



## 344TH BOMB GROUP ASSOCIATION

EDWARD HORN - PRESIDENT 561-626-2497

46 BALFOUR ROAD EAST PALM BEACH GARDENS, FL 33418

[www.344bg-b26.org](http://www.344bg-b26.org) [b26\\_344thbg@hotmail.com](mailto:b26_344thbg@hotmail.com)

CHRISTOPHER HORN - SECRETARY/TREASURER

LAMBERT AUSTIN - EDITOR EMERITUS



# MILK RUN

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER of the 344<sup>TH</sup> BOMB GROUP ASSOCIATION

Volume XX, No. 2 Dec 2010

MERRY CHRISTMAS

HAPPY HANAUUKAH

HAPPY NEW YEAR 2011

### 2010 REUNION REPORT (Norfolk, Virginia)

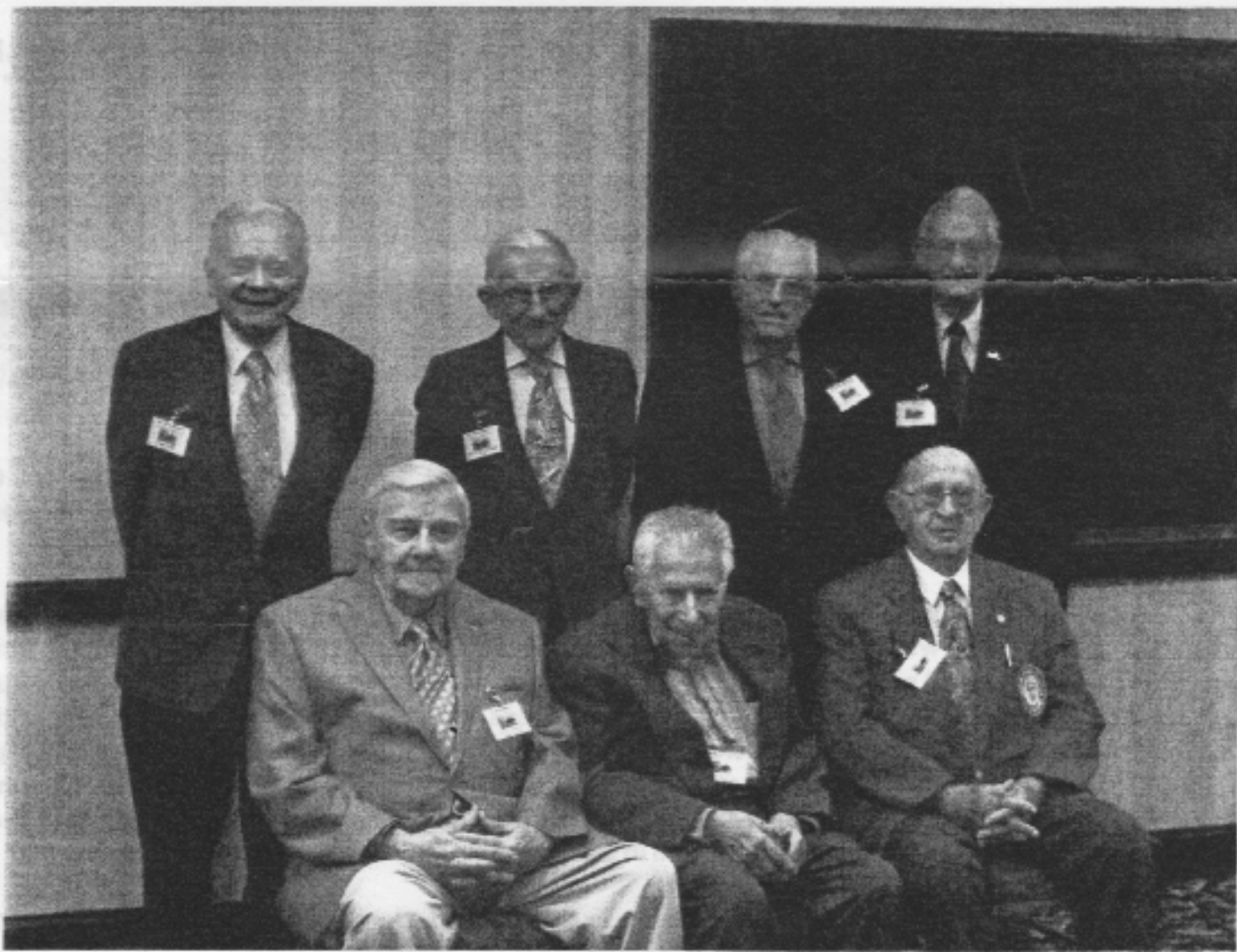
For the third straight year, the 344<sup>th</sup> BG partnered with our friends from the 454<sup>th</sup> BS (323<sup>rd</sup> BG) to have a most enjoyable reunion. We had 28 attendees from the 344<sup>th</sup>, including seven 344<sup>th</sup> veterans: Bill Morton (494<sup>th</sup>), Edward Horn (497<sup>th</sup>), George Eldridge (494<sup>th</sup>), Carl Cutright (496<sup>th</sup>), Don Korkowski (494<sup>th</sup>), Otto Kirkpatrick (494<sup>th</sup>), and Abe Inkles (495<sup>th</sup> Pathfinders). From England, we had John & Daphne Smith; Dudley & Janet Baker. The regulars showed up in force: Shirley Fowler & daughters Carol Fowler & Mary Ellen Gregorich & her son John (1<sup>st</sup> timer); Dorothy Schickedanz & son John; Betty Morton; Mel Jangard & friend Joan Christopherson (1<sup>st</sup> timer); Chris Horn; Larry Eldridge & his sister Mary McCarty & her husband Marc; Rick Kirkpatrick. Honored first timers were Linda Shilt, Tricia Wendt, Mary Lou Crawford: they are the relatives of Corporal Leonard Norris Pew (KIA on 28 May, 1944, while tailgunner on Ed Horn's crew).

September 23<sup>rd</sup> – We had a motorcoach tour of the Norfolk Naval Base. It was led by an enlisted sailor, who was very entertaining, and kept reminding us of “NO PHOTOS”. Our motorcoach left the base and proceeded to the General Douglas MacArthur Museum. The museum and his resting place are in Norfolk because this was his mother's hometown. The museum is located in the old City Hall building, and was very educational. Unfortunately, we ran out of time to fully explore the museum. We arrived back at the Holiday Inn to find the entire hotel staff lined up with American Flags to honor the 344<sup>th</sup> and 454<sup>th</sup> veterans. This was a very unselfish act on the part of the hotel, and it was greatly appreciated by all in attendance.

September 24<sup>th</sup> – Our motorcoach took us to Nauticus – The National Maritime Museum. The museum provided a wide variety of educational and entertaining exhibits and displays, including The Hampton Roads Maritime Museum. Attached to the museum was the gangway to the USS Wisconsin Battleship (BB-64). After leaving the museum and the Wisconsin, we walked to the tour boat dock and began our water tour of Norfolk. We passed the Norfolk International Terminals and proceeded to the water side tour of the Norfolk Naval Base. We made up for not being allowed to

snap photos the day before by taking numerous shots of the USS Enterprise (CVN-65) nuclear aircraft carrier, and a fleet of cruisers, frigates, amphibious assault ships, supply ships, and even submarines (although our Navy guide from the day before told us "that's classified"). Safely disembarking, we returned to our motorcoach for the ride back to the hotel. Dinner was held at the hotel, with entertainment provided by two young ladies, and a WW2 era tap dancer (who had to do her routine on a carpet).

September 25<sup>th</sup> – The 344<sup>th</sup> business meeting was held in the morning. There were no changes in officers, and the financial report was read. Two B-26 tee shirts with a 344<sup>th</sup> plane were drawn for and awarded to two members. The 2011 Reunion will be held jointly with the 454<sup>th</sup>, and will be at the Holiday Inn & Suites at the Minneapolis / St Paul International Airport. Room rates will be \$ 89 / per room (1 – 4 per room). Further details will be forthcoming. The evening dinner included speeches and limericks (Bill Morton). Each attending member of the 344<sup>th</sup> received an inscribed wine glass, which were filled using the 344<sup>th</sup> tontine Champagne and Brandy to toast those members who were no longer in attendance. Good-byes and "See You Next Year" were exchanged and the successful 2010 Reunion came to a close.



Back Row: Carl Cutright (496), Don Korkowski (494), George Eldridge (494), Bill Morton (494)  
Front Row: Otto Kirkpatrick (494), Abe Inkles (495 Pathfinders), Ed Horn (497)

## HISTORY OF THE 344<sup>TH</sup> TONTINE

A "Tontine" is defined as a joint financial arrangement where the participants usually contribute equally to a prize that is awarded entirely to the participant who survives all of the other participants. In this case, two bottles of liquor were purchased years ago to be enjoyed by the last survivor of the 344<sup>th</sup>. One might remember a MASH episode where Col. Potter, dressed in his "doughboy" uniform, toasts his departed WW I mates when he learns that he is the sole survivor. The two original bottles for the 344<sup>th</sup> were: X.O. Cognac Frapin Grande Champagne Extra Old and a bottle of V43 single barrel Germain-Robin Alambic Brandy. The location of these two bottles remained a mystery until two years ago, at the reunion, the subject was brought up during the business meeting. At that time, Bill Morton, a non-drinker, confessed that he (or Betty) had recently found the bottles in their basement. He subsequently gave them to Chris Horn for safe keeping. Ed and Chris decided that the 2010 Reunion might be the right time to toast our members no longer with us. Since they were driving to Norfolk, the bottles would be easy to transport. Memorial wine glasses were designed and ordered, and were to be sent to the Norfolk Hotel. Well, about two hours into their driving trip, Chris realized that he had left the two bottles at home. Therefore, the two bottles used at the 2010 Norfolk Reunion were REPLACEMENTS. (editor's note: the two original bottles are still in safe keeping and in plain sight at the Horn house)

### V-Mail

HARRY WILLIAMS – 497, 1<sup>st</sup> crew shot down, POW Stalag Luft 4, radio-gunner / bombardier, member of Ralph Leone's Crew.

DONALD CHANCEY – 494, Sgt Glider Pilot, joined 344<sup>th</sup> on June 5<sup>th</sup> as co-pilot, 64 missions as co-pilot, 1 as 1<sup>st</sup> pilot, POW, mess officer.

CHARLES D'ATRIO – 494, sent photo of himself from Dec '42, and pointed out that Lambert Austin was a member of the 494<sup>th</sup>.

OTTO LEMKE – 494, armorer-gunner, crew of "Nick's Chicks".

JAY L CHASE – 496, keeping busy at almost 92 years old.

MARY LOU CRAWFORD – 497, Ed Horn, you made us feel so at ease at the reunion, we enjoyed it all.

### FINANCIAL REPORT

Dues & Donations – Joseph Castoro (\$100); John Schickedanz (\$100); Jay L. Chase (\$100); Edward Horn (\$50); Mary Lou Crawford (\$50); Otto Lemke (\$40); Maurice A Halladay (\$25); Charles D'Atrio (\$25); Donna E Lemieux (\$25); Daphne Smith (\$20). THANKS TO ALL OF YOU FOR THE SUPPORT OF THE 344<sup>TH</sup>!

Beginning Checking Balance = \$4672.02

Ending Checking Balance = \$4726.10

Expenses – \$840.06: Printing and supplies \$176.15 Postage \$236.20 Reunion Advance \$20.00

Website \$207.07 Reunion Expenses \$200.64

Income – \$894.14: Dues & Donations \$535.00 Interest \$1.14 Reimbursement \$358.00

The squadron identification for Curley's B-26 was 71, and the particular ship designation was "J". These ID letters and numerals were painted on the aft fuselage sides of every 9<sup>th</sup> Air Force B-26; in white if the ship wore the olive-drab paint, and in black if the plane was in the natural metal finish of the latter replacement aircraft.

Capt. Rafael Joseffy, pilot of 71-J, took particular pride in declaring that his airplane was "J for Joseffy," and he lorded this fact over the many West Point graduates in our bomb group who kidded him about earning his commission through the Texas A&M ROTC "Boy Scout" program. Being one of the most personable, handsome and gentlemanly officers in our squadron, "Captain Joe," or "Joseppy," as we good-naturally called him, fended off their jibes with pleasant banter and declared: "Hell, none of you long-grey-line martinets have a personalized B-26 like me!" Even though early on I was just the copilot of *Terre Haute Tornado*, I also proudly declared that my airplane was "71-H for Havener."

WW II airmen were a superstitious lot, and the 13<sup>th</sup> mission was commonly referred to as "12-B." Most of us took the time-honored precautions against black cats crossing our paths, walking under ladders and the old show-biz custom of never placing your hat on the bed, etc., but one superstition of this ilk that involved the changing of a name hit those in our hut between the eyes.

First Lt. Morrison's ship was named *Fertile Myrtle* and had a painting of a sexy gal on the nose. The co-pilot, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Ed Borreson, lived in our hut; he was a tall, blond, happy-go-lucky 19 year old. For some reason or other, our group commander, Col. Reginald F.C. Vance, decided that "Fertile" was too suggestive and told Morrison to remove it. The half naked girl was all right, but "Fertile" had to go, so they rubbed it out.

As there were three Johns in our hut, the other seven members decided to differentiate among us three when addressed. John Nemeth was to be called by his last name, and John Hollinger was the only John in the hut. The committee picked up on my unusual middle name, "Kratzo," my mother's maiden name, and delighted in calling me "Kratz" or "Kratzie." Borreson immediately changed it to "Krotch," and just before we left for the briefing for the May 10, 1944, mission, he said to me: "You know, Krotch, I just don't like the idea of changing names. It's bad luck!" Damned if his ship didn't go down that day!

I don't have any idea who led the mission that morning, but even if I did, he would remain nameless, as we cursed him and his navigator for days afterwards. Our target was the railway marshalling yards at Mons, Belgium, but we got disoriented in the haze (easy to do flying at 12,000 feet when the visibility was only half a mile down sun), and the leader evidently mistook Brussels for Charleroi, which was the IP (Initial Point) for our bomb run on Mons. We were leading the second box of three flights of six planes each, and our navigator, Preston, kept insisting we were off course, but radio silence prevented any contact with the mission leader and we had to follow.

As a result, we flew right over the center of Brussels before he realized it was the wrong place, and we caught one of the worst flak pastings ever! I remember looking down, seeing the streetcars running and thinking how peaceful it looked, just as Preston came on the intercom with: "Hell's fire! This is Brussels!" The Germans played it smart and let us get well into the center of the city before they opened fire, and then they had us trapped!

The first bursts hit our box, and Morrison's plane exploded from a direct hit and went down in flames; no one saw any chutes come out. By then, the leader had realized his mistake and started violent evasive action to get the hell out of there. Because the city was so heavily defended, it seemed hours before we were out of it, got back on course and eventually bombed Mons.

I can't recall the specific damage to our ship or others, or how many we lost, but it was a shock to have one of our hut members lost. Even though most of us didn't actually believe in the various superstitions (at least outwardly), we took comfort in the mental security they afforded us. After the tragedy, we put even more faith in them.

It wasn't until after the War that I learned from former hut mate Ed Horn, who was shot down subsequent to Borreson, that Borreson was the only member of Morrison's crew who had survived the direct hit. He had literally been blown out of the ship by the explosion, still strapped to his seat, and had managed to free himself and pull the ripcord. Although badly burned, he eventually showed up at the same POW camp (Stalag Luft III) where others from our squadron were interred.

Conversely, changing the name of 71-J for *Joseffy* didn't bring any bad luck to that ship. Capt. Joseffy was eventually bumped upward to another outfit, and when copilot Joe Balach took over the ship, he renamed it *Shirley Ann*, after his girlfriend back in Duluth, Minnesota. Joe Curley took credit for the supernatural powers of his "antimagnetic" divining rod overcoming any misfortune that befell 71-J, despite its name change.

Almost all air crewmen carried a good-luck charm of one kind or another or a talisman given to them by someone close to their heart – a rabbit's foot, a lucky coin or medal – and some wore the same article of clothing on

every mission. The tiny ivory elephant on my dog-tag chain had great sentimental value; it had been given to my mother during WW I by a sergeant in the Belgian army (which is a story in itself). And I also wore a little gremlin medal on my dog-tag chain that my wife gave me when I first entered pilot training. It protected us flying in combat from the many tricks the mythical gremlins usually pulled on aircrews: desynchronizing the propellers, lifting an aileron, siphoning off fuel, adding ice to the propellers, drinking hydraulic fluid, tilting the gyros, biting through electrical wiring, creating static on the radio with their chatter and blowing gusts of crosswinds during landings.

Probably the best known talisman to our crew was the set of tiny boxing gloves my wife sent me after I had gone overseas. When I left the States, we were hoping she was pregnant, and she had penned a note on the gloves saying that our baby could wear them. At first, I tied them to the front of my Mae West life vest, but later I hung them from a handle on the canopy hatch over my head, and they became a symbol to the entire crew. In fact, they became a part of the preflight check list, and the crew vowed they wouldn't take off without them. On one occasion, I had forgotten them, and our armorer-gunner bicycled back to the squadron area to pick them up just before we were due to start engines.

The charms must have worked for us because in all the 12 months our crew flew together in combat, we always made it home safely, and I was the only one to receive an injury – a minor one from enemy action.

In addition to superstitions such as always putting your pants on left leg first and your socks and shoes on the left foot first, there were little protective procedures some crews went through before each mission. Some recited nonsensical verses especially composed for the ritual; some always walked around the ship to the left for preflight inspections, while others had established a certain priority on crew members who entered the aircraft prior to engine start. There were many others, but in our squadron, Joe Curley's divining-rod routine was the most spectacular to witness.

The most widely publicized quote from famous WW II war correspondent, Ernie Pyle, "There are no atheists in foxholes," applied to aircrews as well. After all was said and done, after all the mumbo-jumbo and rituals were performed, all the good-luck charms and talismans were safely tucked away and all precautions taken against superstitions, it was probably the prayers (silent and spoken) that most of us uttered that really did the most good.

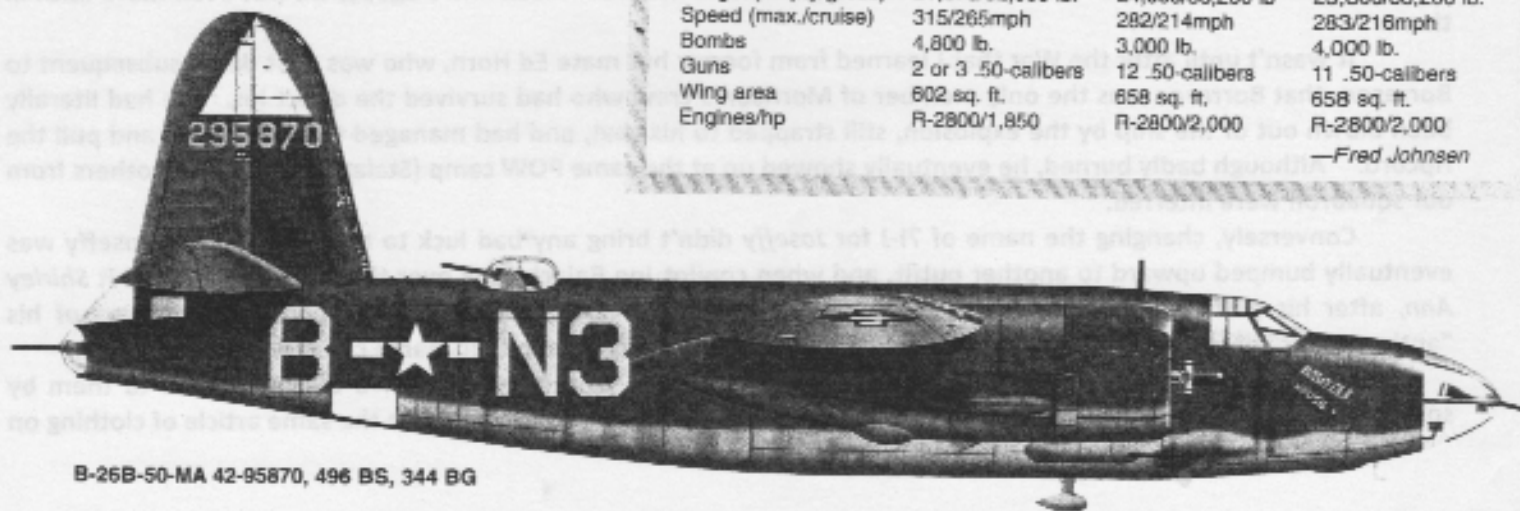
### LIST OF 344<sup>TH</sup> MEMORIAL PLAQUES AND DEDICATION DATES

United States Air Force Academy Cemetery Memorial Wall		23 August, 1991
Lakeland Airport	Lakeland, Florida	5 October, 1993
Barksdale Air Force Base	Shreveport, Louisiana	21 September, 1994

### MARTIN B-26 MARAUDER SPECIFICATIONS

	B-26	B-26C	B-26G
Span	65 ft.	71 ft.	71 ft.
Length	56 ft.	58 ft. 3 in.	56 ft. 1 in.
Weight (empty/gross)	21,375/32,000 lb.	24,000/38,200 lb	23,800/38,200 lb.
Speed (max./cruise)	315/265mph	282/214mph	283/216mph
Bombs	4,800 lb.	3,000 lb.	4,000 lb.
Guns	2 or 3 .50-calibers	12 .50-calibers	11 .50-calibers
Wing area	602 sq. ft.	658 sq. ft.	658 sq. ft.
Engines/hp	R-2800/1,850	R-2800/2,000	R-2800/2,000

—Fred Johnson



B-26B-50-MA 42-95870, 496 BS, 344 BG