

"LUCK WAS WITH ME"

By Judson Mills

IN 1944, I WAS A MEMBER OF A B-25 BOMBER CREW OF THE 77th BOMB SQUADRON STATIONED ON ATTU. OUR MISSION WAS TO MAKE BOMB RUNS ON THE NORTHERN KURILES AND TO STRAFE JAPANESE SHIPPING. WE ALL KNOW HOW TERRIBLE THE WEATHER CONDITIONS IN THE ALEUTIANS WERE. SO EACH MORNING WE WOULD GO TO BRIEFING TO FIND OUT IF WE WERE TO FLY THAT DAY. FROM DECEMBER 18th TO DECEMBER 22nd WE HAD NO MISSIONS THEN ON DECEMBER 23rd I WAS CALLED TO THE ORDERLY ROOM AND TOLD THAT MY FATHER HAD A STROKE AND WAS NOT EXPECTED TO LIVE. I WAS ALSO TOLD THAT AN EMERGENCY FURLOUGH WAS OUT OF THE QUESTION SINCE NO COMBAT PERSONNEL OF THE 77th HAD EVER GOTTEN ONE. NEVER THE LESS I WENT TO THE CHAPLAIN AND BETWEEN HIM AND THE RED CROSS I WAS GRANTED ONE. I WAS TO FLY IN A C-47 BACK TO THE STATES VIA ELMENDORF FIELD IN ANCHORAGE. JUST BEFORE TAKE OFF A FELLOW MEMBER OF MY CREW, HERBERT WELLS OUR RADIO OPERATOR, HANDED ME \$50.00 AND SAID "MILLS, HERE'S SOME MONEY, YOU'LL NEED IT BACK IN THE STATES!"

I LEFT ATTU ABOUT 11:00 AS IT WAS JUST GETTING A GOOD DEAL OF DAYLIGHT. WE WERE TO REFUEL AT ANCHORAGE, BUT SINCE THE WEATHER HAD CLOSED IN THERE WE WENT TO WHITEHORSE IN THE YUKON TERRITORY OF CANADA WHERE IT WAS -40 DEGREES BELOW ZERO BUT CLEAR. AFTER REFUELING WE IMMEDIATELY HEADED FOR O'HARA FIELD IN CHICAGO, ILLINOIS AND ARRIVED SOMETIME ON CHRISTMAS DAY. THE WEATHER THERE WAS ALSO VERY BAD AND THE NEXT FLIGHT WAS NOT FOR 20 HOURS SO I DECIDED TO TAKE THE TRAIN TO LYNCHBURG, VIRGINIA WHICH WAS 50 MILES FROM MY HOME TOWN OF CULLEN. I TELEGRAPHED A FRIEND TO MEET ME THERE. UNKNOWN TO ME THERE WAS NO WAY FOR MY FRIEND TO GET TO LYNCHBURG BECAUSE, THEY ALSO WERE HAVING A SNOW STORM. HOWEVER HE EXPLAINED THE SITUATION TO THE STATION MASTER WHO WIRED AHEAD WITH INSTRUCTIONS ON WHAT TO DO. I DIDN'T KNOW IT AT THE TIME BUT WHEN I GOT TO THE APPOINTED PICK-UP POINT THE CONDUCTOR WAS TO SLOW THE TRAIN DOWN AND I WAS TO JUMP!!!! WHEN THE TIME CAME I WAS GIVEN THE SIGNAL. WITH MY BARRACKS BAG UNDER MY ARM I LEAPED AND ROLLED DOWN A BANK THROUGH BRIARS AND BUSHES UNTIL I CAME TO A STOP. MUCH TO MY SURPRISE WHEN I GOT UP I WAS STANDING IN THE HEADLIGHTS OF MY FRIEND'S CAR. WE HURRIED TO MY DAD'S BEDSIDE. GOD HAD ANSWERED MY PRAYERS FOR HE WAS STILL ALIVE. I STAYED THERE UNTIL DECEMBER 28th WHEN I RECEIVED A TELEGRAM FROM THE FATHER OF THE PILOT OF MY CREW. HE ASKED ME TO CALL HIM, WHICH I DID. HE SAID "MILLS, I GUESS THE BALL GAME IS OVER". THE WAR DEPARTMENT HAD NOTIFIED HIM THAT HIS SON WAS MISSING IN ACTION ALONG WITH THE WHOLE CREW. HE DIDN'T KNOW HIS SON WAS ON ATTU OR EVEN WHAT HIS MISSION HAD BEEN. I TRIED TO CONSOLE HIM BUT I KNEW THAT AFTER SEVERAL HOURS WITHOUT BEING HEARD FROM, THAT THEY WERE LOST IN A STORM AND THE NEWS WOULD BE BAD.

I SPENT THE MONTH OF JANUARY 1945 AT HOME THEN WENT BACK TO ATTU FOR REASSIGNMENT TO ANOTHER CREW. WE FLEW OUR FIRST MISSION ON MARCH 19, 1945 AND CONTINUED FLYING UNTIL OUR TOUR WAS UP ON JULY 15th.

IN SEPTEMBER, 1989 I WENT TO BOONE CAMP, KENTUCKY, THE HOME OF HERBERT WELLS, (MEMBER OF OUR ILL-FATED CREW WHO LOANED ME \$50). I LOOKED UP HIS FAMILY AND REPAID THE LOAN I HAD MADE 45 YEARS EARLIER. (MY DAD RECOVERED AND LIVED ANOTHER 10 YEARS)

**MY FORMER CREW
MISSING IN ACTION DECEMBER 28, 1944**

**SLT BOBBY C. COLLIER
SLT HARRY E. BRENG
SLT WILLIS P. BEARD
S/SGT HERBERT S. WELLS
SGT EDWIN J. LAGERBLADE
PVT JACK GREENSTEIN**