WINGS



News

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Fred Kaplan Editor

Future Field Trips

Space Shuttle at the California Science Center in Exposition Park! September 6 2014
Chino Air Museum
Point Mugu Naval Air Station
Robinson Helicopter Torrance
Space X Torrance
USS Iowa San Pedro

Richard Raskoff

Profile

LaVere Grateful, Sad About Close Call

Mike LaVere, an Air Force veteran of 36 combat missions, almost didn't make any of them. Having failed an altitude decompression test, he was separated from his group who left for training in Arizona. Of the 32 air cadets who left for Kingman, Ariz. in 1943, 28 of them were killed when a train crashed into the bus that was taking them to the night gunnery practice range.

That was just one close call. The other was when tracer bullets exploded into one of his squadron's planes because of an error by a waist gunner during preparations for a bombing mission at his airbase in England.

It seems, however, that Mike has always been lucky. During delivery of gasoline to Patton's army following the D-Day invasion his B-24 which was heavily overloaded slid off the end of the runway during landing in France. Fortunately there was no explosion. He has received several medals, including the French Legion of Honor and the Air Medal with three oak leaf clusters.

He was recently honored as the Hero of the Game by the Los Angeles Kings. Maybe he threw out the first goaltender for the other side.

LaVere, active for the last five years with Wings over Wendy's after first meeting Fred Blechman when the group was formed in 2002, is that smiling guy who sits up front and is often wearing his World War 11 uniform.

Mike, who will be 90 on March 14 next year, enlisted in the Army Air Corps (that's what it was called in those days) while he was in high school in Brooklyn. When he turned 18 he was called up and after receiving his wings as an aerial navigator was assigned to active duty in England and served with the 8th Air Force in a B-24 bomber group. He was discharged as a 1st Lieutenant.

Back in civilian life, he launched into a 33-year career with Hughes Aircraft. His hobby is computers, video photography, editing and audio recording. College educated, he attended Brooklyn College and the University of Miami after his service.

His wife, Boots, often comes to meetings, and they will be celebrating their 65th anniversary. He's really a modest guy and

doesn't want to run the meetings He's happy serving on the treasury committee with Leon Waldman and Howard Swerdlick.

"I just like to help," says Mike. We all agree he does a great job doing it.

Ray Rosenbaum

Profile Dancing with the Stars

I kept glancing across the dining room looking for Bud and Gil. I saw Gil. I decided to interview him for the next newsletter. But I was still concerned about Bud's wife and how she was doing after her operation.

The raffle was over and I was looking forward to Ed's lecture about his trip to the islands in the Pacific that the Marines and Air Corps used during WWII. He was enthusiastic and informative about his travels to these islands.

After the meeting everybody began sharing their interests, concerns or their reaction to Ed's speech. I informed Ed about my observations in 1947 of how the native Okinawa's visualized the Pacific and their travels to South America especially Brazil and Peru since the early 1920s. Our Okinawan cleaning lady, who spoke perfect Spanish, like dozens of others, spelled out how the natives of all the Pacific islands traveled freely among this immense ocean. To them the ocean currents were like the 405 or the 101 or the 118 freeways.

I spotted Gil by the exit eating a snack while waiting for his wife to pick him up. Finally I can write about another WWII airman. Gil Rendon was a radio operator stationed with the 15th Air Force and flew 50 missions. But his personal battle when he was inducted was convincing those in command that he wanted Air Corps flight training.

I guess it was during basic training in Utah that he began his quest. He asked the 1st sergeant for a meeting with the company commander. With only a third grade education from the schools in San Antonio, Texas, Gil was denied any Air Corps training opportunities. But this determined youth went back to the 1st sergeant and asked for a second meeting with the company commander.

"You again! I told you no because of your lack of education." was the First Lt's reply.

"Did you learn how to drive when you were born? I want to fly." He sold the commander.

This 19 year old was asked to return at 10:00 a.m. the next morning to take a battery of tests. It took Gil four hours to finish them.

In four days he returned to the orderly room. The First Lt surprised him by saying how well he did. His highest score was in Communications. He got 95%. So Gil soon found himself in Bellville, I'm. Going to radio school.

After the war, his first job was helping his father in Westwood as a shoe repairman.

Within three years Gil decided to apply at North American Aviation by the airport as a radio installer for the F86s. Soon there was an opening for bolt degreasers at \$1.63 an hour. In nine months he was the lead man for the section coating parts at \$2.10 an hour. Because of his strong work ethic, he became supervisor of processing all the parts used by the F86s.

At Rocketdyne in Canoga Park, Gil became an expeditor for parts used by the F1 engine. He traveled to companies in and out of state and enjoyed being involved in space activities.

Gil was happily married to June, his first wife for 45 years, until her death. They danced swing and ballroom in many dance venues in Southern California. Other dancers would form a ring around them as they danced. They had talent and joy in their dancing. Gil and his wife won 40 exhibitions and contests. Now he has continued dancing the swing of the 1940's with Ursula, his second wife. After their recognition in the dance venues in Las Vegas, Gil and Ursula are sought after by casinos as dancers who can occupy center stage.

"I'll see you," he remarked as he left to meet Ursula who had come to take him home.

Ed Moreno Reporter

Wings Over Wendy's Staff

Art Sherman--Fearless Leader Howard Swerdlick, Mike La Vere, Leon Waldman Finance Committee

Shirley Andrews, Karen Vegtel, Alice Stone Ellie Harrison, and Boots La Vere --Sunshine Committee Neil Baliber --Publisher

Neil Baliber --Publisher
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Richard Raskoff --Travel Committee
Howard Swerdlick --Shirts & Hats
Fred Kaplan & Neil Baliber Parade Committee
Art Sherman --Veterans Museum
And last but most important Ron & Diane Ross -Owners & operators of Wendy's Platt Ave.

We are very sorry to report that we have lost a national hero and honored member of W. O. W. Clyde East passed peacefully in his sleep on July 29, 2014

"Conversations with Heroes"

On June 21st, 2014, 3 of our members visited the library in Studio City to tell their experiences during World War II, to a full house of 69 adults and kids, Barney Leone, Lee Leveton, and Mike La Vere spun tales that thrilled the enthusiastic audience. As Barney spoke he and Mike La Vere, held up the flag that flew on Barney's ship during the Iwo Jima campaign. Lee took the audience on a B-26 mission over France with his tales and mike finished his navigation stories of directing his B-17 during combat missions over Europe.

After the tales were told the audience asked questions and one kid flabbergasted Barney with his question "what is a Kamikaze", that question expressed how little WWII history is being taught in the schools today. This proves the need for "Conversations with Heroes to libraries and and schools today so at least some kids will learn about what we did during WWII.

p.s. We can expose your tales to kids and adults if you will volunteer to speak at the San Fernando Museum which we will be a part of in the fall of 2014.



Barney Leone & Mike La Vere display the flag that flew on Barney's fuel tanker during the battle for Okinawa

Submissions to Wings News no later than the last Wednesday of the month!





