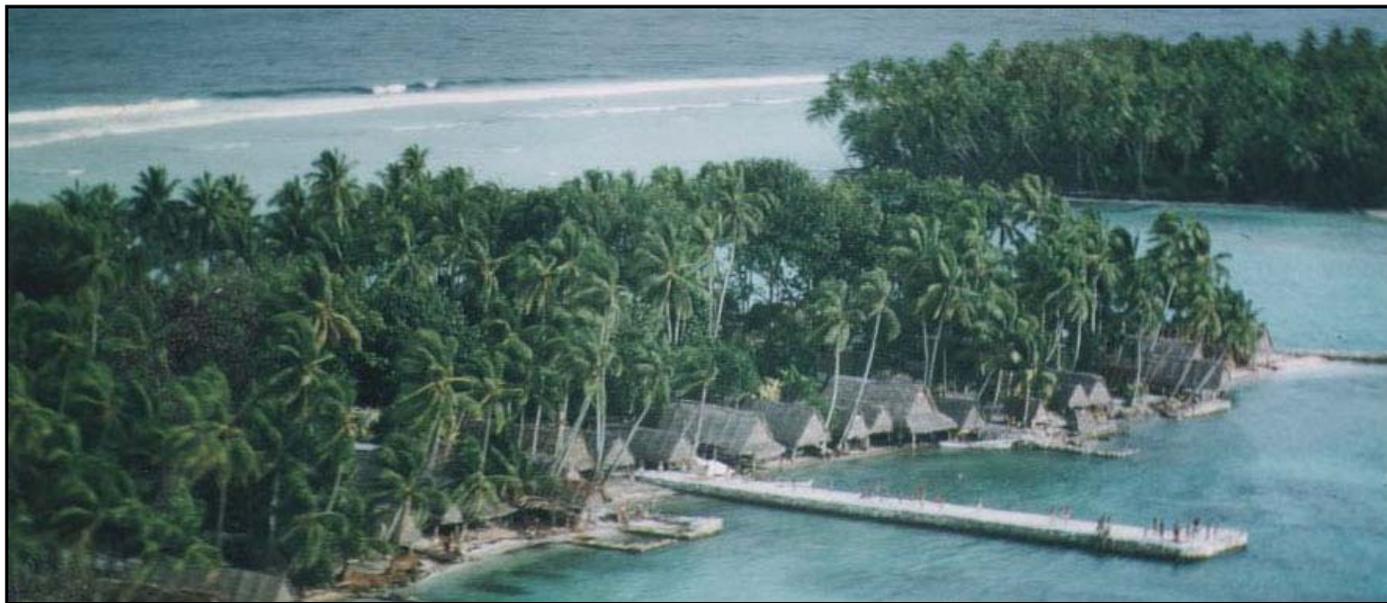




# Air Weather Reconnaissance Association

Volume 17 No. 1

June 2009



## CHRISTMAS DROP

*Editor's note: The following article about "this year's Christmas Drop" was written by the 54th WRS Information Officer in 1970. At that time the tradition was about 18 years old, dating to sometime in 1952. Remember, "this year" in the story refers to 1970 ... See more on Christmas Drop on Page 3.*

**Photo (above) of Kapingamarangi circa 1950 by Ray Brashear, Operations Officer of the 514th RS (VLR) Wea.**

By Zigi Pladars

It all began with the tiny atoll of Kapingamarangi. The natives waved and cheered, as the airplane circled low over their island. The crew decided to repay this friendly gesture. They went back to their home base, collected some items of food and clothing, and packed them in a metal can. Later they returned and dropped it on the island. And thus, a tradition was born.

From the sparse beginnings of a single canister, dropped on one island - to 18,515 pounds of gifts, delivered to the inhabitants of 29 islands of the Trust Territory of the Pacific - sums up the growth of this tradition during the past 18 years. But there is much more to the story of Christmas Drop.

It was in 1952 that the crew of a WB-29, belonging to the 54th Weather Reconnaissance Squadron at Andersen

AFB, responded to the islanders' greetings with a gift. For the next ten years, the squadron continued Christmas Drops to selected Trust Territory islands, and the project was expanded to include donations from other units on base. Then, from 1962 through 1964, the squadron was assigned WB-47 aircraft, which were not capable of dropping the packages, so the actual airdrops were delegated to the 79th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron.

Since 1965, when the 54th WRS received WC-130's, both squadrons have co-operated in making the drops. By 1965 Christmas Drop had grown to such proportions, that the Third Air Division, the host unit at Andersen, assumed overall responsibility for managing it. In 1967 the Guam Chamber of Commerce was asked to join the units at Andersen in this annual project, and so began civilian participation in Christmas Drop.

See **Christmas Drop** continued on Page 6

# PRESIDENT'S CORNER

by Bob Tuttle, AWRA President

Another year and another fabulous reunion have come and gone. The time seems to go by faster and faster every year. For those of you who missed last year's reunion in Florida we had a great one. This is the fifth time the Ruyles have sponsored a Florida reunion and they get better each time. So thanks once again Ralph and Libby and a special thanks to Guy Dunn for his great help co hosting the event.

Of the three Florida reunions I've attended the weather this time was the best ever. I was there for seven days and the sun shone every day except the day I left. Mother Nature then decided enough was enough and hammered the whole southeast with some pretty nasty weather. All the southeast flying corridors were affected and flight schedules were thrown off all across the U.S. I got into Chicago five hours late and if my connecting flight to Anchorage hadn't been delayed I might still be in Chicago.

This past year has been a sad one as several of our AWRA members, two regular attendees John Kosick and Lee (Sully) Sullivan and member Barry Granlund who lived just up the street from me here in Alaska have taken their final flights. I have also been informed that several of our members are

having some pretty trying health issues. My personal condolences go to the families of the departed and hope that those with health issues are doing better.

It seems that Bernie Barris doesn't know when to say no. As many of you already know he has again volunteered to do this year's reunion in San Antonio. He claims the last one didn't really show off San Antonio because of the short amount of time he had to set it up. The previous San Antonio reunion was great and with the extra time to plan, this one should be spectacular. So mark your calendars for the 14<sup>th</sup> thru the 18<sup>th</sup> of Oct and make your reservations. Bernie has asked me for two favors. One is to ask our regular attendees to call, e-mail or grab your buddies that don't regularly attend and bring them along this year. Recent conversations with Bernie indicate that he has some very interesting stuff planned so let's make this a big one that everyone will remember.

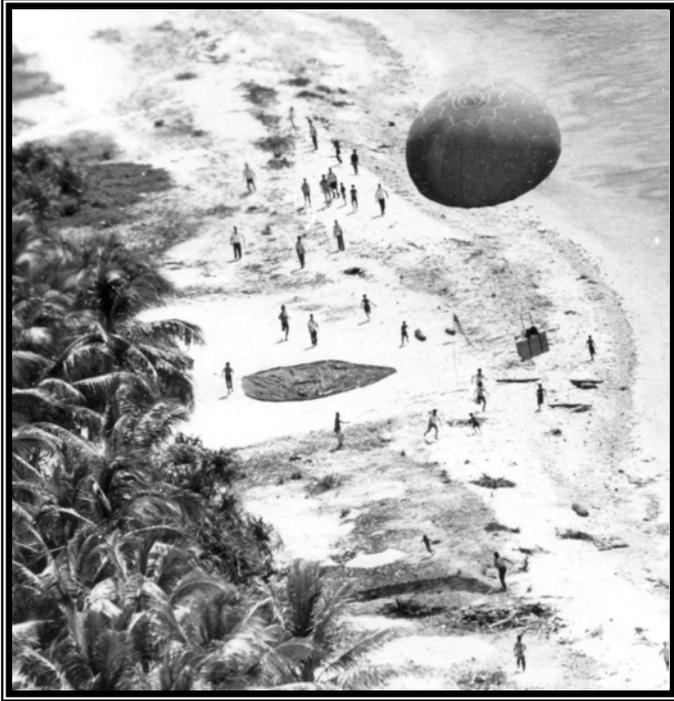
Oh yah about that other favor, seems that he, along with several others, want me to make sure that Billy Davis stays away from the pool area.



**"Has it only been 33 years?" AWRA reunions are a great place to catch up with old friends. First time attendee Chuck Lavoie, at right, and Bernie Barris share some great memories of their time on the same 55th WRS crew back in 1974-75. They hope to see all of you this year in San Antonio.**

## The Rest of the Story

# The Christmas Drop Good Will Lives On



The photo at left shows a typical Christmas Drop delivery during the WC-130 era. Boxes contained as much as 450 lbs of gifts when delivered under an actual cargo chute. This picture shows islanders appearing from everywhere to meet the drop, with one chute already collapsed on the ground.

The photo below, from 1955, shows the more humble early days of Christmas Drop. Maj Winton Brown, A2C Otto Boetticher, and A1C Durley Lartey of the 54th Weather Section pack magazines, candies, toys, etc. into boxes that AMT-3 dropsondes were shipped in. Using unserviceable dropsonde chutes saved during the year, these were dropped to natives in Palau and to Coast Guardsmen on Anguarh and Uliithi.



By Bernie Barris

I hope everyone enjoyed the Christmas Drop story from 1970 on Page 1, continued on Page 6.

This morale-boosting mission by the *Typhoon Chasers* of Guam brought much positive attention to the Squadron and the Air Force as a whole.

The 54th remained in the lead for coordination of collection and delivery of these items for another 17 years after the article was written, ending only when the 54th furled their flag for the final time in October 1987.

Remarkably, the tradition had such a strong following by then that the military and civilian team on Guam has continued it to the present day.

Beginning in 1987, the actual aerial delivery has been accomplished by tactical airlift C-130's from the 374th AW in Japan. Usually 2 C-130's will deploy to Guam to conduct the missions.

The author had the opportunity to participate in 5 of the annual programs, from 1978 through 1982, as a member of the 54th and later as the standardization navigator for the 41st Rescue and Weather Reconnaissance Wing. These were some of the most

fun and rewarding missions of my weather recon career.

The 1970 article mentions awards that the 54th received because of the Christmas Drop program from various groups. This also was true of later years. Of special note is the 1977 Christmas Drop season. The project officer that year was Capt Craig Polly, a navigator and squadron plans officer. Capt Polly was selected as the Military Airlift Command Junior Officer of the Year, having previously won the same honor at the squadron, wing, and service (ARRS).

The same year, the overall squadron was nominated for, and won, the 1977 Mutual of Omaha Humanitarian Award. This award was presented in 1978 to Col Jerry Lasco, the 54th Commander, by none other than Gen Jimmy Doolittle.

## AWRA Officers

<b>President</b>	<b>Bob Tuttle</b> 17444 Meadow Creek Dr Eagle River, AK 99577 (907) 694-4992
<b>Vice Presidents</b>	<b>H. Pierce Bilyeu</b> (See Directors List)
	<b>Roy E. Ladd</b> 5100 John D Ryan Blvd, Apt 225 San Antonio, TX 78245
<b>Secretary</b>	<b>William Burnette</b> (See Directors List)
<b>Treasurer</b>	<b>Ralph Ruyle</b> (See Directors List)
<b>Historian-Emeritus</b>	<b>Otha Spencer</b> 4245 Spencer's Road Campbell, TX 75422
<b>Historian-Archivist</b>	<b>Bernard Barris</b> (See Directors List)
<b>Membership</b>	<b>Bernard Barris</b> (See Directors List)

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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)



USAF Basic Training class during weekly graduation ceremony at Lackland AFB. One of the activities of the 2009 Reunion will be attendance at the graduation ceremony on Friday, 16 Oct 2009. Hope to see you there.

Official USAF Photo

## AWRA Membership Roster Is Online

The last full distribution, hard copy roster published by AWRA was in 2006. Since 2007 we have converted to an online version in PDF format.

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 need a User ID and password to download and either save or print the roster. 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 are concerned that, so far, only 63 members have requested their passwords. That is less than 10% of our active membership. **WE WANT EVERY MEMBER TO HAVE A CURRENT ROSTER!** If you feel digitally challenged, or don't have access to a computer, please call Bernie Barris to arrange to have the roster either sent via E-mail, or to receive a hard copy in the mail.

Phone Bernie at: 210-274-9974

## TAPS

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

Janine Devereaux	2007	
Leslie Gamble	2007	
Woody Jenkins	2007	
Howard Rust	2007	
Paul (Chip) Steves	2007	
Thomas Thrower, Jr	2007	
Mary Thrower	2007	Wife of Thomas (D/07)
Richard Vogel	2007	
Dan Waylett	2007	
Harold Zercher, Jr	2007	
Robert Appel	2008	
Wayne Bogard	2008	
Barry Grandlund	2008	
Ray Hintzen	2008	
John Kosick	2008	
Russell Ver Nooy	2008	
Nelvin Walling	2008	Wife of Joe

## From the Archives



Here is a photo I'd like to know more about. It is of WC-130B t/n 62-3494, one of the original five WC-130's fielded in 1962. It comes from new Life Member Richard Teerman, a Dropsonde Operator with the 55th. Of interest is that the aircraft is configured for all three WC-130 missions, weather reconnaissance, atmospheric sampling - note the U-1 foil aft of the crew entrance door, and weather modification - there is a silver iodide ejector rack forward of the paratroop door. These were used during rainmaking missions in SEA, the Philippines, and West Texas. Circa 1970.

Since traditionally Christmas Drop had been a unit project, in 1969, after a break of four years, the 54th WRS requested that the responsibility of managing it be returned to the squadron.

Much credit goes to Lt Col Harry N. Fields, the 54th WRS Executive Officer, who volunteered and was appointed 1969 Christmas Drop Project Officer. Under his sincere interest and expert leadership, the scope and size of the operation more than doubled the previous year's record. For the first time the Navy was invited to join the Air Force and civilian communities, and more than 500 people were personally concerned with the drop.

In February 1970 the Senate of the Congress of Micronesia adopted a resolution praising and thanking participants of Christmas Drop 1969. The 3960th Strategic Wing Information Office selected Christmas Drop 1969 as the most outstanding humanitarian effort conducted at Andersen AFB and nominated this project to the Department of Defense for possible national and international news coverage. It was also submitted as one of the ten most significant humanitarian projects in the Department of Defense.

This year again WC-130 Hercules aircraft from the 54th WRS and the 79th ARRS will be making deliveries of presents and supplies to the islands. The actual drops will be made between December 15 and Christmas Eve. To quote the 1970 Project Officer, Major Robert Bissett, "Some drop bombs. We will drop parachutes with gifts to demonstrate our concern for the welfare and happiness of our neighbors. In view of the increased emphasis on civil actions, Christmas Drop is particularly meaningful."

There is quite a variety of jobs to be done to make Christmas Drop a reality. The initial planning stages involve a good amount of paperwork, starting with obtaining project approval from the High Commissioner of the Trust Territory of the Pacific and from higher Air Force staffs. Careful coordination of all activities is an absolute necessity, if the operation is to be a success. This includes the efforts of Andersen AFB units, local governmental agencies, the many Navy installations, Officers' and NCO Wives' Clubs, the Guam Chamber of Commerce, civilian businessmen, churches news media, and numerous individuals. Committees are appointed to carry out specific duties within a set time limit. All homes at Andersen are canvassed by Boy Scouts, and donations are collected.

The list of gifts ranges from clothing, food, and toys to medical supplies and sewing materials. Cash donations are used to purchase items that are not obtained in collections. These are bought at a discount from local merchants and include machetes, small hand tools, hammers and nails, fishing equipment, and zoris. All

clothing is sorted and packed according to size and sex. Gifts are wrapped, boxed, and then crated. They are marked and directed to specific islands, according to the population breakdown and needs of each one. Wooden pallets are constructed to hold the packing crates, and these are rigged with cargo slings and parachutes, and then the pallets are loaded on to the aircraft. Special aircrews are selected and thoroughly briefed on the location of the islands and the many details involved in this extraordinary mission.

The islands, where drops are to be made, are selected by the High Commissioner of the Trust Territory on the basis of need and location. In October of 1969 Typhoon Elsie almost completely destroyed Alamagan, Agrihan, and neighboring Pagan. To them last year's drop consisted not only of gifts, but included vitally needed supplies as well. People were starving on Agrihan, so 1000 pounds of rice was airdropped there. Four hundred bags of copra were delivered to Alamagan and Pagan. The copra was desperately needed, if the residents were going to be able to harvest their crops. Their own supplies had been lost in the typhoon.

Other islands are so isolated by their very remoteness, that not even an occasional boat pays them a visit. The sight of a plane and then a brilliantly colored parachute floating to the ground, provides unparalleled excitement for the people living there. According to the High Commissioner's Office, for many of the islanders, the gift they receive from Christmas Drop is the only gift they ever receive.

Wherever the jet-age Santas have delivered their presents, they have been welcomed with great joy. All of the inhabitants of each island turned out to wave and cheer. On Ulithi Lathow there are only six of them; but Nama, in the Upper Mortlocks, has 1052 residents. Often there are American flags near the drop zone. One island, Onari, last year had placed a panel proclaiming "Merry Christmas" in the center of their drop zone.

"Merry Christmas" is what Christmas Drop is all about. Even though in the past 18 years it has come a long way from the humble "Drummer Boy" beginnings, it remains an expression of good will and friendship from the people on Guam to their neighbors throughout the islands. Sharing Christmas with them in the spirit of brotherhood and love - and recalling an event that took place in Bethlehem almost 2000 years ago - that is the true meaning of Christmas Drop.

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**Reminder: This article is from 1970.**

**See Page 3 for more of the story of Christmas Drop and the 54th WRS**

## SAN ANTONIO IS CALLING YOU

San Antonio, Texas, proudly bills itself as "Military City, USA". Home to numerous bases, they are proud of their history with the armed services, especially the USAF. The flight history goes back to the earliest days at Fort Sam Houston and Kelly Field. Randolph AFB was known as the "West Point of the Air." Today, every new USAF enlisted member goes through his or her Basic Training at Lackland AFB.

In addition, San Antonio is one of the top tourist destinations in the country. We have the world-famous River Walk and the Alamo, as well as top flight parks like Six Flags Fiesta Texas and Sea World.

Two former weather reconnaissance aircraft grace the displays at Lackland.

All-in-all, there are lots of reasons to join us in October for the reunion of members. With your help, we can make this one of our best ever.

The Radisson Downtown Market Square proved to be a great host in 2005, and they are working with us again this year to make sure we have a great reunion.

Please plan to join us and make your reservations today.

We guarantee that you will have a great time!

## 2009 AWRA Reunion Tentative Agenda

### Wed, 14 Oct 2009

1200-2200	Hospitality in the Hospitality Suite
1200-1830	Registration in Lobby
1900-2000	Welcome Social

### Thu, 15 Oct 2009

0800-2200	Hospitality and Registration in the Hospitality Suite
0830-1630	Optional Bus trip to Fredericksburg, TX

### Fri, 16 Oct 2009

0800-2200	Hospitality in the Hospitality Suite
0900-1100	USAF Basic Training Graduation at Lackland
1800-2200	Open House at Bernie and Roz Barris' home

### Sat, 17 Oct 2009

0800-2200 ***	Hospitality in the Hospitality Suite
0900	AWRA Officers and Board of Directors Meeting
1030	AWRA General Membership Meeting
1800	No Host Social Hour
1900-2100	Annual AWRA Banquet

### Sun, 18 Oct 2009

0800-1200	Departure Hospitality	Hospitality Suite
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\*\*\* Hospitality will be closed during the AWRA Membership Meeting and the evening festivities.



WB-50D 49-310 of the 57th WRS on the ramp at Hickam AFB circa 1956. This aircraft currently on display at the NMUSAF.



**Air Weather Reconnaissance Association**

c/o Bernard C. Barris  
11019 Oaktree Park  
San Antonio, TX 78249-4440

Place  
Postage  
Here

***IMPORTANT REMINDER!***

The next AWRA Reunion of Members  
will be held in San Antonio, Texas  
from 14 - 18 October 2009

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

Let's make 2009 the best reunion ever! Come see  
the World Famous River Walk and make new friends!

# Air Weather Reconnaissance Association

## 2009 Reunion

### 14 - 18 October 2009

## SAN ANTONIO TX

Mail Reunion registration to: Bernard C. Barris  
11019 Oaktree Park  
San Antonio TX 78249-4440

\*\*\*\*\*

**Registration Form must arrive NLT 1 September 2009**

\*\*\*\*\*

**Name:** (as you want it to appear on your name tag):

\_\_\_\_\_

**Address**

**Street:** \_\_\_\_\_

**City/State/Zip:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Home Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Cell:** \_\_\_\_\_

**E-Mail:** \_\_\_\_\_ (to confirm registration and receive regular updates)

I plan to attend the Air Weather Reconnaissance Association 2009 Reunion at the Radisson Downtown Market Square Hotel, San Antonio TX.

I will be accompanied by spouse (Y / N) and \_\_\_\_\_ other guest(s) for a total of \_\_\_\_\_ persons, including myself, who will attend.

Name of spouse and other guest(s) who will attend:  
(as they want it to appear on their name tag)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I / We will be staying at the Radisson Downtown Market Square. YES NO (circle one)

To make your hotel reservations, call: 210-224-7155

**ROOMS WILL GO FAST! Make your reservation now! Be sure to say you are with AWRA.**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Reunion Registration cost is \$70 per person. This fee covers Welcome Social on Wed evening, the Annual Banquet on Sat Night, Hospitality all 5 days, and administrative costs. Cost for Annual Banquet Only is \$40 per person.

(1) Please register \_\_\_\_\_ persons @ \$70.00 each for the 2009 AWRA Reunion (includes banquet) \$ \_\_\_\_\_

(2) I have \_\_\_\_\_ guests coming exclusively for the Saturday banquet @ \$40.00 each \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Total amount enclosed (Make check payable to Bernard Barris) \$ \_\_\_\_\_

\*\*\*\*\*  
**Cancellations fully refundable if notice is received by 09/13/09**  
**Send notice by mail, E-mail, or phone to Bernard Barris**  
**Phone: (210) 274-9974 E-Mail: bcbarris@aol.com**  
\*\*\*\*\*

The information below is for our planning purposes. NO PAYMENT required at this time for the Thursday and Friday events. We will let you know when payment is needed.

We are planning a bus trip on Thurs, 15 Oct, to Fredericksburg, TX. Bus departs hotel at 0830L and returns at 1630L. Fredericksburg is home of the National Museum of the Pacific War (formerly the Nimitz Museum), numerous small shops, and dining along a downtown boardwalk. **Cost is \$30 per person**, which includes the bus and guide. Museum entry fee is additional \$5 each, with any WWII veterans getting in FREE. Lunch will be on your own. There is some walking involved; however, I can personally attest to lots of available benches to take a break.

I have \_\_\_\_\_ persons interested in this trip to Fredericksburg, TX On 15 Oct 2009.

On Friday morning, we will take a bus to Lackland AFB to attend the weekly graduation of a new class of USAF Airmen. There is covered seating in the grandstand. After the ceremony we will be able to walk the heritage path around the parade ground and view the many USAAF and USAF aircraft on display. This includes a WB-29 displayed as a WWII bomber. **Cost will be \$10 each for the bus.** A Lackland Public Affairs representative will board the bus and give us a short tour of the training facilities before we depart. Near the gate is one of the few WB-66 left.

I have \_\_\_\_\_ persons interested in this trip to Lackland AFB on 16 Oct 2009.

Please, don't delay!

**Send in your Reunion Registration  
and  
Make your hotel reservation TODAY!**

**Questions? Contact Bernie Barris at: (210) 274-9974**