

CHAPTER 7 – GIBBY’S LAST MISSION

CHAPTER 7

It was December 1, 1943. The destination was the Insein rail yards and locomotive factory as well as the Japanese occupied enemy airfield, Mingaladon, at Rangoon, Burma.



The weather was expected to be good that day and the target visibility pretty clear. It was close to a very visible Landmark called the Insane prison, that looked like the spokes of a wheel. The rail yards were adjacent to the Mingaladon Enemy Airfield, which is where most of the Airborne fighter resistance was based, defending the city.

The Rail Yards were fairly large as seen here in this inset.

CHAPTER 7 – GIBBY'S LAST MISSION

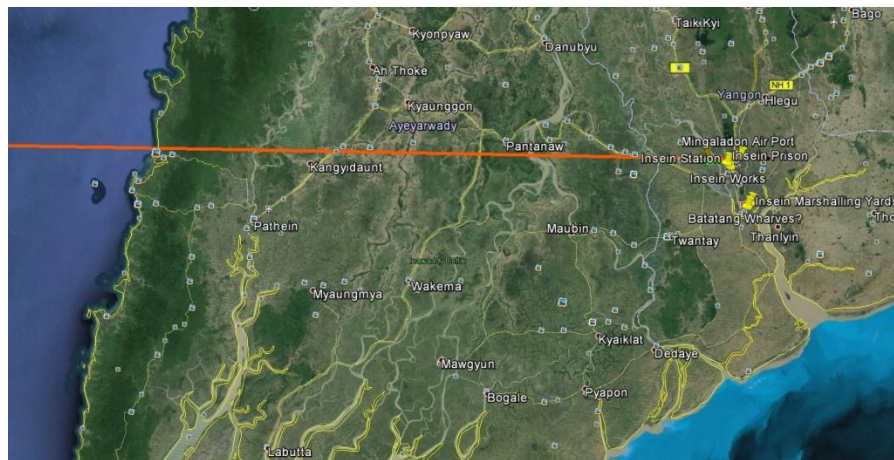
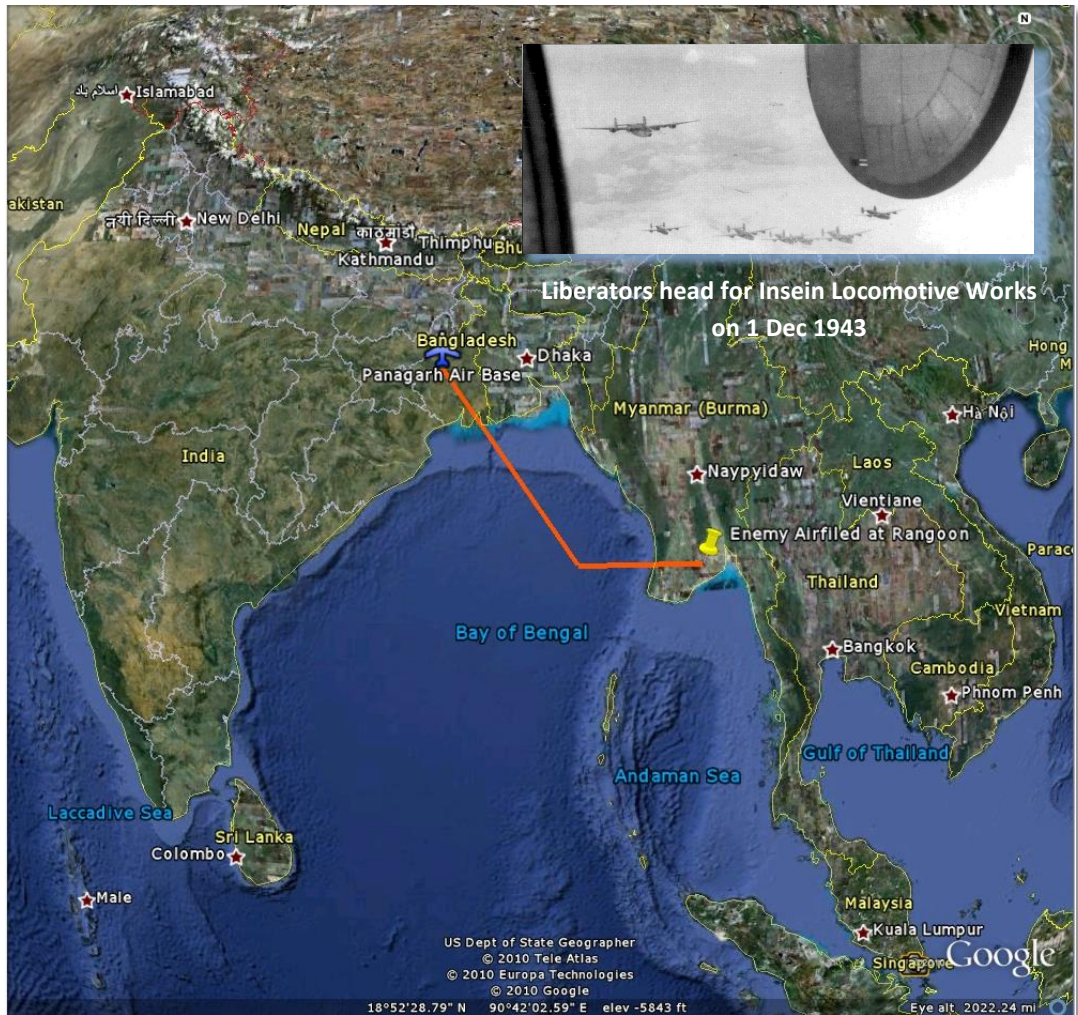


Looking at the target of their previous Mission just 3 days earlier - Mission #9 - the wharfs in the southern part of the city of Rangoon, you can see from a reconnaissance photo in the insert, the wharfs were pretty well destroyed.

(Note: The area in the previous Japanese photograph from 1941 from page 83 is shown in the overlay).

CHAPTER 7 – GIBBY’S LAST MISSION

Their course from Panagarh was 150 degrees magnetic flying over open water for 530 miles until the 280 mile run for the target began in the Bay of Bengal. Landfall was made at Pathein and the mission continued for 100 miles over thinly populated jungle. They arrived at their target at 12:25PM.



CHAPTER 7 – GIBBY'S LAST MISSION



The crews and the squadron had the feeling that this mission, #10, would be a simple repeat of the previous one with good results and little aircraft damage. The Japanese fighter air coverage was rated at fair to moderate and the flak was manageable given the direction of the bombing run. While flak is flak and always unpredictable, they believed they could successfully navigate their way through it again. Overall, they felt like the odds were in their favor.

As previously described, the area had been occupied by the Japanese Imperial Forces since 1941. It was usually well fortified with both ground-based anti-aircraft installations and a significant number of Ki-84S fighter squadrons.

Strike One - While the Japanese fighter strength in the Rangoon area apparently had been at a low ebb on 28 November, in the two intervening days the Japanese Air Force's 5th Hikodan (Air Brigade), which was preparing for a large raid on Calcutta, had ordered additional fighters to concentrate around Rangoon bringing in heavy reinforcements from neighboring regions. Over those 2 days, the 64th Hentai would assemble 60 + additional fighter planes at Mingaladon, and they would be airborne on maneuvers on the morning of December 1st.

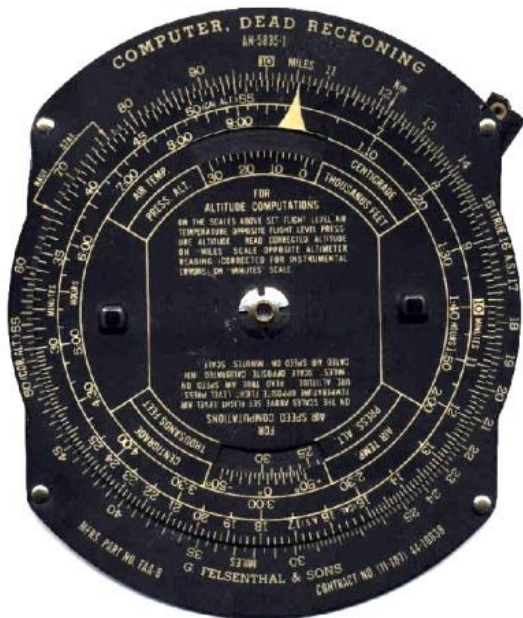
When the bombers made their run from north-to-south in order to avoid heavy anti-aircraft fire, the sixty-odd enemy fighters already aloft were able to make head-on attacks out of the sun.

CHAPTER 7 – GIBBY’S LAST MISSION

Mission #10 Begins

Due to the lack of precise navigation equipment even the beginning of a mission was nothing easy! In order to rendezvous, squadrons of bombers and fighters had to take off at the same time from different airbases. But the weather often prevented that. Then relying on visibility and imprecise dead-reckoning navigation to find each other they needed to meet up at the planned rendezvous - sometimes they never met. After wheels up on this first day of December the aircraft would rendezvous with 19 other bombers in southern India or near the northern end of the Bay of Bengal and proceed to their targets lined up in a standard “combat box” formation, holding that formation for the duration of the mission until returning to their respective sites.

Radar was developed during the war but it was limited in range, target differentiation and only ground based. Not only was there no airborne radar, there were no satellite navigation or inertial guidance systems, no satellite images, no computers, few ground beacons in service – but they had one of these --



▲ dead reckoning computer used by navigators in World War II.

This was the “handy-dandy” secret pocket calculator that the navigator carried so he could make believe he knew the answer when the crew asked him, “where the f... are we?” It was probably roughly right but hard to use when you were being shot at.

Their only navigation gear consisted of a watch, compass, list and photographs of route landmarks and distances, and reconnaissance photographs of the target area which they were given at each pre-flight briefing. As you would expect, the photographs did not help very much when routes and targets were obscured by cloud cover.

The visibility for a bombing run was often reported on a 1 to 10 scale as was the cloud cover. A ten by ten day was a cloudless day with no haze – perfect for identifying targets on the ground but unfortunately also perfect for spotting targets from the ground. (As Army trainees were taught, tracers work both ways!!). No haze and some clouds were ideal to target, drop, run and hide.

After two days for maintenance and repairs following the November 28th mission to the Batanitang Wharves, two bomb groups returned to Insein. All available fighters, now ten P-51 Mustangs and fifteen P-38 Lightnings, were assigned as escorts. These 25 fighter pilots did not know they would be facing 60 + enemy Fighters. While those odds were not expected, at 2.5 to 1, it might be manageable, given the superiority of the Allied fighters to the Ki-43 Japanese fighters.

CHAPTER 7 – GIBBY'S LAST MISSION

Strike Two - Delayed in taking off from Kurmitola by heavy fog and unable, because of poor communications, to warn the bombers, the ten P-51's failed to finish refueling at Ramu in time to make the rendezvous. The mission went out with only the fifteen P-38's to protect it – now four-to-one odds. Compounding the difficulty, the visibility at



P-38 Lightning



P-51 Mustang

Rangoon on that day was reported as poor due to intervening clouds. But a mission is a mission in the orchestration of a war so once launched a mission would continue to the bitter end.

Strike Three - One other factor, made a bad situation even worse.

YASUHIKO KUROE – JAPANESE ACE

The executive officer of the 64th Hentai was Yasuhiko Kuroe. He was an Ace, who by the end of the war, would have the second highest number of kills as a Japanese fighter pilot. He was extremely aggressive and was known to follow his kills all the way to the ground, continuing to fire as they crashed. If anyone escaped the plane by Parachute, they were also fair game to his cannons. There was no respect or chivalry with Kuroe.

Some of the earlier 1943 missions involving Kuroe foreshadowed the growing resolve of the Japanese defenders as described in this recounting of a remarkable mission in March of 1943:

Born in February 1918, Yasuhiko Kuroe followed in the footsteps of his father, who was a major in the infantry. In June 1937 Kuroe graduated from the Japanese Military Academy (50th edition).

After finishing a course of flight training in November 1938 Kuroe was sent to the 59th Sentai (Squadron) and was assigned to the Air Force base in Japan in Hankou (Central China). At this time, relative calm reigned on this front so Kuroe together with other pilots rapidly mastered the new Ki-27 "Nate" fighters. When hostilities broke out on Khalkhin, the 59th Sentai was immediately sent to the Manchurian-Mongolian border. In mid-September in the last days of the fighting, Kuroe managed to win his first victories - he shot down two Soviet I-15's.

In 1941, Lieutenant Kuroe returned to Japan and worked as an instructor at the Army Aviation School. In May 1941 he was promoted to captain. Four months later, nine prototypes of the newest Ki-44 "Seki Tojo" fighters arrived and were planned to be tested in combat conditions. Captain Kuroe participated in the test program. The fighters were sent to Southeast Asia (Indochina, Burma, Malaysia). Although in the first months of the war the Allies provided minimal resistance to the Japanese in the air, Captain Kuroe managed to bring down three Royal Air Force "Hurricane's" of the 232 Squadron. Despite its successes, however, Kuroe formed a low opinion of Ki-44.



CHAPTER 7 – GIBBY’S LAST MISSION

Meanwhile, with the British and Americans rapidly building up military presence in Southeast Asia, Kuroe was assigned to the 64th Sentai and appointed commander of the 3rd Chutaya to take on an increasing load. After Colonel Tateo Kato - the then commander of the 64th Sentai - was shot down in May 1942, Kuroe took his place. Kuroe always remained optimistic and had nerves of steel. At the head of the 64 Sentai Kuroe made a name other than the commander of the fighter team.

"It took great courage to intercept the formidable B-24s, and even greater luck to bring one down." Captain Yasuhiko Kuroe told his pilots to, "fly head-on into the American formations and concentrate on a single bomber. Attack boldly," Kuroe counseled. "Go into the wall of fire and take their bullets, be relentless." Kuroe's tactic worked, but often at great loss to the fragile Ki-43s.



A trio of Nakajima Ki-43 Oscar fighters patrols above Japanese installations somewhere in the Pacific.

On 13 Sep 1943 Kuroe shot down an F-5A (unarmed P-38) of 9 Squadron while it was on photographic reconnaissance. 1st Lt. Frank X. Tilcock recalls: "I did not have time to see the plane attack me. I realized that I was shot down only when the dashboard of my plane broke into pieces, and the cabin was filled with smoke and flames."

The American pilot managed to jump with a parachute, and three days later he was captured. Kuroe eventually met Tilcock and recalled that the American shook his hand and said that he was shot down on the anniversary of his wedding. Frank Tilcock, who retired to Florida, said: "I was interrogated by many Japanese officers who asked me many questions. Maybe among them was Kuroe."

During this period, the British began to actively use new fighter-bombers such as "Mosquito" which struck constantly against Japanese positions until the end of the war. On 11 Feb 1943, the Japanese managed to

CHAPTER 7 – GIBBY'S LAST MISSION

bring down the first "Mosquito". The reconnaissance flight over Rangoon was PR IX DZ697 from 684th squadron and was piloted by officers Fielding and Turton. The Japanese fighter pilot was none other than Yasuhiko Kuroe.

Major Yasuhiko Kuroe ended the war with 51 aerial victories, the second highest in Japanese history. During the war he was shot down 3 times, wounded 3 times, and his plane hit over 500 times - but he survived!

In the last months of the war, he led a squadron of fighter jets for the Air Force in defending Japan, personally shooting down three B-29's and was eventually promoted to Major General. After the war he served in the new Japanese Self Defense Force, where he flew and commanded jet fighters of Japan Air Self-Defense Force. After many years as a fearless 'shoot-down' king, he met his end in 1965 when he accidentally drowned on a fishing trip.



In December 1943, 2nd Lt. Gilbert Rauh would come face to face with Yasuhiko Kuroe in what would be Gibby's final mission.

CHAPTER 7 – GIBBY'S LAST MISSION

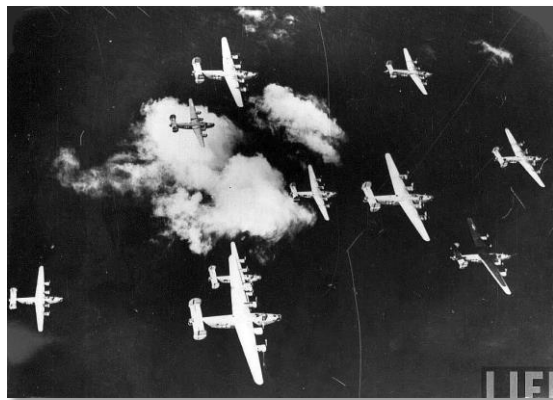
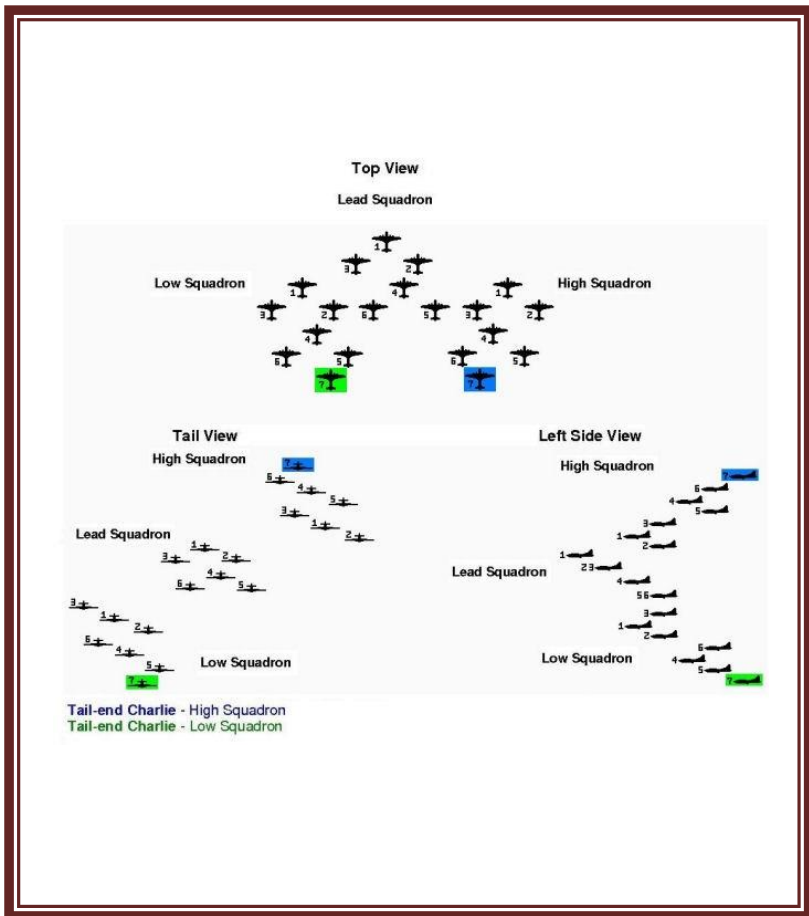
COMBAT BOX - The US Army Air Force developed the combat box formation for its heavy bombers that was designed to provide the maximum amount of protection for the bomber formation.

The basic combat box was a four (later three) bomber formation that arranged the bombers both horizontally and vertically to give the clearest fields of fire for its machine guns.

Machine gunners in the various positions were assigned sectors; they could engage targets in their sectors but not outside of it as it risked hitting bombers in the box.

And the bomber box was supposed to be tight: a tight formation meant that the bombers were within a wingspan or less of each other, not an easy feat when the bombers were buffeted by turbulence from other aircraft in the formation, flak and weather.

The most vulnerable bombers in the box formation were the "Tail-end Charlies." They had the fewest number of bombers and machine guns covering them and were consequently the preferred targets for German fighters who were looking for the easy kill. However, the most effective biggest prize was the disabling or destruction of the lead plane (number 1 in the lead squadron) since that crew had primary responsibility for setting the altitude, direction and speed for the bombing runs and for primary targeting. All the other planes in the formation dropped when they did. The job of the other bombardiers was to trip the bomb release switch in their own plane when the lead dropped their bombs. This method/technique was intended to concentrate the bomb pattern for maximum destruction. This routine led to the creation of another role and title when there were personnel shortages. Some enlisted crew members were selected to sit in the bombardier's position and trip the switch when the lead plane dropped their bombs. That role was called a "togglie."

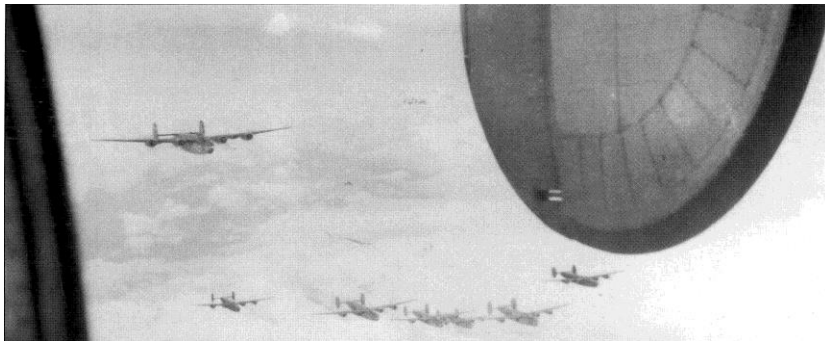


CHAPTER 7 – GIBBY'S LAST MISSION

For their 10th Mission, the McLauchlen crew would be flying on the Apocalypse, a B-24J, serial number 42-73196. Pilot John McLauchlen is third from the right. This is the actual crew that would be in action that day. Gibby was missing in the original photo since he was taking what would be the last photo of this group of men. With a little artistic license, he has now been added on the right.



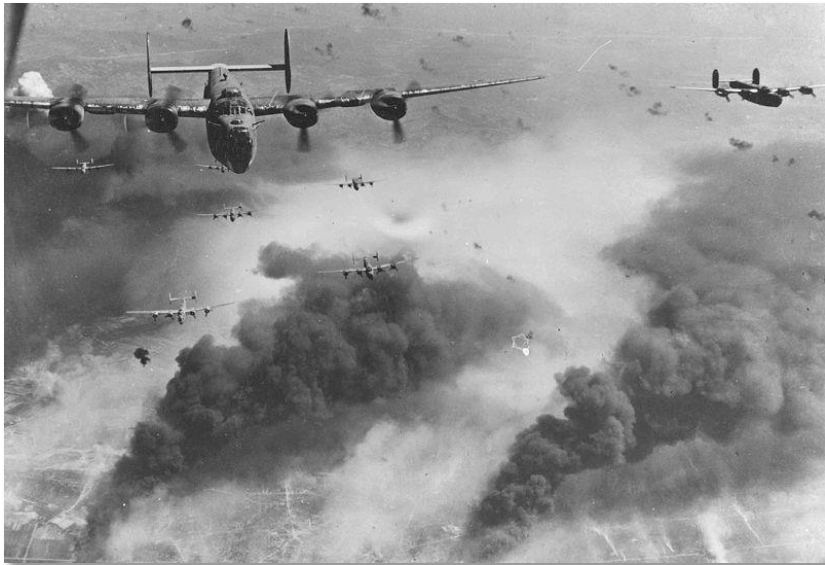
Their course from Panagarh was 150 degrees magnetic flying over open water for 530 miles until the 280 mile run for the target began in the Bay of Bengal. Landfall was made at Pathein and the mission continued for 100 miles over thinly populated jungle. They arrived at their target at 12:25PM.



This photograph of the Liberators on their way to the Insein marshalling yards on the morning of December 1, 1943, was taken from the waste gun window of one of the B-24J's in formation. There were a total of 56 in this force of B-24 Liberators.

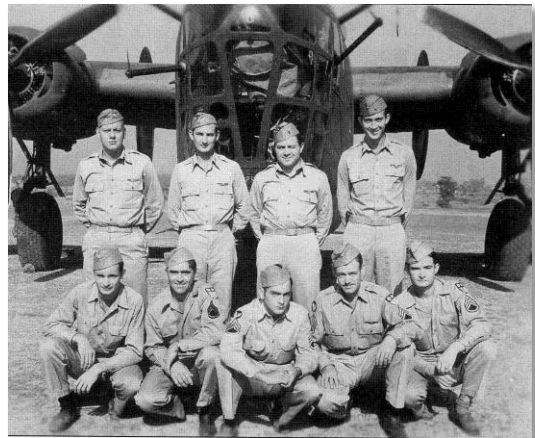
CHAPTER 7 – GIBBY'S LAST MISSION

The Bomb Run - The first assault was as devastating as it was surprising and took place approximately ten minutes before the bomb release point. Enemy aircraft were in firing distance before they were sighted, concentrating on the formation leaders. The 436th, 493rd and 9th Squadrons of the 7th Bombardment Group were on their final north-to-south run to the target at 19,000 ft when they ran into heavy anti-aircraft fire in addition to the fighters. Engagement by Japanese fighters had been intense and once within range of the targets the anti-aircraft fire made it a living Hell.



The 7th Bombardment Group squadrons, forming the first wave, bore the brunt of the attack. The 493rd BS was leading the 7th BG, with 21 aircraft in the first wave. Its B-24s were attacked first, and Lt Granville Stringfellow's airplane, in the lead position, was hit in the right wing by flak. As the pilot banked away from the formation, his bomber was quickly set upon by Japanese Air Force fighters. The Liberator was seen to fall apart in a ball of flames.

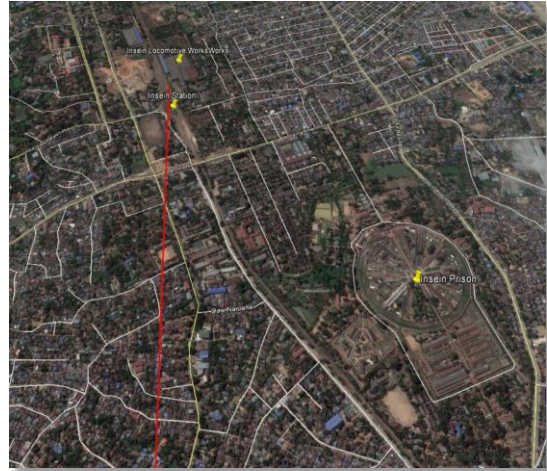
Of the three squadrons in the 7th BG, the 9th took the brunt of the attack. Although its elements were flying the B-24J that day, the front turrets did not provide the hoped-for defensive fire. The lead bomber, flown by squadron operations officer Capt Bill Wright, was quickly shot down, followed by his wingman in a second Liberator. Three planes pulled up to close the gaps in the formation. As the formation



Flying a brand-new B-24J, Stingfellow and his crew were shot down and killed on the 1 Dec 1943 mission to Insein. The regular co-pilot, Lt. Lynn Stokes, standing left, was not flying that day.

CHAPTER 7 – GIBBY'S LAST MISSION

closed up, one of those three aircraft was hit and fell away after repeated passes from the fighters. Three others tried to cover the group leader, who was losing speed and altitude, and thus did not complete the bomb run. By the time of bomb-drop, four planes had been shot down. Only ten parachutes were seen – thirty men were lost.



P-38 Lightning "Battle Axe"
475th FG, 45th FS, Pacific Theater - 1945

The P-38's could give little direct assistance to defend the incoming Liberators as they had their hands full with other fighters still above the bomber formation. However, the lack of P-51 coverage probably contributed more to the high US losses that day. The P-51's arrived as the crippled B-24's were leaving, but it was too late for five aircraft and their crews.

When the planes of the 308th Group arrived and were ready to begin their bomb run, the attacks were repeated by a slightly smaller number of aircraft. Sometimes enemy fighters came in three abreast, all concentrating on a single plane.



At other times they approached in a string, each plane making a pass and pulling away to allow the next in line to come in. The lead plane of the 308th was shot down on the first pass, just before the bomb run, and the plane which took its place was badly hit during the run. Attacks persisted after bombs were away, enemy pilots singling out cripples; but the P-51's finally arrived in time to offer some protection on the return, losing one ship in their brief participation.

CHAPTER 7 – GIBBY’S LAST MISSION

The Apocalypse was one of only three of seven 436th Bomb Squadron bombers that were able to reach the target. Immediately after bombs away, the formation turned sharply to their right in the tight circle, and headed back the same way they came. Again, they were anticipating less flak on that northerly route.

That was the plan, but it didn’t work out quite so well for Gibby and the McLauchlen crew.

In the 436th BS formation, flak hit the left wing of aircraft number 64, 2nd Lt. John McLauchlen's bomber, Apocalypse. When he dove off to the left, three 'Oscars' (Ki 84S) attacked the bomber and shot it down.



Ki 84S Hayate



From an eye-witness report given by 1st Lt. Emil A. Kremer, pilot of 436th Bombardment Squadron element flying in the number 2 position adjacent to McLauchlen -

“Our formation of three planes [was] tacked on to the 9th Bombardment Squadron’s formation. After turning from the bombing run Lt. McLauchlen’s left wing was hit by Anti-Aircraft fire and began to smoke badly. He then dove sharply to the left and three enemy aircraft followed him down. He was last seen going into a cloud bank.”

CHAPTER 7 – GIBBY'S LAST MISSION



It turns out that was the last and only sighting by the squadron. There were no other sightings or eye-witness reports from any of the other B-24's. After Gibby's plane disappeared into the cloud bank, no one on the Allied side could see if they crashed or if anyone had parachuted out of the crippled aircraft. Kremer's report was the only available information.

However, there were three other eye-witnesses – the three Japanese fighter pilots who had taken down the Apocalypse.

CHAPTER 7 – GIBBY'S LAST MISSION

Two were warrant officers, Hinoshita and Kamazaki, and the third fighter pilot was the infamous, Yasuhiko Kuroe. These three Japanese pilots that followed Gabby's plane into the cloud bank did record what happened next.



While strafing the B-24 at the beginning of the attack, Kuroe's aircraft was hit by return fire. His right landing gear unexpectedly deployed. The McLauchlen crew was fighting back.



He peeled off and the other two fighter pilots followed the B-24 down, exhausting all of their 1000 rounds of tracer and explosive ammunition into the crippled plane. It is doubtful if anyone survived that.

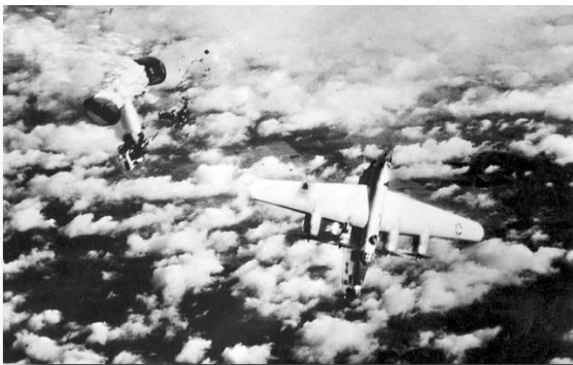
CHAPTER 7 – GIBBY'S LAST MISSION

Kuroe, meanwhile, determined that his aircraft was not seriously damaged, so he re-engaged and followed the B-24 down, continually shooting with no fire being returned, until the plane crashed into the ground. There were no parachutes seen to leave the plane.

The Apocalypse and all her crew were lost and Yasuhiko Kuroe added one more kill to what would be a total of fifty-one by the end of the war.



The downing of aircraft 42-73196 brought the total losses that day to five (some accounts say there were six but there are no clear records of that loss) B-24 aircraft and one P-51 Mustang – a total of forty-one crewmen killed. Five other B-24's were seriously damaged.

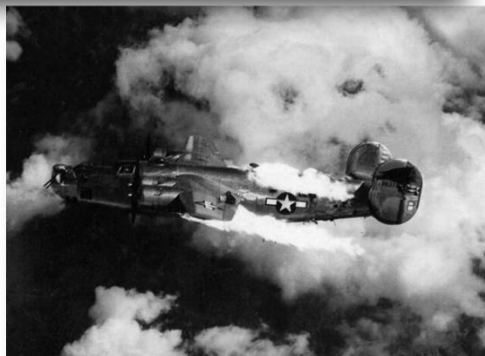


S/N 42-73055

S/N 42-73159

S/N 42-73183

S/N 42-73222



CHAPTER 7 – GIBBY’S LAST MISSION

➤ B-24J-5-CO Liberator Serial Number 42-73055

USAAF **Pilot** Captain Bill Wright, O-725565 (POW / MIA) TX
10th AF **Co-Pilot** 1st Lt. Merrill R. Parker, O-720160 (POW / MIA) MS
7th BG **Navigator** 1st Lt. Roy A. Wentz, Jr., O-659938 (POW, survived)
9th BS **Bombardier** 1st Lt. Raymond A. Maloney, O-726056 (POW, survived)
Engineer SSgt Clifford H. Bockman, 19075514 (POW, survived)
Radio SSgt Francis C. Winderl, 19019299 (POW / MIA) MN
Asst Engineer SSgt Frank Rodriguez, 6578491 (POW, died Aug 27, 1944, BRN / MIA) CA
Asst Radio SSgt Edward J. Girman, 35258994 (POW, MIA) IN
Gunner SSgt Alvin L. Hastings, 35357272 (POW, survived) IN
Gunner SSgt Joseph B. Wells, 6934111 (POW, survived) IA
Crashed December 1, 1943
MACR 1227

Aircraft History

Built by Consolidated. Assigned to the 7th Bombardment Group, 9th Bombardment Squadron. No known nose art or nickname. When lost, engines R-1830-65 serial number 42-91183, 41-43411, 42-91628, 42-90944. Weapon serial numbers noted in MACR.

Mission History

Took off from Pandaveswar Airfield on a bombing mission against Insein in Burma. Shot down by enemy fighters 30km west of Maubin in Burma. Five died in the crash.

Fates of the Crew

Wright, Parker, Wentz, Maloney, Bockman, Winderl, Rodriguez, Girman, Hastings and Wells were captured by the Japanese. Imprisoned as POWs in Rangoon. Rodriguez died on August 27, 1944, but his remains were never recovered and listed as MIA.

At the end of the war, four of the crew were liberated from Moulmein & Rangoon jail: Hastings, Wells, Wentz, Bockman. Girman, Parker and Winderl were officially declared dead on February 4, 1946.

On May 17, 1946, the remains of Wright were transported aboard C-47 43-48308 on a flight from Rangoon to Calcutta and crashed.

Memorials

Rodriguez, Wentz, Bockman, Girman, Parker and Winderl are memorialized on the tablets of the missing at Manila American Cemetery.

CHAPTER 7 – GIBBY’S LAST MISSION

B-24J-15-CO “Tough Babba” Serial Number 42-73159



USAAF
10th AF
7th BG
493rd BS

Pilot 1st Lt. Granvill B. Stringfellow, O-725549 (MIA / KIA) Des Moines, IA
Aircraft Commander Lt. Col Everett C. Plummer, O-300865 10th AF, HQ (MIA / KIA / BRN) NJ
Navigator 1st Lt. Hugh P. MacPherson, O-660875 (MIA / KIA) Camaron, NC
Bombardier 1st Lt. Lancer W. Robertson, O-727076 (MIA / KIA) Long Beach, CA
Engineer TSgt Charles C. Bowen, 1407020288 (MIA / KIA) Osceola, AR
Radio SSgt Alfonse S. Cieslak, 36301984 (MIA / KIA) Chicago, IL
Asst Engineer SSgt Henry W. Ley, 11045540 (MIA / KIA) New Haven, CT
Gunner Cpl George W. Tidd, 14073599 (MIA / KIA) Hendersonville, NC
Asst Radio SSgt Henry C. Vanis, 37190972 (MIA / KIA) David City, NB
Gunner SSgt Bertram J. Archer, 12140538 (MIA / KIA) Peekskill, NY
Observer Captain John W. Lasell, O-219261 (MIA / KIA) Whitinsville, MA
Crashed December 1, 1943 at 12:30pm

MACR 1233

Aircraft History

Built by Consolidated. Assigned to the 7th Bombardment Group, 493rd Bombardment Squadron. Nicknamed "Tough Baba". When lost, engines R-1830-65 serial numbers 42-88468, 42-89208, 42-89198, 42-91856. Weapon serial numbers are noted in MACR.

Mission History

Took off from Pandaveswar Airfield in India leading a formation of bombers on a bombing mission against Insein in Burma. After dropping their bombs, this B-24 was hit by anti-aircraft fire causing white smoke to emanate from the no. 3 engine and began losing altitude. Attacked by 8-10 enemy fighters. Two were observed to bail out, one pulling his parachute instantly, then other delayed opening his shoot, likely to avoid being strafed while descending. The bomber went into a tailspin, burst into flames and exploded.

Fates of the Crew

Plummer was officially declared dead on December 9, 1943. It is unclear if he was captured by the Japanese, died of wounds or was executed.

Recovery of Remains

Postwar, the remains of the crew were recovered and transported to the United States.

Memorials

The crew was officially declared dead the day of the mission. The crew was buried in a group burial at Jefferson Barrack National Cemetery at section 79 site 449C-E. Plummer is missing in action and is memorialized on the tablets of the missing at Manila American Cemetery.

CHAPTER 7 – GIBBY’S LAST MISSION

➤ B-24J-20-CO Liberator Serial Number 42-73183

USAAF **Pilot** 2nd Lt. George T. Elliott, O-670990 (MIA / KIA)
10th AF **Co-Pilot** 2nd Lt. Morris P. Maag, O-742495 (MIA / KIA)
7th BG **Navigator** 2nd Lt. Howard Hansen, O-673560 (MIA / KIA)
9th BS **Bombardier** 2nd Lt. Roy E. Emery, O-671407 (MIA / KIA)
 Engineer TSgt Albert C. Johnson, 33190179 (MIA / KIA)
 Radio TSgt Roland E. Soderstrom, 37294533 (MIA / KIA)
 Asst Engineer SSgt John D. Bender, 33276178 (MIA / KIA)
 Asst Radio SSgt Talbot C. Glance, 14149234 (MIA / KIA)
 Gunner SSgt Verl E. Coddington, 39832131 (MIA / KIA)
 Gunner SSgt James W. Forrest, 15333185 (MIA / KIA)
 Crashed December 1, 1943

MACR 1225

Eye-Witness Report – While participating in the combat mission on the 1st of Dec, 1943 I was standing between Pilot and Co-Pilot of our aircraft number 27. We were flying to the left of ship number 24 when it burst into flames. The fire extended from the Bombay to the waist windows. Ship number v24 dove out of the formation, out of control, but I did not see it hit the grounds. I saw one man parachute out. The plane burst into flames approximately half way between the target and the bay. – Fred Pape, Stanley Allison & Raymond Cawood.

Aircraft History

Built by Consolidated. Assigned to the 7th Bombardment Group, 9th Bombardment Squadron. No known nose art or nickname. Weapon serial numbers noted in MACR. Nose number "24".

Wartime History

Took off from Pandaveswar Airfield in India on bombing mission against Insein near Rangoon in Burma. Shot down by enemy fighters over the target. The entire crew was killed in the crash.

References

ABMC does not list any of the crew

CHAPTER 7 – GIBBY'S LAST MISSION

➤ **B-24J-25-CO "Bugs Bunny"**
Serial Number 42-73222



USAAF
10th AF
7th BG
9th BS

Pilot 2nd Lt Carl F. Carpenter, O-742680 (MIA / KIA) MN

Co-Pilot 2nd Lt William R. McCandless, O-683037 (MIA / KIA) IA

Navigator 1st Lt Grant W. Erwin, Jr., O-558862 (POW, survived) WI (2nd Lt Richard Kaufman's replacement)

Bombardier 2ndLT Clarence H. Clyborne (POW, died December 31, 1943)

Engineer SSgt Robert McCarty, 12126491 (MIA / KIA) NY

Radio SSgt William C. Fetterman, 13155731 (MIA / KIA) PA

Gunner Eugene L. Moyers, 14160896 (MIA / KIA) TN

Gunner Sgt Alfred L. Busby, 18193907 (MIA / KIA) OK

Gunner Sgt Malcolm W. Carter, 31151547 (MIA / KIA) ME

Gunner Sgt Paul I. Elyea, 36179569 (MIA / KIA) MI

Crashed December 1, 1943 - **MACR** 1226

Aircraft History

Built by Consolidated. Assigned to the 7th Bomber Group, 9th Bomber Squadron. Nicknamed "Bugs Bunny".

Mission History

The entire crew had just arrived in India and were on their first combat mission.

Regular navigator Kaufman⁸ was ill and did not fly the mission. He was replaced by Grant W. Erwin who was an experienced navigator.

On of 50 B-24s that took off from Pandaveswar Airfield on a mission to bomb Insein railway marshalling yards near Rangoon. Escorted by P-51 Mustangs that rendezvoused late with the bombers. Intercepted by enemy fighters fifty miles south-west of Insein. This B-24 was set on fire and engulfed in flames. Only two of the crew (Erwin and Clyborne) were able to bail out from roughly 200'. The bomber crashed near Bassein, exploding when it hit the ground.

Fates of the Crew

Erwin and Clyborne survived and were captured by the Japanese and transported to Rangoon POW Camp. Clyborn died in captivity on December 31, 1943. Erwin survived and was liberated at the end of the war.

Recovery of Remains

Postwar, US Army AGRS recovered five sets of remains were recovered from a banana grove near the crash site where they were buried by the Japanese or locals. On May 17, 1946, these remains were transported aboard C-47 43-48308 on a flight from Rangoon to Calcutta and crashed.

Memorials

All are memorialized on the tablets of the missing at Manila American Cemetery.

⁸ With missions from Panagarh to Burma winding down in early December of 1943, Charles Kaufman was transferred to the 9th Bombardment Group at Pandaveswar Airbase where he would fly twenty-seven missions. He most likely knew Gibby at Panagarh and would end up flying with Mike out of Pandaveswar.

CHAPTER 7 – GIBBY'S LAST MISSION

Issued less than 48 hours after the accident, the now declassified Missing Air Crew Report, # 1223, gives details of the Apocalypse aircraft and crew, armaments, Kremer's eye-witness account and the last reported position of the plane.

1223

Classification changed
to *Secret*
by E. A. BRADUNAS, Lt. Col., AG
by F. M. MUENCH, Capt., AG
Date *30 Dec 45*

~~SECRET~~

HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES ARMY FORCES
CHINA BURMA INDIA

AAS/abb

A.P.O. 885,
9 December 1943.

319.1 (9 December 1943)

SUBJECT: Missing Air Crew Report.

TO : Commanding General Army Air Forces, Attention:
Statistical Control Division, Room 4-D-960,
Pentagon Building, Washington, D.C.

Inclosed herewith Missing Air Crew Report in accordance with
AG 360.33 (5-21-43) OB-S-AF-M.

For the Commanding General:

Frank Melam
FRANK MELAM,
Colonel, A.G.D.
Adjutant General

1 Incl:
Incl 1 - Missing Air Crew Report - B-24J - 42-72196 - supporting papers.

DEC 27 1943

RECEIVED
AIR FORCE

Classification changed
to *Secret*
by E. A. BRADUNAS, Lt. Col., AG
by F. M. MUENCH, Capt., AG
Date *30 Dec 45*

~~SECRET~~

- 1 -

W-740

CHAPTER 7 - GIBBY'S LAST MISSION

10AF Form
129

HEADQUARTERS TENTH AIR FORCE
DELHI

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT

Classification changed
to RESTRICTED
by E. A. BRADONAS, Lt. Col., AG
by F. M. MUENCH, Capt., AG
Date MAR 1 1948

IMPORTANT: This report will be compiled in triplicate by which Army Air Forces organization within 48 hours of the time an aircraft is officially reported missing.

1. ORGANIZATION: Location Panagarh, India; Command or Air Force 10th Air Force; Group 7th Bomb Gp (H); Squadron 436th Bomb Sq (H); Detachment
2. SPECIFY: Point of Departure Panagarh, India; Course 150°, 90°; Intended Destination Rangoon; Type of Mission 1
3. WEATHER CONDITIONS AND VISIBILITY AT TIME OF CRASH OR WHEN LAST REPORTED: Visibility poor due to intervening clouds.
4. GIVE: (a) Date Dec. 1, 1947 Time 1225; and Location Insein, Rangoon of last known whereabouts of missing aircraft.
(b) Specify whether (x) Last Sighted; () Lasted Contacted by Radio; () Forced Down; () 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) () Enemy Aircraft; () Enemy Anti-Aircraft; (x) Other Circumstances as follows: Plane was believed to have been hit by anti-aircraft fire and was then attacked by enemy fighters.
6. AIRCRAFT: Type, Model and Series B-24J; A.A.F. Serial Number 42-73196
7. ENGINES: Type, Model and Series B-1830-66; A.A.F. Serial Number (a) 42-92058 (b) 42-91451; (c) 42-91836; (d) 42-91830
8. INSTALLED WEAPONS (Furnish below Make, Type and Serial Number)
(a) See Attached List; (b) See Attached List; (c) See Attached List; (d) See Attached List
(e) See Attached List; (f) See Attached List; (g) See Attached List; (h) See Attached List
9. THE PERSONS LISTED BELOW WERE REPORTED AS: (a) Battle Casualty x 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".)

	Crew Position	Name in Full (Last Name First)	Rank	Serial Number
DEF1.	Pilot	Mclaughlin, John E. Jr.	2nd Lt.	0-797160
DEF2.	Co-Pilot	Watts, Elden W.	2nd Lt.	0-680554
DEF3.	Navigator	Bowes, Parshing E.	2nd Lt.	0-674124
DEF4.	Bombardier	Rauh, Gilbert A.	2nd Lt.	0-738787
DEF5.	Engineer	Rodinski, Roman J.	T/Sgt	16034281
DEF6.	Radio Operator	Seifried, Harold L.	T/Sgt	13080602
DEF7.	Gunner	Morley, Charles W.	Sgt	19017399
DEF8.	Gunner	Tedone, Frank J.	S/Sgt	11094405
DEF9.	Gunner	Nixon, Claude E.	S/Sgt	38114201
DEF10.	Gunner	Pyle, Edward K.	S/Sgt	35300957

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

Name in Full (Last Name First)	Rank	Serial Number	Check Only One Column			
			Contacted by Radio	Last Sighted	Saw Crash	Saw Forced Landing
1. <u>Kramer, Emil A.</u>	<u>1st Lt.</u>	<u>0-791450</u>	<u>x</u>			
2. _____						
3. _____						

12. IF PERSONNEL ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE SURVIVED, ANSWER YES TO ONE OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS: (a) Parachutes were used; (b) Persons were seen walking away from scene of crash; or (c) Any other reason (Specify) None
13. ATTACH AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH, MAP, CHART, OR SKETCH, SHOWING APPROXIMATE LOCATION WHERE AIRCRAFT WAS LAST SEEN.
14. ATTACH EYEWITNESS DESCRIPTION OF CRASH, FORCED 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 None

Date of Report December 2, 1947

Richard T. Henning
(Signature of Reporting Officer)

RICHARD T. HENNING,
Captain, Air Corps,
Commanding

CHAPTER 7 - GIBBY'S LAST MISSION

SECRET

FOUR THIRTY SIXTH BOMBARDMENT SQUADRON (H) AAF
Office of the Operations Officer

LAS/qlb

Panagarh, India
2 December 1943

SUBJECT: Installed Weapons.

TO : Commanding Officer, 22nd Statistical Control Unit, Headquarters
Tenth U. S. Air Force, New Delhi, India.

1. In compliance with Headquarters Tenth Air Force Memorandum 60-17,
paragraph 8, Missing Air Crew Report, 10th Air Force Form 129, the following
list of installed weapons on Airplane No. 42-73196 is herewith submitted:

10 Guns, Machine, Cal. 50, Br, M2, AC, Flexible

Serial Numbers

677568
932285
931923
931892
932426
932569
931831
932036
932191
931810

2 Guns, Sub-Machine, Cal. 45, M1928A1

SERIAL NUMBERS

385357
383308

Rifle, U.S. Cal. 30, M1903

Serial Number

754538

Bombsight M-9 Serial Number

M-9-N-6488

Leonard A. Swanson
LEONARD A. SWANSON,
1st Lt., Air Corps,
Operations Officer.

CHAPTER 7 - GIBBY'S LAST MISSION

S T A T E M E N T

December 2, 1943

On or about December 1, 1943 at 1225 hours, 1st Lieut. Emil A. Kramer was flying number 2 position 436th Bombardment Squadron (H) element.

Our formation of three planes tacked on to the 9th Bombardment Squadrons formation. After turning from the bombing run Lt McLauchlens left wing was hit by Ant-Aircraft fire and started to smoke badly. He then dove sharply to the left and three enemy aircraft followed him down. He was last seen going into a cloud bank.

Emil A. Kramer

EMIL A. KRAMER,
1st Lieut., Air Corps,
1st Pilot.

CHAPTER 7 – GIBBY'S LAST MISSION

✓ 2nd Lt. John E. McLauchlen Jr.	Mr. John E. McLauchlen Sr., (Father) 896 Lothrop Avenue, Detroit, Michigan.
✓ 2nd Lt. Elden W. Watts	Mrs. Mary Frederick, (Grandmother) 123 South 6th St., Tulsa, Oklahoma.
✓ 2nd Lt. Pershing E. Bowes	Mrs. Elizabeth Bowes, (Mother) 151-10 35th Avenue, Flushing, New York.
✓ 2nd Lt. Gilbert A. Rauh	Mr. J. C. Rauh, (Father) Thornwood, New York.
✓ T/Sgt. Roman J. Kopinski	Mr. Pat J. Kopinski, (Father) Route #1, Jefferson, Wisconsin.
✓ T/Sgt. Harold L. Seifreid	Mrs. Anna Seifreid, (Mother) 1769 North 53rd St., Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
✓ S/Sgt. Frank J. Tedone	Mrs. Celia Tedone, (Mother) 36 Elm St., East Hartford, Connecticut.
✓ S/Sgt. Claude E. Nixon	Mrs. Mary F. Nixon, (Mother) Route #3, Box 525, Corpus Christi, Texas.
✓ S/Sgt. Edward K. Pyle	Mrs. Claudine Pyle, (Wife) 2246 South Rockhill Street, Alliance, Ohio.
✓ Sgt. Charles W. Morley	Mr. Alvin George Morley, (Brother) 1123 Forsythe Street, Aberdeen, Washington.

By the middle of December, a few weeks after this MACR was issued, the family was notified of Gibby's status as Missing in Action. This was the telegram his father, Julius Rauh, received from the War Department on December 16th.

7m-10-18

CASUALTY MESSAGE

STANDARD FORM NO. 14A
APPROVED BY THE PRESIDENT
MARCH 16, 1942

TELEGRAM

OFFICIAL BUSINESS—GOVERNMENT RATES

AG 201 RAUH, GILBERT A. (16 DEC 1943) SPXPC-N 117135-1 (9) 16 DEC 1943
ASN 0-738787

MR J. C. RAUH
LINCOLN PLACE
THORNWOOD, NEW YORK

THE SECRETARY OF WAR DESIRES ME TO EXPRESS HIS DEEP REGRET THAT YOUR SON SECOND LIEUTENANT GILBERT A. RAUH HAS BEEN REPORTED MISSING IN ACTION SINCE FIRST DECEMBER IN ASIATIC AREA IF FURTHER DETAILS OR OTHER INFORMATION ARE RECEIVED YOU WILL BE PROMPTLY NOTIFIED PERIOD

OFFICIAL: DUNLOP
ACTING THE ADJUTANT GENERAL
BATTLE

ADJUTANT GENERAL

80057

FILE

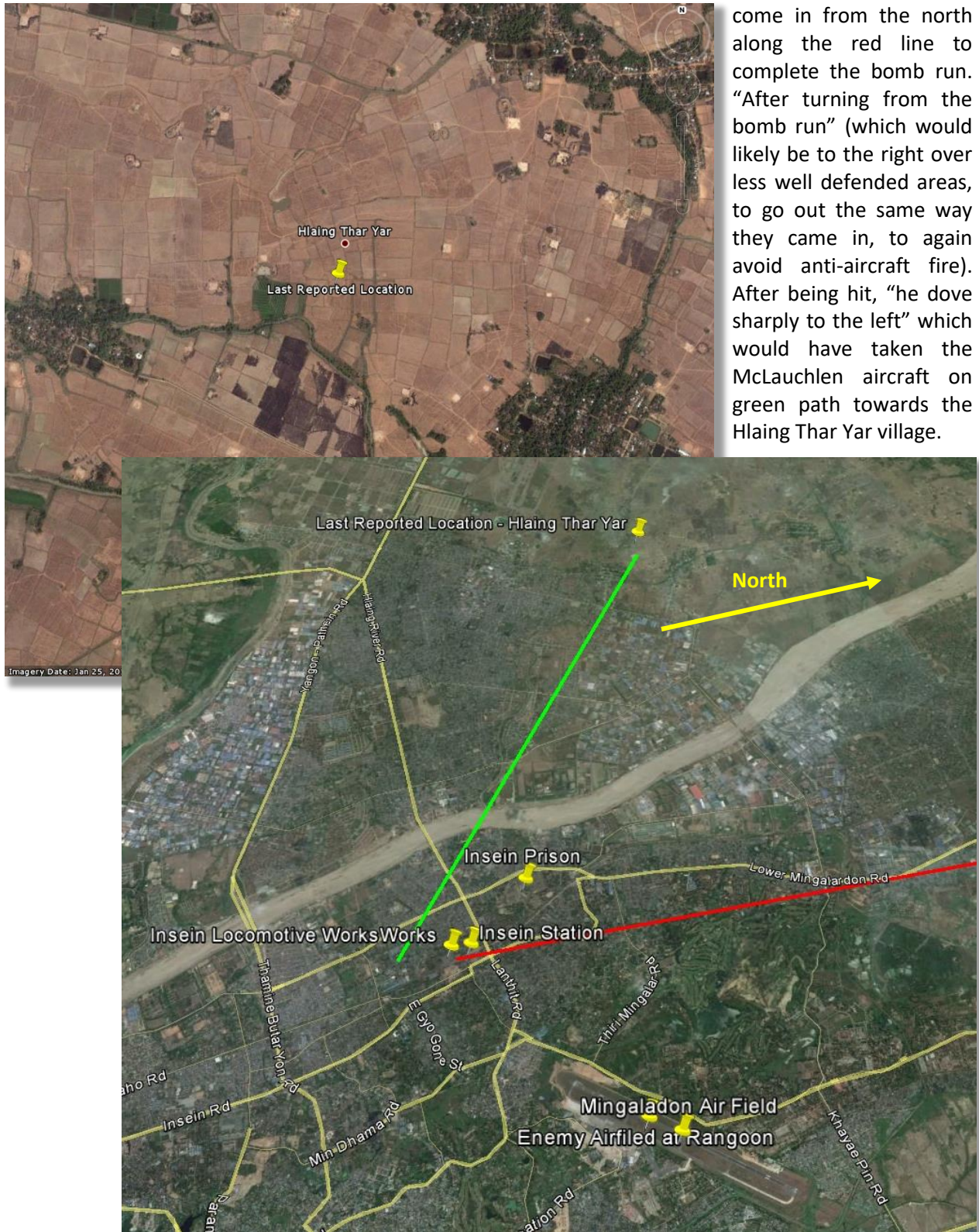
A.E.B.-

ARMY EFFECTS BUREAU
RECEIVED
DEC 16 1943
KGBW

CHAPTER 7 – GIBBY’S LAST MISSION

This is the last known position of 2nd. Lieut. Gilbert A. Rauh and his crew – only 5 miles from his target, still 723 miles from his base – but 8,450 miles from home.

The formation would come in from the north along the red line to complete the bomb run. “After turning from the bomb run” (which would likely be to the right over less well defended areas, to go out the same way they came in, to again avoid anti-aircraft fire). After being hit, “he dove sharply to the left” which would have taken the McLauchlen aircraft on green path towards the Hlaing Thar Yar village.



CHAPTER 7 – GIBBY'S LAST MISSION

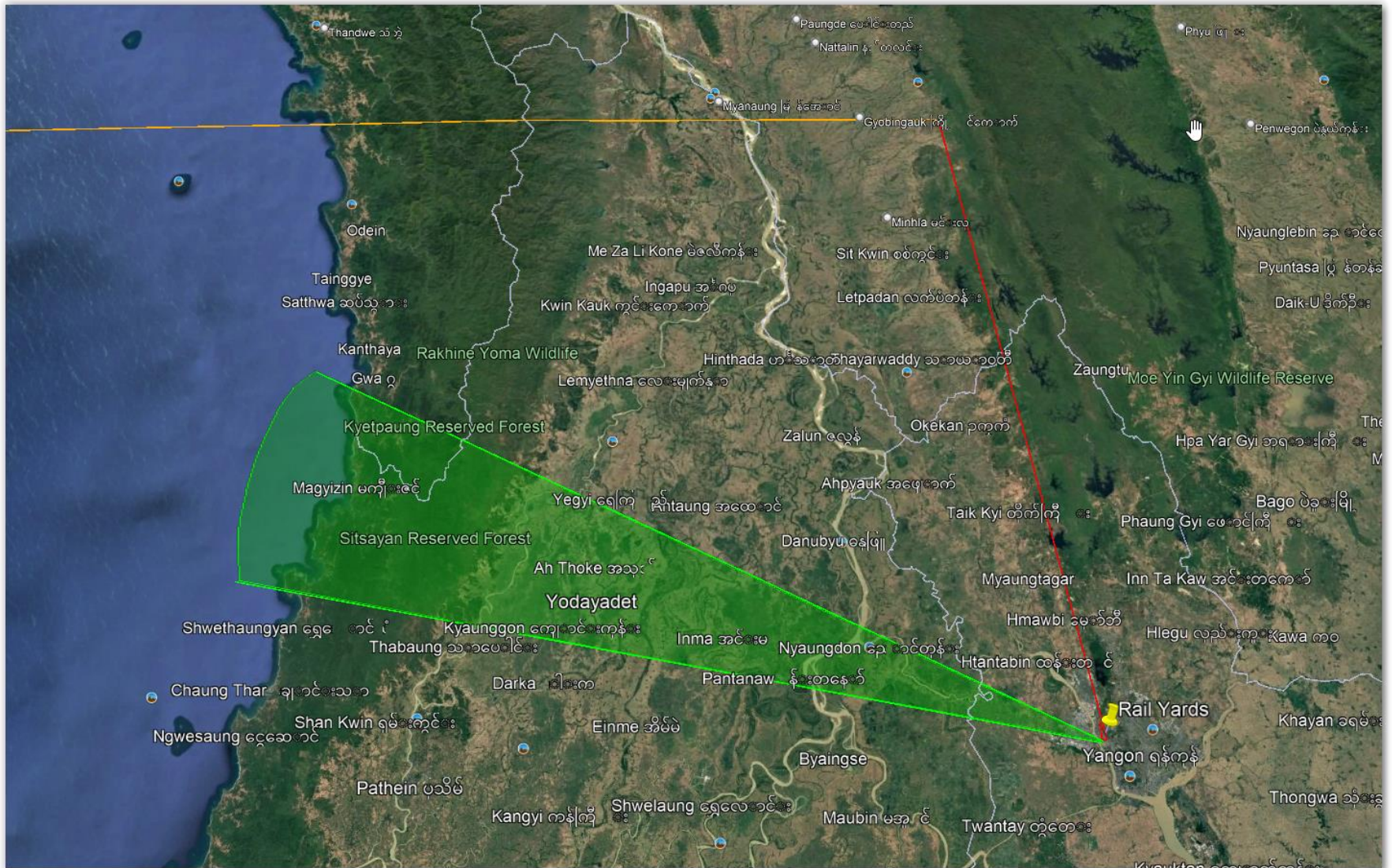
Putting all of the known facts and assumptions together regarding the final location of the Apocalypse:



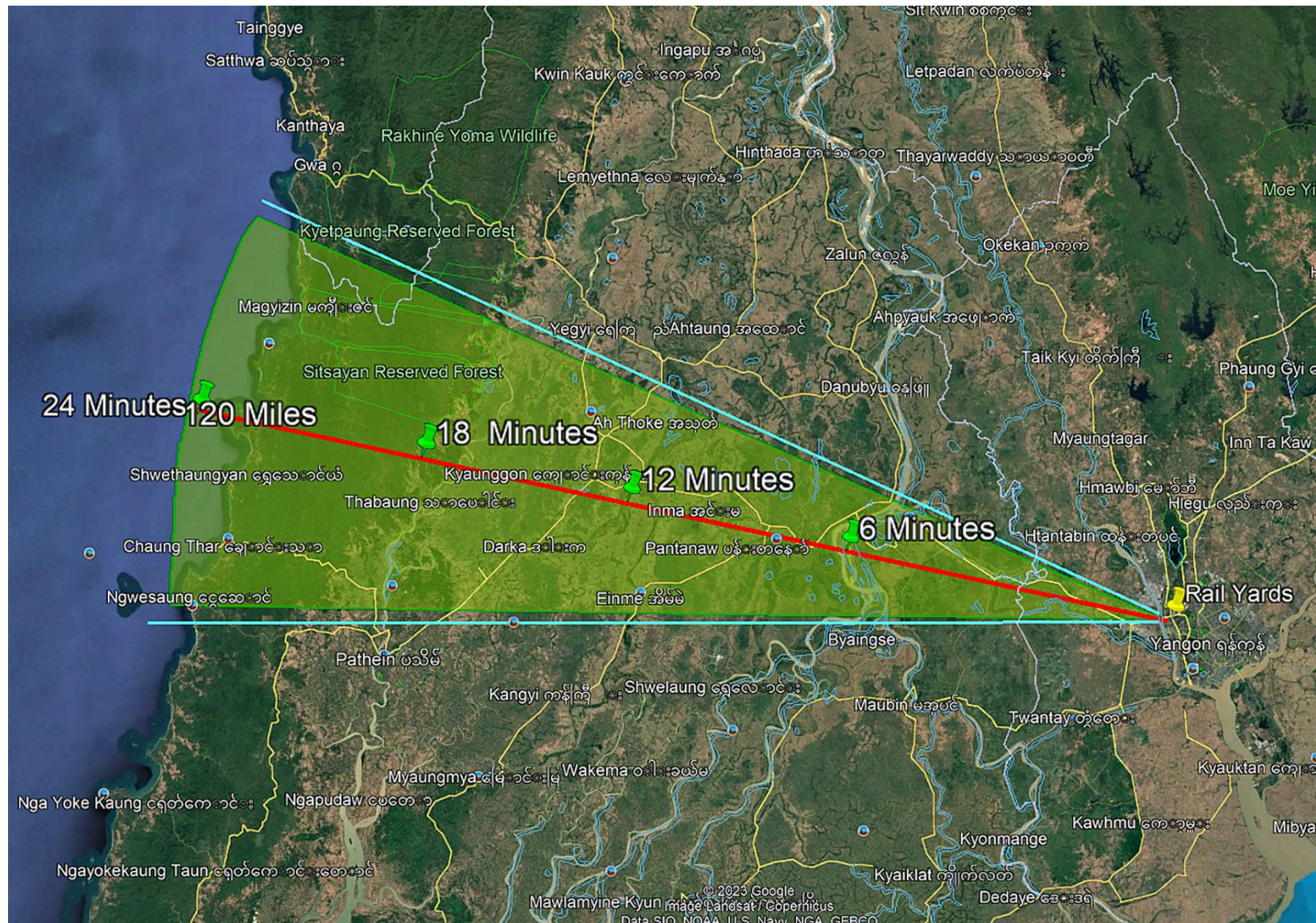
- (1) Bomb run due south
- (2) The turn to retreat after bombs-away would be to the left to avoid Mingaladon Air Field and its probable heavy concentration of anti-aircraft guns.
- The turn would be quick and completed in a radius of less than ½ mile.
- The aircraft maintained their bomb-run altitude of 19,000 feet .
- They had accelerated to and were running at top speed – 290 MPH with no bomb load.
- (3) According to eye-witness accounts, the McLauchlen aircraft was hit after the turn and dropped out to the left. That would put them on a course roughly to the west-northwest.
- Visibility was poor that day.
- They quickly disappeared into cloud cover and there were no eye-witnesses after that to observe parachutes or the ultimate fate of the aircraft.
- McLauchlen had some control of the aircraft as evidenced by his left turn and descent into the clouds for cover.
- The Bay of Bengal coastline was 120 miles to the west-northwest and it is likely they were headed there.
- At 290 MPH, the coast would be reached in 24 minutes.
- Losing altitude and speed, and, possibly suffering catastrophic wing failure, they most likely crashed partway to the coast.

Given these assumptions and facts, the following aerial view shows, the probable area the McLauchlen aircraft came to rest in green The orange track is the incoming path from the Bay of Bengal. The red path is the bomb run and retreat.

CHAPTER 7 – GIBBY’S LAST MISSION



CHAPTER 7 – GIBBY’S LAST MISSION



While some notion of the location of the crash site was known, due to ongoing hostilities, no searching would take place for two to three years.

CHAPTER 7 – GIBBY'S LAST MISSION

The American phase of the operation in Burma came to a close on the afternoon of 4 December 1943 when AAF bombers ran successful mining missions to Rangoon and Moulmein without encountering resistance or suffering losses. The AAF missions on 25, 27, and 28 November and 1 December resulted in the loss of twelve B-24's, eight P-51's, and two P-38's, while many other aircraft of various types were temporarily unusable because of damage sustained.

The many factors involved made it almost impossible to reach an objective evaluation of these combined missions. Due to the limited time the 308th Group was available the plan could not be flexible in timing, and when bad weather intervened, the alternatives were either to call the whole operation off or try to carry it out in the face of undesirable flight conditions. Once the element of surprise was taken away by an abortive mission, each succeeding mission was more risky. It must be remembered, however, that on all previous missions the Liberators had flown to Rangoon without escort and without heavy losses from fighters. Hence it was not unreasonable to expect that the small escort provided would be sufficient to minimize losses from hostile aircraft.

The operation was an expensive one in a small air force where loss of every plane was felt. Reckoning on a percentage basis, on the other hand, the loss was less alarming. While serious, loss of eight P-51's in a series of some sixty sorties where interceptors were numerous and very determined was not unreasonably high. The rate of loss among B-24's was even lower--twelve in 205 sorties. Only on the mission of 1 December did heavy bomber losses exceed 10 percent of the participants.

The objectives of the operation were not fully accomplished. Serious damage was done in the dock area, but it was not so extensive as to paralyze the water front. Enemy aircraft losses were probably upwards of fifty; but owing to arrival of reinforcements during the operation, Japanese air strength was greater at the finish than on the first day. Some damage was done to major enemy airfields in southern Burma. Communications targets such as Mahlwagon marshalling yards were not attacked.

On the credit side of the ledger were the great destruction at Insein and a very successful mining mission which affected both Moulmein and Rangoon. Photo intelligence as well as ground intelligence coming in later indicated that in the face of limited successes elsewhere destruction at Insein alone might have justified the whole undertaking. Several vital parts of the locomotive works were completely obliterated and many others were so badly battered as to be utterly useless. A Tenth Air Force photo intelligence report of 1 December stated: "The functional capacities of the Locomotive Work Shops have been seriously and effectively checked. The complete destruction of certain vital departments makes it extremely doubtful whether this Works will be able to operate for a considerable time."

Less tangible results were not easy to assess, but the fact that RAF, Tenth Air Force, and Fourteenth Air Force units had participated in a jointly planned series of missions was a good omen for the theater. British effort was smaller than anticipated, consisting of only sixty-six sorties instead of the anticipated maximum of some 175. Cooperation between the 7th and 308th Groups was beyond reproach.

Several important operational lessons were learned which would be of value in planning for the future. Staging medium bombers from Chittagong and fighters from Ramu was entirely feasible, but it was believed that in subsequent operations the fighters should arrive at the staging fields the night before the mission, thus permitting a refueling in ample time to make the rendezvous with the bomber formations. Both P-38's and P-51's showed their value as escorts, but the P-51 with greater belly-tank load per engine was better for close support, while the P-38 was superior as high-altitude top cover. Gunners on fighters

CHAPTER 7 – GIBBY’S LAST MISSION

and bombers were stale and needed additional training. And, perhaps most significant of all, fighter escorts would probably be required for all subsequent daylight missions to Rangoon.

However, for 2nd Lt. Gilbert A. Rauh and his crew, the war was over. They were officially listed as Missing in Action by the War Department and the families were notified.

The Panagarh Air Base records entered by the 436th historian noted the final mission and loss. This was Gibby’s tenth and final mission.

DATE	TIME	TARGET	COMBAT MISSION	AIRCRAFT	PILOT	CO-PILOT	CREW	RESULTS
1-Dec-43	0710	Insein Railroad Yard and Locomotive Works		64	MacLauchlin	Watts	Bowes Rauh Ropinski Seifried Tedone Nixon Pyle Morley	Only three of seven ships with fighter escort were able to reach the target. Ship # 64 failed to return. Details of the loss were reported in Missing Air Crew Report (MACR) 1223. All of the crew members were declared KIA. No wreckage or remains were ever found.

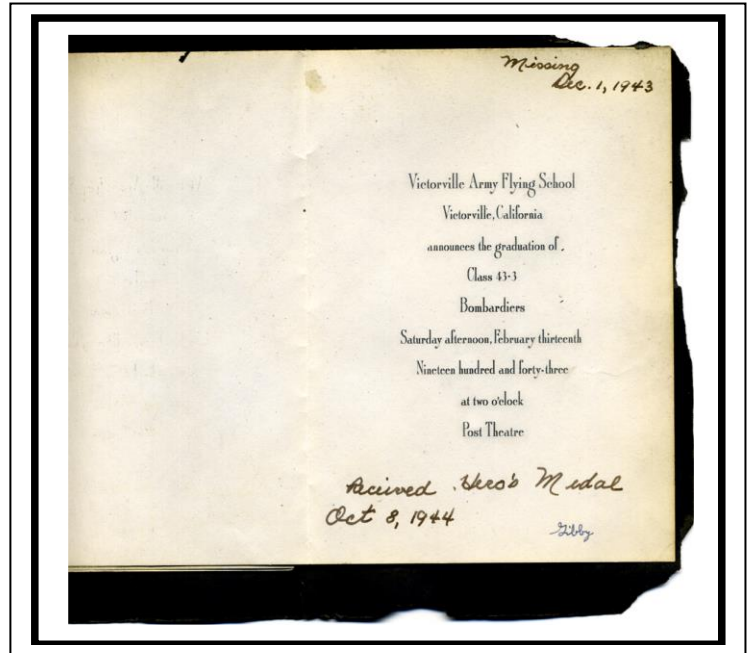
Sadly, Gibby’s close friend Mike Iriarte arrived to join him at Panagarh Air Base in mid-December – just a few days too late - and found an empty bunk and a box of his personal belongings. Mike was devastated. He was unable to fly or fulfill any of his duties. Given special dispensation by the Air Force and time to heal, Mike left Panagarh in January 1944, transferring to the 9th Bombardment Squadron and different assignments with new crews at Pandaveswar Air Base. He would begin his own combat missions one month later.



CHAPTER 7 – GIBBY'S LAST MISSION

It had to be heartwrenching for George's wife, Hazel, to write these notes in her scrapbook on Gibby's Bombardier Graduation Notice when he went missing and when awarded a Hero's Medal in October of 1944. Four months later, he and his crew were officially declared Killed in Action.

George would not know of Gibby's loss until the end of the war. Although the accident was recorded in a secret MACR (Missing Air Crew Report) within the required 48 hours of when the surviving B-24's returned to India on December 1, 1943, the War Department would not notify next of kin via telegram for weeks. When the MIA status telegram arrived, it had to hit the families hard, just before Christmas. For the Hofmann's and the Rauh's, however, the finality of it all would not be known for months.



While Mike suffered alone in India, top secret maneuvers and training sessions of December were fortunately intense enough to keep George focused on many other things. Final preparations for him would quickly follow in early 1944 and deployment orders to Rivenhall Air Base in Great Britain would be issued in March.

This was a horrible December – but things were about to get much worse. Mike and George would once again follow in Gibby's footsteps, flying similar combat missions in only a few months – and could be facing the further destruction of their lifelong companionship.

