



TAC Tanker Tales



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Deadline Draws Near for Colorado Springs

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Registrations have been flowing into our mailbox for the past two months and from all indications we will have a terrific turnout. Several topics have arisen since our December newsletter when the packets went out in the mail and we want to share these:

RV Parks in the Area For those of you who will drive your "hotel" to Colorado Springs, there are several options, including a parking area if you plan on staying at the hotel. First, there is the Peregrine Pines FamCamp at the Academy. We have directions if you need them, but call 808-840-9999 or 719-333-4356 before May 1. Two other Parks are Fountain Creek RV Park (719-633-2192); and the Garden of the Gods Campground (1-800-248-9451). Both are on W. Colorado Blvd. near Manitou Springs. If you are "Computer Savvy" then log onto www.fountaincreekrvpark.com or www.coloradovacation.com/camp/

Golf Tourney at the Academy

Fred Fullington, our helping TAC Tanker, has reserved the Eisenhower Golf Club at the Academy. Play in on Friday morning, May 14, at 0800 with a shotgun start, scramble format.. The cost is \$40 which will be collected at registration and there are only 36 slots. Golf club rentals are available at the course: \$25. For Taylormade, graphite shafts, \$15 for Cobra Steel shafts.



Soooooo, if you are interested in participating and can forgo the Old Colorado Shopping Tour that morning, please contact us ASAP at 740-653-3835 or nhill1@greenapple.com to hold your space. An e-mail went out recently, but alas many of our members don't have access. Gary Parker is coordinating with the Club for this special add-on event.

FORE! **Solo's Restaurant**- A Special Dining Experience. Would you believe a retired Boeing KC-97 as a restaurant? The owner and developer of this unique dining experience is a pilot. Thanks to local resident and TAC member, Rod Perry, we received a copy of their menu and immediately contacted the owner about the possibility of having our Thursday evening meal at "his place." The fuselage will seat 42 for dinner and 30 of those seats are re-

served for "our group." There is also an attached building with more seats in the regular restaurant. This complex is on Fountain Avenue near the C.S. Airport. We have contacted our Tour Bus Company and they agreed to transport those needing rides to and from the hotel for \$14 (roundtrip). Tickets are printed and will be sold during the registration. The first 30 get the fuselage seats.

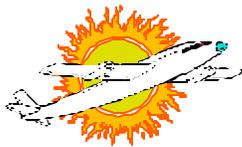
The selections in the menu will be on you. The menu has very moderate prices and includes, starters, salads, pastas, favorites, burgers, sandwiches, combos and drinks called "jet fuel" (spirits). This menu, by the way, is a piece of art and excellent reading on the KC-97's history and Billy Mitchell's background.

The Chapel Hills Mall

For you ladies with time on your hands and transportation to go out on your own, you will be delighted to know that your "mall-fix" is just around the corner, only one exit north of our hotel off I-25. Not only do they have a 40 ft. climbing wall and an ice arena, but over 155 stores, a fabulous food court and six department stores for your pleasure. Open 10-9pm M-Sat and 11-6pm on Sun.

Embassy Suites Reservations

Our contact at the hotel has been keeping us posted with a weekly list of those who have made reservations. Originally we had a block of 50 rooms which was extended to 70 recently due to the number of registrations we have received here at Headquarters. Currently we have over a dozen who have sent paper work to us, but are not on the hotel list and over a dozen who have booked the hotel, but not sent us their paper work. The deadline for TAC registrations and the hotel is April 12, one month from the reunion. We must have your "stuff" by then in order to give final counts to the tour group company, arrange for meals and finalize the nametags, packets and inserts. So, please finalize your itinerary so we will be ready at this end and the hotel will have a room if you need one.



The President's Corner By Dan Weber

Photos of an RAF Sculthorpe KB-50 in a Swedish book?

In fact a Swedish military book? This is not the kind of book we might associate Sweden with, after all it is the home of sometimes rather graphic sexual encounters, both in print and in film. And Swedish military? Is it not a neutral country with very small military? But I can explain.

Some time ago, perhaps two years in the past, I received an e-mail from a Swedish author concerning the United Nations operation in the 1960s in what was then the Belgian Congo. I have no idea at this time how he ever found me but maybe it was through TAC Tankers web site. He wanted to put together a book on the U. N. operation with the emphasis on the Swedish Air Force's contributions. He also knew that other countries were involved--especially the U.S. with the KB-50s, C-124s, C-130s, C-133s, C-135s and other aircraft--flying sorties throughout the war torn country. We corresponded back and forth until I had an idea what he was going to do and I then sent him some photos taken while I was in the Congo. In addition I sent him some data I had on gallons of fuel hauled, hours flown, and that sort of thing by the RAF Sculthorpe crews as we supported the U. N.

He seemed most pleased with what I had given him and he promised me several times that he would send me a copy of the book if he was able to ever get it published. I felt he was writing for a very small audience especially being written in Swedish and that I would never hear from him again.

But imagine my surprise when the book arrived a couple of weeks ago and it is a beauty. The 360 page effort is titled *Fredsflygarna—FN-flyget i Kongo 1960-1964*.

The USAF gets much space with lots of photos from American contributors including several of the photos I sent him. I thanked him very much and he said he was going to try and get an English language version published as well. I suggested he put my name at the top of the mailing list.

So after all these years and with only two KB-50s still around the old bird is not totally forgotten with pictures of it in a few American publications and now in a new book from Sweden. Not bad for fifty years on!

The U. S. Air Force Museum in Dayton publishes a quarterly magazine titled the *Friends Journal*. The magazine has a dozen or so articles in each edition about historical events often written by men who participated in them. This quarter's index includes articles about the Wright Brothers, B-29s flying out of Ladd AFB, B-26s in the South Pacific Theater, the B-2 arriving at the museum for display, and so on. All of these articles are written by readers or museum visitors as the magazine does not author any articles except about what is new at the facility.

A recent membership survey showed that members were looking for stories about "Early Years, SAC, Cold War, Vietnam, KB-50, XC-99" and so on. I don't know who suggested the KB-50 stories, but I think we are on to something.

In looking at past TTAL newsletters and listening to stories told at the reunions I believe that we have some members who could write something up for the magazine and maybe not necessarily about the KB-50. Here are some addresses that you could use to contact some one about your story: Editor, The Air Force Museum Foundation, Inc., P O Box 1903, Wright-Patterson AFB, OH 45433-1903.

For e-mail enquiry's go to www.wpafb.af.mil/museum/.

I don't believe you have to be a Hemmingway, but it would be nice to see some stories about our past 50 years. After all the World War II stories are getting thin as the years move on. One of our members told me when the Paris area was foggy right after the liberation of the city in World War II, the top of the Eiffel Tower would often stick up and one would come over the top of the spire in his aircraft on a certain heading, altitude, airspeed, and descent rate to reach his airfield out in the suburbs. Naturally it was an unpublished approach but it worked. At least it did for him—he is still with us. So there is one story. Nate tells me we have a Goodyear blimp pilot in the membership rolls. I would think that might be worth writing up and we could always publish any of your stories in the newsletter first if you would like. Please think about it.

The Colorado Springs Reunion, "A Gathering of Golden Eagles" is progressing very well. Recently we firmed up the golf tourney, we are working with you RV'ers, the registration packets are flowing in, the door prizes are being worked on, so it is really looking very good. Of course Nate and Natalie will be telling you all about that starting on the Front Page of this edition, the last one before the reunion. Remember it is an important reunion as there will be a business meeting as well.

Barb and I look forward to seeing all of you at the Springs.

Dan

New Life Members

Dave Bishop, Quincy WA-431, 622 James Bunch, Incline Village NV-421,431 Ron Cahill, Honolulu HI-421 Bob Chamberlen, Charlottesville VA 421,429 Jimmie Conder, Filer ID-431 Jesse Cordova, Temecula CA-421,427 T.P. Fowler, Benton LA-421 Don Glynn, Apache Junction AZ-431 Richard Goodman, Bedford PA-421 Mario Grabar, Seabrook TX-429, 622 Peter Grant, Rainer OR-427 Don Hiemstra, Newport News VA-421 Norman Kelley, Citrus Heights CA-421 Bob Knauss, Lexington SC-420 Tom Lee, Jerusalem AR-420, 622 Roy McClellan, Mesa AZ-421 (July 03) Vince McDonald, Eldorado Hills, CA-431 Terry O'Neill, LaQuinta CA-427 Justin Shires, San Antonio TX-427 Gerald Theunissen, Jennings LA-622 Al Vanderbilt, Jr. Tampa FL-427, 4505 Eston (Lucky) Wilson, Dayton OH-421 Alan Yerger, Valley View PA-421 (July 02) Peter Zuras, Potomac MD-420, 429

Welcome

New Members

Ted Arther, Bethel Park PA-427



Tips for the Air Force Academy

On Friday, May 14th, we will be boarding buses at 3 pm. to head to the AFA and a six hour set of activities.

First, we will head to the Visitors Center for an overview and then to the beautiful Base Chapel for our Memorial Service (4-5 pm). Next we will load up for a tour around the entire grounds of the Academy (the golfers can point out their morning workout place), and on to the Academy Club for Cocktails and Appetizers from 6-7 pm.

The Banquet will follow and has been set up as a Bountiful Buffet with many choices (note you didn't have to pick a meat this time). We will have presentations, announcements and lots of door prizes, plus the raffle drawing for a KB-50 model. **NOW** FOR THE TIP: Although the first part of the afternoon is just riding we will be more formal toward the end so suggest a sports jacket for the guys and semi dressy for the ladies.

Report on the PIMA Project

(Board of Directors member Bob Cleckler has been in contact with the PIMA Air & Space Museum in Tucson AZ and recently sent us a copy of the letter mailed to Scott Marchand, Collections & Restoration)

January 21, 2004

"I visited the PIMA museum in early December 2003. I met with Ms. Jule Dawson. I asked for and was assured that I would be furnished an updated thumb-nail sketch on our "KB-50." I say "our" because in 2000 we more or less adopted the bird and at our reunion business meeting your representative, Ms. Lyons, gave us figures needed to begin restoration of this bird. At the meeting, \$5000.00 was raised and pledged toward this project. We were assured that an account was already established and donations applied since the early '90's (as solicited on behalf of PIMA) by Mr. Chuck Monka, a local resident/volunteer and member of our organization. We had hoped to return to Tucson in 2004 for our reunion and a celebration of your progress on our KB, but our membership has voted to go to Colorado instead. As of this date I have heard nothing from PIMA. Our records indicate that \$8000.00 plus has been donated specifically for this craft.

I am hereby asking for an update on what has been done and what is planned to be done to satisfy your agreement with our organization. Our concern is to help get this bird in museum condition and under cover for permanent display. A cover like the SR-71 would be a good start.

Sincerely, etc.

reply.....

February 4, 2004

And the

Dear Mr. Cleckler,

Thank you for your recent letter regarding our KB-50J here at the PIMA Air & Space Museum. It is unfortunate that you didn't call ahead and arrange for a meeting with myself while you were here for your visit—it would have avoided a lot of undue anxiety for you.

Nevertheless, I must apologize for the unfortunate encounter you had with one of our hanger docents, he was out of line making any commentary (particularly gross uninformed and false commentary) on matters of foundation business. The docents are here to enhance the visitor experience, not detract from it. If you still recall the individual's name we will take steps to remedy this conduct.

As for the items you addressed in your letter, I am happy to report the following to you:

*The KB-50J fund is a restricted access account earmarked only for documented work on the aircraft, with a balance of \$8,245.00, as of December 2003.

*The KB-50 has received some treatment: tires have been changed from existing PASM stocks and consequently were not charged to this account.

*I have been in charge of the restorations program for a year now. Unfortunately, past supervisors in this department may have been somewhat inaccurate in the type of work, nature of it's execution and

cost. The sum currently held should be sufficient to properly strip, prime and repaint the aircraft. A few windows and blisters need attention but are not in poor shape and are cosmetic issues.

*Our restoration schedule is full for the remainder of 2004 and into early 2005. I inherited a large backlog of aircraft already in the restorations holding area that require attention before any other aircraft are brought in off display. The earliest the KB-50 could begin any additional treatment is mid 2005.

Before closing I would like to remark upon a few items you addressed in your closing paragraph: the agreement between our two organizations vis-a vis the KB-50J is, as far as I can ascertain, an informal one. I am unable to find any formal signed association agreement in the files I inherited. If you have such a document I would like to obtain a copy from you. If there is no proper delineated agreement, I would like to suggest that we draught one so that we are both protected and clearly understand the amicable and mutually beneficial nature of the existing ad hoc situation.

You remarked about the desire to place the KB-50 under permanent cover. While it is certainly a fine idea, I would suspect that it is unlikely in the foreseeable future—if ever. A structure sufficient to house the KB-50 would be at least \$75,000 and higher. It is hard for us to justify a structure for only one aircraft when there are many others that would benefit from cover and there are many other groups who have similar passions about other individual aircraft—to the exclusion of any other, I need. The tensile structure over the SR-71 at current prices is about \$30/square foot—not including concrete, and only have a life 30 years before re-skinning is necessary—hardly an ideal situation for a museum!

So, I hope I have adequately addressed your concerns and answered some questions for you. We are looking forward to having the KB-50J restored to all our satisfaction and putting it's best face forward for our legions of visitors.

Best Regards,

Scott Marchand

Director of Collections & Aircraft Restorations

A Christmas Story From a Flight Circa 1962
(sent in by Frank Gawell-a bit late for Dec. issue)

T'was the Night Before Christmas, We were making a flight In
a KB-50 Tanker from Lajes to Argentia to Langley our site
Bob Young in the left seat, Jim Hamilton the right I
was just settled into the Nav Seat with the radar on bright Ap-
proaching the ADIZ, Ocean Station Bravo was near When all
of a sudden what should appear But a very
large blip on my APX29, Oh Dear! Could it be the
Great Bear the Russians we feared? I called out to Bob,
"Got a bogie at 3 cbsing in fast Quick Jim called
NORAD, New York OAC and Bravo all 3 We have a bogie at
three, He's closing in fast In a minute or two,
We'll see him fly past Back came the re-
sponse to make the visual ID Then we'll scramble
the F-101 alert fighters quickly As we tightened our
parachutes to prepare for a fight The bogie so strange
came into sight And what to our search-
ing eyes did appear WOW, a rusty old sleigh and 8 fly-
ing reindeer The pilot a jolly fat elf seemed full
of great cheer Flight suit trimmed in bright
red and fur a bright white The sleigh packed with toys,
Oh, it was a sight The jolly fellow waved and
called us on Guard And these were his words, I
repeat Hello, TAC Tanker there's nothing
to fear Call my position to NORAD, No IFF
again this year Merry Christmas to all and a
blessed New Year.

More on the 1955 Charity Auction At Yokota - 421st Guy Won!

In response to our article about this auction in the December "Tanker Tales," Harry Rummel wrote in with some great follow-up. He had been in the 421st up until mid-'55, and remembered several of the men listed on that raffle stub which we now have in the archives. All of them were 421st crew members. He especially remembers "Charles E. McCoy: as Lt Col McCoy, the 421st Operations Officer and aircraft commander of crew #1. And Harry thinks that McCoy won the first prize, the Austin Healy 100 sports car! After his time in the 421st, Harry became a check pilot at Bolling AFB, DC, and met Lt Col McCoy in that capacity when McCoy had a Pentagon assignment. The two became reacquainted, and Harry recalls that McCoy drove up to his home in the Austin Healy on a visit. Harry writes, "He enjoyed telling me of the problems he had with it on his return to States. A question of engine overheating." Harry also recalls Lt WC Cary as a copilot on another 421st crew, and the others as being crewmembers as well. So the raffle ticket stub we have must have been sold in the 421st. Ops Section that spring or summer of 1955. Thanks, Harry, for this good follow-up!

Al Dyck Recalls the 421st, 1953-55

(In another reply triggered by our raffle article, Al Dyck came in with his memories of those early days.)

"I got there (Yokota) in August 1953, from B-29 combat crew training at Randolph AFB. Others in the same group were Vince Walls, Arch Nesbitt, George (?) Holsomback, and Chuck Penney. We all volunteered to go fly tankers rather than go to SAC. Lt Col McCoy was the commander and he became the Ops Officer when Lt Col John Steele assumed command.

"As I recall, we had seven KB-29s, one we called the Triple Nipple because it had pods on both wingtips as well as one in back. At the time we were the only probe-and-drogue refueling outfit in the Air Force. We had a lot of fun in those days.

"We refueled F-84Gs of the 49th Fighter Bomber Group. Those pilots had some real prejudices about "many-engine" operations, and it took many training flights to get them proficient. They had some real problems, too, since the probes were in the tip tanks instead of on the fuselage. I think what finally convinced them of the necessity of having us there was one day when Vince Wallis and crew saved one from taking a swim in the Sea of Japan by meeting him out there and giving him a load of JP-4. Bob (Spider) Chamberlen was Wallis' copilot and Nesbitt's copilot was Billy J. Moore "I left in late December '55, just before the KB-50s came in."

Thanks, Al, for those memories. We all love the "correcting" of those F-84 jocks' attitude once that emergency happened!

Air Refueling Exhibit at AMC Museum Opens Early March

Since my article about the refueling display in the December "Tales," the Air Mobility Command Museum has continued putting its display together. Mike Leister, the museum director, tells me that it is still a "work in progress," but that it will open to the public in early March 2004. The timeline text that we worked on with him will be installed, and tactical tanker history should take its rightful place alongside the other vital USAF refueling efforts. The display is on a large mezzanine, overlooking the many aircraft on display in the museum's huge hanger. The display will be "permanent," that is, it will be up for many years rather than months.

Mike says that Rufe Mewborn's tape of KB-50 operations, which I delivered to him last October, won't be ready for this opening, but he is enthusiastic about it and plans to get it operational later, for "phase two" of the exhibit.

The exhibit will also feature two real artifacts, a KC-135 boom, and a KB-50, reel, and drogue. We have been asked to provide the text for the plaque explaining the KB-50 system, and we are working on it "as we speak." Some of you may be asked for help on this.

There will also be featured scale models of the various refueling aircraft and receivers. In our case, I have been asked to help the modelmaker generate an authentic KB-50 model, with the proper pods, radomes, and markings, and the appropriate receivers (I am favoring F-100s at the moment). So I will be meeting him and Mike Leister on 6 March to provide the necessary photography and other backup material so that we get a good representative model set. He is also building the other aircraft models for the display to the same scale and standards, so any model we, the association, could contribute wouldn't "fit in," he and Mike say.

For more info on the museum, check out its website www.amcmuseum.org. Anybody living or traveling anywhere near Dover AFB, Delaware, is encouraged to drop in on the Museum (it's an official AF museum and therefore free) and check this display out. It should be good. But if you spot errors of any kind, be sure to let me know so they can get corrected.

See you in Colorado Springs!

The Merry Men Are Still At It

By Carel Humme

The TAC Tanker Reunion 2002 Committee met on Thurs., Dec 4th at the Williamsburg Airport for lunch and camaraderie. We had reduced attendance due to incapacitation of three members and the unavailability of others. We had a great lunch and the BS flowed as normal. We elected to meet again in March.

In attendance were Don Hiemstra, Gary Myers, Jim Underhill, Whitey Siekirski, Harvey Margulies and Carel Humme. Reporting on our crippled Airmen: Mac MacDonald had a stroke on Thanksgiving day, while Don Smock and John Morello each had back surgery. All are in stages of recovery.

Letters Received From Our Members

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

Easton W. "Lucky" Wilson of Dayton OH (January 2004)

Lucky was an Inflight Refueling Operator who spent over 30 years involved with Tanker aircraft as a flight crew member. During his career he flew on a host of tanker aircraft from the early B-29 conversions by Boeing Aircraft Company, WA, with the first extendable boom, operated from the tail gunner's station, to the triple nipple KB-50 conversions with (2) reel pods, developed originally by "Flight Refueling LTD" London, UK, which was later retrofitted with (2) jet augmentation engines by Hayes Aircraft Co., Birmingham, AL.

His Aircraft Commander in 1957 in the 421st was Nate Hill the TAC - Tankers VP. He later flew on all models of the KC-97 tanker and while on loan from SAC to ATC at Chanute AFB, IL, served as Ground and Airborne Instructor with the Boeing Co. Mobile Inflight Refueling Team, as they traveled to most SAC bases in the United States.

After returning to SAC, he flew on KC-135 models A-G at Castle, Ramey, Guam, K.I. Sawyer, Eileson, Wright-Patterson AFB and others. During the Vietnam Conflict, he volunteered to serve TDY an average of (6) months a year during operation "Young Tiger" out of U-Tapao AB, Thailand. He racked up 374 combat sorties from there earning 8 Air Medals and a Distinguished Flying Cross during that time.

In 1974, when SAC's KC-135 tankers moved to Wurtsmith AFB, Lucky wanted to retire, but the Base Commander asked him to go to 1st Sergeant Academy after which he served his last two years of active duty at Wright -Patterson as 1st Sergeant for the 4950th Maintenance Squadron. He retired in 1976 at Wright-Patterson and resides in Jefferson Township, Dayton OH with his wife, Joan.

Donald G. Glynn of Apache Junction AZ (January 2004)

Mini-Mini at Wright Patterson

The TAC Tankers staff was very busy on the weekend of 21 February. Nate and Natalie accepted a very gracious invitation from Walt and Barb Larimer to spend the weekend with them in Fairborn, OH. Barb outdid herself in providing gourmet meals and Walt makes a mean scotch and water. Since the Larimers were exposed to "Two Buck Chuck" wine at our last reunion in California, he had located an eastern US resource and we availed ourselves of a bottle or two to go with some lovely filet mignons! I also replenished my stock on a shopping trip to the Dayton "burbs" so we are back in good shape in the wine department.

Since the staff is always looking for new contacts, I had found one of my refueling operators from Yokota days. Easton (Lucky) Wilson-mentioned in the story above- is also in the Dayton area and of course we both wanted to see each other again. Lucky invited me and Walt to attend the monthly meeting of the local DFC Society luncheon meeting on Saturday. We went and had a great time and waaaay too much food, but heard an interesting talk by a gent who flew "spooky" helicopters in NVN. We also had the privilege of meeting the current commander of the Air Force Materiel Command, General Greg Martin. All in all a lovely weekend and of course it's always nice to see and "break bread" with friends from 45 years ago. How rewarding to find Lucky after all these years thanks to a tip from Chuck Callier!!

Enlisted in April 1954 and spent the first four years as a radio repairman. After Technical School, my first assignment was O'Hare Inter. Airport in the 62nd and 63rd Fighter Squadrons. Then to Alaska and assigned to the 64th and 66th Fighter Squadrons. As they wouldn't let me re-enlist in Alaska, I chose discharge in April 1958.

In early 1959, I decided to go back in the Air Force where they stationed me in El Paso, TX with the 431st Air Refueling Squadron. When the 431st disbanded in 1965, I spent a couple of months in 449th Bomb Wing where I was then sent to Forbes AFB, KS and assigned to the 313th Troop Carrier Sqdn.

Only after 10 months, I found myself escorting the C-130 outfit to the Philippines in support of the Vietnam War. Ten months later my family followed me and we spent the next fourteen months there.

Then back to the CONUS and Kincheloe AFB, MI, where I was selected for Avionics instructor and sent after checkout to Barksdale AFB, LA. Five years later to Ubon, Thailand for one year and back to the CONUS and Davis Monthan AFB, AZ. In Tucson, I met up with an old friend at the Pima Air Museum, a KB-50, tail number 072, I believe, my 431st Commander's plane. After all those years it was a nice sight.

While there at Davis Monthan, I served as Avionics Navigation shop chief, almost two years as First Sergeant of the Avionics Sqdn. And Technical Administration. When asked to move again I decided retirement was better. That was in November 1977.

After retirement from the Air Force, I have been in real estate, a property manager, remodeled and refurbished houses and ended up back in the Electronic career field. That found me taking care of the electronics on 200 ton mine trucks. At last retiring for sure in June of 1998.

I am a life member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, being Past Post and District Commanders, and annual member of the American Legion, 18 years as an Elk and an associate member of the Navy Seabees Island X10. After spending 38 years with my first wife, Carol, and losing her to cancer, I remarried in 1995. Now I live in Apache Junction, AZ, with my wife, Ruby and Tiger, the Yorkie.



Shown above at the DFC Society Luncheon in Dayton: Left to right- Chuck Hatfield, President DFCS, General Martin, Nate Hill, Walt Larimer and Lucky Wilson.

“Twilight of A Gallant Warrior”

This reproduced article from a magazine was sent in by
Dave Scott, (431) of Albuquerque, NM

Did you say the Air Force hasn't any sentiment? They have to hard-nose it all the way or they won't hack the course? You're wrong friend! Just look back, for a minute, to February 17, 1965, and into the cockpit of a venerable KB-50 landing on a runway at Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio. The people in the scene include Maj. Tony C. Pronier, 40, of Long Beach, CA, at the controls and his crew, the “KB-50 Boys” from Biggs AFB, TX. Their mission was to put their *Superfortress* down safely after a 1,100-mile flight, and deliver her with a smile to the Air Force Museum. There, future generations of Americans who have never seen her flying majestically overhead will learn of the important niche she and her sisters have impressively carved in aerial history.

The KB-50 Boys, comprising the crew for the 4-hour flight to the museum, were picked for sentimental reasons. Every one of them had been flying with the KB-50J since early 1958. Maj. Pronier had 1,700 hours in the aircraft. The copilot, Kermit T. Hale, Jr., 30, of Dallas, TX, had flown 2,803 hours in the tanker. Other crew members—all of them with more than 2,000 flying hours in KB-50s—were Capt Charles S. McPhie, 29, of Riverside, IL, navigator; TSgt Donald F. Durant, 33, of Fisherville, MA, engineer; and refueling operators, TSgt Everett C. Snead, Jr., 38, of Tampa, FL, and SSgt Laurie H. Harmon, 31, of Columbia, SC.

With the passing of the KB-50s, Tactical Air Command (TAC) now depends upon the faster KC-135s of the Strategic Air Command to refuel its far-flung tactical fighter force. TAC began retiring the KB-50 aircraft early in 1963, and the last unit to use the famous tanker aircraft, the 431st Aerial Refueling Squadron at Biggs AFB, TX, was inactivated in March.

Their History Is a Story of Adventure

Capt Roy A. McClellan is an Air Force man with a long memory and a pocketful of facts, and can tell the story of another unit, the 421st Air Refueling Squadron. His story sounds like an adventure novel, but it's all backed by historical notes and detailed facts.

“This squadron's story might well be typical of all the refueling outfits that flew the KB-50 over the years,” the captain reports. “Their history is replete with examples of devotion to duty; the mission always came first. Successful mission accomplishment, in turn, came as a result of command leadership by example. Air and ground crews of the 421st had excellent, effective commanders from the first—Lt Col John A. Steele, through the eighth and final commander—Lt Col Fain H. Pool.”

The 421st “Flying Rainbow Squadron” was formed shortly before the end of the Korean conflict. Its official activation date was June 18, 1953, and the first type of aircraft assigned was the old KB-29, which saw action through 1957.

The first KB-50 was assigned to Tactical Air Command in July 1956. Modification was begun in 1957 with the installation of two jet engines, with 5,620 lbs. thrust each, to assist in carrying heavier loads of fuel at higher speeds and altitudes. Then came an improved probe and drogue refueling system that enabled the jet-assisted aircraft to refuel three tactical fighters simultaneously. Compartments at each wing tip and in the tail of the plane provided space for reels, hoses, and drogues for aerial refueling.

Built by the Boeing Co. to operate as high as 38,000 feet at a top speed of 370 mph, the KB-50 was ideally suited for refueling TAC's aircraft in the 1950s and early 1960s. The huge tanker had an operation range of more than 4,000 miles. The 421st ARS saw its first KB-50s arrive at Yokota, Japan, in March 1958, and had them in service until the unit's inactivation. There are many highlights in the service record of the Rainbow Squadron and its KB-50s. Operation *Flying Fish*, which ran continually for many years, entailed ferrying aircraft in and out of the PacAF area, and demonstrated TAC's capability to immediately disperse planes based in the continental United States to any area requiring air-

During the Matsu Island conflict in 1958, when United States intentions to support the Nationalist Chinese were tested, the 421st and its KB-50s was called into action. And in 1962 the unit supported the movement of the United States Marines into Thailand. The KB-50 was in continuous action in support of friendly nations in Southeast Asia right down to the “final bell” of the squadron's life. Over the years, B-66s, F-100s, F-101s, F-104s, F-105s, and a variety of United States Navy and Marine Corps aircraft tapped the “liquid assets” of the KB-50s.

Cooperative efforts with our allies are among the squadron's most memorable missions. Operation *Royal Elephant* was flown over Bangkok, Thailand, in 1955, and was a demonstration of air refueling during which three fly-bys were executed. Though burdened with a heavy flying schedule, the Rainbow Squadron was always ready and willing to participate in air shows. Many performances were given in conjunction with fighter units in Australia, Korea, New Zealand, and the Philippines. On one occasion, during Philippine Aviation Week in 1962, two crews were acclaimed by President Macapagal for their outstanding airmanship while participating in a combination of air refueling and low fly-by demonstrations.



Top-notch KB-50 Ground Crews

“During the years of operation of 421st aircraft, they saw service from Hickam AFB, Hawaii, to Bangkok, Thailand and from Misawa AB, Japan, to Ohakea AB, New Zealand,” Captain McClellan observed, and they received excellent support all the way from such bases as Wake Island; Andersen AFB, Guam; Clark AB, Philippines; and many others throughout Southeast Asia. Without this support, the achievement of our mission could, in many instances, have been impaired.

“A great deal of credit for the enviable reputation of the 421st and its brother squadrons is due to the concerted efforts made by the crew chiefs and ground staff who worked on the KB-50s,” the captain added. “Many is the time that crew chiefs, their assistants, and other specialists worked through the night to ready aircraft for a mission the following day.”

Personnel of the 421st have participated in many civic activities, which are perhaps best represented by the squadron's sponsorship of the Keimei Gakuen Orphanage in Minshima City, Japan. Many thousands of dollars have been invested for the improvement of facilities, morale, and welfare at the orphanage. New buildings were constructed in 1962 and a Boy Scout program started. To finance new construction, squadron personnel sponsored a “Kanto Karnival” during which more than \$3,000 was raised for the orphanage. In December of 1964, the boys and girls were brought to Yokota AB for a farewell party, that included a night spent in the home of squadron members and a complete outfit of new clothes.

“The history of the 421st and its KB-50s has been one of devoted service by assigned personnel and a good deal of moral support by their wives and children,” said Captain McClellan. “The unselfish attitude of each individual member greatly increased our mission capability, and resulted in the unit being honored on two occasions with the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award for superior performance as the lone air refueling unit in PacAF, whose area extends from the west coast of the United States to the Indian Ocean.”

Gone But Not Forgotten

The TAC men are not the only ones who will long remember the wide-winged (141 ft) KB-50s resting in Davis-Monthan's desert storage facilities in Arizona. Brig. Gen. Roy W. Nelson, Jr., Air Weather Service commander, announced in February that Air Force hurricane tracking and fixing missions would in the future (cont. on p.8)

Bits and Obits

Last December, we received an e-mail from Maggi Iverson informing us of the passing of a dear friend, Bud-die Ballard (420), of Gadsden, AL. He died on Friday, 12 December 2003 in his home after a long and hard fight against lung cancer, throat cancer, and then fell and fractured his hip. The funeral was held on Monday 15 December. *Juanita Jones recently informed us of the passing of her husband, Robert, a new Life member from the 420th. He died on 21 January in Boise, ID.*

Word from Diane Graves that our Legal Counsel, George passed away Thursday, 12 February 2004. His wake was that Saturday at the AS Turner Funeral Home and the funeral on Monday at the Thomas More Catholic Church, both in Decatur, GA. "It was very sudden, and unexpected. He had a massive heart attack. We had just decided to go to the Colorado Reunion, and he was going to make reservations that day."

David O'Hara (429, 431) of 6 Coventry Place in Sandwich, MA passed on 17 February, at the age of 69. We received this message from his wife Janet who mentioned that he had been battling cancer for eight years.

A note from Lou Schindler informed us of a visit to see Gene Valentine in December. He is in the Gulfport VA Hospital afflicted with both Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. Lou said they spent two plus hours together having a few laughs and some tears, too.

Another note thru the email, from Dan Weber who heard from George Ganjon, who would like to get to "the Springs" this May but participation is iffy because of his health. He described his prostate cancer and added that now he has a brain tumor. George mentioned that he was happy that Fred (Fullington) was involved in the reunion because they lived across the street from each other in Kansas at one time and flew together in the 427th, so they are old friends.



TAPS

(Forwarded from Sharon Hattaway who received it from Rick Jeffer)

We in the United States have all heard the haunting song, "Taps." It's the song that gives us that lump in our throats and usually tears in our eyes.

But, do you know the story behind the song? If not, I think you will be interested to find out about its humble beginnings. Reportedly, it all began in 1862 during the Civil War, when Union Army Captain Robert Ellicombe was with his men near Harrison's Landing in Virginia. The Confederate Army was on the other side of the narrow strip of land.

During the night, Captain Ellicombe heard the moans of a soldier who lay severely wounded on the field. Not knowing if it was a Union or Confederate soldier, the Captain decided to risk his life and bring the stricken man back for medical attention.

Crawling on his stomach through the gunfire, the Captain reached the stricken soldier and began pulling him toward his encampment. When the Captain finally reached his own lines, he discovered it was actually a Confederate soldier, but the soldier was dead. The Captain lit a lantern and suddenly caught his breath and went numb with shock.

In the dim light, he saw the face of a soldier, it was his own son. The boy had been studying music in the South when the war broke out. Without telling his father, the boy enlisted in the Confederate Army.

The following morning, heartbroken, the father asked permission of his superiors to give his son full military burial despite his enemy status. His request was only partially granted. The Captain had asked if he could have a group of Army band members play a funeral dirge for his son at the funeral.

The request was turned down since the soldier was a Confederate, but, out of respect for the father, they did say they could give him only one musician. The Captain chose a bugler. He asked the bugler to play a series of musical notes he had found on a piece of paper in the pocket of the dead youth's uniform

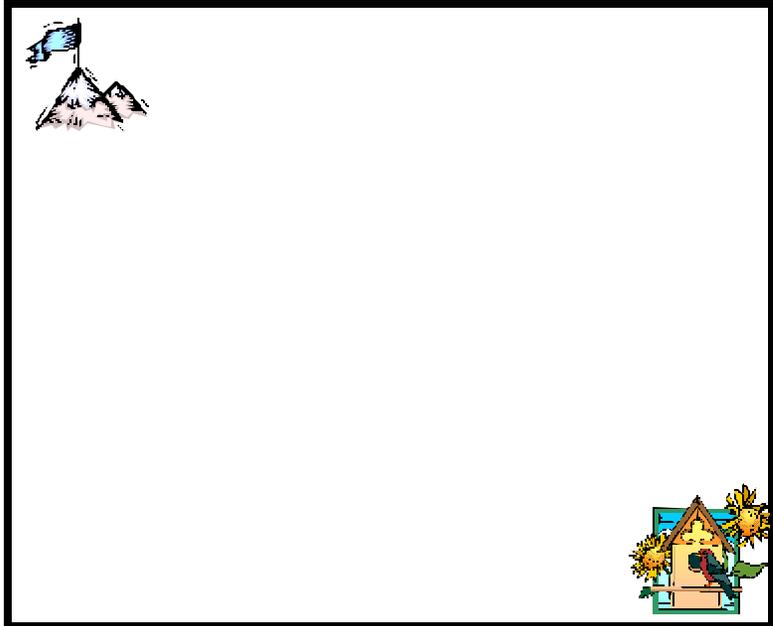
This wish was granted. The haunting melody, we now know as "Taps" used at military funerals was born.

Day is done,
Gone the sun,
From the lakes,
From the hills,
From the sky.
All is well!!
Safely rest
God is nigh.

(cont. on p. 8)

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Continued from Page 6- "Twilight of a Gallant Warrior"

be flown by the weather-instrumented Lockheed WC-135 Hercules, "a modern aircraft which will provide hurricane date in less time and at less cost than has been possible with earlier Air Weather Service aircraft."

In 1955, the first production-line model of the weather-monitoring WB-50 was delivered to the Air Weather Service (AWS). It replaced the WB-29 *Superfortress* and operated at altitudes up to 30,000 feet. Then the WB-50s gave way to the WB-47s—powered by six turbojets, and operating ceiling above 40,000 feet and 520-knot speed.

General Nelson also said the 53rd Weather Reconnaissance Squadron (the Air Force Hurricane Hunters), using Ramey AFB in Puerto Rico for its new weather planes, would fly WB-47s based at Hunter AFB, GA, to provide added storm-overflight capability during the 1965 hurricane season. The AWS announcement noted quietly that "with the turbo-prop WC-130, AWS has found the logical successor to the Boeing WB-50 *Superfortress*, which has flown lower-level storm missions since 1955."

Will the KB-50 be a forgotten plane? "Never!" say the thousands of airmen and officers who were so closely associated with the gallant warrior and refueler of our men in the skies. With its average load of 78,000 pounds of fuel, 4,500-mile range at 30,000 feet, and a true air speed of 310 knots, the KB-50 was a welcome sight to a busy fighter jock or an anxious bomber commander with near-empty tanks where the air is thin and home base far away.

Now the paths of aircraft and men have split. The KB-50s are going to a well-earned rest, but the men must go forward to greater deeds and responsibilities. Such mottos of the KB-50 men as "Can Do" and "Anywhere-Anytime" not longer will ring out at bases around the world, but old crew men aren't worried. They know the KC-135s of SAC and the WC-130s of AWS will take over where the KB-50s left off, five miles up in contail country! -H.H.



TAPS (cont. from p. 7)

Fading light
 Dims the sight.
 And a star
 Gems the sky,
 Gleaming bright
 From afar,
 Drawing nigh,
 Falls the nig
 Thanks and praise,
 For our days,
 'Neath the sun,
 'Neath the stars,
 'Neath the sky,
 As we go,
 This we know,
 God is nigh.

I, too, have felt the chills while listening to "Taps," but I have never seen all the words to the song until now. I didn't even know there was more than one verse. I also never knew the story behind the song and I didn't know if you had either, so I thought I'd pass it along. I now have an even deeper respect for the song than I did before. Sharon.