



# AIR APACHES

## ***STRAFER***

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### President's Message

*By Mary Sloan Roby, 500<sup>th</sup>*



Just this week, we were saddened to learn that Frank Dillard, a former organizer and President of the 345th Bomb Group Association, was tragically killed in an auto accident in North Carolina in May, 2016. Frank attended the Dayton reunion in 2015 with his son, Cliff. Since Dayton, in addition to Frank, we have also lost attendees Vic Tatelman, Norma Miller, and Perle Baird, all veterans or spouses of veterans.

This brings to mind one of our biggest challenges as an organization—how to retain institutional memory. At this year's meeting in Oshkosh, WI, our group visited the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA) Museum, which currently is exhibiting a remarkable collection of memorabilia from the 345th Bomb Group. This exhibit also shows dog tags for the more than

700 missing and killed members of the 345th. This is our first museum experience and the comments of museum goers were appreciative and sometimes very personal. I was touched by the message left by K Fitzgerald from Tallahassee, who "... cried my eyes out in the ladies room, thinking of my dear Dad who served in WWII at 19 years young as a bombardier (sic) in London. Also served in Korea. What a Dad and soldier. I love this museum! Thank you!" Iowan Lynn Johnson, the niece of a turret gunner in WWII, said the exhibit made her think of her uncle.

Exhibits, such as the one in Oshkosh, provide personal context for historical events. The greatest generation of WWII veterans is shrinking by the day, so it is especially important that their experiences are captured through tangible items, paper records like log books and journals, and stories recorded in publications like *The Strafer*.

The EAA exhibit would not have been possible without the artifacts kept and loaned by members of our 345th family. In order to share with others the experiences of the 345th and their remarkable accomplishments in WWII, we hope that all families will engage their special veterans in recording

their experiences and also holding on to their WWII mementoes. They are what make an exhibit like the one at EAA possible, and we send them our thanks.

I would like to extend my personal thanks to each of you who made the trip this past August to Oshkosh for our meeting. The hotel was very accommodating (the hospitality suite was the site of much interesting storytelling and camaraderie) and we were treated so well by the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA) staff members who really made our comfort their priority. They also seemed to enjoy our visit! Ron Twellman, former EAA curator, gave a most interesting presentation at the banquet.

Two folks deserve special mention.

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L to R—Orville Schmidt, Roger Lovett, Lincoln "Linck" Grush and Quentin Stambaugh at the EAA in Oshkosh, WI

Marvin Loomis, from Mankato, KS traveled (with Kelly McNichols) to EAA to deliver a remote controlled scale model B25 to the museum, which was absolutely thrilled to receive it.



500th BS B-25 "Seabiscuit" by Marvin Loomis of Mankato, KS. 101" wingspan, 84" long, 45 lbs. Powered by two Zenoah G38 engines. Operational landing gear, gear doors, bomb bay doors and cowl flaps. Able to drop model bombs.

And, Marcia Wysocky deserves special recognition for her enthusiasm and on-the-ground organizing support. We have heard a lot of positive comments about the exhibit and the meeting so we hope you will consider attending next year. We are evaluating venues and will let you know as soon as we have a location and firm dates.

On a related note, I am happy to let you know that our group's transition from a 501(c)(19) veterans' organization to a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization is nearing completion. We'll update you in the next edition of The Strafer.

Thanks, everybody, for your continued support of the 345<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association.

## From Kelly McNichols of the 500th

Every reunion I attend has its special moments. I look forward to spending time with both the original 345<sup>th</sup> BG vets as well as their families. After all these years, those second and third generation members have become like family to me. Original members Roger Lovett, Lincoln Grush and Quentin Stambaugh were men I had met many times before, but a new original member, Orville Schmidt was able to attend one day's events. I was glad to meet him.

Sometimes it's those casual

conversations that spark my interest. One evening while sitting around a table in the hospitality room, many were viewing Lincoln Grush's photos. Linck had several volumes of photos from his service. One picture caught my eye. It was of a gentleman I had heard of because of a photo I received from Rex Reheis. Sixteen years ago while working on the Finley C. Smith, Jr. project in Mankato, Kansas, Reheis had sent me many photos from his personal collection. I scanned everything thinking I might need the photos someday. While looking at Lincoln Grush's photos, I recognized the photo of Stan Andrews. I remembered I had a photo of him.



Stan Andrews



Handwritten by Grush's photo of Andrews was "Killed fighting in the Israel War of Independence". I asked Lincoln what this was about and he told me that he had learned many years later that Stan Andrews had died fighting for Israel. Andrews was a pilot in the 500<sup>th</sup> BS.

That night I had trouble sleeping so I got up early and decided to find out what I could about Andrews. He was killed  
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along with pilot, Leonard Fitchett and navigator, Dov Sugarman on October 20, 1948, in a Bristol Beaufighter while on a mission on an Egyptian fortress. The bodies of Andrews and Sugarman were never recovered. It seems that Andrews was an artist and helped design the "Death Angel" logo on a napkin with the help of Bob Vickman. This logo is still used by the 101 Squadron of the Israeli Air Force. If you are so inclined, you can view the recent movie entitled, "Above and Beyond" about the various volunteers who helped start the Israeli Air Force. The movie can be viewed on Netflix or Amazon instant video. A portion of the movie speaks of Andrews. Andrews gave the ultimate sacrifice in volunteering to the yet to be country of Israel by using the skills he acquired in flying for the 345<sup>th</sup> BG. We should remember his sacrifice both in the South Pacific and in helping Israel become a nation. You can read more about Stan Andrews by Googling his name.

A second incident occurred at the reunion on Saturday while the attendees were at the Experimental Aircraft Museum. The group was being given a private tour of the facilities when a woman approached Jim Bina, Mary Roby and myself. Sandy Knudsen asked if anyone there knew of a pilot named Andrew Johnson. Sandy's mother had been married to 2/Lt. Johnson who had been killed during the war. Jim asked me if I had my "Warpath Across the Pacific" by Larry Hickey. I always have it at

reunions. I looked up Johnson in the index and found out that 501<sup>st</sup>BS pilot 2/Lt. Johnson had been killed on April 28, 1945 while on a raid over Saigon, Indochina in the B-25 "Cactus Kitten". Two other 501<sup>st</sup> BS crews were also lost on that mission, 2/Lt Milton Esty and 2/Lt Vernon M. Townley, Jr.

Sandy explained that she and her sister, Lissa Palombo and husband Ray had traveled from Detroit, MI to attend the reunion after learning about it on Facebook. Sandy and Lissa's mother had married 2/Lt. Johnson and was remarried after Johnson was killed. The women shared that their mother had never gotten over the loss. The two desired information on 2/Lt. Johnson. 501<sup>st</sup> BG member Walt Willard had been corresponding with one of the two even though they hadn't met. The scene became very emotional when Hickey's book told all about the mission. I also mentioned that a mission report from that day is available on the 345<sup>th</sup> BG website. For me, that moment is the main reason that I am blessed to be a part of the 345<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association. Everyone I know has the desire to help those looking for answers and information. Hopefully Jim, Mary, Walt and I were able to help answer some questions. The last incident I want to share is one of the main reasons I attended the reunion. Most of you are aware of the EAA's exhibit of the 345<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group archives. You all would be proud of the display. Several months ago, Jim

Bina asked me if I knew of any large model 345<sup>th</sup> BG painted B-25 which might be loaned to the EAA museum display. I just happened to know that Marvin Loomis of Mankato, KS had an excellent flying model. Mr. Loomis made the 101" wingspan 500<sup>th</sup> BS "Seabiscuit" several years ago in honor of his friend Rex Weaverling. Weaverling was the brother-in-law of Finley C. Smith, Jr. who was killed along with the rest of crew of "Seabiscuit" on April 6, 1945, off the coast of China while on a mission to sink the Japanese destroyer "Amatsukaze". The plane is fully functional with operational landing gear, gear doors, bomb bay doors and cowl flaps. It truly is an impressive airplane painted just like the original B-25. Mr. Loomis graciously agreed to loan the plane for the duration of the 345<sup>th</sup> BG exhibit. Marvin and I traveled to Oshkosh in his pickup to deliver the plane to the museum. I don't know if Marvin enjoyed the trip or not. I did since he drove the 700 miles to and from. My unofficial job was to talk, which I did.

This brings up my final point. I believe all attendees were really impressed with the museum display. All of you would be proud. My favorite item is the 754 dog tags displayed on the wall. One tag for everyone lost from the 345<sup>th</sup> BG during WWII. Each tag has the individual's name, rank and occupation and is organized by squadron. Many photos from Bob Bynum's endless photo  
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collection adorn the walls. Since you now know that the items are well taken care of, please consider sending your items for loan. We would like to rotate the collection from time to time to keep it fresh. Thanks again for special memories.

## The Highlights of My Time During WWII

*By Al Stone, 500<sup>th</sup>*



The 345th was moving as a unit from Clark Field in the Philippines to Subic Bay, which was run by the Navy. It was a beautiful deep water port. We loaded onto a LST (landing ship tank). We spent a couple of hours driving all of vehicles and other supplies onto the LSTs. A total of eight LSTs were loaded and went as a convoy to Ie Shima off the north coast of Okinawa. This is where the American journalist, Ernie Pyle was killed. We sailed all day and night and the second day about mid-day, we got an announcement over the loud speaker that we were off the southern tip of Okinawa. Three of us went up on deck to take a look. As we stood there, there was a battle going on. The terrain was

mountainous, with airplanes diving and explosions all around. We watched a couple of minutes and then noticed about 200 ft. away that there were splashes in the water. They were firing at us! After seeing four or five splashes, we went to the other side of the ship for a bit of cover in case we got hit. After a few minutes, the shelling stopped. Later that afternoon, we pulled into the harbor and unloaded. We got on shore and found out that our tent area was not ready yet, so we stayed near the harbor in a tent. We ate dinner and went to bed with mosquito netting covering all the beds. At one end of the tent there was a 100' high pile of coral, used for air strips and roads because the mud made it impossible to transverse. At the other end of tent was a 90mm anti-aircraft gun pointed straight up in the air. I didn't pay much attention to it, there were guns everywhere. That night after dinner, I went to bed. Since it was tropical country, I went to sleep in just my underwear. Everything was fine until around midnight when we woke up to boom, boom, boom! It was the gun at the end of the tent firing. The sky lit up with every boom. I grabbed my shoes, helmet and gas mask and ran out of the tent. It was an air raid. I heard gun fire everywhere, daylight with each boom. It was cloudy and I could see planes coming out through the clouds and I was standing there in my underwear. When I first arrived in the Philippines, I was told that if during an air raid you

heard a whoosh, whoosh, whoosh sound, it meant a bomb was coming straight for you. I heard whoosh, whoosh, whoosh, so I laid down in the mud and tried to dig in to cover myself up. After 30 seconds or a minute and not feeling a concussion, I figured the bomb must have hit by now. So I stood up, covered in mud, still hearing the boom, boom, boom, and looked around for a better place to hide. There was an 8'-10' pile covered with a tarpaulin. As I got under it, I felt wooded boxes, which I figured were food supplies. I stayed in there a couple of minutes, the firing stopped and we got the all clear. I got out and since the showers were closed, I cleaned off the best I could with a canteen of water. Everything was okay, so we all went back to bed. In the morning, I was able to take a shower, eat breakfast, and went to look where I had been hiding the day before. I checked under the tarpaulin and the boxes were loaded with ammunition for the big gun at one end of tent. I decided I needed to find a better place to hide! I found a broken down truck that was just left there and decided that would be my new place to hide. We figured out that the woosh, woosh, woosh was a bomb that went over my head and hit a pile of coral, and that was a couple of hundreds of yards away. No one was hurt and later that day we moved to our permanent tent area.

We had a bunch of good guys in our tent and they dug a 10' fox  
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hole. We used a discarded piece of sheet metal and put sand bags on it. We felt we had a safe fox hole to get in. During the course of the next month, one airplane kept coming by at night just to drop bombs to annoy us. They would fly along in a Betty Bomber. There were two or three search lights played on it from the group. You could see anti-aircraft explosions all around it, but we never knocked one down, but I'm sure they were full of holes. Our Navy Picket boats and our night fighters always lost the plane at the same location each night. They finally found the island the plane was coming from and the bombing stopped. A few months later the war ended.

There was a point system in place to decide who got to go home. The longer you were overseas, the more points you had. I did not have enough points, so I was assigned to a general in Bomber Command in Okinawa. I never saw the General and it was pretty easy work. I got assigned to a tent with no floors. Just dirt, but it was clean. Maybe a little dusty but it was fine. They gave me a foot locker to put stuff in and I shoved it under the bed.

There was a Sherman tank with no treads next to the tent, which was just left it there. We were up on a bluff and there was a gorgeous beach in one direction and a PT base in the other direction. It was just beautiful. We'd work during the day time until noon, have lunch and then go back to the tent to write a letter or take a nap. One day I took my

foot locker out and looked under the bed. A little piece of metal was sticking up out of the dirt, so I got out my combat knife and started digging around it. It was a rounded piece. I knew a battle had gone on and there was junk all over the place. I finally figured out after digging down a couple of inches that it was a land mine. I reported this to headquarters and they told us to get out of there. They called in the mine experts. They dug it up and took it down to the beach and blew it up. I had been sliding my foot locker over and over it! I was told the mine had tipped over 60 degrees, so the plunger was not up in the air. Someone didn't want me up above or down below! I am 92 years old.

I was lucky. I came back and had two good jobs. My wife and I had an airplane, and one day we flew from our hanger in the Boston area to Portland, Maine. On the way back, flying at the right altitude, we got about halfway back. I could see down, but could not see straight ahead as the sun was in my face. I knew where I was and decided to follow a highway back home. All of a sudden, about 100' off our left wing, a fighter plane came by at the same altitude from the opposite direction! I ducked down below 1000 feet, knowing military aircraft must fly above 1000 feet. Once again someone didn't want me up above or down below! I'm now working on my next 92 years.



## George J. Hurt Autobiography, Part 2 Continued Training in Carlsbad, NM and Columbia, SC

*By Perry Hurt, 500<sup>th</sup>*

This excerpt is from the papers of my father George J Hurt, bombardier for the 500<sup>th</sup> 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 is 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.

[From Victorville] Half the class went directly to B-17s and on to Europe. The remainder were sent  
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to Carlsbad, NM for navigation training.

From Carlsbad I received my first opportunity to show the folks at home what a lieutenant looked like [leave to Roanoke, VA]. For ten days I supposedly awed them.

The school at Carlsbad hadn't been completely setup when we returned, but the wheel must not stop turning, so for six weeks we carefully listened as instructors stuffed us with ways and means of leaving one point, finding another, and eventually returning to the original. We then made several practice flights. By that time we could be trusted to direct a plane to the extreme end of the field and return without becoming lost.

About this time I met a luscious apple at one of the local swimming pools. Shortly [thereafter] we were deemed to be qualified navigators and sent to Columbia, SC. The apple never became ripe.

After ten days in Roanoke [on leave] I arrived in Columbia. At the time everyone seemed to be in a slight daze, or at least it seemed so to me. John Landt, my roommate at Carlsbad arrived the same day and we proceeded to learn more about the art of destroying the enemy. It was the popular opinion at the time that most of us would wind up in North Africa. I personally didn't really think of the Pacific. Any place would suit me except the Aleutians. Weather was too bad there for anything but ducks.

After a couple weeks of review classes we were assigned to crews. Lt Whitman as pilot, Lt.

[Jack] Tackaberry as co-pilot, myself as bombardier-navigator, Sgt Peyton as engineer, Sgt Bailey, Radio, and Sgt Vojinovich [sp?] as Gunner. Whit was a damn good fellow, but only average as a pilot. He just didn't seem to have the high skill required for the type work we were to do. It was always my personal opinion he would have been best in a heavier plane. One thing he did excel in, instrument flying. Don't believe I've flown with anyone before or since that could top him. Jack was a big happy bird that liked to laugh. He was an excellent pilot, but had one fault. He just didn't realize the airplane would kill him. Peyton was a kinda quiet fellow. Everyone liked him. Bailey was one of the best radio men I've ever seen. He could at times when it suited him make a radio set do anything. Only fault was that he seldom received the urge. Vojinovich was just a kid, eighteen. I never had the opportunity to see him in action. One specialty he did have, dice. He could make them do

anything. Guess the great part of his luck was spent on them, for he definitely did not have any when it came his turn.

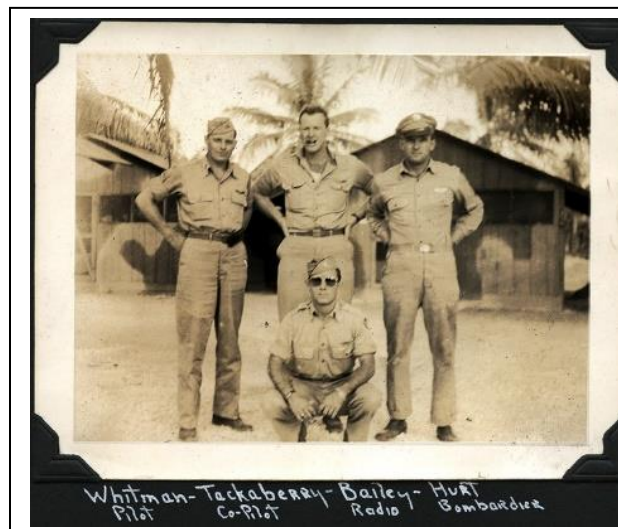
As a crew we did very well. Each had at least one thing in common. A desire to do as little as possible. Frequently this was exceedingly hard to accomplish.

A week or so after the crew was assembled we began phase training. This included numerous training missions deemed necessary by the higher command. The first few weeks weren't bad. No gasoline to fly with. Dear Heir Hitler's subs were very active off the Florida Coast.

[George Hurt's autobiographical sketch ends at this point and he starts his diary and log book of flights in the Pacific.]

[Next, across the Pacific and first missions.]

Happy  
Halloween



Whitman (Pilot), Tackaberry (Co-Pilot) and Bailey (Radio). In front is George J. Hurt (Bombardier)

## From Columbia AFB to Overseas – Part 4a

(cont. from June '16 issue)

*By George Givens, 498<sup>th</sup>*

Everything we ate from here on came out of cans or boxes. Also, with every meal we were given a little yellow pill called Atabrine, it was used to prevent malaria. The old-timers told us with a wink and a whisper that, "Them little yellow sonovabeetches would make you sterile". We kind of suspected this was scuttlebutt but one thing for sure; they did turn our skin yellow as a blind Chinaman. The equatorial sun tanning us, mixed with the yellow dye of the pills, our skin took on a peculiar tint indeed. What a remarkable difference in skin tone between us new arrivals and the old-timers. They flew us back to Nadzab, New Guinea, about 50 miles from Lae. For the next few days we practiced skip bombing and strafing at the range out in the Markham Valley near Nadzab. We asked what do we do with the high level leather and fleece lined flight uniforms we were given in the states? They told us to fly over the jungle and throw them out! You weren't going to need them over here! What a waste.

One morning we were taken to the mission briefing tent. We were finally going on a "mission" over Japanese held territory. We were going to drop propaganda leaflets, no bombing or strafing. Furthermore, we were to make our drop from 5,000 feet altitude, well out of range of any small arms fire, if any at all. It had been

many months since previous crews reported any hostile fire. However, there was always a chance for some kind of enemy action, we were told. It was to be our introduction to possible hostilities, a very gentle approach to combat. The obvious disdain and nonchalance the briefing personal exhibited about this kind of mission put us slightly more at ease. This was V Bomber Commands way of introducing new replacement combat crews to probable enemy action. Just to make us wet our lips a little they added there was always that chance, of a one in a million round, of small arms fire hitting a plane or person in a vital spot.

An experienced pilot took the command pilots seat (the left flying seat), Gruer took the right seat (co-pilots), Big John (Holdener) and Little John (Hart), nicknames we finally hung on them because of their obvious sizes, were also in the front behind the pilots. To get to the rear of the B-25, during flight, one had to crawl over the bomb bay which was very tight indeed. Frank (Holz), Willie (Sainato) and I (Gibby) were in the waist area with the two other gunners, one the radio gunner in the waist and the other, the turret gunner, in the rear turret. We entered from the back floor hatch behind the bomb bay.

(A note about the B-25, Dad and I were at a local airport in the Pittsburgh area about 20 years ago. The owners gave us permission to get inside and "check it out". It was the first time

I was ever inside a B-25. He sat in the pilot's seat and I in the co-pilot's seat. Dad is 150 pounds about 5'-10" tall with a medium frame and I'm 225 and 6'-1" with a wide frame. Our shoulders touched each other! I was surprised how narrow the fuselage was. I expected there to be at least 6" between our shoulders. I also climbed above the bomb bay at that time and barely made it through to the rear compartment. I know they were skinny guys that came out of the depression, but boy, there is very little space between the bomb bay and the top of the fuselage. I could not imagine what it would have been like to squeeze thru there, with a fleece lined jacket, that the guys in the Mediterranean flew as they did fly their missions at 10,000 feet and would have needed the bigger bulky jackets plus the harness for your parachute and while flying, possibly evasive maneuvers!)

Our three, B-25's took off and headed for the "target" area in the jungle hill country where the remnants of Nip soldiers barely existed. There was no organized resistance at all. Occasionally a half starved Jap would surrender, thus the propaganda leaflets we were going to drop to encourage them to come in. The Mitchells we flew in were retired from combat flying because of age and wear and tear. These were old B-25C's and D's which had the upper turret in the back of the aircraft. The latter models, especially, the B-25J's had the upper turret up  
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front right behind the pilots. It was pretty crowded in the back with extra gunners and the upper turret. I was in the right aircraft of the three plane flight and as we made or run over the target area our bomb bay doors rumbled down open and thousands of leaflets went tumbling out like a snow storm in the jungle. A mile below was unbroken jungle. There were no fields or clearings to be seen anywhere, only the green double canopy of the jungle with a wisp of white steam or fog issuing up from bogs and swamps unseen below.

I was looking around for muzzle flashes in the shaded areas but could not detect any, everything looked peaceful below. I thought just because I could not see any did not mean that there were not any rounds coming up at us from unseen enemy. Just for the hell of it, I drew out my .45 caliber automatic pistol from my shoulder holster, held it with both hands, stuck it out the waist window and emptied the clip of eight rounds into the jungle below. The rest of the crew in the waist looked at me in amused amazement.

"Them bastards might be shooting at us, so I'm letting them have it back." I said. They just looked at me and grinned. And thus were my first shots of WWII fired.

The next 7 or 8 "missions" we flew were like this interposed with more skip bombing and strafing practice and a couple of real bombing missions dropping 100 pound bombs on known Japanese positions near Wewak, supporting

the Aussies. These "missions" were not considered combat missions.

All the while we were processing along in the rear area echelon of the V Bomber Command pipeline we kept hearing of some hot-shot B-25 group that had an Indian sounding name, Air Apaches. They said they were a front line outfit that went for the Jap jugular in skip bombing and strafing attacks. The 345<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, Air Apaches with a large Indian head painted on the tail of their aircraft was spoken with some kind of awe in the rear areas, their exploits and valor were legend. We did not know it yet, but our orders had already been cut for us as replacements for this famed group. We were braves being funneled into the Apache camp.

Another phase of our training in New Guinea was jungle survival. Australian bush soldiers were in charge of this operation. They assembled the entire group of replacements and marched us out into the nearby jungle for a two day overnight exercise. The Aussies purposely avoided the known trails and blazed our way through virgin jungle, hacking their way through with machetes, explaining that if we ever got shot down or had to bail out over the jungle there would not be any well-worn trails for us to follow.

For all of us, it was our first trek in the jungle. The first impression of the senses for me was the odor of decay. A jungle lives on the decay of its past life. The second thing was the oppressive heat and

very high humidity. At our bivouac area in the Markham valley camp the terrain was a wide open grassy valley, and although we are only 7 degrees south of the equator, we at least had a breeze even if it did feel as though it issued forth from a blast furnace. Here in the equatorial jungle under a double canopy of 120 foot tall trees there was no hint of a breeze. The only blessing was the fact that the trees also shut out any chance of sunshine. The foliage was so dense that it lent a twilight kind of gloom and everything hung limp like a wet wash rag. The next thing to strike the senses was the jungle sounds, the eerie squawking and shrill cries of the unseen bird life. But worst of all was the insect life, especially, the no seeums. The odor, heat, light, humidity and sweat were mild, compared to these pesky devils. They swarmed around our faces and got in our ears and noses, mouths and eyes, down the backs of our shirts and up under our arms under our cuffs.

I was about in the middle of our the single file column and what amazed me was after 25 or 30 men had passed before me, I was the one who walked face first into a spider web! Toward mid-morning we hiked through a swampy area for 2 or 3 miles. The muck was ankle deep and slimy black. Occasionally, there would be a curse when someone tripped over a hidden root and fell into the smelly slime. We green-horns had one hell of a time keeping up with the Aussie guides and they  
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were the ones blazing the trail. Secretly, I thought to myself, I'm so happy I don't have to fight my war in this slimy mess. My regards for the poor dogface Infantryman went up another notch.

After we slogged through the bog we came to a small clearing and the Aussies called for a break. I took an instant liking for the Australians, especially, their lingo. It's a kind of a cross between an Irish brogue and Cockney dialect and their particular jingoisms that I found pleasing to my ear.

Although we did not realize it, they said, all around us was food and water. We were amazed because all we could see was green jungle. With one whack of his machete one of them cut a tall green reed, picked it up quickly and held it over his open mouth and let liquid flow in. "Do it yourselves." He commanded. It was the sweetest, coolest water I could ever imagine finding in the jungle. They showed us how to recognize wild berries, celery, breadfruit, bananas and papayas. The bananas were small and green but good to eat. The papayas tasted like a cross between cantaloupe and peaches. It was all right there at our feet. They also showed us what not to eat, and this was as important as what to eat, things that looked good but would make you terribly ill or even fatal. In a final instruction they told us to observe what the monkeys and birds ate.

Late in the afternoon we came to a large clearing. One of the Aussies yelled out loud in pig English and little black men began

appearing out of the bush all around us. They are very small with bushy heads of hair. They wore breech cloths and twine belts in which they all carried their machetes. They are also the ugliest people I had ever seen. They are like pygmies. One of the Aussies yelled, "You belong a numba one boss man." And they all gathered around him. He issued more orders I did not understand and they all disappeared back into the jungle as mysteriously as they appeared. Presently we heard much hacking and cutting sounds out there. A guide asked us if we saw or heard any of the Bushmen on our hike today, and all of us, not one of us saw them. They had been with us all day knowing that they would be needed to build our shelter for the night and there would be pay in it for them. The whacking sounds diminished and the little Bushmen came into our camp site and erected a bamboo and palm leaf shelter in 15 minutes or less. It was 2 feet above the ground and kept us perfectly dry during a night time rain squall.

The next stop along the pipeline of replacements was Biak Island near the Northwestern tip of New Guinea. After we were quartered and had some time to kill, we went to the lovely beach, nearby, to swim. One hundred yards off the beach was the bow of a sunken Japanese barge protruding about 25 feet above the surf, a perfect diving board. Three or four of us frolicked around for an hour or so and wondered why no one else

seemed to be taking advantage of this amusement. We painfully found out a few hours later, a bunch of lily white numbskulls, fresh from the winter states (remember its February), under the blazing hot equatorial sun, were turned beet red. We had the worst case of sunburn any of us had in our lives and when we went to the medics for some lotion, we got our dumb red butts chewed out royally. We suffered for that swim for days afterward.

The next move along the transit line was a refueling stop at the Halmahera Islands, halfway between New Guinea and the Philippine Islands. One thing I noticed on these moves was how apparent the recent fighting took place. The closer we came to the front lines the more battlefield evidence of heavy fighting remained, especially around the airfields where the fighting was most intense. The palm trees for hundreds of yards around were broken and shredded and pock marked with numerous bullet holes. Burned out vehicles and destroyed Japanese aircraft were still evident. After we refueled we loaded up and headed for Leyte Island, Philippine Islands. The date is February 22, 1945; the marines started their assault of Iwo Jima, three days before. The Pacific was not holding up to its name, and the war was getting even bloodier.

The aircraft we traveled in was a C-47 transport, better known in WWII as the gooney bird. The pilot named his plane "So What", and it was painted in big white letters on  
(con't on next page)

either side of the cockpit. Aboard "So What" were 18 replacements, 3 crews, plus the crew of 3 for the plane. We occupied bench seats on either side of the cargo compartment. Behind each seat was a small Plexiglas window. The window had a 4" round hole in the center protected by a rubber gasket. These holes were to be used for firing rifles or machine guns if the aircraft ever came under attack. However, this was a desperate attempt to "protect" the aircraft because aiming would have been by pure luck. The other 18 men that came overseas were in another C-47 and we flew together.

(Part 4b to be continued in the next issue!)

## DEPARTURES

Mike Dillard reported that his father, Frank Dillard, was killed in a traffic accident on May 1, 2016, while vacationing in North Carolina. Frank was an organizer and past president of the 345<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group. His obituary can be viewed at <http://bluefuneralhome.com/2016/frank-l-dillard/>.



Nancy Baird Ingram reported that Perle Baird, wife of Lt. Col. Julian Baird, passed away on May 14<sup>th</sup>. Lt. Col. Baird was the designer of the 499<sup>th</sup> Bats Outa Hell insignia shown below.



## TEST YOUR WWII KNOWLEDGE

*(see answers below)*

1. The nations involved in the war formed two opposing alliances. What were they called?
2. How many years did WWII last?
3. How many different countries were involved in the conflict?
4. Who first used the phrase "the war to end all wars"?
5. Who was the U.S. president when Pearl Harbor was attacked?

Answers:

1. Axis and Allies. The two major powers were the Axis (Germany, Italy and Japan) and the Allies (the U.S., Britain, France, China and the USSR).
2. Six. The war lasted six years, from 1939 to 1945.
3. 30. By the end of the war, more than 30 countries across the globe were involved in the fight between the Allies and the Axis.
4. Woodrow Wilson. The quote is often used to describe WWII is attributed to President Woodrow Wilson, but he wasn't actually talking about WWII. He was referring to WWI.
5. Franklin D. Roosevelt. Harry Truman was vice president and became the 33<sup>rd</sup> president when FDR died in 1945.

***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!

**345<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association**  
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(Please specify the name and squadron of your 345<sup>th</sup> veteran and/or tell us about yourself) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Dues are \$15 per year for 345<sup>th</sup> 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 345<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association and send it with this application page to:

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