



AIR APACHES

STRAFER

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SPECIAL 2019 REUNION ISSUE—*See You in Ypsilanti, MI September 13-16!*

President's Message

Mary Roby, 500th

Every year when we start the planning for our annual reunion, there are several things we want to know to create a reunion that folks will want to attend: a location that offers some WWII connections, a nice hotel with amenities needed by our group, field trip opportunities, and good local restaurants. We are lucky this year that Ypsilanti, MI offers just about everything we could need.

Also, this year, as we have explored options, it has been great to have the help of one of our members, John Turner, who lives in White Lake, MI; Bruce Stoddard, a volunteer with Yankee Warrior, and Gerald Lester, historian and spokesperson for Yankee Warrior.

John, Bruce, and Jerry did the site visit for the hotel and provided lots of good information. They were also able to work with our hotel representative to make sure the spaces we will be using are

easy to get to for all our attendees.

In addition to good hotel accommodations, we like to offer a program that somehow ties into the history or activities of the 345th Bomb Group. Yankee Warrior is one of about 25 currently flying Mitchell B-25s that Clint and I have encountered at several Doolittle Raiders events at Grimes Field in Urbana, OH and at the Mid-Atlantic Air Museum's WWII Weekend in Reading, PA.

Did you or a family member receive the Air Medal or other recognition from General Jarred V Crabb? General Crabb was flown around to these medal ceremonies by Bruce Stoddard's dad. Small world, huh?

On Saturday, we will visit the Henry Ford Museum of American Innovation. There is a lot to see there, including railroad and aviation exhibits, including Heroes of Aviation.

After our business meeting, on Sunday, we will take a bus to Hangar 1 at Willow Run Airport, where Yankee Warrior is kept. In addition to providing museum passes, the Museum has extended a special corporate rate for flights in Yankee Warrior. Only 7 seats are available on this flight and the discounted cost is \$375, rather than the usual \$400. Please contact me directly if you would like to sign up to fly in Yankee Warrior!

See more about the reunion on page 6.



STILL MISSING

By Andy Decker, 499th

I'm not sure if anything is more frustrating than governmental complacency.

At the end of WW2, Americans were told that they had to move on and leave their war dead in the past. Somehow, it was felt that the nation had to move ahead and the effort to retrieve the thousands of missing in action servicemen could not be made. I'm not sure that this went over so well with the families of those who were to be left behind.

Today, there is some effort being put into retrieving not only our current casualties, but also those of past wars. This is a laudable action to take but the delay has only made the search more difficult. The search has been pushed ahead by private groups such as Bent Prop and MIA Hunters who turn their findings over to the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) for possible excavation and recovery.

On March 29, 1944, the 345th Bomb Group was assigned a mission to bomb the Japanese-held airdrome at Dagua, on the north coast of New Guinea. Two flights of three B-25's from the 498th Squadron took off from Nadzab Strip #4 at 9:36am, rendezvoused with a squadron of P-47 fighters and headed off

toward their target to the northwest. Each airplane carried six 500-pound bombs.

By 11:30am, the 498th had reached the target area and made a wide circle out over the sea to get below the cloud cover and to get lined up to attack from the west. They would be the second squadron over the target that morning. Bombs were dropped on the assigned area at 11:38am but airplane 41-30040, the *Hitt and Miss*, experienced a bomb rack failure. The flight opted to make a second run over the target so that the *Hitt and Miss* could drop its bombs. The flight headed out over the Bismarck Sea and made a sharp, banking, diving turn to the left into the thickening cloud cover to again attack the target from the west. After all that, the bombs might have been salvoed, although a crewman on the left-wing ship stated that he saw two bombs drop from the *Hitt and Miss* before they went into the steep bank to the left. It could be that some of the hung-up bombs had been freed by sharp maneuvering and fell away. The *Hitt and Miss* and its crew of seven did not return from the mission that day and no evidence of a crash site was found during a search mission the next day. It was last seen in a steep spin, banked to the right, about a mile southeast of the airdrome.

Seven weeks later, a 501st B-25, the *Tin Liz*, would be lost while strafing at treetop level over the Dagua airdrome but would be found burning in the jungle ¾ mile southeast of the airdrome. That wreckage was identified, in part, by markings on the tail, which had broken away from the main fuselage and was 50 to 60 feet away from the rest of the wreckage. During the 1970's, the tail of the *Tin Liz* was reportedly moved 66 miles to the west for use in a static display at a school in Tadjji.

During my 2009 visit to the area, I photographed all the *Tin Liz* wreckage that I could find. One large piece, that was within a few yards of the right wing, was much more corroded or damaged by fire than the rest and at first, I thought that it was a part of the left wing or a piece of a single engine aircraft. The mother of the landowner claimed to have witnessed the crash as a child. She described the airplane as having crashed vertically, which did not mesh well with an airplane strafing at treetop level as the *Tin Liz* had been.

During my 2011 visit, closer inspection of the unknown part revealed a stamped part number on one of the attachment surfaces that indicated that it was the horizontal stabilizer assembly from a B-25. Very odd if the *Tin Liz* tail assembly had been

moved to Tadj. More research and reading Missing Air Crew Reports for the area led me to the case of the *Hitt and Miss*.

I tried to contact the DPAA through their website on several occasions but received no reply. I then resorted to contacting them through my U.S. Senator, which worked, but their response indicated that while my information was interesting, they had no intention of investigating the situation.

I cannot begin to convey the disappointment their response brought to me, but my one lingering thought is that ***it is no wonder we can't find anybody if we don't look for them.*** I'm no expert and I'll be the first to admit that. I'm just a guy who noticed a discrepancy and then wondered about a possible correlation to another case.

As to why there isn't more comingled aircraft wreckage at that site I can only speculate further that perhaps the bombs in the bomb bay dropped far enough to release the arming mechanisms but became hung up and their windmill fuses were armed by the wind flowing through the bomb bay. Upon impact, the four 500-pound bombs would have exploded with a devastating blast that could have sent pieces of the airplane flying through the jungle for hundreds of yards. Or, perhaps the airplane augered in and

there is more wreckage buried in the soft, saturated soil. Maybe the airplane exploded mid-air and spread wreckage over a wide area. Maybe the crew bailed out to an unknown fate. Who knows? But it sure is tempting to go back and look for radial engines and pieces of airplane parts in the surrounding jungle.

The crew of the *Hitt and Miss* deserves the effort.



Part number on horizontal stabilizer; horizontal stabilizer middle rear of photo 2; and horizontal stabilizer at the Tin Liz site.



DPAA to Investigate 501st Crash in French Indo China

By James Bina, 501st

Every once in a while, I get inquiries about the Air Apaches. They're all bona fide questions, typically relatives requesting information about an air crew member while in theater, and we do all we can to find the answers. One request I took particularly special notice of was a request from the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) asking for additional information on one of our lost crews, specifically details of the crash and if there were any better photos of the crash. Upon further investigation the researcher, JAMES M. CLONINGER JR. PhD., Vietnam War Case Officer Major, USAF (Ret) for the DPAA, was asking for any details of the crash of Lt. Vernon M. Townley and his crew of the 501st Bomb Squadron over Saigon, French Indo China (now Viet Nam) on 28 April 1945. Mr. Cloninger also explained that they were looking at the possibility of locating the crash site sometime in the future.

Let's jump back a few decades to that successful but fateful mission over Saigon. Col. Colthorp was leading the raid and was taking the 345th into one of the most heavily defended targets in Southeast Asia, to find and destroy target Fox Baker, or better known as the Kanju Maru, a 5800-ton Japanese freighter. The 499th and 501st sent a total of 13 B-25s into Saigon that day. Once

over Saigon, Lt. Peppy Blount and his wingman, Townley, flew a separate course from Col. Colthorp and strafed and bombed a 100-ton freighter. As Blount pulled up to look for the large ship, which was his primary target, a burst of flak damaged Townley's right engine and it caught fire. Just then Blount spotted the freighter anchored along the riverbank ahead.

Blount, and Townley with his damaged plane, made course adjustments and set up the attack on the freighter. Blount came in low with Townley following closely, Blount released three bombs which struck the freighter amidships and in the center of the well deck, a successful strike! Blount climbed steeply away from the target and Townley released three bombs, flying directly through the flak in his flight leader's wake. One bomb was a near miss and the other two landed on land a hundred feet from the river. A burst of flak scored another hit on Townley and his aircraft immediately snap rolled on its back and crashed into the ground. When last seen his plane was upside down at less than 100 feet altitude with all guns firing. It is believed that Townley's plane crashed in a small wooded area about 1000 feet west of the transport. Photos taken by Blount's plane show Townley's three bombs, and also show what is evidently the actual crash of his plane.

The 501st suffered additional losses that day as two more B-25s went down, 2/Lt. Andrew Johnson and crew of the CACTUS KITTEN and 2/Lt. Milton Etsy and the crew of REINA DEL PACIFICO. It was a tragic day for the Black Panthers. However, the 499th missed the maelstrom over Saigon with only one plane seriously damaged. The aircrews were never recovered and are still listed as missing. Mr. Cloninger is currently gathering information to see if DPAA can visit the crash location to see if there is any wreckage left that might help with recovering the missing crew. Additionally, he will be gathering data on Lt. Johnson's downed aircraft, the CACTUS KITTEN, but that will be at a later date.

This is where we turn to you, the interested audience. If you have any additional information about anything regarding this crash, please contact me and I will put you in contact with Mr. Cloninger. His main interest is locating the photo taken by Lt. Blount's plane showing the crash of Lt. Townley. However, any and all info is appreciated.

It is gratifying to know that someone is still looking for our MIA's and wanting to bring them home. Godspeed in their mission to find these brave young men.

This photo shows the death of the Kanju Maru and the crash of Lt Townley's plane (lower Right). DPAA would like to acquire the original photo for further investigation.



Seventy-five Years Ago, in the Southwest Pacific

by Bob Sweet, 499th

A 75th anniversary is a special time to remember and to honor those who served in the Southwest Pacific Theater. The year was 1944, and the plan was to isolate Rabaul, a major Japanese bastion. Key to the isolation was to take control of the Admiralty Islands, an archipelago of 18 islands off the coast of New Guinea.

The mission of the 345th Bomb Group was to hit the harbor of Manus Island, the largest of the Admiralties. These attacks in January 1944 are described in Larry Hickey's "Warpath Across the Pacific" (page 114-116).

During two years of combat in the Southwest Pacific, the four squadrons of the 345th

Bomb Group were awarded Distinguished Unit Citations for four missions.

In addition, the 345th was awarded the Philippine Presidential Unit Citation.

In 1944, the Department of the Air Force published, "Combat Squadrons of the Air Force, World War II", edited by Maurer Maurer. This volume notes the mission that each squadron of the 345th participated in - and was awarded the Distinguished Unit Citation (DUC). This decoration is awarded to units for extraordinary heroism in action against an armed enemy. The 499th BS received the DUC 75 years ago for its mission over the Admiralties.

**Please follow us on
Facebook!!**

Want to help the 345th Bomb Group Association? We need...

WEB help. We'd like to get the material from our current website transitioned to the new one right away, so we can debut the new website at the reunion. Please, get in touch with me if this is a skill you have and can devote some time to in the near future.

More writers and stories. There are lots of photographs and lots of interesting information posted to our Facebook page. Help us develop these stories and create some wonderful new material for the Strafer.

Squadron Representatives. Represent your group!

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Reunion, continued.

Did you know there is an American Rosie the Riveter Association with a Willow Run Chapter? “Rosies,” as they are called, played an enormous part in building the B-24 at the Ford Willow Run Plant.

As we all know, women played many important roles during WWII—from planting victory gardens, to managing family budgets with ration coupons, to working in plants like the one at Willow Run. We tend to think about the flyers of WWII as mostly men, but the Women Air Service Pilots certainly fulfilled a crucial role in testing airplanes as they came off the assembly line and in ferrying the planes to the squadrons that would be flying them to overseas destinations.

TOGETHER WE STAND



TOGETHER WE CAN

At the Yankee Air Museum, we will see exhibits about Rosie the Riveters and the Women Air Service Pilots. (Unfortunately, the last Michigan pilot, Jane Doyle, passed away in February.

We have been sure to leave plenty of time for memorabilia sharing in the hospitality suite.

Please bring your special items with you to show others. We will have the big scanner and flash drives at the reunion, so if you have photos, especially of medal ceremonies with General Crabb, letters, articles, orders and other things you would like to scan and share with the 345th, please bring them with you.



Plans are still underway for the reunion and there are some important details about things you will want to know on the back of the registration form, so please read carefully.

We are very much looking forward to seeing our 345th family September 13-16 in Ypsilanti, MI. We think our reunion in Ypsilanti will be a great one and we hope to see you in September! Please make your reservations as soon as possible, and please don't hesitate to get in touch if you have any questions!

What We're Reading

Kangaroo Squadron: American Courage in the Darkest Days of World War II, by Bruce Gamble. Da Capo Press.

They Fought with What They Had; The Story of the Army Air Forces in the Southwest Pacific 1941-1942 by Walter D Edmonds. Uncommon Valor Reprint Series.

Weller's War: A Legendary Foreign Correspondent's Saga of World War II on Five Continents by George Weller, edited by Anthony Weller. Crown Publishers.

And, of course, if you haven't read it yet:

Air Apaches: The True Story of the 345th Bomb Group and its Low, Fast, and Deadly Missions in World War II by Jay A Stout. Stackpole Books.

Neat Fact

1942 The Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron (later called the Women's Airforce Service Pilots or WASPS) was founded by Nancy Harkness Love* of Houghton, the first woman air ferry pilot in the nation in 1940.

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 _____

Phone _____ Home _____ Cell _____ Other _____

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. 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 urge you to share any information you may have with the Association, by scanning and sending to the Association on a flash drive or DVD.

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
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*Thanks for renewing your
membership for 2019!*

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

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