Flotilla 72 member Robert Shema
Leads the Way in Research of River Mystery

Norman C. Arbes, Editor of the OH-AL-MON GUARDIAN

A computer rendering by Filmet, Inc., of the last moments of the B-25's flight prior to ditching in the Monongahela River.
Copyright © 1994 Filmet Inc

Robert presented a fact filled and interesting talk following the January Flotilla 72 meeting. On the right is a Life-size mural of the B-25 that filled the west exterior wall of the Senator John Heinz Pittsburgh Regional History Center

"January 31, 1956, a Mitchell B-25 bomber, on a flight from Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada to Olmstead Air Force Base in Harrisburg, crashed in the Monongahela River (locally known as the "Mon"), just outside of Pittsburgh. The crew of 6 survived the crash, but two were later claimed by the icy waters of the Mon River. What happened over the next two weeks fueled one of Pittsburgh's greatest unsolved mysteries… What became of the B-25 bomber?   In the two weeks following the crash, a search for the plane was conducted, but no trace of the B-25 was ever found. Theories about the plane's disappearance are plentiful, and are still discussed throughout Pittsburgh. The search still continues, headed up by an organization called the B-25 Recovery Group made up of an eclectic mix of people with a passion for aviation, boating, waterways, Pittsburgh, and, of course, a good old fashioned mystery." Albrecht Powell *

Through careful research and development, Robert Shema determined that a metal detecting magnetometer is the best tool to be use in locating the remains of the bomber. "After 44 years of being subject to the varying pH (acid) concentrations, river traffic and pressures associated with burial, Bob believes this non-intrusive sensor has the best chance of locating the B 25 which would now be in a fragile and corroded state. Once a potential target is located by the magnetometer, selective excavations will be conducted to confirm the bomber's presence. Evidence of the bomber will likely be small samples of metal collected during the excavations. These samples will then be analyzed to confirm that are the same materials originally used in the construction of the aircraft. If evidence exists that the aircraft is intact, it is commonly thought that this is unlikely, an effort may be mounted to recover part or the entire bomber."

About Robert Shema.

"Bob Shema brought almost 40 years of experience to the B-25 recovery project that includes an in-depth understanding of the Monongahela River and the river's complex environment, the application of side and sector scan sonar in along the shore settings and a unique understanding of the "whole is greater than its parts" that results when man, machine and the river meet. Bob's role within the group was that of Operations Director. His responsibilities included the planning and scheduling of all river-borne activities. Additionally, Bob is responsible for the acquisition and use of specialized equipment, safety of operations while on the water and post mission research activities.

Among his personal accomplishments, Bob Shema holds a USCG Masters license which allows him to operate and navigate passenger carrying vessels. He has received recognition by the United States Coast Guard for his work in navigation safety. Bob has been a valued member of Flotilla 72, Division VII Eighth District Eastern Region of the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary since 2003. Bob, along with Norman Arbes, VCDR of Division VII, are scheduled to make a presentation at the Sewickley, PA YMCA Men's Club upon Bob's return to the Pittsburgh area. Bob spends the winters on Lake Powell in Page, Arizona where he works as a boat Captain for Aramarc.

To his credit, Bob was actively involved in the preparation for the 2005 All-Star Game at PNC Park held in the Port of Pittsburgh. Bob and his company were asked to locate a small suitcase (simulating a terrorist explosive device) on the bottom of the Allegheny River adjacent to the Convention center, and they did it expeditiously.

Shema, as Director of Special Projects for the Marion Hill Associates, Inc. is on 24/7 call with numerous agencies, police departments and transportation clients to coordinate the use of high-tech electronics and hard hat divers to assist with underwater emergencies. Currently, Captain Shema is technical advisor to the Port of Pittsburgh regarding Environmental Impacts and serves on the Port's Safety Council and Security Committee. company was asked to locate a small suitcase (simulating a terrorist explosive device) on the bottom of the Allegheny River adjacent to the Convention center, and they did it expeditiously.

Bob Shema looks over model of B-25 during a pre dive check off in the Mon.

*Albrecht and Kimberly Powell are dedicated to actively exploring Pittsburgh and the surrounding communities. They have lived in several Pittsburgh neighborhoods, including Monroeville, Shadyside, Duquesne Heights, Greentree and North Fayette. They have been the About.com Guides to Pittsburgh since 2000.

from the desk of the Flotilla Commander.

To the members of Flotilla 7-2, now that the holiday season is over I am looking forward to starting the New Year. As a Flotilla, we had a great year with a lot accomplished. Last year was a great year for recruitment, public affairs, public education and operations. As a result of the hard work from everyone last year our Flotilla was recognized with the Flotilla of the Year for Division 7 (082-07). I hope as a group we can improve on our accomplishments of last year.

As I get settled into the Flotilla Commander office I am looking forward to what has to be done in the New Year. For this year, I am asking all members to be as active as they can be with Flotilla activities. There are many ways you can participate from vessel exams, to operations, to public affairs. Currently there are many public affairs events scheduled that will need help.

To all the newer members, I encourage you to take a course this year. There are many opportunities to take educational courses. There are online courses through E-learning and there will be classes performed by the various Flotillas in the Division. If you do not see a course you would like to take please let me know and I will see if it is possible to get it scheduled.

The entire Division 7 is low on boat crew qualified members and coxswains. If you are not currently boat crew qualified I would ask you to think about becoming Qualified through the Boat Crew Training Program. I have been told by Division Officers that there will be a push to get the crew qualified numbers up. Becoming qualified does take some time and effort on your part but it is worth it in the end. If you have any questions about the Boat Crew Program please ask FSO-OP Ralph's Unglo or me.

In closing, be proud in what you do with the Coast Guard Auxiliary. Show your pride by wearing your uniform.

from the desk of the Vice Flotilla Commander.

The year has steadily been moving along and we've seen great things from the Flotilla and Division members. As a member of a volunteer organization it is always good to see other members going out and reaching out to the community to make them aware of what the Coast Guard Auxiliary does. I challenge those who do not go to the monthly meetings to come and meet the newer members. Also I challenge those who have ideas to bring them up during the OPEN FORUM and present them at the meetings. We are also looking for events that the Flotilla can be involved in so please send those to myself or the Flotilla Commander. The more we plan up front ahead of time will allow more participation by our members.

Editor's Corner

This edition of Around the Point was a joy to write and publish. The members of 72 have to be proud of their accomplishments during 2011. Several of your members were awarded the Outstanding Auxiliarist Award by Division VII. A hand salute to Greg Knippel and John Franko for exemplary effort and service during the Pittsburgh Regatta by providing quality AUXCOM and satellite support from Mt. Washington and the Formula Boat Pit Area on the North Shore.

Joshua Maverick Langford, your energy, commitment, creativity, and dedication to "doing your job" has catapulted the Flotilla PA Booth to new heights of exposure to the citizens. I salute you for reaching out for the recruiting and awareness of public education efforts in your PA Booth presentation. You are a worthy recipient of the Outstanding Auxiliarist Award for expanding the horizons of Division VII Public Affairs.

A Bravo Zulu to all the members of Flotilla 72 for garnering the Flotilla of the Year Award for consistent and quality contributions to both Operational and Support Missions with and for Marine Safety Unit Pittsburgh, Division VII, and for Flotilla 72. Pride in Accomplishment. You all deserve to walk a little taller, smile a little wider, and work a little harder for your Flotilla Commanders, John Franko and Dan Beahm to maintain the work ethic to earn a 2012 Flotilla of the Year ribbon streamer for your Auxiliary Ensign.

Auxiliarist of the Year, Norman Arbes. Wow, what an honor to receive this award. I sincerely thank those who were part of the decision making process that endorsed this award for me. I was humbled for several reasons. There are so many members in Division VII who also would have been worthy recipients. The namesake of the award, Max Solomon Award, exemplified all things good and proper about the Coast Guard Auxiliarist. The picture from his collection awarded to me hangs proudly in my office as a constant reminder to strive for pride in accomplishment and to conduct myself in the Max Solomon tradition.

I wish this could be a personal not to Flotilla 72, but I'm sure it will not. I am privileged to have been chosen to serve as Division Vice Commander for 2012. I will do all that I can to fulfill the responsibilities of the office and stretch the parameters when necessary. I have accepted the office of Vice Commander, but my heart remains in Flotilla 72.

norman

Mission Statement: To recruit, organize, train and retain U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary Volunteers to provide delivery of recreational boating safety and environmental security services to the boating public, and to assist the U.S. Coast Guard during normal operations as well as times of emergency.

Richard A. Washburn
District Commodore
Eighth District, Eastern Region

"We never touch anyone so lightly that we do not leave a trace"

Peggy Tabor Millin