

THE STORY OF THE MISSING REED FULLMER

PREFACE

This is a story of a man that I never knew. I have only gotten to know this man through an amazing resource of volunteers who are dedicated to finding all recorded historical information about the particular Bombardment Group (THE 307TH BG) that he served with in World War II.

This man was my father, but by the time I was born in 1950, he had completely hidden who he had been in the war, in a booze bottle, and that is why I never got to know the person he had been, until after he died.

I am telling the story now for two reasons. First, I want to honor this man's service during that horrible war. Secondly, I want to write this story down as an explanation to myself and my offspring, why we never got to know the person that he was before and during that war. We only knew the battle-scarred pieces of him that were left when he returned from overseas.

THE PRE-WAR YEARS

My dad, Reed, and my mother, Lucille, had been married for ten years before he enlisted in the Army Air Corps in 1943. I was not aware that they had been married so long before my sister and myself were born in 1948 and 1950, until I was a teenager, and it was mentioned very casually at that time. It struck me then, that they had had a whole different life together before I knew them. What was that life like, and who were they as a couple going through the Depression of the 30's, and the War in the forties? Their previous years together were never talked about, so it was all conjecture, until recently when I came to know a lot about Dad's service during the war.

My dad had had a very confusing and traumatic childhood before he met my mom, and I believe marrying her finally brought some stability into his life. In having conversations with a couple of my cousins on my dad's side, who were alive during the first years of their marriage, and from some pictures of that era, it seems that they were very much a happy couple and appeared to be very much in love as well. Learning that was a revelation to me, since they were always fighting and at odds with each other when I was growing up. I don't even remember ever seeing them embrace or kiss.

In any event, things obviously changed at some point, and I had no reference as to why, until my dad's war story was discovered. I had no explanations given as to why my dad was an alcoholic, and couldn't keep a job or a residence much longer than a few months at a time. (He did tell me one time when he was in his eighties, that he didn't start drinking heavily until after the war, but would not tell me what his experience in the war was, so I still had no explanation for his alcoholism.) Evidently he was just not able to talk about those things.

I was about to discover for myself finally at age 71, who this man had been, why he couldn't talk about it, and why he had changed so much. The following is the story of the man I never got to know.

THE EARLY WAR YEARS

I was able to put together the following outline of events during this period with the help of a diary that his sister-in-law kept, and a scrapbook that my mom kept.

Dad had several different jobs before the war started, and by 1940 was working in a Coca Cola plant in Southern California. In September of that year, it was required of all men ages 21 through 45 to register for the draft. Obviously by that time, the U.S was getting closer and closer to being involved in the war in Europe. The Japanese were starting to take over parts of China and it looked like they could eventually become a threat to our western coast. When they bombed Pearl Harbor in December of 1941, suddenly we were at war. My dad wanted to enlist at that point, but had landed a job as a fireman with the U.S. Army Fire Department at the Quartermaster Supply Depot in Mira Loma, Ca., and his job there was considered critical to the war effort, so he was refused. He kept trying for several months and was finally allowed to enlist. On June 16th, 1943, he joined the Army Air Corps. He was 32 years old.

TRAINING STATESIDE

The following is the best timeline I have been able to put together for Reed's training in the states before going overseas:

- **JULY AND AUGUST 1943.** BASIC TRAINING, AMARILLO, TEXAS-
Reed qualifies for a technical school because of scoring high marks in the Army mechanical aptitude tests.
- **SEPTEMBER 1943.** AIR CORPS TECHNICAL SCHOOL, KEESLER FIELD, BILOXI, MISSISSIPPI. –
Reed is promoted to Private First Class and is enrolled in the Keesler Field's B-24 Liberator Bomber mechanic's school.
He completes 17 weeks of training in all phases of servicing the heavy bomber, its fuel, electrical and hydraulic systems, instruments, engine operation and inspection.
- **FEBRUARY 1944.** CENTRAL TECHNICAL TRAINING COMMAND, WILLOW RUN AIR BASE, YPSILANTI, MICHIGAN-
Reed begins his active duty on the assembly line at the Ford Motor Bombing Plant. He completes five weeks of technical training, including a total of 224 hours in the following areas: Airplane structure, Hydraulics and related systems, Electrical systems, Engine systems, Engine changes, Landing gear inspection, and General inspection. He earns his certification in Service and Maintenance on March 18th, 1944.
- **APRIL 1944.** AERIAL GUNNER SCHOOL, HARLINGEN, TEXAS-
Reed trains for eight weeks in gunnery school learning to operate Browning's .50 caliber twin machine guns in the various turrets of the B-24 bomber.
- **JUNE 1944.** WALLA WALLA ARMY AIR BASE, WALLA WALLA, WASHINGTON-
Reed spent approximately two months here participating in onboard training flights to prepare for his upcoming stint overseas. He was assigned to Crew #96 with crew position of Flight Engineer because of his training and was promoted to Corporal.

- SEPTEMBER 1944. HAMILTON FIELD, CALIFORNIA-**
 Reed was deployed from this base and left for overseas on September 22nd at 12:30 a.m. by Army air transport with his, and two other crews.



CREW #96: Front row, left to right, Lt. James K. Fogelman, pilot; Lt. Norman C. Graves, co-pilot; Lt. Robert C. Kempf, navigator; Lt. William A. Gorse, bombardier. Rear row, left to right, Cpl. Eugene G. Lier, gunner; Cpl. Leslie W. Martin, gunner; Cpl. Stephen R. Sherwood, gunner; Cpl. Ernest N. Harris, armorer, gunner; Cpl. William D. Litchfield, radio operator; Cpl. Reed Fullmer, engineer, turret gunner.

I learned that the pilot of his crew, Lt. Fogelman, was 24 years old. The co-pilot, Lt. Graves, was 19. My dad, being 33 by this time, was called "Gramps" by the rest of the crew.

OVERSEAS COMBAT

This part of my father's story begins with a conversation I was having a few months ago with a new acquaintance, Kevin, whose father had also served in the war. He and I were talking about the B-24 planes that our dads flew in, and their involvement in the war effort.

I told him that I knew very little, since my dad never talked about his war years. I had learned little pieces, from my mother, since she had kept a scrapbook, and a few jewelry items that Dad had made for her while he was overseas. She had his medals that he had received from flying in bombing missions in the South Pacific. Mom did not want to talk about his experiences, if she even knew them, and Dad was hiding whatever he didn't want to remember, in the bottle. Since my sister and I were both born after the war, our parents obviously wanted to forget that it had ever happened, and get on with their lives, raising their two children and trying to make a living.

Kevin said that there were ways to find out about his service if I knew which Bomb Group he was assigned to. Well, the search began, and fortunately I found in Mom's scrapbook, a reference to the 307th Bomb Group, also known as "The Long Rangers". Kevin got on the case and sent me a link to a volunteer association that had formed to preserve the history of the 307th Bomb Group. I was, pardon the pun, blown away! Thus began the journey of finding out all about Dad's service history, and more importantly, why he could not talk about any of his experiences.

The pathway of the journey really widened when I sent an e-mail to the 307th BG association asking for any information about my dad. Below is the response I got from the historian of the association named Jim McCabe.

It's good to hear from you. You have found the correct resource. It is with great pleasure that I respond to your inquiry regarding our Long Ranger, Reed. You will see your dad's 370th Bombardment Squadron and crew in the subject line above. Importantly, though our website has an extensive amount of information, it will provide you with only about 10% of the information available. Reed was a genuine war hero. I doubt he would have spoken much about his combat missions. Given the combination of combat missions that he flew, I would be surprised if he did talk about them. Your father flew multiple combat missions, many of which would have been enough to never discuss his experiences.

Over the next few weeks, Jim was able to not only provide for me detailed information about Dad's whereabouts in the Pacific Theater, but also about what his responsibilities were as Flight Engineer and Turret Gunner on a B-24 Bomber. In addition, he was able to put together for me the entire history of Dad's bombing missions, as well as the physical copies of each mission report that was completed by the crews when they returned from a mission. The next e-mail from Jim was this:

Let's begin here: This animated film was done by the son of one of our pilots. It gives a good depiction as to what was involved in the bombing of targets in Borneo (Balikpapan, Tarakan, Brunei Bay) which began on 440930. The sole B-24 Bomber at the end is a tribute to the men lost and wounded on 441003 as only one of our B-24 bombers/crews (out of twenty-two) returned directly to their 307th BG base at Noemfoor, New Guinea. Your father flew multiple combat missions to Borneo. They said it couldn't be done. Your father and his brothers-in-arms proved otherwise. Over the course of 4

missions from 9/29/44 through 10/14/44 the Japanese oil refineries at Balikpapan were destroyed.

And so it began for Reed Fullmer. After he left the States on September 22nd, 1944, or in military time, 440922, he and his crew flew to Hickam Field, Oahu, Hawaii. There they were assigned to the 370th Bomber Squadron of the 307th Bomb Group of the 13th Airforce. They were then flown to the air base on a tiny island in Dutch New Guinea, called Noemfoor, which had just been recaptured from the Japanese in August. The missions that Jim described above had just taken place days before Reed's crew arrived on the Island. This means that they discovered upon arrival the tragic news of the 307th BG mission on 441003. They also were told that 5 out of 12 of the 370th squadrons' planes and crews (50 men) had been lost in that battle. This also meant that their newly arrived crews were going to replace those that were lost, immediately. Instead of slowly being trained by flying practice runs, with experienced crews, they were going to have to learn "on the job". Reed and his crew had only one practice run on 441013 before being assigned their first missions.

On the next page, you will see all of Reed's crew's 41 missions over the next six months. You will see the date of each mission, the type and serial number of the plane flown, the bombing target, and the number of hours spent in the air on that run. The reason these B-24 Liberators were called the "Long Rangers", was because, as you can see, they could go such a long distance without re-fueling. They typically held 3,000 gallons of fuel each time they went. By the time Reed was done with his 41st mission, he had spent 424 hours in the air!

There are a few dates that are particularly noteworthy:

- On November 22nd, after their bombing run, the Japanese bombed their air base, destroying 15 planes, and damaging 8 more. Parts to repair planes were scarce, since most of them were still being shipped to the European Front, a decision made by our President and Winston Churchill. Their priority was still to try and stop Hitler's Germany first, then put all our efforts into stopping the Japanese. As such, it wasn't until May of 1945 that supplies to the Pacific Front were sufficient.
- On January 8th, Reed and his crew saw the plane directly on their left get a direct hit, and explode. None of that crew survived. These would have been men that Reed's crew knew well and were undoubtedly sitting in the same briefing room with them only hours earlier. That was the real horror of war, seeing your buddies die! There was a story written by a young prisoner of war in a Japanese POW camp, who saw the explosion from her viewpoint on the ground. The story is called, "*The story of the B-24 Liberator*". You will find it attached.
- On January 23rd, the first mission to bomb Corregidor was sent north to make way for McArthur's troops to invade and re-claim the Philippines. 24 Liberators were sent on this mission and my Dad's crew was one of those planes.
- Note that as time went by, Reed was steadily promoted, until he became a Tech Sergeant, wearing five stripes.

Here is another e-mail from Jim McCabe:

Your dad is listed as S/Sgt. on this one. Also of significance is if you look at the top of the report, they were flying for the 370th BS Intelligence Unit, (S-2), and in the A-2 position on the Crew Loading List. This is a compliment to their collective skills and a big responsibility as should anything happen to the A-1 Lead (loss, serious battle

damage, mechanical problem), Fogleman would have been responsible for taking over the lead, a dubious honor as the Japanese knew the deal and focused anti-aircraft fire and fighter interception on our lead B-24's.

REED FULLMER T/Sgt. Reed Fullmer, TTO, 307th BG, 370th BS, Lt. James K. Fogleman Crew, Long Rangers Missions

DATE	A/C MODEL & SER. #	TARGET	TIME IN AIR	NOTES
OCTOBER 13TH, 1944 **	not recorded	WEWAK, N.G., Troop concentrations	4 HRS, 10 MIN	Considered practice mission
NOVEMBER 6th, 1944 **	B-24J 42-110147	NEGROS ISL. Alicante Airdrome	14 HRS	Turned back, jettisoned bombs
NOVEMBER 11th, 1944 **	B-24J 42-110142	NEGROS ISL., Dumagette Airstrip	14 HRS, 20 MIN	
NOVEMBER 16th, 1944	B-24J 44-40553	BORNEO, Benai Harbor	12 HRS, 10 MIN	One B-24 crippled
NOVEMBER 22nd, 1944	B-24J 42-110147	NEGROS ISL., Bacalod Airstrip	10 HRS	Enemy bombed 15 planes on our base
NOVEMBER 25th, 1944	B-24J 42-110147	SHIPPING SEARCH	12 HRS, 40 MIN	Bombed Freighter & 2 Cruisers
NOVEMBER 28th, 1944	B-24J 44-40719	NEGROS ISL., Dumagette Runway	10 HRS, 50 MIN	
DECEMBER 1st, 1944	B-24M 44-51313	NEGROS ISL., Bacalod Airstrip	9 HRS, 50 MIN	
DECEMBER 4th, 1944	B-24J 44-41178	Search for downed airmen	8 HRS	weather bad, had to turn back
DECEMBER 8th, 1944	B-24M 44-51313	NEGROS ISL., Carlota airstrip	11HRS	
DECEMBER 11th, 1944	B-24J 44-40915	PANAY ISL., Mandurriso Airdrome	9 HRS, 30 MIN	"TILLIE II"
DECEMBER 14th, 1944	B-24J 44-40915	NEGROES ISL., Malago Airdrome	10 HRS	"TILLIE II"
DECEMBER 16th, 1944	B-24J 44-40915	PALAWAN ISL., Puerta Princessa	10 HRS, 30 MIN	"TILLIE II"
DECEMBER 23rd, 1944	B-24J 44-40719	NEGROS ISL., Fabrika Runway	11 HRS	
DECEMBER 26th, 1944	B-24J 42-110142	HALMAHERA ISL., Troops, supplies	4HRS, 10 MIN	
Note: Cpl. Fullmer promoted to Sgt. At this point				
JANUARY 5th, 1945	B-24M 44-51313	HALMAHERA ISL., Lolobata strip	5 HRS	#2 engine down, bombed #2 Tgt.
JANUARY 8th, 1945	B-24L 44-41463	LUZON, Neilsen Airdrome	13 HRS, 30 MIN	#0533, Lucey crew, direct AA hit, all KIA
JANUARY 12th, 1945	B-24M 44-51313	LUZON, San Jose, San Vicente	12 HRS, 35 MIN	Bombs jettisoned at sea
JANUARY 14th, 1945	B-24J 42-110147	LUZON, Mindoro, Neilson Airdrome	13 HRS, 20 MIN	Entire squadron jettisoned bombs
JANUARY 20th, 1945	B-24J 44-40719	NEGROS ISL., Fabrika Runway	12 HRS, 20 MIN	
JANUARY 22nd, 1945	B-24J 42-110142	NEGROS ISL., Fabrika Runway	2 HRS	#4 engine lost, turned back
JANUARY 23rd, 1945	B-24J 44-40719	CORREGIDOR ISL., Manilla Bay	12 HRS	First group to bomb CORREGIDOR
JANUARY 26th, 1945	B-24J 44-40934	NEGROS ISL., Binalbegan	12 HRS, 30 MIN	
JANUARY 29th, 1945	B-24J 44-41033	CONACAO Pt., Manilla Bay	12 HRS, 45 MIN	
Note: Sgt. Fullmer promoted to Staff Sgt. At this point				
FEBRUARY 1st, 1945	B24J 44-40954	CANACAO Pt., Shipyards	12 HRS, 40 MIN	"DRYER'S DEVILS"
FEBRUARY 6th, 1945	B-24J 44-40934	BORNEO, Balikpapan, Sepinggan	15 HRS	Heavy AA, holed in nose turret
FEBRUARY 8th, 1945	B-24M 44-51316	BORNEO, Balikpapan, Sepinggan	12 HRS, 10 MIN	Four enemy fighters intercepted
FEBRUARY 14th, 1945	B-24L 44-41390	CORREGIDOR, Gun emplacements	12 HRS, 20 MIN	video on you-tube
FEBRUARY 16th, 1945	B-24J 44-41370	S.E. CELEBES, Kendari Airdrome	7 HRS, 20 MIN	"SHADY LADY"
FEBRUARY 22nd, 1945	B-24 44-41625	N.BORNEO, Tarakan Airdrome	8 HRS, 10 MIN	
FEBRUARY 28th, 1945	B-24J 44-40915	N.E.BORNEO, Sandakan Airdrome	9 HRS, 30 MIN	"TILLIE II"
Note: S/Sgt. Fullmer promoted to Tech Sgt. At this point				
MARCH 5th, 1945	B-24L 44-41463	MINDANAO, Licanan dispersal area	5 HRS	
MARCH 9th, 1945	B-24 44-40966	MINDANAO, Zamboanga defenses	6 HRS, 30 MIN	5TH AF Plane bombed by accident
MARCH 19th, 1945	B-24J 44-40915	CEBU ISL., personnel & supply	9 HRS	
Note: Flew with other pilots from now on				
MARCH 23rd, 1945	B-24 L 44-41419	CEBU ISL., personnel & supply	9 HRS	Lt. GRAVES, Pilot
MARCH 27th, 1945	B-24J 44-40915	BORNEO, Sandakan ship yards	12 HRS, 10 MIN	Lt. MILLER, Pilot
APRIL 2nd, 1945	B-24J 44-41033	BANGAO Isl., Gun Positions	9 HRS	Lt. GRAVES, Pilot
APRIL 7th, 1945	B-24J 44-40719	SOEMBAWA Isl., Bima Harbor	14 HRS	Lt. HOKANSON, pilot, HICKLIN crew hit
APRIL 14th, 1945	B-24J 44-40915	MINDANAO, Davao power plant	6 HRS	Lt. BEADE, pilot
APRIL 17th, 1945	B-24J 44-40934	MINDANAO, Kabacan, Personnel	7 HRS, 30 min	Lt. COOLEY, pilot
APRIL 18th, 1945	B-24 44-41625	MINDANAO, Cotobato	6 HRS, 40 MIN	Lt. GRAVES, Pilot
APRIL 24th, 1945	B-24L 44-41390	BORNEO, Tabanio, Personnel/supp.	13 HRS, 30 MIN	Lt. HOKANSON, pilot
** These first flights were from the Noemfoor Base. The rest were from the new base at Morotai, starting November 15th				

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DAD'S CREW, JANUARY 1945

FRONT ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT- Lt James Fogelman, pilot; Lt. Robert Kempf, navigator; Lt. Norman Graves, co-pilot; Lt. William Gorse, bombardier

BACK ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT- Cpl. Leslie Martin, gunner; Cpl. Eugene Lier, gunner; Cpl. Ernest Harris, armorer / gunner; Cpl. Reed Fullmer, Engineer / top turret gunner; Cpl. William Litchfield, radio operator

No wonder they called my dad "Gramps". Some of these kids were right out of High School!

The attached 450108 mission report is the one when the B-24 Bomber beside them (Lucey Crew) blew up due to anti-aircraft fire over Manila, Philippines.

You might enjoy the Santo Thomas article. It is nice to know that if KIA, our dads would have been remembered in this way.

The Story of the B-24 Liberator

By Sascha Weinzheimer Jansen

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Ex- Santo Tomas Prisoner

Manila, Philippines

On January 8, 1945, from the steps of my shanty in Santo Tomas Prison Camp in Manila, my family and I were watching a bomb group of B-24s flying in formation right over head in the middle of a sky full of flak. I know everyone else in camp was as focused as we were. As usual they were on a bombing run which was always exciting for us to watch. We always thought they were gifts from heaven - shiny, silver slivers catching the sunlight which streaked across the sky. The loud heavy droning we knew so well alerted us to their approach before sightings. It was like a symphony orchestra tuning up before the music began. We knew our liberation had to be near. Where we were standing they were positioned at about 11:00 o'clock. When one of the bombers took a direct hit, projectile tears sprang from our eyes as we choked and grabbed our throats in horror, not believing the scene we were watching. The plane split apart and started its spiral downward in smoke and flames as it dispensed one parachute after another. We were devastated not knowing their fate. I can honestly tell you that these boys became part of my daily prayers for the rest of my life. I prayed that they made it – that they went home to their waiting families – to their rich, full lives ahead of them. After we were shipped back state-side and resumed a free life, all of us from Santo Tomas met each other at yearly reunions. I was amazed that among us younger people in these groups we always spoke about the B-24 incident and always wondered what happened to these boys. Funny, how this story never left our hearts and minds. Frank Stagner, a childhood friend in camp who had their shack next door to ours, was my buddy during and after the war. Over the years Frank and I spoke often about this incident, always surmising and hoping that they were alive. It wasn't until I was 60 yrs. old that I ran into an old friend, Bill Dunn, a CBS radio war correspondent during the war in the Far East, who listened to the telling of this story. I was living in Hawaii at the time and he excitedly introduced me to a friend of his who was a wing Commander for B-24s flying the Philippine campaign. We met, compared stories and the date of the hit. To our surprise, this was his bomb group. I was excited. We spoke at length and he gave us contact numbers for the reunion group of his outfit, the 13th Air Force, 307th Heavy Bomb Group, 370th Bomb Squadron. As I was on my way back to Manila the very next day, Frank attended their reunion in my place and received this information. The group also known as the Long Rangers, because of the large amount of fuel they could hold, had been based on Morotai and had flown up to Bomb Nielsen Field that day. The remains of most of the crew were recovered from graves near the crash site shortly after our liberation, while three or four were listed as MIAs. Today, some of these boys rest with The U.S. Battle Monuments Cemetery in Manila. The MIAs are remembered on the Walls of the Missing. On my next trip to the Philippines I gathered most of my travelers at the gravesite and at the Wall. We finally could pay proper homage to our long-time pals and liberators who had been with us all of our lives and who were so instrumental for our freedom. We owe these men and boys so much. On one of my trips back to Manila, my good friend, Jim Litton, who was in the 3rd grade with me and who still lives in Manila, also witnessed the same catastrophic

scenario from his home on the outside. Sixty-five years later Jim, Frank and I compared notes on what we had witnessed and the final closure of this heartfelt story. This past February – 2015, when I brought back 78 people for our 70th Anniversary of our liberation, and while visiting the U.S. Battle Monuments Cemetery, we laid a wreath and paid homage to these amazing boys while I related their story of the B-24. Allow me now to introduce you to these wonderful boys who sleep within these hallowed grounds and whose loving attentions are bestowed upon them each day by two wonderful, caring Superintendents, Larry Atkins and Burt Caloud. I thank them both from the very depths of my heart for their genuine care and devotion to so many who gave their lives so others could be free.

*Lt. John D. Lucy, Pilot – California – Plot C - Row 15 – Grave # 68 Service #0771070
2nd Lt. William O. Goodlow, Co-Pilot – Oregon – Plot D – Row 8 – Grave #40 – Service # 0205878*

Lt. Harvey Max, Navigator

Lt. Tris S. Hooker – Bombardier

Sgt. Forrest R. Phibbs, Engineer

Sgt. George Hadjopoulos – Asst. Engineer – New York-Army Wall of the Missing – Service #12225898

Sgt. Theodore R. Benner – Radio Operator

Sgt. John C. Grim – Asst. Radio Operator

Sgt. William O. Dilsburg – Gunner

*Staff Sgt. – Harold R. Sargent – Cameraman – Service # 39408838– Army
Wall of the Missing - California*

Cpl. Rudolph Szmans – Gunner – Service #42103316 – Plot J – Row 5 – Grave # 9 – New Jersey

Addendum

January 9, 1945: At the same time the plane went down the day before, the Squadron came over again in Missing Man Formation. At the exact same spot where the plane had been hit, a huge rain-bow puff of smoke was released and cascaded down like a fountain in between the black ack ack that had riddled the sky. It was a necessary sign we all needed, and an homage well paid to the downed crew.

Jim responded:

Yeah, I've spoken with Sascha. She and her fellow former prisoners still go every week to care for your dad's Lucey Crew squadron KIA's as they have been doing since 1945.

FLIGHT ENGINEER

Until I had talked to Jim McCabe, and read more information on the subject, I had no idea what being a Flight Engineer meant. The following is copied from an article written about that position on the crew:

As Engineer, this crew member is responsible for the mechanical maintenance of the engines, electrical systems (110 fuses), hydraulic systems (including the landing gear and Bombay doors), and fuel system of the aircraft while in flight. This is a heavy responsibility considering that an aircraft costing almost \$400,000, as well as the lives of 10 crew members are involved. The Engineer also has been trained to fly the aircraft in case something should happen to both the pilot and co-pilot. Whenever the aircraft comes under attack from enemy fighter planes, he must shift his attention to the twin .50 caliber machine guns mounted in the top turret.

As well as those duties mentioned above, the Engineer was responsible for checking all the systems before takeoff, and re-checking them upon landing. He also had to provide a report on the systems that needed repairs before he could return to his tent.

ENVIRONMENT

The conditions on the islands in the South Pacific were just another thing the men had to contend with on a daily basis. Reed and the entire 307th bomb group was transferred to the island of Morotai, marching always toward the Philippines and the Japanese mainland. The island of Morotai, was 25 miles wide and 40 miles long, and was still occupied by Japanese forces, recently shoved up to the northern end by our bombers and Marine infantry. The new airstrip had been built in 3 days in the mud and the ruins of the old Japanese base at the south end of the island. It is only about 2 degrees north of the equator, so the temperatures and humidity were stifling. It was also infested with rats, mice, land crabs, and of course, mosquitos. At first their tents were just pitched on top of the mud, but as time went on, the men were able to find wood enough to build platforms.

The nearest Japanese airbase was only about 2 hours south, at Halmahera, so the Japanese were constantly bombing their new airbase. Over one 90 day period, it was bombed 84 times, and during the month of December it was bombed 26 days. These were all night bombings, so as the men were trying to get some sleep, the Japanese bombers would appear out of the dark, and the men would have to run out to their foxholes and dive in. Many times repairs had to be made to the airstrip before the next group of planes could leave on their mission.

This, again from Jim:

The Japanese usually bombed at night to protect themselves. I wonder how many B-24's were lost due to these bombings. It's no wonder it is hard to find photos of them and these losses don't show up on Mission Reports or MACR's. Lots of sleepless nights for anyone with anxiety issues. Despite their youth, some of the guys must have just been exhausted between their long missions and these bombings.

Like most of the other periods in the South West Pacific, the missions, regular bombings of their bases, lack of fighter escort, floods, tropical diseases, loss of friends, heat, etc., added up to a difficult and stressful deployment. If one doesn't know this truth, the letters home are almost comical, like they took classes on, "How not to worry your Mom". In England, the countryside bases were near towns, civilization, pubs, women..., an incredible disparity.

EPILOGUE

It was pointed out to me, that because of the fact that Reed enlisted, he could have stopped flying these bombing missions anytime and asked to be reassigned to a different job on the ground, such as engine replacement and repair, which he was qualified to do. I guess I won't ever know the reason that he kept on going, but it probably had a lot to do with flying with the same crew for those many months, developing close ties and friendships as you helped each other make it through each mission.

Reed's last mission was flown on April 24th, 1945. He was then sent to Sydney, Australia for a well-deserved rest. When returned to Morotai, enough new crews had arrived, that he was able to assume other duties on the base. He might have even flown some training runs with some of the new crews, but that would not have been recorded. He was probably also busy repairing planes that had been damaged, as parts and supplies became plentiful in the Pacific shortly after Germany surrendered, on May 8th.

By the end of July, he had accrued enough points (based on rank and number of hours flown) to return to the States. Reed was flown back to the States by Army Air Transport, arriving at Fort Mason, San Francisco, Ca., on July 28th, 1945. He was then transferred south to the Redistribution Center at Camp Beale, Santa Ana, Ca. He got his separation papers in September.

Reed was issued the following medals and decorations for his service in the Army Air Corps:

- AIR MEDAL AND RIBBONS, WITH THREE OAK LEAF CLUSTERS
- GOOD CONDUCT MEDAL AND RIBBON
- PHILIPPINE LIBERATION MEDAL AND RIBBON, WITH TWO STARS
- AMERICAN CAMPAIGN MEDAL AND RIBBON, WITH ONE STAR
- ASIATIC PACIFIC CAMPAIGN MEDAL AND RIBBON, WITH FOUR STARS

The surrender of the Empire of Japan was announced by Emperor Hirohito on August 15, 1945, and formally signed on September 2, 1945. The war was finally over!

Now that I have all this information about what Dad went through, I not only have come to honor and respect the man that he was before the war, but also to have compassion for who he became afterwards. (Jim McCabe told me that his father had also become an alcoholic after the war.) I also can see now that not only did *he* become a casualty of that war, but his entire family as well. I have often wished that our family could have talked about all of this, but because of the circumstances of dad's PTSD, and the era, and family culture, it just wasn't possible.

My thanks and gratitude go out to all the people who have taken the time with me to uncover the story of the war years of Reed Fullmer. Bless all of you, as it has made such a difference in my life.

One parting note; Dad said to me one time, "Those war years were the happiest years of my life"!

Jim Fullmer, September 2022