

September 2020 Newsletter



Dear Thirsty 13th members, relatives, and friends,

September 2 is the 75th anniversary of Japan’s surrender, ending WWII. The Thirsty 13th played a key role in bringing this about, and we can all feel proud to be a member, relative or friend of the squadron.

The last newsletter, July 19, noted we had been blessed with hundreds more original stories, written in letters by our 1943-1945 aerial engineer Joseph R. LaLonde. Excerpts from some of his letters were in my June letter. This letter shares excerpts from the rest of his letters, plus a story from the son of CO Hal Wilson, and one from the sister of pilot Gordon Baldry.

With best wishes,
Seth P. Washburne, Squadron Historian
August 31, 2020

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This is the newsletter for the U.S. Army Air Corps 13th Troop Carrier Squadron, 1940-1946, nicknamed “The Thirsty 13th.” This is prepared by Seth P. Washburne, the son of John C. Washburne, navigator 11/42-7/43. Please direct any comments to him at: (212) 289-1506, sethgw1@gmail.com, or 5200 Meadowcreek Drive, Apt. 2060, Dallas, TX 75248.

Page numbers referred to are in the book “The Thirsty 13th” unless otherwise stated.

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1. Additional History

a. 1943-1945: Letters from Joseph R. LaLonde, Engineer, 6/22/43-9/4/45

LaLonde, from Michigan, is pictured at right, with his wife, Pauline, from Kansas City, who he married 2 months before leaving for overseas. Pauline inspired him to write her almost every day. The excerpts are presented without quotation marks.



1943: On the way to the South Pacific

6/12/43: After an all-nite hop from Tulsa, we arrived here at 6 a.m. I am at a field [Hamilton Field] near San Francisco. It's very hilly and beautiful. The weather is cold. We expect to be here another day, then to beautiful blue Hawaii, I guess.

We are getting everything ready. It's quite a job. I have had no sleep in 36 hours, and am quite tired. I hope you had a nice trip home [from Fort Wayne to Kansas City].

We are restricted here on the field. No calls, and no passes to town.

Ships are coming in at all hours, with men on leave from the West. It's quite a sight.

I met a friend of mine from Traverse City. He and his wife are here. It was nice to talk to someone that you know a little.

I can't send you an address, as I won't have any until I am permanently assigned, so wait until you hear from me before you write.

1943: In the New Caledonia Camp

7/5/43: Just returned from a trip. Had a nice time, and saw many interesting sites. We carried some wounded men to the hospital. They were an odd lot. Mostly none saying a word of what they had been through. They were not severe cases, only minor injuries.

7/15/43: Yesterday I did not work, and as there was a chance to go to town [Nouméa], I accepted it. The trip was a long one, about 35 miles, and it was very nice. We drove on a small winding road that really took us around hairpin turns, and up and over two small mountains. The natives were a sight, in their thatched houses, and their peculiar dress - when they were dressed.

I visited the only place of amusement in town and had some French pastry and some cold drinks - pineapple juice. It was a large Red Cross building.

The town was small, a seaport, and predominantly French. There were mostly soldiers in the town. A few white French. I wandered through several streets, and got some souvenirs, but can't send them home, as they are made with a name on them.

On the way home I saw lots of coconut trees, and several small gardens. They were a sight, as there are no level spots to be cultivated here.

7/27/43 [from Journal]: A day to be remembered. I had a letter from Paulina today, my first one, and she told me the news that she is to have a baby. I am glad and proud.

9/6/43: I can never send you any pictures, as they don't allow cameras here.

In the Espiritu Santo Camp

11/1/43: Flew 92 hrs combat time [October]. Eligible for Air Medal.

11/7/43: There is a beautiful moon outside and a nice cool breeze blowing through the palm trees. Sounds like a summer resort instead of a war zone, doesn't it? It's really nice here, even without the stately mountains [of New Caledonia]. I like it and would be content to stay here forever if you were at my side.

12/24/43: Here I am up at 10,000 feet, flying along somewhere over the South Pacific. It's really cold up here, but I am dressed warm, and have the heater on. The Pacific is very calm, and there are a lot of clouds below us, and also higher up. It's a pretty sight, but all you can see is 'water, water, everywhere, and not a drop to drink.'

We are landing now, a good one, too. The pilot [Dalmann] and co-pilot are good, and are nice fellows. Fellow from Mo. is Conard.

12/25/43: We came home in time for a good supper – turkey, potatoes, beans, raisin bread, cranberries, and even a beer.

New Hebrides	
12/30/43	Hostages
12/31/43	Melody Parade
5/12/44	The Song of Burnedette
6/4/44	Around the World
6/6/44	Buffalo Bill
6/10/44	Nine Girls
6/10/44	Standing Room Only
6/14/44	Destination Tokyo
6/15/44	Passage to Marseille
6/19/44	See Here Private Hargrove
6/23/44	One Foot in Heaven
7/31/44	Up in Mable's Room
Biak	
4/27/45	Meet the Waves
6/17/45	Hotel Berlin
6/20/45	Without Love
7/15/45	Valley of Decision
7/23/45	It's in the Bag
7/24/45	The Affairs of Susan

1944

1/5/44: I now have a new job, as Flight Chief. So now I have not one, but five airplanes to have to take care of. I give advice and help the men in their work, and see that the planes are kept up in the best possible shape. One good thing, I don't do much flying, hardly any, and that is good, as I am beginning to like the good earth pretty much.

1/11/44: At noon I asked the First Sgt for a car to ride around the island as it was my day off. We got a nice open model like a roadster without a top, and six of us set off.

1/17/44: We had a ration of 4 Cleo Colas tonight [two bottles are shown at right, by the Vess company, named presumably for Antonio and Cleopatra cigars, and with an image of Cleopatra].

1/25/44: It was my day off today, so I went down on the beach, and found a boat. I got out about 100 feet from shore, when I saw a large fin, and long object slowly go past us, a big 15-foot shark, what a beauty. We turned around and raced for shore, for our boat was only 10 feet long, and we had a lot of respect for him. We did see a great big turtle, about the size of a wash tub, only bigger. We had quite a time in our little boat riding the big waves.



2/15/44: Boy! I just had the radiogram telling me the most wonderful news [that his wife had a baby boy Feb 9, the telegram, on the next page, sent Feb 11]. I certainly am happy my dear, and so proud. I was sitting in a chair re-reading your letters when a man came in bearing your telegram. I hastily tore it open and read its wonderful contents. Better news I have never received. It certainly is great to be a father, and I am so happy that you are all right. It came on my birthday today, and this is the most wonderful present that I have ever received.

2/17/44: They are calling me Pa Pa here in this Sqd now, and I certainly am a proud one.

2/26/44: I have been looking over your announcement card, and the 'baby's' footprints [on the next page]. I sure like them. I carry them with me always, to show people that I have a son.

3/9/44: Just came home from a three-day trip. We carried some famous passengers. A group of USO movie actors. Ray Milland, Francis Fay, Mary Elliott, and Rosita Moreno [pictured on the book's page 458]. We had quite a conversation on the way back. They were very congenial. We had quite a gang of big shots and cars around when we landed.

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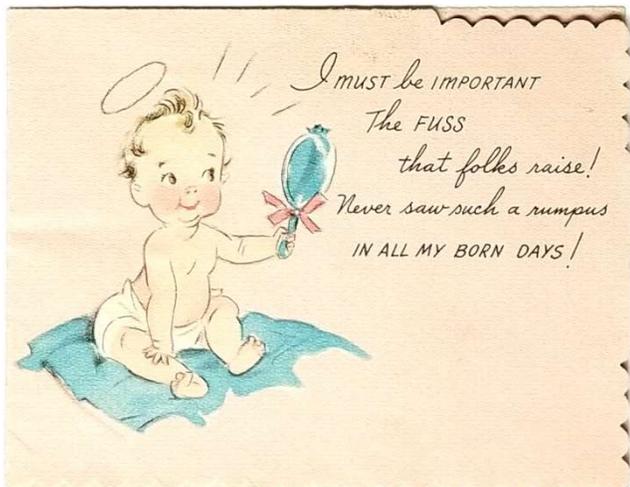
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Adresse : EFM T/SGT JOSEPH R LALONDE 36111126 AMISRO
Address:

85 59 32

SON BORN. LOVING BIRTHDAY GREETINGS. ALL MY LOVE DEAREST.

MR ROBERT LALONDE



And speaking of "Born Days"
I arrived on Feb. 9, 1944
Weighing 7 3/4 lbs.

My Mother and Dad are
Pauline & Bob Lalonde

And they named me
Robert Joseph

Love and kisses my Dearest
Dad

4/6/44: It's a beautiful day out here in the Pacific, and we are now flying high above it [to Guadalcanal for 2 days, with Mendenhall, Hopkins, ES King, Wicks], away up over the clouds. They sure are a pretty sight, a mile below us, like puffs of cotton, floating on the water.

We have company today; a few smaller planes are flying with us. I am making them hungry by showing them what we have for lunch, as they are pretty close. We have hot coffee and sandwiches, cheese bits, and gum, so I am pretty well satisfied now.

4/12/44: We just took off [from Espiritu Santo to Guadalcanal, with Judd, Hamilton, Pyke, and Hershberg], and are now climbing higher and higher over some tall mountains. I am looking down at the earth, looking at twisting rivers, and waterfalls. In one place there is a cliff straight up 1,000 feet with a tiny trickle of water flowing down it, really a pretty sight.

5/19/44: Had a very nice trip over to a very beautiful island [Fiji until 5/21]. Lots of green fields, and the natives live in small, thatched huts, made only from the grass that grows so long here. They are a quaint lot, very well built, stocky, with great big bushy heads of hair. Guess none of them wears shoes - I haven't noticed any yet. We done a little shopping, and I got some very nice grass skirts, and a lot of native jewelry. The town here is one block long, and very few stores, mostly vacant places. I am in the only lighted building now, writing you this. There is no transportation back to the field till after the dance, which is supposed to attract the native gals. Wish you were here to see the colorful natives. The women here wear some bright cloth, usually red, green, pink, or white, wrapped around them some way or another, and all carrying a baby. [Below left is his postcard of the Grand Pacific Hotel, and below right the Victoria Parade.]



6/10/44: The radio is on, and the latest news is coming on over the air and sounds good. I am glad that 'D' day is on now. I hope we win a speedy victory.

7/12/44: We had a lot of fun out in the bay, and we dove for shells and star fish. And came home just in time to miss calisthenics, so we timed it right. Had a nice dinner, then played horseshoes, and shot a few baskets, and then read some of the Saginaw papers that you sent me.

7/14/44: Went for an airplane ride yesterday, to get my time in. It was formation practice, and I really got some thrills, as we dove from great heights, and done some 180° turns, and buzzed the native villages, and boats out in the water.

7/22/44: I am out on a trip [to Guadalcanal, 7/21-28], writing you this letter while I am flying along at 10,000 feet, and on my way home.

From Los Negros

8/31/44: Nite before last, Bob Hope and show played on our field [Los Negros 8/28-29], and I saw a part of it. Pretty good. I got Frances Langford, Jerry Colona, and Lonny Rors's [?] signature on my 'short snorter.' They cracked a lot of funny jokes, and sang, and this Patty [Thomas] sure was something to look at [on the book's page 457].

We don't have any lights at night, and really keep busy until dark. We changed time, too, and it's dark here about 5:30, and daylight at 4 a.m. It's a beautiful nite out here, full moon, and the big waves crashing up on the shore. Pretty in spite of war.

9/30/44: I was down by the seashore this morning, and when the tide is out you can see many small fish and crabs. All the shells seem alive with some sort of a creature inside them. The coral reefs look very pretty in their many different shades of color.

On Wakde

10/18/44: Am sitting here looking at the sun go down, and the waves pound the shore, while a cool breeze is flowing. At nite there's not a thing to do at all, maybe a show, where I went last nite. Made the third time I saw it and had to stand up away in back at that.

On Biak

10/25/44: We done a lot of flying over the last two days [Biak to Morotai, with Drago, Waldrip, and Malloy]. I really saw a lot of new sights, saw a lot of paratroops being dropped in practice. They looked like a lot of mushrooms. Also saw a bad smash up.

On Noemfoor

11/2/44: Boy, is it ever muddy here! Seems like it rains every day, and half the night. We haven't had any lights the last few nights.

On Biak

11/5/44: Flew a bit today, had a nice short ride back to my home [Biak], as I was on "D.S." [detached service] to another small island here. It's sure nice to get back to a nice clean area, where the meals are really good. We ate rations up there [on Noemfoor], and it was a rugged seven days [10/29-11/5] in the mud and rain.

11/8/44: Yes, we still have the ship 'Sweet Leilani,' but as someone else is now crew chief, the name is off it now. It's our oldest airplane, and really has a lot of hours on it now but is still as good as ever.

11/12/44: Worked on the line this afternoon, and really got dusty. It has really been dry over here for quite a spell. Saw some W.A.C.s today, the first I have ever seen overseas.

11/13/44: They are having a football game out in front of the tent, and really making a racket. [indicates LaLonde was in row A at Biak].

11/15/44: Just finished folding up my laundry, after waiting several days for it to dry. It always rains when my laundry is out. We have two washing machines to do it, so it's a real treat to pay 25 cents and get it back nice and clean.

It's a quiet nite here in the tents. There is a fellow blowing some sweet music on a trumpet. Sounds pretty good for a change.

At Noemfoor

12/5/44: I am up here again [not on morning reports] for a week's duty, and conditions are not so hot. Lots of mud, and rain, and loads of work, and no light in the tents, so that I can write.

12/7/44: We went for a little ride after supper in our jeep. This is quite an island, and has quite a few natives on it. While driving, we passed near the beach, where we saw thousands of large land crabs, as big as a plate, 10" or more, and we ran over so many that it sounded like rain falling, the ground was just covered with them. We are sitting here in the tent, listening to the music records over the P.A. system. It is pretty good.

12/9/44: Took a ride around the island the other day, and saw some sights. The roads really were a surprise. They were very good. Saw an old Jap airfield, wrecked planes, and a Dutch plantation on a very beautiful lagoon. Also saw a native village. They were quite civilized, wore clothes, had electric lights, showers, and running water.

Biak

12/11/44: We have been playing monopoly tonite just to pass the time away. It's quite a bit of fun. Then we raided the mess hall and had some fresh peach pie and some good coffee.

Tomorrow we will have a busy day, sports and a general celebration with all the beer you can drink, and steaks for supper. It's a Group anniversary celebration and promises to be a big affair.

12/14/44: The other day we really had quite a celebration. Played games, football, volleyball, horseshoes, and in the evening we had a beer drinking contest, and as you might know, we won, and that clinched the plaque given to the winners. Then we had an orchestra play many numbers, and then a double feature show. So it really was quite a day, even if we only got three bottles of beer, instead of all we could drink.

12/16/44: Spent the evening working on our club. It's turning out quite nice. Ping pong tables, and booths like in a bar. Also a P.X. attached.

12/21/44: Came in to enjoy mother's nice cookies that came today. They went in a hurry.

12/30/44: We opened our club again tonight. Duffy's Tavern is what it's called, serving coke and coffee. It's at least a place to go in the evening.

2/13/45: Our officers have a band and party, with quite a few nurses and Red Cross workers, and way out here, too. Quite the life.

3/9/45: [About rest leave in Sydney] "I went with the others [Hartline, R. Bruce, Osman] and three officers [Hopkins, Nitrauer, Reimer], so that there were seven of us most of the time, and we really had quite a time when we all got together [the officers hung out with the enlisted]. I brought back a lot of stuff: eggs, apples, oranges, lemons, cucumbers, baloney, wine, and a very comfortable camp chair.

3/11/45: Went to the show and saw a good mystery picture. There was a ping-pong demonstration by the world champ that we have here on the island.

3/27/45: Had a kangaroo court session last night and I was the main object because I did not do the club a favor while on rest leave. I was supposed to get some food, but could not get it, and then loaned the money out to some of my friends. They charged me interest for 10 days and I contested and won the case hands-down. The jury took 2 min. to come to a verdict and my interest was returned. A kangaroo court is something strictly off the record that we enlisted men hold whenever we have any difficulties among ourselves.

I sent you my Air Medal today. I kept the ribbon to wear; the button is for civilian use.

4/6/45: Had some fun today with the natives, taking out my false teeth. Their eyes sure pop, and they sure make faces. To them it's a wonder.

4/18/45: Just returned from a 5-day flying trip, and we really covered the Pacific. Flew over 6,000 miles. Saw some of the Philippines, where we were besieged by kids for food or clothes.

4/24/45: This is our third day out here flying, really am seeing a lot of new and pleasant country, and am taking some strange people for rides.

We slept in the plane the last few nights, somewhere in the Philippines, and have been eating all our C-rations. Yesterday we landed in a new guerilla strip and picked up some wounded. They were sure glad to see us, and to get to a good hospital.

4/27/45: The last few days we spent on medical evac, carrying out wounded from the forward areas. There certainly were some cases, and I thank my lucky stars that I am in the Air Corps instead of my former Infantry outfit. We landed on some newly captured repaired airfields, and the natives really were glad to see us. I was really touched by the way people greeted us. They said they were glad we finally came, in their halting English.

5/2/45: Just heard 'Radio Tokyo,' and they still say they are winning the war.

5/13/45: As I write you, there is quite a commotion and rant. A huge bulldozer is tearing up our basketball court, and it's quite a mess. We are going to build a new one, as usual improvements are being made.

5/18/45: The day was spent by getting up at 4 a.m., and flying lots of rations, ammo, and dropping rations, to our troops on the front lines. Saw some planes dive bombing and firing rockets at the Japs somewhere in the reeds, not far from where we were flying. After seeing the infantry at work, my respect for them grows.

5/23/45: I think that soon I will probably make it home by air crew rotation, if they ever start sending us home. The money I am making here is pretty darn good, and I don't think I could make that much in civilian life right away.

6/5/45: Saw a very wonderful [live] show last night: 'This is the Army,' and all-soldier cast of about 100 men, who sang, danced, cracked jokes, impersonated women, and really tore the place up. It was the best stage show I have ever seen, and there were thousands there to see it.

6/16/45: Tonight I saw a nice show, Rita H. in 'Tonight and Every Night.' She's really got it. Sure sends your senses reeling, which is not such a good moral builder over here.

6/27/45: Here we are away up high flying. We have a very nice crew, all kids about 22 or less [Bridges was 22 until 7/26, Soderland was 21 until 11/4, Willman was 21 until 8/28, Osman was 23 on 3/17]. I am the old man here [30 on 2/15]. They're all nice guys, and we joke and have a lot of fun. Helps make the trip go that much faster. It is clear weather out, the sun is brilliant on the silvery white clouds, and makes the water look very bluish white. It's nice to get away from the work and things down on the line, and everyday life in the camp.

Several days later: Really had quite a busy time this trip. Had lots of work to do on the airplane. Worked one night til 2 a.m. and really was tired. Saw some very interesting country. Carried out some wounded and dropped ammo and eats to our troops. They put up red flares so we would know where they were, and a little ways away the japs put up some white ones to entice us over their way, but of course we were too smart for them. Really saw the war. Big guns firing, and towns all shot up. Got some very nice bananas, and steaks. We really ate well, and of course I was the cook. We are now on our way home to rest and some nice mail.

7/14/45: We are having a big party tonite. They gave us 24 beer chits, a case, quite a few.

7/21/45: Nothing new on my status, whether I go home by air crew rotation or points. It looks like it will be air crew rotation, and several more months over here for me.

8/1/45: Paid for our squadron book today, five dollars [equal to \$71 in 2020]. It will be sent to you as soon as they are made up and available, which should be soon, I hope.”

8/3/45: I just got my laundry out tonight. It’s pretty nice to have, it comes back clean in a few days without having to wash it myself.

In Dulag Camp

8/12/45: The other day we lost 15 points, [three] Campaign stars [e.g. Leyte not awarded]. There is a school right across the road.

8/16/45: It’s a custom here that a man can’t even so much as touch a woman, not even shake hands, or they consider it a romance or marriage.

8/24/45: As I sit here. the beautiful white flowers fill the tent with perfume.

9/2/45: Tell your mother to fatten up a couple of hens, and don’t milk cows until I come home to drink it all.

9/5/45: Well, happy days are here again as I am now relieved from duty and am on a 5 min. notice to go to a casual camp, where we will leave for the states. I probably will have to stay there for a week at least, so it will be some time yet about three weeks before we see each other.

Leyte Casual Camp

9/9/45: Well, it won’t be long now as I am now in the hellhole of a casual camp four days waiting for a boat. We are living in tents in the mud, eating rough and just wasting away in our sacks. Guess I got bedsores after three days on. Expect to board one any day now, and it will probably take two weeks before we hit Frisco, so don't expect too much till then.

9/14/45: Still sitting here sweating out a boat and hope that one comes soon. We have been here eight days now and I am really getting tired of it all. There are only about 100 men ahead of me, which is not that many. [LaLonde moved to the Tabinta, which weighed anchor 9/15/45].

Los Angles upon Disembarking from Ship

10/7/45 [Western Union telegram]: Arrived safely. Going to Leavenworth. Will wire you more at your sister’s address in KC. See you all soon. Love, Bob

10/9/45 [postcard from Kansas City]: Just got in from L.A. Am here 15 minutes, on my way to Leavenworth. Will be at Leavenworth for 4 or 5 days. Don’t try to come out. I will come out to you as soon as possible.”

These are just a fraction of LaLonde’s stories, and with the others add numerous details to the history. Thank you again to LaLonde for writing so many details, to his wife for inspiring him to write often, and thank you to his son, Bob, for sharing the letters with us.

b. 1943-1944: Story from Son of Hal Wilson, CO, 11/43-9/44

On March 15, 2020 the son, Don, of our 2nd overseas commanding officer, Hal Wilson, emailed me the following story:

Wilson H. (CO, 11/43-9/44, per his son): He didn't talk about the war, which seems to be typical of those who served, with one exception. He recalled returning to his base [estimated Espiritu Santo] after dropping supplies or paratroopers, when a flight of Japanese Zeros was going in the opposite direction. His only weapon was his issued .45 pistol, and he stated that wouldn't have been much help...an understatement. For whatever reason, the Japanese pilots did not open fire, so the two units just passed one another. He speculated they may have been out of ammo, low on fuel, or that a post-mission C-47 ("The Green Goggled Ghost") was not worthy of their time. Whatever, neither I nor my younger brother Doug would be here to recount that story had the Japanese decided to attack those C-47s."

c. 1942-1943: Story from Sister of Gordon Baldry, Pilot, 7/42-12/43

The last newsletter had three of Bergstrom's photos of Baldry, and he had three more that I emailed to Baldry's sister, Pat. On July 20, she replied to me "They are priceless. I have been sharing them with my family." She also shared a story from Baldry's training, which was before he joined the 13th TCS, but reflects how he loved flying.

Baldry (Pilot, per his sister): "When he was in flight school in Texas, on one of his solo flights, he had such a good time flying that he didn't pay attention to much else. He ran out of gas and had to make a forced landing, in Mexico! He walked to a phone and had to call the base, give his coordinates, and wait for help to arrive. His commanding officer brought a can of gasoline and told my brother to 'follow me' back to base. He described to us the joy of flying by himself, his chagrin at his mistakes, and embarrassment at being led back to base.

"He was sure his career was over, and he felt so bad. But there was such a need for pilots at that time, so he got to stay.

"I wish you could have heard him tell it. I realize this isn't within the scope of your work with the book, but it might give you a bit of an insight into what sort of man my brother was."

Thank you, Pat, for sharing this story. That is a fun story, and he was a great pilot in the 13th.

2. History Related Activities

a. 1943: Aircraft Serial Numbers

On May 25, about 10 hours after I sent the May newsletter, I received an email from my friend and colleague in Fort Worth, Leo Clevenger. He wrote "I think you know how I like serial numbers," and that he had studied the serial numbers in my flight list. Leo wrote:

"Although 41-19499 is a later serial number, it looks like it arrived before 41-18499. Since it arrived Feb 1943, I believe it could be the 15th plane flown overseas in your book, page 105, line 15, listed as "unknown" serial number possible Risky II."

When I scanned items from DeLoss in 2017, he wrote he was assigned to "#499, Risky II," and I assumed this was 18499, not 19499. I may have caught this, but Leo did first. Thank you, Leo!

3. Conclusion

Thank you to LaLonde's son Bob, Wilson's son Don, Baldry's sister Pat, and to Leo for sharing stories and insights. With best wishes, - Seth