



# DR AHEAD



THE AIR FORCE NAVIGATORS OBSERVERS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

VOL 35, NUMBER 1

LITTLE RIVER, CALIFORNIA

JANUARY 2019



USAF photo from public commons release by AF/PA. Of note is that WSOs/EWOs and navigators were flight crew members in the F-4, F-105 and KC-135 in this USAF photo. Photo provided by Ron Barrett.

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by John D. Bridges, James Connally 63-19

By the time you are reading this issue of **DR AHEAD**, a new year has arrived! **HAPPY NEW YEAR!**

Hopefully everyone has recovered from the Thanksgiving and Christmas festivities. My hope and prayers are that all of you stay safe and healthy throughout this New Year and beyond.

As the years pass it becomes painfully clear that "time" is a personal enemy to each of us and to organizations such as **AFNOA**. Please continue to reach out to prospective new members. Also, if you are not receiving **DR AHEAD** electronically, please consider doing so as the savings over the mail cost will help to extend our organization's life.

Thank you to everyone making donations, purchasing the **AFNOA** Navigator History thumb drives, and making plans to attend our next reunion in Branson, Missouri, in September 2019.

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## HISTORIAN'S REPORT

by Ron Barrett, James Connally 63-06

From 24 September to 26 September 2019 we will be experiencing our biennial "All Navs-All Types" reunion at Branson, Missouri. We say "all" because we as navigators have been variously called many names by our beloved USAF. No matter—we have all flown missions important to keeping our nation free. And now we continue as CSOs! Whatever we are called...

Branson, Missouri, will provide us a place to laugh and enjoy each others company in many ways. One unique and historical great way to enjoy our reunion will be to take a side trip to Eureka Springs, Arkansas, to see the Aviation Cadet Museum. It takes less than an hour to drive from Branson down to the Aviation Cadet Museum. Added to the Aviation Cadet Museum itself is Eureka Springs. A fun tour for both family and friends.

Of great historical note to all is the museum's T-29C navigation training stations. Duck below the D-1 sextant

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Name _____													
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Address _____													
City _____													
State/ZIP _____													
Home Phone _____													
Work Phone _____													
Cell Phone _____													
E-Mail Address _____													
Base Name/Class Number _____													
<p>Send a Tax Deductible \$15.00 Annual Membership check payable to <b>AFNOA</b> to:</p> <p>Dennis Ehrenberger, <b>AFNOA</b> Treasurer                  2783 Glenview Drive                  Sierra Vista, AZ 85650-5734                  Telephone: 520-378-1313</p>													
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46-55	\$150.00	70-79	\$50.00										
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<p>If you are currently a member, GREAT! Please consider a donation to the operating account, grant fund, or both. If you are not a current member, please consider joining and giving a donation to the organization. Thank you.</p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td>Membership</td> <td style="text-align: right;">\$ _____</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Donation to Operating Account</td> <td style="text-align: right;">\$ _____</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Donation to Grant Fund</td> <td style="text-align: right;">\$ _____</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total Amount Enclosed:</td> <td style="text-align: right;">\$ _____</td> </tr> </table>		Membership	\$ _____	Donation to Operating Account	\$ _____	Donation to Grant Fund	\$ _____	Total Amount Enclosed:	\$ _____				
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**DR AHEAD**

**DR AHEAD** is the official publication of the Air Force Navigators Observers Association; a non-profit, non-political organization dedicated to maintaining the peace and security of the United States of America and a spirit of comradeship among all Aerial or Surface Navigators, Observers and Bombardiers who are serving or have served in the U.S. Air Force or its predecessors, The United States Marine Corps, The United States Navy, The United States Army, The United States Coast Guard, or any of the predecessor organizations of these service organizations, or persons closely affiliated with navigation in any capacity on a case-by-case basis. TENOA, the forerunner of **AFNOA**, was organized by Clarke Lampard, Ellington Class 50-D, in 1985.

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Inside the T-29 trainer at the Aviation Cadet Museum, before the radar scopes were put in.  
 Photograph by Errol Severe at the Aviation Cadet Museum.

**Continued from Page 1**

in the ceiling, take a seat at the radar station, turn the APN-9 Loran knobs, and have a smoke! Yes, the ash trays are still there! Some still had butts in them when the fuselage arrived! See Errol Severe's T-29 interior photo herewith.

Of note is that no matter if you were OCS, ROTC, early AF Academy, or off the street Aviation Cadet recruit, you trained in the T-29 from mid 1950s to the early 1970s. The T-29C/D was "the" navigator trainer for both navigators and bombardiers during the hot times of the cold war.

Although most of the WWII and thereafter USAF leaders had come into flying through an aviation cadet program, there is not much documented anywhere but here at the Aviation Cadet Museum about that period. Still to this day, the greatest numbers of USAF flyers by count were aviation cadets. The best history about the USAF Pilot aviation cadet program is Errol Severe's *The Last of a Breed* (on sale at the museum).

The Viet Nam veterans (Yes, the country's name was two words in the SEA theater) will relate well to the F-100C (two seater) and F-105F/G aircraft in the Museum and the dual F-105F/G cockpit that you can climb into.

"Buff's Buddy" F-105F/G is open in the hangar with

the names painted on it of the F-105 pilots/EWOs/WSOs lost in Viet Nam. The historical total of F-105s lost in Viet Nam was almost 400 aircraft. Early on in the war, the F-105 cadre was flying over 70% of the bombing missions. The F-105s at the museum are a historic tribute to the CSO cadre of today. It makes one sober up to drop into the WSO/EWO seat. Brave fliers!

We will set up a navigation history table at the reunion in September 2019. Bring anything you want to display. The rather technical, but comprehensive, history of the AF and of navigators and bombardiers is the AFNOA-created, Ronald P. Barrett-edited, Air Force Navigators Comprehensive History (AFNCH).

The AFNCH is an 11,000+ page comprehensive compilation of historical navigator materials, 51-40s, class room/course booklets, photos, and navigation manuals: all scanned and digitally placed onto a 4 gigabyte USB thumb drive as pdf files. The time period covered is from the Wright brothers to year 2000.

To get an AFNCH thumb drive donate to AFNOA 5-1.C.19 treasurer and I will send you a drive. The USB thumb drive will run on any computer with a USB port or adapter.

Remember, the top jet ace from the Viet Nam war was USAF WSO/navigator, Charles B. DeBellevue with six victories.

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**479th STUS AIRMEN PROVIDE HURRICANE RELIEF**

by William J. O'Donnell, 2LT, USAF  
and Jessica Beauregard, CAPT, USAF

Air Force students who will eventually deliver support from high in the sky have begun lending a hand to their countrymen long before they are scheduled to graduate from combat systems officer training. More than sixty students and instructors from the Air Force's 479th Student Squadron at Naval Air Station Pensacola, Florida, broke from their day-to-day routine last month to help people whose schedules, homes, and lives have been shattered. The students, turned disaster response volunteers, contributed almost 700 man-hours to Hurricane Michael relief. Dozens deployed immediately after landfall and assisted with damage assessments, debris removal, and supply distribution.

"Despite having lost nearly everything, Panama City's citizens welcomed us with kindness and appreciation," said 2d Lt Ethan Baker, a combat systems officer student.

Some of the volunteers traveled through blocked roads, while citizens lacked fuel for their vehicles under a strict curfew. Others used chainsaws to remove trees from victims' houses. Within the first two days, one group spent 156 man-hours distributing supplies to victims and fellow volunteers. Also, thanks to the Airmen, the distribution centers were able to function seamlessly despite growing demand for life-saving supplies such as food and water.

"As more and more residents emerged from their homes, supply lines were pushed to the limit," said Baker. Although the Air Force volunteers have helped many relief

organizations and countless families so far, they continue to deploy to further the relief effort. Demand for aid is high, and one thing has remained very clear to all those that volunteered—there is much more work to be done. As the reconstruction process continues, more and more volunteer opportunities become available, and there are more and more ways to help.

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Temporary help for the roof (top) USAF photo by LtCol Russell Klawitter. Water distribution USAF photo (above) by Capt Kendahl Jackson.

**THE 2019 REUNION**

by Jim Faulkner, James Connally 64-04

**The Dates —**

September 24, 25, 26, 2019

**The Hotel —**

Radisson Hotel Branson  
120 South Wildwood Drive  
Branson, MO 65616

**The Hotel Rate —**

\$103.00 +Tax per night, including breakfast.

**The Tentative Reunion schedule —**

Final cost and registration information will be in the April 2019 and July 2019 issues of **DR AHEAD**. Note that some classes are planning to hold mini-reunions.

**TUESDAY, September 24**

Hospitality room opens for registration — 2:00pm  
Social hour — 5:30pm to 6:30pm  
Dinner buffet — 6:30pm

**WEDNESDAY, September 25**

Board of Directors meeting — 7:30am to 9:00am  
Membership Meeting — 9:30am to 1200am  
Social hour — 4:30pm to 5:30pm  
Plated meal — 5:30pm  
This concludes the formal part of the reunion.

**THURSDAY, September 26**

**The Aviation Cadet Museum Tour**

**Thursday, September 26 at 8:30am —**

Welcome to the one and only live one-man show to entertain and teach the history of the men who built the air arm of this nation. Errol D. Severe was a member of Aviation Cadet class 61-E, graduating as a pilot from Vance AFB in January of 1961. He went on to work for Delta Airlines and retired as a 727 Captain in 1985. Captain Severe is one of, if not, the foremost authority on the Flying/Aviation Cadet program in the world. He wrote the *Last of a Breed*, the only book on the entire Flying/Aviation Cadet program. You will not only be entertained by his wit and knowledge, you will be able to sit in the cockpit of a Vietnam era F-105 F/G Wild Weasel aircraft which actually served in Vietnam during the war.

You can enter the forward section of a Convair T-29 flying classroom used to train our navigators. This is the only original display of its type anywhere. When we have groups, we will launch the space shuttle (at least a video of an actual launch) while viewing the actual firing room consoles used at Cape Kennedy. We also have an Air National Guard F-16 simulator that you can view. We have an autogyro built in Arkansas. In our "Plane Pen" we have a complete F-105 F/G, T-34, F-5, F-100 and a T-33 all on display. As you can see, this is not a dry "museum," it is

an entertainment center which has pleased most all who have been here, men, woman, and children.

The bus leaves for Eureka Springs, Arkansas, at 8:30am and will return at about 2:00pm. Cost of the tour is not calculated yet, but it will include a \$15.00 admission charge by the museum. Drink machines available, but no snack bar.

**The Dixie Stampede**

**Thursday, September 26 at 4:15pm —**

The Dixie Stampede is an extraordinary dinner show with thirty-two magnificent horses and a cast of top-notch riders. They will thrill you with daring feats of trick riding and competition, pitting North against South in a friendly and fun rivalry. You will enjoy a barrelful of music, dancing, special effects and family friendly comedy along the way. Celebrate as the North and South join together in a patriotic salute of Red, White and Blue featuring Color Me America, written and recorded by Dolly herself. The Patriotic Grand Finale soars with flying Doves of Peace, luminous costumes and fireworks, reminding you of the pride and spirit of America.

We will have tickets available for a group rate to the dinner and show. If enough people are interested in renting a bus, it will be scheduled to leave the hotel at 4:15pm.

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**MEMBERSHIP**

by Jim Faulkner, James Connally 64-04

AFNOA has two types of memberships available:

- LIFE** based on age, reasonable rates (see page 2)
- ANNUAL** \$15.00 per year

What do you get for your AFNOA membership?

1. **DR AHEAD** newsletter, 4 issues per year. Please keep us updated on address and e-mail changes.
2. **BIENNIAL REUNIONS** on odd years, next in Branson, Missouri, September 24-26, 2019.
3. **ROSTERS** available on request via e-mail in Excel:
  - A. AFNOA—4,050 located +10,000 deceased
  - B. James Connally—6,400 accounted for
  - C. Harlingen—5,500 accounted for
4. **GRANTS** are available for projects supporting navigation programs.
5. **NAVIGATIONAL HISTORY** and past issues of DR AHEAD are available on a thumb drive
6. **WEB SITES**
  - A. AFNOA website: <http://www.afnoa.org>
  - B. NAVIGATIONAL HISTORY website: <http://www.usaf-nav-history.com/>
  - C. CONNALLY-HARLINGEN website: <http://james-connally.org>
7. **QUESTIONS** call Jim Faulkner at 580-242-0526 or e-mail to [jfaulkner39@suddenlink.net](mailto:jfaulkner39@suddenlink.net)

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**B-58 Hustler with Richard Weir at age 101, whose name is painted on the aircraft. Photograph provided by Jim Conner.**

**RICHARD WEIR, Lt Col USAF**

by Jim Conner, Mather 69-12

This photograph was taken in October 2018 of Lt Col Richard Weir USAF ret when he was 101 years old. It is the B-58 Bomber that was placed on static display at Kelly Field with his name as navigator on the side. This is the same aircraft that he planned the mission for and flew to break the speed record in 1960. It was the world's first supersonic strategic bomber. He was at Edwards AFB in California and flew as part of a select crew during the record-breaking flight which established three world records for speed—the first time in the 33-year history of the competition that it had been won by a bomber crew. His B-58 was the first United States bomber to fly twice the speed of sound (Mach 2).

Richard's amazing flight was a secret at the time—during the Cold War—because the idea was to have a bomber that could fly all the way to Moscow with bombs if Russia attacked us first. To make the record a realistic one, the plane had to carry a full load of bombs, filled with enough cement to simulate the exact weight the bombs would have if they were armed with explosives. Richard said with a laugh he was glad they never had to test the theory that his bomber could penetrate that far into Russia, drop the bombs, and get back out again without being shot down; it didn't sound totally plausible to him.

At the beginning of his career during WWII he and his crew ferried airplanes overseas to our allies—delivering airplanes for fourteen months—landing in Italy, India, North Africa, Sicily, England, Russia, and more. At the end of WWII Richard was sent to Calcutta in India where his C-54 crew was given a list of bases to fly to and check for liber-

ated American prisoners of war who had been held in Japanese prison camps. They picked up POWs and flew them to designated recovery bases. At the end of WWII he transferred from the Army Air Corps into the Army Reserves.

In 1949, General LeMay was increasing his nuclear forces to match the Russian buildup. Richard was recalled to active duty from the reserves and he was assigned as a navigator to a B-29 crew. One year later the Korean War was starting and Richard's B-29 squadron was ordered to Yokota, Japan. From there combat missions against North Korea were flown. After 55 such missions, Richard was assigned back to the United States.

From that duty he went to reconnaissance in a RB-47 and was stationed at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio. Richard and his crew made a spy flight over Russia in 1954 in that plane. He also made reconnaissance photos of atomic bomb explosions in Nevada.

In January of 1959 he transferred to the B-58 and was with that plane until 1967, making his famous record-breaking flight in 1960. The same crew won the SAC bombing competition that year.

He next was stationed at Wright-Patterson AFB in Ohio with the Systems Programs Office where he worked on the Aeronautical Development Program for the F-111. He was sent back to Edwards Air Force Base in California in 1969 for flight testing F-111 avionics until he retired in 1975.

Richard's decorations include the Distinguished Service Medal, the Distinguished Flying Cross, five Air Medals, the Presidential Unit Award and the Air Force Outstanding Unit Citation. He lost all of them and his uniforms in the fire that destroyed their home in 2013.

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**RECOLLECTIONS OF D-DAY**

From the perspective of a Squadron Navigator  
in the 556th Bomb Squadron  
of the 387th Bomb Group

by William V. McBride, Coral Gables 43-01

Several years ago, I attempted to write about our D-Day mission. The years have dimmed many of the facts and advanced age has probably enhanced my imagination. Nevertheless, after reading some of the recollections of a few other members of the 387th Bombardment Group—most of them accurate—I thought it may be useful to complement their views while I am still able to do so.

When I originally drafted this brief paper, the purpose was solely to share my experiences with members of my family in a personal and private manner—and for that reason, I actively sought comments from other 387th crew members who flew on D-Day that would make the paper more accurate or more complete.

I saved my navigation log/flight plan of the D-Day mission—and it has been helpful in refreshing my memory of the events of the day. The original log has been framed for at least forty years—and I hesitate to remove it as it must be fragile and may fall apart. However, I have had copies reproduced within the frame—but the quality is not as good as I would prefer. I believe the flight plan, to include the route, planned times and actual times are accurate—however, the marginal remarks on the log reflect what I thought I observed, yet after reading other historical accounts of the overall activities of D-Day, it is now clear some of my observations may not be accurate.

I joined the 556th Bomb Squadron at Station 162, Chipping Ongar in Essex, in early August 1943—several days before the 387th flew its first combat mission. I was a young (21), inexperienced second lieutenant navigator/bombardier on a replacement crew and not a member of the original cadre.

By the spring of 1944, almost all of the remaining original crewmembers of the 556th had flown at least fifty-plus missions. A few had already completed a tour of sixty-five missions and rotated back to the States—but for the most part, the 556th Bomb Squadron was a combat experienced unit and highly effective. We had good leadership and I was proud to be a member.

By early May 1944, it was evident D-Day was approaching. Our targets began including many of the marshalling yards and railway centers connecting the German anti-invasion coastal defenses with the troop and logistic centers in the enemy interior. Many of our missions at the time were against V-Bomb launching sites being constructed near the northwest coast of France. These sites, which were called “Noball” targets, were later to house low-level flying rockets aimed at the London area. None were launched until several days after D-Day—probably a tribute to the accuracy of B-26 bombing. By the middle of

May, the group was daily bombing highway and railway bridges across the Seine from Le Havre to Paris—and by D-Day, few, if any, of these bridges were standing. The Marauders, among other Ninth Air Force aircraft, had effectively isolated Normandy and Brittany from other German forces by 1 June.

At this time, I was the Squadron Navigator of the 556th Bomb Squadron—and as such, most of my missions then were as a lead crewmember. One or two days before D-Day, selected members of the lead crews were informed that the hour was near. We were briefed on the general target area, how our group would fly the mission, and then, although we did not have much useful information, all briefed crewmembers were restricted to base. This was not a burden—and it was readily accepted by all. As I remember, the only members of our crew who were briefed were Major Glenn Grau, our Squadron Commander, and Lt. Carl Cooper, the Squadron Bombardier and me. In my opinion, Grau and Cooper were the best in our Group and I was very fortunate to be teamed with them.

In England in June, the days are very long and the nights are short. During dusk on the evening of 5 June, it was apparent preliminary operations for the invasion were already underway. From our airbase at Chipping Ongar, we could see large formations of troop carrier aircraft (C-47s) beginning to form in the west. This was a very unusual sight—and we knew it could only mean one thing. It was apparent to all the night of 5 June was going to be very short.

I was awakened shortly after midnight on the sixth and told to report to Group Operations. It was common practice for the lead navigators to assist the Group Navigator in preparing the final flight plans to be used for crew briefing and the mission. The planning for this mission was somewhat more complicated than others for several reasons. First, the weather was poor. We had intermittent rain showers throughout the night—and a forecasted low ceiling would not permit the group to form underneath. Consequently, the decision was made to climb to altitude by single aircraft in trail and form the group on top of the overcast. Second, it was clear that a night take-off would be required. This alone didn't pose a very difficult problem, however almost all of our combat missions were flown in daylight—and our pilots had little experience in taxiing-out from their hard-stand positions at night and finding the correct position for taxi and takeoff, particularly if there was precipitation. The third factor in our planning was that our group was directed to drop our bombs at a relatively low altitude of 5,500 feet—rather than the standard altitude of 10,000 to 12,000 feet. This altitude was selected because of the forecast cloud cover and low ceiling over the target. I do not believe our bombardiers had dropped bombs from this altitude since they were in bombardier school, and in addition, it was generally believed that at this relatively low

PILOT MAJOR GRAU  
 PLANE AT MCBRIDE  
 FLIGHT LT COOPER  
 TIME 6:12  
 DATE 6-6-44

START ENG 0404 ✓  
 TAKE OFF 14 ✓  
 TAKE OFF 24 43  
 DR COURSE 32 50  
 REMARKS 1000

COAST OUT  
 COAST IN  
 I.P.  
 TARGET  
 COAST OUT

POSITION		CH	ETA	ATA	TC	DR	TH	VAP	FLH	DEV	ALT
PC	TC										TEMP
			0456		172	+4	176		186		3000
			0508								7000
			0535		190	+6	196		206		12000
			0555		266	+8	274		284		
			—		246	+9	255		265		
49°43'N	01°17'W		—		181	+6	187		197		
49°34'N	01°20'W		—		189	+7	196		206		
49°27'N	01°12'W		0620		148	+11	149		159		
49°13'N	01°36'W		0637		234	+9	243		253		
49°40'N	02°30'W		0642		308	+2	310		320		
BILL OF PORTLAND			0655		003	-6	357		007		
DORCHESTER			0700		003	-6	357		007		
RAVESEND			0710		067	-7	060		070		
BASE			0748		352	-4	348		358		

00 FEET	290	6-12
10 FEET		
20 FEET	300	28
30 FEET	320	32
40 FEET	320	35
50 FEET		

REMARKS  
 COAST OUT  
 COAST IN  
 I.P.

TARGET  
 COAST OUT  
 COAST IN  
 BASE

FLIGHT RECORD

SUPPORTING 1st ARMY

SCR  
 DEL  
 CON  
 ST

0552 COAST IN 0652  
 0607 TIME 0740  
 0610 PLD. ALT. 12500  
 0613 LIND. FUEL ALT. 5000  
 0619 TARGET ALT. 5500

ALTITUDE 5500  
 HEADWIND 180  
 AIR SPEED 185  
 TIME 2620  
 RESULTS GOOD

TIME	GS	TO	RUN		
		DISTANCE			
180					
184	193	20	06	0438	
180				0452	
193	206	48	H	0533	
180					
219	198	42	13	0545	
219	204	25	7	0552	
85					
225	248	60	N	0607	
90					
232	253	10	3	0610	
85					
225	258	12	3	0619	
95					
237	230	23	6	0619	
90					
232	194	51	15	0634	
220	194	58	18	0652	
210	190	14	5	0657	
210	218	132	36	0733	
210	186	20	7	0740	

REMARKS

NIGHT TAKEOFF, ON INSTRUMENTS

THROUGH STRATUS AND CUMULUS

CLOUDS FROM 1000' TO 10600' AT

FRANCON, DUE TO WEATHER FORM-

ATION WAS FAIR, GUNFIRE FIRST

SIGHTED AFTER LEAVING ST CATHERINE

POINT, CHANNEL FULL OF TRAFFIC

NAVY SHELLING COAST, DESTROYED

SEEN WITH DIRECT HIT SINKING

THREE BOMBERS SEEN TO EXPLODE OVER

TARGET, GLIDERS AND PARACHUTES

VISIBLE ON GIBBERING PENINSULA

FAAR OVER ET, LIGHT FLARE,

INTENSE, MODERATE TO ACCURATE

DIVERSION  
 COMPLETE

WATER TANK  
 BREACH LOCK  
 TREETOP  
 SPEARHEAD

CH. LIGHT b z  
 FLARE P c  
 BOMBERS RG BRR  
 ET OF WIND  
 BOMBERS  
 BOMBERS TO BOMBERS

WATER TANK  
 BREACH LOCK  
 TREETOP  
 SPEARHEAD

2000 FIGHTER

altitude we would be very vulnerable to German anti-aircraft fire.

Most of the briefing information was routine and standard, but there were a few exceptions. One exception was that if any serious mechanical difficulty was encountered after leaving the English coast, or if serious battle damage was received, the crew should continue into France a practicable distance and bailout. Under no circumstances should any aircraft turn back to England, as many additional aircraft would be heading south at different altitudes and a single aircraft going the wrong direction could easily disrupt the formations of follow-on bomb groups. We were also informed any aircraft flying north in this part of the Channel should expect to be considered hostile by our Allied naval gunners. Special attention was also focused on the high probability of the German Air Force using their fighter force in a maximum effort to try to stop the invasion.

We were reminded of the need for tight crew discipline, with emphasis on close formations and no radio transmissions.

The mood and reaction of the aircrews during and after the briefing were unique. There was a quiet excitement because the day to invade had finally arrived, and we knew this was the most important mission to date. We had been waiting for this mission. However, there was also silent apprehension on the part of each crewmember. We knew this had to be a successful mission—but all recognized the weather conditions were unfavorable at home base and over the target—and it was well understood we would be operating at an altitude where we had no combat experience, only limited training, and we would be very vulnerable to enemy fire.

It was maximum effort for the 387th—and the group prepared 54 aircraft with spares for the mission. Although I am not positive, I believe Joe Whitfield, Commander of the 557th Bomb Squadron, led the first group of eighteen, Glenn Grau, Commander of the 556th Squadron, led the second group, and I do not remember who led the third.

While waiting in the aircraft for “start engine” time, it was clear the local weather was deteriorating. It was dark and the light rain showers continued. During this quiet wait, a jeep drove up to our aircraft and one of the Group Operation Officers (either Lt. Col. Smith or Major Walker) climbed into the wheel well with additional instructions. We were told the weather over the target would probably be worse than briefed—but our instructions were to bomb our assigned targets no matter how low the ceiling became. In other words, there were to be no weather aborts.

My log indicates we started our engines on time—but our take-off was delayed some nineteen minutes. I cannot explain the delay—but I suspect it was directed by Group Operations because of the local weather after we had taxied out. Other members of the 387th have told me that a change in the wind direction required a last minute change

of the takeoff runway. This delay alone did not compromise the mission as a forty-minute orbit at Friston, a weak navigational aid enroute, had been built into the flight plan to insure adequate time for forming the group. This was very fortuitous, for we needed every minute.

After take-off we climbed on instruments through the weather to Gravesend and then on to the low frequency splasher beacon at Friston. We were on instruments throughout the climb and encountered moderate turbulence and light ice.

As I reminisce, the climb to altitude may have been the most dangerous part of our mission. There was no air traffic control. Each aircraft navigated solely by flight plan and there was no practical way to do accurate navigation. On instruments, it is quite disconcerting to know you have aircraft seconds ahead and seconds behind you. Occasional prop wash in the dark night was a constant reminder of that fact. Radio transmissions were not permitted for obvious reasons. The skies were full of aircraft. Within a two hour period, every Allied combat-ready aircraft stationed in Essex and East Anglia from more than 250 airbases was climbing to altitude on different routes through the same overcast in a space approximately the size of New Jersey.

Our rendezvous altitude was 12,500 feet and as I recall, we broke into the clear about 10,000 to 11,000 feet. The sky was becoming light in the east, but the sun was well below the horizon. There was a full moon directly overhead which did give some useful light. As we orbited at Friston, there was mass confusion. All lead aircraft used different color flares to help form the group, but it was very difficult for each joining aircraft to find the right place in the right formation. My log indicates we spent twenty-seven minutes at Friston—0508 to 0535—and during this time we were in a small racetrack pattern attempting to find our lead eighteen aircraft and trying to attract our own aircraft into our formation. The distinctive tiger-striped tail was very helpful, but I would not be surprised if we had some B-26s from other groups in our formation. While we orbited, the daylight became stronger and visibility slowly improved.

My log indicates we left Friston two minutes late on a westerly heading to Selsey Bill, which was only forty-two miles away. I cannot explain why we were about ten minutes late at Selsey Bill—although we did have exceptionally high headwinds. For this reason, the formation cut the corner short at St. Catherine’s Point and headed south toward our target area. Along the English coast, we had a solid undercast, however we could see some breaks to the south over the channel. When we turned south toward the Cherbourg peninsula, our formation started to descend, hoping the breaks in the layers of stratus clouds would permit us to do it in formation. Fortunately we were able to accomplish this primarily due to the airmanship and lead-

ership of Whitfield, Grau and others—and my hat is off to all of them. This was no small feat! When we reached our assigned altitude of 5,500 feet we were below the cloud level, the air was relatively smooth, but the visibility was somewhat restricted by a dark gray haze. By this time, the heavy naval traffic in the channel was visible in all directions—the firing of guns from Allied warships and German coastal defenses slowly became visible. We were able to identify the northeast tip of the Cherbourg peninsula five to ten miles to our west and this permitted us to get an accurate heading for our target area.

As we approached the target, a number of landing craft were about a thousand yards out heading for the beaches—and the firing of coastal guns became more evident.

Our target complex was several coastal gun batteries on Utah Beach about two hundred yards from the coastline. We had been provided pictures of the target area at our briefing, but our specific target was very difficult to identify—and the existing low visibility made it exceptionally difficult. Nevertheless, Carl Cooper, our bombardier, did his usual outstanding job and we reported good results. My log indicates we dropped our bombs at 0620—seven minutes late—but well before the “drop dead” time of 0630.

As we made landfall and crossed the target, we expected fighters and flak. However, we encountered no fighters—and the ground fire was unexpectedly light and only moderately accurate in comparison to many of our prior missions. We had no losses in the 387th—but many aircraft were damaged. As briefed, we continued to head south some twenty-five miles before turning west over the channel to the Guernsey Islands and then north to return to base. While over the Cherbourg peninsula, many of the gliders and parachutes our airborne troops had left only a few hours before were clearly visible.

We landed back at Chipping Ongar at 0748—eight minutes late. We immediately went to debriefing—and to the nearest radio to try to get reports on what was happening on Utah Beach and elsewhere. We then started the cycle all over again. We were immediately briefed for the second mission of the day—but this was scrubbed because of adverse weather over the target after we had taxied to the take-off position.

\*\*\*

*Ed Note: General William V. McBride retired as Air Force Vice Chief of Staff.*

\*\*\*\*\*

## **OF POSSIBLE INTEREST**

by Bill Wilkins, Ellington 52-09

Renowned and respected war correspondent Ernie Pyle landed with American troops at Oran, Algeria, as the North African campaign began in October 1942. He lived,

walked, rode, ate, slept in foxholes, tents, and on open ground with the troops through a brutal winter of battles, defeats, and finally victory in Tunisia in the Spring of 1943. His account of all of that is collected in *HERE IS YOUR WAR: STORY OF G.I. JOE* published in 1943. It is a record of war in the raw. His firsthand knowledge of why air superiority was “a wonderful thing,” necessary for victory, will be of special interest to **DR AHEAD** readers. The book is richly illustrated by the wartime drawings of Carol Johnson.

Poignantly, he writes on page 288 “...someday Private Lorenze and I will take off our shoes and lie in the grass in (a friend’s) back yard and tell him about all our narrow escapes on Hill 428...” But Pyle was killed by Japanese machine-gun fire on Ie Island, just west of Okinawa, on April 18, 1945.

A friend found a copy of the book in a thrift store and recommended it to me. I was able to borrow it from the San Antonio Public Library. If it hasn’t been handed down to you from your parents or grandparents and your public library doesn’t have it, it is available online for from about \$4.00 up.

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## **NO REGRETS...**

by Nellie Gilles of Radio Diaries

On Aug. 6, 1945, the United States dropped an atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. It was the first time a nuclear weapon had been used in warfare.

There were three strike planes that flew over Hiroshima that day: the *Enola Gay*, which carried the bomb, and two observation planes, the *Great Artiste* and the *Necessary Evil*. Russell Gackenbach was a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army Air Corps and a navigator on the mission. Today, the 95-year-old is the only surviving crew member of those three planes.

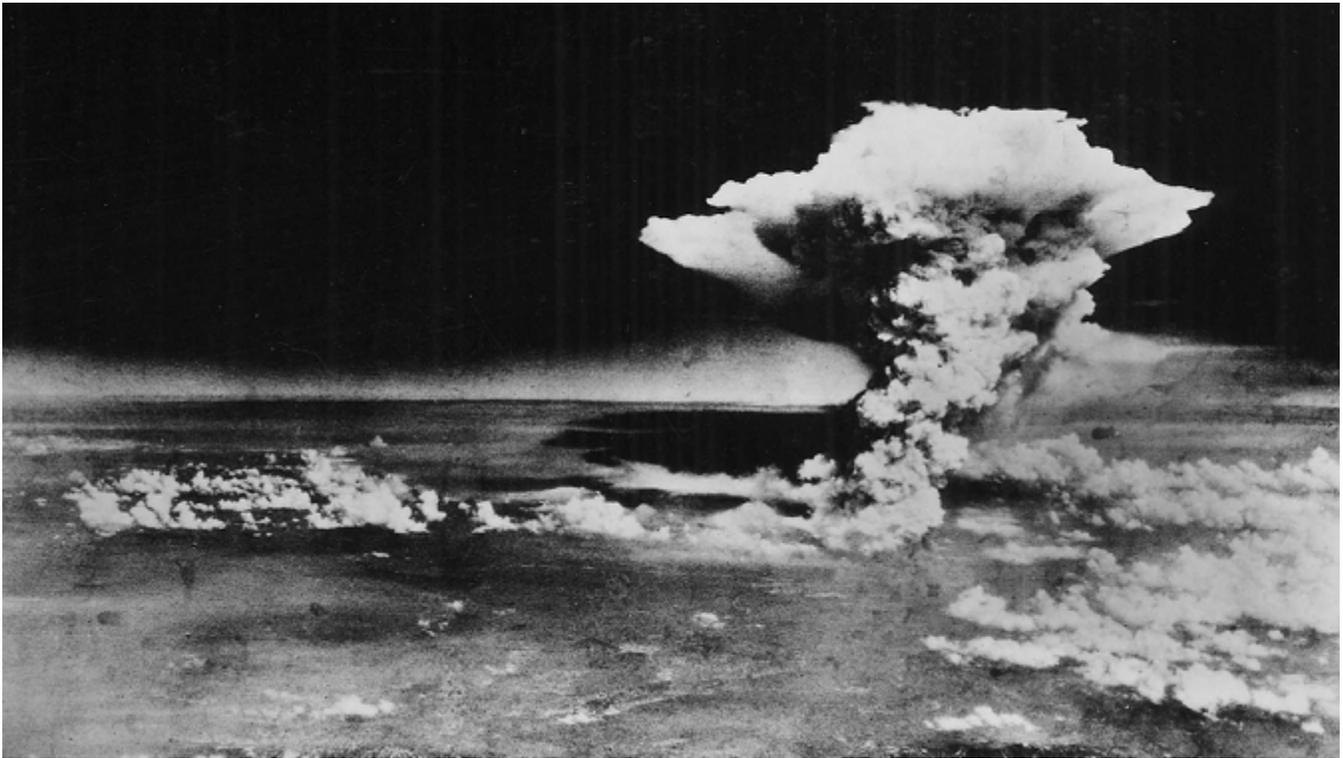
## **Preparation**

Gackenbach enlisted in the Army Aviation Cadet Program in 1943. After completing his training, he was approached by Col. Paul Tibbets, who was recruiting officers for a special mission. Tibbets said it would be dangerous but if they were successful, it could end the war.

The 509th Composite Group, lead by Tibbets, spent months training in Wendover, Utah, before being shipped off to an American air base on the Pacific island of Tinian.

Their planes were reconfigured B-29 Superfortress bombers. They had different engines, fewer guns and a larger bomb bay. The *Enola Gay* carried the weapon, nicknamed *Little Boy*. It weighed nearly 10,000 pounds and could produce an explosive force equal to an estimated 15,000 to 20,000 tons of TNT.

But at the time, Gackenbach didn’t know any of this.



Smoke from the Hiroshima fires, August 6, 1945, several hours after detonation.

Photo provided by NPR

"I never heard the words *atomic bomb*," he tells Radio Diaries. "We were only told what we needed to know, and keep your mouth shut."

### The flight

The planes took off around 2 a.m. on Aug. 6, 1945. Gackenbach was part of the 10-man crew that flew on the *Necessary Evil*. "We were told that once the explosion occurred, we should not look directly at it, that we should not go through the cloud," he says. "We were not told anything about the cloud, just [told] don't go through it."

As they made their final approach to Hiroshima, they were flying 30,000 feet over the city. Then, the radio went dead: that was the signal from the *Enola Gay* that the bomb had been released.

The first thing Gackenbach saw was a blinding light and then the start of a mushroom cloud. He got out of his seat, quickly picked up his camera and took two photographs out the navigator's side window. The plane circled twice around the mushroom cloud and then turned to head home. "Things were very, very quiet," Gackenbach says. "We just looked at each other; we didn't talk. We were all dumbfounded."

The casualties on the ground were staggering. An estimated 80,000 people were killed instantly. Another 80,000 died from effects of the bomb in the months and years following. Hiroshima was destroyed. Three days later, the U.S. dropped a second atomic bomb, on the city

of Nagasaki. And on Aug. 15, Japan announced its surrender, bringing an end to World War II.

Gackenbach was discharged in 1947 and went on to work as a materials engineer for 35 years. In 2011, he returned to Japan to visit the Hiroshima Peace Memorial. "After 73 years, I do not regret what we did that day. All war's hell," he said. "The Japanese started the war; it was our turn to finish it."

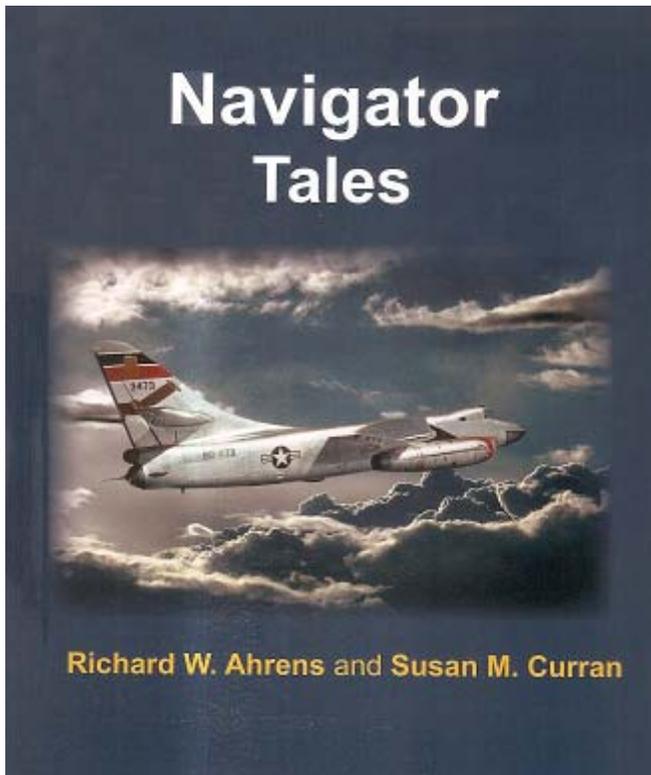
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*This story was produced by Nellie Gilles of Radio Diaries along with Joe Richman and Sarah Kate Kramer and edited by Deborah George and Ben Shapiro. Special thanks to the Atomic Heritage Foundation. This story is part of an ongoing series from Radio Diaries and NPR called Last Witness, which features portraits of the last surviving witnesses to major historical events. Send us your ideas for the series by using the hashtag #LastWitness. To hear more stories from Radio Diaries, subscribe to the podcast at [www.radiodiaries.org](http://www.radiodiaries.org).*

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**WHO ARE THEY?**

by Ray Uribe, Harlingen 57-19

This is a Christmas mission that I flew in support of the B-52s, finally destroying Hanoi. I'll backtrack one week. On December 18, 1972, I was on reconnaissance flying out of Okinawa. Our missions were normally 16 hours and 48 minutes, almost to the minute. I was Nav I on that particular crew. All our missions were supposed to be, or were scheduled to be, or agreed to be, radio silent. You never heard so much radio chatter in your whole life as up in the gulf area just east of Hanoi. Mostly navy flyers coming and going.

It was night time. We observed two B-52s get struck by missiles. We followed up, trying to determine where they went down and coordinate with search and rescue for any survivors of those aircraft.

Forward to Christmas Eve night the next week, and we were on a similar mission. Again, the radio silence was not. We were still dodging naval aircraft, naval fighters, and we did not see any of the B-52s get hit. We flew our normal mission. We did what we were capable of to conduct coordinated missions with the helicopters and the SAR.

After we got back to Okinawa on Christmas morning and were going to our normal debriefing, they took us to a new area that we'd never been into before. It was kind of like a vault. They opened that up and led us in there. There were six very long tables with black and white pho-

tographs covering every inch of them. We were asked to please go down each one of those tables and look at each one of those photographs very carefully. If we could identify any of our B-52 crewmen, if we knew who those people were, to let them know who that individual was.

I asked, where did all these photographs come from? They said French photographers got the film to us that they had taken during the previous week. I thought initially it was the B-52 flights that we had that night, but it wasn't.

I didn't see anybody that I recognized until finally there was an underclassman of mine at Harlingen. He was in really good shape. There were two photographs. One showed a young Vietnamese lady with a big hat and a very old weapon with a long sticker on the end of it, prodding him upstairs into a hut.

The next one showed him with other B-52 crew members, standing at attention in a courtyard—I guess at the Hanoi Hilton. So I was able to identify one individual so that the North Vietnamese could not say "We did not have this individual." Some of our other crew members did the same thing, identifying at least one person. One fellow identified three people.

For that mission and all the other things that we had to do on that particular night—Christmas Eve 1972—our crew was awarded a DFC just for doing our jobs.

Flash forward to about four months ago here at Blue Skies of Texas West. A young man came in. Somebody told me he was a POW at the Hanoi Hilton. I said to

myself, I wonder if he knew my underclassman. I went over to him and introduced myself. I told him I'd heard he was a Viet Nam POW and did he know my underclassman. He said, "Well, he was sitting right next to me when we went down." They were crew members too. I thought that was unbelievable. That is my Christmas story of a particular mission back in 1972.

\*\*\*

*In the midst of the 2017 holiday season, at the invitation of Bill Wilkins, former navigators who are now residents of Blue Skies of Texas West met to share memories of missions flown during holidays past. The gathering was videotaped by Teresa Santana, assistant resident services director of BSTW. Subsequently, the audio from that recording was converted into written form by Nancy Hoffman of Corvallis, Oregon and has been edited for clarity, context, and length.*

\*\*\*\*\*

**LAST FLIGHTS**

by Jim Faulkner, James Connally 64-04

It is sad to see that we lost so many **AFNOA** members and navigators in 2018. Thanks to the following for the *LAST FLIGHTS* inputs: George Crowl, James Connally 59-03; John Fradella, James Connally 66-17; John Massey, Ellington 54-19; Bill Wilkins, Ellington 52-09 and others. They advise us when a navigator/observer/bombardier/EWO or combat system officer has made their last flight. We received notice of the following *LAST FLIGHTS* this quarter. Please keep their families in your prayers.

**CARLSBAD**

Wortman, Kenneth Florence OR 44-46

**CORAL GABLES**

Adams, Welles V. Wethersfield CT 44-06

**ELLINGTON**

Lebel, Lionel B. Pacific Palisades CA 44-45  
 Leanza, Frank R. Bradenton FL 44-49  
 Koehnen, Fred J. Hilo HI 44-53  
 Leavengood, William H. Savannah GA 44-53  
 Moselle, Merritt Boulder CO 45-04N  
 Nevin, Clement D. Englewood CO 45-04N  
 Spinks, Wesley J. Beaumont TX 45-04N  
 Corley, Owen M. Houston TX 45-08  
 Kass, Daniel H. Delray Beach FL 45-08  
 Jacoby, Casper J. Godfrey IL 45-8N  
 Carver, Richard W. Rock Hill SC 50-D  
 Eskridge, Elmer D. Endicott NY 50-D  
 Lebaron, Allen D. Logan UT 51-03  
 Alongi, Fredrick F. San Antonio TX 51-22  
 Phipps, John L. San Antonio TX 52-16

Looper, Vernon L. Arlington TX 53-18  
 Corlett, Robert M. Santee CA 56-01

**HARLINGEN**

Foulk, Dan H. Land O'Lakes FL 54-13  
 Umstead, John G. Orlando FL 54-13  
 Piccotti, Louis S. Boise ID 55-08  
 Bengel, Bobby J. Woodway TX 56-00  
 Hodges, James B. Cartersville GA 56-09  
 Belveal, Duane L. San Luis Obispo CA 56-12  
 Buck, Norman C. Friendswood TX 56-12  
 Colebaugh, Norman L. Titusville FL 56-12  
 D'Aloia Jr., Silvio Temple Terrace FL 56-12  
 Doerr, John L. Zanesville OH 56-12  
 Dorton, Bobby R. Charlotte NC 56-12  
 Fernald, Richard T. Columbia SC 56-12  
 Fletcher Jr., Markwell A. Punta Gorda FL 56-12  
 Forney, William E. St. Johns Island SC 56-12  
 Garland, John R. Glendale AZ 56-12  
 Gower, William R. Marshfield MO 56-12  
 Howard, Robert G. Fremont CO 56-12  
 Lehr, Glenn C. Manchester MI 56-12  
 Mathias, Lawrence D. Victoria TX 56-12  
 McKay Jr., John G. Austin TX 56-12  
 Moore, Paul S. Unknown 56-12  
 Parshall Jr., Carlton F. Richland SC 56-12  
 Rainbolt, Glen E. Yacolt/Clark WA 56-12  
 Taylor, Lloyd Fort Worth TX 56-12  
 Thompson, Gerald F. Riverside CA 56-12  
 Brennan, Bruce J. Homosassa FL 56-14  
 Frisch, John J. South Park PA 56-16  
 Allison, George B. Prattville AL 56-18  
 Ashley, James P. South Bend IN 56-18  
 Bachelor, James T. Prattville AL 56-18  
 Brautigam, Richard D. Decatur IL 56-21  
 Brown, Richard H. New York NY 56-21  
 Brainard, James E. Folsom CA 57-01  
 Parker, Charles Michael Lenour City TN 57-01  
 Yantis, Richard P. Westerville OH 57-01  
 Baker, Robert Lee East Lebanon ME 57-03  
 Balthazar, Lantz A. Marietta GA 57-04  
 Booth, Ramon L. Berkley CA 57-11  
 Carnochan, John A. F. Lake Harmony PA 57-18  
 Kothanek, John F. Macon GA 57-18  
 Mishou Jr., Edward C. McKinney TX 57-18  
 Mutrie, Henry W. Narragansett RI 57-18  
 Pollard, Dulon D. Smithfield NC 57-18  
 Wise, Robert J. Merced CA 57-18  
 Wood Jr., Eugene L. Grass Valley CA 57-18  
 Niemeyer, James E. Guttenberg IA 57-22  
 Duck, William W. Quincy FL 58-01  
 Devoe Jr., Frederic A. Fort Pierce FL 58-06  
 Southwick, Alvin R. Rochester MN 58-08C  
 Burchard, Thomas E. Omaha NE 58-09

Thomas Jr., George J. Annapolis MD 58-09  
 McLean, Lawrence A. Lakeland FL 58-11  
 Colosimo, John C. Carmel IN 59-02  
 O'Neil, Robert E. Papillion NE 59-16  
 Eichelberger, Robert A. Conroe TX 59-17  
 Brown, Jackson D. Fair Oaks CA 59-21  
 Wimberley, David N. Altus OK 59-21  
 Gilgut, Richard C. Ocean Park ME 60-01  
 Brainard, James L. Fairborn OH 60-06  
 Frank, Robert E. Carmichael CA 60-08  
 Henderson Jr., Robert L. Endicott NY 60-08  
 Johnson Jr., Robert B. Horsham PA 60-08  
 Steele, Richard R. Saint Louis MO 60-08  
 Phillips, William L. Crosswell MI 61-01  
 Berger, Charles E. Santa Fe NM 61-02  
 Hufford, Merle Alton Ridgecrest CA 61-02  
 Koverman, William M. Sherwood AR 61-02  
 Kozej, Freddie G. Lumberton NC 61-02  
 Schuiten, Clyde L. Harriman TN 61-02  
 Brown Jr., William A. Easley SC 61-03  
 Ederer, Larry P. Hampton VA 61-04  
 Hansen, Donald C. Jenks OK 61-05  
 Marchetti, Frank J. Cranston RI 61-05  
 Boettger Jr., Albert J. Galesburg IL 61-06  
 Lea, Gary C. Midland TX 61-06  
 Money, Richard W. Menifee CA 61-06  
 Konopka, Robert C. Laguana Nigel CA 61-07  
 Schweikhart, Richard G. Elgin IL 61-07  
 Walker, Ronald M. Camp Verde AZ 61-07  
 Langley Jr., Kenneth I. Burnet TX 61-08  
 McKown, Michael R. Fairfield CA 61-09  
 Grimes, William D. W. Rumney NH 61-10  
 Burney, David L. Leesburg VA 61-14  
 Gilchrist Jr., John R. Greenville SC 61-15  
 Yingling, Kay A. Bay City OR 61-18  
 Martin, William E. Nixa MO 61-21

**HONDO**

Keegan, John J. San Anselmo CA 45-01

**JAMES CONNALLY**

Stockman, David T. Montgomery AL 51-13  
 Roever, Marvin R. San Antonio TX 51-19  
 Wise, Lucien D. San Antonio TX 52-08  
 Jacobson, Adolph D. San Antonio TX 53-10  
 Becker, Roger A. Saint Paul MN 53-13  
 Garison, Jack W. San Antonio TX 54-16  
 Winters, Edgar J. Bourne MA 54-19  
 Beatty, Richard D. Benbrook TX 56-12  
 Koeller, Alfred D. Huntington Beach CA 58-06  
 Kulickowski, Vincent W. Kittery ME 58-06  
 Lau, Robert J. Bradenton FL 58-06  
 Mire, Karl J. Maurice LA 58-06  
 Smyser, Craig H. Upland CA 58-06

Perkins, Gene E. Fort Worth TX 59-21  
 Borden Jr., Andrew G. San Antonio TX 60-09  
 Wolfe, James L. Dallas TX 60-14  
 Randall, John F. Shreveport LA 61-04  
 Thomas, James E. Fair Oaks CA 61-11  
 Roll, Donald J. Atlanta GA 61-20  
 Nunnally Jr., Edward R. Wylie TX 61-21  
 Taylor Jr., Charles S. Austin TX 62-00  
 Stephenson, Howard D. Boston MA 62-12  
 Purdon, Tommy J. Rockwall TX 62-21  
 Skinner, Rondall E. Keller TX 62-22  
 Sims, Clark W. Duncan OK 63-06  
 Wimbrow II, Nutter J. Whaleyville MD 63-16  
 French, Thomas H. Rosharon TX 64-10  
 Branch, Charles L. Willis KS 65-13

**MATHER**

Martindale, Chester C. Fort Walton Beach FL 70-21  
 Geist Jr., George A. Missouri City TX 44-10

**SELMAN**

Cramm, Reginald M. (MGen) Burlington VT 42-00  
 Seder Jr., Arthur R. Williamsburg VA 42-00  
 Wiswell, Merideth P. Huntington WV 43-03  
 Lasell, John H. Spencer MA 43-08  
 Stotts, Frank Las Vegas NV 43-09  
 Mason, Charles I. Clarkesville NY 43-10  
 Keen, Herbert J. McCall ID 43-14  
 Herndon, Emmitt B. Boise ID 44-04  
 Worster, John Franklin Lakes NJ 44-04  
 Aldrich, Frank N. North Easton MA 44-09  
 Walker, David H. Johnson City TN 44-09  
 Latham, Robert I. Marblehead MA 44-10  
 Piala, Joseph J. Chevy Chase MD 44-10  
 Lewellyn, W. L. Birmingham AL 44-14  
 Neff, Alan M. Philadelphia PA 45-03  
 Wozniak, Aleck Monroeville PA 45-235N

**SAN MARCOS**

James, Kenneth W. Bloomfield NJ 43-04  
 Hall, Emmet E. Wichita KS 43-18  
 Stockham, John Schererville IN 44-03  
 Statum, Glen W. Costa Meas CA 44-06

**SCHOOL UNKNOWN**

Stealey, Roy P. Largo FL 41-00  
 Owen Jr., William A. San Antonio TX 43-00  
 Lichter, Eugene L. San Antonio TX 44-00  
 Giroux, Albert P. Falls Church VA 45-00  
 Kirby, Bobby A. Atlanta GA 53-00  
 Wagner, Robert B. Rockville MD 54-00  
 O'Neil, Phil Elmer Cornville AZ 60-00  
 Karma, Arthur Ventura CA 51-00

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