

Transcript: Robert Gardewing

Interviewed and Transcribed by Joyce Baer, 13 Nov 2013

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### **WW II and Korean War Veteran**

Robert Gardewing of Greendale entered the Army Air Force in October 1942 and became a Technical Sergeant. He served as an Engineer-Gunner on a B-24 with the 14<sup>th</sup> Air Force based in China.<sup>1</sup> They flew against targets in the South China Sea, Formosa, and Hong Kong, as well as flying low altitude mine-laying maneuvers on the harbors of Shanghai and Hong Kong. He mustered out of the Army Air Force in October, 1945. Bob also served during the Korean War (April 1951- Dec. 1952).

(Source: *Dearborn County Pictorial History, Vol. 2, 1940-1945*).

*(Interview conducted by Joyce Baer, Nov. 13, 2013 at the Lawrenceburg Public Library)*

Bob Gardewing enlisted in the Army Air Corps in October of 1942. After training he flew from Norfolk, Virginia to Florida to Puerto Rico, to South America (Brazil). In Brazil GIs were making money (\$200 per plane) to paint decals/names on the planes. The officers couldn't agree on a theme so Bob's plane remained without a painted decal. The four officers (pilot, co-pilot, navigator, and bombardier) flew on to Ascension Island<sup>2</sup> then on to Africa, Egypt, India, and over the Hump into China. The crew gunners made the trip by boat.

While stationed in China, Bob badly sprained an ankle. Needing an x-ray he rode down to the medical base on a flatbed truck with three fellow GIs. His two companions on the flatbed had been drinking and proceeded to fling the cargo of cucumbers at any civilians they encountered along the road. Coming along the narrow dirt road that stretched between two rice paddies was a civilian with 10-12 small horses. The GI driving honked the truck's horn and when that did not clear the horses off the road, proceeded to fire his revolver into the

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<sup>1</sup> See "Army Air Corps Museum ([armyaircorpsmuseum.org/wwwii\\_14th\\_Air\\_Force.cfm](http://armyaircorpsmuseum.org/wwwii_14th_Air_Force.cfm)); "World War II: Fourteenth Air Force – Heir to the Flying Tigers," History.net ([www.historynet.com/world-war-ii-fourteenth-air-force-heir-to-the-flying-tigers.htm](http://www.historynet.com/world-war-ii-fourteenth-air-force-heir-to-the-flying-tigers.htm)).

<sup>2</sup> "Ascension Island is 1,000 miles from the coast of Africa and 1,400 miles from the coast of Brazil. During World War II, it was an important naval and air station, especially providing antisubmarine warfare bases in the Battle of the Atlantic." (Source: "Ascension Island," Wikipedia ([www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)) : accessed 8 July 2021).

air. "You are holding up the U.S. Mail" he roared. With that and another shot in the air, the horses proceeded to jump into the rice paddies thus clearing the way for the truck to proceed.

Civilians who had an ear for the English language soon picked up jobs cleaning the barracks. Black market cigarettes were a valued form of payment. GIs were only allotted 4 cartons/month so the black market flourished. There was no px, just a general store that opened once per month.

On one mission over the South China Sea, Bob and crew were assigned to bomb Japanese vessels carrying supplies in shipping lanes. The radar operator would use a scope to pick up any signs of metal (ships) within a 5 mile radius. U.S. submarines were not supposed to be traveling in the area because it was difficult to distinguish between the metal pings on the radar of an enemy ship vs. friendly.

Christmas Eve, 1944, an air raid occurred and the GIs scrambled to the slit trenches (trenches that had been built to use for protection during air raids). It was midnight, and as the GIs hunkered down in the trenches they began to smell an offensive odor. Because there were no fences surrounding the trenches, Chinese civilians had built a house very close to the trench. They had been using the trenches as their latrine. The GIs were so angry that they torched the house.

When asked about his most memorable event, Bob described his first mission—a night bombing of a northeastern Chinese city (Han Cho?). Search lights and flak lit up the nighttime skies. The planes followed in a line one after the other. Of the 12 original planes in the air that night, 3 did not make it back to base.

Bob returned to Camp Atterbury<sup>3</sup> then was sent to California for R & R. He attended hydraulics school (May 1945) at Chenault Field (close to Champaign, IL). His basic job was a gunner and engineer, in charge of fuel transfers and solving electrical problems. At war's end, Bob returned to Dayton (Wright Patterson Air Force Base) where he was expected to march in a welcome home parade. It was a really hot day and he decided instead of marching to hide in the back seat of a civilian's convertible. Imagine the driver's surprise when Bob popped up in the backseat and asked to be let out at the next corner.

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<sup>3</sup> "Camp Atterbury," Wikipedia ([www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)) : accessed 8 July 2021).  
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For many years Bob traveled throughout the U.S. attending annual reunions of those men with whom he served. Four years ago the annual reunions were discontinued as the number of veterans continued to decrease. Today there are 4 crew members still living; the pilot, co-pilot, engineer (Bob) and waist gunner.

Note: Robert E. Gardewing died on 26 June 2020 at the age of 97. He was born 15 June 1923, the son of Harry and Madeline (Minnick) Gardewing. He was a veteran of the US Air Force. Bob was a member of St. Lawrence Catholic Church. He liked to bowl, golf, play pool, and ski. He was active in the Senior Olympics. Bob was a life member of the American Legion and a member of the Elks. He loved animals. Bob worked at Seagram's Distillery for 43 years. He was preceded in death by his parents and his wife, Jeanne Marie Gardewing. A funeral mass was held at St. Lawrence Catholic Church on July 2, 2020, with Father Ben Syberg officiating. Fitch Denney Funeral Home was in charge of arrangements. Burial was at River View Cemetery, Aurora, IN. (Source: Press June 20, 2020 p. 4; Obituaries, Lawrenceburg Public Library.)