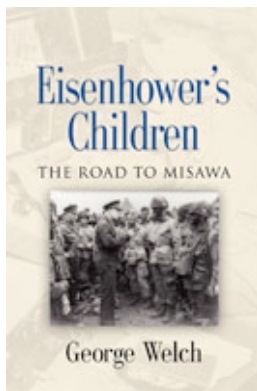


Eisenhower's Children

THE ROAD TO MISAWA



George Welch



EISENHOWER'S CHILDREN: The Road to Misawa is an epic story spanning seven decades that chronicles the history of the American military's presence at Misawa, Japan. Army engineers arrive at Misawa in September 1945, and begin the monumental task of rebuilding the base to accommodate not only the U.S. Army Air Forces 49th Fighter Group, but also the Top Secret intelligence gathering command known in those days as the United States Air Force Security Service (USFSS).

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EISENHOWER'S CHILDREN

The Road to Misawa

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Chapter One
The Green Frog
May 1945

Palpable—that was the word Captain Mack Duggan had been trying to think of as he lay in his bunk. “Palpable” was not a word he had ever used in conversation but a word he had read in a book. It seemed to perfectly express his feelings, however.

It took a few minutes for Duggan to even realize that he was awake and not dreaming the thoughts in his head. Duggan knew that he dreamed; he never remembered the details, however, only the fragments, the tail ends of the dream that seemed to dissipate immediately upon awakening.

But this dream was familiar. It was a dream, he knew, that he had had on more than one occasion. He could almost—not quite!—find the thread of it in those confusing first moments when it had ended.

He may not have been able to recall the wholeness of it but he knew what it meant and it was based on a very strong feeling that he shared with quite a few others of his crew.

The war was reaching its end.

The war was almost over.

That’s what Captain Mack Duggan had been preoccupied with in his nocturnal ramblings these past few months. Ever since General Hansell had taken over the 314th Bombardment Wing at Guam in January, the frequency of the missions had increased dramatically. The bombings went on and on, week after week until the factories and bases they targeted were rendered inoperable and the great cities of the Japanese mainland lay scorched beneath the heavy bomb loads of the B-29 Superfortresses that he and the hundreds of other pilots relentlessly flew “into the mouth of the Tiger” as Lieutenant Rossi—his co-pilot—had once put it.

After a few drinks, of course.

How much longer could the enemy hold out?

No one really knew but the end was in sight.

He sensed it.

As General Twining had said once to the men, “We shall go out against them like a plague of locusts, like locusts over the land, and we shall—hear me clearly—we shall utterly destroy them.”

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Suddenly, with an overwhelming sense of disgust, Mack Duggan realized that he was fully awake and that his undershirt was soaking with sweat. God, how he hated that! It had been happening almost every night for several weeks and it always made him feel slightly ashamed. He knew that it was not fear that was causing it. It wasn't the oppressive heat and humidity of Guam either. Duggan had been raised on a small farm just south of Lake Charles, Louisiana. As far as he knew there wasn't any place on earth as hot and humid as that. Lake Charles was a sweltering den of mosquitoes and constant heavy rain. Men and women there started out their days in a sweat and ended them the same way.

No, it wasn't fear and it wasn't humidity. What Mack Duggan was dreaming about at night—and he knew this even without the knowledge of all the details—was the end of the war and going home.

“Lord,” he often heard himself praying under his breath, “Just give me a few more days, a few more months, whatever it takes to bring these people to their knees. Then let me go home. Home to my Jeannie, home to my family.”

Home.

The Luxury of Fear

General Curtis LeMay, a legend in the 20th Air Force, had once visited the troops in the Marianas to brief them on the details of their mission. Mack Duggan had thought the world of General LeMay and his tactics, although he could not imagine what it would be like to hold a position such as LeMay's, to actually make the plans upon which the war effort would either rise or fall.

“Gentlemen,” said LeMay, “first of all, let me congratulate you all on a job well done thus far. But the job is not completed. As I look out upon your faces, I recognize many of you from the bases in China, from the airfields in Tinian, and now here you are on the island of Guam, a mere 1,500 miles from the primary target, the primary objective.

“Tokyo. The Big Apple, as you like to call it. The heart of the Japanese empire. If we destroy Tokyo and its environs, men, we will defeat the Japanese and then, by God, we can get the hell out of this damnable place and go back to America. How about it? Can you do one little thing for me, men? Can you blow that goddam city to hell and back, so we can shut this operation down and go home? Can you, men? Can you?”

“Yes sir!” came the roar from the hundreds of men gathered in the converted Japanese warehouse where the General was speaking.

A ripple of laughter swept over the room.

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The General continued.

“Many of you in this great crowd of heroes are veterans of this campaign but I see some fresh meat out there as well. How many of you are fresh meat?”

“We are, sir!” shouted dozens of voices, drawing more laughter from the band of men seated before the General’s podium.

“Well, fresh meat, let me welcome you to Guam and the war against the so-called mighty Empire of Japan. The *mighty Empire of Japan* thought after Pearl Harbor that America would never recover. Well, listen up! We did recover and we are going to show those bastards a thing or two.”

More cheers and laughter.

“I have said all along,” LeMay continued, “that, while they were very fine aircraft—the B-17 and the B-24—what we needed was a super bomber to defeat the Germans and the Japanese. I am reminded of your noble fellow airman Robert Morgan and the damage he inflicted upon the enemy in Europe as he—again and again—attacked their factories and installations aboard the B-17 bomber known around the world as the *Memphis Belle*. Time and time again, men, time and time again, Bob Morgan took the *Belle* out and he always brought it back. His men faced every hardship, the guns of the enemy, the hazards of high altitude flight, storms that hindered navigation, the weariness that comes with months of non-stop flying.

“In the days following the capture of these islands, Bob Morgan joined us here in the Pacific. It was a new venture for all of us. We are a special people here in the 20th Air Force. Don’t ever forget that. Don’t ever forget it. We do not work for just anybody. We report directly to General Henry Arnold and the Chiefs of Staff. Our every move in this campaign is coordinated with Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz. We are not playing games, gentlemen. The enemy would have us—at the end of this conflict—speaking German or Japanese and we simply cannot allow that to happen. For one thing, I am too damn old to learn another language and I suspect many of you are not too crazy about the idea, either.

“In November of 1944 Robert Morgan was assigned command of the B-29 Superfortress *Dauntless Dotty* and with 500 other Superfortresses on his wings, he led the first B-29 attack against the city of Tokyo. Excuse me, I meant to say he bombed the living daylights out of the *Big Apple*. We don’t want the Japanese to know we’re attacking their pride and joy, now do we? Well, if they don’t know it by now, they just haven’t been paying attention.

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“The B-29 Superfortress is what we needed to win this war, fellas. It is exactly the weapon we needed and they are rolling off the assembly lines back in America so fast that you wouldn’t believe it.

“Bob, are you here tonight? There’s too goddam many people in this room. I can’t see you.”

Robert Morgan stood shyly to his feet at the back of the crowd but in the dim light, General LeMay could still not locate him.

“There he is, General!” shouted one of the airmen. “Bob’s here with us tonight and you’re right about that, he’s one hell of a guy.”

More laughter.

“Well, Mr. Morgan, it’s good to see you again,” said the General. “You haven’t gotten any less ugly since the last time but, nevertheless, we are all very happy to have you on our team.

“Now. Since that historic first B-29 attack against the Big Apple, Colonel Morgan has participated in 25 other missions against the main Japanese island of Honshu. He has inflicted major damage against the enemy. When the dust settles and America has won this war, Colonel Robert Morgan, along with the hundreds of you gathered here tonight, will be remembered as the airborne heroes who brought victory to America and her Allies.

“We had several primary targets in mind when we began to attack Japan from these islands. Number one, we wanted to destroy the Mitsubishi Aircraft Works at Nagoya. Number two, we thought, while we were at it, we would just fly over the Big Apple and bomb the Nakajima Murashino Aircraft Engine Plant. As I stated earlier, America can produce all the aircraft we need but if we deprive the Japanese the capability of producing planes, they will soon run out of them and will be able no longer to keep up the flight.

“Well, then, did we meet our objectives? Did we destroy the targets we thought were most important? Yes, we did.

“On April 7 of this year we hit the Mitsubishi plant and we hit it hard. Aerial reconnaissance assures us that the Mitsubishi Aircraft Works was 94% destroyed. Similar results occurred five days later when 60% of the Nakajima Murashino Engine Plant was taken down by our bombs.

“We are almost there, guys. We are almost there. The Japanese cannot and will not be able to hold out much longer.

“In closing, let me just quote the words of Lieutenant General Nathan Twining. Like so many others—myself included—General Twining dreamed of the production of the B-29 Superfortress. He knew what could be done with it and we are all proving him right with every mission we fly:

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“The Twentieth Air Force was created by the Joint Chiefs of Staff as the application of a new refinement of global warfare. The great range of the Superfortress made permanent assignment of the Twentieth Air Force to individual commanders uneconomical, since it is capable of striking from many places at a single target, and its employment requires close coordination of operations. The Twentieth Air Force will be in the nature of an aerial battle fleet, able to participate in combined operations, or to be assigned to strike wherever the need is greatest. Just as the naval fleets are available for assignment by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to any vital project, so the Twentieth Air Force can likewise be assigned. It is not, therefore, because of its great potentialities, the weapon of a single agency of the Army Air Forces, but a central aerial battle fleet in whose employment and deployment all the top commanders, including air, land and sea, will have a voice and all of whom will be kept in constant touch with its operations.’

“We are, gentlemen, the Twentieth Air Force: the best airborne unit in the goddam universe and we fly the most sophisticated aircraft the world has ever seen and with it, we are going to beat the Japanese like a drum.

“And we do not fly in fear but in confidence. I say this to you young fellas who are just joining us here in the war. You want to be scared shitless, that’s fine with me! I have been scared shitless a few times myself, let me tell you.

“But we are here to wrap this thing up.

“We are here to win this war.

“We do not have the luxury of fear.”

Despite the fact that Mack Duggan had been in the thick of the battle for over three years, he still looked up to his military heroes. I’m like a little kid in that respect, he thought.

General Curtis LeMay was one of Mack’s top two heroes. Although LeMay would become a controversial figure as he aged, spoofed in the press and in popular movies—almost a caricature of the man he had been in the war—his men had loved him and thought of him as a god.

They didn’t call him “Old Iron Pants” or “Bombs Away” LeMay for nothing, Mack thought.

“We came here to fight,” General LeMay had once said to the troops. “If you’re not here to fight, get the hell out of my command!”

The airmen responded well to an attitude like that.

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Let's do it, they said to themselves.

Let's kick some ass and make these sumbitches holler "Uncle!"

Captain Duggan's other hero was "Ike" Eisenhower, the Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in Europe. The Germans and Italians had surrendered earlier that month and now, if General LeMay and his boys could just get the Japanese to do the same thing, we could call it a war.

While he admired Generals LeMay and Eisenhower, Duggan had no intention of staying in the Army after the war was over. His father and several uncles had told him what the military was like during peacetime: reductions in numbers and reductions in funding. No promotions. What the hell was the Army going to do with all these bomber pilots when there was nothing left to bomb? Send them home, that's what. Scrap their planes and muster all the pilots and crewmembers out of the service.

It all sounded boring to Mack and pointless.

Might as well get out into the civilian world and make some money. He could get a job flying commercial airliners. He knew that. If I can fly this big bag of bolts, I can fly anything, he thought.

Make some money, buy a nice car for him and Jeannie to ride around in, maybe a convertible, have a yard so big he would need a tractor to mow it with. You better believe it, buster!

But there he was dreaming again.

He reached down on the floor and located his watch: the phosphorescent hands read 0100 hours. He had his crew were scheduled to take off at 0245.

Put that convertible on hold for awhile, he thought with a sigh.

The war is still on.

Being careful not to wake the others who were sleeping in the large open barracks, Mack Duggan tiptoed down the hallway, rinsed himself off and put on fresh uniform pants and a dry undershirt. Lighting a Camel, he walked outside to see what the weather was like.

He was surprised to see another airman in the shadows of the barracks, also smoking a cigarette. At first he didn't recognize him but when the man spoke he realized it was Eddie Colombo, his new navigator.

"You're up mighty early, Captain," Colombo said to him.

"You, too, Eddie. What's going on?"

"Not much. Just couldn't sleep. Goddam barracks are too hot. You know what I mean?"

"Not that hot to a Louisiana boy," Duggan said with a smile. "But I guess for you Northern fellas, it might seem a little humid."

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“Damn right,” Colombo muttered, putting out his cigarette.

“I’m gonna walk over and check on the plane. You want to go along and get some exercise?” asked Duggan. “We’ll all be sitting on our butts most of the day.”

“Yeah, I’d like to see it, Captain. I surely would,” Colombo replied.

Staff Sergeant Preston “Press” Robertson was one of a dozen MPs who guarded the airfield 24 hours a day, working twelve-hour shifts on an irregular cycle that allowed them a few days off once or twice a month, providing everyone stayed healthy and no extraordinary situations arose.

Press looked like a one-man commando squad, equipped as he was with grenades, nightstick, two flashlights, an M1 carbine and the standard issue Army 45 semiautomatic sidearm. He was—by general agreement—one “sizable son-of-a-bitch” and not a man who you wanted to play practical jokes on. He was all business.

The good sergeant was 26-years-old that month of May 1945, a native of Gallup, New Mexico, the son of a career Army tank commander and a full-blooded Navajo woman. He had the light hair and military bearing of his father and the cinnamon complexion and flat deep eyes and stoic nature of his mother.

The job of a military policeman on Guam was a dangerous one.

Guam was unique in the role it played for both the American and Japanese forces during the war. Settled over 4,000 years ago by an indigenous tribe called the *Chamorros*, Guam had for most of modern history been a possession of Spain. Following the Treaty of Paris in 1898 that spelled out the peace terms for the Spanish American War, Guam became a part of the United States. On the day following the Pearl Harbor attacks, the Empire of Japan invaded Guam and occupied it for a period of two-and-a-half years until United States Marines retook the tiny island in July of 1944.

The Japanese occupation of Guam was a sorrowful time for the natives. They were tortured, forced into slave labor, often beaten to death or even beheaded. When the Marines waded ashore on July 21, 1944, it was a day of great celebration and relief. They would commemorate that occasion every year as “Liberation Day.”

It became their greatest holiday.

Following the liberation of Guam, all of the occupying Japanese forces, those who had survived, were declared prisoners of war and placed in Pacific Camp Guam for the duration of the fighting. For many weeks thereafter there had been trouble with prisoners escaping and managing to kill American

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soldiers or the native islanders. Finally the American military commanders laid down the law to those in charge of Pacific Camp Guam.

Keep these little bastards locked up, said the commanders. If they try to escape, shoot them. If you can't keep them locked up, we will put you behind the fence with them. We're sure these happy Japanese warriors would be delighted to have you join them.

The camp personnel got the message.

Pacific Camp Guam was secured and there were fewer escapes after that.

Still, as Press Robertson and his comrades knew, it was never over.

It only took one escapee to kill you.

So, the MPs lived on edge, every minute, every hour of the day and night.

"Halt! Who goes there?" came the voice out of the darkness.

"Relax, soldier, it's Mack Duggan of *The Green Frog*."

"Oh, that's you, Captain?" answered the nearly invisible sergeant. "Who's that with you?"

"This young fellow is Lieutenant Colombo. He's a Japanese spy," Mack said with a chuckle. "Who the hell am I talking to you? Is that you, Press? I can't see a goddam thing out here?"

"Yeah, it's me, Captain. Colombo, huh? Must be one of those Japanese Italians I've been hearing about. You guys are together? I thought Eddie was on Doc Blasingame's team."

Incredibly, Mack realized, Sergeant Robertson knew almost all of the thousands of Army Air Force crewmen by sight. Mack doubted he knew one-tenth of them.

"Well, you heard about Rudy, didn't you, Press? What happened to him?"

Rudy Riojas had been Mack's navigator since the day he had joined the forces on Guam back in August of last year but had been stricken by dysentery—or so the medics thought it was—recently and had been unable to recover from it. When Rudy had been transferred to the hospital ship, several changes had to be made in the crew alignments. Eddie Colombo—navigator aboard Walter Blasingame's *Maria Elena* had taken his place. Eddie himself had been replaced aboard the *Maria Elena* by a new guy—"fresh meat" in General LeMay's words—straight out of navigator's school back in America.

"I guess not," said Robertson. "Rudy on sick call or what?"

"Worse than that, I'm sorry to say. They thought it was dysentery but now they're not sure. He had lost over thirty pounds before they moved him

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out. If you're a praying man, Press, you might want to say a little prayer for Rudy. I'm really worried about the boy."

"I'll do that," said Robertson. "I surely will. Rudy is a real nice guy."

"We were going to take a look at *The Green Frog* if you don't mind," said Eddie. "I'll be flying it for the first time tonight and just want to be sure it's all in one piece, you know? If I don't like the looks of it, maybe I'll just stay home and play some cribbage with you, Press, when you get off duty."

"I wouldn't advise that, Lieutenant. For a half-breed Navajo, I play a pretty mean game of cribbage. The *Frog* is out there if the Captain can remember where he parked it. I haven't lost a plane yet, as far as I know. They should give me a medal for that but I doubt they will. Say, you guys wouldn't happen to have a ham sandwich in your pocket, would you? It gets real hungry out here."

"We haven't chowed down yet," said Mack. "But I'll bring you something when we get ready to board. Be careful out here. Keep your eyes open."

"Always, Captain. Always."

The sight of *all those planes*—especially on a dark, moonless night—never failed to take Captain Duggan's breath away.

All those planes.

It was right, what they read in the directives sometimes, back home, across that great ocean, in America—*in America!*—where the factories ran day and night producing B-29 Superfortresses, rolling them off the assembly lines as though there was no end to the ability of his countrymen and countrywomen to do what was needed to win this war.

We can do anything in America! Duggan thought.

Anything.

Try as he might—he had seen pictures of the assembly lines at the Ford Motor Company—he could not imagine an assembly line that could handle something so colossal.

Propelled by four 18-cylinder air-cooled engines that produced 2,200 horsepower upon liftoff, each of the 550 or so bombers on the airfield stood nearly 28 feet high, 99 feet long and with a wingspan just over 141 feet. They could carry loads up to 135,000 pounds, climbing 900 feet per minute to reach their most economical cruising altitude of 20,000 feet in about 38 minutes. At the peak altitude of 30,000 feet they could fly—seeming forever—at over 350 miles per hour.

Amazing, thought Duggan. Just amazing.

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“May I approach the plane, Captain?” asked Eddie Colombo.

“Certainly, Lieutenant. Be my guest.”

Colombo walked over to *The Green Frog* and placed his hand on one of the struts. He was a short dark man in comparison to the tall rangy Captain to whose ship he had just been assigned. He wondered what it would be like to have red hair and freckles all over like Captain Duggan. Would the girls back in Maryland like that? Yeah, they would, he suspected, but doubted he would need red hair to have his way with them when he got home.

They’ll love me, thought Eddie. I’m a goddam war hero.

Looking forward and aft at the *Frog*, the Lieutenant sighed.

“She’s a good plane, Captain,” he said. “I give her my blessing. Why do you call her that, anyway? I mean, why *The Green Frog*?”

“There’s a restaurant back home in Lake Charles called *The Green Frog*,” said Duggan. “It’s right on the corner of Broad Street and Highway 14, catty-cornered from a nightclub named *The Blue Moon*. Kinda strange, huh? A green frog and a blue moon in the same intersection. My fiancée Jeannie and I used to eat there all the time and then go dancing at the *Moon*. Great Cajun music there on the weekends. You’ll have to come down and join us sometimes.”

“I don’t know how to dance to Cajun music,” said Colombo, “but I bet you I could learn. You gonna marry that girl?”

“Just as soon as I get home, Eddie. Just as soon as I get home.”

“I don’t have a girl,” said Eddie. “Well, I had one but I haven’t heard from her in awhile. I’ll have to find me another one when I get back to Hancock, I guess.”

“Something will work out, Lieutenant. If you can’t find one up there, come on down to Louisiana. We’ve got plenty of girls and they’re all pretty.”

“Okay,” said Colombo.

“I was just thinking, Eddie. You’ve never been to the Big Apple, have you?”

The Big Apple was the informal codename most of the guys used when they spoke of Tokyo. They knew they weren’t fooling anybody with it but a lot of the men were superstitious and thought it might jinx the mission if they called a target by its actual name.

“No, sir,” said Eddie. “Me and Doc were always assigned the coastal cities on the Western side of Honshu.”

“So, you’ve never been there?”

“No, sir.”

“And you’re my navigator?”

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"Yes, sir."

"Eddie, you think you can find the damn place?"

"Oh, hell yes, Captain. That's what they teach you in navigator's school. I was seventh in my class. I bet you didn't know that. I guarantee you, Captain, we'll find it. I'm a certified navigator in this man's Army Air Force, sir. I can take a plane to any destination on the earth!"

"Even Lake Charles, Louisiana?" asked Mack.

"That's where you want to go, Captain Duggan, I'll get you there," he replied with a laugh. "We might have to stop somewhere along the way for fuel, of course."

And the minutes rolled.

You can't stop the clock, thought Captain Mack Duggan as he hurriedly made his way back to barracks to grab his gear and finish dressing. You can't stop the clock. In high school, he had excelled in several sports but basketball was his favorite. Once—with less than two seconds remaining—he had made a shot that would have taken his team to the State finals but the referee ruled that it had gone in after the buzzer.

No, that was rule number one. You can't stop the clock.

Joining the thousands of other airmen at the mess hall, Mack ate his fill and packed away some extra sandwiches for the trip, not forgetting to wrap up two ham-and-egg sandwiches for Press Robertson.

And the minutes rolled.

Then they were boarding the plane and the runway that had been so dark earlier was suddenly ablaze with light.

"Gimme a count," Duggan shouted into his headset.

"One short of a dozen, Captain," replied 2nd Lieutenant Rowland "Pappy" Thornton, the ship's radar operator, from his position in the rear of the plane. "We're ready to get this show on the road."

"Aye, aye, Lieutenant," said Duggan. "That's eleven, come back."

"Eleven, sir. Affirmative."

"Preparing for takeoff, men. Buckle up and God be with you."

And the minutes rolled.

Finding his place in line among the 464 planes that would be in formation that night, Mack Duggan revved up the four big Wright engines and began to creep along behind the plane just ahead of him.

Most of the remaining planes on the field were down for maintenance or short on crewmembers or assigned to some other sortie the next day or the day following. Remarkably, his new navigator's former ship *Maria Elena*

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would be joining them tonight. It would be Doc Blassingame's first trip to the Big Apple and he had a brand-new navigator aboard.

"I hope somebody knows where they're going," Duggan mumbled to himself, only half in jest. Old time pilots had to do their own navigating, Duggan knew, but it was too complicated now and on big ships like the B-29 Superfortress, the pilot had to depend on another person specially trained for that job.

Mack was a good pilot but—not having an understanding of that science—was a little suspicious of navigators. It seemed akin to magic or voodoo to him.

Oh, well, he thought. I'll just follow the crowd. It's a big city, like they say. Can't miss it.

"Takeoff. Affirm, please."

"Affirm," came back the voice of the controller.

And then they were lifting off into the vast and empty darkness of the night in the month of May, in the year of 1945, moving not like the locusts the General had likened them to—Mack thought—but like a great and awesome flight of angels.

"We are the angels of death," General LeMay had once said.

"We are the angels of destruction."

And the minutes rolled.

The Crew of the B-29 Superfortress "The Green Frog"

The crew of the B-29 Superfortress consisted of eleven men. In the front compartment of the plane—sealed off from the rearward compartments—were the pilot and co-pilot, bombardier, flight engineer, navigator and radio operator. Amidships were the radar operator and three gunners: the top gunner, the starboard (right) waist gunner and the port (left) waist gunner. At the vulnerable tail of the plane—also sealed off from the rest of the crew—rode the eleventh man, the tail gunner

Each man had been specifically trained for his job and all of the crew aboard *The Green Frog* were veterans of many bombing runs. The *Frog* was fortunate in that respect. Captain Duggan had thought about posting a sign: "No Fresh Meat Allowed!" but had thought better of it. Still, it gave you a feeling of confidence to know that your men had experience.

We'll get it done tonight, he thought. We're all right.

THE PILOT

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Captain Mack Duggan of Lake Charles, Louisiana had been trying to finish his college education when the war broke out. A tall, rangy Irishman, he had been a local football and basketball star in high school and was engaged to a beautiful dark-haired Cajun girl by the name of Jeannie Fontenot. By the time he had gotten to pilot's school, the Army has long since waived the 1,000 hour rule and he began flying missions over Japan by the time he was 23 years of age. He was now 25 and had three ambitions in life: to do his part in winning the war, to go home and marry Jeannie and to get a job flying planes for American Airlines.

THE CO-PILOT

1st Lieutenant Paul Rossi was one of three Italian-Americans aboard *The Green Frog* and he hailed out of Providence, Rhode Island. Rossi had been quite the lady's man back in Providence and had his sights set on being a criminal lawyer. "Think of the money!" he told his mother and father. Now that the Army had taught him how to fly, he was no longer sure of that career but figured he had plenty of time to sort all that out. Rossi was 24-years-old.

THE BOMBARDIER

2nd Lieutenant Matthew Kelly, Brooklyn born and raised, was responsible for releasing the bombs the plane carried and was seated in the nose of the aircraft. Tonight, he knew, they would be carrying approximately 12,000 pounds of bombs and dropping them from an altitude of 7,000 feet. In earlier flights, Kelly had been required to drop the load from upwards of 25,000 feet—sometimes as high as 30,000 feet—but the winds around the island of Honshu which was bordered by the Pacific Ocean and the Sea of Japan made bombing from that height a haphazard thing, so the procedure was changed. Kelly readily admitted that diving to 7,000 feet above a highly fortified city such as Tokyo "scared the shit" out of him but the nervousness was overcome by the feeling of satisfaction he got by knowing his bombs would be on target. Lieutenant Kelly, who was 23 years of age, dreamed of Brooklyn nights and Brooklyn girls and getting back home someday to see all of his old pals again. He hoped they were all okay and had survived their part of the war.

THE FLIGHT ENGINEER

The B-29 Superfortress was among the first planes to carry a flight engineer and Master Sergeant Arthur Kowalski—at 32 the oldest crewmember aboard *The Green Frog*—was a highly skilled engineer who understood every working part of the massive bomber. His responsibility was to make sure that

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every single component of the plane from the engines to the instruments to the hydraulic system was in tip-top shape and remained that way.

THE NAVIGATOR

1st Lieutenant Eddie Colombo of Hancock, Maryland had—as he often bragged—graduated seventh in his class at navigator’s school. With classes often numbering 60-80 or more students, this really was quite a feat and one that Colombo could rightly be proud of. In this sophisticated new age of flying, the navigator was a key member of the crew. Required to guide his ship across thousands of miles of unmarked waters, the navigator was constantly plotting radio compass bearings to obtain a fix. He had to know at any given moment exactly where the plane was located. Eddie’s father had died of a heart attack just days before he entered the Army and that grieved him to no end. “Pop would have been so proud of me,” Eddie often said. At 25, he was the same age as Captain Duggan.

THE RADIO OPERATOR

Sergeant First Class Martin Rabinowitz was the radioman for the mission. At 29 he was a native of Chicago and the only Jewish crewmember of *The Green Frog*. Most of the time, Marty didn’t do anything at all but monitor the various frequencies to which he was assigned but if the plane ever went down over enemy territory, it would be his radio skills that would be used to direct other aircraft on a rescue mission.

THE LEFT AND RIGHT GUNNERS

Sergeant Felix Dubois of St. Louis was the left or “port waist gunner” aboard *The Green Frog*. He was also a trained electrical specialist and would often be called upon to fix the electrical problems that cropped up more often than not in the course of a flight. Sergeant Frank Brennan was Dubois’ counterpart, the right or “starboard waist gunner” aboard the ship. Dubois was 26 and Brennan 27 years of age. The two of them often hung out together between missions, often trying to talk the other airmen into “a friendly game of poker.” Their card-playing reputation preceded them, however, and they didn’t get too many takers.

THE TOP GUNNER

Manning the turret at the very top of the plane's midsection, Staff Sergeant Aleksandr Zorin of Portland, Oregon was a prime target for enemy aircraft. His position was also referred to as Central Fire Control (CFC) Gunner. The CFC gunner's range of visibility enabled him to warn the rest of the crew of an impending attack. Zorin was 28 years of age.

THE RADARMAN

2nd Lieutenant Rowland "Pappy" Thornton of Sylvester, Georgia, was one of the more highly trained members of the crew. He could also, if it proved necessary, fill in as bombardier or navigator. Thornton's desk area was crammed with sophisticated equipment such as the AN/APQ-13 radar system that he used to zero in on and identify the specific targets of the mission. The radarman would also periodically shove chaff out a rear tube located in the bomber. The chaff would confuse enemy radar and—hopefully—allow his aircraft to pass through heavy flak without taking a direct hit. "Pappy" Thornton was 24.

THE TAIL GUNNER

Staff Sergeant Donald DeLuca had the loneliest job of all. He was isolated from the rest of the crew in his own pressurized compartment and was extremely vulnerable to enemy attack from the rear. In the latter years of the war, the tail gunner was normally a trained mechanic and engineer. DeLuca, who came from Houston, Texas, was 29 years of age.

"I Have Seen Him in the Watch-Fires of a Hundred Circling Camps"

And the minutes rolled.

"Visual, Captain. Can you affirm?" whispered Lieutenant Kelly.

"Visual affirmed."

"Jesus, Captain! Is that the Big Apple?" muttered Eddie Colombo.

The entire city below seemed to be in flames from the bombing of the planes that had preceded them.

"That's it all right," replied Captain Duggan sadly. "At least that's what left of it. You did good, Eddie. You found it on your first try."

"Sergeant First Class Rabinowitz," Duggan continued, "can you lead us in the prayer tonight?"

George Welch

“Surely, Captain,” said Marty Rabinowitz. “The Lord bless us and keep us; the Lord make His face shine upon us and be gracious unto us; the Lord lift up His countenance upon us and give us peace. Amen.”

“Amen.”

“Amen.”

“Amen.”

“Attention crew, this is Captain Duggan. We will begin our dive in one minute, 15 seconds. We will be going down to approximately 7,000 feet to release our bombs and then I am going to bring this thing up and take it home. Be alert and God bless everyone of you.”

And down they went, the great aircraft screaming against the forces of nature as she descended into the raging heat of the firestorm below. The target for all 464 planes tonight was the area directly south of the Imperial Palace and it was easy to see even from this distance that most of the bombs had fallen within acceptable limits of that target.

The B-29s carried M-69 incendiary bombs that night, bombs fueled by gasoline and napalm that, the crew knew, would start a fire that it would be impossible to contain. Each of the M-69 bombs was only three inches in diameter and twenty inches long but bound in clusters of 38 bombs, they were fearsome in the destruction they could bring to a city built primarily of wood and paper.

As they dipped slightly below 7,000 feet Bombardier Kelly began to release his bombs. Several seemed to make a direct hit upon the Palace. None of them fell very far away from it. At the rear of the plane, Radarman Thornton was shoveling chaff as fast as he could, although apparently no enemy planes were being sent out to meet them. Flak was coming from every direction, however, but no damage had been inflicted on the plane.

“That’s it, gentlemen. We’re out of here,” shouted the Captain.

A great cheer went up from all quarters of the three pressurized cabins, a cheer amazing in the very fact that it could be heard over the ungodly roar of nearly five hundred planes shaking and whining as they dove and ascended, one after another after another.

And then they were out over the Pacific and clear.

“Yee haw!” shouted Tail Gunner DeLuca from his isolated post in the rear of the plane. “Take this baby home!”

So, they began their journey.

Reports began to come in about the losses they had suffered.

Eisenhower's Children

“Looks like over 20 planes down, Captain,” Marty Rabinowitz said. “They’re expecting a few more but that’s probably about it.”

The final number would be 26 planes lost.

Almost 300 men.

Captain Duggan sighed.

Planes are nothing, he thought to himself. We can replace the planes. But how do we replace the lost men? Each one of them an individual, Mack thought. Each one of them a special creation of God. Unique. Like no other.

The seating arrangement in the cabin of *The Green Frog* placed Captain Duggan between his bombardier, 2nd Lieutenant Matt Kelly, and the radio operator Rabinowitz. The navigator, 1st Lieutenant Eddie Colombo, sat directly to Marty’s left, up against the port wall of the cabin.

Duggan looked over his shoulder at Sergeant Rabinowitz. An unspoken question hung in the air between them. Marty’s head was bowed. He appeared embarrassed, ashamed, as though the knowledge he alone had made him guilty in some respect, simply because of what he knew. Finally, Marty raised his eyes to the Captain’s and gave a brief nod. Affirmative.

A few moments later Mack turned the control of the plane over to his copilot Paul Rossi and approached the desk of his navigator who was busily drafting the coordinates that would bring them back to Guam.

“Eddie,” Duggan said, “I’m afraid I’ve got some bad news.”

“Don’t get much other kind, do we, Captain?”

1st Lieutenant Eddie Colombo continued to stare stoically at his charts and graphs, waiting for the Captain to continue.

“We’ve lost the *Maria Elena*, Lieutenant. She never came out of her dive. It looks, one of the witnesses said, as though the plane itself made a direct hit on the Imperial Palace with all her bombs intact.”

Eddie didn’t say anything.

“You gonna be okay, Eddie?” asked Duggan. “We can bring Pappy up from the back to plot our way home.”

“No, I’m fine Captain. It was just a great bunch of guys on the *Maria Elena*. Doc named her after that song by Jimmy Dorsey, you know?”

“I figured that,” said Mack. “It’s a beautiful song.”

“Doc’s girl was named Maria, too. He was always talking about her. So, that was the reason. The song and his girl. That new guy—I don’t even know his name—the navigator who took my place, he did all right, huh? He took ’em right downtown to the Big Apple. I wonder how he did in school. I was seventh in my class. Did I ever tell you that?”

“I believe you did,” said Captain Duggan, smiling.

George Welch

It was several days before they determined the name of the dead navigator. In a gaffe of monumental proportions, the base chaplain, leading a Mass for those who had been lost in the raid, read from an outdated list of the crewmen aboard the *Maria Elena* and made the sign of the Cross as he pronounced the name of 1st Lieutenant Eddie Colombo, “dearly departed brother from Hancock, Maryland.”

“Departed, my ass!” fumed Eddie Colombo.

A few days later, Mack signed out a Jeep and he and Eddie rode out to the ruins of San Dionisio Church on Umatac Bay. San Dionisio had been erected by the Spanish settlers back in the 1680s and was one of the very few churches that had survived the Japanese occupation of the island.

There was no priest now, no congregation, but San Dionisio, along with Dulce Nombre de Maria and all the other lovely Spanish edifices would be rebuilt and thrive again.

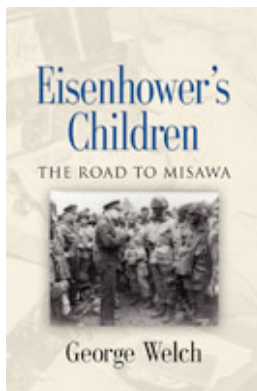
Eddie Colombo carried in his pocket eleven candles and he and Mack lighted them and placed them on the altar.

They said a short prayer and left.

Somewhere in the voluminous records of what they came to call the Second World War, records that have grown old and musty after 70 years, you can find the name of a navigator, 2nd Lieutenant Ben Traylor, son of Robert and Betty Traylor of Wichita, Kansas.

It will tell you that Ben Traylor died a hero on May 26, 1945—May 25th back in the United States—as his plane the *Maria Elena* went down on a bombing raid over the city of Tokyo, Japan.

Lieutenant Traylor was flying his very first mission.



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Eisenhower's Children

The Road to Misawa

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