



Humanitarian Missions

Former Army Air Forces pilot recalls duty in Philippines

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I was assigned to the 2nd Emergency Rescue Squadron based on the Island of Palawan in the Philippine Islands, and my first humanitarian mission involved transporting our flight surgeon and medical personnel to a leper colony that was in desperate straits on the northern tip of the island. Upon arriving, we saw that the situation was indeed horrific. Even our medical personnel were astounded by what we saw. These people needed much more than the food and medical supplies we were equipped to give. Leprosy, I soon learned, is an insidious, infectious disease in which those afflicted routinely lose limbs, fingers, ears, and any body part that was infected. In addition to being gravely ill, the afflicted people were ostracized not only by the Japanese who had invaded the island, but also by their own Filipino people.

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Above: On Palawan, Philippine Islands, in spring 1945. I am in the center of the picture, and the only permanent member of my crew is to my right. My copilot was Dave Booth, the brother of actress Clare Booth Luce. We were the first aircraft in the Air Force to have search radar, which is mounted above the cockpit. The airplane is an OA-10A Air Force version of the Navy PBY-5A.

ately made arrangements to get medical supplies and food transported by ship and soon left the island, but to see the lepers and their families and the suffering they endured was an experience that would stay with me always.

This mission came within a month of my arrival on Palawan. After graduating from the U.S. Army Air Forces (USAAF) Advanced Flight School in 1944, I proceeded with others in my class to Naval Air Sta-

Our flight line at Clark Field, September 1945. A friend of mine and I discovered 45 years later that we were stationed on Palawan at the same time. He was in photo recon flying B-24s. His airplane revetment was next to ours, and our squadron tent area was next to his, but it wasn't until 45 years later that we found out we were there at the same time.



tion Pensacola, Florida, where we qualified in the Consolidated PBV Catalina and graduated as naval aviators. To my knowledge, the USAAF air/sea rescue crews flying Catalinas were the only dual-rated (USAAF and Navy) pilots at the time.

From there we went to Kessler Field, Mississippi, for crew training and to pick up our aircraft, a Vickers OA-10A Catalina, the Canadian-built version of the Consolidated PBV-5A. Soon we received our orders to depart for the South Pacific, where we were assigned to the USAAF's 2nd Emergency Rescue Squadron. Our 82-flight-hour route took us to Honolulu, Christmas Island, Tarawa, and Guadalcanal, among other stops, before finally reaching our destination at Palawan.

The mission to the leper colony was but the first of many humanitarian assignments I would complete in the year I spent in the Philippine Islands.

We were informed that the population on a small island in the Sulu Sea, between the Island of Palawan and Luzon, wanted us to visit the island to see how we could help them improve their food supply. These people had moved from Manila to escape the Japanese. We found that they were largely self-sufficient with fresh chicken, fish, and rice, but had little else. They told us that if we brought them fresh beef, we could exchange it for eggs, which they had in abundance.

We were happy to comply, as we

2nd Emergency Rescue Squadron Song

Written by 2nd Lt. John Baum and 2nd Lt. Francis X. Foley

Tune: Ramblin' wreck from Georgia Tech
Courtesy: www.PBYrescue.com

**Take a gruesome goose,
And some jungle juice
And a pilot who thinks he's hot.
Take an eight man crew,
That would rather shoot
And a medic who'd rather not.
Send another ship to them
A thousand miles at sea
For the Navy will have to rescue
The Second Emergency**

**Take a raunchy mess from O.C.S.
An Officer more or less
A navigator, the prevaricator,
Who makes his choice by guess
When Tojo sees them coming
He'll throw up his hands and flee
For the Army's secret weapon
Is the Second Emergency**

**If you're nervous in the service
And wishing you were home
Then come with us in the damndest
bus
That ever crossed the foam.
When the navigator reckons
The course is ninety-three
You'll land in hell or heaven
With the Second Emergency**

**When we get our final briefing
And the orders read R.I.P.
With the engines revin', we'll fly to
heaven
And ask for the golden key.
But neither Pete nor Satan
Have room for such as we
Our ghosts will fly their PBY's
For the Second Emergency**

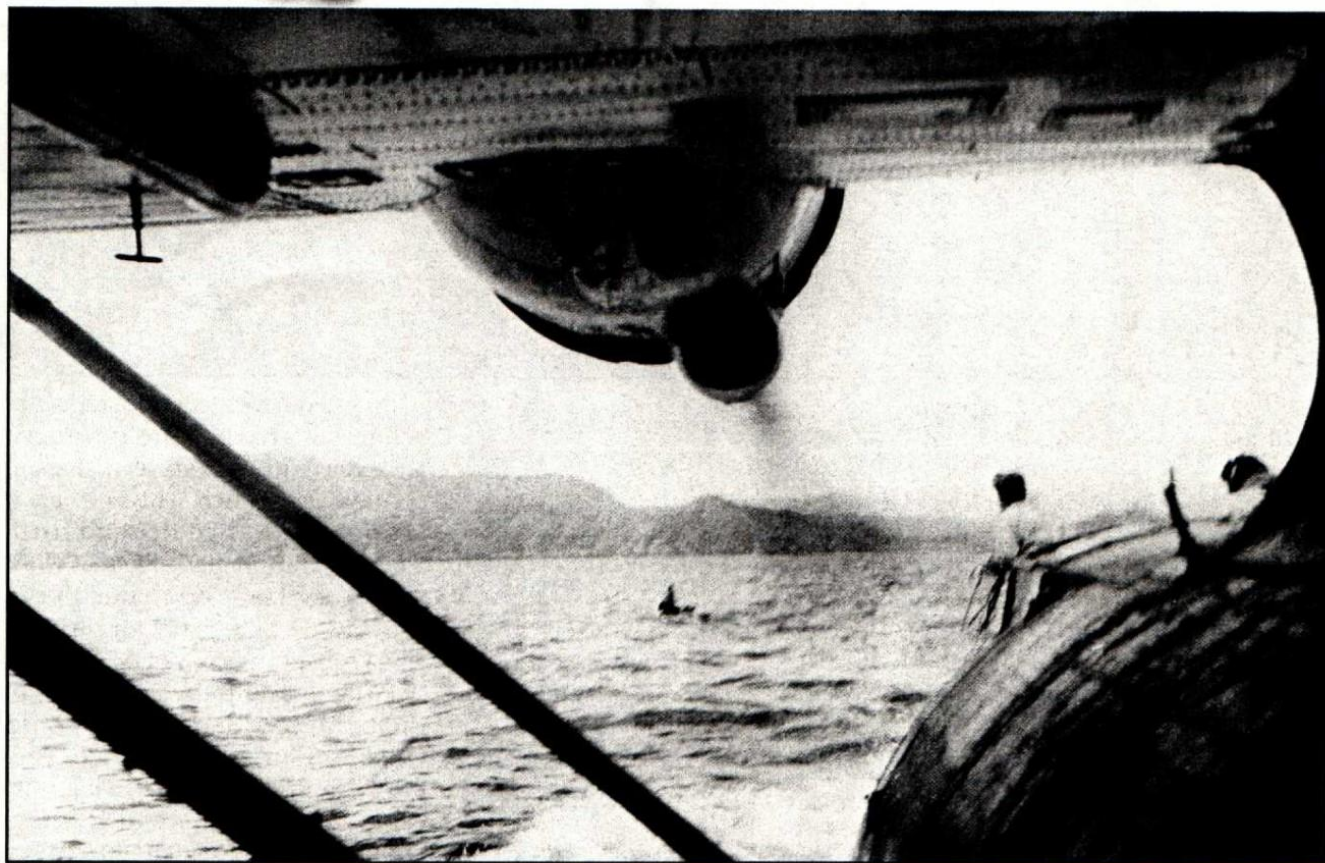
hadn't seen eggs in almost a year. When we arrived, the islanders greeted us with the eggs as well as an invitation for lunch. This is where I learned to eat fried rice and fried chicken. It was remarkable that with all that was going on around them, they always said, "Stay for lunch," when Americans showed up.

Lunch would be a common theme on several of our missions. Once, on an assignment to the northern tip of Borneo to a guerilla camp, we went ashore to visit the commander who wished to meet the Americans. We weren't sure what to expect as they dispatched a group armed with rifles into the jungle. As gunfire erupted, we wondered if we were in danger, but the next thing we knew, they returned with wild chickens they had killed. We then had another sumptuous lunch of fried chicken and fried rice!

Prior to the Japanese surrender in August 1945, our unit was en route to Okinawa. Our mission was to cover the invasion of the island of Kuyusha and we were told to remain at our base. Shortly thereafter, we were told to go to the city of Balikpapan on the island of Borneo and were directed to Celebas City in the Celebas Islands to evacuate the sick and the POWs who were survivors of the Battle of the Java Sea. They had been on the British cruiser Exeter and were interned in the POW camp on the island.

Upon arrival, British officers took us on a tour of the POW camp. They

Air/Sea Rescue



This was the best photo of a rescue by our squadron. I was not on this mission, but the picture was so good that all of the pilots in the squadron received a copy. This was one happy and lucky downed pilot.

had appropriated a large mansion in the middle of the city and had set themselves up as if there had never been a war. And once again, of course, there was an invitation to lunch—complete with full china

service and stewards. As we departed, they had one request: next time we came, could we please bring them some fresh bread? We made two trips, delivering the sickest of their POWs, probably 30 people in

all, to the U.S. Navy at Balakpapan for medical attention and transport. This would turn out to be one of the most memorable of my trips—to see the style in which the British officers always seemed to live. ✕



In August 1945, we were sent on leaflet drops to all possible islands in the South China Sea to notify any Japanese that may have been left behind that the war was over. We were a two-ship formation, and this is the airplane I was flying on this mission.



The squadron tent area on Palawan, spring 1945.