



SUNSETTER'S GAZETTE

Newsletter of the
Seventh Fighter Command Association
USAAF-World War II



NEWSLETTER

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Reunion Seattle, Washington



July 3-6, 2003

I realize that this is short notice, but an opportunity arose that was just too good to pass up. The Museum of Flight in Seattle, one of the premier air museums in the country, asked me to provide some speakers for a P-51 Fly-in that they were having over the 4th of July. In return for providing the speakers the museum has graciously agreed to provide, free of charge, a catered dinner with a 1940's theme and big band music for up to 400 people.

There has been some confusion that this is a P-51 related reunion. It is not. In fact this is designed to be a 7th reunion with as much representation from all of the Squadrons that were part of, or attached to, the 7th Fighter Command. Although there will be P-51's present at the Museum, I am diligently trying to locate a P-40 and P-47 to join them as well.

A breakout of who is in the association can be seen below:

6th FS	61 members	18th FG	33 members
19th FS	104 members	44th FS	43 members
45th FS	55 members	46th FS	64 members
47th FS	127 members	72nd FS	54 members
73rd FS	68 members	78th FS	119 members
318th HQ	12 members	333rd FS	80 members
413th FS	21 members	437th FS	8 members
456th FS	34 members	457th FS	16 members
458th FS	25 members	462nd FS	55 members
506th FG	45 members	531st FS	26 members
548th NFS	56 members	549th NFS	43 members
7th HQ	53 members	WARDS	124 members
Misc	122 members	TOTAL	1440 Members

Since many of you were in multiple Groups and Squadrons, this could be an opportunity to meet with a larger mix of old friends. Sub-reunions could be a possibility and I would especially like to see the Pearl Harbor survivors and the WARDS be able to meet separately. My main purpose for having this reunion is not so much to take up your time in tours and shows, but it will

be designed with renewing relationships, making new friends and recording your history for generations to come. With that in mind I have found a hotel that will accommodate us with a large hospitality suite and a large conference room dedicated just to us.

So little is recorded on the 7th's contribution to WWII that I would like to take this opportunity to speak with as many of you as possible to record your personal experiences for the sake of posterity.

The rough agenda looks as follows:

Thursday July 3rd

Arrive and check in

Friday July 4th

Morning orientation meeting followed by informal Group / Squadron gatherings.

A catered lunch at the hotel.

Optional depending on weather, 4th of July Fireworks excursion, either at the veterans home or on the Sprit of Washington Dinner Train.

Saturday July 5th

Morning - Get aboard coaches for a trip to the Museum of Flight.

Lunch at the Museum.

Presentation by 7th Fighter Command pilots from 2-4 PM on their experiences in the Pacific flying P-51's. The presenters will be: Jim Van Nada - 72nd FS, Jim Vande Hey - 78th FS, Jim Tapp - 78th FS, Walt Kreimann - 78th FS, and Paul Chism - 78th FS. It is expected that maybe up to a half dozen P-51's may show up for the event.

Return to Hotel to get ready for dinner.

Afternoon: Banquet at the museum, complete with cocktail hour early on and dinner and dancing to follow. (FREE to 7th FC Members and family) (This will also be open to members of the museum who are willing to pay to share a table with some veterans)

Sunday July 6

Morning - 7th FC Board meeting

Potential reunions at the squadron level at the hotel, depending on how many folks from each squadron come.

Rest of the day open for socializing.

All Days - I will be available to meet with members willing to share their photos and experiences. I may have a PBS crew there to video record the event as well.

Monday - Wednesday July 7-9 - For those willing to stay I will arrange more squadron activities and be conducting more interviews. I will see if I can't get a grant to help pay for your additional time to do this.

Depending on the response, I will assist those interested in side trips to Victoria, Mt. Rainier, Seattle, etc... and may have a tour of my F-22 assembly area and a tour of McCord AFB available.



I am also negotiating with Boeing to give us a donation to help transportation and reunion costs. The hotel is the Larkspur Suites in Renton and we have a guaranteed rate of \$69 for a Suite.

Your costs for the reunion would be transportation to Seattle (shuttle to/from airport provided by hotel), your room, lunch and dinner costs (except for Sat night) The Suites do have full kitchens. I will arrange for free light breakfasts to be served in the meeting room each morning.

Again, I realize that this is short notice, but I would appreciate it if you could let me know your intentions as soon as possible. For those who respond, I will follow up with another letter with more details when they become available. Since I have a dozen folks already committed to come, I am going to go forth with the reunion and the events will depend on how many people eventually sign up to come.

Latest News

Leading Ace of the 7th FC Passes -



GLASGOW KY — **Robert Wilson "Todd" Moore**, 81, of Glasgow died April 21, 2003

The Louisville native graduated from Anchorage High School and attended Duke University. He was a World War II Army Air Corps veteran and was a highly decorated "Ace" fighter pilot, serving in the South Pacific. His last assignment was commanding officer of the 45th Fighter Squadron at Iwo Jima. He later activated the Kentucky Air National Guard Fighter Squadron in 1949. He was actively engaged in promoting private, business and pleasure flying and was chairman of the Glasgow Airport Board from 1957 to 1967, when he was named commissioner of Aeronautics for Kentucky. He was managing partner and president of L.L. Morris Supply Co., a crude oil supply business in Glasgow, Greensburg, Greenville and Beattyville and was

past president of Kentucky Oil and Gas Association. He was the son of the late Henry W. and Kate Bell Moore.

Expressions of sympathy may take the form of donations to the Aviation Museum Building Fund, Aviation Museum of Kentucky, 4316 Hanger Drive, Lexington, KY 40510 or First Christian Church, 1100 N. Race St., Glasgow, KY 42141.

Survivors include his wife, Wilma Morris Moore; a brother, Scott W. Moore; and three nieces.

History of the 7th

The following article was printed years ago and was centered around the time Todd Moore spent with the 7th. Since it is a large article I will present it in several parts and have edited it to abbreviate it.

The story of Robert W. Moore, leading ace of the Seventh Air Force during World War Two - by Tom Ivie

The sound of 108 Merlin engines shattered Iwo Jima's early morning silence on 7 April 1945. Pilots of the Seventh Fighter Command's 15th and 21st Fighter Groups sat at the controls of the Mustangs awaiting the signal to takeoff. This was to be the first of the Very Long Range (VLR) fighter missions, a 1600-mile round trip, in which they would strike the home islands of Japan. Reporters were everywhere covering the mission, and noting that the 15th FG, which rose to defend Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, was to be the first American fighters to strike back. For the men of the 15th Fighter Group it had been a long wait - except for one brief campaign in the Marshalls - they had waited three and a half years for this moment.

One of those young men was Captain Robert W. "Todd" Moore of St. Matthews, Kentucky. Captain Moore, who came to the Pacific area in September 1942 was now, at age twenty-three, one of the most experienced pilots in the 15th Fighter Group.

When "Todd" Moore arrived in Hawaii he was assigned to the 78th Fighter Squadron which was then a part of the 18th FG. The 18th had the responsibility at this time for the aerial defense of the Hawaiian Islands. The two fighter groups used much of their time in engaging in vigorous fighter combat training and developing new tactics based on the information fed back to them from the combat zones. The real opportunity for some practical training came in January 1943. At that time the 78th FS was ordered to Midway Island to relieve the 73rd FS.

On 23 January 1943 the Squadron took off on an historic mission. This flight was a 1,300 nautical mile trip entirely over water. It was at the time, the longest over water flight by single engine fighters on record. Upon their arrival on Midway Island, the 78th FS assumed the responsibility for patrol duty over the island. During its stay on Midway the

78th was transferred, on 16 March, to the 15th Fighter Group. The Squadron's assignment on Midway ended on



21 April, and on that day its twenty four P-40's took off for the 1,300-mile return trip to Hawaii. The mission took a little over seven hours to fly, and it was an excellent preparation for the missions to come.

In March, the 46th FS was sent to Canton Island to partake in Operation Galvanic, the Central Pacific campaign which would begin with an invasion of islands in the Gilberts chain. In the meantime, the remainder of the Group remained in Hawaii and continued training. During this time Major Julian "Jack" Thomas in command of the 45th Fighter Squadron and requested the transfer of some of the men who trained with him during the stay on Midway and Lt. Moore was one of them. In July the 45th received orders that they had all been looking for - the squadron was headed for a combat assignment. They departed Hawaii on 18 August 1943 and after a seven day voyage joined the 46th FS on Canton Island and then on 11 September, they headed for a new base on Baker Island. This new base put them within 600 miles of Japanese bases, and enemy contact was now a real possibility. The 45th's mission on Baker was twofold; they were to provide combat air patrol for the island, and to search for enemy submarines and surface shipping. Their only opportunity for aerial combat over Baker was a successful one. On 23 October an unsuspecting Emily fling boat was bounced by pilots of the 45th at a point south of Baker Island and Captain Gilmer Snipes shot it down in flames.

On 20 November 1943 Army and Marine troops stormed ashore on the Tarawa and Makin Atolls in the Gilbert Islands and began the bloody task of securing these islands. These islands plus Abemama were secured by 28 November, and the 45th FS along with the 46th and 72nd Fighter Squadrons moved to their new forward bases in the Gilberts. The 46th and 72nd moved to Makin, and the 45th ended up on Abemama. During the month of December the bulk of aerial action was carried out by the 46th and 72nd FSs flying P-39s, while the 45th outfitted with longer ranged P-40Ns sat and waited. The missions to Mili and Jaluit were beginning to take quite a toll on these two squadrons, and finally in mid-January 1944 the 45th was brought into action. The 45th's first mission was on 17 January, and they attacked flak emplacements and barracks on Mili with bombs and strafing. During the next several days the 45th continued their strafing missions against Jaluit and Mili.

The purpose of these continuing interdiction missions against Mili and Jaluit was to render them totally useless to the Japanese. With the invasion of the Marshall Islands rapidly approaching the Navy could ill-afford Japanese air units on these islands. In the meantime B-24s and B-25s were striking at targets deeper in the Marshalls. These

targets were beyond the range of our fighters and as a result the bombers were suffering heavy casualties. This situation was both frustrating and disturbing to the fighter pilots who wanted to protect the bombers and have a crack at the enemy fighters. The solution to this problem came about on 25 January because of a rescue mission.

On that date a B-25 was downed in the waters off Arno Atoll, and any rescue attempt would require fighter escort. This atoll was beyond the normal operating range of the fighters, and though it was possible for the P-39s and P-40s to fly the 600-mile round trip it meant they would have to pass right over Mili. If any enemy was encountered, the fighters would have to drop their external tanks and this would prevent them from continuing on to Arno. Even if no enemy was encountered they could only orbit over the rescue area for about forty minutes. In spite of the odds against them the fighters did fly the mission successfully, and in doing so a plan for ambushing enemy fighters was born. It was known that the Japanese fighters would follow our returning bombers to at least this point because they had no fear of being intercepted by our fighters. With this thought in mind an ambush mission to take place over Arno Atoll was planned and carried out on 26 January 1944.

This mission which Todd Moore now considers his most memorable mission began with the B-25s of the 41st Bomb Group heading out to hit Japanese airfields deep in the Marshall Islands. They would be unescorted over the target area and for a part of the return trip, however the B-25 crews knew that as they passed back over the Arno Atoll our fighters would be waiting for the unsuspecting Japanese fighters.

As the B-25s passed over this point the Japanese pilots were too busy to notice P-40s boring in on them. Within minutes the Japanese force had been decimated. Ten enemy aircraft were destroyed, two more listed as probables, and none of our fighters were lost. One of those victories, his first, was scored by Lt. Moore. Moore saw a Zero trying to sneak away from the fight and went after it. As Lt. Moore approached the Japanese pilot saw him and turned for a head-on attack. Moore stayed with the Zero and fired a burst which hit its engine and wing root. As their planes passed each other, Lt. Moore turned and got on the Zero's tail. "As I closed in on the Zero, he turned slowly over on his back as though the pilot was already dead. I closed to about 700 feet and gave him a slight lead and exploded the fighter with a very short burst."

It had been an exceptional mission. The 45th pilots had not only won a great victory in their first large air battle, but they had also demonstrated their skills as aviators by flying round trip of over 800 statute miles over water to accomplish the mission.

The Japanese pulled their fighter units out of the area later in that same day, and the bombers never faced them again during the remainder of the Marshalls campaign. On 10 March 1944 the campaign ended and the 45th returned to Hawaii to rejoin the rest of the group.

To be continued...

If you are thinking you might be able to attend the reunion, please fill out the following form and send it to the address below or give me a call at 253-630-3199.

Name(s) of those attending _____

Squadron(s) represented _____

I may be interested in personal side trips after the reunion, please send me more information on what might be available

I may be able to stay a couple of extra days for additional reunion activities and to share my war time experiences.

Unfortunately I can't make it but I would be willing to share my experiences with you next time you are in my part of the country.

Suggestions:

Mail to:
Mark Stevens
7th Fighter Command Association
14629 SE 198th St.
Renton, WA 98058-9405