



AIR APACHES

STRAFER

Volume 34, Issue 1

February 2017

New 345th Book on the Horizon, Opportunity to Contribute

By James Bina, 501st

Once in a while an opportunity comes along that you just can't ignore. Someone once said, "When opportunity knocks, don't send your kids to the door..." This is an opportunity we are not ignoring.

A noted WWII aviation author, Jay A. Stout, has approached the 345th to express great interest in writing a book about our beloved Air Apaches. His works include eleven published aviation and military-related books and he has been recognized by the Smithsonian Institution as a leading author in this genre. After careful deliberation, the board of the 345th has decided to collaborate with Mr. Stout in this endeavor.

No major books about the history of the 345th have been published since Lawrence Hickey's "Warpath Across the Pacific" that is admittedly a hard act to follow. Many of us consider Hickey's book to be "the bible" of the 345th because of its accuracy and breadth.

However, it has been thirty-plus

years since Hickey's final edition went to press and since then new information, facts, and stories have come forth thanks to diligent researchers, veterans who are just now telling their stories, and families of veterans discovering valuable history. And, yes the advent of the internet has had something to do with it, too. We think it is time that someone new puts fingers to the keyboard to present the Air Apaches in a fresh way with updated information.

Mr. Stout, Jay, requests your assistance in this project. He is seeking information from our veterans, family members, and friends to bring new light to the adventure of the Air Apaches. His letter of introduction and contact information is below and he is eager to hear from you.

Please note this one very important item! Jay requests that you only send COPIES AND IMAGES of documents, stories, and photos. Do not send the original items! With today's technology it is easier to send a copy electronically and the risk of losing those valuable items is greatly reduced. Once again, please do not send original items!

Check out Mr. Stout's website at: <https://www.jayastout.com/>

LETTER FROM AUTHOR,
JAY A. STOUT:

Dear 345th Bomb Group members, families and friends:

My name is Jay A. Stout. I am a successful aviation writer and historian with nearly a dozen mainstream books to my credit, as well as a twenty-year career as a military pilot. My specialty is World War II aviation and my work has been well-received. Air & Space Smithsonian said this about my book on the 352nd Fighter Group: "This may be the finest book yet written about the air war over Europe during World War II."

The actions of the 345th in the Pacific have always interested me and, although there already exist some good works, I am interested in doing a fresh new book about the group. However, doing so will be more difficult than in years past simply because so many of the veterans have passed. That being the case, I will need to rely extensively on what friends and family can share in terms of letters, diaries, memoirs, etc. It is these sorts of personal recollections and contemporaneous observations that make a book of this sort interesting and readable.

(con't on next page)

I hope that you will be willing to participate as I think the 345th's actions deserve more visibility. If the response is robust enough, I would be able to start writing in the next month or so. Typically it takes about a year for me to research and write a manuscript, and another eight months or so for it to get through the publishing process.

Again, material from the veterans is paramount to this effort. But I cannot accept originals as they are too valuable and I do not want to take the risk that they might be lost or damaged in shipping. However, I would be happy to pay for copying and postage costs, if you would prefer to send them via the postal service. E-mail scans, however, are best. Also, if there are veterans who are willing and able to do telephone interviews, I'd certainly be interested in doing so.

Thank you for considering my request. I very much hope that there is enough interest/response for me to take this project on, and I look forward to doing so. I can be reached by email at:

jayastout@usa.net and by snail mail at the address listed below.

Kind regards,
Jay A. Stout
LtCol (Ret) USMC
11874 Bridgewood Way
San Diego, CA 92128



Jay Stout

President's Message

By Mary Sloan Roby, 500th



A very happy 2017 to our 345th members and friends! First, I have some big news for our group. Last fall, the IRS approved our application to change from 501(c)(19) status as a veterans' organization to 501(c)(3) status as a non-profit organization.

This means that we will be more likely to receive contributions and grants from businesses and foundations that we might not have received previously. Having this ability will help us raise funds to further our collection of WWII memorabilia and artifacts and to share them with institutions, as we have done for the past two years with the Experimental Aircraft Association in Oshkosh, WI.

As veterans of the 345th make decisions about dispersal of their WWII correspondence and mementoes, our organization plans to explore and share possibilities of places—libraries and museums—where they might share their items. If we are to understand and preserve the important history of the HQ, 498th, 499th, 500th, and 501st squadrons of the 345th we want to be sure that these precious items will be taken care of and, as much as is possible, available for research

and exhibition.

Jim Bina is our historian. If you or any of your family members are pondering what to do with your items, please contact Jim (jamesbina@verizon.net) as he may be able to help you evaluate your options. It's important to remember that artifacts and ephemera (paper items like letters, orders, and other documents) might need to go to different places. Libraries are less likely to want three-dimensional items like jackets, medals, and equipment, while museums may prefer these as they make more compelling exhibits.

In addition to helping our members and veterans find homes for their items, we are looking into possible locations for temporary or permanent exhibits showcasing the important history of the 345th Bomb Group. We welcome your inquiries about your collections of 345th items and look forward to hearing from you and helping you assure the continued respect they deserve.

mroby1916@gmail.com

Do You Have Info?

By Bob Sweet, 499th

Two families have contacted me requesting information on a family member who served with the 499th in New Guinea. Any information on the following two men will be helpful and forwarded.

Tech. Sgt. Milton Wickhorst was a crew member on "The Snatch". I mailed copies of pages from Larry Hickey's "Warpath Across the
(con't on next page)

Pacific" (pg. 31, 32) to one family. These pages note how Wickhorst and the crew saved a disabled aircraft and landed safely.

Herbert Walker is the other airman. There is no info in the referenced work, but his family indicated he was wounded while being transported from Biak to Leyte on the S.S. Thomas Nelson. Hickey's book (pg. 234, 235) describes the Kamikaze attack on the S.S. Nelson, and I mailed copies of those pages to the family.

My e-mail is sweet@hood.edu, and any information will be appreciated. Thank you and the very best in the New Year.

Airplane Art

By Kelly McNichols, 500th

I have always been fascinated with airplane art and color schemes. For me the pinnacle of the form is found on WWII aircraft. Most of the art was fashioned in the field by gifted young men, the majority stationed far from home. I am curious how many of those individuals became professional artists after service. I read somewhere that artists working for Disney Studios fashioned some of the nose art for the European planes as their part for the war effort.

If you were fortunate enough to have attended the recent 345th BG reunion in Oshkosh, WI, you may remember seeing the salvaged nose art panels displayed in the EAA museum exhibit. Some farsighted individual saved several dozen examples from aircraft destined for the scrapyard by

chopping them from the planes with an ax or similar tool. Even though the perimeter was rough, the art was splendid. I spent quite a bit of time viewing them. Most appeared to be examples from B-24s.

I was privileged to have met two of the individuals who created the art on some of the 500th Bomb Squadron's planes. Pete Luciano told me once that he painted the nose art on "Mexican Spitfire". My friend and former POW, Ben Muller, said that was his favorite plane. I believe he painted other planes in the Squadron. Luciano autographed my "Warpath Across the Pacific" book on the page with the photo of the plane when I met him in Washington, DC in 2005. I think it was the only time I spoke with him and in retrospect, I regret not asking more questions.

500th BS member Bob Scudder shared with me that he had painted the "Rough Raider" snorting mustang logo on the tails of the original planes sent to the Southwest Pacific Area. I know nothing about how his art was selected. Scudder autographed my copy of Hickey's book on a page showing his art. Like my thoughts concerning Pete Luciano, I wished I would have asked Bob for more details about the incident. I was so new to the organization, I didn't know what I didn't know. I remember reading in Scudder's obituary that he was a commercial artist for a career. Obviously, the man had recognizable talent.

The 345th BG undoubtedly had many artists who contributed to

the colorful aircraft which flew against the Japanese, but I'd like to concentrate on three. When I first became an honorary member of the 500th BS, I was told that the original name for the group was the "Treetop Terrors". Several of the gentlemen I spoke with were less than enthusiastic with the name. However, in reading Hickey's book, I learned that radio gunner T/Sgt Hobart R. Bartlett from the 501st BS won the competition on February 27, 1944 to name the Group. I believe that after the War, Mr. Bartlett became the mayor of Burleson, TX and served in that capacity from 1962-1968. A few years ago, while collecting artifacts for the 345th BG exhibit at the EAA museum, Linda Bynum sent photos from the Bob Bynum collection which included several photos of the "Treetop Terrors" sign. They were the only photos I've seen of the logo. There was also a copy of a mimeographed newsletter with the logo. If anyone has more information concerning this first name for the Group, let one of the officers know.

All of us recognize the "Air Apache" Type I logo which was designed by 498th BS member Sgt Charles Pushetonequa. While assistant crew chief, he won the design competition in July of 1944. In reading about Mr. Pushetonequa after the War, he evidently continued in his art. There are several references to him in books on Native American art and featured artist in local art shows in Tama, IA. I don't know if this was
(con't on next page)

his profession or just a hobby. I think he passed away in August 1987.

Cpl Charles O. Metzal with HQ Group Intelligence was the artist who designed the Type II “Air Apache” logo found on the planes late in the war. Personally, I think that this is the most beautiful of the three. In reading about the history in Hickey's book, Mr. Metzal took many of Pusheton-equa's ideas from the Type I head and refined them. To me this is an example of less is more. Cpl Metzal distilled the “Air Apache” logo to its essential form—a simple design, but also elegant. Nothing was there that didn't need to be. Evidently patterns were made and circulated to the four squadrons for them to recreate the logo. This undoubtedly led to the artistic license seen in the many different versions of the head. If you look closely at the various photos of the planes, quite a few alterations can be noted. Some examples have more bear claws, some less. Some have more feathers in the headdress, some less. Even though I've tried, I haven't found any information on Mr. Metzal's occupation following the War. I think he passed away in 2001.

If you are interested in seeing flying models painted in 345th BG colors, you can view photos on the internet of the B-25 “Apache Princess” which sports a Type I head. The planes “Show Me”, “Betty's Dream” and “In the Mood” are painted with a Type II head on the tail. “Tondelayo” wears the “Snorting Mustang”

logo of the 500th Bomb Squadron. Mid America Air Museum in Liberal, KS displays “Iron Laiden Maiden” with a Type II head.

I constructed a Rat Rod (look it up) a couple of years ago which sports my version of the Type II head. Because of the difficulty I encountered in attempting to recreate the logo, I have great admiration for the artists who painted the originals. Even though it's not yet shown, I plan to add the Bomb Group and Squadrons to the panel. In displaying this historic logo, it is my desire to show the respect I have for and to remember those who served with the 345th BG. Hopefully those who see it will ask questions and I can relate the story of the “Air Apaches”.



Kelly's Rat Rod

Never Forgotten

By Sandy Knudson, 501st

I grew up with my parents and my two sisters in a modest house on Greenfield Road in Berkley, Michigan. Like most children growing up in the post war 1950's, we found adventure everywhere. One special place was the attic. That rectangle of wood on the

ceiling in the utility room, the metal chain hanging down, a round metal ring at the end, was just out of our reach. So Mom or Dad would give it a tug and down came the attic door. We pulled the stubborn steps down, squeaking their hello, until the first wood step met the floor.

Then up we went on the narrow steps to explore all the treasures stowed away in dust, dark and clutter. Off to the far left side was a hallowed space where Mom's cedar chest stood and where it still sets today, now for over sixty years. When we opened the top, the scent of musty cloth drifted upward. We knew the contents of that cedar chest were full of memories and meaning. Inside there were two army uniforms. One was Dad's army uniform from World War II. Our dear Dad, Wally Knudsen, was injured in basic training and was not sent overseas.

There was a second uniform inside. We knew it was Andy's. There were also a few photographs of him, like the ones in the old album in the living room with its black pages and photographs tucked in with little paper corners. Lt. Andrew Johnson was a man we never met, except through the words of our mother. Words that told of her first love, who she married in 1942 at age nineteen and how they traveled the country after he enlisted in the Army Air Force. They traveled to airfields in Gainesville, Asheville, San Antonio and finally Sacramento. His pilot training for
(con't on next page)

the Army Air Force complete, Andy went to the South Pacific as part of the 345th bomb group, 501st Black Panther Squadron. He arrived in January 1945 and flew B-25 Mitchell bombers. They were huge, loud planes. The pilot's job was to fly the plane, fire the front guns and drop the skip bombs and parachute bombs on the enemy targets.

On April 28 1945, after flying low to successfully sink a Japanese ship, Andy's plane came under intense anti-aircraft fire. It disintegrated in mid-air. This mission was described in detail in R. E. Peppy Blount's book (1984), *We Band of Brothers*. Peppy Blount flew on this mission as well and his account tells it best: "Lt. Johnson, flying on Col. Coltharp's wing, dropped his first bomb at a five hundred ton freighter and his last three bombs at a twenty three hundred ton freighter transport, docked at the main wharves on the south bank of the river. The first fell short, the second skipped up to the water line and the third bounced up on the deck. The ship was loaded with ammunition or other explosives, and it blew up with a violent explosion, and immediately disappeared as if it had never existed. Lieutenant Johnson was hit by a massive flak burst of heavy caliber coming off his attack on this ship, and his right engine caught fire. The crippled airplane climbed to one thousand feet altitude where it drew the attention of every enemy gun in the Saigon Harbor! At that moment a Zero got on his tail, and had fired three long

bursts at the airplane before I could come to his rescue.

'Johnson, Johnson' I yelled into the inter-ship radio. 'Get out! Bail out! Get out of that airplane!' As I closed to within fifty feet of the cockpit, we could not see anyone at the controls. Like a ghost ship that seemingly was flying itself, both the pilot and the copilot had taken a direct hit from a massive round of explosive flak, that either blew them out of their seats or caused them to slump over and out of sight.

'Get out! Bail out Johnson! Do you hear me? Over.' I continued to try to reach someone, anyone, in the doomed plane. The fire that started in the right engine, had now spread over the length of the entire wing and into the fuselage, so that the airplane was now totally enveloped in fire. I stayed with the intensely burning B-25 down to two hundred feet, at which altitude a crewman attempted to bail out. The plane was so low that his chute never had a chance to open."

Mom's first love gone without a trace. Then came the dreaded telegram and the torrent of tears. Finally all that was left to touch of him was his uniform, his letters and his image in the photographs in the cedar chest in the attic.

My mother, Maggie, married our dad in 1947. The war was over. They had three daughters and moved from the small northern Michigan town of Cadillac, to the modest house in Berkley. They loved each other very much.

Mom's life with Andy was over

but he was never forgotten. Mom spoke of Andy to my sisters and me often. In my childhood diary, I have very few entries but one is from April 28, 1960. I was ten years old. It says: "Today mom said it has been fifteen years to the day Andy (mom's first husband) died."

In her late sixties, Mom had a major stroke and several others followed. She was still able to walk with minimal help but the stroke affected her thinking in some ways. She told me at that time that she thought maybe Andy had survived and was in a prison camp in the Soviet Union, not knowing where she was or how to get home to her.

Years went by. My younger sister, Sherri, lived with Mom and took care of her. One cold Michigan winter, Mom insisted that Andy was sitting on the front porch, cold and hungry. So Mom put out a plate of food and a blanket that night and on many nights to come.

As time went on and Mom was in her eighties, she began to contemplate her life history and its eventual conclusion. She would tearfully wonder what would happen when she went to heaven. She had dearly loved two wonderful men. Was she to choose one over the other when the time came to see Andy and our Dad again? It was a dreadful choice to contemplate. I told Mom that heaven would be a place where such fears and dreadful anticipation would not exist. It simply would not matter.

(con't on next page)

My older sister, Lissa, told Mom her vision: that Dad would take one of her hands and Andy the other and Mom would simply hold their hands in hers and feel only the joy of being with each of them again.



Sandy's Mom

Mom died ten years ago, in November 2006, and with her those reminders of Andy Johnson. From time to time, especially on Memorial Day, I would think of him again. On one of these occasions I looked up the 345th Bomb Group on the internet and found that they had a website and a Facebook page. One day in the summer of 2016 I saw the Facebook post about their yearly reunion. For the first time, I felt compelled to attend and to connect with others and their shared experiences. So in August, my sister, Lissa, and brother-in-law, Ray, and I traveled to Oshkosh, Wisconsin. Sherri retrieved Andy's uniform and photographs from the attic and I packed these and some letters to bring with us. We shared these with the other fine people in attendance including four WWII veterans who also flew B-25's in

Andy's bomb group. There were four squadrons in the 345th Air Apaches bomb group but no one from Andy's squadron, the Black Panthers, was present. We had a tenuous hope that someone there might have known him but it was not to be. Yet meeting the others there, hearing their stories and sharing ours, created a bond of cherished memories, heroism, love, loss and compassion.

There on the grounds of the air museum, was a B-25. We were all drawn like a magnet to this monolith of shining steel. I went up the stairs to the center of the plane, crawling back to the tail in the cramped space and imagining what it must have been like for the crew and for the tail gunner in that confined space, surrounded by steel and yet so vulnerable.



Finally, my heart filled with anticipation, I climbed up the narrow metal stairs at the front of the plane to the cockpit of the B25. Step by step, I felt as if my whole body was filling up with tears. "Are you with me, Mom?" I asked softly. "Are you with me, Andy?" Finally I was at the top of the stairs, sitting in the pilot's seat, imagining Andy's feelings on that fateful, final day and knowing how Mom had imagined it herself, over and over again. Tears flowed for Andy and for our dear mother. I

took a final breath inside that venerated space, wiped my tears, and carefully backed down the metal stairs.

The next day we packed up and drove back to Michigan, a pilgrimage fulfilled. Andy's uniform, the photographs and letters were soon to be returned to their resting place, imbued with new memories and meaning. Mom's cedar chest, in the sleepy dark, was waiting to welcome her family home.

We love and cherish our dear mother. In her honor, we remember Andy Johnson, who gave his life for his country and was never forgotten.



Andy

B-25 Heritage Project

By James Bina for Mike Buchkowski

Mike Buchkowski (500th) is looking for someone to hand off his B-25 Heritage Project, for the past untold years he has been
(con't on next page)

building B-25's in Air Apache livery. His work is extraordinary and some of his examples reside in our EAA exhibit and other prominent locations across the country. He has been doing this for quite some time and now Mike would like to share his secrets of being a master modeler to someone that would take an interest in his heritage project. Mike will divulge the details of his project and also donate his tools to the next individual, it's everything you would ever need to complete one of these models. Mike just finished my B-25, it will sit in an honored place in my home.



B-25J Lazy Daisy May of the 501st
built by Mike Buchkowski

If you are interested in taking on this project, contact Mike at (951) 567-5377 or at the mailing address below.

Mike Buchkowski
17050 Arnold Drive, Apt G204
Riverside, CA 92518

Orville Schmidt: In Memoriam

By Karl McCarty

Orville Schmidt died October 28, 2016 at the age of 92. It was by sheer coincidence that the articles on his service were being published in the Campbellsport News at the same time as his passing.



Orville Schmidt

Orville was an impressive character, who could mix humor even in the most serious of stories. He'd even laugh about getting up there in age. "You know, if you'd asked me this 20 years ago, I could have snapped some answers really quick," he said in an interview.

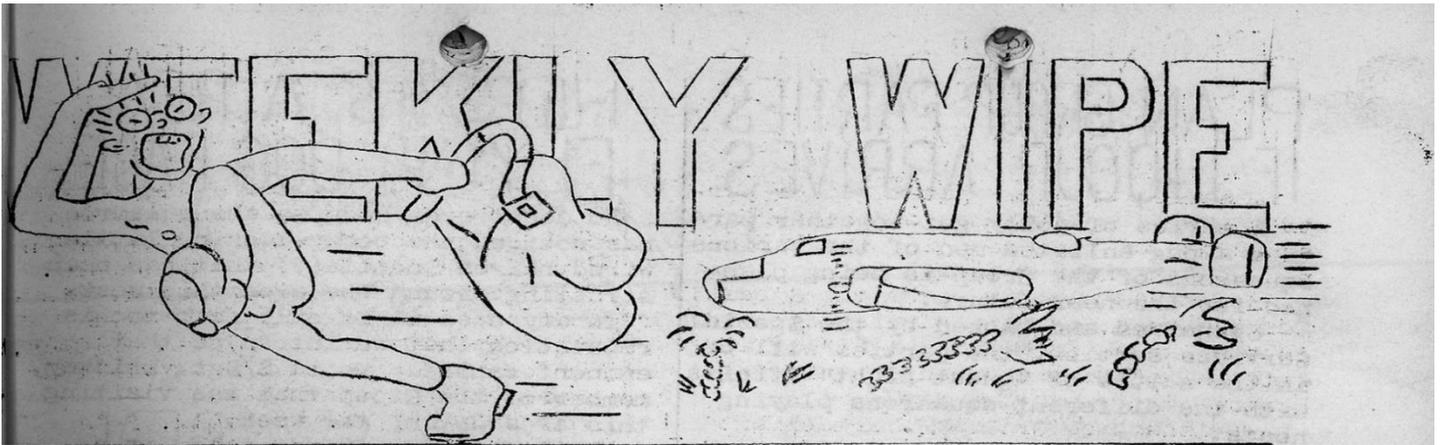
Explain Orville Schmidt. This task was put to Orville's friend Dietrich Otto, when we were driving back from our time with Orv. Dietrich went in detail: "A guy that can be proud of what he accomplished. He never brags about it, [or] mentioned what he did. And I give the guy credit that he had his own business for 20 some years. And up until," Dietrich guessed, the "last 3 or 4 years, he was very active in rebuilding old machinery, farm machinery and everything like that. I mean, you should have seen the shop in the garage right here" in Auburn. "He lived more out in the garage than anywhere else in his retirement." In addition, Orville Schmidt was a straight shooter. Dietrich said, "There was one thing that Orville didn't like, and that was a wind bag. Anybody that was trying to fill you full of BS, he'd tell 'em point blank." It was refreshing to hear Schmidt's narrative on the war, which in some case was quite frank. Such directness included his opinion on Atabrine, his willingness to share that he had died in

the war, and his ability to explain in detail what it was like to witness U.S. planes (and his buddies) crash and die underneath him.

Orville is also a reminder of the need to go beyond the obituary. Everyone has a story to tell, and it's hard to top Orville's flights over the Pacific, including flying over nuclear bombed Hiroshima. It was a blessing that he took the time to share his experience before he faded away. The 345th Bomb Group Association agreed, and personally invited him to their nationwide reunion this past August at the EAA in Oshkosh, where they gave him the VIP treatment. His appearance at the event was not just a visit; it was a pilgrimage to honor the plane he so proudly flew in: his B-25.

Lastly, there is a picture of Orville Schmidt at the EAA in August which shows him having a good time. Dozens of people who came from all over the country expressed their appreciation for his World War II service. It was a fitting climax to a great life.

Orville Schmidt was laid to rest at Auburn Cemetery, a small rural resting place just outside of Campbellsport. If you are driving east on County Y, you might miss it if you don't take the time to enjoy the simplicity. People honor veterans in different ways. If you choose to appreciate Veterans Day, but do so privately, considering making yourself acquainted with Auburn Cemetery. There's a World War II hero there who's worth the respect and time.



Reprint from the *WEEKLY WIPE*

(a weekly newsletter published by the 500th for its members); Vol. 1, No. 4, 500th Bombard-ment Squadron in the Field Oct. 3, 1943

"ROUGH RAIDERS" NEW 500th NAME

We are officially the "Rough Raiders" bomber-strafer squadron. This nickname, chosen by a committee headed by Maj. Hagest will become henceforward the guiding symbol of our squadron til victory and beyond.

The name "Rough Raiders" is suggested by Teddy Roosevelt's colorful and immortal Rough Riders, whose traditions we hope to uphold.

Nearly 100 nicknames were suggested by officers and men of the squadron and the committee had a tough time deciding. Among the runners up were Pacific Pacifiers, Roaring Hellcats, Hoppin' Hellcats, The Tip Toppers, The Red Raiders, Nip Enders, Avengers, Hellpoppers, Red Dragons, Lethal Lancers, and many others.

"Rough Raiders" will be used in all stories regarding squadron deeds, great or humble, that appear back home.

The next step is to find a suitable design or painting to

appear on all our airplanes. The field is wide open to all men of the squadron and suggestions and drawings will be welcomed. The nickname committee included Maj. Hagest, Capt. Fleury, Capt. Hanna, Capt. Hochella, and Capt. Cavoli.

MAY SOON ENJOY ICE COLD COKES

We may soon be enjoying cool cokes to help ease the coming hot season if present plans work out. A coca cola machine has been ordered in Brisbane through Quartermaster and Special Services and will be dispatched to this squadron either by air or by boat in the near future. The machine, costing 280 pounds, does all but hand back change. Fed coca cola syrup and water, it chlorinates, carbonates, and refrigerates the mix and dispenses the drink in cups. The cokes will cost six pence until the machine is paid for. With the machine comes a regular issue of 200 gallons of syrup and three carbon dioxide cylinders. An additional 100 gallons of syrup can be had every month through Quartermaster. An estimated 120 drinks can be made per gal. of syrup, so figure it out.

Idea men behind getting the machine were Lt. Duggins and Lt. Peterson. Location of the machine in the area has not yet been decided.

BUCKLEY'S BOMBERS BLAST OPPOSITION

The 500th Bombers softball team added three more victories to their list last week, defeating the 1127 M.P.s, 403rd. Squadron and Lt. Levy's "Live Wires" to make a total of 10 wins since their debut. The game against the M.P.s was a free-hitting affair with Ison pitching good ball and winning 8 to 0. Tight defense prevented the constables from turning their hits into runs.

One of the best games of the season was the contest with the fighting 403rd. outfit, with the Bombers winning 4 – 0. Ison pitched a no-hit, no-run game, and a triple by Cpl. Buckley with two men on, and singles by Coombs, Sire, and Martin accounted for all the runs.

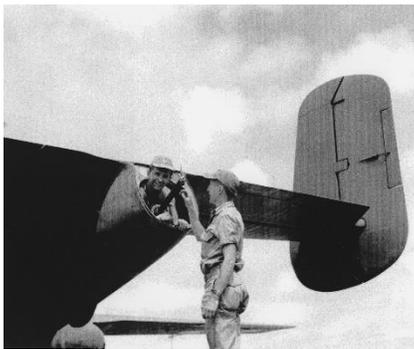
Poorest showing for the Bombers was in the game with the Live Wires" which ended in a score of 8 to 2. The Bombers' batting and fielding was bad but Ison and Levy pitched heads-up ball. Other stars for the officers were Lt. Stevenson, short stop, and

(con't on next page)

Lts. Holtzman and McLean. Sidelight of the game was the laugh Lt. Hessel had on Lt. Levy. The defeat cost the "chief live wire" not only use of his arm for a while but also 5 pounds sterling.

JOKES?

Hitler wanted his wardrobe for a second winter on the Russian front. One of his Nazis suggested that he do what Napoleon did – wear a red uniform so the blood would not show if he were wounded. "Excellent idea," Hitler said. "Bring me a pair of brown pants."



Mike Hochella and Keith Dougherty checking out a 50 caliber machine gun in the tail of Mike's plane "Stubborn Hellion."



This picture was taken from Thane Hecox's plane scoring a direct hit on a Japanese corvette (small boat). Hecox was later killed on a raid over Kaviang February 15, 1944.



From Columbia AFB to Overseas – Pre-Combat Training (con't from last issue)

By George Givens, 498th

Early in the afternoon we flew over Leyte Gulf on our approach to Tacloban Field. Below us in the gulf were ships of every description. Warships, aircraft carriers, tankers, troop transports, LST's and sundry others. The sight of all this power was awe inspiring. In the distant green hills of Leyte Island, mopping up of enemy defenders was still going on. We were getting closer and closer to our war. The day after Christmas of 1944, General MacArthur declared Leyte Island secure. This enraged the infantry men of the 8th US Army as it was to take four more months of the most savage fighting to "mop up" the remaining fully organized and armed Japanese soldiers.

The Pilot banked "So What" over the gulf and we began our final approach to Tacloban Field. As we passed over the end of the runway we seemed to be awfully high. Our decent glide was too gradual and we passed the control tower at midfield and we were still in the air. I noticed the alarmed looks on the faces of the men about me. The pilot slammed the plane onto the runway and began applying emergency braking. None of us could see ahead as to how much runway was still before us. We were traveling about 70 MPH when we ran out of runway. With the brakes fully locked on the right landing gear, the pilot desperately attempted to steer "So What"

onto the taxi way at the end of the landing strip. Our speed was too great. The aircraft spun to the right but our momentum carried us straight ahead. The landing gear collapsed under us with a rending, grinding crunch. We careened off the end of the runway and crashed into a drainage ditch. When I realized a crash was eminent I grabbed at something to hold, everything happened too fast to be afraid. The last thing I saw before being knocked unconscious was bodies flying through the air of the compartment and I was one of them.

A miracle occurred. The gooney bird did not explode and burn. We survived an airplane crash. "So What" finally came to rest on a road between 2 trucks, another miracle. Thank God we missed those trucks or it probably would have been all over for many of us on the plane. When the truck occupants made sure that we were not going to explode and burn, they came to our aid. I came to sitting on the road. How I got there I do not know. Outside of being unconscious, I seemed OK, although my shoulders hurt. Later a medic told me that my shoulders probably popped out of their sockets from the weight of my body hanging on so tight and when I let go they snapped back into place or while I was still unconscious a medic popped them back into place before I regained consciousness. I really do not remember.

Big John had his forehead split open and some other men were
(con't on next page)

bleeding also, but no one had any broken bones. We were damn lucky. We were all checked out by doctors and medics, patched up and sent on our way. The only nasty event to come out of the crash was that, while we were still unconscious, our benevolent rescuers robbed us blind. Not of our wallets, but of our .45 caliber pistols, our watches and our very expensive GI issue, Ray Ban Sunglasses! So there we are, not even on our first "real" combat mission and death was just breath away.

(A note about this "Crash" when I started going to the reunions, dad's pilot, Albie was next to the cockpit and watched the flight engineer shut off all the electrical circuits right before the end of the runway. Albie said that probably saved them from catching fire and exploding with the electrical power shut-off. Another thing, I asked dad when they were landing, where Leyte Gulf was oriented from their flight path, and he told me at the port side (left) of the aircraft and the island was on the starboard side (right). Then it dawned on me that there might be a photo in "The Book", and could possibly have the crash site. If you own Larry Hickey's book, "Warpath across the Pacific", on page 245, from the first printing, there is a photograph of Tacloban Airstrip taken from about 3,000 or 4,000 feet. The middle, right, of the photo shows the end of the runway where a C-54 transport (4 engines and single tail) is turning onto the runway. This is the end

of the runway where the "Crash" happened. Dad's info to me indicated that they were landing from top to bottom in this picture in the book. He was amazed when I showed him the photo and told him here is where you guys crashed. Then he laughed about "losing" his pistol, watch and glasses. I still have his "replacement" watch and sunglasses. Also, throughout most of his life his neck has "bothered" him, which we have attributed to this crash. The injuries of our youth come back and haunt us in our old age. I wished there was a similar photo of the San Marcelino and the Ie Shima airstrips.)

We bivouacked for the night in tents at a replacement depot, or as they called them then, a repo-depo, adjacent to the beach where the infantry came ashore a few months earlier, once again ample evidence of heavy fighting.

So we loaded up into, obviously, a different C-47 gooney bird and approached our final destination, an airfield in a dusty valley on the main island of Luzon, the San Marcelino valley. This was to be my home for the next several months. As we banked over a line of low lying hills I caught a glimpse of the airstrip in the valley below. One dusty road ran the length of the valley. The group headquarters was to the east of the road and the tent area to the western side. Each squadron had its own distinct area layout and it gave the appearance of military neatness. The hard packed crushed coral runway laid

about a fourth of a mile to the west of the bivouac area. We had finally reached the end of the V Bomber Command pipeline. We arrived at the staging area for the 345th Bomb Group (M), V Bomber Command, 5TH US Air Force. It was February 24, 1945.

We taxied past rows of B-25's parked on their hardstands. But these were B-25's like we never seen before. Every one of them had large red, white and black Indian heads painted on the vertical stabilizers (tails). However, the most striking element of their appearance was the nose art. Fierce looking birds, bats and horse heads covered the entire nose sections of the aircraft. Some of the planes were being serviced by ground crews. Duce and a half trucks, the nick name for 2 and a half ton trucks, picked us up and delivered us to the headquarters area. In front of the headquarters tent was a large sign identifying the outfit stationed here. It had a large Indian head painted on it like the one on the bombers at the airstrip. Also painted on it were row upon row of Japanese meatballs (Hinomaru), each one representing a Jap fighter or bomber destroyed either in the air or on the ground. There were also quite a few ships, pictured sinking to Davey Jones locker. Painted on it also were the four squadrons in the 345th BG, the 498th, 499th, 500th and the 501st. In military jingoism, 501 is pronounced five oh first, not five oh one. Everything about the station smacked of professionalism. (to be continued in next issue)

Below are some of the handwritten comments about the 345th's exhibit at the EAA Museum in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. We had so many comments, look for more in future issues! For ease of reading, I have typed the comments to the right of the comment.



Name / Address: PATRICK
 Comments: AS MELVIN POLLOCK'S GREAT GRANDSON, IT GIVES ME AN APPRECIATION OF THE FREEDOMS I HAVE, AND WHAT HE AND ALL THOSE MEN WENT THROUGH TO PRESERVE THAT

By: Patrick: As Melvin Pollock's Great Grandson, it gave me an appreciation of the freedoms I have, and what he and all those went through to preserve that

Name / Address: Wetter Appleton
 Comments: Lovely experience for our grandpa 351st B-17 pilot

By: Wetter Appleton from Wisconsin: Lovely experience for our grandpa, 351st B-17 pilot.

Name / Address: Lynn Johnson, Iowa
 Comments: My uncle was a turret gunner during WWII, never spoke of it... Made me think of him while I was here.

By: Lynn Johnson from Iowa: My uncle was a turret gunner during WWII, never spoke of it... Made me think of him while I was here.

Name / Address: The Hawk Family, Fredonia WI
 Comments: Lovely, history. Grateful.

By: The Hawk Family from Fredonia, Wisconsin: Lovely history. Grateful.

Name / Address: Excellent
 Comments: History must be documented so all can learn from it.

By: Unknown: Excellent. History must be documented so all can learn from it.

Name / Address: KAY & ALICE BIBER
 Comments: CAPE CORAL, FLA
 FANTASTIC EXHIBIT!
 KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK!

By: Ray and Alice Biber from Cape Coral, Florida: Fantastic exhibit! Keep up the good work!

DEPARTURES

Adrian Bustamante reported that his father-in-law, Arthur Rural, passed away in August 2016, at 94 years of age.

Linda Kilroy reported that her father, Alfred W. Skeets (500th), passed away September 27, 2016.

It was reported that Doris Moore, widow of Fred Moore, passed away in November 2014.



January 2017

Happy New Year, Everyone!

We are up to some exciting things! The 345th Bomb Group Association has recently become a 501(c)(3) organization! This new IRS designation should help us acquire additional support from foundations and corporations for our activities related to our new educational and historical mission.

For two years, we've had a fantastic 345th exhibit at the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA) Museum in Oshkosh, WI, which we were excited to visit during our meeting there last year. As more and more veterans and their families contact us about their WWII collections, we are exploring options for developing additional exhibits and locations for displaying them. One of our priorities is working to create a searchable database of information so researchers have easier access.

We're planning now for our meeting later this year. We will be settling on a location soon and the details will be available in our next Strafer. We hope you will come to the meeting, where you will have the opportunity to talk to our veterans and their families and learn more about the 345th. In Oshkosh, attendees brought remarkable mementoes and artifacts. We had some attendees who had never attended a reunion, so it was wonderful to meet new friends.

It's a new year, so it's now time to renew your membership in the 345th Bomb Group Association and we look forward to hearing from you! Four times a year, we mail about 500 Strafers to known (paid) members and others whose names are on our mailing list. Although we did away with general life memberships several years ago, we may not have heard from those members in awhile. Additionally, members may pass away and their families continue to receive the Strafer. We don't like to drop folks from our mailing list; we encourage 2nd and 3rd generation family members to stay in touch and let us know what would be interesting to them.

If you have not communicated with the 345th Bomb Group Association in some time, please fill out the membership form and send it to us with your dues. If you would like to be removed from the Strafer list and 345th mailings, please let us know.

Sincerely,

Mary Sloan Roby

Note to our Members and Friends. Thank you for your membership in the 345th Bomb Group Association, which is now a 501(c)(3) non-profit educational and historical organization to which your contribution may be tax deductible on your federal return. Memberships and contributions help us achieve our goals to remember and share the accomplishments of the 345th.

**345th Bomb Group Association
Membership Form**

Name(s) _____ Squadron _____

Mailing Address _____ Please check if new

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Home Phone _____ Cell Phone _____

Email Address _____

I am a:

345th Vet or Widow 345th Family Member Vet from another group Other

Please tell us about yourself and your interest in the Association. If you are a family member, please tell us who your veteran is and about your relationship to him. We are very interested in hearing your stories and about any personal materials you might have or want to share with the Association.

Please check here if you would like to be contacted by the Association about getting involved.

Dues are \$15 per year for 345th Veterans and their spouses/widows. All other 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

Thank you!!

345th Bomb Group Association
PO Box 8755
Roanoke, VA 24014

Bulk Rate
US
Postage
PAID
Permit No.

President

Mary Sloan Roby (500th)
PO Box 8755
Roanoke, VA 24014
410-963-8693
mrobby1916@gmail.com

Vice President

Kelly McNichols (500th)
2256 80 Road
Burr Oak, KS 66936
785-647-7541
mcnichols@ruraltel.net

Secretary

Janice Rary (499th)
604 6th Street
Marietta, OH 45750
740-376-0540
janrary@suddenlink.net

Treasurer

Clint Roby (500th)
PO Box 8755
Roanoke, VA 24014
443-413-6458
croby001@gmail.com

Historian

Jim Bina (501st)
1386 Crane's Bill Way
Woodbridge, VA 22191
703-680-1057
jamesbina@verizon.net

Strafer Editor

Cindy Hillman (501st)
PO Box 609
Tomball, TX 77377-0609
832-563-5807
cindyhillman@mail.com

Squadron Representatives

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

499th "Bats Outa Hell"

Bob Sweet
4934 Western Ave.
Bethesda, MD 20816
301-229-0493
sweet@hood.edu

500th "Rough Raiders"

Kelly McNichols
2256 80 Road
Burr Oak, KS 66936
785-647-7541
mcnichols@ruraltel.net

501st "Black Panthers"

John Fezio
352 Cross Road
Lexington, SC 29073
803-312-3792
asynthetic@yahoo.com