

2 August 1986

Mr. Maurice Hartey
6629 Walker St
Philadelphia, PA 19135

Dear Mr. Hartey:

My correspondence has been somewhat is dásarray, but I do not believe that I have responded to your inquiry of last May concerning Robert J. McKeage. I am not sure that I can add much, but I'll give it a try, and tell you what little I know.

Robert J. McKeage, SSN# 13045970, was assigned to the 368th Bomb Squadron of the 306th Bomb Group, as a gunner on the crew of Capt. William S. Raper, joinin g the group during its combat training in Wendover, Utah, The group went overseas in early September 1942. He flew with Capt. Raper's crew on plane #41-24514. I am not aware that that plane had a name, but it lasted in combat until 8 March 1943, when it was shot down with another crew flying it. Also as a passenger on that plane on the flight to England was Major William A. Lanford, the squadron commander.

It is very likely that he flew the group's first mission to Lille, France, as Capt. Raper flew that mission. But I do not see his name on the roster for the second mission, a month later.

McKeage was received an Air Medal 3 March 43, incidcating he had completed five missions perhaps a month before that date. Then 6 April 43 he received an oak leaf cluster in lieu of sa second Air Medal, indicating another five missions had been completed.

On his last mission, 17 April 43, he was flying with Lt. Glenn Lally in an original plane with the group, 41-24467, which was named "Grim Reaper," which was the insignia for the 368th Squadron. On this date the group lost 10 out of 16 planes that got to the target at Bremen, the first of three times in which the group lost 10 planes during the war. It never lost more than 10. Two members of the crew died on this mission.

As I did not interview McKeage in the course of preparation to write the history of the group, "First Over Germany," I fear that I have little other information that I can pass along to you. Incidentally, copies of the book are available at \$20 each from me.

Perhaps you might be able to get some other information from Brig. Gen. William S. Rader, 1108 Key Dr., Alexandria, VA 22302, his first pilot, and/or Col. Glenn Lally, 400 Wonic Circle, Box 604, Enon, OH, 45323, the other pilot. (Rader changed the spelling of his name after the war.

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Perhaps your best bet for information is a fellow crewman on the last mission, Leo L. Gallegos. They were probably in prison camp together, that I don't know. But Leo lives at 11005 Haines Ave, NE, Albuquerque, NM 87112. I am sure that you will get a response from him. He is very active in POW affairs, and also has lots of information.

The best of luck to you in your continued pursuit of information.

Sincerely yours,

Russell A. Strong
Historian

Dear Mr. Strong

5-7-86

My name is Maurine Hartley and I am married to the daughter of Robert J. McKeage (Robert J. McKEAGE), who was a member of the 306th. Since his death your publication has become a source of information to the family about a part of his life that we did not know much about. The problem is that we do not have enough information on him to really be able to relate to certain stories and articles printed in your paper. I have tried to research these gaps myself but I could only come up with bits - pieces of his career. I was hoping that you could maybe fill in some of these gaps. The information I was able to come up with was that he was a Sgt. and a smart gunner, he received the Purple Heart, he was shot down over Europe in '42-43 and he was a P.O.W. in Italy '47. If you could supply any information it would be greatly appreciated, like the name of his plane, his air group etc. Again I would like to say that your publication reminds us of the sacrifice made by men like my father-in-law and yourself, keeps the process rolling.

Sincerely
Maurine Hartley

P.S. So there really is a Kalamazoo MI!