

303rd BOMB GROUP ASSOCIATION, INC HISTORY, REUNIONS & MEMBERSHIP

by Edgar C. Miller

The 303rd Bomb Group Association, Inc., has had a wonderful existence since it got started back in 1975 at Orlando, Florida. There have been seventeen annual reunions and many dedications and smaller get-to-gathers.

The very first gathering of just five veterans took place in New York City at the *21 Club* on August 6, 1944. This was a one day meeting of close associates that had located in the New York area after they returned from Molesworth, while the fighting was still going on.

A much larger group of veterans, estimated at over 100, gathered at the Henry Hudson Hotel in New York City, on May 7, 1948 for a one day dinner meeting of 303rd Bombardment Group veterans. This was a very historic meeting as most of the veterans had returned to civilian life, although there were a few who had remained in the service.

In 1975 at the Sheraton Olympic Villas, in Orlando, Florida, a group of "serious" 303rd Bomb Group veterans met with the sole purpose of incorporating the Association. This meeting, held on 29 through 31 August, was most constructive in establishing by-laws, and election of the first officers of the Association. **Weldon "Don" Harrison** was selected as the first President of the Association — he carried membership number 001. **Charles J. McClain** carried membership number 002 and he became President the following year.

At the Orlando meeting there were 167 veterans and their spouses in attendance. For the most part, these veterans lived in and around the Florida area. Names (and membership numbers) like **William E. Eisenhart** (003), **Owen O'Neill** (004), **Joseph Vieira** (005), **Forrest E. Barton** (007), **Julius "Sam" Bass** (008), **Norwood D. Borrer** (009), **Clyde W. Bradley, Jr** (010), **Louis H. Breitenbach** (011), **Rufus S. Charlton** (012), **Hubert Corley** (013), **Frank De Maria** (014), **Lee E. Dolan, Jr** (015), **James E. Ferris** (016), **Elmer A. Fessler** (017), **Harry H. Heller** (024), **James C. Hicks** (028), **Robert J. Hullar** (029) and **Walter J. Mayer** (032) were some of the early veterans that really got this Association off to a wonderful start.

At the first meeting it was decided to hold Reunions every other year and the next one was held at Colorado Springs, Colorado on August 25-28, 1977 at the Four Seasons Motel where over 400 veterans attended.

In addition to our regular reunions, many mini-reunions have been held in conjunction with the 8th Air Force Historical Society's annual meetings. And several dedications around the world have been held, whereby many of our members were in attendance to pay homage to the men or places that were being honored.



REUNIONS AND DEDICATION CEREMONIES

REU #	DATES	LOCATION	HOTEL	ATT'D
**	1944 (Aug 6)	New York City, NY	21 Club	5
**	1948 (May 7)	New York City, NY	Henry Hudson Hotel	100+
1	1975 (Aug 29-31)	Orlando, FL	Sheraton Olympic Villas	167
2	1977 (Aug 25-28)	Colorado Springs, CO	Four Seasons Motel	400
3	1979 (Aug 23-26)	Dayton, Ohio	Stouffer's Plaza Hotel	294
4	1981 (Aug 20-23)	San Diego, CA	Bahia Hotel	288
5	1983 (Sep 22-25)	Washington, DC	Quality Inn, Capitol Hill	313
D ^[1]	1983 (Oct 9)	Dayton, Ohio		Unk
D ^[2]	1983 (Nov 4)	Colorado Springs, CO	Red Lion Hotel	50
MD ^[3]	1984 (June 19-26)	RAF Molesworth, England		184
6 ^[4]	1985 (July 24-28)	Bellevue, WA	Red Lion Inn	850
7	1987 (June 3-7)	Fort Worth, TX	Hilton Hotel	530
D ^[5]	1988 (July 21)	San Angelo, TX		30
8	1989 (Sep 17-Oct 1)	Norfolk, VA	Omni Hotel	650
M ^[6]	1990 (Sept 14)	Barksdale AFB, LA	Sheraton Bossier Inn	70
M ^[7]	1991 (Apr 7)	Galveston Island, TX		35
9	1991 (May 23-28)	Schaumburg, IL	Marriott Hotel	430
10D ^[8]	1992 (Sept 8-13)	Boise, ID	Red Lion Hotel	700
M	1993 (May 19-26)	RAF Molesworth, ENG	Holiday Inn	125
11	1994 (Mar 28-Apr 3)	Savannah, GA	Hyatt Regency Hotel	550
D ^[9]	1994 (Aug 15)	RAF Molesworth, ENG	Marriott Courtyard	12
12	1995 (Sept 12-17)	Colorado Springs, CO	Red Lion Hotel	708
D ^[10]	1996 (May 13-14)	Pooler (Savannah), GA	Econo Lodge	60
13	1996 (Aug 22-27)	San Francisco, CA	Airport Marriott	545
14	1997 (Sept 4-8)	Pittsburgh, PA	Westin William Penn Hotel	450
15	1998 (Aug 21-25)	Savannah, GA	Savannah Marriott Riverfront	556
16	1999 (Oct 8-11)	Oklahoma City, OK	Oklahoma City Marriott	457
MD ^[11]	2000 (June 2-3)	RAF Molesworth, ENG	Crown Plaza Hotel	185
17	2000 (Sep 25-29)	San Diego, CA	Hanalei Hotel	370
18	2001 (Sep 5-9)	Baltimore, MD	BWI Marriott	326
19	2002 (Oct 3-8)	Branson, MO	Guest House Inn & Suites	
20	2003	Portland, OR		

NOTE: Special 303rd BG(H) Association mini-reunions have been held in connection with annual meetings of the Mighty Eighth Air Force Historical Society 1975 - 1996

M - Mini Reunions

D - 303rd BG(H) Memorial Dedication Ceremonies

****** One day dinner meeting of 303rd BG(H) vets prior to organization of our 303rd BG(H) Association

[1] Dedication -USAF Museum memorial plaque

[2] Dedication - USAF Academy Cemetery memorial plaque

[3] Dedication - Brington Church memorial plaque - June 24th

[4] In conjunction with B-17 50th Anniversary, Boeing Co, Seattle, WA

[5] Dedication - Mathis Brothers plaque & display - Mathis Municipal Airport

[6] Dedication - 8th Air Force Headquarters Museum 303BG memorial

[7] Dedication - Lone Star Flight Museum - Keith Ferris **Thunderbird** Mural photo reproduction (4' x 12') installation. Restored **Thunderbird** B-17 flown from Duxford, England arrived Galveston Island airport on 7 April 1991

[8] Gowen Field memorial plaque and monument dedication

[9] Dedication new JAC-USEUCOM "Might in Flight" building

[10] Dedication of 303rd BG(H) monument in memorial garden at the Mighty Eighth Air Force Heritage Museum grand opening

[11] Reunion continued June 4-8 at the Garden Moat House Hotel, Cambridge, England and the Forum Hotel, London, England. Additional attendees: 113 from seven other 8th AF Units & Resistance Helpers - **RAF Molesworth Memorial Dedication** was 03 June 2000. A total of 298 were in attendance. Over 1,500 attended the June 3rd RAF Molesworth Hangar Dance

The glue that holds the membership of the 303rd Bomb Group Association together is the *Hell's Angels Newsletter*, which has been in continuous publication since the late 1970's. It's first editor was **Albert E. "Al" Martel, Jr.**, who published the first issue in April 1976. **Harry F. Jenkins**, took over and published 12 issues from 1977 to 1981. He was followed by **Wilbur "Bud" Klint**, who published 14 issues during 1982-1985. Then **Harold A. "Hal" Susskind** took over in December 1985 and published 46 issues before he turned the demanding job over to **Eddie Deerfield** for the November 1998 issue, hopefully for a long run. Much help has come from the "ladies" of these families. I know that **Rae Susskind** has told me that every room in her home has papers aimed to go into the newsletter at some point in time.

We have the most outstanding newsletter of all World War II Bomb Groups, now at 20 pages and with a quarterly color spread. The current distribution of the *Hell's Angels Newsletter* is around 1,950 copies each quarter.

The leadership of the 303rd Bomb Group Association, Inc has been in excellent hands over the years. Following **Don Harrison** and **Charley McClain** as Presidents, we have had **William E. "Bill" Eisenhart** in 1979; **Richard C. Waggoner** in 1981; **Joseph Vieira** in 1983; **E. C. "Al" Lehman** in 1985; **Carl J. Fyler** in 1987; **Wilbur "Bud" Klint** in 1989; **Carl L. DuBose, Jr** in 1991; **William S. McLeod, Jr** in 1992; **J. Ford Kelley** in 1994; **Edgar C. "Ed" Miller** in 1995; **Eddie Deerfield** in 1996; **Harold A. Susskind** in 1997; **Harry D. Gobrecht** in 1998; **William J. "Bill" Roche** in 1999; **Richard R. "Dick" Johnson** in 2000 and **Jack P. Rencher** in 2001. And over the many years, these leaders have had the privilege of having Major General **Lewis E. Lyle** act as their Group Advisor.

But those names have at all times, someone behind them that has been doing the "much needed, and necessary chores" of a non-profit Association. They are, of course, "OUR LADIES !"

Over the years, it has always been left up to the "Ladies" to make the Reunions a success and they have done just that. What a wonderful group that dedicate themselves to making sure that everyone in attendance, has the correct ticket for the occasion, has been given directions to the correct bus, and been told when to meet and where. We sincerely thank you all.

The Association offers memberships in three categories: First is for our "Molesworth" veterans which we refer to as "Regular Members." We also offer Family Memberships to anyone who is related to a Molesworth veterans, from sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, nephews, nieces, uncles, aunts, and cousins. A third form of membership is referred to as "Friends of the 303rd" and is offered to anyone whose reason for wishing to join, coincides with the "Purposes of the Association" as set forth by the By-Laws of the Association. They are:

- a. To perpetuate the history of the 303rd Bomb Group, Eighth Air Force, during World War II, in training and combat, and to memorialize the same by appropriate memorials.
- b. To arrange for reunions of the surviving members at the pleasure of the membership.
- c. To memorialize and perpetuate the memory of lost comrades.
- d. To provide social, educational, patriotic and recreational activities for its membership.
- e. To publish a newsletter for the information and pleasure of the membership.
- f. To seek out and reunite former 303rd Bomb Group members.
- g. To carry out the business of the corporation.

**Membership information and much more is available on our web site at
www.303rdBGA.com**