



# Air Weather Reconnaissance Association

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WC-130H, 65-0965, on the 54th WRS ramp at Andersen AFB, Guam. Photo taken during an Engine Running Crew Change (ERCC) pilot proficiency sortie. This technique allowed multiple groups of pilots (with instructors) to complete their currency on one mission. This plane disappeared while performing reconnaissance of Typhoon Bess on 12 Oct 1974, the only C-130 weather reconnaissance plane ever lost.

## GONE, BUT NEVER FORGOTTEN

With Memorial Day right around the corner, it is an appropriate time to pause and remember the men who gave their lives while conducting weather reconnaissance and atmospheric sampling.

Of particular note are the three crews lost conducting typhoon reconnaissance for the Joint Typhoon Warning Center and its predecessors. All three losses are similar, in that the aircraft and crew disappeared during penetration missions and no trace of them were ever found.

On 26 Oct 1952, WB-29, 44-69770, (christened *Typhoon Goon II*) was lost while flying into Typhoon Wilma. The crew had reported that their search radar was out and that they were attempting a low level penetration. They never were heard from again. A massive search was initiated, with no results. All ten crewmen are missing and presumed dead.

On 15 Jan 1958, WB-50D, 49-295, disappeared while conducting reconnaissance of Typhoon Ophelia. Again,

what was characterized as the largest search effort of its kind was launched. No sign of the converted bomber or its ten man crew was ever found.

In 1962, AWS acquired 5 C-130B aircraft. These were modified for atmospheric sampling and divvied up between the Pacific area units. In 1965, a true weather reconnaissance capability was added to the WC-130, and the 5 B-models were joined by 6 WC-130E. The six E-models were assigned to the 54<sup>th</sup> WRS on Guam, and the B-models consolidated at the 53<sup>rd</sup> WRS, newly assigned to Ramey AFB, Puerto Rico. The WC-130's replaced the WB-50D and WB-47E as tropical storm reconnaissance aircraft. After Hurricane Camille hit the Gulf coast in 1969, Congress and President Nixon were spurred to action. Additional WC-130's were added to the fleet and the 55<sup>th</sup> acquired WC-130's as well.

From its arrival in 1962, the WC-130 proved to be a great platform. It was newer, had tons of room and

See *Swan 38* continued on Page 6

# President's Corner

by Bob Tuttle, AWRA President

WOW, what a reunion we had this past fall. Who would have thought that a trip to a Bone Yard could be so enlightening? The hotel had great rooms, a wonderful hospitality suite, and a friendly, helpful staff. The tours that Pete and Mary set up were very memorable. Those of us who accepted the challenge to visit Lee's Runway Bar and Grill will not forget TJ and Lee's friendly get-away spot and the great T shirts. Once again my thanks and appreciation to Bernie Barris, Pete and Mary Copesky, and Fred and Bonnie Towles for the super job they did on setting up the reunion and also to the gang at the 25<sup>th</sup> OWS for the tour and lunch. Tucson introduced us to several first time attendees, a couple of new members and of course being able to honor the founder of AWRA David Magilavy and his wife Maureen.

All in all I believe that this was one of the best reunions we have had in recent years and it

certainly will stick in the minds of those that flew on the two WX Recon birds that we were able to find in the bone yard. I know that it was hard for me to visit 554 and see it all torn apart and shot up.

I've been talking to Ralph Ruyle about the 2008 reunion in Ft Walton Beach and it sounds like he has once again done an outstanding job organizing and setting up this year's reunion. I hope that the attendance this year will be as good as or better than last year. I know that with the price of fuel these days and the decline in the economy, some of you might be thinking "can I afford to attend?", but remember, it's a once a year chance to visit old friends and flying buddies, and our ranks get smaller with each passing year. Thanks to everyone attending last year's reunion and hope to see you all in Florida.



AWRA President Bob Tuttle calls the Saturday night strategy session to order. Sitting, from left are Mary Copesky, Bruce Russell, Pam Russell, and Bob Tuttle. Standing are Peter Copesky, Bernie Barris, and T.J. Smith.

## 2007 Reunion Recap

# Tucson Gathering Proves Successful for AWRA



The photo at left shows David Magilavy and his lovely bride, Maureen at the 2007 Reunion banquet. David was honored for 15 years of service to AWRA as the first President and, later, as Chairman of the Board of Directors.

David also brought the Assn. into the digital age as the first Web Master for [www.awra.us](http://www.awra.us).

He was instrumental in getting the Reunion held in Tucson. After missing four years due to health and travel concerns, he was asked what it would take to get him to a reunion. "Well, you could hold it here," he said.

The rest, as we say, is history.

Photo by John Hug

Reunion 2007, is in the history books as one of the most successful AWRA gatherings ever. The Hilton Tucson East was a great setting for the event, and we all enjoyed the wonderful Southwest hospitality.

Several of us arrived early, and strategized over a beer (or two) at Lee's Runway, a great local watering hole run by AWRA Life Member, and former Dropsonde Operator, T.J. Smith, and his wife, Lee.

On Sunday afternoon, we welcomed over 100 members and guests at our registration table and hospitality suite. We can't say enough about the job done by Jackie Tabaco, Barbara Cooper, and Fred Towles. We also saw Joey Tabaco and Charley Cooper ready to help when needed.

The members brought many display boards for everyone to enjoy. Unit photos were on display from WB-29, WB-50, WB-47 and WC-130 eras. A few copies of biographies submitted by attendees circulated. Forty members responded. Inputs ranged from 4 pages of single space typing to the following: *"I spent 10 years in recon, from 1971 to 1981, as a Dropsonde*

*Operator. I was assigned to McClellan (55th), Ramey (53rd), Andersen (54th), and Keesler (53rd again). I was qualified in the WC-135B and the WC-130B/E/H."*

We would never identify the author, so Charles is safe for now. Kookie Hart was really mad, however...

The Pima Air and Space Museum tour was great and you need to go if you've never been there.

The 25th OWS hosted two tours of the Boneyard as well as their own facility. Peter Copesky really outdid himself here, along with new member Jeremy Samuel.

And we capped it all off with a fun banquet dinner on Wednesday evening. There were 110 folks in attendance, and we had a great time. While we once again decided not to have a single keynote speaker, the words of David Magilavy upon receiving his plaque were moving, to say the least. We really hope that he and Maureen will make it to Ft Walton Beach.

Let's see if we can't do even better this year, so start recruiting! See you there.

## AWRA Officers

<b>President **</b>	<b>Bob Tuttle</b> 17444 Meadow Creek Dr Eagle River, AK 99577 (907) 694-4992
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<b>Secretary</b>	<b>William Burnette</b> (See Directors List)
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<b>Historian-Archivist</b>	<b>Bernard Barris</b> (See Directors List)
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\*\* AWRA President is voting member of Board of Directors

The AWRA Newsletter is an unofficial publication of the Air Weather Reconnaissance Association. Address questions and comments to Bernard Barris, the Editor, at the address listed above, or E-mail Bernie at: [awra038@aol.com](mailto:awra038@aol.com)



First time reunion attendee, John Kubiak, spends a little quality time with one of his old aircraft at the Aerospace Maintenance and Regeneration Group (AMARG), aka "The Boneyard". This WB-57F, and all of her sisters, are kept for parts - supporting the two NASA aircraft still operational. Besides being a genuine F-Trooper, John went on to be the Inspector General at AFTAC.

## AWRA Membership Roster Goes Online

The AWRA membership has twice voted to move our membership roster from a printed hard copy, to an online version.

We understand that not everyone has a home computer. However, it was felt that everyone should be able to get access, either through a family member, friend, or your local library. And with postal rates and printing costs ever rising, now is the time to act.

The roster is located in a password protected, members-only, area of the AWRA web site.

The URL is: <http://www.awra.us/roster/>

You will be prompted to provide a User ID and password. Current year, or Life members of the Association may obtain a Password and User ID by writing to the web master at: [awra038@aol.com](mailto:awra038@aol.com).

We hope to soon have a searchable data base available as well. Watch for information on the NEWS page.

## TAPS

AWRA has learned of the deaths of the several members of the weather reconnaissance family.

Dortha Anderson	2006	Wife of William (D/O3)
Lester R. Ferriss	2007	(See Photo Below)
Leon Grisham	2007	
Carl Gunderson	2007	
Don Offerman	2006	
Vern Robertson	2007	
Lester Vohs	2007	

## Membership Drive Winner

In the last newsletter we announced a membership drive and contest. The winner of the \$30 Prize was Peter Copesky.

Thank you to all who participated. Let's not stop recruiting. There are many former men and women of weather recon out there who would join up if they only knew about AWRA.

## From the Archives



Here we see then Capt Lester R. Ferriss (kneeling second from the right), with a crew from the 59th Recon Sq (VLR) Weather, taken at Ladd Field, AK. This may be Ferriss' first Ptarmigan mission, overall Ptarmigan Number 8, flown on 12 Jun 1947. Note the 4 small Barber Pole emblems above the "O" in Polar, representing 4 North Pole missions. Col Ferriss passed away in Jun 2007, after a long battle with Alzheimer's. An arctic mission pioneer, he also was the AWS point man on Long Range Detection issues, and served as Commander of the 56th from May 1952 – Apr 1955.

carrying capacity. And it enjoyed a stellar safety record. Continuing through to today, the various models of the WC-130 have been tremendously safe and successful.

The one blemish on the WC-130 record occurred on 12 Oct 1974. On this date, WC-130H, tail number 65-0965, was dispatched from Clark AB in the Philippines to monitor Typhoon Bess. Bess had developed between Guam and Luzon. She passed over that mountainous island bringing heavy rains and causing landslides and flash floods that killed 29 people. While overland, the central pressure was recorded as 976.9 mb at a station about 30 miles south of the center. Emerging back over the South China Sea, Bess appeared to be heading for the Hong Kong area until she turned due west on the 12<sup>th</sup>. The projected path of the typhoon required further tracking to allow JTWC to provide warnings.

A mission was tasked as “Bess 0827”, meaning the 8<sup>th</sup> flight into Bess, which was the 27<sup>th</sup> Tropical System tracked by JTWC in 1974. The crew that night used the Call Sign of “Swan 38”. The crews used static call signs to let ATC know who we were. The 53<sup>rd</sup> crews used Gull, the 55<sup>th</sup> was Lark, and the 54<sup>th</sup> was Swan. Each aircraft commander had his own call sign, and Swan 38 belonged to 1Lt Gary W. Crass. They had a “basic” crew of six, meaning no trainees, maintenance folks, and of course, no passengers. Flying with Crass that night was Capt Edward R. Bushnell, ARWO; 1Lt Michael P. O’Brien, Co-pilot; 1Lt Timothy J. Hoffman, Navigator; TSgt Kenneth Suhr, Flight Engineer; and SSgt Detlef W. Ringler, Dropsonde Operator.

WC-130H 65-0965 had just recently arrived on Guam from weather modifications done at Robins AFB. The aircraft had previously spent 8 years assigned to combat rescue as an HC-130H. The last radio call from Swan 38 showed that the crew had completed their first penetration and most of an “Alpha pattern” peripheral track. They should have been preparing for their second penetration. They were on the north side of the storm, somewhere between Hong Kong and the center. After about an hour without contact, the HF Airways station at

Clark attempted to contact Swan 38. When that failed, other HF stations joined in the communications search. On the morning of 13 Oct (local Philippines’ time) a massive air and sea search was undertaken. USAF and US Navy assets covered a huge area of the South China Sea over a period of several weeks. No definitive wreckage was ever sighted. The USAF accident investigation board was unable to reach any conclusions as to what had happened. Did the aircraft break up? Explode? Suffer a control problem? Something catastrophic happened to cause them to go down with no opportunity to get out a radio call.

What we do know is that this brave crew, doing a job that they knew was crucial, was lost, and eventually declared dead. Their sacrifice will never be forgotten, as long as we keep their memory alive. The 1974 Annual Typhoon Report was dedicated to the memory of the crew of Swan 38 by JTWC. USCINCPAC removed the name “Bess” from the rotating list of storm names. The 54<sup>th</sup> WRS retired the Swan 38 Call Sign, and placed a memorial plaque on the front of the squadron operations building.

May they rest in peace, and may we never let their story be forgotten.

Ironically, one month prior to the loss of Swan 38, ABC aired their first Movie-of-the-Week for 1974. It was called “Hurricane”, and starred Martin Milner as the aircraft commander of a WC-130 flying from the fictional Cassler AFB. The 53<sup>rd</sup> WRS provided an aircraft and crew for many of the interior and exterior shots used in the movie, and the 55<sup>th</sup> sent an aircraft to Los Angeles for additional airborne pictures. Having never read the novel on which this movie was based, most of us were unaware that the plot had Milner’s crew perish during a Hurricane Camille-like storm. Since we had all reassured our families that our mission was very safe, this story line caused much consternation in homes near Keesler, McClellan, and Andersen the night that it first aired. And then four weeks later, Swan 38 disappeared ...



At left is WB-29, the Typhoon Goon II, lost in Typhoon Wilma on 26 Oct 1952. At right is a memorial plaque to the Swan 38 crew that is currently on display in the HC-130 simulator building at Kirtland AFB. This is not the same plaque that was dedicated on Guam in 1975.

## AWRA WELCOMES NEW MEMBER ART ARONSEN

One of our new members who attended his first AWRA Reunion was Art Aronsen. Art was a B-29 weather observer during WWII. When the war broke out, Art was in his second year at MIT. He enlisted in the Army Air Forces as a meteorologist, and was sent off to school at UCLA. After he graduated from the UCLA program, Art was assigned to the base weather station at Mather Field in Sacramento, CA.

In Jan 1945, a call went out for volunteers for meteorology duty with 20<sup>th</sup> Air Force in the Marianas. As Art puts it, he volunteered because he was “naïve, dumb, and bored at Mather.” He soon received orders to 20<sup>th</sup> Air Force, and upon arriving on Guam, was assigned to the 19<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, 28<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron.

Art says he doesn't know whether he was assigned to a crew and aircraft, or whether they were assigned to him, but he soon found himself flying single ship Weather Strike Missions over Japan. His aircraft commander and plane had previously been assigned to photo reconnaissance missions. It was technically an F-13, which was a dedicated photo version of the B-29. Art flew in the greenhouse nose and provided visual weather observations. Also on Art's crew was Al Wood, a fellow meteorologist, trained to take radar weather observations.

Art tells of many harrowing 17+ hour sorties flown over China, Korea, and Japan. It seemed that they always were returning with at least one engine shut down. On one mission, where they were observing a typhoon on their way to Japan, they lost an engine prior to reaching Honshu. The crew decided to press on, because they knew the data was important, and also because they wanted “mission credit”, which put them a bit closer to returning home. Over Japan they lost the second engine on the same side. Only through first class crew coordination and piloting skill were they able to get back over Iwo Jima, where they made a successful (if harrowing) landing despite tower demands that they hold – with no fuel remaining to do the holding. Art had a great view of it all .

After 20<sup>th</sup> AF reviewed the mission, the members of this crew were all awarded the Distinguished



Above we see new AWRA Life Member Art Aronsen presenting one of the 19th Bomb Group memorial globes to AWRA.

Photo by Bernie Barris

Flying Cross. There can't be too many other weather officers ever awarded a DFC.

When the war ended, Art returned to MIT, graduating in 1948. He tried to put the war behind him.

In the 1990's, Art became aware of, and active in, a 19<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Association. A few years ago he designed a special memento for that group. It is a double wall glass globe, hand painted from the inside with the logos of the 19<sup>th</sup> BG and the 4 wartime squadrons. He presented them to his fellow 19th BG veterans and a few select museums. During the Tucson reunion, Art presented a globe to the Pima Air and Space Museum, the 25<sup>th</sup> OWS at Davis-Monthan, and to AWRA. Bob Tuttle, AWRA President, accepted this memento, and today it sits proudly with our archive collection in San Antonio.





**Air Weather Reconnaissance Association**

c/o Bernard C. Barris  
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Place  
Postage  
Here

***IMPORTANT REMINDER!***

The next AWRA Reunion of Members  
will be held in Ft Walton Beach, FL  
from 19 - 23 October 2008

PLEASE FILL OUT THE ENCLOSED  
REGISTRATION FORM AND  
MAIL IT IN TODAY!

Last year we had over 115 members and guests attend  
the AWRA reunion in Tucson. Act today, don't miss out!