

8th Air Force Association Historical Society Oregon Chapter

May 14, 2005

Meeting Opening Don Bourgeois

Welcome to the May meeting.

Pledge of Allegiance

Lead by Don B.

Reports

Treasurer Report - Jerry Andrew

\$3271 as of May 1. Year ago was close to 2600. 1227 in checking, 104 cash rest in savings.

Flight Line Editor - Jerry Ritter

Mailings came back from 12 people due to using an old address list (Tom maintains the mailing list now, have taken over from Charles Gallagher who is in England on vacation, accidentally used an old initial list.)

Membership - Joe Conroy

113 veterans, non 8th AF vets, 65. 178 total.

Keith Sessions died last month., Warren Caldwell joined, was top turret gunner.

Don remarked that we are trying to get the membership larger by getting family members, advertising to get the word out to other people about the organization.

B-17 and B-24 are coming here May / June to let them know about the meeting. Flyers at the airplanes.

General Notes

P-47 Reunion

Don Bourgeois and Tom Philo attended over the weekend of May 6-9 up in Seattle, Washington near Sea-Tac Airport. Both Don and Tom met the President of the Seattle 8th AF organization. One of the items that was discussed with him was having a joint meeting with their group. This will be brought up at the next board meeting.

Both Tom and Don heard, and participated in, lots of stories from these Thunderbolt pilots. The 137 pilots present

had fought in all the theatres of war. There were two French pilots present including one who had designed the Free French Wings in 1940! The Frenchman came across On June 22, 1940 across the English channel with 114 others on a fishing boat. He was in training during when France surrendered and the whole school came across: ground crew, aircrews, and those in training.

When the national group decided to dissolve, they divided the money left in their accounts into equal portions and gave them to 10 museums that had a P-47 on static display. The requirement in getting the funds was that the money can only used to preserve the plane.

Oregon Meeting Stories

During early 1945 when POWs were being moved westward some were sent to a camp overlooking Nuremberg. To prevent the POW camp located to the east just outside of Nuremberg situated on a hilltop from being bombed by the Allies, the German Luftwaffe guards put flares around the camp when a raid was on. This ensured that it would not be bombed and strafed by the British and American planes that could have mistaken it as a German Army camp.

When Barth (Stalag Luft 1) POW camp was about to be overrun by the Russians and liberated, the German guards told the POWs to march to the west. Col Zemke, the CO of the camp, refused and so the guards left and the 10,000+ POWs remained. With that many located that far east it was impractical to march. Thus, after a week of delays, the Russians finally allowed the 8th AF to send in planes to pick them up. (The Russians did herd in 50 head of cattle for the POWs to eat soon after they arrived. Prior to February of 1945 they were fairly well fed due to the Red Cross parcels came on a regular basis.) The men were loaded 35 per B-17, (the bomb bay was boarded up to put more on board) and flown to Rheims France. They ex-kriegies were nervous since there were no parachutes for them! Stalag Luft 1 was the only camp, to be so evacuated. After Rheims they moved onto Camp Lucky Strike, via train (or Marlborough, or any of the other returning POW camps that were named after cigarrets) along the French coast.

All the other ex-POWs had marched westward as the Russians moved in from the east. A lot of the POWs were marched toward Bavaria where some, like Ramsey Fendall, were finally liberated by General George Patton's Third Army around Moosburg.

During the meeting a few stories were told. Clint Gruber started this off by telling of a ditty made up in Stalag Luft 1 where he was at with Hub Zemke. He stated that this had been "written by a kriegie, POW, who had been in the bag a long time, so long that he started talking like a German."

Now I've traveled this Deutschland wide over
And I've stopped at all the Gefängnislager Lufts
Some were good, some were bad, some were different
And others were the best that they had

Now this last one I stopped at was a lulu
So pretty and fine and neat
But all of us got rotes Kreuz parcels
But wait till you hear what we had to eat

On Montag we had borscht and gravy
On Dienstag was gravy and borscht
On Mittwoch and Donnerstag with gravy on toast
Which is nothing but gravy and borscht

On Freitag I went to the Gauleiter

And asked him for something instead
So on Samstag and Sonntag by via the change
We had gravy without any bread!

The whole meeting was video-taped so this unique song was recorded for posterity.

Evergreen Aviation Museum - Eldon Bevens

A new DVD produced by the Museum called "Dream to Fly." The modern production have various members of the engineering crew talking about Howard Hughes HK-1. It also has a video tour of the boat on it. Special features includes a time lapse view of the disassembly in Long Beach and the reassembly of the "Spruce Goose" in McMinnville. The 1947 radio broadcast of the first flight and movie taken of it the first - and only - flight in Long Beach harbor in 1947. It can be purchased at the museum store.

Evergreen museum won an award from the Oregon Consular Corporation (?) . This company is a conglomerate of 5 companies, 100 air bases, 4500 employees flying cargo 747s.

The prodction company that made the movie donated some of the miniature sets used in making the movie "The Aviator" to the museum.

Jerry Thatcher added in that they are actively restoring a Zero down in their restoration center now.

The concrete pillars seen as you drive by are the foundations of the OMNIMAX theatre construction.

There are 5 aviation museums within a half a day drive from Portland: Pearson Air Musuem in Vancouver, Evergreen in McMinnville, Tillamook Air Museum, Olympic Flight Museum, and Seattle Museum of Flight. At Seattle the Personal Courage Wing is the newest addition to the Museum of Flight and it houses World War I and World War II aircraft on two levels. It openend up in June of 2004. The unique feature of this section of the museum is that it places the aircraft in context of its main operational environment using painted backdrops and floor enhancements (like partial quonset huts, disperesal areas, flight deck of a carrier) for each aircraft.

Pearson Air Museum

Russ Roland is on the board of Pearson (8th member) and they are re-organizing the whole place. Park Service is still trying to make create and redo the whole historic acerage centered around the Fort Vancouver reconstruction thus wiping out the airfield and the museum.

Oregon Military Museum - Phil Richart

Not here.

Historians - Joe Conroy, Tom Philo

Please create your stories and send them in. Update the stories that have been submitted already if you have items to add, and give them to Tom Philo.

Tom is still in the process of scanning all the information collected and creating PDFs documents that can be distributed without having to track them. A large and complicated aspect is to organize it so that stories and individual events, words can be easily found using table of conents and an index. The hardest item of any collection is organing it so so these stories and people can be found on the CD without extensive training by the user. This

will allow CDs to be given away without having to have them returned. The stories would all be present, and those that require permission to be read, will be secured and only after permission granted would the user be sent a password to unlock that particular story (only 5 so far have restricted rights assigned to them.)

Collings Foundation Aircraft Tour Dates

Corvallis June 11-13 stop, as well as the Aurora June 17-20 airport stops The B-24 Liberator is now known as "Witchcraft" of the 791st SQ 8th AF with the appropriate paint scheme for the B-24. During the European air war the original flew 130 missions without an abort. Collings foundation is based in Stow, Connecticut.

Milwaukie Bomber - Charles Gallagher

A milk truck ran into the tail of the B-17 and damaged it. Around 40k worth of damage. Insurance will cover the repair.

Guests

If you wish to join Jerry has the membership forms.

Displays

Aero Frame had airwork on display as well as members own models, books, and photographs.

Other Items

Check to ensure that Jack Young's memories. Two books should be in the library. Confirm that they are there and get back to them. 503-252-7529. 8 1/2 x 11 sized. 8 1/2 x 11 folded over and stapled. Tan cover. My world war II memories. 50 pages old.

Door Prize and Raffle - Jerry Andrews

Cold Cash Raffle Prizes

\$25 and \$15 were the prizes this month due to the low turnout (around 90).

People helping at the sign-in desk get a free meal - volunteer today!

Speaker Introduction - Don Keller

Sig Ulander spent 6 years researching, locating, and then getting a lithograph created depicting the role of the Mexican Air Force Squadron 201 participation in World War II in the Phillipines which were known as the Aztec Eagles.

Aztec Eagles

Most of the people here served in Europe and are familiar with the exploits of pilots in the ETO as well as some aspects of the Pacific Theatre of Operations (PTO), but there was a whole different type of war being fought in the Pacific as compared to Europe

A lot of people never think of South America, including Mexico, as a belligerents during world war II but little is known of their military contribution. Most people think of those countries merely as a source of raw war material as well as a food supply source. But reality it was quite different than what is commonly known.

Background History

In the 1847 Mexican war (after the early 1800s Mexican Civil war in which Texas became a republic) the US invaded what was left of Mexico above the Rio Grande and took over 1/3 of then Mexican state landmass - what later became New Mexico, Arizona, California, plus other lands which were integrated into Texas. The Mexican Civil war of the early 1900s led to the punitive invasion led by "Black Jack" Pershing before the First World War due to the raids by Pancho Villa across the Rio Grande. The Zaprunder Telegram incident (purposely exposed by British Intelligence) during World War I, led to Mexico declaring war against Germany and becoming an ally of the United States.

The Interwar years saw squabbles and the Nationalization of the oil industry which did not sit well with American companies. However, in the spring of 1942 two Mexican oil tankers were sunk by German U-Boats. After the first one was sunk Mexico protested to the Nazi Government, after the 2nd one was sunk 10 days later Mexico declared war.

Of all the South American nations that declared war against Nazi Germany, only two nations sent units into combat during World War II: Brazil and Mexico. Only the Mexican Air Force Unit 201 unit served along side US air units in the war.

After the declaration of war (and passing of an amendment to the constitution to allow Mexican forces to operate outside Mexico proper in fall of 1944) the government concluded that the only way Mexico could participate was via the Air Force so they concentrated on that.

All the pilots and ground crew were volunteers and eventually ended up at Greenville Texas for training. However, first they went to Pocatello Idaho, during the winter and were quite miserable. Many of the men had never seen, let alone operated, in snow. After a short time the whole unit was transferred to Greenville (just north of Dallas) Texas in March of 1944.

Every pilot had to be a top notch pilot and fluent in English. One pilot could speak 4 languages. Due to this requirement, and the original pride and skill of the people who were able to get into the Air Force to begin with, many pilots had thousands of hours flying before they went to the US flight schools. This was reflected in the fact that they had, as a unit, some of the highest aerial gunnery scores that was seen by US training command.

In December of 1944 the constitution law was passed allowing them to fight the President of Mexico decided to send the unit to fight in Philippines where it would have a higher profile than in Europe and since the Philippines, like Mexico itself, shared a common history with Spain.

The unit arrived Manila on May 1st, 1945. They were the first Mexican force to leave Mexico on a combat mission.

June 4, 1945 was their first combat mission. Equipped with P-47 "Thunderbolts" their designed role was to support the 6th US Army in ground attacks. They were ordered never to intercept or engage the enemy in air to air combat.

However, this did not lessen the risks. Five pilots died in combat: 1 dove into ground during an attack, 2 were lost in flight due to storms (they arrived at the start of the monsoon season), 1 in a test flight, and 1 due to unknown

causes.

1 Pilot was shot down over enemy island and thought killed / captured. However, an American pilot spotted a signal mirror and notified his CO that an ally was on the Japanese held island. His Co refused to believe it, thinking it was a Japanese trick, and ordered him not to overfly it nor get an American plane to do a recon mission over it. The pilot convinced, that his CO was wrong, and following orders, instead convinced an Australian flying boat (no "American plane") to over fly it, and that plane again spotted the signal mirror. The Australians then arranged a PBY rescue, and under enemy fire, the PBY landed and retrieved the Mexican pilot.

At the end of the war a parade was held for 201 Squadron members in the main Plaza in Mexico, which is the 2nd largest square in the world after the square outside the Kremlin in Russia, and 250,000 people showed up for it.

Sig Unlander lives in Cornelius Oregon and operates his Aviation Art business there.