The New Whiteman 13th

There is a new 13th Bomb Squadron at Whiteman AFB that promises to be every bit as gung-ho as the de-activated unit at Dyess AFB. The Dyess group invented the phrase "Reaper Pride" and that pride was everywhere evident at Whiteman. As we visited the display the aircraft was already painted "13th Bomb Squadron" on the B-2 gear doors and along the bottom of the doors "Grim Reapers", with an Oscar. Not to leave any detail undone – the wheel chocks were already painted "Grim Reapers".

Although it wasn't planned that way, several of the Association Officers and members arrived at Whiteman at about the same time on Thursday afternoon, 22 September, and coincidently met at the "End of Mission Club" for dinner. Whiteman has an all-ranks club with separate entrances and areas for officers and enlisted. The Association had an excellent turnout for the activation with about 40 members and spouses in attendance – including some from the WW II era.

We were picked up at the Club on Friday and conducted by bus to the hanger for the activation ceremonies. It was a really striking setting for the ceremonies. On the ramp in front of the hanger were examples of four of the 13th's most important aircraft. At the back of the ramp toward the far hanger was a glass nosed B-26 named "Lady Liberty", dressed in 13th colors. In front of the B-26 was a B-25 equipped as a 1942 South Pacific "strafer" with 50 caliber guns in 2 pods on each sides of the fuselage under the cockpit, and 3 guns mounted in the glass nose. In as much as the aircraft of the 3rd Attack Group weren't painted in squadron colors in 1942, the B-25 on the ramp was probably also in correct colors of its day. Diagonally parked and facing the open hanger on the right was the B-1B "8th Chadwick" from Dyess AFB, and mirrored on the opposite side of the ramp was a 13th B-2 aircraft with Mission Commander Lt. Col Bussiere's name on the nose gear door.

Spirit of Missouri on Display

Now the bad news. The audience was seated near mid-hanger facing the stand for the dignitaries and looking out the hanger door toward the ramp. It made a nice view of the aircraft on display but it also made good photos of the ceremony near impossible against the bright back light. The activation at Dyess in 2000 used the same set up for the activation ceremonies but the de-activation at Dyess was made looking into the hanger. Maybe a very powerful flash on a professional camera could overcome the back light but the shots from my very good camera required massive manipulation to become marginally acceptable.

People from the 13th Association had reserved seating at the side front near the stands and personnel from the 325th Bomb Squadron (known as "The Cavemen) were assembled in formation in the middle of the hanger in front of the stands. We Association people were well dressed out in red and made an impressive appearance.

13th Association Attendees

There were opening ceremonies and then a reading of the deactivation orders for the 715th Weapons Squadron and the 325th Bomb Squadron. Personnel from the 325th would become the personnel of the new 13th. The respective flags were furled. Activation orders were read for the 325th Weapons Squadron and personnel from the old 715th became the new 325th.

Then activation orders for the 13th Bomb Squadron were read, the 13th Bomb Squadron flag was unfurled, the men from the old 325th peeled their Velcro "Caveman" patches from their uniforms and flight suits and attached Oscar in its place.

Brian Parker, First Vice-President, was given the honor of presenting our most valuable artifact, the 1952 Korean War Squadron flag, to Squadron Commander, Lt. Col. Tom Bussiere for safe keeping. While the flag was in the care of the 13th at

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Dyess AFB it was taken on mission deployments and flown over unit headquarters at Guam and Diego Garcia. The final act of the Dyess 13th was to take the flag on a low level fly-by in the B-1 and post it at the deactivation ceremony. Following the Dyess ceremony it was folded and bagged for presentation at Whiteman AFB.

Lt. Col. Bussiere accepts 1952 flag from Brian Parker

A reception was held at the Mission's End Club following the activation ceremonies.

Members of the 13th Association were taken to the Spirit of Missouri hanger, by Major Leland Bohannon for a close up view and inspection of Lt. Col Bussiere's B-2. It is one strange bird. Besides being all wing, it is made of an odd assortment of materials – titanium, plastic (well – carbon fiber) and duct tape. The crew chief, S/Sgt Petree, has been assigned to this airplane for 4 years. I would expect that in that time he should know his charge well. Our speaker at San Antonio told us the airplane could carry 80 bombs of the 500 pound variety. Looking at the bomb bays made me wonder how they fit them all in.

One of the first tasks upon landing is to place mechanical safeguards over all the sharp edges of the gear doors. All the edges are razor sharp because of the fine tolerances in the fit of the titanium doors. The crew chief told us that a titanium cut is dangerous because it has a long healing time.

For a large technology airplane the cockpit is very unimpressive. Of course it would have looked much more "gee whiz" if the power had been on in the "glass cockpit". Somehow intrusting all that mighty firepower into the charge of only a two man (no make that two-person) crew is an overwhelming responsibility. That is an awesome responsibility. Getting into and out of the pilot seats requires some acrobatic ability, there being two overhead hand grips, left and right side, to lift oneself up to slide the fanny into the seats.

The new 13th squadron held its first Red Shirt Night on that Friday evening. The squadron personnel were in flight suits with red tee shirts, and there were enough Association people to bring sufficient red to the evening.

Association President Dave Spotswood presented Lt. Col. Tom Bussiere with the Associations original oil painting "Flight of Aces", which shows the five SPADS flown by the 13th Aero Squadron's Aces of World War I, for safe keeping during the life of the squadron.

Spotswood's Presentation of painting - Flight of Aces

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Don Henderson presented a copy of the latest revision of his historic aircraft poster, updated to include the B-2, to Sq Commander Bussiere. The poster is the culmination of a five year project to show all the aircraft flown by the 13th Aero/Attack/Bomb Squadron since it's formation in June of 1917. It is likely that Don's poster is unique in the world as a history of a single unit. He is a professional Graphics Designer with Prisma Inc, one of the largest art studios of Pittsburgh, PA. If there was sufficient interest Don would have the poster reproduced in a size of 24" x 18". It would make a great wall display for some young man of "my grandfathers (or father's) famous Air Force squadron".

The 1952 Korean War flag, presented to Bussiere at the activation ceremony, was displayed with all the members of the squadron behind it. It made a great "keeper" picture if you have a copy of the original. All of the members of the new unit wore red tee shirts underneath their flight suites. We should have planned that shot better with the flag centered, the buffet table removed and everyone's faces visible. Maybe someone will make a new historic photo and send me a copy. And someone needs to remind the unit the flag should not be flown in the wind to make it a "tattered old banner". (Hmmmm – just did.)

An item missing from the festivities was the five foot tall 3-D Oscar (some assembly required) retrieved from the World War II 13th Attack Squadron. I understand that it takes some talent and time to put it together, but the guys from Dyess could do it so we will leave this task as a challenge to the ingenuity of the B-2 bunch. The Association Archives have pictures of "Oscar on Guard" at squadron headquarters in Barksdale about 1937 or 38, him on guard at headquarters, Augusta GA at Christmas 1941, and on guard at Dyess in June 2005. The Association needs one more photo.

The culmination of the evening was the demonstration of the firepower of the Reaper Mobile, donated by the Dyess squadron to the Whiteman squadron. The Reaper Mobile is a bright red and white hearse, complete with coffin in the back and a special exhaust system. I didn't get outside soon enough to hear the explanation of this, but when the exhaust system is charged with an excess mixture of gasoline and a spark plug provides a spark the hearse puts out lots of fire, explosion and smoke.

And with that the evening and the ceremonies ended.

Oscar on Guard - Dyess, Texas