



1st Lt. Joe Coccia
413th Headquarters
Group Statistical Officer

Joe, a native of Cranston, RI, was the son of the late Silverio and Elizabeth Coccia. At an early age, Joe was a student of piano and composition. Joe graduated from Providence College in 1941 as a political science major. Plans for law school were deferred. Joe was drafted and entered the military service as a private in the Army Air Corps in 1942.

After his basic training in Atlantic City, he was shipped to Armor School in Denver, then on to a bomber group stationed in Utah. When the bomber squadron shipped overseas, Joe was transferred, instead, to a band in Sioux City, IA.

From Sioux City, Joe was sent to officer training school in Florida. His training concluded at Harvard Business College in 1943, where he completed the Army Air Corps Statistical Program,

and was then commissioned an officer. [In 1943, Joe also became a member of the Stan Kenton Orchestra arranging staff.]

From Cambridge, to Richmond, VA, to Milleville, NJ, which was a P-47 training base, to Blumenthal, NC where he joined the 413th Fighter Group.

Joe was the Group statistical officer, keeping track of flights, mission results, plane availability and condition.

According to Joe, when they arrived on Ie Shima they "learned to get off the ship quick" because of potential air attacks. Once on the island, they moved from place to place, digging fox holes at each locale until a camp location was decided.

The Group had a rough time with monsoons - there was "mud up to our knees" and they didn't have a "stitch of clean clothing".

Over time, they moved from foxhole to pup tent to 2 man tent to 4 man tent. According to one of Dad's letters, the 4 man tent was shared by Joe, Dad, Burt Hamilton and Bill Lynch.

Dad also wrote that after the war ended, and the wait to return home began, Joe worked on a song entitled "Homesick". According to Joe, Homesick never came about but Stan Kenton recorded RENDEZVOUS WITH KENTON, an album of Joe's arrangements, including

two original compositions. [In addition to RENDEZVOUS WITH KENTON Joe's compositions and arrangements have been recorded and released on Capitol Records and Creative World: DANCE TO THE BANDS and, BY REQUEST-Volumes II and V. His music has been recorded by the Paul Cacia Jazz Orchestra in the albums, QUANTUM LEAP and THE ALUMNI TRIBUTE TO STAN KENTON.]

After the move to Okinawa Joe shared a Quonset Hut with Burt Hamilton where they cut a hole through the wall and used local rocks to build a fireplace. "My mom sent us ravioli that she made and canned."

Dad wrote in a letter to his mother that Joe wrote his fiancé "long hand every night". When I mentioned this to Joe, he laughed. "My father and my wife's father grew up together in the same town in Italy. In fact, one room in my father's house was set up as the village school." The village, Alatri, is in the Frosinone province and, according to Joe, the school arrangement was typical in small villages.

When Joe was stationed in Milleville, NJ, Joe's father wrote to his boyhood friend, then living in Glasboro, NJ, who brought Joe to his home. "I kidded her that we were an arranged marriage."

The 413th Fighter Group was commanded by Colonel Harrison Thyng.

Harrison Thyng was a "marvelous commander". Thyng flew home to New Hampshire every weekend and took Joe with him, dropped him off at Millville, NJ so he could visit his fiancé and then picked him up on Sunday on the way back to Blumenthal.

"After I was discharged, I didn't know what the heck to do. I was gonna be a big song writer." Joe ended up "doing nothing all day, occasionally play[ing] music at night". "My wife went to work at Textron. Eventually she told me that I was wasting my education and should try substitute teaching". As a result, Joe became a full time teacher.

Joe taught at the junior and senior high school levels and in 1955, he completed his Masters degree studies in Educational administration. In 1958, he was appointed Assistant Principal of Cranston High School West. On January 1, 1962, he was promoted to Principal and served in that capacity until his retirement in 1982.

Since the war, Joe has led an active and interesting life, with a focus on education and community service.

After his honorable discharge from active duty in 1946 to 1963 he was active in the Air Force Reserve Program, eventually retiring as a Lieutenant Colonel.