
THE AMAZING LIFE OF
NATAPU MARA
A Tahitian Volunteer
Free French Airman
WWII Veteran
ENGLAND
Hartford Bridge
Blackbushe
FRANCE
Chevilly-Larue
Creil
Creil
RURUTU
TAHITI
THE AMAZING LIFE OF
NATAPU MARA
A Tahitian Volunteer • Free French Airman • WWII Veteran
A Life of Courage, Service and Sacrifice
WAIRUNA
SOUTH PACIFIC

PAUL LT MARA

AN ILLUSTRATED TRIBUTE

THE AMAZING LIFE OF

NATAPU MARA

A Tahitian Volunteer • Free French Airman

World War II Veteran

By Paul LT Mara

A visual journey told through six commemorative posters

From Rurutu to the skies over Europe

LEST WE FORGET • N’OUBLIONS JAMAIS

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A Tahitian volunteer and Free French airman

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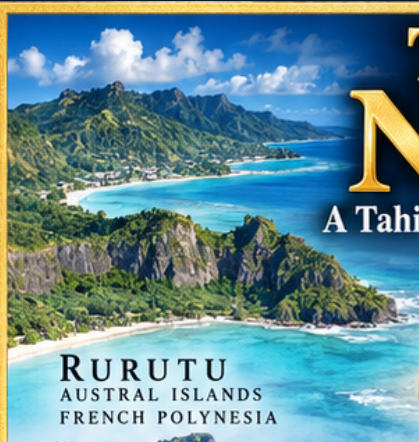
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Author • Paul LT Mara

The Amazing Life of Natapu Mara

A Tahitian Volunteer • Free French Airman • WWII Veteran



RURUTU
AUSTRAL ISLANDS
FRENCH POLYNESIA



Boston Bomber
No. 342 Squadron
'Lorraine'



Rurutu
My Birthplace

21 Tahitian Volunteers
March 1941

1. **Born: 8 July 1922**
   Avera, Rurutu, Austral Islands, French Polynesia
2. **1940–1941**
   One of 21 young Tahitians who volunteered to serve during World War II
3. **31 March 1941**
   Left Tahiti aboard the *Wairuna*
4. **Journey**
   Tahiti • Fiji • New Zealand • Australia • Canada • Iceland • Scotland • England
5. **28 July 1941**
   Registered in London with the Free French Air Force as a navigator candidate • Matricule 30.766
6. **Served with No. 342 Squadron RAF / *Groupe de Bombardement 1/20 "Lorraine"***
7. **Role:** Wireless Operator / Air Gunner (WOp/AG)
8. **September 1944**
   Flew bombing missions over Boulogne, Mont Lambert and Woensdrecht
9. **Tour Ended: 51 Sorties • Final Mission:** 14 September 1944
10. **One of only six** survivors of the original Mā'ohi Tahitian aviation group
11. **Reunion in France: 5 June 1984**

SS WAIRUNA
31 MARCH 1941



Reunion in France
5 June 1984



A life of courage, sacrifice and enduring joy.

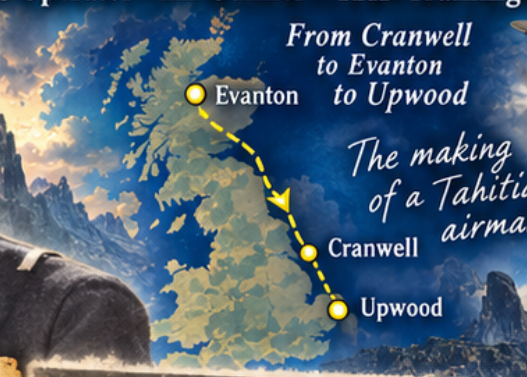
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THE AMAZING LIFE OF NATAPU MARA

THE TRAINING BEGINS • 1 to 5

Wireless Operator • Air Gunner • RAF Training 1942 – 1943











1 25 – 29 March 1942
No. 1 Signals School, Cranwell
- First training flights in Dominie and Proctor aircraft
- **Harwell Box** training: 16 hours

2 14 April 1942
Qualified as W/Opt AG
- No. 1 Signals School
- Wireless proficiency and Morse training completed
- Still only 20 years old

3 26 April – 29 May 1942
No. 8 Air Gunners School, Evanton, Scotland
- AB INITIO Air Gunnery Course
- Exam Marks: 77%
- Flying Time: 7 hrs 50 mins
- **Result: PASS**

"Above average, very keen and hardworking"

4 1 – 25 May 1942
Blackburn Botha training flights
- Exercises: Sea Marker • Beam • Rear Search • Tracer • Cine Gun • Cross Over
- Total for course: 7 hrs 50 mins

5 16 Jan – 13 Feb 1943
17 O.T.U. – RAF Upwood
- Advanced crew training in the Avro Anson
- Exercises: MR 3.4 • P3 • P5 • P6/P7 • QGH • P4 • P10
- Landed at Aston Down – 21 Jan 1943
- **Total flying time:** 20 hrs 05 mins





HARWELL BOX

Ground training for wireless operators — sometimes called the "torture chamber".









Training, discipline and courage

From determination and discipline came the airman he was destined to become.

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THE AMAZING LIFE OF NATAPU MARA

TRAINING 6 to 10

Advanced Crew Training • Certification • 342 Squadron • 1943







6 **16 Jan – 13 Feb 1943**
17 O.T.U. – RAF Upwood

- Advanced crew training in Avro Anson
- Duties: MR 3.4 • P3 • P5 • P6/P7 QGH • P4 • P10
- Landed at Aston Down – 21 Jan 1943
- Total flying time: 20 hrs 05 mins

7 **15 Feb – 1 Mar 1943**
C Flight – 17 O.T.U.

- Blenheim Mk. IV training
- 10 training flights
- High Level Bombing
- Air Firing
- C.C. Gun
- Blenheim flying time: 15 hrs 25 mins
- One DNCO return to base – 28 Feb 1943

8 **8 – 19 March 1943**
Intensive Blenheim training

- Duties 0.1 • 0.2 • 0.3 • 0.4 • 0.5 0.7 • 0.8 • 0.9 • LL • QGH • F/A
- Night Flying (NF) • NF x Country
- Day flying: 29 hrs 17 mins
- Night flying: 5 hrs 30 mins

9 **25 March 1943**
Certification – RAF Upwood

- Certified on Blenheim Mk. IV
- Bailing out drill
- Ditching & dinghy drill
- Oxygen drill
- Procedure when lost at night
- S.B.A. – Standard Beam Approach
- Mission-ready for Squadron 342

10 **16 – 21 April 1943**
342 Squadron – West Raynham

- Douglas Boston III conversion
- Local flying and Cross Country
- Pilots: S/L Dugot • Lt Garot
- April total: 4 hrs day
- Grand total: 92 hrs 37 mins
- The road to 'Lorraine'



Pilot Training Course

30766 Mara. N.

CERTIFIED THAT
30766 Sgt. Mara. N.
has been instructed on the following:-
(1) Bailing out drill.
(2) Ditching and dinghy drill. (done it)
(3) Oxygen drill.
(4) Procedure when lost at night.
(5) S.B.A. (Standard Beam Approach)

Training Wing 17 O.T.U.
R.A.F. UPWOOD.
Date.... 25..3.43.....

Certification – 25 March 1943


Blenheim Mk. IV


Westland Lysander Target Tug



Douglas Boston III – 342 Squadron

West Raynham – April 1943

Training, discipline and courage became the road to service.
The final steps before joining Lorraine Squadron 342.

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THE AMAZING LIFE OF NATAPU MARA

TRAINING 11 to 14

342 Squadron • Courage • Ditching • Return to Flight • 1943






Douglas A-20 Havoc
Boston IIIA


Douglas Boston IV

11 4 – 25 May 1943
342 Squadron build-up

- Havoc / Boston training flights
- Local Flying and Formation
- Cross Country II • III • VI
- "Circus" training mission
- Formation of 6 aircraft
- Low Level Bombing
- Added flying time: 11 hrs 45 mins

12 6 – 27 June 1943
Plane Ditched at Sea

- Formation and bombing exercises
- Cross-country and six-aircraft box formation
- 27 June: Air Sea Rescue / Submarine Patrol
- Aircraft ditched in the sea
- Sgt Pierre Drès killed
- Natapu saved pilot S/Lt Dugot
- 2 hrs 30 mins in the dinghy
- June flying total: 5 hrs 00 mins

13 29 August 1943
Return to Flying

- First flight since the ditching
- Refused a desk job
- Returned as replacement W/Op AG
- Flew with S/Ld Gorri
- Low-level training at 1500 ft
- Flying time: 1 hr 00 min

14 6 – 28 September 1943
Hartford Bridge / Blackbushe

- Transfer from Great Massingham
- Low-level cross-country training
- Formation exercise
- Exercise Eric – landed at White Waltham
- Cross-country low-level flying
- Six-aircraft formation
- September day flying: 9 hrs 05 mins



Pilots Course / Men of 342 Squadron



S/Ld Gorri – the return to flying




Boston IV – E=BZ319
The aircraft of future missions



Courage, recovery and determination carried him back to the skies.
From ditching and hardship came the resolve to fly again.

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THE AMAZING LIFE OF NATAPU MARA

LET THE MISSIONS BEGIN

15 to 20

First Combat Missions • Operation Crossbow • 1943 – 1944







15 **2 – 3 October 1943**
First Mission – Chevilly-Larue

- 2 Oct: Test flight – 1 hr 17 mins
- 3 Oct: First bombing mission – 2 hrs 40 mins
- Target: Chevilly-Larue power station
- Aircraft hit by flak
- Natapu helped locate the difficult target
- Bombing carried out with precision
- Close friend Tavi Kainuku lost on the operation

16 **3 – 26 November 1943**
Early Operational Raids

- Low-level cross-country and reception test
- 7 Nov: Bernay-St-Martin airfield
- 8 Nov: Mimoyecques raid
- 10 Nov: Cap Gris-Nez – DNCO
- 25 Nov: Audinghen bombing
- 26 Nov: North Cherbourg / Couville
- November ops: 5 • Op hours: 8 hrs 45 mins

17 **19 – 23 December 1943**
Winter Raids

- 19 Dec: Formation cross-country
- 20 Dec: St Omer high-level bombing
- 21 Dec: Mesnil-Allard circus
- 22 Dec: Mesnil-Allard bombing
- 23 Dec: Low-level reserve
- December flying: 9 hrs 10 mins
- Total ops reached: 9

18 **4 – 25 January 1944**
Operation Crossbow Intensifies

- 4 Jan: Crécy-en-Ponthieu reserve
- 5 Jan: Marquain constructional works
- 7 Jan: La Glacerie, Cherbourg
- 21 Jan: Bois d'Enfer
- 25 Jan: Bois d'Esquergers
- Aircraft badly hit by flak
- Natapu manned two positions under fire
- January ops: 4 • Op hours: 7 hrs 25 mins

19 **3 – 24 February 1944**
Noball Campaign

- 3 Feb: Feuvrard, Somme
- 6 Feb: Bois de Béhen
- 8 Feb: Bois de Paplard
- 9 Feb: Bois Paplard
- 10 Feb: Bois de la Justice
- 11–12 Feb: Beaulieu / Combined ops
- 22 Feb: Bois de la Justice in E=BZ319
- Total ops reached: 19

20 **25 – 29 February 1944**
Busy End to February

- 25 Feb: Ecalle-on-Buchy at 7,500 ft
- 28 Feb: Bois de Justice raid
- 29 Feb: Ex. Circus in formation – 10,000 ft
- February ops: 8 • 14 hrs 20 mins
- Training flying: 3 hrs 50 mins
- Grand total ops: 21



Chevilly-Larue – 3 October 1943
The target – power station

He had to bomb the city of his dreams

It was a bright, sunny day in 1943. Paris, spread out below, was majestic still, despite the years of Nazi domination. And in the heart of the young Tahitian airman, looks out at the Eiffel Tower for the first time, there was both excitement and sadness...'

To Mara, now a cargo worker in Auckland, that mission is as real and as vivid today ...



First mission story – 3 October 1943
"He had to bomb the city of his dreams'



Honoured for courage
Three wartime medals



81 Course / Fellow Airmen
Natapu Mara with his pilot course comrades



Boston aircraft of the early missions
E.BZ312 / E.BZ319



From Chevilly-Larue to the Crossbow campaign, the young Tahitian airman had entered the battle in earnest.
Mission after mission, Natapu Mara flew with courage, precision and resolve.

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THE AMAZING LIFE OF NATAPU MARA

LET THE MISSIONS BEGIN

20 to the FINAL MISSION

From Operation Crossbow to Liberation • 1944



21 — 2 – 20 March 1944
Crossbow Continues
- 2 Mar: Bois de la Justice – 10,500 ft
- 3 Mar: Ailly-le-Haut-Clocher
- 7 Mar: Gorenflot, Somme
- 14 Mar: Decoration trip to Camberley
- 15 Mar: Formation and night flying
- 18 Mar: Bonnières – escort failed to arrive
- 20 Mar: Vacquerièttes near Hesdin
- Ops total reached: 25

22 — 23 March 1944
Double Mission Day
- Creil marshalling yards near Paris
- Gorenflos strike at 13,000 ft
- Rail disruption and V-1 site attack
- March flying hrs: 12 hrs 35 mins
- Ops total forward: 27½

23 — 5 – 20 April 1944
End of First Tour
- 5 Apr: Formation at 1,500 ft
- 8 Apr: Hirson marshalling yards
- 18 Apr: Dénœux
- 19 Apr: Bonnières – heavy flak
- 20 Apr: Bois de Ligescourt
- 30 missions completed
- 45-day rest after first tour

24 — 24 – 31 July 1944
Back to Combat
- New pilot: Lt Sauberli
- 24 Jul: Local and formation training
- 25 Jul: Bois de Mauléans
- 29 Jul: Night flying
- 30 Jul: Laval – Mayenne – Le Mans patrol
- Operation Cobra support
- 31 Jul: Air test

25 — 2 – 8 August 1944
Normandy Breakout
- 2 Aug: Aborted – engine trouble
- 4 Aug: Aunay-sur-Odon / Falaise
- 4–5 Aug: Bernay–Falaise night ops
- 7 Aug: La Chapelle-Gauthier ammo dump
- 8 Aug: Igoville petrol dump
- Heavy flak and night intruder work
- Former pilot Sgt Pierre shot down on 4 Aug

26 — 9 – 14 August 1944
Closing the Falaise Pocket
- 9 Aug: Forêt de Lyons ammo dump
- 9 Aug: Potigny – heavy flak
- 12 Aug: East of St Maur
- 12 Aug: Vallée de l'Orne night raid
- 14 Aug: Maizières fortified positions
- Day and night bombing
- Allied push tightens the pocket

28 — 8 – 14 September 1944
Final Missions
- 3 & 6 Sep: Familiarisation and training
- 8 Sep: Enemy positions at Boulogne
- 9 Sep: Batterres at Boulogne
- 12 Sep: Woensdrecht comuunications
- 13 Sep: Mont Lambert and Woensdrecht
- 14 Sep: Strongpoint N.E. of Boulogne
- Final combat mission



From Crossbow targets to the liberation battles of 1944.

Marshalling yards at Creil near Paris

The marshalling yards at Creil were a vital target in 1944, disrupting German rail movements and supporting the Allied advance on Paris.





Decorated for courage and service.



Comrades of No. 342 Lorraine Squadron.



Boston aircraft of the later missions.



After 30 missions, Mara was granted a 45-day rest before returning to action.



Sgt Pierre was shot down on 4 August 1944 — Natapu survived after moving to Lt Sauberli's crew.



14 September 1944— Final operational mission.



From Operation Crossbow to the liberation of France and Holland, Natapu Mara flew through 1944 with courage, precision and endurance.

His final combat mission came on 14 September 1944, after a remarkable operational tour.

LEST WE FORGET • N'OUBLIONS JAMAIS

A LIFE REMEMBERED

Natapu Mara

A Tahitian volunteer who answered the call to serve.

A Free French airman whose courage carried him through war.

A remarkable story preserved for future generations.

With respect and remembrance

Paul LT Mara

LEST WE FORGET

N’OUBLIONS JAMAIS