

8th Air Force Association Historical Society Oregon Chapter

May 13, 2006

Meeting Opening Don Bourgeois

Welcome to the February meeting.

Pledge of Allegiance

Lead by Don B

Opening Prayer

Roland Stewart .read the list of names of those who have died since last meeting (see notes)

Reports

Treasurer Report - Jerry Andrew

Compares to the same amount as last year so doing good.

Flight Line Editor - Jerry Ritter

Thanks for materials for the flight lines. Need other stories from fighters, ground and other stories.

Chapter patches \$3.00.

Thanks to his wife for helping out with the flightlines letter.

Membership - Joe Conroy

108 veterans, non 8th AF vets, 65 non 8th AF veterans. 176 total in Oregon and SW Washington.

Web Site and Historical Archive

summary of the web site and how the archives are run

General Notes

Evergreen

Eldon Bevens.

IMAX in June will be opening. New hanger will then start construction to the east of the IMAX. 80 total WWII type a/c now owned by Evergreen.

747 Supertanker for firefighting with 20,000 gal drop capability now owned by Evergreen.

The t34 does run as do the armored car. In July they will give rides in the tank.

Seattle

Tuskegee airmen going up there in June.

Collings Foundation

Coming to Salem June 14th, 15th, then 16th to Aurora around 2PM departing time. Arrives Salem around 3 PM from Medford.

95th BG Reunion

Aug 29-Sept 2, 2006 in downtown Portland. Marilyn Gallagher is organizing it. McMinnville, Columbia Gorge, are the field trip - hanger dinner dance (18 piece band) at the hotel.

Bomber Museum

Charlie Gallagher.

1st Friday of every month is a meeting at 10:00 to 12:00 PM. No set program, just a meeting get-together.

Dick Jackson wanted to know the natural color of the ball turret on a natural metal ball turret. Answers to Don Keller.

Presentations

Nestucko Mid School - see Charles Gallagher.

Chehalis New War Museum

West side of I-5 covers all forces, all wars.

Oregon Military Museum

Phil Richart.

Announcements

Ian Hawkins writing a book on the 15 BG and looking for materials. Also info on a gun-camera film shot on 9 Sept 1943 by Leut. Honner of 11/NJG 1. (see my e-mails)

Wreaths at Arlington Cemetery. Sign the book.

Guests

Ray Winters, brought son.

Frank Haste Navigator 467th BG.

330th BG top turret gunner could not make it will be here next meeting.

Don Pullman 46th Depot Group set up 3rd SAD for B-24s.

Ken Lagmon, x Navy.

Displays

Don Keller had some of his items on display (aircraft engine plates), paintings and books.

Door Prize and Raffle - Jerry Andrews

Cold Cash Raffle Prizes - He gives money away too!

Door prize Tom Davis.

Raffle prizes: \$10, 15, 25.

Speaker Introductions - Tom Davis

The speakers at the May meeting were both aircraft mechanics with Ray Winters and Urban Kluthe. However, the contrast between the two were vastly different. Ray went to the Pacific right at the end of the war, and worked in an almost peacetime routine, while Urban went to North Africa in 1942 and was bombed, shelled, and strafed from Tunisia, Sicily, Italy, France, and ended the war in Germany itself.

Ray Winters

Ray Winters is a Oregon native being born in Sherwood in 1927. The day he graduated as a junior in Sherwood High School he got his draft papers and 15 days later he was in the Army Air Force.

After Shepard Field Texas for initial training, he moved to an A&E school (Aircraft and Engine Mechanic) in Mississippi then he was shipped out to the Pacific to Okinawa as a PFC (Private First Class) where he eventually made the rank of Corporal after two years. He was assigned to the 371st Air Engineering Squadron on Okinawa.

With the 371st he serviced 51 P-47 "Thunderbolts," a dozen P-61 "Black Widows", a single C-46, C-47 "Dakotas", and some B-29 "Superfortress" bombers. He did engine changes mainly at the Yon Tan airstrip at the Kadina base.

He noted that a B-29 - which were stripped down for photo recon uses - could easily out fly the P-47s in level speed. These B-29s were used for photo mapping of Korea, Cambodia, Vietnam, China, and other parts of South-East Asia.

In order to perform engine changes They took an old 2 1/2 tonne GI truck and took off the rear tires and made a set of dual tires for the front of it and used the rear axle as a hoist. Constructing an "A frame" over the rear so that it would be high over an engine. This setup allowed them to take off engines and props. The shooting war was over by this time so when they did an engine change they they took out the spark plugs, packed up the hole with silica gel, put the R2800s into boxes and nailed them all shut and put 5 onto a trailer to ship back to the US for overhaul in Texas at the 3rd Echeleon repair level. After doing all this work the Air Force guys took them up to the end of the island at the top of the hill and used a dozer to push them over the hill into the South China Sea - and they are still there.

His workday at the Yan Tan airstrip was very routine since they had regular shops and an 8 hour days 6 days a week. Two nights a week they had an outside theatre to watch movies. When the show was over they would always play "Sentimental Journey." They were still a long way from home.

It would rain like the devil there on Okinawa. But they had a hugh hanger to work in along with a bunch of different specialty shops for the different systems which go into an warplane. They had lots of parts and never had to create "hanger queens" to get other aircraft back into the air.

Accidents

One time a pilot who had graduated from West Point came back went to fly a P-47. He had been flying only AT-6s or Corsairs both which are quite a bit lighter aircraft than a Thunderbolt. They cautioned him on how heavy the P-47 is compared to other aircraft and they watched him takeoff the almost two mile long runway. He got 10' above the ground and got the gear up. He was flying but he never got higher and after using the whole 10,000 foot runway it dropped off into a coral pit canyon valley at the end and he went down into it and never pulled it out. It cartwheeled in there and he killed himself.

One time they had replaced an engine and had spent time lots of time getting it all fixed up and running just right . Then the pilot came over jumped into the plane did the engine checks and took off to break it in. However no one - including the pilot - bothered to check the fuel levels before he took off. He got up to 15 or 16 thousand feet and t engine quit so started to go down. There is a small island off the main island but you cannot see it from Okinawa and he landed there. So they go off in an LSI with a truck, and a new prop, engine, tools to go and change the engine again. They went across and the waves were 10 to 14 feet high and he thought they would never make it. They did make it across but no one took an oil cooler with them so they had to pressure wash all the metal filings out of the existing one to prevent ruining the new engine.

They wanted to leave the old engine there but they could not so they had to come back just as loaded as they left. The plane took off and flew back to base with no problem after the second repair.

Weather

Originally the enlisted men slept in 12 man squad tents in camp. They later later moved into 4 man tents. They had no heating at all so they put one doubled the tent so they could have curtains and extra insulation. At times It got down to 36 degrees and with those old army cots it got "uncomfortable."

In order to alieviate this sleeping problem he designed his own cot. He located some plywood, framed up a bed, located some old truck inner tubes, stretched them across the frame which gave it some "spring" and finally put blankets under and over himself to get stay warmer than sleeping right on the army cots.

Food & Health

Hot cakes were baked so hard they would throw them around the mess hall. The cooks did not like their playfulness.

They had Japanese POWs on Okinawa when he first got there and they worked in the mess hall serving the food. They really liked the fruit cocktail that was being served to the troops. The POWs wanted to eat more of it themselves so they would often just grin at you and never give you another helping no matter what you do since they wanted it themselves!

Ray and the others had no washing facility so they rigged up an old jeep rear end and using a 1 HP engine make an agitator out of a 55 gallon drum and washed their clothes using that.

When he was getting ready to ship out to Okinawa a Scarlet Fever scare occurred while they were in Seattle. They all were told to bring two canteens of water down to the mess hall. When they got there they found out they had to take horse pills sized sulfa pills -- 6 of them. They had to drink a canteen of water, take all the pills, then drink the other can of water.

Once at Okinawa they went through a Sleeping Sickness scare and so everyone had to take a size 22 or 20 needle shot - horse size again - the syringe was around 6 inches long. He was looking through his "junk" the other day and he still has his medical shot record - he held onto it since he did not want to go through that shot again! "Boy that shot hurt my arm."

It took Ray 11 days by ship to get to Okinawa from Seattle and 29 days to come back from there to San Francisco. On the way to Okinawa he was sick for 7 of those days in the sick bay with an IV in his arm. The ship he came back on had actually taken POWs from the states to Japan then they loaded up the ship with US personnel to go back to the states when he left in late 1946. SS Marine Dragon was the ship's name. 8 knots was the top speed. It was set up that bunks were stacked five high all over the ship. He thinks the troop ship was really a converted oil tanker.

They sailed the northern route back to the States up the Aleutian chain and down to San Francisco. At one point in a storm in the Aleutians the ship took on a 31 degree list - and they were all very worried. About three days out from docking in San Francisco the Captain decided to throw all the fruit over the side due to fresh fruit restrictions of California (just like now). The Lt. in charge of them talked to captain and convinced him to leave it on the deck and the guys will take care of it instead of throwing it away. They had apples, potatoes, oranges, and grapefruits. The Captain said OKAY as long as they cleaned up the deck. In a few minutes 15 to 20 sacks of potatoes were gone just like that - and so was everything else. There were 1200 people on the ship: 900 black soldiers and three hundred white soldiers.

SOS - chipped beef on toast - was served in to both Ray and Urban and they liked it. Ray went in at 190 and came out at 209 so he was well fed. Except those green eggs - he hated those green eggs.

Observation

It was different time and experience in the immediate postwar year for service personnel and he never kept in contact with any of the people he worked with.

Urban's Combat Career Summary

Urban Kluthe was born in Nebraska long before the Great Depression came about. Before this occurred his family moved to California where his father continued to farm but in a better climate. On February 15, 1941 he joined the Army. He went to Hammond Field in California for crew training then they were moved to

Portland and he helped organize the 57th Service Squadron. He had a brother that also went into the Air Corps as service squadron engine specialist a year after he went in. Urban's brother was stationed in the Pacific during the whole war.

The 57th Service Squadron shipped out to North Africa on October 1, 1942 from the East Coast (*Editor's Note: Hampton Roads most likely*) as part of "Operation Torch"- the invasion of North Africa which occurred on 11 November 1942. This invasion against Vichy France eventually forced the Germans out of North Africa in May of 1943. He landed on the coast at Casablanca in Morocco on along the Atlantic Ocean.

He was first attached to the 27th Fighter Bomber group. After a few months he went to the 332nd Service Group in the newly organized 12th Air Force.

After the North Africa campaign he participated in the invasion of Sicily in July 43, following on to Salerno in September of 1943. His unit was then fought up the Italian "boot" before it was sent into the Anzio beachhead at the fighter strip there. Once Rome was liberated in June of 44 he then participated in the D-Day landings in southern France in August of 1944. He had attained the rank of Staff Sergeant while in Italy. After the invasion (*Operation ANVIL*) of France then they were assigned to the 9th Air Force. Due to the converging of air groups in France they had too many support units concentrated in one area so his unit was reassigned to Italy at Pisa where for four months they basically "hung around."

His main work was repairing the rudders, ailerons, and other dope and fabric covered control surfaces on aircraft as well as being a general purpose mechanic.

Aircraft Worked On

The A-36 "Apache" was one of the a/c he worked on in North Africa - the A-36 is forerunner of the P-51 Mustang - only 500 were made. The A-36 used the Allison engine and had dive brakes on it. The accuracy of this dive bomber was reported to be so good that they could hit a rain barrel if they started from 12,000 feet due to these very effective drive brakes. It had the same capabilities of the German Ju-87 "Stuka" or the Navy's SBD "Dauntless" dive bomber.

An example of their effectiveness was that Patton had tried to take Kasserine pass without using any air support but was stopped cold by the Germans. After two days going nowhere, General Patton called in air support of the A-36s and in two hours the Germans positions were blasted away and Patton's ground army were were push them out of their fortified lines. The use of the A-36s changed Patton's mind about tactical air support.

Due to the low production run of these North American aircraft, and lots of combat at low altitude where enemy flak was extremely good, and accidents, they suffered lots of losses of the A-36s. Most of the air units were re-equipped with P-40s "Warhawks" (Kittyhawks, Tomahawks), then P-51 Mustangs, and then the ground attack units converted to P-47s in 1944 just before the invasion of Southern France.

He field was always the first airfield behind the front lines so damaged aircraft always landed at their airfield for immediate repair. This allowed him to work on all types of a/c. One time he worked on a B-24 whose tail gunner was KIA and one of the tail rudders was shot off. They replaced the tail, the turret, fixed the landing gear, patched over 300 holes in plane, replaced 3 engines, and got it flying again. He also worked on A-20s, B-26s, Spitfires, Beaufighter's - about every aircraft in the allied inventory.

Patching an aircraft that had bullet holes went real fast. In North Africa they captured lots of pop rivets from the German airfields and used them for non-stress sheet metal areas. Pop rivets were great for wing tips where you could not "buck" a rivet easily. They found these German rivets much easier and faster to use when repairing planes than what they learned in school using US style rivets.

A field crew consisted of 12 men of different skills. They had 4 crews while in North Africa. They would go out to where aircraft had handed off the field and fix them up enough to get them back where they could be properly rebuilt, or salvage parts off of them if they could not get them back.

Had trailers for engine, electronics, parts, propeller shop, paint, wood shop, electrical, radio, had a good electrician so could light up a city.

If a piece of metal was a non structural panel with a lot of holes they would just replace the whole panel with new sheet metal and pop rivet it in. Stressed skin areas took longer to repair.

Some parts were hard to get - so then you stole it from elsewhere. Major parts of aircraft came in pretty fast like engines and wings. They always cannibalized from wrecked aircraft.

His unit could reall fix anything. After the German surrendered in Tunisia they captured a milling machine. Their shop people were in heaven since they could now make any part they needed.

Engines, Air Coolers, tires - lots of brakes - and wings were the most often replaced items.

Workday Routine & Camp Life

His workday was a 8 to 12 hour day except about 6 weeks before each of the three invasions he went through when everyone worked sun-up till sunset - sometimes working to midnight. Even then sometime they were up at 3 AM and repeating the day. This was done so that maximum number of aircraft could participate in preparation and during an invasion. After the invasion was over then they back to the routine 8 and 10 hour days 6 days on and 1 day off routine.

Like Ray, they made up a washing machine when in a combat area using the standard 55 gallon drum. Unlike Ray, most of the time they had local women around and who did all the laundry for the unit. It only cost them one or two two dollars a week for the local women to do the laundry. In North Africa the locals would take the laundry down and beat them on the rocks in the nearestl river. To clean their coveralls which had grease and lots of stains they washed them in 100 octane avgas. One time he hung his coveralls next to a tent but it was too close to the stove outlet so it caught on fire!

When he was near Pisa after Operation Anvil he went hunting and killed a boar in the Atlas mountains. That was a welcome change of diet since most of the time they were eating C-rations. Once they ate C-Rations for 8 straight weeks. Another time they were fed pork chops - but everyone got sick. Their original Mess Sergeant was real good - but then he got syphilis in Italy and so he got transferred out and the next cook was really bad. The new cook would cook the food the night before to avoid getting up early and let the food sit all night long. That made the food less than pleasing.

Urban got malaria in France. Once the unit was shipped back for their 4 month rest in Pisa he had to take sulfa pills. Only thing the drug did was postpone the Malaria. He had reoccurrences of Malaria for up to two years afterwards before it finally subsided.

Anzio

There was an airfield inside the Anzio beachhead and his unit was sent there soon after the invasion. The Germans knew the exact location of the airfield the so the Wehrmacht's railroad gun in the mountains south of Rome would fire onto the runway early each morning between 4 AM and 5:30 AM and damage it, then the American Engineers would get out and repair it right away. *[Editor's Note: The Anzio invasion starting at 0200 on 22 January 1944 was supposed to be an "End Run" around the German defenses and seize rome and cut-off the Germans in the south. Instead it became a four month battle through the winter / spring till they southern allied forces finally broke through the original German defense line and relieved the*

beachhead on 24 May 1944.]

At night the Luftwaffe would bomb the airfield as well as other areas inside the beachhead. The closest a bomb exploded near him was 150 yds. He was strafed three times: North Africa, Sicily, and once by a ME-262 in Germany. The 262 destroyed one aircraft on the airfield and damaged a bunch of the others with its four 30 mm guns.

Accidents

At the end of the war at the airfield in Germany they had 100,000 POWs camped around the field. Then one day he saw two that two 38s were going to buzz the field. One went down real low and started a slow roll but was he was too low and clipped the field with a wing and cartwheeled down the field but the plane did not catch on fire. Urban said "Lets go down and see what is happening" but the officer said "Hell he's dead there's no use in going down there." However Urban and one of the guys jumped into a jeep and went down there anyway and found the pilot still alive trapped in the cockpit so they got him out. The pilot could not walk so they carried him away from the plane to the highway that was next to the field and luckily a German ambulance came by just then and took him to the hospital. He survived.

It was so dusty in North Afrika that they would do take-off control using flags to communicate back to the takeoff area as to when it was safe to land or take off from a hill overlooking the whole runway. One day an A-36 Apache was taking off and was still on the runway when a 2nd A-36 tried to take off too soon flew into the dust and put his prop into the cockpit of the first Apache killing him. With his plane now damaged that pilot then climbed to altitude and bailed out and survived.

They had a bunch of other wrecks too, belly landings, catching on fire at landing or takeoff, P-38 landing on 1 engine which did land correctly and the pilot died - these types of accidents occurred all the time.

French Invasion

On the day Operation Anvil started he was in an LST getting ready to land on D-Day in France when they were attacked by Ju-88. The LST next to his was hit and 160 killed. Their LST picked up 6 from the sinking ship. He watched as the string of bombs were coming toward him and if another bomb had been on the Luftwaffe plane his ship would have been hit too.

During the late fall and early winter of 44 they were stationed in France for only two months. It was miserable for them. Then they were told they were no longer needed and were shipped back over to Italy south of Pisa. They were told that no offensive was going to happen against the Germans to the North in the Po valley since if they crossed the mountains into the Po then all the people in the Po valley would have to be fed by the Allies. So in order to save food and not lose any men the taking it during the winter the Allies waited till spring to take over the valley.

After waiting there for four months - where their morale was the lowest - then they were all shipped back to France and moved supported the battle into southern Germany where he was when the Second World War ended.