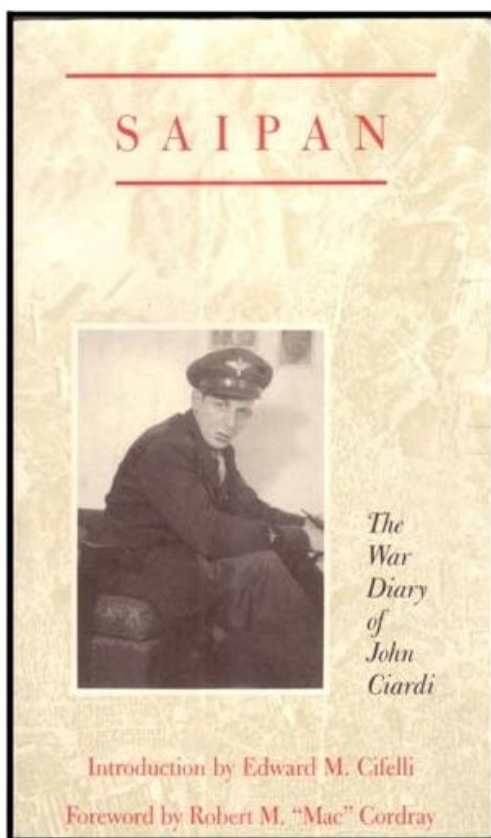


# **Ciardi and Chance: Comments on Saipan: The War Diary of John Ciardi**



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Experiences as a gunner in World War II led John Ciardi to see life and death in war as a gamble, a matter of chance, or luck. In 'Return' (Ciardi 1988, 119) he describes a crew returning from a bombing mission:

**The hatches spill the lucky and returned  
Onto the solid stone of not-to-die**

In 'Ritual for Singing Bat' (Ciardi 1988, 112) he honors a young man who had described himself as 'one part Indian, one part Tennessee':

**'You can't quite kill a man named Singing Bat'  
He said. And would have bet. And lost the bet.**

John Ciardi (1915-1986) is known primarily as a poet. In addition to many individual poems, he published over twenty-two books of poetry for adults (four were published posthumously) and sixteen for children (three posthumously), and many individual poems. Besides the poetry, he wrote or co-authored sixteen nonfiction books, and many essays. Among his best-known contributions are his translation of Dante's *Divine Comedy* and *How Does a Poem Mean?*, a classic in literary criticism.

While he was stationed on Saipan in the Mariana Islands near the end of World War II, he kept a diary from November 5, 1944, to March 10, 1945. After his death, this diary was published by the University of Arkansas Press (1988), *Saipan: The War Diary of John Ciardi*. Robert M. 'Mac' Cordray, the pilot of the plane on which Ciardi was a gunner, wrote a Foreword for the book and Edward M. Cifelli, who later published a biography of Ciardi, wrote an Introduction to provide biographical information and analysis to assist the reader in placing the diary in its historical context.

Besides writing, Ciardi taught for many years in universities, served as an editor, appeared regularly on National Public Radio, and traveled the lecture circuit. I knew him in yet another role -- the war in the Pacific where we both were gunners at the B-29 base at Saipan in the Mariana Islands. Our lives were linked by some circumstances of chance, or fate, or whatever.

*Saipan: The War Diary of John Ciardi* should bring back some memories that are at times painful and at other times comic to any veteran of World War II. For the fellow who slept in the cot next to Ciardi's on Saipan, the book holds more than memories. I had never suspected that the incidents that happened to me and to others on Saipan had such a profound effect on him. My reactions to comments in his diary on what happened during our period of service in the 20th Air Force, along with some

**corrections and added details, may provide information from a perspective that does not appear elsewhere.**

**While I recognized references to me in the diary, it seemed that a casual reader not knowing the circumstances could hardly relate several events with one person. The reason is that my name was spelled differently in different parts of the book and it could be perceived as three different individuals. I believe that part of the problem was that the handwriting was difficult to read though the editors did the best job they could. This presentation is an attempt to clarify some points for anyone interested in Ciardi's experiences during World War II. After some preliminary remarks, I will describe the confusion of Levin, Levine, and Leon. Then, I will supply some missing information and correct a few minor details in the diary. Finally, I will comment on certain statements made by Ciardi in the light of my own experience.**

**My name is Edwin D. Lawson. When I was in the Air Corps, my name was Levin. For reasons we need not go into here, I changed my surname a few years after the war. After going through two armament schools, air-to-air gunnery school, and finally the Central Fire Control school at Lowry Field, I was assigned to Major Hurlbutt's crew of the 882nd Squadron, 500th Bomb Group, which was then training at Walker Air Force Base, Victoria, Kansas. (I was to replace a crew member who had been injured in a crash landing. He had jumped out of the training plane, a B-17, as it came onto the runway with an engine on fire.)**

**After showing up at Walker, I soon heard about and met Ciardi. Most of us were intimidated by authority, but Ciardi was anything but shy. He was not afraid to raise his hand when questions were sought and to point out inconsistencies in what his superiors said or did. As a result, he was quite a hero with his fellow enlisted men. We had heard that he was about to be commissioned as an officer at navigation school but had been caught hopping over the fence to go to town on the night before graduation. For that infraction, the navigation school authorities dismissed him. Years later, I found out that he had been identified as a APAFC 'a premature anti-fascist' because he had signed some petitions in favor of the Spanish Loyalists in the 1930s. He was so identified by Martin Dies, who was chair of the House Un-American Activities Committee. Ciardi and Cifelli give interesting accounts of the various factors that may have led to Ciardi's dismissal from navigation school. These include signing political petitions at the University of Michigan in 1938-39, punching a white army officer who was mistreating a black woman in New Orleans, being a poor cadet, and other factors (Ciardi 1984, 198; 1988, xii-xiii; 1989, 57-58; Cifelli 1997, 48-50, 72-76).**

It was not until I read Cifelli's Introduction to *Saipan* that I learned the facts of Ciardi's experience in aviation cadets, and that being expelled actually had saved his life. None of those in his navigation school class survived the war. His awareness of these facts had to have had an impact on him.

He was also supposed to be a real brain. The Army General Classification Test (AGCT) had a maximum score of 160. It was rumored that Ciardi had obtained a score of 156. To be on flying status, we had to have a score of 120. Most of us were probably just over this, so Ciardi's score was quite a bit higher.

One other thing I clearly remember about Ciardi was his social dates. Most of us were 19 or 20. Those of us who went to town took a bus or walked. Ciardi was older than most of us by several years. He always had a woman or even more than one at the gate waiting for him. By our standards, they were "old." Why some were as old as 35, even older than John!

Overseas at Saipan, it was my fortune to be in the same Quonset hut as John. Air crew had the Quonsets, the ground crew had tents with wooden floors. Our Quonset hut held about 12 men, the enlisted men from two crews. The officers had their own Quonsets a short distance away. John had the bunk closest to one of the two open sides. Since he had the side toward the officers' huts, he could come and go to the officers' quarters with little chance of being observed. Also, he had a neighbor on only one side -- me. Everyone knew John from our earlier training at Walker Air Force Base in Victoria, Kansas. I looked up to John when we were still in Kansas, long before Saipan. He was not only a college graduate but he had a master's degree! Furthermore, he was on the teaching staff of the University of Kansas City.

For me, he was a person of high status. I had come into the Air Force after being barely into my second semester in university. The Signal Corps at the University of Illinois had offered an ROTC program that promised we could graduate before going into service, but we were all called up early.

Besides the attraction of John being a college instructor, we had two other things in common -- hometown and similar air crew training. John came from Medford (just outside Boston) and had gone to Tufts. I had lived in Roxbury and Brookline. We were also among the first selected for Central Fire Control (CFC) training at Lowry Field. We were being prepared for the new B-29 then being built.

**Levin/Levine/Leon**

- p. ix. The first time I am mentioned is in Cifelli's Introduction, reference to a "soldier named Levin."
- pp. xvi-xvii. This is the second reference although my name is not mentioned. Cifelli writes, "It seems that a friend of his from another crew had a wound that kept him from flying on a mission from which his crew never returned."
- Ciardi also refers to this in an oral history compiled by Studs Terkel: 'The unit was the crew. You belonged to eleven men. You're trained together. You're bound together. I was once ordered to fly in place of a gunner who had received a shrapnel wound. I dreaded that mission. I wanted to fly with my own crew. I didn't know those other people. I didn't want to run the risk of dying with strangers' (Ciardi 1984, 199).
- p. xvii (quotation). Hedges (the name is not Hodge), the tail gunner, was the only survivor of the last mission of the ill-fated crew mentioned above. Hedges survived the Japanese ramming of the plane by parachuting. He was captured and sent to a POW camp and eventually returned to the US. A few years ago, a colleague of mine who grew up in Nagoya and was later a professor of economics in the US told me that he remembered seeing the tail section of the plane from which Hedges had parachuted. It had been placed on display in a department store.
- p. 21. This is the first mention of my name in the text of the diary itself. Here Ciardi wrote "Levine's radio is out of order." It was a small Emerson table model that I had managed to get safely overseas. Having a radio was a bit of a luxury. It provided us with a bit of entertainment until one of its tubes died. Saipan had its own radio station, Armed Forces Radio network station, KSAI. They played songs such as *The Wabash Cannon Ball* and *The Great Speckled Bird* enough times to last me for the rest of my life. Mercifully, there were also news broadcasts. We did hear Japanese broadcasts but never heard a female announcer introduce herself as Rose.
- p. 22. Ciardi describes my attempts to lure him into a philosophical conversation.
- p. 49. "I took the first strafing run lying on the floor with Levin." This is a description of a Japanese night air raid. Well do I remember scrambling to get under a canvas cot. I cannot remember whether Ciardi and I were trying to get under the same cot or not. I do remember laughing afterward at the absurdity of thinking in our fear that a canvas cot would protect us from bullets.
- p. 81-82. Mention of my being wounded and Ciardi going to see me in the

hospital. I had been up on the flight line during a Japanese air raid after midnight. Enlisted members of the crew took turns at guarding their plane. It was not really much work but we did get the chance to wear our pistols. It also meant we had a jeep at our disposal and could drop in at the mess hall and get coffee. I was at the revetment for my plane when the siren alarm went off announcing a raid. Then we saw many tracers. There was a streak in the sky. I assumed that a Japanese bomber had been shot down. It looked like it would fall close to where I was. When a previous Japanese plane had gone down, some people had gotten souvenirs. I wanted one, too.

I was unaware that the Japanese had rocket bombs and was nonchalant about watching the display until I heard a whistling sound. Then I remembered that planes shot down do not whistle. I tried to get into the air raid shelter. I could not get in all the way. Others blocked me. Perhaps the shelter was too small. The result was that my ankles were sticking out. The bomb (I later found out that it was an 1800 pounder) had landed quite close to us. I believe it exploded 100 to 200 feet away. It was the loudest noise I ever heard in my life, before then, or later. I remember having visions of flames.

It turned out that a bomb fragment had pierced my left ankle and I was bleeding badly. I told those who came to my assistance to make a tourniquet from my belt. Finally Sergeant Walter J. Type picked me up and put me in a weapons carrier. With one or two other men he drove me to the hospital on another part of the island. I remember seeing many tracers still lighting up the sky. I believe the Japanese were gone but the firing continued anyway. At the hospital a few hours later, a surgeon -- Milton Greengard -- repaired my severed tendons and put me in a partial cast. Because of the danger of infection, they left the wound open for a couple of weeks and we had to put liquid penicillin in it every few hours with a syringe. The staff at the hospital (369th Station Hospital) was wonderful and after a few weeks I could get around on crutches, still wearing the cast.

I had been scheduled to go on a flight with my crew that same day. Obviously, I could not go. My crew went on a raid to Nagoya. Ciardi reports that the plane was rammed. It probably was, but I think I have another explanation. Let me describe some of the features of the B-29. It was different from any of our other bombers. It was designed to fly at 35,000 feet with a pressurized cabin thus eliminating the necessity to be on oxygen unless there was an accident of some kind. The speed of the 29 was also faster than the B-17 or B-24. The guns were operated remotely and gunners could shift control from one

position to another depending on who had the most advantageous position. It was even possible for the same gunner to control two turrets simultaneously. At the top of the plane, there was a forward turret and an aft turret. There were two turrets below plus the tail guns. For accuracy in aiming, the guns were connected with a computer. I understood at the time that the computer (probably simple by today's standards) cost \$50,000 (a huge sum in those days). The computer allowed for our air speed, wind speed, other factors, and that of the target. Our main job was to get our target correctly framed in the gunsight and to press the electrical trigger. Besides the enlisted men who were gunners in the central section and in the tail, there was supposed to be another person who would step forward to man the gunsight position in the nose. Having an additional person up in the nose made for a very crowded situation when everyone was wearing all the required equipment. This was further complicated by the fact that my crew was a lead crew. This meant that the bombardier gave the signal for the other planes in the formation to also drop their bombs. When the bombardier was busy at the bombsight, the post at the nose gunsight was empty. No one had come forward to man it.

As CFC gunner, supposedly in charge of all the guns, I tried to get our officers to have someone take care of that nose position at all times when over enemy territory. My guess is that the Japanese fighter plane was shot out of control and just crashed into the bomber. Ciardi (1988, 22) described a situation where a Japanese fighter collided with a B-29 and another time (41) when a Zeke (single-engine Japanese fighter plane) tried to ram his plane. I suppose it is possible that was the situation with my plane. However, tracers and armor piercing bullets could have destroyed the fighter before it got to the 29 if someone had been manning the nose position. Actually, there was an extra person on board for the fatal flight, a high-ranking officer who went along as an observer. I do not know where he was on the bomb run. Whether having someone at the nose position could have provided enough fire power to destroy the fighter before the crash is an open question.

- p. 94. This passage describes my getting wounded and bleeding. The text reads "Leon." Again, the handwriting must have been difficult to read. The man who picked me up was Walter J. Type. After a little urging on my part, Ciardi put Type in for a Soldier's Medal, which was awarded. That ride in the weapons carrier was at night without lights over narrow curving roads. There were also shots being fired all the time though there were not any enemy planes around. It was not uncommon for anti-aircraft gunners to be nervous and continue firing their weapons after the attacking planes were out of range.



**Corrections/Clarifications**

- p. xvii. Quoted para. Should be Hedges' instead of Hodge's bed. Mention of Hedges above.
- p. xxiii. lines 3-4. "a hastily built air base in the middle of Kansas between Hayes and Victoria." This was Walker Air Force Base.
- p. 6. 2nd complete para. last line, "tomorrow for P of E." P of E stands for Port of Embarkation.
- p. 7. line 14. "meat wagon." Ambulance called to the flight line as a precaution for a crash.
- p. 8. 1st complete para. lines 11-17. The 'acrobatic' airman was Tiger Johnson, a very energetic fellow.
- pp. 34-35. Ciardi certainly had many items. He also had much more underwear and sox than the supply room issued. He must have picked up that GI hack watch in navigation school because gunners were not issued watches.
- p. 37. We had an unusual method of heating water for shaving. We took #10 cans, filled them about two-thirds full of sand. Then poured gasoline in and lit it. We got good hot water.
- opposite p. 40. Caption for photo should be Grow instead of Crow.
- p. 53. line 2. Chamarras. Should be Chamorros.
- p. 82. 2nd para., lines 1 & 2. Mention of "Hodges, Hunt, Dreier, Nyhen, Yanik." These were: Harold T. Hedges, Karl Hunt, Paul E. Dreyer, Joseph P. Nighan, Frank J. Yanik.
- p. 94. para., 2, line 1. "On New Year's Eve " Here Ciardi is in error. It was New Year's night. Ciardi had already described New Year's Eve (1988, 76-81). I was wounded in the last Japanese air raid to have a casualty. This was on January 2, 1945. I cannot forget it. The armorer who did take my place was not Type.
- p. 126. Dreier. Sergeant Paul E. Dreyer, radar operator on Hurlbutt's crew. Barracks mate. He was lost over Nagoya although the Appendix does not show this.
- p. 126. Hodge. Corporal or Sergeant Harold T. Hedges, tail gunner on Hurlbutt's crew. Barracks mate.
- p. 126. Hunt. Corporal or Sergeant Karl Hunt\*, gunner on Hurlbutt's crew. Barracks mate.
- p. 126. Hurlbutt. Major Wilbur E. Hurlbutt\*, airplane commander (pilot) of lead crew for the 882nd.
- p. 127. Levine. Staff Sergeant Edwin D. Levin, CFC gunner on Hurlbutt's crew. Barracks mate.
- p. 127. Nyon. Corporal or Sergeant Joseph P. Nyhan\*, radio operator on Hurlbutt's crew. Barracks mate.
- p. 127. Saloz/Chico. Salaz\*. Otherwise correct.

- p. 128. Major Wollcott [sic]. Major Robert E. Wolcott, ground echelon commander.
- p. 128. Yanik. Corporal or Sergeant Frank J. Yanik\*, gunner on Hurlbutt's crew. Barracks mate.
- p. 131. Suntans. I think suntans refer to the khaki summer uniform 'shirt and pants' as opposed to the winter woolen uniform. The summer uniform in the Air Force then did not have a blouse, but the winter uniform did.
- \*Killed in action

### Comments

- p. xix-xx. This description and analysis of Ciardi's motivation after being transferred to Wing Headquarters is one that I understand. Ciardi had seen the odds of his surviving the war as a member of an air crew reduced more and more until he was transferred to Wing. He realized how close he had come to not surviving and writing. Years later, Ciardi himself, told me that Major Brannock, the commanding officer, had called him in and asked whether he wanted to take my place on the tragic flight. Ciardi asked whether it was an invitation to volunteer or an order. On being told that he was being asked to volunteer, Ciardi declined. It is situations like this that can have a strong influence on one's life.

I felt that my life had been spared and I resolved to do something positive with it. After discharge, before I did anything else, I went to visit as many families of my crew members as I could. Of course, part of this was a guilt feeling. It was a melancholy journey to visit the five families that were geographically close plus the family of the man who had taken my place. It was a bit spooky being invited to sleep in the bed of my fallen comrade (Nyhan). I suppose I did not do much for the families, but they all appeared friendly and appreciative of my visit. In one case, I did help the family get straightened out on the awards and social security benefits due their son.

- p. 8. Cold weather in Kearney, Nebraska. It was November and really cold. We had to have warmers as Ciardi describes to warm up the engines.
- p. 15. Mather Field near Sacramento. That base was beautiful compared to other places we had been.
- p. 17. Ciardi crossed the Golden Gate at 8:30 in the morning and was impressed. My plane crossed in the middle of the night. Yes, it was a magnificent sight but I also wondered whether I would see it again.
- p. 23ff. Sometimes the air raid alerts were during the day. We had to remain close to the shelter and could not move around. There was plenty of wasted time. Some of us wrote letters. Others read. It was during these air raids that I saw Ciardi in a corner always writing. I

asked to see what he had been writing. It was then that I said those words that really annoyed him. They were, "What does it mean?" Did he ever scold me! I felt like an idiot. I had limited experience with poetry. In Latin School, the idea of teaching poetry was to have us memorize endlessly long poems like the "Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner" and Tennyson's "In Memoriam." There was little or no attempt to try to understand the craftsmanship involved. Later, of course, Ciardi wrote *How Does a Poem Mean?* He also used it as a theme for his lecture circuit. So, I guess there were a few others out there like me.

The night raid he described was very scary. It seemed that the tracers were aimed right for us.

- p. 37ff. Mission over Tokyo. My plane went on this mission also. While previous raids over Tokyo had not drawn fighters, this one did.
- p. 41. Ciardi has a description of Colonel King, our group commander, going down. I saw the plane dropping down and the parachutes opening. Believe me, it was a sickening feeling, particularly after we had seen the movie *The Purple Heart*. The movie was about Jimmy Doolittle's air raid on Japan from an aircraft carrier. Some crewmen were lost over Japan and were captured. The film showed the Japanese gouging their eyes out as torture to get them to talk. Now, I do not know whether it was true or not, but it certainly made me fearful about bailing out over Japan. I recall one other statement being made at a briefing. We were told that if we bailed out over Tokyo we were to head to the emperor's palace. He would protect us from mobs or whatever. I can just see how successful we would have been parachuting into Tokyo and asking in English for directions to the emperor's palace!

At the briefing on our return, we reported 65 fighter attacks. Hedges and I thought we had shared with another crew the shooting down of a Japanese fighter. However, contrary to the Hollywood movies, we did not have time to watch it hit the ground. We were far too busy watching for the next attack. No subsequent missions I was on had anywhere near the number of attacks.

- p. 43. Ciardi describes the Japanese fighters as coming in solo. I agree with this. If they had attacked in pairs as American pilots were taught, we would have really suffered because we could fire at only one plane at a time. Our training was to fire at the closest plane. If the Japanese had come in pairs, the second plane would not have drawn fire.

A few days later, I received a Statement of Charges for \$120. We had burned out two machine gun barrels. They were charged to me. As I mentioned above, control of the guns was not entirely by one person. The control could be swapped around depending on which gunner had the best view. So, it really was not possible to figure out

who had been firing.

I may have very well burned out the barrels. Gunnery school trained us to fire 10-round bursts and then count to three before firing again. Gunnery school is one thing but a combat situation is something else. When I saw those red circles coming at me, I must have speeded up my count of 1-2-3. Anyway, one of the ground officers interceded and I did not have to pay.

- p. 56. Middle of page. Pagan Island. This was a small island about 200 miles north of Saipan. It had a live volcano at one end.
- p. 58. Troubles with guns. Planes I flew in never had the troubles Ciardi described. Some months later, we did have trouble with one turret. The gunner told me he knew his business and did not want my supervision. At altitude, probably above 30,000 feet, we test fired our guns. His turret fired just once. When we got down and checked the guns, we found that he had mistakenly put bore cleaner in the oil buffer tube instead of oil. The bore cleaner froze and did not provide the cushion that oil does. Needless to say, I checked that man's guns every time after that.
- p. 59. 7th line from bottom. These extraordinary winds were unexpected. The results on formations were devastating. Our planes just seemed to be crawling and were scattered over the sky.
- pp. 66-67. References to Tiger Johnson. Tiger was one of those restless individuals who always had to be doing something. He, Ciardi, and I built a porch with a roof on it at our end of the barracks. Then Tiger and I went about locating (stealing, we called it 'moonlight requisition') plywood so that we could build a ping pong table.
- pp. 69. 5th line from the bottom. "The gunners on the line shot down . . ." I would like to mention that the antiaircraft battery protecting us was a black outfit. At the time of WWII, the Army segregated units. We were very grateful for this unit.
- p, 76ff. Ciardi socializing on New Year's Eve. The officers' Quonsets were in a line perhaps 100 feet away and parallel to ours. Occasionally, we enlisted men would venture over when we had some business to talk over with an officer who was on our crew. I do not think I went over to the officers' huts more than a few times, and only on business.

Ciardi was different as his diary shows. He was over at the officers' huts quite often and seemed perfectly at ease there. Of course, it makes sense. The officers were closer to his age and were more sophisticated than his mates in the hut.

That New Year's Eve, people were exuberant. We could hear sporadic shots being fired all over the island and there were no Japanese attacks. Major Wolcott was the commander of our ground echelon. He had made his headquarters in an abandoned Japanese two-story tower-like building. We called it the Papaya Penthouse. The

announcements over the PA system came from that building. People were to report here or there or wherever. On this New Year's Eve occasion, there were some shots fired at the Penthouse. I do not think anyone really wanted to kill the major. They just gave in to the spirit of New Year's Eve.

- pp. 90-91. Describes Ciardi as having combat nerves as he describes what has happened to some crews in the squadron. Ciardi mentioned that his pilot (Cordray) had been transferred to Wing to fly a Super-Dumbo, a plane fitted out to help with search and rescue. Ciardi was also leery of the new general (Curtis LeMay) who wanted the planes to bomb at lower altitude to improve accuracy. The lower altitude would mean greater vulnerability to antiaircraft fire. There was good reason for Ciardi's apprehension. The 882nd had started with 10 crews. Many were lost as were some replacement crews. By the end of the war, a total of 13 crews had been lost. We took tremendous casualties.
- p. 92. Lieutenant Carrico and his crew did this spectacular feat. He had come most of the distance back from Japan with two engines out on one side. The plane flew at a quite an angle. He was lucky he could land the plane as well as he did.
- p. 96. This was Maug Island. It was one of the strangest sights that I had ever seen up to that time. Actually, it originated in an extinct volcano. Sediment had filled the empty cone. Then the volcano dissolved but the cone survived. Devil's Tower, Wyoming is similar.

### *Christmas(?) night*

John had a flair for the stage and was very good. One night, members of the 500th put on skits in our Surfside Theater. John assumed the role of Lieutenant Hotshot J. Pilot for a skit poking fun at pilots. He came on stage wearing an enormous pair of wings that must have been at least 16 inches wide. Under the wings were "ribbons" for various achievements. These were oversized as well. John was asked what these ribbons were for. The only one that I can remember was the ribbon for the Battle of Brownnose Creek. The audience loved it.

### *Captain Cordray and further flying*

On p. 64, line 3, Ciardi wrote, "We live by accidents." When I returned to the unit after my stay in the hospital and brief convalescence, I asked to fly again. I flew my quota of 35 missions over Japan as a CFC gunner. Captain Cordray also returned to the unit from his Super-Dumbo duty. It is ironic that while Ciardi did not take my place on the fatal mission, I ended up taking his place on Captain Cordray's crew. When it came time for the Distinguished Flying Cross

to be awarded to the crew, I was listed as the CFC gunner.

### ***Beacon Hill***

After demobilization, I kept in contact with Ciardi. Once he wrote from an address on Beacon Hill inviting me over for an evening. Eager to impress my then-current girlfriend, I took her along. Opportunities to visit someone on Beacon Hill were not common in the circles I was in. Yes, our hosts were in an apartment on Beacon Hill, but it was not a regular apartment. It was a basement apartment and fairly comfortable. There was something different about the apartment. Once a week a maintenance man wheeled the garbage cans from all the apartments through their bedroom early in the morning while they were still in bed! We had a pleasant evening. He told me that he was a graduate student at Harvard and working on James Joyce.

### ***73rd Wing Reunion***

In 1983, I attended the annual 73rd Wing Reunion in Lexington, Kentucky. Cordray had settled there. Ciardi and Bud Orenstein were also there and we spent an evening reminiscing.

John was widely known and respected as a poet and was prominent on the lecture circuit. Orenstein was an advertising executive in Los Angeles. Cordray had continued to fly for many years and was an executive with United Parcel Service. I was a professor of psychology at a state college.

We had an evening of pleasantries. Orenstein was in good physical shape and had brought his uniform to appear in the "Line-up" the next day. At the Line-up those who had uniforms and could still get into them stood up in the ballroom while people applauded. Of the four of us, Bud was the only one who tried.

One thing that came up during the evening was my mentioning the propaganda leaflets our planes dropped over Japan warning of further bombing raids. I mentioned that I had several and offered to give away some. John wanted two. These were the widely printed leaflets showing a 29 dropping a great many bombs. He explained that he wanted to frame and display both sides. Bud asked for one also.

Later that evening the four of us bumped into Colonel Dougherty (then Lieutenant-General Dougherty) in the lounge of the hotel. He seemed to want to join us and was very pleasant. I did think it was

strange that Ciardi was so cool toward him and said we had to be moving on. Now, after reading the diary, I can possibly see why. John mentioned the situation where Dougherty ordered enlisted men (1988, 47) to bail out of a plane. Two died. One hit the tail boom and the other fell into a lake and drowned. It was 4 o'clock in the morning. Who would have expected to bail out over a lake in Nebraska? Dougherty also had bad luck with a mission to Iwo Jima. I had put these incidents out of my mind, but had John remembered them after all those years?

### *Chautauqua 1985*

The last time I saw John and Judith was in the summer of 1985. He was a popular speaker at the Chautauqua Institution in Western New York. My wife, Irene, and I drove over there one afternoon when he was free. We had a pleasant visit and talked over old times. He mentioned that he thought that Orenstein had nerves of steel. As we left, I had the feeling of wondering whether it would be the last time we would see each other.

I hope that this description of events gives some insight into the character of a very remarkable and creative man. As I read Cifelli's Introduction to the diary and in the biography, I began to recognize the escapes that Ciardi had from death. The first was being expelled from navigation school and not dying in combat or in training like his classmates. The second was the time he did not volunteer to take my place for my crew's fatal mission. The third was the circumstances that took Ciardi off flying status and sent him up to Wing to write up decorations and condolence letters. These experiences, surely, were part of a powerful motivation to do something creative with his life.

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**Author's Note**

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John Ciardi never doubts that the Japan of World War II was a rightful target for his B-29 Bombers. His diary is not about the moral issues of being sent to fight, but rather it is about the daily events, boredom and the arbitrary nature of Army life contrasting with the high stress arbitrary survival of combat missions. He takes pride For those of us who may never experience war as a first person, kill or be killed experience, it is vital that we understand what it means to send people into war. John Ciardi never doubts that the Japan of World War II was a rightful target for his B-29 Bombers CIARDI, JOHN (Author) University of Arkansas Press (Publisher). Production date. 1988.Â The Mansel diaries the diaries of Captain John Mansel, prisoner-of-war and camp forger, in Germany 1940-45. Related content. Â© IWM (CH 19). History. How has war in the air changed over time? KS3-4. First World War. Second World War. Â© IWM (Art.IWM PST 8235). History.