

**468<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group  
In Memoriam**

**Robinson Billings**

**Rank:** Lt Colonel  
**Serial:** 0-388871  
**Squadron:** 793<sup>rd</sup>  
**Position:** Co-pilot  
**Hometown:** Hopedale, MA  
**Died:** January 11<sup>th</sup> 1945  
**Buried:** Hopedale Village Cemetery, MA in 1948

**Son of Harry and Beatrice Billings**

**Brother of Henry and William Billings**

**"Postville Express" serial number 42-24704**





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**B-29 Bombing Mission**

**By F. Tillman Durdin  
Boston Herald - N.Y. Times Wireless**

**CHUNGKING, June 17 [1944] - Eleven crewmen and myself assembled on the airfield and Maj. Robinson Billings, of Hopedale, Mass, our pilot and captain, handed out our money belts, first aid kits and language books. It was late afternoon and the take-off was 15 minutes away. He sketched the weather prospects for us and cautioned us to keep a special watch for Jap fighters during the time between take-off and darkness.**

**"Put on your life jackets, parachutes and flak vests now, " he ordered the gunners. "We may have trouble anywhere on the way and you shouldn't have to waste any time putting your gear on if anything happens."**

**"And everybody keep awake on this trip all night," he added handing out benzedrine sulfate tablets as an aid to wakefulness.**

**We clambered into the big silver plane. Now we were off at last with the target Japan. Hard on the tail of another superfortress Billings wheeled onto the runway. Second Lt. John Cowsert, co-pilot, counted off the seconds until take-off time. The great ship got moving and in a moment it was pulling the runway underneath us at terrific speed.**

**Billings cursed as a dog trotted across our path. We roared inexorably on, crushed it with our left wheel.**

**"Come on up, come on up, you devil," Billings shouted as the end of the runway raced toward the ship's nose. We just made it and sighed with relief.**

**"The right wheel won't retract," Cowsert reported.**

**"Try the emergency motor," shouted First Lt. Edwin R. Johnson, flight engineer. The wheel tucked itself in**

**The clouds and late afternoon sun caressed the quiet beauty of walled towns, temple compounds and wooded hilltops crowned with white pagodas.**

**Billings pulled his ship up into the murky overcast to clear the mountain barrier that separates West China from Central China. The motors hummed joyfully.**



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**Billings said happily, "By God, this ship would fly all the way across the Pacific."**

**He got his altitude and switched on Elmer, the automatic pilot, while he relaxed. The tension eased for everybody. The great bomber rode steadily and quietly without tremor.**

**We spanned mountains and poked our way over the flat plains country of Central China, riding above a low ceiling of clouds. We were nearing the biggest Japanese air bases in China and the cloud cover was staying.**

**Billings took out a little steel-backed Bible - a gift from his wife - from his vest pocket and read a few verses.**

**Suddenly two searchlights appeared far to our right. "A ship is tailing us, major," Rear Gunner Sgt. A.E. Holst reported over the interphone. Nothing happened. We soon left the lights far behind and the plane pursuing us drifted away.**

**Cowser suddenly grabbed my arm. Far off to our right, perhaps still 30 miles away, faint searchlights stabbed at an acute angle into the mists and around their base drifted a dull yellow haze of fires. This mist over the target was deep and Billings worried about whether Meredith (the bombardier) could get a good sighting.**

**Westbrook (the navigator) brought us in like a veteran. Billings lost altitude steeply, for we were one of the ships assigned to make a low run. Searchlight cones brightened. There seemed scores of them. We could see ground flashes of ackack and now processions of tracers marching into the sky.**

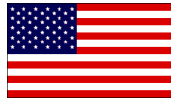
**"There is a B-29 just away from the target," "Betty" Peterson called from his radio desk.**

**"A plane at ten o'clock," reported Gunner Holst.**

**"Clear guns," ordered Billings.**

**"Target ten miles ahead," Westbrook called.**

**The searchlight mass straightened slowly, its poles of light converging dead ahead of us in the sky.**



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**"They have a B-29 penned," shouted Brown. We saw the great plane's bombs explode with a dull glow in the mist and smoke below. The ship twisted to evade the pinions of light. Ground guns palpitated in angry flashes that lighted here, there and everywhere like a gigantic instrument panel, and tracers raced up toward the B-29.**

**It seemed to be faltering. I lost it as we veered to the left.**

**"That's where we gotta go. That's the target," said Billings.**

**Meredith took over the ship for the bomb run. "Plane at nine o'clock very close," shouted Sgt. Pegg. "Looks like a night fighter."**

**"Plane overhead," reported Corp. Jackson.**

**A light beam detached itself from the mass around the target and started feeling our way, then another and another. The interphone cracked with exchanges.**

**"Lights all over the tail," someone shouted.**

**A cone found the nose. Billings took over the plane and swung it sharply. We shook some of the lights, but not all. Meredith took it back and evened off of the final plunge into the fury of flak and lights.**

**"A bunch of night fighters at 10 o'clock," someone said.**

**"This is it, men," broke in someone else grimly.**

**Lights were all over us now. I no longer had to slosh uncertainly in the dark with the pencil on the notebook page, for the plane was as light as day. Flak came up but I could not see any explode. Gunners reported it flying about. I felt the tremor.**

**"Damn, that one was close," Holst exclaimed from the tail.**

**The bomb bays were open and after what seemed an interminable agonizing minute, word came, "Bombs away."**

**A glowing fog and smoke covered an area ringed with fens and searchlights which lay just ahead and beneath us. It seemed certain that bombs would smash something down there in the close packed precincts of Yamata's imperial iron and steel works.**



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**"There's a fighter on our wing," shouted a gunner.**

**Billings looked, and chimed in, "He's got the light right in my eyes. Shoot the bastard."**

**I heard our guns stutter. The fighter, which seemed to be a two-engine job, peeled off and snapped out his lights. Billings swung our ship carefully about at terrific speed and searchlights loosed their hold.**

**We looked back over Yamata to see the beams spotting another B-29 and guns on opposite sides of the target spouting their explosives skyward. We judged that we were probably the third or fourth bomber to make our run and there were many more behind us.**

**The ship seemed all right. No one was hurt. Our gunners reported that night fighters had made tentative attacks and tracers had come our way but no attacks had been pressed home. Brown said it was past midnight.**

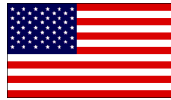
**Enroute Cowser had patched up an ailing generator and the emergency motors brought our landing gear down. We sat down quietly, the third ship back from the target. As on our departure last night, we were just 10 minutes behind our group's first plane.**

**Thirty-one year old Maj. Billings, bulky, ruddy faced and good-natured, but with plenty of determination and drive to match, like all the rest of his crew, was on the first combat mission against major opposition. Veteran of the air transport command before he shifted to super fortresses last year, he is now rated as one of the 20th bomber command's most dependable pilots.**

**Billings has a wife in Hopedale, Mass., and expects a baby this fall. Chubby, genial co-pilot Cowser who worked his way up from sergeant pilot is a natural collaborator with Billings. There is little he does not know about making heavy bombers work.**

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**HOPEDALE, Nov. 17 [1946] - Lt. Col. Robinson Billings of the Army Air Corps was killed in action Jan. 11, according to word to this effect which was received from Washington today by his wife at Charlotte, N.C., and Mr. and Mrs. Harry A. Billings of Hopedale.**



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**At the time of his death he was on a mission from his air base in India to the Malay peninsular and was in the vicinity of Singapore. Soon after that he was reported missing in action, but no further information was obtainable until today.**

**Lt. Col. Billings was born in Hopedale, graduated from Hopedale High School, studied at the Clark School in Hanover, N.H., and went to Colgate University, where he graduated in 1936 after a brilliant record as a star end on the most famous football team Colgate ever had. He worked for the Draper Corp., of which his father is a director, until 1939, when he enlisted in the Army Air Corps.**

**He received his air corps training at Parks Air College at East St. Louis, at Randall and Kelly fields in Texas, and at Aberdeen proving ground in Maryland. Recognized as a very able flyer, he was assigned to the Ferry Command and was stationed at Great Falls, Montana, where he had charge of ferrying planes to Alaska and Russia.**

**With the advent of the B-29 he was transferred to the Pacific area and flew on the first B-29 raid over Japan. He was then assigned to the air base in India, where he had charge of raiding planes that flew over Burma, China and Japan, and flew with his squadrons on these missions.**

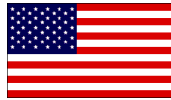
**His last mission was to Singapore, where from what meager information his parents have so far received, his plane was shot down. At that time he held the rank of lieutenant colonel, having earned his way up from the bottom by meritorious and distinguished service.**

**Lt. Col. Billings was married June 11, 1943, to Miss Dorothy Baker, daughter of James A. Baker, a well known cotton broker of Charlotte, N.C.**

**Besides his parents and widow, he leaves two brothers, Henry of Hopedale and Lt. Cmdr. William C., recently discharged from the navy after service in the Pacific.**

**Robinson was one of the most popular boys in Hopedale, being loved by the children, by those his own age and regarded with favor by the older people. In college he was popular with his mates, and the same ability to win confidence and regard held with the men with whom he served in the air corps. Milford Daily News.**

**This aircraft wreck was found south of Seremban town which most of her bigger parts were taken away by POWs which Japanese ordered the salvage parts send**



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to Singapore for evaluation.

Some small parts still found scattered on a small abandoned paddy field.

### **Mission History**

This plane was operating out Kharagpur, India to bombed Japanese drydock at Singapore harbor in 11 January 1945. The aircraft came under attack from a number of Japanese aircraft enroute to India. Several Japanese planes were shot down by Postville Express crews. The Japanese attacks put the Central Fire Control system out of order, making most of the B-29's guns useless. The attacks also started a fire in the Number 3 engine, a fire that could not be extinguished.

Major Humphrey cannot stayed the formation and turned inland and hope that all crews can be bailed out and evade capture with the help of underground anti-Japanese guerrillas.

Approximately 10 miles south of Seremban, Major Humphrey ordered all crews to prepare for bailed out while he and Sgt Kundrat help Col. Robinson which he was wounded from the Japanese fighter attack. Later the burning wing gave away and the plane plunged uncontrolled toward ground. He and several of the crews managed to get away from the burning plane.

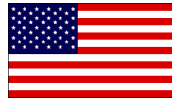
### **Evading Captivity**

Humphrey, Duffy, Saltzman, Spratt and Hansman successfully reached the ground but Spratt died later from burning injuries. He was buried near the wreck site. The surviving men walked away to the jungle and were assisted by guerrillas. While under hiding, Hansman was captured by Japanese and executed on 14 February 1945. McDonald, Gillett, Govednik, and Lindley were ultimately captured and spent the rest of the war as POWs in the prison at Singapore.

Robinson and Kundrat were found dead near or in the crashed aircraft. The Missing Air Crew Report for this loss is #10879. Humphrey, by the way, was from Postville, Iowa. His previous aircraft, which was sent home as war weary in late December 1944, was named "Postville Express." Their new aircraft was apparently never named, although Humphrey referred to it as "Postville Express" in a postwar account.

- Pilot-Maj. Donald J. Humphrey
- Co-Pilot-Lt. Col Robinson Billings
- Navigator-Capt. Carl A. Hansman
- Bombadier-1st Lt. William F. Duffy





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- Flight Engineer-1st Lt. Ernest C. Saltzman
- Radar-1st Lt. Martin J. Govednik
- Radio-T/Sgt. Michael A. Kundrat
- Senior Gunner-S/Sgt John MacDonald, Jr.
- Left Gunner-T/Sgt. Harold D. Gillett
- Right Gunner-T/Sgt. Ralph C. Lindley
- Tail Gunner-S/Sgt. Rouhier E. Spratt

<http://farrellpublishing.com/pages/photos.html>







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The Mission**

Four minutes from our Singapore target, Humphrey had managed to bring the large bird down to twenty-three thousand feet. This was the most vulnerable time of the mission. The ship had to maintain an uninterrupted course, so I could carry out my task as bombardier. All the while, fighters came at us with blazing machine guns. I had to ignore the attacking force and concentrate on the target. The flight here was eight hours, with the trip home yet to come, but the success of our mission depended on these few minutes.

I ran over final calculations and adjusted the bombsight. The bomb bay doors were lowered. Humphrey passed control of the Postville Express to me and I piloted the plane toward the target. Through the Norden bombsight, I piloted our bomber according to calculations and instructions from radar, and held the heading as we neared the target.

Fighter attacks increased, hitting at our nose, but I forced myself to ignore their pursuit and concentrate on my target. Sweat beaded on my forehead and rolled toward my eyes. A swipe with my shirtsleeve soaked them up.

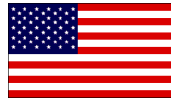
Any moment now . . . Steady Bill . . . Thoughts on the target . . . Be patient, let it happen . . . Perspiration beneath my khaki flight suit dampened my tee shirt and sent a chill down my back and underarms. I wiped moisture from my hands on the cotton covering my thighs and returned to the knobs of the bombsight. My body prepared for battle.

Our gunners were busy with no fewer than fifteen Jap fighter attacks in one minute. “Zekes,” “Tonys” and “Oscars” filled the sky, diving sometimes three at a time. Antiaircraft artillery fire dotted the sky and rocked our ship. The racket of the guns faded inside my head as I concentrated on the target and radar’s direction.

It was 8:54 a.m., January 11, 1945, when I yelled, “Bombs away!”

I returned control of the plane to Humphrey, and for the next sixty seconds, he held the ship on course, to let the automatic camera record hits on the target. The flash of exploding bombs triggered the camera to shoot pictures, used by intelligence to assess damage to the target. With the pictures taken, Humphrey turned our ship sharp right, to get us out of there and head home.

“Duff, any sight of the target? Were you on?” Hump asked.



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**“Hump, I was blind! Let’s pray the radar had good eyes and the settings were correct,” I answered.**

**“Pilot to tail gunner!”**

**“Spratt here, Major!”**

**“Can you see the target, Spratt?”**

**“Negative, Major, cloud cover.”**

**“Damn!”**

**“Maybe the cameras will pick it up, Hump,” I offered.**

**“Yeah, maybe.”**

**With Hump in control of the ship, I focused on the Jap fighters coming in at our nose. The sound of gunfire and aerial bombs was strong. Enemy planes stayed with us and now numbered thirty-five, perhaps forty. Most aimed their attack at the nose of our bomber, high and level, very coordinated, coming head-on, firing all the way. Just as they reached us, they would roll over and dive underneath and continue firing at the belly of our B-29. But they didn’t seem to be hitting us, or at least where it counted.**

**Lindley, right gunner, hit our first one. He called over the interphone, “Got one. He’s on fire and falling fast toward the Strait of Malacca. I’m tracking another in my gun sight, it’s diving under the wing. Damn, he got away!”**

**Our burst of .50-caliber guns, targeting Jap fighters crossing our path, continued nonstop. Above, fighters dropped aerial bombs, and explosions shook our B-29 violently. There was no relief as we retreated up the west coast of Malaya. The fighters staged attacks from all sides, working us over repeatedly.**

**Spratt phoned as he was yacking with the tail guns, “I have the rear closed off. Dishing it out pretty good to visitors. Oh boy, got a Zeke, diving on my right, he’ll be with you next, Gillett,” he called to the left gunner. “I’m swinging on him, with a dose of .50-caliber lead.” His voice grew louder. “One hundred yards . . . seventy-five . . . fifty . . . I hit it . . . It’s falling apart, pieces of fire everywhere!” Spratt added.**



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**When Spratt was not providing updates, there was plenty of chatter phoned from the waist cabin gunners Gillett, Lindley and MacDonald. They were burning up the sky with the constant blare of the two heavy guns, within each revolving turret, picking out the most threatening of the attacking force, while others were ignored.**

**With the thunderstorm behind us, the sky opened up a sea of blue. We continued up the coast, climbing in altitude and speed, hoping to shake the Jap fighters.**

**In the nose, I was firing on an Oscar head-on, till it dove beneath the ship. My eyes picked up another, high at eleven o'clock, firing its guns in a steady stream as it advanced on our ship. I wiped sweat from my brow, lined up the Oscar in my gun sight and returned the fire.**

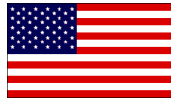
**Aerial bombs continued to fall on us, shaking and tossing the big bird. The fighter plane's determination in its attack, coming straight in without altering its course, worried me. I recalled other American bombers under such attack, ending with the enemy ramming their ship, creating a fiery explosion, and death to the crew.**

**My stomach got queasy, and throat dry, while I tracked the enemy in the gun sight and flooded its path with .50-caliber bullets. It lasted forever, it seemed. During a fight, I tended to think of the exchange of shells between the enemy and me, knowing that one of us might connect and hit the other. My heartbeat increased and I tensed in the long moments. There is no way to get by these thoughts, it was going to happen. I could only hope I was better than the guy behind the other guns.**

**I got him . . . scored a hit. The Oscar exploded, shooting a bright yellow and orange fire across the sky, briefly engulfing the nose of our B-29. Large and small pieces of the enemy craft scattered and dropped to the sea. Tension eased and my stomach started to feel better, but I was chilled by more perspiration in my clothes.**

**The crew had faced tight spots before and always come through with only scratches. But we were facing more than double the number of enemy fighters than we had encountered on previous missions. Plus, we had always been in the company of other B-29s from our squad, which helped the odds—but now we were battling the attackers alone.**

**Another Oscar challenged, coming head-on, spraying firepower ahead of it. I returned the fire, as the distance between our ships disappeared. I hit it and a**



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**stream of black smoke followed the enemy's tail, as it passed under the right wing. I called to the right waist gunner, "Lindley, finish off the Oscar, at four o'clock!"**

**"You took care of him, Duff. He's falling to the sea!"**

**I spotted a Tony high at one o'clock, about nine hundred yards out, firing continually and closing the gap fast. Swinging my guns on the diving plane, I fired constantly. The fighter never swerved, coming in over our heads, passing within fifty feet.**

**The blast of a shell penetrated the top of the Plexiglas nose, stirring dust about the cabin. Piercing cold air rushed in, dropping the air pressure and sounding the warning klaxon for the crew to put on oxygen masks.**

**"Pilot to crew, get your oxygen masks on, repeat, get your masks on!" Humphrey yelled over the phone.**

**I put my mask to my face and attached it behind my head, then looked over my right shoulder to locate the moaning voice that accompanied the whistle of air in the cabin. Colonel Billings had been hit, left thigh, his pants saturated with red. He was conscious, attaching an oxygen mask to his strained face. A hole in the Plexiglas above Billings' head showed the path of the destructive shell. Humphrey noticed also and questioned him.**

**"Colonel, are you all right?"**

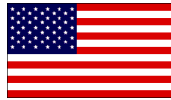
**Billings nodded yes and said with a snicker, "Hope I don't lose that leg, it's a damn good leg."**

**Humphrey called Kundrat, "Mick, get up here with the first aid kit, the colonel has been hit!"**

**In my left ear resounded the stomp of Humphrey's foot on the rudder control pedal. He hollered to Billings, who was holding his leg tight in both hands.**

**"Colonel, have you got any rudder? Try your controls!"**

**Billings sat forward, made contact with his foot, then shook his head no to Humphrey. Mick, kneeling beside him, tended his leg.**



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**As the excitement behind me continued, I saw another fighter plane coming head on, at twelve o'clock high. Swiveling the gun sight, I took aim and tracked the invader perfectly, pointing the forward turrets, holding six .50-caliber guns, at the fuselage of the craft. Confident with my aim, I engaged the guns to blast it to pieces and send it to join the other Jap ships in the sea.**

**The big guns didn't fire. They tracked the target, but no firepower. Holding the guns on the enemy fighter, I tried again. Each attempt yielded nothing. I prayed as I pretended to shoot the guns, hoping to make the enemy believe it was under fire.**

**"Hump, my guns are out. I'm not getting anything. I can swing on them, but no fireworks!"**

**"Major, this is Lindley. My guns are silent too!"**

**The same reports came in from Gillett, and MacDonald. The central fire control system that operated all the guns except the tail station was inoperative. That last "Tony" did the damage.**

**There was a drop and tilt in the plane's course. Humphrey and I glanced at each other. Looking out windows on both sides of the plane, we could see each of the four Wright Cyclone 2,200-hp engines, each powering a sixteen-foot-diameter propeller. It was the number two engine. The propeller had stopped and the engine housing was torn by enemy shells. Humphrey called to the flight engineer, Ernest Saltzman, "Saltz, kill number two engine!"**

**Saltzman, seated back to back with the copilot, was out of his chair delivering sulfa powder to the colonel for his wound. He flipped the powder to Mick and jumped back in his seat, grabbing the control and killing the engine.**

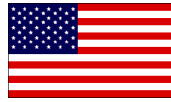
**"Hump, number two shut down!" Saltzman reported.**

**"Saltz, how far can we fly on three engines?"**

**"I'll get back to you, I need to do some calculating."**

**"Duff, any change with the guns?" Humphrey asked.**

**"Nothing, Hump, we're a sitting duck, nowhere to hide. I have a Tony in my sight and I'm pointing the gun barrels on him, but I think he knows our guns are out!"**



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**Between attacks I removed my hands from the sight and rubbed warmth into them. The high altitude air, blowing into the cabin, was icy. Grabbing the gun sight, I aimed at one of two more fighters making a run on us. It was frightening to sit behind the Plexiglas nose and watch the enemy take turns unloading their firepower on our ship.**

**“Here come three more Tonys Hump!” I shouted. The diving fighters opened their guns all the way in, riddling our giant Superfortress unopposed. The bursting shells frightened me. Oh, how I wished to take a crack at them!**

**“Major, number three engine is on fire!” Lindley shouted from right gunner position.**

**Humphrey and I looked through the window and saw the engine wrapped in flames. We looked at one another, not saying a word. We needed that engine to get home, and close to twenty-eight hundred gallons of hundred octane gasoline were carried in that wing.**

**“Saltz, feather number three and put out the fire. We need that engine back!” Humphrey ordered.**

**“Okay, Hump!” Saltzman feathered number three, and put out the blaze using the fire extinguisher built into the engine.**

**“Hump, I’ve got those calculations. We can’t make it home, but we can ditch the plane at sea in a safe zone and be picked up by submarine. But we need three engines to get to the safe zone!”**

**“Hump, there’s two B-29s at eleven o’clock, about four miles ahead of us!” I hollered. Sight of them lessened my fear and the rising doubt of our return home. It was a beautiful sight.**

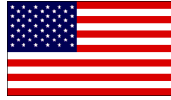
**“Saltz, I need power to catch up to the others. How is number three engine?” Humphrey asked.**

**“The fire is out, Hump, but a trail of black smoke streaks behind her!”**

**“Start up number three engine, Saltz, and give me all you can!”**

**“Bringing number three back up, Hump!”**





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**“Mick, radio our boys ahead of us, let them know we’re on their tail and we have engine trouble!” Humphrey shouted.**

**“Hump, the radio is dead! I’ve been checking it over, but I haven’t found the problem. I’ll keep at it and keep you posted.”**

**Suddenly, I realized it was quiet! I searched the sky, and then called for MacDonald in the waist cabin. “Mac, any sign of fighters?”**

**“Nothing here, Duff! We were just wondering if that was the last of them.”**

**“They’re going home!” Spratt called in from the tail section. “Heading back to Singapore!”**

**Jubilant voices rocked the interphone, until Humphrey announced, “Okay, that’s enough, keep the phone open!”**

**“Radar to pilot!” Marty called.**

**“What’s up, Marty?”**

**“Hump, we’ve lost our radar, its gone! I can’t get any readings!”**

**“Work on it, Marty. We have visual of two of our squad ahead of us, so we have someone to follow!”**

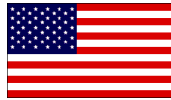
**I turned to look at Billings and nodded to Humphrey to do the same. Billings was lying back; his head tilted left, eyes tightly closed. The bleeding from his thigh seem to have slowed, by the bandaging Mick had wrapped around the leg. His left hand held the wound tight in attempt to relieve the pain.**

**“Colonel, how are you doing?”**

**“I’m in bad pain, but I’ll be okay. I don’t think I’ll be much help to you, Hump.”**

**“That’s fine, just hang in there.”**

**“Number three engine started, Hump!” Saltzman announced. Silence filled the cabin as we watched the engine. Without three engines our chance for reaching a safe zone was impossible. The propeller turned and quickly came to life, gaining**



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speed until it matched the power of the remaining two engines. The tension within me eased, as I watched it reach full power and operate fine.

In moments it burst into flames. The fire engulfed the engine, covering the wing, and creating a tail behind it.

Saltz called out, “Hump, the flames are worse on number three! I’ve tried to extinguish them, but it’s no use, it’s out of control. It’s feeding off the fuel tank and it can blow up any moment!”

“Try to give us some time Saltz, do what you can!” Humphrey turned the plane toward the Malayan coast, roughly thirty miles north of the city of Malacca.

He announced over the interphone to the crew, “This is the pilot. Number two engine is out and number three is burning up. I’m heading us to the mainland, where we will bail out over the jungle. We’ve been briefed that in a situation like this, we should try to establish contact with the Chinese Communist guerrillas. They will be our best chance for survival of the Japs and the jungle.

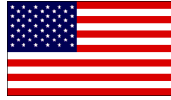
“Check your parachutes, they should include your jungle survival pack, and make sure you have your Webb belt around your waist. Keep an eye out for one another, so you have an idea where others are touching down. Once we hit the jungle floor, it will be impossible to see each other, so we need to get our bearings before hand. Don’t go shouting for one another, because we have no way of knowing if the Japs will be waiting. We’ll push east, deeper into the jungle, and hope for a rendezvous. This may be the last time we see each other. I don’t know what to say. I haven’t rehearsed anything. Good luck. May God be with us!”

Silence swallowed the interphone.

Humphrey turned his attention to our advance. “Duff, we need to avoid open areas and get ourselves into the hill country. Keep an eye out for us.”

“Will do, Hump!” I bit down on my lip, while studying the approaching coast. I thought of the times I rehearsed this scene in my head. Shot from the sky, parachuting into Jap-occupied territory, thousands of miles from the base, food, water, Peggy and the children. What’s in the jungle . . . Can I survive what’s ahead . . . Can a submarine rescue us . . . Can we get word to headquarters.

“Mick, any change in the radio?”



**468<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group  
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**“No! I don’t get anything, Hump!”**

**“Waist and tail section get ready! Open the rear door and await my order to bail out.”**

**Their exit was in the rear storage compartment, the same side as the burning engine. Spratt announced that he was climbing forward from the tail compartment and Marty phoned he was opening the bulkhead door to the storage compartment.**

**“All standing by, Hump! Spratt, Gillett, MacDonald and Lindley,” Marty reported.**

**The nose cabin was getting hot and the flames from number three engine were streaking nearly fifty yards. Our exit was through the front wheel well. Carl stood up from the navigation table and called, “I’ve got the hatch!” bending over and lifting a panel in the cabin floor. Humphrey lowered the wheels and said, “Stand by in the nose cabin!”**

**I adjusted and tightened the straps to my parachute, and saw that the ripcord was in place to release the silk canopy.**

**“Radar to pilot!”**

**“Go ahead, Marty.”**

**“Hump, we just opened the rear hatch and the sky is a wall of fire! Flames streak from the wing to beyond the tail. Can Saltz give us any relief by killing the fire on that engine?”**

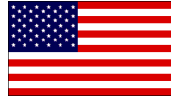
**I watched as Humphrey turned to Saltzman for an update and saw him shake his head no. “Negative, Marty!”**

**I called to Humphrey, “You feel that? The shake, the vibration! She’s ready to break up.”**

**Humphrey shook his head in agreement.**

**“Pick your spot, Hump, we have good jungle ahead!” I added.**

**“Okay, get ready to jump, Duff!”**



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**“Colonel, let’s go, let me help you,” I said to Billings, grabbing him by the arm to lift him from his seat.**

**“Thanks, Lieutenant!”**

**“This is it, when I give the order everyone out, no delays!” Hump announced.**

**Then came a startling crack, followed by ripping metal and a loud “whoosh,” as the right wing tore away from the fuselage. The Superfortress flipped on its right side, tossing us about the nose cabin.**



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# 'Cobra Named For Hopedale



"The Hopedale Avenger", named in honor of the town of Hopedale, is shown at an airdrome where these Bell Airacobras are turned over to the Russians to be flown to the eastern front. Major Robinson Billings, chief test pilot and assistant operations officer at the base, is from Hopedale. When he learned of this, Col. A. N. Kotikov, Red Star Air Force representative at the base, had this 'Cobra christened to honor Maj. Billings and the people of Hopedale. Shown with "The Hopedale Avenger" are Flight Officer R. G. Berry, USAAF, 2d Maj. N. N. Kalinnikov, Red Star Air force.

Somewhere along the great Rnc. I



## 468<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group In Memoriam

### Details for Robinson Billings

Rank:	Unit:	Branch of Service:	Enlistment Date:
<b>Colonel</b>	<b>468th Bombardment Group based in India and China</b>	<b>Army Air Corps</b>	<b>1939</b>



Source: The Charlotte Observer 11-18-1945

Place of Birth:	Date of Death - Place:	Age at death:
<b>Hopedale, MA</b>	<b>1/11/1945 - over Singapore</b>	<b>32</b>

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### Family Information Prior to 1947

Spouse Name and Address:

**Dorothy Baker Billings**  
821 Berkeley Avenue  
Charlotte, NC

Parent Name and Address:

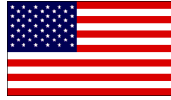
**Mr. & Mrs. H. A. Billings**  
Hopedale, MA

Sibling Name and Address:

**Henry Billings, II**  
Hopedale, MA

**William Clarke Billings, Lt.**  
**Commander**  
Navy





## 468<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group In Memoriam

Family Member Name and Address:

**Mr. and Mrs. J. A. Baker** (*in-laws; Mr. Baker was a cotton broker and city councilman*)

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Education:

Clarke School, Hanover, NH  
Colgate, Class of 1936  
Tabor Academy, Marion, Maine

Military Posts/Deployments:

Aberdeen, Maryland  
Albuquerque, NM  
Great Falls, Montana  
Long Beach, CA  
Randolph Field, TX  
Salina, Kansas  
Seattle, WA

Employers:

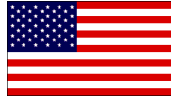
Draper Corp., Spartanburg, SC

Other Affiliations:

Colgate varsity football player for 3 years  
Phi Gamma Delta Fraternity at Colgate  
Konosioni Club at Colgate

Promotions & Awards:

Air Medal with an Oak Leaf cluster  
Presidential Unit citation  
Wings (first class graduated at Randolph Air Force Base)



## **468<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group In Memoriam**

### [Death Details/Burial/Memorial Services:](#)

He was the command pilot of a B-29 and had 200 hours of combat service at the time of his death. He had completed a mission to Singapore and was returning to his base when his plane was reported missing after encountering 20 Japanese planes.