

## Reunion of Robertson B-17 Crew Goes Awry

B-17 Ball Turret Gunner Cliff Digre and his favorite pilot, William T. (Robbie) Robertson, were scheduled to make a joint presentation at a Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> luncheon in June. But Robbie tripped and fell at his home in Florida while checking his mailbox just before leaving to fly to the Twin Cities. So Cliff made the journey himself, with his wife Bernice, their children, grandchildren and many captivated 8<sup>th</sup> members looking on.



Cliff talked about his B-17 experiences while being “interviewed” by his son Dan. He spoke with photographs of Robbie propped on the table behind him. To this day, Cliff has great respect and admiration for his former pilot Robbie and all his crewmates who flew with him. Their two years together in their 20’s were few but intense.

But it is his pilot Robbie Robertson, who controlled their star crossed, jinxed B-17 airship Rattlesnake Daddy and for the most part the crew’s destiny, for whom Cliff has particular affection. Robbie wasn’t able to make it here in June. But Cliff made sure he got the credit he deserved both in his talk and in his book, *Into Life’s School: My World War II Memories*.

Cliff spoke from his heart in meticulous detail about his knowledge of the vulnerable ball turret on the underbelly of the B-17 and of his missions, many of which didn’t go as planned. He spoke with passion about his crewmates, their courage and tenacity under fire from flak and fighters. He remarked about their sacrifice, of the human toll of the battles.

When he finished his talk, Cliff Digre received a standing ovation from the many 8<sup>th</sup> members in attendance, as well as from his children and grandchildren.



Luncheons are Wednesday, 11:15 AM  
K of C Hall, Bloomington, MN.  
See our website: [www.8thmn.org](http://www.8thmn.org)



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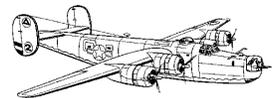
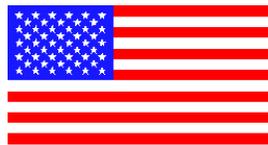
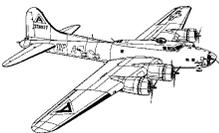
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*Newsletter prepared and edited by Lawrence Sagstetter, 1696 E. Third St., St. Paul, MN 55106,  
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**Recte Faciendo Neminem Timeo – "I Fear None In Doing Right."**





**President's Report  
By Steve Marks**

My wife and I went to her high school reunion in Washington, DC, the first weekend in May. She's an "Air Force brat" and went to a military high school in Paris, France. Instead of class reunions, they have school reunions.

We re-met many friends. I was blessed to have some very memorable times. Friday night, I was able to go to "Eighth & I" Streets, (the USMC Barracks,) to see the USMC security companies go through their routine during the Friday Parade. The commandant of the Corps and the Secretary of the Navy were both in attendance. The precision of the two companies of Marines was unbelievable. The parade lasted two hours.

After the reunion, we went to Stafford, VA where we stayed with a nephew who is a retired Marine. His next-door neighbor is retired Army and we got a three hour personal tour of the Pentagon. That's where Bob's neighbor works.

I also got to Quantico where my nephew works for the Marine Corps Marathon. It always amazes me how the Marine guards at the gate give personal recognition to each person entering. We also went to the Marine Corps Heritage Museum and it was a great time. There were displays in the museum that brought to mind Marines I've met. Knowing them gives so much more meaning to the displays.

We had two air shows this summer: AirExpo at Flying Cloud Airport; the other, at Blaine. AirExpo had many memorable VIPs: Richard Cole, (Doolittle's co-pilot on the Tokyo raid,) Wayne Johnson of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Fighter Group along with many others.

Thanks to all our 8<sup>th</sup> members who helped organize and staff our selling tables. There are many who have done so much to help. Our program committee, as usual, has been at the forefront. Thanks to all.

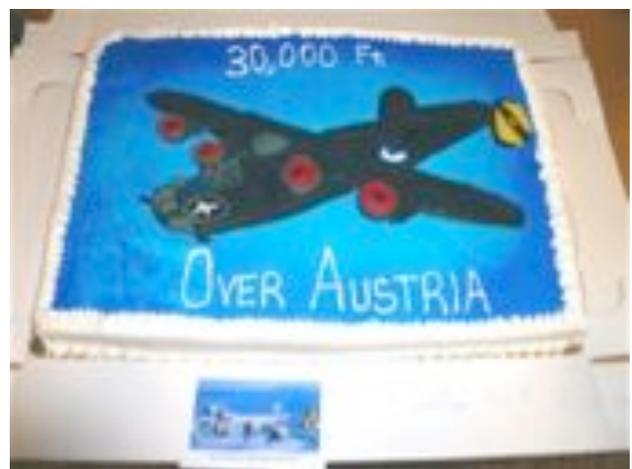
What a pleasant surprise a few weeks ago when Kevin Callahan brought Emmett Mackenzie's widow, Pauline, to the luncheon. It was great to see she is doing well.

Never forget those who have gone before, are serving now or have served. Our lives are much better for them. God Bless America!

*-Steve Marks.*

**"The Navy could lose us the war, but only the Air Force can win it. The fighters are our salvation, but the bombers alone provide the means of victory."**

*-Winston Churchill*



### Chaplain's Message

"O my people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden from of old – things we have heard and known, things our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power and the wonders he has done. He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born and they, in turn, would tell their children.: Psalm 78:1-6

We should tell our children of the many blessings we have received in this great country – Amarica.

Thank you. Lord, how you have blessed us and continue to bless us.

*-Bob Clemens*



### Editor's Notes

At AirExpo in Eden Prairie in July, I learned first hand the definition of insanity: Being a B-17 Ball Turret Gunner. They always bring in a B-17 to AirExpo. It is open to the public for tours. I didn't take a tour of the plane. I didn't need to. The plane was on the tarmac with the door to the ball turret open. I walked under the belly of the plane and bent down on my hands and knees to get a first hand look at the ball turret.

I sat in the heat on the tarmac under the plane staring into the ball completely dumbfounded. To just fit in there requires a person of small, narrow stature. The gunner actually lies on his back in the ball against the outside door

opening. The guns are aimed and fired between the legs while lying on one's back. Handle cranks are manipulated to rotate the guns and turret using a primitive bicycle chain mechanism.

All of this is supposed to be done in the heat of battle while laying on one's back beneath the plane exposed at some 20,000 feet in the sky.

**THAT TAKES GUTS! THAT TAKES COURAGE!**

The whole thing is completely INSANE!

**It has been a busy summer.** Members participated in three airshows. In June was Discover Aviation Days at the Golden Wings Museum, the south end of Anoka-Blaine airport. AirExpo in Eden Prairie was July 15. Return of the Big Bombers was at the north end of Anoka-Blaine the end of July.

All three events were well managed with huge crowds of visitors. We actually made some money this summer selling books, trinkets and memorabilia. The 8<sup>th</sup> really doesn't have much to sell. But folks were buying what we had. The volunteers selling were busy with throngs of people looking for a memento, a photo or an answer to a question.

It is really amazing to me that year after year, crowds are actually building to see you guys and gals (Liz Strofus!). The 1940's was really a unique time in American history and world history. The stories and the equipment of the times – the commitment of the nation to a single goal – is a story for the ages.

**With the dawn of August came word of the passing of Dewey Folkestad.** Dewey was a regular attendee to our Wednesday luncheons. He was always at our Christmas parties at Mancini's. Before being part of the 8<sup>th</sup> Historical Society, Dewey worked as a pharmacist. He

was a volunteer at Planes of Fame for seven years. In the photo below, Dewey is left of his son John at last December's Christmas party.



Dewey was a very gracious, easy going, friendly guy. He loved his daughters Julie, Kathy and Kristi, his son John. Only recently, I learned from Roald Knutson that Dewey had been living for some time with a newer, younger heart. He had had a transplant some years ago. I never would have known, had I not been told about it.

His luncheon pal Kevin Callahan writes, "What a shock that he's gone. He said how much he was looking forward to a trip to Alaska just before he left. Our table won't be the same without him."

**At a recent board meeting, the Board of Directors voted to increase dues to \$15 a year. Please send annual dues of \$15 to PO Box 131208, Roseville, MN 55113.** The increase is needed to cover the cost of the 8th newsletter.

**Mancini's will again host the 8th Christmas Party** in December. Entertainment might include a barbershop quartet. More about that will come to you in a separate mailing.★

## Reconstructed Waco Glider Moves to Granite Falls

In case you missed it in local newspapers, Jim Johns completed reconstruction of a CG-4A glider. The plane was moved to Ron Fagen Fighters World War II Museum in Granite Falls, MN.

An open house was held June 6 at Villaume Industries in Eagan, site of the glider's reconstruction. It took 4 years for Johns and his team of expert restorers to fabricate parts to finish the plane. It took longer than that to raise the funds necessary to complete the project.

At the open house, one side of the glider was left uncovered, free of its final skin, so visitors could view the inside of the plane. The wing was separated from the plane in preparation for placing it and the fuselage on a flatbed truck for transport to Granite Falls.

There was a media frenzy around the plane the evening of the open house. Television cameras and newspaper reporters surrounded the plane taking photos and conducting interviews with the restorers led by Jim Johns.★



## ED Haider Visits 8<sup>th</sup>

A year ago, May 2011, Ed Haider stopped by an 8<sup>th</sup> luncheon to speak about his experiences as a paratrooper in WWII. His story is profound. It is recorded in the book, "Blood In Our Boots."



His work is copy written. So I called him last year to ask permission to use material from his book for this newsletter. His answer was an enthusiastic Yes! But it wasn't until now that I had space to relate his story.

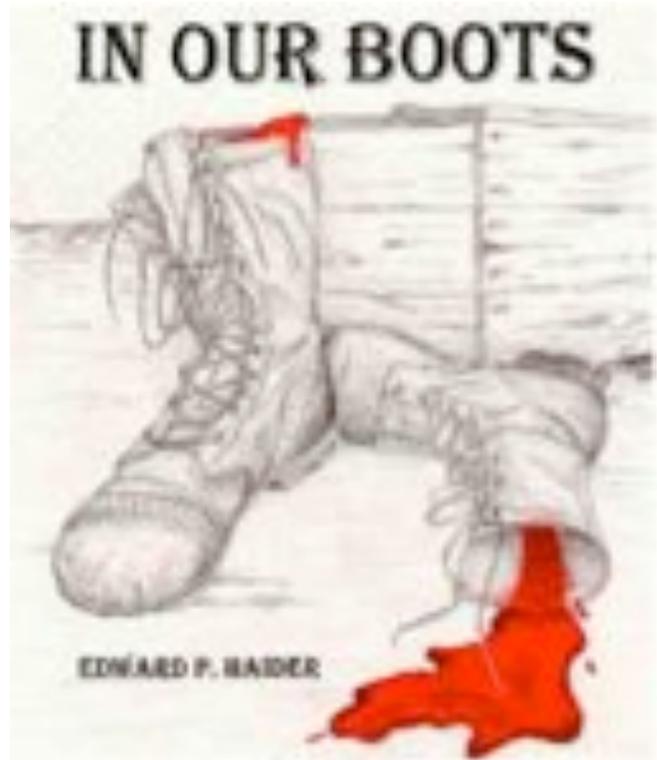
Like many others, Ed was an eager, patriotic twenty year old, when he enlisted in the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne. He worked his way up to Sargent in the X-Battalion of the 505<sup>th</sup> in Sicily.

His experience turned into a living nightmare when he was taken prisoner by the Germans. He lived as a guest of Stalag 2B for some 2 years.

At the end of the war, near the end of his life as a POW, Ed ran into Earl Joswick – literally. They both were part of The Black March of prisoners across the German heartland in the cold and snowy winter of 1944-45. How ironic they would both end up as members of the 8<sup>th</sup> Historical Society of Minnesota.

Blood In Our Boots is a great read, a compelling story. And Ed was a terrific speaker at our luncheon last year. Ed's story has been written up in the Minneapolis tribune. His book can be found on Amazon.com.

Thanks Ed for sharing your story at our 8<sup>th</sup> luncheon. We apologize for waiting until now to get it into the newsletter.★



## Piggy Back Pilot: Glen Rojohn

*by Dr. Vivian Rogers-Price*



This Colt .25 Caliber Automatic Pistol, manufactured in late 1919, was Glenn Rojohn's personal side arm. David Graham recently donated it to the Eighth Air Force Museum.

On 31 December 1944 the 100th Bomb Group took heavy casualties coming off the target over Hamburg, Germany. When one of the group's aircraft went down in flames, two B-17s tried to fill the gap at the same time and slammed together, one on top of the other, in a jarring mid-air collision.

The bombers remained mostly intact but jammed together. Amazingly, they maintained forward flight, although the pilot and co-pilot of the lower plane, 1st Lt. William MacNab and 2nd Lt. Nelson Vaughn in 43-38457, had been killed. The upper B-17, 42-31987 The Little Skipper, was piloted by 1st Lt. Glenn Rojohn.

Rojohn shut down his own damaged and burning engines and, using the three remaining engines of the lower plane and the flight controls of his own, held the two bombers steady long enough for four men to bail out of the lower plane and six to exit his. Knowing that the two aircraft would spin out of control if he left his seat to jump, Rojohn ordered his Co-Pilot, 2nd Lt. William Leek to bail out.

Leek refused, and by sheer strength the two men wrestled the coupled planes around and headed back towards Germany. Rojohn and Leek successfully belly-landed the joined

planes near Wilhelmshaven. Upon impact Rojohn's "Little Skipper" slid off the lower B-17 and skidded another hundred yards. Three men from Rojohn's crew and five from MacNab's died that day. Rojohn, Leek, and four other members of their crew were taken prisoner and remained POWs for the rest of the war. The four men of MacNab's crew who had bailed out likewise survived as POWs.

Fifty years after his "Piggy Back" Flight, Rojohn returned to Germany and renewed contact with those who had captured him. On his mission to Hamburg, Rojohn had carried his personal side arm, a Colt .25 Caliber Automatic Pistol, with him and his German captors had confiscated it. Now during Rojohn's 1994 visit it was returned to him. Subsequently, Rojohn gave it to his personal friend, David Graham, who recently donated it to the Mighty Eighth Air Force Museum.★



January 28, 1942, the Eighth Air Force was activated in the building behind the marker – the National Guard Armory, Savannah, GA.

# Luncheon Pics



The Dr. Harold C. Deutsch

## World War II History RoundTable

### 2012-2013 Schedule

All programs begin at 7 PM at Fort Snelling Museum

**SEPT. 13, 2012 - OPERATION Market-Garden More than a Bridge Too Far** John McManus, author of September Hope, and Airborne and Ground Veterans will discuss Operation Market-Garden and the fighting in the Scheldt Estuary.

**OCT. 11, 2012 - RUHR Pocket Defeat of the Industrial Pocket** Derek Zumbro, author of Battle of the Ruhr, and Veterans will discuss the much overlooked Campaign to seize the Arms production base in Germany.

**OCT. 25, 2012 - GERMANY DURING THE 1930'S** Andrew Nagorski, author of Hitlerland, Rudy Boschwitz, and other Holocaust refugees will discuss the rise of power and oppression by the Nazi Party in Germany in the 1930's.

**NOV. 8, 2012 - OPERATION ASHCAN Interrogation of the Nazi Leaders at Mondorf** Ken Hechler, author of Goering and his Gang, will discuss his personal experiences during interviews with the Nazi Leaders.

**DEC. 13, 2012 - RELIEF OF BASTOGNE Patton as a Commander in the Battle of the Bulge** John Nelson Rickard, author of Advance and Destroy, and Veterans of the Winter Operations to relieve Bastogne will discuss the celebrated military campaign.

**JAN. 10, 2013 - DEFEAT IN THE EAST: 1943 – Fighting the Lost War** Robert Citino, author of The Wehrmacht Retreats, and Veterans of the Eastern European Front will discuss the influence of fighting on multiple fronts led to the German defeat.

**FEB. 14, 2013 - EMERGENCE OF VIET-NAM FROM WORLD WAR II** James Willbanks, author of Abandoning Vietnam, and Veterans will demonstrate the linkage of WWII to American involvement in Southeast Asia.

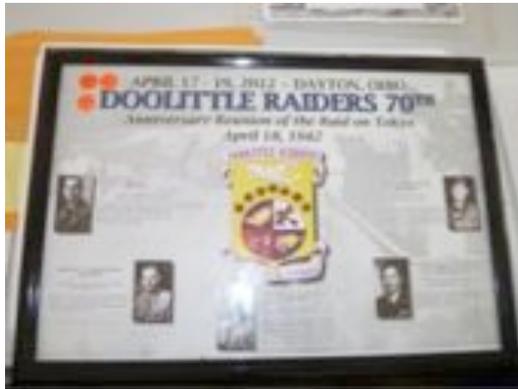
**MARCH 14, 2013 - THE MILITARY INTELLIGENCE SERVICE LANGUAGE SCHOOL (MISLS) at Savage & Fort Snelling** Bill Yenne, author of Rising Sons: the Role of the Nisei, Edwin Nakasone, and other Nisei Veterans will discuss the Training in MN and the heroic successes on many fronts.

**MARCH 28, 2013 - WORLD WAR II IN THE MIDDLE EAST and the Origins from WWI** Frank Nicosia, author of Hitler's Germany and the Middle East, will lecture on the Allied Operations in the Middle East and the German Objectives in the region.

**APRIL 11, 2013 - HITLER'S BREAKWATER FIGHTING IN THE BALTIC** Henrik Lunde, author of Breakwater Fighting on the Eastern Front, and Veterans of the Eastern European Front will discuss the controversial strategy of leaving defense pockets for futile losses.

**MAY 9, 2013 - KAMPFGRUPPE PEIPER AT MALMEDY** Danny Parker, author of Fatal Crossroads, and Veterans of the fighting in the Battle of the Bulge will discuss the atrocity at Baugnez and its impact on their morale and willingness to fight.

# Air Expo 2012



# Return of the Big Bombers





MINNESOTA CHAPTER  
*The Eighth Air Force Historical Society*

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Address Service Requested



Gary Chambers on the crew of Miss Mitchell, one of the 20 B-25 Mitchell bombers that honored the Doolittle Raiders in Dayton, Ohio.