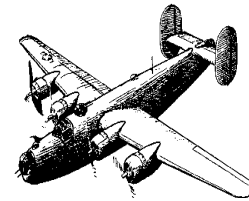


Plane Talk

The Eighth Air Force Historical Society
Virginia Chapter Newsletter



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Greetings From Your President:

As I stated in a separate letter which all Chapter members received, it is an honor that you have chosen to put the affairs of the Virginia Chapter in my hands. The functions of the Chapter will not be a one man show, however. The Board, which you also elected, will play a large part in our continuing efforts to associate with and enjoy the fellowship of fellow Veterans. This friendship and socializing will also extend to you second generation types. Your Board and I will need and seek the help and participation of every member.

Your Board previously determined that three general meetings should take place each year. We will happily meet that requirement. We will try to make these meetings enjoyable and even educational. There are probably short tours, shows, etc. that we can merge into our Luncheons. This will be explored. The reward for our efforts is your enjoyment of the activity we schedule. Suggestions are certainly welcome.

Because the bulk of our membership lives in the Richmond, Williamsburg, Norfolk area, it makes sense to meet where most of us are. It may work best if we concentrate on Richmond/Williamsburg as the location for future Board and General meetings. This thinking is not chiseled in stone so there may be other considerations as time goes by.

I will close by saying "LET'S KEEP 'EM FLYING!"

Lew Burke

WE NEED YOUR STORIES AND PICTURES! WE WANT TO KEEP PLANE TALK INTERESTING AND NEED YOUR HELP. PLEASE SEND YOUR STORIES AND PICTURES TO THE EDITORS.

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CHAPTER MEETING – 21 SEPTEMBER 2006

President Bob Noziglia called the meeting to order at 1200. There were 34 members and guests in attendance. John Pearson led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance. Chris Bowers offered a prayer. After introductory remarks by President Noziglia the group had lunch.

The meeting reconvened after lunch with remarks from Dick McClune, Rich Kemper, Monique Pitts, and Bob Noziglia followed by a program.

Neal November, a World War II Navy veteran, described his experiences onboard the *USS Crescent City* at Okinawa. Casualties from kamikaze attacks were brought on board the *Crescent City* to be treated by the ship's doctors any many members of the crew, including Neal, were pressed into service providing aid to the wounded. When the ship ran short of blood, November volunteered to take an LCVP to pick some up and ended up being shot at by pursuing Japanese ships and by the U.S. ships he was approaching on his return trip since they believed him to be part of the Japanese attack.

Wayne Edwards described the Library of Congress Veterans History Project. The Library of Congress is using volunteers like Wayne to interview veterans in order to collect their personal recollections so that they can share them with current and future generations. He offered the opportunity for members to sign up and got a number of volunteers. Wayne can be reached at (757) 871-0998 or at waynedanang@cs.com.

President Noziglia announced that health issues have kept him from being active since being elected President and will keep him from completing his term. He previously appointed Chris Bowers to a Nominating Committee for the purpose of developing a slate of officers for the coming year. President Noziglia accepted the report and asked for other nominations from the floor. There were none. The slate presented was Lew Burke - President and John Pearson - Vice President with all other current officers and directors continuing in their current positions. A motion was made that nominations be closed and the slate presented by the Nominating Committee be adopted by acclamation. The motion was seconded and accepted unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 1355.

A DAY IN MY LIFE

Monique Pitts

Today, September 24, I gave my self the most extraordinary treat. I had wanted it for a long time, postponed it till a suitable time, and promised myself I would have it.

Today, I took a ride in an authentic B-17. Sixty-three years ago, my husband Jesse flew 25 times over Germany and France in a very similar Flying Fortress.

Today I flew, not at 21,000 feet, but much closer to the ground at 1500 feet. No oxygen needed no parachute, no enemy fighter attacks, no flak, no pitfalls of assembly, and no flying in formation.

But our plane carried 10 people, including pilot, copilot, radio-navigator, my son Christopher, various interested passengers, and, you guessed it, one Japanese tourist.

As we all approached the entrance to the plane, I thought that my trip would stop right there, before it started. I could see everybody entering with hands up, legs projected forward into the opening, about three feet above the ground. I had a fleeting recollection of Gregory Peck in *Twelve O'Clock High* unable to get his legs in the opening due to severe battle fatigue or whatever. But quickly, the copilot and the navigator helped me. On inside pulled me by the arms to sit on the edge while the other, outside kneeling on one knee, had me use his thigh as a step. Soon I found myself hauled inside.

On takeoff and landing, we were sitting on a flat cushion, buckled up, and unfortunately seeing nothing. When given the sign to unbuckle, everyone cautiously started to roam around. As I went along, the view from the windows was breathtaking, but partly obstructed

by the waist gunners' long machine guns.

I was thinking "Here I am, actually flying in that beautiful plane." That alone was a humbling experience. All through the flight my son mumbled "They must have been nuts! It was insane!" He was thinking of these young airmen in 1943-45, flying missions for 8-10 hours, often with lousy weather, the stress of danger, explosions, collisions, damage, enemy fighters, flak, and the ever present possibility of violent death.

So, in our plane, there was no comfort, to be sure. As I reached the middle of the plane, bumping and gripping and climbing over fittings of many kinds, I found the found the radio operator's station most agreeable. Looking ahead at the narrow catwalk going over the bomb bay, I hesitated for a few seconds. Then gripping whatever I could, ropes and metal casements, I reached the area behind the pilot's and copilot's seats.

I could see the passengers coming or going on all fours creeping into a hole under the cockpit. An excuse came to me "I am 80 years old. If I go on all fours, I'll never get up." Christopher appeared and urged me to go forward saying: "The best is there. It is incredible! You must sit in the bombardier's seat and enjoy the view!"

So I went, not on all fours, but squatting in a sort of duck walk, hands helping me along. Finally I emerged in the nose, slightly below the pilot-copilot station. On the left, is the navigator's table, and forward is the awesome transparent domain of the bombardier. The view was all around, above and

below my feet. I was speechless. I was grateful for Christopher's insistence. I'll never forget the experience!

I know the plane well. I had been inside a B-17 before, with Jesse, but on the ground. I went to many reunions of his bomb group and saw hundreds of photos. I can place every crew member in his position. It will not astonish anyone if I say this was very different. The noise, the waltzing motion of the plan, the almost constant whipping on both sides, the bumping and rocking what made us quickly grasp whatever support was available, and, surprisingly, the impression of a gracious flight. I'm sure that the veterans of the war missions in 1943-45 would laugh at this, but I know they found beauty even in the midst of destruction; proud to be in a "tight formation."

On that day I felt closer than ever to my husband, to the young eager airman

he was then, relying on fate and luck and secure in the knowledge that nine other men were doing what they had to do. This is what was missing in that marvelous flight – the combat crew with its chatter and the other planes in the formation.

I wish I could find better words and I know it was not even a "milk run," but, rather, a cream run. I cannot help admiring the "insane magnificent" men. As my son labeled them, who survived this constant testing of their courage, stamina, and, the word my husband used, fortitude. Those who never returned to base still live in the hearts of the survivors.

Today I understand why they called the Flying Fortress "The Lady of the Skies" and why the men who flew in it are still nostalgic about her.

Are You Interested in Having Your Story Saved?

The United States Congress created the Veterans History Project in 2000. It is a project of the Library of Congress aimed at collecting oral history interviews, memoirs, letters, diaries, photographs, and other original materials from veterans of World Wars I and II, and the Korean, Vietnam, and Persian Gulf Wars and the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts (2001-present). Those U.S. citizen civilians who were actively involved in supporting war efforts (such as war industry workers, USO workers, flight instructors, medical volunteers, etc.) are also encouraged to contribute their personal narratives. More information is available at the Veterans History Project website (<http://www.loc.gov/vets/vets-home.html>).

Interviews are conducted by volunteers using kits provided by the Library of Congress. Names of interviewers are listed on VHP website. Wayne Edwards, a Vietnam veteran, lives in Newport News and is conducting interviews in this area. If you are interested, contact him at (757) 877-0403 or (757) 871-0998 (cell phone) or by e-mail at waynedanang@cs.com. He will send you a form for your biographical data and a Veteran's Release Form. After you return the completed forms, he'll call and arrange a time and place for the interview. Four copies of your filmed interview will be made (in DVD format): one for the Library of Congress, one for your hometown library, one for the War Memorial Museum in Newport News, and one for you.