



**43rd Bomb Group (H) Time Capsule Submission  
Commemorating  
The 75th Anniversary of the 43rd's Activation at Langley Field, Virginia**



**Full Name and Rank of 43rd Bomb Group Member**

Joseph Thompson, Private

**Serial Number** 10939138 **Date of Birth** 3 May 1917

**Where Born (City and State)** Mankato, Minnesota U.S.A.

**Dates Assigned to 43rd** March 1942 - December 1943 (KIA) **Assigned Squadron** 63rd

**Duties While with the 43rd** Door Gunner

**Name of Person Submitting Item & Relationship to 43rd BG Member (self, spouse, son, niece, etc.)**

Sandra Smith, Daughter

**Description of Item(s) Donated to the Time Capsule**

Photos and articles / documents of his life, his death, his family AND my search for his family and mine

**Significance of Item(s), Personally and/or Professionally**

- Please submit this form and your items to:  
Louise Terrell, 207 Huron Street, Houghton MI 49931, NLT 30 August 2015
- Contact Louise through email at lterrell5@verizon.net or by phone at 703-999-3542 with any questions or to provide notification that your item(s) are being sent
- If you want to keep originals of items, documents, etc, please make and forward only copies

**Our Mission:**

Project Homecoming is committed to speeding the recovery of the 80,000 American soldiers still missing from World War II, Korea and Vietnam.



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There's nothing in the yellowed photo of a cherubic baby Joseph Thompson to suggest the hard luck life he would have, but maybe there's a hint of the miracles his family sees in his recovery.

Eliza Miller and John Smith lived in the Blue Earth country of Mankato, Minnesota when their son was born May 3, 1917 They'd married young and it didn't last, by the time Joseph was 4 his mom and dad had split up, a source of shame at the time. Family lore has it that Eliza's parents pressured her to give up her child to another local family for adoption, and to move away to Stewartville, MN, never to see him again. Not many details are known about Joseph's adopted life, he had a sister who no one has been able to identify, and his only known relative, a nephew, only recalls seeing him once. We'll never know if it was a troubled relationship at home or tough depression times that led Joseph to leave home early and join the Air Corps. For the next 60 years all we knew was he was assigned to the 63rd Squadron of the 43rd Bomber Group in Dobodura, New Guinea. That Group earned renown for its Skip bombing expertise flying in low and skipping bombs, like stones on a pond, into the sides of Japanese ships. Exploding on the side of the ship at the waterline increased the odds of a sinking. These bombers flew dangerous missions for high returns. On December 3, 1943 he replaced a gunner on an 11 man B-24, named the "Swan", for an armed reconnaissance flight over the Bismarck See. His plane, B24D-60-CO serial #42-40475, went down on December 3rd, 1943 over Papua New Guinea. Its last message radioed at midnight was "Why aren't lights on?". Presumably as it could not find Dobodura. Searches focusing on the Bismarck see yielded nothing and Joseph, the hard luck kid with the tenuous family connection, disappeared from memory.



Young Joseph Thompson



Joseph's 102nd Observation Group

For the next 60 years all we knew was he was assigned to the 63rd Squadron of the 43rd Bomber Group in Dobodura, New Guinea. That Group earned renown for its Skip bombing expertise flying in low and skipping bombs, like stones on a pond, into the sides of Japanese ships. Exploding on the side of the ship at the waterline increased the odds of a sinking. These bombers flew dangerous missions for high returns. On December 3, 1943 he replaced a gunner on an 11 man B-24, named the "Swan", for an armed reconnaissance flight over the Bismarck Sea. His plane, B24D-60-CO serial #42-40475, went down on December 3rd, 1943 over Papua New Guinea. Its last message radioed at midnight was "Why aren't lights on?". Presumably as it could not find Dobodura. Searches focussing on the Bismarck see yielded nothing and Joseph, the hard luck kid with the tenuous family connection, disappeared from memory.

Until Sandy started wondering about her Dad.

Sandy Smith was born in 1944. Her Australian mother Joyce Pardella had fallen in love with American Joseph Thompson while he was based there en route to New Guinea and Sandy was their child. Sixty four years after Joe's death Sandy found her mother's friend from the 1940's who wrote her the following.

"I am just writing to tell you about your Dad Joe Thompson. I got to know Joe very well when he was here on furlough. Your mom and I were very good mates. We were always together and told each other all our problems. Your mom told me she met a nice guy, so my sailor friend and I and your mom and Joseph became a foursome. It wasn't long and I could see Joe was smitten with your mom. They were both so happy. They told me your mom was pregnant. Joe was over the moon. His leave was getting over but he didn't want to go back and leave your mom so he went AWOL. It was quite a while before he was picked up by the MP's (Military Police). It was a very sad day for us all. After he went back we had no news from him. Your mom was frantic when you were born. Joe loved you very much. Your Dad would have been so proud of you. He was a very loving man. I'm glad to call him my friend. All my love and best of luck"

When Sandy began her search for Joe's family in 1984 she had not known Joe was adopted. When she discovered that he was through American military records, she decided she wanted to let his birth mother know he had died in 1943. Working through friends and amateur researchers by 2002 she found Joe's birth family, chiefly his cousin's line, the Fox's. Though Joe's mother Eliza had died 20 years earlier, Joe's birth family embraced her, and, through them she learned of Joe's surviving adoptive family. In Carolyn Fox's eyes, this is the first miracle. That 59 years after his death, Joe's daughter, birth family and adoptive family were now together, and sharing a concern for Joe. But that year had more miracles in store for them.

Having learned Joseph was an MIA, Carolyn posted an email on her family web site requesting help finding him. Three more coincidences, or maybe it's 3 more miracles, came in rapid succession.

In New Guinea, a local native by the name of John Arête was reported as having in his possession a crew-member's dog-tag from the plane Joe had been on. Word of this had reached John Douglas, an Australian living in Papua New Guinea who searched for the Missing. If this was accurate, clearly this town and this man were the keys to finding the bomber. 30 miles to the south east is the town of Popondetta which provided airfield access to the area. This is the field the "Swan" was seeking when it crashed in 1943. From there a boat trip along the coast and a banana boat to Deboin would take searchers to a cross-country starting point.

Back in the US Carolyn's web site elicited a reply from an American eager to help as well. Christopher Moon was not only experienced in locating the missing, but unknown at the time to either Carolyn or Chris, they lived in adjacent towns in Minnesota. A million to one connection had been made and a new search for Joseph Thompson's bomber had begun. Carolyn passed on to Christopher and his father Bryan Moon all the evidence she had gathered from US, Papua New Guinea and Australian sources which focused on the Owen Stanley Range of mountainous jungle near Cape Ward Hunt on the north shore of the island. Efforts by both Douglas and Moon, each seeking the B 24 "The Swan", came together in 2003.



Cockpit of "The Swan", Joseph Plane, when discovered

Following up on Moons account. "Our Papuan colleague Michael Roy and his two colleagues reached Deboin at 5.30pm on Tuesday, June 24th after a banana-boat trip. The small town of 600 people received them well and they enquired about the man John Arete who reportedly had a crew-man's dog-tag. There was no such person but there was a John Atade who had left to become a missionary. His father Johnson Karigo was the village Chief who, with his son, had originally found the lost bomber on May 12th 2002 and was the only other person who knew the aircraft's location.

The Chief agreed to guide Michael and his party to the crash site, a torturous six hour walk climbing mountains and thick

jungle, wading through water and almost impassable thick bush which cut and poison the skin. They reached the crash site only to find that on hitting the mountainside, the aircraft had broken into pieces which were scattered and partially buried. The fuselage was half full of soil. All four engines were at the site but one wing had settled near a village.

After taking photographs at the crash site, the Chief guided Michael back to Deboin offering to cut a path through the thick bush if the Moon's came to Deboin. When asked about the dog-tag, the Chief said he had dug inside the fuselage of the bomber where he had found it bearing the name Robert E Frank. Aircraft records list him as S/Sgt Gunner on the B-24 Serial Number 42-40475, the same B-24 as crewman Joseph Thompson, the first name given to the Moon's by Carolyn Fox. The Chief no longer had the dog-tag but had recorded the details in a book. Curiously, these details also showed that on the back of Frank's dog-tag was written the name "Mrs. Blanche Terry, Plain Field, NJ." Subsequent check revealed that Mrs. Blanche Terry was the airman's mother who had remarried and was since deceased."

In April, 2004 the US Military's JPAC, responsible for the return of located remains, visited the site in Papua New Guinea and confirmed it was the site of the "Swan" B24D-60-CO serial #42-40475. On board the plane at the time of the crash were the following Americans.

Capt Robert L Coleman 0-789137  
2nd Lt Kenneth L Cassidy 0-802017  
1st Lt George E Wallinder 0-662400  
2nd Lt Roland F Ward 0-736737  
2nd Lt Irving Schechner 0-673737  
T/Sgt Paul Miecias 32302997  
S/Sgt Albert J Caruso 32464441  
T/Sgt William L Fraser 17035405  
S/Sgt Robert E Frank 32303093  
T/Sgt Robert C Morgan 16039363  
Pvt Joseph Thompson 19039138

Once returned to Hawaii, attempts were made to identify the individual remains, whose bones will be buried per the instructions of the family. Unidentified remains will be buried together in Arlington.

In November, 2007 Carolyn and Sandy received the call they'd all worked for. Private Joseph Thompson's bones had been identified using Fox family DNA. He would be coming home. Unfortunately, changes in the Military's requirements for identification mean that her baptismal certificate, identifying Joseph as father, was no longer acceptable to the Military to prove her being next of kin. His DNA was too degraded to confirm his parentage of her. After all these years of effort, Sandy was not to be allowed to see her father's internment, not to be recognized as daughter and not to be given access to his DNA to prove her connection to him. At this dark hour unexpected good fortune, or as Sandy's call it, miracles, intervened again. First, one of Sandy's American family members, who was to be offered passage to the internment at Arlington, asked the US Military to send Sandy, from Australia, in their stead. In August, 2008, Private Thompson returned. Thomas, the hard luck boy from the broken home, is back, with a daughter, cousins and nephews to welcome him. He finally got his break. And, Sandy, having found her Dad and a second family, got to meet them 65 years after the "Swans" last flight. All that was left for Sandy was establishing legally her connection to her father. Having spent a lifetime under a cloud without a father, and having worked decades to find her extended family, Sandy wanted proof. While she was convinced she must be related to her American family (in her words, "look at our big noses") advances in genetic testing were needed to prove her case and neither the US nor Australian government would take on the effort. Friends located geneticists affiliated with the UN War Crimes tribunals that would take on the case. After eight of Sandy's American blood relatives donated their blood, and after a year of laboratory work, in January, 2010 the results were in. The odds are 15,000 to one in favor. Sandy Smith is Joseph Thompson's Daughter. And Joseph's daughter brought Joseph home. In doing so giving Sandy a new family, and reminding all involved what love, family and friendship really mean.



Joseph returns to Hawaii

**Thank You:** Carolyn Fox and Sandy Smith and Bryan Moon

## Private Joseph Thompson and the Swan

By

Mardell Haskins

A few months ago I found the story of the Swan, a B-24 Liberator bomber, when I was writing an article on Lost Aircraft.

Because the *Swan* was in the 63<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Squadron, one of four squadrons in the 43<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group, which I had been writing about for the past year, I call the 43<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group's Secretary and Historian, Ed Gammill who lives a short distance from me in Phoenix, AZ to ask him some questions about the *Swan*.

Ed's reply was, "Oh that's the plane that we spent 10 years looking for!" I decided that I wanted to write a separate article about the *Swan* because it had a rather lengthy and interesting, but tragic history. Not to mention it had the only Private on an aircrew in the South Pacific.

How did Private Joseph Thompson get to be a Private and how did he get on the *Swan*, which was not his regular crew? He was actually assigned to Kirby's crew.

Both Kirby's B-24 and the *Swan* were one of about 50 special B-24 Liberators which were painted black and equipped with radar that flew at night looking for Japanese ships that hid in the numerous coves and harbors in the multitude of islands in the South Pacific and the Far East. These special radar equipped aircraft usually flew alone at night with no accompanying fighter protection.

Both airplanes were assigned to in the 63<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Squadron, the 5<sup>th</sup> Air Force's Snoopers Squadron, one of three radar equipped squadrons that flew special night missions. At the time the 63<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Squadron was located in New Guinea.

New Guinea, the second largest island in the world, is 1500 miles long and 400 miles wide and is surrounded by many smaller islands. It has a very high 16,000 foot mountain range that runs down the middle of the entire island; in

addition, a large part of the island is covered in dense jungle, making it very hard to see or find anything.

During WWII, because the Japanese forces were much stronger than the Allies, it had been decided that the major strategy of the war would be to cut Japanese supply lines. After the Japanese losses at the battles of Midway and the Coral Sea, the Japanese quit sending out large flotillas of ships and started sending out one or two ships that laid low during the day and moved from island to island at night.

Needing airplanes that could fly at night, U.S. commanders came up with the idea of using aircraft which had radar added to the upper turret with a radar man to replace the gunner.

They outfitted over fifty B-24 Liberators with radar and sent them to three locations. The first was the 63<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Squadron, in the 43<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group in the 5<sup>th</sup> Air Force, the second was the 373<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Squadron in the 13<sup>th</sup> Air Force and the third Snooper Squadron was the 373<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Squadron, one of four squadrons in the 308<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group which was part of the Fourteenth Air Force stationed in China. Both the 63<sup>rd</sup> and the 373<sup>rd</sup> Squadrons were operating out of New Guinea at the time of the Swan's disappearance.

## **THE SWAN**

On December 3, 1943 the Swan left from Horanda No. 4 Airfield, located west of Dobodura on the north coast of Papua New Guinea, on an armed reconnaissance mission over the Bismarck Sea.

On board at the time were pilot Capt. Robert Coleman, Co-pilot, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Kenneth L. Cassidy; Bombardier 2nd Lt. Irvin Schechner, of Brooklyn NY; Navigator 1/Lt George E. Wallinder, from San Antonio, TX and Engineer, T/Sgt. Paul Miecias, of Pisataway, N J.

The Gunners were S/Sgt Albert, J. Caruso, from Kearny, NJ, S/Sgt Robert E. Frank, from Plainfield, NJ, T/Sgt William L. Fraser, of Maplewood, MO, T/Sgt Robert C. Morgan, from Flint, MI and Pvt. Joseph Thompson, Compton, CA who

had volunteered to take the place of M/Sgt Robert J. Turner, who was sick. Also aboard was an Observer 2/Lt. Ronald F. Ward of Cambridge, Mass.

The Swan had a successful mission and was on her way home. During the return flight the crew had several communications with the base and reported no problems.

Thirty-five minutes after midnight they radioed, "Why aren't the lights on?" presumably because they could not see Dobodura and the field. This was the last message every heard from the ill-fated bomber.

For two days Allied aircraft searched its last reported position north of Cape Gloucester, but failed to locate any trace of the black B-24.

Because they could find no trace of the '*Swan*' it was thought that she had gone down in the water between Dobodura and Hanover Island off the northwest coast of New Britain in the Bismarck Sea.

The Swan, however, had actually crashed near Deboin on the tip of Cape Ward Hunt on the north coast of Papua New Guinea (PNG), killing the entire crew.

The Swan and her crew were officially declared Missing In Action a short time later. Nothing would be known about the location of the Swan for over sixty years.

However, the crash site was known to local villagers since shortly after the crash, but they never told anyone.

## **JOSEPH THOMPSON**

His parents had married young and parted shortly after Joseph was born.

His father John was killed during WWI and his mother very shortly married Henry Meins. They had daughter Martha born in 1919.

Family history has it that Eliza's parents pressured her to give up her son to another local family for adoption and to move away to Stewartville, MN, never to see him again.

In 1921, two years after Martha was born, when he was 4, his mother gave Joseph up for adoption to the Hans Tobias Thompson Family, who moved to California. At that time his name was changed from Smith to Thompson.

His mother also put Martha up for adoption and her name was changed from Martha Mein to Eileen Cooper.

Henry Meins was in and out of jail so Eliza moved on and later married twice more. When she died in 1985 she was living in Stillwater, MN and her name was Eliza Millarch.

Not many details are known about Joseph's adopted life. He had an adopted sister, Ethel Johnson whom he listed as his next of kin when he joined the military.

He was living in Compton, California when he joined the U.S. Army Air Corp at the age of 24 on May 19, 1941. Before joining the Army he had worked as a mechanic and was in the Civilian Conversation Corp (CCC) when he enlisted.

Joe did his training at March Field, Riverside, CA from May 1941 to February 1942 and was at Norton, Field in San Bernardino, CA just before shipping out to Australia in March 1942. At that time he was in the 102<sup>nd</sup> Observation Squadron.

When the 43<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group asked for volunteers, Joe decided to join them and was transferred to the 63<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Squadron.

While in Australia before the 63<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Squadron was sent to New Guinea, S/Sgt Joseph Thompson met seventeen year old Dorothy Joyce Pardella, in Mackay, Australia. He was immediately smitten.

Mackay is located on the eastern coast of Australia in Queensland, opposite the Great Barrier Reef, 600 miles north of Brisbane.

Joe kept a notebook where he recorded who and when someone wrote to him. He responded to all their letters. His notebook showed he started writing to Joyce weekly in August of 1943. The book showed no correspondence in November. That was because he found out that Joyce was pregnant, so he went AWOL to be with her and see if they could get married.

He stayed with Joyce and her friend Neil for the month of November 1943. Neil was dating a sailor so Joseph donned a sailor's uniform as they moved out and about around MacKay before he was picked up by the military and given the choice of going to Leavenworth or being demoted to a Private and going back to the war.

So now we know how he became a Private and why he was on the Swan.

Joe gave Joyce his sister's name and address in case anything happened to him. After his death Joyce wrote to his adoptive sister, Ethel Johnson, sending her photos of their daughter on her first birthday. After a while the letters stopped because Joseph's life insurance went to Ethel and she was afraid that Joyce would make a claim on his benefits. Sadly this link was broken and it would be over **forty** years before Joseph's daughter, Sandy, would find it, again.

### **JOSEPH'S DAUGHTER - SANDY**

Born on May 23, 1944, after Joseph and the Swan were lost, Sandy grew up in Mackay, Queensland, Australia living with her mother, Joyce, and her grandmother Alice Pardella. Her Grandmother raised her while her mother worked.

In the years after WWII it was difficult for an unwed mother and Alice was very sensitive to this attitude, so they moved to Sidney when Sandy was seven. Joyce soon met her future husband and, shortly after they were married, they moved back to MacKay to be near Joyce's mother, Alice.

Joyce had two more daughters, Christine and Karen. They lived in Mackay until Alice's death, when they moved to New South Wales and stayed there until 1980,

Later the family moved to West Australia where they remained until the death of Sandy's mother and step-father. Sandy has just recently moved back to her home state, Queensland, to spend her golden years.

Joyce's very close friend sent a letter to Sandy 64 years after Joseph's death telling her about her mother meeting Joe. Sandy was overjoyed to learn something about her father.

The letter read:

"I am just writing to tell you about your Dad Joe Thompson. I got to know Joe very well when he was here on furlough. Your mom and I were very good mates. We were always together and told each other all our problems. Your mom told me she met a nice guy, so my sailor friend and I and your mom and Joseph became a foursome. It wasn't long and I could see Joe was smitten with your mom. They were both so happy. They told me your mom was pregnant. Joe was over the moon. His leave was getting over but he didn't want to go back and leave your mom so he went AWOL. It was quite a while before he was picked up by the MP's (Military Police). It was a very sad day for us all. After he went back we had no news from him. Your mom was frantic when you were born. Joe loved you very much. Your Dad would have been so proud of you. He was a very loving man. I'm glad to call him my friend. All my love and best of luck."

### **A DAUGHTER'S SEARCH FOR HER FATHER**

Sandy had always wanted to know more about her father and his family. She states, "I started my quest to learn about my father in 1983. The only information I had was his name Joseph Thompson and that he was from Compton, California." It took many letters to the military and many months to get a reply.

When she began her search for Joe's family she had not known he was adopted. When she discovered this, through American military records, it gave her another avenue to find his history. She decided she wanted to let his birth mother know he had died in 1943. So she began a search for his birth family.

Working through friends and amateur researchers, in March 2002 she had found Joe's birth family through his cousin's line, the Fox's. Joe's birth family

embraced her and, through them she learned of Joe's surviving adoptive family in March 2002

Sandy also learned that Joe's mother had died 20 years earlier, not knowing anything about Joe.

Sandy relates, "During the many years of searching for information about my father, when I had reached a brick wall, my husband Kevin Smith, could see my distress, and the empty void I had carried all my life. "He would say, 'If I could find him for you I would'.

Continuing, she says, "Well, my lovely husband died in a car accident in 2002, and one week later to the day, I received information that the plane was found on land, not in the sea. " To this day I believe Kevin kept his word.

Sandy and Kevin have two daughters, Samantha, born May 6, 1971 and Jolene born on March 25, 1977.

She remembers, "In 1998, I wrote to a vet's newspaper requesting anyone who knew my father. A lady called Irene Dow contacted me as her brother-in-law had served in the same bomb group. A man called George Wyatt, a retired U.S. Marine who served in both Vietnam and Korea, felt the need to help others to find kin. He joined the 43<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group for research to help others, we all became like family."

Sandy also was contacted by Jim McEwan who served with Joe in the 102<sup>nd</sup> Observation Group.

In 2000, Sandy , sent an E-mail to the 43<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group's web site which was instrumental in not only the finding of the Swan but in her long search to learn about her father, Private Joseph Thompson.

She sent the E-mail after she saw this note on the site's message board, "*Joseph Thompson, a gunner, was KIA on B-24D 42-40475, "The Swan", which was lost on a mission from Dobodura, New Guinea on December, 4, 1943.*

Sandy's email read:

***JOSEPH THOMPSON, 63<sup>RD</sup> SQ***

*"I am in search for individuals who may have known or served with my father, Joseph Thompson, who was in the 63<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Sq. (H) from May, 1941 to Dec 3, 1943. Please E-mail [sankev@wn.com.au](mailto:sankev@wn.com.au)*

Sandy actually started working with the previous 43<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group Secretary, Howard Anderson, but when Ed Gammill took over as Secretary, he continued to help Sandy.

They were both able to provide Sandy with the different organizations and avenues to bit by bit, piece by piece find out not only about her father, but his family as well.