

Welcome new members!

December 2025

THE RAIDER CHRONICLES



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ABOUT US

THE AFHF Newsletter is a newsletter by the Air Force Historical Foundation, a private non-profit organization dedicated to preserving the history and traditions of American air and space capabilities.

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Chairman's Corner

Welcome to the latest issue of *The Raider Chronicles*. Although we anticipated launching our new LinkedIn-based format this month, a few technical challenges delayed the transition. Rather than keep you waiting, we chose to publish one final edition in the current format—while giving you a preview of the type of content you can expect when the new version debuts next year.

Even in this abbreviated edition, you will find several familiar elements, including our always-popular “Fun Picture” and a feature article. This month’s story is particularly meaningful. It highlights the remarkable work of our board member, Dr. Frank Blazich, who successfully reunited a bracelet lost during World War II with the family of its original owner—a moving reminder of how personal artifacts can reconnect us to the individuals who shaped air and space power.

We are also introducing a new feature that shines a light on lesser-known contributors to American airpower. Our inaugural spotlight honors Col (Ret.) Ron Terry, widely regarded as “The Father of the Gunship,” whose innovation and leadership left an enduring mark on Air Force history.

Thank you for your continued support of the Foundation and of our mission to preserve, honor, and share the stories of air and space power. I hope you enjoy this abbreviated newsletter, and I extend my warmest wishes for a safe, joyful, and restorative holiday season.

John L. Barry, Maj Gen, USAF (Ret)
Chairman, Air Force Historical Foundation

Quiz



Courtesy USAF

Maj Gen Robert Olds, the father of Brig Gen Robin Olds, had a hand in the creation of which famous group during World War II?

- a. Navajo Code Talkers
- b. Tuskegee Airmen
- c. Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP)

Answer on last page of the newsletter.

Fun/First Photo of the Month

A section dedicated to photos of first flights of aircraft/spacecraft and fun air & space events



From Eileen Bjorkman: My father, Arnold Ebnetter, flew F-100s and was stationed at Tuy Hoa AB in Vietnam in 1968. During their down time, he and several other pilots built some model airplanes. From the stories he told, it sounds like the models spent more time crashing than flying. The sandy soil at Tuy Hoa was blamed for many landing mishaps.

Submit quiz ideas or suggested photos to newslettereditor@afhistory.org



Historical Spotlight

Colonel (Ret.) Ron Terry

The earliest idea for a side-firing gunship was demonstrated in 1926 by a first lieutenant using a .30 caliber machine gun and gun sight mounted on a DeHaviland DH-4. Unfortunately, his superiors considered the idea a waste of time. The concept took a while to catch on: technology had to mature, and fighter pilots had to warm to the idea that there might be a better way to attack some targets besides forward firing guns.

In 1963, the Air Force resurrected the idea and performed initial tests using T-28 and C-131 aircraft. Dubbed "Project Tailchaser," skeptical senior officers deemed the project a low priority, and it limped along with no funding until U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia (SEA) began ramping up. After visiting South Vietnam and becoming convinced that an orbiting, side-firing gunship would be perfect for defending U.S. special forces from night attacks by Viet Cong, then-Capt Ron Terry--who had flown F-86s and F-100s--led a small band of innovators to cobble together the original AC-47 gunship. The concept quickly proved perfect for night operations that multiple strike aircraft could not accomplish. Four aircraft, dubbed "Spooky," were quickly modified for SEA.

The AC-47 performed admirably, but the newer, larger C-130 platform promised more capability. The prototype AC-130A "Spectre" was introduced to SEA for a combat evaluation in September 1967. Within four months 7th Air Force reported that "Spectre accounted for over 29 percent of the total destroyed and damaged trucks in Laos while flying less than 4 percent of the total sorties used to attack moving vehicles." Later gunship models became the "weapon of choice" for special forces and sometimes conventional forces in virtually all conflicts since Vietnam.

Among other honors, Col (Ret) Ron Terry was inducted into to the Air Commando Association Hall of Fame in 2013. He passed away in 2022.

A Bracelet's 80-Year Journey

Adapted from News Sources and Frank Blazich Emails



The Lost Bracelet (Courtesy Frank Blazich)

Eighty years after World War II ended, Joan Sheehan of Houston learned that someone in France wanted to return a bracelet belonging to her veteran father, John J. Sheehan, Jr. John Sheehan, who passed away in 1995, spent the last two years of World War II serving in the Navy in the Pacific. He carried with him an identification bracelet, inscribed to him from his first wife, Helen. At some point, he lost or discarded the bracelet, which was found in Le Havre, France, in 1946.

The story might have ended there except for a determined descendent of the woman who found the bracelet.

Enter Frank Blazich, Curator of Modern Military History at the Smithsonian, who assists the French Embassy in Washington on various military history matters. On August 29, 2025, he received an email from Colonel Thibaud Thomas at the Embassy, who described the bracelet and its inscription: "John J. Sheehan, U.S.N. 909.64.39, Type A," on one side and "Your wife – Helen – 1945" on the other. Thomas asked if Blazich could assist in finding the sailor's family.

Email in hand, Blazich began sleuthing. He had most of Sheehan's name and his identification number. Using the identification number, he tracked down Sheehan's ship assignment via digitized National Archives World War II muster

rolls. Those records placed Sheehan's naval service in a time and theater, but Blazich needed a birthday to eliminate other people named "John J. Sheehan" who served in the Navy during World War II.

Blazich turned to the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis, who sent him the personnel file linked to the service number. That file had Sheehan's birth date. With the birth date, Blazich used ancestry.com to exactly identify Sheehan and discover more details of his life. Blazich's next stop was findagrave.com, where he found a picture of Sheehan's grave marker in New Orleans. In addition to Sheehan's name and that of his wife, the grave marker listed a daughter, Joan M., and her date of birth. Blazich then used whitepages.com to track Joan's movement from New Orleans to Houston, Texas in 2005 (around the time of Hurricane Katrina). His last Internet stop was LinkedIn, where he found only one Joan M. Sheehan living in Houston. An email followed by a phone call on September 5, 2025, put everything together.

Blazich says the search took "five business days, but four of those were spent waiting on the personnel file. Once I had this information I was able to find Joan in less than an hour." A search that would have taken months or even years prior to the Internet was completed in only eight days total. *(Continued on next page)*



A photo of John J. Sheehan, Jr. along with the bracelet at the Veterans Day ceremony (Courtesy Residence of France in Houston)

After Blazich spoke with Joan Sheehan, he put her in touch with the French Embassy, and the Embassy took care of the bracelet's return to Houston. On November 11, 2025, John Sheehan's bracelet was reunited with his daughter in a ceremony at the French Consulate in Houston.

In addition to being thrilled to receive the bracelet, Joan Sheehan told ABC News she was grateful to learn some things she hadn't known about her father's World War II experiences, such as being part of a raid on a Tokyo munitions plant. She also learned that the woman who wanted to return the bracelet was descended from a concentration camp survivor, and she wanted to thank the United States for helping the French during the war.

One mystery remains: Since John Sheehan served in the Pacific, how did his bracelet end up in France? Blazich says he found no evidence that Sheehan's Navy ship, LSM-434, ever left the Pacific Theater during the war. But he says, "My suspicion is that Sheehan was in the merchant marine before joining the Navy, and once discharged in early 1946, he went right back to being a crewmember in the merchant marine. With so many transports bringing men from from Europe in 1946, it is plausible that he found himself in Le Havre and either accidentally lost the bracelet or purposely disposed of it (as his first wife, Helen, apparently left him prior to his returning from the war)."

However the bracelet arrived in France, it is a reminder that a war that occurred eight decades ago continues to impact us today. Joan Sheehan told ABC News that the bracelet symbolized "my father's love for his country, his willingness to fight for freedom." She added, "He's been dead for thirty years, but part of him is still out there."



Joan Sheehan receives her father's bracelet during a ceremony at the Residence of France in Houston (Courtesy Residence of France in Houston)