



Stephenson Brothers

Glenwood

Roland Stuart

Clyde

1924

3/22/11

Brief Biography (Biosketch) of Captain Glenwood Gordon Stephenson**United States Army Air Forces****By Larry W. Stephenson, M.D. (Glen's Nephew)
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Glen Stephenson was born in 1914 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin to middle-class parents. His father was a successful electrical engineer. When he was in the seventh grade his comfortable life in Milwaukee came to an abrupt end. A doctor told his father that the dust at Cutler-Hammer, manufacturer of electrical devices, and the dampness from nearby Lake Michigan were aggravating his asthma and he should move to the country. The family sold their city house in the spring of 1927. Gordon Stephenson purchased eighty acres of land near Arpin, in central Wisconsin, and became a farmer.

The family's new home was nothing like their comfortable Milwaukee residence. The house had no electricity or indoor plumbing. A shallow twenty-foot well provided water of dubious quality. The round oak stove in the downstairs living room provided the only heat, so the upstairs bedrooms in the winter seemed as cold as the outdoors, which not uncommonly dropped to temperatures of 10° below zero Fahrenheit or more in the winter. The family never had a telephone.

Years of asthma made his father rather frail, weak and unable to perform strenuous physical activity, so Glen and his three older brothers supplied most of the farm labor. There were two other children, a boy and a girl, who were as yet too young to be of help.

It was at about this time that the Stephensons' finances took a turn for the worse, due to the onset of the Great Depression. Profits from the sale of the Milwaukee house had been invested in the stock market, which collapsed in October 1929, wiping out all the family's investments.

In spite of Glen's heavy work load on the farm, as a high school student he managed to play varsity basketball, participate in school plays and be a member of the glee club. During his senior year, the school principal appointed him president of the student council.

Because of family finances, a four-year college was out of the question. For those interested in becoming teachers, there were one-year programs offered at some vocational schools, one of which Glen attended, graduating with his 26 classmates in June 1933. Only five graduates found teaching jobs; most school districts were not hiring new teachers and some were even laying off those they did have. Glen picked up

any temporary work he could find, including working at a gravel pit that winter. By the following spring, with no job prospects in sight, Glen packed a small bag, jumped a freight train and became a "hobo," taking odd jobs here and there as he slowly worked his way west to California.

The job situation in California turned out to be no different from that in Wisconsin, so Glen enlisted in the U.S. Army in November 1934. He was shipped to the Philippines where he became a member of the 31st Infantry Regiment. While in the Philippines, he received an appointment to the premier Army Military Academy at West Point, New York. In 1938, between his sophomore and junior years at the Academy and four years after leaving Wisconsin, he returned to the family farm for the summer. Sadly, he found that his mother had been permanently committed to a mental hospital, where he visited her several times. Although he planned to come home again sometime after his graduation, that never happened, and the summer of 1938 turned out to be the last time his family ever saw him.

Shortly after graduation in June 1940, Glen enrolled in the nine-month Army Air Corps pilot training program, graduating in March 1941. He was assigned to the 27th Bombardment Group in Savannah, Georgia. The group consisted of four squadrons equipped with smaller types of bombers called attack bombers, which were more nimble than the larger bombers and used for close support of ground troops. They also flew A-24 single engine dive bombers, which were the planes they would eventually take to war.

On October 6, 1941, Glen married Ann Grace Nail, a local girl from Savannah. Shortly thereafter, the 27th Bomb Group received secret orders that they were to be part of Operation Plum, and left Savannah around October 19th. The unit went by train to California and then by ship to the Philippines. Their A-24 dive bombers were shipped in a separate convoy. The unit arrived at Manila on Thanksgiving Day 1941, with 1,209 airmen.

On Sunday morning, December 7, the U.S. Pacific Fleet was attacked at Pearl Harbor by planes from six Japanese aircraft carriers. The attack started at 7:55 a.m.; it was 2:25 a.m., Monday, December 8th, in Manila. That same day, Glen was made squadron leader of the 16th Squadron of the 27th Bomb Group. The ship convoy with the 27th Bomb Group's planes was still two weeks away from arriving in Manila, but shortly after the Pearl Harbor attack, the convoy was diverted to Australia. At that point, the plan was to send most, if not all, of the pilots and some of the enlisted men by plane to Australia to reassemble the aircraft and fly them back to the Philippines.

In the early morning hours of December 18th, 23 pilots from the 27th along with two enlisted men were sent by transport planes to Australia to reassemble some of their A-24 dive bombers and fly them back to the Philippines. The main Japanese invasion of the Philippines began on December 22nd. At that point, Glen's squadron was about forty miles outside of Manila, helping to build an airfield. On December 24th, they were

ordered to return to Manila and proceed to Bataan. All other army units on the island of Luzon were also ordered to retreat to the Bataan Peninsula or to the island fortress of Corregidor in Manila Bay. The only tactical airfield MacArthur's troops had on Bataan and Corregidor was Bataan Field. Glen's 16th squadron was put in charge of Bataan Field and was responsible for maintaining the field as well as some of the P-40 fighter planes. The airfield was bombed every day by the Japanese.

MacArthur's air force at Bataan Field consisted of about twenty P-40 fighters, some older P-35 fighters and a few observation planes. They were greatly outnumbered by the Japanese air units in the area. At the end of January Glen, along with four other pilots from the 27th, were ordered to report to Corregidor; from there they were sent by submarine to Java. Those left behind became a part of the infamous Bataan Death March after the American and Philippine troops surrendered in April. Most of them died on the march or in Japanese POW Camps.

Glen spent the month of February on Java working with the U.S. Army Air Corps, initially helping to supervise construction of an airfield to be used by the 27th bringing planes out of Australia. Soon a squadron of the 27th's dive bombers arrived and he joined up with the unit. At the end of February there was a large-scale Japanese invasion of Java, and Glen's squadron was ordered to Australia. In Australia, Glen met up with most of the other 23 pilots from the 27th Bomb Group, who had been sent there in December to retrieve and reassemble their planes. As it turned out, by the time the A-24 dive bombers were reassembled and ready to fly back to the Philippines, the Japanese were in control of the refueling routes for these relatively short range planes. The 27th Bomb Group then began flying missions from the northern Australian airfields.

At this point, the pilots of the 27th in Australia, with their A-24 dive bombers, were ordered to join up with the newly arrived 3rd Bombardment Group. They had been the sister unit to the 27th Bombardment Group in Savannah, Georgia. Shortly after, the 3rd Bombardment Group received 15 new B-25 two-engine bombers and began to fly missions from Charters Towers, which was their new airbase. Many of the missions required flying to Port Moresby for refueling and then on over the Owen Stanley Mountains to attack the enemy on the other side of the island. They also flew both bombing and reconnaissance missions over the Bismarck Sea, the Solomon Sea and the Coral Sea.

Glen Stephenson was made a member of the 90th squadron of the 3rd Bombardment Group. Since he had very little time flying in the new B-25 bombers, he was made copilot for a risky series of reconnaissance missions from April 19-23. These missions required flying from Charters Towers to Port Moresby and then out over the Bismarck Sea. On April 21, while returning from a reconnaissance mission via Port Moresby, they reached the Australian coastline just as it was getting dark and flew into a rain squall. The plane crashed into Mount Bartle Frere, Queensland's highest mountain. The exact cause of the crash has never been determined. All seven crew members were killed.

Their bodies were initially buried at the site of the crash, but several months to a year later the bodies were moved and reburied. Some reports stated they were buried in a cemetery in Ipswich in southern Queensland; another source indicates they were interred at the U.S. Military cemetery in Townsville.

After the war the bodies were exhumed and returned to the United States for burial. Glen was reburied in the National Military Cemetery in Hawaii, known as "Punchbowl." The cemetery overlooks Pearl Harbor where, on December 7, 1941, the lives of Glenwood Stephenson, his wife, Ann, his family in Wisconsin and all American citizens were changed forever. For more about Glen Stephenson and the early years of the war in the Pacific, see "Operation Plum," by Adrian Martin and Larry Stephenson, Texas A&M University Press, 2008.