



# TAC Tanker Tales



Volume 4 Issue 4

June

## ***A Great Gathering of Golden Eagles*** By Nate Hill

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Glad to see so many of you at our Guard in Dallas.

“gathering” in Colorado Springs. We sure had a great time from all reports and are already anxiously waiting for the next location. The folks at Embassy Suites treated us exceptionally well as usual; great rooms, cooked to order breakfast, lots of space for us to use for partaking of snacks and beverages, visiting opportunities all around and super service from the staff. What a great place for our 50th anniversary!

Every day was a new experience since lots of us saw the local area for the first time. A little spooky up on Pikes Peak with no oxygen or parachutes. Fourteen thousand feet is a little scary even for old airplane people especially when the cog railway had no wings.

All the tours were exciting, particularly the surrounding area and the Air Force Academy. Our very unique dinner at Solo’s Restaurant on Thursday night will be talked about for a long time. The location is a converted KC-97 which is made to house a complete eatery with seating both in the fuselage and under the left wing. Since the bird has R-4360 engines that “always” drip oil, everyone who ate under the wing was guaranteed two drops of engine oil on every serving of mashed potatoes.

Natalie and I had the pleasure of eating with Bud and Linda Wilson (427) in the fuselage. What a great time for me and Bud to reminisce about flying that actual airplane 40 years ago with the Texas Air-

Rev George Burrows has done another great job at the Memorial Service assisted by Shirley Wolford’s vocals. The windows are always in jeopardy when Shirley “hits the high notes”. We were all impressed with the flyover which God provided for us. Note that we now have a Chaplain’s Corner.

As usual Natalie outdid herself at the AFA officer’s club. Plenty of good food and lots of eagle prizes to the attendees. Bob Cleckler (622) won the KB-50 model this year and I hope he got it home in one piece.

A western hoe-down would not be complete without a chuck wagon dinner and we had a great one at the Flying W. Little cool, but the food and hot coffee warmed us up and we all enjoyed applauding the western band.

We now officially have a Quartermaster, Jake Jacobson (427,429) who is in charge of the hospitality room and our store. Jake sold out of our caps for this reunion but we still have patches for all of the squadrons and TAC Tankers and navy polo shirts with embroidered TTAL emblem and pocket. If you would like to have either of these give me a call to order.

Dan Weber surprised me with a call telling me about the new computer which the membership voted to give me. Thanks to you all. What a great gesture. I am using it to write this column and it is certainly much more efficient than the old one. Thanks again to you all. The balance of the business meeting agenda is covered in Dan’s corner.

I have received pictures from Dan, George Rose and a CD from Fred Duck. Thanks to you all and if others of you have spare pictures for the scrapbook just send them on. Natalie has info on the next trip elsewhere in this issue so start making plans. The parties seem to get better every year. Have a great summer, Nate



Left: Justin Shires, Al Courtney, Emory Morgan, Pug Hoover . Right: Don Wadsworth, Phil Hughes, Roy Costly, Ted Clisby, Frank Gawell.

## Our Outgoing President's Corner *By Dan Weber*

By now, I would guess, that all of us who attended "A Gathering of Golden Eagles 2004" or as some referred to it, "A Week's Vacation From the Grandchildren," are safely home and catching up on the mail or yard work. It was good to see all of you and I know that some drove in from as far away as South Carolina and Florida and of course Harvey and Betsy Lee flew all the way from the Islands along with the Cahills.

Nate and Natalie returned home via the Black Hills and Rochester, MN, while Barb and I took a week to get home after touring New Mexico (where we ran into our next door neighbors at a road side rest stop near Albuquerque!), also Arizona, and then Barb's compulsory stay in Sin City to play video poker. It was a great trip especially at the end photographing the waterfalls in Yosemite.

As usual there were a number of highlights or special memories of the reunion. For me it was the lovely Memorial Service conducted by our chaplain, the Rev. George Burrows at the Air Force Academy chapel. To have the honor of standing on that altar, as I did, lighting the candle and even saying only two or three sentences in that magnificent and almost overpowering edifice is something I will always remember. Of course the C-5 fly-by at the end of the service was a lovely touch.

For those of you at the business meeting, you will recall that we discussed getting Nate and Natalie a surprise gift of a new computer. That idea took hold at the Sonoma reunion and carried on. We felt that with the completion of the fifth successful reunion (making them "aces") that we should do something nice for them. However, the secret slipped out accidentally at the Springs and so Nate and I had a long talk after we all arrived home. We decided that rather than have something delivered unannounced and perhaps incompatible, I would leave it open to him as to what kind of a computer he wanted and what programs to load into it. He quickly agreed and I told him the dollar amount that the membership agreed on. He was most appreciative of our offer as he is in need of a new machine and this one will be tailor made for him and the organization. So we have that taken care of.

Two other matters came up at the business meeting that we will be working on. One item has to do with the eventual disposition of TTAL way down the road as the demographics take over. For those of you not at the meeting there were several suggestions to get us started. One was a donation at some point, of whatever money there will be in our accounts., to an organization such as the Air force Aid Society or the USAF Museum at Wright-Patterson AFB, or to Pima, (if they get their act together), or to a scholarship fund of some sort. The Board of Di-

rectors will discuss this in the near future and we welcome helpful suggestions from the membership. I know there are lots of good ideas in the minds of the membership.

A second and, perhaps, more pressing matter is the placing of a monument in the Memorial Garden at the Wright-Patterson AFB Museum. Some of you have visited there in the last few years and have seen the shaded area with all the stones, benches, plaques, monuments, and the like, dedicated to various Bomb Groups, Fighter Groups, Wings, and so on. The small independent 420th AREFS reunion group has a memorial plaque there as well. The officers and Board of Directors of TTAL feel that we, too, should have something dedicated to our Cold War activities of the 1950s and 1960s. At this time we are pursuing this matter gathering information as to cost, style, and procedures. Again we will solicit information from the members at a future date. As we proceed on this matter, we will use our newsletter, e-mail, and future meetings to discuss it.

The meeting in the Springs also saw the election of two new officers. Bill Wolford was elected present replacing me and Jim "Pappy" Boyington was elected as our new secretary replacing Bob Horne. We look forward to having them on board and I hope that you will support them as you have all past officers. I have moved to the Board of Directors serving with Ted Buck, Bob Cleckler, John Hanna, Rufe Mewborn, Bill Szanyi, and Vern Williamson. Other official officer changes saw the appointment of Joe Furukawa as Legal Counsel, George Burrows as Chaplain and Gordon "Jake" Jacobson as Sergeant-at-Arms/Quartermaster. Thanks to them for accepting these position and for all their help.

At the meeting we all filled out a red/orange sheet with suggestions on it for our next could of gatherings. There was plenty to choose from and Natalie tallied up the numbers as they drove toward the Black Hills. Elsewhere in this newsletter she will discuss the options and I'll bet she is starting on door prizes right now!

This will be my last column for The President's Corner. I pass the baton to Bill and he will fill this spot from now on. Hopefully, his style and grammar will be better than mine and will keep our editor happy! Barb and I wish the best to all of you and we look forward to seeing you at future meetings.

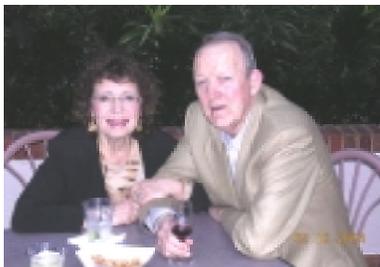
Dan

### New Life Member s

Kyle Anderson, San Antonio TX-420, 431  
Harold W. Elliott, Roseville MI-431  
Hollis Moore, Hayward WI-421  
Willard O. Taylor, Anniston AL-  
Vern Williamson, Corona AZ-429,427 (8/03)

### Welcome New Members

Larry R. Clark, Ft. Worth TX-421  
Milton J. Terrell, VanAlstyne TX-431



Left: Meet our new President, Bill Wolford and his wife Shirley, who shared her talents at our Memorial Service

Right: Bo Ault, our Treasurer, Vern Williamson, Board member, and our outgoing president, Dan Weber.



## And Where Are We Going Next?

Well, the red and orange ballots handed out in the reunion packets were collected as scheduled, at the Business Meeting on Saturday. As Dan mentioned, my first goal once we drove out of the Embassy Suites parking lot, was to tally up the votes and so I could jump on the plans for '05, '06 and '07.

There were 85 sheets with each having the chance to vote for three of the listed reunion sites. Thus a total of 255. "The envelope, please!"

Dayton/Wright-Patterson AFB.....43 votes  
(To be our Major Reunion in 2006)  
Nashville TN.....42 votes  
(To be our Next Mini Reunion in 2005)  
Branson MO.....39 votes  
(To be our other Mini in 2007)

Following in order of placing were:

St Louis/St. Charles MO (29)  
Bermuda Cruise (26) -maybe a Fall event in '05  
Gatlinburg TN (20)  
Louisville KY (17)  
Atlanta NW (15)

The remaining votes were less than 10 each for: Chattanooga TN, Lisle IL, and Peoria IL.

Request for proposals (RFP) to the first two sites have already gone out and I have purchased material and found patterns for my goodies. Ironically, The Reunion Network (for military reunion planners) will be having one of their Conferences and Familiarization (ConFAM) tours in Nashville this September and Nate and I will be going. I have my agenda all planned, but will finalize the hotel, tour bus company and see what great deals we can find.

The Dayton Reunion for a Major gathering with Memorial and Business Meeting seems perfectly timed also, since the plans to have a dedication of some type of memorial at that time would fit right in. It is also an active Air Force Base, with THE AF MUSEUM and lots of flight history in the area (Ohio license plates read: Ohio-Birthplace of Aviation). We met the gals from their visitors bureau while in Branson in March so have a good rapport going with them. Not to mention that Nate was based there in the late 60s and we are only two hours away—(remember? WE live in Ohio).

Sooooooo, now that the word is official, you can start planning ahead. Hopefully, we will have the dates and hotel location by the next newsletter in early September upon our return from Nashville. We know that a few out there are early birds with your hotel reservations—right, Art B.?

By the way, St. Charles was my favorite and since it didn't win, Nate and I will go alone (boo hoo). We have a cruise on the Missouri River in late August and plan to spend a few days in the St. Louis/ St. Charles area. (The biggie problem with seeking out all these reunion sites, it is hard to pick the right place for everyone and thus the reason for the balloting at the reunion—we try to be democratic).

## Golf Results from the Reunion Tournament

By Gary Parker, Chairman

The Tournament went off with 13 golfers heading out to the AFA Golf Course on Friday morning. Winning First Place was the team of John Hanna, Doyle Reid and Gary Parker (prize of \$20 each); Second Place: Al Dyke, Pug Hoover and Ron Smith (\$15 each); Third Place: Gerald Brooks, Gerald Dawson, Bob & Mary Jane Knauss (\$5 each) Fourth Place: Bob Cleckler, Charlie Harrell and Rod Perry.

Seven door prizes were drawn and awarded: Sleeves of golf balls, a T-38C goblet and towel donated by Boeing, and a beautiful golf watch donated by Charlie Harrell. Each golfer also received towels, balls and tees.

A great time was had by all at the Eisenhower Silver Golf Course. Ron Barnes, the tourney director and his staff did an outstanding job organizing the tournament.

## Following in Her Father's Bootsteps

(This article is reprinted from the LEADING EDGE June 2002 Issue written by M/Sgt Anne Ward, AFFTC Public Affairs)

Ever since Capt. Lynnette Gawell was a blue-eyed, blonde-haired 11-year-old girl with a pixie haircut and glasses, she knew exactly what she wanted to do with her life—be a navigator, just like her dad. Now Capt. Gawell, of the 412th Operations Group, is the only female C-135 navigator at Edwards Air Force Base, CA.

Surrounded by a military family, she grew up traveling around the world. Her father, a 20-year Air Force veteran, was a KB-50 and C-130 navigator who graduated from the first Air Force officer training course at Lackland AFB, TX in 1959. Her uncle also was in the Air Force, along with two of her brothers and one cousin who went into the Army.

### Following her dreams

It was in her blood. She knew she wanted to follow in their footsteps—and she knew that she wanted to fly. "I grew up hearing the 'war' stories," she said. "My dad's stories were so inspirational. As my brothers and I grew older, we all decided to go into the military. My parents always encouraged us to follow our dreams and to get as much education as possible."

Her father, who finished his career teaching the Reserve Officer Training Course at South Dakota State University, encouraged her to apply to all the military academies. She was accepted to the US Air Force Academy in 1987.

### A new merger

Capt. Gawell met her husband, Capt. Andy Freeborn, 418th Flight Test Squadron, at the academy and was married there in the chapel three days after her graduation from navigator school. Their careers mirrored each other. They both flew the KC-135—at times going in opposite directions, and other times serving in the same squadron. She said she and her husband have worked hard to stay together, but it didn't work out until they finished flight training.

### Coming together

"We finally worked an assignment together to go to Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, Japan, in 1994, and arrived there on her second anniversary," she said. After being stationed at three bases around the world, she followed her husband to Edwards in March 2001 while he attended the US Air Force Test Pilot School to become a C-135 test pilot.

Capt. Gawell's plan is to make a career of the Air Force. She says she considers herself lucky to be able to merge her professional and personal goals—she's been happily married for 10 years. "You have to be able to compromise, in any situation," she said, arms folded and standing tall in her slim green flight suit. "I've had the best time of my life and a lot of fun flying. I am doing what I always wanted to."

### Satisfaction guaranteed

She occasionally speaks to students by phone or at home in Texas and has advice for those looking toward a career. "See the world and choose what makes you happy," she said. "Look at your goals, be reasonable and market your talents. If you make a million dollars, but you are away from your family too much what good is it?"

"I've been lucky to be an Air Force navigator. It's been interesting and challenging. I've had the camaraderie of the military

family, the chance to live overseas — see many interesting places and meet wonderful people. I've lived my dreams and followed in my father's footsteps."



**TAC Tanker History Stuff, Past and Future** At the Colorado Springs reunion business meeting, I gave a report on what we are doing history-wise. So that all can read it, here's a repeat:

Your hysterical officer (oops, historian) has been active, coping with requests for info, asking for and getting material from the members, planning for the preservation of our "stuff", and getting ready to create talks and articles on our history.

The best thing we all did in 2003 was to memorialize 26 of our own refueling operators who had fallen in the line of duty in our units, 1957-1964. We were able to add their names to the very impressive Boom Operators Memorial at Altus AFB, Oklahoma, which was dedicated last May. One of our own ROs, Titus Owen, represented us at that ceremony.

Another organization, the Enlisted Heritage Hall at Gunter Air force Station, Alabama, has recently asked us for information on our enlisted aircrew men, including those who successfully bailed out. We had 21 such survivors, and their names and particulars are en route to this organization. We'll have more on this in the next "Tales."

Another accomplishment in the past year has been helping the Air Mobility Command Museum at Dover AFB, Delaware, establish a comprehensive display on the history of air refueling. Since AMC has the refueling as well as the airlift task, its museum needed good history. We stepped in and have inserted our history alongside the better-known strategic stuff, so we are now well-publicized there.

I showed several photos of the display to the business meeting, and noted the places where we had 'elbowed our way' into the exhibit. The museum will also display a mannequin wearing the flight suit belonging to Jim Meyers (ex-427th). Also, besides displaying a normal series of aircraft models depicting refuelers from the biplane era through the KC-10 and beyond, the museum will feature a model of a KB-50J (probably in 420th markings) refueling three receivers (probably an F-100, an RF-101, and an RB-66). They will "fly" above a genuine KB-50 hose/reel combination, with a genuine F-100 probe looking as if it's just before hookup (without the turbulence). We are also angling to get Rufe Mewborn's video (shown at the 2002 Hampton reunion) to play in the exhibit. So drop by the AMC Museum if at all possible. It's got a lot of other good stuff, too.

Four archives are growing. In the past year we have collected a bunch of material from several of our members, including some stuff donated at this reunion. Four ex-421st personnel—Norm Kelley, Red Anderson, Malcolm Gale, and Ray Donoghue—have donated or loaned newspaper articles, orders, and other

stuff. Pete Adair (431st) and Bob Cleckler (622nd) have contributed CDs with great material on them. This all will be useful to me when writing articles and talks, and also to answer queries from folks.

This is already happening. I was able to plaster the walls of the Hospitality Suite at the reunion with articles, and I was happy to hear folks starting to spin tales (real or imagined) about our flying days while looking at the stuff. Thanks, people; keep them goodies coming! To do any serious history work about Air Force units, you need the official unit histories. Thanks to Chuck and Carol Monka and their hard work beginning years ago, we have acquired copies of a good number of them (those available on microfilm only).

In April, I went down to Maxwell AFB, Alabama, where the Air force has the hard-copy documents we don't already have. I have uncovered references to a lot of them, but only had the time to copy a few of the 4505th Wing ones. I was also able to get access to unclassified air refueling material inside some still-classified Command (TAC, USAFE, PACAF, etc) histories. But I still need to get more done on-scene at Maxwell, and will try to do so in the next few months. I may ask people living in the Maxwell area to help out with copying this material; be in a positive mood if I contact you by phone or e-mail!!

There's more happening—there always is! More in the next "Tales."

### **4505th NCO "Oldest Man in the Air Force" in 1962**

While rummaging through old histories of the 4505th Air Refueling Wing at the archives at Maxwell AFB, Alabama, I came across an article from the Argentinia Naval Station "Foghorn" newspaper. It was announcing the pending retirement at the end of September 1962 of MSgt James R. "Pappy" Horn, First Sergeant of Detachment 1 of the 4505th, and it stated that "Pappy" held the title of "Oldest Airman on Active Duty."

At our recent Colorado Springs reunion, When I announced to the business meeting that in 1962, we had hosted this 72-year-old guy, one man there remembered meeting him. Bo Ault, our treasurer, was a young 429th refueling operator when, in 1961 or early 1962, he was among several 429th crews on a mission to Argentinia. After they landed, all clustered in the Detachment offices where MSgt Horn and others briefed or debriefed them. After that was over, one new 2nd Lt. Navigator (who had had previous enlisted time) asked, "Sgt Horn, what are those diagonal stripes on your sleeve?" To which Bo recalls that "Pappy" replied, "Son, I earned those long before you were a twinkle in your daddy's eye."

And he had. Those were World War I overseas service hashmarks. Further research has revealed that Horn, born in 1890, had enlisted the Army in 1909. He was first assigned to a mule train in the Panama Canal Zone, then served under General John J. Pershing in the 1916 campaign against Pancho Villa. Later he was in the infantry in World War I, at Chateau Thierry and in the Argonne Forest (thus the hashmarks, son). Bo recalls that "Pappy" had, behind his desk, a large framed picture of General "Black Jack" Pershing, well designed to inspire awe and respect in those around him.

There's no information on "Pappy's" service in World War II or the Korean War, but when he retired he was credited with 28 years active

service. Col. George Kneen, 4505th commander, presented “Pappy” with the Air Force Commendation Medal upon his retirement. The Argentia article notes that “Pappy” wanted more on his tombstone than just dates, so he composed his own epitaph: “Here lies Pappy, who has headed west, All dressed up in his Sunday best. Saint Pete need no longer wait, For a First Sergeant of the Gate.” Does anyone else out there remember “Pappy?” If so, let us know your stories.

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## Letters Received From Our Members

*Editor's Note:* This is a continuation of the column begun a few issues back.

Larry R. Clark of Ft. Worth TX (April 2004)

My wife, Melva and I will be celebrating our 47th anniversary this coming September. We have one daughter and two wonderful grandchildren. After separation from the Air Force, I completed college and went to work for Bell Helicopter Textron. After a 33 1/2 year career as a Management Engineer in the Industrial Engineering department, I gave up my pencil, laptop and travel papers and retired.

During this time my duties included forecasting helicopter manufacturing man hours, program scheduling, program reporting, contract negotiations, and in general what ever was asked. I was very blessed in that I was able to work on any new Helicopter programs during this time frame.

Since retirement, we have been to visit our daughter in Norway, met her family in Paris and went back to work at Bell Helicopter part time. My work responsibilities now do not include supervision of men. Just act as a very reliable teacher.

From a health stand point, I have had a major heart attack, triple by-pass, a stent installed in one of the heart's arteries, and then later had to have it enlarged. I had an Implantable Cardiac Defibrillator installed last November, along with the complications that go with that procedure. My wife Melva is an eight year cancer survivor.

We have been active in the local Baptist Church, and try to give back part of the abundance that has been given to us. *In an additional e-mail, Larry notes* he will be unable to attend the Colorado Springs event, but looks forward to visiting and doing the "remember this" routine. "Like the time I was unable to talk the new F-100 pilot into listening to me, and he took the last 8 ft. of hose and the drogue with him. Of course he lost his probe. ....As noted in the Tanker Tales, the operator from Sculthorpe got a Commendation, Capt. Covert and I got to fill out the incident report. ....Or the engine fire in Guam that the firemen in their big red trucks just couldn't get in gear, and the navigator and I pulled the big walk around CO2 to the airplane and discharged it in the No. 3 nacelle.

Harold W. (Bill) Elliott of Roseville MI (March 2004)

I arrived at Turner in early 1957, coming from the 83rd Fighter Wing at Seymour Johnson AFB, NC. For a while, I worked on SAC KB-29s before our aircraft arrived. I was an engine mechanic and spent over a year on the engine conditioning team trouble-shooting R4360 engines on the KB-50.

Twice I went to the Azores for a total of about three months. At that time we were sending fighters to Lebanon. During my time at Turner, I was active in the TAC Aeroclub at Albany Airport.

I was discharged in June, 1959. Gail and I were married on the 27th of that month in our home town of Gaylord, Michigan. We lived for a while in Grand Rapids and I worked for Oliver Machinery Company. Our next move was to Los Angeles so I could go to Northrup Institute of Technology to get my A & P licenses.

After a few moves, including being the Airport Manager

for Otsego County Airport in Gaylord, MI, and a period of employment for Zantop Air Transport at Detroit Metro Airport, we eventually settled in Roseville, MI. Roseville is not far from Detroit City Airport where I first worked for an executive charter outfit as a mechanic and co-pilot. I retired eight years ago as an aircraft maintenance supervisor for a Fortune 500 company that flew all over the world.

We have three sons, all married, and six grandchildren.

I recognized about three names on the list and I am looking forward to contacting old friends.

## Chaplain's Corner

By Rev. George Burrows

The Majesty of the Mountains.

The Beauty of the Air Force Chapel.

The Songs of Shirley Wolford.

The Music from a massive pipe organ.

Six men lit candles and spoke of their squadron memories. President, Dan Weber, paid tribute to TAC Tanker. The warmth of lasting friendships of you who attended Colorado Springs 2004.

This Memorial Service challenged all of us to remember comrades who have passed on. All Challenged me, as chaplain, to remind us of God's blessings, the value of our freedom, the sacrifice of those who currently serve and our continued memories of things past. These things bind our hearts together.

In my forty years of ministry; I count our time in memorial the fulfillment of a dream to offer a sermon tribute at such a prestigious place of worship, to such a great group of people! "Oh may all who come behind us find us faithful. May the fire of our devotion light their way. May the footprints that we leave lead them to believe. And the lives we live inspire them to obey. Oh may all who come behind us find us faithful.

"Amen" "Shalom"



Forty-four years ago on Saturday morning, 2 February 1957, most USAF personnel assigned at RAF Sculthorpe were still sleeping or having breakfast and contemplating what they were going to do with their families that weekend. However, three different KB-29 crews had awakened much earlier, donned their flight suits, driven to the base in the damp chilly winter darkness and, as they weaved through the narrow winding country roads leading to the base, encountered occasional patches of ground fog. They gathered in 420th Operations, received a briefing for a routine air refueling mission of F-100s over Bordeaux, France.

Meanwhile, Capt Jack Kendrick, 420th navigator and squadron intelligence officer, finished his cup of coffee at home and reflected that he too could have been at the briefing since he had been invited by 1st Lt. Jim Erwine (navigator on one of the departing crews) to go along and build up flying time. Kendrick declined Erwine's invitation because he had promised to take his wife somewhere special since she had been "cooped up" all week at home with their little boy.

According to the briefing, the fighters would have taken off from their base in West Germany and, assuming the air-to-air refueling went well, they would continue on TDY to Nouasseur Air Base, Morocco for a week of combat readiness training in gunnery and bombing. After the briefing, the KB-29 crewmembers proceeded to their aircraft and completed their aircraft pre-flights.

Their takeoff was scheduled for about 0800 hours. Two KB-29s, one led by Capt. Grover Townsend (with eight other crewmembers) and the other aircraft led by Capt. Elton "Mac" McClure (with nine crewmembers) got off the ground OK. Onboard these two aircraft were a total of 19 well-trained men; however, only five of the 19 would live to see Sculthorpe again. The takeoff of the third aircraft, led by 1st Lt. Mike Luna, was delayed for a short while due to minor maintenance problems. By the time Luna got off, Townsend and McClure were far ahead and out of visual contact, but Luna pushed his "throttles to the wall" in an attempt to catch up.

The majority of this tragic story was given to me recently by the only **available and surviving** crewmember of the accident, (then) 1st Lt. Bob Leonard. All ranks and grades reflected in this story were those as of the date of the accident. Leonard's recollection of events was collaborated two ways. The first way by Capt. Grover Townsend (now deceased), the aircraft commander of Leonard's crew. Before returning to the United States at the end of my tour, I had the fortune to fly with Townsend on several extended TDY missions and he told me about his narrow escape from the aircraft.

The second method of collaboration was to obtain inputs from several other 420th aircrew members (not on this fateful mission) who were assigned to the squadron at the time the accident occurred and who remember reasonably well the many discussions which took place in squadron ops after the accident.

After 44 years, it is logical and quite understandable that I would receive a few conflicts in the information provided to me by the various sources. I have

deliberately avoided: (1) portion of the story that would highlight these minor conflicts; and (2) placing blame on primary crew members for creating causative factors which led to the accident. Obviously, the interest of the surviving families must be respected and protected. If, in the judgment of some readers, errors have occurred in the story to follow, these errors are unintentional and should be regarded as sins of omission rather than sins of commission.

I have tried to capture the personnel aspects of this story (i.e. those which relate to the affected crew members and their friends) rather than add to, amend, or quarrel with whatever determinations and findings may be found in the sealed files of the official USAF accident investigation board which convened soon after the date of the accident. Before the two KB-29s arrived at the rendezvous point and before air-to-air refueling commenced, Townsend, in the lead aircraft, called McClure on his UHF radio to report that his #2 engine was having a problem. At this point in their flight, both aircraft were about 250 nautical miles from RAF Sculthorpe and therefore almost fully loaded with aviation gas and JP-4. Bob Leonard's account stated that he believed the #2 engine was leaking oil and that the leak was not causing any loss of power or airspeed in the aircraft's performance.

Another source claimed that he thought the #2 engine was smoking. The altitude of both KB-29s at the time was about 16,000 feet. Townsend asked McClure to come up from behind, cross over, take a look at the engine, and try to see where the oil was coming from. Whatever the problem was, it seems logical to me that the instruments in the cockpit and on the flight engineer's panel were not revealing any helpful information. If these instruments had provided useful information, it seems unlikely that Townsend would have ever asked McClure to take a close look. I can recall an in-flight engine accessory fire that I experienced once in a B-26 light bomber where the cockpit gauges and aircraft performance gave us no indication of a problem. The tower at Langley AFB called us on final approach and surprised us by reporting that one of our engines was on fire and that we had been dropping flaming parts over nearby Hampton, VA.

Townsend's crew was positioned in the lead aircraft as follows: (Note: Crew positioning is important to fully appreciate the miracle of survival for five men in this same crew which would occur a few seconds later.)

In the front compartment were: Maj. Dean Harmon in the pilot's seat (left side); Capt. Townsend in the co-pilot's seat (right side) even though he was the designated aircraft commander of this crew; 1st Lt. Hal Schonhans riding in the bombardier's nose position (Schonhans was the regular co-pilot on Townsend's crew); T/Sgt. Ed Kostamo in the Flight Engineer's position.

S/Sgt. Francis "Pat" Buffum in the radio operator's position; and 1st Lt. Mike Kearns in the navigator's position. During the period I was putting this story together, Buddie Ballard (ex-420th radio operator) sent me an E-mail message containing his memories about the accident. In this message, Ballard stated that Buffum had volunteered to take this particular mission in place of Ballard in order to "repay" Ballard for several flights Ballard had flown for Buffum. Apparently, the Operations Officer had originally designated Ballard to fly this mission as part of Townsend's crew but Ballard and Buffum negotiated a deal where Buffum (the regular radio operator) agreed to fly the mission. The Operations Officer would have no objection to this switch as long as both men agreed. Ballard ended his remark with the statement "And, that's how Pat Buffum was on board the plane that day, instead of me." In the rear compartment were: 1st Lt. Bob Leonard in the radar operator's position; A1/C Bill Fultz at the right scanner's position; and M/Sgt. Larry Gregory at the left

scanner's position (but in the tail gunner's position during air-to-air refueling). It's interesting to note that Bob Leonard (crew radar operator) and Mike Kearns (crew navigator) in the front compartment were very close friends. Mike was best man at Bob's wedding and Bob was best man at Mike's wedding. "Pat" Buffum (crew radio operator) had flown with Kearns and Leonard ever since the crew was first put together. Townsend insisted on professionalism, crew integrity, and mutual respect for each other. This crew was tightly integrated and they were all close friends. The same observation can be made for McClure's crew.

McClure's aircraft approached from the rear and crossed over Townsend's aircraft. At that same moment, M/Sgt. Gregory cautiously alerted everyone over the intercom: "Hold steady, they are going over us." The time was exactly 1017 hours (Bordeaux, France time). 1st Lt. Bob Leonard then vividly recalls the horrible metallic thud and crunch as McClure's aircraft settled down on (and/or collided with) the top of Townsend's aircraft. Whatever happened during the receding seconds must have been completely unanticipated.

We can speculate all day what may have been the primary cause of this accident. Could it have been severe turbulence caused by flying into the prop wash of the lead aircraft? In such severe prop wash, did the wing of one aircraft tip into the other aircraft? Because of the short vertical separation between these two aircraft, was this a phenomena that only Boeing B/KB-29 test pilots would have known? What ever the cause, it was extremely fast and unexpected.

After impact, Leonard found himself suddenly pinned to the upper right hand side of the rear compartment as his aircraft began to drop in a spin. Immediately thereafter, he recalls thinking "what a helluva way to die" as he slid down the rear section of the falling aircraft. Leonard then remembers that he and Airman Bill Fultz were both at the left hatch desperately trying to get it open. Fultz eventually got it open and bailed out. I'm sure Fultz must have concluded a few days later that it took him forever to get that hatch open. Seconds spent in a scenario of panic and sheer terror can seem like several minutes to the afflicted afterwards.

Recollections of time actually consumed in these moments of peril are often quite inaccurate. A severe explosion occurred and Leonard ended up in the tail of the aircraft (at the far end of the compartment) recovering from explosive shock and a momentary state of unconsciousness. Smoke and fire filled the rear section of the aircraft and Leonard was unable to see M/Sgt Gregory. Leonard frantically tried to open the back entrance hatch but it was jammed shut. He then crawled back through the spinning wreckage to the left hatch where Fultz had bailed out. Remember that all this time, major sections and pieces of the aircraft were falling to the ground with Leonard trapped inside a major section. Finally, Leonard pulled together all the strength he had left and vacated the aircraft through the same open hatch used by Fultz.

Leonard's personal thoughts about successfully escaping this entrapment appeared in a newspaper article that he mailed to me recently. The article quotes Leonard as saying quite conservatively "God gave me a little push." In a handwritten letter received with the newspaper clipping, Leonard reflected that he may have pulled the ripcord on his parachute too soon because he remembers an engine passing by him about 100 ft away and to his right. Other chunks of the aircraft were falling around him.. He also remembers (as I do in a somewhat similar situation) stating his "Our Fathers" and "Hail Mary's" while falling through the air. From his writing, I can tell that Bob Leonard is certainly a God fearing man and no atheist. For those readers who are atheists, remember the famous World War II adage, "There are no atheists in fox holes when the artillery shells are dropping around." I submit there are no atheists in falling and flying aircraft.

Meanwhile, up in the front compartment, when the explosion occurred,

Townsend stated that 1st Lt. Hal Schonhans was blown from the nose of the aircraft and into his lap. Townsend told me he desperately pushed Schonhans off his lap in order to escape the aircraft. Somehow Townsend, Schonhans, and T/Sgt. Ed Kostamo (the flight engineer) disengaged themselves from the falling wreckage, pulled their ripcords, and parachuted safely to the ground. Perhaps, the entire front section of the aircraft broke apart when the explosion occurred and/or they were all blown clear of the falling wreckage. Leonard remembers Kostamo stating he jumped out of the nose of the aircraft which was blown off.

For some reason, Maj. Harmon, in the pilot's seat (left) never made it. Perhaps Harmon was rendered unconscious by the blast of the explosion or was killed instantly. It's clear to me that God gave these three crewmembers in the forward compartment, in Bob Leonard's words, "a little push" (maybe a big push) as well. Another miracle is that none of the five survivors were clobbered by falling aircraft wreckage while parachuting to the ground and after landing. Townsend reported that when he hit the ground, wreckage was all around him and pieces of the aircraft were still falling. (more next issue)

**Reunion Stats:**

Number of Reunions attended by members: 1st time-17, 2nd-28, 3rd-34, 4th-26, 5th-15.

Number of Men Members-120, Women Members-4, Spouses-93, Guests/Teachers-18=235

Top States Represented: TX-35, CA-32, FL-22, NM-12, VA-10, CO, NV-9, NE, OH, WA-8, GA-7, AL, AZ, NC-6, OK-5

Squadrons Represented: 420th-11, 421st-42, 427th-30, 429th-30, 431st-33, and 622nd-13.

***A Note from Frank Gawell:***

While I was in Mexico, I got a call on my answering machine from Vernetta Towne about Harve passing on or about 7 March. Harve was an Aircraft commander in the 427th AREFS during my time with the squadron(1960-63). In fact, Harve was my A/C on the day we were supposed to fly formation with Maj. Bob Tawney to Lajes. We had an engine fire on take-off roll and aborted the flight to get an engine change. Maj. Tawney went on to disappear. After the 427th disbanded, Maj. Towne became the base Weather Officer at Langley ARB until he retired. Harve went on to a successful career in insurance with NY Life and eventually retired to Worthington MN. He suffered Alzheimers and Parkinsons disease prior to his death. He is survived by his wife, Vernetta (of 50+ years). She maybe reached at 1957 Summit Ave. Worthington MN 56187.



The Long Gray Line-  
our transportation to  
the Air Force Acad-  
emy, Manitou Springs,  
Old Colorado City,  
Pike's Peak Cog Rail-  
way, Solo's Restaurant  
and the Flying W  
Ranch  
Below: "Butch" and  
Nate loading them up,  
and riding them out.