

DIAMOND LIL

MEMBER NEWSLETTER



Volume I Issue 3 March 2016



Club Update

“Diamond Lil—Dressed to the Nines”

Diamond Lil ...she sure looks great with the lights down low! But when the lights come up, you'll find the maintenance team has been busy dressing her down. Our dedicated volunteers have been diligently putting in lots of hours during this heavy maintenance and restoration period as you'll read in the Maintenance Update.

2016 is going to be a very big year for *Diamond Lil*! This year's goal for the **Diamond Lil Century Club** is to raise \$100,000 and we're already off to a good start. We are grateful for the support from CAF Headquarters *12 Planes of Christmas Campaign* where we raised nearly \$10,000, and thanks to many Century Club members who have already renewed. We have reached over 30% of our goal to-date! For those members who have not renewed, be watching your mailbox for your 2016 renewal opportunity, or go on line now at www.DiamondLil.org. We are hoping for 100% participation from our charter members, and if you haven't already joined, we hope you will this year.



Taken on the night the Red Tail Squadron hosted Col. Charles McGee, one of the original Tuskegee airman at the CAF National Airbase, Dallas, Texas



This year, as a token of our appreciation for your support, you will receive a limited edition *Diamond Lil* Challenge Coin, specially designed by Squadron member, Kon Kelley. Challenge coins were a tradition used during the war by all branches of the armed forces and promoted solidarity to hold unit members to a certain standard.

I'm excited we have embarked on a new avenue of fundraising this year to give more people an opportunity to connect with the oldest American WWII four engine bomber – *Diamond Lil*. When the CAF Air Power History Tour takes to the road this spring, everyone that comes through the gate will have an opportunity to sign up for

our free eNewsletter. I would like to add a special thank you to all of you who signed up in Mobile, Sarasota and Punta Gorda, our first stops on the AirPower History Tour. We know you share in our mission to keep the legacy of the Greatest Generation going. We are in the planning process for *Diamond Lil*'s fall tour schedule and working on a very special event. Stay tuned for more information as details are worked out.

Remember: 100% OF ALL DONATIONS TO THIS CAMPAIGN GO TO THE AIRCRAFT.

Again, I would like to THANK all of you that have renewed your membership in the **Diamond Lil Century Club** and we look forward to a very exciting year for *Diamond Lil* in 2016!

Toni Rabroker

Diamond Lil Century Club Chairwoman



From the Left Seat



Al Benzing

Diamond Lil is highlighted in the February issue of the Commemorative Air Force's *The Dispatch* magazine. The focus is on efforts to restore a WWII radio compartment in *Lil*, as well as showing the more up to date avionics that have been installed for safer current day operations. They did a nice job in depicting this project as you can see in this issue of the newsletter.

With one project complete – installing new avionics—the focus now will be on creating a realistic WWII radio compartment. This will likely involve a number of phases before it is completely operational, but we look to the day when it will soon be functional during our flights on tour.

Fuel tank sealing has been on hold for a few weeks as the focus has been on getting *FIFI* ready for tour and as we work through some technical issues.

The volunteer maintenance team headed by Steve Rabroker has been putting in a lot of hours toward the annual inspection. Volunteers have also been working diligently on cleaning interior panels for painting. It's a big chore, but necessary for preserving the airframe. We are looking to ramp up maintenance activity on *Lil*, now that *FIFI* and other aircraft are heading out on tour, freeing up some manpower.

The Fall Tour of 2016 is months away, but the weeks are passing quickly, so there's an urgency to work on *Diamond Lil's* planned tour stops. Our marketing team has some exciting ideas to bring this rare warbird to the veterans who flew her and the public in a big way.

Thank You – Each of you, who support *Diamond Lil* and her mission!

Al Benzing

B-24 Go Team Leader



Photo by Rick Garvis



Maintenance Update

Hello again from the Maintenance corner...and I do mean from the corner of the hanger where *Diamond Lil* is sitting. She hasn't moved since we reported last quarter, however she is a little lighter! We have removed all engine cowlings, including cowl flap rings and nose bowls. All exhaust manifolds have been removed, which will make it much easier to access the different parts of the engine for inspection and service. All engines have had the oil drained and next step will be washing them down.

The interior items of the aircraft have been removed – seats and seat frames, guns and mounting brackets, bombs, the sling seat, and most of the flooring. We've started a detailed cleaning of the interior airframe in preparation for shooting a coat of primer and paint. In conjunction with the seat frames being removed, we're also having all the upholstered seat cushions recovered.

The fuel tank resealing job is half way there. And by this, I mean almost all of the old sealant has been removed. Next step will be for Crew Chief Rick to do a spar inspection, and if all goes well, we'll be applying a new coat of sealant.

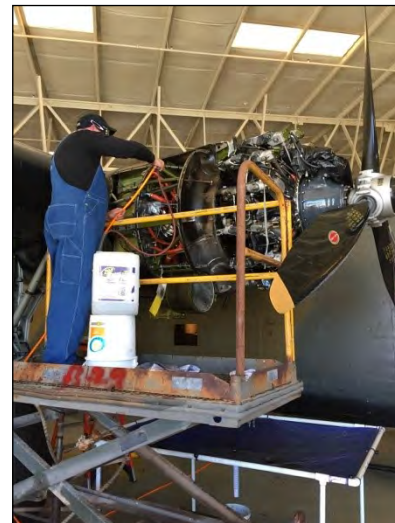
Take a look at the avionics project which is now complete – with new audio panel, two new transponders, a new Garmin 530W and new Intercom with ADS-B/GPS.

We've had a small group of very dedicated volunteers that have put forth a lot of hard work over the past several months. If you would like to volunteer some time, please send me an email. There are many jobs to do around the hanger in addition to turning wrenches, so if working on an engine is not your forte, there's certainly lots of other things to do. Thanks to everyone for your support of *Diamond Lil*!

Steve Rabroker

Volunteer Maintenance Coordinator

rabroker@hotmail.com



DIAMOND LIL



The Oldest Flying B-24 Liberator

The 25th Liberator built, the 18th production B-24, *Diamond Lil* rolled off the assembly line in May, 1941, leading the way for over 18,000 made during WWII. Acquired by the CAF in 1967, she remains the oldest American WWII heavy bomber still in flying condition. Today, *Diamond Lil* is a tribute to those that served or paid the ultimate price for our freedom.

DIAMOND LIL

B-24A Liberator
Serial#40-2366

STATISTICS

✱ Wing Span	110 ft.
✱ Fuselage Length	66 ft. 4 in.
✱ Height	17 ft. 11 in.
✱ Engine	4 Pratt & Whitney R-1830 1,200 T/O HP
✱ Max Speed	275 mph.
✱ Max Gross Weight	56,000 lbs.
✱ *during wartime	65,000 lbs.
✱ Fuel Capacity	3,000 gal.
✱ Max Range	2,100 mi.
✱ Bomb Load	8,000 lbs.
✱ Fuel Burn	200 gal/hr.



Follow *Diamond Lil* at www.AirPowerTour.org
or Twitter [@B29B24squadron](https://twitter.com/B29B24squadron)



COMMEMORATIVE
AIR FORCE

CAF Aircraft Status Report



Aircraft: B-24 *DIAMOND LIL*

Date: FEB. 2016

Task: REPLACE AVIONICS

COMPLETED

Select one: ☒ Maintenance

☐ Restoration

Describe the project. Include photos if applicable.

THE AVIONICS OF *DIAMOND LIL* HAVE BEEN RESTORED. THE OLD SYSTEMS (RIGHT) HAVE BEEN REPLACED BY A NEW SYSTEM (BOTTOM). ALTHOUGH THIS SYSTEM IS NOTHING LIKE THE ONES NAVIGATORS AND RADIO OPERATORS USED DURING THE WAR, IT WILL HELP *DIAMOND LIL* AND HER CREW TOUR THE COUNTRY SAFELY. THIS WILL MAKE THE B-24 ADS-B COMPLIANT, AS REQUIRED BY FAA BEFORE 2020. MORE IMPORTANTLY, IT WILL PROVIDE NAVIGATION, TRAFFIC AND WEATHER INFORMATION, ALONG WITH MUCH IMPROVED COMMUNICATION CAPABILITY. THE B-29/B-24 SQUADRON WOULD LIKE TO THANK THOSE WHO CONTRIBUTED TO GETTING THIS SYSTEM REPLACED.



THE NEW EQUIPMENT:

GARMIN 530W	NAV/COM/MAP
GARMIN GDL-39	GPS/ADS-B RECEIVER
GARMIN GMA 350	AUDIO PANEL/INTERCOM
GARMIN GTX330ES	TRANSPONDERS (TWO)

Official Commemorative Air Force Media Report

TOP PHOTO BY MARYANN ALLARD

CAF Aircraft Status Report



Aircraft: B-24 *DIAMOND LIL*

Date: FEB. 2016

Task: RESTORE RADIO OPS.

IN PROGRESS

Select one: Maintenance ☒ Restoration

Describe the project. Include photos if applicable.

SINCE THE B-29 RECEIVED OPERATIONAL RADIO EQUIPMENT, HAM RADIO OPERATORS AROUND THE U.S. HAVE FOLLOWED *FIFI'S* FLIGHTS. SO, NOW IT IS *DIAMOND LIL'S* TURN TO RECEIVE AN AUTHENTICALLY RESTORED RADIO COMPARTMENT USING WWII RADIOS. IN TIME, THESE RADIOS SHOULD BE OPERATIONAL AND ABLE TO COMMUNICATE WITH OTHER HAM RADIO OPERATORS AS WELL. MOST OF THE EQUIPMENT IS IN HAND, INCLUDING THE TRANSMITTER SEEN IN THE PHOTO (RIGHT). CURRENTLY THE EQUIPMENT IS NOT INSTALLED AND WILL NEED TO BE WIRED WITH THE HELP OF SEVERAL VOLUNTEERS. YOU CAN FOLLOW THE PROGRESS AND CONTRIBUTE BY BECOMING A MEMBER OF THE CENTURY CLUB AT WWW.DIAMONDLIL.ORG.



B-24 RADIO COMPARTMENT IN 1941 CONFIG.



TRANSMITTER TU-6-B WILL BE INSTALLED.

Official Commemorative Air Force Media Report



Liberator Legacy: B-24 Veteran's Story

S/Sgt. Robert Phillips

By Konley Kelley

I would like to introduce you to Robert Phillips. I met Robert in 2012. We corresponded by e-mail and met in person when he came to the hangar to see *Diamond Lil*. Robert served our country in WWII as a B-24 air gunner. I stayed in touch with Robert and have seen him at many CAF events since. We met for lunch one day and I surprised him with a scale model of *Grumpy*, the B-24J Liberator Robert called home for many of his missions in WWII.



Robert's story begins in Wichita Falls, TX. He was born on June 25, 1925. His father was a disabled WWI veteran who built furniture for a living. His mother was a nurse. At the age of 16, Robert learned of the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor from their home radio. In 1943, Robert enlisted in the Army Air Corps. As Robert put it, "he preferred the idea of flying in an airplane over marching in the infantry or swimming in shark-infested waters if his ship was sunk."

He did his basic at Sheppard AFB before heading to Randolph AFB in San Antonio. There he was selected to be an aerial gunner and was sent to Laredo for 4-months of gunnery school. He then boarded a troop train for Lincoln, NE. At this base, his 10-man bomber crew was formed. The new crews were transferred to Davis-Monthan AFB in Tucson, AZ. They did practice bombing runs over well-known icons like the Rose Bowl and Hoover Dam. In late summer, 1944, they got their B-24 and made their way to an air base in Lecce, Italy. Thanks to a savvy bombardier, the crew got a choice assignment in the famed 98th BG / 343rd BS.

One of Robert's first combat missions was one of the final missions over the oil refineries of Ploesti. On another memorable mission, Robert was flying right waist when there was a loud bang. The Flight Engineer reported the bombardier accidentally dropped the right rack of bombs through the closed bomb bay doors. One door fell away. The other door was hanging precariously from the aircraft. With this drag eating fuel and no way to land, Robert took the push rod from his gun to use as a hammer on the disabled bomb bay door.

His crewmates held on to him as he banged away on the damaged door. Not far below, Robert could see the snow-covered Italian Alps. Finally, the door broke away. Robert's pilot put him in for a medal but the base commander turned it down concerned an inquiry into the accident would cause a mess.

In the final days of the war in Europe, Robert learned of orders to ship him and other veteran airmen stateside for B-29 training. Robert's time in the service and numerous missions in the lead aircraft on missions afforded him an option to be assigned other duties.



After a long trip home on the troop ship USS America and some R&R in Miami, he was back in Harlingen, Texas working as a clerk in the Provost office. His commanding officer was not expecting an experienced man in this position. He offered Robert the opportunity to go to Buckley Field, CO for training in the Criminal Investigators Division (CID). Robert enjoyed this duty and was honorably discharged in October, 1945.



Robert moved to Dallas to look for work. With no openings in the police department, Robert followed the suggestion of a friend and applied for the fire department. He landed a job and was stationed at #14 on 10th and Tyler. Trained as a driver, he was a "good truck man" and had the honor of driving the DFD Chief's car.

Rising through the ranks, Robert took the Captain's exam in 1954. At 27 years old, he became the youngest Captain in the history of the Dallas Fire Department.



Robert was in the DFD for 41 years and was a Station Commander for nearly 34 of those years. In 1946, he had also married a young beauty, LaDane. They had 54 wonderful years together.

Robert is retired and lives in DeSoto, Texas. He has attended many reunions with fellow veterans of the 98th BG at Barksdale AFB. Robert flew 38 missions in WWII. During his service, he was awarded the Bronze Star, Silver Star, Air Medal with 3 Oak Leaf Clusters Aerial Gunners Wings, Good Conduct Medal and other ribbons.

I hope you get a chance to meet Robert in the future at a CAF event. You might end up going to lunch at one of Robert's favorite eateries. There might be a Liberator there, too!



Robert Phillips, bottom left



S/Sgt. Robert Phillips, Top Turret Gunner

On December 20, 1944, our Liberators from the 98th were ordered to bomb the railyards at Innsbruck, Austria. German forces were retreating out of Italy and we wanted to stop them from getting home. My B-24 was the lead bomber for the entire squadron. Having been with my crew for awhile, my pilot took me off top turret and put me at waist so I could move about the plane and help the Flight Engineer if needed. But on this mission, we had a few extra passengers, a Brigadier General and two Colonels. I was told to man the nose turret. We were at 26,000 ft. Innsbruck is at 11,000 ft. I had a clear view of the snow-covered city. It looked like something right out of a Christmas card. We had no enemy fighters but flak was heavy. I believe our escorts were P-51's from the 332nd, the Tuskegee Airmen, on this mission. They often flew missions with us out of our base at Lecce. On some missions, we were escorted by P-38's which would dive down and strafe the gun batteries. Below I could see the puffs of smoke from the guns shooting at us. Our bombardier would signal the other aircraft to drop bombs by firing flares out of the tail of our plane. You could feel the plane jump after our bombs dropped. We climbed and banked to the right. The way home was a slow coast down to 10,000 ft. where we could remove our oxygen masks. Two B-24's were lost on the mission but one made it to Switzerland. I'll never forget how pretty that town looked to me.

Above—Robert Phillips talking to CAF B-24 pilot, Al Benzing. Robert's story is featured on the 15' x 3' educational banner affixed to Diamond Lil at tour stops. Robert's story is to the right. The banner also features a picture of Robert and his B-24 crew during training stateside.





Diamond Lil Trivia

This issue's Trivia Question:

QUESTION: What does the American flag on the starboard side of *Diamond Lil's* nose represent?



Crew Chief Rick Garvis painted the American flag on Lil.



Last issue's Trivia Question:

What is the name of *Diamond Lil's* hula dancer and what is her function on the plane?

ANSWER: "Lilly" The crew jokingly refers to her as *Lil's* "turbulence detector."

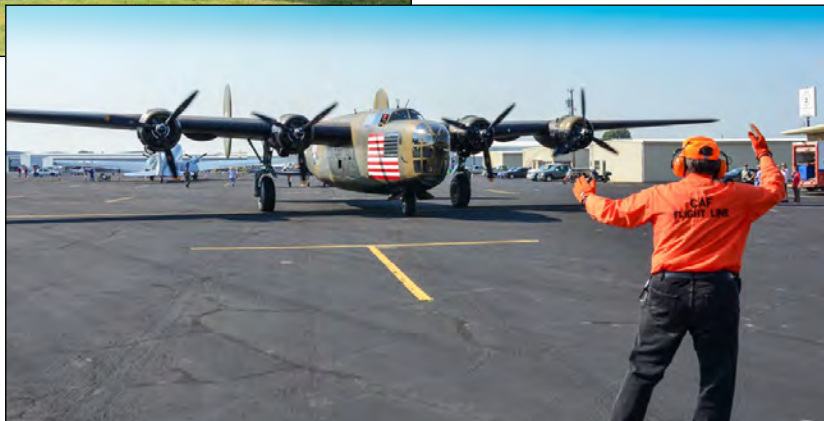
Please reply with your answer to: B24DiamondLil@gmail.com. The first five people to answer correctly will be recognized in our next quarterly email!

If you have a Trivia Question that you think not many people know and would like to share, please submit this as a separate email.



Diamond Lil Photo Gallery

Featured photographer, Raymond Jeffcoat
Diamond Lil's arrival at Warbirds on Parade
Lancaster, TX
August, 2013





Contact Us

What is your personal connection to *Diamond Lil*? Did you become a ***Diamond Lil* Century Club** Member to honor the service of a family member? Are you a veteran? Are you an aviator or A&P? Are you a military history buff? Did you ride on *Lil* at a tour stop and take a picture with her nose art? What can we do to tell your individual stories in our newsletter?

Please contribute to this newsletter. We are eager to publish stories from our membership and showcase your pictures. Your stories remind us of why we keep *Diamond Lil* flying and what makes this B-24A Liberator so unique and special to so many.

In the future, we will publish member stories, e-mails and photographs. Also watch for e-mails between newsletter publication dates with news about *Lil*, tour information or stories of interest.



Photo by Rod Reilly

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PS: If you know of anyone that would be interested in helping to preserve this historic B-24, *Diamond Lil*, please forward this newsletter and direct them to our website.



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