

# TAC Tanker Tales

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## **Another Fun Reunion is in the Archives**

Yes, the gathering in San Antonio is history, but with it came a lot of good memories. The weather, hotel and agenda went along as planned and those that attended seemed to enjoy themselves.

As scheduled on the last day, we had our Memorial Ceremony led by Board Chairman Bill Wolford and Chaplain Ellen Dodd. We remembered those TAC Tankers who had passed on their "final flight." The Business Meeting followed and President Vic Ventura touched on the move of the KB-50 from MacDill to the Dover Mobility Museum.

Plans for the next two reunions were discussed and decided to return to Dayton OH next year to view the Monument we dedicated in 2006, then go to Dover DE in 2020 when the restoration will be completed. Currently, I am working on both events so you will get a peek on the activities in the next issue. See page 3 for some info on my Dover visit.

At the end of the meeting I was surprised to be presented a lovely plaque by the officers and board. I share it with all of you for it is with your support, that I continue to do "my thing."



## ***President's Views From Vic-***

Once again a great time was had by all who were able to attend our annual reunion, this time held in San Antonio. Natalie, as usual, had many outings arranged for us, all enjoyable.

We had a fruitful annual business meeting settling many matters. We launched into it by awarding a plaque to Natalie for her many years of outstanding service. We then opened the floor for nominations of new officers. But everyone there decided that they were happy with the current worthless lot, so nominations were closed.

We then voted to meet in 2019 at Wright Patterson (The National Air Museum) since aircraft #389 at Dover will still be in pieces being restored. Then in 2020 we will be somewhere near Dover and Natalie will plan a day trip to Dover so we can have a formal dedication ceremony for #389.

Lastly, Gary Myers gave the budget report which showed that we don't have much money because of our \$25,000 contribution toward the restorations of #389. The low balance will result in a higher cost to attend reunions. If you would like to donate money to the Dover Museum, a good way to do that is to become a member of the Museum. Our Vice President Lou Chapman, did just that for 5 years. I will do that also.

Preceding our business meeting, our Board Chair Bill Wolford and Chaplain, Ellen Dodd, graciously introduced a memorial service. Twelve names were read aloud, each one being one of our TAC Tanker friends who left this earth during the past year.

Closing on a sad note. Carol Bessette joined this group of twelve in late May. Our thoughts and prayers are with John, our Historian and his family. Adious for now., Vic

## **Board Chairman's Corner**

*by Bill Wolford*

Dear Fellow Tankers:

The reunion in San Antonio was, as usual, outstanding.

The hotel accommodations were great. It was like being home again. The River Walk and Cruise were both a lot of fun. I especially enjoyed the bus trip up to President Johnson's Ranch and the tour. The continued tour on up to the 'Willie Nelson village' was really different, making a tourist attraction out of something I never would have thought possible.

The Memorial Service really brought home to me the importance of continuing to have our reunions as long as we can get enough of us to participate. We enjoy seeing you all and hope to see you next year in Ohio. We want to wish you a wonderful rest of the year with good health and as Shirley keeps reminding me, no falling allowed. May God bless each and every one of you until we meet again.

Bill Wolford

# A Report on My Visit to Dover Delaware By The Editor

Following the San Antonio Reunion, I returned back to Florida and closed shop for the summer with plans to head to Pennsylvania and get out of the heat of the south. The route taken was to go by way of Dover and a stop at the Museum and possibly meet with John Taylor, the new director. Unfortunately, he was not there, but I did get to meet with Deborah Sellars, the collections manager who was in the gift shop at the time. She remarked that she had recently received our check for \$25,000 for the KB-50 move.

Debby gave me a copy of the Air Mobility Command Museum HANGER DIGEST (Apr-Jun 2018 issue) and showed me the article about our aircraft written by Jeff Brown, the editor.

Here is what it says about our restoration progress:

“Dover has received all of the KB-50J (from Mac Dill), and (Museum’s Restoration Chief Les) Polley’s restoration team already is hard at work doing repairs before the plane is reassembled.

But they’ve found the job is much more involved than originally thought. ‘We’ve completed work on the outer wings and we’re starting on the inner wings,’ Polley said. “But we’ve got a lot of work because of the amount of damage we’ve found.’

Constant exposure to Florida’s salty air has wreaked havoc on the wing’s aluminum surface and inner structures, the restoration chief explained. Of particular concern are the main spars, he added. The metal in the wings actually is 7075 aluminum, an alloy that includes zinc as a primary element. As such ‘it really limits our repair capabilities,’ he said.

‘It’s really strong, but it’s brittle when it’s heated,’ Polley said, a characteristic that restricts what areas can be welded during the repair process. Some areas will be sanded down and replaced with a putty-like commercial aluminum filler. Parts of the wings originally covered in fabric have been replaced with sheet aluminum as well.

The AMCM’s restored KB-50J never will fly again, but that wasn’t the plan to begin with, Polley said. “It won’t be airworthy, but that will work for us,’ he said. AMCM visitors will see a plane looking exactly as one in the refueling fleet appeared a half-century ago.

The restoration team also is busy at work searching for replacement parts for the interior of the airplane. Even though the public usually won’t be able to climb around inside the restored KB-50, Polley intends to make everything as authentic looking as possible. The volunteer’s work also is bolstered by archivists at the Boeing Company, who dug through their files and provided copies of original construction blueprints.

‘Those were very helpful, in fact, invaluable,’ Polley said. ‘They show us the location of things that we’d only be able to find by cutting holes in the wings.’ “

There were three photos displayed on these pages in the magazine, but not having my scanner with me, I could not show Polley as he examines the wings. I am grateful for the copies of the magazine and the detailed article that Jeff wrote letting the readers know of the hours of work the museum people put into their museum aircraft.

I was going to pass on writing an article for this issue because I thought there were more important and interesting things members would like to read about. But that was not to be. Natalie informed me this morning that I was delinquent in getting something written for the V-P's column, so here goes.

First off, when I returned from San Antonio, I knew I would be attending the funeral of Dan Weber who passed away on the day the reunion started. Dan was our President for four years (2000-2004) before being replaced by Bill Wolford in 2005. I had a chance to speak with Dan's wife Barbara and his sons at the funeral Mass and the burial which took place with full military honors.

For my next job, I hope to get all the reunion photos up on the TAC Tankers Facebook in a day or two. The newsletter will be posted on the TAC Tanker website as soon as I receive it from the Editor (Natalie).

Next item of interest is a phone call this morning from Howard "Matt" Mathews, who informed me that he visited Dover AFB and the AMC Museum after the reunion and got to see what progress had been made on 389. Matt had been stationed at Dover early in his Air Force career. While he was at the museum, he spoke with the person in charge of the work taking place on the KB-50 and could see the fuselage with the wings almost ready to be re-attached. He also mentioned to me that the work being performed on the 4360 engines was almost complete. As mentioned in the last newsletter, they found more salt air corrosion than had been anticipated in the wings, tail section and in the forward cockpit area including the engineers panel. Hopefully nothing more will pop up and delay the restoration. If all goes well, and we get a projected date for Worldwide Aircraft Recovery to get it back on the landing gears and re-assembled, we will have an update for all of you. Then Natalie can start making plans for the 2020 reunion and the dedication ceremony the museum wants to have.

Sadly we have six obituaries for this issue, four being members and two being wives of members. We had received word before the reunion from our Historian John Bessette, that he would not be attending as his wife Carol would be needing his help along with Hospice care during the time we would be in San Antonio. She passed away early one month after the date the reunion was to start.

When I was calling members who knew John and Carol, one of them I talked to was our first President, Ted Buck. He told me that his wife Betty passed away last November after a long illness, so we have included her obituary in the newsletter. To all the members, spouses and families, we offer our condolence on the loss of their loved ones.

### Obit

Betty L. Buck, 83, of Opdyke, Illinois went to be with the Lord surrounded by her family at 6:50 A.M. November 11, 2017 at SSM Health Good Samaritan Hospital in Mount Vernon, Illinois. Betty was born in Troy, Alabama on July 14, 1934. She married Ted Buck on October 12, 1952 in Mount Vernon, Illinois and he survives her in Opdyke, Illinois. Ted and Betty lived in Virginia and North Carolina for 22 years as Ted served in the United States Air Force. She taught Girl Scouts in North Carolina and was active in the Air Force Chapel in Goldsboro, North Carolina. Along with her husband, Betty is survived by her two daughters, two sons and their families, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Visitation was held Monday, November 13 and funeral services were on November 14, 2017 at Lebanon Baptist Church in Mount Vernon, Illinois. Interment followed at Smith Cemetery in Jefferson County, Illinois.



## Obits of Members

**Alvan R. Tisdale**, age 84 of Webb City MO passed away on Tuesday, March 20, 2018 at Webb City Health & Rehab. He was born August 8th 1933 in Kenbridge, Virginia. He was a retired major in the United States Air Force where he was a Navigator. Alvan married Rita (Jeri) (Taylor) Tisdale on April 2, 1983 and she survives him at home. Funeral services were held on Friday, March 23, 2018 in the chapel of the Simpson Funeral Home in Webb City. Burial took place in Park Cemetery in Carthage, Missouri with full military honors. He served with the 429th at Langley VA and was a Life member of TAC Tankers Association.



**Retired Lieutenant Colonel Daniel R. Weber (429th and 420th) of Rancho Cordova CA** passed away at the age of 85 on 29 April 2018 from the effects of a short battle with cancer. Born in Cleveland Ohio in 1932, he is survived by his lovely and supportive wife Barbara Ann, his three sons and their families. Dan graduated from Cleveland's John Marshall High School in 1950 and Kent State University in 1954. He was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the USAF and went on to attend pilot training. Dan was stationed in Texas, Virginia, Kansas, Hawaii, California, England, Germany, and Vietnam. In 1974 he was transferred to Mather AFB, where he served as the base commander. He retired in 1981, after over 6,000 hours in aerial tankers and transports. He was active in the community, both while serving at Mather AFB and after retirement. His awards included the Distinguished Flying Cross, 12 Air Medals and other US and foreign awards. He was a graduate of numerous USAF courses and schools including Air War College. Dan was a Life Member and served two terms as president of the TAC Tankers Association. Interment was held at East Lawn Cemetery and he was



**Thomas Owen (T.O.) Williams III**, (429th and 421st) of Blacksburg Virginia passed away at the age of 80 in his sleep early on Saturday, March 10, 2018 at his home, after having enjoyed a dinner with his family the previous evening. T.O. was born July 4, 1937 in Portsmouth, VA. where he grew up being mentored by his uncles who were WWII Pilots. He graduated in 1955 from high school in Portsmouth, attended Virginia Polytechnic Institute where as a member of the Corps of Cadets he led the Cadet Band as Drum Major in 1959, his graduating year. It was during his years in Blacksburg that he met his wife of 52 years, the late Frances Shealor Williams.



T.O. served in the US Air Force as a Command Pilot, instructor and Flight Examiner during the Vietnam War, Asst Professor of Aerospace Studies at the Citadel, Air Command and Staff College, the Country Director for Arabian Peninsula Affairs in the Office of the Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs at the Pentagon, the National War College, Deputy Commander for operations of the 1st Special Operations Wing at Hurlburt Field, Fl., Senior US Defense Representative in Khartoum, Sudan and as the Base Commander at Kelly Air Force Base TX. He retired with the rank of Colonel after 27 years of service in 1986 and returned to Blacksburg where he served on local school board and as Chairman and CEO of the Board of Directors, Virginia Tech Corps of Cadets Alumni, 2005-2009. T.O. was a Life Member of the TAC Tankers.

**Gerald A. "Jerry" Ragas**, passed away on Friday, May 25, 2018 at the age of 84. He was preceded in death by his beloved wife, Doreen Lilian B. Ragas. He was the devoted father of two sons and two daughters, plus many grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Jerry was a US Air Force Veteran having served with the 420th Air Refueling Squadron both in Louisiana and England as a KB-29 radio operator, and was a lifetime member of the American Legion and the VFW. He was also a Free Mason and Life member of the TAC Tankers. He had retired from Gulf Oil Company and Chevron Oil Company, and found time to be a Louisiana citrus grower. Jerry was also a Louisiana state licensed alligator hunter. His visitation was held at the Mothe Funeral Home in Harvey LA, funeral Mass at St. Patrick Catholic Church, Port Sulphur LA, and interment at Our Lady of Good Harbor Cemetery, Buras, LA with military honors.



# Historian's Corner

by John Bessette

When reminded of the current issue deadline, we received the following email from John:

Got the email and will comply to best of my ability. Right now I do have another priority. Maybe most of you might recall that my wife Carol had been diagnosed in late 2016 with brain cancer. As of our 2017 TTA reunion in New Orleans, she hardly had any ill effects, and we both enjoyed the city and all the TTA crowd hugely.

But things changed drastically beginning in late 2017. The cancer started to take its toll. She became gradually more debilitated since this January, and despite great care she continued to slip. In late April, when a new MRI showed that the tumor had grown about an inch in six weeks, Carol's oncologist put her into a Hospice situation. This was to be hospice-in-the-home, and this worked well initially. But by mid-May she required care 24/7, still in our home. A hospital bed was brought, and Carol rested quite well.

Things changed again and got worse, and in the last several days she was essentially comatose. This was tough on her, and tough to contemplate.

She passed from this Earth this morning ( May 29) about 0430. The 24/7 caregiver, a lovely woman named Hilda Williams, woke me up with the news that Carol was gone...

I am now coping with all the usual and unusual decisions and actions that one must take. Fortunately, I have the support of many wonderful friends and neighbors here. Services details will be forthcoming soon.

Thanks all you tanker folks. Because of the KB-50 and Langley AFB, I found myself there in 1960. A year or so later I met Carol, a newly-minted USAF 2nd Lt. and the rest is our history. It's been a great ride...Love to all, John"

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## Obituary

USAF Lt.Col (Ret.) **Carol Schoeller Bessette** passed away May 29 at home in Springfield VA. She was born August 14, 1938 in Passaic NJ and received her BA in Social Studies from Misericordia College in 1960, as well as a MA in International Relations from Georgetown in 1967 and one in Business Management from Central Michigan in 1980.

She was commissioned as a Second Lt. in the USAF in 1960 and served as an American defense analyst and an intelligence officer from 64-85. She was a Research Analyst for Anser Corp. in Arlington VA since 1986.

Carol and John were married October 3, 1960 and became a dynamic duo for the USAF. They traveled a lot to England and elsewhere during the later years after retirement and Carol served as our Step on Guide during the Washington DC Reunion in the fall of 2008. She will be missed



Writing this on Memorial Day, having just watched PBS's Celebration, TWICE, my emotions are running high, very high. Memories of family and memories of many young friends, victims of both the cold war and the non-war called Vietnam were intense. Our defeat by a tiny nation, rushed in by Walter Cronkite's 1968 declaration that the "war" had been lost still leave a bitter taste. It takes strong medicine to get over that. A deep dive into a fine book did it for me. I first encountered the author, Charles Kuralt and his work, the TV Series "On The Road" in 1968. It's healing power aided my return to a "normal" life. In May, 1973, a chance encounter at the airport in Kalispell, MT, helped me keep the wheels on during transition to civilian life. Once again, during our visit to Charleston, SC, there on a plaque at the Magnolia Plantation was Kuralt, proclaiming the site "My Greatest Charleston Pleasure". Finally, on a recent visit to the book section of a Christian thrift store, there was Kuralt's "My Life on the Road" my current offering

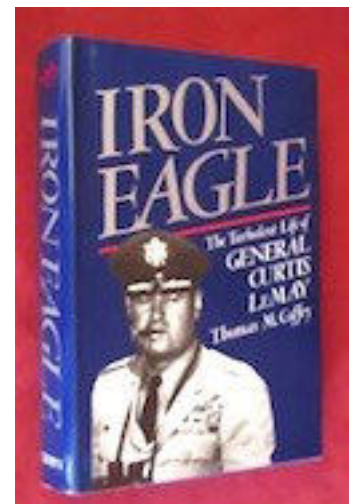
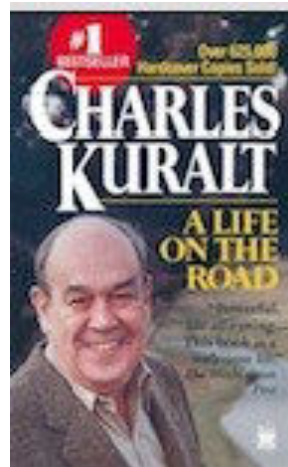
Acknowledged the modern (TV) world's best story teller, he had previously covered Cuba, Vietnam, South America, the Congo, Russia, Japan and an attempt to reach the North Pole, before CBS finally bought in to his vision of a trip across the United States, gathering stories of people, places and events. He elevated the "ordinary" into newsworthy. His uncanny ability to integrate words and pictures - no dumbing down - no spin, to gently ask the right questions and allow his subjects to relax and tell their story set him apart. What was to be a three month trial became a regular feature on CBS/Cronkite's "Evening News", that first year he covered forty-seven stories from twenty three states. He wore out six RVs during his time on the road. Starting in 1979 he anchored CBS News Sunday Morning for 15 years.

Kuralt, a lifelong liberal, a seeker of truth (seems to come with a journalist bent) had one true love, that of the open road. He left his first wife and 2 children to wander for CBS. He "wandered" on his second wife by supporting a mistress and her three children in a home on the Big Hole River in Montana. After a squabble over his will, the mistress got the house and the land it sat on. A complex man, he never let the

truth get in the way of a good story. Whether you read for information, education, inspiration or simple pleasure, its all here. Packed into 26 easy to read sub headings, big fish, small fish, the famous, the infamous, short stories that would make O.Henry proud. Available, along with DVDs of the TV series on Amazon.

Always, a second offering at no extra cost. Iron Eagle: The Turbulent Life of General Curtis LeMay by Thomas M, Coffey is my pick. Lemay, our "Patton of the Air" spoke bluntly, leaving no doubt about what he was saying. If in 1958, you recall President Eisenhower signing into law a six percent military pay raise score one for Lemay. Better base housing, better enlisted quarters and hobby shops could all be attributed to his efforts as Vice Chief of Staff. Unfortunately, he was often misquoted, resulting in his reputation being tarnished. Criticized for Vietnam, though all major decisions were made by LBJ, who was led by the nose by Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. The master of domestic legislation had zero sense of how to conduct a war, but worse, he would not listen to his air commander. Johnson retained LeMay as his Chief of Staff after JFK's death from fear of appearing weak on military matters. LeMay's conduct of the war over Europe and Japan plus the creation of the Strategic Air Command were and remain legendary. This book corrects a false record created by our failed press. Its all here under one cover. Available from Amazon.

(Continued on page 8)



**(Pappy from page 7)**

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## **My first experience with the KB 50J**

by Kenneth S Kruger

I arrived as a brand new refueling specialist to England AFB, Louisiana in January 1959. That was the day the 622nd Air Refueling Squadron lost their first aircraft with a crew of 6. I landed on a commercial flight at the base and being a brand new Airman 3rd Class, I had no idea of where to go.

So being very resourceful and seeing where all the KB 50's were parked, I went out on the flight line amongst the F 100's and attempted to walk up the big birds. Of course the Air Police pulled up beside me and asked "Where the hell do you think you're going?" I told them proudly that I was headed to the 622nd Air Refueling Squadron. They, knowing I must be pretty new, invited me on their vehicle to give me a ride to the squadron. One of them asked me what job I was going to have and I told him. He said, "they must be sending replacements already, as they just lost an airplane this morning with the whole crew."

Of course when I arrived at the squadron, no one wanted to deal with me as their attention was on their loss. So, they gave me a ride to the barracks and told me to stay there until further notice. They came for me 5 days later. My first flying gear had the names of some of the guys who were killed on that plane.

I was assigned to Boyce Mayo as my instructor and was told that my first flight was to be a 10 hour navigation flight. I asked if the plane would land anywhere else and was told "no, we always fly for 10 hours and land right back where we started." So, as we were flying close to Oklahoma City, the Flight Engineer came to the back through the tunnel and looked out the left blister. After he went back up front, the Aircraft Commander came to the back and also looked out the left blister. After he went forward, I asked what was going on and Boyce had me look at the left aileron. It was fluttering quite a bit. We then declared an emergency and landed at Tinker AFB Oklahoma.

The base did not have transient facilities, so we went to a motel. The next day the decision was made to go straight back to England AFB. When we arrived the weather was near minimums, and when we broke out of our first GCA approach the runway was a quarter mile to our left. On the second try we broke in the same direction, so we headed for Barksdale AFB and spent the night there. I was with a Staff Sergeant, Tech Sergeant and a Master Sergeant and they all needed to borrow money from me, the Airman 3c Class. And yes, they all paid me back.



Photos from the San Antonio Reunion



Above Left: The entrance to our hotel-Holiday Inn-Riverwalk

Above Right: The famous Riverwalk with the eateries and riverboat.

Right: View from the Tower of the Americas in Hemisphere Park

Below Left: Entering the LBJ Ranch

Below Right: Stage at Luchenbach where Willie Nelson performed.

