Group

823rd Squadron

71st Squadron

405th Squadron

822nd Squadron

"The Sun Setters"

THE 38TH BOMB GROUP ASSOCIATION (WWII) SEPTEMBER 1993

THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

JAMES B. THOREN

Hopefully one year from now you will be able to join us at Hampton, VA, for the 1994 Reunion. The dates are set — September 21-24. A special mailing of the registration forms will be sent to everyone on the mailing list and a quick response will greatly assist in planning of this reunion. We will make arrangements at the hotel for those who would like to come a couple of days early or stay a couple of extra days to tour some of the historical locations in the area. The program and recreational activity potentials will be covered in more detail as our plans progress.

We have a roster of 904 members, 188 life members (13 additional are deceased, 73 non-dues paying widows), 219 have never paid dues and 424 dues-paying members. We have recently located a few more of our lost comrades. For those of you who have requested information on how to locate former friends and crew members from the military, I suggest you contact Military Information Enterprises, P.O. Box 5243, Burlington, NC, 27216, or call 1-800-999-9068 and request "How to Locate Anyone Who Is or Has Been in the Military" (ISBN 1-8tt639-o1+X) the cost is $15. Our missing buddies locator is limited to our current roster which you all should have from the January mailing.

Our editor, Lew Pavel, is requesting each of you to search your memories for events of interest — your own mission reports, off-duty activities, leaves, recreation — send them in. They don't have to be dramatic to be interesting to those of us who were out there. If your only excuse is your lack of writing experience, just send the facts to Lew (his address listed in "Association Contacts") and he will do the editing. YOU can help keep the newsletter viable and interesting by sharing the things that happened to YOU or which YOU observed — on duty or off!

OBSERVATIONS OF A COMBAT CREWMAN

L. R. "Pop" Kienle, Jr., 823rd

— from forming a new crew, acquiring a new B-25 at Hunter Field, Savannah, GA, leap-frogging across the U.S.A. and the Pacific Ocean to Brisbane, Australia.

The trip west seemed routine until Long Beach cleared our ship for a straight-in approach. At touchdown, the aircraft rolled the full 10,000 feet of the strip. OOPS!!! — the co-pilot forgot to drop the flaps.

After indoctrination on over-water flying at Sacramento's McClellan Field, we moved on to Hamilton Field (near the Golden Gate Bridge) for a fully-loaded 9 PM takeoff, west to a Hickam Field touchdown on Oahu. Neither pilot moved from his seat for the full 12'30" and we landed with enough 130 octane left for 45 more minutes of wild blue yonder.

On July 3 (day #2), an early A.M. takeoff at Hickam for Christmas Island, 1,000 miles SW, with excellent weather, broken clouds at 2,000 feet, and south-southwesterly winds. The Navigator (borrowed from Air Transport Command) selected a dead-reckoning heading, shot a few sun lines, crawled up on the chart table and had a short nap. Pilots followed the time and distance heading but NO ISLAND! Pilots began a square search, after 1 1/2 hours located Christmas, landed, and chewed out the navigator. Said Navigator was exceedingly alert during the remaining daytime island hops to Samoa, Tutuila, New Caledonia and Brisbane.

Bone chilling cold at Brisbane's Eagle Farm Field! The crew was elated to have completed the Pacific journey with only one near miss, bedded down in cold, unheated barracks. The man in the last bunk was required to turn off the single overhead bulb. "Mr. Last" looked up at the offending bulb, pulled out his "45", shot out the light and put a sizable hole in the ceiling. This brought out both U.S. and Aussie MPs. No one let out a peep; however, the next night our slow moving marksman used the light switch and THEN crawled into the sack.

Aircraft and crew were ordered north to Townsville and then inland 60 miles to Charters Towers strip. The 38th Group formed up two

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"LIFE ON THE LINE"

Al Saccomando, 822nd

As a crew chief in the 38th Bomb Group, I recognize air crews were at more risk than we grease monkeys on the ground, but I would like to point out that when we moved up to New Guinea in late 1942 because of the shortage of aircraft (in the 71st we were down to seven planes) we worked day and night to keep them in the air. In addition, we had to pull a 6-hour guard shift at least twice a week and anyone who was in Guinea knows that at night, the mosquitoes brought out their big bombers. We put gasoline in little cans, spread them around and stood in the middle figuring it was better being a target for any enemy who had managed to reach Moresby down the famed Kokoda Trail than to be picked up and carried away by the giant mosquitoes. Then came the red alert, the frantic rush to douse all the cans and hit the slit trenches.

I vividly recall the day on Moratai sitting under the wing — the only shade around — bringing my forms up to date (engine hours, aircraft hour, landings on tires, and a record of all work performed on that particular aircraft. when the radio man assigned to that plane informed me his responsibility was to clean the guns in the waist windows. He climbed into the plane the next thing I knew, a burst of 50 caliber shells churned up the ground six inches away from me —and I set a world record for the most altitude reached from a sitting position. He came out of the plane with an apology — "Sorry. I didn't know the gun was charged." As politely as I could, I informed him the first thing to do when you want to handle the gun was to raise the cover. I then suggested if he wanted to fly the rest of his missions so he could go home, he had better leave right then — and I made a mental note the next time he came to clean the guns, I would definitely be some place else.

Then in the Philippines, we were waiting for the planes coming back from a mission While walking along the taxi strip back to my plane and passing in front of another aircraft, the pilot cut loose a burst from the 8-gun nose and once again I heard the whistling of 50 caliber slugs and my medium height paid off — the shells

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YOUR 1993-94 ASSOCIATION CONTACTS

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ADDITIONAL LIFE MEMBERS

The Association has gained eleven new Life Members since the listing in the May 1993 Sun Setters newsletter:

Clifford W. Gyhsalys ..... (71st)
Leland B. Frazee ..... (405th)
Paul E. Gore ..... (405th)
Meady M. Huffmaster ..... (405th)
Fred K. Surabian ..... (405th)
Robert T. Williams ..... (405th)
William O. Wilson ..... (405th)
William H. Alberts ..... (822nd)
Glenn Lawrence ..... (822nd)
Romonis I. Markwart ..... (822nd)
Gayland W. Dill ..... (823rd)

Here is the breakdown by squadron of the total number of members who have contributed $100 to the

LIFE MEMBERSHIP FUND

HQ	71st	405th	822nd	823rd	ASC
7	43	75	36	39	2
		Deceased			
1	4	5	2	1	—

Total - 202

"IN EVER-HONORED MEMORY"

Since the publication of the May 1993 newsletter we have been informed of four veterans of the 38th Bomb Group that have gone to their final resting place.

George Keegan ..... (405th)
Albert L. Behrens ..... (822nd)
Ben Brockwell ..... (822nd)
Dean Gimple ..... (822nd)

REMNANTS OF REUNION '92

Ish Johnson

The '92 Reunion Committee met at a luncheon in February. The financials were received and the committee voted unanimously to use residual funds to purchase the 38th BG plaque for the 5th Air Force Memorial Wall at the Air Force Academy.

Charles S. McLean won a $50 prize in the drawing for those members who turned in their Reunion questionnaire.

$$ TREASURY NOTES $$

There are some members that haven't got the word dues for the two years have been increased from $20 to $30 despite all our efforts to make them aware — SO if you look carefully at your newsletter label, if you just paid $20, you will see "'94 DUES SHORT BY $10" above your name.

The only way we know our members are alive and kicking is if they attend our Reunions or send in their dues. We have 904 names on our roster, but have never heard from 218 in the last five years. Of the 686 names left on the roster, 251 are Life Members or Widows. Only 253 of the remaining 435 members are current with 1993 dues. We try to alert you by printing a notice of your dues status on your mailing label. With present costs of preparing and mailing rosters and "The Sun Setter", we must soon drop those not supporting the Association. Please let us know if a shortage of funds is a problem. You are a part of us and we want you to remain as part of the Group.

In another effort to cut expenses we would like to hear from the widows of all our departed members. A post card to Bill McKinstry (address in list of contacts) will do. Let him know if you want to keep receiving the mailings from the 38th BG. If we don't hear from you, we will assume you are no longer interested.

REUNION '94

Grant Nelson, Vice President

I spent several days at the Holiday Convention Center, our 1994 hospitality site. Situated on 13 acres, most of it paved, there is plenty of parking including RVs (no hookups) with easy access to two major highways. The staff is most efficient and the facility specializes in meetings our size. We will be the only convention in the hotel and will have their undivided attention.

Everything that happened in the early history of our country centered around this area in Virginia. There are so many interesting and historical sites, you can only select a few of the best. You can go from Jamestown to aircraft carriers in an hour's drive with Revolutionary and Civil War sites in between.

The weather should be ideal with cool nights, warm days and leaves starting to turn and we are tentatively planning a barbecue around the pool. Plan NOW and come prepared for a great time. President Jim has excellent excursions planned and great souvenirs for our 51st year.

"LIFE ON THE LINE" CONTINUED

passed by without using my head interrupting their progress. I looked up at the pilot who held his hands out and shrugged his shoulders as if to say "what can I say?" I gave him one of those arm waves that says "forget it — I'm getting used to it." Needless to say, I survived malaria, the lousy chow, and most important, the guys the wearing the same uniform I was. Life on the line was not without some risks, which reduced by keeping clear of guns being cleaned and airplanes with members of the crew in them.

50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION BATTLE OF CORAL SEA

Mat Gac, 38th BG

At the 1990 5th A.F. Memorial Foundation Reunion in Las Vegas, Australian Graham Jenkinson reported his country would commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Coral Sea Battle and extended an invitation to all 5th Air Force members to attend. He stated his country was most grateful for help the U.S. had given in its defense, particularly in the battle of the Coral Sea which prevented the Japanese attempt to seize Port Moresby and perhaps invade Australia. The 5th AF operating out of forward bases at Charters Towers and Garbutt Field assisted in checking that advance under most difficult conditions.

Mrs. Gac and I accepted that invitation, departing Rochester, NY, at 8:40 a.m., May 4, 1991, and arriving at Townsville at 5:45 p.m., May 6.

The next day we traveled to Charters Towers by bus, stopping en route at a large WWII strip, now a desolate grazing area for some skinny cattle. At Charters Towers, things livened up with flowering bushes, green trees and other tropical finery. Homes were sturdy and comfortable, either brick or stucco with tile roofs. Surprised that some of the landmark buildings I had photographed 50 years ago were still there. Gold mining is still a major industry on a huge scale. In 1942 population was about 3,000 — now over 30,000. The lamb and mutton days are gone — beef heads the menu with chicken and fish. Cost of everything is high, equal to those in our own expensive hotels.

Lt. Gen. Ruegg, who had escaped with Pappy Gunn's group from the Philippines to Darwin and was assigned to the 3rd B.G., Breddon Field, March '42, found Mrs. Williams, who used to bake cakes for them — a joyful reunion. We stopped at the wartime Breddon Field, now paved and used for training lessons. The original camp area was overgrown and wild looking, and along the way the Anthill Plains stretched five miles or more.

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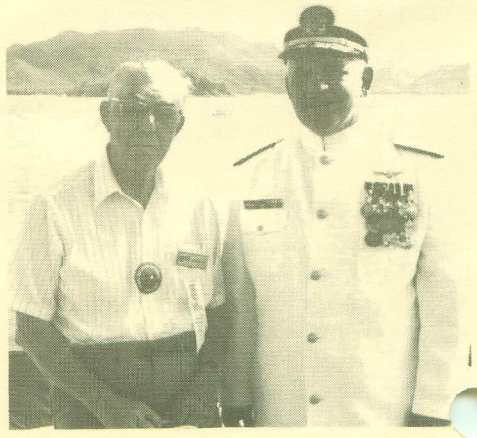

Mat Gac and Vice admiral Stanley Arthur, commander of the 7th Fleet, as they sail aboard the blue Ridge to the Coral Sea wreath laying cermony.

INSURANCE DIVIDEND RUMOR

Herb Miller, 38th BG Financial Advisor, provided Secretary Bill McKinstry with information regarding GI insurance dividends. Bill checked with the Veterans Administration and they advised him that the information definitely does not apply to any WWII veterans. It is a rumor that crops up every few years and causes the VA terrible headaches trying to kill it.

Please be advised that if you hear any story about GI insurance dividends, disregard it and do not pass it along. If any such dividends should ever be authorized, they will be well publicized in the newspapers, military journals, etc. and those eligible, notified.

★ NOTES ★

We signed a contract with "Armed Forces Reunion, Inc." who will be handling most all of the '94 reunion functions. They happened to be located in the Hampton, VA area but handle reunions in any of the 50 states.

★ REUNIONS ★

The 38th has held eight reunions and for those of you who were not able to attend, these are the stalwart comrades that took on those chores:

PLACE	CHAIRMAN
1978 Atlanta	Doug Hagie
1980 New Orleans	?? ...
1982 Albuquerque	John Irick
1984 Colorado Springs	John Mutu
1986 Anaheim	Terry Terrell
1988 Nashville	Suedekum/Terrell
1990 Dayton	Bob Lamb/Johnson
1992 San Antonio	Ish Johnson/Johnson

It is very important that we recognize them and extend our thanks to them. YOU plan to assist in future reunions to help hold us together.

COMBAT CREWMAN CONTINUED

new squadrons — 822 and 823. In the process of training briefings, the instructors always emphasized "Don't buzz the dry river beds" but never gave the reason WHY. A few days later, a dust-covered fighter pilot, carrying his chute, showed up in Operations, his initial statement, "I buzzed the river bed!" Seems in the rural outback the Aussies, unable to afford bridges, used cable lifts to cross rivers in wet season. Cable are hard to see at 200+ MPH — "nuff sed". Flew numberless hours of low level formation 75mm gunnery and made endless landings. At conclusion of training, the C.O. threw a giant party with tubs of fish, chips and hundreds of bottles of Tooth's bitter pale Ale, a real send-off to 17-Mile Strip at Port Moresby and combat humongous head aches and all. ("Pop", 823rd charter member and owner of 71 combat missions, assured the Editor his next effort will be entitled "Reflections from Australia".

AIR COMBAT AT 20 FEET

By Garrett Middlebrook
(Reviewed by Lee Grover, 405th)

I frequently flew in formation with Garrett Middlebrook. He was a good flight leader and I respected his ability and judgment. We went overseas at the same time and returned at the same time — I lived through and saw most of the events about which he wrote.

The book brings out the fact that a "Strafer Pilot" developed special skills some older "Bomber Pilots" failed to master. He was quick to note the advantage of attacking in pairs rather than as a 4-ship formation since nearly all the aircraft lost were flying in the #4 position except for the two lead aircraft flown by Bob Henry and Ralph Cheli. As I recall, all 3 aircraft lost on 9/2/43 were flying the #4 position.

Obviously a great deal of time and effort was expended in developing the book and much depends upon the author's personal interpretation of the events. On the 9/2/43 mission he stated he was happy to see 60 P-38's above him. I had never seen so many fighters at one time and had expected a maximum of 16 — it seemed to me to indicate someone expected lots more opposition than we had been briefed to expect — and so it was! With all those P-38s above the clouds and apparently unwilling to enter them, we had the 80 Zeroes under the overcast all to ourselves. The photograph in the book was taken from the tail of my aircraft and appeared in Newsweek 9/27/43. Phillip Kelsal, my co-pilot and bomb releaser, put one bomb at the ship's waterline and sank it while another bomb bounced over the ship. I went between the masts and brought the ship's radio antenna home on my right wing. Two fighters made a rear quarter attack and Charles Barber, my wingman, tent-mate, classmate, and my friend was shot down.

My aircraft and 10 zeroes battled off their front quarter attacks for 10 to 12 minutes. As I caught up with Middlebrook and Latham, we went around a mound that rose above the trees and an in-line "Tony" came around the hill at tree top level. That pilot had a choice of going over our formation which would have certainly meant death from our turrets, or to go through my aircraft. He seemed to understand the situation as did I. I lifted up a few feet and the "Tony" went under me. I looked down and saw a pilot in a leather helmet and wearing goggles who did what anyone else would have done in his place. We both seemed to understand we both would live or we both would die. He chose to live when I gave him a way out of his impossible situation.

I shared Middlebrooks's fear when going to a target but then the adrenalin gave me a sense of power and the battle became a challenge. It seems that this was a common experience for all of us.

Garrett Middlebrook wrote a good book and I congratulate him upon stimulating me to feel emotions I had forgotten.

PACIFIC PROWLER #129710

Ed Gervase

The date, October 5, 1942, and our 3-plane flight was off the north coast of New Guinea between Buna and Salamaua looking for Japanese shipping and barges. Bud Thompson was leading with Harry Tanberg on left wing and Bill Tarver on the right. I was Tarver's navigator. We had jumped over the Owen Stanley Range pass from 17-Mile Strip and were skirting the coastline checking the coves and small creeks emptying into the sea. We were at about 6,000 feet, the weather was good with no upper clouds and about 4/8's alto-stratus below.

I had my head stuck in the bubble behind the co-pilot's seat looking for targets. Bombardier Jim Crag was in the nose and Ralph K. "Robbie" Robinson was co-pilot. Paul Lane, our gunner, was on the alert as usual. Our radio operator was a new man named Jordan.

Through a break in the clouds I saw a flash of sun on metal and in a few seconds counted four Zeroes climbing fast. I called over the intercom: "Four Zeroes fast at three o'clock low, climbing fast." Robbie Robinson looked out his window and as fascinated watching them when suddenly he shouted "Hey, those S-O-Bs are shooting at us.

Somehow we closed ranks and got the hell out of there. Gunner Lane kept the Zeroes away from us all the way to the Owen Stanley Range. We did pick up a few bullet holes near the bomb bay but fortunately no one was injured.

AIR-TO-AIR BOMBING

Dale Howieson

On a flight out of Nadzab on a strike at the Wewak airdrome, we made our run over the target in flights of three and were starting to join up as a group.

Enemy aircraft was sighted at 12 o'clock high. Our gunners were firing at a plane (I believe a "Val") and something fell off as the plane pulled up. I thought our gunners had knocked a wheel loose but as I watched it falling, it suddenly exploded in a large white burst with at least a dozen tentacles formed by particles dropping from the object. It resembled a giant octopus — a really colorful display.

Later during examinations of the planes, it was noted some of them had holes burnt through the wings. Intelligence concluded it a phosphorus or some other flammable metal bomb.

Later I witnessed one more such incident but it was at a greater distance. Apparently it didn't work very well since no casualties were reported and I never saw another one after the second sighting of this air-to-air bombing.

AN UNUSUAL MISSION

Gene Benson

Some of the success our Air Force had in destroying enemy planes on the ground was due to Australian spotters. These brave men lived with the natives in the hills near Japanese airfields. They reported by radio about their observations on the numbers, types and disposition of planes at various fields. Our intelligence was especially interested in knowing when new groups of planes arrived. This information helped our people plan many successful air strikes. Because they were so close to the Japanese air fields, these men had to be constantly on the move to avoid Japanese patrols.

On November 20, 1944, my crew was selected to fly an unusual mission. We were given directions on how to locate one of these spotters in the hills which overlooked air fields at Rabaul, New Britain. Our task was to drop supplies to him so that he could continue to survive and do his work. We took off well before dawn from Dobadura, New Guinea, alone with no air cover. We were to go in as low and slow as possible and drop the supplied in a particular area which was to be marked by the smoke from three fires. To make things more difficult, the fires would be in a valley surrounded by hills to help avoid detection by the Japanese.

Shortly after arriving in the area, we spotted the smoke from the fires. We went in as low and slow as we could. The supplies were dropped from the bomb bay just as in a regular mission, followed by an immediate climb to avoid crashing into the hills utilizing full power and full flaps. Our trip back to base was uneventful.

We later learned that the supplies actually landed on one of the fires but were recovered without damage — but equally important to the crew was the fact we received credit for a combat mission.

PLAN NOW FOR THE 1994 REUNION

BATTLE OF CORAL SEA CONTINUED

The dedication ceremony began at 11:00 a.m. with remarks by Mayor Mooney, blessing and unveiling of the memorial, posting of the colors with the special 5th AF flag, playing and singing both national anthems, acceptance speech by General Adams, Commander of the AAF in the Pacific followed by the Australian Defense Minister and other high officials. The laying of wreaths by Lt. Gen. Hawley, CO of the 5th AF now stationed in Japan, was followed by final prayers and a fly-over by 5th AF F-15s and Aussie planes.

At 3:00 p.m., at the dedication of the Major Bong Bridge in suburban Allendale, General Hawley uncovered the plaque spoke his thanks, then drove over the bridge in a jeep breaking the ceremonial ribbon.

That evening we were invited to the Red, White, Blue gala ball in a beautiful park with tropical surroundings, and over 2,000 attending, and enjoyed ringside tables next to the huge stage. The ball honored the Coral Sea Battle survivors and all veterans, American and Australian, with many high military and civilian officials in attendance. Entertainment featured top Australian performers with WWII songs and skits, and Marine ceremonial squad performing a silent manual of arms.

Saturday, May 9, the 5th AF group of veterans participated in the Coral Sea Battle Parade, climax of the year-long celebration. A large, noisy crowd cheered as the Coral Sea Battle survivors, Australian WWII veterans, followed by active duty U.S. and Australian naval units followed by Australian servicemen and women, and other military units with their equipment marched by. At Anzac Park, we disbanded for rest and refreshment, and then seated in the veterans' section.

The dedication was reverent and moving, with various dignitaries addressing the group. Australian and American national anthems were played and numerous groups laid flowered wreaths by the memorial.

The Coral Sea Battle 50-Year Commemoration extended from May 1 to 12, celebrated in various parts of the country at different times of the month with the climax in Townsville with the dedication of the Memorial and Anzac Park. The battle was fought 300 miles off the coast of the Townsville areas. A couple enemy planes dropped a few bombs the coastal area but did no damage. The people feared the threat of a Japanese invasion and believe that this battle and the subsequent forming of the 5th AF in the area kept the enemy from attempting to invade Australia.

The Memorial consists of two sets of brown marble 15 feet long, 5 feet high, one side showing the course of battle and positions of American, Australian and Japanese ships that took part. On the other side of the knoll, a similarly engraved marble slab shows the American and Australian ships that were damaged or sunk, along with the Japanese losses. In the center of the park a similar marble monument is engraved with a Eulogy to the men who died in that battle.

That evening our group was invited aboard the USS Blue Ridge by Vice Admiral Stanley Arthur for a cocktail party with a select group of military and civilian officials and the crew.

Sunday morning by special invitation of Vice Admiral Arthur, the men of our 598th AF group boarded the USS Blue Ridge for a short cruise on this, one of the three newest ships with the latest high technology in communications; however, no one was allowed to go below and inspect any part of the ship.

About 40 miles out in the Coral Sea, the ceremonies opened with the Posting of Colors and a call to worship. The ship stopped, and Paul J. Keeping, M.P. and Prime Minister of Australia laid the first flowered wreath overboard, followed by numerous other notables and guests. The Bugler blew the Last Post, a moment of silence was observed in honor of the men who lost their lives in the battle, and a 1-gun salute was fired followed by Taps and Reveille, and a flyover by USN and RAN planes followed by the retiring of the colors with all guests invited to join in a buffet-style lunch while the ships returned to Townsville.

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