

# Videmus Omnia



## 55<sup>th</sup> STRAT RECON WING ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER SEPTEMBER 2000

### LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Greetings from the midlands. Since our last newsletter, there has been a big turnover in the powers (pardon the pun) in the 55<sup>th</sup>. We have a new Wing King. He is **BGen Greg Power**; a new Vice Commander, **Col "Mac" McLean**; Operations Group CC, **Col Greg Gross**; Deputy Ops. Group CC, **Col Scott Merrow**; and Logistics Group CC, **Col Don Richardson**.

Other changes include a new CC for the 343<sup>rd</sup> RS, **LtCol Mike Prusz**; 45<sup>th</sup> RS CC, **LtCol Jim "Gap" Gapinski**; and Command **CMSgt Vicky Swingal**.

Active duty members on the 55<sup>th</sup> SRW Association Board of Directors have also changed. Replacing **Col Bo Marlin** and **CMSgt Richard Casey**, who each departed PCS, on the Board are **Col Scott Merrow** and **MSgt Steven Haggett**, respectively.

Immediately after then-Col Power came on board, the

Omaha Caucus met with him over a quiet dinner to introduce him to Association local movers and shakers. We gave him a short briefing of our projects, past and present, that support the Wing and which provide close interface between the active duty 55<sup>th</sup> and the Association. To say he is eager to support the Association is a gross understatement.

Our most ambitious project, producing a sequel to **Bruce Bailey's** book, "*We See All.*" received strong and dedicated Wing support. Col Power put the Wing Historian and staff at our disposal to help assemble, scan and select data, and promised support when we are ready to publish.

A separate flyer on that subject was mailed to Association members in September. We need everyone to answer the call for information and materials so we can work quickly and ensure we complete the project under BGen Power's command.

At the end of the evening he suggested that we meet over dinner on a regular

basis, and we met again on 26 September.

We have preliminary designs and are currently awaiting detailed designs for the **55<sup>th</sup> SRW Association Annual Award** which is to be presented to the individual(s), crew or unit each year at the Birthday Ball and/or 55<sup>th</sup> SRWA reunions.

It is our hope that a large permanent trophy will be displayed in a glass case at the entrance of the 55th Support Group Headquarters, and that smaller replicas will be presented to and kept by, those selected. More to come on this as the final design is approved by your Board.

The Association purchased Bruce Bailey's commissioned large painting of the RB-47 with MiG in chase that was on display at the Reno reunion, and is currently on loan to the AF Museum. As soon as the AF Museum ships it to Offutt, the Omaha Caucus of the 55<sup>th</sup> SRWA, and any members desiring to take part in the ceremony, will present the painting to the SAC Museum on behalf of the Association.

The big Open House and Air Show at Offutt on 26-27 August featured the Thunderbirds, Northern Lights aerobatics team, the Red Barons team and the US Army's Golden Knights parachute team, plus the all time favorites, the War Birds. Hope you were there for the two-day extravaganza.

**John Caban** and **Barney Clary** have been busy organizing the next reunion in May 2001 (see following article). Plan your trip early and join us on the beach in Melbourne, FL.

Additionally, **John Kovacs** has already put in yeoman's advance work for the "Recon Rendezvous" reunion 3-6 September 2003 in Dayton, OH, in conjunction with the opening/dedication of the Cold War Annex and completed restoration of the RB-47H.

*Videmus Omnia, Bill Ernst, President*

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## **REUNION MAY 2001 MELBOURNE, FL**

Melbourne (the one in Florida, USA) will be the site of the 21<sup>st</sup> reunion of the **55<sup>th</sup> Strategic Reconnaissance Wing Association May 17-20 2001**. Under the capable leadership of John Caban and Barney Clary, the solid planning for another great gathering with myriad exciting events proceeds apace.

The Holiday Inn Melbourne Oceanfront, hard by

the beach of Florida's Space Coast, will be the venue for the sensational doings. With a grand Hospitality Suite overlooking the Atlantic, 55thers will have the perfect stage and scenery to renew friendships and retell those hot war, cold war, TDY and hanger flying stories once again.

Preliminary planning includes a tour of the Kennedy Space Center; casino and lunch/dinner cruises; shopping trips at a factory outlet mall and in Old Melbourne; the obligatory golf match; and the grand finale banquet. There will also be a membership meeting to elect the Board of Directors and conduct Association business.

A symposium on reconnaissance will address past highlights of the 55<sup>th</sup> SRW and the Air Force Technical Applications Center (AFTAC). The latter agency maintained a global network of nuclear event detection sensors. A B-29 sampling mission, flying out of Alaska in 1949, detected debris from the first atomic test by the USSR. This was an event the experts had predicted could not happen until the mid-1950s. An update of current 55<sup>th</sup> Wing missions will be included.

Commercial flights to Melbourne, the closest airport, are available. A less expensive option for some is to fly to Orlando, rent a car for the 60-minute drive to Melbourne.

Rooms rates are \$79.00 regular, \$99.00 for oceanfront and \$159.00 for suites. (The

latter two are in shorter supply.) Early registrants will be placed in a lottery pool for a drawing at the reunion to receive their room for free. Free is good!

For reservations call 1-800-HOLIDAY (465-4329), or directly to the Melbourne Oceanfront at 1-321-777-4100; fax: 1-321-773-6132; e-mail: [gmmlb@lodgian.com](mailto:gmmlb@lodgian.com). Postal address: 2605 N. Hwy. A1A, Melbourne, FL 32903. Check in 1600 hours, check out 1100 hours.

The per person registration cost for the reunion is being worked out. But, the banquet is estimated at \$25.00 per person. Fees to be charged for other activities are still being computed.

For evolving details and updates visit your Association web site at [55srwa.org](http://55srwa.org).

**A future (est. Feb 2001) Association publication will go to all members with finalized plans, costs, agenda and for actual registration commitments.**

**But, hey troops! DO NOT WAIT for that to make your plans!!! NOW** is the time to mark your calendar, make travel plans for flights, RV parking, and room reservations. This will be one more in the long tradition of memorable 55<sup>th</sup> reunions. **BE THERE!!!!**

*By Barney Clary & Max Moore*

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## RANDOM PHILOSOPHY

Give a man a fish and he will eat for **a day**. Teach a man to fish and he will sit in a boat drinking beer for **many** days.

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## EARLY COLD WAR RECONNAISSANCE 1946-1949

Shortly after World War II, US national leaders recognized that the USSR represented a significant military threat with which our nation was ill prepared to cope. Major deficiencies existed in US capabilities, especially in the polar regions: in military intelligence, operational and maintenance experience, weather, logistics and almost every other aspect of knowledge required for successful air operations in the arctic.

That the arctic provided the shortest routes to Soviet targets meant that polar regions would become critical in any future hostilities, because at that time there was no air refueling.

Other concerns were about unknown, unexplored landmasses. There were no navigational aids in areas of numbing cold, fierce winds and long periods when celestial navigation was not possible. (Navigational errors contributed directly to the loss of mission aircraft in 1947).

Additional unknowns were the effects of extreme cold

on aircraft, equipment and personnel. Survival was to be given a priority in training and operations.

The new mission of arctic reconnaissance was assigned to SAC in 1946. A hastily assembled 46<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Squadron was deployed to Ladd Field, Alaska. Deployment began in June 1946, overcoming nightmarish logistical problems and turmoil among personnel.

The squadron was authorized 250 officers and 1000 enlisted personnel. At no time did it reach authorized strength.

At Ladd Field, except for the squadron commander, quarters were not available to dependents until a few months before the 72<sup>nd</sup> returned to the States. Nor was transportation provided for dependents to join their sponsors at Ladd. But some came and some actually built their own homes in order to have family housing. It was a difficult time for the personnel and their families.

In early August 1946, the 46<sup>th</sup>, under the command of Maj **Maynard White**, commenced its pioneering role in arctic reconnaissance.

The 46<sup>th</sup> was equipped with RB-29s, F-13s (an extensively modified B-29 with no turrets and an increased range provided by enhanced fuel capacity and specialized recon gear) and two PBY amphibious aircraft.

The primary mission (highly classified) was to conduct reconnaissance of the periphery of the Soviet Union from the Sakhalin Islands, north along the Kamchatka Peninsula, the Anadyr area, the Bering Straits, around Wrangel Island to as far as Novaya Zemlya, a known Soviet nuclear test area.

This constituted a huge area for photo, radar, visual and electronic reconnaissance, plus atmospheric nuclear sampling, all of which were accomplished. In addition to a desire to learn as much as possible about Soviet military defenses and capabilities, there was great interest in possible unknown polar landmasses. Thus, coverage of the whole arctic area reachable from Ladd Field was another priority task.

Several ice islands heretofore unknown were located and tracked as they made their way through the permanent ice cap. Exploitation of these mobile islands later became an exciting endeavor. They were tracked regularly until 1949.

A third major effort was mounted at the request of the Canadian government to assist in the photo/radar mapping of their northern lands, a truly vast area, and largely not accurately mapped. Several RCAF officers were assigned to fly on many of the missions involved in the radar and photo mapping of this vast expanse. This task was successfully accomplished and data collected was used

extensively for later defense planning.

Devising and improving polar navigation was another most significant part of the 46<sup>th</sup>'s mission. Grid navigation was developed and refined through use, and became the standard method for flying from point A to point B in the arctic. The 46<sup>th</sup> and 72<sup>nd</sup> were tasked to train aircrews from other units in this new method of polar navigation.

The 46<sup>th</sup> was redesignated the 72<sup>nd</sup> Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron on October 13, 1947 with Maynard White and most of the 46<sup>th</sup> personnel continuing in a seamless change to the new squadron.

Actual survival experiences were documented; films were created, distributed and used for training. Technical studies of the magnetic north pole were conducted, demonstrating the effects on magnetic compasses which, essentially, were useless in polar areas.

Navigation studies were accomplished, published and became invaluable in opening the polar areas to safer flying.

**Commentary by the author:** There were too many instances of individual heroism, bravery and outstanding leadership to single out all deserving individuals in this article. But Maj Maynard White, commander of the 46<sup>th</sup> and 72<sup>nd</sup>, **Maj Charles S. Overstreet**, the second

commander of the 72<sup>nd</sup>; **Capt Frank E. Ferrell**, operations officer of the 72<sup>nd</sup> and later deputy commander; and **Capt Richmond "Dick" MacIntyre**, operations officer of both squadrons; and **Capt Bill Vaughan**, 72<sup>nd</sup> Operations Officer; were a few of the many whose performance was key to mission success and to the history-making accomplishments of their squadrons.

Another totally indispensable individual was **Capt Marvin Sims**, 46<sup>th</sup>/72<sup>nd</sup> maintenance officer. The unit would not have accomplished anything if he had not worked nearly impossible hours improvising the solutions to mechanical problems on aircraft and vehicles alike. It was his dedication that set the standard of no aircraft being lost due to maintenance problems in spite of extremely adverse conditions. He clearly deserves a Legion of Merit.

Other various staff members, aircraft commanders, a stable of some of the best navigators/radar observers anywhere; dedicated and talented flight engineers and photo gunners, superb maintenance and support personnel - including cooks and bakers, motor pool personnel (yes, we had our own) combined to record a very proud chapter in USAF history.

The 46th performed these missions for about 16 months in 1946 and 1947; the 72nd did the

same for some 21 months in 1947, 1948 and 1949.

The 72<sup>nd</sup> earned its "sterling" reputation, to quote **LtGen Nathan Twining**, "in large part due to lessons learned from the 46<sup>th</sup>'s arctic pioneer efforts. Theirs is an enviable record of achievement for which the members of those pioneering squadrons can be justly proud."

*Submitted by John T. O'Connor, a 22-year old radar observer when he joined the 72<sup>nd</sup> SRS in February of 1948. He served with that unit until its return to the lower-US in July 1949. In December 1949 he entered the first electronic warfare officer training program at Keesler AFB, MS. He completed the flight phase of that EWO training at Barksdale AFB, LA. He joined the 55<sup>th</sup> SRW at Ramey AFB, PR, as a raven on Bob Dibbell's crew. From crew duty he moved to staff jobs including Hq USAF. Edited by Ben White*

*More information on the 46<sup>th</sup>/72<sup>nd</sup> Recon Sqds. may be obtained from the following: a) World in Peril by Ken White, Library of Congress #92-61710 and b) The Secret Explorers, pub. 1992 by Fred John Wack. Ed.*

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## **MORE PHILOSOPHY**

Eat right, stay fit, die anyway.

The cure for insomnia is to get more sleep

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## 55<sup>TH</sup> WING MOTTO: WHAT'S OLD IS NEW AGAIN

After the demise of the Strategic Air Command in June 1992, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force decreed that all former SAC organizations (wings, squadrons, etc.) would revert to number designations and emblems that, where possible, would reflect their World War II roots as fighter units.

The 55<sup>th</sup> Strategic Reconnaissance Wing became the generically designated 55<sup>th</sup> Wing, and it eventually adopted as its emblem a variation of the WWII 55<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group's emblem, the blue shield with red stripe in the center with yellow zigzags above and below the stripe. The lower scroll said simply, "55<sup>th</sup> Wing."

Soon after assuming command of the Wing, BGen (Sel) Greg Powers was informed by TSgt Robert Michel, Wing Historian, that the symbol did not meet Air Force heraldry specifications since "55<sup>th</sup> Wing" was never designated as the 'official' motto.

In order to rectify that oversight, three possible mottoes were considered: "Pursuit to Defend," "55<sup>th</sup> Wing," and "*Videmus Omnia.*"

The first was the Fighter Group's but obviously did not reflect the modern Wing. The

second was, well, dull. The third was chosen for its historic and still appropriate nature, was submitted through channels and was recently approved.

So, *Videmus Omnia* once again reigns as the official Wing motto. That should warm the cockles\* of the hearts of 55SRW veterans everywhere (for those who still have cockles). **VIDEMUS OMNIA SEMPER!!** *By Max Moore*

(\* *Although Webster's carries the term "cockles of the heart" and defines it as the 'core of one's being,' it doesn't actually define a heart cockle. Presumably if one has lost his cockles, it does not assure impotence. Ed.*

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## MEMBERSHIP REPORT

As of September 1, the Association had 938 members (an increase of 20 since 31 December) of which 145 are non-dues paying widows.

**Please note that dues are still only \$10.00 per year and can be paid in advance, \$25.00 for three years.**

**As always, the year your dues expire may be found on the envelope in the upper right hand corner of the mailing label. If the year '99 appears on that label, and you do not pay your dues by the end of this year, this will be the last newsletter you receive.**

Any member who has **not** received the Association pin after paying his/her **initial** dues, please contact Errol. Replacement or additional pins can be purchased for \$5 prepaid.

## TREASURER'S REPORT

As of 1 September, the Association had cash assets of \$13,087 of which \$5,374 is invested in a CD. *By Errol Hoberman, Treasurer and Membership Chairman*

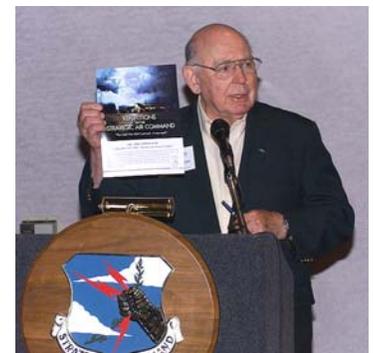
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## DID YOU KNOW?

The world's termites outweigh the world's humans 10 to 1.

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## REFLECTIONS ON THE STRATEGIC AIR COMMAND A SYMPOSIUM, PART OF SAC 2000 REUNION JULY 14, IN OMAHA



General Russ Dougherty, USAF (Ret), opened the symposium with a heartfelt

greeting to a nostalgic group of SAC veterans who were gathered to reflect upon the days of sacrifice and the days of triumph. Sounding the theme of "The Cold War didn't just end, it was won!", Gen Dougherty went on to pay tribute to SAC and its people.

In the keynote address **Gen Dick Lawson**, USAF (Ret), brought the group to their feet cheering as he recalled the magnitude of the success of the Cold War victory and the dedication and sacrifices it took to pull it off. "It was SAC, its men and women, and its glorious vision that brought down that wall!"

SAC leadership and the performance of its men and women in all fields never faltered under the most trying conditions. There was never any doubt in the minds of the adversary that SAC was ready and prepared to prevail at all costs should the US be challenged, Lawson stated.

"What made that happen? It was the vision, the vision we all had, of being able to prevent conflict. Deterrence worked. No one would dare directly confront US military might," said Gen Lawson.

**MGen Earl Peck**, USAF (Ret), recalled his SAC days after having started his career as a fighter pilot. "The overarching quality of SAC was its professionalism. It was the hallmark of SAC, which eventually permeated the entire Air Force, and which led to our

victories in Desert Storm and the air war over Serbia.

He concluded with a ringing endorsement of the view, recently propounded by **LtGen Mike Short**, that the one great distinction between USAF and all other air forces was our tanker force. "Those tankers are the enablers of global reach," he said.

**MGen Chris Adams**, USAF (Ret), long time SAC veteran and chief war planner as the JSTPS/JP, reflected upon the Soviets based upon his 23 trips to the former USSR and Russia in the 1990s. He said that Americans and Russians might not look too dissimilar, but the systems under which they separately labored were profoundly different.

Russians' viewpoints were shaped early in life and did not admit such Western values as open inquiry. The transition out of the wreckage of that 'evil empire,' he said, is yet to be determined.

Air University has published General Adams' monograph "Inside the Cold War." A complimentary copy may be requested by calling Air University (Preston Bryant/EmilyAdams)1-(334)-953-4924

Five members of the Sixth Grade class from St. Isidore's Elementary School in Columbus, NE, presented "*Vigilance for Peace-The Story of the Strategic Air Command*," a 10-minute video produced by the students as their entry in the National History Day

competition. The St. Isidore team won its regional competition and was selected to go to Washington, DC, for the national finals. The excellent presentation earned the students a standing ovation from SAC veterans and contributed to a feeling of confidence in the qualities of midwestern youngsters.

**Dave Webber**, a long time Omaha television personality, entertained the group at lunch with stories from his service as a member of the SAC Elite Guard in the 1960s. Dave was a Security Police dog handler in Libya early in his Air Force tenure, where he learned about the art of bonding with a forlorn canine. He was later selected for the Elite Guard at Offutt AFB, NE. The professionalism that was the hallmark of that outfit indelibly marked Dave. He was, he said, so fortunate to have learned early in his adult life about doing your best every day.

**BGen Russ McCarthy**, USAF (Ret), told about his continuing research on Linebacker II, the December 1972 bombing campaign against Hanoi and Haiphong that forced the North Vietnamese back to the Paris conference table and led to the release of our POWs.

Gen McCarthy was awarded the Air Force Cross for his Linebacker II missions as an Airborne Battle Commander.

He introduced to the audience **John Mize**, another of

SAC's Air Force Cross awardees for Linebacker II, and **Bob Certain** and **Jim Condon**, B-52 crewmembers who were shot down during Linebacker II and became POWs.

General **McCarthy**, recalling his days as a Division Commander at Blytheville AFB, AR, also introduced his former aide then-captain, now **LtGen Bob Hinson**, STRATCOM Vice Commander.

Highlights of **LtCol Mark Conversino's** paper "*In Defense of Curtis LeMay*" were presented by **Robb Hoover**. Published in *Strategic Review* in the spring 1997 issue. The paper presents a vigorous defense of Gen LeMay against revisionist writers such as Paul Lashmar and **Richard Rhodes**. Conversino demonstrates that, through highly selective quotations, lifted out of context, that Rhodes attempted to create a caricature of Gen LeMay.

Gen **Dougherty** described a discussion he had with Gen LeMay about the fire bombing of Yokohama and Tokyo. Gen LeMay had passed through the area after landing at Haneda Airport en route to join the USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay for the surrender ceremony in September 1945. Gen LeMay noted that the remains of small machine shops, etc. could still be seen among the burned out houses, thus confirming his belief that these residential areas were populated with small

factories working for the war effort.

**CMSAF Jim McCoy**, USAF (Ret), led a discussion by SAC's Senior Enlisted Advisors (SEA). He recalled that the term Command Sergeant Major, in his opinion, would have been a title preferable to SEA. The CINCSAC, however, pointed out that 'Sergeant Major' was an Army term. Chief McCoy said he countered to CINCSAC that so were the ranks general, colonel and major.

He also noted that one of today's new chief master sergeants told him that today's youngsters 'scared' him. Chief McCoy pointed out that 20 years ago, the new chief would have been a member of that Air Force group of youngsters who scared the hell out of McCoy. They were the ones back in '79-'81 who referred to McCoy and the senior NCO leadership as 'lifers.' But most of you turned out all right, he told the young chief, and most of today's youngsters will too.

**CMS Charlie Reynolds**, USAF (Ret), related his experience out on a B-47 flight line in 1954 trying to emulate the superb performance of his first crew chief. Chief Reynolds served 25 years in SAC. "We are," he said, "proud and protective of that."

He recalled that after he retired from the Air Force, he had a supervisory job in Saudi Arabia and he had to field appeals from subordinates. When he suspected they were

trying to 'buffalo' him, he would don his jacket with the big SAC patch. When they saw that SAC emblem they knew that their only hope was in top-notch performance and that excuses would not carry the day.

**CMSAF Sam Parrish**, USAF (Ret), reminded the audience that the ops tempo of today, though demanding, was not equal to the pace of Vietnam and an earlier era. He also related a staff fight as SEA for the maintenance and missile troops. They couldn't stop in fast food restaurants in their normal duty uniforms, i.e. fatigues. This imposed a substantial burden and penalty on them as compared to the HQ's staffers whose daily uniform provided no such impediment. After prolonged negotiations 'common sense' finally won out.

**CMS Dan Cook**, USAF, (Ret), saluted the performance of SAC troops during Desert Shield/Desert Storm. He recalled having three Thanksgiving meals in one day while visiting in country. He also talked about the impact of change as the B-52 evolved to a standoff weapon system. Gunners became ever more difficult to justify. Despite the magnificent history of the gunners, their position was eliminated. He personally felt the anguish of that collision of tradition with the requirements of today. CMS Cook said that

he spent 10 years in SAC, and it was all too short.

Former Chairman JCS, and USAF Chief of Staff **Gen David C. Jones**, USAF (Ret), recalled his days as Gen LeMay's aide. He said that Gen LeMay required him to listen in on all of his telephone calls and to sit in on his briefings.

Jones said one of the interesting things about LeMay was that he never told anyone how to fix something. He always made sure that they understood what was wrong and what needed fixing. In his direction to his commanders, he was specific on what he wanted done, but he never told them how to do it.

LeMay instituted a policy that the wing commander had to personally deliver a preliminary verbal report to him within 24 hours of a flying accident. One such commander spent much of his explanatory time moaning about how unlucky he was. Gen LeMay told him, "I don't differentiate between the unlucky and the inept."

Gen Jones also recalled a trip to Lockbourne AFB, OH, where he heard a particularly impressive briefing from a lieutenant about a special initiative program at that base. Gen LeMay turned to his aide (Jones) and said, "Get me some captain's bars." Jones said he found the nearest captain and borrowed a set. Gen LeMay then took the bars and personally pinned them on the

surprised officer. He said, "Congratulations, Captain," and walked away.

When word of CINCSAC's action reached the Pentagon, a Personnel colonel called SAC and instructed Jones to tell LeMay "he can't do that." Gen Jones said he told the colonel, "He's in the next room if you'd like to tell him." There was a long pause, and then the colonel sputtered, "Well,.....tell him not to do it again."

*By Robb Hoover. Edited by Ben White and Max Moore*

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## LOOKING AHEAD TO DAYTON 2003

The Association's Board of Directors has resolved to hold a reunion in Dayton, OH, the weekend (Thursday to Saturday) after Labor Day 2003. This reunion is intended to coincide with the opening/dedication of the Cold War Annex to the Air Force Museum near Wright-Patterson AFB, OH.

Association members will be urged to make it official at the reunion meeting in Melbourne, FL.

The "queen", or centerpiece, of the exhibit is to be an RB-47H, tail number 4299, which flew operational strategic reconnaissance missions for the 55th SRW at Forbes AFB, KS, in the 1960s. Restoration of the ol' bird is well under way.

**John ('Jack', 'Ernie') Kovacs** is our man in place and he has been formulating and coordinating reunion plans. He also keeps the Board updated on the progress of the renovation and is in frequent contact with **MGen (Ret) Charles Metcalf**, Air Force Museum Director.

The Museum may decide to "co-sponsor" the reunion, which possibly will grow to include other reconnaissance units, such as U-2 and SR-71 veterans.

More on this at the Melbourne reunion membership meeting and in future newsletters. *By Max Moore*

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## CARDS & LETTERS

I was a brand new first lieutenant when I received orders transferring me from a bomb wing to the 55<sup>th</sup> SRW at Forbes AFB in Topeka, KS. The Cuban crisis had ended and I was assigned to the 338<sup>th</sup> SRS. As was the custom then, newer personnel "gained experience" (read: were tested) in the RB-47 by flying long-range weather recon missions.

During one daily commander's call in the squadron mission planning room, the commander asked the wing navigator, **LtCol "Smokey" Slover**, how many mission ready navigators were in the 55<sup>th</sup>. I will never forget his answer: "34 and **Lt O'Hara**." I was crushed, then learned I had drawn the short

straw and was to fly with the Wing DO. That DO was **Colonel Rafferty**, nicknamed "Iron Mike" for his reported tendency to absolutely eat copilots and navigators.

On the day of the flight, Col Rafferty finished his preflight and asked me if I was Irish. I answered, "Yes, sir."

"Well, are you any good? Again I answered, "Yes, sir." He replied, "Well, we'll see."

The flight was uneventful with almost total silence from Col Rafferty, except for a few pointed questions aimed at me.

The next day, I reported to the squadron mission replot room with a few other navigators when LtCol Slover approached me, grinning and says that Col "Iron Mike" Rafferty had stated at the standup briefing last night that when he flies, you are his navigator. I met this announcement with mixed feelings and amid audible sympathetic groans from the other navs.

Col Rafferty and I flew perhaps six or seven more times together and the flights were always enjoyable. Though I flew many hours in recon after those early days, but at night, when it's quiet, I can still here those words echoing....."34 navigators and Lt O'Hara."

*Sent by Bill O'Hara*

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Greetings, Ben.

Four members of a 55<sup>th</sup> crew from 47 years ago had a little reunion in Ft. Walton Beach, FL last month (February, 2000). This was **George Penfield's** crew. The members were **John Marks**, **Tex Piwetz** and **Rufus West**. The couples had dinner with John and Julene Marks 25 Feb 2000. *Sent by Rufus West*

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## T A P S



**Robert D. Abraham**, died April 26, 2000. Former RC-135 navigator in Command Support Airlift Division of 55<sup>th</sup>. Wife: **Geri**, Seattle, WA.

**Neil C. Brown**, died May 26, 2000. RB-47 crewmember at Forbes AFB. Wife: **Rita**, San Marcos, CA.

**Betty Callahan**, died September 10, 2000. Widow of **Robert "Ben"**, an intell officer in the 55<sup>th</sup> at Forbes AFB, Survived by daughter **Susan Goldsmith**, Topeka, KS.

**John F. Cota**, died unknown date. Wife: **Florence**, Denver, CO.

**John E. Craig**, died June 19, 2000. Wife: **Camille**, Ripley, TN.

**Vollie (Gene) Griffin**, died March 3, 2000. A raven on RB-47s at Forbes in the 50's. Also on detachment staff at

Incirlik AB, Turkey, in early 60s. Wife: **Bonnie**, Mesa, AZ.

**Cecil D. Johnson**, died Sept 21, 1999, the 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his B-24 bailout over Belgium. Flight engineer, 24-year Air Force veteran. Wife: **Simone**, Albany, GA.

**Fred J. Kildron**, died April 23, 2000. Buried with honors at the Natchez Military Cemetery, Wife: **Anne**, Natchez, MS.

**Gary Lorenzen**, died March 13, 2000. AFA Class of 1976. 343<sup>rd</sup> SRS EWO at Offutt. Taught physics and navigation at AF Academy. Buried at the AFA, CO. Wife: **Debra**.

**Bob Mayer**, died Jan 12, 2000. 343<sup>rd</sup> SRS navigator at Forbes in mid-1950s. Wife: **Rose**, Omaha, NE.

**Ferman E. O'Rear**, died May 31, 2000. Played an important role in establishing Big Safari program. Piloted RC-135E.

**Tom Richardson**, died April, 30, 2000. Navigator in RB-47 and RC135s. CO of 6988th at Yokota AB, Japan. Wing Executive officer of 55<sup>th</sup> SRW at Offutt. Survived by daughters **Mary Richardson Hiatt** & **Janelle Richardson Kerr**, and son **Thomas H. Richardson**. Dallas, TX.

**Dennis Ryder**, died March 27, 2000. Pilot of RC-135s in mid-70s. Served as ops officer at Athena AB, Greece, in mid-80s. Flew B-52s in Linebacker II in Vietnam. Wife: **Sarah**, Charlotte, NC.

*Members are requested to provide information on deaths of members or former members of the 55<sup>th</sup> SRW for inclusion in newsletters. The editors are limited in the amount of information published by the amount provided. Ed.*



### **55<sup>th</sup> WING BIRTHDAY BALL**

The 55<sup>th</sup> Wing 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Birthday Ball is slated for 24 February 2001. Although that date coincides with the activation of the 55th Reconnaissance Group in 1947 at MacDill Field, FL, the Ball celebrates the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary the stand up of the 55<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Group at Hamilton Field, CA, in 1941. The current Wing's heritage started with that event.

The preliminary theme is "Silent Partners" and will be focused on recognizing those maintainers and acquisitions folks who have aided the Wing so ably over the decades.

Co-project officers are **Maj Don Curran** and **Capt Mark E. Stratton** of the 45<sup>th</sup> RS. Association President Bill Ernst and Board member Max Moore serve on the committee

The gala affair returns to Harvey's Hotel in Council Bluffs where two previous Balls were held with up to 800 attendees.

The Association's Board of Directors urges as many members who can to attend this

function to interact with the active duty troops of the current Wing. There are generally between 80-100 Association members who attend each year, many traveling in from around the country. The Ball, and other activities slated for that weekend, become a mini-reunion unto itself. And, as always, it is held in the best of military traditions and pomp.

Invitations are usually sent out thirty days in advance of the event. If you do **not** receive one, but **wish to attend** the Ball, contact 55<sup>th</sup> Wing Protocol at 205 Looking Glass Road, Offutt AFB, NE 68113, phone (402) 294 5797; or let Bill Ernst, Robb Hoover or Max Moore know and they will insure that one is sent to you right away. See you there.

*By Max Moore*



### **TOO BAD, SO SAD**

Sam Pizzo is very depressed. He recently went to the doctor who refused to write him a prescription for Viagra. Said it would be like putting a new flagpole on a condemned building. *(This is a joke. Ed.)*



Light travels faster than sound. That is why some people appear bright until you hear them speak.



### **55<sup>TH</sup> SRW ASSOCIATION CONTACTS**

#### **Business/Policy/Reunion and Recommendations:**

President Bill Ernst  
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#### **Association & Wing History**

Vice President Robb Hoover  
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#### **Membership Dues/Change of Address**

Treasurer Errol Hoberman  
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#### **Newsletter Articles/Letters:**

Secretary Ben White  
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*Information for the TAPS section of newsletters on the passing of Association members, their immediate family members (spouses and children), should be sent to both Bill Ernst and Ben White. Please include date of death, next of kin and an address to which the Association condolence card may be sent; and, if known, crew position, squadron, time period(s) with Wing, etc.*



## LATE LETTERS OF INTEREST

Dear Errol,

We just had a wonderful Big Safari Reunion 2000 in Dallas, TX, in September at the DFW Hyatt. A nonprofit, unincorporated Big Safari Association was formed, and I was elected as Treasurer/Membership Chairman. Bill Ernst, chaired our meeting for the Symposium and the formation of the association.

We have set up a web page and Barry Kibbe was elected to be webmaster. The web page is: [www.BigSafariAssociation.org](http://www.BigSafariAssociation.org).

We now have over 150 charter members, but we need to get the word out that an association has been formed.

Our dues are \$10 per year, or \$25 for three years. Many 55<sup>th</sup> SRW Association members will want to join us as the Big Safari umbrella encompasses all the user organizations, as well as the corporate organization that design, test and deliver the weapon systems to the users.

We had a lot of people who joined at the Reunion, so we are getting a wide cross section already.

My address is: John C. Reynolds, 4448 W. Beach Dr, Greenville, TX, 75402

My e-mail is: [jreynolds@903internet.com](mailto:jreynolds@903internet.com).

Regards, John

### *Post script:*

The Big Safari Association Board of Directors:

President: **Jack Cooke**

V- President: **Wade Whitaker**

Secretary: **Mark Bigham**

Treasurer/Membership

Chairman: **John Reynolds**

Webmaster: **Barry Kibbe**

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### *Response from Errol to 55<sup>th</sup> SRW Association members:*

I'm one of the charter members of the Big Safari Association and attended the reunion. The Symposium included briefings on Office Boy; a Senior Year update; and the early years of the RC-135 recon operations in the Fightin' Fifty-Fifth.

Future plans for the Big Safari Association's are a reunion in the Washington, DC, area in about 18 months, and joining us for a "Recon Rendezvous" in Dayton at the Air Force Museum in September 2003.

**Bill Ernst and I encourage you to join The Big Safari Association.**

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Dear Bill,

While visiting 4299 today, the supervisor of our project mentioned that the goal to finish the restoration is March 2003, if not before. (That's the first time I've heard a "finish by" date.)

The new building is in the solicitation-for-bid stage, last I heard from the General.

The new Cold War annex may end up being part of one of the present buildings (rumor has it), and that it is a possibility due to the AF not funding the moving of the B-36. The museum staff would apparently have to take out a wall of the present building the B-36 is in, to move it into the new building. So they may rethink all their positioning. Shouldn't affect our plans or us. (I wouldn't even try to figure out the movement of all those planes....it's one thing to say: one goes here and one goes there. But to actually move those things around.....wow.) The new annex will still be built.

I saw the instruments and panels they cannibalized from the B-47 at Bradley Field. They are really in good shape, mostly because the old aircraft was positioned so the sun didn't bleach them.

I took a couple of snapshots and in a week or so I'll e-mail them to Don for the web site if he's interested.

I found out today that there was another organization waiting to jump on our dates for the Holiday Inn, (*in September 2003*) if we had declined them.

Cheers Jack

*Received via e-mail from John Kovacs.*

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