

MIS Laneous

May 2021

SAVING THEIR LIVES COST HIM HIS OWN.

Producer
Mariana Tosca

Writer-Director
Christopher Johnson

JOURNEY TO ROYAL

A WWII RESCUE MISSION

VISION FILMS PRESENTS A MISTY FALLS MOTION PICTURE COMPANY PRODUCTION A CHRISTOPHER JOHNSON FILM EARL HOLLIMAN MARSHA HUNT JANIS PAIGE JOHN LOGAN JOHN REE WALTER O. SHEPPARD FREELAND TERPENNING MILTON ROBBINS MARK KISHIGO RAYMOND LEE LAVERLE WESTERMAN HAROLD STRATTON "JOURNEY TO ROYAL: A WWII RESCUE MISSION" CASTING MARIANA TOSCA SPECIAL THANKS TO DAVID B. MILLER SPECIAL THANKS TO JOHN K. STIRBER EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS DAVID JOHNSON OF RECORDING PATRICK O. BIRD DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY JOHN W. FROST ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS NICHOLAS NEUBRAND GLENN ROSSNEY EXECUTIVE PRODUCER CHRISTOPHER JOHNSON PRODUCED BY MARIANA TOSCA, P.G.A. WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY CHRISTOPHER JOHNSON

www.JourneyToRoyal.com
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Journey to Royal: A WWII Rescue Mission featuring Earl Holliman, Marsha Hunt, Janis Paige
produced by Mariana Tosca, p.g.a. www.MTosca.com
written and directed by Christopher Johnson www.ChrisJohnsonFilms.com

The Stars Turned Gold

By Mariana Tosca

Greater Los Angeles Area Mensa

They came from cornfields and corner stores, from soda shops and steel mills. They were farmers and factory



workers, clerks and coal miners. Many had never traveled beyond the periphery of their hometown. Some had been called up. Others volunteered. But all

of them were stepping into an experience that would forever alter the course of their lives.

Left behind were sweethearts and parents, children and friends. In windows throughout the land, blue stars wilted on white banners bound by crimson borders. With one star, worry presided. With more stars, it multiplied. Families did their best to persevere in the absence of those who had gone to war. They lived and they worked and they continued on, girding their spirits against the possibility of that unwelcome day when the stars turned gold.

Flags and flowers cover national cemeteries across the country, identifying the final resting place of the hundreds of thousands who gave their last full measure of devotion. One of those flags marks the modest memorial stone of a 22-year-old Army Air Corps pilot from Elwood City, Pennsylvania. His name was Royal Stratton.

By all accounts, Royal was a sweet kid—the kind who would do anything for you. His youthful days were spent dreaming of becoming a pilot. His nights were spent dreaming of Mary Ellen. To further both ambitions, he took flying lessons at Newcastle airport and in the summer of 1943, at the age of 20, he married his true love. The following year, they welcomed daughter Vickie. On his fourth day of fatherhood, Royal dressed in his military flight suit and set out to join his squadron in the

war-torn South Pacific. He never returned home.

I first learned of the 4th Emergency Rescue Squadron when my production partner, Christopher Johnson, spoke of the mission that claimed the life of his great-uncle Royal. This valiant group of young men was stationed on the island of Iwo Jima and had been tasked with flying, mostly unarmed, through perilous combat zones in order to locate and rescue downed airmen who were adrift and unprotected in enemy waters. Over the duration of their service, the 4th E.R.S. would log over 6,000 hours of flying time, conduct 862 rescue missions and save the lives of 576 men.

On May 29, 1945, just twelve weeks before the end of the war, Royal and his crew received instructions to search for the men of the Dragon Lady, a flak-damaged B-29 that had been forced to ditch and whose exact coordinates were unknown. After hours of searching hundreds of square nautical miles over the open ocean, nine of those crew members were located and rescued, but during that effort Royal's life was lost.

As it is for so many families who have lost a loved one to war, questions remain and reverberate for generations. What could have been, if only ...? To assuage his family's lingering grief and bereavement, Christopher decided to find out exactly what happened to his great-uncle on that ill-fated day, and I decided to help him.

We traveled the world to locate and interview the surviving members of that rescue squadron. Their stories, replete with epic valor, were not diluted through derivative sources nor eroded by the passing of time. Each of those irreplaceable firsthand accounts underscored the resilience of the human spirit and revealed a service and heroism that helped forge the most unified era of our nation's history.

The culmination of our decade-long undertaking is the documentary/narrative hybrid film *Journey to Royal: A WWII Rescue Mission*. This film is our final salute to the

Greatest Generation and to all who served in the global conflict of the Second World War. It is our letter of ineffable gratitude to those who answered the call of duty and made the ultimate sacrifice.

The world is full of heroes whose stories we may never know, but that does not diminish or invalidate the value of their contributions. The story of the 4th



Emergency Rescue Squadron's noble service was not an uncommon one. From front lines to assembly lines, an inherent sense of duty and commitment pervaded that era when America had a unity of purpose. Despite

differences in background, personal beliefs, or politics, millions banded together and proved that the power of unification could triumph over seemingly insurmountable adversity.

Let no vandalism of avarice or neglect, no ravages of time, testify to the present or to the coming generations that we have forgotten, as a people, the cost of a free and undivided republic.

—General John A. Logan, May 1868

As we approach the last Monday of this month, when barbecues, baseball games, picnics, and parades usher in the unofficial start of summer, let us stop to remember and honor those who will not be in attendance—the servicemen and women who left their final footprints on the battlefields of the world. Let us remember to give thanks for the freedom and opportunities their sacrifice has afforded us. For all of us who are beneficiaries of their service, every day should be Memorial Day.

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Captain West (William McKinney) orders 1st Lt. Lloyd (Beau Briens) to prepare for ditching



The Dragon Lady in distress



Seaman George Keene recounts the bombing of Pearl Harbor



1st Lt. Royal Stratton (back row, 2nd from right) and members of the 4th Emergency Rescue Squadron, 1945



Producer Mariana Tosca and Director Christopher Johnson film cast member Shawn Hawkins for a visual effects shot



Seaman Lyle Umenhoffer, survivor of the U.S.S. Indianapolis, shares his harrowing story



A badly injured Staff Sgt. Weaver (Evan Riley Brown) is hoisted aboard an inflatable life raft

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Journey to Royal: A WWII Rescue Mission is available on streaming and cable platforms and through all major online retailers. For a full list of where to watch, visit journeytoroyal.com.

View the *Journey To Royal: A WWII Rescue Mission* trailer here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IrvU2XazU5o>



Producer Mariana Tosca (blue hat) instructs cast members Trierer Sherwood and Andre Datyelian inside a PBY Catalina seaplane