



# Season's Greetings

## 307th BOMBARDMENT GROUP (HV) ASSOCIATION

**"THE LONG RANGERS"**

### *Newsletter .. 1999-3*

December 20, 1999

#### JUST A NOTE FOR THE HOLIDAYS!

*The gifts we give at Christmas Time  
Add beauty to our lives;  
If we but choose them carefully  
As Christmas Day arrives ...  
The gifts I speak of aren't the kind  
We purchase at the store  
And wrap so very carefully  
With tags marked "from" and "for".*

*The cost of all these special gifts?  
The price may be quite high  
And yet we won't be billed for them  
When Christmas Time goes by...  
For these are gifts we never choose  
From racks, displays, and shelves -  
These things we each must gather up  
From deep within ourselves.*

*Rich gifts of kindness, thoughtfulness,  
Unselfishness and love  
That bring the joy once promised  
By a Star that shone above!*



#### NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT

We discussed a lot of items in the notes in the last newsletter. I am really looking forward to some feedback. So far it has been minimal. Remember, this is your Association and your input and help are needed. Together we make it work, just like we did on Wake Island and Manilla.

We have firmed most of our activities and schedule for the 2000 reunion. Remember it is from Wed. Sept. 27 through Sun. morning Oct. 1. Registration will start Wed. at 12:00 noon until 7:00 p.m. The Board will meet at 1:00 p.m. For one evening event, we will go to the Diamond W Ranch for a chuckwagon supper and cowboy show. Thur. we will have a narrated tour of the interesting places in San Antonio with lunch at a Mexican Market. A trip is planned to go to Lackland AFB to attend a graduation ceremony with a formal parade. We will also see their static display of WWII and later airplanes. Lunch will be at the NCO Club where we will be listening to one of our eminent speakers (more about this later). We will tour the History and Traditions Museum. A narrated barge cruise of the River/Riverwalk area and a first rate Mexican feast at the Casa Rio Restaurant is planned. If Mexican food does not agree with you, we will arrange for alternate selections. If anyone has special dietary needs in general, let us know well in advance of the reunion!

Saturday we will have our usual general business meeting with the membership with free time available for visiting with old friends. In the evening, we have our traditional banquet with a guest speaker. Cena will tell you about the speakers in another section of this newsletter.

Plan ahead now. We hope to see you all in San Antonio.

Due to some of us being a little slow in getting inputs to Cena, this newsletter may not get to you before Christmas. If not, I wish that you have a good one and a happy Y2K as they now say.

As ever,  
John Reeves  
President

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#### NOTES FROM THE SECRETARY

Patrick Scannon, MD, PhD  
Trip Report

Those of you who attended the Hampton, VA reunion will recall Pat Scannon's presentation of an earlier trip to the South Pacific to locate missing WWII aircraft. His latest trip report has been printed in this newsletter. Some of the photos he sent have also been included. I hope you will enjoy reading of his efforts and of the success he has had to date.

At the San Antonio reunion Pat has agreed to present a complete up-date on his efforts as well as his plans for future trips to Palau in his search for missing WWII aircraft.

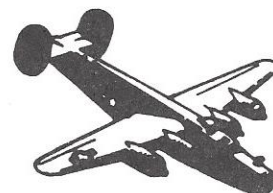
Cliff's letter states, "It is a real privilege for me to speak to such a great group of people. Living in Balikpapan sure gave insight to what you had to contend with every day of your tours of duty in that part of the world. The world owes a lot to you guys."

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Looks like we are going to have a couple of great presentations at the reunion!!!

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*Taps*



For everything there is an appointed season,

And a time for everything under heaven  
A time for sharing, a time for caring;  
A time for loving, and a time for remembering...

#### THE LAST FLIGHT

This time of year is such a sad time to lose a loved one. The following is a list of 307th Members who have taken their last flight. These are old friends and we will miss them.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Sqdn</u>	<u>Date</u>
Austin, Bert C.	370th	12-24-99
Barczuk, Edward	370th	07-06-99
Brenizer, William	372nd	10-09-99
Demer, James G.	424th	07-25-99



15 October 1999

**Report to the 307<sup>th</sup> BG(H) Reunion**

**Summary of Project P-MAN (Palau - Marine, Army, Navy) 8-21 June 1999)**

Reported By: Patrick J. Scannon, MD, PhD

**Summary:**

The purpose of the Project P-MAN was to search for and document crash sites of US airplanes shot down by Japanese military forces over Palau during WWII. The team spent a substantial portion of the expedition searching for a 307<sup>th</sup> BG(H) B-24 ('453) but was unable to locate any debris from this crash. The team did find, both on land and in the ocean, 4 planes (2 F4U Corsairs (US Marines), 1 TBF Avenger (US Navy) and 1 Japanese Jake seaplane) plus a portion of the wing believed to be part of a 307<sup>th</sup> B-24 flown by Capt. Dixon (crashed 28 Aug 44). While scuba diving, we incidentally found two sunken Japanese boats from that era as well. To date one of the F4U Corsairs has been identified; the other two US aircraft are in progress of being identified. While the team was not successful in finding other wrecks that were included in the original plan, through a combination of physical exploration and interviewing of Palauan locals during this expedition, we are closer on finding those as well.

**Expedition members:** Patrick Scannon, Chip Lambert, Pam Lambert, Dan Bailey

**Brief Historical Background of Air War over Palau:**

During 1944-45, US forces (Navy, Army Air Corps and Marines) made repeated air raids over the Palau Islands (approximately 500 miles north of the equator and 600 miles south and east of the Philippines) (Pictures 1 and 2). The first series of attacks occurred in the spring of 1944 in the form of aircraft carrier task force strikes (Operation DESECRATE ONE) to prevent the Japanese Army and Navy in Palau from providing flanking air support against MacArthur's invasion of Hollandia/northern New Guinea. During the summer of 1944, the second series occurred in the form of both carrier task force strikes (operation SNAPSHOT, in which former President George Bush participated) and Army Air Corps B-24 raids (13th AAF and 5th AAF). The purpose of these raids were twofold: a) to prevent Japanese aircraft from flanking MacArthur's invasions of northern New Guinea and the Philippines and b) to soften up Peleliu (an island with a large Japanese air field in southern Palau), scheduled for invasion by 1st Marine Division on September 15, 1944 (Operation STALEMATE). Although the rest of Palau was bypassed after the Peleliu invasion as the war proceeded toward the homeland of Japan, the requirement for ongoing US air coverage over Palau was essential to prevent further aggression from the remaining 25,000 Japanese troops stationed throughout the northern Palau islands. As a result, a third series of air actions occurred during and after the invasion of Peleliu, by both the US Marines Corsair fighters (VMF 114, 122, 121 from the captured Peleliu airfield) and the Army Air Corps B-24 bombers (7th AAF from a new airfield on nearby Angaur built to support the Philippines invasion). Each provided independent air support/suppression against Japanese ground forces throughout Palau

until the war ended. In the face of the war moving elsewhere, the daily air battles fought over Palau were unaccountably fierce, on the part of both sides, turning into a struggle of attrition with both sides sustaining lethal casualties up to the last day of the war.

Palau, because of its strategic location (between the Mariana Islands and the Philippines) and because of its deep-water harbors, was the regional headquarters for the occupying Japanese military. Accordingly, it was heavily defended, both in numbers of troops (~35,000), airfields (3) and antiaircraft sites (many). In the face of some of the heaviest Japanese antiaircraft fire anywhere in the entire Pacific war and with the large number of US air strikes, it was inevitable that American planes would be shot down and they were. Because the Palaus have a barrier reef around the islands, many of the planes fell onto the islands or into waters approachable by conventional scuba diving techniques; however, a substantial portion of these planes and their crews, were never found, in spite of an intense efforts by US Army Graves Registration Units after the war ended.

Even though the invasion of Peleliu turned out to be the third bloodiest battle fought in the Pacific, the several naval, ground and air campaigns involving Palau are generally treated as a historical footnote of little interest, compared to more well-recognized Pacific battles such as Guadalcanal, Iwo Jima and Okinawa. But the numbers of Americans (with their planes) that were lost in the Palau area are not insignificant. At least two books have been published, describing the Japanese ships sunk by US Navy air actions in the Palaus. However, beyond the attempts by the American Graves Registration Service to locate remains of American military after end the of the war, no one has systematically looked for these missing aircraft, which were written off, with their crews, one year and one day after they were lost.

In 1993, following participation in a successful expedition in northern Palau to find the Japanese trawler sunk by Navy aviator Ensign George Bush in July 1944, I began investigating that air war after being shown a 65 foot wing, which at that time had been sitting, with identity unknown, in shallow waters just south of Koror in Palau for almost fifty years.

### **Project P-MAN Goals:**

Prior to arriving in Palau, investigation of US Marine, Army Air Corps and Navy archival records, in combination with interviews with surviving pilots, airmen and Palauans, suggested that up to seven sites might be worth field searches for missing US aircraft during this trip. As has occurred



combatants and witnesses. All of these factors have been important to gaining an insight into the air campaign fought over the islands of Palau from spring 1944 to the war's end in August 1945.

In addition, over the past decade, the people of Palau have becoming increasingly vocal in their interest in the history of their recently independent country. Along with the stunning tropical beauty lies the history of Palauans who have lived on these islands for many centuries. However, for the past 300 years up until its independence in 1994, Palau has been sequentially under the influences of Spanish, German, Japanese (from 1914 through 1945) and finally American (from 1945 to 1994) governments. Scattered throughout Palau are the remains of wreckage of World War II. On land and in surrounding waters can be found many battle scars of the Palau campaign, still remembered by those who survived those bloody times. Later generation Palauans continue to uncover new or already forgotten sites, sometimes with warriors still in place where they died. The Palauan people remain a critical primary and interested source for finding and understanding these historical locations.

Surprisingly to some, archival records do not tell the whole story from the American side, either. While after-action reports of those times generally describe events in considerable detail, it is an understandable consequence of the heat of battle that all too often these reports provide few, if any, useful clues for finding the actual crash site locations. For example, one US mine sweeper, sunk near the end of the war near one of the southern islands in Palau, has yet to be found, despite intensive searches using what appear to be excellent documentation of the sinking ship's final coordinates. In short, one must also look elsewhere and there is no substitute for speaking with someone who participated in or witnessed the action. For many of the surviving American WWII veterans, a bond, not often understood or appreciated by later generations, was created among those who fought together which manifests itself today through reunions. These reunions, which continue to reinforce the ties created more than fifty years ago, are also living and concentrated sources of that history.

If one is to understand what happened on and over Palau during an 18-month period starting in 1944, using available resources is essential. True, memories may not always remain accurate over a half-century - on the other hand, archival records written in close proximity to events may also be next to worthless. But sometimes one little piece of the puzzle is all one needs. Sometimes one gets much more.

### **Project P-MAN Findings:**

From the time the team landed in Palau, everyone was aware that time was a critical factor. With only ten effective days for exploration, the wreck sites had been prioritized before arriving, leaving open the possibility for targets of opportunity. In the true spirit of adventure, despite a considerable effort, little of this expedition went the way things were planned. The success of this trip turned out to be in its targets of opportunity.

The primary prioritized focus of the trip was to attempt to find a particular B-24, shot down 1 September 1944 on a bombing mission over Koror, Palau, which was then the headquarters for Lt. General Inoue Sadae, commander of all Japanese forces in that region of the Pacific. This



bomber's course, after its left wing broke away from the fuselage as a result of two antiaircraft hits, was subsequently well-documented in after-action reports and eyewitness accounts, describing the impact site in the waters between the islands of Koror and Babeldaob. Up to three parachutes were seen (depending on which eye witness) and Japanese documents found after the war indicate that at least two of the 11 crew members were captured and placed on different Japanese vessels later that month – these immediate survivors were never heard of again. The remainder of the crew is presumed to have gone down with the plane. The B-24, aircraft (A/C) # 473453 ('453), a member of the 307<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group (Heavy) of the 13<sup>th</sup> AAF, was one of 15 bombers on the mission that day. Flying almost 700 miles from Wakde Island off the coast of northern New Guinea, the mission was a long one. The antiaircraft fire was reported to be both heavy and accurate, striking not only the wing root of '453, but also causing many shrapnel hits to the bombers that made it back home. Three planes reported circling around Babeldaob back to the crash site to determine the fate of the plane and its crew and reported seeing a small (Japanese) boat headed toward the site to pick up at least one survivor. A small map, attached to the after-action report filed for that day, marks a spot where the plane reportedly impacted. During a recent reunion of this bomb group, a surviving bombardier in an adjacent plane vividly recalled the event and could place on a photo just where at least two pieces of the plane hit the water.

The field search for '453 began in 1995 when I strapped myself into the open doorway of a rented Cessna and flew over the channel, called Toachel Mid, where the bomber is reported to have crashed, photographing the entire area (Picture 3). In 1996, I returned with several people including Chip and Pam Lambert, also members of this expedition. A preliminary survey, utilizing a depth finder and repeated scuba dives revealed the water was deeper (90-120 feet) than indicated on the charts. The bottom of the channel was mostly flat and sandy, interspersed with coral heads of varying sizes. Currents of at least two knots flowed through Toachel Mid most of the day with a midday tidal reversal associated with high flow of silt into the channel from nearby mangrove swamps; resultant visibility was estimated at 10-15 feet maximum. The effective search area was determined to be approximately one square mile. These factors made the search more difficult than expected and may explain why this bomber's actual location has never been found. To add a little spice to the adventure, one Palauan guide told us that this area is a known breeding ground for sharks, although we have never even seen a single shark in this channel. In 1998, after a presentation I gave at the reunion of the 307<sup>th</sup> Bombardier Group (Heavy) of the 13<sup>th</sup> Army Air Corps (now the 13<sup>th</sup> Air Force), Col. Bill Selzer (Ret.) approached me about his witnessing and recalling the location of where this B-24 impacted in Toachel Mid (Picture 4). His recollections became an important part of the subsequent exploration for this plane.

Attempts to obtain access to a high-resolution side-scanning sonar for Project P-MAN, prior to leaving for Palau, proved unsuccessful. However, the team did obtain a low-resolution scanner and a drop underwater video camera for investigating potential targets of interest (to save on dive time).

To sum up the search for this missing B-24, the P-MAN team, using a dive boat with our assigned and highly talented guide, named Joe, from nearby Neco Marine, spent a total of six days on, and an estimated 45 hours under, Toachel Mid without finding one speck of evidence confirming the presence of '453 or its remaining crew (Picture 5). Key factors that became important in this



search were that 1) our low resolution side scanning sonar had considerable sensitivity (ie, could detect small objects on the ocean floor) but, by definition, with little discrimination, 2) the drop video, as configured, was unstable in the channel's current which made it worthless for investigating potential targets. The combination of 1) and 2) meant that the only solution, in spite of relatively low visibility and changing currents, was 3) conducting underwater grid searches with the team members spread out in a parallel line, as far as visibility permitted. Although a substantial portion of the estimated one square mile was covered using this method (as mapped by GPS from the boat), the team did agree upon completion that, even so, a considerable area remains to be searched. Further, relatively small debris fields could have been missed as a result of the poor visibility. We are currently reviewing the data in detail and attempting to come up with more effective strategies for the next trip.

The search for '453 was the primary focus but only one of several targets for the P-MAN expedition. Two other potential sites were eliminated early on, in between dives for '453. A quick sweep of Malakal Harbor, where a TBF Avenger, piloted by Lt. Richard Houle, was shot down 26 July 1944 (George Bush's wing man) revealed the harbor to be too deep and the area too vast when combined with the vague after-action description of the actual impact site to undertake without more advanced surface search equipment. We also conducted an initial search for a second plane, a Corsair piloted by the squadron commander of VMF 122, Major Quintus Nelson, which crashed nearby the Houle site over Aurapushakaru on 16 April 1945. Although the after-action report states that the plane crashed on that island, our interviews with local Palauans revealed that no such plane had ever been found on Aurupushukaru. As this island is in the middle of Palau's most highly populated area, independent searching on our part was discouraged. There was a suggestion made of a possible wreck in Malakal Harbor adjacent to the island, but a concerted scuba diving effort by the team failed to uncover a debris field.

Search for a fourth plane on our list initially looked more promising, as a result of encouraging interviews with local Palauans. This plane, also a Marine Corsair, was shot down over Battery Hill on Koror on 4 March 1945. Major "Cowboy" Stout (Picture 6), who was then the squadron commander of VMF 114, piloted this Corsair. Unlike any of the previous aircraft, the remains of Major Stout were recovered from a mangrove swamp after the war, when his plane was discovered by two Palauan women hunting for crabs on the northern edge of Koror. As Major Stout was the only "ace" (six Japanese planes to his credit) killed in Palau, his Corsair remains of considerable historical value, at least for documentation. However, the whereabouts in the swamp of his fighter, which was not salvaged, have been forgotten. With our guide, Joe, as a translator, we went to the village nearest to the presumed crash site. Since hunting for rock crab in the swamp is common, we wanted to interview members from the village who might have seen or heard of such wreckage. Joe introduced us to Basilius who instructed a village member to take us to a wreck site they knew about in the mangrove swamp. This villager took us deep into the swamp, sometimes chest high in black muck. Although we conducted sweeps in three areas of that mangrove swamp where he was certain the plane was, we were not able to find Stout's Corsair. We were told later that the rumors of man-eating crocodiles in that area were exaggerated (although a crocodile farm is no more than one mile from our search area).



At face value with the first four of four planes on our prospective list not found, one would begin to wonder about the value of this trip. The best we could say for locating these planes, so far, was where they were *not*. However, the expedition did find four additional aircraft (and two sunken Japanese boats). These were discovered under the heading of unplanned for “targets of opportunity” and once again revealed the importance of teaming up with the locals.

Three of them were discovered all on one day after one of the team members (Dan Bailey) recalled that a certain Palauan, named Abby, who ran a Koror restaurant, might know about some wreck sites. Since we needed to eat anyway, it made sense that we eat at Abby’s place. We arrived hungry for both food and information. Following a couple of beers, I was elected to discuss the matter with Abby (picture 7). Abby and I hit it off, in spite of a somewhat rocky start, and, by evening’s end, Abby agreed to arrange for a special guide, named Lazarus (now that’s an appropriate name for the P-MAN project, on more than one count), to show us three possible crash sites, all on or around the big island of Babeldaob. Although Abby knew where these planes were, he knew nothing about them.

The next day, our regular guide Joe took us in a boat north up the western side of Babeldaob, a stunningly beautiful tropical boat ride, to Ngermetengel pier, where we picked up Lazarus. He took us to further north up the coast to an area about one mile from the shore and about 200 yards inside of the outer barrier reef, which encompasses the western side of Palau. There lying in less than 3 feet of water (at low tide) was the remains of an F4U Corsair (Pictures 8 and 9). This aircraft was lying, wheels up, in a southerly direction. The tail section of the plane, from the rear of the cockpit back, was completely missing but the forward elements of the cockpit, e. g., the wings, engine and propeller, were present as a unit with the exception that the propeller, a three-bladed Hamilton Standard, had been ripped away from the engine, probably on contact. Both wings were intact and right over where each of the three 0.50 caliber machine guns should be, on each wing, grew bright orange corals (due to ingestion of iron oxide from the guns?). The canopy was missing and the cockpit area was heavily encrusted with coral. Attempts to find an identification plate were unsuccessful due to the dense coral. Amazingly, despite over fifty years of pounding surf, the control stick and the rudder pedals remained intact. The control stick was fixed in a rearward position, suggesting that the aviator may have flared just before landing to make a wheels-up landing. Because of the proximity of the Corsair to the outer barrier reef and its southerly heading (in the direction of the US airfield on Peleliu), the aviator appears have been hit by antiaircraft fire possibly with loss of hydraulics or power. However, the shape of the forward half of the plane suggests he have had sufficient time/altitude to get the plane out near the barrier reef for a relatively gentle wheels-up landing. On the outer edge of this reef, US Navy amphibian aircraft (called “Dumbos”) could and did routinely land in the nearby deep water (even under continued enemy fire) to pick up aviators shot down over Babeldaob. We found out, once we got there that this Corsair had been photographed previously (by Dan Bailey, on an earlier trip, no less!) but it has not yet been identified. My review of all after-action reports of Corsairs shot down over the Palaus during World War II “limits” the number of possibilities to seven candidates. I am currently interviewing surviving Marine aviators to determine if the list can be further narrowed. Chip Lambert at the crash site saw a white band around the forward edge of the cowling, which would identify the plane as belonging to VMF 114. Only two VMF114 Corsairs



fit this profile. Work remains in progress. But Lazarus was eager to get us to the next crash site, which involved a trip yet, further north

We next pulled into an area next to Ucherael dock. This time the plane was under water. After donning our dive gear and jumping in, we found about 30 feet down a Japanese seaplane, known as a Jake (American designation) (Picture 10). This single engine fighter was reasonably intact, although lying upside down with the pontoons broken off and on top of the fuselage. The plane appears to have been sunk in place as tie-down cables to nearby concrete blocks were still in place. Lazarus said that some years ago, this Jake had been lying upright on the ocean floor but a severe typhoon flipped it over and caused much of the present damage. After Chip and Dan took some photos of the Jake and we fixed the location by GPS, Lazarus took us to the third crash site.

For this one, we turned back south, to the mouth of Karamadoo Bay. This plane had crashed on land nearby, so at a small pier inside the Bay, Lazarus transferred us to a small fishing boat with a shallow draft. We headed north to the nearby mangrove swamps and proceeded up the creek until the boat could go no further. As we went further on foot through the swamp, we began to see evidence of a widely dispersed debris field, visually limited by the dense jungle vegetation. Near the base of the waterfall which fed into the mangroves, Lazarus pointed up a steep hill and said the wreck was up on top (Pictures 11, 12 and 13). Chip and I immediately assaulted the hill and pretty soon through the thick overgrowth, we could make out the faded blue color of the tail section of a Corsair. This nearly intact empennage lay precariously nestled between a giant tree root and the face of this steep hill. Rotated 90 degrees around the fuselage axis, the top of the vertical stabilizer faced outward (approximately west) from the hillside. As the tail section was one of the locations for aircraft identification numbers, I crawled out on the vertical stabilizer (now horizontal), swept away the jungle debris but did not see any numbers immediately, although "NAVY" remained visible (note: the Marine Corsairs were originally assigned from the US Navy). Disappointed, I took several pictures of all aspects of the empennage anyway. Further yet up the hill, Lazarus had brought Dan and Pam up an easier route and the debris field became more clear: all the debris seemed to lie in a 40 yard radius, facing up the hill (roughly eastward) from the base of the empennage. To the left and up the hill from this point lay 1) part of the cockpit firewall with a tube, with a valve on which was printed "Fresh Air", 2) the outward tip of the starboard elevator, and 3) the starboard wing heavily overgrown by jungle. To the right, Lazarus discovered the Pratt&Whitney R2800 engine, lying impacted in the hillside with one of the Hamilton Standard propeller blades bent back around the engine. Just below the engine, we found small pieces of the plastic canopy and parts of both landing gear assemblies. There was no evidence of human remains found. We photographed the site until we ran out of film and then headed back.

Analysis of the debris field seems to indicate that the aviator was flying in a north to northeasterly direction and impacted into the hillside at high speed, not far from Sisngembang Mountain. If there was an explosion (and there must have been), it appears to have been snuffed out almost immediately as there was no evidence of fire damage anywhere. The fuselage (including the tail section) appears to have been thrown further to the north after initial impact up the hill with small pieces of debris being blown down the hill (south and west) for almost a hundred yards of impact. This would explain why we saw debris as we approached the base of the hill from the south.



After returning to the States and developing my slides, I discovered that there was in fact a Bureau Number of the vertical stabilizer that I had missed in the filtered jungle light. This Corsair's number was "14241" and was flown by First Lieutenant Kenneth A. Wallace, USMCR of VMF 114 (Picture 14) and Saginaw, Michigan. He died in action in this plane on 3 March 1945 (the day before Major Stout, his squadron commander was killed). Reviewing the official after-action report from that mission, Lt. Wallace had requested permission to strafe some camouflaged boats near the shore of Karamadoo Bay. His flight leader, Major Oelrich, after giving the go ahead, saw Lt. Wallace's plane make a low strafing run and then "crash into the ground about 100 yards north of the target (note: this appears to be about where Lazarus pulled up his small fishing boat for us to get out) and cut a path through the undergrowth".

According to a later report, on 20 April 1947, Mr. Ngiringas, who was then Captain of the Koror Police, reported this crash site to US military authorities occupying Peleliu. On 25 April, a Search and Recovery Team found at this site approximately 90 bones (sufficient for identification) which were then interred, after notifying the family in a military cemetery near Manila in the Philippines. Interestingly, the team did not find the Corsair's Bureau Number as part of the identification process. In his recent book describing his experiences as a Marine aviator in VMF114 (Friends, Dear Friends, and Heroes, Freebooter Press, Springfield, MO, 1997), Bill Cantrell recounts that day, remembering Lt. Wallace as a "shy Scot with little to say, a ready smile and brave heart". Lt. Wallace had been noted on previous missions to return with tree leaves in his gun ports, "irrefutable evidence that he was flying too low." Concerned that Lt. Wallace might have a problem with "target fixation," several squadron members had cautioned him about this. Whether or not that problem took him to his grave will never be known, but Bill noted that "He wiped out the gun position in the process".

One day, Joe introduced us to Milan who said he knew where an airplane wing was along the mangroves of southern Koror. He guided us to the site and lying in three feet of water lay the middle third of what appeared to be a wing of a B-24. The location of this wing was such that I believe it to be a fragment of the left wing from B-24 (AC# 44-40603). This wing fragment lies in between where '603's right wing and fuselage lay. (I had found these on earlier expeditions and reported them to the 307<sup>th</sup> BG(H) during the 1998 reunion).

In between searching for some planes and finding others, we made a couple of minor nautical discoveries, as well. The first of these came at the recommendation of our guide, Joe. He felt that the B-24 ('453) might have come down in a nearby lagoon on the other side of the hills on the northeast side of Koror. While we were searching a section the lagoon's shoreline remote from any human habitation, Chip Lambert thought he saw some wreckage in the water. Once in the water, he rapidly identified it as a Daihatsu landing craft (Picture 15). These had been plentiful during the Japanese occupation but became targets for the skillful US Marine aviators who worked to deny the enemy any access to Peleliu by water. Any such wrecks which would have been known would have had any key parts salvaged years ago. The remains of this approximately 80 foot boat lay in about 10 to 25 feet of water on a steeply sloping shore line and still had its engine, ballast, admiralty-type anchor, brass propeller (highly prized by salvagers) and one intact rice bowl. The wood (and the rice bowl) were heavily charred, suggesting this boat had been sunk



on fire. Palauans we later spoke to were not aware of this wreck. I found the second boat was discovered just off a coral head in Toachel Mid while snorkeling with Chip for '453. This all-metal boat was about 40 feet long, encrusted with coral and lying nose up on the coral head's steep slope. Although this may be a post war wreck, there were a number of similarly-shaped holes dispersed along the top of the wreck, which suggests this boat was subjected to strafing fire from overflying fighters. Within a half mile of this wreck is the remains of a pier used by the occupying Japanese (from which, incidentally, a small Japanese boat was observed by a B-24 crew to leave and pick up '453's immediate survivors). Although beyond the primary goal of this expedition, these boats are part of Palau's history as well.

Since the last day we were in Palau was a mandatory "non-dive" day, prior to getting on the plane, the team decided to return to Peleliu. The local expert on Peleliu's battle sites is Tangie Hesus, who has guided us around the island on several previous trips. When we got to Peleliu and told Tangie about our mission in the northern islands, he said that he knew of some mangrove fisherman who had found a plane in the mangroves in the mid-eastern part of Peleliu. After talking with the fishermen who were willing to take us there, Tangie stated that we were the first outsiders to see the wreck. The fishermen brought up an even smaller boat than Lazarus used for our trip. We traveled from the northern dock on Peleliu, south along the eastern coast for about 40 minutes along an open water way through the swamp and, with the eastern face of Bloody Nose Ridge (the site of one of the most devastating portions of the battle) nearby and to our right, we suddenly turned into the mangroves. Hopping out of the boat, we could see a relatively intact aircraft, lying with landing gear up in a northerly direction in about three feet of water. As we approached, it became immediately apparent it was a TBF Avenger, an American three-man torpedo bomber from World War II (pictures 16 and 17). There appeared to be shrapnel hits all over the plane and there was no canopy. The Hamilton Standard propeller, though bent, was present, along with all other major components of the plane, although the port wing was sheared off and to the rear of the plane. The cockpit was missing all its instruments and there was no evidence of human remains. The "star and bar" emblem on the starboard fuselage was still present. No machine guns were seen. The landing gear was in a wheels-up orientation and the starboard tire was in remarkably preserved condition. The vertical stabilizer did have an identifiable Bureau Number on it. The crew of this aircraft has not yet been identified but an ongoing effort with the US Navy Historical Research Center is in progress.

Overall, this Avenger appears to have sustained antiaircraft hits and appears to have crashed at a relatively low speed, given the remarkably good shape in which this aircraft remains. The absence of the canopy suggests that the crew may have bailed out prior to the crash. The absence of any instruments might be the result of subsequent efforts by either Japanese (while they still controlled the island), the US military at some later time or locals. Alternatively, it is conceivable that this aircraft was an operational loss and not due to enemy fire: it is oriented in roughly the same direction as the north-south runway of the Peleliu airfield to the immediate south of this crash site. The exact cause of this aircraft's demise should, hopefully, be determined soon.

On the 21 of June 1999, we took off from Palau early in the morning. It had been an exciting and successful expedition, if not due to good planning at least to good luck. There remain more undiscovered aircraft wrecks throughout Palau. Even more important than finding such wreck

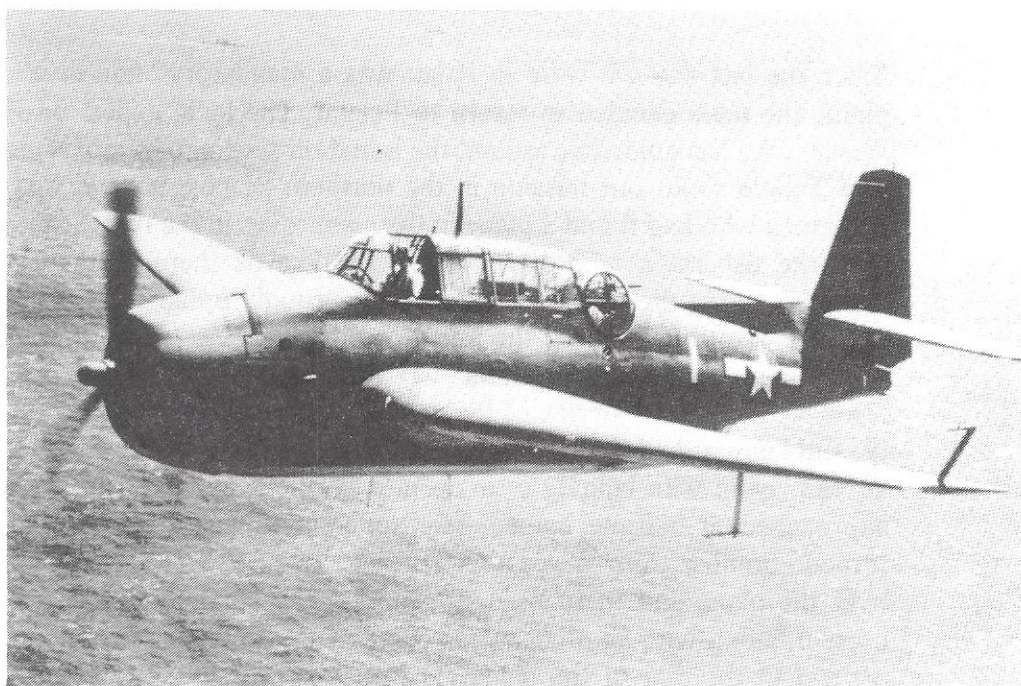


sites is recalling and honoring the histories of the warriors who died in these planes. Not all Americans died in the well-known battlefields of WWII but they died just as valiantly and for the same cause. This expedition will help to fill in a few small additions to the historical record of that time.

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Patrick J. Scannon, MD, PhD  
176 Edgewood Avenue  
San Francisco, Ca 94117  
October 1999

Picture #17

TBF AVENGER

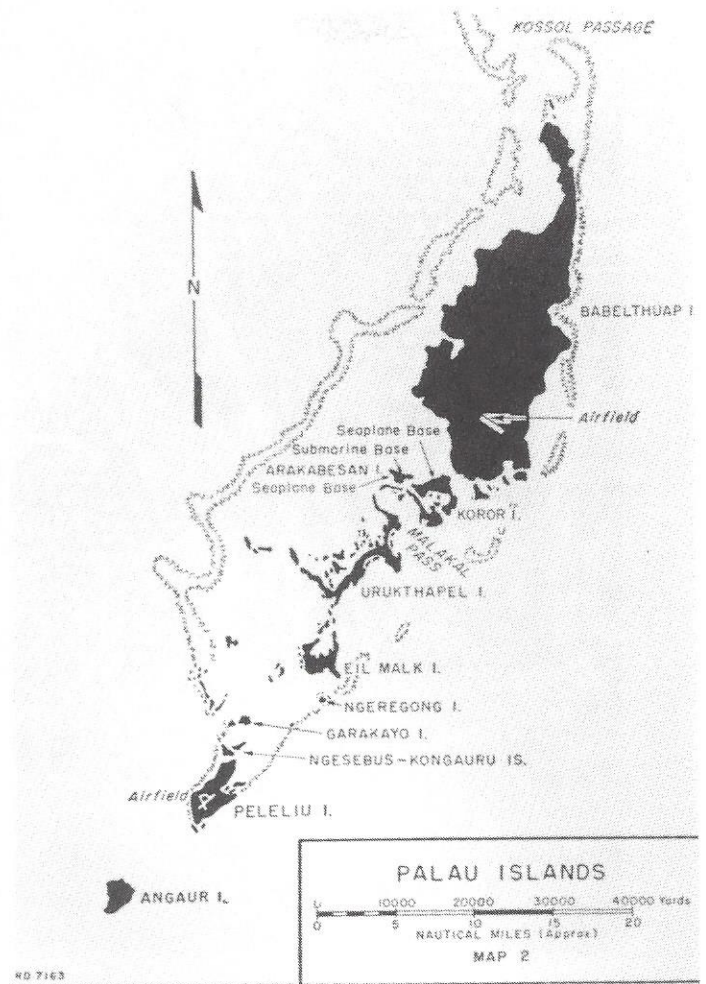
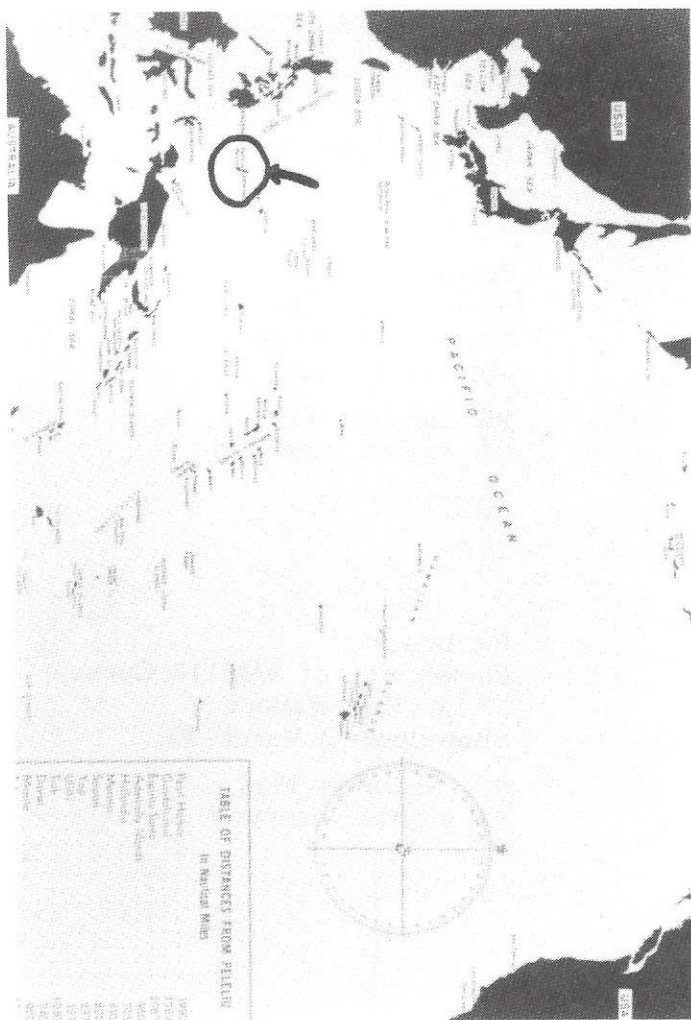


Picture #16

Pat Scannon with  
TBF AVENGER,  
Peletiu

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Picture #3

Toachal Mid  
Reported location  
of B-24 '453 Crash  
Site 307th B6/BAAF

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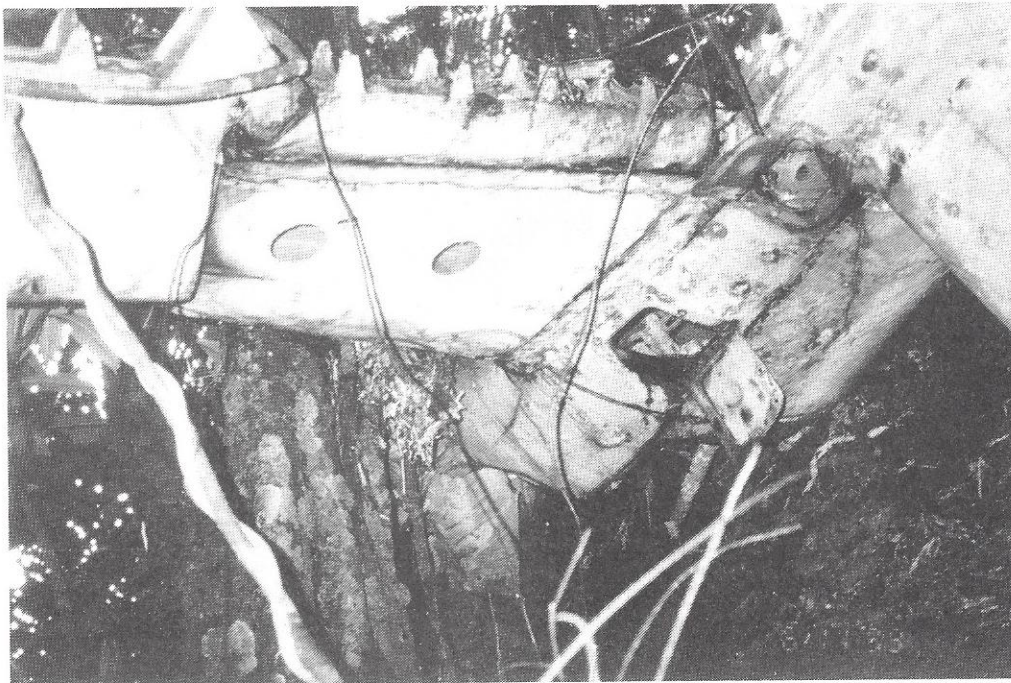
Picture #12  
P. Scannon under  
Vertical Stablizer  
VMF114 Corsair

@C.Lambert 1999  
All rights reserved



Picture #11  
Empennage of VMF114 Corsair  
of Lt. Ken Wallace  
Shot down 3 March 45

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## FROM YOUR HISTORIANS

### e-mail, anyone?

An increasing number of people, including many "Long Rangers", are finding their way into computers, Internet and e-mail. The few members with whom I have corresponded via e-mail have been unanimous in recommending that we publish a Newsletter listing of member's e-mail addresses. I have e-mail addresses for several 307th members but will list only three here as a start for a complete list.

President John Reeves: [ranger1able@juno.com](mailto:ranger1able@juno.com)

Sec/Treas Cena Marsh: [b17rlroadr@aol.com](mailto:b17rlroadr@aol.com)

Historian Jim Kendall: [jmk307hist@aol.com](mailto:jmk307hist@aol.com)

Send your e-mail address to one of the above if you would like it included in the first such list which we hope to print in the next Newsletter.

### Search for Information

In Newsletter 99-2 we reported on the requests for information regarding the military service of three men; **Sgt. Joseph H. Rhodes, T/Sgt. Albert J. Novak, and Sgt. Joseph A. Allison.**

Thus far there has been no response regarding **Rhodes** who may have been in the 5th Bomb Group rather than the 307th. However, a note in the 5th BG Newsletter brought no response either.

We have received no information regarding **Novak** unless someone wrote directly to his grandson, Allen Novak.

At least two of our members responded to the request for WW II information from **Allison's** daughter. Both knew the Saye (or Seay?) crew but did not know Allison personally.

A recent note from Pat Allison O'Neal thanks all of us for our interest in and help with her request. Pat and her mother, health permitting, plan to attend our next reunion in San Antonio to meet us and perhaps learn more.

### New Military and Space Museum in Michigan

Frankenmuth, Michigan, known for its legendary chicken dinners now has a new attraction, Michigan's Own, Inc. Military and Space Museum. This small museum highlights the actual uniforms worn by Michigan Medal of Honor recipients plus the largest collection of original Medals of Honor on display in the United States. It also holds more than 350 uniforms and related artifacts of Michigan men and women who served our nation in six foreign wars, from the Spanish-American War to the Gulf War. Also displayed are uniforms and flight suits of Michigan Space Pioneers and all of Michigan's Astronauts. Clark Pardee (370th), who told us of the museum, vouches for its interest and value to all, especially those with military backgrounds. The museum, located at 1250 Weiss Street. in Frankenmuth, Michigan, is open every day, but closed January and February. Admission is free.



## How About Starting Our Own "Greatest Generation" Series?

Tom Brokaw's recent best seller, *The Greatest Generation*, makes for great reading by all Americans and especially for those numbered among that generation, our membership included. I have read the book, a gift from my daughter, and found it spellbinding. The thought occurs that each of us who were part of that

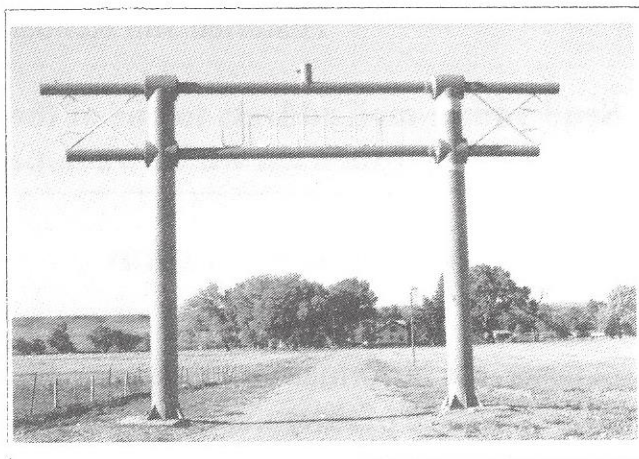
generation have similar stories which have been subdued in the rush to get on with life after the end of WW II. Stories of accomplishments of ordinary citizens as interesting, inspiring and heart-warming as those of the political and media "movers and shakers" who made up much of the Brokaw book. Joe Johnson's story, gleaned from his letters sent over the past several years seems a logical point from which to begin our own "Greatest Generation" series.

**Joe Johnson** was 20 years old when discharged from the Army Air Force in July of 1945. As tail gunner on the crew of Charles Teague in the 424th Squadron, 307th Bomb Group (H), he had flown 42 missions in the South-West Pacific. He was soon enrolled at Oklahoma State University under the GI Bill, finding time in 1947 to marry Clara Lou and buy a Wyoming ranch. The couple graduated from Oklahoma State in 1948 (Joe with a BS in Agriculture) and moved to the Wyoming ranch. They had six children, five sons and a daughter. One son died in an accident in 1977. The other five children received degrees from the University of Wyoming and three of them are active in the management of ranch operations.

Today, after investing more than fifty years of hard work, Joe runs 2500 head of cattle in good years. In addition to cattle, the ranch grows corn, wheat, barley, sugar beets and what may well be the world's best alfalfa. These crops became possible after test drilling in 1977 revealed that the ranch sits atop a mile high bowl of water that is constantly replenished by underground run-off from nearby Laramie Mountain. Joe has installed nineteen center-pivot sprinkler systems on dry range land which irrigate more than 3000 acres. A twentieth center-pivot will begin operation soon. This water also provides back-up water for the ranch's 1500 megawatt coal-fired power plant.

Community respect for the Johnson's is acknowledged by invitations to accompany high ranking military officers, Wyoming's Governor, Senators and others, to Vandenberg AFB for satellite launches and ballistic missile tests. Joe has been part of a Wyoming delegation that visited Panama to view work performed there by the Wyoming National Guard.

We feel that Joe and Clara Lou Johnson qualify as bona fide members of the *Greatest Generation*. And so do you. Send us your story.



From a letter to Joe from artist Charles Parson  
*"It was one of the highlights of my year to have had the opportunity to meet with you and hear some of the history of your ranch. Your gate has been a source of inspiration to me on many trips through central Wyoming. It symbolized to me the independent proud spirit of accomplishment that I heard from you. It is individuals like you who encourage my generation towards fulfilling our dreams as you have yours."*



Son Richard, Joe Johnson, son Rex, grandsons Adam and Brandon in field of 150 bushel/acre corn with Laramie Peak in the background



## **Book by Coast Watcher Martin Clemens**

About a year ago the Newsletter covered a forthcoming book by Martin Clemens who served as the Coastwatcher on Guadalcanal during the early days of WW II. The book, entitled *Alone on Guadalcanal* should now be available at most bookstores or from the *U. S. Naval Institute Press, 118 Maryland Ave., Annapolis, MD 21402-5032*. The Price is \$32.95 plus, we presume, Shipping and Handling. The book should be of interest to 307th members, especially those who flew from Guadalcanal and thus benefit from the service of the Coastwatchers.

## **Confederate Air Force Considers Name Change**

According to Ralph Dummit, writer for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, political correctness is about to catch up with the Confederate Air Force. The 42-year-old organization has no political agenda, being dedicated to restoring, preserving and flying WW II aircraft and honoring the men and women who served during that war. But the very word Confederate conjures up a different meaning for some people.

Tom Barnes, Unit Leader of the CAF's Dixie Wing, puts it this way: "As time goes along, as society becomes more sensitive to people of color, sexual orientation and to disabled people, the notion of a Confederate Air Force has created some resistance.

Members of the Dixie Wing were turned down recently while soliciting

a corporate donation from a previous donor. The company in question had been sued in a discrimination issue and they were very sensitive that a CAF donation might smack of racism.

A surprising number of CAF members are receptive to the idea of a name change. Others feel that political correctness is no reason to change the name of a 42 year old organization as well known as the CAF citing the probable loss of a lot of identity.

As members discuss the issue, two different names have cropped up as possible options. One is *Ghost Squadron*. Another, which would retain the current group's initials as well as reflect its purpose of honoring the war's aviators, is *Commemorative Air Force*.

The only comment we can offer to all of this is, as Pogo once said on the comic pages, "We have met the enemy - and they is US!"

A VERY  
MERRY CHRISTMAS  
and  
A HAPPY NEW YEAR

or

HAPPY HOLIDAYS

—TO ALL—



