



Air Weather Reconnaissance Association

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Captain Richard B. Clement, Aircraft Commander, briefs his crew prior to departing McClellan in their WB-50. L-R: 1Lt. Gary E. Stevens, SSgt. Orbrey O. Owens, SSgt. Charles J. Beaney, A1C Clifford L. Oizan. Note the "Willie Weatherbee" squadron logo that was approved during WWII, and used by the 55th WRS until 1967. Official USAF Photo

“RETURN TO MCCLELLAN”

“Return to McClellan” is our battle cry this year. For 50 years, that base in Northern California was home to many weather reconnaissance and atmospheric sampling units.

In addition to the familiar aircraft squadrons, McClellan also was home to the McClellan Central Laboratory (MCL) which played a critical role in monitoring foreign countries’ nuclear programs. The host unit for the MCL was known variously as the Western Field Office, 1155th TOS, and the Technical Operations Division. For 40 years, the MCL was part of the Air Force Technical Applications Center, or AFTAC. Often we just called them “the Customer”.

It is our hope that we can convince many of you to join us. We are hosting the reunion at the Lions Gate Hotel. This used to be the McClellan AFB Officers Club and Visiting Officers Quarters. Fully refurbished, it is known as a great destination. Our Hospitality Suite will be in one of the General Officer houses. A truly unique setting.

Please make your plans NOW! Fill out the enclosed form today, and drop it in the mail. Also, call the Lions Gate and get your room reserved.

Call all your friends, and we’ll see you there!

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

by G.D. "Stoney" Faubus, AWRA President

Wishing you all a very Happy New Year.

I hope that all is going well for you. Melva and I had a great time in Omaha. It was fun seeing everyone and renewing old times.

On a sad note we had to say good bye to one of our members. Larry Baker passed away on Feb. 19 from Cancer. He was the Stan Eval FE in Guam during my tour. He will be missed.

A get well shout goes out to Bob Tuttle. He is having some problems and we wish him a quick recovery.

On a happier note, hoping to see as many of you that can make it to Sacramento for the next reunion. We should have a great time. There are many things to see and do in the area. In closing, I would like to send a great big thanks to Bill and Sharon Burnette for the super job they did for us in Omaha. I think the flight lunches were a great touch and brought back many old memories to a lot of us.

Thanks again and hope to see you in Sacramento.

Thanks, G.D. "Stoney" Faubus

Omaha Reunion Wrap-up

AWRA had a earlier reunion last year. We joined with all Air Weather Service veterans in Omaha to help celebrate the 75th Anniversary of Air Force Weather. Our group was rather small, about 45 of us, but there were almost 500 total folks in attendance.

We want to thank Jim Reardon for representing AWRA at all of the planning meetings held at the Air Force Weather Agency, and coordinating our participation. Great work, Jim.

We also want to extend a huge thank you to Bill and Sharon Burnette. Bill jumped in and worked with many base agencies at Offutt. He arranged with ACC for tremendous static display in one of the hangers. We got to see two of our former WC-135 aircraft. We went aboard 667, one of the air samplers, and got to see the new technology. We also got to speak with some of the ACC and AFTAC crew who flew missions in 2011 against the Japan nuclear plant incident, caused by their tsunami. As a special treat, Bill had box lunches from the flight kitchen waiting when folks got back on the bus. Finally, a very special Thank You to Sharon Burnette who hosted our whole group at their home.



Thank you to the men and women of the 45th Reconnaissance Squadron and Det 1, AFTAC, for the great tour of WC-135W 61-2667. Seeing the current technology upgrades, and hearing first hand accounts of sampling against the Japan nuclear crisis after the 2011 tsunami, was both interesting and eye opening. Photo by Charles and Kookie Hart.

Looking Back at McClellan AFB

The weather reconnaissance story at McClellan Air Force Base begins 28 October 1949 when the 374th Reconnaissance Squadron (VLR) Weather arrived in Sacramento from Fairfield Suisun. At the time the 374th arrived, they had been involved in the search for the first Soviet nuclear test with crews flying across Canada and to the UK. Crews had previously been flying weather missions in support of the Berlin airlift from bases in Great Britain.

In February 1951, the air staff decided to return Air Weather Service squadrons to their earlier 50-series numbers. At that time the 374th was inactivated. All personnel and equipment were transferred to the 55th Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron, Medium, Weather. For the people at McClellan, this was really just a name change, but, for lineage purposes, these are two completely separate units. On 15 February 1954, the unit was renamed the 55th Weather Reconnaissance Squadron. During this time the 55th flew daily missions over the Eastern Pacific Ocean and Gulf of Alaska gathering crucial meteorological information as well as monitoring air masses moving across the Pacific. They also supported the Atomic Energy Commission nuclear testing in Nevada. Beginning in 1955, their WB-29 aircraft were replaced by newer WB-50D, which were being phased out by SAC.

By 1958, the international community put tremendous pressure on the United States and the Soviet Union to stop atmospheric nuclear testing. At the end of 1958 an unofficial testing moratorium was in place. President Eisenhower was also interested in reducing military spending. Air Weather Service put in motion a plan to reduce the number of their flying squadrons. In 1958, the 58th WRS was inactivated in Alaska, as was the 57th in Hawaii. A smaller number of aircraft and personnel remained at each location as Detachments of the 55th. In 1960, the 59th WRS on Bermuda was inactivated, also becoming a 55th detachment.

AWS made more changes in 1961. The 9th Group was transferred from Scott AFB, IL, to McClellan AFB in July. At that time, the 55th was inactivated. The former 55th assets became a detachment of the 9th WRG, as did all of the former 55th Dets. This slow downsizing of airborne weather reconnaissance came to an end when the Soviet Union unexpectedly broke the nuclear testing moratorium. This led to the 55th squadron being reactivated in Oct 1961.

In 1963, the first WB-47E was delivered to McClellan and the 55th, along with two WC-130B. Configured for sampling, the WC-130 was used as a backup sampler and admin aircraft. One was kept at McClellan and one at Det 1 in Alaska.

In 1965, the 55th received five WC-135B aircraft. These, along with five more stationed at the 56th WRS in Japan,

would soon become the primary air sampler for the USAEDS. Also in 1965, the WC-130B's were modified with a full weather recon suite and sent to the 53rd WRS in Puerto Rico. The 55th would operate both the WB-47E and WC-135B on worldwide deployments. Their capabilities were enhanced even more beginning in 1968 when air refueling receiver equipment was installed on the WC-135.

By late 1969, the WB-47 was becoming very long in the tooth. As the sole operator of B-47 aircraft, AWS found them unsustainable, and abruptly retired the remaining fleet.

In 1970, the 55th again gained WC-130 aircraft. WC-130B/E/H would be stationed alongside the WC-135 until Dec 1975. In 1971 the 56th was inactivated, and all remaining WC-135B were consolidated at McClellan. Seven aircraft would be assigned to the 55th.

By the mid 1970's, AWS was involved with national programs to upgrade weather satellites, NEXRAD weather radar, and was on the leading edge of using mainframe computers to enhance forecasting and dissemination of weather products. These programs were vastly expensive, and AWS had to drop support for routine airborne weather collection. MAC and the Air Staff decided to transfer all remaining recon squadrons from AWS to Rescue Service. This occurred on 1 Oct 1975. At that time, the 9th WRW was replaced by the 41st RWRW, under ARRS. The transfer resulted in additional changes at McClellan. First, the WC-130s left for Guam and Keesler to conduct hurricane and typhoon reconnaissance. Also the WC-135 was limited to only a few hours of weather reconnaissance support every year, on a not-to-interfere with air sampling basis. By 1980, the met equipment was totally removed from the WC-135B.

During the 1970s, and 80s, the 55th maintained rotational aircraft and crews at Yokota AB, Japan, and flew routine background missions over the pole to Europe, as well as quarterly missions to the southern hemisphere. They participated in numerous special missions for the USAEDS, including major involvement during the Chernobyl nuclear plant incident of 1986.

With the end of the cold war, it was decided that a dedicated sampling squadron was no longer justified. Several 55th aircraft were transferred to the Open Skies program. In 1993, the 55th was officially inactivated at McClellan. All remaining aircraft were transferred to other missions and commands. Two WC-135B went to ACC at Offutt to maintain a contingency national sampling capability.

AFTAC's Tech Ops Division and the MCL would continue to support national objectives at McClellan until 1999 when the base was closed under BRAC.

AWRA Officers

President	Stoney Faubus (See Directors List)
Vice Presidents (see note)	Peter Copesky (See Directors List)
Secretary	William Burnette (See Directors List)
Treasurer	Bob Tuttle 17444 Meadow Creek Dr Eagle River, AK 99577 (907) 694-4992
Historian-Archivist	Bernard Barris (See Directors List)
Membership	Bernard Barris (See Directors List)

Note: At the 2012 reunion, John Hug resigned as a Vice President and member of the BOD. AWRA is looking for nominees to fill the open Vice President position. Contact any officer with your suggestions.

Board of Directors

Ralph Ruyle (<i>Chairman</i>) 1502 W Mariah Way Fort Walton Beach, FL 325474 (850) 862-1571	
Bernard Barris 11019 Oaktree Park San Antonio, TX 78249 (210) 696-5072	William Burnette 1910 Crest Ridge Dr Papillion, NE 68133 (402) 502-3771
Charley L. Cooper 10837 St. Xavier Lane St. Ann, MO 63074 (314) 428-4379	Peter Copesky 4112 E Kilmer St Tucson, AZ 85711 (520) 514-8844
Stoney Faubus 1329 Hwy 395 N STE 10 – 242 Gardnerville NV 89410	Pat Hanavan 12402 Winding Branch San Antonio TX 78230 (210) 479-0226
Arnold Jarvis P.O. Box 776 Elephant Butte, NM 87935 (505) 744-5722	John E. Lein P.O. Box 41288 Charleston, SC 29423 (843) 522-5796
David Young 3800 Vista Circle Dr Lancaster, CA 93536	

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



From 1958 through 1969, McClellan AFB and the 55th WRS operated WB-47 aircraft. First they received the one-and-only WB-47B, which had been part of the National Hurricane Research Project. From May 1963 until the aircraft was retired in Oct 1969, the 55th WRS was the largest operator of the WB-47E, like the one shown above. The WB-47E was primarily an air sampling platform (note the U-1 sampling foil on the aft bomb bay door) but the WB-47 was also key in the development of automated weather data collection and dissemination. For more information, see our WB-47E web page at: <http://www.awra.us/gallery-feb09.htm>

Official USAF Photo

Newsletter and Reunion News

Every year we ask the question about when is the best time to spread the word and get folks to register for the reunion. If we send the newsletter out too soon, people have the natural tendency to set the registration form aside and wait until the deadline approaches. If it comes out too late, folks will have already made different plans.

This year we tried to reach a happy medium. The dates and location for the 2013 reunion were set last fall, and we told everyone who joined us in Omaha to spread the word that we were going Sacramento (McClellan) in 2013. In addition, the AWRA reunion web site announcing the reunion has been up since September, a full year before the planned reunion dates. Hopefully most of you were aware of when and where we planned to gather.

We are now a little over 100 days until the reunion starts. While we are still over 75 days before the cutoff for getting rooms at our group rate (\$89.00 plus tax), we do have a limited number of rooms in our block. I'm asking everyone to call and make their reservations NOW! That will give us time to increase the size of our room block if necessary. Make the call today. The phone number is: (916) 643-6222



McClellan Reunion Items

Reunion items available this year include polo shirts and ball caps with the 55th WRS logo. One of our fellow weather recon veterans has a graphics business in Sacramento, and has been very helpful in making these available. The shirts are offered in sizes Small through XX Large, and come in green, black or grey with white lettering. The caps are one size fits all, and only come in black.

If people are interested in getting similar items for any other squadrons, let me know.

TAPS

Sadly, over the past year, AWRA has learned of the deaths of several more members of our weather reconnaissance family. May they Rest in Peace.

Clifton K Momberg	2008
Marilyn Kendall	2009 Wife of John (D/09)
Roger C Minter	2009
Shirley Sullivan	2009 Wife of Lee (D/08)
James Paul Guidrey	2010
Raymond Leis	2011
Thomas Warne	2011
Gloria Vargas	2011 Wife of Vernon (D/98)
Edward Gervase	2012
Albert J Kantor	2012
Dr Clifford Kern	2012
Wilson Nixon	2012
Harlow Rasha	2012
Frank Schmidt	2012
Otha Spencer	2012
Larry Baker	2013
Helmut (Eric) Nimke	2013
John Principe	2013
Fred Stewart	2013
Edward G Vrable	2013

Our lives are so much richer for having known them.

We will greatly miss them all



From the Archives



Otha Spencer and Eric Nimke

Included in the TAPS list this year are two gentlemen who gave tirelessly of themselves, and provided tremendous additions to our continuing knowledge of the history and heritage of weather reconnaissance. Our Archives exist because of them.

Otha Spencer was born April 27, 1920 in Lone Oak, Texas. He died June 1, 2012 at the Briarcliff Health Center in Greenville, Texas. He was known during his 10 month stay at Briarcliff for his big smile, and always wearing his favorite WWII cap.

Otha graduated from East Texas State Teachers College (now Texas A&M University Commerce) in 1941 and joined the Army Air Force as an aviation cadet. After flight training he qualified in the B-25 aircraft and soon became an instructor in the B-25. He was one of five highly qualified aircraft commanders chosen, by name, for the Army Hurricane Reconnaissance Unit in 1944. This history-making unit flew numerous missions through and around tropical storms in the Atlantic and Caribbean during the summer and fall of 1944. A gifted writer, Lieutenant Spencer was selected to write the end of year report about their operations. The unit was disbanded after the 1944 hurricane season, and Otha transferred to the China-Burma-India theater of operations flying missions over "The Hump".

After the war, Otha returned to East Texas State and earned a master's degree in 1946. In 1948, he joined the ETSU faculty and taught there until he retired in 1978. In 1955 he earned his Ph.D. After retirement, Otha was named a Professor-Emeritus, and maintained an office at Texas A&M - Commerce until his death, mentoring hundreds of students over the years.

Otha was a prolific writer, having over 300 magazine articles and 12 books published. He wrote [Flying the Hump: Memories Of An Air War](#), relating to his experiences as a Hump pilot.

In 1994, at the urging of AWRA, Otha undertook the daunting task of writing a book about weather reconnaissance, beginning with his own experiences in 1944. He sent out hundreds of information requests to weather reconnaissance veterans, and received a tremendous amount of information and personal photographs. In 1995, he published [Flying the Weather](#), one of the best books about weather reconnaissance published to date.

From 1994 until 2007 Otha was the historian for AWRA. At that time he indicated it was time for him to turn these duties over to a new historian. The AWRA board of directors requested that Otha accept the title of Historian-Emeritus in honor of his service to the Association. Bernie Barris volunteered to take over as AWRA historian and archivist. Bernie had numerous chances to visit with Otha and his wife Billie at their home in Commerce, Texas.

Otha donated the files he used to write [Flying the Weather](#), including the many responses to his survey questions sent in by veterans. These first hand accounts continue to be used to tell the story of weather reconnaissance to a new generation.

Otha was a friend to us all and will be greatly missed.

Helmut Eric Nimke was born May 25, 1921 in Schneidemuhl, Germany (now Poland). Eric passed away at the age of 91 on April 17, 2013 after a brief illness.

He came to the United States with his family in 1928 and grew up in the Bronx, New York. During WWII, he served with the 55th Reconnaissance Squadron, Long Range, Weather, as a technical supply specialist. He served both on Guam and on Iwo Jima. After the war he graduated from the City College of New York. He was a professional engineer working in the fields of mechanical, civil, and environmental engineering. Among his many professional accomplishments was design work on the Cape Canaveral assembly and launch complex that was used during the Saturn V Moon landing program.

Eric was extremely proud of his WWII service. He became very active with reunions of 55th Weather Recon Squadron veterans, which included their former commander, Colonel Nicholas Chavasse. Colonel Chavasse appointed Eric as squadron historian, a job Eric happily embraced. For over 20 years he worked tirelessly keeping surviving WWII veterans and their families in touch with one another. One of his lasting contributions included collecting and indexing (by hand) all of the special orders issued by the squadron. He also obtained copies of higher headquarters orders pertaining to the squadron, such as those awarding the Distinguished Flying Cross and Air Medals. Again working by hand, Eric indexed every squadron member alphabetically, and listed all orders that included their name. This work has been used over and over by the veterans, their children, and grandchildren.

Eric was a valued Life Member of AWRA for many years. It was our pleasure to work with him and help to keep the story of these WWII "Typhoon Chasers" alive. Over the past years, Eric has sent AWRA copies of much of his archival work. When the time came for Eric to move into hospice care, he asked his daughter to mail his remaining records to AWRA. They will forever be a treasured part of our archives and we will make every effort continue his work supporting the WWII 55th families.

I personally will miss both of these fine gentlemen and fellow historians. May they rest in peace.

Welcome New Members

Thank you to everyone who responded to our request for help locating lost Life Members. With your assistance, we found valid addresses for quite a few, and also discovered a few who had passed away.

New Life Members

Donald Craghead	55th	WB-29
William Nichols	54th	WC-130
Gerard Partee	55th	WB-47 WC-135 WC-130
John Penz	58th	WB-57F
Grant Phifer	55th	WC-135
Dick Purdum	55th Det 1 9th Wg	WB-47
James Tupen	58th	WB-29 WB-50
Richard Wickman	55th 9th Wg	

New One-Year Members (Expires 1 Aug 2014)

Benford Harris	375th	WB-29
Darwin Kampman	58th	WB-57F
Horace Abbott	58th	WB-29
Terry Martin	55th 59th	WB-50
Herbert Plucker	53rd 56th 55th	WB-50 WC-135
Stanley Sowa	55th 41RWRW	WC-135
Robert Triplett	56th	WB-57F WC-135
James Turner	54th	WB-29

Note to all of our One-Year Members:

AWRA does not currently send renewal reminders about expiring membership. It is up to you to send us your \$5.00 annual renewal fee in order to stay on our mailing list and have access to the online membership roster past your expiration date. Current One-Year Members can become Life Members for just \$25, rather than the whole \$30 Life Member fee. Please consider upgrading your membership. Thanks.

We keep the most current version of the AWRA roster online in the Members-Only area of the AWRA web site. Go to:

<http://www.awra.us/roster/>

Log in credentials are required. If you have lost yours, or not previously asked for one, send a request to the web master at:

awra038@aol.com Subject: Members-Only Area Request

2013 AWRA Reunion Tentative Agenda

Wed, 25 Sep 2013

1300-1800	Registration in Lobby
1400-2200	Hospitality in the Hospitality Suite
1800-2200	Registration in the Hospitality Suite
All Day	Personal Activities

Thu, 26 Sep 2013

0900-2300	Hospitality/Registration in the Hospitality Suite
0900	Depart Lions Gate Hotel for Old Sacramento
1000	Arrive Old Sacramento
1000-1500	Tour Old Sacramento and lunch on your own
1500	Depart Old Sacramento
0900	Arrive Lions Gate Hotel
All Day	Personal Activities

Fri, 27 Sep 2013

0800-2300	Hospitality in the Hospitality Suite
0900-1300	(Optional) California Air and Space Museum Located near old 41 RWRW building
1800-200	(Optional) Group Dinner Location/Cost TBD
All Day	Personal Activities

Sat, 28 Sep 2013

0800-1700	Hospitality in the Hospitality Suite
0900-1030	AWRA Board of Directors Meeting
1030-1200	AWRA General Membership Meeting
1800-1900	No-Host Social Hour
1845	Group Photos
1900-2200	Annual AWRA Banquet – Casual Dress Speaker: TBD

Sun, 29 Sep 2013

0800-1200	Departure Hospitality
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Air Weather Reconnaissance Association

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

Place
Postage
Here

IMPORTANT REUNION REMINDER!

The 2013 AWRA Reunion
will be held in Sacramento, CA
from 25 - 29 September 2013

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

Also, Call the Lions Gate Hotel and make your reservation!