APPENDIX III

BLACK CATS – DUMBO RESCUE MISSIONS
CODE NAME – GARDENIA

Commander Mastake Okumiya. a combat hardened Japanese Navy fighter pilot, praised US Navy aviators for their skill and daring shown during their rescue efforts in World War Two. Okumiya is quoted as saying:

After every mission, the Americans sent out flying boats to the areas in which their planes had fought, searching for and rescuing crews surviving aboard life rafts. Although their duties were extremely hazardous, the crews of these flying boats performed their missions gallantly and there arose few occasions during the war when groups of men so consistently exposed themselves to multiple dangers. Our pilots regarded them as (being) unusually courageous.

Flying their big, black Consolidated PBY-5 Catalinas, crews showed the same determination, successfully completing each assigned mission, whether it was to rescue one man, a flight crew or survivors of a mortally wounded ship.

These rescue missions, which frequently entailed circling or landing in an area under attack were better known as *Dumbo* flights. This name, appropriate for the big-winged Catalinas so successful in rescue work, was taken from the 1941 Disney animated film of that name. Such flights were given the code name *Gardenia.*

During WWII, rescues took on various degrees of heroics. In 1941, while flying anti-submarine patrols from Iceland, CAP (enlisted Chief Pilot rating) Joe Higbee volunteered to fly a critically ill young girl, Halla Gudmundsdoffair, from Patrekafiord to Reykiavik.

The flight, necessary to save the child's life, was made at the height of a severe storm. Ragnar Ragnarson, who was researching American wartime aviation activity in Iceland, found a man who had witnessed Higbee's takeoff on the storm-ridden sea. He said, "The plane was taking a terrible beating in the heavy seas. It's unbelievable for it to survive."

In the South Pacific theater of operations, a dangerous rescue mission required the rescuers to also be rescued. On 25 April 1944, Lt. Dick Haase of Patrol-Bombing Squadron Thirty three (VPB-33) eased his PBY-5 off the water at 0700 hours. In a climbing turn to 1000 feet, he swung to a heading for the Caroline Islands northeast of New Guinea. His reconnaissance track would take the crew to within 75 miles of the Japanese-held Truk Islands.

He had been alerted, during the pre-flight briefing, to be on the lookout for the crew of an Army B-24 Liberator shot down over Truk a few days earlier. About 1030 hours, the port blister lookout reported seeing something in the water. Haase began a slow circular decent to check the contact. It was the missing bomber crew.

With swells running six to eight feet high, a conference was held concerning the advisability of attempting a rescue. The unanimous decision was "go". The base was, as customary, contacted for permission to make the attempt. It was granted. Turning into the wind, flares were dropped to get a better read on wind direction and speed to aid in the landing attempt. Several passes were made to get the feel of conditions. Although things were not favorable, concern for fellow airmen prevailed. The landing approach was begun.

Haase began easing back on the throttles until the plane was "hanging on the props" (airspeed reduced to just above the aircraft's stall speed). When he reached the spot he wanted, Haase chopped the throttles. The flying boat impacted the water, skipped once, then came down in a slight starboard wing-down attitude. For the moment, all seemed to be fine as Haase slowly taxied toward the raft.

Cutting the port engine, he positioned the plane alongside the raft. The crew quickly began helping the downed airmen into the PBY. While this was taking place, John Mcintyre, the plane captain, notified Haase that the plane's hull had been split on the starboard side under the tower (the wing support and flight station for the plane captain who monitored the PBY's engine performance gauges).

With the bedraggled Army crew on board, the engines were started. During engine run-up for a magneto check. the starboard engine failed to deliver the desired RPMs. Despite the engine's shortcoming, takeoff was attempted with mattresses held over the hull's rupture by the crew. With the starboard engine failing to deliver enough power, Haase was unable to get the PBY airborne.

The big plane bounced two or three times, apparently causing further damage to the hull. With water pouring into the plane, the crew quickly launched life rafts. Radioman Steve Sikora tried to send SOS calls but with water covering his transmitters he feared they were not being received.

Haase and Sikora, the last to abandon PBY BuNo 08513, clambered onto the plane's wing. It was then they discovered Mcintyre had apparently been thrown out of the plane. Sikora spotted him in the water and dove into the swells to rescue the struggling Mcintyre who had suffered a fracture of his right leg just below the knee.

Lt. Busker, a VPB-34 pilot who had been flying an adjacent "recon" track and monitoring Haase's radio messages, flew into the area. When he saw the crew abandoning 08513, he landed and picked up Haase's crew and the B-24 crew. Then with Haase in the copilot seat, the two made a successful takeoff. Once airborne, Haase relinquished his seat to Busker's regular copilot and went aft to look after Mcintyre. Busker headed his Black Cat for his seaplane tender.

Two months later, a small detachment of VPB-33 crews was stationed on Woendi, a tiny island off the northern coast of New Guinea, to fly Dumbo flights. Just at dusk, on the 14th of July, a message was received from the Army that a B-25 Mitchell had been shot down eight miles from Halmahara Island, which lies just north of the equator some 450 miles from Woendi.

Lt.(jg) George Favorite and Crew Three drew the assignment. By the time all was in readiness, darkness had fallen. In the total darkness of Woendi's harbor, the big PBY roared over the water and took to the air. Favorite's only chart of the Halmahara area was an old *National Geographic* map.

Thirty minutes into the flight the radar malfunctioned and radio messages became too garbled to be decoded. Despite these problems, the flight continued until stormy weather was encountered. Making the correct decision, Favorite turned the Catalina for home. At 2330 hours, Favorite made a skillful, hazardous night landing and taxied to the beach for repairs.

The next morning, with the weather clear and sunny, the mission was again undertaken. The Army crew, Favorite was told, had ditched eight miles from a Japanese airfield. He was also informed that Army fighters would rendezvous with him to ensure safety for the rescue.

At the reported location, no sign of the downed crew was seen, so a standard expanding search was begun. The half-inflated raft was spotted after 35 minutes search time. The flying boat settled gently onto the swells and the Army men helped aboard. The rescued men were: Captain J. C. Wise, 2nd Lt. F.W. Watkins, 1st Lt. P. Wright, S/Sgt. P. Manes, S/Sgt P.C. Price, and S/Sgt. H.J. Salerno. When the men were safely aboard, the big Catalina lifted off. Their protective escort of fighters finally rendezvoused with the Catalina after it was well on its way home.

On 20 October 1944, MacArthur's forces began the invasion of the Philippines. The principal target was Leyte. The actual push began when the Sixth Ranger Division overran the nearby islands of Suluan, Dinagat and Homonhon near the entrance of Leyte Gulf. Three days of heavy air, land and sea combat took place as Allied forces made

the landing on Leyte. The Japanese lost a fleet carrier, three light carriers, three battleships, six heavy and four light cruisers as well as eleven destroyers. The US Navy lost a light carrier, two escort carriers, two destroyers and a destroyer escort.

Three days after the Leyte invasion began, Black Cats of VPB-33 began operations from Leyte Gulf. On 26 October, a search mission to scour the seas off Samar Island, some 35 miles east of Leyte, was ordered. Admiral Kurita's support fleet had arrived but, after a fierce battle, hastily withdrew. Lt.(jg) George Favorite and his crew drew the mission to search for survivors.

Favorite's copilots were Ensigns Milt Metzler and Tom Gregory. The flight crew members were J.B. Hawk, G. Sheihamer, T. McNelly, P. Diez, P.L. Koster and G. DeLong. They were about to participate in one of the most unique rescues of WWII.

Shortly after beginning their search pattern, a man was spotted adrift in the extremely rough, wreckage-strewn sea. The heavy seas caused the plane to lose sight of the man when his raft dropped into troughs between the waves. A safe landing was impossible. Flying low, the crew dropped a raft with emergency equipment, then watched as it was recovered.

Shortly before spotting the raft, the PBY crew had seen the victorious Seventh Fleet steaming to the southeast some 50 miles from the raft's location. Favorite headed for the fleet.

The consensus of the crew was to try and have a ship of the fleet return to rescue the drifting man. They also knew near-miracles were needed to accomplish the mission. Gregory handled the navigation, plotting wind speed and direction given him by Metzler, who was monitoring wave spume length and direction. When a wave breaks, the spume trails back into the wind. With experience, pilots learn to "read" waves for wind direction and speed with a great deal of accuracy. This skill is valuable in dead reckoning navigation over the open water where there are no visual aids.

Thirty minutes after leaving the drifting survivor, the fleet was spotted dead ahead. With radio silence in effect, the Aldis lamp (used for silent signaling) was broken out but found to be inoperative. With no signaling equipment available, someone had a bright idea as the Black Cat neared the fleet.

Koester, Diez and DeLong, in a desperate attempt to get a message to the last destroyer in the battle line, stood in one of the blisters and made "hitchhiking" gestures as Favorite flew by the destroyer at masthead height. After three passes. the plane crew cheered as the destroyer swung out of line and turned in the direction the Black Cat headed.

As the destroyer followed, the Catalina circled several times to stay within sight. The plane crew noticed that the destroyer was steaming at full "battle station" alert with every gun station manned.

The crew's worry became the problem of finding the man still adrift in his tiny rubber raft. They had flown over 50 miles in uncertain weather to find the fleet; navigation had been made more difficult by circling the destroyer; the odds against easily spotting the raft were extremely great.

Gregory and Metzler again worked together in plotting the return course. As they drew near the spot where they hoped the survivor would be, a shout went up as they spotted the tossing raft dead ahead. Navigation had been perfect.

The Black Cat circled the man until the destroyer arrived and his recovery was completed. Favorite, with his crew waving, buzzed the cheering men on the destroyer before continuing their assigned mission.

During the Philippine invasion, there were frequent confrontations between Allied naval vessels and enemy shore batteries. One such confrontation, reported on 4 December 1944, took place at Ormoc Bay on the west coast of Leyte. A US destroyer apparently hit a floating mine. It broke in half and sank in minutes, flinging crewmen into a debris-laden ocean.

Early in the morning after the battle, two VP-34 crews penetrated a weather front and landed in cluttered Ormoc Bay to rescue as many survivors as possible. The apprehensive crews set to work immediately. There was no interference, however, from shore installations.

Lt.(jg) Joe Ball and his crew snatched two officers, one the skipper of the destroyer, and 54 men from the water. Ball lifted his PBY-5 off the water with a total of 63 men, including his crew, aboard his flying boat.

Lt.(jg) Mel Essary, the pilot of the second Black Cat, and his crew hauled in 43 men and three officers for a total of 53 persons aboard his flying boat when it lifted off. Of 102 men rescued by the two VP-34 crews, eleven of them were seriously injured.

On 25 December, Lt.(jg) Jack Thurman of VPB-33 was in the "ready" tent, his crew preparing PBY 08449 for Dumbo duty. An emergency call came in for an immediate air-sea rescue. Thurman, whose plane was ready, took the call and a stand-by crew was called for the Dumbo assignment to cover a Lockheed PV-1 Ventura strike.

The downed airman, Flight Leader Vanderpump, of the Royal New Zealand Air Force, was easily spotted about a mile offshore at Atalikllkun Bay where he had ditched. An onshore breeze was drifting him toward the Japanese-held island. Thurman landed on the easy rolling swells and taxied to within 50 yards of the New Zealander. Cutting his port engine, he eased up to the raft and the crew helped Vanderpump aboard. Just as Vanderpump climbed aboard, two rounds from a shore battery splashed down some 50 yards beyond the PBY.

It was a Japanese error.

Vanderpump's squadron mates had been circling over his raft. When they saw the shell splashes, they roared down in their F4Us with guns blazing and plowed up a quarter mile of beach. Thurman got the PBY into the air as quickly as possible and departed.

The same day, Lt.(jg) Jack Jones rescued another RNZAF pilot, Squadron Leader Kiles who had been shot down 25 miles from Kavieng, New Ireland. Jones had been flying for several hours before the rescue. When he landed at Emiru Island, he had less that 50 gallons of fuel remaining.

These two rescues provided a special thrill to the participants. Each took place on Christmas Day, 1944.

Steve Sikora. ARM 1/c (Aviation Radioman. first class) who saved John Mcintyre's life during Haase's rescue effort, was involved in a second 1944 air-sea rescue.

Lt.(jg) Minter Aidridge and Lief Johnson were flying Army and Navy personnel from the Admiralty islands to the Philippines. The weather was overcast, but a break in cloud cover occurred and a drifting raft was spotted in the Philippine Sea. With a calm sea, the rescue of four Army airmen aboard the raft was safely completed.

A New York newspaper carried this short item:

'Ever been disappointed? So were four Army airmen adrift on a life raft for 17 days and 20 hours. In that time 30 aircraft and two convoys were sighted but every effort made to contact their attention failed. Then a Navy Catalina, aboard which was Steven Sikora, picked them up.'

1st Lt. R. Wright, one of the B-25 airmen, rescued by Favorite and his crew, was so grateful he assured them that he would name his first child "Gardenia" to commemorate the rescue. In 1985, in Captain R. Knott's book, Black Cat Raiders of WWII, he saw a photograph of his rescue, credited to Favorite.

Wright then contacted the Navy for Favorite's address and wrote him. Later, Wright and Favorite were able to meet. Wright explained to Favorite that he hadn't kept his promise to name his first born Gardenia; it had been a boy.

On 26 May 1944. Lieutenant Floyd Reck and his crew were scheduled for a Gardenia mission. Shortly after they reached their assigned area they spotted a raft rising and falling on the slow rolling swells. There was no problem in landing and retrieving two downed B-25 airmen, one a pilot, the other a young sergeant gunner.

After the war, Reck remained in the Navy and attended aeronautical engineering school. After a three-year tour of duty in Trinidad, Reck was assigned to Transport Squadron VP-6 flying routes over the north Atlantic. In March 1950, because of fog, a flight was grounded at Argentia. The crew was relaxing in the bar when a group of Coast Guard officers entered. One of the officers, a young Ensign, stared at Reck for several seconds, then walked over and asked if Reck had ever flown PBYs in the south Pacific.

When Reck acknowledged that he had done so, the Ensign extended his hand and said, 'Sir, you plucked me out of the water off Wewak (on the north side of New Guinea) in 1944.' The Ensign was the young sergeant of the downed B-25. After his discharge, he had received an appointment to the United States Coast Guard Academy.

APPENDIX I

THE COST OF AN AIR WAR
HORRIFIC WWII UNITED STATES ARMY AIR CORPS STATISTICS

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"On average 6600 American service men died per MONTH, during WWII (about 220 a day)…."

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Most Americans who were not adults during WWII have no understanding of the magnitude of it. This listing of some of the aircraft facts gives a some insight.

- 276,000 aircraft manufactured in the US .
- 43,000 planes lost overseas, including 23,000 in combat.
- 14,000 lost in the continental U.S.

The US civilian population maintained a dedicated effort for four years, many working long hours seven days per week and often also volunteering for other work. WWII was the largest human effort in history.

(There are more amazing facts at the end of the photos...)

WWII MOST-PRODUCED COMBAT AIRCRAFT

Ilyushin IL-2 Sturmovik 36,183

Yakolev Yak-1,-3,-7, -9 31,000+

Messerschmitt Bf-109 30,480

Focke-Wulf Fw-190 29,001

Supermarine Spitfire/Seafire 20,351

Convair B-24/PB4Y Liberator/Privateer 18,482

Republic P-47 Thunderbolt 15,686

North American P-51 Mustang 15,875

Junkers Ju-88 15,000

Hawker Hurricane 14,533

Curtiss P-40 Warhawk 13,738

Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress 12,731

Vought F4U Corsair 12,571

Grumman F6F Hellcat 12,275

Petlyakov Pe-2 11,400

Lockheed P-38 Lightning 10,037

Mitsubishi A6M Zero 10,449

North American B-25 Mitchell 9,984

Lavochkin LaGG-5 9,920

Note: The LaGG-5 was produced with both water-cooled (top) and air-cooled (bottom) engines.

Grumman TBM Avenger 9,837

Bell P-39 Airacobra 9,584

Nakajima Ki-43 Oscar 5,919

DeHavilland Mosquito 7,780

Avro Lancaster 7,377

Heinkel He-111 6,508

Handley-Page Halifax 6,176

Messerschmitt Bf-110 6,150

Lavochkin LaGG-7 5,753

Lockheed Martin B-26 Marauder 5288

Boeing B-29 Superfortress 3,970

Short Stirling 2,383

STATISTICS FROM *FLIGHT JOURNAL* MAGAZINE

THE COST OF DOING BUSINESS

---- The staggering cost of war.

THE PRICE OF VICTORY (cost of an aircraft in WWII dollars)

B-17	$204,370	P-40	$44,892
B-24	$215,516	P-47	$85,578
B-25	$142,194	P-51	$51,572
B-26	$192,426	C-47	$88,574
B-29	$605,360	PT-17	$15,052
P-38	$97,147	AT-6	$22,952

PLANES PER DAY WORLDWIDE

Total Time Frame - From Germany's invasion of Poland 1 Sept 1939 and ending with Japan's surrender 2 Sept 1945 --- 2,433 days.

From the beginning of America's involvement in 1942 onward, America averaged 170 planes lost per day.

How many is a 1,000 planes? 1,000 B-17s carried 2.5 million gallons of high octane fuel and required 10,000 airmen to fly and fight them.

B-17 production (12,731) wingtip to wingtip would extend 250 miles.

THE NUMBERS GAME IN TOTAL

9.7 billion gallons of gasoline consumed, 1942-1945.

107.8 million hours flown, 1943-1945.

459.7 billion rounds of aircraft ammo fired overseas, 1942-1945.

7.9 million bombs dropped overseas, 1943-1945.

2.3 million combat sorties, 1941-1945 (one sortie = one takeoff).

299,230 aircraft accepted, 1940-1945.

808,471 aircraft engines accepted, 1940-1945.

799,972 propellers accepted, 1940-1945.

Sources: Rene Francillon, Japanese Aircraft of the Pacific war; Cajus Bekker, The Luftwaffe Diaries; Ray Wagner, American Combat Planes; Wikipedia.

According to the AAF Statistical Digest, in less than four years (December 1941- August 1945), the US Army Air Forces lost 14,903 pilots, aircrew and assorted personnel plus 13,873 airplanes --- inside the continental United States . They were the result of 52,651 aircraft accidents (6,039 involving fatalities) in 45 months.

Think about those numbers. They average 1,170 aircraft accidents per month---- nearly 40 per day. (However, less than one accident in four resulted in total loss of the aircraft)

It gets worse.....

Almost 1,000 Army planes disappeared en route from the US to foreign locations. But an eye-watering 43,581 aircraft were lost overseas including 22,948 on combat missions (18,418 against the Western Axis alone) and 20,633 attributed to non-combat causes overseas.

In a single 376 plane raid in August 1943, 60 B-17s were shot down. That was a 16 percent loss rate and meant 600 empty bunks in England.... In 1942-43 it was statistically impossible for bomber crews to complete a 25-mission tour in Europe the number set as the target needed to be achieved before returning stateside.

Pacific theatre losses were far less (4,530 in combat) owing to smaller forces committed .... The worst B-29 mission, against Tokyo on May 25, 1945, cost 26 Superfortresses, 5.6 percent of the 464 dispatched from the Marianas Islands.

On average, 6,600 American servicemen died per month during WWII, about 220 per day. By the end of the war, over 40,000 airmen were killed in combat theatres and another 18,000 wounded. Some 12,000 missing men were declared dead, including a number "liberated" by the Soviets but never returned. More than 41,000 were captured, half of the 5,400 held by the Japanese died in captivity, compared with one-tenth in German hands. Total Army Air Force combat casualties were pegged at 121,867.

US manpower made up the deficit. The AAF's peak strength was reached in 1944 with 2,372,000 personnel, nearly twice the previous year's figure.

The losses were huge---but so were production totals. From 1941 through 1945, American industry delivered

more than 276,000 military aircraft. That number was enough not only for the US Army, Navy and Marine Corps, but for allies as diverse as Britain, Australia, China and Russia. In fact, from 1943 onward, America produced more planes than Britain and Russia combined and more than Germany and Japan together 1941-45.

However, our enemies took massive losses. Through much of 1944, the Luftwaffe sustained uncontrolled hemorrhaging, reaching 25 percent of aircrews and 40 planes a month. And in late 1944 into 1945, nearly half the pilots in Japanese squadrons had flown fewer than 200 hours. The disparity of two years before had been completely reversed.

EXPERIENCE LEVEL

Uncle Sam sent many of his sons to war with absolute minimums of training. Some fighter pilots entered combat in 1942 with less than one hour flying time experience in their assigned aircraft.

The 357th Fighter Group (often known as The Yoxford Boys) went to England in late 1943 having trained on P-39 Mustangs. In theater the group never saw a Mustang until shortly before its first combat mission.

A high-time P-51 pilot had 30 hours flying time experience in assigned aircraft type. Many had fewer than five hours. Some had one hour.

With arrival of new aircraft, many combat units transitioned in combat. The attitude was, "They all have a stick and a throttle. Go fly “em." When the famed 4th Fighter Group converted from P-47s to P-51s in February 1944, there was no time to stand down for an orderly transition.

The Group commander, Col. Donald Blakeslee, said, "You can learn to fly `51s on the way to the target.”

A future P-47 ace said, "I was sent to England to die." He was not alone in his feelings.

Some fighter pilots tucked their wheels in the well on their first combat mission with one previous flight in the aircraft. Meanwhile, many bomber crews were still learning their trade: of Jimmy Doolittle's 15 pilots on the April 1942 Tokyo raid, only five had won their wings before 1941.

All but one of the 16 copilots were less than a year out of flight school.

In WWII flying safety took a back seat to combat. The AAF's worst accident rate was recorded by the A-36 Invader version of the P-51: a staggering 274 accidents per 100,000 flying hours.

Next worst were the P-39 at 245, the P-40 at 188, and the P-38 at 139. All were Allison engine powered.

Bomber wrecks were fewer but more expensive. The B-17 and B-24 averaged 30 and 35 accidents per 100,000 flight hours, respectively-- a horrific figure considering that from 1980 to 2000 the Air Force's major mishap rate was less than 2.

The B-29 was even worse at 40; the world's most sophisticated, most capable and most expensive bomber was too urgently needed to stand down for mere safety reasons. The AAF set reasonably high standard requirements for B-29 pilots, but the desired figures were seldom attained.

The original cadre of the 58th Bomb Wing was to have 400 hours of multi-engine time, but there were not enough experienced pilots to meet the criterion. Only ten percent had overseas experience. Conversely, when a $2.1 billion B-2 crashed in 2008, the Air Force initiated a two-month "safety pause" rather than declare a "stand down", let alone grounding.

The B-29 was no better for maintenance. Though the R3350 was known as a complicated, troublesome power-plant, no more than half the mechanics had previous experience with the Duplex Cyclone engine. But they made it work.

NAVIGATORS

Perhaps the greatest unsung success story of AAF training was Navigators.

The Army graduated some 50,000 during the War. And many had never flown out of sight of land before leaving "Uncle Sugar" for a war zone. Yet the huge majority found their way across oceans and continents without getting lost or running out of fuel --- a stirring tribute to the AAF's educational establishments.

CADET TO COLONEL

It was possible for a flying cadet at the time of Pearl Harbor to finish the war with eagles on his shoulders. That was the record of John D. Landers, a 21-year-old Texan, who was commissioned a second lieutenant on December 12, 1941. He joined his combat squadron with 209 hours total flight time, including 2 in P-40s. He finished the war as a full colonel, commanding an 8th Air Force Group --- at age 24.

As the training pipeline filled up, however those low figures became exceptions.

By early 1944, the average AAF fighter pilot entering combat had logged at least 450 hours, usually including 250 hours in training. At the same time, many captains and first lieutenants claimed over 600 hours.

FACT

At its height in mid-1944, the Army Air Forces had 2.6 million people and nearly 80,000 aircraft of all types.

In 2009 the US Air Force employed 327,000 active personnel (plus 170,000 civilians) with 5,500+ manned and perhaps 200 unmanned aircraft.

The 2009 figures represent about 12 percent of the manpower and 7 percent of the airplanes of the WWII peak.

IN SUMMATION

Whether there will ever be another war like that experienced in 1940-45 is doubtful, as fighters and bombers have given way to helicopters and remotely-controlled drones over Afghanistan and Iraq. But within living memory, men left the earth in 1,000-plane formations and fought major battles five miles high, leaving a legacy that remains timeless**.**