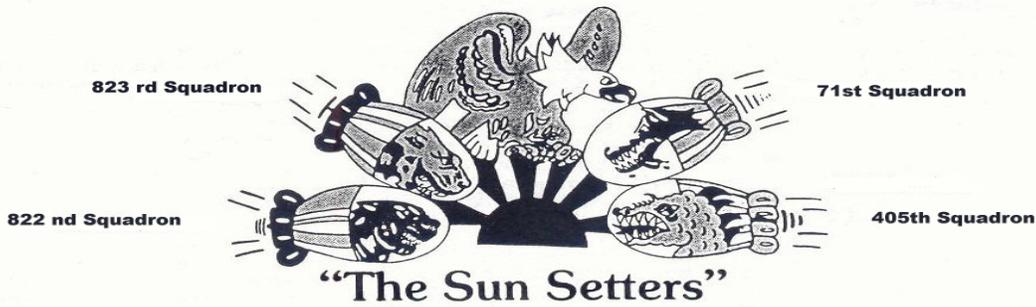


38th Bomb Group



THE 38TH BOMB GROUP ASSOCIATION (WW II) September, 2009



A MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Our **2009 Reunion**: **David Gunn** has organized a super reunion in San Diego, CA, 30 September to 4 October.

Wednesday - registration, plus have an early evening **Welcome Dinner** at 5:30 p.m.

Thursday - we visit the **Aerospace museum** and have **lunch** at world famous **Bali Hai**.

Friday - brief business meeting in morning (next year's reunion site), tell me of other items: jackder@hawaii.rr.com Afternoon: **Air Show**; see page three for more details.

Saturday - **Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery**, memorial for departed comrades. **Cabrillo National Monument**. In the evening at 5:30, our **Farewell Dinner**.

Secretary/Treasurer: Orland Gage continues to keep our finances as solid as possible during these turbulent times. He also does many other important support functions for the Association; such as, maintaining rosters, collecting the dues and, posting the newsletters. **THANK YOU ORLAND !**

Our Newsletter: David Gunn with the help of **Orland Gage** and **Jim Thoren** are doing a great job of helping to perpetuate the significant contribution the 38th BG made in winning WW II. Now they are writing interesting history and stories of World War II. Send your stories to David: pappygnk@juno.com

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38th BG WEBSITE: **Tom Behrens**, with the help of **Orland Gage**, continues to produce one of the best sites on the web. It recently received a "B" rating with SEOENG.com. We know people are reading the website, because I average receiving two e-mails or phone calls a week, usually asking about a family member who was in the 38th BG during WW II. Check it out: www.sunsetters38bg.com You'll like it.

Project Legacy 38th BG is our effort to help perpetuate the history of the 38th BG's contribution to winning WW II. We are hoping to obtain video tape or DVD stories, as told by our Association members and place them on our web site. Anyone, who has tape or DVD of a 38th BG story, please send them to **Tom Behrens** or bring them to the reunion. Tom Behrens' address is 11206 Mist Moor Ct., Riverview, FL. 33569.

38th BG Sun Setters Book status: Larry Hickey recently underwent major surgery for a recurring facial cancer. The latest report is that he is recovering well and will have chemo and radiology treatments. The book is expected to go to the publisher in October, which means that we will not see it this year.

Address Project: see page 2, **WE NEED YOUR HELP**, for important information.

In closing, let us all remember to say a prayer for our troops who are currently in harms way fighting for this great country of ours. May they return home safely.

See you in San Diego, CA. 30 September 2009.

Jack DeTour

**Mark your
 Calendar - - -**

**REUNION
 2009
 SAN DIEGO
 September 30
 to
 October 3**

IN EVER HONORED MEMORY		TOTAL TO DATE	
Our President has furnished the following list of named member comrades who have passed on to their final Post as reported to him since our previous listing. Their names have been added to the list of our "Ever Honored Comrades".		Headquarters	18
Richard C Fields	71st Sqdrn.	69 th Squadron	2
Joseph M. Daugherty	405th Sqdrn.	70 th Squadron	59
Conrad B. Mattox	405th Sqdrn.	71 st Squadron	157
		89 th Squadron	1
		405 th Squadron	176
		822 nd Squadron	96
		823 rd Squadron	97
		Unit unknown	2
		Honorary	1

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We solicit your comments or notes of errors and the submittal of your stories or items of interest. We reserve the right to reject items and the right to edit items for space and suitability.

We also reserve the right to alter names or other details that might cause embarrassment to individuals or family members.

Our Man In Korea the Editor

In our last issue, we told you about Terry Popravak, U. S. Air Force, stationed in Seoul, Korea. Terry has been reading our newsletters and is interested in having contact with men from our Group, especially S2 types. Give Terry a hello message at:
terrylin105@yahoo.com

Terry recently sent an e-mail with a link to a web site with Japanese records of WW II airmen lost over Japan: http://www.powresearch.jp/en/pdf_e/pilot/seibu.pdf

He had found the record of the loss of Col. Hawes' plane and of finding the remains of the men in the waters of that area following the crash.

Terry sent reports of current Air Force operations, particularly in the Afghanistan and Iraq area - ground support, personnel movements, supply drops, supplies landed, air tanker fuel transfers. Of special interest to me was a report of rescue of personnel. I will forever remember the Catalina that landed on the water near Tarakan to pick me and eleven other guys up on 1 January, 1945.

Here is Terry's report of a rescue in Afghanistan in mid July.

On July 15, Air Force HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopters and "Guardian Angel" teams transported eight patients to coalition field hospitals from locations in Afghanistan. Para-rescue team members aboard located, rescued and began treatment to stabilize patients in the battlefield. The HH-60G transported these patients to field hospitals in less time than it takes for a civilian patient to reach emergency care by ambulance in most major cities.

Gee, it was eight hours before we reached a hospital.

If you are interested in reading more of Terry's reports, send me an e-mail and I will forward the reports when they arrive. Just e-mail me at:

From the Editor -

David Gunn

As we promised in our May issue, this issue contains the story behind the story of "The Royce Raid". The story centers on the 27th Bomb Group which had arrived in the Philippines just days before Pearl Harbor and without their planes.

There are a few sites on the Internet where you can find the basic information on "The Royce Mission" but I have found the most detailed information in a history of the 27th Bomb Group, published in 2008. The book written by Adrian Martin and Larry Stephenson, is entitled "Operation Plum".

I found the book quite interesting although I felt it was not as well written as the two books referenced in the May issue. The mission itself is a great story. The fact that the principal planes on the mission were B-25s makes it of special interest to members of the 38th Bomb Group.

Several of the pilots on this mission were members of the 27th Bomb Group who had escaped from the Philippines to Australia shortly after the war started.

By the date of this mission, the men of the 27th Bomb Group had been reunited with and incorporated into the 3rd Bomb Group (3rd Attack Group) from which the 27th had been formed.

Enjoy the read!!

COVER PHOTO

The mailing cover photo is a 38th BG photo of bombing shipping at Cebu. The Royce Mission bombers in the feature story of this issue encountered Japanese shipping at Cebu, also.

WE NEED YOUR HELP - Address Project:

We need your help to find a valid address for members, who paid for our "Sun Setter" book, but are not on our current up-to-date roster. These include members who have passed away, moved, or been dropped from our active roster during the 22 years our book has been in production. FYI: Since our "May Newsletter", we have called the latest phone number we have for all the missing and found 20 valid addresses. See special insert in this issue for our updated list of names and reporting instructions.

"The Sun Setters" is printed and mailed by **Lewiston Printing**, Lewiston, Idaho. Mrs. Snyder and Kathy Morgan go out of their way to help. They fix the Editor's goofs. We couldn't get the job done without them!

DID YOU KNOW THEM ??

We have recently received inquiries regarding loved ones who served with us in the far distant western Pacific. If you knew the following men, you can be a great help if you contact their family members noted in the listing below.

Lt. James A. Shurig, 71st Sqdrn., grandson Joe Farrier: JFARRIER@nch.com
Joe writes that James is in poor health but talks much about his "wonderful flying friends that he met in New Guinea." Joe's other grandfather was a P-40 instructor at Luke Field in 1942-1944. Joe flies a B-25 every night on an online game called **Aces Hi II**. He even bought a stick, throttle quadrant, and rudder peddles for his computer. His instructor grandfather rated the simulation "EXACTLY like I remember it in the cockpit" of his P-40.

Pvt. Jack W. Hornback, 405th Sqdrn., great grand niece Liz Bayardo trying to get information to pass on to her children. Jack was KIA on 7 August 1945. He was a gunner on a shipping search on the Korean coast when his plane struck the water and all perished. Send e-mail to: izybalizy08@att.net

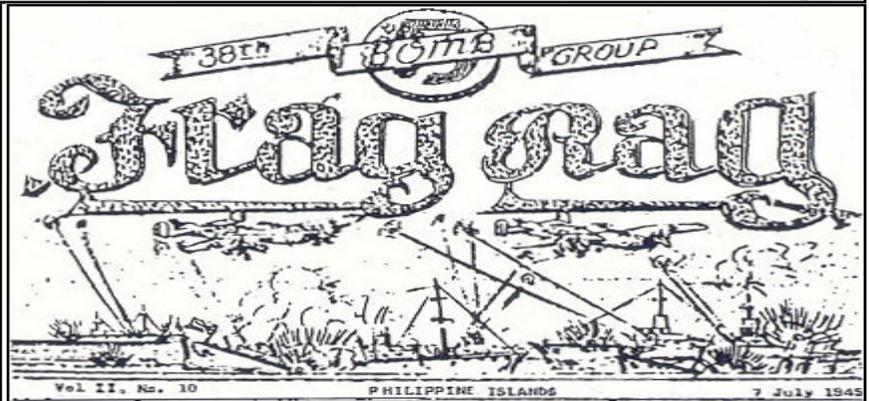
2009 REUNION - SAN DIEGO

YES, IN JUST A FEW DAYS, old Green Dragons, old Wolf Packers, old Terrible Tigers, and Black Panthers will be landing at Lindberg Field and driving to Harbor Island to take up residence at the Hilton. We hope we'll see you in that pack of **SUN SETTERS** coming through the doors.

It's not too late to renew your bond with comrades of yester year. The Hotel will accept your reservation to be with us if you call **before September 4**. We'll make room for you on the bus for our tours and at our dinner table. There will be room in the Hospitality Room for you to settle down in a chair near an old friend to brush those cobwebs away. If you call before 31 August there will be no late registration fee.

If you haven't made your hotel reservations and registered for the Reunion, don't delay. If you can't find the information sheets sent in the May issue, call Orland Gage or David Gunn (numbers on the facing page). We'll hustle the information to you

LATE BREAKING NEWS - For the Air Show we will have Premium Box Seats - not Grandstand - and the souvenir Air Show Program. These are at the center in front of the Grandstand seats, easier to get to and out of. The Marines cut some red tape in their requirements for us so we could have these box seats.



THE 27TH BOMB GROUP FIGHTS TO FIGHT

The 27th Bomb Group was formed in February 1940 at Barksdale Field, Louisiana, when the Army decided to expand the Air Corps to build 24 combat-ready air groups ready and deployable by 1941. Recent graduates from flight schools and tech schools began filling both Groups. Some of the new men were sent off for specialty training and then to return to their Group.

During the following October, both Groups were transferred to the newly expanded civilian airport, now an Army Air Base, at Savannah, Georgia. The 27th was flying single engine Northrop A-17s, twin engine Curtiss A-18s, and twin engine Douglas B-18s. The new Douglas A-20 was being incorporated into both groups at the time. Several of the pilots were being sent to Long Beach, California, to take delivery of the A-20s and ferrying them to their base on the east coast. The planes were being used to practice low level attacks on ships along the eastern seaboard.

Taking note of the German strategic use of dive bombing in its European conquest, the Army Air Corps decided to build such a force. The Navy was using a dive bomber from its carriers, the SBD-2s and -3s. The Army Air Corps began acquiring these planes built by Douglas and designated them as A-24s. As with the A-20s, pilots of the 27th were sent to the Douglas plant to take delivery and to fly them to Savannah.

As time passed in 1941, there was more apprehension about what Japan might do in the Pacific. In August, the 27th was sent to Louisiana for maneuvers with the Army in war games. This gave them an opportunity to test their A-20s and A-24s in mock battles. They returned to Savannah in early October.

In mid-October the Group received secret orders to prepare to depart Savannah. Every piece of equipment belonging to the men and the Group was stamped or tagged "PLUM". Planes were disassembled, crated and shipped by rail. Some equipment and supplies were left at the Savannah base when the trains pulled out on 19 October. It was understood that it would be replaced at its destination - a regrettable error! All their troop trains arrived in San Francisco by 29 October.

OFF TO THE ORIENT

On 1 November, lines of men, each man carefully checked, trekked up the gangplank of the USS President Coolidge. It was a drizzly San Francisco day. With the rumbling of the engines and propellers stirring up the foaming gray waters, the ship inched away from the dock and headed toward the Golden Gate, gathering speed, as well wishers waved good-byes from the dock in the late afternoon dreary gloom.

The trip to Hawaii was a pleasant journey on smooth seas. The food was great. There was much to choose from for entertainment. There were some typical military activities to remind the passengers that this was not a luxury tour - roll calls, physical training, lectures by officers previously stationed in the Philippines, lectures on dive bombing. Then there were the smaller pleasures of poker games, pinochle, and bridge.

Homesickness set in quickly and by the time the ship docked in Hawaii there was a lot of mail to special people back home. The six-hour liberty in Hawaii was a rambunctious affair. None of the ship's bars had

The 27th Bomb Group Fights to Fight

been open on the journey and private supplies had to be replenished.

The following fourteen-day trip to Manila, like the first six, was on calm seas. The ship now traveled in a convoy accompanied by a Cruiser. There was concern that Nazi submarine raiders might attack. The men supposed that their crated planes were aboard a cargo ship in the convoy and that they would be able to get them reassembled quickly upon arrival at their destination.

Flying personnel were anxious about receiving flight pay for November. The news that their planes were not on a ship in the convoy was a shock when they set foot on the Manila dock on 20 November. The transport carrying their A-24s had not even reached Hawaii. No A-20s were on a ship. None of the necessary materials for a real conflict was in great supply in the Philippines. Essential items left in Savannah were not available.

The 27th was scheduled to be sent to the new San Marcelino Air Base on the western coast of Luzon north of Manila. There was as yet no water supply at the new base where the barracks were just being completed. Most of the men were accommodated in tents at Fort McKinley. A few men were sent to the new airfield to assist in preparations to accommodate the 27th along with the Materiel Squadron and Ordnance Company attached to the Group.

To keep the enlisted men busy, some were assigned to digging drainage ditches and building revetments for planes expected at the base. Softball teams were organized in each squadron and competed against other squadrons. A Group All-Star Team was quickly formed to compete against other military organizations and local athletic clubs.

For the flying officers, a loan of two well worn B-18s from the 19th Bomb Group, the only heavy Bomb Group in the Philippines, was arranged. This enabled the air crews to get the four hours of flight time necessary for securing flight pay for November. Their families at home counted on this extra pay.

The days moved on and MacArthur received the warning message from Washington that negotiations with Japan had broken down and anything could happen. On 7 December (6 December in Hawaii) the 27th threw a banquet in honor of General Brereton. The General did little partying, staying in close contact with MacArthur throughout the evening.

PEARL HARBOR BOMBED

As the hours passed and the time for the attack on Pearl Harbor was in the final ticks of the countdown, the partiers headed for their quarters. They did not know that the ship carrying their planes was 5,000 miles, eight sailing days, to the east. At 0225 hours on 8 December in Manila Japanese planes dropped their torpedoes and bombs. The quiet Sunday morning in Hawaii turned into a blazing, booming, smoky cacophony.

At 0430 hours in Manila, Major John Davies was notified that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. "Big John" became the Commanding Officer of the 27th Bomb Group that day - Pearl Harbor Day. Within the next few hours there were other reports of invasion landings, some in the Philippines. Confusion soon took over in the minds of the men of the 27th BG. As one man stated, "No body knows what to do. The only thing we knew how to fight with was planes, and we didn't have any."

The men went about their routine duties, numbed by the confusion of the continuously changing reports. Many wondered about brothers, friends, and sometimes, fathers in military service around the globe. One Captain started giving his men small arms drill. Very shortly 450 rifles were sent to the 27th BG Headquarters. No such equipment was listed on their Table of Basic Allowances.

Six pilots from the 27th volunteered for a B-18 mission. They flew three of the decrepit B-18s from Nielsen Field to Nichols Field to be loaded with bombs. While there, air raid sirens began screaming and the pilots of two planes managed to get into the air. The third plane did not get airborne due to injuries to the pilot. The two airborne planes flew around for more than two hours. Because they could not get clearance to land at Nichols Field, they flew south to a field from which a Filipino Fighter outfit, equipped with old P-26s, operated.

After hearing of the destruction at Clark and Iba fields, it was assumed that Fort McKinley would be next. The 27th BG enlisted men started digging emplacements for installing machine guns and digging fox holes while watching the sky as air raid sirens blasted several false warnings.

On 13 December, a large group of volunteers from the 48th Materiel Squadron attached to the 27th BG were sent on a secret mission 150 miles south of Manila. The ship they were on was loaded with a large quantity of aviation fuel. The fuel and the men were to be stationed at an airfield on Mindoro Island to service planes moving between Manila and the recently opened field at Del Monte on Mindanao to the far south of the Philippines.

Several Officers from all units in the Group were assigned to Far Eastern Air Force Headquarters in various capacities. Men were sent to Nichols field to man machine gun posts and were immediately involved in combat situations with Jap planes in their sights. On 14 December, FEAF Headquarters moved to Fort McKinley, leaving a 27th BG First Lieutenant in charge at Nichols Field. It was difficult to camouflage the planes left at Nichols because there was no cover and little material in the area to confiscate for cover.

23 PILOTS ESCAPE

On 17 December, word was received that the ship carrying their crated planes was in a convoy redirected to Australia. Hush-hush orders were dispatched to 23 pilots and two enlisted men to appear at Major Davies' quarters at 1400 hours bringing a parachute and a change of clothing. At the appointed time they were advised that they were to board a plane after dark at Nichols Field. Secrecy was of first importance.

The group, including Major Davies, assembled in a house at Nichols after dark. The house had suffered major damage from Jap bombings. With candle light, the assembled group bent over maps spread on the floor. Two B-18s and a C-39 were to fly the group to Darwin, Australia. The 2,500 foot pocked Nichols runway was totally blacked out.

The planes were pulled to one end of the runway and parked headed down the runway. After all were aboard, a flashlight at the other end of the runway blinked as the engines were started and checked. The overloaded planes trundled down the runway, one after the other, and managed to get airborne as they crossed the end of the field. There were several key personnel from other organizations also on board.

Before reaching Del Monte Field on Mindanao, they ran into a tropical storm that tossed the battle-weary planes

(Continued page 5)

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around a bit. They landed in the dim light of early morning, 19 December. Having had little sleep in the last 24 hours, most of the men spent the day sleeping in whatever shady spot they chose. The planes took to the air well before sunrise the following morning, headed for a fuel stop at a Dutch air base on Tarakan Island off the east coast of Borneo.

During the morning the C-39 crew became jittery as they found themselves flying high above a Japanese carrier among the smaller islands below. Finally the carrier was left behind without having launched fighters to challenge the lumbering plane. As they approached Tarakan they encountered severe weather and could not locate the island in the storm. It was decided to try to reach Balikpapan. After nursing their engines on a lean fuel mixture and working their way around rough jungle mountains and valleys, they landed at Balikpapan with only a few gallons of gas slopping in the tanks. The B-18s had managed to make a landing in the fowl weather at Tarakan before pushing on to Balikpapan.

The following morning, 21 December, the tired and tattered group took off for Macassar on Celebes Island. Upon landing, they observed that the local military had set up several machine gun positions and had strung barbed wire around defensive positions near potential invasion landing spots. After refueling, they pushed on to Koepang on Timor Island. By the time the B-18s landed at Darwin, the C-39 had fallen a day behind them.

Brereton had sent a secret message which Davies received after landing at Darwin on 21 December. The message ordered Davies to send the three planes back to Manila as soon as possible loaded with .50 caliber ammo. Davies responded to Brereton that the planes would leave on 23 December and that another B-18 and pilot were available for the mission which could deliver a load of ammo and then return to Australia with more pilots. But the situation on Luzon deteriorated so rapidly that the mission had to be cancelled. A load of pilots standing by at Manila was left without transportation.

A dirty mixture of Aussie and American uniforms was offered them in Darwin. A four engine amphibian flying boat had been taken over by the RAAF. It was made available to fly the 27th BG men and three fighter pilots from the 24th Pursuit Group on Luzon to Brisbane where they were told the A-24s and P-40s had been unloaded.

Because of the urgency to get the men to Brisbane, most of the seats had been removed from the plane to reduce weight. The men were forced to sit on the floor. Little food was found at the refueling stops during the first day. Arriving in Townsville late at night, they were driven to a hotel for showers and good beds. Local people made sandwiches for them because the eating places had already closed for the night.

The following day the tired and bedraggled men landed in Brisbane. They were hustled to Brisbane's finest hotel on Christmas Eve. They piled up their gas masks, helmets, parachutes and pistols and relaxed under hot showers. They relished the steaks and drinks provided.

CHRISTMAS AND STILL NO PLANES

On Christmas Day they found their planes still aboard ship in crates and learned that on Christmas in Australia, no one worked, even if there was a war. The crates were eventually taken to Amberley and Archerfield. Assembly lines were set up and two 12-hour shifts were organized

with men from other American units in the area to work around the clock to get the planes assembled.

There task was complicated by the fact that the shipment was a hodge podge of different configurations of A-24s. Some were new from the factory; some had been pulled from other Army organizations; some were Navy SBD-3As while others were SBD-2s. Some had self-sealing fuel tanks. Some had armor plating. Some still had Louisiana mud on the wheels, a left-over from the Summer war games. Instead of 77 planes needed for the Group, there were only 52.

As work began, it was discovered that many parts were missing. Local machine shops were pressed into service to make parts. Work-arounds for some missing items had to be designed. Truck tires were used when missing or damaged tires had to be replaced. The P-40 pilots striving to get their planes from the same shipment into operation, had similar problems. Very little Prestone coolant had arrived in the shipment. It was weeks before enough coolant would arrive. Major Davies reported that "The persons in America responsible for sending dive bombers over without gun mounts, trigger motors, sights, . . . in my opinion are subject to trial for criminal negligence."

In spite of the many problems and frustration, the first plane off the "production line" took to the air on 29 December. The convoy had brought, in addition to the A-24s and P-40s, two regiments of artillery, the 7th Bombardment Group, a number of unassigned pilots, and large amounts of ammo. A training program was set up to give instruction to pilots of the 7th Bomb Group. An intensive ground school preceded the flight instruction. The newly arrived pilots, most without combat type flight training, were soon turned into combat pilots. New "provisional squadrons" were formed as planes became available from the assembly line. The 27th Bomb Group was reborn.

As the Japanese steam roller continued moving forward, the British in Malaya and Singapore were quickly crushed. A new Allied defensive line was set up in the Dutch controlled Islands of Sumatra and Java and adjacent smaller islands.

The Australians were deeply concerned about a possible assault on their homeland. Most of their regular military had been sent to the Middle East to stem the German assault on North Africa and in the southeastern European approach to Turkey. An Australian Division had also been among the British Commonwealth defenders of Singapore. Essentially, only their Home Guard was left to defend the home ground. They welcomed whatever form of military assistance reached them from the USA.

While the 27th BG was about to be reborn in Australia, the 27th BG members still on Luzon were being turned into infantry and airbase engineers. Mechanics were helping to support the P-40s still flying. Some of the West Point graduate pilots became leaders of detachments set up to establish new airfields in preparation for the return of the pilots with their A-24s from Australia. Two fields were south of Manila. The efforts were terminated abruptly on 24 December with orders to bring "what they could pack on their backs" in a retreat to Bataan peninsula.

Some of the men found a way to cross Manila Bay but major portions of three squadrons were still organized and traveling in commandeered trucks. Their officers, ignoring their orders, had loaded every piece of equipment

(continued On page 6)

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and containers of food possible. At the bay front, there was total confusion and they headed their trucks north to reach Bataan by road.

Once on Bataan they headed to the southern end and began to search for other 27th BG units. By the end of Christmas Day the 16th Squadron cooks had managed to make coffee which other units enjoyed as they joined up. On the 26th, the cooks managed to actually serve a breakfast. The 16th was assigned to Bataan Field on the southern end of the peninsula to maintain the field, service P-40s flying in, and to build revetments with the equipment they had brought with them.

On 2 January, MacArthur ordered the air group personnel to start infantry training. The men were given rifle practice firing old Enfield rifles into Manila Bay. The 27th Bomb Group men and their attached 48th Materiel Squadron became the 2nd Battalion, 2nd Provisional Air Corps Regiment. They were assigned a position on the defensive lines part way up the eastern side of the peninsula.

Eventually, they endured the fate of all those who were forced to surrender when Bataan was given over to the Japanese conquerors. They suffered the same indignities, cruelty and barbarous treatment as the others who were marched off the peninsula in the infamous Death March.

On 25 January, before the end of the Bataan campaign, four pilots from 27th Group leadership were ordered to report to the dock at Mariveles at the southern tip of the peninsula. The next evening they were taken by boat to Corregidor. Finally, in the early evening darkness of 28 January, a submarine surfaced at the nearby dock. A large quantity of ammunition was unloaded. The sub slipped into the sanctuary of deep ocean water before daylight. On 30 January the sub once again slowly broke surface in the near darkness of late evening. Sliding in near silence through the oily waters, it returned to the dock and the four 27th BG pilots clamored aboard, joining 27 other men, Army and Navy pilots and three non flying personnel.

In the very early hours of 31 January the sub slipped away in the darkness and headed south. The pilots had nothing but the cloths they wore but the Navy crew shared clothes from their sea bags. The food was unbelievable after enduring half and even shorter rations on Bataan. They were told they "were worth their weight in gold" because they had been given priority over the gold and silver bullion of the Philippine National Treasury which had to be taken out before the Japs could capture it.

The sub traveled on the surface at night but submerged during daylight. The air was so thick in the crowded sub during the day that a cigarette would stay lit only if it was continually drawn on. Unknown to those onboard until just before docking, their destination was Surabaya, Java.

FLYING COMBAT AT LAST

With a degree of puzzlement, the four 27th BG pilots wondered why they were in Java and where their buddies were who had left the Philippines earlier. They were assigned to airbase construction supervision. On 12 February, 11 A-24s landed at the field. The reunion surprised both groups of men. The three other provisional squadrons of the 27th were scheduled to join the 91st Squadron soon.

Unfortunately before they could leave Australia for Java just four days later, the Japanese had landed at the only intermediary fueling base on Timor Island. The 27th BG now had three Squadrons defending the Darwin area and one on Java.

After a few missions on Java, only two A-24s were still in flying condition. Some of the men were evacuated to Australia on a C-52 which they had managed to repair to make flyable. They brought with them the pregnant wife of the Dutch Officer in charge of the field, and her friend, a mother with a baby. Other 27th BG members managed to hitch rides back to Australia.

The A-24s in the Darwin area were not very effective against the Japanese fighters and bombers that soon began bombing and strafing the Darwin/Broome area. The slow planes did manage to hit a few ships at sea but were soon decimated. During this time, the few A-24s the 3rd Bomb Group had brought to Australia in February were assigned to the 27th. This left the 3rd Bomb Group without any planes because the A-20s that some squadrons were to fly had been assigned to other war duties.

In March all remaining A-24s were sent back to Charters Towers. Other 27th Group personnel scattered in Australia were also sent to Charters Towers including Pappy Gunn. Pappy had been assigned to the group at the time they were assembling the A-24s in Brisbane in January. By now, there were over 70 people assigned to the provisional squadrons of the 27th. This included the casuals pressed into service at Brisbane in January and trained by the original handful of 27th BG pilots sent to Australia from the Philippines in late December. The 27th had only pilots and gunners on its roster.

In late March, these men were incorporated into the recently arrived 3rd Bomb Group which was under the leadership of a Lieutenant. Since the 27th personnel were all experienced combat personnel, they became the leaders of the 3rd BG. The 27th, having been spawned from the 3rd in 1940 was now back as a part of the 3rd. Col. Davies became the C. O. of the outfit he had served with in the mid 30s. The few remaining war weary A-24s were assigned to the 8th Squadron which had flown A-24s back at Savannah.

In late March, the A-24s were sent to Port Moresby. On 1 April, five planes flew over the New Guinea mountain hump with six P-40s flying cover to bomb Salamaua, the first 3rd Bomb Group combat mission.

THE MYSTERY OF THE B-25s

Pappy Gunn had discovered that there were a number of B-25s not being used at Brisbane. He told "Big Jim" the 3rd Bomb Group should get those planes.

The planes had been bought under contract by the Dutch and delivered to Australia in crates. They had been reassembled and were waiting on the parking apron. The swift advance of the Japanese left no organized Dutch Air Force at the moment, so there were no air crews to fly them.

There are differing versions of the story of how the 3rd Bomb Group acquired the planes, each an intriguing tale in its own right. But the Dutch had no crews and the 3rd Bomb Group needed planes.

Military leaders on New Guinea were begging for any kind of help in holding back the Japanese. Air support was badly needed. Weapons, especially planes, were in short supply. Having flown A-20s and their own planes not being anywhere in site, the Group could make use of the B-25s and provide some of the desperately needed air support on New Guinea.

So, the planes were stolen by (?), assigned to (?), or

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loaned to (?), the 3rd Bomb Group. Soon after midnight on 3 April, 19 B-25s were parked in revetments at Charters Towers ready for combat by the 3rd Bomb Group. A trip was made to Archerfield to get the Norden bomb sights that had been in the planes originally.

On 5 April, "Big Jim" and his B-25s flew to Port Moresby. The following day, six of the Mitchells took off for an assigned target, Gasmata, occupied by the Japs in February. The planes could not carry a full load of bombs because they had to carry additional fuel for this long mission. The Japs were surprised by the attackers and the destruction of 30 bombers on the field was claimed. There had been no interception. Some have said this was the first B-25 combat mission to be flown anywhere.

The planes and crews returned to Charters Towers the next day. They found a lot of excitement at their base. A special secret mission was in the works. On 8 April, several planes were flown to Brisbane for installation of auxiliary fuel tanks in the bomb bay. That evening Davies, Pappy Gunn, and James McAfee left for Melbourne.

General MacArthur arrived in Melbourne in late March. He was anxious that those left in the Philippines should hear some news that would encourage them and assure them they had not been forgotten. The task was finally passed to General Brett who selected General Ralph Royce to organize a mission to attack the Japanese in the Philippines.

THE ROYCE MISSION

In the planning sessions that followed, three of the six remaining battle weary serviceable B-17s in the western Pacific and 10 B-25s were to take on a mission to break the Japanese blockade so that a few waiting merchant ships could reach Corregidor.

Volunteers made up the crews for the mission, considered to be a suicide mission by many. With tanks fitted, the planes were loaded with medical and food supplies. On 11 April, eleven B-25s took off long before daylight for Darwin. Among the pilots were 16 men of the 27th Bomb Group who had escaped from the Philippines. In the darkness, the planes flew singly across the northern Australian frontier. The sun had not yet reached Darwin and the planes circled this northern outpost which had no field lights. As dawn broke, the planes landed. One of the B-25s sustained severe tire damage and was scratched from the mission.

The three B-17s, with General Royce, led the group as it headed over the water for Mindanao, skirting Japanese held islands and avoiding ships. All made the landing at Del Monte. No one at Del Monte had seen a B-25 before the ten landed. Five of the B-25s then flew a short 40-mile flight to an auxiliary field at Valencia which was camouflaged. The remaining B-25s would stay at Del Monte for the night but would fly the next night to Maramag which had a 4,000 foot grass field and revetments. General Royce kept the B-17s at Del Monte.

The planes at Del Monte were led down a road and pushed back under palm trees. One of the already war weary B-17s had managed to reach the field with only three engines operating. It would need repair. The men slept on their bedrolls under the wings of their planes.

Meanwhile at Valencia, the planes were met by natives and immediately towed to scattered sites and covered with pieces of brush by natives. Men worked most of the night removing the B-25 bomb bay tanks and loading bombs.

With little special equipment for the heavy task, the job was done by all hands using regular muscle power. Problems were encountered keeping the pilots working most of the night.

Plans were laid during the evening with available intelligence gathered by the four P-40s and one P-35 still remaining at Del Monte. For the B-17s, a large number of Japanese bombers had been spotted on Luzon at Nichols Field parked wing tip to wing tip. For the B-25s, shipping in Cebu Harbor was to be the target.

On the following day, 12 April, the B-25s headed for Cebu. Finding a Jap transport on the sea below, Davies ordered each plane to drop one bomb on the transport, claimed as their first success for the mission. At Cebu, warehouses and harbor facilities were bombed as well as two ships moored in the harbor. Fires and explosions erupted.

Returning to their dispersal fields, the B-25s were loaded again. Refueling by hand from 55 gallon drums was a major task. Half of the planes were to return to Cebu and the others were to bomb Davao.

A Japanese recco plane spotted the B-17 being repaired at Del Monte while the others were out on their mission. The two B-17s had bombed targets near Manila and one claimed a tanker sunk at Batangas. Shortly after they returned, Japanese bombers arrived.

The Japs had plenty of targets. One B-17 was destroyed. Mechanics set to work to repair the damage to the two remaining B-17s. Early on 13 April, these two planes took off to return to Australia with the crew of the third B-17 and some additional personnel waiting to escape.

The B-25s struck Davao several times that day, as well as returning to Cebu, creating considerable damage. Pappy Gunn came back boasting that he had destroyed a warehouse he had helped to build three years earlier.

Pappy Gunn took his plane to Panay to pick up four men who had been evacuated by small planes from Corregidor. He returned to Del Monte with a United Press correspondent, a Chinese liaison officer, and two Hawaiian born Nisei who had been working with U. S. Army Intelligence in Manila. These two were on top priority for passage to Australia. They had been working under cover in Japanese social clubs and in the Japanese Consulate.

There were thousands of people on and near Del Monte Field wanting to be flown to safety. MacArthur's headquarters would make up the final list. Among the throng of hopefuls were three 27th BG pilots that had spent the last four months as Infantry on Bataan. They had escaped from Bataan in an old single-engine flying boat in a third attempt to take off. To assure their successful escape, their comrades added their names to the flight crew lists of the B-25s.

On the evening of 13 April, orders were given for the bomb bay tanks to be reinstalled. Nine refueled planes were loaded with crews and approximately 30 evacuees and took to the air in the middle of the night. Among the passengers was the Naval officer who had commanded the four PT boats that had evacuated MacArthur and his family from Corregidor.

The bomb bay tank for Pappy Gunn's plane had been destroyed by Japanese raiders. An all-night search turned up a couple of containers that would hold barely enough fuel to get the plane back to Darwin. In early morning

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they flew the plane to the Valencia auxiliary field to be hidden during the day from nosy Japs.

That evening they flew back to Del Monte and worked all night to get the tanks installed. It took two nights of work to overcome the problems. Even then, when they took off for Australia there were still a few small leaks in the damaged tanks.

Pappy reached Darwin, refueled and headed for Cloncurry. After a successful landing on a runway marked only by the headlights of a few local automobiles, they caught a bit of sleep before heading for Charters Towers after daylight on 17 April, rejoining the others.

The B-25s had operated with audacity behind enemy lines for two days. All ten B-25s returned to their base to fight again. It was the first offensive operation in the western Pacific. For those in the Philippines who learned of the operation, it was a token of remembrance and promise that they had not been forgotten. The Australians took hope that this was only the first blow to turn the advancing Imperial Japanese forces back.

The Americans and their Filipino friends were continuing to throw sand into the gears of the Japanese war machine, causing delays in their time table to build the East Asia Co-prosperity Alliance. The delays would give the Americans added time to get the machines of war to the front line. Even then, for many months, the Pacific Theater was supplied with what was left over from the requirements for war in Europe.

For a few days the American news media played the

story creating sparks of hope. But at the end of the week the story of these daring airmen was buried beneath an avalanche of reports of the Doolittle Raiders and their daring strike at the heart of the Japanese Rising Sun.

These small beginnings were followed just three weeks later by the strategic U. S. Naval victory in the Battle of the Coral Sea. This, in turn, was followed hardly a month later by the overwhelming defeat of the Japanese Navy at Midway. The stinging raids of the **Royce Mission** were the beginning of the setting of the Japanese Sun.

Four months after these 10 B-25s served notice, the 38th Bomb Group, "**The Sun Setters**", reached Australia with more B-25s to add to the Yankee fury that would pursue the brazen and brutal foe to its final defeat. They were the first Medium Bombardment Group to dare to fly the wide Pacific from San Francisco to Australia.

Five months after they arrived, **The Sun Setters** were veterans of combat and the Japs had been pushed off the beach at Buna. The tide had indeed turned to flow in favor of the free world.

The **Sun Setters** would not rest until they had taken possession of a base in the Japanese home islands three years after their arrival in Australia. The throaty roar of their engines served notice, along with other tenacious comrades, that the "Spirit of 1776" still lived in the hearts of men.

Some accounts of the Royce Mission report varying numbers of B-25s. The book, "Operation Plum" provides a list of planes by serial numbers and appears to be the most authentic. This number is attested to on other web sites.

"THE SUN SETTERS"

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