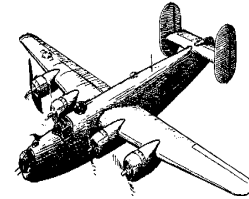


# Plane Talk



The Eighth Air Force Historical Society  
Virginia Chapter Newsletter

<http://www.8thaf-virginia.org>

VOLUME 22 ISSUE 1

November 2015



## Greetings From Your President:

The Board decided that the Chapter could no longer subsidize lunch at our meetings since the Chapter Treasury is running low on funds. There are only approximately 50 dues paying members out of the 78 we have on the roll. I want to apologize for the cost of the lunch. I had no idea that it would cost as much as it did. We are looking into a way to meet and eat at a lower cost. More to come on this subject.

We had an interesting meeting on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June – the 71<sup>st</sup> anniversary of D-Day. Laurence Gulick told us about his mission that day. It was revealing to the old Vets and informative to the youngsters among us. Chris Bowers played some 40's music during lunch and showed some film of 40's youngsters jitterbugging. I cannot believe I ever did that, but guess I really did.

Twenty six of our folks attended: Laurence Gulick, Tom Tokarz. Liz Carlisle Mercurio, Ron Marchand, Rachel Carlisle, Bill Mclean, Stephanie Amata. Doris Armstrong, Don Demmert, Cort Demmert, Hildegard Demmert, Russell L. Scott, Jean Hughes, Robert A Wright, George Bergdoll, Carolyn Bergdoll, Forest Marshall, Geraldine Marshall, Donald "Spec" Campen, James E. Harvell, Chris Bowers, John Payne, J. Maurice Miller, Jr., Nancy Miller, Lewis Burke, and Lillie Burke

I asked John Payne to fill the Director post left vacant due to the resignation of Abe Firestone and he accepted.

Jean Hughes, Chris Bowers and Spec Campen have arranged for a special treat at our Christmas meeting. Jean has a good friend who is a member of a local band. They will be playing 40's music as well as some modern and seasonal songs.

We expect some guests from the Richmond Area since Jean ran an ad in the *Times Dispatch*. Please RSVP so that we can plan appropriately.

*Lew Burke*

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**WE NEED YOUR STORIES AND PICTURES! WE WANT TO KEEP *PLANE TALK* INTERESTING AND NEED YOUR HELP. PLEASE SEND YOUR STORIES AND PICTURES TO THE EDITOR.**

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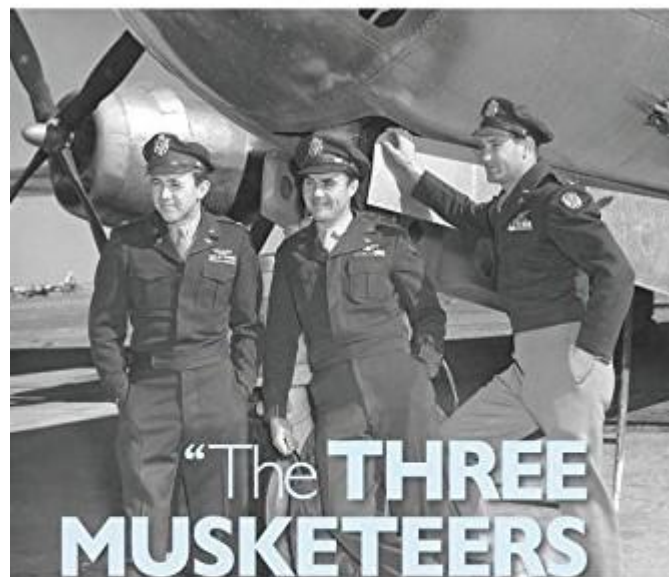
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## A NEW BOOK

The U.S. Naval Institute has just published a new book entitled "The Three Musketeers of the Army Air Forces." The title comes from a *Life Magazine* in 1942 that called the B-17 pilot, bombardier, and navigator "the three musketeers of the Army Air Forces."

The book describes the personal lives and relationship of three men – Paul Tibbets, Tom Ferebee, and Ted "Dutch" Van Kirk. Robert Harder provides a look at exactly who these three men were, how they were trained, what they meant to each other, and finally how everything coalesced into the Hiroshima and Nagasaki attacks.

The author, Robert O. Harder, was a Strategic Air Command "Cold War" B-52D aircrewman who flew 145 combat missions during the Vietnam War. A rated navigator and radar bombardier, he also flew nuclear training sorties and stood Pad Alert.



of the **ARMY**  
**AIR FORCES**

FROM HITLER'S FORTRESS EUROPA TO HIROSHIMA AND NAGASAKI

ROBERT O. HARDER

## A World War II Sergeant's "Tail"

By Irvin Davis

My name is Irwin Davis and I was a Staff Sergeant in the 461<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group of the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force stationed in Carignola, Italy. I was a ball turret gunner on a B-24 Liberator called the *Tail Dragon* because we always flew at the tail end of our formation. I started my combat missions on Palm Sunday 2 April 1944 and flew my last run on 1 June 1944.

I was waiting to come home on my tenth mission when the pilot asked me to check the hydraulics on my turret. As soon as I moved, a piece of flak came through where I had been sitting! If I had not moved at that instant, it would have hit me in the back. That piece of flak came in one side of the fuselage and out the other.

We only had fighter escorts for part of our mission. The P-47s and P-38s could only fly so far, so we had to complete our mission without fighter protection. On my 25<sup>th</sup> mission we had to abandon the plane. We were losing altitude along with our hydraulics and electrical. The navigator told the pilot that if we stayed on course we would ditch in the ocean. The closest land was in enemy territory which is where we chose to go.

We landed in a field and I was stunned to find that the first thing I saw a boy about 11 or 12 years old gathering up my chute and heading towards a farmhouse. I decided to follow him and met his parents. They didn't speak much English but managed to communicate that help was on the way.

At dusk the Italian partisans came and made me change my uniform for civilian clothes. They put me in a two-wheeled cart and told me to follow the newspaper regardless of who picked it up. I watched people pick up the paper from one place to another and only saw a few German soldiers. I finally made the boat that was waiting for me.

When I got to the 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force Headquarters in Bari, Italy, I was told that the Germans had been coming to capture me. I had \$47 in gold seal money in my escape kit and wrote a financial note for \$150 and gave it to the Italian family that helped me. The partisans said that they would sacrifice 100 of their people to get one of us back in the air.

After this experience we got seven days of R&R on the Isle of Capri which is about six miles off the coast of Naples.

Soon after, I flew my final mission to Toulon Harbor in the south of France. The Germans used this facility to repair their submarines. The flak and fighters were heavy but we got over the target but couldn't drop our bombs because the bomb bay doors wouldn't open on the lead plane. We had to go over the target again and drop the bombs through the doors.

That was my last mission. I went to Berlin twice, Ploesti three times and many other places.

# Collings Foundation Fly-In at Chesterfield Airport 17 October 2015

Photographs by Chris Bowers



## **WORLD WAR II MEMOIRS OF A B-24 NAVIGATOR**

### **First Combat Mission**

**By Paul F. Dwyer**

*Editor's Note: While going through my Father's papers after his death, I found a copy of Paul Dwyer's memoirs. Dwyer's manuscript covers the time from his enlistment in January 1942 to his discharge in 1945. The edited excerpt presented here describes his first combat mission as a navigator in the 713<sup>th</sup> Squadron of the 448<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group (H).*

I remember my first mission; it was on 22 May 1944 and the target was Siracourt, France. We had to get up at about 3:00 or 4:00, eat breakfast, and then go to the flight line. Upon entering the briefing room, I noticed that there was a curtain against the wall. After calling the pilots of each crew to ascertain if their entire crew were present, the briefing officer went on to indicate on a large wall chart the position of each plane relative to their squadron within the formation. Then, either a Catholic or Protestant Chaplain offered prayers for safeguarding the lives of the crews.

The briefing officer then drew the curtains apart, which disclosed the target for the mission. He outlined the route to be followed, the altitude to be flown, and other information to be followed. We then heard from the Intelligence Officer, who told us of the purpose of the mission, the route in to the target, and the existence of flak batteries along the course we would follow. We learned the I.P. (Initial Point) location where we would turn onto the route to the target, about 40 miles to be flown in a tight box formation, the rally point where we would assemble after dropping our bombs, and the course to follow away from the target area. It was stressed that the entire Group would make a sharp turn after dropping our bombs in order to avoid the flak that would be directed at us.

After learning additional information, we adjourned to our separate briefings. The navigators assembled in a separate room where the briefing navigator provided additional information on courses and distances to be flown, the various altitudes that we would fly, Group assembly, crossing the French coast, approaching the target area.

We then went to the supply room to get our parachutes and heated flying suit. Initially, this was a one-piece bright blue heated suit which, we thought, would make us more visible to any Germans who might seek us out if we had to bail out. Later on, we received a two-piece suit that was a dark green shade that made us less visible after bailing out. As for the parachute, I decided early on to wear a backpack in case I was blown out of the plane; at least the chute would be on my back. Others preferred the chest pack, which was attached to two hooks on the front of the harness. It was usually stowed in a handy place near each airman's position in the plane.

We also received a Mae West from the supply room. To all of this, we added two items that were already on the plane – a flak jacket and helmet – which weighed more than 40 pounds. Altogether, this meant carrying more than 60 pounds of equipment while standing in the

navigator's area throughout the entire mission. We then rode a jeep out to the hardstand – mounds of dirt to protect the bombers from strafing by German intruders. Then it came time to climb aboard and start the engines.

As the pilot and co-pilot warmed up the engines and checked the magnetos, the rest of the crew tried to adjust to their positions on the plane. The bombardier, nose turret gunner, and I cleared the nose section and remained on the flight deck behind the pilot area on take-off and landing since we would be “dead meat” if the plane crashed nose down. Shortly thereafter, the air controller fired a Very pistol, which shot flares into the air to start the mission. Prior to that, each plane taxied from its hardstand and assembled in the designated locations along the two sides of the taxi strips. This allowed the planes to enter the main runway and take off in sequence. Since planes entered from two sides, it meant that the mission was off and flying more quickly than if they entered from one side only.

As soon as we were airborne, we joined up with other 448<sup>th</sup> Group planes that had assembled on the formation plane – a brightly painted B-24. The formation plane would take off first, climb to the designated formation altitude, and circle over a particular area designated for our group. Other groups circled in adjoining areas.

As we crossed the channel into the interior of the European continent, it was my responsibility to inform the crew that it was time for them to put on their flak jackets and helmets. As we climbed past 10,000 feet and headed to our operational altitude for the mission, we attached our oxygen masks. The outside temperature was probably 50 degrees below zero. It was very, very cold. I know that because I had to perform various map calculations using a divider with the glove off of my writing hand. In fact, I remember looking out the left window blister and seeing the vapor trails from the bombers in the group.

We then proceeded on course to the target area and, at a designated time, turned onto the bomb run. The lead plane in the group would drop their bombs first and then the bombardiers in the other planes toggled – manually released their bombs – upon seeing the bombs drop from the lead plane. Immediately afterwards, the group made a sharp turn and approached the rally point where it assembled and hastened away from the target area. By then, the Germans knew the target that we had just bombed and, accordingly, aimed their flak batteries at the formation. By making a quick turn immediately after the bomb drop, we frustrated their aim.

As navigator, I kept a log of our flight, noting the altitude, air speed, and compass, other useful information (such as the amount of flak along the way), any German fighters we encountered, and the weather (e.g., degree of cloud cover over the target).

After landing, we sat down with a briefing officer and reported what we observed during the mission. We were provided a glass of whiskey to help relax us after the tension that we had been through. After changing out of our flying clothes, we were through for the day. Some of us went to the Officer's Club for additional drinks while others went to our barracks to catch a few winks of sleep after a long day flying.

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# A TRIBUTE TO VETERANS

By Jean Knaub Hughes

I humbly say thank you to all of my heroes on Veteran's Day but I am also grateful to you 365 days a year.

To those who gave their lives for our freedom, my prayers are with you in heaven and to your families left to honor your name.

For those who served in all branches of the military, and to those who still serve today to keep us free, my heart swells with pride to claim you as our American Heroes. You are all heroes. May God bless you and keep you. May your families know we appreciate their sacrifices as well. In my heart, I pray that each of you know I understand that freedom is never free.

Thank you for your service to our country.

Here is a poem I wrote in honor of my father, James Randolph Knaub, who was, is and always will be, my hero. He served in the 91<sup>st</sup> BG (H), 323<sup>rd</sup> Squadron as radio operator and waist gunner on "Outhouse Mouse," "Betty Lou's Buggy," and "Ramblin Rebel."

*My Father, My Hero*

*In a B-17 in World War II  
the 91st Bomb Group is with whom he flew.  
He flew 30 missions with 7 in the lead plane  
and prayed for peace for our country again.*

*An honorable man who never patted himself on the back,  
he fought a Me163B Rocket Fighter attack.  
He treated a wounded comrade then turned to his waist gun,  
And fought bravely as the Mustangs finished what he and his crew had begun.*

*There were many brave missions, and more stories to tell  
about the love of his country, and devotion to family as well.  
He believed in our nation, our flag and her glory,  
I am only beginning to tell of a hero and his story.*

*The honors, awards and the medals he wore,  
are a fitting tribute to the man I adore.  
His Distinguished Flying Cross was among many received,  
yet he had a quiet dignity about all he achieved.*

*Now he is resting with "folded wings"  
but I won't be silent about my pride in him.  
Just look through the clouds in the far away sky,  
for to protect us again, my Hero flies.*



Meet Members of The 8th Air Force Historical Society Virginia Chapter Who Lived This History



Applications Will Be Available for Membership in Our Chapter, But Not Required

Join The Greatest Generation & Their Families For Our Christmas Get-Together  
**Saturday, December 5, 2015**

**Meet & Greet 11:30am - 12:15pm • Lunch 12:30 - 1:00pm**

**Mtg. 1:00 - 1:30pm • Musical Performance 1:30 - 2:30pm**

*Live Entertainment Provided By Just Us Jazz Ensemble*

WWII Veterans from all Branches of Service & Their Families Are Welcome

**Please RSVP by November 28, 2015**

Stonehenge Golf & Country Club

1000 Farnham Drive, Richmond, VA 23236

Music: Mix of Christmas, Jazz Standards & Swing



\$5 Donation at the Door • Lunch — Separate Checks Will Be Provided  
To RSVP, Directions & More Information, Visit: [www.8thaf-virginia.org](http://www.8thaf-virginia.org)

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