



# PASS IN REVIEW

"Shedding Light On Idaho's Military History"

2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter

June 2000

## 3<sup>rd</sup> ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP PICNIC

**Mark Your Calendars for 25 July 2000,  
6:00 PM!** We have reserved the Open Air Pavilion on Gowen Field. It is located between the swimming pool and the base chapel. Parking is available next to the baseball diamonds by the NCO Club. There is also parking next to the Pavilion; a new lot is just being constructed as we speak. (See Strip Map on page 7).

The Board will provide the hot-dogs, just bring yourself, your lawn chair, and a side dish (potato salad, baked beans, fruit, etc.) and join us for an informal get-together.



Our guest speaker will be **Lillian Azevedo**, (See article titled **IDAHO HISTORY DAY WINNER**). It will be a good time to get reacquainted with friends, talk with Board members, ask questions, make suggestions, and so on. **See you on the 25<sup>th</sup>!**

## SOME SPECIAL THANK YOU'S

On the 5<sup>th</sup> of April, a special **Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon** was held to thank everybody who helped us with the move to our new building.



Some of our volunteers taking a well-deserved break at our recent Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon.

Some of the guests of honor were: **Harlan Andrijeski, Jim Barker, Clark Barlow, Gerald Bell, Charles Chambers, Marie Crandall, Jill Dingle, Barry Fransden, Eric Garman, Calvin Goode, Loren Grout, Terry Gulick, Dennis Hain, Leroy Harmon, Ron Hill, Gus Hofert, Vern Moore, Max Moorehouse, Nick Nealis, Rocky Neilson, Robert Paul, Larry Reynolds, Terry**

**Shepherd, Richard Smithger, Ben and Joyce Steffens, Rod Steffens, and 'Dusty' Stehr.**

Lunch was provided by Noodles and included lasagna, salad and garlic bread.

Thank you to everyone. We could not have accomplished everything that has been done in the last 4 months without you!

At our Grand Re-Opening, **700** visitors signed the guest log and many, many, many, positive comments were made. Again, ***this would not have been possible without the support and assistance of our volunteers.***

Thank you to **Kwal Howell**. As the revamping of Bld 924 continued, more walls were erected and more

paint was needed. **Kwal Howell** donated another 10 gallons of paint to aid our efforts.

Thank you to **Western Trophy**. A plaque from the 116<sup>th</sup> Engineers honoring the 6 individuals from their unit killed in Viet Nam needed restoration. **Western Trophy** repaired and re-chromed it for us at no charge.

Thank you to **Fred Heywood**. He and his wife donated an additional display case which is now in use in our gift shop. It makes a wonderful post card display!

Thank you to **Wayne Mitchell and Bill Kemp of the American Legion Post 136** for all their efforts in the May Pancake Breakfast Fundraiser.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, **to everybody - Thank you very much!** ★

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Our Board of Directors President, Ken Swanson, regretfully had to step down due to heavy work demands at *the State Historical Museum*. Speaking for our membership, our Board, and me personally, **'Thanks Ken, you have been a great inspiration and expert technical advisor to us, and we appreciate you very much'**. We don't say 'So long', because Ken will remain on the Board, just in a less demanding capacity.

Do you like to stand around and look at things? Good, let me show you something. Do you see what I see? Back there behind us—over our shoulders, **look back** to about 1992 or 1993. See those busy people—a few retirees, civilians, and members of the Idaho Military Division??

Struggling for a way to preserve the official military history of the State of Idaho, **and** preserve Idaho military history generally? Neither side sure whether two distinct entities - one free and democratic, the other regimented and directed - can function with trust and without strife, to accomplish a common worthwhile purpose.

Well, these people working cooperatively and unselfishly began creating an organization to accomplish a greater good. But a few are still skeptical. Can a private, self-directed organization like the IMHS function side by side with a military organization? Not all are skeptical, however.

But now let's **look forward**, turning away from those earlier days. Forget the uncertainty; forget the concerns. Focus on that future just coming into view! Do you see it? **A growing partnership is now visible.** A mutually cooperative relationship between two unique organizations.

Each recognizes the needs and mission of the other, yet both acknowledge their dependence on each other. Teamwork and trust are brightening the picture now, and tomorrow is clearly seen.

**Today** the Idaho Military Historical Society and the Idaho Military Division share a very unique and enviable relationship, and it is the product of the hard work and vision of many supporters inside and outside 'the system' - our founding group, the leaders in the Military Division, individual and corporate contributors, and countless volunteers.

And above all, the military personnel who have sacrificed - some ultimately - to preserve our American system. Indeed, it is *that very system* that our unique partnership showcases: a system characterized by freedom, trust, and individual enterprise.

This is my roundabout way of **thanking all** who made the IMHS and the Idaho Military History Museum what it is today. **You have truly done a marvelous job.** I know; I was there then, and I'm here now, just standin' here lookin' around, marveling on all that has been accomplished.

- Bill Miller

## UPDATE

Since we profiled Medal of Honor Recipient Thomas Croft Neibaur, (3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter 1999) new information has come to light.

It appears that history has incorrectly recorded his unit. His official citation reads "Rank and organization: Private, U.S. Army, Company M, 107th Infantry, 42d Division."

A unit history of the **167<sup>th</sup> Infantry** written in 1919 by the unit historian of the 167<sup>th</sup> Infantry lists Neibaur as a recipient from that unit. The engraving on the back of his medal appears to authenticate the unit history. The back of his medal, shown here, reads:



**T.C. Neibaur  
Co. M 167<sup>th</sup> Inf.  
By  
Gen. Pershing  
Feb. 9, 1919**

Other documents also support this including a story and interview on Mr. Neibaur done in July 1919.

*Photo is courtesy of the Idaho State Historical Museum.*

## IDAHO FILE INTO HISTORY



### Bernard Francis Fisher

**Rank and organization:** Major, U.S. Air Force, 1st Air Commandos.

**Place and date:** Bien Hoa and Pleiku, Vietnam, 10 March 1966.

**Entered service at:** Kuna, Idaho.

**Born:** 11 January 1927, San Bernardino, Calif.

**Citation:** "For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. On that date, the special forces camp at A Shau was under attack by 2,000 North Vietnamese Army regulars. Hostile troops had positioned themselves between the airstrip and the camp. Other hostile troops had surrounded the camp and were continuously raking it with automatic weapons fire from the surrounding hills. The tops of the 1,500-foot hills were obscured by an 800 foot ceiling, limiting aircraft maneuverability and forcing pilots to operate within range of hostile gun positions, which often were able to fire down on the attacking aircraft. During the battle, Maj. Fisher observed a fellow airman crash land on the battle-torn airstrip. In the belief that the downed pilot

was seriously injured and in imminent danger of capture, Maj. Fisher announced his intention to land on the airstrip to effect a rescue. Although aware of the extreme danger and likely failure of such an attempt, he elected to continue. Directing his own air cover, he landed his aircraft and taxied almost the full length of the runway, which was littered with battle debris and parts of an exploded aircraft. While effecting a successful rescue of the downed pilot, heavy ground fire was observed, with 19 bullets striking his aircraft. In the face of the withering ground fire, he applied power and gained enough speed to lift-off at the overrun of the airstrip. Maj. Fisher's profound concern for his fellow airman, and at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty are in the highest traditions of the U.S. Air Force and reflect great credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of his country."



**USAF Medal of Honor**  
**Maj. Fisher received the very first one ever awarded.**

**I'm Rolling In Now.** - It seemed like a million years and a million miles from his first solo to this take off. In that solo he had listened for every little 'tick' in the engine and eyed every dial as the plane rose. This time he just "poured on the

coal" and hoped to clear all the runway debris and the holes -- and *then*, the trees off the end of the landing strip.

This was not solo either. He had a man in the cockpit with him - dumped there unceremoniously, muddy, out of breath and unbelieving that he was being rescued. Yes, he was listening for 'ticks' again but they would be hits from enemy fire in the bush along the damaged airstrip that had been carved out of the jungle.

The engine labored over the climb out - in fact, it labored so much, with so little speed, that the warning horn sounded for a possible stall as he skimmed across the treetops. But he had to keep it flat because, one; the short take off denied him the speed for sharper climb and two; he had to hug the treetops to stay under big enemy ack-ack up on both sides of the canyon. Although he was boxed in, the big guns could not depress to shoot *down* at him. Yet, upon landing, his plane would have nineteen holes in it.

**Who was this guy?** Well, his name was Bernard Francis Fisher - 'Bernie' to his friends. One of four children, his family moved from California to Utah right after he was born. There, he received his elementary and secondary education after which they moved on to Kuna, Idaho. At seventeen years of age he joined the navy and served the last year of World War II. Then, home from the service, he attended Boise Junior College (now BSU) and on to finish at the University of Utah.

His urge to fly was realized via service in the Idaho Air National Guard from which he volunteered for Air Combat training. ☛



This ultimately led to his pilot wings.

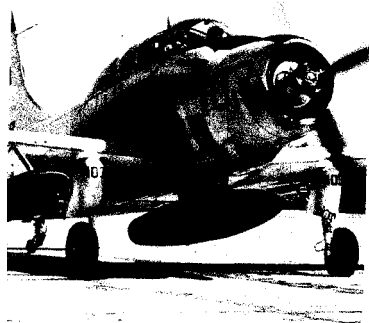
Before long the itch to fly saw Fisher back in the military, this time in the Air Force. After he won his wings, he was assigned to an F-86 squadron at O'Hare Field in Illinois. As time went by he flew several other jets including the mach two F-104.

### **Then Vietnam.**

As the fighting heated up, Fisher and four other jet pilots from his squadron volunteered for duty in Vietnam. They arrived there in July, 1965. They would spend the first two or three months training South Vietnamese pilots in the Douglas A-1E Skyraider, a single engine, propeller driven fighter-bomber.

It boasted real power with a fourteen foot, four-bladed propeller. The A-1E was a very good airplane for its time and mission even though some pilots, after flying jets, considered it "a dump truck with wings." But the jets could never work under a 300-foot ceiling in mountainous terrain as the A-1E did. It could carry as much ordnance as that of the Flying Fortress of WWII fame. It also had four 20-mm cannons.

After several months as instructors, his group was assigned to the First Air Commando Squadron.



**Douglas A-1 Skyraider**

That's the equipment. **This is the situation.** We must establish a perspective so we can gain a better understanding of just what it took to pull off this caper. The enemy, about 2,000 strong, was attacking a Special Forces complex in A Shau Valley. It was made up of a triangle of three mutually supporting bunkers and a forward landing strip.

With the American body of seventeen Special Forces troopers were about 200 South Vietnamese irregulars and a troop of 140 mercenaries (Nungs). The enemy had overrun two of the three strong points. In the fight, the temporary runway of pierced steel planking or P.S.P., had been severely damaged in mortar barrages. Around the craters jagged pieces of steel (two or three feet high from the P.S.P. mat) were sticking up to rip at any vehicle that might pass that way. The runway was short at 2,500 feet with only parts of that useable.

The A-1E usually used nearly 3,300 feet (depending on load) to land and take off. This section of the mountain valley was only about six miles long and 1,200 yards wide. Add to that problem the fact that they had a ceiling of only 200+ feet. Thus, it was called "the tube." The pilots got "down under" by finding a hole in the clouds. They made their way out by finding that hole again or, if it had closed, by looking for a bright spot (the sun) in the cloud cover and using that as a heading.

On March 9, 1966, Fisher and his flight drew the mission to go in and destroy an American C-47 that had made a crash landing in

A Shau Valley. To prevent armaments on board from falling into enemy hands they were to destroy what was left.

In this action Fisher, besides performing his assigned strafing/rocket mission, was cited for repeatedly guiding other aircraft through the hole in the clouds to the objective. He had a knack for finding access through otherwise impenetrable clouds above which the mountain peaks protruded menacingly. He was written up for the *Silver Star* medal but the papers were lost which proved to be an anticlimactic prelude to a more dramatic event the next day.

**March 10, 1966.** The pilots were awakened at 5:00 a.m. for a one-hour briefing on a classified mission. They flew that mission and returned to base to reload for a second "go", but back in the air they were suddenly diverted to a new target. It was a mission of bombing and strafing in support of American forces in A Shau Valley. This was about thirty-five miles west of Da Nang. When they arrived, there were several flights of American planes circling at assigned levels (layers) from about 10 to 23 thousand feet.



**'A group of Skyraiders  
returning from pre-dawn  
dealings with the Viet Cong'**

They were under the control of a Forward Area Controller (FAC) plane high above. Fisher's flight was ordered down through a hole in the clouds but due to bad

weather in the tube they had a difficult time locating their target. After three tries they finally found the U. S. Special Forces landing strip and defense position noted earlier in this story. They went to work with bombs, rockets and strafing of enemy positions from which assaults on American and South Vietnamese defenses were being launched.

It was at this point that a pilot from Fisher's flight, Major Dafford 'Jump' Myers was hit and forced to crash land next to the strip. The other pilots (including Fisher and another Idaho pilot, Capt. Dennis Hague) flew protective cover by strafing around him. They also called in a rescue helicopter. The chopper was delayed and that's when Major Fisher decided to go in and pick his fellow flier up.

To hear the tape of pilot radio traffic as this action unfolded is revealing. They sound almost nonchalant. After Fisher told them he was going in, he made one try but the damaged strip forced him up in the air and had to go around once more. The tape then says:

Fisher: *"I'm gonna make a 180 degree, come in to the southeast."*  
Wing: *"Okay. Well then, we'll come in behind and strafe parallel to your heading."*

Fisher: *"Okay. I'm rolling in now."*

Fisher then sat that A-1E down on about half of the short airstrip, danced it around some craters and saw the runway end coming at him at an uncontrollable speed. He had to brake hard or ride it out

over the end of the strip. If he braked, he could nose over and ruin the prop, then both pilots would be prisoners. If he went off the end, he might keep a measure of control and be able to pick up Myers.

He shot off the end of the runway, over a berm, and into a collection of 55-gallon drums. He slammed on the left brake and spun the Skyraider around, goosed it and taxied back over the soft earth and on to the P.S.P. -- taxied a bit and in a moment saw Myers running behind him. He jumped out on the wing to help his fellow pilot aboard but he had set the idle too fast so the wind prevented Myers from pulling himself up on the wing. He could feel the impact of slugs hitting nearby on the plane. Fisher reached in, set a lower idle and stepped back to help the downed pilot aboard. *As Myers leaned over the cockpit Fisher grabbed him by the seat of the pants and dumped him in upside down. Then he jumped in, revved the engine and they were off.*

And that's where we came in. When we hear stories like this, we think of young, "hot pilots." Hey ... these guys were "old smoothies"... 40 and 46 ... each had a wife and five kids at home. But Fisher was part of his plane. He could make his A-1E do the waltz, which is just what he did that day in far off Southeast Asia. There's no other way to explain how he danced it down that beat up airstrip, off into the wild blue.

You can readily anticipate the rest of the story. It was in January, 1967, that Major Bernard Fisher, of Kuna, Idaho, stood at attention

in the White House as President Johnson hung the Congressional Medal of Honor around his neck.



Maj. Fisher was later assigned to the Idaho Air National Guard as the Senior Air Force Advisor and retired in 1974 at the rank of full Colonel.



Col Fisher's most recent honor came in 1999. As you can see in the photo, the city of Kuna Idaho now has a "Colonel Bernard Fisher Veteran's Memorial Park."

Pictured in the photo are Col Fisher and his wife Realla, Brig. Gen Sayler, and two retired Army Green Beret Soldiers.  
Photo taken by TSgt Gary Adams.

*Editors Note: Thank you to Mr. Fisher, The Idaho Military Division, The Idaho Air National Guard, and HomeofHeroes for their assistance.*



**VOLUNTEER OF  
THE QUARTER**

**Please meet Fred Anderson**

Fred joined the Society in 1994 and was one of our Charter Members. In addition to an active duty tour, he also served in the Idaho Army National Guard in both the 25<sup>th</sup> Army Band and the 116<sup>th</sup> Quarter Masters.

He has taken on the enormous responsibility of the Military Archives and is the primary researcher for inquiries that come in. He knows what artifacts we have, where they are, and the story behind them.

He is also our primary source of information on Heraldry, Unit Histories, Patches, and Medals. He personally designed and constructed the patch and medal display at the Museum.



**Our Favorite Museum  
Curmudgeon presentation**

He is also our Official Museum Curmudgeon but don't let that deceive you. If you need help tracking down some information or want to replace a lost medal, he is the person who can point you in the right direction and will gladly help you with the required forms and paperwork.

**Fred, we'd be lost without you!  
Thank you for everything.**

**IDAHO HISTORY  
DAY WINNER**

**Lillian Azevedo – Boise**

won first prize in the *Best Project in Military History* category at the annual Idaho History Day, held on April 21<sup>st</sup> at BSU!

Her project was a presentation of "Pickett's Charge: High-Water Mark That Turned The Tide." The prize was a check for \$100, which she tells us she is using to help pay her way to the National History Day competition in Washington DC 10-15 June 00.

She is also 1 of 4 in the nation chosen to give their performance at the National Archives on June 14<sup>th</sup>!

Be sure and join us on the 25<sup>th</sup> of July to see first hand this award winning performance!

**NEW MEMBERS***Special Welcome to:*

- ★ Larry Argenian
- ★ William Beck
- ★ William E. Elson
- ★ Edith K. Elson
- ★ Darlene Hand
- ★ Addy Huston
- ★ William Kolb
- ★ Patricia Kolb
- ★ Don McCarter
- ★ Larry Mereness
- ★ Vivian Martin
- ★ Dawana Pate (*Welcome Back*)
- ★ Rick Vernon

**MOST WANTED**

Some of our mannequins are barefoot! We are looking for **Boon Dockers** - Brown shoes from the WWII and Korean timeframe.

We are also looking for **Buckle Top Combat Boots** from the end of WWII through the Korean War.

Attention Ladies! We are looking for **Women's Marine Corps Uniforms** from WWII and on. If you still have yours and would like to give it a good home, bring it in. ★

**MEMBERSHIP MEETING** (Continued)

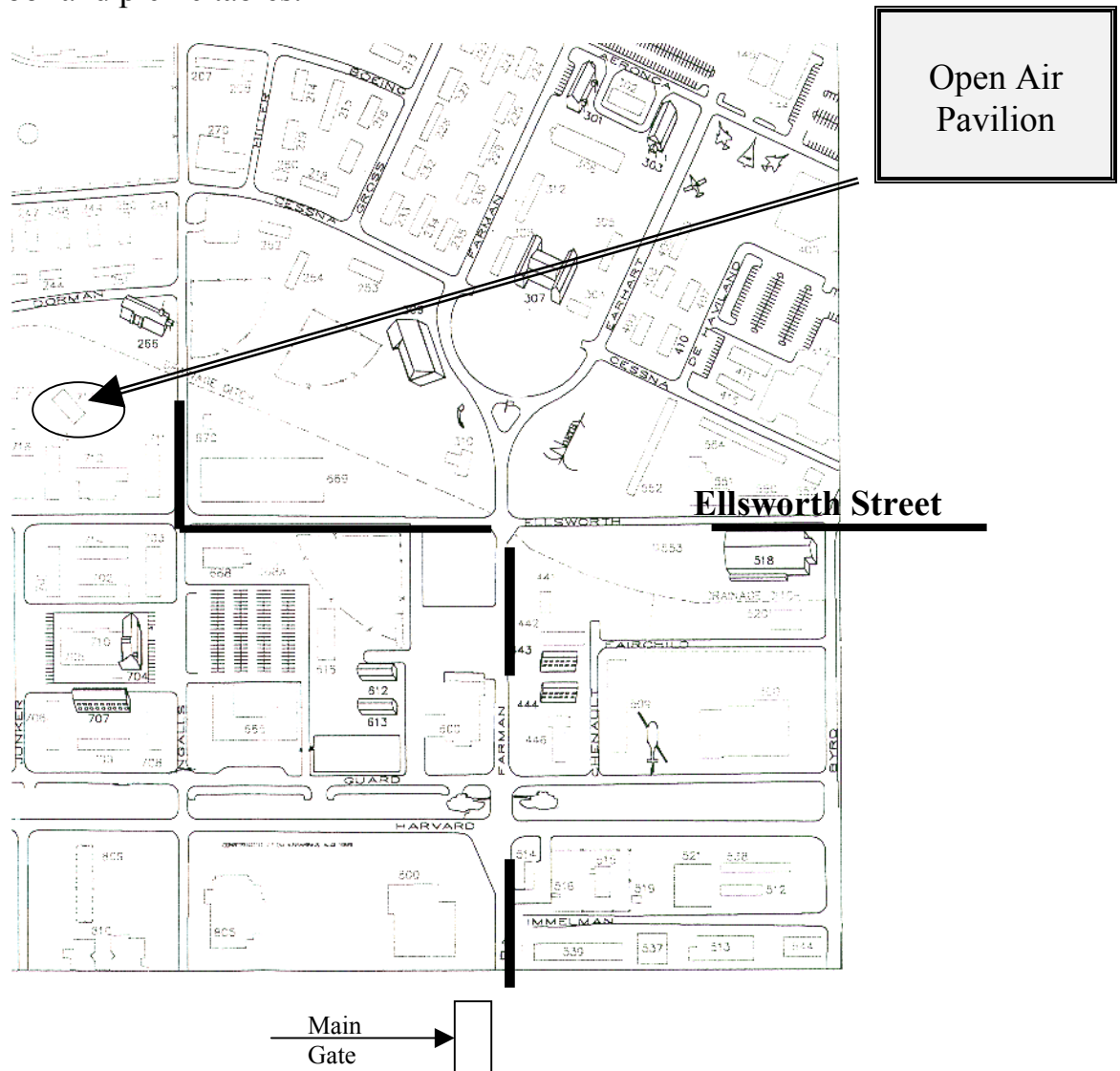
**Strip Map for Open Air Pavilion on Gowen Field.**

After you enter Gowen Field, **continue on Farman Street** until you reach Ellsworth Street.

**Turn left on Ellsworth** and then

**Right at Ingalls.** You will be able to see the Open Air Pavilion on your left.

It has a large blue roof and picnic tables.



**JUST IN CASE**

If you haven't had a chance to send in your renewal for 2000, here is your chance. Just clip the enclosed application and send it in with your **TAX DEDUCTIBLE** contribution. **If you aren't sure what your renewal date is, check the address label on your newsletter**, it lists the month and year your renewal is due.

**Does your employer (or previous employer as the case may be) match charitable contributions? Some do, it's worth asking them about it!**

*Produced By:* Idaho Military Historical Society  
*Production:* Gayle Alvarez, Phil Obenchain  
 Comments or article suggestions are welcome, contact us at 422-4841 or visit our web site at:  
<http://inghro.state.id.us/museum/>

**IDAHO MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

4040 W. Guard Street,  
 Boise, Idaho 83705-5004

***Donation/Membership Application/Renewal Form***

**YES!** Please enter my **tax deductible** membership application/renewal in the category checked below. I have enclosed a check or money order in the amount indicated.

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\$ 375 ☐ Lifetime

\$ 15 ☐ Senior (60+)

\$ 10 ☐ Student

**ORGANIZATIONAL:**

\$ 500 ☐ Platinum

\$ 250 ☐ Gold

\$ 100 ☐ Silver

\$ 50 ☐ Bronze

**OTHER:** (*Endowment, Contributions, etc.*)

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**TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED:** \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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**Interests:** (*Volunteering, Research, Displays, etc.*) \_\_\_\_\_



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*Heroic Past...Proud Future*