



# AIR APACHES *STRAFER*

Volume 35

Issue 2, July 2018

## President's Message Mary Sloan Roby, 500<sup>th</sup>

I'm excited to report that the 2018 version of the 345<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group's annual reunion will be held in Greenville, SC from August 31 to September 3!

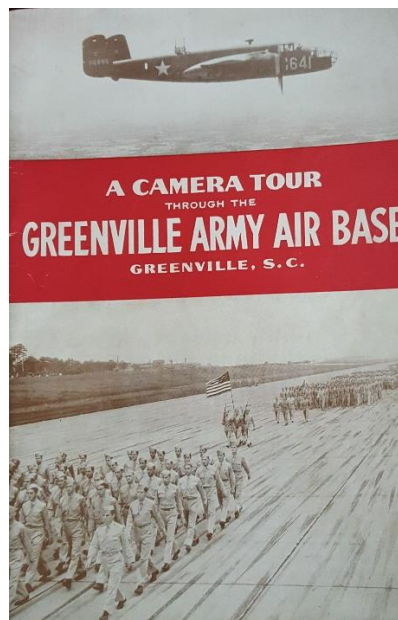
Members of the 345<sup>th</sup> who trained at Greenville Army Air Base may remember that GAAB was one of several Army Air Bases in South Carolina. Others included Camden, Sumter, Walterboro, and Greenwood, and the Columbia Army Air Base, where the 345<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group was formed in November 1942. These bases were installed to help ramp up efforts in the early 1940s and GAAB became the largest B-25 training facility in the country.

The SC Upstate was also known for its contribution to the war effort from the prevalent textiles industry. Cloth for parachutes and uniforms was milled there.

Today, Greenville is a vibrant city that has worked hard to revive a dormant downtown and to replace the textile industry with amenities sought out by residents and visitors.

I think you will be impressed with Greenville and I urge you to come to the annual gathering of the 345<sup>th</sup> BG.

During our Saturday field trip, we will visit the Upstate Museum, where we will have a brief tour, view a documentary film about the Museum's Oral History Project, and have a few minutes for Q & A. The link to some of the oral histories is <http://www.upcountryhistory.org/about-the-museum/the-collection/>. Following the Museum visit, we will have lunch in a local downtown restaurant.



Our base for the weekend will be the Courtyard by Marriott Downtown Greenville. The contact information can be found on the registration page and I urge you to make your hotel reservations and travel plans immediately! *Our group rate for the hotel is only good through August 1.* You can cancel if you need to later, but you will not get the group rate if you wait too long.

Lots of details, but the MAIN THING is we want and need you to attend this reunion! Each year, the number of attendees drops a bit, and at some point, we'll have to decide if we want to keep meeting annually. I know some of do and we would appreciate your support to keep things going. The reunion is always a highlight of my year and I look forward to renewing friendships and meeting new people with a connection to the 345<sup>th</sup> through their fathers, brothers, uncles, and friends.

Please join us in Greenville this Labor Day weekend! See you there!

**345<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association Meeting • August 31 to September 3, 2018**  
**Courtyard by Marriott Greenville Downtown**

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

<i>Events and Fees</i>	<i>Cost</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Totals</i>
Registration Fee (non-refundable)	\$65		
<b>Friday, August 31</b>			
Welcome Reception			
<b>Saturday, September 1</b>			
Field Trip to Upstate History Museum/Ticket & Transportation Provided	\$25		
Lunch at a Local Restaurant/Transportation Provided	\$30		
Hospitality Room Open for Sharing Memorabilia 2 to 5 p.m. & 7 to 10:30 p.m.			
Dinner on your own in one of Greenville's fabulous restaurants			
<b>Sunday, September 2</b>			
345 <sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Business Meeting 10:00 a.m.			
Hospitality Room Open. Noon to 5 p.m. & after the Closing Banquet			
Closing Banquet with Guest Speaker Fritz Hamer Curator for the SC Confederate Relic Room and Military Museum Cocktails at 6 p.m., dinner at 7 p.m.	\$60		
Membership in the 345 <sup>th</sup> . Vets and widows \$15. All other \$35			
Please send your completed registration form and check for the total amount payable to <b>345<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association</b> .			
Please mail to: Clinton Roby, Treasurer, P.O. Box 8755, Roanoke, VA 24014.			

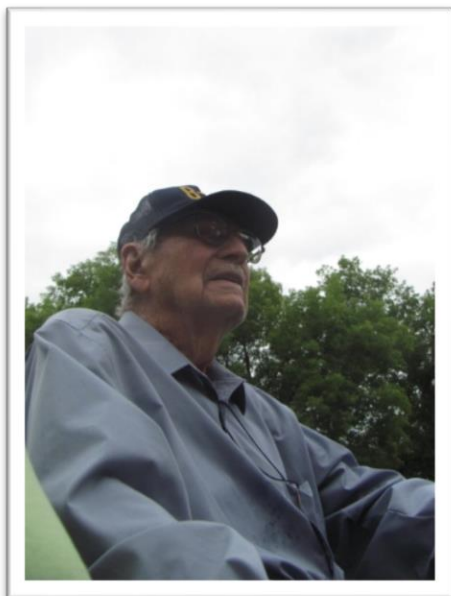
<b>Please indicate the number for each Banquet Meal Choice:</b>		
# Beef	# Chicken	# Other/specify
<b>Please indicate any special services you will need to attend the reunion:</b>		
Wheelchair or Scooter	Please describe anything else you may need.	

<b>Courtyard by Marriott Downtown Greenville: Please make your reservations by...</b>
<b>Phone: 1-864-451-5700 (Mention that you are with the 345<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association)</b>
<b>Online: <a href="https://www.marriott.com/meeting-event-hotels/group-corporate-travel/groupCorp.mi?resLinkData=345th%20Bomb%20Group%20Association%5EGSPGD%60BGABGAA%7CBGABGAB%60134-144%60USD%60false%604%608/30/18%609/3/18%608/1/18&amp;app=resvlink&amp;stop_mobi=yes">https://www.marriott.com/meeting-event-hotels/group-corporate-travel/groupCorp.mi?resLinkData=345th%20Bomb%20Group%20Association%5EGSPGD%60BGABGAA%7CBGABGAB%60134-144%60USD%60false%604%608/30/18%609/3/18%608/1/18&amp;app=resvlink&amp;stop_mobi=yes</a></b>

## Orville Schmidt's Story, Cont.

By Karl McCarty

This is the next part of a series on World War II flight engineer Orville Schmidt, who spent much of his combat time flying in B-25 Mitchells. The last article introduced his background up to his landing in New Guinea; it continues here with his start as an A-20 crew member.



Orville Schmidt riding in his "Blitz" wagon in the summer of 2016. He died shortly after the 345<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group reunion in Oshkosh, WI that he attended.

### U.S. was Second to Japan

In context, Orville spent 18 months in World War II. He left Japan around September of 1945, a month after the nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Therefore, it is likely Orville got to New Guinea in the early part of 1944. Orville has a postcard from May 1943 mailed to his parents from Fort Sheridan, Illinois, which was the initial entry point for training. Orville said it was plausible that he entered combat in late

1943, but it could have been early to mid '44.

Whatever the case, his service started when the Philippines had been lost and the Allies were struggling. The Japanese were "not only in New Guinea, (but) all the islands surrounding that territory," Orville said. "The Japanese were still top dog ...Our airplanes were not good enough to tangle with the Japs. It wasn't until—oh...early '44, when the U.S. finally had some pretty good fighters that would start competing." Orville also gave credit to the Japanese for developing the Zero, which was a plane they used to destroy Pearl Harbor in 1941.

### The Widowmaker

Given the success of the Japanese, it's no surprise that when Orville started serving overseas, his planes were less than desirable. "I started there in the southern tip of New Guinea, I flew my training missions there with my new pilot." At the time he said he was "stuck with the A-20," a Douglas made plane.

Was he safe in New Guinea? Or was he susceptible to fire? "Ah... well, occasionally, but it wasn't a big deal." He said, "every once in a while," he had to watch out. New Guinea wasn't as dangerous as Leyte. "I know one of the first nights we (were) really hit with combat was on Leyte Island—the southern tip of the Philippines." In comparison, "the southern tip of New Guinea was pretty well taken care of. Some of our

first missions in New Guinea were support missions for the 32nd division (The Red Arrow) that was fighting for its dear life in the mountains of New Guinea."

Orville called the A-20 a "Widowmaker," and it was superseded by other A type models. He said the other models took "a good portion of the war in Korea" to get to a point where "you didn't have to be saying the Lord's Prayer when you went in the cockpit." Orville never got to fly those variations, but his point is well taken: It would take more than World War II to make the A-20 a decent plane.

Orville was the flight engineer during his A-20 time; the plane was unique in that there were only 3 people in that plane. What was the purpose of his missions in New Guinea in the A-20s? "Survival," and after a long pause he added, "surviving." He said the plane was pretty pathetic. In general, "They used them for some of these scattered islands. They didn't have much range in them." Not surprisingly, "nobody ever wrote any big books about what they did. They lost a lot of airplanes." In contrast, Orville will tell you the B-25s he flew later in the war were awesome, and of course they have a book worth reading titled *Warpath Across the Pacific*, which is the story of the 345<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group which he was a part of.

**See next page.**

## Running Out of Gas and Nerves

Orville made it clear that there were two stories he could give with the A-20s. The first: it was an awful plane. The second, he almost crashed running out of gas.

When asked when the first time he felt the sense of combat was, Orville said it was over New Guinea. "It kinda creeps up on ya. My first mission...I had an awful queasy feeling in my doggone gut, and I knew my pilot was a trainee—just like me. And we were flying over the jungle. I didn't know how good we's (we was)...but, we're flying along. And the story comes back to me...All we're doing is practice bombing. And we had our area designated for the bomb run."

So, this fresh pilot and a greenhorn flight engineer (Orv) are "somewhere, southern part of New Guinea." It was a practice run, so to some extent, he didn't have to worry about getting shot. Then Orville added a qualifier: "You never can tell where the Jap is hiding." However, "yea," it was a safer than a usual flight. Now, "My first flight...we're flying along. We were in a—we had been in a training flight. But then, for some reason or another, my plane that I was on drifted off the doggone pattern. We were kinda alone. And then all of a sudden, complete quiet. Oh boy, sounds good, Orv said sarcastically. Hey. Wait a minute.... the propellers aren't turning. So I call the pilot, and says, "...What the heck is going on?" He says, "We've run out of gas."

Orville continued, "And I says, 'Well, did you transfer gas? Did you hit the transfer valve?' he says, 'Yea, but the pump wouldn't take it.' He says, 'Bale out.' I say, 'No, the ground is getting awful close.' I said, 'What are you gonna do?' ... He said, 'I'm gonna fly it down.' I said, 'Well, I'll be right behind yah.'" This is all somewhat unique, because even though Orville was on the verge of death he could still laugh about it while storytelling. Of course, Orville was right behind the guy; they were in the same plane.

So, Orville was in his first flight, a training flight no less, and just about to crash. "And we were in training—about the oldest planes you could find. Rickety," he said of the A-20. "So, I happened to remember from the crew chiefs, that there was a manual pump over here. A big lever. A manual pump. I grabbed the doggone manual pump that was supposed to transfer fuel" if the initial "pump didn't work. I start pumping that doggone thing!"

Orville remembering his pilot after that flight: "He says, 'I never saw a wobble pump work so fast.' And I says, 'You don't know how big a hurry I was!'" Orv pumped that wobbly pump like there was no tomorrow, and fuel was manually transferred just in time and the propellers kicked up. "Yep. It kicked up—never even barked or nothing that it (the engine) got flooded or anything."

They got back and landed safely. "And for months later, he (the pilot) would always kid

me. He says, 'How's old wobbly?'"

Orville thought he was in New Guinea for maybe a month or six weeks. And then what? "All hell broke loose!" he could say with a laugh. Orville eventually worked his way north by northwest toward the Philippines.

*Thanks to Orville's friend, Karl McCarty for interviewing Karl and providing these interviews to us. Look for the last installment in the next Strafer.*

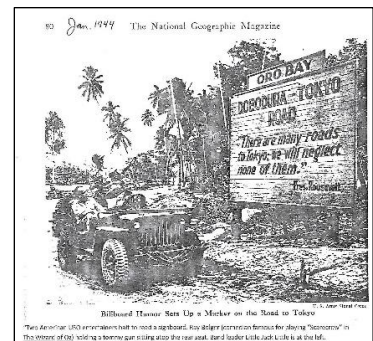
## At Ease Time

### By Bob Sweet, 499th

As a deadline approaches, and no specific news items have been received, I am jotting a short description of life for the 499th BS in Dobodura.

Seventy-five years ago (June 1943) the 345th BG left training in South Carolina and other U.S. locations to join the combat forces of the Fifth Air Force in the South Pacific.

Mixed with days of missions and battles, the airmen and women of the Air Apaches also had time "at ease." A National Geographic article (January 1944) described some of the diversionary activities of the troops at war.





USO shows came to Dobodura featuring Bob Hope, Joe E. Brown, and other Hollywood stars. The USO motto was "Home Away from Home", and the shows were a hit wherever they were performed. The magazine article highlighted the Dobodura Airfield complex, home of the 345th BG.

Leisure time was filled with letter writing and letter reading. Adoption of stray pets was also popular. This is fine if its Fido the dog, but some crew members are shown holding the Australian Koala Bear. These furry marsupials may be cute, but they can also become very aggressive.

Although images of the South Pacific include many beautiful beaches, there was very little ocean swimming. Shaded forest streams provided better swimming holes than jagged coral reefs and sharks in the Pacific. This war-time National Geographic article portrays a short glimpse of airmen at ease while stationed in Dobodura, New Guinea.

### **Boots Find Their Way Home By Dennis O'Neill, 500th**

In mid-May 1944, my father-in-law, Joseph Symonds, from Defiance, Ohio, was ordered to California. From there he was transferred overseas to Hawaii, then on to Port Moresby, New Guinea for assignment to the 5th Air force

Accompanying him were Edwin Bentz, Milwaukee, WI; Robert Gribble, Shiremans Town, PA; and John Dunham, Racine, WI. These four, spending a week together in

transit, unsurprisingly formed a friendship.

Upon arriving in Port Moresby, all were assigned to the 345<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, with Gribble going to the 499<sup>th</sup> and the other three to the 500<sup>th</sup>. Within the first two weeks of combat missions, Gribble was shot down and killed.



*Joseph Symonds and John Dunham*

The three 500<sup>th</sup> members became tent mates and their friendship deepened. My father-in-law and Dunham became especially close, pal-ing around, attending movies together.

On leave to Australia, Dunham bought a pair of Aussie boots, which were very popular amongst the pilots. The boots weren't allowed as part of a flight uniform and were purely for off-duty wear.

In early November 1944, Pilot Frederick Dick, of Congers, NY and Co-Pilot John Dunham

flew a special mission to attack Japanese shipping in Ormoc Bay, Leyte. Arriving at Ormoc, they encountered more warships than anticipated.

The US force was comprised of only four B-25's and sixteen P-38's. The Dick-Dunham aircraft was seriously damaged on a bombing run and observed limping towards land. They never returned to base.

As Dunham's closest friend, Symonds was asked by their commander to pack Dunham's belongings for shipment to his relatives in the States. When I became interested in Dad's military career sometime back in the early 2000's, his footlocker was naturally part of the story. I discovered the boots and asked about them. Dad never told me why, but he kept John's boots. He said that he never wore them (which I can believe, since Dad had some big feet!)

Dad died in January 2012, at the age of 95 ½. He was active, sound of mind and lived alone at home. Going through the entire house uncovered many memories and memorabilia, including Dunham's boots.



*Dennis O'Neill with Mary Smith, John Dunham's sister, and Dunham's boots*

Coincidentally, shortly after Dad's death, a relative of Dunham's made contact with group members inquiring about Dunham's service. This inquiry led to contact with remaining relatives and my sending the boots to Dunham's surviving sister in St. Petersburg, Florida.

On a trip in 2014 to visit family in Florida, we (my wife, Joseph's daughter, Susan and I) arranged to stop in St. Pete's and meet John's sister, Mary Smith. She had organized a little get-together with other family members. We spent a pleasant afternoon, learning more about John as a young "civilian" and I told them what I could about his short, but brave, military career.

Mary told us that she placed John's boots just inside her front door the day she received them. After 70 years, they finally found their way home.

### **Recent Losses**

We are sorry to have learned of the deaths of several members of the 345<sup>th</sup> family. Jim, Tom, and Randy Jones let us know of the death of their father, Donald R Jones in January. Tom Damour reported that his mother, Ruth Damour, widow of Louis Damour, passed away in April. Ruth last attended a reunion in Columbia in 2012. And, in June, Roger Lovett's death was reported by his son, Brent. Roger last attended the 2016 reunion in Oshkosh, WI.

We send our sympathy to the families and friends of these members.

### **Air Apaches Book Submitted to Publisher By Jim Bina, 501st**

Author Jay Stout recently delivered his manuscript of "Air Apaches" to his publisher. The official title of the book is "**Air Apaches--The True Story of the 345th Bomb Group and its Low, Fast and Deadly Missions in World War II.**" The publisher is very pleased with the manuscript and the book is slated to be released in February 2019.

In a note from Jay: "Thanks to everyone who contributed material and photos and support, no matter how small. Every bit was helpful. Even if I didn't use it in the book, it still often pointed me in an interesting direction, or provided context that I didn't have before.

In total, the manuscript ran about 135,000 words, which should translate into a book that runs well more than 300 pages. It was submitted to the publisher on time on May 1 and is slated to lead off Stackpole's (the publisher) 2019 catalog of books. It will be available in book stores, Amazon, etc., in February.

The publisher plans to include about 70 photographs which will be printed together in two separate sections of the book. Stackpole's editors are quite pleased with the manuscript, and I am too.

Thanks again to the 345th Bomb Group Association, and other friends, families and fans of the 345th." - Jay Stout

I was privileged to work closely with Jay during the final editing of the manuscript. We went back and forth for the better part of 6 weeks, reading, rereading, correcting punctuation and spelling, and making some significant rewrites.

The result is a gripping new tale of the men of the 345<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group who were put in extraordinary circumstances as they waged the deadly profession of war. Jay masterfully puts you into the cockpit of the venerable tool of the Air Apaches, the B-25 as they take off on their harrowing seek and destroy missions.

I found Jay's work hard to put down, and I hope you will too! Watch for it soon!

### **Recommended Reading**

Dr. Courtney L. Tollison of the Furman University History Department has written a most interesting book about Greenville, SC during WWII, called "World War II and Upcountry South Carolina: "We just did everything we could.""

Its chapters discuss how the war affected life in Greenville, military history related to upcountry bases, and the Pacific and European Theaters of War. It also talks about what life was like after the war was over.

The book is enhanced by numerous photographs of such topics as training, recreation, and overseas locations.

**Note to our Members and Friends.** Thank you for your membership in the 345<sup>th</sup> 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 345<sup>th</sup>.

**345<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association  
2018 Membership Form**

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Squadron \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_ Please check if new

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Home \_\_\_\_\_ Cell \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

I am a:

345<sup>th</sup> Vet or Widow  345<sup>th</sup> Family Member  Vet from another group  Other

*Please tell us about yourself and your interest in the Association. We are especially interested in hearing from grandchildren and great-grandchildren of veterans. 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 345<sup>th</sup> Veterans and their spouses/widows. All other 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:

Clint Roby, Treasurer  
345<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association  
PO Box 8755  
Roanoke, VA 24014

*Thank you!!*

345<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association  
PO box 8755  
Roanoke, VA 24014

Bulk Rate  
US  
Postage  
PAID  
Permit No.

President

Mary Sloan Roby (500<sup>th</sup>)  
PO Box 8755  
Roanoke, VA 24014  
410-963-8693  
[mroby1916@gmail.com](mailto:mroby1916@gmail.com)

Vice President

Kelly McNichols (500<sup>th</sup>)  
2256 80 Road  
Burr Oak, KS 66936  
785-647-7541  
[mcnichols@ruraltel.net](mailto:mcnichols@ruraltel.net)

Secretary

Janice Rary (499<sup>th</sup>)  
604 6<sup>th</sup> Street  
Marietta, OH 45750  
740-376-0540  
[janrary@suddenlink.net](mailto:janrary@suddenlink.net)

Treasurer

Clint Roby (500<sup>th</sup>)  
PO Box 8755  
Roanoke, VA 24014  
443-413-6458  
[croby001@gmail.com](mailto:croby001@gmail.com)

Historian

Jim Bina (501<sup>st</sup>)  
1386 Crane's Bill Way  
Woodbridge, VA 22191  
703-680-1057  
[jamesbina@verizon.net](mailto:jamesbina@verizon.net)

Strafer Editor

Cindy Hillman (501<sup>st</sup>)  
PO Box 609  
Tomball, TX 77377-0609  
832-563-5807  
[cindyhillman@mail.com](mailto:cindyhillman@mail.com)

Would you like to represent the 498<sup>th</sup> "Falcons?" We need a representative to write occasional articles for the Strafer. Please contact Mary Roby if interested.

499<sup>th</sup> "Bats Outa Hell"

Bob Sweet  
4934 Western Ave.  
Bethesda, MD 20816  
301-229-0493  
[sweet@hood.edu](mailto:sweet@hood.edu)

500<sup>th</sup> "Rough Raiders"

Kelly McNichols  
2256 80 Road  
Burr Oak, KS 66936  
785-647-7541  
[mcnichols@ruraltel.net](mailto:mcnichols@ruraltel.net)

501<sup>st</sup> "Black Panthers"

John Fezio  
352 Cross Road  
Lexington, SC 29073  
803-312-3792  
[asynthetic@yahoo.com](mailto:asynthetic@yahoo.com)