



# PASS IN REVIEW

“Shedding Light On Idaho’s Military History”

3rd Quarter

September 2007

## ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING AND ELECTIONS

The Board has scheduled the **Annual Membership Meeting for 24 October at 6:30 pm.**

**The Election** - At this meeting, elections will be held for three members of the Board of Directors to serve a three-year term.

To date, three members of the Board will be seeking re-election. They are **Gayle Alvarez, Ken Swanson** and **Russ Trebby**. In addition, the nomination process will be open and nominations will be accepted at the meeting.

*If you are interested in helping the Museum grow and expand and taking an active roll in directly supporting the preservation of Idaho Military History for future generations, then we would like to hear from you.*



### Our Guest Speaker –

Following the election, we are pleased to announce that a member of the Idaho Air National Guard’s 124<sup>th</sup> Wing, will our guest speaker. General Johnson, the Wing Commander, will provide an overview of the 124<sup>th</sup> units and a member of the 190<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron will discuss a recent deployment to Iraq.

As we go to press, they have not released the name of the speaker but based on past experience, we know it will be an evening to remember. As soon as they provide us with the information we will post it on our webpage and will send an e-mail update to everybody.

Please mark your calendar and join us on **24 October at 6:30 pm** for what will

most definitely be a very **educational and enlightening evening.** ★

## CURATOR’S CORNER

First, I would like to thank our small group of docents for their continuing support of the Museum. Right now there is a real shortage of docents and those who are volunteering are doing extra shifts. In some cases, they are working two or three Saturdays per month.

These people deserve applause because they are the front line in our relations with the community and are working to ensure that the Museum is open and staffed properly. Many of the docents are retired but travel and volunteer for other organizations such as the Idaho State Veteran’s Home. Others work full time and still docent one Saturday a month. Personally *I am very grateful* for what they do for this Museum. Every minute they spend here is important.

I think there is a misconception about being a docent and I’d like to clear that up. In speaking with potential volunteers, many have expressed an interest in working with the public but have said “I don’t know enough about military history.”

**It doesn’t take a PhD in military history to be a docent.** What it takes is someone who enjoys learning about the topic and likes to work with people. I have found docenting to be a rewarding experience, especially when veterans start discussing their experiences in

regards to artifacts here in the Museum. If you’re interested in giving it a shot, give me a call or stop by the Museum. **Don’t be shy.**

Second, the new Idaho Air National Guard in the Global War on Terror exhibit case is complete and open for viewing. This exhibit case focuses on the role of transporters of the 124th Logistics Readiness Squadron of the Idaho Air National Guard and their contributions in Iraq on the dangerous convoy duties.

I would like to thank Joe Eastman and Yancy Mailes for their assistance in getting the exhibit done as well as TSgt Neil Ramey and CMSgt Beard for donating their uniforms and other personal items that have really made this case. Both Air Guardsmen participated in the first rotations and this story is a unique part of Idaho’s military history. Be sure to check in at the Museum as there will be more to follow about the Idaho Air Guard in the War on Terror, including artifacts, photographs and history.

In closing, I’d like to say look for more changes at the Museum this coming fall. A nice time to visit the Museum is our Third Annual Veteran’s Day Night Fire on 10 November. There will be lots of activity with blank firing demonstrations of historic weapons up to the current war as well as static displays. Also look for the Museum to have an entry in the Veteran’s Day parade that morning.

- Gary Keith

## Inside This Issue

Open Request	Endowment Update
Upcoming Events	Membership Reminder
Have You Had A Change Of Address?	Volunteer Of The Quarter
Recent Donations	New Items In Gift Shop
Book Review	
Idaho File Into History – Willard A “Bill” Heath	
Most Wanted	Just In Case

**AN OPEN REQUEST** To Members And All Persons Who Enjoy The Museum.

Soon it will be time to join or renew memberships for 2008. Starting now, all new memberships and renewals are good through December 2008.

As we settle into the fall months, it is a great time to check our schedules for that day or afternoon we could spend volunteering at the Museum. It is great fun to greet people as they enter the Museum and help them find and enjoy the high-quality military history exhibits which are of particular interest to them.

We try very hard to make the Museum available to all people including students. We do not charge admission so volunteers are required to keep the Museum, the library and the educational outreach programs active. Your volunteer time is very important to us. In order to be a part of the cadre of volunteers, call Gary Keith at (208) 272-4841. We look forward to seeing you at the Museum! - *Joe Icehower*

**ENDOWMENT UPDATE**



Our Endowment balance currently stands at **\$37,459.33** (Our goal is \$500,000)

Recent Endowment

Donors include:

**Frank & Genevieve Boguslawski**

(In memory of Larry Mereness)  
(In memory of Virginia McCutcheon)

**General James Brooks**

(In memory of Larry Mereness)  
(In memory of Jerre Kauffman)

**Stan Herzinger**

(In memory of Larry Mereness)

**Larry Kauffman**

(In memory of Jerre Kauffman)

The plan is to create a financial base which will ensure the preservation of Idaho's military heritage for future generations.

*Thank you for supporting The Idaho Military History Museum. ☆*

**UPCOMING EVENTS**

Here are some of the events we currently have scheduled; more details will be posted on the webpage as invitations are confirmed and more information becomes available.

 **24 October** - Annual Membership Meeting. See page 1 for all the details.

 **8 November** - Channel 7's **Larry Gebert** will be doing his morning show **LIVE** at the Museum. Be sure to tune in!

 **10 November** - This is actually a double event day! The IMHS has been invited to participate in the annual **Veterans Day Parade** and then that evening we will be having a **Veterans Day Open House**. The Museum will once again and **by popular demand** hold a Night Fire on Saturday, November 10<sup>th</sup>. The Museum will be open as normal from 12:00 noon until 4:00 pm. The gates will reopen to the public at 6:30 pm with the event starting at 7:30 pm. The Event will run until all activities are concluded.

General Admission: \$3.00  
Students w/School ID: \$1.00  
Children under 6: Free  
Veterans in Uniform: Free

Be sure and monitor our webpage for more information as it becomes available.

*Please join us as we celebrate and honor Veterans! ☆*

**MEMBERSHIP REMINDER**

As a reminder, your IMHS membership is due for renewal in **January**. That time is quickly approaching!

Annual renewals are:  
**General Membership:** \$25  
**Senior (60+):** \$15  
**Associate (Spouse):** \$10  
**Student:** \$10

If you'd like to become a Lifetime Member and forgo the annual reminder, a **Lifetime Membership is \$375**. Payment may be spread out over a one-year period.

*Help us help you preserve Idaho's Proud Military History! ☆*

**HAVE YOU HAD A CHANGE OF ADDRESS?**

Based on the number of 'bounced' e-mails of late, several of you have changed Internet Service Providers.

Please don't forget to add us to your list when you tell your friends and family your new address. It helps us get late breaking news to you as well as announcements that were not received in time to be published in the newsletter.

If you haven't done so already, please send Gayle a short e-mail at [gayle.alvarez@idbois.ang.af.mil](mailto:gayle.alvarez@idbois.ang.af.mil) or [galvarez@imd.idaho.gov](mailto:galvarez@imd.idaho.gov) with your e-mail address so we can quickly reach you on short notice.

Many of you have also requested your newsletter be delivered electronically instead of through the mail. Without your current e-mail address, we can't get it to you!

For our new members who were not aware of this, the newsletters can be sent to you in Adobe Acrobat or .pdf format. This greatly reduces the size of the document. You do need the Adobe Acrobat Reader but most computers of today come with it already installed. If you don't have the reader, you can download it at: <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html>. If you would like to sign up for the electronic newsletter, please contact Gayle.

All e-mail addresses and other membership information is kept confidential, we **do not provide or sell it to other organizations or individuals.** ☆

**VOLUNTEER OF THE QUARTER**

Please join me in recognizing and thanking our Volunteer of the Quarter, **Ted Brownfield**. In keeping with the theme of our Museum, Ted served in an Idaho based unit a few years back- the 321st Engineer Battalion. After a few years with the 321st, Ted took an active duty tour in Japan. He talks often of his boating trips and borrowing the CO's jeep so it must have been good duty.

Ted is one of our newest volunteers, having started in March of this year and brought his interest and skills in carpentry to the Museum. In a short amount of time, Ted has accomplished a tremendous amount of work. His major contribution has been the construction of our video kiosks, of which three will be built.

Ted completed the first one in time for the unveiling of the Medal of Honor exhibit and it houses a DVD player, monitor and speakers securely.



**The New Medal of Honor Kiosk Ted built**

Each of the kiosks is being custom built by Ted in the Museum

workshop and with some help from Ted at his home workshop. In addition to these, he has been busy modifying some of our exhibits with casters so they can be moved more easily. His latest creation is new "frame" cases which will house our Korea, Vietnam, Desert Shield/Storm and Global War on Terror patch collections.

Ted's work is a combination of his excellent skills and his eagerness to help out. I look forward to Wednesdays as he is a great volunteer to work with and gets a lot done in one day. Words here are not enough to thank Ted for all he has done and is continuing to do.

**Ted, we deeply appreciate all of your hard work. You are our Volunteer of the Quarter!** ☆

**RECENT DONATIONS**

**Col Larry Kauffman** - USAF uniforms including Blues, shoes and DCU's from his time as commander of the 407th AEG in Iraq.

**CMSgt James Beard** - DCU uniform and helmet cover worn in Iraq during first truck convoy rotation.

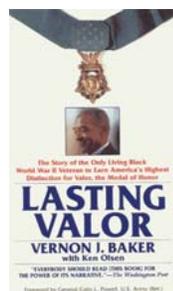
**Vahan Sipantzi, Col, USA (Ret)** - A complete set of US Army Special Forces Beret Flashes and shoulder patches.

**Kirk Hall** - papers and artifacts from his father who was in the Idaho Army National Guard prior to WWII.

**Maj Ron Storer, USMC** - USMC uniform worn by him in Desert Storm along with Iraq uniforms and field gear.

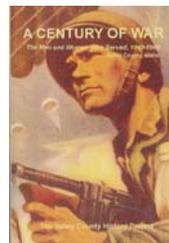
**Bob Swisher**- artifacts and photos from his father, a WWII 148th Field Artillery veteran. ☆

**NEW ITEMS IN THE GIFT SHOP**



**Lasting Valor: The Story of the Only Living Black WWII Veteran to Earn America's Highest Distinction for Valor, the Medal of Honor**

Written by Lieutenant Vernon J. Baker, with Ken Olsen, it goes into great detail about his life, the discrimination he faced, and the actions he took in Italy during WWII which ultimately resulted in his being awarded the **Medal of Honor**. His story in his own words **AND Lieutenant Baker has personally autographed each copy!**



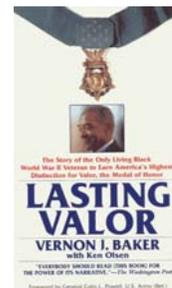
**A Century of War: The Men and Women Who Served, 1860-1960, Valley County, Idaho**

Written and produced by the Valley County (Idaho) History Project, this book profiles Idahoans who have served their

country from Valley County from 1860-1960. Includes many photos. ☆

**BOOK REVIEW**

*by Ian Spurgeon*



**Lasting Valor: The Story of the Only Living Black World War II Veteran to Earn America's Highest Distinction for Valor, the Medal of Honor**

In his book *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*, Lieutenant Colonel Dave Grossman argues that the burden of taking another human life places the highest amount of stress on a soldier, and leads to the greatest emotional and psychological pain from combat. For Grossman, this helps explain why many veterans are hesitant to discuss or think about enemy soldiers they killed, even while openly talking about the other horrors of war.

World War II veteran Vernon J. Baker, however, does not quite fit Grossman's model. Like many combat veterans, Baker carries deep and painful memories of his experiences under fire. Yet, it is not the German soldiers he killed in the mountains of northern Italy in late 1944 and early 1945 that weigh so heavily upon his mind. His greatest burden is the image of brave black soldiers who died fighting alongside him. Indeed, his very first words in his autobiography *Lasting Valor* read, "I am haunted by the memory of nineteen men; men I left on a ridge in northern Italy five decades ago."

Baker, of course, is not alone among veterans who are haunted by the memory of dead comrades. But his story does include an element many American GIs during World War II never faced—opposition from his own side. Vernon Baker was a black officer in a black unit, fighting not only against Germans, but against prejudice and racism in the US Army. This experience adds to his mourning of fallen comrades. They were not only casualties of German bullets and mortars, but victims of their own white commanders' doubt and disdain. On

April 5, 1945, near the base of Castle Aghinolfi in northern Italy, 2nd Lt. Baker found himself battling behind German lines with just over two dozen men.

He had personally taken out at least two enemy bunkers and killed a German who heaved a grenade at his feet. The grenade failed to explode; Baker's aim was true. In the midst of this chaos, his white company commander abandoned the men, supposedly to get reinforcements. In reality, the officer retreated to friendly lines and reported the entire unit wiped out.

Baker and the other black infantry soldiers did not have the benefit of retreating so quickly. The white officer "wasn't a Buffalo Soldier, a man who lived under the accusation of always running," he writes. "We were Buffalo soldiers; we had to fight to the last man to retain any shred of dignity."

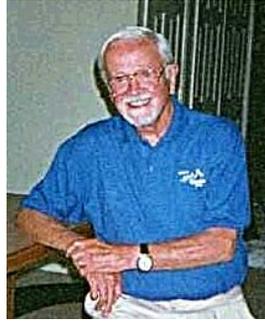
Countless black soldiers fought and died for their country and respect. The army was slow to give them that respect and recognize them as equal to whites. In fact, it took the United States government over fifty years to award a black soldier the Medal of Honor. When it did, seven distinguished soldiers received the honor. Of those men, all but Vernon Baker had already passed away.

*Lasting Valor* is not just about Baker's combat experience, or his struggle against racism in the army. It is a story about an ordinary man, who faced the types of hardships regular Americans have always encountered: the tragic death of family, financial problems, mistakes in love and marriage, and the quest to find peace and happiness.

His early life offers a priceless glimpse at life in the West (Wyoming to be specific) during the Depression. His later career in the army, which took him into the much more rigid racial system of the south, offers a fascinating but depressing look at American society in the early twentieth century. Although his military experiences in Italy comprise a good portion of the book, even the section

(Continued on page 7)

## IDAHO FILE INTO HISTORY



**WILLARD A. "BILL" HEATH  
WWII VETERAN, MEMBER OF IDAHO'S  
148<sup>TH</sup> FIELD ARTILLERY**

During WWII, I kept a small notebook. When I retired in 1980 and returned to Boise, the first thing I did was to buy a computer. Earlier, I had dusted off the notebook, and started reading. After so long a time, it didn't make much sense, and the spelling was atrocious. I decided to type it out. I sat down at the keyboard, and started typing. As I did so, memories returned.

After many months, I had close to a full-length manuscript. What to do with it? I sent a draft copy to my kids and grandkids. No response. Finally, one of my grandchildren, Justin, expressed an interest, and asked if I would come to Illinois, and speak to his class. At that point, I changed the name of the manuscript from something generic to "*Letter to Justin*," and sent the original to him. Later, I did go to Illinois, where our family lived while I was working. It was fun talking to what turned out to be two elementary-school classes. I felt honored, and did my best to answer their many questions. What follows is a condensed version of "*Letter to Justin*."

I was born February 15, 1919 and raised in Portland, OR. After graduating from high school in 1938, I moved to Boise and went to work for the Bunting Tractor Co. in Boise for roughly 18 months. When I figured I had enough money to go to college, I quit my job and went to Eugene in the fall of 1939 and registered. I attended the University of Oregon for two full years, returning to Boise in for the summer of 1940, again working for the Bunting Tractor Co.

I was just finishing my second year of college, when I received my "welcome" letter from Uncle Sam. I was told to report to the Army Reception Center in Portland on June 25, 1941. There on that date, I was inducted into the Army of the United States, and was sent to Camp Roberts, CA, for basic training in the Field Artillery. I spent the summer of 1941 at Camp Roberts for basic training as a clerk.



**Camp Roberts  
Calif, 1941, the  
original "Sad  
Sack"**

After graduating, I was sent to Fort Lewis, WA, to join the 148th Field Artillery. There I reported to regimental headquarters, and was assigned to Battery B. I had considered it a stroke of luck to be joining an Idaho National Guard regiment, for I was surprised to learn both my CO and 1st Sgt. were from Boise. I felt right at home!

I was with the 148th Field Artillery up until January 1942. It was on Jan. 6, 1942, that six officers, (mostly Infantry) and six enlisted men (all Field Artillery) from the troopship, *Willard A. Holbrook*, were transferred to HQ Far East Air Force (FEAF). Our orders directed us to proceed to Java, an island in the Netherlands East Indies (N.E.I.) by first available military air transportation. I was one of the enlisted men, age 22, a Battery Clerk with the rank of Corporal.

We were met dockside by 1st Lt. Edgar W. Hampton, an Air Corps pilot, who took us to the Royal Australian Air Force Aerodrome outside Darwin, Australia. On Jan. 14, we packed our few belongings, boarded a C-47, and took off, going northwest. After several hours of flying, we landed at Kupang, on the island of Timor. After refueling, and with Lt. Hampton at the controls, we took off again, going west. In late afternoon, we landed at Surabaya, Java (now part of Indonesia). At dusk, we reached our destination, Batavia (now Djakarta), the capital of Java.



**Corporal Heath,  
February 1942**

The next day, our small group reported for duty at HQ FEAF. It had

left the Philippines to avoid capture by invading Japanese forces. The HQ was temporarily located in the American Consul's office in Batavia. FEAF at the time consisted of assorted airplanes, mostly B-17s, P-40s and C-47s, their flight crews, senior officers, and very little else. The dozen officers and men were to replace HQ staff left behind in the Philippines. We purchased what supplies we could locally and tried to get things organized, knowing everything here was temporary.

As for Java, we knew only that it was one of about 3,000 islands in a long chain of islands between southeastern Asia and Australia. The Dutch had governed much of the area for more than 300 years. It covers 51,000 square miles, some of which are volcanic cones. The lower slopes are wide, fertile plains. Population at the time was 60 million hard-working people, with 1,000 inhabitants per square mile.

The city, country and its businesses appeared well managed. Everything was clean and well maintained. Restaurants and hotels were first class and quite comfortable despite the tropical heat, and lack of air conditioning. Being close to the equator, Java was hot and humid 24 hours a day, but rich vegetation, shady palms and trees of all kinds, gave relief. Scented flowers were everywhere, and cold "Java Bier" made life not only bearable, but quite pleasant.

There were no quarters for either officers or enlisted men, so we were allowed per diem for living expenses. We took hotel rooms and had our meals at restaurants. From a menu I saved, dinner one Fri. at the Daendels Hotel consisted of Princess

Soup, Shell a la Montglas, Fried Sole Grenobleise with steamed potatoes. Dessert was Caramel Cream Pudding, fruit and coffee.

A short time later, HQ FEAF moved by car and truck to Lembang up in the hills, outside the city of Bandoeng. The weather was slightly cooler but still humid. Lembang was the name of a large resort-type hotel where the Allied Forces chiefs were gathering to establish a combined headquarters; Admirals and generals were all over the place. British, Scots, Australian, Dutch and Americans, all wore colorful uniforms. U.S. Admiral King was in his Navy blues with gold braid and colorful service ribbons. There was an American Marine sergeant in full dress uniform, and a Scot officer in kilts. Gen. Lewis H. Brereton was our (FEAF) commander.

Unfortunately, the Allies had too little military hardware, sea and air power with which to fight a war. The well-equipped Japanese were even then coming within range with their aircraft, ships and fighting forces. We were at Lembang just long enough to observe the peaceful countryside with its rolling green hills, most of which were meticulously terraced for rice paddies. Narrow, winding roads made driving slow and tedious.

The people of Indonesia are mostly Malaysian, with light brown skin, straight black hair, and short slender bodies. Most are Muslims. We found them to be clean, well-groomed, attractive, and friendly. They live simply. Most are farmers, either full or part time. Everyone in the family helps with the rice and other produce. Chief products are cacao, cassava, coffee, kapok, rice, rubber, sisal, soybeans, spices, sugar, tea and tobacco. The per-person income averaged only \$50 to \$70 a year, at the time.

My job was that of chief clerk in charge of message and mail traffic, producing special orders and commendations, plus typing, filing, and whatever needed doing. I also became typist for Lt. Crane, a doctor on special assignment from Washington, DC. He was doing a

study on tropical diseases. Java, with its average temperature near 80 degrees and 60 inches of rain a year, was a culture dish for diseases. I also prepared the Morning Report, the purpose for which was to keep track of our field units, personnel changes, etc.

On Feb. 5, we had our first air raid alarm at noon. Outdated Brewster Buffalo fighters, flown by Dutch pilots, took off from the Bandoeng airport headed for Batavia. The following day, HQ FEAF moved to a Dutch military academy closer to Bandoeng. Again at noon, the air raid alarm sounded. The local help, called djongos (servant boy) filled the few slit trenches.

Alarms now sounded daily, always about noon. On Feb. 11, we saw a bunch of airplanes fly over, but no bombs dropped. That evening it was drinks at the Indies, and dinner at the Penguin. What a way to fight a war! It's crazy. What am I going to tell my grandchildren? At the academy, British and Australian troops were arriving daily, mostly evacuees from Singapore. The enemy was only 600 miles away, and coming in our direction.

On Feb. 15, there was an air raid at 1300. Three B-17s flew in shortly before, but as the last plane settled on the field, four enemy Zeros flew directly over us, following the B-17s. All three of the bombers were destroyed on the ground, but their crews escaped harm and later moved in with us at the academy.

We worked until 2100 on General Order No. 2, consisting of numerous, well-deserved citations and awards for bravery in action against the enemy. More British troops arrived from Sumatra, the next island up the chain from Java. On Feb. 18, the Japanese invaded Bali. At Bandoeng, another alarm. This time we ducked for cover, as nine Japanese bombers with 35 fighters came into view. We could hear the rattle of machine guns. Bombs fell on the airfield. Allied fighters – hopelessly outnumbered – managed to break up the attack.

On Feb. 19, we learned that Australia's Darwin Harbour had been bombed and strafed, catching 45 ships in the harbor, and coming close to wiping Darwin off the map. The Japanese strike force was the same one that had bombed Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941. We were told to be ready to move out on a moment's notice. No great surprise. I was named 1st Sergeant for Hq & Hq Squadron.

On Feb. 25, The Australian-British-Dutch-Australian command was dissolved, and its Supreme Commander, Sir Archibald Wavell, flew to India. Gen. Brereton relinquished his command of FEAF. He and his general staff followed Sir Archibald to India, in what few B-17s remained. Round #1 would have to go to the Japanese, whose air, sea and ground forces up to this point had been an almost perfect offensive weapon.

Their fighting men and officers were trained in offensive warfare, and the whole thrust of their efforts was to advance or die trying. The individual warrior had been taught from the beginning that death led to a beautiful after life. He was ready to die. That, plus the fact that the allies were ill-prepared for such an onslaught, resulted in speedy Japanese advances.

At 0430, Feb. 26, the remaining staff of HQ FEAF formed a motor convoy consisting of 17 cars, one bus, and two trucks, struck out for the southern port of Tjilatjap (pronounced chill-a-chap), 160 miles away. We would pass through such exotic-sounding places as Oedjoengbroeng, Tjitjalengka, Tasikmalaja, Bandja, Madjenang, and Wangon. All smelled of dead fish! A volunteer member of the N.E.I. armed forces, a sergeant, was our guide and interpreter. We arrived at Tjilatjap at about 1600. There, we joined a growing group of Americans from units on the island, all hoping to escape the advancing Japanese. We bid a grateful goodbye to our Dutch guide, who declined to leave with us, saying Java was his home, and it was his duty to defend it.

That evening, we boarded a decrepit-looking – but very serviceable – Dutch

freighter, named the ABBEKERK. Its few cabins went to badly injured Navy personnel, some officers, and a few civilians. There were no other living quarters or facilities for human beings. We were human cargo. But this was our only hope for freedom, so we were very glad to be there. Ultimately 1500 men would crowd the decks and holds.

In preparation, we organized committees. The mess committee consisted of senior mess sergeants. Food supplies went to the forward deck where the sergeants and their KP helpers set up field kitchens. Cartons of corned beef were stacked here, the beans over there, and so on, far into the night. Another committee was busy filling every container it could beg, borrow or steal, with drinking water. Another committee was busy building latrines and showers.

A sloping wood platform extended over the side. A 2x4 frame went over that, with more 2x4s serving as toilet seats. A similar structure was constructed for showers. Running water? It was pumped from the sea and dispersed through hoses running across the platform. It wasn't pretty, but it worked for what turned out to be an eight-day journey to Australia.

Feb. 27, 1942 – we were supposed to depart last night, but hadn't finished loading supplies and equipment, including a number of machine guns. An Air Corps group had salvaged the guns and brought them along. Conditions bad; morale extremely good all things considered. We left the dock about 1700, and steamed slowly out of the river. Several other ships followed.

The plan was that we were to rendezvous with other ships and form a convoy. We didn't know it at the time, but this was the date of the Battle of the Java Sea north of Java. It was a battle that all but wiped out what remained of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet, and the allied fleets. Fortunately, our skipper, Captain Wijker, had other ideas. Soon we were in the Indian Ocean, headed for Australia, alone and at full speed. We would learn later that of the 24 ships leaving Tjilatjap

that evening, 13 escaped, and 11 were sunk or captured by the enemy.

The following day about 1000, the lookout spotted a plane – two engines, probably a medium bomber. It disappeared on a straight line into a cloud bank. Another smaller plane was spotted at 1530, and it had seen us! It circled and followed us for approximately 45 minutes. The ABBEKERK's only armament was a four-inch gun on her stern. It could be used against aircraft, but not effectively. However, yet another committee had mounted the 30 and 50-caliber machine guns on the ship's railings, and they were manned and ready.

When the attacking aircraft came within range, first the four-incher fired. As the plane came closer, the 50s opened up. Then the 30s cut loose. A hail of tracer bullets reached out to our tormentor. At the same time, the ABBEKERK still at full speed made every possible evasive move. We finally got a good look at the plane as it veered off.

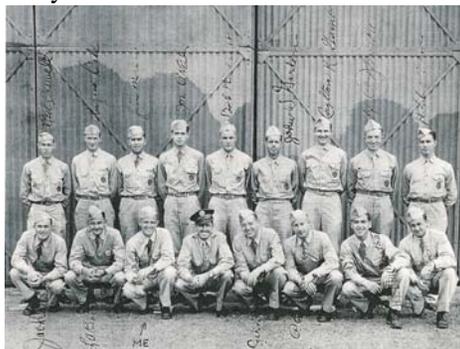
It was a Mitsubishi Zero, either out of ammunition or intentionally light-loaded for reconnaissance duty. A couple of the guys swore they saw two small bombs drop in to the ocean. My guess is that the pilot realized he'd run into a hornet's nest, and decided to get the hell out of there. What the guys thought were bombs were probably extra wing tanks for long-range surveillance.

On March 4, at 0750, the good ship ABBEKERK arrived at Fremantle on the coast of Western Australia. The injured Navy personnel were helped onto trucks and taken to a hospital in Perth. Morale was still high, and the officers toted their own luggage. The train left Fremantle 2120 and arrived at Northam 0135 the next morning. After a good night's sleep and a good meal, everybody was in much better humor.

The Australian army had a very nice canteen and recreation room. Nearly all of our men rushed to the canteen and purchased, not beer, but milk – the first since we left Brisbane in Dec. 1941. Of our ragtag group, half were reassigned

and ordered out, but no one had yet said where we were going or how. Eventually, we boarded a troop train to cross Australia to Melbourne on the east coast, several thousand miles away. There we were reassigned to other Army units in the Southwest Pacific Theater. It was an arduous three-day journey, changing trains upon entering each new state as each state had its own unique rail gauge.

March 16, we arrived Melbourne, Victoria, 1500. I was assigned to Headquarters U.S. Forces in Australia (USAFIA), and given a job in S-1 Personnel. Again I was getting in on the ground floor, for it too was just setting up shop. Two days later, Gen. MacArthur arrived from the Philippines. He immediately assumed command of all military forces in Australia. For my part, I had assumed command of the Publications Section of HQ USAFIA. Nine months later, I would attend the first OCS class in Australia. Ninety days later, I became a 2nd Lieutenant in US Army.



**Air Corps contingent of Officers Candidate School #1, Camp Columbia, Queensland, Australia – April 1, 1943**

I was assigned to the 43rd Bomb Gp (H), and joined the unit in New Guinea. In 1944, I was rotated to the U.S., and served the rest of my five-year Army career at HQ First Air Force, Mitchel Field, Long Island, N.Y.

After five years in the Army, I went on active reserve, and was employed by United Air Lines in New York City, later moving to Chicago. I retired from UAL in 1980 after 34 years and moved my family to Boise.



**Lieutenant Heath New Guinea, 1943**

After putting an ad in the Boise paper, I finally found the 148th Field Artillery veterans group in 1989, and asked for a copy of the unit's history. Bill Turner, chairman for that year's reunion, told me it had never been written. But, he said, "Here's a list of survivors with their addresses. Why don't you do it?"

I wrote and talked to numerous surviving members, and the results of those efforts are *The 148th Field Artillery Story, World War II Unit History 1940 – 1946*, which is now in its 2nd edition and available in the gift shop of the Idaho Military History Museum, at Gowen Field, Boise, Idaho.

The 148th Field Artillery holds a reunion each year and ALL 148th Field Artillery Veterans are welcome to attend.



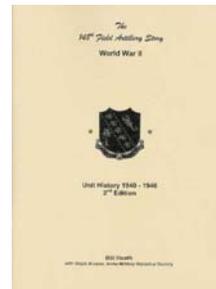
**Photo taken at the September 2006, 148th Field Artillery Reunion in Bend, Oregon.**

**Seated (1st row) left to right: Bill Heath, Andy Anderson, Harold Jacobs, Charles Stack, Takeshi Hanami.**

**Standing (2nd row) left to right: Sylvester Wirtz, Ernie Lathrop, Charles Lake, WWII Medal of Honor Recipient and guest of honor Bob Maxwell, Clyde Hanson**

*Editors Note: A very special thank you to Bill Heath for sharing his story with us. To learn more about Bill Heath and*

the 148th Field Artillery's actions during WWII, stop by the Museum gift shop and pick up



*The 148th Field Artillery Story, World War II Unit History 1940 – 1946*

**Book Review**  
- Continued from page 4

describing his amazing actions during the assault on Castle Aghinolfi is matter-of-fact and void of romantic, Hollywood-style imagery. His discussion of combat is a tragedy, replete with loss, fear, and frustration. He gives us the reality of war.

Baker expected no award for his actions. Respect from white commanders, he explains, meant more. Too often, it was not shown. He did receive the Distinguished Service Cross, despite attempts by some senior officers to block it. Even well after the war, a white colonel brazenly tried to intimidate the battle-hardened Baker to remove the ribbon from his uniform because of his race. Baker stood his ground. He is known for his action at Castle Aghinolfi, but his small, personal battles for equality throughout his life show the depth of his bravery.

Vernon Baker is not a crusader. His actions on the field, as well as, his actions in the rest of his life, were that of a man simply wanting stability, happiness, and respect. While we celebrate his heroism in Italy and throughout his life, his book constantly shows us his imperfections and how he never felt anything above the ordinary. He repeatedly reminds us that he tells his story for the sake of his comrades. This lesson should be taken to heart, for he is a regular guy.

It is because he is imperfect that he is so important; for true American heroes are real people. They show us what we, other imperfect people, can do. Baker is

a regular guy who was willing and able to demand that he be treated as such and nothing less. Considering the obstacles he faced, this was no small feat.

Idaho has the great honor of being home to Vernon Baker, and his remarkable book is available at the Idaho Military History Museum gift shop for \$10. Mr. Baker was kind enough to sign each copy, adding a *priceless, personal touch*.

To truly understand and appreciate Vernon Baker's Medal of Honor actions in Italy in 1945 and why he is such a hero, one should not simply read the citation. The bigger story is what Baker and his men accomplished together, on the field and off.

*Book Review by Ian Spurgeon*



**MOST WANTED**

➤ **YOU!** If you have just a couple of hours a day or week that you can share with us, we would

greatly appreciate it.

➤ **Docents!** Many of our volunteers have re-entered the workforce.

➤ **New Members!** You enjoy the Museum and helping preserve Idaho's Military History. Tell your friends, but they'll enjoy the Museum too!

➤ **Your ideas!** Do you have a good idea for a Museum fundraiser? Bring it to the attention of a member of the Board.

*Produced By:* Idaho Military Historical Society  
*Feature Stories, Editor & Production:* Gayle Alvarez  
Comments or article suggestions are welcome, contact us at 272-4841 or visit our web site at: <http://inghro.state.id.us/museum/>

**JUST IN CASE** - Have you sent in your renewal for 2007? Perhaps you know somebody who is interested in the joining the Society. The enclosed membership application may be used or copied as needed. Don't forget, *donations are tax deductible*.

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*Heroic Past...Proud Future*