

# 82nd Fighter Group Association



Final Issue 104

November 2022



CLOSEOUT CEREMONY & FINAL REUNION

P38 NATIONAL ASSOCIATION & MUSEUM  
MARCH AIR RESERVE BASE

EMBASSY SUITES – ONTARIO

JUNE 22-23, 2022

# Introduction

This final issue is written more as a booklet than a newsletter. It has four chapters each of which is divided by a page from the Final Closeout and Banquet Brochure. The brochure itself uses the format of that from the 1996 reunion in Dayton, Ohio done appropriately in Air Force blue. The cover of this booklet shows both the logo used in 1996 as well as our current one. It emphasizes our transition from paper to an on-line focus through our website and Facebook page.

You will also notice our strong relationship with the P38 National Association. Their museum at March ARB in Riverside, CA houses a permanent display of the 82nd Fighter Group and we are appreciative of their support to honor our veterans and the plane they loved. We encourage your donations and membership to this worthy organization.

**Chapter One** contains the articles in our regular newsletters as well as a narrative that gives an overview of the entire closeout event.

**Chapter Two** contains the Closeout Program and relevant annotated photos.

**Chapter Three** contains the Banquet Program and annotated photos as well as photos of the annual meeting, reception and hospitality room.

**Chapter Four** contains the recognition of our sponsors. It also contains articles from March ARB Public Affairs and Robert Stutt, an independent journalist, who covered the event.

Emphasizing our on-line focus, this booklet as well as the video of the P38 flyover and the article in ***Lightning Strikes***, the P38 National Association magazine, will be on our website and a link to these will also be on our Facebook page. Sadly, both of our videocams malfunctioned at the Closeout so we cannot produce a DVD as originally planned.

## From the Chair

It was with a sad heart, not to mention many tears, that Steve and I and John and Judy Parlman hosted the final “official” reunion of the 82nd Fighter Group Association. It was so wonderful to see old friends and make new ones. However, just because this was the last official reunion doesn’t mean the 82nd FGA is gone. Even though no longer a formal, non-profit organization, our focus is changing and we are still very much alive. The first change is that the former officers are now a steering committee with me as Chair - all still committed to the mission of the 82nd Fighter Group Association.

The next step is to focus on our online presence. We have two online locations, the 82nd Fighter Group Association web site, [www.82ndfightergroup.org](http://www.82ndfightergroup.org) and the 82nd Fighter Group Facebook page. The web site, of course, can be accessed by anyone and everyone (the more the merrier). The Facebook page is a private group and is available to original WWII members, family, USAF heritage units and friends. For the privacy of our members, access to our Facebook group is by request or invitation and requires approval. We encourage all who qualify to join. It is the source of our day-to-day updates and communication.

With our new emphasis, we need everyone to look at your photos, documents and other memorabilia to add to our website that honor your WWII 82nd FG veteran. You don’t need to send originals, just take a photo or scan them and email them to [82ndfga@gmail.com](mailto:82ndfga@gmail.com). It is important to put as much as possible on our website. This is where future generations will look to learn about what their grandfathers, great-grandfathers etc. did in WWII. I know Steve and I frequently talk to our 5 year old grandson about his great-grandpa Jerry who flew the plane. I know he will love looking at the website when he gets older.

So the “final” reunion isn’t at all the end of the 82nd FGA. It’s the push to expand our online presence so it can be shared with everyone. And as for the reunion part, as I mentioned at the banquet, plan on a much more informal gathering in Salt Lake City (our back yard?) sometime in 2024. If you want to contact me, I’d love to hear from you. Email me at [82ndfga@gmail.com](mailto:82ndfga@gmail.com).

So Adorimini to all and take care.

*Peggy Powell*

### Steering Committee

**Chair - Peggy Jean Powell**

Marc Buonaguidi

Todd Felton

Bruce Loewenberg

Jerry Martin

Nancy Medley Manduano

John Netzer Parlman

Judy Parlman

Lowell Phillips

Steve Powell

**Website:** [82ndFighterGroup.org](http://82ndFighterGroup.org)

**Email:** [82ndfga@gmail.com](mailto:82ndfga@gmail.com)

**Facebook:** The 82nd Fighter Group Association

## Treasurey Report

As of October 1, 2022 our account balance is \$4241.08. All reunion expenses have been paid. In line with our committent to increase our on-line presence, our website capacity has been increased to accomodate our larger archives and domain registration and web host fees have been paid ahead for four years. One pending expense is for the printing and mailing of this final newsletter. Our on-going expenses will be for the website. Our projected reserves will easily cover this into the foreseeable future.

*Marc Buonaquidi*

## Folded Wing - Henry P 'Hank' Phillips - 96th FS



Hank above with son and FGA President, Lowell

Nov 12, 1922 - June 3, 2022

"From a very young age, he wanted to fly airplanes, so when the time came and he was of age, he joined the Army Air Corps. During WWII he was a P-38 fighter pilot with the 82nd Fighter Group stationed in Italy. After the war, he joined the Washington State Air National Guard. In 1951, Hank transferred to the US Air Force. In the '50s and '60s, he was stationed in Europe. While Hank was assigned as the US Air Force liaison officer to the German II Army Corps, he met Marlene and they married in 1963. Hank later became a proud graduate of the US Army Paratrooper Program. In 1967, he served in Vietnam as a forward air controller flying spotter planes for the 101st Airborne Division (Screaming Eagles)."

Editor Note: The above is an exerpt from Hank's obituary. He loved the FGA and knew the 'story' of every one of the 350+ members on the roster he meticulously kept. He put his heart and soul into the newsletter as its editor for 15 years. It was my privilege to know him, work with him and to have his friendship.



*John Netzer Parlman*

## Final Annual Meeting Summary

The annual meeting of the 82nd Fighter Group Association was held at the Embassy Suites at 10:00 AM, June 23, 2022. The entire Executive Committee and approximately 25 members were in attendance.

Because of a 3-year Covid hiatus, Lowell Phillips and John Parlman reviewed the 2019 Dayton reunion annual meeting decisions. Due to dwindling membership and treasury, as well as lack of the 3rd generation to assume leadership roles, the Executive Committee was empowered to make and implement decisions without annual membership vote.

On October 26, 2021, during a monthly virtual meeting, by unanimous vote, the Executive Committee decided to close out the formal, non-profit 82nd Fighter Group Association on June 23, 2022, at the P38 National Museum at March AFB where the 82nd Fighter Group assembled in 1942. The Executive Committee members agreed to continue to support the mission of the FGA as a steering committee with Peggy Powell as Chair.

To continue to fulfill our mission to honor the WWII members of the 82nd FGA and perpetuate the bonds of friendship among related families, AF Heritage Units and friends, the committee will

- Develop and expand relationships with membership within their respective units.

- Enhance the website to preserve the fighter group and the FGA archives including files for photos and documents of the WWII vets.

- Try different ways of keeping in touch: virtual ZOOM-type meetings, regional or local social gatherings, periodic 'keeping-in-touch letters' or notes on our closed Facebook site, etc.

The final annual meeting of the 82nd Fighter Group Association closed at 10:45 AM.

*Judy Parlman*



This plaque was presented to the P38 National Association at the Closeout Ceremony with a check for \$1000. The Association, located at its Museum at March Air Reserve Base in Riverside, CA, has a permanent display of 82nd FGA memorabilia. In addition, Association President Scott Frederick, Treasurer Howard Ramshorn, and Board Member Steve Blake have been immeasurably helpful with the details of closing down the FGA, setting up the ceremony and getting the P38 Flyover.

If Steve Blakes's name is familiar to you, he is also co-author of *Adorimini*, the definitive history of the 82nd FG, former FGA Historian and, in addition to his P38 Board responsibility, Editor of ***Lightning Strikes***, the P38's periodical. You will find coverage of the FGA Closeout and Final Banquet in the latest issue. It is on our website, [82ndFighterGroup.org](http://82ndFighterGroup.org), and our private group FaceBook page The 82nd Fighter Group Assn.

We are appreciative that The National P38 Association assists us is honoring our WWII veterans. We encourage you to support this effort with a donation and/or by becoming a member.

For more information, contact them through their website: [p38assn.org](http://p38assn.org) or [SteveBlake1944@gmail.com](mailto:SteveBlake1944@gmail.com).



Closeout - 82nd FG Veterans with FGA Executive Committee

From Front Left: Dick Ostronik, Lute Thompson, Leo Press, Mel Roalsvig

# Narrative of the Closeout and Final Banquet

The Closeout Ceremony was held in the morning at the P38 National Association Museum, March ARB, Riverside, CA. Lowell Phillips, President of the FGA, welcomed the attendees and introduced the Association's honored guests, its WWII veterans: Dick Ostronik and Lute Thompson of the 96th Fighter Squadron and Leo Press and Mel Roalsvig of the 97th. Dick is 98 years old, Leo 99 and Lute and Mel 100. Leo Fisher, who was unable to attend, turned 103 on the day of the ceremony and is the oldest 82nd vet.

Among the attendees were families and friends of the veterans, Instructor Pilots of the 96th and 97th Fighter Training Squadrons, two post-WWII members of the 95th Fighter Squadron (FGA Heritage members Len Coleman and Bob Priest) and two officers of the P38 National Association: Scott Frederick, President, and Howard Ramshorn, Treasurer. Our four honored veterans sat in front of the podium facing the audience with the group and unit flags behind them and the museum's full scale P38 model to their right.

Bruce Loewenberg, 82nd FGA Historian, gave a memorable tribute to the men of the 82nd by highlighting their pride, professionalism, courage and camaraderie through stories of their wartime experiences. He is fortunate to have met many of those he spoke of in his early years in the Association. He related the stunning accomplishments of the 82nd \_ 3 Distinguished Unit Citations, 548 victories, 58 probables and 227 damaged. The terrible cost for these achievements was 66 killed in action, 40 in flight accidents and 78 MIA. He summed up his presentation by saying, *'We should all remember and never forget the brave actions and sacrifices made by all members of the 82nd. They were truly a remarkable group of men who accomplished so much for their country.'*

Al Norman, Chief Test Pilot for Lockheed Martin, reminded those gathered of the greatness of the P38 and the commitment of Lockheed to excellence in the air. He fittingly mentioned he had been in flight operations in the 82nd FG as part of his Air Force career.

John Netzer Parlman, FGA Vice President, thanked the P38 National Association for its assistance over the past few years with the closeout process, for hosting the ceremony and for perpetuating the memory of the 82nd Fighter Group of WWII. He presented a plaque with a check for \$1000 to Scott Frederick and encouraged those attending to support the P38 Association with dues and donations. The plaque reads, *'Dedicated to the mission of the 82nd Fighter Group Assn to honor and preserve the memory of the WWII members of the 82nd Fighter Group and in gratitude to the P38 National Assn and Museum for its support of that mission.'*

The closing prayer was given by Todd Felton, USAF retired, past FGA President and former Instructor Pilot of the 96th FTS. He summarized the ceremony saying '*We're here today to remember the sacrifice of the 82nd fighter group, and their sacrifice was significant, awe-inspiring, and world-changing..... The 82nd fighter group association was formed after the war, to continue the fellowship of brothers who bonded during wartime....It is moving to a new, different season, which we commemorate here today. Whatever that new season might look like, it will still be filled with immeasurable gratitude, pride, and love for the men of the 82nd fighter group.*'

The ceremony aptly concluded with a P38 Flyover from Planes of Fame in Chino, CA. The multiple passes and turns, the sound of the twin engines and wing-wag were a fitting tribute to the 82nd FG men who flew, maintained and loved it. There were very few dry eyes.

The Final Reunion Banquet began that evening at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Ontario, CA. Lowell Phillips welcomed the attendees and assured that the evening would be full of memories, tears and happiness. After the Pledge of Allegiance led by incoming President Peggy Jean Powell, John Netzer Parlman led the group through a history of the Association from its roots in the Fighter Pilot Aces Association. Tribute was given to those who through 43 years led the FGA, edited the newsletters, kept the books, updated the membership rosters and hosted the reunions. Members of the 82nd's USAF Heritage Units from the 96th and 97th Fighter Training Squadrons who flew in for the ceremony were also recognized for being present and for keeping the memory of the 82nd alive. Nona Isaacson, 99 year old wife of former 96th FS CO, Brigadier General Clayton 'Ike' Isaacson. Finally he acknowledged the veterans present and their families in whose honor this event was done.

The Missing Man Ceremony followed remembering those from all services and our members who are no longer with us and the pain of their loss by their loved ones. Following the ceremony, Todd Felton gave the blessing. After dessert, Nancy Medley Manduano, FGA 95th Unit Representative, gave the background on the tradition of the upcoming Rose Ceremony. Nancy relayed that in the early years of the Association, Col Ben Mason decided to have roses presented to the wives of the 82nd veterans as a symbol of gratitude for their strength and support. Over the years the presentation was extended to all women present. The honor of presenting the red roses at this final reunion went to the members of the 96th and 97th FTS. Nona Isaacson and Sylvia Ostronik, long term members and spouses of originals were honored with yellow roses.

The open-mike portion of the program began with the introduction of Dick Butler who spoke from his newly published book, '*P-38 Odyssey: Farmboy, Pilot, POW*', a biography of his dad, Richard M Butler of the 97th Fighter Squadron. Dick spoke in particular about the significance of the Sergeant Pilot program by which his father as



well as the majority of the pilots at the beginning of the war were used to staff the 82nd. This is a unique aspect of the 82nd that produced many of its Aces. The audience was then invited to share their experiences with the Association.

Lowell Phillips then gave Certificates of Appreciation and Challenge Coins in recognition of those whose efforts have benefited the Association and helped bring it to a fitting and appropriate closure. Steve and Peggy Powell and John and Judy Parlman, hosts of the reunion, gave Lowell gifts in recognition of his leadership over two terms at this critical time in the Associations history. The closeout would not have happened without his persistence and vision.

To conclude, Peggy Powell, as incoming President, gave a brief, but encouraging speech that the Association, though no longer a legal entity, will continue to fulfill its mission to honor the men of the 82nd Fighter Group. We are 'redefining' ourselves. There are no dues or formalities, just a network with a shared purpose. The website is being redesigned and the archives expanded. We will be reaching out to family members to add pictures, videos and documents to the site and to join our private Facebook group for news and updates. We will experiment with 'virtual', on-line social gatherings and group emails to keep in touch. And yes, there may be more reunions – informal, low-key and low cost. Peggy playfully hinted that the next may well be 2024 in the Powell's backyard.

When all is said and done, Lowell's prediction at the beginning of the night was fulfilled. It was a long and memorable day. We were exhausted but full of wonderful memories, renewed and new friendships and a sense that we had properly honored our veterans and preserved the memory of the 82nd Fighter Group and Association. More importantly, we left knowing that we are still on mission. Our association may be different, but it is continuing. After all....ADORIMINI!

## Continued from page 25 'Comments'

If there are any informal get togethers in the future, please let me know. We'd love to participate/help/host - *Andy Calhoun* 96th FTS

I will always keep fond memories of the last reunion. That group of people represents a lot that was good about America, and I was honored to be allowed to attend. Thanks for sending me the newsletter, I enjoyed reading! God bless everybody who poured themselves into making the 82nd FGA a fitting tribute to the men who served - *Elliot 'Willie' Nelsen* 97th FTS

CLOSEOUT CEREMONY  
P38 NATIONAL ASSOCIATION MUSEUM  
JUNE 23, 2022  
10-11AM

WELCOME

82ND FIGHTER GROUP ASSOCIATION  
FGA PRESIDENT - LOWELL PHILLIPS

HISTORY OF THE 82ND FIGHTER GROUP  
FGA HISTORIAN - BRUCE LOEWENBERG

LOCKHEED MARTIN GUEST SPEAKER  
CHIEF TEST PILOT - AL NORMAN

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE P38 NATIONAL  
ASSOCIATION  
FGA VICE PRESIDENT – JOHN NETZER PARLIMAN

CLOSING PRAYER  
96TH FIGHTER TRAINING SQUADRON & FORMER FGA  
PRESIDENT  
TODD FELTON

P38 FLYOVER  
PILOT - CHRIS FAHEY  
PLANES OF FAME AIR MUSEUM



82nd Veterans with members of the 96th Fighter Training Squadron, Laughlin AFB, TX and 97th FTS, Shepard AFB, TX

## Dick Ostronik 96th Fighter Squadron



## Leo Press 97th Fighter Squadron



## Mel Roalsvig 97th Fighter Squadron



## Lute Thompson 96th Fighter Squadron



## Leo Fisher 96th Fighter Squadron



Editor Note: Leo is a past president of the FGA. He is the oldest member of the 82nd Fighter Group. His 103rd birthday was on June 23, 2022 - the day of the Closeout Ceremony. Unfortunately he was unable to attend but was with us in spirit.

# Closeout Ceremony Speakers



**Lowell Phillips**



**John Netzer Parlman**



**Bruce Loewenberg**



**Todd Felton**



**Al Norman**



**23 Skidoo Flyover**  
See the video on our website or Facebook page

**FINAL REUNION BANQUET  
EMBASSY SUITES ONTARIO, CA  
JUNE 23, 2022**

**RECEPTION IN MAIN LOBBY 6-7PM**

**WELCOME – FGA PRESIDENT LOWELL PHILLIPS**

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF FGA WWII VETERANS**

**MISSING MAN CEREMONY**

**FOLDED WINGS MEMORIAL**

**MEAL BLESSING**

**ROSE CEREMONY**

**ATTENDIES FGA STORIES**

**NEW WEBSITE DEMONSTRATION**

**CLOSING REMARKS – LOWELL PHILLIPS**

**INTRODUCTION OF INCOMING PRESIDENT**



## The Missing Man Table



In memory and honor of those unable to be with us.

## The Dick Ostronik Table



From the left: Marc Buonaguidi, Robert & Suzanne Thomas, Kim & Sam Ostronik, Dick & Sylvia Ostronik, Joannie Pinson Goodman and Thomas 'TJ' Fletcher

## The Leo Press Table



From the left: Gigi & Dick Butler, Trudy Miller, Linda Foy, Leo Press, DeeDee West, Diane Smith, Judy & John Parliman and Keli 'Recce' Haaekuahiwi

## The Mel Roalsvig Table



From the left: Chris Roalsvig, Joe Davis, Elliot 'Willie' Nelsen, Mel Roalsvig, Nanette Medley Forrester, Eileen Vincent, Nancy Medley Manduano, Joey Manduano and Michael Vincent

## The Lute Thompson Table



From the left: Deanna Callan, Lexi Ley, Emma Ley, Becky Thompson, Lute Thompson, Andy Calhoun, Mark Smeaton and Jim & Liz Chase

## The 95th Fighter Squadron Heritage Table



From the left: Caleb Klass, Steve & Peggy Powell, Ivy & Len Coleman, Bob & Kathy Priest, and Maryann & Howard Ramshorn

## The Nona Isaacson Table



From the left: Harry & Kay Leibowitz, Nona Isaacson, Ann Edmund, Eric Rode, Nan Powell, and Jerry & Howard Martin

## The Lowell Phillips Table



From the left: Al Norman, Camber 'Red' Governski, Lowell & Steve Chipman, Lowell & Joni Phillips, Patti Kindree and Norm Fluhrer

# The Todd Felton Table



From the left: Ann & Bill Litton, Bruce Loewenberg, Gale Douglas, Susan Helms, Lorraine & Todd Felton, Whit 'Diesel' Hollis and Noel Shutt



# The Rose Ceremony



The Rose Ceremony was introduced by **Nancy Medley Manduano** with a history of its origin. In the early days of the 82nd Fighter Group Association, Col Ben Mason decided it fitting to recognize the sacrifice and support of members spouses by presenting each with a red rose. From that day it has been a tradition to do so at every reunion. With time, the presentation was made to all women attending.



At this final reunion, Todd Felton presented a yellow rose to Nona Isaacson and Sylvia Ostronik, spouses of original members. The presentation of the red roses was performed by members of the 96th and 97th Fighter Training Squadrons.

From the left: 88th FTS - Keli 'Recce' Haaekua hiwi,  
 96th FTS - Andy Calhoun, Thomas 'TJ' Fletcher  
 and Caleb Klass  
 97th FTS - Elliot 'Willie' Nelsen  
 96th FTS - Whit 'Diesel' Hollis and Todd 'Rat' Felton





**SPECIAL GRATITUDE TO OUR  
REUNION SPONSORS**

**LOCKHEED MARTIN  
CORPORATE DONATION**

**P38 NATIONAL ASSOCIATION & MUSEUM  
MARCH AIR RESERVE BASE  
RIVERSIDE, CA  
THE P38 MUSEUM**

**PLANES OF FAME AIR MUSEUM  
CHINO, CA  
THE P38 FLYOVER**

**ROGER LOUER  
ROBERTS & ROGERS FAMILY  
VINEYARDS  
NAPA VALLEY, CA  
BANQUET WINES**

**ECKERT FABRICATION  
CUSTOM PLASMA CUTTING  
LENZBURG, IL  
BANQUET CENTER PIECES**



## Comments from Members

I'm the daughter of Col. Ben Mason who was the CO of the 82nd in Foggia, Italy in 1944. My Dad passed away 10 years ago (at 100 yrs old!). I have been out of touch for many reasons with the 82nd reunions for quite awhile - but did accompany my Dad to many of them - we actually hosted the reunion in 1998 in Houston.

I recently received the latest info about the very last 82nd reunion to be held next month. I wish I could attend but I believe I will be unable to. Dad was deputy CO and then CO for a time. He was in his early 30's then where most of the men were in their 20's or even teens! I have many good memories of lots of the guys at reunions telling me how much they loved my Dad and was glad he was the formation leader on missions. And he loved them - fellow pilots and ground crew of all 3 squadrons. I enjoyed meeting Jerry Loewenberg. He had worked closely with Dad during the war. Also getting to know and talk with many others like Vaughn, Embrey, Hughes, Medley, Norris, Pinson, Wilsie and many others. He was career military and I'm so very proud of him.

I have lots of papers etc...relating to the 82nd. I have original Mission Reports, original pictures of the Foggia Base and much more. Perhaps you could use some for the 82nd.  
**-Sandy Mason**

So sad to miss this memorable reunion...If our trip is cancelled, we'll be there. Thank you for all your hard work. This has been so much fun especially for the Phillips family.  
**-Lola Phillips Elliot**

Thank you so much for all your hard work putting on a great reunion party, even if it was a close-out. It will always be a cherished memory for all of us.  
**-Becky Thompson**

I believe the 82nd Fighter Group will have its finest hour during the final reunion. I like the idea of maybe future get togethers. I am definitely on board for that. **-David Bloxom**

That was a bittersweet event for me: the first and the last at once. I'm so sorry I didn't tumble several decades sooner to what I was missing! **-Dick Butler**

I also am grateful that you and the others on the executive committee continue to keep this wonderful association united and in touch. I am so proud of my Dad's service for six years in the US Army Corp from 1939 - 1945, and I am so happy that I can remain a part of this outstanding group of Vet families! **-Marilyn Pachmeyer**

I am the daughter of a WWII fighter pilot named Douglas Allen Neilson. Before she passed away, my mother attended one (or more) of your reunions. Through her, I heard about your organization and have received your newsletters for several years. I read in the last newsletter that you may still be looking for pictures of members of the 82nd. I don't know if you may also be interested in the story of one of those pilots being shot down behind enemy lines, but, if so, I've attached it along with some pictures. **-Leann Powers**

Concerning the June 2022 meeting I and my daughter, Becky and her husband, Mark will be there. Hate to see this happening, but it's bound to be. My first meeting was in Denver, we attended a football game at the Air Force Academy- they lost! If I remember the affair was put on by a man who was one of the sergeant pilots in North Africa. **-Lute Thompson**

I would love to join the group next June. The only issue I can see is that we're moving (only 20+ miles) about that time as my wife retires from teaching. So that's not a complete answer, but it's what I know at this point.  
Best/Love/Etc. **-Bill Hattendorf**

So glad to hear a possibility of another reunion. I miss everything about them. So, I'll talk to mom (Regina Foley) about the reunion. I know in her heart she will want to go, but I don't think she can handle it. **-Karen Mccaffrey**

Enclosed is my registration fee. My dad, 97th Squadron crew chief and Association Life Member Wilson C. Thomas, attended his first reunion in San Antonio in 1985. I have been following the 82nd on its website and Facebook since Dad and Mom have passed away. I've enjoyed the newsletters but have been saddened with each passing year. -  
**Robert Thomas**

Thank you for organizing the Final Reunion and Closeout of the 82nd Fighter Group Association. We are well and hope everyone is, too. We have decided it is too far to attend in these uncertain times. My parents, Edward (1917-2010) and June (1921-2013) Huss brought us to the 82nd Reunion in Las Vegas, 2009. We attended the Reunion in San Antonio on our own. Everyone was very welcoming! We had a wonderful time and learned so much about the Air Force, the 82nd members, and Texas. Thank you for the opportunity. **-Dale June (Huss) Imes**

Hosting the closeout reunion with the Powell's was pure pleasure. The executive committee and hosts Zoomed monthly with updates, ideas, etc. There was nothing but support for one another and willingness to take on yet another project when needed. Once again, the spirit of camaraderie prevailed and things went off without a hitch. I was particularly touched when your registrations arrived with comments of thanks, willingness to help in the hospitality suite, donations with offers of more if needed. It's been a beautiful journey and thanks to you all. **-Judy Parlman**

# March ARB Public Affairs Office Article

## ! March Air Reserve Base Public Affairs Department

Published

By Wendy Day

82nd Fighter Group Association

**March Field Museum, CA**

Years come and go, often without much to do in our day-to-day lives. Sometimes, we find something extraordinary to celebrate, like those who served in the military through extraordinary wars. World War II was a time when the world came together to fight the evils of mankind to ensure a better future for tomorrow, with justice prevailing. In January of 1939, The Lockheed P-38, nicknamed the Lightning made its first flight from March Field, CA. When World War II broke a few months later, the United States military ordered nearly 10,000. The P-38 would begin flying combat missions in 1942 and would be the plane responsible for the interception and shooting down of Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, the commander of the Imperial Japanese Navy and mastermind of the Pearl Harbor attack.

80 years after the first combat missions, on a hot summer day as the crowd files into an old airplane hangar converted into a museum exhibit of the P-38, Lightning, to celebrate the 82nd Fighter Group Association closeout and final reunion of the 96th and 97th Fighter Squadrons with the last four surviving pilots in attendance; Leo Press, Lute Thompson, Dick Ostronink, and Mel Roaslvig. These men survived World War and have carried their stories back home and have over decades. Lowell Phillips, the 82nd Fighter Group Association president said

This group has been operating for forty-four year. Since the last reunion, the group has lost four pilots. I lost my dad two weeks ago, he almost made it here. It's important to celebrate and turn our heritage over to a new group, the current Air Force pilots. So it's one last goodbye, farewell tour. Stories, ceremony, and comradery.

The story of the P-38 and the men who fly them have become history legends and is one of the planes attributed to the success of winning World War II. The stories of the men that flew them become T.V. shows and movies. The real stories, the real heroics are sometimes hard to believe. One P-38 Lightning pilot, Dick Andrews. Andrews managed to land in a combat zone with active fire to save his downed wingman and flight leader, Dick Willsie. In a one seater plane, they managed to fit both men, take off and make it back to their base. "It is important to honor our heritage, our legacy, the men and women, who paved the way and set the foundation for everything we do in the Air Force today. This might be the last opportunity we get to spend with these men. Two remaining from the 96th and two remaining from the 97th. It is a treasure that we get to spend an evening with these men hearing their stories" said Major Andy Calhoun of 96t Flying Training Squadron.

As we take heart with growing global aggressions, and how we can help in European Support operations, we can look back into the heroism and leadership displayed by the men and women of World War II, who paved the way for the next generations. Each generation growing and learning from the living history, our brave fighter pilots of World War II.

notes:

The 82nd Fighter Group Association is dedicated to honor the WWII members of the 82nd Fighter Group and the 95th, 96th and 97th Fighter Squadrons and to promote and perpetuate bonds of friendship among those veterans, family, friends and related United States Air Force units. The National P-38 Association has its facility here on the museum grounds. It displays a full-size replica of the classic twin-boom fighter in the Quonset hut just south of Firebase Romeo Charlie.

## **Article by Rob Shutt, Journalist**

### **Closeout and Final Reunion of the 82nd Fighter Group Association**

**by Robert Shutt @robnoels**

For 32 months during the Second World War, the pilots of the 82nd Fighter Group bolstered the allied efforts in its campaigns from North Africa to southern Germany. Both in escort and combat missions as well as reconnaissance. Nearly 31 years later in 1976, the 82nd Fighter Group Association was formed to immortalize the stories of those who served. On June 23rd, the members of the association reunited formally for the final time.

The members and friends of the association met in Ontario, CA due to its proximity to March Air Reserve Base, an airfield with significant relevance to the 82nd.

The very first meeting of those who would come to form the association was during a reunion of the Fighter Aces Association. Those bound by the common bond of having served with the 82nd Fighter Group, which consisted of the 95th, 96th, and 97th fighter squadrons, decided to meet again the following year in New Orleans alongside the Fighter Aces Association once again. Over two dozen veterans of the 82nd Group attended that year. In 1979, the individuals who would soon establish the 82nd Association met independently for the first time in Corpus Christi and then again in 1981. During that reunion, those in attendance decided to associate formally and draw up a set of by-laws

and by the following year, the by-laws were prepared and a slate of officers was elected. The Association has since met in many different cities across the US with unique and enlightening stories being shared between both veterans and generations alike.

“It has been a wonderful gathering of both history and camaraderie,” Peggy Jean Powell, newly elected president of the 82nd association, said during an interview at the final reunion. “I have gotten to see several emotional reunions at these events. Not to mention the many interesting conversations reminiscing about the war. An important thing to remember about the greatest generation is that the term post-traumatic stress disorder had not come about yet and I think after holding in so much emotion for so long, they were grateful to be able to share their stories and open younger minds to what they had done and seen.” Military records as well as personal accounts attest that active combat was only a part of the danger that soldiers faced during the war. The US armed forces needed pilots desperately and a program that allowed enlisted men to become pilots was enacted. The program came to be known as the Sergeant Pilots Program. The program provided most of the 82nd FG pilots in 1942 and it was what allowed many of the pilots in the 82nd to achieve ace status. However, an unfortunate result of this desperation was the shocking amount of pilots that perished during training exercises and non-combat missions away from enemy

territory, some stateside even, that surely seemed safe and easy at the start. One tragedy, however, brutally forced many of those in the 82nd Group to stare death directly in its haunting, judgmental face before they had even gotten to Europe. The year was 1942. It was late September and the first group of pilots and ground crew designated to the 82nd fighter group embarked on the Queen Mary in New York. Many of the men had already been through rigorous training together and the bonds formed by war were already taking shape. The now iconic ocean liner was moving as a part of a convoy escorted by several other heavily armed ships including the HMS Curacao, a British light cruiser. A majority of the crossing was uneventful but as the convoy was approaching the coast of Ireland, a radio message came through warning of German submarines in the area. The Curacao proceeded to move in a zig-zag pattern as a means of confusing enemy observations and reducing the chances of a torpedo hit. In a moment of either panic or shortsightedness, the HMS Curacao cut too close to the bow of the Queen Mary, and the light cruiser was cut into two pieces by the unyielding ocean liner. The protocol at this point in the war was to not stop for any reason if there were reports of enemy submarines in the area and thus 329 sailors aboard the Curacao were lost to the sea as the men aboard the Queen Mary watched in horror from the deck. An image surely burned into each and every one of their brains.

Despite this terrible event, the 82nd Fighter Group landed in Ireland, completed several more training courses and was then sent to North Africa where the group became a well-oiled machine thanks to the tireless efforts of its ground crew, intelligence officers, and medical personnel.

“The ratio of support people to pilots was eight to one. They’re living conditions throughout their time in the Mediterranean theater were horrible. Freezing at night during the winter months in North Africa then facing heat exhaustion and dehydration in the warmer months with 100 degree and above temperatures. To make things worse, no barracks had been built for them. There were no cots and no blankets. All they had were canvas tents that many used to build rudimentary shelters amongst the natural landscape,” said Bruce Loewenberg, historian for the 82nd Association, in an address to the reunion attendees.

Indeed the American war machine was still warming up by the time the 82nd group first arrived in Europe but spirits remained high as the fight against tyranny and unmitigated evil was far from over. Thankfully, companies like Lockheed-Martin picked up some of the slack and were able to produce war planes early on that were sent immediately to both Europe and the Pacific. History shows that a despicable and formidable enemy is a powerful motivator but the pilots of the 82nd fighter group were given a weapon of war that pushed them from motivated to downright dedicated, the Lockheed-Martin P-38 Lightning.

A fighter plane that was begrudgingly nicknamed “the fork-tailed devil” by an unfortunate German pilot that witnessed its wrath firsthand.

Akin to the force of nature that is its namesake, the P-38 was fast, devastating and capable of inflicting extensive damage. The plane’s sleek design featuring twin tails was cutting edge and the pilot could fire 409 rounds per minute from its nose-mounted, 50-caliber machine guns, a strategic weapon placement that allowed those who flew it to aim with deadly accuracy. The P-38 was also equipped with a 20-mm cannon just in case the machine guns could not pierce heavily armored targets. First introduced in 1940, it was able to ascend 3,300 feet in one minute and reach speeds up to 400 miles per hour making it the fastest fighter plane of its time.

“The P-38 was a trailblazer for an entirely new generation of aircraft and it was a huge leap forward in the field of aviation,” Todd Felton, past 82nd Association president and 96th heritage member, said in his speech at March.

The plane's range of 1,150 miles made it a formidable long-range threat and it could escort bombers to any objectives the allies had set their sights on. Those who flew the Lightning were able to disable ships, strafe enemies on the ground, destroy tanks and decimate enemy bunkers. This is all in addition to its proven ability to take down enemy aircraft, including the Luftwaffe’s highly advanced Messerschmitt jet fighter.

“I would say one of the best things about the P-38 is that it has two



engines,” said Lucius ‘Lute’ Thompson, a former World War II fighter pilot and veteran of the 82nd Fighter Group that was in attendance at the reunion. “Most fighters at the time were single-engine and if that engine went out and you couldn’t get it going again, you were in for it. On one of my first missions, we flew up the Adriatic coast of Italy and were eventually cleared to go after targets of opportunity. I had made it pretty close to Munich when I spotted a marshaling yard with lots of tracks leading to it and I figured I’d blow it up. I dove down and dropped bombs into the embankments that were holding up the railways and did some heavy damage but as I turned to head back, both of my P-38’s engines quit. I figured out later that I had screwed up switching fuel tanks while we were coming in over the coast. You’re supposed to switch to the main fuel tank when you get into combat.”

As Thompson hurried to revive his P-38’s engines his airspeed increased and he intentionally went into a glide so that he would not simply fall out of the sky all while moving his fuel selector valve switch, an instrument on World War II fighter planes that is notoriously difficult to operate while flying especially for young pilots that were new to the P-38. Thompson tried desperately to connect the engine to a fuel tank that was not empty. Both wings of the P-38 have a set of tanks in them and moving the engines fuel intake laterally across the body of the plane could take several attempts which, ordinarily, is more of an annoyance than a life-threatening obstruction but that is exactly what it was for Thompson

as he quickly lost altitude above enemy territory with neither engine showing signs of life.

“I stayed calm and recalled my training. We had done blindfolded cockpit training where we would have to practice switching valves and point out various instruments and controls without being able to see at all.” Thompson added

Fortune favored Thompson that day as he was able to get one of the engines running after several minutes of struggle and fly safely back to allied territory. An impressive story that is similar to other accounts that had a much darker ending for many other pilots in Europe.

The main event of the 82nd Fighter Group Association’s final reunion was a group trip to March Air Reserve Base just southeast of Riverside, California. The airfield, amongst many other functions, serves as the base of operations for the P-38 National Association and an impressive museum dedicated solely to the history of the Lockheed Lightning. Seeing a P-38 actually tear through the sky is a nostalgic and comforting sight for the veteran pilots who flew them and a simply awe-inspiring sight for anyone else. Those civilians who have been lucky enough to see a fork-tailed devil fly with their own eyes can only imagine the savage warplane in combat-ready condition engaging enemies while maneuvering with almost unbelievably modern ability. Certainly, only the pilots who fought with the P-38 as their weapon of choice truly understand the dominating presence of a fully engaged Lightning firing its guns and cannon

while going almost twice as fast as any modern Formula 1 car is capable of going. The transition from home life in 1940s America to being the aerial scourge of the Third Reich was surely a unique one but it was handled admirably by the men of the 82nd. Amazingly, the leaders of the 82nd Association were able to arrange a P-38 flyby at the airfield while the veterans and the loved ones who had joined them watched and actively treasured the rare sight.



Noel & Rob Shutt



We are also indebted to Rob for his many wonderful photos of our event.

It's been a great run

43 years of memories and friendships

We will continue our mission to honor  
our 82nd Fighter Group veterans

Send us photos/documents of your  
family's veteran for our website

**email:** [82ndfga@gmail.com](mailto:82ndfga@gmail.com)

Follow our website and Facebook page

**website:** [82ndFighterGroup.org](http://82ndFighterGroup.org)

**FB:** The 82nd Fighter Group Assn

**ADORIMINI**