



The Stratojet Newsletter

Number 5

December, 1998

Secretaries Report:

It is hard to believe that another Thanksgiving has come and gone, and that Christmas is less than four weeks away. Since I have a lot to say, I'll get right to work.

As has been the case for the past two years, the B-47 Stratojet Association is growing at an impressive rate. We now have over 1000 members, and continue to receive inquiries on a daily basis. Since this is the Holiday Season, why not pass along the names of former B-47 crewmates whom you continue to exchange Christmas cards with? For those of you who have already sent in a Membership form, how about passing along a copy to a friend?

Last issue, I mentioned that we had agreed not to raise Association dues, and that those of you who were paid up for

the year would find "98" in the bottom left corner of your mailing label.

Unfortunately, the Post Office felt that placing a number on the bottom line of the label would confuse the ZIP CODE reader, and they requested that the year be moved to the upper left corner. So, from now on, you will find this information in the upper left corner of each newsletter. Sorry for any confusion this may have caused. Anyone who sent in more than one payment for 1998 has been credited for 1999 as well.

Many thanks to those of you who have written to inform me of the letter in the recent October/November issue *Smithsonian Air & Space* magazine promoting our organization. I would like to thank A&S editor **George Larson** for the plug which generated many new memberships.

New England Air Museum Trip

On October 19th, 25 members of the Association met at the **New England Air Museum** in Windsor Locks, CT. with the hope that we would be allowed to board their **WB-47E s/n 51-2360** (see "Stratojets on the Move" in the last newsletter for more information about this bird). After an interesting presentation by Museum Board Member **David Isner**, our group was led outside to the waiting B-47. The weather was perfect, and everyone lined up at the crew entry hatch and waited for their turn to climb aboard. For more than an hour, we took turns moving about the cockpit, sitting in the pilots, co-pilots and navigators seats. Ron Berniscone even crawled down the passage leading to the bomb bay for a look around. What a great way to spend a beautiful fall afternoon!



Don Tynan in the AC seat

President's Podium

I am pleased to announce that the **RB-47H s/n** on display at Eglin AFB, FL has been beautifully restored. The last time I saw it in 1994, it was a dismal looking aircraft, unkempt and badly in need of a paint job. Since then, it has been repainted and it glistens! This aircraft was formerly used as the radar testbed for the General Dynamics F-111 Aardvark, and it's nose was modified to carry that radar. After completion of the F-111 test program, the nose was refitted with an "E" model bomber nose in lieu of the familiar fiber glass nose which was

standard on the RB-47Hs. The nose was painted black to simulate the original nose of the RB-47H.

100th BW Reunion

The **100th Bomb Wing** held its sixth reunion since the wing was deactivated in 1966 at the Ramada Plaza Beach Resort at Fort Walton Beach, FL from October 28 to November 2. There were over 180 attendees, among them **Colonel Andreas A. Andrae**, the first wing commander; **Colonel Jim Howard**, the last wing commander; and **Major General Leo Lewis**, the first DO of the wing. As with every reunion it was sad to note the husbands and wives that have passed away since the last reunion.

Charlie Brown and his team did an outstanding job of planning. There was golf, shopping, fishing, Gulfarium and trips to the Navy Museum at Pensacola, Hurlburt Field, and the Armament museum. The Oasis bar next to the pool served as the hospitality room for the reunion and was open almost continuously.

The highlight of the reunion was the Saturday night Luau where a great meal was served. The next 100th BW reunion will be held in 2000 with the place and the exact date to be determined 5819.

The 50th Anniversary of the Reactivation of the 306th BW

1999 will mark the 50th anniversary of the reactivation of the 306th BW. The 306th at MacDill became the first wing in the Air Force to receive the B-47 and was commanded by Colonel Michael N. McCoy. The next issue of the newsletter will feature an article on the early days of the 306th BW.



The Twelfth Stage

Once again, many of you have written to say how much you enjoyed the stories in the "Twelfth Stage". Read on....

"Way Back In 1956 When I Was A Young Airman At Plattsburgh AFB"

By George Adams

After finishing Weapons Training School at Lowry AFB, Colorado in 1956, I was assigned to the 380th Armament and Electronics Squadron at Plattsburgh AFB. Construction on the base was still underway and much still remained to be done.

Fortunately, the brick dormitory to which I was assigned was ready for occupancy. At Lowry, we lived in World War II open-bay barracks; at Plattsburgh I was assigned to a room which I shared with two other guys. In lieu of steel cots, we had "Hollywood" beds, separate lockers, tiled floors, venetian blinds, and a head and shower, which we shared with the occupants of the adjoining room. It was heaven to me, and was probably better than many of the homes most guys came from. I slept comfortably that first night at Plattsburgh.

After chow the next morning we were lined up, separated by AFSCs (Air Force Specialty Code) and taken to the flight line where several Stratojets were taxiing. I had seen a B-47 at Lowry in a walk by where an instructor said; "Some of you guys may be going to SAC and work on this one." That was the extent of my formal training on the B-47, and I was directed to help remove flyaway kits located on bomb bay pallets. Fortunately there were a couple of experienced sergeants in charge who told us what to do. We got the bins down and I was off and running in SAC where I remained until I was discharged in 1959.

I was a weapons mechanic involved in the loading/unloading of special weapons, i.e. nukes. It was an awesome responsibility for

an 18-year old and humbling when you realized the destructive power, which these weapons could unleash. I remember the egg shaped MK 6 atom bomb, the bomb bay filling thermonuclear Mk.17, and the slender torpedo like thermonuclear MK 28. In later years when I watched World War II films, I realized how similar my job was to that of the soldiers who loaded the bombs and armed the guns on the bombers of that era. The job was the same, only the technology had changed.

My life followed a routine pattern. I got up, ate chow, went to the flight line, made the 0730 formation, proceeded to dispatch where I picked up my work orders, grabbed my tools and was taken by a weapons carrier to the aircraft where I was to work. I worked until noon when I broke for lunch, returned to the flight line and continued to work. At 1600, my workday was over, I ate supper, showered, and went into town. It was like a regular civilian job, except I didn't get overtime. I liked it, I really liked it.

My specific duties as a weapons mechanic involved checking the actuation circuits of the special weapons, ejection seat cartridges, and weapons release systems. Each weapon had a different release configuration which had to be changed if the weapon on the aircraft was changed. Not exactly a complicated job but more akin to that of an Indianapolis racing car pit crew. The quicker you got your job done, the quicker the aircraft was in the air. Our teams took great pride in our ability to turn around a configuration and we competed with one another as to who was the fastest. My team was the best. We really were organized; we had our tools laid out and each member was assigned a specific area of responsibility. Not braggin' just fact.

In spite of working with nuclear weapons the only dangerous situation I can recall involved the 20mm cannons. Though I was also trained to service the 20 mm guns; I did not service them, as this was normally the

responsibility of the field shop. After a mission, which involved firing, the guns had to be removed, cleaned, and reinstalled. On landing, the copilot was responsible for visually checking the guns to insure they were empty. The incident involving the guns occurred shortly after a 0730 roll call when we were dismissed earlier than usual. After being dismissed, we proceeded to the dispatch room when we heard a loud bang followed by the sound of a metal object ricocheting down the ramp. The mechanic responsible for checking the firing circuit had incorrectly laid the barrels down facing the ramp and did not check to see if the guns were clear. When he proceeded to check the firing circuit, the round in the gun was fired and went through a truck on the loading ramp and it ended up spent next to a mechanic working on an engine. If the morning formation had not been dismissed earlier than usual, the round would have torn through some of those who were standing in the formation. No one can predict what fate has in store for us.

Off duty, we headed for the "Korina" which was the most unusual bar I have ever been in. It was located in the last house on a street with a string of almost identical Cape Cod cottages. This was the 380th hangout and we filled it every night. The bartender was a double for the actor Edmund O'Brien, and he knew what everyone drank. The 380th drank beer and lots of it. When there was a promotion party, we kept the empty cases of the beer which had been drunk in the corner of what was the living room and it was not unusual to see two or more stacks of cases reaching to the ceiling.

"Arabella's" in Keesport was a minor hangout for the weapons guys since a number of sergeants lived in the town. Though not in the National Register of Historic Places, "Arabella's" began as a speakeasy house during prohibition.

I was fortunate to go with the wing when they deployed to Brize Norton for 90 days. It was a tour that I thoroughly enjoyed. My duties were the same as those at Plattsburgh,

mainly changing the reconfiguration of the special weapons rack when the weapon was changed.

Off duty, I went to the local villages for a pint where I made some great friends with members of the Royal Signal Corps. I had fun playing darts and downing a few pints, and on weekends there was time to go to London.

In a chow line at Brize, I ran into a kid who I had not seen since the third grade, small world. Not all was merry in England. While there, I picked up a case of hay fever, which was so severe that for a time my eyes were swollen shut.

There was an amusing incident, which occurred while we were at Brize, which involved the Air Police. At the time both air and ground crewmen in SAC wore leather hats, our squadron's hats were black with 380 AE in orange across the front. The cops were picking up members of our squadron for being out of uniform. We were released only after our commander had interceded and the cops were made aware that the cap was part of the uniform.

I returned to Plattsburgh on a beautiful Lockheed Constellation. What awaited me was winter as only winter can get in upstate New York. I wore Arctic clothing on the flight line with bunny boots. Working on the flight line, we had to constantly check one another for frostbite. It was so cold that a cup of hot coffee would freeze while walking from the bomb bay to the tail. If you spit, your spittle would freeze before it reached the ground and bounce when it hit. Cars in the parking lot disappeared under a mountain of snow. The first priority for snow removal was that of the clearing the runway where four Walter snowplows raced in formation up and down the runway at 40 miles per hour. At times the ramp would be covered in ice following an ice storm which caused trucks to move more sideward than forward. The ever-resourceful crew chiefs used ice skates to travel up and down the

ramp. There are many pleasant memories I have of Plattsburgh but winter is not one of them.

When my tour was up, I contemplated going to OCS and staying in. However, after seeing what a Boeing tech rep made, I decided to go to the Aeronautical School at Boston University. After all these years I am proud of having served in SAC and the 8th Air Force. These were some of the finest years of my life!

In 1986, I made a nostalgic return trip to Plattsburgh where I visited Arabella's. I thought I was in the Twilight Zone, nothing had changed. The shuffleboard table was still there, the same guy was on the same bar stool drinking, although he was older, and the floor was still wet in the men's room.

"Cold War in Flames"

By Sigmund Alexander

On September 12, 1998 a symposium on Cold War manned reconnaissance entitled "**Cold War in Flames**" was held at the new SAC museum in Omaha, Nebraska. The objective of the symposium was to present an historical perspective on the role of manned reconnaissance flights during the Cold War, and to honor the airmen of the Air Force and Navy who carried out this hazardous mission.

The meeting was hosted by **Robb Hoover**, a former 55th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing RB-47H electronic warfare officer. The 200-seat auditorium was filled to capacity and among those in the audience were survivors of Soviet fighter attacks and families of those who were killed in these attacks. Survivors included **John Roche**, the AC, and only survivor of a 17-man RB-50 crew shot down off the

coast of Vladivostok on July 29, 1953; and **Don Sonnet**, an ordinance man on a P2-V5 Neptune attacked by MiGs on June 22, 1955, which subsequently crash landed on St. Lawrence Island in the Bering Straits. Fortunately all crewmembers survived. **Hank Douby**, copilot; **Hank Rogers**, navigator; and **George Back**, EW, of RB-47H crew E-96, which successfully fended off North Korean MiG-17s over the Sea of Japan in April 1965. Family survivors included **Maria Goforth McAfee**, widow of EW **Oscar Lee Goforth**, and **Patricia** and **Roxanne Phillips**, widow and daughter of EW **Dean Phillips**. Both Goforth and Phillips were crewmembers on the RB-47 H which was shot down over the Barents Sea on July 1, 1960. Survivors of this attack were lieutenants Bruce Olmstead and John McKone.



"Cold War In Flames" Participants

The first speaker was **Lt. Colonel John T. Farquar**, Associate Professor of History at the Air Force Academy. Farquar covered the initial development of reconnaissance of the Soviet Union following the end of World War II when it became apparent that the Soviet Union may be an opponent in a future war. He covered the period from 1945 to 1948. In 1946, reconnaissance was a jury rig haphazard affair utilizing B-17s. Project Nanook flying out of Eielson AFB, Alaska in 1946 mapped northern

Greenland and searched for signs of Soviet radars in the vast Arctic expanse. In August 1946, following the shooting down of an American C-47 by Yugoslav fighters, a B-17 was outfitted as a ferret to detect Yugoslav radars. The B-17 was successful in ascertaining that the Yugoslavs were using captured German Wurzburg radar.

During the Berlin airlift, a B-17 ferret flew in between the transports ferrying food and fuel to Berlin to acquire intelligence on Soviet radars. The B-17 never landed at Berlin. It notified the tower that it was having difficulties, and would have to return to its home base.

By the end of 1949, reconnaissance and intelligence gathering had become systematized in a concerted effort to obtain information about potential targets within the Soviet Union, and the nature of the country's air defense network including radar. A former German Gehlen intelligence team was recruited to work for the United States, and both Air Force and Navy aircraft were flown along the perimeters of the USSR to glean information on their early warning and GCI radars.

Though America alone possessed the atomic bomb, the number of atomic weapons in the American nuclear stockpile were pitifully small. In 1945 the United States possessed two bombs, nine in July 1946, thirteen in July 1947, and fifty by July 1948. Moreover these early weapons were not immediately ready for use but had to be armed. This required several hundred personnel, and involved considerable time. Initial JCS war plans were drawn up in 1946 to counter a possible Soviet attack on the West, and intelligence and

reconnaissance were directed to obtain the necessary information to carry out these war plans.

Greg Skavinski, a contracting officer with the CIA, addressed the issue of the fate of airmen lost on ten American aircraft shot down from 1950 to 1965. Greg's interest in the topic stems from trying to learn the facts surrounding an uncle killed when his RB-29 was shot down over the Sea of Japan on June 13, 1952. Over the years, the Pentagon was reluctant to discuss the loss of reconnaissance aircraft, which they classified as non-combat related. However, as a result of the efforts of Greg and others, the Air Force finally admitted that the losses were combat related and subsequently awarded Purple Hearts and Distinguished Flying Crosses to all of the men who were killed.

Greg has created an exhibit depicting each of the ten shootdowns along with other artifacts related to Cold War reconnaissance. CIA graphics and training aids assisted Greg in the creation of this exhibit which was displayed at the CIA, the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), and the National Security Agency (NSA). Greg has donated the exhibit to the SAC Museum for permanent display.

Former lieutenants **Bruce Olmstead** and **John McKone**, now retired colonels, retold their stories of being shot down over the Barents Sea on July 1, 1960; their subsequent ejection, survival and rescue from the frigid sea, imprisonment and interrogation in the Lubyanka prison, and their eventual release. Both stated that it was President Kennedy's personal intervention to Khrushchev, which secured their freedom.

Crewmembers lost were **Major Palm**, the AC and the two EWs, **Goforth** and **Phillips**.

Lt. Serge Sherman, USN of the missing POW office in the Pentagon briefly addressed the group regarding efforts to resolve the fate of crewmembers lost in the various shootdowns. Lt. Sherman stated there is little possibility of closure since the Soviet system was based on duplicity and finding the truth is impossible.

Gary Powers Jr., who has an uncanny resemblance to his deceased father, told the story of his father's shoot down, and how his own life was affected by his father's U-2 flight. The high regard that Gary had for his father is manifested in his efforts to build both a Cold War memorial near Arlington National Cemetery and a Cold War museum.



Francis Gary Powers, Jr.

The final presentation was made by **Dr. Robert Hopkins** who covered the importance that manned aircraft played in debunking the so called missile gap, and defusing crises in both the Middle

East and the islands of Quemoy and Matsu in the late fifties.

Robb Hoover closed the meeting with a quote from a speech that Ronald Reagan made in January 1988. *"We must never forget that freedom is never free. It is the most costly thing in the world. And freedom is never paid for in a lump sum. Installments come due in every generation. All any of us can do is offer the generations that follow a chance for freedom."* Unrelated to the symposium, but pertinent to a long overdue recognition for those who flew manned reconnaissance missions, the CIA honored U-2 pilots in a ceremony at Ft. McNair, DC on September 17, 1998.

The Last Word

Over the past year, I have received many requests to add members email addresses to the roster. I have been reluctant to do this without first obtaining everyone's permission. Since we now have several hundred members with e-mail addresses, it is not practical for me to try to contact each of you personally to ask for your permission. Therefore, I would like to take this opportunity to ask everyone who **DOES NOT** wish to have their e-mail address made available to the group to contact me. If I do not hear from you, then your email address will be published in the next newsletter.

B-47 reunion-2000

Dick Purdum and **Don Malm** will be hosting the Associations next reunion, which will coincide with the annual Confederate Air Force air show in Midland, Texas in October 2000. Dick would like to hear from those of you who feel you might attend. He can be

reached by telephone at 402-291-5247 or e-mail him at DickPurdum@aol.com.

Recent Passings

Robert G. Allison February, 1998
William L. Polhemus October, 1998
Phillip Dupont November, 1998

Association Memorabilia

Many of you have been asking for Association goodies like T-shirts, patches and pins. I am pleased to announce that we are now offering a number of B-47 related items for sale. The T-shirt (available in Large and Extra Large) features the familiar B-47 logo over the left breast, while the back of the shirt depicts a B-47 performing the LABS maneuver above which are the words, "America's Only Aerobatic Bomber, the B-47 Stratojet." Below you will find a list of items and prices. All prices include postage and handling.



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|--|---------|
| 1) B-47 Stratojet Association pin | \$10.00 |
| 2) B-47 Stratojet Association patch | \$5.00 |
| 3) B-47 Stratojet Association T-shirts | \$15.00 |
| 4) B-47 (airplane) tie pins | \$6.00 |
| 5) B-47 1,000 hour pins | \$25.00 |

Please make your checks payable to **The B-47 Stratojet Association**. Mail your orders to George Brierly, 4 Mountain Ave, St. Johnsbury, VT 05819.

Requests

Ed Yingst is looking for a 97th Bomb Wing (M) Biggs AFB patch and a 341st Bomb Squadron. Will buy, trade or swap for one. Ed is also looking for a 95th BW, 7th BW and all B-52 SEA patches (Iron Dukes, Black Knights of Mekong, Sea Raiders, Black Eagles, Port Bow, Bullet Shot). Contact Ed at 224 Shadowoak Drive, Burleson, TX 76028, 817-478-7803.

Brandon J. White is urgently looking for contact with anyone who flew with the 96th BW at Dyess AFB. He is writing a SAC history of **RAF**

Bruntingthorpe, located about 10 miles south of Leicester and was known as WILDCAT-FOXTROT during the Reflex days. Brandon can be reached at 61 Cresecent Road, Lutterworth, Leicestershire, LE 17 4NR, U.K.

Wayne Mutza is an established aviation writer who would like to hear from members who are willing to provide research assistance for in-depth historical volume on the B-47. This book will provide detailed coverage of the Stratojet's development, operational use, air and ground crews, unit histories, special projects and surviving airframes. Seeking photographic material, unit histories and emblems (color copies sufficient), operational background and personal experiences. Material is carefully handled, copied, credited and promptly returned. Contact: Wayne Mutza, 8523 W. Holly Road. Mequon, WI 53097, 414-238-9561.





In April of 1951, Boeing received a contract for the modification of two B-47Bs as flying turboprop testbeds under the designation XB-47D. The two B-47Bs selected for the conversion were serial numbers 51-2103 and 51-2046. They retained the outboard J47-GE-23 jet engines of the B-47B, but a single Curtiss-Wright YT49-W-1 turboprop of 9710 equivalent shaft horsepower occupied each of the inboard underwing nacelles in place of the paired J47s.

(excerpt from Joe Baughers's history of the B-47 Stratojet)



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