

Tarrytown—A Great Reunion

“IT WAS ALL WORTH IT!”

Millie and Frank O’Bannon

They came from Alaska, from Maine, from Florida, from California, and points in between! Thirty-five states were represented by proud members of the Group.

Crystal Balls, Palmest, Card Readers, etc., and the local authorities, were utilized to select the most appropriate dates that would give us a large turnout. Would you believe that no thought was given to the viewing of the famous “fall colors” so famous in the eastern United States? Now if you believe that one, would you be interested in the sole purchase of a famous bridge?

The elves, the gremlins, the ‘little people’, the Committee, and the hotel staff all assembled to determine whether or not this was done, do we need this, etc., and etc. The elves went away happy, the gremlins were not very happy, and the ‘little people’ just wanted the party to get going!

Finally Thursday morning arrived—guess what? No FALL COLORS! It was soon apparent that it didn’t matter what the colors were as long as it had a blue shield, a gold bolt of lightning, and a white bomb! It was “AL ATAQUE”! Forty some years disappeared as men came out of the haze to meet for the first time since departing Italy or POE! For a bunch of men that took all the enemy could throw at them, it was surprising how many men developed eye problems or developed a new cold. You did not need a planned program for this day!

The Volunteers Corps, consisting of Peggy Hayes (766th), Mary Emma Knapp (767th), Katherine and Don Lundberg (764th), Millie and Barbara O’Bannon (764th), smoothed out the processing to the point that the men forgot the long lines of yesteryear. Treasurer, Glenn Stempel (766th), made it easy to bring your dues and late payments up to date. PX Manager, Wally Robinson (767th), did a thriving business up until the last day. Included in the Official Packet were name tags with squadron colors and names big enough to read from ten paces, which made a big hit for those of us with a ‘slight’ loss of vision, schedule of events, Memorial Service Book, and small metal official squadron insignia as approved by the Army in 1943. Sammy West, Vice-President, was unable to attend due to illness, but sent an 8 x 10 photo of our Memorial Plaque on the Cemetery Wall at the Air Force Academy for each one.

Squadron rooms were available, along with a slide and VCR room, for viewing and just enjoying the telling of tall tales. Once the rumor was found to be true no time was lost by many of the men in searching out the P&W 1830 that was the center piece of our reunion for three days. Hats off to George Dickie (767th) for arranging this great exhibit for us! At 8 PM the members assembled to view a VCR on the U.S. Military Academy and to be briefed on life as a Cadet by Major Edward Evons, USA. A question and answer period followed with the members coming away with an in depth knowledge that should serve them in good stead at home.

Friday arrived with blue skies and just begged to be enjoyed. Enjoyed it was by five bus loads of bright eyed and bushy tailed LIBERAIDERS wanting to see the area and tour the U.S. Military Academy at West Point.

Following a forty-five minute trip from Tarrytown to the Academy we were met by our guides and then on to the Cadet Chapel for our Memorial Service. The Service was conducted by Chaplain (Major) Andrew Hagen, Jr. His message to us regarding our fallen members was outstanding. Mr. Lee Dettra, Organist, might have been playing the worlds largest pipe organ, but he could not drown out the voices of our members! The tour continued on to the Old Cadet Chapel, Post Cemetery, Michie Stadium, Trophy Point, and the Plains. We were in time for our viewing of the noon formation. It was a little more informal than expected as enthusiasm for the football game on Saturday took over. Then on to the souvenir shop.

It was then on to the world famous Bear Mountain Inn for lunch. For those of you that use to listen to the radio and read the sport pages, this is the place that in the 1930s many viewed the ski jumpers of that day. Believe me it isn't the 90 meter runs of today. The lunch was served on time and was good. Back on the buses for a return trip to the hotel. We were only a few minutes late on our ETA. That's better than we did on some of our missions—who said we circled the target three times?! It might be noted that Pruitt claims he has trouble with a course selection when he can't see the sun.

The General Business Meeting was held. See "Business Meeting" for report of election and Financial Report. Following the business meeting it was back to mini reunions.

Saturday morning saw the departure of three bus loads of LIBERAIDERS for a tour of Liberty Island, Lower New York, and the Trade Center. This tour was arranged and conducted by Tom Javaruski (764th). Tom did a great job and even arranged that the last bus be unloaded at the hotel just as the rain came down. Bob Hayes led a group of die-hard football fans to West Point for the Cadet Parade, lunch at the Officer Club, and the football game in Michie Stadium. Sorry fellows—West Point lost. The remainder of the men and friends of the Group conducted tours of the local area or just sat and caught up on the past years.

The BIG EVENT finally started at 6 PM with an Attitude Adjustment hour and the taking of photos for the memory book. (As the photos this year were taken under a contract with an outside agency we will not be able to supply any books from our PX.)

The Banquet was held in the main ballroom of the hotel and was one to be remembered. When were we able to dine in Italy under four crystal chandeliers, beautiful table settings, and a great floor to dance to the tunes of the 40s? The food was great and the service was outstanding thanks to the efforts on the part of Bob Hayes (766th). One of our former cooks was heard to say, "Sure wish we had had this food to serve in Italy". Can't say enough for the music, but, it should be noted that the large dance floor was still covered when the music wishing hour was announced at midnight. Quiet one, Fred Hill (764th) was responsible for getting us the wonderful music for this banquet!

Katherine Lundberg arranged an outstanding floor show which was enjoyed by all of those that were privileged to view it. A picture is worth a thousand words? Don was not aware that his wife had arranged this dance and as he collapsed into his chair he was heard to say, "Katherine will kill me!"

Acknowledgement was made of long distance travelers Richard and Dorothy Durand from Anchorage, Alaska, Jim Spencer's crew (most in attendance—7), and the great showing of those faithful ground men that supported the flying men so well!

Outgoing Directors, Leonard O. Cole (Hqrs), Thomas Javaruski (764th), Thomas R. Moss (765th), Ralph T. Seeman (766th), and Harry J. Oglesby (767th) were honored for their past services to the Group. Each man was presented a framed Group insignia in colored leather. The insignia were handcrafted by our own Joseph D. Boblasky of the 764th Squadron.

For taking that one extra step that has produced this outstanding reunion, Fred Hill (764th), Tom Javaruski (764th), and Robert Hayes (766th) received 461st bullion crests.

Millie O'Bannon received a standing ovation for her assistance to your President in getting this reunion together. As she said, "As of tonight, I know it was all worth it!"

Sunday morning produced a great breakfast with joy and sadness as all wonderful things must come to an end for this time. Many date books were filled in with reminders that they WOULD get together again in St. Louis in 1989!