



Videmus Omnia

55th STRAT RECON WING ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

MAY 2007

PRESIDENT'S CORNER



Pres Thomas moderating the Tales event.

We are successfully through our most busy time of the year. As all can see from the activities reported herein, a lot has been going on.

An added event during the Birthday Ball season was the short notice change of command of **BGen Jonathan George** and his hurried departure to Afghanistan. Many factors went into the timing of this change, such as availability of the Air Combat Command commanding general, the planned spring offensive in Afghanistan, and of course, least of all, the Birthday Ball date.

With a change of command just three days before the Birthday Ball, could there be any worst timing for both a departing commander and a new commander? There was not much time to ponder the "what ifs". All knew that it was time to press

ahead with all plans set in place, and to make double sure that all went well to give a good sendoff to the former commander, and to bring the new commander onboard with our best foot forward.

With a grand change of command completed on Wednesday, 28 March, the **55th Wing** Birthday Party celebration started Thursday afternoon at 1600 at the 38th Reconnaissance Squadron break room and naming of the crew lounge for **Reggie's Raiders**. This event started the recognition of the heritage of the **Wing** leading to the Ball; well attended and a good time was had by all.

The following day was the customary *Tales of the 55th*. Another event to remember the history and events of the **Wing's** distant and recent past, and the story tellers did a great job. The success of the *Tales* this year is a tribute to the many who worked to make it happen. Before the *Tales* were all told, I had many step forward with tales they wished to present at our next go. And just when we thought it was over, in walked **Tommy Lasorda** to cap off the post-*Tales* last chance at food and drink. Those two days of celebration then carried over to the final day of celebration.

The Ball this year was attended by 840. It was a great celebration for the **55th** recognizing our heritage and celebrating our accomplishments over the years. The simple humor of Lasorda, and the serious compliments he paid to the men and women of the Armed Forces for their service and sacrifice in preserving our freedoms, wrapped up a most

successful and enjoyable evening. The 55th Wing was on a roll that night ...as the band played on.

BGen George attended the Ball, along with other past wing commanders, and I am sure that it was the most relaxed he has been at a Birthday Ball. He surely looked that way to me. The **Association** has expressed its best wishes to BGen George in his new assignment, and our hope for a safe return from this most demanding assignment. We are grateful for his steadfast support to the **Association's** purposes of comradeship and continued fellowship with the men and women of the *Fightin' Fifty Fifth*.

Colonel Jim "The Rev" Jones stepped on to a fast moving train when he came on board as the commander just three days before the Birthday Ball.....and he did not miss a step. The **Association** had an opportunity to welcome Col Jones on board at a dinner at Gorat's Steakhouse just last week (26 April). We are looking forward to our continued relationship. The **Wing** continues to be in good hands under the leadership of Col Jones and Vice Commander Colonel **Curtiss Petrek**.

Videmus Omnia, Jim.



REUNION SPRING 2008

Vice President Ricky McMahon, who is honcho of the 2008 **Association** gathering, now dubbed "*The National Treasures Reunion*", has been diligent in the early planning for the event. He has received responses from ten hotels around the Potomac and is in the process of selecting the best option for our group's comfort and enjoyment.



The (very) tentative dates are 2-5 April 2008. In addition to the plethora of attractions in the nation's capital to draw visitors, all of which are free, fairly recent new ones are: the World War II Memorial, the Air Force Memorial, the FDR Memorial, the new annex of the Air and Space Museum near Dulles International Airport.

Just as soon as the solid details for the dates and hotel are made, that information will be conveyed via e-mails, posted on the Assn home page, and with a supplemental newsletter so all members can make their plans soonest. All hands can look for a full blown registration, schedule and cost package/newsletter this fall.

There is a large cadre of **55th** alumni, (retirees, active duty and Beltway Bandits) in the greater DC area whom Ricky Mac will be looking to tap for various committees to make for another in a series of great *Fightin' Fifty-Fifth* reunions. **LtCol Jeff** and **Major Trish Seinwill** are already involved; and probables are **Rick Rankin, LtCol Ed Topps, Joel Lutkenhouse, Colonel Bo** and **Ann Marlin, Dean Yount** and **Colonel Christina Lafferty**. Anyone wishing to volunteer to serve, please contact Ricky. (*See info in Directory, below.*)



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Other Members of the Board of Directors:

Permanent Members: **Sam Pizzo, Sparky Adams, Charlie Waters, Bill Ernst,** (Hoover, Maloney, Hoberman, Moore). *Elected Members:* **Joe Gyulavics, Fox Censullo, George Ross, Kevin Todd, Michael Cook, Dennis Haun, Pete Glenboski, Larry Utley.** *Active Duty Members:* **Colonel Don Kelly and LtCol Ken Bauer.**

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TREASURER'S REPORT

The **Association**, as of 15 April 2007, had a checking account balance \$2139.00. Another \$10,855 is in a saving account. There are currently no CDs.



It looks good on paper, but we have bills to pay and expenditures pending, so please pay your dues promptly.

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MEMBERSHIP REPORT

As of 15 April, the **Association** had **1,005** members in good standing, of which 160 are widows and 28 associated members. Another 36 **55th Wing** units receive the newsletter.

The **Association** still claims members in all **50 states**, plus Guam, Puerto Rico and APOs in Europe and the Pacific.

The number of **active duty members** continues to increase, largely due to the **Association's** exposure to the **Wing** at events such as the *Tales* and Birthday Ball; in addition to the solid support of the **Wing** senior staff, and as current members continue to recruit in other areas of the country.

The total membership is down from last October due to 120 members who did **not** renew in 2006. Another 58 lapsed in 2005 and **this is the last newsletter** they will receive unless they reup.

2006 on your address label means that your dues expired at the **end of last year**. (*If you threw the envelope away, go look for it!*) Any other year indicates when your dues will expire, or have already expired.

Dues are payable each January, so if you haven't already done so, renew now.

If your dues expired in 2006, \$10.00 is due for 2007; \$25 will update your membership for three years beyond what now shows as an expiration year.

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Please remit dues to **55SRW Association and mail to Errol Hoberman as soon as practical.** For those who receive this newsletter via regular post, an **Association**-addressed envelope is enclosed for your convenience.

New members receive the Association's dual-shield lapel pin and the **55thSRW** Cold War Memorial coin from 2003 when they join.

Members desiring replacement or additional pins can get them from Errol for \$5.00 prepaid (*if you want more than one pin, the cost is just \$3.00 for each additional pin if mailed at the same time; i.e. one pin, \$5, two pins, \$8, three pins \$11, etc.*).

Jim Thomas and Max Moore have pins and coins, as well, so members in the Omaha area can get the pins from them for \$3.00 without the postage. Extra memorial coins are \$5.00 each.

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*Over the years, it has not been unusual for members to include modest amounts of money over and above that required for dues to add to the treasury, and **every dollar is much appreciated.***

*Others may wish to contribute to the **Association** with an outright donation, or by an endowment or bequest. Something to consider.*

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If you don't receive e-mails from the **Association, it likely is because your e-address is not listed or outdated. To get on the *members only* e-mail roster, or correct/update any changes in recent months, send your current e-mail address to Errol Hoberman at SAC-EWO@mchsi.com.**

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6000 DAYS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

On 11 January 2007, the 55th Wing commemorated 6000 continuous days of operations in the Middle East at a ceremony in the Davis Maintenance Facility at Offutt AFB. Those missions began with the first Gulf War in 1991, when Iraqi invaded Kuwait, and have continued unabated through the War on Terror and Operation Iraqi Freedom.



For truth in journalism: the Offutt tower depicted was recently razed and has been replaced by a new state of the art control facility.

The Wing deployed RC-135 aircraft, crews, a contingent of support and maintenance personnel on very short notice and with little-to-no pre-position planning to Saudi Arabia. **Colonel Dave “Tiny” Wolfe** (an *Association* member then and now) led that effort and made due with innovation, initiative and a complete ‘can do’ team effort to get missions flown from the earliest days of the Gulf War.

That sixteen years have gone by, and a multitude of members of the *Fightin’ Fifty-Fifth* have participated, is a testament that the professionalism, dedication and warrior spirit that is the heritage of the 55th still prevails, as always.

BrigGeneral Jonathon George, 55th Wing commander, made opening remarks and Col (now retired) Wolfe was a featured speaker to give a recap of those early days. **LtCol Mike Kelly**, who was a first lieutenant EWO on the second aircraft into the region in 1991, and now is the ops officer of the 338th CTSqd, also spoke of RC-135 operations then and now. There was a ceremonial passing of the sword from LtCol Kelly to **A1C Gary Chappell** signifying the continuity of operations that go on to this day.

There was a large audience of active duty, retired personnel (including several *Association*

members), government representatives, and local dignitaries at the event, which also featured the Night Wing combo from the ACC Heartland of America Band, a video presentation, a reception and static display of RC-135 aircraft, tail number 132.



CHANGE OF COMMAND, ONCE AGAIN, NOW

On 28 March 2007, the 55th Wing at Offutt AFB, NE, held a change of command ceremony officiated by **LtGen Robert Elder**, commander of 8th AF at Barksdale, LA.

BrigGen Jonathon George relinquished the helm of the *Fightin’ Fifty-Fifth* to Colonel James J. Jones. BGen George assumed command in September 2005. His new assignment is Deputy Commanding General, Afghanistan, in Kabul.

Colonel Jones, nicknamed “The Rev”, is a former fighter pilot whose most recent command was the 116th Control Wing at Robbins AFB, GA, which operates E-8A Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System aircraft.



Colonel Jones got an immediate introduction to the heritage, traditions, and camaraderie of the 55th, and the *Association*, as in the first four days of his tenure he witnessed and/or participated in the naming of a crew lounge at the 38th, the Hall of Fame induction ceremony, the *Tales* and the Birthday Ball. Your basic ‘fire hose’ treatment.



TALES OF THE 55TH

The eighth edition of the *“Tales of the 55th”* was held Friday, 30 March 2007, at the Patriot (Offutt) Club beginning with a social hour at 1500. The large assemblage had time to socialize, view multi-media displays of memorabilia before the program began at 1630.

The wing commander, Col James Jones, opened the event by joining Hoover and **Harry Tull** in ringing the ceremonial bell.

Opening the **55th Wing** Birthday Ball weekend, speakers from various eras of **55th** heritage tell their tales. It is one more opportunity for **55th** alums, both local and out-of-towners, and active duty troops, and guests to mingle, and relive, or learn of, some significant stories from the *Fightin' Fifty-Fifth's* history.

Originally created and coordinated by Hoover, Jim Thomas took over the duties of orchestrating and emceeing the affair in 2006.

Thomas, resplendent in his WWII replica regalia (*see page 1*), related a WWII tale involving two P-51 pilots with the 343rd of the 55th Fighter Group in 1945, regarding a raid on a German airfield near Prague, Czechoslovakia.

John Draper told of his adventure as an RB-47 copilot out of Forbes, TDY to Thule AB, Greenland, when his crew had to make a non-scheduled landing off an operational sortie at Danish Weather Station Nord, Greenland, in January 1957. At the time it was the farthest north landing by any jet aircraft.



Steve Stevens was an RC-135 commander on a mission out of Eielson AFB, AK, in September 1969 when he had occasion to spot a four ship Soviet bomber stream. He made the decision to deviate from the mission profile to fall in trail behind the formation to take advantage of the rare collection opportunity.

The RC hummed along with the bombers



toward a bomb plot at Tiksi in the Soviet Union until ground control cleared “number five” onto the range, wherein the Soviet lead related that they were just a four ship formation. Then it was time to head home for the RC.

Of the more modern era, **Capt Gavin Digstead** briefed the actions of a 55th RC-135 and crew in support of special forces ground action in Afghanistan in August 2005. One of the more significant results was the prevention of a friendly fire incident on the ground team.



The event was again being tri-sponsored by the **55th SRW Association**, the Strategic Roost, Association of Old Crows; and the local Curtis E. LeMay Chapter, Order of Daedalions.



55TH WING BIRTHDAY BALL 2007



55th Association President Thomas presents a check for \$1000 to 55th Wing Commander BGen Jonathon George, 5 February 2007. The money is given annually by the **Association** to help defray admission costs to the Ball for Wing enlisted personnel E-4 and below.

Witnesses to the presentation are: (Far left) **Capt Brian Spliethof**, Ball Committee chair, and (far right) **55th Command ChiefMSgt Kenneth Funderburg**.

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The 29th Birthday Ball was held on Saturday, 31 March, 2007, at the Qwest Center Omaha. The theme will be “Safeguarding Our Nation.....Assuring Freedom.”

This year’s attendance set an **all time record** of 840, well over 150 of which were **Association** members, family and guests.

Tommy Lasorda, famed former LA Dodgers manager, Baseball Hall of Famer, and Major League Baseball Ambassador of Goodwill, was the featured speaker. **Dave Webber**, a longtime Omaha TV sport personality, who was once a member of the SAC Elite Guard, was the MC.

The planning committee was ably headed by **Captain Spliethof** of the 55th Communication Group. Moore and Ernst represent the **Association** on the committee.

Everyone in attendance, from enlisted to generals to DVs, enjoyed a great evening of pomp, ceremony, social interaction and fine dining. In addition of Lasorda’s entertaining oratory, the audience was treated to a program that included the ceremonial cake cutting, with WWII veteran and current 55th Fighter Group Assn VP, **Don Gifford** assisting Col Jones and the youngest member of the Wing **AmnBasic Angela Backetter** (*who entered the Air Force in November 2006*); the Offutt Honor Guard Drill Team, Hall of Fame introductions, presentation of the

55th **Association’s**



Award for Excellence.

The Night Wing group of the Heartland of America Band played for dancing until midnight.

The **Association** was well represented by active duty and retiree members and guests. Six former wing commanders made it: **MGen (Ret) Greg Power**, **BGen (Ret) Reg Urschler**, **BGen (Ret) Larry Mitchell** and wife, **Susan**; **BGen George and Kelly**; **Col (Ret) Stevens and Suzanne**; and **Col (Ret) Dan Peterson and Katy**.

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55th WING HALL OF FAME

In 2003 the **55thSRW Association** assumed the administration of the selection process of the **55th Wing Hall of Fame**. Nominees are solicited each year for induction. The inductions are made at a ceremony at Wing HQ the Friday before the Birthday Ball, and presented at the Ball.

This year the newest members of the Hall are from two distinct eras of the Wing’s long history. **Col (Ret) John E Drost** is a Cold Warrior, and the late **Major (Ret) Eddie “Mitch” Phillips** represents the RC-135’s transition from a strategic system into the world of tactical warfare support.

Hall of Fame 2007

Colonel Drost, was assigned to the **55th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing** from 1954 -1969 at Forbes AFB, KS, and Offutt AFB, NE.

Colonel Drost was a superior performer as an RB-47 pilot, instructor, and aircrew commander throughout his tenure in the Wing. He was specifically selected to lead and execute several classified, higher headquarters directed projects and missions, some of which remain classified to this day. Due to the heightened sensitivity of the operations, at times the objectives of the missions were not fully briefed to **55th** commanders and staff, or operating location commanders.

In 1963, because of his extensive history of successful operational deployments, then-Major Drost was approached by agents of the Central Intelligence Agency to carry out a top-secret project. He readily volunteered for the extremely sensitive duty and the required frequent deployments.

Over the next two-years, Major Drost and crew embarked on many deployments with a specially-

modified RB-47H aircraft to various overseas locations. The missions were flown in hazardous and potentially hostile areas, to provide collection data to the CIA that Strategic Air Command had not previously been able to gather. The priority for national security was such that the results of each of those missions were briefed by CIA representatives directly to the President of the US.



John and Reecie at the induction ceremony 30 Mar 07

During his 15 years in the *Fightin' Fifty Fifth*, Colonel Drost flew numerous operational missions that were **not** in the routine strategic reconnaissance spectrum, and was deployed more often, and for longer periods than was the norm for other 55th crewmen of that period. All were vital to the nation's security.

Col Drost's significant accomplishments occurred under frequently challenging conditions during the high tensions of the Cold War. His superior leadership, outstanding airmanship, and dedicated professionalism were recognized with the awarding, during 'peacetime', of **seven** Distinguished Flying Crosses, three Air Medals and three AF Commendation Medals, among other decorations.

"Mitch" Phillips

Major Phillips earned his commission in 1981, graduated from navigator training and Electronic Warfare Officers School, then reported to the **55th SRW** in October 1982. Mitch flew as a 343 SRS RC-135 EWO, upgrading rapidly to crew commander, instructor, and evaluator.

During a deployment to the Mediterranean theater, he was singled out by the Chief of Naval Operations for critical support provided to the Commander of US Forces during the *Achille Lauro* cruise ship hostage incident. During multiple

missions, his actions provided essential intelligence for a plan to capture the terrorists attempting to go from Egypt to Libya. Once the plan was executed, he provided direct and essential support to a US Naval airborne task force. Capt Phillip's innovative use of his crew and new applications of capabilities of the RC-135 translated to a successful mission.

Also on that deployment, Capt Phillip's crew provided direct support to the Battle Group Commander during missions that challenged Libyan dictator Mommar Kadafi's "Line of Death" that resulted in the US Navy destroying two Libyan fighters that attempted to shoot down the RC-135.

Captain Phillips was subsequently assigned as the **first** RC-135 EWO instructor at the SAC Tactics School at the Air Force Weapons Center at Nellis AFB in 1987. His tireless efforts were instrumental in educating the tactical community, and senior leaders, to the diverse capabilities of the RC-135.



Returning to the **55th** in 1989, he became the **first** Wing Tactics Officer and was on the ground floor of the 55th participating in war game exercises at Nellis, and in the integration of the RC-135 into the tactical strike package.

During DESERT STORM, while flying 15 combat missions, he saw first-hand the efforts of his labors in the evolution of the RC-135 as an essential war-fighting platform. As Chief, Special Technical Operations (STO) at the USAF Battle Staff Training School he insured the capabilities of the RC-135 were known to senior Air Force commanders .

Subsequently, then-Capt Phillips received a by-name assignment to the Air Force Tactical Applications Center where he wrote the RC-135 into the Air Force's first Counter-Proliferation Plan, and integrated developing technologies into Air Force war fighting capabilities.

As a member of the **55th**, in other AF assignments, and finally as a DOD civilian, the late-Major Phillips made significant and lasting contributions to the mission of the *Fightin' Fifty Fifth*, which impact the unit's mission today and will continue to have relevance into the future.

Mitch's untimely death of a heart attack came at the age of 51 in February 2006.

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THE 55TH SRW ASSOCIATION AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE

The **55th SRW Association Annual Award for Excellence** is presented to that individual, crew, group, or organization that best exemplifies the basic tenants of the **55th SRW Association**. The presentation is made at the annual **55th Wing Birthday Ball**.



MSgt David Cain with the award presentation by Assn Board Member CMSgt (Ret) Dennis Haun.

The award selectee for 2006 is **MSgt David A. Cain** of the 55th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron. A crew chief by trade, he is the Production Superintendent for the unit and the manager for flightline maintenance operations. MSgt Cain's superior leadership and outstanding professionalism made him the wing's nominee for the LtGen Leo Marquez Award as the top maintenance supervisor/manager in the Air Force.

Past award recipients are **LtCol Ricky McMahon**, 338th Combat Training Squadron commander, for 2000; and **MSgt Steven** and **MSgt Lisa Hagggett**, 55th Wing Command Section, 2001; **LtCol Kurt Kramer**, 38thRS commander, 2002,

and **LtCol Glen Gulleckson**, 343rdRS commander, 2003; **TSgt Terry Hunt**, Medical Support Group, 2004; **MSgt Norman de la Vega**, 55th Security Forces Sq, Elite Guard, in 2005.

The permanent trophy resides in a display case in the lobby of the Gen Russell Dougherty Conference Center at Offutt. Many significant events are held there each year, including the annual ACC Commanders and Chiefs Conferences, so it is in a high visibility area.

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FIGHTIN' FIFTY-FIFTH HISTORY

The following two articles recount episodes from the 55th's storied past. They are also entries in the Association web site under the Memory Lane link, where one can find more such tales. Both have been edited for space and readability. Max



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OPERATION HOME RUN Cold War Over Flights of Soviet Landmass

This article is to honor the aircrews, and the outstanding maintenance and other support troops, who participated in *Operation Home Run*. In 2001 the details were declassified. This is the story.

In early 1956 President Dwight D. Eisenhower authorized photo and electronic over flight missions of the entire northern slope and interior portions of the USSR from the Kola Peninsula to the Bering Straits. Missions were to be flown out of Thule AFB, Greenland, and required an approximate 7000 mile round trip.

Accordingly, sixteen photo capable RB-47E model aircraft of the 10th Recon Sq from Lockbourne AFB, OH; four RB-47H electronic collection capable aircraft from the **55th SRW**, Forbes AFB, KS; plus, 27 KC-97 air-refueling tankers from various Air Force bases, along with various maintenance and support personnel of the **55th** were directed to take part in this operation.



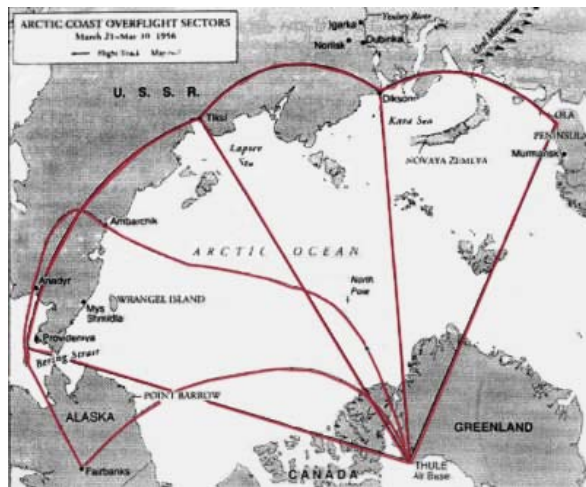
RB-47H at Thule AB

The four 55th crews selected for the operational missions were: From the 38SRS: **AC-Burt Barrett, CP-D Waller, N-Jim McDonnell, R1-Phil Mitchell, R2-S Elliott, R3-Bill Kane; AC-Dick Campbell, CP-Joe Gyulavics, N-Paul Caselton, R1-Bill Rosser, R2-Paul Fortin, R3-Tom Everling.**

From the 343rdSRS: **AC-Don Grant, CP-Doug Wells, N-Al Benziger, R1-Chas Waters, R2-CR Smith, R3-Nick Yanuzzi; AC-R Hubbard, CP-C Aslund, N-R Mayer, R1-Walt Duer, R2-Roger Thompson, R3-M Sawyer.**

C Hunter Smith and **G Finefrock** each flew one sortie, as well.

Missions were flown between 21 March and 10 May 1956. A total of 156 combined sorties were flown in *Operation Home Run*.



General zones of interest

During 1956 if the Cold War had turned into a 'hot war', SAC bombers were to penetrate Russia via Arctic flight plans enroute to their targets. It was of paramount interest to know what capabilities the Soviets possessed along the northern coastline, with regards to defensive as well as offensive weaponry.

Facilities such as naval installations, airfields, radar sites, atomic energy facilities, large industrial

complexes, port facilities, missile sites, plus others, would be of prime interest to the photo crews, whereby the RB crews' focus was to ascertain what the Soviets had in early warning radar capabilities.

Thus, *Operation Home Run* was born. Some of the cities and points of interest to be over flown were: Dikson, Makarova, Chelyuskin, Ust Olenek, Tiksi, Nordvik, Khorgo Ambarchik, Taltumus, Anadyr, Wrangel Island, Providenya and Novaya Zemlya ('Banana Island'), and Mys Shmidta.

This was the real deal. No flying 12 miles off of the coastline for purposes of 'studying electromagnetic wave propagation'. This was it.

Accordingly on 21 March 1956, the four RB47H aircraft departed for Thule AFB, Greenland, and the deplaning crewmen were greeted by 35 degrees BELOW zero temperature. And of course, there was no sunlight at this time of the year in the Arctic.

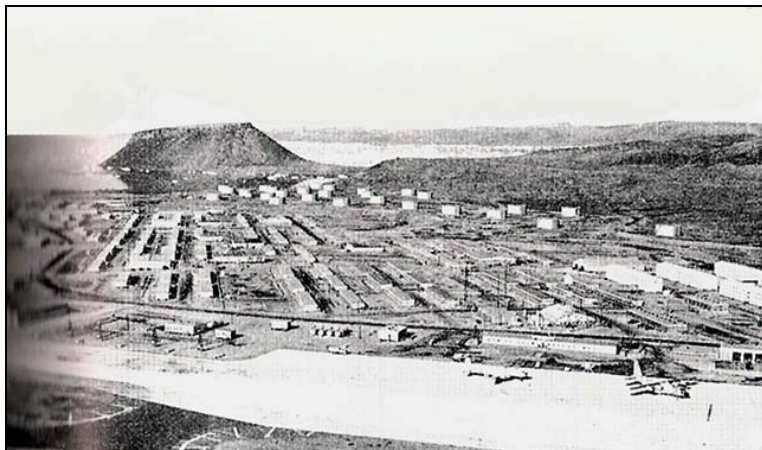
All told, 20 RBs and 27 KC-97 tankers were operating out of a base certainly not designed for this magnitude of operations. For instance none of the RBs had hangers, and all maintenance, refueling operations, etc, were conducted outdoors in below freezing weather conditions, which included blowing snow adding to the chill factors.

Not enough praise that can be given to the dedicated crew chiefs, maintenance and ground support personnel who performed yeoman duty under the worst weather conditions imaginable. **Line Chief Kitchens** and his crew chiefs: **F Filburn, J Rodecap, L Ross** and **G Grenke**, earned the highest commendation for their dedicated duty. Their efforts certainly contributed to the success of the mission.

Adding to the woes of having below freezing weather, there was ice on the runway. As fighters would take off on their daily routine air patrols, their jet blasts would melt the snow which would then turn to ice. That made takeoffs and landings most thrilling!

Secrecy was paramount. It is doubtful that **55th** HQ, or the squadron staffs at Forbes, had any insight as to what their crews were involved in. The crews at Thule were instructed not to discuss any facet of their missions with their counterparts. Each flight element, which might be a two or three ship flight (one H accompanying one or two E models), would brief separately, so each element knew only what they would be doing on each mission.

That policy of secrecy remained in effect until 2001 when the operation details were declassified.



Thule AFB, Greenland - May 1956

Missions Tactics

All flights were conducted in radio silence, with hand signals used between aircraft in flight. The RBs did monitor HF radio in case of any recall messages, but absolutely no outgoing calls were permitted, and none were reported on 156 sorties.

Aircraft formations varied mission to mission. In some instances aircraft were in trail formation with the RB-H flying one mile or so behind the RB-E model. At other times, they would fly in tight formation, a wing-length to the side and the same distance to the rear of the RB-E. Yet on some occasions, the RB-H aircraft did not see the RB-E.

Distances involved on those missions required that the mission aircraft have a specific on board fuel load at a given point of the route. Attempting to obtain this amount, usually around 20,000 lbs from a single tanker, would leave the tanker with insufficient fuel to return to Thule. Thus, on some of the longer missions, two refuelings were required.

Two or three tankers would fly abreast each aircraft in the element, each receiver to offload an amount less than the total required. The RBs would take on a certain amount of fuel from one tanker, and then slide over to the next tanker getting the balance of fuel needed to go the distance.

Soviet response to *Operation Home Run* missions with fighter intercepts reflected quite a few attempts; however, in all instances they were ineffective. There were no reports of missile firings. With regards to fighters, perhaps the Soviets, during

this time, shut down some of their fighter bases in the area due to the harsh winter conditions.

As to the results of the mission, we shall probably never know. All data, photo and electronic, was sent back to SAC HQ. The crews were never briefed on their accomplishments.

Due to the fact that there is no official documentation available, sortie and over flight data has been compiled from information gathered from various crewmembers. The average number of sorties flown by each crew is estimated to be eight and ten, with half of those being overflights.

What can be determined however, is the outstanding performance given by the aircrews of the 343rd and 38th, and ground personnel of various units of the **55th SRW**, in accomplishing the demanding goals of the operation, and doing so under the most challenging conditions.

Flight crews were awarded Distinguished Flying Crosses or Air Medals for their efforts.

When the Soviets subsequently registered complained about the overflights, President Eisenhower responded, with tongue firmly planted in cheek, "Must have been navigational errors".

Wow! On ALL those overflights! SAC must have had some really inept navigators back in those days! (This comment, by the author, also made with tongue in cheek.)



*Aerial View of Thule AFB –
Circa March-May 1956*

Author's Comments: My thanks to those who provided material and support in the writing of this significant event.

Prior to publication, this article was reviewed by various participants of the operation and deemed correct in content.

Videmus Omnia, Sam Pizzo, Mandeville, LA



A TELL-TWO TALE



The EB-47E Tell-Two model was a bomber with the bomb bay modified into an EWO compartment and with 'black boxes' specifically to monitor missile telemetry.

In the summer of 1964 a **55th SRW** crew flying the EB-47E Tell-Two model, comprised of **AC-LtCol Leo Legard, CP-Capt Floyd Braeske, Nav-LtCol Walt Stoll, Raven1-Major Willard Ladnier, R2-Capt Irving Wisner**, (all ranks were theater spot-promotions as was the custom of the time), at Incirlik AB, Turkey (OL-4), flew 20 alert sortie missions in the period 22 July – 25 September without a late take-off or abort. Most likely a record for the wing and maybe all of SAC.



L to R: Legard, Braeske, Stoll, Ladnier, Wisner

What makes this whole story unusual is that during this tour, the Tell-Two operations to monitor USSR missile test launches routinely called for two crews and aircraft to be on alert, ready for short notice launches at any given time. One crew was primary, another secondary, and they rotated regularly. Those circumstances would normally

preclude a specific crew from completing an inordinate number of sorties since the mission executions were purely random. However, strange things do happen.

Once the primary crew and aircraft launched on a mission (*quite often at o-dark hundred*), it was common practice for the secondary crewmembers to leave all their flying gear and mission materials at their respective positions in the aircraft. Then they were free to resume their routine activities on base: swimming, volleyball (*jungle rules*), o-club, BX, library (*yeah, right*); but were still on alert status.

However, if the primary mission was aborted, the alert alarm would sound and the secondary crew would madly scramble to get to the backup plane. It was our unfortunate lot to be paired with a crew and aircraft that seemed to abort every other mission.

As a result, I remember our crew climbing the ladder into the plane dressed in anything from slacks, Hawaiian shirts, wet swim trunks, sandals, et al, then, taxing to make the fastest take-off possible and fly the mission. It was a lot of fun trying to get into flight suits and boots in those cramped areas of the aircraft while enroute to the designated surveillance area.

“...And there we were...”

On one of our missions while patrolling over eastern Iran, the area for picking up telemetry from Soviet missile launches, we staggered up to 45,000 ft. Former RB pilots will remember how the aircraft responded at that altitude. She shuddered, stalled and almost ceased flying, but Leo held her there and steady as possible so the ravens could get their work done. After that one, one Mr Brown, who debriefed us, said that we had gotten a ten million dollar, one tenth of a second ‘take’ on a rare signal type.

Here’s something else pilots can appreciate, because Leo would never take credit for himself. We **55th** crews took a lot of flak from the AF fighter jocks at Incirlik about how much better they were in their hot planes than we were in our “slow, lumbering aircraft”.

So, on our final mission before going home, upon calling for landing instructions, Leo had the copilot ask for permission to do a 360-degree overhead approach to landing.

The tower immediately questioned the request and wanted to know the type of aircraft. Once we ID-ed as a multi-engine jet, the tower asked two

more times for aircraft type, but finally and reluctantly granted approval.

Well, Leo pushed full-throttle to the engines and pulled the plane up into a tight turn, stayed inside the airfield boundaries, lined up on the runway and set her down as neat and smoothly as you can imagine.

The fighter jocks must have been alerted by the tower guys about what was going to happen, as a bunch of them were watching. We **never** were again ragged about our “clumsy ol’ bird”.

On an earlier deployment, from 13 July to 17 October 1963, the same front end crew, with ravens **Capt Frank Forrest** and **1Lt Dominic Ricci**, flew 18 Tell-Two missions from Incirlik without an abort or late take-off. This would give Crew E-38’s front end crew 38 consecutive successful alert missions. Something to be proud of and remembered.

I gleaned the flight data from my personal Form 5a and flight orders.

*Submitted by **Walt Stoll**, Wills Point, TX*

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38TH DEDICATES ITS CREWDOG LOUNGE

LtCol Ron Machoian, commander of the 38th Recon Squadron, on 29 March led the dedication and naming of the squadron’s crew lounge with name of that living legend BrigGen (Retired) Regis F.A. Urschler.



It was a rousing occasion attended by many of Reg’s comrades from the **Association** and days gone by, in addition to a packed group of the active squadron and wing staff.

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DINNER WITH THE WING COMMANDER

Members of the Omaha Caucus of the **55th SRW Association** feted the newest **55th Wing Commander**, Colonel (now BrigGen–sel) James J. Jones at dinner at Gorat’s Steak House in Omaha on the evening of 26 April 2007. He is the seventh wing commander to meet and greet members of the **Association** in an intimate social setting.

Association President Jim Thomas presided over the event which began with an hour of socializing as Col Jones moved among the group. Harry Tull rang the **55th** ceremonial bell to single sit-down for dinner. Also on display during the event was the **55th SRW Association** Award for Excellence trophy.



Pres Thomas, former Wing commander Steve Stevens, Col Jones

After an excellent dinner, Pres Thomas made remarks welcoming Col Jones, and an around the table introduction of the guests ensued. Thomas



then presented a copy of **Bruce Bailey’s** “We See All” book to Col Jones.

He also received gifts of the Association logo polo shirt and the most recent issue of the **Association**

newsletter. (He was wearing the **Association** tie).

Col Jones addressed the group and expressed his appreciation for the experience, commitment, and contributions of the **55th SRW Association**.

All in all, it was a worthwhile and convivial evening in which Col Jones was further impressed with the dedication that former members of the **55th** still have for serving the current active duty wing.

In attendance were: **Association** Board members: Max Moore, Robb Hoover, Michael Cook, Jim Maloney, Pete Glenboski, Dennis Haun, Larry Utley, Kevin Todd, Col Don Kelly, and LtCol Ken Bauer; plus members Steve Stevens, **Arlen Howe, Ham Kennedy, Frank Hicks, Dick Purdum, John Tresmer, Bob Krist, and Hank Dubuy**.

(Note: This article and more pictures are on the Assn web site.)

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T A P S



Daniel J. Birmingham, 76, died 3 November 2006, Toms River, NJ; wife **Tracy**. Dan was an RB-47 navigator with the **55th SRW** at Forbes AFB, KS, and served in the SAC Recon Center at Offutt AFB, NE. He also was commander, AF Personnel for NSA at Ft Meade, MD, and at Sondrestrom AB, Greenland, when he retired in 1980.

Ruth Burton, 27 October 2006, Topeka, KS; widow of **Robert W.** who passed in 1991. Bob was an aircraft commander in RB-47s at Forbes circa 1958. Ruth taught school in Topeka for 18 years.

Andrew (Andy) Corra, 1 August 2006, San Diego, CA; wife, **Mary**. An RB-47 navigator at Forbes, Andy was an IN, squadron nav and in stand board. He also was a staff officer in the **55th**.

John King, 66, 22 December 2006, Rockwell, TX; wife, Marilyn. John served in the **55th** at Offutt as an RC-135 pilot, ops officer, then squadron commander of the 343rd SRS. He also served with the 6th SW at Eielson AFB, AK, and 14th Air Div at Beale AFB, CA.

Daniel Mateik, 75, 5 January 2007, Rancho Palos Verdes, CA; wife, **Bette**. A long time 55th EWO in RBs at Forbes in the 1960s. Dan was an avid hunter and environmentalist in his retirement years.

Chris McAloon, 70, 20 November 2006, Sullivan, ME; wife, **Margaret (Peggy)**. A pilot in RB-47s at Forbes, then RC-135s at Offutt and Kadena AB, Okinawa, Chris was the last commander of the 82 SRS there in the April 1975.

Lindy Melton, 66, 29 May 2006, Spring, TX; wife, Ann Marie. Lindy was an RC-135 navigator at Offutt from 1967, and later at Kadena. He also was assigned to USAF Europe before retiring in 1986.

David Meunier, 64, 22 November 2006; Bellevue, NE; wife: **Constance**. A veteran of numerous B-52 missions in Vietnam, Dave served as Chief, Battle Staff Operations, in the E-4 NECAP staff, 1980 to 1989 when he retired.

Don E. Miller, 16 February 2007; Friendwood, TX; wife, **Esther**. Don flew photo recon in Korea, and was in the 55th at Forbes for many years. An RB-47 pilot, he was chief of stand/eval.

Gene Milligan, 57, 15 January 2007, San Diego, CA; wife, **Doris**. A pilot in RCs at Offutt from mid-70s to 1978, he went with PSA and later USAirways as captain in 727s, MD-10, and DC9.

Alan Prince, 8 December 2005, Fresno, CA; wife Lois.

Anthony (Tony) Rais, 82, 5 December 2006, Valencia, CA; wife, **June**. Tony was a decorated WWII veteran who flew P-51s. He later piloted RB-47s as an AC/IP at Forbes. He served as commander of the 38SRS and 343SRS there. After retirement he worked for Douglas Aircraft Corp and the FAA.

Philip Sterling, 3 January 2007, 8 days shy of his 71st birthday, Roseville, CA; wife, **Rita Mae**. A native Hoosier, Phil was an RB-47 EWO at Forbes, then at Offutt in RCs. He also served with the 6SW at Eielson, then worked for Lockheed Martin after retiring from the AF.

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TAPS notification of Association members, spouses, friends and associates taking the Big PCS should be sent to Jim Thomas and Max Moore (*see DIRECTORY, page 2 for contact info*).

Please include next of kin and an address and to whom the Association condolence card may be sent; date of demise, age, crew or duty position;

bases and approximate years with 55th; and any other pertinent information.

The news in TAPS is limited by how much and how accurate the given information.



LETTERS AND STUFF



THIS SECTION INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

No choice. No correspondence received since last newsletter. Woe is me, nobody loves (or dislikes) us any more, I guess; at least not deeply enough to write or e-mail. Max.



STRATEGIC AIR COMMAND MEMORIAL PROJECT



Design depiction by Dodds Monuments of Xenia, OH

The SAC Memorial project is an effort by veterans and former component organizations of SAC to erect a monument at the National Museum of the US Air Force Memorial Gardens near Wright-Patterson AFB, OH.

Initial planning and design of the ten feet tall, six feet wide monument, are completed. Site preparation work has been completed, and work on the memorial itself will begin as soon as weather permits this year. It will be finished well in advance of the official dedication set for **2 May 2008**. (See REUNIONS)

The funding target of \$25,000 was readily achieved thanks to contributions of individual SAC veterans, SAC organizations and private sources. **The memorial has been paid for in full.**

For more information, you can e-mail **Ron Resh**, project coordinator at: rreshlegis@aol.com or SACMemorial@aol.com.



Editor's plea: If any members wish to contribute letters, stories, photos and articles, please send them to me. If events occur in your area that you think would be of interest to **the general readership**, mail or e-mail the pertinent details, and include the names of those Association members who attend. **Names are news.** The only way to broaden our coverage is to get input from 'out there'.

Thanks, and *Videmus Omnia*, Max

(Contributions may be edited for content, readability, and spacing.)



ASSOCIATION COINS



Coin shown as actual size

Above is a picture of the coin (1.75" diameter) that was a gift presented to all who registered for the September 2006 Omaha reunion.

They are available for purchase. Make checks payable to the **55th SRW Association**. Send check and mailing instructions to Jim Thomas' home address: 4418 Anchor Mill Dr, Bellevue, NE, 68123. **Coins are \$5 each, plus postage for 1-3 coins...\$1; 4-6 coins...\$2; 7-9 coins...\$3; 10 or more coins – contact Jim for cost and availability.**

You can view a color representation of the coin on the Association website, www.55srwa.org/sales.



MEMORIAL BRICK ORDERS

Dear Fellow Members,

There may still be some **55th** veterans or family members who want to order bricks for the **55th SRW** Cold War Memorial patio in the National Museum of the US Air Force Museum Memorial Gardens, Wright-Patterson AFB, OH, dedicated in September 2003. Over 600 of the bricks have been engraved-to-order thus far.



If you wish to buy a brick, or know of anyone who wants one, **it can still be accomplished**. It is necessary to compile **fifteen or more orders** for the contractor to engrave the additional personalized bricks on-site. Since June 2006, 21 new bricks have been ordered and will be laid this spring.

The cost is \$65 for **each brick**, and the engraving is **limited** to three lines, 13 characters per line including spaces, dashes and slashes (**No periods, commas, colons or semicolons or quotation marks**). Send us **\$100** and you will pay for a **brick** and get **three years' association**

membership dues extension. Add \$65 for any additional bricks.

This is the time to get a brick for your grandchildren and great grandchildren to reflect upon in the years to come.

Make your checks to **55SRW Association**, **tell us exactly how you want your brick(s) to read**, and mail to Bill Ernst, 410 Greenbriar Court, Bellevue, NE, 68005. *VO, Bill*



ASSOCIATION POLO SHIRTS/CAPS

A new batch is on hand, so there are plenty should you desire to purchase same. **Be sure to state the size you want:** S, M, L, XL, XXL, and we can get 3XL if the need arises; and yes, we have sold that size in the past. Anything larger, we have to go to Omar the Tentmaker.

Give a big hint to the family and mayhap some generous loved one will give you one for whatever you have going: Fathers Day, birthday, anniversary.

Cost is \$25 per shirt.

The dual shield logo is on the left front, white with red collar and sleeve trim, navy blue front placket, no pocket. They are 100% combed cotton. The quality is such that there is little to no fading or shrinkage.



The golf/ballcaps sold out at the reunion and were reordered. They are royal blue with the dual shield logo on the front, and an adjustable back strap. **They go for \$7 each.**

The items can be viewed in color on the Association web site at www.55srwa.org, and click on the *Clothing Sales* link.

Anyone desiring to purchase these items can send an e-mail: **Larry Utley** at LarryU1001@aol.com; phone 402-592-6627; or write 1001 Michelle Parkway, Papillion, NE 68046.

There are charges for priority postage to be added to the individual item costs: \$5 for a shirt only; \$7 for two shirts; \$6 if both a shirt and cap are ordered; \$4 for a cap only.

Checks for the full amount of your order should be made to the 55th SRW Association, or to Larry Utley. Either way, the bucks end up in the Association treasury.

One more way to identify with your Association and “show the logo” at appropriate official and social functions, on the golf course, wherever.

Great gifts! The shirts and caps are unisex, so get one for your spouse, significant other, or other family members. The family pet, even.



THE ASSOCIATION TIE

The ‘regimental’ tie is a distinguished blue and red striped design with the **Association’s** dual shield logo prominently displayed in the tie’s center. A fine gold line defines every fourth blue/red stripe.

It can also be seen in color on the web site.

The price is now \$25 each and includes shipping and postage.

Order now! This item is a must have for reunion banquets and other appropriate events.

Larry Utley has taken over the sales of the ties, as well, so he is the sole **Association** haberdasher.



55TH FASHION PINS

As a direct result of newsletter notices, the above pins have sold at a steady pace to **55SRWA** members all over the country.

You will want to acquire one for that special lady in your life to wear on any appropriate

occasion. Gents, it makes a great birthday or anniversary accessory gift. Classy, but inexpensive.



(Shown as near actual size)

The **Association** does **not** sell these pins and receives **no** money. But, as a service for those who wish to possess same: **Erwin’s Jewelers, Frank Kumor**, proprietor, in Olde Town Bellevue, offers them and **you can purchase directly from the store.**

Send requests to 223 W. Mission Ave, Bellevue, NE; or call: (402) 291-2454, or fax to (402) 293-5873 to order the pins. **Costs are \$9 for the pin and \$3 for shipping.**



YOUR 55TH SRW ASSN

WEB SITE

www.55srwa.org

The **Association** web site is an integral and vital part of the Association’s line of communications and information. You are urged to check it out periodically to see updated data and the recent makeover by Webmeister Griffin.

Everything you want to know about the **Association** is there: **constitution, bylaws**; Board members and bios; membership and change of address forms, library, picture gallery, a new bulletin board, and links to other associated and interesting sites.

There is also an archive of many past newsletters for review and research. As examples: the October 2005 issue has an article on the **history of the Association**; the April 2003 and February 2004 issues have all one would want to know about the **55th SRWA’s Cold War Memorial** at the National Museum of the US Air Force in Dayton, OH; and the January 2001 issue tells the **Hall of Fame** story.

Timely info and updates on the next reunion, other events and important bulletins on any projects in progress are posted. Also, there is e-mail traffic on subjects of interest to members.

Webmeister Griffin maintains and regularly updates the site so as not to let it get stale. His team now consists of Jim Maloney, **George Back** and **Gary Percival**.

They are always looking for new and fresh ideas. The most recent of which is the addition of the **Memory Lane** feature whereon members can relate their various memoirs, or “and there I was” stories.

Inputs from members are encouraged and welcome. Send them pictures, war stories, anything pertinent to **55th** history you want to share with the **Association**.

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MEMORY LANE FEATURE

Webguy Grif has created a new feature on the Association web page, labeled *Memory Lane*, which publishes factual, non-fiction stories on **55SRW**, or **55th Wing**, individuals, crews or events. Browse it and you will be pleased at what you view. (*It is the brainchild of Sam Pizzo.*)

You are invited, and welcomed to submit your inputs to Don. If you need some help in getting started, feel free to contact Sam at 985-845-7445, or e-mail at sampizzo@webtv.net.

Some day we may incorporate this feature in issues of the newsletter, or some other publication form.

Take advantage of this opportunity. This is your chance to let the **Association** membership learn of your experiences.

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E – NEWSLETTER

Association members in good standing who so desire can receive the newsletter via electronic transmission. **To get on the members only e-mail roster, send current e-mail address to SAC-EWO@mchsi.com.** Or go to: **www.55srwa.org** for full instructions on how to read and/or download the e-newsletter. **There is an archive of past issues there, as well.**

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REUNIONS

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SAC INTEL REUNION 17-19 MAY 2007 - OMAHA, NE

Former members of the SAC IN, 544th IW and friends will hold a symposium and other presentations at this gathering.

The Embassy Suites Old Market/Downtown is the registration center, but main events will be at Offutt’s Dougherty Conference Center and in Bellevue’s Lied Activity Center.

Bill Doyle is Chairman. He can be reached at yeared@cox.net. For complete details and schedule go to web site SACINTELreunion.com.

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COMBAT APPLE OPERATIONS 11-12 SEPT 2007- COUNCIL BLUFF, IA

The COMBAT APPLE Reunion will be at the Holiday Inn & Suites (adjoining Ameristar Hotel & Casino) Council Bluffs, IA. This will be a joint 82nd SRS and 6990th Security Sqd event. The reunion is planned on the precise dates of the 40th anniversary of the first Combat Apple mission flown by crew S-01 on RC-135M, tail #24135.



Rick Francona, current NBC military analyst and a former Vietnamese linguist on Combat Apple ('70-'71), will be the banquet speaker.

Contact **Robb Hoover**, via e-mail: RobbHoover@aol.com, or Ph: 402-292-6616; or **Tom Tennant**, e-mail: AMStht@aol.com, or Ph: 402-291-3045) for details.

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343rd SRS 2007 REUNION
3-5 OCTOBER 2007-LINCOLN, NE



The Country Inn and Suites is HQ for this gathering of veterans from any era of the “weary crow squadron”. It is easily accessible off I80 in Lincoln. Room rate is \$82, plus taxes.

Banquet and other activity details will be forthcoming.

Project point man is **Paul Dolby**. Contact data is: 1211 Riverside Drive, Huntington, IN, 46750; ph:260-356-1761;e-mail: paul343rdsrs@yahoo.com

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7499th SUPPORT GROUP REUNION
4-8 OCTOBER 2007-WASHINGTON, DC

The Double Tree Hotel in Crystal City, Arlington, VA, is reunion central. It is adjacent to Reagan International Airport and near the Pentagon.

Many former **55thers** served in or were associated with the 7499th SG and the 7405, 7406, 7407, 7580 Sqds at Wiesbaden and Rhein-Main ABs flying assorted “spook air ‘chines” in the Berlin corridors during the height of the Cold War.

This will be the third reunion of the group and **Alan Brown** is the contact guy for more details. He can be reached at 7097 Game Lord Drive, Springfield, VA, 22153; ph: 703-455-38218; e-mail: a-abrown@cox.net. There is also a web site www.7499throupreunions.com

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SAC REUNION
30 APR - 4 MAY 2008- FAIRBORN, OH



The Holiday Inn Conference Center in Fairborn, OH, is the staging area for this reunion.

The main event is the dedication of the SAC Memorial in the Memorial Gardens of the National Museum of the **Air Force** on **Friday, 2 May**. There will be an “under the Wings” banquet in the Museum on Saturday, 3 May.

Ron Resh is a contact for the reunion. Address:10825 Bucknell Dr, Silver Spring, MD, 20902-4325; e-mail: rreshlegis@aol.com

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WHO SHOT WHAT



RC/tower from Offutt web site. All pix from Tales, Ball check donation, Drost, Reggie lounge, award, dinner with Jones and shirt/cap pix by Moore. Ball logo from 55th VA. Phillips, *Homerun*, aircraft and reunion logos from various archives. Crew shot from Stoll. SAC Memorial picture from Resh. Clip Art for various graphics; Assn coins, Cook; bricks from **Jack Kovacs**; tie, Pizzo; 55th pin, **Beth Kelley**.

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(Graphic courtesy of Patricia “copper” Gros’.)



MEMBERSHIP AND INFORMATION UPDATE FORM

Name _____ Spouse _____
Address _____ City _____ State ___ Zip _____
Home Phone _____ Cell Phone _____
eMail Address _____

Are you a prior member or a friend of the 55th Strat Recon Wing? Member ___ Friend ___

Are you a current/prior member or a friend of the 55th Wing? Member ___ Friend ___

When were you a member of the 55th Strat Recon Wing or 55th Wing? _____

Which 55th Unit(s) were you a member? _____

Are you on active duty? ___ If so, with what unit? _____ Rank _____

What is your present occupation? _____

Are you a widow/widower? ___ (*Spouses of deceased members receive free lifetime membership.*)

Please duplicate and send to a 55th Friend/Member.

Return this form with dues, if applicable,
(currently \$10 per calendar year or **\$25 for 3 years**) to:

**55 SRW ASSOCIATION
6441 Avenida De Galvez, Navarre, FL 32566**

