**From the 73BG/500BW/801BS**

Aircraft SN: 42-24849 A/C MAJ Bob Fitzgeraldand P 2LT Bob Copeland

Mar 16/17 1945 Kobe firebomb raid.

This letter was written by Mr. Bill Spokane's Uncle Bob Copeland to his Mother, Norma, in March of 1945.

"Dear Mom, The thing about combat that is beginning to impress me most is the appreciation I now have for the finer things of life. The love one has for their friends, the love and need for a woman and the things one wants to do for that dream girl when this thing is all over. A woman somewhere seems to be the the driving force behind all men in combat. You're so scared that even at 400 miles an hour doesn't seem fast enough. The bomb run is only four or five minutes long, but it seems like hours. The bomb bay doors are only open for one or two minutes, but that seems like an eternity because that's when we're most vulnerable. Each burst of flak jeers at you and says "I'll get you yet" and any second you expect a burst to do just that. All of a sudden the flak quits and as you start to breathe a sigh of relief, someone says " fighters at 10 o'clock, coming in. You begin to relax now because here's something to do, something you can shoot back at. They're coming in all over, 9,3, 10, 12 and 2 O'clock, the tail gunner is even calling out some from the rear. Some of these Japs are really sharp today! During all this the bombs have gone away, the doors are closed and we're high tailing it for home and a nice juicy steak, maybe. You aren't even thinking of that though because that damned upper turret is playing a raucous death song for the devil that just went between us and our wing-man. Here comes another one in at 12 O'clock level, the Jap puts his [TONY](http://www.angelfire.com/fm/compass/K61.htm) up on it's side and he keeps getting bigger and bigger, his four guns are winking at us, you think he is going to ram us? Somehow, he doesn't and we continue to beat our way out of what seems like an abyss. Maybe, It's more like a wild horrible nightmare from which it is impossible to awaken, but> nevertheless, we do make it once more. We are smiling, shaking hands with each other and recounting the events of the past few minutes as though they were just part of a dream. As we approached the target in the center of Tokyo the searchlights suddenly come on and light up the whole sky. For a while they weaved around like the tentacles of an octopus, but suddenly one of them flashed by then came around again and on the third try hit us squarely and stayed on us. The rest attracted like flies to a piece of candy swung on us and they all followed us through the bomb run. It was impossible to see out in any direction except up. And there the stars were shining their encouragement and I offered a prayer to God at that very moment. It must have been answered because flak was exploding so close that it was rocking the ship and we could hear it, but only one hole was in the ship. The Bombardier says "Bombs away" and we begin as violent evasive action as possible. During this, one fighter has made his pass and missed. Soon the flak ceases and the lights go off in ones and twos and again we are alone with only God and the stars for company. I looked out the same upper window and offered a prayer of thanks for our deliverance from that which would have liked to have crushed us. We've survived six missions now and they seem to be getting easier, at least mentally. The raid over Akashi was easy. I'll never forget how beautiful the trip could have been had we not been under the strain of battle. In the clear, cold rarefied air at 28,000 feet and in the brilliant sunlight things take on a different aspect. You're so much closer to God up there and it's easy to call on him for his help and that's what I did. He must have answered my prayers. Japan rose out of the sea as a dark brown blotch but soon evolved into familiar shapes and a beauty which I hadn't noticed before. Nagoya Bay was on our right and it's color of azure blue, and the contrasting pine colored mountains on it's west shore was a scene of immense tranquility. Those pine covered mountains brought back memories of a country which will always be dear to me. (Northern Idaho and Eastern Washington). Off in the distance was Mount Fujiyama and it's snow covered cone protruding over the Cumulus, was a sight of rare beauty. Beauty soon took a back seat and war with all it's threats gripped us. The door to the BLACK CORRIDOR had again been shut and we were again traversing it's floor and wondering if we would see the other end. Over Osaka the flak started coming up and soon fighters were reported. It turned out to be one of our easiest trips over the target.. When we left the coast at the DOOR again seemed to open wide and again the sun was shining. Again I offered my thanks to the Lord who had brought us safely through these six missions.

I'm not afraid to fly in combat but on each mission I become more and more aware of the insipid foolishness of war. I don't want to kill anyone. I want to be free to live my life in peace, doing the things I like to do most. My whole life is flying, everything I have ever done has been pointed toward that thing alone and without it I think I would be as empty as seashell found on the beach. It hurts very deeply to have that which is paramount to me connected with fear, pain and even death. I Had visions of a small amount of success in burning out Tokyo, but, couldn't under any circumstance have imagined the amount of damage we did achieve. Dante's Inferno would have taken on proportions comparable to a bonfire. As we approached the coat line we began to see a faint glow in the direction of the city and a good many small fires out on Chosi Point, started by ships unable to reach Tokyo. As we turned in towards our target it vanished behind an enormous cloud of smoke. Searchlights were weaving around but they didn't pick us up and we soon entered the smoke which spread for many miles East of Tokyo. We could smell burning wood and the heat waves rocked us as though we were in a storm. We broke out and found ourselves flying in a corridor formed by two pillars of smoke, the end of which could have been the "Gates Of Hell," because there at our feet lay Tokyo, by now a sea of flames. It was a horribly wonderful sight and one I'll never forget. Fires were everywhere and the destruction wrought this night could have been nothing less than catastrophe."

This was the end of the letter. Not the end for his family.

It was not finished so he hadn't mailed it. It was found in his belongings when they were sent home. His aircraft was rammed by an enemy fighter on their next mission and all were lost. The letter was published in the Lewiston ,Idaho newspaper shortly after the war. Bob Copeland and all his veteran compatriots will never be forgotten.