

Mac S Groesbeck

Compiled by Judy Hansen
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Mac Stephenson Groesbeck was born in Holden, Millard County, Utah on 19 June 1916 to Hyrum Jr and Lue Emma Stephenson Groesbeck. He had siblings Emma, Lue, Byron, and Leslie. His family only stayed in Holden for the first two months of Mac's life when they moved to Roosevelt, Utah for five years. After that they moved to Highland, Utah where Mac attended schools graduating from the American Fork High School. After graduation he attended Utah State Agriculture College for one year and studied diesel mechanics. Mac was a very faithful member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and served in many callings. His most favorite was serving as MIA (Mutual Improvement Association) dance director because he loved to dance. He also worked in the sales department at Timpanogos Motor Company.



Mac enlisted in the United States Army Air Corps on April 25, 1941 and was described as a 5'10" 166 pounds – blue eyes, blond hair, light complexion man. He was assigned to the 30th Bomber Squadron 19th Bomber Group.

From November 13, 1941 through Oct 31, 1942 Mac kept a diary that was returned to his brother in 1984 from a family member of one of Mac's crew living in Nevada. Transcriptions of his diary can be found in Family Search. We know from the diary that he left Salt Lake City on November 13, 1941 and arrived in San Francisco the morning of November 15, 1941. He left November 21st on the *USS Republic* and on November 28th sailed into Pearl Harbor where he went into Honolulu, a place he had always wanted to see. He notes that he left Pearl Harbor just one week before the Japanese started bombing it. Mac had left a girl at home named Mary that he mentioned frequently. He described her "*by far the grandest person I've even known*" and "*in my estimation is the grandest girl I've even known.*" He writes often to Mary and both Mary and his mother write often to him. He often talks of attending religious services and expressed his hope that Mary was home attending her religious services.

Mac's diary lists various missions that he flew on and the places he'd been to and left from. He was in Brisbane, Australia and rounded the tip of Camp York. He sailed to Soerabaja Habor (Java) and said that Perth has "*more pretty girls than the law allows.*" He transferred to Melborne by crossing the Great Australian Desert where "*Nothing grows more than six inches high*". He took off and landed from Port Moresby often. He was the first to land on Horn Island. He bombed ships near Kopang, Timor and spent his birthday, June 19, 1942 flying in a terrible storm almost colliding with another plane. He targeted Japanese planes in New Guinea

sinking transports below Lea. He got caught in a storm in Mareeba but also spent a week in Sydney to relax. He flew through 50 minutes “*of hell*” going to Rabaul where the ack-ack barrage was so thick he couldn’t believe they got through it. Mac talks of “*cheating death again*” and the hotels he stayed in during short leaves.

It was a week before he was to complete his service and return home to his mother and beloved Mary. On November 1, 1942, he volunteered for a pre-dawn mission to bomb the shipping installations of the Japanese near Faise Island in the Soloman Islands because the crew was short-handed. He was never assigned to this mission. No one ever knew for many years what happened. The Army reported to the family he was ‘lost at sea.’ His younger brother, Leslie was the one that got the envelope out of the mailbox and gave to his mother telling the family that Mac was missing in action. This devastated the family and they “*were never the same again.*”

For 56 years the B-17 “Flying Fortress” that he was in laid in the Papua New Guinea jungle until a villager was out hunting for betel nuts on February 24, 1999 in the tree-lined mountains near the town of Alotau near Milne Bay and found the wreckage. He ran back and gained the assistance of a Red Cross worker where they found “dog tags, a watch, a comb and other personal items” among the wreckage. Soon afterwards, military personnel visited the site and later sent the Army’s Central Identification Laboratory personnel from Hawaii to excavate the site. They started digging in May of 2001 and spent two months. They were able to uncover Groesbeck’s dog tags and a watch that had his initials engraved in it. Mac recorded the day he went downtown with Mike Zundel and Ross Lewis on December 31st, 1941 and had his initials engraved on that watch. This resulted in an article in USA Today Wed. May 23, 2001 titled “*Anthropologists fanning the word as more WWII sites are uncovered.*” Mitochondrial DNA preserved in the human bones were found at the site. However, the team making the identifications were pulled from the assignment to help identify victims of the 9-11 terrorist attack in 2001. It wasn’t until 2005, after family members of the crew volunteering their DNA, they were able to identify six of the crewmen lost including Mac S Groesbeck. Mac’s remains were returned to the family and were buried in the Richfield, Utah Cemetery. The unidentified remains of the other two were buried in the Arlington Cemetery.

Those that lost their lives that day November 1, 1942 on the “*Flying Fortress Serial Number 41-2635*” were:

Pilot 1st Lt John S. Hancock, O-417619 from Haileyville, OK
Co-Pilot Sgt Robert H. Burns, 6999729 from Belleville, IL
Navigator 1st Lt. James W. Carver, O-725946 from Eagle Pass, TX
Engineer Cpl Hiram D. Wilkinson, 16014049 from Grand Rapids, MI
Radio Sgt Edward R. Cipriani, 13012501 from Monessen, PA
Gunner Sgt Mac S. Groesbeck, 19011114 from American Fork, UT
Gunner Sgt Raymond A. Maxwell, 18037760 from Stephenville, TX
Gunner Cpl Curtis F. Longenberger, 6890994 from Berwick, PA

Sergeant Mac Stephensen Groesbeck earned the Air Medal, Distinguished Flying Cross, and Purple Heart. His name is memorialized at Fort William McKinley, Manila, the Philippines,

American Fork City Cemetery, and his remains were buried March 15, 2005 with military honors in the Richfield, Utah City Cemetery.

This story is a combined effort of the Lehi Historical Society and the Stories Behind the Stars project, a national effort of volunteers to write the stories of all 400,000+ of the US WW2 fallen on Fold3. Related to this, there will be a smart phone app that will allow people to visit any war memorial or cemetery, scan the fallen's name and read his/her story.

Sources:

<https://www.familysearch.org/tree/person/details/KWJ8-L8S>

U.S. WWII Draft Cards -

https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/2238/images/44041_09_00022-00483?treeid=&personid=&hintid=&queryId=6951c06097a4ca99f576a958f7b2fc52&usePUB=true&phsrc=htD265&phstart=successSource&usePUBJs=true&ga=2.45355618.755334255.1596338088-1004001888.1591474577&pId=10902394

WWII and Korean Conflict Veterans Interred Overseas <https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?indiv=1&dbid=4283&h=57059&tid=&pid=&queryId=c91bd3f5f11f8d7d39110103a885150f&usePUB=true&phsrc=htD287&phstart=successSource>

Pacific Wrecks - B-17E Flying Fortress Serial Number 41-2635 <https://pacificwrecks.com/aircraft/b-17/41-2635.html>

Salt Lake Tribune March 17, 2005

Deseret News March 17, 2005