



THE FLYER

Commemorative Air Force
B-29 / B-24 Squadron

Timeless Beauty



FIFI returns to Dallas

Photo by Allie Hoyt

May 2017



COMMEMORATIVE
AIR FORCE

*B-29/B-24 Squadron
Officer & Staff Listing*

B-29 / B-24 Squadron Directory			
Position	Name	Phone	Email
If you would like to get scheduled on a Tour Stop as a Crew Member... Contact the following:			
B-29 Personnel Scheduling Officers	Archie (Pilots) Brad/Rick (FEs) Brad/Steve (Scanners)	See below for phone#'s	See below for e-mail addresses
B-24 Personnel Scheduling Officers	Archie (Pilots) Brad/Rick (FEs) Brad/Steve (Scanners)	See below for phone#'s	See below for e-mail addresses
If you are a New Member Looking to Get Plugged In or Want to Volunteer... Contact the following:			
Volunteer & New Member Coordinator	Tim Colman	214-708-2279	tpcolman@gmail.com
Squadron Officers:			
Squadron Commander	Neils Agather	817-946-9950	vnagather@agathertx.com
Executive Officer	Tom Travis	214-763-0147	tomtravis@aol.com
Adjutant & Personnel Officer	Debbie King	469-688-1709	squadadjutant@gmail.com
Maintenance Officer	Don Obreiter	580-471-3048	obreiter@cablone.net
Safety Officer	Steve Rabroker	469-387-6439	rabroker@hotmail.com
Operations Officer	Archie Taylor	817-944-3226	taylor2014@tx.rr.com
Assistant Ops Officer	Al Benzing	214-707-2726	albenzing@gmail.com
Public Information Officer	Kim Pardon	913-636-6250	pardonb29@gmail.com
Finance Officer	Gerald Oliver	312-953-0357	gerald.oliver@yahoo.com
Squadron Staff:			
Squadron General Manager	Brad Pilgrim	843-991-3814	bpilgrim@cafhq.org
Administrative Manager	Liz Vue	972-387-2924	evue@cafhq.org
Sr. Crew Chief	Rick Garvis	972-380-8800	rgarvis@cafhq.org
Crew Chief	Don Thurston	903-714-8037	don@donseye.info
Crew Chief	Ben Powers	214-277-3150	f14_ad@yahoo.com
Facility Manager	TBD	TBD	
B-24 Team:			
B-24 Go Team Leader	Al Benzing	214-707-2726	albenzing@gmail.com
Diamond Lil Century Club Chairman	Toni Rabroker	972-740-4601	rabroker@hotmail.com
B-24 Volunteer MX Coordinator	Steve Rabroker	469-387-6439	rabroker@hotmail.com
B-24 Flight Ops Coordinator	Al Benzing	214-707-2726	albenzing@gmail.com
B-24 Aircraft Tours Coordinator	TBD	TBD	
B-29 Team:			
B-29 Flight Ops Coordinator	Archie Taylor	817-944-3226	taylor2014@tx.rr.com
B-29 MX Coordinator	Rick Garvis	972-380-8800	rgarvis@cafhq.org
B-29 Flight Engineer Coordinator	Rick Garvis	972-380-8800	rgarvis@cafhq.org
Stearman Team:			
Stearman Flight Ops Coordinator	Archie Taylor	817-944-3226	taylor2014@tx.rr.com
Stearman MX Coordinator	Bill Goeken	817-308-1916	wk.goeken@verizon.net
Squadron Volunteer Leaders:			
The " Flyer " Newsletter Editor	Kon Kelley	214-995-5184	konartist@verizon.net
Appearance Captain	Henry Borderlon	972-406-0644	pixie@sbcglobal.net
PX Co-Captain	Rocky Smith	214-565-8562	diverock@hotmail.com
PX Co-Captain	Alma Smith	214-284-9128	alma@b29b24px.org
Social Chairman	Toni Rabroker	972-740-4601	rabroker@hotmail.com
Tours/Ride Desk/Marketing:			
Tour Manager & Scheduling	Jon Oliver	312-925-6184	aphtwarbirds@gmail.com
Ride Desk Captain	Mary Mount	209-605-4313	mgmount@aol.com
Tour Marketing Coordinator	Kim Pardon	913-636-6250	pardonb29@gmail.com

Its FUN to Volunteer

www.CAFB29B24.org

www.AirPowerTour.org

CAF AirPower History Tour

National Air Tour of Historic World War II Aircraft



Summer Tour A

Reading, Pennsylvania	June 2 - 4
Hagerstown, Maryland	June 7-11
Newport News, Virginia	June 12 - 14
Wilmington, North Carolina	June 16-18
Charleston, South Carolina	June 21-25
Knoxville, Tennessee	June 27 - July 2
Lexington, Kentucky	July 5-9
Cincinnati, Ohio	July 12-16
Kankakee, Illinois	July 19-23
Oshkosh, Wisconsin	July 24-30
Duluth, Minnesota	August 2-6

Summer Tour B

Janesville, Wisconsin	August 16-20
Indianapolis, Indiana	August 23-27
Marion, Illinois	August 30-Sept 3
Kansas City, Kansas	September 6-10
Branson, Missouri	September 13-17
Fayetteville, Arkansas	September 20 -24

Fall Tour

Wings Over Dallas Dallas, Texas	October 6-8
WWII AirPower Expo New Orleans, Louisiana	October 27-29

Volunteers Needed

New Scanners wanted! If you attended B-29 Ground School, you may be able qualify as a Scanner while on tour. Please let us know your availability. Contact Steve Rabroker rabroker@hotmail.com.



*Schedule subject to change
Check www.airpowertour.org

"FIFI"

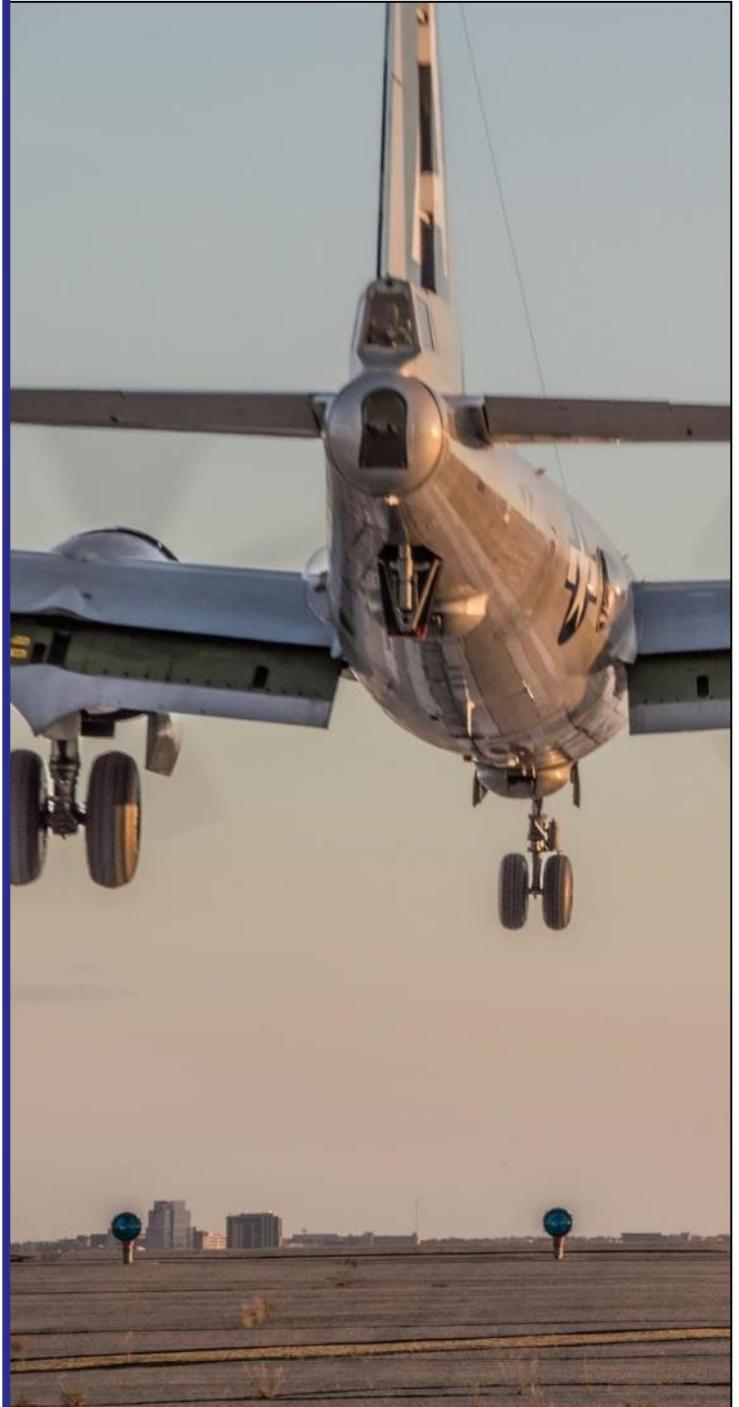


Photo by Kevin Luke



*A young FIFI fan with cheek art
Photo by Konley Kelley*

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Feature Story: "General Travis and his B-29" by Fred Barber



**Remembering
Robert Phillips**

Squadron Report

In the simplest terms, we are having a tough year. We had a delay due to a series of mechanical issues. While the delay was unavoidable and the Mx crew moved mountains to make the necessary repairs, it has cost us. Not only the cost of the repairs but, more importantly, the tour suffers financially when you don't show up as has been planned and advertised. So we have a tough row to hoe financially.

Please know your officers are working on solutions. In the meantime, *FIFI* is back on the road and working well. We have been hit with weather delays, but they are a normal part of our operations. With Memorial Day behind us, summer is here and ride sales are increasing and the crowds coming to see *FIFI* are beginning to grow.

We need all the help we can get. Keep your fingers crossed and *FIFI* in your prayers.

See you on the road.

Neils Agather
Squadron Leader

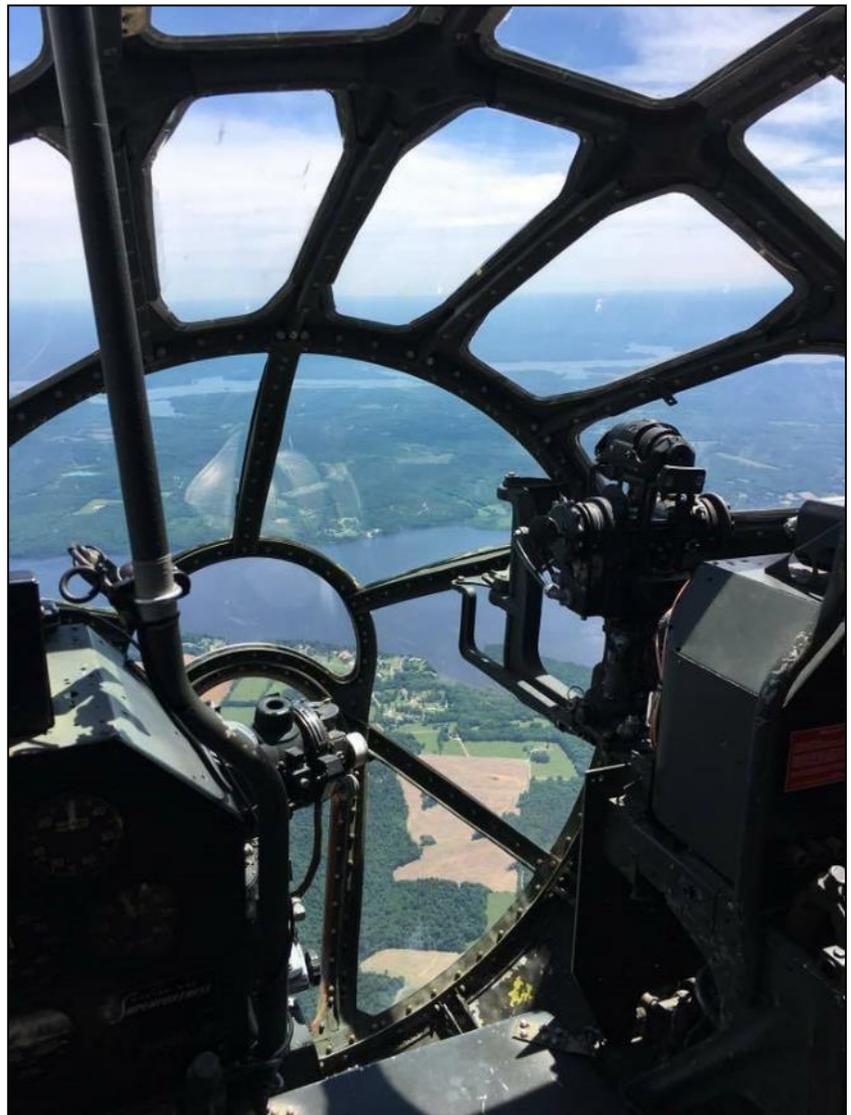


Photo by Mark Novak

Flight Operations Report

The Squadron finished Spring Tour 2017 on May 8th returning from Palm Springs CA. Thanks to all that helped during the Spring Tour. The Maintenance Team got *FIFI* and the T-6 ready for Summer Tour A that started at Dallas Executive on May 18th. Glen Mount is the tour leader.

Since the Dallas stop the aircraft have been to Bowling Green, Smyrna, and are headed to Trenton. The month of June takes us to the Reading Airshow then to Hagerstown, Newport News, Wilmington, Charleston and finally Knoxville. We are hoping for big crowds and lots of ride flights for the aircraft.

The T-6 is staying with the tour all summer. Congratulations to Richard Mandel, Curt Lewis and Jerry Morelock who recently checked out in the T-6 to help out this summer. They paid for some block time and got the opportunity to ferry the aircraft on tour to complete their required hours for doing ride flights.

The Stearman is finishing up Maintenance and will join the tour in Lexington on July 5th. The B-24 has received one of its new engines and maintenance needs your help getting *Diamond Lil* ready for tour later this year. Check with Rick Gravis or Toni/Steve Rabroker to see how you can help.

Our *Bucket* pilot Jon Oliver reminds us that Oshkosh is just around the corner and should be a good time this year.

Archie Taylor
B-24/B-29 Operations Officer



Camarillo, CA

Photo by Mark Limon



Bullhead City, AZ

Photo by Richard Kohlman



Mesa, AZ

Photo by Shannon Young

Training & Safety Report

To borrow a tag line from the late legendary Texas sports writer *Blackie Sherrod*, “Scatter Shooting While Wondering Whatever Happened To.....” This was his opening for a smorgasbord of topics, so here goes!

While on tour in Palm Springs, California with *FIFI* and *The Bucket* a couple of weeks ago, we were welcomed by record heat for that time of year – 104-107°. It was a hot ramp! Oh yeah, but I forgot, they say it’s a dry heat, so no big deal (right!). The point of this is, while touring is great fun, it’s also a lot of hard work. As Chief would say “Up at 0-dark-30, out to the planes for 10-12 hours, back to the hotel, sleep fast, then get up and do it all over again”. Not to discourage anyone, but just to let you know – be prepared. Be physically in shape, stay hydrated, keep a good attitude and be ready to work.

Keep a watchful eye on the weather. At the Dallas tour stop last week, Crew Chief Rick and I were on the ramp early Sunday morning, standing under the wing of *FIFI*. With thunderstorms around, it didn’t take but one pop of close lightening for us to figure we were in the wrong spot, an empty ramp except for one large airplane. Be aware!

And lastly, I know this is sometimes difficult to do, but as we give cockpit tours on *FIFI*, or any of the planes that require climbing, maybe we need to be a little more watchful for the folks who may have a hard time physically negotiating steps and ladders. I hate to tell anyone that they would probably be better off if they just looked from the ground, but that may be to our advantage as opposed to possibly injuring themselves. Just a thought.

So again, I know touring is a lot of work, but it is also great fun! The comradery with your fellow crew members and interacting with the customers makes it all worth it – many times over.

Always remember: “IF THE JOB IS DONE RIGHT, IT IS SAFE”.

Steve Rabroker
Safety Officer



Photos by Raymond Jeffcoat

PIO Report

Tour seasons that start the way this one has are pretty discouraging for the person responsible for getting people on the ramp and selling seats in airplanes. Maintenance and weather issues add an additional layer of stress -- way beyond the normal stress of figuring out how and when to advertise and how to get reporters out to cover the story for 30 plus consecutive stops.

To say I have had some challenging days this season would be an understatement.

We did manage to get some pretty good news coverage in Trenton in spite of the airplane not showing up until noon the last day of the event. This thanks to a couple of WWII veterans who came out for interviews on Memorial Day. [Story here](#) and [here](#). If the weather is decent at Reading we will do well there and we will get good news coverage in Hagerstown. I am optimistic about that stop.

I am also excited about Newport News, Wilmington, NC, Charleston, SC and Knoxville, TN – places we have not been since I took over this job 5 years ago – but communities that fit the profile of places we do well. Smaller markets are easier. Advertising is less expensive and people are looking for something fun to do. It seems to be what works best for us.

So I am hopeful...

Kim Pardon
Public Information Officer



Nic Coleman and his crew from PLANE RESURRECTION shooting video of the crew briefing prior to FIFI's flight from Meacham to the APHT stop at Dallas Executive Airport.

Financial Report

The Perfect Storm

Sometimes many forces, not of your making, converge to create difficult circumstances. Perhaps that is an understatement to describe the events that have unfolded for the Squadron this year. A series of smaller storms have intersected into our operation and built a Perfect Storm situation.

Spring Tour

We started the year with high hopes of a great Spring Tour. Traveling to Arizona and Southern California has been very good to us in the past. Vexing maintenance problems (landing gear and engine cylinders) caused us to miss the scheduled departure. Tracing down the problems meant we needed to stand down. Nothing is more important than making sure that *FIFI* is fully ready to fly in the safest manner. Our maintenance crew worked tirelessly to find and fix the problems. By the time all was clear, we missed the departure by six weeks. Our tour crew scrambled to make the best of it and was able to go west and make four of the scheduled six stops. But rescheduling meant some of our riders cancelled, and a lot of snow birds in AZ and southern CA had already left for northern climes. We had budgeted to gain \$150,000 from our Spring Tour. Instead, we barely broke even.



Home Show at DEA

Upon the return, we again had high hopes for a great home show at Dallas Executive Airport. A large group of very dedicated volunteers turned out. The set up was great, the displays wonderful, the planes ready to go. Unfortunately, the weather didn't cooperate and the crowds didn't show. We almost never lose money on a tour stop, but Dallas was a financial loss. The touring crew has battled weather at all three of the first three tour stops (Dallas, Bowling Green, Nashville). Financial results have been poor.

Loss of \$278,000 For First Five Months

The bottom line is that we have not made any money from our tour operations so far this year. In the meantime, our regular overhead costs continue. As you look at the numbers below, you can see that we have spent \$278,000 more than we have taken in. Maintenance costs on the B-29 and Stearman have been higher than normal. Our cash balance in the bank has taken a serious hit.

B-24 Bright Spot

The one bright spot recently has been the B-24. The efforts of the team heading the *Diamond Lil Century Club* have brought in donations. The B-24 has money in her account that is being spent to overhaul the engines and return her to the skies. The DLCC needs another \$50,000 in donations to complete the renovation of three engines and return her to flight. In the past, the B-24 depended on the B-29 to help pay the way. Not so this year.

Results Year to Date Through May

The results through May are shown below. These results are on a cash basis. That means we add up all that came in and all that went out. Some of our major expenses for the first four months are listed. These are in addition to fuel for training flights and tour expenses. But as mentioned above, tour expenses (hotel, rental car, advertising, ride and transition fuel) have been covered by tour income.

Your officers have been grappling with these issues and we hope to have some better news soon. The good news is that *FIFI* is out on tour and running great. She is now starting into the tour season that is traditionally the best of the year. We have found that tour stops after Memorial Day and before Labor Day bring out the most people and best results. That starts today (I'm writing this report on Memorial Day).

Your help is greatly appreciated as we continue to soldier on. This Squadron has faced problems before. Some larger than these challenges. We will see them again in the future. But our resolve is steadfast and our belief in the mission continues. Let's work together to "Keep 'Em Flying" and honor America.

Gerald Oliver
Finance Officer

B-29 / B-24 Squadron & the AirPower History Tour			
Cash Balances			
Jan 1, 2017 to May 29, 2017			
	Cash Balance at Jan 1, 2017	Cash Balance at May 29, 2017	Cash Gain <Loss>
Checkbooks:			
Chase Bank Account	\$176,236	\$158,857	\$(17,380)
Bank of America Account	\$21,123	\$21,348	\$225
Aircraft Accounts: *			
B-29 Aircraft Account	\$195,958	\$(5,671)	\$(201,628)
B-24 Aircraft Account	\$197,874	\$120,257	\$(77,616)
Stearman Aircraft Account	\$(742)	\$(642)	\$100
T-6 Aircraft Account	\$395	\$18,718	\$18,322
Cash Balance Totals	\$590,843	\$312,866	\$(277,977)
Notable Large Expenses in 2017			
Payroll (Jan thru April 30)		\$126,620	
Interest on B-29 Note (Jan thru April 30)		\$17,701	
B-29 Engine Overhaul		\$53,648	
B-24 Engine Overhaul		\$62,145	
B-24 ANUAC		\$26,368	
			\$286,481
* Aircraft Account info current thru April 30			

DIAMOND LIL

B-24 Go Team Report

B-24 Engines:

The 1st replacement engine has been received and should be installed on *Lil* shortly. The 2nd engine will be built up from an engine case that was recently removed from *Lil*. It is being inspected and components sent for overhaul before assembly as a 'new' engine. The timing for a 3rd engine, and a 4th 'spare' engine will depend on our fundraising efforts.

B-24 Grants:

As I wrote last month, the application for grants is an area in need of development and I had asked for a volunteer to take on this significant effort. Dan Dunn, who is a member and frequent volunteer in our Squadron has agreed to head up this project at the Squadron level. Toni Rabroker, Konley Kelley and I will be working with Dan to develop a system for grant applications and soon have a process underway.

Help Needed:

If anyone is aware of a *person* who may contribute to *Diamond Lil's* new engines, please refer them to www.DiamondLil.org. For *companies, organizations or foundations* that you wish to refer, please contact me.

Thanks!

Al Benzing
Assistant Flight Ops Officer
B-24 Go Team Leader
214-707-2726
albenzing@gmail.com



Photos by Chet Manly



Member News

May, 2017

Several members of the Squadron are now also members of the new CAF WASP Squadron including Lisa Foster and Natasha Sanders pictured here.



<https://riseabovewasp.org/squadron-home/>

Memorial Day 2017



Missing Man Table

Konley Kelley attended an event at Richland College in Dallas, TX hosted by the Veterans Services Division. The dining area for the event included a "Missing Man Table."

The Missing Man Table is traditionally part of military dining ceremonies and services balls. In recent years, the ceremony has been frequently performed in conjunction with Veterans Day and Memorial Day Services.

Membership Info

If you have any membership questions, please feel free to contact me at squadadjutant@gmail.com

Dues and new member apps can be mailed to:
Debbie King
13562 Braemar Drive
Dallas, Texas 75234
B29/B24 Squadron Adjutant
469-688-1709



RED Bird Squadron

Our members are also joining the new Redbird Squadron based at DEA.

The Redbird Squadron joined us at the APHT tour stop in Dallas.



Maintenance Help and Questions

Rick Garvis
B-29 Mx
972-380-8800

rgarvis@cafhq.org



Steve Rabroker
B-24 Mx
469-387-6439

Rabroker@hotmail.com

Get your Squadron gifts and gear at the Squadron Px: <http://www.b29b24px.org/>



Find us on [facebook](#)



Volunteer Spotlight “Natasha Sanders”

By Konley Kelley

Recently I met up with Natasha Sanders for an interview for the May Volunteer Spotlight. What can you say about our friend Natasha? – colorful personality, lots of energy, killer smile. She is a bright spot in our Squadron and we are lucky to have her.

Natasha was born in Humble, TX on July 17, 1983. It is a miracle Natasha was born in Texas. Her grandparents were rushing to get her mother, Topsanna, back home to Louisiana and were pulled over for speeding in Humble, TX. Natasha was born there but has never been back. Her grandparents, James W. Sanders and his wife, Delta, cared for Topsanna and helped raise Natasha.



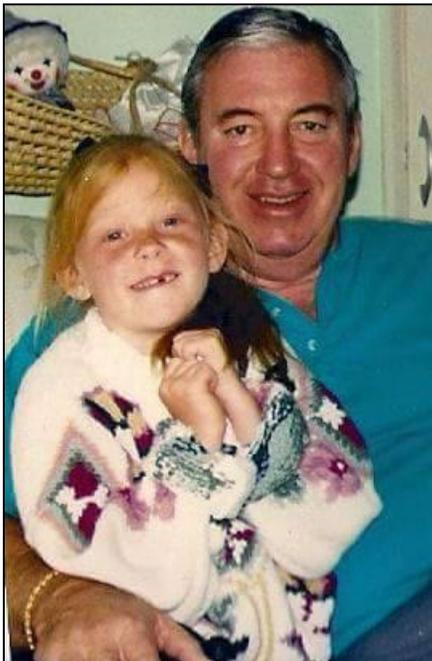
Natasha’s mom married S/Sgt. Scott Robinson when Natasha was 7 years old. She gained a sister, Courtni. The family accompanied S/Sgt. Robinson on deployments to England and Turkey during Operation Desert Storm. The two divorced and Natasha’s mom settled back in Midland, TX, the new home of Natasha’s grandparents.

Natasha grew up in Midland and attended the local high school. She recalls field trips to the petroleum museum and, yes, the CAF airbase and museum. Her personality growing up was part tomboy – happy with Barbies and matchbox cars. For a time she worked at PetSmart in Midland. The CAF planes were always present. She remembers sitting on the roof of her house and watching warbirds fly over including a silver, 4-engine bomber named *FIFI*.

She took the ASVAB military test in high school. She thought about a career in the Coast Guard or Navy. The test revealed an aptitude towards programming and coding. An *X-Files* fan, Natasha also dreamed of being a forensic investigator like *Agent Scully*. She saw herself working crime scenes and doing autopsies.

At 18-19, she wasn’t keen on jumping into college classes. Natasha took a job working for Cingular in Midland. For a change of scenery, she moved to Anaheim, CA for a year in 2006 where she worked for Van Law Foods. Not happy in CA, Natasha returned to Texas and joined her mom. She briefly worked at a Scooter Store before falling back into tech support work. For a time she did technical troubleshooting for powerchairs used by the elderly.

In 2008, she moved to Odessa and took a job with Telvista. This was pure tech support in support of Verizon DSL. In six months she was promoted to a Level 3 Escalation Supervisor. In 2009, she was transferred to Dallas to open a new call center. She supported the training of 250 employees in the fast ramp up of the center. The work kept her busy but she also kept her eye on other options.



Natasha and her grandad

She did a brief stint at CSC Computer Science Corp. and, in 2013, took a job in tech support with Atlantic Aviation at Addison Airport.

It was here she found her friend from Midland again. *FIFI* was based in Addison and she saw *FIFI* while doing some work at the fuel farm near the south end of the airport. At Warbirds over Addison, she met Brian Studer. Brian told her about the CAF and encouraged her to join. He believed a young woman like her would be a welcome addition to our ranks.

On June 2, 2013, Natasha joined the CAF and B-29/B-24 Squadron. She has been a regular at Squadron meetings, activities and ground school. She quickly fell in love with *Diamond Lil* and has helped whenever she can during the restoration process. If you've been to a Squadron event at DEA, Natasha probably served you your meal.

Natasha's first flight on *Lil* was on in September, 2014. She traveled to Gainesville with Al Benzing, Tim Henry, Jim Neill and Tim Colman. *Lil* did a flyover and static display - and Natasha loved every minute of it.



Natasha at WWII Air Expo

In February, 2015, she did a training flight on *FIFI*. Natasha had a Go-Pro camera on her forehead. It might be the first time I've really seen a Go-Pro used properly. Natasha worked Scanner in the aft section. Cool video.



Natasha and BOB

I also remember Natasha wearing glasses at ground school with a video camera mounted on the nosepiece. Tech-savvy Natasha is!



Natasha and Col. Dick Cole



Natasha and Lil



Natasha and FIFI



Natasha with Lisa Foster and a real Rosie at WOD

I've flown with Natasha, too. At a Squadron meeting, Natasha, our friend Lisa and I won a raffle to flyer on *Bucket of Bolts*.

In 2015 she booked a flight to Washington, DC to support the Squadron and witness the *Arsenal of Democracy* flyover. She also recently took her first helicopter flight with the Dallas PD. It was cool seeing her home from above.

Natasha has embraced the world of living history. She loves to dress in 40s and 50s period clothing. She also fondly adores the music of the time which reminds her of spending time with her Grandpa. Natasha makes her own clothing and costumes and bedazzles lots of her stuff.

She also joins her Squadron-mate Lisa Foster dressing as the iconic *Rosie the Riveter* and telling this important story from history to future generations. She is very proud of her recent membership in the new CAF WASP Squadron. Natasha knows the story of the WASP will be lost to history unless we act to acknowledge their contribution to the war effort and use their story to inspire young girls and future aviators.

Natasha intends to complete her scanner training on *FIFI* and tour with the Squadron. She has her reservations for Oshkosh and can't wait to see *FIFI* and *Doc* on their first date.

What drives her interest in the CAF and aviation history? Natasha's grandfather was in the Air Force. Every time she promotes the CAF's mission she knows she is also honoring his memory. As base military police, he may have guarded some of the last remaining B-29s and B-47s in the SAC. She carries on for him and for her own love of these beautiful aircraft that are now a big part of her life. Thanks Natasha for sharing your passion and joy with all of us.



James W. Sanders serving at Lackland AFB



Natasha in Dallas PD Helo



Natasha in period costume posing with the T6.



Yes we can!



Natasha with a Fifiella on her shirt working on Diamond Lil's interior



Feature Story

“General Travis and his B-29”

By Fred Barber

The troop train arrived at the depot in Fairfield, CA on a Sunday morning the 1st week of October 1950. The weather was beautiful as only October in northern California can be. There were palm trees everywhere. I had just come from snow country in Rantoul, Illinois (Chanute AFB), and I ‘sunburned my tonsils’ looking up at the tall palms.

A 6-by AF blue truck was waiting for us. The ride from the RR station was not long and the sign had already been re-painted at the main gate when we arrived—now saying “Travis AFB”. An AP (Air Policeman) checked our orders and questioned each of us about the inked in name change. He quickly decided it must be OK as there were 12 Airmen all with “inked” orders. And of course he very well knew of the name change—just being an AP.



Brigadier General Robert F. Travis

In late July, 1950, Communist troops came across the Naktong River to the southwest and also northwest of Taegu on the Korean peninsula. They started filtering troops to the rear of Allied lines, forming a tense political situation. The Communist perimeter around Pusan was forming thus increasing hostilities and the North Koreans numeric superiority left few options for the UN and US ground forces. On that day, a Mark IV nuclear bomb was dispatched to the eastern Pacific. It would travel in two parts. One part, the dense uranium core, and the other, the high explosive outer casing; each would be carried via separate aircraft, routes, and times.

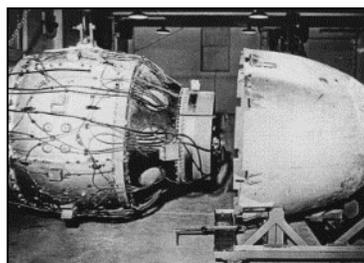
A B-29 bomber left Fairfield-Suisun Air Force Base on August 5th, 1950, carrying the high-explosive portion of the Mark IV. However, it would not travel very far.

On 5 August 1950, a Saturday, B-29, *Check Six* SN 44-87651, crashed, burned, and exploded just after takeoff from Fairfield-Suisun AFB causing fatal injuries to 12, and 8 crewmen and passengers received injuries. Extensive damage to property and injuries to both civilian and military personnel were caused by a subsequent explosion of a bomb on the aircraft.



*USAF Boeing B-29 Check Six
Serial Number 44-87651*

The pilot, Captain Eugene Q. Steffes, was at the controls, with Brigadier General Robert F. Travis as Command Pilot. At 2200 PST, the aircraft was cleared for takeoff on runway 21 left, which is 8,000 feet long. The wind was 17 knots from the southwest. A power check (2,800 RPM) was made. The brakes were released!



*Atomic bomb being assembled
at Travis AFB*



Flaming wreckage from Check Six **16**

Prior to full liftoff, the #2 engine propeller malfunctioned, and the command pilot ordered the propeller feathered. There was not enough room left on the runway to land. Continuing the liftoff was the only option. After liftoff, the pilot actuated the gear switch to the UP position, but the gear did not retract. Due to the increased drag, the feathered engine, the slightly rising terrain ahead and to the left, and the inability of the aircraft to climb, the commander elected to make a 180 turn to the right and back to base—this would be pretty-much in the direction of Suisun Bay towards the south.

Upon completion of the turn, the left wing became difficult to hold up. The commander allowed the aircraft to slide to the left trying to avoid a base trailer court. A crash landing was imminent as the altitude of the aircraft was only a few feet above the ground. The aircraft struck the ground, with the left wing down, at approximately 120 mph. All ten people in the rear compartment were fatally injured. General Travis and one passenger in the forward compartment received fatal injuries; all other crewmembers and passengers escaped with only minor injuries. About 20 minutes after the crash occurred, the high explosives in the A-bomb's iron casing ignited. The blast was felt and heard in a circumference of over 35 miles away (Lodi, Birds Landing, Fairfield, even up in Winters, CA) and caused severe damage to the nearby base trailer park. The 6 trailers that were taken out were empty—the AF personnel, their spouses, and children were attending a Saturday-Sunday religious conference in nearby Stockton, CA and were sound asleep in the retreat's beds.

In addition to those killed or injured in the initial crash and as a result in large part to the explosion that occurred shortly after the crash—180 military, civilian, and dependents were killed or injured; seven people were killed, 49 were admitted to the base hospital, and 124 others received superficial injuries.”



The day after the accident, investigators comb through the wreckage for clues

A survivor remembers the Aug. 1950 crash on Fairfield-Suisun AFB (Travis Air Force Base, CA); Lt. William Braz was an eyewitness to base history. He is the last known surviving member from the B-29 Superfortress crew that crashed Aug. 5, 1950, an incident which gave the base its new name. Braz was born in 1920 and was 92 years old at the time of the interview (2012): his mind was still sharp with a vivid memory of the events that occurred so long ago, he was able to give a full account of what happened during the day that changed the history of the base.

Back in August 1950, 1st Lt. Braz was a bombardier assigned to the 99th Bomb Squadron, 9th Bombardment Wing at Fairfield-Suisun Air Force Base. He was seated near Brig. Gen. Robert Travis on the B-29's flight deck at the time of the accident. The B-29 *Check Six* crashed just five minutes after an almost midnight takeoff at Fairfield-Suisun AFB as part of a 15-ship deployment to the Pacific just after the beginning of the Korean conflict on June 25, 1950. The B-29 crash killed 12 crewmembers and passengers aboard the B-29, including Gen. Travis. Additionally, seven people on the ground, five Base firefighters and two volunteers attempting to rescue the crew, also died. In addition, 49 injured people were admitted to the hospital and 124 others received minor injuries. Miraculously, eight of the B-29's crew and passengers survived the crash.

As he remembered the crash, Braz spoke with a shaky voice. He had to pause at times, but was still able to continue. He gave a vivid account of the accident. As he talked, he remembered lost friends and wondered if things could have gone differently.

"It was a normal mission as far as I was concerned, until takeoff," Braz said. "Then it seemed when they were halfway down the runway, No. 2 ran away and there seemed to be difficulty in getting No. 2 back."

Fred Says: A runaway engine does not happen often. Sometimes it was a jammed control and sometimes there was a fuel line problem—a check valve perhaps, or the fuel injection pumps (there were two on each engine). I also heard rumors that it was sabotage. Gen. Travis had an “8-ball squadron”. It was made up of officers and enlisted men who had ‘screwed’ up. A lot of resentment! Some mechanics that I knew, believed that some grommet guides (or cable leads) had been crimped with a pair of water pump pliers. This would cause the controls—that were run by cable—to be stiff or NOT move at all.

Braz heard Pilot Capt. Eugene Steffes’ call to move turbo boost selector to a more powerful setting for the other three and the No. 2 engine's propeller blades were positioned so air flowed straight through them rather than making them spin (feathered). He heard the co-pilot, yell the landing gear wasn't coming up. Steffes started making a turn back toward the base.

"They lost airspeed and Steffes called to the co-pilot to alert the crew for a crash landing," Braz said. "His interphone wasn't working and he was shouting across the cockpit “Where's the field?” I tried to direct him to the right. Braz said he was moving around, half out of his seat, when he heard someone yell that something was happening to the No. 3 engine as well.

"It looked like things were getting difficult," he said. I ran toward the back to get into a crash landing position and started to pull down the crash crossbar. Just then, General Travis told me, “Get back, get ready, there is no time.” Travis pulled Braz down just before the plane crashed. Braz said it seemed as though the aircraft turned and turned and rolled five or six times. In order to escape the aircraft, the pilot knocked out a window. Steffes got out, but, on the way, badly injured his hand. The co-pilot was halfway out when he got stuck, needing a push from Braz, who then followed him out.

"I stood up and saw people looking around," Braz said. "Someone shouted, “That's the general.” They went over and dragged him away from the plane." Someone yelled to get away from the plane. Braz walked toward a nearby jeep road. Quickly, he was in a car—it transported him to the base hospital where he collapsed in the receiving room.

According to the Air Force accident report, the cause of the crash was propeller malfunctions at liftoff combined with the failure of the landing gear to retract. Approximately 20 minutes after the crash, the highly explosive ‘filler’ in the bomb casing ignited, resulting in a blast that severely damaged the base trailer park near the main gate. Braz was seriously injured in the accident, but recovered and continued to serve a long career in the Air Force that began in World War II flying in B-24 Liberators and ended flying in a B-52 Strato-Fortress in the late 1950's.

The US Congress created the Veterans History Project in 2000 as part of the American Folk Life Center at the Library of Congress. The mission of the project is to collect, preserve, and make accessible the personal accounts of American war veterans so that future generations may hear directly from vets to better understand the realities of war.

It has taken Braz years to talk about what happened and what he saw. His daughter said she had never heard her father talk about the B-29 crash before. Future generations will now have these historical memories and be able to learn from his first-hand account.

Dave Trojan, Travis Heritage Center researcher, has investigated the accident as part of an effort to update the Travis exhibit at the Heritage Center. He used genealogy websites to track down Braz. "There are some pictures and official reports that help tell the story of what happened, but hearing it first-hand by an eyewitness who was there was dramatic," Trojan said.

Before leaving, Travis members presented Braz with a 60th Air Mobility Wing commander's coin on behalf of Col. Dwight Sones, the wing's former commander, to show him he is part of Travis AFB history and will be remembered. *Fred Says:* Col. Kelly took over Fairfield–Suisun 72 hours later by order of Gen. LeMay and was my commanding officer for over two years (Oct. 1950 to Dec. 22, 1952). I had also signed a form stating that I would NOT talk about Gen. Travis and the B-29 until it came out in the newspaper, radio, or TV. I never mentioned it for 59 years.

At the end of World War II, Soviet development with modern four-engined heavy bombers lagged behind the west. The Petlyakov Pe-8 — the sole heavy bomber operated by the VVS — first flew in 1936. Intended to replace the obsolete Tupolev TB-3, only 93 Pe-8s were built by the end of World War II. During 1944 and 1945 five B-29s made emergency landings in Soviet territory after bombing raids on Japanese Manchuria and Japan. In accordance with Soviet neutrality in the Pacific War, the bombers were interned by the Soviets despite American requests for their return. Rather than return the aircraft, the Soviets reverse-engineered the American B-29s and used them as a pattern for the Tupelev Tu-4.

Fred says: During the Cold War about 1963, I was working at Northrop-Anaheim, Calif. and one of the Managers said to me, “Fred, follow me. I want to show you something.” We walked down to building 2 and out into the storage area. Sitting upright on a wheeled pallet was an R-3350. The Manager said, “Go look at the ID plates.”

They were in Russian. This was one of the R-3350 engines the Soviets had “reverse” engineered. It looked the same except the outside of the castings were much rougher than ours. We were seeking a “signature” of the engine. We were building sensor UAV/Drones back then and needed one of the engines of their B-29 copy.

Production of the B-29 was phased out after WWII with the last example completed by Boeing's Renton factory on 28 May 1946. Many aircraft went into storage, being declared excess inventory and were ultimately scrapped as surplus. Others remained in the active inventory and equipped Strategic Air Command when it formed on 21 March 1946. In particular, the "Silverplate" modified aircraft of the 509th Composite Group remained the only aircraft capable of delivering the atomic bomb, and so the unit was involved in the Operation Crossroads series of tests, with B-29 *Dave's Dream* dropping a "Fat Man"-type bomb in Test Able on 1 July 1946.

Some B-29s, fitted with filtered air sampling scoops, were used to monitor above ground nuclear weapons testing by the United States and the USSR by sampling airborne radioactive contamination. The USAF also used the aircraft for long-range weather reconnaissance (WB-29), for signals intelligence (SIGINT) gathering (EB-29) and photographic reconnaissance (RB-29).



S/Sgt Fred Davis on left and S/Sgt Fred Barber on right—Diamond Head in the rear (1951). We were on our way home from the Orient in a C-124—it had R-4360's non-injected.



Check Six photographed in WWII.

F. Eugene Barber has published 18 novels.

They can be found on www.amazon.com, www.abebooks.com, www.authorhouse.com

Check for a discount or maybe FREE shipping



Photo Album

AirPower History Tour visits Dallas

Dallas Executive Airport May 18-21, 2017

*Photos by Raymond Jeffcoat
and Konley Kelley*









Feature Story “FIFI Flight” By Joe Reavis

Riding in a warbird is cool, but for many of the passengers at Commemorative Air Force events there is a special connection; such is the case for Chuck and Michele Cutrer of Austin who drove up from Austin to ride aboard the B-29 *FIFI* at the AirPower History Tour stop May 20 in Dallas.

The father of the brother and sister, William Edward Cutrer III, served as a tailgunner of a B-29 with the 20th Air Force based on Guam.

“It’s like coming to terms with family history, understanding our parents better, what they had to sacrifice at an early age,” Michele said.

The brother and sister related that their parents did not talk much about WWII, but that they have learned some of the history from Internet searches, such as the fact that their father’s first mission was Operation Meetinghouse on March 9, 1945, a firebombing mission to Tokyo. With an estimated 100,000 killed, it has been ranked as the deadliest death toll of any air raid.

A little more than 300 Boeing B-29 bombers, stripped of their weaponry to improve range and bomb load, made their bomb runs at about 7,000 feet, a low level tactic ordered by Gen. Curtis Lemay, commander of the 20th, to improve accuracy. The bombing burned 15 square miles from the Tokyo city center. Pilots reported that the updrafts from the inferno kicked their planes up as much as 5,000 feet.

Firebombing of Japanese cities continued until the end of the war, Sept. 2, 1945. Many B-29 crews were taken off bombing missions and started dropping supplies on POW camps before the war ended, and after the surrender. Last October, Michele presented Chuck with a ticket for a flight aboard *FIFI* and she bought one for herself. The siblings waited until the Dallas tour stop to make their flights because Chuck wanted to secure the best seat in the bomber for himself, in the nose.

“This was at the very top of my bucket list since I was a kid,” Chuck declared. “This has been a lifetime dream for me.”

“I always wanted to be a pilot. I got my pilot’s license in 1978 and there was a glut of pilots, so I ended up working on airplanes, instead,” he continued. Chuck started a business repairing aircraft instruments.

He also noted that he has a picture in his office of himself looking out of *FIFI* when he was in his 20s. It just took some time before he took a ride.

Michele’s reasons for riding on the iconic bomber are somewhat different from those of her brother. “I had to come to terms with my father’s history. War is ugly!” she stated.



She started researching their father's wartime experience after their mother died in 2004.

Michele knew that their father was stationed on Guam and was a member of a B-29 crew. At took just a short session at the computer to find a picture of their father's flight crew and pilot's notes of the missions they flew. In the pictures, the crew members are holding coffee cups, which the brother and sister note are probably not filled with coffee.

"Can you imagine doing that (flying) for 15-17 hours?" Michele questioned after their flight. Chuck made his way back to the tailgunner's post and noted that it is cramped and gave him claustrophobia.

After the war, Cutrer returned home, earned an engineering degree at Southern Methodist University, started a business and raised a family. He put the war behind him as so many others did. Cutrer died in 1976.

FIFI provided an additional insight to a brother and sister on a special member of the Greatest Generation.



Raymond Jeffcoat pic



In Memoriam “Robert Phillips” 1925-2017

By Konley Kelley

I met Robert Phillips in the Summer of 2010. It wasn't at a CAF event. It was thanks to an art show in DeSoto, TX. I entered a print of a 3D rendering of a B-24. My Father-in-Law was part of the show planning committee. He told me a WWII veteran expressed interest in buying my artwork. S/Sgt. Robert Phillips, a B-24 gunner who served with the 98th BG was my buyer.

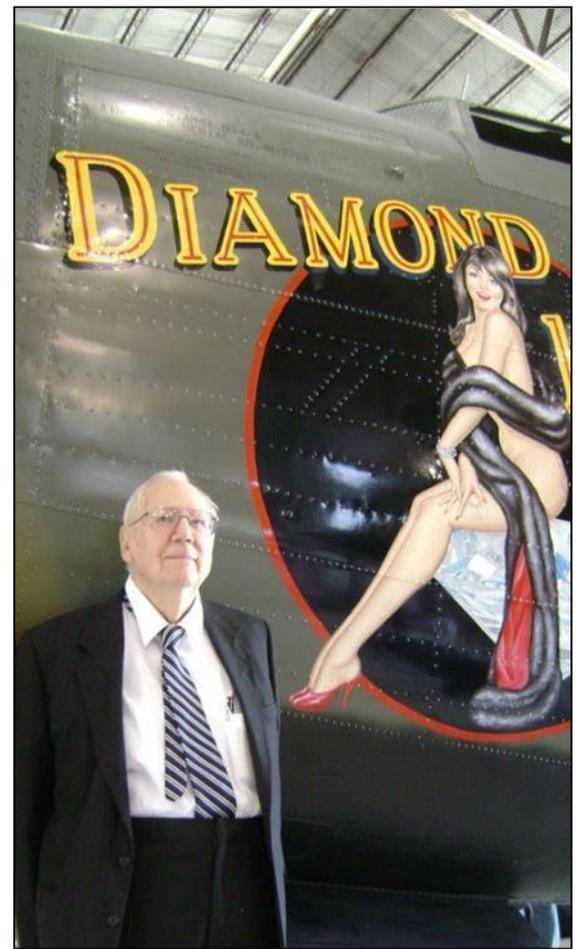
This began a friendship that lasted several years. Robert was also a CAF member. He attended events with the DFW Wing in Lancaster, TX near his home in DeSoto. He visited our B-24 at her former home in Addison and I was honored to be his host.

In subsequent years, I visited with Robert at his home and we would grab breakfast or lunch at his favorite spots nearby. Our visit usually included a trip to the DFW wing. He also was an honored guest at several local air shows, Squadron meetings and a presentation Al Benzing and I made about the B-24 at my college. I made a few more art pieces for him and had a wonderful experience modeling his B-24 *Grumpy* with first-hand guidance. Robert also recalled several missions from his base of operations in Lecce, Italy with the 332nd FG as their escort so I modeled him a Red Tail P-51D Mustang, too 😊

In January, 2013, I told Robert's story in the *Flyer*. We don't have an archived copy of this issue available online so I have reprinted his story in this issue.

Robert served his country in WWII flying 38 combat missions as a B-24 crewman. He served his community post-war with 41 years in the Dallas Fire Department including being the youngest Captain in the history of the department. In fact, Robert opened the Red Bird fire station near Dallas Executive Airport in 1962.

Robert was one of the finest men I've ever met. On Wednesday, I have the honor of speaking for the CAF and my family at Robert's memorial service. The service will include military and DFD recognition for Robert. He will be missed but remembered by many friends and admirers near and far.



Robert at Diamond Lil's dedication in April, 2012.



One of Robert's missions is featured on the B-24 educational banner. Robert is talking to CAF B-24 pilot, Al Benzing in McKinney, TX in Sept. 2013.



Robert enjoyed eating at Bubba's BBQ in Ennis, TX for reasons besides the great food.



Feature Story

(Reprinted from the January 2013 issue of the Flyer)

S/Sgt. Robert Phillips

By Konley Kelley

I would like to introduce you to Robert Phillips. I met Robert a few years ago. We corresponded by e-mail and met when he came to the hangar to see the B-24. Robert served our country in WW2 on a B-24 as an air gunner. I have stayed in touch with Robert and have seen him at CAF events in Addison and Lancaster. We met for lunch a few weeks ago and I presented him with a scale model of "Grumpy," a B-24J Liberator that Robert flew missions on over Europe.



Robert's story begins in Wichita Falls, TX. He was born on June 25, 1925. His father was a disabled WW1 veteran who built furniture. His mother was a nurse. At the age of 16, Robert learned of the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor from a radio in their home, a tent his father upgraded with furnishings and a floor. In 1943, Robert enlisted in the Army Air Corps. He preferred the idea of flying over marching in the infantry or possibly an unlucky swim as a sailor.



He did his basic at Sheppard AFB before heading to Randolph AFB in San Antonio. There he was selected to be an aerial gunner and was sent to Laredo for 4-months of gunnery school. Later he boarded a troop train for Lincoln, NE. At this base, his 10-man crew was formed. The new crews were transferred to Davis-Monthan AFB in Tucson, AZ. They did practice bombing runs over notable targets such as the Rose Bowl and Hoover Dam. In late summer, 1944, they got their B-24 and started out for a final destination, Lecce, Italy. Thanks to a savvy bombardier, the crew got assigned to the 98th BG / 343rd BS.

One of Robert's first combat missions was one of the final missions over Ploesti. On another memorable mission, Robert was flying right waist when he heard a loud bang. The FE came back to report the bombardier had accidentally dropped the right rack of bombs through the closed bomb bay doors. One door fell away. The other door was hanging precariously from the aircraft. With this drag eating fuel and no way to land, Robert took the push rod from his gun to help.



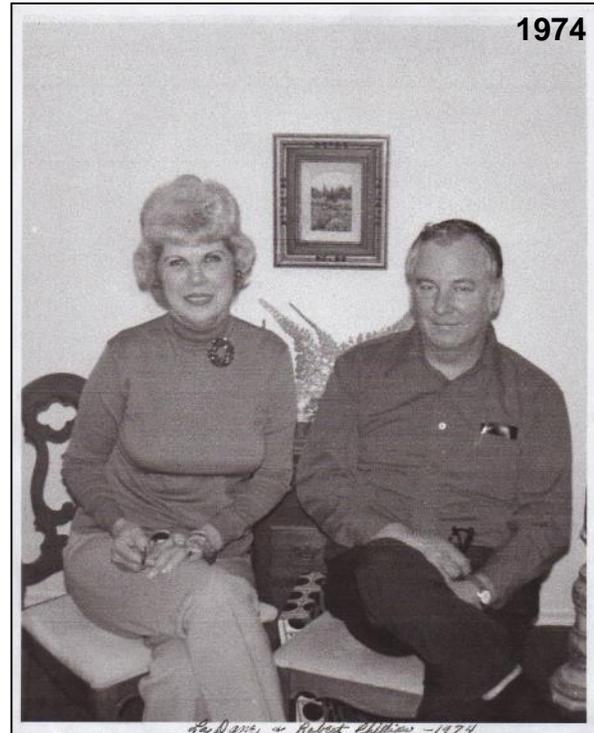
Wearing a parachute, his crewmates held him as he banged away on the damaged door. Not far below, Robert could see the snow-covered Italian Alps. Eventually the door broke away. Robert's pilot put him in for a medal but the base commander turned it down concerned an inquiry into the accident would cause a mess.

In the final days of the war in Europe, Robert learned of orders to ship him and other airmen stateside for B-29 training. Robert's service record and frequent missions in the lead aircraft gave him an option to be assigned other duties.

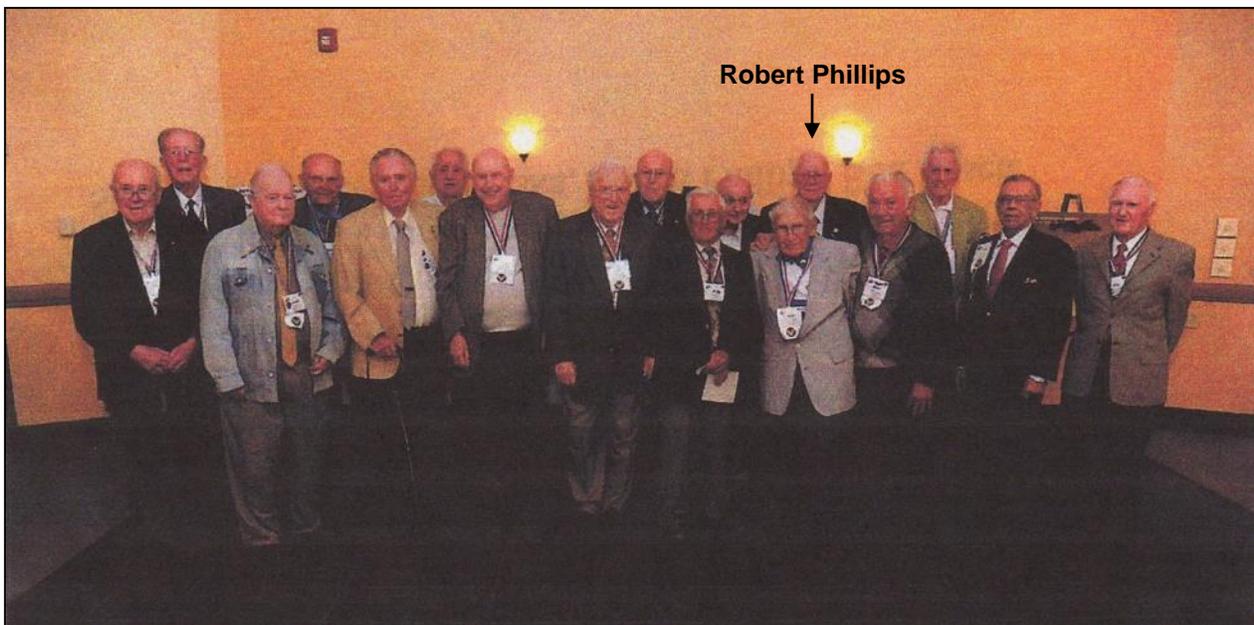
After a long trip home on the troop ship USS America and some R&R in Miami, he was back in Harlingen, Texas working as a clerk in the Provost office. His commanding officer was not expecting an experienced man in this position. He offered Robert the opportunity to go to Buckley Field, CO for training in the Criminal Investigators Division (CID). Robert enjoyed this duty and was honorably discharged in October, 1945.



Robert moved to Dallas to look for work. With no openings in the police department, Robert took the suggestion of a friend and applied for the fire department. He landed a job and was stationed at #14 on 10th and Tyler. Trained as a driver, he was a “good truck man” and also drove the Chief’s car. Rising through the ranks, Robert took the Captain’s exam in 1954. At 27 years old, he became the youngest Captain in the history of the Dallas Fire Department. Robert was in the DFD for 41 years and was a Station Commander for nearly 34 of those years. In 1946, he had also married a young beauty, LaDane. They had 54 wonderful years together.



Robert is retired and lives in DeSoto, Texas. He continues to meet with fellow veterans of the 98th at Barksdale AFB for reunions. Robert flew 38 missions in WW2. During his service, he was awarded the Bronze Star, Silver Star, Air Medal with 3 Oak Leaf Clusters Aerial Gunners Wings, Good Conduct Medal and other ribbons.

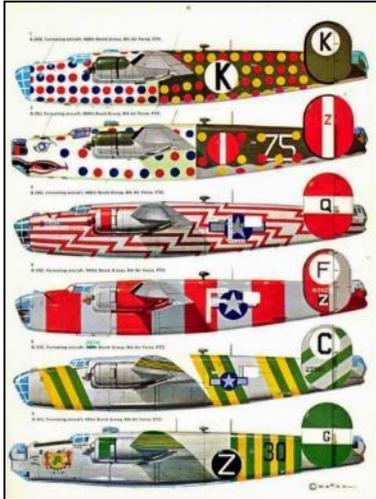




Editor's Corner

Liberators Assemble!

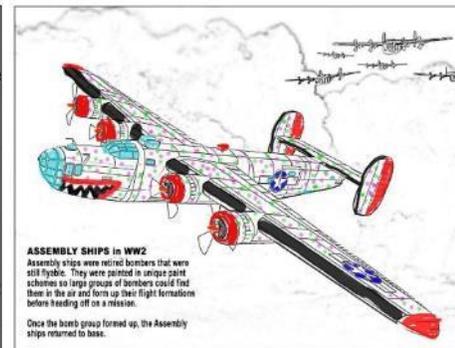
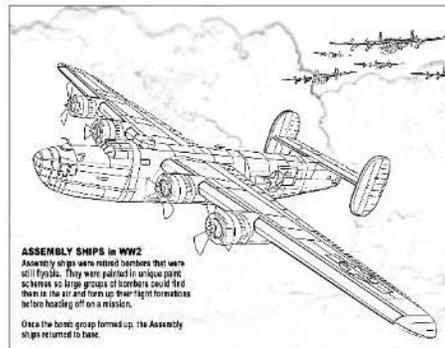
Inspired by WWII veteran, Jim Walston's show 'n tell contribution at the March Squadron meeting, we came up with an activity for the kiddos at the APHT tour stop in Dallas. As ground crew for 466th BG based at Attlebridge, Jim saw these wildly painted Assembly ships including the B-24D *Ready and Willing* depicted in the artwork to the right. Coincidentally, there is a 1:72 model kit of *Ready and Willing* at Hobby Lobby. I hope to have it done by Jim's birthday.



Kids at our exhibit could visit with Jim and learn of his wartime experiences and the untold story of Assembly ships. With crayons and a B&W image of a B-24 Assembly ship, kids could design their own. Thanks to Ken Kovar, the exhibit had many nice models and a beautiful 1:48 Franklin Mint B-24 Assembly ship.



The October 2014 issue of *The Flyer* included an article Polka Dot Warriors. I encourage you to read it and learn more about these unique aircraft.



THE FLYER WANTS YOU!

You are welcome to contribute a story, photographs and artwork for this decades-old newsletter. If you are a veteran, please tell us your story. Squadron members continually meet veterans at the hangar, on tour and in everyday life – let us know their stories. We're also looking for contributors for "This Month in History" and news spotlighting our aircraft and members.

Thank you and
"Keep 'Em Flying!"

Konley Kelley
THE FLYER editor
konartist@verizon.net



3D model of
Robert Phillips'
B-24 Grumpy.



B-29 / B-24 Squadron

Mailing Address:
PO Box 763577
Dallas, TX 75376
United States of America

Street Address:
5661 Mariner Drive
Suite 2924
Dallas Executive Airport
Dallas, TX 75237

www.cafb29b24.org
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972-387-2924 (Hangar)
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