



Flightline



Newsletter of the 780th Bombardment Squadron of WWII

December 2017

Nothing fishy in *Bagley Tale*

Editor's note: About four years ago Vera Bagley, widow of 780th ball gunner Jim Bagley, published a book about her husband. Jim was founder and original president of Bagley's Better Baits fishing lure manufacturing company. Jim was deserted by his father at just two years old, but Jim never let life get him down. Bagley Tale, as told by Vera, is full of fun times with buddies and celebrities, stories of adventure, and great love of country and the South. Below is an excerpt pertaining to the 780th. The book is available through amazon.com.

The 780th Bomber Squadron Association was formed in 1961. Over 350 men are part of the association. Reunions are scheduled every year and many attend. Jim Bagley proudly served his country with these men, and he greatly supported the reunion that is held in a different area of the U.S. every year. He served as president of the group for about 10 years, and used his office staff at the bait company to help make this possible. Countless hours were spent making contacts with many fellow comrades encouraging them to attend the reunions. Sometimes he sent money so that they could attend.

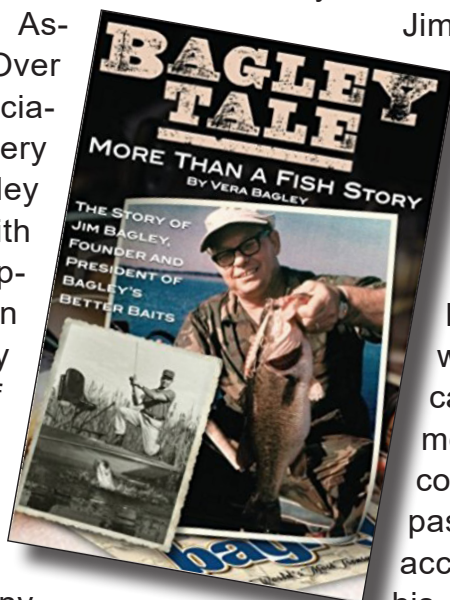
In 1983 I started attending the reunions with Jim. From the first day I met any one of them, I immediately felt a bond. Everyone was so friendly, you always felt welcome. Jim once told me that he was more proud of his accomplishments in fighting for his country, than any other

achievement in his life.

Chick Byrd, a crew member, became a great friend. Chick's sister, Eleanor, would write Jim while he was abroad. Chick and Jim made a pact. Whichever one reached the states first, they were to visit the other one's family. Since Jim was the first to return, he traveled to Alabama to visit Chick's mother and sister. Jim and Eleanor hit it off right away. After returning to Miami, Florida, they talked on the phone many times. They couldn't stand being apart.

Jim returned to Alabama to get married. Eleanor and Jim had a two-week honeymoon in Miami before Jim was to return to Keesler Field, Mississippi, to start his cadet training to become a pilot. Eleanor was sent to Lakeland, Florida, to live with Jim's mother while he was in cadets. Normally cadet school would be for college men, but due to Jim's fine flying record during the war and since he passed the entrance exam, he was accepted. He studied hard and took his studies on as a marvelous challenge to improve his mind. Finishing school, he started training as a flight engineer and pilot. Then the war ended! This was a great disappointment to Jim. He loved combat. Now there would be no need for officers.

Returning home he searched for a new career. At this time he realized that he had made a mis-



continued on page 2...

Dayton site of 2018 reunion

The 2018 reunion of 15th AF Bomb Groups is set for September 13-16, 2018, in Dayton, Ohio. It will be held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in downtown Dayton, affording great amenities and great access for everyone. I understand some fresh ideas are being planned for this reunion, so you don't want to miss it. My very first 780th reunion was the 1998 Dayton reunion at Wright-Patterson AFB, when all four bombardment squadrons met - I believe for the first time. I am going to make every effort to be there in 2018 - my 20th anniversary, if you will. I hope you will, too.

The 2017 reunion in New Orleans was a success, with 292 attendees, including 36 World War II veterans. At right is a list of members from 465th Bomb Group squadrons who were in attendance. Let's add the 780th in 2018! Thank you, Carole Lee of the 781st, for sharing this information.

... from front page

take by marrying Eleanor so quickly. They divorced. "I was just too young to know what I was doing," Jim recalled, "Eleanor suffered a great injustice."

Among the ten members of Jim's flying crew, only two are still living. When I spoke to crew member Earl Francis, his comment about Jim was, "Jim was the true warrior in our group. Always willing to go the extra mile."

Along with Jim's helmet, jacket, and mission tags on his gun belt he also managed to smuggle out his parachute when he returned home from service. He had carried it all the way through the war without ever having to use it. But much to his disappointment, was the day that his mother

proudly showed off the wedding gown that she had made his sister, Juanita, for her wedding day. His mom's comment was, "Well, Son, I figured it carried you safely through the war, therefore it would also carry your sister through a long, happy marriage." Jim said, "Wouldn't you know it! That marriage didn't even last."

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465th Bomb Group Attendees

(veterans in bold)

781st

Charles 'Bubba' Braud & Mamie,
James & Theresa Braud,
Charles & Janie Braud,
Robert Braud,
Mike & Julie Deslatte,
Jeremy Deslatte,
Phillis & David Krech,
Orren Lee & Carole,
Bud & Libby Russell

782nd

Harley Bridger & Katy,
Albert Riffle, Scott Riffle

783rd

Connie Maffey & Afra,
Mary Schere,
Ken & Betty McComas,
Nancy Bitterman,
Joan Bitterman Rao,
Gail Bitterman Carey/Paul Carey,
Mary Bitterman Norwood,
Mary Walton,
Kay Huston,
Dan & Carole Dulitz,
Leo J. & Becky Meyer,
Tom & Ann Tennille,
Lynda Marie-Taylor,
Joyce Kulcyk-Urban,
Karen Wnek,
Dan & Katherine Coffield

TAPS



Bartram C. Branch, 91, passed away July 25, 2017, in Merrimack, New Hampshire. He was born in Manchester on September 13, 1925 and graduated from high school at the age of 16. At the beginning of World War II he was too young to join the regular military, so he joined the Merchant Marines delivering supplies to Europe. After returning home he enlisted in the U.S. Air Force and became a B-24 tailgunner with the 15th Air Force in Italy, where he flew a full 50 missions. His son, Bradshaw, wrote and produced a documentary, *On the Wing*, about his father's squadron's harrowing experiences. After the war Bart earned degrees in history and law and was a partner at Devine, Millimet, Stahl and Branch until his retirement in 1990. Tennis was his passion, playing competitively. He last played tennis at the age of 85 with his children and grandchildren in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, where he spent his winters. Bart is survived by his wife, Helen; children, Deirdre Branch, Bradshaw Branch, Bartram (Wendy Nixon Branch, Esq.) Branch Jr., Esq., and Dr. Hilary (Pixie Plummer) Branch. Also, Susan (Tom) Leppala, Patrick Roddy and Michael Roddy. He is also survived by five grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.



Donald F. Draeger, 99, of Janesville, Wisconsin, passed away September 6, 2014. Don was born in Janesville on September 2, 1915. He enlisted in the Army Air Corps after the declaration of World War II and trained as a navigator. A knee injury kept him from active deployment, leading him to be reassigned to office work in Texas. He married Lois Schlintz, his wife of nearly 65 years, on November 15, 1947. For much of his life Don volunteered with the Boy Scouts of America, and the Red Cross Blood Mobile. He was also an active member of the Kiwanis Golden K's and enjoyed listening to Big Band music. Don is survived by children, Louise James and Bob (Shari) Draeger; and four grandchildren. He was preceded by his wife, Lois, in 2012.

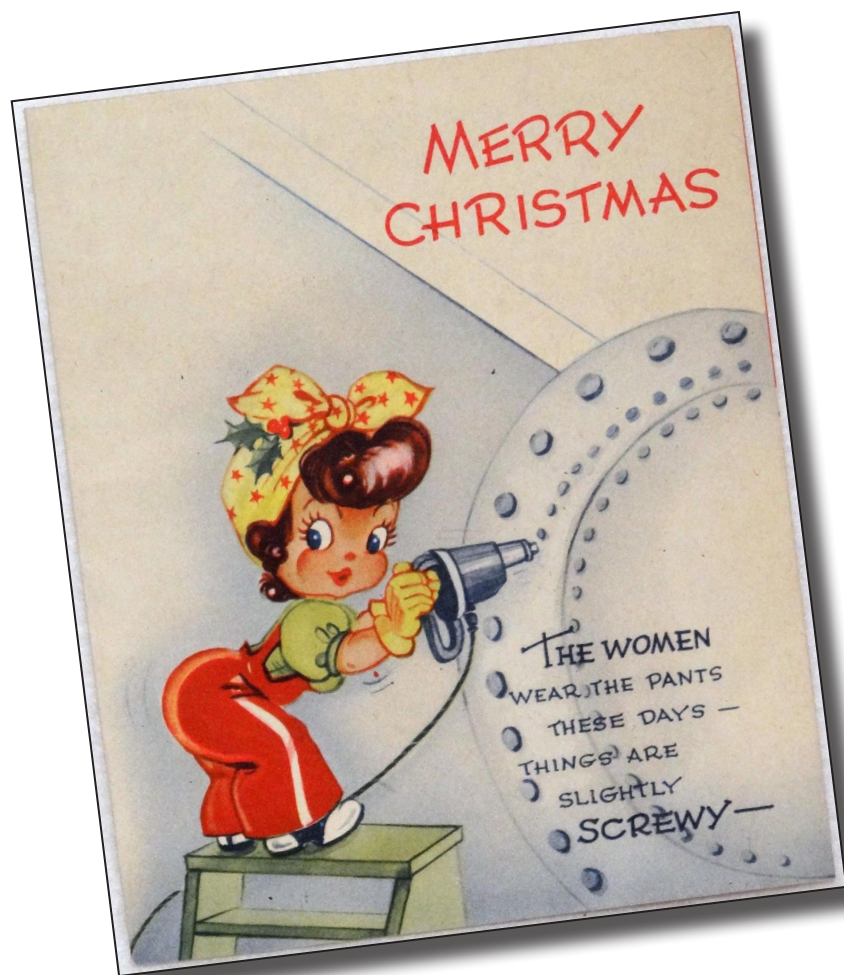
Presidential holiday address began with FDR

During World War II, Pres. Franklin D. Roosevelt began the tradition of the president of the United States offering remarks during the ceremonial lighting of the National Christmas Tree. Every president since FDR has taken it upon himself to express reverence for the message and meaning of Christmas. Below is FDR's Address to the Nation on Dec. 24, 1944:

Here, at home, we will celebrate this Christmas Day in our traditional American way because of its deep spiritual meaning to us; because the teachings of Christ are fundamental in our lives; and because we want our youngest generation to grow up knowing the significance of this tradition and the story of the coming of the immortal Prince of Peace and Good Will. But, in perhaps every home in the United States, sad and anxious thoughts will be continually with the millions of our loved ones who are suffering hardships and misery, and who are risking their very lives to preserve for us and for all mankind the fruits of His teachings and the foundations of civilization itself.

Kathy Le Comte
Editor, *Flightline*
1004 Williams Blvd.
Springfield, IL 62704-2832

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I couldn't pass up sharing this Christmas card. Who wouldn't like to go back to the days when women wearing pants was the definition of "screwy?" Happy holidays to everyone, and here's to hoping things don't get screwier in 2018.