

# Contact!

Leonard Rosen, Editor

FEBRUARY 2008 ISSUE

**From the Editor** With the holidays behind us it's time to get down to the important stuff; the upcoming APA Annual Reunion on Saturday April 26, 2008 in the Empire Room of the Sportsmen's Lodge. Festivities will begin at 11:00 AM with a hosted cocktail hour (and a half) followed by lunch. After lunch, Hal Cope will commence the afternoon program with some remarks, followed by one or more video short subjects. Our guest speaker will be R.E.G. (Ron) Davies. Ron is Curator of Air Transport at the Smithsonian Institution's National Air and Space Museum. His topic will be "Directions of Air Transport in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century". Ron is a prolific author having written many books with aviation related subjects. The Reunion will conclude with the drawing for lots of very fine door prizes.

For out of town attendees a block of rooms at special rates has been reserved right next door at the Sportsmen's Lodge Hotel. If you wish to reserve one of these rooms, please do so before April 4, 2008 by calling the hotel at (800) 821-8511 and mention you will be attending the Aviation Pioneers Reunion.

As is usual, on Friday night April 25, 2008, the night preceding the Reunion, a no host cocktail party will be held in the lobby of the Sportmen's Lodge Hotel from 6:00 PM to 7:30 PM for all of the out of towners and anyone else that wishes to attend.

**Cope Note...** I spent my New Years Eve alone at home watching, for the second or third time, "A Guy name Joe" starring Irene Dunn, Spencer Tracy and others. You will remember it is the story of a pilot gone to the sky only to come back to earth to help fledgling pilots become pilots. As the story goes Spencer adopts an up and coming cadet, Van Johnson,

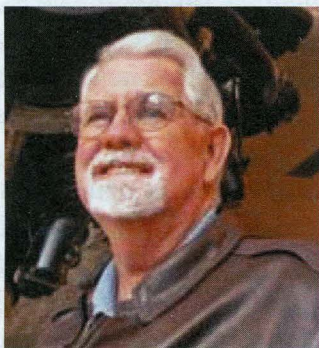
moving him along the pilot path. Unfortunately Johnson meets and falls in love with Dunn, Spencer's old love. It all ends well with Spencer releasing Dunn into the arms of Van Johnson.



Plenty of good flying sequences in the film which I always enjoy. Flying sequences featuring P-38's were the most interesting to me.

I had a couple encounters with P-38's. Always wanted to fly one but that didn't happen. I was assigned to the SS Rainbow a Merchant Marine C-2 Cargo ship for close to three years during WWII. I was a member of the US Navy Armed Guard Unit assigned to each merchant ship to man the guns and communications equipment. Unfortunately, although it all worked out in the end, the Rainbow generally carried ammunition and other high combustible cargo. In each convoy the Rainbow had to cruise at least 500 yard astern of the last ship in the convoy because of our high explosive cargo. We were a sitting ducks for marauding U-Boats. We had a couple of torpedoes that missed, thank God.

On one of the many voyages I made to the South Pacific our deck cargo was five P-38's headed for the Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands. The five P-38 pilots were also on board. After arriving in Guadalcanal the aircraft were unloaded, un-pickled and made ready for flight – none to soon as it turned





out. Once the pilots got their hands on the 38's and got back into the air, the first thing they did was to give the crew of the Rainbow a Granddaddy of air shows. Loops, slow rolls, snap rolls and inverted low passes over the ship was the order of the day. Our gunners got into the act, strapped themselves into their 20mm anti-aircraft guns and had a ball tracking the buzzing P-38's. What a "thank you" from the pilots to the crew of the Rainbow.

June 19, 1944 while anchored in the Marianas the Rainbow and her crew were to witness one of the classic dog fights of WWII. The "Mariana Turkey Shoot" was a classic dog fight between US and Japanese aircraft. The US pilots downed 220 enemy aircraft with the loss of only 20 aircraft. It



was an amazing thing to watch as black plumes of smoke identified yet another "kill." We couldn't

claim for a fact that "our P-38's" were among the hundreds of aircraft filling the sky like a swarm of locust but the crew of the Rainbow would like to think that we had made a small contribution to one of the great "air shows" of WWII.

While taking flying lessons at Hank Coffins, Coffin Air Services in East Los Angeles, California, in 1946 I had a second encounter with the wonderful P-38. I had just finished a solo in the "Yellow Peril", aka Stearman, as a P-38 with one engine feathered made a low pass across Vail Field. By low, I do mean low, no more than a few feet above the top of the parked aircraft. The low pass ended with a slow roll. I learned later the pilot was Bill Lear Jr. I also heard the CAA caught up with him about his aerobatics in unauthorized air space.

Last P-38 tale - my old friend "Fish" Salmon, test pilot for Lockheed, promised me a ride in a P-38. For one reason or another it didn't happen, much to my dismay. Man I would have liked to have flown that aircraft. Robie Robinson, a pilot for NAA, was a P-38 jockey if my memory serves me correctly also, Larry LeBaron who flew for Viking. I have been surrounded by P-38's it seems but never had

the opportunity to fly one.

**Another P-38 Story...**Sixty-five years after it ran out of gas and crash-landed on a beach in Wales, an American P-38 fighter plane has emerged from the surf and sand where it lay buried — a World War II relic long forgotten by the U.S. government and unknown to the British public.



Based on its serial number and other records, "the fighter is arguably the oldest P-38 in existence, and the oldest surviving 8th Air Force combat aircraft of any type. The Wales Lightning, built in 1941, reached Britain in early 1942 and flew combat missions along the Dutch-Belgian coast.

Second Lt. Robert F. "Fred" Elliott, 24, of Rich Square, North Carolina, was on a gunnery practice mission on Sept. 27, 1942, when a fuel supply error forced him to make an emergency landing on the nearest suitable place — the Welsh beach. His belly landing in shallow water sheared off a wingtip, but Elliott escaped unhurt. Less than three months later, the veteran of more than 10 combat missions was shot down over Tunisia, in North Africa. His plane and body were never found.

As the disabled P-38 could not be flown out, American officers had the guns removed, and the records say the aircraft was salvaged, but it wasn't. It was gradually covered with sand which helped to preserve the aircraft, and there it sat for 65 years. With censorship in force and British beaches closed to the public during the war, nobody knew it was there. It was first spotted by a family enjoying a day at the beach where it became temporarily uncovered due to some unusual weather conditions. The tides have again covered the wreck with sand and its location kept secret pending recovery efforts. The International Group for Historic Aircraft Recovery (TIGHAR) has been tasked with the recovery process which will begin sometime this summer.



**Flight Attendant Retires After 50 Years...** Patti Smart joined Aloha Airlines in 1957. She said flight attendants' jobs have changed a lot since then. "In the older days, the flights were longer so you had more time to be intimate with passengers and you got to be very good friends with them." She rubbed elbows with Frank Sinatra, performed in-flight fashion shows and danced in smoke-filled aisles aboard cramped DC-3s seating two dozen passengers.



Smart has the third most years in the sky among the 55,000 flight attendants represented by the Association of Flight Attendants. The most senior flight attendant in the nation started her job in 1950.

Hearing Smart reminisce over times gone by makes her job sound more like fun than work. She laughs when remembering affable celebrities, prankster pilots and a box-like cart that sheltered passengers from the rain as they disembarked.

Retired Aloha Airlines Capt. Ron Sprink recalls that Smart was "a barrel of fun" when she started flying, and she acquired the skill of keeping her passengers orderly soon afterward. "The ones who stay on for a long career, the dedication shows through, and they have to snap their fingers at people every once in a while," Sprink said.

With the advent of lower-cost flights with fewer amenities, air travel has lost some of its charm, Smart said. Passengers are more concerned with getting where they're going than enjoying the ride. Aloha Airlines has been engaged in a three-way airfare war with rivals Hawaiian and upstart go! airlines for more than a year. "The pie is the same size, but there are more slices," Smart said. "These are trying times. Fuel is going up, and everyone is feeling the pinch." Even after retirement, Smart will continue to participate in a group that meets for monthly prayers for the company's survival.

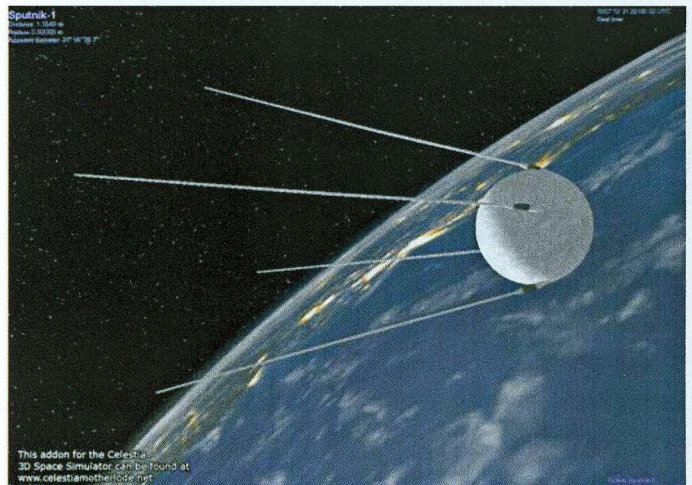
**A Flashback from Bill Heller...** In mid 1954 Bill Butler hired me to be chief pilot of the East Coast for North American Airlines. When operating as a charter carrier, the company did not have station managers or facilities all over the world, so in most cases the Captain arranged for and paid for hotel reservations for his crew at various stops. On one

such charter flight, I was giving the late Buck Prentice a line check ride. Our flight ended up in London not only with no hotel reservations but there were no hotel rooms to be found. I had spent two years in England during World War II as a B-17 pilot and I knew of the ladies of the night known as the Picadilly Commandos. So based on past experience, I told the crew I would take care of them. Down to Picadilly we went. I accosted the first Commando I saw and we chatted. I asked her how many tricks she thought she would turn for the rest of the night. She told me about five. I asked her if we paid her an equivalent amount of money, would she put us up for the night in her digs. She



agreed. And that is how a North American Airlines crew from LGA, spent the night in a Picadilly Commando's flat in London. And no, we took no favors.

**Fifty Years Since Sputnik and The Dawn of the Space Age...** History changed on October 4, 1957, when the Soviet Union successfully launched Sputnik I. The world's first artificial satellite was about the size of a beach ball (22.8 inches in diameter), weighed only 183.9 pounds, and took about 98 minutes to orbit the Earth on its elliptical path. That launch ushered in new political, military, technological, and scientific developments. While the Sputnik launch was a single event, it marked the start of the space age and the U.S.-U.S.S.R space



race.

In 1952 the International Council of Scientific Unions decided to establish July 1, 1957, to



December 31, 1958, as the International Geophysical year (IGY) because the scientists knew that the cycles of solar activity would be at a high point then. In October 1954, the council adopted a resolution calling for artificial satellites to be launched during the IGY to map the Earth's surface.

In July 1955, the White House announced plans to launch an Earth-orbiting satellite for the IGY and solicited proposals from various Government research agencies to undertake development. In September 1955, the Naval Research Laboratory's Vanguard proposal was chosen to represent the U.S. during the IGY.

The Sputnik launch changed everything. As a technical achievement, Sputnik caught the world's attention and the American public off-guard. Its size was more impressive than Vanguard's intended 3.5-pound payload. In addition, the public feared that the Soviets' ability to launch satellites also translated into the capability to launch ballistic missiles that could carry nuclear weapons from Europe to the U.S. Then the Soviets struck again; on November 3, Sputnik II was launched, carrying a much heavier payload, including a dog named Laika.

Immediately after the Sputnik I launch in October, the U.S. Defense Department responded to the political furor by approving funding for another U.S. satellite project. As a simultaneous alternative to Vanguard, Wernher von Braun and his Army Redstone Arsenal team began work on the Explorer project.

On January 31, 1958, the tide changed, when the United States successfully launched Explorer I. This

satellite carried a small scientific payload that eventually discovered the magnetic radiation belts around the Earth, named after principal investigator James Van Allen. The Explorer program continued as a

successful ongoing series of lightweight, scientifically useful spacecraft.

The Sputnik launch also led directly to the creation of National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). In July 1958, Congress passed the National Aeronautics and Space Act which created NASA as of October 1, 1958 from the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (NACA) and other government agencies.

**A True Story?...**A woman was flying from Seattle to San Francisco on Southwest Airlines. Unexpectedly, the plane was diverted to Sacramento along the way. The flight attendant explained that there would be a delay, and if the passengers wanted to get off the aircraft the plane would re-board in 50 minutes.

Everybody got off the plane except one lady who was blind. A man had noticed her as he walked by and could tell the lady was blind because her Seeing Eye dog lay quietly underneath the seats in front of her throughout the entire flight.

He could also tell she had flown this very flight before because the pilot approached her, and calling her by name, said, "Kathy, we are in Sacramento for almost an hour. Would you like to get off and stretch your legs?" The blind lady replied, "No thanks, but maybe Buddy would like to stretch his legs."



Picture this: All the people in the gate area came to a complete standstill when they looked up and saw the pilot walk off the plane with a Seeing Eye dog! The pilot was even wearing sunglasses. People scattered. They not only tried to change planes, but they were trying to

change airlines! Story submitted by Luther B. Johnson.

**Boeing 707 turns 50...**The Boeing 707 prototype, the Dash 80 was America's first jet aircraft designed for commercial passenger travel as well as military applications. It's also the ancestor of the nearly 15,000 Boeing jetliners built since then. As a matter



of fact, the Dash 80 set the pattern for almost every large commercial passenger jet flying today. Development of the Dash 80 was driven by two factors: the end of World War II and the resumption of commercial aviation. With the end of the war, aircraft companies were left without the massive



orders for military aircraft. Furthermore, the development of jet engines, meant the writing was on the wall for piston-engined, propeller-driven airplanes. Boeing had the 377 Stratocruiser, a prop-driven airliner based on the B-29 bomber that first flew in 1947. Though it was a vast improvement over prewar planes, the Stratocruiser was not a commercial success and Boeing sold only 56 copies, losing other sales to the rival Douglas DC-6 and Lockheed Constellation.

Driven by the need to chart a new course for the company's future, Boeing president William M. Allen almost literally bet the farm on the new aircraft. On August 30, 1952, Boeing announced it would go ahead with production of the Dash 80, even though the company had no orders in hand. The project aircraft was called the 367-80 to mislead competitors into thinking the new plane was a refinement of the Stratocruiser. After an investment of \$16 million, totally funded by the company and representing almost two-thirds of Boeing's postwar profits, the first plane rolled out of the factory on Friday May 14, 1954.

Two months later, on July 15, 1954, the thirty-eighth anniversary of the Boeing Company, the Dash 80 made its maiden flight. The Dash 80 was not the first jetliner; that honor goes to the de



Havilland DH 106 Comet, which first flew on July 27, 1949 and entered commercial service in 1952. In fact, the U.S. was third to add jet service; the Soviet Union's Tupolev Tu-104, a variation on the Tu-16 "Badger" bomber that even kept the military plane's transparent nose, began carrying passengers in October 1956, two years before the first American commercial flight, almost a year after the maiden flight of the Dash 80. However, a series of crashes beginning in 1953, as well as limited range and payload, doomed the Comet and the Tupolev Tu-104 was never adopted outside the Soviet bloc.

With its wings swept back 35 degrees and four Pratt & Whitney JT3 turbojet engines mounted below the wings (a practice Boeing adopted from its successful B-47 and B-52 bombers), the Dash 80 was a vast improvement over the other planes. It was 100 mph faster than the Comet and

significantly larger with a range of more than 3,500 miles vs. 1,750 miles for the British jet. It could carry more passengers and cargo than either the British or Soviet jets. The Dash 80 was also easier to service than either the Comet or Tupolev, both of which had their engines mounted in pods next to the fuselage.

Over the next few years, the Dash 80 set new speed records each time it flew. On March 11, 1957, the Dash "dashed" from Seattle to Baltimore in 3 hours 48 minutes at an average speed of 612 mph. One famous feat came earlier, in the summer of 1955. Legendary Boeing test pilot Tex Johnston was at the controls for what was supposed to be a simple publicity flyover of the hydroplane races on Lake Washington. Thousands of spectators and dozens of stunned Boeing executives watched as Johnston decided to demonstrate the plane's strength and performance with an impromptu double barrel roll over the lake.

The prototype had no seats other than those for its crew of three. Boeing had hedged its bet, hoping for military orders, and the Dash 80 was configured for cargo with two large loading doors. Boeing's gamble paid off, as one week after the maiden flight, the Air Force ordered 29 of the new planes to be configured as the aerial tanker that would



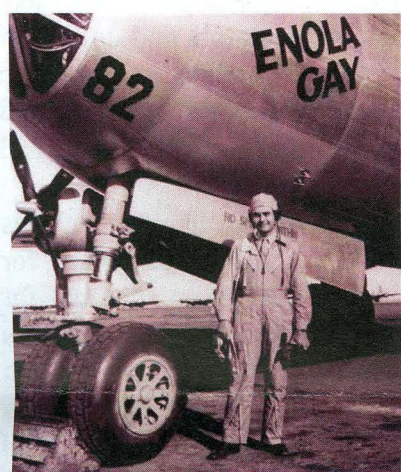
become the KC-135. The first passenger version, now officially called the 707, took its first test flight on December 20, 1957. On August 5, 1958 Pan American Airlines took delivery of its first jetliner and on September 18, 1958 the aircraft received certification to operate in passenger service.

On October 26, 1958, a longer version of the 707, widened to accommodate the six-across seating requested by Juan Terry Trippe, entered commercial service with Pan American World Airways, flying between New York and Paris, beating the rival Douglas DC-8 by almost a year. The 707 was flown by airlines all over the world, making commercial air transport fast, safe and more affordable to generations of new passengers.



By the time the 707 line was closed in May 1991, Boeing had delivered 1,010 707s and 820 KC/C-135s. Even though the last KC-135 left the assembly line in 1965, more than five hundred are still in service today as flying filling stations for the Air Force.

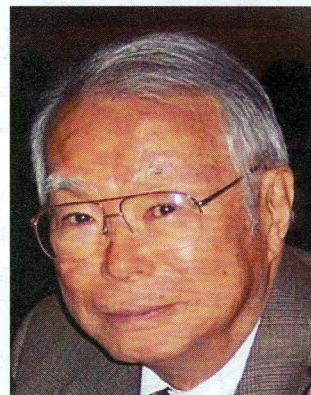
**Obituary...**Paul Tibbets Jr., who flew the plane that dropped the first atomic bomb, dies at 92. He was born in Quincy, Ill., but grew up in Miami after his father moved the family there. Tibbets fell in love with flight and, at age 12, volunteered as a backseat assistant to a biplane pilot, dropping leaflets for the Curtiss Candy Co. at fairs, carnivals and other public gatherings. He joined the Army Air Corps in 1938. After the U.S. entered World



War II, Tibbets first patrolled the Atlantic coast for submarines and later piloted some of the first daylight missions of B-17's over Germany. On Aug. 6, 1945, Tibbets piloted the Enola Gay, a B-29 he had christened for his mother,

down the runway on Tinian Island for a six-hour flight to Japan. He was a 30-year-old colonel. The day's assignment was code-named Special Bombing Mission No. 13. "If Dante had been with us on the plane, he would have been terrified," Tibbets said later about bombing Hiroshima. "The city we had seen so clearly in the sunlight a few minutes before was now an ugly smudge. It had completely disappeared under this awful blanket of smoke and fire." Tibbets remained in the military until 1966. He later was president of a Columbus-based, international air-taxi service called Executive Jet Aviation.

**Obituary...**Tad Shibata passed away May 28, 2007. He was 80 years old. He was born in the U.S. and expected to become a commercial fisherman like his father. Tad's family was relocated to an internment camp during World War II. When Tad became of age he joined the U.S. Army and finished out his Army career in Japan as an interpreter. After the war, he took advantage of the G.I. Bill to get an accounting degree from USC. He went to work for Brown, Kelman and Kraft, a CPA firm, and that was his introduction to aviation.



He spent a substantial amount of time doing accounting for Great Lakes Airlines and became one of the regulars at the Great Lakes offices in the Lockheed Air Terminal and the Great Lakes Maintenance Hangar. Tad was a real favorite of the

Great Lakes trio of Ida Mae Hermann, Marge Wilson and Nancy Anton. Tad was a long time member and supporter of the Aviation Pioneers Association and will be remembered by all who knew him as a true gentleman.

**Obituary...**Ruby Mercer died Jan. 12, 2008, in Longview Washington. She was born in Texas on June 11, 1924, the third of seven children and the first of only two daughters. The Morgan family



became a well known singing family. They traveled together all over the United States performing in Vaudeville theatres. They were cast in a movie called "Stars Over Broadway" in 1934. Ruby's younger sister went on to become a successful

singer and actress, Jaye P. Morgan. After World War II, Ruby changed careers, entering the field of aviation. She met and married D.W. (Poddy) Mercer and together they started Mercer Airline. The airline operated charter flights for the U.S. Navy as well to various race tracks in California. Poddy and Ruby lived a dual residency in Northridge, Calif., and Cheyenne, Wyo.

After Poddy's death, Ruby devoted herself to public service. She volunteered much of her time to the Cheyenne Frontier Days Rodeo. She was also a supporter of the Cheyenne Memorial Hospital. Ruby considered Cheyenne her home. Ruby was a Director and one of the original founders of the Aviation Pioneers Association. She was an avid supporter of the organization, a regular attendee at Directors meetings, missing only one of the past 16 Annual Reunions. She maintained contact with the many, many friends she made in the aviation. She will be sorely missed.