

August 2016 Newsletter



Dear Thirsty 13th members, relatives, and friends,

In the seven weeks since the last newsletter, July 9, 2016, more information has been gained about the U.S. Army Air Corps 13th Troop Carrier Squadron, the “13th TCS,” in World War II.

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This is the newsletter for the U.S. Army Air Corps 13th Troop Carrier Squadron, 1940-1946, nicknamed “The Thirsty 13th.” This is prepared by Seth P. Washburne, the son of John C. Washburne, navigator 11/42-7/43. Please direct any comments to him at (212) 289-1506, sethpw1@gmail.com, or 5200 Meadowcreek Drive, Apt. 2060, Dallas, TX 75248.

Page numbers referred to are in the book “The Thirsty 13th” unless otherwise stated.

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Sgt. Herbert F. Langer



THIRTEENTH TRANSPORT SQUADRON AIR CORPS
DREW FIELD
TAMPA, FLORIDA

3-24-42
Tuesday Evening

1. Additional History

a. 1942, 1945: Items from Herbert Langer, Tech Supply, 6/41-9/45

On July 10 I received an email from the son-in-law, Greg, of Herbert Langer, that Herb's wife Eileen passed away. One of my fondest memories in researching the book was visiting her to scan Herb's photos in Ohio on a snowy night in February 2010. She was super nice to me, as were several of her children who drove over to meet me. Greg wrote: "When going through everything in the house, we came across [more] pictures," and shared many additional items.

The second 13th TCS camp was at Drew Field (now Tampa Int'l Airport), from July 1941 until May 1942. Herb wrote a letter, above, showing the squadron had its own stationary. This was before its name was changed from "transport" to "troop carrier" squadron. He wrote 3/24/42: "Have been playing ball this evening, for it really is nice here. I was over to see the Reds get a licking last Sunday by the Brooklyn Dodgers. They lost by the score of 8 to 1. A poor game for the Reds." Great for the Ohioans that the Cincinnati Reds were in Tampa then for spring training.

The book on page 10 notes the men went to Clearwater Beach. The photos below provide views up the beach, which was quite rural. Langer is on the left; the bottom two are unidentified.





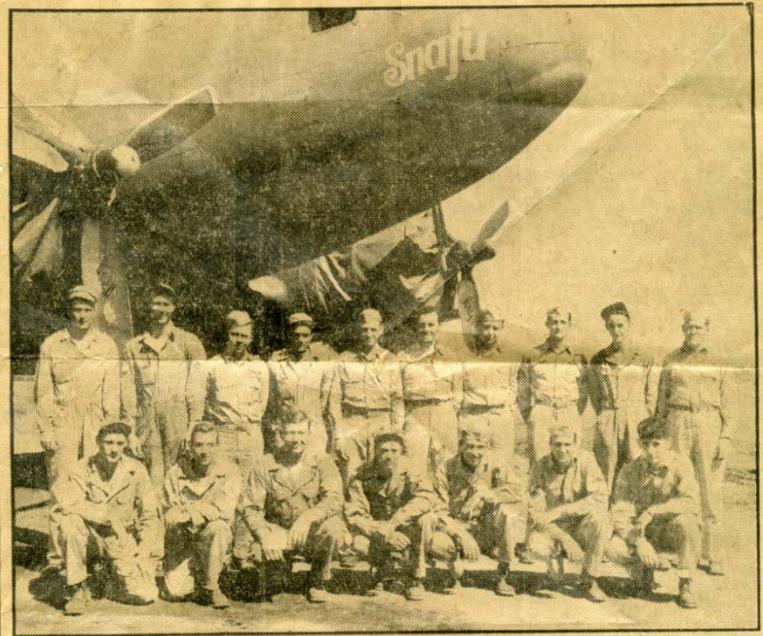
13th TCS
Barracks and Work area

Larger had the photo above of the Drew Field base, from the control tower. All was quite new.

The convoy pictured on the book's page 17, moving the squadron from Tampa to Pope Field, at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, May 25, 1942, is also shown below. The motorcycles look like fun.



First U. S. Transport at Munda Has All-Ohio Crew



These are the All-Ohio ground crew members of the 13th air force standing in front of "Snafu" first American trans- (left to right, front row) Sgt. Elbert R. Amert of Shelby; Corp. Casper J. Biedenbach of Woodsfield; Sgt. Wayne E. Carruth- Staff Sgt. Herbert F. Larger of Fort Loramie; Corp. Donald L. Myers of Norwood; Staff Sgt. Willard D. Palmer of Granville; Corp. Virgil E. Pasco of Hart-

1943 Photos for Hometown Papers

The book on page 353 describes the photos taken in August 1943 of enlisted men by state, after the 13th TCS received a Distinguished Unit Citation for Guadalcanal, for local newspapers. Larger saved the large section at right from the Columbus Dispatch, which provides the date, October 17, 1943, the Ohio photo was published.

The headline notes that the crew on the first C-47 into Munda (page 344) was all from Ohio. It was fun of someone to perhaps plan this.

September 1945 – Ship Boarding Area

Larger had the photos below which go with the quote on the book's page 727 by Samiran: "When we left the Philippines, we were on the sand, on the beach, waiting for a means to get out to the ship. All of a sudden a landing craft came up to the beach, and a bunch of Japanese came out. There was an MP with them [inset below from a third photo] who fired a Thompson submachine gun into the sand with a short burst, and all the Japanese popped to attention. The next thing I remember is we all loaded onto that LST."

This, then, is where most of the ground crew started their journey home. The *Tabinta* anchored four miles offshore from Tacloban, Leyte. There is little to help identify this beach, though.



← These trees in both photos, a panorama

Japanese soldiers facing inland as if disembarked; perhaps those Samiran saw.





b. 1942-44: Stories from John T. Coker, Jr., Radio Operator, 6/42-3/44

In the July newsletter on page 14 I noted I found 94-year old John T. Coker, Jr., the last enlisted aircrew member from 1942 or 1943 still living. I visited him July 30, in Shawnee, Okla, from 10:30 a.m. until 2:30 p.m. John looked great. I set my phone and an iPod on a table and recorded 3 hours of stories, transcribed into 23 pages. He has an amazing memory, all about tuning the transmitters, radio frequencies (“4495 kilocycles”), and much more. He planted a large garden, and I left with many delicious cantaloupe and tomatoes. A few stories are below.

Swimming in the Tontouta River (page 234)

Coker (Radio Operator, 6/42-3/44): “We go down the road to the river, and there was a bridge across it, and from the bridge we had a rope hanging down over the water. The rope was long enough that you could drag it back to the shore. Right there the water was deep, and maybe 20 or 30 feet wide. You get on the rope, and get out on the deck and swing back and forth, like a couple of kids. Yeah, I enjoyed that river. Always naked [laughs].”

Assigning Radio Operators and Navigators to Flights in 1942-43

Coker (Radio Operator, 6/42-3/44): “You’d come in off of a flight, you’d put your name at the bottom of the list, and as they schedule flights going out, when your name came to the top of the list, you went on the flight. They had the same way set up for the navigators. The operation office took care of it. You wouldn’t go on a flight before your turn, and cause any dissension. They kept it very straight and very strict, and it worked out real fine.”

Barely Missed Landing at Henderson Field When Under Attack

Coker (Radio Operator, 6/42-3/44): “One time we were going into Guadalcanal and it was early in the morning and we were about maybe an hour yet until we got to Henderson Field. Well, they called me, and told me the Japanese were having a bombing raid on the base, several planes over from the Japanese airbase at Bougainville where they had their planes. They had their bombers and their fighters over, and they were really giving a rough time at Henderson Field. So they called me and said to circle until they called me back.

“We carried a limited amount of fuel, and if we were going to be out there very long circling it would be bad news. The crew discussed it, and I told them they said they’d call me back just as soon as we get cleared to come on in. And so we made two or three circles, and they called me back, and told us come on in, they we’re ready.”

Guadalcanal Night Bombing Raid

Coker (Radio Operator, 6/42-3/44): “I was up there one night, I think maybe we had plane trouble, but we were going to have to spend the night. They had an outside movie theater, it had coconut logs for seats, and we were out there watching a movie, and ’course the sirens gone off, the Japanese sending a nighttime raid over. They had the search lights on them, planes picking them up. We had the P-38 fighter planes up in the air waiting for them, and they shot down two or three of the Japanese planes.

“We had right outside of where they had the movie what we call a foxhole. It had a huge place back under the side of the mountain, or hill, and you get maybe 30, 40, 50, maybe 100 [men], it was right close, to dash into the foxhole. So everybody ran for the foxhole.

“Well, I’m Mr. Curiosity. So I go in the foxhole, and I kind of got just off to the side right at the entry, I wanted to see what was going on. And as soon as all the troops got in, well, I’m kinda easing back out, and standing in the entry way to the foxhole.

“Well, a bomb fell about 100 feet from the entrance, dirt all over everything. Didn’t take me long to get back in [laughs].”

Almost Running out of Gas

Coker (Radio Operator, 6/42-3/44): “I remember one time we had been to, I think, New Zealand. We were coming back, and we had a lot of the New Zealand troops that were coming back to active duty. We got to our base at New Caledonia, and the base was closed in, the weather, it closed it in. And they called me and said go on to the base at the other end of the island [estimated Plaine des Gaicas, page 133]. ‘Go on up there, it’s open, and you can land there.’ So we go on up there, and the storm had moved up the island, and we got up there, and couldn’t find the base.

“I quit working the ground station, I’m working the tower, and he says ‘I heard your plane go by.’ So he says ‘Make a 180 out over the ocean, and come back,’ and he says ‘I’ll hear you coming,’ and he says ‘now the runway opens right out to the ocean,’ and he says ‘You spot it, you come in and land.’

“Well, we were really running out of gas, low on fuel, and the pilot was Catfish Smith. And I got in the co-pilot’s seat, and communicating with the guy on the ground, and the pilot could listen, I adjusted his controls to where he could hear him alright, and he’d nod when I was talking to the guy.

“So we made a 180, and we’re coming back. He [the control tower] said ‘I hear you coming. Now watch for the end of the runway.’ So we’re both, eyeballs on what shoreline we see out there, and, sure enough, we spotted it, and he whipped in there with the plane, landed. And we rolled about 50 feet, and the engines died. Out of gas.

“The people that we had on the plane, ’course none of them knew about this until the engines stopped on the runway. Catfish Smith got out and kissed the ground.”

Reflections on the Squadron

Coker (Radio Operator, 6/42-3/44): “The people were close together, I mean if one of them was having a problem, there was two or three ready and willing to help out. 360 people got along pretty good, I would say. They all had a certain respect for one another.”



c. 1945: Item of J.N. Brown, Crew Chief, 3/45-10/45

In the July newsletter I mentioned that on Ancestry.com I found a 1993 listing for a J.N. Brown, at the same address as on a squadron roster in 1945. He then passed away in 2006. Although 10-23 years had passed, on July 18 I drove by this address in Fort Worth, and knocked on the door, to ask if they knew about this prior owner. I enquired about “Jan N. Brown,” and to my great delight the person replied “That was my grandfather, let me go get my dad”!

The dad, Randall, above, recalled off the top of his head the names of Zarek and Scotfield, because his dad was an artist, and etched these into a canteen, above. Sitting next to him on his couch, I turned in the book to page 560, to show him the photo above of “Zarek, Cain, ‘Red’ Brown [who I had not associated with J.N.] and Scotfield.” To my surprise, Randall pointed to the third man, and said: “That’s my dad.” I have long admired this photo of Brown, and it was a thrill to meet his son. The canteen lists the names of these men with whom he flew over.

d. 1945: Items of Robert C. Clunie, Radio Operator, 6/45-9/45

The roster of enlisted men was compiled in May 1945, and so excludes men who came into the squadron after this date. Therefore in May when the daughter, Karen, of radio operator Amelang emailed scans of his diaries to me, and they referred to “Clunie,” I had never heard of him. I found his daughter Carol, though, and in June she emailed me a scan of her dad’s diary, with the entry below, that he was assigned to the 13th TCS June 12, 1945. His diary’s next entry was boarding a ship to return to the U.S. Amelang’s notes provide the date Clunie left the squadron, September 24, 1945, when he transferred to the 64th TCS, so he was in for three months.

On July 15, Clunie’s daughter, Carol, emailed me scans of 17 photos: 4 at Sioux Falls radio school, where he was an instructor, 3 in a replacement depot in Tacloban, 6 in a camp at Dulag, and 4 at an undetermined location in the Philippines. Four in the Dulag camp are shown here, either in the 13th TCS camp, or the 64th TCS nearby to which he transferred. Carol also found his Thirsty 13th patch. He liked to write.



6/12/45 ASSIGNED (FINALLY) to 13th T.C.S. BIAK.





2. History-Related Activities

a. 1942: Aerial Search for The Lana T

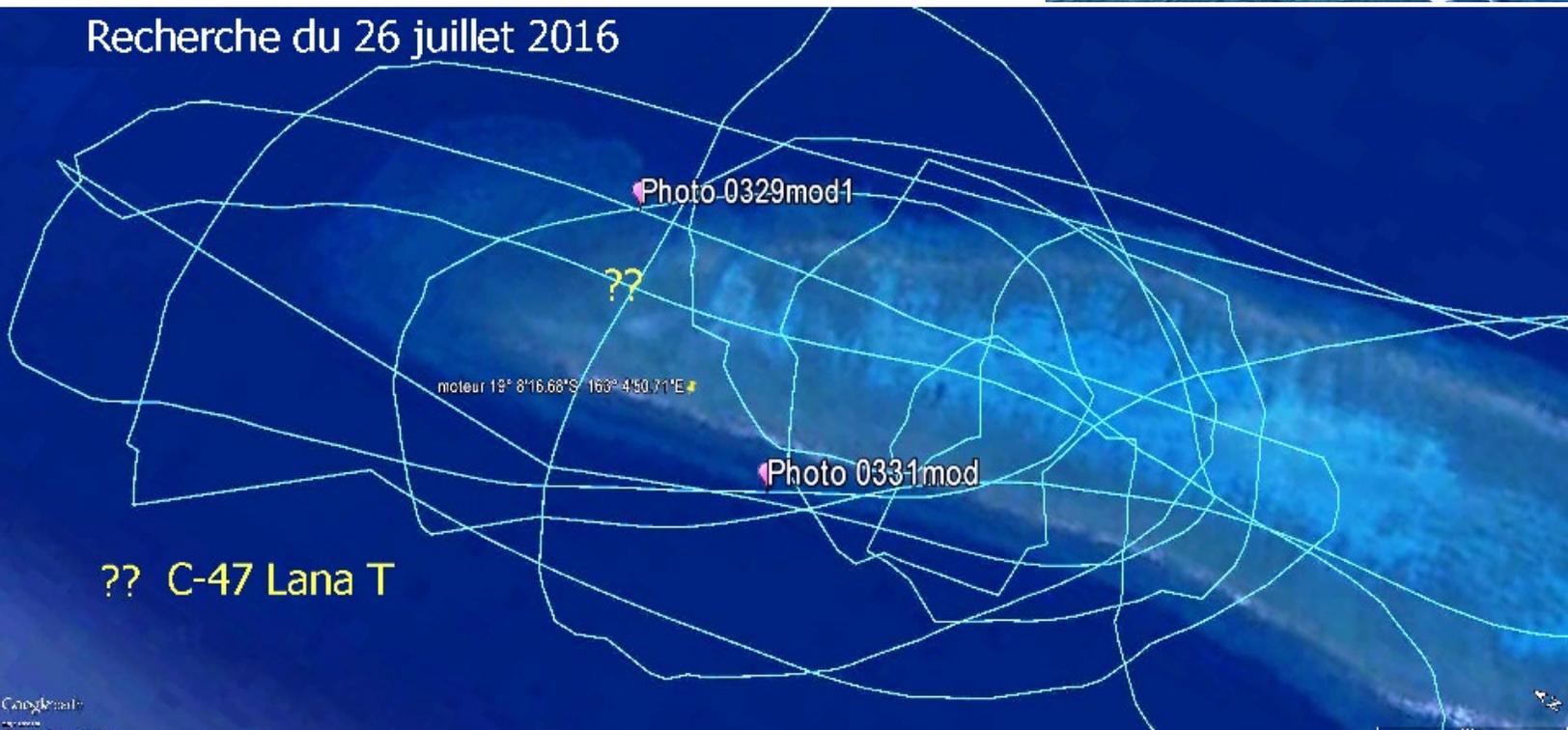
The book on page 172 describes the crash landing in October 1942 of the squadron's plane "The Lana T" on a coral reef northwest of New Caledonia, from which 25 men were rescued 10 days later by three PBVs, one of which ran aground on the coral reef. In 2014, Jean-Paul Mugnier, above right, located the engines of the PBV.

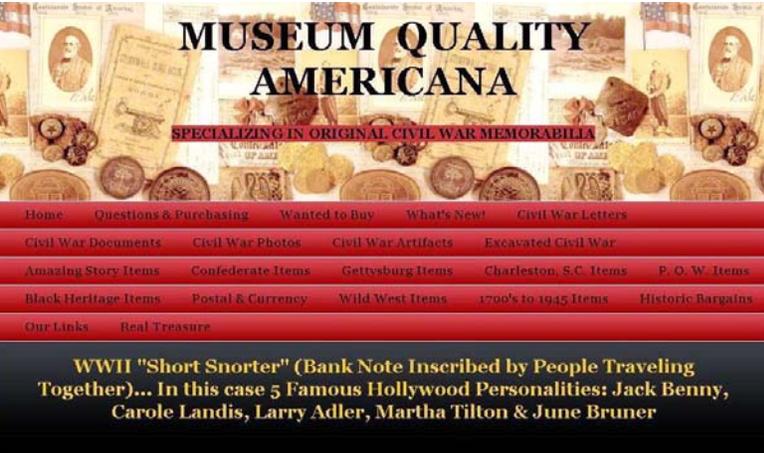
On July 26, Hugues Jurion, above, who hand-build this RV-8, offered to fly over the area of the PBV engines, in a search for The Lana T itself, with Jean-Paul, a 4-hour expedition, plotted at right.

They circled for 25 minutes over the reef, following the pattern below, searching for shining metallic objects, or something like a plane wreck. They had good light, but the tide was high, and the sea choppy – a 6-foot swell, and 20 knot wind. They did identify some unnatural coral shapes, one circled at right, in a view looking south. Jean-Paul hopes to return at low tide when fewer waves and search a smaller area. **Incroyable. Merci beaucoup Hugues et Jean-Paul!**



Recherche du 26 juillet 2016





b. Short Snorter single bill offered for \$750

On August 19, Carl Soderland emailed me a link to the “Museum Quality Americana” website, which was offering a single bill from a short snorter, above right, from someone in an unidentified outfit, with signatures from “USO Tour in the South Pacific,” which the 13th TCS also saw, on page 456. It includes signatures of, from left, June Bruner (“pianist in the show”), Jack Benny, Carol Landis (across the top), Larry Adler (“acclaimed as the world’s greatest harmonica player.”), and Martha Tilton (below “Larry”). The offer includes six photos that they “copied on glossy photo paper.” The bill and photos were offered for \$750.

A wonderful piece of WWII history!
#EL77 - Price \$750

It was helpful to learn that Bruner, on page 456, played piano. This is the first time I have learned of a market for short snorters. Checking eBay I see some with other famous signatures offered, e.g. Jack Dempsey. In all the short snorters I have seen I do not recall signatures of any of these performers, or famous people, other than one of Ben Petmecky’s on page 458, with Ray Milland, so no need to go check yours! Someday when the squadron is even more famous, the signatures of our fathers and grandfathers will be priceless, I’m sure, so hold on to yours.

c. MarCom Award Submission

Last fall I was wondering how an independent group might rate my newsletters, and learned about the MarCom awards, sort of an Oscars for different forms of communication. They had a digital newsletter category.

Their website says “The MarCom statuette graces the trophy cases of some of the top business and communication firms in the world. The MarCom competition has grown to perhaps the largest of its kind in the world with about 6,000 entries per year.” Judging is done in rooms in Dallas and Washington, DC, and the judges are free lancers or own their own business, selected based on their experience and availability. The judges agree on a score, and entries receiving scores between 90-100 points are Platinum Winners; entries with 80-89 points are Gold Winners, and entries scoring from 70-79 receive an Honorable Mention.



The 2016 submission start date was August 3, and so on August 4 I submitted three newsletters, from November 2015, March 2016, and July 2016 (entries must be after January 1, 2015, almost a two-year window), for their category 76, Digital Media, Newsletters - Other. Winners will be announced before November 1.



3. Members and Relatives

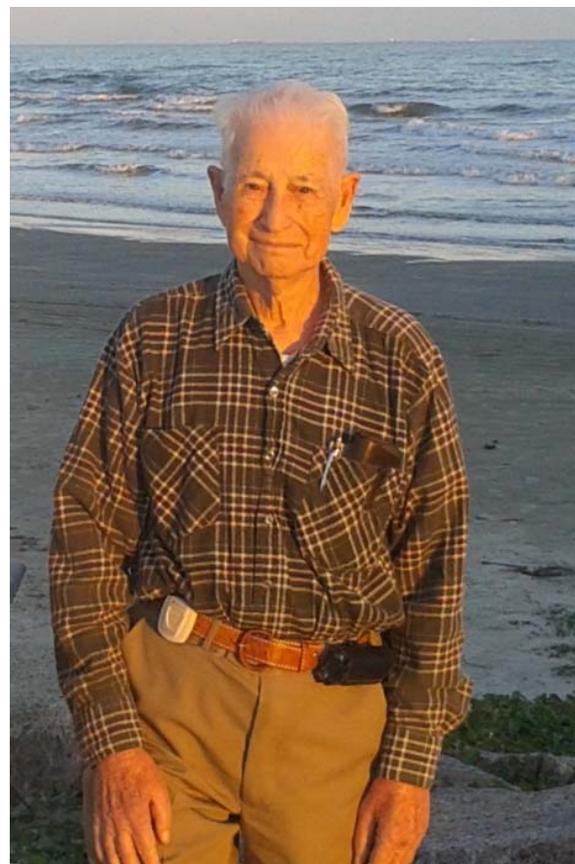
a. Ken Soderland, Pilot, 2/45-5/46

Earlier this year, Thirsty 13th pilot Ken Soderland got up from a chair but his foot was asleep, and he broke it. It became infected, and is not responding to antibiotics. On August 25 I learned he will be moving to hospice. Ken is 93, born November 4 (the same as my birth date), 1922. He is pictured above in 1944, then at Dulag in 1945, and at Clark Air Base in 1946 – 70 years ago.

Ken is one of the top contributors of stories to the Thirsty 13th book, writing extensively about Biak and the Philippines. The book on page 559 notes his many contributions. The last two quotes in the book are his, and he has provided many helpful answers since then.

Every Thirsty 13th member has been special to me, but Ken has been one of my favorites. I first met him October 26, 2009, south of Houston. In July 2010 we met in Chicago and went to the Oshkosh air show, where they had many DC-3s. We visited together several times after I moved to Dallas. He is shown here November 19, 2014, when we drove from Houston to Galveston.

Ken is **One of the Greatest of The Greatest Generation.** Please keep him and his family in your prayers.

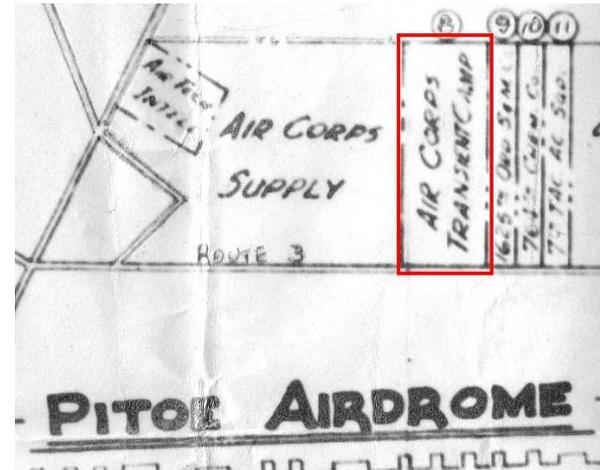


b. New Member Families

Since the last newsletter we added two new member-families, of: J.N. Brown, and Harry Donovan. I sent out 13 books, and the number remaining at August 25 was 371.

4. Corrections

In the last newsletter the daughter, Linda, of pilot Schneider shared a diagram of the airfield at Morotai, halfway between the 13th TCS camp at Biak and the Philippines. The sketch had an area defined for the “13th Air Force,” and I concluded this is where our air crews would spend the night if not on the airplane. While re-reading the letter, I zoomed in on the sketch, and noticed, at right, an area north of the field defined as “Air Corps Transient Camp.” This may instead be where air crew members stayed when not on the airplane.



Also, the July newsletter stated that the VFW in New Albany, Miss., provided background on William H. Caldwell, who died overseas in 1945, and has his name engraved on a monument here, but the documents came from Mike Bennett of the New Albany Veteran’s Administration.

5. Appreciation

Shortly after emailing the July newsletter, and reflecting on how fortunate we were that Max Schneider retained so many wonderful photos and items (including dozens more not included in the newsletter), which his daughter Linda allowed me to scan and share, it occurred to me I wish I had given more thanks also to Linda’s friend, Patrick Aguilar, who, after she mentioned her dad had been in the squadron, researched it, bought her the book as a present, and put us in touch. He is pictured at right, with me, and essentially all of the Thirsty 13th family, “leaning on” him, which we did for his help in connecting us with Linda. Thank you again, Patrick!

To the contributors this month: Greg Moyer, John T. Coker, Jr. and his son Bruce, Randall Brown, Carol Clunie, Hugues Jurion and Jean-Paul Mugnier, and Carl Soderland, for yet more items which help us all learn more about our loved ones, we also say a big THANK YOU!

We thank Ken Soderland again for his wonderful, extensive writings, and with a heavy heart wish you the best, Ken, at this difficult time.

Thank you for your interest in the Thirsty 13th.

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