

TAC Tanker Tales

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Twenty Down and ???? To Go

No, that is not football talk, but the count of all our reunions since the start-up at Warner Robins in 1998. Looks like we have been downsizing a bit lately as our guys get older and take their final flights. However, we who are hanging in there still want you to know we will put together the gatherings as long as we can

So that brings us to next year and the trip to San Antonio for a replay. I dragged out the folder with all the details on that reunion which was at the Holiday Inn Riverwalk where we had 80 rooms at \$99 and 170 attendees. Did bus tours, trip to Fredericksburg, rode the cocktail riverboat and ate at a Mexican restaurant (and more).

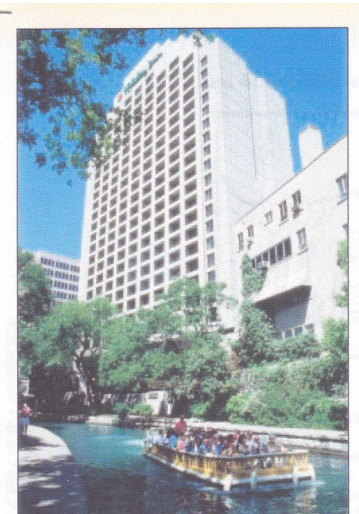
I have contacted the same hotel which has undergone a renovation recently and now, ten years later we are blocking 35 rooms at \$124 and I hope we will have a good turnout. Its up to you out there in never-never-land. Next newsletter will have the registration form with all our activity options.

I want to thank Dick Hermans who lives in Texas and sent me a few pages of activities to do during the reunion. I will be trying them out –some new things and some repeats.

Currently, while sitting here in my “headquarters office” in Winter Park FL, we are watching the weather reports with all the news about Harvey in Texas (by the way San Antonio is fine), and now my area is getting ready for Irma, the next building hurricane. It is heading for Florida ETA Saturday (9/9), so I don’t know where I will be-hopefully snug at home (concrete block house).

.....Natalie

.....P.S. Our dates will be April 29-May 2, 2018



President's Views From Vic-

Hello again everyone. Hope the newsletter finds you all in good health and that your weather is better than it was for all of those in the Houston "Harvey" catastrophe. If you and/or yours were affected, I hope that your recovery is going as well as can be expected. Now, look out Florida.

For an update on the movement of #389 to Dover, in exchanging email with Johnny Taylor two weeks ago, he informed me that "the contracting office is in the process of soliciting and then awarding the contract. It should be awarded within two weeks. John is the Director of the Air Mobility Command Museum.



In the previous newsletter I asked for input if anyone has ideas about where our 2019 reunion should be held, if it should be one day shorter, or if we should schedule several regional reunions each year. I received two responses.

I think that we are getting to be a smaller group, older and less mobile. Keep letting me know how you feel about "the final reunion" or any other thoughts you might have. After we make our \$25,000 donation to the Dover museum as per agreement, our accounts will not have a lot left, so that won't be a significant factor.

We'll need to figure out the 2019 reunion in San Antonio in May.



As always, adios for now, Vic

Board Chairman's Corner

by Bill Wolford

Dear Fellow Tankers and Friends.

We've been extremely busy this summer. Don't know how I ever had time to work now that I'm retired. After getting my mother-in-law settled in the same nursing home with Shirley's brother, by the way he is doing so much better and really loves it there, considering he was not expected to live more than a few days when we placed him there three years ago. God does still does miracles.

In May we went to Maine, just Shirley and I. First time we were alone in quite a while. Later, as you know, we were in New Orleans for the reunion. Once again, it was so great to see you all. In June our daughter Fran and her husband Rick came from Indianapolis for a week. July we went to Williamsburg, VA for a week to visit old stomping grounds. August we flew to Indianapolis for a weeks' visit with Fran and Rick so we could meet the rest of Rick's family. September we are going to a cousin's wedding in Atlanta. We may get a close look at Hurricane Irma. I hope that we and the rest of you in the southeast miss it. Enough of the Wolford saga. We just want to wish you all a pleasant and healthy Fall. — — —-Bill

Congrats to Bill and Shirley on their 62nd Wedding Anniversary-9/4/2017 !!!

The Hanford "B" Reactor, a National Historical site in Hanford Washington on the banks of the Columbia River is open to the public. It created the material for the weapons our receivers carried. In 1942, our government, concerned that Nazi Germany was pursuing a nuclear weapon, accelerated the program to convert uranium to plutonium and separate the two. Several processes to obtain enough fissionable to produce a bomb were under study.

Gaseous Diffusion, used to separate U-235 from U-238 was developed in Oak Ridge, TN. It resulted in the bomb dropped from a B-29 on Hiroshima Japan on August 6, 1945. The ill fated cruiser USS Indianapolis delivered 137 pounds of U-235 used in the core for the "Little Boy" to Tinian.

In September 1942, Brigadier General Leslie Groves of the Army Corps of Engineer's, was placed in command of the "Manhattan Project". He engaged the DuPont Company as prime contractors to create a full-scale production facility to convert non-fissionable U-238 to plutonium U-239 and separate the two. The possibility of both creating a more efficient weapon, and a much earlier delivery gave the project the highest priority. That, and the B-29, capable of delivering the 10000 pound bomb at long range, were high dollar costs of WWII.

By December, based on the criteria developed by DuPont, Hanford has been identified as the ideal location. Groves visited the site in January 1943. Ground was broken in March. It took a peak of 45,000 workers to complete the complex. Construction of the "B" Reactor started in August of 1943 and was completed by mid September. By February 1944, the first shipment of plutonium was shipped to Los Alamos, N.M. where the bombs were developed. Production from the "B" Reactor, and its sister reactors "D" and "F" continued. Shipments were made every five days until enough material (about 32 pounds) for two bombs, the test weapon named "Gadget", detonated at the Trinity Site in New Mexico (16 July, 1945) and the "Fat Man" (Nagasaki, Japan 9 November, 1945) had been delivered.

The original three reactors and six more added during the cold war produced enough fissionable material for 60,000 nuclear weapons. The "B" Reactor was shut down in 1968 and the last ("N") reactor was shut down in 1987. The monster task of cleanup (2014 cost estimate \$131 Billion) continues to this day, along with the problem of where to store the product of that clean up.

Tours are available. They are free, require an advance reservation, and a signed release. Visitors are bussed out to the reactor site from the welcome center and the tours last four hours. Seeing this engineering marvel and having knowledgeable guides explain its operation are priceless.

Bonus Book: **The Greatest Fishing Stories Ever Told**", edited by Lamar Underwood. The former editor chief of Outdoor Life and Sports Afield has gathered 28 of the very best fishing tales based on technical and literary merit, and entertainment value. Additionally, you are introduced to the author, the story background and are led to other works of interest. Truly a fine read.. Available from Amazon in paperback for \$14.95. This FUN read would make a fine gift for any angler, armchair angler or wannabe angler.



Our Membership Vice President's Column

by Lou Chapman

Our thoughts and prayers go out to all our members and/or their families who suffered through and are now dealing with the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey. Floods and tornados are also being reported throughout the Deep South, so we hope all of you take the necessary precautions and stay safe. Your life is what matters and everything else is just possessions. It will be difficult for those who have to start over, but we come from a resilient generation that has faced adversity many times and can do it again if necessary.

For members who occasionally visit the TAC Tankers website and like to look through the reunion photos, you will notice if you click on the Reunion Archives button that you get transferred to Facebook where all the Reunion folders now reside. This was done because of the extremely large number of pictures we had on the website. Now when I finish working with all the each years reunion pictures, I can upload and post them without having to send them to our webmaster. Also, as I come across pictures we didn't have before, I can add them to the appropriate Album. Clicking on any reunion will open the T TACankers page on Facebook, but you do not have to join and open an account. If you get a message about signing up, click the Not Now on the page. When the TAC Tankers page open, click "Photos" on the left and it will show Reunion Albums. Above the New Orleans Album, click "See All" and every reunion will be available going back to the 1998 gathering at Warner-Robins AFB. If you have any problems, contact me and I will e-mail direct links to open the page.

I will be mailing out renewals about the 1st of December to those who are two year members. Please check the notice, include your check and mail it to me with the address enclosed by the 1st of January. Unfortunately we have had members who put the notice somewhere and then forgot about it. If I don't receive a renewal, I cannot send it to our Treasurer Gary Myers, which means we have to drop them from our Rolls.

Sadly, we once again have more obituaries to include in this issue. Bill Reesman contacted me concerning Larry Hinz, Harvey Margulies notified me about Frank Neely and Matt Mathews called and told me about Robert Leonard. My thanks to all of you. The others I found out about through web searches after not being able to reach them by phone/e-mail or having newsletters returned. If you hear of a member passing, let me know so we can include their obituary in the next issue.

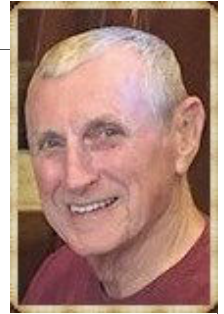
Chaplain's Chat

By Ellen Dodd

The leaves are just starting to turn here in West Central Illinois. Time for the season to change. Fall always makes me think back for some reason. What were you doing sixty years ago? Fifty? Forty? Time passes quickly. That is why this organization is so special to everyone. The newsletters and reunions let us catch up with old friends and make new ones as well. Some of us may have changed a bit since the day we first met, but it doesn't take long to remember a voice, a smile, or a laugh. We are blessed to have people who always have our backs. Stay in touch! As we look at the people around us and the ones we have lost, we remember the words from the Gospel of John: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

Obits of Members

Major Frank A. Neely Jr., USAF (Ret), passed away quietly in his home on Aug. 28th 2017. He was 78 years old. Frank was born on Feb. 24th, 1939, in Roda, VA. Frank enlisted in the U.S. Air Force in 1956 as a Weather Observer and in 1961 attended the Aviation Cadet Program where he became a Commissioned Officer in the U.S. Air Force. He served as a Navigator on transport and refueling aircraft and later as a Personnel Officer. During this period, Frank also served in the Republic of Vietnam from Oct. 1968-Oct.1969 and was awarded the Bronze Star Medal. After retiring from the Air Force in 1978, Frank attended Old Dominion University where he earned a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration, graduating Magna Cum Laude in 1980. He worked as an accountant until retirement in 2005. He was a Life Member and served in the 429th.



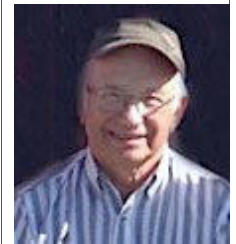
Retired USAF **Major Robert L. Leonard**, 86, of Alexandria, passed away on Friday, August 18, 2017. Bob was a loving husband, uncle, and devout Catholic. He was a graduate of the University of Nebraska. Bob was a career officer in the United States Air Force and retired after 20 years of service as a Major. He was a former member of 420th TAC Tankers After Bob's service, he was in sales for over 10 years. He is survived by his loving wife of 62 years, Leah F. Leonard; As a side note, he was one of the five survivors of the mid-air accident of the two 420th KB-29's



Richard G. Schweikhart March 31, 1938 - December 28, 2016 U.S.A.F Veteran (Ret)Lt. Col. Richard G. Schweikhart, 78, of Elgin Illinois, passed away Wednesday, December 28. Richard served 27 years in the USAF followed by a civilian career at Northrop Grumman until retirement. He is survived by his wife Irene. He was with the 429th and was a Life Member of TAC Tankers. Interment took place in Arlington Nat'l Cemetery Plot 62/897.



Larry G. Hinz September 4, 1940 -April 24, 2017, age 76 passed away at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Minneapolis Minnesota. Larry enlisted in the U.S. Air Force in January of 1960 and worked as a jet engine mechanic assigned to the 431st Air Refueling Squadron at Biggs AFB TX. While in the service, he was united in marriage to Jacquelyne Jacobs on Feb. 17, 1961, at St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Fairmont. They lived in El Paso, Texas, as well as other Air Force bases until Larry's honorable discharge in January of 1964. A funeral service was held May 6, 2017 at St. Paul Lutheran Church in Fairmont. Military honors by the Lee C. Prentice American Legion Post 36 and the Martin Co. V.F.W. Post 1222 followed the service at the church. He had been a member since June 2012.



Charles Bednarik Sr. (MSgt, USAF, Ret.)of Davidson MD passed away on May 20th 2017 at the age of 86. He served from 1946 until his retirement in 1971. Included among his numerous assignments as a Flight Engineer was his time with the 431st at Biggs AFB. His next career was as a civilian employee with the US Navy in Annapolis MD from 1974-1994. His funeral service was held on Thursday, May 25 at George P. Kalas Funeral Home. Internment, with military honors followed at Lakemont Memorial Gardens in Davidsonville, MD.



Bobby Max Gwaltney Sr. Age 83, of Woodstock, GA, previously of Taylorsville, passed away in Woodstock Georgia, July 3, 2015. He was born July 13, 1931 in Alexander County. He served in the US Air Force four years after graduating from High School. Bobby retired from Lockheed Aircraft Company in Georgia after forty years. He was a TAC Tanker Life Member who served with the 420th and 622nd Air Refueling Squadrons.



Donald R Kachuck 82, was born on July 20, 1934 and passed away on Wednesday, November 9, 2016. Donald was a resident of Fresno, California at the time of passing. He was a Gunner during the Korean War, then training as a Refueling Operator before being assigned to the 429th and 421st Air Refueling Squadrons. Later he was a Line Foreman for Pacific Gas & Electric. He was a Life Member of TAC Tankers. The Air Force Honor Guard rendered Military honors at his service on November 18th.



Two Requests for Tanker Loss Info

Since the last "Tanker Tales" I have received two separate requests for info about aircraft/aircrew losses. The first request came from Steven Gil-land from Oklahoma. He was asking if I had any information about his great-uncle, TSgt Vernon Lloyd Koonce, who had been lost in a KB-50 accident near Tokyo on 8 May 1957. He had found bits and pieces on the Internet, but couldn't piece it together.

Then he discovered the TTA website and an article in "Tanker Tales" from 2003 with some more information. So he sent me an email. I responded with copies of all the relevant loss info that I have, including especially the released sections of the aircraft accident report.

TSgt Koonce was the crew chief on KB-50 49-322 of the 421st AREFS at Yokota AB, Japan. The KB, commanded by Capt Willard O Stevens, had taken off from Yokota for Itazuki AB, where it was to conduct air refueling training with receivers. It reached its assigned enroute altitude of 14,000 ft, but could not maintain its desired air-speed. Apparent engine and aileron problems put the aircraft into an uncontrollable situation, and Capt Stevens ordered a bailout.

At this time the KB was overwater not far from Tokyo. The navigator, the flight engineer, and the assistant crew chief bailed out and were successfully rescued, but Capt Stevens, the copilot 1st Lt Almos Land, the refueling operators SSgt Thomas O'Connor and A2c Donald Coster, and TSgt Koonce all perished.

I combed our files and sent Steve copies of everything that I have relevant to this accident, including the accident report, newspaper articles, and the chapel pamphlet from the memorial service at Yokota. Especially important for Steve and his family are the words written to me back in 2002 by Norm Kelley, a 421st refueling operator at the time of the loss, who said, "The loss of this KB-50 took much away from our squadron because the entire crew, including Sgt Koonce the maintenance technician, was made up of the best that any unit could hope to have."

Steve was very pleased at receiving this material and is sharing it with the family, several of whom still remember the young Vernon Koonce after all these years.

The Second Request: 420th KB-29 44-83906

More recently I received an email from Paul Peck of Arizona. He had been trying to find out more information about "a tanker my dad, Robert Peck, had been an engine mechanic on. The tail number was 0-483906. The only thing I know is that it was involved in a mid air collision over France..." Right away I knew it had been a Sculthorpe-based KB-29P, lost in a midair over Vire, France (in western Normandy) on 2 February 1957.

I checked my files and discovered considerable information about the aircraft and the collision. This aircraft was commanded by Capt Eldon McClure, in formation with KB-29 44-69846, commanded by Capt Grover Townsend. They were enroute to refuel F-84F fighter-bombers enroute to Morocco for range work.

The lead aircraft, 846, experienced oil leakage in #2 engine and requested 906 switch over from right-side to left-side, in order to check the engine for visible oil leaks. As 846 did so, the two aircraft collided, and both, now heavily damaged, fell earthward. 906 crashed, all ten crewmen aboard being killed. 846 stayed viable long enough for five of the nine aircrew to bail out and survive. The other four were killed.

This accident has been vividly described in two issues of "Tanker Tales," June & September 2004, by TTA member Walt Larimer, who had arrived in the 420th later in 1957, and heard the stories from the surviving aircrew and saw the effect the loss of 15 highly-valued officers and enlisted men had on the squadron.

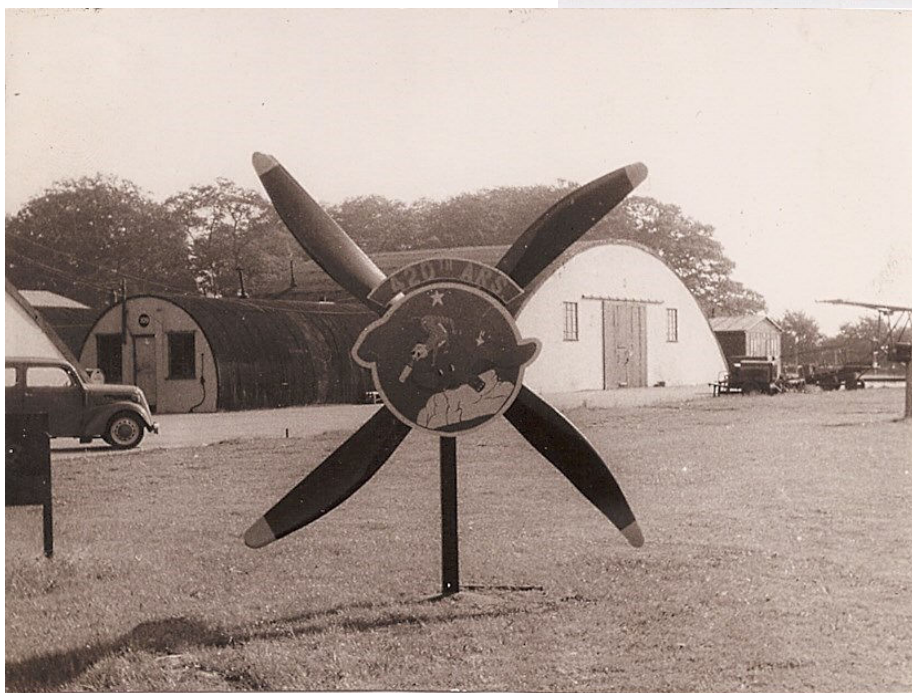
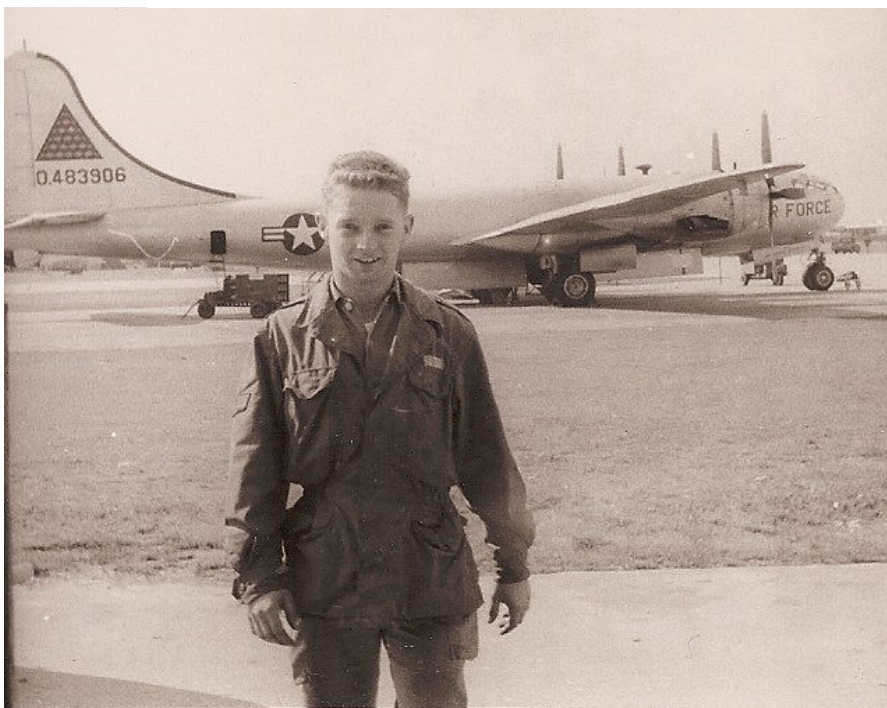
But the squadron continued operating, converting from the KB-29 to the KB-50 over the next two years and posted an outstanding record before its disbanding in March 1964. The high quality of its work is evidenced by its inclusion in the award of the newly-established Air Force Outstanding Unit Award to its parent unit, the

47th Bomb Wing, for the period 15 March – 30 June 1960 (when the 420th was under operational control of the 47th).

I will notify Mr Peck of this information, including various pieces of info besides the “bare-bones.” Apart from copies of the AF accident reports and two photos of KB-29 #906, included will be a page from the 47th's 1957 “yearbook,” which has a photo of his father, A1c Robert B. Peck.



420th Squadron KB-29P at Sculthorpe, England about 1956. Young airman in foreground is most likely a maintenance technician.



420 ARS at Sculthorpe including the Squadron Insignia, about 1956. (photo from Jim Lane, an A1c at the time).