



## NEWSLETTER 90<sup>th</sup> EDITION APRIL 2004

### PRESIDENT

CHARLES RAUCH  
2329 PALM TREE DRIVE  
PUNTA GORDA, FL.  
33950-5009  
941-639-6421

### VICE PRESIDENT

JIM CHERKAUER  
114 THORNCLIFF RD.  
KENMORE, NY  
14223-1216  
716-875-4346

### TREASURER

WILLIAM H. WILSON  
P.O. BOX 360  
SNYDER, TX  
79550-0360  
325-573-6351

### SECRETARY

HOWARD K. ANDERSON  
6669 S. SHERBOURNE DR.  
LOS ANGELES, CA  
90056-2123  
310-641-7770

Web site : [www.kensmen.com](http://www.kensmen.com)

\*\*\*\*\*FROM CHARLES RAUCH, PRESIDENT\*\*\*\*\*

I am looking forward to the next two years as your president and will give you my devoted attention and will be supported by the following devoted members ; Jim Cherkauer, VP, Andy Anderson, Secretary and Bill Wilson, Treasurer.

The planning for the 2004 43<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group Association reunion in Tampa, FL at the Wyndham Harbor Island Hotel from Monday, September 13, 2004 until noon Sunday, September 19, 2004 is on schedule. The major planning is well under way and I have been surprised at the large amount of activities available in the Tampa area even after living in Punta Gorda for the past thirteen years. We are looking at a combination two hour historic bus trip plus a two hour lunch trip on a boat touring the harbor with narration and the other option has a two hour lunch trip on the boat with narration. The boats do not have casino gambling. More details later after prices have been discussed.

They tell me all of the 300 hotel rooms have view of the water. ( I haven't checked this out). There will also be an optional trip to Busch Gardens, which is a short distance from the hotel. Bus transportation is furnished to and from there and is included in the price. I have not arrived at a final price as yet.

I want to call to your attention the annual dues for 2004 were due at the annual meeting in Corpus Christi And the 2005 dues may be mailed to Bill Wilson at this time. We will also accept dues by check at the Tampa reunion. Bill's address is in the above letterhead.

Please send Andy Anderson the news you may have for future Newsletters. It is the "life line" to keep in touch with our members and your own crew.

Please mark your calendars for the Tampa reunion and future Newsletters will bring more details to you.

Your officers are interested in knowing more about a man named Alfred Joseph Pagani. We need to know if his name appears on any of your old Air Medal Orders or old documents of the 64<sup>th</sup> Squadron during the B-24 period of the war either as ground crew or flying personnel. If you have any information at all, contact the Secretary, Vice President or President at the addresses listed above.

*Chuck Rauch*

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By Andy Anderson, Editor

I wish to try to help **Bill Wilson's Elf, Elain Pierce**, who is asking for help in determining why newsletters are being returned from the following persons:

**Burt Aden** (for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time)  
**Clarence H Creamer** ( for the 2<sup>nd</sup> time)  
**Shirley Nelson** ( for the 2<sup>nd</sup> time)  
**Warren C. Adams** ( for the 2<sup>nd</sup> time)  
**David B. Grant** ( for the 2<sup>nd</sup> time )

I had communication from Burt Aden within the last year or so and he had a winter address in Florida and a summer address in Omaha at that time. If anyone can help provide a new address for these persons please contact myself or Bill Wilson. The post office department will not forward the newsletters but will return them to where they are mailed from; Snyder, Texas. **Harry Brownstein's** mailing was returned from Yuma, AZ marked "deceased" so that one is no mystery.

With his dues **Albert E. Feldbin**, 64<sup>th</sup> Bombardier, sent a note that he had a reunion with the Radioman on his (**Ken Brown's**) crew **Mario Barsotti** and his wife, **Florence**, last October. The two had not seen each other in 58 years. The two men and their wives hope attend the Tampa reunion in September and join up with Ken. To quote Albert, "It's been a long time between drinks!" Mario took a photo of the mushroom cloud at Nagasaki from the waist window of their B-24 while returning from a mission. Your editor was on that same mission. Since Mario's name is not on our roster, Albert, I hope that you will get an application from our website or from **Ed Gammill** and recruit him as a new member.

**Steve Perrone** sent your Editor an attractive New Years Day card and a report on his book "World War II B-24 Snoopers" which Steve states is selling slowly, but steadily. Copies were requested for Wright-Patterson AFB and Maxwell AFB for their archives. The book was reviewed by Air Force Times and Flight Journal. Steve was interviewed by The Philadelphia Inquirer and The Courier-Post and the book is sold in the book store at Wright Paterson and several other air museums around the country. If you do not yet have a copy, you can contact Steve at his address in our roster.

**Roger Kettleison** forwarded me a letter and a mission report form **Orion L. Rogers**, 63<sup>rd</sup> pilot of Peoria, AZ. What follows are his memories of a dual purpose mission.

#### OUR CHRISTMAS MISSION OF 1944

The dates and places mentioned in the following account, our "Our Christmas Mission" are authentic, but what happened during that mission is as I remember it 59 years later. The Japanese were being pushed back so rapidly, that we couldn't effectively reach them with our B-24s from our established bases. It became necessary that we stage through islands that the allied forces had recently invaded. After suitable maintenance, these strips were used as refueling stops on the way to our primary target.

We left Owi, a very small island near New Guinea in the Netherland East Indies (now known as Indonesia) on 12-16-44 for Anguar in the Caroline Islands (now known as Bileu Islands. Allied forces had landed on Anguar on 9-17-44, so by now the island was fairly secure. From there we would fly three missions to Northern Luzon in the Philippine Islands before returning to Owi.

One of these missions began on Christmas day in B-24J #42-10037. We departed Anguar before noon with a full crew of ten, 3100 gallons of 100 octane gasoline, six 500 pound GP bombs, a full complement of 50 caliber ammunition and many thousands of leaflets (Christmas cards) to be dropped over the Manila area of Luzon, P.I. We landed at Tacloban Airstrip on Leyte about 1600 hours for refueling and dinner.

Allied forces landed near Tacloban on 10-20-44, but the island of Leyte was still not secure. While we waited for the fuel truck and the dinner that had been promised, a Japanese plane flew low over the area with guns ablaze. Fortunately, neither we nor our airplane was hit. Shortly afterward, our fuel truck arrived. While our B-24 was being refueled, our dinner arrived. The rumor was that we were to get turkey. We were not disappointed. We got turkey with all the trimmings including cranberry sauce. What a treat! By 1800 hours we were airborne on our way to Luzon. Our first order of business was to circle over Manila several times while dropping the Christmas cards. Several searchlights blinked on but they were not accurate. No ack-ack was observed.

After delivering the Christmas greetings to Manila, we headed for our primary target on Northern Luzon. About midnight, we arrived at Laoag Airstrip. We dropped three of our bombs on the airstrip and three in the personnel area nearby. Then we dropped down to about 500 feet looking for targets to strafe. As we passed over Vigan Bay, one of the gunners pressed his intercom button and said, "Look at that ship down there!" After saying that he opened fire. Immediately, the Japanese ship returned fire which was very accurate. The airplane was holed in a booster pump drawing gasoline from #2 engine.

Almost immediately, the airplane was filled with 100 octane fumes. We immediately turned off all electrical equipment to prevent ignition of the fumes. The smallest spark would blow the airplane out of the sky. At this point we were a flying bomb. We had to open the windows on the flight deck so we could breathe. One of the crew was heard to remark, "It's a miracle that we are still here!" Our lives were in the hands of a higher being.

The airplane seemed to be functioning ok. We headed back toward Leyte via Hill airstrip in Southern Mindoro. If, as we approached Hill, everything seemed to be in good condition, we would alter our course and return to Leyte. Allied forces had landed near Hill on 12-15-44. At the briefing for this mission we were told that Hill airstrip was in friendly hands, but the area was far from secure and we should use it only if it was absolutely necessary. On our way to Hill, the crew tried in vain to stem the flow of fuel. Our situation wasn't good. The airplane was still full of fuel fumes. At the rate we were losing fuel, we would not be able to reach Leyte, so we decided to land at Hill.

By now it was well past midnight. In the distance, as we approached Hill, we could see several large fires, but we could but we couldn't see Hill. As much as we dreaded turning on the radio, we knew we must identify ourselves and get instructions for landing. We crossed our fingers and threw the switch. We didn't blow up. We told them that we had been damaged and needed to make an emergency landing. They told us that earlier they had been heavily bombarded for several hours by the Japanese Navy. They had sustained severe damage. Most of the runway lights were not working. They told us that the runway was short and extremely soft, and only suitable for small aircraft. They gave us landing instructions and wished us luck.

We approached the strip as instructed and landed. As we neared the end of the runway, we steered to one side and came to a controlled stop. We turned the engines off. The time was 0500, December 26<sup>th</sup>. We all got out and moved away from the airplane fearing that it would burn. It didn't. Several minutes later, we saw the lights of several vehicles approaching. We were not sure they were friend or foe. We drew our weapons, spread out and waited for them to arrive. When we didn't approach them, the drivers got into the beam of the headlights so we could see that they were friendly.

We were taken to operations. There we were told that there were no mechanics or spare parts to fix our plane. We would have to leave it and return to Leyte by other means. In the meantime, we were given cots so we could get some badly needed rest. About 0800, we were awakened and given some breakfast. Then we were driven to the airstrip and boarded a C-46 for transport back to Leyte.

The C-46 had no guns for protection, so Navy fighters escorted us to Leyte. There, we were fortunate to get a ride in a B-24 for the five hour and thirty minute ride to Anguar. When we arrived, all ten crew members were very tired and grateful to be alive.

By Andy Anderson

We are grateful to **Orion Rogers** for sharing his "Christmas Mission of 1944" with us. I think, at the time of this mission, he was co-pilot on **Captain George C. Welch's** crew. He later took over **Brownfield's** crew when Brownfield was made CO of the 63<sup>rd</sup>.

**Max Axelsen** has asked me to thank former **President Sam Commons** for the good word that he does to help the Dunning Company publish such good photo reunion books. I didn't know this, but Sam helps to match names with photographs and also selects the other photos to appear in the books.

With his dues, **Howard "Bud" Booth**, 63<sup>rd</sup> Pilot of Fairfield, California, sent a note to say that he will make it to the Tampa reunion if he can find a way to travel with his oxygen bottle. His doctor has him on oxygen day and night. Bud, I suggest that you discuss using oxygen with the airlines.

We have a new member who was an armament officer in the 403<sup>rd</sup> Squadron. He is **Ely L. Hill** at 7480 Heatherwood Lane, Cincinnati, OH. He joined us while we were at Clark Field and moved to Ie Shima with us. At the end of the war he served in Japan as part of occupation forces. He was in the inactive reserves until called back in during the Korean War.

**Ben Damron**, 65<sup>th</sup>, of Stanford, Kentucky states that he is also on oxygen but is still able to drive his car. He and his grandson both enjoy the newsletters. He hopes that someone will refresh his memory about Iron Range and the train ride from Newcastle to Torrens Creek in Australia.

**Clifford and Betty Neve**, Life Members, have a new address. It is "C/O Unical Corp. Jakarta, 14141 SW Freeway, Sugar Land, TX 77478. Your editor may be wrong, but I believe that Cliff was a speaker at one of our reunions to inform us about what one of our tough targets, Balikpapan, Borneo, is like today.

**Charles Thomason**, 64<sup>th</sup> Tail Gunner, writes from Idaho, "Same old state, same old town, same old house, and same old gal for 59 years. From here on I consider every day a bonus!" Charles was originally on **Matt Holahan's** crew but finished on **Thomas Sprott's** crew. He describes the newsletter as A+.

Your Editor received a letter in early February from **Weldon Yost**, B-24 Pilot of Norman, Oklahoma to inform us of the death of the Navigator on his crew, **Allen Chrisman**. These two had been friends since they met in training and Allen was best man at Weldon's wedding. They often visited at reunions and in each others homes. During the war they flew about 44 missions together.

**Jim Rodella**, 64<sup>th</sup> Gunner, wrote me in late January to say that he enjoyed **Jim Cherkauer's** report on the tough mission to Tainan, Formosa. He was reminded of the tough missions he flew over the same town. He stated that he and his wife hopes to see us in Tampa in September. Jim's daughter **Joyce Rodella** usually attends reunions with him and is an associate member of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Association. I must ask Jim sometime why his wife, **Gladys**, is called "**Boots**". I've known him long enough to be inquisitive... some 60 years!

A bit of ancient history arrived in the mail from **Flacnor Gifford**, 64<sup>th</sup> Crew Chief of Yakima, WA. He enclosed a set of orders marked "CONFIDENTIAL" and dated 15 May, 1942. The names were being ordered to fly by as passengers in LB-30 and B-17E planes from Hickam Field on Hawaii to a place called Nandi where some were to pick up B-17E airplanes and proceed to a place called Tontouta. Falcner writes that MacArthur changed the orders and the B-17 air crewman and went on to Brisbane, Australia and then on to Townsville or Mareeba to replace the 19<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group. The ground crewmen went on to Charlieville, unassigned. On August 3, 1942, Falcner flew with a B-17 crew to join the 64<sup>th</sup> Squadron at Fenton Field in Northern Australia. If any one of you believe that your name is on this list and would like a copy, I can send one to you. I recognize names on the list but none that are still living except for Falcner.

With his dues sent to **Bill Wilson**, came these comments from **William R. Snyder** of Crawfordsville, Florida. "I have been on the 63<sup>rd</sup>'s reunion list for some time and did not know why until I received my copy of 'Snoopers' Now, after all these years, I know what some of those 'unknown missions' I flew were. I was TDY to the 43<sup>rd</sup> from FEAF to fly 10 missions for info and experience, so I flew with any crew needing a replacement including the one when we got shot down, but survived. I got quite an education with the 43<sup>rd</sup>. One day at a time." *W.R. Snyder* Your editor would like to hear about the mission where you crew got shot down, William. It might be a story worth putting in the newsletter. In our roster you are listed as a 403<sup>rd</sup> gunner. Is that incorrect?

Your Editor received a letter from **William Jobe**, 64<sup>th</sup> Radioman to inform me of the death of his pilot **Henry Joseph Domagalski** in January of this year. Domagalski was not a member of this association but his death will be reported in TAPS because others may have known him. Jobe also had this interesting bit of news to report. The Collings Foundation is pushing for a stamp to be issued by the US Postal Service to honor the B-24 Liberator. If you wish to support the issuance of such a stamp you can write to Dr. Virginia Noelke, Citizens Stamp Advisory Committee USPS, 475 L'Enfant Plaza SW, Washington DC 20260-2435. I am sure that any sincere letter would work but if you wish to use a form letter one is available on the Collings internet website at <http://www.collingsfoundation.org/b24stamp> I am sure that this works because I accidentally pulled up the website while printing this message.

We are grateful to **Roger Kettleson** for tracking down the address of **George White**, a former president of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group Association. The address is 919 Sidehill Drive, Bel Air, MD 21015. Now George can receive this and future newsletters. George, be sure that Bill Wilson receives your phone number.

+++++TAPS---LAST ROLL CALL+++++

|                                                                                                       |                                    |           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Glenn B. Peltier</b> 403 <sup>rd</sup> Gunner, on March 3, 2004                                    | Reported on our web site           | God Bless |
| <b>Harry Brownstein</b> 63 <sup>rd</sup> Eng. Reported when Newsletter was returned marked "deceased" |                                    | God Bless |
| <b>Allen Chrisman</b> , 65 <sup>th</sup> Navigator on Dec. 30, 2003                                   | Reported by <b>Weldon Yost</b>     | God Bless |
| <b>Vernon Fred Gaston</b> 65 <sup>th</sup> Pilot on Feb. 4, 2004                                      | Reported by <b>Charles Rauch</b>   | God Bless |
| <b>Henry Joseph Domagalski</b> 64 <sup>th</sup> Pilot on Jan 13, 2004                                 | Reported by <b>William Jobe</b>    | God Bless |
| <b>Ken Beckstrom</b> 63 <sup>rd</sup> Navigator on Feb 5, 2004                                        | Reported by <b>Bob Butler</b>      | God Bless |
| <b>Aileen White</b> , wife of our former president <b>George White</b>                                | Reported by <b>Roger Kettleson</b> | God Bless |

**Damon Copress, Sr.** new member being recruited 403<sup>rd</sup> Sq. Reported by **Ed Gammill** God Bless

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Your Editor received an eight page copy of an article in the Spring 2004 edition of "Invention and Technology" publication from **Ed Gammill**. The article was titled "Gas Stations in the Sky" and is a complete history of in-flight refueling. Believe it or not, aerial refueling began in the 1920s in a very crude fashion. The first non-stop around the world flight was made in 1949 by none other than the 43<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group when Capt. James Galleghar flew a 94 hour 1 minute mission beginning Feb 26 and ending March 2. His B-50 piston engine plane was refueled four times and landed on the same field it took off from. At that time the 43<sup>rd</sup> was part of the Strategic Air Command.

As this is being written Saint Patrick's Day has arrived, so the Quarterly Humor section will honor the Irish!

### Quarterly Humor

#### The Errand

McQuilland walked into a pub and ordered martini after martini, each time removing the olives and placing them in a jar. When the jar was filled with olives and all the drinks consumed, the Irishman started to leave. "Excuse me," said a customer who was puzzled about what McQuilland had done "What was that all about?" "Nothing," said the Irishman, "me wife just sent me out for a jar of olives!"

#### Lost luggage

An Irishman arrived at J.F.K. Airport and wandered around the terminal with tears streaming down his cheeks. An airline employee asked him if he was already homesick. "No", replied the Irishman, "I've lost all my luggage." "How did that happen?" "The cork fell out," said the Irishman.

#### You've been drinking again

An Irishman had been drinking in a pub all night. The bartender said that he was closing. So, the Irishman stood up to leave and fell flat on his face. He tried to stand up one more time; same result. He figured he'll crawl outside and get some fresh air and maybe that will sober him up. Once outside, he stood up and fell again. So he decided to crawl the four blocks home. He crawled through the door and into his bedroom. When he reached his bed, he tried one more time to stand up. This time he managed to pull himself upright, but he quickly fell into the bed and is sound asleep as soon as his head hit the pillow. He was awakened the next morning to his wife standing over him shouting, "SO, YOU'VE BEEN DRINKING AGAIN". Putting on an innocent look and intent on bluffing it out he said, "What makes you say that?" "The pub just called; you left your wheelchair there, again!"

#### Water to wine

An Irish priest is driving down to New York and gets stopped for speeding. The state trooper smells alcohol on the priest's breath and then sees an empty wine bottle on the floor of the car. He says, "Sir, have you been drinking?" "Just water," says the priest. The trooper says "Then, why do I smell wine?" The priest looks at the bottle and says, "Good Lord, He's done it again!"

An elderly Irish woman goes to the doctor and asks his help to revive her husband's sex drive. "What about trying Viagra?" Asks the doctor. "Not a chance," says Mrs. Murphy. "He won't even take an aspirin for a headache." "No problem," replies the doctor, "Drop it into his coffee, he won't even taste it. Try it and call me in a week to let me know how things went. A week later, Mrs. Murphy calls the doctor and he inquired how things went, "Oh, faith and bejasus and begorrah, it was terrible, just terrible, doctor".

"What happened?", asked the doctor. "Well, I did as you advised and slipped it into his coffee. The effect was immediate. He jumped straight up, with a gleam in his eye and his pants bulging fiercely! He swept the cutlery off the table, at the same time ripping off my clothes and then proceeded to make wild, mad, passionate love to me on the tabletop for hours! It was terrible, doctor." "What was terrible," said the doctor, "Was the sex not good?" "Oh no, doctor, the sex was the best I've had in 25 years, but I'll never be able to show my face in Starbucks coffee shop again!!"

Your editor has received a lengthy dairy from **Frances P. Denault**, former 63<sup>rd</sup> Squadron pilot who lives in Deerfield Beach, Florida. The report is about 75 pages long, double spaced, so perhaps I can get it into about three newsletters in installments, since this newsletter is single spaced.

By Frances Powers Denault

This is a true story of my experience as an Air Force pilot during World War II, first in Panama and then with the 63<sup>rd</sup> Squadron of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group in the Southwest Pacific during 1942 and 1943. The 43<sup>rd</sup> was part of the famous 5<sup>th</sup> Air Force that helped to stop the Japanese advance in the Southwest Pacific and their attempt to invade Australia.

It was December 1941 and I had just finished flying school in the Army Air Corps. They sent 15 of us to Mitchell Field, Long Island, New York for transition flying in Curtis P-40 fighter planes. We were to be commissioned 2<sup>nd</sup> Lts. in the Army Air Corps Reserve on Dec. 11, 1941, and then put on inactive duty for the purpose of taking a job with Pan American Airways. We all know what happened on Dec. 7, 1941 at Pearl Harbor. The Army Air Corps cancelled everything. We had a few days off before we were to be commissioned on Dec. 11. In the meantime Walt Beckler, Richard Deabler and I decided to see New York City.

We got on the subway at Jamaica and got off on Lexington Ave. We made our first stop at Plaza Hotel. We were brand new 2<sup>nd</sup> Lts. with silver wings. Needless to say, we drew quite a bit of attention and there were lots of free drinks. This was great because a brand new 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. does not have much money. We met some very nice people, one, in particular, a beautiful young lady by the name of Mary Powers. She was unattached and from a very prominent family. She invited us to her family home on 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. It was very plush and she entertained us royally. Her family invited us out for a night at the El Morroco supper club. We had a great time. They were very nice people. We lived it up those few days.

My mother and father came to see me from West Springfield, Mass. and spent the day with me. We had some relatives on Long Island and they stayed with them. Needless to say, they were upset. It was the last time I saw them until I came back from combat.

In a few days we were transferred to Tallahassee, Florida, and were stationed at Dale Mabre Field. We were to be checked out in P-39s. It was similar to the P-40 except it had a 40 millimeter cannon in the nose. It did not impress me. Tallahassee was a nice place and I enjoyed it very much. It seemed that everything was in a state of confusion. We were preparing for war and it was going to take quite a while to catch up. While I was in Tallahassee, I was given a yellow fever shot and I had a reaction. I tried to get out of taking it but could not. I had a feeling that I would. I have many allergies and eggs is one of them. Most of these shots are stored in egg albumen. I got choked up and had trouble breathing. I could not sleep so I walked around the base most of the night trying to clear up my lungs. Finally, I cleared up and went to my quarters and fell asleep.

The next thing I knew we were transferred to the Panama Canal Zone. I got to spend Christmas in Tallahassee, and then it was off to Panama. We were stationed at Howard Field in the middle of the Canal Zone. The field was new and there was jungle all around the place. Snakes were all around the area. The boa constrictors were so plentiful that we used them for target practice with our Colt 45 pistols. There was a poisonous snake called the bushmaster, about the size of our rattler in the States. We lived in tents and one of the men found a bushmaster in his bed. Fortunately, he did not get bit.

We were preparing for a possible Japanese attack on the Canal Zone with our few obsolete planes. It was a pathetic situation. The most modern fighter that we had was the P-39 and it had not been tested in combat. The cannons were not on some of them. I noticed a couple of A-24s, a low wing fighter plane that was ancient. It had a 30 caliber gun that fired through the prop. There were some P-40s at France Field on the Atlantic side of the Canal Zone. I was told that there were some B-17 and B-18 bombers at Rio Hato about 80 miles north of the Canal Zone on the Pacific side of Panama. Fortunately, the Japanese never came. If they had, it would have been another Pearl Harbor. While we were in Panama, we were able to get into Panama City a few times. There was a famous place there called Panama Hatties, where you could have a drink and a good time. They sold no liquor but you could buy a bottle and take it into



Panama Hatties and buy all the "set-ups" you wanted. They only sold "set ups". We made a drink called Cuba Libre. It contained rum, coke and dash of lime. My mother would not allow any liquor in the house, so this was all new to me. I learned to drink in Panama. The Cuba Libres were very good and and you know what happens when you mix your own.

Albrook Field in Panama City was an old established supply base and had a lot of American civilian personnel working there. There were a lot of girls from the States working as secretaries and clerks. Unfortunately, we did not get into Panama City very often. We were not at Howard Field very long when they transferred a group of us to a field at David, about 30 miles up the coast on the Pacific side of Panama. It was not much of a place, a dirt strip in the jungle just off the coast. When we were driving to David in a jeep we stopped quickly because right over the road hanging from a tree were two very large boa constrictors. We were not sure that we wanted to drive under the tree. Finally, we got up enough nerve to go ahead. . We got over to one side of the road and went around them. They looked big enough to swallow us whole.

At the field in David they had 10 P-36 fighters and one P-40. The P-36 was built by Boeing Aircraft Co. It had guns in the wings and looked something like a P-47 but did not have the R 2800 engine. It has shotgun starter. At first I had trouble starting the P-36, using 2 or 3 shells. I liked to fly it and it was very maneuverable. I would say it was obsolete for World War II. The only one checked out in the P-40 was 1<sup>st</sup>. Lt. James, who was in charge of the group. We did not have it very long. He had orders to transfer the P-40 to France Field at Christobal, on the Atlantic side of the Canal. He wanted to know if anybody was checked out in the P-40. Nobody spoke up. I could not resist. I volunteered to fly the P-40 to France Field. I never did get to fly the P-40 at Mitchell Field, Long Island, but I felt I could handle the ship. I got off the ground all right, but it was in the afternoon and thunderheads were building up over the Canal Zone. I would have tried to under them, but I was not familiar with the area and what type of structures were in the area. I decided to go over the top of the clouds. I started to climb and for a while it seemed the clouds were climbing faster than I was. Finally, I got to the top at about 22,000 ft. It only took about 10 minutes to go across the Canal Zone, which was about 25 miles wide. I let down on the Atlantic side of the zone. The weather was clear with only a few clouds. Fortunately, I let down just off the coast of Cristobal and spotted France Field sitting on the coast line. I contacted the control tower on the radio and they gave me landing instructions. The wind was blowing toward the ocean and they told me to land on a runway right on the shore heading inland. I let down into the downwind lane and made a left turn into the base lane. From there I started my let down. It was a very small field and the runways were not very long. Keep in mind that I had never landed a P-40. I decided to make a three point landing and I knew that I had to hit on the first few yards of the runway. Everything went fine and I hit on the first few yards of the runway. I made a perfect landing and all I had to do was come to a stop. I had heard that a P-40 nosed over very easily so I hit the brakes easy. The plane came to a stop with plenty of runway to spare. I taxied over to a parking area and a serviceman gave me parking instructions. I took the form from the plane and turned it over to operations. There I met some of my classmates from flying school. Little did I know it but this was to be my only flight in a combat fighter in World War II.

The flight in the P-40 reminded me of the time I was in basic flying school. We had finished our training in primary school at Tuscaloosa, Alabama in PT-17s, a fabric biplane. We took our basic training at Montgomery, Alabama in PT-13s, a metal low wing monoplane. It was a lot heavier than the PT-13 and landed faster. I was assigned to a redheaded 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. for training, along with three or four other students. He flew with all of the other students and finally got around to me. It was early in the morning and we walked out of the operations office together towards the plane and then all of a sudden he stopped. He stood there and looked at me. Without hesitation, he said, "Do you think you can fly this plane?" He took me by surprise and I did not know what to say. I wanted to tell him I had no time in the plane, also I was afraid that if I told him I couldn't fly the plane he might wash me out. The war had not started yet and they were washing men out for the least little thing. Without hesitation, I told him that I thought I could. "OK, he said, go ahead and fly it," and walked away. In sort of a fog, I walked over to the plane and checked everything out. I then climbed into the cockpit and started it up. Everything checked out in the



cockpit, so I gave the signal to the line chief to pull the wheel chocks. I taxied out to the end of the runway and received take off instructions from the control tower. I did not have too much trouble taking off. I noticed immediately how much heavier the plane was than the plane I had been flying. I climbed to 5,000 ft. and leveled off. I flew around for a while to get the feel of the plane. Takeoff is the easy part, landing is the hard part. The plane was a lot heavier than anything I had flown before and I anticipated having trouble getting a feel for the stalling speed of the plane. I entered the landing pattern and received instructions for landing. The first time I came in for a landing I came in a little too fast and tried to get a feel for the stalling speed. I did not want the plane to stall out on me. I hit a little too hard and bounced a couple of times. I decided to go around again and pressed forward on the throttles slowly to increase speed. I climbed to about 3,000 ft. and reentered the landing pattern. The second time I came in for a landing I had a better feel for the stalling speed and landed without any trouble. I practiced a few takeoffs and landings, then taxied back to the parking line. My instructor was gone when I returned, so I checked out and returned to my quarters. This is how I checked out in a PT-13 trainer. I think he knew that he had not flown with me. Of course, I passed basic flying school.

After I tuned the P-40 over to France Field operations, I returned to David. Living conditions were bad at David and we lived in tents. There wasn't much to the town. It was very hot and when we were not flying, we tried to sleep.

Lt. James, who was in charge, told us that they needed pilots at the 6<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group in Rio Hato, about 60 miles north of the Canal Zone on the Pacific side of Panama. He knew that we were bored at David. He told us that if any of us wanted to transfer he would arrange the transfer for us. He also told us they had permanent barracks. He said they were flying submarine patrol over the Caribbean Sea and that we would get more flying time. Lt. Francis Kritzmacher and I volunteered and were transferred to the 6<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group in Rio Hato. The 6<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group had a collection of some obsolete and some that were not combat ready. They had a few B-17s with no armor. These were nice to fly, cruising at about 180 mph. There were a few B-18 2 engine bombers which were very slow, cruising at about 150 mph. They had 2 B-24s equipped with radar equipment for tracking submarines. The B-24s were the first new ships that I had seen, so far. Then there were a few A-17s. I think they were classified as attack dive bombers. They carried four 100 lb. bombs. They had a single engine with a 30 cal. machine gun that fired through the propeller. Also there was a squadron of 2 engine A-20 Douglas attack bombers. They were a fairly new low wing plane with guns firing from the wings. This was what we had to defend the Canal Zone with. Needless to say, everybody wanted to fly the B-24s. I started out as a co-pilot and acquired some good experience flying over water and in tropical weather. We flew a route almost up to Jamaica and along the coast of South America. When we could not get back to Rio Hato because of weather or any other reason we were allowed to land at airports in Columbia, South America such as Barranquilla or Cartagena. We were allowed to stay at hotels in those cities. We spotted a submarine one day but before could get to it, it submerged. We dropped two bombs where it went under. We observed no evidence that we had made a hit. One night when we were staying at the Prada Hotel in Barranquilla, a man approached me and asked me if I wanted to buy some diamonds. He showed me the diamonds and said he wanted six hundred dollars for them. I did not know if they were real or not. Besides I did not have that kind of money. I told him I was not interested. While I was in Panama I made a trip to the Galapagos Islands where the 6<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group had a landing strip. It was a barren place and the large turtles were all over the place. Lt. **Harry Staley**, about the 18<sup>th</sup> of February, 1942, bombed a submarine off the Atlantic coast of the Canal Zone. He dropped four 100 lb. bombs on the submarine which was partly submerged in the water. The submarine disappeared under the water and he returned to Rio Hato. At that time the Free French submarine, The Surcouf, which was believed to be in the area, disappeared and was never heard from again. Staley thought that he had sunk a German submarine. In 1991 an English history researcher by the name of James Bushridger wrote to Harry Staley and told him he was very sure that Harry had hit the Free French submarine, The Surcouf. An American merchant ship, blacked out in wartime fashion collided with something at 10:30 PM on February 18<sup>th</sup>, 1942 in the Caribbean off the coast of Panama. When Staley hit the submarine, it was very low in the water and probably had been damaged by the

freighter. It was the largest submarine ever built. It had a forward turret that mounted a pair of 8 inch guns. At the rear the conning tower a fold-away sea plane was stored. She was going to Tahiti by way of the Panama Canal. Lt. Staley and I later served together in the Southwest Pacific.

On March 15, 1942 we received orders to take the 10 P-36s and 2 B-18s to Fortaleza, Brazil. We were to turn them over to the Brazilian Air Force for training purposes. **Lt. Bill Thompson** was to pilot one of the B-18s. I had been flying as his co-pilot so I got to go along on the trip. We left from Albrook Field and flew the 10 P-36s and 2 B-18s. Our first stop was Ampac, Venezuela on the west side of British Guinea. The next morning we took off for British Guinea, landing at Georgetown.

The Guianas were hot, sandy desert country located right on the equator. The thing I remember most were the black "jiggers" the sand was full of. We only stayed there one night. It was a miserable place. We gassed up and the next morning took off for Balem, Brazil. We had to fly over the mouth of the Amazon River. It is about 180 miles wide where it empties into the Atlantic Ocean. We flew at about 3000 ft. It was a beautiful sight. I remember what appeared to deer or antelope on grassy areas out in the middle of the delta. You could see the muddy water of the Amazon River for many miles out into the ocean.

We arrived in Belem late in the afternoon. It was quite a large city and they still had trolleys running on the streets. There was a lot of night life and entertainment. We visited the Pan American Club which was run by Pan American Airlines. They had Portuguese girls working in the club. They were very good looking. Most of them had olive skin and blonde hair. We had a good time that night. The next day we took off for Fortaleza on the northeast coast of Brazil. . We turned the planes over to the Brazilian Air Force and we stayed in a very nice hotel that night. We spent 3 days in Fortaleza and were treated royally by the Brazilian Consular. They threw a party for us one night and I met a very nice young lady from one of the biggest banking families in Brazil. She invited me to visit her in Rio De Janeiro. It would be a long time before I get to Rio. I haven't been there yet! After a good time on Fortaleza we were taken back to the Canal Zone by commercial aircraft.

Back in the Canal Zone we continued to fly submarine patrol. Sometime in May, I made a trip to Quito, Ecuador with a Lt. Ridgel. He was a graduate of West Point and a very nice guy. We only spent a day there, returning the next day. We went into town to see the city. I was quite surprised to see so much poverty. The people were quite poor and most of them lived run down residences. Most of the people in those countries in South America were very poor prior to World War 2. Life in the 6<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group wasn't too bad. We were right on the Pacific Coast and had a nice beach. The food was pretty good and the barracks weren't bad.

As the war progressed and it appeared that the Japanese were no longer a threat to the Canal Zone, the Air Force started looking around for experienced pilots to send to the combat zones. About the end of June they transferred about 8 crews to Hamilton Field, California, and I was on one of the crews. We were temporarily assigned to Hamilton Field, which was about 30 miles north of San Francisco. We were told that we were to receive new B-17s from the Boeing Aircraft factory. While we were waiting on the planes, we were allowed to visit San Francisco and stay overnight. There were several of us that took advantage of his opportunity to see San Francisco; Harry Staley, Ed Scott, Mac McCullar, Bill Thompson, Bill Blain and others. We found that we could get a room at the Fairmont Hotel for 5 dollars a night, a special rate for servicemen. This lasted for two weeks or more. Jim Ellis, and airline pilot called to active duty, was our commanding officer at the time and I was assigned as his copilot. It was my duty to call him each morning to see if the planes had come in. As I said, this went on for two weeks or more. The Fairmont Hotel was on the top of Knob Hill. At that time the Mark Hopkins Hotel across the street had a tower on top of the hotel where you could look out over all of San Francisco. I was a beautiful view. In the afternoon you could sit there nursing a drink and watch the famous San Francisco fog roll in from the ocean under the Golden Gate Bridge. About 3 or 4 in the afternoon this would take place. It was like a big funnel and after it passed under the bridge it would spread out and cover the whole bay and eventually cover all of San Francisco in fog. It could be a nice day when you went into the hotel and when you went out you would need a rain coat as it was a wet fog.

After the war, the Fairmont Hotel was the setting for the television show, "Hotel" with John Bolin, Connie Sellekkas, and Anne Baxter. It was called the Sir Gregory Hotel in the television show. We had quite a time on Powell Street, visiting all the night spots. We knew we were going into combat some place and that this would be our last fling in the United States, so we made the best of it. We visited the best hotels on Powell Street along with the Mark Hopkins, the Fairmont, the Sir Francis Drake Hotel and the St. Francis Hotel. At the St. Francis, I met Onna Colbert, the belly dancer, featured at the hotel at that time. She was from Vancouver, Canada. I went out with her two or three times and she took me all around San Francisco. The Fairmont had a large serviceman's club in the basement and there was something always going on. In 1995, my wife and I were in San Francisco and we visited the Fairmont Hotel. They recently built a tower lounge and bar like the Mark Hopkins had. The Mark Hopkins tried to keep them from building it but they got it done. They had a outside glass elevator that went to the top of the hotel. Riding up on the elevator you have a beautiful view of the harbor. At the top we ordered a beer at the bar. The bartender was a World War II vet and I told him about the time we stayed at the hotel in 1942 for 5 dollars. He got a kick out of that and told me that the cheapest room went for about \$135 per night.

One morning toward the end of July when I called Capt. Ellis, he told me that the planes were coming in and to round up the gang and get back to Hamilton Field. When I got back to Hamilton, they gave me my orders promoting me to 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. We received brand new B-17Es from the Boeing factory. After a couple of days of preparation, we took off for Hawaii on Sunday August 2, 1942. I flew as Capt. Ellis' copilot, Bill Hoover was the navigator. We had a flight engineer and a radio operator, whose names I cannot recall. It was obvious now where we were going, somewhere in the Pacific. It took 14 hours flying time from San Francisco to Hawaii. Jim Ellis leaned out the engines, getting the maximum fuel economy. It turned out we had plenty of fuel left. There were some B-25s that made the trip at the same time as we did. They were about out of gas when they got there. It is only natural that the 2800 horse power engines on the B-25s would use more gas than the 2000 horse power engines on the B-17. We were the first planes other than Pan American Airlines to fly this route over the Pacific. (Ed. Note. Not accurate, many B-17s flew the same route, including those who flew into Hawaii on Dec.7, 1941)

I started keeping a dairy on August 2, 1942. In my diary I kept a record of what I did each day from the time I left the United States until I returned in July, 1943. It covers my duties and my experiences as one of the original pilots of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group. I made a notation of what I did each day and the bombing missions that I flew. Recently, when going through some of my paraphernalia from World War II, I found the dairy. I thought about writing about my experiences several times but always felt it was not the right time for personal reasons. Now, I feel that I can write about those experiences and tell it like it was. Everything I have written is the truth. The only thing I have changed are some of the names to protect privacy.

We arrived just before dark at Hickam Field, Hawaii, checked into the B.O.Q. and got a place to sleep. They had not gotten over the shock of Dec.7, 1941 yet. There was a great deal of damage all around the place. On August 3, we went into town to see the sights. Things were very quiet around town. We visited the capitol buildings and the downtown area. We then went to Waikiki Beach. It was very rough at the beach, so we did not go swimming. The waves were very high. A lot of the places were closed and not very much was going on. We decided to return to Hickam Field.

On August 4 we took off for Christmas Island. It is a small coral island about a mile square.. We hit the island right on the nose, thanks to Bill Hoover's good navigating. The only thing on the island was a small coconut grove. The rest of the island was coral rock. We spent the night there. The Sea Bees had a refueling dump on the island. We refueled the plane and took off the next morning for the Island of Canton about 100 miles southwest. Again, we hit the island right on the nose. God help you if you should miss one of those islands. There is nothing for miles. Canton is another coral reef with nothing on it at all. There was a small freighter that sunk on the rocks off one side of the island. This island is part of the Gilbert group where Amelia Earhart was supposed to have gone down and was lost.

We gassed up the plane and found a place to bed down for the night. All they had were tents. The next morning we took off for the Fiji Islands, landing at Viti Levu, the largest of the group. The islands were about 1000 miles southwest. The natives were well built and wore bright colored clothes. They were very friendly. Most of the islands were formed by volcanic eruption thousands of years ago. We stayed two days in the Fijis. Early August 8<sup>th</sup> we took off for the island of New Caledonia, a French mandated island. We landed on the afternoon about 3 PM. It is a long narrow island with a mountain range in the middle. It is supposed to have great mineral resources. It was raining that day when we landed and I remember the red mud that stuck to everything. The reason that we stopped at all these islands is because we were the first military planes to fly this route to Australia. They did not want to take chances that we would get lost or run out of fuel. Early the next day, Sunday, August 9, we took off for Brisbane, Australia. Just as we were approaching the coast of Australia the propeller control for engine number three went out of control and we had to feather the propeller and cut the engine. We made a three engine landing at Amberly Field in Ipswich, about 25 miles west of Brisbane. We spent the night at the field. It took us 8 days to fly from San Francisco to Brisbane, Australia. A few years ago my wife and I went to Australia. We took a direct flight from Los Angeles. It took us 14 hours, quite a difference! The next morning Major Ellis and I went into Brisbane. It took us about an hour to go 25 miles as the train was very slow. In Brisbane, we reported to the Fifth Air Force commander, General Kenney. We had 11 crews and planes at the time; more were on the way.

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 Frances included an old copy of orders listing those 11 planes and crews. Your editor will try to list them here but will omit the Army Serial Numbers of the men in order to get more names in a smaller amount of space. These men were assigned to the 63<sup>rd</sup> Squadron at Torrens Creek, Australia on August 19, 1942.

B-17-F 124391

|                                        |                 |
|----------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Capt. David W. Hassmer                 | Pilot           |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt. Chester C. Kennedy | Co-pilot        |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt. Harry L. Mot       | , Navigator     |
| S/Sgt. James M. Iverson                | , Engineer      |
| Cpl. Morris McFarland                  | , Asst. Eng.    |
| Sgt. Wilbert N. Grogan                 | , Radio Op.     |
| Pvt. Ralph P. Osborn                   | Asst. Radio Op. |
| Cpl. Robert F. Wright                  | Gunner          |
| S/Sgt. Richard W. Cullison             | Bombardier      |

B-17-F 41-24381

|                                             |            |
|---------------------------------------------|------------|
| 1 <sup>st</sup> Lt. Folmer J. Sogaard       | Pilot      |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt. William E. Ward         | Co-pilot   |
| 1 <sup>st</sup> Lt. William M. Ahl          | Navigator  |
| 1 <sup>st</sup> Lt. William A. Lindsay, Jr. | Bombardier |
| Cpl. C.E. Green                             | Engineer   |
| Sgt. A. J. Bukovac                          | Asst. Eng. |
| Sgt. C. E. Haftan                           | Radio Op.  |
| Pvt. D.W. Allton                            | Gunner     |
| Cpl. J. F. Frazee                           | Gunner     |

B-17-F 41-24384

|                                            |             |
|--------------------------------------------|-------------|
| Capt. James A. Barnett                     | Pilot       |
| 1 <sup>st</sup> Lt. James C. Dieffenderfer | Co-pilot    |
| 1 <sup>st</sup> Lt. David Hirsch           | Navigator   |
| Sgt. E. W. Snyder                          | Bombardier  |
| Cpl. W. F. Cody                            | Engineer    |
| Pfc. C. D. Browning                        | Asst. Eng.  |
| Sgt. M. Berkowitz                          | Radio Op.   |
| Pfc. G. A. Brown                           | Asst. Radio |
| Pfc. G. R. Tredway                         | Gunner      |

B-17-F 4124357

|                                       |             |
|---------------------------------------|-------------|
| Capt. Edward W. Scott                 | Pilot       |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt. Merrill T. Ward   | Co-pilot    |
| 1 <sup>st</sup> Lt. Robert R. Sedwick | Navigator   |
| Sgt. J. C. Lewis                      | Bombardier  |
| S/Sgt. W. D. Butler                   | Engineer    |
| Sgt. A. L. Quail                      | Asst. Eng.  |
| Cpl. L. S. Garfola                    | Radio Op.   |
| Pvt. R. W. Halley                     | Asst. Radio |
| Cpl. P.H. Malone                      | Gunner      |

B-17-F 41-24355

|                                          |             |
|------------------------------------------|-------------|
| Capt. Kenneth D. McCullar                | Pilot       |
| 1 <sup>st</sup> Lt. Harry A. Staley      | Co-pilot    |
| 1 <sup>st</sup> Lt. Kenneth W. Beckstrom | Navigator   |
| 1 <sup>st</sup> Lt. Robert H. Butler     | Bombardier  |
| Sgt. M. J. Paz                           | Engineer    |
| S/Sgt G. Dirr                            | Asst. Eng   |
| Sgt. E. Welconie                         | Radio Op.   |
| Cpl. H. E. Bancroft                      | Asst. Radio |
| Pfc. C. S. Reser                         | Gunner      |

B-17-F 41-24353

|                                       |            |
|---------------------------------------|------------|
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt James T. Murphy    | Pilot      |
| 1 <sup>st</sup> Lt. Charles. F. Owens | Co-pilot   |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt. Nathan J. Hirsh   | Navigator  |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt. John C. Lombard   | Bombardier |
| S/Sgt. Albert J. Tubbesing            | Engineer   |
| Cpl. Joseph. G. Gillis                | Asst. Eng. |
| Cpl. Ephron H. James                  | Radio Op.  |
| Pvt. Louis M. Prifti                  | Gunner     |
| Pvt. Arthur J. Lutz                   | Gunner     |

B-17 -F 41-24401

|                                              |             |
|----------------------------------------------|-------------|
| 1 <sup>st</sup> Lt. William M. Thompson, Jr. | Pilot       |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt. Berry T. Rucks, Jr.      | Co-pilot    |
| 1 <sup>st</sup> Lt. John S. Blain, Jr.       | Navigator   |
| Cpl. Haskell H. Mallory                      | Gunner      |
| Pvt. John R. Geary                           | Radio Op.   |
| Pfc. Joseph J Cone                           | Asst. Radio |
| Sgt. Henry L. Danis                          | Asst. Eng.  |
| Sgt. Fredrick J. King                        | Bombardier  |
| Pfc. Maurice C. Sokol                        | Passenger   |
| S/Sgt. Robert I. Greenfield                  | Engineer    |

B-17-F 41-24429

|                                        |             |
|----------------------------------------|-------------|
| Capt. James O. Ellis                   | Pilot       |
| 1 <sup>st</sup> Lt. Francis P. Denault | Co-pilot    |
| 1 <sup>st</sup> Lt. William H. Hoover  | Navigator   |
| T/Sgt. Charles Kachigian               | Crew Chief  |
| Pvt. John T. Nannion                   | Radio Op.   |
| T/Sgt. Carl Cristriansen               | Bombardier  |
| Pfc. William W. Elrod                  | Asst. Radio |
| Sgt. William H. Bishop                 | Asst Eng.   |

B-17-F 41-24402

|                                           |            |
|-------------------------------------------|------------|
| 1 <sup>st</sup> Lt. Edwin H. Reeder       | Pilot      |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt. Robert W. Schlen      | Co-pilot   |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt. William W. Grosenberg | Navigator  |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt. Davit M. Anderson     | Bombardier |
| Sgt. James C. Kersh                       | Engineer   |
| Cpl. Leslie M. McCormic                   | Asst. Eng. |
| Cpl. Edward C. Ayline                     | Radio Op.  |
| Cpl. Alfred F. Westphal                   | Gunner     |
| Pvt. Harold N. Hahn                       | Gunner     |

B-17-F 41-24358

|                                         |                 |
|-----------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Capt. Franklin T. Green                 | Pilot           |
| 1 <sup>st</sup> Lt. Charles L. Anderson | Co-pilot        |
| 1 <sup>st</sup> Lt. Roger F. Vargas     | Navigator       |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt. Fredrick O. Blair   | Bombardier      |
| T/Sgt. Earl H Kennedy                   | Engineer        |
| Sgt. Marvin B. Wolverton                | Asst. Eng.      |
| Cpl. Charles N. Hunter                  | Radio. Op.      |
| Pvt. Wesley M. Chadwick                 | Asst. Radio Op. |
| Sgt. Philip Bosso                       | Gunner          |

B-17-F 41-24383

|                                       |            |
|---------------------------------------|------------|
| 1 <sup>st</sup> Lt. Lewis A. Anderson | Pilot      |
| 1 <sup>st</sup> Lt. John R. Van Tregt | Co-pilot   |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt. William K. Fox    | Navigator  |
| T/Sgt. Vincent W. Zekis               | Engineer   |
| S/Sgt Albert C. Neis                  | Asst. Eng. |
| Cpl. Archibald B. Hodge               | Radio Op.  |
| Sgt. Milton Kelkey                    | Bombardier |
| Pvt. Richard M. Keeley                | Gunner     |
| Cpl. Vernon R. Kaylor                 | Gunner     |

Your Editor recognized the name of **Bill Elrod** on Denault's crew. We once featured a lengthy report in one of our newsletters with the assistance of **Ed Gammill**, ....remember? Two of our former Association presidents are listed with these crews: **Bob Butler** and **Jim Murphy**. Also **Roger Vagras**, **Charles Anderson**, **Folmer Sogaard**, and **Jim Dieffenderfer** have been frequent attendees at our reunions.

On the next page **Frances Denault's** dairy will be continued.

The standard of living in Australia was lower than in the States. Our money was worth more than theirs on the exchange. We got a hotel room and spent the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> of August in Brisbane. Brisbane seemed several years behind our cities in development. In Brisbane, we learned that we were to become the 63<sup>rd</sup> Squadron of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group. We also learned that the ground crews had gone over on the Queen Mary in February, 1942 and landed in Australia March 10, 1942. The Queen Mary had left Boston on the 18<sup>th</sup> of February, 1942 and landed in Australia March 10, 1942. It took 40 days to make the trip. The Queen Mary crossed the oceans unescorted and made several trips during the war. It took longer to make the trips because it could not take a straight course. It had to use evasive tactics to avoid submarines. Nothing could catch it. It had a top speed of over 30 knots. A few of our pilots were on the Queen Mary, namely **Carl Husted**, **Lenny Symrowsky**, and **Neil Kirby**. This gives you some idea of how bad our situation was for new combat aircraft. The ground crews had been waiting for over 4 months for the planes to arrive. On August 13<sup>th</sup> they sent us to a place called Charlieville, about 90 miles west of Brisbane in the outback country. It was a grass field and there were no facilities at the field. We went into town and checked in at one of the hotels. The town was not much and the hotels were not either. They had straw mattresses on the beds. There were some American military nurses stationed at a small hospital. We spent the evening talking to them. The town was very small and behind times. The next day we took off for a place called Torrens Creek, north of Charlieville in the outback. We were assigned tents to live in. The place was very rough. The water was chlorinated and tasted terrible. The ground was red and dusty. It had an open air mess and the place was infested with small flies. Every time you stopped they would cover your back. They were a sticky type of fly. It was hot and the mosquitoes were very bad. We had to sleep under netting in GI beds with GI mattresses. (GI means government issue.) The kangaroos were running wild all over the place. (Big bucks.) I was trying to get some sleep in the afternoon when **Capt. Scott** came up to the tent and asked me to go into the town with him. It seems that a group of our men had gotten a little too much Australian beer and were cutting up a bit. They were teasing the local sheriff who was trying to calm them down. In the process they taken his gun away from him, embarrassing the old gent. We got the gun back and apologized to the old gent. He did not want to hurt anybody. The boys quieted down and went back to camp. These things happen at a place like this in wartime. The boys didn't mean any harm but they went too far in their fun.

The next day, August 15<sup>th</sup>, a group of us got permission to take one of the B-17s and go to Sydney for a couple of days. I remember Bill Thompson, Harry Staley, Ed Scott and a couple of others that I can't remember went along. It was about a 3 hour trip and we landed in the afternoon. Rooms were hard to get. We were lucky and found some rooms with a woman by the name of Mrs. Hay, who lived in the Kings Cross area. She had a large house. She was a very nice older woman. Sydney was a very nice place, more like our cities. The weather was most always nice and in the 70 degree range. The harbor is one of the most beautiful that I have ever seen. Bill Thompson and I went to Bondi Beach, one of the more popular beaches on the Pacific Ocean. We met a couple of Aussie girls there and had a great time. The beach was protected by a shark net because the white sharks were very bad in those waters. Even with the shark nets one of the sharks got through and bit a girl on the arm while we were there. She nearly lost her arm. We didn't venture very far from shore. We only had a few days so we made the best of it. One of the favorite places was the Australia Hotel downtown. Every day at cocktail time from 4 to 6 the place was full. They could only sell liquor for two hours each day. We had a great time in those few days. While we were in Sydney, the U.S. Navy heavy cruiser, Chicago, was tied up at the north end of the Sydney bridge. We were there right after a Japanese one man sub tried to sink it with a torpedo. Somehow the sub had gotten through the net at the opening of the harbor and fired the torpedo at the Chicago before it was detected. Luckily it missed and exploded on the shore. The Chicago was brand new and had just been sent to the Pacific. It was later sunk in a naval battle in the Solomon Sea. The Japanese were making another attempt to invade Australia and the U.S. Navy sent the Chicago up through the middle of the Japanese fleet. It was said that before it went down it sank several Japanese ships. The Japanese losses were heavy enough for them to turn around and go back to Rabaul, their navy base on the east end of New Britain.

We had a great time in these few days but all good things must come to an end. Early in the morning we took off for the "hell hole", Torrens Creek, northwest of Brisbane. On August 19<sup>th</sup>, 1942 the whole 63<sup>rd</sup> Squadron took off for a place called Mareeba on the northeast corner of Queensland on the edge of the outback. It was a very small town and looked like something out of the past. There were buildings on both sides of a two lane street for about a quarter of a mile. I had a theatre and a place where they sold sodas and other soft drinks. That was it. The town had a hospital with Australian nurses and doctors. The 19<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group was at Mareeba, or you might say what was left of it after they escaped from the Philippines. Bob Prouty, a classmate of mine in flying school and also from Springfield, Mass. where I was born was with the 19<sup>th</sup> Gp. at Mareeba. He told me they had just got out of Java before the Japanese moved in. He said they were shooting at them when they took off. He and I celebrated with Australian booze and hashed over old times. We stayed in tents and the food was pretty good. The Australians seemed to have enough food. The camp was well organized considering the rough conditions that existed. There was one runway heading east and west made out of metal stripping. Plane rebutments were built around the runway. I was told they once grew tobacco in the area before the war. The soil was dry and sandy. The place was loaded with termite and ant hills, some very large—6 ft. high or better.

Sunday, August 23, I went to church in Mareeba. After church I felt sick to my stomach. Monday morning it was still bothering me, so I went to the flight surgeon. I couldn't seem to eat, my stomach was sore and my eyes were turning yellow. He thought that I had a case of yellow jaundice and he took me to the hospital in Mareeba. At the hospital they put me on a carbohydrate diet, no fat. I was in the hospital for about a week. It was nice being waited on. August 29, I went to church. On Monday the 30<sup>th</sup>, I felt better. Tues. the 2<sup>nd</sup>, they released me from the hospital and I was put back on flying status.

We were all issued rifles. They still felt that that the Japanese might try to invade Australia. If they did invade, I guess we would have to fight as infantrymen. On Sept. 5, we moved back to Torrens Creek. We did very little the next few days. I flew into Townsville one day with Capt. Barnett to pick up the payroll. We stayed overnight and had a good time at the service club. Sept. 8<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup> were spent at Torrens Creek. On Sept. 9 we flew 300 miles out to sea. It was supposed to be a practice identification mission with our own Navy ships. We flew to the coordinates where the ships were supposed to be, but found no ships and returned to Torrens Creek. The next few day we were put on alert. Sept. 11<sup>th</sup> the Squadron flew back to Mareeba. We stayed in temporary quarters with the 61<sup>st</sup> Material Squadron.

Sept. 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> we were put on alert. We were told that we were going to fly to Port Moresby in New Guinea. It was time to go to work. The United States Navy had done an excellent job keeping the Japanese from getting into Australia. Thank goodness we had a pretty good navy left even after Pearl Harbor. Fortunately, our carriers were out to sea when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. In the Battle of Midway we sunk several of their carriers, which helped. In the battle of the Coral Sea we held our own and the Japanese went back to Rabaul, their base in New Britain. After Pearl Harbor the Japanese admiral, Yamamoto made the statement, "We have awakened a sleeping giant." The only trouble was it took Quite a while for the giant to get going. The marines landed on Guadalcanal on August 7<sup>th</sup>, 1942. After bitter fighting, they drove the Japanese off the island on January 1943. The Japanese lost over 30,000 men. The tried to capture Milne Bay on the southeastern tip of New Guinea in September, 1942 but after bitter fighting were driven off. It was their last attempt to move toward Australia. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of August, 1942 the Australians lost the air strip at Kakoda Pass in New Guinea. This is only 30 miles from Port Moresby. General Kenney flew two divisions into Port Moresby and they attacked the Japanese at Kakoda Pass and stopped the Japanese advance. The fresh troops pushed the Japanese back to Buna on the north coast of New Guinea. On November 8, 1942, American troops landed at the Dobadura Airstrip near Buna. After bitter fighting the American and Australian troops captured Buna in January of 1943.

The story I have to tell you now is about the missions that I flew as a member of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group and the 63<sup>rd</sup> Squadron. The 43<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group played a major part in driving the Japanese out of the Southwest Pacific. On September 14, we took off for Port Moresby in New Guinea, arriving at dawn. We gassed up and went looking for Jap ships that were supposed to be in the Dodacanese Island area. We searched the area and found no ships. We returned to Port Moresby, gassed up and returned to Mareeba,



arriving just after dark. This was my first trip to Port Moresby. The first 14 missions I flew as a copilot with Capt. Bill Thompson in B-17E 41-24401. We could not leave the planes on the ground at Port Moresby during the day time because the Japanese would bomb them. We had very little fighter cover at this early part of the war. The round trip from Mareeba to Port Moresby and fly a mission was about 1800 miles and took about 12 hours. In the beginning we flew most of our missions at night. We skip bombed the ships at 200 ft. with 4 second delay fuses. Skip bombing was the idea of Major Benn, General Kenney's aide. We marked an X on the copilot's windshield about 6 inches from the top. When the X and the nose of the plane lined up with the ship to be bombed we would release 3 or 4 500 lb. bombs. The 4 second delay fuses allowed us to get out of the way before the bombs went off. Almost always, one of the bombs would hit or explode near the ship. We would make these bomb runs at about 220 miles per hour. On Sept. 5<sup>th</sup>, they gave us 24 hours off and we went to a town called Atherton, about 25 miles south of Mareeba. It was much larger than Mareeba. We went to a dance and returned to Mareeba that night. For the next week we hung around Mareeba working on the planes and washing some clothes. On Sept. 16, we took off for Port Moresby about 3 PM. We were about halfway when they contacted us on the radio and told us to return to Mareeba. The Japs were bombing Port Moresby. Sept. 18 we took off for Port Moresby about midnight. We landed in the early morning and were on alert all day. A Jap reconnaissance plane came over Port Moresby about 7 PM that night. It dropped a few bombs but did little damage. Sept. 19, we took off about 1:30 PM to look for a Jap freighter off the coast of Lae on the north coast of New Guinea. We found the ship just south of Lae. There were about four planes that took off on the mission and proceeded to the target in about 10 minute intervals. Thompson and I were the first to find the ship. The weather was pretty clear with only a few broken clouds in the area. We made a bomb run on the ship at about 6000 ft., dropping three 500 lb. bombs. We made another bomb run and dropped the rest of our bombs, three 500s with instant fuses. By this time they were shooting at us, mostly small caliber stuff. The last bomb was a near miss. The ship stopped and seemed to list to one side. We were surprised that no Jap fighters attacked us. We returned to Port Moresby, getting back after dark. We nearly missed the place due to ground fog. One of the other B-17s bombed the same ship and the crew said it appeared to be sinking. About a half hour after we landed, Jap bombers came over and dropped several bombs. Most of them missed the runway and caused very little damage.

Sept. 20, we were on alert all day. Japanese bombers came over at night and dropped several bombs. The anti-aircraft guns drove them away. They did very little damage and no planes were hit. We had been in Port Moresby for about 3 days and I had only the clothes on my back. It was warm and most of us cut the legs off our pants and made shorts out of them. We had only cold water in Port Moresby. The only way we could get hot water was to build a fire under a fifty gallon drum cut in half and use a bucket. We rigged up a shower by putting 50 gal. drums on a rack. If you wanted warm water, you waited until the middle of the day for water to be warmed by the sun. Otherwise you took a cold shower, which is what usually happened. My clothes were so dirty I think they could walk by themselves. Bill Thompson and I shared a four man tent together. We had GI folding cots and GI mattresses with mosquito nets. You wrapped yourself up in the mosquito net and if your arm was up against the net the mosquitoes bit the hell out of your arm. The food was about as bad as food can be. We had a daily diet of powdered eggs, powdered milk and some kind of canned mutton made in Australia. There was bread made by the Australians in Port Moresby that had hunks of dough in it because they did not have enough yeast to make it rise. I did not eat powdered eggs so I was in a hell of a fix. A man could starve to death, and I nearly did in the end.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of Sept. 1942, we were relieved by the 65<sup>th</sup> Sq. and we went back to Mareeba. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of Sept., the next day, they sent us back to Torrens Creek which was almost as bad as Port Moresby, except the food was pretty good. On Sept. 23, I got up early and started washing clothes. I had to boil them in a makeshift bucket made of a fifty gallon drum. I spent most of the day washing clothes and cleaning myself. On Sept 24<sup>th</sup> we flew out over the ocean and practiced skip bombing. We used 500 lb. bombs with 4 second fuses at 200 ft. We then returned to Torrens Creek. I wrote some letters and read the rest of the day. On Sept 25<sup>th</sup>, we flew to Townsville to pick up some men who were on leave. On Sept. 26 we had to

go to Brisbane to have our number 3 engine changed. It was running rough and acted like it had a bent push rod. The rest of the squadron went to Port Moresby. We arrived in Brisbane about 2 PM and turned the plane over to the maintenance crew at Amberly Field. Bill Thompson and I then went into Brisbane and got a room at the Belle View Hotel. Rooms were scarce in Brisbane. It was the headquarters for the Southwest Pacific Command. General MacArthur had his headquarters in Brisbane. It was great to sleep in a real bed again. We met some fighter pilots who were on leave and had a party that night. I also met a very pretty girl by the name of Hazel Ward. Sunday, Sept. 27, I got cleaned up and went to church in a very nice looking cathedral. I spent the rest of the day browsing around Brisbane with Hazel, the girl I met the night before. Brisbane was loaded with servicemen. We took a walk through a park by the bay. There was hardly room to walk with all the military personnel lying around. Sept. 28, Monday, We went to Amberly Field to order some parts and check on the plane. We spent the day at the field and then went back into Brisbane that night. We had to take off early in the morning.

October 1; The plane was ready and we took off for Torrens Creek about 12 noon. We were about 10 minutes airborne when we discovered our bomb sight was missing and had to return to Amberly Field for it. They are top secret and we had to put it the vault while the plane was at the field for repairs. We arrived aback at Torrens Creek about 6 PM. October 2; we took some men to Townsville for leave and returned to Torrens Creek the same day. October 3: we dropped some practice bombs in the morning. In the afternoon, Bill Thompson and I took a trip to a town called Hughenden in the outback about 50 miles from Torrens Creek. We drove a Dodge Caryall. It was all we could get. It rode like a truck. The road was two lane and very bad. After we got there, we were exhausted and found nothing worth seeing. It was an old town. We did not get back until late that night. It was a mistake, and no way to see Australia. We were both tired and piled into bed.

We did not wake up until 11 AM on the morning of the 5<sup>th</sup> of October. I did very little the rest of the day. I flew around locally with **Capt. Heats** from headquarters who needed some time in the B-17. That afternoon, our mess tent, as we called it, or eating place, burned down after one of the gas stoves exploded. We put the fire out and nobody was hurt. It was not much of a loss and they put up another tent. On Oct. 6, we were told that we were going to move back to Mareeba for good. I was glad because Torrens Creek was not much of a place. Oct 7 we had a meeting and took off for Mareeba. The 19<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group was being sent back to the states. They had been through some rough times since the fall of the Philippines. We were issued tents at Mareeba and had to put them up by yourself. They gave me a two man tent for myself. I guess nobody wanted to share a tent with me. I was not the only one. I think they ran out of the larger ones. As I said before, Mareeba was much better than Torrens Creek.

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By Andy Anderson

Frances has given me permission to keep his dairy and complete publishing it in installments in the next two newsletters. I changed the spelling of some words. I have the advantage of a computer with the Microsoft Word program. The instant I type a word that is misspelled, it is underlined in red, so I can drag out the dictionary and get it right.

Frances has a brother, **Leo**, who lives in Port St. Lucie, Florida. Leo was a radioman in the 403<sup>rd</sup> Squadron during the latter part of the war after Frances returned home. Are these the only two brothers who both served in the 43<sup>rd</sup>? I can't remember hearing of other brothers serving in the 43<sup>rd</sup>. Both are expected to attend our reunion in Tampa.

I have been invited to participate in a "Ceremony of Peace and Healing" to be held at the Buddhist Temple in a section of Los Angeles known as "Little Tokyo". The event will be held on May 19 this year. About 35 to 40 Japanese aviation veterans of World War II will be in Southern California with family and friends. They will visit Disneyland, tour the USS Midway in San Diego, see a fly-by of Zero fighter at "Planes of Fame Museum" in nearby Chino. If any of you men would like to attend, please notify me. I one attended a meeting with some Japanese Kamakaze pilots at the New Otani Hotel in Little Tokyo. My invitation came from **Curt Holquin**, son of **Jose Holquin**, former 65<sup>th</sup> Navigator, who was a POW at

Rabaul for two years and two months. Curt is hoping to find others from the 43<sup>rd</sup> to attend. Some of you remember Curt's mother, **Rebecca Holquin**, who attended some of our reunions. She is well and is still a member of our Association. Curt reports that she is moving to a smaller home in this area. I hope to learn of her new address so that I can report to it to **Bill Wilson**. Curt works in the City Attorney's Office in Los Angeles. His former boss, Jim Hahn, is now mayor of Los Angeles.

The **Newsletter** is published 4 times each year: **January, April, July and October**. It is written in the prior month. If you have items for the Newsletter, please have it in the Editor's hands no later than the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month before publication. Late arriving material will be included in the following issue. Please write legibly and avoid sending material at the last minute if you can send it earlier.

**Dues are \$15 per year or \$100 for life.** Make the check out to 43<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group Association and sent to **Bill Wilson, Treasurer** or **Howard "Andy" Anderson, Secretary**. Check the mailing label on your envelope for this edition to find out about your dues status.

**Please note that Bill Wilson's telephone area code has changed and his P.O. box is slightly different. Use the information on the first page of this newsletter.**

You may send e-mail to the Secretary/Editor to **andyanne@comcast.net**

My Microsoft "Outlook Express" e-mail program is now rejecting "attachments". I suppose this is to prevent "worms" or "viruses" from infecting my computer. There is no way that I can view an attachment; photo or otherwise.

The Post Office Department will not forward the Newsletter. If you have a change of address, please send it to **Bill Wilson, Treasurer** as soon as possible