

Here's an addendum to your story of Harry John and Blessed Event which appeared in the March 8 newsletter and is not accurate in all respects.

I was the navigator of one of the cadre crews sent back from Guadalcanal to Espiritu Santos when the 371st was formed. The pilot was Bill Moeller, the co-pilot Harry John, the bombardier Jack Krummel. At about that time we acquired a B24D named Frenisi, which had logged 44 missions and 400 and some hours, had never lost an engine and as far as I know never had a man hurt on board, and had just had all four engines changed. The crew chief was Kurt Patzlaff.

We went through the final agonies of Kahili and the first Rabaul missions together. In December of 1943, Harry John was given his own crew and an airplane called Blessed Event. His first mission as a first pilot was the day before Christmas 1943. He lost his superchargers during the bomb run over Rabaul and fell below the formation. As they usually did, most of the Zeros jumped the straggler. Somehow he made it back to Bougainville. Two men were dead and everyone else including Harry was wounded. The airplane had something like 21 20 mm. holes, the canopy over the pilot's compartment was shattered, the radio was shot out, the engine controls were shot out, and it had lost one or two engines.

I've seen the next part of this story attributed in your

newsletters to other airplanes but it really happened to Harry. They got one wheel down but couldn't get the other down or the first one back up. He had no engine controls so had to kill the engines by cutting the switches and once he had he was committed.^{ES} About this time, they saw an F4U start down the No. 1^{ES} runway at Empress Augusta toward them. They had no choice but to continue on what now appeared to be a collision course. Somehow Harry and Ray Green horsed Blessed Event up over the F4U. The gear that was down hit the nose of the F4U and broke off and Blessed Event made a perfect belly landing.

Everyone who could jumped from the airplane and ran. Harry was a camera buff and when he thought he was far enough away he handed his leather jacket to a marine who had come toward him. Harry turned and took several 35 mm shots of the airplane. I've seen the prints. When he turned back, the marine had run away, stealing his jacket.

They brought Harry down on a hospital C-47 the next day. He was under heavy sedation and he lay on his cot and shook for what seemed like the whole day. Subsequently, because Harry knew I had been a newspaperman, he asked me to write a story for his home town paper in Crowley, La., and the citation for his silver star. Although I was not on the mission, I'm familiar with all the details because he related them to me for the story while they were still fresh in his mind. Here's one further note on the last mission of Blessed Event. I had wanted to transfer to Harry's crew

because I liked him and I knew he was a superb pilot but we were not able to make the transfer in time. His navigator was killed, I think by a 20 mm. that came through the open canopy, and I never again tried to do anything that I thought might change my luck.

Harry flew no more combat. He was sent to Auckland and I saw him there when I was on rest leave before they sent him home. He was succeeded as co-pilot on Frenisi by Ray Miller and Dave Zellmer, and when Bill Moeller stopped flying, Ray Miller became first pilot and Dave Zellmer co-pilot. We flew her through to 93 missions before we stepped down. Jack Krummel went home with malaria and we acquired a bombardier who had been in a terrible crash on an emergency runway north of Munda during the Kahili campaign. The airplane cartwheeled down the runway and it was a wonder anyone survived. After five missions with us, the bombardier complained of back pains and it was found that he had a fractured vertebrae. We finished the final missions most of the time with Messenbourg, whose first name I can't remember. Mess had dysentery and spent his days on the ground between you-know-where and the hospital. Mess loved to get a group together at the Shortland Club in Auckland and sing "As Time Goes By" because he thought it was so funny.

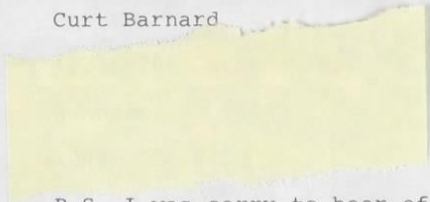
When we stepped down, everyone wanted to fly Frenisi because it was a lucky airplane. Up to that time, it had never lost an engine in 93 missions and no one had ever

been seriously hurt. They changed all four engines again, but the magic was gone. I was home by then but people coming home told me the story. It lost an engine on almost every mission. On one mission it lost two engines but came home without throwing anything out. On most B-24's down to two, the crews threw everything overboard including the Norden and the change from their pockets. It finally finished 100 and they sat it on the ground and said, that's it.

Many years later when I decided to retire from a public relations job with a big eastern corporation, I was cleaning out my desk and came across the clipping of the story I had written which had appeared in the Crowley paper and which Harry had sent me while I was still overseas. On a chance, I wrote him in Crowley without a street address and "Please Forward" written on the envelope. A few days later, I had an answer. He was still in Crowley. On my way west to the state of Washington where I grew up, I stopped and spent a few days with Harry and also stopped in Houston to stay with Felix Haas. Felix was another 307th navigator who had lived across the street from me for a few years in Syracuse, N.Y., before he returned to Texas as research director for the cancer center at the University of Texas medical center in Houston. I am still in touch with both of them as I am with Dave Zellmer. I wish I could locate Tom Campbell, a close friend who went through navigation school with me at Hickam Field and was also in the 371st. Also, whatever happened to Charlie Ogg? I noticed Lucky Lundby's name on your roster

so I know he came through it safely. He was the best crapshooter and poker player I ever encountered. He also led the Distinguished Unit Citation first Truk mission. They lost three airplanes and ran out of ammunition on the way home but destroyed the repair facilities on Eton Island. On the next mission, we set their tank farm on fire and burned up most of their gasoline.

Curt Barnard



P.S. I was sorry to hear of the death of Carl Whitesell, another graduate of the navigation school at Hickam Field in the class before mine. When the 424th camp was wiped out in the Mother's Day flood of 1943, Carl invited us to share his tent where the water was only about a foot above the tent floor. The tent was wall-to-wall, water-soaked cots for about a week.