

**Eighth Air Force Historical Society**

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**Roland Fisher, 1944**

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## **Introduction**

Hello Everybody. It's nice to see you, again. I don't get here as often as I would like to. I'm going to try a little harder in the future...I'm asked to give these talks because of my experiences in WWII. I have to say at the outset, that was some 65 years ago or more. When I think about it, it's not easy to recall those times accurately. When I try, all kinds of memories and pictures will go through my mind. For the most part, they are kind of dim and fuzzy, fragmented. Certain things stick. I can still feel the sheer delight of the first time I was up in the air all by myself in a big, powerful 50 hp *Cub*, the day I soloed. That's a memory that will never leave me. I can recall some very intense moments just maybe about a year later after I soloed, when I'm staring at my instrument panel in my night fighter ready to launch it off into the black mist of an English night. Some of those moments stick pretty well with me.

## **The *Spitfire***

I suppose, I should mention the memory I have of flying that silky *Spitfire*. That's the airplane that caused John McGee to write those immortal words, "I chased the shouting wind along and flung my eager craft through footless halls of air." ["High Flight" by John Gillespie McGee, Jr.] That's a memory that I will carry with me for a long time.

## **B-24 *Liberator***

There is one memory that really sticks. That is of a big, boxy, four engine airplane with twin tail, the B-24 *Liberator*. Sixty eight years ago, as a country, we were climbing out of the worst economic Depression in our history. At that time, this was in the decade of the late 30's, from across the Atlantic, we were hearing a rumble of what became the most destructive war in human history. We felt a lot of uncertainty. I can remember this, we felt a lot of uncertainty as a nation. We weren't directly involved in the war, but it was a scary time.

## **B-17 and B-24**

When our two main strategic aircraft, the *Flying Fortress* and the *Liberator*, came into being, I think as a people we took some inspiration from those names. Both planes filled a compelling need. They served our country very well. The B-17, that design began in 1934 and took 5 years to reach production.

### **B-24 Design to Construction**

At that time, there was a very visionary Air Force leader by the name of Hap Arnold, who recognized the value of this as a weapon to our country. He fought what was then a very stingy Congress and what was also a battleship mentality, to bring strategic aircraft to the United States. He thought that the B-17 was a good plane, but that we needed another strategic aircraft. So, he wrote a specification and put it out into the aviation manufacturing field. Consolidated Aircraft got Arnold's specification and in just 2 weeks—the B-17 took 5 years from design to construction.

When Arnold put out that specification, in 2 weeks, the chief designer of Consolidated Aircraft, a guy named Mac Laddon, put together a design. It had the new Davis high wing which was an innovation. It had the twin tail. I should mention that the Consolidated people were flying boat specialists. They really had no experience building land bombers. That [flying boat] was really Mac's cup of tea. He took the basic design of this new twin tail flying boat that he had just finished—it wasn't flown yet--and he hung the Davis wing on this big, boxy fuselage. He put the twin tail. He put four Pratt and Whitney engines on it. On January 20<sup>th</sup>, he took his proposed design to Wright Field and presented it and he so impressed what was then the Army Air Corps officials that, in March of 1939, they gave Consolidated an order for the XB-24. They did a mock up in April. They got an order then for seven YB-24s which was the experimental model. Performance looked so good to them that thirty eight B-24As were ordered in August. To rush readiness for the first flight of the one he was putting together, he took the entire twin tail section off of this experimental flying boat that he had designed, but hadn't even flown yet. He put that on this new the land bomber.

They flew 4 Pratt and Whitney engines out in a cargo plane from the east coast to San Diego. Barely nine months after getting their contract, the first B-24 lifted off from Lindbergh Field. It was December 1939.

### **First Look at a B-24**

Fifteen months later, starting quite a series of coincidences, I got my first look at a B-24. At that time, I was investing every penny and every moment that I could in getting my pilot's license. I had flown a 64 hp *Luscomb* down to San Diego as part of my cross country qualification.

In San Diego as I taxied out to return to Los Angeles, I taxied up behind a huge, boxy, four engine airplane. I'd never seen anything like this before. I waited behind it while the pilot ran up his engines. The ground—the air-- just thundered and roared and my little *Luscomb* just bounced and shimmied around from the prop wash of that big thing ahead of me. Then, he wheeled around and he pointed it down the runway. With this thundering roar, he took off and went out of sight. I hadn't the faintest idea what it was. I got my green light and I pushed the throttle and my 65 hp Continental cackled and got me up into the air. I set my course for Los Angeles. I just reflected on what I'd seen. I hadn't the foggiest notion what it was. I know now that the airplane I saw that day was an LB-30 that was designed to go to the RAF Coastal Command where it did such wonderful service against the rampaging German submarines.

### **B-24 Functions**

That was just one of the many myriad of duties that the B-24 served. It was adapted to more roles and more missions than any other aircraft of WWII. *Liberators* served in every theater of the war: the sands of North Africa; the icy Aleutians; muddy Italy; foggy England; tiny little coral atolls out in the vast, trackless Pacific; swamps and rainforests of New Guinea; and over the towering hump, the Himalayan Mountains between India and China. It carried out mass bombing raids from high altitudes against the powerful Luftwaffe. Clint [Gruber] can tell you a story about that one. It flew against the fearsome German ack-ack. It skimmed the wheat fields of Romania in that famous Ploesti Raid which flattened the oil industry of Romania.

## **Night Squadron**

My squadron, which I'll tell you more about later, flew at very low level in the dark against Japanese ships—as low as 50 feet off the water, believe it or not, in inky blackness. We had a very primitive radar altimeter that could tell us within 25 feet of accuracy how high we are above the water and sometimes a wave can be almost 25 feet high. So, that was a pretty hairy thing when you were following this little needle with a target up ahead of you.

## **B-24 History**

The *Liberator* was not just a bomber. It was a superb transport. It was an excellent photo [inaudible] plane. It flew clandestine missions mostly in Europe in the Scandinavian countries at night to land behind enemy lines and drop spies and pick up downed airmen. It was flown by, believe it or not, civilian pilots. They were called the Carpetbaggers. They played a role in the war that was very little known.

## **Winston Churchill's *Commando***

A one of a kind B-24 made great moments in history. In August 1942, Winston Churchill flew from England to Moscow in his customized B-24. He called it *Commando*. It was a very long, perilous journey. His pilot, something that is not very often known, was a 26 year old American who had been hand picked by the head of the Royal Air Force as the best pilot and he was assigned to fly *Commando*, Winston Churchill's plane. The fellow's name was Bill Vanderkloot. That night, when he flew Churchill to Moscow, he made a night take off in a rainstorm, made stops at Gibraltar, Cairo, Tehran, and finally into Moscow.

When they stopped in Cairo, they picked up Able Hariman who was Franklin Roosevelt's Aide d' camp in all of these diplomatic missions. Three weeks from his departure from England, the highly talented Bill Vanderkloot, following a reverse course, delivered Churchill safely back to Britain.

### **Eleanor Roosevelt**

Franklin Roosevelt had a customized B-24. The sad thing is that there is no record of his ever riding in it. He never went anywhere in it, but Eleanor did. Eleanor went lots of places. One of my most cherished memories is when I was still in the Royal Air Force, she flew in that B-24 to England and on an inspection trip, came down the ranks of Americans who were in the RAF, stopped and talked to each one of us, asked our names, our hometown, and always had some nice little comment to make about it. I shall never forget her gracious beauty, as I call her, her gracious beauty. What a wonderful woman she was.

### **Joseph Kennedy, Jr.**

One special model of the B-24 carried Joseph Kennedy, Jr. to a very tragic end. We heard, a couple of years ago, the detail of this mission. In an effort to blow up the Nazi submarine pens that were so heavily armored and armed along the coast of France, they selected this B-24. They packed it with a special kind of explosive which we used in our bombs, by the way, against Jap ships. It was called Torpex. It was more sensitive than ordinary TNT. It sometimes would go off just from a blow.

The plan was that Kennedy and another volunteer, would fly this flying bomb, this B-24, over the Channel, aim it at the Nazi submarine pens, bail out and let it crash into them. With the tremendous amount of explosive that it had, it was bound to crack it and do some damage. It was no fault of the plane. They never really did figure out exactly what caused it, but just as they were departing England, the whole thing detonated in an enormous ball of flame—a fire ball that shook the land for miles around. I have read reports of witnesses to this thing. It left absolutely no trace and abruptly ended the life of a young man who undoubtedly would've become President of the United States.

### **B-24 Firsts**

The B-24 had many, many firsts. It was America's first mass produced airplane. It was the first one to use this innovative Davis airfoil and fly. It was the first production bomber with a nose wheel. Until a B-29 came along, the B-24 had the biggest payload, the longest range, and the greatest speed of our heavy bombers.

Just 10 months after Pearl Harbor, it carried out the first 100 plus raid against the German occupied areas in France. For a catch-up airplane that Mac Laddon had put together a design in one month, it was truly a pioneer.

In WWII, it was the most complex aircraft ever put into mass production. More were built than any other U.S. aircraft in history. In total nearly 20,000—I think it was 19,926 *Liberators* of all types were produced in five factories. By 1944, a finished "Lib" was rolling out the Ford Willow Run Plant in Detroit every 58 minutes. That's making airplanes. Not counting the several one-of-a-kind planes, such as Churchill's *Commando*, there were 57 different models crewed almost entirely by young Americans freshly out of high school.

It reached into every action of the war in this greatest war of human history and it definitely played a major role in defeating two giant war machines.

## **RAF**

My relation with the *Liberator* was a gradual one. In 1942, while I was still flying with the RAF, I saw them on occasion—these huge, ghostly painted monsters that flew low over the water. They were part of the RAF Coastal Command and they were very effective against the German submarines around Britain, but I really didn't get close to one for about a year.

## **Eighth Air Force**

In late 1942, I transferred from the RAF to the US [Army] Air Force. I flew with the Eighth Air Force for a while, mostly fighters. Then, I was sent home.



## **Fifth Air Force**

### **418<sup>th</sup> Night Fighter Squadron**

In October 1943, I was sent to the Fifth Air Force in the South West Pacific area as the Operations Officer of the 418<sup>th</sup> Night Fighter Squadron. We were equipped with a very poor airplane for its duty. It was the P-70 [*Nighthawk*]. It was a Douglas. What the British called a *Boston*, we called a *Havoc*, the A-20, the low level attack bomber. It was a very effective low level attack bomber. It was an absolutely lousy fighter. It couldn't keep up with the fast, nimble Japanese aircraft, who by the way, at that time were very good at night. They just simply weren't matches for these airplanes.

So, in short, we were not much benefit to the Fifth Air Force and the leaders didn't like what they considered a waste of pilot talent and aircraft. They thought that we were no value at night. The big difference was that, when we were in Europe, there was an intense, very complete, comprehensive ground radar system that could guide you through the night so that you could do exactly what you needed to do with precision. In the Pacific, there wasn't that. There were just a few very poor radar stations generally mounted on ships or boats. It just didn't work. Not being trained because the commanders of the Fifth didn't think we were of any value at night, they started using us during the daytime attacking Japanese antiaircraft emplacements. Not being trained for this, we didn't do much damage. We took a lot of losses.

### **Fifth Air Force from B-17 to B-24**

Through 1942 and 1943, the B-17 was the heavy bomber for the Fifth Air Force and it gave outstanding service day and night, but it just did not have the range to cope with the needs of the area. The Japanese aircraft did. The B-24 could satisfy these needs. It could fly somewhat faster than the *Fortress* and with somewhat heavier bomb loads. So, in 1943, the Fifth Bomber Command replaced all of their *Fortresses* with *Liberators*. By 1944, they had reached its full complement of four groups of B-24s, each one with about 55 aircraft.

## ***Liberator* Night Squadron**

All of these groups operated entirely in the daytime, mostly on daytime strikes in formation with the exception of one squadron and that was mine. The Japanese, when these new *Liberators* began to become so effective in bombing Japanese targets, the Japanese then changed their strategy and began moving all of their goods at night. They had such heavy losses of vessels during the day that... They had a huge army in New Guinea. It was as big as the German Army was at Stalingrad. It spread up and down that island and they needed to supply it. So, they began moving everything in at night. This required a change in the U.S. strategy.

In October 1944, a squadron of *Liberators*, just a single squadron, arrived in New Guinea with new equipment: 10 cm search radar and a low level bomb sight. The crews were trained to fly at night, find enemy ships, and attack them at low level anywhere from 50 to 500 feet. At an altitude of about 1500 feet, this search radar could see up to about 150 miles. When you were over open water, it was very effective in locating islands and most of the bases that the Japanese had we used were on little islands. These special model "Libs" were very heavy.

The original *Liberator* was designed for a take-off weight of 45, 000 pounds. These that we were flying with the special tanks and the radar—it was the same size airplane with the same engines--weighed 72,000 pounds. So, we had to run them about 7,000 feet at sea level just to get them into the air. It was not an easy thing, but we were able to do it.

To this new squadron of *Liberators*, just settling into their anti-shipping duties when my night fighter squadron was dismantled and broken up and put into all other parts of the Fifth Air Force. Somebody in headquarters discovered that I'd had previous experience using airborne radar in operations. So, they transferred me from where I was to this new *Liberator* squadron. Thus, began a relationship with this big, boxy bomber that I had first seen from my little *Luscomb* cabin about two years before.

First, it was just a relationship. You know, at that age most young males, we were all just ending adolescence. We'd had, I think I speak for most of you guys, we'd had a lots of flings. In my case, a few were with girls, but most of them were with airplanes because my true love was flying and all I needed was a willing partner.

### **Checking out in a *Spitfire***

Except perhaps for the brief time I got in a *Spitfire* and I should explain that.

When I was given orders in the RAF to transfer to the Eighth Air Force, my squadron commander said, "We appreciate your service as a volunteer to help our country. We'd like to know, is there anything you'd like to do before you go to the Eighth Air Force?"

I said, "I'd love to fly a *Spitfire*. I'd like to get checked out in a *Spitfire*."

I'd never flown one and they just deeply impressed me with their beauty. Well, my reward was, they sent me down to the *Spitfire* Operational Training Unit where they brought in newly trained new pilots and they ran them through a complete course in order to qualify them as a *Spitfire* pilot. I got to go through with an entire class. That was my reward and I want to tell you it was a wonderful one.

### ***Liberator* Night Squadron Missions**

Except for that [experience in a *Spitfire*]—which was in my case a true love—my experience with the *Liberator* was pretty much just an experience, an affair. It didn't have the flying beauty, the loveliness that fighter aircraft did. Some bombers were beautiful to fly. The B-24 was kind of an ungainly box and that's about the way it flew. So, I had what I just call a relationship, but as I flew with it on these night missions--and some of them were pretty hairy--while it didn't offer much graceful, pleasurable flying, as we shared these long hours in the dark and reached our target and carried out our [mission], I began to an affection for it. There were missions I went through turbulence so severe, tipped me over on my back. Missions that took me through just withering fire coming up from a ship. At 50 feet, that's shaky. It required on some of these missions, precision bomb drops at about 500 feet, right down a 100 foot wide runway on a little island.

### **Mission into Hong Kong Harbor**

There was one mission that I flew. It was into Hong Kong Harbor. I was assigned to ferret out some enemy radar stations. As some of you may know, Hong Kong is a beautiful harbor surrounded by high mountains. I went in low, cruised around to feel out the different radar installations, and the anti-aircraft was shooting down at me, instead of up. That was a new experience.

#### **Mission: 5 Sep 1944**

My affection from this ungainly monster that carried me and my crew successfully through all of these dangerous times, got deeper and deeper. During the night of September 5, 1944, it turned into the undying love that I have for that critter, today. That evening at 8 o'clock, 8 p.m., I lifted the B-24D, "Miss Liberty", off of Owi Isle. It was just a tiny island. It was just 8,000 feet long. We had a single strip on it. My mission was to go to Davao Gulf in the Philippines which is about 900 miles to the northwest from Owi--roughly like flying from here [Portland, OR.] to Santa Barbara—and search for shipping in Davao Gulf. If I couldn't find any, then I had a secondary target of Matina Air Strip. As I started down the runway that night, it had just turned dark, anti-aircraft fired off a red alert signaling that we were under attack by Japanese planes.

By the way, that's something I would like to point out, in Europe when you were not flying combat, it was a pretty cushy affair. You lived in comfortable quarters. Out in the Pacific, you were either dealing damage or you were receiving damage. Everybody was trying to damage somebody all the time. It just never stopped. That night as I took off, a bunch of Jap bombers attacked Owi and they fired the red alert. I was probably half way down the runway when my Turbo Supercharger on my #3 engine blew the waste gate and I abruptly dropped down from full power, full manifold pressure, to just ambient manifold pressure. So, in effect, I had three and a half engines. I was past the point of no return. I couldn't stop. Guns were shooting all over the place. So, I elected to go on. I just barely cleared the palm stumps at the end of the runway. I staggered into the air. Then, I got up and trimmed it up a little bit.

The tower called me and said, "The runway's been holed. You can't come back."

I thought, "Well, my crippled engine is running OK. I've got three and a half. So, I'll go on to the target. I wasn't going to have to fly very high, anyway."

A little after 0100 hours, just after midnight, we entered the mouth of Davao Gulf, Mindanao, Philippine Islands. Our radar showed no vessels in the Gulf. So, I elected to attack the secondary target which was Matina Air Strip that lay just south of Davao City on the coast. I climbed to about 5,000 feet because I knew that there would be very heavy anti-aircraft [fire] surrounding that air strip and I elected to make a somewhat higher elevation than I usually did. Unfortunately, as I was on my way up there a bright moon had risen. We of the 63<sup>rd</sup> just hated the moon because it just showed up everything. We much preferred the darkness as a cloak.

There I was sitting up above this air strip making my run in bright moonlight. As I made my approach, some search lights snapped on me just like that. We'd been warned, by the way, that we had to bomb this air strip very accurately and not let our bombs stray to the south because there was an enormous contingent of American Prisoners of War that were used as laborers by the Japanese to maintain their installations throughout there and their encampment was very close to the strip and we were told that we could easily hurt our own countrymen. So, we had to keep those bombs there on target. So, I did. That's of the one reason I didn't go higher. We laid the bomb. Howard Hamett, my bombardier, put them right down the strip and I felt the release of the bombs and I turned left hard to get out of the [antiaircraft fire]. There was some anti-aircraft [fire], but it didn't seem to be all that accurate. I turned hard left and stuck my nose down.

I was headed out over the bay-- the Gulf--to pick up speed and the searchlights now were from behind me illuminating the area ahead of me and just abruptly like this, a fighter came at me, much faster than I can tell you about. It went right under my right wing.

I thought, "Boy, that guy really means business. He came so close,"

Well, I stuck my nose down a little bit more to get a little bit more speed. Just then, I heard a volley of automatic weapon fire—canon fire. My plane began to shutter and took a lot of hits. I could feel them. Then, abruptly I felt this great big "boop" in the rear end and it pitched me straight down. It felt like it was straight down. I'm sure it was probably 45 degrees, but it looked like I was headed straight down. I came back on the column slack. No feeling at all. My elevators were gone. I went to the autopilot. It wasn't working.

I had one thing left, the trim tab. I rolled that trim tab back just as hard as I could. We just kissed the water, in over controlled. We went climbing up like that. I rolled the trim tab forward and I went out of the bay porpoising, rolling this wheel back and forth. I finally got the thing leveled down. Fortunately, my engines were still running. We didn't know what was wrong with the aircraft, except that I had no elevator control. I had no hydraulics. The electrical system seemed to be haywire because everything was spinning. My compass, by the way, which was a [inaudible] compass. It came from one that was out in the wingtip from a master and came to a slave station on the instrument panel—[it] was not functioning. So, all I had left was my little magnetic compass which was sitting up, you all know where it was mounted. It was right up above the windshield.

I headed out of the bay. Unfortunately, the weather was calm. My three and a half engines ran beautifully. We headed homeward, six hours home over open ocean. I still didn't know what had happened.

My engineer went back and he came up and he said, "Well, the two waist gunners are really full of shrapnel and they are bleeding very badly."

The engineer was hurt a little bit, too.

He said, "I don't know what's wrong with the elevators. The wires have been cut and I can't fix them."

So, I went home on the trim tab and kept it level. As daylight brightened up and I approached Owi, I called ahead for landing instructions.

They said, "We've got all the day strike bombers lined up on the runway."—Remember it's a single runway—"We don't want you to land. You'll crash and you'll block the bombers. You've got to go bail out."

I said, "I can't. I've got wounded men aboard and they can't bail."

Apparently, there was some kind of a big conference at the other end. I think a pretty high ranking [official]--I suspect it was General Kenny-- said, "Let him land."

So, I made a big, long, slow approach. Swung around. Hydraulic fluid was gone. So, we collected fluid in all the customary manner of bomber crews, you know. Coffee and water and lemonade and everybody took a leak and we got enough fluid to pour it. Clint [Gruber] can tell you about this, the B-24, everything was on a single hydraulic system—the brakes as well as the flaps and the gear were on the same system. So, if you lost hydraulics, you could crank your wheels down and you could crank your flaps down, but your brakes weren't going to work.

That's why we collected all the fluid we could and poured it into the accumulator. I made this big, long, slow approach and rolled the trim tabs back very carefully. Just as I touched down, I had everybody that was free run to the back, sort of weight the tail down. By the way, I don't know how many of you tail-draggers know, but you can ground loop a B-24. Its center of gravity is just slightly behind the wheels. So, I got it on. I was dragging the tail a little bit and my nose wheel came down. Then, I had everybody go forward to keep the weight on the nose. The end of the strip was coming pretty fast. So, I had a little tiny bit of brake and then it quit. I got it slowed up a little. Then, as we approached the end of the runway, I hit hard left rudder and ground looped it and stopped.

We were all very happy to be there. We got out and looked at the aircraft. Until then, I didn't realize what had happened. We found this huge gaping hole in the right side of the lower part of the aircraft. There was a huge crease mark on the left side. There were canon holes all through it. Canon shell comes in and makes a little hole as it enters and when it goes out the top, it blows a great big hole. So, the empennage of the tail was pretty weak. It just has the two sides. The top and the bottom are pretty flimsy.

It wasn't until then that we realized that we had been struck by a Japanese fighter. This got a lot of attention from everybody. In fact, there was a tech representative there from Consolidated Aircraft and he was fascinated by the whole thing. I've got a little story. I'll tell you about that later. We figured out that the Japanese fighter could not possibly have survive. From the enormous amount of damage that was apparent, it looked like his airplane—the canopy had been completely crushed.

### **Distinguished Flying Cross**

So, we were given credit for knocking down an enemy fighter by clubbing him out of the air. General Kenny, he took a great delight in what he called "his boys". He called me in and he gave me the DFC for getting the guys home.

He said, "I just think it's wonderful you kids go around knocking the enemy out of the air using your airplanes as clubs."

They retired and they cannibalized "Miss Liberty", but I want to tell you, they didn't do it before I went out to the strip and climbed up in her and put my arms around that control column and gave her a great big hug and told her how much I loved her.

It all got a lot of attention. They invited me to fly down to General MacArthur's headquarters in New Guinea and I got to meet a whole bunch of the press. I heard from people all around the country because these reporters sent stories out and it was printed in the hometown paper. So, I got a lot of attention and reaction from this thing, but the war had to go on.

I finished out the war flying missions. I went out to the Philippines. I finished out the war flying my *Liberator* and other *Liberators* in various times.

### **Japanese Pilot Yoshimasa Nakagawa**

At the wars end, the story should've ended, but it didn't. One day, twenty years after I got out, I was reading a little pocketbook and it was called *Kamikaze, Divine Wind*, is the title. [*The Divine Wind: Japan's Kamikaze Force in World War II* by Rikihei Inoguchi, Tadashi Nakajima, and Roger Pineau]



It was written by a couple of Japanese Admirals and a guy named Roger Pineau who is a well known American who at the time was the curator at the Museum of Science and Industry at the Smithsonian Institution. Roger had written a lot of books on the Japanese because he did a lot of research. As I was reading this book, I read this account by this Japanese night fighter pilot, Yoshimasa Nakagawa, how he had been given strict instructions by his commander at Matina Air Strip on this particular night—it was the correct night, September 5<sup>th</sup>—that the next B-24 that comes in, "You get that SOB" or however they say it in Japanese.

This guy took the oath, "I will. I will."

When, he attacked me that night, and he's the one that made that head on pass at me and went under my wing and came around from behind, he had a very unusual, beautifully designed aircraft. The Japanese called it *Gekko* which means "moonlight". We called it "Irving", our code name. It was a very long, slim, twin engine.

It had an unusual gun mounting. Instead of forward firing guns, it had two 30mm canon mounted in the dorsal position behind the pilot and just ahead of the observer. They were fixed so that the Japanese pilot would fly under a target without having to point his aircraft at the target. As he would pass under, he would rake the target with these 30mm canon and do enormous damage.

We were talking a little bit ago about our companion squadron in the South West Pacific. We had the 63<sup>rd</sup> which was in the Fifth Air Force. There was the 868<sup>th</sup> Squadron which was part of the Thirteenth Air Force. They suffered huge losses.

Some of these losses were accomplished by a night fighter pilot named Yoshimasa Nakagawa flying *Irvings*. He had quite a number of aircraft to his credit and this was the type of aircraft that did so much damage to the 868<sup>th</sup>. He had just been transferred to the Fifth, Philippines because we were just now giving the Philippines a lot of attention. MacArthur was just determined he was going to go back to the Philippines. So, we had been bombing it pretty regularly.

Hence, this hot-shot, crack night fighter pilot was sent from Truk to Matina Air Strip so that he could help defend against the B-24s. He had a record of being very good at it. So, he attacked this B-24 that night. He reported in this book that he passed under it, made an abrupt turn and came in underneath and fired a number of shots and hit it and did a lot of damage.

Then he said, "My guns jammed. They quit. I had to do something. I'd sworn I was going to get that guy. I couldn't shoot him down. So, I decided to ram him."

Which he did. He reported that the impact smashed his canopy in his face, tore out his right engine. He said he was able to get the blood and gore out of his eyes just in time to see this B-24 hit the water south of [inaudible] Island. His report was exact. It was identical to my experience with one exception. I didn't hit the water. I pulled that baby out just at the last instant. He got credit for knocking down this B-24. It was very interesting, a paradox.

I was stunned to read this account. There was no question in my mind it was reporting my mission. So, I called Roger Pineau at the Smithsonian. He was fascinated.

He said, "This is an amazing thing."

He checked the book and he said, "I have a lot of friends in Japan. I'll do some research and see what I can find out. I just wondered if the guy by chance has survived the war."

It took him two years, but he called me and said, "I've located the man who lives in Kyushu on the southern island and he has the same name as your former adversary, but he won't admit to being that guy.

He said, "I suggest you send him a letter."

I did and apparently I said the right things because, in about two weeks, I got a very carefully worded reply. The outstanding thing about the letter is that it ended up-- first it went through the course expressing amazement that I'm still alive, "I thought I killed you and you're still alive?"

He said, "This is incredible."

I didn't realize it, but his daughter who was writing. He doesn't speak any English, but his daughter was writing the letters for him.

He was dictating and he said, "This is such an amazing coincidence. It must have been the work of God."

Now, his religion, if you want to call it a religion is Shinto. It's more of a philosophy than a religion. For him to make that expression, "It must have been the work of God", was something. I was fascinated, of course. We began a correspondence, wrote back and forth for several letters.

### **Meeting in Japan and *Life Magazine***

Then, my wife and I went to Japan to visit him. Big story about that, but I don't have time to tell you. I'd love to do it sometime. We ended up in Tokyo planning to fly down to his home island in Kyushu to visit him. This was a Friday night, we landed in Tokyo.

The Japanese authorities met me at my hotel and said, "We know you want to see your friend."--they called him 'my friend'—"as soon as possible, but you can't go down today. We have a very important thing happening in Tokyo, today. Cassius Clay is fighting for the world's heavyweight championship. Everybody's attention will be on that. What we'd like to do, is fly you down Monday—or go take you down Monday--and visit. We want to send an interpreter, a translator, with you."

We agreed. On Monday morning, we got in this little commuter-type, twin engine. This translator, he looked like a hippy. He had crazy clothes. He had a big, scraggly beard. He carried three or four cameras around his neck. I didn't realize what he was. He was a freelance photographer for *Life Magazine* [*Life Magazine* article published April 21, 1972]. They didn't tell me that. He was also an excellent translator because he had traveled the United States well and he spoke English with a perfect idiom, these expressions and so on. He spoke the vernacular and it was a big help.

As we landed at this little airport and we taxied around, his name was Tenuma [sp]—he came up and he said, "Would you mind staying on the aircraft and let everybody else get off first so then you get off last? I'd like to take your picture as you meet your friend."

At that time, I began saying, "Geez, I wonder what this guy will look like. I've never seen him. How am I going to tell him from all this sea of Japanese that happen to occupy Japan?"

Well, we waited. We got off the airplane and we walked around the nose. Here's about one hundred Japanese people standing there with flash bulbs going off and cameras whirring. Right in front was a lady dressed in a kimono-style, formal dress and a man in a business suit. His face was as white as your jacket and I knew that's my guy. He's normally colored yellow, but he was nervous, too. We shook hands. We walked up and we shook hands. My wife shook hands with his and I shook hands with him. That guy, Tenuma [sp], got a magnificent picture at that moment. It's a treasure that I'll carry to my grave. I just love it. I'm going to show it to you later.

We had a wonderful visit. He happened to be a construction contractor and he was building a new house. He hadn't quite finished, but he had finished one room. So, he invited us to come visit his home. We had a beautiful lunch with him. He introduced me to his kids. He had a 15 year old daughter who was dressed in body socks right up to her naval and he and his wife would shake their heads every time she walked around. They would look at each other and shake their heads like, "What can you do with them?" I guess is what they were thinking.

I began to realize at that point--I should say that after the war, I hated the Japanese because they did terrible things. They executed some of my squadron men. I have a friend who spoke to you sometime back who was a Prisoner of War with them. His life in their care is just a horror story. So, I have these strong anti-Japanese feelings, but when I spent this time with them as a family, I began to realize that we have a lot of similarities—that we are more alike than we are different. We began to empathize, especially with that hippy daughter of his. I still feel sorry [for him]. I think now she's a nice young lady. We had a great visit. We flew home.

### **The Dick Cavitt Show and Meeting in Portland, Oregon**

One day in the office, I got a call from the Dick Cavitt people.

They said, "We'd like to have you be on our show. We are going to invite Mr. Nakagawa over."

So, they brought him over to the U.S. He came to Portland.

Connie McCready was Mayor [of Portland,] then. She went out to the airport with me to meet him. She's a doll to welcome people to the city of Portland. She loved Portland with a purple passion. We had a great time. The newspapers here reported it. It just happened to be during the spring salmon season. So, I barbequed him up a big Spring Chinook. That went over good. He loved it. The news photographers and news, they loved it. We were on TV all the time.

A couple of days later, we all climbed on a United and went non-stop to the east coast and New York where we got ready to be on the Dick Cavitt Show. In this circumstance, we were guests of both the *Life Magazine* people and Dick Cavitt. They were taking care of Nakagawa and his wife completely and we had a very interesting time on the Dick Cavitt Show.

I developed a great respect for that man. He was, as you know, the first of the talk show artists. To this day, I still admire him because I think he's more than just a talk show artist. He's a very profound thinker and a great American.

It was a wonderful time. He and his wife enjoyed meeting and seeing New York. When the time came for them to part, they had to go back to Japan, they wanted to do just certain things before they left and they wanted my help in arranging it.

One is they wanted to see Niagara Falls. The other one is they wanted to go to Disneyland. What else? Last, and I was impressed with this, that demure little wife of his that was never out of her kimono robe wanted to go to Las Vegas I guess to live it up. You gals have secrets that you don't tell us about. Anyway, that was the last time I saw him. They took off and went back to Japan. I continued my correspondence.

### **The Samurai Sword**

We sent each other gifts. He sent me a magnificent gift. He had made for me—and he had to get a special deal passed through the Japanese Diet, the legislature, giving permission for this to leave Japan. He had made for me by a national artisan, a Samurai Sword. Just the box that it came in is a work of art.

I have the lid hanging on my wall as a wall decoration because it's so beautiful—a beautiful pine box—and inside was this Samurai Sword in a sock that was embroidered just beautiful. There may be a picture of that, too.

That pretty much ends the story. Over the years that have passed, we've both changed from a couple of very dark haired, passionate warriors imbued with the spirit of serving our country, to a couple of old, white haired geezers that probably are a little bit wiser today than those kids were.

One thing about it is that we are both very grateful that each of us survived—each of us that the other survived—and we've expressed that to each other quite often. We are pleased that we've been able to get so far along in life and enjoy what we have from life, and altogether, we are a couple of satisfied Veterans.

I stray now from my talk about the B-24. I really meant to talk about the B-24. I'm going to end up by saying that I love that old baby with a passion that I don't think you can understand because it did not offer me beautiful flying, but many times it delivered me home from exceptionally difficult circumstances that I should not have survived. I love it and always will. Thank you. [Applause]

## Slide Show Organized by Tom Philo

(\*Some photographs Courtesy of Tom Philo and for use of Lt. Col. Fisher only.

Other photos provided to Tom Philo by Lt. Col. Fisher.)



1. Roland T. Fisher in a Mark-5 *Spitfire*: "Here I am still in the RAF. Somebody has captured me and a Mark-5 *Spitfire* which I loved and I'm standing beside. That, I think, was when I was at that training school that the RAF sent me to. The Mark-5B carried canon. The Mark-5A carried machine guns. That was sheer pleasure to fly that thing."

*Question: You're a tall guy. I tried to get into a Spitfire cockpit once and couldn't close the canopy. How did do it?*

*Answer:* Clint, I had to lie down in it. You could put the rudder pedal—they weren't tiptoe brakes—you remember the British braking system? It was just a rudder pedal. You could put them way out. I could shove them out as far as I could go and I put my seat back and I actually was lying down in a *Spitfire*. My head was even with the canopy. Surprisingly, I was very comfortable. It was such a graceful aircraft to fly. You flew it with your thumb and finger. Other than the taxing and landing, which was kind of treacherous, once you got in the air, it was just sheer poetry and that's the way I felt. You wore it like a glove. If you don't know how to get in the glove, you have a tough time. I was able to get into it and I thoroughly enjoyed it.



2. Lt. Col. Fisher in a Spitfire: "That's in the cockpit of a *Spit*. That's in the cockpit and I've got on the RAF flying helmet. I still have my helmet. My oxygen mask has turned into a lump of coal. That foam rubber oxidizes, but the helmet is just wonderful. I still have my flying jacket. It's not sheep lined like the ones you wore, Clint. It's lined with Lamb's [wool]. It's nice."



\*3. 63<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Squadron: "This is my new outfit in the Pacific, the 63<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Squadron. We were part of what was called the snooper effort, but our name for ourselves was the Sea Hawks."





\*4. C-87: "That's the C-87. That's the transport version of the B-24. Made a very good transport." [Pictures collected by Tom Philo]



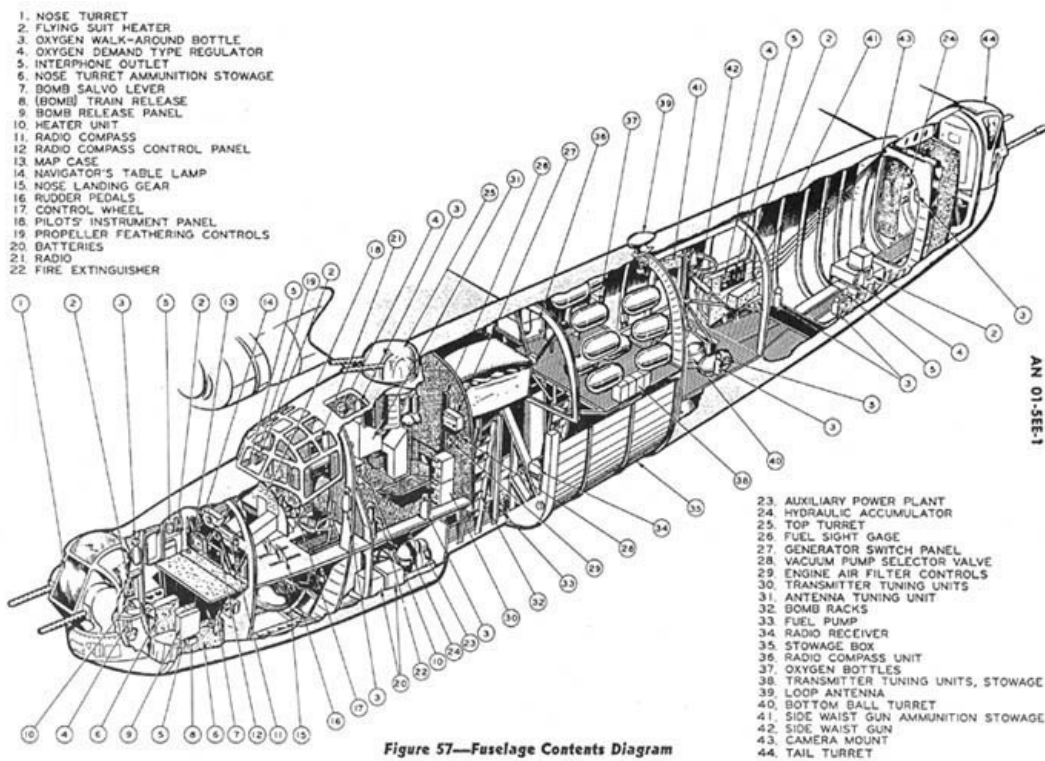
\*5. Navy version of the B-24: "This is the Navy version of the B-24. Instead of having a twin tail, it had a single rudder, but it was essentially the same airplane."

[Tom got a picture of one of those in Alaska doing fire fighting in the 1970s.]

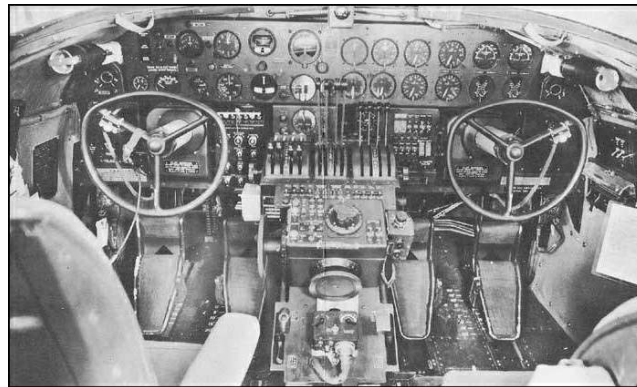
"Yeah, it was used—still is—there are several of those working as water aircraft. They do a good job."



\*6. LB-30: "This is the twin tail LB-30 which the RAF Coastal Command flew. That shows the radar installation which was so effective against German subs."



\*7. "That's the cut away. You can study that at your leisure. I just barely remember how to get from one part of the thing to the other."



\*8. "That's the controls. It had a very spacious cockpit and was quite comfortable...Trim tab is the wheel on the throttle column. That's how I pulled it out."



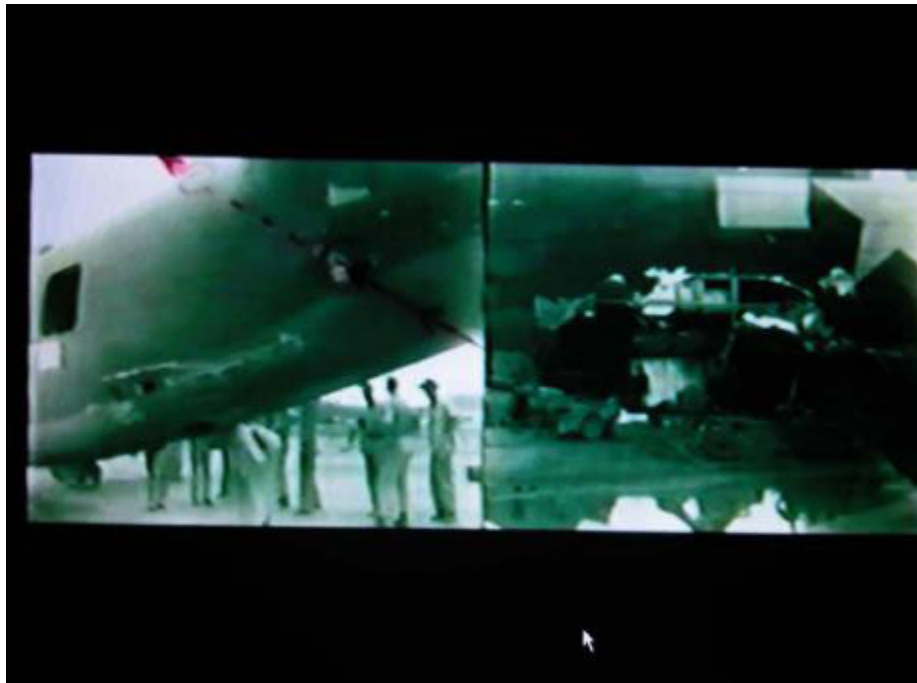
9. "Miss Liberty": "That's Miss Liberty before she ended. You can see all the victories and missions that she had. That came off the internet, by the way. I found that by accident.



10. "Miss Liberty" art: "This a picture that I took of her art while I was still in the squadron."



\*11. Map: "This is a map of the mission area. Down in that part of New Guinea and my mission was to fly over the ocean up to Davao Gulf which is right there...It was quite a long trip, but not boring."



12. Damage to "Miss Liberty": "This is the damage that was done to my aircraft. You can see where his right engine scooped a big hole in the right side and you can see on the left side of the fuselage the crease marks that his canopy made and that's where we found pieces of an aircraft sticking in mine when we landed. That was when we first realized that we'd been struck by an enemy fighter. One of my waist gunners almost fell out of that hole, by the way. He had a lot of shrapnel in his feet and legs. It was from the flying metal that that propeller caused when he chopped a hole in my plane...The other damage that was done was it tore up my tail skid. As I said, hydraulics operated everything in a B-24. So, when the tail skid went out, all of my hydraulic fluid leaked out that pipe. It tore out my radar spinner."





13. Yoshimasa Nakagawa and Roland Fisher during WWII: "Here we are when we were young, eager pilots flying for our country. I think he was 18 at the time. I was about 20."



14. Yoshimasa Nakagawa and Roland Fisher in Japan: "Here we are meeting in Japan almost 25 years later. I'm shaking hands with him and my wife was shaking hands with his wife. That airplane in the background was the prop jet we flew down in."



15. Yoshimasa Nakagawa and Roland Fisher in Portland: "When he came to Portland, he came up the causeway at the airport and I met him. I had an interpreter, a young Nisei first generation Japanese called Carl Kato. He worked for the Department of Commerce in Portland. He did a great job in translating for me. The darn newspaper reporters and photographers want you to show what you were doing at the time. Everybody thinks that the right way to do it is to use your hand to represent an aircraft. That's what I'm doing.

I don't particularly enjoy that, but the photographer said, 'Show us how you were positioned when he did what and so on.'

So, he's showing how he rammed under me while I was flying above me. I guess that's what that all means."



16. Yoshimasa Nakagawa and Roland Fisher in Portland: "Same thing, there."



17. Yoshimasa Nakagawa and Roland Fisher in Japan: "Here we are in Japan when we first met. His face is a little obscured, but there are significant scars still in his face from the Plexiglas that was shattered when he hit me and tore into his face. He almost lost one eye, but they saved it and saved his life. He continued flying, by the way, after he got out of the hospital, for about a month and a half when he got out of the hospital. By then, we had shattered the Japanese Navy in the Battle of Leyte Gulf. We were attacking Japan, itself. He was assigned to fly fighters at his hometown island, Kyushu, because that's the direction we were coming from.



When we were in New York, he told me a touching story. He said that, at the end of the war, he got the command when the Emperor broadcast the surrender command over the radio. He was in the air and he heard the command over his radio.

He said, 'I'm not going to quit. I'm *Bushido*, the warrior,' so he said, 'But, I want to see my Mother one last time.'

So, he flew back near his home. He landed in a field, set fire to his airplane, and walked to his home. It was a farm home. He went in and had every intention of committing *hari-kari* after he had met his Mother.

Now, you have to understand in the Japanese culture, outside the home, the men rule. They have all the say-so. Inside the home, the wife rule—the wife and the Mother. She's the boss and everybody, including the husband, does exactly what she says in the home. So, he went in. His Mother was sitting in a chair and he knelt down before her and he put his head in her lap. She knew immediately what he had in mind, that he was going to kill himself.

She said, 'You will not. You are my son. I command you. You will continue to live and you will face this disgrace like the warrior that you are.'

He said, 'I had no choice. I had to do what my Mom said. So, I continued.'

It was very hard after the war. He had a tough time making a living, but eventually he got his construction business started and became a success. By the way, he became immensely wealthy because, when we were in Japan, everywhere we went people recognized us. We were on NHK almost all day long. Everybody wanted to use his service after that. He had one job after another and made a lot of money out of it. I'm glad I could help."

## **Distinguished Flying Cross Citation**

**Citation to Accompany the Award of the Distinguished Flying Cross Captain Roland R. Fisher, Air Corps, United States Army. For extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight over Davao Gulf and Matina Airdrome, Philippine Islands, on 6 September 1944. Captain Fisher was the pilot of a B-24 aircraft on an armed night reconnaissance mission over this Japanese-held territory. Though picked up by a searchlight which tracked him accurately, he flew through the anti-aircraft fire and made an excellent bombing run over the airfield. As he was trying to escape the searchlights, three enemy night fighters came toward his plane and two of them attacked as they closed in. Hits from 20mm shell fire ruptured three bulkheads, cut the elevator control wires, destroyed the automatic flight control equipment, blew apart the electrical junction box, and put a large hole in the top of the fuselage. One the fighters then rammed the underside of the airplane, tearing a ten-foot section off the side, destroying the radar spinner and cutting hydraulic lines. In spite of the damage, Captain Fisher succeeded in eluding the attackers by diving into a cloud with exceptional skill, brought the crew of his severely crippled aircraft through difficult weather back to his base for a successful landing. The outstanding ability, courage and devotion to duty displayed by Captain Fisher during this flight are worthy of the highest commendation.**

**Used with permission from Michael O'Neil of the Distinguished Flying Cross Society**

**[http://www.dfcsociety.org/citation\\_detail.asp?ID=911](http://www.dfcsociety.org/citation_detail.asp?ID=911)**

18. DFC Citation: "That's the citation. Where'd you find that? [Internet] Actually, Google has a whole website on DFCs and it's quite interesting."

The main thing is that I made it. I was glad I did. [Applause] Thank you very much.

### ***Tsutsugamushi fever***

One thing I came out [of the war] with was rubber legs. I have to be very careful. I might tell you why my legs were rubber. When I was on Owi, there was a deadly disease there. It was called *Tsutsugamushi fever*...When we were on Owi, this little island I left the night I went up to attack and when he rammed me, we had a deadly disease, there. It was carried by a mite.

Three of my crewmen came down within an incubation period of about two weeks. It invariably killed people. This particular strain was not fatal, but it did terrible damage to people. So, they lost teeth and hearing. So, the fight surgeons in their infinite medical wisdom—they knew what was carrying this disease, this little, tiny, almost microscopic mite. In their wisdom, they decided to kill the mite. So, they sprayed the entire island with DDT. We slept in it. We lived in it. We breathed it. My legs started going rubbery.

After ten years ago, I went to the Neurologist down at OHSU and he said, "Have you ever been exposed to insecticides?"

I told him that story and he said, "Have fun with your rubber legs."

I sure wish we could've had Rachel Carson [author of *Silent Spring*] around then.

[End of Recording 1:10:04  
1 hour, 10 minutes, 04 seconds]

## **Oregon Chapter News for the Eighth Air Force Historical Society**

**By Clint Gruber (93<sup>rd</sup> BG)\***

**President Davis introduced our speaker for the day, Roland Fisher. A long time member of our Chapter, Fisher had varied and distinguished WW2 service in both the RAF and the US Army Air Corps. Although he had already earned a private ticket, Fisher was a year too young to qualify for Air Corps aviation cadet training when war broke out. So, he went to England where he enlisted as a RAF Volunteer, and after earning his wings as a Pilot Officer, was assigned to an RAF night fighter unit, where he flew Beaufighters. It was here that he learned, and used in many night actions over England, the skill and technique of using airborne radar. In December of 1942, he transferred as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt to the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force, and was sent to Orlando Florida as a night fighter instructor.**

**Then, a big move...to New Guinea and the 5<sup>th</sup> Air Force as Operations Officer of the 63<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Squadron, THE SNOOPERS. This was new duty for the versatile B24, as well as for the crews who flew them. Their job was flying alone at night and at low altitude (50 to 500 feet), using a new radar with range of up to 175 miles, to locate and sink enemy ships. And that they did! The 63<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Squadron was credited with destroying 750,000 tons of Japanese shipping during WW1!**

**In September, 1944, based on OWI Isle in NW New Guinea, Fisher was given a night mission to look for Japanese ships in Davao Gulf, Philippine Islands, 900 miles to the northwest. At dusk he lifted off in B24D, "Miss Liberty." By midnight he had found no ships, so he diverted to his secondary target, an enemy airstrip on the coast near Davao City. He bombed the strip and was headed home when a Japanese night fighter attacked and badly damaged his plane. 20mm shellfire cut his elevator control cables and hydraulic lines and destroyed the autopilot and compass. Then, because his guns jammed, the fighter pilot deliberately rammed the B24. The impact tore off the right engine of the fighter, crushed the canopy, and threw the Lib into a steep dive. With only his trim tabs for elevator control Fisher just missed going into the ocean, leveled off, and began the long dark flight over 900 miles of open ocean to home base on OWI. A hairy landing using trim tabs for elevator control, touch down with no brakes, and a deliberate ground loop brought Miss Liberty and her crew safely home.**

**This action brought an award of the Distinguished Flying Cross to Captain Roland Fisher.**

**At the beginning of his talk, Fisher had lauded the great wartime service of the B24. The remarkable saga of Miss Liberty added much to that record.**

Years after the war, although Fisher had been sure that the Japanese fighter pilot had died in ramming his plane, he found that the pilot, Yosimasa Nakagawa, had survived and was still living. In 1972 they met in Japan, and in comparing their stories both were amazed but deeply grateful that each had survived. Nakagawa returned the visit that same year, and they have been close friends since.

On what turned out to be his last mission with the 63<sup>rd</sup>, Fisher found himself near the end of his search without spotting any shipping, so diverted to a target of opportunity, a Japanese airstrip on a small island near Davao in the Philippines. He made a bombing run over the target and was on his way home when a night fighter attacked and severely damaged his plane. In addition to wounding both the waist gunners, hits from 20mm shellfire cut the elevator control cables and destroyed the autopilot. With many holes in the airplane, and without control of the elevators, it appeared that they would crash, but Fisher found that he could manage the elevators by use of the trim tabs, and gradually regained flight control. Then, because his guns jammed, the Japanese pilot deliberately rammed his target. But, it was a glancing blow on the underbelly of the bomber, and the long flight over a thousand miles of open ocean to home base on Owi Island off New Guinea began. A very hairy landing using trim tabs to control the elevators, a touch down with no brakes and a deliberate ground loop at the end, got Fisher and his crew down safely.

This action brought the award of the Distinguished Flying Cross to Captain Roland Fisher.

At the beginning of his presentation, Fisher had lauded the toughness and great wartime service record of the B24. The remarkable saga of "Miss Liberty" and the heroics of the crew on the night of 6 September 1944 added much to that record. Years after the war, even though Fisher was sure that the Japanese pilot had died in the ramming of his plane, he too had survived, and was still living! Through much searching and letters back and forth Fisher and the pilot, Yosimasa Nakadawa, met in Japan in 1972 to compare their amazing stories. Nakadawa returned the visit to Fisher here in Portland the same year, and they have remained friends and correspondents over the years since.

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