

WINGS



THINGS

GREAT PLAINS WING - COMMEMORATIVE AIR FORCE

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3rd Quarter 2022

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Photo: From the Web



Twenty? Questions, Paul 'Pappy' Gunn

In every success story, there are little-known and generally unsung heroes who contribute critical or essential elements. Some escape notice by accidents of history or timing, others choose to maintain a low profile for various reasons.

Paul "Pappy" Gunn is one of those individuals. At the beginning of WWII, he was in the Philippines, running an airline and flying.

In 1941, he found himself "pressed" into service in the Army when the Japanese invaded. He flew many important missions in the early days of the war and many of his innovations or inventions became essential to the success of the Allied advance from Australia through New Guinea and the Philippines to Japan.

So, in a slightly different format, here is his story.

"Lest We Forget"

1. His middle name was Irving and he preferred the nickname "PIG"

False. He was from Arkansas and then was fightin' words.

2. He landed a C-45 on Quezon Boulevard in Manila in 1941 to attempt to rescue his family.

True. He contacted a Philippine Army Scout while on a mission flying supplies into Bataan and paid him \$5,000 to help his wife and children escape and bring them to an agreed spot to be flown out. The flight was about 600 miles from his base at Del Monte on the southernmost island of Mindanao. He had pre-positioned fuel at a little used field on Mindoro and landed there to refuel before proceeding to Manila. He waited as long as he could, only taking off as vehicles began to come down the road. His family never appeared. They were liberated in 1945 after 4 years of internment.

3. He mounted a 75mm gun in a P-38.

True. But it was not used in combat after the test-firing damaged the aircraft on the ground and the installation was judged to be hazardous.

4. He "stole" a Squadron of B-25s from the Dutch.

True. Read that "Requisitioned". As he said, "The Dutch had no pilots and they were not using them anyway". The 24 B-25s were sitting at an airfield in Melbourne. Pappy had been looking for machine shops to keep the Air Transport Command in operation and stumbled across the B-25s accidentally. He asked around, mostly by helping the US maintenance crews on the field and listening. He knew the 3rd Bombardment Group was waiting for B-25s to be delivered and these were just sitting on the field waiting for the Dutch to get pilots. His years as a Navy enlisted man served him well. He convinced his commander, Colonel Jim Davies, to request authorization from the Commanding General, General Eubank to go get the B-25s. Eubank refused to give authorization to take the airplanes from the Dutch, but in true scrounger fashion, Col. Davies requested authorization to pick up B-25s for the 3rd Group, telling General Eubank that if the 3rd picked up the wrong airplanes, the blame would fall on them and not General Eubank. Eubank issued the general letter and Pappy and Col. Davies ferried the 3rd BG pilots to Melbourne and Pappy bluffed the Dutch with the letter. With the B-25s safely in Charters Towers, while prepping the planes for combat, they discovered the bomb sights were missing. They found the Dutch had them in a warehouse. Pappy went back to Melbourne and "requested" the bomb sights. General Eubank and Colonel Davies were mysteriously "unavailable" when the Dutch called. The Dutch released them to Pappy and loaded them on his transport, after only some minor threats involving 45 automatic pistols. By the time the Dutch complaints had reached higher command, the 3rd had already flown successful missions to New Britain in the first successful strikes in the theater. The Dutch were calmed by the promise of replacement B-25s and higher command was happy to report success, so all sins were forgiven.

5. As a teenager, he was a bootlegger.

True. Working to make his cars faster made him an excellent mechanic

6. He became an aviation mechanic in the Navy by volunteering for things.

True. Contrary to military wisdom, he constantly volunteered whenever he was asked. His can-do attitude led him to demonstrate the mechanical ability he learned building bootlegger cars when he fixed an aircraft engine for a Lieutenant who wanted to fly, which resulted in his transfer to aviation.

7. He joined the Navy as an alternative to prison.

True: He was arrested in Arkansas for running alcohol and the Judge gave him the option. He decided the Navy sounded better.

8. He was the test pilot for the first aircraft catapult launch.

True. His volunteering got him this honor. The idea was to launch a reconnaissance seaplane from a Cruiser. The engineering was a guess, so the explosive charge was a bit heavy and gave Pappy a double hernia. He recovered from the injury and the catapult was redesigned with a lower explosive charge and then replaced with a steam design. As an aside, he also volunteered to test the recovery system, which involved taxiing the airplane to catch a hook lowered by the ship with an eyelet on the aircraft. When he was recovered, the aircraft swung into the ship and Pappy nearly lost all his teeth when his face hit the instrument panel.

9. He was an Enlisted Pilot in the Navy and eventually was commissioned and rose to Command a Squadron.

True. He served in the Navy from 1919 to 1939. His penchant for volunteering got him into aviation mechanics then into flight school. He eventually commanded a Dauntless Squadron, VJ-7 and served on the Lexington and the Saratoga.

10. He flew evacuation flights for Military Officers and Diplomats from Manila to Mindanao.

True. He flew these missions in his trusty C-45, avoiding Japanese fighter patrols at low level. He was summarily inducted into the Army as a Captain at the beginning of hostilities. He was shot up over Cebu and managed to limp back and crash land at Nichols Field near Manila. His last mission flying diplomats caused him to miss the chance to evaluate his family from Manila, which was the source of his quest for anonymity. His wife and four children were Japanese prisoners and he did not want his war exploits becoming common knowledge and causing the Japanese to retaliate against them.

11. He was the Commander of the Air Transport Command in the Southwest Pacific.

True: He was named to this post when he was promoted to Major. During his tenure, Pappy ferried several groups of P-40s from Brisbane to Surabaya, in the Dutch East Indies, acting as navigator for fresh-from-training pilots. He flew a B-17 and tried to bomb Japanese convoys several times, earning a recommendation for a Distinguished Service Cross. He remembered from his Navy days that naval guns would only depress to 18 degrees to keep them from lifting out of their mounts, so he successively flew lower, trying to get bomb hits until he was attacking at less than 100 feet. He had the ball and top turret gunners fire at the ships to suppress the pom-pom and machine gun

AA Fire. After flying the B-17, he had himself transferred to the 3rd Bombardment Group to try to get into the action.

12. Pappy flew in the Royce Raid(s) in April, 1942.

True. The raid was conceived to interfere with the Japanese Navy and allow supplies to get to Corregidor and was led by Gen. Ralph Royce. The major problem was the distance of 2,000 miles to the target, which necessitated refueling from a staging base. Del Monte field on Northern Mindanao was used as a staging base for 3 separate raids on Cebu and Nichols Field on Luzon. 3 B-17s and 12 B-25s were fitted with long-range fuel tanks in the bomb bays to be flown from Darwin to Del Monte. One B-25 suffered an accident on take-off so only 11 made it to Del Monte. The fuel tanks were removed and the bomb bays refitted for bombs. Pappy then flew on the Cebu raids. High level bombing proved ineffective. Pappy went in low and shallow and sank 2 ships with low-level skip bombing, using the 50cal machine guns in the turrets and Bombardier's position on the B-25 to suppress the Anti-aircraft fire on the ships. After the raids the long range tanks were remounted and the aircraft flown back to Darwin.

13. Pappy designed and installed the 50 cal nose gun installations in the B-25 and A-20.

True. Pappy's combat experience with standard B-17 and B-25s making low-level attacks convinced him that low-level strafing and skip-bombing were the most effective way to attack ships. The guns suppressed the ship's anti-aircraft and the skip bombing was much more accurate than high-level against moving targets.

The A-20 modification was the simpler, just replacing the 4 30 cal guns with 4 50 cal guns. The guns themselves were obtained initially by scavenging from wrecked P-40s. Eventually another two 50s were added on the sides of the A-20s fuselage, giving it 6 total.

Pappy was also responsible for adding long range fuel tanks to both the A-20 and the B-25. In the B-25, this was accomplished by removing the belly turret and replacing it with a jettison-able fuel tank (in case the non-self-sealing tank took hits and combat and became a fire-hazard). In spite of the seat-of-the-pants characterization of these modifications, Pappy meticulously tested each modification, insisting on being the first to fly the modified aircraft. The first gun installation in a B-25 added 3 50s firing through the glass nose. Although effective, Pappy wanted more firepower, so the Bombardier's position was removed, which gave room for 6 guns. Eventually, 4 more were added to the sides of the fuselage. With the top turret firing forward, 12 50s were on target, with what was described as 'devastating effect'.

Pappy developed a relationship with Jack Fox, the North American Aviation factory representative to the 5th Air Force. Pappy and Jack collaborated on the B-25 modifications. Jack's support helped when North American engineers recommended against the modifications Pappy submitted to them in engineering drawings, citing safety concerns with center of gravity problems on the airplane. The engineers were forced to relent when they were informed the modifications were already flying in combat.

14. Pappy designed the bomb racks and the delay fuses for the Parafrag bombs used throughout the war.

True: Pappy redesigned the bomb bay on the B-25 to allow carrying standard bombs on one rack and parafrags on the other, also redesigning the bomb release mechanism to work correctly with the mixed load. He also designed the timed delay fuses for the parafrag bombs commonly used on missions in the Southwest Pacific.

I did not make it to '20', but there are many other fascinating stories associated with Pappy Gunn. I have barely managed to scratch the surface here. I used Pappy Gunn by Nathaniel Gunn as my primary reference. There are several other books about him, one written by his other son and one written by Gen George Kenney. There are many references on the web. I highly recommend further research. Gunn's exploits and attitude remind me of Gen Olds. Ed.

The Gunfighter

There was a boy, about eight years old,
Who well remembers stories told,
Of evil men from overseas.
That did so ever as they pleased,
With clicking heels and stomping boots,
They marched through nations taking loot.
And driven on by one great liar,
Enslaved a nation, destroyed with fire,
The hopes and dreams of young and old.
He starved the weak and killed the bold.
But little did this villain recon
That from the west, that he would becom,
One tall and swift, one unafraid,
To take him on in daylight raids.
For this great fighter of our nation,
Was born to hold our reputation.
And now this liar faced the gun
Of swift and mighty '51,
Who from the skies reduced his power
And took his dreams in that dread hour,
When others planned to take the skies,
Were given warning, "Don't you try."
"Why? We've the might and who are you?"
"I'm a big '51 and a GUNFIGHTER too."
The boy of eight is up in years,
His knees are bent, his eyes in tears,
Says, "Thank you Lord, for Freedom's gift,
And thank you Lord, for ones that lift,
The spirit of this tired old man,
By doing work that they have planned."
Now Reg...and Jerry... and Jim...and others,
Still do a job that no one bothers.
And lets us know his work's not done,
Reminds us...in His Day... WE WON.
-Amen

Terry Helphrey forwarded this to me from Jim Beyer. It was subtitled "A tribute to Brig. Gen Regis Urschler and his P-51 Mustang (The Gunfighter)" and was written by "Ernest Rockhold, The Carpenter's Son" Ed.

Great Plains Wing
COMMEMORATIVE AIR FORCE
Council Bluff Iowa Airport
16803 McCandless Road
Council Bluffs, Iowa 51503

2022 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Aug. 7	GPW Open House & Fly-in/Walk-in Pancake Breakfast	GPW Hangar
	8:00-11:00 AM Breakfast	
	8:00 AM - 4:00 PM Open House	
Aug. 20	Wing Meeting	11:00 AM GPW Hangar
Sept. 3-4	Kansas City Airshow - New Century Air Center	
	Gardner, KS	
Sept. 17	Wing Meeting	11:00 AM GPW Hangar
Oct. 15	Wing Meeting	11:00 AM GPW Hangar
Nov. 19	Wing Meeting	11:00 AM GPW Hangar
Dec. 17	Wing Meeting	11:00 AM GPW Hangar

MONTHLY EVENTS

Council Bluffs Airport - Great Plains Wing hosts a monthly cookout on the 3rd Wednesday of each month from April to October - 5:30 - 7:00 p.m.

York, NE Airport: EAA Chapter 1055 hosts a fly-in breakfast on the 1st Saturday of each month from 8:00 to 10:00 a.m.(free-will offering)

Crete, NE Airport: EAA Chapter 569 hosts a fly in breakfast on the 3rd Sat. of every month from 8 to 10 a.m.

If you would like to put a event on this calendar, please send an email with the necessary information to Terry Helphrey at terry.helphrey@outlook.com