

# TAC Tanker Tales

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## **Storing Up For Fall and Winter**

As I take “keyboard” in hand for our September newsletter I have just survived the longest Labor Day Weekend in history. We returned to Florida on August 22, to open the shutters of the Winter Park casa and get ready for my Woman’s Club annual Rummage Sale set for Aug 31. I went there the entire week before to work, all the time wondering if **Dorian** was going to throw a monkey wrench into our labors. Saturday came and it was beautiful out, sunny and the usual humidity– HOT. We made over 5K. Yeah!!

Family came for the weekend and so did the rain on and off, so it was busy. The town around (Orlando etc) shut down for Labor Day and Tuesday and it seems that “D” has moved north along the coast. Thus, I am back to work, so you all out in Never-never-land will get the TAC News.

Actually, not much has changed as far as the agenda printed in the June issue regarding the **Dover Reunion**. I will be having more details in December along with the registration form. Lou and his troops already have their reservations at the **Sheraton Wilmington South** and you might do the same. Sales office: Janae 302-544-6814. Its **Thursday 5/14-Sunday 5/17**, with check out on Monday the 18th.

Our fearless leader, Vic Ventura (the Prez) tells about his visit to Dover recently in his column, so take a peek. We also have anew writer, Richard Goodman who tells about his days at Yokota in the early 60s. Pappy has and interesting review of a Tuskegee pilot and his story and pictures. We welcome back, John Bessette, who has missed a few issues.

For anyone out there who tried to call me during the summer, I apologize about the number. It is my home number on the list to the side. I was gone four 4 months and unfortunately did not know how to check my home messages. Dhrrrr. My cell is 740-503-8057 (from Ohio days). Use either at this point.

Stay safe and don’t stand in front of a hurricane.....

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

Greetings to all from our "Q" room at McGuire AFB. We're in NJ visiting our son and his wife, following our visit to Dover AFB to check on 389. We were lucky enough to get a hop from Travis to Dover on a C17 on our second day of trying.

The visit to the Dover museum was very informative and exciting. Our airplane, 389, turned out to be in much worse shape than originally thought with corrosion at every turn. What impressed Chris and me the most is the determination and enthusiasm of all of the volunteers we met who are passionate about restoring this aircraft correctly.

We were met by Deputy Director Eric Czerurnski, who led us right out to see the current situation first hand. Eric has a masters degree in aircraft restoration and is a professor at Delaware State University. There's a long and interesting story of his continued education and activities following his AF career.

We then met Wes, who runs the fabrication shop among other duties. He's very knowledgeable and continues to learn new things as he works there. I learned the day after they did what an "English Wheel" is and how it's used. They were very excited about it. I'll tell you about it when I see you.

We also talked with the crew chief Tim, who showed us details of each segment of restoration taking place every day with 389. I'm forwarding some pictures and you'll see that the aircraft was "cribbed" to keep it from falling apart. It was pointed out that this is the toughest project that they have ever taken on, BUT they are happy to do it as 389 is the most rare aircraft in their inventory as only 6 B-50s remain in the world. Two are KBs

I know that the AMC Museum is spending a lot of dough on this project. I'm also aware that some of our members have donated large sums of money along with our \$25,000 donation. Each time that I've visited there, I'm always thanked by the staff and volunteers. So if you have a few bucks laying around, I know that any other help will be greatly appreciated.

One last thing I want to mention is that currently only National Museums are allowed to display plaques and logos to publicly thank corporations for their financial donations. There is legislation in the works that would allow all military museums to do the same. You might help the cause by communicating with your representatives.

As always,  
Adios for now,  
VicVic Ventura

## **Board Chairman's Corner**

**by Bill Wolford**

Dear Fellow Tankers,

Hope this note finds everyone in good health. We have had a very healthy and busy summer. It's been family gatherings and doctor's appointments at this stage of the game. We celebrated a milestone on Shirley's 83rd birthday and our 64th wedding anniversary on 4 September and with our tribe of 14 grandkids and 13 great grandkids, many birthdays over this same period, seems like we are always celebrating either a birthday or an anniversary or a holiday. Don't know when I ever had time to work. Add to this that we are involved with the Air Force Association and teaching senior adult Bible classes. I'm getting tired just writing about it, but God is good and we've had a wonderful life together. Wishing you all a beautiful Fall and Thanksgiving with your families. Looking forward to seeing you all at next year's reunion. I know Natalie will have great things planned for us there and I'm excited to see what all they've done with our KB-50. Hoping to see many of you there as we share many memories of our TAC Tanker days.

God Bless you all, Bill

Bill

As I sit here thinking about what I could include in my article, I can't help but think that once again many of our members, their families and their friends are facing another possible devastating hurricane season in the eastern half of our nation. As in the past, both the affected states and communities warn their citizens to either evacuate or have some plan in place to help them survive the storms. At times like these, hard decisions must be made about leaving their homes and possessions behind, but things can be repaired or replaced, lives cannot. Safety first above all else.

I received more pictures of our plane at the AMC Museum from Vic and Chris Ventura while they were visiting family showing the work involved in dealing with the extensive corrosion issues that keep popping up. I now have them posted to our TAC Tanker Facebook album dedicated to 389 so anyone interested can view them. As to whether it will be completed in time for the 2020 Reunion dedication is up to the hardworking volunteers there.

Just a interesting addition to Pappy Boyington's book review "Soaring To Glory", I had seen an interview on television with Harry Stewart and he talked at length about his experiences as a Tuskegee Airman. His book was mentioned, so I ordered it, read the book and learned included a lot more that I had previously known about the Tuskegee Experiment. That led me to looking him up and calling him. He is 96, has a sharp mind, clear memories and was very gracious in taking the time to talk with me. I called Pappy, told him about the book, he ordered it and as you can tell from his review, he also found it vey interesting and informative.

### Some Memories from a Support Personnel at Yokota

Looking back to my Air Force days, most military people would not think being in Unit Supply was a very exciting job. Keep in mind, our job was to insure that all of the people in the Squadron were supplied with whatever equipment the Air Force indicated they needed to complete their mission. That ranged from clothing, to instruments, tools and even to Aircrew survival equipment. One of my responsibilities was delivering two foot lockers with survival equipment inside to each KB50J upon an alert being called. Since these aircraft were not supposed to leave without those foot lockers, the refueling mission was aborted. So I'd say my responsibility was on the important side, at least at that time.

For the most part, life was pretty laid back at the 421<sup>st</sup> Unit Supply. We routinely replaced the clothes needed by the flight crews, including flight suits, jackets, boots, gloves, watches, sun glasses, instruments and what ever else we could get. But these men were easier to work with than the aircraft mechanics who were a little different breed of people. If we kept an open mind knowing what they had to deal with daily, and a sense of humor, we got along very well together.

The thing I had to keep in mind while supporting the mechanics was also remembering my own responsibilities for delivering the survival equipment foot lockers to the aircraft. You can imagine the fun some of these men had when we (my native driver and I ) pulled up to one of their aircraft. More times than I can remember, I was "forcefully" removed by a mechanic holding a M1 Carbine since they took protecting their aircraft very seriously. Face on the ground and a boot on the back of my neck, asking me lots of questions with a big smile on his face. These exciting moments were soon over without jeopardizing our mission because they knew they also had to deal with me when they eventually needed something. Our Alerts were few and far between, but the things needed from supply was a daily occurrence. Happily, these experiences were later discussed over a cold beer.

A1C Richard E. Goodman, 421<sup>st</sup> AREFS (PACAF) Yokota, Japan. January 1960 to June 1963

## Obits of Members

Warner Robins, GA- **William "Rip" Buist Collins** (May 6, 1930 - February 27, 2019), passed away yesterday at the Heart of Georgia Hospice Inpatient Care Unit in Perry after a battle with cancer. He was residing in Warner Robins, Georgia. He was preceded in death by his wife Wilma Collins.

"Rip" was born in Barnwell, South Carolina on the 6th of May, 1930. He entered into the U S Air Force in 1948 retiring as a M/Sgt. after 28 years of service. He was awarded several medals and ribbons including the Vietnam Service Medal.

He was a life member of VFW Post 6605 where he served as Post Commander from 1984 through 1986 in addition to various other organizations. He served with the 431st at Biggs and was a Life Member of TAC Tankers.

Services were held Saturday, March 2, 2019 in the Chapel of Heritage Memorial Funeral Home & Crematory. Burial was in Morning-side Cemetery in Rochelle, Georgia.



**James Edwin Callahan** (429th-420th), 80, of Winter Garden, FL passed from this life August 9, 2019. Born November 21, 1938 in Cincinnati, OH, he enlisted in the USAF in 1956 and served as a Nuclear Weapons Fusing Systems Specialist. In 1960, he earned his commission and pilot wings through the Aviation Cadet Program. After 30 years he retired in 1986 as a Colonel. During his service in the USAF, he held command positions at the squadron, group and wing levels, as well as a variety of Command Headquarter positions. He retired as 616<sup>th</sup> Military Airlift Group Commander while simultaneously serving as DCS Airlift, Alaskan Air Command and Commander Airlift Forces, Alaska. A command pilot, Colonel Callahan accumulated over 8,000 flying hours, primarily in the KB-50 and C-130 aircraft. After retirement from the USAF, Jim became an International Marketing Manager for the former Sierra Research Company of Buffalo, NY and retired from that position in 2007. Jim was a life member of the Air Force Association (AFA), where he served in positions at the chapter, state, regional and national levels. He also held life membership in the Military Officer Association of America, Daedalian's, Airlift Tanker Association and TAC Tanker Association. He was predeceased by his daughter Capt. Jodi Callahan and is survived by his wife, Bonnie, and his daughter, Jamie.

A Celebration of Life was held at Baldwin-Fairchild Funeral Home in Winter Garden on August 31, 2019. Interment will take place at Arlington National Cemetery, at a date determined by Arlington. Contributions may be made to his deceased daughter's memorial scholarship, funding graduate education for AF members at: Capt. Jodi Callahan Scholarship, Air Force Association, 1501 Lee Highway, Arlington, VA 22209.



# Historian's Corner

by John Bessette

## Summer and Fall 1961 at the 622<sup>nd</sup>

Shortly before TTA's June reunion in Dayton, our intrepid reunion planner, Natalie Hill, received a letter from a Melinda Morrell, Lt Col, USAF (Ret). Her letter contained a clipping from what she described as the base newspaper at England AFB, Louisiana, dated 22 September 1961. The clipping was a photo showing a crew lineup at the nose of a KB-50 tanker. The attached caption noted that the depicted aircrew had just been credited with setting a new record. It proudly stated that it "holds the record in TAC for the most fighter refuelings by a single aircraft in the shortest time period." It stated that in three days the KB-50 crew offloaded 118,590 lb of fuel, all at night.

The receivers included three F-100s on the first two missions and two F-100s on each of the third and fourth missions. A total of 12 receivers were "serviced" in this short time period. The photo notes that the depicted crew included Capt Gerald Theunission (aircraft commander), 2nd Lt Alvin Hotz (copilot), 1st Lt Samuel Gugliotta (navigator), TSgt Harley F Howard (flight engineer), TSgt Andrew M Theis (flight engineer), SSgt Boyce W Mayo (refueling technician), A2c Arthur M Jones (refueling technician), and TSgt James I Hill (crew chief).

"Impressive, I thought, "A whole lot of fuel, offloaded in a very short time." I contacted Ms Morrell by email and learned where she was "coming from." It turned out that she is the daughter of TSgt Hill, the KB-50's crew chief. He (or his family) saved that clipping as a memento of his career. He retired from the AF in 1962, a year after this article, and eventually passed away in 1993, 30 years later. His wife now lives in San Antonio, Texas.

Ms Morrell then revealed that her parents produced five children, all of whom had military service. Three brothers served in the Army, including one who is a Vietnam veteran, and one joined the Air Force. One sister served in the Army as both enlisted and officer, including service during the Iraq war. Ms Morrell also served, in her case as an Air Force officer in the comptroller career field. She admits as a little seven-year-old girl she would sit in her father's lap and play with the zippers on his flight suit. Maybe that is what inspired her to join the Air Force. She herself married an Army officer. What a family!

Why the Intensive Flying?

**Back to 1961:** What she could not tell me was why this intensive flying that summer? The answer was "right under my nose" (in a matter of speaking). I suddenly recalled what was going on that summer: the crisis in Berlin. That was when the Soviets allowed the East Germans to build a Wall separating East Berlin from the West. That aroused the three Western powers occupying the city, and they provided a united front in opposition. When the Soviets refused to make the East German border guards tear down the Wall, the West, led by US President John Kennedy, decided to escalate their military presence in Western Europe. And that's when we came in.

Summer 1961 was already promising to be "unusual." The main runway at Langley AFB was to be closed for repairs and resurfacing, so the two Langley-based refueling squadrons, the 427th and the 429th, had to redeploy elsewhere. The 429th (at least) was to relocate to Donaldson AFB, South Carolina, about 15 July and operate out of there. (Continued on page 6)

(**Historian**-page 5) Operations continued more-or-less as planned through mid-August, but the Berlin crisis was building and the KB-50 units TDY at Lajes and Kindley (at least) felt the in-

creased tasking as TAC began sending its fighter and tactical recon units to Europe to reinforce our allies via the “usual routes.”

Complicating this enhanced effort was an unscheduled event: the 19 September evacuation of Langley-based KB-50s, newly returned to Langley from Donaldson “back home” on an emergency hurricane-based evacuation, this time to England AFB, Louisiana (the home of the 622<sup>nd</sup> AREFS) to avoid the approaching Hurricane Esther. Thankfully Esther avoided causing major damage at home base, and the KB’s returned home the next day.

It appears that the intensive refueling activity reported as happening in mid-September 1961 must have taken place wherever the Thennisson (622<sup>nd</sup>) crew mentioned above was stationed TDY (either Lajes or Kindley). The only “unusual” flying the 429th was doing in late September 1961 was to fly three KBs as part of the flyby honoring the retirement of Gen Frank Everest as Commander TAC on 29 September.

However, at least in early November, KBs TDY at Lajes became involved in a very unusual operation called Operation Stairstep. As part of the reinforcement of US tactical aviation in Europe the Air Force activated several AF Reserve and Air National Guard F-84F units, sent them to Western Europe, and “bedded” them down at various formerly-inactivated airbases. To get themselves “across the pond” the F-84F units had to traverse the Atlantic Ocean on only one route: flying the “Thunderstreaks” west-to-east nonstop from Newfoundland to Lajes. That required very strict flying, conserving fuel and waiting for a favorable “wind factor” before taking off.

The F-84F could only be refueled in flight by a rigid boom-equipped tanker, and the KB-50 only had the probe-drogue system. SAC couldn’t (or wouldn’t) release KC-97s or KC-135s for this purpose. And very few (if any) reservist or National Guard pilots had been checked out in boom air refueling. Also, not enough existing USAF rescue aircraft and trained crews could be found to provide emergency aerial “capping” to cover the possibility of these F-84Fs having to ditch at sea while enroute. Thus the only direct help the TAC KB-50 force could supply was to provide KBs to become “emergency duckbutts” (a term covering the emergency service an aircraft could provide to a fighter in distress). Thus at Lajes several KB-50s took on the “emergency duckbutt” role, the refueling operators becoming “instant experts” in deploying rafts and other gear necessary to help a fighter pilot in distress. Once again, the tactical tanker force saved the day! (And nobody to my knowledge ever got a “good going award” for this free service!)

*Editor: Welcome back, John!*



Homer's epic poem "The Odyssey" has nothing on Philip Handleman with Harry Stewart's tale, told in book form "**Soaring to Glory**". Stewart, born the 4th of July, 1924, raised in New York City during the depression, got the "flying bug" at a tender age. Homer's work only covers a period of ten years, while Harry's life has continued for over 90 years. If you like WWII flying stories, the history of black airmen and the social revolution of race in the USA and the U.S. Air Force and its predecessors, this book is for you. The Tuskegee Airman performed the same as most combat units, unbelievably well. Their surviving members like all heroes of that era say "The real heroes didn't make it home." They are humble in their old age, thankful to have survived .

The early beginnings of an all black flying unit was a touch and go proposition. President Roosevelt's wife Eleanor was an early cheer leader and she prevailed over some very tough opposition. Later during the North Africa Campaign Col. William Momyer, (age 27) 33rd Fighter Group C.O. (later 4 star Commander of Tactical Air Command 1968-1973) wrote a scathing report (that had been endorsed all the way up to General Hap Arnold) that would have removed the the all black flying units from front line combat duty. Cooler, wiser heads prevailed. Momyer was removed from command of tactical units for the remainder of the war and served in staff positions. Benjamin Davis successfully defended his unit before Congress. The 332nd Red Tails flew on to establish an exemplary combat record.

On April 1st, 1945, Harry (age 20 ) shot down two BF-109 Ds and was credited with a third, all within a few minutes. Such is the nature of aerial combat. Swift and final. In addition, Harry had completed 43 combat missions. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and six Air Medals. The Red Tails had lost fewer bombers than any other fighter group.

President Truman's desegregation order of 1948 had not yet taken effect. This was to be the last hurrah for the Red Tails. May 1949 found Harry on a team selected by the 332nd Fighter Group Commander, Col. Benjamin O. Davis heading for Las Vegas for the first post war Air Force wide gunnery meet. Flying obsolescent F-47s, they captured first place team honors in the non jet class. An F-51 pilot had been granted a "Re-do" resulting in the 332's "top gun" being denied first place individual honors.

The unit was deactivated (the result of desegregation) on July 1, 1949, Early in January, 1950 Harry left the Air Force. His lack of formal education placed him high on the

RIF (reduction in force) list along with hundreds of thousands of others. On entering the civilian work force, he learned flying and fighting were not marketable skills. The only work he qualified for was manual labor. He started out as a baggage handler three levels below Penn Station in New York City.

After struggling (for 13 years) with multiple side jobs plus night school Harry obtained a mechanical engineering degree in 1963. He landed several jobs as his experience and "can do" attitude developed. He traveled the country and the world working on engineering projects. Upon his retirement in 1986, (culminating in 10 years with the company) Harry was Vice President of Administrative Services of a pipeline company.

March 29, 2007 Statuary Hall, U.S. Capitol Building (after five years of dithering) found Harry and fellow Tuskegee Airmen honored with the award of The Congressional Gold Medal. Remarks by Colin Powell followed by President George W. Bush's stellar Speech, left no doubt that a grateful nation had finally recognized the achievement of the Red Tails. The book is available on Amazon.



In the spring of 2009, the Tuskegee Airmen National Museum in Detroit took delivery of one of only two still flyable AT-6 advanced trainers that had been used at Tuskegee Army Airfield during World War II. Harry rode along on the last leg of the delivery flight, helping to guide his old trainer to its new home. Sitting behind ferry pilot Bill Shepard, Harry flashes the victory sign, a poignant reference to the campaign to achieve the Double V—victory against totalitarianism abroad and racism at home. In subsequent years, while in the company of the plane on the air show circuit, Harry has delighted in explaining that he was "one of the luckiest people in the world to be able to fly this great airplane." *Tuskegee Airmen National Museum*