



# Air Weather Reconnaissance Association

Volume 27 No. 1

July 2019



## SACRAMENTO, CA - HOME OF THE 55th WRS

By Bernie Barris

This year the AWRA reunion group is going back to Sacramento, CA. Sacramento is near and dear to many of us as the home of the 9th WRW, (later the 41st RWRW), and the 55th WRS. I spent two tours here and enjoyed the challenges and travel.

The Sacramento connection goes all the way back to WWII when heavy bombers like the B-24 and B-29 transited through both Mather Field and McClellan Field on their way to the Western Pacific.

**1949** - The first unit assigned here came in Oct 1949 when the 374th Reconnaissance Squadron (VLR) Weather

transferred from Fairfield-Suisun Field (F-S)(today known as Travis AFB) in Vacaville CA. SAC had just taken control of F-S and wanted the tenant units out. The 512th RS moved to Tinker AFB and the 374th to McClellan, the 375th RS had their primary location in Alaska and a detachment at F-S. They were all flying B/RB-29 aircraft.

**1950** - The 374th deployed a flight to Dhahran, Saudi Arabia and another to Eielson AFB, AK. The latter flight supported the 375th daily operations over the pole from July 1950 until September 1950. The Dhahran flight was relieved by the 373rd RS in Dec 1950.

**1951** - In Feb 1951, the 374th RS was deactivated as part

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# President's Corner

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

Greetings from the Pres ~

Another year has come and gone. We have gained only two new members, and unfortunately, we have lost 11 or more. One of our losses was a staunch supporter of the AWRA and always a friendly face at our reunions. Billy Davis will be missed by all.

On a brighter side, the reunion this year will be in Sacramento.

McClellan AFB was the home of the 55th WRS and the 41st RWRW (Rescue and Weather Reconnaissance Wing), while I was in the 54th WRS in Guam. Melva and I love going there, as that is where we met, 53 years ago. We hope to see many of you there in October.

The Savannah reunion was a great success. A great time was had, by one and all. We all need to work on our membership. None of us are getting any younger. Membership is the lifeblood of any organization. We all had a great time flying and working on the weather birds. Try to contact old friends and work mates, from those "good old days".

Hope to see you in Sacramento!

Stoney



On top, the original 55<sup>th</sup> pactch going back to WWII and on bottom the Pole Vaulters version approved in July 1967



WC-130 Days memories from President Stoney Faubus. At left is the office, back from the days of ARWO's and Flight Engineers in the Cockpit. At right is Stoney's crew that flew to Wake Island in 1984. A nice emergency runway to have halfway between Hawaii and Guam

Photos courtesy of Stoney Faubus, All rights reserved

## Sacramento from Page 1

of an Air Force wide renaming effort. The 55th Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron, Medium, Weather was activated the same day, absorbing all of the personnel and equipment of the 374th. The 55th flew regular missions over the Pacific and Gulf of Alaska in support of weather forecast taskings, as well as deploying in support of domestic nuclear testing in Nevada and the Marshall Islands.

**1954** - On 15 Feb 1954 it was redesignated the 55th Weather Reconnaissance Squadron.

**1956** - The WB-29 aircraft were replaced by the newer WB-50D. Over the next few years, changes occurred, and in 1958 the US and USSR agreed to a non-binding moratorium against any nuclear tests. As a result, several of the weather recon squadrons were deactivated and became detachments of the 55th. McClellan was now the center for worldwide nuclear sampling. The regular mission now included the wagon wheel. A WB-50 would depart for Eielson AFB, then fly the Ptarmigan North Pole mission, then down to Hawaii for additional tracks before returning to McClellan. The Ptarmigan track had been flown regularly (daily or every other day) since 1947.

**1961** - In July 1961 the 55th was deactivated and the former squadron also became a detachment of the 9th Weather Reconnaissance Group along with all of the other detachments. The 9th WRG had assumed control of all Air Weather Service weather reconnaissance at the same time and moved from Scott AFB, IL to McClellan AFB in July 1961. The Soviet Union broke the moratorium and resumed atmospheric testing in 1961 which led to numerous changes in US policy. Key to weather reconnaissance was the desire to verify compliance with any future agreement on testing. As a result AWS was again authorized to have squadron level reconnaissance units with air sampling responsibilities. In Oct 1961 the 55th was reactivated at McClellan. AWS was named to sole manager for USAF air sampling and contracts were let for new aircraft.

**1963** - WB-47E and WC-130B would be fielded in 1963 and 10 WC-135B would come along in 1965. As the WB-47 came to McClellan, WB-50 were retired. In 1965 the 55th had five of the new WC-135 and six of the WB-47.

**1965** - On 8 Jul 1965, the 9th Weather Reconnaissance Wing was activated at McClellan and assumed management of all AWS weather reconnaissance from the 9th WRG which was deactivated the same day.

**1968** - The routine North Pole flights, now known as Lark Alpha and Delta, were discontinued.

**1969** - In 1969, the USAF announced that the WB-47E was being retired. The last aircraft departed McClellan on XX Oct 1969. Also in 1969, the Gulf Coast was hit by Hurricane Camille, with tremendous loss of life and structural damage. In the political fallout that followed, AWS was sent additional WC-130B aircraft to the existing fleet of 6 "E" and 5 "B" model. When the squadron realignment was done, the 55th received several WC-130B/E to augment the WC-135 fleet. In 1973, they also started receiving recently modified WC-130H which had previously been combat rescue aircraft in Viet Nam.

Huge changes happened in 1975. The three remaining

weather reconnaissance squadrons were transferred from AWS to Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service (ARRS). To accomplish this the 9th WRW was deactivated, as was the 41st ARR in Hawaii. The two organizations were combined into the 41st Rescue and Weather Reconnaissance Wing at McClellan. The new unit moved into a HQ building previously used by a AF Reserve Wing. In Dec 1975, the WC-130 fleet was reorganized to include an AF Reserve component flying tropical storms. In the process the 55th lost their WC-130 and became exclusively a WC-135 organization flying in support of the Atomic Energy Detection System. AWS had decided to stop funding the meteorological portion of the WC-135 and that portion of the mission was dropped over the next few years.

**1986** - The 41st RWRW and the 55th WRS were heavily involved in flights to track radioactive debris from the Chernobyl Nuclear Reactor meltdown in the Ukraine. A crew from the 55th first found airborne debris as a 1500 ft thick visible cloud layer north of Norway. The crew had the first "inflight positive" indications of radioactivity since the end of atmospheric testing flights. Sampling Flights would continue for several weeks over most of the globe.

**1993** - McClellan continued along with the 41st RWRW and the 55th WRS as MAC and the USAF drew down active duty weather reconnaissance. The 41st RWRW was deactivated and the 55th WRS closed their doors on 1 Oct 1993.

Weather reconnaissance had finally left Sacramento. With so many veterans of our mission having been assigned here and many more who retired in the area, AWRA has returned to Sacramento numerous times and will do so again this year. Please join us.

### SAVANNAH REUNION A HIT

AWRA had a successful time in Savannah last year. The host site on Tybee Island was great, on the Beach with numerous restaurant options within walking distance of the hotel.

We enjoyed two fantastic trolley tours.

One to see the historic areas of downtown Savannah and the other to visit the Mighty Eighth Air Force Museum. I know that sometimes not everyone enjoys aviation museums, but the Mighty Eighth seemed to appeal to all. The realistic and moving movies taking us back to WWII days flying B-17, B-24, and fighter aircraft over the Europe continent were exciting to everyone!

Bruce and Pam Russell; and Jeff and Patty Proulx did a great job setting everything up and we look forward to them doing it again some year soon!



## AWRA Officers

<b>President</b>	<b>Stoney Faubus</b> 3024 Single Tree Ct Carson City, NV 89701
<b>Vice President</b>	<b>Bruce Russell</b> 5930 Parkway E. Harrisburg, PA 17112 (717) 652-9482
<b>Secretary</b>	<b>William Burnette</b> (See Directors List)
<b>Treasurer</b>	<b>Bob Tuttle</b> (See Directors List)
<b>Historian-Archivist</b>	<b>Bernard Barris</b> (See Directors List)
<b>Membership</b>	<b>Bernard Barris</b> (See Directors List)

## Board of Directors

**Bernard Barris (Chairman)**  
11019 Oaktree Park  
San Antonio, TX 78249  
(210) 696-5072

**William Burnette**  
1910 Crest Ridge Dr  
Papillion, NE 68133  
(402) 502-3771

**Chuck Lavoie**  
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**Pat Hanavan**  
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**Bob Tuttle**  
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The AWRA Newsletter is an unofficial publication of the Air Weather Reconnaissance Association. By the way, AWRA is looking for someone to help publish our annual newsletter. 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)



**McClellan Ramp circa 1969.** Photo by Bill "Modzelewski" Moore. All rights reserved. Shows the 55<sup>th</sup> WRS ramp with eight WB-47E and three WC-135B, two parked and one in the closest Nose Dock/hanger. Below is 55<sup>th</sup> WRS parade on the flight line,circa 1956. (USAF)



## Welcome New Members

### New Life Members

John Kovach	56th	WC-135
Donald Reynolds	23rd SRS	RB-36

As noted by AWRA President Stoney Faubus in his President's Corner, on Page 2, we need everyone's help to recruit new members. This past year we only had two new members join, while we lost many more, see the TAPS list at right.

AWRA doesn't mail renewal reminders to our annual members. It is incumbent on the member to send in their annual dues, or upgrade to Life Membership. For those annual members who want to become Life Members, please send \$30 to the membership chairman. Send to:

Bernard C Barris, AWRA Membership Chairman  
11019 Oaktree Park  
San Antonio TX 78249

If you noticed, our new members this year joined for Life. The subject of annual members was a discussion item at the 2015 General Membership meeting in Tucson. It was decided to raise the annual dues to \$15 per year, up from \$5. This was necessary to offset our rising costs, and also encourage new Life Memberships.

### Members Only Section

You can download color copies of the current and past newsletters here. Due to ongoing issues with our hosting provider, the login credentials are not working. As a result, the membership list is not currently online to protect members privacy.

To see the newsletters Go to:

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

When the login problem is fixed we will post information on the News section of the AWRA.us web site. To get a copy of the latest roster by e-mail, send a request to:

awra038@aol.com Subject: Membership Roster Request

If you do not have access to the Internet, please contact the Membership Chairman for a hard copy roster.

Call Bernie at: 210-274-9974

### Help Needed

Bernie Barris has been single-handedly editing the Newsletter and publishing our awra.us web page since 2004, over 15 years. AWRA is looking for volunteers to help pick up some of the work load. If interested, please contact any officer or board member and let us know your skills and availability.

## 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.

Ernie G. Brockman	2016 Wife of Warren (D/91)
Roland Wurstner	2016

Charles Dean Catoe	2017
Gene Hollingsworth	2017
Gerald "Jerry" Minor	2017

Bess Minor	2018 Wife of Jerry (D/2017)
Bill Ostendorf	2018
Floyd Wendell Smith	2018
Eddie Volson	2018
Charles Wheelock	2018

M/Gen John Collens	2019
Roswell Crosier Jr	2019
Bill Davis	2019
Robert Lilly	2019

Our lives are so much richer for having known them.  
We will greatly miss them all .....

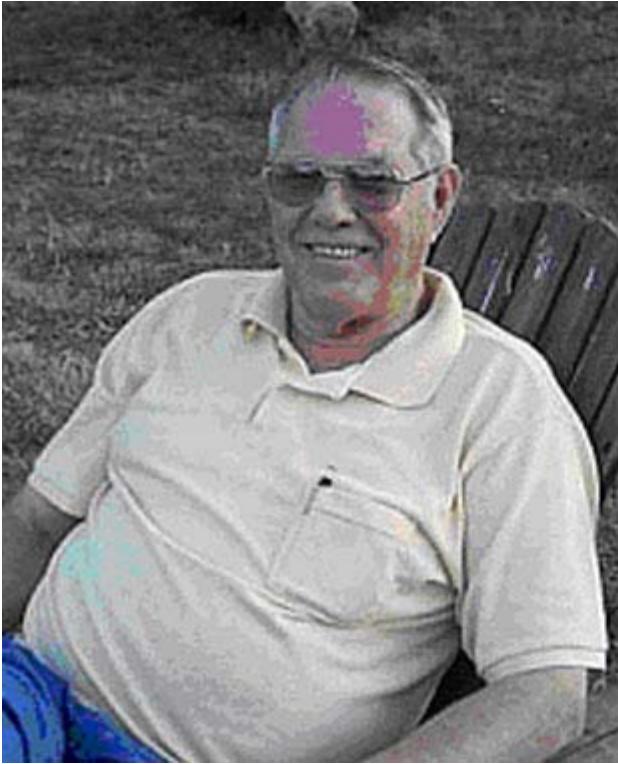
The families of all of these men and women are  
in our thoughts and prayers.



1920-2019

Lt Col Roswell L. Crosier Jr. USAF (Ret)

As a Capt in 1945, England



At left is T/Sgt Bill Davis USAF (Ret)

## AWRA Loses our Good Friend, Billy L.Davis 1937-2019

TSgt Billy L Davis USAF (Ret) died 9 May 2019 at age 82. Bill was a true "friend to all" and one of our AWRA reunion stalwarts! He served in the USAF from Oct 1954 until Jun 1977, spending most of his career as a Weather Observer/technician and Dropsonde Operator.

Bill maintained his meteorology credentials by working for the NWS after his USAF Career. He flew tropical storms and other weather missions with the 53rd, 54th, and 55th WRS. He was part of Det 2, 41st RWRW, an active duty unit which trained the USAF Reserve Storm Chasers in the Hurricane Hunter mission. He retired from Det 5, AWS at Keesler.

Bill was an avid bowler, and enjoyed all sports. He served several units as their NCO in charge of intramural sports. Whether football, softball, basketball or at the bowling alley, you would always see Billy competing or just cheerleading the squadron on.

Over his flying career he was awarded 12 Air Medals, primarily for penetrating Hurricanes and Typhoons. That equals more than 180 penetrations. Bill was a true force of nature and we all miss his smile and quick story. RIP, Bill, we miss you.



At Right is M/Gen John Collens USAF (Ret)

## Major General John Collens takes Final Flight

Major General John Wharton Collens was born in Monroe, La., on Nov. 14, 1924 and died peacefully in his home in Cameron Park, Calif. on Feb. 25, 2019. John was predeceased by his wife, of 66 years, Barbara Wesbrook Collens and his son Paul Wesbrook Collens. John is survived by his daughter Janet Collens Durant (Randy Poole); his granddaughters Melanie and Melissa Durant; and his great-grandson Brandon Durant; niece and nephew Mardi and Chuck Morris; and daughter-in-law Fran Collens.

John began a career in the military in 1943 during World War II as an aviation cadet. He received his commission and pilot wings in 1944. After flying 28 B-17 combat missions with the 96th Bombardment Squadron, John entered the Air Weather Service. During the Korean War he flew 75 tactical weather reconnaissance missions in a weather-modified B-26 aircraft. John joined the 58th Military Airlift Squadron at Robins Air Force Base, Ga., in 1966 where he flew C-141's operating into Vietnam. He commanded the 9th Weather Reconnaissance Wing at McClellan AFB before taking command of the Air Weather

Service, and eventually became chief of staff for Military Airlift Command. General Collens was a command pilot with more than 5,600 flying hours which includes more than 1,200 hours in single jet engine aircraft

His military decorations and awards include the Distinguished Service Medal, Legion of Merit with two oak leaf clusters, Distinguished Flying Cross, Meritorious Service Medal, Air Medal with five oak leaf clusters and Air Force Commendation Medal. He was a member of the Air Force Association, American Meteorological Society, National Defense transportation Association, Order of Daedalians and a very active member of the Elks Lodge.

At the time of his death, he was a proud resident of Ponte Palmero retirement community where he enjoyed the friendship of so many caregivers, administrators and staff who pampered and adored him. Special thanks to all who cared for him so patiently and sweetly, including Randy, Sandra, Eileen, Shira, Karen, Rodger Amber and Betsy.



## 2019 AWRA Reunion Tentative Agenda

### Wed, 23 Oct 2019

1200-2200 Hospitality & Registration at Hotel Tybee

### Thu, 24 Oct 2019

0700-2200 Hospitality & Registration in the Hospitality Suite  
Free time to visit Old Sacramento and Museums

\* Optional Group Lunch at Urban Root Brewing and Smokehouse

### Fri, 25 Oct 2018

0800-2200 Hospitality in the Hospitality Suite  
Free time to visit Old Sacramento and Museums

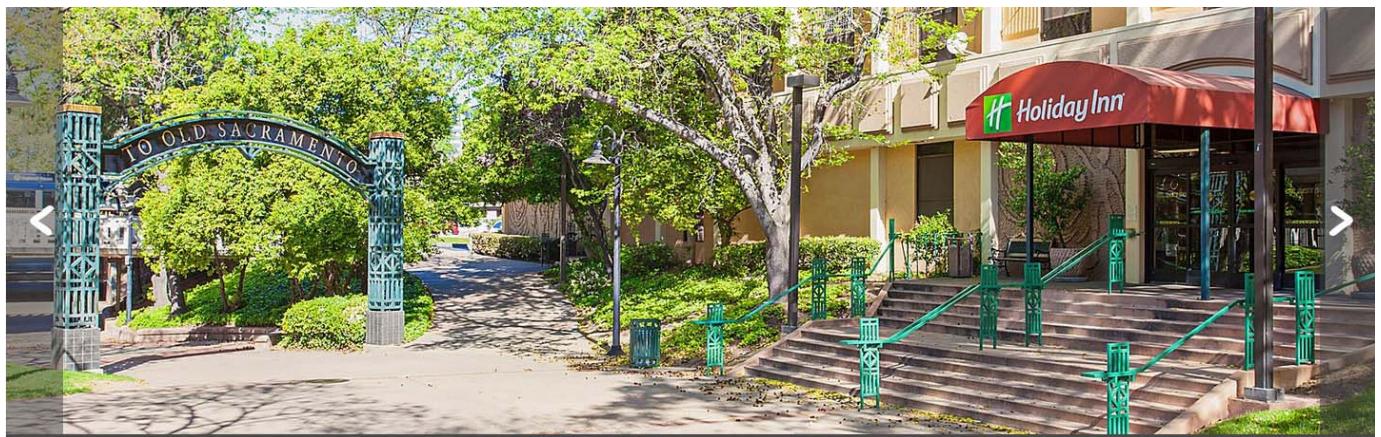
\* Possible group trip to the California Air and Space Museum

### Sat, 26 Oct 2018

0800-1000 Hospitality in the Hospitality Suite  
0900-1000 AWRA Board of Directors Meeting  
1000-1100 AWRA General Membership Meeting  
1500-1600 5th Annual Flight Suit Contest  
1800-1900 No-Host Social Hour and Group Photos  
1900-2100 Annual AWRA Banquet

### Sun, 27 Oct 2018

0800-1200 Departure Hospitality



The host hotel for our 2019 Reunion is the Holiday Inn Downtown Sacramento. As you can see, there is a walkway to Old Sacramento right outside the hotel entrance. Please join us for a wonderful opportunity to catch up with old friends!



## Air Weather Reconnaissance Association

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

Place  
Postage  
Here

### ***IMPORTANT REUNION REMINDER!***

The 2018 AWRA Reunion  
will be held in Sacramento CA  
from 23 -27 October 2019

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

Also, call the Holiday Inn Hotel and make your reservation!