

## **461st BOMB GROUP REUNION**

**September 25-29, 1996      Salt Lake City, Utah**

The weather was perfect, the fall colors were at their peak, and the hotel was located within easy walking distance of a huge covered shopping mall, Temple Square and excellent restaurants. Add several hundred congenial people and it all added up to a terrific 1996 reunion of the 461st Bomb Group at the Red Lion Hotel in downtown Salt Lake City.

Beginning at noon on Wednesday, arrivals were greeted with packets of information with details of coming events and were welcomed to refreshments in the hospitality room set aside for our use.

The first evening's dinner took place in the beautifully refurbished Lion House, one of Brigham Young's homes near the massive Eagle Gate, originally the entrance to his private farm. There we were treated to a delicious dinner of lightly sauced chicken breast and the largest, tastiest, fresh-baked rolls ever. Afterward, we were entertained by a member of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir who gave us the scoop on choir member's selection and activities.

On Thursday, we were off to the mountains to Park City (6900 feet), originally established as a silver mining town but now a year-round recreational area, a popular winter destination for skiers. It will be the venue for the 2002 Olympic Winter Games. Many will find the name familiar because it is also where the Sundance Film Festival is held in January of each year.

After cruising the many gift and craft shops, relaxing in quaint eateries and enjoying the picturesque community, we returned to the comfortable Red Lion for a bit of rest (or department store shopping and sightseeing) before the evening's Squadron Dinners at the hotel. Director's and alternates were nominated and elected at the dinners.

The following day, we were given the opportunity to view more than sixty indoor and outdoor exhibits at the Hill Aerospace Museum near Ogden. Well-informed retired military men were volunteers who acted as our guides in showing us around and answered our many questions. The museum is adjacent to the mammoth Hill Air Force Base but instead of attempting to tour that busy facility, we were bussed en masse to Antelope Island, a three by seven mile expanse somewhere in the Great Salt Lake.

The excursion to Antelope Island entailed a drive over the 7.2 mile causeway built on an earthen dike. As we passed huge flocks of birds were feeding on brine shrimp which are very prolific in the lake. Although the 28,000 acre island had been both privately and by the Mormon Church for cattle and sheep, it has been taken over as a state park to rescue it from severe overgrazing. It is the home to elk, deer, antelope, etc., but principally bison.

We were treated to buffalo burgers and all the trimmings at a rustic beachside lodge. Afterwards, the assistant administrator of the island presented a very interesting discussion of the management of the bison herd (held to about 550 head) while preserving the ecology of the area.

Friday afternoon's general business meeting was well attended. A summary of the business meeting follows this reunion report.

Not all members took part in all the tours offered. Many took advantage of the opportunity to find their roots at the Family Search Center and the Joseph Smith Memorial Building where a helpful staff and over 200 computers are available. Others took some of the free tours at Temple Square, attended an organ recital at the Tabernacle,

watched an IMAX presentation of the Mormon migration, visited the copper mine about 20 miles out of town or visited heritage Centennial Park at the mouth of Emigration Canyon. The touching monument there commemorates the Mormon's entrance into the valley and the place Brigham Young said, "This is The Place" (we've been looking for).

One of the tours took us to the Beehive House, Brigham Young's official residence which he occupied as Governor of the Territory and president of the Mormon Church. The stories told to us of each of the well-restored rooms would take pages to tell. It was called the Beehive House because the bee was considered very industrious and hardworking as were the Mormons. An original low wall (though moved closer to the house to make more room for the street) still stands. It was built not only to enclose the garden, but to provide work for newly arrived men seeking work so that no one had to ask for or accept a handout. The gardens, many authentic to the past, are beautifully maintained and a major attraction to many. There was much to see.

Saturday evening featured good food and music at the Annual Banquet and Dance, and more lively conversation.

While each person attending the reunion would select their own "highlight", many would agree that Sunday's agenda was tops. The Memorial Service, in memory of the departed, was touching and culminated with a very stirring hymn.

After an appetizing buffet breakfast, we adjourned to the 6500 seat Tabernacle in Temple Square, home of the famous Mormon Tabernacle Choir and its 11,623 pipe organ. The 325 choir members are all unpaid volunteers between the ages of 30 and 60, serving a maximum of 20 years in the choir. We watched as they rehearsed, took a few minutes break and then returned to their positions for the Sunday morning television broadcast. It was fascinating to see the movements of the TV cameras and the resulting pictures on the huge screens flanking the dias. This was an experience to remember, but the day had just begun!

Our busses took us into the foothills to an 18th century French chateau, LaCaille at Quail Run. Just past the ornate gates were all kinds of animals and peacocks in an attractively landscaped setting. Inside the chateau, we enjoyed a four course "continental" breakfast like none we've ever encountered "on the Continent" or elsewhere. To say it was beautifully served is an understatement ... It's one of those things you had to experience to fully appreciate.

All too soon we had to leave the chateau for our ride through the colorful fall foliage in the canyons and up to the premier ski resort Snowbird. We all rode the tram up 2900' to the top of 11,000' Hidden Peak with its 360 degree view of Utah's mountain ranges and valleys. We tore ourselves away to complete the half-hour drive back to the hotel, some to leave that afternoon and many to stay one more night before starting for home on Monday.

A most successful 10th Annual Reunion of the 461st Bomb Group!!!