



MEMORIES OF GENERAL LeMAY, IRA MATTHEWS & FATHER BARTHOLOMEW ADLER

Editor's Note: This is a departure in content from previous issues of MEMORIES. It seems appropriate, however, that we gather together our memories of three of our good members whom we lost in 1990. In the last Newsletter, members were invited to send in their contributions, and these have been gathered in this MEMORIES issue.

Newspaper columnist, Bob Greene, wrote, a few years ago, about a meeting he had with his high school gang--the ABCDJ club, standing for Al, Bob, Chuck, Dan and Jack. He wrote as they broke up: "We stood in the bar of the hotel, and we said goodbye. We shook hands. There was something in the air; something fragile and precious. I know that men aren't supposed to confess that they love each other, but I don't know what else you'd call it."

This encapsulates the purpose of this issue of MEMORIES.

General Curtis E. LeMay

A vignette from Carmon R. Strobel about LeMay

The memory of General LeMay that I have happened on Tinian Island.

I was hitching a ride from the flight line back to our area when I saw this jeep coming with a banner with a general's stars on it. I gave a hand salute and when the jeep stopped, I realized who it was. He said, "Hop in, Sergeant." We hadn't gone very far when he stopped and picked up two second lieutenants. When we got to our area, we all got out. I saluted and started to walk away when he called out to me to wait. He then called out to the two officers who were walking away without saluting. He told them to come to attention. He then ordered them back to the jeep. He "chewed" them out, asking why a sergeant could salute, but why they didn't feel it was necessary? They were shaking in their shoes. After he dismissed them, he turned to me and said, "I hate myself for doing this, but some of these -- -- officers think they are hot stuff." This may seem trivial, but when I talked with him, he seemed so kind and honest. Just like his standing orders which said, "I'm not over here to ferry gas back and forth to Japan--we're here to carry bombs and get this war over."

A story about LeMay Reed Sass loved to tell

(Editor's note: Reed Sass (deceased) was Historical Officer for the XX Bomber Command during the time the Command was headquartered in Kharagpur. Reed enjoyed telling this story although he could never confirm whether or not it was true. Reed was an honorary member of the 40th.)

One time General LeMay was invited to a party given by a British officer in Calcutta. Many of the British had their wives with them in India, and LeMay was seated next to one of them at dinner. As dinner was finishing, the British lady said to LeMay, "General, I have tried to engage you in conversation all evening. I have tried to talk with you on a variety of subjects, but seem unable to find anything you are interested in. General, what are you interested in?" To this, LeMay is supposed to have responded, "Madam, I am interested in getting more bombs on the target."

Bill Rooney remembers his first encounter with LeMay

This happened up at A-1. LeMay had been appointed CO of the XX Bomber Command August 29 so it had to be at the time he flew the mission to Anshan with Cornett on September 10. We were down at the briefing and interrogation rooms on the line trying to get ready for the mission. LeMay's aide had driven him down to the line in his jeep and had driven the jeep into the center of the U that the three S-2 buildings formed. The aide was in one of the buildings looking for someone the General wanted to speak to. Meanwhile, the General sat in the jeep smoking his pipe. At that moment I came out of the briefing-room door and caught the General in mid-motion putting his pipe in his mouth or taking it out. Scared spitless at seeing a two-star general right in front of me, my brains scattered for an instant, but then I got them together enough to realize what I should do was salute, which I did. How did the General handle this moment with his right hand occupied with his pipe? He saluted me with his left hand.

E.W. "Scoop" Martin has an unexpected meeting with LeMay

On one occasion in SAC, it was announced that LeMay would make an inspection trip to Fairchild AFB. It think it was in 1946. Everything was in an uproar. We spruced up the place. Officers were in their best dress uniforms. Linemen were in clean coveralls.

The great day arrived. The officers assembled at the Security Gate. They waited and waited for the general, but he didn't show. I was the only one left in the Maintenance Control office. I heard someone coming up the steps, and General LeMay appeared. I jumped to attention, and he gave me the "at ease" signal. Then he looked at the status board which showed three planes out of commission AOCB (Aircraft out of commission for parts). He said, "Sergeant, is this Status Board up to date?" I said, "Yes sir, as we reported it to SAC this morning." Then the General asked me, "Sergeant, do you do much cannibalizing?" I answered, "Only when necessary." The General grinned and said that the parts situation is critical and will get worse until we get new jet aircraft. Then he thanked me and said, "Sergeant, keep up your work."

The General then went to the Security Gate and surprised the officers gathered there. To this day we don't know how he got past Security.

Bob Hilton recalls a visit with LeMay

When it was decided at the Arlington reunion that the next one would be held in Anaheim, Bobby Shanks suggested that, inasmuch as LeMay lived in nearby Newport Beach, it would be a great idea to invite LeMay to the Anaheim reunion. (We had heard that LeMay was in constant receipt of invitations to attend such functions and, because of this, turned them all down.) Bobby was nevertheless determined.

I had access to a corporate plane and planned to make a trip to California. As part of that trip I intended to visit with the California reunion committee. Bobby thought it would be a great idea to visit with LeMay and to extend an invitation to our reunion in person. Accordingly, he wrote LeMay, told him about the Association and asked him if we could visit with him. Bobby subsequently received a note from LeMay saying that he would receive us. Bobby and Letha, along with Cleo, my wife, and I flew out to California. Ferrell Majors and his wife, Marion, came over from Fullerton.

The LeMays received us in their home and were very gracious. We spent the better part of an afternoon with them. LeMay was up to the task of making us feel at ease and told us many stories of his career. LeMay expressed both concern and sympathy to Bobby and Ferrell about their POW experiences. I was particularly pleased with LeMay's references to, and appreciation for, the work of the photo recon crews. Of course we all know LeMay did attend our Anaheim reunion. For this, a large assist goes to Jack Ledford.

Amusingly, my only previous direct contact with LeMay had been in China following a recon mission. After the debriefing and "medicinals," I decided to walk to the hostel area-quite a long walk, if my memory is accurate. In any event, as I stumbled along, a jeep came by, stopped, and a gruff voice asked if I'd like a ride. It was only after I piled into the rear of the jeep that I realized the occupant of the right front seat had stars on his collar. Needless to say, it was a sobering experience. I did manage to answer yes, sir, and no, sir to his questions and exited the jeep as quickly as possible when we reached the hostel area.

Father Bartholomew Adler

Bill Rooney remembers "A Catholic chaplain named Adler"

The words in quotes above are from page 219 of the book "In Search of History" by Theodore H. White. Reading those words in 1980 made me determined to again try to locate Fr. Adler after all of these years. We had been friends, but became closer when we traveled on the troop ship from Norfolk to Bombay. When I went to China as a part of the forward area contingent, I had an extra bunk in my hostel room, and Father Adler was my roommate when he came up for the missions.

On page 220, White wrote, 'I went to the end of the runway to see if the planes could clear with their heavy lift and found Chaplain Adler there. As the planes one by one rumbled by and the pilots squeezed aloft, he would chant aloud from his prayer book as if trying to give the wings just an extra bit of lift in Christ's name, amen.'

This time, my effort to locate Fr. Adler was infinitely simpler and more successful. I called some religious office in Chicago, and the priest who answered said, "Sure, I can find him, living or deceased. There is a directory of all priests in the U.S., and I have it right here...Yes, there is a Bartholomew Adler in the Passionist Monastery in Los Angeles."

From that bit of good fortune, I found Fr. Adler, and we corresponded until he advised me that he would be celebrating his 40th anniversary as a priest at a church in Chicago that spring. Would Roberta and I like to attend. There we met again for the first time in 35 years. At the reception following mass, I told Fr. Adler how meaningful it would be for us if he would attend the 40th reunion in New Orleans. It turned out that he could come.

We remained friends in those ten intervening years, and we were talking on the telephone in 1990 when he mentioned that he was celebrating his 50th anniversary of ordination in St. Louis later that year. Roberta and I were going to be in St. Louis at that time so we were invited to the reception held in Fr. Adler's honor. Thus I had the good fortune to attend both his 40th and 50th anniversaries, and I had the honor of knowing a very special man.

A priceless one-liner remembered by Tom Friedman

On September 11, 1943, Bill Renfro and his crew in #26222 were returning from Hsinching to Chakulia. They arrived over Chakulia and on the downwind leg of the landing pattern at about two thousand feet with gear down, all four engines quit. They had run out of gas. Renfro managed to get the gear up with battery power and came in for a perfect belly landing in the dirt. Father Adler came out to the crash site--as he did on the occasion of every accident. As he drove up, co-pilot Bob Conley said to him, "Howdy Father. We've just been talking to your boss."

Norman Larsen remembers Father Adler "then and now"

After returning from a bombing mission one day, I was standing on the mission whisky line with my friend and bombardier Jim McGivern, a staunch Roman Catholic. I said to him: "Mac, you Romans really get me. Before the mission you are all down on your knees praying like crazy. But when we get back, you head right for the free shot of booze, and I don't see any of you kneeling down and saying thanks." Mac repeated what I had said to Father Adler who laughed and said: "Jim, tell your navigator that as each plane lands safely, I say a fervent thank-you prayer to our Lord."

I was reminded of this deep regard that Father had for all of us in the 40th Group by something that happened last year. Father Adler wrote me a letter dated June 20, 1990 in which he said that he had read in MEMORIES the story that I had written about my experiences as a POW at Rangoon, Burma. He asked if it would be OK if he referred to this article in the talk he was scheduled to give at the reunion to be held at the end of October in Tucson. I was deeply moved by the fact that our Padre was so concerned about the homily that he would give at the reunion that he was preparing his remarks so many months in advance.

Marin County, CA will always remember Fr. Adler as Jim O'Keefe reports

Father Adler touched the lives of many people, and most of them have never forgotten him.

In the years following WW II, the Church assigned Fr. Adler to Marin County where he served several parishes. He left Marin many years ago, but when he passed away, a notice of his death and a story about him was placed in the Marin paper.

When I proposed a Memorial Plaque for the College of Marin, I suggested that the plaque contain the same inscription (from Sirach) which Father Adler had used on the 40th Memorial Plaque. I told the college administration about him and pointed out that he was well known to many in Marin County. It is likely that relatives and friends of some of the men whom the plaque honors knew Father Adler. Without hesitation, the Administration accepted the words from Sirach. (The quote from the biblical Book of Sirach which Fr. Adler suggested reads: "Their bodies are peacefully laid away, but their names live on and on.")

At the dedication ceremony on November 13, 1990, I was asked to say a few words. I quoted from Father Adler's last letter to me. In it he had praised me and those who had supported the plaque for seeing the project through to completion. When I'm on the campus, I now and then stop and stand before the memorial plaque. I feel that Father Adler is standing there with me.

Fr. Adler used "friendly persuasion" in many ways. Scoop Martin knew.

We always called Fr. Adler "Padre." I think he liked that. In Chakulia the line personnel saw him almost daily. Padre didn't like the paintings on the aircraft, and he made his opinion known. He said, "Those paintings won't win the war." In fact, he protested so much that he was responsible for one painting getting touch up with some clothes being painted on some voluptuous body.

Father Adler's classmate Fr. John Cyril said this in his eulogy

...To top it all off, the Lord plucked Bart off a golf course after two good holes and in laughter. Without a moan or groan, he took off. The lesson is, of course, that if you are going to die on a golf course, have a Priest there to absolve you as you go. It's a nice getaway if you're going with the Lord. Of all the classy things that Bart did, this takes the cake and is better than he planned or dreamed of. The dear Lord was truly merciful to him!

Father Bartholomew was a good story teller. He came back (from the war) with many varied experiences of his war years. He could embellish a dull event and make it interesting and even exciting. His wit and sense of humor were a part of him, and he developed these qualities. I would not be surprised if he told St. Peter about the nice drive he had on the third hole.

Don Starkey remembers Fr. Adler's poker victory

I will never forget a time in India in the Officers' club when Father Adler played poker with some of the boys one night and just couldn't help but win (perhaps with some of the officers' help, if you know what I mean). It seems to me he won some considerable amount, perhaps \$2-300. He tried to give it back at the end of the session. Of course, the officers would have nothing of it. The following week, all kind of small furnishing items appeared throughout the club where he had spent the money for the "good of the base personnel." He was a great guy, as you know.

Ira V. Matthews

Marshall "Shorty" Norton remembers:

When we were returning from the Omura mission, Ira literally saved the plane and crew of which Mansel Clark was the A/C and Elmo Gray was the Flight Engineer.

Clark's plane was in trouble both because of being attacked by a Jap fighter and because of engine problems. Seeing that the other plane was in trouble, Ira took our plane down to support Clark's plane. First the fighter was driven off when our gunners-as Ira credited them-drove off the Jap fighter shooting off his engine cowling in the process.

Clark's plane was losing altitude. Ira figured that the co-pilot had feathered the wrong prop--#4--after the Engineer had cut the #3 engine fuel off and requested the feathering of #3 prop due to the gushing fuel leak (caused by flak) next to the #3 outboard turbo exhaust. When Ira informed Clark that they had feathered #4 prop instead of #3, Clark figured out the mistake and restarted the #4 engine.

When the fuel leak stopped gushing out of the #3 engine, Alvin Hills, our co-pilot talked Mansel Clark into restarting #3 engine. Ira persuaded them to put just enough fuel back in the #3 fuel tank to keep the engine running. Every time the leak restarted, Ira would warn them. Very soon, Gray marked his fuel gauge and managed to keep all four engines running by using that transfer gauge marking to keep the engine running-without fuel leaking-for the rest of the flight.

Ira caught it from Blanchard and from the XX Bomber Command staff. First, we violated the Bomber Command Tactical Doctrine which had just been published by Gen. LeMay. It said no one was to leave a formation to help a crippled plane. Next he got it for calling the other plane in the clear which was another doctrine violation. Back in India at the mission critique, Ira was subjected to a long and loud verbal blast from Blanchard. Blanchard even threatened court martial.

All of Clark's crew, and ours knew that, without Ira's help, disregarding tactical doctrine, Clark's plane would have had to ditch in the Yellow Sea. In fact, a U.S. submarine cruising in the general area, upon hearing the transmissions between our plane and Clark's, sent out an "in the clear" message giving the sub's coordinates and inviting the plane to ditch near them if they could get to the sub's location.

Typically, whenever he talked about this event, Ira insisted upon crediting everyone for their help, including our gunners Ralph Smole, Sam Winborne, Leo McBride and Delbert Glover. And he pointed out that both Louis Grace and Alvin Hills were deserving of credit. Grace and Hills are among our deceased members as are the members of Mansel Clark's crew who were lost when they were rammed in mid-air by a Jap plane over Japan on 29 May, 1945.

Two stories about "Matty" from Col. James I. Cornett

While stationed at Bourinquen Field, PR, the 40th received new lieutenant pilot graduates periodically. Lt. Ira V. Matthews was one assigned to the 45th Squadron. As a late arrival, he was near the bottom of the totem pole rankwise, but superb junior officer. I recall a flight with him which consisted of air work and hooded instrument activities. I was impressed with his flying ability, but most of all his precise instrument flying. Oscar Schaaf, a classmate of mine, was our Squadron Commander. He outranked me by one day due to age. Over a period of time, I told Oscar that we should check Matty out in the B-18A. His response was that Matty was too junior, and there were others more senior who should get checked out first. In those days seniority had some particular significance. I personally did not consider that rank seniority had a lot to do with flying ability, but Oscar was the boss.

Sometime later, I headed up a flight of three B-18As sent to the Dutch island of Curacao. Our purpose was to conduct secret patrol missions from the Army Air Force base there. Matty was with the flight, but on one of the other crews. En route to Curacao, we landed at San Juan and picked up an Admiral who would be in charge of our operational planning and missions.

Somehow, I found out that the base CO at Curacao could sign off on pilot check-out authorizations. I arranged for a switch of co-pilots to get Matty on my crew. I told Matty he would fly the next patrol mission with me as co-pilot, and we would do some air work on completion of our mission. As I expected, Matty did a super performance and the base CO signed his check-out authorization.

I then sent it to Bourinquen Field for Oscar's information. I understand Oscar blew a fuse and promptly checked out Matty's so-called seniors. (To allay any bad impressions, I must add that Oscar and I were pretty close friends before and subsequently. I was more impetuous, and he was forever trying to keep me out of trouble. In this case, he was more interested in seniority status.

I've been asked about a muddy shoes episode involving Marry. He was my co-pilot while we were operating B-18As out of Coolidge Field, Antigua, BWI. Our mission was to prevent French naval vessels from leaving Fort de France, Martinique. The landing strip and parking ramps were still under construction, and they were a sticky, muddy mess. Keeping shoes clean was a constant chore. The first night we were there, Matty scraped the mud from his shoes and got ready to hit the sack. I instructed him to polish his shoes first. I didn't want any sloppy-appearing officers on my crew. Besides, it degraded from his otherwise sharp dress appearance. Matty complied and continued to do so during the period we operated from Coolidge Field, and ever after that to the best of my knowledge. He had a lasting impression of the muddy shoe situation, and of me, I suppose. In January of 1982, I wrote Matty a letter in which I included a vignette commendation for his attention to military appearance, including shoes, some 40 years earlier.

Memories of Ira and the publication of MEMORIES

It was probably around the time of the Dayton reunion in 1984 that Jim O'Keefe, Ira Matthews and the editor of MEMORIES had a conversation about what has come to be MEMORIES. Col. Cornett had written a piece about the mission he flew to Anshan with LeMay on board (the only B-29 combat mission Washington allowed LeMay to fly). We agreed that something had to be done to preserve stories like this as a part of the history of the 40th. The idea for a format was talked about, and it was at this time that Ira came down hard about content. He insisted that any such publication should not be "brag and boast" stories. Nor should they single out individuals for beatification as heroes. Ira was very positive about the fact that everyone was a hero, and no individual should be distinguished above the rest. After the first issue was published, Ira recorded his approval. On a number of occasions thereafter, he would call the editor and remind him, "Now we don't want any brag and boast stuff, nor do we want to make heroes of these guys. Just tell their stories."

Not long after that, however, calls began coming in from Ira to the MEMORIES editor in which Ira would have a story idea that would salute some heroic act by some combat crew member or pilot. As gently as possible he would be reminded that that was not what we agreed upon as the direction of MEMORIES when we set about their publication. Reluctantly, Ira would agree that that was what we had agreed upon. But that wouldn't be the end of it. Slyly, Ira would attempt to go around the editor by getting in touch with the participants in some adventure in which the person he wished to eulogize had taken part. Ira would get these participants to write the story of heroic act and then would persuade them to submit the story to MEMORIES for publication. Indeed there are any number of these stories in the MEMORIES "futures" file providing useful source material but which are not in the agreed-upon format for telling the 40th's history. All of these stories are treasured for their content, but also for the evidence of Ira's deep caring for the people of the 40th.

Paralleling this is another collection of experiences that revealed Ira's caring for the men of the 40th. It is hard to make such a sweeping statement as this and have it believed, but it is true: Ira knew every single member of the 40th. He knew what they did in the service and what they did in civilian life or what they were doing in retirement. He had a good idea of their financial situation and a sure knowledge of their state of health. Countless times during the course of editing MEMORIES, writing would come to a stall because a name was missing or there was a need to check a fact. A mention of this to Ira would bring his certain memory into play. He would know the answer or would know a member of the crew with whom the fact that could be checked. Together with that information would come word about the crew member and his address. Also, there would be word about how well the guy was doing, what he had been doing in retirement and whatever else would be needed to identify him. It added up to the fact that Ira dearly cared for every 40th member.

Reflecting on Ira Matthews are recorded by Jim O'Keefe

I believe I have a copy of everything Ira Matthews wrote about his days with the 40th. Note that I did not say "War Memories." To be sure, most of his stories did describe combat operations, but among them are many descriptions of places, events and people (above all, "people") in which there is little or no reference to the war.

Ira's feelings for his fellowman come through in his writings. His style was simple, but his words could move you. In one of his last stories, "Missionaries to Untouchables," Ira tells of a stop for water at an isolated mission some miles from Chakulia. Ira and Louie Grace, coming from Midnapore in an open jeep, were feeling the effects of the Indian sun. They were welcomed by the Benefields, an English missionary couple who had been in India for fifty years. Here are some of Ira's words: "...we finished and thanked the Benefields for the water...no bill was proffered, so Louis and I pooled our rupees and handed them to Mrs. Benefield...Louie and I never saw the missionaries again. I have often reflected on the Benefields and their wonderful work for the Untouchables. It is reasonable to assume, the missionary and his wife are buried in that beautiful oasis. Above all, I hope their mission work continues among the Santals."



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