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Ken Gastgeb (HQ) sent in this picture of the World War II Memorial design. Ken and his family made a contribution to support the construction of the monument back in 1999. The Memorial is located in Washington, DC and is positioned between the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Monument, which is in the background.



PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By: Jim Bina

Reunion XXV is shaping up nicely and we are looking at having plenty to do for all our guests. Some of the more notable highlights; B-25 Betty's Dream operated by the Texas Flying Legends out of Ellington Field will be at Columbia! The crew is just as excited to be at the reunion as we are and eager to learn more about the 345th. Betty's Dream is a B-25J-20 with the solid 8-gun nose and proudly displays the 499th's Bats Outa Hell paint scheme. We've also requested an A-10 Thunderbolt II from Moody AFB as a then-and-now comparison to the B-25, let's see if the Air Force approves. We are commemorating a historical marker for the 345th which will be located outside of Columbia Airport, the former CAAB. This is a typical historical marker you see on the roadside with a brief story what happened here. The City of Columbia also hosts a great Veterans Day Parade and we are making time in the schedule of that. Plus we are scheduling some educational seminars. In all it will be an exciting time for anyone and everyone that attends. The registration form is in this copy of The Strafer.

If you are considering attending Reunion XXV, make your hotel



reservations early! The University of South Carolina is hosting Arkansas in Columbia the very same weekend of our reunion. That means that hotel rooms will become scarce! The hotel number is on the registration form, call early!

My wife and I recently took a Caribbean cruise where we visited the islands of Curacao, Bonaire and the Panama Canal Zone, a wonderful area to explore, and experience the Panama Canal and the history surrounding it. Did you know that the Panamanians are busy digging a bigger canal? Yup, 2015 is the scheduled opening date. During our cruise south, the ship hosted a Veterans gathering. Two notable gentlemen I met were WWII Vets, one flew B-24's with the 380th BG "The Flying Circus" out of New Guinea and the other, Harrison Covington, flew P-47's with the 316th Sq of the 348th Fighter Group. Harrison shared a story with me, in typical fighter pilot fashion, he was on a mission over mainland Japan when his P-47 took a hit by ack-ack and



damaged his radio among other things. Harrison knew he couldn't make it back to his home base so he

started looking for an alternate landing strip, and fast! Then he spotted Ie Shima. He couldn't communicate with Ie Shima tower but he lined up his P-47 for the south end of the runway, a straight in approach. During his approach he drifted below the cliff at the end of the runway but he managed to gain enough altitude and settled his P-47 on the runway, right in the oncoming path of 345th B-25's taking

off! Evasive actions on his part avoided a collision and his aircraft came to rest off the side of the runway. I was wondering if anyone who was on le Shima could say “I remember that...!” Nowadays Harrison is an artist and resides in Tampa, Florida.

We will do our best to keep everyone advised on 345th upcoming activities. Stay safe!



BLACK PANTHERS

501ST SQUADRON

By: Paul Van
Valkenburg

We received a request for information on the website from the nephew of S/Sgt James J. Beattie, an aerial photographer who was lost in a B-25 crash in New Guinea. The text of his request follows:

“I was wondering if there is any way anyone associated with the 345th BG Reunion Association might lead me to more info about my uncle James J Beattie whose B-25 disappeared over New Guinea on March 29, 1944. My old hometown newspaper wrote an article recently which is all I know about him.

Specifically, it would be wonderful to learn of anyone who may have known about my uncle or the pilot he flew with or have any other info. Coincidentally, I just finished reading “MacArthur” which allowed me to learn a lot more about the WWII events in New Guinea/Southern Pacific/Australia including General Kenney’s air corps.

Thank you in advance for your time and any info or advice that you might have.”

Ron Beattie

rbeattie@roadrunner.com

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S/Sgt Beattie was aboard the 498th Squadron’s ‘Hitt and Miss’ when it was lost on a bombing mission to the Wewak area. The airplane was piloted by Lt. Bernard Foley.



BATS OUTA HELL

499TH SQUADRON

By: Jim Mahaffey

While the 345th had virtually knocked off Rabaul as a power, we still had to make one final blow to Kavieng and Chinatown. But, it cost the 345th several planes and gave our navy friend Lt. Nathan Gordon the Medal of Honor for his feat of rescuing 15 men from the water and certain death at the hands of the Japanese. All of this was reported in the *Strafer* about three years ago when Mr. Gordon died. After the Navy, he served as Lt. Governor of Arkansas for 19 years. I recently talked of him with a man from his hometown who now lives in our retirement center.

The 345th had made a move to Nadzab and we were making strikes up the coast toward the Philippines. Black Sunday intervened on 16 April 1944. I was on my way home and waiting in Moresby where I got bits and pieces of the info from people passing through on their way to leave in Sydney, or to pick up food in a Fat

Cat. I waited there 60 days while all the wounded were flown out but I didn't mind because I had gotten by with just a scratch on my leg.

The weather was questionable that Sunday, as 5th Air Force got off about 200 planes of all sorts. We had 27 from 3 squadrons of the 345th, the 499th, 500th and 501st. This was to Hollandia and 4 bases on the way up the coast of New Guinea, hitting A/A batteries, supply depots and troop areas, but they got weathered in on the way home. An old tent mate, Capt. Dick Baker, led the 499th. He flew cover for us when we ditched off the Admiralty Islands and I heard from him a lot after the war. They tried to find a way over, under or around the clouds, but those thunderheads in the SWPA were insurmountable. They went up to 50 thousand feet and down to the water. You do not fly in the clouds over ground there as there are rocks in the clouds. After about an hour, off from Madang, Baker found a break and saw water below, so he dove from about 8000 feet with the squadron following in trail. They followed the coast to Finschafen where they landed. However, Lt James McWilliams in "Stingeroo" was straggling behind and losing oil. The engine started to heat and was trying to run away, so he decided to ditch. He sat it down nicely and all tried to get out at one time, so they got stuck in the escape hatch. There was a malfunction with the main raft, so they all got in one raft. With him were Lt. Leo Fleniken and Sgt Charles Sweet.

In the back of the plane Sgt. Robert Stewart was trapped as the steel door was stuck so he put all his 200 pounds on it and

he and Sgt. Jack Meneffe managed to escape just as the plane went down. They got into the raft and started cranking the Gibson Girl radio to notify people that they were down. It was dark and they were drifting toward Karkar Island and there were Japs there so they paddled to keep away from it. They drifted all night and after daybreak three fighter planes discovered them and wagged their wings to say a PBY was coming soon. About an hour later a PBY picked them up and headed down the coast to pick up an A-20. The Cat gunners riddled the raft as was common to keep the Japs from knowing of their rescue.

The 5th AF lost 31 planes that day to weather and other causes. General Kenney wrote that it was the worst blow he took in the war. After this, Army troops landed at Aitape and Hollandia and the 345th pounded Hansa Bay for three days. We were on our way to the Philippines.

I pay tribute to the Catalinas as they saved a lot of us from certain death or capture by the Japanese. There are about 45 mentions of the Catalinas in our history book "Warpath Across the Pacific" by Hickey. Get a copy if you do not have one. Great history!

We just received word of the death of Capt. Ferguson. He was a great communication leader and also great in keeping the troops spirits up during the kamikaze attacks. His daughter sent an article about a vacation trip he and Pat Goforth took to New Guinea. I'll send it in later. Also Morris Perkins' son contacted me about the death of his father earlier this year. I enjoyed visiting with Morris at

a couple of reunions. He had also been rescued by a submarine.



ROUGH RAIDERS

500TH SQUADRON

By: Kelly McNichols

One of the first stories of the 345th BG

I came to know was about the unescorted raid on Rabaul in October, 1943. The second was the Kavieng raid of February 15 of 1944. Because I am with the 500th BS, I had heard about the Kavieng mission from that perspective. I knew that Bill Cavoli had been shot down and rescued by Medal of Honor winner, Nathan Gordon. I knew that Cavoli's top turret gunner, John Murphy happened to be the same man who had become an "ace" by shooting down five Japanese planes on October 18, 1943 while serving aboard "Tondelayo". I remember thinking, "How much does a guy have to take?"

Larry Hickey's book "Warpath Across the Pacific" is truly a wonderful book and I'm sure that I can't add anything to the commentary about the Kavieng mission. I can only imagine the amount of time it took to do the research for the book. I have recently had conversations with individuals who were on that mission and being interested in history, I decided to look for myself into that day.

Because of tireless efforts from 345th BG member Paul Van Valkenburg, we now have the ability to look at the mission reports on the 345th website at <http://www.345thbombgroup.org/history/mission-reports.php>. I downloaded the

reports from each of the four squadrons and tried to understand that day's events. It is interesting to me that each squadron has varied information. Some reference planes from other bomb groups that participated and some have maps. It quickly became overwhelming for me to keep the information straight in my own mind which makes Hickey's book more amazing for he examined the whole war. I was looking at one day. I finally had to draw a schematic of the planes and a timeline for the flights. I hope it is accurate.

In both Hickey's narrative and the mission reports, it became apparent that the 345th BG was not the only group involved. Earlier in the day according to the 501st report, seven squadrons of B-24s from the 43rd BG and the 90th BG along with A-20s from the 3rd Attack preceded the B-25s of the 345th and 38th BG. Air cover was provided by two squadrons of P-38s. I have yet to find documents on which fighter group this was.

The 499th BS log states that A-20s were to strike shipping in Kavieng Harbor one hour and fifteen minutes before the B-25s. The heavy units were to attack Kavieng Airdrome fifteen minutes prior to the 499ths arrival. 498th reports indicate that the 38th BG was to lead the raid. 501st records state that the 500th was to lead the 345th BG with the 501st, 498th and 499th to follow.

The 38th BG led the attack formation with three squadrons participating, 71st, 405th and 823rd. The 71st BS had eight B-25D-1 planes in two flight elements; the 405th BS flew as number two squadron with nine B-25D-1s. One plane turned

back with engine trouble. The 405th BS contained two flight elements. The first had six planes abreast, the second five including three planes from the 823rd squadron. The 823rd BS flew nine B-25G-1s.

Jack DeTour, 38th BS Association President <http://www.sunsetters38bg.com> was able to fill in some gaps in the story. One of the 71st planes in the second flight #41-30306 was hit and caught fire. The radio operator, T/Sgt J.C. Healan was killed in the crash. The gunner, Sgt H.J. Gross, jumped from the rear hatch before the crash and was not seen again. The pilot, 1/Lt E.E. Benson, co-pilot 2/Lt W.S. Smith and navigator 1/Lt H.H. Rushing survived the crash and were in the water for two hours before being rescued by Navy PBY pilot Nathan Gordon. They were strafed by mistake by another B-25 crew while they were in the water.

The 823rd BS plane #42-64873 was hit by intense machine gun fire and crashed in Chinatown, Kavieng, New Ireland killing all aboard. The crew included pilot 1/Lt John H. De Filippo, co-pilot 2/Lt Louis S. Kefer, navigator 2/Lt George S. Heyen, radio gunner T/Sgt Willis K. Fulp and gunner S/Sgt George S. Basha.

The 345th BG came into Kavieng from the southwest with eleven planes from the 500th leading two elements of two flights each. The first element had five planes including Mortensen, Ames, Hecox, Fray and Davis. The second had six with Hochella, Geer, Shirreffs, Cavoli, Doman and Gibb.

Capt. Hochella flying close to the right of the lead element was hit by a gasoline drum which exploded and flew into the air. His plane was last seen two to

three feet above the water heading southeasterly from the target. Lt. Hecox's plane was hit after dropping its bombs and exploded after crashing. Pilot 1/Lt Thane Hecox, co-pilot 2/Lt James Dubose, bombardier Capt Sylvester Hoffman, engineer gunner S/Sgt Joseph Peyton, radio gunner T/Sgt James Davis and gunner S/Sgt. Oliver Miller were all killed. Lt. Doman's plane was hit on the bomb run and forced to salvo his bombs. He later landed in Finschhafen. Lt. Cavoli's plane was hit, caught fire in the right engine and very quickly found himself in the water about three fourths of a mile north of Kavieng.

The 501st followed with two elements, the lead with five planes the second with six. Lt. Tunze was hit by machine gun fire in his bomb release mechanism and his right engine. He was forced to land in Finschhafen.

Next into Kavieng was the 498th BS with plane # 041 hit in the turret tank and forced to land while on fire four miles northwest of North Cape. The pilot, Lt. Cavin, and crew were injured while the bombardier 1/Lt John Howard was killed. The bravery of the 498th crews of Maj. Chester Coltharp, Capt. Anthony Chiappe and 1/Lt Joe Armijo who circled the scene for protective cover and flew to lead back the PBY rescue plane can't be underestimated. In the narrative of the mission report, Maj. Coltharp asked each of the crew members if he would be willing to stay in the area. All agree to. After over two and one half hours flying cover over the target, he landed at Cape Gloucester with less than ten gallons of gas remaining.

The 499th was the last squadron into Kavieng. Lt. Parke flying # 347 took anti-aircraft fire resulting in a three foot hole in the left horizontal stabilizer along with fragment holes on various parts of the plane. Plane #591 had machine gun holes in the left nacelle which left turret gunner S/Sgt Jack Menefee wounded. Lt. Irish's plane #254 received damage to the elevator. Earlier that day, the 499th lost a crew on takeoff killing the entire crew of #41-30317 including pilot 1/Lt John Wilson, co-pilot 2/Lt Joseph Koch, radio gunner T/Sgt Clarence Fiebig, engineer gunner S/Sgt Oscar Oakes and gunner S/Sgt Andrew Chesanek.

When we look at the day's events, nineteen men and seven B-25 planes were lost from five squadrons of two bomb groups. Navy pilot Nathan Gordon landed his PBY Catalina four times and picked up three crews under enemy fire which earned him the Medal of Honor. He saved fifteen men in the water who surely would have been killed had he not performed his duty.

As a conclusion to this story, Capt. Keith Dougherty discovered Hochella's crew the next day while on a mission near New Hanover Island just west of Kavieng. That crew was picked up on February 17. The battle which started with the raid on Kavieng continued for the next several days against shipping and ground targets in the area. Many Japanese vessels were sunk or disabled.

If you are interested in aviation art, Nicolas Trudgian has composed two versions of Gordon's role in the February 15th event. One is "Black Cat Rescue" and the other is "Flight Out of Hell". Artist

Jack Fellows painted the 498thBS Maj. Coltharp in "Strafer-Mission to Kavieng". Robert Taylor created "Air Apaches on the Warpath" showing the February 16 attack of the 500thBS against the Japanese Subchaser #39. You can view examples of each on the internet.

THE SQUADRON HOUSE IN SYDNEY

By: Vic Tatelman

While the Squadron was based in New Guinea, the combat crew leave policy (R&R) was rotational; that is, each crew was given a week's leave in Sydney about every six weeks. The privilege ended however when the next advance was made and it was too far to travel. It was a wonderfully worked out arrangement. The crew flew its own airplane to Townsville, spent the night then went on to Amberley at Brisbane, then Sydney where maintenance people were waiting. The airplane was given a 100 hour inspection, oil and hydraulic fluid was checked, the control cables tightened, a tire or two might be changed – a good minor checkout. Before taking off from New Guinea, Doc Archie Brown, the Squadron Flight Surgeon, stuffed our pockets with condoms. (Interestingly enough, Doc's pre-war primary medical activities were to keep the girls of the Indianapolis Red Light District healthy.)

The only drawback to the whole procedure was quarters. The place was mobbed, the hotels always full, restaurants were packed, transportation was difficult if not impossible, etc., etc. The enlisted men had their quarters provided.

The obvious solution was for the 499th officers to pool funds and buy a house. Not just any house, but a fine four-bedroom home right on Rose Bay, in an affluent neighborhood looking out onto Sydney Harbor. We even had a permanent taxi driver, George, whom we supplied with gasoline (100 octane aviation fuel to be exact, drained from airplanes). George knew where the best Aussie beer was sold, how to get drunken pilots back and forth to the Roosevelt Club and where to find the most luscious girls.



View from the Squadron house looking out across Rose Bay to Sydney Harbor.

After the horror and filth of New Guinea, what a change of mood and attitude that place brought. If New Guinea was hell, Sydney was heaven! Clean clothes, all the hot water showers one wanted and comfortable beds. Three lovely girls made sure the house was clean and stocked with food, liquor and beer.

Remember that Australia went to war along with Britain in 1939. Her troops were primarily in North Africa trying to stop Rommel from taking Egypt, so there hadn't been any young men in Australia

since then. When the Yanks arrived in 1942/43; young, virile, eager, with money in every pocket (where could you spend money in New Guinea?) one can imagine the welcome they received from the girls who hadn't had any men around for three or more years. As I said, heaven!



War weary crewmen with some moral support.

With the war moving north, Sydney gradually became just too far, but the memories of that beautiful city and our experiences there carried us for months after. The house was abandoned and I suppose it was taken over by the city for back taxes but during those years and at our ages, not much thought was given to its future.

Many years later, Ann and I went to Australia (we were actually on our way to New Guinea, but that is another story) where we spent an afternoon trying to find that house on Rose Bay. We hired a taxi to drive us through the neighborhoods where I might be able to recognize the place, but no luck. I don't remember what we paid for that place, but the driver that took us around exploring said that those properties were now selling for millions.

**Trip Up the Valley to the Mission -
June 1944 in New Guinea**

Submitted by: Jane Ferguson

In June 1944, Capt. Max Ferguson and a handful of other officers took a road trip from the airbase at Nadzab up the Markham River valley to a remote mission. The following is a short excerpt from his journal.

“Came to our first native village which had been blocked off so no one could go thru. Angan Sgt. went and saw the lulai (head village man) and got his permission to proceed. Went thru 3 villages and over one rocky river bed, then arrived at mission up on high hill where we put up for the night. A flock of Marys came down and carried all our equipment up the hill.”



Trading salt with the mission residents.

“Traded for grass skirts, lemons, paw paws, etc. Native Doctor Boy that we picked up at first village did all the trading. One yell from him we had some salt to trade & Marys & lik-lik (little kids) came running from every direction. Mosquitoes

were a little bad but put up our nets and got along O.K.”



Capt. Ferguson with an armload of pawpaws and lemons.

“For evening chow we cut end off coconut, added some lemon and gin and had a wonderful Tom Collins. An Angan Lt. was also at mission and we had a lot of fun spinning yarns. He’d been over here when the Japs came in and had done a lot of fighting against them. Really got a lot of good pictures of Marys with their femininity flapping in the breeze.”



Capt. Ferguson and his fellow travelers at the remote mission in New Guinea.



Air Apaches to Meet in Columbia, SC in November

Twenty Fifth Reunion to Commemorate 70th Anniversary of Founding at CAAB

By: Mary Sloan Roby (500th)

Excitement is building around the upcoming meeting of the 345th Bomb Group Association this Veterans Day weekend in Columbia, SC! The meeting this year will be a very special one as the group will be in town on the exact 70th anniversary of the founding of the 345th at the Columbia Army Air Base (CAAB.) Many of our members trained at Columbia, so it will be a homecoming for them.

Following a great “scouting” trip this past December, plans are coming together. We’ll be staying at the Doubletree hotel in Columbia, which will be convenient to most of the planned activities. Call the hotel at (803)-744-0142 using group name “345th Bomb Group”.

Kelly McNichols and Jim Bina have been hard at work, lining up B-25’s and Betty’s Dream, representing the 499th, is already confirmed. We hope we will have at least one B-25 to represent each squadron. We will visit these airplanes, along with a B-25 “Skunkie” that was retrieved from nearby Lake Murray at nearby Owens field. We are trying to arrange for rides for all our Vets.

Our opening reception will take place at the University of South Carolina’s Caroliniana Library, which has a fantastic collection of military memorabilia. We would like to dedicate an historical marker at the Columbia Airport (CAAB site) and hope to have a B-25 fly over on Sunday morning.

Because of our emerging focus on education, we will have some special speakers in several educational sessions. We’ll have the usual hospitality suite where you can swap stories with your buddies and pass your experiences along to members of younger generations, our annual meeting of members, and a fantastic final banquet.

I’ve been contacted by several vets and others about the reunion who have great ideas, so please send yours along. We have a Facebook page and that will be a good way to get the most up-to-date information and to make comments yourself.

I’m really looking forward to the meeting and I hope you are too. Please save the date, make your arrangements early, and we will see you in Columbia!



BULLETIN BOARD

IN MEMORY OF:

The members of the 345th Bomb Group Association extend our sincere condolences to the families of our departed members and friends:

Robert P. Cornwell (498) 14 June 2011 Belmont, MI

Richard L. Pease (500) 8 January 2012 Medina, NY

Joseph W. Symonds (500) 27 January 2012 Defiance, OH

EMAIL ADDRESSES NEEDED

The *Strafer* will soon be available in an emailed, digital format for members preferring that delivery option. In order to receive the digital edition, a mailing list of email addresses has to be assembled. Please contact the *Strafer* editor with your email address and he will add you to the growing list. Your editor can be reached by email at strafer2@gmail.com, by phone at (612) 296-1424, or by mail at 2106 Heritage Cove, Hernando, MS 38632. Thank you for your cooperation.

DUES, DUES, DUES

Dues for 2012 are \$15 per year for WWII 345th Bomb Group veterans or their widows and \$35 per year for all other memberships. Dues are payable in January of each year and can be sent to Mary Sloan Roby, Treasurer, 1916 East Pratt Street, Baltimore, MD 21231. Thanks for your attention to this detail.

STRAFER CONTRIBUTORS

Thank you to everyone who contributed an article, story or pictures for this issue of the *Strafer*. I appreciate your continuing efforts to keep the history of the Air Apaches available to those who were not there. As always, I would like to see contributions from everyone because the efforts of every single soldier and officer made a difference in the outcome of the war. Airplanes didn't fly without mechanics, guns didn't fire and bombs didn't drop without armorers, nobody was happy without the mail being delivered by the clerk and airplanes needed to be defended by gunners. I'm sure everyone has some tale that sticks in their mind and needs to be told. The next issue will be mailed in June so if you have a story, recollection or picture you'd like included, please send it to the editor by May 12.



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