

# HACKETT LARSON POST 163



VOLUME 7 APRIL 2013

## DON CRADDOCK ~ ONE LUCKY BASTARD

Don and Betty Jane Craddock grew up in Pueblo, CO. She lived on the North side and he lived on the East side of town. They met in high school at the age of 16 and the rest of their love story is history. They graduated high school in 1942 only a few months after Pearl Harbor.

After high school, Don joined the Army Air Corps Reserve and enrolled in college. Six months later, he was called up for active duty and pilot training. When he was called up he asked Betty to marry him, but she declined, wishing to graduate from college before tying the knot.

Don went straight to boot camp at Jefferson Barracks in Missouri. During the battery of tests given at boot camp, Don was singled out for pilot training. Following boot camp, he traveled with fellow future pilots to Morehead Teacher's College in Minnesota.

This was the beginning of WWII and America was just ramping up, so all the arrangements for the mass training of pilots was hasty. Don says the young Army Air Corps recruits literally sat on their duffle bags outside the dormitory while the women in the dorms at Morehead were hastily moved out and sent to live in private homes so that the military could take over the dormitory for the pilot train-



Don in his flight suit.

ees. His eyes twinkle as Don describes, "When my roommate and I got into the dorm room, there was still a brassiere hanging over a line." Barely eighteen years old at the time, he says, "You can imagine how that thrilled two young men."

Don's memories of Morehead, MN are fond. "There were lots of beautiful girls at Morehead College," he says, "And those wonderful Norwegian housewives fed us pilots well."

During his pilot training, Don's first experience of flying a plane was in an open cockpit biplane. There were two seats; instructor in front and student in back. He found it exhilarating. That was the beginning of Don's love affair with flying and eight-

een months of pilot training to become a future B-17 pilot member of the "Lucky Bastards" Club.

After some training at Morehead, MN, he shipped out to Merced, CA for more pilot experience. Then Don was sent to Langley, VA where he would get his first experience in a B-17G, the Flying Fortress. Along each stop of the way, he asked Betty to marry him. This was the last stop in over a year of training.

Betty Jane had a change of heart about delaying their marriage. Don returned for a liberty leave to receive a telegram that Betty and her parents would be arriving in a few days for a wedding. That was three weeks be-



B.J. and Don on their wedding day.

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*A preserved B17G similar to the "Embraceable You" flown by Don Craddock*

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fore he would leave for England to begin his career as a bomber pilot.

Keep in mind, this was the middle of WWII now, there was rationing of everything. Betty had to borrow coupons to purchase her new leather shoes and a dress. She and her parents had to travel from Colorado to Virginia by train. Despite some setbacks, including the baggage car being decoupled from the train; and the minister who left on a fishing trip, Betty and her parents arrived safely and the wedding took place in Shell Island Lutheran Chapel near the Air Force base. They were married on July 18, 1944 just two days before Betty Jane's birthday. An Air Force chaplain performed the ceremony with the crew of Don's plane as wedding guests.

Don and his crew flew their brand new B-17 to England. They took off from Langley and flew to Bangor, ME. From there it was on to Goose Bay Labrador. It was there that Don had to get a new navigator. "The damn navigator couldn't find the field." Don says, "So I got on the radio and called the airport and told them we were

lost." Fortunately the Canadians were able to pick up the plane on the radar and give them a bearing. "When we landed," Don recalls, "the base commander sent a jeep out to pick up our so-called naviga-

tor, and that was the last we ever saw of him."

With a new navigator assigned to the crew, they flew to Reykjavik, Iceland. At this point in the story, Betty interjected, "The town was empty when they landed because they were all hiding and protecting their women. These fly boys," she nods toward her husband, "had a real reputation." The last leg of the trip was to Wales where they left their planes with another flight crew. Don's crew traveled by train and bus to Framingham, England where they were assigned to their new B17G.

It was the custom during WWII for captains to name their plane. Don named the plane "Embraceable You", after their favorite song. "And," Betty Jane adds, "it had a picture of me on the tail." Under the picture was Don's nick name for his wife, "Janie".

The bombing missions were usually a group of thirty-six B-17s. In the early missions the fighter planes that were with them, could only accompany the bombers part way as they had a much shorter range of flight. On one mission that included multiple squadrons of planes, Don witnessed the en-

tire lead squadron of twelve B-17s shot out of the sky by the anti-aircraft guns.

"That's ten to twelve crew members on each plane," he reminded me. On the later missions they were accompanied by the fierce, maneuverable and fast P-51 Mustangs fighter planes which provided more protection from the German fighter planes, but not from the flack.

The B-17 G held thirteen Browning .50 caliber machine guns. Chin, dorsal, ventral, and tail turrets each mounted a pair of guns. Left- and right- side guns in the cheeks and waist added 4 more. And a single, rear-firing gun on the top of the fuselage made 13.

The most distinctive thing about the B-17G was the "chin"



*The chin turret of the B-17G and the left cheek gun. The powered chin turret, operated by the bombardier, greatly improved the B-17's forward defenses.*

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Don (left -front row ) with some of the crew of "Embraceable You" the plane that had Betty Jane's picture on it.

was necessary to fly low and steady over the target so the bombardier could site the target. After the bombs were dropped the pilot could go higher and fly an evasive pattern to avoid the flack.

Don flew thirty-five missions over Germany. At that time, the average number of flights for a B-17 pilot was six missions before being shot down. During his missions, Don's targets were bridges, munitions factories, and rail roads. The final few missions were over Berlin to finally end the war.

At the end of the war, he was awarded a certificate for the "Lucky Bastards Club". "And I was a lucky bastard," Don smiles at the memory.

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turret, sticking out below the nose. It looks like an after-thought, and it was. But the two machine guns there addressed the B-17's earlier vulnerability. The B17G was the first Boeing airplane with the distinctive tail for improved control and stability during high-altitude bombing. It also sported the Norden bomb site that insured more accurate drops.

However, the crew of ten men was at the mercy of the heavy flack that was thrown up over Germany by the anti-aircraft guns. In order for the bombardier to drop the bombs on the appropriate target, it

**Diploma**  
390th BOMB GROUP

This is to Certify that D.R. Craddock a member of "MOLLER'S MAULERS" BOMBING COLLEGE HAS SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED HIS TOUR OF OPERATIONS AGAINST HITLER'S HOT SHOTS AND IS NOW ELIGIBLE TO RETURN TO GOD'S COUNTRY (THE LUCKY BASTARD)

*Missions Completed*

1. 25 Sep 44 Andingshaf	13. 30 Nov 44 Morseburg	25. 23 Feb 45 Trenchlin
2. 27 Sep 44 Mainz	14. 11 Dec 44 Koblenz	26. 27 Feb 45 Leipzig
3. 2 Oct 44 Kassel	15. 12 Dec 44 Mainz	27. 26 Feb 45 Berlin
4. 6 Oct 44 Munster	16. 24 Dec 44 Zell/Hans	28. 28 Feb 45 Kassel
5. 12 Oct 44 Bremen	17. 28 Dec 44 Koblenz	29. 8 Mar 45 Langen
6. 15 Oct 44 Kolln	18. 3 Jan 45 Fulda	30. 11 Mar 45 Hamburg
7. 17 Oct 44 Kolln	19. 5 Jan 45 Frankfurt	31. 14 Mar 45 Hanover
8. 19 Oct 44 Mannheim	20. 14 Jan 45 Derben	32. 15 Mar 45 Berlin
9. 28 Oct 44 Hamm	21. 1 Feb 45 Wesel	33. 21 Mar 45 Yorden
10. 30 Oct 44 Sertic	22. 3 Feb 45 Berlin	34. 22 Mar 45 Munster
11. 9 Nov 44 Saarbrücken	23. 6 Feb 45 Chemnitz	35. 23 Mar 45 Schweite-
12. 6 Nov 44 Neuhausen	24. 15 Feb 45 Cottbus	Holtzwickede

PROFESSOR OF BOMBING  
DEAN OF FORMATION

**CHRIS BILLMYER  
UPDATE**



*Chris went to New York for training with his new service dog, Odin.*

Remember Chris Billmyer, nephew of Steve and Bobbi Billmyer?

Chris was wounded in an IED explosion during his second tour of duty in Afghanistan in 2010. After many surgeries and physical therapy, Chris is now self sufficient and he has a new friend, Odin, his service dog.

Service dogs for those in wheel chairs, are helpful in opening doors or picking up dropped keys. Some are even trained to help their partner into and out of the wheelchair, and they help their partner rise from the floor if he falls.

**A Salute to Volunteers**

The number of troops in Iraq and Afghanistan have dwindled significantly. This month we have only one name on our list, Sgt. Anthony Livano. Livano is the son-in-law of Lori Brown who works at Islander's Bank

However, our care package program will continue until there are no more service men in war zones.

**Virgil Hennen** (right)



seen here with Councilman Bob Jarman has been helping regularly with troop collections for over six years.

Virgil, a Korean War veteran took some time off from helping when his wife had surgery. Otherwise he is there from 10—12 the first Saturday of every month when we collect for our troop boxes.

Thank you for your service, Virgil! And, thank you for your continued service.

Another regular troop collection volunteer is **Kay Kohler**. Kay always takes the 4:00 PM to 6:00 PM shift for troop collection. That is the hardest shift to fill and she

often has to work alone as that's the time that people start fixing dinner. Thanks Kay!



Our Legion Auxiliary depends on volunteers and it is nice to have great volunteers who help keep our programs going.

New volunteers are important too. **Jennifer and Katie Heeb** volunteered last month to help with troop collection last month and had a great time.

If you haven't volunteered lately, try it, you'll like it?

On the next page, you'll find many volunteer opportunities.



## VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

*As spring arrives so do lots of service opportunities for our members of all three branches of Post 163. Please look over the list of options for volunteering or contributing and see how you can become involved.*

### **APRIL TROOP CARE PACKAGE COLLECTIONS**

*We have a monthly collection table for food and comfort items and money to help purchase items to send to our troops overseas. The next collection date is Saturday, April 6. The shifts are 2 hours long to stand or sit by the table. If you would like to help, Call Minnie Knych @ 378-7040.*



### **MAKING OF AMERICA SEMINAR ~ April 18**

Is the Constitution outdated and unnecessary? Or is it more important than ever? How can you defend it if you don't know it? Plan to attend the Making of America seminar on April 18 sponsored by the American Legion Auxiliary and find out.

Volunteers are needed to help with preparation, serving and clean up of lunch or to provide cookies for the lunch dessert. **Volunteers who help out can attend the workshop for free.** Call Minnie Knych at 378-7040 if you would like to attend or volunteer.

### **POPPY DAYS**

**MAY 18-19 & MAY 25-26**

Poppy Days are coming soon. This year's Poppy chair Marie Skuffeeda needs an army of volunteers to sit at our Poppy table in two hour shifts. Can you give two hours of your time to help raise money that is used to assist veterans and their families in need?

If you would like to help call Marie at 298-0470.



### **MEMORIAL DAY CEREMONY**

The Memorial Day ceremony will take place at Memorial Park on Memorial Day, Monday, May 27, 2013. We need American Legion Auxiliary members to march from the Legion building to Memorial Park on that day. If you can march call Marlene Crosby at 378-2858. We will meet in front for Post 163 at 9:00 AM to form up for the march down to Memorial Park.

Marching uniform is a blue jacket & pants, with white shirt. Legion Auxiliary provides the hat and a red, white and blue scarf.

If you are no longer able to march, please return your hat and scarf so that others can use them.



### **LEGION AUXILIARY ELECTIONS**

At the April Legion Auxiliary meeting we will nominate officers for the board. Legion Auxiliary officers serve a one year term from June—May. Can you step up and volunteer your time and talent?

See a list of offices on the back page of this newsletter and call Minnie Knych if you would like to volunteer to serve.



### **TEAM TRIVIA REMINDER**

Next Team Trivia game is Tuesday, April 2.

Team Trivia will take place at Post 163 on the first Tuesday of the month at 6:00PM

**This month there will not be a dinner served before the game, so plan accordingly.** You can bring your own dinner or plan to eat afterward.



The Know It Knots were the winning team last month. Who will win drink chips and Just Desserts in April?

**AMERICAN LEGION**

**Commander** ~ Shannon Plummer ~ 317-5256 ~  
[toenees@rockisland.com](mailto:toenees@rockisland.com)  
**1st Vice Cdr.** ~ Chuck Harwood~378-1044~ [thechazman55@yahoo.com](mailto:thechazman55@yahoo.com)  
**2nd Vice Cdr.**~ Daven Holzer ~ 360-840-8434  
**Adjutant** Curt VanHyning ~[cvanhyning@gmail.com](mailto:cvanhyning@gmail.com) ~ 370-5012  
**Service Officer** ~ Peter DeLorenzi ~ 298-1940 ~  
[twobears@rockisland.com](mailto:twobears@rockisland.com)  
**Finance Officer & Judge Advocate** ~ Wes Benstine 378-3839. [wbenstine@yahoo.com](mailto:wbenstine@yahoo.com)  
**Historian** ~Jim Glover ~[jimbopawn@rockisland.com](mailto:jimbopawn@rockisland.com)~ 378-8776  
**Chaplain** ~ George Iliff ~ 378-0807 ~ [iliff@u.washington.ed](mailto:iliff@u.washington.ed)  
**Sgt. At Arms** ~ David Lumsden ~ 298-4046



**AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY**

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 2nd VP Marie Skuffeeda ~ 298-0470  
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 Sgt.At Arms: Minnie Knych [knych@rockisland.com](mailto:knych@rockisland.com) 378-4662



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 378-4662

~For God and country ~

**SONS OF AMERICAN LEGION**



**Squadron Commander:** Rob "Bubba" Walters – 378-8451  
 ~ [chinooky@centurytel.net](mailto:chinooky@centurytel.net)  
**Vice Commander:** Don Shuff 231-920-2987  
**2nd Vice Commander:** Doug Brow 378-3868 [brow-zer@centurytel.net](mailto:brow-zer@centurytel.net)  
**Adjutant & Finance Officer:** Randy Lindsey – 378-5874~  
[rudykris@windjammercable.net](mailto:rudykris@windjammercable.net)  
**Sgt. At Arms:** Jeff Gull – 472-0627  
**Chaplain:** Norm Hanson ~ 378-1185 ~ [nlhanson@centurytel.net](mailto:nlhanson@centurytel.net)  
**Historian:** Mike Scott ~ [minkon@gmail.com](mailto:minkon@gmail.com)

# APRIL 2013

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1	2 Team Trivia 6PM	3	4	5	6 Troop care package collection
7 Cribbage Tournament 1PM Karaoke 6:00PM	8	9	10	11	12	13
14 Cribbage Tournament 1PM Karaoke 6:00PM	15	16	17	18 MAKING OF AMERICA CLASS ALL DAY	19	20
21 Cribbage Tournament 1PM Karaoke 6:00PM	22	23	24	25	26	27
28 Cribbage Tournament 1PM Karaoke 6:00PM	29	30				