

## Mid-Atlantic Air Museum (MAAM) World War II Air Show and Mini-Reunion

\*Lorraine (Henning) Kiewiet, daughter of Sgt. James Henning (d.1989), 416 BS Tail-Gunner

On June 7-9, 2013, the MAAM in Reading Pennsylvania held its annual World War II Air Show. Several members of the 99<sup>th</sup> BGHS were in attendance and we were privileged to have a few veterans join us.



Shown here are Lt. Col. Charles Bilharz (346 BS) and Gary T. Staffo (99<sup>th</sup> BGHS 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President). Second photo, Charles Bilharz's son Doug researching with Gary. Col. Bilharz was a prisoner of war in Germany when his B-17G was shot down during an attack on Regensburg. His story appears in "The Diamondbacks" book on page 41, and his brief Bio can be found on page 77. Col. Bilharz flew his Final Mission on 11/15/2013.

Also in attendance was 99<sup>th</sup> BG Veteran George Dulac (346 BS) with several members of his family.

Edward "Wally" Walzak (416 BS) was scheduled to be in the VIP hangar meeting visitors and signing autographs. Unfortunately, he was hospitalized in May and he left us on his Final Mission on 07/06/2013.

It was because of the 99<sup>th</sup> BGHS that I was blessed to meet Wally, who flew most of his 50 missions with my father. Wally was a ball turret gunner and my dad was the tail gunner. They were based in Foggia from April to August 1944.

They trained together in South Dakota and Florida before going overseas. Their missions took them over Ploesti, among other significant targets. I have a copy of the 99<sup>th</sup> BG Presidential Unit Citation award for the Weiner-Neustadt mission on 22 April, 1944. For several of their missions, their ship was the "Turnip Termite," which is the plane shown on the cover of the "Diamondbacks" book.

My father told me very little about what he did during the War, so it was a great privilege to find Wally and talk with him on the phone and meet him in person.

Because of the 99<sup>th</sup> BGHS website, Wally's son Richard learned about our group. After our Springfield, Illinois reunion in 2010, I used the 99<sup>th</sup> BGHS Mission List provided with my Membership, to post a query on the website searching for his Dad, Edward Walzak, and Rich got in touch. We were supposed to meet at the 2011 Shreveport Reunion, but Wally had to go to the hospital just before that reunion. We finally met when I attended the MAAM WWII Air Show in 2012 to meet Wally. He and Wally introduced me to people as "his tail-gunner's daughter" with a sense of pride that I found comforting (maybe because he held my hand). My dad, James Henning, flew his Final Mission in 1989.

One of my aunts had only four pictures of my dad from the WWII era; my dad kept nothing. And so it was thanks to Richard that I have additional photographs as well as the memories. I visited with Wally at his home in 2012 for dinner, and we did everyday kinds of things, such as attend Mass together and then go to brunch, during the short time I took to go to Philadelphia from California.



None of these things could have happened without the 99<sup>th</sup> BGHS. There are surely many more daughters and sons, or grandkids, yearning to learn and connect with a World War II hero in their family tree.

This photograph is of my dad's crew (missing are the radio operator Gay and the co-pilot Huckin) when they were training in the 483<sup>rd</sup> BG. From there, they trained at MacDill AFB in Tampa, Florida. When they flew to Dakar,

North Africa, they were reassigned to the 99<sup>th</sup> BG before going to Italy. The crew shown here, most of whom flew their missions with my father are: top row, Lt. Harrott, Navigator, Lt. Davies, Bombardier, Lt. Hinkle, Pilot, bottom row, S/Sgt. Hilofsky, Waist Gunner, S/Sgt. Henning, Tail Gunner, T/Sgt. Krieger, Engineer Gunner, S/Sgt. Walzak, Ball Gunner, S/Sgt. Cameron, Waist Gunner.

This is why it is so important that the 99<sup>th</sup> BGHS continue to collect photographs, letters, records and stories from our veterans and their children and grandchildren.

Following the publication in the March 2013 newsletter (in which I covered the 2011 Joint Reunion with the 98<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group in Shreveport, La., and included a picture of my dad standing in front of "Oh Josie!") I received a phone call from Robert Koch, who now resides in Wisconsin. Robert and his son provided me with pictures of my dad after they returned from the war and finished out their service together. They met on the homeward bound ship and became friends.



They hitch-hiked between St. Louis and Milwaukee. Robert Koch is so tall that whoever took the photo didn't get all of him! My dad was 5'9" so he fits in the picture.

Left to right, Robert Koch, Ray Heskes, and Jimmy Henning. Home safe & sound!

In addition to a fantastic air show, the event features on-the-ground reenactments, an authentic display of tents and vehicles that would be found at a WWII airfield, 1940s era entertainment

throughout the day, and re-enactors and spectators dressed in period costume. Families came from surrounding states to see the air show and learn more about World War II aircraft. I met a family from Delaware (in the tent where Catholic Mass was celebrated on Saturday evening) specifically because their 11-year-old son was so interested in the history. There is plenty of food for sale and there are aisles of WWII military related items for sale including uniforms, equipment, books, photos, etc.

The air show featured the following aircraft: Primary and Advanced Trainer aircraft, Transport aircraft such as the Curtiss C-46 Commando and Douglas C-47D Skytrain, the Boeing B17G Flying Fortress, B-24 Liberator, and B-25J Mitchell Bombers, the B-29 Superfortress, and the North American P-51D Mustang and the Curtiss P-40K Warhawk Fighters. Various planes flew Pacific/Iwo Jima and European battle scenarios.



The VIP Hangar at the MAAM air show included special guests such as Severin Fayerman, a Polish Jew who survived Auschwitz and Buchenwald concentration camps. Women flyers, the Tuskegee airmen, and many veterans of the Army Air Corps and the Airborne Army, and Infantry units.

Many attendees dressed in period costume. There was so much to see that one day was not really enough time.

If you have not been to the **Mid-Atlantic Air Museum (MAAM) World War II Air Show in Reading, PA**, please consider adding it to

your "To Do List". It is held each year on the first full weekend in June. ***If you plan to attend please let the 99<sup>th</sup> BGHS know and we will see if we can have another Mini-Reunion of 99<sup>th</sup> BGHS Members.***

Check the link to the MAAM WWII Air Show website for details: <http://www.maam.org/maamwwii.html>

Thousands of people come to this Show every year, make your reservations early!

**\* 99<sup>th</sup> BGHS Editor's Note: This article has been edited to provide additional information on the 99<sup>th</sup> BGHS.**



B-25 taxiing for its take-off and photo-op, P-51 available for close-up inspection, B-29 maneuver, and a tent for Catholic Mass to be said in Latin, as it would have been during the War.

