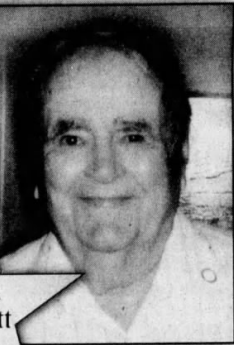




Brazos Valley HEROES

One in a series of tributes to members of "The Greatest Generation" who served our country during World War II



**Ross
Garrett**

First of two parts

By Bill Youngkin
Special to The Eagle

A lot of veterans from World War II have their souvenirs from the war. Many have their military awards and ribbons in shadow boxes their families provided for them. Ross Garrett of Madisonville has a shadow box that includes his Purple Heart medal, but he also has another one that contains only an old worn Bible opened to the 23rd Psalm.

"It was the Bible we used when we buried our fellow POWs in a Japanese POW prison at Rangoon, Burma. It originally belonged to a Brit, but it was handed down from him to others until I ended up with it. I have it because I conducted the last burial detail before we were liberated. I've kept it opened to the 23rd Psalm because that is the passage I used on that detail."

Ross Garrett is now 87 years young and still going strong. Strong is something he had to be to survive as a Japanese POW. Garrett was born in Nacogdoches, Texas, and raised in the Oak Flat Community in Rusk County.

"When I was about six or seven my father died and I ended up living with the Chapman family. Mr. Chapman was a blacksmith and I helped him in the shop after he took me in. I remember as a teenager a Japanese man coming by the blacksmith shop offering to buy all of our scrap metal, but Mr. Chapman wouldn't sell to him. I don't think he had a premonition about the war, but I'm glad to know that the shells used to shoot my plane down didn't come from our scrap yard."

Garrett graduated from the Nacogdoches school in 1937 and then attended Stephen F. Austin State College as he could afford to go to school. In 1941, with two years of college under his belt, he joined the Army Air Corps after Pearl Harbor.

"I married my wife, Thelma, on December 14, 1941, and headed off to the Army. I attended OCS and became a bombardier on a B-24 crew. In December 1942, I left the U.S. and my wife, who was now pregnant with our first child. We flew to India to carry out bombing runs on the Japanese installations on the Burma peninsula. That area of operations was called the China-Burma-India theatre. We flew the southern route across North Africa until we landed at Karachi, India, where we celebrated Christmas. I still have the program and menu from that Christmas meal."

"When we arrived at our base near Calcutta they found out that I hadn't been inoculated for yellow fever. I was removed from the crew that I flew over with and was assigned to the 7th Bombardment Group and became part of a B-24 group known

as Kavanagh's Crew. There were nine of us, and it was the best group of individuals anyone could ever hope to serve with. First Lt. Kavanagh was the pilot, 2nd Lt. Cotton was the co-pilot and 2nd Lt. Moxley was our navigator, the best navigator I have ever known.

"We were on our 17th mission, bombing the Japanese docks at Rangoon on May 1, 1943, when the ack-ack knocked out our number three engine. As a result we had to fall out of formation, and the Jap Zeros came after us like sharks to blood in the water. When the number three engine went out it took out the electricity to our tail gunner turret, making it inoperable. The Jap Zeros were chewing up our section. It was shot full of holes.

"We tried to hide in the clouds and did so for a while, but soon realized we weren't going to be able to make it back. Our tail gunner was dead and when I pulled the waist gunner out he was full of shrapnel and would die shortly. We knew if we landed in the jungle we probably wouldn't survive the crash, so Moxley, our navigator, located the last rice paddies we could land in before the jungle. One of the waist gunners opted to parachute out instead of trying to survive the crash landing.

"Kavanagh and Cotton managed to land in a rice paddy without any fatalities. Our engineer Bodell's arm was about shot off. We bandaged it as best we could and applied a tourniquet. We left him there because there was no way he could travel. Hopefully they would put him in a hospital so that he could survive. He would not have survived traveling with us while trying to avoid the Japanese. With the help of some locals, we made it to the beach where the tsunami occurred a couple of years ago. We were hopeful we would get noticed and picked up by our guys.

"We were digging a hole near the beach to get some water when we were approached by some civilians. When Kavanagh looked up from his digging, he was shot in the shoulder. The 'civilians' were Japanese soldiers in civilian clothes. They took us to Rangoon Prison, the old British prison at Rangoon, Burma. On the way we picked up Bodell from a hospital. Of the nine members of our crew who left on that mission that day, only three of us would survive the next two years.

Part Two will be in next Sunday's Eagle.

Ross Garrett's name can be found on the Brazos Valley Veterans Memorial. For more information, to make a contribution, or if you know a World War II veteran whose story needs to be told, contact the BVM at www.veteransmemorial.org or Bill Youngkin at (979) 260-7030.



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