

The Charles Kleist Letter

The Kleist (now deceased) letter is important because it shows how B-24 crews flew their own planes over to the combat area in the South Pacific. Here was almost a full squadron of planes (6 planes in the 307th, as many as 24 planes in the Eighth Air Force bombing Germany.) All the pilots' names began with the letter K except for Bill Blair. I spent an afternoon at Bill's home in Phoenix back in 1992 or 3 (see enclosed letter.) The Kendall in this group is not Jim Kendall.

Chuck Kleist was also on the last mission for Gayle Kizer, October 23-24, 1944. This was a later Kizer crew. This crew included Bud Foster who appeared in several crew photos. Bud's sister was Bettie Foster Thomas with whom I exchanged many letters and phone calls. Their father was the man who went out to the South Pacific and located the wreckage of the Kizer plane (another packet about this will follow.) Bettie and David Zellmer (now deceased) author of "The Spectator", were good friends. I will include some letters from him. David is in the William Lamp photos on your website, photo # 7 back row third in from right end, under letter "F".

The crews usually departed from Hamilton Field near San Francisco. Hamilton was closer to Hawaii and the shortest route. From there they went on to Canton Island and other fuel stops until they arrived in Australia and/or New Guinea.

Dean, as my brother was usually called at home but became "Dick" or "Wiley" in the service, mentioned that they saw some new H model B-24s at March Field. They probably trained in D models. I don't know what model they flew over, but when they arrived in Australia their plane was assigned to another crew and the Kizer crew flew up to Los Negros in a C-47 transport. An extra D model was assigned to them at that time. This was the plane, 42-40857, that they flew on the fateful day, July 15, 1944.

This letter is important, Pat, because Kleist says he lost his navigator, Charles Harder, in the Yap raid, July 15, 1944. No explanation given but his name does appear in the list of names at the Manila American Cemetery, Harder, Charles J. missing 15 Jul 1944. The list appears in 307th BG Reunion Book # 12. Did you know about this? This is another name for your research.

The letter from Bill Blair mentions that they saw flame from one of the engines on the Kizer plane. He was assigned to follow them and send out "Mayday" radio signals. There was some confusion because their radioman sent the wrong information about their location (see the Holland letter) and the Navy PBV couldn't find them at first.

Bill Blair said that he visited Dean and Gayle at the base hospital and that they were blistered and red as beets. There is some confusion as to the loss of fuel and why the plane came down.

Dean flew missions with a newly formed Kizer crew until he and some others were ordered off of combat flights by the flight surgeon because he had the "shakes."

Bob Ashby was assigned to another crew which was lost in October 1944. Jim Erickson was the only member of the first Kizer crew to survive the war. He opted for ground duty and made it home. He wrote to my mother after he arrived home.

Dean Wiley was ultimately lost on an armed B-24 between Los Negros and Guadalcanal on Jan 4, 1945. The plane was headed for Auckland, NZ and Cairnes, Australia. I will cover that crash later.

Pat, I will follow this up with emails and other material by regular mail.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tom Wiley". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name "Tom Wiley".