

CHAPTER 8 - MIKE

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This was one of the few photos Hazel kept of Mike, capturing him and his sister in front of Grace Methodist Church in New York City. Mike is wearing his Bombardier Wings so this photo was taken mid-to-late 1943 before he shipped out for combat.

To help him cope with the loss of Gibby upon his arrival at Panagarh Air Base, Mike was grounded and reassigned to the 9th Bombardment Squadron twenty-three miles to the northwest to Pandaveswar Air Base, also in eastern India. The 9th was a sister squadron to the 436th in the Tenth Air Force. As with all of the squadrons in the 7th Bombardment Group, Mike would serve as bombardier on a B-24 Liberator operating in the China-Burma-India Theatre. His primary missions would take him to Port Blair in the Andaman Islands, a major Japanese held port in the eastern Bay of Bengal.

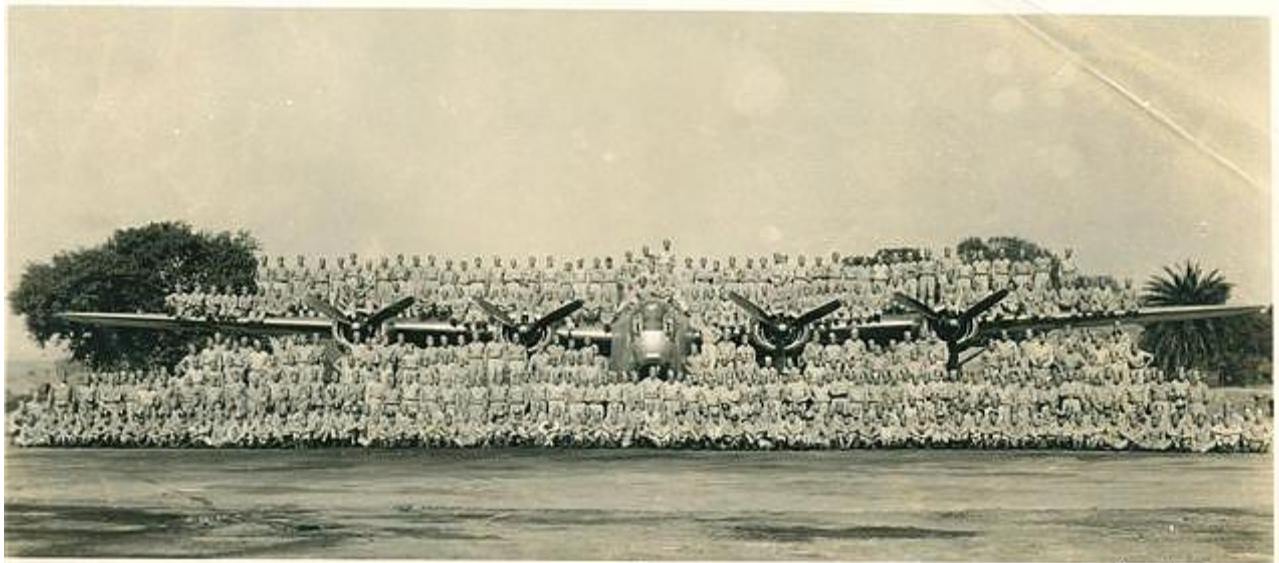


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Images of Pandaveswar, India – 1943



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9th Bomb Squadron Pandaveswar India

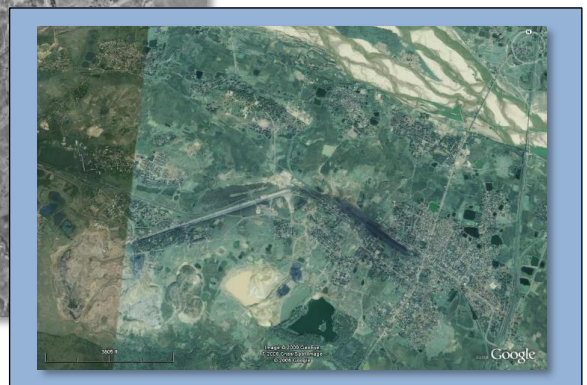


Above: The entire 9th Bomb Squadron at Pandaveswar on one of their B-24 Bombers. You might think Mike is in this photo somewhere, but this photo was taken in March of 1945.

Left: Ground crews eagerly await the return of their aircraft (and friends)

Below Left: Pandaveswar Airfield as it appeared in 1945

Below Right: Pandaveswar today



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Mike's longest mission – Combat missions for Mike began on his 25th birthday – March 16, 1944. It is not clear how many missions he would have flown before his last one, but at Gibby's pace of one every three days, it was probably less than ten.

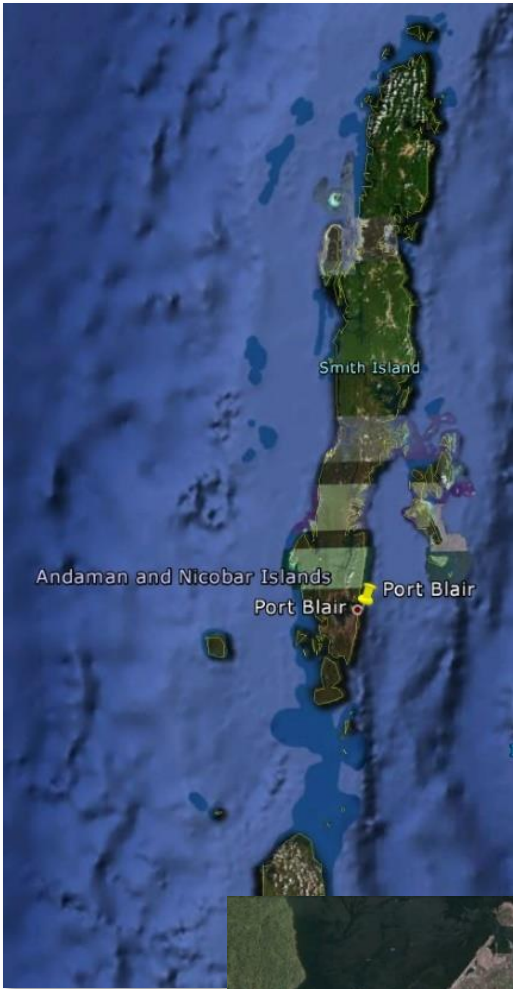
At daybreak on the morning of April 15, 1944, Mike's aircraft number 42-100243, piloted by highly experienced 1st Lt Stanley M. Allison, left Pandaveswar Air Base. Allison had flown numerous missions to Burma from Panagarh Airbase as part of the 436th Bombardment Squadron, including the disastrous December 1st mission where Gibby was killed. He too, had known Gibby and was now operating with the 9th Squadron.

This would be Allison's thirtieth-plus combat mission. In addition to bombardier Mike Iriate, the remainder of the crew were a mix of individuals who had served with multiple crews on other B-24's. One of those individuals was navigator Charles Kaufman who had been grounded with malaria at Panagarh on December 1, 1943. That would have been his first combat mission. He was fortunate to have missed it given his entire combat crew were lost, with the exception of his substitute, Grant Erwin. Kaufman was, indeed, a very lucky man but now living with survivor's guilt.

The targets on April 15th were the airfield and docks at Port Blair in the Andaman Islands.



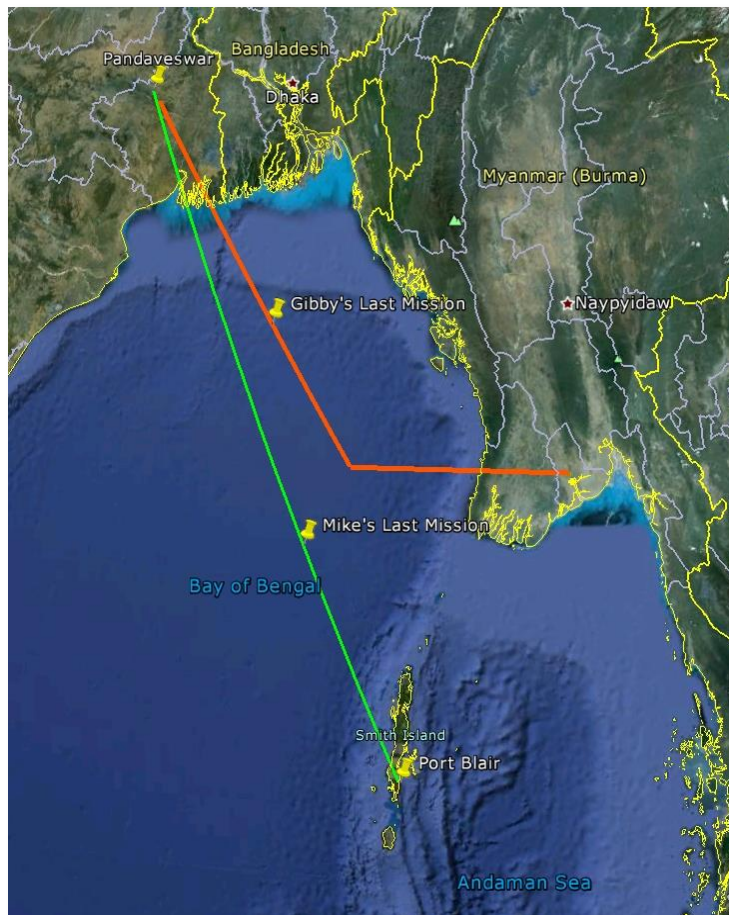
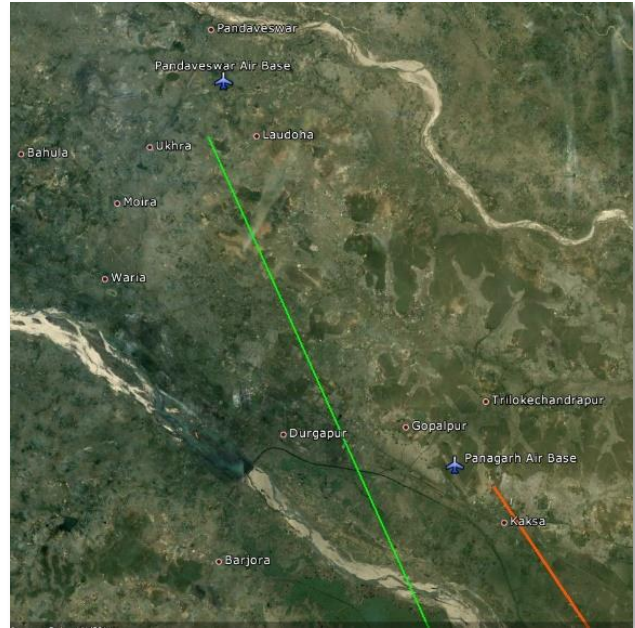
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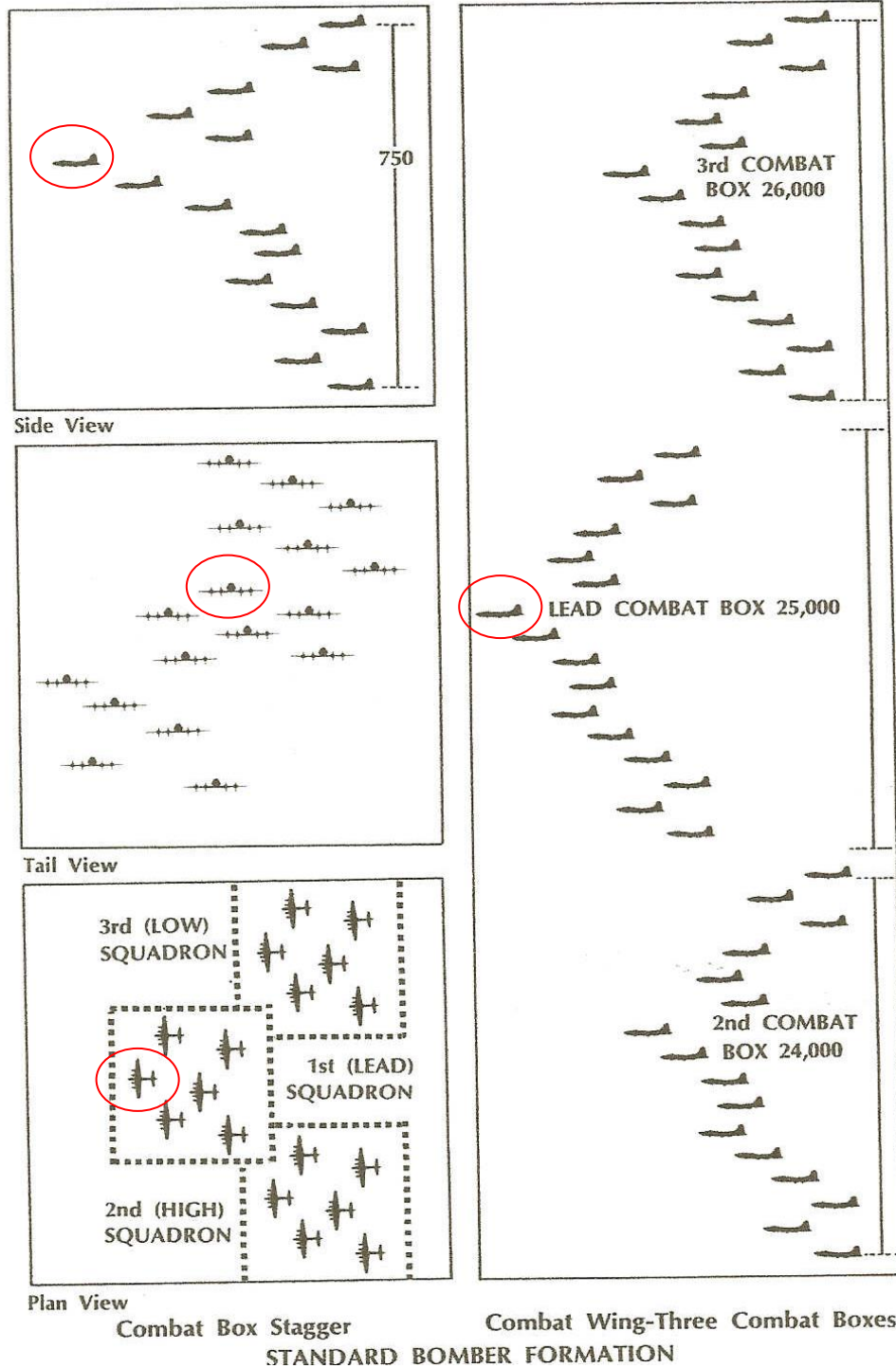
Mike might not have known, but ironically on that day, he was closely following Gibby's footsteps yet again. Taking off from an airfield only 23 miles northwest Panagarh where Gibby began his last mission on December 1, 1943, Mike would travel south-by southeast across the Bay of Bengal on a course of 156 degrees, only five degrees more southerly than Gibby. Both had uneventful flights, although Mike would travel more than twice the distance south - over 900 miles.

As fate would have it, neither would make it home. Mike's listed contact, Leonora Capote, of West 104th Street, New York City, received the awful MIA telegram from the war department in late April. Hazel Hofmann and all of 104th Street surely heard about it immediately. However, as usual in time of war, the details remained classified for years, additional information came slowly and the finality of this accident would also not be known for many months.



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1st Lt. Allison and his crew, including Mike, would be flying the dangerous lead aircraft position in the traditional box formation. Being the lead aircraft was a position of high responsibility. However, it was also the primary target of the anti-aircraft batteries on the ground always who aimed for the front of the squadron. Enemy aircraft in the air also knew the lead plane in a box formation set the direction of the bombing run and the release point. Thus, they tried to take that one out first.



At the beginning of the war, like Rangoon, Burma, the Andaman Islands were heavily fortified by the Japanese with significant air, sea and ground forces. Mike's squadron was met by hostile forces some 50 to 100 miles before landfall. They would rely on their own gunners and escort fighters to protect them. Unfortunately, they would be overwhelmed as you can see from the following declassified missing aircraft as reported by eyewitnesses flying in the same formation (MACR # 4119).

4119

CONFIDENTIAL
RESTRICTED

Classification changed
By: [Signature]
Date: 10/1/40

SECRET 4119

DETACHMENT TWENTY SECOND STATISTICAL CONTROL UNIT
HEADQUARTERS TENTH AIR FORCE
U.S. ARMY

SECRET
By Authority of
C.O. With A.P.
Date Initials

V

A.P.O. 465
25 April 1944

SUBJECT: Transmittal of Form 129, Missing Air Crews.

TO: Commanding Officer, 22d Statistical Control Unit,
Hq., AAF, India-Burma Sector, C-B-I Theater, A.P.O. 671.

Inclosed herewith Form 129, Missing Air Crews, for the below
listed organization:

9th Bomb Sq. (H) AAF., (dated 15 April 1944)

Airplane serial number. 42-100243

Type & Model. B-24-J

Pilot. 1st Lt. Stanley M. Allison.

J. RESSEGUITE,
Capt., A.C.,
Detachment Commander.

1 Incl:
Incl #1 Form 129 (with supporting papers) (in dupe)

22SCU 360.33 (23-4-44) Missing Crew Report 1st Ind. /11s
TWENTY SECOND STATISTICAL CONTROL UNIT, Headquarters Army Air Forces,
IB Sector, CBI Theater, APO 671. 25 April 1944

TO: Commanding General, Army Air Forces, IB Sector, CBI Theater, A.P.O. 671.

W. R. A.
AAF-5-2

1 Incl:
n/c (1 copy w/d)

AAF (IBS) 360.33 (23-4-44) Missing Crew Report 2nd Ind. AAS/11s
HEADQUARTERS ARMY AIR FORCES, IB Sector, CBI Theater, A.P.O. 671 1 - MAY 1944

TO: Commanding General, Army Air Forces, Washington, D.C., Attn: Statistical
Control Division.

W. M. S.
SECRETARY AND RECORDS

1 Incl:
n/c

SECRET

-1-

MC-942

404 072-19659

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A. P. O. 886
16 April 1944

A F F I D A V I T

On the 16 April 1944 while participating on a combat mission we were attacked by enemy fighters. The first pass knocked out number two engine of our lead ship flown by Lieut. STANLEY M. ALLISON. This engine was feathered. The second pass started number one engine on fire. All passes from then on were concentrated on the crippled ship. We were flying on his right and could see that the right waist gun, the tail turret gun and the left gun on the nose turret were not firing. Lieut. Allison pulled out of the formation and was flying at approximately 300 feet. Four parachutes were seen to open, three landed in the water and the other landed in some trees on the island. Losing altitude rapidly it appeared that he was trying to make a landing in the water. Due to the loss of his two engines he could not complete his attempt and crashed into the sea about 100 yards from the shore. Upon impact with the water the ship exploded and burst into flames which died out immediately. Through the smoke we could still see the tail of the plane protruding above the water.

Herbert B. Page
HERBERT B. PAGE
ASN 34473751,
Air Corps,
S/Sgt. Gunner.

Salvatore D. Bello
SALVATORE (NMI) DIBELLO,
ASN 11047337
Air Corps,
S/Sgt. Gunner.

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10AF Form
129

HEADQUARTERS TENTH AIR FORCE
DELHI

MISSING AIR CREWS REPORT

Classification changed
to **RESTRICTED**
by E. A. BRAUNAS, Lt. Col., AG
by F. M. MUEHN, Capt., AG
Date 1944

IMPORTANT: This report will be compiled in triplicate, one copy each Air Force, one copy each organization within 42 hours of the time an aircraft is reported missing.

1. ORGANIZATION: Location Pandaveswar, India; Command or Air Force Tenth
Group Seventh; Squadron Ninth; Detachment
2. SPECIFY: Point of Departure PANDAVESWAR; Course Panda Direct to Target
Intended Destination Port Blair; Type of Mission Combat
3. WEATHER CONDITIONS AND VISIBILITY AT TIME OF CRASH OR WHEN LAST REPORTED:
10-20 miles visibility, scattered clouds, slight haze
4. GIVE: (a) Date 15/4/44; Time 1212 hours; and Location 92°44'N 12°55'E
of last known whereabouts of missing aircraft.
(b) Specify whether () Last Sighted; () Last contacted by radio;
() Forced Down; (X) Seen to Crash; or () Information not available.
5. AIRCRAFT WAS LOST, OR IS BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN LOST, AS A RESULT OF (Check only one) (X) Enemy Aircraft; () Enemy Anti-Aircraft; () Other Circumstances as follows:

AIRCRAFT: Type, Model and Series B-24J; A.A.P. Serial Number 42-100243
ENGINES: Type, Model and Series R1830-65; A.A.P. Serial Number (a) BP 42-7664
(b) 42-92248; (c) BP 42-7850; (d) BP 42-7823

INSTALLED WEAPONS (Furnish below Make, Type and Serial Number)
(a) (Included on separate sheet) (c) ; (d)
(e) ; (f) ; (g) ; (h)

9. THE PERSONS LISTED BELOW WERE REPORTED AS: (a) Battle Casualty Yes
or (b) Non-Battle Casualty
10. NUMBER OF PERSONS ABOARD AIRCRAFT: Crew 10; Passengers 0 total 10
(Starting with pilot, furnish the following particulars; If more than 10 persons were aboard aircraft, list similar particulars on the reverse side of the form with notation at the bottom of the page marked "over".)

Status	Crew Position	Name in Full (Last Name First)	Rank	Serial Number
DE01.	Pilot	Allison, Stanley M.	1st. Lieut.	0-672287
DE02.	Co-Pilot	Duby, Melburn A.	2nd. Lieut.	0-806821
FUS3.	Navigator	Kaufman, Charles (nmi)	2nd. Lieut.	0-683632
DE04.	Bombardier	Iriarte, Francis M.	2nd. Lieut.	0-744199
DE05.	Engineer	Evans, Cecil (nmi) Jr.	T/Sgt.	1413821
DE06.	Radio Op.	Mueller, Kurt W.	T/Sgt.	16146125
DE07.	Arms Gunner	Casey, John D.	S/Sgt.	11107843
DE08.	Arms Gunner	Hutchinson, John T.	S/Sgt.	32495670
DE09.	Arms Gunner	Blanc, Walter A.	S/Sgt.	32693639
DE10.	Arms Gunner	Grout, Vernon W.	Corps	17001688

11. IDENTIFY BELOW THOSE PERSONS WHO ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE LAST KNOWN LOCATION OF AIRCRAFT, AND CHECK APPROPRIATE COLUMN TO INDICATE BASIS FOR SAME:

Name in Full (Last Name First)	Serial Number	Contacted by	Check Only One Column		
			Last Sighted	Saw Crash	Forced Landing
1. DiBallo, Salvatore (nmi)	S/Sgt. 11047337	Radio		X	
2. Page, Herbert B.	S/Sgt. 34473751	Radio		X	

12. IF PERSONNEL ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE SURVIVED, INSERT YES TO ONE OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS: (a) Parachutes were used Yes; (b) Persons were seen walking away from scene of crash ; or (c) Any other reason (Specify)
13. ATTACH AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH, MAP, CHART, OR SKETCH, SHOWING APPROXIMATE LOCATION WHERE AIRCRAFT WAS LAST SEEN.
14. ATTACH EYEWITNESS DESCRIPTION OF CRASH, POSSIBLE LANDING, OR OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES PERTAINING TO MISSING AIRCRAFT.
15. ATTACH A DESCRIPTION OF THE EXTENT OF SEARCH, IF ANY, AND GIVE NAME, RANK AND SERIAL NUMBER OF OFFICER IN CHARGE HERE

Date of Report 16 April 1944

David N. Kellogg
(Signature of Preparing Officer)
DAVID N. KELLOGG,
Major, Air Corps,
Commanding.

SECRET

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(371)

1st Lt. Stanley M. Allison

Mrs. Alline M. Housen, (sister)
61 East Center Street,
Mount Gilead, Ohio.

2nd Lt. Charles Kaufman

Mrs. Mildred K. Cowan, (mother)
16255 Cherrylawn,
Detroit, Michigan.

(371)

2nd Lt. Melburn A. Duby

Miss Rose Seranton, (aunt)
25 Central Street,
Brattleboro, Vermont.

2nd Lt. Francis M. Iriarte

Mrs. Leonora Capote, (mother)
140 West 104th Street,
New York 25, New York.

(371)

T/Sgt. Cecil Evans, Jr.

Mrs. Eva H. Evans, (mother)
Route # 1,
Goodlettsville, Tennessee.

S/Sgt. Walter A. Eland

Mrs. Mary A. Eland, (mother)
169-15 45th Road,
Flushing, New York.

(371)

S/Sgt. John D. Casey

Mrs. Mair E. Casey, (mother)
31 Grant Street,
Milford, Massachusetts.

S/Sgt. John T. Hutchinson

Mrs. Beatrice Hutchinson, (mother)
366 East 128th Street,
Bronx, New York.

T/Sgt. Kurt W. Mueller

Mrs. Gertrude Mueller, (mother)
4333 Dickens Avenue,
Chicago, Illinois.

Corporal Vernon W. Grout

Mrs. Ruth P. Grout, (wife)
Broughton, Illinois.

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NINTH BOMBARDMENT SQUADRON (H) AAF
SEVENTH BOMBARDMENT GROUP (H) AAF
Office of the Armament Officer

16 April 1944

SUBJECT: ARMAMENT LOST ON PLANE

TO : Operations Officer, 9th Bomb. Sq.

1. The following equipment was lost on Airplane #42-100243

Guns, Browning Machine, Cal. .50, M2, Aircraft, Ser. Nos.
943950, 943976, 935485, 943279, 943874, 944543, 943476,
943221, 943937, and 942743.

Guns, Thompson Sub-Machine, Cal. .45, Model 1928A1, Ser. Nos.
S-382305, and S-376517.

Rifle, Cal. .30, Model 1903, Ser. No. 407251.

Pistols, Auto., Cal. .45, Model 1911A1, Ser. Nos. 974290,
890205, 1077743, 1077674.

Pistols, Auto., Cal. .45, Model 1911, Ser. Nos. 200543,
587203, 216603, 591071, 532191, and 505756.

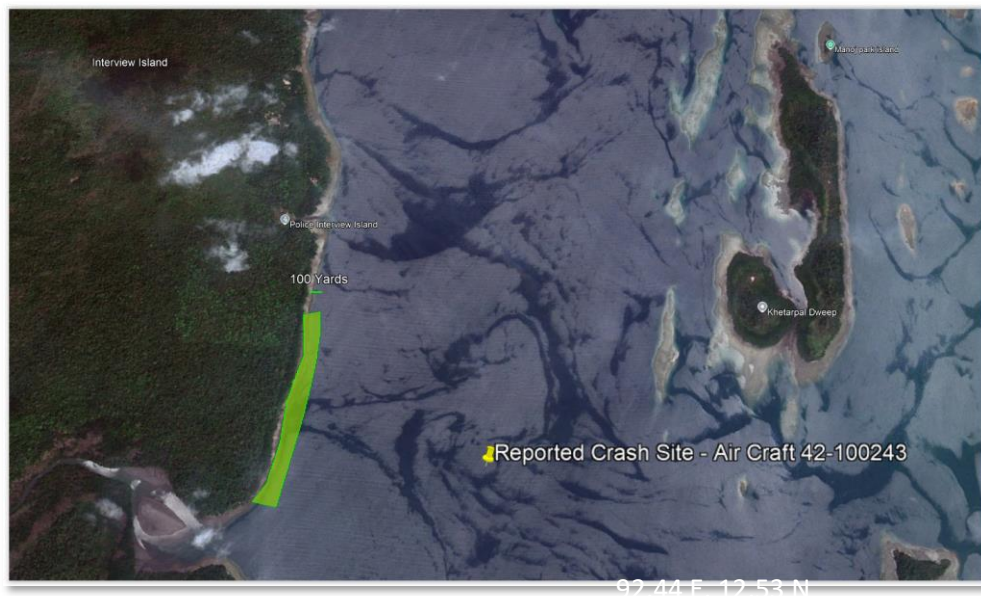
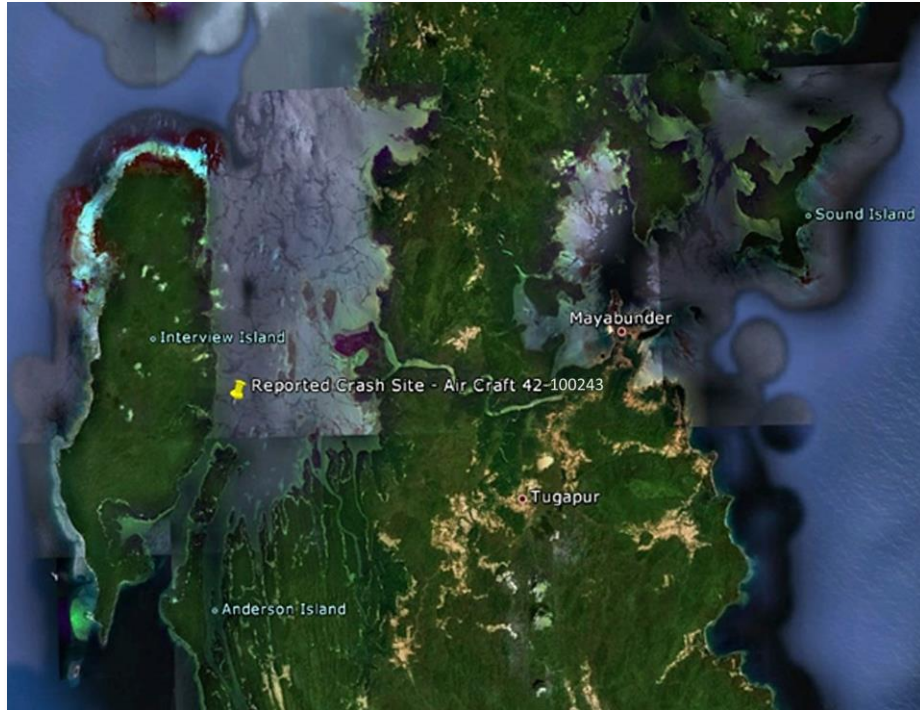
Bombsight, M-9, Ser. No. B-239.

Stabilizer, M-9, Ser. No. B-239.

Robert L. Stell
ROBERT L. STELL
Capt., Air Corps
Armament Officer.

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The targeting of Mike's lead aircraft was intentional given the number of passes the Japanese fighters made to make sure it went down. Although in his memoirs, Charles Kaufman believed the crash was after the bomb run, it must have happened just before the bombing run, since the last reported position of the aircraft was in the water just off Interview Island well west of Smith Island – still 84 miles north of target Port Blair.



The reported longitude and latitude coordinates were 92.44 E, 12.53 N. These are very rough numbers determined by dead-reckoning of heading and distance traveled. Satellites and Long Range Navigation systems were still decades away. In the heat of the battle, it could only be a rough estimate. Interview Island remains undeveloped jungle to this day.

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Reading the Page/DiBello eyewitness account and noting the crash site was “into the sea, about 100 yards from the shore”, the area marked in green is the likely location where the aircraft could be found. (Note: the longitude/latitude position is more than one-thousand yards off-shore).

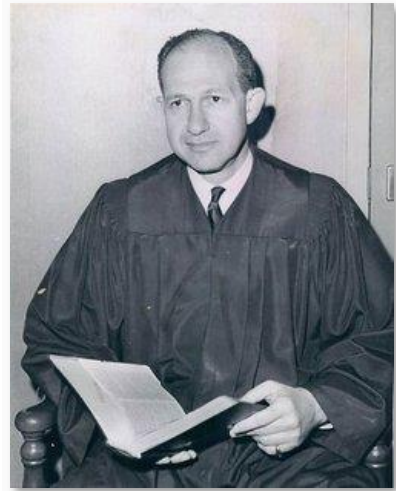
The eye-witness statement reported four parachutes spotted with three landing in the water and one in the trees. Bailing out at an altitude of 300 feet meant a very hard landing with possibly partially deployed chutes. All crew members were listed as Missing in Action and it was not discovered until the end of the war and the liberation of the Japanese POW camps that one of those parachutes belonged to the navigator, 2nd Lt Charles Kaufman.

Kaufman, the son of William Kaufman and Mildred (Falk) Kaufman, was born and grew up in Detroit, and graduated from Central High School. He earned a bachelor's degree at Wayne State University and had started his law studies when World War II erupted.

Kaufman entered the Army Air Corps, was trained as a navigator and assigned to the 10th Air Force, 7th Bombardment Group, 9th Bombardment Squadron. By April 15, 1944, he had been flying combat missions for three and a half months.

His obituary stated, “three out of the ten-man crew were able to bail out, but only Kaufman, who remembered only two parachutes in his memoirs, survived to become a prisoner of war.” He believed most of the crew were already dead and that, just he and the bombardier were alive in the nose of the plummeting aircraft. Having trouble attaching his ripcord to the aircraft, he stepped aside and let the bombardier go first. That bombardier was Mike Iriarte. Charles was the last one to see him alive.

Kaufman was held at Omori Headquarters Prison Camp in Tokyo, which was not liberated until August 1945. Given the atrocities at that camp, he was fortunate to have survived.



At war's end, Kaufman returned to WSU, earned a law degree and went into practice with his father, William. Kaufman entered the court arena in 1957, when he ran for Common Pleas Court judge in Detroit. He lost, but two years later he ran again and won. In 1964, he ran for the circuit court and won, serving 30 years.

He was survived by his wife, two sons, three daughters and twelve grandchildren.



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Mike's status finally made the New York Newspapers in May. It was another clipping my mother regretfully put in her war time scrapbook.



On the day of Mike's last mission, George was at Camp Kilmer, NJ, in the final few days of staging before going overseas. His orders were clear. He would be leaving for England by ship in eight days.

On the evening of March 17th, the day Mike's secret Missing Air Crew Report was issued, George was given a day's leave to say goodbye to his family. Thank God my mother did not yet know about Mike. Knowing Gibby was missing was enough of a secret to keep. I cannot imagine the stress she must have felt.

That night Hazel and George had dinner at George's parent's apartment along with two good friends, Sterling and Evelyn Hoch. Sterling was a pilot in the same Bombardment Group and Squadron as George. Evelyn, a long-time good friend of Hazel's from Grace Methodist Church, and Sterling had just married two weeks earlier on March 3rd. The Hofmann's had married in a hurried ceremony in upstate New York on January 28, 1942, one month after the Pearl Harbor attack when everything started to move at light speed.



Remembering my mother's ever present radiant smile, for me the photos on her marriage license told of a woman who was very frightened of what was to come.



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Together, George and Sterling would be shipping out on the SS Saturnia, leaving New York on March 23, 1944, as part of Convoy UT.10. Twenty-six ships in total would do the crossing in eleven days, delivering 51,273 troops to the Firth of Clyde, Scotland, on April 3rd. Submarine activity during the crossing was always a risk, but it had subsided greatly as the Allies began to dominate the Atlantic. They arrived safely due to the presence of Carrier Escorts like the HMDS Nabob.



Facing combat, George had no idea he was now alone. That was probably a good thing, but it caused a lot of pain for the family back home as he frequently wrote to them to ask about his son, Johnnie, cousin, Gibby, and friend, Mike. News and photos of Johnnie flowed freely – but nothing else.



Now it was George's turn, and the insidious 'rule-of-three's' came with a vengeance. George would go Missing in Action in May.