



# 43RD BOMB GROUP ASSOCIATION, INC. "KEN'S MEN"



## NEWSLETTER 100<sup>th</sup> EDITION OCTOBER 2006

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### Board of Directors

**Headquarters:**  
Fred McAllister (2008)

**63<sup>rd</sup> Squadron:**  
Roland T. Fisher (2009)  
Edward L. Gammill (2007)

**64<sup>th</sup> Squadron:**  
Charles F. McClenny (2006)  
Arvid J. Hougum (2007)

**65<sup>th</sup> Squadron:**  
Lehman C. White (2007)  
Eldon Lawson (2008)

**403<sup>rd</sup> Squadron:**  
Joseph W. Snyder (2008)  
William J. Solomon (2009)

**Historian**  
Eldon Lawson

**Recruitment Officer**  
Edward L. Gammill

**Past Presidents**  
Robert Butler 1981-1984  
George L. White 1985-1987  
William H. Wilson, Jr. 1988-1991  
Dale F. Barr, Jr. 1992-1993  
Max Osborn 1994-1995  
James T. Murphy 1996-1997  
Samuel F. Commons 1998-1999  
Max M. Axelsen 2000-2001  
Roger T. Kettleson 2002-2003  
Charles Rauch 2004-2005

### FROM JIM CHERKAUER, PRESIDENT

A great number of things have taken place since my report in the July 2006 Newsletter. First, let me mention that the missing page two of the President's report is inserted on page 17 of this newsletter. I do apologize for that omission due to some printing error when the newsletter was printed.

The Branson reunion was up to the high quality of our reunions. It went off well and about 115 of our members, guests, relatives and friends attended. We owe many accolades to **Pat** and **Chuck Rauch**, hostess and host, for there many efforts and extensive time given willingly to ensure that all of us who attended would have a great time. This was their second reunion so they are becoming pros at planning and hosting a reunion. A report on the reunion appears later in this newsletter.

Plans for the 2007 reunion in Plymouth Meeting, Pennsylvania, are moving right along. Extensive information about that reunion, registering for it and the many options to choose from for optional tours will appear in the January 2007 newsletter. Mark your calendars for the week starting with September 4<sup>th</sup>, the day after Labor Day.

Before the Branson reunion had been completed, **Sam Commons** and his daughter, **Amy Nally**, volunteered to organize and host a reunion in Atlanta, Georgia, in 2008. It will probably be held in September 2008. More information will be forthcoming as plans progress.

The future of our association appears to be growing a bit stronger. Those of you who get *Bomber Legends* are aware that in every issue more and more WWII Bomb Group Associations have been announcing that they no longer will exist due to the drop in the number of members who can carry on the duties and responsibilities of these associations. This is probably due mainly to the fact that many bomb groups created during WWII were deactivated after the war and all of

those men are in the same age category as most of us are, whereas the 43<sup>rd</sup> carried on as a Bomb Wing for many years before being deactivated and then reactivated several years ago. Because of the fact that our Group was carried on as a Wing, we have hundreds if not thousands of potential members who served in that wing. Our recruitment officer, **Ed Gammill**, 63<sup>rd</sup> Crew Chief from Phoenix, AZ, has located and recruited a few such men who are now members of our association. In fact, while we were enjoying a break in the program on the Showboat Branson Belle, one such lad who served in the 43<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Wing on Guam during the Vietnam War and who as in the audience, sought us out. In a short time we had **Ed** working on him to join our association.

Although the reunion went along well and most of those attending enjoyed a few if not several of the shows, we did miss a few of the regular attendees to our reunions. To mention those that come to mind as I write this report are **Byrle Miller**, 64<sup>th</sup> radio operator, who suffered a stroke shortly before he and his wife, **Dolly**, were to leave Houston for Branson, **Helen Greene** who broke her hip in two places, **Mildred McClenny**, the 43<sup>rd's</sup> pianist who injured her foot, **Alice Barnes** who was unaccounted for although she had registered before canceling, crewmates **Wendell Jones**, 64<sup>th</sup> gunner, **Ralph Grubb**, 64<sup>th</sup> gunner, **Paul Barbus** from the 64<sup>th</sup> and **Helene Brockway**. All were missed and frequently asked after. A very last minute cancellation came from our secretary, **Andy Anderson** and his wife **Anne**. Our stalwart Secretary/Editor, **Andy**, was stricken with a double lung embolism while on a cruise to Alaska with many family members celebrating his wife's, **Anne**, 80th birthday anniversary. He was flown from Ketchikan, Alaska, to Seattle, Washington, where he was treated successfully before returning to their home in Los Angeles. His last minute cancellation came as quite a surprise to all of us. We certainly wish him the best and a vibrant recovery. I offered to help **Andy** in his recovery by preparing this, the 100<sup>th</sup> edition of our Newsletter. After some hesitation because of his feeling of duty and loyalty to the Association, he did rather reluctantly accept this offer. There is more on this incidence later in the newsletter.

A tragic event to report is that **George Tucholski**, 64<sup>th</sup> radio operator, died on Monday, August 28<sup>th</sup>, the day he and his wife, **Anita**, flew home. At the time of this writing, I had not heard any details of this sad event. God bless.

For those of you who are no longer able to travel far, I do hope that the reports contained later in this newsletter on the events in Branson will help you to enjoy some of the camaraderie we attendees found by being together one more time.

May each of you enjoy the best of health possible and may God bless you.

*Jim Cherkauer*

\*\*\*\*\*From Acting Editor, Jim Cherkauer\*\*\*\*\*

**Minutes of the Board of Directors meeting on Wednesday evening, August 23, 2006, 8:00 PM at the Lodge of the Ozarks, Branson, MO, submitted by Eldon "Bud" Lawson & Jim Cherkauer**

Attending: James Cherkauer, Pres.; James Thompson, Vice Pres.; Ed Gammill, 63<sup>rd</sup> Director and Membership Chairman; Roland T. Fisher, 63<sup>rd</sup> Director; Arvid Hougum, 64<sup>th</sup> Director; Eldon E. "Bud" Lawson, 65<sup>th</sup> Director and Association Historian; Lehman "Chalky" White, 65<sup>th</sup> Director; Joe Snyder, 403<sup>rd</sup> Director; William "Bill" Solomon, 403<sup>rd</sup> Director; Sam Commons, Past Pres.; Roger Kettleson, Past Pres.; Max Axelsen, Past Pres.; Charles Rauch, Past Pres. and 2006 Reunion Chairman; and James Dieffenderfer, Co-Chair 2007 Reunion.

#### **REPORTS:**

1. Due to the absence of the secretary, the minutes of the 2005 meeting were not read but were approved.
2. No treasurer's report was available.

3. Chuck Rauch gave a report of the current Branson Reunion. About 118 persons registered. Due to cost no coffee would be served in the Hospitality/Memorabilia Room.
4. James Dieffenderfer gave a report of the 2007 reunion to be held at the Plymouth Meeting, PA. He proposed a special mailing of a Reunion Flyer be mailed to each member with an enclosed post card for members to return with their decision to attend or not. The costs of this reunion were discussed. It was suggested that up to \$10,000 from the Association Treasury be used to reduce costs for registrants. This matter was postponed for later action under "Unfinished Business."
5. Jim Cherkauer reported on the status of our history book with International Research & Publishing CO, Inc. Mike Edmunds of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Bomb Group has offered to finance any lawsuit that our organization might initiate against Larry Hickey and his publication company. In a long telephone conversation with Larry a few days before departing for the reunion, Jim reported that Larry now has a staff of 13 employees, full-time or part-time, working on preparing the materials for and writing the chapters for the histories he promised to the 22<sup>nd</sup>, 43<sup>rd</sup>, 38<sup>th</sup> and 138<sup>th</sup> Bomb Groups. Two full-time persons are working on our history. The early chapters are completed, the outline for the rest of the book is completed, and it is projected to contain about 500-550 pages with about 17 maps and many colored photos of our aircraft. It is supposed to be completed sometime in 2007 and will cost \$90.00. The 22<sup>nd</sup>'s history has been published and was in the binding stage at this time. One of the first two bound books will be mailed to Jim Cherkauer at the Branson reunion for members to peruse. (The book did arrive the next day and was placed in the Memorabilia Room until Saturday evening. On Sunday, Aug. 27<sup>th</sup> Pres. Jim Cherkauer presented it to the 43<sup>rd</sup> Memorabilia Collection in care of Eldon E. "Bud" Lawson.) Some 50-60 pre-paid copies of this book by person not currently identified would be given to the 43<sup>rd</sup> BG Association to distribute at its discretion. The price charged at the time of pre-payment will be honored. Save your receipts.
6. Eldon "Bud" Lawson, Group Historian, reported on the status of our archives and the future possibilities of where these might be stored.
7. Ed Gammill, Group Recruitment Officer, reported on the recruitment situation and how he is still finding men who we lost track of and who are joining our association. This includes a few who served in the post WWII B-29/B-50 era. But he reported that the number of new prospects is diminishing.
8. Max Axelsen, Nominations Committee, indicated that the current officers of the Association had all agreed to run again for another year of service. He also indicated which Squadron Board members whose terms expire at the end of this year will run for office again. Max recruited Fred McAllister from Headquarters to accept that squadron's vacant seat on the Board for the duration of its current term (2008).

#### **UNFINISHED BUSINESS:**

Vice Pres. Jim Thompson moved that up to \$10,000 of the Association Treasury funds be used to reduce costs for the 2007 reunion. The motion was seconded carried unanimously.

#### **NEW BUSINESS:**

1. The Board agreed to appoint Fred McAllister as the Headquarters Squadron Board member since no member of that squadron has attended either of the last two reunions, and he is willing to accept the position and plans to attend reunions in the future. This is an unprecedented action by the Board, but no alternative exists under our Bylaws.
2. A request from James M Chastain Jr. USAF (Ret), Chairman 5<sup>th</sup> Air Force Memorial Circle, for a donation of \$1,400 to the organization for a 13" X 13" bronze plaque for the 43<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group was discussed. No motion to make this donation was forthcoming so the proposal died with no action taken.

3. The chair did not move to take action on the proposal to amend the Bylaws as presented in the January 2006 Newsletter. It was agreed that the Board should let a sleeping dog lie.
  4. The Board voted in favor of a motion made and seconded to amend Article 12. Dues of the Bylaws as amended at the San Antonio 1994 reunion be amended to read - Beginning with the 2007 fiscal year dues shall be increased to \$20.00 annually.
  5. The chair reminded the 63<sup>rd</sup>, 64<sup>th</sup> and 403<sup>rd</sup> Squadrons that each had a Board member whose term expired at the end of 2006 and that they should elect a person to fill that vacancy at the Aug 24<sup>th</sup> Squadron meetings.
- Meeting adjourned around 10:30 PM.
- .....

**Minutes of the General Group Meeting on Friday, August 25, 2006 at 9:00 AM at the Lodge of the Ozarks, Branson, Missouri.**

Meeting called to order by the Chair at 9:02 AM. Chair greeted all in attendance and led them in the Pledge of Allegiance to our Flag. Chair reported on the status of **Andy Anderson**, Secretary.

**REPORTS:**

Secretary's Report - Due to the absence of the secretary the minutes of the 2005 reunion were not read.

Treasurer's Report.

**43<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group Association  
09-01-2005 to 07-31-2006**

**Income**

Dues	\$ 2,820.00
Life Member	\$ 100.00
Donations	\$ 50.00
Interest	\$ 2,273.85
Refund on '05 Reunion	\$ 2,300.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 7,543.85</b>

**Expenses**

Printing	\$ 3,055.95
Postage	\$ 1,028.21
Bulk Mailing Yearly Fee	\$ 320.00
Web Site	\$ 445.87
Checks	\$ 35.84
Gifts for '05	\$ 138.45
Refund for '04 Reunion	\$ 220.00
2006 Reunion Advance	\$ 5,000.00
Donation	\$ 500.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 10,744.32</b>

## Net

9/1/2005 Beginning Balance \$ 21,534.94

07/31/2006 Ending Balance \$ 18,334.47

CD Canyon Investment Co. \$ 30,000.00

**Net Worth** \$ 48,334.47

The chair reported on the status of our history book with Larry Hickey's International Publishing & Research Company. (See Minutes of the Board above.)

Charles Rauch gave a brief report on the Branson Reunion that we are now attending.

Ann Fletcher gave a report on the status of the 2007 reunion in Plymouth Meeting, PA.

### **UNFINISHED BUSINESS:**

Nothing to report.

### **NEW BUSINESS:**

The 63<sup>rd</sup> Squadron reported the reelection of Roland Fisher as a director to the Board through 2009.

The 64<sup>th</sup> Squadron reported the reelection of Arvid Hougum as a director to the Board through 2009. [There is a problem here. Charles McClenny's term is to expire at the end of 2006 not Arvid's.]

The 403<sup>rd</sup> Squadron reported the reelection of William Solomon as a director to the Board through 2009.

### **ELECTION OF OFFICERS:**

Max Axelsen, Chairman of the Nominations Committee, submitted the following men as candidates for the respective offices shown. Terms of office are one year in each case.

President - Jim Cherkauer

Vice President - James Thompson Jr.

Secretary - Edward L. Gammill

Treasurer - William H. Wilson, Jr.

Hearing no further nominations from the floor, the Chair declared that the slate is elected by acclamation.

It was moved by and seconded that Article 12. Dues of the Bylaws as amended at the San Antonio 1994 reunion be amended to read - Beginning with the 2007 fiscal year dues shall be increased to \$20.00 annually. Motion was carried.

**Frank Drab**, 403<sup>rd</sup> Arm/Gun and a legally blind veteran suffering from macular degeneration, reported to the Group on the availability of different organizations to give aid to veterans who are experiencing a loss of sight and how to contact these organizations. He spoke highly of the support he has received from the Blinded Veterans Association.

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The Branson reunion was a tremendous success and we owe the credit to **Pat** and **Chuck Rauch** who hosted their second reunion in three years. Branson Hospitality, Inc. and the Lodge of the Ozarks staffs were very helpful and very easy to work with. Many of the attendees saw several shows other than the ones offered as optional on the registration form. The acting editor and his wife attended a

few additional shows and stayed on a couple of days after the reunion was over. Several others stayed on one to three additional days to take in more of the fine entertainment. The one unfortunate item was that a number of the shows which are very popular took the month of August off and were not scheduled to return until September. Our experience was that the shows featuring music and stars of the '50s were far too loud for our tired old ears. The show on the Showboat Branson Belle, the Mickey Gilley show and the New Shanghai Circus were excellent indeed.

Attending the reunion and listed by squadron (including guests) were:

#### 63<sup>rd</sup> Squadron

Bill & Nancy Smetts  
Raymond & Betty Gates  
Ed Gammill  
Jim & Louise Thompson  
Chuck & Pat Rauch  
Neal & DeDe Fugate  
Jimmie Dee Dieffenderfer  
Ann Fletcher  
Fred Peters  
Ray & Dorothy Crawford  
Lloyd Anderson  
Pete Anderson  
Debbie Anderson  
Fred Hagen  
Hazel Taff  
Roland & Irma Fisher  
Francis & Arlene Langland  
Sue Fisher  
Eleanor Skinner

#### 64<sup>th</sup> Squadron

Arvid & Gerry Hougum  
Roger & Audrey Kettleson  
Bob Cooper & Muscles Furrie  
Lyle & Betty Heineke  
Jim Rodella  
Jesse Fulton  
Roy "Burdell" & Louise Bailey  
Russ & Jane Burnett  
Alvin & Lorraine Haas  
Jack Nunnellee  
June Panther  
Ann Knorr  
George & Anita Tucholski  
Ed & Lillian Ross  
Milton & Imogene Bass  
Hazel Taff  
Milton & Imogene Bass

#### 65<sup>th</sup> Squadron

Tom & Kathy Jamison  
Lehman & Rosemary White  
Don & Betty Marsaglia  
Jim & Anita Cherkauer  
Sam Commons  
Steve & Amy Nally  
Bethel & Bonnie Ray  
Larry Main  
Kathy Tackacs  
Steve & Linda Main  
James W. Eide  
Steve Eide  
Eldon "Bud" Lawson  
Dayt & Ann Blanchard  
Ron Jensen  
Robert Claycombe  
Tudy Crum  
Norm & Jan Rollins  
William & Mary Myles  
Terry Nelson  
Bill Horne

#### 403<sup>rd</sup> Squadron

Francis & Peg Drab  
Bill & Nancy Solomon  
Joe & Sally Snyder  
Phyllis Johnson  
Lois Hattenberger  
Ann Walker  
Joanna Walker  
George & Jean Anderson  
Max & Margaret Axelsen  
Max Axelsen  
Rick Lloyd  
Janet Lloyd  
Leroy & Valerie Moore  
Bob Mangan  
David Adams  
Douglas Flack

#### Squadron Unknown

Jack Strange  
Donna Strange  
Jenny Strange

[The editor has had to compile this list from Branson Hospitality's registration list and with **Pat Rauch**'s help. My apologies if there are errors or omissions above.]

After the General Meeting of the Group, **FRED HAGEN**, Assoc. from Bensalem, PA, presented a DVD showing the removal of the B-17 *SWAMP GHOST* from Aigiambo Lake in PNG where it has lain for the past 64 years after being "ditched" due to damage caused by Japanese action over Rabaul. The procedure showed the disassembled parts being lifted part-by-part by a Russian built helicopter that carried these to a ship in the nearby ocean. All of the parts of the plane were then transported to the port of Lae where they currently remain. Those who oppose the removal of the plane have tied the entire procedure up in red tape. **Fred** hopes that it will be released for transport to the States in the not

too distant future. It was simply amazing to watch the helicopter lower the various parts of the fuselage and wings onto the deck below and with such precision that very little damage was sustained in the process. This was just another in the series of video tapes and DVDs that **Fred** has presented to us over the past several years. Fred has been a most willing, informative and entertaining speaker at these reunions. We do owe him a great "Thank you" many times over for what he has been doing.

On Friday, August 25<sup>th</sup>, the dinner dance opened with the customary presentation of the Colors by the Color Guard. This group was composed of Air Force ROTC high school students under the watchful eye of a Major. Unfortunately, some of them had to head off to work and none stayed to enjoy the delicious dinner with us.

After dinner **Bud Lawson** presented the golf trophy to **Jesse Fulton** who has won the award on a few previous occasions. The golf was cut from 18 holes to 9 holes due to 90+ temperature and rough terrain. **Chalky White** scored the only birdie of the day by masterfully sinking a 50-foot putt on a par 3 hole.

The Songbird of the 43<sup>rd</sup>, **Nancy Solomon**, was presented with one of **Joe Snyder's** fabulous hand carved canes in recognition of all of the years that she has sung at our Memorial Services. It was a well deserved honor.

Our VP, **Jim Thompson**, carved an equally elegant and attractive cane that he was to present to **Mildred McClenny**, who had to cancel her attendance as explained earlier in this newsletter. This cane was carved in recognition for her playing the piano, sometimes under the most difficult of circumstances, while accompanying **Nancy** at our Memorial Services. **Bob Cooper** from Fort Worth volunteered to deliver the cane to **Mildred** who resides in nearby Dallas, TX.

The guest speaker for the evening was **Ron Jensen**, the son of **Raymond Jensen** the Crew Chief of the 65<sup>th's</sup> *WINDY CITY KITTY* while stationed at Clark Field and Ie Shima, who has recently returned to the U.S. after a 17 year stint with *Stars and Stripes* in Europe. **Ron** told us of his many different experiences while working for that paper. He was in every field of action in Europe and the Middle East over those years while serving as both a photographer and author for the independently owned and operated newspaper written for our American soldiers. Of course most of us, if not all, remember that paper during WWII and especially *SAD SACK*. This was a very educational and entertaining presentation.

After dinner and the address we were entertained by a live band from the area. The music was that which we think of as the Golden Oldies and attracted many couples to the dance floor. When the band finished that fine entertainment at about 10:45 PM, there were still a few couples dancing the night away.

On Sunday morning the Group assembled at 8:00AM for our annual Memorial Service which was conducted by our Chaplain, **Roland Fisher**. After the pledge of allegiance, **Nancy Solomon** sang *How Great Thou Art*, a cappella, in her usual soul rendering presentation. This was followed by the reading of the names of those members and spouses who died over the past year. (See **TAPS** later in Newsletter.) A few names were added by those in attendance. This was followed by Taps being played by a trumpeter from one of the bands for the Showboat Branson Belle.

Chaplain **Roland Fisher** presented the following Memorial Address:

## THEY TOUCHED THE FACE OF GOD

Some time, early in his sixteenth year of life, a young man felt compelled to write some words. They were sentimental, melancholy and seemed to anticipate a moment in which, perhaps, he unknowingly, would one day be standing.

"Some evening, when I'm sitting out, alone  
Watching, perhaps, a cloud across the sky,

**I'll feel as if a strange cool wind has blown -  
And suddenly I'll know that I'm to die ..."**

He was much like most of us then, an American, born in 1922, of knowledgeable, warm, loving parents, who strove to imbue him with a keen sense of what he could do, and, more important, what he should do with his life. And, as most of us, in his late "teens", he sensed and understood the disturbing threat to our free way of life posed by the militaristic, totalitarian regimes that had seized control of the populations of Germany and Japan and commenced war against their neighbors. His grandparents' countries of origin, England and Ireland, were among those attacked.

With strong feelings of what he should do, although the USA was neutral, and he was American, he crossed to Canada and volunteered for service. Flying appealed to him and he applied for pilot training. He earned his wings, was sent to England, trained to fly the famous Battle-Of-Britain fighter, the SPITFIRE, and was assigned to a combat Spitfire squadron. He saw much action and wrote touching letters to his parents about his comrades, even three commanders, that he lost in combat.

On September 11, 1941, just three months before his own country was hurled into the war by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, he was killed in action when his Spitfire collided with another plane and crashed. On September 13 he was buried at Scopwick cemetery near Digby, England. His grave is still there.

His name-John Gillespie Magee.

Today, 65 years after his death, he is, probably, the best remembered airman of the thousands who died in World War Two-not because of his patriotism, nor his noble effort in the air to fight the enemies of our freedom but because of some beautiful, exultant words, a poem, that he penned on the back of a letter to his parents and sent to them not long before he died.

One morning he lifted off and aimed his Spitfire high. At 30,000 feet, he felt a mounting exhilaration and his spirit flowed with radiant feelings. Like a great hawk he wheeled and dipped and soared, swung in vast arcs, drew majestic circles around his personal heaven. His heart was singing and his mind too. A sonnet was being born. And, as he "chased the shouting wind along," flinging his "eager craft through footless halls of air" he soared in joyous freedom straight to a crystalline ending. His jubilant mind, reaching on high, found perfect words. The rhymes dropped in place. He grounded his plane and, as he walked to his quarters, the final, fourteenth line came-and fired it all with meaning. Fourteen glowing lines in his head.

He wrote them on the back of a letter to his folks in America saying, "I thought it might interest you." This is what he wrote:

#### HIGH FLIGHT

Oh! I have slipped the surly bonds of Earth  
And danced the skies on laughter silvered wings;  
Sunward I've climbed, and joined the tumbling mirth  
Of sun-split clouds, - and done a hundred things  
You have not dreamed of - wheeled and soared and swung  
High in the sunlit silence. Hov'ring there,  
I've chased the shouting wind along, and flung  
My eager craft through footless halls of air ...  
Up, up the long, delirious, burning blue  
I've topped the wind-swept heights with easy grace,  
Where never lark or even eagle flew-  
And while, with silent lifting mind I've trod  
The high, untrespassed sanctity of space,  
Put out my hand and touched the face of GOD

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In the years that followed, his inspiring words were published countless times; have been heard on television repeatedly; have twice been recited by presidents of the United States in public addresses and, for me, have been a focus of memories---memories of a life I shared with John.

I did not meet him in person. But like him, I heard a call and joined the Royal Air Force before the US was in the war. Like him, I flew the magnificent Spitfire and felt the thrill of its graceful manner. Unlike him, I could not translate those feelings into an immortal poem. He could. And, today, when I read his poem, I again feel that immeasurable thrill of "flinging my eager craft through footless halls of air,"- flying a Spitfire.

After the Japanese attack on my own country, I gave up my RAF wings for the silver wings of the Air Force. And I began to share some different lives, the young men of the 43rd. And as had happened in the RAF, the cruel toll of war began to take those young lives just as I got to know them.

In times past, I have written several times about how those lives were lost, how they died. But I have never written about how they lived.

They lived with a deep connection to their homes so far away, in spite of the brutal environment in which they conducted their duties. They had left familiar faces and places for a strange, raw, part of the world in which, just to live was highly dangerous, without the very great risks of combat. They faced a fanatic enemy in surroundings that were particularly grueling in which to fight a war.

They loved their country-their home. So when they went to this strange world to face the enemy of their freedom, they took their home with them in their minds and in their hearts. There, they kept those things they loved most: their wives, their sweethearts, their moms and dads, their kid brother, their big sister, their pet dog. There, they kept their favorite sports teams, their best place to fish. There, they kept their hopes and dreams of what was yet to be.

And that is how they lived, facing the terms of their cruel environment and risking their lives and well being, while holding onto the hope that those dreams would, once again, be real.

Some of those hopes were dashed; some seven hundred of those dreams were shattered by war. They are gone. And we, who are left, are to think of them. But how do we think of them? How do we measure them?

I think back over those sixty five years. What a rare privilege it was to have been among them; to have shared their hopes and dreams; to have endured with them an abrasive world, and the difficult task of overcoming an enemy who was bent on destroying us. And I flood with emotion. But how to express it? Where are the words?

Then I reach three years, back to England, where I wore blue with white cloth wings. There, in a sky long past, above the base, a graceful fighter dips into a cloud. The dim mass of a larger plane looms ahead. They collide. Both roar out of the cloud. Two planes--two gallant youths---plunge to the ground. The poet is gone.

Yes! He had," slipped the surly bonds of Earth."

And the sonnet? The poem?

John's sparkling words he sent to his parents suddenly become something else. They were not just words any more. They are lives. Gallant, gifted, laughing lives, offered for freedom. They are the spirits of our comrades we left behind. They are those winsome youths who, carrying the weight of fighting a war created by men, inflated their images with a labeled identity, KEN'S MEN.

Now--- they were not men. They were youths-young, fresh, bright souls verging on man-hood. But they had given up living their own, young lives for a broader atmosphere of self giving, for freedom for all, young and old. And with a combination of the optimism of youth, and a measure of reality, they reached their young, clean, bright hands to a God they hoped--- but were not quite sure existed.

Amid the violence of war, of impending ruin, they found Him. As they slipped the surly bonds of Earth, they reached out their hands and "Touched the face of GOD."

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**Roland Fisher** 63rd Squadron 43rd Group Fifth Air Force  
August 13, 2006

Next **Nancy** sang *GOD BLESS AMERICA*, a capella, and we all joined her. With many a tearful eye we solemnly moved to the private breakfast buffet. Soon after the food was gone, the yearly "Good-byes - see you next year, God willing" were heard throughout the dining room.

\*\*\*\*\* OTHER NEWS \*\*\*\*\*

Here is the latest news about our Secretary, **Howard "Andy" Anderson** from **Anne & Andy** themselves. What follows is a direct quote of **Andy's** e-mail to the acting editor.

"I had surgery on July 27 for abdominal aortic aneurysm and I stayed in the hospital only one night. Anne brought me home on July 28. My board certified vascular surgeon adjusted his schedule to make it possible for us to leave for Alaska on August 11. I had the tiny wire clamps used as stitches removed on the morning of August 10. We flew by Alaska Airlines from Los Angeles to Vancouver, B.C., on August 11, a 2 ½ hour flight and boarded the Holland America cruise ship the same day. There 14 of us celebrating Anne's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. I had known about the aneurysm for about two years but my doctors decided that it needed to be repaired before it grew larger.

The cruise ship departed Vancouver that same day and cruising through Canadian waters was very scenic since we took the Inland Passage route. Then one day I left the group to go to the rest room and found myself "out of breath." One of Anne's daughters, Kristy, is a Physicians Assistant and she probably knew what was the matter with me. The next morning the cruise ship, Statendam, docked in Ketchikan, Alaska. Anne, Kristy and I got off the ship and took a taxi to a small hospital. The hospital had a Siemens CT scanner which confirmed that I had blood clots in my lungs.

I was immediately placed in an ambulance furnished by the Ketchikan paramedics and taken to a small airport on the other side of a river on a ferry and placed with Anne and two nurses in a twin engine Lear Jet. While on the ferry, Anne saw a bald eagle swoop down and grab a fish out of the water, probably a salmon. All this time I was lying down breathing oxygen so I did not see much. When we reached the Harborview Medical Center in Seattle, they placed a filter in me to catch any more clots headed for my lungs. For many days I was there with an IV attached to me. The IV was a bag on a stand with wheels and the bag was filled with Heparin. Anne stayed at a nearby place called Providence Inn which was part of a Swedish Hospital. It took several days to get my blood thin enough to leave Harborview. We had "trip interruption" insurance which took care of the hospital bill. Everyone complains about hospital food, but I was allowed to choose much of my own food, so I ate well!

We flew back to Los Angeles "First Class" and were met by a limousine which took us home. I was put on Coumadin. I have already learned that it is not easy to maintain the correct level! I had to get a pill cutter so I could maintain the correct dosage. I'm feeling fine and have no trouble driving my car. We plan to go to a wedding next Sunday [September 3<sup>rd</sup>]. I am grateful to the University of Washington which operated Harborview."

Enclosed with his annual dues to our good treasurer, **Bill Wilson**, is a letter from **Joubert "Mac" McCrea**, 65<sup>th</sup> Pilot from Alexandria, VA, along with a clipping from "Daedalian." A direct quote from the article: "On 1 June 2005, Gen, John Jumper, USAF Chief of Staff, directed Gen Paul Hester, Commander Pacific Air Forces, to stand up the Kenney Warfighting Headquarters. Named after the airpower visionary, General George C. Kenney, the Kenney Warfighting Headquarters provides command and control (C2) of air, space, and information forces throughout the full range of military operations to meet Secretary of Defense, Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Unified Combatant Commander taskings. Specifically, this headquarters combines the robust talents of an Air Force Staff with the technology and skill inherent in an Air Force Air Operations Center and puts it under the leadership of a single airman to provide the Commander, United States Pacific Command a formidable air and space power team.

**Mac** goes on to say that he thinks that the 43<sup>rd</sup> was **Gen. Kenney's** favorite. **Mac** recalls his experience as a pilot in the 65<sup>th</sup> while stationed at Clark Field and Ie Shima. He is also pleased to report

that he visited **Doctor Milton Gusack** of Chevy Chase, MD, who was in the 65<sup>th</sup> a lot longer than he. **Mac** says that **Doc Gusack** can recall his experiences from memory and that is very good for a long serving flight surgeon. In his opinion **Doc Gusack** was probably the youngest Air Force flight surgeon when he joined the 43<sup>rd</sup> BG [this editor concurs with this statement], and that he may be the oldest retired F.S. from the Air Force. **Mac** reports that Doc is doing well. [**Doc Gusack** phoned this editor in early April after **Sam Commons**, 65<sup>th</sup> Flight engineer from Flourtown, PA, told him that the editor had a pace maker inserted in his chest. **Doc** sure sounded to be in robust health although he said that his knees kept him from coming to our reunions.]

**Mac** sends his compliments to Bill Wilson and all of the officers of the association for outstanding efforts. [This editor remembers you well from Clark and Ie Shima, **Mac**.]

**Armand Mancini**, 403<sup>rd</sup> Gunner, wrote to our Treasurer, **William "Bill" Wilson**, with a question about the date of **General Walker** that he writes appeared in our newsletter. **Armand** believes the correct date was January 5, 1943, but does not cite the newsletter in question and date given. **Armand** was flying with the late Capt. **Jean Jack's** crew along with the late **Arthur Durbeck** when they had to ditch the B-17 near Goodenough Island after bombing Rabaul. **Armand** was in bad shape causing some concern among the crew when an Australian seaplane came to the rescue three days later. The crew of that plane was looking for **Gen. Walker** who of course was not there. Capt. **Jack's** crew boarded the seaplane as were flown to Milne Bay, Australia, where **Armand** was taken to the Dr. Mayo Clinic and from there to 105 General Hospital in Brisbane where the doctor who treated him, Major Cave, "... did a great job on my knee." It was from this hospital that **Armand** was sent back to the States and discharged.

The Vice President of Publications and Business Manager, Joe Navarro, for the major author of our history, Lawrence J. Hickey, sent the president of our association a listing of the chapters for our book. In all there are 24 chapters, 5 appendices as well as the table of contents, etc. With one full-time writer and a research assistant working full-time on our history, things are looking a bit brighter than they have been for many years now. I guess the old adage that Hope Springs Eternal has had an effect on this editor. As reported earlier in this newsletter, the 22<sup>nd's</sup> history is in the binding process and will be available for purchase very soon if not already. Larry assured our president that if any of you has purchased this book in advance, that purchase price will be honored even though the book will sell for \$90.00

A later phone call from Larry to our president indicated that he will soon be sending along a management layout that will allow one to follow the progress of our history and check with Joe or Larry to see if the progress is going as planned. It seems that good progress is being made with one full-time writer and another full-time person helping organize the materials for our history along with several part-time employees working on ours and other histories is paying off. Larry says that the early history of the 43<sup>rd</sup> is very sketchy but he is finding that the public library in Bangor, ME, has some of the missing early history. He is looking for men from the 43<sup>rd</sup> to serve as technical editors to go over the history for the time of their service in the 43<sup>rd</sup> as it is being written to make certain no technical errors will occur. He reminded me that none of his staff of 11 full-time and part-time has ever flown an airplane so they would welcome technical advice. If you are so inclined to help in this manner, please contact Larry or Joe Navarro at 303-499-0530.

In a letter to **Andy, Leland R. Loughrey**, 403<sup>rd</sup> Navigator from West Chester, PA, writes that a friend of his, Michael G. Moskow, is collecting all the information that he can on POWs at Rabaul. Michael is a friend of **Douglas Walker**, Associate member of our Association from New Canaan, CT, and the son of Gen. **Kenneth Walker**, and has been receiving our newsletter from Doug. **Leland** hopes that Michael will become an associate member of our Association and perhaps attend our 2007 reunion. Leland mailed to Andy a video and an article from his local paper about B-25s in the South

Pacific. He expects that Sam Commons will bring to that reunion all of his collection of books and pictures concerning the 43<sup>rd</sup> BG. **Leland** meets with a group of veterans from his area for breakfast and although only three of them were in the 5<sup>th</sup> AAF, he will inform them of our 2007 reunion and the dates it is to be held. In addition another friend, Robert "Bob" Ford, from Coatesville, PA, has a large collection of WWII memorabilia and gives talks to groups such as ours and suggests that he might be willing to make a presentation to our group at the next reunion. [**Leland, Ann Fletcher, Fred Hagen** and **Jim Dieffenderfer** are co-hosting the 2007 reunion. Why not contact them?]

**Ellen (Addie) Petty** of Odessa, TX, and widow of the late **Morris E. Petty**, 65<sup>th</sup> Pilot, sent e-mail to **Andy** saying that she read an entry in **Jim Pettus'** manuscript dated Sep. 18, 1944, concerning **Joe Aiello's** fall from the B-24 piloted by **Morris**. "My husband, **Morris**, (now deceased) talked about this and I verified this with **Freeman Keller** (Vancouver, WA) who was also a member of the crew."

In a July 23<sup>rd</sup> letter to **Andy**, **Wendell Jones**, 64<sup>th</sup> Gunner from Raleigh, NC, enclosed an article from the local newspaper reporting about a widow burying her late WWII Pilot husband, **Bill Hafner**, after 63 years of being MIA in the Papua New Guinea jungles. [This editor found a much shorter article in the July 2, 2006 Buffalo News datelined Columbus, OH (AP), about the recovery and identification of 9 men from the 63<sup>rd</sup> Squadron, 43<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group, with **Bill Hafner** of Norfolk, VA, listed as a 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant on that crew. All the names will be listed at the end of this article.] **Wendell** stated that the Raleigh, NC, paper did not identify the Group or Squadron involved, but he surmises that the crew was indeed from our Group. **Wendell** writes that he will not be attending the Branson reunion. He had his granddaughter check out flights to Branson and return from Raleigh. Going he would have to go through Chicago and change planes to Springfield before taking the shuttle to Branson. The return trip would be via Dallas. He decided that would be too much of a hassle for him. He served on the crew of **Robert "Bob" Cooper**, 64<sup>th</sup> Pilot from Fort Worth, TX, with **Ralph Grubb**, 64<sup>th</sup> Tail Gunner from Pulaski, VA, and **Charles McClenny**, Crew Chief from Dallas, TX. Since the latter two would not be attending the reunion, the incentive to attend was just not strong enough to overcome these factors, but he is looking forward to the 2007 reunion. **Wendell** does mention to **Andy** that the Navigator on their crew, **Howard "Sam" Yeager** from Kimberly, WI, died in August 2005 and that **Howard** was once a member of our association. His widow, **Marilyn**, lives at 425 W. Kennedy Ave., Apt, 220, Kimberly, WI 54136-2804. **Wendell** was "...sorry to hear (Newsletter) about your need for surgery. I'm certain that all of the 43<sup>rd</sup> members would join me in wishing you a speedy recovery" and he went on to praise **Andy** for the "super job" he does with the Newsletters.

The 63<sup>rd</sup> Crew members located and identified are: U.S. Army Air Forces 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. **Arthur Armacost III** of Cincinnati; 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. **Charles Feucht** of Reynoldsburg, Ohio; 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. **William Hafner** of Norfolk, VA.; 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. **David Eppright** of Warrensburg, Mo.; 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. **Charles Cisneros** of San Antonio; Technical Sgt. **Alfred Hill** of Temple, Okla.; Technical Sgt. **James Lascelles** of New York City; Staff Sgt. **William Cameron** of Los Angeles; and Staff Sgt. **Wilburn Rozzell** of Duncan, Okla.

The newspaper story by Jay Price, Staff Writer, and forwarded by **Wendell** regarding the above men is summarized below. The article is entitled "63 years of wondering end as widow buries WWII pilot." **Iris Hafner Hilliard** of Raleigh buried her husband at Arlington Nation Cemetery some 63 years after his disappearance in Papua NG.

The author writes that there wasn't much to the story at the time, not even a date. It was passed down in a place where time didn't matter.

At the precise time and date: 0121 hours, Nov. 5, 1943, a 43<sup>rd</sup> B-24 from the 63<sup>rd</sup> Squadron lost radio contact with home base tower just one minute after the radio operator had called the base asking that a navigational signal be turned on to help them find their way home. That was the last contact anyone had with the night bomber. At about 1800 hours, Nov. 4, 1943, the plane took off from an airstrip at Dobodura for an armed reconnaissance mission near the island of New Ireland. The plane arced its way clockwise around New Britain to the sea to the north of the island where they spotted a

10-ship Japanese convoy that they were told to shadow as long as their fuel permitted. Earlier at 0040 hours the radio operator radioed home base to say that they had bombed the convoy, made three direct hits and destroyed a ship that later was identified as a light cruiser. The B-24 and crew were again flying a curved route around New Britain as they returned to home base to avoid more trouble from the Japanese. All contact with home base ended after 0120 hours that early morning on Nov. 5, 1943.

This very day was Lt. **William Hafner's** birthday and his young wife, **Iris**, was visiting his parents in Norfolk, VA, to celebrate his birthday when they received word, via a young lady civilian Army employee, that Bill was missing in action. It was not until 1946 that the Army declared the crew dead.

Back in PNG at the precise moment the airplane disappeared two natives on a hunt heard the sounds of an airplane approaching followed by a crash as it hit a mountain side nearby. They did not find the wreckage the next morning although they did look for it. But their fear of the terrain and the Japanese in the area kept them from staying around very long. Over the years several NG hunters had noticed the B-24 wreckage but gave it wide berth. Then in January 2002, Robert Simau, son of one of the two hunters who had heard the crash, decided to look for the wreckage. Two months later he walked into a government office and handed to the authorities three pieces of metal - dog tags. One read "Armacost," and the other two said "Eppright." Robert had written down the plane's tail number. Immediately after this U.S. recovery workers with Robert's help found the wreckage of the plane that for all these years the Army believed had gone down at sea.

The plane was found at 10,800 feet in the mountains right on the path that it would have been taken while returning to Dobodura. Recovery of the remains, cataloging of these as well as recording their precise locations took two months before they could be packed and shipped to Hawaii where DNA testing of human remains and female relatives of the crew soon was underway. Among the personal effects found at the scene were rotted wallets, corroded watches and a bracelet with a small heart dangling from it. Bones and bits of boots were also carefully cataloged and packed for the trip to Hawaii.

In April 2003, nearly sixty years later another Army civilian lady came to the home of the now Iris Hilliard with a thick book of reports, analysis, diagrams and photos documenting the recovery and identification of her husband's remains. Some time later Iris received a small package in the mail that contained the bracelet with the dangling heart that she had given to Bill nearly sixty years ago. Engraved on the back in clear letters were the words, "Forget Me Not."

**Dorothy Edwards** from Massillon, OH, and widow of **Russell Edwards**, 63<sup>rd</sup> Flight Engineer, wishes to correct her phone number as listed in the 2005 ROSTER. The area code is incorrect. The number should be 330-832-4949. We hope to see you at a future reunion, **Dottie**.

**Janice Olson**, daughter of the late **Chick Olson**, 64<sup>th</sup>, sent an e-mail to give her new address and phone number: P.O. Box 1317, Victorville, CA 92393; 760-885-2286; Fax 760-242-0973. Her e-mail address has not changed - [B17Project@aol.com](mailto:B17Project@aol.com).

Another change of address comes from **Neal Fugate**, 63<sup>rd</sup> Pilot. His new address and phone number are: 17780 Sintonte Dr., Rancho Bernardo, CA 92128; phone - 858-451-6484. It was good to see you at the Branson reunion, **Neal**, and meet your new wife, **DeDe**.

The family of **Paul Barbus**, 64<sup>th</sup> Squadron, reported to Ed Gammill his recent death. **Helene Brockway** has moved to 2180 Veterans Highway #1513, Levittown, PA 19055.

**Chuck Rauch**, 63<sup>rd</sup> Navigator from Punta Gorda, FL, and immediate past president, sent to **Ed Gammill**, Recruitment Chairman, and the officers of the association the names, addresses, phone numbers of a number of men who contacted him regarding our Branson reunion. Two or three were

from the 63<sup>rd</sup> Troop Carrier Sqd. in the 5<sup>th</sup> AAF and were stationed at Biak and Clark also when the 43<sup>rd</sup> BG was there. They had mistaken our reunion for theirs also to be held at Branson. **Chuck** also included the same information along with the era in which they served in the 43<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Wing during the B-25/B-50 era. **Ed** has asked these men to join our association, but of this date the editor has not received any word that they did in fact join us.

**Chuck** also reported that Jack Jack the son of **Jean Jack**, 403 Pilot from Murfreesboro, TN, and **Betty Jack** answered the phone when he called **Jean** regarding the upcoming reunion. Jack Jack then reported the death of both his mother and father earlier this year. **Chuck** mentions that he had been recalled for the Korean War and was assigned to Headquarters of Special Weapons Command, and **Jean Jack** was in charge of one of the groups to which **Chuck** reported. **Chuck** was unaware that **Jean** had also been in the 43<sup>rd</sup> BG 63<sup>rd</sup> Squadron during WWII [Our records show him to have been in the 403<sup>rd</sup> Sqd.]. **Chuck** says after learning of this fact years later at a reunion, "We had a lot to talk about since we were in the Pacific and Kirtland Field which related to many past memories and he was one fine gentleman. I will miss him."

**Arlene Ross**, widow of the late **Robert Ross**, 403<sup>rd</sup> Photographer/Gunner, has a new address. She now resides at 111 North Wells Road, Apt. #127, Ventura, CA 93004-1274. Her new phone number is 805-647-0172.

**Orion Rogers**, 63<sup>rd</sup> Pilot from Bethesda, MD, sent word that, **Leonard O. Bowen**, 63<sup>rd</sup> Radar Operator from Karrinyup, Australia, and a native of Western Australia died on August 8<sup>th</sup> of this year. **Leonard** was on the crew of **George Welch**. **Leonard** and **Orion** flew a mission together on Christmas Day 1944. A narrative of the mission entitled "Our Christmas Mission of 1944" was published in the Newsletter in the spring of 2004. Their plane was hit by small arms fire while strafing northern Luzon, and they had to make a forced landing on a hill on southern Mindoro at about 0300 hours December 26<sup>th</sup>.

**Leonard** has also reported a new phone number - 301-718-3070.

Shortly after this editor returned home from Branson, he received e-mail from **Eldon "Bud" Lawson** informing him that he noticed an obit in the Cleveland paper indicating that **George R. Tucholski**, 64<sup>th</sup> Radio Operator from Cleveland, OH, had died on Monday, August 28<sup>th</sup>. That was the day that **George** and his good wife, **Anita**, had headed home from Branson. **George** was a Michigan native. His funeral was held the following Friday at St. Bartholomew Church and was to be interred at St. Casimer Cemetery, Posen, MI.

More sad news arrived from **Jean Larson** who wrote that her husband, **Harvey Larson**, Public Relations Officer Headquarters Squadron from Bloomington, IL, passed away on May 25, 2006. "**Harvey** so enjoyed receiving your newsletter from 43<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group. He was a USAF major, retired." He is buried at Rock Island Arsenal Military Cemetery and is missed very much by their two sons, a daughter, a grandson and of course by **Jean**.

We will have to be certain to get **Jean's** name in our Roster so that she will receive our newsletter.

Our recruitment officer and next secretary of the association, **Ed Gammill**, has sent along the names of two new members of our association. First, **Kellie Hedgers**, P.O. Box 907, Toledo, WA 98591; phone - 360-864-6649, a student, writes that her late great-great-great uncle, Lt. **Louis Miller**, was Kensmen. **Kellie** is trying to find out all she can about him. He served as copilot on the B-17 Ka-Puhio-Wela that went down on March 3, 1943. If anyone has anything they could share with her about her uncle, she would appreciate hearing from him/her.

Second, we have **Robert E. Lee III**, 11995 Shakerwood Lane, Wellington, FL 33414, whose occupation is a motorcycle builder, but was a 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. in one of the military services. He indicates that his

grandfather, **Robert Lee** served as a copilot in the 43<sup>rd</sup> from October 1944 to November 1945, and flew with the crew of the late **Angus Taff** in the 64<sup>th</sup>. He writes, "I was able to locate because of your Association, **Jim "Boots" Rodella** [64<sup>th</sup> Gunner from Pittsburgh, PA] who was also on my Grandfather's crew. My Grandfather is alive and well living in Palatine, IL, and soon will be speaking with "**Boots**." I would love to speak with anyone who might remember my Grandfather. Also if you have copies of **Jim Rodella's** diary, please contact me.

We certainly welcome these two a new members of our association. It is so good to see younger people becoming members of the association, and we do hope that they will help carry us on for many more years.

Last November (2005) Deborah E. Sorensen sent a letter to the Association reporting the death of her father, **Henry H. Day**, a 64<sup>th</sup> Pilot from Portland, OR. "I am sorry to have to tell you another happy member of Ken's Men has found a perfect flight with his Maker. **Henry Day** ... passed away in September of this year." Deborah also reported that **Henry's** wife, **Clarietta**, is deceased and asked that their address be removed from our mail list. The editor assumes that Deborah is their daughter as she has the same mailing address. Why this letter was misplaced until recently is unknown, but the editor apologizes for this notice not making it in a previous newsletter. Deborah included a copy of a letter sent to his friends. Some of this letter will be of interest to our readers.

"While his squadron was stationed in New Guinea at the same base as his cousin and best friend Bill Towery's squadron, the units went out on a bombing run. His cousin's bomber was told by the tower to "go around again." When **Hank's** flight came up in line, he was given the same message. He stated he was critically low on fuel and had to land; he could not go around again. He landed at another field, losing a tire, but having an intact plane and safe flight crew. You know the routine for failing to follow orders, even when the outcome is good. **Hank's** grief and frustration at being unable to find Bill were doubtless compounded by the Military's response to his actions.

His cousin's flight was never heard from again. It was a crushing blow to a man of 21 years. Bill and Hank were recruiting poster handsome in their uniforms, but with big grins, they were so happy to be flying. At the time of his death, I believe **Hank** was greeted by Bill. Can you just see it? Bright blue skies, warm sunshine. The young man in his blues with the big grin, arms wide open, greeting the worn old man, "**Hank**, welcome home. We've been waiting for you."

**Ruth Wollin** wrote **Andy** to inform him that her beloved husband, **Bernard Wollin**, 64<sup>th</sup> Navigator from Boca Raton, FL, had passed away this past July. **Bernard** served in the 43<sup>rd</sup> Ken's Men at Nadzab, Owi, Leyte, Clark Field and Ie Shima. Like so many of our comrades who are making their final flight, he and they will all be missed. **Ruth** expressed sorrow that they had to miss the reunion.

Lynn Warren writes, "It is with deep regret that I tell you of my father's passing. Thank you and best regards." She enclosed a copy of the obituary of **James B. Warren**, 65<sup>th</sup> Flight Engineer from Princeton, NJ. It contains some interesting information about her father some of which appears in the next paragraph. **James Warren's** widow, **Sophie**, will remain on our mailing list so that she can continue to get this newsletter.

**James** loved his God, country and family. He and **Sophie** were married for 61 years and had a family of three sons, three daughters, four grandson, five granddaughters and two great-grandsons. He enlisted in the USAF in 1940. When he started in the 5<sup>th</sup> AAF, he was an engine mechanic, but volunteered to serve as engineer and top turret gunner on B-17s as losses were so high gunners were needed. He earned a DFC, two Presidential Citations and was credited with shooting down two enemy aircraft by the time he was 21. After the war he returned to the States attended the University of Denver and became a certified public accountant. During his career **James** honored by the Wall Street Journal as the youngest executive vice president of any company listed on the NYSE to that date.

Sallie Schmidt of Fort Smith, AR, wrote to **Bill Wilson**, to inform him that her father, **Dale Cooper**, 65<sup>th</sup> Pilot from Wichita, KS, has also taken his last flight as of July, 2006. She knows that he really enjoyed our newsletters, and although she and her brothers also enjoy the newsletters, she has asked that these no longer be sent to **Dale's** address. She said that her dad was very proud of his 43<sup>rd</sup> cap and the newsletters and indicated that we are doing an excellent job. We are sad to have to remove that address from our mail roster, but we will respect your wishes.

\*\*\*\*\* TAPS \*\*\*\*\*

#### 63<sup>rd</sup> Squadron

- ✓\*George White Dec. 2005
- ✓\*William Heilman Jan. 2005
- ✓\*Wathen Cody Aug. 2005
- ✓Leonard O. Bowen Aug. 8, 2006

Reported by wife, **Robin & Orion Rogers**

#### 64<sup>th</sup> Squadron

- ✓\*Steve Blount Jan. 2006
- ✓\*Henry Day Sep. 2005
- ✓George Tucholski Aug. 28, 2006
- Reported by **Eldon "Bud" Lawson**
- ✗Howard "Sam" Yeager
- Reported by **Wendell Jones**
- ✓Dot Sue Young (Assoc.) Jul. 2005

- ✓\*Francis Denault Dec. 2005
- ✓\*Art Millard Oct. 2005
- ✓\*Richard Wertz Feb. 2005

- ✓\*Bernard Wollin
- ✓\*John Behrns Oct. 2005
- ✓\*John Fahey Jr. Mar. 2006
- ✓James B. Warren Jul. 2006
- Reported by his daughter, **Lynn Warren**
- ✓Helen Commons (Assoc.) Feb. 2006

#### 65<sup>th</sup> Squadron

- ✓\*Augustine Rapisardi Dec. 2005
- ✓\*Charles Reitenberg Jun. 2005.
- ✓\*Dale Cooper
- Reported by daughter, **Sallie Schmidt**

- ✓\*Kenneth Gissone Mar. 2005
- ✓\*Frederick Lloyd Nov. 2005
- ✓\*Carl Averill Feb. 2006
- ✓Jean Jack May 18, 2006
- Reported by son, **Jack Jack**

#### 403<sup>rd</sup> Squadron

- ✗\*Thomas O'Malley
- ✓\*Leon Himmelstein Feb. 2005
- ✓\*Phyllis Himmelstein (Assoc.) Oct. 2004
- ✓Betty Jack (Assoc.) May 10, 2006
- Reported by son, **Jack Jack**

#### Headquarters Squadron

- ✓\*Dale Allton May 2006
- ✓Edmund Kiselica Jan. 2006

- ✓\*Harvey Larson May 2006
- Notified by wife, **Jean**

#### Squadron Unknown

- ✓\*Bernadine Lee Apr. 2006

- ✓Edmund Kiselica about Jun. 2001.
- Notified by son-in-law, **Ronald Rogers**

**GOD Bless** each of these men and women and all of their families.

\* These names were read at the Memorial Service in Branson, MO.

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Below is part of missing page 2 of the July 2006 Newsletter 99<sup>th</sup> Edition that contained some of the president's report. What else was on that page is unknown to this editor, so it can't be included here.

At this time, the government intends to mount an investigation into the legality of the recovery. I know better than anyone that it was done to the letter of the law and was completely legal. I trust that the Ghost will soon return home."

As president, I will propose the following amendment to our Bylaws at the Board Meeting, Wednesday, August 23, 2006, in Branson, Missouri: ARTICLE 9. OFFICERS, Article 8, paragraph 5, as amended at Norfolk, Virginia, 1991 to read: Elected Officers, President and Vice President, shall be elected for a period of one year, and if elected may serve one more consecutive year in the respective office.

This would replace the current Article 8, Paragraph 5 as amended.

This amendment if passed by the Board and the General membership present at the Group meeting on Friday, August 25, 2006, will permit our Secretary and Treasurer to serve for as many consecutive years as they desire and are elected by the membership at each General Group meeting at our annual reunions. This is our current practice so the passing of this proposed amendment would simply make our practice conform to the Bylaws.

Another of our volunteer workers who works so hard behind the scenes and at our reunions, **Eldon "Bud" Lawson**, deserves recognition. **Bud** has served many years now as our Association Historian. He has assembled a large collection of historical materials many of which are displayed each year in our Hospitality/Memorabilia Room at the annual reunions. All of these materials will constitute the archives of the illustrious 43<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group (H) that he hopes to find a good repository for. That is not an easy task. It is not too late to send to Bud materials that you would like to add to the archives.

As our generation, called THE GREATEST GENERATION by Tom Brokaw, moves along in years, it becomes more difficult for many of you to travel and thus attend our annual reunions. We will be thinking of you as we assemble in Branson and may God bless each of you and those of us who are fortunate enough to make it to Branson.

*Jim Cherkauer*

\*\*\*\*\* QUARTERLY HUMOR \*\*\*\*\*

The humor for this quarter comes from **Ed Gammill** and **Max Axelsen**, Past President and 403<sup>rd</sup> Pilot from San Antonio. First are some from **Ed**.

A US Air Force C-141 is scheduled to leave Thule Air Base, Greenland at midnight. During the pilot's preflight check, he discovers that the latrine holding tank is still full from the last flight. So, a message is sent to the base and an airman who was off duty is called out to take care of it.

The young man finally gets to the air base and makes his way to the aircraft, only to discover that the latrine pump truck has been left outdoors and is frozen solid, so he must find another one in the hangar, which takes even more time.

He returns to the aircraft and is less than enthusiastic about what he has to do. Nevertheless, he goes about the pumping job deliberately and carefully (and slowly) so as not to risk criticism later. As he's leaving the plane, the pilot stops him and says, "Son, your attitude and performance have caused this flight to be late and I'm going to personally see to it that you are not just reprimanded but punished."

Shivering in the cold, his task finished, he takes a deep breath, stands up tall and says, "Sir, with all due respect, I'm not your son; I'm an Airman in the United States Air Force. I've been in Thule, Greenland, for 11 months without any leave, and reindeer are beginning to look pretty good to me. I have one stripe; it's two-thirty in the morning, the temperature is 40 degrees below zero, and my job here is to pump crap out an aircraft ... Now, just exactly what form of punishment did you have in mind?"

"Mr. Clark, I have reviewed this case very carefully," the divorce Court Judge said, "and I've decided to give your wife \$775 a week."

That's very fair your honor," the husband said. "And every now and then I'll try to send her a few bucks myself."

A man is recovering from surgery when a nurse asks him how he is feeling.

"I'm O.K., but I didn't like the four-letter word the doctor used in surgery," he answered.

"What did he say?" asked the nurse.

"OOPS!"

Now from **Max** - Penning puns.

Those who jump off a bridge in Paris are in Seine.

Shotgun wedding: A case of wife or death.

A hangover is the wrath of grapes.

Dancing cheek-to-cheek is really a form of floor play.

Does the name Pavlov ring a bell?

When two egotists meet, it's and I for an I.

What's the definition of a will? (It's a dead giveaway.)

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This newsletter is published four times a year - **January, April, July and October.**

**Please pay your annual dues to our Treasurer, William H. Wilson, Jr., C/O Elaine Pierce at 1101 E. Coliseum Dr., P.O. Box 360, Snyder, TX 79550-0360.** It is most important that C/O Elaine Pierce is on the envelope. **Please keep in mind that annual dues were raised to \$20.00 per year effective with the 2007 calendar year.** Life membership remains at **\$100.00.** Please make out your check to the **43<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group Association.**

As of January 1, 2007, our Association has a new **Secretary/Editor, Ed Gammill.** Send items for the Newsletter to Ed at **5415 E Osborn Rd., Phoenix, AZ 85018-6106** or via e-mail to **EdGammill@aol.com**. Any material received after the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month prior to a publication month probably will not appear in that publication.

The Postal Service **will not forward this newsletter.** If you change your address please notify our 43<sup>rd</sup> Elf, **Elain Pierce**, at the address shown above. Send her all changes of phone numbers, etc. also.

The pages that follow are the continuation of the edited version of the James Pettus manuscript of the B-24 era of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group from January 1944- August 1944. The pages are numbered to continue in sequence with previous chapters. The chapters are for November and December 1944.

Another Sea Hawk plane found a heavy cruiser getting under way in Coron Bay. Two direct hits were claimed. The ship was certainly heavily damaged with fires noted on its decks.

Oct 30, 1944. Three reccos and 1 ferret plane were out from the 63<sup>rd</sup> this night. With not shipping sighted bombs were dropped on Zamboanga Drome with unobserved results.

Oct 31, 1944. The Sea Haws sent one armed recco to the Sulu Sea and another to Palawan. The first plane was unproductive, but at Bacuit Bay on the northeast coast of Palawan, the Sea Hawk sighted remnants of the Japanese fleet so many had been hunting. There were at least 10 warships of which 5 were cruisers in the fleet. The plane sent a message about this target the B-24 either was preparing for a quick run on the outer side of the target or it strayed to close to the now moving ships. They opened fire on him and in short order the #2 engine was knocked out, #3 was damaged and one man was wounded. The plane dumped its bombs and headed to Tacloban, Leyte Island, as the nearest strip. The crew dumped all the guns, ammo, loose equipment and the radar to keep it from possible recovery by the enemy in the event of a crash landing. They could not take direct flight to Tacloban as it would have taken them over Cebu. With #3 now gone, the plane reached Leyte on 2 engines only to find an air raid taking place at the strip. The tower refused to give them permission to land with a straight in approach. On their second circuit 2 Jap Zekes dropped phosphorous bombs on the B-24. The 63<sup>rd</sup> pilot made a steep short approach and landed, slamming on the brakes. [Pettus has the crew firing at the Jap planes, but that seems incorrect if they jettisoned their guns and ammo as stated above.] The nose wheel tire blew on the steel matting. Before the plane came to a halt some of the crew were headed for cover at full speed. The pilot shut down the two remaining engines and then the flight deck crew sought cover.

1944 NOVEMBER

With the battle for control of Leyte about over after severe losses to the Japanese navy, air force and army, it was obvious that targets for the B-24s were moving north and that a move from Owi was imminent for the 43<sup>rd</sup> BG.

MacArthur's engineers were adamant that they could build two airstrips about 20 miles inland despite the fact that the Filipino natives told them that the land was unsuitable for airdrome construction. The engineers went ahead to construct the strip San Pablo #1 and Buri #2. When the rainy season arrived the runways, steel mats and all, gradually sank out of sight. Only 1 B-24 ever used either of those strips. A 43<sup>rd</sup> bomber landed there by mistake when coming from Owi. Stripped of all weight and with only 75 gallons of fuel for each engine, Lt. Col. Pettus managed to get the aircraft, with 2 crews, airborne using 2800 feet of soft runway. In the dry season the strips were used by C-47s, P-40s and L-5s mostly to drop supplies to the infantry fighting in the hills.

Headquarters of the 5<sup>th</sup> AF, V Bomber Command and the 5<sup>th</sup> Fighter Command were all in the Tacloban area with heavy bomb groups and fighter groups to move in soon. The Sea Hawks were to operate out of Morotai and Tacloban and move to Mindoro on December 15<sup>th</sup>. With dry weather expected soon, conditions were good for airdrome construction on Mindoro.

Tacloban quickly emerged as the major air facility on Leyte. Dozens of wrecked navy planes from the Battle of Leyte Gulf were bulldozed aside or into the ocean. The strip was lengthened and covered with steel matting. Coral was not to be found and hard fill had to be trucked in for several miles.

Traffic was a nightmare. Wounded had to be moved from the island using this one strip. There were P-38s, P-40s, C-47s, C-46s, C-54s, B-24s (both army and navy), Navy P-3s, L-5s, Marine Corsairs, and later B-25s, P-47s, P-61s and Marine F-8 night fighters. In mid-November it was the world's busiest airstrip with a landing and takeoff every 40 seconds. If a plane broke down or delayed traffic for a few minutes, it was moved aside quickly with every effort made not to damage the plane.

About Nov 10<sup>th</sup> it was decided to bring the 43<sup>rd</sup> to Tacloban as soon as the hardstands were finished. The 63<sup>rd</sup> was to come in first with the other squadrons to come as they could be accommodated. The camp area was constructed by those who came to Leyte via LSTs or were flown there. It was about 2.5 miles from the strip in a muddy but flat area that abutted the main road to the strip. Although the strike squadrons remained on Owi for the time being, they staged missions through Tacloban as did the 22<sup>nd</sup> and the 90<sup>th</sup> Groups.

Lt. Col. Pettus was put in charge of the entire strip. Planes were parked every 10 feet. There was only 1 main taxiway with limited ramp space. Pettus had to rule that aircraft on the ground had priority over those in the air. This was exactly the opposite of what would have been the case under normal circumstances. In all this was an inviting target that the Japanese visited often.

The 43<sup>rd</sup> provided help with servicing transient aircraft and with the navy's BP4Ys. At times this one squadron would have 30 such aircraft there making it a wild and dangerous place.

A second operational strip was located at Dulag about 12 miles south of Tacloban. P-40s and P-38s were stationed there. The strip was only 3600' long and the terrain made it difficult to lengthen it.

On November 9<sup>th</sup> five LSTs left Owi with the 43<sup>rd</sup> personnel and that of a service squadron attached to the 43<sup>rd</sup>. The ocean voyage lasted 6 days amid calm seas. Although the 43<sup>rd</sup> was scheduled to go to San Pablo strip near Tacloban, the navy dumped all on a beach about 20 miles south of Tacloban. The navy refused to go to Tacloban where the unloading facilities were overloaded and air raids took place day and night. With only one north/south road from the town area south to Dulag, it was sheer hell with rain most of the time. It was under these conditions that KEN'S MEN came to the Philippines.

At 0930 Nov 15<sup>th</sup> the unloading began and lasted for 8 hours. Anything not unloaded at that time would stay on the LSTs as the navy was not staying after 1730 hours when the night air raids would begin. Fortunately everything was unloaded using lots of local labor paid with meals only. Some 7 pounds of food per day for 2200 men was consumed. In 12 days everything was moved to a new camp site that was almost as muddy as the unloading site.

Army regulations prohibited a unit from drawing fresh food from the myriads of vessels in the harbor until it had used up the compulsory rations brought in. What was not used of the 7 pounds per man per day was passed out to the Filipinos who had been on short rations for years. While all of this was going on the strike squadrons were to carry out such operations as they could.

Nov 2-3, 1944. The 63<sup>rd</sup> spent the nights looking for shipping and a reported Japanese task force. No sightings were made but 1 plane was trailed by 3 bogeys that did not attack. The bomber lost them after entering a friendly cloud. A ferret did sight a large cargo ship at San Pedro, but not being armed it could not attack.

The night of Nov 3-4 the 63<sup>rd</sup> sent out 5 planes to 5 different airdromes in the Philippines. Each was armed with deadly 260 lb. frags with extension fuses. The fields at Lahug, Cebu City, on the island of Cebu, Opon, Bacalod and Alicante on Negros were all given a going over. One silver plane was seen burning at Bacalod. Over Alicante a Japanese Lilly was seen with lights on and several night fighters closed with the B-24; shots were exchanged with minor damage to engine #3.

Nov 4, 1944. The strike forces went to Lahug Drome, but only 13 of the 19 planes that took off made it to the target. The 65<sup>th</sup> had a bad day. The lead element strayed, missed the rendezvous and returned to Owi after dropping its bombs in the ocean. Three of their planes made it to the target. Two tagged onto the 64<sup>th</sup> while the third joined the 90<sup>th</sup> BG for protection. Although the runway was hit numerous times, the bombing was only fair. The 403<sup>rd</sup> did the best job causing a large explosion only to have 10 Jap fighters appear. The 65<sup>th</sup> had 2 planes damaged and 1 waist gunner slightly wounded. The AA was erratic and only 1 plane was damaged. The 43<sup>rd</sup> crews claimed several interceptors damaged with 1 gunner swore that he exploded a Tojo, but no one else saw this.

This night the Se Hawks sent long range ferrets to the Dutch East Indies and to the northern Philippines. These 15 hours missions were carried out successfully.

Nov 5, 1944. The strike squadrons had the day off preparing for Nov 6<sup>th</sup>.

The 63<sup>rd</sup> sent 3 planes with frags to Alicante and Fabrica. A Betty bomber was claimed destroyed as well as a large building being set on fire. Night fighters were seen but did not fire on the B-24s that held their fire so as not to be easier to locate. At Fabrica there appeared to be 4-engine planes on the ground, but no confirmed damage resulted from the bombings. Five fires and several explosions were reported by the 2 attackers and the planes spent a couple of hours in the area harassing the enemy.

Nov 6, 1944. The strike forces set out for Fabrica with Del Monte as the secondary target. Using 5 X 1000 lb. bombs, the strips and facilities were damaged along with 15 of the 30 planes sighted on the ground. Numerous fires and explosions were sighted. About 6 Japanese Oscars intercepted the B-24s but were not too eager to attack. They made passes but were driven off by concentrated fire from the bombers. One 403<sup>rd</sup> plane did not make the rendezvous and went to Del Monte making a direct hit on one large building resulting in a large explosion. Even with one bomb bay tank, all planes landed at either Morotai or Sansapore to refuel for the long trip back to Owi. The flight from Owi to the Cebu/Negros area was about 1200 miles and required a night takeoff with a rendezvous in the southern Philippines.

The Sea Hawks were back to Fabrica and Alicante with frags that started fires and explosions in the revetment area of Alicante. These strips were the takeoff points for attacks on Tacloban and covering Jap reinforcements coming to Leyte in the Ormoc area.

After the LSTs had left Owi for Leyte, there was a shortage of ground crews to service the planes for missions. Although the flight crews pitched in to load bombs, their strike capabilities were severely reduced. Numerous supply and courier flights took place between Owi and Tacloban with lots of excitement at times because of air raids and alerts.

Nov 9/10, 1944. An unarmed Sea Hawk spotted a 10 ship convoy in the Sulu Sea. Clouds made confirmation difficult, but radar blips indicated the ships may 4 DDs, a possible cruiser and some smaller vessels. The next day the navy could not find it. For the next few nights the 63<sup>rd</sup> sent out ferrets and unarmed reccos but they never found the convoy. Preparations were being made for the move of the 63<sup>rd</sup> to Tacloban.

Nov 14, 1944. The strike forces sent 116 planes to Matina Drome near Davao to destroy runways and airplanes on the ground. Bombing was good with direct hits on the strip. The 64<sup>th</sup> claimed damage to 3 twin-engine planes on the ground with their 1000 pounders.

Nov 15/16, 1944. The Sea Hawks went after airdromes at Matina, Licanan and Tarakan on Borneo with 1000 lb. demos. Bad weather forced all bombing to be by radar that had improved over the months. Facilities at Matina, Licanan and Tarakan were hit.

Nov 16, 1944. The strike forces had a dull day hitting Licanan. Although the bombing was good, the 403<sup>rd</sup>'s bombs did not explode upon hitting the target. There was very little AA and no interception but plenty of harsh words for the armorers. KEN'S MEN had never had a whole squadron's bombs go bad on the same mission.

The 63<sup>rd</sup> bombers were out looking for naval ships with little luck lately, but this night they came across 1 heavy cruiser, 1 light cruiser, and 2 DDs plus several smaller craft at Brunei. Despite attacks on the naval force, only near misses could be claimed.

Meanwhile the Japanese had been stepping up their bombings of Tacloban and the area around it. The area was filled with personnel and equipment in an area about 6 miles by 1 mile. The day attacks were at specific targets, but the night attacks were made on lighted areas. Personnel on the ground became careless with a feeling that these bombers were not after them in particular. As a result the casualties were rather high with several men killed in a motor pool, individual men killed here and there with many fires started and even the control tower hit on one occasion.

During a red alert the control tower operator was to leave his post, but planes were constantly coming in for a landing. This created significant problems since radio communication was halted. Using an Aldus lamp and putting sand bags around the platform of the control tower, one pilot and a radio technician manned the tower. The pilot was deemed to be in the best position to know when to let a plane land or takeoff.

Nov 17/18, 1944. The 63<sup>rd</sup> went back to Brunei to attack vessels they hoped were still there after being attacked the night before. They found a light cruiser of the Yubari class and scored 3 direct hits and 1 near miss setting the ship's superstructure on fire. The bombers were advised to leave the area quickly as they had no radar that could detect night fighters that may be in the area.

Nov 18, 1944. A 64<sup>th</sup> strike force was to take off before dawn and ferry passengers from the 43<sup>rd</sup> Bomber Command to Leyte. There the planes were to refuel, take on bombs and take off again to hit a target on the other side of Leyte and proceed back to Owi. As the 64<sup>th</sup> approached Tacloban there was a red alert, but they were given the go ahead to land. On the final approach an Oscar made a pass at one bomber only to be shot down by a P-38. After their landing the control tower was set ablaze by another Japanese aviator. Several men were wounded but no

planes on the ground were damaged. By 1230 the 64<sup>th</sup> planes had loaded on 5 X 1000 lb. demos, refueled and were ready to takeoff for Palompon on the west side of Leyte. They took off in a hurry and bombed the target area starting fires in warehouses, a jetty and personnel areas. No AA was seen and the planes soon departed for Owi. The Sea Hawks hit Brunei, did reccos and dropped bombs on a dock at Luban near Zamboanga, but there was nothing of interest found.

Nov 19, 1944. It was the 403<sup>rd</sup>'s turn to repeat what the 64<sup>th</sup> had done yesterday. They also got the red alert treatment. Proceeding as the 64<sup>th</sup> had, they soon had the planes fueled and loaded with bombs and were off to Palompon. After good bombing and no AA, the planes went down and strafed the area but encountered only some machinegun fire. This was not a recommended procedure, but the CO as back in Tacloban. One plane had a camera from the 6<sup>th</sup> Combat Camera unit aboard and too time good footage.

The 63<sup>rd</sup> found at least 2 ships in Brunei Bay and a Fox Baker was hit with two 1000 lb. demos after which a large explosion resulted and the ship sank. Three near misses on a two stack Tare Able left the ship listing, but this may actually have been due to sharp maneuvering.

Nov 20/21, 1944. This night the docks of Luban were hit by the 63<sup>rd</sup> and a large explosion resulted. No vessels were found. The Japanese seemed to be building up for a landing on the west side of Leyte so this area was under constant watch by American planes.

Nov 22, 1944. This was a "rest" day for the 63<sup>rd</sup>, but by evening they were back at Brunei where they scored 2 direct hits on a Fox Tare Uncle but no fire followed. The ship was claimed to be damaged.

Nov 23, 1944. The 403<sup>rd</sup> again carried 65 passengers to Tacloban. They started out with 7 planes, but 1 had to stop at Morotai. Upon landing at Tacloban there was no Red Alert only rain. After refueling and loading on bombs they were off to Ormoc on the west coast of Leyte where the enemy had been landing troops at night. There was little AA with the poor weather. Some bombs landed in the bay, but 2 large explosions were seen in the center of the target area. This night the Sea Hawks went to Lauan where 2 planes were sighted on the ground and to Tarakan Drome with 1 plane sighted. The crew made a radar run on the shoreline and strip, dropping through the overcast. It was rewarded with a reflection of a very large explosion taking place on the ground.

Nov ?, 1944. The 65<sup>th</sup> was off to Tacloban and then on to Ormoc, but they had no passengers aboard. The target was 6 heavy dual AA that could be used on ground forces as well as against aircraft in the air. Bombing was poor although 1 gun was probably destroyed. Some bombs landed in the bay, others not sighted due to weather, but 1 bombardier was right on target and the gun stopped firing after the bombs hit. There was no interception with only one plane slightly damaged by AA. This would be the last operational mission of the month for the strike forces of the 43<sup>rd</sup>. Propaganda leaflets were dropped and numerous photos were taken, at the 6<sup>th</sup>'s Army request, of the valley near Limon.

Nov 25 - 30, 1944. The Sea Hawks kept up armed reccos, ferrets and attacks on Brunei for the balance of the month. Generally 2 planes were out each night. On the 26<sup>th</sup> a Fox Tare Uncle, fleeing Brunei, was attacked. The enemy had learned to duck behind one of the many small islands in Brunei Bay. This confused our radar and many a rock pile was lined up on before positive identification was made. The Uncle got away.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> Brunei caught it again when 2 small Sugar Charles were destroyed, 1 disintegrated with a direct hit from a 1000 pounder. The other was capsized by 2 near misses and rolled over and sank. Another unidentified vessel was sighted and attacked, but the bombs missed by 400'. The last mission of the month was made by a 63<sup>rd</sup> ferret to SE Luzon, but due to radar failure it only partially completed its mission.

The move from Owi to Tacloban along with the resulting split operations as well as the operation of Tacloban Strip was a heavy burden on the Group. This was not an outstanding month as far as the combat record goes.

## DECEMBER 1944

This month marked a low point in KEN'S MEN's operations since combat operations began. There was only 1 group strike from Owi, but the Sea Hawks carried on nearly every night with reccos and bombing as far north as northern Luzon and reccos nearly to Hainan Island in the China Sea. A steady stream of daily courier flights to Tacloban to bring more 43<sup>rd</sup> and V Bomber Command people to the "front." But no action is worse for a combat coupled with miserable conditions. The outfit languished in the mud and rain and morale was low until the 43<sup>rd</sup> was given the responsibility for Tacloban strip.

Dec 1, 1944. Three 63<sup>rd</sup> planes went out. One flew the unarmed recco circuit looking for enemy naval activity, covering Mindanao, Leyte Gulf, Samar and southern Luzon. The other 2 went to Miri in north Borneo not far from Brunei. Making separate attacks in the harbor a fire was started. In nearby Kudat Bay a Fox Tare Able was attacked with a direct hit and 2 near misses. After 40 minutes the ship was listing severely, but the plane could tarry no longer as the recco part of the mission was still to come. At Morundu Bay several Sugar Charlies were observed and strafed with no visible results.

Dec 2, 1944. The 403<sup>rd</sup> flew a weather recco and supply flight to Tacloban and brought 4 men, 1 dog and 7000 pounds of construction equipment to the muddy camp. Not many dogs were left in the Philippines due to short rations over the years so this one would be close to camp. This night 2 planes went out to hammer those Sugar Charlies but got only near misses. A third bomber flew an unarmed recco circuit around the islands.

Dec 3/4, 1944. One harassing mission went to Manila to harass and dropped the first Army Air Force bombs on Luzon since its evacuation (the U.S. Navy had been there). Flying from one area to the other, the 63<sup>rd</sup> caused a 7 hour alert at Clark Field even though they were not that long in the area. After dropping 100 pound demos on Fort Stotsenburg and Clark Field and damaging a large building, the planes went to Nichols Field and left a few reminders of their visit. Next it was off to Nielson Field to pay their respects. Due to the fact that night fighters were detected in the area, the planes constantly changed altitude and kept on a weaving course. The searchlights in the area did not seem to be radar controlled. Another Sea Hawk went to Negros and Cebu dropping 100 pounders on Bacolod, Dumagette, Binaloagan and Alicante. No night fighters were sighted and AA was not a problem. "Keep the enemy awake, dodge the searchlights ..." was the order of the night.

Dec 4/5, 1944. The night was pretty much the same as last night with up to 5 hours of bombing with Cavite and Sangley Point added to the tour. The Japanese helped by turning on searchlights with 10 counted at Nichols Field and another 10 at Nielson Field. Medium AA was



encountered but upon seeing this, the planes broke off and returned later from a different direction.

Dec 5/6, 1944. New targets included Binalbagan, Opon and La Carolota with 2 to 10 bombs dropped on each. Fabrica was hit again and a string of bombs was placed through the barracks area of Stotsenburg. Many false runs were made to keep the enemy alert, but one 63<sup>rd</sup> plane was caught in the searchlights at Nichols Field despite evasive tactics. It received a hole in the port wing. It lacked equipment to detect radar control of searchlights or guns.

Dec 6/7, 1944. In the late afternoon of the 6<sup>th</sup>, Lt. Col. Pettus as C.O. of the strip received a call from Gen. Hutchinson of FEAF that Japanese paratroopers had landed at Buri and San Pablo and were attempting to capture the V Bomber Command and 5<sup>th</sup> Air Force Headquarters where generals Whitehead and Crabb were in residence. He stated that a parachute attack on Tacloban and Dulag was expected that night. Tacloban had no organized ground defense or infantry for airdrome protection. Quickly every Army, Navy and Marine unit that had weapons was organized. MPs brought to the field every plane that had an operational power turret. These were fully loaded and manned with auxiliary power at the ready. All AA and searchlights were alerted and manned; the Navy manned all their power turrets and the Marines of Fleet Air Wing 1 gathered such arms as they had, but mechanics and pilots were not trained for this situation. All that could now be done was to wait in the dark. Some Marine F-8 night fighters were airborne equipped with short range radar that was used in conjunction with the vector radar. The P-61s at the strip were not operational. It was dark night with no moon, but with 20,000 plus men in camp and a Philippine city nearby there was some light.

Around 8:00 PM, as the first F-8s were coming in to land, a Japanese TOPSY transport with its navigational light on got into the pattern. It caused no anxiety, but as the first F-8 rolled down the steel matting the TOPSY turned off the base leg to line up and follow the F-8 in with lights still on. An alert anti-aircraft gunner at the south end of the strip saw the exhaust flames from the top of the TOPSY's nacelles (U.S. planes exhausts were from the bottom of the engine nacelles) and began to fire his 40mm gun. The transport took numerous hits in seconds and was on fire as it passed over the gun battery at the end of the strip. It veered off line, and the pilot who had intended to land wheels up on the steel matting to make the runway unserviceable for as long as possible, crashed in a massive fireball. It hit the ground amid 12 Marine Corsairs, bounced and crashed into more planes, a grader, and a cletrac that was towing a 63<sup>rd</sup> B-24. The resulting fire was tremendous, and demolition charges aboard the transport, along with 50 cal. Ammo going off, made it a scene of fiery carnage. It did not appear that any Japanese aboard the transport survived, but no knew for certain. Amid the smoke and flames everywhere men staggered out and bodies were seen. Rescue crews and MPs soon determined that no Japanese were alive from the crashed transport. The 6<sup>th</sup> Army and FEAF were notified and the intelligence people were on their way while the MPs kept order and the souvenir hunters away. Fire fighting equipment was very limited, so planes not on fire were pulled out of the way while bulldozers pushed the smoking wreckage into the bay. The gunners kept watching the sky, but unknown to those on the strip, the attack was over.

Lt. Col. Pettus was notified that troops from the 1<sup>st</sup> Calvary were in truck en route and would arrive by noon tomorrow.

The red alert was ended about 2300 hours when it was felt that there was little danger or further attacks. Two F-8 night fighters landed too close together and ran into each other. That was the excitement for the moment. A man in navy fatigues walked into operations and gave Col. Pettus an unidentified object that he said he did not know what it was. Pettus knew that it was some sort of bomb and with no demolition people around, he put it in the safe where it stayed for a day or so until it was remembered. At about the same time that the TOPSY hit the strip

another Japanese transport crashed in San Pedro Bay, not far from Tacloban Drome where it was headed. The Navy was on the scene quickly and fished a live Japanese 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant alive from the water. He gave them many details of the mission, but of course, this was unknown until the crisis had passed.

On this same night two 63<sup>rd</sup> planes flew a harassing circuit while 1 went northwest on a shipping search. The harassing planes were off before the red alert, but the armed recco was held on the ground by the red alert, the fire and the confusion although Col. Pettus wanted the plane full of bombs off his airdrome. After two bomb runs over Clark Field engine problems cut short the mission of one of the harassing planes. The pilot jettisoned the rest of his load, some 22 X 100 pounders and was rewarded with 3 very large explosions. He then headed home. The second raider went towards Cebu, dodging large thunderheads, and on a 3-hour circuit dropped bombs on 8 different dromes. The plane held up by the red alert finally got off and headed toward Masbate where he found a 13 ship convoy. After determining that this was the main body of ships, the plane attacked the nearest, a 3000 ton Fox Tare Charlie causing some damage. Then a DD on the edge of the convoy was hit on the bow with a 500 pounder and a huge explosion followed. Early dawn showed no sign of the destroyer, but while the Fox Charlie was seriously damaged, it was still afloat. All 3 planes returned at first light and landed between squadrons of fighters taking off.

Dec 7, 1944. Dawn on this day that will live in infamy came with relief to those who had awaited an attack, but the crews that had manned the turrets remained by their planes in case of another enemy plane arriving with unwanted guests. The fires were out and work of the day commenced. U.S. troops were scheduled to land at Ormoc Bay on the west side of Leyte. The Navy had scheduled the Marines to fly close cover for the landing with P-38s providing protection overhead. The Corsairs were to take off 30 minutes before light, but the pilots had never flown at night under blackout conditions. Two of the first four Corsairs to take off crashed; one hit an ambulance killing the driver and the pilot. Fortunately, the wreckage ended in the only open space for 100 yards. The rest of the pilots waited for light before taking off. The Marines had been hit hard during the night losing about 15 planes from the crash of the TOPSY, but only a few men had been injured. From daylight on it was sheer bedlam on the runway with fighters taking off, others sneaking in, transports wanting to land and wounded to be evacuated.

Unknown to everyone was the fact that at Ormoc the Japanese were making a landing at the same place and time as the U.S. troops. No intercepts or aerial surveillance had detected the incoming ships. The 63<sup>rd</sup> had not been given a search mission in the area as American ships were headed there and they wanted no mistakes in identity. U.S. Navy patrols had been there the preceding day but the Japanese had not entered their sectors until dark. It was a major surprise for all. The Japanese being out numbered turned and headed north to San Isidro to try to land their troops and vitally needed equipment. In both places a wild offensive and defensive air battle raged all day. In the end the Japanese lost 4 destroyers, 4 merchant vessels between 3000 and 7000 tons, 3 DD escorts and 2 small freighters. American losses were 2 destroyers by kamikaze attacks, 2 Marine corsairs and 1 P-38, but all pilots were saved, 2 by Filipino guerillas. Japanese air losses were 56 for the day. Only small arms fire hit any of the amphibious U.S. ships, but 2 landing craft were sunk.

About 8:00 A.M. Gen. Blamey, Commander of the Australian Forces, arrived from MacArthur's headquarters in Tacloban Town, but his special C-54 was kept circling for 3 hours until there was a slot and ramp space. The general was very understanding. When his plane did land, it was refueled immediately as there were no close alternatives with the nearest being Morotai about 650 miles away.

Parking space was so short that when the ramp at one end was filled with aircraft refueling or rearming, planes had to land in the other direction. Transports evacuating wounded from the evacuation hospital unit by the strip were given preference and a quick takeoff slot so that the wounded would not have to endure the hot airplane waiting to take off.

If a plane had an emergency that might obstruct the runway, the pilot was told to go over the bay and bailout, and Air/Sea rescue was notified. One P-40 landed against a red flare and rolled towards operations with everyone waving it to get away and go to the end of the runway, but as he rolled in the prop stopped. It was seen that he was badly wounded but fortunately was stopped about 100' from an ambulance. He survived.

Tacloban bore the brunt of the air support for this major battle. There were 895 landings and takeoffs that day averaging 1 every 45 seconds. Two fighters were allowed on the strip at one time on takeoffs, but care had to be taken to avoid turbulence from the plane ahead. On landing a plane was not brought over the end of the runway until the plane ahead had almost cleared the strip. Any plane coming in had to have room to go around in case of an accident, a blown tire or gear collapse. A plane that became disabled on the runway was moved out of the way by the gentlest of means. THE STRIP HAD TO BE KEPT OPEN. Engineers with steel matting, sledge hammers, welders and coral fill were at the strip at all times, day or night, to patch holes of soft spots that occurred frequently due to the rain which fell sometime every day. These strong men would dart out on the runway between planes with buckets of coral and sledge hammers to bash down sharp edges that could cut a tire. KEEP THAT RUNWAY OPEN. KEN'S MEN saw to it that all these chores were attended to.

The 43<sup>rd</sup> had a real share in the day's victory with the operation of the strip. A good portion of the transient aircraft servicing was done by them. Over 20 officers and men ran the operations, and over 100 men worked on the strip day and night. Since the 43<sup>rd</sup> had no planes and their C.O. was the strip commander, Lt. Col. Pettus was able to put his men in action when the airdrome service squadrons did not arrive. There were many unsung heroes those days. Lt. William Jones fired so many Very shells from the tower that he should have had a Purple Heart for his aching arm and finger. Every non-resident plane was met with the word that it would be refueled immediately and it would have to leave the soonest. No excuses; engineering officers were there to check problems and bring help. NO SIGHTSEERES ALLOWED. If a transport landed, it was given a load of sick or wounded. If they brought in VIPs, they were left. If crews needed to eat, they were given C rations and could not leave their planes. A fast Japanese air raid was a great incentive to get planes back in the air. Intelligence officers met planes to see if they had anything to report. No one stayed overnight except for an engine change. Planes had to be protected with the very lives of the maintenance crews or someone with a similar plane would make the plane a "hanger queen" so they could get their plane out of Tacloban. If extensive repairs were needed, the plane was cannibalized and many skeletons joined the wrecked planes lining the shore.

The Japanese had picked December 7<sup>th</sup> to inflict a major defeat on the Americans just as they had done 3 years before. They tried to shut down the strips with suicide attacks, capture, or disruption of the command structure. They failed in every aspect, but they had added a new weapon - the Kamikaze.

Dec 7/8, 1944. This night was fairly calm with only a few red alerts. The 63<sup>rd</sup> sent out 4 planes. Near Cavite one attacked a light cruiser of the Kuma Natori class. After several near misses, 1 bomb scored a direct hit just forward of the tower. The ship remained motionless in the water for the next hour that the B-24 could remain in the area.

The plane of #049 piloted by 2/Lt. Thomas D. Savage disappeared while headed for a harassing mission over Clark Field. The Cebu and Negros harasser dropped 30 bombs on 6 dromes and

saw a large building blow up on Opon. An unarmed ferret made a long sweep around southern Luzon despite miserable weather.

Dec 8/9, 1944. With the battle of Ormoc Bay over, Tacloban Strip began to return to normal with only 600 landings and takeoffs a day. The 63<sup>rd</sup> was gradually moving all of its operations to Tacloban and stepping up the pressure on the enemy both on land and sea.

Two planes were out this night with one harassing the enemy around Negros using radar to make runs on airdromes despite the foul weather. Over Negros an enemy night fighter was observed but it made no attack. A Fox Tare Uncle was attacked near Corregidor but was missed.

Dec 9/10, 1944. Two 63<sup>rd</sup> planes were out again looking for a reported convoy reported in Lingayen Gulf, but only 1 large vessel was sighted and bombed although the plane had a low altitude bombing problem. Another smaller ship in Manila Bay was bombed using radar due to overcast; results were not seen.

Dec 10/11, 1944. Two planes went out. It was thought that the convoy not sighted last night was headed for Manila, but only 1 ship was attacked with a series of near misses. This plane went on to Olongapo and then returned to Clark Field to cause an alert. The other plane did the rounds at Negros and dropped demos and leaflets.

Dec 11/12, 1944. The routine of the previous night was pretty much repeated. One plane missed a first ship it sighted and then dropped a string of 500 pounders alongside a ship in Manila Bay. The ship disappeared from the radar screen after 2 hours. The second plane dropped bombs on a ship near Cavite, but there was no observed damage.

A serious accident killed three 63<sup>rd</sup> men while working in a 63<sup>rd</sup> plane parked on the ocean side of Tacloban Strip. A P-38 swerved off the steel matting runway after losing a right engine blowing a right tire. It hit the B-24. Killed instantly were M/Sgt. Ralph Colman, Line Chief, and Cpl. Jaul R. Gilner, airplane mechanic. 1/Lt. Hugh J. Noonan, Engineering Officer, died of his injuries several hours later, and the P-38 pilot died from burns that same day. Lt. Col Pettus was standing by the control tower when this accident occurred. Someone came to him and reported that the plane was loaded with bombs. That was a direct violation of all orders. So Pettus took his jeep and rushed to the site of the accident and ducked into the bomb bay but there were no bombs. In the B-24 were the many large low pressure oxygen bottles probably mistaken for bombs. The pilot of the P-38 staggered around the nose of the bomber with flight suit smoldering. With the help of another G.I. Pettus got the pilot into his jeep with the other man walking alongside holding the pilot erect. They crossed the runway and were met by an ambulance.

Dec 12/13 & 13-14, 1944. Bad luck and radar trouble dogged the Sea Hawks again. There were low altitude bombing trouble and desperate efforts were being made to find the problem. With the make shift conditions at Tacloban, it was difficult to get precise calibrations, but the near misses were getting the crews down. Risking one's neck for near misses did nothing for morale. On the second night more of the same; a near miss on a Sugar Baker in Manila Bay and then on to dodge searchlights over Clark Field. Armed reccos around Cebu, Negros and other islands were carried out as the American landing on Mindoro was due in a few days.

Dec 14, 1944. This was the only day the strike squadrons had a mission this entire month. In all 18 planes from all 3 squadrons were called into action against Padua Drome where numerous enemy planes had been sighted. Despite grim weather along the route and scattered arrivals,

the bombing was good and a number of enemy planes were destroyed on the ground with very large fires started in the dump areas. With very little AA luck was with the 43<sup>rd</sup>. Many planes made individual runs and in some cases several per plane. The enemy fighters sighted in the area made only half-hearted. The first plane to arrive at the target had missed the rendezvous. Thinking he was late, he headed for the target alone. He arrived after the scheduled "bombs away" time and made 2 runs while getting a half-hearted pass from an Oscar. In minutes other planes arrived including some from the 90<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group that was not better organized than the 43<sup>rd</sup>. They bombed in groups of 3 and 4 planes. At this time 5 Tojos joined the party, but did not press attacks closer than a half mile. No aerial bombs were dropped. Fuel became a significant element and all bombers headed to Morotai or Owi. The 43<sup>rd</sup> crews found this mission a welcome relief from the boredom of sitting around Owi, doing courier flights to Tacloban or practice bombing.

Dec 14/15, 1944. Five Sea Hawks went out this night. Two were on armed recco looking for any interference with the scheduled landing on Mindoro. The other 3 went to search for shipping around Manila Bay and to harass the Cebu circuit. One ship was attacked but not hit, and an explosion was sighted while bombing Negros. Another plane bombed a reef at Pampanga Bay off the north end of Manila Bay.

The landing on Mindoro took place with little Japanese opposition. Before the day was over American airdrome construction was underway.

Dec 15/16, 1944. The 63<sup>rd</sup> had 5 planes out his night. Two armed reccos went to Luzon and on to the west of Mindoro. One ferret flew to northern Luzon and 2 flew harassing missions to Negros, Cebu and Mindanao. These planes would fly over the dromes dropping 1 or 2 bombs at a time only to return later to drop a couple more and keep the enemy up all night.

Dec 16, 1944. The strike squadrons flew several courier missions from Owi to Tacloban. The Sea Hawks were given the day and night off.

Dec 17/18, 1944. The 63<sup>rd</sup> sent 3 planes off. Two went on a harassing routine at Bacalod, Alicante and Carolina on Negros. On the last run over Alicante the crew was rewarded with a huge explosion and a long lasting explosion. These raids lasted about 6 hours so the takeoffs of these planes were gauged accordingly. The third plane was on an armed recco over the China Sea looking for possible fleet movement to counter the Mindoro landing. Weather over Negros was bad but that over Mindoro was good.

Dec 18/19, 1944. Three planes were sent out. Two were to seek the enemy fleet now known to be at sea. They spotted 8 blimps on radar and bombed only to find they hit reefs not BBs. The third plane dropped a flare to send back a report on the fleet before attacking so avoided the same mistake. The pilot then searched elsewhere and ran into bad weather moving in from the China Sea. It was actually a typhoon that blew the plane 100 miles off course, but after bucking the storm for 6 hours, it arrived home safely after 22 hours in the air.

Dec 19/20, 1944. The Sea Hawks headed to Laoag on the northern tip of Luzon. The target was a village near the drome that was used as a landing and transient site for traffic from Formosa. 18 X 500 pounders were dropped, with 10 hitting the village. With good visibility 1 plane made several passes "strafing" at 600'. The planes then headed for home searching for shipping en route. They discovered a large naval task force about 40 miles northeast of Corregidor. Another smaller group of ships was sighted closer to Corregidor. The B-24s

shadowed the convoy for several hours until almost the first light when interception would be certain. Their one regret was having no bombs after dropping all on northern Luzon.

Dec 20/21, 1944. With the Navy watching the sea lanes by day, on this night the 63<sup>rd</sup> was sent to hit the dromes in the central Philippines with 500 pounders; to do damage, not just harass. The targets were Carolina, Alicante and Bacalod with hits scored on all 3 but with no major fires resulting. One plane detoured via Paracel Island to do a sea search and recco, but finding nothing, it went on to bomb Carolina Drome.

Dec 21/22, 1944. The target switched to the Clark Field/Manila area with 3 Sea Hawks in action. Real damage was done at Clark with 9 bombs on target and a huge fire that was still burning 2 hours later. Bombs also hit Nichols where the searchlights were many and accurate, but friendly clouds were around to dodge into. Mabalacat and Las Pinas (?) were hit. The runway at Clark was hit and put out of action for at least 2 days.

Dec 22/23, 1944. An armed recco looked for shipping this night around the Paracel Islands, 200 miles off the Indo-China coast. No shipping was found but dropped flares revealed many shoals surrounding the islands. The aircraft went to Negros to hit the Carolina Drome again. The runway and dispersal areas were hit with no spectacular results.

Dec 23, 1944. The 65<sup>th</sup> suffered the loss of a courier plane from Tacloban to Owi. It simply disappeared in good weather and without sending any radio message that the plane was in any trouble. Four 65<sup>th</sup> planes went out in search for the missing one, but found nothing. One plane foolishly flew low over Babelthaup Island in the Palaus and received several light AA holes for its effort.

Dec 23/24. No shipping was sighted so the 63<sup>rd</sup> hit the Carolina Drome again with a string of bombs going through the dispersal area and 6 parked planes. Two good fires were started and a twin engine plane was destroyed with a direct hit. More than 20 wrecked planes were seen on the pock marked drome. The last plane to leave the drome was met by 5 interceptors that made long range passes at 300 or more yards. The B-24 suffered no damage but did damage an Oscar with its return fire.

Dec 24, 1944. A 65<sup>th</sup> navigator hitched a ride to Tacloban from Biak, but the plane was never heard from again and there are no records of its disappearance except for a brief mention in 65<sup>th</sup> chron.

Dec 24/25, 1944. The Sea Hawks went back to the Clark - Nielson circuit. They dropped Christmas cards before the heavy bombs. The heaviest AA and searchlight activity of recent weeks showed that Clark defenses had been beefed up, but 63<sup>rd</sup> planes were damaged. Manila was blacked out entirely and the bombing was hindered by a rack malfunction. Back in Tacloban, in the swamp, an effort was made to celebrate with a beer ration and a few bottles of hoarded Aussie booze, while the nightly interruption by Japanese raiders took place. These attacks did little damage, there were more men hurt falling into fox holes and by vehicles running off the road than by the few bombs dropped.

Dec 25/26, 1944. The Sea Hawks again visited the Clark/Manila area to hit the strips and dispersal areas. One plane had to return early, but the others left greetings on the runways and started fires at Clark. Nichols yielded a dandy explosion that must have been an ammo dump.

Dec 26/27, 1944. Target tonight was the Laoag Drome and staging area. One persistent fire was started, the runway damaged and tent area strafed. A Betty on the ramp was the object of many tracers, but no fire resulted. One Sea Hawk flew over Vigan Harbor on the way south and was holed in the wing and a booster pump was hit. This could have been serious as it was on the underside of the main fuel tank. Four Japanese vessels in the harbor let him know that he was not welcome.

Dec 27/28, 1944. Two Sea Hawks were sent out to check on long expected Japanese naval activity near Mindoro. They found 7 ships west of the island. On the first attack a light cruiser was hit on the stern by one bomb. Intense AA fire seriously damaged that B-24 that had to jettison the rest of its bombs and head back to Leyte with 2 wounded men aboard. Despite damage to the rudder controls, the plane made it back to Tacloban where it had to circle for 5 hours due to a red alert and work to repair rudder cables. The second plane attacked another light cruiser or large DD and scored 2 direct hits and a near miss. A large explosion was followed by a fire that burned from stem to stern. The plane remained in the area reporting movements and later attacked a DD, but missed. The Japanese task force began shelling the San Jose area and land forces returned fire. The task force shelling that began at 11:00 P.M., hit fuel dumps, runways and parked planes. Mindoro planes were unable to get bombs due to a fire around the bomb dump, but B-25s, P-47s, P-40s and P-38s strafed and damaged the attackers. About midnight they headed back north. A destroyer had been sunk, a cruiser and 2 destroyers heavily damaged. It was a costly night as American losses were 2 B-25s and 25 fighters were missing. The fighters were sent to Tacloban due to damage to the runway at San Jose. Many ran out of fuel and the weather around Tacloban was terrible. Some fighters were lost trying to find Tacloban in the dark and rain. The next day 16 fighter pilots were picked up after bailing out or ditching. Although a number of planes had been destroyed at San Jose, the multitude of American ships in the area was saved.

Dec 28/29, 1944. Only two 63<sup>rd</sup> planes were available to go after the Japanese task force now headed into the China Sea. A destroyer taking violent evasive action was missed and a bomb malfunction caused the attack on another ship to fail. AA from the vessels was intense but inaccurate and seemed to have no central fire control. The task force had been joined by other ships that might have been troop transports that laid back waiting for the warships to clear the way for them to land at San Jose, but the reception was too hot and forced them to retreat.

Dec 29, 1944. With the enemy convoy out of range, the 63<sup>rd</sup> had a much deserved day of rest.

Dec 30/31, 1944. The month ended with a bang for the Sea Hawks as 2 planes hit shipping in Lingayen Gulf near the mouth of the San Fernando river. A 7000 ton Fox Tare Able took 2 hits from 3 bombs. It exploded, burned and sank in a few minutes. A cruiser was missed while taking evasive action and several other nearby ships were lucky in that they only suffered near misses. One plane was holed in the stabilizer by 50 cal. from ships in the harbor. Thus ended 1944.

KEN'S MEN were in a muddy camp not far from the Tacloban Strip, but most of its planes were in Owi. The 63<sup>rd</sup> was operating as best it could from Morotai and Leyte. The Sea Hawks compiled a remarkable record for December. They flew planes on 21 night nights of the month with 31 separate assigned missions entailing 72 sorties. Only 1 sortie was not completed but a few were cut short due to weather or enemy action. Work on Tacloban was going on at a record pace but to relieve the pressure, Mindoro would have to take more of the operating load before the 43<sup>rd</sup>'s B-24s could come up from Owi.