

This was my cousin, a very handsome young man taken from us much too soon. I would love to hear from anyone connected to this flight crew. " LT. LOUIS READ GEORGE" Killed - Battle of Rabaul Jan. 1, 1944 -Jane Slaughter

"Louis Read was born September 9, 1919. He graduated from the Texarkana Arkansas High School in 1933, attended the Magnolia A and M College in 1933-34, the Louisiana State Normal College in 1935-36, and graduated from the University of Arkansas in 1940 with a major in business administration. Louis' first military experience was with Company B, 153rd Infantry Arkansas National Guard, Magnolia, Arkansas, which he joined September 17, 1936, and from which he was honorably discharged as Private September 3, 1937, per paragraph 3, S.O. 143, AGO Arkansas, per bona fide change of residence. This certificate of service was signed by Patrick C. Harris, Major, Infantry, March 31, 1941. He enlisted in the Air Service in 1941, and was inducted March 24, 1942, and commissioned as a Navigator, June 23, 1942, graduated with rank of 2nd Lieut., February 18, 1943, and sent to the Southwest Pacific May 18, 1943. He was killed in action January 1, 1944 in the Battle of Rabaul. He was a 1st. Lieut., in the 13th Air Force when the tragic end came. He had been awarded the Silver Star, Air Medal, the Silver Oak Leaf Cluster and the Purple Heart upon the completion of 31 missions. His body was exhumed at Bougainville Island and buried in Woodlawn Cemetery, Texarkana, with full military honors." From "Genealogy of the Dufлот Family from France 1810 - 2000" by Joseph L. Dufлот (1956) and Jane Slaughter (2000).

BACK FROM THE DEAD

"Out of the fury of the air-battle for Japan's great base at Rabaul came a story last week of an All-American bomber crew that took everything a swarm of intercepting zeros could throw at them and came back to tell the tale. Forced by engine trouble to fall out of formation over Simpson Harbor, the heart of the enemy's greatest Southwest Pacific base, the crew of the Liberator bomber "Blessed Event" weathered certain death in as murderous a fire as dozens of Jap fighters could deal out, then nursed their torn and crippled ship home. Every member of the crew with the exception of one was wounded. One was killed outright and another was fatally wounded. The airplane is believed to be one of the most badly shot up heavy bomber ever to return from combat. Led by Lt. Harry P. John, the first pilot who is of Syrian ancestry, the crew roster of the "Blessed Event" reads like a Notre Dame football line-up: Scotch-Irish-Indian co-pilot. French-Scotch navigator, Jewish bombardier, English-IrishScotch nose gunner, English-Irish tail gunner, Dutch-Irish ball turret gunner, and an Irish waist gunner. "Blessed Event" was a member of a heavy bomber formation that set out to attack Lakunai airdrome at Rabaul on New Year's Day. Just five minutes before the bombing run, engine troubles slowed down "Blessed Event" and she dropped behind the formation. Zero pilots jumped the straggler immediately and scored hits with 20mm. shells in the nose section. One burst completely knocked out the engine controls, smashed the instrument panel, wounded both the pilot and co-pilot, and filled the cockpit with smoke, another burst seriously injured the bombardier and wounded the nose gunner. In the next wave of attacks, another 20mm. shell exploded on the flight deck, killing the navigator, Lt. Louis R. George, outright and inflicting a severe abdominal wound on the top turret gunner. Although he slid from the turret when hit, he returned to his post at the pilot's request and continued to fire as long as zeros attacked despite the pain and weakness from loss of blood..... The Jap fighters paid a penalty for facing the wrath of the crippled bombers guns. Three zeros were positively shot down and five more were listed as probables only because gunner's didn't have time to watch smoking Japs hit the water. But the "Blessed Event" was badly hurt. Twenty-one 20mm. shells had hit her, each one tearing a hole as big as a washtub, in addition to more than eight hundred smaller holes from 7.7mm machine gun fire. The

landing gear, flaps, hydraulic system, and oxygen system were knocked out. The engine controls were shot away. All of the control surfaces were badly damaged, one rudder was gone... "I don't know how we kept flying", the pilot said. "The wings were so full of holes that all we had left was a prayer. The engines had lost so much power that we could have been in the drink long before"..... The closest friendly landing strip was a fighter base on Bougainville Island in the heart of Jap-held territory. Because he knew the crew must have immediate medical attention and the airplane would not fly far in its present condition, Lt. John decided to land there despite the danger of air raids and ground attack. In the usual prosaic reports of Army Intelligence the next day, appeared the following eloquent tribute to the gallantry and teamwork of the crew of the "Blessed Event". "It is unlikely that any crew in any theater of war will ever encounter more severe handicaps and hazards than experienced by Lt. John's crew, causing death and severe wounding of crew members, and placing the plane in a "Clay Pigeon" category. In spite of everything, the crew continued to function as the death-dealing unit it was trained to be....and in addition accounted for three positive kills and five probables of enemy fighters. The seriously wounded were cared for the less seriously wounded as effectively that only one of the wounded did not survive. No one can pay a high enough tribute to the courage and fighting caliber displayed by this crew. No one could have done more brilliant a job throughout. No honor or award would be too great to bestow." The crew roster follows: Pilot - Lt. Harry P. John, 825 South Park Ave., Crowley, Louisiana Co-Pilot - Lt. Raymond E. Green, RFD #3, Sayre, Oklahoma Navigator - Lt. Louis R. George, Lone Ferry Rd., Texarkana, Arkansas (Killed) Bombardier - Lt. Lester NMI Kornblum, 119 Bank St., New York, New York Engineer - Sgt. Chas. E. Derri, Star Route, Westminster, South Carolina Radioman - S/Sgt Thomas G. Craven, 161 First Ave., E.N. Kalispell, Montana (Fatally wounded) Asst. Radio - S/Sgt Dennis T. Ryan, Route #2, Palisades, Minnesota Tail gunner - Sgt. Eugene R. Baldrige, 522 Fletcher Ave., Apt. #1, Indianapolis, Indiana Nose gunner - S/Sgt William N. Barlow, Jr., Route #2 Box 302, Redlands, California Ball gunner - S/Sgt John E. Lemon, 647 Franklin Ave., Kent, Ohio
***** "Back from the Dead" (Ap. #533, B-24-D 13th Air Force). The author's name is not given