



BONNEVILLE BANTER



March 2009

Monthly Newsletter of the Bonneville Austin-Healey Club

Web Site: www.bonnevillehealeyclub.org

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President's Message

We missed a lot of you at the Sweetheart Dinner at the Cinegrill. We had half as many people as usual; but we did have an enjoyable time. I hope this was just a conflict of people's schedules and not an indication of losing interest in the club's events. Or, is it the mood of the Country? I hope you are planning on going with us on the March drive to Wendover. We are not going for the gambling per se, but for the air museum. There is some very interesting information regarding the Wendover Air Field, some of it a lot of us never knew.



Back in the late 1930's the Army Air Corps wanted to determine if their flight operations could be combined with commercial airport activities. Salt Lake City's airport was chosen because of its strategic and topographical advantages and the required enlargements could be made. Fort Douglas also allowed potential housing and administrative facilities to meet the Army Air Corps needs. In August 1940 Fort Douglas was designated an Army Air Base by the Secretary of War, with Salt Lake City airport as its airfield.

The 7th Bombardment Group (Heavy) and 88th Reconnaissance Squadron of the 20th Bombardment Wing were assigned to Fort Douglas. They would operate their huge Boeing B-17 Flying Fortresses and Douglas B-18 Bolos out of the Salt Lake Army Air Base on the east side of the municipal airport. Negotiations between the Army Air Corps and the Department of the Interior were undertaken to acquire a large tract of government land near Wendover to be used as a bombing and gunnery range for the 7th Bombardment Group.

On November 4, 1940, the War Department began construction of the bombing range and the required personnel facilities on the 1.5 million acre site which would ultimately be the world's largest and finest bombing and gunnery range. President Franklin Roosevelt authorized expansion of the Wendover range in February 1941 to include four 63-man barracks, a 250-man mess hall, officers' quarters, an administration building, a telephone exchange, two ordnance warehouses, a bombsight storage building, and dispensary. There were also three ammunition igloos and four powder magazines, a power system with its own generating plant, a railroad spur, and water and sewer systems. By late 1943 there were about 2,000 civilian employees and 17,500 military personnel. By May 1945 the base consisted of 668 buildings, including a 300-bed hospital, gymnasium, swimming pool, library, chapel, cafeteria, bowling alley, two movie theaters, and 361 housing units for married officers and civilians.

A mock enemy city was constructed near the mountains on the base using salt from the Bonneville Salt Flats. This made a fine practice target for the many bomber crews, as did the life-sized enemy battleships and other targets elsewhere on the range. Many of the targets were even electrically illuminated for night practice. Various machine gun ranges allowed gunners to either fire at moving targets from stationary gun emplacements or fire at stationary targets from three machine guns mounted on a railroad car moving along a section of track at up to 40 miles per hour. Wendover's realistic challenges for aerial gunners and bombardiers caused them to become the best trained in the world.

By late 1943 Manhattan Project scientists were confident enough to tell the Army Air Forces (AAF) to begin preparing for the atomic bomb's use. The AAF decided that the B-29 Super fortress aircraft would be the delivery vehicle. It also selected one of its most able aviators, Col. Paul W. Tibbets, Jr. to form and train a group devoted solely to dropping the bomb. He selected the remote Wendover Army Air Field as the training site. The 509th's training was to be completely shrouded in the deepest secrecy, therefore the desert isolation of Wendover was ideal. During the group's stay at Wendover, the base became a maximum-security area with signs stating, "What you see here, What you do here, What you hear here, Stays here." Information about the group's mission was so restricted that even members of the 509th did not know the purpose of this training.

From November 1944 to June 1945 they trained continually. In April 1945, Col. Tibbets declared the group ready and started them moving to North Field, Tinian, the Marianas. They dropped the Atomic Bomb on Hiroshima in August 1945. Not until well after the war did the United States Air Force officially admit that the 509th had trained at Wendover Field. There were 21 heavy bomb groups who trained in Wendover including the 306th BG (first to daylight bomb Nazi Germany), the famed 100th BG (known as the bloody 100th due to aircraft losses) and the Flying tigers 308th Bomb Group which served in China, Burma and India. Additionally, members of three bomb groups trained in Wendover won the Medal of Honor. During the final days of World War II and in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Wendover played a role in the U.S. guided missile program. The first flight of an unmanned U.S. Air Force vehicle to break the sound barrier occurred over the Wendover Bombing range. Wendover Air Force Base was closed by the Air Force in 1963.

As you can see, this is a very historical area. I hope to see you at the Wendover Airfield Museum.

Keep 'em rolling,
Ann

BONNEVILLE BANTER – March 2009

The Sweetheart Dinner was held at the Cinegrill and the food was delicious. as usual. The following attended:

Ron & Kathy Jensen
 Joe & Lora Morley
 Dave & Sandy Maxwell
 Jim & Sheryl Thornton
 Allen & Judy Brown

Bob & Dixie Jahnke
 Bob & Fran Reimenschneider
 Doug & Ann Lewis
 Ann Henderson
 (PHOTOS BY JOE MORLEY)



MARCH WENDOVER DRIVE

Our March activity will be a drive to Wendover on March 21. We will meet at The Home Depot, 328 West 2100 South, at 9:00 AM. Plans have been made to visit the Wendover Air Museum. You can either drive home in the afternoon or spend the night.

I have checked with Wendover Nugget Hotel and found that you can make a reservation by calling 1-800-848-7300. Rooms are normally \$80.00, however you can get a 10% senior discount, which will bring the room price to \$72.00 + Tax.

If weather or other circumstances make not driving your Healey feasible please bring another vehicle. We would like to see many members attend this year's activities. Please let me know if you will be coming, so that we do not leave you behind.

Thanks, Sandy Maxwell, 801-943-4803

Bonneville Austin-Healey Club 2009 Activities Schedule

Tue., Mar. 10th – General Meeting, 7:30 p.m., Joe Morley's, 100 West Center St., (7720 South), Midvale

Sat., Mar. 21st – Drive to Wendover. Visit Air Museum, See article on this page for details.

Tue., Apr. 14th – General Meeting, 7:30 p.m., at Marie Callender's, 1109 E. 3900 South, Salt Lake City

Sat., Apr. 18th – Tech Session, Place to be announced

Sat., Apr. 25th – Drive to Eureka, UT, details to follow

Tue., May 12th – General Meeting, 7:30 p.m., Joe Morley's, 100 West Center St., (7720 South), Midvale

Sat., May 16th – Tech Session, Place to be announced

Sat., May 23rd – Drive to Lava Hot Springs, ID, details to follow

Tue., June 9th – General Meeting, 7:30 p.m., at Marie Callender's, 1109 E. 3900 South, Salt Lake City

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