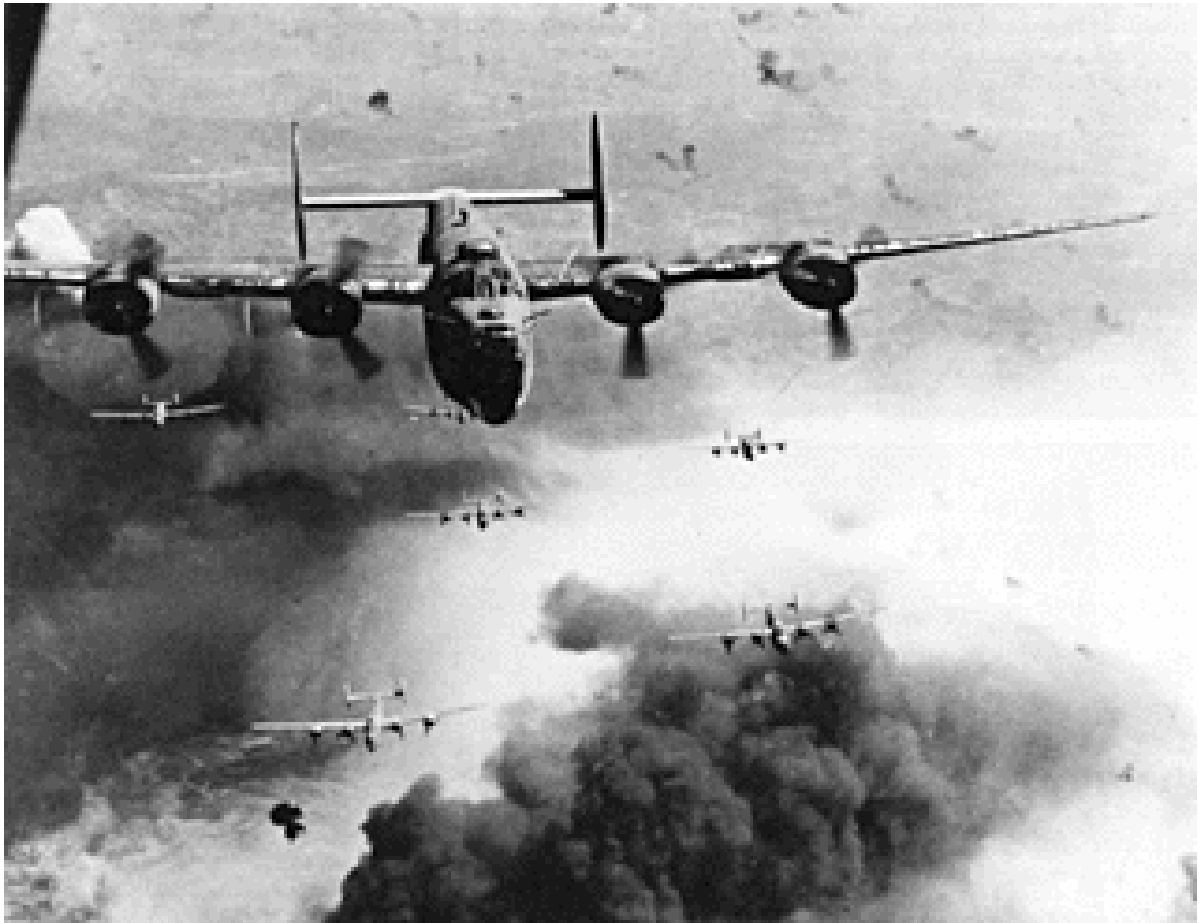


WWII EXPERIENCES OF KEVIN JAMES MCCRACKEN

FOR GRANDMOM, ON HER 85TH BIRTHDAY
OCTOBER 27, 2007

AND FOR THE GREAT-GRANDCHILDREN ...

JAMES KEVIN MCCRACKEN
REEGAN EVELYN MCCRACKEN
KEVIN JOHN GARES
ELIZABETH PAIGE GARES



WWII Experiences of Kevin James McCracken October 24, 1922 – February 9, 2002

The following is a compilation of information related to the WWII experiences of Kevin James McCracken, who served as an airman in the Pacific Theater. This information was written down by his wife, Lorraine, during conversations they had. All photographs, except that on the cover, were scanned from family albums.

Experiences of Kevin McCracken's tour of duty in World War II. Kevin was in the 5th Air Force, 64th Bomb Squadron, 43rd Bomb Group, stationed in Port Moresby, New Guinea.

Enlisted April 1942 for artillery but sent to Camp Lee, Virginia – from there to Biloxi, Mississippi – then to Scott Field at St. Louis, Illinois for radio school. – next to Harlingen, Texas (aerial gunnery school). These stays were all about six weeks. Next to Salt Lake City, Utah for phase training as a crew then to Tuscon, Arizona, Davis Monthan air base for more phase training. Next to Alamogordo, New Mexico – Topeka, Kansas. Last to Los Angeles, California to be shipped out.

In New Guinea (Port Moresby) for a year – flew 66 missions. Flew to Townsville, Australia, then to Brisbane. After about two weeks a ship to San Francisco – then a train to Philly – had about a 12 day furlough. Lorraine and Kevin went to Atlantic City. Ambassador Hotel filled with soldiers (and wives) back from overseas for rest and relaxation. Then to Ft. Meyers, Florida (gunnery instructor school). Was there about a month. Next to Charleston, South Carolina Air Base as a gunnery instructor. Kathie and Lorraine joined him and stayed there for a year. Kevin was then moved to Florence, South Carolina. Lorraine came home. Kevin went from instructing gunnery on a B24 to a B26. In the beginning made a M.P. (too many instructors). He had to fly six missions a month to get flight pay. There were many German prisoners there. After about a year he was discharged. Four of us in back bedroom (2 cribs) at 1422 Sparks Street. After a few months moved to 1412 Sparks Street. Our rent was thirty dollars a month. In 1952 bought new home – 3 Hilltop Rd. in Plymouth Meeting.

Special Events while in Service

First job Kevin had when he enlisted and sent to Camp Lee, Virginia was to go to a low field where all the toilets drained. The matter had hardened and he and others had to chop it up and scatter it on the plants, flowers, etc.

From there he was sent to Kessler Field, Mississippi and took tests for radio, mechanics and armament. Then sent to radio school in St. Louis. While in Biloxi, Mississippi was married May 11, 1942. Lorraine stayed at beautiful southern hotel right on the water. "Aerial Gunner" was being filmed while I was there. Hotel was almost completely destroyed by a later hurricane. Lorraine, after a few days, came home as she was doing electrical table wiring for planes and ships at G.E.. 69th and Elmwood. Milly Hiesly (best friend) and Lorraine got up at 5:00 am – took 55 or 6 trolley at Green Lane and York Rd.

by old Branchtown Hotel, to Olney Ave. Then took subway to center city (*Philadelphia*). Then, another trolley to General Electric at 69th and Elmwood.



Kevin then sent to Scott Field, Illinois for radio school. Lorraine would leave work Friday night – get to the “Jeffersonian” (train) at North Broad Street station for St. Louis. Took train back that got her back in time to brush her teeth at the station and go to work.

While Kevin was at radio school he was caught two days in a row by different C.O.s, gambling at card games. He was given two weeks K.P. which for him was intolerable. He somehow knew a doctor there and through his kindness he put Kevin in infirmary for supposedly bad legs (veins). He was only there a few days and his name came up for gunnery school at Harlingen Air Force Base in Texas. At second or third day at school he was just watching the graduating class (6 weeks) when one of the graduates came over and asked him to fly in his place after giving him his name. Kevin had never flown and was thrilled at the chance. He gave Kevin his parachute and Kevin told pilot his fictitious name. As he was getting to his seat the parachute came loose and as it got bigger Kevin quickly sat on it.

Another plane towed a “sleeve” and each soldier had different colored bullets that they aimed into the sleeve. Kevin never had training for this kind of exercise. When they landed the pilot asked him his name – it was a long Polish one which Kevin forgot – so he mumbled something and got away quickly. He



ran with the parachute all unfolded to “parachute tent” and got away as quickly as he could so he would not have to answer more questions.

After six weeks training if you had previous technical you were made a staff sergeant. He could not wait to sew on his new stripes. He loved the six weeks of shooting all kinds of guns. Lorraine left job in city and came to Harlingen, Texas. Offered waitress work in officer’s quarters but worked in the enlisted men’s canteen so she could see Kevin. Lorraine went to work one morning – they had just sprayed and everything was covered with cockroaches – revolting! Lorraine also worked for Toggle, Sash and Door and had a room with a lovely lady – Ms. Swift. Met with cousin Valerie and her husband Lenard who lived in Brownsville. We also crossed over to Matamoros, Mexico for a visit.

While in Harlingen, Texas, in a crowded little restaurant filled with soldiers, Kevin brought out his pictures he had just taken while up in the planes, etc. M.P.s came in and confiscated all of them. Always tight security everywhere.

Kevin then shipped to Salt Lake City, Utah. It took Lorraine almost a week on a crowded train to follow him. She stayed at Moxum Hotel with mountains all around. She got job at Walgreen’s as a waitress, knowing that she would not be there long.

At the air base in Salt Lake City Kevin was assigned to a crew which consisted of radio



operator – navigator – pilot – copilot – bombardier – engineer and six gunners. He stayed there about a month with practice flights of shooting, bombing, etc.

From there, sent to Davis Monthan Air Base in Tuscon, Arizona. Lorraine followed and rented a bedroom and bath that was in the back of Mrs. Medlin’s lovely home (in back of garage). Her husband was a dentist. Lorraine, from eating in so many different places, had gotten trench mouth – very painful. Had to see 1 doctor in the city. During the war everyone was very kind to soldiers and their wives – always asking us for dinner. Stayed in Arizona about a month and then sent to Alamogordo, New Mexico. The crew spent more time there

practicing gunnery and bombing – everyone perfecting their job.

Lorraine tried to get a room there. It was a very small town. She knocked on all the door – one was the hospital, so small it looked like a house. Packed with army wives – nothing was available – had to go home – was pregnant. After Alamogordo, Kevin sent to El Paso, Texas for more air training as a crew. When Kevin finished at El Paso he had a delay in route to next base so came home. All travel in war days was by train or bus. He was twenty two hours late getting to his next base which was Topeka, Kansas. About thirty other soldiers were late and so they all lost their stripes. They were asked if they wanted squadron punishment or court martial. Kevin opted for squadron punishment and had to march two nights with pack on back. Amazed next morning to find names on the bulletin board and that they were all “busted”. Kevin went to Captain Ross (his pilot) and said he would not go overseas as a private. Captain Ross took Kevin to the C.O. Kevin waited outside. Captain Ross came out and told Kevin to go in. C.O. asked Kevin why he



had not said that I was sick (really wasn't). Kevin quickly sent telegram home to Lorraine to get in touch with her doctor (Dr. Turman) as Red Cross was going to check his story. I was only pregnant – oh those little white lies, but Kevin got his stripes back!

Next incident was Kevin riding on a flat-bed on a rainy day. Flatbed was pulled by a jeep and six crew-men were on it going out to a plane. The hook broke as they were going forty miles per hour. All jumped off except Kevin – all muddy and injured (except Kevin) and taken to the hospital in ambulance.



The crew got their first plane – (brand new in Topeka) and flew to Los Angeles. They were there about a week and then flew to Hickam Field. On the way flew over all the ships that were sunk at Pearl Harbor. While there, the new radar was installed on plane and since Kevin was operator he had to learn about new equipment. He was in Hawaii about a month and while there Hawaiian girls put a show on for all the soldiers. It was the only place beds had sheets. From Hawaii flew to Canton Island, Christmas Island, and one more he could not remember. Then to the ___ stopping at each to refuel. Landed at Brisbane, Australia on to Townsville, Australia and then on to Port Moresby, New Guinea. The was the first time he realized he was in combat because other planes were coming in firing red flares which meant wounded on board and they had right of way and came in first. Kevin saw them unloading dead and wounded.



At New Guinea had a tent for six – netting over cots but that did not keep out the ants. It was very hot and humid. C.O. came and told all enlisted men they had to dig latrines for the officers. Kevin went to Captain Ross and told him of the orders. Ross said he was not sent to

officer's school to dig ditches – Kevin replied he did not go to radio school for that

purpose. Escaped that chore by going to more radio training. Kevin named and painted on their new B24 "Microbe-Hunter". Thought it would be their plane but another crew was assigned to it. On take off it crashed killing all of the crew and many Aussies on the ground. Much of this is written about in a book "Touched by Fire" by Eric Bergerud. From then on always assigned different planes.



Anyone having wounded aboard shot red flares and were given priority to land. Had no fresh food – can remember having peanut butter. Movies were shown and they had a N.C.O. club. Kevin heard that Craig Logan (a friend of Lorraine and brother Jim who lived in Fern Rock – close to their home) was stationed nearby. Kevin hiked over to his base where he was on a ground crew. Kevin invited him back to his N.C.O. for drinks.

First mission was called "Milk Run" because of no Jap opposition. He had two kinds of missions – reconnaissance and sighting and bombing Jap troop ships. Kevin bombed Wewak in N.G. – had to fly over Owen Stanley Mountain Range – about 20,000 feet. Then Madang, Cape Gloucester and Rabaul. Bombed many little islands around there. Japs tried to come over the mountains but ground troops prevented them. On about 8th or 10th mission Kevin shot down a Jap Zero.





Later on shot down another plane –another soldier claimed it too so each was given half. Pilot was Ross- copilot Lt. Mast – bombardier Tibiason – radio – radar and front turret gunner, Kevin McCracken. Two fifty caliber guns operated by Frank Kurdilla from Pittsburgh (came to visit us in Plymouth Valley after the war) Rear turret was Hayes, oldest, about 38 years old. Kurdilla had two fifty caliber guns and was top turret gunner. Pappert from Pennsylvania was ball turret.





Boston from Ohio and Kevin after 32 missions had a furlough to Sidney, Australia. Rest of crew came and they all rented rooms in a boarding house. They were overwhelmed by the half dozen eggs, steak and potatoes each for breakfast. While there went horseback riding (Kevin had never been on a horse) and rode them into the water to make them stop. In Australia seven days and sent home a silver egg holder to Lorraine. From there back to Port Moresby and finished rest of missions before rest of crew because he flew extra reconnaissance. Kevin got on phone – pretended he was Capt. Ross and said he had two gunners who wanted to get to Brisbane and did they have any planes going that way. After many calls got a B24 going to Townsville, Australia. While there got very sick from a mixture of vodka and other food and drinks. He was taken to hospital and was questioned extensively by Intelligence Department to find out what and where he had eaten. There was a fear that Australian Japanese had tried to poison American soldiers.

Bresseall (Kevin's friend) who had flown down with him came to visit him in the hospital. Kevin told him to bring some clothes so he could get out of the hospital without being released. Kevin left and with a strong desire to get home started calling air





bases to get a plane going south to Brisbane – finally got a B25 and left. After about a week Kevin's crew caught up with him in Brisbane and after a few weeks got a Victory? Or Liberty? Ship back to the

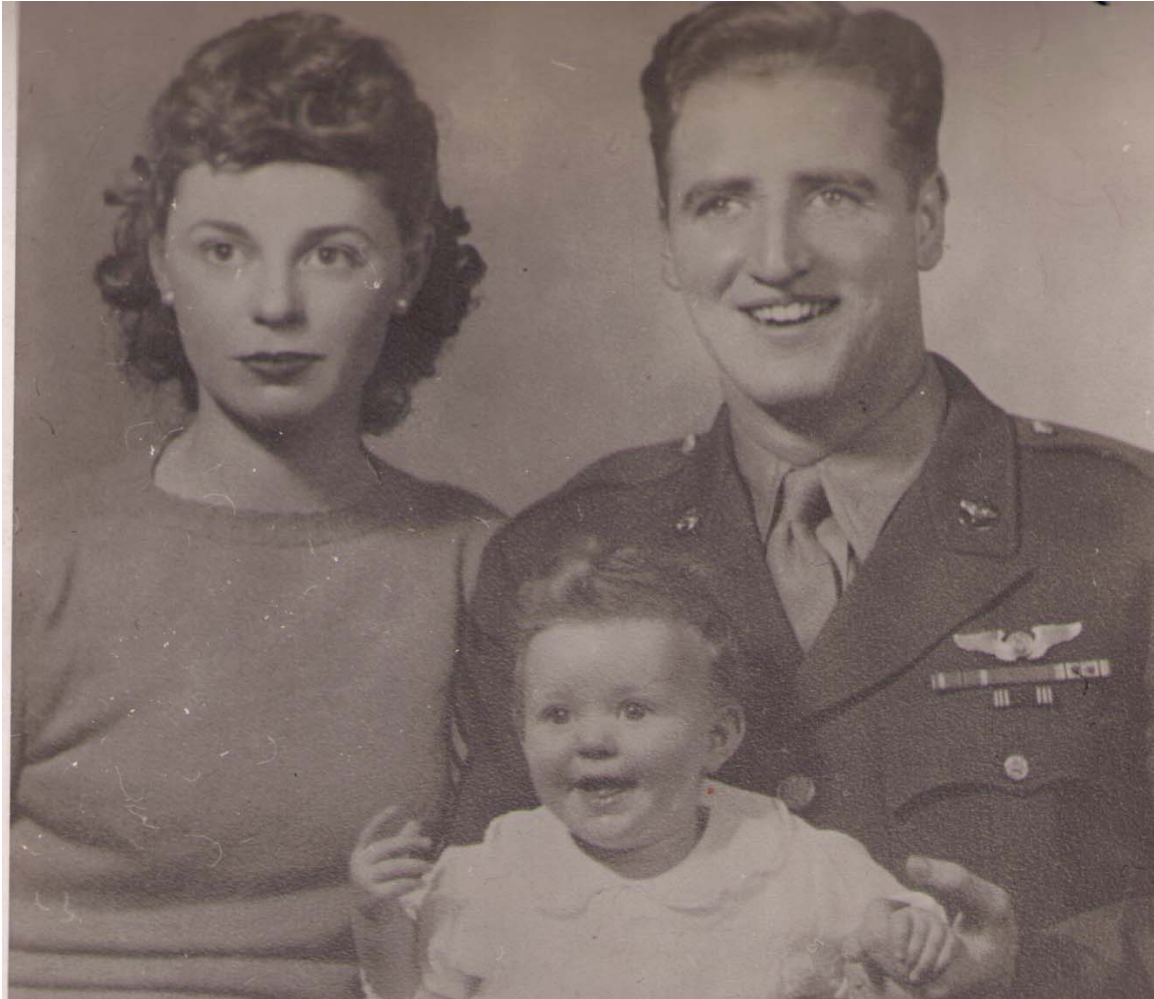
states. There were about 2000 soldiers on board and it took two weeks to get to San Francisco. Not able to take showers on ship so Kevin went to a doctor and fabricated a story of being sick – was put in infirmary where they at least were able to take salt water showers.

Many people there to greet them when they reached the states. Was there two or three days – took train to Philly – subway to Broad and Olney and then home. At 1422 Sparks Street he saw his daughter Kathie who was eight months old for the first time.

Was home for about twenty-one days and then sent to gunnery school to be an instructor. School was at Fort Meyers, southern Florida.

Kevin was also sent to Atlantic City to testing. Kevin tried for pilot but was color blind. While there he received the Air Medal – Distinguished Flying Cross and three battle stars at a ceremony attended by his family. Lorraine was there for two or three days. Stayed at the Ambassador where the enlisted soldiers stayed. Officers were at the Taft Hotel. Kathie was home with Nanny and PopPop.





Lorraine and Kevin went to see Glen Miller (big band leader) at Convention Hall – he was lost at sea shortly afterwards. Glen Miller lost over English Channel going to entertain troops in England.

After a few weeks training at Fort Meyers was sent to Charleston Army Air Base. Kathie and Lorraine joined him and at first shared a small two bedroom house in a large community built for soldiers. The other couple had a baby about the same age as Kathie and another boy about four years old. We had a coal stove – Kevin would go out in the middle of the night and borrow?? coal from close by. In the summer very hot – no fans – television – used to wash clothes and diapers on a little wash board. Little grocery store was about four blocks away. Had a coach and walked everywhere. Aunt Frieda came and stayed for a few days. Kevin showed her around town. While there got to come home on a short furlough and PopPop, Nannie, Elsie were so happy to see Kathie again. Had no phone there so many letters and pictures were sent. Kathie learned to walk there and celebrated her first birthday in Charleston. Later we got our own little house on Suffolk St. – the other was Dorchester Terrace – but all in the same big development.

Used to watch the convoy of ambulances with their big red crosses painted on the side bringing the wounded from over seas to the hospital in Charleston. While home on

furlough a mouse got into closet in Charleston and ate holes in many of Lorraine's dresses. After a year in S.C. the air base was closed. Lorraine came home pregnant. Kevin sent to Florence, S.C. where they had B26. No openings at that time for an instructor so was made an M.P. for a short time and then got to be an instructor again. Had to fly six hours a week to get flight pay. German prisoners were there. Kevin said they baked great pies. Was discharged soon after and came home to Sparks Street. Jimmie was born just before this at Germantown Hospital and Kevin got to see him there. The war was long, over five years, the whole country pulled together and there were many hardships and many wounded and killed. But for Kevin, Lorraine two wonderful children were born who were so good to their parents and enriched their lives with their constant caring, love and good deeds.

Other Information

Date of Arrival in Pacific: 21 Jun 1943
Date of Departure in Pacific: 1 Mar 1944

Decorations:

2 Bronze Stars
1 Service Stripe
1 Overseas Service Bar
Good Conduct Medal Sq 03 64th Bomb Sq 44
Air Medal GO 27 15AF 44
Distinguished Flying Cross GO 1 5AF 44

Crew:

Pilot – Capt. Ross
Copilot – Lt. Glenn Mast
Navigator – Lt. Gowdy
Bombardier – Lt. Tobiason
Radio Operator, Waist Gunner – Tech Sergeant Kevin McCracken
Gunner – Staff Sergeant Pappert
Gunner – Tech Sergeant McGregor
Gunner – Staff Sergeant Kurdilla
Gunner – Staff Sergeant Hayes
Gunner – Staff Sergeant Boston

The B-24 that Kevin named the Microbe-Hunter was renamed by the crew that was then assigned to her as Pride of the Cornhuskers – Crashed Sep 7, 1943 on takeoff.

Print the complete address in plain black letters in the panel below, and your return address in the space provided. Use typewriter, dark ink, or pencil. Write plainly. Very small writing is not suitable.

No. **586824**

From **1st Lt. K. McRacken**
(Sender's name)
A.P.O. 9296 Postmaster
SAN FRANCISCO Cal.
(Addressee's address)
July 21, 1943
(Date)

To **MRS. James McRacken**
852 E. Woodlawn Ave
Philadelphia Penna

PASSED BY
16357
ARMY EXAMINER
(CENSOR'S STAMP)

July 21, 1943

Dear Mom & Dad,
I'm terribly sorry about my delinquency in writing you, but honestly I don't have much time nor much to talk about. We are flying quite a bit and of course you know they are all in action here - no more practice. Sometimes we run into ack-ack, which is shrapnel and I will say it is very pretty but also looking at it again, very deadly. So far and always I hope we have been very lucky in escaping it and the Jap planes. I think I wrote and told you before that this place is not heaven, but there are no complaints from any of us here, because even as it is, it is a lot better than we expected. The food is good, of course it is mostly canned but it is delicious here. Especially after a long bombing mission. Oh yes, Dad, you would like it a lot, because after every mission they give us a big shot 4 finger of good whiskey (when they have it). I promise I will write more often after this so until next time take care of yourselves and Lorraine - Love Kevin

V-MAIL

July 21, 1943

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