



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



**NEWSLETTER 96TH EDITION
OCTOBER 2005**

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS (New)

Headquarters Squadron

C. Fred McAlister re-elected Serves through 2008
(in absentia)

63rd Squadron

Roland T. Fisher Serves through 2007
Edward L. Gammill Serves through 2007

64th Squadron

Charles F. McLenny Serves through 2006
Arvid J. Hougum Serves through 2007

65th Squadron

Lehman C. White reelected Serves through 2008
Eldon Lawson Serves through 2006

403rd Squadron

Joseph W. Snyder re-elected Serves through 2008
William J. Solomon Serves through 2006

FROM CHARLES RAUCH, PRESIDENT

This will be our 96th Newsletter and I hope you will have attended the Minneapolis-St./ Paul reunion that started September 14. Arvid Hougum and Neil Fairbanks did the planning and should be complimented for the work they incurred. This article is being prepared before the reunion in order to speed up the issuing of the October Newsletter.

We are presently working on a reunion for 2006 with the firm of Branson Hospitality Inc. for a reunion at the "Lodge of the Ozarks" on the dates of August 23, 2006 and checking out August 28, 2006 (four nights and five days.) These dates are subject to a change as we are looking for a date toward the end of September, if available. The prices are higher during September than in August and therefore we may still hold to the August dates. The agreement with Branson Hospitality is a totally different concept than we have experienced before as we do not have a 43rd member living in the Banson, Missouri area. This approach looks very good. There are many items furnished by Branson Hospitality that we normally Have to provide staff to do. Some of these are listed below:

Round trip shuttle service to and from Branson for those who fly into the Springfield Regional Airport. Advance notice has to be made within 14 days of arrival. The Limo trip is approximately one and

one half hours plus boarding time. This is the reason we have been thinking of making Sunday a full day and check out Monday morning. This will leave Sunday afternoon open to plan something on your own. You will be able to attend the breakfast buffet and memorial service Sunday morning. Branson Hospitality will mail out and pay the postage for the reservation form that is to be mailed out that is to be mailed out in Jan. or Feb. We are to provide the mailing labels. They have asked that we notify members of this procedure and not to think it is advertising and throw it out.!! The band is furnished for the Saturday dinner dance as well as the color guard. Name tags are also furnished along with a person to coordinate the event. They are also giving a welcome reception with hors d'oeuvres. We are presently working on the shows and entertainment that will be part of the registration package. Shows that are marked "optional" will be charged as an extra cost on the registration. Start thinking about a Branson Reunion for 2006. We should have better information in our January 2006 Newsletter.

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This report was written by **Roland Fisher**; our Lay Chaplain who could not attend the "Twin Cities Reunion" but the report was read by **Sam Commons** during our memorial service

### Forever Young

These words are meant to honor the immense sacrifice of our 700 comrades who gave their lives during World War Two. But to refer to them as number," seven hundred, falls way short of according their honor. It seems, almost, to dishonor them.

Writers, for years, have glibly quoted statistics as an expression of this sacrifice. We have read my times, "In World WAR Two, close to half a million Americans were killed or missing --X thousand GIs died in the landing at Buna—X thousand marines died at Iwo Jima—X thousand Americans fell at Normandy." We have said "Seven hundred of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group were lost."

But statistics just do not meet the needs of a proper expression of hem. For they were not statistics. They Were men, --young perhaps, but men. Each was an individual --not a number. Each had a face recognizable from all others. Each had a voice, distinguishable as his. Each had skills that varied from others. Each had a distinct personality. Each was a man with traits common to all but with a distinct identity.

Sixty-five years ago, they were part of a generation just emerging into manhood. They were part of us. Then a rush of events changed our lives. There were hundreds of us. We were young and had little or no experience at coaxing overloaded airplanes into the air, making them carry out highly dangerous missions. But we heard a call for *somebody* to do this. Circumstances were threatening the well being of our country. Evil men were on a course of action that was to take over the world so that *they* would dictate how we would spend our lives.

That ran counter to what we had been taught since our earliest days: that we should be *free* to act as we wanted, as long as we did not impose our beliefs by force on others. These concepts originated among some remarkable men who, at great risk to their personal welfare, fought the autocracy that controlled our forefathers' lives and handed us a government that was *by the people* and *for the people*--- *for free people*.

Then, sixty-five years ago, this freedom was threatened and we young people were called upon to protect it. There was a huge personal risk for us. The enemy had built enormous war machines. They defeated nation after nation. They came after us. Our country had good geographical protection; two huge oceans between us ant them. We could have held back and let those factors protect us for years. But we did not.

Guided by the beliefs of the brave men who, two hundred years ago formed our country, we engaged the aggressors.

These many years later, I look back and try to identify just why we did this in spite of the enemys' apparent superiority. The answer probably lay in our youth. I think when we are young, we have an amazing ability to turn our heads and ignore reality. We have an energy that pushes us to the edge of safety when reason calls out there are hazards ahead, We have a mental fire that propels us over huge obstacles. We have a skill that transcends what we were trained to do. Put all of these together and we have a willingness- a will—that was a way to do what we knew we had to do.

It was a will that was a way for most of us, but not for all. Publicists have repeatedly written that nearly half a million young Americans felt that willingness, made the extraordinary effort, and fell by the wayside. The young men of the 43<sup>rd</sup>, most in their teens, or in their early twenties, were a significant of that past will. Their effort was beyond extraordinary. Over 700 of them felt that willingness, and fell by the wayside—young men forever.

To this point, I talk about statistics-and that is *not* what we were. To really define *that*, I began to reflect on the *individuals* who made up that prestigious group. About 1990, shortly after we engaged him to write our group history, Larry Hickey documented a list of their names and circumstances of loss. We worked for many hours with Larry to compile this list, first going through al kinds of records, searching our memories. I had known a lot of these men and had many memories. So, I got out Larry's list and mulled through it, recalling face after face, hearing their words, reliving events I had shared with them.

Reading the names of those young men who had so willingly engaged in the final action of their lives-reading the details of just what happened –invoked great sadness in me. It was not only sadness from losing a comrade-a friend. It was realization of the loss of human potential: perhaps a fine surgeon who Would save lives- enable a cripple to walk again; a skilled farmer who would supply food to a growing, hungry world; a scientist who would discover wonderful, new things; an engineer who would design a better life; a loving father to a child who would never be born.

So, let us look at this list and see a person instead of statistic. It begins with the first 43<sup>rd</sup> casualties of the war, **Lt's Peyton Beckman and Wyman Thompson**, killed on November 15, 1941 when their B-18 bomber crashed in bad weather north of Bangor, Maine. It then jumps to the war zone and reports Sgt. Earl Snyder was killed in August, 1942, by gunfire from a Japanese warship over Milne Bay. In September, 1942 a B-17 crashed just after takeoff from Mareeba, Australia. Lost were: **Capt. Hershall Henson, Lt. James Bastion** and their entire crew.

The list goes on relentlessly. Limits of time and space make it impractical to document the entire sequence, although it should be done. But here is a brief selection that, perhaps, will encourage you to get a full copy, read it , and pay homage to these young heroes: January 24, 1943 ,**Brig. General Kenneth Walker**, commanding a strike on Rabaul, shot out of the sky. January 24, 1943, **Lt. Vernon Strawser**, killed by a bullet from a Zero fighter over Rabaul. **Maj. Kenneth McCullar** was killed along with his entire crew, in a crash of his B-17 on take off from Port Moresby.

June 13, 1943, **Lt. Ernest Naumann** and nine men in one of the first B-24s lost, near Wide Bay, New Britain.

June 4, 1944. Ten B-24s from the 63<sup>rd</sup> attacked a convoy near Manokwari. Two enemy warships sunk. A 40 mm shell exploded in one of our planes, killing **Sgt Merle Rice**.

Sept. 1, 1944. The first major strike on enemy bases in Davao, Mindinao, a 403rd formation was hit by 15 Zeros. **Lt. Norris Weaver**, pilot, was killed at his controls.

Oct. 10, 1944. In a mass raid by five groups from the Fifth and Thirteenth Air Forces on Balikpapan Borneo, a 20 mm shell form a Zero fighter, cut the foot off tail gunner **Sgt. Earl Isley** who died from loss of blood before his plane could return to base.

Dec.7, 1944. **Lts. Tom Savage** and **James O'Brien** piloting a plane carrying a crew including **Sgt. George Bowling** hit a mountain at night on Mindanao, P.I.. Ground troops found their remains months later. ( **Sgt. Bowling** was this author's nose gunner on the tortuous night we flew "Miss Liberty" six hours to base over open water after being rammed by the Kamikaze night fighter. **Bowling** needed this one more mission to go home)

Jan.9, 1945. In just 30 seconds, the 63<sup>rd</sup> lost a major part of staff, including its commanding officer, After the Leyte landing, while at Owi, the 63<sup>rd</sup> sent an advance echelon of six planes and crews to Tacloban air strip. The remainder of the staff was to go later. On this date, a group of sixteen loaded into a B-24 at Owi Isle and taxied out for take off. At 0100 hours the plane lifted off, abruptly settled back and crashed into the palm tree stubs at the end of the runway. Some of these men were:

|                             |                 |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Maj. Merrill Sagrent</b> | CO              |
| <b>Capt. Evan Chessor</b>   | Sqd. Adjutant   |
| <b>Lt. Ernest Hixon</b>     | Pilot           |
| <b>Lt. Charles Thompson</b> | Co-Pilot        |
| <b>Lt. Theodore Huffman</b> | Co-Pilot        |
| <b>Lt. Thomas Rorke</b>     | Navigator       |
| <b>Sgt. Robert Egan</b>     | Flight Engineer |

**Bob Egan** was this author's Flight Engineer on the night the Kamikaze night fighter rammed "Miss Liberty". He helped to hold her tail on during the agonizing six hours back to Owi. He was qualified to go home but had volunteered for this flight from Owi just to "help out".

The list goes on with vivid descriptions of losses of these brave young men on missions from Leyte, Clark Field, and Ie Shima during the remaining months of 1945. On May 18, it details the loss of **Lt.'s James Franklin** and **Frances Smith** along with their entire crew when their B-24 exploded from a direct hit in the bomb bay during a raid on Tainan, Formosa. The exploding plane damaged the planes along side in formation causing the crew of one to bail out over water. Among the lost were **Lt.'s Gabriel Levinson** and **Norbert Straeck**. Details of this were reported to Larry Hickey by **Jim Cherkauer**.)

On July 28, the last major combat loss was listed. **Lt.'s Charles Kerns** and **Alex Wadowski's** B-24 , after midnight, reported sinking a Sugar Baker in the Inland Sea of Japan. They sent a position report at 0145 and were never heard from again.

A few days later the A-Bombs brought the war to an abrupt halt. On August 15, two "Betty" bombers flew into Ie Shima with the Japanese peace delegation. Shortly after, **Colonel Jim Pettus** planted an American flag on the roof of building on an airfield on Tokyo Bay. On September 1<sup>st</sup>. the last casualty Of record was **Cpl. Eugene Bailey**, killed in a non-combat incident on August 27, 1945, one of the 700. These 700 young men were part of a barrier to aggressors bent on taking away our freedom. They belonged to a generation that stopped the aggressors, then willingly went on to rebuild a whole world shattered by a terrible war; to bring personal freedom back to it. But before they could the task these 700 died. They were denied the glory of victory; the satisfaction of seeing a free world. But had they, and our comrades whom we have lost since the war, not offered themselves up to this challenge, we may not have had this wonderful ending.

They , who were so very young when we lost them, in our memories, in our hearts, WILL BE FOREVER YOUNG. To them, to ALL our comrades whom we have lost, we offer our admiration and affection, We salute you ALL!

**Roland Fisher** 63<sup>rd</sup> Squadron 43<sup>rd</sup> Group Fifth Air Force. September 14, 2005

TAPS; This list was read at the reunion in Minnesota. These have passed on since the reunion in Tampa.

63<sup>rd</sup> Squadron

James Martin  
Rudi Fugate (wife of Neil Fugate)  
Florence Sogaard ( wife of Folmer Sogaard)  
James Watts  
Howard Booth  
Louise Lonquist (widow of Karl Lonquist )  
Robert L. Gordon  
Jim Murphy (former president of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Association)  
Charles Parker  
Doris Butler ( wife of Bob Butler)

64<sup>th</sup> Squadron

Lester Coffman  
Kenneth Brown  
Edith Greenberg (wife of Bernard Greenberg)  
Chester Danows  
Robert Ireland

65<sup>th</sup> Squadron

Arnold M. Huskins  
Morris E. Petty  
Carl Tipton  
Helen Dennison ( widow of Charles Dennison)

403<sup>rd</sup> Squadron

Elwin H. Hansen  
Reyes Sena (widow of Gilbert Sena)  
Quentin Ember  
Herbert Andress  
Ann Bates  
Philip J. Campbell  
Ray Melhus  
Clarence Daniels

Hq. Squadron

Helen Austin ( widow of Dr. Eugene Austin)  
Art Curren  
Edgar Thornhill

~~~~~  
At the 2005 reunion in Minnesota your editor learned that **George White** is in a "assisted living" facility and has a new address:

George White
Room 310 Phone (717) 747-9438
2760 Pine Grove Road
York, PA 17403

George is a former President of the 43rd Bomb Group Association. His wife, Eileen, passed on several years ago. George was once a B-17 ball turret gunner in the 65th Squadron

By Andy Anderson;

We should all help to keep members and associate members addresses up to date. You can notify me by mail or e- mail at **andyanne@comcast.net** . There is a charge to us for returned mail.

At the directors/officers meeting beginning at 7:00 PM on September 14 the following men were present: Charles Rauch, Jim Cherkauer, Jim Dieffenderfer, Bill Solomon, Sam Commons, Roger Kettleson, Max Axelsen, Arvid Houghlum, Eldon Lawson, Ed Gammill, Jim Thompson, "Chalky" White, Lloyd Anderson, Joe Snyder, and Andy Anderson.

Officers absent : Bill Wilson

Directors absent: Charles McClenny (he arrived later), Roland Fisher and Fred McAlister

It was announced that Virginia Mathias has donated \$100 to the 43rd which will be sent to our Treasurer, Bill Wilson.

Charles Rauch discussed the Branson reunion which everyone favors. Details are in the Presidents Report on a previous page. Other military reunions have been held there and some have gone back a second and third time

It was moved by Jim Cherkauer and seconded by "Chalky" White that up to \$5000 from our treasury be used to subsidize the next reunion. The motion carried without objection.

Jim Cherkauer reported that there is a "glimmer of hope" that Larry Hickey will complete our history book that many of us have already paid for.

Eldon Lawson reported that some sort of history was written in 1945 and will try to look into the matter. There was a discussion about a 2007 reunion in the Philadelphia/Valley Forge area of Pennsylvania. This would be an area full of history and we have not had a reunion in the northeast in many years.

Your secretary failed to note the time of adjournment.

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At the Saturday morning General Membership meeting after the pledge of allegiance was recited a report of our treasurer was read. All your secretary was able to copy down was an ending balance of \$51,534.34.

Jim Cherkauer reported that Larry Hickey has a staff of 2 full time and 7 part time helpers and has finally recognized that he will not be able to do all the writing. He is looking to hire a writer. Hickey has done a great job of researching our history and has much information in his files to draw from. Fred Hagen has volunteered to help finance the book.

Our president, Charles Rauch, brought the attendees up to date on the 2006 reunion to be held in Branson, Missouri.

It is too early to discuss in detail a 2007 reunion but Jim Diefenderfer and others are proposing that we meet in 2007 in the Philadelphia-Valley Forge area. Fred Hagen would help. Your Editor has looked in the 2005 roster on pages 85 and 87 and I note that we have many members in Pennsylvania and New Jersey who would be within easy driving distance. It is been a long time since we had a reunion in the northeast part of the US.

New officers were elected to begin service in January, 2006. They are:

Jim Cherkauer to serve as President

Jim Thompson to serve as Vice President

Andy Anderson to serve as Secretary

Bill Wilson to serve as Treasurer (in absentia)

**Jim Thompson** has helped us before. In 1999 he hosted a very good reunion in Tucson, Arizona.

**Neil Fairbanks** presented a very good film about Fred Hargesheimer who became a P-38 pilot and was shot down over New Britain Island while flying an unarmed photo plane for the 8<sup>th</sup> Photo Reconnaissance Squadron of the 5<sup>th</sup> Air Force. Fred was shot down by a Japanese fighter pilot on June 5<sup>th</sup> 1943. He was saved by many local native villagers from being captured by Japanese who occupied the entire island and was so grateful that he raised funds and went back to build a school and other facilities for the natives who protected him. Hargesheimer was at our reunion in person and spoke to us about his experiences. My wife bought his autographed book and I read it on the plane while returning to Los Angeles. I found it a very good read. The title of the book is "The School That Fell From The Sky". It is available from Odyssey Books, 989 Sutton Way, Grass Valley, CA 95945 (530) 477-2856 or [odysseybooks@hotmail.com](mailto:odysseybooks@hotmail.com)

Fred was rescued from New Britain with the help of Australian coast watchers by a US submarine, the USS GATO along with seven other men who boarded the sub. In the book I learned that one of them was our own **M/Sgt. Gordon Manuel** of the 64<sup>th</sup> Squadron, 43<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group whose B-17, piloted by **Capt. Paul Williams** was shot down on May 21, 1943 by a Japanese night fighter. Williams was CO of the 64<sup>th</sup> at the time. Manuel wrote a book called "70,000 to One" which I borrowed from someone and read.

At the Saturday night dinner/dance **Arvid Houghlum** delivered an interesting address about K rations and health issues related to eating too much fatty foods.

At the Sunday morning Memorial Services we were once again pleased to hear the beautiful voice of **Nancy Solomon**. Nancy sang "How Great Thou Art" and "God Bless America." She was accompanied on the piano by Mildred McLenny, who also played TAPS on the piano.

In the July, 2005 Newsletter your editor mentioned the Distinguished Flying Cross received by **S/Sgt. Lyle Heineke** of the 64<sup>th</sup> Squadron recently. I stated that it was for shooting out one main landing gear tire so that the B-24 could land safely. But I learned that there was more that Lyle did to earn this award. Since the bombs could not be released electrically, Lyle ventured out on the narrow catwalk in the bomb bay and released the bombs manually. His quick action enabled the bombs to hit the target. Lyle also administered first aid to the wounded nose gunner and aerial photographer. His pilot on that mission was **Ed Ross**. Ed, Lyle and **George Tucholoski**, Radioman, were in attendance with all three wives at this reunion in Minnesota.

64<sup>th</sup> Squadron men and wives showed up in greater numbers than any other squadron.

Regina Oldfield Puzzo and her mother, Alice Mannion Odfield were in attendance at the reunion to research the death of Corporal John T. Mannion. Mannion was a member of Capt. Robert N. Keats B-17 crew who went down on May 8, 1943 on a flight along the coast of New Britain. Wreckage of this 63<sup>rd</sup> Squadron plane has never been located. An infantry officer named 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Rodney W. Orange was also aboard the plane. These ladies spent most of their time in the memorabilia room. They reported to me that they learned enough at our reunion about Mannion and his crew to make the trip worthwhile.

**By Andy Anderson,**

I will now publish a story written by Byron "Dutch" Heichel, former B-17 pilot in the 63<sup>rd</sup> Squadron. He relates how he was shot down, captured by the Japanese and spent 2 years and 4 months as a prisoner of the Japanese. Heichel lives in Stanwood, Washington with his wife, Julia. I wrote a letter to him requesting this story and he was gracious enough to respond.

**RESUME OF THE LAST MISSION OF B-17 NO. 24518, NICKNAMED "THE RECKLESS MOUNTAIN BOYS" WITH A CREW OF ELEVEN AND CAPTAIN BYRON "DUTCH" HEICHEL, AS PILOT, INCLUDING SUBSEQUENT TIME IN JAPANESE PRISONER-OF WAR CAMPS UNTIL SEPTEMBER 8, 1945**

On the evening of May 6, 1943 the Operations Officer, Captain Keats, informed me that I had a morning mission scheduled for early take-off. It was to be a reconnaissance mission over Japanese shipping lanes. However, in the morning at our briefing, an Australian Intelligence Officer informed me that they wanted some vertical photographs of Kavieng, as there has been reports of construction at that location. (Note: Here someone should have changed our course; that is, instead of making a landfall on an Island 100 miles above Kavieng, we should have gone straight in from the sea and straight out.) We were given an airplane equipped with a belly camera plus a man to operate the camera. B-17 number 24518, with "The Reckless Mountain Boys" painted on her nose, was the plane of destiny. We departed Port Moresby (Jackson strip) on schedule the morning of May 7, 1943, went through Vitiaz Strait, flew a "creeping line search" across the Bismark Sea over Japanese shipping lanes, making check-point on a small island approximately 100 miles above Kavieng. Originally we were to head back out to sea immediately, but now we followed the coast to our destination and we soon learned the Japanese expected us. We went over Kavieng at 16,500, just under a thin overcast. Immediately, we started taking ack-ack. After two photo runs over the target, the tail gunner reported 14 Zero type aircraft coming up fast in two groups. We immediately headed out to sea, climbing at full throttle. Their first attack did a lot of damage to us. Fires were started in the No. 3 engine and one in the radio compartment. Two men were his, one very seriously. Sometime early in the attack, but unknown to me until later, the ball turret door was shot off. The operator got out, leaving the guns pointed down (mistake). One brash young Japanese pilot leveled off just off our port wing tip. He waved and it looked like he grinned. Our upper turret and side 50 raked him from rudder to propeller. I don't know what happened to him after that. The Zeros were attacking us from below. We lost another engine. So we could not climb or outrun them. I did the only thing left to do; dived for the water and headed back towards scattered cumulus clouds over the island. With two engines out and the ball turret inoperative, we had to get down to what clouds there were at 1500 feet. We nearly collided with a Zero as we came out of a cloud. The Navigator advised against getting in the clouds because of island mountains. The cockpit and entire airplane reeked with raw gasoline fumes. The Engineer, Sgt. Fritz, thought we should ditch before we blew up. Now we were only a few feet off the water, and approaching a small peninsula extending out into sea. Three Zeros, wing tip to wing tip, came scooting over this small knoll with a white, red roofed cottage on it. I could see their guns smoking.



This attack did us in. Number one engine was hit and started bucking so bad I thought it would rupture or break a wing. I was hit in my left leg and I think some control cables were hit, as I lost rudder control. It was here that I ordered the crew to prepare for a crash. I grabbed Sgt. Fritz's leg and yelled at him to get his ass out of the turret and to the back. We hit the water going pretty fast, as I could not from the rapidly approaching peninsula. The ball turret caught a coral reef, driving the nose into the water and breaking the airplane in half, throwing the tail over the left wing. We had pulled the windows open but they slammed shut when we hit. Also, on impact the upper turret wrenched loose and twisted forward, taking my seat and me into the instrument panel, forcing my head into the throttle and turbo controls. My side of the cockpit was badly crushed, and I was in bad shape. I do not know if I was unconscious, but I remember water pouring into the cockpit from every angle. I thought we were sinking. Actually, the airplane was hung up on a reef. When I worked free, I saw Rucks, the copilot, staring ahead with a blank look, a front tooth missing. I yelled at him to get out. Raw aviation gas drenched everything and the Japs were still strafing. A fire seemed imminent, I thought. It took some time for me to become extricated. Here some assistance would have been a bit help.

Strafing continued as I got out on the wing. Lt. Rucks and several others were already on the beach, hollering for me to get away before she blew up. However, we never had a fire. I made it to some rocks and waited until the Zeros left. Sgts. Fritz and Surret came out and helped me in. Next, we heard some yelling from the wreckage, so Fritz, Surret and Kurisko went out to get them. I started out but they took me back. They released a life raft and brought in Etheridge, Surret and Mangett; that made eight on the beach. We couldn't find the other three. Immediately, we gave first-aid to everybody. Lt. Mangett and Sgt Vetter were in very serious condition, near death. Sgt. Etheridge was hysterical. He wore only the uppers of his shoes, no soles. Odd, I too, was in bad shape. Dozens of natives gathered around us, talking in Pigeon English, and difficult to understand. Sgt. Fritz informed me that the co-pilot was terrifying the natives and making them angry towards us. I told Rucks to knock it off and try to make some friends, as we needed them badly. We made up o the house on the knoll of the peninsula and spread everyone out on the grass. Natives piled a bunch of coconuts near us. Rucks and I went through the little house. Nothing was there except a lot of Japanese sign and a cat with a fresh pan of milk. Nonetheless, searching the house was a scary job. The air battle took place around noon. We were at the cottage somewhere between 1:30 and 2:30 PM.

Perhaps some mistakes were made, starting with our course layout from Operations. However, that is debatable and I do not feel any maneuvers on my part, or any particular individual's conduct, would have changed the outcome. There were some inappropriate or improper happenings among the airplane crew. Sgt. Etheridge deserted the ball turret, leaving the guns pointed down without informing me (a bad deal), and the copilot Lt. Rucks determined to leave his seat to trade places with the man in the upper turret (I ordered him to keep his ass in the seat). But these incidents alone did not determine our fate. Now I wish to treat them as having never occurred.

With natives to help, we started across this immense plantation. At mid-afternoon, we took shelter in a coconut processing shed to get away from a violent thunderstorm. Again, we gave first aid all around. We also saw a couple of uniformed Japanese soldiers observing us from a distance. We resisted the temptation to take a couple of pot shots at them; decided that would do us more harm than good. We got into the jungle just about dark. Surret set up the Gibson Girl transmitter and tried sending S.O.S. Again we spread out, giving first aid with our limited supplies. Sgt. Fritz had just returned with some water in a helmet when a commotion among the natives drew our attention to a native, or soldier wearing a garrison cap, approaching from the darkness, waving a white cloth on the end of a stick. Surprisingly, he came directly to me. I say surprisingly. because we had removed all insignia from our clothing. He

handed me a piece of paper. It read: "TO THE AMERICAN AIR FORCES, SURRENDER YOUR WEAPONS AND YOUR WOUNDED WILL BE TEATED. YOU WILL BE HELD AS PRISONERS UNTIL THE END OF THE WAR." I would give anything for that slip of paper. We discussed it at some length, and decided that we didn't have a chance. I handed him my .45 and Rucks gave up his Springfield rifle. It was all over for us. In the darkness we cold see them approaching from different directions; Japanese marines in uniform.

Immediately, they swarmed all around us, bringing in stretchers for each of us. They were prepared. We were taken back down to the plantation house that we had gone through earlier. Japanese Marines were all over the place. Our men were laid out on the long veranda or porch. A German appeared and acted as interpreter. I was taken inside and set in a chair beside a small table. A rugged looking Japanese sat down opposite me. He didn't smile, but he did shake my hand. The German was all smiles. First he told me we were fighting on the wrong side. They wanted to know where I was based, what was the designation of my outfit, and how many airplanes we had there. Fortunately, my face and eyes were so swollen that I could only mumble. I had to hold my eyelids open with my fingers to see. They wanted me to write, but my hands were skinned raw. I couldn't even bend a finger. A soldier brought me a small glass half full of whiskey. I have drunk a lot of whiskey in my day, but that was the hottest stuff I've ever had in my gut. God, I thought it was going to burn through to the chair. As a consequence, I passed out. Sliding under the table, I felt myself go. That would have been the night of May 7<sup>th</sup>, 1943. It was one hell of a night. Sgt. Vetter was delirious, calling for his mother and talking wildly. Sgt. Etheridge, too, was hysterical and unable to communicate rationally. Sgt. John Fritz stayed up all night trying to ease the pain and trauma of the other crewmen. He was one Hell of a Human Being!

In the morning the Japanese took Sgt Fritz down to the beach to identify the three bodies of our crew that had washed ashore. Lt. Eugene D. Bieler, Lt. Oscar M. Linsley, and Sgt. Filbert R. Fleiger. They said they would bury them in a native cemetery with identification. My men were loaded aboard a gunboat and taken away (to Rabaul). I was put on a stretcher and we started across the island. We made an entourage, winding through the jungle and over mountains. All the while, a cameraman from the Tokyo Times was taking pictures as we traveled. Occasionally they would stop, help me to my feet, offer me a cigarette. Meanwhile the camera clicked away footage. Somewhere among the archives of Japanese Tokyo Times film, there is film footage of this trek across the island. We crossed a river after dark; my arms hanging over the stretcher dragged through the water. We spent the night at another plantation, but on the other side of the island. Here, a Chinese cook fed the Japanese, then fed me in a separate room. He told me the Japanese had confiscated his business in Kavieng and made him operate this plantation or they would do harm to his family. Also he said if I could escape and return to this plantation, he would get me to my friends, meaning Americans or Australians.

In the morning my hands and feet were tied again and a blindfold was put across my eyes. The protruding bone between made the blindfold very painful. I was thrown on the back of a flatbed truck. During the day sometime they shot a pig and threw it on the truck beside me. I could smell it. Late that afternoon, we arrived in Kavieng. Civilians, I presume, maybe Japanese soldiers, kept pulling my hair until my scalp felt like a boil. They pulled me from the truck, dragged me into a dark room, removed the blindfold and the bindings from my hands and feet. By prying my eyelids open I could see the room was small, with a dirt floor. The one window had closed shutters but the cracks between the wall boards provided deep dusky twilight. Here the futility of my predicament overwhelmed me. The several days I spent there were probably the most tortuous, mentally, of my entire two and a half years of imprisonment. I remember I prayed, yes, even cried. Later, as I tried sitting on the floor with my back to the wall I was overrun with rats trying to reach the fresh blood still dripping from my nose, I had to take my hands and throw them away. They would go away, but return at intervals. I stood in the corner kicking

at them. Finally, when I just had to lie down, I wrapped my flight jacket around my head, I don't know how long I was Kavieng, probably two to five days, At any rate, the day they gave me my first meal was the day I left, but not until they made another attempt to interrogate me.

On this particular day (morning?) the lock rattled and the door opened. There stood the Japanese guards and a Chinese civilian with a bowl of white rice. There was no provision for eating it so I shoved it in my mouth with my hands. I was about half way with the rice when more guards appeared and took the bowl of rice away. Again, they put a blindfold over my eyes, tied my hands behind me, and led me off. The bone protruding from between my eyes made the blindfold painful and nauseating. I passed out. Probably from a combination of conditions; lack of food, shock, pain, everything together. The guards yanked me up slapped me along the side of the head and pulled me along. We came to a flight of steps, perhaps ten or twelve, which we went up. They stood me against the wall and removed the blindfold but left my hands tied. By tilting my head back I could see a little with my right eye.

The building stood on stilts, with a wide veranda, somewhat like a porch. Construction was of bamboo and thatch. Several guards sat around a nearby table drinking beer, except for the one holding the rope. They were yelling things at me which, of course, I couldn't understand. The one with the rifle stood back and raised the gun to his shoulder, aiming between my eyes, then slowly advanced until the point of the bayonet touched the protruding bone. Again I flinched and nearly fainted. They all roared with laughter. Then the one with the rope doubled it into a short switch and proceeded to whip me. I don't know how this sport would have continued, but another soldier came running up and said something to my guards. They led me into another room. Towards the center of this room was a table. Sitting at it was a sallow completed Japanese dressed totally in black, much like black pajamas. He was not at all friendly. In the corner sat a Japanese naval officer dressed in full regalia... a nice looking man. He smiled and greeted me in English.

I was placed in a chair across from the interrogator. Again, the questions were the name of my outfit and number of airplanes. I gave them my name, rank and serial number. A guard on each side of me, armed with clubs gave me one good whack each. Again, I gave them my name, rank, and serial number and reminded them that, according to international law, that was I was required to say. The interrogator denied that Japan had ratified the Geneva agreement. The guards him me again several times. I told them that I was merely a pilot and not entrusted with crucial information because of this very possibility. He became furious, beat the table, jumped to his feet calling me a liar. He then shouted that I would be executed and never see my family again. He stormed out. The Navy officer I the corner said something to the guards. They stepped back and he came forward. He asked me where in the States I was from. I said north of Seattle. He said he had been in Seattle, and it was a beautiful city. He said he liked Americans, but our President Roosevelt and our military were deceitful. I asked him if there was some way to get some word to my family. He replied that that he was only a visiting officer, but didn't think The Kavieng commander had the authority to execute me. He did not ask any pertinent questions. When he was finished, the guard replaced the blindfold and led me out. At the steps they gave me a hard pull ad I fell and rolled to the bottom. From there they led me to a field; I could feel the grass. I was sure I was to be shot. Instead, we went up some more steps to a platform where they forced me to lie down. Some time later an airplane engine started nearby. I knew I was to be transferred. The cool air was reviving, but the airplane engine sounded like a bucket of bolts.

We landed at an airstrip, which turned out to be Rabaul. Here I was left at on a hot tarmac slab all day, blindfolded, and trussed up hand and foot. It was here on this asphalt that perhaps I became delirious; at any rate I heard the clickety-clack of wooden clogs approaching. I imagined the sound as anything but wooden shoes. It stopped near my head. Someone helped me to a sitting position and held a bottle of sweetened water to my mouth. During the ordeal, neither my bindings nor the blindfold were removed.

This Samaritan massaged my neck but said nothing, then gently laid me back to the hard surface. I would give anything to know that individual. As she/he departed thought I was losing my best friend in the world. Late in the day, some soldiers came and put me in an old car of some kind; I remember they had to push it to get started, Hardly had we got underway before air-raid sirens started blaring from every direction. The soldiers yanked off my blindfold, untied my feet and rushed me into an air-raid shelter already crowded with Japanese. Each one of them, I believe, took a hard poke at me or pulled my hair. Some of them could speak English, so I asked for medical attention. A well-dressed officer looked at my facial wound, made a sharp remark, then slapped my face. I think my buddies flying over 'pissed them off'.

After the clear I was taken back to the car and we continued our journey. Suddenly the soldiers started yelling "KooRaa! KooRaa!" then I saw him: big Sgt. John Fritz, ignoring the yelling, jumped a fence and came running toward me. He picked me up in his arms, tears running down his cheeks. Seared into my memory was his weeping remark, "My God, Captain, what have they done to you?" He carried me into the tin shack, into a small narrow room, probably three feet wide by seven feet long. He placed me on a plank shelf about as high as our kitchen counters. It was hardly eighteen inches wide. But it was my bed for the time I remained. I soon learned that the only survivors of my crew were her also" Lt. Rucks, Lt. Mangett, Sgt. Fritz, Sgt. Surret, Sgt. Etheridge and Pvt. Kurisko. Sgt Vetter, they had last seen bound hand and foot, tied to a foundation pier-post. They doubted he survived the night. There were other prisoners at this small compound; a native islander who seemed somewhat knowledgeable in medicine and an older Caucasian gentleman who could have been English, Dutch, or Australian. He did not have a military background, but had spent years among the islands. I think both these men. Although prisoners, were held for their special use; the islander as a medic and the Englishman as an interpreter.

After several days, it became apparent that I had an infection in my left arm that was beginning to look like blood poisoning. It was decided that that I must be lanced. The Englishman (I cannot remember his name) got permission to heat a tub of water. The water was kept hot while I submerged my arm for an extended period of time. Finally, there appeared a point of concentrated infection much like a boil. Several men held my arm while the medic opened the infection with a pair of scissors sterilized over the fire. The procedure hurt like hell, but no worse than I'd been through. Also, it worked, as my arm improved rapidly; released a great amount of pus.

Young Japanese recruits fresh from Japan collected across the fence to observe us. They looked about twelve years old, round fat faces. The Englishman (Dutchman of whatever) interpreted for them. Several older Japanese veterans would join them on occasion and tell the fantastic horror stories about About the "huge American Marines on Guadalcanal." Their eyes would get as round as saucers.

In a week or two (time had become a nebulous quantity), four of us, Surret, Ethridge, Rucks and I were placed on board a ship taken to Japan. It was a long hot trip. They kept me separated from the others. We stopped at Truck Island (??) for several days. One day, while in the toilet, I was able to look out a porthole. I was flabbergasted at the array of warships anchored in the harbor, all decked out in camouflage. "What a target!", was all I could think of. By the way, I was sweating our a Yank sub putting a torpedo in the ship we were on.

Going back to our departure from Rabaul, of the three men we left there, Mangett was in pretty bad shape, Both Sgt. Fritz and Pvt. Kurisko were in good condition, Fritz especially so. He was always talking about attempting an escape when I got better. I wouldn't wonder if at some time he made a try. There is much more to say about Sgt. Fritz and his plans.

I think we docked at Yokoski Naval Base near Yokohama. The journey to our prison camp was quite an ordeal. Part of the time we were blindfolded. . We did a great deal of walking and traveling by



## TAPS

Edwin "Les" Johnson 63<sup>rd</sup> Squadron on Sept 5, 2005

Reported by Pat Rauch

GOD BLESS

Jim Cherkauer has been sending me, in installments, portions of Col. Jim Pettus' History of B-24 Days of the 43<sup>rd</sup>. To avoid the time required to re-write them I will number the pages by hand and attach them to the back of newsletters. When Pettus refers to the "daylight squadrons", he is referring to the 64<sup>th</sup>, 65<sup>th</sup>, and the 403<sup>rd</sup> squadrons. When he refers to the "Sea Hawks", he is writing about the 63<sup>rd</sup> Squadron. The 63<sup>rd</sup> flew single plane missions at night.

Your Editor failed to get the names of the winners in golf at the reunion. My wife, Anne, and her partner defeated Lloyd Anderson and myself at bridge and won a cash prize. We played in the memorabilia room.

This newsletter is published four times each year : January , April , July, and October. It is written in the previous month.

Dues are \$15 per year or \$100 for life. Make your check out to 43<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group Association and mail to Bill Wilson, Treasurer, at the address on the first page of this newsletter.

Check your address label on the envelope in which you receive this newsletter. It will list the last year you paid dues.

The Post Office Department will not forward the newsletter. If you change your address or phone number, please send a notice to our treasurer, Bill Wilson, as soon as possible.

You may send e-mail to the Secretary/Editor to [andyanne@comcast.net](mailto:andyanne@comcast.net) and the treasurer at [Wilsonmotors@hotmail.com](mailto:Wilsonmotors@hotmail.com)

# 43<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group Reunion (Attendance)

Sept. 14<sup>th</sup> through Sept. 18<sup>th</sup>, 2005

Minneapolis - St Paul, MN

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

Gammill, Ed.  
Thompson, Jim & Louise  
Crawford, Ray & Dorothy  
Green, Helen  
Anderson, Lloyd & guests  
    Pete & Debbie Anderson  
Dieffenderfer, Jim & Daughter  
    Ann Fletcher  
Bachi, Jo  
Gates, Raymond & Betty & guest  
    Mary Jo Gates  
Puzzo, Regina Oldfield & Mother  
    Alice Mannion Oldfield  
Peters, Fred  
Newton, Harold & Pat  
Butler, Bob & Son  
    Rob Butler  
Sether, George  
Rauch, Chuck & Pat

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

Jones, Wendell  
Grubb, Ralph  
Hudgins, Malcolm  
Houglum, Arvid & Gerry  
Haas, Alvin & Lorraine Ross  
Fulton, Jesse  
Mulligan, Arthur & Beverlee  
Heineke, Lyle & Betty  
Ross, Ed & Lillian  
Kettleson, Roger & Audrey  
Miller, Byrle & Dolly  
Cooper, Bob & Mary Furrie  
Adams, David A.  
Tucholski, George & Anita  
Barbus, Paul & Helene Brockway  
Jancosko, Joe & Agnes  
Burnett, Russ & Jane  
Anderson, Howard (Andy) & Anne  
Bailey, Roy & Louise  
Gifford, Falcnor  
Rodella, Jim  
McClenny, Charles & Mildred  
Nelson, Marshall & Billye  
Nunnellee, Jack & June Panther

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

Eide, Jim  
Myles, Bill & Mary  
White, Chalky & Rosemary & guests  
    Horne, Bill & Terry  
Cherkauer, Jim & Anita  
Ray, Bethel & Bonnie  
Lawson, "Bud" Eldon  
Commons, Sam & Helen & Daughter  
    Amy Nally  
Barnes, Alice  
Jamison, Tom & Kathy  
Buelow, Harold  
Main, Larry, Son & Daughter  
    Steve Main & Kathy Takacs

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

Snyder, Joe & Sally  
Fairbanks, Neil & Marlys  
Axelsen, Max & Margaret &  
    Son Max Axelsen  
Lloyd, Rick  
    Son of Fredrick Lloyd  
Solomon, Bill & Nancy  
Mangan, Bob  
Brumm, Steve  
Kehr, Wade  
Johnson, Phyllis & guest  
    Lois Hattenberger

## Quarterly Humor

At New York's Kennedy yesterday, an individual later discovered to be a public school teacher was arrested trying to board a flight while in possession of a ruler, protractor, a set square, a slide rule and a calculator

At a morning press conference, Attorney General John Ashcroft said he believes the man is a member of the notorious al-gebra movement. He is charged by the FBI with carrying weapons of math instruction.

"Al-gebra is a fearsome cult," Ashcroft said, "They desire average solutions by means and extremes, and sometimes go of on tangents in search of absolute values. They use secret code names like X and Y and refer to themselves as 'unknowns', but we have determined they belong to a common denominator of the axis of medieval with coordinates in every country.

"As the Greek philanderer Isosceles used to say, there are three sides to every triangle" Ashcroft declared.

When asked to comment on the arrest, President Bush declared, "If God had wanted us to have better weapons of math instruction, He would have given us more fingers and toes.

"I am gratified that our government has given us a sine that it is intent on protracting math-dogs who are willing to disintegrate us with calculus disregard. Murky statisticians love to inflict plane on every sphere of influence," the President said, adding, "Under the circumstances, we must differentiate their root, make our point, and draw the line."

President Bush warned, "These **weapons of math instruction** have the potential to decimate everything in their math on a scalene never before seen unless we become exponents of a Higher Power and begin to factor in random facts of vertex."

Attorney General Ahcroft said, "As our Great Leader would say, "Read my ellipse. Here is one principle he is uncertainty of: though they multiply, their days are numbered and the hypotenuse tightens around their necks"

### LIQUOR AND LONGEVITY ( by Ed Gammill)

The horse and mule live 30 years and nothing know of wine and beers.  
The goat and sheep at 20 die and never taste of scotch and rye  
The cow drinks water by the ton and at 18 is really done.  
The dog at 18 cashes in without the aid of rum and gin.  
The cat in milk and water soaks and then in 12 short years it croaks.  
The modest, sober dry hen lays eggs for nogs, then dies at 10.  
All animals are strictly dry, but sinful, ginful, rum soaked men  
Survive for threescore and ten.  
And some of us, the mighty few, keep drinkin' till we're 92.