



HISTORIA

VOLUME 15, ISSUE 2

NORTHAMPTON TOWNSHIP HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MAY 2007

“Rings of Supersonic Steel” The Nike Missile Program in the Philadelphia Area



Our speaker this month is Jacob (Jake) Rinier, a former Nike missile technician who was stationed at the local Bristol and Eureka, Warrington Township, Nike Battery's.

Jake will talk about the Nike missile program and life on the small bases at a time when few knew what they were or what they did beyond protecting us from Soviet attack. Jake organizes an annual luncheon for the Philadelphia Nike defense area which is attended by many members from near and far. There is a special camaraderie among the former Nike personnel and the local groups are no exception.

Jake started his active duty in the US Army in January 1956 after training on the Nike Ajax missile at Fort Bliss, Texas. There he was taught the physical makeup and operation of the missile and related equipment. In 1957 he went to the McGregor guided range where he spent nine months in the desert setting up launcher sites and working in the missile assembly building. He went on to Nike Hercules missile mechanic school and then spent the rest of his regular Army career teaching the operation and maintenance of the Nike Hercules missile to foreign troops.

Jake left the Army in January 1959 and remained in the US Army reserves until November 1959 when he joined the Pennsylvania National Guard and went to work at the Nike Ajax missile site in Bristol. He later moved to the PH99 site as a senior radar operator. Jake finished his military career at the 79th ARCOM at Willow Grove Naval Air Station at the rank of Master Sergeant in 1994.

Jake will bring many pictures and documents showing the history of the local Nike installations. In addition we will have guests that also worked at the local Nike facilities including Richboro.



A Tribute to Mr. Gilbert

By Betty Cornell Luff

Oh, how many of us old-timers who attended the Richboro School over the years remember our beloved principle, Mr. Raymond Gilbert.

My earliest recollection of Mr. Gilbert was seeing him in his tiny cramped office at the top of the stairs in the old 1913 stone building. (The one that is now moved back on the property) At the time the principle appeared very scary but after the red brick addition was added to the school, a bigger, nicer office was included for Mr. Gilbert and by this time all the students began to realize what a nice, kind, and gentle man our principle had become.

Story continues on page 3

NEWS FROM THE PRESIDENT

Thomas Jefferson once said, "My God, how little do my countrymen know what precious blessings they are in possession of, and which no other people on earth enjoy"

Spring has arrived with all it's beauty, as we enjoy the warmth of the sun and the wonderful scents, take a moment to remember our armed forces, and those who have served and not returned. On this Memorial Day remember those that have lived and died for America.

Our May meeting will on the Nike missile program will talk about Richboro's contribution to the cold war and the soldiers that served in that mission. It should be very interesting. Please try to attend and bring a friend!

Have a great summer. I am looking forward to seeing you all again in September.



Did you know?

The entire collection of HISTORIA's (over 14 years) are available online and in color. Check it out at:

www.northamptontownshiphistoricalsociety.org

We need your input! Please consider writing and submitting an article for the HISTORIA. Your stories, reminiscences, and photos about "Northampton the way it use to be" are always welcome.

Membership Renewal for 2007 is due!

Please take a moment to check the mailing label which should read 2007 if your membership is up to date.

Congratulations to our latest Life member,
Lois Craven Ferguson

Congratulations to the following NTHS members that gave above and beyond their normal membership dues in 2006.

- NTHS Circle** - Doug Crompton, Lois Craven Ferguson
- Patron** - Roy and Gail Reinard
- Sponsor** - Elinor Crompton, Bud and Dotty Davis, Margaret and Lewis Hull, Nancy Turner
- Sustaining** - Jim and Larice Burt, Kathryn Ciaverelli, Childrens Cultural Center, Christine and Joseph Fluehr, Jim and Joan Kinney, Richard Noe, Louis Leitenberger III, Janet and Kurt Nelson, Virginia Smith, Fred Stewart, Steven Rovner,

UPCOMING EVENTS

Mark your Calendar

NTHS Meeting

Wednesday May 16th, 7:30 PM

Jacob Rinier and other local former Nike specialists will talk on the Nike program and reminisce about life at the local Nike bases.

Arrive at 7 PM for refreshments.

MERCER MUSEUM

Pine and Ashland Streets, Doylestown, PA (215) 345-0210 Hours: Mon.-Sat. 10-5, Sun. Noon-5, Tues. until 9 Admission: \$6, \$5.50 seniors, \$2.50 Ages 6-17, Free to members and children under 6

34th Annual Mercer Museum Folk Fest

Saturday & Sunday, May 12-13 (Rain or Shine)

10 a.m.-5 p.m., Mercer Museum

Traditional artisans make the skills and trades of early America come to life.

Underground Railroad in Bucks County

Monday, May 21

12:30 p.m., Mercer Museum

Millard Mitchell discusses the operation of the Underground Railroad in Bucks County during the Civil War.

WELCOME RICHBORO SCHOOL ALUMNI!

Old Richboro School Reunion

Friday, May 25 - 11AM - 5PM

Northampton Country Club

Civil War Encampment

Saturday and Sunday, May 26-27

Mercer Museum and grounds

Henry's Birthday Festivities

Sunday, June 24, 1-4 PM

Fonthill Museum

Fonthill's Old Fashion

4th of July Celebration

Wednesday, July 4, Noon to 5 PM

Fonthill Museum

HAVE A GREAT SUMMER!

A Tribute to Mr. Gilbert

Continued from page 1

Born in Freeburg, PA in 1906, he came to this area in 1929 and resided in Churchville for 67 years. He began his career teaching science and mathematics and coaching soccer and baseball. He became our principle in 1935 and continued to teach many classes. In 1946 Richboro consolidated with Newtown, Wrightstown, and Upper Makefield to become Council Rock. Mr. Gilbert became Assistant Superintendent for Business in the Council Rock School District.



(above) 1935 Senior class trip to Washington, D.C. (left to right) Mr. Gilbert, Harold Search, Evelyn Weir, Vince Diehle, Mrs Gilbert. (above right) Raymond and Mary Ann Gilbert. (Lower right) Mr. Gilbert with his fir trees from an article in the Courier Times.

He was a Boy Scout leader for many years, a Mason, a 50 year Lion's club member, an honorary life member of the Parent Teachers Association, and a member of the Council Rock Senior Citizens. He was a member of the North and Southampton Reformed Church for sixty one years.

Mr. Gilbert was also a member of our Northampton Township Historical Society and he was the first recipient of the Living Tree Award in 1974.

My fifth grade teacher was Mrs. Mary Ann Bowman, who soon afterwards became Mrs. Raymond Gilbert. The Gilberts were married sixty one years and had two children, Beth and Mary Jane Dolton.



In an article in the July 14, 1993 Bucks County Courier Times, Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert were acknowledged for having never missed voting together for fifty years. A 1990 article in the same newspaper tells of Mr. Gilberts forty year hobby of growing Christmas trees.

On May 11, 1996, Mr. Raymond Oscar Gilbert passed away at the age on ninety. His wife and daughter reside in Churchville. Mrs. Gilbert has two grandsons and three great-grandchildren.



Memoirs of two officers who served at the Richboro Nike site

I was originally in Nike package 44 at Fort Bliss. We were assigned to Philadelphia and learned we would go to Eureka. I was a SFC (Sergeant First Class) and was the Missile Material Specialist. My Platoon Sergeant was Sgt Walter Hartz. The package Commander was Lt. Harcarik. We trained, after schooling, for about two months and then went to Red Canyon, NM to fire two Nike missiles in a simulated combat situation. We then packed up and headed for Pennsylvania.

When we arrived we were assigned to Eureka and there we integrated into the existing unit, Battery B. I worked in the launcher area under CWO White. I was so fortunate for I felt, and still do, that CWO White and Sgt Hartz were as good as any two men in the Army. I rented an apartment in Hatfield and my wife and I settled to live in "yankee" country. Our battalion headquarters was moved from somewhere in Philly out to Eureka and the Commander was LTC Roy. This movement really complicated our lives because the headquarters had many visitors. None knew anything about the Nike missile system but they could tell if things were "pretty" and if the grass had been cut. So we spent a lot of time on beautification (which did nothing for our ability to accomplish our mission.) But, I will admit, time outdoors was good. I was in the launcher silos a lot doing this and that so an occasional break to repair a lawn mower helped. We worked about 12 hours a day and I was on call 24/7. Those of us in maintenance were lucky though because we were not in operational duty rotation so were home more nights than many.

The apartment my wife rented was in the home of Walter and Thelma Culp. Walter was a mechanic and Fire Chief (volunteer) of Hatfield. The Culp's made us more than welcome and we felt like Pennsylvanians in short order. I really enjoyed Battery B in those days, every thing was hit and miss or trial and error and it seemed like every day was exciting. In August 1956, I was commissioned a 2nd Lt and was assigned to Richboro. I was at Richboro from July 1956 to September 1959. Some of the personnel at PH07 I remember were; Capt. Powell E Way, Battery Commander, Lt. Fields, Fire Control Platoon, and Lt. Thomas Hamme, Launcher Platoon. Tom Hamme was from Phillie. Capt. Powell was succeeded by Capt. Everett Whitney of Mississippi. The First Sergeant during my years was Clifford J Rozier. CWO Jesse Powell, I think from upstate Pennsylvania, was fire Control Specialist and CWO Vincent LeBarbera was Missile Material Specialist. Have no pictures of site but Capt Whitney probably does (if you can locate him.) I think most of us lived in Hatboro in military leased housing. The best local friend we had was Chief Frey who had a machine shop near the hotel. Every one in the community was friendly and my wife and I enjoyed our years there (although I was on-duty a lot).

Story continues on page 6

Some additional notes...

We did not have a Mess Hall in the Launcher Platoon on route 332. We did use the Day Room there for feeding which was delivered from the fire control area on Twining Ford Road, but that was only when we were on operational standby. At the launch site we had a BOQ, Day Room and enlisted quarters. Everything else was in the Fire Control area. At one time I had 18 men in my platoon and 17 had to be on duty 24/7 when we were on standby alert. Because of this we had our share of marital and morale problems but I think we got through it OK. I got very tired of 'cutting the grass' being the top priority. But I understood. When a Colonel or General would visit they knew nothing about our weapons system but they could tell if the grass needed cutting. One day the Sergeant in me came out. A General asked me what was my top priority (the expected answer was 'operational readiness') and I told him cutting the grass. Several turned red but the General asked for an explanation and I told him. Within a month we had the best Gravely grass cutters money could buy. I never pulled any punches with senior officers after that but I was on the 'list' frequently.

US Army Major Al Osteen, retired, Augusta Georgia.

I was assigned to Battery C, 506th AAA Missile Battalion and the Integrated Fire Control (IFC) Platoon Leader on February 10, 1958. This was my first assignment after attending the Basic Officer Course at Ft. Bliss, Texas. The Air Defense Center and School was located there. When I actually arrived at the unit, I reported to the Executive Officer, 1st Lt. Al F. Osteen. We are still good friends and I never fail to remind him that when we met, I said: "Lt. Osteen, I'm 2nd Lt. Oscar G. Scoville". His response was: "Lt. Scoville, I am First Lieutenant Osteen to you". He had been a non-commissioned officer (Sergeant First Class) before he was commissioned, so he was very senior to me in terms of experience as well as rank. Back in those days, promotions were quite slow. The Battery Commander was Captain Everett F. Whitney and I guess he was in his late 30's. Today, a 40 year old officer is almost always a Lieutenant Colonel.

Captain Whitney informed me that my wife and I would be staying with the Osteen's as they had been appointed as our sponsor. Sponsors took care of new arrivals, arranged lodging, and anything else that was needed. We stayed with the Osteen's for about two weeks until a leased house became available at 219 County Line Road in Clearbrook Village. I think that's Horsham Township, but I'm not sure. It was on the Montgomery County side of the road. Early on in our stay with the Osteen's, we woke up one morning and heard no traffic or any sounds from the outside. The windows were dark and we were on the second floor of a split level house.

Mom and Dad I'm Home

By Betty Cornell Luff

Each day as I read about the war in Iraq, I am reminded of the worst year of my life. It was the year that our son, Jerry, spent in Vietnam. He was born on our farm on Lower Holland Road in 1945 and because we were farmers he was deferred until our farm and all the surrounding farms were sold. After he received his notice he spent two months in North Carolina and another two in Oklahoma before being sent off the Vietnam.



Cammy "Doc" Wilson celebrates his 86th birthday at the March historical society meeting. (l-r) Charlie Wilson, Doc Wilson, Mary Seader, Richard Noe, and Pat Komelasky.



His two cousins were in the infantry there and were constantly on the move but Jerry was assigned to artillery. In his letters he tried to describe how they would make their own "hooch" and after awhile move on to another location and make another.

Jerry had loved his farm. He had a 4-H steer, helped his dad and uncle plow and plant crops, and baled, and welded his own equipment. One of the saddest periods during his time in Vietnam was in the spring of 1968 when we had to write and tell him about the outcome of the farm machinery sale. Our truck and tractors and all of the farm equipment he had worked on had to be sold at auction.

Jerry and his two cousins returned from Vietnam Safely, for which we were all very thankful. I will never forget when his plane landed in the states and we heard home say, "Mom and Dad, I'm home!"



Betty Luff stands next to an emormous tree stump at the old Reckilitis property, located off of Jacksonville Road, during an auction open house in April. The property sold for \$360,000 and will be restored. This is where Rosana Slack was born.



Jerry home on leave, in 1968 at Betty's former home on Bluebird Road, Holland.

Jerry still owns the 1964 red Chevy Impala shown in this picture.



Ray Gilbert at Richboro School Dance. Photo by Harvey weir.

Nike Memoirs from page 4

Al told me to hurry up and get ready because we had to shovel our way out of the house. Snow was banked up almost to the roof - dry snow, of course. Al drove to a road where he knew the Johnsville rotary snowplows would be working and we followed them almost all the way to the missile site. I don't know whether it was that day or a day or two later, but more snowstorms isolated the missile site. There was no power other than generator power for the IFC and Launcher areas. Finally, a helicopter arrived with field kitchen equipment from the PA National Guard. The guardsmen had a great time needling us about not being able to cook like "real soldiers."

Editors note - This was the great NE blizzard on March 20, 1958. Snowfall measured 20-30 inches in most places with a whopping 52 inches reported in Morgantown, PA.

Duty at the Richboro site was good. I had fine NCO's (non-commissioned officers) working for me and it was a pleasure to work for CPT. Whitney and 1stLT Osteen.

One morning, I mentioned that the mess hall coffee didn't taste to good, and all of the officers laughed and told me that they had been waiting for me to complain, so I could replace the current Mess Officer, an additional duty assigned to officers in all units. The weather that winter was very cold, but dry. I was used to cold, clammy, weather in south Georgia, so the dry cold didn't bother me so much. My neighbors in Clearbrook Village thought I was nuts for shoveling snow in a T shirt. That's not to say that it was pleasant working in the cold wind. That I wasn't used to and fortunately we had warm clothing. All of the officers would be on a duty roster to remain on site when we were on 15 or 30 minute status. That meant we had to be ready to fire in 15 or 30 minutes. 15 minute status simply meant that you sat at your duty station in the vans or in the missile pits. 30 minutes gave you a little more leeway. When we were on 1 hour or three hour status, it was even easier. However, you had to be reached by phone at all times unless you were in transit or on 3 hour status. That really tied soldiers down. It wasn't like much of the Army. We didn't just go home and go to a movie. In fact, no one went to movies unless the alert status allowed it. The enlisted men had to stand guard duty as well as KP and, of course, man the equipment. They did not have an easy life, but they adapted. Because of the draft, the Army was much more of a cross section of society than it is today.

We were schooled in educating the public, and, in particular, our neighbors, that a Nike Ajax site was as "safe as your corner gas station". That all became history when, in May 1958, there was a terrible accident at an Ajax site in Middletown, NJ, part of the New York defense system. Eight missiles blew up in a chain reaction and all eight actually left the Launcher Area, flying in all directions. None of the warheads exploded, and all were eventually recovered. Ten soldiers were killed and several wounded. It was a public relations nightmare. It also was the reason that safety measures were taken from that day on to minimize the likelihood of a recurrence.

Life in Pennsylvania was quite an experience for my wife and me, both dyed in the wool southerners. We expected cold, aloof people, and instead found that folks were pretty much the same as where we came from, except for their funny accent. Of course, they loved to hear us talk and always wanted us to say "Y'all". We had to get by on very little pay back then. The last week of the month was often called "peanut butter and jelly time" because families ran short of money by that time each month. My first weekend duty was in late March. My wife, Kay, called me and told me that she was sure that her baby was going to join us quickly. I couldn't leave my duty station, so she drove herself to Abington Hospital, where our daughter was born that night. I called Al Osteen and he came out, took my place, and loaned me his car so I could drive to the hospital. He also had to loan me \$25 to pay for the hospital bill, because I was broke by March 30th, just before payday.

Although I didn't stay long at Richboro, I never forgot it. I was transferred to the Warrington site, PH 99, which was a double battery - two sets of fire control and launching equipment at the same location. I went to Hercules training and never saw PH07 again. We did live at the house on County Line Road, which still stands, until we left the Philly area in December, 1960 to go to the Robins AFB, Ga. Defense. We left with a love of hoagies, Pennsylvania beer, and bratwurst which we continue to indulge in as often as we can.

US Army Lieutenant Colonel Gates Scoville, retired



Armed Forces Day, 1958. Then 2nd Lieutenant Gates Scoville (left) and an unidentified NCO from the Richboro Nike Base show a Nike missile to children in South Philadelphia.



NORTHAMPTON TOWNSHIP HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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www.NorthamptonTownshipHistoricalSociety.org

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HISTORIA is published quarterly by the Northampton Township Historical Society. The Society meets four times each year at the Northampton Township Library, Upper Holland Road, Richboro. Everyone is welcome at our meetings. Meetings start at 7:30 PM (refreshments 7PM), and include a featured speaker. For more information visit our web page or e-mail us at nths@NorthamptonTownshipHistoricalSociety.org Past issues of the HISTORIA, in color, are available on our web page www.NorthamptonTownshipHistoricalSociety.org The HISTORIA is edited by Doug Crompton. Articles are always welcome.

Meeting Dates for 2007

May 16 General Meeting 7:30 PM Refreshments 7 PM
 September 19 General Meeting 7:30 PM
 November 14 Dinner Meeting 6:00 PM

Board Meetings 2007

February 7, April 11, August 8, October 10
 7 PM - Call for location

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION AND RENEWAL CLASSIFICATIONS

This will be your membership for the calendar year of 2007 (January 2007 to December 2007)

INDIVIDUAL - \$15 SENIOR - \$10 STUDENT - \$10 SPONSOR - \$100 PATRON - \$250 (5 year membership)
 FAMILY - \$20 SUSTAINING - \$50 NTHS CIRCLE - \$500 or greater (Life membership)

Note - Applications received after October 31 will be credited for the following year. This application is sent with all editions of the HISTORIA. Please check your mailing label for the expiration year. Normal renewal time is the first quarter of the year or when the March HISTORIA is received. If your membership is current, please pass this application on to others who may be interested in our society. Please consider a contribution of more than the minimum membership to help defray increasing society costs.

Send to:
 Northampton Township Historical Society
 PO BOX 732
 Richboro, PA 18954-0732

NAME: _____ Date: ___ / ___ / 2007 Membership Classification _____
 ADDRESS: _____
 CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____
 PHONE: _____ DUES ENCLOSED: \$ _____
 EMAIL: _____

May we count on you to serve on one of our committees ? : Y _____ N _____ MAYBE _____
 Please give us your ideas for speakers at future meetings : _____
 Would you be willing to write an article for the HISTORIA _____
 Your comments and suggestions are welcome : _____