

13 November 1986

Russ Strong
Editor; "306th Echos"

Dear Russ:

Just received my latest issue of the "Echos" and, as always, am thoroughly impressed with the first class job you are doing.

I am sorry I did not attend the Dayton reunion as I see a few 369th names I hate to have missed (Bill Casseday for one). I felt obliged to offer you a thought that I came away with when I attended the Colorado Springs reunion the previous year (my first one).

The organizational actions that went into the planning of that reunion were monumental! My wife and I were totally impressed with the Pikes Peak trip, the dinner and all associated activities. My lasting impression (especially after the remarks from the speaker's platform) left me rather saddened at having attended. I found myself feeling like an outsider! The reason for my feeling stemmed from the fact that I did not start my 306th tour at Wendover; I didn't get knocked down; I didn't get captured; I didn't evade and therefore I (and many more of us, I am sure) were treated as though we were not at the reunion at all! I don't intend this to sound in the "sour grapes" mode, but, after giving much thought to the decision to write to you, I decided I might not be the only one feeling this way. Needless to say, I did not consider attending the Dayton reunion or any future ones.

To make my point a little more understandable I can encapsulate my entire experience in the 306th (369th) in a very few words; I was assigned there in early 1944, flew 34 missions in Satan's Lady; flew squadron and group leads the last 15 or twenty missions and quietly came back home! But, I'm just as proud of my experiences in our group as the early Wendover people and those less fortunate than I during their tour.

Russ, if this does sound like "sour grapes", then ignore it. If not, is there some merit in recognizing (in whatever form is appropriate) the kind of folks I am talking about?
(Oops, ran out of room)

Most sincerely, I am
Earl R. Saunders, 369th Sqd.

30 November 1986

Dear Earl:

In answer to your letter of 13 November, I hope you'll give the 306th reunions another chance.

We've done our bit with the POW's, the evadees, the dedication of memorial plaques, and the like. Each time there is apt to be some group singled out, but that is a small part of the whole thing.

The major function of the reunion is to bring people together who have had a somewhat common experience. Our is that we operated at Thurleigh, with theb flying crews and the ground crews all one part of the whole package. I find it a lot of fun to mingle, to trade stories, to see old friends, etc.

My experience mission-wise was much the same as yours. As a navigator, I flew my missions, one or two leads, worked for six weeks in intelligence and public information, and came home. I see very few people at the reunions that I actually knew at Thurleigh--none of my own crew, one or two 367th navigators, and several pilots. I find that very few remember me from those days. Their memories of me are from prior reunions.

I haven't made them all, but almost all of them. I think I've missed two due to changes of residence and jobs. Now, my wife even enjoys traveling along to them. She complains some about it, but at the same time has a very good time. She's seen part of the country she's never been to before, and this is a bonus. Her big complaint is that I'm too involved.

I do know a lot of the 306th people, but that has all come about through reunions, through researching and writing the history, and my work as secretary. I can truthfully say that I thoroughly enjoy about 98% of the people I see--there are several I can't stand!

The reunion willbbe moving back west in another couple of years, and I hope to see you at one of the gatherings.

All the best to you, and thanks for your nice comments about Ethoes.