

DAYTON, OHIO—TARGET OF RARE OPPORTUNITY

During the week of 21 September, 1992, the 461st Bombardment Group (H), augmented by a courageous contingent of wives and friends, performed numerous missions throughout the Dayton, Ohio area aimed at achieving total camaraderie. This force of 565 dedicated veterans was successful in gaining the total submission of the local populace. During these sorties many memorable moments were captured at the U.S. Air Force Museum, Wright Patterson AFB, the Dayton Marriott Hotel and other “liberated” areas.

Debriefing notes of selected members of the 764th Bomb Squadron have now been declassified. Excerpt of statements are released as follows:

Monday, 21 September

The advanced cadre consisting of Frank and Millie O’Bannon arrived to prepare for the major units due in on Wednesday. They were pleased with the facilities offered by the Marriott Hotel and arrangements scheduled by the Marimac Corp. (Marietta & Phil).

Tuesday, 22 September

Not surprisingly, many other early birds began arriving. The lobby of the Marriott was secured as a greeting place for new arrivals seeking refuge from the rain storms. The sight of 461st Bomb Group caps on both men and women began to appear throughout the hotel, the invasion was on!

Wednesday, 23 September

On Wednesday sunny weather heralded the theme of warm friendship which was to continue throughout the week. Many folks arrived to grasp hands, hug and chatter incessantly. Now the serious business of recalling experiences of joy and sorrow during the “big one” truly began. As in past reunions, a surprising number of new members, who were discovered by Ed Chan and others, began to check in. Quizzical looks gave way to recognition as physical characteristics overcame physical appearances to disclose, behind slightly weathered faces, old friends from war days. Many also recalled later duty associations in HQ USAF, the Aleutians, Berlin airlift, Korea, sea and other far-flung places.

Charming lady volunteers manned reception desks at the entry to the “squadron hangar”. Complimentary coffee and cash bar relaxed conferees as they checked their Group and Squadron displays to note the arrival of new members and room assignments. Meanwhile continuous videos depicting WWII air power were viewed.

The event of the day on Wednesday was an evening at the La Comedia Dinner Theatre. The 461st dinners practically took over the place. The food was excellent and efficiently served. The play, “Run for Your Wife” was clever and very amusing. The bus service for this optional tour was excellent and was an indication of the well coordinated transportation system we would experience throughout the week.

Thursday, 24 September

This was antique day in Waynesville, Ohio, touted as the antique capital of the Midwest and the home of the Ohio Sauerkraut Festival. Waynesville, which dates back to 1796, was named after General Anthony Wayne who camped here while fighting Indians. Apparently the General and his entourage departed camp quickly leaving many domestic items (for later discovery by antique dealers) along with a big pot of sauerkraut. One lady said, "One man's junk is another man's treasure", so you can look at it both ways. Most of the ladies found Waynesville delightful and enjoyed the tour. (The O'Bannons, we hear, liberated 2 oil lamps.)

Since Friday would be early to rise and a strenuous day, Thursday evening most folks took advantage of the 25% discount for our members at the Marriott's Parmizzano's Restaurant. There were many "gatherings" in the hotel bar and various private rooms for a toddy or two and for making plans for the morrow.

Friday, 25 September

The hotel breakfast buffet at 0700 hrs. provided excellent selections of fruits and breakfast dishes. At times it was near impossible to find space to dine but this only added to the anticipation and excitement.

The sky was cloudless and the air was crisp as about 500 people in a 10-bus caravan arrived at the Air Force Museum for the dedication of the 461st Bomb Group plaque in Memorial Park.

Frank O'Bannon led the way, through many statuary memorials, plaques and trees that had been previously dedicated, to the site of the 461st Bomb Group Memorial. Noisy chatter changed to respectful quiet as a feeling of peace, reflection and pride enveloped everyone.

The dedication service was brief and impressive. There were comments by the museum staff, prayers were offered by the Air Force Chaplain, Captain Bias, and a short history of the Group was read by Ed Izzo. As the ceremony progressed, four jet aircraft overflew the Memorial Park, truly a fitting salute to the fallen members and survivors of the 461st Bomb Group. The Group Colors were beautifully displayed by the VFW Color Guard as the Rifle Squad fired salvos. The bugler sounded taps to end a very touching ceremony.

Frank O'Bannon acknowledged the work of Willie Gibson, 764th Bomb Squadron, and Ed Izzo for arranging for and the placement of our plaque at the Memorial Park.

Many of the spectators had misty eyes as they thought of those who had gone before. There seemed to be an "uplifting after-effect" as the group made their way back through the Memorial Park. Backs seemed a little straighter and steps a little firmer.

A sign at the airport reads "Dayton, birthplace of aviation". After visiting the Memorial Park and the USAF Museum, Dayton may also be remembered as "Resting place of Eagles".

Following the dedication the group met in the museum to view the IMax film “The Flyers”. The IMax film incorporates state-of-the-art technology, film frames three times the size of conventional 70mm frames and having six channel stereo. This truly provides the viewer with the sensation of being in the middle of the real flying event. (Many of our ladies covered their eyes at times.) Following the movie, buses conveyed the group to the Wright Patterson AFB Officer’s Club for lunch. All was in readiness with food on the tables for over 500 of us to dine and relax a bit before the afternoon movie thriller and tour of the museum exhibits of over 200 aircraft and missiles.

Friday evening dining was available at the hotel with the overflow moving into a huge tent. However, many adventurous ones met in their rooms for cocktails and then spread out to the restaurants in the city or to Wright Patterson AFB for dinner. 461st Bomb Group badges were sighted over a wide area of the city.

Saturday, 26 September

This was the day many of the men chose to return to the museum while wives opted for a tour of the Dayton Art Institute and a reconstructed Indian village. Those who chose to return to the museum became totally immersed in the Air Force lore of the past and present. We studied observations in the main building, then a short bus ride to the museum’s annex to place our hands on many other aircraft including presidential “birds” of the past and the latest supersonic marvels. Some of the men, exhausted mentally and physically from their early day emotional experiences, retired to discreet taverns in the city reminiscent of days of the old Mid-west.

Many with leisure time wandered down to Carillon Park to discover a beautiful slice of Americana along the bank of the great Miami River. They viewed a typical early-time tavern, a one-room school, a replica of Wright’s bicycle shop, a print shop, an early store house and other buildings all within a clean neatly landscaped area having a Carillon as a center piece.

The Dayton Art Institute and Sun Watch (restored Indian village) tours were enjoyed by many. The Art Museum whetted the appetite to return to fully absorb the beauty of the masters displayed.

The Saturday evening affair was a typical 461st elegant final night reunion production. The gals were as beautiful as in the 40’s—their men were as macho as ever.

The highlight of the evening was the presentation of the Purple Heart medal to Trefrey Ross. Frank O’Bannon, upon learning Trefrey had never received it, turned the tables upside down to get him properly recognized 48 years late. Only the tenacity of Frank could do it.

Music was of our age even though many of us could not quite recall all the intricacies of the dances of the early 40’s. Many danced until the band exhausted their repertoire. It was, all in all, a beautiful gathering to be savored in memory of our youth.

Sunday, 27 September

The early schedule for our Memorial Service and buffet breakfast was welcomed by most attendees who were preparing for travel to distant homes.

Chaplain Steven E. Bias, USAF, of the Protestant Chapel Program, conducted the Memorial service honoring those lost in combat and those expiring in later years. Our hymn, "Lord, Guard the Men Who Fly" was rendered by all with misty eyes and the proud awareness of our service to family and country.

AFTERGLOW REFLECTIONS

We missed the beautiful voice of our baritone Farrold F. Stephens.

We wondered how many of our airmen availed themselves of the G.I Bill to further their education.

Some attendees felt we should consider reducing the reunion schedule by one day, to three and a half days.

Why not provide an updated roster? Add dollars to our dues to cover the costs involved. Recent new members need to be recognized.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The material presented in this report of the 1992 reunion was provided by the following members of the 764th Bomb Squadron:

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Editor's note: Thanks John and Lee and all your assistant editors!! It's a great report done in an unusual format.