

A Good Time Was Had by All at the 47th Annual 8th AFHS Reunion!



The 398th's own Barry Lewis proudly shows off a raffle prize he won at the Saturday night Gala Dinner. It was a beautiful framed poster commemorating the 47th Annual 8th AFHS Reunion, a wonderful souvenir of a great event!

Mellisa Ledlow's reunion recap article follows on the next four pages.

398th Savannah Reunion

WELCOME BACK!!!

by Mellisa Ledlow

What a great way to get back to “normal” (whatever that is?!) than to be able to attend October 2021’s 8th Air Force Historical Society (8th AFHS) Reunion in beautiful, historical Savannah, Georgia. There was definitely an air of excitement and relief that the worst of the Covid19 pandemic was behind us. Those in attendance were very happy to see veterans, old friends, family members and make new acquaintances.

The Reunion kicked off on Wednesday, October 27 at the Marriott Savannah Riverfront Hotel. And we mean Riverfront! The Port of Savannah is the third busiest port in the United States because it has several natural advantages. The Port is a warm-water port, sits 18 miles inland from the Atlantic Ocean and can take advantage of convenient highway and railway networks to get products in and out of the U.S. The Savannah River is quite deep and wide and can manage traffic from giant cargo ships. The Marriot Riverfront is built on the banks of the River and ship and boat traffic included the slow, majestic movement of enormous cargo ships frequently passing just yards from almost every hotel window—that view never got old!



Enjoying a pre-reunion Savannah River lunch cruise on the aboard the *Georgia Queen* paddleboat. Clockwise from left: Beverly Bannister, Jim Ledlow, Mellisa Ledlow, Beth Howard, Trudy Howard, Ken Howard, Carolyn Widmann, Sharon Krause, Pete Krause, Geoff Rice, Marilyn Gibb-Rice, Lee Bradley and our sweet Chrysta Moore.



At 1,300 feet in length and having the capability of carrying a total of 16,022 containers, the *Marco Polo* is the largest container ship ever to serve the U.S. East Coast. It made port in Savannah during the reunion and it was breathtaking to see this massive ship sail by our hotel.

Several members of the 398th BGMA arrived in Savannah early Wednesday and were in time to join a Narrated Lunch Cruise on the beautiful paddleboat, the *Georgia Queen*. The three-decker red and white paddleboat travels along the Savannah River while guests eat a Southern-style Buffet (including fried chicken!) while the boat captain narrates and points out historical sights and points of interest. After eating, guests can step out on the deck to see the Port of Savannah, pass under the Talmadge Memorial Bridge and view the active ship yards. Other sights the Captain describes include the famous Waving Girl Statue and Old Fort Jackson. The Waving Girl statue is a tribute to a young girl who, in the 1880’s-1930’s, felt it was her duty to wave and greet all ships heading to the Savannah port. Sailors and Ship Captains were very fond of the girl and wanted to maintain her memory. Fort Jackson was built in the early 1800’s to protect Savannah and was active during the Civil War to defend against Union Forces. It now belongs to the City of Savannah and schedules daily reenactments and is used as a community park.

After the riverboat cruise, the 398th group made their way to the Reunion hotel for registration, PX-set-up and visiting with other attendees. The 8th AFHS hosted a Complimentary Welcome Reception that evening in the hotel lobby. Along with several other Bomb Groups, the 398th also had their own Hospitality Room for members to visit and “catch-up” and enjoy a continental breakfast.

During the several days of the Reunion, the 8th AFHS organized a couple of different local tours for attendees. These included guided trolley rides through Savannah’s National Urban Landmarked Historic District (the largest in the U.S), the Victorian District and viewed Civil War-era buildings. The tours travelled on cobblestone streets, past Antebellum Homes, the Riverfront, beautiful squares and stately mansions. Savannah is truly a step back in time to the Old South and it has a rich, full history.

Thursday afternoon included two speaking opportunities. The 8th AFHS set up a Video-Conference titled “Learn from the Past...Journey to the Future” with speakers from the U.K. The U.K. speakers were affiliated with the Imperial War Museum in Duxford and other history-research organizations in England. The group of five speakers were able to update the audience on current and proposed activities and displays organized by museums around the U.K. The group spoke of a renewed interest in these museums and WWII, particularly in younger people in Britain. Plans are being formed to find additional activities and ways to continue that interest.

Gary Webb, of the Webb Military Museum in Savannah, also spoke about the significance and importance in maintaining and contributing to all museums. Webb’s museum was in walking distance of the hotel and the reunion attendees were encouraged to visit.

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by Mellisa Ledlow

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LTC Steve Bolton, Garrison Commander of Hunter Army Airfield was the featured speaker at the Reunion's Opening Banquet. During WWII, Hunter was purposed as an anti-aircraft artillery training center. It also transpired to be a Cook and Bakers School and the staging area for Army Postal Units. And in the Spring of 1944, Hunter Air Field became the staging area for over 55,000 soldiers destined for travel to Europe for the D-Day invasion.

On Friday, Reunion organizers arranged a day-long visit to the National Museum of the Mighty Eighth Air Force (8th Air Force Museum). For anyone interested in military history, WWII history and in particular 8th Air Force history, the 8th Air Force Museum, located in Savannah, provides an incredible opportunity to learn and discover tremendous amounts of information.

The 8th Air Force was established in 1944 to primarily carry out strategic bombing in the European Theater during WWII. The 8th Air Force has continued to stay active and operational post- WWII and is designated as part of the Strategic Air Command (SAC). SAC has participated and performed duties in the Korean War, Vietnam War, Operation Desert Storm, Operation Desert Shield and Afghanistan. It is still a busy, ready and active part of the 8th Air Force. While the museum in Savannah concentrates on WWII displays and memorabilia, there is also a great deal of other information about the 8th Air Force and its contribution to military readiness and response—as it did in WWII.

The Museum's proudest exhibit is in its Combat Gallery--the newly restored "City of Savannah" B-17 Flying Fortress. The plane was the 5,000th B-17 airplane processed through Hunter Army Airfield in 1944 (in Savannah, Georgia). This B-17 flew combat missions to German targets from 1942-45 and has been restored to its full combat configuration. Other planes are on display at the Museum including a PT-17 training aircraft and the nosepiece to a B-24 Liberator.

Throughout the Museum, exhibits and artifacts donated from various WWII Bomb Group members are on display. Those from the 398th Bomb Group included a bottle of Vat 69 Scotch from the John Rice Crew (600th Sq.). The Vat 69 bottle was the nose-art on the Rice B-17. The crew donated an actual bottle of the Scotch to the 8th Air Force Museum in honor of their copilot who was KIA.



Russ Reed, a 603rd Pilot, donated his flight boots—he had been able to keep and wear them during his time as a POW in Stalag Luft III.

Also on display, is Tail Gunner Samuel Miller's, "Sam's Blanket." Sam was seriously injured landing after parachuting out of his B-17. While hospitalized in Germany, Sam created a 4 ½ X 6 ft blanket from 121 insignia patches he collected from fellow hospital patients.

Members of the 398th BG enjoyed seeing these and the other exhibits throughout the Mighty Eighth Museum.

The Museum is also home to the Roger A. Freeman Eighth Air Force Research Center. The Research Center promotes research on 8th Air Force history and has a priceless collection of over 9,000 books as well as original manuscripts, photographs and artifacts. The Research Center is open to the public and serves as a great resource for anyone interested in WWII and the 8th Air Force.

The campus of the Mighty Eighth Air Force Museum also has a poignant Memorial Garden and Chapel of the Fallen Eagles. The Garden has numerous granite memorial plaques and monuments including one from the 398th BGMA and plaques of a number of our individual members.



Our monument located in the Mighty Eighth Air Force Museum Memorial Garden may be a smaller version of the one in Nuthampstead. but it's just as beautiful.

After returning from the museum to the hotel, members of the 398th gathered for a Rendezvous Dinner. The 398th was grouped with a few other bomb groups and enjoyed mixing and mingling with other attendees. Part of our dinner group was the 452nd Bomb Group which had two veterans in attendance, Bill Roche and Bud Haedike. They delighted the gathering with stories (and song!) for all of our dinner group.

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During the course of the Reunion, the 398th Board and membership gathered for their annual meetings. Annual reports and minutes were presented and accepted. Discussions were had concerning the need for purchasing any historical data needed to add to the 398th's permanent files. Marilyn Gibb-Rice, 398th BGMA President, updated the membership on the ongoing proceedings to turn over to the American Battle Monuments Commission the land which the 398th Monument in Nuthampstead is sitting on, as well as turning over the 55th Fighter Group Monument and land. This will allow for lifetime and permanent maintenance and upkeep of these significant monuments. 398th BGMA Officers and Directors were nominated and elected. And Marilyn also spoke of plans for a "Back to England" Reunion May 28-30, 2022 in Nuthampstead and Cambridge, England. Details can be found on the 398th website and in this issue.

A banquet was held on Saturday night, the last evening of the Reunion and was hosted by the 8th AFHS. The highlight of the event was the traditional Candle Lighting Ceremony. Six candles were lit by individuals to honor several groups with a significant connection to the 8th Air Force during WWII. These were comprised of Ground Crews, Flying Personnel, the 28,000 Airmen/Heroes lost, the 26,000 POW's and Evaders, the 8th's British Friends including the RAF and the courageous spirit of the Civilians, and finally, today's 8th Air Force—a new generation of protectors of freedom and democracy. As always, it was a very solemn and somber ceremony.



Marilyn Gibb-Rice was invited by the 8th AFHS to light a candle signifying the friendship between the US and the UK.

The banquet hosts also called up the 11 WWII veterans in attendance. The group gathered at the front of the ballroom and kindly posed for pictures and were offered a long-standing ovation for their service. It was truly a privilege to have them in attendance.

The 398th BGMA was the largest group in attendance at the 8th AFHS Reunion with 35 Members present. Though none of our veterans were able to attend, we were delighted and privileged to have two of our special widows, Jane Bowen and Chrysta Moore join us. We look forward to the next Reunion in hopes to see our veterans and families in attendance. The 8th AFHS has announced that their Reunion next year will be October 19 - 23, 2022 and will be held in Washington, DC. Additional information will be available on www.8thafhs.org

2021 Reunion Memories

Photos contributed by Mellisa Ledlow and Lee Bradley



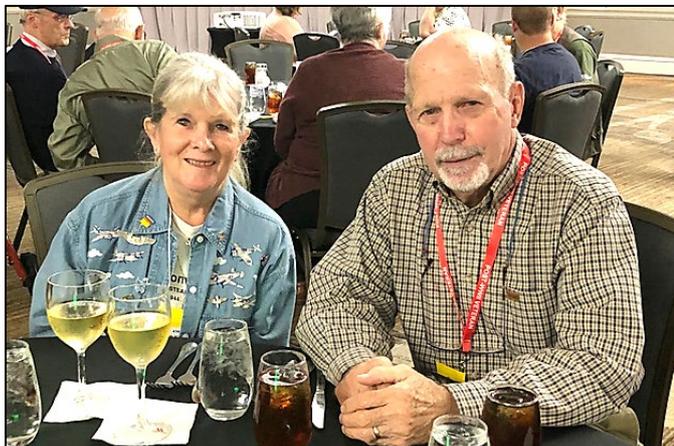
Above: Barbara Wyle, Jane Bowen and Bonnie Turner. Jane's husband was Bob Bowen, Co-Pilot, 602nd SQ.

Below: Beverly Bannister, David Moore and Chrysta Moore. Chrysta's husband was Cecil "Tex" Moore, Tail Gunner, 602nd SQ.



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Clockwise from top left:

1. Sharon & Pete Krause. Sharon's dad was Paul Roderick, 602nd SQ pilot. 2. Beth with her parents Trudy & Ken Howard. Ken's dad was Robert L. Howard, 603rd SQ BT gunner. The Howards are our hardworking Reunion Coordinators. 3. Lindhe & Martha Guarisco with Barry Lewis. Lindhe's dad was John B. Guarisco, 601st SQ bombardier and Barry's dad was Frank E. Lewis, 600th SQ togglier. 4. Courtney Neff-Brack, Juliana Blackwell and Karen Neff. Karen's stepdad was Bill Wells, 600th SQ pilot, KIA April 8, 1945. 5. Chrysta Moore and Alex Minnick. Alex is curator at the Eldred WWII Museum in Eldred, PA. Longtime 398th member Mike Ryan suggested he 'hang out' with our group. It was nice to meet you, Alex! 6. Judy Roth & Jim Rowland. Jim's dad was Bob Rowland, 602nd SQ BT gunner. 7. Juliana & John Blackwell. John's dad was Wally Blackwell, 601st SQ pilot and former president of the 398th BGMA.