



602



601



603



600

398TH BOMB. GROUP MEMORIAL ASSOCIATION • 8TH AIR FORCE • 1ST AIR DIVISION • NUTHAMPSTEAD, ENGLAND

VOL. 3 NO. 4

FLAK NEWS

OCTOBER 1988

Richmond Event Attracts 465 398th Members

Chaplain James Duvall summed up his feelings of the 1988 reunion of the 398th Bomb Group Memorial Association, held September 21-24 in Richmond, Virginia —

“It was an overwhelming experience!”

And so it was, not only for the former group chaplain who retired from the Air Force as a “bird colonel,” but for the others who gathered in the historical American city to stir memories of yet another dramatic period of US history — World War II.

And as if anyone needed to be reminded that many came... and were treated to an exceptionally well organized and well planned event... it was indeed a record turnout!

The new attendance mark now stands at 465, surpassing the 391 who came to Colorado Springs in 1986.

For four days the Marriott Hotel buzzed with clusters of men and women sharing in the common bond that brought them to Richmond — their experiences and memories 40-plus years ago.

And at the larger functions held in the banquet halls, there were additional scenes of excitement, drama, emotions and tears. Like the presence and voice of beautiful gospel singer Diane Susek, who made the strongest weak with her rendition of The Star Spangled Banner. And made us all happy by joining her on “Hallelujah!” And brought tears as she reminded us of “The White Cliffs of Dover.”

Wally Blackwell, Jack Madlung, Federico Gonzales and Mrs. Frank P. Hunter relived some of the drama of the group tour to England and the continent last summer. Each contributed special insights on the memorable “Bomb Run” tour.

One could not come to Richmond without visiting Colonial Williamsburg. And most of the

Continued On Next Page



Soon “Ours”

The EEA B-17, Aluminum Overcast, flies low over Wittman Field, Oshkosh, Wisconsin, while EAA vice president Greg Anderson displays a model of a B-17 showing the colors of the 398th Bomb Group.

Anderson and the EEA have invited the 398th to put its distinctive colors and squadron markings on their plane. And the 398th has agreed to raise the required \$21,000 for the painting and refurbishing via a group-wide fund campaign.

Letters will soon be in the mail inviting the membership to contribute, according to president Bill Comstock. A special chairman and committee will head up the campaign.



GREG ANDERSON
EAA Vice President

Record Set At '88 Reunion

Continued From Page 1

465 opted to tour the early American city to get a small taste of life before the Revolutionary War.

And there was the special visit to the Sentimental Journey, which was flown in especially for the 398th. There were a few attempts by the fearless to try to enter the nose hatch the "real" way (feet first) but for the sake of time most used the convenient ladder.

Inside were heard such remarks as "You mean you sat eight hours in there?" "How did you get in there?" "How cold did you say it got?" "Is this the place you bailed out from?"

Then there was the lady who was asking her husband if those were the engines he used to change "out on the line."

But the proudest of all were the men who had brought their children and grandchildren with them. Very special!

Several years of research effort on the part of Paul Brown, 601 radio operator on the Sam Palant crew came to a successful and rewarding conclusion on the final evening as Lt. Gen. Thomas Hickey came down from his office in the Pentagon to make a posthumous award of the Silver Star to Lt. Ted Kline, 601 co-pilot.

Recipient of the award, given for bravery in combat, was the daughter he never saw, Lana Kline Erxleben. Sharing the honor with her were her husband, Jerry, and Ted's brother and sister, Sid Kline and Helen Kline Hackbact.

Kline was Palant's co-pilot, but on the occasion of the Silver Star mission, Kline was flying with another crew. He perished after taking over the controls of his stricken B-17 from his injured pilot, Emil Martinek.

Brown, for all his dedicated effort in pursuing the award for the Kline family, became ill at home shortly before reunion time and missed the event.

Hickey, deputy chief of staff, brought a cheerful and confident report on the status of today's Air Force.

"Lt. Kline would have been proud to be a member of our Air Force today," he said. "As a B-17 pilot, he would give high marks to our B-1 bomber."

Then Hickey revealed that a wing of even newer B-2's will take to the air in 1990.

Between Gen. Hickey's talk and Silver Star presentation 398th president Bill Comstock announced that the group, at its business meeting, had voted to proceed with a drive to raise \$21,000 to refurbish the exterior of the B-17 called "Aluminum Overcast." This aircraft belongs to the Experimental Aviation Association of Oshkosh, Wisconsin, and is one of only nine airworthy B-17's in the US today.

For this sponsorship the EAA will assign the 398th colors to the aircraft and the scheme will

"Well Done, Thou Good . . .



ELAINE HILLIARD



MARGARET STAHLMAN



MARGUERITE DUVALL

. . . And Faithful Servant"



PEGGY WELLS



MARIA HUNTER



DAVID BANCROFT

One of the dramas played to the accompaniment of emotion and tears at the reunion was the "remembrance" poem presented by Mrs. Harold Stallcup of Forest City, NC.

As Nancy read each segment, ending with the words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant," a representative lit a candle.

Amid the hush in the banquet hall, candles were lit by Mrs. George Hilliard, representing all ground crew personnel; Mrs. Phil

Stahlman, all flying personnel; Mrs. James Duvall, the families that waited at home; Mrs. David Wells, our English friends; Mrs. Frank P. Hunter, those who did not come home; and David Bancroft, those who serve America today.

The memorial service was written by Mrs. Betty Johnson of Charlotte, NC, whose husband was a flight crew member of the B-24 93rd Bomb Group.

remain in this configuration "for all time."

Hal Weekley, who flew for the 601st until shot down, is the chief EAA pilot and the man largely responsible for getting EAA to approach the 398th with the sponsorship opportunity.

Weekley and another pilot, Sam Huntington, along with the EAA vice president for development, Greg Anderson, made the proposal to the group at the opening luncheon.

The EAA B-17 will be housed in the organization's new Eagle Hanger in Oshkosh, but also will be active on the air show circuit along with such B-17's as Sentimental Journey and Texas Raiders.

The 398th not only accepted the opportunity to put its colors on the aircraft, and enter into a

Continued on Page 8

"I have attained the age of 71 and have had an active and exciting life working around the world. Even World War II was an exciting experience. I had a big B-17 to nursemaid. A real challenge. When I think of the many young men who lost their lives at such an early age in England with the 398th Bomb Group I realize I have much to be grateful for. My very best wishes, and very likely my final good bye to you wonderful people."

—CHUCK DREYER

It Was The Night Of The Silver Star



SID KLINE, LANA KLINE ERXLEBEN, HELEN KLINE HACKBART
It was a memorable evening for the Kline family

“Second Lieutenant Theodore A. Kline distinguished himself by gallantry in connection with military operations against an armed enemy of the United States on 13 April 1945. On that date Lieutenant Kline was co-pilot of an aircraft participating in a bombing mission over Neumunster, Germany. After an explosion severely damaged his aircraft, the pilot, who had been wounded, ordered the crew to bail out. With complete disregard for his own safety, Lieutenant Kline insisted the injured pilot bail out while he remained behind to bring the aircraft under control and then he would parachute to safety. Lieutenant Kline was killed when the aircraft crashed and exploded before he could bail out. By his gallantry and devotion to duty in the dedication of his service to his country, Lieutenant Kline has reflected great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.”

LARRY D. WELCH
Air Force Chief of Staff

EDWARD C. ALRIDGE, JR.
Secretary of the Air Force



SAM PALANT AND LANA KLINE ERXLEBEN
Proud of the award given to Sam's co-pilot, Ted Kline



LT. GEN. THOMASHICKEY, Air Force deputy chief of staff, presented the Silver Star medal and citation to Lana Kline Erxleben, daughter of Lt. Ted Kline. The posthumous award followed the general's speech, "Air Force Update, 1988," to the 398th reunion gathering at Richmond.



FRANK GARDIPEE poses by the Sentimental Journey ball turret, his "home" during 398th combat days. Gardipee was among the seven crew members who got out of the burning B-17 that took the life of Ted Kline, recipient of the Silver Star, and engineer Floyd Aaron on the "RDX" mission April 13, 1945.



THE SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY was at the disposal of the 398th all Saturday morning at the reunion. And needless to say, everyone flocked to see the beautifully restored B-17. These folks paused to pose for the cameraman while waiting to enter the nose hatch and tour the "innards" of the famous Fortress.

BRIEF-things

Your FLAK NEWS editor is appealing to the membership to send him the names of all known 398th men killed in action, including rank, squadron and date of death . . . this will become a part of our history re-write book, now in the development stage . . . anyone remember the details of the bomb run to bust the ice on the Yellowstone River in Montana on March 21, 1944? . . . some of those priceless A-2 jackets airmen are selling for \$20 are turning up in Japan and bringing up to \$500 each! Hey, guys, give them to your nearby air base museum; call or write the editor for further information . . . want to see the story of the 398th tour to England and the continent last summer? write your editor for a loan of the VHS video . . . your editor also has two 10 franc Luxembourg Liberation commemorative stamps he would like to give away . . . DALE BROWN recently presented a framed photo of COL. FRANK P. HUNTER to the South Dakota Air & Space Museum at Rapid City (maybe they would like your A-2 jacket or other memorabilia) . . . DAVID WELLS, our contact officer at Nuthampstead, is now an "honorary vice president" in the 398th, and COL. JAMES DUVALL is once again our chaplain . . . anybody know the whereabouts of WALTER B. SULLIVAN, the Catholic chaplain? . . . those of you at the Richmond reunion who did not get a copy of the Silver Star Banquet program should write to the editor (additional copies have been printed) . . . the upsurge in interest among 398th children and grandchildren has been evident and heartwarming; more and more second and third generation are coming to the reunions and finding them rewarding (in due course they will become the officers and members of our outfit) . . . the squadron marking on the B-17 model exhibited by the EAA officers (3 0) was that of the 601st simply because HAL WEEKLEY, the pilot, was a member of the 601st until he was shot down (and ultimately evaded and returned to England) . . . no decision has been made as to what markings would be used when (if) the painting proposal is successfully completed . . . many succumbed to tears when DIANE SUSEK sang "White Cliffs of Dover," and those feeling the strongest outburst of emotion were the English war brides in the audience . . . the group's last two reunions were held at Marriott hotels (San Antonio & Richmond) but in Dayton next September we'll be at the downtown Stauffer Center Plaza Hotel . . . another evadee, JACK HUNTER of the 601 Cucco crew, is our man in charge of arrangements . . . OK, you 600 guys, please note that your DAFFY DUCK emblem has finally been positioned correctly in the logo: straight flight emitting black lines to the REAR, not downward (thanks to Bob Collins and Ralph Ambrose) . . . another name was added to the list of 398th men buried overseas (FLAK NEWS April 1988) when the "Bomb Run" tour party last June found the name of 2nd Lt. Harvey J. Boyd, 603, killed on August 4, 1944; he is on the Wall of the Missing at Margaraten, Holland . . .

Time Now To Pay 1989 Dues

FLAK NEWS will continue to try and stay abreast of the additions and corrections in our membership roster. Y'all can help by advising us of changes.

Also, please fill in the Dues card with the appropriate personal profile information (unless you have already done so.)

This information goes to Ed Stewart, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33334. He has compiled an extensive computer printout indicating name, address, phone, air or ground crew status, length of service with the 398th and if retired military. (Only as complete as members have volunteered.)

This printout is available from Ed at a cost of \$10.

B-17 "Texas Raiders" Returns To Active Duty

Gulf Coast Wing members
complete three-year, \$275,000
"total" restoration to WWII
combat specifications

Two years ago the Gulf Coast Wing of the Confederate Air Force completed a three-year, \$275,000 restoration of their B-17, Texas Raiders. It rejoined the Heritage Fleet after members contributed thousands of hours in making the Fortress "like new." The following article appeared in the CAF magazine, DISPATCH. It was written by David Morgan and Louise Munos. FLAK NEWS is happy to publish the

story as a tribute not only to the Texas Raiders volunteers, but to all the B-17 guys who labored on the line and in the hanger and who know about such things as magnetos, inverters, rivets, spark plugs, tuning units and manifold pressure. Congratulations to the Texas Raiders . . . and to the ground guys, then and now.

BY DAVE MORGAN
Gulf Coast Wing PIO

As many of you know, "Texas Raiders" had not been around for quite some time, due to the "Total" restoration project. "TR" was down for rebuild, but she is back in business! She made her public debut as a newly restored flying machine at the Brazoria County Airshow on 21 June and is now back on the Heritage Tour schedule.

Those who have hung in there with us, such as the crew members and the CAF General Staff, were not disappointed in the efforts of the restoration team. Prior to her appearance at Brazoria County, all four engines were run up to maximum manifold pressure and we knew that our efforts were about to bear fruit.

She passed all of the required electrical inspections with flying colors since Continental Radio totally rewired the airplane. Wing member Ed Schwertfuhrer did most of the earlier layouts and wiring diagrams. Al Robson, Chief Project Design Engineer for Continental Radio, then took charge of the entire rewiring design for the B-17. Harry Bauder, Continental's Installation Manager, supervised his two technicians, Ray Baker and Jude Zimmerman, who installed the breaker boxes, circuit breakers and switches and strung the hundreds of feet of wiring. Bobby Burt, who is responsible for Continental's aircraft interior work, spent many hours working on the bomber.

The instrument panel has been completely updated to conform with FAA regs. All instruments have been overhauled and certified. The panel is complete and was brought back to WWII military configuration wherever possible and looks as though it just came off the assembly line. Other Continental Radio person-

nel are credited with work on the wiring, panel and avionics, such as Peggy Farady's engraving on the controls, switches and placards. Others contributing to the effort were Bob Butterworth on HF antennae and Gene Ross on avionics.

In concert with the splendid efforts of the folks from Continental, Gulf Coast Wing members installed a complete, functional Tokyo tank fuel system, operational fuel transfer system and tail turret. The bomb bay features a bomb hoist, practice bomb and operational bomb bay doors. The elevated floors around the ball turret in the waist gun positions are also complete. A fully functional ball turret was also installed and will be wired

Restoration Job Even Includes Very Pistol

this winter. Just to "show we mean business," twelve .50 caliber machine guns were put in, complete with electric sights, gun cradles, flexible feed chute with dummy rounds of ammunition and replica ammo boxes.

The nose is complete, down to the astro compass, navigator's table with swing out chair, navigational instruments and chin turret with fairing. The radio room sports a complete set of command radios, tuning units and racks with original antennae mounts to the dorsal antennae.

In the totally restored cockpit area, everything looks brand new, like the aforementioned instrument panel, complete with data plate showing the Douglas manufacturing legend. The panel includes a key used to signal other

aircraft with the new formation lights that have been installed. The cockpit roof behind the copilot is equipped with the Very pistol (flare) mount. Yes, we do have the Very pistol!

It also has a new circuit panel with Hobbs meters for all four engines. The invertors have been overhauled, as have the hydraulic pump and emergency hand pump. The cockpit also has new seat covers and yoke boots, a new floor and newly silkscreened throttle quadrant.

All of the propellers have had their airworthiness directives complied with, mags have been timed and yellow tagged, new starters, fuel transmitters and floats have been installed. The engines have all been pre-oiled on a regular basis. The carbs were pickled, then cleaned and carb heat was added. A new duct system was put in, bypassing the turbochargers, and the turbos have been gutted. The plane also has new control cables.

The cargo door was eliminated and the space was covered with new skin. Many, many thousands of rivets have been replaced all along the airframe. The landing gear system has new regulators, microswitches, wheels and tires (if this sounds like a broken record, please understand). The ship has new aluminum oil tanks, new Lexan and a new paint job with nose art. Just about everything one can possibly imagine, plus a lot more, has gone into "Texas Raiders," a restoration quite literally from the ground up. This is a project of which the entire CAF can long be proud.

There are many companies and individuals who deserve our most profound thanks for all their time, expertise, money and parts. These names will all go on a "sponsor board" that will

Continued on Page 6

Texas Raiders Back in Action After Overhaul

Continued From Page 5

accompany the B-17 along the Heritage Tour circuit.

"Texas Raiders" thanks all of the fine folks who so lovingly cared for her through this monumental effort, and she looks forward to seeing all of you in the years to come.

BY LOUISE MUNOS

Gulf Coast Wing Historian

Houston Hobby Airport, 11 May 1988. At about 1645 on this beautiful Sunday, Mother's Day, the "Sleeping Giant" was about to be awakened. Project Officer Dellon Bumgardner was anxious to check the Flying Fort and see just what she could do in a run up check. The number two engine had just been rewired and had not yet been started up.

A "Sleeping Giant" for nearly three years was now being towed down the short runway. It was a proud moment for the men, women and friends who worked on her, who from time to time would find refuge from the sun and rain under her massive wings. They admired the old girl because they loved her and they loved what she stood for; Freedom, Courage, Valor, Duty, Honor, Love of God and Country. Several of them had been with her from the very beginning, and they all felt the long, hot, grinding hours of working weekends since 1983.

Since his retirement in January, 1986, Dellon Bumgardner spent almost all of his time trying to complete the restoration process. A veteran of 35 missions over Europe as a B-17 Command Pilot, Dellon was at home in the left seat for the engine test. He knew the airplane, what her capabilities were and how she was expected to perform.

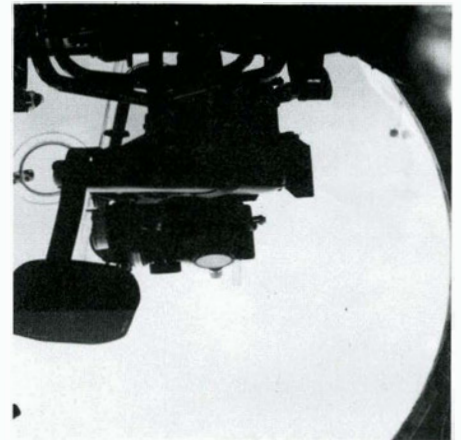
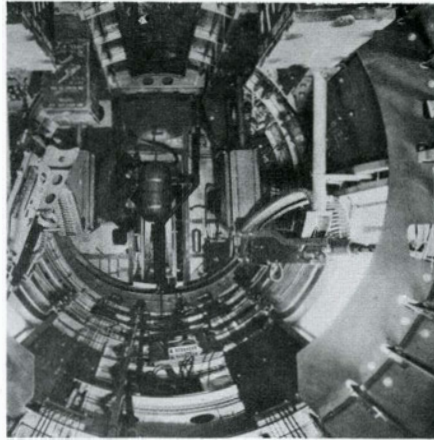
Alongside him as Copilot was Buddy Cooksey, who had flown right seat in many airshows. The duties of Flight Engineer were in the experienced and capable hands of another WWII veteran, Platt Thompson, who had served as Flight Engineer on B-29s. Also on board was Al Robson, the brains behind the massive new electrical system.

The ground crew waited patiently. They, too, were getting anxious. Tommy Garcia was Crew Chief for the mission, with Alan Gunter as his assistant. Other CAF troops participating were Bill Siros, David Stoffel, Bill Bourland, H.M. Hancock, Frances Hancock and Wing Historian Louise Munos. Much of the success of the test was due to the efforts of this crew.

In the cockpit, Bumgardner and Thompson went over the preflight checklist. All eyes were glued on them for the signals indicating what the ground crew should do next. The order was given to pull the prop through its nine revolutions, then the crew was instructed to move away from the plane.

At about 1745, the inverters came on and there was a quick turn of the blades, followed by a low, grumbling sound as the Fort struggled to come alive. The engine finally fired, though roughly. After a few adjustments, the cockpit crew tried again — and the engine started beautifully! After a while on primer, the mix-

And What Do We Have Here?



QUIZ ANSWERS: At left (pictured upside down) is a rear-to-front view of the waist section of a B-17. At right (also upside down) is the navigator's seat and Norden bomb sight.

Changes In 398th PX Department

Wintersteen To Take Over

The 398th's PX Department, growing steadily the past few years, has finally reached a "reorganization" stage. The time has arrived to simplify the ordering and purchasing of our available "stuff."

And all this will be accomplished by our historian, Jack Wintersteen. Jack, who has always handled the squadron and group patches in addition to assembling two major personnel albums, has agreed to oversee the PX sales.

The following items will be available from Jack:

- Group and Squadron patches (\$5)
- Bumper stickers (\$2)
- Lapel pins (\$6)
- Life or Regular Membership plaques (\$25)
- Nylon jackets (\$30). Specify XL, L, M or S. Specify White, Gold, Lite Blue, Royal, Navy.
- Cotton T-shirts with B-17 logo (\$11). Specify XL, L, M, S or childrens 6-8, 10-12 or 14-16. Specify White, Gold, Lite Blue, Royal. White only in childrens.
- Picture post cards (B-17 flying over Nuthampstead Memorial) \$1.

VHS video films, such as All The Fine Young Men, Double Strike, Target For Today, A Queen Dies Hard, The Last Mission, Air War Over Europe, D Day Plus 40 Years, will still be handled by FLAK NEWS editor Allen Ostrom, Seattle, WA 98177. (\$30).

Ostrom also has available a free loaner of the VHS video of the 398th tour to England and the continent in 1988.



HERE IS a small size version of the 4x6 post card that is available to members for \$1 each. A B-17 is pictured flying over the 398th Memorial at Nuthampstead. The back side carries the description and space for an address and stamp. Just the ticket for keeping in touch with buddies.

ture control was placed on auto-rich and the engine was self-sustaining at 1,000 rpm. When the oil temperature stabilized, the throttle was advanced, magnetos were checked, prop pitch and feather were exercised and all systems were normal.

Following shut down procedure, Col. Bumgardner was pleased, to say the least! Although he knew that there was still much more to be done, this had been a significant accomplishment in the long road back to the sky for "Texas Raiders." It would not be long before the majestic Flying Fortress would be flying again. This had been a giant step toward the completion of the project, and an overwhelming feeling of satisfaction swept over all crew members involved. The light at the end of the tunnel was getting bigger and more promising!

That lone, small light became a gleaming beacon on a beautiful summer day in June. On that memorable morning, the big payoff for the restoration crew came in the form of the first public appearance by "Texas Raiders." The restoration was now complete. The months of summer perspiration and winter chill all became worthwhile, and the Heritage Fleet of the Confederate Air Force welcomed a comrade back into the fold.

Reunions Gave Wife A New View

BY CHARLOTTE KREPISMANN

I remember my shock when my husband said, "Those years were the most important years in my life." He was referring to the years he spent as a navigator in the 100th Bomb Group stationed in England during World War II. Where were the 38-plus years of marriage, and where were our three sons?

He tried many times to explain, but all I heard were the words, and those words really hurt. I'd say, "You were an inexperienced kid caught up in all the hoopla about the war. How can you compare that to everything we've meant to each other and all we've built over the years?" None of his analogies to my college years, admittedly wonderful, ever made me change my mind. In fact, I remember adding our years of marriage to my age quite a few years ago and weepily saying, "Do you realize I've given you the best years of my life?"

Why, then, have I begun to come in on my husband's wavelength? I attribute it to the three Air Force reunions I've attended with him—and it took all three to change my sense of insult to one of understanding. At the first reunion, I felt very much the outsider. I was confused by the names: What was a group? What was a squadron? What was a tour of duty? I was a second-class citizen: not only a civilian during those golden years but a female. I enjoyed the spoofing, the camaraderie and the special events set up for the group, but was it so different from a convention of middle-aged businessmen? There was one answer to that question when I overheard an airman

She Couldn't Relate To Husband's Stories

from another group say, "Yeah, that's the Bloody 100—they had a lot of casualties." We were all watching old B-17s simulating an attack during an air show. It had been pretty funny to me because sometimes the "bombs" would explode before the actual drop. Hearing the airman's comment took some of the fun out of the show and made me thankful once again that I had not known my husband during the war.

I had nothing to say to his buddies. I had spent the war only slightly inconvenienced by rationing and brownouts. No one I knew well had been killed. How could I relate to stories my husband told me about waving to a friend in a plane nearby during a raid and seeing that plane spiraling to the ground engulfed in flames? During a banquet at that first reunion, I airily turned to my dinner companion and asked, "Did you ever read *Catch 22*?"

His reply, "I hated that book and couldn't finish it. Heller makes fun of a war that killed too many of my friends," surprised me. I had delighted in the satire and had taught the book many times, never seeing the reality for those

It HAD To Be Written

Editor's Note: Here is an 8th Air Force story that just HAD to be written. It comes from Charlotte Krepismann and she wonderfully expresses how she gained a clearer understanding of her husband's deep feelings toward his World War II bomb group buddies by attending his reunions. Krepismann is a retired high school teacher turned free-lance writer. This article appeared in the August issue of THE RETIRED OFFICER.

who were not characters but real live fighter pilots, bombardiers or navigators. No, I was not yet on his wavelength or my husband's, who wept and applauded when old stories were told and old songs sung.

At my second reunion, I was more comfortable with names and people and even managed to remember a few that we had met before. That old feeling of being an outsider only returned once or twice when my husband was so involved with his fellow fliers that I felt lonely. I took pictures at the Air Force Museum in Dayton, Ohio, where the reunion was held, and looking at them now makes me relive that lonely feeling; so many of the pictures show the group members circled around each other, arms slung over friends' shoulders and souvenir caps placed at a rakish angle.

We had a good time, though, because we became part of a group within the larger group. The old stories were pulled out again, and I started to really listen. Could these aging warriors remember the exploits and bombing raids of World War II? Indeed they did in full technicolor: flak mushrooming all around them, fighter pilots desperately trying to keep the enemy planes away from the vulnerable big bombers and the sad tales of the men who were shot down or parachuted into enemy territory only to be pitchforked to death by the farmers.

After the first reunion was over, we learned that one of the most popular fliers had died following a heart attack. My husband, who hadn't known him that well, was nevertheless inconsolable: One of the "boys" was gone. I, too, was touched because I had a clear picture of him regaling us with wild stories of flying a B-17 over the rooftops of a Scottish town, wagging the wings in farewell to the shocked townspeople below. What crazy kids, I had thought. It's amazing we won the war.

I understand now that what I called childish stunts was the act of a young man challenging his own sense of immortality, who in peace time would have been seeking thrills from the speed of his father's car.

I listened enthralled to the oft-told story of how the amazing "Rosie," the group hero and former command pilot, had duped the German Air Force into believing he was surrendering and then caught them by surprise by evading his escort and flying to safety. To me, this was better than the war movies I had seen with John Wayne, Clark Gable or Van Johnson, handsome and victorious in their uniforms.

Looking through my husband's eyes, I no longer saw a middle-aged man with gray wavy hair who stood up to wild applause when they called his name. For a while, I was part of the loving circle, and Rosie was my leader too.

But I still bristled when my husband continued to talk of those "happiest years" of his life. I granted him the deep love he felt for the men who 45 years before depended on him to get them to the target and safely home. I could even dimly realize that though these 19- and 20-year-olds faced death every time they flew a mission, they didn't reject the war as obscene or crazy. They appeared to be held together by an almost mystical bond; they had seen awful destruction, played out their parts in it all and survived to meet again at these raucous four-day celebrations of their victory over the enemy. I believe today many see the enemy as death, rather than the German planes or the flak. Was that reason enough to remember those days with such joy?

The third reunion, third for me at least, was held only two years later in Long Beach, CA, this time only two years between reunions. I realized, as everyone else did, that the one-year difference was in tacit recognition of the years that were going far too quickly now. Again the hugs and backslappings, the meetings and picture-taking, as well as the banquets celebrating old friends and old admirers from overseas who knew these men as boys or Yanks. I was happy to be greeted by many of the airmen themselves as well as their wives. Finally I felt I was a part of their history, though once again my husband deferred to his buddies when I would have been

Finally, She Became A Part of Hubby's Group

happy to dance when the band played the songs of the forties.

The handsome pilot who had rejected my devotion to Joseph Heller's *Catch 22* gained me as an admirer when he said I looked exactly the same as I had when I met him 11 years ago at my first reunion. I sat with the other wives as the five navigators spun their tales of hair-raising adventures that to them had only happened yesterday. The years dropped away along with the thinning or gray hair and the stockier build. Their voices rose; one pounded the table; another drew pictures to illustrate his point; and they all brought back the happiest days of their lives.

I'm glad I went. I'm glad I feel part of the group now. After all, those were my years too, dancing to Glen Miller and Benny Goodman bands, singing at the war-bond rallies and listening with nervous tension to all the news from the war front. Now I feel that I can travel into the past at the next reunion with more knowledge and a sense of relief. After all, we had won the war, and I was married to some kind of hero.

Many Items of Business Conducted at 398th Meeting

Continued from Page 2

fund raising drive immediately, but also decided to hold the 1990 reunion in Oshkosh. The tentative dates are September 12-15, 1990.

Meanwhile, Jack Hunter reminded the gathering that he is looking for another record turnout when the group meets next September 20-23 in Dayton, Ohio. Jack is reunion chairman and already is planning many special events, one being a visit to the most popular Air Force Museum in the United States, located at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base.

Back to Richmond, meanwhile, to recall that the reunion was dedicated to the ground personnel of the 398th. As Comstock said, "this gathering will honor all those who kept us in the air."

The 398th Bomb Group Memorial Association board officers met on two occasions during the Richmond reunion, and the group as a whole met in one business session.

Following are some of the highlights of the decisions made—

EAA Fund Raising

The Group voted unanimously to enter into a drive to raise \$21,000 to refurbish the ex-

terior of the EAA B-17 owned by the Experimental Aviation Association of Oshkosh, Wisconsin. Included in the paint scheme would be the 398th markings, such as the Triangle W, red tail and wing tip and a squadron designation.

Dues To Remain at \$5

The Board agreed to hold the annual dues at \$5.00 annually, or \$50.00 for a lifetime membership.

Oshkosh in 1990

The Board, after hearing proposals from several Mid-west cities, agreed to hold the 1990 annual reunion at Oshkosh, Wisconsin. The dates would NOT be in conjunction with that city's annual fly-in in late July, but rather on September 12-15, 1990.

Blackwell To Board

Wally Blackwell of Rockville, MD, 601 pilot, was named by president Bill Comstock to fill the Board vacancy left with the passing of Chuck Dreyer. Comstock praised Dreyer for his years of contribution to the 398th, both as a crew chief and Association Board member.

"Choo Choo" Election Again

It was moved and seconded that the

secretary cast a unanimous ballot for the reelection of all 398th officers. These include Bill Comstock, president; Art Harris, VP; Dalton Ebbeson, secretary; Ralph Hall, treasurer; George Hilliard, unit contact; Jack Winterteen, historian; and Board officers Bill Jones, Harry Gray, Dick Frazier, Wally Blackwell, Dale Brown and Allen Ostrom.

Book Proposal OK'd

A proposal to proceed with the publishing of a 398th history "re-write" book, to be sold to the membership at about \$25 each, was approved by the Board.

Slight Treasury Dip

Treasurer Ralph Hall reported to the membership that the group's bank balance dipped slightly during the past year from \$28,731 to \$27,279. He pointed out that \$9,007 of this figure has been placed in the hands of the American Battle Monuments Commission for the care and maintenance of the memorial at Nuthampstead.

Exchange Idea Studied

The Board will study a proposal by David Wells, contact officer for the Friends of the 398th at Nuthampstead, to establish an exchange program for young people. No action was taken.

398th BOMB GROUP FLAK NEWS

**c/o Allen Ostrom
Seattle, WA 98177**