

Our Namesake: Lt B. R. Kimlau, the Story of his Heroic Sacrifice

Our friends, guests, and members often wish to hear more about Lt. Benjamin Ralph Kimlau, whom our Post is named after. This is a brief story of our World War II hero.

Ralph Kimlau was born on April 10, 1918 in Concord, Massachusetts. At age fourteen, Ralph moved with his parents to New York City where he attended DeWitt Clinton High School. Upon graduation in 1937, the young man visited China for the first time.

During that trip, Ralph Kimlau personally witnessed the Japanese aggression in East Asia. Little did he realize then, that this conflagration would develop into a global conflict, and that he would take part in this war and honorably perish in the defense of peace and justice.



Ralph returned to the United States in 1938 and attended Pennsylvania Military College where he graduated with high honors in 1942. He was then commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Field Artillery.

He later applied for and was granted a transfer to the U.S. Army Air Forces. After completion of his pilot training, Ralph was assigned to the 380th Bombardment Group of the Fifth Air Force located in Fenton, Australia. The group was known as the "Flying Circus" and had sustained considerable casualties in its support of General MacArthur's advances in Bismarck Bay.

Operations in this area were of great importance at that particular time because it marked the first offensive from General MacArthur's troops after their retreat from the Philippines. The control of Bismarck Bay would trap thousands of enemy soldiers and cut off the Japanese supply lines to New Guinea and near-by islands, thus, setting the stage for the return of American forces to the Philippines.

On February 27, 1944, a teletype called for twenty-four Liberators with crews and ground personnel to transit to Port Moresby, New Guinea with orders to bombard Hollandia day and night. Lt. Ralph Kimlau was one of the pilots selected for this mission.

However, bad weather caused the planes to be rerouted to Nadzab while the ground personnel remained at Port Moresby. As a remote outpost to the Fifth Air Force, Nadzab was a small airdrome located on the North Shore of New Guinea and had a compliment of a few fighter planes. The base was poorly situated in the Markham Valley of New Guinea and was under-manned and ill-equipped. Each night take-off or landing was a sweat job for the pilots because it required intricate and precise patterns to be flown on instruments to avoid crashing into the surrounding hills.

The pilots' first mission was to bombard all Japanese airdromes and aircrafts around New Guinea to cover the landing of the First Cavalry Division on Los Negros Island in the Admiralties. For four days, the men relentlessly pounded Hansa, Nubia, Hollandia, Wetek, and other key points in this area.

On March 5, 1944, the pilots were ordered to attack the Japanese rear line at Los Negros Island even though they were in no shape to take on the mission. The crews were exhausted from being in constant action, and their planes were in desperately needed of service. However, the First Cavalry Division was already ashore on Los Negros Island and had been suffering from waves of Japanese attacks. This necessitated the bombing mission to be urgently launched to provide air support.

On this mission, Lt. Benjamin Ralph Kimlau and his entire crew met their heroic end. The 380th Bombardment Group, through great courage, skill and devotion to duty, was awarded two Presidential Unit Citations for their outstanding performance and gallantry in battle.

本會命名紀念中尉劉國樑烈士及其壯烈犧牲成仁的故事

本會命名為[華裔紀念劉錦中尉一二九一分會]。每年喜慶聚會，都有不少中外佳賓，甚或本會會員詢問有關劉錦中尉，這位二次世界大戰空軍英雄的事蹟。我們特別在這本紀念特刊裡，簡述劉錦中尉生平，紀念英雄，保留歷史。

劉錦（原名劉國樑）於一九一八年四月十日在美國麻省康珂出生。十四歲時隨父母遷居紐約市，就讀於柯林頓高中。於一九三七年畢業。同年，他第一次探訪中國大陸。是次中國旅遊中，劉錦目睹當時日本人在遠東方面的侵略行動。但他並未預料到，這場燎原之火引發起一場世界性戰爭，同時，他也未預料到他會捲入這場戰禍中。更未預料到他會為捍衛自由與正義而光榮犧牲。

劉錦於一九三八年回到美國，進入賓省軍事學院就讀。於一九四二年以優秀成績畢業，並同時獲授美國陸軍野戰炮部隊少尉軍銜。不久之後劉錦申請並得到批准轉到美國空軍部隊服役。在完成飛行訓練後，他被分派到第五空軍第三八零轟炸機中隊，駐防地在澳大利亞芬頓。該轟炸機中隊當時由支援麥克阿瑟將軍在俾斯麥灣的攻勢而備受日軍極大的摧殘，曾被喻為“飛行馬戲團”。

因為俾斯麥灣攻勢為麥克阿瑟將軍從菲律賓撤退後的第一次反擊，故頗受到各方面的注意與重視。如果能夠有效控制俾斯麥灣，五萬名日軍將會被圍困，而且日軍在新幾內亞及其附近島嶼之軍備供給線亦將被切斷。從而為麥克阿瑟將軍重返菲律賓提供一個大好機會。

一九四四年二月二十七日，芬頓基地作戰室接獲電訓，命令二十四架“解放者”轟炸機，包括飛行員及附屬地勤工作員移防至轟炸摩斯比港。他們得到的命令是日夜不停地轟炸位於新幾內亞，荷蘭海岸的荷蘭地亞。劉錦中尉即為此任務的飛行之一。

當飛機飛往摩斯比港基地時，由於荷蘭地亞山區氣候惡劣，所有飛機奉命改飛一個位於新幾內亞新幾內亞北岸的小機場那石，但所有地勤人員均須留在摩斯比港。那石機場地處新幾內亞的亞麥山谷之中。該機場除了有少數戰鬥機外，並無轟炸機，況且基地內人員短缺，裝備不全，它只是第五空軍的一個外圍基地。每次晚上起飛出勤，對飛行員來說都是一次心力交迫的驚險考驗，因為他們都要依靠駕駛儀器來進行一套複雜而又準確性要求極高的飛行程序，以免飛機撞上山壁。

劉錦和他的戰友們在進駐那石機場後的第一個任務，是轟炸所有環繞在新幾內亞群島的日軍機場及飛機，以支援及協調美軍第一騎兵師在阿得米拉提群島中的洛力勞島登陸之需。此後四天，美軍飛機不斷轟炸日軍在附近地區的據點。三月五日，空軍健兒們奉命去攻擊在洛力勞島日軍後方陣地。在經過連續數日不停地執行飛行任務後，飛行員早已心力交瘁，他們不但在身體及精神方面無法接受這次任務，就是飛機本身，也實在急需接受維修，但當時第一騎兵師已登陸洛力勞島，而且日軍也正在發動一波又一波的反攻。是次陸上戰況並不很樂觀，因而這一轟炸任務是勢在必行的。

就是在這次執行任務中，劉錦中尉及其袍澤們全部壯烈犧牲，獻出了寶貴的生命。第三八零轟炸機中隊的空軍英雄們用大無畏的豪氣，超群的技術，對責任的無限忠誠，在戰鬥中表現出色，因而兩次榮獲全隊性的“總統褒揚”獎。（注：此獎為美國軍隊在戰爭中所能得到的最高功勳榮譽獎）