



# AIR APACHES

# STRAFER

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## President's Message

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

One of the most gratifying things about involvement with the 345<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association is the opportunity to meet others who share an interest in the 345<sup>th</sup> and WWII in the South Pacific, share information, and work with them to make sure our annual reunions continue.

A serendipitous meeting with Bruce Stoddart, a volunteer crew member for Yankee Warrior, a B-25 that is one of few still flying with actual war experience, is leading to the location for our 2019 reunion. We will be getting together from September 13 to 16 in Ypsilanti, Michigan. **SAVE THE DATE!**

There's an interesting connection between Bruce's family and the 345<sup>th</sup>. The first time we encountered Yankee Warrior was at Grimes Field, on the occasion of a Doolittle Raiders 68<sup>th</sup> anniversary event in 2010. But we did not talk to or learn Bruce's connection to the 345<sup>th</sup> until we attended a Reading Air Show a few years later.

It turns out Bruce's dad, Kenneth Stoddart, who flew weather reconnaissance from the 47<sup>th</sup>, also was a crew member for General

Jarred Crabb. Many of our members have photographs of General Crabb presenting them with Air Medals and other recognition. Small world! It's been our pleasure to encounter Bruce and Yankee Warrior since then and the Yankee Warrior folks are excited to have us come to Michigan. I know you will enjoy meeting them.

Our hotel negotiations are underway, and we will put the registration form online as soon as possible; the hotel information will be on our Facebook page soon. Please, if you think you might be able to attend the September meeting, go ahead and make your hotel reservation (you can cancel, if you decide you can't make it.) Knowing approximately how many people plan to attend helps greatly in making transportation arrangements for field trips and other activities.

Depending on transportation costs, there MAY be the opportunity to have a day-long field trip to Kalamazoo for the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Air Zoo Fly-In. There are many other local attractions to visit, including, of course, the Yankee Air Museum. I hope you will consider attending and especially, bringing your young family members with you.



*Clint and Mary Roby at Memorial to Selman personnel who perished in WWII.*

I mentioned in the last edition of the Strafer that Clint and I had a Louisiana trip planned. In January, we visited the Chennault Museum in Monroe, LA and if you are in the area, I urge you to visit, too.

The Museum, on the grounds of Selman Field, where many WWII navigators trained, is small, but packed with interesting exhibits of all US conflicts through current day. Director, Nell Calloway, is General Clair Chennault's granddaughter and the exhibit about the Flying Tigers is something to see.

At the nearby Monroe Municipal Airport, there is a fascinating video about the navigation school and across from the airport terminal is a remembrance wall of Selman alumni killed in action in WWII. We enjoyed expanding our knowledge

about a location where my dad and fellow navigators trained and spent time during WWII.

## The Search Continues 74 Years Later...

*By Jim Briggs, 501<sup>st</sup>*

My father, Capt. James Underwood, was the pilot of a B-25 bomber lost in combat on 9 January 1945, a month before I was born. The following account of the US government's search for my father's crash site in the Philippines reflects some of the significant difficulties in efforts to find American servicemen killed in action in WWII.



The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA), the component of the Defense Department charged with carrying out search and recovery efforts, and its predecessor agencies have undertaken efforts to find my father's crash site, and recover any remains that might still exist, at various times since 1947 (and as recently as 2013). The written record shows that the crash site was actually found in May 1963, with five incomplete bones recovered. While DPAA is confident that it knows the general

area where the site is, it is not sure now of the exact location. (The area is considered some of the most difficult terrain in all of the Philippines.)

The efforts have been hampered by a lack of thoroughness and very poor documentation and coordination of search efforts in 1963 and 1973; the absence of DNA technology in the years when bones were recovered; the concentration of scarce resources in Vietnam once military action had started there, precluding further recovery efforts in the Philippines once my father's crash site had been found; actions by local natives to remove metal parts from crash sites for scrap sales, leaving little behind to identify; removal of bones and ID tags by locals in the hopes of getting a monetary "reward" from American searchers, making it impossible to definitively link bones/ID tags to a specific crash site; the unreliability of "information" provided by locals, which proved to be completely untrue at times; prohibitions by the local tribes against entry into tribal lands without formal approval; the very difficult terrain, presenting very significant obstacles to accessing the area; and now, foremost, the absence of a specific known location, without which DPAA is not prepared to initiate another, more thorough, search and excavation effort.

Basic facts: In the early morning hours of 9 January 1945, planes from all four squadrons of the 345<sup>th</sup> took off from Tacloban Airfield on Leyte Island in the

central Philippines, headed north to support the initial Allied invasion of Luzon Island (where Manila is located). My father was the pilot of one of six B-25s from the 501<sup>st</sup> Squadron. About an hour or so after take-off, the pilot of another plane saw my father's plane, with a crew of six, enter a cloud bank over Sibuyan Island: within a minute, there was a huge flash of light, and my father's plane was never seen again; the assumption was that his plane had gone down on the 6,700-ft peak on that island. About 45 minutes later into the flight, the navigator on another plane saw another "bright flash," this time over Mindoro Island near Mt. Halcon, with an 8,500-ft peak, but no conclusions were drawn from that.

(Other pilots on that mission included Lt. Ed Bina, also of the 501<sup>st</sup>. In addition to my father's plane, a B-25 from the 498<sup>th</sup> Squadron, flown by Lt. Wallace Chalifoux, was also lost; it took off from Tacloban in the dark and was simply never seen again. Based on information from a local, the plane's crash site was finally found in 1992 - on Sibuyan Island. The "huge flash of light" seen on 9 January 1945 was most likely caused by that plane. Remains of the crew were returned to their families in 2000; I'm not aware of why it took so long.)

Search teams were sent to Sibuyan Island to search for my father's plane in March 1947, in response to letters from my grandmother asking for more information on her son; May/June 1948; and December 1948. All

found no trace of my father's plane, or the Chalifoux plane. (Sibuyan Island also has some of the most difficult terrain in the country.)

In late 1999, I joined an organization called the World War II Orphans Network (AWON) - a "support group" for those who lost their fathers in the war - and a person who did research recommended that I request a copy of my father's Individual Deceased Personnel File (IDPF) from the Army. I finally got my father's IDPF in August 2002. (A huge fire at the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis in July 1973 - burning millions of military files - made it difficult, if not impossible, to retrieve records.) All my family had known was that my father's plane was last seen flying into a cloud bank over an island, there was a huge flash of light, and his plane was never seen again.

Surprisingly, in my father's IDPF was a US Army memo from 1965 reporting that my father's crash site had been found in May 1963 some 5,000 feet up on Mt. Halcon on Mindoro Island, about 100 miles northwest of Sibuyan Island. There was also a brief reference to a second visit to what was presumed to be my father's crash site in December 1963. Most of the references cited in the memo (search and recovery trip reports, site sketches, etc.) were not included, so many details were missing. (There was no indication as to why my family was never notified of this discovery.)

My efforts over a number of years to get more information got nowhere. Then, in December 2014 the Army Casualty Office at Fort Knox, KY called me, completely out of the blue, to say that a box with my father's personal effects (flight school ring inscribed with his name, ID tag, and four pictures of my mother and older sister) had been found by chance at the National Archives in Suitland, MD. Those effects were "formally" presented to my mother at her home in California by a Casualty Office representative in January 2015, 70 years (almost to the day) after my father's plane was lost. (My mother passed away in November 2015, so the timing was particularly fortuitous.)



*Barbara Robinson, widow of Capt. James Underwood, and their children, Carol Turner and Jim Briggs, receive his personal effects from Sgt. 1st Class Devin Sorensen on January 22, 2015.*

I was to learn many more details in February 2015, when I received copies of some 400 pages of various search reports and other documents that had been in the box with my father's effects. Unfortunately, the documents also served to highlight significant confusion over the exact location of my father's crash site.

In addition to teams sent to Mindoro Island in May and

December 1963, another team was sent in September 1973. These search efforts had been prompted by different notifications to the US military: 1) information provided by a person in the Mindoro governor's office in March 1962 claiming to know about a crash site; 2) a letter to the Red Cross in Washington DC from the Mindoro Chapter of the Philippines Red Cross in September 1963 reporting different details about a crash site, but mentioning my father's ring, ID tag, and pictures; and 3) letters to the Veterans Administration and Reader's Digest from a Manila businessman in March 1973 claiming to know about a crash site, mentioning that he had my father's ring and the ID tag of the radio operator on my father's plane.

The May 1963 team, guided by local natives, definitely found my father's crash site; no question about it: they found wreckage with the insignia of the 345<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group and the tail number of my father's plane. One of my father's ID tags was given to the search team by local natives, who claimed that it had come from the site. Five incomplete bones were found; since they could not be identified, they were cremated in 1965, under DOD policy at the time. Also found were two engines, a few radio parts, and three machine-guns.

The second team was sent to Mindoro in December 1963 after receipt of the Red Cross letter. The local identified in the letter (a Bernaldo Digma Jr.) was not

available, so his father (Bernaldo Digma Sr.) took that team to “a” crash site assumed to be my father’s. There was no apparent connection between the Dignas and the local natives who had taken the first team to my father’s actual crash site in May. Nothing identifiable was found at the site - and there was nothing large enough to merit photographing. The team did retrieve one of my father’s ID tags and two pictures of my mother and older sister from Digma’s wife at their home.

Confusingly, the brief description of how the team got to the assumed crash site in December (taking parts of one afternoon and a morning to get there, and just 4 ½ hours to get back to their starting point “at the foot of” Mt. Halcon) varies considerably from the brief description of the May trip: a 3-day hike to get to the crash site and apparently two days to return to a village near the mountain. It is not clear how far apart the starting points were.

- The March 1973 letter from the Manila businessman prompted another team to be sent to Mindoro Island that September. Unfortunately, that team knew nothing about the 1963 visits, misled by an American official who decided not to forward the two 1963 trip reports to the team. The businessman referred the team to one of his employees - named Bernaldo Digma (almost certainly Jr.) - and he, with the businessman’s brother-in-law, provided guidance for a helicopter from Clark Airbase to take a US

Army mortuary officer to “a” crash site on Mt. Halcon (weight limitations meant that Digma and the brother-in-law could not accompany the mortuary officer when he actually reached the site). It took two tries to find the crash site: the person guiding the flight got disorientated the first day. Found at that site by the mortuary officer were: an engine; two machine-guns (numbers did not match May 1963); radio parts; rudder; and other miscellaneous items.

Digma, apparently, made no mention of the role that he and his father had played in December 1963. He did provide the mortuary officer with 10 bones that, according to the “Record of Events,” he had “removed from the crash site 15 years earlier.” Those bones, determined to be from at least four men, could also not be identified and were cremated in 1979.

DPAA’s case summaries on my father that I received in 2015 and 2016 assumed that all three of those visits were to the same crash site. Then, surprisingly, the case summary I received in January 2017 contained the startling sentence: “Additionally, based on the disparity of onsite wreckage noted in the December 1963 and September 1973 investigation summaries, two different crash sites were visited.” DPAA removed that sentence from subsequent case summaries, for reasons I have questioned.

After a thorough review of some 500 pages of documents that I have received from DPAA (IDPF,

search and recovery reports, etc.), I sent a long, detailed letter to DPAA in August outlining issues I have with DPAA’s latest case summary and setting out the confusion, from my perspective, over my father’s crash site: there are issues of differing coordinates; very confusing location descriptions and notations on maps/sketches (variously, the crash site was noted to be on the northeast, northwest, south, or southeast slopes of Mt. Halcon); as well as the key issue of how fairly large items (engine, machine-guns) could have been found in September 1973 when they were not there in December 1963 (or even May 1963) if the same crash site were visited.

Unfortunately, the box with my father’s effects and important details of previous search efforts had not been found when DPAA’s predecessor agency sent a large team to Mindoro Island in April 2013 to look for my father’s crash site. (It’s not clear what prompted the visit.) Nothing came out of that trip; the team merely talked to a few locals with some vague recollections of some “crash sites” somewhere on the island. Due to travel restrictions placed by the local tribes, the team was not able to visit the actual area of the presumed crash site(s), which is very difficult to reach.

DPAA’s current status for my father’s case: “DPAA has discussed this case with a strategic partner, but at present they are looking to close out 2-3 investigations already begun on Luzon. DPAA will explore the possibility of assigning

this case to a partner in the next 1-2 years. In addition, DPAA will continue trying to reestablish contact with a local tourism officer who was going to work with indigenous Mangyan residents to find crash sites in the area.”

Interestingly (or, confusingly), there are aspects of two different cases here: 1) my father’s plane; and 2) a B-24 Liberator, with 24 men on board, that was never seen again after take-off from southern Mindoro Island en route to Luzon Island on 6 June 1945. In his March 1973 letter to the VA and Readers Digest, the Manila businessman claimed to have the ID tag of the co-pilot of the B-24, 1/Lt Elmo McCarty, as well as my father’s ring and the ID tag of my father’s radio operator. The leader of the 1973 search team retrieved the ring and the radio operator’s ID tag from the businessman at his office in Manila, but apparently never asked about McCarty’s ID tag. I have raised the question of that tag with DPAA. It seems possible that one of the crash site visits in 1963 or 1973 could have been to that of the B-24.

In addition to my letter to DPAA, I have sent a package of material to Colin Colbourn of the Recover Project, who addressed our reunion in San Diego in September 2017, for possible action or assistance. Colin said that his project is not involved in the Philippines right now, but he welcomed the opportunity to review my father’s case.

At this point, I can only wait for further action by DPAA - which is not in their plans currently.

## The Men of Aircraft #41-30317

*By Bob Sweet, 499<sup>th</sup>*

On February 15, 1944, aircraft #41-30317 of the 499<sup>th</sup> BS took off from Dobodura on a bomb run to Kavieng. The plane lost an engine on take-off and crashed in the Owen Stanley Mountain Range. The crash and crew are noted in Larry Hickey's "Warpath Across the Pacific" (page 368). The five-man crew included 1st. Lt. John Wilson, Pilot; 2nd. Lt. Joseph Koch, Co-Pilot; T/Sgt. Clarence Fiebig, Radio-Gunner; S/Sgt. Oscar Oakes, Eng.-Gunner; and S/Sgt. Andrew Chesanek, Gunner.

The crew members were buried in the temporary cemetery at the Nadzab Air Base. Staff Sergeant Chesanek was my uncle, and I researched the details of the re-interment of the crew. When the war ended, the burials were moved to the cemetery at Clark Field in the Philippines awaiting completion of the Manila American Cemetery.

On May 16, 1946, the 79<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress approved H.R. Bill 3936. This legislation appropriated \$250 million to bring bodies of American war dead back to the United States. Families of deceased members of the armed services had three options. They included: 1) Re-inter remains in a national cemetery near their home at government expense. 2) Burial in a private cemetery, with the government contributing \$50. 3) Burial in a permanent American Cemetery overseas.

The office of the Quartermaster General of the Army reported that 56% of families requested remains returned to the U.S. for re-interment. Four of the families of the five crew members of downed aircraft #41-30317 opted to have their loved ones buried with the war dead at the American Manila Cemetery. The family of pilot 1st. Lt. John Wilson chose re-interment in the Mill Springs National Cemetery near his home in Kentucky.

## Manila American Cemetery

*From Wikipedia*



The Manila American Cemetery and Memorial is located in Fort Bonifacio, Taguig City, Metro Manila, within the boundaries of the former Fort William McKinley.

The cemetery is 152 acres in area, is located on a prominent plateau, visible at a distance from the east, south and west. With a total of 17,206 graves, it has the largest number of graves of any cemetery for U.S. personnel killed during World War II and holds war dead from the Philippines and other allied nations. Many of the personnel whose remains are interred or represented were killed in New Guinea, or during the Battle

of the Philippines (1941–42) or the Allied recapture of the islands. The headstones are made of marble which are aligned in eleven plots forming a generally circular pattern, set among a wide variety of tropical trees and shrubbery. The Memorial is maintained by the American Battle Monuments Commission.

## Mills Spring National Cemetery

*From Wikipedia*



Mill Springs National Cemetery is a United States National Cemetery located in the town of Nancy, eight miles west of the city of Somerset in Pulaski County, Kentucky.

Administered by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, it encompasses 6.3 acres, and as of 2014, has over 4,000 interments.

Mill Springs National Cemetery was on the list of the first National Cemeteries created.

## An Interview with Jay Stout, Author of “Air Apaches”

*By James Bina, 501<sup>st</sup>*

Jay Stout’s latest book, “Air Apaches,” a gripping and personal account of the men of the 345<sup>th</sup>, was recently released to rave reviews. During the past couple of years, I worked with Jay on details

of the group’s history and helped him contact our veterans. I also helped him edit the manuscript and wrote the preface. We recently enjoyed an in-depth discussion during which Jay discussed his background and how he came to write *Air Apaches*. The book is available from Amazon, Barnes and Noble, and other fine book stores. It is also available as an audio book.

WHAT IS YOUR BACKGROUND?  
WHAT CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF?

I was born in Indianapolis, Indiana in 1959. My father worked for the FAA and my mom raised my two sisters and me while working as a bookkeeper. When I was younger, we moved around quite a bit, including a stint overseas, but ultimately, we settled back in Indiana. I graduated from Purdue University in 1981.

All I ever wanted to be was a fighter pilot. But while I was at college, I was turned down by the Air Force because my major discipline, agronomy (the science and technology of producing and using plants for food, fuel, fiber, and land reclamation), was not considered a technical degree. But the Marine Corps didn't care, and one day a Marine Corps recruiter literally grabbed my arm and asked me what I wanted to do with myself. I pointed at a poster he had of an F-4 Phantom II and said, ‘I want to fly those!’ He indicated that I would have no problem doing just that and had me sign on the dotted line.

Of course, the odds against me actually getting into the cockpit of the F-4 were about 100-to-1, but

the right mix of timing, luck, and a little bit of talent worked to my favor.

THEN WHAT HAPPENED?

I flew the F-4 just like the recruiter promised. Following my F-4 tour I flight instructed on the T-2C Buckeye. It was one of the ugliest jets ever, but I had a blast teaching on it. I then transitioned to the F/A-18 and flew with VMFA-451 during DESERT STORM. After that, I didn't get shot at through the rest of my career and finally retired from MCAS Miramar in San Diego during 2001 after twenty years of service.

I started a career with Delta Air Lines but was furloughed immediately following the terrorist attacks of September 11. After flying F/A-18s for a year as a contract instructor with the Kuwait Air Force, I came back to the States and now work for a major defense contractor as a senior analyst.

SO HOW DID YOU GET STARTED WITH WRITING? ANY SPECIAL TRAINING?

I was probably better at writing than most of my peers, but I didn't have any special talent or training. Writing is mostly just hard work. I was like a lot of people: I always wanted to write a book. After DESERT STORM there was no one writing any first-person accounts of combat flying of the sort that I had enjoyed reading as a young man. I figured that I had been there and that I could write about it as well as anyone else, so I gave it a shot.

THIS WAS HORNETS OVER KUWAIT?

Yes, and I did everything wrong. I just wrote it and sent it straight

out to about a gajillion publishers without an agent or even a proposal or a query letter. Most of the manuscripts came back with notes that essentially said, 'Thanks, but no thanks.' There were a couple of bites though, and eventually after a rewrite or two and some tough editing, Naval Institute Press published it in 1997.

The Marine Corps hated the book. I used some colorful language and I picked on some of the senior leadership and some of the service's policies. I slammed the AV-8B Harrier and questioned the role of women in the military. But because of my frankness and honesty I made a lot of friends and sold a few books. I think the Naval Institute Press was pleased.

#### WHAT OTHER BOOKS HAVE YOU WRITTEN?

I've been published by houses as big as Penguin Books, and as small as Casemate, and now have twelve books to my credit, almost all of which are aviation history works. They include, *Hell's Angels*, *The Men Who Killed the Luftwaffe*, *Fortress Ploesti*, and *Fighter Group*, among others.

#### WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO WRITE AIR APACHES?

The 345<sup>th</sup>'s story is so rich and so unique as compared to what happened during the war in Europe. I was surprised that it hadn't been covered in a narrative history sort of style, and I thought that doing so would be a great opportunity. I enjoy that sort of writing immensely, especially because I learn as I write. And I thought that it'd be a great way to preserve the

group's history. And of course, I knew that the 345<sup>th</sup> had a great association that would be able to help me. That developed to be the case, and I'm really grateful for everyone's generosity and help.

#### ANY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WOULD-BE WRITERS?

Start. A person can think of a thousand reasons not to begin writing. Bottom line: 'It ain't gonna get wrote if you don't start it.' And then, don't give up. Finish it. And if it gets rejected, keep fixing it and sending it out. Don't stop until it's published. I have not one shred of doubt that the top twenty American classics were never published because their writers gave up. Those manuscripts are sitting in an attic or garage somewhere and will never see the light of day because the writers didn't have the energy and persistence to see them get to print.

#### WHAT IS IN YOUR FUTURE, ANY NEW BOOKS YOU ARE CONSIDERING?

Right now, nothing. I'm a little bit tired after writing a new book every two years or so for the last twenty years. There are a few things that interest me—particularly the nation's early history. I'm considering relocating to Virginia from San Diego and that might make a perfect fit. Regardless, I'll do something—I can't stand to sit around, and I can't golf at night.

Lieutenant Colonel (ret) Jay A. Stout is a retired Marine Corps fighter pilot. An Indiana native and graduate of Purdue University, he

was commissioned on June 1, 1981 and was designated a naval aviator on 13 May 1983. His first fleet assignment was to F-4S Phantoms



*Colonel Stout*

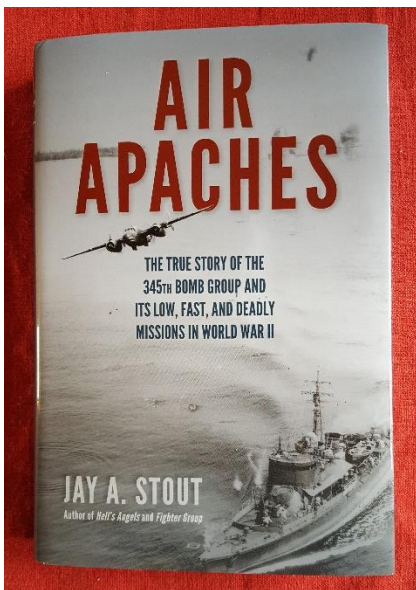
at MCAS Beaufort, South Carolina. Following a stint as an instructor pilot at NAS Chase Field Texas from 1986 to 1989, he transitioned to the F/A-18 Hornet. He flew the Hornet from bases on both coasts and ultimately retired from MCAS Miramar during 2001.

Aside from his flying assignments, he served as the executive officer of 1st Air Naval Gunfire Liaison Company, and in a variety of additional assignments with various staffs around the world. During his twenty-year career he flew more than 4,500 flight hours, including 37 combat missions during Operation Desert Storm.

Lieutenant Colonel (ret) Stout has been published in various national journals and newspapers and his work has been read on the floor of the United States Senate. Articles published while he was on active duty addressed controversial topics, where his opinions and viewpoints were often at odds with the service's senior leadership. Nevertheless, his cogent arguments, logic and forthrightness earned respect and underscored his

credibility. Stout has also written eight books—all published by mainstream publishing houses. Many of them won awards and all have been the subject of positive critical commentary.

Stout is a recognized military subject matter expert. He has appeared on the Fox News Network, Al Jazeera and National Public Radio as well as dozens of regional and local network affiliates.



*“The American 345th Bomb Group--the Air Apaches--was legendary in the war against Japan. The first fully trained and fully equipped group sent to the South Pacific, the 345th racked up a devastating score against the enemy. Armed to the teeth with machine guns and fragmentation bombs and flying their B-25s at impossibly low altitudes--often below fifty feet--the pilots and air crews strafed and bombed enemy installations and shipping with a fury that helped cripple*

*Japan. One of the sharpest tools in the U.S. arsenal, the 345th performed essential missions during Gen. Douglas MacArthur’s campaigns in New Guinea and the Philippines, earning an impressive four Distinguished Unit Citations.*

*This was punishingly dangerous work, and the 345th lost 177 aircraft and 712 men--young men doing their duty in the spirit of the Greatest Generation. Neither was this the more gentlemanly war of Europe, with its more temperate climate, resistance networks aiding downed crews, and POW camps. Airmen shot down in the Pacific theater faced drowning in the ocean, disappearing in the jungle, or torturing and beheading by the Japanese in a war of no quarter expected, no quarter given.*

*A compelling follow-up to Stout’s Hell’s Angels, Air Apaches reconstructs the missions of the 345th Bomb Group in striking detail, with laser focus on the men who manned the cockpits, navigated the B-25s, dropped the bombs, serviced the planes, and helped win the war. To tell this remarkable story, Stout worked closely with the group’s surviving veterans and dug deep into firsthand accounts. The result is a compelling narrative of men at war that*

*will keep readers on the edge of their seats.”*

*--From Amazon summary*

## **Review**

**by Dennis O’Neill, 500th**

I’ve been reading and listening to the Audible version of Air Apaches, recorded by Robertson Dean (the reading time is 15 hours) of Jay Stout’s new book. This time it’s a treatment of our own 345<sup>th</sup> Group. The foreword was written by past Association President James Bina.

As an amateur (but fairly tenacious) researcher of the group, I was impressed with the perspectives from persons that we’ve not often (or ever) heard from. In addition to new stories, there are expansions on some of those stories of which we thought we knew “everything”. If you’ve been to a reunion, you know that part of the appeal of physically gathering is to hash over those many heroic accounts that we’re all familiar with.

Encountering the fresh perspectives in this book has been a real joy!

I also have to mention that the pictures are wonderful, with some that I’ve never seen before.

Other than a few published personal memoirs, this is the first time in a long period that



new insight into the 345<sup>th</sup> Group has been presented.

For any member of our 345<sup>th</sup> "family", it's a must-read.

## Amazon Reviews for "Air Apaches"

I recently received a copy of Jay Stout's new book, as you may have also. I am about halfway through and I don't need to finish to form my opinion. I am impressed.

Looking back at the Feb '17 Strafer when the idea of a new book was floated, I re-read what was asked of us by "an outsider". I feared the book may be a re-hash of old information since first-hand information is difficult 70 years after the fact. I contributed material in the possibility that it was all on the level and I could not risk ignoring such an opportunity. Now I'm reading this book of new stories that is largely in the words of the men who were there. It was completed in the time frame projected, by a person with no direct tie to any of the men.

I want to thank all who contributed great stuff that enabled this book. And to Jay for transforming it into a significant document. Jay did us right. By "right" I mean he did everything he said he would. By "us" I mean anyone who is a fan of the 345<sup>th</sup>.

*John Turner*

Really great book about the war in the skies above the south Pacific. Lots of action, details and personal stories w/ anecdotes. Really well-written.

*Amazon Customer*

Jay Stout's detailed research, organized compilation and well written presentation of numerous factual accounts and gripping bomb missions, often ill-fated, is a testament of the dedication and resolve of the 345<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group amidst both the solemn darkness of war and the hope through victory. So profound was the courage and fortitude that was summoned by these individuals and so many of America's youth during that perilous time.

Having lost an uncle whose missing B-25 crew was part of the 345<sup>th</sup>, (last seen heading near Karkar island after a bombing mission on Dagua, PNG), Jay's book has more than a historical context for me. His book gave me a much better understanding of the circumstances, settings, realities, mind-sets and numerous possibilities that confronted lost airmen, e.g., fatal crash, surviving the crash but becoming captured (Karkar was heavily occupied by Japanese) or not surviving the rough immense sea or shark infested waters, surviving by life raft but then becoming lost at sea, etc.

Jay conveys the strategy and tactics of the 345<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group as it makes it way from New Britain island, with its intense missions at Rabaul, gradually sweeping westerly across Papua New Guinea's north coast and eventually to Philippines, Leyte then Luzon (Clark air base), just before WWII's conclusion in the Pacific.

*Ron Beattie*

Just as he's done with the 303<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group (The Hell's Angels) and the 352<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group (The Blue-Nosed Bastards of Bodney), author Jay Stout has once again given us a great book on the men who served in one the premier B-25 units of the Pacific War: the 345<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, aka "The Air Apaches".

The book isn't a comprehensive account of the group and all their missions (see Lawrence Hickey's book, *Warpath Across the Pacific*, if comprehensive is what you want), but more about the men who made up the unit and what they went through in oftentimes primitive environments while fighting a determined and hostile enemy. There are plenty of personal stories about what happened on various missions, mostly from official reports, personal recollections and correspondence of those who were there. Along the way, you'll get to know some of the men very personally from diary excerpts, letters to family and loved ones and remembrances of those who paid the ultimate price.

The book is also a testament to the remarkable plane the men flew in combat: The B-25 Mitchell bomber. Overall, another excellent book on a fine American aerial combat group by Jay Stout.

*Marc L. Tavasci*

(Audio review) Enjoyed entire book start to finish. Highly recommended. Details I have never heard before. Thumbs up.

*S. Todd Carmichael*

## Recent Deaths

We have recently learned of the deaths of these members of the 345<sup>th</sup> family:

Reed Robertson, a navigator from the 500<sup>th</sup> on October 23, 2018. He was the subject of A Book by Me, Hero Series Book #10, Capturing the Moment. The book was written by some young friends of Reed's, Elizabeth Johnson and illustrated by Maddy Rowe.

Anna Mae Bardwell Walker on October 21, 2018. Anna was the sister of Lloyd Bardwell, pilot of Mexican Spitfire, who was KIA on September 2, 1944.

We extend our sympathy to their families and friends.

## What do you have? What could you share?

A recent Facebook post (Who's Your Favorite WWII Pilot?) from the "I Love WWII Planes" page that we shared with our 345<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association page, brought forth a plethora of responses, many about 345<sup>th</sup> members. A surprising number of responses showed photographs and/or descriptions of wartime experiences or battles. Some referenced works published by 345<sup>th</sup> members.

Over the years, we have collected many books and memoirs, some by the members themselves and some published by others. They make fascinating reading.

We are interested in compiling a master list of available published materials about the 345<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group.

Additionally, we are interested in gathering scans of personal materials held by family members or others and knowing the contact information for whoever holds them. Materials that families are not interested in keeping may be sent to the 345<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association, or if you choose to share them with other family members (i.e. grandchildren) or donate them to a local library or museum, we would appreciate knowing where they are.

In the future, we plan to create a database of this information for the benefit of researchers and family members who want to know more.

We are so grateful when these important items are kept and when they are shared with us. Our mission as an educational and historical organization is achieved by our careful stewardship of the historic archive of the 345<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group.

Thank you for your part in helping keep the memory and significant accomplishments alive.



## Website Progress

At last! With the help of New River Geographics, our webmaster Paul Van Valkenburg, and Andy Decker, who has been doing incredible GIS work, we are making progress toward a redesigned 345<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group website that will enable viewers to search for specific information.

Do you have interesting pictures or drawings from wartime, previous reunions, even present day that might be good additions for the website. Please contact Mary Roby if you do.

[mroby1916@gmail.com](mailto:mroby1916@gmail.com)

Thank you for helping us make our website attractive and interesting!

## Seeking information about 1Lt John D. Wilson

From Nick Wilson, "It seems his B-25 experienced an engine failure on takeoff and crashed at the end of the runway. Perhaps this was due to his inexperience somehow (as I understand it, he was a replacement) or some fault with the engine. My family knows virtually nothing about him. I hope that you might be able to shed some light and also let me know if you have access to any photos of him or other information." If you know anything about Lt Wilson, please contact Nick Wilson, J.D. Candidate '18, Cornell Law School. [nw329@cornell.edu](mailto:nw329@cornell.edu) 859-421-6054.

**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  
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 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.**

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**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**

*Thanks for renewing your  
membership for 2019!*

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Squadron Representatives

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

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

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