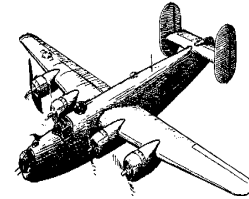


Plane Talk



The Eighth Air Force Historical Society
Virginia Chapter Newsletter

<http://www.8thaf-virginia.org>

VOLUME 20 ISSUE 1

July 2013



Greetings From Your President:

On Saturday, April Sixth we had another very educational and entertaining luncheon meeting at the Stonehenge Country Club in Richmond. John Payne brought Jack Carver along to tell us about his experience in the 25th Infantry under George Patton. Jack was able to give us some first hand information on how his branch of the service slugged it out across Europe.

This year marks the 20th Anniversary of the Virginia Chapter, 8th Air Force Historical Society.

As we wrote in a previous issue of Plane Talk, when Chris Bowers decided to delve into a way to honor his and other Virginia Fathers who served in the 8th AF, little did he know it would grow to the number that it did and last this long. It all started with a meeting of ten Vets that Chris got together and by Fall the group had incorporated. A year later, Jesse Pitts, with the help of his wife Monique, put out the first issue of *Plane Talk*. We wrote the foregoing in our last *Plane Talk*, but perhaps it is appropriate to repeat it

Our next luncheon/meeting is scheduled for August 24th and we will hold our Christmas meeting on November 23rd. Perhaps the August 24th get together can be a special "Thank Chris Bowers" meeting. Chris, try to save that day for the Chapter.

Again, I close by saying, "LET'S KEEP 'EM FLYIN'!"

Lew Burke

WE NEED YOUR STORIES AND PICTURES! WE WANT TO KEEP *PLANE TALK* INTERESTING AND NEED YOUR HELP. PLEASE SEND YOUR STORIES AND PICTURES TO THE EDITOR.

OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS

OFFICERS

Lewis E Burke, President

5287 Ellicott Drive
Centreville, Va. 20120
703-631-0510

smokesignallev@aol.com

Robert V, Gates, Vice President

P.O. Box 352
Dahlgren, Va. 22448
540-663-3068

robgates@va.metrocast.net

Paul L Adams, Treasurer

11813 Coolwind Lane
Richmond, Va. 23233
804-360-9620

padams@accubanc.com

Anne B. Royster, Secretary

7913 Southford Place
Chesterfield, Va. 23832
757-870-1673

lithses@aol.com

DIRECTORS

A.J.Z. Firestone

5 Templewood Drive
Hampton, Va. 23666
757-826-1161

zekes18@verizon.net

James E. Harvell, Jr.

11200 Misty Hollow Road
Midlothian, Va. 22901
804-744-1764

MASTERS OF THE AIR

It's reported that Tom Hanks and Steven Spielberg will produce a 10 hour HBO series on the Mighty Eighth Air Force. The series will highlight the Mighty Eighth Air Force and its crucial role in World War Two. It's reportedly going to be the most expensive production in the history of television costing 500 million dollars. It will be based on the book Masters of the Air by Donald Miller, professor of history at Lafayette College. Miller did research at the National Museum of the Mighty 8th Air Force. While much of the filming will take place in Germany and England, some is also planned for Savannah.

Tom Hank's production team arrives in October. The Mighty Eighth was the greatest air armada the world has ever seen. Out of its 350,000 members, 26,000 were killed in action. And 28,000 became prisoners of war.

DAHLGREN HERITAGE MUSEUM TO OPEN

The Dahlgren Heritage Museum, a community-supported Navy museum, is planning to open in October. The initial exhibit will focus on two key developments in naval aviation by the Navy in Dahlgren, Virginia.

The featured artifacts are a Norden bombsight, which was developed and tested at Dahlgren, and the propeller from the first unmanned aircraft that flew at Dahlgren in 1924.

More information concerning the museum can be found at the museum website: www.dahlgrenmuseum.org.

WAKE UP CALL

By Thomas Lee Creekmore

Early in the morning of April 19, 1945, aircraft of the Eighth Air Force were assembling into twelve plane formations and then into thirty-six plane formations. This was happening all over England before each bomb group joined the one thousand or more aircraft leaving England to bomb targets in Germany. This assembly of the formations is a busy and tedious time for the pilots but not so for the rest of the crew.



I was taking a nap in my plane, XK B, when I became weightless and hit the top of my radio room. Immediately afterward, I hit the floor with a thump. This was repeated until I could grab the leg of my radio table and hold on until our B-17 resumed normal flight. Over the intercom, I soon learned that our twelve plane formation had flown into another twelve plane formation and it was up to each of the twenty-four flight crews to take what evasive action was necessary to save their airplane along with its crew.

About twenty-five years ago, I went to the National Archives in Washington, D. C., in hopes of finding out what squadron of aircraft we had tangled with. Our Major Cook reported the following on our return from the mission:

“At 7:44 a.m. at 5,000 feet over St. Albans, we flew together with a squadron from the 91st bomb group.”

I checked the 91st records and learned the 91st did not fly any missions on April 19. Over the years, every lead I got turned up nothing.

In 1995, I received a letter from the pilot that was flying deputy lead that day and here is what he told me:

“Cook was asleep! Really. His co-pilot kept looking right! Never left hence the mess. Yes I was on Cook’s right wing and saw the airplanes COMING. In fact radioed him as such but no response!! He was asleep. Yes. I pulled out of the dive at 264 MPH and stripped lots of rivets under base of wing. We came close to ground 50 feet or so.”

On March 29 of this year I got some information that the 398th Bomb Group had an encounter with another group of planes on April 19, 1945. It was another false lead in that the mishap was later in the day and not in the early morning. About two years ago, I located a man that I graduated with from high school and we have been e-mailing regularly. I knew that he flew co-pilot with the Eighth Air Force’s 398th Bomb Group so I asked him if he flew on April 19. When he told me he did, I asked him if he remembered the encounter with other airplanes early that morning. This is part of what he told me:

“I remember that my pilot was flying off of the right wing of the plane we were in formation with and could not see the formation that was at exactly the same altitude as ours. I grabbed the yoke of my plane, N7 B, at the last second and put most of my crew on the top of the fuselage as I dived to miss the plane coming straight at us.”

My high school friend, Lew Burke, had the historian of the 398th send me the mission report for April 19. In part, this is what is in the report.

“Assembly was made at Debden buncher at an altitude of 5,000 feet from 0703 to 0739. Some difficulty was experienced on the Wing assembly. On the Wing assembly route in the vicinity of Ware the Wing was flying slightly south of route and the 40th CBW was apparently flying north of their route, with the result the A/C of this group became dispersed. Reassembly was made on course.”

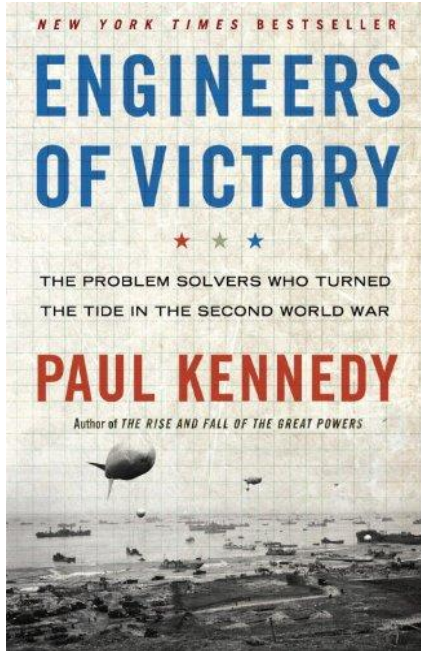
The lead pilot of Lew’s squadron, Newt Moy, is living in Colorado. I have spoken with him several times of late. He recalls that the mishap was in cloudy conditions and bright sunlight. He had to peel off to the right to avoid other aircraft.

There were approximately two hundred guys flying with the two squadrons that day and the four mentioned in this story are the only ones we know that are still living.

Tom Creekmore and Lew Burke were classmates at Washington and Lee High school. They were interviewed by John Kelly of the Washington Post and featured in his column on 18 April 2013. The painting that accompanies this article is by Paul Rendel, a well known aviation artist, and was commissioned by Creekmore.

“... THE COSTLIEST MISTAKE MADE BY THE AAF IN WORLD WAR TWO”

Paul Kennedy, in his new book Engineers of Victory, describes how groups of problem solvers came together to address five critical military-operational problems in the middle years of the Second World War. One of these problems was winning control of the air.



The Eighth Air Force flew its first missions into Germany in January 1943. Other missions were flown to Germany during the remainder of the year. There were significant losses on these missions even with fighter escort for a good part of the way. Then came the mission to Schweinfurt and Regensburg on 14 October 1943. Of the 291 B-17s that left airbases in England that day, 60 were lost and 138 were damaged as they were attacked by wave after wave of German fighters.

These losses – 20 percent – were not sustainable and missions were restricted to short range targets for the remainder of the year.

The official history of the AAF in World War II (by Craven and Cate) says:

“By mid-October 1943 the daylight bombing campaign had reached a crisis. Its cost had risen alarmingly while its successes remained problematical. The assumptions underlying it therefore came up for reconsideration. ... The fact was that the Eighth Air Force had for the time being lost air superiority over Germany. And it was obvious that superiority could not be regained until sufficient long-range escorts became available. ...[C]learly, also fighter range would have to be extended.”

The Army Air Force was depending on the P-38 and P-47, both of which were a match for the Messerschmitt Bf 109 in the air, but they were too short-legged to escort bombers throughout the longer range missions. The original Allison-powered P-51 was designed as a low altitude interceptor and performed that mission well. However, it was not a great performer as a high altitude, long range escort.

The RAF Fighter Command had received its first batch of P-51s and wasn't sure what to do with them. Before canceling their order, they asked Ronnie Harker, an RAF liaison test pilot for Rolls-Royce Engines, to fly a P-51. He confirmed its performance at low to medium altitudes as well as its limitations at higher altitudes. He observed:

“The point which strikes me is that with a powerful and good engine like the Merlin 61, its performance should be outstanding, as it is 35 m.p.h. faster than a Spitfire 5 at roughly the same power.”

Five Mustangs were refitted with the Merlin 61 engine and two were sent to the United States for AAF testing.

The result, as described by the official AAF history, "... came close to the costliest mistake made by the AAF in World War II."



Some of the leaders of the AAF were committed to the P-38 and P-47 and didn't accept the claims of the superiority of the P-51. There were also objections from the Air Force procurement office and rival manufacturers. Anti-British and "not invented here" sentiments were displayed by some key members of the Air Production Board.

Pressure was brought by Churchill (through a variety of emissaries) and a small group of mid-level individuals. This group included Robert Lovett, the Assistant Secretary of War for Air, and Tommy Hitchcock, Assistant Air Attaché in London (who privately lobbied his neighbor Eleanor Roosevelt). When Jimmy Doolittle assumed command of the Eighth Air Force, he immediately pressed for Mustang squadrons.

The re-engined P-51 went into production but air superiority was certainly not regained because of a single "wonder weapon." Drop tanks, for example, greatly increased the range of all allied fighters. Round the clock bombing by the AAF and the RAF and an emphasis on integrated targeting of key strategic targets in the Third Reich were also critical. The result was the decimation of German fighter squadrons. When Mustangs were observed flying over Berlin in broad daylight in mid-1944, Goering is reported to have said "We have lost the war."

There were many more missions to be flown in 1944 and 1945 and many more losses, mostly from flak, but the introduction of the P-51 Mustang changed the air war in Europe.

ANNOUNCEMENT

We are having our next meeting and luncheon on August 24th at Stonehenge Golf and Country Club in Chesterfield. The meeting will start at 11:30 with lunch at 12:30.

This is the second meeting scheduled for 2013. This is a great opportunity to see and talk with fellow vets and 2nd Gens. As always, Stonehenge Golf and Country Club will serve a great lunch.

The Chapter will pay for lunch.

James Harvell needs to give the club an approximate head count a couple of days in advance so that they can plan. Please give James a call at (804) 744-1764 if you plan to attend. He can also give you directions if you're not sure how to get to Stonehenge Country Club.

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