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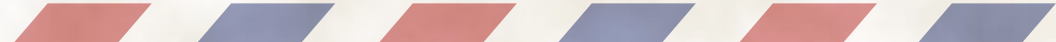
Then and Now

The memories are as fresh today as if they happened yesterday, not decades ago. There is still the pain, the laughter, the tears and the joy, yes, the joy, of sharing the experiences with all generations.

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Remembrances of Yosemite

By Leone J. "Lee" Snow #4244

22 May 2000

Dear David,

I hope I can call you by your first name as I feel I am a friend with a common bond of Yosemite National Park.

I recently read an article that you are now the superintendent in Yosemite. I thought you might like to receive a different type of letter rather than a complaint or worse.

So, just in case you may enjoy a bit of past history and for your information, I submit this as a big step in time for me also, as I recall memories of Yosemite dating back to 1943 and World War II, then, also, a number of years thereafter.

I am now an 84-year-old lady who can look back to our wonderful Yosemite. I was a truck and staff car driver, a corporal in the Women's Army Corps stationed at Camp Pinedale, Fresno, California, during the terrible World War II.

I saw and enjoyed that mountain driving and drinking in that cool air before returning to the hot valley. We didn't have the luxury of air conditioning in vehicles or barracks back then.

Many may not know that Yosemite was also used as an R&R camp for troops as well as Army signal training. All was top-secret and questions were not asked.

I still recall our camp as "Western Signal Aviation Unit Training Center."

My job in the motorpool was to drive troops, supplies and officers there.

Now, I wonder how I managed to take large trucks around those then-narrow roads with no power brakes or steering or automatic trannys. Just double-clutching when necessary. I was young, brave and took my status seriously.

Many of my memories are dim now and names and times forgotten. There seemed to be only one very small store in the valley to purchase groceries, etc.

Nothing else to clutter up the valley floor.

I recall driving a chaplain, doctor, to minister to the troops there. It was a job for me and not a vacation, so I don't recall anything but military activities.

I did enjoy the challenge and beauty of Yosemite every drive I made, though.

After World War II ended, I remained in Fresno for a few years while our Army Air Corps camp was permanently closed. I remained to help in its closing, and a few years ago, I wrote about this event and enclose it for information and a memory.

I bought an old car and, with an army friend, learned to enjoy backcountry by hiking and camping—then very primitive, quiet and enjoyable.

Tioga Road was a very narrow dirt road. If you did meet someone else, you had to find one of the wide spots to allow passing.

I never got to Tuolumne Meadows and a trail to Pinwheel Falls(?), as a wolverine blocked the trail, with threatening flashing teeth. Back to the meadow area, there were a large number of deer grazing along with a number of black bears, all in perfect harmony.

With caution, we circled around them and returned to our waiting car, a bit frightened by it all as we were the only people around in this wild area.

Then, and I have never forgotten, there was the beautiful "Fire Falls" on Saturday nights from Glacier Point and falling so gracefully into the valley below, as an unknown soprano sang "Indian Love Call" to the small crowd gathered below.

Easter sunrise service beside Mirror Lake was another quiet, calm space in time. There was the fun of dipping, wading and swimming in the pools below magnificent falls. Just you, the roar of the falls and water, clear as a crystal. What simple fun it was.

Driving through the famous Wauwona tunnel tree and seeing deer, white-headed woodpeckers and other birds made one feel you were in a special cathedral, as all was so quiet, serene and undisturbed.

Then, above Badger Pass, as the snow was beginning to welcome spring, one would find a beautiful bright red flower peaking through the snow at the feet of those towering trees. I didn't know what the flowers were; it was just a thrill to see them popping through the remains of winter snow. Their bright red beauty remains with me today.

Now, almost 60 years later, I became curious and found them in an old wildflower book as a "snow plant" in all its beauty. It would be interesting to know if anyone else has seen them there? Would be quite a discovery.

Yosemite held, and holds, many fond memories. Sadly, I saw what I call, "the rape of a national wonder;" while unhappy to see and feel this happening, I

for one was able to see and enjoy the serenity of this beautiful place and was able to enjoy its primitive beauty, a place for me that even holds memories of a time at war that had its place in our victory.

Do I wish it could go back to what it was then? Yes. But I also realize it can't be in a world that doesn't know, care or understand that it, too, was bought for a price by those who trained there so we could later enjoy it with the freedom won in World War II.

I retired from the United States Air Force in 1966 and not living in California any more, but I do have very fond memories of this special place you are now directed to save for the future. Wisdom, good luck and prayers to you as you also serve our cuntry in this special National Park.

I have enjoyed talking to you and telling you my thoughts and memories.

Leone J. (Lee) Snow

Dear Leone,

Thank you so much for your insightful letter about your times in Yosemite. That was certainly another incredible period in Yosemite's amazing history.

Your letter has been passed on to David Forgang, our Cultural Resources Specialist for inclusion in our collection of social history.

It is always interesting to hear how much our Park has changed over the years.

Thanks again for taking this time to acquaint us with your experience.

Sincerely,

David A. Mihabi,

Superintendent, Yosemite National Park

Everybody's Grandpa

By Marvin Gough #25852

When you first suggested we put our World War II stories in writing, I never thought of being someone who had something to tell or write about, but the other night our granddaughter (second year at Friends University, Wichita, Kansas) asked, "Granddad, what did you do in World War II and where did you serve?"

We were sitting in a restaurant in Wichita at the time, and I started to relate a little about my experiences during World War II.

I told my granddaughter the story of being drafted, and after basic training, I was assigned to the base unit at Great Bend, Kansas, Air Corps Base as a mechanic on B-17s, which were used to train flight crews before they went overseas.

In November 1944, I ate Thanksgiving dinner in Kansas. After dinner, I was transferred to a B-29 group in Grand Island, Nebraska, and ate another Thanksgiving dinner up there.

It was so cold in Nebraska the winters of 1944 and 1945 we had trouble getting the engines to start. We were moved to Puerto Rico to finish training. In the spring of 1945, I was sent back to Nebraska to put the outfit together to go overseas. On our way, we crossed the International Dateline and celebrated two July 4ths, arriving on Guam on the 4th of July.

I was assigned to a B-29 named "35 or Bust," which stood for 35 bomb missions, then R and R to Australia. I was ground crew. Hopefully, the ground crew would get to go to Australia, too. A painting of a nice looking young lady





adorned the nose section of the plane. After each bomb run, another bomb symbol was added to the painting. The schedule was for our plane to go on a mission every other evening, with Japan as the target. In six weeks, until the war was over, our plane missed only one mission.

Shortly, the war was over and our planes hauled supplies to Japan for the occupation troops. Some planes were being sent back to the United States. Four B-29s were flown from Japan to Washington, D.C. I was chosen for engine and carburetor specialist for the crew to prepare the planes for General Armstrong to make the flight. The planes encountered bad weather and had to land at an alternate airport. We readied

four more planes; they made it to D.C. But one plane had enough fuel that it flew on to a base in Florida. That was the longest flight of record at that time.

While my granddaughter was still in a receptive mood, I threw in another story.

There were four guys who played old hillbilly music. When our planes were ready or on mission, we got together to entertain ourselves and sometimes others. We had a fiddle, guitar, banjo and mandolin.

On the troop ship home, two of us musicians played with a USO group to entertain a couple of evenings. Since we entertained, we didn't have to do K.P.

My granddaughter knew this, but I continued talking.

After discharge, I married a girl who played piano and guitar. We raised five boys and taught them our music.

Now, Mom and I, five boys, two daughters-in-law and five grandchildren all play whenever we have the chance.

The grandchildren are the fifth generation to play with the old family fiddle I have.

When I stopped talking, a young lady at the next table came over to our table. She thanked us for letting her listen in. She said her grandpa had died when she was small and she didn't have any grandparents to talk with. I guess I am glad she enjoyed the story, and in a way I was her grandad, too, for a little while.

Reunion Memories

By Sally Clement #2262

It is Thanksgiving 1943.

Thousands of young men are arriving in England by ship and by plane. Some are as young as 18. They are all eager to defend Britain in her struggle against Germany. Ever since Pearl Harbor it has become our war, too. These are the B-24 pilots, navigators, bombardiers, engineers, radio operators, gunners and those who make up the ground crews of the 446th Bombardment Group (Heavy) of the 2nd Air Division, US Army Air Corps. The British people of Bungay, East Anglia, welcome them with open arms. Their airfield is officially designated as Station 125.

So begins World War II for the Bungay Buckaroos.

This is the story of one group and the role it played in World War II. It was activated on April 1, 1943, at Davis-Monthan AAF Base in Tucson, Arizona, and received overseas training at Lowry AAF Base, Colorado. Upon reaching combat strength, the group was equipped with new B-24Hs and transferred to the command of the Eighth Air Force in England.

The first combat mission was flown on December 16, 1943. (Crew photo.)



HARRY W. CLEMENT
2nd from front, bottom

June 6, 1944, D-Day

Seared into our memory are newsreel pictures of GIs struggling up the beaches as the Allies landed on the European continent. In the air, the 8th Air Force launched over 2,000 bombers and fighters to provide strong support for the ground assault along the Normandy coast of France. It was the task of the 446th Bomb Group to lead the 20th Combat Wing, which in turn led the 2nd Air Division. The B-24 bomber, “Bungay Buckaroo,” led the entire 8th Air Force on this historic mission.

The last combat mission was flown on April 25, 1945, scarcely one year later. During a total of 273 combat missions, 16,819 tons of bombs were dropped on enemy installations, and 36 attacking aircraft were destroyed. Sixty-five B-24s assigned to the 446th were lost while 447 men were killed in action, 237 were taken prisoners of war, 28 evaded capture, and 50 were interned in neutral countries.

The group returned to the United States in June 1945 and was deactivated in September 1945.

May 2006

Less than 100 veterans, all in their 80s, are gathering to celebrate the 21st annual reunion of the 446th Bomb Group Association. This year the reunion was held in Tucson, Arizona, to revisit the Pima Air and Space Museum at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, where one of the last of their beloved B-24 aircraft is housed.

The occasion is especially nostalgic because Davis-Monthan was the birthplace of the 446th, where 63 years ago eager young men trained for one of the most meaningful experiences of their lives.

They remember, also, the reunion of May 1994, when the Museum was the site chosen for the 446th Memorial Roll of Honor dedicated to the members killed in action. Today, faces light up and steps become swifter as the nose art of “The Buckaroo” greets us in the World War II hanger.

Each year fewer and fewer veterans of the 446th Bomb Group are able to make the reunion trip. Some have “folded their wings” and passed on to the great Station 125 in the sky, while others are no longer able to travel.

They come alone or with their wives and sometimes their adult children and even grandchildren. A few are in wheelchairs, many use canes, two or three even tote their oxygen bottles. Numerous hearing aids are in evidence because ear protection on the flight line was not mandatory in those days as it is today.

Though their bodies are aging, the World War II experiences about which they reminisce are as sharp in their minds as if the events happened yesterday.

Memories

Listen and you will hear echoes of the past as Buckaroos exchange war stories

...how the local kids stood by the fence watching aircraft take off. As the planes returned, they counted to see how many were lost.

...when there was a major mission to bomb an important target such as Berlin, an armada of over 2,000 planes would fly over. The thunder of 8,000 engines would be deafening and would literally shake the ground.

...remember “Fearless Freddie?” She was the discarded, stripped-down old war-weary B-24C painted brilliant yellow with flashing lights of all colors. Though she never flew any more missions, dropped bombs, or fired on enemy aircraft, she served as a brilliant beacon in the sky as each mission was formed.

...a few former POWs can be heard reminiscing about their doomed flights being shot down over enemy territory. After bailing out, some temporarily evaded capture, eventually becoming prisoners of the Germans. Life as a POW included forced marches and often mistreatment, lack of warm clothing, and insufficient food. Their greatest joy was finally being liberated by the American Army.

...then there was the first liberty run for GIs after working around the clock for six weeks at Flixton Airfield. Trucks took them to Norwich, about 45 minutes away.

The pub scene was fun but soon it was time to leave. Unfortunately, it was so dark outside they couldn't find the trucks to return to base. Telephone operator to the rescue; a soft feminine voice guided them as they called from each bright red phone kiosk while trudging along the 11-mile road back to Bungay. It took the GIs an hour-and-a-half to finally make their way back. A fun evening!

...another time some of the guys, on a lark, broke into a hothouse at Flixton Castle, home of the local lord, to eat some fruit. Just boys being boys!

Over 60 years later as these aging airmen relive the exciting but dangerous missions, they have not forgotten the lighter moments of their time in England.

The current 446th BGA president is the niece of a Bungay Buckaroo who was killed in action during one of their missions. Little by little, as members pass on, dedicated descendants are assuming the tasks of running the organization. The 446th BGA is determined NOT to become a last-man organization. The 2007 reunion will take place in Savannah, Georgia, so the Bungay Buckaroos

can visit the Mighty 8th Air Force Museum to commemorate the B-24 and its place in history.

Never Forget

The spirit of the Bungay Buckaroos and all the others who fought so proudly on the ground, on the seas, and in the air during World War II will never die as long as their stories are remembered by their children, grandchildren, and generations to come.

May the deeds and history of the 446th Bomb Group never again have to be repeated.

Till We Meet Again

Sally wrote this story for her husband, Harry W. Clement. Harry was a 22-year-old pilot in the 446th Bomb Group in 1943 to 1944. He was assigned his own crew after the crew photo was taken. He made the Air Force his career, retiring as Lt. Col. in 1963. Today he is a "retired" RVer who still loves to travel.

