38th BOMB GROUP

823rd SQUADRON

71st SQUADRON

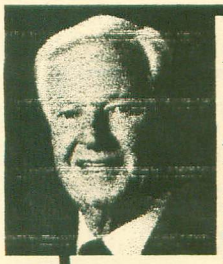
405th SQUADRON

822nd SQUADRON

"The Sun Setters"

THE 38TH BOMB GROUP ASSOCIATION WWII

SEPTEMBER 2000



From the president ...

As I report to you the State of the Reunion, I recall with fond memories the first reunion I attended in Colorado Springs, September of 1984. What a thrill it was to meet with old comrades in arms whom I had not seen in over forty years, and to talk about the experiences we shared as young men, in those far away places. Now here we are on the eve of our eleventh reunion and the thrill of anticipation is building once again.

Reunion 2000 plans are in place and the Imperial Palace Hotel awaits the arrival of The Sun Setters. The Activity Registration Form, the Program of Events form, the Memorabilia Order Form, and a general information sheet are included in this mailing. Request that you return the completed reunion forms along with your checks, WITHOUT DELAY, so that we can firm up the scheduled events and order the reunion memorabilia.

The Association Business Meeting Agenda for Reunion 2000 will be included in the September newsletter, and will cover the following: Proposed changes to the C&BLs, reunion site for 2002, officers for 2001-2002, selection of a 38th Bomb Group Memorabilia repository, official Sun Setters Logo, and other items that you wish to have us mention for consideration.

The Hospitality Room will again be the center of activity where old friends will meet and enjoy the photograph albums and WWII scrap book, as well as find out what went on out there. It's amazing how little we knew about what was going on outside of our squadrons. It's "catch up time!" By the way, name badges with the squadron logos on them and will be required for entry into the Hospitality Room for security of the memorabilia on display. We will have 38th BGp Association members as Greeters to issue the name badges for incoming registrants, even if the AFR reps are not on duty, so that no one will be excluded.

Imperial Palace Hotel, Monday, October 2nd through Thursday, October 6th. Call for reservations early at (800) 800-2981. Look forward to seeing you in Las Vegas for another great reunion of the **"Greatest Generation"!!!!!**

Update for Reunion 2000

The reunion will be held at the Imperial Palace Hotel which is centrally located on the Las Vegas Strip. Its important that you fill out the enclosed forms, the "Reunion Memorabilia Order Form", **(SEND TO TERRY)** and the "Activity Registration Form" **(SEND TO THE ARMED FORCES REUNIONS)** as soon as possible. The addresses are at the top of each form. It is suggested that you make a copy of each form you use as a record of what you have requested. Further, review the schedule of events and save it for reference at the reunion.

Harry E. "Terry" Terrell, President & Reunion Chairman

Note From The S/T

Notify us if you fly south for the winter—or north, east or west! **Zip code** or area code changed? Keep us up-to-date! Read the message above your name on the mailing label. Are your **dues current? ?????????**

Send current information and dues to:

William J. McKinstry, Sec./Treas.
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IMPORTANT NOTICE

To continue the 38th BGp Association we must have people willing to accept the positions of **President, Vice-President and Secretary/Treasure** for the **2001 & 2002 years.** Squadron representatives must query their members for those willing to serve. This requirement is **URGENT !!!!!**

THINK ABOUT IT

Note

Mat Gac, committee member 5th AFMP, and member of the 38th BGp Association would like to make presentation regarding the National Warplane Museum and the current 38th BGp logo. Anyone else that would like an item discussed that concerns all members of our group, should bring it to the attention of Terry Terrill

Bomber Over Wewak

By Vern Haugland

From New Guinea

"There was a lot of man in that B-25". That's the way Joe Carroll put it. Joe was one of five men aboard the medium bomber.

"A lot of Man" From the earnest, embarrassed way he said it, you knew he was trying to express the deep feeling he had for his four companions on the wickedly rough return flight from Wewak. Another person might have called them brave or heroic. Joe, inarticulate with emotion, had suddenly found exactly the right phrase.

The "lot of man" in that B-25, one of a large force of medium bombers hitting Japanese airstrips in the Wewak area that day, was a very young lot indeed.

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The grand pappy of the crew was the pilot, First Lieutenant John Donegan of Phoenix, AZ, twenty-six years old, but so boyish-looking you'd swear he hadn't yet reached twenty-one. This handsome, straight-shouldered, black-haired U of Arizona graduate taught mathematics at a Mesa, AZ high school before the war — and plans to be a teacher again.

Next in age was the navigator, 1st Lt Victor Scammel, Twenty(?) tall, blond, worked for the city of Los Angeles before the war, and had been in house building business at Dallas, TX.

Curly-haired 2nd Lt Charles Peebles of Philadelphia, Mississippi the co-pilot, was a bit the youngest man aboard —and a married man, at that. He went on this particular mission four days before his twenty-first birthday.

The enlisted men of the crew SSgt Donald Bybee, Twenty-three, of Kansas City, MO, Tail gunner, who worked in a Slater MO, gas station in pre-Pearl Harbor days, and SSgt Joseph Carrol, twenty-one, of College Point, Long Island, NY, the radio man and waist gunner.

Experienced flyers and fighters, these men, despite their youth. They had flown many a mission, together and with other crews. Some of them had encountered trouble before, John Donegan, for instance, had taken part in forty-eight combat missions in a year. But he'd never forget an experience at the outset of his flying in this area. It was on August 14, 1942, when his plane became lost during a routine flight in Australia.

"We were just getting ready to bail our," says Donegan, "when Herb Weiner, a 2nd Lt from Lynn, MA, accidentally pulled his rip cord and his parachute billowed open inside the plane.

"We didn't have an extra chute, and we knew there was no use jumping with the open one . It would either get tangled up with the plane or would fall to umbrella out. The only way out was a double jump.

"So he and I fastened ourselves together with our belts. He locked his arms around my waist, and I hooked my legs around his body.

"Then we jumped — but it didn't work. The sudden opening of the parachute broke our belts and tore us apart. After that one jarring jerk, I was floating down alone.

Searchers found Weiner's body later, and he was buried in Australia. Donegan, who has twice been awarded the Air Medal for taking part in dangerous missions, received the Soldier's Medal for heroism for his unavailing attempt to save his friend's life at the risk of his own.

Now, a year later, Lt Donegan was to undergo another unforgettable experience.

Last August the Japanese had built up a great airbase at Wewak, on the north coast of New Guinea, 350 miles northeast of Salamaua and 450 miles from Port Moresby. On four airdromes they had based an air strength comparable with that at mighty Rabaul in New Britain. More than 200 bombers and fighters were poised there, apparently in readiness for a strike at Allied fields.

Wewak had never been hit by American medium bombers or fighters, so the Japs reasoned it was beyond their range.

Early on August 17, in darkness, Flying Fortresses and Liberators bombed the Wewak strips with devastating effect, and a great force of B-25's, escorted by long-range P-38's, attacked later the same day. Jap planes were caught with their motors warming up, for take-off; others were standing idle. A bomb would land on one plane and three would explode, so closely were they parked.

Said Major General Ennis C. Whitehead, deputy 5th AF Commander in New Guinea.

"Well over 50% of the Japanese airplanes in the Wewak area were destroyed and another 35% badly damaged." Radio Tokyo subsequently announced that 176 Japanese planes had been destroyed, but that the Americans had lost more than 200. Actually, the American loss was three planes.

Donegan and his men took part in this raid, but it was on the next day that they met trouble. On that day, August 18, the heavy bombers — B-24's & B-17's — joined the medium bombers in the greatest daylight assault ever made on Wewak. This time the enemy was sufficiently prepared to send up intercepting planes, but fifty more were destroyed on the ground and twenty-eight of the interceptors were shot down.

During the action Donegan's B-25 had so much of its tail shot away that it was hard to believe it had been able to fly at all. All its rudder controls were shot out and there were 250 holes in its fuselage.

When they returned, four of the five men in the plane were covered with blood. Donegan had three shrapnel wounds in the arm. His co-pilot, Peebles, had been hit in the head, arm wrist & chest. Bybee had a slight wound. Most seriously injured was Scammel. Shrapnel had creased his skull and penetrated his body. Carroll, somehow, hadn't been hurt at all.

Two days after the raid, the three officers occupied adjoining beds in a hospital. Donegan and Peebles, their wounds bandaged, were able to sit up or walk around, Scammel was still confined to his bed, but he was able to talk about his experience. Bybee, already released from his ward, and Carroll were visiting their officers.

John Donegan began their story:

"I was flying #4 in a diamond formation. We were still four miles from the target when a Zero made a pass at us from the front. The pilot in another plane and shot at him with our nose guns. Then my plane got hit from the rear.

"The interphone system went out and the gunner couldn't tell me where the Zeros were coming from. I lost most of my elevator control, and when the formation made its run over the target I couldn't turn sharply enough stay with them. It was up to me to find some other formation that I could join for protection.

"While we were flying alone, out of the formation, we had a couple of head-on attacks. I shot a long time at one of the planes."

Peebles broke in: I'm pretty sure Donegan got that one. I saw him fall into the clouds, smoking a lot. I don't know where the Japs got all those planes after the licking they had just taken, but they had 'me. Those were just about the most persistent Zeros I ever saw

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"There were several other attacks, mostly from the rear and overhead - - eight or ten, I'd say," Donegan resumed. "We were flying by ourselves for about five minutes, and it seemed as thought all the Japs wanted to take a crack at us personally."

(Donegan's plane proved to be the downfall of a number of Japanese fighter, the flyers learned later. The Japs were unable to resist the allure of a lone target, and their persistence enabled P-38 pilots waiting above and send them crashing.)

"Before we managed to join another formation, one Jap mad some hits squarely in the navigator's compartment. Scammel got it badly. When I had a chance to turn around, I saw him crumpled up on the floor. Beside me, Peebles, with a lot of shrapnel in his shoulder and a bad hit on the cheek, was slumped over his wheel."

"Finally we got into formation, and I asked the leader to take us to the nearest landing field, because my men needed first aid. We hit a lot of bad weather and went on instruments. After flying blind for fifteen minutes we came out of the clouds —four planes — and found ourselves directly over Wewak."

"Antiaircraft guns had been firing through the clouds at the sound of our engines, and we got a few hits. The other planes turned sharply to avoid the ack-ack. We couldn't and follow them ; and I thought I saw some more Zeros, so I dove for the ground."

"We flew in clouds for ten minutes. Finally we came out of ;the weather at 9,000 ft, south of Wewak, and saw a formation of B-25s two miles ahead. I gave the plane everything she had, which was quite a bit in spite of her damage. The hydraulic system was out and the bomb-bay doors kept coming open. There was no one in front to close them after the navigator was hit."

"I had to keep the plane gunned all the time. At low speeds I would had no control at all. I couldn't get in touch with Carroll and Bybee, with the interphone out."

"When we got to within a mile of those other B-25s, some Zeros mad a pass at them, and then started an overhead attach on us. We dove pretty steep into a layer of clouds at 1,500 ft."

I was afraid I wouldn't be able to get the plane out of the dive when we got the clouds, but somehow I did. Meanwhile, though, the dome of the tail turret had been knocked off and the rudder cables shot up."

Bybee was in the tail turret, and when the dome was shot away from over his head, flying Plexiglas struck him in the face and drew blood. His turret was open to the elements now, and the wind roared in. The sight also had bee shot away. Nevertheless, he stuck to his gun and continued to fire at oncoming Zeros. Donegan knew his ship still had protection from the rear.

Donegan continued:

"I turned off course ninety degrees and flew in the clouds awhile, and when we came up out of them we had definitely lost the Zeros. From then on it was just a matter of trying to get home. We had to go to 16,500 ft to find clear weather. The oxygen system was pretty badly shot up, but fortunately we had enough on our side to keep going.

I kept worrying about the engines. I didn't dare slow them down to normal speed for fear of going into a spin, and I worried about keeping them gunned, especially after that hammering we'd taken. There was so much that could go wrong.

But the Japs hadn't made us lose any gas and they hadn't hit the oil lines. Those engines kept roaring, too, because I just gave them hell. Some day I want one of for a watch fob."

"It's a miracle we got back," added Peebles.

And it was.

The Zeros had battered the plane intermittently for 45 minutes, and then Donegan had to fly the ship for almost three hours to bring them home.

Next to the pilot, the busiest man on that return flight was Carroll.

"When I went forwarded." he said, "I found the navigator, Lt Scammel, almost unconscious on the floor. I bound ;up his wounds with some first aid bandages we had in the plane. I did it awkwardly, wishing heartily that I'd learned something about first aid before this.

"Then I went up front, where Lt Peebles had fallen over the wheel. I helped him back out of the seat and tore off my sweat shirt to make bandages for him and the pilot."

"I put an oxygen mask on Scammel, and then crawled back to see how Bybee was. He said he was all right, but he looked pretty bad, with blood all over his head. I got an oxygen mask out of the rear compartment and took it forward. Lt Donegan told me to give it to Peebles. He needs it most, he said.

"But Peebles was still conscious enough to refuse to take the mask. He insisted that Donegan wear it — after all, it was the pilot who would have to get us back — so finally Donegan put it on."

"Peebles was getting weak from loss of blood, but he kept wanting to help. I'd just get him down on the floor when he'd want to get up at his controls again. And he did get up several times to do his best to help keep the plane flying."

"It was the same way with Lt Scammel. He had lost the most blood and much of the time was completely out. I got some morphine shots from the firs aid kit and gave him an injection — the first I'd ever given any one. And I gave all the wounded men sulfanilamide pills."

"When we got lost in the clouds, I helped Lt Scammel sit up at his maps. He tried to write out instructions, but we couldn't read his feeble scrawl. Then I took the maps to Lt Donegan, but we couldn't figure out from them where we were. Finally Lt Scammel managed t give us a reading that helped us get onto our course again."

"I was pretty proud of Sgt Bybee, too, the way he sat up there in his turret watching for Zeros. Most of the time all could see of him was his feet. But sometimes I'd crawl over and take a look, and he'd be sitting there at his gun, watching out through the open turret and wiping the blood from his face now and then. He never said a word about his own injuries; he just was worried abut the officers."

(Editors note, The above "Bombers over Wewak" was sent to me, It appears to have been published in Liberty Magazine)

To be continued in September News Letter

(Good reading: "Forty of the Fifth" Aerothentic Books, M. Claringbould, Box 5136, Kingston, ACT 2604, Australia e-mail mjc@albury.net.au)