

**20TH AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION
NEWSLETTER**

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FALL 2000

Want A Brand New "20th Air Force Album" for \$25?

Embossed or hard cover, 9.5 x 12, 248 pages, photos of targets, people, islands, nose art. All 20 AF combat units covered. "Coffee table" quality. Deadline for orders to be received is January 15, 2001. Books will be shipped about March 15, 2001. Send address to which you want book(s) shipped and check (\$25 per copy for as many copies as you want) to "20th Air Force Album," 2700 Stemmons Freeway - Suite 901, Dallas, TX 75207-2288. Note: This onetime printing is permitted by copyright holders, thanks to Fiske Hanley. If interested, don't miss this boat. Directors of this Association have ordered a significant number of personal copies, but the Association is not involved. This information is for 20th AF veterans and without representations or warranties, express or implied. Their Heroes

Some complained about last year's hair-raising B-29 landing stories which said nothing about heroes on the ground who made all that flying possible. Ground Hero stories often focus on Maintenance Men (for getting planes off on missions), so here's what some radio men did toward a mission's end to help some flight crews. August 20, 1944, a mission left Western China about 7:30 am for a steel mill at Yawata, coke ovens were the aiming point. Bombing was daylight precision, in-trail. (LeMay tactics were yet to be applied). Leaving China required climbing to 11,500'/higher immediately or after the first hour, and staying at least that high until within a couple of hundred miles of home. Imagine what this did to 3350-engines and fuel requirements.

One 4-ship-diamond formation crossed China, the East China Sea, and reached the I.P. on Kyushu as a lone B-29 came off the target 'heading the wrong way,' one engine smoking...Col. Richard Carmichael, CO, 462nd Group Commander, (poor soul) was headed for a Jap prison camp. At the I.P., a Zero appeared off the right wing, out of gun range, and started reporting speed, course and altitude to someone. Strike photos later showed results that hardly justified the effort, but everyone gave it his best. On leaving the target, the formation broke-up, and crews started home alone. One got back across the East China Sea on auto-pilot at 11,500' in scattered cumulus. About dusk (20 minutes west of Shanghai?), a steady tapping noise started on the right side. Burned-out short-stack? Home base was another 900 miles (4 hours?) away and chances good a missing short stack would cause an engine fire before then. After determining #4 was making the noise, it was shut down. The Flight Engineer recalculated his fuel, and reported the reserve had been cut in-half. Have a nice day...or night.

15 minutes later it was, "Navigator to Pilot, Navigator to Pilot. I have 3 groundspeeds figured-out...which one do you want me to use!" The pilot acknowledged and asked the Radio Operator to get a Direction Finding (DF) steer, while the Bombardier went back to help the Navigator. 10 minutes later the Radio Man reported the base wasn't answering any of a half-dozen B-29s begging for DF steers. When the Bombardier returned to his seat, he paused by the Pilot and said, "I can't figure out the Navigator's log and can't get a decent celestial fix in this turbulence." They droned-on, daring not descend because of mountains ahead (6,017,10,580,7,382) and now it was totally dark.

They wanted to climb (into smooth air?) but there wasn't enough fuel to get home if they climbed, and besides, terrain a hundred miles beyond the base rose to 24,910'. Moonless nights over China, with no lights or land-marks meant 'fly the gauges or else.' Wandering off-course/overshooting could be expensive. Navigation aids were a static-filled radio range about 100 miles north of the base (still 800+ miles away) a weak homing beacon near the base, and a radio direction finder...if it worked. A piece of cake.

A few minutes later, it was, "Radio to Pilot...let me try something and I will report back." The pilot, "Roger" him. 10 minutes later the Radio Operator said, "Radio to Pilot, our bearing to base is 261 degrees" (or some such heading). Hourly, the pilot requested another DF steer, the Radio Operator obtained it, a small course correction was made, and they droned-on. As their ETA (based on estimates of when they passed Shanghai and groundspeed) approached, another DF steer was obtained and the course corrected 40-45 degrees to the right...they 'had to be' near the base but everything outside was black. They droned-on several minutes in complete silence, the bombardier and both pilots 'staring holes in the sky,' looking for any sign of life. Nothing! A couple more minutes of silence, then one pilot thought he may have seen a weak, dull-orange light momentarily, but it had disappeared. He told the others about it, but it was gone. Minutes later he thought he may have seen it again, but it was so dim he thought he must have imagined it. Then suddenly, straight-ahead, both pilots briefly saw a dull, pale-orange light! A couple of more minutes of staring and that light was flashing regularly and getting whiter. They had made it!

Next day, lounging under a wing while the Crew Chief worked on #4 (and found 11 more badly burned short stacks) the pilot asked the Radio Man "John, what took so long getting that first DF steer last night?" He replied, "Well, about a dozen B-29s were asking for DF steers and the Base wasn't answering. Then I heard them call our India Base (1,800 miles away?), and both were 'loud & clear.' India was far beyond my normal operating range, but worth a try, so I called and they came right back, asking what I wanted. I requested a DF steer from our China base, completed the DF procedure, and a few minutes later India relayed us that first steer. As soon as I had one, everybody else followed suit and about a minute later, India told another B-29, 'Standby, you're #10 for DF Steer.' The problem was that the long range signals (being high frequency) were skipping over the Base while the low frequency signals were getting through to the DF unit." The man who had first to hear calls heard nothing, while the guy whose equipment could pick-up a signal didn't know he was to take a reading on it. Several flight crews needed help and the radio operators didn't realize they were being called. For 50 years, that's where this story ended.

In about 1994, one 20th Air Force veteran phoned another long-distance for some information. Before hanging up, the two compared notes on 20th Air Force experiences and found that one (Keith Gabhart) had been the Ground Radio Operator in China that night and the other was the pilot on the crew that obtained the first DF steer! Keith said, "We knew we should be hearing from a lot of planes but weren't, and until India asked us to provide a DF steer on a B-29 over Eastern China, we didn't realize calls to us were skipping over us. I received India's request and yelled it across the Radio Room to the DF Operator who took a bearing on the signal and yelled the bearing back to me, for relay to India. I have forgotten how many crews we helped that night, but we were busy for several hours after that first call." And so, after 50 years, the ex-pilot again contacted a radio operator who had helped save his crew's bacon. (The two corresponded until Gabhart's death.) Because those ground radio operators got the job done in spite of equipment deficiencies, they were that mission's heroes. And are still saluted by those combat crewmen.

A Tragic Loss Brings On New Management

December 1999, we lost a fine leader when our president, Jay Reichbach—a 500th Bomb Group pilot—passed away. We miss Jay, his good spirit, clear thinking, and wonderful companionship. At our 2000 board meeting (9/8/00), a moment of silence was observed in his memory. Requiescat In Pace.

George W. Allen, Jr., a 462nd Tail Gunner is now our president. At its September 8, 2000 meeting, the board:
1. Raised its donation to the "Bronze B-29" from \$8.100 to \$9.900. to honor all 20th Air Force veterans on

a monument which will remain in U.S. Government custody, in perpetuity. In 1999, \$8,100 was given for the names 20th Air Force, M/G Curtis LeMay, 7th Fighter Command, B/G Emmett Moore (CG, 7th Ftr. Cmd.), B/G Armstrong/315th Wing, B/G O'Donnell/73rd Wing, B/G Ramey/58th Wing, and 314th Wing. Both 7th Ftr. Cmd.'s and its commander's names were included in recognition our respect for 7th Ftr. Cmd.'s gallant pilots. In 2000, it was realized contributions had not been made for the names of 20th Air Force's Commanding General-Gen, of the Army H. H. Arnold-and XXIst Bomber Command, so \$1,800 more was given for them. Today, the last 30 spaces are being sold, the list of names is being updated (and names arranged under Groups and Wings), and the plaque is to be replaced. Those who have 'missed the boat' had better contact our Secretary immediately.

2. Elected Mai. Gen. Timothy J. McMahon. CG 2Q'h Air Force an Honorary Director of this Association and heard his Command Briefing (thanks to Fiske Hanley) on today's 20th Air Force. It covered the mission, organization, equipping, and manning, and is a much smaller outfit than in our day but packs far greater punch. Gen. McMahon was informative, outgoing, sincere, and answered questions for the best part of an hour. He wants to optimize his command's contact with all 20th AF veteran organizations and can accommodate about a dozen men at next Spring's Guardian Challenge (annual ICBM team competition at Vandenberg AF Base). He proposes that officers and directors of our associations meet at Warren AF Base, WY 82005 for additional briefings and orientation by his staff. The ball is in our end of the court. When do all of you organizational heads want to do it?

3. Elected M/Sgt. Henry "Red" Erwin-the only 20th Air Force veteran awarded the (Congressional) Medal of Honor-a Life Member of this Association. Red honors us with his presence, and we wish him the very best.

4. Raised Annual Dues to \$25 and Life Memberships—of which there are about 500-to \$125.

5. Received two proposals about contracting for 'veterans reunion services' but took no action on either. They were:
a. Tom Schoolcraft had Kelly Helms of American Airpower Heritage Foundation (AAHF) brief us on their proposal ("B-29 Groups Maintenance and Support Services") for delivering data base management, reunion planning, newsletter writing and distribution, AAHF/CAF publications, retirement and investment planning, and oral history interviews.

b. Family illness kept Herb Hobler from attending the meeting but he sent a 4-page letter which the Secretary read aloud to the board. Herb recommends these associations have Pat Carnevale, a Tucson travel agent, provide most of the same reunion services contained in the AAHF proposal.

6. Approved Manny Horowitz's motion to establish a Long Range Planning Committee. Manny was named chairman of the committee with authority to recommend others to serve as members.

If That's All You Do, Why Have a 20th Air Force Association?

Good question, but what would have happened without this organization? For example, who would have arranged for all of us to attend Boeing's 50th anniversary celebration of the B-29's first flight? Or quarter-backed a 20th Air Force-wide banquet while there? Or, would all of that have happened 'anyhow?'

Who would have gone after the Smithsonian when, in 1994, it became clear Enola Gay was about to be used as the centerpiece of a national mea culpa for America's atom-bombing Japan? Had/has the American public ever heard of our group or wing associations? Could those outfits generate enough public outrage to get the Smithsonian's attention? How much attention would/will the Smithsonian pay to your or my bomb group, or its leaders?

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AN INDEPENDENT, NON-PROFIT WAR VETERANS ORGANIZATION

And when, a couple of years later, Air Force Memorial Foundation needed a letter-writing campaign to keep a District of Columbia neighborhood association—backed by Marines and a former Navy Secretary—from keeping the proposed Air Force Memorial off Arlington Ridge (in D.C.), who could generate an effective letter writing campaign? Or arrange for Gen. Rus Dougherty (former CG, SAC and a Washington attorney) to represent all Air Force veterans in the public hearings held by the 4 local agencies that could approve/disapprove the AF Memorial Association plan? Which of our other associations could have done as much?

And more recently, who would take-over and have a bronze model of the B-29 placed at the Air Force Academy before we are too old, or dead, to do anything about it? Three 20 AFA Life Members did! If any other organization could have done this-much less all-of these things, which is it (and where has it been)?

When this Association was formed, Gen. LeMay took the trouble to come tell us in person that he, "Was pleased that, at last, there is a 20th Air Force Association. It gives you a single-voice with which to speak-out in support of U. S. Airpower, and I hope you will use it." What a difference it made in 1994 to have this organization in-being when we set out to get the Smithsonian's attention! We could speak-out immediately as "20th Air Force Association, " and the nation listened] This is where Gen. LeMay wanted us, and powerful editorials by AIR FORCE

MAGAZINE'S John Correll, our political influence, and nationwide news releases did the trick but we couldn't have gotten started without 20th Air Force's powerful name. If well used, it alone justifies having this organization!

Some criticize us for not attempting to take over the group and wing associations but that is not our purpose. We use 20th Air Force's name in support of U. S. Airpower in general, and 20th Air Force in particular, and keeping this outfit going means you must voluntarily send annual dues (\$25 per year) or become a Life Member (now \$125). If you do neither, the next time Air Power needs public support, this outfit may not still be around. We suggest doing your part to support this outfit, for once it's gone, the revisionists will have a field day.