

THE GILDER LEHRMAN INSTITUTE *of* AMERICAN HISTORY

Inside the Vault: Highlights from the Gilder Lehrman Collection

May 20, 2021

The session will start shortly. Please note:

- Your video and audio will automatically turn off.
- You can participate through the Q&A function.
- If you have technical difficulties, please email collectionprograms@gilderlehrman.org so we can assist you.

Our Team

- Sandy Trenholm - Collection Director
- Ryan Scheb - History Educator at Cristo Rey New York High School in New York City
- Avery Sobczak - Swing in the National Tour of *Hamilton*
- Zoya Siddiqui - Curatorial Intern
- Allison Kraft - Assistant Curator

During the Session



- If you would like to ask a question, you can **use the Q&A feature.**
- We will be answering audience questions throughout the session.

For Security and Privacy

- Your microphone is automatically muted.
- Your camera is automatically turned off.

Today's Documents

We will be looking at some of the World War II correspondence of Lieutenant Robert Stone.

These documents illustrate some of the experiences of an airman including:

- An accident during training
- Letter & oral history describing a frightening mission
- His stepbrother's mission at Iwo Jima
- His 40th mission



Lieutenant Bob Stone
Gilder Lehrman Collection



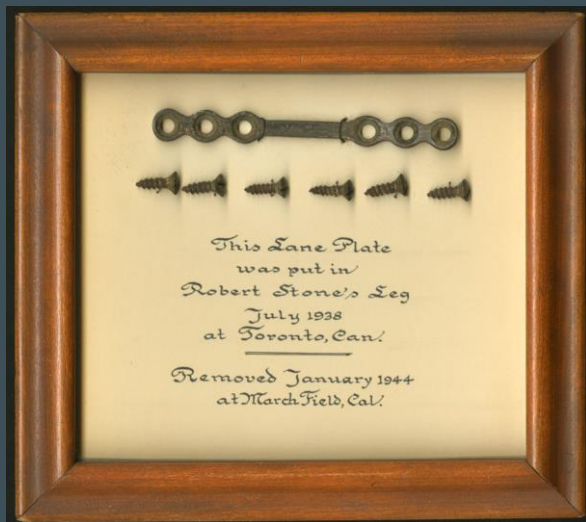
B-24 Liberator
Gilder Lehrman
Collection

Lieutenant Robert L. Stone (1919-2009)

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- Bombardier on a B-24 Liberator, 431st Bomb Squadron (Heavy), 7th United States Army Air Forces
- Sophomore at Williams College in Massachusetts when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor
- Enlisted in Army Air Forces in July 1942
- Reported for duty February 1943
- Had surgery to remove the plate, which delayed his deployment



Lieutenant Bob Stone (top) & Plate and Screws removed from Bob's leg (bottom)
Gilder Lehrman Collection

Training

- Training at seven army bases:
 - Nashville, Tennessee
 - Ellington, Texas
 - Childress, Texas
 - Wendover Field, Utah
 - March Field, California
 - Hammer Field, California
 - Oahu, Hawaii
- Assigned to “Pop” Elkins’s crew in May 1944.

*Lieutenant Bob Stone (center back) with his training crew
Gilder Lehrman Collection*



Witnessing an Accident

- Between December 1941 and August 1945, the Army Air Forces had 52,651 airplane accidents in the continental United States that were not related to combat.
- Many of these crashes occurred during training and drove home the dangers of Air Force duty.
- While Bob was training in Childress, two such fatal plane crashes happened in one day.



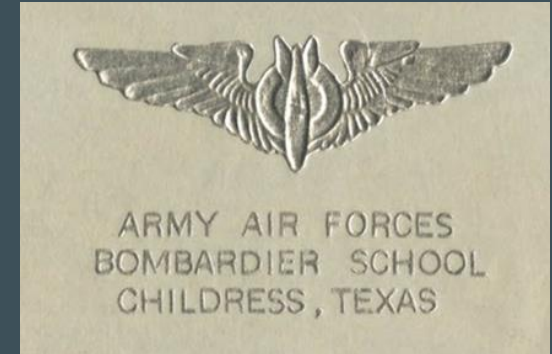
*Photograph of formation taken during
training*

Gilder Lehrman Collection

Witnessing an Accident

“After supper the camp was hit by the greatest blows any of us had ever received. We were playing ball against the officers out on the landing field. Our squadron commander, who’s one of the greatest guys you’d ever want to know, and a major who was the head of our maneuvers, were buzzing around the vicinity in a little basic trainer that we had along to go for the mail every day. All of a sudden the ship made a sharp turn about 200 ft. above the ground and went into a spin when the engine stalled.

“The wing flew apart like paper in mid air and the ship crashed into the ground. It was horrible when it immediately broke into flames right on the end of the runway not 300 yards away from us. Of course, both of the poor devils were killed instantly as the plane burned to a cinder before our very eyes. It was horrible and at first we couldn’t believe what had happened although we saw the whole thing unfold before us.”



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Witnessing an Accident



Lieutenant Bob Stone
Gilder Lehrman Collection

“This was a tragedy that left the camp deep in sorrow and mental dejection. There was just nothing to say since we’d all seen it happen and it was nothing but an indescribable catastrophe. One of the pilots tried to say a few words to us but he choked up and had to stop so we all dispersed and returned to our tents in silence.... This was a tragedy that only a long time will erase from our memories. Our squadron will never be the same!”

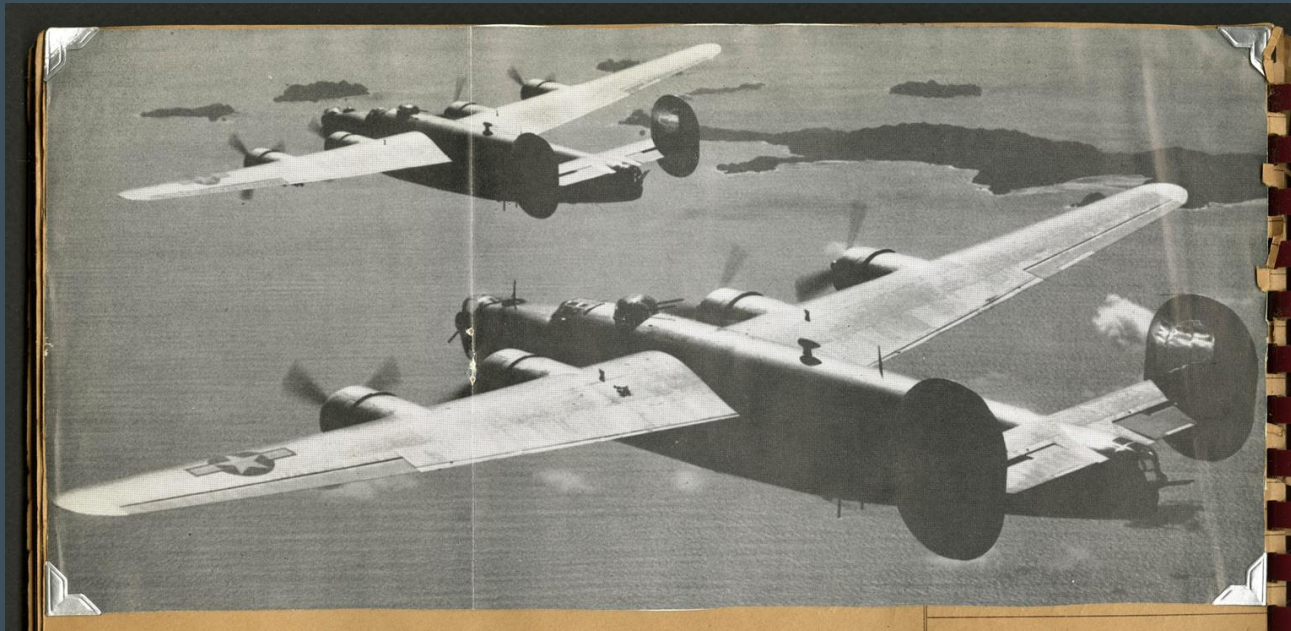
40 missions

- Bombardier crews in the Pacific Theater completed 40 missions.
- Lt. Stone was stationed in Guam from October 1944 to May 1945.

COMBAT MISSIONS		
*** NAMES and ADDRESSES ***		
1. October 21 st the airfield at Yap	6 hrs. 20 min.	21. January 21 st airfield #1 at Iwo (10 hrs. 25 min.)
2. November 1 st Navy escort in Bonin	13 hrs. 45 min.	22. January 24 th installations at Iwo (10 hrs. 10 min.)
3. November 9 th shipping at Haha	12 hrs. 30 min.	23. February 12 th gun placements at Iwo (10 hrs. 50 min.)
4. November 11 th airfields at Iwo	9 hrs. 35 min.	24. February 16 th air support to task force (10 hrs. 10 min.)
5. November 14 th shipping at Chichi	10 hrs. 50 min.	25. February 18 th air support to task force (10 hrs. 30 min.)
6. November 21 st installations at Haha	21 hrs. 15 min.	26. February 27 th Susaki Airfield at Chichi (12 hrs. 25 min.)
7. November 25 th shipping at Chichi	11 hrs.	27. March 1 st Susaki Airfield at Chichi (11 hrs. 50 min.)
8. November 29 th airfields at Iwo	9 hrs. 40 min.	28. March 6 th Susaki Airfield at Chichi (11 hrs. 25 min.)
9. December 3 rd airfields at Iwo	11 hrs. 30 min.	29. March 10 th Susaki Airfield at Chichi (10 hrs. 45 min.)
10. December 8 th airfields at Iwo	9 hrs. 40 min.	30. March 11 th Susaki Airfield at Chichi (11 hrs. 05 min.)
11. December 10 th airfields at Iwo	9 hrs.	31. March 14 th Susaki Airfield at Chichi (11 hrs. 50 min.)
12. December 21 st airfield #1 at Iwo	10 hrs. 10 min.	32. March 18 th Susaki Airfield at Chichi (11 hrs. 35 min.)
13. December 24 th airfield #1 at Iwo	9 hrs. 45 min.	33. March 20 th Susaki Airfield at Chichi (10 hrs. 50 min.)
14. December 27 th airfield #1 at Iwo	10 hrs.	34. March 22 nd Susaki Airfield at Chichi (11 hrs. 25 min.)
15. December 29 th airfield #1 at Iwo	10 hrs.	35. March 27 th Susaki Airfield at Chichi (10 hrs. 35 min.)
16. January 5 th airfield #1 at Iwo	10 hrs.	36. March 30 th Installations + Airfield on Marcus (11 hrs. 35 min.)
17. January 8 th airfield #1 at Iwo	10 hrs.	37. April 5 th Installations on Eten Is. Truk (8 hrs. 20 min.)
18. January 10 th airfield #1 at Iwo	10 hrs. 20 min.	38. April 9 th Installations + Airfield on Marcus (11 hrs. 35 min.)
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20. January 18 th airfield #1 at Iwo	9 hrs. 25 min.	40. April 17 th Installations on Dublon Is. Truk (8 hrs. 10 min.)

A frightening mission over Iwo Jima: January 21, 1945 letter

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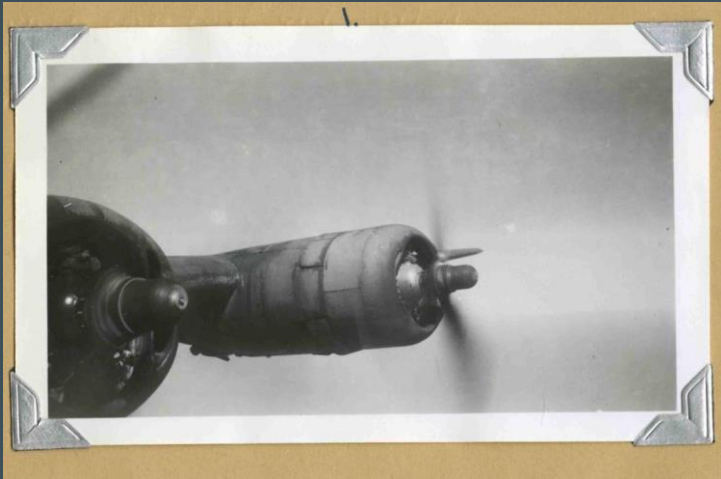


Gilder Lehrman Collection

“Actually our rest came at a very opportune moment because our next to last mission was a real rough one and all of us were pretty badly scared. We were all too jumpy to fly for awhile so a rest leave was quite welcome. Incidentally, we now have twenty-two missions to our credit which leaves us eighteen to go. It’s been a long nervewracking pull, and we’ve still got alot in front of us. At least we’ve gotten over the half way mark, none the worse for it (considering everything)”

A frightening mission over Iwo Jima: 2006 Oral History

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"How our engines looked when we started the mission." Gilder Lehrman Collection



"Our troubles really began when we had to feather #1. A mighty helpless looking engine!" The Gilder Lehrman Collections

"We had just bombed Iwo Jima and were leaving the target, which was 6 hours away from our base on Guam when several Japanese fighter planes called Zeros attacked us. Although we fought them off, we took a number of hits, as well as some hits from the thick flak we encountered when we flew over the island to drop our bombs. After a while flying back towards Guam, one of our four engines sputtered and stopped running.

"The pilot 'feathered' this engine which means that he turned the propeller blades sideways so that they would cut through the air rather than being a total drag. A loaded B-24 cannot take off with only two working engines, but once in the air it can fly with only two engines.

"With only three engines operating, the plane was flying much slower and was beginning to lose altitude, which made us consume more gasoline. All of a sudden there was total silence when all three engines stopped.

"The silence was devastating and eerie."

Engines Stopped Working

“We were all in a state of panic wondering what had happened and if the end was near—it seemed inevitable! After what seemed like a long time, but probably was only a couple of minutes, the engines caught hold and we were once again on our way to our base. We found out that in transferring fuel from the non-working engine to the working ones, an air lock developed which momentarily stopped the proper flow of gas and made the plane stall.”



Lieutenant Bob Stone
Gilder Lehrman Collection

Lightening the Load

“Because of our loss of altitude, we decided to lighten our load by throwing overboard anything ... of any weight except the Norden Bomb Sight was jettisoned. The bombsight was top-secret equipment, very expensive, and very difficult to replace because it enabled the pilot to transfer the control of the plane to the bombardier who could then zero in on the targets more accurately. The reduction of all this weight helped us maintain altitude and at the same time use less gas. We continued along for about another hour or so hoping we would not lose altitude and not use up all our gas before we got to base. We also hoped that our three engines would continue to operate until we landed safely.”



Waist gun position
Gilder Lehrman Collection



Tail Gun position
Gilder Lehrman Collection

Diverting to Saipan

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“At this point, we decided to head to Saipan rather than our home base of Guam because Saipan was somewhat closer than flying back to Guam.... The next hour or so was really tense and scary as there was nothing else we could do except to hope that Saint Francis and Saint Christopher would do their job and protect us!



“It was an enormous relief when we saw the lights of Saipan. We started our final approach and descent to the runway from a much lower altitude than normal. When the wheels hit the runway, we started to roll but only got half way down the runway when the other two engines stopped because we had completely run out of gas. This was an absolute miracle because if we had to fly another 100 feet to reach the runway we would have come down in the water and crashed! When the crew left the airplane, we all kissed the ground because we had been so fortunate in making it back safely to terra firma! The Flying Jenny was hauled away and never flew again because its engines and the body of the plane had been so badly damaged it was not worth repairing.”



St. Francis Medal that Bob carried on every mission.

Gilder Lehrman Collection

Stepbrother Barry Marks on Iwo Jima

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2) Barry, after he returned from
the Iwo campaign.

Barry Marks
Gilder Lehrman Collection

“March 4th - Until now I was unable to discuss the whereabouts of Barry’s outfit because it hadn’t come out in the newscasts or the papers. When I returned from rest leave, he left me a note saying “when you next bomb Iwo be careful you don’t hit me” so of course I knew the 3rd marines were Iwo bound. From all the news reports their going has been tough, but I’m certain Barry will come through with flying colors. I’ve often thought what a small world it is when we were hitting Iwo during the invasion, and knowing that my brother was down on the beaches. If I get any word about his outfit, I’ll write as soon as censorship regulations permit. Ordinarily you’ve got to wait until it’s been related on the radio or in the papers, however.”

“March 17th - You’ve asked numerous times if I’d heard from or about Barry. As yet I’ve had no word from him, but I know it’s because he’s too busy to write. You must have faith that he’s O.K. and that no news is good news.”

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Bittersweet 40th mission

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“Today you are receiving the letter that I have dreamed of writing for the last six months. Yes, we finally flew our fortieth mission! It had been a long and trying tour of duty filled with a number of black hours and narrow escapes.

“My joy over finishing was spoiled a couple of days ago when I had a letter returned from one of my best friends with the word ‘missing’ on the outside. It was a letter to Bill Struby who was flying a B-17 in Italy. I wrote his commanding officer to see if possibly it couldn’t have been a mistake. Why it is that the best always have to pay the price is beyond me. Incidentally the bombardier on his new crew was Al Swain, a classmate of his and mine at Williams. The fellow on Ken’s ship is his older brother, Bob Swain. Both of them are darn nice kids. Al was a very good friend of mine at college. Don’t say anything about Bill being missing until I can confirm it by a letter from his C.O. I’m hoping against hope that my returned letter was in error.”



Working on the “post 40 tan”
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Bob Stone Booklet

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"Black Hours and Narrow Escapes"
The World War II Experience of
Bombardier Robert L. Stone
with an introduction by Michael S. Neiberg

- 60 pages of additional resources from the Robert Stone collection
- Includes introductions from Sheila M. Stone and Michael S. Neiberg, Chair of War Studies and the US Army War College
- Look for the booklet in an email from GLI tomorrow!

Upcoming Programs

- *Inside the Vault*, Thursday, June 3 at 7 p.m. ET (4 p.m. PT)
 - We will be discussing the 1963 March on Washington.
- *Book Breaks*, May 23 at 2 p.m. ET (11 a.m. PT)
 - David Head discusses his book *A Crisis of Peace: George Washington, the Newburgh Conspiracy, and the Fate of the American Revolution*.
- Visit the History Shop on our website for a self-paced course on WWII!
 - Led by Michael Neiberg, Chair of War Studies, US Army War College