

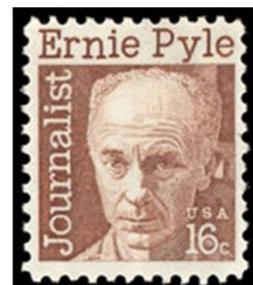
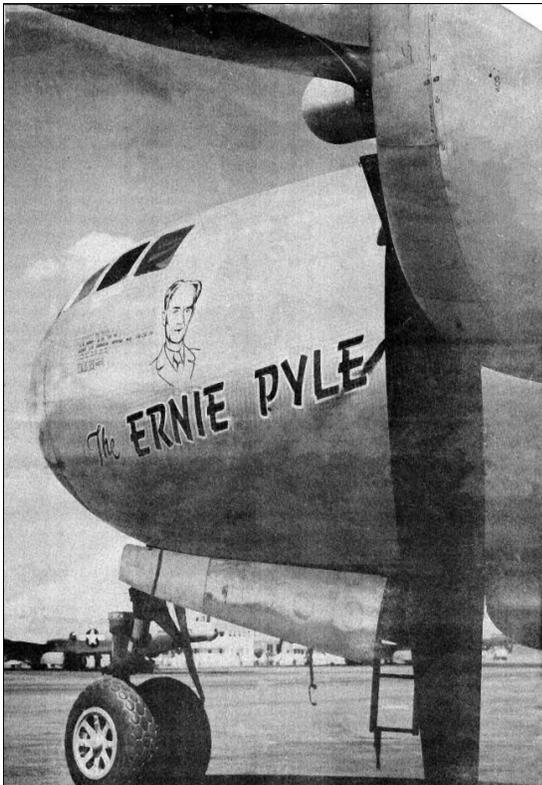
News Reports

Of Ernie Pyle

At the 73rd Wing

During February and March 1945

Ernie Pyle was a celebrated war correspondent who was known for his description of GIs. The month after writing these columns, he was killed on an island off Okinawa. A B-29 was named after him. He was one of a few American civilians to be awarded the Purple Heart. In 1971, he was honored with a 16-cent postage stamp.



Figuring Ways to Fight the Unpredictable Japanese

BY ERNIE PYLE.

IN THE MARIANAS (Delayed). — Soldiers and Marines have told me stories by the dozens about how tough the Japs are, yet how dumb they are; how illogical and yet how uncannily smart at times; how easy to rout when disorganized, yet how brave.

I've become more confused with each story. At the end of one evening, I said, "I can't make head nor tail out of what you've told me. I'm trying to learn about the Jap soldiers, but everything you say about them seems to be inconsistent."

"That's the answer," my friends said. "They are inconsistent. They do the damndest things. But they're dangerous fighters just the same."

Multiple Hara-Kiri.

They tell one story about a Jap officer and six men who were surrounded on a beach by a small bunch of Marines.

As the Marines approached, they could see the Jap giving emphatic orders to his men, and then all six bent over and the officer went along the line and chopped off their heads with his sword.

Then as the Marines closed in, he stood knee-deep in the surf and beat his bloody sword against the water in a fierce gesture of defiance, just before, they shot him.

What code led the officer to kill his own men rather than let them fight to the death is something only another Jap would know.

Saved the Bomb for Himself.

Another little story: A Marine sentry walking up and down before a command post on top of a steep bluff one night heard a noise in the brush on the hillside below.

He called a couple of times, got no answer, then fired an exploratory shot down into the darkness. In a moment there was a loud explosion from below. A solitary Jap hiding down there had put a hand grenade to his chest.

Why he did that, instead of tossing it up over the bluff and getting himself a half dozen Americans is beyond an American's comprehension.

To Honor Their Dead.

On Saipan, they tell of a Jap plane that appeared overhead one bright noonday, all alone. It obviously wasn't a photographic plane, and they couldn't figure out what it was doing.

Then something came out of the plane, and fluttered down. It was a little paper wreath, with a long streamer to it. He had flown it all the way from Japan, and dropped it "in honor of Japan's glorious dead" on Saipan.

We shot him down in the sea a few minutes later, as he undoubtedly knew we would before he ever left Japan. The gesture is touching — but so what?

I've talked with Marines; I've begun to get over that creepy feeling that fighting Japs is like fighting snakes or ghosts.

They are, indeed, queer, but they are people with certain tactics and now by much experience our men have learned how to fight them.

As far as I can see, our men are no more afraid of the Japs than they are of the Germans. They are afraid of them as a modern soldier is afraid of his foe, but not because they are

slippery or ratlike, but simply because they have weapons and fire them like good tough soldiers. And the Japs are human enough to be afraid of us in exactly the same way.

Can They Take it?

Some of our people over here think that, in the long run, the Japs won't take the beating the Germans have. Others think they will, and even more.

I've not been here long enough, really, to learn anything of the Jap psychology. But the Pacific war is gradually getting condensed, and consequently tougher and tougher. The closer we go to Japan itself, the harder it will be.

The Japs are dangerous people and they aren't funny when they've got guns in their hands. It would be tragic for us to underestimate their power to do us damage, or their will to do it. To me it looks like soul-trying days for us in the years ahead. (February 24, 1945)

In the Tropical Marianas: Visit With the B-29ers

BY ERNIE PYLE.

IN THE MARIANAS ISLANDS (Delayed). — Before starting out on my long tours with the Navy, I've decided to visit the famous-29 Superfortress boys who are bombing Japan from here.

This came about largely because I have "kinfolk" flying on the B-29s, and I thought I'd kill two birds by visiting and writing at the same time.

So here I am, sitting on a screened porch in my underwear, comfortable as a cat, with the surf beating on the shore and a lot of bomber pilots swimming out front.

The B-29 boys, from commandant clear down to lowest enlisted men, live well out here. They are all appreciative of their good fortune, and I've not heard a dissenting voice. Of course, they would all rather be home, but who wouldn't?

Indiana Boy.

The man I came to visit is Lt. Jack Bates, another farm boy from down the road near Dana, Ind. Jack is a sort of nephew of mine. He isn't exactly a nephew, but it's too complicated to explain. I used to hold him on my knee and all that sort of thing. Now he is 26, and starting to get bald like his "uncle."

Jack's folks still live just a mile down the road from our farm. But Jack left the farm and went to the University of Illinois and got educated real good, and was ready to become a famous lawyer when the war came along and he enlisted.

He spent a year as a private and then got a commission and now he's a first lieutenant and flew over with the B-29s from Nebraska last October.

When I telephoned Jack and said I'd be out in about an hour to stay a few days, he said he would put up an extra cot in his hut for me.

Disappointed Volunteers.

When I got there the cot was up, with blankets and mattress covers laid out on it. Jack had told the other boys he was having a visitor, and on the assumption it was a woman, Jack had six

eager volunteers helping him put up the cot. When I showed up, skinny and bald, it was an awful letdown, but they've all been decent about it.

Jack lives in a steel Quonset hut with ten other fliers. Most of them are pilots, but Jack is a radioman. He and another fellow have charge of all his squadron's radio. He doesn't have to go on missions except now and then to check up.

But upon arriving I learned, both to my astonishment and pride, that he had been on more missions than anybody in his squadron. In fact, he's been on so many that his squadron commander has forbidden him to go for a while.

Another mission or two and he will have had his quota authorizing him to go back to rest camp for a while. But he seems to show no strain from the ordeal. He's pretty phlegmatic, and he says that sitting around camp gets so monotonous he sort of welcomes a mission just for a change.

Blind Flying.

During flight Jack sits in a little compartment in the rear of the plane, and can't see out. In all his missions over Japan he's seen only one Jap fighter. Not that they didn't have plenty around, but he's so busy he seldom gets to a window for a peek. The one time he did, a Jap came slamming under the plane so close it almost took the skin off.

Like all combat crewmen, Jack spends all night and at least half of each day lying on his cot. He holds the record in his hut for sack time, which means just lying on your cot doing nothing.

Packages From Home.

Each flier has a dresser of wooden shelves he's made for himself, and several homemade tables scattered around. The walls are plastered with maps, snapshots and pin-up girls — but I noticed that real pin-up girls (wives and mothers) dominated over the movie beauties. In fact eight of the ten men in the hut are married.

Although the food is good here, most of the boys get packages from home. One kid wrote and told his folks to slow up a little, that he was snowed under with packages.

Jack has had two jars of Indiana fried chicken from my Aunt Mary. She cans it and seals it in mason jars, and it's wonderful. She sent me some in France, but I'd left before it got there.

Jack took some of his fried chicken in his lunch over Tokyo one day. We Hoosiers sure do get around, even the chickens. (February 28, 1945)

Bombing Japan Across — and “Ditching” In—Wide Pacific

BY ERNIE PYLE.

IN THE MARIANAS ISLANDS (Delayed). — When you see a headline saying “Superforts Blast Japan Again,” I hope you don't get the idea that Japan is being blow sky high and that she'll be bombed out of the war within another week or two.

Because that isn't the case. We are just barely starting on a program of bombing that will be long and tough. Even with heavy and constant bombings it would take years to reduce Japan by bombing alone. And our bombings are not yet heavy.

Too, we have lots of things to contend with. Distance is the main thing, and Jap fighters and ack-ack and foul weather are other things. The weather over Japan is their best defense. As one pilot jokingly suggested, "The Nips should broadcast us the weather every night, and save both themselves and us lots of trouble."

Don't Wait to Be Overrated.

Almost the first thing the B-29 boys asked me was, "Do the people at home think the B-29s are going to win the war?"

I told them the papers played up the raids, and that many wishful thinking people felt the bombings might turn the trick. And the boys said: "That's what we were afraid of. Naturally we want what credit we deserve, but our raids certainly aren't going to win the war."

The B-29 raids are important just as every island taken and every ship sunk is important. But in their present strength it would be putting them clear out of proportion if you think they are a dominant factor in our Pacific war.

I say this not to belittle the B-29 boys, because they are wonderful. I say it because they themselves want it understood by the folks at home.

Long Flight Home.

Their lot is a tough one. The worst part is that they're over water every inch of the way to Japan, every inch of the way back. And brother, it's a lot of water. The average time for one of their missions is more than fourteen hours.

The flak and fighters over Japan are bad enough, but that tense period is fairly short. They are over the empire only from twenty minutes to an hour, depending on their target. Jap fighters follow them only about fifteen minutes off the coast.

What gives the boys the woolies is "sweating out" those six or seven hours of ocean beneath them on the way back. To make it worse, it's usually at night.

Some of them are bound to be shot up, and just staggering along. There's always the danger of running out of gas, from many forms of overconsumption. If you've got one engine gone, others are liable to quit.

Ditching — In a Big Ditch.

If anything happens, you go into the ocean. That is known as "ditching." I suppose around a B-29 base you hear the word "ditching" almost more than any other word.

"Ditching" out here isn't like "ditching" in the English Channel, where your chances of being picked up are awfully good. "Ditching" out here is usually fatal.

We have set up a search and rescue system for these "ditched" fliers but still the ocean is awfully big, and it's mighty hard to find a couple of little rubber boats. The fact that we do rescue about a fifth of our "ditched" fliers is amazing to me.

Yes, that long drag back home after the bombing is a definite mental hazard, and is what eventually makes the boys sit and stare.

Sky Buddy System.

Maybe you've heard of the "buddy system" in the infantry. They use it in the B-29s, too. For instance, if a plane is in distress on the way back and has to fall behind, somebody drops back with him to keep him company.

They've known planes to come clear home accompanied by a "buddy," and you could go so far as to say some might not have made it were it not for the extra courage given them by having company.

But the big point of the “buddy system” is that if a plane does have to ditch, the “buddy” can fix his exact position and get surface rescuers on the way.

The other morning after a mission, my friend Major Gerald Robertson was lying on his cot resting and reminiscing, and he said: “You feel so damn helpless when the others get in trouble. The air will be full of radio calls from those guys saying they’ve only got two engines or they’re running short on gas. I’ve been lucky and there I’ll be sitting with four engines and a thousand gallons extra of gas. I could spare any of them one engine and 500 gallons of gas if I could just get it to them. It makes you feel so damn helpless.” (March 1, 1945)

In the Marianas: How a B-29 Squadron Commander Lives

BY ERNIE PYLE.

IN THE MARIANAS ISLANDS (Delayed). — The B-29 squadron that my nephew is with is commanded by Lt. Col. John H. Griffith of Plymouth, Pa.

He walked into our Quonset hut the first night I was here and grinned sort of knowing-like as we were introduced. I felt our paths had crossed somewhere in the dim past, but I couldn’t recall it.

Finally he said, “Remember the Rangitiki?”

“Oh for God’s sake, of course,” I said. The Rangitiki was the ship that took us from England to Africa in the fall of 1942. Colonel Griffith was in the near-by cabin on that trip and we became well acquainted. But the war is big and times flies, and you do forget.

Combat Missions East and West.

Colonel Griffith flew combat missions both out of England and Africa. And now on this side of the world he has made eleven missions to Japan. But from now on, being an executive, he is restricted to four missions a month.

On one mission Colonel Griffith’s bombardier had his leg blown almost off. As Colonel Griffith was dragging him back into the pilot’s compartment, he thoughtlessly took off his oxygen mask. In a moment he passed out and fell over. But he freakishly fell with his face right in the mask, and it revived him.

Although still young, Colonel Griffith has been in the Army eight years, and will stay in after the war. His wife and baby and dog are waiting for him in Lagrange Park, Ill.

Marianas House.

Until recently Colonel Griffith lived with the pilots in the same Quonset hut I’m in. But a few days ago they finished his new house. You should see it.

It’s a skeleton framework of two-by-fours about thirty feet square roofed with canvas and walled only with screen wire, tropical fashion. The roof overhangs about six feet all around to keep out the almost horizontal rain.

Inside, they’ve given it the semblance of a many-roomed house by putting up little hip-high partitions of brown burlap. This makes it seem that you have a living room, bedroom, bath, kitchen and sun porch, although it’s actually just one big room.

With Modern Conveniences.

The place is wonderfully comfortable. It has four desks, two cots and ten chairs, and yet there's lots of room left. It has a big clothes closet, and a washbowl and shower, the water coming from two fifty-gallon barrels up the hillside.

It has an icebox, a radio and a field telephone. Incidentally, Colonel Griffith still has the same alarm clock he took with him when he went to England nearly three years ago.

If you had this house in America, it would cost you \$200 a month rent, yet the whole thing was built of packing boxes and metal bomb crates and Army left-overs.

The wooden floor is painted battleship gray. Colonel Griffith likes to keep his floor clean. Consequently he has a big sign on his screen door saying "Please remove shoes before entering."

He isn't joking either. He even makes his own commanding officer take off his shoes when he comes to visit. He furnishes his guests extra socks in case their feet get cold, which, of course, they don't.

Away From the War.

The house is built on stilts, and sits amidst laurel and other green shrubbery, wildly native, only fifty feet from the sea. You come down the slope to it over a path cut out of the laurel, and once in the house you are utterly away from everything.

Before you is only the curve of the lagoon, and the pounding of incessant rollers on the reef a hundred yards out, and the white clouds in the far blue sky. Several times a day sudden tropical showers drench and cool the place.

It's on Colonel Griffith's porch that I'm writing these columns. My only excuse for them not being better columns is that I can't seem to keep away from that low deck chair at the far end of the porch. And also I keep looking up the path to see if Sadie Thompson isn't strolling down with her umbrella. (March 2, 1945)

Notes on Excellence of B-29 After Joy Ride in One

BY ERNIE PYLE.

IN THE MARIANAS ISLANDS (Delayed). —The B-29 is unquestionably a wonderful airplane. Outside of the famous old Douglas DC-3 workhorse, I've never heard pilots so unanimous in their praise of an airplane.

I took my first ride in one the other day. No, I didn't go on a mission to Japan. We've been through all that before, I don't believe in people going on missions unless they have to. And as before, the pilots here all agreed with me.

But I went along on a little practice bombing trip of an hour and a half. The pilot was Major Gerald Robinson, who lives in our hut. His wife, incidentally, lives at 123 South Girard Street, Albuquerque, N.M., on the very same street as our white house.

Way Out in Front.

I sat on the box between the pilots, both on the take-off and for the landing, and as much as I've flown, that was still a thrill. These islands are all relatively small, and you're no sooner off the ground than you're out over water, and that feels funny.

If the air is a little rough, it gives you a very odd sensation sitting way up there in the nose. For the B-29 is so big that, instead of bumping or dropping, the nose has a willowy motion, sort of like sitting out on the end of a green limb when it's swaying around.

The B-29 carries a crew of eleven. Some of them sit up in the cockpit and the compartment just behind it. Some others sit in a compartment near the tail. The tail gunner sits all alone, way back there in the lonely tail turret.

Efficiency Apartment.

The body of the B-29 is so taken up with gas tanks and bomb racks that there's normally no way to get from front to rear compartments. So the manufacturers solved that by building a tunnel into the plane, right along the rooftop.

The tunnel is round, just big enough to crawl in on your hands and knees, and is padded with blue cloth. It's more than thirty feet long, and the crew members crawl back and forth through it all the time. Major Russ Cheever reported that he accomplished the impossible the other day by turning around in the tunnel.

On missions, some of the crew get back in this tunnel and sleep for an hour or so. But a lot of them can't stand to do that. I've heard combat crewmen bring up the subject a half dozen times. They say they get claustrophobia in the tunnel.

There used to be some sleeping bunks on the B-29, but they've been taken out, and now there's hardly even room to lie down on the floor.

Sleeping on the Way.

A fellow does get sleepy on a fourteen-hour mission. Most of the pilots take naps in their seats. One pilot I know turned the plane over to his copilot and went back to the tunnel for "a little nap," and didn't return for six hours, just before they hit the coast of Japan. They laughingly say he goes to sleep before he gets his wheels up.

The B-29 is a very stable plane and hardly anybody ever gets sick, even in rough weather. The boys smoke in the plane, and the mess hall gives them a small lunch of sandwiches and oranges and cookies to eat on the way.

On mission days all flying crewmen, even those not going on the mission, get all the fried eggs they want for breakfast. That's the only day they have eggs.

Pressurized Cabins.

The crewmen wear their regular clothes on missions, usually coveralls. They don't have to wear heavy fleece-lined clothes and all that bulky gear, because the cabin is heated. They do slip on their heavy steel "flak vests" as they approach the target.

They don't have to wear oxygen masks except when they're over the target, for the cabin is sealed and "pressurized" — simulating a constant altitude of 8,000 feet.

Once in a great while one of the plexiglass "blisters" where the gunners sit will blow out from the strong pressure inside, and then everybody better grab his oxygen mask in an awful hurry. The crew always wears the oxygen mask over the target, for a shell through the plane "depressurizes" the cabin instantly, and they'd pass out.

The boys speak frequently of the unbelievably high winds they hit at high altitudes over Japan. It's nothing unusual to have a 150-mile-an-hour wind, and my nephew, Jack Bales, said that one day his plane hit a wind of 250 miles an hour.

Another thing that puzzles and amuses the boys is that often they'll pick up news on their radios, when still only halfway home, that their bombing mission has been announced in Washington. Thus all the world knows about it, but they've still got a thousand miles of ocean to cross before it's finished. Science, she is wonderful. (March 3, 1945)

Waiting for the Return From the Mission

BY ERNIE PYLE.

IN THE MARIANAS ISLANDS (Delayed). —No sooner have the B-29 formations disappeared to the north on their long fight to Japan, then single planes begin coming back in.

These are called "aborts," which is short for "abortives." It is a much used word around a bomber base.

The "aborts" come straggling back all day, hours apart. They are planes that had something happen to them which forbade them continuing on the long, dangerous trip. Sometimes it happens immediately after take-off. Sometimes it doesn't happen until they are almost there.

The first "abort" had a Bomb-bay door come open, and couldn't get it closed. The second had part of the cowl flap come unfastened and a mechanic undoubtedly caught hell for that. A third had a prop run away when he lost an engine.

My friend, Major Walter Todd of Ogden, Utah, "aborted" on the mission I watched take-off. He blew a cylinder head clear off. He was within sight of Japan when it happened, and he beat the others back by only half an hour. He flew thirteen and one half hours that day, and didn't even get credit for a mission. That's the way it goes.

Waiting Through the Day.

Those left on the field will idly look at their watches as the long day wears on, mentally clocking the progress of their comrades. "They're about sighting the mainland now," you'll hear somebody say. "They should be over the target by now. I'll bet they're catching hell," comes a little later from somebody.

By late afternoon you look at your watch and know that by now, for good or bad, it is over with. You know they're far enough off the coast that the last Jap fighter has turned for home, and left our men along with the night and the awful returning distance, and their troubles.

Home Through the Night.

Our planes bomb in formation, and stick together until they've left the Japanese coast, and then they break up and each man comes home on his own.

It's almost spooky the way they can fly through the dark night, up there above all that ocean, for more than six hours, and all arrive here at these little islands almost within a few minutes of each other.

By late afternoon we've begun to get radio messages from the returning planes. A flight leader will radio how the weather was, and if anyone went down over the target. It isn't a complete picture, but we begin to patch together a general idea.

We lost planes that day. Some went down over the target. Some just disappeared, and the other boys never knew where they went. Some fought as long as they could to keep crippled planes going, and then had to “ditch” in the ocean.

Shot to Pieces but Made it.

And one tenacious planeload miraculously got back when it wasn't in the cards for them at all. They had been hit over the target, had to drop down and back alone, and the Jap fighters went for him, as they do for any cripple.

Five fighters just butchered him, and there was nothing our boys could do about it. And yet he kept coming. How, nobody knows. Two of the crew were badly wounded. The horizontal stabilizers were shot away. The plane was riddled with holes. The pilot could control his plane only by using the motors.

Every half hour or so he would radio his fellow planes, “Am in right spiral and going out of control.” But he would get control again, and fly for an hour or so, and then radio again that he was spiraling out of control.

Landing Without Controls.

But somehow he made it home. He had to land without control. He did wonderfully, but he didn't quite pull it off.

The plane hit at the end of the runway. The engines came hurtling out, on fire. The wings flew off and the great fuselage broke in two and went careening across the ground. And yet every man came out alive, even the wounded ones.

Two other crippled planes cracked up that night, too, on landing. It was not until late at night that the final tally was made, of known lost and of missing.

But hardly was the last returning bomber down until a lone plane took off into the night and headed northward, to be in the area by dawn where the “ditching” were reported. And the others, after their excited stories were told, fell wearily into bed. (March 5, 1945)

Home Life of B-29 Crew Between Missions to Tokyo

BY ERNIE PYLE.

IN THE MARIANAS ISLANDS (Delayed). — There are five officers and six enlisted men on the crew of a B-29. All the enlisted men of a crew stay in the same hut, because that's the way the boys want it. Thus there are usually three crews of six men each in a Quonset hut.

The enlisted men's huts are more crowded than the officers'. Outside of that there is no difference. They have a few more duties than the officers when not on missions, but they still have plenty of spare time.

“My” crew is a grand bunch of boys, as I suppose most of them are. They have trouble sleeping the night before a mission, and they're tense before the take-off. As one of them laughingly said at the plane just before take-off one morning. “How do you get rid of that empty feeling in your chest?”

Six Men.

But they relax and expand and practically float away with good feeling once they get back and have another one safely under their belts.

The six enlisted men of “my” crew are Sgts. Joe Corcoran of Woodhaven, L.I.; Fauad Smith of Des Moines, N.M. (near Ranton); Joe McQuade of Gallup, N.M.; John Devaney of 333 West Second Avenue, Columbus, Ohio; Norbert Springman of Wilmont, Minn., and Eugene Florio of 1343 South California Blvd., Chicago. Springman and Florio are radio men, and all the others are gunners.

Sergeant Corcoran is the oldest of the crew. The first time I walked into their hut he called from his cot, “Hi, Ernie, the last time I saw you was in the Stork Club.”

“But I’ve never been in the Stork Club in my life,” I said.

So we puzzled over that a while, and finally decided it must have been two other guys, or else I’m living a double life which I don’t know about.

Sergeant Corcoran was a chiropractor before the war and still gives the boys amateur treatments. He practiced for three years at Jamaica, Long Island, and had a fine business worked up. I asked him how a chiropractor ever wound up to be a side gunner on a B-29, and he said damned if he knew.

Two From New Mexico.

It’s unusual to find two men from thinly populated New Mexico on the same crew. Smith and McQuade never knew each other until they met on this crew, and then it turned out they had joined the Army the very same day. Now they are great buddies.

McQuade was a fireman on the Santa Fe, and Smith owned a grocery store, but finally had to sell it. They’d just had letters saying it was below zero back home, and they were at least thankful to be away from that.

Both the boys have had experiences. McQuade made two trips to the Aleutians as a gunner on a ship. And Smith is serving his second tour of aerial combat overseas.

Smith was in the South Pacific in the early days and flew fifty-three missions as gunner on B-17s. He has all his missions painted on the back of his leather flying jacket— yellow bombs for the South Pacific and red ones for Japan. He says he’s only got room for twenty-seven more missions on his jacket, and then he’ll just have to quit.

Sergeant Smith’s odd first name — Fauad — is Syrian. He is growing a funny little rectangular goatee, black as coal. I asked him how long he was going to keep it. He said, “Probably only until the colonel happens to notice it.”

Strategy Against a Mouse.

Smith and Corcoran are the only two sergeants on the crew who are married. Both their wives are living temporarily in California.

We were all gathered around Corcoran’s and Smith’s cots one day, when Corky reached under his cot and pulled out a huge rat trap to show me.

It seems they have a mouse in the hut, who eats their candy and soap and is a general nuisance. They couldn’t find a mouse trap, so they set this big rat trap.

But every night Mr. Mouse eats all the cheese, even licks the plunger clean, but the trap is so strong it won’t go off. So now Corcoran has strung thread through the cheese, hoping the mouse will get his teeth caught in the thread and thus yank the trap off. We’re waiting with bated breath to see how this noble experiment turns out. (March 6, 1945)

About a Cowboy-Looking Pilot and His Ornerly B-29

BY ERNIE PYLE.

IN THE MARIANAS ISLANDS (Delayed). — The funniest man in our hut of B-29 pilots is Capt. Bill Gifford of Buford, S.C.

He's a drawly-talking Southerner, lean, profane and witty. He has a long neck and blond pompadour hair and a wide mouth and he is the salt of the earth.

Before I arrived Gifford held the record for being the skinniest man in the B-29 base. The other boys call him "the ninety-seven-pound wonder". But now they can laugh at me instead of him when we go to take an outdoor shower.

Bill Gifford is an old-timer in aviation, much older than his fellow pilots here. He is 36 and has been flying about seventeen years. As he says, he's "too damned old to be in this bombing business."

Scared and Admits It.

He says he gets so scared over Japan he can hardly think, and I imagine that's true. But I noticed he volunteered to go on a certain specially tough mission when it came up.

It turned out that Giff and I had lots of mutual friends in the early airmail days, such as Dick Merrill and Gene Brown and Johnny Kytley, so we've become practically bosom pals. The Gandhi twins, you could call us.

Bill has been around in this world of aviation. He flew the early night airmail. He flew for Pan American in South America. He was in the Royal Canadian Air Force, and made seven trips across the Atlantic, ferrying bombers to England.

Relating a Mission.

It's worth a theater ticket to hear Giff tell about a mission after he gets back. He uses his hands and his feet and half the room and great portion of his vocabulary. He gets tickled and then he gets mad.

It seems that everything always goes wrong when Giff is on a mission. He had an experience to prove it while I was here. I'd gone to visit in a neighboring hut for a few minutes and he couldn't find me, or I would have been with him on it. Thank goodness I always seem to step out at the right moment.

Anyway, it was just a half hour before supper, when Giff got an emergency order to beat it to the airstrip right quick and take a ship up on a half hour's test hop.

Shooting B-29 Trouble.

He made the flight all right, but when he got ready to land the wheels wouldn't come down. That's very annoying you know.

Well, Giff radioed the field, and then began working on those wheels. Of course these big B-29s are so complicatedly automatic that you do everything by little electrical switches and levers, and not by hand.

"Some guy must have spent all day crossing up wires on that airplane," Giff said in his comical exaggeration when he got back.

"Instead of the wheels coming down, the bomb bay doors opened. When I tried to shut them, the upper turret gun started shooting. I hit the light switch by mistake, and the tail skid came down. Just for the hell of it I tried to lower the flaps, and instead the bomb bay door went shut.

“By that time I’d turned it over to the copilot and was back in the bomb bay trying to make some sense out of the switchbox and get things working again.”

“Finally I just got so disgusted I hauled off and gave the damn switchbox a good smack with the screwdriver and started to walk out. And just like that the wheels came down and everything was all right.”

Cowboy-Looking Aviator.

Giff looks more like a Texas cowboy than a bomber pilot. He’s a conscientious objector to all forms of exercise. All the pilots sleep all night and half the day, but Giff sleeps more than any of them.

Giff calls his plane, “Honshu Hank.” He wants to form a new fraternity called “Fujiyama, ’44.” It’s membership would be limited to those who had flown over Japan on bombing missions in 1944. He says if he never goes on another mission in his life it would suit him fine. (March 8, 1945)

Marianas Diversions Between Missions to Tokyo

BY ERNIE PYLE.

IN THE MARIANAS ISLANDS (Delayed). — “Sack time” is one of the most-used expressions in the B-29 outfits. It means simply lying on your cot, doing nothing.

Combat fliers everywhere have lots of spare time, because they are under a terrific nervous strain when they work, and they need much recuperative rest.

But out here there is a double, even a triple incentive for spending practically all your time, both walking and sleeping, in “the sack.” Three reasons are:

1. A fourteen-hour mission is an exhaustive thing. The boys say the reaction is a delayed one, and they really don’t feel it so keenly until the afternoon of the next day. Then they’re just plumb worn out. It takes some of them two or three days to get to feeling normal after a mission.
2. The climate, warm and enervating, seems to make you sleepy all the time. I’ve found it doubly hard to write my columns out here, because I just can’t stay awake.
3. There’s really nothing else to do except lie on your cot. Combat crews have few duties between missions. And, since there’s no amusement or diversion out on these islands, except homemade ones, they just lie and talk and lie some more.
4. The result of it all is that you just get lazier than sin. As one pilot said, “I’ve got so lazy I’ll never be worth a damn the rest of my life.”

Pacific Isolation.

It’s one of the phases of isolation. It’s what leads to “island neurosis,” or to going “pineapple crazy.” Troop commanders know the importance of keeping their men busy to overcome this, but it’s difficult to do that with combat crewman.

But new classes have been organized, and the fliers have to go to school part of each day. Those who are especially good are getting further intensive training as “lead crews” and they go to school from morning till night.

Endless talk and arguments go on in every tent and Quonset hut. They can argue about the damnedest things. One afternoon several pilots got into an argument over whether or not you do everything in reverse when you're flying upside down. They were all veteran fliers, and yet they split about fifty-fifty on whether you do or not.

Material for Argument.

Another day they go to arguing about what causes planes to leave vapor trails behind them at high altitudes. I had always thought it was the heat from the exhaust stacks condensing the moisture at certain temperatures. But one pilot said no, it was moisture being whirled off the tips of the propellers. That started a long discussion in which nobody won.

They argue about God, and they recount funny stories of escapades during training, and they wonder why the Japs do this or that.

Some pay solitaire. Some write letters all the time. One flier told me he had written to people he hadn't thought of in years, not because he wanted letters back, but just to have something to do. Others, with nothing but time on their hands, can't make themselves write at all.

They read magazines, but very few books. At first they spent weeks making furniture for themselves out of packing crates. But that's all finished now.

Other Things to do.

Some of them swim daily, and they all take daily showers. The camps are dotted with concrete floored baths, which are roofless. Water comes from a tank set on high stilts nearby. It is not heated, and, although the weather is always warm, a cold bath in the morning is pretty nippy. The best time is around 2 o'clock in the afternoon when the sun has made the water good and warm.

The fliers send some of their laundry to the Army laundry unit, but it takes about ten days, so most of them do their own washing.

Every bath unit has a white-porcelain Thor washing machine and wringer in it. The fliers build a bonfire of discarded lumber and heat water in big cans, carry it in to the washing machine, and turn her on. Between every Quonset hut there is always a clothes line full of wash flying in the wind.

Some days they play volley ball, some days they take setting –up exercises, and some days they swim. My friend, Capt. Bill Gifford, spurns all these things, and just lies in bed. Every day they ask if he isn't going to "PT," which means physical training, and he says, 'Hell, no; I'm too old to get out there and jump up and down like a damned Russian ballet dancer.'
(March 10, 1945)

Veterans of Both Fronts Carry B-29 Scourge to Tokyo

BY ERNIE PYLE.

IN THE MARIANAS ISLANDS (Delayed). — Over here the Marines have an expression all their own for the Japs. They call them Japes, which is a combination of “jap” and “ape”.

Now the fliers are taking it up, and there are various of it. I notice a lot of people unconsciously pronouncing Japan as “Jay-pan” just as in Africa we always used to say “A-rub” instead of “Errab”, as we were taught in school.

Further they carry into multi-syllables, such as saying “we’re going to Jay-pan-man-land tomorrow”

“Gear” in Slang.

Another slang word over here is “gear,” which apparently means a big shot. For example: Every afternoon a soldier brings about fifty letters written by enlisted men into our hut for the officers to censor. The officers in this hut have a rule of doing the letters right now, and getting it over with. They take about six a piece, and they’re all through in a few minutes.

The boy who brings the letters around is a Spaniard – Pfc. Gustavo Gonzalez of 2620 Avenue K, Galveston, Texas. He talks with an accent and is quite a character. The fliers enjoy kidding back and forth with him.

When Gonzales came back for the letters, they were all finished. Apparently the other huts don’t do so well by him, and he has to wait. For as he left he turned at the door and said to the officers: “You guys are all right. If I was a gear I’d promote you all.”

Plenty of cigarettes.

One day while I was with the B-29 crews Gunner Sergeant Fauad Smith pulled out a pack of cigarettes and said, “How does that look?” He was pointing to the tax stamp on the package. It was the familiar orange-colored stamp of New Mexico.

“The folks keep insisting on sending me cigarettes, he said. “I write and write and tell them we can get more than we want over here, but they don’t believe me.”

Two-Front Fliers.

I’ve been amazed at the number of men flying these Tokyo missions in the B-29s who have already served one tour of combat duty in the European theater.

Of the ten men in our hut, two are combat veterans, even though they are very young.

Major William Clark of Bayhead, N.J., flew his fifty missions out of Africa in B-17s, and so did Capt. Walter Kelly of Manayunk, Pa. In fact Captain Kelly and I were together at Biskra Airdrome on the edge of the Sahara Desert just two years ago this month.

They are both heady, wise pilots, who have learned the tropical ways of wearing shorts and spending half their lives just lying on their cots. And they don’t seem to mind at all that they’re starting all over again on this side of the world after having done their share on the other side.

Needed to Help Flier Morale.

One of the things most needed for morale among fliers over here is the setting up of some kind of goal for them. The setting of a definite number of combat missions to be flown, whereupon they would automatically go back to a rest camp.

The way it is now, they are just flying in the dark, so to speak. They’re just going on and on until fate overtakes them, with nothing else to shoot for.

Of course it's probably too early yet, and the war on both sides of the world too desperate, to set up a final mission total whereupon a B-29 flier goes home for good.

They're going to have to go to rest camps and then come back for more missions a couple of times before they finally go home. But no rest-camp goal has yet been set. They say it has to come from Washington, and Washington is slow about it.

It's no good to create a rest camp out here. The boys would just as soon lie on their own cots as to go to a rest camp out here. What they want is a change, something far away-lights and girls and, companionship and modern things and gayety. And somebody better hurry! (March 12, 1945).