

FRED AND SAL'S EXCELLENT ADVENTURE!  
or  
KEEP THE SHOW ON THE ROAD – TO FLORIDA

When I asked my brother-in-law in San Antonio, Sal Scalia, if he would like to take a road trip to Florida with the 384<sup>th</sup> wing panel, he jumped at the chance! Sal, a Viet Nam Veteran, feels a kinship with all Veterans, and appreciated the opportunity to do something for "our" Veterans.

We left San Antonio on Friday, 17 January 2014. During the course of our trip we put 3,275 miles on Sal's truck, completing the mission "As Briefed" on Wednesday, 29 January. However, as with most "missions," we encountered conditions that required us to adjust our plan. Here is the story...

After two days on the road, we met Keith Ellefson at Love's Travel Stop in Cottondale, Florida, where he handed over the wing panel to us. He also gave us stained-glass Triangle-P mementos for each Veteran on our list. As we headed to Lake City for our overnight stop, we received the news that the first Veteran on our schedule, Walter Ramsay, had been called away unexpectedly, and would not be able to participate at this time. That put a bit of a damper on our mood as we headed off the next day to Boynton Beach for our third overnight stop. On the way I checked in with Monday's Veterans and found that they were all set for our visits, so that cheered us up considerably.

Monday morning, we visited Jack Garstak in Davie, who talked about crash-landing in Poland, and helping repair their B-17 before flying it home to Grafton Underwood – by way of Italy! After that, it was off to see Morry Sunshine in Miami Beach. Morry served with my father, although never on the same crew. Nonetheless, the several stories he told were fascinating to me. Then we crossed the peninsula – on "Alligator Alley" – to visit Steve Buczynski in Marco Island. Steve showed us a display case he had made honoring his original crew, complete with a B-17 model, crew photo, and a silk escape map. He had to stop and regain his composure while recalling members of his original crew who died during combat. Then we headed up to Naples for our overnight stop, and to alert Tuesday's Veterans that we were on schedule.

Our first stop Tuesday was to visit John Fahr in Naples. His wife Helen had told us that John was quite disabled following a stroke. But we would be welcome to stop by and pay our respects "if we wanted to." We wanted to. While John was not able to sustain conversation, there was no doubt he recognized the Triangle-P when we presented it to him – he said: "B-17." Then Helen wheeled him outside where the wing panel was set up in the beautiful Florida sunshine – and he signed his name, adding "PILOT" underneath. These Veterans are tough guys, and they do remember.

We left the Fahrs and drove up to Cape Coral to visit Everett Barnes. Ev was an MP and told us how he and his brother Edward came to serve in the same MP unit at Grafton Underwood from 1944 on. I also asked him how to contact Ed, as I had not yet been able to establish communication with him. He said that Ed didn't answer the phone when he called, either, but that I could try dropping in on him...

With five signed and five to go, we took a break. I dropped Sal off at his sister Donna's place in Cape Coral, and I went up to Holmes Beach the following day (Wednesday) to visit Alvaro "Al" Fernandez. His daughter Margie had arranged for reporters from local papers to attend the event (thank you Margie), and Al signed in the beautiful Florida sunshine. It was lunchtime, and Margie asked: "Do you like Cuban sandwiches?" Suffice it to say, I reluctantly said good-bye – after lunch with Margie and her very charming parents – and headed off to Seminole to visit my Aunt Lil for the evening.

Thursday dawned a bit chilly, but I pressed on. First up was Erwin Harrison in Clearwater, who had not been feeling well recently, but who agreed to a short visit. After some small talk, I presented Erwin with the stained-glass Triangle-P, and he signed the wing panel. Then I was off to Plant City to visit the man of mystery, Edward Barnes.

After finding his place out in the country and introducing ourselves, Ed explained that he had been having trouble with his phone and it was only fixed recently. We got right down to business, presenting the Triangle-P and signing. Then Ed said: "Wait, I have a wine bottle I want you to have." This turned out to be a souvenir bottle from the 14<sup>th</sup> reunion with the labels intact, so I carefully placed it in the truck and headed off to Citrus Springs to visit my sisters for a few days.

After a day of "rest" on Friday, I headed up to Ocala on Saturday morning to rendezvous with Sal and his sisters Patti and Donna, who had driven up from Cape Coral for the panel signing event, for breakfast. Then we headed off to the Ocala-Marion County Veterans Memorial Park. Volunteers were already setting up tables, chairs, a microphone – all we had to bring was the wing panel. The weather started out nice, but by the scheduled start time (1:00 PM) it was incredibly gorgeous!

Our Veterans, Paul Bureau and John DeFrancesco arrived early so I was able to hold a pre-mission briefing, and we got under way on schedule. Since there was a small audience, I gave some introductory remarks about the 384<sup>th</sup> and the Wing Panel Project, then turned the mike over to Paul, and then John, to introduce themselves, say a few words, sign the wing panel and receive the Triangle-P mementos. Both men spoke in some detail about their wartime experiences, which the audience appreciated. Because the Park volunteers had really done such a nice job for us, I presented the Park with a Triangle-P for display in their small museum: it was accepted by Jeffrey Askew, Director of Marion County Veterans Services.

That concluded the Veterans signing portion of the mission. At this point it was "Mission Accomplished." But now – as with WWII missions – we had to get back to home base: San Antonio. We encountered no enemy flak or fighters, but just as our Veterans did, we had to fight through extreme winter weather conditions!

Sal and I started out for home on Monday the 27<sup>th</sup>, handing the wing panel back to Keith that evening at our overnight stop in Bonifay, Florida. With weather deteriorating, we hit the road early Tuesday. By the time we got to Hammond, Louisiana, the truck was starting to ice up, so even though it was only about 11:00 AM, we got off the road, holed up at the Holiday Inn, and waited for the storm to pass. Wednesday did not look too promising: the storm had passed, but the ice remained – and I-10 was closed. We learned from a very helpful Louisiana State Trooper that US- 190 to Opelousas was open, and from there we could pick up I-49 down to Lafayette and get back on I-10. So that's what we did and came home safe and sound to San Antonio that evening, "As Briefed."

You can view a photo-montage of these Florida Veterans (and two who signed for Keith) on the 384th Gallery at <https://bit.ly/2PPjB4F>, and photos of all the veterans who have signed at <https://bit.ly/2OKjNFS>