

# A ringside view of war in the Pac



Charles Twitty (standing second from right) with members of his bomber crew in the South Pacific.

# cific from the nose of a bomber

*EDITOR'S NOTE: In recognition of the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II, Lawrence Township Memorial Committee, in cooperation with the Ledger, will feature a column each week during the anniversary year profiling a Lawrence resident.*

It was a grueling 11- to 12-hour round trip for the B-24s of the 307th Bomb Group based on Morotai to the Japanese oil refineries and storage facilities at Balikpapan, Borneo, but the target was extremely important, as 80 percent of all Japanese aviation fuel was produced and refined there.

Ten of Charlie Twitty's 30 bombing missions as a nose gunner in one of the group's B-24s, were made to Balikpapan to destroy, or at least interrupt the flow of gasoline needed to supply the Japanese war machine.

Charles H. Twitty was born on Nov. 1, 1925 in Zeigler, Ill. He attended local schools and when he became of age, enlisted in the Army Aviation Cadet Program. He was called to active duty in December 1943, but after completing basic training, the cadet program was sharply downsized. Rather than take pot luck, he was still determined to fly, and volunteered for aerial gunner training. He was ultimately assigned to a B-24 Liberator crew as the nose gunner. When the crew completed overseas training, they were issued winter flying gear for the December

weather in England, and in true military fashion, were then sent to the South Pacific.

The 307th Bomb Group, known as "The Long Rangers," had already built an enviable record in the 7th and then 13th Air Force. In December 1942, they hit targets on Wake Island and then proceeded to island-hop across the Pacific as the war moved closer to Japan. They struck out at Japanese airfields, installations and shipping in the Solomon Islands, Bismark Archipelago, Yap, Truk, the Netherlands Indies and the Philippines.

"We arrived in New Guinea in January, 1945," Charlie related, "and had another month of combat training before flying two missions to Rabaul and Wewak, which at one time were Japanese strongholds. We then moved on to Morotai where the 307th was based. Morotai is in the Halmahera Islands between New Guinea and the Celebes. It is 40 miles long and 25 miles wide, and the Japanese occupied the northern two-thirds of the island while we were there. It was an uncomfortable feeling sharing the island with them, even though a force of Australians held the perimeter around the airbase and kept them contained. Balikpapan was the Polesti of the Pacific, and the 307th had some heavy losses bombing there late in 1944. On one mission alone they lost seven out of 24

---

## VETERAN PROFILE

### Nicholas Loveless

---

planes from flak and 40 fighter planes that jumped them near the target."

Charlie and his crew flew most of their 30 missions to the Celebes, Borneo and the Philippines, with one mission to Java. The flights were long and mostly over water, making it essential for the aircraft to be in top mechanical condition. The danger of a water landing miles from nowhere was just as hazardous as contending with anti-aircraft and fighter attacks.

"We had a 10-man crew," Charlie continued, "the pilot, co-pilot, bombardier, navigator, upper turret gunner, who was also the flight engineer, the ball turret gunner, two waist gunners, one of whom was also the radio operator, the tail gunner, and I was the nose gunner. When we went on a mission we would fly singly until we were about 100 miles from the target area, and then rendezvous at a pre-set position to assemble into formation to make the final approach to the target. It was pretty much standard to

See **VETERAN**, Page 3A

# Veteran

Continued from Page 2A

bomb at high altitudes, although some of the missions were as low as 7,000 feet.

"On the way back we dropped down on the deck to strafe targets of opportunity, mostly shipping. Whenever we encountered a heavily armed Japanese ship, it changed our perspective on strafing. In addition to oil refineries, we hit airfields, shipping, supported the Australian invasion of Borneo, and provided support for the infantry in the Philippines. One of the longest missions was over 13 hours to Java to bomb a Japanese cruiser, but we couldn't find it and hit the alternate target. We lost two engines on that one and flew the last four hours home on the two remaining good engines.

"On one of the missions to Balikpapan, we couldn't keep up with the formation and hit the target alone. We drew a lot of flak on that one, and one piece made a large hole not too far from my head. On a pre-invasion strike at Brunei, we were using too much gas, and five hours from our base we had to throw out guns, ammunition and equipment to lighten the plane. By the time we landed, the gas tanks were empty.

"The Japanese fighter planes were always a threat near the targets and would occasionally make passes, usually head-on, rather than the pursuit curve the Germans used. They would go by so fast it was hard to track them with our guns. From my position in the nose, I had a birds-eye view of everything ahead."

Charlie's crew completed their tour of 30 missions with no serious injuries or losses and were preparing to return to the U.S. as the war in the Pacific was winding down. He remained to join another crew that modified a B-24 with a 75 mm cannon and additional machine guns for low level use. Their first mission on this airborne tank was to be Singapore. A few hours before take-off,

word was received that the atom bomb had been dropped, and after much debate, the mission was canceled. When the war ended, he was sent to Manila to await transportation back to the U.S. and a discharge. His awards included the Air Medal with multiple oak leaf clusters, Pacific Campaign Medal with battle stars, and the 307th Presidential Unit Citation for destruction of Japanese installations and refineries at Truk and Balikpapan.

On his return to Illinois, he resumed his interrupted college education under the GI Bill, and while working full-time, received his BA and master's degree from the University of Illinois. In 1950 he married Vera Turner, a classmate from college. After graduation he was employed at a TV manufacturing plant in Indiana, and in 1964 spent a two-year stint at a ballistic missile site outside of Fairbanks, Alaska. As a personnel manager and labor relations manager for RCA he worked at Cherry Hill, New York City and finally Forrestal Center in Princeton where he retired in 1986.

Unable to adjust to retirement, he has several ventures, including 1-hour photo processing, and is presently associated with the newly opened Sam's Club on Route 1. His hobbies include photography, reading and history, particularly military history.

He and Vera moved to their present home at 5 East Darrah Lane in 1973, and he later served a four-year term on the Lawrence Board of Education. They have three children, Charles, Janet Lano, and James, in addition to two grandchildren.

His interest in military history recently led Charlie to try to locate his former bomber crew, after losing contact with them over the years. He learned that five of them had since died, and that the son of one of the other gunners, Walter Kirstein, was a police sergeant on the Trenton Police Department. He has since contacted all the surviving members of the crew, and a reunion was planned in July, but had to be canceled because

of emergencies several of them had. Interestingly enough, his former tail gunner and one of the Australians he met on Morotai bought a kangaroo ranch in Australia after the war and became very successful. Although his reunion mission was aborted, the remaining crew members hope to reschedule their 50-year reunion soon.

Looking back over his experiences in World War II, Charlie recalls the dropping of the A-bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and has no doubts that hundreds of thousands of American lives, perhaps his own, and millions of Japanese lives, were saved by the decision made by President Truman. Japan, he says, ignored warnings by the U.S. and refused surrender proposals, and would have fought to the bitter end had it not been for the difficult decision that finally brought an end to the war.

*A local resident who served with the 307th Bomb Wing in the Korean War will be featured in the near future.*

*The Veterans Memorial Committee is asking veterans from World War II and other conflicts to provide a photograph in uniform, along with their name, present address, branch of service and unit, where and when they served, their principal assignment and summary of their service. Their individual experiences or unusual stories are also welcomed. All photographs will be returned. Families of deceased veterans are also encouraged to submit articles. All materials should be sent to The Lawrence Township Veterans Memorial Committee, P.O. Box 55966, Trenton, N.J. 08638. Inquires may be*



## WEEKLY ROLL OF MEMORIAL DONORS

Crystal Diner Restaurant  
Tree

Lawrence Twp. PBA Local 119

Colonial Cadillac

Marion and Charles Connell

K-Mart, Lawrence

Ingeborg and Peter Radice

Anna and Frank Giglio

Mrs. G's, Inc.

Franco's Tuxedo Rentals

Shoprite Market

Mrs. Minnie M. Hullfish

In memory of Charles C. Hullfish, Sr.

Eleanor C. Gulden

In memory of Edward R. Gulden

William H. McCarroll

Mr. & Mrs. William G. Zimmer

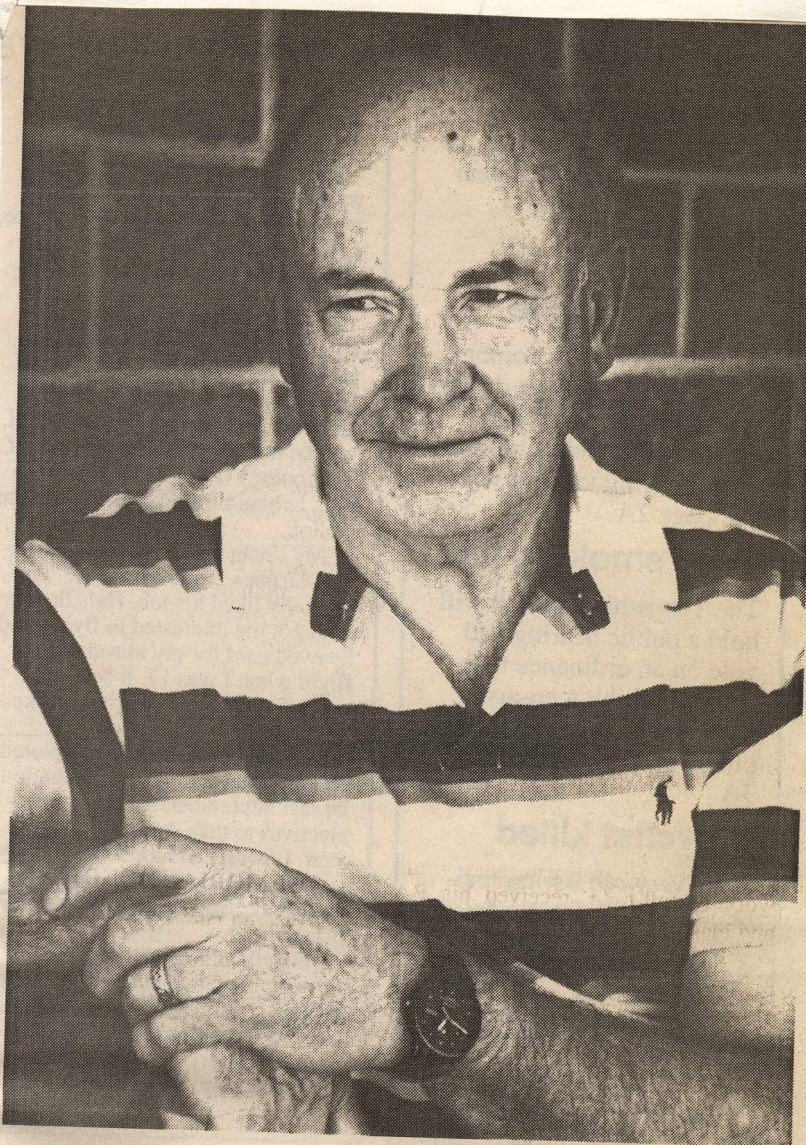
Forence and James McGroarty

Paul's Step By Step Footwear

Seasons Restaurant and Bar

The Lawrence Ledger

Thursday, August 17, 1995



Staff photo by Holly Marvin

Charles Twitty and his fellow nine crew members successfully completed 30 B-24 bomber missions in the South Pacific, but there were many anxious moments, and many close calls.