

Richard I Bong Veterans Historical Center

Finding aid for
Richard Bong Collection
Date range: 1920-2000
Bulk dates: 1941-1945

Finding Aid created by Briana Fiandt, 2017
Copyright Richard I Bong Veterans Historical Center

Creator: Richard Bong and Bong Family

Extent: 24 linear feet (24 boxes)

Abstract: The Bong archives include military records, correspondence, photographs, scrapbooks, Bong Memorial items, newspaper clippings, magazines, books, films.

Call number: Range C, Unit 3 & 4

Language: The material is in English

Acquisition Information: These records came to the Center over a range of years from the museum opening in 2003 to the present day. Small future additions to the collection are expected.

Access Restrictions: The record group is open to research.

Copyright: Copyright belongs to the Richard I Bong Veterans Historical Center.

Cite as: [item], folder, box, Richard Bong Archives, Richard I. Bong Veterans Historical Center.

History: Born September 24, 1920 in Superior, WI. He enlisted in the Army Air Forces in 1941 as a flying cadet. After training at Rankin Aeronautical Academy in California, he went to Luke Field in Arizona for advanced training. He stayed on at Luke Field as an instructor for several months before being transferred to Hamilton Field in California for P-38 training. He went overseas in September 1942 and was assigned to the 9th Fighter Squadron, 49th Fighter Group. He quickly amassed 5 “kills” and became an Ace. He would go on to eventually surpass 26 kills, the WWI record of Eddie Rickenbacker. At this point he was sent home on leave as well as a war bond promotional tour. As the leading WWII Ace, he was very well-known at home. In April 1944 he was assigned additional gunnery training at Foster Field, Texas. In September 1944, Bong returned to his assignment with the 5th Fighter Command in the Pacific and was placed in charge of gunnery training with that organization. In addition to his duties as gunnery instructor, though not required or expected to perform combat duty, he voluntarily flew 30 more combat missions over Borneo and the Philippine Islands, destroying 12 more enemy aircraft, bringing his total to 40 enemy destroyed. For his achievements during this 3rd tour of overseas

duty, Major Bong was awarded this country's highest decoration, the Medal of Honor. He was released from his assignment with the 5th and returned to the U.S. in December 1944.

Upon his return, he married girlfriend Marge Vattendahl in February 1945. While in the Pacific, Bong had placed her picture on his plane and she too became a media favorite and in Major Bong's words was "the most shot at girl in the Pacific". He was assigned as test pilot at Wright-Patterson Airfield in Ohio and was later transferred to Burbank, CA and given an assignment as Chief of Flight Operations, Office of the Army Air Force Plant Representative, in the Lockheed Aircraft Plant. It was here that he began work as test pilot on the new P-80 jet aircraft, the first U.S. jet technology. He was killed on August 6, 1945, when the P-80 he was flying crashed near Burbank due to power failure, reasons unknown. He was buried in the cemetery family lot in his hometown of Poplar, WI on August 8, 1945.

Soon after his death, a committee was formed to build a Memorial to Major Bong in Poplar, Wisconsin. A small memorial room stood in the local school for approximately 50 years as well as having a P-38 outside the school given to the local American Legion by the Air Force in 1949. The plane was fully restored in the 1990's and now is the centerpiece of the Richard I Bong Veterans Historical Center in Superior, Wisconsin.

Scope and Content: The Richard Bong Collection includes childhood memorabilia, military records and paperwork, correspondence, scrapbooks. The strength of the collection is found with the correspondence, newspaper clippings series, and military records. These series give a historical overview of the life of Richard Bong as well as the efforts to keep his memory alive following his tragic and early death.

The *correspondence* series ranges from 1941-2006 and includes correspondence Dick Bong to family, Marge Bong to family, and items related to Bong Memorial.

The *newspaper clippings* series contains a wide range of articles on Richard Bong, Marge Bong and the Heritage Center

The *scrapbooks* include 4 of Marge's personal scrapbooks dated from WWII, Memorial scrapbooks, and Bong family scrapbooks of newsclippings.

Subjects:

- World War II
- Bong, Major Richard Ira
- Army Air Forces
- Pacific Theater of Operations
- P-38 Lightning

Related Materials:

Researchers interested in this archive may also wish to consult the following resources in the Bong Veterans Center holdings:

49th Fighter Squadron Papers

P-38 Restoration

Folder #	Description
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Record Box Series

BOX 1

Childhood

1	Music Books
2	Student Books & Manuals
3	Cards & Certificates
4	School Records (1932-1939)

Military Career

5	Biography
6	Biography by Lee Van Atta
7	Signature Items
8	Enlistment & Training (1941-1942)
9	Training
10	USAF Research Report
11	Statement of Service – Awards and Decorations
12	Address Book
13	Missions & P-38 Lightning's of Richard Bong

14	Flight Logs
15	South Pacific/New Guinea news
16	49 th Fighter Group History
17	Certificates
18	Lockheed Star
19	Written Remembrances
20	Group Memberships (American Legion, Eagles, Elks)
21	Gifts to Major Bong
22	Jim Nichols "Marge" nose art
23	Bong Family Military Service
24	Orders & Memos (1942)
25	Orders & Memos (1943)
26	Orders & Memos (1944)
27	Orders & Memos (1945)
28	Orders & Memos (Date unknown)
29	Crash Documents
30	Medals & Honors

Officer's Club Register, Amberley Field, Ipswich, Australia

BOX 2

Homefront

2 Guest Books

31	Bond Drives
32	Radio Scripts
33	Quint Fleet
34	Tax Return (1945)
35	Sheet Music
36	Wedding

Correspondence (1941-2006)

37	Marge Bong Drucker (1971-1990)
38	Dick & Marge (1941-1945)
39	General George Kenney
40	Dick Bong Related (dates unknown)
41	Dick Bong Related (1943-1945)
42	Dick Bong Related (1946-1947)
43	Dick Bong Related (1948-1949)
44	Dick Bong Related (1950-1951)
45	Dick Bong Related (1952-1959)
46	Dick Bong Related (1960-1969)
47	Dick Bong Related (1970-1979)
48	Dick Bong Related (1980-1984)
49	Dick Bong Related (1985-1989)
50	Dick Bong Related (1990-1994)
51	Dick Bong Related (1995-2006)
52	Movie Rights

53 Bud's Book

Marge Bong Drucker

54 Donations

55 Speeches

56 Boxer Review

57 Correspondence (1995-2000)

58 Obituaries

59 Scrapbook

60 Signature/Biography

BOX 3

Bong Service Records (3 rolls of microfilm)

Poplar Memorial

61 1955 Dedication

62 Ephemera

63 Financials

64 Historical Marker

65 Legal Agreements

66 Meeting Minutes (1955-1960)

67 Memorial Room labels

68 P-38 story book

69 Dedication photos (photocopies)

70 Postcards

71 Theft of medals (1981)

Legacy

72 49th Fighter Group

73 Richard I Bong Airport

74 Bong Bust

75 Elks Lodge Memorial Wall

76 Misawa Air Base – Richard Bong Theater

77 Commemorative Items

78 Richard I Bong Interstate Bridge

79 Magazine Articles

80 P-38 Aircraft

81 P-38 Aircraft History

82 P-38 Aircraft specs – Lockheed Corp.

83 P-38 Aircraft Records

84 P-38 National Association

85 Programs

86 Resolutions

87 Tributes

88 Lew Holt Correspondence (1970-1971) school display

89 Rod Ripley - Correspondence (1975-1976) Nat'l Memorial effort

90 Rod Ripley - Correspondence (1975-1976) Nat'l Memorial effort

91 Rod Ripley – Petition for National Memorial

92 Rod Ripley – Confederate Air Force

BOX 4

Poplar Memorial Room sign-in sheets (1955-2001)

BOX 5

P-38 Restoration

- 1 P-38 Commemorative Postal Stamp
- 2 Search for Parts and Restoration
- 3 Correspondence Bill Ion Regarding Restoration (1994-1997)
- 4 Volunteers and Contact Points
- 5 Restoration Press
- 6 P-38 Lightning Parts Listings

BOX 6

Scrapbook's compiled by Marge Vattendahl (1926–1965)

The collection consists of 4 scrapbooks compiled by Marge Vattendahl from 1944-1945. Filled with newspaper clippings about Richard Bong's exploits in the Pacific as well as memorabilia from her courtship with Dick. Some of the artifacts in the album include menus, movie tickets, matchbooks. Many of these also include handwritten comments by Marge documenting where and when they were accumulated. She kept contributing to the albums through their wedding in February 1945 and also includes fabric samples from her veil and dress.

The scrapbooks were left in the care of her brother Lowell Vattendahl, who donated them to the museum in 2015. Acid free, thin leaf paper has been placed between pages containing items especially susceptible to acidification and decay.

Also included in this box is scrapbook compiled by the Bong family. It consists of copies of stories about Richard Bong from various books. The last few pages document Marge's life immediately after Dick's death from 1945-1946. Included is a copy of a print ad that features Marge as model.

BOXES 7-8-9

The collection consists of a total of 21 scrapbooks, of which 16 were compiled by the Bong family documenting Dick's life, death, and commemorative events through the early 2000's. They consist mostly of newspaper clippings, but also some letters and programs from commemorative events. They document the 1955 Poplar Memorial dedication, Airport dedication, proposed Bong AFB, General Kenney's death, Bong Memorial robbery, Bong bridge dedication, Aviation Hall of Fame induction, USPS stamp, P-38 Fund, Bong Heritage Center.

There are 2 scrapbooks compiled by the Bong Family that were part of the Bong Memorial room in Poplar. The first book consists of newspaper clippings documenting Dick Bong's career, marriage, and death. The second documents commemorative events after his death including the Historical Marker in Poplar, the School Forest, Memorial Dedication, UWS Hall of Fame.

There are 3 additional scrapbooks. One, put together by Delores Bjerga, consists of newspaper clippings following Dick Bong's career. The second was put together in 1984 by students in the Superior school system. It was cataloged into their library for many years before being donated to the Center. The third, compiled by a local family includes newsclippings about Dick's career, wedding, and death.

Albums are stored in chronological order.

Publications Series

BOX 1

Manuals and textbooks belonging to Richard Bong and used by him in college and military training

BOX 2

Magazines featuring articles about Richard Bong from 1945-2006. Arranged chronologically within box.

BOX 3

Magazines featuring articles about Richard Bong from 1945-1985

Oversized Series (see Bong Clippings spread sheet for detailed finding aid of newspaper clippings)

BOX 1

News Clippings Dick Bong related

1	1942-1943
2	1942-1943
3	1942-1943
4	1944
5	1944
6	1944
7	1945
8	1945
9	1945

BOX 2

News clippings Dick Bong related

10	1946-present
11	1946-2010
12	1950's
13	1970's
14	1980's
15	1990's
16	2000's
17	Unknown dates

18

Unknown dates

19

Oversize – misc. dates

BOX 3

Oversized Archives Box 1

Original certificates awarded with medals

P-38 Piggyback certificate

Artwork related to Richard Bong

Media Series