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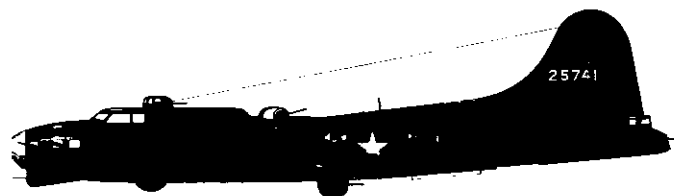
NEWS

Happy Holidays

FAMES FAVORED FEW



DECEMBER 1987



This YB-40 story was written by Jim McGrew and Walt Murphy for Pres. Charles Kelly. Part 1 will be Jim McGrew's story.

YB-40

The Concept

"As early as 1941, the Air Force believed that they could make deep penetration into Germany by using heavily armed bombers and specially designed escort bombers. These were designated as XB-40 or YB-40. Although contemplated without enthusiasm by General Eaker, it was favored by many commanders who hoped that, by mixing YB-40's with the bombers in a ratio of one YB-40 to two or three bombers, it might free the bombers from the limitations of fighter range and send them over Germany as far as their fuel would take them." ★

The Aircraft

During the winter of 1942-1943, the USAAF approved a prototype XB-40 to be converted from an early Lockheed-Vega B-17F. This was followed by an order for 13 YB-40s to be used for an operational test with the 8th Air Force in England.

The YB-40s were armed with sixteen .50 caliber Browning machine guns: two nose side guns, twin waist guns on each side, twin tail guns, Sperry upper twin turret, Martin Twin Turret in the radio compartment, Sperry ball turret, and Bendix chin turret. The aircraft were designed to carry more than three times the ammunition of the B-17, about 11,000 rounds. Electric motors fed the rounds along tracks in the waist to the rear guns. All aircraft had extra armor plate. The tail and waist were almost completely enclosed in armor plate, and additional protection was installed in other crew compartments. Because of the weight, fuel consumption was greater than for the B-17. Bomb bay fuel tanks were standard.

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER:

I want to remind everyone about the reunion, and what a reunion it will be, that is coming up in one year in San Antonio, Texas at the Windham Hotel. It is located about a mile west of the loop on I-10. Mark your calendar-call your buddies-get special groups together-write people you haven't seen in a Coons' Age, and get the interest to the highest pitch. We want to have a great turn out, especially you old timers. Just seeing a few who have never been to one of these events, like we saw at the last reunions, makes the whole experience worth while. If you will look at page 31 or the 1987 Roster you will see why these reunions are soon going to be over. So let us make this the biggest bash of all. I'll be looking for you in San Antonio in 1988. THINK REUNION.

Charles Kelly

SAN ANTONIO IN 1988

Reunion Chairman Makes First Report:

Plans for the 1988 World-Wide Reunion of the 92nd Bomb Group are rapidly firming up according to Perry Burnham, Reunion Chairman. He provides us with the following initial report:

The main activity dates of the reunion span Thursday through Saturday, October 13th, 14th and 15th, 1988. Mark those dates on your calendar right now!

The WYNDHAM HOTEL, a fairly new, outstanding hostelry in San Antonio will be the center of operations. Two hundred fifty rooms have been space-blocked for 92nd personnel and their families at the Wyndham. Should attendance exceed these requirements, we have arranged for additional, first class hotel space at a fine, new hotel nearby. Based on a recent radar scan of member interest, we suggest that you make early reservations at the Wyndham.

Please note that all of your Hotel reservations must be made by you directly with the Wyndham Hotel. The Wyndham will book any overflow. A reservation form, with the 92nd identification



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YB-40 (continued from page 1)

The YB-40s were flown from the Lockheed-Vega complex in Burbank, California, to Biggs Field in El Paso, Texas, in early March 1943. Several civilian technical representatives accompanied the aircraft. Serial numbers of the aircraft were 42-5732 through 42-5744.

Everything about the YB-40 aircraft and its mission was classified SECRET.

Training the Crews

At Smoky Hill Army Air Field, Kansas, a special order was published directing 13 crews to proceed by rail to Biggs Field at El Paso, Texas, on or about 16 March 1943 to be assigned to Project YB-40. The crews had completed B-17 phase training and were awaiting overseas assignments at Smoky Hill. The 13 first pilots, who had probably averaged 350 hours in the aircraft, were Lieutenants Wayne C. Bogard, John O. Booker, Paul S. Casey, William P. Carey, Edward M. Grabowski, William H. Holland, Paul Horvay, Ellison Miles, Benjamin Smotherman, J.D. Stewart, William H. Stewart, Winston J. Tucker, and Stafford Webb.

In El Paso awaiting the crews were Major B. Keck and Captains George L. Ott, Jack S. Griffin, and Richard W. Pugh; M. Sgt. Stephen Zubach; T. Sgts Glen E. Johnson and Leroy Bemis; S. Sgts. Victor E. Jones, Melville W. Jones, Marvin E. Score, and Cass W. Germany; and Sgts. Daniel A. Delmonte and Warren L. Huber. These officers and noncoms were from the 327th Squadron of the 92nd Bomb Group already active in combat with the 8th Air Force in England. They had been detailed to be in charge of preparing the YB-40s and the crews for the flight to Alconbury, England. Aircraft and crews were assigned to the 327th Squadron upon arrival at Biggs Field.

The first flights in the YB-40 proved to be . . . well . . . exciting. The aircraft was several thousand pounds heavier than the B-17, and the first landings were controlled crashes when the plane stalled 100 feet above the runway. Weight distribution was also a problem because the extra armament and armor plate shifted the center of gravity aft. After 10-15 hours flying, the crews learned they would be flying the YBs to Florida for further training.

On 26 March 1943, the YBs were flown in formation to Orlando, Florida. All crew members were looking forward to a Florida vacation before going to England and winning the war. Their hopes were shattered when on 3 April they were ordered to fly the YBs to a satellite field, Montbrook Air Base, a single landing strip recently cleared from a swampy jungle 100 miles north of Orlando.

Montbrook was an ecologist's Eden, a naturalist's nirvana, a biologist's Beulah Land. Everything that creeps, crawls, flies, and slithers seemed to be there. The crews slept in pyramid tents. The only structures in their assigned area were two concrete block latrines. At five o'clock, two barrels would be set up, a plank would be placed across the, a stack of cardboard boxes would be set out on the ground, and the PX was open. Crew members would carry armloads of beer to a spot between Major Keck's tent and the latrines. There they would build a fire on the ground, guzzle beer, and tell how they were all making \$800 a week in civilian life.

The Keck Group, as it became known for security reasons, was directed by Air Force Hq through VOCC AAF, verbal orders Commanding General Army Air Force. Crew members participating in the marathon blackjack game on a crude table set up in one of the tents could always tell when verbal orders were being issued. The field phone would ring in the major's tent. He would answer casually, "Major Keck speaking." Then, "YES, SIR!!!" and there was the feeling that he was standing stiffly at attention. The blackjack players would wonder what Hap had in for them that day.

Comprehensive training programs had been prepared for all YB-40 crew positions. Classroom instruction was held in the training center at Orlando. Gunners and navigators could track aircraft wheeling and swooping across a motion picture screen, and when they "fired" lights flashed on the screen to show where they had aimed and where they should have aimed. Pilots were told how they should fly and land the YB-40 by instructors who had

no intention of ever getting into one. When navigators wanted to know what to do about deviations of 25 to 30 degrees because of the armor plate and wanted to know why every now and then the compass would swing off 180 degrees for no apparent reason, instructors stared out the window and scratched themselves.

At Montbrook gun turrets mounted on trucks followed a Piper Cub that wheeled and dodged about 2000 feet over the ramp. Pilots attempted to get acquainted with the characteristics of the YB-40s and the unique problems of landing an aircraft that always came in tilted in a strange nose-up tail-down attitude usually associated with a steep take-off.

Several times a week, the crews would practice formation flying for several hours alternating positions in the formation for each flight. The lead aircraft would determine the route and the others followed. There was one requirement, however. On the return to Montbrook, the formation would fly out about 10 miles over the water then drop to an altitude of about 50 feet and turn in toward Daytona Beach. All the recruits at the WAC training center would be on the beach drilling or doing whatever WAC recruits did when the 13 YB-40s roared in and lifted to clear the buildings. The WACs would break formation and run up and down waving and probably yelling.

One day, Lt. Miles and his crew were summoned to Orlando for a specific test involving flying a YB-40 loaded with 10,000 rounds of .50 caliber ammunition. A light colonel from the pentagon greeted the crew and announced he would be on the flight to observe aircraft performance. Unfortunately, the ammunition was delivered to the aircraft loose in boxes. The crew was given the task of putting the shells in link belts, the belts in ammunition boxes, and the boxes placed at various stations in the aircraft. As a box was loaded, a crew member would enter the rear door and place the box on the first bracket available. Finally the colonel declared enough ammunition had been loaded. The YB was boarded and cleared for take-off. The navigator still has recurring nightmares of that take-off when, from his position in the nose, he found himself staring at a tall tree bearing down on him from the end of the runway and thinking he would much rather die in combat with the bugles blowing and somebody yelling "Charge!" over the intercom. However, only a few of the top branches of the tree were knocked off, and the plane staggered up to 10,000 feet where it went into a continuous stall.

After a reasonably safe landing (Miles was good), the crew went to the flight line snack bar where the Pentagon officer, with the pilot, co-pilot, and navigator, analyzed the problem on a paper napkin. He departed abruptly saying he would very likely recommend that the ball turret be moved forward to improve the tail-heavy problem. The crew continued to drink coffee, glad to be alive, recapping the mission and resolving to load more ammunition forward next time.

To insure safer YB landings, on final approach the co-pilot would continuously call out the air speed to the white-knuckled pilot who was staring at the perimeter fence and the runway beyond. This seemed to work well enough until one day . . . One day, one of the YBs was set to take off. A full crew was aboard plus one passenger in the nose, a sgt. who had never been up in an airplane. The aircraft began to roll. It reached take-off speed, 115 mph, and was ready to go up and away when the pilot looked down at the air speed meter. Zero! He had forgotten to take the cover off the pilot tube. He yanked back on the throttles and stood on the brakes. The YB, thousands of pounds heavier than a B-17, ran off runway in a hurry. It went careening and bouncing out across the Florida countryside through an area being graded and excavated for new buildings. It bounded and waded around power shovels, trucks, huge holes, and uprooted trees but managed to miss the workmen who dropped their shovels and fled. It finally came to a stop in a peanut field about a half mile away from the runway. The brakes were white hot and spewing a black, acrid smoke. Major Keck said some bad words, and the YB was grounded until a new landing gear could be installed. It is believed that somewhere today there is an ex-sgt. Who has still never been up in an airplane.

Continued

YB-40 (continued from page 2)

When the YB-40s took off for England, they left behind thirteen 500-pound piles of armour plate taken from their tails.

The People

Because of the nature of their mission and the Montbrook experience, the members of the 13 crews got to know each other better than would be usual in a group this size. Too, by some happy chance there was a greater collection of extroverts and happy screwballs than would be normally expected. All crew members were serious about their responsibilities and because no ancillary services were provided, there was considerable rapport between the officers and enlisted men. Whatever had to be done, they all had to do it together. When the aircraft needed cleaned, all ten crew members crawled over it and through it with mops and buckets of soapy water.

George Keck was considered by all to be a fine officer in every respect, and he had an excellent sense of humor and an appreciation of the absurd—strict requirements for a man with his assignment.

As the men became better acquainted, nicknames began to be assigned, such the "The Goat" Baker, "The Fat One" Broach,

"Moose" Carey, "Dangerous Dan" McGrew, "Trapper" Miles, "Li'l Joe" Liebman, "Seldom Seen" (nobody knew where he would disappear to), and "The Colonel" (a lieutenant), and "Tex" (who came from New Jersey with cowboy boots, a ten-gallon hat, and Texas brogue that would make an El Paso man weep). It is generally conceded that The Goat and The Fat One were responsible for everyone talking like Damon Runyon characters, using only the present tense.

The blackjack game (Montbrook rules) continued on the makeshift table in the tent. Games were interrupted only by the snake lover who was fascinated by snakes he would capture and bring in to be admired. "Feel him. He's not slimy. People think snakes are slimy, but they're not. "Feel him." When no one would feel the snake, he would toss it onto the blackjack table. Cards, money, and 2nd lieutenants would go flying in all directions. As many times as he did this, no one seemed to expect it and no one ever brained him with a tent peg.

Everyone agreed that after they had won the war, the YB-40 gang would get together and throw a never-to-be-forgotten party — at any place in the world but Montbrook. Some are still hoping it can happen.

1. *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, edited by W.F. Craven and J.L. Gate

SAN ANTONIO (Continued from page 1)

overprinted, will be sent to you with the next News-Letter for your use in mailing in your reservations directly to the Wyndham as soon as may be feasible for you to do so."

For those planning to arrive in San Antonio during the weekend prior to the reunion or during Monday or Tuesday (October 10th or 11th), positive reservations for any of those dates may still be made by mailing in the reservation request at least forth-five days in advance. The 92nd special reunion rate of \$60.00 per night will apply if the reservation request specifically identifies the 92nd Bomb Group Reunion.

Apart from the traditional and central reunion activity of flying back some forty-five years in the 92nd time machine, three days of group and individual activities have been planned. These include a day at SEA WORLD, SAN ANTONIO which, as the latest and largest SEA WORLD of all, will have opened up to the public just a few months prior to our reunion. This extensive facility will be the outstanding SEA WORLD anywhere on earth. It has been designed somewhat along the lines of Epcot Center at Orlando, Florida.

Then, in the flavor of Old San Antonio's wild west spirit, Fame's Favored Few will visit a working, long-horn cattle ranch and enjoy a real, western rodeo, cookout style dinner and western music hoedown.

Yes, we will also have our traditional Saturday night banquet and dance, but this time with real, honest-to-goodness Glenn Miller music by Larry Herman and his orchestra direct from the "Roaring Twenties Ballroom". This orchestra includes a leader and members from Glenn Miller's own time and they are famous for playing it just right.

Of course, we will have a visit and tour of perhaps two of the four, large Air Force Bases here in San Antonio where, at one of them, we will again memorialize our missing members in special Chapel services. We also hope that once more we'll be able to move up right next to a vintage B-17 airplane which, with a number of additional WW II aircraft, will be on display at Lackland AFB.

The traditional bi-annual business meeting of the 92nd membership will occur on Saturday morning, as usual, and we will also schedule both time and facilities for meetings of the 92nd Board of Directors and of the ever-supporting ladies of our members should they desire to meet together separately during the reunion.

There will also be time set aside for visiting some of the main attractions of San Antonio such as the historical ALAMO, the famous Paseo del Rio (the river-wals), boating on the river, Mercado and Mall shopping, Old Missions Tour, the Space

Needle, Art Museums and yes, to enjoy the best Mexican Food to be found anywhere.

If there is a sufficiently strong interest in golf, we will also try to schedule a round for those afficianados. If you would really like to play golf (necessarily at the expense of other activities during Wednesday, Thursday or Friday), please send a prompt note to your Reunion Chairman requesting this activity to be scheduled.

Since we will be only one hundred fifty miles from Mexico (Laredo and Del Rio) some of you may want to include more time in your plans for a visit to Old Mexico or, perhaps, to the Gulf Ports of Corpus Christi, Port Aransas and Galveston, or even to places along Padre Island.

For those planning to travel by commercial airlines, we expect to be able to provide you with a special, low rate opportunity to be announced in the next News Letter. An interesting alternative: Don't overlook AMTRAK.

It is important to note that your Reunion Registration with reservations for activities, must be made directly with the Reunion Chairman. For this purpose, and to obtain answers to your questions, mail your requests to Col. Perry H. Burnham, 111 Roletto Drive, San Antonio, Texas 78213. He may be reached by telephone at No. (512) 342-1864. Sufficient details to registration and activity costs to permit you to complete a registration form (to be provided soon) will be forthcoming in a subsequent issue of the News Letter.

Special Request: As soon as any of you decide to attend the 1988 Reunion, please send a pre-registration deposit (by check) in the amount of \$15.00 to the Reunion Chairman. Although your pre-registration deposit is a voluntary one, it will be of great assistance in making certain deposits against contractual arrangements we must make about a year ahead of events and to help with smaller expenses occurring from day to day. Any advance deposit you make will be fully credited against your final registration fees. When sending the deposit, tell the Chairman how many persons will accompany you to the reunion.

Even if you can't make an early firm decision to attend the 1988 Reunion but you are nevertheless making tentative plans to attend and state how many persons would likely accompany you. The Chairman needs to know quite soon, the approximate number of attendees to be expected for the reunion.

Believe me, NOW IS THE TIME to begin to firm up your plans to make SAN ANTONIO IN '88 the greatest 92nd Reunion ever. San Antonio and your Committee are doing their best to make it so.