

Seasons's Greetings



Newsletter of the B-47 Stratojet Association

Number 3

December 1997

To the membership:

I have nothing but good news to report this holiday season. To begin, I would like to inform everyone that our organization has experienced remarkable growth during the past twelve months. Our roster has grown from a respectable 350 members last December, to our current level of more than 800! This number is even more impressive when you consider that we have attracted most of our new members by word of mouth. Please continue to pass the word.

Legal Affairs

Last April, our President **Sigmund "Alex" Alexander** submitted paperwork to the IRS requesting that the B-47 Stratojet Association be granted a 501(c)(3) tax status in his home state of Texas. I am pleased to announce that we are now officially a non-profit organization in the "Lone Star State". Alex and I would like to thank **Wayne Pittman** of the B-52 Association, and **Bob Norton** of the B-58 Hustler

Association for providing the information necessary to complete the IRS forms.

Air Force Turns 50

As many of you are aware, the Air Force Association's celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the United States Air Force took place in Las Vegas last April. Our Publicity Chairman **Bob Dennison** was in attendance, and he spent much of



Bob Dennison at the B-47 booth

his time at the convention manning the B-47 Stratojet Association booth. Bob's efforts paid off with the addition of fifty new members to the group. While I'm at it, I'd like to mention that Bob's writing career has taken off with the publication this year of two articles about his experiences flying the B-47. The most recent article can be found in the current issue (November/December) of "AIR COMBAT" magazine.

Fifty Years Ago This Month

On December 17, 1947, Boeing experimental test pilots **Robert M. Robbins** and **Scott Osler** first flew the *XB-47* (serial number 46-065) from the Boeing plant in Seattle, Washington to nearby Moses Lake AFB, Washington. Although it is doubtful that many of those in attendance that day realized the significance of this flight, pilots Robbins and Osler had ushered in the age of swept wing, multi-engine jet travel.



Robert M. Robbins and Scott Osler

Association Internet Web Site

For those of you with access to the Internet, I would like to invite you to check out the "Official B-47 Stratojet Association" web site, located at <http://nerd/dartmouth.edu/~man>. Once you have logged on, you will find a

comprehensive, multi-chapter history of the B-47, written by **Joseph Baugher** and edited by **Burwell Block** and **Andy Labosky**. If you are interested in obtaining photographs of the B-47 for use on your computer, take a look at the "Photo Gallery" and "Where Are They Now?" pages. The "Photo Gallery" page consists of three dozen downloadable images, culled from our members scrapbooks. The "Where Are They Now?" page contains photographs of more than a dozen of the 25 remaining static display Stratojets. If you would like to surf the net, you will find links to additional aviation related web pages including, the National Air Space Museum, the Air Force Museum and many others. Be sure to check out the "Membership Flight Log". It contains a list of more than fifty members and their flight times in the B-47. Anyone interested in having his name added to the list should contact me with your name and flight hours. By the way, **Richard Jarvis** leads the pack with an amazing 8497 hours in the cockpit!

Newsletter Notes

Once again, I would like to remind everyone that the purpose of this newsletter is to provide information, and to give everyone belonging to our organization the opportunity to communicate with others. Beginning with this expanded newsletter, you will find stories written by our members in the "Twelfth Stage" section. Since everyone has a story of their own, I would like to encourage you to pass them along for use in upcoming newsletters. Who knows, we may have a few more Bob Dennisons out there.

Stories should be sent to:

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Aviation Art

During the past year, several aviation art dealers who are interested in making their limited edition lithograph prints available to our members have contacted us. After consulting with Alex and our Treasurer **Don Cassiday**, I am pleased to announce that we have decided to offer three B-47 prints at this time. Each of the numbered prints, painted by noted aviation artists, will include a certificate of authenticity from the dealer. In addition, fifty percent of the retail price of each print sold through our organization, will be donated to the B-47 Stratojet Association. Anyone interested in purchasing one of these fine prints, should send a check, made payable to *The B-47 Stratojet Association*, to my address. When I receive your order, I will contact the dealer, and forward your check to Don Cassiday. All prints will be shipped in sturdy mailing tubes and sent *Priority Mail* by the dealers. So, if you have ever considered purchasing an aviation print, now is your chance. By the way, the donation is tax deductible!

The Prints

Those of you who subscribe to Air Force Magazine may remember the first lithograph, which was featured on the cover of the 1996 Aerospace Education Foundation calendar. At 29" x 22.5", "*Cold War Warriors*" is impressive. Each print is signed by Boeing test pilot **A.M. Tex Johnston**, and by the artist, **John Young**. Price \$125 plus \$5 s/h



"Cold War Warrior"

The second print, which can be found in the current 1998 Aerospace Education Foundation calendar, is titled "*Silver King at the Pump*". It features an RB-47H refueling with a KC-97. This 24" x 18" beauty is signed by the first XB-47 test pilot, **Robert M. Robbins**, and co-signed by the artist, **Robert Watts**. Price \$95 plus \$5 s/h



"Silverking at the Pump"

The third print was painted by noted aviation artist **Nixon Galloway**, and it is titled "*Strategic Air Command's B-47 Stratojet*". **General Seth J. McKee**, **Lieutenant General James W. Wilson**, **Lieutenant General William F. Pitts** and **Major General William C. Garland** have signed it. All proceeds from the sale of this 22" x 28" print will benefit the *March Field Museum Foundation*. Price \$95 plus \$5 s/h



“Strategic Air Command’s B-47 Stratojet”

NOTE: A few special edition Galloway prints, signed by **Brig. Gen. Jimmy Stewart** are still available at \$1,000 each.

B-47 Historical Snapshots Pt. 1

By Andy Labosky

12-17-47

First flight of the XB-47 (46-065) was 44 years to the day after the Wright brothers first manned flight at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina.

09-03-48

First contract for 10 B-47As to be built at Boeing Wichita.

11-29-48

The Air Force accepted the XB-47 and in December, accepted the second XB-47, and then loaned them back to Boeing.

02-08-49

Unofficial speed record, Moses Lake to Andrews AFB, 607.8 miles per hour, three hours and forty-six minutes. Pilot was Major Russel E. Schlee and copilot was Major Joseph W. Howell.

11-14-49

Definitive production contract for 10 B-47As to be delivered between April and November 1950. And for 87 B-47 Bs to be delivered between December 1950 and December 1951

03-01-50

First B-47 off the production line at Boeing Wichita. This aircraft had the first J-47GE-3 jet engine producing 5200 pounds of thrust. (Replaced the J-35-2 engine rated at 3750 pounds of thrust.)

06-25-50

First B-47A flight. (Model 450-10-9) None saw operational duty and were not considered as true production aircraft, were unarmed, but had ejection seats. They were used in a trainer role.



1951

Air Force takes delivery of 204 B-47Bs, (Model 450-11-10.) none of which were suitable for combat. The B-47B had no ejection seats and the Bombing-Navigation system was unreliable.

The Twelfth Stage

"A Comedy of Errors"

By Allen C. Hart

In the summer of 1954, I was the Chief of Maintenance for the 310th Bomb Wing stationed at Smoky Hill AFB, Salina, Kansas. We had been flying the Boeing B-47 for over a year, and were almost combat ready. Our crews were still relatively new to the B-47, and lets admit it, the 47 was not the easiest airplane to fly.

On this particular day, I had just arrived at my quarters, which were only a mile or so from Base Operations, and was seated at the dinner table when the phone rang. Any time the phone rang, I expected the worst. This time was no exception. The tower was on the phone and the message was "One of your airplanes is just running off the end of the runway!" I didn't even bother to hang up the receiver. Making a mad dash for my car and driving at a speed well in excess of the speed limit, I arrived at the fire station in time to catch the first truck heading for the crash scene.



The ship was about a half-mile from the end of the runway and in the middle of a wheat field. We could see the smoke and flames just beginning to emerge from the mid-section of the fuselage. As the fire truck approached the ship, we could see that the fire was on the opposite side from our direction of approach and there was no way to reach the flames because of a six-foot deep ditch between the plane and us. I jumped off the truck before the driver headed off to the right in an attempt to find a way to cross the ditch. A couple of hundred yards away he was able to cross and could reach the plane from the side where the fire was located. By now the fire was really pouring out of the plane. It was being fanned by the engines, which were running at full power. I managed to reach the cockpit door and climbed into the plane. I shut down all six engines and tried to exit by the canopy, but it was jammed half open. There was not enough room to get out that way, so I exited by the door. Something was wrong here; I was alone in the airplane. No evidence of any crewmembers. I began to hunt for bodies when I heard someone say "What are you hunting for, we're over here." The pilot and co-pilot were sitting on the bank of the ditch having a smoke, but the observer was nowhere to be found. After some yelling and searching, he was located further up the ditch casually watching the airplane burn.

I went back to where the pilots were sitting, and asked the pilot why there was no drag chute. He said the he had pulled the release handle and nothing happened. Being the Chief of Maintenance and being conscious of my responsibility, I crawled under the fuselage and located the drag chute door.

Sure enough, the door was open but the chute was not deployed. The flames were getting out of control, so the Fire Chief made me get way back from the airplane, so I couldn't do any more accident investigation work at that time. We were all most fortunate that I was able to do what little investigation that I had done.

The plane was a total loss and was consumed by the fire. I was fortunate, or un-fortunate enough, to be on the Aircraft Investigation Board that had the responsibility for determining the cause of the accident. To the best of my recollection, this is the story as told by the aircraft commander. " We were returning from a routine mission and were preparing to land. The approach was made as normal and the handle was pulled to deploy the drag chute. I thought it came out. As we crossed the runway threshold, the tower called and said that we were landing long. I glanced out of the canopy and saw that we were passing the first quarter of the runway. I pulled back on all six throttles and tried to put the plane on the ground. We touched down hot but not hard. I got on the brakes and told the co-pilot to help with the braking. We slowed a little, then the brakes had no effect. We were passing the middle of the runway and I decided to go around. Too late, there was no way that we could get that thing off the ground. I put it back down and pulled off the power. We were now passing the end of the runway. I hit the switch to raise the canopy and just as I did, the co-pilot hit the emergency canopy eject. The canopy rose a couple of inches and the grasshopper arms froze. The canopy would not go up or down. By now, we were past the runway overrun and were headed for the

wheat field. The ride was a little rough, but not bad. I figured that the best thing to do was to set up a big wide turn and let the soft dirt slow the aircraft. To help the turn, I pushed up the three right-hand engines to full power and chopped the left engines to idle. We were turning nicely when I saw this iron railroad track rail rising up from the wheat field. I knew that if I hit it there would be hell to pay so I tried to turn away from it. That's when we hit the ditch. I never saw it coming. When the ship hit the ditch, it broke just behind the wing and smoke started coming out. I figured it was time to get out of there, so the co-pilot and I went out the side door. Neither of us saw the observer leave, he must have beat us to the door. The co-pilot and I went over to the bank of the ditch and lit up a cigarette. That's where we were when Major Hart found us."

The board found no indication that maintenance was a cause of the accident. We did find that a material failure of the brake pads was a contributing factor and that a design flaw in the drag chute operating mechanism was also a factor. The pilot had properly placed the cable ball in the door key slot but the slack in the cable allowed it to pop out as the door closed making the chute undeployable. The operation types on the investigating board tried to say that it was pilot error, but the landing was within prescribed limits. Had the chute deployed, or the brakes worked, the landing would have been routine. This comedy of errors resulted in the loss of an airplane, but no injuries. We put out an emergency fix on the chute door that included a latch for the cable, and I never heard of another airplane having this trouble.



**B-47E s/n 15223 of 341st BW
at Greenham Common 1960**

Photo courtesy of Graham Luxton

President's Podium

Plans for the first meeting of the B-47 Stratojet Association, Inc. have been finalized. The meeting will be held at the Embassy Suites in Omaha, NE from May 21-24, 1998. One hundred and twenty rooms have been blocked for the meeting for Thursday, Friday and Saturday. All attendees are responsible for making their own reservations. The number to call to make your reservation is **1-800-EMBASSY**. When making your reservation, inform them that you are with the B-47 Stratojet Association. The rate for the suite, whether single or double, is \$109 per night. There is an additional \$2.00 city tax, plus a tax of 11.5% for a total of \$123.54 per night. The Embassy Suites provides pick up service from the airport to the hotel. A courtesy phone is available in the airport to call the Embassy Suites hotel. The hotel provides free parking, a breakfast cooked to order, and complimentary adult drinks in the afternoon. Complimentary drinks will be served from 6-8 PM on Thursday and 5-7 PM on Friday and Saturday. There will be a registration desk in the hotel lobby.

There will be a hospitality room on the first floor; however, it will only be stocked with soft drinks and mixers. All other beverages will be BYOB. Mixed drinks from the hospitality room may not be taken into the bar. The hospitality room will also have a TV and VCR for viewing B-47 videotapes. B-47 memorabilia will also be displayed, so all attendees are encouraged to bring their own B-47 memorabilia to add to the display.

The tour of the new SAC Museum will take place on Friday morning, with buses departing from the hotel at 9:30 AM. Buses will return to the hotel from the museum at 1 PM. Upon your return, you will have the rest of the afternoon to go sightseeing in "Old Town". There will be a buffet dinner at the hotel from 5-6 PM.

Five tours of the *Command Center* have been scheduled for Saturday morning. Since space is limited to 200 people, we must operate on first come first served basis. The first bus will depart from the hotel at 8 AM and every hour thereafter. No cameras, tape recorders, pagers, cellular phones or other electronic devices are allowed in the command center. In addition, purses, bags and metal objects should be left on board the bus. Tour groups must walk up and down four flights of stairs to get to, and return from the Command Center. Since limited elevator service is available, please inform me if you require this service. Each person on the tour must possess proper ID in order to enter the building, and your name will be checked against a list that will be supplied to the Command Center.

On Saturday afternoon, we will hold a meeting at 2:30 where the guest speaker will be **Robert M. Robbins**, the first pilot of the XB-47. Happy hour will begin at 5 PM, followed by the banquet dinner at 6 PM. The guest speaker will be **Hal Austin**, the pilot of an RB-47E who flew over the northern reaches of the Soviet Union in 1954. A short business meeting will be held following Hal's presentation after which there will be a slide or video presentation (time permitting).

Miscellaneous Information

There were a number of people interested in golf and visiting Boys Town. However, there was not enough open time available in our itinerary to arrange for these trips. If anyone is interested in including these activities at our next meeting, it is suggested that an additional day be added.

The buffet dinner on Thursday evening is conditional. A minimum of 50 people are required for the hotel to put on the buffet. The buffet dinner will offer grilled chicken breast and cut roast beef with marsala sauce. Salad, vegetables, desserts and coffee are included.



The banquet dinner entrees will also include a salad, rolls, vegetables, desserts and coffee.

Please remember to bring your B-47 memorabilia to put on display in the hospitality room. Also, please remember to bring your cameras along, and send copies of your photos to **Mark Natola** for use in upcoming newsletters.

Refunds will be made to those who send money for the Command Center tour but for whom space was not available.

The business meeting after the banquet dinner will be short and sweet. The agenda is as follows:

1. Increase dues from \$10 to \$20
2. Location of the next reunion
3. Length of next reunion
4. Election of Association Officers
5. Proposed guest speakers

Final Notes

With the rapid expansion of this group during the past year, it has not always been possible for me to make a prompt response to every telephone call or letter I have received. Hopefully, I have managed to follow up with everyone. If not, I apologize.

Attached to this newsletter you will find a Membership Information form. If you have not already filled one out, please take a few minutes to complete this form and return it to me. Feel free to make additional copies and pass them along to a friend.

Since the New Year is upon us, I would like to remind everyone to send in their \$10 dues for 1998. Please send your

check, made payable to the B-47 Stratojet Association, to my address.

Anyone living in the Wichita area who is interested in belonging to a local *wing* of the B-47 SA should contact **Andy Labosky** at 316-788-5277 for further details. **Tom Nation** is hoping to get together with members living in the Midwest City, OK area. Give him a call at 1-800-859-5427.

Several members of the group are working on book projects, and are looking for help. **Wayne Mutza** is writing a B-47 book, and is looking for photos and personal experiences. He can be reached at 414-375-9791.

Richard K. Smith is writing a history of inflight refueling for the *Office of Air Force History*. He would like to hear from members willing to discuss B-47 /KC-97 refueling. Richard can be reached at P.O. Box 5646, Wilmington, N.C. 28403.

Enclosed you will find a membership form for the *Society of the Strategic Air Command*. **Roderick J. Hagerty** has requested that our members consider joining this organization which is dedicated to preserving the memory and heritage of SAC.

Just a reminder to those of you who are you are planning to attend the meeting in Omaha next May. Please be sure to return the completed form, along with a check made payable to the B-47 Stratojet Association, to Alex as soon as possible.

Finally, I want to thank everyone who helped make this year such a success. I hope to see you in Omaha.

Mark Natola 9

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This Association is a non-profit Organization. All contributions are gratefully received.

