

CHUCK YEAGER

In our 357th newsletter, we have not given any space to our former 363rd pilot for we have felt that your local T.V. and news media has covered all aspects of Chuck's career.

We are most proud of Chuck and it is a great pleasure to have him be one of us and to have him join us at each of our reunions. As a member of our Board of Directors, he is a great asset in helping to conduct our business matters. For a fellow who has accomplished so much in the air and space, he is the most "down to earth" man one could ever meet. Always willing to sign an autograph! Glad to add his signature to your copy of his book! Never too busy that he doesn't have time to visit with all at our reunions! A request to have a picture taken with a 357th buddy never denied! The 357th wives sure are proud to have a picture taken with him to show to their children. What a gentleman!!

Charlie Espey's wife is a special 357th person who is confined to a wheel chair part of the time following a stroke. Ann's day was made when Chuck spoke to her at length and had his picture taken with them.

On October 14, 1985 a celebration was held at Charleston to honor Chuck. The Kanawha Airport there was renamed the Charles Yeager Airport. Also a school was named after him. In the evening, a banquet took place with some 100 West Virginia Corporate executives including the Governor. Chuck was the Guest of Honor and made an interesting speech.

Gordon Cross, a Texan and former 364th armorer with early boyhood ties in Charleston was also there. Gordon tells us that Chuck's speech at the school dedication was most impressive.

Thanks to Paul Bowles for the newspaper which contained many pictures and articles about Chuck as well as a nice article about Glennis.

The 357th

Yeager Still A Down-To-Earth Guy, Pilots Who Flew With WWII Ace Say

By JENNIFER BUNDY
Of The Daily Mail Staff

Hundreds of people claim to be be Chuck Yeager's friends, but only a few can rightfully hold that title.

At least four pilots who have been Yeager's friends at different times of his life agree that he lives up to his reputation as a down-to-earth, genuinely nice guy.

They say fame hasn't changed him and all have fond, vivid memories of times they spent together. William Overstreet, Obie O'Brien and Paul Bowles flew with Yeager in World War II. Astronaut Jon McBride knows Yeager as another famous West Virginia aviator.

Overstreet met Yeager in California as the 357th fighter group was formed. "Chuck was what we called a hot-shot pilot boy," Overstreet said. "He was quite enthusiastic and had the ability to fly low and close."

"There were times we would bump our wings together in formation," he said.

While the group practiced formation and combat flying over the hills and deserts of California and Nevada, Yeager and his friends would often branch out, Overstreet said.

"We would fly under the Golden Gate Bridge in formation and silly stuff," he said.

been over there with me and I was fine, how much better we were than they (the Germans) were," Bowles said.

Today, Bowles said Yeager is still down-to-earth and modest. "But he's very confident. He knows he can do things and he doesn't hesitate to tell people. He's not bragging. That's just the way it is."

The only things Yeager has changed are his drinking habits and his language, Bowles said.

"He's still rough-spoken when you get him in the right position," Bowles said. "It's the Lincoln County language he still uses. When he wants to make a point, he can do it."

"In the war, like everyone else, he drank," Bowles said. "Right now, the most he will ever have is a glass of white wine before dinner. He's very careful about that."

O'Brien was also in the 357th group and met Yeager in California during flight training.

He said, "My claim to fame as far as he is concerned is that I'm blind Tom, of course. He got shot down flying with me in Bordeaux France."

Yeager contends O'Brien doesn't see well or he wouldn't have gone down. "My contention is if he hadn't been so damn dumb he wouldn't have been flying No. 4," O'Brien said.

"You get shot down flying No. 4. No. 1 stays alive. That's me," he said.

Overstreet still sees Yeager at the 357th group reunions. "Everybody changes, but he's changed much less than most people," Overstreet said. "He's still reasonably down-to-earth. We still cuss each other out and talk like we used to."

He said he liked Yeager's book. "But I was disappointed he left out some of the funny incidents." While Yeager related many of the practical jokes he played on others, "some of the funniest stories about Chuck happened to him," Overstreet said.

One choice story centered around Yeager's return to England after he had been shot down and missing for several months in occupied France.

"They had to check him out because he could have been a Nazi spy," Overstreet said. "Ernest Tiede was sent to London to identify Chuck."

"Tiede walked in the door and said, 'I've never seen that man before in my life,' turned around and walked out and fell down on the floor laughing," Overstreet said. "They were getting ready to shoot Chuck as a spy."

But Yeager never forgets old debts. Years later, after he had become famous, Yeager was a passenger on a Eastern Airlines plane Tiede was flying, Overstreet said. When the plane landed, the airline planned to get some publicity shots of the two war buddies flying together again.

"Tiede said it was the worst landing he had ever had," Overstreet said. The plane bounced several times before coming to rest.

"On his way off the plane, Yeager stuck his head into the cockpit and said, 'Damn it, Tiede, you never did learn to fly.' Tiede sat in the plane until dark. He wouldn't get out for the publicity shots," Overstreet said.

Overstreet said Yeager is definitely a great pilot, but Clarence "Bud" Anderson, Yeager's best friend, is the best pilot he has ever seen.

"He's smoother, steadier. Andy has flown through World War II, Korea, Vietnam and is a multiple ace," Overstreet said. But Yeager has done all that.

"Andy never lost a wingman, never lost a plane, never bailed out," Overstreet said. Yeager can't claim those records. In fact, Overstreet said, "Andy watched him bail out several times."

Charleston resident Paul Bowles also flew with Yeager in Europe. Bowles joined the 357th in England and got to know Yeager because they were the only West Virginians in the group.

"He was an experienced fighter pilot and I was green," Bowles said. "He took me up and practiced maneuvers. He taught me how to handle an airplane."

Bowles sometimes flew as Yeager's wingman. A wingman flew alongside another fighter pilot. While the second pilot would search for enemy planes and maneuver to shoot them, the wingman would protect him from offensive fire.

Of the 73 missions Bowles flew, he was Yeager's wingman 25 to 30 times, he said.

Yeager finished his tour of duty long before Bowles. "When he came back to the states and married Glennis, he came through Charleston and visited my mother," Bowles said.

"He told her how easy it was. He said he had

In those days we'd have a little bit of motor trouble and things like that and we usually asked for volunteers to fly a spare, so out of the 16 ships we had to go up, if we had them, we'd put two extra up to replace anyone that had to turn back because of engine malfunction or radio out," he said.

Yeager volunteered to fly spare that day. O'Brien's No. 4 plane turned back. "Volunteering for that was what caused him to get shot down."

O'Brien still sees Yeager at the fighter group's reunions.

"I really don't see a lot of difference physique-wise between the Yeager today and the Yeager of 40 years ago," O'Brien said. "He was always wiry."

"He's very muscular. He keeps himself in excellent shape. He stomps all over the hills of California and West Virginia," O'Brien said.

"He's older, his hair has thinned down, his face has got a little wrinkled, things like that. But physically, the last time I talked to someone who was knowledgeable about things like this, when he took his Air Force physical examination, they had a hard time separating him from a 21-year-old pilot."

As for Yeager's accent, O'Brien said, "I never had any trouble understanding him. I think he always ribs everybody with that stuff."

"He can always say, 'I'm just a dumb country boy you know.' But the old fox is hiding because he's not a dumb country boy. He's a damn fine engineering pilot."

"He's articulate and he's intelligent. Don't let the rest of that stuff fool you."

O'Brien said Yeager's eyesight is not so special. "I'd say he's about normal. He thinks I'm blind, and he thinks he can see for everything."

"I'd say there is such a thing as combat awareness, which he utilized rather well. He could focus his eyes out at infinity, every little thing that moved, he had good peripheral vision, he would pick it up immediately. But he's not any better than any other man."

McBride met Yeager in 1975 at Edwards Air Force Base in California, but he had heard of Yeager all his life.

"When we lived in Beckley, Dad and I would drive to Charleston every week. We had to drive across the Chuck Yeager bridge," he said.

McBride said he became interested in flying because he grew up next to an airport. "He was an inspiration to me, perhaps subconsciously."

McBride said Yeager has an incredible capacity to remember names and faces. He met Yeager while he was a student at the test pilot school at Edwards and Yeager was the commander of the Norton Air Force base.

They didn't meet again until two or three years later, McBride said. But Yeager remembered him.

McBride will pilot the March launch of the space shuttle that will study Halley's comet. When asked if he thought Yeager would ever fly the space shuttle, McBride said, "There's a chance. There's no reason he shouldn't."

"I would love to have him go with me in March. But I don't know whether he wants to," McBride said. "I'd let him fly it a little bit."