

1st Fighter Association Newsletter



27th



71st



94th

Volume 30 No. 3

December 2011

A Most Memorable Reunion

**Mission Inn, Riverside, CA
September 14-17, 2011**

For those members who attended this Reunion it certainly will go down as one of the best to date or even the best ever! From the surroundings provided by the Mission Inn, to the venue put together by the Board with special assistance and expertise from Jon Goldenbaum and all Jon's friends at FLABOB airport, to the dedication of a set of "Commemorative Wings" on the famous Mission Inn "Fliers' Wall", to the final presentation made by our guest speaker, Lt Gen Harry A. Wyatt, Director of the Air National Guard, at the concluding banquet, this was certainly a reunion to remember! Of course we wish everyone could have made this Reunion. It was in every way an historical event especially because of the recognition of our WWII vets thru the induction of the "Commemorative Wings" on the Mission Inn Fliers' Wall and the overall organization of the reunion events and the setting of the Mission Inn. A recap of everything follows.

The setting for the Reunion was the spectacular Mission Inn in Riverside, CA. The Inn was founded in the mid-1800, is on the list of National Historic landmarks, and has been opened and closed on many occasions until finally bought by the modern founder of today's Inn, Mr. Frank Miller. Miller started the tradition of the "Fliers' Wall" in March of 1934
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Racquet's Corner

Issues and Potential Recommendations

As I mentioned in the last few "Racquet's Remarks," the 1st Fighter Association is in a period of transition. This fact became more obvious during the outstanding Reunion we just enjoyed at the Mission Inn, Riverside, CA. The 2011 Reunion was a fete to our WWII Vets. They were honored for their service, recognized for the contributions to the defense of our country, participated in the induction of "Commemorative Wings" on the famous Mission Inn "Fliers' Wall" which now permanently recognizes, for all to see, the contributions of our WWII members in creating the heritage and outstanding reputation of the 1st Pursuit Group and the 1st Fighter Wing.

Capping this off were flights, by many of our WWII vets, in restored open cockpit airplanes many of which were the same models they had flown 70 years previously in pilot training. This Association will always keep our WWII Vets and all they have contributed foremost as we develop plans to ensure the Association's future. Not too many years ago many of us had conversations with some of our past heroes such as Tom Maloney, Joel Owens and Al Eberhart who expressed their desire to maintain the Association for the future generations of the 1stFW. It is now time to put that plan in place while we still have a strong contingent of WWII vets to provide guidance and keep us straight.

The Riverside Reunion was so successful and enjoyable that we wish that more of our membership had attended. It was truly a historic event! Why more members did not attend was very surprising as we did not hear from any members taking exception with the location, timing or venue of the Reunion that would have given us a clue that attendance would be so low. We need to understand why

this happened by getting feedback from all members, especially those that did not attend, so we do not make the same mistake again. Pete Marty will be distributing a questionnaire shortly using our new "Constant Contact" e-mail system which will allow us to gather the feedback we need. The new system is very cost effective and allows feedback on how well we are reaching the membership; to date we have learned that only 35% of members open their Association e-mails.

This is a discouraging trend that we are at a loss on how to fix. That brings me to the second point I would like to discuss concerning the future of the Association.

The Board sees a need to be more pro-active in our transition plans by taking the initiative to revitalize, thru fresh ideas and activities, the camaraderie and spirit we had in the past. It is our goal to motivate everyone to want to be a member of this great organization by bringing to your attention initiatives under consideration by the Board which we will pass on to the general membership for approval. We feel these ideas will bring about changes to the Association that will be a value-added formula to success and attract membership participation. The key to this initiative is to focus future activities on Vietnam era and later members, who would benefit from an in-depth knowledge of today's USAF issues provided by current Air Force leaders.

In the last year your Association has supported five Wing and Squadron events thru money contributions and member participation, our WWII guys coming thru again in many instances. These events have fostered close bonds between the Wing/Squadron leadership and Association. I have had direct conversation with the 1st Wing Commander; he is a strong supporter and wants to actively participate in future events and activities. He and I have

agreed on initiatives that will alter future frequency, content and member participation. It is time for your Board to complete our review, approve the initiatives and submitted to the general membership for an up or down vote on each. Constant Contact questionnaire will also include this list of initiatives for member consideration and if the majority of respondents agree we will begin taking those steps necessary for implementation. Look for Pete's e-mail shortly.

It continues to be an honor to serve as the President of this great Association and we thank you in advance for participating in the upcoming survey which should help define the Association of the future.

Finally, thanks to Bill "Gopher" Roeger for taking over the newsletter editor position. Please give him you full support with your great photos and articles.

V/R

Racquet

Notes from the Secretary

The Annual Membership and Dues Drive takes place in January. All non-life members will receive a letter in the mail requesting dues for 2012. Please consider becoming a life member and contributing to the Association Endowment Fund.

The Membership Drive is a good time to update your contact information. However you can do it anytime by e-mailing me at 1stfigher@comcast.net or snail mail at:

504 Southgate Drive
Blacksburg, VA 24060-5437.

Cheers,

Pete

2011 Reunion Photos



Racquet with Ted Wegland of the Mission Inn Foundation



World War II members are honored at the wings ceremony



WWII Vet Harry Cheshire with his son Dr. Cheshire



Pete, Racquet and Frito enjoy the ceremony



Dominick Negri, Felix Pasteris, and Randy Dodge



WWII Veterans before the wings dedication ceremony (L-R): Ray Cleary, Harry Cheshire, Robin Hansen, Loyd Longenbaugh, Felix Pasteris, Bob Riley, Bill Tarry, Darrell Welch



Racquet with Lt Gen Harry Wyatt and Maj Jeremy Hout



St Frances of Assisi, patron saint of bird men



Racquet, Goldy and Pete admire Goldy's plane



Beautiful day at FLABOB



Robin Hansen ready for a ride!



Goldy's DC-3 – it flies!



Darrell feels at home



One of the projects at FLABOB



Easy ready to fly



Famous Mission Inn clock

Chapel and courtyard where the wings ceremony was held



Enjoying breakfast before the ceremony



Quick trip to wine country on another beautiful "SO CAL" day



Members at the National POW/MIA Memorial



Wall of Heroes at the POW/MIA Memorial



POW/MIA museum



Display at the P-38 museum



Darrell Welch and family enjoy the hospitality suite

(A *Most Memorable Reunion* continued from page 1) and since then 152 names of the most famous aviators and aviation organizations have been recognized thru dedication of “Commemorative Copper Wings” placed on the wall. Those recognized on the wall include MG B.D. Foulis, Gen Hap Arnold, Gen Jimmy Doolittle, Amelia Earhart, CAPT Eddie Rickenbacker, Gen Curtis LeMay, Charles Lindbergh, Chuck Yeager, and Sen. John Glenn, to name just a few. The 1st Pursuit Group/Wing’s significant contribution to the history and heritage of the Army Air Corp and the US Air Force, recognized in the presence of nine [9] 1st Fighter Association WWII veterans who significantly contributed to that history, became the latest organization to be added in a place of honor on the wall. Having so many of our WWII members in attendance, brought special meaning to the ceremony, and instilled in all attendees, a sense of pride that we



associate with such an august group of aviators and have belonged to an organization that has such a heralded past. A truly once-in-a-lifetime memorable occasion.

Although the venue was full of daily activities including side trips to the Riverside Veterans Memorial Cemetery co-located with “The Medal of Honor Memorial and the “POW/MIA” Memorial and visits to two outstanding military aviation museums at March Field and Chino’s Planes of Fame home of a flyable P-38, the truly memorable event was our afternoon spent at Jon Goldenbaum’s FLABOB airport. Just 10 miles from the Mission Inn, the airport is an uncontrolled field, home to numerous vintage airplanes and innumerable aircraft restoration



projects that boggles the mind every time you turn the corner. Goldy had arranged a great barbeque, buckets of refreshing beverages and numerous vintage, open cockpit aircraft available for rides. Many of the vintage training



aircraft were the same aircraft models our WWII members had flown in pilot training 70 years ago. They could not wait to strap those planes on again and slip those surly bonds. Everyone who wanted had a chance to feel the wind blow thru part of the anatomy that once was hair. What a ride! What a day!



This Reunion turned out to be a once-in-a-life time event which created a sense of pride in all who attended and firmly entrenched in everyone's minds our contribution to the history and heritage of the 1st Pursuit Group and 1st Fighter Wing.

Racquet

Nieuport 28 "Spad" Progress Report

SSgt Javaris Allen and a volunteer team from the 94th AMU have been hard at work rebuilding the Nieuport since it was wrecked in a wind storm last summer. Great progress was



made when the F-22s were grounded; things have slowed a bit now that the wing is flying again, but steady work continues. Fuselage tubing has been straightened and repaired, and all wooden formers and stringers have been replaced. Most of the structural work on the fuselage is complete, the frame has been primed and varnished and the fuselage is back on the gear, sitting proudly on the hangar floor.



New wings are being built; Sgt Allen and team are completing wooden wings using the old ribs and spars as patterns. Although different from



the skills the team uses in their daily Air Force jobs, there are enough woodworkers and modeling hobbyist to get the job done. Tail



feathers have been rebuilt and straightened, and most of the heavy structural repairs are complete. The airplane will be covered with Poly Fiber polyester fabric, and then painted in the authentic camouflage paint scheme used by the 94th Aero Squadron. Jon "Goldy" Goldenbaum, former 94th DO, (later 71st CC), is donating all the covering, coatings and custom paint necessary to complete the project.

Goldenbaum's company manufactures dope, fabric, and paint for antique and classic aircraft restorations. When the airplane is ready to

cover, Goldenbaum and his technicians will travel to Langley to hold an instructional class in fabric covering for Sgt Allen's team.

With luck, the Nieuport will be ready to go back on display early in 2012.

27th "Fightin' Eagles" Change of Command: 18 November 2011

On 18 November, four members of the Association attended the 27th Squadron Change of Command ceremony held in the Squadron hangar at Joint Base Langley-Eustis. Association members attending included, Jim Hardenbrook, Maj Gen (ret) Steve Miller, Bill Roege and Randy Dodge. Col Richard Boutwell, 1st Operations Group Commander, officiated at the ceremony where Lt Col Cavan "Caveman" Craddock assumed command from Lt Col Pete "Coach" Fesler. The event provided a great opportunity



for renewing friendships with nearly all of the Wing leadership, meet the new 27th CC Lt Col Craddock and thank Lt Col Fesler for all his

support during his 18 month tenure as squadron commander. Lt Col Fesler led the charge to have an F-22 designated "Maloney's Pony" and obtained HHQ approval for nose art on the stealthy Raptor. Following the ceremony we all watched a practice F-22 demo—most impressive.

A Message for the 27th Squadron

Over the course of some 28 years in the Air Force I have had quite a few assignments, as most of you all have. I can honestly say that I enjoyed each of them but my time at Langley in the 27th stands out from the rest. It wasn't just because I was flying the world's best fighter but because I was flying with some great people. I have become close with many of you and I can only imagine how flying in combat like our World War II brothers did would truly bind you together. We get to see this every time we have a reunion and watch these guys together.

I also need to add that it wasn't just the guys; we had a bunch of wives that were just as big a part of it. We all just seemed to gel and still do till this day.

The point of all this is that getting together at our 1st Fighter Association reunions is good for us in many ways. Sure, we drink a few adult beverages and reminisce about all those things that made out time together special: like, "remember the time JC went supersonic on Tub's wing and broke all those windows" or our trip to Holland, and so on. Great memories only made better by having your buds there to share them with. So, quit your whining about not having the time, the money, the kitchen pass (bring her with you) and so on. Start planning now to come home to Langley in Sept 2013. Racquet and his crew did a spectacular job this year and I'm sure they will next time.

One last thing, I want **each** of you 27th guys to send me an e-mail so I can update my list. This

way I can keep you informed of upcoming events and other important stuff. Just send it to fpickart@gvtc.com. You don't need to write anything if that's too hard, just type in your name (doesn't have to be spelled correctly) and hit send. For those of you without e-mail, drop me a line at:

29642 Fairview Place
Fair Oaks Ranch, TX 78015

Or call me at (830) 755-2292 and pass on the info.

Mission Inn Wings Photo Presented to 1FW Commander

On 18 November the Association had the opportunity to meet with Col Robbins, 1st Fighter Wing Commander and present the Wing a framed picture of the "Commemorative Wings" inducted into the "Fliers' Wall" at the Mission Inn during the 2011 Reunion. Col Robbins, a very big supporter of the Association, was most grateful for the picture and said it would be hung in place of honor for all members of the Wing to see and be aware of the high honor the 1st Pursuit Group and 1st Fighter Wing received thru this recognition. Members of the Association present at the ceremony are from L-R, top-bottom are: Jim Hardenbrook and Col Robbins; Jim Hardenbrook, Col Robbins and one of our newest members and former 94th and 1st Wing Commander, Maj Gen (ret) Steve Miller; Bill Roege, our new Newsletter editor, Col Robbins and Maj Gen (ret) Miller; and finally Randy Dodge with Col Robbins. A special thanks to everyone who participated.

In the background is the framed 1st Pursuit Group Campaign flag originally given to the Association by a WW II 1st Pursuit Group Commander's niece and then presented to the Wing in 2008.



Reunions Gone By...1983

Contributed by Felix Pasteris

Off they go – again...Wild, blue yondering (by Frank DeFrank, The Macomb Daily, Thursday, May 6, 1983)

Joel Owens was remembering a special day of World War II, when he was a first lieutenant and a fighter pilot in the skies over North Africa.

“We were escorting B-17s and I was leading the pack...” recalled Owens, who retired from the air force as a colonel in 1972.

“It was the first time I had ever shot at a target in the air...” The target was one of Germany’s legendary ME-109s, a formidable foe for Owens’ twin-tailed P-38.

“I was supposed to go to the gunnery school, but the war broke out and I never made it...”

“I got close enough to see the tail, and fired a burst, and they all hit him. The guy behind me [ed: M. Morrowson] said ‘You got him, Rumhead.’ I said ‘Yeah, now let’s get the hell out of here’.”

Owens has forgotten how many times he’s told the story. But it’s a safe bet he’ll tell it a few more times this weekend, when the 27th Fighter Squadron celebrates its 66th anniversary with a reunion at Selfridge Air National Guard Base.

Nearly 100 current and former members are expected. Highlights will be a photo session, movies of the current unit and a dinner-dance Saturday night.



But reminiscing will be the first order of the weekend.

“We’ll tell war stories, bend a few elbows and shed a few tears,” said Walt Flynn, also a pilot with the squadron in World War II.

The stories began Thursday morning, as soon as the first few members arrived. Laughter, sprinkled with occasional debates over hazy details, dominated conversations.

Mention of squadron members who never came back from foreign soil produced somber looks and dimmed the festive mood – but only for moments.

The First Fighter Group, of which the 27th Fighter Squadron is a part, is the oldest in the Air Force. It was formed in 1917 as the First Pursuit Group and Selfridge was its home from inception until 1940.

Members say it was far more than just another military outfit.

“We operated as a single cohesive unit,” said Irv Styer, a veteran of 50 combat missions. “We knew what our organization was all about. There was no question. We were there to overthrow the madman. That’s why we had such great camaraderie.”

Today, war is not the “glamorous” business it was 40 years ago, when the 27th was doing its part to help the allies win World War II. The Vietnam War and increased threats of nuclear confrontation have combined to destroy the nation’s starry-eyed view of battle.

The changing attitude has not gone unnoticed by members of the 27th.

“Then, everybody was incensed at Japan for bombing Pearl Harbor and at Hitler,” said Flynn now a New York resident. “Everybody was motivated. Today, there’s no motivation.”

Styer, now a resident of California, visited the North American Defense complex near Colorado Springs during a First Fighter Group reunion last year. Methods of fighting an air

war today, he discovered, differ drastically from his days as a P-38 pilot.

“Some of the weapons they have today are totally unreal,” he said. “You wonder what would happen if somebody backed into the wrong button.”

But those are the problems for a new generation. Members of the 27th Fighter Squadron would rather spend the weekend downing tall drinks, telling taller tails and listening to Joel Owens recount that first kill...

“We were escorting B-17s and I was leading the pack...”



Pasteris, Wilson, Pope and Lay at 1983 Reunion

“Before each flight, make sure that your bladder is empty and your fuel tanks are full!”

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