

## War Era Story Project 2012

Submitted by: Carl J. Messerly  
Current home town: Lancaster, Ohio  
Age: Not given

This account of Eugene Messerly's service in the U.S. Army Air Corps is submitted by his brother, Carl J. Messerly. I have never seen nor heard in any form of this long and perilous flight to get these planes and crew members to their air base in China. The base was under construction during their arrival. These remarkable men and their accomplishments need to be recorded for historians of the future along with other brave exploits of the Army Air Corps in World War II.

Eugene Francis Messerly was born in 1922, in Lancaster, Ohio, in the home of his parents Francis E. and Pauline M. Messerly,. He was the first of nine children. He enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps on Sept. 11, 1941. He married Rose Angeline Rizzo in April 1944, in Paterson, New Jersey. They had one child, Rosemary T. Messerly. Eugene retired Nov. 30, 1962, as a Captain in the Air Force, having been awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and other medals. Eugene Messerly died in July 1995, in Tampa, Florida.

The account of the flight Eugene Messerly made is recorded in "Messerly Family History" on pages 202 and 203:

Eugene F. Messerly enlisted in the Army Air Corps on Sept. 11, 1941, and took his training at Sheppard Army Air Base, Wichita Falls, Texas. He took additional training at other bases and was sent to Salina, Kansas, to pick up a new B-24 heavy bomber. On Jan. 13, 1943, thirty-five bombers left Salina for De Rodder, Louisiana, and next to Morrison Field, West Palm, Florida. On Feb. 15, 1943, thirty planes left on the flight to Boringuen Field, Puerto Rico; next to Atkinson Field, Georgetown British Guinea; next to Belen, Brazil, next to Natal, Brazil. There, maintenance on the aircraft was done for the next flight to Ascension Island in the middle of the South Atlantic.

From Ascension Island, they flew northeast to Accra, British West Africa; next to Maidugure, Nigeria; and on March 1, 1943, from Maidugure to Khartoum, Egypt. They left Khartoum on March 2, 1943, and arrived at Aden, Arabia, on the same day. On March 3, 1943, they left Aden and refueled at Salalah, Arabia, and arrived at Karachi, India, on March 4, 1943; left Karachi and arrived the same day (March 5, 1943) at Agra, India. They stayed there fourteen days, preparing the aircraft and loading it with fuel and armaments for their first flight over the Himalaya Mountains to China.

The flight from the U.S. to China was 12,000 miles with 26 B-24 bombers finishing the trip. T/Sgt. Eugene F. Messerly was a member of the 14<sup>th</sup> Army Air Corps, the 308<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, the 375<sup>th</sup> Squadron, bomber #24222. He served in China thirteen months, making 26 flights over the Himalaya Mountains and fifty combat missions. The 308<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group was the first to bomb

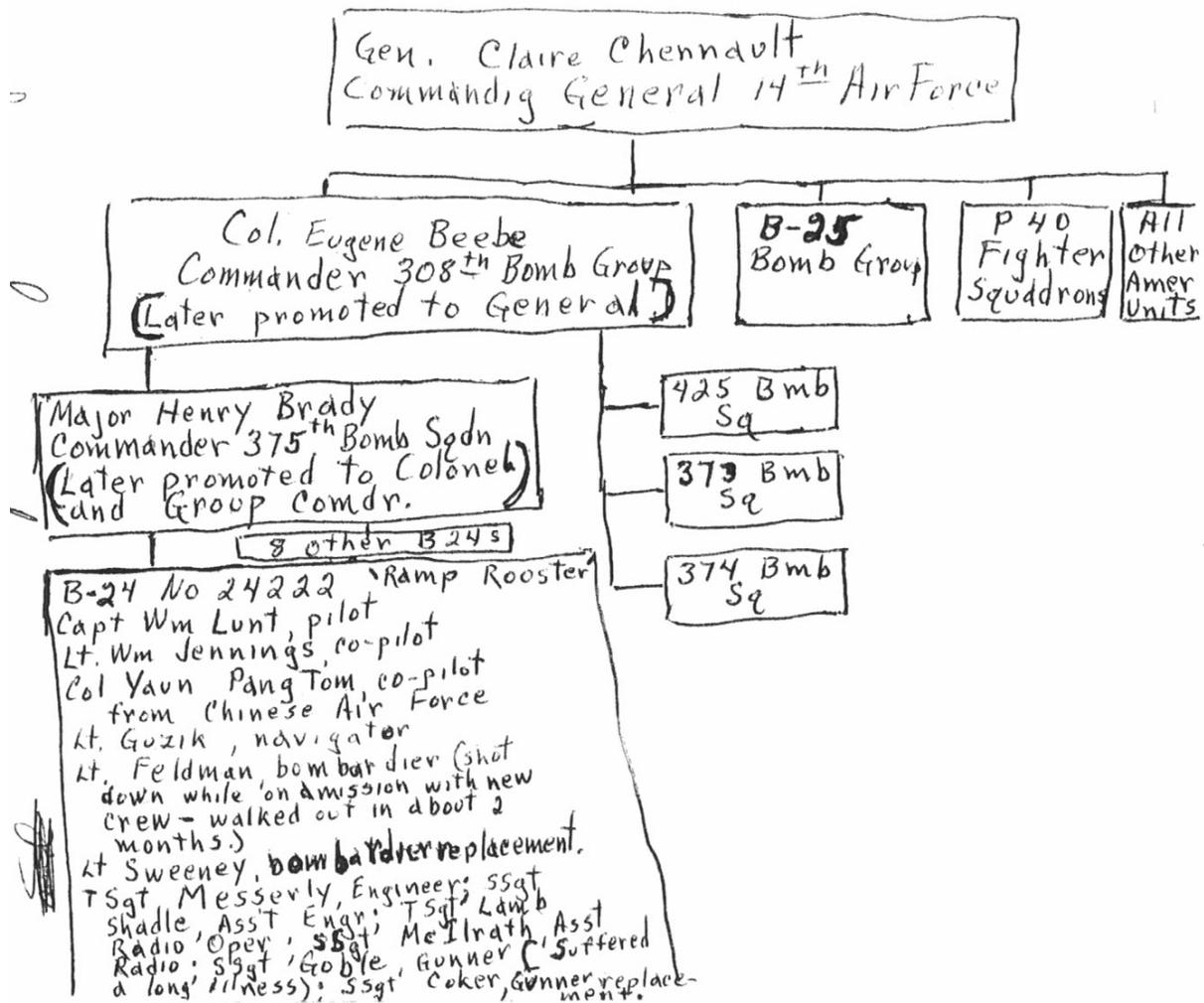
Shanghai, Saigon, and Manila after the fall of Corregidor. The Strategic Bombing Survey stated the 308<sup>th</sup> had the highest bombing accuracy and the heaviest casualties in China.

Eugene Messerly flew back to Miami, Florida, on a civilian aircraft contracted by the Army, arriving on March 10, 1944. Eugene stayed in the service and retired a Captain on Nov. 30, 1962, having served overseas in Germany from 1946 to 1947; in North Africa from 1953 to 1954; and in Morocco from 1958 to 1961.

Below is a copy of the letter handwritten by Eugene Francis Messerly. It was sent by him in 1981 from his home in St. Petersburg, Florida, to his niece, Cathleen Sammler, in Lancaster, Ohio. The letter was his answer to five questions sent to him by Cathleen as an eighth grade school project. These are five good questions with remarkably frank and candid answers that need to be preserved for others as an historical fact.

1. Who did you serve under and where? ①

~~I~~ I believe this organizational chart will depict my assignment.



2. Where were you at the time of Pearl Harbor? <sup>(2)</sup>

Sheppard Army Air Base,  
Wichita Falls, Texas

Specifically I was reading  
the Sunday comics and  
listening to a buddy's  
radio while waiting for  
several other friends to  
dress so we could attend  
Mass.

(3)

3.

a. Were you in any famous battles?

Nothing like the Battle of the Bulge. Yet each of our missions was a battle for survival—right from the time our pilot signed for our <sup>new</sup> B24 at Salina Army Air Base, Kansas, ~~about~~ 7 Jan 43 till we returned to Miami's 36<sup>th</sup> St Air Station on 10 Mar 44 via a commercial airliner flying under government contract. My guess is that out of the original combat crew ~~men~~ (officers and enlisted) ~~of~~ about 324 persons crewing 36 B24s that departed Salina only 26 planes made it to China and a year later only about 80 officers and ~~men~~ <sup>crew</sup> were alive — and not even on original <sup>crew</sup>.

over

④

In fact those of us who still had our original B24 had to trade them in for a new model in Nov 43 because they were worn out. ~~and~~

I didn't like that new plane - it was a lemon because the <sup>number 3</sup> supercharger would go haywire after flying for about thirty minutes above 20,000 feet. Finally a factory engineer from the Honeywell company repaired the linkage and all was well.

Also I disliked our new B24 because I had to compromise with our ground crew chief on naming it - we settled on 'Rose of Jaudez'. That put my future wife's name in the title. The art work was about a 6 ft tall painting of a female Mexican dancer with castanets and wearing long dress with a train. (See next page).

3 a Cont'd

(5)

I thought I was clever in naming our original B 24 with the title 'Ramp Rooster'. The ~~letter~~ RR were the initials of Rose Rizzo, my future wife. The art work was of a huge red rooster lunging into combat. ~~He~~ He did have some other colors in his feathers and legs, but his red comb and wattle and breast feathers were dominant.

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3 b.

If you weren't in any famous battles, name some you were in?

as I implied above every day was a battle day in some way for some combat crew in China. It was a

⑥

<sup>battle</sup> that involved proper aircraft maintenance; loading and fuzing bombs or naval mines; bringing in our ground crews or equipment; bringing in our own gasoline, oil, ammunition, clothing, etc.; Guarding our airplane on every fifth night as the duty was rotated among the five enlisted men from the day we departed the U.S. until we left China about 13 months later; daily exposure to new strains of disease because many Chinese (and Indians in <sup>India</sup>) cooked our <sup>locally grown</sup> food, maintained our barracks, constructed and repaired ~~our~~ airbase, did our laundry, operated a barber shop, emptied our outhouse toilets with buckets heated (?) our shower water in the winter and maybe once a month in the summer; supposedly boiled our drinking water but still many of us got hepatitis - which put me in the hospital for 2 weeks (it affects you for life - I can't donate blood). In

China, the ratio of hospital admissions <sup>(7)</sup> for non-combat cases versus combat casualties was about 220 to 1 — and the total American troop strength was less than 5,000 as of the time I departed in ~~Jan~~ Feb 44.

So my ~~question~~ <sup>position</sup> is that each individual soldier thinks his daily struggles are a series of famous battles. And he'll think that till he dies of old age.

### Our Little Battles

South China Sea between Formosa (Taiwan) and Mainland China. Summer, 1943.

We were on a sea sweep with another B24 and discovered a Japanese fleet of about 25 plus vessels. As we made our first run through the fleet at ship's level for skip bombing, I was shocked to see anti-aircraft shell bursts from ~~naval~~ guns. Between us and our wing man, we sank or damaged about 10 ships. Our pilot alerted our

advance base and by the end ⑧  
of the next day the entire fleet  
was sunk.

Laying Naval Mines in Hong Kong Harbor.  
Early Summer, 1943.

This was a night mission as  
was all our mining of harbors.  
Also only 2 enlisted men were  
on each plane as firing any  
guns was prohibited as that would  
reveal our position. Only one  
B24 would go so that no traffic  
snarl could occur in the  
target area and the Japs  
couldn't guess where the mines  
were dropped.

We came in at about 150 feet  
and followed the waterfront  
for about a half mile, dropped  
our mines and veered out  
to sea. While doing this  
I was amazed at my ability  
to see Japanese soldiers walking  
with Chinese girlfriends along  
the lighted boulevard. I  
believe ~~they~~ the people  
thought we were a Japanese  
plane.

⑨

Bombing a Jap Army Base, French  
Indo-China. Early Fall, 1943.

Monsoon (hurricane) clouds  
would obscure the camp  
just as our squadron  
~~would~~ begin our bomb  
run so ~~it~~ we went  
below the clouds for our  
second run. Our  
tail gunner was suffering  
from motion sickness  
and he rushed for the  
toilet. First he vomited  
then he would suddenly turn  
around and sit down and  
then he would <sup>get up and</sup> turn around  
and vomit again. He was  
on about his fourth sitting  
when we made our second  
run over the Jap camp at  
about 500 feet. A burst  
of ground machine-gun fire  
hit our bomb-bay and several  
~~the~~ rounds ricocheted through  
the flimsy toilet bowl. 'Doc'  
stood straight up (thought he

over

was shot) and was instantly (10)  
tripped by his coveralls which  
had fallen and entangled his  
feet. It was a hilarious  
one-man show but Doc  
was dirty all over. After  
we departed the target area  
he had the back half of  
the airplane all for himself.  
When we landed it took  
him several buckets of  
gasoline and several hours  
to clean up the toilet and  
the surrounding floor —  
that was one of the rules  
of flying.

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(11)

4. What was it like to fly over a battle field?

We never saw armies engaged in ground combat as southern China, French Indo-China, Burma, and southeastern India (now Bangladesh) were covered by dense forests wherever our allies made combat contact against the Japs.

Our battlefields were in the air over specific targets on land or at sea and the Japs used flak (anti-aircraft guns) or fighter planes or searchlights to harass us.

On our low level bomb runs we could see Jap soldiers walking about when they mistook us for a Jap plane or running about when they had advance warning or sailors would dive overboard as our bombs blew up their ships or when we machine gunned them.

Over

12

Overall, each man experienced every ~~possible~~ emotion humanly possible while over the target or while engaged in combat - I've heard people laugh and cry and yell and I could never understand them because their was always so much work to be done during a bomb run even if it was just manning a machine gun to shoot back at the enemy.

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5. Tell me something you think would be important or interesting to tell the class?

WWII produced the greatest mass examples of good and evil that the world ever witnessed, i.e., the Holocaust in Europe and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.