

**TITLE: THE FRED HILL WORLD WAR II PHOTOGRAPHY COLLECTION**

**PERIOD COVERED:** ca 1941–ca 2002

**NUMBER OF PIECES:** 1527 images

**PROVENANCE OF COLLECTION:** gift of Fred Hill to Pierce Library, Eastern Oregon University, La Grande, OR, March 22, 2010

**SUBJECT MATTER\*:**

**1941-1945: World War II: Army Photo Reconnaissance Prints and Copy Negatives**

Note: These are generally photographs Hill saved by other photographers: aerial images Hill's crew processed, including the landing on Corregidor of the 503<sup>rd</sup> Parachute Infantry; images he developed and printed for fellow soldiers; photos by others taken with Fred's cameras.

**1941-1945: Pacific Theater, World War II: Personal Images**

Note: Generally taken by Fred Hill but sometimes snapped by his fellow squadron photographers, these images document the following during 1941-1945: pre-deployment Army life; life on board four different ships; nine Army and civilian sites in New Guinea, Netherlands East Indies, The Philippines, and the Ryukyu Islands. Hill photographed military subjects on base and the civilian life around him.

**1946: Fort Lewis, Washington, *Fort Lewis Sentinel* Images**

Note: these images record the post-war inspection and visit by General Dwight Eisenhower

**1950-2002:** Veterans' Reunion, Hill Home in California; 1950  
Tent Mates Reunion, Hill Home in California, 1970;  
5th Air Force Memorial Wall, Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, 2002

\* Note: flawed or damaged images are included in the collection because, as Mr. Hill advised, "They may be the only image we have."

**FINDING AID:**

**Basic Keyword Search:** This is the PastPerfect default setting that displays results alphabetically by title (numbers appear in front of the letters). To view a larger image, click on the thumbnail to the left of the entry. To obtain the "full data" about the photograph, click on the entry title.

**Advanced Search:** this feature narrows the search to date, people, place, etc. The link is

found directly below the "Search by Keyword" data field on the "Special Collections" home page or in the left-hand menu column inside the database. For example, if you want to see the photographs taken by Fred Hill in 1944, follow the steps below:

- 1) Type "Fred Hill" into the Author/Photographer field box
- 2) In the date field type in "1944"
- 3) Click on the "search" button
- 4) Results will be returned

Any combination of searches is possible, based on the fields available from the advanced search screen. A "Help" section that discusses keyword, advanced searching, etc. is available from within the database

### **BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY:**

Born in Elgin, Oregon, Frederick H. Hill (1920–) was a photographer who served in the U.S. Army from 1943 to 1945 as a Photography Lab Chief in the 17<sup>th</sup> Photographic Reconnaissance Squadron, Fifth Air Force, Pacific Theater. After his discharge he studied with Ansel Adams and Minor White at the California School of Fine Arts. From 1947 to 1986, Lucky Stores, a California company, employed him as a commercial photographer. In 1989, he returned to eastern Oregon, and during the 1990s his work achieved national recognition. His collected, published, and award-winning photographs show a full spectrum of interests—from the historical and documentary to the aesthetic and personal—and everything between. In 2007, he published *Darkroom Soldier*, a book of photographs and letters to his wife Martha between 1943-1945. The volume was named as a Finalist by national "Best Books, 2008."

### **DIGITAL DATA:**

Images in this collection were digitized to .tif files at 1200-3200dpi. The resolution was determined by the size of the scanned negative with a standard of at least 3,000 pixels on the long edge. These files are stored as they are. Using the high resolution image, a second compressed .jpg image was created using Adobe Photoshop. These .jpg images, at 600 pixels on the long edge, are what appear as thumbnails throughout the collection.

### **USE OF COLLECTION:**

**Alternative Forms Available:** For print quality images, prints, or high resolution tiff files, or commercial uses please contact the Library Director at Eastern Oregon University

**Restrictions on Access:** Collection is open to the public and available via the Pierce Library "Special Collections" website. On request, original photographs may be viewed but not removed from Pierce Library.

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**Preferred Citation:** Acknowledgment of Eastern Oregon University as a source is required. Publication of these materials must include full and complete credit to the “Fred Hill Collection, Pierce Library” on the same page with the photograph and in any notes and bibliography. If the publication includes images published in Fred Hill’s book *Darkroom Soldier*, that source must also be acknowledged.

## **BIOGRAPHY OF FREDERICK H. HILL (1920–)**

Frederick H. Hill was born in 1920 in Elgin, Oregon. He grew up in a soldiering family that loved cameras, darkrooms, black-and-white prints. By the time he turned eleven, his father Lynn, who ran the local hardware store, and his mother Etha, a teacher and homemaker, had cleared a space in their cellar, and Fred began making contact prints from his Jiffy Kodak 620. Down in that darkroom, he mustered the courage to develop his first roll of personal film, and that process launched his seventy year quest for memorable, useful, and beautiful images.

Hill’s future was cast the summer and fall of 1940. While attending classes at Eastern Oregon University, he befriended Minor White—later a famous fine art photographer—who was teaching at the WPA Art Center in La Grande. Using the Hill family car, White and Hill photographed northeast Oregon. Also, in July, 1940, Hill joined the 41<sup>st</sup> Division National Guard unit in La Grande and began drilling. On September 16, 1940, everything changed: National Guard units were federalized. Private Hill became a full-time soldier in an infantry mortar squad. The United States Army shipped the nineteen-year old kid to Fort Lewis, Washington. After asserting for fifteen months that he was, in fact, a serious photographer who knew how to use his Miniature Speed Graphic camera, the Army finally transferred Hill in November 1941 to the new Oregon National Guard 123<sup>rd</sup> Observation Squadron at Gray Airfield, Ft. Lewis, Washington.

In May 1942, Hill married his sweetheart Martha Simonson in Tacoma. For the next seven months, he flew as an observer on coastal submarine patrol, photographed the camouflage of Coast Guard units, worked in various offices. In December, Private Hill was transferred to a base in Salinas, California, where the Army assigned him to the 17<sup>th</sup> Photographic Reconnaissance Squadron, 71<sup>st</sup> Reconnaissance Group. Eventually, the squadron moved to training bases in Louisiana and Mississippi. On October 6, 1943, they boarded the USS *General John Pope* in Newport News, Virginia, and with his Kodak 35 camera, he sailed for the South Pacific.

From October 1943 to October 1945, Sergeant Fred Hill served as a Photography Lab

Chief in the 17<sup>th</sup> Photographic Reconnaissance Squadron, Fifth Air Force, Pacific Theater. They were a key part of the Allied reconquest of the Pacific—from New Guinea to Tokyo. Like the men in other such squadrons, Sergeant Hill and his crew—most of whom were already civilian photographers—set up and operated darkrooms to process the aerial photographs brought back by planes that had flown over Japanese-held territory. Sometimes, when the enemy threatened, loud anti-aircraft guns fired three red warning flares over their canvas tents, and these darkroom soldiers ran for their foxholes. However, if these men were to provide critical target and topographic photographs to commanders and pilots—photos that saved innumerable lives—they had to be removed from combat. So, like thousands of other support troops who survived World War II, Sgt. Fred Hill never fired a shot in combat. His only weapon was accurate clear aerial photographs, his front line the darkroom tent, his enemies dust, heat, fatigue, sickness, loneliness, insects, rusting equipment, fungus, KP.

During his time off, his Zeiss Super Nettel and his Leica cameras filled his days with exploration and discovery. As he wrote to his wife in August 1944, “I am in a strange land.... I look always to find some new beauty, some new thing to learn, some new joy to live, and ever try to take good pictures to bring as much of this life back to you as possible....” Living with her parents in Tacoma and working as a riveter at Boeing, Martha Simonson Hill became the exclusive, enabling, and passionate audience for her far-away husband. Over the two years he was deployed, like thousands—perhaps millions—of young wives, she sustained her soldier husband in various ways: bought, packed, and shipped cameras; sent recent photos of herself; wrote uncountable letters. She mailed candy, clothing, shoes, newspapers, maps, sunglasses, cookies. She sent cans of Kodachrome 8 mm movie film for his Revere and rolls of 35 mm Kodachrome color film for his Zeiss Super Nettel or his Leica.

To survive the perpetual chaos around him, Hill found a way to share, preserve, and order his inner life: he wrote Martha some 315 letters, and enclosed his recent black-and-white photographs and negatives—hundreds of prints and exposures created with multiple cameras. Alone, late at night, at work, or after work—the other guys gone to the movies—Hill got out whatever paper he could find—squadron stationery, Australian toilet paper, blank Japanese medical forms. He arranged Martha’s photographs before him, loaded his fountain pen with blue or black ink, sipped some hot black tea, listened for the rats, cursed the flickering light bulb or candle or lantern, swatted mosquitoes, and poured out his daily problems, experiences, observations, plans, passions, photo expeditions, requests, and lists of his enclosed photos. “Hope you get as much off your chest when you write me about the pea-brained foremen you have there at Boeing,” he wrote in January 1945. Thousands of miles away, the woman he loved in Tacoma always wrote back. She saved his every text, his every image. Their marriage was new. They both wanted to keep it alive. The letters she sorted into bundles, tied them with cotton string, stored them in a box in the basement. The photos she pasted into albums; the negatives she saved in envelopes and sleeves.

Writing these letters, Hill was always aware of two different audiences—Martha and Army censors. To maintain the secrecy of Allied movement and operations, censors cut out or blotted out text and/or removed photos and other enclosures, then resealed and stamped the

envelopes. To pass censorship, Hill was required to always substitute Army Post Office (APO) numbers for site-specific inside addresses. To tell Martha where he was and his address, he invented allusions and codes. For instance, in letters from New Guinea, he wrote "S.W.I.N.G." for "Some Where In New Guinea." Once, he addressed Martha as "Dear Sulu" in a letter written while traversing the Sulu Sea. With one or two exceptions, censorship forced him to limit his correspondence to non-military subjects. As he noted in one letter: "Nothing happens that I can write about." Even his enclosures were subject to censorship: his photo of the ace pilot Major Richard Bong was removed from the envelope.

Hill's success in his quest to bring back images to Martha came in part from an unlikely source—airial reconnaissance film for the K-17 Fairchild camera. This film came in rolls ten inches wide by up to two hundred feet long. After a mission, Hill's crew brought the magazine of exposed film to the photo lab, and in total darkness, they cut off the exposed portion of the film to be developed and printed. When there were only ten exposures left on a roll, they discarded that tag end and installed a new two-hundred foot roll to be loaded in the plane for the next mission. Wasting that end of unexposed film—perhaps ten feet long by ten inches wide—"tore our hearts out," Hill remembered. So he and four other men built a slitter, cut the aerial film into three and one quarter inch strips, wound those strips onto film spools, and installed the salvaged film in Kodak 3-A (postcard) cameras ordered from the States. Blocking out the red window on the back of the camera, they calibrated and recorded the number of quarter turns required to advance the film to the next exposure.

After his discharge in 1945, Fred and Martha moved to San Francisco where Hill attended the California School of Fine Arts and studied with Ansel Adams, who taught ways to earn a living as a photographer. When Adams was replaced by Minor White, who was disinterested in occupational skills, Hill decided he didn't want to become a starving artist. His growing family depended on him. He knew how to use his 4" x 5" Speed Graphic and others. Time to get a job.

His photographic skills with his 5" x 7" Burke and James view camera led to a career with a California company called Lucky Stores where he worked from 1947 to 1986. As a commercial photographer, he created innumerable documents—executive portraits, product images, freight damage documents, lawsuit evidence. With Martha employed as a teacher's aide, they raised their family of four sons—Ed, Wayne, Lynn, and Stan—and three daughters—Jean, Vivian, and Sara Maria, an infant who died of spina bifida. During these years, Hill continued to create images with his Leica and a new Pentax Spotmatic, images he intended as art. In the 1970's he exhibited his work to various California audiences and for that photography he regularly received awards. In 1988, Hill showed two carousels of color slides to a reunion of his 71<sup>st</sup> Tactical Reconnaissance Group in Columbus, Ohio. "Guys yelled across the room to one another, 'Hey, remember that?'" Hill recalled. "There were so many interruptions I didn't think I'd finish."

In 1989, Hill and Martha returned to live and free-lance in Oregon, and during the 1990s his work achieved national recognition. The British journal *History of Photography* published his

account of his friendship with Minor White. Editors of ten different World War II books published his Pacific Theater photographs. In Oregon, the Tillamook Air Museum added his work to their permanent collection. The local historical society invited him to present an illustrated lecture. He and Martha exhibited their photographs in the community. His photos with his Minolta Maxxum and his Leica received awards, including distinction in a Photography Society of America Invitational Salon.

After Martha passed away in 2002, Hill married Verna Haefer. In 2007, he completed *Darkroom Soldier*, his book of photographs and letters to Martha between 1943-1945. The volume was named a Finalist by national “Best Books, 2008.” As of October, 2010, he is at home in La Grande, happily married, amiable, witty, vigorous, and productively engaged in all kinds of photography. In his lifetime of negotiating the subtle gray boundary between document and art, Hill is fond of reminding viewers that “Photography teaches us to see. That is enough for anyone to learn and appreciate.”

## **RELATED INFORMATION:**

### **Primary Sources:**

#### **I. World War II Manuscripts:**

**(A) Fred Hill to Martha Hill Letters(1943-1945):** 315 original texts– handwritten and typed–with original envelopes, various enclosures, etc. Some 115 of these are transcribed, excerpted, edited, and published in *Darkroom Soldier*.

#### **(B) Fred Hill Unpublished Texts:**

**(1)** “A Different Memoir of World War II.” Five page typed single-spaced text delivered with photos at the Union County Historical Society, La Grande, Oregon, November 11, 1999: 1-5.

**(2)** “Memories of Military.” One page manuscript given to his children, Christmas, 1994, to describe his pre-deployment service.

**(3)** “Travels of the 17<sup>th</sup> Recon Squadron, 71<sup>st</sup> Recon Group, 91<sup>st</sup> Wing, 5<sup>th</sup> AF.” One page chronology of Hill’s movements from Laurel, Mississippi, on September 24, 1943 to August 22, 1945, at Ie Shima.

## **Selected Secondary Sources**

**I. Books:** *Darkroom Soldier: Photographs and Letters from the South Pacific Theater World*

*War II*. Fred Hill with George Venn. La Grande: Photosmith Books, 2007, 287 pp.

## **II. Fred Hill's Published World War II Photos (2004–1947)**

“One of the B25's of the Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron in the South Pacific, 1944,” and “Installation of Armament in the 8-gun nose of a B-25 in the South Pacific.” *Warriors Without Weapons: Triumph of the Tech Reps*. John W. Casey. Corvallis, OR: Premiere Editions International, 2004: 44 and 87.

“The Courtyard at Santo Tomas University...,” “Coconut Knife,” “Gold Mining Community, Mountain Province, Luzon, The Philippines.” *Three Year Picnic: An American Woman's Life Inside Japanese Prison Camps in The Phillippines During WW II*. Evelyn Whitfield. Corvallis, OR: Premiere Editions International, 1999 and 2002: 69 and 106.

“Tsubaki Club,” “Yours In War, High Pockets.” *Ghost Soldiers*. Hampton Sides. New York: Doubleday, 2001: 4, 118-119.

*Forty of the Fifth: The Life, Times and Demise of Forty U.S. Fifth Air Force Aircraft*. Michael John Claringbould. Kingston, Australia: Aerothentic Publications, 1999: Eight black/white photos on pages 23, 27, 84, 88, 94.

*WW II Pacific War Eagles: China/Pacific Aerial Conflict in Original Color* by Jeffrey Ethell, Warren M. Bodie, and Bob Boyd. Front Royal, VA: Widewing Publications, 1997: Sixteen color photos on 124-129, 133-136, 145, 157, 204.

“The Surrender Flight That Almost Failed.” Robert C. Mikesh. *Aviation History*, September, 1995: 53. Color photo of Japanese surrender plane on Ie Shima. Credited as reprint from Jeffrey Ethell.

*At Ease*. Ed. Mike Beno. Greendale, WI: Reiman Publications, L.P. 1996: Two reprinted color photos on 29 and 146 from *The Victory Era in Color* by Jeff Ethell. Greendale, WI: Reiman Publications, 1994.

“Sgt. Van Reimer,” “Photo Lab at Finchhafen,” “War Bond Sale, Portland,” “Rizal Avenue, Manila, 1945.” *There Once Was A War*. Chuck Yeager and Clarence Anderson. Ed. Jeffrey Ethell. New York and London: Penguin Books, 1995: Four color photos on 51, 126, 175, 211.

*G.I Victory*. Jeffrey L. Ethell and David C. Isby. London and Mechanicsburg, PA: Greenhill Books, 1995: Six color photos: 125, 127, 129, 130, 136, 140.

“Outdoor maintenance on... North American B-25J...Lingayen, Luzon....” *WW II War Eagles: Global Air War in Original Color* by Jeffrey L. Ethell. Hiawassee, GA:

Widewing Publications, 1995: 185.

“Motor Pool Friend,” “Monsoon Mud,” “Jungle Headquarters,” “Waiting to Ship Out,” “Fording the River,” “A Real Mouthful,” [“Red Cross Girl.”] *The Victory Era in Color* by Jeff Ethell. Greendale, WI: Reiman Publications, 1994: 130-133.

*Fifth Air Force*. Ed Robert J. Martin. Paducah, KY: Turner Publishing Co., 1994: Eleven black and white photos on 17, 23, 172, 173, 174. These include photos by Fred Hill and from the Fred Hill Collection.

*The Strafin’ Saints*. Robert P. Nichols and Katherine Sams Wiley. Houston, TX: no publisher, 1994: Thirty six black/white photos from 322-346. These include photos by Fred Hill and from the Fred Hill Collection.

“Tsubaki Club,” “Corregidor,” “Manila Government Buildings,” “Luneta Park–Armeta District, Manila,” “Bilibid Prison,” “Walled City,” “Major John Boone,” “Women’s Correctional Institution,” “Santo Tomas,” “Ruins of Fort Santiago.” *Manila Espionage* by Claire Phillips and Myron B. Goldsmith. Portland, OR: Binford and Morts, 1947: 26-155.

### **III. Articles by Fred Hill in Periodicals (1992)**

“When I Knew Minor White.” Fred Hill. *History of Photography*, Vol 16, No. 2, Summer, 1992: 147-151. One black/white photo by Fred Hill: “Minor White in High Valley, 1940.”

### **IV. Articles about Fred Hill in Periodicals (2007-1944)**

“They Also Served: A Soldier’s Pacific Theater Album, World War II.” With George Venn and Jan Boles. *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 108.2 (2007): 294-316.

Dick Mason, “La Grande Man Experiences A Flight In A Fortress.” *The Observer* (LaGrande), July 5, 2007: 3.

George Venn, “Rider in the Wilderness: Minor White in La Grande 1940-41.” *Calapooya Literary Review* 2(Spring, 2004): 21-26.

Dick Mason, “Fred Hill Recalls War Years.” *The Observer* (LaGrande), November 11, 2003: 3.

Dick Mason, “WWII Connection.” *The Observer* (LaGrande), August 31, 1999: 3.

Dick Mason, “Local Photographer’s Images Preserve Airborne Legacy: Fred Hill’s

Work on Permanent Display at Tillamook Air Museum.” *The Observer* (LaGrande), May 19, 1999: 3.

“Hills to Display Photos.” *The Observer/Baker City Herald*, July 25, 1997: no page.  
(“Halls of Art” Show with Martha).

Karen Holtzmeister, “Family Members Preserve Military Tradition.” *San Leandro Morning News*, Memorial Day, 1966, no page.

“New Guinea K.P.” *Sunday Ledger-Tacoma News Tribune*, 1944: no page.

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