



# **Richard Buchignani: Country Boy to Fly Boy**

# Richard Buchignani: Country Boy to Fly Boy

Researched, compiled, and published by his niece, Jean Melinda Taeuffer  
La Crescenta, CA – March 2014

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**Richard  
Victor  
BUCHIGNANI**

b: 04 Aug 1924  
d: 30 Sep 1944 in  
Balikpapan, Borneo



**Vittorio  
Alberto  
BUCHIGNANI**

b: 26 Sep 1894 in  
Italy  
m: 06 May 1919  
d: 04 Jun 1946 in  
Healdsburg,  
Sonoma, California,  
USA



**Eva Veronica  
GIORGI**

b: 07 Sep 1901 in  
Santa Rosa,  
Sonoma, California,  
USA  
d: 24 Dec 1966 in  
Talmage,  
Mendocino,  
California, USA

**Orlando  
BUCHIGNANI**

b: Ponte San Pietro, Carignano,  
Lucca, Italy  
m:

**Columba  
PUCETTI**

b: 19 Apr 1860 in Carignano,  
Lucca, Italy  
d: 24 Aug 1918

**Francesco  
BUCHIGNANI**

**Antonio  
PUCETTI**



**Giacomo  
GIORGI**

b: 20 Aug 1856 in  
Boveglio, Lucca,  
Toscana, Italy  
m: 1896  
d: 26 Jun 1932 in  
Healdsburg,  
Sonoma, California,  
USA



**Gacopa  
Giacinto  
GIORGI**

b: 07 Jul 1829 in...



**Daria  
FERRARI**

b: 04 Jul 1834 in...  
d: 21 Oct 1913 in...



**Agnese  
Giancolli  
TARANTELLI**

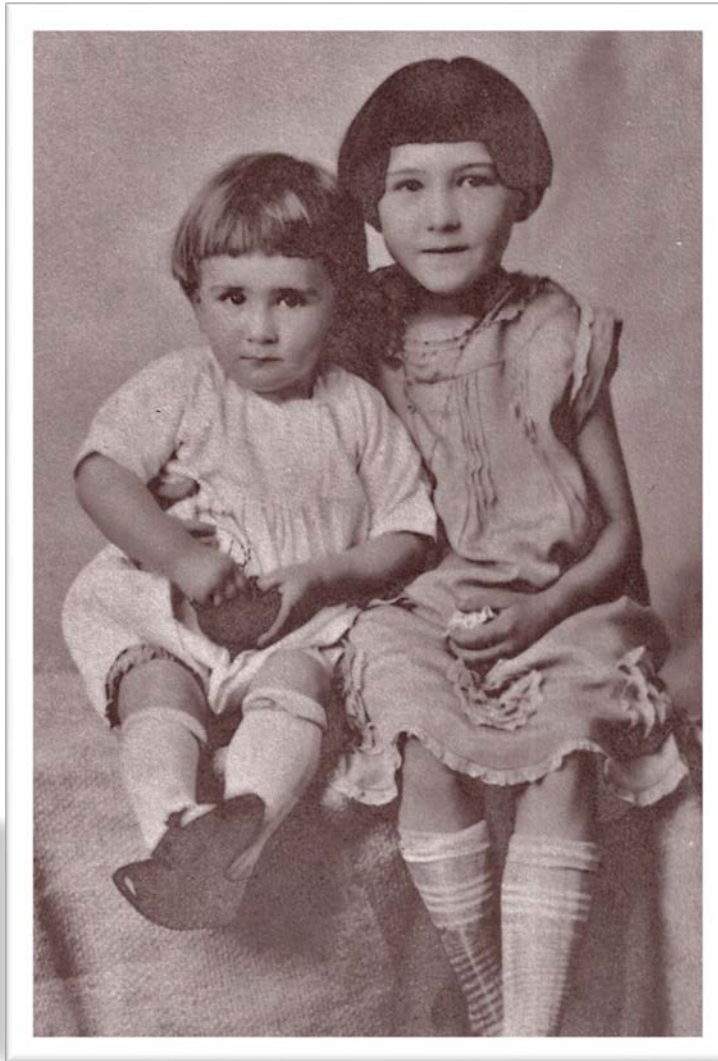
b: 08 Mar 1872 in  
Boveglio, Lucca,  
Toscana, Italy  
d: 13 Jun 1928 in  
Healdsburg,  
Sonoma, California,  
USA

**Giuseppi  
GIANCOLLI**

b: Italy

**Veronica  
PARCHINI**

b: Abt. 1855 in Italy  
d: Aft. 1913



Richard Victor Buchignani was born in Healdsburg, California on August 4, 1924. His parents were Victor and Eva (nee Giorgi) Buchignani. He joined his sister, Maria Columbia, who was four years old at the time of Richard's birth. They lived on his grandparents' ranch on Limerick Lane located North of Healdsburg until Richard was five. During the day, the Buchignani family lived in a two-room cabin behind the main house. At night, they slept in the main house with Eva's parents, Giacomo and Agnese (nee Giancoli) Giorgi.

When Richard was five, the family moved to the 126-acre Lytton Springs ranch located three miles north of Healdsburg where Eva's sister Rosie had been living with her husband Frank Belluomini. On the ranch were a few prunes and mostly grapes along with a sulfurous pond by the railroad tracks. The area where the ranch was located, later occupied by lumber company Boise Cascade, was commonly referred to as Sulphur Flats.





Richard enjoys “the pause that refreshes” in a photo dated 1934, taken just a few days before his 10<sup>th</sup> birthday.

These more formal poses of a “studious” Richard were taken at school around the same time.



Richard is seen here posing with Pedro the Calf (as the back of the photo carefully noted) while Mama Cow looks on.



Clearly, a concerted effort was made over the years to thoroughly document all of the family pets!



Richard flanked by his cousins Emma Jane and Alberta Nanni.

The Buchignani family consisting of parents Victor and Eva plus Richard and his older sister, Maria was fairly small. But the siblings enjoyed the company of their extended family that included Aunts, Uncles, and numerous younger cousins. In 1940 Eva's sisters Louise DalColletto (with husband Basil) and Rosie Belluomini (who was by then a widow) were living nearby on the Limerick Lane ranch. Although their children Elvira and Frank Belluomini and Peter and Leon DalColletto were quite a bit younger, they still spent time with Richard and Maria. Meanwhile, Eva's youngest sister, Mary, was living with her husband Guido Nanni in Oakland. They were able to make the trip North to Healdsburg with daughters Alberta and Emma Jane for regular visits. And Eva's brother, Joe Giorgi, lived in San Francisco with his wife and daughter (both named Catherine). They too were frequent visitors to the family in Healdsburg.

Reportedly, Richard was like his older sister, something of a prankster. His younger cousin, Peter DalColletto recalled the time that Richard threw a string of caps onto the wood stove on the ranch. The noise from the resulting explosions caused young Peter to run away and hide for the rest of that day. Seventy five years later he hadn't forgotten the ruckus it caused.



Richard returning from a fishing trip with one of his buddies.

STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
THE BOARD OF EDUCATION OF SONOMA COUNTY  
AWARDS THIS

### Certificate of Promotion

To Richard Buchignani  
who has been a pupil in the Litton Elementary  
School District and has completed the work in the prescribed Course of Study  
for the eight grades of the Elementary School, and is recommended for enrollment  
in High School.



AWARDED June 17 1938

J. F. Crestwood PRESIDENT  
Edwin Kent SECRETARY

**In 1938, Richard completed the 8<sup>th</sup> grade at the Litton School and entered Healdsburg High School.**



Richard's younger cousin, Catherine Giorgi Speris, remembered that Eva's house on the Lytton Ranch had a long living room - dining room, much like they have in houses today. Richard had two guitars, which they kept on a library table behind the sofa. "The big thing for me was to go in and plunk away on those things," Catherine says. "I really liked to do that."

As told to Joanne Taeuffer for the 1985 Giorgi Family Reunion in Healdsburg, California





While at Healdsburg High School, Richard (first on the left in the second row) joined the Future Farmers of America.

Richard competed in gymnastics (or “tumbling” as it was called in his yearbooks) throughout his High School career



The 1941 team below center included (from the bottom): Don Strider, Tom Palmer, Robert Roelafsen, Ed Hartman, Clifford Johnson, Jack Hart, Jim Englehart, Bill Autry, Bob Silzle, Andrew Luchi, Robert Hood, Lee Hurd, Allen Shriver, Richard Buchignani, and Roy Kirkpatrick.



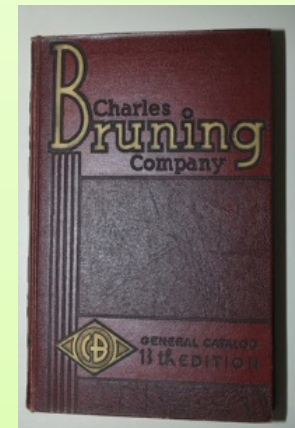
The 1942 team to the right included (from the top): A. Alkire, Charles Hartman, Richard Buchignani, Tom Palmer, Edwin Hartman, and Stanley Ballard.



Richard was interested in anything and everything mechanical. Family members all recall that he was an avid car enthusiast and excellent mechanic. He studied drafting in High School, perhaps as a first step towards a hoped for career as an engineer, making good use of the set of tools he proudly labeled with his name.



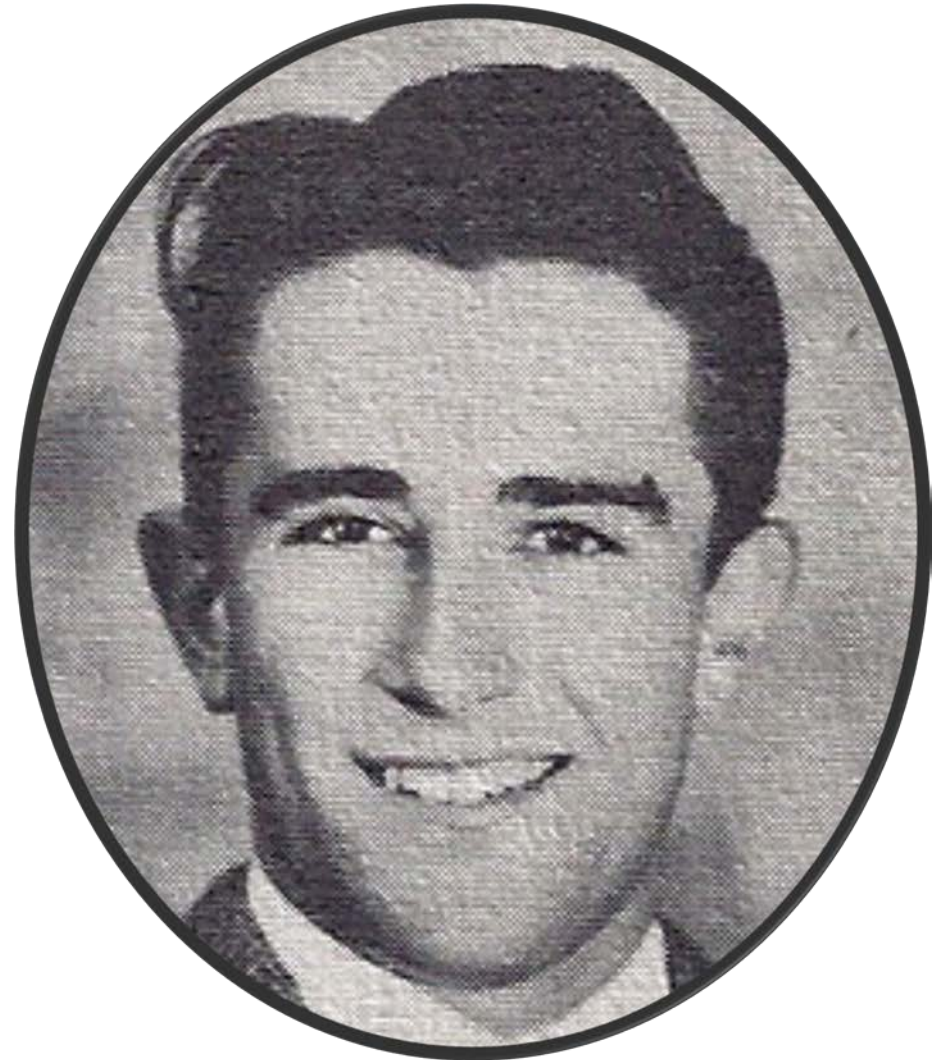
The set of drafting tools Richard used in High School were manufactured by the Charles Bruning Company located in Chicago, Illinois.





In 1941, Richard helped his Uncle Basil and Aunt Louise DalColletto move from the Limerick Lane ranch into town. Basil had been injured in a farming accident some time earlier and had never really recovered properly. In return for his kindness, Basil gave Richard his 1929 Ford Model A like the one pictured above. It was quite some time later, after having driven blithely around town for a period of weeks, that Richard realized his Uncle Basil's illegal still was comfortably nestled in the rumple seat!

**Richard Buchignani graduated from Healdsburg High School in June 1942.**

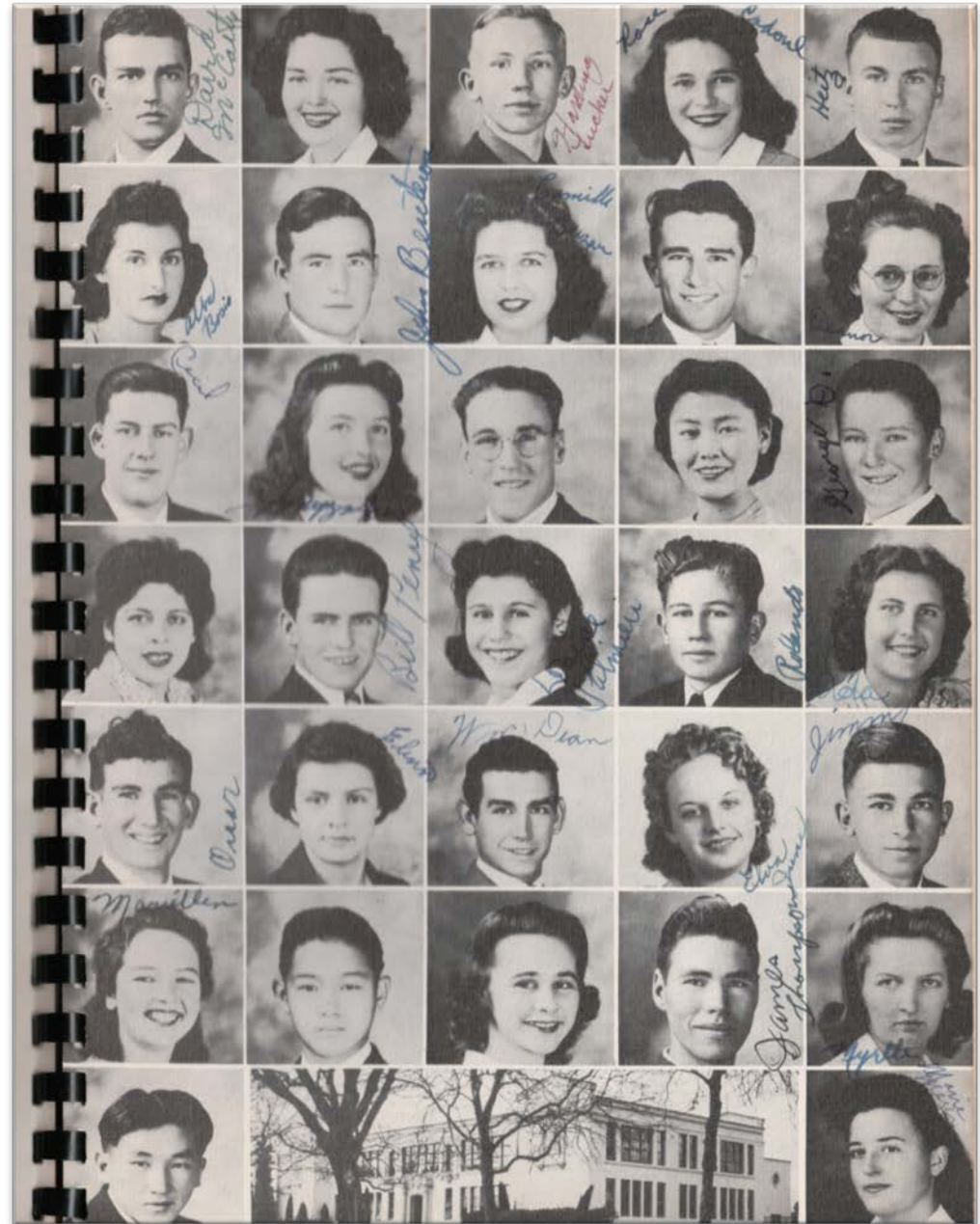


**In the traditional “senior will” section he wrote:  
“I, Richard Buchignani, bequeath my way with  
the girls to Edwin Hartman.”**

The Healdsburg High School yearbook from 1942 was printed and mimeographed on off-white construction paper. It was fitted with a red fiberboard cover and bound with a comb fastener reflecting the wartime frugality. The pages were decorated with hand drawn military scenes of planes, battlefields, and dog fights.

The pages of Richard's book are filled with signatures and sentiments from students and faculty alike. References to shared antics and adventures abound, as do admonishments to "be good" and wishes of "good luck." The photos of almost every one of his schoolmates in the Senior class and many of those from other classes were signed. Especially the photos of the girls.

The prediction page listed Richard's nickname as "Dick", his appearance as "Antagonistic", his ambition "Defense Worker", and his destiny "Butcher."



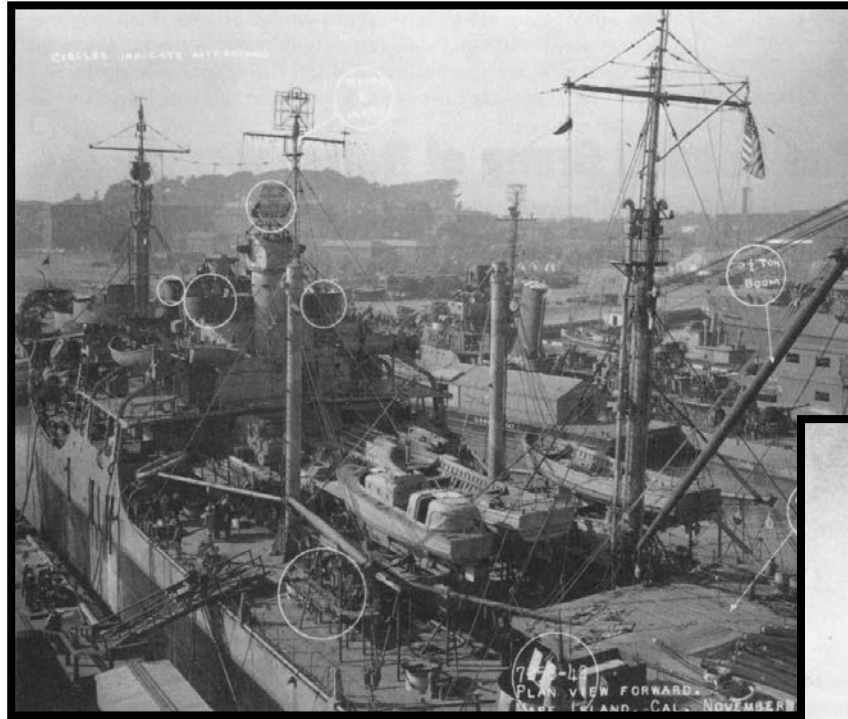


This photo of a shiny 1936 Ford was found among Richard's most prized possessions. Perhaps he was able to trade in Uncle Basil's 1929 Model A as a down-payment on this beauty?

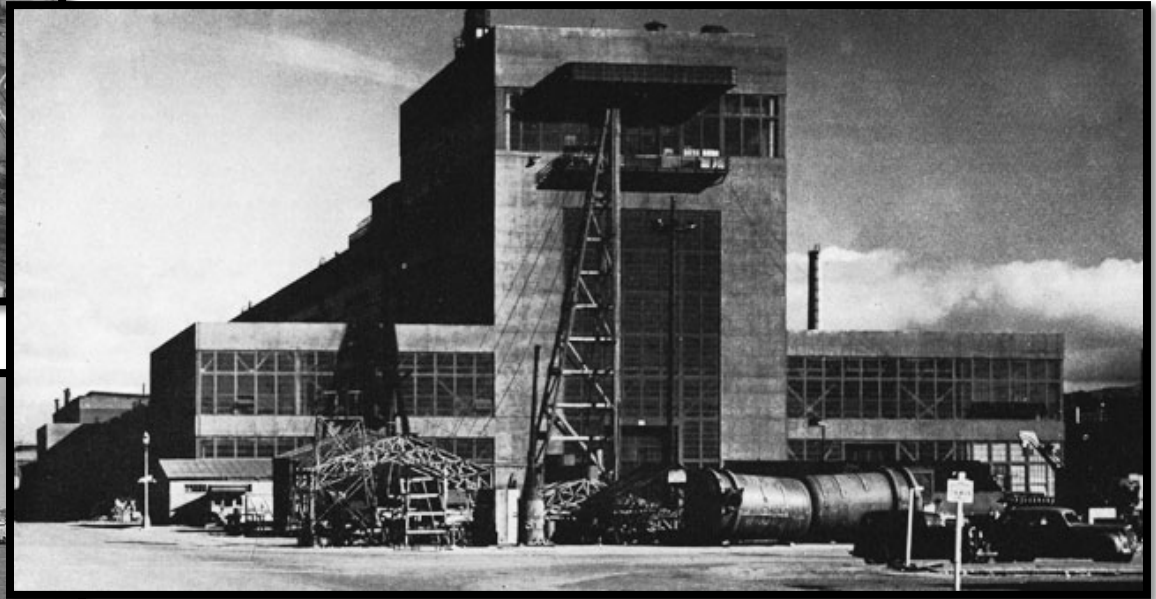
Apparently, Richard did have a “way with the girls” as he noted in his yearbook. His Aunt Louise remembered that when Richard would go out at night with his High School friends, his father, Victor would often get angry and lock the door. Later when Richard returned home, he would knock softly on the window to wake his mother, Eva, who would then surreptitiously let him in.

But he was closed-mouthed about his romantic life. When the girl he had been seeing before he enlisted (who he had never introduced to his family) stopped receiving letters from him in 1944, she shyly made her way to his Aunt Louise’s house to inquire if the family had heard from him. Of course, they had to tell her that he was missing and that they had not.





After High School Richard began his efforts to join the military. On July 7, 1942 his mother, Eva, signed her consent that, despite the fact that Richard was only 17 years old, she agreed to his application for seaman. He submitted his application to join the Coast Guard that same day. While Richard waited for his application to be processed, he went to work at Mare Island fulfilling his expressed High School ambition of becoming a Defense Worker.

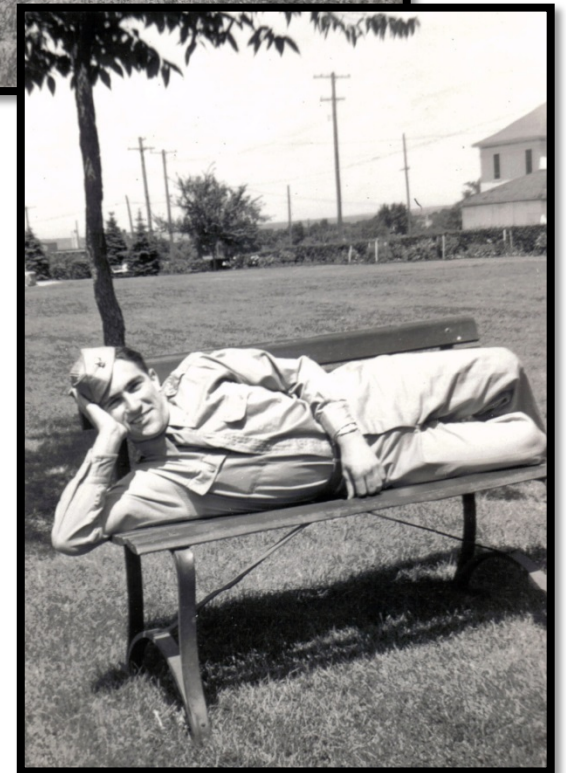
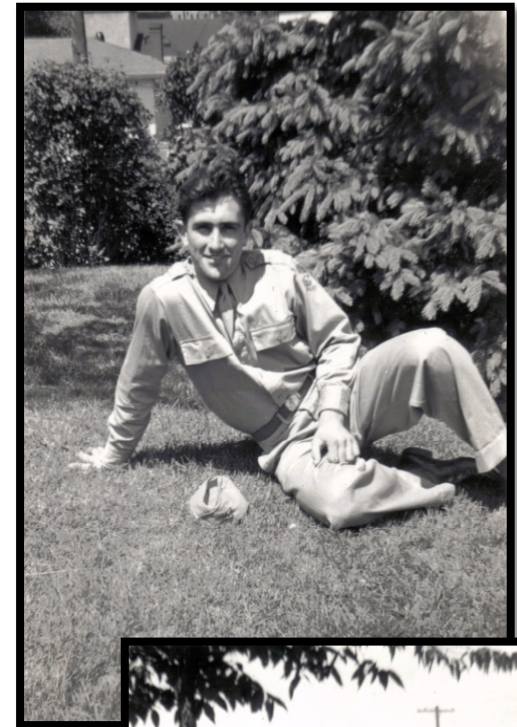


Mare Island was an important part of the war effort. In 1942 four submarines were built and launched from Mare Island; Sunfish, Tummy, Tinoso, and Tullibee. One sub tender, Bushnell, was also built and launched from Mare that same year.

Evidently, he was not accepted by the Coast Guard, so in January 1943 eighteen year old Richard applied to the local draft board in Healdsburg for voluntary induction into the Navy. It would appear that he was not accepted into that branch of the service quickly enough for the eager young Richard either.



A few months later his efforts to join the military were finally successful when Richard was inducted into the Army Air Force. He first reported to Laredo, Texas on April 30, 1943. After Basic Training he was sent to Sioux Falls, South Dakota. This opportunity to get away from home and see new places was an enjoyable time for Richard as is illustrated in these carefree photos he sent home.



803 G

# Army Air Forces Technical School

SIoux FALLS, SOUTH DAKOTA.

*This is to certify that*



Pfc.

Buchignani, Richard J.

39126636

810th



*has fired the qualification course, dismounted, with the*  
U. S. AUTOMATIC PISTOL, CALIBER 45, MI911A1  
*and has qualified as*

**Marksman**

DATE 14 Oct. 1943  
SCORE 71.3

*John Oleszczuk*  
JOHN OLESZCZUK,  
Capt., A. C.,  
Post Range Officer.

Success at the Army Air Force Technical School was the first step towards realizing the dream of flying, which would eventually take Richard even father than ever from small town Healdsburg. However, the first stop after Sioux Falls would be a training facility in the middle of the Nevada desert. About as far out in the boondocks as it is possible to go.



After Basic Training, Pfc. Richard Buchignani was transferred to the newly re-fitted Army Air Field in Tonopah, Nevada in December 1943. Here he received training in aerial bombardment. The crew that he would serve with was formed here. His sister recalled many years later that the pilots were reportedly very discerning about who they accepted into their squads and that very tight bonds were forged during this training.

The practice of maintaining permanent crews each made up of an established group of men had not originally been in place when the war broke out. However, once the command realized that casualties were reduced when the men working together knew and trusted each other, the team approach became the standard early in 1942.



Richard (on right) with flight crew members John Stroud, Jr. and Marcus Lightfoot.

**The crew at the Army  
Air Force facility in  
Tonopah, Nevada circa  
April 1944.**

Pictured are: top left to  
right: Lt. Edgar Whitman  
(Pilot), Lt. Steinkamp  
(bombardier), Lt. Everett  
Smith (Co-Pilot), Lt.  
Howard McGill  
(Navigator), bottom left to  
right: Frank "Bud"  
Buthman (lower ball  
gunner), Marcus "M.O."  
Lightfoot (radio operator),  
John W. Stroud, Jr.  
(engineer), N.H. Wallace  
(waist gunner), R.N.  
Greene (waist gunner),  
Richard Buchignani (tail  
gunner).



Training at Tonopah lasted from February through April 1944 and included 10 missions conducted aboard a B24D piloted on most occasions by Lt. Wittmann and less frequently by Lt. Smith.

In early April Richard was promoted to the rank of Corporal. A subsequent twelve missions were conducted aboard various versions of the B-24 in late April and early May.

On May 18<sup>th</sup>, 1944 the crew was transferred to the Processing Unit at Hamilton Field for deployment. From there they would travel to the Pacific theater to join the 31<sup>st</sup> Bombardment Group.



# Remembrances of Richard Buchignani

As told to Joanne Taeuffer by Catherine Speris for the Giorgi Family Reunion in 1985

When he was in the service....I guess it was the last time he was coming home on leave....our doorbell rang one morning and there he was. He didn't have the money to pay for the taxi downstairs. Of course in those days the taxi drivers were gouging every service man. So I remember Dad paying for the taxi and him coming upstairs and we all piled into my father's old Oldsmobile and headed for Healdsburg.

I can remember it was very, very cold that weekend in Eva's. Richard had all his gear with him, even his flight boots, the ones they wore when they were in their planes.

They were great big leather boots completely lined in sheepskin. And I tromped around in those boots most of the day to keep my feet warm. I think I just wanted to wear his boots.

Anyhow, every time I hear the song Stormy Weather I think of Richard because that's the tune he was whistling and singing most of that weekend.

It kind of takes me back a long way because he was my hero. In fact, I can remember asking him for a pair of wings and, by God, he went to the PX and mailed me a pair of wings. And when he was in the South Pacific, he took the time to make me a necklace out of shells. It's still around because I've never had the heart to get rid of it.

Private First Class  
Richard Buchignani  
in a 1944 photo  
taken in Healdsburg  
while on his last  
leave before shipping  
overseas.





## 31<sup>st</sup> Bombardment Group in World War II

The 31<sup>st</sup> was one of four squadrons flying collectively in World War II as the 5<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, a heavy bomb group in the 13<sup>th</sup> Air Force. The 13<sup>th</sup> was also known as “The Jungle Air Force” to reflect the fact that it operated out of facilities and air strips carved from the jungles of selected Pacific islands.

From: The 31<sup>st</sup> Bombardment Squadron (H) Association website  
[www.31stbombers.org](http://www.31stbombers.org)

The 31<sup>st</sup> Bombardment Group had been hitting Japanese targets in the Truk Atoll in the Caroline Islands hard beginning in February 1944 and had suffered many casualties. Richard and his crew were among the replacement teams being brought in from the U.S. As was customary, they would have to fly a number of 2 to 4 hour combat training missions before they were allowed to join in regular missions with the rest of the Group. After arriving on Los Negros Island, Admiralty Islands they flew these training missions on June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>, 1944 from Momote Airdrome.

On June 12<sup>th</sup> they began flying longer missions (6 to 9 hours in duration) against targets on Rabaul Island. Around this time Richard's designation changed from Gunner to Assistant Radio Operator. On June 27<sup>th</sup> they began flying extended missions of over 12 hours against Yap Island in the Caroline Islands. It was a 2,000 mile round trip over open ocean with no landmarks. These missions that stretched the B24 to its maximum rated distance continued throughout July and into August.



“Living in a tent, with outhouses, tubes pounded into the ground with funnels on top for urination, with limited shower and nonexistent laundry facilities, was a little hard to get used to,” Hayers commented, “but we were living with good buddies, had movies at night, beer to drink, food that while not good, kept us alive, and baseball games on off days.”

-John Hayes letter to Joanne Emerick February 6, 2007 in “Courage Before Every Danger, Honor Before All Men”

“Living conditions were primitive on Los Negros. ‘We were in tents,’ explained Ulmer. ‘We didn’t have lumber of any kind. For the latrine we would dig a pit and just put some kind of tarp over it. For a shower we would take a 55-gallon steel drum, cut it in half, bore holes in the bottom and catch rain water. We had it rigged so you could pull a cord when you wanted to take a shower – you could pull a cord and let it drip through until you soaped up and then let it drip through to rinse off.’”

-S. Sidney Ulmer interview with Joanne Emerick in “Courage before every danger, honor before all men”

In the days between August 11<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>, 1944 the 31<sup>st</sup> Bombardment Group moved 590 miles from Los Negros Island to tiny Wakde Island off Papua New Guinea. This move was required in order to shorten the distance to Palau Island that was soon to become the focus of their activities.

Although they scarcely could have imagined it, the accommodations on Wakde were even more primitive than they had been on Los Negros, as shown in the photos below taken in 1944 by Clyde Avery.



Above and right: 5<sup>th</sup> Group Camp - Wakde Island

**W  
a  
k  
d  
e**



During the Group's stay on Wakde Island, comedian Bob Hope came through with his USO show, which included glamour girl Frances Langford and comic Jerry Colonna. As an indication of the small size and primitive conditions on the island, Hope reportedly referred to Wakde as the "Tropical Alcatraz" in his opening monologue.



Jerry Colonna was known for his "bug" eyes and screeching voice.

In his memoir, *Don't Shoot! It's Only Me!*, Bob Hope recalled how Frances Langford got the biggest laugh he had ever heard. At a U.S.O. show in the South Pacific, Langford stood up on a stage to sing before a huge crowd of G.I.'s. When Langford sang the first line of her signature song, "I'm in the Mood for Love," a soldier in the audience stood up and shouted, "You've come to the right place, honey!"



John "Jaybird" Stroud and Richard "Buck" Buchignani cutting up for the camera.



Atop a captured Japanese "Betty."



There were light moments in the Pacific Theater in addition to those provided by the USO shows.



The bravado of youth is in evidence in the photo of Richard with side-arm posing by his plane, as well as in the humorous note he sent home to his Uncle Joe.

Print the complete address in plain letters in the panel below, and your return address in the space provided on the right. Use typewriter, dark ink, or dark pencil. Pencil or small writing is not suitable for photographing.

TO: Mr. Joe Girgi  
5574 - 19<sup>th</sup> St.  
San Francisco - 10 -  
California

FROM: SPO. Richard Bushigiani  
5th Bomb. Grp. - 394<sup>th</sup> Bom. Sq. (M)  
APO. 719 - 4/6 PM. - 57, Cal.  
7/17/44

(CENSOR'S STAMP) SEE INSTRUCTION NO. 2 (Sender's complete address above)

Wish You WERE HERE!

But -  
Between You and Me  
Almost All the Gals  
I've Seen  
CAN DO THIS  
- This is near  
the real thing  
as we could put  
it - Rich

HAVE YOU FILLED IN COMPLETE ADDRESS AT TOP?

REPLY BY V-MAIL

HAVE YOU FILLED IN COMPLETE ADDRESS AT TOP?

17 U. S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1943 O-25420-0



In the fall of 1944 the Japanese were expecting an American invasion to liberate the Philippine Islands. Key to their being able to repel the US would be for them to have a large supply of fuel. Their primary source of fuel was the Netherlands East Indies. At the center of this supply were the Pandansari and Edeleanu Refineries at Balikpapan on Borneo.

The American plan to take out the oil refineries at Balikpapan required that the way to Borneo be cleared of enemy protection. The first three weeks of September 1944 would be spent on missions against the Japanese fighter unit on Ambon Island, the fighter squadrons on the Celebes Islands to the West, and the air units in the Halmaheras Islands. Richard's crew flew three 9 to 10 hour missions against the Halmahera Islands and one each against the Ceram and Ambon airdromes.

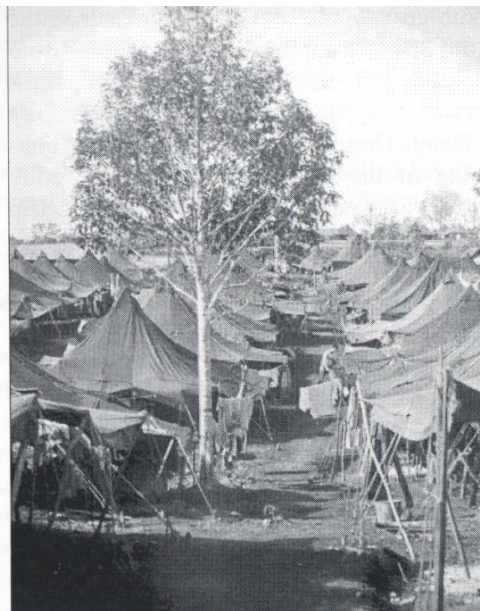
While the 31<sup>st</sup> was attacking by air, the US ground forces had invaded Morotai and had promised the Army Air Force that an emergency airstrip would be ready there for the aircrews that would be attacking Borneo.



In late September, the squadron moved 180 miles West to Noemfoor Island where they would be able to use the Kornsasoren Airdrome. This would shorten the distance they would be traveling to Borneo. Only the air crews relocated; the ground support remained on Wakde. While the conditions on Wakde were primitive, they were even worse on Noemfoor, where it rained every day.



**5<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Camp – Noemfoor**  
(S. Sidney Ulmer)



# NOEMFOOR

(Photos:  
Felix Stumpf)



**Captured Japanese Soldiers**  
(Felix Stumpf)



“For those transferred to Noemfoor, life on the island was anything but pleasant. It rained continually and the entire 5<sup>th</sup> Group area was a sea of mud. Vehicles sunk to their axles, luggage had to be stored on platforms and ditches dug around tents for drainage. ‘Noemfoor was a mud hole,’ Claude Avery said. ‘It was a heavily forested area with a whole lot of mud: volcanic type of ash mush. Here the Mess Hall didn’t exist. It was two 50-gallon barrels with a 2x12 stuck between them. We stood up to eat in the rain. We washed our clothes in the rain. We got our planes washed when we flew through a rainstorm.’”

– “Courage Before Every Danger, Honor Before All Men” by Joanne Pfammemstiel Emerick



Somewhere in the Pacific circa June or July 1944.

Pictured are: Top row left to right: Bob N. Greene, Marcus "Mo" Lightfoot, Richard "Buck" Buchignani, "Sweet Thing", Frank "Buddy" Buthman, Clyde "Smoky" Ross, John "Jay" Stroud, bottom row left to right: Alvan "Shorty" Shirk, Howard "Mac" McGill, Everett "Smitty" Smith, Edgar "Witt" Wittmann.



The crew hailed from towns large and small scattered all across the country, just like some Hollywood cliché .

Finally, the day arrived for the mission to Balikpapan. The distance from Noemfoor to Balikpapan and back was around 2,600 miles, a round trip of 15 ½ to 17 hours, and well beyond the rated distance of the B24s they would be flying. In order to stretch the planes' range all but the most critical of equipment from the planes had to be removed. This included half the normal ammunition and 20% of the normal bomb payload. Also, an extra 700 gallons of fuel would be carried in order to give the crews a chance to return to Noemfoor. Maintaining the proper center of gravity in the plane as the fuel was depleted from one tank after another was of great concern if the B24s were to remain aloft. In order to accomplish this balancing act, the crews would have to sit in designated spots in the plane and to shift periodically throughout the flight. Due to the distance that would be flown, no fighter protection would be provided to the 24 bombers that would be flying this mission.

In preparation for the strike, the men were briefed again and again on the rescue protocols. Because this aspect of the mission was being so heavily emphasized, the men knew that there was a very good chance that rescue activities would be required. The briefings that day were noticeably subdued.

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The first B24 took off from Noemfoor at 0300 on September 30, 1944. There would be twenty-four planes in all, each one taking off within 90 seconds of the one before.

The Japanese on Halmahera detected the aircraft by radar but were not able to scramble their planes in time to intercept them, however they were able to radio ahead to Celebes. Their fighters there were ready and would be waiting when the 31<sup>st</sup> arrived.

The cloudy conditions initially allowed the squadron to elude the Japanese at Celebes. However, as they approached Balikpapan, they were greeted by another 30 fighters as well as heavy anti-aircraft shelling. The cloud cover that had protected them now served to prevent them from being able to attack the refineries immediately.

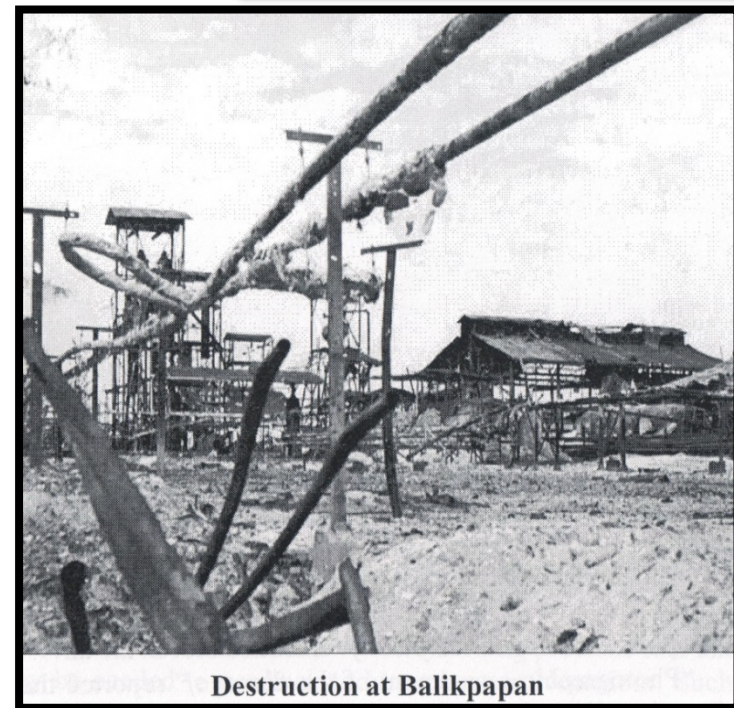
Mission Leader Colonel Thomas C, Musgrave evaluated the conditions. He had been provided with alternative targets to strike, but after considering how critically important success of this mission could be he decided to circle, using precious fuel, while he waited for the weather to provide an opportunity to proceed.

Then, as the Group circled around one final time, there was a sudden break in the clouds and Musgrave gave the order for the attack to begin.



The planned round trip to Balikpapan was 2,600 miles. A much longer distance than the B24s were designed to fly.

A total of twenty-eight tons of bombs were dropped on the Balikpapan refineries on September 30<sup>th</sup>. There would be four more raids made against the island in October 1944 before the refinery was completely destroyed. Its destruction enabled the eventual success of McArthur's promised return to the Philippine Islands



When the grueling raid was completed, it was time for the weary aircrews to try to make their way back to safety. An alternate airstrip had been hastily built on the Island of Morotai in case the planes could not make it all

the way back to Noemfoor. Of the twenty-three B24s that had left Noemfoor, fifteen had been damaged in the raid. Three of those would not make it back, including Richard's.



The last sighting of Richard's plane was at 1255 hours by Robert A. Hannagan, pilot of another B24 which had participated in the raid. He reported that plane #44-40529 "had the #2 engine out with propeller jammed, large hole in right rudder one and one half feet in diameter, six inch hole in left rudder, and flack holes in bomb bay." Initially, the crew was not jettisoning ammunition, but after losing some altitude, began to do so. They signaled to Captain Hannagan that they had fuel and he should go ahead without them. Since his plane was also damaged, and believing that the other plane would be able to make it to

the airdrome on Morotai, he did so. "When we last sighted the airplane they were on a heading of 85 degrees at 5,000 feet doing 130 MPH."

The final message from the plane was received by the Communications Section of the 5<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group at 1310 hours indicating that they were at "00 deg. N - 124 deg. E" putting them over islands controlled by the Japanese. Extensive searches conducted over the following three days did not reveal any trace of the crew or plane.

## The Crew:

Somewhere in the Pacific circa July or August 1944.

Pictured are: back row left to right: Clyde M. Ross, Mark Lightfoot, Frank "Buddy" Buthman, Edgar Whittmann, Everett W. Smith. Front row left to right: John W Stroud, Alvan E. Shirk, Howard W. McGill, Robert Greene, Richard Buchignani. This crew (minus Robert Greene, who was replaced that day by a photographer) went down in the Pacific near Balikpapan off Borneo on September 30, 1944.



# The Healdsburg Tribune

And Enterprise

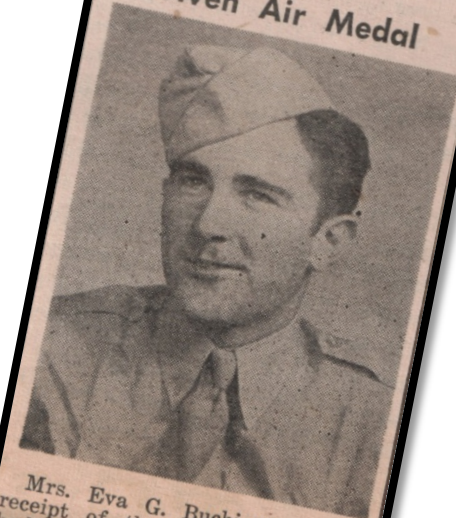
A Healdsburg flier was in the attacking formation when the 13th AAF Liberators, in a bold daylight raid, opened their drive against Japan's Palau Islands base, according to word from headquarters to the Tribune. Corporal Richard V. Buchignani was radio operator and gunner on one of the giant Liberators in the 13th's "Bomber Barons" outfit. The raid marked the launching of a 13th AAF campaign to reduce the strongest Japanese bases remaining as prominent for the Philippines, 500 miles away. Making the long overwater flight without fighter cover, the Liberators set huge fires on Palau. Enemy installations were severely damaged, the bomber crews reported on their return. The assignment to knock out Palau was given to Corporal Buchignani and the other 13th AAF fliers after the veteran air force had neutralized Truk and Yap, to the east. The 13th began its offensive in the Battle of Guadalcanal and defeated Japanese airpower at New Georgia, Bougainville, Rabaul and Kavieng.

## Missing



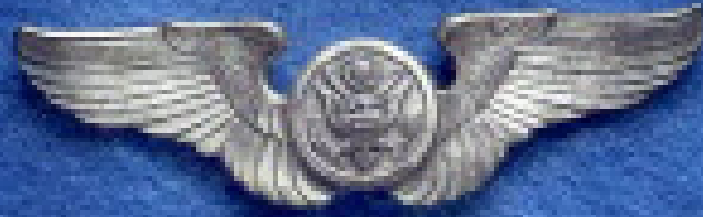
"Your son, Corporal Richard Buchignani, is missing in action" was the message received Saturday by Mr. and Mrs. E. Buchignani from the war department. Cpl. Buchignani was top gunner with the air forces and was reported as missing in the southwest Pacific area. As the custom of the brief notices from government there were no details contained in the wire. Cpl. Buchignani attended the Litton School and was graduated from the Healdsburg High School. He has one sister Mrs. Norman Taeuffer at Medford, Oregon.

## Given Air Medal



Mrs. Eva G. Buchignani is in receipt of the Air Medal which had been awarded to her son, Staff Sergeant Richard V. Buchignani, air corps, who has been reported missing in action. The citation reads as follows:  
"For meritorious achievement while participating in sustained operational flight missions in the southwest Pacific area from 12 June 1944 to 5 August 1944, during which hostile contact was probable and expected. These operations consisted of bombing missions against enemy air-dromes and installations, and attacks on enemy naval vessels and shipping. The courage and devotion to duty displayed during these flights are worthy of commendation." J. A. ULIO, Major General, The Adjutant General.  
Since the award could not be formally presented to the staff sergeant, the decoration was to have been presented to his mother at special services at the Fulton Army Air Field, but because of her inability to be present the medal was sent to her.

Richard's mother preserved the newspaper from September 29<sup>th</sup>, 1944 describing Richard's participation in a raid on the Palau Islands. And the one from October 27<sup>th</sup>, 1944 announcing that he was missing. And the one from August 24<sup>th</sup>, 1945 announcing he had been awarded the Air Medal.



**Richard was  
awarded the  
Airman's Wings,  
the Air Medal,  
and the Purple  
Heart.**





Many decades later, a poignant memorial honoring all the local men lost during World War II was erected in the Plaza in Healdsburg, California.

“Dedicated to those from Healdsburg who served their country in World War II, and to the memory of those who gave the last full measure of devotion.”



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Cover Art: Painting “Where Have All the Young Men Gone?” courtesy of Joanne Taeuffer