

## A TALE OF A BELL

RB-47 Crew S-67 of the 343rd SRS of the 55th was TDY at RAF Upper Heyford in England in 1965 when the crew realized that the O-club bar had no bell, and therefore no way of 'dinging' officers who entered the bar without removing their hats. Since by tradition, offending officers were obliged to buy drinks, the situation had to be remedied.



L to R: Hoover, Tull, Howe

The six crewmen, Howard Rust, Vic Prislusky, Arlen Howe, Harry Tull, Robb Hoover and Chuck Meyer, bought a brass bell (Robb's idea), inscribed it with the name of the wing and their own names, and donated it to the bar as a permanent fixture. Fast forward to 1970. That year the 55th detachment was being transferred to RAF Mildenhall. Conrad Beggs, stationed at Eielson AFB in Alaska and on TDY, who thought that the bell should rightly be located where the recon crews were to operate, asked the Upper Heyford base

commander for permission to move the bell to Mildenhall. Permission was flatly and unequivocally denied. Beggs and Bill Henderson decided the bell needed to be 'liberated'. So Henderson did so, in shall we say, a clandestine manner (details are still classified), the intent being to relocate the bell to Mildenhall. However, when the discovery of the bell's 'migration' became known to the UH base CO, a real uproar ensued with angry calls being made to higher ups at Eielson and SAC HQ, and words such as "courts martial" being bandied about. Discretion dictated that the bell be spirited back to Eielson until things cooled off. There, Beggs kept it stashed until his retirement in 1975. After moving to Arkansas, Beggs hung the bell from his porch for the next 27 years.

In July 2002 at a local meeting of the Daedalians, Beggs related the 'tale of the bell'. In the audience sat Roy "Pop" Kaden, another 55<sup>th</sup> veteran, who, upon inspecting the bell, saw Hoover's name on it. He subsequently called Robb and set in motion events which led to Beggs returning to the bell to the 55<sup>th</sup> Wing at Offutt.

At a ceremony during 'happy hour' at the O-club on Friday, August 23, 2002, Open House/Air Show eve, with many 55<sup>th</sup> veterans and active duty troops in attendance, including three of the former crewmen whose names were inscribed on the bell: Tull, Howe and Hoover, Beggs presented the bell back to the Wing. Tull then rang the bell, 37 years after he was given the honor of ringing it for the first time at Upper Heyford. *(Harry also subsequently built the wooden cradle to hold the bell.)*

In September 2003 it was rung during the dedication ceremonies for the monument to the 55th SRW in The National Museum of The Air Force Memorial Park in Dayton, Ohio. Members who died in the line of duty during the Cold War were recognized as the bell was sounded once as each of the fifty-five names were announced.



The bell is now displayed with other 55<sup>th</sup> memorabilia at the Dougherty Conference Center at Offutt, and is used on appropriate occasions to celebrate the wing's heritage. Since 2003, it's been rung to open the "Tales of the Fifty Fifth<sup>th</sup> ", which annually is held on the eve of the 55<sup>th</sup> Birthday Ball.



\*\*\*\*\*

*Published in April 2003 Newsletter.*