



AIR APACHES

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President's Message

By Mary Sloan Roby, 500th



Ron Twellman is the Curator of Collections for the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA) and he will be looking for new adventures after his retirement. A significant recent achievement is the completion of the 345th Bomb Group exhibit at EAA. Ron and our member, Marcia Wysocky, worked closely together to plan the exhibit, solicit contributions, and actually put the exhibit together. We decided to hold our meeting in Oshkosh this year, so many more members would be able to view the exceptional exhibit.

Ron is from the small town of Troy, MO in east central Missouri between St. Louis and Hannibal. He attended college to study electrical engineering in 1968 at the University of Missouri at Rolla and also was a Co-op Engineering Trainee with Ford Motor Company's body engineering division in Dearborn, MI.

He dropped out of college, attended Bailey Technical School in St. Louis where he became an auto mechanic and auto parts salesman for several different companies at numerous locations in the St. Louis area.

In the mid-1970s an interest in history and travel led to his earning a BA in American History from the University of Missouri in Columbia. He worked as a tour guide at the Museum of Transport in St. Louis County and then returned to work in the auto parts industry.

Ron had always been interested in airplanes and when he heard about the creation of the St. Louis Aviation Museum group he joined and worked with the events committee. He enjoyed this work so much that he decided to work in the museum field full time. This new interest led to a graduate program at Texas Tech University in Lubbock, TX where he earned an MFA in Museum Science.

After finishing the Museum Science program he was hired in January 1989 by the Experimental Aircraft Association as a contract worker to write exhibit labels for their new Eagle Hangar addition. After serving fourteen months in that capacity, he was hired as the museum's assistant manager.

Ron is retiring soon from his illustrious career at the Experimental Aircraft Association and moving on to new challenges.

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NEWS ABOUT THE 499th

By Bob Sweet, 499th

In addition to the excellent books about the 345th BG (Larry Hickey's *Warpath Across the Pacific*) and the 499th BS (Vic Tatelman's, *Flying Colors*), I have added *Bat's Outa Hell Over Biak* by Max B. Ferguson to my library.

This small book is a gem of a memoir portraying the movement of the 499th BS from Dobodura to Biak - a strategic island location closer to the Philippines for the impending advance by General MacArthur. Max Ferguson died in 2011, but he did publish his experiences in 1991. Although he did not keep a diary, he was able to recount events through numerous letters sent home. Some of those days *Over Biak* have also appeared in prior issues of the *Strafer*.

Ferguson writes vividly of the horrors of war, the grief of losing friends, and also some of the lighter moments of R and R in Sydney. Many names of the 499th

fill the pages, and Ferguson also includes many from the 498th, 500th, 501st, and Headquarters. My reading spotted a familiar name; that of Capt. Marty Wood. I was a business associate and fellow alum (small men's college in Hartford) of Marty's for 10 years and never knew that he was the Exec. Officer with the 499th. *Bats Outa Hell Over Biak* is available at Amazon, and I highly recommend it. I look forward to meeting family and friends of those that I have read about when we get together in Oshkosh.

Return of Effects 70 Years Later

By Jim Briggs, 501st

If we were Irish, I'd call it "the luck of the Irish." An analyst from the Army Casualty Office was doing research at the National Archives in Suitland, MD, in December 2014 and, just by chance, a workman happened to bring a box out of a back room, saying: "You might be interested in the things in this." Inside were my father's flight school ring (with his name engraved inside), ID tag, and four pictures of my mother and older sister found at my father's crash site in the Philippines, as well as 400 pages of military documents. A Casualty Office representative called to tell me this in mid-December; I had been contacting various offices from 2002 to 2009 - including the Casualty Office - to try to find my father's things, with no luck whatsoever, so my name was in their files. My father's effects

were "officially" presented to my mother in California in January 2015, almost exactly 70 years to the day since my father's plane went down. (My Mother passed away on 30 November 2015.)

My father, Capt. James Underwood, was the pilot of the "Lazy Daisy Mae" when it went down in the Philippines on 9 January 1945 (a month before I was born), on a mission from Tacloban to support the initial Allied landing on Luzon. All my family knew for 57 years was that his plane, with its six-man crew, had last been seen flying into a cloud bank over Sibuyan Island, with a 6,500-foot peak. Another pilot noticed my father's plane enter the cloud bank, saw a large flash of light some 15 seconds later, and assumed that my father's plane had crashed into the mountain. But three search efforts on Sibuyan Island in 1947/1948 failed to find any wreckage.

In the late 1990's, I joined an organization called the American World War II Orphans Network (AWON), a "support" group for those who lost their fathers during the war which offered considerable advice on researching the last locations of servicemen killed or missing. I was finally able to get a copy of my father's Individual Deceased Personnel File (IDPF) from the Army in August 2002. In it is a February 1965 Army memo detailing how my father's crash site was found in 1963, based on information received from a local native, on a completely different

island than originally assumed. A search team from Clark Air Base found my father's ID tag, with his name and serial number; a few small sections of a plane, with the marking 36012 on the tail boom - the number of the plane he had been flying; and the painting of an "Indian Head" on the stabilizer. The site was found on Mindoro Island, northwest of Sibuyan, high up on an 8,400-foot mountain - called "the most difficult mountain to climb in the country." The 1965 memo states: "These clues positively identified the aircraft as the B-25J 'Mitchell bomber' #43-36012 which was piloted by Captain James W. Underwood, 0-421358, on a bombing mission to Luzon, P.I., 9 January 1945." My family was never told even the mere fact that my father's crash site had definitely been found; and nothing in the IDPF indicates that any attempt was made to contact my family.

The search team also found "five incomplete bones" at the crash site; a document in my father's IDPF shows that they were forwarded to the U.S. Army Mortuary, Japan, which no longer exists. After a number of years of messages and phone calls trying to get information from the Army, I finally learned in February 2008 from the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command in Hawaii that the bones had been cremated in October 1965 since they couldn't be positively identified.

Documents in my father's IDPF also explain that a Filipino native found my father's flight school ring and the pictures and took

them home. The native mentioned it to a local Red Cross representative, who reported it to the US military. One memo says: "Near the wreckage of the crashed plane, he found a skeleton of a person...with a ring in which these words were engraved: 'Air Corps Flying School, US Army 1941' - the year my father graduated from flight school in Texas. The search team in 1963 recovered the ring and pictures from the native's home. Another memo says the ring was forwarded to Washington, to an Army office that no longer exists.

From 2002 to 2009, I was never able to locate my father's things, so I had given up the search. (I had also never been able to find any more information on the other crew members.) Then came the call in mid-December 2014, completely out of the blue.

In February 2015, my sister and I went to one of the periodic "conferences" the Army holds for the families of those killed or missing in action whose remains have not been recovered yet. We received copies of the 400 pages of documents found in the box in Suitland, including memos detailing another search of the crash site in 1973. That time, 10 incomplete bones were found, known to have come from four different men. Again, since they couldn't be identified, they were cremated in 1975. One other ID tag was found - the radio operator's. But again, no attempt was made to notify the families, judging by our experience and the lack of any indication of that in the

documents. The other crew members were:

- 2Lt William H. Clark - co-pilot
- Maj William J. McBride - navigator-bombardier
- Sgt Carl E. Schenzel – engineer
- TSgt Robert S. Knowlden - radio operator
- SSgt George H. Ray - gunner

My wife and I went to another Army "conference" this January in Los Angeles. We were told that my father's crash site is "on a list" of possible sites to be excavated in 2017. There are considerable logistical difficulties to be overcome first: the site is in some of the most difficult terrain in the Philippines; negotiations are required with the "natives" to enter their "sacred land"; and helicopter transportation to the site must be arranged and the helicopter certified for such a flight.

But we're hopeful. . .

My wife and I thoroughly enjoyed the reunion in Dayton, and hope to be able to attend future events.

Enough to Make the Japs Quit

By Perry Hurt, 500th

This excerpt is from the papers of my father George J Hurt, bombardier for the 500th Bomber Squadron in the Pacific theater of WWII from Dec 1943 to Oct 1944. My father left me three documents: a short autobiographical sketch about his training at Victorville, CA, Carlsbad, NM and Colombia, SC; a

diary/log book of his time stationed in New Guinea; and a photo album covering much of his WWII experience. George was born in Roanoke, VA in 1923. He was short, smart and athletic, a bit scrappy but with a good sense of humor. After the war he became an aeronautical engineer and worked for many years with NASA. He passed away in 1987. This excerpt and those in future newsletters are transcribed verbatim from George's papers. I've added a few comments in brackets for clarity and interest, such as aircraft information from *Warpath Across the Pacific*, by Laurence J. Hickey. My father's writing was personal, but it surely represents the experience of hundreds of others who fought in the 345 Bomber Group.

I had thought all my life about making a career for myself in the Army. Almost started in 1939, but my father thought it best to wait a few years. Wish now that I hadn't let him talk me out of it.



George J. Hurt

On Dec. 7, 1941 [attack on Pearl Harbor] I received another

jolt to my desire for an army career. By this time I had taken up flying. I had amassed the huge total of something like 30 hours in a high speed Cub. For several months after the Declaration of War I pictured myself as a demon fighter pilot surrounded by flaming Jap zeros. Really a poor picture of what I would actually do in the future.

By April "42" my desire reached a full pitch. By sweating out a three hour mental exam, a rapid physical, and repeating the oath after the examining officer, I became an Aviation Cadet. The next four months were spent waiting to be called. Wish I had quit work too, for I had three teeth knocked out during this period [working at the local ammunition factory]. Finally on the 10th of August I received orders to report to the Local Recruiting Office. The 16th a group of us left Roanoke for the classification center at Nashville, Tenn. A group of the local citizens gave us a speech and farewell supper. We arrived in Nashville about 9 pm on the evening of the 17th. The camp was only a few weeks old, but had already collected enough mud for years to come. Believe I felt more home sick right then than at any time after. That first night brought little sleep to any. We were too busy discussing our own personal expectations of what each of us would accomplish in the near future. Some of us were to be greatly disappointed.

The following day commenced a series of events that was to last

four full years. At the end of which time I was still to wonder at the apparent insane system that was followed by the Army, but which amazingly produced miraculous results.

After two days of written exams, physical checks and numerous application of small needles to ward off diseases I'd never heard of, we finished classification. Somewhere in the midst of all this we managed to draw uniforms.

When the classification officer had finished most of us were slated to become bombardiers. An envied few were sent to pilot training, and a very small number were sent to navigation.

In a few days we boarded the train for Santa Ana, Calif. It proved to be an uneventful trip.

The first few days at Santa Ana were almost a repetition of those in Nashville. The first week was spent drawing school supplies, collecting shots, and doing K.P. Finally we settled down to what was to be nine weeks of intense classroom work, drills, and inspections. Mixed in for excitement were occasional weekends in Santa Ana and Los Angeles. Only one or two failed to complete Pre-Flight.

Our graduation party was held at the country club in LA. From that night I was to remember two things: never mix peanuts with too much scotch and a beautiful girl. Her hair, face and figure were all that each man dreams his future love will have, but some where she had forgotten to stop growing. She had attained the height of

6'4" plus the extra gained from extra high-heeled evening slippers. She towered above my 5'4" like a California Redwood. For a time I didn't enjoy myself too well. This was due mostly to the scotch and peanuts, plus a few Canadian high balls that slipped in unnoticed. I shortly excused myself from the fair maiden and proceeded to part company with all my insulted stomach held. For the next hour I was rather miserable. However this soon passed and I returned to spend a most enjoyable evening.

The next morning all awoke with their heads exploding, but things had to be packed for we were moving out for Victorville, Calif. and Advanced Bombardiering. Now we were getting someplace.

Next: "Training in Columbia, SC"

Return to the South Pacific

By Bob Kantor, 499th

About forty years ago, I was rummaging through one of the cruise brochures and I noticed there was a cruise in there called "Cruise for Remembrance" directed to veterans who had served in the South Pacific area 35 years before. I preface this with approximate dates with a caveat as my memory is not what it use to be but I think it is still pretty good for a 95-year-old member of the 499th.

The ports of call, some of which the 345th had not called upon but were of importance in the Pacific theater and of general interest of

my shipmates who were primarily navy people. The cruise ship was one of the main liners and while we traveled, I think the women were equally interested because of the unusual ports. We got about ship in Sydney, Australia and our first stop was Townsville, which was the staging area for the 345th and might be remembered by early members of the group. The group was encamped in an area west of Townsville and little remained that could be identified as a staging area. I did not join the group until months later, following the attack on the Nelson. The town had not changed that much and I am sure that the old timers remember how Townsville was laid out and on the bluff facing north. The canons were still in place as a reminder of what might have been, had there been a Japanese invasion from the north. The south end of the Great Barrier Reef, some 15 miles out, is now a great tourist destination.

Leaving Townsville, we headed north to the Coral Sea, where there was a brief ceremony with a speech or two and a wreath was thrown into the water. This was to honor the losses we had in the Coral Sea, first encounter of our navy and our decimating the Japanese Navy on their way to attack Port Moresby. We suffered the loss of the Lexington air craft carrier.

Lectures were given aboard the cruise ship, mainly Navy people. One speaker was extolling the exploits of the Navy and it seemed to him as though the Navy won the war for us. When he

concluded, there was a question period so I got up before the audience of over 500 and said that the 345th Bomb Group helped win the war also and we had been awarded three Presidential Citations and should not be overlooked. He did acknowledge that there were other elements who helped win the war besides the Navy. After I sat down, a veteran from the 500th or the 501st came up to me for adding my say so and thanked me for our making our case. I don't remember his name.

Once on our way again, we stopped in Wewak, Lae and spent a whole day in Biak. We dropped anchor in the harbor and to honor our visit, hundreds of the natives came to the dock and danced and threw flowers at the ship. They stayed on the dock the entire time we were in Biak. While on Biak, we visited a massive cave where hundreds of Japanese soldiers had holed up hoping to avoid detection as the American Forces swept across the island. In the distance the island of Owi could be seen. You might recall American forces were withdrawn from the island because of the fear of typhus.

The ship stopped in Hollandia and I remembered back in 1944 it was a bustling port with many ships unloading war material. The road in and out of the port was a corduroy road of palm tree trunks. Now it was a quiet stop and the roads were all paved by the U.S., but every car on the road were new Japanese automobiles. I wanted to see where General

MacArthur's headquarters were on New Guinea so I went out to Lake Senteni where the only thing remaining of the MacArthur compound were cinder blocks outlining the perimeter. The views overlooking the lake were magnificent. Further on were the beaches where the invasion had taken place. Now the area was completely overgrown with tropical vegetation.

Our next stop was Honoraria, the capital of Guadalcanal. This was a bitterly fought battle for Bloody Ridge. The control tower for the airstrip at Henderson Field was still standing as a memorial. The navies gave us a concert on instruments that looked like giant gourds. In the harbor, sunken ship hulls could be seen. On Bloody Ridge, the Japanese had erected a six or seven foot pylon honoring their soldiers and right next to it was a much smaller American memorial to the troops that had fought so valiantly to gain the island. The town was bustling with busy stalls, selling goats, chickens and other farm produce.

Leaving Guadalcanal, the ship headed to Borneo. We spent a day in Rabual that while never invaded, had ben the target of constant bombings by our group and I think, earned us a Presidential Citation for isolating the island so that the Japanese could never reinforce it, resulting in the starvation of many of 40,000 Japanese troops there. Rabaul was interesting. The Japanese main headquarters for their campaign was there and walking into the concrete dugouts

that they had built, you immediately became aware of the fact that the ceilings were low, as the generals were all short. In the center of the town a memorial had been built thanking the U.S. for freeing them. The remnants of the German occupation following the first World War were apparent. The streets were laid out, devoid of buildings, but left was a hotel that had been constructed during that occupation.

Then on to Manila in the Philippines by bypassing Tacloban and San Marcelino and Clark Field. Manila had been pretty much rebuilt. Walking down Razal Boulevard you would never know that as we left that area during our occupation with most of the buildings were left in ruins. Santa Thomas University that had been left pretty much destroyed was rebuilt, but the wall around the university was never reconstructed. I returned to Manila again about forty years later and went to visit the new war memorial built in the interim honoring the service personnel that has been killed to liberate the Philippines. Within the memorial park there were large marble slabs engraved with the names of hundreds. There were quite a few names of members of the 345th listed and with the name as the designation of our group.

And just to get things in the time perspective, I was in the Intelligence Section of the 499th. I wrote up most of the letters to headquarters for medals and citations. Pat Goforth was the

officer in charge and the rest of the men were Robert LeMay, Salvatore DiGiovanni and Hollihan.



Wall of the Missing at Manila American Cemetery in the Philippines

From Columbia AFB to Overseas – Part 3

(cont. from Nov. '15 issue)

By George Givens, 498th

When I arrived back at Columbia AFB with the rest of the returning men, we immediately processed for shipment to our POE. An entire troop train of combat crews loaded up. Our destination was Savannah, GA. We had all been issued brand new fleece lined flying gear before we left Columbia that led to much speculation that we were headed for the ETO.

(Note that there were no American B-25 units that flew from England or France (ETO) just B-26, A-20 and A-26 units. However, the Mediterranean Theater of Operations (MTO) had 5, B-25 groups based in Italy.

These groups flew at 10,000 feet warranting the fleece lined flight gear.)

The Turkey dinner with all the trimmings didn't seem to lift our spirits much. Sainato's wife, Rose, stayed in New York when he returned but Holdener's wife was determined to be with her man until the last minute, as she motored down to Savannah.

The next week was filled with getting booster shots, checking our records, complete physical examinations including dental. Shortly after New Year's Day 1945, six crews were alerted to stand by for immediate processing of overseas orders. Unknown to us peons, at this time V Bomber Command sent a rush order to the Overseas Replacement Office for immediate shipment of six combat replacement crews to replace six KIA or who those completed their prescribed number of missions. A clerk somewhere in the system had randomly picked six crews from our roster and Gruer's crew, along with five others were chosen, six, 6 man crews, thirty six men. How mysteriously the gods of war cast the dice.

The next day we loaded aboard six brand new North American B-25J Billy Mitchells that had already been checked out. I can remember they even smelled new, like a brand new car. Only the machine guns hadn't been installed yet to conserve weight. We flew the B-25J with serial number 44-30146 all the way to California.

We had orders to fly to Sacramento, California, Holdener's home town. What a lucky break

for him. As soon as we knew where we were heading, Holdener's wife took off in her old reliable Ford coupe. Would you believe, she beat us to Sacramento! We hit a severe weather front and were grounded for three days at Amarillo, Texas. (Remember it was in the dead of winter and there were no "Interstate" highways then, just the Pennsylvania Turnpike! All the way from Savannah, GA to Sacramento, CA., amazing. I wish she were here, I would love to talk with her about that trip.)

We had permission to fly low level on that flight across the country. We chased trucks and buzzed cows on the open range and just had a great time of it all. The people on the ground waved at us, especially the kids. When the weather cleared and we continued west, we flew below the rim of the Grand Canyon and that was a site to behold. We landed at Fairfield-Suisun AFB (now Travis AFB) at the outskirts of Sacramento. Another good break for Holdener, all B-25's built in our series at a certain factory was grounded for an oil pump malfunction. This gave all of us a few more days at Sacramento than planned. We didn't get to fly our new aircraft overseas. A few days later, on my father's birthday, February 2nd, we boarded a C-87, a B-24 Liberator that had been converted into a cargo and troop carrier. Thirty six men, six crews, and all our gear were jammed aboard along with sundry and various cargos.

We were finally on our way

overseas.

We took off about 1000 hours and were still climbing for altitude as we flew out over San Francisco and the Golden Gate Bridge, our destination, Hickam Field, Hawaii.

The war in the Pacific was heating up again. The first 18 months or so was very bloody as we halted the Japanese southward thrust toward Australia at Guadalcanal and New Guinea. For the next year and a half it was mostly sparring. We took a few strategic islands, such as Tarawa, New Britain, Eniwetok, Saipan and Guam, where fighting was brief but fierce and deadly. General MacArthur's strategy was to bypass the highly fortified islands such as Rabaul and Truk and bypassing highly fortified Japanese bases along the northern New Guinea coast line. Thus cutting them off from their supplies and letting them "wither on the vine". This saved many casualties and much time.

In October 1944, MacArthur invaded the Philippine Islands at an island named Leyte. This was the largest land battle up until this time in the Pacific war. Iwo Jima and Okinawa lay months ahead in the future, and the closer we got to the Japanese home islands the stiffer and more desperate became the resistance. The first time in the Pacific, at Leyte, that the Japs used a terrifying new weapon..... the kamikaze.

We landed at Hickam field, Hawaii, just after sunset. We were to have a three hour layover to refuel and switch to a fresh crew for our next leg of our trip. We ate

at a nearby mess hall. The terminal at Hickam still showed evidence of the Pearl Harbor attack on December 7, 1941. Even at this time of night the place was a beehive of activity. After we had chowed down, we loafed around the flight line and noticed a long line of ambulances pulling in and parking nearby. Several C-54 transport planes had just landed and were taxiing over to where the "meat wagons" (GI Slang for ambulances) were parked. We could see that the C-54's had red crosses painted on them, hospital planes. Huge flood lights had the entire area bathed in bright light. The big doors on the C-54's opened and a group of high-lifts pulled alongside. The ambulances moved closer. We moved closer for a better look.

Stretcher after stretcher was being unloaded from the aircraft. It was a warm muggy night, so no blankets were needed for the wounded. Almost all of the wounded were amputees. Man after man lowered by the high-lifts to the waiting ambulances. They were missing arms and legs and one poor chap had his entire head swathed in bandages except for a slit at his mouth. There had to be at least well over a hundred wounded being unloaded from the C-54's. The wounded were silent; the ambulance and medic personnel were silent. If any words passed among them, it was in whispers.

I looked around at the faces of the men with me. We were all staring, silent, round eyed. "Holy Jesus, look at that!" someone

exclaimed. We followed his gaze to where he was looking. On one of the stretchers being unloaded down the line was the unmistakable figure of a woman. One of her legs was missing above the knee. The scene is crystal clear in my mind. She was hunched up on her elbows looking around. She had red hair. "Sonuvabeetch, she must be a nurse." Someone uttered. A sailor standing nearby said aloud, "Plane loads like these have been coming in every day since the invasion of the Philippines. That invasion started on October 22, 1944, 3 months ago!

Just a few weeks ago, on January 9th, the 6th US Army landed on the largest island of Luzon, P.I. The landing took place at Lingayen Gulf on the west coast of the island, north of Manila, under command of General Krueger. The Japanese defenders were under the command of General Yamashita, the same brutal commander who allowed his drunken army to rape Nanking, China for three weeks. The same army he had here. He was under direct orders from Imperial High Command in Tokyo to hold Luzon at all costs. To lose this strategic island would be a death blow for Japan's lifeline of the supplies from Indonesia and South East Asia. It would mean the American airfields on Luzon would be used to interdict the flow of materials and oil from natural resource rich, Indonesia. We did not know it then, but this was the conflict we were destined for, known later as the Battle of the China Seas.

The fighting was ferocious and intense and we were witnesses to some of the drastic results here at Hickam field. This was quite sobering, to we green-horns, was the knowledge that we were heading for the cauldron that these poor souls had just recently arrived. There were no flags snapping smartly in the breeze as a military band played. I didn't see any high ranking generals or officers and their most certainly weren't any politicians on hand. It was just a silent procession of wounded returning from war.

We lifted off from Hickam field in the wee hours of the morning. The large tail gun position on our cargo plane was stripped of its guns, only a bicycle seat mounted a foot above the deck was still in place that the tail gunner squatted on in the bomber version of the aircraft. Many times during the flight from California to New Guinea, I'd go back there to gaze at the stars at night or the mighty Pacific Ocean during the day time. On this particular morning as we left Hawaii I saw one of the most spectacular sunrises I'd ever seen. Our aircraft was skimming along above the top layer of cumulus clouds. Giant mushrooms of clouds painted by the rising sun with colors and hues no poet could even begin to describe in words, or an artist could even brush, the breath taking beauty of that sunrise.

We landed on tiny Johnson Island for refueling. Our next stop was Tarawa Island in the Gilberts. After a bite to eat in a Quonset hut mess hall we had an hour or

so to kill. It took the US Marines three days to take this tiny island and a nearby concrete bunker showed much evidence of heavy fighting. Some of us moseyed over for a look-see. The wall facing the lagoon side was three feet thick of reinforced concrete. The rusted and a skewed barrel of an 8" cannon protruded from the gun slit. The entire wall was pock marked with bullet and shell holes of all calibers. Also there were two 16" holes from the battleship Alabama when it fired point blank from 1,000 yards. I looked into one of the 16" holes and could see where the armor piercing shell exited the opposite wall. I couldn't imagine what it must have been like inside that bunker when a 16 incher went whistling through. On the back side of the bunker a large steel door had been blown off its hinges and lay rusting nearby. Inside it was a mess and it smelled of urine. Someone said the black splotches on the walls were dried Japanese blood.

Nearby was a POW stockade with about 18 or 20 Japanese. Marine MP's were keeping guard. They said that none of them willingly surrendered, these prisoners were all found unconscious after the battle ended. The Jap POW's were all sitting or squatting in the shade of their barracks smoking American cigarettes. They would not look directly at us. They looked healthy enough and well fed. We speculated the US government left this bunch of POW's here for us transients to get a good look at what our enemy is. I do not know

what I felt as I looked at them. Under these conditions they did not appear too fearsome, but then again it was this bunch of men and their dead buddies, about 4,700, that made the US Marines pay such a high price in men, about 3,800 casualties, and material to take this small atoll named Tarawa.

The leg of our trip sent us to Guadalcanal where the marines, then later the army stopped the Japanese advance in the south west Pacific, again just a layover for fuel and food.

We took off in the late afternoon for our final leg of our journey to Biak, New Guinea. I was back in my favorite position in the tail gazing at the nighttime sky. There was no moon. It is a known fact that the human can only perceive 10,000 stars with the naked eye. It seemed more like 100,000 stars that night, because of the inky jet blackness of the sky and there was no ambient light from any great cities for thousands of miles. The south Pacific below was also a jet black void. Somewhere below us lay the Los Negros islands, still in Japanese possession. Also in that black void we crossed the equator. We could now brag about being denizens of the briny deep and one of Neptune's pollywogs. Whenever the US Navy crosses the equator, all the green swabbies get one heck of an initiation.

As I sat there contemplating these thoughts I got a sudden whiff of an odor that sent instant fear coursing through me, RAW GAS FUMES! I scurried as quickly

as I could up to the main passenger's area. I could see alarm on the men's faces and the smell of gas was much stronger there. Thank God nobody was smoking at this precise moment or we would have, most likely, been a shooting star falling out of the night sky. Albie saw the gas streaming from the Bomb Bay tank and stuck his finger in the hole. He then asked another passenger to get the pilot and tell him of this situation. The pilot was making his way into our compartment and yelled if anyone was smoking to put the butt in his mouth and douse it out with spit right now. Also, do not light any flashlights. As luck would have it, no one was lit up. For some unknown reason, a rivet had popped out of the Bombay fuel tank. One of the crewmen jammed a pencil in the breach and packed a wad of gum he luckily was chewing around the pencil to further staunch the escaping fumes. The raw gas odor vented

away. Needless to say, the smoking lamp was out for the remainder of the flight to New Guinea. ("Good old American ingenuity", chewing gum! I've read about this versatile substance in many books that I've read about WWII! Although this was a temporary "fix," it was good enough to get to our destination where the correct repair could be accomplished.)

It was still dark when we landed at the Fifth Air Force base at Biak, an island off the coast near the north western part of New Guinea. We were about 7 degrees south of the equator and God was it hot. We loaded onto a couple of, duce and a half, trucks and were dropped off in a tent area. Army cots with mosquito nets were already setup and we snatched as much shut eye as we could get after traveling for 46 straight hours. It was February 4, 1945 and we were getting closer to our destination. (to be continued!)

OOPS! In my haste to get the last issue out, I did not confirm the picture of the Seabiscuit was the right plane. Little did I know that there was more than one Seabiscuit! Kelly McNichols was kind enough to point out that the picture was of another plane with the same name, not the 500th BS's plane. Kelly has researched planes with the name "Seabiscuit" and there were at least two B-25s (3rd Attack, 500th BS) and a Navy Ventura bomber. Kelly has heard that there were a couple of fighters with the name also, however he was never able to verify this. *-Editor*



Thanks to Kelly McNichols, here is a picture of the 500th BS's Seabiscuit!

A Blast from the Past!

The following was originally published in the April 1985 issue of the *Strafer*:

To The Men of the 345th Bomb Group

Graced with youth and foolish questions
He asked, "What was it like there?"
"It was a long time ago" I said, but
I knew what he wanted, a story
Of ancient fire and the faded snarl
Of a B-25 lugging a belly-full of iron
Over the endless and patient water;
A story of ships and cities destroyed
And gallant planes returning in the dusk.
"Were they brave?" he asked, but I
Could give to him no proper answer.
He wanted a scene from a movie;
Strutting actors, sneering at their fate,
Flying down the barrels of alien guns,
Dying with a brilliant, brittle speech
Of duty and of honor. Oh, there was
Enough of both, but I had never heard
Anyone speak about them. They were carried
Quietly; worn in silent assurance, and
I knew that they belonged to those who wore them.
"I don't remember any more," I said.
"But, what were they like?" he whined.
"They were men!" I said, "and I
Shall not, in this life, see their like again."

William C. Hilton, Detroit, Michigan
499th Bomb Squadron

Edward (Bud) L. Boghosian

It has been reported that Bud Boghosian of Chicago passed away on December 22, 2014, at the age of 90. Bud was a member of the 499th BS.

John W. Cady

Marith Reheis, wife of John W. Cady, reported that John passed away on April 14, 2016, at the age of 72, surrounded by friends and family. He was the son-in-law of Herman "Rex" Reheis of the 500th BS.

George J. LaHood, Sr.

Ann LaHood, wife of George J.

Recent Passings

LaHood, Sr., has reported that George passed away on March 31, 2016. George was born on September 6, 1921 and was the last surviving member of the original cadre of the 5th Air Force, 345th bomb group.

Norma Miller

Jan Rary and Margene Brown, daughters of Norma Miller, reported that Norma passed away on February 25, 2016. Norma was the widow of Ben Miller, who was a former president of the 345th BG.

Victor Tatelman

Lt. Col. Victor Tatelman passed away at home on February 7, 2016. Vic was a member of the 499th BS and former president of the 345th Bomb Group. Vic was born on November 18, 1920. The book *Flying Colors* is an account of Vic's experience during WWII. See Vic's full obituary at <http://www.345thbombgroup.org>.



Our sympathy is extended to all the families of those that have passed on. *Please let us know of others that have passed on.*

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!

**345th Bomb Group Association
Membership Form**

Name _____ Squadron _____

Mailing Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Home Phone _____ Cell Phone _____

Email Address _____

Additional Names _____

Membership Type

_____ New _____ Renewal _____ Address Change

Status

_____ 345th Vet or Widow _____ 345th Family Member _____ Other

(Please specify the name and squadron of your 345th veteran and/or tell us about yourself) _____

Other (Please specify) _____

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:

**Clint Roby, Treasurer
345th Bomb Group Association
PO Box 8755
Roanoke, VA 24014**

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Squadron Representatives

498th "Fighting Falcons"

A new representative is needed for the 498th Squadron. Please contact Mary Roby if you are interested.

499th "Bats Outta Hell"

Bob Sweet
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Bethesda, MD 20816
301-229-0493
sweet@hood.edu

500th "Rough Raiders"

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345th Bomb Group Association Meeting
 Best Western Premier Waterfront Hotel & Convention Center, Oshkosh, WI
 August 26-28, 2016

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

Events and Fees	Cost	# <i>Attending</i>	Totals
Registration Fee (non-refundable)	\$50		
Friday, August 26			
Welcome Reception at EAA 6 p.m.	No Charge		
Saturday, August 27			
Visit to EAA See the 345 th BG Special Exhibit 10:00 a.m.	Adults \$9.50 Seniors \$8.50		
Hospitality Room Open for Sharing Memorabilia Noon to 5 p.m.	No Charge		
Dinner on your own Check out the Oshkosh Riverwalk	No Charge		
Sunday, August 28			
345 th Bomb Group Business Meeting 10:00 a.m.	No Charge		
Hospitality Room Open for Sharing Memorabilia Noon to 5 p.m.	No Charge		
Banquet Guest Speaker, Ron Twellman of EAA Cocktails at 6 p.m., dinner at 7 p.m.	\$50		
Please send your completed registration form and check for the total amount payable to 345th Bomb Group Association . Please mail to: Clinton Roby, Treasurer, P.O. Box 8755, Roanoke, VA 24014.			

<i>Please indicate your Banquet Meal Choices:</i>			
# Beef	# Chicken	# Fish	# Vegetarian
<i>Please indicate any special services you will need in order to attend the reunion:</i>			
Wheelchair	Please describe anything else you may need.		

Please make your hotel reservation as soon as possible to get the group rate, which expires on August 1.

Dear Members and Friends of the 345th Bomb Group Association,

Last year in Dayton, our group expressed strong interest in continuing to meet on a regular basis and we agreed that Oshkosh, WI would be a great place to hold our 2016 meeting. We look forward to visiting the special exhibit about the 345th at EAA and continuing to build relationships with our veterans and their families.

I invite you to join us at the Best Western Premier Waterfront Hotel & Convention Center in Oshkosh from August 26 to 28, 2016!

- Before you read any further about the planned activities, please register for your hotel room **NOW!** Our group rate expires on August 1, so please contact the hotel as soon as possible. We have secured a group rate of \$99.99 + \$3 per night municipal services fee and city and state taxes. The rate includes up to 2 breakfast coupons per room. You may also add Thursday and/or Monday night at the group rate. The hotel contact information is:

Best Western Premier Waterfront Hotel & Convention Center
1 North Main Street, Oshkosh, WI 54901
Telephone: 920-230-1900 Toll-free 1-855-239-1900
Group Name: 345th Bomb Group Reunion

- The newly renovated hotel is located on Oshkosh's Riverwalk and most rooms have a view of the Fox River or Lake Winnebago. Additionally, each room has a microwave and refrigerator.
- There are many things to see and do in Oshkosh and lots of interesting restaurants. For more information about Oshkosh, visit <http://www.visitoshkosh.com/>.
- The highlight of our last meeting in Dayton was the interaction between the veterans and their families who attended, many of whom attended a reunion for the first time. If you have original documents, scrapbooks, photos, data you've collected, PLEASE bring the items with you to Oshkosh! We have full use of the hospitality suite, so you will have ample opportunity to share your memorabilia with others, learn more about the Air Apaches, and make new friends from the group!
- We are very excited that our guest speaker for the banquet will be Ron Twellman, the Curator of Collections at EAA (and is in the process of retiring), led the development of the 345th Bomb Group exhibit at EAA that we will visit during our meeting. Ron will tell us how he created the exhibit and provide some tips for taking care of our collections.
- The registration form is also available online at our website www.345thbombgroup.org. Please also visit the 345th Bomb Group Association page on Facebook.

As your President, I am really excited to see you all again in Oshkosh! If you have any questions, please let me know. You should know that Clint and I are moving from Baltimore to Roanoke, VA in the next few weeks, so the best way to reach us will be by email. mroby1916@gmail.com or croby001@gmail.com. Hope to see you in Oshkosh!