

A REUNION TO REMEMBER

Rapid City, South Dakota
August 28-31, 1991

The enthusiasm of members of the 461st Bomb Group (H) was evident as we met in Rapid City, SD for our fifth annual reunion. With the reunion scheduled to begin officially on Wednesday, August 28th, the O'Bannons arrived the preceding Monday expecting to be well in advance of reunion guests. Instead, they were greeted by a number of early arrivals, ready for the party to begin. At opening of registration on Wednesday morning nearly half of the participants had arrived. By the end of the day, only seventeen registration packets had not been claimed.

Participation was very high in all the activities planned by Lyman and Beverly Delameter (764th). Although temperatures soared in Rapid City, tour buses were comfortably air conditioned and the air naturally cooled at the higher elevations of the Black Hills. We were awed by Mount Rushmore in the bright sun of mid-day and inspired by the impressive nighttime lighting ceremony. We admired the Korczak family's tenacity in developing the Crazy Horse memorial, marveled at the skill of the bus drivers as they negotiated pigtail bridges and snaked through tunnels only inches wider than the bus as we traveled Iron Mountain Road and Needles Highway in Custer Park.

We enjoyed a night on the town, the historic town of Deadwood where poker, black jack and slot machines beckon from every doorway. Many of our group found those easy to ignore as they explored classic old hotels, some adorned with mounted wildlife, one with a mezzanine bordello scene, another with a display of fine art, some with live music and many had inexpensive food and drink offered to entice us to the spinning slots and green felt tables. We saw no one wearing a barrel on the trip back to Rapid City. It was a fun evening and totally unlike any other scheduled activity.

"Free ice water" is said to be the start of Wall Drugs famous store. We had the opportunity to explore this unique block-sized emporium and to eat in its western art gallery dining room (seating 520) after a sunset ride thru the jagged landscape of South Dakota's badlands. The scenery is so striking that it's frequently been used in the movies, most recently in "Dances with Wolves". But we didn't need any of that hype to appreciate the beauty of the sharp ridges, plunging canyons, soaring pinnacles with the setting sun as a backdrop.

The best tour for many of us was the excursion to neighboring Ellsworth Air Force Base, home of our nation's biggest B-1B fleet and the South Dakota Air and Space Museum. We were treated to a tour of the museum restoration hangar where we saw and were told about recently acquired aircraft in various stages of restoration. The museum exhibited memorabilia and planes spanning many years of our country's history. The highlight of the day for many was the one-on-one talks with the B-1B pilots on the flight line. Our members had the opportunity to ask questions and compare their bomber and its four-man crew with their own experiences with B-24s. An attractive and satisfying buffet in the officers mess was part of our tour of the base.

There were many more activities, tours, shopping for black hills gold jewelry, the dinosaur park, Stavkirke Chapel, Minnilusa Pioneer Museum, the Passion play and as always the camaraderie of fellow members in the spacious Sheraton room at the hotel. Rosters of attending members, pictures and videos related to the group were available. The registration table and PX were in the care of Ernie and Betty Spirito (766th) and Frank and Millie O'Bannon (764th). They were helped by Marietta McCanse, president of the Marimac Corp. who will be coordinating the 1992 reunion in Dayton for us. She's already selected a hotel, planned tours and a special activity for the ladies.

The business meeting is covered in an article by "Pete" Peterson following this reunion report. It was heartening to have so many members in attendance participating in the decision-making of the organization.

Laughter and lively conversation dominated the Saturday evening banquet. Introductions and greetings preceded the invocation by Chaplain Hansen of Ellsworth AFB. Live music during cocktails and dinner set the mood for an enjoyable evening of dancing to the mellow music of the Tones.

Farrold Stephens' (764th) singing was a perfect compliment to Chaplain Hansen's interesting and moving presentation at the Memorial Service Sunday morning. His message, parts of which are printed elsewhere in this issue, presented a review of the history of the 461st from its inception, as he mentally meshed our own experiences with those of the group.

A wonderful breakfast buffet followed the service. This was a time for farewells, for saying "Same time next year" and unabashed displays of affection between friends, both old and new.

There were 380 attendees this year and we all owe special thanks to the O'Bannons who worked on this project the whole year; to the Delameters who surveyed hotels and researched each tour so we'd all have a good time; to Trefry and Nellie Ross who made all our name tags and the memorial program; to Ed Chan who works tirelessly to locate 461st men so that they too can enjoy the fellowship of our reunions; to the Spiritos who missed the tours in order to welcome new arrivals and tend the store (PX); to the many others who lent a helping hand to make this reunion the success it was; and to all of you who made an effort to befriend "first timers" and make them feel welcome.

You may be asking who more of your favorite reunion memories weren't included in this report. Well, next year it could be your turn to write the report of the reunion. This year the responsibility for the report was given to the Headquarters staff. Next year it will be the responsibility of the 764th Squadron. Hope to see you all in '92 at the sixth reunion in Dayton.

Len and Grace Cole
Headquarters

Editor's note: Thanks, Len and Grace for your report. Notice is hereby given to the director of the 764th Squadron, John Trommershauser, that you are responsible for finding someone to write the report on the Dayton reunion, 1992.

461ST BOMB GROUP BUSINESS MEETING
1991 Reunion, Rapid City, SD

President, Frank O'Bannon, opened the business meeting with a few points of interest to the members. He noted that nearly one-fourth of the men attending the reunion were there for the first time. He also noted the "chair" of past president had not yet been filled and that he would be a candidate for that office. However, it was moved that the incumbent officers be re-elected, so he, along with V.P. Sammy West and Treasurer Gail Peterson, will fill the chairs for two more years.

Minutes of the 1990 business meeting at Tucson were approved. The July 1991 report of the Treasurer was approved as presented. The June, 1992 issue of the "Liberaider" will contain a complete report for calendar year 1991.

The report on the enrollment of new members of the 461st given by Ed Chan was very encouraging. Just in the past few months nearly 200 men have been located.

John Underwood stated that the 50 in. TV screen purchased for the eyesight rehabilitation center at Hines, IL was proving to be a great help to the patients. It's used with VCRs for training the hard-to-see patients at the center. There are four more centers in the United States and it was moved to furnish large screen sets for these centers as funds become available.

George Dickie, the "Liberaider" editor, asks for your help in keeping your mailing addresses up-to-date. It costs quite a bit of money to pay for the return of undeliverable issues of the newsletter. Please send your "change of address" cards to Frank O'Bannon, Gail Peterson or George Dickie at addresses shown on page 2 of the "Liberaider".

Hang on to your squadron roster. No new rosters will be published. Member information will be published in the "Liberaider". If you have questions, contact your group officers shown on page 2.

The 4th grade class at Big Creek Elementary School, Fresno, CA has been researching the B-24 that was lost N. E. of Fresno early in December 1943. It was moved that the group check with the class to see how we might help.

Plaudits go to crew 25R of the 765th Squadron for having 7 members at the reunion. They were: Leonard Wojtkowiak, pilot; Fran Ditirro, co-pilot; William Showalter, engineer; William Kerlew, radio operator; Harold Hylton, ball gunner; Robert Dewell, turret gunner and Everett Tuttle, nose gunner.

The squadron caucuses elected these officers for 1992 and 1993:

Respectfully submitted,
Gail Perterson, Sec'y/Treas