They reported seeing a large convoy leaving Barneo and heading back to the main Japanese homeland. This was about an eleven hour flight. Pilot Sisson spotted an American submarine in the water at about the same time we saw the Japanese convoy. Then all hell broke loose! It seemed that all the Japanese convoys were spreading out in all directions.

Anyway, if my memory is correct, we paired off with another B-25, both of us heading over the South China Sea, made a 90 degree turn, opened the bomb bay door and headed into the side of a pretty large freighter. I think we dropped two 550 pound bombs which actually hit the side of the ship, barely missing the top of the ship.

I thought we made a safe run until later heading back to Luzon our Captain announced to all of us that we had been hit and were losing engine oil from our left engine and would have to shut that engine down. Well, not knowing if we could make it back on one engine, I had no time to worry about our situation. We were all told to

throw out all unused ammunition or anything that would lighten our plane. Since the shell that hit our engine did not cut off our hydraulic oil supply we could feather the props. Later we settled at an altitude of 900 feet and, yes, a B-25 could fly with only one engine.

We made it back to our home strip without our other engine overheating. This successful mission is one of the reasons I will be celebrating my 89th birthday on September 13, 2013.

Joke time!

THIS PREACHER WAS RIDING HIS BICYCLE DOWN A STREET NEAR HIS CHURCH WHEN HE SAW A YOUNG MAN CUTTING GRASS WITH HIS LAWN MOWER. HE STOPPED AND SAID "YOUNG MAN WOULD YOU LIKE TO TRADE YOUR LAWN MOWER FOR MY BICYCLE"? WITH NO HESITATION THE YOUNG MAN SAID "YES I SURE WOULD". A FEW DAYS LATER THE YOUNG MAN WAS RIDING HIS NEWLY TRADED BICYCLE FOR HIS OLD PUSH MOWER AND HE SAW THE PREACHER PULLING THE STARTING ROPE. HE STOPPED AND THE PREACHER SAID "IT WON'T START". THE YOUNG MAN SAID "PREACHER IF YOU CUSS IT, IT WILL START". THE PREACHER SAID "I DON'T KNOW ANY CUSS WORDS, I HAVE BEEN A PREACHER FOR 30 YEARS". IN REPLY THE YOUNG MAN SAID "KEEP PULLING THE STARTING ROPE AND IF YOU PULL LONG ENOUGH THE WORDS WILL COME TO YOU".



Bill



**ROUGH RAIDERS
500th Squadron**

BY: Kelly McNichols

My son just started college eight hours away from where I live. In considering that life changing event, I began to think about how the family would now communicate with one another. I expect there will be phone calls, email and Skype. What I do not expect is a written

letter from him. With most of the communication in the electronic realm, what is lost on the current generation is the importance of the handwritten letter.

Before she passed away, my mother spent countless hours composing her thoughts in written form in letters and cards. After she died, many friends told me how much they missed Mom's letters. I think what she did is a bit of a lost art. I know she had several running correspondences with friends and family members and all those in the loop knew who owed the next letter.

In past generations, this was really the only practical method of keeping in touch over long distances. Before the days of the internet or the phone for that matter, other than a personal visit, the letter was the only way to communicate. I have letters from my ancestors that are valuable to me because they are the only link I have to know the person by.

One letter is from a great uncle of mine who was killed in France during WWI just weeks before the end of the war in 1918. The letter by Jesse Smith mentions to his sister, my grandmother, that if he were killed during the war she was to tell their father Jesse had served this country as faithfully as his fore fathers had and he would die in his tracks before he gave up. To the casual observer, that might just be a statement. To Jesse I believe, this statement had deeper meaning. His father, two uncles and his grandfather had all served with the 3rd Wisconsin Calvary during the Civil War. His grandfather, my great grandfather, Sidney Smith died of disease at White Cloud, Kansas in 1862. The family knew a little of what service meant. It's the only letter I have from Jesse. I value it deeply.

I have many of my Dad's letters during his service. Many of them speak of the mundane life of a Private in the Army. Some of the correspondence is humorous. In one letter, Dad tries to help my uncle who would have been seven or eight at the time by discussing in detail the inner workings of a coaster brake on a bicycle. Evidently by Uncle Roger was having some trouble and Dad was attempting to remedy the problem. Roger must have tried what Dad suggested because he thanked him for the help.

Even though I don't have the letters from my grandparents, I'm sure they were concerned about their two boys in the Army.

Several years ago, I received copies of letters from Wilmer R. Fowler to his family

during the Second World War. His sister, 500th BS member Edna Goehring asked if I would like to have copies. Wilmer, known by his family as Roland or Buck, was one of the twenty-one servicemen from the 499th and 500th Bomb Squadrons killed in the C-47 crash. On August 7, 1943, these men died when their plane crashed soon after takeoff near Townsville, Australia. They were on their way to Sydney for R and R.

In these letters, Roland gives advice to Edna on her work, education and other topics. He spoke of what it was like to be in the Southwest Pacific during the War. He mentions missions, but mainly kept in touch with his family those many miles away. These many years later, these letters still speak to the reader of the thoughts and concerns of a young man who died much too young.

345th BG member René Armstrong wrote a book a few years ago because of some "found" letters. Her husband was in a junk shop and came across 295 letters from 501st BS pilot J.R. Jones to his sweetheart Elnora Bartlett. The book Wings and a Ring was born dedication of this woman to see her dream of having these letters published. René is able to weave the of letters into the historical context of the daily events of the War. If you haven't read this book, I suggest you do.

This brings me to the reason for this article. Many of you original veterans have historical artifacts and letters from your WWII days. For those of us who are intensely interested in history and its preservation, I submit to you to consider either donating or at the very least making copies and providing them to some archival enterprise. You may think of your correspondence as not very significant, but I challenge that thought.

My wife and I have a friend who plans estate sales. Once he mentioned a client who wanted to sell many old letters and postcards. When he arrived to view the prospective items, all the woman had was pristine antique postcards. When our friend inquired about what happened to the rest of the correspondence, she told him she had thrown it away. Our friend was still sick about the event when he told us, "She threw away the best part".

Your letter may be just that to you, but to those who want to preserve history, they are the best part. Please consider speaking to the Group Historian Carol Hillman if you should consider making them available to the rest of us.



PANTHERS
501st Squadron

By Paul Van Valkenburg

It's hard to believe that it's been 15 years since I first attended a 345th Bomb Group reunion and began an experience that I will never forget. I travelled to San Antonio not knowing what to expect, just hoping to learn something about the organization that my dad was a part of. The very first 345th vet I met was Melvin Best and his lovely wife Gladys. They are two of the nicest, most welcoming people I have ever met. I count them as good friends to this very day. It didn't take long to meet many new people and over the years I have made many new friends. My dad was an armorer with the 501st so I particularly sought out armorers so I could get an idea of just what my dad did during his time with the 501st. I got to know the few 501st armorers who attended reunions and looked forward to seeing them at each subsequent reunion. Quint Giuliani became a close friend and hunting partner and, at the 2004 reunion, when he was ready to relinquish the 501st vice president seat, he nominated me to succeed him. Since that time I have been serving as the 501st vice president. Not only am I the first 2nd generation 501 VP, I think I may hold the honor of being the longest serving VP. With that said, I think the time has come for a new 501st vice-president. With so many new second and third generation members on board now I'm sure someone will step up and lend a hand.

I want to thank everyone in the organization that has helped me along the way. I want to especially thank our veteran generation members Smokey and Ann LaHood, Riley Kline, Chet Burns, Bill Cather, Frank Dillard, Vic Tatelman, Ken Gastgeb, Charlie Wilson, Marilyn McGowan, Dee Musket, and of

course Melvin and Gladys Best. You guys, and so many more that are no longer with us, have made this organization very special to me. I also want to thank the executive board for all their hard work keeping this organization alive and promoting the history of this very special group. I wish you all the best. While I cannot make this year's reunion, I hope to catch up with you all at future reunions.

Thank you all again for the opportunity, and honor, to have served as 501st Vice President.

Below is information received from in an email from Colonel Barringer F. Wingard, Jr., US Army, retired. He is helping a friend who is trying to locate a picture of his Father in uniform. The son wants to be able to have his Father remembered with a plaque on the Florence Wall of Honor in Florence, SC. If anyone has any information, pictures or can help provide clues please use the contact information below.

Any help is appreciated. Here is the information provided.

Name: William Franklin Rainwater
DOB: 19 Aug 24
Army serial # 34 655 840
Branch: Army
Dates in service: 25 May 43 - 10 Jan 46
Rank: Staff Sergeant
Headquarters 345th Bombardment Group
Medals: Distinguished Unit Badge
Good Conduct Medal
WWII Victory Medal
Philippine Liberation Medal
APT Theater Sv Medal
Location: New Guinea, Philippines

Barringer F. Wingard, Jr.
Colonel (R), US Army
1420 Lazar Place
Florence, SC 29501
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Leyte Trip - October 1999

By J.W. "Bill" Stone

The Dulag strip is all but obscured. The Tacloban strip is still there. It's recognizable, not because of the steel mat that we knew but because of the surroundings. The island just off the shore and all the distinctive islands and waterways that were so welcome when we were coming home from a mission look familiar.

The steel map has been replaced by concrete. It's a little longer. The old tower remains even though it looks tired and unkempt. The places where we parked our planes at the South end of the Tacloban strip are now occupied by buildings. The people are the same. Beautiful, small, friendly. They love Americans who brought freedom back to them. General MacArthur is their hero.

I was at Dulag for the 55th anniversary of General MacArthur's triumphant "I shall return" celebrations. The magnificent huge statues of the invading party are historically set in a shallow pool of water depicting their wading ashore. It's a hallowed place. It's guarded. The Filipinos really appreciate the sacrifices we paid and revere those warriors who didn't return! The monuments are many and the maintenance is excellent.

For this celebration all the stores, businesses and schools close in memory of the landing by General MacArthur and the ensuing freedom that you and I participated in achieving. This is in vivid contrast to the way we now celebrate (or don't celebrate) acts of freedom in this country. Maybe there are many places in America where there are parades and bands playing and banners flying and patriotic speeches taking place and people crying and people cheering. However, in my community it seems that only a few participate in military holidays but thousands of people are rushing to the department stores for the 50% off sales! It makes one ponder about values and priorities and how they can become warped over the years. What short memories we have! What does freedom cost? Think of the guys who went down. What kind of men were they? Outstanding young men with destinies! Really we were boys. Young boys. I rebel at the thought that somebody "gave" his life for his country. I guess that's true in some instances

but a better phrase would be "had his life taken". Their lives were taken so that the rest of our country and the world could be free. Is the price too much? I wonder. I was with a group of 15. An invasion widow. An invasion daughter and granddaughter who never saw their Dad/Granddad. A historian. Spouses of attending veterans. A decorated "behind the lines" Alamo Scout Colonel. Four ground-pounder veterans.

The leader was a Brit having been an R.A.F. Pilot during the Blitz in England. Bob Reynolds is his name. He flew Lancasters on those miserable long range night bombing missions over Germany. He's become a very strong American citizen, but he still owns that beautiful British accent. He is almost revered in the Philippines because he, alone, over the past 25 years as the owner of Valor Tours has provided informational signs all over the island of Corregidor and was solely instrumental in building a monument to our men who fell. He has been on many commissions and chaired so many efforts to see that the Americans are forever remembered. His specialty is providing nostalgic tours to places of WW II significance. Mainly the Pacific but also Europe. I recall being in Guadalcanal with him on another occasion where he was encouraging the building of the monument to the Fifth Air Force. I heard that's been completed now.

Being the only flyboy in the group of 5 veterans who were there I stayed in the background because these other guys landed and paid a dear price in combat as infantrymen. The celebration related to the landing. As you know we did our thing after the landing. We were treated as dignitaries (even heroes). At every function, and there were many, we had the "honored" seats. We were greeted and entertained by the Mayor of Dulag, Mayor of Tacloban, Governor of Leyte, the American Ambassador, special representative of the President of the Philippines as well as top diplomatic people from New Zealand, England and Australia. The parades were cheered by literally thousands of people lining the streets. What an experience! There were no Japanese present but their cars and cameras were! Who won the war? Maybe we just won the battle!

Next year's celebration promises to be even better and larger, I'm assured. Wanna go with me? It's wonderful! Go now, your heirs will!

A Thank You Letter

As the 2013 reunion of the 345th Bomb Group approaches, I find myself reflecting about what these reunions have meant to me and my family. You see, this will be the first time I will attend a reunion without my father, Ben F. Miller, who passed away at the age of 90 on December 29, 2012. Dad was always proud of being part of the 345th Bomb Group. When I was very young, I didn't know much about it, but I was aware that each year when the license plate for our family car was renewed it would read "1A 499" and that it had something to do with Dad's involvement in WWII. I knew there were many photographs from the war that Dad kept in his desk, and that occasionally we would hear a WWII story, but that was about it. More relevant to us as children were the visits from his buddy, Pax Baker, who would stop at our house in Indiana when he was driving new school buses back to his home state of Colorado. Growing up in the day of western heroes on television, few things could have been more exciting to us than a visit from a real live cowboy, complete with western boots and hat! If he and Dad reminisced about stories from the South Pacific during those times, I don't remember hearing them.

It was in 1982 that I started to hear many more stories about the 345th Bomb Group, especially the 499th squadron, because that is when Mom and Dad attended their first reunion in Colorado Springs, Colorado. They were "hooked" and attended every reunion from 1982-2012. Dad went on to proudly fill positions as Vice President of the 499th and as President of the 345th throughout the years. He and Mom even hosted several mini-reunions for the 499th at Bear Creek Farm near their home in Decatur, Indiana during the period when the 345th was only meeting in alternate years.

When Dad became Assistant Vice President for the 499th Squadron he took on a role that he dearly loved, writing articles for the Strafer. Many of you probably remember reading his stories. It was in reading one of his articles that I finally understood the significance of Dad's smoking "our cigar", as he called it, each year on my birthday, November 12. It was in the Strafer that he described being aboard the ship, the Thomas Nelson, on November 12, 1944. He was about to play cards with several friends who were topside on the ship. He sat on the bunk next to a buddy who was also from Indiana when "the notion hit me that this called for a cigar". His fiancée, and later his wife of 67 years, had recently sent him a box of cigars that were at his bunk below deck. In the brief moments when he ran across the deck towards his bunk he heard a "horrible noise and went flying through the air and into the side of the ship. Where I had been seconds before, all was on fire, and most of the men were dead. Lord, thank you for making me run". I was born 4 years later on that same date and Dad smoked a cigar each and every year on my birthday. Yes, his experiences in the war were a part of our family's life in many more ways than we recognized.

If anyone is ever interested in a topic which Dad wrote about in the Strafer, we have them all. Dad kept a complete and well organized file with a copy of each article that he submitted, plus all of his correspondence with the editors. I think his ability to organize and to detail what happened represents traits that were needed for a cryptographer to do his job effectively in the primitive conditions of the communication offices in the South Pacific.

About 10 years ago, my sister, my brother and I each received a 54-page written account of Dad's memories from the war. It begins on December 7, 1941, with him listening to the radio and learning about the attack on Pearl Harbor. His account ends with him returning back home in 1944, after the war. It was written the same way that he conducted his life as a cryptographer during the war years. The record of his life in the military service was typed on his "trusty typewriter", single-spaced, and represents many hours of work. Dad thought it was important for us to know what he and his fellow 345th comrades experienced to defend freedom for us and for our country. Even today, his basement work area remains filled with files, mementoes, and photographs from the war and from the many reunions that he and my mother attended from 1982 through 2012.

Many of you may recall how much Dad loved to reminisce and to tell war stories at the reunions. His written stories are much like the stories he told, being a blend of seriousness, of courage, and of humor.

We did not know that the 2012 reunion in Columbia, SC would be the final reunion that Dad would attend, but we are so thankful that he could be there. He was admitted to the hospital a few days after returning home, and I will never forget listening to him tell everyone who came into his about the reunion. The event that he talked about most was the Saturday afternoon when our veterans were introduced to 80,000 screaming fans at the USC/University of Arkansas football game. The veterans received a deafening salute as the fans rose to their feet and chanted "USA, USA, USA". What a grand tribute for these brave, heroic men!

Dad was in and out of the hospital for the next month, and in the early morning hours of December 29th he fell asleep in his recliner at home with most of his family around him in celebration of the Christmas season. What a peaceful way to end a good life! Although we miss him deeply, we can't mourn or wish him back because he had totally used up the gift of life that God had given him. We can only smile, imagining him in heaven sharing war stories with friends he hadn't seen since that terrible day on the Thomas Nelson - or at the reunions of the 345th Bomb Group - all recalling memories of the days that they proudly served their nation as young Americans.

To Dad and to each and every one of you brave and courageous veterans, we salute you again.

USA! USA! USA!

Jan Rary

IN MEMORY OF:

**The members of the 345th Bomb Group Association
extend our sincere condolences to the
families of our departed members and friends:**

Philip R. Grabbe, October 2012

William "Bill" Franklin Rainwater, February 2013

Warren Everette Perkins, August 2013

Donald Eugene Wagner, July 2013

Bulletin Board

Replacements Needed

We have two openings on the board that we're looking to fill. Those positions are the Presidents of the 499th and the 501st Squadrons. We're looking for some dynamic folks to represent each of these proud fighting units. If you are interested, please contact me or the former Presidents of these positions, Bill Paulis of the 499th and Paul Van Valkenburg of the 501st.

Through the Grapevine

Lyn Moore and Vic Tatelman would like everyone to know they attended the Oshkosh, with the Texas Flying Legends people and it was wonderful! They look forward to the reunion with such a wonderful group of aviators.

Mike Buchkoski sent in the following information and pictures



I would like to sell this fleet of 345th Bomb Group B-25's before the 2013 reunion in Houston, Texas. Please call me (Mike) at (505) 275-3930 for details.

Also the T-shirt designs, caps, & mugs will be on the website www.500thBSq-B25s.com and www.345thBombGroup.org



Come join the fun!



Watch a video about the Wings Over Houston Airshow at the link below.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xYB7TtKCOSQ&feature=player_embedded



**It's been said that All Good Things Must Come To An End
but that doesn't mean they can't go out with a BANG!!**

If you have been a “fence sitter” arguing with yourself about attending this 345th Bombardment Group Association Reunion or waiting until next year, please join us this year. There may not be a next year reunion. I know some of you are disappointed that the destination is not New Orleans, but it just wasn't in the cards. We have a series of activities that will blow your socks off and send you home so glad you experienced this last-in-a-lifetime reunion. Much of the reunion will take place at Ellington Field where many of our pilots received their wings.

Our T-shirt vendor for this exciting reunion has graciously allowed us to move deadlines to September 21 for the T-shirts. That means we will be submitting totals to the vendor on Monday, September 23, a month before we will convene in Houston for our 345th Bomb Group Reunion. Attendance registrations and hotel registrations are due October 10 for the group rate discounts. The Texas Flying Legends Museum folks have gone above and beyond anything we ever experienced in planning a reunion. They are determined that as many veterans as possible are able to attend. To help ensure that cost is not a factor, they are paying for all activities on Friday and Saturday for each 345th veteran and widow of a veteran and a caretaker for each. The only expenses to the veteran and widow of a veteran and their caretaker will be the Sunday activities.

Larry Hanna reminded me of a special fund that was set aside years ago for those veterans who needed financial assistance with airline tickets or hotel reservations. We are very serious about getting all veterans to this reunion so if you would like a little help with these expenses, please contact me immediately. Carol Hillman 214-499-6884.

Here's a quick reminder of the events:

Thursday: Registration begins in the hospitality room. The documentary interviews of the 345th veterans, widows, and wives will be filmed. Please bring any memorabilia for the filming. The 352nd Fighter Squadron is also attending the Wings Over Houston Air Show. They are treating us to an Ice Cream Social Thursday evening at the hotel.

Friday: The educational session, “Air Combat Then and Now: A Discussion of WWII Tactics, A Discovery of Current Day Similarities” will take place at one of the Texas Flying Legends Museum hangers at Ellington Field. Lunch will be provided. We will also be able to climb all over B-25 Betty's Dream and a P-51. Veterans can go for a ride in the B-25 Betty's Dream and in a P-51. That evening will be a trip back in time with a 1940s USO Hangar Dance and dinner (Heavy Hors D'oeuvres). A 9-piece swing band will provide music for dancing and an exhibition of precision ballroom dancing by a couple wearing dress from the 40s. We will vote on the best swing dance team in the Swing-Dance Competition. Finally, General George Patton will inspire us with his military presentation. Want to get into the spirit of the evening? Then come in uniform or a 40's costume (optional).

Saturday: We will have a motorcycle escort to Ellington Field for the Wings Over Houston Air Show where our veterans will be honored guests. At the close of the show we will be treated to a special presentation about the Drone Program at Ellington Field.

Sunday: The General Business Meeting will take place in the morning followed by a trip to NASA. The Reunion will close with the cocktail hour and banquet at the hotel. Astronaut Col. Douglas H. Wheelock will be the guest speaker. Colonel Wheelock has flown aboard the space shuttle, the International Space Station and the Russian Soyuz TMA spacecraft. He has accumulated more than 178 days in space and has conducted six space walks totaling 43 hours and 30 minutes. His resume is amazing and we feel confident none of us will want to miss this opportunity to meet him.

So that's it, folks. Now all you need to do is access the registration form in this newsletter and submit it immediately. Don't forget to write on the reservation form what size T-shirts you will want. Make your airline reservations to fly into Houston Hobby Airport. **DO NOT FLY INTO HOUSTON INTERCONTINENTAL AIRPORT.** It is forever away from where we will be meeting. Make your hotel reservations and join us for this wonderful reunion. If you need shuttle service, make that reservation, too.

Remember: Some of you think everything is bigger in Texas so we are working hard to NOT disappoint you. See you in Houston October 24 – 28, 2013.

Submitted by Carol Hillman, Reunion Chairperson

**345th BOMB GROUP XXVI REUNION, 2013 REGISTRATION FORM
October 24-28, 2013**

South Shore Harbour Resort & Conference Center, League City, Texas

Name	Spouse/Guest names
Veteran's Name	
Address	
Phone No.	
Email	Squadron

Indicate the T-shirt size beside names. Ex: Melvin-L Gladys-M
Adult: S,M,L,XL,XXL,XXXL,XXXXL. Youth XS(4), S(6-8), M(10-12), L(14-16), XL(18-20)

T-shirt orders must be placed by September 21, 2013

Please indicate your arrival and departure dates.

Arrival ____ / ____ / ____ Departure ____ / ____ / ____

Events and Fees	Cost	#Attending	Total
Registration Fee (Nonrefundable)	\$50		

Thursday, October 24, 2013

Hospitality Room open	No Charge		
Videotaping for Documentary	No Charge		
Rides for 345th Veterans aboard B-25 "Betty's Dream" Yes No (Please circle one)	No Charge		
Dinner - on your own	No Charge		
Ice Cream Social	No Charge		

Friday, October 25, 2013

Breakfast at the hotel for hotel guests	No Charge		
* Catered Lunch and Panel Discussion Education Session	\$20		
* Buffet Dinner and Back To The 40's Entertainment	\$50		

Saturday, October 25, 2013

Breakfast at the hotel for hotel guests	No Charge		
* Wings Over Houston Air Show Discounted VIP Tickets	\$20		
* Catered Lunch	\$20		
Drone Education Session	No Charge		
Evening Free and Dinner - on your own	No Charge		

Deadline for Reunion Reservations is October 10, 2013

Sunday, October 27, 2013

Breakfast at the hotel for hotel guests	No Charge		
345th Bomb Group Business Meeting	No Charge		
NASA Ticket	\$12.50		
NASA Group Meal - Optional	\$7.95		
Cocktail Hour/Banquet with Speaker	\$60		
Dues for Veterans and Widows	\$15		
Dues for all other members	\$35		

345th Bomb Group Challenge Coin - optional

These coins commemorate the 70th anniversary of the 345th Bomb Group in Columbia, SC and the dates of overseas service.	\$20		
*No charge for 345th veterans and widows of 345th veterans and their travel caregiver.			
Total Due			

Please indicate your Banquet Meal Choices:

_____ #Beef _____ #Chicken _____ #Fish _____ #Vegetarian

Please indicate any special services needed:

_____ Wheelchair _____ Other - please describe _____

Name your Veteran _____ What was his job? _____

Make hotel reservations as soon as possible by calling:
South Shore Harbour Resort & Conference Center
281-334-1000 and use group name "345th Bomb Group"
Group rates are only available until October 10, 2013

Please send completed registration form and check payable to:
345th Bomb Group Association
Carol Best Hillman
2904 Woodhaven
Carrollton, TX 75007

Deadline for Reunion Reservations
October 10, 2013

For Questions: Carol Best Hillman - 214-499-6884

For discount airline reservation details for your city contact:
Ann Dennis, Arta, Travel, 5700 W. Plano Pkwy, Suite 1400, Plano, TX 75093
972-422-4000, 800-878-2782 FAX 972-422-2331
Website: www.artatravel.com

For shuttle service to and from hotel contact
Al Austin at Travel Zone, 281-326-8050
Reservations MUST be made in advance.

Please Join and Support the 345th Bomb Group Association!

Memberships and contributions support our newsletter, website, annual reunion, and other activities. We are not accepting any "new" life members, but thank and appreciate our current life members. Annual membership for veterans who are not life members and their wives/widows is \$15. Annual individual memberships are \$35. Thanks for your support!

Name:

Squadron:

Relationship to 345th:

City:

State:

Zip:

Home/Mobile Phone:

E-mail:

Credit Cards are now accepted! Memberships: _____ Contribution: _____ Total: _____

Payment type: Check made payable to 345th Bomb Group Association

Please charge my Credit Card \$ _____

Credit Card Type _____ Credit Card Number _____

* Security Code _____ Signature _____

* Security Code is the 3 or 4 digit code found on the back of your credit card.

Please send to: Mary Sloan Roby, Treasurer, 1916 E Pratt Street, Baltimore, MD 21231

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