

# **8th Air Force Association Historical Society Oregon Chapter**

**November 12, 2005**

## **Meeting Opening Don Bourgeois**

Welcome to the November meeting.

## **Pledge of Allegiance**

Lead by Don.

## **Reports**

### **Treasurer Report - Jerry Andrew**

New method of signing in, pass around the sign-in sheet to each table. Jerry's son Scott was in charge of this. It is an OLCB (Oregon Liquor Control Board) requirement that people sign in.

\$2,682.40 total in the accounts as of November 1. Postage stamps, internet site startup fees etc added to the expenses this past quarter. All of the bank statements are with Jerry and are open for inspection at all times.

### **Dues**

The first dues letter was sent out. So far around 60 people have not paid their dues for next year. Officially the dues are due 1 January. Final letter will be sent out in January. This means that around 2/3 of the existing members have paid.

All monies sent in above the base \$10 yearly dues is tax deductible. To date around \$210 extra has been donated to the chapter.

### **Flight Line Editor - Jerry Ritter**

Mailings came back from 12 people due to Jerry accidentally using an old address list. (Tom Philo maintains the Excel spreadsheet mailing list now, he took over from Charles Gallagher who was in England on vacation this past spring.)

### **Membership - Joe Conroy**

112 veterans, non 8th AF vets, 62. 174 total.

Joe keeps the official chapter roster applications and related information. Between Joe, Tom and Jerry they ensure that the mailing list is kept up to date. Always notify one of those three with address changes.

## Nominating Committee

Joe reviewed the by-laws as they concern the election of Officers and Board Members.

- The President and Vice- President may be re-elected for one year term.
- The Secretary and the Treasurer and elected for their lifetime.
- If we see their obituaries in the Oregonian, we will elect someone else.
- Board Members are elected for a three year term. They may be re-elected for one more three year term.

## Committee Members

- Joe Conroy
- Eldon Bevins
- Von Erickson

## Officers Nominated

- Don Bourgeois - President
- Roland Fisher - Vice President
- Secretary - Tom Philo
- Treasurer - Jerry Andres

## Board Members

- Virginia Knight - Re-elect 2nd three year term
- Tom Davis - Re-elect for 2nd three year term
- Charlie Gallagher - New for board three year term

Joe listed those to be voted on and their position, all were seconded, and all voted in.

## Deceased members

Roland Stewart report has the count has been very small this year - thankfully. Special corner for the 8th AF in heaven.

Keith Sessions 1924-2005 (engineer for Tektronix)

James Roop (81) 305th BG (Liberty Mutual VP)

A. Victor Ottemoeller 477th BG, Bronze Star. Self employed.

"Anyone seeing their own obituary in the Oregonian let him know."

## Web Site and Historical Archive

8th AF meeting Memories Project Status November 2005

CD Status

Printing and opening restrictions enabled on documents.  
ability to open but not print or save them

password protection on documents that require approval to read

Can fit all stories onto single CD.

Adobe Reader required, also on CD

All documents indexed and searchable using the Adobe Reader program.

Videos of Meetings are going to be put onto DVD

Fit only 2 per DVD

Cost of owning CD / DVD?

Likely just cost of materials

Web Site

Moved basic info that I had from personal site to 8thafhsoregon.com

Basic structure created

PDFs uploaded into site

Need

What people would like out there?

Ideas: like what Information that you be looking for?

Discussion forum / blog

Restrict blog to members?

## **General Notes**

Eldon Bevens is on a book tour so he could not be here today. He wrote up his own story and got it published so he could not attend while on a book promotional tour day.

## **Beaverton Memorial Park**

On Friday, Veterans (Armistice Day) the town of Beaverton dedicated a new memorial to WW II which is a prop from a P2V "Neptune" sub-hunter. The aircraft is actually post-WWII but was designed during the war.

## **Evergreen**

The ground under and around the McMinnville Evergreen Museum was annexed by the city of McMinnville. An IMAX Theatre is being built there. Already there is an RC (Remote Control model aircraft) field. NASA is going to donate to the museum a Titan-2 (used for satellite launches). Emery Riddle has selected it as a teaching site.

## **National Meeting**

Don Bourgeois and Joe Conroy attended the national convention. No time in the meeting for any formal report.

## **Pearson Air Museum**

Been taken over the Vancouver Heritage Historical Society. They received a French plane made before (or contemporary with) the Wright brothers. They eliminated being a separate society in order to save on back office fees and other administrative expenses.

## **Bomber Museum**

3rd anniversary dinner last friday. This is the B-17 Flying Fortress on McLaughlin Blvd, Milwaukie.

## **Oregon Military Museum**

Phil Richard. Restoring a 1919 truck. Most of the parts that were missing were wood. Did the Albany parade. One of the largest in the US. They have a Japanese 3-man tank there.

## **Collings Foundation**

The non-profit got the exemption from the FAA which allows them to take the B-17 and B-24 on their flying tour for another two years. June / July next year is the tentative date they will be in the Pacific Northwest.

## **Fuddy Duddy**

Now going to the west coast. This puts another B-17 on tour on the West Coast.

## **Veterans Day History**

Don reviewed the history of Veterans Day. Originally named Armistice Day as a result of an armistice signed with Germany to stop the fighting of The Great War (now referred to as World War One) on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of 1918. The Treaty of Versailles officially ended the war. The United States reconized it as a day to honor those that fought in the war in 1919.

In 1926, through a Congressional Resolution, it was formally recognized and 12 years later in 1938 it became a Federal holiday.

Emporia Kansas town published the holdiaiy as "Veterans Day" in 1953 in order to recognize both the WWI, WWII and Korean veterans. Kansas Represenative Ed Reece then introduced it to Congress and they officially changed the holiday to use Veterans Day starting in 1954.

## **World War I POWs**

Has anyone heard any POW stories of camp life from World War I?

## **Other Displays**

A member brought a "Lucky Bastard" certificate. This member left before arrangements could be made to scan it for the archives.

A Boeing factory training certificate was brought to the meeting. Arrangements to scan that was also missed.

Future task for Tom Philo to find the members and scan the documents.

## **Guests**

33 guests were at the meeting.

## Displays

Aero Frame had artwork on display as well as members own models, books, and photographs. Don Keller had a display table. Clint Gruber had two posters of camp pictures from Stalag Luft 1.

## Door Prize and Raffle - Jerry Andrews

### Cold Cash Raffle Prizes - He gives money away too!

Door prize \$8 Sally Brown

Raffle prizes: \$10 - to a guest, \$15, John Horne, \$25 to Cruz.

## Speaker Introductions - Don Bourgeois

Clint Gruber (who did the display boards) flew in a B-24 "Liberator" bomber named "Iron Ass." Ramsey Fendall's B-17 "Flying Fortress" heavy bomber ship was called "Good Ship Lollipop." Ramsey stated he liked Clint's ships' name better.

## Clint

Clint was in pilot training class of 43C, and received his wings at Roswell New Mexico in March of 1943.

He joined a B-24 "Liberator" crew as co-pilot and finished training with them in May. His pilot was a Texan.

On June 1, his crew flew the Northern route to England, and arrived at their new base at Hardwick near Norwich. They were assigned to the 329th Squadron, 93rd Bomb Group (H).

The Group was ordered to Benghazi in Libya, North Africa in late June of 1943, but Clint and most of his crew did not go there then. A veteran crew needed a replacement navigator, and took theirs, leaving the remainder of the crew in England. On August 1, 1943, five B24 Groups - including the 93rd -flew the disastrous low-level mission against the Ploesti, Rumania oil center. ["Operation Tidal Wave" was the code's name.] Clint's crew then received a new navigator and flew to re-join the Group at Benghazi. After a couple of missions, the 93rd returned to home base in England. But not for long. In early September, the order came to return to Tunis in North Africa, to support the on-going invasion of Italy. Then, back to England.

[Various groups of the 8th AF were transferred to the Med in support of Operation Torch in November of 1942. Some units then were transferred to the 12th then later the 15th and never returned to England's 8th.]

In June of 1943 he returned to England after that visit to North Afrika.

On Dec 1, 1943 mission, the Group attacked steel industry targets at Solingen in the Ruhr valley. This was Clint's 9th mission, but he never got there. On the way in Iron Ass was attacked and shot down by German ME 109s. The prop on #3 had run away, and could not be feathered, resulting in wind milling and too much drag to keep up with the formation. One fighter attack from 6 o'clock killed the tail gunner and damaged the elevators and rudders. Then, a head-on attack blew up the #2, and Iron Ass became uncontrollable. At about 18,000 feet, the order was given to bail out, and all of the remaining crew jumped. Except for a serious leg wound suffered by a waist gunner, all landed safely and became POWs.

## Ramsey

Enlisted in the army air corps at 17, and when he turned 18 he went to Kansas and reported in. They looked at this 5' 7" frame and he was assigned as a ball turret gunner. He also trained as a top-turret gunner. Their pilot was 22 years old. After training he was assigned to a crew. In September in Lincoln, Nebraska they were assigned a new B-17 to ferry to England and then named it "Good Ship Lollipop."

Oct 5, 1944, while on his 25th mission, he was shot down. By this time the mission count had gone to 35 for a crew member before being allowed to return home.

## Clint

Severely damaged his right ankle when he landed in a remote area in the hills of the Eifel about 25 miles south of Cologne. [There were various models of electrically heated flight suits one of which was a blue "bunny suit" which were always shorting out, and only thing to wear over them are fleece flight boots which have no ankle support.] He hid his chute under some brush. For some reason, he had taken off his brass and buried it along with his escape kit with the chute. After walking he realized this and returned and recovered the escape kit, but forgot the brass. Looking for a hiding place, he found what seemed to be a picnic area and found an old newspaper. Printed in German, there was no mistake now where he was! He had landed about noon, and stayed hidden until dark. He couldn't travel far because of his ankle injury, so spent a very cold snowy night until morning, when he was capture by a German civilian carrying a shotgun.

The police were called, and took him to the nearby village of Altenahr where he was put in a jail cell overnight. The policeman that came to get him wore a spiked helmet!

The next morning a Luftwaffe noncom came to pick him up for the train trip to Dulag Luft near Frankfurt, where all Allied captured air crews were taken for interrogation. At almost every town where the train stopped another flyer was collected it seemed.

Overnighted in Frankfurt Oberursel is where stalag Luft was for interrogation. The routine there was isolation in solitary for a day or so before the grilling by interrogators. Clint's questioner was a Kriegsmarine officer who had spent a lot of time as a commercial airline pilot in the United States. After a couple of sessions of name, rank, serial number, Clint was shown a book titled "93rd Bomb Group" off the shelf in the office. Amazingly, it contained reams of info about the Group's personnel, equipment, and detailed history, including photos of the Group commander and staff! After pulling what was probably his favorite joke, "2nd Lt co-pilots don't know anything anyway" the interrogator sent Clint on to his permanent camp at Stalag Luft One.

## Ramsey

The 351st Bomb Group shot down 303 German fighters while losing 124 B-17 bombers [Official records show the 351st having completed 311 missions and dropped 20,357 tons of bombs.]

Was put into a rear area barn. The German who interrogated him looked like Eric Von Stronheim He was a real hardnose and asked incessant questions like group, CO in the states, position in the crew. Asked him how he knew I was not a spy. Asked him how to show he was not a spy. He told him that the US Government does not hire 19 year old spies. His eyes lit up, and he jumped up and yelled in German and marched out and he thought he might get shot. When he got to the barn his pilot Lt. Kennedy was there with a broken leg. Later on two Canadians were marched in who had tried to get Kennedy before the Germans did, and got captured also. If Lt. Kennedy had not broken his leg he would have gotten away along with them. John, who was shot in the leg, had to be carried for a few miles. Only time he was hurt due to thirst, guards would hit them to keep them going rather than scoop up snow to drink.

Went to a guard house. When woke up heard loud engine noises were and found out they were on a rear area FW 190 base. Some of the German pilots ended up talking with them, and found out they were just like them. Started talking about missions. Found out they would attack B-24s first since they were easier to shoot down than 17s!

Next day put into a car cut and half and drawn by a horse.

Nickname for Frankfurt was "Happy days hotel."

Anytime of day or night they would wake you up and interrogate you. The interrogator was a guy who swore up and down that he was raised in Brooklyn and went to Germany to visit, and they never let him go back. This man even told Ramsey about the new awnings on Sgt. barracks! He knew his stuff.

Then transferred to another stalag where you were supposed to write down what you stated in Frankfurt.

This was late in the war was that he was only there for 100 days. He never saw a red cross parcel. 1/2 can of red cabbage soup and a 1/2 piece of bread.

Nuremberg was bombed on February 23rd by the 8th and RAF. They had to wait it out. No shelter that they could hide in. With the Russians closing in - we could hear loud explosions getting closer, they split us into two groups to walk 120 miles to Moosberg. A lot were young and most could make it. One day a P-47 pilot saw them and strafed them. Only hearsay, but I heard that two were killed. On April 13 heard a guard put a gun to his own head and stated Roosevelt Kaput. They thought they were lying, but later on confirmed via a clandestine radio that it was true, that Roosevelt had died. Only President they knew was Roosevelt since he was in office so long.

Moosberg had grown to 140,000 troops there by this time. From all nationalities.

He slept on the floor.

On April 29, Sunday, a P-51 did a victory roll over the camp. George Patton came in and told them they were liberated by George S. Patton. 5 days later in Rheims, then to Camp Lucky Strike.

## Clint

Parachuting into or near a burning city that you just bombed was not a good thing. Many fliers were murdered by enraged civilians, or even police or soldiers. A flier captured by Luftwaffe personnel were in better hands generally. No, Clint never asked for medical help for his injuries. Not knowing for sure whether the treatment would be good, there was more safety in numbers. He did not want to be separated from the group. At age 22, broken bones tend to heal themselves, and after the year and a half in prison camp, his ankle was in pretty good shape. Forty years later, that old injury came back to haunt him.

Safety in numbers. As you got more and more people around you it was safer. So he never asked for help since he did not want to be separated from the group. Only 20 years later did his broken ankle come back to bother him.

The Interrogator of the 93rd BG with , loaded with pictures, news clippings, names, command changes etc.

After Dulag Luft Clint was part of a large group loaded into a box car and headed off on a three day trip to Stalag One. At the railroad station at Barch, the POWs were met by a whole bunch of guards with mean-looking dogs and walked the three miles to the camp. Here, first thing was to be deloused, have ID picture taken, and assigned a barracks. Already 24 men in the room assigned. Issued a bunk, straw-filled mattress, a blanket, spoon and fork - no knife. Later, moved to a small...14' by 14'...room, with only five other roommates. Eventually, two more were moved in, making it very crowded. The air in the locked up barracks and small shuttered window got pretty awful overnight for especially for 12 hours in wintertime

Stalag Luft One had only just been opened up to Americans when he got there. At that time there were about 1,200 RAF personnel and 500 Americans. At the end of the war the camp had swelled to over 9,000..mostly Americans. RAF personnel included Free French, Poles, Czechs, Norwegians, and many other nationalities, plus Brit colonials from New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, Canada, and others from all over the world. Clint was in the original compound, South/West. As the war progressed many more POWs arrived, and three more compounds were constructed...North 1, 2 , and 3. Each compound was separated by wire, and there was no inmate traffic between them.

The Senior Allied Commander organized the camp as "Provisional Wing-X", with each compound being a Group. Each barracks, or "block" in the compound was a Squadron.

By the middle of April '45, it was apparent that the Soviet armies were getting closer, and the big guns and bombing attacks at the front could be heard in camp. Also, Ju-88s were operating from the airbase three miles south of Barth and, by timing the intervals between takeoffs for a mission and retrun, it was obvious that the front was getting closer. Because of the Zemke got permission for them dig foxholes in the ground, which was mostly sand, as protection from the fighting.

Colonel Hubert "Hub" Zemke, the leading American fighter ace when he went down, was the Senior Allied Officer at this time. He was an outstanding leader, and a hero to us POWs as our leader in his dealings with the Germans. He was fluent in German, and also had a command of Russian. Just before the end, the German commandant informed Zemke that following their orders, the camp would be evacuated and all POWs marched south away from the Russians. Zemke held his ground and, in effect, told them "Hell no, we won't go!", pointing out that even though a fight would be bloody, there were over 9,000 of us against the German guard force of about 250. Additionally, he reminded the commandant that it would be well for them not to be captured by the Soviets. So, during the night of April 30th, the entire German camp command fled to the west, leaving the camp in our control. The Soviet army, tough-looking front line troops, arrived the next day firing their weapons into the air and driving a tank through the wire.

Even though the Germans were now gone, under Col Zemke's order we were still confined. Our own guard was thrown up around the camp to keep us in and relatively safe, because fighting was still going on around us. Some took off anyway, and we heard that several had been killed before reaching Allied lines. The Soviets put up a guard on the perimeter also, because their orders had been to march liberated POWs to safety behind their lines. Col Zemke was successful in talking them out of that march also.

The war ended on May 8th, but it wasn't until the 12th that we were really liberated and left Stalag Luft One for good. After much very high level negotiations between General Eisenhower's headquarters and Moscow, the Russians allowed an airlift over their zone of occupation and finally, on May 12th, the first B17 of several hundred to follow arrived. Over the next three days, the nearly 9,600 camp prisoners were flown out...the Brits to England...the Americans to Camp Lucky Strike near Le Havre in France. The planes were flown by crews of the 91st, 381st, and 598th Groups of the 1st Air Division. They had been lightened as much as possible, crewed only by the two pilots, a navigator, engineer and radio op. Bomb bays were boarded over for standing room for the 30 POWs loaded into each ship. No chutes for anyone, but nobody complained.

[The bombers were allowed to come in and land, but not allowed to shut off the engine. Stalin wanted Vlasov's Army, which had been fighting with the Germans against the Soviets, to be turned over to the Russia when they had surrendered / been captured by the US Army. The US Army had stated they were their prisoners and would not let them be turned over to the Russian. The 13 days was waiting while waiting for this high level argument over Russian prisoners. The reason the 17s could not turn off the engine was one of the conditions as a result of the negotiation to get them out.]

The Russians wanted to march them out. The POWs became paws because of the Yalta agreement where the Allied had agreed to turn all Russians over to them.



Anyone with a German sounding name, gave a sales talk, against the common enemy Russia. Offered them a job in the luftwaffe if they joined.

Each POW received only 1/2 of a Red Cross food parcel a week (instead of 1 a week like they were supposed to). From November onwards no parcels arrived due to the transportation problems due to P-47 and other attacks against the rail and road systems.

Most of the flight crew would never carry a weapon. Who would you shoot? Soldier- others around. Shoot a civilian. I think not.

Best way to get items into the camp was by trading cigarettes with the German guards. Only thing you could not get was a girl. By trading you could get most anything.

Packages came from home. 3 letters and 4 postcards a year could be mailed. Middle of July of 1944 - after 7 months - did the first letter come for him.

In propaganda they would read the names and SN of people who had been captured via HAM radio broadcasts. Was at least three months before the War Department notified them officially.

### **Answers to audience questions.**

#### **Propaganda?**

At Dulag Luft, anyone with a German-sounding name such as mine was given a sales talk, claiming that we were fighting the wrong enemy, and offering a job in the Luftwaffe to fight the Russians. I never heard of anyone taking them up on the offer.

#### **Food?**

Thank God for the Red Cross and their food parcels. If we had been forced to live solely on German rations, we might not have survived. At Stalag One, we got a parcel from the Red Cross about once every two weeks (instead of the programmed one each week. From late November onward from the fall of '44 to war end, received practically none, due to Allied bombings and combat damage to the continent's transportation system by that time.

#### **Side arms?**

No bomber crew member that I knew of carried a personal weapon on missions. If shot down, who would you shoot? An armed military captor? A civilian? I think not.

#### **Secret radio?**

The best (and only) way to acquire extra food, banned items such as pocketknives, parts for our clandestine radio, cameras, etc. was to trade cigarettes with guards for the items. It was dangerous for them, but cigarettes to a guard were like gold.

#### **Packages and mail?**

Each POW was issued short letter and postcard forms, and allowed to send two letters and four postcards per month. Delivery on either end of the mail system took a long time. My first letter from home arrived in July of '44, eight months after I was shot down. Packages from home with clothing and cigarettes were especially anticipated.

#### **Family notification?**

MIA telegrams were usually received by the family within a week or so from the incident, but many weeks could go by before official notification from the War Department of POW status. However, many times on German propaganda broadcasts, they read the names and serial numbers of new prisoners over short wave radio, and received by ham operator in the States. My family received several notifications in this way from hams all over the country . . . and within just a few days or so of my capture.

## **Ramsey**

Never got any mail at all. A Missing in Action was sent to his mother a week after bailing out, but three months later got an official notice saying he was a POW.

Never saw anything but a truck. "The other compound got it." When they got to France was told that the Germans were stealing them.

The CO eventually organized negotiating with the Germans on their behalf using skilled negotiators and who knew German well.

- end of meeting -