



AIR APACHES

STRAFER

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Mary Roby, 2nd Generation 500th

Today, as I am writing this, Clint and I have, except for trips to the grocery store and pharmacy, and a few days of work for him, have been keeping "social distance" for over 10 days. While what we are going through is very different from what Americans experienced during WWII, there are many corollaries.

We are being asked to make preparations for an uncertain future, take action that will benefit the common good, and to support those on the front lines, who, for this battle, are health care workers, first responders, those who deliver supplies and those who are working at the grocery store. Of course, there are many others working out of public view, modifying their

factories to make much needed health care items. There are even ad-hoc efforts by those who sew to fashion desperately needed masks for nurses, doctors, and respiratory therapists. The need to pull together as Americans has never been more necessary. As during WWII, we are stepping us.

That said, I hope you and your families are doing as well as you can, and that the US will recover in as short a time as possible. I am sending positive thoughts to all our 345th family.

That said, this week, I optimistically signed the hotel contract for our 345th 2020 Annual reunion to be held October 2 through October 5 in San Antonio, TX. We have made plans with the Museum of the Pacific War to dedicate a plaque to the members of the 345th on Saturday, October 3. On that day,

we will have a full day field trip to Fredericksburg, where the Museum is located. I hope you will all put this on your calendars as we never know when our last reunion might be.

While more details will be forthcoming through Facebook, our website, and the next Strafer, you may go ahead to reserve your rooms at the Menger Hotel. The group rate will be honored for three days before and after the reunion. To make your reservation, please call 800-345-9285 and identify yourself as a member of the 345th WWII Bomb Group Reunion. You may also make your reservation on-line at <https://www.mengerhotel.com/>. The Menger Hotel is a lovely, historic hotel, conveniently close to the San Antonio Riverwalk. I know you will like it.

Please save the date: October 2-5, 2020

Annual Reunion San Antonio

PILOT TO PILOT

By Toney Bowen, 345th

Facebook Friend

Note: This is the first piece we've had from one of our Facebook friends. Writers are encouraged to propose articles for the Strafer. Please contact us through our Facebook page, "345th Bomb Group Association."

When I was a young man of about 33 (this was around 1987) I had the privilege of meeting Samuel Bennett. I had just gotten married and was spending some time with my new father-in-law and when he suggested we stop and visit an acquaintance of his, I agreed. It wasn't far and we were there in just a few minutes. Sam answered the door and invited us in.

After introductions we soon found ourselves seated in his living room and while the two older men conversed my eyes began to wander over the interior of the room. It was like most living rooms. Console TV, books, pictures of the family, but then something caught my eye. It was a model of a B-25 with the Air Apache "chief" on the vertical stabilizers. Since I was a child, I had always loved planes, all kinds of planes and being a WW2 history nut as well, I knew about the Air Apaches. I had always looked up to and was filled with admiration for the men who were combat pilots in the war. I had recently gotten my Private Pilot's license and was thrilled to the core that I could call myself a pilot.

When a break presented itself in the conversation, I asked Sam if he was an airplane guy. His answer caught me off guard..." You could say that I suppose, he replied, I flew those in WW2". It took a moment for that to sink in, "You flew with the Air Apaches" I asked? When he saw that I knew the unit his expression changed, and he became a bit more animated. We talked pilot talk... and I had a lot of questions. If you lost an engine could only one R 2600 keep you airborne? What was your stall speeds? What was the greater threat? Fighters or flak? This lasted a while and my father-in-law finally

said he needed to go. I told Sam that I had something at home that I wanted to give him, and could I drop it off the following day? He said, "Sure thing."

We said our goodbyes and we left. The next day I brought him a large book whose subject was the Japanese "Zero" fighter. It had many color illustrations and exploded drawings detailing the fighter in its many versions and he was quite pleased that I had given it to him. He asked me if I had time to sit awhile and I responded that I did as I wasn't working that day. He said, "I have a book here you might be interested in" and he sat beside me and opened "Warpath Across the Pacific."

I have no idea why Sam decided to let me into some of his secret places, no idea why he opened up to me like he did. Maybe he saw in me the love of flying he had had as a young man. Perhaps he saw the respect I had for guys like him, young men who answered the call, men who faced a merciless enemy and pounded out victory with bullets, blood and bombs. That afternoon he told me his story, of hard missions, of friends dying and crews not coming home. He let me know that some things...you never get over.

He told me how the eight fifties in the nose of an H model B-25 could sink a destroyer. He said, "when we would do a strafing run on a jap ship and open up with those fifties, the first thing you see is all the tracers ricocheting all over the place, but soon they start penetrating and a black hole appears. Then in the hole it begins to glow and soon if you're lucky.... she blows up."

He turned to the book again and said let me show you something. What he showed me is on page 308. He pointed to his plane making a strafing run on a Jap destroyer but that wasn't what he wanted to show me. In the left upper part of the photo is a huge splash where 1st Lt. Joseph Herick's plane had crashed, inverted after taking a direct hit in the cockpit by heavy AA fire. Sam looked at me with

deep sadness in his eyes. "I knew he wasn't going to make it through the war", he said. "His wife had a new baby and I don't think he had ever seen his kid and he so desperately wanted to see his wife and baby. He was so distracted; oh, he did his job.... but all he thought about was getting home and in my heart, I knew he wasn't going to make it back. Whole crew...gone."

"Man...that's a damn shame. So sad," I replied...seeing and feeling the immense sadness he still carried for a buddy lost over forty years earlier.

He continued, "once when we were on a coastal patrol, we spotted a couple Jap vessels towing river barges full of Jap soldiers or marines...hard to tell at 200 mph... We knew we couldn't let them land those men on the beaches or they would be killing marines that night. So...we strafed them...we strafed them till the water was red with blood...we killed hundreds of them. Hundreds of them." Sam was no longer with me in his living room in Sulphur, Louisiana. He was back in the South Pacific strafing Japanese...Turning to me with tears in his eyes, he pleaded with me saying... "But what else could I do...what else could I have done?"

I don't know about you...but I often fail to have the right words at the right time. If I ever do have the right words, it is almost always far too late. If Sam were here today here is what I would tell him.

Sam, you killed those Japs...that's true. But in doing so you saved many a young Marine. Those Marines, because of you went home to get married, because of you they enjoyed the love of their wives, they had families, children and grandchildren. They got to watch their team in the Superbowl.

They were able to LIVE their lives...because of you and others like you. I am not one who thinks that every single person who wears a uniform is a hero. I wore the uniform and I was never a hero. But Sam was a HERO. I will soon be 67 years old

I am old enough to know what a real hero is. And I am here to tell you Lt. Samuel Bennett was the real deal. A real HERO.

NEWS ABOUT THE 499th

by Bob Sweet, 499th

January 1945 was the beginning of the final year of World War II - but no one knew it. Luzon and Clark Field, in the Philippines, were held by Japanese forces. Before any landing on Luzon by allied forces, Clark Field had to be neutralized. By the end of January that mission was accomplished with all four squadrons of the 345th participating.

During January, 75 years ago, 30 combat missions were flown by the Air Apaches. Larry Hickey, in "Warpath Across the Pacific" (page 258) notes the heavy losses. Sixty-one men were lost, and 16 aircraft destroyed. The 499th lost 5 aircraft and 16 men. A heavy price, but by the end of the month, Clark Field was controlled by allied forces.

On Feb. 12, 1945, the 345th Bomb Group - and the entire Fifth Air Force began to move headquarters to Clark Field. This was the start of the drive toward Formosa, the Japanese coast, and the surrender of Japan in seven months.

SOMETHING TO DO WHILE STAYING SAFE AT HOME

*Check out our Facebook page!
More than 1500 folks follow our page and they post a lot of interesting material and photographs.*

Have a question about someone in the 345th? Ask it there and you may get an answer or help someone else with their question.

Thank you!

RESEARCH – HOW ONE THING LEADS TO ANOTHER....

By Dennis O’Neill, 500th

Investigating combat records of Victor F. Brownell, as requested by his son Brad, led me to the 3rd Attack Group web site. His records ended with the 501st. Further research revealed developments in the pilot training program of which I personally was not aware.

- It ended in late 1942, since the educational requirements for cadets had been lowered to that of an aviation student (high school diploma) and all students were to be appointed at graduation as flight officers or second lieutenants. Promotions of those pilots still sergeants were ordered on Nov. 17, 1942.

Congress enacted:

- Public Law 658 - Flight Officer Act, passed late November 1942: A new rank, FO, under commissioned officers, the highest rank for an enlisted man.
- Public Law 99 passed June 3, 1941: It contained the requested authority and gave flying students the title of “Aviation Students”. It also contained a provision for life insurance in the amount of \$10,000 for each student undergoing training by the U.S. government.

Based on the enactment of these two laws, the following took place:

- Class of 42C all became fighter pilots.
- Class of 42H-I-J posted to fighter, bomber, troop carrier and anti-sub units.
- Class of 42J were last to be called “Sergeant Pilots”, a total of 2574 under Public Law 99.

The other part of my research within the 3rd Attack Group website is of a more personal nature.

Hobart “Doc” Rankin started as an enlisted man, a Sergeant Pilot for the 3rd Attack Group, flying B-25’s. He also flew the mission to

Rabaul on Nov. 2, 1943.

After that mission, the 3rd went to A-20’s and Rankin was transferred to the 500th. Load lists reveal that my father-in-law, Joseph Symonds, flew co-pilot on his 3rd and 4th missions, with Captain Rankin on his (Rankin’s) last 2 missions.

This is a good example of “one thing leading to another” during our research efforts. We should be flexible, allowing ourselves to trust hunches and follow leads which, at first, may seem to be unrelated. This is also only one of the reasons that I love being a member of our group and taking up the challenges and responsibilities that we owe to these brave men.

Resources:

<http://www.3rdattackgroup.org/>

Arbon, Lee (1992). *They Also Flew: The Enlisted Pilot Legacy 1912-1942*. Smithsonian Institution Press



345TH PLAQUE AT THE MUSEUM OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC

Thanks to the initiative of our member, Marc Stevens, a plaque of recognition to the history and accomplishments of the 345th in the South Pacific

will be dedicated at the Museum of the South Pacific in Fredericksburg, TX on Saturday, October 2. The cost of the plaque is \$2500, and the Association would greatly appreciate your contribution to the effort. We would like to thank Susan Savett (Joe

Mallard), Michael Romano (Patsy Romano), John Turner (Ray Link), and those who contributed to our FB fundraiser on National Day of Giving. Any funds beyond those raised for the plaque will be reserved for maintenance of this plaque, our memorial to the 345th at the National Museum of the USAF at Wright Patterson AFB near Dayton, OH, and the historical marker at the Columbia, SC airport. If anyone is aware of any other public markers or memorials, please let us know in case maintenance is also needed for them.

Thanks to everyone who already has and will contribute to this effort. We hope you will be able to join us in San Antonio to dedicate the plaque.

If you would like to contribute to the plaque, please make your check payable to:

345th Bomb Group Association

Please mail to Clint Roby, Treasurer at the address on the Membership page.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO

As noted by Vic Tatelman, who was then President of the 345th Bomb Group Association, in the March 1995 Strafer.

I've been reading the "new" Mission Reports recently distributed to the squadrons by Bill Helvey. Fascinating! That project that he had the pertinacity to pursue alone boggles the mind. The thought of "reading" thousands of frames of microfilm, one is struck by the curious estrangement of his role. Other than the initial curiosity of his father's activities with us, what inspired him to continue the enormous effort through the other squadrons?

The enormousness of the task is not lost on us. Those who have been confronted with a complex research project can certainly appreciate and understand the gargantuan effort required. And to continue through the entire Group—well, incomprehensible.

The material itself is like reading stories, tales where we are the protagonists. Like an out-of-body experience, we are almost looking down on something that couldn't have happened; we the spectators, watching an episode of history that we experienced. An experience that seems reductive after so many years.

I'm sure no one of us reading of his experiences remembers everything, every detail. We thought we'd never forget even the slightest incident, but time dulls the memory. And some of the details, as we read of them, are not familiar, they don't come back, but they must have happened—the report is merely the written reproduction of our own debriefing. No one "made this up;" it's an actual history. Did I really do that? Did that really happen? But don't read panegyrics into it, these aren't public compliments. Merely an evocation of childhood memories, and children we were. Reading them now, my thoughts alternated between terror and acceptance.

Thanks, Bill, for your splendid contribution, the results are not attenuated by time.

A San Antonio Question

The first person with the correct answer will win a special San Antonio gift.

What famous baseball player has a connection to our San Antonio hotel?

WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM OTHER WWII GROUPS

Mary Roby

At last year's reunion in Ypsilanti, we had a good conversation about the Association and our future, as many WWII organizations are no longer holding reunions, and some are even disbanding.

The recent deaths of two of our most active veterans, Linck Grush and Murph Leventon, really brought home for me the need to focus on the Association's future.

In addition to focusing on the need to recruit more members from second and third generations of original members of the 345th, we also talked about how to secure funds to keep the reunions going. Several people suggested seeking sponsorships from businesses or groups that care about veterans. We'll be looking into that.

Recently, I had a great conversation with Mary Crowley of the 449th Bomb Group (Flying Horsemen) that served in Italy. Their four "tightly knit" squadrons now consider themselves entirely "the 449th."

The group has a fabulous online newsletter, the Late Pass that contains a lot of information about current and historical events, and also has updates on missing crews. (The

2020 edition will be posted soon.)

The group has both an historian and an archivist. Oral histories that they began collecting 20 years ago have been donated to the Smithsonian and the WWII Museum in New Orleans. There are a number of interesting items on the website. Let me know if you see any ideas that the 345th might take on.

BYLAWS UPDATE

Mary Roby

At our reunion last year, we talked about revising our bylaws to comport with our status as a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization.

With the assistance of Jim Bina, Marith Reheis, and Lynne Victorine, an expert parliamentarian in Roanoke, we have written what I think is an excellent version that respects our current circumstances and recognizes plans for the future.

Our existing and proposed bylaws revision will be posted on our website later this summer. If you would like an email or hard copy, please let me know.

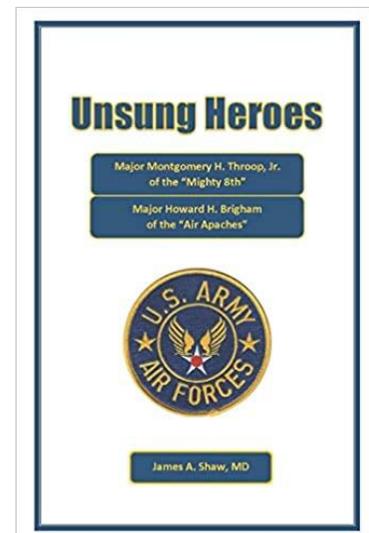
A NEW BOOK ABOUT A 345TH MEMBER

Unsung Heroes is a war-focused biography of World War II pilots, Major

Montgomery H. Throop, Jr. and Major Howard H. Brigham. Assembled by Dr. James Shaw from military documents, letters home, and autobiographical notes, the book recounts the first-person thoughts and experiences of two pilot family members within the historical context of major events in the European and Pacific Theaters and detailed histories of the two heralded units for which they flew - the "Mighty Eighth" and the "Air Apaches."

Major Throop was a fighter pilot with the Eighth Air Force and Major Brigham was B-25 pilot with the 345th Bomb Group of the 5th Air Force in the South Pacific. Both pilots served throughout a majority of the United States' involvement in World War II, compiling 81 and 56 combat missions, respectively.

Available on Amazon



Note to our Members and Friends. Thank you for your membership in the 345th Bomb Group Association, which is 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 plan to come to San Antonio! Will really help with planning. Thank you!

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

Please check here _____ if enclosing a special gift for the 345th Plaque at the Museum of the Pacific War

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

Have you paid your 2020 dues?

Only \$15 for veterans and their spouses/widows. Other individual memberships are \$35 per year.

Additional contributions are much appreciated.

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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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