

May 2010

Experimental Aircraft Association Chapter 33

A monthly publication of the Dr. Alexander M. Lippisch Chapter of the Experimental Aircraft Association, Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

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## Read Back - Serenade To The Big Bird

By Jim Meade

1LT Bert Stiles flew 35 missions as copilot on B-17's flying out of England in World War II. A published author before the war, Stiles kept a journal of his bomber flying. We learn the composition of a bomber crew and how they relate to each other. The anticipation and anxiety of the first mission comes out in a commentary on the crew's reactions to formation flying, flak, enemy and friendly fighters, finding the target and getting back unscathed. By the time the book ends, the missions are described in more frenetic terms. Airmen know what has happened to friends and could happen to them. The strain becomes nearly unbearable.

After flying bombers, Stiles refused a chance to return to the U.S. as

an instructor and transferred to P-51 fighters with the 8th Air Force. In November, 1944, he shot down a FW-190 but became disoriented or suffered target fixation and flew his fighter into the ground, killing him. His mother had his journal published in England in 1947 and it has been in print at various times since. W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. New York printed Serenade To The Big Bird in the U.S. in 1952. Before the war, Stiles had been a published short story writer. He also wrote for publication during his tour in England. Maybe because his mother arranged for publication, the book is not nearly so raw as some war writ-





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ing. The language is strong for polite society in the 1940's but nothing like what you encounter in other battle stories.

Stiles will be the first to say that the main interests of the air crews were women, liquor and sleep. He tells plenty of stories about the kind of wild drinking we associate with young men at war. He is much more circumspect about any encounters with the ladies. Several chapters of the book are about a girl he was attracted to that he called August. She writes him often but in the end Stiles feels her slipping away. It makes me wonder if he was writing with a real woman or if her letters were a reflection of his own wishes.

As the book goes on, eagerness and naiveté give way to detachment and distance. The explosion of a Fortress or the number of chutes opening from one going down are called out with keen interest but without permitting himself to become emotional. Only when friends die does he reveal his inner feelings. There are several chapters that show a pacifist or anti-war sentiment.

Bomber crew compatibility is not automatic. Stiles never clicks with his pilot in the air. They never approach flying the same way. But, they leave it in the plane and get along fine on the

ground. After the 20th mission, Stiles is transferred out and ends up completing his required missions with other crews, some of which he gets along with well. While military courtesy is pretty lax, officers and enlisted don't mingle much off duty.

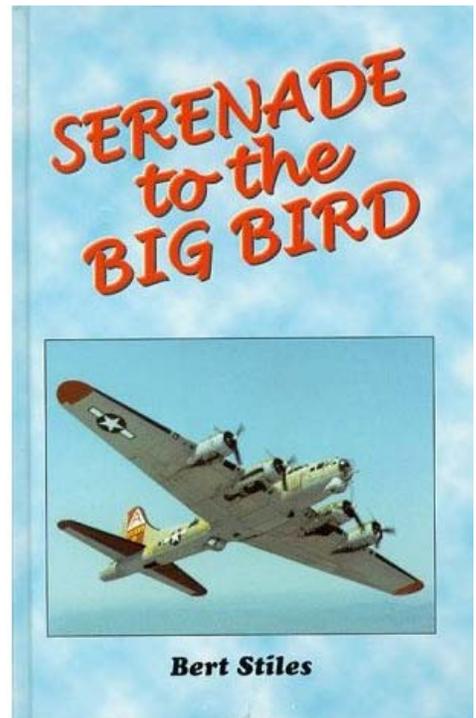
The B-17 is a beautiful airplane in the air, but "the Flying Fortress is no fun to fly", Stiles writes. "The more formation you fly the more you dream of fighters and Cub and gliders, anything little that flies by the touch system, anything but a big heavy monster that has to be heaved around the sky." If you were ever curious about bomber formation flying, this book is worth it for that chapter alone. Stiles confirms what we have often heard, that safety resides in a tight formation. The problem for the bomber pilots was keeping it tight. The Luftwaffe developed head on passes as one way to try to break up and disperse formations so that stragglers could be picked off more easily. If the Luftwaffe was light for a few days, the pilots would relax and let the formation open up until the next enemy fighters were seen, sometimes too late.

One of the most riveting chapters is about a raid on Leipzig. Bogeys are called out. Sights tracked on German fighters. Intercom and radio calls shout out warnings and orders. A sudden push on the yoke keeps them from being smashed by a stricken bomber. Another plane asks anxiously if his wing is on fire. After the despair of believing a friend went down on another plane, the relief of finding him alive is palpable. On landing, Stiles finds a 20mm shell had blown up in-

side the gas tank without causing an explosion. These are example of how Stiles emotions are pushed to extremes.

Stiles confirms that war and relationships are hell on the psyche. One crew was one of the best softball teams in the division. It went down on a raid. He finds women who interest him but who are unable to allow anyone emotionally close. Pinup girls like Ingrid Bergman, Margaret Sullavan, Jane Russell and Doris Merrick were easier to relate to than real girls. Acquaintances stay casual and don't become friends.

I liked this book. It's a journal, so it has portions that are slower, more prosaic and reveal the things a young man in war things about when he is not in the grip of action. It has plenty of interesting facts about what it is like to fly a heavy bomber in World War II aerial combat. The book is written in a spare, straight-forward style. It may be difficult to find, but it is definitely worth it if you like first-person stories about the young men who won the air battle over Europe.



## Last Meeting

April 9th - Beautiful weather and a nice turn-out for John Anderson to show-off his newly built Rans Coyote II.

Thanks to John for taking the time to show it. Also thanks to Randy Hartman for letting us use his hangar as a gathering place. Thanks also to Jim Meade for bringing something to snack on.



## Next Meeting - Spring Banquet

May 04, Tuesday 6:30pm-9pm (6:00pm for a pre-dinner cocktails). Location: Cedar Rapids room at the Marriott, 1200 Collins Rd NE Cedar Rapids, IA 52402 The cost will be \$20.00, please RSVP to [david.miles@mchsi.com](mailto:david.miles@mchsi.com) by April 28th. MENU: Sauteed Breast of Chicken (Marsala sauce Sour Cream and Chive Mashers), House Salad: Mixed Seasonal Greens topped with Grape Tomatoes, Julienne Carrots, Peeled Cucumber & Julienne Yellow Squash with Choice Ranch & Raspberry Vinaigrette Dressings, Squash Carrots Zucchini, Assorted Breads & Butter, NY Style Cheesecake / Strawberry Topping Coffee, Tea or Milk

Speaker: Author and WWII veteran Norman Rudi of Ames Iowa, Norman has authored four books describing the military experiences of twenty World War II veterans. Most of these veterans ended up living in the central Iowa area and include airmen, soldiers, sailors, and marines. Norman experienced the military first hand as a WWII veteran serving as a paratrooper in the 11th Airborne Division in the Occupation of Japan, after the fighting ceased and before the Korean conflict. A native of Glidden IA and a graduate of the University of Oklahoma in Architecture, Rudi taught in the Department of Architecture at Iowa State University for five years and half-time for seven years. He opened an architectural office in Ames IA in 1966 and retired from that firm in 1994. Norman is in the middle of a fifth book and has a sixth book underway. He continues to interview World War Two veterans to get their stories, because he believes these stories should be preserved for future generations

## Young Eagles

We will have a YE Rally at Washington June 6th from 9 AM till at least 11 or may be 12 noon. As always we need ground crew as well as pilots. If you can help out with either please contact Connie White [rewhite691@msn.com](mailto:rewhite691@msn.com) 319-393-6484

## B-17 tour stop

Chapter 33 will host the B-17 "Aluminum Overcast" at Cedar Rapids, July 20-21, 2010. To book a flight please call 1-800-359-6217. Self Guided Ground Tours daily from 2-5 pm. Cost \$5 per adult, \$15 per family. Active Military or Veterans receive free ground tour.

# New RV-10 in Chapter 33

By Dave Lammers

After four and one half years of working (and over 6000 hours—yup I counted every darn one), the Chapter has a new RV-10. Typical of the outstanding RV designs, this one is easy to fly, handles beautifully and has a combination of performance attributes that cannot be purchased in a “certified” airplane. (Not to imply that amateur built airplanes aren’t certified).

I invite each of you to come to McBride airport on June 12th at 10:30 to 12noon and I can walk around the airplane with you and show you features that you cannot buy in a comparably sized Cirrus or Columbia (Cessna). I’ll also share issues about the build process, things to avoid and recommendations. Bring your own chairs.

Then please stay for a pot-luck lunch. The Chapter will provide meats / plates, etc and then everyone can bring a side dish or desert to share. I look forward to seeing you at McBride.



## Chapter 33 Calendar

**May 4 6pm-9pm** Spring Banquet, Cedar Rapids room at the Marriott, 1200 Collins Rd NE Cedar Rapids, IA 52402 Speaker: Author and WWII veteran Norman Rudi

**May 8 7-10am** Tulip Time Flight Breakfast, Pella Municipal Airport, Free Shuttles available to Tulip Festival May 6th, 7th and 8th

**May 16 7-noon** Cherokee Flying Club Flight Breakfast, Cherokee Municipal Airport

**Jun 12 10:30-noon** Chapter meeting, Project visit, Dave Lammer's RV10a, and Pot-luck cook-out, Mc Bride airport, Marion IA



Be careful when you chose your tail number

In The May 2010 Issue...

Read Back - Serenade To The Big Bird, New RV-10 in Chapter 33



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