

# The Big One: World War II

By Robert Earl Wildermuth



## CREW MEMBERS AND MY RECOLLECTIONS

PILOT: First Lieutenant Maxwell Van Valen - "Van" was from Newton, Massachusetts. He was a third year student at Massachusetts Institute of Technology when he enlisted in the Army Aviation Cadet Program. He was a quiet man, very intelligent, cool and calm under all stressful situations. He was an outstandingly capable pilot and he could fly close formation better than anyone else in the squadron. I received a post card from Van a couple of years after the war and he was living in Paris.

CO-PILOT: First Lieutenant Robert Steckroth - Bob was from Hazelton Pennsylvania a coal mining area at that time. He was a second year student at William and Mary College at the time of his enlistment. Bob was an all around athlete with a physique of a hard working coal miner and star athlete. It was rumored that he was a little All American football player at William and Mary. Bob was an excellent pilot and loved to fly the airplane manually. He didn't get much opportunity however and many times our plane flew on automatic pilot much to the chagrin of Bob. He was the catcher on our squadron championship soft ball team. Bob deserved to have his own crew.

NAVIGATOR: First Lieutenant Robert E. Wildermuth - Bob was one year out of high school in Marietta, Ohio. Although he had traveled quite a bit as a young boy with his father, he was always thrilled and fascinated by his many military transfers. Life seemed one big adventure. In basic training, Bob volunteered for Aviation Cadet training. Not fond of flying, he chose this route as a means to an end. The free government education policy for all veterans had not yet come into being. Bob saw the aviation training as a means to becoming a commissioned officer and this meant much more pay, prestige and better living conditions. The pay was important because more than anything a college education was top priority with him and he planned to save all he could to pay for that education when the war was over. He was extremely conscientious in his navigational duties, never cheated on training flights for he felt that to cheat was only to fool one's self. A rule he lived by all his life.

Radar/Bombardier: First Lieutenant Merwin Adler: Merwin was from Buffalo, New York where he was a second year college student at Buffalo University. He was careless in his duties, lax in his personal hygiene and appearance and often had to be counseled by those with whom he lived. He was over confident and was not much of a "team player".

Engineer: Technical Sergeant Lyle Pound - Lyle was a farm boy from the land of really big farms Kansas. He and his family farmed a thousand acre wheat farm near Great Bend, Kansas. Lyle was an excellent aircraft engineer and he was always "tinkering" with the various aircraft systems to make everything as fine tuned as possible. At age 22, he was the oldest member of the crew and he acted as "old man" and counsellor to the other crew members. Being a farm boy who had driven all kinds of farm equipment, Lyle was the only crew member who could

(Crew members continued)

drive an automobile and the only one that possessed a driver's license. Lyle must have re-entered the service after his post war discharge for one time while I was attending a movie, the MGM movie newsreel showed survivors of a B-29 type aircraft that had crashed in the Caribbean and Lyle was one of them.

Radioman: Technical Sergeant Frederick Kuszmaul - Fred or "Fuzzy" as he was called was my best friend on the crew even though military custom dictated no fraternization between officers and enlisted men. I was counselled many times by other officers about my association with Sgt. Kuszmaul. Fred was an extremely intelligent person with a sharp wit and very personable attitude. He was from Logansport, Indiana and was a second year pre-med student at the University of Indiana. Originally he enlisted in the Aviation Cadet Pilot Training program but when that specialty developed an extreme surplus in manpower, the Army curtailed the program and gave the trainees a choice of becoming gunners or radio operators. Fred chose radio school and I must say he was the best. No matter where we were or how far we were from our home base, he was always able to contact them and get our position reports through to them. On one mission along the China coast, I looked over at Fred from my adjacent desk and he motioned for me to switch my radio headset over to the frequency he was listening to and it turned out to be some commercial station in San Francisco with "Big Band" music playing. Fred could reach stations all over the world. When our crew disbanded after returning to the States, Fred and I got the same orders to report to Wright-Patterson Air Base in Dayton, Ohio for discharge processing. We enjoyed a long train ride across the country, had a last fling in Dayton where while enjoying a big steak dinner, we were approached by a young girl and her mother who invited us to their home ( a parsonage, the young girl's father was a preacher) and the mother explained that she was afraid we were going to get in trouble on our last night together. They fixed Fred up with a nice young lady and we all went to a movie. I sincerely hope that at this time, young Fred is Doctor Kuszmaul for he had the right caring and friendly personality to be a good one.

Nose Gunner: Staff Sergeant Charles Bojt - Charley was the baby of our crew. He had just turned 18. He was fearless and was always eager to climb in his nose turret with no qualms even though that turret stuck out in front of the airplane and in that position you seemed to just bore through the air and the rest of the airplane couldn't even be seen. To make it even worse (if one was the least bit claustrophobic) once the nose gunner had entered the turret, the navigator closed some strong doors between the turret and the nose compartment and the nose gunner was locked in. Charles was from Buffalo, New York.

Top Turret Gunner: Staff Sergeant Orland Young - Orland was another good old Ohioan. He was from Coldwater, Ohio near Akron. Orland was very quiet and shy; a loner but absolutely dependable.

Pall Turret Gunner: Staff Sergeant Milton Emkow - Milt was also the assistant engineer. He was from Columbus, Wisconsin and he

(Crew members continued)

always seemed a little resentful of officers. Milton was eliminated from pilot training during the big phase down when pilot trainees became surplus. Milton was also the armament supervisor and as such he had to insure that all 50 caliber ammunition was in its place for each of the guns; that the right type of bombs were hung in the bomb bay for a specific mission; that the bombs were fused properly, and that the bomb release system functioned properly. A lot of responsibilities and he was absolutely trustworthy. If there was any person that had to have "guts" it was the ball turret gunner. This turret situated back in the floor in the waist of the aircraft, was lowered through the floor with the gunner inside and hung out beneath the airplane. It could be rotated in all azimuths by the gunner and was just a big glass bubble with guns. Milton never hesitated to "buckle in" and be cast off to look for Jap fighter planes.

TAIL GUNNER: Staff Sergeant Jesse Murdock - You know there just had to be one on every crew -- A TEXAN !! Jesse was it on our crew. He was from Ferris, Texas cowboy boots and all. He elected himself to be the crew photographer and he really came up with some artistically composed pictures. Quite often the subject would turn out on film minus his head or perhaps his legs. Jesse was a subtle practical joker and one had to be on his toes around him. He always volunteered on any crew project and with a twinkle in his eye he'd say, "Let's get on with it". A real asset to any crew.

THESE THEN WERE THE YOUNG "KIDS" WHO WENT TO WAR, DEFEATED THE JAPS AND CAME BACK MEN. THEY MADE TOKYO ROSE EAT HER WORDS AND PROVED THAT SHE WAS JUST A MISGUIDED PROGNOSTICATOR.

FOLLOWING ARE THE FLIGHTS AND BOMBING MISSIONS IN WHICH I PARTICIPATED AS AN AIR CREW MEMBER DURING WORLD WAR II.

MONTH & YEAR

NOVEMBER 1944

<u>DATE</u>	<u>DEPARTURE POINT</u>	<u>TARGET/DESTINATION</u>
15 Nov. 1944	Travis AFB, Calif.	John Rodgers Field Honolulu, Hawaii

COMMENTS: On a dark night in November at precisely midnight, we flew out over the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, California and headed for John Rodgers Field, Honolulu, Hawaii twenty-one hundred miles west in the Pacific Ocean. About fourteen and a half hours later, looking out our right front window, there was the Control Tower at John Rodgers Field about 5 miles away. We had passed our first test of a long over water hop at night enroute to the War in the Southwest Pacific. Our ultimate goal was Biak Island in the Netherlands East Indies some 5000 miles away. The rest of our island hopping out to Biak would be done in the daytime. Thank heavens for I don't have much confidence or ability in "shooting stars" with the sextant.

17 Nov. 1944	John Rodgers Field, Honolulu, Hawaii	Canton Air Field Canton Island, Phoenix Islands
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COMMENTS: Bright and early in the morning, we set out for a small dot in the Pacific Ocean some 1100 miles southwest. This small island was Canton Island about a mile long and a mile wide. The Air Strip extended from water's edge to water's edge from one end of the island to the other. Finding this tiny island would test our navigational skills. Not a landmark, railroad track or highway to follow, only the vast Pacific Ocean. Not an alternate runway or airfield to go in case we had an airplane malfunction and ditching a B-24 in the ocean was a dangerous alternative. The aircraft generally broke in two upon impact with the water. We departed fully confident for youth knows no bounds. This island had only one tree on it and daily at meal time all of the aircraft maintenance men permanently stationed there would gather under that one tree to eat. Upon landing and after opening all of the exit hatches, a grizzled, sun tanned sergeant stuck his head up in the nose compartment and asked if we had any whiskey aboard. Bottles of whiskey were highly prized on these desolate stop over islands in the Pacific. Many aircrews transiting through these islands brought along from the United States, cartons of whiskey and sold the bottles for as much as \$50 per bottle. Even though we did have one bottle of 8 year old Scotch



air fields along the coast. A three star Japanese general and his twenty thousand troops had been bypassed as the Allied Forces invaded the Netherland East Indies further to the west. For the first time our gunners were at their gunnery positions and alertly scanned the skies for Japanese fighters. We landed at Biak Island unscathed, in aircraft tail number 471, our baby, a brand new, factory fresh B-24 that we were delivering to our new Bomb Group, the famed Jolly Rogers 90th Bomb Group. We arrived late in the afternoon at about meal time and had our first meal eaten from a mess kit. The mess hall at Biak had not been completed yet so we had to sit on a sandy beach and partake. This was only the beginning for three days later we were to have our Thanksgiving meal (full course) from our mess kits. Have you ever eaten mashed potatoes and gravy with a piece of pumpkin pie pushed down on top of them? We just couldn't get all of the holiday fixings in our mess kit. Even with this mixture of food and the occasional scoops of sand as troops walked by, the food tasted pretty good.

25 November 1944

Biak Air Field  
Biak Island

Nadzab Air Field  
New Guinea

COMMENTS: Our stay at Biak was a short but busy one and now we were on our way in a C-46 aircraft of the Transport Command along with several other new crews that had just arrived with new airplanes, back down that long coast of New Guinea to the eastern end. Our purpose in going there was for two weeks of in-theater ground school at Nadzab Air Field. Nadzab was a holding area for all kinds of flying personnel (about 4000) who were receiving ground school training peculiar to their type of aircraft. I received ground navigational training, celestial navigation training (for now we were in the Southern Hemisphere seeing stars and constellations we had never seen before.) We had to learn our navigational stars all over again. We did skeet shooting gunnery practice (I couldn't hit a thing), small arms gunnery practice (that 45 cal. hand gun I carried couldn't hit anything either), gunnery practice in a real B-24 ground mounted turret firing 50 caliber ammunition, and escape and evasion tactics. The training lasted about two weeks and then we waited a couple of days for air transport back up the 1000 miles of New Guinea coastline to Biak and the home of our assigned heavy bomb group. We were ultimately assigned to the 400th Bomb Squadron -- the Black Pirates. There were four squadrons in the group, the 319th, the 320th, the 321st and our 400th that made up "THE BEST DAMNED HEAVY BOMB GROUP IN THE WORLD" or so stated the big sign right outside our orderly room.

Tragedy, however was soon to strike. On our very first full day in the Group, our engineer, Corporal Lyle Pound, accidentally shot himself through the foot. On our way back from the officer's mess, we stopped by the enlisted men's tent to make sure they were adequately housed and fed. We talked for awhile and our engineer was sitting on his cot cleaning his hand gun. I jokingly said to the men "Boy how did you all like that ham and eggs for breakfast?" (we didn't have ham and eggs, we just had warmed up field rations like everybody else). I was only kidding them. Our engineer said "Hev. we peons

didn't get any ham and eggs" and with that he pulled the slide back on his 45 and the thing seemed to explode and kicked up coral dust near the engineer's foot. I said "Boy that was close !!" and the engineer said "Close hell ! I just shot myself" By that time he had his shoe off and was hopping around looking for help. He had a hole about the size of a cigarette right through the big bone of the instep of his right foot. He was hospitalized and missed flying for six weeks. After about a week, we were assigned a new crew chief so we could get on with our flying duties.

#### DECEMBER 1944

20 December 1944	Biak Air Base Biak Island	Davao, Mindanao, Philippi- ppines Islands
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COMMENTS: Finally our first combat mission. We were to take a couple of 500 pound bombs up to Davao, a city on the southeastern tip of Mindanao. Look out Tojo, here we come !!! The course lay northwest and Biak was situated about 12 miles south of the equator. I alerted the crew as we crossed over the equator and told them to look out the window but no one could spot the line that separates the Northern and Southern Hemisphere. Same results as when we crossed the International Date Line when we were enroute out to Biak from the States. On this mission, about 300 miles out from Biak, we encountered a severe weather front. The clouds were too high to fly over and the front was too long east and west to fly around it so we bored on through. For about an hour we experienced extreme buffeting. It was nothing to suddenly gain 100 to 150 feet straight up and then hit a severe down draft where we could lose up to 3 or 4 hundred feet. We were pelted by heavy rain and hail. St. Elmo's fire danced along the wing tips and blinding lightening flashed through the clouds. After about an hour of this, we finally broke out into a sun filled sky and it was a beautiful day where one could see for miles. We proceeded on to the target area, a sleepy little town at the head of a bay. It had been bombed many, many times in the past weeks and had almost become a practice mission for new crews. We dropped our bombs in the target area and headed home encountering no enemy action. About two hours out from the target, we began experiencing severe oil leaks in the number two inboard engine. The engine temperature soared to the top of the dial. The engine began running very rough and finally the pilot had to shut it down to prevent a fire. Now we were flying with only three engines running but this posed no problem except we knew that we had to fly back through that severe squall line. We discussed what to do and finally decided that we had to lighten the plane and the pilot gave the order to throw everything of any weight over board. We took the ten machine guns out of their mountings and threw them in the ocean, all of the heavy ammunition and ammo cans went the same way, we burned the fuel out of the big bomb bay tank and then jettisoned it. We even toggled out the 600 pound "belly" gun turret. Now we were as light as we could get. Pretty soon we reached the huge squall line and plunged in. Fortunately the

storm had subsided somewhat; not so much lightening or rain and much less turbulence. Our old B-24 flew through it like a "greased pig". Upon arriving at our home base we found our squadron commander, maintenance and operations officer pretty upset with us for throwing everything over board but after a couple of days things passed over. Combat flying time 12 hours.

25 Dec 1944            Biak Air Field            Davao, Mindanao, Philippi-  
                          Biak Island                           ppines Islands

COMMENTS: Back to the sleepy little target in the southern Philippines but this time, it was Christmas Day. No Christmas tree; no gifts and we didn't even get a Christmas dinner. Our in flight lunches consisted of K-rations but one of the cans had cold packed turkey in it. We placed these cans on the aircraft heating ducts and they got almost warm throughout. We were fast learning. Again no Japanese action in the target area and the mission turned out to be what was called a "milk run" O.K. by me, we didn't need any heroics. On our return to home base, we found that all of the real Christmas turkey and trimmings had been eaten by those who didn't fly that day so it was fried Spam and hash browns for us. Combat flying time: 11 hours and 50 minutes.

#### JANUARY 1945

2 Jan 1945            Biak Air Field            Peleliu Island in the  
                          Biak Island                           Pelau Island Group

COMMENTS: We were informed of a temporary duty assignment for us and all of the new crews that had come over with us to go to the Palau Islands to fly with the 22nd Bomb Group. The 22nd was a night flying group and the aircraft that we had flown out to the Pacific Area was one of the first to be fitted with a primitive radar bombing system which supposedly had a night time navigation capability. Our bombardier, Flight Officer Merwin Adler, had been trained in its operation and flying at night with the 22nd was a good way to test the radar's capabilities. Everyone on the crew except the bombardier thought radar bombing was a joke and we had little faith in this new system.. We were flying at night so who could visually tell if the bombs hit the target, of course our bombardier always reported that the radar showed the bombs were right on the money. We flew two missions from Peleliu (one on the 2nd and one on the 6th) both to Formosan (Taiwanian) targets. We had a new and frightening experience on our first night missions. In the target area, we got picked up by Japanese searchlights. What a shock to be flying along in total darkness and then all of a sudden the aircraft and flight deck was as bright as day. The lights as they searched for us swung back and forth across the sky like those one sees at a Hollywood premier. As soon as the lights got on us, we could see muzzle

blasts from their guns on the ground. Fortunately there were some pretty good clouds in the area and we flew into a cloud bank as soon as we dropped our bombs. On the second mission, the intelligence officer of the 22nd Bomb Group told us at our pre-mission briefing that the Japanese Army defenders (not the navy gunners) used sonar controlled search lights. This meant their searchlights picked us up by sound not by radar which was much more accurate. We were told that if this happened on subsequent missions, we should quickly change the pitch of the propeller blades (the pilot could do this in flight) and in so doing it would change the sound being emitted by the engines and the searchlights would lose us. Sure enough on the next flight, we gave this procedure a try and just as surely it worked. The Japs spent the whole time we were in the target area trying to pick us up. On these two first night missions, we got a total of 20 and a half hours of combat time. This was important because under the rotational system to return to the States, we got points based on flying time along with some other criteria such as being hit by flak, being jumped by fighters, losing an airplane on a mission etc. We got hit by flak only one time but that was enough.

An interesting thing took place while at Peleliu. One day we all went to lunch with the exception of one crew member from another crew that lived in the tent next door. He said he wasn't hungry and he was going to take a nap. Coming back from lunch as we neared the tent area, we heard the awfulest screaming shout you could ever hear. We rushed to our tent area and there stood the airman who hadn't gone to lunch trembling in panic. We got him calmed down and he told us he had awakened to find a Japanese soldier going through the crew's duffle bags. The yell had scared the intruder away but you can bet that thereafter we all carried our .45's and slept with them under our pillows. There was still heavy fighting going on in the Pelau Islands while we were there and stragglers from the Japanese Army could be anyplace.

13 Jan 1945

Peleliu Air Field  
Pelau Islands

Leyte Air Field, Taclo-  
ban, Philippine Is.

COMMENTS: We flew a mission on this date from Peleliu to a target on Formosa leaving late in the afternoon and on our way back we were to land at Leyte Air Field the next morning where we would then be stationed. Thereafter we would stage out of Leyte. Heavy fighting was still going on on Leyte Island where a recent landing of 20,000 Japanese troops had just arrived. We got an almost nightly Japanese airraid. They always seemed to bomb the town of Tacloban about ten miles away but we would jump into our fox holes and watch our search lights seek them out and we'd listen to the anti-aircraft units firing and the muffled bombs dropping in the distance.

A near fatal error on this mission almost did us in. We 90th Bomb Group crews who had always flown day missions only just couldn't seem to get the hang of night flying. On every night mission in which we participated, some Jolly Rogers crew would get lost and sea and search missions had to go out to look for the missing crew. Eventually, they would come struggling in but having been lost and fumbling around trying to find their home base always

all who adhere to them. These two rules are: when given a job to do, stick to it until it's finished and you've done the best you can do; number two: if you want a job done right, do it yourself.

18 Jan 1945

Leyte Air Field  
Philippine Islands

Target on Formosa

COMMENTS: This was a bad day to have to fly a combat mission. I lost my dearest buddy and fellow navigation school class mate, Flight Officer John (Jay) Strozier. Jay was the navigator on Lt. William Courtney's crew in the 320th Bomb Squadron. They too were a Jolly Roger's crew on temporary duty with the 22nd. They and our crew were on an alternating day flying schedule. They would fly one day and we would fly the next. Jay and I had made a ritual of waiting for the one who flew to get back in the morning and then we'd go have breakfast together so we could unload the night's events and sort of calm ourselves down. Jay was always a pessimist and he had told me many times that he didn't think he'd ever return to the United States. This day Jay's crew never came back. About two weeks later I walked one of their crew members. I think it was their radio man. He told us the story of their last flight. On our missions up to Formosa, we generally flew west out of Leyte through an inland sea passage and then after passing Manila we would head north for our target on Formosa. Last night when Jay's crew flew, the flight plan had been changed. This night the 22nd Bomb Group Operations Staff had decided that on the 17th of January all crews flying would depart Leyte on a northerly heading and fly up along the coast of Samar Island (the first island northeast of Leyte) and then fly up along the eastern coast line of the Philippines until arriving at the north end of Luzon Island and then they would turn northwest and proceed on to Formosa and their targets. Perhaps this tactic would fool the Japanese. Tokyo Rose was keeping pretty good tabs on us and daily in her propaganda broadcasts she would predict dire things for the Jolly Rogers Bomb Group. With her giving us so much attention, we knew we were hurting the Japanese effort. As the survivor on Flight Officer Strozier's crew told it, his crew flew into a huge thunderstorm just off the southern tip of Samar. This storm turned out to be a violent storm with updrafts, downdrafts, hail, lightning and thunder. The aircraft was caught up in an overwhelming down draft and with Lt. Courtney fighting the controls, he was finally able to pull the aircraft out of its downward plunge at about 2500 feet. He was having great difficulty however in getting engine power, the aircraft was barely flyable and was just mushing through the air. Lt. Courtney gave the order to abandon ship. The survivor said he bailed out immediately but he saw no one else preparing to parachute out. As he floated down in his parachute, he shouted to see if he could get a response from anyone else that might be in the area. No answers. Finally he heard and observed a huge explosion and fireball. Lt. Courtney and his airplane and crew had run into a mountain that rises up on the southern tip of Samar. The survivor eventually drifted up on the beach, covered his tracks and wandered around for awhile then decided to hide out until daybreak. As he was walking along a road, he spied some

made them extremely late getting back and this caused much anxiety in our headquarters. On this particular flight, it was my turn to get lost. When we flew these long boring night missions all of the rest of the crew (except me) would sleep until we were about a half hour out from the target and then I would wake them all up to prepare for our run over the target. Even the pilots would sleep. They would put the plane on automatic pilot and go sound to sleep. One night I needed to have the pilot change to a new compass heading and I couldn't rouse anybody up on the flight deck so I had to crawl back through the tunnel in the nose of the aircraft and climb up on the flight deck and shake the pilot awake. As for me, I couldn't sleep because I had to take periodic instrument readings and celestial navigation fixes to maintain the exact location of the aircraft at all times. On this particular flight as we were returning and were only about 100 miles out from our home base, the radar bombardier called me up on the interphone and said he could pick our home base up on the radar and that if I wanted, I could take a nap and he would guide us on into our airfield. The landing strip was a metal type runway laid out on the beach and according to the radar/bombardier metal gave a beautifully bright return on his set and he was sure it was Leyte Field. I folded up my charts, put away my navigation equipment and stretched out in the tunnel for a much wanted snooze. BIG MISTAKE !!! After about an hour, the radioman, S/Sgt. Fred Kuzmaul woke me up and said we were lost. The radar man had been picking up a large thunder (electrical) storm that he had mistaken for Leyte Air Field. They had flown around in circles, changed headings many times and were completely lost. Of course I was dumb founded and could not reconstruct where they had flown for the past hour for the past hour or so while I was asleep. There was a homing technique whereby the radio man could contact the control tower at home base and by sending out a long steady radio signal the base could take a fix on us and give us a heading to fly to get to the base. We did that several times and each time we would get a different heading to fly. We were flying around in circles. (Later found out that the Japanese were picking up our signal and then sending us false headings). Finally as the fuel gauges got lower and lower through a break in the clouds below us, I spotted a huge naval convoy. I told the pilot that they were probably going into Leyte harbor so he should take up their same heading and at least if we had to bail out over the ocean they would come by and could pick us up. Really desperate now. This was the only time that I ever saw every crew member have his parachute and Mae West life jacket on. They were ready to go. As it turned out my hunch was right and on that convoy's heading we flew right into our home airbase. We landed with what was estimated to be 15 minutes of fuel remaining. For weeks, I caught HELL from every superior all the way up to 5th Air Force Headquarters. All kinds of celestial navigational requirements were placed on me and I was threatened with being assigned to the Air Transport Command where they flew only in the daytime and they had no Stateside rotation system. After a few more successful night time missions everything quieted down. Got a total of 14 hours and twenty minutes combat flying on this ill-fated mission.

Almost at the expense of my crew, I learned two valuable lessons this night. They have stuck with me throughout my life and I think they are well worth passing on for they will surely benefit

armed men up ahead, they were not in uniform so he didn't think they were Japanese. He circled around and then approached them and as it turned out they were Filipino guerrillas and they listened to his story and told him to stick with them and they would get him back to his outfit on Leyte. The group evaded all enemy forces and eventually made their way back to our base.

The survivor being thoroughly shaken by this ordeal, voluntarily took himself off of flying status and said he would never fly again. Much pressure was brought to bear from the operations people, for they needed extra gunners, and he was told if he wanted to rotate back to the States he'd have to fly. He still declined so the commander grounded him and put him on permanent K.P. duty in our mess hall. After about a week of this type of duty and while still being pressured to fly, he finally agreed to fly as an extra gunner. He flew one mission and again decided that combat flying was not for him and he grounded himself permanently.

An interesting anecdote concerning my friend Jay. While as a cadet at Selman Field, Monroe, Louisiana, he came to me one day all excited, nervous and atwitter. I asked him what was the matter and he said he had just received a letter from his "little brother" who was coming to visit him. I thought that was great and I asked Jay why he was so nervous about that. He explained that his "little brother" was a much decorated fighter pilot who had just finished a second combat tour in Europe and that he was a lieutenant colonel. Imagine having a younger brother who was a lieutenant colonel !! As aviation cadets, we were in awe of all officers and the highest ranking officer with which we had only casual contact with was a major. I understood Jay's dilemma. Even with Jay's loss weighing heavily on my mind, I flew that night up to a target in Formosa wondering about the fate of my friend. We had no trouble and got 14 hours and 10 minutes combat time.

21 Jan 1945           Leyte Air Field           Target in Formosa  
                          Philippine Islands

COMMENTS: Fifteen hours of combat time.

25 Jan 1945           Leyte Air Field           Target in Formosa  
                          Philippine Islands

COMMENTS: Another long one to Formosa. On this mission, one of the crews threw a case of empty beer bottles out of their airplane. On the next day, Tokyo Rose in her daily broadcast, said that the Jolly Rogers had unleashed a new psychological weapon on the "poor rice farmers of Formosa". She said the weapons emitted shrill shrieks and howls as it fell through the air and harmlessly landed in the rice paddies below. She predicted a dire consequence for the "killers" of the Jolly Rogers Bomb Group. Our intelligence fellows seemed to think that the "new psychological weapon" was the empty beer bottles that created a whining roar as they tumbled through the air. COMBAT TIME: Fourteen hours and ten minutes.

30 Jan 1945

Leyte Air Field  
Philippine Islands

Target in Formosa

COMMENTS: This flight turned out to be our last nighttime flight with the 22nd Bomb Group. Praise the Lord !! We returned to our old Bomb Group that had now moved up to Mindoro Island in the Philippines. Some kind souls had taken down our tent on Biak, secured all of our personal property and had even saved our precious and hard to get lumber so we could build another wooden floored tent abode. We were told it was a particularly harrowing trip for those Jolly Roger people who moved up to Mindoro by boat. They were under Japanese bombing attacks several times. A friend told me that one minute you could look out on your left and see a ship in the convoy and the next minute it would be gone. Total combat time this mission: twelve hours and fifty-five minutes.

FEBRUARY 1945

5 Feb 1945

McGuire Air Field  
Mindoro Island, Phi-  
lippines

Corregidor Island and Bataan  
Peninsula, Luzon Island  
Philippines

COMMENTS: Now we're getting somewhere. Driving the Japs north. Good to see our bombs falling on targets occupied by Japanese troops. Especially these targets where our troops suffered so badly back in 1941. Combat time: 6 hour 15 minutes.

7 Feb 1945

McGuire Field, Min-  
doro, Philippines

Clark Field, Luzon  
Philippines

COMMENTS: Expected to see some Jap opposition from this former U.S. Base now occupied by the Japanese. Not a Jap fighter in sight. Later we flew over over Manila and dropped hundreds of propaganda leaflets. Messages from their president who was in exile in the United States and a message from our President Roosevelt. Combat time: 6 hours.

10 Feb 1945

McGuire Field, Min-  
doro, Philippines

Luzon Island, Philippines

COMMENTS: This was a ground support mission for American troops coming down from the Linguyen Gulf invasion point. Hate



bat time: 9 hours.

24 Feb 1945            McGuire Field, Min-            Luzon Island. Philip-  
                          doro, Philippines            pines

COMMENTS: Ground support, the battle for the entire Philip-  
pines is really heating up. Combat time: 8 hours. At this time,  
we became the senior crew (the most flying time) in the 400th  
Bomb Squadron. Getting flying and combat weary.

25 Feb 1945            McGuire Field, Min-            Corregidor Island, Luzon  
                          doro, Philippines            Philippines

COMMENTS: Supported American paratroopers dropping on  
Corregidor. Re-captured that hallowed ground where besieged  
American forces suffered such harsh treatment and indignities.  
Combat time 2 hours.

26 Feb 1945            McGuire Field, Min-            Kiiren City, Formosa  
                          doro, Philippines

COMMENTS: Kirren City was located on the northernmost tip  
of Formosa. There were several large manufacturing complexes in  
this area. One of which was a factory that manufactured anti-  
aircraft guns. Our intelligence estimated that there were 365  
heavy anti-aircraft gun emplacements around this target area. In  
addition, nearby was a large naval base. Got to be extra careful  
on this mission. Group operations decided to try to fool the  
enemy by sending our large force of bombers up the eastern coast  
of Formosa. The eastern side of Formosa was mostly mountainous  
with very few towns. We were told that cannibalistic head-hunters  
lived in these mountains and that the Japanese had erected a high  
electronic fence the entire length of the island on the western  
side of these mountains to keep the tribesmen penned up in the  
mountains. We had also been told that if we were ever in trouble  
over targets on Formosa, to head for these mountains and to take  
our chances with the natives. How's that for options. Japanese  
troops were not held in too high esteem.  
Our sweep up the east coast and around the tip of Formosa must  
have caught the Japanese by surprise for our raid on this target  
was uneventful. Combat time: 14 hours.

MARCH 1945

1 Mar 1945            McGuire Air Field, Min-            Nippon Aluminum  
                          doro, Philippines            Plant, Takao Formosa

COMMENTS: We had bombed Takao many times. This was a big  
complex but not a very heavily defended target however, on a

later mission, we did lose a plane to flak. Combat time 9 hours and a half.

3 Mar 1945            McGuire Field, Min-            Sydney, Australia  
                          doro, Philippines

COMMENTS: For a year or two, the Group policy had been for the senior crew as it accumulated a certain number of combat hours, to go on a Rest and Recuperation (R&R) to Sydney, Australia. The Group had leased a big hotel on King's Cross in the center of town. The usual length of an R&R was ten days and crews stayed at this nice hotel rent free. It was really great. At any hour of the evening or night after being out on the town, one could go into the kitchen and fix himself any kind of a huge sandwich, all the fresh, cold milk one could drink, cakes, pies and that long forgotten delicacy --- ICE CREAM. It was paradise after being in the jungle for a while. Carole Lombard, the movie actress and a bevy of Hollywood stars had made a bond selling drive down there in 1943 or 44. Upon returning to the States in an interview she described Australia as a land of wanton women and said the United States government should issue their troops going there big sticks to fight off the girls. These statements had made her persona non grata in Australia but truer words were never spoken. At about 5 P.M. each day when the offices, banks and shops closed, swarms of young girls would line up at the entrance of the hotel and soldiers exiting had to fight their way through the gauntlet and they would generally end up with a pretty young lady on each arm. It was "tough" duty but someone had to do it.

As it turned out, we were the last crew to go to Australia from the 90th Bomb Group. Due to the long distances now that we had moved up to the Philippines, a new R & R sight had been selected in the northern mountains in Bagio the summer capital of the Phillipines. Since we were the last ones to go to Sydney, the regularly scheduled Air Transport planes that shuttled crews back and forth had ceased operations. We had to hitch-hike transportation on any plane that we could find going towards the Philip-pines and our routine 10 day R&R turned out to be one of 21 days. Really tough !! Even got a couple of days in Brisbane. I would have liked to spend the rest of the war here. Too busy fighting the "Battle of Sydney", we got no more combat time in March.

APRIL 1945

6 Apr 1945            McGuire Field Min-            Luzon Island, Philippines  
                          doro, Philippines

COMMENTS: Another mission to support American ground forces as they pressed on towards Manila. Combat time 4 hours and 30 minutes.

7 Apr 1945            McGuire Field, Min-            Tainan, Formosa  
                          doro, Philippines

COMMENTS: Tainan was located only about a third of the way up the western coast of Formosa. We had flown there before. This target was not heavily defended and it was located right on the coast so it was just a quick dart into the target and then back out to sea. Combat time: 5 hours and 40 minutes .

10 Apr 1945            McGuire Field, Min-            Koshun, Formosa  
                          doro, Philippines

COMMENTS: This was a new target about midway up the coast of Formosa. Again a nice target located right on the coastline; easy in; easy out. Combat time: 9 hours and 10 minutes.

18 Apr 1945            McGuire Field, Min-            Target on Formosa  
                          doro, Philippines

COMMENTS: Really plastering Formosa. In addition to our raids, the navy was busy so the Japs must not have gotten much done. The Japanese tried a new psychological warfare technique on us. They had loaded their anti-aircraft shells with a phosphorous gel. When the shells exploded in the air, the gel was released and when exposed to the air the phosphorous caught fire. Theoretically the phosphorous gel was supposed to stick to our aircraft and set it on fire. To my knowledge noone ever suffered any damage from this type of shell but to look out in the sky in front of your aircraft and see these shells explode and then see the long trailing tails of white smoke was rather unnerving. Combat time: 10 hours and 45 minutes.

25 Apr 1945            McGuire Field, Min-            Saigon, Indo-China  
                          doro, Philippines            (Viet Nam)

COMMENTS: New kind of target this day. Our intelligence fellows had spotted a Japanese submarine tied up at the end of a long pier just off Saigon. Each airplane was loaded with a 2000 pound bomb and we were going hunting. Over target, big as life, a sub tied up at a pier. We made our bomb runs by squadrons; one squadron would go in and attack the target while the other three squadrons circled out at sea waiting for their turn to bomb. Quite a show sitting out there watching. We saw bombs hitting everywhere but on the sub. One squadron walked their bombs right out the pier only to fall short by about twenty yards. We missed too. No enemy defensive action. Combat time: 7 hours and a half.

26 Apr 1945            McGuire Field, Min-

doro, Philippines

COMMENTS: Big day today. I got my commission and became a Second Lieutenant in the Army of the United States. Just prior to my cadet classes' graduation, the Army Headquarters in Washington announced a new policy for all aviation cadet programs. A new rank had been formulated, that of Flight Officer. As it was explained to us, the criteria for receiving a commission from congress would be as follows. Those eligible had to have reached the age of 21 years; they had to have displayed leadership qualities and since Congress had put a ceiling on the number of commissioned officers, there had to be a vacancy. When I got my wings at Selman Field, Monroe, Louisiana, I was twenty years old, there were no vacancies for new Second Lieutenants and at my young age, I doubt if I displayed the proper leadership qualities. After all who would follow a twenty year old kid "still wet behind the ears". So at graduation, I was given a warrant by congress as a Flight Officer. We wore a modified Warrant Officer's rank insignia (a blue enamel bar with rounded ends) instead of a gold lieutenant's insignia and on our garrison hats, we wore a large propeller mounted on gold wings instead of the officer's gold eagle. We had all of the rights of a commissioned officer and for some strange reason, Flight Officers earned \$75 more per month than second lieutenants and that was permanent even when one was commissioned. Rank really didn't mean much to me; I was after the money so I could afford to go to college after the war.

Well even though I was still not 21, I guess with all my combat flying to date I had displayed some leadership qualities and there must have been a space available for another Congressional commission so our Commanding General came out in the jungles and at an official ceremony, he pinned the gold bar of a second lieutenant on all of us getting promoted.

MAY 1945

1 May 1945            McGuire Field, Mindoro, Philippines

COMMENTS: Getting up there now. Our crew just received orders that we were now Flight Leaders of "A" flight in our squadron. This meant on future missions, we would get to be the lead plane of our squadron to go into the targets and drop our bombs. All other crews (5 other airplanes) would align themselves in formation on us and when our bombardier dropped his bombs, the others would salvo theirs. We were being recognized for our Group longevity and experience.

3 May 1945            McGuire Field, Mindoro, Philippines            Saigon, Indo-China (Viet Nam)

COMMENTS: Our First mission as Squadron Lead. Our target was a large Shell Oil Refinery and tank farm. Really plastered this target complex. Our bombardier must have had his bomb-sight cross hairs right where they should have been. Started horrendous fires with black smoke reaching our flight altitude. I saw two bombs hit right inside a big storage tank and an oily river of fire poured out over the rest of the area. Combat time 12 hours and 30 minutes.

10 May 1945            McGuire Field, Min-            Canton, China  
                          doro, Philippines

COMMENTS: First mission to China proper and our target was the White Airdrome. Canton was an easy target, right on the coast, no enemy action even though we were attacking one of their airfields. Combat time: 12 hours.

14 May 1945            McGuire Field, Min-            Hydroelectric plant near  
                          doro, Philippines            Hsinchu, Formosa

COMMENTS: This target should have been heavily defended but it wasn't. Early in our raids on Formosa, our intelligence people had determined that the Japanese had only two types of anti-aircraft capabilities. Medium range and heavy. The medium range was effective between 5000 and 7500 feet; the heavy was accurate and set to explode at 10,000 to 12,000 feet. We flew most of our missions at 9000 to 9500 feet. Out of the effective ranges. Hit target. Combat time 9 hours and 15 minutes.

19 May 1945            McGuire Field, Min-            Hydro-electric plant at  
                          doro, Philippines            Kiirun, Formosa

COMMENTS: Back to the land of hundreds of heavy anti-aircraft guns and naval vessels. Target area clear of clouds and had good results. Lost a plane this flight due to engine failure. The crew was that of Lt. Finley but after turning around before getting to the target area and after heading back towards our home base, this aircraft lost it's second engine. Lt. Finley decided to head for China only 90 miles away. There he would take his chances making it to Chinese held territory. At a designated point, all crew members parachuted out safely and they were greeted by friendly Chinese who helped them evade the Japanese. One way to get out of the war. Combat time: 12 hours.

21 May 1945            McGuire Field, Min-  
                          doro, Philippines

COMMENTS: Another promotion, this time to First Lieutenant. Must have set a record for the shortest time in grade as a 2nd Lieutenant; about 30 days.