



AIR APACHES

STRAFER

Volume 32, Issue 3

November 2015

Update from the 500th

By Kelly McNichols

The 345th Bomb Group Association held its most recent reunion September 4-7, 2015, in Dayton, Ohio, commemorating the 70th Anniversary of the end of WWII. Attendees owe a sincere debt of gratitude to Dennis and Susan O'Neill for their efforts in allowing a great opportunity for reflection and a time of comradery. Five original vets were among the travelers to the festivities. From the 500th BS Association, Murph Leventon, Ed Smith and Lincoln Grush were able to attend. Frank Dillard with the 498thBS and Vic Tatelman of the 499thBS also made the journey. Widows of former veterans included Karen Cessna, Mary Sizemore, Jean Willard, Pearl Baird, Norma Miller and Dottie Gwyn. I believe the total count was close to 100 total attendees.

One goal for the O'Neill's was to provide a spacious area which would allow many personal conversations to be held simultaneously. The huge hospitality room afforded this in a spectacular way with a lot of room for tables and chairs allowing people to spread out. If you are

like me, the conversations and the meeting of friends are major reasons I go to the reunions.

Saturday, September 5th was remarkable because of the service held at the recently refurbished 345th BS memorial stone. A color guard ceremoniously presented the flag followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. The five original members watched from the front of the group. 345th BG Association President, Jim Bina, presented his remarks. The service concluded with the retiring of the colors and playing of Taps.

Following the service those who chose to were free to view all the artifacts and aircraft at the adjacent National Museum of the Air Force. If you don't like aircraft, you were at the wrong place. One note of caution, if attending with a group, have a plan to link up somewhere at a specific time. I lost sight of the individuals I traveled with and only saw them late in the day. Cell phones didn't seem to work in the museum so unless you want to hitchhike back to the hotel, have a plan B. I've never seen so many people. I'm sure being the Labor Day holiday had some influence on the crowd. This was my second time at the museum. I still don't believe I

scratched the surface on seeing what is there. I believe one needs several days of viewing.

Sunday morning allowed time for the business meetings. The 500th BS Association took action on the future of the organization and after much thought voted to disband. No one took the decision lightly. The 345th BG Association is currently in the process of changing from a 501(c)19 to a 501(c)3 organization. All the other squadron associations have disbanded and it seemed that to keep one organization viable, the 500th BS needed to do likewise. As one in attendance stated, "Nothing lasts forever". It was also decided that the 500th BS Association would contribute financially to the current EAA museum display in Oshkosh, Wisconsin.

In trying to reconcile this move personally, I have concluded that in the past, many military organizations have been deactivated. When the purpose for being was met, the next logical thing to do was to go home. The 345th BG has twice in its history been deactivated. The 500th BS Association is now at the same place.

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Even though the Association no longer exists, the long heritage of the organization should be remembered. We will still have a website as long as Harlan Hatfield is willing to maintain it. I spoke to several second generation members about the decision. Some were in favor. Some needed convincing. In the end I believe Randy Wagner said it best when he shared that his father, past President Don Wagner probably would have been onboard because he was a pragmatist. If the reasons for doing something were explained to him and he saw the need, he was convinced.

Hopefully I have articulated the reasons for the disbanding of the 500th BS Association and merger with the 345th BG Historical and Educational Association.

Because this is the last issue of the newsletter, some items need to be mentioned. The proposed new 345th group will not have lifetime membership, only annual dues. If the perpetuation of the history of the 345th BG is important to you and you want to continue to support it, your annual membership is really the only means of revenue generation. The original members and spouses will continue to receive the Strafer with or without your dues. The leadership feels this is the least we can do for your service. The rest of us, however, need to step up and send in our annual dues. The treasury of the 500th BS Association will be used to pay the current outstanding bills from the reunion. As I previously mentioned, a donation

will be made to the EAA museum. The remainder will be donated to the 345th BG Association.

I do want to thank everyone that I have been privileged to meet over the last ten years that I have been a member of this association, the last four as your President. Thanks also to Vice President Diane Daker Brauer, Secretary Dennis O'Neill, Treasurer Marith Reheis Cady, Newsletter Editor Sue Wagner and Webmaster Harlan Hatfield. You were all great to work with. I hope I have led you well.

President's Message

By Mary Sloan Roby, 500th



Although the "final" reunion of the 345th Bomb Group Association is two months behind us, I am still remembering how excited everyone seemed to be there, how interesting the conversations were, and the resemblance of our gathering to a large family get-together.

Dennis and Susan O'Neill did such a great job in the planning, arranging for a large space that gave us all room to spread out, share our mementos, and tell stories.

It was wonderful that veterans Frank Dillard, Link Grush, Murph Leventon, Ed Smith, and Vic

Tatelman could be with us in Dayton. And, it was gratifying that wives, widows, and second and third generation family members could be there, too.

At the business meeting on Sunday, September 6, I was honored and humbled to be elected the President of the group. I'm excited to be the person to lead the transition of the 345th Bomb Group Association into the future as the 345th Bomb Group History and Education Association.

In the next few months, the incorporation of the new group will be taking place and we'll be seeking 501(c)(3) status that will allow us to apply for grant funding for projects. (A current project we're involved with is the 345th Bomb Group Association exhibit at the Experimental Aircraft Association Museum in Oshkosh, WI.) You'll hear more about the new organization in the next Strafer.

Additionally, I am interested in putting together a new 345th directory that ties each entry to specific veterans in the group. That way, anyone doing research on the group might have an easier time locating family members or descendants of original members. This directory would go beyond the existing directory, which was only of members, not the entire group.

In Dayton, the 500th Bomb Squadron Association voted to decommission and to merge into the 345th. This was a very difficult decision for the group and for its President, Kelly McNichols. He (con't next page)

worked through the decision carefully with 500th members and I would like to thank him for his leadership. I'd also like to recognize Jim Bina for his service as President of the 345th. Thanks also to the other folks who have agreed to serve as officers—Kelly McNichols as Vice President, Jan Rary as Secretary, and Clint Roby as Treasurer. Cindy Hillman has agreed to take on a huge job, that of Editor of the Strafer. Cindy needs stories, biographical sketches, book reviews, old or new photographs, and broad representation of the squadrons of the group. Her contact information is elsewhere in the newsletter, so please let her know if you have an idea for a story—and would be willing to write it.

One last thought... There was a great deal of interest in Dayton in continuing to meet as a group. Because the 345th Bomb Group exhibit will be at EAA in Oshkosh until December 2016, we're going to move ahead with planning for a meeting there sometime next year. Mark your calendars now!

Thanks to everyone who has offered to help the 345th. I'd love to hear your ideas for the future. Feel free to contact me at mroby1916@gmail.com or through our Facebook page.

The Bomb Group Family

By Marcia L Pollock Wysocky, 500th

By now, I am assuming you are all aware of the exhibit at EAA in Oshkosh, Wisconsin honoring our heroes of the 345th. On my last

visit there, I requested that a guest book be placed nearby as Mary Roby and I thought it would be interesting to see not only where people come from that visit, but also their comments. It is our plan to periodically pass along any remarks to you in future newsletters.

I will be 65 years old on the eleventh day of November. For much of my childhood, I was of the belief that this day was all about my arrival into this world. Of course I knew better, but even though I was raised by some of the greatest of the Greatest Generation, they just wanted me to be a kid. They didn't talk about the war years; some of them couldn't.

My mother also didn't say much about my father, Melvin Pollock (500th). When he was killed five days after my first birthday, she had two babies to take care of and no time to dwell on the fact that she was now alone.

Over these past few years, I have realized that I may have lost, but I have certainly gained. My first encounter with a 345th Veteran was I believe the reunion in St. Louis. I waited anxiously in the lobby for something to happen or better yet, anyone to make an appearance. It wasn't long, and I knew there was a very special person in my midst. It was 'Bear' Britt. And that was just the beginning of this treasure trove of memories I will always cherish. I have met some of the most beautiful, amazing, awesome, down to earth, wonderful people

in the last few years, that anyone should have the honest to goodness happiness of meeting. I thank you all for becoming my friends and helping me see this exhibit to where it is now. It means the world to me and I know it does to all of you.

May we all, through this endeavor of ours, and those of the future, preserve the legacy of our loved ones, remain the Bomb Group family, united together, and join with our hearts and our convictions, to be the best we can be, and pass down to generations to come, our knowledge of love, of family, and keep our heroes' tradition going no matter what it takes.

God bless all of my extended family and hope to see you in Oshkosh next year.

Recent Deaths

Gladys Hayes Best, widow of Melvin Best, passed away on September 8, 2015. Gladys and Melvin, one of the 16 original pilots of the 498th Bomb Squadron of the 345th Bomb Group, were married for 69 years, until his death in 2013. Mr. Best was a key member of the 345th Bomb Group Association. Mrs. Best is survived by Carol Hillman and Judy Zurlis, who organized 345th reunions in Dallas in 2010 and Houston in 2013. Our sympathy is extended to them and their families.

* * *

Please let us know of those who have passed on.

MINUTES

Annual Business Meeting

345th BG Association

September 6, 2015

Dayton, Ohio

The meeting was called to order and all in attendance were welcomed by Jim Bina, President.

The Pledge of Allegiance was made, and Don Rary gave an invocation.

Other officers in attendance were Mary Sloan Roby, Treasurer, Dennis O'Neill, 1st Vice President, and Kelly McNichols, 2nd Vice President. Jim Bina expressed his appreciation for the ceremony and attendance at the memorial for the 345th Bomb Group, held on Saturday at the Wright Patterson Air Force Museum. He had since received requests for copies of his speech, made at the ceremony, and said that he would make copies available to anyone who wanted one. He added that the story had been covered on the evening news, and would be printed in the newspaper within the next few days.

Old Business

The following topics covered at the last business meeting, held on October 26, 2013, at the reunion in Houston, Texas, were reviewed:

1) A motion had been made and passed, with no objections, to amend the bylaws to change the 345th BGA from a 501(c)(19) status to a 501(c)(3) tax status. The motion was to amend the bylaws from allowing, when the

organization is "decommissioned," the treasury to be distributed to members. Rather, now the bylaws say that any assets may be distributed to a non-profit organization, which the new group will be. The association can no longer support a (c)(19) status due to the small percentage of veterans in the current membership.

2) A motion had been made and passed, with no objections, to amend the bylaws to move the 345th BGA treasury to the new organization once 501(c)(3) status is approved.

3) A motion had been made and passed, with no objections, to move forward with a 345th exhibit at the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA) Museum in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. *2015 Update: Jim Bina reported that he had taken part at the debut of the exhibit on July 21, 2015, as part of the EAA's AirVenture show. He will show pictures of the exhibit at this evening's banquet, and he was very pleased with the professional job done in setting it up. We have a lot of space, and could still accept additional loans of artifacts for the display. He encouraged anyone who is interested to visit the museum and see the exhibit that will be there for two years. Marcia Pollock Wysocky, who was instrumental in getting this exhibit in the EAA, was recognized for making this tribute to the Air Apaches a success.*

4) There had been open discussion about future disposition of artifacts. No motion was made. *2015 Update: Jim*

added that the Board's recommendation to families is that any artifacts contributed to an exhibit should be made as a "loan."

5) The meeting ended with the decision to move forward with finalization of the change to the new association tax status.

The minutes were approved.

The treasurer's report was given by Mary Sloan Roby, Treasurer. As of August 31, 2015, the balance was \$9,119.81. Outstanding expenses remain from the 2013 reunion for expenses shared with the other group for bus transportation and the hangar dance. A motion was made and approved to accept the treasurer's report.

New Business

Overview of what the new organization, a 501(c)(3) will look like:

- Focus on education and history of the 345th. We have members who are doing extensive research, and others who have or are writing books or other written materials to continually move ahead with information that will preserve our history.
- Will qualify for financial contributions to support the organization where we currently are not eligible; for example, Harley Davidson is very supportive of veteran's groups, but status as a 501(c)(3) is a requirement.
- The Board will make decisions for the association
- instead of requiring a vote of approval by the entire (con't on next page)

membership. However, all members can, and are encouraged to participate by providing input and working within the new organization. Members interested in a particular project may form a committee to work on the project; the Board needs input from everyone.

What about the Strafer?

The organization has not had an editor for the past 2 years. Mary Sloan Roby, who was responsible for producing the most current issues, said she is determined to keep a printed copy of The Strafer for all members. Jim Bina added that he values having printed copies, and has every Strafer that his father received since the 345th BGA was formed. Members are urged to submit information for future issues.

What about reunions?

Jim said that many members here in Dayton have expressed their wish that this will not be the last 345th BGA reunion. Although this is officially the final reunion of the current organization, perhaps the new organization can have “meetings” on a more informal basis, such as in Oshkosh in 2016 while the 345th's exhibit is on display.

Plans to go forward are, in this order, to:

1st - create the new 501(c)(3) organization;
2nd – disband the current organization and move the treasury into the newly formed organization.

Mary Sloan Roby added that it is reasonable to expect this process to be completed within a year. The new bylaws are nearing completion.

Jim Bina encouraged members to follow the 345th on our website and on Facebook. He noted that what we put on the 345th website gets picked up by other organizations, so may have a broader impact than only on our group. He is currently researching the post-war history of the 345th tactical bomb wing, which was shut down in 1959. He knows that when it was shut down, someone had to make the decision to either archive the records or make a memorabilia box and send it to the National Archives. He has not been able to locate either. This is another example that research continues to be needed, and he encouraged everyone to get involved. Kelly McNichols added that members need to “think outside the box” in pursuing efforts to learn more, and to provide information about our veterans and their service so that future generations may learn from them.

Mary Sloan Roby said that she is interested in linking members of the 345th BGA to their veterans, perhaps in the form of a directory. Permission would, of course, be requested before anyone’s contact information would be published.

One need of the organization is for a website designer. The website needs rebuilding, and someone to keep it up-to-date.

Another need is for an editor of The Strafer. Cindy Hillman volunteered.

Election of Officers

President Jim Bina thanked members for their support during his 4+ years as the association’s president, and noted that Frank Dillard, one of the 5 veterans in attendance today, had nominated him for the honor of this position. Mary Sloan Roby was nominated for the office of president, and expressed her willingness to serve. She described the following three objectives that she would pursue:

- 1) Complete an inventory of the membership, perhaps developing a directory linking members to their veterans;
- 2) Would work to develop a document, or some recommendation, of what families can do with the artifacts that have been passed down to them; and
- 3) Provide more advocacy to Congress to locate those still missing from WWII. This generated some discussion about government resources and programs presently in place to help families obtain information about loved ones who have never been recovered.

Frank Dillard and Don Rary closed the nominations for President, and Mary Sloan Roby was elected.

1st Vice President: Kelly McNichols was nominated, accepted, and was elected.

2nd Vice President: There were no nominations for this position.
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Dennis O'Neill, currently 1st Vice President, chose not to run. The position remains vacant.

Treasurer: Clint Roby was nominated and accepted the nomination. He stated that although he did not favor having two of the officer positions in the same family, he believed it could be beneficial not to transfer the financial records until the treasury is transferred to the new 501(c)(3) organization. Clint was elected Treasurer.

Secretary: Janice (Miller) Rary was nominated, accepted, and was elected.

Historian, Jim Bina, volunteered for this position, explaining that he would especially like to finish growing the EAA exhibit in Oshkosh, and stay involved until the payment issues with the Texas Flying Legends is finalized. He was elected.

Thanks to Don Rary were expressed for serving as chaplain at this, and other recent reunions.

Dennis and Susan O'Neill were thanked for sponsoring this reunion, which has exceeded everyone's expectations. Their hard work and careful planning were appreciated by all.

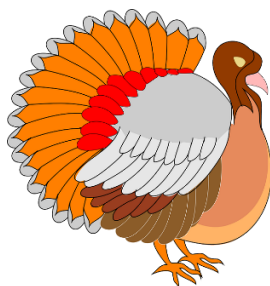
Kelly McNichols announced that at the meeting of the 500th Squadron, held earlier this morning, the decision was made that it was time to disband as a separate organization and roll over into the new organization as of today. Dennis O'Neill stated that the three veterans in attendance, Ed Smith, Lincoln Grush, and Marvin Leventon each endorsed the change. Marith

Reheis will manage the transition of funds between organizations. There is one CD that may not mature until after the transition. The members of the 500th, in attendance believe that the new organization will be great!

Jim Bina said he will show pictures of the EAA exhibit at the banquet tonight, and has some ideas to expand the exhibit. One idea is to obtain large models of a B-25 and a Japanese bomber and hang them in a way that replicates an actual attack. He encouraged everyone to visit the EAA while the exhibit is there, and to let him know beforehand because he can arrange to have the admission fee waived for 345th members. He again encouraged members to consider holding "meetings" in the future in place of formal "reunions". In addition to the idea of meeting in Oshkosh, Mary suggested that Sacramento may be a site for a future meeting since most of the 345th group left the States from there.

The meeting was adjourned, and all were reminded that the cash bar for tonight's banquet begins at 5 pm, and everyone is to be seated by 5:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Janice Rary, Secretary



Happy Thanksgiving!

MY UNCLE S/SGT ERNEST STANLEY ROBERTS

By Harlan Hatfield, 500th

Ernest enlisted on 15 January, 1942, into the Army Air Corps., at Denver, Colorado. He was sent to Shepard Field Texas, where he arrived on 25 January, 1942. He graduated from his school here on 20 August, 1942 and departed on 1 September, 1942.

He arrived at Panama City, Florida on 4 September, 1942, to attend Aerial Gunnery School. He commenced classes on 6 September, 1942, and took his first flight on 5 October, 1942. On 13 October, 1942 he graduated and was promoted to S/SGT. Next he went to Daniel Field, Augusta, Georgia for a period of nine days. Then on to Greenville A.B., Greenville, South Carolina and the 472 Bomb Squadron, arriving 25 October, 1942. He was able to go home on furlough from 1 December to 10 December, 1942.

On 13 December, 1942 he was transferred again to Greenville A.B. Here he was to undergo more extensive training on the B-25 Bombers. On April 10, 1943 he had been to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina and was now a Qualified Engineer.

It is about this point that things start getting sketchy. There were not many letters from him to his mother, to form a full detailed accounting. Apparently he arrived at San Francisco, California on the way to APO SF 12069. However it (con't next page)

is not known if he arrived at San Francisco or at the APO, on 24 May, 1943.

On 18 August, 1943 he writes there was another "Roberts" in the same tent he was living in. On 9 October, 1943 he had returned from a 7 day leave in Australia. On this date he also writes: "Today I had my first crack at those yellow devils and boy am I ready to give them more!"

On 16 October, 1943 at approximately 1130 hours, the bomber, a B25D-20(D-1) #41-30561 crewed by 1st. Lt. Donald L. Stookey Pilot, 2nd. Lt. Herschel D. Evans Co-Pilot, S/Sgt. Thomas H. Laird Eng-Gunner, S/Sgt. Ernest S. Roberts Radio-Gunner, and S/Sgt. Max Gerstein Gunner, approached the target. As they bore down on the target, 5 1/2 miles East of Wewak and 3 miles North East of Cape Moem, the plane was hit by ground fire. After making the bomb run it gradually fell out of formation and was able to turn out over the water. Finally it had to ditch, making a perfect water landing. Photographers got pictures showing a life raft at the rear of the plane and all of the crew members out of the plane and in the water. Other planes dropped some rafts and supplies, then departed. This information was furnished by Capt. Michael Hochella "C" Flight Leader.

31 October, 1943: A letter from Maj. Charles M. Hagest commander tells of the downing.

November 1943: Lts. Stookey and Evans were apparently imprisoned at a small prison inside the town of Rabaul.

5 March, 1944: After spending a few days and nights in a cave due to the bombing of the area. During an inspection Lt. Stookey, Lt. Evans, and other officers were taken away blindfolded and hand cuffed, led down a trail not to be seen again. It was found after the war that they had been taken down the trail and executed. It is suspected that Maj. Matsuda was the person who was responsible for this.

9 March, 1944, 22:22 hours: CST Radio GOKIO announced Ernest Roberts had been captured at Wewak, New Guinea and was okay. This was received by Dan Mowrey 3807 Memphis St., El Paso Texas, as well as William E. Shanon at U.S. Coast Guard Construction Battalion Ketchikan, Alaska. At the same time Walter Seymour 933 Arabella St. New Orleans Louisiana received the message and caught a portion that said "I am being treated swell and getting along okay." This does sound like the way he would say it, based on the letters he had written.

2 May, 1944: An unofficial radio broadcast was intercepted which states that Herschel D. Evans was in a prison camp and was okay. This was received by 21 different stations on the West Coast. These messages contained information that virtually guarantees it was from him.

22 January, 1946: S/Sgt. Ernest S. Roberts's status was changed from Missing in Action to Presumed Dead. To this date no information that I know of has

been found that tells what happened to him.

Arriving at Columbia for Training – Part 2 (cont. from last issue)

By George Givens, 498th

Holdener had an open roundish face that always seemed to have that look of imminent glee that you would see on the face of a person waiting to hear the punch line of a joke. You couldn't help but like the guy. He radiated strength and confidence. The kind of guy when a barroom brawl is about to start, you're damn glad he is at your side.

Hart had a slightly pock marked face and the swarthy complexion reminded me of a Mexican bandito. It seemed like you could never make eye contact with him. He was very shifty eyed, but an excellent navigator.

Holz was the next hardest man to get easy with. His Clark Gable mustache and, sneery like, smirky smile made me leery of him. He and I never did get to be too friendly. He had a standoffish air about him.

Sainato was a short, hairy, barrel chested and square jawed Italian, with a friendly open face, quick to smile and, as with Holdener, easy to like. He had a crew cut and his black hair stood out like tooth picks. Willie was 20 years old and he and Holdener were the only two men of the crew that were married. Both of their wives were with them at (con't on next page)

Columbia where they shared an apartment in town. Sainato's wife, Rose, was expecting a child at this time.

True to the captain's word, they most certainly did fly our butts off. High altitude bombing from 10,000 feet was practiced at a small island in nearby Lake Murray. We dropped 100 lb. bombs filled with sand that had a small explosive white smoke flare that detonated upon impact to let us know where the bomb hit in relation to the target on the island.

Low level skip bombing and strafing was on a gunnery range on the Atlantic Ocean, about 20 minutes flying time away near Myrtle Beach. This I liked the best. It was the fall of the year, the time when the geese are migrating south for the winter. One day we were practicing formation flying. I was at the waist window watching the lovely South Carolina farm country sliding by about 2,000 feet below. Suddenly there were some thuds and I heard a rush of air come thru the plane. It felt like the bomb bay doors opened. At the same time white flashes sped past the waist window. Geese! We had hit a flock of geese and one of them had smashed thru the windshield on the co-pilots side and slammed into Holdener's face. As it turned out he wasn't hurt very badly; however, he had some cuts from flying Plexiglas. What impressed me the most about this incident was the way Gruer held the plane in tight formation, without flinching or veering off course so much as one foot that

could have been disastrous in a tight formation. My esteem and confidence in his flying ability went up several notches.

One time we were to practice a night time bombing run on a large city. Pittsburgh, Pa. was to be that city. I called home and told the folks I would be in a group of bombers that would be over the city that night, about 9 o'clock. I told them to watch for the B-25 that would be flashing V ... from the waist window of one of the planes, which would be me. The folks were all excited and said they would call all of the relatives and tell all the neighbors.

I remember before I enlisted in the service, we would practice air raids at home, and they blacked out the whole city, with air raid sirens blaring and air raid wardens running around blowing whistles and yelling "Lights Out! Lights Out!" It was all very exciting. We would go up on our attic roof and wait for the bombers to appear. We pretended we were in London, England under the German Blitz, as we scanned the night time sky when we heard the ominous drone of the approaching, unseen enemy and with the entire city in a complete blackout it seemed unreal.

At the briefing before the "Mission," we were informed that Pittsburgh was scrubbed because of a foul weather front moving in, so we would be "Bombing Jackson, Mississippi instead." I was very disappointed as I know the folks back home were. My fleeting moment of glory for the neighborhood was lost forever.

The beautiful autumn days sped by in a flurry of flying activity as we all honed the edge of our particular assignments to a fine degree.

One thing that Gruer insisted upon was that every member of the crew gets as much stick time as we could possibly squeeze in before we went overseas. He was pragmatic enough to the point that if he and the co-pilot were injured that any other member of the crew could keep us airborne long enough for the crew to bail out. There was no way we could ever get enough experience to land the Mitchell under these circumstances, but in case he was killed or wounded as well as Holdener, one of us would be able to follow the rest of the bomb group to our home field and bail out, taking the wounded with us.

Of course, we couldn't get any of this type of unauthorized flying time while doing formation flying but enough opportunities presented themselves at other times. Gruer made sure that we were up at 5,000 feet for this "training."

My first time in the pilot's seat was very exciting indeed. With Holdener in the co-pilots seat and Gruer between us, I was given the controls. For the first ten minutes or so I was all over the sky as the yoke was very sensitive to the touch. Beginners are always apt to over compensate in any maneuver. With practice and coaching from the 2 pilots in a (con't next page)

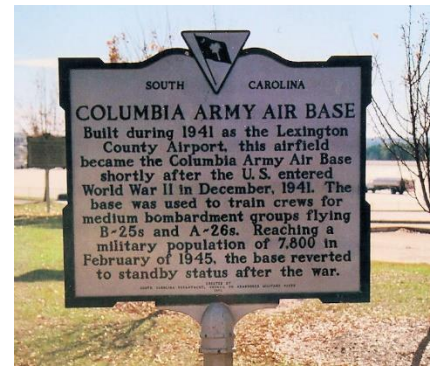
very short time I was able to keep the B-25 fairly level and hold the heading to the compass setting, as for the speed, the throttles were set in the notch for cruising, which was 160 MPH. So the only instruments we novices were concerned with was the altimeter setting and the compass setting, and the compass we wouldn't have to follow if there were other aircraft to follow home. Sharing this knowledge gave us the confidence with one another as a crew. I acquired about 6 hours "Stick" time flying B-25C's and D's in our training time at Columbia. It formed a cohesiveness that this type of training was aimed at. Our training days had slipped by rapidly and had concluded in late December 1944. We were as fully trained and competent in our respective assignments as the US Air Corps could make us. We were now prepared for the acid test that only aerial combat would prove our worthiness.

Before we shipped out to our port of embarkation (POE) we were granted a five day leave. Holdener stayed for his leave in Columbia with his wife. Gruer and Hart caught a train to St. Louis. Holz and Sainato and his wife, Rose, and I caught a train to New

York, where I got off in Washington D.C. and transferred to a train to Pittsburgh. Out of the five days leave I had three at home. I had to leave home on December 21st, four days before Christmas, to be back at camp in time for shipment to my POE. My parents took it pretty hard that I could not be home for the holidays. Once again, my father was too upset, emotionally, and his asthma flared up so we said our goodbyes at home. My mother accompanied me to the Pennsylvania Station that was jam-packed with servicemen and their relatives. Plenty of tears were being shed in that station.

My mother and I found a seat on the hard wooden benches and sat quietly, neither of us seeming to know what to say gracefully. This extremely short leave was offered by Uncle Sam with all good intentions, I'm sure, but it felt cruel to be saying goodbye all over again after such a short time, and what made it even more emotionally rough, was that it was close to the major holiday season. We watched the clumsy embraces, hasty kisses and brave smiles of those around us in sad departures. The PA system was playing the nostalgic love songs of WWII interspersed with the latest war

news, which at this time was very gloomy indeed. The Germans launched a massive counter attack on the Western front in Belgium. The allied armies were reeling under this surprise attack and casualty lists, published in all the daily papers, were increasingly drastically. The war communiques were pessimistic and nothing seemed to lend to the gaiety of the approaching season. History was to later refer to this attack by Germany as the Battle of the Bulge. Buddy Sherlock, a fellow I grew up with, who lived a few doors down the street, was only in the Army for four short months, was killed in action in this battle. All the women in the neighborhood gathered around her. My mom wrote me later that Mrs. Sherlock was inconsolable.



**Columbia Army Air
Base Historical Marker
Columbia, SC**

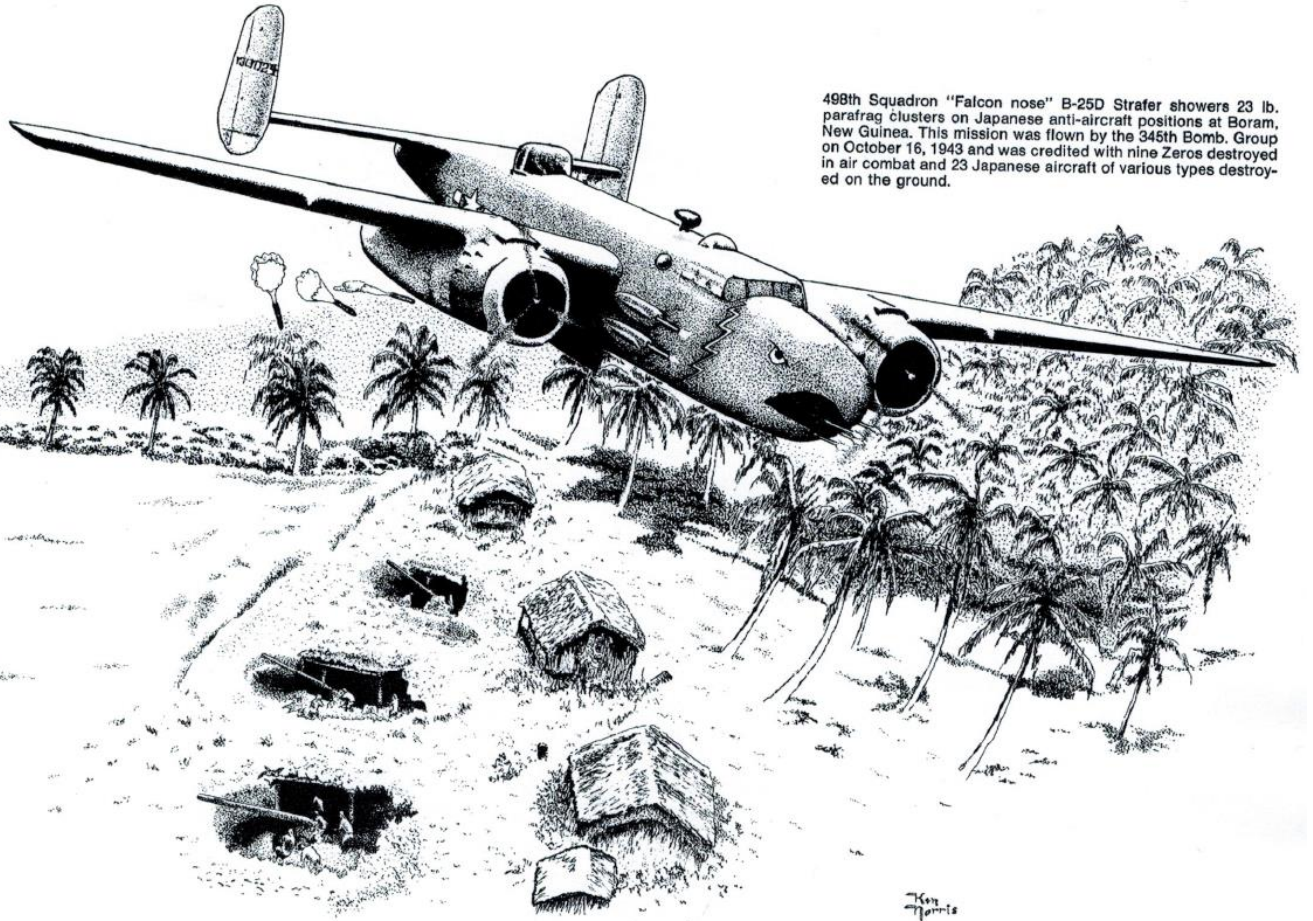


*Are you following us on Facebook?
It's a good way to stay in touch with folks
who are interested in the 345th and other WWII topics!
It's fun, too!*



A Blast from the Past

This picture was taken from a 1979 Strafer



498th Squadron "Falcon nose" B-25D Strafer showers 23 lb. parafrog clusters on Japanese anti-aircraft positions at Boram, New Guinea. This mission was flown by the 345th Bomb. Group on October 16, 1943 and was credited with nine Zeros destroyed in air combat and 23 Japanese aircraft of various types destroyed on the ground.

This article taken from the March 1988 Strafer:

498th Gunner Miffed!

The story goes something like this. It seems when our flight crews trained for combat at Columbia and Walterboro, they had among them a pilot who hailed from Texas by the name of Melvin Best. Through a very selective inquiry process for gunners, Best ended up with a radio gunner named Don Stout.

All went well until the crew was overseas and Stout suddenly became aware, quite by accident, that they were going to use 'live' ammunition in the guns when they strafed the Japs. Stout, being a wide awake 498th gunner, deduced quickly that if they were going to use live ammunition on the enemy, the enemy would probably get hopping mad and probably follow them home, shooting at the rear of the B-25.

Stout noticed there was no protection on guns in the rear of the plane for him to protect

himself! He asked pilot Best for permission to build himself an area in the rear of the aircraft to house himself and a couple of 30 caliber guns. With help from some line personnel, a Plexiglas dome was constructed. It was a first for a B-25, a first in the 498th and Stout is upset because it was never recognized as such. He wants to sue someone or anyone for patent rights – or maybe he will settle for a drink.

Now, how about that?

~*~*~*~*~*~*~

Editor's Note: Aren't these old stories remarkable!

Note to our Members and Friends. Thank you for joining and supporting the Association. In order to keep publishing the *Strafer* and continuing our outreach efforts—like the exhibit that is currently at the Experimental Aircraft Association Museum in Oshkosh—we need your financial support. If you've not supported the Association in the past, please consider making a contribution in addition to your membership dues. It's much appreciated!

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Dues are \$15 per year for 345th Veterans and their spouses/widows. All other types of memberships are \$35 per year. Additional contributions are most appreciated. Please make your check payable to 345th Bomb Group Association and send it with this application page to:

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New

representatives are needed for the 498th and 499th Squadrons. Many thanks to George Givens and Bill Paulis for representing their squadrons. Please contact Mary Roby if you are interested.

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